**NOTE:** The following is the concluding chapter from *Autocracy And Redistribution: The Politics Of Land Reform*, by Michael Albertus, in press at Cambridge University Press.

**CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSION**

Despite rapid rates of urbanization and development, just shy of half of the world's population still lives in the rural sector. Most of these individuals dedicate themselves to agriculture. Those that already own land work feverishly to retain and exploit it. Yet many of them wake up every day dreaming to own a plot of land that they can farm to feed their family, insure themselves against capital or employment losses, and have the freedom to allocate their labor as they wish.

This book seeks to explain why governments sometimes choose to allocate land to these rural laborers and at other times guard the privileges of large landowners. In doing so, it marshals a century of evidence spanning from broad cross-country trends to micro-level details about the machinations of elites.

I draw several important conclusions. First, the most redistributive type of land reform is implemented when there is a coalitional split between ruling political elites and landed elites alongside low institutional constraints. Land redistribution of this variety makes waves. With sufficient scope, it has the power to decimate landed elites and create a new class of smallholding peasants. These reforms can be eroded or transformed by subsequent governments in ways that hang peasants out to dry, but they can never be entirely rolled back. The autocratic or majoritarian democratic governments that implement them are thus critical players in a country's long-term political and economic development. Popular rural pressure can ratchet up the scope of land redistribution, but only when the political conditions are ripe for redistribution in the first place.

Given the overwhelming strength of this finding, it is surprising that landowners seemingly so often feared democratic transitions, as Barrington Moore, Alexander Gerschenkron, and others have long noted. Large landowners in countries that democratized in the late 20th century such as Brazil, Colombia, El Salvador, the Philippines, and South Africa have not only avoided being soaked by the masses; they have thrived. Perhaps landowners in these countries were not as sanguine as they should have been about their capacity to act as cogs in the wheel of land reform efforts under democracy. Fearing radical, popular democracy, they may have overlooked the fact that holding veto power over major reform in a Madisonian-style democracy is often better armor than an alliance with a pliable or sympathetic political elite under autocracy. One change of mind by an autocratic political elite can spell more harm to landed elites than a string of antagonistic democratic governments.

In any case, large landowners are now good democrats – at least outwardly – in most of the world's democracies. When Chávez picked up the phone daily in Venezuela in front of a sea of television cameras to threaten the rich and powerful, these elites clamored for a more independent judiciary and fair elections that could win them greater political representation in the National Assembly. Brazil's landowners have mostly abandoned the paramilitary tendencies of the Rural Democratic Union and now rely on what is perhaps the most successful sectoral congressional block in the country – the *bancada ruralista* – to do their bidding. In South Africa, white landowners that inherited their privileges from the apartheid era fear nothing more than an unchecked ANC, and therefore are the first to organize to protect the judiciary and to decry the ANC's increasing consolidation of power. Where large landowners are not good democrats in today's autocracies, it is mostly because they have nearly insoluble links with ruling political elites or prefer to keep their heads down. Egypt, Myanmar, and Saudi Arabia are illustrative.

A second key conclusion is that the less redistributive types of land reform – land negotiation and land colonization – operate under logics distinct from land redistribution. While a coalitional split between ruling political elites and landed elites together with low institutional constraints is conducive to land negotiation, their effects are much more muted than on land redistribution. This is because landed elites face little material loss from land negotiation by receiving market value compensation for their property. Large landowners targeted for land negotiation are not destroyed but rather displaced. Only if landed elites are deeply enmeshed in valuable social and political networks, as indeed they sometimes are, will they vehemently resist land negotiation. But in cases such as Venezuela from the 1960s until the 1990s, when landed elites were offered practically scandalous levels of compensation for their property, they may be happy to rinse their hands of the business and go earn a living and influence politics and policy in the big city.

In contrast to land redistribution, foreign aid contributes to the likelihood and scope of land negotiation. In Latin America, US aid through the Alliance for Progress went to financing land reform programs, studying reform possibilities, and providing grants for inputs and infrastructure. This aided land reform efforts while freeing resources for compensating landowners. Today much of the foreign aid toward land reform comes from the World Bank. This aid supports land negotiation programs in countries such as Namibia, the Philippines, and South Africa.

