

Agrarian Land reforms by country

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[Agrarian reform](#) and [land reform](#) have been a recurring theme of enormous consequence in world history. The goal of this page is to compare and contrast the different land reforms that were done (or attempted) around the world.

Latin America

Brazil

[Getúlio Vargas](#), who rose to presidency in Brazil following the [Brazilian Revolution of 1930](#), promised a land reform but reneged on his promise.

A first attempt to make a national scale reform was set up in the government of [José Sarney](#) (1985–1990), as a result of the strong popular movement that had contributed to the fall of the military government. According to the 1988 [Constitution of Brazil](#), the government is required to "expropriate for the purpose of agrarian reform, rural property that is not performing its social function" (Article 184). However, the "social function" mentioned there is not well defined, and hence the so-called First Land Reform National Plan never was put into force.

Throughout the 1990s, the [Landless Workers' Movement](#) has led a strong campaign in favor of fulfilling the constitutional requirement to land reform. They also took [direct action](#) by forceful occupation of unused lands. Their campaign has managed to get some advances for the past 10 years, during the [Fernando Cardoso](#) and [Lula da Silva](#) administrations.

It is overseen by the [National Institute for Colonization and Agrarian Reform](#).

Bolivia

Main article: [Land reform in Bolivia](#)

Land in Bolivia was unequally distributed — 92% of the cultivable land was held by large estates - until the [Bolivian national revolution of 1952](#). Then, the MNR government abolished forced peasantry labor and established a program of expropriation and distribution of the rural property of the traditional landlords to the Indian peasants. A unique feature of the reform in Bolivia was the organization of peasants into [syndicates](#). Peasants were not only granted land but their militias also were given large supplies of arms. The peasants remained a powerful political force in Bolivia during all subsequent governments. By 1970, 45% of peasant families had received title to land. Land reform projects continued in the 1970s and 1980s. A 1996 Agrarian Reform Law increased protection for smallholdings and indigenous territories, but also protected absentee landholders who pay taxes from expropriation. Reforms were continued at 2006, with the Bolivian Senate passing a bill authorizing the government redistribution of land among the nation's mostly indigenous poor.

Chile

Main article: [Chilean land reform](#)

[Attempts at land reform](#) began under the government of [Jorge Alessandri](#) in 1960, were accelerated during the government of [Eduardo Frei Montalva](#) (1964–1970), and reached its climax during the 1970-1973 [presidency of Salvador Allende](#). Farms of more than 198 acres (80 hectares) were expropriated. After the [1973 coup](#) the process was halted, and up to a point reversed by the market forces.

Colombia

[Alfonso López Pumarejo](#) (1934–1938) passed the Law 200 of 1936, which allowed for the expropriation of private properties, in order to promote "social interest".

Later attempts declined, until the [National Front](#) presidencies of [Alberto Lleras Camargo](#) (1958–1962) and [Carlos Lleras Restrepo](#) (1966–1970), which respectively created the [Colombian Institute for Agrarian Reform](#) (INCORA) and further developed land entitlement. In 1968 and 1969 alone, the INCORA issued more than 60,000 land titles to farmers and workers.

Despite this, Matsetela (2000) stated that the process was then halted and the situation began to reverse itself, as the subsequent violent actions of drug lords, paramilitaries, guerrillas and opportunistic large landowners severely contributed to a renewed concentration of land and to the displacement of small landowners.

In the early 21st century, tentative government plans to use the land legally expropriated from drug lords and/or the properties given back by demobilized paramilitary groups have not caused much practical improvement yet.

Cuba

Main article: [Land reform in Cuba](#)

Land reform was among the chief planks of the revolutionary platform of 1959. Almost all large holdings were seized by the [National Institute for Agrarian Reform](#) (INRA), which dealt with all areas of agricultural policy. A ceiling of 166 acres (67 hectares) was established, and tenants were given ownership rights, though these rights are constrained by government production quotas and a prohibition of real estate transactions.

Guatemala

Main article: [Decree 900](#)

Land reform occurred during the ["Ten Years of Spring"](#) (1944–1954) under the governments of [Juan José Arévalo](#) and [Jacobo Arbenz](#), after a popular revolution forced out dictator [Jorge Ubico](#). The largest part of the reform was the law officially called [Decree 900](#), which redistributed all uncultivated land from landholdings that were larger than 673 acres (272 ha). If

the estates were between 672 acres (272 ha) and 224 acres (91 ha) in size, uncultivated land was expropriated only if less than two-thirds of it was in use.^[1] The law benefited 500,000 people, or one-sixth of the Guatemalan Population. Historians have called one of the most successful land reforms in history. However, the [United Fruit Company](#) felt threatened by the law and lobbied the United States government, which was a factor in the [US-backed coup](#) that deposed the Jacobo Arbenz in 1954. The majority of the reform was rolled back by the US supported military dictatorship that followed.^[1]

Mexico

Main article: [Land reform in Mexico](#)

by the liberal government. One of the aims of the reform government was to develop the economy by returning to productive cultivation the underutilized lands of the Church and the municipal communities (Indian commons), which required the distribution of these lands to small owners. This was to be accomplished through the provisions of Ley Lerdo that prohibited ownership of land by the Church and the municipalities. The reform government also financed its war effort by seizing and selling church property and other large estates. After the war, the principles of the Ley Lerdo were perverted by President [Porfirio Díaz](#), which caused land concentration and contributed to causing the [Mexican Revolution](#) in 1910. A certain degree of land reform was introduced, albeit unevenly, as part of the Mexican Revolution.

