Land Reform and Political Change in the Postcolonial World: Patterns, Causes and Consequences

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I hereby declare that this dissertation is my own work entirely, that no part of it consists of the work of others, except where it is acknowledged, and that no part of it has been published.

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Abstract

Land reform has been central yet a contested feature of development and political change in the postcolonial world. While a rich body of literature documents land reform through individual case studies, systematic comparative evidence on its patterns, causes and political consequences has remained limited. This thesis addresses that gap by examining land reform across 101 postcolonial developing countries between 1945 and 2020, drawing on an original cross-national dataset: the Land Reform Development Dataset (LRDD).

This thesis makes three interrelated contributions. Firstly, it introduces the LRDD, the first large-N dataset of land reform episodes, identifying 123 reforms across Asia, Africa and Latin America and distinguishes between market-oriented and state-oriented institutional models. Using this dataset, the thesis maps the temporal and regional patterns of land reform, identifying two major waves: the Decolonisation Wave in the 1960s—1970s and the Post-Cold War Wave of the 1990s.

Secondly, it analyses the domestic and international determinants of land reform. The findings show that reform adoption and design were shaped not only by structural conditions but also by political ideology and global alignments. Market-oriented reforms were strongly associated with democracy and donor conditionality, while state-oriented reforms were more closely related to left-leaning executives and alternative geopolitical alignment.

Thirdly, the thesis examines the political consequences of land reform for regime trajectories. Disaggregating reform by institutional type, the analysis shows that market-oriented reforms tend to cluster around democratic transitions and consolidation, particularly during the Third Wave of Democratisation, whereas state-oriented reforms are concentrated in authoritarian contexts and are associated with regime persistence. At the same time, the results indicate that the political effects of reform are gradual rather than immediate and that the absence of reform itself is associated with authoritarian durability. Emphasising that inaction is a politically consequential strategy.

This thesis repositions land reform as a central institution in the political economy of postcolonial development, demonstrating its enduring relevance for understanding inequality, governance and regime change in the developing world.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Land Reform, Development and, Political Change in the Global South

Abstract

The chapter summarises the findings of a doctoral dissertation project on the causes, patterns and consequences of land reform in the postcolonial and developing-country contexts. Creating and drawing on an original cross-national dataset—the Land Reform Development Dataset (LRDD)—covering 101 countries from 1945 to 2020, the research makes three contributions. Firstly, it introduces the LRDD, the first large-N dataset of land reform episodes, identifying 123 reforms across the Global South and classifying them as either market-oriented or state-oriented. Secondly, it provides the first quantitative analysis of the ideological, domestic and international determinants of reform. Findings show that market-oriented reforms are strongly associated with democracy and aid conditionality, while state-oriented reforms correlate with leftist executives. Thirdly, it demonstrates how different reform types shape regime outcomes: market-oriented reforms are associated with democratic transitions and consolidation, whereas state-oriented reforms support authoritarian durability. These studies advance our understanding of land reform as both a developmental and political phenomenon, highlighting its enduring significance in global debates on inequality, governance and institutional change.

1.1 Introduction

Land reform has long occupied a central place in debates about development, inequality, social justice and political change. In the decades following the Second World War, newly independent states across Asia, Africa, and Latin America inherited deeply unequal agrarian structures and tenure systems, the result of both colonial land policies and pre-existing social hierarchies (Lipton, 2009; Borras and Franco, 2010; King, 2013). For many postcolonial leaders, land reform became a pressing policy challenge—viewed simultaneously as a means to address historical injustices, stimulate economic development, and consolidate political authority. Despite its prominence in both scholarly and policy debates, systematic comparative research on land reform has remained limited.

This thesis treats land reform not simply as a response to inequality but as a strategic policy choice. Governments face competing pressures: demands from rural populations for redistribution, resistance from landed elites, institutional constraints linked to regime type and international incentives or pressure arising from alliances and aid relationships. Whether governments reform, and what type of reform it is, depends on how these pressures are managed. Market-oriented and state-oriented reforms are therefore understood not only as policy instruments but as distinct political solutions to distributive conflict.

Existing research has faced two persistent challenges. Firstly, the literature contains conceptual inconsistencies in the definition of land reform. In some accounts, land reform

refers narrowly to the redistribution of land, while in others it encompasses a broader range of rural development policies, including tenancy reform, agricultural support and institutional restructuring (Schultz, 1964; Lachman, 1970; Lipton, 2013; El-Ghonemy, 2009; King, 2019). Definitions of land reform vary widely across disciplines. Economists often emphasise the redistribution of productive assets and the efficiency of land use (Besley and Ghatak, 2009; Deininger, 2003), while political scientists stress the ways in which redistribution reshapes power relations between rural populations, elites, and the state (Albertus, 2015; Hirschman, 1970). International organisations have broadened the term further to include issues of gender equity and environmental sustainability (Agarwal, 1994; Deere and León, 2001; Razavi, 2007; Fairhead, Leach, and Scoones, 2012; Boyce, Rosset, and Stanton, 2005). This conceptual pluralism has hampered cross-national comparison and undermined cumulative knowledge.

A second limitation is the overreliance on case studies. While case studies have generated rich insights into the political dynamics of land reform, they often focus on a small group of countries or regions, limiting the ability to generalise findings and generate hypotheses about when and why reforms occur, how they vary and what consequences they produce (Adams, 2000; Wolford, 2007; King, 2019). At the same time, these studies provide important conceptual insights that can inform broader comparative frameworks.

While land reform has often been analysed within a postcolonial framework, this perspective is best understood as one among several political conditions shaping reform trajectories. Postcolonial legacies—such as unequal land distribution and institutional restructuring—are important, but they do not fully explain the variation in land reform observed across countries. The findings of this thesis suggest that land reform is more broadly shaped by political institutions, ideology, and international influences. Framing land reform in this way allows it to be understood not as a phenomenon confined to postcolonial contexts but as a recurring feature of political and economic development under varying historical conditions.

This doctoral project addresses these limitations through the creation of the Land Reform Development Dataset (LRDD), which provides the first cross-national dataset of land reform episodes across the Global South from 1945 to 2020. The dataset covers 101 postcolonial, developing countries with populations over 500,000. Latin America presents a distinct historical trajectory in the study of land reform, with several major reform episodes occurring prior to the post-war period. Instead of treating Latin America as an exception, this variation reinforces the broader arguments of the thesis: that land reform is shaped by diverse political and historical conditions rather than a single defining context. A full country and episode level summary of the LRDD is provided in Appendix A.

The LRDD identifies 123 reform episodes, distinguishing between market-oriented and state-oriented reforms. Of these, 86 categorised as market-oriented and 37 categorised as state-oriented. Market-oriented reforms emphasise the protection of property rights, voluntary transfers, and market-led redistribution, while state-oriented reforms involve expropriation, collectivisation, and state-administered allocation of land. This binary typology allows for

systematic comparison across regions, regimes, and time periods, while remaining sensitive to the ideological foundations of reform.

The distinction between market-oriented and state-oriented reforms is grounded in patterns observed across case studies, which highlight fundamentally different approaches to ownership, allocation and price formation. However, this typology necessarily simplifies a complex empirical reality. Market-oriented reforms, in particular, encompass a range of institutional arrangements, including cases implemented within strong state-led development contexts, such as South Korea. While the framework captures core institutional differences, important variation remains within each category, which future research could explore in greater detail. It should therefore be understood as a comparative tool rather than a definitive classification.

This also raises broader conceptual questions about whether some market-oriented reforms are more appropriately understood as property-rights interventions rather than redistributive land reform in a narrower sense. This thesis adopts an inclusive definition, treating reforms as land reform where they involve the legal transfer or reallocation of land rights, while acknowledging that this boundary remains contestable. Detailed examples of coding decisions are provided in later chapters.

Building on this dataset, the project advances three interrelated contributions. The first is descriptive: documenting the scope, frequency, duration, and typology of land reform episodes, and mapping their regional and temporal distribution. Two distinct waves of reform are identified: the Decolonisation Wave of the 1960s–1970s and the Post-Cold War Wave of the 1990s. The second contribution is explanatory: testing the determinants of reform using logistic regression models. The analysis demonstrates that domestic ideology and international alignments played important roles. Market-oriented reforms were strongly associated with democracy, aid conditionality, and alignment with the United States, while state-oriented reforms correlated with left-leaning executives, G77 membership, and ties to the Soviet Union/Russia. The third contribution is analytical: exploring the political consequences of reform for regime trajectories. Market-oriented reforms were associated with democratic transitions and consolidation, especially during the Third Wave of democratisation, while state-oriented reforms were linked to authoritarian durability. Countries that avoided reform altogether were disproportionately authoritarian, suggesting that inaction itself constitutes a deliberate elite strategy of regime preservation.

These studies reposition land reform as not only a developmental intervention but also a profoundly political institution shaped by and embedded within wider ideological and institutional constraints. By providing the first large-N evidence on reform patterns, determinants, and consequences, the project contributes to three areas of scholarship. It contributes to the political economy of development by demonstrating how variation in agrarian institutions and redistributive policy design is systematically associated with different development and state-building trajectories across the Global South. It contributes to comparative politics by linking the institutional design of redistribution to regime dynamics, showing that different forms of land reform are associated with distinct patterns of

democratic transition, consolidation, and authoritarian persistence. It also contributes to international relations by illustrating how global ideological competition, geopolitical alignment and donor conditionality shaped domestic land reform strategies, highlighting the ways in which international pressures are mediated through domestic political institutions.

The remainder of this chapter is structured as follows. The next section outlines the dataset, scope conditions, and methodological approach. It explains how the LRDD was constructed, defines the typology of reforms, and situates the data in relation to existing literature. The findings are then presented in three parts: first, the descriptive mapping of reform prevalence and typology; second, the statistical analysis of domestic and international determinants; and third, the analysis of regime outcomes. The discussion reflects on the broader implications for debates on land, inequality, and political development, while the conclusion highlights the enduring significance of land reform for understanding the trajectory of postcolonial states.

1.2 Methods and Data

At the heart of this research is the Land Reform Development Dataset (LRDD), an original cross-national dataset that systematically records land reform episodes across the postcolonial developing world. The dataset addresses a longstanding gap in the literature, which has relied heavily on case studies and lacked consistent definitions or comparable measures of reform (Adams, 2000; Lipton, 2013). By offering a standardised operationalisation of land reform and comprehensive temporal coverage, the LRDD provides the empirical foundation for the analyses presented in this thesis.

1.2.1 Scope and Coverage

The dataset covers 101 postcolonial developing countries across Asia, Africa and Latin America, spanning the years 1945 to 2020. Countries were included if they met three conditions: (1) they were former colonies or territories under significant external control; (2) they were classified as “developing” by World Bank criteria at independence or 1945; and (3) their populations exceeded 500,000 at the time of independence. Countries that implemented reforms before 1945, such as Mexico, were excluded, as were microstates with limited agricultural land. This highlights the importance of considering variation beyond a strictly postcolonial framework, particularly in regions such as Latin America. The final dataset yielded a balanced panel of 6,170 country-year observations.

The decision to focus on the post-1945 period reflects both substantive and practical considerations. Substantively, the postwar decades coincided with decolonisation, state-building, and the onset of the Cold War, when land reform became highly salient as a developmental and political strategy. Practically, post-1945 records from international organisations, governments and scholars are more comprehensive, permitting greater reliability and comparability across cases.

1.2.2 Definitions and Typology

One of the key challenges in land reform research is definitional ambiguity. In this study, land reform is defined as state-led intervention aimed at altering the ownership, use, or distribution of land, initiated through formal mechanisms such as legislation, executive order, or regulatory decree. To qualify, a policy must entail the legal transfer or redistribution of land rights. This definition excludes broader land governance measures, such as agricultural subsidies, land titling without redistribution, or environmental schemes, which fall outside the redistributive core of reform (El-Ghonemy, 2009; King, 2019). Reforms are categorised into two "ideal" types:

- Market-Oriented Reforms: characterised by private ownership, legal protection of property rights, voluntary or compensated transfers, and market-determined valuation. These reforms are typically associated with liberal or capitalist development strategies. Examples include compensated redistribution reforms in South Korea and Taiwan.
- State-Oriented Reforms: characterised by state ownership, centralised control of land use, and expropriation without compensation. These reforms are often implemented under socialist or authoritarian regimes, serving both redistributive and political consolidation goals. Examples include the collectivisation programs in North Korea, Cuba, and Zimbabwe.

1.2.3 Data Collection and Coding

The LRDD was constructed through extensive archival and secondary source research. Each country's land reform history was reconstructed using academic publications, government reports, and documentation from international organisations. Coding decisions were made on a country-by-country basis, triangulating multiple sources where possible to enhance reliability. For each episode, information was recorded on:

1. Existence of reform (yes/no by country-year)
2. Timing (year of initiation)
3. Duration (measured in years until official termination or de facto end)
4. Typology (market-oriented or state-oriented)

The dataset identifies 123 reform episodes in total: 86 market-oriented and 37 state-oriented. On average, reforms lasted 11.6 years, though significant variation exists across regions and periods. Notably, two temporal clusters are evident: the Decolonisation Wave of the 1960s-1970s, when many African and Asian states pursued reform after independence, and the Post-

Cold War Wave of the 1990s, when donor conditionality and international financial institutions drove a surge in market-based reforms.

1.2.4 Analytical Strategy

The LRDD underpins three complementary analyses. Firstly, descriptive statistics map the regional and temporal distribution of reform episodes, offering a comparative overview of prevalence, typology and duration. Secondly, logistic regression models test hypotheses about the domestic and international determinants of reform, distinguishing between general incidence, market-oriented and state-oriented reforms. Thirdly, regression models and descriptive sequencing analyses examine the relationship between reform type and regime trajectories, particularly democratisation and authoritarian persistence.

This combined strategy allows the research to move beyond case-specific accounts and generate generalisable insights. By standardising definitions, documenting reform episodes systematically, and applying cross-national statistical methods, the LRDD offers a new empirical basis for understanding land reform as both a developmental and political process.

1.3 Findings

1.3.1 Patterns of Land Reform

The LRDD reveals that land reform has been a widespread but uneven phenomenon across the postcolonial world. Of the 101 countries in the dataset, 83 implemented at least one reform episode, while 18 did not adopt any form of redistribution between 1945 and 2020. In total, 123 episodes were identified, highlighting the prevalence of land reform as a postcolonial policy tool.

Two major temporal clusters stand out. The Decolonisation Wave (1960s–1970s) coincided with independence movements in Africa and Asia, as new states sought to dismantle colonial tenure systems and establish legitimacy through redistribution. The Post-Cold War Wave (1990s) reflected a different logic, as international financial institutions and bilateral donors encouraged market-oriented reforms tied to structural adjustment programmes. By contrast, the 1980s and 2000s saw a relative decline in new reform episodes, reflecting both shifting global priorities and the exhaustion of initial redistributive efforts.

Regionally, Sub-Saharan Africa accounted for the highest number of reform episodes (46), reflecting the intensity of agrarian inequality and the centrality of land in post-independence state-building. Asia recorded 36 episodes, often concentrated in East and Southeast Asia, where reforms were integral to developmental state strategies. Latin America saw 29 episodes, reflecting the persistence of land inequality as a political issue despite earlier reforms in the mid-twentieth century. The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) accounted

for 12 episodes, typically concentrated in revolutionary or post-revolutionary contexts such as Egypt and Syria.

The dataset also highlights significant variation in reform type. Market-oriented reforms (86 episodes) predominated overall, particularly in Asia, Latin America, and Sub-Saharan Africa after the 1980s. These reforms typically emphasised private property rights, compensated transfers, and titling programmes, reflecting the ideological influence of donors and international financial institutions. State-oriented reforms (37 episodes), by contrast, were concentrated in the 1960s–1970s and were more common in socialist or authoritarian regimes. These reforms involved uncompensated expropriation, collectivisation, and state-directed land use, as exemplified by reforms in North Korea, Cuba and, Zimbabwe.

These findings provide the first systematic overview of land reform as a global phenomenon. They suggest that land reform was not a marginal or exceptional policy but rather a recurrent feature of postcolonial development strategies, albeit one shaped by regional context and international pressures.

1.3.2 Determinants of Land Reform

The second analysis uses logistic regression models to test hypotheses about the domestic and international determinants of land reform. The results indicate that reform incidence and type were shaped by a combination of structural conditions, domestic ideology, and international alignments.

At the structural level, land reform was more likely in poorer economies with predominately agrarian structures, consistent with the argument that redistribution is a developmental response to underdevelopment (El-Ghonemy, 2006; Lipton, 2009). GDP per capita was negatively associated with the likelihood of reform, particularly in the early decades after independence, when land was often the most significant productive asset.

Domestic political ideology also played a decisive role. Left-leaning executives were strongly associated with state-oriented reforms, reflecting commitments to redistribution, social justice and anti-colonial sovereignty (Albertus, 2015). By contrast, democracies were more likely to implement market-oriented reforms, often designed to balance redistributive demands with institutional protections for property rights. Democratic institutions such as legislatures and courts constrained expropriation, making consensual, compensated and, market-based reforms more politically feasible.

International alignments further influenced reform trajectories. During the Cold War, the United States promoted market-oriented reforms in allied states such as South Korea, Taiwan, and Colombia as part of a broader anti-communist strategy (İşcan, 2018; Dore, 2013). Conversely, the Soviet Union supported state-oriented reforms in Cuba, North Korea, and Syria, embedding land redistribution within socialist development models. After the Cold War, geopolitical patronage gave way to donor conditionality: Official Development Assistance (ODA) became a strong predictor of market-oriented reforms, particularly in

Africa and Latin America, where World Bank and IMF programmes promoted titling and liberalisation.

Membership in international coalitions also mattered. G77 states, which often emphasised sovereignty and resistance to neoliberal conditionalities, were more likely to implement state-oriented reforms. Conversely, countries aligned with the United States during the Cold War were more likely to pursue market-based redistribution.

In short, the analysis demonstrates that land reform was rarely a purely domestic policy choice. Instead, it emerged from the interplay of structural conditions, ideological preferences, and international alignments. Market-oriented and state-oriented reforms reflected distinct constellations of domestic and global political–economic pressures.

1.3.3 Political Consequences of Land Reform

The final set of findings examines the association between land reform type and regime trajectories, focusing on democratisation, authoritarian durability and the consequences of non-reform.

The results reveal a consistent divergence between market- and state-oriented reforms. Market-oriented reforms were disproportionately associated with democracies and transitional regimes and often coincided with democratic openings. During the Third Wave of Democratisation (1974–2000), 17 of the 24 countries that democratised for the first time had implemented market-oriented land reform. Cases such as Taiwan, South Korea, South Africa, and the Philippines illustrate how market-based redistribution could dismantle entrenched agrarian elites while fostering new coalitions supportive of democratic governance. Market reforms provided compensation to landowners, allowing them to re-invest in industry and align with democratic institutions that protected private property, while simultaneously empowering rural populations through redistribution (Boix, 2003; Acemoglu and Robinson, 2006).

By contrast, state-oriented reforms were strongly associated with authoritarian persistence. These reforms often served as tools of regime consolidation: expropriating rival elites, redistributing land to politically dependent smallholders, and embedding rural populations in clientelist networks (Albertus and Menaldo, 2012). In countries such as Egypt, North Korea, and Zimbabwe, state-oriented redistribution entrenched authoritarian rule rather than fostering democratic transformation. By undermining independent economic actors and creating rural constituencies reliant on state patronage, state-oriented reforms reduced the prospects for democratisation.

Equally significant are the findings on non-reformers. Of the 101 countries studied, 18 did not implement any form of land reform. These countries were disproportionately authoritarian, suggesting that inaction itself functioned as an elite strategy of regime preservation. By maintaining existing landholding patterns, elites protected their economic base and blocked redistributive pressures that might have destabilised their rule. This

underscores that the absence of land reform is not a neutral outcome but a politically consequential decision.

These findings demonstrate that the consequences of land reform depend less on its presence than on its type. Market-oriented reforms tended to facilitate democratic transitions and consolidation, while state-oriented reforms reinforced authoritarian durability. Countries that avoided reform altogether were more likely to remain autocratic. These patterns highlight the significance of institutional design in shaping the political consequences of redistribution.

1.4 Discussion

These findings paint land reform as a central understudied dimension of development, international relations and political change in postcolonial and developing contexts. By combining a new dataset with comparative statistical analysis, the research challenges longstanding assumptions and provides new insights into the scope, drivers, and consequences of redistributive policies in the Global South. This section situates these contributions within broader debates, highlights their theoretical implications, and considers their relevance for contemporary policy.

1.4.1 Land Reform as a global and recurring phenomenon

One of the most striking findings is the prevalence and recurrence of land reform. With 123 episodes identified across 83 countries, land reform was not a marginal or exceptional intervention but a recurrent feature of postcolonial statecraft. The two temporal waves identified—the Decolonisation Wave of the 1960s-1970s and the Post-Cold War Wave of the 1990s—underscore that reform was not confined to a single historical moment but re-emerged under shifting global conditions.

This challenges the tendency in much of the literature to treat land reform as either a relic of early post-independence politics or a phenomenon restricted to a few symbolic cases. Instead, the LRDD demonstrates that redistribution was a common response to enduring structural inequalities, albeit pursued through different institutional models. Recognising land reform as a global, recurrent policy sheds new light on how states across the Global South sought to resolve the dilemmas of inequality, legitimacy, and development.

1.4.2 Ideological, conditional and geopolitical determinants of land reform

The second contribution lies in clarifying the determinants of reform. The analysis shows that land reform was neither a simple function of agrarian inequality nor a purely domestic decision. Instead, reform was shaped by the interplay of structural conditions, domestic political ideology and international alignments.

This helps to explain why some states pursued redistribution while others, facing similar levels of inequality, did not. Left-leaning executives used state-oriented reforms to pursue redistributionist agendas, while democratic governments were more likely to implement consensual, market-oriented reforms. At the international level, the Cold War context fostered starkly different reform trajectories: U.S. alliances often encouraged market-oriented redistribution, while Soviet support underpinned state-led collectivisation. In the post-Cold War era, donor conditionality became a decisive driver, with Official Development Assistance linked to a surge in market-oriented reforms. These patterns were not uniform across regions. For example, the United States promoted different land reform models in East Asia and Latin America during the same period, reflecting regional strategic priorities. This suggests that international influences on land reform were more context-dependent than often assumed.

Theoretically, these findings extend debates on the political economy of redistribution by showing how global ideological competition and donor leverage penetrated domestic policymaking. Land reform emerges not only as a response to domestic inequality but also as a field where global power struggles and conditionalities played out.

1.4.3 Political consequences: democratisation, authoritarianism and the politics of inaction

The third contribution concerns the political consequences of land reform. By disaggregating reforms into market- and state-oriented models, the analysis reconciles conflicting narratives in the literature. Market-oriented reforms are consistently associated with democratic transition and consolidation, while state-oriented reforms correlate with authoritarian persistence. This suggests that the consequences of reform depend less on whether redistribution occurs than on how it is designed and implemented.

Market-oriented reforms created dual pathways to democracy: they empowered rural populations through redistribution and simultaneously compensated elites, aligning their interests with democratic institutions that protected property rights. By contrast, state-oriented reforms undermined independent economic actors and embedded rural populations in clientelist networks, bolstering authoritarian regimes.

Equally significant is the finding that non-reform itself is politically consequential. The 18 countries that did not implement reform were disproportionately authoritarian, suggesting that inaction functioned as an elite strategy to preserve existing landholding patterns and suppress redistributive pressures. This highlights the importance of analysing “negative cases” and recognising that policy absence can be as revealing as policy adoption.

1.4.4 Implications for theory and policy

This thesis contributes to several strands of literature. Firstly, it contributes to comparative political economy by providing a new dataset that enables systematic analysis of land reform across countries and over time, addressing a longstanding reliance on case studies. Secondly,

it contributes to the study of land reform by introducing a typology that distinguishes between institutional models of reform, allowing variation in design to be analysed rather than treating reform as a binary phenomenon. Thirdly, it contributes to democratisation and development research by demonstrating how different forms of redistribution are associated with distinct regime trajectories. This thesis positions land reform as a political institution linked to property rights, redistribution and state-societal relations which offers a framework for understanding how agrarian structures shape political development.

There are also contemporary policy implications. Land inequality remains acute in many parts of the world, and questions of land governance are increasingly tied to issues of gender equity, environmental sustainability, and indigenous rights. The findings suggest that the design of redistributive policies matters profoundly for political outcomes: market-oriented models may be better suited to contexts where democratic consolidation is fragile, while state-oriented models risk entrenching authoritarianism. At the same time, the research cautions against treating donor-driven, market-oriented reforms as politically neutral; they reflect and reproduce specific ideological commitments, and their success depends on local institutional capacity and legitimacy.

1.4.5 Limitations and avenues for future research

Finally, the research has limitations that point to avenues for future study. While the LRDD provides the first large-N dataset of land reform, coding decisions inevitably involved trade-offs, and some reforms combined features of both market- and state-oriented models. The binary typology may mask variation within reform categories, suggesting the need for a more fine-grained classification when expanding this research. Future work could explore hybrid cases in greater detail. Similarly, while the statistical analysis identifies robust associations, it does not establish causality. In the final chapter, sequencing test, horizontal trends, logistic regression and, survival models all point in the same substantive direction, even if individual effects do not reach statistical significance. More fine-grained, mixed-methods research is needed to unpack the mechanisms through which reform shapes political outcomes. Finally, extending the dataset beyond 2020 would enable analysis of how land governance interacts with emerging global challenges such as climate change, migration, and food security.

1.5 Conclusion

This chapter has brought together the findings of a doctoral project on land reform in the postcolonial and developing world, drawing on the Land Reform Development Dataset (LRDD) to examine reform patterns, determinants, and political consequences across 101 developing countries from 1945 to 2020. In doing so, it has made three interrelated contributions.

Firstly, it has documented the prevalence and diversity of land reform. With 123 reform episodes identified, land reform emerges not as a marginal or exceptional intervention but as a recurrent feature of postcolonial statecraft. By distinguishing between market-oriented and state-oriented reforms, the LRDD provides a clear typology for cross-national comparison, enabling researchers to move beyond case-specific accounts.

Secondly, it has explained the determinants of reform, demonstrating that redistributive policies were shaped by the interaction of structural conditions, domestic political ideology, and international alignments. Market-oriented reforms were more common in democracies, donor-dependent states, and U.S. allies, while state-oriented reforms were associated with left-leaning governments, G77 membership and ties to the Soviet Union/Russia. These findings highlight how land reform was embedded in global ideological struggles and donor conditionalities, rather than being solely a domestic developmental choice.

Thirdly, it has analysed the political consequences of reform, showing that institutional design matters but its effects unfold gradually. Market-oriented reforms cluster around democratic transitions—especially during the Third Wave—and countries adopting them tended to democratise earlier and sustain democracy for longer. State-oriented reforms were concentrated in authoritarian settings and overwhelmingly occurred in countries that never democratised; however, their long-run Polity trajectories show modest improvements similar to market reforms. Short-term effects of reform are minimal, and statistical models do not show significant results, but sequencing, temporal and survival analyses consistently show that market reforms accompany periods of political opening while state reforms align with contexts of authoritarian consolidation. Countries that avoided reform completely were more likely to remain autocratic, reinforcing that no reform reflects elite resistance rather than administrative incapacity.

Market-oriented reforms were associated with democratic transitions and consolidation, particularly during the Third Wave of Democratisation, while state-oriented reforms correlated with authoritarian resilience. Countries that avoided reform altogether were more likely to remain autocratic, underscoring that inaction itself can be a politically strategic choice.

These contributions reposition land reform as a critical lens for understanding development, inequality, and political change in the postcolonial world. They suggest that land reform should not be treated as a discrete agrarian policy but as a political institution with far-reaching consequences. By tracing its prevalence, determinants, and outcomes, the research advances debates in development studies, political economy, comparative politics, and international relations.

Beyond its scholarly implications, the findings also resonate with contemporary policy debates. Land inequality remains a pressing issue in many parts of the Global South, with implications for food security, environmental sustainability, and social justice. The results presented here suggest that redistributive policies cannot be assessed solely in terms of their economic outcomes; their institutional design and political context shape their capacity to foster inclusive development or entrench authoritarian rule. As international donors,

governments, and social movements continue to grapple with the challenges of land governance, the lessons of historical land reform remain highly relevant.

The LRDD provides a foundation for future research in at least three directions. Firstly, further work could investigate hybrid reforms, which combine elements of both market- and state-oriented models, to assess whether they generate distinct developmental or political outcomes. Secondly, mixed-methods research that combines the LRDD with in-depth case studies could help unpack the mechanisms through which reforms translate into regime change or persistence. Thirdly, extending the dataset beyond 2020 would allow analysis of how land reform interacts with new global challenges, including climate change, migration, and shifting patterns of international aid.

In conclusion, this project demonstrates that land reform—long regarded as a controversial and unevenly studied policy—remains central to understanding the trajectories of postcolonial and developing country contexts. Its patterns reflect global ideological struggles; its determinants reveal the interplay of domestic and international forces; and its consequences underscore the political stakes of redistribution. Land reform is thus not only about who owns land, but about how societies confront inequality, construct legitimacy, and shape their political futures.

Chapter 2: The Land Reform Development Dataset (LRDD)

Stuart Bagnall

Abstract

Land reform has played a central role in political and economic development across the Global South, yet no large-N, cross-national dataset systematically measures its prevalence, duration or typology. The Land Reform Development Dataset (LRDD) addresses this gap. It covers 101 postcolonial developing countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America (populations greater than 500,000) from 1945 to 2020. Drawing on academic, governmental and international organisation sources, the dataset comprises of 6,170 country-year observations. Analysis shows that 83 of the 101 scope countries implemented at least one reform episode, while 18 did not. In total, 123 episodes were identified: 86 market-oriented and 37 state-oriented, lasting an average of 11.6 years. Two temporal clusters are evident: the Decolonisation Wave (1960s–1970s) and the Post-Cold War Wave (1990s). The LRDD makes five main contributions: (1) it provides the first global dataset of this scale; (2) quantifies reform frequency; (3) develops an ideological classification; (4) identifies regional and temporal trends; and (5) documents reform duration. This resource enables comparative analysis of reform drivers and outcomes, offering new empirical foundations for debates on land inequality, political economy, and development. Additionally, the LRDD enables land reform to be analysed as a political institution that varies across domestic and international contexts.

Keywords: Land Reform, Development, Dataset, Political Economy, Agrarian Reform

2.1 Introduction

There is a substantial body of literature on land reform, reflecting its central role in the political and economic development of many states. Following the Second World War, the process of decolonisation accelerated across Africa and Asia. These newly independent states inherited deeply unequal land ownership and tenure structures, often shaped by colonial policies. As a result, land reform became one of the most urgent—and often contested—policy challenges for postcolonial leaders. Land reform is often analysed within a postcolonial framework; this perspective is best understood as one among several conditions shaping reform trajectories. Variation in land reform across countries reflects not only colonial legacies but also differences in political institutions, ideology and international influences.

Despite their significance, scholars have faced difficulties in systematically testing hypotheses about the causes and consequences of land reform. A key obstacle has been the absence of a comprehensive, cross-national dataset capturing land reform episodes across the developing world. Without such data, fundamental questions remain unanswered: How many

episodes have occurred? Do countries engage in multiple reforms? How long do reforms last, and how can they be categorised? Existing research has largely relied on case studies and has used varying definitions of land reform. In addition, definitions of land reform vary across disciplines, ranging from narrow redistributive policies to broader rural development interventions. This conceptual inconsistency, combined with the dominance of case study approaches, has limited the development of a large-N, cross-national dataset.

This paper introduces the Land Reform Development Dataset (LRDD), an original cross-national dataset covering 101 developing countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America with a colonial past from 1945 to 2020. This dataset includes 6,170 country-year observations and focuses on countries with populations exceeding 500,000 at independence. By providing systematic cross-national data, the LRDD enables the study of land reform not only as a policy intervention but as a political and institutional phenomenon that varies across contexts.

The study adopts a specific definition of land reform and categorises each episode into one of two classifications: market-oriented or state-oriented. Land reform is defined here as state-led intervention aimed at altering the ownership, use, or distribution of land. This can be initiated through formal mechanisms such as legislation, executive order or regulatory decree. To qualify, a policy must involve the legal transfer or redistribution of land. Market-oriented reforms emphasise the protection of individual property rights, allowing market mechanisms to determine the value of land and its produce. By contrast, state-oriented reforms centralise land ownership, land leasing, and associated rights under state authority. These definitions are examined in greater detail in a subsequent section.

The dataset shows that 83 countries implemented one or more land reform episodes, while 18 did not. In total, 123 reform episodes were identified with 86 categorised as market-oriented and 37 as state-oriented. Two waves of land reform are identified. The first, the Decolonisation Wave, spans the 1960s and 1970s. The second, the Post-Cold War Wave, occurred in the 1990s. On average, reforms lasted 11.6 years. These findings contribute to the literature by: (1) providing the first large-N cross-national study of land reform; (2) quantifying reform episodes; (3) developing an ideological typology of reforms; (4) revealing regional and temporal trends; and (5) offering a foundation for analysing the impact of land reform policies. This dataset forms the empirical foundation for the analyses in subsequent papers, which examine the political determinants and regime consequences of land reform.

This paper is organised as follows. Section 2 defines the scope of the dataset and the concepts of land reform, while establishing the typology of reforms. Section 3 explains the data collection process and coding decisions. Section 4 presents empirical findings on the prevalence, duration, and ideological dimensions of land reform, as well as regional and temporal trends. Finally, the conclusion discusses the implications of the dataset and outlines avenues for future research.

2.2 The Data

This dataset aims to improve our understanding of land reform by examining the nature and frequency of reforms conducted in former colonies across Latin America, Asia and Africa. Upon achieving independence, most colonies were classified by the World Bank (WB) as developing countries. These nations were prime candidates for land redistribution policies due to significant disparities in land ownership left by colonial powers.

The dataset begins in 1945 which marked the post-war decolonisation period when many Asian and African states gained their independence. Although most Latin American nations had gained independence earlier, they are included if land reform had not been implemented before 1945. Land inequality has continued to be an issue in Latin America despite colonial rule ending in most cases more than a century ago. Lapp (2004) estimates that 90% of agrarian land in Latin America was owned by less than 10% of the population by as late as the 1950s. The post-war period witnessed significant momentum in land reform worldwide. This period witnessed reformsimplemented at a pace not previously observed. Also, after 1945, states and international organisations (IOs) generally kept better records, making data more reliable and comparable with greater validity. The research scope was defined by identifying countries that: (1) were former colonies in Asia, Africa, or Latin America; (2) were classified as developing nations; and (3) had populations exceeding 500,000.