Land colonization is distinct from both land redistribution and land negotiation. Unlike these other types of land reform, coalitional elite splits and institutional constraints have little impact on land colonization. In fact, landed elites at times champion land colonization as a way to relieve pressure from the landless on the property of large landowners. Rather than risk losing their own property to land invasions, landed elites much prefer a "go West, young man" policy that rids them of superfluous rural laborers. In the United States, the West was sparsely populated Native American land; in Brazil, it is the Amazon; in Argentina, the Pampas; and in much of sub-Saharan Africa, it is low-quality arid land or forests. The most robust determinant of land colonization is therefore latent popular pressure from the rural sector. Wealth is also linked to greater colonization. Countries with the resources to resettle rural dwellers are more likely to do so.

Taken together, land redistribution, land negotiation, and land colonization policies have ordered and reordered the countryside in much of the world in the last century. Every country in Latin America adopted at least one of these programs. A total of 14% of all of the land in the entire region – 271 million hectares – transferred hands between 1930 and 2008 as a result of these three types of land reform. Because most of this land was concentrated in productive agricultural zones, more than half of all cultivable land transferred hands through land reform.

Yet land reform is hardly limited to Latin America. Roughly a third of all countries in the world implemented a land redistribution program in the last century. Many more executed land negotiation and land colonization policies. These policies set the stage for modernization in many countries. They also serve as a backdrop to the massive private land titling efforts that have been sweeping the developing world since the 1980s.

The conditions that paved the way for large-scale land redistribution in the past century are unlikely to repeat themselves on the same scale in the current one. This is more due to the spread of democracy than it is to a decline in elite splits. The third and fourth waves of democracy have brought unprecedented advances in political freedom. But institutional constraints are usually part of the democratic deal. And institutional constraints in most of the world's new democracies have given elites more than just a foothold in government to slow or water down land redistribution; they have given them a platform on which to strangle it.

But land reform is hardly over. Half of the world still lives in the rural sector and the urban demand for food is steadily increasing. Land inequality and landlessness remains high in South and Southeast Asia, parts of the Middle East and Latin America, and much of sub-Saharan Africa. As Boone (2013) notes, levels of ruralness in sub-Saharan Africa are comparable to Western Europe around 1850 and Latin America in 1900. The demand for land reform therefore continues unabated in much of the world. Where autocracy is still deeply entrenched, land redistribution may emerge, as Zimbabwe exemplifies. But in democracies and countries that depend critically on foreign aid, it is now the World Bank and foreign donors that must fight land inequality, and they must do so with cash rather than with a military. Their tools may not be as effective or quick-handed as a determined autocratic regime, but they are tools nonetheless.

**REDISTRIBUTION BEYOND LAND REFORM**

Though the theory and empirical analyses in this book focus on land reform, it stands to question how deep this critique of the dominant view on the link between regime type and redistribution may run. Is there something unique about land redistribution that sets it apart from other forms of redistribution, making it a major and consequential exception to both social conflict theory and power resources theory? Or do other forms of redistribution also occur under elite splits amidst low institutional constraints? While the answers to these questions can only be definitively uncovered with further research, a brief survey of several other major forms of redistribution suggest that the insights developed here have broad implications well beyond land reform.

Recall several important features of land redistribution: it is institutionally exacting, requiring consent and coordination between the executive, legislature, bureaucracy, and even the judiciary and military; it tends to target a narrow and powerful social class rather than society more broadly; it often requires individual rather than group enforcement; and, it is difficult to reverse. Other major redistributive programs that exhibit several of these key features may therefore occur under conditions similar to those that guide land reform. Furthermore, one could certainly make the case that large-scale, relatively irreversible reforms targeted squarely at elites are the most consequential types of redistribution. They affect more lives in a more profound way over the long term than, for instance, minor tweaks to fiscal redistribution that come from fiddling with marginal tax rates or the progressivity of spending.[[1]](#footnote-2)

The large-scale expropriation and distribution of resource rents and financial assets, for instance, often occurs under autocracy when there are splits between incumbent elites and preexisting economic elites (e.g., Albertus 2015, Albertus and Menaldo 2012a). To name just a few Latin American examples, these conditions set the stage for the expropriation and nationalization of banks in Brazil under Vargas, Cuba under Castro, El Salvador under Duarte, Mexico under López Portillo, and Nicaragua under Ortega. Similar conditions paved the way for the nationalization of mining and oil interests under several autocratic regimes in Bolivia, under several military rulers in Ecuador, and again under Castro in Cuba and the PRI in Mexico. In many of these cases resource rents were used to finance more generous social programs, and banking terms became more favorable for a broader swathe of the population.

