

By 1953, the 1943-53 cycle of popular revolution and reform had already been overlapped by a new cycle of counterrevolution. As early as 1947, when the political reform wave seemed to be carrying all before it and 85 percent of Latin America's total population was living under broadly based regimes apparently intent on fundamental change, political currents in some countries began to flow in the other direction.

Beginning in 1947, 6 years before the postwar cycle of political and social revolution had run its full course, counterrevolutions began. The reaction to popular reform governments set in and continued for an entire decade, until nearly every government of this type had been either overthrown or forced to adopt a more moderate course. Generally, it was the armed forces that stepped in, either at the behest of the oligarchy or of the frightened middle class, to halt any further leftward political evolution. Reformist rulers lost a measure of popular support when they failed to deliver on demagogic promises, yet it does not appear that the people turned against them. Rather, the military was generally provoked to intervene by the middle and upper groups, who reacted against labor-backed leaders' deliberate efforts to widen existing social cleavages. Often the military unmade the very revolutions they themselves had launched several years previous. This counterrevolutionary process began in Ecuador in 1947, and the following year rightist military dictators seized control in neighboring Peru and Venezuela. By the early 1950's the brief reformist experiment petered out in El Salvador. In 1952, Batista once more seized power in Cuba. Perverted reform regimes were brought to an end by military force in Brazil and Guatemala in 1954, in Argentina in 1955, and in Colombia in 1957, and all these labor-leftist governments were replaced by regimes of a moderate-to-conservative stripe.

The rightist drift in Latin America after 1947 was not of pure military origin, but was rather the result of a complex of factors involving leftist failures, middle group fears, oligarchic resistance, and the cold war. This became evident when similar political trends appeared in countries where the military was nonpolitical. In Mexico, after the 1946 elections, the life seemed to have left the social revolution. Even the radical MNR government in Bolivia became more moderate after consolidating its position and after U.S. aid began flowing into the country in 1954. Also, rightist party victories in the 1958 elections in Costa Rica, Chile, and Uruguay suggested that the immediate postwar radicalism of the new broadly based political parties had become considerably more moderate.

A very important recent political development is the anti-militaristic, anti-dictatorial trend that has been running in Latin America since 1954. In that year, 13 Presidents were military; today only four remain—General Trujillo in the Dominican Republic, General Stroessner in Paraguay, General Ydigoras in Guatemala, and Colonel Lemus in El Salvador. Although this development is too recent to justify conclusions, the natural reaction to a decade of militarism is one obvious explanation for it. Once the trend of resurgent militarism reached its apogee in the year 1954, it was perhaps inevitable that civilian reaction to military rule would soon set in, bring the movement to a halt, and then begin to roll it back. In the alternation of trends