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The Changing Demographics of Cohabiting Unions in Latin America: The Income Gradient

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Abstract

Cohabitation and marriage have coexisted in Latin America since the times of colonization. The level of cohabitation, however, has varied across and within countries. Traditionally, these unions were most common among population groups characterized by having lower socioeconomic status. However, beginning in the 1970s but to a much larger extent during the 1990s cohabitation arose in countries with and without traditional forms of cohabitation, and across different social strata. Comparative studies in the region have considered the effects of socioeconomic variables on the probability of cohabiting to be constant across cohorts, even though correlates of cohabitation have undergone important transformations during the period of cohabitation expansion. In this paper, using data from the Luxembourg Income Study Dataset, we challenge this assumption using harmonized Latin American data and regression methods to analyze within- and between-country cohort variation in the effects of income differentials on the probability of cohabiting, assessing to what extent this relationship varies across countries and to what extent it can be explained by other demographic variables. We aim to contribute to the understanding of the continuity and change in Latin American cohabitation and of the role it plays within the larger society and its stratification.

Keywords: Cohabitation, marriage, income.

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Introduction

Cohabitation and marriage have coexisted in Latin America since the times of colonization. The level of cohabitation, however, has varied across and within countries. Traditionally, these unions were most common among population groups characterized by having lower socioeconomic status and belonging to certain regions within countries (Fussell and Palloni 2004; Parrado and Tienda 1997). However, beginning in the 1970s but to a much larger extent during the 1990s and 2000s cohabitation arose in countries and regions with and without high levels of cohabitation, and across different social strata (Esteve et al. 2012). Accordingly, recent research has focused on identifying new forms of cohabitation based on its spreading across traditional socioeconomic barriers. Comparative studies in the region have considered the effects of socioeconomic variables on the probability of cohabiting to be constant across cohorts, even though correlates of cohabitation, such as women's educational attainment, have undergone important transformations during the period of cohabitation expansion. In this paper, we challenge this assumption. Using harmonized Latin American data and regression methods, we analyze cohort change in the effects of income differentials on the probability of cohabiting, assessing to what extent the relationship varies across countries and to what extent it can be explained by other demographic variables. We focus on household income because previous research has use women's education as a proxy for socioeconomic status in the absence of reliable income data, thus we take advantage of the availability of harmonized income data from the Luxembourg Income Study (LIS) to measure the effects of income and education separately. With this analysis we aim to contribute to the understanding of the continuity and change in Latin-American cohabitation and of the role it plays within the larger society and its stratification.