As previously indicated in Chapter 6, the Peruvian military regime under General Velasco did not just redistribute land; it also forged a statist economic policy as it split from powerful industrial elites. The military expropriated foreign mining companies (e.g., the Cerro de Pasco copper company and the Marcona iron mine) and privately owned Peruvian companies including banks (e.g., Banco Popular), utilities, fishing enterprises, and all five major presses. Furthermore, it created manufacturing laws that specified worker participation in profit distributions, worker shareholding, and participation in company management in all industries.

Legal changes that extend human rights (e.g., the abolition of forced servitude) and yield economic and social redistribution over the long term are also in many cases – though certainly not all – implemented under conditions similar to land redistribution. Land tenure reforms abolishing semi-feudalistic tenure and labor arrangements in countries such as Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru, Chile, and Mexico destroyed some of the most exploitative labor conditions in the Americas and enabled peasants to increase their political and social independence vis-à-vis landlords. All of these reforms occurred when leaders' political coalitions were split from landowners and these leaders faced low institutional constraints. Exploitative land tenure relations were upended under similar conditions in Egypt, Russia, Taiwan, and elsewhere. Chapter 8, for instance, details how new authoritarian regimes that came to power without the aid of landowners rewrote tenure relations in Egypt and Taiwan by undercutting debt peonage and severing paternalistic landowner-peasant relations that were at the heart of social subjugation.

Another form of redistribution that is at least partially consistent with the theory here is the centralization and expansion of access to education, which in many cases preceded the establishment of social insurance systems and laid the groundwork for subsequent increases in quality and funding for education. In analyzing the origins of the centralization of primary education from 1870-1939, for instance, Ansell and Lindvall (2013) find that the centralization of education by the state has typically occurred under either dictatorship or democratic liberalism/social democracy. Some of these dictatorships clearly exhibit elite splits, such as Japan during the Meiji Restoration (Trimberger 1978). Although the authors' predictions are split fairly equally over democracy and dictatorship, the small set of countries in their analysis dramatically oversamples democracies during the era.[[2]](#footnote-3) The centralization of education may actually be more common under dictatorship if it occurred at an even more frequent rate in the excluded dictatorships. This may indeed be the case. A study of primary education in postcolonial Asia, for instance, suggests that almost all countries in the region that centralized education or maintained centralized systems (e.g., China, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Taiwan, Vietnam) were dictatorships at the time (Tan 2014). Many of these regimes were forged under elite splits.[[3]](#footnote-4) The KMT, for instance, centralized control of education under the state after it invaded Taiwan and forcibly displaced indigenous Taiwanese elites with mainlanders. The KMT monopolized teacher training and funding via a teachers' college system, curricula and degrees were controlled by the state, and access to education was expanded dramatically in an effort to reshape and control society (Albertus, Fenner, and Slater 2015). By contrast, the two most stable and long-lived democracies in the region – India and Japan – have had decentralized systems since independence. Many other countries in the region decentralized after they became, at least temporarily, democracies (e.g., Indonesia, Nepal, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand).

Interestingly, and yet another chink in the armor of median voter models of redistribution, the earliest welfare state initiatives also occurred under autocratic rulers. Germany's Bismarck and Austria's von Taaffe pioneered modern social insurance through workers' pension benefits and income protection, building off the programs spearheaded by France's Napoleon III (Esping-Andersen 1990). Their model was one of "monarchical socialism," an absolutist model of paternal obligation for the welfare of the state's subjects. Aristocratic rulers such as Disraeli in Britain and Estrup in Denmark also initiated relief for the poor. Throughout Western and Northern Europe, conservative authoritarian and aristocratic rulers were some of the first to underpin social rights and attack the commodification of labor that divorced social welfare from labor arrangements. They were at the same time more likely than their democratic counterparts to introduce consumption and income taxes (Brambor 2014).[[4]](#footnote-5) These rulers often engaged in reform policies with narrow political coalitions that supported the aggrandizement of the state over nascent and still weak industrial elites. When Bismarck introduced Germany's first social insurance scheme, he did battle against both liberals and conservatives, instead choosing to “chain workers directly to the paternal authority of the monarchy” (Esping-Andersen 1990). This drive for state autonomy is one of the deeper origins of elite splits discussed in Chapter 2 and squares well with many cases of land redistribution.