In 1934, president [Lázaro Cárdenas](#) passed the [1934 Agrarian Code](#) and accelerated the pace of land reform. He helped redistribute 45,000,000 acres (180,000 km²) of land, 4,000,000 acres (16,000 km²) of which were expropriated from American owned agricultural property. This caused conflict between Mexico and the United States. Agrarian reform had come close to extinction in the early 1930s. The first few years of the Cárdenas' reform were marked by high food prices, falling wages, high inflation, and low agricultural yields. In 1935 land reform began sweeping across the country in the periphery and core of commercial agriculture. The Cárdenas alliance with peasant groups was awarded by the destruction of the hacienda system. Cárdenas distributed more land than all his revolutionary predecessors put together, a 400% increase. The land reform justified itself in terms of productivity; average agricultural production during the three-year period from 1939 to 1941 was higher than it had been at any time since the beginning of the revolution.

Starting with the government of [Miguel Alemán](#) (1946–52), land reform steps made in previous governments were rolled back. Alemán's government allowed capitalist entrepreneurs to rent peasant land. This created phenomenon known as [neolatifundismo](#), where land owners build up large-scale private farms on the basis of controlling land which remains [ejidal](#) but is not sown by the peasants to whom it is assigned.

In 1970, President [Luis Echeverría](#) began his term by declaring land reform dead. In the face of peasant revolt, he was forced to backtrack, and embarked on the biggest land reform program since Cárdenas. Echeverría legalized take-overs of huge foreign-owned private farms, which were turned into new collective [ejidos](#).

In 1988, President [Carlos Salinas de Gortari](#) was elected. In December 1991, he amended Article 27 of the Constitution, making it legal to sell [ejido](#) land and allow peasants to put up their land as collateral for a loan.

[Francisco Madero](#) and [Emiliano Zapata](#) were strongly identified with land reform, as are the present-day (as of 2006) [Zapatista Army of National Liberation](#).

Today, most Mexican peasants are landowners. However, their holdings are usually too small, and farmers must supplement their incomes by working for the remaining landlords, and/or [traveling](#) to the United States.

See also: [México Indígena](#) (2005-2008 project)

Nicaragua

During and after the [Nicaraguan Revolution](#) (1979), the [Sandinista](#) government officially announced their political platform which included land reform.

The last months of Sandinista rule were criticized for the [Piñata Plan](#) which distributed large tracts of land to prominent Sandinistas. After their [loss in the 1990 elections](#), most of the Sandinista leaders held most of the private property and businesses that had been confiscated and nationalized by the FSLN government. This process became known as the "piñata" and was tolerated by the new Chamorro government.

Peru

Land reform in the 1950s largely eliminated a centuries-old system of [debt peonage](#).

Further land reform occurred after the 1968 coup by [left-wing](#) colonel [Juan Velasco Alvarado](#). The military dictatorship under General Juan Velasco Alvarado (1968–75) launched a large scale agrarian reform movement that attempted to redistribute land, hoping to break Peru's traditionally inequitable pattern of land holding and the hold of traditional oligarchy.^[2] The model used by Velasco to bring about change was the associative enterprise, in which former salaried rural workers and independent peasant families would become members of different kinds of cooperatives.^[3] About 22 million acres were redistributed, more land than in any reform program outside of Cuba. Unfortunately, productivity suffered as peasants with no management experience took control. The military government continued to spend huge amounts of money to transform Peru's agriculture to socialized ownership and management. These state expenditures are to blame for the enormous increase in Peru's external debt at the beginning of the 1970s.^[3] State bankruptcy was partly caused by the cheap credit the government extended to promote agrarian development, state subsidies, and administrative expenditures to carry out the agrarian reform during this period.^[3] The more radical effects of this reform were reversed by president [Fernando Belaúnde Terry](#) in the [1980s](#).

A third land reform occurred as part of a [counterterrorism](#) effort against the [Shining Path](#) during the [Internal conflict in Peru](#) roughly 1988–1995, led by [Hernando de Soto](#) and the [Institute for Liberty and Democracy](#) during the early years of the government of [Alberto Fujimori](#), before the latter's *auto-coup*.

Venezuela

Main article: [Mission Zamora](#)

In 2001, [Hugo Chávez](#)'s government enacted [Plan Zamora](#) to redistribute government and unused private land to *campesinos* in need.

The plan met with heavy opposition which led to a [coup attempt in 2002](#). When [Pedro Carmona](#) took over the presidency during that event, he reversed the land reform. However, the reversal was declared null when the coup failed and Chávez returned to power.

By the end of 2003, 60,000 families had received temporary title to a total of 55,000 km² of land under this plan.

References

1. [^] [Jump up to: ^a ^b](#) Gleijeses, Piero (1989). "The Agrarian Reform of Jacobo Arbenz". *Journal of Latin American Studies* **21** (3): 453–480.
2. [Jump up](#) [^] Hunefeldt, C. A Brief History of Peru. New York, NY.
3. [^] [Jump up to: ^a ^b ^c](#) Hunefeldt, C. A Brief History of Peru. New York, NY