

EXPEDITIONARY CULTURE
FIELD GUIDE

Paraguay



About this Guide

This guide is designed to prepare you to deploy to culturally complex environments and achieve mission objectives. The fundamental information contained within will help you understand the cultural dimension of your assigned location and gain skills necessary for success.

The guide consists of two parts:

Part 1 “Culture General” provides the foundational knowledge you need to operate effectively in any global environment with a focus on the Southern Cone.

Part 2 “Culture Specific” section

describes unique cultural features of Paraguayan society. It applies culture-general concepts to help increase your knowledge of your assigned deployment location. This section is designed to complement other pre-deployment/-assignment training.



AFCLC.Region@us.af.mil or visit the AFCLC website at <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/>.

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PART 1 – CULTURE GENERAL

What is Culture?

Fundamental to all aspects of human existence, culture shapes the way humans view life and functions as a tool we use to adapt to our social and physical environments. A culture is the sum of all of the beliefs, values, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning for a society. All human beings have culture, and individuals within a culture share a general set of beliefs and values.

Members of a culture also usually assign the same meanings to the symbols in that culture. A symbol is when one thing – an image, word, object, idea, or story – represents another thing. For example, the American flag is a physical and visual symbol of a core American value—freedom. At the same time, the story of George Washington admitting to having chopped down a cherry tree is also symbolic, because it represents the premium Americans place on personal honesty and leadership integrity.



Force Multiplier

The military services have learned through experience the importance of understanding other cultures. Unlike the 20th-century bipolar world order that dominated US strategy for nearly half a century, today the US military is operating in what we classify as asymmetric or irregular conflict zones, where the notion of cross-cultural interactions is on the leading edge of our engagement strategies.

We have come to view the people themselves, rather than the political system or physical environment, as the decisive feature in conflict areas. Our primary objective hinges on influencing constructive change through peaceful means where possible.

We achieve this endeavor by encouraging local nationals to focus on developing stable political, social, and economic institutions that reflect their cultural beliefs and traditions.

Therefore, understanding the basic concepts of culture serves as a force multiplier. Achieving an awareness and respect of a society's values and beliefs enables deploying forces to build relationships with people from other cultures, positively influence their actions, and ultimately achieve mission success.

Cultural Domains

Culture is not just represented by the beliefs we carry internally, but also by our behaviors and by the systems members of a culture create to organize their lives. These systems, such as political or educational institutions, help us to live in a manner



that is appropriate to our culture and encourages us to perpetuate that culture into the future.

We can organize behaviors and systems into categories – what the Air Force refers to as “cultural domains” – in order to

better understand the primary values and characteristics of a society. A cross-culturally competent military member can use these domains – which include kinship, language and communication, and social and political systems and others (see chart on next page) – as tools for understanding and adapting to any culture. For example, by understanding the way a culture defines family and kinship, a US military member operating overseas can more effectively interact with members of that culture.

Social Behaviors across Cultures

While humankind shares basic behaviors, various groups enact or even group those behaviors differently across cultural boundaries. For example, all societies obtain food for survival, although agrarian societies generally produce their own food for limited consumption using considerably basic techniques.

Conversely, industrialized nations have more complex market economies, producing foodstuffs for universal consumption. Likewise, all cultures value history and tradition, although they represent these concepts through a variety of unique forms of symbolism. While the dominant world religions share the belief in one God, their worship practices vary with their traditional historical development. Similarly, in many kin-based cultures where familial bonds are foundational to social identity, it is customary for family or friends to serve as godparents, while for other societies this practice is nearly non-existent.

Worldview

One of our most basic human behaviors is the tendency to classify others as similar or different based on our cultural standards. As depicted in the chart below, we can apply the 12 cultural domains to help us compare similarities and differences across cultures. We evaluate others' behavior to determine if they are "people like me" or "people not like me." Usually, we assume that those in the "like me" category share our perspectives and values.

12 Domains of Culture



This collective perspective forms our worldview — how we see the world and understand our place in it. Your worldview functions as a lens through which you see and understand the world. It helps you to interpret your experiences and the values and behaviors of other people that you encounter. Consider your worldview as a way of framing behavior, providing an accountability standard for actions and a logical explanation of why we individually or collectively act in a certain manner.



Cultural Belief System

An important component of a worldview is our belief system. A community's belief system assigns meaning, sets its universal standards of what is good and bad, defines right and wrong behavior, and assigns a value of

meaningful or meaningless. Our beliefs form the fundamental values we hold to be true – regardless of whether there is evidence to support these ideas. Beliefs are a central aspect of human culture. They are shared views about world order and how the universe was physically and socially constructed.

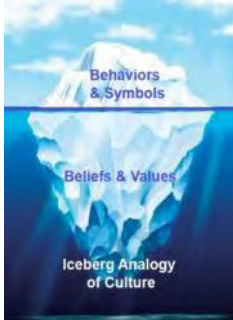
While all people have beliefs, their specific components tend to vary depending upon respective world views. What people classify as good or bad, right or wrong depends on our deeply held beliefs we started developing early in life that have helped shape our characters.



Likewise, these values are ingrained in our personalities and shape our behavior patterns and our self-identities. Because cultural beliefs are intensely held, they are difficult, though not impossible, to change.

Core Beliefs

Core beliefs shape and influence certain behaviors and also serve to rationalize those behaviors. Therefore, knowledge of individual or group beliefs can be useful in comprehending or making sense of their activities. We will use the iceberg model for classifying culture to illustrate two levels of meaning, as depicted. Beliefs and values, portrayed by the deeper and



greater level of the submerged iceberg, are seldom visible, but are indicated / hinted at / referenced by our behaviors and symbols (top level). It is important to recognize, though, that the parts of culture that are not visible (under the waterline) are informing and shaping what is being made visible (above the waterline).

In many cases, different worldviews may present behaviors that are contrary to our own beliefs, particularly in many regions where US forces deploy. Your ability to suspend judgment in order to understand another perspective is essential to establishing relationships with your host-nation counterparts. The ability to withhold your opinion and strive to understand a culture from a member of that culture's perspective is known as cultural relativism. It often involves taking an alternate perspective when interpreting others' behaviors and is critical to your ability to achieve mission success.



As you travel through the Southern Cone, you will encounter cultural patterns of meaning that are common across the region. What follows is a general description of 12 cultural domains which are used to frame those commonalities.

CULTURAL DOMAINS

1. History and Myth

History and myth are related concepts. History is a record of the past that is based on verifiable facts and events. Myth can act as a type of historical record, although it is usually a story which members of a culture use to explain community origins or important events that are not verifiable, or which occurred prior to written language.

The Southern Cone includes four countries on the South American continent: Argentina, Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay. Scientists believe that early humans entered the region around 13,000 years ago. Between 5,000-2,500 years ago, they developed agriculture, and over time, some groups remained nomadic hunter-gatherers, while others settled in communities. By the 15th century, the population comprised a variety of ethnolinguistic groups, with some territories in northern Chile and Argentina controlled by the powerful Inca Empire from its center in present-day Peru.

In the 16th century, Spaniards conquered much of the Americas, seeking wealth, enhanced social status, and the spread of Catholicism. Columbus touched on the Venezuelan coast in 1498, while other explorers landed on Colombia's Caribbean coast in 1499, then conquered Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia by 1541. Meanwhile, Spanish and Portuguese explorers were sailing along the Southern Cone's Atlantic coastline. In 1536, Spaniards founded Buenos Aires (present-day capital of Argentina) and Asunción (present day capital of Paraguay) a year later. Moving overland from Peru, other Spanish conquerors founded Santiago (Chile's modern-day capital) in 1541. By contrast, Uruguay saw little Spanish settlement until the early 17th century, then the founding of



Montevideo (its present-day capital) in 1726 as a counter to the Portuguese presence in neighboring Brazil. The Spaniards introduced horses, cattle, and sheep, establishing **estancias** (large ranches) that relied on forced Indigenous labor or enslaved Africans (primarily in Uruguay) and later, **gauchos** (hired ranch hands, often European immigrants). Over the years, the region's Indigenous populations reduced due to conflict, disease, famine, and their exploitation in forced labor systems. In Paraguay, the Catholic Church forcibly resettled Indigenous people in order to convert them. Some indigenous communities violently resisted the Europeans for centuries.

In the early 19th century, some local leaders began to seek autonomy from the Spanish Crown. Following several years of armed struggle, Argentina, Chile, and Paraguay achieved independence by 1818. Meanwhile, Uruguay, though claimed by Argentina, was annexed by Brazil in 1821, leading to war. After international mediation, the independent state of Uruguay was created as a buffer between Brazil and Argentina in 1828.

Border disputes and economic competition spurred conflicts across South America in subsequent decades. Chile invaded neighboring Bolivia and Peru in 1836, and Paraguay's violent confrontations with Brazil and Argentina in 1858 subsided only

after the appearance of US and British navies.

The devastating 1864-70 War of the Triple Alliance pitted Paraguay against Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay and resulted in the deaths of two-thirds of Paraguay's



male residents and the loss of one-quarter of its territory. In 1883, Chile gained new territories when it won the War of the Pacific against Peru and Bolivia.

Meanwhile, Indigenous resistance in Argentina and Chile had continued. To open additional territory for European immigrants, those governments launched campaigns against the Indigenous

rebels in the late 19th century, killing or displacing thousands from their traditional lands. In the 1930s, Paraguay prevailed in the Chaco War against Bolivia, gaining disputed territory but causing significant losses to both sides.

Beginning in the mid-20th century, a wave of authoritarian leaders seized power. Prominent Dictators included Juan Perón in Argentina (1946-55 and 1973-74), Gen Augusto Pinochet in Chile (1973-90), and Alfredo Stroessner in Paraguay (1954-89).



Such regimes typically imposed censorship, banned trade unions, dissolved national legislatures, and outlawed political activities, though they often received the support of the US due to their anti-communist stances. These regimes also frequently detained, tortured, and murdered tens of thousands of their own people. In the 1970s, the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile and military regimes in Argentina and Uruguay perpetuated numerous human rights abuses, with the plight of the “disappeared” victims receiving worldwide attention.

In the 1980s, democracy and civilian rule returned to the Southern Cone. In recent decades, Argentina and Paraguay have experienced political volatility and serious economic challenges. Although a stable democracy, Chile struggles to respond to ongoing social unrest prompted by wealth inequalities. Considered one of the world's strongest democracies today, Uruguay has the region's lowest levels of corruption, poverty, and inequality.

2. Political and Social Relations

Political relations are the ways in which members of a community organize leadership, power, and authority. Social relations are all of the ways in which individuals are linked to others in their community. The Spanish conquest and colonial rule changed society in the Southern Cone considerably. Further, the decimation of the Indigenous population, import of enslaved Africans, and arrival of European immigrants in the

19th-20th centuries permanently altered the region's ethnic and racial makeup.

Today, the residents of the Southern Cone are mostly of European or mixed European and Indigenous ancestry, with most Argentines, Uruguayans, and Chileans identifying with their European roots. By contrast, Paraguayans are proud of their mixed Spanish and Indigenous Guaraní heritage, viewing it as the fundamental aspect of Paraguayan national identity. Some 2.4% of Argentines and Uruguayans and 2% of Paraguayans identify solely as Indigenous, compared to 13% of Chileans. Almost 5% of Uruguayans claim a Black identity, and a small number of Chileans and Argentines also have African ancestry. Generally, Indigenous and Black residents across the region tend to be poorer, less educated, and face discrimination. Indigenous communities also struggle to attain rights to their traditional lands.

All the Southern Cone countries today are Presidential Republics. Since the 1983 return of democracy, most Argentine Presidents had been adherents of Peronism – the populist and nationalist policies espoused by former President Perón. Taking office in 2023, President Javier Gerardo Milei is taking a different approach and describes himself as an “anarcho-capitalist” seeking to reduce bureaucracy in the Argentine government.



Between 2006-22, the Chilean Presidency alternated between socialist Michelle Bachelet and conservative Sebastián Piñera. Although representing opposite ends of the political spectrum, they both faced large-scale public unrest. Since 2022, Gabriel Boric Font, Chile's

youngest President and a progressive, has focused his term on constitutional reforms.

Except for the period 2008-13, the conservative Colorado Party has dominated politics in Paraguay since 1947. Taking office in 2023, Santiago Peña Palacios actually started his political life as

a member of the Liberal Party but switched parties in 2017 and was elected representing the Colorado Party.

Since the 1985 return of democracy in Uruguay, parties and coalitions from across the political spectrum have held the Presidency. After 15 years of rule by a center-left coalition, the conservatives returned to power with the 2019 victory of Luis Lacalle Pou. Then, in a close vote in 2024, Uruguay elected Yamandú Ramón Antonio Orsi Martínez of the left-leaning Broad Front party as President.

Relationships in the region are occasionally tense due to territorial disputes, illegal activities in porous border regions, and the influx of illegal migrants, most recently from Venezuela. In 1982, Argentina invaded and briefly held the United Kingdom (UK)-administered Falkland Islands. Today, Argentina continues to claim these and other UK-held territories in the South Atlantic, occasionally leading to tense relations.

3. Religion and Spirituality

Religion is a cultural belief system that provides meaning to members of a community. Religious and spiritual beliefs help preserve the social order by defining proper behavior. They also create social unity by defining shared identity, offer individuals peace of mind, and explain the causes of events in a society.

The Spanish conquerors introduced Christianity beginning in the early 16th century. As Roman Catholicism spread, the Catholic Church became entrenched in colonial life. Today, the Catholic Church remains an important part of many communities, a significant provider of social services, and an influential organization with sometimes strong political and social influence.



Roman Catholicism remains the dominant religion in the region, with around 90% of Paraguayans and some two-thirds of Argentines and Chileans identifying as Catholic. By contrast, less than half of Uruguayans

claim a Catholic identity, while over one-third report religious beliefs without any formal affiliation. At least 15% of Argentines, Chileans, and Uruguayans and around 6% of Paraguayans are Protestant Christians. Secularism is growing in the region, with some 17% of Chileans and 19% of Argentines reporting no religious affiliation in recent surveys.

Other faiths with a presence in the region include Jehovah's Witnesses, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Islam, and the Baha'i Faith. Argentina has the region's largest Jewish (some 220,000) and Muslim (up to 1 million) populations.

None of the Southern Cone countries names an official religion, though the Argentine Constitution grants a preferential legal status to the Roman Catholic Church.

4. Family and Kinship

The domain of family and kinship refers to groups of people related through blood ties, marriage, or through strong emotional bonds that influence them to treat each other like family members (often called "fictive kin").

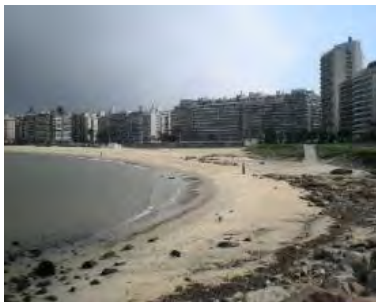


Family life and relationships are fundamental elements of Southern Cone societies. Regional inhabitants tend to maintain strong connections with family members, supporting them emotionally and financially, while providing physical care for elderly or ailing kin

if needed. Residence patterns differ somewhat across the region, though multiple generations often reside together in one household or live in close proximity.

While close family ties mean relatives have some influence over children's choice of spouses, both genders generally choose on their own. Both Spanish traditions and Roman Catholic teachings strongly value marriage as an institution and discourage divorce. Nevertheless, divorce rates have risen in recent years.

Most residents live in urban areas, notably over 96% of Uruguayans and around 93% of Argentines and Chileans. By contrast, less than two-thirds of Paraguayans are urban dwellers. As both men and women take advantage of the enhanced educational and employment opportunities available in urban areas, family structures have become more diverse.



While many upper income residents in Buenos Aires, Montevideo, and Santiago inhabit luxurious high-rise apartments, many cities lack affordable housing. As a result, some residents occupy crowded sub-standard housing in make-shift communities on urban peripheries.

5. Sex and Gender

Sex refers to the biological/reproductive differences between males and females, while gender is a more flexible concept that refers to a culture's categorizing of masculine and feminine behaviors, symbols, and social roles.

The cultures of the Southern Cone traditionally privilege the male's role as provider and leader. **Machismo**, or masculine behavior and pride, is an important element of male identity in many areas, while women traditionally occupy subordinate domestic roles. Women have acquired more equal rights under the law, though social, economic, and political inequalities between the genders remain.

Women face continued challenges to their participation in the workforce. In much of the region, women still assume the traditional roles of wives and mothers, oftentimes having to balance both domestic duties and employment demands. Female workforce participation rates range from a high of 60% in Paraguay to around 51% in Chile.

Women have a long history of serving in public office in the Southern Cone. When Isabel Martínez de Perón assumed the Argentine Presidency following her husband's 1974 death, she became the world's first female President. Since then, both Argentina and Chile have had female heads of state. Generally, Argentina has the



largest female participation in politics, ranking 17th in the world in 2022, when women held over 44% of seats in the national legislature. Paraguay tends to have the lowest rates, with women holding some 15% of such seats in the 2023 legislative elections.

Fertility rates have fallen significantly in recent decades, with Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay averaging fewer than 2 children per woman and Argentina around 2.2. The decrease has been starkest in Paraguay, with the rate declining from 6.5 to 2.3 children per woman between 1960-2023. Since 2012 and 2020, abortion is legal in Uruguay and Argentina, respectively. In Chile and Paraguay, it is illegal except in a few circumstances.

In 2010, Argentina became the first Latin American country to legalize same-sex marriage. Uruguay followed in 2012 and Chile in 2022. Uruguay has since emerged as a Latin American leader in homosexual rights, permitting homosexual individuals to serve openly in the military. Same-sex marriage remains illegal in Paraguay.

6. Language and Communication

Language is a system for sharing information symbolically, whereby words are used to represent ideas. Communication is defined as the cultural practice of sharing meaning in interaction, both verbally and non-verbally.

As a result of the Spanish conquest and colonialism, Spanish is an official language in every Southern Cone country and is the region's most widely spoken language. However, Paraguay's Constitution also names Guaraní, an Indigenous language, as an official one alongside Spanish. Almost 90% of Paraguayans speak Guaraní, though most also speak Spanish. As of 2021,

Chilean law outlines protections for nine Indigenous languages yet grants them no official recognition.

Some Argentines and Uruguayans speak a Spanish variety having an accent and vocabulary resembling those of certain Italian dialects. Along the Uruguay-Brazil border, some residents speak a mixture of Portuguese and Spanish.