Even the more contemporary foundations of the modern welfare state in much of Europe were built in times when institutional constraints were low and leaders were split from major economic interests. This occurred most often in the course of and aftermath of major wars and during extraordinary economic crises. Alesina and Glaeser (2004), for instance, argue that the welfare state and the institutions that underpin it in continental Western Europe came about in the wake of WWI and WWII. These wars decimated the strength of the secular right and also brought substantial political instability as armed and disgruntled veterans returned from war unhappy with the status quo. Relatively unconstrained political leaders at the time reformed institutions and rewrote the social contract to empower labor and the left more generally.

Take the case of Germany. At the end of WWI in 1918, Germany lost control of its own military and the Kaiser abdicated. The Spartacist uprising in Berlin provided the opportunity for a shrewd and popular socialist leader, Friedrich Ebert, to strike a deal with the military. In exchange for becoming the president, Ebert allied with the military and the right-wing paramilitary Freikorps to suppress the uprising. Ebert also agreed to keep Hindenburg as the head of the army (he later followed Ebert as president). Ebert then ushered in the Weimar constitution in 1919, which featured proportional representation, few constitutional checks, and key redistributive measures such as the right for labor to collectively bargain and the eight-hour workday. Hitler continued redistribution. The National Socialists, facing few constitutional constraints, built massive public works programs, pushed for profit-sharing in large industries, increased pensions, and threatened land redistribution (Alesina and Glaeser 2004, 116). Further redistributive measures were enshrined in the wake of WWII. Just prior to the end of the Allied occupation, Germany's first post-war chancellor Konrad Adenauer promulgated a co-determination law that gave labor unions seats on company supervisory and managerial boards.

In contrast to the types of redistribution described above on which there are surprisingly few broad and explicitly comparative studies, there is a well-developed literature that examines variation in fiscal redistribution since the 1970s. Annual changes in fiscal redistribution via taxation and social spending are perhaps one of the least similar types of redistribution to land reform: changes in fiscal redistribution are less dependent upon institutional agreement, are broad-based, are reversible, and important elements of enforcement can be aggregated up to a smaller number of actors (e.g., employer income withholding for tax purposes). It is therefore unsurprising that a host of studies find that fiscal redistribution is guided by a much different political logic than land reform (see, e.g., Avelino et al. 2005, Huber et al. 2008, Timmons 2005). Nonetheless, several recent contributions to this literature can be viewed through the lens of the theory presented in this book. First, as noted in recent work such as Albertus and Menaldo (2014) and Inman and Rubenfeld (2005), not all democracies are equally effective at implementing fiscal redistribution through social spending and progressive taxation. Those democracies that inherit autocratic legacies intended to hamstring the median voter actually redistribute less than autocracies on average. These legacies may come in the form of higher constraints on policymaking. Second, Slater et al. (2014) demonstrate that autonomous militaries in the postcolonial world that topple democracy while acting independently of wealthy economic elites tend to uphold – and in some cases expand – the fiscal redistribution policies they inherit upon seizing office. Even fiscal redistribution, therefore, does not operate according to a simple median voter or power resources logic, and may in some cases become more progressive under the conditions laid out here.[[5]](#footnote-6)

**NORMATIVE IMPLICATIONS**

Even setting aside the patterns that guide the other types of redistribution discussed above, the main findings in this book raise a host of thorny normative concerns. If autocratic regimes implement more redistributive land reform in developing states where access to land is critical to rural well-being, then is dictatorship such a bad thing? To take it one step further, should policymakers who are serious about rural poverty promote (or at least turn a blind eye to) dictatorship – or foreign occupation for that matter – as an institutional line of attack rather than democracy? There is certainly evidence that citizens at times look back on dictatorship with nostalgia and at their current democracy with ambivalence (Diamond and Plattner 2008, Inglehart 2003). This is even more likely the case among rural dwellers that benefitted through autocratic land redistribution programs.

Unfortunately, dictatorships do not only redistribute land. In cases where economic and political elites are fused, they implement hardly any redistribution at all. At the same time, they squelch freedom of speech, deny citizens fair representation and voice in government by rigging or eliminating competitive and open elections, and in many cases violate human rights and even violently repress their own populations through politically motivated imprisonment, isolation, and murder. It could thus hardly be considered sage advice to foist a Trujillo or an al-Assad on any society.