The initial list comprised 216 countries and territories from the World Bank's database of independent states and territories. This list was refined to include only countries located in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. The Colonial Dates Dataset (COLDAT), which codes countries colonised by Belgium, Britain, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Spain, was used to identify former colonies (Becker, 2020). Ziltener, Kunzler, and Walter (2017) corroborated this data and allowed for the inclusion of Japanese colonies such as Taiwan and the Koreas. China was excluded, as it was never fully or formally colonised, although some parts were occupied. These exclusions reflect the need for a historically comparable universe of cases. Fully non-colonial states such as China and Ethiopia underwent land reforms under institutional and ideological conditions that are not comparable to postcolonial settings and would therefore distort cross-country inference. However, former Soviet Asian republics were included due to external control over their economic and agrarian policies, which in some respects mirrored colonial dynamics.

The World Bank classifications determined whether each nation was classified as developed or developing. Table 1 outlines these classifications based on GDP per capita. The Maddison Project Dataset (2023) was used for historical economic estimates, supplemented by World Bank data for six countries (Guyana, Suriname, South Sudan, Somalia, Eritrea and Bhutan) the dataset did not include. Nations classified as developed were excluded, as were countries that had implemented land reform before 1945, such as Mexico. These pre-1945 reforms fall outside the temporal scope of the study, which focuses on the post-war wave of land reform for which administrative records are consistent and comparable. Their exclusion is not theoretical but methodological, to ensure coherence in the dataset rather than implying that such cases are invalid.

Financial hubs such as Singapore, Hong Kong and Macau were excluded due to their lack of agricultural land. The World Bank has been criticised for including such countries in datasets examining inequality, poverty, land ownership and land usage as their inclusion can undermine the validity of results. Including these nations in the LRDD would likewise undermine the validity of the dataset. It is important to note that the World Bank now uses Gross National Income (GNI) per capita rather than GDP per capita for country classifications. However, consistent historical estimates for GNI are not available for the full study period, and therefore GDP per capita is used here to ensure comparability across time.

Table 1: Classification of Countries by Real GDP Per Capita According to the World Bank (2015)

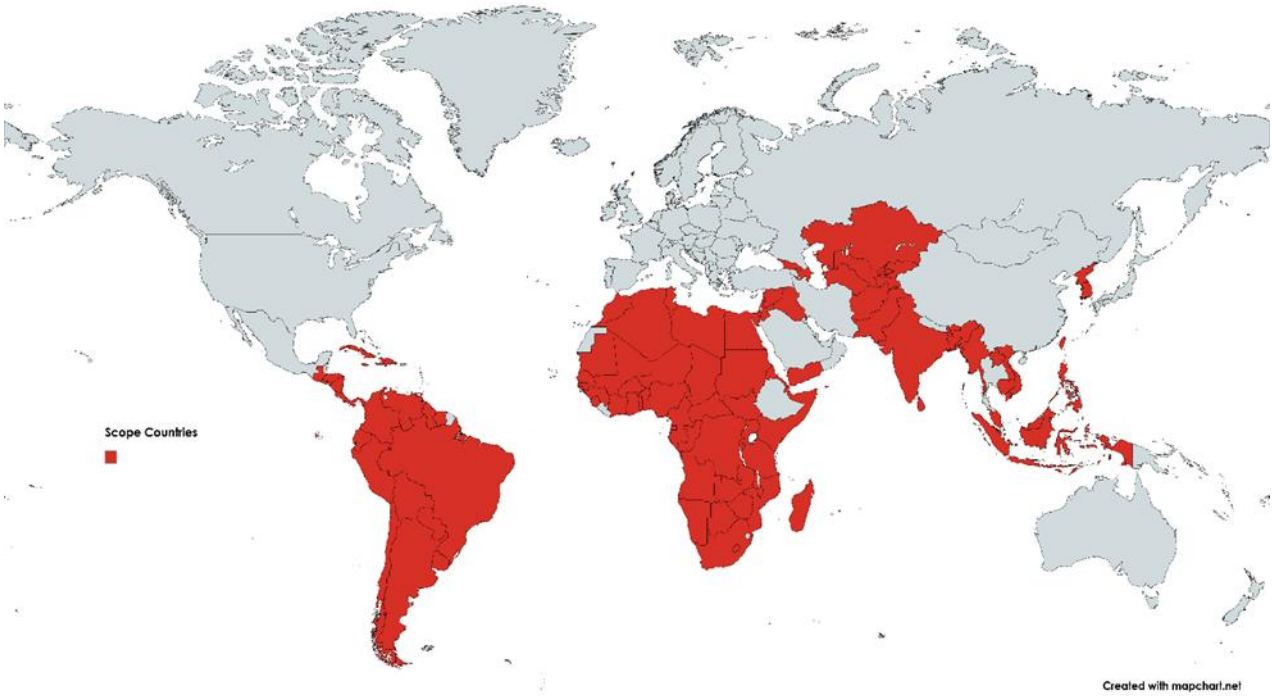
GDP Per Capita (USD)	Classification	Developing Status
X<$1,005.0	Low	Developing
$1,005.1 ≤ X < $3,955.0	Lower Middle	
$3,955.1 ≤ X < $12,235.0	Upper Middle	
X ≥ $12,235.1	High	Developed

Source: (World Bank, 2015)

Countries with populations under 500,000 were excluded, consistent with Polity IV's classification rules. Their small size suggests limited land availability, reduced relevance for land reform and limited statistical capacity. Furthermore, their inclusion could introduce statistical outliers, compromising results, and many international datasets already exclude microstates. This exclusion primarily affects nations in the Caribbean, Indian Ocean, and Pacific Islands.

The final research sample included 101 former colonies in Asia, Africa and Latin America, covering the period of 1945 to 2020 with a total of 6,170 observed country-years. Figure 1 shows a map of all scope countries. A completed list of scope countries and all recorded episodes are provided in Appendix A.

Figure 1: Map of Scope Countries



Source: Author's own, based on The Land Reform Development Dataset (LRDD) (2025)

2.3 Weaknesses in the Land Reform Literature

Despite the significance of land reform, the development of cross-national datasets has been hindered by two primary factors: (1) inconsistent definitions of land reform and (2) reliance on case study analyses of a limited number of nations.

2.3.1 Definitions of land reform

Land reform is defined inconsistently across disciplines, complicating cross-national analyses (Adam, 2000). Scholars such as Lipton (2013) and King (2019) note that definitions often depend on disciplinary perspectives. For example, economists may view land reform as the redistribution of capital, examining its effects on economic development, redistribution, efficiency and poverty reduction (Besley and Ghatak, 2009; Deininger, 2003; Besley, 1995). Political scientists, by contrast, often view land reform as a process that alters power dynamics within society. They may examine the social and political processes of reform, including power dynamics, state capacity, and ideological conflict (Hirschman, 1970; Borras and Franco, 2010).

Commonly, land reform refers to the redistribution of land from one group of people to another, often facilitated by government intervention or executive action (Schultz, 1964;

Lachman, 1970; Lipton, 1993, 2009, 2013, 2020; Kaufman, 1972; Chayanov, 1986, 2018; El-Ghonemy, 2009; Tarisayi, 2014; Wolford, 2007 and King, 2019). Within these definitions, the specifics of who receives land can vary significantly. For example, Chayanov (1986) describes land reform as the division of agricultural land to meet the needs of the peasant classes. These needs are not defined in this literature and could encompass a broad range of necessities.

Land is not only redistributed from groups of citizens to other citizens. Land can also be seized from private citizens and transferred to government and/or state control (El-Ghonemy, 1990). This type of land reform is often associated with revolutionary or post-revolutionary contexts, when democracies or monarchies are overthrown or when nations gain their independence by force. These types of reform were observed in North Korea, Libya, Cuba and Mozambique (Hwang, 2012; Ahmida, 1994; Gayoso, 1970 and Hanlon, 2004).

The literature on land reform spans numerous fields and subfields. It can encompass redistribution, alteration of land markets, investment in agricultural capital, and training of agricultural workers. In recent years, international organisations (IOs) have expanded the definition to include shifts in gender norms relating to land ownership and the promotion of environmental protection (Agarwal, 1994; Deere and León, 2001; Razavi, 2007; Fairhead, Leach, and Scoones, 2012; Boyce, Rosset, and Stanton, 2005).

To address these inconsistencies, I define land reform as state-led intervention involving the alteration of ownership or distribution of land, initiated through formal mechanisms such as legislation, executive orders, or regulatory decrees. To qualify as land reform under this definition, a policy must involve the legal transfer or reallocation of land rights, whether through restitution to previous owners, redistribution to landless populations, government appropriation, or restructuring of tenure systems. Such reforms may be introduced to address historical inequalities, improve agricultural productivity, or achieve wider social and economic goals.

2.3.2 Case study analysis

Much of the existing literature relies on case studies focusing on one or a small number of countries. While these allow for a detailed examination, they limit the generalisability of findings across contexts, regions and time periods. Insights from existing case studies informed the construction of this dataset, ensuring the comprehensive coverage of key characteristics and typologies.

There have been several attempts to collect information on land reform at a broad comparative scale; however, these efforts have been limited in scope, in definitional consistency, and in the absence of systematic coding of land policies and transfers in a way that is cross-nationally comparable over time. Notable examples include Barraclough (1973), Dorner (1992), Thiesenhusen (1989), Rosset, Patel, and Courville (2006), Binswanger-Mkhize, Bourguignon, and van den Brink (2009), and Albertus (2015). Among these, Albertus's Autocracy and Redistribution is the most theoretically sophisticated political

explanation of land redistribution to date, but its empirical strategy is necessarily constrained by its scope. The book is built primarily on an intensive, historically grounded analysis of Latin America, with global cases used illustratively rather than as part of a systematic cross-national design. Its quantitative component codes the extent of redistributive, negotiated, and colonisation reforms within Latin America from 1930 to 2008, while the broader global compilation of reforms is presented as a descriptive universe rather than an econometric dataset. This approach is entirely appropriate for the book's theoretical aims—tracing elite divisions, institutional constraints, and the political logic of redistribution—but it means that the field has lacked a global, country-year dataset capable of testing competing explanations of whether reform occurs and which type of reform governments choose.

The LRDD helps address this gap. It employs standardised coding rules, covers all developing regions, and distinguishes market- and state-oriented reforms in a manner that enables hypothesis testing across time and space. While Albertus provides the leading theoretical account of radical land redistribution, his empirical framework cannot adjudicate between alternative explanations at the global level. This study builds directly on his theoretical insights while extending the empirical foundations of the field by enabling systematic, cross-national analysis of the political, economic, and international drivers of land reform.

2.4 Definitions and Typologies

Given the diversity of land reform initiatives, this dataset classifies reforms into two categories: market-oriented (MO) and state-oriented (SO). These categories allow for systematic comparison across time and space. While many reforms fit clearly into one type, others exhibit characteristics of both, highlighting the spectrum between market-oriented and state-oriented models. The classification relies on key defining features, with greater weight given to criteria representing the core logic of each approach.

2.4.1 Coding rules

To ensure consistent classifications, each land reform episode was coded using three criteria: (1) ownership structure, (2) allocation mechanism and (3) price or compensation setting rules. These criteria form the foundation for distinguishing between Market-Oriented (MO) and State-Oriented (SO) land reform. They capture the practical operation of each episode, rather than relying solely on formal legal designations. An episode is classified as MO when ownership or long-term control lies with households or private actors, when beneficiaries obtain land or land-use rights through decentralised or voluntary processes, and when land values or compensation are set through market forces. Conversely, an episode is classified as SO when the state retains effective control over ownership, directs allocation administratively, and determines prices through political or bureaucratic mechanisms.

In some cases, the three criteria do not point in the same direction. When two criteria reflect market-based characteristics and one reflects state-based characteristics or vice versa, the episode is treated as a hybrid case. These hybrid cases are resolved by considering the dominant operational features of the reform, prioritising the strength of effective ownership rights, the degree of decentralisation in allocation, and the extent to which markets or administrative processes determine prices. For illustration, Vietnam's 1993 reform is coded as market-oriented because long-term, inheritable land-use rights were transferable at market prices despite formal state ownership. Additionally, Indonesia's 1960 reform is coded as state-oriented because the state-maintained ownership and allocation authority, however, market pricing for land and produce were used to determine prices before being altered by the state. While this classification captures core institutional differences, it necessarily simplifies more complex empirical realities and variation within categories remains an important avenue for future research.

2.4.2 Market-oriented land reform

Market-oriented reforms emphasise private property rights for new owners and the role of the market in determining land value and the value of production. These reforms are typically found in liberal or capitalist development contexts and aim to increase agricultural productivity and investment through secure land rights. A reform is classified as market-oriented if it satisfies three core elements: (1) individual ownership of land; (2) legal protection for property rights; and (3) voluntary market-based land transactions. There are other important supporting characteristics of market-oriented reform; however, these are not essential. These include market-determined prices, which are important but may coexist with some state involvement. They may also include the ability to buy and sell land and its produce internationally. An ideal example of a market-oriented reform is found in the reforms implemented in South Korea and Taiwan.

2.4.3 State-oriented land reform

State-oriented reforms are grounded in centralised control of land and agricultural production. They are typically implemented under socialist or authoritarian regimes, where land redistribution is used to consolidate state authority and restructure rural economies. A reform is classified as state-oriented if it meets three core characteristics: (1) state ownership of agricultural land; (2) direct state control over land use and allocation; and (3) state-determined prices for land and its produce. Other supporting but non-essential characteristics may include state-assigned labour for agricultural production, communal or collective farming structures (e.g., land leased to groups), and exclusive state control over legal ownership rights. Examples include North Korea, Vietnam's 1970 collectivisation reforms, Mozambique and Zimbabwe's post-1990 reforms.

The classification rules developed in this section form the basis for the dependent variables used in the remaining papers. In this section the initiation of market-oriented and state-oriented land reform episodes are analysed across the global sample.

2.5 Data Collection and Coding Process

The dataset captures various land reform characteristics across scope countries, including the existence of land reform, its frequency, the duration of reform episodes (in country-years), the rate of reform repetition and the type of reform (market-oriented or state-oriented). The identification and coding of these variables drew on a wide range of secondary sources, including academic journals, books, textbooks, government reports and reports from international organisations (IGOs).

For each country, the first step was an exhaustive review of academic journals such as *The Journal of Development Studies, The Journal of Development Economics, Journal of Agrarian Change, World Bank Research Observer, World Development, and Journal of Political Economy.* This was supplemented with detailed analysis of government and IGO reports, along with additional online library searches. Supporting documents provide a complete list of sources used for coding decisions. It is important to note that the availability and quality of sources varied across countries.

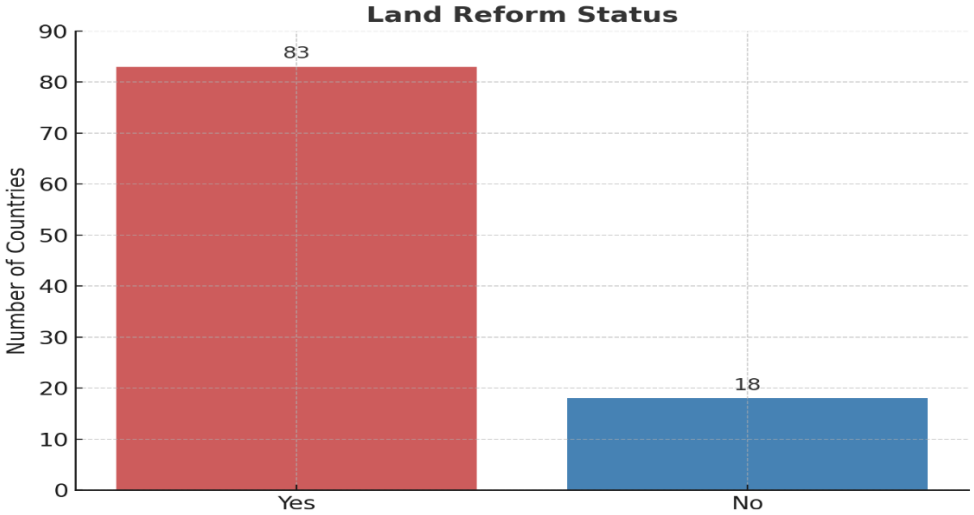
Coding decisions were made on a country-by-country basis. The first step was to determine whether land reform had occurred in a given country and, if so, to identify the number of reform attempts and the duration of each reform episode. Subsequently, the specific attributes of each reform were evaluated to classify them as market-oriented or state-oriented. These coding decisions were corroborated using multiple academic sources with preference given to the most recent sources to ensure accuracy and reflect the dataset's longitudinal scope. When sources disagreed, priority was given to the most recent peer-reviewed article and corroborated with government or IGO documentation.

2.6 Findings

2.6.1 The presence and prevalence of land reform

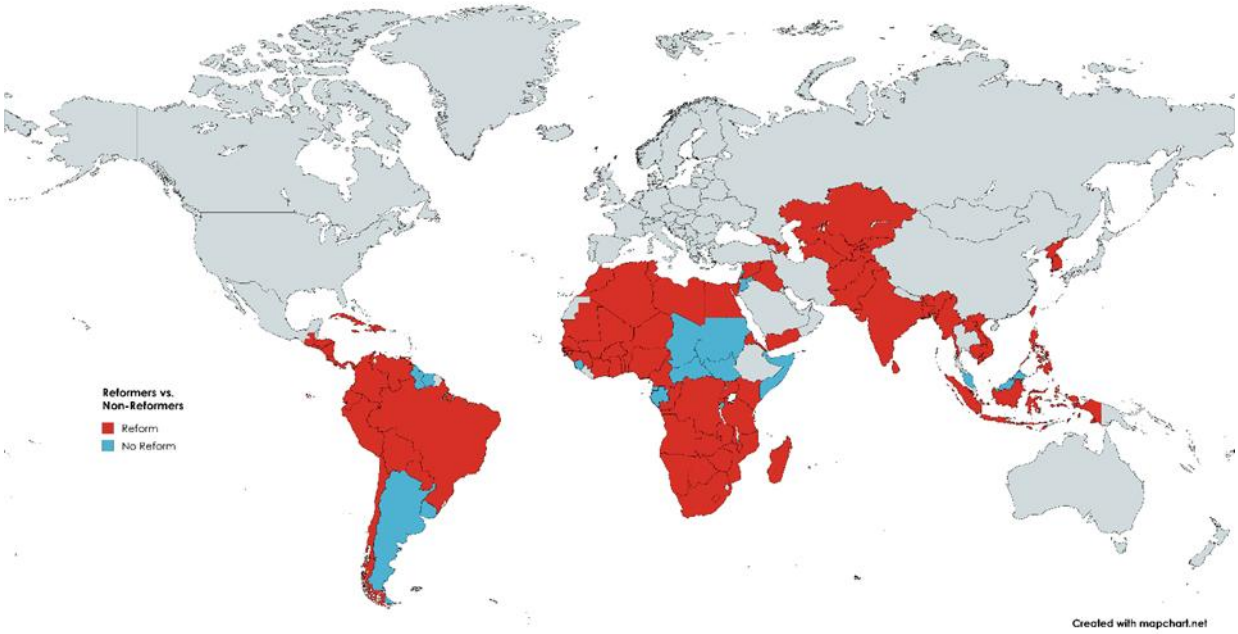
This section presents descriptive patterns of land reform across 101 countries. Figure 2 summarises the number of nations that have implemented land reform at least once compared to those that have not. Of the 101 countries in the sample, 83 have implemented land reform at least once, while 18 have not. This means that 82.2% of scope countries introduced land reform, while 17.8% did not. The reasons for non-reform remain unclear and represent an important avenue for future research. As shown in Figure 3, the majority of countries in the dataset attempted reform at least once.

Figure 2: Cross-National Land Reform Summary



Source: Author's own, based on The Land Reform Development Dataset (LRDD) (2025)

Figure 3: Reformers vs. Non-Reformers

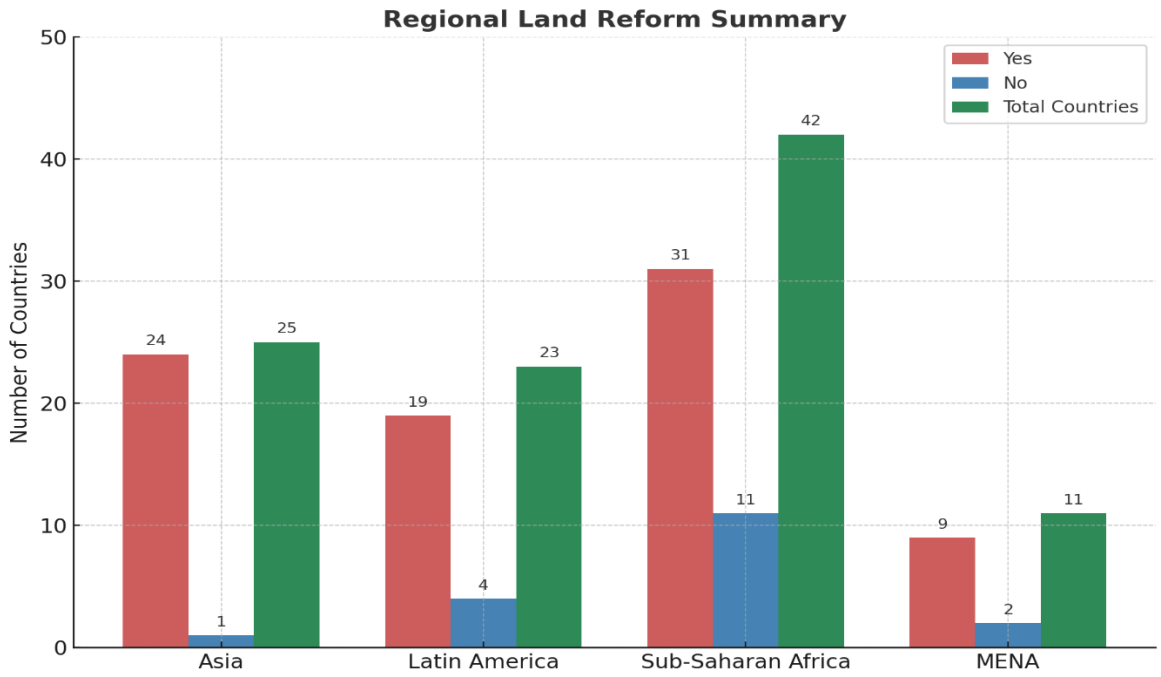


Source: Author's own, based on The Land Reform Development Dataset (LRDD) (2025)

2.6.2 Regional differences

This section examines regional variations in the implementation of land reform across Asia, Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Significant regional differences exist in both the number of countries that implemented land reform and the number of episodes identified. Figure 4 highlights these regional variations. Asia has the highest implementation rate, with 96.0% of countries introducing land reform. Malaysia is the only country in the region that has not redistributed land. Sub-Saharan Africa has the lowest implementation rate with 26.1% of countries (11 nations) never introducing land reform. Some of these countries include Sudan, South Sudan, Equatorial Guinea and Sierra Leone.

Figure 4: Regional Land Reform Summary



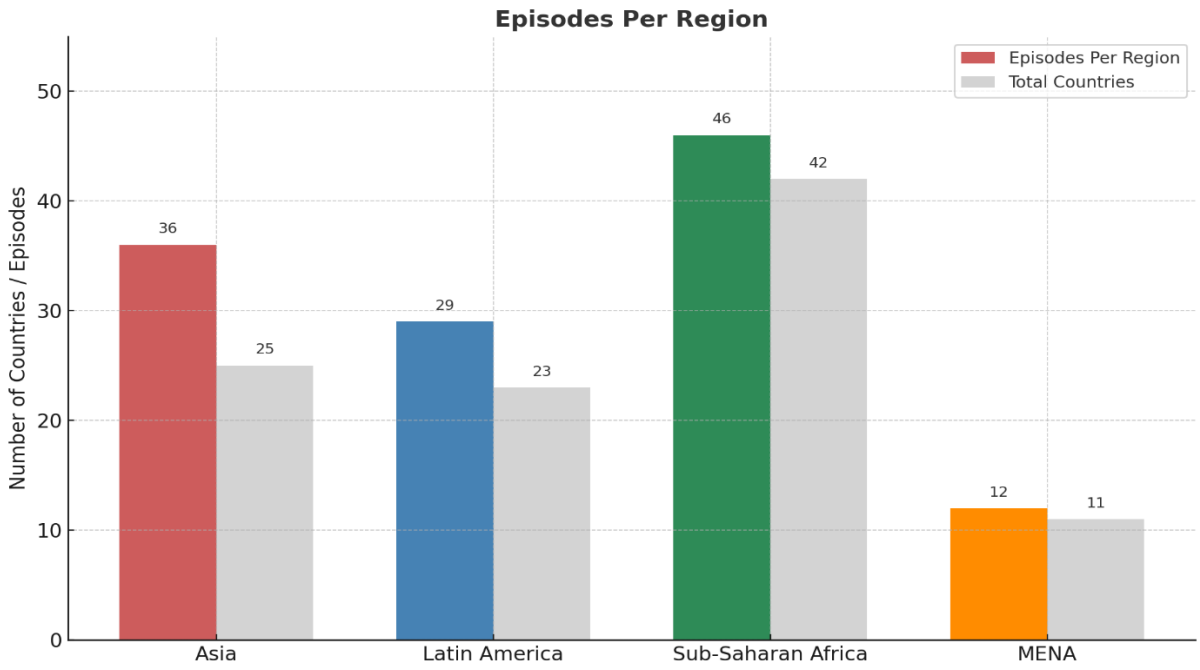
Source: Author's own, based on The Land Reform Development Dataset (LRDD) (2025)

Latin America and MENA show similar rates of implementation. In Latin America, 82.6% of countries carried out land reform, while 17.4% did not. The four nations that failed to redistribute land are Argentina, Guyana, Suriname and Uruguay. Similarly, in MENA, 81.8% of countries implemented land reform at least once, leaving 18.2% without any such redistributive initiatives. Non-reformers in MENA are Jordan and Lebanon. Figure 2 above provides a visual representation of the countries that have and have not introduced land reform within the scope of this study.

2.6.3 Land reform episodes by region

This subsection analyses the distribution of land reform episodes across regions, highlighting differences in frequency and geographic concentration. Results are shown in Figure 5. Sub-Saharan Africa leads in the number of reform episodes, with 46 identified across 31 countries. This represents 37.4% of all reform episodes. Several Sub-Saharan nations, including Mozambique (1975 & 1997), Ghana (1960 & 2004), Mali (1963 & 2000) and Burkina Faso (1984 & 1991) implemented more than one land reform initiative.

Figure 5: Land Reform Episodes by Region



Source: Author's own, based on The Land Reform Development Dataset (LRDD) (2025)

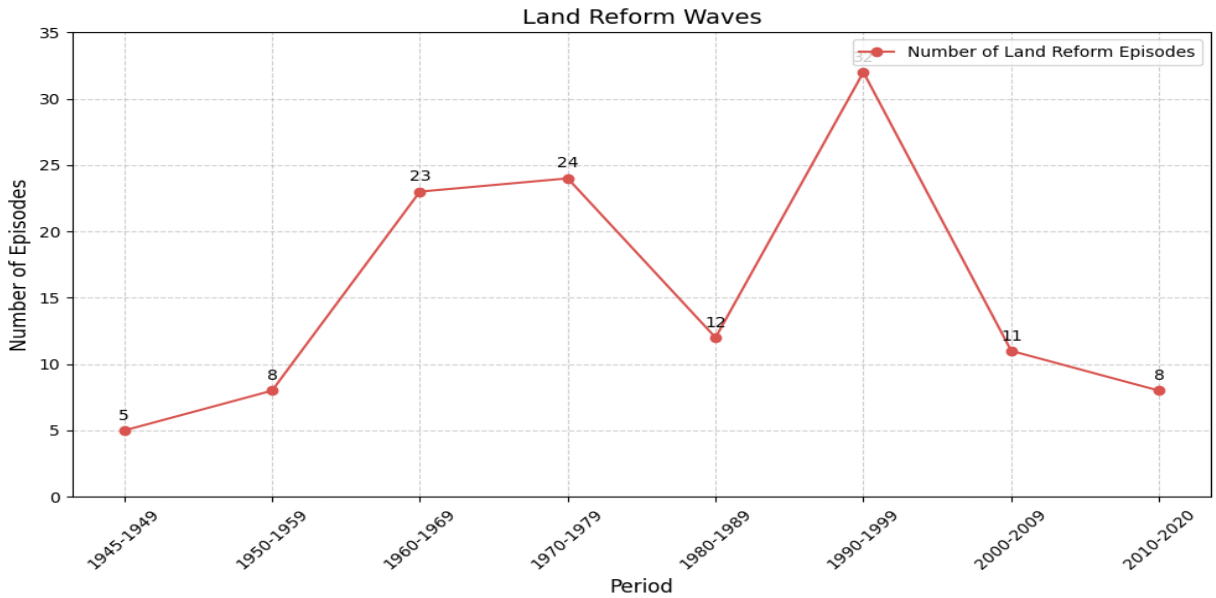
Asia accounts for 29.3% of all reform episodes, with 36 identified across 24 countries. Latin America follows with 23.6% of episodes, with 29 reforms implemented across 19 countries. MENA, the region with the fewest countries in the dataset, represents 9.6% of all episodes, with 12 episodes carried out across 9 countries. Nations that implemented multiple land reform episodes are analysed in greater detail in subsequent sections.

2.6.4 Temporal variations

The subsection presents the temporal distribution of land reform episodes across the study period. The dataset reveals two significant waves of land reform: the Decolonisation Wave (1960s-1970s) and the Post-Cold War Wave (1990s). Figure 6 illustrates these waves. The Decolonisation Wave coincided with independence movements in Asia and Africa, where new governments prioritised redistribution to address colonial inequality. The Post-Cold War

Wave, by contrast, reflected the global spread of liberal market policies and structural adjustment programs promoted by international organisations such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Figure 6: Land Reform Episodes Across Time



Source: Author's own, based on The Land Reform Development Dataset (LRDD) (2025)

The temporal clustering of reforms is evident, with reform intensity peaking in the 1960s and 1970s and again in the 1990s. Since the early 2000s, however, the number of new reform episodes declined sharply. This decline suggests that global momentum for land redistribution has slowed, possibly giving way to alternative approaches to rural development.

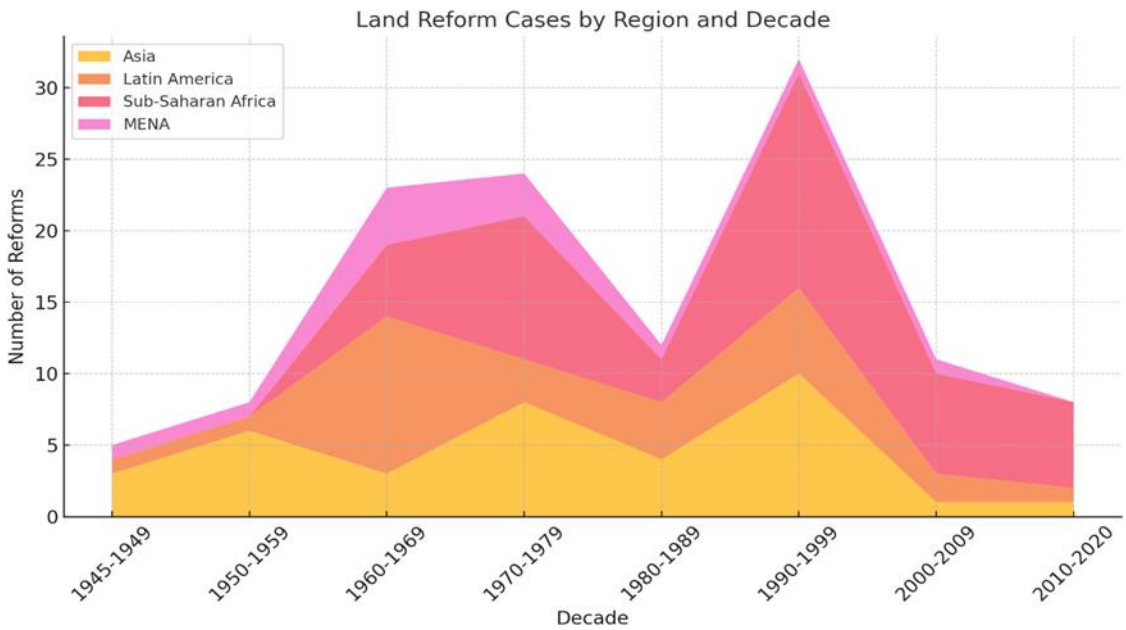
2.6.5 Temporal trends and regional variations

Figure 7 shows the regional and temporal distribution of land reform episodes. Land reform episodes from the 1940s and 1950s account for 10.6% of all reforms. These reforms were primarily implemented in Asia, with notable exceptions including Guatemala (1945), Israel (1948) and Egypt (1952). Sub-Saharan Africa did not experience any land reform episodes during these decades.

The Decolonisation Wave of land reform emerged during the 1960s and 1970s. These decades saw a sharp rise in the number of land reform episodes in Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa, which collectively introduced 47 episodes representing 38.2% of all reform episodes. The 1960s marked the only decade where Latin American reforms outpaced those other regions, with 11 reforms introduced. Some of these nations include Brazil (1961), Colombia (1961), Cuba (1963) and Panama (1969). These two decades also witnessed a

significant rise in land reform episodes in Sub-Saharan Africa, likely reflecting the efforts of newly independent states to address colonial injustices. The number of independent states in Sub-Saharan Africa increased significantly during these decades. Many African nations pursued land reform within the first few years of gaining independence, such as Tanzania (1961), Senegal (1964) and Benin (1972). The MENA region recorded its highest number of reforms in the 1960s (4 episodes) in Morocco (1960), Syria (1961), Tunisia (1962) and Libya (1969). Asia also increased from 5 to 8 episodes during these decades, some including Pakistan (1972), Cambodia (1975) and Vietnam (1976).

Figure 7: Land Reform Episodes Per Region and Decade



Source: Author's own, based on The Land Reform Development Dataset (LRDD) (2025)

After this surge of reforms in the 1960s and 1970s, the 1980s witnessed a sharp decline in reform activity, marking a trough in the global land reform implementation. This marked a trough following the first wave of reforms. Only 12 reforms were introduced globally—half the number of the previous decade. Asia and Latin America implemented 4 reform episodes each. Sub-Saharan Africa introduced 3 reforms in Zimbabwe (1980), Mauritania (1983) and Burkina Faso (1984), while only 1 was recorded in the MENA region in Algeria (1987).

Following the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the 1990s marked the Post-Cold War Wave of land reform, with a resurgence of reforms across Asia, Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa. MENA maintained the same number of reforms as the previous decade, Yemen (1990). A total of 32 episodes were implemented, accounting for 26.0% of all reforms, with Sub-Saharan Africa leading with 15 episodes. Asia introduced 10 reforms during this decade while Latin America recorded 6. This wave was influenced by the collapse of the Soviet Union, which led to reforms in newly independent states such as Uzbekistan (1992), Kyrgyzstan (1991), Kazakhstan (1993), and others. International

organisations such as the World Bank also increased their involvement in land redistribution and development programs. IOs played a more prominent role in financing and facilitating land reform programs in the developing world, especially in Africa (Deininger and Binswanger, 1999; Deininger, 2004; Bernstein, 2002).