7. Learning and Knowledge

All cultures require that the older generation transmit important information to the younger generation. This information can be strictly factual (for example, how to fulfill subsistence and health requirements) and culturally traditional (the beliefs, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning to the community). This knowledge transfer may occur through structured, formalized systems such as schools or through informal learning by watching adults or peers.



While education has improved across the region in recent years, quality and completion vary. Chile and Uruguay performed highest in the most recent international assessments, though they, like all the Southern Cone countries, show large gaps between high- and low-achieving students.

Access to education has increased significantly in recent decades, especially at pre-primary and secondary levels. Generally, children from poor and rural backgrounds are less likely to attend school and more likely to receive a lower-quality education. Argentina and Chile lead the region in secondary enrollment rates. By contrast, Paraguay lags in enrollment at all levels, from pre-primary to secondary. Uruguay has the region's highest repetition rates at the lower secondary level.

Literacy rates reflect the region's varied education landscape, ranging from 95% in Paraguay to 97% in Chile and nearly universal in Argentina and Uruguay. Public investment in education also varies, usually lowest in Paraguay.

8. Time and Space

In every society, people occupy space and time in ways that are not directly linked to physical survival. In most Western cultures, people tend to be preoccupied with strict time management, devoting less effort to relationship-building. While the pace of life in the Southern Cone is somewhat faster than in many other parts of Latin America, establishing and maintaining relationships often take precedence over meeting deadlines, punctuality, or accomplishing a task in the most efficient manner. The workday runs on a schedule similar to the US, though some businesses may close for mid-day break of around 2 hours.

The rhythm of daily life typically changes during national holidays, many reflecting Christian traditions, and historical events. Communities throughout the region celebrate Carnival,



an annual celebration prior to Catholic Lent. Argentina, Chile, and Paraguay celebrate their independence from Spain and Uruguay from Brazil.

Concepts of personal space sometimes differ from those in the US.

During conversations, regional residents often stand closer than most Americans. Also, men shake hands both in greeting and parting, while some women may greet each other with a kiss on the cheek.

9. Aesthetics and Recreation

Every culture has its own forms of creative expression that are guided by aesthetic principles of imagination, beauty, skill, and style. Most of the Southern Cone's art, architecture, dance, music, and theater reflect the region's Roman Catholic heritage and European and Indigenous influences. Some traditional art and folklore centers on the South American cowboy, the *gaucho* in Argentina and Uruguay and **huaso** (countryman) in Chile.

Dance and music infuse daily life in the Southern Cone and influence and reflect styles from across the Caribbean and Latin America. Andean styles featuring Indigenous instruments like

panpipes are common in some northern regions. Other styles more clearly demonstrate European influence, such as the polkas and waltzes common throughout the region and the **tango**, a music and dance style that emerged in Buenos Aires in the late 19th century. One traditional Paraguayan dance requires performers to balance bottles on their heads.



By far, soccer is the most popular sport across the region. Uruguay notably hosted the inaugural World Cup in 1930, and all the Southern Cone countries have had significant international success, producing players of world renown. With its *gaucho* tradition and vast **pampas** (treeless plains), Argentina has also achieved international preeminence in polo. Some games and sports in Chile and Paraguay are of Indigenous origin.

Traditional handicrafts such as weaving, ceramics, leatherwork, and woodcarving have been revived in recent years. Paraguay's most famous handicraft is **ñandutí** (spider web) lace, reflecting 16th-century European and Guaraní techniques. With a rich literary tradition, the region has produced writers of international influence, notably Argentina's Jorge Luis Borges, Chile's Pablo Neruda and Isabel Allende, Paraguay's Augusto Roa Bastos, and Uruguay's Eduardo Galeano, among others.

10. Sustenance and Health

Societies have different methods of transforming natural resources into food. These methods can shape residence patterns, family structures and economics. Theories of disease and healing practices exist in all cultures and serve as adaptive responses to disease and illness.

Cuisine varies across the region based on local products and tastes, though beef is universally popular. Argentina and Uruguay lead the world in beef consumption, typically more than twice the US per capita average. Along the coasts, residents

consume seafood. In Paraguay and Chile, some dishes reflect Indigenous traditions, such as the varied use of corn or maize. Argentina and Chile are large wine producers with high domestic consumption. **Maté**, an herbal beverage traditionally drunk from a gourd through a straw, is popular throughout the region.

Health in most of the region has improved in recent decades as evidenced by decreased infant mortality rates and longer life expectancies. Argentines, Chileans, and Uruguayans have access to healthcare that is subsidized by their governments, with high quality services and standards of care. Uruguay's healthcare system is especially advanced, with almost 50



physicians per 10,000 people, compared to 38 in Paraguay and the US rate of 36.

In Paraguay, few residents have health insurance, and clinics and hospitals are often ill-equipped and understaffed,

particularly in rural areas. Noncommunicable diseases, such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cancer, and chronic respiratory disease cause at least 75% of deaths in all the Southern Cone countries, though Argentina and Paraguay also experience outbreaks of communicable diseases.

11. Economics and Resources

This domain refers to beliefs regarding appropriate ways for a society to produce, distribute, and consume goods and services. It details how countries allocate their resources by sector, trade with other countries, give or receive aid, and pay for goods and services within their borders.

Under Spanish colonial control, regional economies focused predominantly on large agricultural estates. After their 19th-century independence, Chile experienced a mining boom, and while most economies continue to rely on the export of agricultural products today, they have become more diversified. The Southern Cone's largest economy is Argentina, followed by Chile, Uruguay, and then Paraguay.

The services sector comprises the largest part of GDP in all the countries, ranging from 63% in Uruguay to 48% in Paraguay, as of 2022. Tourism brings in significant income across the region, and Uruguay has emerged in recent decades as an important offshore banking center. Industry has seen significant growth in Paraguay, and mining continues to comprise about 14% of GDP in Chile in 2022.

Nevertheless, agriculture continues to provide most export products. For example, Argentina is one of Latin America's largest producers of grain, Paraguay is a world leader in soybean production, and livestock and associated products make up 40% of Uruguay's export income. Patagonia (a region comprising parts of Argentina and Chile) is home to about half the world's sheep, most sheared for their wool. Wheat and wine are other important agricultural products.



Paraguay tends to have the region's lowest standard of living and Uruguay the highest.

Paraguay also has a large informal sector, with many residents laboring as small-scale subsistence farmers. Argentina, Paraguay, and Uruguay benefit from their membership in Mercosur, the Southern Common Market, a trading bloc that has signed free trade agreements with Chile, Japan, the European Union, among others. Meanwhile, Chile has joined other international blocs, notably becoming the first South American member of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development in 2010.

As of late-2024, economic recovery is underway in the Southern Cone. While the region is still experiencing effects of the pandemic, experts expect economic growth to reach a moderate 2% in 2024

12. Technology and Materials

Societies use technology to transform their physical world, and culture heavily influences the development and use of

technology. Roads form the primary infrastructure in the region, though quality tends to deteriorate in rural areas. Argentina has one of Latin America's largest rail systems, though services have reduced in recent decades. While Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay have large container ports for sea-going vessels, landlocked Paraguay relies on river ports for access to the Atlantic Ocean.

Argentina and Chile depend predominantly on fossil fuels, and Argentina also has three nuclear reactors generating about 5% of its energy. While all the Southern Cone countries rely on hydroelectric plants, Paraguay generates all its power from hydroelectricity and is one of the world's largest exporters of electricity. By contrast, Uruguay has become a world leader in solar and wind energy, generating some 46% of its energy from such sources in 2023.

Of the Southern Cone countries, Uruguay ranks highest in a



2024 worldwide press freedom ranking. In Argentina, Chile, and Paraguay, press freedoms are threatened by the concentration of media ownership by a few organizations. Further, to prevent them from reporting on sensitive

topics, journalists in Argentina and Chile occasionally face harassment and those in Paraguay experience threats and violence.

Telecommunications infrastructure is generally highly developed. Paraguay has the region's lowest rates of mobile phone users at 128 subscriptions per 100 people as of 2022, compared to more than 132 in the other countries. Internet use ranges from 77% of Paraguayans to 90% of Chileans and Uruguayans.

Now that we have introduced general concepts that characterize the Southern Cone society at large, we will focus on specific features of society in Paraguay.

PART 2 – CULTURE SPECIFIC

1. HISTORY AND MYTH

Overview

A landlocked country in the heart of South America, Paraguay was home to several Indigenous populations, notably the Guaraní, before becoming a Spanish colony in the mid-16th century. Rivalries with its larger neighbors, particularly Brazil and Argentina, defined Paraguay's colonial and post-colonial history. Upon achieving independence in the early 19th century, a series of three Dictators ruled Paraguay, and the country suffered a catastrophic defeat in a war against Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay.

Intense, sometimes violent, competition between the two principal political parties gripped the country until 1954, when Dictator Alfredo Stroessner seized power and ruled for 35 years. The Colorado Party has dominated politics in Paraguay for more

than 70 years, and the country has been a democracy since the 1990s.



Early History

Before the Spanish arrival in the 16th century, nomadic and seminomadic peoples inhabited what is now

Paraguay for at least 3,000 years. The seminomadic Guaraní occupied most of the eastern region of modern Paraguay. Various other nomadic groups, known collectively as the Guaycuru, inhabited the western, now referred to as the Chaco region, part of present-day Paraguay. The Guaraní and Guaycuru frequently battled each other, and because of this constant warfare, the Guaraní allied with European explorers who arrived in search of routes to resource-rich Peru.

Spanish Arrival

In the 1520s, the first European explorers arrived in modern-day Paraguay under the false assumption that the area was rich in gold and silver like other parts of the Americas, particularly Mexico and Peru. In 1537, after several temporary expeditions by other explorers, the Spaniard Domingo Martínez de Irala established the first permanent settlement in modern-day Paraguay at **Asunción** (Assumption) on the banks of the Paraguay River.



Founded on the Catholic feast day of the Assumption, Asunción quickly grew in population as Irala encouraged his Spanish men to marry local Guaraní women. As a result of this early intermarriage, a homogenous **mestizo** (mixed Spanish and Indigenous) population soon dominated Asunción in contrast to other Spanish colonies in South America, where the elite consisted of **peninsulares** (people born in Spain) and **criollos** (Spanish people born in the Americas).

Because of the significant intermarriage between the Indigenous Guaraní and the Spanish, today Paraguay has one of the most homogenous populations in South America. About 90 percent of the population speaks the Guaraní language in addition to Spanish (see *Language and Communication*).

Early Colonial Paraguay

Under Irala's governorship, Asunción not only grew in population but also emerged as the center of Spanish power in southeastern South America. Shipments of gold from Peru passed through Asunción before reaching the Atlantic Ocean, and the city became a headquarters for Spanish explorers searching for riches in the rest of present-day Paraguay, Bolivia, and Argentina. After 2 decades without major discoveries of gold

or silver, the Spanish crown ordered Governor Irala to stop searching for resources and instead focus exclusively on settling the land. To fulfill this order, Irala instituted the **encomienda**



(tribute based on forced Indigenous labor) system in 1556, granting the Spanish the right to demand labor from the Indigenous Guaraní in exchange for clothing, food, shelter, protection, and religious instruction.

In practice, this system led to the exploitation of some 20,000 Guaraní and disruption of their traditional lifestyle. During the last years of Irala's governorship, Paraguay

experienced significant turmoil including political instability, uprisings by the newly exploited Guaraní, and attacks from Portuguese raiders in Brazil.

Jesuit Missions

Shortly after the inauguration of the *encomienda* system, the Jesuits, an order of Catholic missionaries, began building **reducciones** (settlements) for the Guaraní populations in areas

outside of Asunción's control. Seeking to convert the Guaraní to Catholicism and create a humane alternative to the *encomienda* system, the Jesuits constructed thirty *reducciones* by the early 18th century. These self-sustaining and politically



autonomous communities became centers of religious conversion, agricultural activity, and defenses against

Portuguese expansion from present-day Brazil. Over time, the riches of the *reducciones* drew resentment from Asunción, and concerns about a powerful Jesuit "state within a state" reached the Spanish royal court. In 1767, King Charles III of Spain expelled the Jesuits from all Spanish domains, including Paraguay, and the once thriving *reducciones* crumbled to ruins.

Viceroyalty of Río de la Plata

In 1776, the Spanish crown created the **Virreinato de la Río de la Plata** (Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata, or Viceroyalty of the river of silver) which ruled over the territory of modern-day Argentina, Bolivia, Uruguay, and Paraguay from its capital in Buenos Aires. Through this colonial restructuring, Asunción, and



the rest of what is now Paraguay, became subordinate to Buenos Aires. For the next 3 decades, Paraguay's economy suffered as Buenos Aires replaced Asunción as the region's commercial nucleus and gateway to Europe. Elites in Asunción resented

their diminished status relative to Buenos Aires, and early signs of Paraguayan nationalism and opposition towards its more powerful neighbors began to emerge.

Paraguayan Independence

Soon after forming the Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata, Spain began prioritizing its European homeland over its overseas colonies due to threats from Napoleon Bonaparte's Army following the 1789 French Revolution. In 1810, authorities in Buenos Aires called for a **cabildo** (council) which resulted in a declaration of independence from Spain, founding the nation of Argentina to govern the Viceroyalty of Río de la Plata. In 1810, the governor of Buenos Aires declared independence from Spain and founded the nation of Argentina to govern the Viceroyalty of Río de la Plata. Since Paraguay was once part of the Viceroyalty, the new Argentine leaders expected to govern it

and dispatched 1,100 troops to Asunción to establish control. After nearly 3 centuries of external Spanish dominance, the Paraguayans refused to be ruled by Buenos Aires like a colony and crushed the Argentine Army. The victorious militia in Asunción, led by Pedro Juan Caballero and Fulgencio Yegros, overthrew the remaining Spanish colonial authorities in the city.

Fueled by fierce nationalism, the Paraguayan uprising against the Spanish lasted 2 days, and on May 15, 1811, Paraguay officially achieved



independence from Spanish rule. Today, Paraguayans celebrate their independence on 2 consecutive days, May 14 and 15, to commemorate the 2-day rebellion that overthrew the Spanish. Free from both Spain and Argentina, the newly formed nation of Paraguay now controlled its own affairs.

Early Independence: The Francia Regime

Shortly after Paraguay achieved independence, Dr. José Gaspar Rodríguez de Francia, known as ***El Supremo*** (The Supreme One) took control of the country and ruled as Dictator from 1814-40. A diligent yet ruthless leader, Francia brought stability to Paraguay despite the threat of Brazilian invasion in the North, aggressive Chaco Indigenous groups in the West, and an Argentine economic blockade in the South. Surrounded by hostile neighbors and lacking an outlet to the Atlantic Ocean, Francia managed to create a self-sufficient economy through extensive state control and suppression of political freedoms.

He transformed Paraguay's economy by seizing land from the Catholic Church and other colonial landowners then leasing it to peasants. In an effort to dismantle the remaining power of the Spanish-born aristocracy, Francia prohibited Spaniards from marrying other Spaniards. Coupled with the extensive land redistribution, Francia's marriage policies weakened the influence of the old elite and won him the support of ordinary Paraguayans. Despite preserving Paraguay's independence,

Francia's strict isolationism and political repression hindered economic progress and set the stage for future dictatorships after his death in 1840. Today, Paraguayans have strongly opposed opinions about Francia's legacy: some view him as an oppressive tyrant responsible for Paraguay's historic lack of democracy, while others praise him for safeguarding the nation's independence during uncertain times.



Post-Francia Regimes and Buildup to War

Shortly after Francia's death in 1840, Carlos Antonio López gained control of Paraguay and ruled as the country's second Dictator until 1862. Despite his authoritarian leanings, Antonio López modernized Paraguay's infrastructure and increased its industrial capacity by building the country's first railroad and reopening its markets to the

world. This reversal of Paraguay's isolationism led to diplomatic disputes with the US, Argentina, and Brazil. These arguments, coupled with Paraguay's historic mistrust of its neighbors, prompted Antonio López to strengthen the military.

Following Antonio López's death in 1862, his inexperienced son Francisco Solano López assumed power as Paraguay's third Dictator. Sharing his father's desire to modernize and strengthen Paraguay, Solano López intensified the country's military buildup. By the mid-1860s, Solano López commanded one of the region's largest standing armies and finished the construction of the Humaitá fortress at the mouth of the Paraguay River. In contrast to Francia's isolationism and Antonio López's focus on diplomacy, Solano López wanted Paraguay to play a larger role in the region. His overconfidence and drive for power concerned neighboring countries and foreign powers. The result was the most devastating war in South

America, which killed 90 percent of Paraguay's prewar male population.

War of the Triple Alliance

Solano López's chance to enhance Paraguay's standing in the region arrived in 1864 when Brazil sent troops to intervene in Uruguay's civil war. Fearing that Brazil's intervention would disrupt the regional balance of power and threaten Paraguayan independence, Solano López declared war on Brazil and invaded the Brazilian province of Mato Grosso. After capturing arms and territory, Solano López turned his attention to the Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Sol, the main staging ground for Brazilian forces entering Uruguay.



To meet the Brazilians in Rio Grande, do Sol, Solano López needed to cross Argentine territory. When the Argentine government denied his request to pass through the country, Solano López declared war on Argentina and crossed the territory anyway. Heavy fighting in Brazil and Argentina stalled the Paraguayan Army, and a Brazil-backed government soon took power in Uruguay. In 1865, united in their opposition to Solano López, the governments of Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay signed the Treaty of the Triple Alliance and formed a military alliance against Paraguay. Within a year, Solano López's attempt to expand Paraguay's power in the region dragged the country into a war against its most powerful neighbors.

Paraguayan Defeat by the Triple Alliance

Despite the military buildup started by Antonio López and continued by Solano López, the Triple Alliance forces still outmatched Paraguay's military. The Triple Alliance's combined population of 12 million dwarfed Paraguay's population of

450,000, and the allies swiftly blockaded Paraguay's outlets to the Atlantic Ocean, isolating the country from sources of foreign assistance and resources.

Though outmanned, the Paraguayan military resisted longer than anticipated. After driving Solano López's forces back into Paraguay, the allied forces spent 2 years besieging the Humaitá fortress on the way to Asunción. Faced with famine, disease, and supply shortages, Paraguayan forces fought barefoot and without adequate food. In 1869, the battered Paraguayan Army, which at this point contained units of child soldiers, retreated

deep into the country's interior.



