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ARTICLES/ARTÍCULOS

Immigrant occupations in 1900s Uruguay: new evidence from birth records

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Abstract

Were economic migrants to Latin America able to access the same occupations as locals? We examine 1900s Uruguay, where immigrants accounted for approximately one-fifth of the total population. Historical censuses in Uruguay are very limited, so we rely on random sampling to mine a new individual-level source: Uruguayan civil birth records. We find that the occupations of foreign-born fathers were in general like that of their Uruguayan counterparts, with the important exception of non-manual high-status occupations (especially "rancher," *hacendado*), for which being born in Uruguay remained a statistically significant advantage. This reflects both the success and the limits of Uruguay's relatively egalitarian economy: migrants were readily integrated into a wide range of occupational paths but were less likely to reach the top of the occupational structure, where key resources (notably land) remained concentrated in the hands of a local elite.

Keywords: birth records; occupational attainment; migration

JEL codes: J19; J61; J62

Resumen

¿Pudieron los migrantes a América Latina acceder a las mismas ocupaciones que los locales? Examinamos el Uruguay del siglo XX, en el que los inmigrantes representaban aproximadamente un tercio de la población total. Los censos históricos en Uruguay son muy escasos, por lo que recurrimos al muestreo aleatorio de partidas de nacimiento. Encontramos que las ocupaciones de los padres nacidos en el extranjero eran en general similares a las de sus homólogos uruguayos, con la importante excepción de ocupaciones de alto estatus no manuales (especialmente hacendado), para las cuales nacer en Uruguay seguía siendo una ventaja estadísticamente significativa. Esto refleja tanto los logros como los límites de la equidad en la economía uruguaya: los migrantes se integraban fácilmente en una amplia gama de trayectorias ocupacionales, pero tenían menos probabilidades de alcanzar la cima de la estructura ocupacional, donde los recursos clave (especialmente la tierra) permanecían concentrados en manos de una élite local.

Palabras clave: migración; estructura ocupacional; partidas de nacimiento

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1. Introduction

The integration of economic migrants into the labor market decisively shapes distributional and political outcomes in receiving countries. Historians depict 1900s Uruguay as a highly integrated society, characterized by relatively low inequality, progressive politics, and some features of a welfare state, having benefited from an early (by Latin American and global standards) schooling revolution in the late nineteenth century. Real wages were by 1913 three times higher than in Mediterranean Europe, and immigrants from across the Atlantic (and from nearer by) showed up in numbers, accounting up to a third of the total population, a higher share than in the United States (Williamson, 1999; Sánchez Alonso, 2007). How egalitarian was Uruguay from the perspective of these economic migrants? What economic opportunities were open for them?

A lack of quantitative sources from the era of mass migration has impeded answers. Only one census was conducted in Uruguay between 1870 and 1962, which provides very limited cross-tabulated returns (the microdata were destroyed). The approach we introduce in this paper overcomes that limitation and opens a whole new trove of data for historians, economists, and social scientists of Uruguay. The systematic examination of individual-level civil registration records can fill the gaps created by the lack of demographic censuses, which has long prevented scholars from answering basic questions about the country's historical development, such as when Uruguay became a predominantly urban nation. Through a collaboration with Uruguay's Civil Registry, we are the first scholars to access these archives in full, including the original index books listing all records, which we can use to draw random samples.

The contribution of this paper is threefold: first, to make available to researchers a comprehensive database of our sample of birth records for the year 1908; second, to show how random sampling can be used to produce reliable datasets from other administrative records in Uruguay (marriage and death certificates); and finally, to carry out a first analysis of this source. Specifically, we examine the labor market dynamics of Uruguayan and migrant workers through their occupational descriptors. In highly stratified societies such as those of Latin America at the turn of the twentieth century, it is possible to get a very good sense of someone's status from their occupational descriptor. Occupational gaps between migrants and locals (and across different groups of migrants) have already been examined by several scholars for the other so-called "settler societies" which received large inflows of migrants during the First Globalization (Argentina, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United States),[1] although there is no previous systematic study on Uruguay.

Our main findings suggest that the occupations of foreign-born men (using a random sample of fathers as a proxy) were, in general, like that of their Uruguayan counterparts, with the important exception of non-manual high-status occupations (*hacendado*, i.e. "rancher"), for which being Uruguayan remained a statistically significant advantage after controlling for age, literacy, and location. These results reflect both the success and the limits of Uruguay's relatively egalitarian society: most immigrants were eagerly integrated into a wide range of professions but found it much more difficult to reach the top of the occupational structure, as key resources (notably land) remained highly concentrated in the hands of a local elite. We argue that this limited egalitarianism is partially explained by a Uruguayan peculiarity that made it an unusual settler economy: the agricultural frontier was already closed by the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

After this introduction, Section 2 provides historical context and situates our study within the comparative empirical literature on migrants' occupational attainment during

[1] Important recent examples are for Argentina, Pérez (2017) and Arroyo Abad et al. (2021); for Canada, Green and Green (2016) and Inwood et al. (2019); for Australia, Clark et al. (2020); for New Zealand, Lenihan (2012); for the United States, Minns (2000) and Abramitzky et al (2021).