The early 21st century saw a sharp decline in land reform episodes across all regions except MENA. The 2000s saw 11 reforms introduced globally accounting for 8.9% of all reform episodes. Sub-Saharan Africa recorded 7 reforms including Zimbabwe (2000), Angola (2004) and Madagascar (2005). Latin America introduced 2, Venezuela (2003) and Bolivia (2006), Asia just 1, Indonesia (2007); and MENA also 1, Israel (2009). In the final decade of the sample, the 2010s, only 8 reforms were introduced. This market the lowest implementation rate in land reform episodes since the 1950s. Sub-Saharan Africa recorded 6 reform episodes, while Asia and Latin America each introduced 1 each (Colombia, 2011 and Myanmar, 2012). No reforms were identified in MENA.

2.6.6 Duration of reform

This subsection evaluates the average duration of land reform episodes, considering both global trends and regional variations. Analysing the duration of reform episodes offers insight into the persistence and implementation timelines of these initiatives, as well as potential challenges that may impede the reform process. Figure 8 summarises the observed years by region, the duration of land reform episodes, and the average duration for each region.

Figure 8: Observed Years and Duration of Reform

Source: Author's own, based on The Land Reform Development Dataset (LRDD) (2025)

Across the 6,170 observed years in this dataset, land reform was active in 1,497 years, resulting in an average episode duration of 11.6 years. This demonstrates the long-term nature of land reform initiatives, which often require extended periods to achieve intended outcomes, whether market-oriented or state-oriented.

Sub-Saharan Africa stands out with the longest average land reform episode duration at 15.3 years. This is significantly higher than the global average and may reflect challenges such as large-scale land inequality, complex colonial legacies or political and institutional barriers. In the remaining regions, Asia and Latin America had an average reform duration of 10.3 years while MENA recorded 10.6 years.

2.6.7 Types of reform

This subsection examines the ideological composition of land reform episodes, distinguishing between market-oriented (MO) and state-oriented (SO) approaches. Of the 123 reform episodes identified in the LRDD, a total of 86 land reform episodes were categorised as MO, accounting for 69.9% of all reforms. SO reforms make up the remaining 37 episodes, representing 30.1% of all reforms.

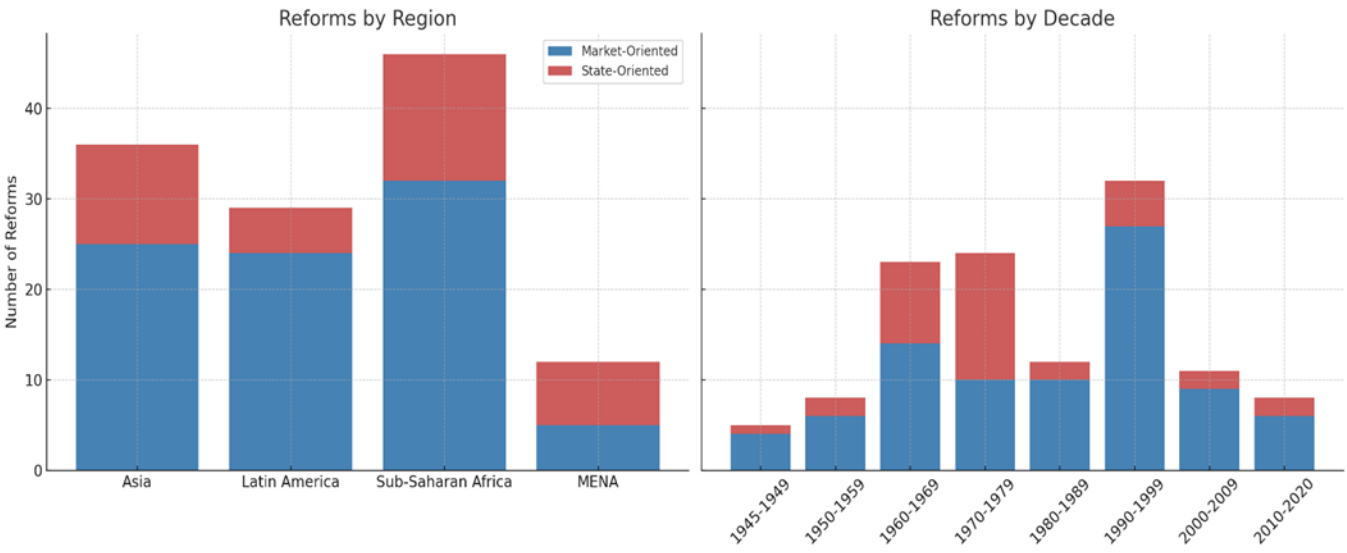
2.6.7.1 Regional and temporal variations

Regional and temporal variations in the types of reform are shown in Figure 9. Latin America exhibits the highest proportion of MO reforms at 82.2%. Only 17.2% of reforms are SO—the lowest among all regions. MENA is the only region where SO reforms outnumber MO at 58.3%. This reflects the region's unique socio-political and economic contexts. Both Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa show a similar balance between MO and SO reforms, with 69-70% MO and 30-31% SO.

The 1940s sample marks the early post-war years, when reforms were sparse and limited in scope. A total of 5 reforms were introduced in this period. MO reforms account for 4.6% of all MO reforms and 3.3% of the total reforms. These reforms were introduced in South Korea (1948), Guatemala (1945), Israel (1948) and Taiwan (1949). One SO episode was identified in North Korea (1948), representing 2.7% of all SO reforms and 0.8% of all total reforms.

The 1950s saw a gradual uptake in reforms. A total of 8 reforms were introduced during this decade. Six of these were MO, accounting for 7.0% of all MO reforms and 4.9% of total reforms. The remaining 2 SO reforms accounted for 5.4% of SO reforms and 1.6% of total reforms. These were introduced in Egypt (1952) and North Vietnam (1954) The increase in reforms corresponds with the growing wave of decolonisation, particularly in Asia and Africa where newly independent states began experimenting with land policies.

Figure 9: Types of Reform by Region and Decade



Source: Author's own, based on The Land Reform Development Dataset (LRDD) (2025)

The first wave of land reform, the Decolonisation Wave, began in the 1960s and continued into the 1970s. The 1960s saw a sharp rise in both types of reform, coinciding with the momentum of independence movement and socio-economic restructuring. Of the total 23 episodes introduced in the 1960s, 14 are categorised as MO and 9 episodes categorised as SO. Some MO reforms include the Philippines (1963), the Dominican Republic (1966) and Peru (1969). While select SO reforms were introduced in Cuba (1963), Myanmar (1964) and Libya (1969). This decade accounted for 24.3% of all SO reforms but only 16.3% of MO reforms. SO reforms gained significant traction as governments in Asia, Africa, and MENA increasingly adopted interventionist policies. The decade reflects the ideological conflict of the Cold War between market capitalism and state socialism.

Continuing the first wave, the 1970s was the only decade when SO reforms were dominant. Of the 24 episodes identified in this decade, 10 were MO and 14 were SO. These 14 SO reforms accounted for 37.8% of all SO reforms. The rise of socialist-inspired reforms in Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, and MENA reflected a global ideological shift toward state control. Notably, all reforms in Latin America during this decade were MO, contradicting global regional trends.

The 1980s saw a sharp decline in the number of reforms introduced. A total of 12 episodes were introduced in this decade with 10 being categorised as MO and 2 categorised as SO (El Salvador, 1980 and Nicaragua 1981). The sharp decline in SO reforms likely reflects the waning influence of socialist ideologies and the economic crises faced by many interventionist regimes. MO reforms maintained a modest presence, with all reforms in MENA and Asia categorised as market-oriented including Algeria (1987), the Philippines (1988) and Indonesia (1988).

The 1990s marked the second wave of land reform, the Post-Cold War Wave and also the peak of MO reforms. Nearly one-third of all MO reforms occurred in this decade. A total of 32 reforms were introduced during this decade. MO reforms accounted for 27 of these episodes or 31.4% of all MO reforms. Some of the MO reforms introduced in this wave include Niger (1993), South Africa (1994), Zambia (1995) and Guinea-Bissau (1998). The remaining episodes were categorised as SO accounting for 13.5% of all SO reforms. The surge in MO reforms aligned with the global shift toward neoliberal economic policies following the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Contrary to expectations, SO reforms did not disappear entirely indicating continued reliance on state intervention in specific contexts, however, on a smaller scale. SO reforms were introduced in Yemen (1991), Laos (1992), Uzbekistan (1992) Zimbabwe (1992) and Eritrea (1994).

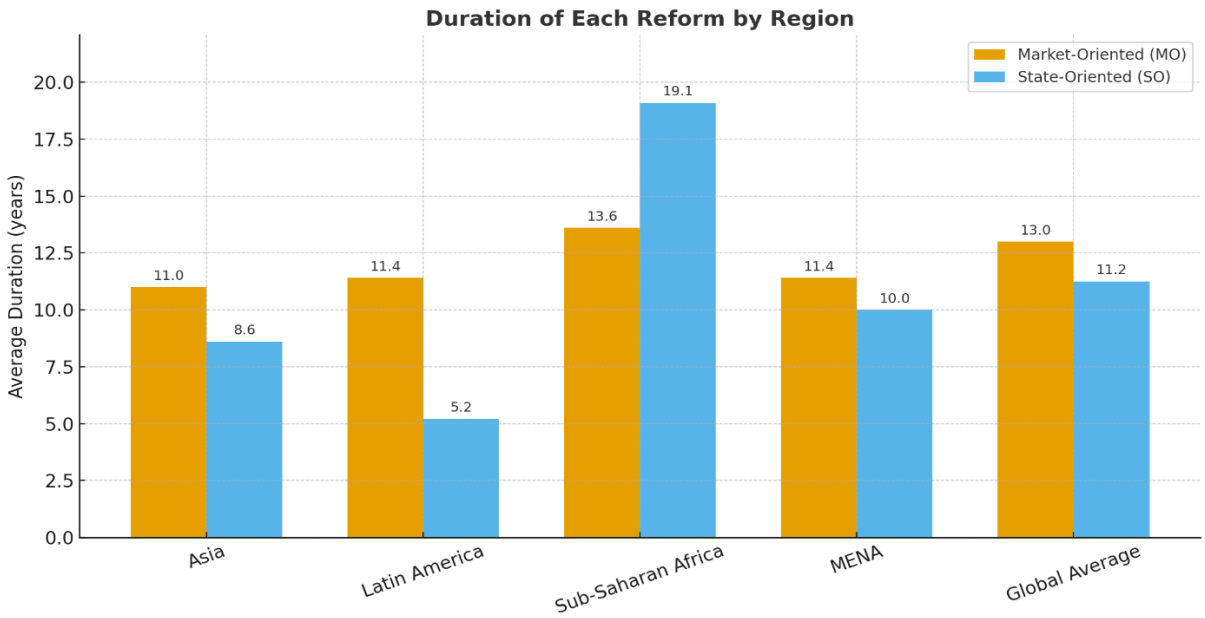
The 2000s recorded a significant decline in land reform. MO reforms fell to 9 episodes in this decade while SO reforms declined to 2. These account for 8.9% of all reforms. The dominance of MO reforms persisted though their frequency diminished compared to the previous decade. Reforms include Ghana (2004), Rwanda (2005) and Indonesia (2007). The final observed decade, the 2010s, saw a further decline in MO reforms while SO reforms remained at 2 (DRC and Republic of Congo both in 2012), the same as the previous decade. Six MO episodes were introduced accounting for 7.0% of all MO reforms and 4.9% of total reforms. This decade reflects an overall retreat from large-scale land reform initiatives, potentially due to the rise of other development priorities such as urbanisation and climate change.

2.6.7.2 Duration of reform types

There are significant variations in the duration of land reform episodes between market-oriented and state-oriented reforms across regions. Globally, MO reforms tended to last longer, averaging 13 years per episode compared to 11.25 years for SO reforms. This pattern suggests that MO reforms may benefits from more stable implementation processes or more supportive institutional frameworks.

Regional analysis highlights notable disparities. Sub-Saharan Africa recorded the longest average duration for both types of reform, with MO reforms lasting 13.6 years and SO reforms averaging an even longer 19.1 years. This region is unique in having SO reforms outlast MO reforms possibly linked to the complexity of redistribution process or state capacity.

Figure 10: Duration of each reform by region



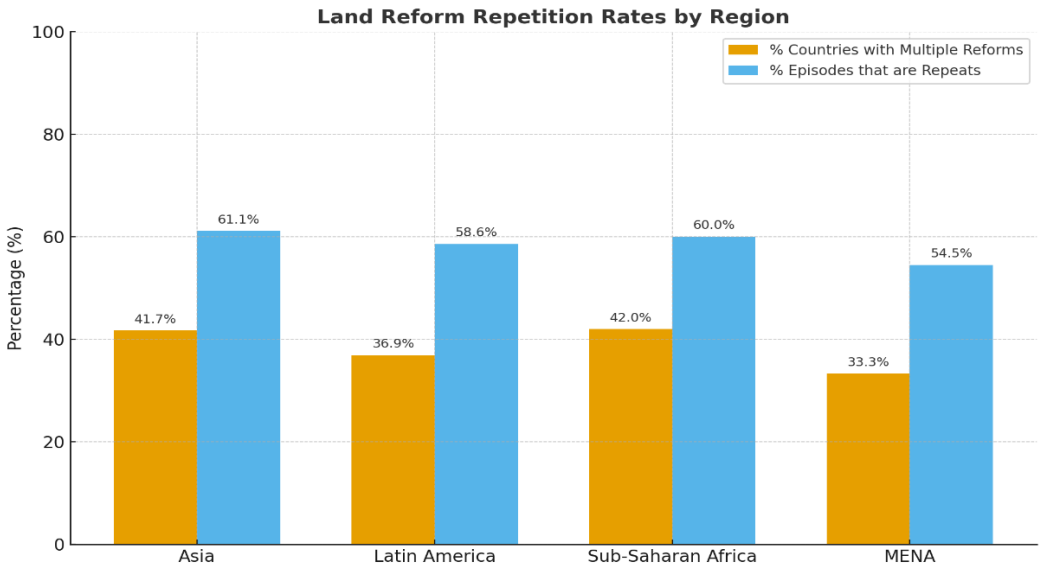
Source: Author's own, based on The Land Reform Development Dataset (LRDD) (2025)

In contrast, Latin America recorded the shortest duration for SO reforms, averaging 5.2 years compared to 11.4 years for MO reforms. This disparity suggests resistance to government-led redistribution. In Asia and MENA, the duration of both reform types was relatively similar. In Asia, MO reforms average 11 years, while SO reforms were slightly shorter at 8.6 years. Similarly, in MENA, MO reforms lasted 11.4 years compared to 10 years for SO reforms. These figures suggest that in these regions, the choice of reform type did not significantly affect the implementation timeline.

2.6.8 Land reform repetition

This subsection examines the frequency of repeated land reform episodes across regions, identifying countries with multiple reform attempts. Figures 11 and 12 illustrate the number of countries with multiple reforms episodes, the total number of repeated episodes and the share of repeated episodes relative to each region.

Figure 11: Land reform repetition rates by region

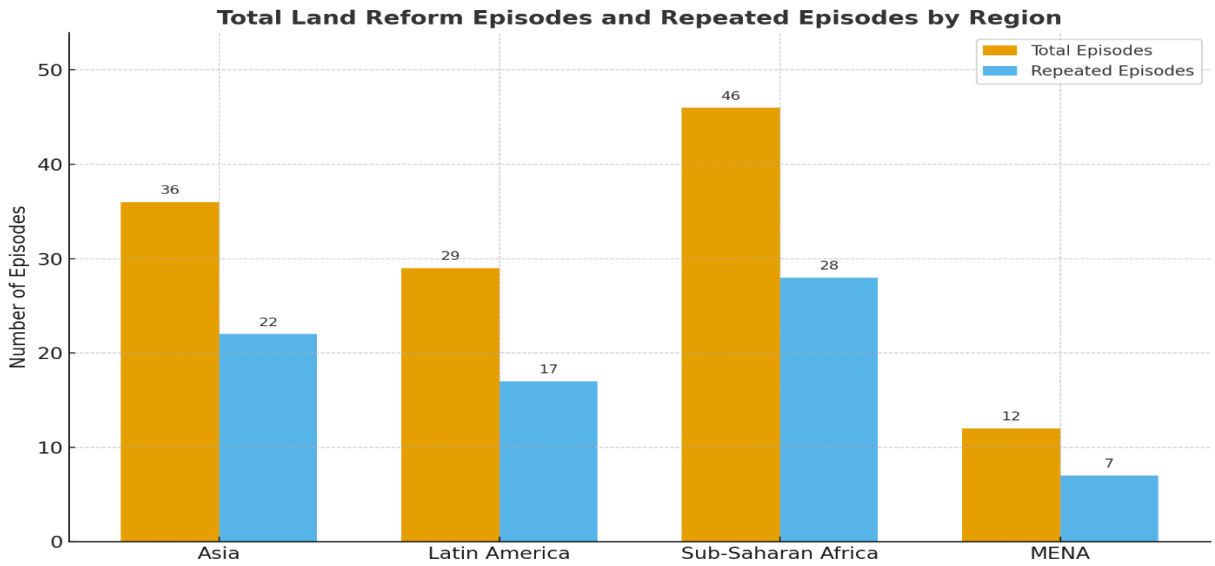


Source: Author's own, based on The Land Reform Development Dataset (LRDD) (2025)

Of the 123 land reform episodes identified in this dataset, 50 were stand-alone attempts. These were reforms introduced in countries that attempted land reform only once. The remaining 73 episodes occurred in 33 countries that attempted land reform multiple times. No country in the dataset attempted land reform more than three times.

Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa recorded the highest rates of repetition. In Asia, 41.7% of reforming countries attempted land reform more than once, with repeated episodes accounting for 61.1% of all reforms in the region. Similarly, in Sub-Saharan Africa, 42.0% of reforming countries introduced more than one reform episode, contributing 60.0% of the region's total episodes.

Figure 12: Total land reform episodes and repeated episodes by region



Source: Author's own, based on The Land Reform Development Dataset (LRDD) (2025)

Latin America recorded a slightly lower repetition rate, with 36.9% of reforming countries introducing more than one reform. These repeated episodes represented 58.6% of the region's total reforms MENA had the lowest repetition rate with only three countries (Israel, Yemen and Algeria) introducing multiple reform episodes. These 54.5% of the region's total reforms.

2.7 Conclusion and Discussion

This paper presents the Land Reform Development Dataset (LRDD), which enhances our understanding of the developing world through its descriptive statistics and highlights areas for future revision. The dataset encompasses land reform episodes in 101 developing and postcolonial country contexts, covering the period 1945-2020. Land reform occurred in 83 nations, while 18 did not engage in such practices. The data catalogued and characterised 123 land reform episodes comprising 86 market-oriented and 37 state-oriented. On average, episodes lasted 11.6 years, and two distinct waves of reform were observed, highlighting both temporal and regional variations. The LRDD provides a foundation for analysing land reform as a political institution shaped by the interaction of domestic structures, ideological commitments and international influences.

The findings shown here tie directly to broader debates in comparative political economy and development studies. The identification of two waves of land reform reflects both temporal clustering and shifting global ideological patterns: decolonisation and the Cold War on the

one hand, and neoliberal restructuring after the 1990s on the other. The prevalence of repeated reform episodes, particularly in Africa and Asia, highlights the enduring salience of land redistribution as both a policy tool and a political strategy. Variation in reform duration and type underscores the central role of state capacity and institutional design in shaping outcomes. By grounding these debates in systematic cross-national evidence, the LRDD bridges richly detailed case studies with broader theoretical claims about land, inequality, and development trajectories.

The dataset not only catalogues these descriptive statistics but also opens avenues for deeper exploration into the drivers of land reform. Unequal land distribution in former colonies highlights the need to explore why some nations embrace land reform while others did not. Was reform driven by domestic socio-economic pressures, international factors or ideological commitments? Or did external and internal opposition hinder redistributive efforts? The dataset equips researchers to address these questions, potentially revealing broader insights into the geopolitics of the post-war period.

A significant contribution of this dataset lies in its emphasis on the heterogeneity of land reform strategies and outcomes. It underscores how redistribution policies differ in terms of beneficiaries, property rights, and methods of implementation. For example, in South Korea, Taiwan, and Colombia, land reform granted permanent ownership rights reinforced by national legal frameworks. In contrast, countries such as Libya, Cuba, and Zimbabwe adopted state-centric models in which land remained under government control and tenants were granted communal leases. These differences reflect contrasting ideological and governance models that shaped not only the reforms themselves but also their broader economic, social, and political outcomes.

The dataset's distinction between market-oriented and state-oriented reforms is particularly valuable for assessing outcomes. By enabling comparisons across reform types and regions, researchers can investigate which approach fosters economic growth, equity and social justice. For example, market-oriented reforms might be more aligned with global economic systems, while state-oriented reforms could prioritise rapid redistribution at the expense of market stability. Understanding these trade-offs is essential for crafting effective policies in the future.

Like any large-N dataset, the LRDD is not without its limitations. Coding decisions rely on secondary sources, which vary in availability, reliability and depth across nations and periods. Some reform episodes may therefore be underreported or characterised differently depending on the source base. The reliance on GDP per capita (rather than GNI) for country development classifications, while necessary for historical consistency, also introduces a degree of measurement constraint. Moreover, the binary typology of MO versus SO reforms, though analytically useful, may oversimplify hybrid cases that incorporated elements of both approaches. These limitations should be borne in mind when interpreting findings and point to avenues for future refinement of the dataset.

In sum, the LRDD represents the most comprehensive dataset to date, offering a vital foundation for cross-national study of land reform and development. This is a critical

resource for scholars, policymakers and political economists. Its detailed characterisation of land reform episodes provides a foundation for exploring both the causes and consequences of reform. As researchers delve into the dataset, they may uncover patterns and lessons that not only enhance our understanding of historical land reform efforts but also guide contemporary debates on addressing land inequality in developing nations.

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Chapter 3: What are the ideological and domestic determinants of land reform?

Stuart Bagnall

Abstract

Why do countries implement land reform? Despite its prevalence and significance, this question has rarely been tested systematically or empirically. Drawing on an original dataset–the Land Reform Development Dataset (LRDD)–covering 101 postcolonial, developing countries from 1945 to 2020, this paper distinguishes between general, market-oriented and state-oriented land reform. Logistic regression models test hypotheses on economic development, regime type, government ideology and international alignments. The results show that land reform is more likely in poorer economies; that state-oriented reforms are strongly associated with left-leaning executives; and that market-oriented reforms are consistently linked to Official Development Assistance (ODA) and democracy, especially during the post-Cold War era. Other factors, such as U.S. military alliances during the Cold War and G77 membership, also appear influential but vary across contexts. These findings highlight the interplay between domestic ideology and international political–economic pressures, with implications for both scholarship on land reform and strategies of international donors.

Keywords: Land Reform, Development, Dataset, Agrarian Reform, International Relations

3.1 Introduction

What drives land reform? In the decades following the Second World War, many newly independent states embarked on land reform initiatives aimed at transforming patterns of land ownership, use and tenure systems inherited from colonial rulers. However, a substantial number of newly independent states did not. Despite land reform's widely recognised potential as a tool for socio-economic transformation, there is no widely accepted, generalisable explanation for when and why land reform occurs or why it takes different forms.

Existing research faces two primary challenges. Firstly, the literature relies heavily on case studies, often focusing on a single country or a small number of cases. Secondly, there is a lack of conceptual consistency in defining land reform. While case studies offer valuable context-specific insights, their methodological limitations hinder the development of generalisable, cross-national explanations for the timing, scope, and the type of land reform.

A review of the case study literature points to three broad motivations for land reform: (1) ideological drivers, both domestic (such as partisan preferences) and international (especially

Cold War–era political–economic alignments); (2) attempts to address colonial land injustices; and (3) developmental goals aimed at reducing poverty and inequality (Adams, 2000; Borgogno, Rekers & Waligore, 2019; Boudreaux and Bradley, 2016; Deininger, Jin, & Nagarajan, 2009; Besley & Burgess, 2000; Bo, 2013; Dore, 2013). While the first explanation lends itself more readily to comparative testing, the second and third are more difficult to operationalise empirically, owing to challenges in measuring colonial injustice or identifying thresholds of poverty and inequality that might trigger reform.

This paper addresses these gaps using the Land Reform Development Dataset (LRDD), a novel, cross-national dataset covering 101 postcolonial, developing countries across Asia, Africa and Latin America from 1945 to 2020. All countries within the dataset have populations exceeding 500,000. Land reform is defined as state-led intervention aimed at altering land ownership, use, or distribution, implemented through formal mechanisms such as legislation, executive decree, or regulation, and facilitating legal land redistribution or transfer. Using this data, the study conducts one of the first large-N statistical analysis of the domestic and international ideological drivers of land reform. It also explores variations over time, comparing the Cold War and post-Cold War eras—and across world regions to uncover broader patterns and asymmetries in reform trajectories.

The analysis finds that ODA and democracy are the strongest predictors of market-oriented reforms, while left-leaning executives are strongly associated with state-oriented reforms. These effects are particularly robust in the post-Cold War era and in the Latin American and Sub-Saharan African sub-samples. GDP per capita is generally negatively associated with land reform, though effects vary across reform type and period. Other factors—including U.S. alliances during the Cold War and G77 membership—appear influential but inconsistently so.

This paper makes several contributions to the study of land reform and international political economy. Firstly, it offers the first cross-national quantitative analysis of land reform's determinants, addressing a longstanding empirical gap in a literature historically dominated by qualitative research. Secondly, it sheds light on the role of ideological competition, especially during the Cold War, in shaping redistributive policies in the developing world. Finally, it provides insight into how developing states navigate domestic and international pressure in designing and implementing land reform.

This paper is structured as follows. The next section reviews the relevant literature, outlining gaps in the literature and examining the drivers of land reform. Section three develops the theoretical framework and derives testable hypotheses regarding international and domestic ideological determinants of land reform. Section four outlines the research design, including scope conditions, variable definitions, and modelling strategies. Section five presents empirical results, disaggregated by time period (full sample; Cold War and post-Cold War) and by world region (Asia, Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the Middle East and North Africa). The final section discusses the broader implications of the findings for theories of development, political economy, and international relations.

3.2 Literature Review

This section reviews existing research on land reform, identifying two major obstacles that have hindered systematic, cross-national inquiry: (1) inconsistent definitions of land reform and (2) an overreliance on qualitative, limited case studies. It then examines three central motives for land reform identified in the literature: correcting colonial injustices, promoting development, and responding to ideological pressures. While these motivations find support in case studies, their broader comparative generalisation remains underexplored. This chapter addresses these limitations by drawing on the Land Reform Development Dataset (LRDD), the first cross-national dataset capable of systematically distinguishing land reform type across time and regions.

3.2.1 Conceptual inconsistency in land reform definitions

A persistent challenge in the land reform literature is the lack of a unified conceptual framework. Across disciplines and contexts, the term "land reform" has been applied to a wide array of interventions, including land redistribution, land titling reform, restructuring of land markets, agricultural investment schemes, gender equity in land ownership, and environmentally driven land governance (Agarwal, 1994; Deere & León, 2001; Razavi, 2009, 2013; Fairhead, Leach, & Scoones, 2012; Boyce, Rosset, & Stanton, 2005). This definitional pluralism has impeded comparative research and obstructed the construction of consistent datasets. As Adams (2000) notes, this inconsistency has long obstructed the development of a systematic, theory-testing research on land reform. The LRDD resolves this issue by adopting a clear operational definition which enables consistent coding across 101 postcolonial countries.

3.2.2 Overreliance on case studies

A second limitation is the literature's reliance on qualitative case studies, often focusing on a single country or a small group of cases. While such studies provide valuable in-depth insights into political and institutional contexts shaping reform outcomes, they rarely allow for broadly generalisable conclusions or the identification of macro-level drivers. Consequently, broader political, economic, and ideological factors influencing land reform remain understudied from a cross-national perspective.

3.2.3 Why do countries introduce land reform?

Although no comprehensive empirical theory currently explains global variation in land reform, three primary motivations recur across the literature: (1) correcting historical injustices stemming from colonial rule; (2) reducing poverty and promoting economic

growth; and (3) responding to ideological forces, both international and domestic. While these categories are not mutually exclusive, they provide a useful typology for organising existing literature.

3.2.3.1 Correcting colonial injustices

One of the most frequently cited justifications for land reform is the desire to address the legacies of colonial tenure systems. Under colonial rule, land was often expropriated by foreign settlers or companies, creating highly unequal systems of ownership that excluded indigenous populations. In the post-independence era, land reform was often framed as a moral and political imperative to rectify these legacies. Countries such as India, Zimbabwe, Cuba, Kenya, and both Koreas have undertaken reforms with explicit references to their colonial histories (İşcan, 2018; Bo, 2013; Joshi, 1974; Gayoso, 1970; Studwell, 2018).

Empirically establishing this link, however, is methodologically difficult. There is no clear threshold of land inequality or dispossession that determines the likelihood of reform, even among countries with similar colonial experiences. Historical data on land tenure systems are often incomplete, contested or unavailable. Policy justifications were often framed in ambiguous terms, making it difficult to determine whether reform was genuinely motivated by social justice or whether such framing merely served as a political rationale. Notably, of the 101 postcolonial countries in the LRDD, only 83 implemented land reform despite their shared experience of colonial rule, suggesting that colonial history alone cannot explain the presence or absence of reform.

3.2.3.2 Reducing poverty and promoting development

A second rationale emphasises reform as a developmental tool for reducing poverty and boosting agricultural productivity. Scholars such as Besley and Burgess (2000), El-Ghonemy (2006), Lipton (2009) and King (2019) argue that redistributive land policies can improve rural livelihoods and generate long-term macroeconomic benefits, particularly in agrarian societies where land is the primary productive asset. Empirical examples include South Korea, Taiwan, Bolivia, Chile and India, where reforms have been credited with boosting agricultural output and reducing poverty (Bo, 2013; You, 2014; İşcan, 2018; Clark, 1968; Deininger, Jin, & Nagarajan, 2009).

However, as Studwell (2013) notes, in the early post-war period there was no empirical evidence linking land reform to economic growth, and many governments implemented reforms without reliable poverty data or robust indicators of policy success. Furthermore, few reforms were accompanied by clearly articulated developmental metrics, complicating efforts to determine whether poverty alleviation was a primary motivation or a post hoc justification. The wide variation in outcomes—from successful reforms to poorly implemented or regressive programs—suggests that developmental objectives alone cannot explain the timing or type of land reform.

3.2.4 Ideological determinants

3.2.4.1 International ideological determinants

A prominent explanation in the comparative literature attributes land reform to both domestic and international ideological factors. During the Cold War, land reform emerged as a key site of ideological contestation between the United States and the Soviet Union, each promoting their own economic and political models. The United States promoted land reform in South Korea, Japan, Guatemala, Taiwan, Colombia and Israel as part of its broader anti-communist development strategy (İşcan, 2018; Bo, 2013; Dore, 2013; Findley, 1972; Melville & Melville, 1971). These reforms often combined technical assistance with military support and financial aid. In contrast, the USSR supported redistributive reforms in Cuba, North Korea, and Syria, aiming to dismantle capitalist property relations and consolidate socialist governance (Lee, 1963; Jeon & Kim, 2000; Dikötter, 2018; Keilany, 1980).

Aid conditionality is a crucial mechanism linking international influence to reform. From the late 1970s onwards, the World Bank, IMF, and bilateral donors increasingly tied financial assistance to the adoption of structural adjustment programs and liberalising reforms (Mosley, Harrigan, & Toye, 1995; Killick, 1998). Countries strategically aligned with the West, or those facing financial crises, were especially subject to such conditions (Vreeland, 2003; Dreher, 2009). For example, higher aid inflows often coincided with donor leverage, where support was conditional on market-oriented policies such as land titling, compensation programs, and liberalised tenure systems. As Stiglitz (2002) notes, these programs reflected a broader ideological commitment to market-based development within international financial institutions. After the Cold War, international organisations such as the UN, World Bank, and OECD played an even greater role in promoting land reform, particularly in Africa and Latin America, advancing reforms aimed at formalising property rights and liberalising land markets (Akram-Lodhi, 2007; Collins & Mitchell, 2018). In contrast, coalitions such as the G77 and the Non-Aligned Movement advocated more redistributionist approaches (Pereira & Almeida, 2022). These dynamics show that aid operates not merely as a financial transfer but as a vehicle of ideological influence, embedding recipients in the political and policy priorities of international donors.

3.2.4.2 Domestic ideological and political determinants

While international ideologies are clearly influential, other scholars emphasise the importance of domestic political context. The ideology of domestic state actors, especially the executive, influences the emergence of land reform. Left-leaning governments are more likely to pursue redistributive policies, including land reform, as part of broader ideological commitments to social justice and economic equality (Albertus, 2015; Barraclough, 1999). Democratic regimes may also be more responsive to mass demands for reform, and thus more likely to introduce land policies aimed at rural constituents. Authoritarian regimes have often

implemented land reform as a means of consolidating political control, undercutting rival elites, and securing regime legitimacy (De Janvry, 1981).

These dynamics suggest that land reform often emerges from the intersection of domestic ideologies, political considerations, and international pressure. For example, a leftist government aligned with socialist principles may pursue reform independently of superpower alignment, while a centrist or authoritarian regime may adopt land reform under pressure from international donors or security concerns. The Cold War exemplified this interplay, as domestic and international ideologies converged to shape reform trajectories. While the geopolitical context has changed, similar dynamics persist in the post-Cold War era, with international organisations and global governance structures increasingly influencing domestic policy choices.

Although Albertus's Autocracy and Redistribution (2015) provides the most influential political explanation of land redistribution, its empirical scope is necessarily limited. His quantitative analysis focuses primarily on Latin America and global cases are used illustratively rather than to test theory systematically. As a result, important questions remain about whether the political dynamics he identifies—elite divisions, ideological commitments and coalition incentives—operate similarly across regions and historical contexts.

The present study builds on these insights but addresses this empirical gap by providing the first global, country-year test of the determinants of reform. Using the LRDD, the analysis evaluates whether the political and international drivers highlighted in case study research generalise to a wider developing world and whether they explain the variation between market-oriented and state-oriented reform.

3.3 Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses

Understanding why states pursue land reform—and the form such reforms take—requires an integrative theoretical framework that accounts for economic conditions, geopolitical alignments and ideological preferences. This section develops three hypotheses grounded in the literature on development, regime type and international influences and informed by cross-national patterns observed in the LRDD. Each hypothesis is grounded in existing theory and tested using variables derived form the LRDD and related datasets.