For the next year, Solano López waged a guerrilla campaign in the northern jungles with the remnants of his troops until Brazilian forces killed him in

1870. Solano López's final words of "***muero con mi patria***" ("I die with my country") reflected a tragic truth, considering the war resulted in the deaths of over half of Paraguay's prewar population. Nevertheless, today Paraguayans largely consider Solano López a national hero. The presidential palace, a major avenue in Asunción, and important streets in Montevideo and Buenos Aires are named for him. The one thousand Guaraní coin also bears his portrait.

Aftermath of the War of the Triple Alliance

Defeat at the hands of the Triple Alliance left Paraguay's population decimated, impoverished, and under occupation. The war left 1 man for every 28 women and brought about extreme poverty. Disease ravaged the country, and the ruined Humaitá fortress became a quarantine zone to prevent yellow fever from spreading to the capital. Beyond the human toll, defeat brought an era of foreign dominance to Paraguay as the victors of the war occupied the country from 1870-76. Consisting primarily of Brazilians and Argentines, the occupation government sold Paraguay's state-owned land to foreign companies, which paved

the way towards the unequal distribution of land that still exists (see *Political and Social Relations*). Due to disputes over territory and a timely intervention by US President Rutherford B. Hayes, Paraguay managed to keep most of its land despite the defeat. As a result of US assistance in settling postwar borders, one of Paraguay's departments (states) is named "**Presidente Hayes**" (President Hayes, see *Political and Social Relations*).

Postwar Political Reconstruction

Once occupation ended, a new class of Paraguayan political leaders consisting mostly of those who had fought with the allies against Solano López took control of the country.



Beginning in 1887, the political class in Paraguay divided into two parties, the **Partido Liberal** (Liberal Party) and the **Partido Colorado** (Red or Colorado Party), also known as the **Asociación Nacional Republicana** (ANR, National Republican Association, see *Political and Social Relations*), which continue to dominate today.

Even after Paraguay's formal occupation ended, foreign interests continued to dominate the nation's political system, with Brazil supporting the Colorados and Argentina the Liberals. To raise funds to rebuild the nation, both parties sold large chunks of state-owned land to foreign companies which concentrated wealth in the hands of a few large, mostly foreign, landowners.

The Colorados ruled from 1887-1904, and after a brief civil war, the Liberals took power from 1904-36. During this period of party politics, ordinary Paraguayans suffered from instability, poverty, and inequality as party leaders fought for political power and the wealth generated by foreign investments.

The Chaco War

During the 1930s, as Paraguay suffered under the Liberal Party and from the effects of the Great Depression, tensions with Bolivia over territory in the Chaco region escalated into war. Paraguay and Bolivia both claimed the remote, inhospitable Chaco region, but neither had established firm control over it. Except for some Mennonite farming colonies and Guaycuru nomads, the area remained mostly uninhabited.

In the 1920s, Bolivia began to pursue its claim to the Chaco, aiming to access potential oil reserves and reach the Atlantic Ocean through the Paraguay River. Bolivian troops began building forts in the disputed territory, yet the Liberal Paraguayan



government did not defend the land despite the population calling for war. In 1932, with Bolivian forces only 130 miles from Asunción, Paraguay declared war against Bolivia. After a year of fighting, the Paraguayan Army appeared to be on the

verge of victory. However, the Liberal Government's agreement to a temporary ceasefire prolonged the war, sparking outrage among Paraguayans.

In 1935, after 2 more years of fighting, General José Estigarribia's Paraguayan forces pushed the Bolivians from most of the Chaco, and the two nations ended hostilities. The fighting resulted in the death of between 30,000-40,000 Paraguayans and some 55,000 Bolivians. While Paraguay retained most of the disputed Chaco territory, Bolivia received one port on the Paraguay River. This concession fueled the pre-existing resentment towards the Liberal Government and set the stage for a coup.

1936 Febrerista Revolution

In February 1936, Chaco War veterans and political rebels formed the **Partido Revolucionario Febrerista** (Party of the

February Revolution) and overthrew the Liberal Party Government in Asunción. Despite initial support, the revolutionary *Febrerista* Government proved ineffective, and the Liberals regained power in 1937. General Estigarribia, a Chaco War hero, served as President of the new Liberal Party Government for 1 year before his death in a plane crash.

1947 Civil War and the Colorado Return to Power

In 1940, General Higinio Moríngo succeeded Estigarribia as President and banned the *Febrerista* and Liberal Parties from the government. Although Moríngo had limited support from the population, the Paraguayan economy grew under his leadership because of US economic assistance and increased demand for Paraguayan products during World War II. Despite economic growth, in 1946, a group of rebels from the *Febrerista*, Liberal, and Communist Parties launched a civil war to overthrow the Moríngo government.



The Colorado Party proved to be the deciding factor in the war. Lieutenant Colonel Alfredo Stroessner, a Colorado officer, struck decisive blows against the rebels, and within a year of fighting, the Moríngo government regained control. The victory dismantled the *Febrerista*, Liberal, and Communist Parties, leaving the Colorados as the only force in Paraguayan politics. President Moríngo retained power until Colorado military officers removed him from office in 1948. Backed by the Paraguayan military, the Colorado Party governed Paraguay for 60 uninterrupted years.

The Stroessner Dictatorship (1954-1989)

Beginning in 1954, General Alfredo Stroessner, the 1947 civil war hero, ruled Paraguay as a dictator for 35 years in a period called the **Stronato** (time of Stroessner). The son of a German

immigrant father and a Paraguayan mother, Stroessner became the undisputed leader of the Colorado Party and glorified



previous dictatorships to retain power in his own regime. In the 1960s and 1970s, Stroessner promoted rapid economic growth in Paraguay due in large part to American and Brazilian economic assistance.

By establishing himself as anti-communist, Stroessner secured American military and economic aid. Then, in 1973, Stroessner partnered with Brazil to build the Itaipú dam, a \$19 billion hydroelectric dam on the Paraná River between the two countries. The 9-year project generated thousands of jobs which temporarily boosted Paraguay's economy until the end of construction in 1983. The completion of the Itaipú Dam project occurred just as the US started reducing its economic and military assistance to Paraguay due to the Stroessner regime's poor human rights record and absence of democracy. In 1989, capitalizing on the regime's declining international and domestic support, General Andrés Rodríguez led a coup that ended Stroessner's 35 years in office. Despite also belonging to the Colorado Party, President Rodríguez promised to bring democracy to Paraguay.

Transition to Democracy

Seeking to reverse the diplomatic isolation of the Stroessner dictatorship, President Rodríguez made good on his commitment to bring democracy to Paraguay by ratifying a new Constitution, reinstating banned newspapers, and legalizing opposition parties. Rodríguez also sought closer relations with Paraguay's neighbors and joined the ***Mercado Común del Sur*** (Southern Common Market, or MERCOSUR), a free trade bloc that included Paraguay, Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay at the time.

Paraguayan politics after Rodríguez faced instability when his two successors, Colorado Party Presidents Juan Carlos Wasmosy (1993-98) and Luis González Macchi (1999-2003), were charged with corruption and a Vice President, Luis María Argaña, assassinated in 1999. The economy also struggled in the 1990s as levels of poverty, inequality, education, and health worsened. In 2008, Fernando Lugo, a left-wing former Catholic Bishop and leader of the ***Alianza Patriótica para el Cambio*** (Patriotic Alliance for Change), won the Presidency, ending 60 years of Colorado Party rule and marking Paraguay's first-ever peaceful transfer of power to an opposition party. In 2012, before implementing any lasting reforms, Paraguay's Colorado-led Congress impeached Lugo, and the Colorado Party regained power through the election of President Horacio Cartes in 2013.

Modern Politics (2013-24)

Cartes' attempts to extend his presidential term led to protests and decreased popular support for the party. In 2018, Mario Abdo Benítez of the Colorado Party narrowly won the presidential election despite strong performances from opposition parties. In 2025, the Colorado Party remains in power under the leadership of President Santiago Peña, the former Finance Minister and a direct descendant of Paraguay's first Dictator, Dr. Francia. He governs with a socially conservative stance and advocates for free-market policies and greater regional integration.



Myth Overview

In contrast to history, which is an objective record of the past based on verifiable facts, myths embody a culture's values and often explain the origins of humans and the natural world. Myths are important because they provide a sense of unique heritage and identity.

Yerba Mate

A Guaraní myth narrates the creation of the yerba-mate tree, which is used to make mate and **tereré**, Paraguay's national beverages (see *Sustenance and Health*). The myth begins with Yasí, the moon goddess, and Araí, the cloud goddess, taking human forms so they can explore the Paraguayan jungle. During



their adventure, a jaguar nearly kills them, but an old hunter saves them by shooting the beast with an arrow.

Later that night, the goddesses visit the hunter and gives him a yerba-mate plant out of gratitude. Before returning to the sky, Yasí and Araí teach him how to prepare the infusion. Today, nearly

everyone in Paraguay consumes yerba-mate and **tereré**, often from ornate gords and with social customs (see *Sustenance and Health*).

Plata Yvguy

The **plata yvguy** (buried treasure) myth claims that during the War of the Triple Alliance, Solano López and his soldiers buried Paraguay's national treasures on the battlefield. Since the end of the war, generations of Paraguayans have searched for the **plata yvguy**. Contemporary folklore suggests that treasure hunters experience hallucinations to include those of headless white dogs or seeing ghosts of soldiers when they are near the **plata yvguy**.

The belief of buried treasure is widespread, and Paraguayans continue to search for it with metal detectors. The most coveted prize, Solano López's wagon, which was allegedly loaded with gold and silver from Paraguay's treasury, remains undiscovered.

2. POLITICAL AND SOCIAL RELATIONS

Official Name

Republic of Paraguay

República del Paraguay

(Spanish)

Political Borders

Brazil: 852 mi

Argentina: 1573 mi

Bolivia: 468 mi

Coastline: 0 mi (landlocked)

Capital

Asunción

Demographics

Paraguay's population of around 7.52 million is growing at an annual rate of around 1.09%. Some 63.1% of the total population lives in urban areas, with over 3.5 million people residing in the capital city, Asunción. The Eastern and Southern regions have the highest population concentration, while the Western region holds only 2% of the population.



Flag



Adopted in 1842 by previous Dictator Dr. Francia (see *History and Myth*), the Paraguayan flag has three equal, horizontal stripes of red (top), white (middle), and blue (bottom). The red represents bravery and patriotism, white integrity and peace, and blue liberty and generosity. The center of the flag has an emblem that differs on each side, making the flag one of three national flags with different front and back sides. The front

emblem is the national coat of arms, a yellow five-pointed star with a green wreath and the words "***República del Paraguay***" (Republic of Paraguay). The star is from the story that a star was

shining over the capital city Asunción when Paraguay declared independence in 1811 (see *History and Myth*). The back emblem is the seal of the Treasury, a yellow lion below a red Cap of Liberty and the words “**Paz Y Justicia**” (Peace and Justice).

Geography

Paraguay is a landlocked country located in central South America. It borders Bolivia to the north and northwest, Brazil to the east and northeast, and Argentina to the south, west, and southeast.



Paraguay's total land area is just under 157,048 sq mi, only slightly smaller than California.

Paraguay has two distant geographic regions, Eastern and Western, divided by the **Río Paraguay** (Paraguay River). The Eastern region includes Paraguay's major agricultural and urban centers. The East features grassy plains, rolling hills, and low mountains. The Paraná Plateau of Brazil, a 1,000-2,000 ft plateau, extends into the Eastern part of the East region. The Western region, known as Chaco, covers some two-thirds of the country and forms the Northeast part of Gran Chaco, a vast arid lowland that extends into Bolivia and Argentina. The West features low, marshy plains near the Paraguay River and dry forests with thorny scrub elsewhere in the region. Parts of the Pantanal, the largest tropical wetland and flooded grassland in the world, is in northern Paraguay.

Despite being landlocked, Paraguay is known for its rivers, which are the country's major medium of transportation (see *Technology and Material*). Rivers make up 3,649 sq miles of Paraguay's total area and over 75% of the country's borders. The three largest rivers are the Paraguay River, Paraná River, and Pilcomayo River. The Paraná River is the second largest river in South America and joins the Paraguay River in the Southwest. The Paraguay River runs from the North to the South of Paraguay and passes through Bolivia, Brazil, and Argentina. The Pilcomayo River joins the Paraguay River near Asunción.

Climate

Paraguay, located on the Tropic of Capricorn, has a semi-tropical climate in close to 80% of the country and a temperate climate in the remainder. Paraguay has mild winters and long, hot, and humid summers. In the East, the annual average temperature is between 68°F-75°F, while in the West, the average annual temperature is around 77°F. Precipitation varies by geographic region. In the East average annual rainfall is around 100 inches, while it oscillates around 15 inches in the West. Rainfall occurs most during the periods March-May and October-November.

Natural Hazards

From 2010-20, natural disasters affected over 2.6 million people in Paraguay. In March 2019, floods from the Paraguay River damaged 347 schools, killed 16 people, forced 19,500 families to evacuate, and affected 69,534 families. Since 2020, successive longstanding droughts have plagued the country. In September 2024, water levels in the Paraguay River dropped 35 inches below the benchmark at the port of Asunción, the lowest point in 120 years. Lower water levels disrupt local transport, fishing, and commerce on the major waterways.

Between 1985-2013, around a fifth of the Chaco was cleared and used for food production, primarily from cattle ranching and commercial agriculture (see *Economics and Resources*).



Following a series of devastating wildfires in Paraguay since 2019, scientists recently designated Gran Chaco one of four fire-prone hotspots in South America.

Environmental Issues

Human practices and climatic changes are increasing the occurrence of natural disasters and environmental degradation in Paraguay, resulting in increased drought, flooding, and pollution. More occurrences of natural disasters are connected to changing weather patterns, such as the El Niño phenomena that bring floods and cooler weather and La Niña episodes that

bring droughts and warmer weather. Extreme rainfall causes landslides and flooding in the alluvial plains and hills of the East. Droughts cause water supply shortages and reductions in hydroelectric outputs in the West. Additionally, toxic dumping and inadequate waste disposal are polluting Paraguay's rivers, further stressing water resource management.

Government

Paraguay is a presidential republic that divides into 17

Departamentos (departments) and the capital city Asunción, each led by a Governor and a

Departmental Board, a group of 7 to 21 regular and alternate Parliamentarians depending on Department population.



Departments subdivide into 262 **Distritos** (districts), each governed by a Mayor and local council. Residents vote in general elections every 5 years, with simultaneous national and departmental elections held most recently in 2023.

District elections are also held every 5 years, separately from general elections. Residents most recently voted in district elections in 2021. Paraguay adopted its current Constitution in 1992 and last amended it in 2011. The Constitution promotes a representative and pluralistic democracy, dividing government power among the executive, legislative, and judiciary branches.

Executive Branch

The current President, Santiago Peña, took office in 2023 (see "Political Climate" below). The President is the head-of-state, government, and the commander-in-chief of the armed forces. The President appoints military and police commanders, and the 18 members of the Council of Ministers. After their term, former Presidents are appointed Senators for life with speaking powers but no voting powers.

The President and Vice President (VP) are jointly and directly elected by a simple majority vote for a 5-year term with no possibility of re-election. Paraguay does not have a runoff system for presidential elections; the candidate with the highest

number of votes is elected. Entering office in 2023, Paraguay's current VP is Pedro Alliana.



Legislative Branch

The 2-chamber **Congreso Nacional** (National Congress) consists of a 45-seat **Cámara de Senadores** (Chamber of Senators) and an

80-seat **Cámara de Diputados** (Chamber of Deputies). Senators are directly elected in a single nationwide constituency by a closed-list proportional representation vote. In closed-list voting, electors select a party rather than individual candidates. Winners are decided in the order they appear on the list dependent on their party's proportion of the vote. Deputies are directly elected in 18 multi-seat constituencies, corresponding to Paraguay's 17 departments and Asunción, by a closed-list proportional representation vote. Members of both chambers serve 5-year terms and can seek re-election indefinitely.

Judicial Branch

The judiciary includes the **Corte Suprema de Justicia** (Supreme Court of Justice), appellate courts, first instance courts, minor courts, and other courts. As the highest court in the judicial system, the Supreme Court is an appellate court that reviews lower-court decisions. The Supreme Court consists of nine ministers and is divided into the Constitutional Court, Civil and Commercial Chamber, and Criminal division with three ministers each. The **Consejo de la Magistratura** (Council of Magistrates), a six-member independent body, proposes ministers. After the council's proposals, the Chamber of Senators appoints ministers with presidential approval. Ministers serve for 5 years and can be reappointed for additional terms until the mandatory retirement age of 75.

Political Climate

Paraguay's democracy is characterized by single-party rule. Democracy indexes score Paraguay around 6 of 10, ranking the country 41 of 137 using criteria for political and economic

transformation and governance. Paraguay has an electoral system, checks and balances, and limits on military power, along with universal and compulsory suffrage for citizens age 18 and older.

Paraguay's political system has two prominent parties, the conservative **Asociación Nacional Republicana – Partido Colorado**, commonly known as the *Partido Colorado* (Colorado Party, or Red Party) and **Partido Liberal Radical Auténtico** or the Partido Liberal (Liberal Party). Despite a multi-party system, the Colorado Party dominates Paraguay's political system, challenging values of representation and competition core to democracy. The Colorado Party was affiliated with Dictator Alfredo Stroessner (1954-89) and almost every President since elections began in 1993.

The only exception was in 2008, when Fernando Lugo, affiliated with the Liberal Party, won the presidential election. In 2012, the Colorado-led Congress impeached Lugo, attracting condemnation from the international community. In 2017, former President Horacio Cortes attempted to override Paraguay's one-term limit, sparking protest in Asunción (see "Foreign Relations" below). During former President Mario Abdo Benítez's term (2018-23), the Colorado Party split into competing factions, **Honor Colorado** (Honor Colorado) led by former President Cortes, and **Fuerza Republicana** (Republican Force) led by former President Benítez. In 2023, Santiago Peña, aligned with Honor Colorado, won the presidential election, extending the party's dominance to the present.



Colorado governments have mostly sought to maintain macroeconomic stability, maintain low tax rates, and finance infrastructure projects. The current Peña administration has followed predecessor policies, along with increasing transparency in the civil service and public pensions system, funding school lunch programs, and renegotiating the binational Itaipú hydroelectric dam terms with Brazil (see "Foreign Relations" below).