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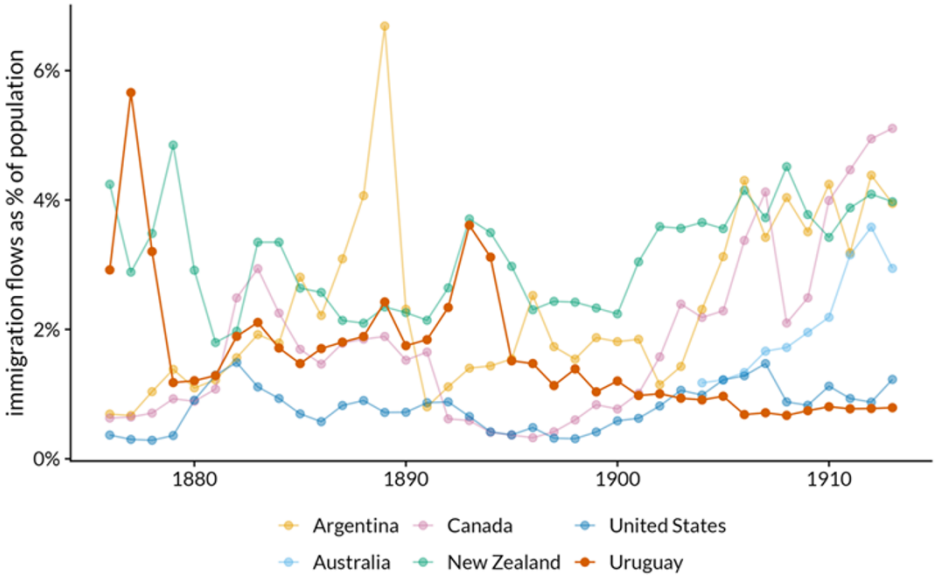


Figure 1. Yearly immigration flows as % of population in settler economies, 1875–1913.
Source: DEMIG Total and (for Australia) and Ferenczi and Willcox, *International Migration*, 951.

the First Globalization. Section 3 describes our data and methods. Section 4 presents and discusses our main results. Section 5 offers a brief discussion. Section 6 concludes.

2. Context

The age of mass migration during the First Globalization saw over 60 million Europeans leave their continent in search of economic opportunity elsewhere, notably in lightly populated and temperate "settler economies." Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States were prime destinations, as were Argentina and Uruguay (Figure 1). Like their English-speaking counterparts, the River Plate economies had comparatively high wages and low-income inequality in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. These mass migratory flows were bound to have a substantial impact on labor markets and economic inequality, as most migrants were adults with low levels of education and high rates of labor force participation, thereby pushing down unskilled wages in settler economies (Williamson, 1997). As O'Rourke (2001) argued, the outcome of this immigration was reduced inequality in the sending countries (mainly in Europe) and increased inequality in receiving countries.

Scholars have found that landownership structures help explain the extent to which inequality increased as a result of mass immigration of unskilled workers, because large landowners were typically situated at the higher end of the income distribution (Williamson, 2002). The impact on inequality would be greater where land ownership was more concentrated, as in Argentina or Uruguay, and lower in societies where family farm ownership predominated, such as in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the northern United States (Denoon, 1983; Fogarty, 1985; Álvarez *et al.*, 2007; Willebald, 2011). The evidence presented by Williamson indicates that in Latin American countries between 1870 and 1913 the unequal distribution of productive factors led to globalization reducing wage-to-land rent ratios, thereby increasing inequality (Williamson, 1999).

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Table 1. Percentage of foreign-born people in Uruguay and Montevideo

	Uruguay	Montevideo
1860	33.5	47.7
1884		44.4
1889		46.8
1908	17.4	30.4
1963	8	13.5

Source: National censuses.

Were immigrants to Uruguay able to become large landowners and access other high-status occupations? By the standards of the First Globalization era, Uruguay was rich, egalitarian, and even progressive. By 1870, Uruguay's income Gini was 0.48 (about the same as Canada and Australia, lower than Argentina and the United States), and its GDP per capita was among the highest in the world (similar to France's or Denmark's), sustained by high international prices for beef and wool.[2] Moreover, a schooling reform establishing free, secular, and mandatory primary education led to Latin America's highest literacy rate (c. 60% in 1908) for women as well as men (Sokoloff and Engerman, 2000), while social legislation was, in some respects, ahead of Western democracies (the death penalty was abolished in 1907, the 8-hour workday was established in 1911, and women won the right to divorce in 1912).[3] Nevertheless, in Uruguay's rural hinterland, landownership was concentrated, and the agricultural frontier was closed to a greater extent than in other settler economies, leaving considerable scope for inequality to increase.[4] And it did: the wage-land rent ratio was 10 times smaller in 1913 than it had been in 1870 (Bértola *et al.*, 1999).

During the two decades before 1910, Uruguay received, relative to population, more immigrants than the United States and ranked only behind Argentina and Canada in global immigration rates (Sánchez Alonso, 2007, p. 400). Natural population growth contributed as much to population increases as immigration, as fertility rates remained at pre-demographic transition levels while mortality decreased (Pellegrino and Pollero, 1998). As shown in Table 1, foreign-born people represented a substantial share of the population. Immigration rates reached their historical maximums between 1875 and 1895: most were Italian (about 35%) and Spanish (about 30%), followed by the French (15%) and other Europeans (Mourat, 1969). Non-Europeans, mostly Brazilians and Argentinians, made up about 20% of arrivals (Rial, 1983). As first shown by Mourat (1969), from the 1930s onward, the trend reversed, with immigrants steadily declining as a share of the total population.