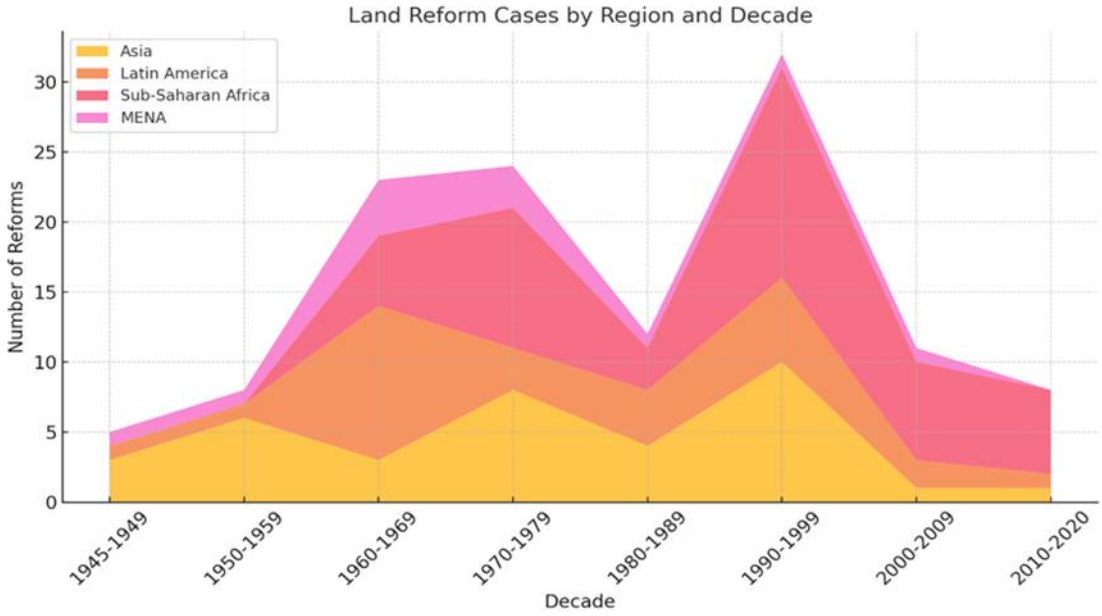
3.3.1 The Land Reform Development Dataset (LRDD)

The LRDD records 123 episodes of land reform in 101 developing countries between 1945 and 2020, classifying them into two categories: market-oriented and state-oriented. Market-oriented reforms involve redistribution through legal, administrative, and market mechanisms (e.g., compensation to landowners, voluntary transfers, titling programs). State-oriented

reforms involve expropriation without compensation, collectivisation, and state-administered allocation.

The dataset highlights clear temporal and regional patterns (Figure 1). Two major waves stand out: the Decolonisation Wave (1960s–1970s) and the Post–Cold War Wave (1990s) (Bagnall, 2025). These coincided with major geopolitical and ideological shifts.

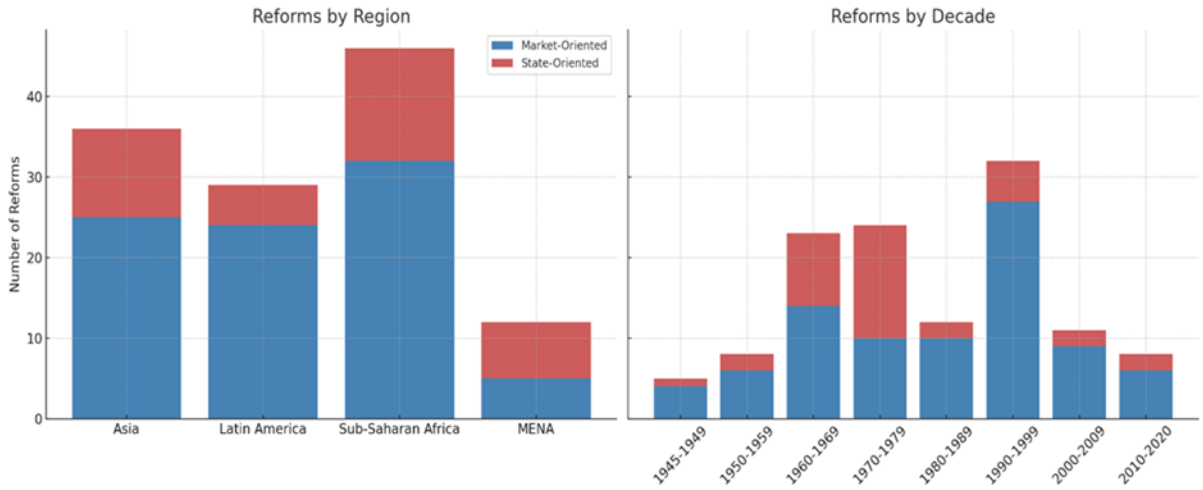
Figure 1: Land Reform Episodes Per Region and Decade



Source: Author's own, based on The Land Reform Development Dataset (LRDD) (2025).

It also reveals typological variation across space and time (Figure 2). Of the 123 reforms, 86 were market-oriented and 37 state-oriented. Market-based reforms dominate in Asia, Latin America, and Sub-Saharan Africa, while state-led reforms are more common in the Middle East and North Africa. Over time, market reforms became more prevalent in every decade except the 1970s, when state-led reforms peaked during decolonisation.

Figure 2: Types of Reform by Region and Decade



Source: Author's own, based on The Land Reform Development Dataset (LRDD) (2025).

These descriptive patterns suggest that land reform responds to shifting political, economic, and geopolitical conditions. The following subsections outline three hypotheses to explain when reforms occur and what form they take.

3.3.2 Hypothesis 1: General likelihood of land reform

Land reform is often theorised as a developmental response to agrarian underdevelopment, particularly in economies lacking the resources or infrastructure to industrialise. Such states typically have abundant arable land and large rural populations which may incentivise redistribution. Scholars such as El-Ghonemy (2006), Lipton (2009), King (2019), and Albertus (2018) argue that in low-income countries, land reform can reduce poverty, raise agricultural productivity, and generate revenues to support industrialisation and social spending. Politically, economic hardship intensifies demands for reform and weakens elite legitimacy, especially in unequal agrarian societies where redistribution may consolidate rural support or stabilise regimes.

The LRDD shows that reforms clustered in countries with low GDP per capita and high rural inequality, particularly during early independence. This supports the expectation that land reform emerged as a response to structural agrarian underdevelopment.

H1 (Economic Development): Countries with lower GDP per capita are more likely to implement land reform.

3.3.3 Hypothesis 2: Market-oriented reforms

Market-oriented (MO) land reforms are characterised by redistribution carried out through legal, administrative, and market-based mechanisms. These reforms typically involve compensation to landowners, voluntary or incentivised land transfers, and formal land titling initiatives. MO reforms reflect the principles of economic liberalism, emphasising private property rights, secure tenure, and market efficiency.

Geopolitical alignment. During the Cold War, U.S. foreign policy promoted MO reforms to stabilise allies and prevent the spread of communism. Direct interventions in South Korea (1948), and Taiwan (1949) integrated reform into occupation and reconstruction strategies, while Latin American reforms in Guatemala (1945), Bolivia (1953), Colombia (1961), Chile (1964), and Peru (1969) also followed U.S. alignment. This suggests that geopolitical patronage, backed by financial and military support, enabled MO reforms.

Democracy. Democracies are more likely to adopt MO reforms due to institutional constraints (judicial review, press freedom, legislative oversight) and the need to appeal to median voters resistant to coercive redistribution. Landed elites often prefer democratic regimes where negotiations and legal protections are possible (Albertus, 2015, 2017, 2019). Authoritarian regimes, by contrast, more often impose state-led reforms through decree.

Official Development Assistance (ODA). Since the 1970s, ODA has been tied to structural adjustment and liberalising policies (Mosley, Harrigan, & Toye, 1995; Killick, 1998; Stiglitz, 2002). Conditionality became especially influential after the Cold War, when Soviet aid disappeared. Many African and Latin American reforms were directly ODA-financed, such as titling programs in Tanzania and Burkina Faso (1991), Malawi (1996), and Côte d'Ivoire (1998). The LRDD records 32 Post–Cold War reforms, 27 of which were market-oriented, suggesting donor leverage was decisive.

H2 (International Alignment and Conditionality): Market-oriented reform is more likely in countries that (a) receive higher levels of ODA, particularly under donor conditionality; (b) are democratic; and (c) were aligned with the United States during the Cold War.

3.3.4 Hypothesis 3: State-oriented reform

State-oriented (SO) land reforms reflect a redistributionist ideology driven by a centralised vision of state control and erosion or abolition of property rights. These reforms typically involve collectivisation, an administrative allocation of land and expropriation without compensation. State-oriented reforms reflect commitments to socialism, anti-colonialism and economic sovereignty.

Geopolitical alignment. The Soviet Union promoted SO reforms in Cuba (1963), North Korea (1948), Cambodia (1975), and Syria (1961), embedding socialist governance. While reforms might have been expected to decline after 1991, the LRDD records later cases (Zimbabwe 2000; Venezuela 2003; DRC 2012; Yemen 1991), raising questions about continued possible Russian influence or post-Cold War adaptations.

Membership of the G77. The G77 coalition, sceptical of neoliberalism, often resisted donor conditionality and defended policy autonomy. In many member states, land reform symbolised sovereignty and anti-colonial resistance, as in Gaddafi's 1969 reforms in Libya.

Left-leaning executives. Leaders with socialist or redistributive ideologies often saw land reform as a tool for social justice, elite eradication and power consolidation. Albertus (2019) finds executive ideology strongly predicts reform, especially when executives face few elite vetoes.

H3 (Domestic Ideology and Alternative Alignments): State-oriented reform is more likely in countries with (a) left-leaning executives, (b) G77 membership, and (c) Soviet/Russian alignment.

3.4 Research Design

3.4.1 Scope of inquiry

This study investigates the structural, ideological and geopolitical determinants of land reform across a diverse sample of postcolonial developing nations. This analysis draws on the Land Reform Development Dataset (LRDD), which covers 101 countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America with populations exceeding 500,000 at independence. The temporal scope spans 1945 to 2020, yielding a balanced panel of 6,170 country-year observations.

The dataset identifies 123 reform episodes, 86 classified as market-oriented and 37 as state-oriented. Land reform types (market and state) are coded according to the criteria and decision rules set out in the previous chapters, ensuring consistency between the construction of the dataset and the empirical analysis presented here. These episodes cluster into two waves: the Decolonisation Wave (1960s-1970s) and the Post-Cold War Wave (1990s). Sub-Saharan Africa accounts for 46 episodes, Asia 36, Latin America 29 and the Middle East and North Africa 12. These patterns highlight that reform is embedded in broader historical and regional contexts, requiring a comparative approach.

3.4.2 Dependent variables

The analysis uses three dependent variables that capture the initiation of land reform in a given country-year and distinguish its ideological orientation. Reform types follow the classification rules developed in Chapter 2.

3.4.1.1 Land Reform (LR)

This variable records the first year in which a new land reform is initiated. It is coded 1 if a reform is legislated or formally authorised in that country-year and 0 otherwise. In total, 123 distinct land reform episodes are identified in the LRDD. This measure captures the overall incidence of land reform and is used to evaluate H1.

3.4.1.2 Market-oriented reform (MO)

This variable records the initiation of market-oriented land reform. It is coded 1 if, in a given country-year, a new episode is authorised that meets the market-oriented criteria, and 0 otherwise. Among the 123 episodes, 86 are classified as MO. This variable tests the conditions outlined in H2.

3.4.1.3 State-oriented reform (SO)

This variable records the initiation of state-oriented land reform. It is coded 1 if a new episode meeting the state-oriented criteria is authorised in that country-year, and 0 otherwise. The remaining 37 episodes fall into this category. This variable evaluates the conditions predicted in H3.

It is important to note that MO and SO are mutually exclusive and each is a subtype of land reform (LR). This means that, in any given year a country can initiate at most one reform, classified as either market-oriented or state-oriented.

Land reform episodes are defined consistently with coding rules set out in previous papers. An episode begins in the first year that a reform is legislated, authorised or formally initiated through a law, decree or official policy directive. This marks the point at which the state commits to a new programme of redistribution regardless of when implementation begins at the ground level. An episode ends when the legal basis of the reform is repealed or replaced, or when there is no evidence of administrative activity for five consecutive years, indicating that the programme is no longer operational. If a new reform is launched after an episode has ended, it is coded as a separate episode. These rules ensure that the DVs capture the initiation of distinct reform episodes rather than ongoing implementation or administrative continuation.

3.4.3 Explanatory variables

This study incorporates a range of explanatory variables. These variables test whether alignment with the United States or the Soviet Union/Russia is associated with distinct reform patterns.

3.4.1.4 International factors

3.4.1.4.1 Military alliances

Formal alliances between sample countries and major global powers (the United States, United Kingdom, France, Soviet Union/Russia, and China) are drawn from the Correlates of War: Formal Interstate Alliances Dataset, 1816–2012 (Gibler & Sarkees, 2013). This dataset categorises alliances into defence pacts, neutrality agreements, non-aggression pacts, and entente agreements. The dataset has been extended through original coding to 2020. These variables assess whether alignment with the United States or the Soviet Union/Russia correlates with distinct patterns of land reform, as posited in H2 and H3. The variable uses “Russia” as the base label even when referring to Soviet alliances.

3.4.1.4.2 Membership of G77 and NAM

Annual membership in the Group of 77 (G77) and the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) is coded based on academic and web sources. These variables assess whether alignment with anti-neoliberal coalitions influences the propensity for state-oriented land reform, as outlined in H3.

3.4.1.4.3 Official Development Assistance (ODA)

Annual ODA inflows are sourced from the World Bank for 1960-2020 and are expressed in constant USD. These figures include grants, loans, technical assistance and debt relief. To address negative values (e.g., net repayments), all negative figures are coded as 0, and 1 is then added. The values are log-transformed to address right skewness and improve interpretability. A binary version is also created using a predefined threshold to facilitate inclusion in logistic models. ODA is expected to drive market-oriented land reform (as outlined in H2).

3.4.2 **Domestic factors**

3.4.2.1 Regime type

The regime type of each country is measured using the Polity IV dataset (Marshall, Gurr, & Jaggers, 2018), which codes political regimes on a continuum from fully autocratic to fully democratic for 1945–2020. A scalar variable distinguishes democracies from autocracies, testing the hypothesis that democracies favour market-oriented reforms. This scale ranges from -10 (most autocratic) to +10 (most democratic). In this study, countries scoring +6 or above are classified as democratic, while those scoring between -6 and -10 are considered authoritarian. This variable tests H2, which predicts that democracies are more likely to pursue market-oriented land reform.

3.4.2.2 Domestic Ideology

The ideological orientation of executives is measured using Identifying Ideologies: A Global Dataset on Political Leaders, 1945-2020 (Herre, 2023). This dataset classifies national leaders according to their ideological position—left, centre, right, or non-ideological—across 182 countries over the 1945–2020 period, aligning closely with the temporal scope of the LRDD. For the purposes of this analysis, a binary indicator is constructed to identify left-leaning

executives. This variable is used to test H3, which predicts that left-leaning governments are more likely to implement state-oriented land reform.

3.4.2.3 GDP per capita

Historical GDP estimates are sourced primarily from the Maddison Project Database (2023), supplemented by World Bank data for Guyana, Suriname, South Sudan, Somalia, Eritrea and Bhutan. This variable is log-transformed to reduce skewness and normalise the distribution, facilitating interpretation and more robust statistical modelling. GDP per capita is used to evaluate H1, which predicts that land reform is more likely in poorer countries.

3.4.3 Control variables

3.4.3.1 Colonial heritage

Using the Colonial Dates Dataset (COLDAT), the colonial heritage of each scope country is identified, accounting for multiple colonial rulers. This variable has been extended to include Japanese colonies and Soviet-era Asian countries.

3.4.3.2 Year dummies

Year dummies capture global temporal trends such as decolonisation, Cold War competition, and neoliberal reforms.

3.4.4 **Modelling strategy**

This study employs pooled logit regression models, using binary outcome variables to estimate the likelihood of reform occurrence and reform type. This approach is appropriate given the binary dependent variables as well as the rarity of reform episodes. The pooled design allows the analysis to retain both time varying and time invariant covariates, such as geopolitical alignment, development assistance funding and military alliances.

To address concerns over heteroskedasticity and within-country correlation over time, standard errors are clustered at the country level. Country-fixed effects are not used in the main models, as they would absorb all between-country variation and drop time invariant explanatory variables, many of which are essential to this study's theoretical framework. Moreover, the relatively rare occurrence of land reform events across the panel could lead to significant loss of data under fixed-effects specifications.

3.4.5 Subsample Analysis

The LRDD is split into subsamples to test hypotheses across different temporal and regional contexts:

1. Full sample (1945–2020): Covers the entire dataset, examining land reform dynamics across the full sample period and establishing baseline effects across all cases.
2. Cold War (1945–1991): Tests ideological dynamics under the bipolar competition between the United States and the Soviet Union.
3. Post–Cold War (1992–2020): Evaluates the role of donors and international institutions, and tests whether ideological effects were limited to the Cold War.
4. Regional subsamples: Asia, Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa, and MENA. These explore regional asymmetries but are not further split by era due to sample size constraints.

3.4.6 Multicollinearity checks

A correlation matrix (Table 1) shows that none of the explanatory variables are highly correlated, with no coefficient exceeding 0.41. The strongest associations are between GDP per capita, U.S. alliances, and democracy ($r \approx 0.34–0.41$), reflecting the empirical clustering of economic development, democratic regimes, and Western alignment. Year is also moderately correlated with GDP and ODA ($r \approx 0.28–0.30$), consistent with long-term trends in growth and aid flows. Negative correlations appear between Russia/USSR alliances and both U.S. alliances ($r = –0.15$) and G77 membership ($r = –0.37$), reflecting Cold War geopolitical divides. Most other variables, including leftist executives, are only weakly correlated with the rest of the predictors. These results suggest that multicollinearity is not a significant concern and that each variable contributes analytically distinct information to the models.

Table 1: Correlation Matrix

Correlation Matrix								
	Log_GDP_Per_Capita	Log_ODA	M_alliance_USA	M_alliance_Russia_USSR	PolityIV_POLITY2	hog_left	M_G77	Year
Log_GDP_Per_Capita	1	-0.182	0.412	0.068	0.338	-0.099	-0.043	0.277
Log_ODA	-0.182	1	-0.182	0.024	0.014	0	0.183	0.304
M_alliance_USA	0.412	-0.182	1	-0.145	0.400	-0.177	0.053	-0.037
M_alliance_Russia_USSR	0.068	0.024	-0.145	1	-0.130	0.092	-0.367	0.081
PolityIV_POLITY2	0.338	0.014	0.400	-0.130	1	0.001	0.034	0.336
hog_left	-0.099	0	-0.177	0.092	0.001	1	0.001	0.023
M_G77	-0.043	0.183	0.053	-0.367	0.034	0.001	1	0.248
Year	0.277	0.304	-0.037	0.081	0.336	0.023	0.248	1

Source: Author's calculations using the Land Reform Development Dataset (LRDD, 1945–2020), merged with Maddison Project GDP estimates (2023), World Bank World Development Indicators, Polity IV (Marshall, Gurr & Jaggers 2018), Correlates of War alliance data, and Herre (2021) executive ideology dataset. Models estimated with pooled logistic regression; standard errors clustered by country. Logged GDP per capita and logged ODA used. Year dummies included but not reported. $p < 0.10$; $p < 0.05$; $p < 0.01$.

3.5 Results

This section presents the results of logistic regression models estimating the predictors of land reform across three distinct periods and geographic regions. Table 2 reports estimates for the full sample (Models 1-3), the Cold War (Models 4-6), and the post–Cold War era (Models 7-9), distinguishing between general land reform, market-oriented reform, and state-oriented reform. Regional results are presented in a later subsection.

3.5.1 Trends across time periods

Across the global sample, a consistent pattern emerges in the conditions under which governments initiate different types of land reform. Market-oriented reforms are more likely to occur in contexts where donors play an active role and where governments face institutional pressures to pursue more liberal or decentralised land policies. Higher levels of democracy and increased engagement with international development agencies are consistently associated with the initiation of MO reforms, particularly after the end of the Cold War, when donor leverage and governance benchmarks became more influential. By contrast, state-oriented reforms are more common under left-leaning or strongly centralised governments that seek to expand state control over land and rural production. These dynamics are especially evident during the Cold War, when alliances, ideological competition and domestic state-building imperatives shaped governments' reform choices. The global results indicate that regime characteristics and external political pressure play a central role in determining not only whether land reform occurs but the form it takes.

Consistent with H1, lower GDP per capita is associated with a higher likelihood of land reform. In the full sample (Model 1), GDP per capita is negatively signed and statistically significant ($\beta = -0.253^{**}$, $p < 0.05$). The average marginal effects (AME) suggest that a 10% increase in GDP per capita reduces the probability of reform by roughly 0.5 percentage points, holding other variables constant. Predicted probabilities indicate that a country at the 25th percentile of GDP per capita has a 2.3% likelihood of reform, compared to 1.6% at the 75th percentile. Similar patterns appear for market-oriented reform (Model 2, $\beta = -0.278^{*}$, $p < 0.1$) and, less robustly, for state-oriented reform (Model 3, not significant). The GDP effect is strongest in the post–Cold War era (Model 7, $\beta = -0.349^{*}$, $p < 0.1$), but weaker and insignificant during the Cold War (Models 4–6). AME and predicted probability results are reported in the Appendix.

Turning to H2, the results provide strong support for ODA and democracy as predictors of market-oriented reform. In the full sample (Model 2), ODA is positively associated with market-oriented reform ($\beta = 0.220^{**}$, $p < 0.05$). The predicted probability rises from 0.75% at the 25th percentile of ODA to 1.25% at the 75th percentile. This effect is stronger in the

post–Cold War era (Model 8, $\beta = 0.310^{*}$, $p < 0.1$), consistent with the heightened leverage of international donors after 1991.

Democracy also emerges as an important predictor of market-oriented reform. In the full sample, the Polity IV score is positively associated with market-oriented reform ($\beta = 0.042^{**}$, $p < 0.05$), and the effect strengthens in the post–Cold War era (Model 8, $\beta = 0.086^{**}$, $p < 0.05$). Moving from an autocracy (–6) to a democracy (+6) increases the probability of reform from 0.4% to 1.1%. The third element of H2, U.S. alliances, is significant only in the Cold War period. In Model 5, alliance with the United States is associated with a substantially higher probability of market-oriented reform ($\beta = 0.947^{**}$, $p < 0.05$). Predicted probabilities indicate that U.S. allies had a 2.6% chance of reform compared to 1.0% for non-allies. This effect disappears in the post–Cold War era (Model 8), consistent with the decline of bipolar ideological structuring in aid and development.

For H3, state-oriented reform is most strongly associated with left-leaning executives. In the full sample (Model 3, $\beta = 1.740^{***}$, $p < 0.01$) and during the Cold War (Model 6, $\beta = 1.416^{***}$, $p < 0.01$), leftist leadership increases the predicted probability of state-oriented reform from 0.1% to 0.7%. This effect disappears in the post–Cold War period (Model 9), potentially reflecting the narrowing policy space for structural redistribution under neoliberal globalisation.

Other variables show weak or inconsistent effects. G77 membership is negatively associated with reform in all state-oriented models (Models 3, 6, and 9), suggesting that membership may have reflected resistance to externally driven reform agendas. Russia/USSR alliances are not significant in most models, though point estimates shift across periods. The year variable is consistently negative and significant in several models, reflecting the declining frequency of reforms over time. These results suggest a clear division in the drivers of reform: market-oriented reforms are closely tied to external political—economic pressures, while state-oriented reforms are primarily driven by domestic ideological commitments.

Table 2: Logistic Regression Results for the Full Sample, Cold War and post-Cold War Sub-Samples

Logistic Regression Models of Land Reform for the Full Sample, Cold War and post-Cold War Sub-Samples

	Dependent variable:								
	Full Sample			Cold War			post-Cold War		
	LR	MO	SO	LR	MO	SO	LR	MO	SO
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
Log GDP per Capita	-0.253**	-0.278*	-0.157	-0.169	-0.259	-0.046	-0.349*	-0.311	-0.201
	(0.122)	(0.146)	(0.223)	(0.167)	(0.212)	(0.270)	(0.193)	(0.235)	(0.398)
Log ODA	0.088	0.220**	-0.057	0.053	0.172	-0.055	0.170	0.310*	-0.054
	(0.062)	(0.090)	(0.070)	(0.071)	(0.114)	(0.082)	(0.142)	(0.180)	(0.145)
US Alliance	0.337	0.456	0.043	0.584*	0.947**	-0.184	-0.092	-0.265	0.725
	(0.266)	(0.308)	(0.571)	(0.333)	(0.413)	(0.639)	(0.494)	(0.539)	(1.428)
Russia/USSR Alliance	0.134	0.150	0.099	-0.124	-0.757	0.374	0.163	1.562	-1.886
	(0.404)	(0.509)	(0.648)	(0.613)	(1.045)	(0.759)	(0.980)	(1.332)	(1.605)
Polity IV Democracy	0.011	0.042**	-0.072**	-0.004	0.025	-0.062	0.044	0.086**	-0.136
	(0.017)	(0.021)	(0.036)	(0.022)	(0.027)	(0.041)	(0.032)	(0.037)	(0.083)
Left Exec	0.448**	-0.012	1.740***	0.692**	0.304	1.416***	0.219	-0.189	17.376
	(0.209)	(0.247)	(0.504)	(0.280)	(0.347)	(0.528)	(0.326)	(0.363)	(1,300.530)

G77 Membership	-0.661**	-0.672*	-0.525	-0.543	-0.745	-0.044	-0.990	0.217	-2.150*
	(0.291)	(0.370)	(0.464)	(0.380)	(0.493)	(0.580)	(0.901)	(1.310)	(1.248)
Year	-0.022***	-0.022**	-0.033**	-0.023	-0.008	-0.065**	-0.082***	-0.092***	-0.061
	(0.008)	(0.010)	(0.015)	(0.019)	(0.024)	(0.032)	(0.024)	(0.027)	(0.058)
Constant	40.634***	37.045**	61.978**	42.842	9.873	124.548**	161.180***	175.800***	104.839
	(15.167)	(18.258)	(29.487)	(36.381)	(45.932)	(61.572)	(47.777)	(53.003)	(1,305.612)
Observations	5,027	5,027	5,027	2,529	2,529	2,529	2,498	2,498	2,498

Note: $p < 0.10$; $p < 0.05$; $p < 0.01$

Source: Author's calculations using the Land Reform Development Dataset (LRDD, 1945–2020), merged with Maddison Project GDP estimates (2023), World Bank World Development Indicators, Polity IV (Marshall, Gurr & Jaggers 2018), Correlates of War alliance data, and Herre (2021) executive ideology dataset. Models estimated with pooled logistic regression; standard errors clustered by country. Dependent variables are binary indicators of reform: land reform (LR), market-oriented reform (MO), and state-oriented reform (SO). Logged GDP per capita and logged ODA used. Year dummies included but not reported. $p < 0.10$; $p < 0.05$; $p < 0.01$.

3.5.2 Regional results

Regional patterns show that Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America are the strongest regions of reform, with ODA linked to market-oriented reforms and leftist executives driving state-oriented reforms. Asia exhibits weaker patterns, while MENA stands out as a distinct outlier. These regional analyses allow assessment of H1–H3 in different contexts.

Although these global patterns are clear, the determinants of land reform show important regional variation. In Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America, the relationships observed at the global level appear strongly and consistently. These regions also exhibit the most frequent and repeated episodes of reform, reflecting long-standing political contestation over land. In Asia, the effects are more muted, partly because land reforms there often reflect broader developmental state strategies rather than clear ideological or donor-driven pressures. The Middle East and North Africa display a distinct trajectory, with reforms concentrated in a small set of countries and driven largely by regime consolidation rather than external or ideological factors. Despite these regional differences, the overarching pattern remains that the political and institutional context in which governments operate systemically shapes their choices between market-based and state-led land reform. The regional analysis therefore reinforces, rather than contradicts, the global story.

3.5.2.1 Sub-Saharan Africa

In Sub-Saharan Africa, the results provide limited support for H1. These results are shown in Table 3. GDP per capita is positively signed but not statistically significant, and predicted probabilities remain flat across income levels. This suggests that reform in the region does not appear to be strongly influenced by economic development.

H2 receives strong support. ODA is a powerful and consistent predictor of both general and market-oriented reform. ODA significantly increases the likelihood of reform, with coefficients of 0.473 and 0.710, respectively ($p < 0.01$ in both cases). The AMEs suggest that a one-unit increase in logged ODA raises the probability of market-oriented reform by 15–20 percentage points. Predicted probabilities also indicate a sharp increase in reform likelihood between the 25th and 75th percentiles of ODA inflows. Democracy also has a strong effect. Polity IV scores are strongly associated with market-oriented reform ($\beta = 0.101$***), with democracies several times more likely than autocracies to adopt reform.

For H3, there is clear evidence that leftist executives influence state-oriented reforms, with a coefficient of 1.645 ($p < 0.05$) and an associated probability increase of 10–12 percentage points. By contrast, G77 membership is negatively associated with reform ($\beta = -2.112$***, $p < 0.05$). Soviet/Russian alliances are not significant in the Sub-Saharan African sample.

Table 3: Logistic Regression Results Sub-Saharan Africa Sub-Sample

	Dependent variable:		
	LR Africa	MO Africa	SO Africa
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Log GDP per Capita	0.047	0.025	0.180
	(0.210)	(0.243)	(0.410)
Log ODA	0.474***	0.659***	0.200
	(0.158)	(0.203)	(0.244)
US Alliance	N/A	N/A	N/A
Russia/USSR Alliance	-13.863	-13.015	-14.413
	(704.169)	(698.818)	(1,167.606)
Polity IV Democracy	0.032	0.103***	-0.192**
	(0.029)	(0.034)	(0.087)
Left Exec	0.382	-0.025	1.645**
	(0.315)	(0.363)	(0.786)
G77 Membership	-1.349**	-0.462	-2.112***
	(0.558)	(0.856)	(0.800)
Year	-0.037**	-0.056***	-0.002
	(0.017)	(0.021)	(0.030)
Constant	61.140**	94.476**	-7.059
	(30.757)	(38.407)	(57.534)
Observations	2,168	2,168	2,168
Note:			p < 0.10; p < 0.05; p < 0.01

Robust standard errors clustered by country.

Source: Author's calculations using LRDD merged with standard datasets (see Table 2 note). Models estimated with pooled logistic regression; standard errors clustered by country. Logged GDP per capita and logged ODA used.

3.5.2.2 Latin America

In the Latin American sub-sample, the evidence does not provide strong support for H1. GDP per capita is negatively signed across all models, but none of the coefficients reach statistical significance. The estimated marginal effects are also small, indicating only modest changes in the probability of reform across income levels. These results are presented in Table 4.

For H2, ODA is positively and significantly associated with market-oriented reform ($\beta = 0.356^*$, $p < 0.10$). The AME for ODA in the MO model is approximately +0.006, implying about a 0.6 percentage-point increase in the probability of MO reform for a one-unit increase in logged ODA (≈2.7× aid), holding other variables constant. Democracy is positively signed but not significant ($\beta = 0.019$). The U.S. alliance coefficient is very large ($\beta = 15.822$) with an

enormous standard error, indicating quasi-complete separation and making the estimate unreliable for inference.

Turning to H3, left-leaning executives are associated with a higher likelihood of state-oriented reform ($\beta = 2.048^*$, $p < 0.10$). Substantively, the AME is small in absolute terms (≈ +0.008, or +0.8 percentage points), which is typical of rare events. Nonetheless, the sign and significance align with the theoretical expectation that leftist executives drive state-oriented programs. G77 membership is negatively signed and not significant in this model, similar to the Sub-Saharan African sample. Russian/Soviet alliances are absent from this model due to the lack of military alliances among states in this sub-sample.

Table 4: Logistic Regression Results Latin American Sub-Sample

	Dependent variable:		
	LR Latin Amer	MO Latin Amer	SO Latin Amer
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Log GDP per Capita	-0.325	-0.366	-0.111
	(0.318)	(0.391)	(0.701)
Log ODA	0.073	0.356*	-0.101
	(0.106)	(0.206)	(0.092)
US Alliance	1.490	15.822	0.799
	(1.109)	(1,053.238)	(1.380)
Russia/USSR Alliance	N/A	N/A	N/A
Polity IV Democracy	0.006	0.019	-0.082
	(0.036)	(0.042)	(0.086)
Left Exec	0.457	0.238	2.048*
	(0.421)	(0.467)	(1.214)
G77 Membership	-0.618	-0.346	-1.369
	(0.600)	(0.698)	(1.361)
Year	-0.036**	-0.057**	-0.011
	(0.018)	(0.022)	(0.042)
Constant	67.992**	89.721	18.942
	(34.163)	(1,054.063)	(82.279)
Observations	1,322	1,322	1,322
Note:			$p < 0.10$; $p < 0.05$; $p < 0.01$
		Robust standard errors clustered by country.	

Source: Author's calculations using LRDD merged with standard datasets (see Table 2 note). Models estimated with pooled logistic regression; standard errors clustered by country. Logged GDP per capita and logged ODA used.

3.5.2.3 Asia

Results for Asia do not support H1. Regression results are shown in Table 5. GDP per capita is not statistically significant as a driver of land reform. This relationship is also observed across the other two models in this sample.

For H2, ODA, democracy, and U.S. alliances are all insignificant for market-oriented reform (e.g., ODA $\beta = 0.057$; democracy $\beta = 0.005$; alliance $\beta = 0.012$). The AMEs for the MO model are very small ($\approx +0.001$ or less), and the baseline predicted probability of MO reform is low ($\approx 2.1\%$), which helps explain the small absolute changes.

For H3, there is modest evidence that left-leaning executives are associated with general reform (LR $\beta = 0.938^*$, $p < 0.10$). The AME is about +0.023, or a 2.3 percentage-point increase in the probability of LR under a leftist executive. By contrast, the SO model's left-executive coefficient is extremely large ($\beta \approx 18.724$) with an inflated standard error, indicating estimation instability due to sparse positives. We therefore do not interpret that SO coefficient substantively. For context, the baseline predicted probability of LR in Asia is about 4.1%. The other variables relevant to this hypothesis (Russian/Soviet alliances and G77 membership) are positively associated but not statistically significant.