Paraguay's political system is plagued by corruption. Politicians practice vote-buying, extortion, and other methods of patronage. According to Latin American Public Opinion Project, in 2021, 75% of Paraguayans believed that most politicians were corrupt (see "Security Issues" below).

Paraguay human rights challenges include limited support for civil society, arbitrary detentions, and inadequate minority representation (see "Social Relations" below). In 2024, Paraguay's Congress passed a law that regulates its civil-society organizations, raising concerns from international human rights groups.



Defense

Paraguay's military force, the **Fuerzas Armadas de La Nación** (Armed Forces of the Nation) consists of ground, maritime, air branches, and a paramilitary with a joint

strength of around 28,750 personnel. The military's primary mission is to safeguard territorial integrity and legitimately constituted authorities of Paraguay. There is compulsory conscription for men at 18 years of age, having an obligation of 12 months for the Army and 24 for the Navy.

Army: As the largest branch, the Army consists of some 7,400 active-duty personnel and is organized into 3 division headquarters. The Army comprises 4 maneuver corps (3 light and 1 guard regiment), 1 combat service support (logistics group), and 3 combat support (artillery brigade, engineer brigade, and signals battalion).

Navy: Paraguay's Navy comprises around 3,800 active-duty personnel and has Marines and Naval Aviation divisions. Their naval fleet consists of 21 vessels for both patrol and amphibious operations. About 900 Marines organize into 3 Amphibious Maneuver battalions, and roughly 100 Naval Aviation personnel organize into 1 transport squadron, 1 training squadron, 1 attack helicopter squadron, and 1 transport helicopter squadron.

Air Force: Composed of around 2,750 active-duty personnel, the Air Force comprises 1 ground attack, 2 transport, 2 training, and 1 transport helicopter squadrons.

Gendarmerie and Paramilitary: Paraguay's gendarmerie and paramilitary comprises around 14,800 active-duty personnel, who protect domestic security (see "Security Issues" below). Paraguay has the **Fuerza de Tarea Conjunta**, a joint Task Force with the national police and the **Comando de Defensa Interna**, an internal defense command with the Army, Navy, and Air Force to coordinate security support to the police and National Anti-Drug Secretariat.

Security Issues

Organized Crime: In 2023, the Global Organized Crime Index ranked Paraguay fourth of 193 UN members for criminality, only below Myanmar, Colombia, and Mexico. Criminal groups exploit Paraguay's centralized location, porous borders, and extensive internal waterways to traffic contraband, smuggle arms, and launder money. Organized crime mostly occurs in Paraguay's Tri-Border Area (TBA), the southeast area of the country near the border with Argentina and Brazil, and the Northern region.



Paraguay is South America's leading marijuana producer and an important pipeline for Cocaine, mostly exported to Europe. In 2023, Hamburg authorities seized 10 tons of Cocaine, which originated in Bolivia and passed through Paraguay. Brazilian gangs like **Primeiro Comando da Capital** (PCC) and **Comando Vermelho** reportedly operate in Paraguay.

Terrorism: Paraguay is a hub for terrorist activity and a country where US designated Foreign Terrorist Organizations – Hezbollah, al-Qaeda, and Hamas -- are believed to recruit, plan attacks, and fundraise. Hezbollah has a regional headquarters in Ciudad del Este, a metropolitan area in the TBA. Hezbollah provides financial services, such as money laundering, to other crime syndicates in the area.

PARAGUAY

Paraguayan Air Force



Major
General



Brigadier
General



Colonel



Lieutenant
Colonel



Major



Captain



1st
Lieutenant



Lieutenant



2nd
Lieutenant



Command
Sergeant
Major



Sergeant
Major



Master
Sergeant



Sergeant
1st Class



Staff
Sergeant



Sergeant



Sergeant
2nd Class



Corporal



Private
1st Class

Domestic Armed Groups: Since 2008, the Paraguayan's People Army (EPP) and its offshoots Mariscal López's Army and the Armed Peasant Association have inflicted violence in Paraguay. The EPP is a small domestic armed group of between 20-50 people. The EPP initially was dedicated to socialist revolution in Paraguay, focusing on extorting and intimidating the local governments and populations of Concepción, San Pedro, and Amambay. Since 2008, the EPP has been



responsible for the deaths of 21 soldiers, 13 police officers, and 28 civilians.

Paraguay partnered with Argentina and Brazil on the Trilateral TBA Command and with the

Interior Ministries of Brazil and Uruguay to increase intelligence sharing.

Paraguay is a member of the Financial Action Task Force of Latin America (LATAM), a regional body on legal frameworks for counterterrorism and corruption. In 2024, Paraguayan authorities offered a US \$894,366 reward for information on EPP members to solve the kidnappings of former VP Óscar Denis, Police Officer Edelio Morínigo, and rancher Félix Urbietta.

Despite Paraguay's efforts, state institutions and politicians have a limited ability to stop organized crime and terrorism. In the TBA, criminal groups sometimes overpower the police forces. Some political and economic elites have close ties with criminal networks and enable criminal activity. In 2023, Congressman Erico Galeano was indicted for lending his private plane for drug-trafficking operations.

In 2022, the US sanctioned former President Horacio Cortes, VP Hugo Velázquez, and his close advisor Juan Carlos for suspected involvement with Hezbollah (see "Foreign Relations" below). In 2022, Paraguay's high-profile criminal prosecutor, Marcelo Pecci, was murdered while on his honeymoon at an island resort off the coast of Colombia. Murder suspects are believed to be connected to the PCC.

Foreign Relations

Generally, Paraguay maintains constructive relations with its neighbors in LATAM as well as Taiwan and the US. Paraguay is a member of multiple international political, economic, and peace organizations like the United Nations (UN), International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and World Trade Organization. Paraguay is an active member of regional organizations like the Organization of American States and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States.

Paraguay has been a consistent contributor to UN peacekeeping operations since 2001 and is the eighth largest contributor in the Americas, with deployments typically less than 40 people. Paraguay also has military ties with the US and signed a defense-cooperation agreement with Russia in 2017.



Paraguay is a member of the Southern Common Market, known by its Spanish-language abbreviation Mercosur. Mercosur is an economic and political bloc founded to create a common market, encourage development, and bolster agreements. The bloc includes Paraguay, Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, Bolivia, and Venezuela (suspended in 2016), among others.

Relations with Brazil: Paraguay and Brazil have had official diplomatic relations since September 14th, 1844, celebrating their 180th anniversary in 2024. The two nations focus on commercial, academic, and cultural exchange. Paraguay remains an ally to Brazil today, despite Brazil's part in the Triple Alliance war against Paraguay in the 19th century (see *History and Myth*).

In the 20th century, Brazil supported the Stroessner dictatorship. Stroessner created favorable conditions, such as abolishing a law prohibiting foreign purchase of land, for Brazilian migration into the eastern border region of Paraguay. Today, Brazilians are Paraguay's largest immigrant population, numbering over 400,000.

An indicator of Brazil-Paraguay cooperation is the Itaipú dam, one of world's largest hydroelectric plants, with a capacity of 14,000 MWh (see *Economics and Resources*).



In 1973, Brazil and Paraguay signed the Itaipú Treaty, which established the terms of the construction and operation of the plant.

Relations with Taiwan:

Paraguay has a strong relationship with Taiwan and is the last South American country with

formal relations to Taiwan and only that recognizes Taiwan's sovereignty. Paraguay's formal links with Taiwan lends to its statehood, and in return, Taiwan supports Paraguay's plans to develop an industrial sector with value-added production. Between 2019-23, Taiwan pledged US \$150 million in aid to fund housing, education, and transport in Paraguay.

Paraguay's relationship with Taiwan affects an alternative formal relationship with China, which is South America's top trading partner and a major source of Foreign Direct Investment and aid through the Belt and Road Initiative. Between 2010-19, China invested US \$14 billion annually into LATAM but hardly any went to Paraguay. According to Francisco Urdinez of the Chilean think tank China's Impacts in LATAM and the Caribbean or ICLAC, Paraguay's relationship with Taiwan costs it more than 1% of its GDP in missed investment and credit from China. Paraguay's agricultural sector has called for the government to open soybeans and beef to Chinese markets. In 2023, President Santiago Peña said he was interested in maintaining Paraguay's relationship with Taiwan and open to trade with China.

Relations with the US: Paraguay and the US established diplomatic relations in 1861. In 1878, US President Rutherford B. Hayes' intervention preserved much of Paraguay's territory despite its resounding loss in the War of the Triple Alliance. President Hayes' efforts resulted in generating a positive sentiment toward the US throughout Paraguay that still exists (see *History and Myth*). In 2023, US-Paraguay merchandise

trade exceeded US \$3 billion, with the US exporting around \$2.8 billion goods to Paraguay and importing \$259 million goods from Paraguay. For fiscal year 2024, the US President's budget proposal requested \$4.5 million in assistance for Paraguay.

Recently, tension between Paraguay and the US intensified following US actions to combat corruption in Paraguay. In 2021, the US sanctioned a member of Paraguay's lower house and three businesspeople. In 2022, the US State Department sanctioned a former President, his adult children, a previous VP, his advisor, both of their respective spouses, and their adult children for engagement in deals to consolidate power, particularly involving Hezbollah (see "Security Issues" above).

Ethnic Groups

Approximately 95% of Paraguayans are **Mestizos** (mixed Spanish and Indigenous), 2.3% Indigenous, 1% Afro-Paraguayan, and the rest divided among white and Asian. There is no official information about Paraguay's ethnic composition, as the census does not ask about race nor ethnicity. Paraguay is one of the most ethnically homogenous countries in LATAM, as most residents are *Mestizos* (see *History and Myth*).



Prior to European colonization, several Indigenous ethnic groups lived in present-day Paraguay. The Paraguay River splits the country's Indigenous populations among four ethno-linguistic groups, who mostly spoke Guaraní, in eastern Paraguay. There were 13 ethno-linguistic groups of the Chaco, who spoke 5 different languages (see *Religion and Spirituality*). The most dominant Indigenous ethno-linguistic group was the Guaraní. Historically, the Paraguayan Indigenous population's existence was undermined by encroachment into their territories, along with political and social discrimination.

Today, Indigenous people belong to 17 different ethnic groups and have around 19 different languages. Approximately 90% of Indigenous people speak Guaraní, which is also the common language in Paraguay and an important part of Paraguayan national identity (see *Language and Communication*). Most

Indigenous people live around Asunción or in northern Paraguay, such as the Guaraní, Aché, and Maká people.

Many Afro-Paraguayans trace their ancestry to Africans, who were brought to Paraguay as slaves during the Spanish colonial period. Today, most afro descendants live in Emboscada (89%), Kamba Kuá (5%), and Kamba Kokué (4.9%). Emboscada was founded in 1740 with the name ***Emboscada de Pardos Libres*** (Place of Free Blacks), because its first settlers were 500 freed persons of black and Indigenous descent. In 1820, Kamba Kuá was settled by 250 soldiers who went into exile with José Artigas, the independence leader of the Banda Oriental (now Uruguay). Kamba Kuá maintains a strong afro-descendant community that

practices its culture through festivals.

In the decades following the War of the Triple Alliance, Paraguay implemented a pro-immigration policy to increase population (see



History and Myth). The government recorded around 12,000 immigrants entering Paraguay between 1882-1907. Migrants of European and Arabic descent were assimilated into *Mestizo* culture and urban life. Beginning in the 1930s, Japanese began to immigrate to Paraguay because of agricultural opportunity and a bilateral agreement between Paraguay and Japan. By the 1980s, there were some 8,000 Japanese immigrants, mostly in agricultural settlements. In the 1970s, Brazilian migration to Paraguay increased. Today, Brazilians are the largest migrant population (see “Foreign Relations” above).

Social Relations

Like in other Spanish colonies, early Paraguay had a hierarchical class- and race-based system that continues to influence its society. Paraguay’s *Mestizo* population became the dominant class during the colonial period because of policy that encouraged intermarriage (see “Ethnic Groups” above). These policies that encouraged Spanish and Indigenous marriage, did not allow for *Mestizo* marriage with minority groups, maintaining the divide between *Mestizo* and Black, mixed-race afro

decedent, and un-assimilated Indigenous populations. Today, Paraguayan society divides along ethnic, rural-urban, and rich-poor lines. *Mestizos*, specifically those that own land and are a part of the Colorado Party, control most of the country (see “Political Climate” above).

Unequal land distribution causes significant urban-rural and economic disparities. Small farmers and rural residents encounter barriers to owning land, violent



persecution, and forced migration to urban areas for economic opportunity. Foreign nationals and multinational corporations own most of the land, primarily using it for large-scale corporate farms (see *Economics and Resources*). Specifically, 90% of the land was in the hands of 5% of landowners, while the remaining 10% was divided among small and medium-sized properties.

In contrast, around 300,000 family farmers had no land at all. Paraguay’s unequal land ownership stems from historical injustices, such as Alfredo Stroessner’s seizure of seven million hectares and distribution to his political allies, as well as the purchase of land by foreign nationals after the War of the Triple Alliance (see *History and Myth*).

As a result of social hierarchies and economic inequality, Paraguay has an unequal society. In 2022, Paraguay’s score on an inequality index, the Gini Index where a lower value shows a more equitable society, was 45.1, lower than neighboring Brazil (52) but higher than the US (41.3). Additionally, significant disparities exist for those outside of the elite, especially minority groups, particularly Afro-descendants, women, and homosexuals. Minorities often receive unfair treatment and lack representation in political and business institutions. In 2023, no Indigenous people were elected, despite 19 running for state and national office. Around 66% percent of Indigenous people live in poverty, and 34.4% absolute poverty, around three times the national level.

3. RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

Overview

Paraguay's population is predominantly Christian. According to a 2023 survey, some 80% of residents identify as Roman Catholic, 12% non-religious (including those who identify as atheist and agnostic), 7% Protestant, and about 1% identify with other religions such as Buddhism, Judaism, Islam, and others.

Paraguay's Constitution (see *Political and Social Relations*) guarantees freedom of worship, prohibits religious discrimination, and declares the country has no official religion. The right of Indigenous communities to freely practice their faiths is given special recognition to preserve their pre-colonial cultures and belief systems. Nevertheless, the Catholic Church has greatly influenced Paraguayan culture, attitudes, and history.



Early Religion

Before the arrival of European **conquistadores** (conquerors, see *History and Myth*), early inhabitants (see *Political and Social Relations*) lived rich spiritual lives. The Guaraní practiced animistic pantheism, meaning they believed god, or divinity, lived in every aspect of the natural world such as animals, plants, and water. They also believed **Tupã** (Supreme God) created humans from clay and gave each person two souls: divine, which controlled dreams, and earthly. Shamans (spiritual healers), who could communicate between the divine and earthly realms, provided guidance and protection by interpreting dreams. Music played a large role in shamanistic rituals, with songs and chants used to communicate with the gods and ancestors.

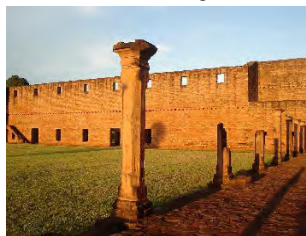
La Tierra Sin Mal (The Land Without Evil), a mythical utopia where all living things lived in harmony and abundance, guided

and inspired the everyday lives of the Guaraní, especially in their agricultural practices. Crops such as **maize** (corn) and **yerba maté** (a caffeinated drink made from steeping the dried leaves of the native *yerba mate* plant in hot water, see *Sustenance and Health*), were considered gifts from the gods, with their harvest consisting of numerous blessings and rituals.

Arrival of Christianity

Spanish *conquistadores* brought Christianity to Paraguay in the early 16th century. In 1537, Spanish explorer Domingo Martínez de Irala (see *History and Myth*), established the first Spanish settlements and founded the city of Asunción. In 1547, Pope Paul III (leader of the Catholic Church) authorized the creation of the Diocese of Paraguay, and in 1556, Pedro de la Torre became the first Bishop of Asunción.

In 1588, the Jesuits (a Catholic order) began building settlements to evangelize and protect Indigenous populations



from the **encomienda** system (forced Indigenous labor, see *History and Myth*). The Jesuits adapted Guaraní culture and beliefs with their religious doctrine and oversaw the opening of schools, orphanages, and hospitals. However, upon the Spanish King's expulsion of

the Jesuits from his empire in 1767, many of these institutions shut down.

Religion in the 19th Century

When Paraguay secured its independence from Spain in 1811 (see *History and Myth*), the Catholic Church retained significant economic and political power. In 1814, José Gaspar Rodríguez de Francia became Dictator. He sought to establish a self-sufficient country by limiting foreign influence, which the Church threatened due to its ecclesiastical oversight from Argentina and Italy. To consolidate power, Francia stripped the Catholic Church of its holdings, prohibited political activity, and ordered the closing of the **Real Colegio Seminario de San Carlos** (Royal Seminary College of San Carlos – see *Learning and*

Knowledge), which halted all higher learning and the only source of new clergy in Paraguay. Likewise, Francia transferred the responsibility of social services such as hospitals, homeless shelters, and orphanages to the State.

Following Francia's death in 1840 (see *History and Myth*), Carlos Antonio López became President (see *Political and Social Relations*), and Paraguay experienced a period of modernization. López sought to end the country's isolationism and to reestablish Church-State relations. He reversed many of Francia's regulations on religion and education by reopening the *Real Colegio Seminario de San Carlos* and granting clergy judicial rights. As a result, the Catholic Church officially supported López and Paraguayan nationalism, which became intertwined with the Church's teachings and moral code. Following the devastating War of the Triple Alliance (1864-70, see *History and Myth*), a constituent assembly drafted a new Constitution that established Catholicism as the nation's religion. It also granted other religions freedom to worship, resulting in increased immigration and introduction of new faiths such as Mennonites and Jews in the 1890s.

Religion in the 20th Century

Throughout the early 20th century, the Catholic Church remained neutral as Paraguay faced economic, political, and territorial instability. During the Chaco War (1932-35, see *History and Myth*), land disputes between Paraguay and Bolivia began. The government sought to colonize the vulnerable, western Chaco region and offered autonomy to immigrants in an effort to establish a permanent civilized presence. Mennonites, many of whom



emigrated from Canada to escape assimilation, established large farming settlements, and interacted peacefully among Indigenous tribes. Despite exposure to religion, conversion of these Indigenous communities remained limited. Further, the

Mennonites often abandoned their efforts due to the ongoing conflict.

