



Basic facts	
Capital	Montevideo
Official language	Spanish
Population	3.3m
GDP per capita 2010	US\$11,996

CIVIL SOCIETY PROFILE: URUGUAY

For the first time in Uruguay's history, a left-oriented government took office in 2005, which brought additional opportunities for civil society to participate in the execution of public policies. However, strategic participation is not still as frequent as desirable, and in partnerships between government and civil society, the emphasis is on short term issues rather than on any longer term strategic view. Uruguayan political parties have traditionally been and remain strong. Crucial areas for strengthening identified by CSOs include their critical autonomy towards the state and their long term sustainability.

CONTEXT AND ENVIRONMENT FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

Uruguayan society remains highly centred around the state and leading political parties, which is felt to be a factor behind low levels of political civic engagement in non-institutionalised actions. But civil society's assessment of the socio-political context for its operations is favourable, with a widespread view that it has improved in recent years. The leftist government that took office in 2005 was re-elected in 2009, and this brought the opening of new spaces for and new relationships with civil society.

Few restrictions are placed on CSOs by government, but only just over half – 52% - of CSOs surveyed assess the legal framework for civil society as moderately enabling, and a further 36% rate it as rather limiting. The legal framework is seen as too cumbersome and comprehensive, failing to take into account the diversity and varying capacities of civil society, with one issue being the length of time it takes a CSO to obtain legal status. CSO representatives question whether the regulations discourage the formation of some kinds of associations, as opposed to facilitating or promoting them. Against this, only around 18% of CSOs report facing restrictions or attacks from government. The closest collaboration with CSOs comes from the Ministry of Social Development, which implements its programmes in cooperation with CSOs.

MAKE UP OF CIVIL SOCIETY

Most CSOs originally defined themselves in opposition to the government, since many organisations played an important role in the fight against dictatorship and in the restoration of democracy in

CIVICUS Civil Society Index Key data about civil society	
CSI overall scores	Overall score: 56.3. Civic Engagement: 44.8; Level of Organisation: 59.5; Practice of Values: 43.1; Perception of Impact: 60.9; External Environment: 73.0. Ranked 4 out of 33
Interpersonal trust	17.0%
CSOs network membership	71.3%
Policy activity	59.6%

Key indicators	
UN Human Development Index, 2011	Score: 0.783. Ranked 48 out of 187
Freedom House Freedom in the World rating, 2012	Status: free. Political rights score: 1. Civil liberties score: 1
Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index, 2011	Score 7. Ranked 25 out of 183
World Bank Governance Indicators, 2010	Government effectiveness: +0.66. Percentile rank: 70.8. Rule of law: +0.72. Percentile rank: 71.1
Reporters Without Borders Press Freedom Index, 2011	Score: 4.25. Ranked 32 out of 178
Failed States Index, 2011	Score: 41. Ranked 154 out of 177
EIU Democracy Index, 2011	Status: full democracy. Score: 8.17. Ranked 17 out of 167

1985. But after more than 20 years along the democratic path, many CSOs now cooperate with the government in the execution of social policies. CSOs working on gender and human rights issues are seen to have influenced the public agenda quite strongly, especially in comparison to environmental or grassroots organisations.

Cooperatives, particularly peak organisations of cooperatives, are also considered to have some influence. Trade unions have different levels of power, depending mostly on which economic sector they represent. Other types of CSOs, such as networks and think tanks, are assessed as having very little public or governmental influence. The relationship between governments and CSOs varies: in some cases government works effectively with CSO to outsource work, and the relationship is essentially contractual, while in other cases, CSOs are allowed more responsibility and more scope to influence.

PARTICIPATION

Voluntary work in socially-oriented CSOs has increased in recent years, reaching around 20% of the population of age 14 and above, compared to 7% in 1998, while 43% of the population has volunteered at some point in their lives. The average number of volunteers per CSO surveyed was 66. Men and women devote the same amount of time to voluntary work, but people who identify themselves as lower class contribute more time than people who identify as upper class. There is assessed to be good participation by people from minority and marginalised groups, and when it comes to CSO staff, women outnumber men, including in executive positions. The CSOs that have the highest active population are church and religious organisations, arts and educational organisations, and sport and recreational organisations, with consumer organisations and environmental and human rights CSOs recording the lowest levels of participation.