Table 5: Logistic Regression Results Asian Sub-Sample

	Dependent variable:		
	LR Asia	MO Asia	SO Asia
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Log GDP per Capita	-0.132	0.028	-1.241
	(0.413)	(0.463)	(1.272)
Log ODA	-0.013	0.057	-0.182
	(0.082)	(0.117)	(0.165)
US Alliance	0.021	0.012	0.331
	(0.625)	(0.726)	(1.243)
Russia/USSR Alliance	0.184	0.120	0.215
	(0.527)	(0.746)	(0.832)
Polity IV Democracy	-0.014	0.005	-0.026
	(0.034)	(0.042)	(0.065)
Left Exec	0.938*	0.069	18.724
	(0.485)	(0.573)	(1,918.863)
G77 Membership	-0.267	-0.556	0.149
	(0.545)	(0.717)	(1.021)
Year	-0.033*	-0.020	-0.042
	(0.019)	(0.022)	(0.042)
Constant	63.685*	35.133	72.721
	(34.663)	(41.513)	(1,920.374)

Observations	924	924	924
Note:		$p < 0.10$; $p < 0.05$; $p < 0.01$	
		Robust standard errors clustered by country.	

Source: Author's calculations using LRDD merged with standard datasets (see Table 2 note). Models estimated with pooled logistic regression; standard errors clustered by country. Logged GDP per capita and logged ODA used.

3.5.2.4 Middle East and North Africa (MENA)

The MENA sub-sample shows no robust support for H1-H3. GDP per capita is negatively signed but insignificant across models (LR $\beta = -0.575$; MO $\beta = -0.731$; SO $\beta = -0.476$). Shown in Table 6. ODA and democracy are also insignificant. Both U.S. and USSR/Russia alliances have imprecise coefficients with very large standard errors, reflecting limited variation. Left-leaning executives (SO $\beta = 0.615$) and G77 membership (SO $\beta = 0.764$) are positively signed but not statistically significant. AMEs are small in absolute terms (e.g., LR $\approx +0.008$; MO $\approx +0.002$), and baseline predicted probabilities are low (LR $\approx$ 1.2%, MO $\approx$ 0.7%, SO $\approx$ 1.0%), limiting the scope for large absolute changes.

Table 6: Logistic Regression Results MENA Sub-Sample

	Dependent variable:		
	LR MENA	MO MENA	SO MENA
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Log GDP per Capita	-0.575	-0.731	-0.476
	(0.807)	(1.482)	(0.987)
Log ODA	-0.284	-0.036	-0.400
	(0.227)	(0.487)	(0.279)
US Alliance	-12.884	-11.731	-12.001
	(3,225.197)	(5,332.368)	(3,221.895)
Russia/USSR Alliance	-17.486	-14.914	-18.734
	(2,054.110)	(3,994.655)	(1,806.129)
Polity IV Democracy	-0.084	-0.364	-0.004
	(0.107)	(0.353)	(0.114)
Left Exec	0.555	0.415	0.615
	(0.740)	(1.288)	(0.918)
G77 Membership	-0.576	-3.332	0.764
	(0.927)	(2.140)	(1.272)
Year	-0.034	0.017	-0.043
	(0.043)	(0.078)	(0.051)
Constant	72.151	-32.531	89.889
	(78.962)	(147.431)	(94.810)

Observations	611	611	611
Note:		$p < 0.10$; $p < 0.05$; $p < 0.01$	
		Robust standard errors clustered by country.	

Source: Author's calculations using LRDD merged with standard datasets (see Table 2 note). Models estimated with pooled logistic regression; standard errors clustered by country. Logged GDP per capita and logged ODA used.

3.6 Discussion and Conclusion

This study set out to explain why some developing countries adopted land reform while others did not, and why reforms took different forms. Drawing on the Land Reform Development Dataset (LRDD)—the first cross-national dataset of its kind—the analysis tested three sets of hypotheses concerning the roles of economic development, international pressure, and domestic political ideology. The results provide clear insights into the conditions under which reform occurs and into the variation between market- and state-oriented reforms. The findings point to a broader theoretical implication: land reform is not a uniform policy response to economic conditions, but a politically mediated process shaped by the interaction of domestic ideology and international political-economic pressures. Crucially, these factors operate differently across reform types, producing distinct pathways to market-oriented and state-oriented reform.

Firstly, the evidence for H1 is limited. Across the full sample, lower GDP per capita is associated with a higher likelihood of reform, and in some models this effect reaches statistical significance. However, this relationship weakens or disappears in regional and temporal subsamples, and predicted probabilities show only modest differences between richer and poorer states. These findings suggest that while economic underdevelopment may create structural incentives for reform, it is rarely sufficient to explain either its timing or its form.

Secondly, the results strongly support H2. ODA and democracy emerge as the most consistent predictors of market-oriented reform, especially in the post–Cold War era and in Sub-Saharan Africa. AMEs and predicted probabilities confirm that ODA has a substantial effect on the likelihood of reform, with democracies significantly more likely than autocracies to pursue market-oriented programs. U.S. alliances mattered only during the Cold War, consistent with the geopolitical logic of the era, while Soviet/Russian alliances were not significant across any models. These results highlight the enduring influence of international actors in shaping redistributive policy, both through aid conditionality and the normative pressures of democratic governance.

Thirdly, H3 finds robust support in the case of state-oriented reforms. Leftist executives are the most consistent predictor of state-oriented reform, particularly in Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa. AMEs indicate that left-leaning governments increase the probability of state-

led redistribution, even if absolute probabilities remain small due to the rarity of such reforms. By contrast, G77 membership and Soviet/Russian alliances show weaker or inconsistent effects, with coefficients often negative or unstable. This pattern underscores that domestic ideology, rather than international alignment, is the key driver of state-oriented land reform.

The regional results further support these conclusions. In Sub-Saharan Africa, ODA and democracy are the strongest predictors of market-oriented reform, while left-leaning executives also matter for state-oriented reform. In Latin America, ODA plays a role in promoting market-oriented reform, but ideology dominates, with left-leaning executives driving state-led redistribution. In Asia, results are weaker, with only modest evidence linking left-leaning executives to general reform. In MENA, none of the hypothesised drivers prove robust, reflecting the rarity and idiosyncratic nature of reforms in the region. These differences suggest that while global determinants of reform are important, their effects are mediated by regional political economies and historical legacies.

These findings highlight that land reform is shaped less by structural economic conditions than by international political—economic pressures and domestic ideological commitments. Whereas Albertus (2015, 2019) emphasises elite strategies and regime type as central to land redistribution, this study shows that international conditionality and donor leverage were equally decisive, particularly in shaping the prevalence of market-oriented reforms in the post-Cold War era.

This study contributes three advances to the literature. Firstly, the LRDD enables the first systematic cross-national test of the determinants of land reform since 1945, addressing a longstanding empirical gap. Secondly, the results show that international donors—particularly through ODA conditionality—were decisive in promoting market-oriented reforms, especially after the Cold War. Thirdly, the findings reaffirm the enduring importance of left-leaning ideology in driving state-oriented reforms, particularly in Latin America.

Going beyond its empirical findings, this paper contributes to broader debates in comparative politics and international political economy. Existing scholars often treat redistribution as an endogenous response to inequality or as the product of regime type. The results here show that land reform in developing countries was instead deeply embedded in international political-economic structures, particularly donor conditionality after the Cold War. By integrating domestic ideology with international constraints, the analysis bridges debates over state autonomy and external influence, demonstrating that redistributive reforms cannot be understood without situating them in the global political economy. In this way, this paper advances both the study of land reform and the broader comparative literature on redistribution and development.

Future research should build on these findings by exploring the long-term consequences of reform for inequality, agricultural productivity, and political stability. Equally, more attention is needed to how reforms are implemented and enforced, not only legislated. By placing land reform in a comparative framework and linking domestic ideology with international political

economy, this section underscores that land politics remain central to the study of development, redistribution and state-building.

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Chapter 4: Land Reform, Political Change and Regime Stability

Stuart Bagnall

Abstract
This paper examines the relationship between land reform and regime trajectories in 101 postcolonial developing countries between 1945 and 2020. Using the newly constructed Land Reform Development Dataset (LRDD), which records 123 reform episodes, it distinguishes between market-oriented and state-oriented reforms and analyses their distribution, sequencing and political consequences. Three empirical patterns emerge. Firstly, while all regime types implement land reform, democracies overwhelmingly adopt market-oriented reforms, whereas authoritarian regimes display greater variation, but account for nearly all state-oriented reforms. Secondly, sequencing and survival analysis show that market-oriented reforms are frequently associated with democratic transition, whereas state-oriented reforms cluster in non-transition cases and are linked to authoritarian persistence. Thirdly, countries that never reformed were disproportionately authoritarian suggesting that inaction may reflect elite strategies and political preservation. These findings indicate that land reform is not politically neutral. The institutional design of land reform conditions long-run regime trajectories and should be understood as a political institution embedded within wider process of democratisation and autocratic consolidation.

Keywords: Land Reform, Democratisation, Modernisation, Dataset, Regime Change

4.1 Introduction

What are the political consequences of land reform? Land reform remains one of the most consequential and contested policy tools in the postcolonial world. While often associated with economic restructuring and rural development, land reform also carries profound political implications, particularly for regime trajectories. Although a rich case study literature documents these effects in specific contexts, systematic cross-national analysis remains limited. This paper addresses that gap by examining how different types of land reform correlate with regime trajectories in 101 postcolonial countries between 1945 and 2020.

Existing research presents a paradox. On the one hand, land reform is portrayed as a democratic tool that dissolves entrenched elites and expands political inclusion. On the other, authoritarian regimes have used it to consolidate control, suppress dissent and restructure elite coalitions. These competing narratives suggest that the consequences of land reform depend less on whether land reform occurs than how it is designed. This paper argues that

disaggregating reform into market and state-oriented models helps reconcile these competing narratives.

In this study, land reform is defined as state-led intervention that alters the ownership or distribution of land through formal mechanisms such as legislation, executive orders or regulatory decrees. To qualify as land reform, a policy must involve the legal transfer or reallocation of land rights—whether through restitution to previous owners, redistribution to landless populations, compulsory acquisitions by the state or restructuring of tenure systems. This definition excludes land reform programmes such as financial support initiatives, environmental schemes, policies to change gender-based agricultural roles and land-use planning initiatives.

This study distinguishes between market-oriented and state-oriented reforms using the Land Reform Development Dataset (LRDD). Covering 123 land reform episodes across 101 postcolonial developing countries, the dataset enables systematic cross-national comparison. The LRDD and its reform typology are described in detail in Chapter 2, here I apply those classifications to analyse regime trajectories. The analysis adopts a descriptive framework guided by four questions: Which regimes most commonly initiate reform, what kind of reform do they adopt and when do they adopt them? Are particular reform types associated with democratic transitions, especially during the Third Wave of Democratisation (1974-2000)? Does reform influence the durability of new democracies? And does the absence of reform itself reinforce authoritarian persistence?

The results reveal clear patterns. Market-oriented reforms—based on voluntary transfers, decentralised ownership and legal protection of property rights—are disproportionately associated with democracies and transitional regimes. State-oriented reforms occur predominantly under autocracies. Non-reformers such as Malaysia, Jordan and Djibouti, were more likely to remain authoritarian throughout the postwar era.

Temporal analysis further shows that market-oriented reform has, in some cases, preceded democratisation, while in many others it followed democratic openings as part of institutional consolidation. Recognising this bidirectional pathway highlights that land reform can operate as both a trigger and a by-product of democratisation, depending on regime incentives and historical context. The temporal window analysis also reveals how the relationship between reform and regime type shifts across major political waves.

In addition to descriptive evidence, logistic regression, survival analysis, and temporal sequencing tests indicate that these patterns hold across the large-N sample, even if the effects are not statistically significant. A case study of South Korea illustrates how market-oriented reform is consistent with process that weaken elite dominance and underpin democratic consolidation.

This study does not attempt to establish causality. Rather, it provides a historically grounded descriptive account of how the design, timing, and absence of land reform are associated with divergent regime trajectories. In doing so, it contributes to a growing literature that views

land reform not only as an economic intervention but also as a politically embedded institution with regime-shaping consequences.

The paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 reviews the literature on land reform and regime change. Section 3 outlines the guiding descriptive questions. Section 4 presents the research design and data. Section 5 reports the empirical results. Section 6 discusses the implications for theory and policy and outlines avenues for future research.

4.2 Literature Review

4.2.1 Land reform and regime outcomes

The political consequences of land reform remain contested. Some scholars view land reform as a democratising force that reduces inequality, expands political inclusion and mobilises rural communities (Boix, 2003; Deininger & Byerlee, 2011; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2006). Empirical evidence from South Korea, Taiwan, India, Colombia, Guatemala, Bolivia, the Philippines, Ghana and Namibia show how redistributive land policies foster democratic openings (Bo, 2013; Boyce, Rosset & Stanton, 2005; Dore, 2013; İşcan, 2018; You, 2014; Deininger, Jin & Nagarajan, 2009).

In contrast, other scholars emphasise land reform as a strategy of authoritarian consolidation. Autocratic regimes have repeatedly used redistribution to eliminate rivals, co-opt rural populations and bolster regime survival (Albertus, 2015, 2017; Albertus & Menaldo, 2012). Historical cases include North Korea, Zimbabwe, Cuba, Malaysia, Cambodia, Egypt, El Salvador, and Algeria (Hwang, 2012; Chaves, 1991; Moyo, 2011; Feinberg, 2016; Chandler, 1991; Waterbury, 1983; Figueroa, 1991). These contrasting perspectives highlight a central paradox: land reform can facilitate both democratisation and authoritarian durability. Comparative research has struggled to resolve this tension, in part because land reform is often treated as a single, binary category. By disaggregating reforms into market and state-oriented models, this study clarifies the distinct political logics underpinning implementation across regime types.

4.2.2 Competing theories: modernisation/democratic motives versus authoritarian strategy

Two theoretical traditions dominate existing debates. One strand argues that democracies possess stronger institutional and electoral incentives to implement redistributive land reform than authoritarian regimes. Drawing on social conflict theory and the median voter framework, scholars such as Boix (2003) and Acemoglu and Robinson (2006) argue that democratic institutions translate majority preferences into policy outcomes. In agrarian postcolonial democracies, where rural populations constitute a large share of the electorate, this encourages political leaders to adopt land redistribution to address demands for equity and social mobility.

Building upon this logic, Lapp (2004) and Swinnen (2002) show that where landownership is highly unequal, electoral competition induces politicians to court rural voters with promises of land reform—patterns especially evident in Latin America. This stands in direct contrast with the authoritarian strategy literature which portrays land reform as a tool for consolidating autocratic rule.

Modernisation theory further argues that economic development generates the conditions necessary for democracy: rising incomes, improved education, an expanding middle class and increasing demands for representation (Lipset, 1959; Inglehart & Welzel, 2005). Land reform can accelerate this process by boosting agricultural productivity and facilitating social mobility (Haggard & Kaufman, 1995; Dore, 1959).

In contrast, scholars of authoritarian strategy highlights elite resistance and adaptation. Moore (1966), Ziblatt (2008), and Albertus (2015, 2017, 2018, 2024) show that landed elites often resisted democratisation to protect their capital, while authoritarian rulers used land redistribution to reinforce loyalty and suppress opposition. In Brazil and Colombia, elites adapted to democratisation by embedding their interests within emerging democratic institutions (Skocpol, 1973; Stephens, 2007; Albertus, 2017). Elsewhere, autocrats used redistribution pre-emptively to diffuse pressures for regime change (Albertus & Menaldo, 2012, 2018).

Postwar Asia illustrates a more complex dynamic. Following radical expropriations in Maoist China and the Soviet Union, landowners in South Korea, Taiwan and Japan viewed democracy as a safer mechanism for protecting property rights and facilitating integration into global markets (Dore, 1959; Haggard & Kaufman, 1995; Jeon & Kim, 2000; Albertus, 2018). This suggests that the political effects of land reform depend not only on economic modernisation but also on shifting elite strategies in response to international and domestic constraints.

However, much of the literature treats land reform primarily as an outcome, rather than as a political institution. From a political economy perspective, land reform lies at the core of state formation and regime transformation. Classic theorists have long argued that the distribution of property and agrarian power shapes political outcome. Moore (1966) identified the destruction of landed elites as a precondition for democracy, while Polanyi (1944) argued that market reforms are always embedded within broader social and political relations. North (1990) and Olson (1993) likewise highlight how property rights and collective action underpin institutional stability.

More recent works—Boix (2003), Ansell & Samuels (2014), Acemoglu & Robinson (2006), and Albertus (2015, 2018)—extend this logic by showing that the design of redistribution determines whether it facilitates democratisation or entrenches authoritarianism. These perspectives highlight that land reform is a pivotal institution shaping the relationship between property, power and political stability.

4.2.3 4 Mechanisms linking reform to regime outcomes

4.2.3.1 Market-oriented mechanisms

Disaggregating land reform into institutional models clarifies the mechanisms involved. Market-oriented reforms redistribute land under voluntary and compensated conditions, secure property rights, and establish individual tenure. These features incentivise investment, raise agricultural productivity, raise rural incomes, and expand the middle class—thereby increasing demands for political inclusion (Lipset, 1959; Huntington, 1991; Przeworski et al., 2000). Compensated elites often reinvest in industry and finance, aligning their interests with democratic institutions that safeguard private property (Boix, 2003; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2006; Studwell, 2013; Albertus, 2015).

Market-oriented mechanisms:

Secure property rights → increased investment → higher productivity → rising rural incomes → middle-class expansion → greater demand for political participation.

4.2.3.2 State-oriented mechanisms

State-oriented reforms, grounded in coercive expropriation and collectivisation, tend to undermine modernisation pathways. Evidence from the USSR, Maoist China, Zimbabwe, Cambodia and Venezuela shows that collective farming often produced economic stagnation and food insecurity (Ladejinsky, 1972; Dikötter, 2010; Albertus, 2015). Politically, such reforms eliminate rival elites and create dependent clientelist networks, reinforcing regime control (Albertus, 2017).

State-oriented Mechanisms:

Expropriation → collectivisation → reduced productivity → beneficiary dependence → suppressed mobilisation → authoritarian consolidation.

These mechanisms also vary historically. According to the LRDD, during the decolonisation era, land reform was often deployed by new autocracies as a nationalist tool of legitimacy or imposed under Cold War pressures. After 1990, reforms increasingly aligned with market-based models promoted through global liberalisation and donor conditionality (Bagnall, 2025). By analysing reform incidence across five fifteen-year windows, this study captures these shifting logics and situates land reform within changing geopolitical and regime contexts.

Equally significant is the absence of reform. In the LRDD, 18 countries did not implement land redistribution between 1945 and 2020. While sometimes reflecting weak state-capacity, non-reform also signalled elite resistance: entrenched inequality preserved authoritarian power by suppressing rural mobilisation and blocking democratisation (Moore, 1966; Ziblatt, 2008; Acheampong et al., 2023).

4.2.4 Definitional ambiguity and methodological constraints

Comparative research on land reform is complicated by conceptual inconsistency. The term has been applied to redistributive transfers, market restructuring, agricultural support schemes, gender-equity programmes and environmental initiatives (Agarwal, 1994; Deere & León, 2001; Razavi, 2007; Fairhead, Leach & Scoones, 2012; Boyce, Rosset & Stanton, 2005). This breadth hampers systematic comparison and limits cumulative theory-building (Adams, 2000).

Furthermore, much of the literature relies on single-country or small-N studies. Although rich in historical detail, they offer limited external validity and generate competing narratives. By employing a large-N dataset, this study aims to move beyond these limitations and provide systematic comparative evidence on reform–regime associations.

4.2.5 Illustrative comparison: North versus South Korea

The divergent experiences of North and South Korea highlight the importance of institutional design in shaping political outcomes. South Korea pursued compensated redistribution with private tenure, incentivising investment and laying the foundations for democratisation. North Korea imposed collectivisation through violent expropriation, entrenching authoritarian rule (Hwang, 2012; Dore, 1959). Similar patterns appear in India, Poland, Egypt, and Indonesia, where smallholder-based systems consistently outperformed collective models (Patnaik, 1972, 1976; Zyl, Miller & Parker, 1999; Bhattacharyya, 2001; Dyer, 1991; Ladejinsky, 1972, 1976, 1978).

4.2.6 Land reform typologies

To mitigate conceptual ambiguity, the LRDD distinguishes between market-oriented, state-oriented, mixed, and non-reforming cases. Market-oriented reforms emphasise voluntary redistribution, compensation, and individual ownership; state-oriented reforms rely on expropriation, collectivisation, and central control. These typologies are consistent with those in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3. Mixed reformers implement both models at different times; and non-reformers abstain from redistribution entirely. This typology provides a structured basis for cross-national comparison and helps identify systematic patterns in the political consequences of reform.

4.3 Guiding Descriptive Questions

This paper adopts a descriptive framework to explore the relationship between land reform and regime type across postcolonial states. Recognising the challenges of endogeneity and causal identification—given that land reform can be both a cause and a consequence of political change—the analysis does not seek to establish causal effects. Instead, it presents a structured empirical account designed to identify broad patterns and associations that can inform future research. Four questions guide the analysis:

(1) Which regimes initiate land reform, in what form and when?

This question examines whether democracies, autocracies or hybrid regimes (anocracies) are more likely to introduce land reform and whether they favour market or state-oriented models. Prior research suggests that autocracies often use reform to fragment rivals or co-opt rural communities (Albertus, 2015), while democracies may pursue land reform to reduce inequality and promote modernisation (Deininger & Byerlee, 2011). This question also considers temporal variation in reform implementation across regime types.

(2) Are certain types of land reform associated with democratic transitions?

Here the focus is on whether different reform types are linked to transitions from authoritarianism to democracy, particularly during the Third Wave of Democratisation (1974-2000). The rise of land reform across the Global South overlaps with multiple waves of democratisation. The question therefore asks whether this coincidence reflects a substantive political relationship. Existing theories offer competing expectations: some argue that land redistribution empowers rural actors and facilitates democratisation (Boix, 2003; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2006), while others contend that reform can be instrumentalised to entrench authoritarian power (Albertus & Menaldo, 2012).

(3) Does land reform affect the durability of democracy?

Beyond initial transitions, the analysis evaluates whether land reform contributes to the stability of democratic regimes. This question assesses whether particular types of reform—especially market-oriented reforms—are associated with sustained democratic governance, drawing on theories linking economic development and institutional design to democratic consolidation (Haggard & Kaufman, 1995; Inglehart & Welzel, 2005).

(4) Is the absence of land reform linked to authoritarian persistence?

Finally, the study considers whether countries that never introduced land reform were more likely to remain autocratic. Theoretical work suggests that high land inequality preserves elite dominance, suppress mobilisation and blocks democratisation (Moore, 1966; Ziblatt, 2008; Acheampong et al., 2023). In this view, institutional inaction—including the failure to reform—can itself be a deliberate political strategy.

These questions provide a coherent framework for assessing how the presence, absence and institutional design of land reform have shaped regime trajectories in the postcolonial world.

4.4 Research Design and Methodology

4.4.1 Research design overview

This study employs a cross-national, descriptive research design to examine how the timing, type, and absence of land reform are associated with regime trajectories in 101 postcolonial developing countries between 1945 and 2020. The purpose of the design is not to identify causal effects but to map systematic patterns that clarify how land redistribution interacts with political change. As land reform may be a cause and a consequence of democratisation, the analysis avoids treating it as an exogenous effect. It combines episode-level data, temporal sequencing, long-run regime trajectories and survival analysis to provide a comprehensive empirical foundation for future causal work.

4.4.2 Case selection and scope conditions

The analysis focuses on postcolonial states specifically former colonies situated in the Global South (Africa, Asia and Latin America). To be included, states had to meet three conditions: they were classified as “developing” by World Bank standards at independence; their populations exceeded 500,000; and they had not undertaken land reform prior to 1945. This scope reflects the reality that redistribution became politically salient during post-independence state-building.

4.4.3 The Land Reform Development Dataset (LRDD)

The analysis draws on the newly compiled Land Reform Development Dataset (LRDD). Operationally, the LRDD codes an episode as land reform only when the policy entails a legally mandated transfer or reconfiguration of land rights initiated by the state. This dataset identifies 123 episodes of land reform across the 101 sampled countries between 1945 and 2020. Each episode is coded by year of initiation, reform type, and institutional orientation,

with no country recording more than three episodes. Coding draws on secondary literature, historical case studies, and policy reports, allowing for systematic comparison.

The LRDD distinguishes different types of reform. Market-oriented reforms involve decentralised redistribution, voluntary transactions, and legal protections for private property, as seen in South Korea, Taiwan, and Chile. State-oriented reforms are characterised by expropriation, collectivisation, and state-led redistribution with limited compensation, exemplified by North Korea, Zimbabwe, and Cuba. Of the 101 countries within the sample, 83 introduced land reform at least once. Further details of typology coding can be found in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3. While analytically useful, this typology simplifies variation within reform types, particularly where market-oriented reforms occur within strong state-led development contexts. Mixed reformers are those nations that have implemented both market and state-oriented reforms at different points in time. Such nations include Brazil, Indonesia and Mali. Finally, some countries—including Jordan, South Sudan, and Malaysia—did not implement land redistribution during the study period. This typology allows for structured comparison of how institutional design shapes political outcomes.

4.4.4 Measuring regime type

Regime type is measured using Polity IV's "Polity2" score, which ranges from -10 (fully autocratic) to +10 (fully democratic). For each reform episode, the Polity2 score is recorded at the year of initiation. In cases of multiple reforms, each episode is treated separately. For non-reformers, the average Polity2 score between 1974 and 2000—a period aligned with the Third Wave of Democratisation—is used as a baseline indicator. Boxplots of Polity distributions are also employed to capture variation across regimes more effectively than means alone.

To assess how reform patterns vary across political contexts, the analysis classifies each reform episode by the Polity2 score in the year of initiation, rather than by a country's average regime type. This episode-based approach ensures that countries experiencing multiple reforms—often under different political conditions—are coded precisely according to the regime context in which each reform occurred. The same logic applies to analyses of "whether democracies (or autocracies) introduce land reform": percentages are calculated using countries' regime status at the time of reform, not across their full political history. This ensures comparability across countries with fluctuating regime trajectories.

4.4.5 Temporal-regime window design

To examine how reform dynamics evolved across different geopolitical eras, Polity IV data (1945-2018) is used again with the LRDD. Five fifteen-year windows —1945–1959, 1960–1974, 1975–1989, 1990–2004, and 2005–2019—align with key global transitions from post-war reconstruction, the Decolonisation Wave of land reform, the Second and Third Waves of

Democratisation and the post-Cold War Wave of land reform. Within each window, countries were classified by entry regime (autocracy < +6 Polity2, democracy ≥ +6), reform incidence and orientation (market- or state-oriented), and the average change in Polity score (ΔPolity) from reform to window end. Eighteen non-reforming countries serve as counterfactuals for political change absent reform. This temporal framing complements the episode-based analysis and allows assessment of how the political role of land reform shifted over time.

The choice of fifteen-year windows is deliberate. These periods are used in this study to align with well-established wave-based interpretations of global political change and agrarian action. Analysis is able to track political and agrarian transformations at a natural pace, while ensuring enough case variation. Huntington's (1991) typology of democratisation—comprising the Second Wave (1945–1962), the subsequent reverse wave (1962–1975), and the Third Wave (1974–2000)—shows that expansions and contractions of democracy unfold over extended multi-decade periods rather than in a short burst. A 15-year interval effectively captures these slow-moving cycles, including both the rise and decline phases of each wave (Linz & Stepan, 1996; Tilly & Tarrow, 2007). The same temporal logic is mirrored in the history of agrarian restructuring: the "Decolonisation Wave" of land reform in the 1960s–70s, the "Post-Cold War Wave" of the 1990s and the post-2005 decline in reform initiation.

4.4.6 Temporal sequencing of reform and democratisation

The study pays particular attention to the Third Wave of Democratisation (1974–2000). Transitions are classified as first-time if the country had not previously experienced democracy or repeat if earlier democratic periods had broken down. Democratic endurance is defined as maintaining a Polity2 score of +6 or higher for at least ten consecutive years, in line with common practice in the regime literature (Przeworski et al., 2000; Huntington, 1991).

To assess sequencing, reform episodes are categorised relative to transition: they are coded as preceding the transition if they occurred more than five years earlier; coinciding if they occurred within a ±5-year window; and following if they took place more than five years afterwards. Countries that never democratised are coded separately. Robustness checks, reported in the appendix, use a narrower ±2-year window.

4.4.7 Quantitative methods

4.4.7.1 Sequencing coding

To assess the temporal ordering of land reform and democratisation, an episode-based approach is adopted. Each occurrence of a market-oriented or state-oriented reform, as identified in the LRDD, is treated as a separate reform episode. Democratic transition is operationalised as the year in which a country's Polity2 score first rises to +6 or higher, following a period below that threshold.

Reform episodes are then classified relative to the transition year into one of four categories:

- Preceded: Reform occurred more than five years before transition.
- Coincided: Reform occurred within a +/-5-year window of transition.
- Followed: Reform occurred more than five years after transition.
- No Transition: The country did not democratise within the observed period.

Countries with no land reform episodes are assigned to a separate "None" category, enabling direct comparison between reforming and non-reforming trajectories. Robustness checks using a narrower and coincidence window (+/-2-years) and country-level classifications are reported in the Appendix.

4.4.7.2 Logistic regression

To complement descriptive sequencing, a set of logistic regression models are estimated. The dependent variable is a binary indicator of whether a democratic transition occurred after a land reform episode. The key independent variable is reform type (market versus state-oriented). The "No Reform" category is excluded from this regression model due to quasi-complete separation (very few transitions occurring in this group), which prevents reliable estimation in logit models. However, non-reformers are analysed descriptively and in survival models.

A second specification included log GDP per capita (sourced from The Maddison Project, 2024 and from the World Bank, 2023) to account for the potential confounding effect of economic development, a crucial variable within the modernisation literature. Coefficients are reported as odds ratio with standard errors in parentheses. These models are not intended as fully specified causal tests, but as minimal statistical checks to assess whether descriptive patterns hold with basic controls.

4.4.7.3 Kaplan-Meier survival analysis

To further evaluate sequencing, Kaplan-Meier survival analysis is employed, which is well-suited to modelling the timing of political transitions (Box-Steffensmeier & Jones, 2004; Clark & Linzer, 2015). Survival curves estimate the probability that a country remains authoritarian following a reform episode, stratified by reform type (market-oriented, state-oriented, and no reform). Episodes without transitions are treated as right censored. Log-rank tests are used to evaluate differences across survival functions.

4.4.7.4 Empirical strategy

The results proceed in three analytical steps aligned with the structure of the paper. Firstly, reform episodes are examined descriptively to identify patterns of incidence across regime types and institutional designs. Secondly, the political consequences of reform are analysed through sequencing relative to democratisation, transition likelihood, long-run Polity trends, and simple robustness checks (logistic regression and survival analysis). These methods assess whether different reform types are associated with distinct political trajectories without inferring causality. Thirdly, the timing of reform is situated within major historical periods—decolonisation, the Third Wave, and the post–Cold War era—to evaluate how global political cycles shape reform incidence and outcomes.

This approach provides a coherent analytical framework for understanding land reform's political correlations while remaining consistent with the descriptive character of the research questions, the data and the historical variation across cases.

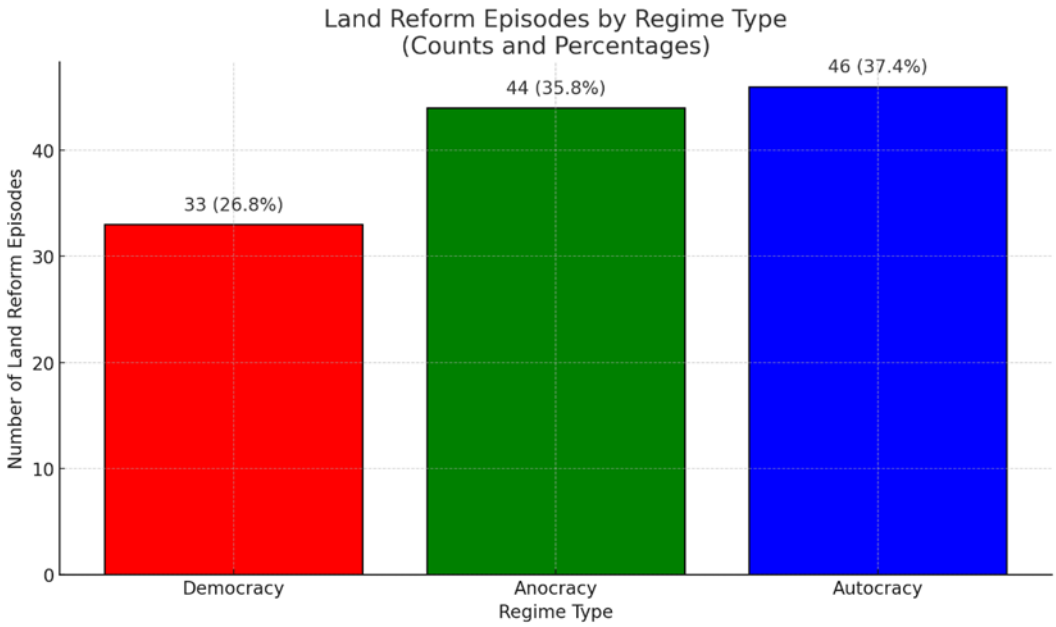
4.5 Results

4.5.1 Descriptive patterns of reform

4.5.1.1 Reform patterns across regimes

Across the 1945-2020 period, land reform occurs under all regime types rather than being confined to any single political system. Of the 123 land reform episodes recorded in the LRDD, democracies initiated 33 reforms (26.8%), anocracies 44 (35.8%) and autocracies 46 (37.4%). Figure 1 presents these results. Although the distribution is relatively balanced, the slightly higher concentration among autocratic and hybrid regimes challenges the assumption that redistribution is primarily a democratic project. This indicates that land reform is not inherently a democratic policy, but a flexible instrument used across regime types for different political purposes.

Figure 1: Land Reform Episodes by Regime Type

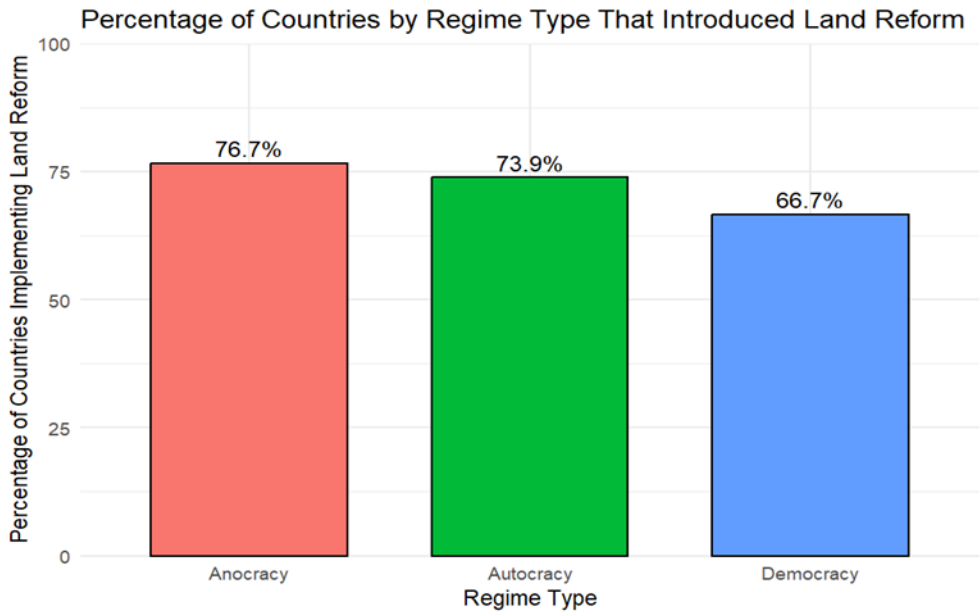


Source: Author's calculations using the Land Reform Development Dataset (LRDD) and Polity IV Project (Marshall & Gurr, 2018).

