

Democratization of uruguay

[Countries](#), [United States](#)



Giancarlo Orichio Dr. A. Arraras CPO 3055 20 November 2008 Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Uruguay A study of democratization presumes that the meaning of democratization is self-evident: defined simply as a transition of a political system from non-democracy towards accountable and representative government practices. (Grugel 3) A concept that is valid in Uruguayan politics however, has an element of potential risk that will be the topic of further analysis.

Assessment of the latter will enable us to determine why Uruguay is the only one of the four former “ bureaucratic-authoritarian” regimes in South America that includes Chile, Brazil, and Argentina to attain this debatably political status quo. Guillermo O’Donnell described this type of regime as an institution that uses coercive measures to respond to what they view as threats to capitalism, whereas, the only means of opposing this repressive government is by an “ unconditional commitment to democracy. (O’Donnell xiii) The hierarchically lead bureaucratic-authoritarian regime as a political actor poses a possible advantage to democratization insofar that the military-as-institution may consider that their interests are best served by extrication from the military-as-government. However, seizing power to a new governing body without imposing strong constraints is improbable and has occurred predictably in Uruguayan democratic transition. Understanding the obstacle faced by the newly fragile democratic government in managing the military and eliminating its reserved domains brings us to the task at hand.

First, I will analyze the political history in Uruguay that lead up to the no doubt controversial argument that it has attained democratic consolidation.

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Secondly, I will analyze the factors that either contributed or hindered its journey to representative democracy; ultimately, arriving to the conclusion that Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan describe as a “ risk-prone” consolidated democracy. On 25 August 1825, Juan Antonio Lavalleja, at the head of a group of patriots called the “ treinta y tres orientales,” issued a declaration of independence. After a three-year fight, a peace treaty signed on 28 August 1828 guaranteed Uruguay's independence.

During this period of political turmoil and civil war, the two political parties around which Uruguayan history has traditionally revolved, the Colorados and the Blancos, were founded. “ Even by West European standards, [Uruguay] had a tradition of high party identification and a clear sense of a left-right index. ” (Linz 152) Uruguay's first president, Gen. Jose Fructuoso Rivera, an ally of Artigas, founded the Colorados. The second president, Brig. Gen. Manuel Oribe, a friend of Lavalleja, founded the Blancos. The 19th century was largely a struggle between the two factions.

However, it was not until the election of Jose Batlle y Ordóñez as president in 1903 that Uruguay matured as a nation. The Batlle administrations (1903–7, 1911–15) marked the period of greatest economic performance. A distinguished statesman, Batlle initiated the social welfare system codified in the Uruguayan constitution. From then on, Uruguay's social programs, funded primarily by earnings of beef and wool in foreign markets, gave Uruguay the revered soubriquet “ Switzerland of South America. ” After World War II, the Colorados ruled, except for an eight-year period from 1958–66.

It was during the administration of President Jorge Pacheco Areco (1967–72) that Uruguay entered a political and social crisis. As wool declined in world markets, export earnings no longer kept pace with the need for greater social expenditures. Political instability resulted, most dramatically in the emergence of Uruguay's National Liberation Movement, popularly known as the Tupamaros. This well-organized urban guerrilla movement adopted Marxist and nationalist ideals while on the other hand, most nationally important actors were disloyal or at best semi-loyal to the already established democratic regime.

Their revolutionary activities, coupled with the worsening economic situation, exacerbated Uruguay's political uncertainty. Gradually, the military-as institution assumed a greater role in government and by 1973 was in complete control of the political system. By the end of 1973, the Tupamaros had been successfully controlled and suppressed by the military-as-institution. In terms of systematic repression, as Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan stated, “ Uruguay was the most deeply repressive of the four South American bureaucratic-authoritarian regimes. (Linz 152) Amnesty international denounced Uruguay for human rights violations; in 1979, they estimated the number of political prisoners jailed at a ratio of 1 per 600, Chile and Argentina were respectively 1 in 2, 000 and 1 in 1, 200. (Linz 152) By 1977 the military announced that they would devise a new constitution with the intentions to “ strengthen democracy. ” The new constitution would be submitted to a plebiscite in 1980, and if ratified elections with a single presidential candidate nominated by both the Colorados and the Blancos and approved by the military would be held the following year.

