

>> Flags of the member nations decorate the hall of the Organization of American States headquarters in Washington, D.C. Representatives discuss how to improve the lives of their citizens.

Interactive Flipped Video

>> Objectives

Analyze how Latin America has grappled with poverty.

Describe the struggles of Latin American nations to build democratic governments.

Explain the struggle between repression and freedom in Argentina.

>> Key Terms

import substitution
agribusiness
liberation theology
indigenous
Sandinista
contra
Organization of
American States
(OAS)
Juan Perón
Mothers of the Plaza
de Mayo
Oscar Romero

12.4

Latin America comprises Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean, and South America. It includes 33 independent nations, ranging from small islands, such as Grenada, to giant Brazil. It is a diverse region in which each country has its own history and traditions. Despite differences, Latin American nations faced political, economic, and social challenges similar to those of other developing nations—rapid population growth, poverty, illiteracy, political instability, and authoritarian governments.

Latin American Nations Move Toward Democracy

Poverty Challenges Latin America

From the 1950s to the 1980s, economic development failed to change deep-rooted inequalities in many Latin American countries. Due to inequality and growing populations, most countries saw little improvement in living standards.

Promoting Industry and Agriculture In Latin America, as in other developing regions, nations often relied heavily on a single cash crop or commodity. If harvests failed or if world demand for that commodity fell, their economies were hard hit.

To reduce dependence on imported goods, many Latin American governments in the 1950s and 1960s adopted a policy of **import substitution**, or manufacturing goods locally to replace expensive imported goods. Results were mixed. Many new industries did not produce efficiently and needed government or foreign capital to survive.

In time, Latin American governments moved from import substitution to promoting exports. They developed a variety of cash

crops and encouraged mining and other industries that produced goods for export. Some worked with multinational corporations willing to invest in new projects.

In many Latin American countries, governments backed the growth of **agribusinesses**, giant commercial farms owned by multinational corporations. These agribusinesses produce cash crops that help boost national incomes. In Central America and Brazil, agribusinesses and other developers have cleared tropical rain forests to use as farmland. Deforestation has had both economic benefits and environmental costs. Burning of forest land has destroyed plant and animal habitats, polluted water supplies, and contributed to soil erosion.

The Income Gap One challenge facing Latin American nations is uneven distribution of wealth between rich and poor. This income gap is especially evident in cities, which are divided between comfortable residential neighborhoods and sprawling favelas, or slums. The income gap has long existed in rural areas. In many countries, a tiny elite controls the land, businesses, and factories. These powerful groups oppose changes that might undermine their position. As a result, the gap between the rich and the poor has widened, fueling discontent.

Population Growth Contributes to Poverty Latin American nations, like the rest of the developing world, experienced a population explosion that contributed to poverty. Although population growth rates slowed somewhat in the 1990s, economies were hard-pressed to keep pace with the needs of their people for housing, education, and other basic services.

In rural areas, population pressures made life more difficult for peasant farmers. Even though a family might own a small plot to grow its own food, most farmers worked on the estates of large landowners for low wages.

Faced with debt and poverty, millions of rural dwellers flocked to cities. Today, more than 75 percent of people in Latin America live in towns and cities. Some newcomers found jobs in factories, offices, and stores. Many more survive by working odd jobs. They fill the shantytowns on the edges of Latin American cities. More than 111 million people in Latin America live in shantytowns.

The Role of Religion in Latin America The Roman Catholic Church remained a powerful force across Latin America. Although it was often tied to the ruling class, some church leaders spoke up for the poor. During the 1960s and 1970s, many priests, nuns, and church workers crusaded for social justice and an

Economic Activity of Latin America



>> **Analyze Maps** Much of the land in Latin America is devoted to farming. Which type of farming is most widespread?

Interactive Map



>> Thousands of Catholics crowd into St. Peter's Square in Rome to see and hear Pope Francis on Easter Day 2013. Pope Francis, who is from Argentina, is the first pope from the Americas.



>> This March 1982 photograph shows police detaining people who were protesting the dictatorship in Argentina. Many protesters were jailed, and thousands who disagreed with the government were killed.

end to poverty. This movement, known as **liberation theology**, urged the church to become a force for reform.

In 2013, people across Latin America celebrated the selection of Argentina's Jorge Bergoglio as pope. He became the first person from the Western Hemisphere to lead the Roman Catholic Church. The new pope took the name Francis, after Francis of Assisi, who had devoted his life to the poor. Pope Francis was well known for his own advocacy for the poor during his life in Argentina and continued to address the issue as pope:

Since the 1980s, evangelical Protestant groups have won many converts in Latin America. Evangelical sects stress the authority of the Bible and belief in salvation through Jesus. Many poor people were attracted to evangelical Christianity. In addition to the Catholic Church and Protestant groups, other world religions had an established place in Latin America.