4.5.1.2 Country-level likelihood of reform

To assess how likely each regime type is to introduce land reform, a country-level analysis was conducted using only countries with one or no reform episodes. This approach avoids complications arising from countries that implemented multiple reforms and experienced regime changes between episodes, ensuring cleaner comparisons across regime types. The results, visualised in Figure 2, show that 76.7% of anocracies, 73.9% of autocracies and 66.7% of democracies implemented at least one reform. These row percentages demonstrate that democracies are not the most likely regime type to undertake land reform; instead, hybrid regimes (anocracies) and autocracies exhibit slightly higher tendency. This pattern supports Albertus' (2018) claims that authoritarian regimes often use land redistribution as a tool for coalition-building, elite restructuring and regime legitimation.

Figure 2: Percentage of Countries by Regime Type That Introduced Land Reform

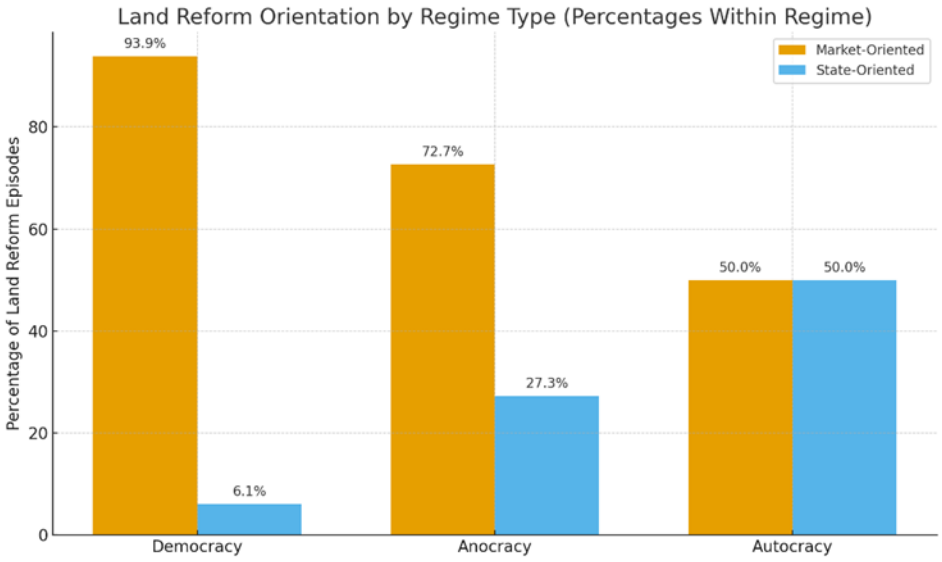


Source: Author's calculations using the Land Reform Development Dataset (LRDD) and Polity IV Project (Marshall & Gurr, 2018).

4.5.1.3 Institutional design: market-vs state-oriented reform

Disaggregating reform episodes by institutional design reveals sharper regime contrasts than those observed in overall reform frequency. Democracies overwhelmingly favour market-oriented reforms: 31 of the 33 reform episodes (93.9%) fall into this category, with only two instances (6.1%) of state-oriented redistribution. Anocracies display a similar, though less concentrated pattern, initiating 32 market-oriented reforms (72.7%) and 12 state-oriented reforms (27.3%). Autocracies, however, diverge from this trend. They divide evenly between market-oriented (23 episodes, 50%) and state-oriented (23 episodes, 50%), indicating substantial internal variation in how authoritarian governments implement redistributive policy.

Figure 3: Land Reform Orientation by Regime Type



Source: Author's calculations using the Land Reform Development Dataset (LRDD) and Polity IV Project (Marshall & Gurr, 2018).

Figure 3 illustrates these institutional patterns. The dominance of market-oriented reforms in democracies aligns with expectations that elected government favour mechanisms that preserve property rights, minimise elite resistance and avoid the economic disruption associated with coercive expropriation. Such models seem more compatible with democratic norms of compensation, legal protection and gradual institutional adjustment and often emerge from electoral incentives to broaden support.

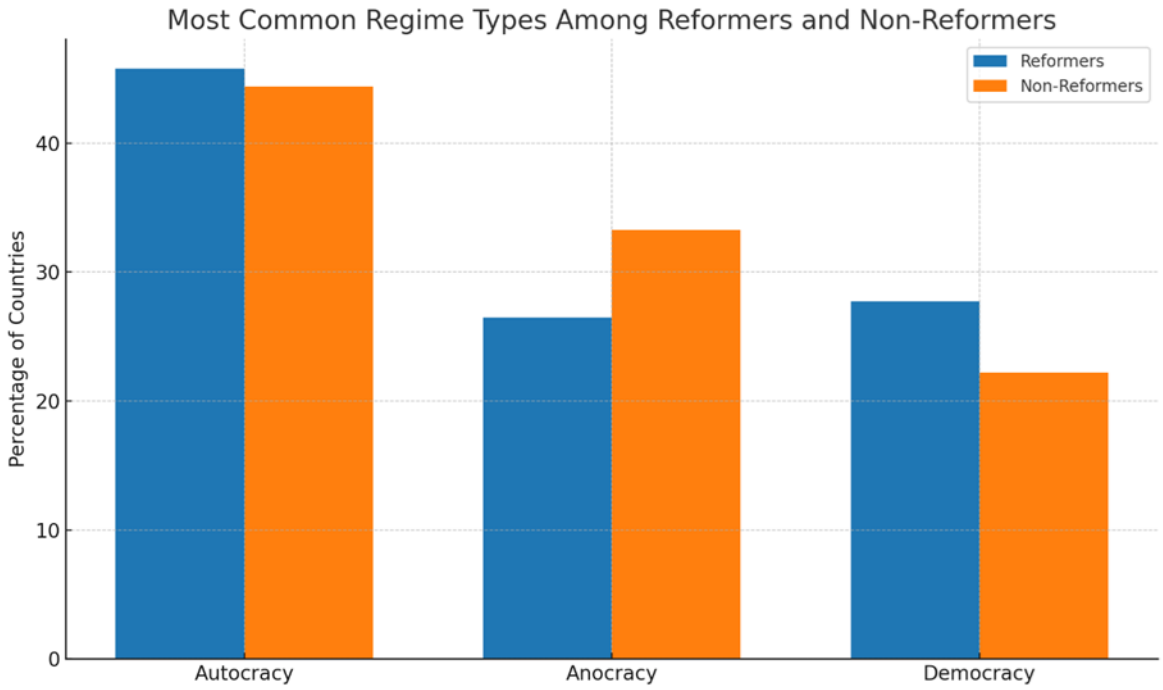
In contrast, state-oriented reforms—typically involving uncompensated land seizures, centralised redistribution or collectivisation—fit more naturally within an authoritarian institutional logic. These reforms allow autocrats to restructure rural society, weaken landed elites and generate politically dependent beneficiaries. The even split observed among autocracies underscores that not all authoritarian rulers adopt coercive redistribution. Some pursue market-aligned reforms to boost productivity, attract donor support or cultivate international legitimacy, while others employ state-led reforms to consolidate authority and reshape agrarian power relations.

These patterns highlight a broader point: regime type shapes not only the likelihood of reform but also its institutional design. Democracies consistently gravitate toward market mechanisms, anocracies exhibit mixed yet market-leaning preferences and autocracies display the greatest variation, alternating between technocratic market reforms and a more coercive agrarian dominance.

4.5.2 Non-reformers and political patterns

Of the 101 postcolonial countries in the LRDD, eighteen did not implement any form of land redistribution between 1945 and 2020. While much of the literature focuses on the political consequences of land reform, the implications of inaction or the absence of reform have received far less attention. However, the decision not to redistribute land is itself a political act. Explanations for non-reform vary, ranging from weak state capacity and fiscal constraints to elite resistance, where inaction functions as a deliberate strategy to preserve rural hierarchies and prevent mass mobilisation.

Figure 4: Most Common Regime Types among Reformers and Non-Reformers



Source: Author's calculations using the Land Reform Development Dataset (LRDD) and Polity IV Project (Marshall & Gurr, 2018).

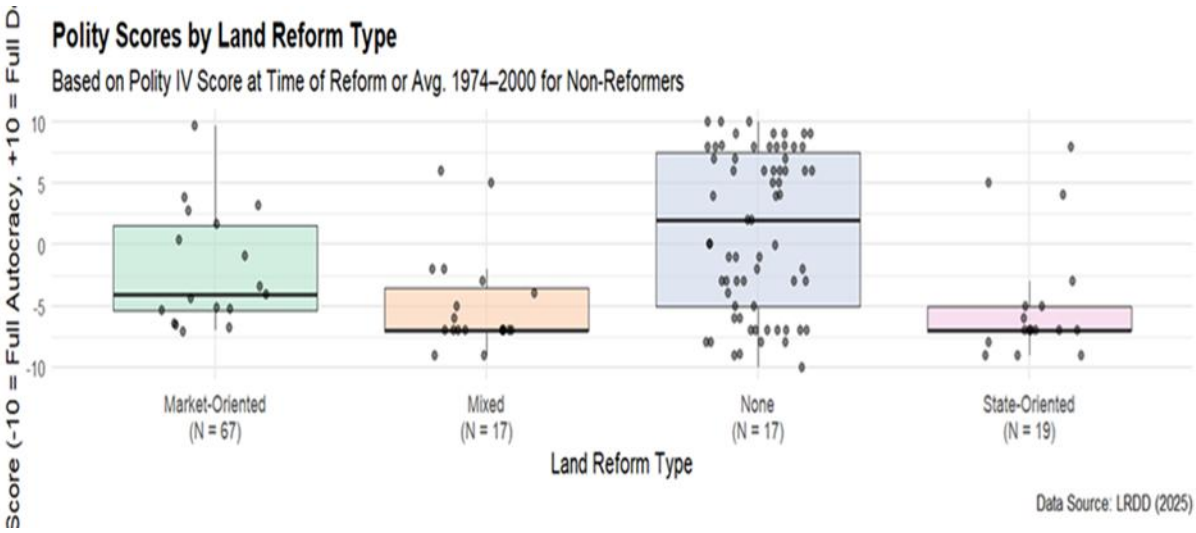
Figure 4 compares the regime distribution of reformers and non-reformers. Autocracies accounted for 44.4% of non-reformers and 45.8% of reformers. Democracies, however, made up a higher share among reformers (27.7%) than among non-reformers (22.2%). These findings suggest that non-reformers should not be treated as neutral or passive cases. In some contexts, non-reform may reflect a deliberate elite strategy that preserves authoritarian structures, even if the aggregate regime distribution appears broadly similar.

As the analysis proceeds, the label anocracy will be dropped. This category was initially used to capture the spectrum of mixed regimes and to assess whether land reform was predominantly associated with authoritarian, democratic or hybrid settings. From this point forward, authoritarian regimes are defined as those with a Polity score below +6.

4.5.3 Descriptive distributions: polity scores and reform orientation

A boxplot of Polity scores further illustrates these distributions. Market-oriented reforms cluster around mild autocracy to semi-democracy with only a small number of democratic outliers. State-oriented reforms are overwhelmingly located in authoritarian contexts, reflecting their concentration within more coercive institutional environments. Non-reformers display the widest distribution of Polity scores, spanning long-standing autocracies such as Sudan and Malaysia as well as democratic regimes like Argentina. This variation is visualised in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Polity Scores by Land Reform Type (Boxplot)



Source: Author's calculations using the Land Reform Development Dataset (LRDD) and Polity IV Project (Marshall & Gurr, 2018).

4.5.4 Political Effects of Reform

This section consolidates all analyses evaluating the political outcomes associated with different reform types. Sequencing analysis, Polity trends, regression models and survival analysis are all explored in this section.

4.5.4.1 Sequencing relative to democratisation

Understanding the temporal sequence between land reform and democratisation helps clarify whether redistribution functions primarily as a trigger for political change or simply a by product of it. To address this question, reforms were matched with the onset of democracy using a ±5-year window around each country's first transition to a Polity score of +6, consistent with the threshold defined in Section 4. Table 1 summarises the timing of reform episodes relative to democratic transitions, while Figure 6 presents the same information as a

stacked bar chart. Percentages are reported as row percentages, representing the share of each reform type falling into each sequencing category.

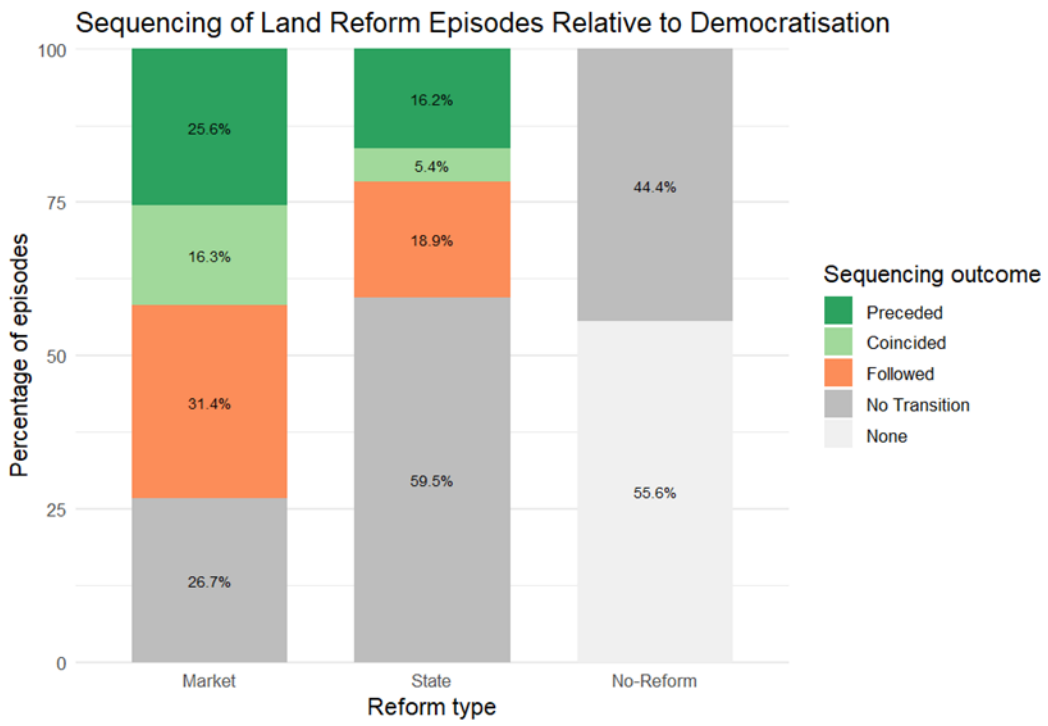
Table 1: Sequencing of Reform Episodes Relative to Democratisation

Reform Type	Preceded	Coincided	Followed	No Transition	None	Total
Market	22 (25.6%)	14 (16.3%)	27 (31.4%)	23 (26.7%)	0	86
State	6 (16.2%)	2 (5.4%)	7 (18.9%)	22 (59.5%)	0	37
No-Reform	0	0	0	8 (44.4%)	10 (55.6%)	18
Total	28	16	34	53	10	

Source: Author's calculations using the Land Reform Development Dataset (LRDD) and Polity IV Project (Marshall & Gurr, 2018).

Across the sample, market-oriented reforms are more likely to occur before or during democratisation, while state-oriented reforms tend to take place after transitions or under regimes that remain authoritarian. Among market-oriented reforms, 41.9% occurred before or coincided with democratisation, compared with only 21.6% of state-oriented reforms. Conversely, almost 60% of state-led reform episodes took place in countries that never democratised, compared with just 27% of market-oriented episodes. Non-reforming countries present a mixed pattern, with nearly half never democratising at all.

Figure 6: Sequencing of Land Reform Episodes Relative to Democratisation



Source: Author's calculations using the Land Reform Development Dataset (LRDD) and Polity IV Project (Marshall & Gurr, 2018).

These patterns are confirmed statistically. A chi-square test indicates that sequencing distributions differ significantly across reform types ($\chi^2 = 12.37$, df = 3, $p = 0.006$). As some expected cell counts were small, Fisher's exact test was also conducted, which confirmed the association ($p = 0.008$). The effect size is moderate (Cramér's V = 0.32), suggesting a substantively meaningful relationship: market-oriented reforms are more likely to precede or coincide with democratisation, whereas state-oriented reforms are disproportionately concentrated in non-transition cases. Robustness checks (shown in Appendix A.2), using both a collapsed 2×2 specification and a narrower ±2-year coincidence window, confirm that market reforms disproportionately cluster around transitions, while state reforms remain concentrated in non-transition contexts.

The sequencing analysis supports a conditional association that is consistent with but does not establish a causal relationship. Land reform does not automatically produce democratisation; however, market-oriented reforms more frequently accompany or slightly precede political openings, whereas state-oriented reforms tend to occur after transitions or in settings where democratisation does not occur at all.

A closer look at the countries where land reform preceded democratisation reveals several common mechanisms linking early redistribution to subsequent political openings. In a number of East and Southeast Asian countries such as South Korea, Taiwan, India and to a slightly lesser extent Indonesia and the Philippines, market-oriented reforms restructured agrarian power relations, which weakened landlord dominance and expanded the smallholder sector (Bo, 2013; Boyce, Rosset & Stanton, 2005; Dore, 2013; İşcan, 2018; Chaves, 1991; Adams, 1995; Denininger and Nagarajan, 2009; Dai-yao & Xe, 2014). These reforms frequently coincided with externally driven state-building agendas or developmental strategies that broadened property rights and raised rural incomes which laid the social foundations for later democratic transitions. Similar dynamics appear in Latin America (Peru, Chile, Ecuador, Bolivia, Paraguay, Panama, Guatemala and Honduras), where redistributive reforms— market-aligned or donor-supported—reduced rural elite influence and facilitated the emergence of more competitive political environments (Albertus, 2020; Albertus, Espinoza & Fort, 2020; Baland & Robinson, 2008; González, 2013; Goodwin, 2017; Gillette, 2005; Spalding, 2017; Donovan, 2002; Gould, 1989; Nelson, 2003).

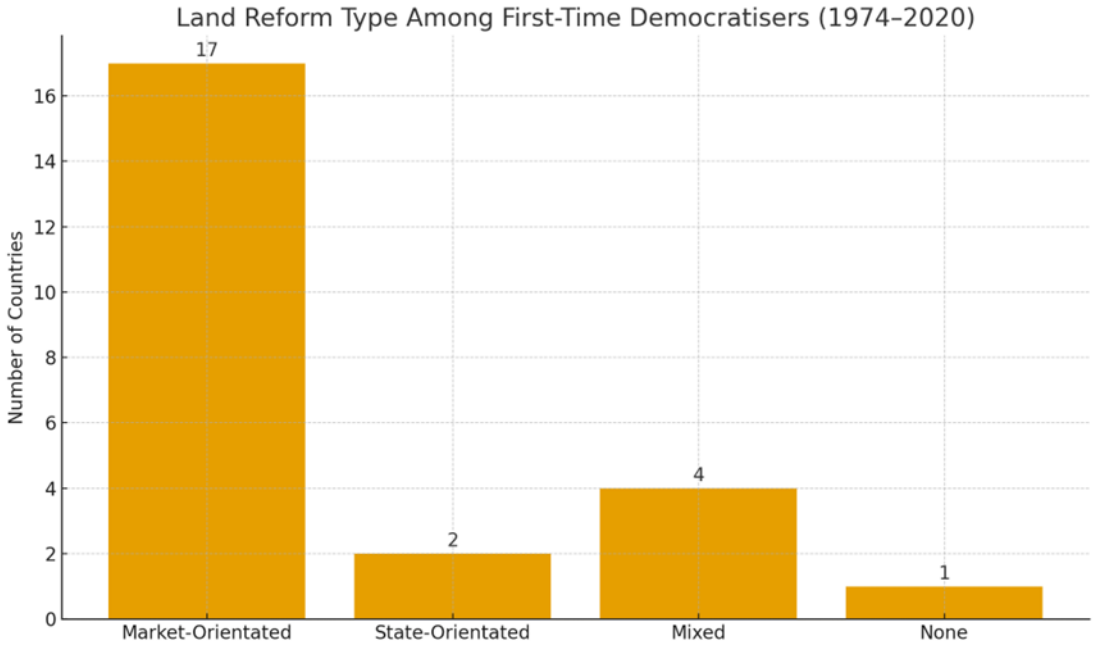
In parts of Sub-Saharan Africa (Kenya, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Mali, Benin, Senegal, Guinea-Bissau and Namibia) and the post-Soviet region (Kyrgyzstan, Georgia), reforms were introduced during broader postcolonial or post-socialist institutional restructuring (Achiba & Lengoiboni, 2020; Coldham, 1979; Amanor, 2009; Anaafo, 2015; Bambio & Agha, 2018; Hughes, 2014; Neef & Heidhues, 1994; Faye, 2008; Funk, 2019; Adams, 1993; Garcia, 2004; Bloch, 2002). These episodes tended to diversify rural property holdings, weaken corporatist or colonial networks and expand the pool of politically autonomous citizens—developments that lowered barriers to eventual democratisation. Even among nations who introduced state-oriented models like Bangladesh, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Iraq, Mali, Benin and Senegal, early land redistribution often formed part of larger transitions away from concentrated rule or civil conflict, supporting the gradual emergence of more pluralistic political orders. Israel

and Bhutan also fit this pattern, adopting early redistributive reforms that strengthened smallholder agriculture and facilitated later political opening. Across these diverse contexts, the overarching regularity is that early episodes of redistribution, especially those strengthening private tenure or undermining landed elites, contributed to structural conditions that made democratisation and modernisation more feasible.

4.5.4.2 Democratic transitions during the Third Wave (1974-2000)

The Third Wave of Democratisation (1974-2000) provides a critical temporal lens for assessing whether land reform systematically preceded political liberalisation. Of the twenty-four countries that democratised for the first time during this period, seventeen (70.8%) implemented market-oriented reforms before or during their transitions. These cases include Bolivia, Guatemala, Malawi, Namibia, the Philippines, South Africa and Taiwan. By contrast, only two transitions- El Salvador and Senegal- followed state-oriented reforms. Four countries adopted both market and state-oriented reforms at different historical moments (Indonesia, Mali, Nicaragua and Benin). It is important to note that the most recent reform undertaken to the transition was market-oriented. Only one country, Guyana, democratised during this period without implementing and form of land reform. Figure 7 visualises this distribution.

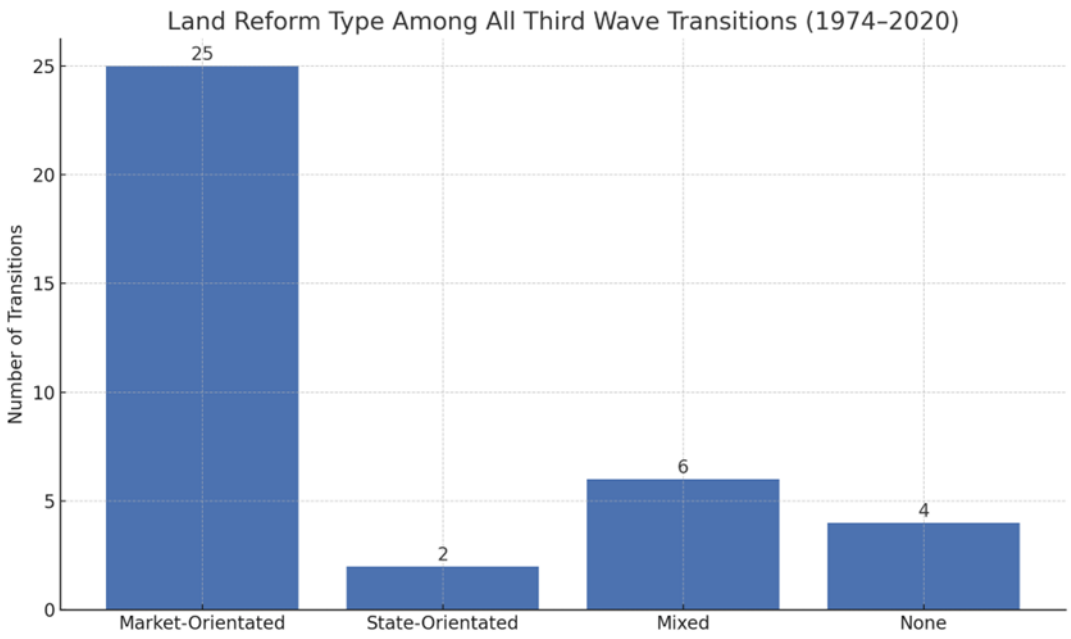
Figure 7: Land Reform Type among First-Time Third Wave Democratisers (N=24)



Source: Author's calculations using the Land Reform Development Dataset (LRDD) and Polity IV Project (Marshall & Gurr, 2018).

Expanding the analysis to include all transitions occurring during the Third Wave (N=37 across 34 countries) produces a consistent pattern. Twenty-five transitions (67.6%) followed market-oriented reforms, including Haiti and the Dominican Republic, which each experienced two separate transitions during this period. Again, only two transitions followed state-oriented reforms (El Salvador and Senegal). Mixed-reform countries such as Bangladesh and Brazil also transitioned during this period; in all six cases, the later reform undertaken was market-oriented. Four non-reforming states—Argentina, Guyana, Sudan and Uruguay—also democratised during this period.

Figure 8: Land Reform Type among All Third Wave Democratisers (N=37)



Source: Author's calculations using the Land Reform Development Dataset (LRDD) and Polity IV Project (Marshall & Gurr, 2018).

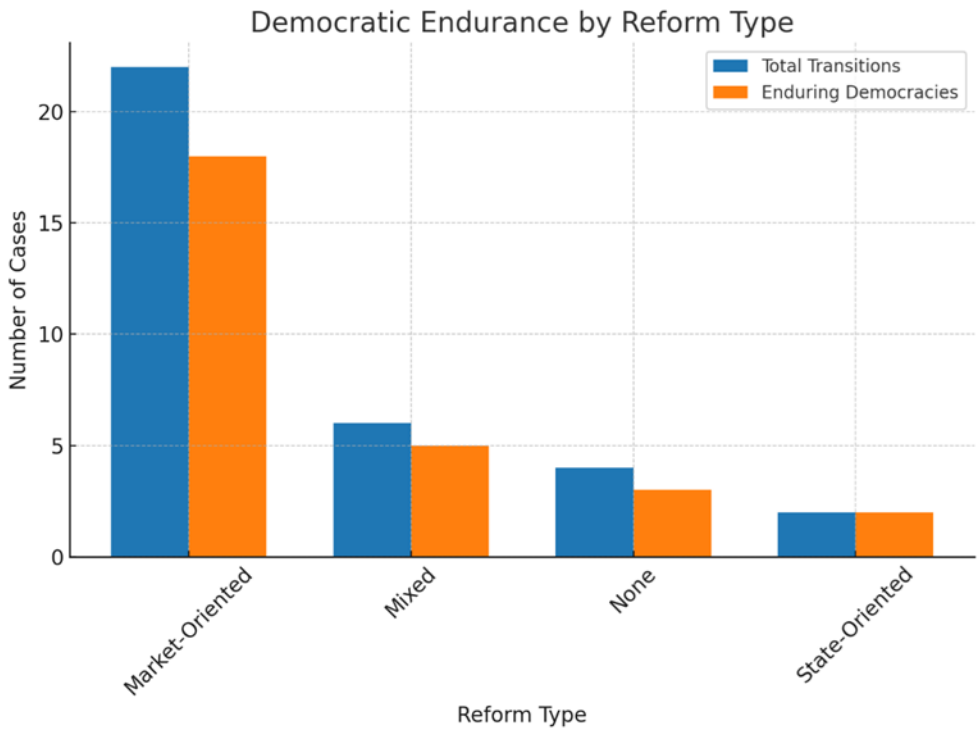
The Third Wave evidence reinforces the sequencing findings above. Democratic transitions were far more likely to occur after market-oriented reforms than after state-led ones. Although market-oriented reforms were not universally presented prior to transition, it was much more common that state-oriented redistribution. The clustering of transitions following market-aligned reform strengthens the interpretation that these reforms frequently accompany and may even help facilitate, political liberalisation.

4.5.4.3 Democratic endurance and consolidation

A further question concerns whether the type of land reform undertaken prior to transitions shapes the durability of newly established democratic regimes. Democratic endurance is defined here as maintaining a Polity score of +6 or higher for at least ten consecutive years

into the twentieth century. This measure allows for comparison across reform types among Third Wave democratisers.

Figure 9: Democratic Endurance by Reform Type



Source: Author's calculations using the Land Reform Development Dataset (LRDD) and Polity IV Project (Marshall & Gurr, 2018).

Among the twenty-two market-oriented reformers that democratised during the Third Wave, eighteen sustained democracy for at least ten years producing an endurance rate of 81.8%. These cases include South Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, Chile, the Dominican Republic, South Africa and Guatemala. Mixed reformers display an almost identical pattern: five of the six sustained democracy for at least a decade with Bangladesh as the sole reversal.

Although the sample is small, both countries that democratised after state-oriented reforms—El Salvador and Senegal—retained stable democratic institutions, yielding a 100% endurance rate. This figure should, however, be interpreted cautiously due to the very limited number of state-led cases. Among non-reformers, three of the four democratising states (Argentina, Guyana and Uruguay) remained democratic for at least a decade, while Sudan reverted back to authoritarian rule.

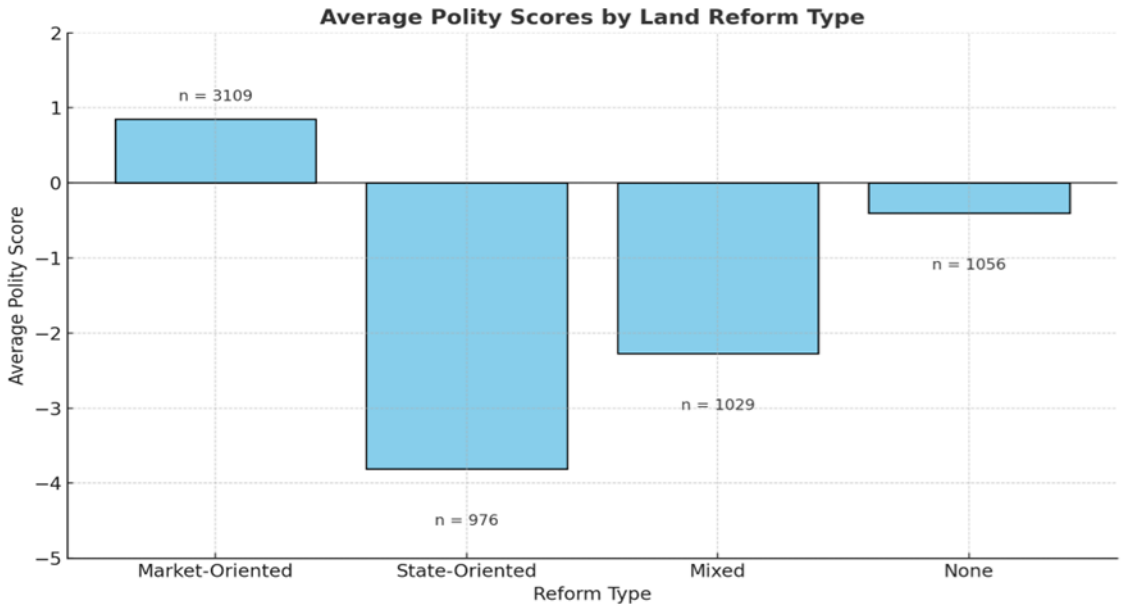
These descriptive patterns suggest that market-oriented reform is not only compatible with long-term democratic stability but may also facilitate it by creating new constituencies with a stake in inclusive governance, property protection and decentralised institutional authority. The strong performance of mixed reformers reinforces this interpretation. Conversely, the limited number of state-oriented cases prevents strong generalisation, and the endurance rates

of non-reformers appear to mirror broader global democratisation trends rather than reform-specific dynamics.

4.5.4.4 Polity score trends and long-run trajectories

Polity scores provide a longer-term perspective on the political consequences of land reform and reinforce several of the patterns identified above. Mean Polity scores differ across reform types (shown in Figure 10). Market-oriented reforms are associated with an average Polity score of +0.85, consistent with semi-democratic or democratising political orders. State-oriented reforms average –3.81, reflecting their strong association with authoritarian regimes. Mixed reformers fall between these categories (+2.27), while non-reforming countries average –0.40. The slightly higher democratic tendency among non-reformers likely reflects the fact that many authoritarian regimes undertook state-led reforms, thereby lowering the average score among reforming states.

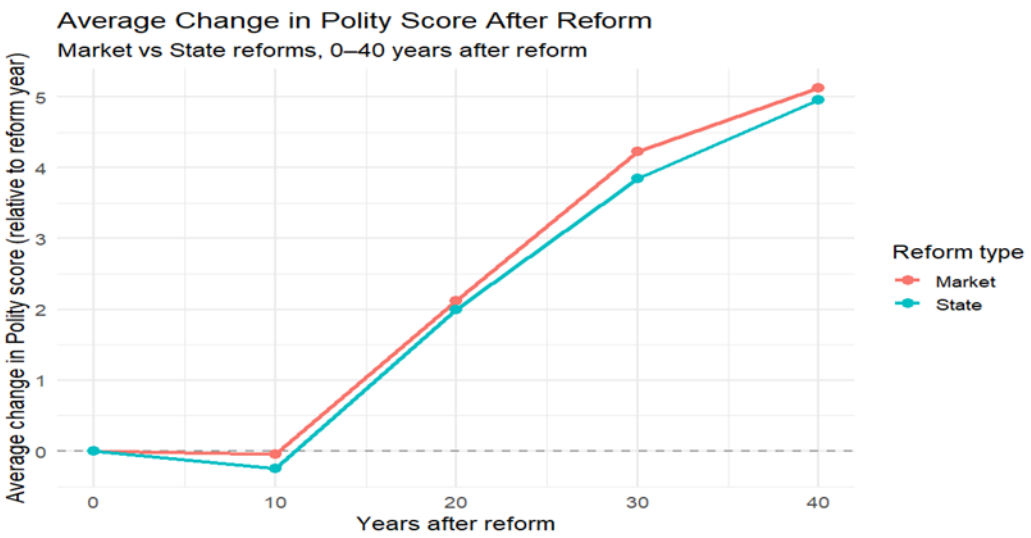
Figure 10: Average Polity Score by Land Reform Type



Source: Author's calculations using the Land Reform Development Dataset (LRDD) and Polity IV Project (Marshall & Gurr, 2018).