In general, participation in politically-oriented CSOs is lower than in socially-oriented CSOs, reflecting a practice of politics that is highly rooted in political parties, and so in which there is little perceived scope for individual activism to achieve results. Union membership received a boost following the creation of salary boards for pay bargaining between government, business and workers in 2005, sparking 70,000 new or renewed memberships.

There is also worry about whether the small number of very active people participating in multiple platforms, while demonstrating dedication by this group, may suggest a wider participation deficit.

PUBLIC TRUST

Over three quarters of the population express some trust in charitable (76%) and women's (77%) organisations, with environmental organisations trusted by 59% of the public. In contrast, around 32% of people trust labour unions and only 44% trust the church, a low figure compared to other countries. The government and judiciary also have the trust of 44% each, and only 19% trust political parties.

According to the 2011 Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index, Uruguay is one of the least corrupt countries in the world, ranking 25th out of 183 countries. Interpersonal trust appears to have declined in recent years, with only 17% of people saying other people can be trusted, but tolerance of diverse groups is uniformly high, with over 90% of the public expressing



tolerance of different minority groups.

NETWORKS

Over 70% of CSOs report being members of networks, of which there are more than 90, many of which have a sectoral or thematic role, including the National NGOs Association, Uruguayan Cooperatives Confederation, Inter-Trade Union Assembly Plenary Session – National Workers Convention and the National Follow-up Commission of Beijing Commitments, on gender issues. But there are concerns about falling levels of active participation in networks, which means many networks do not have sufficient human, economic and time resources to meet their objectives, and so the impact and efficacy of CSO networks is being called into question.

There are also several local networks, but organisations based outside the capital, Montevideo, struggle to be represented, a consequence of the historical concentration of power and assets in the capital, and there is a sense that CSOs based in Montevideo have privileged access to resources as well as space. In contrast, CSOs based outside Montevideo believe they are starved of information and influence, and encumbered by centralist registration procedures. CSOs are also acknowledged to be poor at external communication.

RESOURCES

CSOs have seen the loss of international funding as donors that came into Uruguay following the restoration of democracy have withdrawn as the country is now stable and classed as a middle income country. Just over half of CSOs believe they have an adequate human resource base and four out of five believe their staff has a sufficient level of experience for the CSO to perform its functions. 65% of CSOs surveyed assess themselves as having a sustainable financial base, but both financial and human resource levels are more challenging outside Montevideo. Members' subscriptions are the most frequent source of CSO funding, followed by foreign donors, government funds and individual donations. Over half of CSOs receiving government funds rely on them, with the funds making up 80-100% of these organisations' funding base. There is relatively little private sector support.

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IMPACT

CSOs judge themselves as having a high level of responsiveness to the current priority issues of poverty and employment, and to have high impact on supporting poor and marginalised people and on education. However, only around 60% of CSOs surveyed report attempting policy advocacy during a two year period, and only about half of these report a successful outcome, with the main focuses for policy advocacy being housing, health and education policy. External stakeholders also rate highly the social impact of CSOs, and assess CSOs' policy impact as higher but their responsiveness as lower than CSO representatives do themselves. Visibility of CSO actions is acknowledged as an issue which hampers impact.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Key recommendations for strengthening civil society in Uruguay include: expanding civic participation through creating volunteering demand and supply data banks, and developing volunteering training, compensation and acknowledgment mechanisms; strengthening civil society networks and partnerships, including through promoting trust-

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building between different institutions and brokering agreements to share different institutional strengths; enhancing the diversity of the sector by seeking direct subsidy from the government for CSOs with fewer resources and technical and administrative capacities; building the capacity of personnel in the sector by developing partnerships with universities; and enhancing the available information on the sector by carrying out a census of CSOs.

FURTHER INFORMATION

La Sociedad Civil en Línea - www.lasociedadcivil.org

Asociación Nacional de ONG (ANONG) - www.anong.org.uy

CNS Mujeres - www.cnsmujeres.org.uy

Mesa Nacional de Diálogo sobre Voluntariado y Compromiso Social - www.mesadevoluntariado.org.uy

Red Uruguaya de ONGs Ambientalistas - www.uruguayambiental.com

Rendir Cuentas - www.rendircuentas.org