European immigrants were predominantly single men of working age who settled in Montevideo. Rial and Klaczko argued that the first wave of European immigrants largely comprised individuals with experience in factory work, retail trade, or military service (Rial and Klaczko, 1981). According to these scholars, rural occupations were, therefore, less attractive to European migrants to Uruguay. Others argued (albeit without systematic evidence) that migrants from the Mediterranean found little economic opportunity in the Uruguayan hinterland, as land concentration made access to a plot almost impossible in most areas (Finch, 1995). Meanwhile, crop farmers working smaller holdings in the

[2] On inequality, see (Bértola et al 2010). On income levels, Uruguayan GDP per capita by 1870 was in the top 10 globally (Bolt and van Zanden 2020).

[3] On these policies and their outcomes see the overview in Caetano (2011).

[4] For a comparative analysis of frontier expansion in settler economies, see Willebald and Juambeltz (2018).

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south of the country were generally too poor to employ more workers. Across the "latifundia/minifundia" divide, the rural economy expelled immigrant workers rather than attract them (Millot and Bertino, 1996, pp. 48–55),[5] and even led to widespread rural poverty among Uruguayans and rural-to-urban migration (Barrán and Nahum, 1972, pp. 21–47; Moraes, 2008, pp. 91–93). Therefore, the urban bias of immigration flows contributed to the country's early (by Latin American standards) demographic transition, already completed by the 1960s (Pellegrino, 2010). This pattern would also be explained by Montevideo's agglomeration advantages and public policy choices in the early 1900s, which led to the highest levels of urban primacy in Latin America (and one of the highest in the world) (Travieso and Herranz-Loncan, 2023).

Beyond this general picture, the scarcity of sources has severely limited the development of historical demography in Uruguay (Pollero, 2016). National censuses were conducted in 1852, 1860, 1908, 1963, 1975, 1996, 2004, 2011, and 2023, with additional censuses for Montevideo in 1884, 1889, and 1930. The absence of censuses between 1860 and 1908, and particularly between 1908 and 1963, is notable, especially when contrasted with the regular livestock censuses conducted every 6–8 years. Access to other data sources in Uruguay has until now also proven extremely challenging, resulting in reliance on rough population estimates between 1908 and 1963. These estimates have often led to large discrepancies.

Among studies providing population estimates for Uruguay between 1908 and 1963, the most recent and comprehensive work comes from the Population Program at Universidad de la República. For 1887–1962, Pellegrino presents quinquennial age-segment estimates, while Cabella and Pollero offer annual age-segment estimates for 1885-1962 (Pellegrino, 2013). For the economically active population, the most widely cited study is Pereira and Trajtenberg's *Evolución de la Población total y activa en el Uruguay 1908–1957*. Subsequent studies covering part of the intercensal period (1908–1963) have often used Pereira and Trajtenberg's estimates as a foundation. For instance, Rial (1983) employed them in his analysis of population structure from 1850 to 1930, while Noya, Pereira, and Prieto (2003) used them to examine the role of human capital in economic growth in Uruguay between 1942 and 1999. More recently, Fleitas and Román (2010) provided estimates for the economically active population between 1908 and 1996. In all cases, economic historians and historical demographers base their results on guesstimates of population variables for the decades without censuses.

In the following sections, we exploit our newly digitized individual-level source to examine the occupational profiles of foreign-born and Uruguayan fathers in 1900s Uruguay. The approach we introduce in this article can produce actual data on demographic variables for Uruguay in the decades without censuses, thereby providing social scientists with a much better empirical foundation for their analyses of sociodemographic behavior and changes in family structures.

3. Data and method

3.1. Sources and sampling[6]

The priorities guiding census-taking became emblematic of the perceived hierarchy between natural and human resources, and in particular of governments' ideas about where the nation's wealth lay: the Uruguayan state counted cattle and sheep herds far more often than people, to the great dismay of several generations of scholars. Fortunately, when seeking new sources on Uruguay's political past, the record turns out to be very generous to the

[5] Labour-intensive niches such as sheep shearing were the exception to the rule; see Moraes (2002).

[6] Here we follow the previous strategy attempted by one of us in a chapter of his PhD thesis (Travieso, 2020); some of the description is taken from this unpublished chapter.

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quantitative historian. As a result of the relatively—by Latin American standards—short-lived colonial period (less than a century passed between the foundation of Montevideo and the start of the independence revolution), the Uruguayan Catholic Church did not wield temporal power comparable with the influence it enjoyed elsewhere on the continent. It could be said that the Church's hold on the country was, much like the Spanish colonial state's, "weak because it was tardy" (Caetano and Rilla, 1994, p. 17). By the late nineteenth century, Uruguay was, to borrow Real de Azúa's (1984, p. 21) eloquent definition, "the faintest star in the Catholic firmament of Latin America." It was, therefore, politically feasible for successive governments to progressively assume functions and spaces the Church once monopolized (graveyards, schools, hospitals, record-keeping), establish mandatory attendance at secular schools, and eventually define Uruguay as a completely secular state in the 1918 constitution, all without facing great opposition (Barrán, 1988; Caetano and Geymonat, 1997). This matters for present purposes because in 1879 the national state took over vital registration from the Church: births, marriages, and deaths had to be recorded with the newly created Registro de Estado Civil (Civil Registry) before any religious sacraments took place. Birth registration was mandatory within 20 days (10 days in urban areas), free of charge, and issued by Justices of the Peace in each court district. A copy of the certificate was sent to each provincial capital and to the national record office in Montevideo, where they remain to this day. This government takeover of registration proved to be much more than a change of management, forms, and stamps: it pioneered the first drive toward full vital registration in Latin America (Breckenridge and Szreter, 2012, p. 26).[7]

The new secular birth records, unlike the previous religious ones, included children born out of wedlock and, crucially, recorded the father's occupation. Another significant advantage is that they were centrally processed and kept, so the rate of source survival does not depend on the circumstances of the district where the birth was recorded. The records follow a narrative template that includes information about the place of birth, as well as the nationality, age, and occupation of parents, grandparents, and witnesses to the registration. The father was asked to declare his own age and to sign the register. Despite the wealth of individual-level data offered by the birth records, the court clerks' very readable handwriting, and the almost perfect rate and conditions of source survival, scholars have never explored them systematically as a source, other than for reconstructing individual family histories or tracing particular lineages.