By the mid-20th century, Paraguay fell under the dictatorship of Alfredo Stroessner (see *Political and Social Relations*), who violently suppressed any opposition by restricting and closely



monitoring education, public gatherings, and media. Religious gatherings became one of the few places where dissent for Stroessner's regime could be expressed, resulting in the Catholic Church's increased involvement in social activism.

Between the 1970s-80s, church leaders encouraged congregants' involvement in the country's future to uphold Christian values and motivated liberation. In 1992, under the Presidency of Andrés Rodríguez (see *Political and Social Relations*), Paraguay's Constitution officially separated the Church and State, declaring no official religion. Likewise, the relationship between the Catholic Church and State became based on autonomy, cooperation, and independence.

Religion Today

While Paraguay's Constitution recognizes the Catholic Church's place in the country's history and culture, it grants Paraguayans religious freedom. All religious groups must register annually with the Vice Ministry of Worship as nonfinancial organizations, and leaders must undergo a financial and criminal background check. As of 2022, Paraguay is home to around 621 registered religious groups.

Some observers assert the Catholic Church maintains certain privileges within the government and society. These privileges include observance of public holidays, subsidized education, and tax exemptions. Despite the prohibition of active clergy members from running for public office, several of the country's leaders are of the Catholic faith. In 2008, Fernando Lugo, a former Catholic Bishop, became President.

Catholicism: Today, Catholicism influences the everyday lives of many Paraguayans and has helped shape their culture. Traditional rituals and ceremonies such as christenings, marriages, and funerals occur in the Church (see *Family and Kinship*). Each year on December 8, thousands of followers travel to the Cathedral Basilica of Our Lady of Miracles in the central city of Caacupé. The Basilica houses a 16th-century wooden sculpture of the Virgin Mary and hosts an open-air mass (the central act of worship of the Catholic Church) to account for the large crowds. Paraguayans who are unable to make the pilgrimage typically watch the ceremony on national television.

Many Catholic Bishops have denounced corruption, human trafficking, organized crime, and poverty in Paraguay. In 2015, Pope Francis visited Asunción as part of his American pilgrimage and condemned the country's sufferings due to war, lack of freedom, and violation of human rights. Likewise, in 2022, the Bishop of Caacupé Ricardo Valenzuela criticized the government for its prevalent corruption, lack of support for marginalized communities, and allowance of drug trafficking.

That same year, the Archbishop of Asunción, Adalberto Martínez Flores, became the first Paraguayan Cardinal, an office that provides council for the Pope and the government of the Roman Catholic Church throughout the world.

Other Christian Churches:

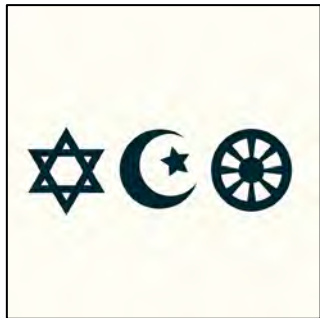
Protestantism is the second most common Christian denomination in Paraguay, with some 460,000 members. In the 1940s, members of the Utah-based Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, also known as Mormons, began missionary work throughout the country. Today,



Paraguay is home to some 100,000 members of the Latter-Day Saints church, about 1.5% of the population. Other Christian minorities include Jehovah's Witnesses, Lutherans, Orthodox Christians, and others.

Some activists have argued that the Mennonite presence in Paraguay has had negative social and environmental impacts. The success of their agricultural colonies, accompanied by the building of the Trans-Chaco Highway (see *Technology and Material*), has modernized the otherwise isolated region. This modernization is argued to have violated Indigenous rights by displacing certain tribes, creating land conflicts, and disregarding cultural practices. As of 2022, Paraguay is home to some 46,000 Mennonites.

Syncretic (Mixed) Religion: While few Paraguayans practice syncretism as their religion, many incorporate syncretic beliefs in their spiritual lives. Since the 16th century Paraguayans have combined Guaraní symbols with Catholic ideas, imagery, and practices, which has resulted in forms of folk Catholicism.



Other Religions: Various non-Christian religious minorities live in Paraguay, primarily in major cities such as Asunción and Ciudad del Este. During the 1930-50s, Japanese immigrants, many of whom were escaping persecution in Brazil, introduced Shinto (Japan's native religion) and Buddhism to the country.

As of 2020, Paraguay is home to about 15,000 practicing Buddhists. In the 20th century, Muslim immigrants, primarily from Syria and Lebanon, brought Islam to Paraguay. As of 2022, an estimated 10,000 Muslims live in the country.

Judaism was first practiced by **conversos** (crypto-Jews), who were forced to publicly accept Christianity but secretly continued their Jewish faith. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Jewish immigrants from Europe and the Middle East moved to Paraguay. Today, the country is home to about 1,000 practicing Jews. Less than 1% of the population practices Hinduism, Baha'ism, and various other faiths.

4. FAMILY AND KINSHIP

Overview

The family is the center of Paraguayan life and provides emotional, economic, and social support. Paraguayan families are typically close-knit and involved in members' life decisions. Marrying and starting a family remain a priority for most young adults.



Residence

Paraguay began to urbanize in the early 20th century, though rapid movement into cities did not occur until the 1980s. As of 2023, about 63% of the population lives in urban areas. While electricity and indoor plumbing are widely available, some residents lack access to basic services. Various homes in both urban and rural areas lack access to safe sanitation services. Certain government incentives such as financing, tax exceptions, and partnerships with organizations have provided access to safe housing for low-income families. However, poverty, land inequality, and inadequate infrastructure still contribute to the country's housing shortage. As of 2022, about 72% of the urban population had access to safely managed drinking water, compared to some 51% of the rural population.

Urban: Middle- and upper-class urban families tend to reside in high-rise apartments, private homes, or townhouses made from concrete, iron, or wood. Their apartment buildings are equipped with modern appliances such as microwaves, washing machines, and air conditioning units. While newly built residences typically have an electric water heater for hot showers, traditional shower heads that heat water through a connected electrical component remain common.

By contrast, many lower-class families live in makeshift housing.

Bañados (peripheral neighborhoods) were developed due to migration from rural regions to cities, where some residents build homes from cardboard, tin, plastic, or other readily available

materials. The country's largest *bañados* sit along the floodplain of the Paraguay River in Asunción (see *Economics and Resources*), where rising water frequently cause evacuations.

Rural: Residents in rural areas typically construct dwellings suited to the local climate using materials such as wood, glass, and **adobe** (clay) brick. *Adobe* withstands extreme weather and regulates the home's temperature by absorbing and distributing heat, keeping the house cool during the day and warm at night. Roofs typically are made of thatch or metal, which protect the home from sunlight without trapping heat. Likewise, doors and windows are often left open to allow air to flow through the home.

Most rural homes lack indoor plumbing, and families often gather cooking and drinking water using a hand or electric pump that extracts water from a well. In very remote areas, and in some Indigenous communities, water from local streams is used to drink, bathe, and wash clothes.



Family Structure

In Paraguayan families, the father is traditionally the primary breadwinner and head-of-household, while the mother is responsible for domestic tasks and childcare. Many households consist of multiple generations, and children usually care for their aging parents. Single-parent households are also common due to the cultural acceptance of men having children

with multiple partners. This practice is another social consequence of the War of the Triple Alliance that left Paraguay practically without men, and the mother assuming the role of both provider and caregiver (see *History & Myth*).

Children

While Paraguayan families historically had many children, they have fewer today (see *Sex and Gender*). Parents' involvement in their children's lives generally continues into adulthood, and parents tend to be highly protective, especially of girls. In rural areas, children often work from a young age, with boys tending

to farm work, while girls help care for younger siblings. It is common practice for children to live at home well into adulthood or until they get married or take a job that requires relocation.

Birth: A few weeks before a woman's due date, family and friends typically hold a party similar to a baby shower in the US, whereby attendees bring gifts, food, and entertainment to celebrate the baby's arrival.

Naming: While naming conventions vary (see *Language and Communication*), Paraguayans often name their children after Catholic saints or other Biblical figures (see *Religion and Spirituality*).



Rites of Passage

Many Paraguayans observe the Roman Catholic rite of passage of baptizing their children within a few months after birth (see *Religion and Spirituality*). Baptism is an important social ritual, with **padrinos** (godparents), family, and friends usually in attendance. Many Paraguayans also observe other Catholic traditions like first communion and confirmation that mark life's milestones. Some Paraguayan 15-year-old girls have a **fiesta de quince** (15th birthday party) to celebrate their transition into adulthood. These are generally large parties with family and friends typically and are marked by festivities like a religious ceremony, dance, food, and music.

Dating, Courtship, and Marriage: Paraguayans typically begin dating in their late teens and usually ask permission from their parents or siblings before starting a relationship. For the most part, parents do not allow couples to see each other without supervision at the beginning of their relationship. While it is customary for urban residents to marry around their mid-20s, the age in rural areas is often younger. Around 22% of girls entered a union by the age of 18 and 4% entered a union before the age of 15, comparatively lower than Brazil (26% and 6%) similar to Bolivia, but (20% and 3%, see *Sex and Gender*) than Uruguay (25% and 1%).

Weddings: Paraguayan weddings typically comprise a civil ceremony performed at a municipal office and a religious one at a church. *Padrinos* give the couple marriage advice and help them plan the ceremony. Before the wedding, the couple receives 13 gold and silver coins, which symbolize the apostles of Christ and good fortune. Weddings often occur at night and continue late into the morning hours. During the ceremony, the bride and groom exchange vows and wedding rings before the priest or minister pronounces them married.

After the ceremony, the wedding reception usually includes plentiful food, sweets, alcohol, music, and dancing. The couple receives gifts such as flowers, housewares, and money. It is customary after the wedding for the groom to carry his new bride into their residence placing his right foot into the doorway first as a symbol of the beginning of their marriage. Due to the high cost of church weddings, common law marriage (the legal recognition of marriage without a ceremony or license) is also typical.

Divorce

Breakup of a marriage is uncommon, and older, rural, and conservative Paraguayans often view it as inappropriate. While either spouse may file for divorce, many women lack access to resources and are unaware of their rights to end their marriage (see *Sex and Gender*).



Death

After death, Paraguayans typically hold a wake in the deceased's home, where friends and relatives visit to pay their respects. The family typically holds the funeral in a church, and the burial occurs

within 2-3 days after the death. Many cemeteries contain mausoleums or other above-ground enclosures, which are placed on high ground and considered to be closer to God. Catholic families often take part in the **rezo** (prayer), a 9-day period of prayer that reoccurs each year on the anniversary of the death. Typically, loved ones recite prayers on a white altar adorned with flowers, candles, and photos of the deceased. The 9th day of the *rezo* usually concludes with a large meal.

5. SEX AND GENDER

Overview

Traditionally, Paraguay has had a patriarchal social system, whereby men hold most of the power and authority. Women's equality has progressed in recent decades, yet gaps remain. In a 2024 gender equality index, in which a lower ranking is better, Paraguay ranked 81 of 146 countries, than neighboring Argentina (32), Brazil (70), Bolivia (44), and the US (43).

Gender Roles and Work

Domestic Work: Historically, Paraguayan women were responsible for informal domestic work (household chores and childcare), even if they also worked outside the home. In 2022, they dedicated around 18.5 hours per week to unpaid domestic work, while men averaged about 5.4 hours.



For Paraguayan women who work outside the home, paid domestic work is one of the most common forms of income, with 15.5% engaged in the activity in 2020. However, paid domestic work has one of the lowest average hourly wages, around 8,234 Guaraní (about US \$1) per hour in 2020.

Labor Force: In 2024, some 62% of women worked outside the home, similar to the US (57%), higher than Brazil (53%) and Argentina (52%), but lower than Bolivia (72%). In general, men tend to occupy more managerial and professional positions. In 2024, women held positions (39%) as public officials, managers, and senior executives, similar to Brazil (40%) but lower than the US (43%). Despite Paraguayan women's notable labor force participation, as of 2024, around 68% worked in the informal sector, where they are paid cash for their services. They likely work independently, which is less likely to include protections and benefits, such as paid time off and healthcare.

Gender and the Law

The 1992 Constitution established equality between men and women by prohibiting discrimination, although there are few laws that provide the means to enforce this constitutional ban on discrimination. Paraguay's advocacy groups for women include the Women's Bureau of the Office of the President, Women's Bureaus in the 17 Departments, and the Advisory Gender and



Equity Commission in Asunción (see *Political and Social Relations*). Paraguay's minimum legal age for marriage is 18-year-olds or 16 years old with the consent of parents, guardians, or a judge. Child-marriage also occurs but at a low rate (see *Family and Kinship*).

Paraguay's 1993 Labor Code prohibits any gender-based discrimination in the workplace, mandates maternity leave, requires the provision of breastfeeding rooms, and prohibits employers from

assigning high-risk work to pregnant women. Aligned with legal requirements, Paraguayan women receive an average of around 126 days of paid parental leave and men receive around 14 days at the time of birth. Even with the Labor Code, gender discrimination in the workplace and reluctance to hire women still occurs. In 2024, Paraguayan women's monthly incomes were around 71% of those of men.

Gender and Politics

Although the campaign for women's suffrage began in the early 1900s, it was not until 1961 that women gained the right to vote, making Paraguay the last country in Latin America to grant this right. Women were first able to vote in the 1991 municipal elections, following the end of the Stroessner dictatorship (see *History and Myth*). As of 2024, women hold some 24% each of both parliamentary and ministerial positions, lower than the US (29% and 33%), Argentina (42% and 33%), but higher and lower than Brazil (18% and 29%). Paraguay has a mandatory quota of 20% female presence on internal electoral lists. In the 2021 municipal elections, 57% of eligible women voted, as compared to some 56% of eligible men.

Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

GBV is an issue in Paraguay. As of 2021, nearly 80% of women experienced some form of GBV, one of the highest rates in South America. Also in 2021, 26 in 1,000 women and girls lost their lives to femicide, murder of a female based on her gender. In Paraguay, rape, child physical and sexual abuse, and femicide are all illegal and punishable by prison. Additionally, Paraguay participates in multiple local and global efforts to combat GBV through the use of national 24-hour hotlines, shelters, and training for the National Police on how to manage domestic violence complaints. However, protective measures are often ineffective.

Human Trafficking

Paraguay is a source and transit country for human trafficking, with individuals being trafficked for forced labor, illicit drug sale, debt bondage, and illicit sex. The most common form of trafficking in Paraguay is the illegal practice of **criadazgo**, temporary adoption of children, who then work for other families without pay.



Sex and Procreation

Between 1960-2022, Paraguay's birthrate declined from 6.5 births per women to 2.4, higher than the US rate (1.7) and the Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) average (1.8). Paraguay's adolescent fertility rate was 70 births per 1000 girls ages 15-19, higher than the LAC average (52) and the US rate (15). Experts have attributed Paraguay's high adolescent fertility rate to sexual violence, the country's deficient sex education program, and inaccessibility to reproductive health services. In Paraguay, abortion is illegal, including in cases of incest or rape, unless the mother's life is in danger.

Homosexuality in Paraguay

Since 1990, homosexuality has been legal in Paraguay, although the 1992 Constitution bans same-sex marriage, and there are few protections for discrimination. At this time, the US State Department does not have a Status of Forces Agreement in place for Paraguay. Service members will be subject to local laws with regards to this topic.

6. LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

Language Overview

Paraguay has two official languages: Spanish and Guaraní. In general, Spanish is used in government, business, and education, while Guaraní is spoken in family and social settings. Paraguayans commonly speak a blend of Spanish and Guaraní called **jopará** (mixture).

Spanish

The Spanish brought their language to present-day Paraguay in the 16th century (see *History and Myth*), which today 90% of the population speaks. Approximately 60% of the population speak Spanish as a first language, while an additional 30% use it as a second language. Because of standardized education, increased urbanization, and greater media consumption, the share of the population that speaks Spanish continues to grow. Paraguayans refer to the Spanish language as **castellano** (Castilian) instead of **español** (Spanish), the term commonly used in Latin America and the Caribbean. Spanish uses the same alphabet as English with three additional consonants – ch, ll (usually pronounced like “y” as in yam or “j” as in jam), and ñ (pronounced like the “ny” in the word canyon).

Paraguayan Spanish has some features that distinguish it from other Spanish dialects like its unique vocabulary, distinct pronunciation, and differences in the use of formal and informal pronouns. Except for some upper-class citizens, most Paraguayans use the **voseo** which employs the second-person singular **vos** (“you”) and its verb forms instead of **tú** (see “Forms of Address” below). Additionally, the word “**luego**,” normally translated as “later,” can mean “now” in Paraguay or be used to add emphasis to other words. Similarly, the phrase “**un poco**”



which usually means “a little,” can also mean “please,” and the word “**guapo/guapa**” can mean “hard-working” and “attractive.”

Most Paraguayans speak the **rioplatense** (of the River Plate) dialect also spoken in Argentina and Uruguay. The dialect's main pronunciation difference is the use of the “sh” sound for the letters “ll” and “y.” For example, a Paraguayan will pronounce the word “**pollo**” (chicken) as “**posho**.” In areas near the border with Brazil, many residents known as **brasiguayos** (Brazilian-Paraguayans) speak a dialect called **portunhol** that combines elements of Spanish and Portuguese.

Guaraní

The Constitution Paraguay adopted in 1992 declared Guaraní an official language alongside Spanish. As of 2022, around 70% of the population regularly speak Guaraní at home, making it the



only Indigenous language in the Americas spoken by a non-Indigenous population. As of 2022, around 70% of the population, to include non-Indigenous people, regularly speak Guaraní at home, making it the only Indigenous language in South America that is

spoken as a native language by both groups of people. Although Paraguayan law requires primary schools to instruct students in their first language, many parents prefer that their children learn in Spanish rather than Guaraní.

Jopará

This dialect is slang that combines Spanish and Guaraní and is used informally throughout Paraguay. Paraguayans use many *jopará* and Guaraní words in daily conversation, particularly **mitái** (“child”), **angiru** (“friend”), **jaha** (“let’s go”), **purete** (“cool”), and **tranquilopa** (“all good” or “no worries”).

Other Languages

Between 50,000-60,000 Paraguayans speak one of the 18 Indigenous languages other than Guaraní recognized by the

Constitution. Because of Brazilian migration into Paraguay and the geographical proximity between the two countries, 241,000 people in Paraguay speak Portuguese (see *Political and Social Relations*). Some Paraguayans, especially those in rural farming communities, speak European languages, particularly German (62,700), Italian (41,00), and Plautdietsch (Mennonite Low German) (40,000).