Context

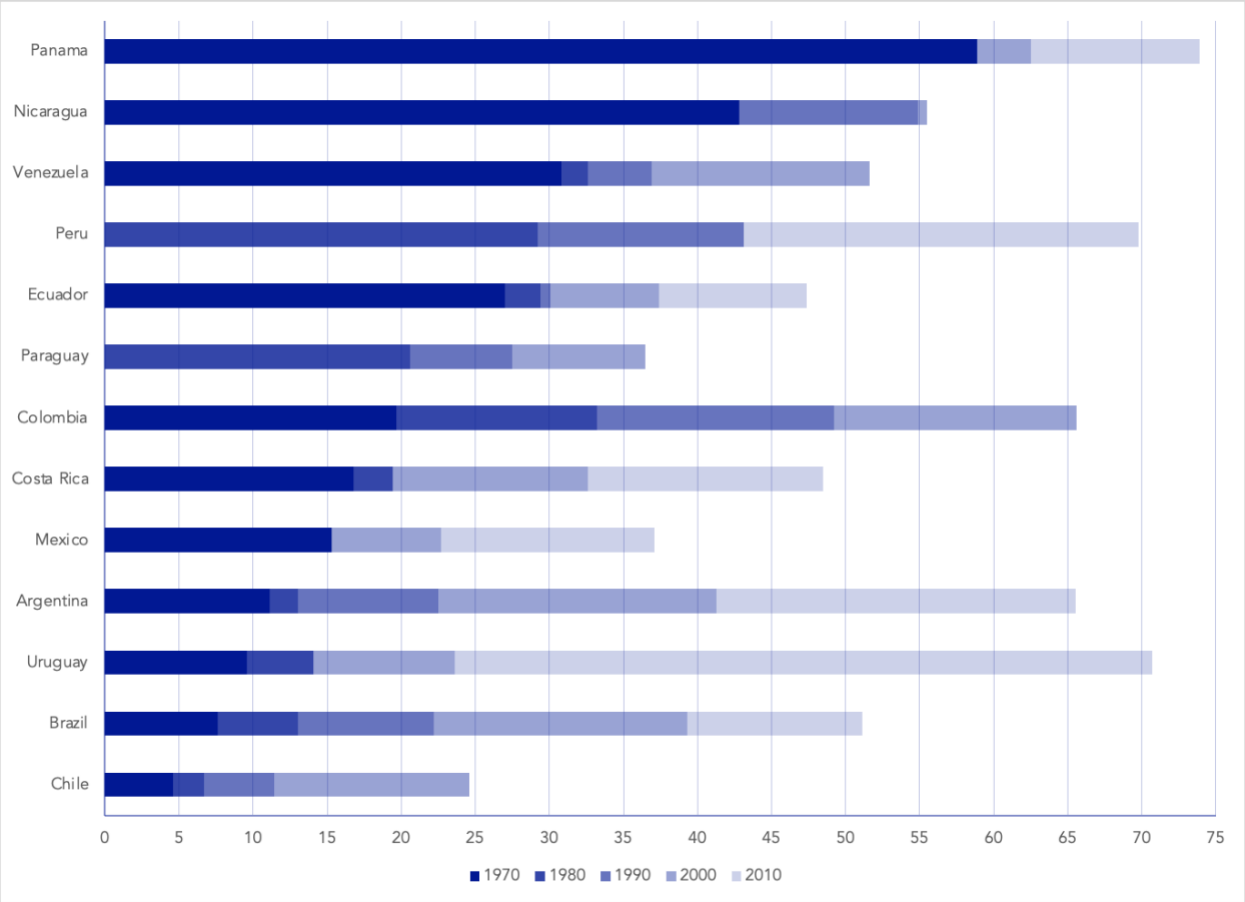
Cohabitation is a significant demographic event imbedded in the process of family formation in Latin America. Contrary to trends in some Western Industrialized countries, the process of family formation in Latin America has included cohabitation alongside marriage prior to the mid twentieth century. Nonetheless, cohabitation grew rapidly in many countries in the region during the 1990s,

accelerating subsequently during the 2000s: nowadays, country levels of cohabitation among young Latin American women have reach between 37% and 78% (Esteve et al. 2016). This boom in cohabitation raises the question of whether it has correspondingly taken on a new form (as predicted by the second demographic transition) or has simply reproduced its old pattern while becoming more common. Most of the previous research characterizes "new" and "traditional" forms of cohabitation in Latin America based on *who* cohabits (i.e., the rural, the less educated, etc.), arguing that its increasing overall rates and diffusion to social groups of higher socioeconomical status signals the emergence of a new form adopted because of ideational change. Less often, research characterizes traditional and modern forms of cohabitation as part of the entire process of family formation, either in terms of its role in the process of union formation and dissolution (e.g., Perez Amador 2016), or the role of such unions as environments for childbearing and rearing—as indicated by the timing and sequence of the transitions into union formation and motherhood (Covre-Sussai et al. 2015) and the number of children cohabiting women have (Castro Martin 2002; Castro Martin and Dominguez-Rodriguez 2016; Binstock et al. 2016). Our study follows in the line of the first studies by focusing on the widespread of cohabitation across socioeconomic strata.

Levels and trends

Multiples studies have shown that, before the boom, cohabitation levels where high in countries of Central America and the Caribbean; medium in Brazil, Mexico, and the Andean countries; and low in countries of the South Cone (Castro Martin 2002; Fusell & Palloni 2004; Esteve et al. 2012). More recently, in a comprehensive study of the rise of cohabitation in the Latin America, Esteve et al. (2016) analyzed levels and trends in 24 Latin American and Caribbean countries from 1970 to 2010. They identify groups of countries according to their initial level of cohabitation, the onset of the increase and its pace. They first distinguished two groups of countries: one with initial high levels, on and above 30%, where cohabitation has had "strong historical roots"; and another with initial low levels, below 20%. Among the countries in the first group are the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Venezuela, Peru, and Panama, whereas examples of countries in the second group are Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Mexico, Paraguay, Puerto Rico, and Uruguay. Then the authors classified countries according to when cohabitation began to increase, regardless of the initial level: early starters, such as Colombia, Argentina, Brazil, and Costa Rica, experienced a significant rise in cohabitation during the 1990s; while late starters such, as Mexico, Puerto Rico, Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay, did so until the 2000s.