The reasons for such neglect lie beyond the scope of this paper, but at least two factors should be noted. First, these sources are held in a civil registration office, an arena more familiar to lawyers and notaries than to historians and economists, and one where access to records is normally not free of charge. The second problem is that insights from this large corpus, comprising millions of individual manuscript records from 1879 to 2013 (when files became digital), can be gained only by systematically extracting large amounts of information, which requires a significant time investment by expert staff, as some contextual knowledge is required for effective transcription. A large team of scholars and a significant research grant would be needed to fully extract the data contained in all the records. The alternative is to work with representative samples. Given that the seminal historiography on this period was written before personal computers and statistical software were widely available, and that most historians remain unfamiliar with the potential and limitations of sampling methodologies, neither path has been explored until now, and the potential

[7] A similarly rigorous procedure was followed for civil marriage registration, and the resulting records contain valuable information regarding the occupation of women, both single (i.e. the bride) and married (the mothers of bride and groom). We have not been able to access them freely yet, but, if scholars are granted free access to them by the authorities, they could powerfully contribute to our understanding of female work in the late nineteenth century.

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of birth records emerging from the early years of state-led registration and recognition remains untapped.

A crucial question regarding the usefulness of these birth records as sources, at least from the perspective of quantitative history, concerns the extent and quality of their coverage. Even if some under-registration of births, particularly in rural areas, must have occurred, scholars have generally regarded the coverage of vital statistics in Uruguay through individual records in this period as reliable by international standards (Birn, 2012, pp. 419–422). Moreover, the implied fertility rates calculated on the basis of these records (131 live births per 1,000 women of reproductive age in 1908, or about 6 live children per woman throughout her life) are consistent with what can be expected of a pre-demographic transition society, which is how historical demographers have characterized Uruguay in this period (Pellegrino and Pollero, 1998). This scenario of high fertility rates also increases the likelihood that fathers (and their occupations) will be representative of men in general, as it makes it more likely that men in a fertile relationship will appear in the birth records as fathers.

The quality of the occupational data derived from these birth records depends not only on the reliability of the registration practices that produced the underlying data (which we have reason to think was relatively high) and on the fertility and age specificity of different occupations (which demographic scholarship and the 1908 census' age cohort data suggest does not produce large distortions), but also on the method used to extract information. Ideally, a quasi-census of fathers could be constructed by extracting the father's occupation from each birth record. Indeed, this method could (and hopefully will in the future) make up at least partially for the census hiatus in Uruguayan history. However, such an approach is simply impracticable without very substantial funding. Fortunately, a random sample that is large enough can give a reasonably representative image of the whole population of fathers who appear in the records.[8]

This Civil Registry maintains books listing all these certificates alphabetically, enabling us to gather the necessary information to obtain a sample of birth records from various years in Uruguay. From 1879 to 1915, these books are organized by province ("departamentos") and alphabetically by surnames. However, after 1916, this listing was discontinued, and information regarding each birth is contained only in individual files, significantly limiting the ability to construct a comprehensive list and sample. The books with birth record lists resumed in 1935. These books are not digitized, and some pages need to be handled carefully due to damage. Despite the complete coverage provided, the books and birth records are not stored under optimal conditions and are at risk of deterioration.

The sampling strategy used stratified random samples from Montevideo and the rest of the country. Given the total population of births (approximately 30,000 at the beginning of the century), we estimated a sample size of 388 for the capital city, Montevideo, and 1,300 for the rest of the country. Notably, underreporting of births is not considered an issue in Uruguay, and all selected birth records in the sample are available in the Registry, so we can consider the sample free from bias that would require correction. The sample was drawn in R, following standard parameters in the literature (95% confidence interval, 5% oversampling, and an anticipated response distribution of 0.5).[9]

The decision to start in 1908 was intentional, allowing us to compare the sample results with data from Uruguay's 1908 population census to test the validity of the selected sampling methodology. Below we present some descriptive statistics comparing both sources

[8] For a clear discussion of the difference between random and systematic samples, and the latter's limitations for historical research, see Schofield (1972).

[9] The R code will be made publicly available along with our sampling database to ensure full reproducibility of our results and verification by other researchers.

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Table 2. Distribution of female and male adults 15–39, Uruguayan and migrants, census vs our random sample, 1908

	Adult men age 15–39		Adult women age 15–39	
	Uruguayan	Migrants	Uruguayan	Migrants
Census	78%	22%	86%	14%
Our sample	74%	26%	83%	17%

Source: Estimates based on census 1908 and our sample of birth records 1908 (see text).