The post-authoritarian transition to democracy began in Uruguay when the democratic opposition won the plebiscite. By the 1980's the military did not have an offensive plan to lift Uruguay from its uninterrupted bad economic performance, the Tupamaros had in fact been defeated by 1973, so a defense project against urban guerrilla was unnecessary. The military had no civil or political support, and with their loss in the plebiscite, whose results they said they would respect, tarnished the military's political leverage significantly.

Thus, the democratic opposition in the form of the two major catch all political parties that have governed de jure since the 19th century presented a non threatening alternative despite their disloyal behavior before the authoritarian coup d'état. As previously touched on, the opportunities presented by a hierarchical military favoring democratic transition is the possibility that the leading officers of the military-as-institution will come to the conclusion that the cost of non democratic rule is greater than the cost of extrication.

With the main interest resting in a stable state that will in turn allow the military to become a functioning sector of the state apparatus. However, this does not preclude the possibility of non democratic prerogatives in the transfer. The party-military negotiation called the Naval Club Pact disqualified Wilson Ferreira of the Blanco party to be nominated as president, pushed for guarantees concerning their own autonomy, and the most damaging to democracy was the curtailment of human rights trials for military officials.

Elections were held in 1985 where Julio Maria Sanguinetti from the Colorado party became the first democratically elected candidate in the 1977 constitution. Because of strong public discontent with Military Amnesty granted during the transition, the curtailment was sent to a referendum in 1989, where it approved the amnesty and gained democratic legitimacy by 57%. It has to be stated that the majority of Uruguayan opposed the amnesty, however the fragile democratic government confronted a troubling decision. They could have breached the Naval Club Pact and tried military officer for their human right offenses and risked military refusal and therefore a crisis in their own authority. Or they could have hastily granted them amnesty at the cost of lowered prestige in the new democracy. It is safe to assume that the electorate voted to let the amnesty law stand not because it was just but more so to avoid a crisis. By 1992 the left-wing Frente Amplio was integrated into Uruguayan politics without any other major party leaders deeming them unacceptable arriving to the quarrelsome argument that Uruguay became a consolidated democracy.

Uruguay's economic development can be divided into two starkly contrasting periods. During the first period, when it earned its valued sobriquet “Switzerland of South America,” from the late 1800s until the 1950s, Uruguay achieved remarkable growth and a high standard of living. Expanding livestock exports; principally beef and wool accounted for its economic development. The advanced social welfare programs, which redistributed wealth from the livestock sector to the rest of the economy, raised the standard of living for the majority of the population and contributed to the development of new industries.

When export earnings faltered in the 1950s, however, the fabric of Uruguay's economy had begun to unravel. The country entered a decades-long period of economic stagnation. It was during the administration of President Jorge Pacheco Areco (1967–72) that Uruguay entered a political and social crisis. As wool and beef demands declined in world markets, export earnings no longer kept pace with the need for greater social expenditures causing bad economic performance that lead to the bureaucratic-authoritarian take over of government.

Although the old democratic regime was not able to lift economic prosperity neither was the military-as-government. Bad economic performance still plagued the nation throughout authoritarian rule. By 1980 the military had no agenda in combating the bad economic performance that helped unveil the inadequacies of the non democratic regime. In fact, economic performance has been in a decline since 1950's until today. Although the legitimacy that the democratic system posses in Uruguay is strong, the capacity, or as Stepan and Linz say, the “ efficacy” of the democratic system in resolving the stagnant economy is low.

Thus, making Uruguay's democracy risk-prone due to an unsolved economic performance. Since the economy has been the number one issue affecting Uruguayans since the end of their golden era in the early 19 century. A public opinion poll was asked to upper class respondents weather a political alternative from the authoritarian regime at the time would speed rather than slow economic recuperation. By a margin of 2 to 1 they believed it

would, more surprisingly was a 7 to 1 response to the question if a new democratic regime would bring more tranquility and public order.