English

While English is not widely spoken in Paraguay, the government has taken steps to improve English proficiency in the country. In 2022, the Paraguayan government launched a program to teach English in public primary schools, reaching over 52,000 children in 300 schools. English speakers in Paraguay are typically young, belong to the middle or upper classes, and live in Asunción or Ciudad del Este.



Communication Overview

Communicating competently in Paraguay requires not only knowledge of Spanish or Guaraní, but also the ability to interact effectively using language within the context of the culture. This broad notion of competence includes paralanguage (rate of speech, volume, intonation), nonverbal communication (personal space, touch, gestures), and interaction management (conversation initiation, turn-taking, and termination). When used properly, these forms of communication help to ensure that statements are interpreted as the speaker intends.

Communication Style

Paraguayans tend to be polite and indirect communicators, rarely raising their voices and usually remaining optimistic during conversations. Sometimes Paraguayans will avoid saying “no,” opting instead to say what they think their conversation partner wants to hear. Similarly, a “yes” does not always mean “yes.”

Paraguayans consider nonverbal gestures crucial to effective communication. Eye contact shows respect and attentiveness while listening. Regardless of gender, they typically touch their conversation partner's arm, shoulder, or back to signal friendliness. Paraguayans tend to stand closer to each other while talking than Americans, and they consider backing away from someone during conversation rude.

Greetings

Paraguayans value greetings, and upon meeting someone for the first time, a handshake with eye contact is customary regardless of gender. Men usually greet other men they know well with an **abrazo** (hug) and a slap on the back, while women greet female friends with a hug and light kisses on either cheek.

Greetings are usually accompanied by the phrase **buenos días** ("good morning"), **buenas tardes** ("good afternoon"), or **buenas noches** ("good evening"). A common Guaraní greeting is **¿Mba'eichapa?** ("how are you?"). In rural areas, Paraguayans



often say "**adios**" ("goodbye") to people passing their homes or while walking by someone on the street. Urban residents rarely greet or smile at strangers to avoid offense. It is polite to say "**permiso**" ("permission") before entering someone's yard or house, and

Paraguayans, particularly in rural areas, typically announce their presence at someone's home by clapping.

Names

A Paraguayan name often contains one or two first names and two last names, usually the father's and mother's surnames. Paraguayans tend to use their first given name and father's surname in everyday life, while reserving their full name for legal and formal matters. Married women can opt to take their husband's last name but usually keep their maiden name.

Forms of Address

Titles depend on age, social status, and relationship but are generally formal and courteous. In professional settings, Paraguayans use titles of respect such as **señor** ("Mr."), **señora**

("Mrs."), and **señorita** (for young/unmarried women), sometimes with the last name. Older, distinguished members of the community are often given the title **Don** (Sir) or **Doña** (Madam) before their last name. Paraguayans also refer to priests, monks, and nuns as *Don* and *Doña*.

Paraguayans also adjust their usage of "you" pronouns and verb conjugations depending on the level of formality required. The formal *Usted* typically is in professional settings, when speaking to those of higher status, or to indicate respect. Nevertheless, the informal *vos* or *tú* are more common terms, and Paraguayans tend to use them among family, friends, and strangers. Many Paraguayans make a "tsst-tsst" sound to get someone's attention.

Conversational Topics

After initial greetings, Paraguayans typically engage in conversation about work and family. Other common topics include Paraguayan culture, cuisine, and sports, particularly **fútbol** (soccer, see *Aesthetics and Recreation*). Guests should avoid discussing politics and sharing opinions about sensitive topics, notably the War of the Triple Alliance (see *History and Myth*) and the Itaipú Dam Treaty with Brazil (see *Economics and Resources*). The Paraguayans are proud of their nationality and unique culture. Accordingly, foreign nationals should not confuse Paraguay with Uruguay or compare the country to Argentina or Brazil.



Gestures

Paraguayans often use gestures in conversation. Wagging a raised index finger indicates a strong "no." Placing hands on the hips can be confrontational or signify boredom and using the American "good luck" sign with crossed figures is considered offensive. Brushing fingertips underneath the chin can mean "I don't know" or "I don't care."

Language Training Resources

Please view the Air Force Culture and Language Center website at www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/ and click on "Resources" for access to language training and other resources.

Useful Spanish Words and Phrases

English	Spanish
Hello	Hola
How are you?	¿Cómo estás? / ¿Cómo andás?
I am well	Estoy bien
Excuse me	Disculpe / Perdón
Yes / No	Sí / No
Please	Por favor
Thank you	Gracias
You are welcome	De nada
I'm sorry	Lo siento
I don't understand	No entiendo
What is your name?	¿Cuál es tu nombre? / ¿Cómo te llamas?
My name is	Me llamo
Where are you from?	¿De dónde sos?
I am from the US	Yo soy de los Estados Unidos
Goodbye	Chau / Adiós
Good morning/day	Buenos días / Buen día
Good afternoon	Buenas tardes
Good evening	Buenas noches
What does ____ mean?	¿Qué significa ____?
What is this?	¿Qué es esto?
I would like a ____	Quisiera un/una ____
How do you say ____?	¿Cómo se dice ____?
...in English?	...en inglés?
...in Spanish?	...en castellano?
What do you want?	¿Qué querés?
What time is it?	¿Qué hora es?
Yesterday	Ayer
Today	Hoy
Tomorrow	Mañana
Where is the bathroom?	¿Dónde está el baño?
Car	Auto / Coche / Camioneta
Plane	Avión
Bus	Bus / Ómnibus / Colectivo
Left / Right / Straight	Izquierda / Derecha / Derecho

Useful Guaraní Words and Phrases

English	Guaraní
Hello	Maiteí
How are you?	Mbaé'chepa?
I am well	Tranquilopa, Iporã
And you?	Ha nde?
Yes / No	Hee / Nahániri
Let's go	Jaha
Thank you	Aguyje
You are welcome	Tereiko porake
I'm sorry	Cheñyromi / Añembyasyiterei
I don't understand	Ndaikuaái la ereséva
I don't know	Ndaikuaái
What is your name?	Mbaé'chepa nderéra
My name is	Che cheréra
Pleased to meet you	Avy'a roikuaahaguére
Goodbye	Jajotopata
Good morning/day	Mba'éichapa neko'e
Good afternoon	Mba'eichapa nde asaje
Good evening	Mba'eichapa nde pyhare
Where is ...	Moõpa opyta ...
Do you speak __?	Ndépa reñe'e
...English	...Ingléspe
...Spanish	...Castellánope
How do you say __?	Mbaé'chepa ojeey
...in English?	...Ingléspe
...in Guaraní?	...Guaraníme
...in Spanish?	...Castellánope
I don't speak Guaraní	Che nañe'eĩ guaraníme
I don't understand	Nantendéi hína
How much does it cost?	Mboý kóa?
Is ____ far from here?	Mombyrý pa ko'á gui ____?
How many hours to get to ____?	Mboý hora-pe pa o-he-ġuahẽ ____?
How do I get to ____?	Mb'é ikatú aġuahẽ upépe ____?
Where are we?	Moõ ñaime ñande?
Where is the bus?	Moõpa opyta ómnibus?
See you later	Jajohechapeve

7. LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE

Literacy

- Total population over age 15 who can read and write: 94.5%
- Male: 94.9%
- Female: 94.2% (2020 estimate)

Early Education

Before the arrival of the Spanish conquerors, who brought standardized, formal education to Paraguay, regional inhabitants transmitted values, skills, beliefs, and historical knowledge to younger generations through stories and myths (see *History and Myth*). Rites of passage were also an important means of perpetuating morals and values (see *Family and Kinship*).



Spanish Education

During the Spanish colonial era (see *History and Myth*), the primary focus of education was to impart instruction in Roman Catholicism (see *Religion and Spirituality*). Various Roman Catholic orders – such as the Dominicans, Franciscans, and Jesuits – established missions and schools for the sons of local elites and certain some Indigenous groups (see *Religion and Spirituality*). In 1588, the Jesuits established **reducciones** (reductions, see *History and Myth*) for Indigenous Guaraní communities that focused on Spanish-language instruction and religious education. Guaraní students typically practiced European-style arts such as sculpture, painting, and music.

In the late 18th century, the bishop of Asunción, Juan José Priego, petitioned the Spanish monarch to build an institution of higher education to train priests and provide a source of clergy in Paraguay. In 1783, the **Real Colegio Seminario de San Carlos** (Royal Seminary College of San Carlos) was founded to provide upper-class boys education in philosophy, theology, and Latin. While some private schools emerged by the end of the

colonial period, the country lacked a centralized education system, so the opportunity to achieve formal learning remained low.

Education After Independence

After Paraguay gained independence from Spain in 1811 (see *History and Myth*), successive governments attempted to expand the school system. The dictatorship of José Gaspar Rodríguez de Francia (1814-40, see *History and Myth*) sought to form a more united, independent, and literate republic by establishing a secular elementary educational system provided by the state. To improve quality and access to education,



Francia oversaw the construction of new schools, improved teacher training, and raised teacher salaries. However, Francia believed higher education could be achieved privately and that it was not the responsibility of the state to fund. In 1822, the *Real Colegio Seminario de San Carlos* temporarily closed, halting all higher education in the country.

Following Francia's death in 1840, political and social instability along

with the emergence of the War of the Triple Alliance (see *History and Myth*) greatly hindered educational development. Nevertheless, by 1877 a secondary public school system for boys emerged. As enrollment in secondary education increased, education expanded at all levels. In 1889, the country's first university, the **Universidad Nacional de Asunción** (National University of Asunción) opened. In 1896, Adela and Celsa Speratti, sisters who received formal teacher training in Argentina after fleeing during the war, established the first teacher training schools in Asunción.

Education in the 20th Century

By the early 20th century, Paraguay was home to several teacher training colleges and secondary schools. In 1909, the Constitution mandated boys between the ages of 7-14 attend primary school. While school enrollment only slightly increased

immediately after the mandate, by the 1930s it had doubled. In the 1940s, the US government began a joint effort with Paraguay to enhance education. Special focus was placed on vocational training for elementary teachers and curriculum development. Likewise, during the 1960s-70s, rural education expanded as the government funded the construction of new schools, teacher training, and textbook production.

Major developments in education occurred throughout the 1990s, as the nation began to democratize and reorganize. In 1992, under a new Constitution, the government enacted the Educational Reform. This initiative outlined programs, objectives, and resources to address critical problems in education such as efficiency, equity, and quality. The reform included a revision of the national curriculum, the distribution of textbooks, and increased teacher training. Likewise, a general education law required students enrolled in early education to receive instruction in their native language. This policy led to Guaraní becoming an official language taught in schools along with Spanish.



Modern Education System

Today, education in Paraguay is provided by the government and compulsory for all children aged 7-14, comprising 1 year of initial education and 6 years of basic education. Most students attend government-run schools, although some enroll in private, often religious, schools. In 2022, about 20% of primary-age students attended private, fee-based schools, equivalent to the average in Latin America and the Caribbean, but higher than neighboring Brazil (18%) and Bolivia (9%).

While most public schools follow the national curriculum, some private schools that cater to wealthier families teach according to the curricula of global educational programs or their students' native countries which often include instruction in foreign languages such as English, French, and Italian. Likewise, the quality of education tends to be much higher at private schools.

Since 2014, Paraguay has initiated the National Development Plan which aims to improve educational management, curriculum development, and professional teacher training. The plan also focuses on improving access and quality of early childhood care and development. Likewise, the plan seeks to create more economic opportunities for Paraguayan women,



who often undertake the responsibility of childcare and are unable to seek employment or education (see *Family and Kinship*). The plan also highlights governmental educational financing, which despite a constitutional mandate requiring 20% of the country's budget be spent

on education, has largely been ignored due to corruption and mismanagement. In 2021, Paraguay spent about 3.4% of its GDP on education, lower than Bolivia (8%), Brazil (5.5%), and the US (5.4%).

The Ministry of Education and Science oversees all school accreditation and is tasked with assuring that educators meet national benchmarks. The federal government manages the funding for public schools and provides support for some independent and religious schools that are registered with the government. Many rural public schools lack resources, such as textbooks and funding, while urban public schools tend to be slightly better. In a 2022 assessment of student performance in reading, math, and science, Paraguay ranked below the US, with scores similar to Brazil and Indonesia.

Pre-Primary: Paraguayan children under 5-years-old attend public pre-primary programs, though some attend fee-based private institutions. *Inicial* (initial) education, which lasts 1 year, prepares students for formal education and is mandatory for children ages 5-6. In 2020, about 51% of children of the appropriate age were enrolled in pre-primary school.

Basic: *Escolar básica* (basic level) education divides into three cycles beginning at age 6. The first cycle is for students ages 6-

8 (grades 1-3), the second cycle for students ages 9-11 (grades 4-6), and the third cycle for students ages 12-14 (grades 7-9). Most schools follow the national curriculum, which covers Spanish, English, arts, social studies, science, and physical education. In 2022, about 88% of children of the appropriate age were enrolled in primary education.

Secondary Education: After *escolar básica*, students ages 15-17 can complete **media** (middle) education. The purpose of this level is to provide students with general training and interdisciplinary preparation so they can integrate into society. Students can take a track that either aligns with academic courses, which prepare them for university, or technical-focused courses.

Upon completing *media*, students receive a **bachillerato** (baccalaureate) certificate, similar to a high school diploma in the US. In 2022, about 73% of children of the appropriate age were enrolled in secondary education. However, only some 45% completed *media* education.

Post-Secondary School: Paraguay has a large network of public universities that offer tuition assistance for Paraguayans. The high cost of living in urban areas (see *Family and Kinship*), coupled with Paraguay's economic instability, has negatively impacted the completion of post-secondary degrees.



Competition for public university spots is also intense, as Paraguayans across the socioeconomic spectrum apply for a limited number of seats at public universities such as the *Universidad Nacional de Asunción*.

For those who can afford the cost of attendance, Paraguay also has private universities such as the **Universidad Católica Nuestra Señora de la Asunción** (Our Lady of the Assumption Catholic University) and the **Universidad Nihon Gakko** (Nihon Gakko University).

8. TIME AND SPACE

Overview

Paraguayans view interpersonal relationships, reputation, and respect as vital to conducting business, though attitudes are often more casual in personal settings. Generally, personal space preferences vary by degree of familiarity.

Time and Work

Paraguay's workweek runs from Monday-Friday, and most business occurs between 9am-5pm. At noon, many Paraguayans go home to eat lunch with their families and take a nap before returning to work. Though hours vary widely by store size and location, shops typically open during weekdays 8am-6pm and close for lunch around noon. Many shops open half a day on Saturday and close on Sunday. Some supermarkets in Asunción remain open for 24 hours. Most banks open on weekdays from 8:30am-1:30pm, and post offices operate weekdays from 7am-1pm. Government offices do not

have standardized opening hours, but services are generally available 8am-3pm.



Working Conditions:

Paraguay's 1993 Labor Code outlines protections for workers. The law mandates a maximum 48-hour workweek

and requires employees to have at least 1 full day off per week. Other protections include a national monthly minimum wage (US \$358 as of 2024), paid vacation, sick leave, parental leave (see *Sex and Gender*), overtime pay, severance pay, and the **aguinaldo** (mandatory Christmas bonus equivalent to 1 month of pay). Many employers in Paraguay's informal sector, which includes over half of the labor force, ignore labor regulations, leading to unsafe and exploitative working conditions (see *Economics and Resources*).

Time Zone: Paraguay adheres to Paraguay Time, which is 3 hours behind Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) and 2 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time. In 2024, Paraguay stopped observing

Daylight Saving Time to align with Argentina, Uruguay, Chile, and Brazil.

Date Notation: Like the US, Paraguay uses the Western (Gregorian) Calendar. Unlike Americans, Paraguayans write the day first, followed by the month and year.

Time and Business

National Holidays

- January 1: New Year's Day
- March 1: Hero's Day
- April (date varies each year): Holy Thursday
- April (date varies each year): Good Friday
- May 1: Labor Day
- May 14-15: Independence Day
- June 12: Chaco War Armistice
- August 15: Founding of Asunción
- September 29: Battle of Boquerón Victory
- December 8: Virgin of Ca'acupé Day
- December 25: Christmas

In business contexts, Paraguayans are generally less punctual than Americans. Foreign nationals should always arrive on time even though meetings often begin up to 30 minutes late. Meetings typically begin with substantial polite conversation, and visitors should allow their host to shift the conversation from small talk to business matters. Paraguay's business environment is formal and hierarchical. Top-level employees make most decisions, and demonstrating respect to leaders is an essential component of business.

Additionally, foreign nationals should address Paraguayans with their academic or professional title, such as Doctor, Engineer, or **Licenciado** (licensed) for university graduates. Paraguay's business culture emphasizes personal connections and trust. Paraguayans value face-to-face communication and prefer to do business with familiar people. Accordingly, foreign nationals should avoid adding new participants during negotiations.

Public and Personal Space

As in most societies, personal space in Paraguay depends on the nature of the relationship. Paraguayans generally stand closer during conversation and touch more frequently than Americans when among friends and family. Paraguayans tend to consider backing away or standing at a distance during conversation to be rude (see *Language and Communication*).

Touch: In business settings, Paraguayans generally greet with a firm handshake, which is repeated when saying goodbye. Paraguayans usually reserve physical affection, typically hugs and cheek kisses, for family and friends, as the norm for greeting (see *Language and Communication*).

Eye Contact: This nonverbal gesture is customary in conversation and signals interest and respect (see *Language and Communication*).



Photographs

Some museums, churches, and military installations limit photography. Visitors should ask permission before taking photographs, especially of police, soldiers, children, and Indigenous people.

Driving

Road conditions, traffic patterns, and the presence of motorcycles can make driving in Paraguay challenging. As of 2019, about 91% of roads remained unpaved or made of stone. In general, major highways and city roads are better maintained, but daily conditions vary based on weather. Flooding is common during the rainy season (see *Political and Social Relations*) and makes even paved roads impassable. Traffic can be heavy in urban centers, and protesters sometimes block traffic on major roads. Outside of Asunción, few roads have overhead lighting, adding to the difficulty of driving at night on potentially unpaved surfaces. Like Americans, Paraguayans drive on the right side of the road. In 2021, Paraguay's rate of traffic-related deaths per 100,000 people was 19, higher than the US (12.8). Most traffic-related deaths involve motorcycles.