Table 3. Distribution of single and married mothers, Uruguayan and migrants, census vs our random sample, 1908

Mothers by marital status, female age 15–54				
	Uruguayan		Migrants	
	Sample	Census	Sample	Census
Married	920	64,890	212	24,225
Single	222	15,595	14	1530
Total	1142	80,485	226	25,755
% Single mothers	19.4%	19.4%	6.2%	5.9%

Source: Estimates based on census 1908 and our sample of birth records 1908 (see text).

(1908 census and 1908 sample), which are encouraging. Table 2 shows the distribution of Uruguayan and migrant adult population for both sexes, according to the census and sample, demonstrating that the sample tracks the census results well.

When focusing on mothers aged 15–54 and differentiating between Uruguayan and migrant women, we observe that the distribution between married and single mothers is identical across both data sources (the 1908 census and the 1908 sample). The proportion of single mothers among Uruguayan women is three times higher than among foreign-born women, which may reflect the more vulnerable conditions of the former (Table 3). During this period, being a single mother may be associated with having a child out of wedlock and raising the child alone. This observation can be further explored by analyzing the ages of single mothers, their family context (for example, their parents' jobs and whether they are daughters of single mothers), and their educational level (approximated by their ability to sign the birth certificate). Regarding this last variable, in our sample we can examine a proxy for literacy among the group of women who registered the child: only 28% of single mothers could sign their names, compared with 65% of married mothers.[10]

Finally, we compared the occupational distribution of male workers (aged 20–59) in Uruguay and Montevideo. As Table 4 shows, the differences between the two sources do not alter the main message: the highest proportion of workers are in trade and industry, with the share in Montevideo higher than in Uruguay as a whole. This is an expected result, as the capital concentrated the development of services and manufacturing production. On the other hand, in Uruguay as a whole, according to the census, 30% of workers were employed in agriculture, whereas in our sample, this percentage reaches 40%. In Montevideo, these figures are considerably lower (7% in both sources). Hence, the group of 'liberal professionals' is significantly more important in Montevideo than in the rest of the country.

[10] In our sample, 256 mothers register the child being born, while 1,328 fathers do this.

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Table 4. Distribution of male workers aged 20–59, Uruguay and Montevideo, census vs our random sample, 1908

	Total Uruguay		Montevideo		Total Uruguay		Montevideo	
	Census	Sample	Census	Sample	Census	Sample	Census	Sample
Agriculture	36,486	268	4151	16	16%	21%	6%	5%
Ranching	30,718	248	427	7	14%	20%	1%	2%
Trade and industry	121,887	632	51,975	233	54%	50%	78%	71%
Liberal professions	36,667	123	10,308	72	16%	10%	15%	22%
Total	225,758	1271	66,861	328				

Source: Estimates based on census 1908 and our sample of birth records 1908 (see text).
Notes: Liberal professions exclude students. *Hacendados* are included under ranching.

Because our analysis focuses on occupational attainment, we classified each occupation declared in the birth record using HISCLASS. This classification is based on HISCO, a historical version of the 1968 International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO), developed by the International Labour Organization. While HISCO classifies 1,600 occupations, the original HISCLASS reduces these to a manageable set of 12 socioeconomic groups using theoretical and specific criteria. Each group in HISCLASS includes divisions by manual vs non-manual work, skill level, degree of supervision, and economic sector. As suggested by the comparative empirical literature (Silvestre *et al.*, 2015; Westland, 2021), we combined the 12 HISCLASS categories into 4 groups. This reclassification is useful when modeling and dealing with few observations in some categories. Following the presentation in Silvestre et al. (2025), Table 4 shows how the 12 HISCLASS categories (column II) have been converted into the ones used in our study (column I).

In our sample, we recorded 78 occupations for male workers (i.e., the fathers of the newborn babies). The final column in Table 5 shows the most common occupations in each of our final categories. The occupation with the most observations is "day laborer" (332 observations out of a total of 1,353 with occupational data). In Uruguay, as in other countries, this occupation (*jornalero* in Spanish) refers to workers paid on a daily basis, but it does not indicate a specific sectoral employment (whether in farms, factories, or construction).

Finally, as women's occupations were largely recorded as "(domestic) labor," we focused only on men, for whom observations with unreported occupations are negligible.[11]

3.2. Method

To address our research question, we use a multinomial logit (MNL) model to estimate the occupational attainment of male workers in Uruguay in 1908, controlling for relevant variables such as literacy, place of residence, marital status, and place of origin. The MNL model is commonly used when the outcome variable is nominal, i.e., when its categories do not have a natural order. Although our classification (Table 5) may appear hierarchical, this is not the case for the "low and medium skilled, manual" and "low and medium skilled, non-manual" categories: these cannot be ordered in a clear-cut way in terms of income or social status in the historical context we are studying.

[11] Camou and Pellegrino (1994) also found that in Montevideo in 1858–1859, women who were active in the labor market were mainly devoted to domestic work (72% of those that declared being workers). On the other side, some women declared to be "owners" who are often heads of household and widows, and those few women working as nuns or merchants may suggest a different socioeconomic status.

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Table 5. Occupational classification, following HISCLASS groups

Category	HISCLASS groups		Main occupations
I	Unskilled, manual	Unskilled workers (11)	Laborer
		Unskilled farm workers (12)	
II	Low and medium skilled, manual	Foremen (6)	
		Medium-skilled workers (7)	Blacksmith
			Cheesemaker
		Farmers and fishermen (8)	Farmer
			Breeder
		Lower-skilled workers (9)	Carpenter
			Shoemaker
			Artisan
III	Low and medium skilled, non-manual	Non-manual lower managers (3)	Driver
		Non-manual lower professionals,	Trader (*comerciante*)
		clericals, and sales personnel (4)	Assistant
		Non-manual lower clerical and	Provider
		sales personnel (5)	
IV	High skilled, non-manual	Non-manual higher managers (1)	Rancher (*hacendado*)
			Rentier
		Non-manual higher professionals (2)	Educator

Source: HISCLASS using the proposal written by Silvestre *et al.* (2015).