To evaluate whether land reform is associated with structural shifts in openness, changes in Polity scores were tracked over a forty-year horizon using the reform year as the baseline (year 0). Figure 11 plots the average change at 10, 20, 30 and 40 years after reform for both market and state-oriented episodes.

Figure 11: Average Change in Polity Score Following Reform, by Reform Type



Source: Author's calculations using the Land Reform Development Dataset (LRDD) and Polity IV Project (Marshall & Gurr, 2018).

The short-run effects of land reform are minimal. Ten years after reform, neither market- nor state-oriented reforms are associated with meaningful shifts in institutional openness (–0.04 and –0.24 points, respectively). These near-zero effects indicate that land redistribution does not immediately trigger democratisation and may occur in contexts of political stagnation or mild decline.

More substantial improvements appear over the medium run. Twenty years after reform, average Polity scores increase by roughly two points for both market-oriented (+2.12) and state-oriented reforms (+2.00). This parallel movement suggests that, in the medium term, the political consequences of reform depend less on the underlying institutional design.

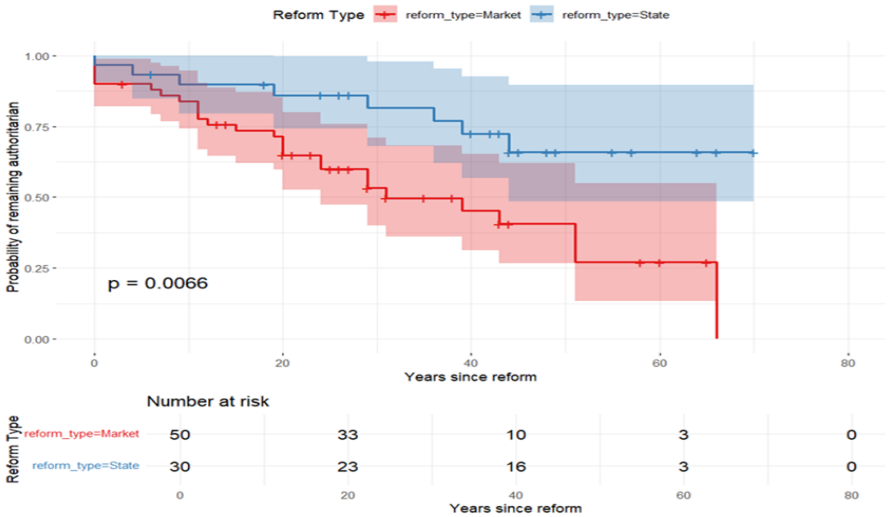
The most pronounced effects emerge over longer horizons. Thirty years after reform, market-oriented episodes are associated with an average gain of +4.23 points, compared with +3.85 points for state-led reforms. By forty years after reform, both groups converge, with market-oriented reforms linked to a +5.12 point increase and state-oriented reforms to a +4.96 point increase.

These findings support a gradualist interpretation of land reform's political effects. While land redistribution does not produce short-term democratisation, it is associated with sustained long-run improvements in institutional openness. Differences between market- and state-oriented reforms exist but are modest relative to the broad upward trajectory observed across both types.

4.5.4.5 Survival analysis

Figure 12 presents the Kaplan–Meier survival curves estimating the time until democratisation following different types of land reform. Market-oriented reforms are associated with a higher probability of democratising over the long run, while state-oriented reforms correspond to more prolonged authoritarian persistence. The log-rank test indicates that the difference between the curves is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$).

Figure 12: Kaplan–Meier Survival Curve by Reform Type



Source: Author's calculations using the Land Reform Development Dataset (LRDD) and Polity IV Project (Marshall & Gurr, 2018).

The substantive magnitude of this difference, however, is modest. The 95% confidence intervals overlap for much of the time horizon which suggests some caution in interpretation. The log-rank test indicates significance at conventional levels, but the magnitude of the effect is modest rather than substantial. Still, it points in the same direction: market-oriented reforms tend to be followed by earlier and more frequent democratic transitions, whereas state-oriented reforms are more commonly associated with extended authoritarian durability.

4.5.4.6 Logistic regression

To assess the robustness of the descriptive patterns, logistic regression models estimate the likelihood of democratisation as a function of reform type, with and without the control for economic development (logged GDP per capita). Historical GDP data are drawn primarily from the Maddison Project (2024) and supplemented by the World Bank (2023). Both models are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Logistic Regression of Democratic Transitions (Odds Ratio)

Variable	Model 1: Reform type only	Model 2: Reform type +Log GDP
Intercept	0.34 (0.25)***	0.44 (2.28)
State Reform (vs Market)	0.68 (0.49)	0.77 (0.50)
Log GDP per capita	—	0.96 (0.29)
Observations	123	117
AIC	139.7	132.1

Source: Author's calculations using the Land Reform Development Dataset (LRDD), Polity IV Project (Marshall & Gurr, 2018), and historical GDP estimates from the Maddison Project Database (2024) supplemented with the World Bank World Development Indicators (2023).

Reforms were operationalised as dummy variables identifying whether each episode was market-oriented or state-oriented, with reform timing taken from the LRDD. The dependent variable captures the first democratic transition defined as the first year a country's Polity IV score reached +6 or above. Non-reforming states were excluded due to the very small number of transitions observed among them.

Model 1 includes only reform type. Relative to market-oriented reforms, state-oriented reforms are associated with lower odds of democratisation (OR = 0.68), although this effect is not statistically significant. This finding is directionally consistent with the sequencing analysis, but the model indicates that the association is not strong enough to be statistically confirmed.

Model 2 adds log GDP per capita. Neither reform type nor economic development reaches statistical significance. The coefficient for GDP per capita is very close to one (OR = 0.96), suggesting that, conditional on reform type, variation in economic development does not meaningfully predict democratic transitions in this sample.

These models detect no statistically significant effects. However, the point estimates consistently favour the interpretation that market-oriented reforms are more conducive to democratisation than state-led reforms. The lack of statistical significance reinforces that these relationships are complex and likely mediated by additional political and institutional factors rather than simple direct effects. This pattern aligns with descriptive, temporal and sequencing analyses, while also indicating that additional political factors-such as elite strategies, institutional legacies and international pressures-likely condition the relationship between land reform and regime change.

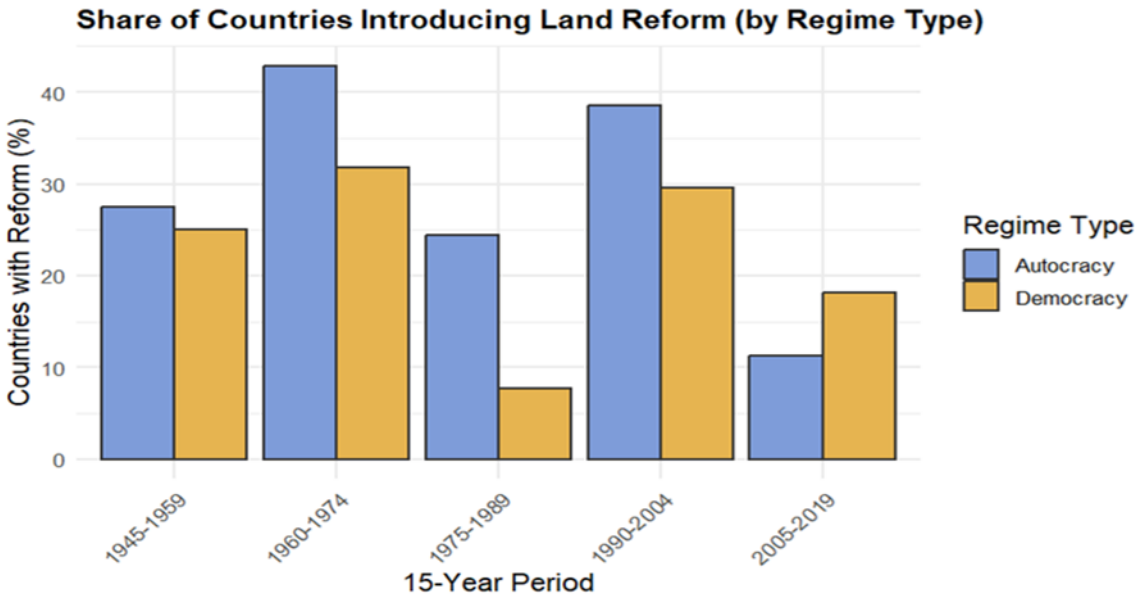
4.5.5 Timing of Land Reform

The timing of land reform episodes closely overlaps with major global political shifts, including the Second Wave of Democratisation (1943–1962), the Third Wave (1974–2000), the Decolonisation-era reforms of the 1960s and 1970s, and the Post–Cold War wave of market-oriented reforms in the 1990s. These overlapping cycles raise an important question: were land reforms merely coincidental to these broader transformations, or did they form part of the political and institutional changes underway in the Global South? This section examines the temporal clustering of land reform initiatives to assess how they align with or diverge from periods of political opening and authoritarian consolidation.

4.5.5.1 Land reform and temporal analysis

This section examines how reform incidence and outcomes vary across historical periods, using five fifteen-year windows (1945–1959, 1960–1974, 1975–1989, 1990–2004 and 2005–2019). Figure 13 summarises the share of reform initiations by regime type across these periods, revealing clear temporal clustering consistent with major political and economic transformations. Because Polity scores are available only until 2018, the final window is slightly shorter.

Figure 13: Regime Type and Land Reform Initiation Across Five Temporal Windows, 1945-2019



Source: Author's calculations using the Land Reform Development Dataset (LRDD) and Polity IV Project (Marshall & Gurr, 2018).

Early periods (1945–1959 and 1960–1974) are dominated by state-oriented reforms undertaken by newly independent or consolidating authoritarian regimes. These reforms were often embedded in postcolonial nation-building projects, Cold War competition and state-led

development strategies, functioning primarily as instruments of political consolidation rather than liberalisation.

In contrast, the 1975–1989 and especially the 1990–2004 periods saw a pronounced rise in market-oriented reforms. These shifts correspond to the Third Wave of Democratisation and international financial institutions' promotion of compensated transfers and private tenure. During these decades, land reform became more closely linked to economic liberalisation and institutional strengthening, particularly in Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa.

In the most recent period (2005–2018), overall reform frequency declined but remained diverse. Both democratic and authoritarian regimes continued to implement reforms, though typically smaller in scale and often embedded within broader market reforms or transitional justice processes. This suggests that land reform has evolved from a primarily redistributive project into a more institutional or developmental policy instrument.

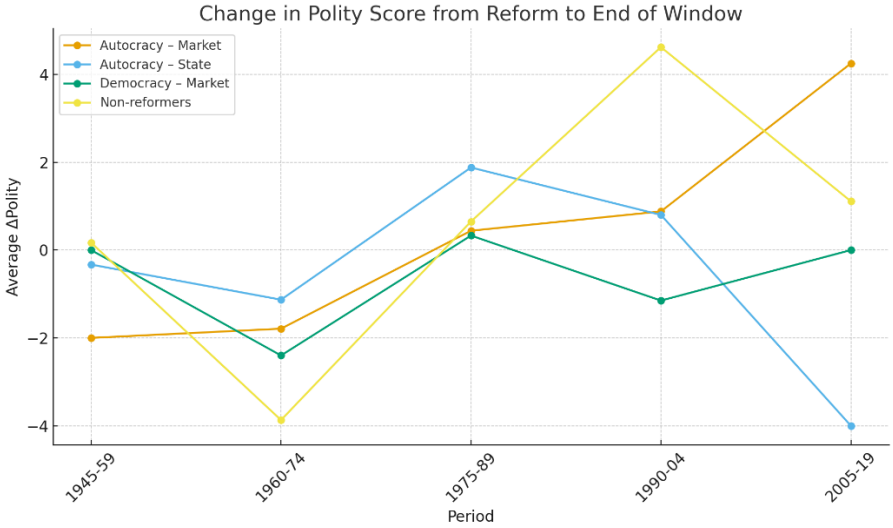
These temporal patterns reinforce earlier findings: market-oriented reforms increasingly cluster around periods of political opening, whereas state-oriented reforms remain concentrated in earlier phases of authoritarian consolidation. This indicates that reform and regime change co-evolve, reflecting structural and historical contingencies rather than a single causal pathway. Appendix Tables B1–B3 provide additional details on period-specific effects.

4.5.5.2 Timing, sequencing and period-specific trends

Figures 14 and 15 summarise ΔPolity values across the five temporal windows, allowing the long-run political consequences of reform to be visualised more clearly. During the early periods (1945–1974), average changes are negative across most regime–reform combinations, suggesting modest authoritarian movement following reform. This pattern likely reflects broader reversals of democratic gains associated with the Second Wave of Democratisation, particularly in Africa prior to the onset of the Third Wave in 1974.

In the 1975–1989 window, outcomes improve modestly. Autocracies implementing market-oriented reforms exhibit small positive changes (+0.44), while those introducing state-oriented reforms show somewhat larger gains (+1.88). During the post–Cold War period (1990–2004), autocracies continue to record mild improvements regardless of reform type, whereas democracies experience slight declines (–1.15). In the final period (2005–2019), autocratic trajectories diverge sharply: market-oriented reformers improve substantially (+4.25), while state-oriented reformers decline (–4.00). Democratic regimes remain broadly stable throughout.

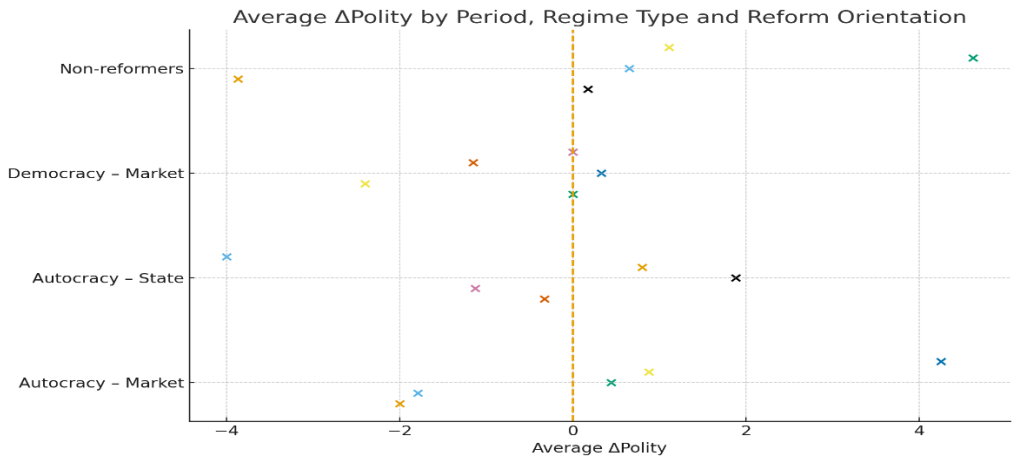
Figure 14: Change in Polity Score from Reform to End of Window, by Reform Type and Regime Type



Source: Author's calculations using the Land Reform Development Dataset (LRDD) and Polity IV Project (Marshall & Gurr, 2018).

For non-reformers, the horizon analysis shows a distinct pattern. Initial short-term declines are followed by more substantial long-run improvements, most notably during the 1990–2004 window. This suggests that non-reformers may be responding primarily to global democratisation pressures rather than to reform-specific political dynamics.

Figure 15. Average ΔPolity by Period, Regime Type and Reform Orientation (Dot-and-Whisker Plot)



Source: Author's calculations using the Land Reform Development Dataset (LRDD) and Polity IV Project (Marshall & Gurr, 2018).

These results indicate that land reform plays different political roles depending on regime context. In autocracies, market-oriented reforms are associated with gradual liberalisation, potentially linked to broader economic openings. State-oriented reforms show sporadic gains but remain more consistent with strategies of regime consolidation. In democracies, reforms tend to stabilise rather than transform existing institutions. Non-reformers display slower-but eventually positive-political shifts, reflecting the influence of global structural changes rather than land reform itself.

These findings all point to a clear pattern: market-oriented reforms cluster around democratic transitions and consolidation, while state-oriented reforms are disproportionately concentrated in authoritarian and non-transition contexts. This suggests that the institutional design of reform plays a central role in shaping long-run political trajectories.

4.5.6 Case Study: South Korea

South Korea provides one of the clearest illustrations of the mechanisms through which market-oriented land reform can facilitate democratic transition and consolidation. While South Korea represents a particularly clear example, it should be interpreted as an illustrative case consistent with the broader cross-national patterns rather than definitive causal evidence. Introduced under U.S. military occupation in 1948 and consolidated in the early 1950s, the reform dismantled the entrenched tenancy system and created a broad class of smallholding farmers (Lipset, 1959; Ansell & Samuels, 2014; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2006; Bo, 2013; İşcan, 2018; Studwell, 2013). This case aligns closely with the quantitative patterns identified above, demonstrating how external pressure, domestic institutional change and socioeconomic transformation can jointly support democratisation.

4.5.6.1 U.S. role and external involvement

Unlike many reform episodes, South Korea's programme was not initiated primarily by domestic political actors. U.S. occupation authorities compelled the Rhee government to implement redistribution, supplementing the programme with food aid and security guarantees to ensure compliance (Studwell, 2013; Bo, 2013; İşcan, 2018). Without this leverage, landed elites would likely have resisted meaningful reform. External enforcement therefore created institutional changes that domestic elites could not easily reverse.

Even after the withdrawal of occupation authorities, subsequent authoritarian governments under Syngman Rhee and later Park Chung Hee retained the core elements of the reform. Cold War dynamics, fears of renewed conflict with North Korea and the imperative to expand agricultural production generated strong incentives to preserve the new agrarian structure. By the 1960s and 1970s, rising procurement prices, improvements in agricultural productivity and the expansion of rural advisory programmes generated substantial income gains for smallholders. These farmers accumulated assets, invested in their children's education and gradually emerged as an economically independent and politically literate middle class.

4.5.6.2 Land reform and the freeholder class

As Patnaik (1972), Ladejinsky (1977), Bo (2013) and İşcan (2018) argue, smallholding farmers often constitute a natural constituency for representative government. South Korea's reform converted millions of tenants into freeholders, weakening landlord dominance and empowering rural households. By fragmenting concentrated landownership, the reform dismantled a key pillar of pre-war authoritarianism and reduced the likelihood of rural conflict.

Productivity gains in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s further strengthened this emerging rural middle class. By the mid-1970s, South Korea had one of the most productive agricultural sectors in Asia (Ladejinsky, 1972). Rising incomes, asset accumulation and expanding educational opportunities helped consolidate the social bases associated with democratic demands (Studwell, 2013; Albertus, 2024). In this sense, land reform not only reconfigured rural power relations but also created a broad socioeconomic group with incentives to advocate for political participation.

4.5.6.3 Economic preconditions and democratisation

Modernisation theorists such as Lipset (1959) and Przeworski et al. (1996) highlight the importance of economic thresholds for democratic transitions. South Korea illustrates this logic. Per capita income stood at just $87 in 1962—among the lowest in the world—but rose above $3,500 by 1982, coinciding with major improvements in education, literacy and political consciousness. Polity IV and Freedom House scores show a parallel pattern: political rights and civil liberties improved steadily from the early 1980s, culminating in South Korea's democratic breakthrough in 1987.

Land reform was central to this trajectory. By making the agricultural sector profitable, it generated tax revenues and surplus capital that the state channelled into industrialisation. The resulting export-led growth strategy allowed South Korea to surpass the income thresholds that Huntington (1991) and others associate with democratisation. In this sense, land reform functioned as an enabling condition: it set in motion the economic transformation that raised incomes, expanded education and ultimately created a mass constituency for democracy.

4.5.6.4 Democratic consolidation

South Korea's democratic consolidation since 1987 exemplifies Diamond's (2008) claim that no democracy has broken down in a wealthy country. With per capita income exceeding $33,000 in 2023, South Korea's democracy remains highly resilient. According to democratisation theory, the country had already surpassed the income and education thresholds that Przeworski et al. (1996) and Barro (1996) identify as guarantees of democratic endurance. Even recent political crises—such as President Yoon Suk Yeol's attempted declaration of martial law in 2024—were met with rapid institutional resistance. The National

Assembly voted to overturn the decree, and Yoon was subsequently impeached, demonstrating the robustness of democratic institutions.

Land reform's role in consolidation is indirect but consequential. By transforming the countryside into a foundation of property—owning farmers, it reduced social polarisation, broadened the middle class and tied the interests of rural citizens to democratic institutions. In short, land reform did not merely enable South Korea's transition; it also contributed to the socioeconomic conditions under which its democracy could endure.

This case mirrors the broader cross-national patterns identified earlier in this paper, where market-oriented reforms are systematically associated with earlier transitions and stronger long-run democratic performance. South Korea thus provides a clear micro-level illustration of the mechanisms through which market-oriented redistribution can facilitate both political opening and subsequent institutional consolidation.

4.6 Conclusion and Discussion

4.6.1 Summary of findings

This paper examined the relationship between land reform and regime type across 101 postcolonial states between 1945 and 2020, drawing on the Land Reform Development Dataset (LRDD), complemented by sequencing, temporal, survival, and regression analyses, as well as a case study of South Korea. The study assessed how the timing, institutional design, and absence of land reform shaped democratic transitions and long-run regime trajectories.

The findings provide several key insights. Firstly, land reform is not confined to democracies or any specific regime type. Although most episodes occurred under authoritarian or semi-authoritarian regimes, the types of reform these regimes adopted diverged significantly. Market-oriented reforms were disproportionately associated with democratic or semi-democratic contexts, whereas state-oriented reforms were concentrated within authoritarian regimes. This reinforces a core insight of the political economy literature, the importance of institutional design. Rather than the mere presence of reform, the institutional design determines its political consequences.

Secondly, market-oriented reforms are strongly associated with democratic transitions during the Third Wave (1974-2000), though this relationship is not uniform. In some cases, reform preceded democratisation, while in others it followed transitions as part of institutional consolidation. Logistic regression models do not yield statistically significant results, but their direction consistently favours market-oriented reforms. Survival analysis similarly indicates that transitions occur earlier and more frequently among market reforms. These findings resonate with modernisation theory: reforms that broaden ownership and raise rural

incomes help create constituencies with incentives to demand political participation (Lipset 1959; Przeworski et al. 1996; Acemoglu & Robinson 2006).

Thirdly, democratic consolidation appears closely tied to reform type. Among Third Wave democratisers, countries with market-oriented reforms sustained democracy at much higher rates than those without reform or with state-oriented redistribution. South Korea illustrates this mechanism: its 1948 market-oriented reforms dismantled landlord dominance, raised productivity and produced a politically literate and assertive rural middle class that, alongside industrialisation, underpinned the eventual democratic transition (Huntington, 1991; Bo, 2013).

Finally, the study provides tentative evidence on the political implications of non-reform. Countries that failed to introduce land reform were more likely to remain authoritarian and their long-run Polity trajectories show lower and more uneven political change. The absence of reform should be understood as an active political outcome rather than a passive omission. Although this group is small, the results suggest inaction may function as an elite-preserving strategy rather than a neutral absence of policy (Moore 1966; Ziblatt 2008; Acheampong et al. 2023).

4.6.2 Theoretical contributions

The findings demonstrate that land reform is not politically neutral, but its institutional design determines whether it facilitates democratisation or reinforces authoritarian rule. By disaggregating reforms into market and state-oriented types, the study helps reconcile conflicting claims in the literature. It shows that neither the optimistic view (that reform promotes democracy) nor the pessimistic view (that reform is a tool used by autocrats) holds uniformly across all cases. Scholars have relied heavily on a small number of case studies which, while rich in detail, has overstate general patterns and produced claims that do not always withstand large-N analysis. The cross-national evidence presented here shows that the political effects commonly inferred from such cases are not universal.

The results also provide support for modernisation theory. In South Korea and other market reformers, redistribution expanded ownership and helped create a rural middle class aligned with democratic institutions—consistent with Lipset (1959), Przeworski et al. (1996), and Diamond (2004). However, the persistence of authoritarianism in state reformers and non-reformers highlights the centrality of elite strategies, institutional constraints and the political uses of redistribution which supports Albertus's argument that autocrats deploy land reform to entrench their rule.

Viewed historically, the political function of land reform shifts as regimes evolve. Early autocracies used redistribution to secure legitimacy and centralise control, whereas later democratic waves adopted market-based reforms as instruments of consolidation and modernisation. The evidence therefore supports a conditional interpretation: market-oriented reform can contribute to democratisation under specific circumstances, yet land reform more

broadly co-evolves with wider political transformations rather than acting as a uniform causal trigger.

4.6.3 Policy and comparative implications

The findings highlight that institutional design of land reform carries important political consequences. Market-oriented reforms appear more compatible with democratic openings and long-run democratic consolidation, while state-led reforms frequently reinforce authoritarian control by creating dependent constituents and weakening rival elites. This suggests that governments and international organisations should treat land reform not only as an economic intervention but also as an institutional choice with direct implications for political liberalisation.

Comparatively speaking, the analysis highlights that inaction is as politically meaningful as reform. Non-reform, whether driven by capacity constraints or elite resistance, can entrench existing power structures and prolong authoritarian durability. This has implications for contemporary cases where high inequality coexists with stalled redistribution: elite vetoes over reform may close off potential routes to democratisation, even where economic or social pressures favour change.

4.6.4 Limitations and future research

Several limitations remain. Firstly, while this study demonstrates associations between reform type and democratisation, it does not establish causality. Future work could employ process-tracing, comparative-historical analysis or natural experiments to assess whether reforms directly trigger political change or simply accompany broader transformations. Secondly, sequencing requires deeper investigation: do reforms that precede democratisation produce different outcomes from those that follow it and under what political conditions? Thirdly, interaction effects deserve attention-particularly the ways land reform intersects with inequality, rural mobilisation, elite cohesion, and foreign aid. Finally, the case study approach could be expanded. Examining transitional countries with mixed reform trajectories—such as Brazil, Mali, Nicaragua, or Indonesia— would help clarify how successive reform phases interact with shifting political coalitions and why some mixed reformers consolidate democracy while others do not.

4.6.5 Conclusion

This study shows that land reform is a deeply political institution rather than a neutral development policy. Market-oriented reforms are consistently associated with democratic transitions and long-term democratic durability, whereas state-oriented reforms are more often linked to authoritarian persistence. The absence of reform, meanwhile, appears to

reflect strategies of elite preservation that constrain political openings. South Korea provides a clear example of how market-oriented redistribution can create the economic and social foundations for democratic consolidation. The findings demonstrate that land reform is not a uniform policy tool but one whose political consequences depend fundamentally on institutional design.

By combining large-N descriptive evidence with a process-oriented case study, this paper contributes to a more nuanced understanding of when and how land reform reshapes political trajectories. Ultimately, the findings suggest that the institutional design of land reform matters profoundly—not only for economic development but also for determining whether societies move toward democracy or remain locked in authoritarian rule.

Appendix for Chapter 4

Note:

As regime type fluctuates over time and many countries implemented more than one land reform episode, all descriptive statistics in the main text are calculated using an episode-level classification. A country is counted as a "democratic reformer" only for those reform episodes that occurred when its Polity2 score was ≥ +6. Similarly, "autocratic" episodes are defined as Polity2 < +6 in the year of reform initiation. This allows consistent estimation of the share of democracies, autocracies, anocracies, and non-reformers that undertook reform at least once, without double-counting countries that changed regime type. Country-level summaries are provided only in the final robustness tables, where countries with multiple reforms are treated as special cases.

Appendix A. Additional Sequencing and Horizon Analysis

This appendix provides supplementary analysis that supports the results presented in Section 5.2. All tables and figures here present additional detail or robustness tests that complment but do not repeat the main results/

A.1 Average Change in Polity Score by Reform Type (10-, 20-, and 30-Year Horizons)

Table A1. Average Change in Polity Score Over Time by Reform Type

Reform Type	Avg. Change (10 Years)	Avg. Change (20 Years)	Avg. Change (30 Years)
Market-Oriented	-0.74	+0.16	+3.57
Mixed	-1.62	-1.06	+5.36
State-Oriented	-0.47	-0.07	+1.67
None (No Reform)	N/A	N/A	N/A

These values correspond to the horizon trends visualised in Figure 10 of the main text.

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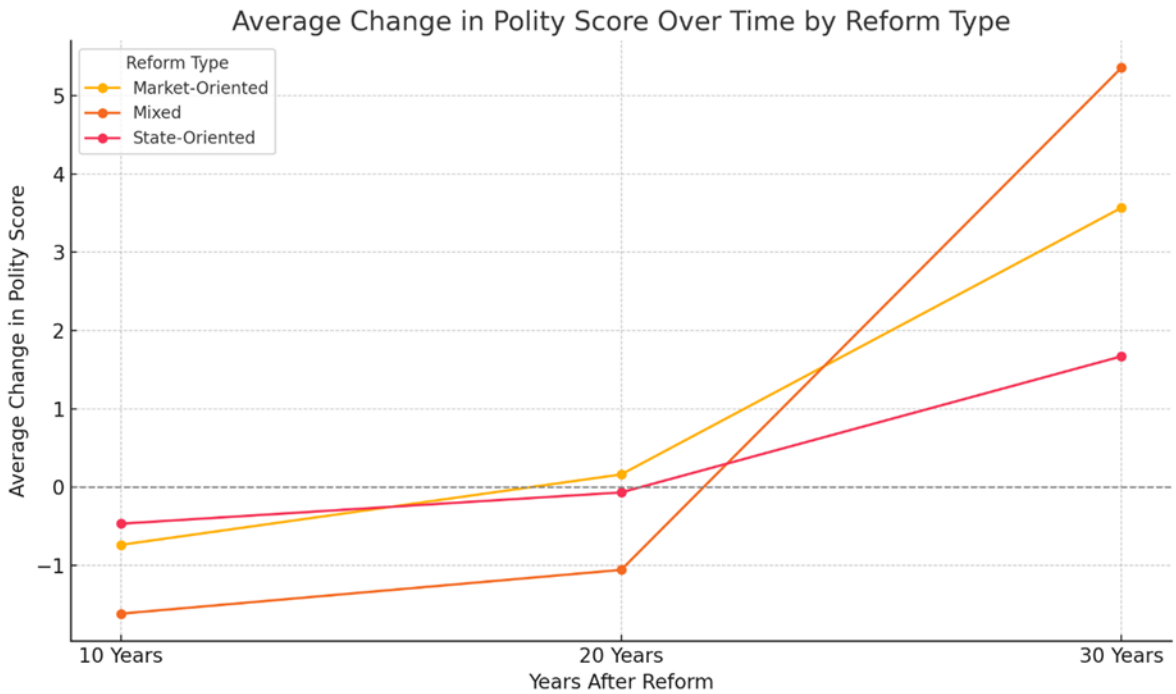


A.2 Sequencing Robustness Checks

This subsection contains the robustness tests that validate the sequencing patterns descrived in Section 5.2.1

A.2.1 Collapsed 2×2 Sequencing Test

Table A2. Collapsed Sequencing: Before/Coincided vs After/No Transition

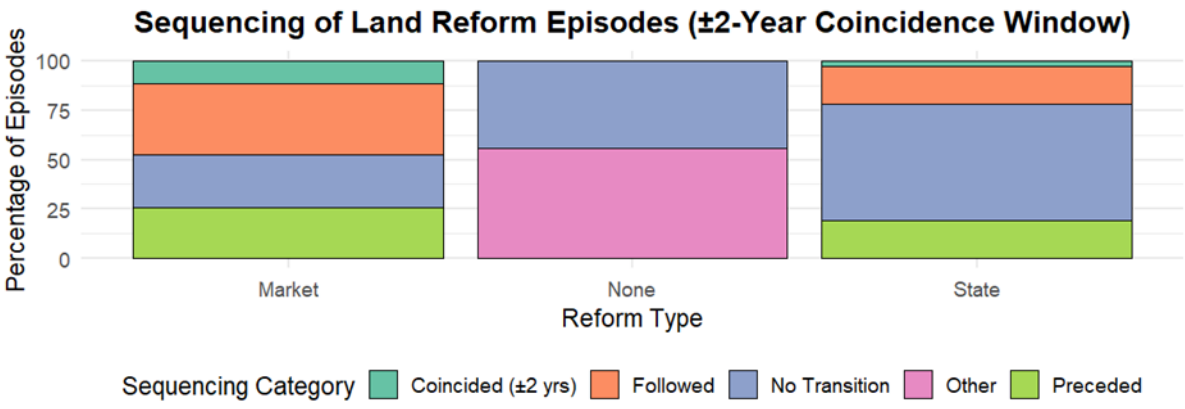
Reform Type	Preceded	Coincided (+-2 yrs)	Followed	No Transition	Total
Market	22 (25.6%)	10 (11.6%)	31 (36.0%)	23 (26.7%)	86
State	7 (18.9%)	1 (2.7%)	7 (18.9%)	22 (59.5%)	37
None	0	0	0	8 (44.4%)	18

A.2.2 Narrow ±2-Year Coincidence Window

A robustness check using a tighter ±2-year window produces substantively identical results.

Table A3. Sequencing with ±2-Year Window

Reform Type	Preceded	Coincided (+-2 yrs)	Followed	No Transition	Total
Market	22 (25.6%)	10 (11.6%)	31 (36.0%)	23 (26.7%)	86
State	7 (18.9%)	1 (2.7%)	7 (18.9%)	22 (59.5%)	37
None	0	0	0	8 (44.4%)	18



This reduced classification shows the same directional differences across reform types as the full sequencing model. Shrinking the coincidence window does not materially alter the distribution of sequencing outcomes.

Appendix B. Temporal and Regime-Specific Effects

This section provides the detailed period by period values that underpin the temporal analysis in Section 5.3.

B1. Reform Type by Regime Type and Historical Period

Table B1. Reform Type by Regime at Reform Across Temporal Windows

Period	Regime	Reform Type	N	%
1945-1959	Autocracy	Market	8	72.7
1945-1959	Autocracy	State	3	27.3
1945-1959	Democracy	Market	2	100.0
1960-1974	Autocracy	Market	14	48.3
1960-1974	Autocracy	State	15	51.7
1960-1974	Democracy	Market	5	83.3
1960-1974	Democracy	State	1	16.7
1975-1989	Autocracy	Market	9	52.9
1975-1989	Autocracy	State	8	47.1
1975-1989	Democracy	Market	3	100.0

1990-2004	Autocracy	Market	16	76.2
1990-2004	Autocracy	State	5	23.8
1990-2004	Democracy	Market	13	92.9
1990-2004	Democracy	State	1	7.1
2005-2019	Autocracy	Market	4	66.7
2005-2019	Autocracy	State	2	33.3
2005-2019	Democracy	Market	8	100.0

These figures correspond to the distribution display in Figure 12.