? DRAW CONCLUSIONS What problems did the gap between the rich and the poor cause in Latin America?

Dictatorships and Civil War

Most Latin American countries had constitutions that set up representative governments. Building true democracy, however, was difficult to achieve in nations plagued by poverty and inequality. From the 1950s on, many groups pressed for reforms. They included liberals, socialists, urban workers, peasants, and Catholic priests and nuns. Although they differed over how to achieve their goals, all wanted to improve conditions for the poor.

Conservative forces, however, resisted reforms. Among those who resisted change were the military, the traditional landed elite, and the growing business middle class. Conflict between conservatives and reformers contributed to political instability in many nations.

Military Leaders Seize Power In the 1960s and 1970s, as social unrest increased, military governments in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile seized power. They imposed harsh, autocratic regimes, outlawed political parties, censored the press, and closed universities. They also imprisoned and executed thousands. "Death squads" linked to military rule murdered many more.

Writers, such as Pablo Neruda of Chile and Gabriel García Márquez of Colombia, went into exile after speaking out against repressive governments or social inequality.

Revolutions Break Out In Latin America, as elsewhere, leftists wanted to build socialist societies, which they believed would end inequalities. Some leftists joined guerrilla movements to battle repressive governments. After building a communist state in Cuba, Fidel Castro supported leftist guerrillas in many other parts of Latin America.

Cold War fears about the spread of Marxism complicated efforts for reform. Many conservatives in Latin America saw any call for reform as a communist threat. The United States often supported military governments and conservative groups that were strongly anti-communist.

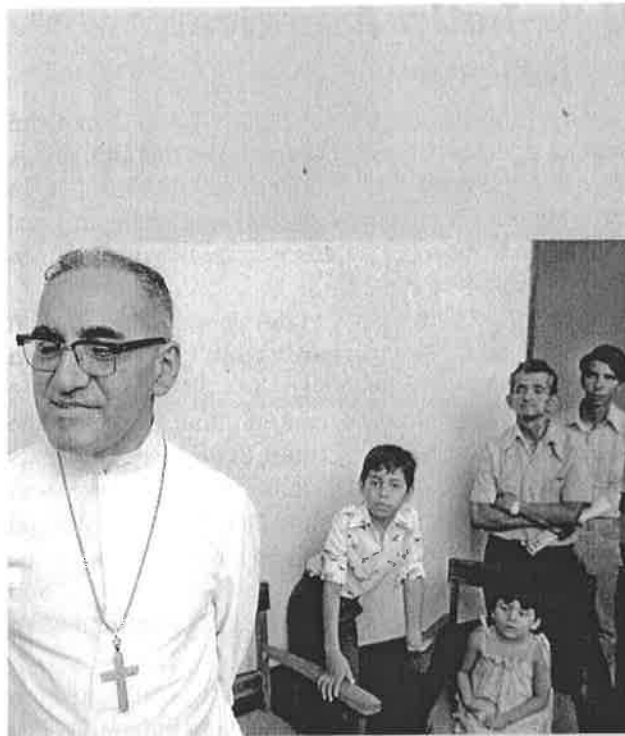
Civil War in Central America Several Central American nations were torn by civil wars as revolutionaries battled authoritarian governments. In 1954, the United States helped the Guatemalan military overthrow an elected, leftist government. Leftists and others fought the military regime, which responded savagely.

The military targeted Guatemala's **indigenous**, or native, people, slaughtering tens of thousands of Mayans and members of other Indian groups. Fighting ended in 1996, after the government signed a peace accord and held elections.

In El Salvador, too, reformers and leftist revolutionaries challenged the landowning and military elite. During a vicious 12-year civil war, right-wing death squads slaughtered student and labor leaders, church workers, and anyone else thought to sympathize with leftists. One reformer, Archbishop **Oscar Romero**, was assassinated in 1980 while celebrating mass. In 1992, both sides finally agreed to a UN-brokered peace.

In 1979, the **Sandinistas**, socialist rebels in Nicaragua, toppled the Somoza family, which had ruled since 1936. The Sandinistas introduced land reform and other socialist measures. Fearing that Nicaragua could become "another Cuba," U.S. President Ronald Reagan financed the **contras**, guerrillas who fought the Sandinistas. Fighting raged until 1990, when a peace settlement brought multiparty elections.

Movement Toward Democracy By the 1990s, international pressure and activists within each country pushed military governments to restore civilian rule. Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and other countries held elections. In some countries, such as Brazil, Venezuela, and Bolivia, leftist leaders won office. Since then, many Latin American countries have experienced the peaceful transition of power from one elected government to the another.



>> Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador became widely known for defending the poor and oppressed. His sharp criticism of the government gained him a large following, but also many enemies.

Mexico had escaped military rule, but still experienced growing demands for political reform. Between 1930 and 2000, a single political party—the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI)—won every election and controlled the government. It claimed to represent all groups in Mexican society from workers and peasants to business and industrial interests as well as the military. Although a few small political parties did exist, PRI bosses moved forcefully against any serious opposition.

Under pressure, the PRI made some reforms in the 1990s. In 2000, Vicente Fox became the first candidate from an opposition party to be elected president.

Fox and later presidents faced tough challenges, ranging from rural poverty to crime, corruption, and violent drug gangs. Despite government pledges for reform, Mexico has remained a disturbing mix of prosperity and poverty. In recent years, some regions of Mexico have suffered from violent crime related to drug trafficking.

? IDENTIFY CAUSE AND EFFECT What social and political conditions led to civil wars in many Latin American countries?

U.S.-Latin American Relations

A complex network of ties linked Latin American nations and the United States. Since the late 1800s, the United States has been a looming presence in the Western Hemisphere. It has intervened in local conflicts and taken other steps to ensure its influence in the region.

Today, Latin America and the United States remain closely linked. The **Organization of American States (OAS)**, was formed in 1948 to promote democracy, economic cooperation, and peace in the Americas. Although the United States often used its power to dominate the OAS, Latin American members have at times pursued an independent line. The United States is economically linked to Mexico through the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and has sought to create a larger free trade area with other Latin American countries.

Despite these links, the United States and Latin American nations view each other very differently. The United States sees itself as the defender of democracy and capitalism in the region. It also provides much-needed aid.

While many Latin Americans admire the wealth of the United States, they often resent what they see as its political, economic, and cultural domination. "North Americans are always among us," said Mexican poet Octavio Paz, "even when they ignore us or turn their back on us. Their shadow covers the whole hemisphere. It is the shadow of a giant."

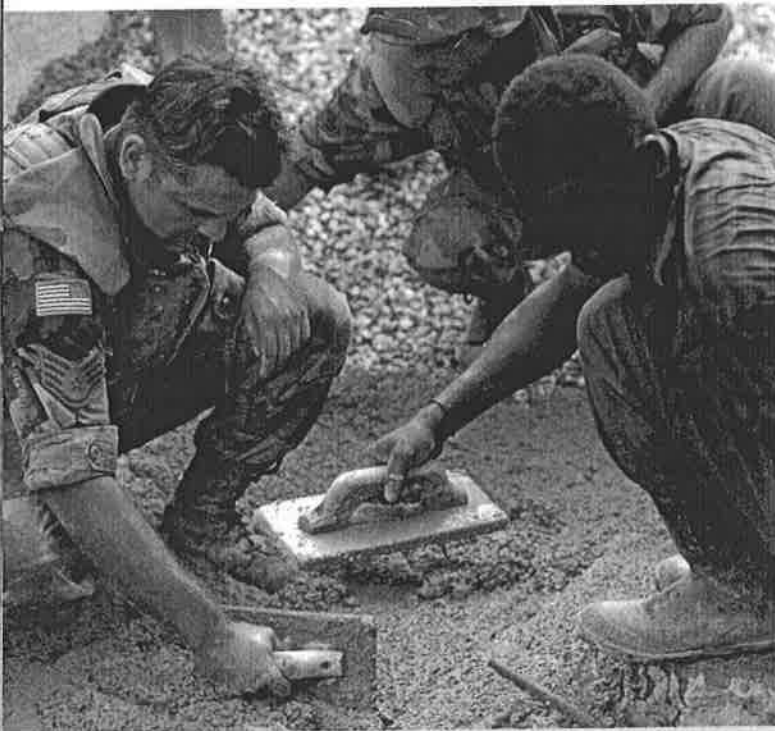
U.S. Intervention During the Cold War, the United States helped train and equip the military in many Latin American countries and often backed anti-communist dictators. It also returned to a policy of intervention, usually sending its military to stop what it saw as the threat of communism. In 1954, it helped overthrow Guatemala's leftist government. In 1965, the U.S. sent troops to the Dominican Republic when unrest raised fears the island nation could become a "second Cuba." In 1973, the United States secretly backed a military coup in Chile against democratically elected socialist president, Salvador Allende (ah YEN day), putting military dictator Augusto Pinochet (pee noh SHAY) in power.