The determinants of occupational attainment in our regression model include two human capital attributes, namely age and literacy, as well as other variables such as family structure, place of origin, and place of residence. Age may be used as a proxy for experience, while age squared captures the possibility of decreasing returns to experience in occupational attainment. Literacy is defined as the ability to sign (a dummy variable set to 1 for literate respondents). On the other hand, marital status (dummy variable for married vs not married) is also included as a family structure variable. Finally, the variable place of origin indicates whether the worker is Uruguayan or an immigrant (immigrant = 1), and the variable place of residence is a dummy variable where Montevideo is 1 and any other place in the country is 0.

In formal terms, the MNL model is an extension of the binary logit model for predicting categorical outcomes with more than two categories. For each category j (except one reference category), the MNL function is defined as follows:

$$log\left(\frac{P(Y_i = \mathrm{j} \mid X_i}{P(Y_i = 0 \mid X_i}\right) = X_i\beta_j \, for \, j = 1,\ 2,\ \ldots \ldots J - 1. \tag{1}$$

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To obtain the probabilities for category j, we use the following formula:

$$P\left(Y_i = j|X_i\right) = \frac{e^{X_i\beta_j}}{1 + \sum_{k=1}^{J-1} e^{X_i\beta_k}} \text{ for } j = 1, 2, \ldots \ldots J - 1. \quad (2)$$

And for the reference category 0:

$$P\left(Y_i = 0|X_i\right) = \frac{1}{1 + \sum_{k=1}^{J-1} e^{X_i\beta_k}} \text{ for } j = 1, 2, \ldots \ldots J - 1. \quad (3)$$

4. Results

As we are interested in the differences or similarities in the occupational attainment of local and migrant workers, we describe some variables in our sample, dividing both groups by occupational skills (into the four groups defined above). Table 6 shows that in the "unskilled" and "low and medium skilled, manual" groups, the distribution between Uruguayans and immigrants is quite similar (around 25% and 45%, respectively). We observe a higher proportion of immigrants in Group III ("low and medium skilled, non-manual") and, on the other hand, a lower presence of immigrants in Group IV ("high skilled"). Therefore, immigrants were well integrated in the labor market across almost all these broad categories and were overrepresented in urban activities associated with higher human capital (Group III).

When considering other variables, in Group I, we find the lowest proportions of married workers (though much lower for locals: 67% compared with migrants' 82%), literate workers (50% and 65% respectively), and those born with at least one European parent (17% and 61%). Among nationalities, Argentinian and Brazilian workers are overrepresented in this group (46% and 39%, respectively). We could infer that this group has accumulated less human capital, and, taking marriage and European lineage as evidence of expanding social networks, less social capital as well. If we analyze whom these male workers marry, we observe that in Group I, 90% of natives marry Uruguayan women, while among migrants the figure is 50%, the lowest among the four occupational categories. In other words, lower-skilled migrants were also the least integrated in terms of marriage. Importantly, the kind of low-skill work that migrants and locals did was often different. Uruguayans lived mainly outside the capital in mostly rural settlements (82%), whereas migrants were concentrated in Montevideo (51%). Thus, the work that day laborers actually did was presumably different (Uruguayans more involved in farm and ranch work, and migrants in construction, public works, and factories).

Almost half of workers, regardless of origin, were in low- and medium-skilled manual occupations. In this Group (II), a higher proportion of workers were married (91% and 90% for Uruguayans and migrants, respectively), and literacy was higher (69% and 73%) than in Group I (but, with some exceptions, lower than in Groups III and IV). Contrary to Group I, in this group, workers born in Spain or Italy are overrepresented (46% and 50%, respectively).

The group of low- and medium-skilled non-manual workers (Group III), for both locals and migrants, is characterized by the highest literacy levels (94% and 89%) and the highest share of workers living in Montevideo (42% and 59%). Furthermore, workers in Group III record very high marriage rates (82% and 97%) and a high share of European descent (47%, even among Uruguayans). This latter is correlated with the higher representation of Spaniards and Italians (31% and 21%, respectively). Contrary to Group I, we could infer that men in this occupation had accumulated more human and social capital, and it may be suggested that immigrants found in the capital city an environment more conducive to occupational integration.

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Table 6. Summary descriptive of male workers, Uruguayan, and migrants, by occupational skills, sample Uruguay 1908

	Uruguayan					Migrants				
	I	II	III	IV	Total	I	II	III	IV	Total
Share of total workers, %	24.71	46.86	17.89	10.54	71.46	26.93	44.80	22.40	5.87	28.54
Share of migrant, by nationality, %										
Argentinian						45.83	37.50	4.17	12.50	
Brazilian						38.81	38.81	11.94	10.45	
Spaniard						19.30	46.49	30.70	3.51	
Italian						27.03	50.00	20.95	2.03	
Share of total workers in Montevideo, %	25.30	25.90	42.77	6.02	52.36	33.77	30.46	33.11	2.65	47.64
Marital status, % married	67.67	91.36	82.14	87.88	83.49	82.18	90.48	97.62	95.45	90.13
Married with a Uruguayan, %	92.36	93.28	92.75	91.95	92.86	50.60	57.89	54.88	76.19	56.51
Literacy, % able to sign	50.00	69.32	94.05	82.83	70.39	65.35	72.62	89.29	77.27	74.67
Residence in the capital city, %	18.10	9.77	42.26	10.10	17.68	50.50	27.38	59.52	18.18	40.27
European parents, %	17.24	46.84	46.53	32.86	39.47	61.40	79.34	93.18	71.43	77.12

Source: our estimates from 1908 birth records sampling (see text).
Note: "European parents" equals 1 whether at least one of the male worker's parents was born in Europe.