9. AESTHETICS AND RECREATION

Overview

Paraguayan clothing, recreation, sports, and arts tend to reflect the country's rich history and blend of Spanish and Guaraní traditions.

Dress and Appearance

Traditional: Paraguay's traditional dress is most common in rural areas, especially among Indigenous peoples (see *Political and Social Relations*) and is often worn on holidays or for special events. Men's wear typically consists of a white shirt, **bombachas** (wide-legged capri pants), a neck scarf, a poncho, and a **pira** (wide-brimmed hat made of straw). Both men and women often wear tunics made of **ao po'i** (fine cloth), a light-weight cotton fabric that is made using an ancient embroidery technique.

Women's wear typically consists of a white embroidered blouse, a **rebozo** (shawl), a brightly colored long skirt or dress, and gold or silver jewelry. Many women adorn their outfits with **ñandutí** (spider web) lace, which is made of cotton or silk woven in a circular motif (see "Arts and Handicrafts" section below). Many Indigenous women wear their hair in braids as a symbol of heritage and place flowers in them.



Modern: In urban areas, residents tend to follow the latest Western fashion trends. Men typically wear jeans or pants, shirts, and closed-toe shoes. Women often wear skirts with a blouse or t-shirt, or dresses. In business settings, Paraguayans generally prefer formal styles such as dark suits or dresses/pantsuits. *Ao po'i* is recognized by the government as the country's national attire and is frequently worn by government officials and in formal settings.

Recreation and Leisure

Paraguayans often spend their leisure time with family and friends. Typical activities include gathering for **asados** ("barbecues," see *Sustenance and Health*), attending **fiestas** ("parties" or "public celebrations"), playing sports, going to cafés, spending time outdoors, and watching movies and television.

Holidays and Festivals: Paraguayans hold a variety of *fiestas* and community celebrations. Several of these occasions reflect the country's Catholic roots (see *Religion and Spirituality*), Spanish or Indigenous traditions, and historical events. Residents traditionally take part in the week-long celebration of Carnival in February, which coincides with the days before Lent (a 40-day period of prayer and spiritual reflection observed by Catholics). While Carnival celebrations tend to vary by region, the country's largest occur in the southeastern city of Encarnación, where a permanent **sambadrome** ("stadium of samba," a platform or arena specifically for Carnival performances) is housed. Generally, the festivities include fireworks, music, parades, processions of dancers in colorful costumes, and faux snow made from spray cans or shaving cream.



The **Fiesta de San Juan** (San Juan Festival) occurs on June 24th, which coincides with the birth of Saint John the Baptist, a Christian feast day. The festival features elements important to Guaraní culture, which include

bonfires, lighting the **Judas kái** ("Judas's Fire," a tradition of burning an effigy of Judas Iscariot, or a disliked person), walking on hot coals, and playing games.

Some national holidays commemorate important dates in Paraguayan history. **Día de los Heroes** (Heroes' Day), is held on March 1st to commemorate the death of President Francisco Solano López in 1870 during the Battle of Cerro Corá, which concluded the War of the Triple Alliance (see *History and Myth*).

The holiday is a day to honor and acknowledges those who served or contributed to their country, similar to Veterans Day in the US. Celebrations include parades, music, dance, food, and moments of reflection. Likewise, on May 14-15, Paraguayans celebrate ***Día de la Independencia Nacional*** (National Independence Day), which commemorates the country's declaration of independence from Spanish rule in 1811 (see *History and Myth*). Celebrations include historical reenactments, parades, music, and flag ceremonies.

Sports and Games

Paraguayans participate in a wide variety of sports such as soccer, basketball, tennis, rugby, ***pádel*** (a racket sport similar to tennis), volleyball, swimming, and motorsports. They also participate in international competitions such as the Olympic Games, FIFA World Cup, ***Copa América*** (America Cup), and the Pan American Games. Notable Paraguayan athletes include golfer Sofia Garcia, who won an individual gold medal at the 2023 Pan American Games, javelin thrower Leryn Franco, who won a gold medal in the 1998 South American Youth Championship and participated in three Olympics (2004, 2008, and 2012), and tennis player Víctor Pecci, who made it to the 1979 French Open final. Football player Benny Ricardo, became the first Paraguayan to play in the National Football League in the US as a placekicker for multiple teams between 1976-84.

Soccer: Fútbol (soccer) is Paraguay's most popular sport, with youth learning through neighborhood pick-up games, at school, and in amateur leagues. The national team, nicknamed ***La Albirroja*** (The White and Red), has qualified for eight World Cups. The men's team won the country's first Olympic medal at the 2004



games after beating Argentina and earning the silver medal. ***Fútbol*** player Arsenio Erico is one of the country's most celebrated athletes and regarded as the greatest Paraguayan player of all time. While he played during the 1930s, today he

remains the all-time highest goal scorer for Argentina's premier football division with 295 goals.

Trans Chaco Rally: Since the 1980s, the city of Encarnación has hosted the Trans Chaco Rally, a motorsport event that takes place each year in July. Drivers race off-road, navigating the extreme terrain of the dry Chaco region. Despite having drivers from across the world attending and competing, the event has only been won by Paraguayan drivers. Notable winners include the Galanti brothers, Alejandro and Marquito, who have won the event 11 times since 1998.

Games: Paraguayans play a variety of games. A popular game, **muñeca** (doll), is similar to hopscotch. Players draw a series of shapes with chalk to resemble the legs, arms, and head of a "doll." The first player must toss a rock onto the doll and hop on one leg through the shapes, avoiding the rock. The player who lasts the longest without making a mistake wins.

Music and Dance

Paraguay's rich musical and dance traditions primarily reflect Spanish and Guaraní influences. The Guaraní (see *History and Myth*) used instruments such as the **mbaraka** (rattle) and the **takuapu** (rhythm baton) for songs and dances during religious rituals (see *Religion and Spirituality*). In the 17th century, Jesuit missionaries introduced the Celtic harp to Paraguay and began incorporating it in church music and instruction. The Guaraní began producing their own harps, resulting in the emergence of the Paraguayan harp. This instrument's strings run through the center of the head, triangular sound box, and lighter string tension. Today it is Paraguay's national instrument.



Throughout the 19th century, political instability and nationalistic attitudes influenced Paraguayan music. Paraguayan polka emerged in Asunción as an upbeat song and dance based on a 6/8 rhythm, similar to that of songs such as "We Are the Champions" by

Queen or “Lights” by Journey. Instruments such as the Paraguayan harp, guitar, bass, and accordion are used to accompany lyrics of Paraguayan pride and history in the Guaraní and Spanish language. **Pájaro Chogüí** (Chogüí Bird) and **Galopera** (The Gallop) are popular polkas often played during courting dances, whereby a pair of dancers perform a series of hops and steps in sync with one another, often while wearing traditional clothing.

In the early 20th century, guitarist Agustín Barrios began composing guitar pieces inspired by Paraguayan polka. He blended classical styles with folk music and sometimes performed under the Guaraní folk hero name Nitsuga Mangoré, while dressed in Guaraní clothing. Of his over 300 compositions, his most famous is Julia Florida, an expressive, slow melody. Today, Barrios is still regarded as one of the greatest and most prolific classical guitar composers of all time.

Guaranía: In the 1920s, composer José Asunción Flores created guaranía, a melancholic slow rhythm that is strongly intertwined with Paraguayan identity. While guaranía uses similar instruments to the polka, lyrics generally incorporate themes of hometowns, heartbreak, grief, and longing. In the 1940s, Demetrio Ortiz composed **Recuerdos de Ypacaraí** (Memories of Ypacaraí), which tells the story of a man meeting a woman, who he sings old Guaraní melodies with before leaving and never seeing her again. The song is world-renowned and has been performed by numerous artists.



Danza de la Botella: The **danza de la botella** (bottle dance) is a traditional folk dance, usually accompanied by the Paraguayan polka. It features dancers dressed in traditional clothing performing a series of movements while holding their skirt and balancing a glass bottle or jug, which often is painted with flowers or the colors of the Paraguayan flag,

on their heads. Dancers can have multiple bottles on their heads at once.

Other Musical Genres: Today, Paraguayans listen to both foreign and local music styles like pop, rock, **cumbia** (a blended style originally from Colombia), classical, rap, electronic, and jazz. In the 1950s, Luis Alberto del Paraná popularized Paraguayan pop music by blending traditional Paraguayan instruments with modern pop sounds. In the 1960s, the government funded Paraná and his trio group **Los Paraguayos** (The Paraguayans) to play and spread Paraguayan music throughout Europe. Today, *Los Paraguayos* continues to tour with new members. Since 2012, the **Orquesta de Instrumentos Reciclados de Cateura** (Recycled Orchestra of Cateura) has been comprised of children who play instruments built from recycled material from the Cateura landfill in Asunción. The orchestra has received international acclaim and performed with artists such as Stevie Wonder and Metallica.

Literature

With roots in oral traditions, Paraguay also has a rich literary history. In the 17th century, Jesuit missionaries established the foundation of Paraguayan literature by creating a written Guaraní alphabet. The earliest known record of the written Guaraní language is the **Tesoro de la Lengua Guaraní** (Treasure of the Guaraní Language), which Jesuit priest Antonio Ruiz de Montoya published in 1639. After the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1767 (see *Religion and Spirituality*), literacy and locally published works slowed (see *Learning and Knowledge*).



Mujeres y Fantoques (Men, Women, and Puppets), which explored themes of good and evil through the emotional conflict of a man named Jorge Lazarra and his two lovers. Casaccia's

In the 20th century, Paraguayan authors explored themes ranging from identity to socio-political commentary. In 1930, Gabriel Casaccia wrote **Hombres,**

works often centered around freedom, women, and the Paraguayan landscape. He is recognized as the father of modern Paraguayan literature.

In 1960, Augusto Roa Bastos published *Hijo de Hombre* (Son of Man), the first novel of his trilogy which explored the relationship between the government and Indigenous peoples during the early 20th century and Chaco War (see *History and Myth*). The novel is told through magic realism, which blends reality and myth and uses both the Spanish and Guaraní language to emphasize the bilingual culture of Paraguay.

His 1974 novel *Yo, el Supremo* (I, the Supreme) is told through the perspective of Dictator José Gaspar Rodríguez de Francia (see *History and Myth*) and covers themes such as isolationism, abuse of power, and the exploitation of language central to Paraguayan history. In recent years, themes of national identity, social injustice, colonization, and the country's history have remained popular.

Arts and Handicrafts

Paraguay's rich history of arts and crafts is characterized by weaving, woodwork, embroidery, leatherwork, and ceramics. Some Indigenous groups weave baskets, fans, bags, and other goods from natural fibers. Featherwork is popular among Indigenous groups, who produce headdresses and accessories such as bracelets and collars from brightly colored feathers for festivals and religious ceremonies.

Traditional Paraguayan lace, *ñandutí*, is produced by stretching a piece of fabric across a wooden frame, drawing a pattern on the fabric, and using a needle and thread to embroider intricate patterns of geometric shapes, the sun, stars, and flowers. While *ñandutí* is sold in markets and shops across the country, the city of Itauguá is considered the home of the craft, accounting for its largest production.



10. SUSTENANCE AND HEALTH

Sustenance Overview

Meals are often important social events, with family and friends lingering for conversation and companionship. Paraguayan cuisine reflects the country's livestock-raising tradition, along with its mixed Spanish and Guaraní heritage.

Dining Customs

Most Paraguayans eat three meals and two snacks during the day. Traditionally, **desayuno** (breakfast) is light and followed by a small **medio mañana** (mid-morning snack) a few hours later. **Almuerzo** (lunch), the heartiest meal of the day, typically is served at noon. Business schedules allow for long lunch breaks during which some Paraguayans return home instead of eating at the office or a nearby restaurant (see *Time and Space*). **Cena** (dinner) typically is smaller than lunch and served in the late evening, usually between 9-10pm.

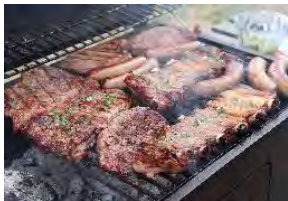
Consequently, Paraguayans tend to eat a **merienda** (snack) between 5-7pm, which often consists of **chipa**, a soft ring-shaped bread made from **mandioca** (cassava/yuca, which is a starchy root vegetable like a sweet potato), cornmeal, and cheese. Other common **meriendas** include **mbeju** (savory pancake made of cassava, milk, and cheese), and crunchy bread rolls flavored with anise seeds called **coquitos**, **rosquitos**, or **palitos** depending on their shape. While eating a **merienda**, many Paraguayans drink coffee or **mate cocido** (cooked mate), a tea-like infusion made by boiling **yerba mate** herbal leaves in water (see "Beverages" below).



When invited to a Paraguayan home, guests usually arrive a few minutes late and bring flowers, chocolates, sweets, or wine to thank the hosts for their hospitality. Guests usually are served first and should wait until the host says "**buen provecho**" (enjoy) to begin eating. Diners should keep their hands visible and

elbows off the table. Paraguayans hold the knife in the right hand and fork in the left. Accepting seconds is considered polite, and guests typically must decline several offers if they do not want additional servings. Guests should leave some food on their plate to show their host that they are done eating. Paraguayans tend to take their time eating and often linger for hours to chat.

On Sundays and holidays, Paraguayans usually gather with friends and family for **asados** (barbecues). Traditionally, women prepare *asado* side dishes like salads, cassava, and *chipa*, while men cook the meat over a **parrilla** (grill). The **asador** (griller) slowly grills cuts of beef, particularly **bife de chorizo** (strip steak) and **costillas** (ribs), along with sausages like **morcilla** (blood sausage) and **chorizo** (spiced sausage). Paraguayans who do not have access to a *parrilla* usually dine at steakhouses or roadside grills instead of hosting their own *asado*.



Diet

While varying by region and socioeconomic status, meals tend to feature animal protein and make ample use of starchy foods. The population's Guaraní heritage (see *Political and Social Relations*)

influences the country's cuisine, resulting in the prevalence of cassava and cassava-based foods like *chipa* and *mbeju* in meals. Paraguay's robust livestock sector (see *Economics and Resources*) produces significant beef for consumption.

Other staples are potatoes and **polenta** (cornmeal purée), which Paraguayans use for their versatility and low cost. Many Paraguayan dishes contain animal fats, particularly lard, butter, and **queso Paraguay** (Paraguay cheese), a soft, mozzarella-like cheese. Paraguayans eat vegetables like sweet potato, carrot, celery, onion, squash, pumpkin, tomato, and bell pepper. Common fruits include pineapple, passion fruit, peaches, melons, grapes, and citrus. Typical seasonings are parsley, oregano, black pepper, onion, garlic, and anise.

Meals and Popular Dishes

Breakfast in Paraguay is typically small and eaten quickly. The morning meal often features *chipa*, **chipa so'o** (*chipa* filled with

ground beef), or cookies served with milk, coffee, or **yerba mate**. Lunches tend to be heavier and more elaborate. Some popular dishes include **vorí vorí** (soup with meat and cheesy corn flour dumplings), **chupín de surubí** (stew of **surubí** (river fish) with potatoes, vegetables, and cheese), and **kumanda fideo** (bean stew with pasta). European-inspired dishes like **milanesas** (thin cuts of meat breaded and pan-fried) **tallarines** (fettucine pasta), **ñoquis** (gnocchi, dense potato dumplings), and **pizza de polenta** (pizza made with polenta dough) are also popular.

Dinner features similar dishes to lunch. Options include **tortilla Paraguay** (Paraguayan tortilla, an omelet of egg, cheese, milk, and flour) and **chipa guazú** (casserole of corn kernels, cheese, oil, and milk). Paraguay's national dish is **sopa Paraguaya** (Paraguayan soup) which is not a soup, but a bread pudding made of cornmeal and cheese. Boiled cassava accompanies nearly every meal, much like bread in the US.



Paraguayan desserts often include **dulce de leche** (sweet made of milk), which is a caramel sauce made from sweetened milk. Some popular choices are **alfajores** (**dulce de leche** sandwiched between butter cookies, sometimes rolled in shredded coconut or dipped in chocolate), and **pastafrola** (pie filled with quince or guava jam). Other popular sweets are flan, custard, ice cream, and **kamby arro** (rice pudding).

Beverages

Most Paraguayans drink **yerba mate** throughout the day in several different forms. The beverage predates the arrival of the Spanish in Paraguay (see *History and Myth*). **Yerba mate** is traditionally served warm and drunk from a gourd and **bombilla** (metal straw) that is shared by several people. Strict social conventions govern this method of consumption. Most notable traditions include thanking the preparer only when one no longer wants to receive the gourd again and never touching the **bombilla**. In hot months, Paraguayans drink **tereré** (Guaraní

word for “slurping noise”), which is *yerba mate* prepared with ice water and medicinal herbs. Paraguayans also consume **mate cocido**, made by boiling the *yerba mate* leaves and adding sugar. Some Paraguayans, particularly in rural areas, prepare **cocido quemado** (burned *cocido*) which involves using a hot coal to caramelize sugar and *yerba mate* leaves before boiling all three ingredients in a pot. Espresso, **café cortado** (espresso with a little steamed milk), and **café con leche** (coffee with hot milk) are common drinks in cafés. **Gaseosas** (sodas) and fruit juices are popular among children.

Caña (rum) is the most popular spirit in Paraguay, with El Supremo (see *History and Myth*) and Fortín being the most well-known brands. Beer is also common with Pilsen, Munich, Eisenbahn, and Polar being Paraguay’s most popular domestic brands. Additionally, most bars have imported beers from Brazil

and Argentina. Paraguayan shops and restaurants sell imported wines, but spirits and beer are more widely consumed.



Eating Out

Restaurants in Paraguay range from upscale establishments specializing in international and local

cuisine to inexpensive food stalls. Street food is popular, and stalls often sell **empanadas** (meat or cheese turnovers), **sándwiches de lomito** (thin steak, egg, lettuce, and tomato on a bun), shawarma, or **panchos** (hotdogs, often with toppings like corn, cheese, crispy potatoes, onions, ketchup, and mustard). On many street corners throughout Paraguay, women known as **chiperas** (*chipa* sellers) sell fresh *chipa* from baskets. A 10-15% tip is expected in most dining establishments.