In 1985, of the nine institutions evaluated in terms of trust, political parties ranked highest with a net score of 57 and the armed forces with a net score of negative 73. Only 5% viewed the military sympathetically while 78% viewed the military with antipathy. (Linz 153) In my studies concerning democratization never did democracy start with such rejection of the political role of the military from all class coalitions alike.

During the first half on the 19th century the norm was a two party system similar to that of the United States in that there was “ low fragmentation and low polarization. ” (Linz 163) However, contrary to the American vetting process the Uruguayan had a peculiar electoral system known as the double simultaneous vote that allows all parties to run multiple candidate for the presidency. This did not present a problem until after the 1960’s when presidents routinely were elected with less than 25% of the vote because of the amount of candidates running.

This creates party fragmentation that can hinder democracy. The fact that the old regime political structure remains untouched means that the opportunity for constitutional change was missed and this presents a potential democratic upheaval. Behaviorally, by 1968-73 political elites were at best semi-loyal to the democratic system that soon caused the authoritarian regime to take over government, and one thing that can be done from previous failures in democratic attempts is to learn from their missteps.

Stepan and Linz clearly state that for the consolidation of democracy loyalty to the system as well as the perception that all other parties are loyal to the democratic process plays a crucial role. (Linz 156) By 1985 not one of the twelve major factions of the three leading parties perceived the other parties to be acting disloyal. As well as the mere fact that the once unacceptable left-wing party, Frente Amplio, held the mayoral position of Montevideo by 1989 and then the presidency by 2004 demonstrates the positive elite choices that contributed to democracy.

Since Uruguay's troublesome and long fought battle for independence in August 25, 1828 Uruguay did not encounter any "intermestic" stateness problems. As far as Washington relations to Latin America and in particular Uruguay, the United States continues to pursue hegemony over the region. The neo-liberal reforms in place in the region are bound by the restraints of the global market and for a country like Uruguay it is very difficult to compete with such superpowers.

These reforms have often left the lower classes impoverished and desperate while the upper classes and Washington feed their gluttonous appetites. The civilian government in Uruguay has found it increasingly difficult to enforce these foreign economic influences that can potentially result in authoritarian means of accomplishment. As a member of MERCOSUR, Mercado Comun del Sur, Uruguay faced foreign political influences to liberalize its economy during the 1990s, as economic giants, and MERCOSUR partners Brazil and Argentina had done.

This can be potentially devastating to democracy except that Uruguay in the 1980's had a gross national product (GNP) per capita income of 2, 820, higher than any of its MERCOSUR counterparts. However, we must remember that Uruguay has been experiencing a downward economic performance since the mid 1900's and is a potential risk that needs to be addressed to preserve democracy. United States foreign policy in Uruguay and in the rest of Latin America has encouraged for the liberalization of markets. The side effect of neo-liberal reform is the zero-sum element that produces excessive amounts of losers.

Essentially the contrary to what it is intended to produce.

Thesesuperpowerpolices implemented creates few winners most of which are “ elites with government connection [that] have been the primary beneficiaries of the sweeping economic transformation. ” (Kingstone 196) This transcends business when the only means of preserving this market economy is through potential authoritarian means. The contentious claim that Uruguay is a consolidated democracy since 1992 is threefold, first, because of the reluctance to fix the already proven failed double simultaneous vote electoral system.

Secondly, because of civil-military relations concerning human rights violation during authoritarian rule, although was legitimized by democratic referendum, but more importantly budgetary cuts that have been implemented as a result of bad economic performance. Finally, and most importantly, Uruguayans accept democracy as the most legitimate political game, but also recognize its incapacity to fix the troubling economy,

producing this efficacy-legitimacy gap that can be potentially destructive for democracy.

These three factors give Uruguay the title of a risk-prone democracy. Works Cited Kingstone, Peter R. , ed. Readings in Latin American Politics. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2006. Linz, Juan, and Alfred Stepan. Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996. O'Donnell, Guillermo. Modernization and Bureaucratic-Authoritarianism: Studies in South American Politics. Berkley: Institute of International Studies, University of California, 1973.