B2. ΔPolity Scores by Period and Reform Type

(Matches Results Section 5.7)

Table B2. Change in Polity Score from Reform to End of Window

Period	Regime	Reform Type	N	Avg ΔPolity
1945-1959	Autocracy	Market	8	-2.00
1945-1959	Autocracy	State	3	-0.33
1945-1959	Democracy	Market	2	0.00
1960-1974	Autocracy	Market	14	-1.79
1960-1974	Autocracy	State	15	-1.13
1960-1974	Democracy	Market	5	-2.40
1960-1974	Democracy	State	1	-10.00
1975-1989	Autocracy	Market	9	0.44
1975-1989	Autocracy	State	8	1.88
1975-1989	Democracy	Market	3	0.33
1990-2004	Autocracy	Market	16	0.88
1990-2004	Autocracy	State	5	0.80
1990-2004	Democracy	Market	13	-1.15
1990-2004	Democracy	State	1	0.00
2005-2019	Autocracy	Market	4	4.25
2005-2019	Autocracy	State	2	-4.00
2005-2019	Democracy	Market	8	0.00

These values correspond to the average plotted in Figure 13.

B3 (Non-Reformers). Change in Polity Score for Non-Reforming States Across Temporal Windows

Table B3. ΔPolity for Non-Reformers

Period	N-Non-reformers	Avg ΔPolity
1945-1959	6	0.17
1960-1974	15	-3.87
1975-1989	17	0.65
1990-2004	17	4.62
2005-2019	18	1.11

Non-reformer trajectories reflect background global democratisation rather than reform-specific political change.

B4. Long-Term Effects of Land Reform (Event-Time Horizons)

These results test whether land reform generates durable political change.

Table B4. ΔPolity X Years After Reform (By Regime Type and Reform Type)

Horizon (years)	Regime	Reform Type	N	Avg ΔPolity
10	Autocracy	Market	50	0.58
10	Autocracy	State	31	0.29
10	Democracy	Market	26	-1.23
10	Democracy	State	2	-8.50
20	Autocracy	Market	48	3.62
20	Autocracy	State	32	2.12
20	Democracy	Market	21	-1.33
20	Democracy	State	1	-2.00
30	Autocracy	Market	30	5.47
30	Autocracy	State	25	4.08
30	Democracy	Market	9	0.11
30	Democracy	State	1	-2.00
40	Autocracy	Market	25	7.00
40	Autocracy	State	24	5.29
40	Democracy	Market	8	-0.75
40	Democracy	State	1	-3.00

These values support the long-run trends discussed in Section 5.2.4.

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Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

This thesis has examined the causes, patterns and political consequences of land reform across the postcolonial and developing world from 1945 to 2020. Drawing on the Land Reform Development Dataset (LRDD), it has provided the first cross-national, large-N analysis of land reform episodes, addressing longstanding limitations in a literature dominated by case studies and conceptual inconsistencies. By combining descriptive analysis with statistical modelling and sequencing analysis, the thesis has repositioned land reform as both a developmental intervention and a political institution shaped by domestic and international forces.

The analysis proceeded in three stages. Firstly, it introduced the LRDD and documented the scope, variation and temporal distribution of land reform across 101 countries, demonstrating that reform has been widespread but an uneven feature of postcolonial development. Secondly, it examined the determinants of land reform, showing that both domestic and political factors—such as regime type and ideology—and international factors—including geopolitical alignment and donor conditionality—are systematically associated with the likelihood and type of reform adopted. Thirdly, it explored the political consequences of reform, highlighting how different institutional designs are linked to distinct regime trajectories, with market-oriented reforms associated with democratic transitions and democratic consolidation, whereas state-oriented reforms are associated with authoritarian durability. Across these analyses, the thesis has also emphasised that the absence of reform is itself a politically meaningful outcome, reflecting strategies of elite preservation.

These findings suggest that land reform is not a uniform or purely technical policy response to agrarian inequality but a strategic and politically motivated process. The design, timing and implementation of reform reflect the interaction of competing domestic pressures, institutional constraints and international influences. While the analysis does not establish causality, it identifies consistent patterns that contribute to a broader understanding of how redistributive policies are shaped and how the relate to political change.

This concluding chapter draws together the core findings of the thesis and reflects on their theoretical and empirical implications. It first summarises the main contributions of the research, before situating them within broader debates in political economy, comparative politics, and international relations. It then considers the limitations of the study and outlines avenues for future research. The chapter concludes by reflecting on the continuing relevance of land reform for understanding development, inequality, and political change in the contemporary global context.

5.2 Summary of Findings

This thesis has examined land reform as a cross-national phenomenon, focusing on patterns, determinants and political consequences. Drawing on the Land Reform Development Dataset (LRDD), the analysis provides a systematic account of land reform across 101 countries from 1945 to 2020, offering new empirical insights into a policy area that has traditionally been studied through a limited number of case studies.

The first key finding concerns the scope and distribution of land reform. The evidence shows that land reform has been a widespread but uneven feature of development, with 123 reform episodes identified across 83 countries. Two distinct temporal waves are evident: the Decolonisation Wave in the 1960s and 1970s and the Post-Cold War wave in the 1990s. These waves reflect shifting global and domestic contexts, including state-building processes, ideological competition and the influence of international financial institutions. At the same time, a notable minority of countries did not implement reform at all, highlighting that the absence of reform is itself a meaningful and politically consequential outcome.

The second set of findings relates to the determinants of land reform. The analysis demonstrates that reform is associated with a combination of structural conditions, domestic political factors and international influences. At the structural level, land reform is more likely in poorer, agrarian economies, where land constitutes a central productive asset. Domestically, political institutions and ideology play a key role. Market-oriented reforms are more commonly associated with democratic regimes, where institutional constraints encourage compensated and negotiated redistribution, while state-oriented reforms are more closely associated with left-leaning governments and more centralised forms of political authority. International factors are also significant. During the Cold War, geopolitical alignment shaped reform trajectories, with market-oriented reforms more common among countries aligned with the United States. In the post-Cold War period, donor conditionality and international development agendas became more influential, particularly in promoting market-based reforms.

The third set of findings relate to the political consequences of land reform. Market-oriented reforms are associated with democratic transitions and longer periods of democratic endurance, particularly when implemented during periods of political liberalisation. These reforms appear to facilitate shifts in economic and political power that are compatible with democratic institutions. By contrast, state-oriented reforms are associated with authoritarian durability. In these cases, redistribution often occurs in ways that reinforce state control and create politically dependent constituencies, limiting the emergence of independent economic actors. The findings also highlight that countries that do not implement land reform are disproportionately authoritarian, suggesting that the maintenance of existing landholding structures can serve as a strategy of regime preservation.

These findings suggest that land reform is best understood not as a uniform policy intervention, but as a set of institutionally distinct strategies with different political implications. The type of reform adopted, the context in which it is implemented, and the broader institutional environment all shape its role in processes of political and economic change. While the analysis does not establish causal relationships, the consistency of these patterns across multiple methods and levels of analysis provides a robust empirical foundation for understanding land reform as a politically embedded process.

5.3 Theoretical Contribution

This thesis makes three interrelated contributions to the study of land reform and its relationship to political and economic development. These contributions speak to debates in the political economy of development, comparative politics and international political economy, and collectively reposition land reform as a politically embedded institutional choice rather than a uniform policy intervention.

The first contribution is to reconceptualise land reform as a political institution shaped by competing domestic and international pressures. Much of the existing literature has treated land reform primarily as a developmental tool, focusing on its economic effects or its role in reducing inequality (Lipton, 2009; Deininger, 2003; King, 2013). While this perspective has generated important insights, it often detaches from the political processes through which reform is adopted and implemented. By contrast, this thesis demonstrates that land reform is best understood as a strategic policy choice made by governments facing competing pressures from rural populations, landed elites, institutional constraints and international actors. This aligns with broader political economy approaches that emphasise the role of distributional conflict and state–society relations in shaping policy outcomes (Hirschman, 1970; Boix, 2003). This thesis extends these frameworks by showing that redistributive polices themselves vary systemically in their institutional design and political impacts.

The second contribution is conceptual. By introducing a typology distinguishing market-oriented and state-oriented land reform, the thesis addresses a key limitation in the literature which has often treated land reform as a binary variable—whether reform occurred or not. Existing research has typically aggregated diverse reform experiences, obscuring important differences in institutional design. Market-oriented reforms operate through decentralised ownership, compensated redistribution and market-based allocation, while state-oriented reforms centralise control and allocate land administratively. This distinction allows the analysis to move beyond the question of whether reform occurs and instead examine how different institutional models relate to political context and regime trajectories. In doing so, the thesis builds on and extends the influential work of Michael Albertus, whose analysis highlights the importance of political incentives and elite coalitions, but does not systematically distinguish between reform types at a global scale.

The third contribution is analytical, demonstrating that the institutional design of land reform is systematically associated with different political contexts and regime trajectories. While existing research has recognised that redistribution can reshape political coalitions and institutions (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2006; Albertus and Menaldo, 2012), it has often produced conflicting conclusions regarding the relationship between land reform and democratisation. This thesis helps reconcile these debates by showing that such outcomes depend on the type of reform implemented. Market-oriented reforms are consistently associated with democratic institutions and periods of political liberalisation, while state-oriented reforms are more closely associated with authoritarian regimes and patterns of regime durability. These findings suggest that redistribution is not inherently democratising or authoritarian; rather, its political effects depend on the institutional form it takes. This insight contributes to comparative politics by linking redistributive policy design to regime outcomes and to development studies by highlighting the importance of institutional variation within ostensibly similar policies.

A further contribution lies in highlighting the political significance of non-reform. While most of the literature focuses on cases where land reform occurs, this dissertation demonstrates that the absence of reform is itself a politically meaningful outcome. Countries that do not implement land reform are disproportionately authoritarian, suggesting that the maintenance of existing landholding structures can serve as a strategy of elite preservation. This finding extends existing work on elite resistance and distributional conflict by showing that policy inaction is not simply a failure of capacity, but a deliberate political choice. In this respect, the thesis contributes to a broader understanding of how states manage distributional pressures and respond to demands for redistribution.

Finally, the thesis contributes to international political economy by demonstrating that land reform is shaped not only by domestic conditions but also by global ideological and institutional forces. During the Cold War, geopolitical alignments influenced reform trajectories, while in the post-Cold War period, donor conditionality and international development agendas became more prominent. This supports and extends existing work on the role of international actors in shaping domestic policy choices (Borras and Franco, 2010), while also showing that these influences vary across time and context. Land reform thus emerges as a site where global ideological competition, development policy, and domestic political incentives intersect.

These contributions reposition land reform within the broader literature as a politically contingent and institutionally diverse process. Instead of treating reform as a singular policy category, the thesis demonstrates that its design, determinants and consequences must be understood in relation to the political and institutional contexts in which it occurs. This work provides a foundation for future research that can build on these insights to explore causal mechanisms, hybrid reform models and the evolving role of land governance in contemporary development challenges.

5.4 Implications for Political Economy, Development and Policy

The findings of this thesis have a number of broader implications for the study of political economy, development, and public policy. By demonstrating that land reform varies systematically in its institutional design, determinants and political consequences, the analysis challenges several implicit assumptions in existing debates and provides a basis for rethinking how redistributive policies are conceptualised and evaluated.

The first implication concerns the study of redistribution in political economy. Much of the literature has focused on the conditions under which redistribution occurs and its aggregate effects, often treating redistributive policies as broadly comparable across contexts (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2006; Boix, 2003). The findings presented here suggest that such an approach may overlook important variation in how redistribution is implemented. Land reform is not a single policy instrument but a set of institutionally distinct strategies, each with different implications for property rights, state capacity, and political coalitions. This suggests that future research on redistribution should pay greater attention to institutional design, rather than treating policy adoption as a binary outcome. It highlights the need to integrate the study of policy form into analyses and economic change.

A second implication relates to development policy and the role of the state. Land reform has long been viewed as a tool for addressing inequality and promoting economic development, particularly in agrarian societies. However, the findings of this thesis indicate that the developmental and political consequences of reform depend critically on how it is designed and implemented. Market-oriented reforms, which operate through compensation and market mechanisms, appear to be more compatible with institutional environments characterised by legal constraints and pluralistic political competition. State-oriented reforms, by contrast, tend to centralise control and can reinforce state dominance over economic resources. These patterns suggest that policy prescriptions which treat land reform as a uniform solution to inequality may be overly simplistic. Instead, the effectiveness and consequences of reform are likely to depend on the interaction between institutional design and the broader political context in which reform takes place.

A third implication concerns the role of international actors in shaping domestic policy choices. The analysis shows that land reform has been influenced not only by domestic political conditions but also by global ideological and institutional pressures, including Cold War alignments and post-Cold War donor conditionality. This highlights the importance of situating domestic policy choices within a broader international context. For scholars of international political economy, this suggests that redistributive policies can serve as a lens through which to examine the transmission of global norms and incentives into domestic policymaking. Furthermore, it highlights the need to move beyond simple models of external

influence and instead consider how international pressures interact with domestic political structures and interests.

A fourth implication concerns the political consequences of inequality and the strategies through which it is managed. The finding that non-reform is disproportionately associated with authoritarian regimes suggests that the absence of redistribution can be understood as a deliberate strategy of political control. This has broader relevance for debates on inequality, state capacity and regime stability. It indicates that governments may actively avoid redistributive reforms in order to preserve existing power structures, even where structural conditions might otherwise favour redistribution. In this sense, the management of inequality is not only a question of policy design but also of political strategy, shaped by the incentives and constraints faced by ruling elites.

Finally, the findings have implications for contemporary policy debates. Issues of land governance remain highly salient in many parts of the world, intersecting with concerns about food security, environmental sustainability and social justice. While the historical patterns identified in this thesis do not translate directly into policy prescriptions, they suggest that the political dimensions of land reform cannot be ignored. Policymakers and international organisations must consider not only the economic objectives of reform but also its institutional design and political context. Policies that fail to account for these factors risk producing unintended or counterproductive outcomes.

These implications reinforce the central argument of the thesis: that land reform is not simply a technical intervention, but a politically embedded process shaped by institutional design, domestic pressures, and international influences. Understanding this complexity is essential not only for explaining past reform trajectories, but also for informing future research and policy engagement in the field of development and political economy.

5.5 Limitations and Future Research

While this thesis provides a systematic cross-national analysis of land reform and its political implications, it is subject to a number of limitations which point to important areas for future research. These limitations relate primarily to issues of measurement, conceptual scope, and causal inference and addressing them offers opportunities to extend and refine the research agenda developed here.

A first limitation concerns the classification of land reform. The typology distinguishing market-oriented and state-oriented reforms provides a clear and analytically useful framework for cross-national comparison, but it necessarily simplifies a complex empirical reality. In practice, some reforms combine elements of both models or evolve over time, reflecting changing political and economic conditions. While the binary typology captures core institutional differences, it may mask variation within categories and overlook hybrid forms of reform. Future research could build on this framework by developing more fine-

grained classifications or by examining hybrid cases in greater detail, particularly in contexts where reforms do not conform neatly to ideal types.

A second limitation relates to measurement and data constraints. The Land Reform Development Dataset (LRDD) represents the first systematic effort to document reform episodes across a large number of countries, but like all cross-national datasets, it involves trade-offs between coverage, consistency and precision. Coding decisions rely on available historical and secondary sources, which vary in quality and detail across cases. In addition, the operationalisation of reform episodes focuses on formal policy initiation and duration, which may not fully capture variation in implementation, enforcement or outcomes on the ground. Future work could extend the dataset by incorporating more detailed measures of reform intensity, implementation quality and distributional outcomes, potentially through the integration of subnational data or case-specific evidence.

A third limitation concerns causal inference. The analysis presented in this thesis identifies consistent associations between reform type, political context and regime trajectories, but it does not establish causal relationships. While multiple methods—including regression analysis, sequencing approaches, and survival analysis—point in the same substantive direction, the possibility of endogeneity and unobserved confounding factors remains. For example, the same underlying political conditions that shape regime type may also influence the adoption and design of land reform. Addressing these issues would require more targeted research designs, including the use of quasi-experimental methods, the inclusion of instrumental variables and in-depth process tracing. Future research could build on the patterns identified here to investigate the mechanisms through which land reform influences political outcomes.

A fourth limitation concerns the temporal and contextual scope of the analysis. The dataset covers the period from 1945 to 2020, capturing major waves of reform associated with decolonisation and the post-Cold War period. However, land governance continues to evolve in response to new global challenges, including climate change, migration and changing patterns of international investment. These developments raise new questions about the role of land reform and land policy in contemporary development contexts. Extending the dataset beyond 2020 and examining more recent reforms would provide valuable insights into how these dynamics are reshaping land governance and its political implications.

These limitations also point to a broader research agenda. Building on the findings of this thesis, future work could explore the political logic of non-reform in greater detail, examining why some governments resist redistribution despite structural pressures. It could also investigate variation within reform categories, particularly in hybrid cases, and examine how different institutional designs interact with specific political and economic contexts. More generally, there is still scope to integrate cross-national analysis with in-depth case studies to better understand the mechanisms linking land reform to political change.

5.6 Conclusion

This thesis has examined land reform as a central yet understudied dimension of political and economic development in the postcolonial and developing world. By introducing the Land Reform Development Dataset (LRDD) and providing the first cross-national analysis of reform episodes, it has sought to move beyond case-specific accounts and conceptual ambiguity to offer a systematic understanding of the patterns, determinants and consequences of land reform.

The findings demonstrate that land reform is neither a uniform policy nor is it a purely technical response to agrarian inequality. Instead, it is a politically embedded process shaped by the interaction of domestic pressures, institutional constraints and international influences. The analysis shows that different forms of reform are associated with distinct political contexts and trajectories. Market-oriented reforms tend to emerge in settings characterised by institutional constraints and political competition and are associated with processes of democratic transition and consolidation. State-oriented reforms are more closely associated with centralised political authority and patterns of authoritarian durability. At the same time, the absence of reform is shown to be a politically meaningful outcome, reflecting strategies of elite preservation rather than simple administrative inaction.

These findings suggest that the relationship between redistribution and political development is more contingent than often assumed. The political effects of redistribution depend not only on whether it occurs, but on how it is designed and implemented. By distinguishing between different institutional forms of land reform, this thesis contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how redistributive policies shape political and economic outcomes.

This thesis highlights the importance of integrating the study of policy design into analyses of development and political change. Land reform emerges not simply as an agrarian policy, but as a key site through which states confront inequality, construct political coalitions and respond to both domestic and international pressures. Understanding these dynamics is essential for explaining past trajectories of development and governance, and for informing future research and policy engagement in this area.

In this respect, land reform provides a window into broader questions about how states manage distributional conflict, how institutions shape political outcomes and how global and domestic forces interact in the process of development. While the analysis presented here is necessarily limited, it establishes a foundation for further research into the political economy of redistribution and the role of institutional design in shaping long-term political and economic trajectories.

Appendix A—the Land Reform Development Dataset (LRDD)

A1: Overview of the Land Reform Development Dataset (LRDD)

This appendix provides summary information on the Land Reform Development Dataset (LRDD), which underpins the empirical analysis presented in this thesis. The LRDD records land reform episodes across 101 postcolonial and developing countries over the period 1945 to 2020, offering the first systematic cross-national dataset of land reform.

The purpose of this appendix is to improve transparency and provide a clear reference for the country coverage and reform episodes included in the dataset. Table A1 lists all countries within the scope of the LRDD, identifying their regional classification, the number of reform episodes recorded, and whether land reform was implemented during the study period. Countries that did not implement land reform are included to reflect the full scope of the dataset.

Table A2 provides a detailed account of individual reform episodes. Each row corresponds to a single reform episode and reports the country, reform type, start year, end year, and duration. Reform type is classified as either market-oriented or state-oriented, based on the institutional characteristics of ownership, allocation and compensation.

A2: Scope Countries and Reform Status

Table A2 lists all countries included in the LRDD and identifies whether each country implemented land reform during the study period. Countries with no reform episodes are included in Table A1 to reflect the full scope of the dataset.

Includes all 101 countries.

Country	Region	Reform Count	Reform Status
Afghanistan	Asia	2	Reformer
Algeria	MENA	2	Reformer
Angola	Sub-Saharan Africa	1	Reformer
Argentina	Latin America	0	Non-Reformer
Azerbaijan	Asia	1	Reformer
Bangladesh	Asia	2	Reformer
Benin	Sub-Saharan Africa	2	Reformer
Bhutan	Asia	1	Reformer
Bolivia	Latin America	3	Reformer
Botswana	Sub-Saharan Africa	1	Reformer
Brazil	Latin America	2	Reformer
Burkina Faso	Sub-Saharan Africa	3	Reformer

Burundi	Sub-Saharan Africa	0	Non-Reformer
Cambodia	Sub-Saharan Africa	3	Reformer
Cameroon	Sub-Saharan Africa	1	Reformer
Central African Republic	Sub-Saharan Africa	0	Non-Reformer
Chad	Sub-Saharan Africa	0	Non-Reformer
Chile	Latin America	2	Reformer
Colombia	Latin America	3	Reformer
Costa Rica	Latin America	1	Reformer
Cuba	Latin America	1	Reformer
Democratic Republic of Congo	Sub-Saharan Africa	2	Reformer
Djibouti	Sub-Saharan Africa	0	Non-Reformer
Dominican Republic	Latin America	1	Reformer
Ecuador	Latin America	1	Reformer
Egypt	MENA	1	Reformer
El Salvador	Latin America	1	Reformer
Equatorial Guinea	Sub-Saharan Africa	0	Non-Reformer
Eritrea	Sub-Saharan Africa	1	Reformer
Gabon	Sub-Saharan Africa	0	Non-Reformer
Gambia	Sub-Saharan Africa	1	Reformer
Georgia	Asia	1	Reformer
Ghana	Sub-Saharan Africa	2	Reformer
Guatemala	Latin America	2	Reformer
Guinea	Sub-Saharan Africa	2	Reformer
Guinea-Bissau	Sub-Saharan Africa	1	Reformer
Guyana	Latin America	0	Non- Reformer
Haiti	Latin America	1	Reformer
Honduras	Latin America	3	Reformer
India	Asia	1	Reformer
Indonesia	Asia	3	Reformer
Iraq	MENA	1	Reformer
Israel	MENA	2	Reformer
Ivory Coast	Sub-Saharan Africa	2	Reformer
Jamaica	Latin America	1	Reformer
Jordan	MENA	0	Non- Reformer
Kazakhstan	Asia	1	Reformer
Kenya	Sub-Saharan Africa	2	Reformer
Kyrgyzstan	Asia	1	Reformer
Laos	Asia	2	Reformer
Lebanon	MENA	0	Non- Reformer
Lesotho	Sub-Saharan Africa	1	Reformer
Libya	MENA	1	Reformer
Madagascar	Sub-Saharan Africa	1	Reformer
Malawi	Sub-Saharan Africa	1	Reformer
Malaysia	Asia	0	Non-Reformer
Mali	Sub-Saharan Africa	2	Reformer
Mauritania	Sub-Saharan Africa	1	Reformer

Mauritius	Sub-Saharan Africa	0	Non- Reformer
Morocco	MENA	1	Reformer
Mozambique	Sub-Saharan Africa	2	Reformer
Myanmar	Asia	2	Reformer
Namibia	Sub-Saharan Africa	1	Reformer
Nicaragua	Latin America	2	Reformer
Niger	Sub-Saharan Africa	1	Reformer
Nigeria	Sub-Saharan Africa	1	Reformer
North Korea	Asia	1	Reformer
North Vietnam	Asia	1	Reformer
Pakistan	Asia	2	Reformer
Panama	Latin America	1	Reformer
Paraguay	Latin America	1	Reformer
Peru	Latin America	1	Reformer
Republic of Congo	Sub-Saharan Africa	2	Reformer
Rwanda	Sub-Saharan Africa	1	Reformer
Senegal	Sub-Saharan Africa	1	Reformer
Sierra Leone	Sub-Saharan Africa	0	Non- Reformer
Somalia	Sub-Saharan Africa	0	Non- Reformer
South Africa	Sub-Saharan Africa	1	Reformer
South Korea	Asia	1	Reformer
South Sudan	Sub-Saharan Africa	0	Non- Reformer
South Vietnam	Asia	1	Reformer
Sri Lanka	Asia	1	Reformer
Sudan	Sub-Saharan Africa	0	Non- Reformer
Suriname	Latin America	0	Non- Reformer
Syria	MENA	1	Reformer
Taiwan	Asia	1	Reformer
Tajikistan	Asia	1	Reformer
Tanzania	Sub-Saharan Africa	2	Reformer
The Philippines	Asia	2	Reformer
Togo	Sub-Saharan Africa	1	Reformer
Trinidad and Tobago	Latin America	1	Reformer
Tunisia	MENA	1	Reformer
Turkmenistan	Asia	1	Reformer
Uganda	Sub-Saharan Africa	2	Reformer
Uruguay	Latin America	0	Non- Reformer
Uzbekistan	Asia	2	Reformer
Venezuela	Latin America	1	Reformer
Vietnam	Asia	2	Reformer
Yemen	MENA	2	Reformer
Zambia	Sub-Saharan Africa	1	Reformer
Zimbabwe	Sub-Saharan Africa	3	Reformer

A3: Land reform episodes recorded in the LRDD, 1945 TO 2020.

Table A3 reports each recorded reform episode by country, including reform type, start year, end year and duration.

Country	Region	Reform Episode	Start Yeat	End Year	Duratio n	Reform Type
Afghanistan	Asia	1	1975	1977	3	Market-Oriented
Afghanistan	Asia	2	1978	1979	2	State-Oriented
Algeria	MENA	1	1974	1978	5	State-Oriented
Algeria	MENA	2	1987	1999	13	Market-Oriented
Angola	Sub-Sahra Africa	1	2004	2020	17	Market-Oriented
Azerbaijan	Asia	1	1995	2005	11	Market-Oriented
Bangladesh	Asia	1	1972	1976	5	State-Oriented
Bangladesh	Asia	2	1984	1989	6	Market-Oriented
Benin	Sub-Sahra Africa	1	1972	1989	18	State-Oriented
Benin	Sub-Sahra Africa	2	2013	2020	8	Market-Oriented
Bhutan	Asia	1	1952	1972	21	Market-Oriented
Bolivia	Latin America	1	1953	1954	2	Market-Oriented
Bolivia	Latin America	2	1996	2005	10	Market-Oriented
Bolivia	Latin America	3	2006	2020	15	Market-Oriented
Botswana	Sub-Sahra Africa	1	1975	1983	9	Market-Oriented
Brazil	Latin America	1	1961	1964	4	State-Oriented
Brazil	Latin America	2	1984	2016	33	Market-Oriented
Burkina Faso	Sub-Sahra Africa	1	1984	1990	7	Market-Oriented
Burkina Faso	Sub-Sahra Africa	2	1991	1996	6	Market-Oriented
Burkina Faso	Sub-Sahra Africa	3	2009	2020	12	Market-Oriented

Cambodia	Asia	1	1953	1974	22	Market-Oriented
Cambodia	Asia	2	1975	1979	5	State-Oriented
Cambodia	Asia	3	1989	2002	14	Market-Oriented
Cameroon	Sub-Sahra Africa	1	1974	1996	23	Market-Oriented
Chile	Latin America	1	1964	1972	9	Market-Oriented
Chile	Latin America	2	1973	1986	14	Market-Oriented
Colombia	Latin America	1	1961	1970	10	Market-Oriented
Colombia	Latin America	2	1994	1998	5	Market-Oriented
Colombia	Latin America	3	2011	2020	10	Market-Oriented
Costa Rica	Latin America	1	1961	1976	16	Market-Oriented
Cuba	Latin America	1	1963	1969	7	State-Oriented
Democratic Republic of Congo	Sub-Sahra Africa	1	1973	2011	39	State-Oriented
Democratic Republic of Congo	Sub-Sahra Africa	2	2012	2020	9	State-Oriented
Dominican Republic	Latin America	1	1966	1986	21	Market-Oriented
Ecuador	Latin America	1	1964	1994	31	Market-Oriented
Egypt	MENA	1	1952	1958	7	State-Oriented
El Salvador	Latin America	1	1980	1981	2	State-Oriented
Eritrea	Sub-Sahra Africa	1	1994	2020	27	State-Oriented
Gambia	Sub-Sahra Africa	1	1990	2020	31	Market-Oriented
Georgia	Asia	1	1993	1999	7	Market-Oriented
Ghana	Sub-Sahra Africa	1	1960	1968	9	Market-Oriented
Ghana	Sub-Sahra Africa	2	2004	2010	7	Market-Oriented
Guatemala	Latin America	1	1945	1954	10	Market-Oriented
Guatemala	Latin America	2	1996	2004	9	Market-Oriented

Guinea	Sub-Sahra Africa	1	1976	1981	6	State-Oriented
Guinea	Sub-Sahra Africa	2	1992	2001	10	Market-Oriented
Guinea-Bissau	Sub-Sahra Africa	1	1998	2011	14	Market-Oriented
Haiti	Latin America	1	1999	2001	3	Market-Oriented
Honduras	Latin America	1	1962	1972	11	Market-Oriented
Honduras	Latin America	2	1973	1977	5	Market-Oriented
Honduras	Latin America	3	1989	1992	4	Market-Oriented
India	Asia	1	1950	1972	23	Market-Oriented
Indonesia	Asia	1	1960	1965	6	State-Oriented
Indonesia	Asia	2	1988	1995	8	Market-Oriented
Indonesia	Asia	3	2007	2009	3	Market-Oriented
Iraq	MENA	1	1970	1979	10	State-Oriented
Israel	MENA	1	1948	1953	6	Market-Oriented
Israel	MENA	2	2009	2020	12	Market-Oriented
Ivory Coast	Sub-Sahra Africa	1	1998	2003	6	Market-Oriented
Ivory Coast	Sub-Sahra Africa	2	2015	2020	6	Market-Oriented
Jamaica	Latin America	1	1973	1980	8	Market-Oriented
Kazakhstan	Asia	1	1993	1995	3	Market-Oriented
Kenya	Sub-Sahra Africa	1	1963	1970	8	Market-Oriented
Kenya	Sub-Sahra Africa	2	2012	2020	9	Market-Oriented
Kyrgyzstan	Asia	1	1991	2005	15	Market-Oriented
Laos	Asia	1	1975	1988	14	State-Oriented
Laos	Asia	2	1992	2010	19	State-Oriented
Lesotho	Sub-Sahra Africa	1	2010	2020	11	Market-Oriented

Libya	MENA	1	1969	1981	13	State-Oriented
Madagascar	Sub-Sahra Africa	1	2005	2020	16	Market-Oriented
Malawi	Sub-Sahra Africa	1	1996	2008	13	Market-Oriented
Mali	Sub-Sahra Africa	1	1963	1993	31	State-Oriented
Mali	Sub-Sahra Africa	2	2000	2017	18	Market-Oriented
Mauritania	Sub-Sahra Africa	1	1983	1990	8	Market-Oriented
Morocco	MENA	1	1960	1977	18	Market-Oriented
Mozambique	Sub-Sahra Africa	1	1975	1990	16	State-Oriented
Mozambique	Sub-Sahra Africa	2	1997	1999	3	Market-Oriented
Myanmar	Asia	1	1964	1988	25	State-Oriented
Myanmar	Asia	2	2012	2016	5	Market-Oriented
Namibia	Sub-Sahra Africa	1	1990	2020	31	Market-Oriented
Nicaragua	Latin America	1	1981	1990	10	State-Oriented
Nicaragua	Latin America	2	1991	2002	12	Market-Oriented
Niger	Sub-Sahra Africa	1	1993	1998	6	Market-Oriented
Nigeria	Sub-Sahra Africa	1	1978	2020	43	Market-Oriented
North Korea	Asia	1	1948	1948	1	State-Oriented
North Vietnam	Asia	1	1954	1956	3	State-Oriented
Pakistan	Asia	1	1959	1971	13	Market-Oriented
Pakistan	Asia	2	1972	1979	8	Market-Oriented
Panama	Latin America	1	1969	1977	9	Market-Oriented
Paraguay	Latin America	1	1963	1969	7	Market-Oriented
Peru	Latin America	1	1969	1978	10	Market-Oriented
Republic of Congo	Sub-Sahra Africa	1	1973	2011	39	State-Oriented

Republic of Congo	Sub-Sahra Africa	2	2012	2020	9	State-Oriented
Rwanda	Sub-Sahra Africa	1	2005	2020	16	Market-Oriented
Senegal	Sub-Sahra Africa	1	1964	1974	11	State-Oriented
South Africa	Sub-Sahra Africa	1	1994	2020	27	Market-Oriented
South Korea	Asia	1	1948	1953	6	Market-Oriented
South Vietnam	Asia	1	1958	1961	4	Market-Oriented
Sri Lanka	Asia	1	1972	1977	6	Market-Oriented
Syria	MENA	1	1961	1984	24	State-Oriented
Taiwan	Asia	1	1949	1953	5	Market-Oriented
Tajikistan	Asia	1	1991	2005	15	Market-Oriented
Tanzania	Sub-Sahra Africa	1	1961	1982	22	State-Oriented
Tanzania	Sub-Sahra Africa	2	1991	2005	15	Market-Oriented
The Philipines	Asia	1	1963	1987	25	Market-Oriented
The Philipines	Asia	2	1988	2020	33	Market-Oriented
Togo	Sub-Sahra Africa	1	1974	1978	5	Market-Oriented
Trinidad and Tobago	Latin America	1	1992	2000	9	Market-Oriented
Tunisia	MENA	1	1962	1969	8	Market-Oriented
Turkmenistan	Asia	1	1991	1997	7	Market-Oriented
Uganda	Sub-Sahra Africa	1	1975	1994	20	State-Oriented
Uganda	Sub-Sahra Africa	2	1998	2010	13	Market-Oriented
Uzbekistan	Asia	1	1992	1996	5	State-Oriented
Uzbekistan	Asia	2	1998	1998	1	Market-Oriented
Venezuela	Latin America	1	2003	2005	3	State-Oriented
Vietnam	Asia	1	1976	1984	9	State-Oriented

Vietnam	Asia	2	1993	2003	11	Market-Oriented
Yemen	MENA	1	1970	1979	10	State-Oriented
Yemen	MENA	2	1991	1991	1	State-Oriented
Zambia	Sub-Sahra Africa	1	1995	2010	16	Market-Oriented
Zimbabwe	Sub-Sahra Africa	1	1980	1991	12	Market-Oriented
Zimbabwe	Sub-Sahra Africa	2	1992	1999	8	State-Oriented
Zimbabwe	Sub-Sahra Africa	3	2000	2011	12	State-Oriented