Even when dictatorships do redistribute land, they sometimes introduce market distortions that hobble the independence of peasant beneficiaries. Though not necessarily unique to dictatorship, these regimes typically use land reform as an entrée into cultivating political dependencies to prop up regime support by withholding formal land titles, creating artificial scarcities of credits and inputs, isolating beneficiaries from markets, and failing to invest in human capital that enables social mobility (e.g., Albertus 2013, de Janvry et al. 2013). Land reform beneficiaries then find themselves bumping up against a politically generated ceiling just as they are establishing themselves.

Yet dictatorship comes in many stripes. Autocrats *can and sometimes do* implement progressive policies. This is true not only when it comes to direct redistribution. Htun (2003), for instance, demonstrates that military regimes in Latin America were often more effective at implementing liberalizing reforms on gender and family issues that extended a wider repertoire of rights to women. In East Asia, the developmental states of South Korea, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Taiwan have generated spectacular economic growth rooted largely in the broad-based expansion of education and manufacturing (Haggard 1990, Woo-Cumings 1999), largely implemented under authoritarian rule. The former Soviet Union and many other communist regimes elevated workers' rights and access to housing, health care, and education (Laclau 1977). Ataturk in Turkey and the Meiji Restoration in Japan led to major reforms from above including the elimination of powerful bureaucratic ruling elites, judicial reform, and the expansion and secularization of education (Trimberger 1978).

Are rural populations in developing states destined to be stuck between the Scylla of an autocratic regime that may benefit them materially while turning a deaf ear to their broader concerns and the Charybdis of a democratic regime that grants citizens voice but little else? Or does the analysis teach us something about policymaking under autocracy that informs our understanding of democratic policymaking in a way that could improve it? Similarly, what does the analysis tell us about the potential for land reform in the guise of land negotiation or land colonization?

**MAKING LAND NEGOTIATION AND LAND COLONIZATION WORK**

For those living in one of the increasing number of democracies in the world, land redistribution is more or less off the table. But as Venezuela’s *punto fijo* era of democracy detailed in Chapter 7 demonstrates, democracy does not spell the death of land reform more broadly. Land negotiation and land colonization can operate actively under democracy. And if done correctly, these policies can benefit rural dwellers while preventing landed elites from crying foul.

Take the case of Brazil. During the period 1988-2008, Brazil’s National Institute of Colonization and Agrarian Reform transferred nearly 70 million hectares of land, an area equivalent to the size of Texas, to 750,000 families (INCRA 2011). This was hardly a seamless process. Change of this scale required nearly 8,000 land invasions in rural areas – staged by several million individuals – due to the demand-driven nature of Brazil’s ongoing land reform. The state responds to land invasions and rural land pressure with expropriation at market value and redistribution rather than leading the process by targeting unproductive land and building a land bank for qualified petitioners. This legal framework protects large landowners from broad, state-initiated land redistribution, and though it creates incentives for rural conflict and land invasions, most observers consider Brazil’s large-scale land negotiation in response to popular and partisan pressure leveraged by the Landless Workers’ Movement largely a success. Landowners have embraced democracy and many rural families have gained access to land.

South Africa's land reform since its 1994 democratic transition is consistent with this. At the end of apartheid, 86% of all farmland (82 million hectares) was held by 60,000 white farmers (Lahiff 2009, 170). The 13 million blacks on the remaining poor-quality land, many whose forebears were dispossessed through racially discriminatory practices such as the 1913 Native Land Act, clamored for restitution of their land rights that had been usurped during colonialism. The South African government promised to redistribute 25 million hectares of agricultural land by 1999 to redress historical racially based land dispossession. It then instituted a market-based willing seller-willing buyer reform in line with the World Bank's recommendations. Through this land negotiation program, now known as the Land Redistribution for Agricultural Development (LRAD) program, the South African government purchases voluntarily offered private farmland at market value rates up front in cash and then provides grants to farmers that enable them to purchase land. LRAD and other programs peacefully guided the transfer of 4.2 million hectares to black farmers from 1994-2007.

Land negotiation and colonization can even function successfully in the wake of widespread civil conflict rooted in land issues. In Guatemala, a brutal civil war sparked by the unequal distribution of land simmered for 30 years before the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity, an umbrella organization representing the four strongest guerrilla groups, entered into negotiations with the government. The two sides finally reached a deal in 1996 after a decade of UN-brokered negotiations. The peace accords stipulated that land should serve a social function. To that end, the parties created a land agency, FONTIERRAS, that would both ensure the rural poor got access to land and grant official land titles to rural landholders. Guatemala’s Land Access Program provides credits and cheap loans to peasants to use to buy land. The program also provides subsidies to rural communities to help them capitalize their farms. Between 1998, when the program started, and 2010, a total of 94,251 hectares of land had been transferred to peasants. And, when land conflicts have arisen, the Secretariat for Agrarian Affairs has mediated disputes and even purchased land for displaced peasant communities. While FONTIERRAS gets less funding than it needs and thus only marginally improves land inequality, it has helped alleviate pressing land disputes that could be tinder for wider conflict.