Finally, the group of high-skilled, high-status workers has a higher share of workers living outside the capital city (90% and 82% for Uruguayans and migrants, respectively), which is strongly associated with the "rancher" occupation. They are also married at high rates (92% and 76%), and migrants in this group are much more likely to be married to Uruguayan women (76%) than migrants in the other occupational groups. Their literacy levels were well above the average (83% and 77%), while being less likely to have one European parent (33% among Uruguayans). However, when analyzing by nationality, we find a high share of Argentinians and Brazilians associated with this occupational skill. To sum up, this group is strongly associated with the "rancher" occupational descriptor and is composed largely of those born in Uruguay. We may also suspect some social mobility driven by intermarriage for a very select group of migrants (6%).

Turning to a more systematic analysis, the main results of the MNL models are presented in Table 7. The coefficients represent the average marginal effect on the predicted probability of a father belonging to a particular occupational category. For continuous variables, the coefficient indicates the effect of a one-unit increase; for binary variables, it indicates the effect of a discrete change (from 0 to 1). We ran likelihood-ratio tests, which rejected the null hypothesis.

First, the results for the age variables are reasonable. Each additional year of age, as a proxy for experience, reduces the probability of belonging to one of the two manual categories. These results suggest that experience increases the probability of belonging to a non-manual category. However, the effects are not statistically significant. Turning to literacy, we obtain significant results across the four categories. The predicted probability of belonging to the "unskilled, manual" category is 20% lower at the mean for a literate individual, and 10% lower in the "low and medium skilled, manual" category. By contrast, the predicted probabilities at the mean for literate individuals are 22% and 6% higher in the two non-manual categories. The relatively low impact of human capital in the "high skilled, non-manual" category may suggest that other elements, such as further education, existing wealth, or social networks, are necessary to attain occupations in this group.

When comparing residence in the capital city with residence elsewhere outside Montevideo, all results are statistically significant. The predicted probability of belonging to the "unskilled, manual" category is 11% higher for a worker in Montevideo and 18% higher in the "low and medium skilled, non-manual" category. This result is reasonable, as employment in Montevideo is highly correlated with services, trade and liberal professions, and it also concentrates a higher proportion of day laborers. On the other hand, the predicted probabilities are 24% lower in the "low and medium skilled, manual" category and 5% lower in the more skilled group of workers. The variable "married" shows significant results in the first two groups. If the worker is married, the predicted probability of belonging to the "unskilled, manual" category is 20% lower, and conversely, the probability of belonging to the "low and medium skilled, manual" group is 21% higher.

Finally, the variable "migrant" yields interesting results. In comparison with the reference group of Uruguayans, the migrant status has a negative and significant effect among high-skilled workers when controlling for age, literacy, location, and marital status. Therefore, this result confirms that migrants faced a disadvantage in accessing the very top of the occupational structure. In future studies, it may be interesting to analyze whether this changed over the decades as the immigration flow ebbed.

5. Discussion

In addition to offering the first analysis of occupational attainment during Uruguay's *belle époque*, our results contribute to the broader empirical literature on occupational attainment and the economic outcomes of migrants during the First Globalization. Scholars have

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Table 7. Multinomial logit model of occupational attainment for male workers in 1908

	Unskilled, manual		Low and medium skilled, manual		Low and medium skilled, non-manual		High skilled, non-manual	
	dy/dx	Std. error	*dy/dx*	Std. error	*dy/dx*	Std. error	*dy/dx*	Std. error
Age	−0.010	0.007	−0.004	0.009	0.012	0.008	0.002	0.004
Age^2	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	−0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Literacy	−0.203***	0.022	−0.097**	0.032	0.247***	0.035	0.053***	0.019
Married	−0.204***	0.027	0.225***	0.039	−0.043	0.029	0.023	0.023
Montevideo	0.110***	0.026	−0.244***	0.032	0.183***	0.019	−0.053**	0.023
Migrant	0.039	0.026	0.051	0.031	−0.025	0.023	−0.065**	0.022
Log likelihood = −1431.1567								
LR chi2 (18) = 327.23								
N = 1,291								

Notes: *** indicates statistical significance at the 1% level, ** indicates statistical significance at the 5% level. The regression includes an intercept term and is estimated using heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors. *dy/dx* refers to the marginal impact.

compared the occupations of migrants and locals, focusing on migrants' ability to move into higher-status jobs after settling in host countries. They often construct longitudinal panels by linking individuals across censuses, and sometimes even across other sources such as passenger lists of arrivals. Some of the literature also relies on occupational income scores to estimate earnings gaps, based on the potential income associated with different jobs. While these two methodological paths are not open to economic historians of Uruguay given source limitations, we are able to exploit an individual-level source that provides us with additional variables for each of our observations.