Health Overview

While the overall health of Paraguayans has improved in recent decades, they continue to face high rates of non-communicable “lifestyle” diseases, often due to poor diet, tobacco use, and excessive alcohol consumption, in addition to other serious health challenges. Between 2000-24, life expectancy at birth

increased from about 70 to 74 years, a figure equal to the average of Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) countries (74) but lower than the US average (77). From 2000-22, infant mortality (the proportion of infants who die before age 1) decreased from about 28 deaths per 1,000 live births to 15, close to the LAC average (14) and higher than the US rate (5).

Traditional Medicine

This treatment method consists of the knowledge, practices, and skills derived from a native population's beliefs, experiences, and theories. Traditional Paraguayan medicine, known as **medicina popular** (folk medicine), relies on herbal treatments and prayer to identify and cure illnesses, both physical and spiritual. Today, some Paraguayans use traditional herbal remedies, often overseen by a **curandero** (healer), in addition to modern Western medicine. Many Paraguayans add **pohã ñana** or **yuyos** (medicinal herbs) to their daily cups of *yerba mate* or *tereré*. Common examples of plants used in medicine are mandarin orange, chamomile, mint, lime, linden, and cedar. **Yuyeras** (herb sellers) prepare and sell these remedies.

Healthcare System

Paraguay's Constitution declares that health is a basic human right and the responsibility of the state. Paraguay's healthcare system is a centralized network composed of three entities under the direction of **the Ministerio de Salud Pública y Bienestar Social** (Ministry of Public Health and Social Welfare, or MSPBS). The largest provider of healthcare is the MSPBS itself, which covers Paraguayans who lack health insurance, approximately 74% of the population.



The **Instituto de Previsión Social** (Social Security Institute, or IPS) is the country's second largest healthcare provider, covering formal sector employees and their families – around 20% of the population as of 2022 (see *Economics and Resources*). Medical coverage from the IPS is funded by employer, employee, and state contributions. The remaining 6% of Paraguayans not covered by public entities have private

health insurance or pay for services out-of-pocket. The country's private healthcare network caters to wealthy Paraguayans and foreign nationals.

Private hospitals and clinics typically offer a higher standard of care with shorter wait times. The disparity in the accessibility of medical care has led to unequal health outcomes among different segments of the population. Low-income and rural Paraguayans are sometimes unable to access care and have to postpone required procedures.

In 2021, Paraguay spent around 4.5% of GDP on healthcare, lower than the LAC (8%), and US (17%) averages. As of 2023,

Paraguay had 3.7 physicians per 1,000 people, above the average for LAC (2.3 in 2019) and nearly equal to the US (3.6 in 2020).



Healthcare Challenges

Paraguay's leading causes of death are chronic and non-communicable "lifestyle" diseases, which accounted for some 75% of deaths in 2019. These include heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and kidney disease. Communicable diseases, particularly tuberculosis and HIV infection, caused around 14% of deaths in 2019, more than double the US rate for that year (5%). Preventable "external causes" such as suicides, car accidents, and other injuries resulted in about 11% of deaths in Paraguay, higher than the US rate (6.6%). In 2019, around 56% of Paraguayans aged 30-79 experienced high blood pressure, the world's highest rate.

As of 2024, the Paraguayan government had confirmed over 838,000 cases of COVID-19, resulting in around 20,000 deaths. Meanwhile, some 50% of Paraguayans had received two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine, and 23% a booster or additional dose.

The Paraguayan government aims to reduce healthcare inequities between Asunción and rural areas, improve coordination between health agencies, and increase insurance coverage.

11. ECONOMICS AND RESOURCES

Overview

During the pre-colonial era, Paraguay hosted minimal economic activity. In the 16th century, the Spanish settled in modern-day Paraguay, establishing Asunción in 1537 (see *History and Myth*). Due to Paraguay's lack of minerals and seacoasts, the Spanish pursued minimal economic involvement.

During the colonial era (see *History and Myth*), Paraguay's economy was primarily agricultural. Jesuit missionaries established agricultural settlements called **reducciones**, or townships (see *History and Myth*). Amicable relationships between Jesuits and the Indigenous peoples facilitated agricultural production for both subsistence and export. By 1556, Paraguay exported sugarcane and other cash crops and traded with its southeast neighbor, Argentina, gaining access to the Atlantic.



After independence in 1811, Dictator Dr. José Gaspar Rodríguez de Francia implemented an isolationist economic policy, void of exterior trade. Under Francia's rule, Paraguay had a centrally administered agricultural sector, extensive cattle grazing, shipbuilding, and textile industries.

Following the death of Francia, Dictator Antonio López (see *History and Myth*) invested in Paraguay's communication and transportation infrastructure. In 1865, Paraguay began construction of one of the first railroads in South America. Merchants in Paraguay had access to the telegraph, allowing them to communicate with Europe. Coincidentally, trade expanded, and Paraguay entered into various treaties.

The War of the Triple Alliance (1864-70) decimated Paraguay's population, physical infrastructure, and economy (see *History and Myth*). Following the war, Paraguay's government implemented *laissez-faire* economic policies, based on free-

market principles of minimal government intervention in the economy. Paraguay sold large tracts of land to foreigners, who converted them into large-scale agricultural farms for export. Many Paraguayans worked as wage laborers and grew crops on the foreign-owned **latifundios** (large landholdings). Besides **yerba mate** (see *Sustenance and Health*), tobacco, and hides, export crops also included timber, meat products, and cotton.



During this period, foreign nationals owned an estimated 70% of commercial establishments in Paraguay.

The Gran Chaco War (1932-35) disrupted Paraguay's economic growth (see *History and*

Myth). After the war, Paraguay implemented several social reform policies such as labor legislation, banking regulations, and agrarian reform. Opposition to these reforms led to a civil war in 1946 (see *History and Myth*) that lasted until the mid-1950s, causing high inflation throughout the decade.

During Alfredo Stroessner's dictatorship from 1954-89 (see *History and Myth*), a combination of free-market policies and patronage politics, whereby political favors were exchanged for regime loyalty, stabilized inflation and the economy. In 1956, Paraguay launched an International Monetary Fund stabilization plan that abolished export duties, lowered import tariffs, restricted credit, devalued the currency, and implemented austerity measures. In 1962, Paraguay established the **Secretaría Técnica de Planificación** (Technical Planning Secretariat or STP) to be responsible for economic planning.

In the 1970s, Paraguay invested in hydropower, stimulating the economy, while reducing the country's reliance on thermal and diesel electricity. Paraguay completed its first major hydroelectric plant, the Acaray Dam, in 1968. In 1973, the signing of the Treaty of Itaipú with Brazil initiated the construction of the Itaipú Dam, one of the world's largest hydroelectric plants, and an average annual production of around 94 million megawatt-hours (see *Political and Social*

Relations). Additionally in 1973, Paraguay signed a treaty with Argentina outlining the construction and joint oversight for the Yacyretá Dam, ultimately completed around 2008. Electricity, gas, and water energy production combined made up 2.8% of Paraguay's GDP by 1986.

At the same time, exports of the cash crops soybeans and cotton skyrocketed. In 1973, prices for soybeans tripled, inspiring large agribusiness to transform their business to soybeans and soybean oil. First introduced in 1967, soybeans covered more acreage than any other crop and had an export revenue of approximately US \$150 million by 1987.



The 1970s were marked by increased regional cooperation and investment in industry. New roads and bridges opened Paraguay's eastern region, connecting it to Brazil. Increased economic cooperation between the two countries led to the growth of Ciudad del Este, located in the Tri-Border Area with Brazil, to the second largest and most important city in Paraguay.

Contraband trade became a dominant economic activity, particularly in Paraguay's borderlands (see *Political and Social Relations*). Implemented in 1975, Law 550 promoted foreign investment by providing income-tax breaks, duty-free capital imports, and other incentives for investment in high priority areas such as the Chaco. Real GDP increased by over 8% annually in the 1970s and exceeded 10% annually between 1976-81.

Paraguay experienced stagnated economic growth and high inflation in the mid-1980s-90s. Its democratic transition, beginning in 1989 (see *History and Myth*), centered the economy along free-market principles, increasing trade, and financial liberalization. In 1991, Paraguay entered the Southern Common Market (or MERCOSUR – see *Social and Political Relations*). Beginning in 1995, Paraguay underwent successive financial crises, resulting in the closing of some major banks.

Since the beginning of the 21st century, Paraguay has seen continuous economic growth. The Cartes Administration (2013-18) passed laws to encourage private sector and public partnerships, increasing infrastructure investment. In 2013, the government passed a Fiscal Responsibility Law capping annual budget deficits at 1.5% and recurrent spending growth at 4%.



From 2003-23, the economy grew annually by approximately 3.6%.

The number of people living under the real poverty line (US \$6.85 per day per capita in 2017) decreased from almost 50% in 2003 to 17.6% of the population in

2023. Paraguay's economy was not hard-hit by the COVID-19 pandemic in comparison to other countries in South America. Paraguay's GDP shrank by 2% in 2020 and rebounded by 2.8% in 2022.

Despite the recovery from the pandemic and current stable economic growth, Paraguay's economy has vulnerabilities. Its agricultural and export-based model is subject to global price fluctuations, changing weather conditions, and geopolitical conditions (see *Political and Social Relations*). In 2022, drought and Russian sanctions impacted the livestock and soybean markets, resulting in Paraguay's first trade deficit in 28 years.

Paraguay maintains a low tax burden, with a tax revenue of approximately 10% of GDP, impacting available resources for the public sector. A substantial portion of Paraguay's workforce labors in the informal sector, almost 70% in 2019 (see *Sex and Gender*). Also, Paraguay is one of the South America's most unequal societies based on the Gini Index (measure of income distribution across a population), with large discrepancies between economic opportunity, income, and social services (see *Political and Social Relations*).

Services

Comprising around 49% of GDP and 64% of employment in 2023 and 2022, respectively, the services sector is Paraguay's largest. Major subsectors are tourism, technology, and banking.

Tourism: In 2019, some 4.3 million tourists, mostly from Argentina and Brazil, visited sites like the Pantanal wetland, Paraguay's many rivers, and cities like Asunción. In 2023, the tourism subsector accounted for around 4.7% of Paraguay's GDP and 6.1% of total jobs.

Technology: Paraguay's growing technology subsector. Low taxes and cheap electricity attract technology investors. The country has had an increase in both legal and illegal cryptocurrency farms, inspiring legislative countermeasures.



Banking: Paraguay's financial system consists of 390 financial institutions, including 17 licensed banks. The **Asociación de Bancos del Paraguay** (The Paraguayan Banking Association, or ASOBAN) oversees banking activities, while the **Banco Central del Paraguay** (Central Bank of Paraguay) regulates financial activities.

Industry

The industrial sector accounts for around 32.4% of GDP and employs 19% of the workforce. Major subsectors include energy production and manufacturing.

Energy: Paraguay sources 100% of its electricity from hydropower and, in 2023, generated almost 57 terawatt-hours (see *Technology and Materials*). The country exports excess electricity and is one of the world's largest electricity exporters.

Manufacturing: In 2023, manufacturing accounted for around 19% of GDP and includes the processing of agricultural products to include seed oils, grain mills, meats, and dairy. Paraguay's **Maquiladora** (foreign owned factories for exported goods) industry is growing, with an increase by some 250 and 500% companies between 2015-22.

Agriculture

This sector comprises around 11.3% of GDP and 17% of the labor force. Nearly 12% of Paraguay's land is arable, and agribusiness is vital to the economy. Livestock rearing, farming, and forestry are the principal agricultural activities.

Livestock and Farming: Paraguay is a prominent exporter of cash crops and beef. Common crops are sugarcane, maize, soybeans, cassava, rice, wheat, milk, oranges, and oil palm fruit. Paraguay is the largest exporter of organic sugar, the second-largest producer and exporter of stevia (sugar substitute), and the third-largest exporter of soy.

Forestry: Timber is an important export for Paraguay, although timber and cattle ranching have caused rapid deforestation. Paraguay has one of the highest rates of deforestation in the world, with a loss of around a quarter of its net forests between 2000-20 (see *Political and Social Relations*). Approximately 7.15% of GDP is not included in the figures for services, industry, or agriculture due to non-allocated consumption that is not captured in reported data, typically from informal economic services.



Currency

Adopted in 1943, Paraguay's national currency is the Guaraní (₲ or PYG), issued in six banknotes (2,000, 5,000, 10,000, 20,000, 50,000, and 100,000) and four coins (50, 100, 500, and 1000). A Guaraní divides into 100 **céntimos** (cents), which are no longer issued. From 2019-24, US \$1 was worth between ₲6,245.63-8,002.34.

Foreign Trade

Exports, which totaled some US \$15 billion in 2022, consisted of beef, electricity, soybeans, corn, and soybean meal sold to Brazil (36%), Argentina (19%), Chile (12%), Russia (4%), and the US (3%). Imports totaled some US \$17 billion and consisted of refined petroleum, broadcasting equipment, cars, fertilizers, and pesticides from China (28%), Brazil (32%), the US (11%), Argentina (8%), and Chile (3%).

Foreign Aid

Paraguay is a recipient of foreign aid, which primarily supports governance, economic growth, law enforcement, and countering corruption (see *Political and Social Relations*). In 2022, Paraguay received almost US \$97 million of net official development assistance.

12. TECHNOLOGY AND MATERIAL

Overview

Paraguay's physical and telecommunications infrastructure has improved in recent years but is still underdeveloped in rural areas. While the Paraguayan Constitution provides for freedom of expression, journalists face occasional harassment, violence, and government interference.

Transportation

Most Paraguayans travel by bus, car, or **motos** (small motorcycles). In 2020, close to 2.5 million motor vehicles were in circulation in Paraguay, and almost 37% of Paraguayan households owned a car in 2018. *Motos* are a popular source of transportation for Paraguayans because of their small size and inexpensive price. In 2018, almost 55% of households in Paraguay owned a motorcycle. Bus fares vary by service type, though local routes are generally inexpensive and services frequent. Paraguay has **colectivos**, long-distance buses that connect major towns or cities, and **micros/combi**, short-distance buses within urban areas. Taxis and rideshare services (e.g., Uber and Bolt) are other popular ways to travel in Asunción. Ferry services connect cities along the Paraguay River and link Paraguay to neighboring countries.



Roadways: Around 11% of Paraguay's 49,000-mi-long roadway network is paved (see *Time & Space*). Roads connect Paraguay's major cities of Asunción, Encarnación, and Ciudad del Este. Rural areas have fewer and less developed road networks. The Trans-Chaco highway, running northwards to Bolivia, is paved but full of cracks and potholes. Since 2019, Paraguay has been constructing the **Corredor Bioceánico** (Bio-Ocean Corridor) to provide connectivity between Chilean ports in the Pacific and Brazilian ports in the Atlantic. Despite these efforts, a 2019 global assessment placed Paraguay 71 of 141 countries in road quality – lower than the US (1), Argentina (12), and Brazil (69).

Railways: Although Paraguay has transported by railway since the late 17th century (see *Economics and Resources*), today, there are no domestic passenger trains, and many railway lines are in disrepair. Paraguay's only international passenger line connects Encarnación with Posadas in Argentina, catering mostly to tourists.

Ports and Waterways: Paraguay has almost 2,000 mi of navigable waterways, including some of South America's major rivers (see *Political and Social Relations*). The Parana River and the Paraguay River are the two primary examples of these, both flowing into the Rio de La Plata Estuary in Argentina. Paraguay relies on its rivers for ports and international trade (see *Economics and Resources*).

Airways: As of 2024, Paraguay has 83 airports, of which 15 had paved runways in 2023. In 2021, Paraguay had 799 runways with 784 of those having unpaved surfaces. Silvo Pattirossi International Airport (ASU) in Asunción is Paraguay's primary air transit hub, serving some 1 million passengers in 2023. LATAM (Latin America) Paraguay, part of LATAM Airlines, is Paraguay's largest airline and services 8 domestic and international airports.



Energy

In 2022, hydropower provided 100% of Paraguay's electricity needs and approximately half of Paraguay's overall energy supply. In 2021, Paraguay's total energy supply was approximately 64% renewables, which includes hydropower and biofuels, and 36% oil. The Itaipú Dam accounts for approximately 90% of electricity production, while the Yacyretá and Acaray Dam provide the remainder (see *Economics and Resources*). **Administración Nacional de Electricidad** (National Electricity Administration, or ANDE) is Paraguay's state-owned entity that manages electricity.

Media

Paraguay's media landscape is diverse, though a few private firms wield substantial influence. The Paraguayan press is protected by a range of legal freedoms, particularly a constitutional right to freedom of expression for the press and

media. However, the government often does not protect freedom of expression. Paraguay ranked 115 of 180 countries in a 2024 world press freedom index, lower than Argentina (66), Brazil (82), and the US (55). Threats, assaults, and attacks on journalists occur and are often unpunished. Criminal groups occasionally target journalists, especially in border areas with Brazil (see *Social and Political Relations*). Authorities also sometimes use libel and slander laws to retaliate against journalists.

Print Media: Founded in 1967, Asunción-based *ABC Color* is Paraguay's most widely circulated Spanish-language newspaper. *La Nación* and *Ultima Hora* are other major papers. *The Asunción Times* is one of Paraguay's primary English-language newspapers.



TV and Radio: Four commercial groups – Grupo Cartes, Grupo Vierci, Grupo Zucolillo, and Grupo Albavisión – control Paraguay's media, owning most newspapers, radio stations, and TV channels. The most viewed TV channels are *NPY* (Noticias Paraguay), *Telefuturo* (Canal 4), *ABC* (Canal 9), *RPC* (Canal 13), and Paraguay TV HD. Paraguay the latter is a state-owned channel. Most radio channels are privately-owned, including *Radio Cardinal*, *Radio Nanduti*, *Radio Venue*, and *Radio Canal 100*. *Radio Nacional del Paraguay* is a prominent state-owned radio station.

Telecommunications

Paraguay has a low fixed-line density but high mobile phone usage. As of 2022, Paraguay has around 128 mobile subscriptions and 2 landlines per 100 inhabitants. In 2023, Paraguay did not have a modern 5G network but the prevalence of 4G or mobile connections with at least LTE speed was almost 97%.

Internet: Some 77% of Paraguay's population (around 5.2 million people) were regular Internet users in 2022. In 2023, Paraguay had some 13 broadband subscriptions per 100 inhabitants. Paraguayans commonly access the Internet via personal electronic devices.



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