Land reform played a similar role in El Salvador's civil war, which raged for 12 years before a negotiated settlement ended the fighting in 1992. As part of the deal, ex-combatants from both sides as well as civilian supporters of the country’s main guerrilla group received land. The land transfer program was also a state-market hybrid: private owners and cooperatives with space for more members voluntarily sold off plots. El Salvador’s national Land Bank served as a broker. Ten percent of the country's agricultural land was transferred through the program to applicants during the first six years after the peace accords. There were over 36,000 beneficiaries by 2000. The program was far from perfect: many of those who resisted demobilization or received insufficient agricultural credits and training joined gangs and organized crime outfits. Yet land conflict in the countryside has largely subsided.

These experiences show that market-based reforms are a viable option for gaining consensus among negotiating parties and getting land to the tiller. Although such reforms do not guarantee decreases in rural inequality, they ameliorate some of the most destabilizing land conflicts and a broader turn to organized rural violence.

Land negotiation and colonization programs extend far beyond Brazil, El Salvador, Guatemala, and South Africa. These policies are also being implemented at a substantial scale in Malawi, Namibia, the Philippines, Venezuela, and a host of other countries. Furthermore, countries such as Kenya are actively rewriting laws that impact land allocation and define what constitutes property rights over land.

*Land Negotiation and Colonization Shortcomings and the Path Forward*

From the perspective of keeping the peace and curtailing broader rural unrest, the land negotiation and colonization projects discussed above have been largely successful. They have also improved the lives of millions of rural beneficiaries that have received land. Yet they are uniformly too small in scale. And they are much less redistributive than land redistribution. The Gini coefficient for landholding inequality in Brazil in 2006, for instance, was an incredible 0.857, exactly the same figure as in 1985. In South Africa, a host of analysts have long decried the fact that it will take a lifetime or more for land negotiation at this pace to deliver 30% of agricultural land to blacks as promised in 1994 (see, e.g., Thwala 2006, 68). It is therefore not surprising that President Jacob Zuma announced in 2013 that the willing seller-willing buyer principle would be dropped in favor of a "just and equitable" redistribution principle that enables expropriation of private land, encapsulated in the Expropriation Bill. The deadline for land restitution claims, which previously had to be submitted by the end of 1998, was extended to 2018 by parliament in February 2014. Broad new legislation guiding land reform looks set to pass in 2015.

How can land negotiation and colonization programs be modified to make them more effective and more popular? The first and most obvious answer is better funding from the top down. If high institutional constraints effectively grant landed elites veto power over reform and foreclose reform by imposition, then the proponents of reform can only move forward if landed elites are a willing partner. Compensation must substitute for force in acquiring private property, and creativity in making state land available is paramount. Though South Africa's LRAD is slowed by an inefficient bureaucracy and incomplete land registries, for instance, there is little question that much more land could be transferred with greater access to funding. When governments themselves lack the funding, the World Bank or foreign donors could step in, perhaps by matching government investments in land purchases or colonization schemes.

Colombia is one interesting case of how such a solution may come to fruition. Landed elite resistance along with an agonizing and draw-out conflict with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) stymied substantial agrarian reform for 50 years. Yet a 2013 preliminary agreement on agrarian reform as part of the peace negotiations with the FARC would distribute some three million hectares of land to small landowners and landless farmers through a series of regional "Land Funds." These Funds would distribute lands that have been illegally or improperly attained and consequently seized by the state, as well as underutilized private lands in some cases. This builds on top of the Victims Law that President Santos signed in 2011, which offers reparations in the form of land to victims of civil conflict. Some 350,000 families are eligible to reclaim roughly two million hectares of land through the law. The price tag is hefty – somewhere around $20 billion for the Victims Law alone. The United Nations has promised to help Colombia implement the Victims Law, and a host of actors such as Brazil, the United Sates, Spain, the Organization of American States, the European Union, and the United Nations have spoken out in favor of the peace negotiations. These parties should help to fund the Colombian government's investments in land purchases and loans if they want to push reform forward.