On other occasions, the United States stepped in for different reasons. In 1989, it sent forces to Panama to bring its drug-smuggling president Manuel Noriega to justice. In 1994, a UN force led by the United States landed in Haiti to restore its elected leader after a military coup. The United States later withdrew its forces from Haiti, leaving UN peacekeepers to protect democracy in the poverty-stricken country. Since then, the United States has provided much aid to Haiti after it was devastated by a strong earthquake and struck by hurricanes.

The War on Drugs As illegal drug use increased in the United States and around the world in the 1970s, criminal gangs in Latin America began producing and smuggling ever-larger quantities of cocaine and other drugs for export. In the 1980s, the U.S. government declared a "war on drugs" and set out to halt the flow of illegal drugs into the country from Colombia, Peru, Bolivia, and elsewhere. It funneled military and financial aid to Latin American governments to destroy drug crops and crush the drug cartels, or criminal gangs that ran the drug trade.

Latin American governments cooperated with U.S. anti-drug efforts. After all, drug lords were bribing government officials and hiring assassins to kill judges, journalists, and others who spoke out against them. But many people argued that the root problem was growing demand for illegal drugs in the United States.

Migration Immigration from Latin America to the United States increased rapidly after the 1970s.



>> American soldiers joined UN forces to keep the peace after the coup in Haiti. Peacekeepers also did practical work, such as building, supplying food, and spreading cement to repair roads.

Poverty, civil war, and repressive governments led many people to flee their homelands. Many entered the country legally and eventually became citizens. A large number, however, were illegal immigrants. The earnings they sent home helped raise the standard of living for their families in Latin America.

Pressure rose within the United States to halt the flow of illegal immigrants. The United States tightened security along its border with Mexico. Congress debated immigration reform legislation. At the same time, Latin American countries like Mexico hoped to improve the quality of life and opportunities so fewer citizens left their homelands.

2 DRAW CONCLUSIONS Why do people in Latin America have mixed opinions of the United States?

The Long Road to Democracy in Argentina

Argentina is among the most prosperous countries in Latin America. During much of the last century, it enjoyed a robust economy based on exports of beef and grain. But it also experienced political and economic upheavals. Since the 1980s, the country has worked to rebuild democracy and recover prosperity.

The Military Takes Control From 1946 to 1955, nationalist president Juan Perón enjoyed great support from workers. He increased the government's economic role, boosted wages, and backed labor unions. Perón was helped greatly by his glamorous wife, Eva Perón, who used her influence to help the poor. While Perón wooed the urban poor, his authoritarian government stifled opposition.

When Perón's policies led to an economic crisis, he was ousted in a 1955 military coup. The military was in and out of power for more than two decades. To combat leftist guerrillas, the military waged a "dirty war," torturing and murdering people it claimed were enemies of the state. As many as 20,000 people simply "disappeared." The Dirty War lasted from 1976 to 1983.

In 1977, a group of mothers whose children had disappeared began to meet each week in the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires. They demanded to know what had happened to their missing sons and daughters. The nonviolent protests of the **Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo**, drew worldwide attention.

In 1982, the military hoped to mask economic troubles by seizing the British-ruled Falkland Islands. In the brief but decisive war, the British retook the islands.



>> American soldiers entered Panama to arrest military dictator Manuel Noriega, a major drug dealer. The United States wanted to put an end to the drug trade and to restore freedom to Panama.



>> Juan Perón, shown here with his wife, Eva, made some improvements in Argentina. However, as his government became more repressive and corrupt, he relied increasingly on military force to hold on to power.



>> The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo gathered weekly in Argentina's capital, carrying photos of their "disappeared" children, who had been kidnapped and probably killed by the government.

Interactive Gallery

Restoration of Democracy Defeat in the Falklands War undermined the military, and it was forced to hold free elections. In 1983, Argentina gained a democratically elected government. Despite economic

setbacks and corruption scandals, democracy has survived in Argentina.

Argentina's economy has often experienced cycles of boom-and bust. In 2001, a financial crisis devastated the economy, causing widespread poverty and serious unrest. Eventually, the economy rebounded. Like other nations, Argentina is affected by global economic events as well as by internal crisis.

? EXPLAIN Why did the military restore democratic rule in Argentina?

ASSESSMENT

- 1. Describe** What changes did Latin American nations make to economic policy to try to cope with poverty and economic hardship?
- 2. Identify Cause and Effect** Why did Latin American nations find it difficult to establish democratic governments?
- 3. Identify Central Ideas** How have repeated U.S. interventions in Latin America affected Latin American attitudes toward the United States?
- 4. Draw Conclusions** Why do you think many of the repressive dictatorships in Latin America were led by the military?
- 5. Sequence Events** Describe the changes Argentina's government went through after the 1930s. List significant events in the order in which they occurred.