We find that in the 1900s immigrants were typically employed in similar occupations to native-born Uruguayans (across occupational Groups I–III), as was the case in the United States during the same period (Abramitzky and Boustan, 2017). Nevertheless, this pattern does not hold when we zoom in on the highest-status occupations, especially "rancher." This significant yet incomplete integration of migrants into the upper levels of occupational status also aligns with findings from Silvestre, Ayuda, and Pinilla's study of Barcelona in 1930 (Silvestre *et al.*, 2015).

In the case of Uruguay, this was largely explained by migrants' limited access to land. As in neighboring Argentina, European migrants concentrated in urban areas, where Italians, in particular, achieved absolute upward mobility in Buenos Aires and economic integration through access to relatively high-paying jobs (Pérez, 2017; Arroyo Abad *et al.*, 2021). Given that the agricultural frontier was closed in Uruguay, migrants were even more concentrated in urban occupations, less likely to become large landowners, and therefore comparatively less present in high-status occupations in the countryside (where most people still lived in the 1900s).

This result should not be taken to mean that access to the rural elite was impossible for foreigners. Since Real de Azúa's seminal study of Uruguayan elites, scholars have argued that, in the wake of the economic dislocation caused by the long cycle of post-independence wars (ending with the Guerra Grande in 1851), a "new rural upper class" emerged, in which foreigners played a larger role than in the "old patrician class" (Real de Azúa, 1961; Barrán and Nahum, 1967, pp. 317–330; Sims, 2014, p. 185). The economic impact of foreign landowners (notably the Basque, Catalan, British, French, and German) has been debated: while it was traditionally argued that they were an enlightened group of entrepreneurs who led agricultural innovations, recent quantitative research has questioned this assumption in the case of cattle improvement (Barrán and Nahum, 1973, pp. 205–206; Millot and Bertino, 1996, p. 101; Travieso, 2023). By 1908, foreigners accounted for 30% of landowners, substantially above their overall share of the population (17.4%) and presumably representing a substantial increase from the mid-nineteenth century. How does this fit with our results? We would argue that foreigners were overrepresented in the bottom half of the landownership distribution but underrepresented among very large landowners. We cannot test this directly because the microdata from the agricultural censuses have not survived. However, our evidence from birth records does offer some indication of this. The occupational descriptor we have translated as "rancher" (*hacendado*) could also be rendered as "breeder" or "ranch owner," and it implies a much higher status than "farmer" and ownership of a substantially larger landholding. According to a contemporary Uruguayan dictionary, hacendado was synonymous with *estanciero*, and it meant "someone who has one or several *estancias*" (i.e. cattle or sheep ranches) (Granada, 1889, p. 48). This is because, in the Río de la Plata region, *hacienda* meant, above all, livestock. Smaller landowning farmers were normally described as *labrador* or *agricultor*, and among them migrants were relatively more common. As has noted for the case of Argentina, there was a substantial difference in income between these two agricultural occupational descriptors in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

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On that note, how unusual was Uruguay in terms of the occupational assimilation of immigrants compared with other settler societies? Belle époque Uruguay shares, to some extent, the pattern observed in the United States at the time, where the average immigrant generally accessed the same occupations as the average native-born worker (Abramitzky and Boustan, 2017). In the case of Canada, there is also data on the intended occupational distribution of migrants in the 1910s (i.e., the occupations they aspired to in the host country), which was very similar to that of the native workforce. By 1921, some migrants had moved away from farming, but their non-agricultural occupational structure remained very similar to that of native Canadians (Green and Green, 2016). In the case of Argentina, the occupational pattern of immigrants and natives differed, with farming being much more common among natives and shopkeeping more prevalent among immigrants, who, like in Uruguay, were concentrated in urban areas (Pérez, 2017). Moreover, immigrants went on to achieve more upward occupational and earnings mobility across generations than native-born families (Pérez, 2017).

In sum, Uruguay did not fundamentally diverge from most other settler economies, insofar as immigrants were generally able to access the same occupations as locals, especially in the urban economy, where natives were relatively more present in farming. Nevertheless, the specific gap in high-status occupations seems larger in the Uruguayan case than in other settler economies.

6. Conclusion

We have demonstrated the feasibility and effectiveness of using random samples of Uruguayan birth records for historical research, which we hope will help fill the largest evidential gap in modern Uruguayan economic and social history. Armed with these new data, our study provided new insights into the labor market of *belle époque* Uruguay, focusing on the different occupational attainments of Uruguayan and migrant workers.

We found that the occupations of foreign-born fathers were, in general, similar to those of their Uruguayan counterparts, with the important exception of non-manual high-status occupations ("rancher" being the most common), where being a Uruguayan remained a statistically significant advantage after controlling for age, literacy, and location. This reflects both the success and the limits of Uruguay's comparatively egalitarian economy, by Latin American standards. Most economic migrants were eagerly integrated into a wide range of occupational paths but were, at the same time, less able to reach the top of an occupational structure where key resources (notably land) remained highly concentrated in the hands of a local elite. In this respect, Uruguay proved less egalitarian than other settler societies at the time (and since).

In future research, we will extract samples for additional benchmark years and include more demographic variables to build a comprehensive picture of the long decades without censuses in Uruguay. In so doing, we will advocate for improved archival practices to preserve valuable historical data for future research: the sources we use in this paper are still available but are rapidly deteriorating because they are not kept in a historical archive. By continuing this line of research, we aim to enhance our understanding of historical demographic patterns. Further studies may examine intergenerational mobility by place of origin, particularly among migrants, and the marriage market, including links to social endogamy and by nationality.

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