A second possible solution to improving the efficacy and scope of land negotiation and colonization programs is to create a parallel reform track that operates from the bottom up. It is not hard to imagine an NGO – or even a World Bank program – that deploys mobile units to areas of particularly high rural pressure or rural poverty. These areas could be identified with the help of widely available mapping technology paired with data on land invasions, droughts, agricultural product prices, or crime, or even through social media or mobile platforms given the increasing penetration of cell phones in rural areas. Mobile units could then work with existing land reform agencies to identify target properties and match peasant demands with private or public properties that could be purchased through a World Bank fund or through a crowd-sourcing method along the lines of Heifer International. This would have the added benefit that the host country land reform agency could claim partial credit for the land transfer. In cases where a land reform agency is either absent or unwilling to participate, mobile units could use local information to identify available properties in the land market and then match peasants to these properties once funds were raised. The most obvious downside of such a program is that it is unlikely to approach the scale of an effective government program of land negotiation or colonization. Yet it has the advantage that it does not require large-scale collective action or necessarily even state participation to institute change.

A final solution for making land negotiation programs in particular more effective – especially where there is a paucity of unoccupied and potentially productive land for colonization – is to push the boundaries of negotiation into what actually constitutes "land redistribution light." In other words, loosen the compensation standards for land negotiation. This would only work if international organizations such as the World Bank sign on and aid in generating standards – or signaling approval – for "fair" expropriation that is short of market value compensation yet will not cause capital to flee in unison. Though this sounds naively optimistic on its face, it has in fact received substantial discussion. The prominent World Bank consultant and former World Bank senior advisor to Africa Hans Binswanger-Mkhize writes in the recent volume *Agricultural Land Redistribution: Toward Greater Consensus* (Binswanger-Mkhize et al. 2009, 27),

"[T]he fear of adverse economic repercussions associated with the use of the expropriation instrument should not be a deterrent to its use, provided the state is using due process and is willing to pay amounts ultimately judged reasonable by the broader class of owners and the general public, if not by individual owners."

South Africa seems poised to move toward this type of land redistribution light after years of land negotiation and land colonization. The Expropriation Bill that would enable a shift to "just and equitable" redistribution from the current willing seller-willing buyer is anticipated to be brought to parliament shortly. This of course occurs as the ANC continues to tighten its grip on power amidst widespread allegations of corruption and cronyism. Some observers are therefore fearful that South Africa may mimic its northern neighbor Zimbabwe and focus more on the "equitable" over the "just" in future land redistribution and restitution. Nonetheless, the enticement of access to capital may lead governments such as that in South Africa to calculate that a slow program of land redistribution light is better than a Mugabe-style fast-track land confiscation program.

**SOWING THE LAND AND HARVESTING THE FUTURE**

Given the rural demand for land, the fact that it can enhance agricultural productivity by putting more land into the hands of those that would farm it regularly, and the obvious short-term benefits in terms of rural poverty reduction, investing in land reform seems like an uncontroversial proposition. But land reform can also risk stoking a backlash by large landowners or generating distributional conflict. Furthermore, development trends come and go, which can leave popular programs and their beneficiaries in the lurch once a strategy has changed. So while the World Bank is turning its focus back to land reform after several decades of disfavor, should countries and foreign donors do the same?

Aside from the substantial number of countries where the rural status quo cries out for land reform regardless of other considerations, this depends in part on the long-term consequences of land reform. Yet the research on long-term effects is still in its nascent stages, in part because researchers have not previously compiled systematic land reform data.

There are several facts that are fairly well established. First, land redistribution can spur sustained economic growth by creating greater equality in the distribution of land and more efficient exploitation (Alesina and Rodrik 1994, Lipton 2009). This is perhaps best demonstrated by Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, where massive land redistribution paved the way for modernization and spectacular subsequent economic growth. Yet land redistribution does not always generate such virtuous outcomes. In Mexico, for instance, land redistribution generated short-term economic growth that then turned negative in the long run as economic distortions and political dependencies associated with the reform derailed progress (Albertus et al. 2014). This is likely due to the perverse incentives created in the *ejido* structure that deterred investment along with insufficient state provision of credits, inputs such as seeds and fertilizer, and infrastructure. This bolsters the case for pursuing “integral” land reform. There is little evidence on the long-term economic consequences of land negotiation and colonization.

Land reform also clearly impacts rural stability and conflict, though not always in positive ways. The demand-driven structure of reform in Brazil essentially requires land invasions in order to yield reform, a process that creates incentives for rural conflict and land threats (Albertus, Brambor, and Ceneviva 2015). In Russia following the emancipation of serfs in 1861, land-based rural rebellion actually increased as landlords hijacked the reform implementation process to win favorable land allotments (Finkel, Gehlbach and Olsen, 2012). And in Colombia, land titling in conflictive rural areas led to spillover effects in which nearby communities recognized the need to support rebel groups in order to garner the attention of Colombia’s land reform agency (Albertus and Kaplan 2013). The key to tamping down conflict in Colombia was sustained, large-scale reform coupled with inputs, credits, services, and the development of local infrastructure.

There is less research on the long-run impacts of land reform on education and on income inequality. Yet research on land inequality suggests differences in the distribution of land ownership contributed to the "great divergence" in income per capita across the world between 1800 and today. Gurov, Moav, and Vollrath (2009) argue in favor of this hypothesis and provide consistent empirical evidence to explain public spending on education across US states. They also attribute major education reforms in Japan, Russia, South Korea, and Taiwan to the role land redistribution played in changing the calculus of landed elites in blocking access to education. Further research is required to determine how generalizable these examples are, and how dependent they are upon land redistribution over land negotiation or colonization.

Finally, land reform – or the possibility of land reform – may also have political consequences in the long run. A dictator or series of dictators who implement large-scale land redistribution can condition the future likelihood of democratic transition and consolidation. This could operate through several channels. Land redistribution may abolish traditional land tenure relations, destroying rural patron-client relations that landlords can use to dominate electoral competition by influencing rural votes. The elimination of landholding elites can also reduce capture of local officials and activists that can be used to manipulate election outcomes. Lastly, a redistributive dictator can make powerful elites more wary of autocratic rule and therefore more likely to support democracy, particularly if they can disproportionately influence policy.

The potential for a nondemocratic leader to favor a support coalition distinct from landed elites can deter those elites from mounting a coup if they imperfectly control a dictator’s behavior or potential countercoups and dictator cycling. It can also lead landed elites to support a more predictable, mildly redistributive democracy over the prospect of irregular leader replacement and possible reformist autocratic rule. As Schmitter (2010, 20) notes in Latin America, democratization in many states followed after elites that had formerly supported autocratic rule “began to realize that their interests would be better protected under democracy than they had been under authoritarianism.” This line of argument is consistent with the fact that democratization is often initiated by elites from a position of relative strength (Slater and Wong 2013). Democratic transition in unequal countries where elites are powerful, such as Colombia and Venezuela in 1958 and Brazil in 1985, are less surprising under this account than most of the current literature anticipates. Indeed, this may help to explain the lack of a general relationship between inequality and democratization (e.g., Houle 2009).

Governments have a number of arrows in the quiver when it comes to development policy. Given its subsequent effects, the discussion above suggests that land reform is one of the first arrows that should be drawn. But it must be drawn carefully. Land reform must come in tandem with supportive policies such as land titling, the provision of credits and inputs, the development of rural infrastructure, and access to basic schooling. It may otherwise land wide of the mark.

1. Major shifts in fiscal redistribution, of course, can have a much broader impact and be difficult to entirely peel back. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Their intent, however, was to focus on countries examined in early studies of the welfare state. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Another well-known example from Ansell and Lindvall's period of study is 1920s Turkey, where Ataturk abolished separate religious schools and colleges and replaced them with secular schools unified under the state (Trimberger 1978). His support coalition was clearly split from the religious and imperial bureaucratic elite within the Ottoman Empire. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. This is also true in Latin America. In Mexico, for instance, it was the autocratic leader Plutarco Elías Calles who first adopted progressive taxation on individual income and corporate profits under the Tax Law of 1924 (Albertus and Menaldo 2012a). Barely one year after income taxation had been introduced, five percent of Mexico’s total government revenue was in the form of income taxation, while the level of income taxation had reached one percent of GDP. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. The same is true for the provision of public goods. While also very dissimilar in structure to land reform and not always redistributive in nature, there are at least some cases in which public goods such as sanitation, rural infrastructure, and education spending are provided at higher rates by authoritarian regimes in which there is an ethnically-based elite split (Albertus, Fenner, and Slater 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)