Figure 1. Proportion of cohabitation among women 25-29 years old in union, 1970-2012



Source: Esteve, Lesthaeghe, López-Gay, and García-Román (2016). Adapted from table 2.2 pp. 34-35.

In order to illustrate the diversity of the levels and trends in the region, in Figure 1, we present the evolution of the percentage of cohabitation among women 25-29 years old in union as estimated by Esteve and colleagues (2016; Table 2.2 pp 34-35). for countries with at least three data points. Countries are ordered according to the level they have in 1970 or in the case of Panama and Peru, 1980. Bar total magnitudes represent the level of cohabitation at the most recent available census for each country, either 2000 or 2010. The shade composition of the bars indicate how cohabitation levels were increasing from census to census. Darker shades represent levels registered in earlier censuses while lighter shades represent levels at most recent censuses. According to this data, in 1970, at least one quarter of young women in unions were cohabiting in Panama, Nicaragua, Venezuela, and Ecuador. Peru and Colombia were above that level by 1980 and Paraguay by 1990. By the year 2000, Costa Rica, Argentina, Uruguay, and Brazil also passed the 25% mark,

whereas Chile and Mexico remained below. The rise in cohabitation during the 2000s was spectacular. So much so that by 2010, at least one half of young women in 8 of the 13 countries shown in Figure 1 were cohabiting; in Peru, Colombia, Argentina, and Uruguay the proportion reached levels above 65% and in Panama almost 3 of every 4 young women in unions were cohabiting.

The onset and pace of the increase in cohabitation has been diverse throughout Latin America. During the first two decades (i.e., the 1970s and 1980s), the level of cohabitation tripled in Brazil and doubled in Argentina, Chile, and Colombia. The increase continued at a faster pace in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, where the levels of cohabitation doubled again in only a decade. Also, during the 1990s, Mexico experienced an increase of 50%, and Colombia and Paraguay of 30%. The spectacular rise in cohabitation during the 2000s included decade increases of 50% in Costa Rica, and of 60% in Argentina and Mexico; even more impressively, Uruguay tripled its share of cohabitation between 2000 and 2010.

The shade composition of the bars in Figure 1 illustrates the diversity in levels, onset and paces just described. For instance, Colombia and Argentina started at a very different baseline in 1970 (20% vs. 11%, respectively), but they reached the same level of cohabitation, of about 66%, in 2000 and 2010, respectively. Colombia was an early comer with increases evenly distributed over the three decades been observed, whereas Argentina started later with most of its increase taking place during the 1990s and 2000s. Thus, Argentina's bar is mostly composed of lighter shades while Colombia's of all shades equally. Peru and Uruguay are another illustrative example. In 2010, levels of cohabitation reached 70% in both countries, but baselines and paces were different between them. Peru had a level of almost 30% in 1980, which increased 50% during the next decade and 60% during the following two decades; whereas Uruguay started at around 10% in 1970, increasing 50% during the next decade, 70% during the following two decades, and then, tripled during the first decade of the twentieth century. The lightest shade is, therefore, the biggest component of Uruguay's bar. Nonetheless, despite these variations, most of these countries have reached high levels of cohabitation. Clearly, cohabitation has become the most common form of union in Latin America surpassing marriage in many countries.

Who cohabits

Cohabitation was traditionally concentrated overwhelmingly in the lower socioeconomic sectors of Latin American societies. It was common among women with residence in rural settings in poorer regions within countries (Parrado and Tienda 1997; Saavedra et al. 2013). Similarly, women whose partners had lower occupational status were more likely to be in cohabiting unions (Ojeda 1989; Castro Martin 2002). Additionally, previous research has consistently found a negative education gradient in cohabitation in most countries in the region: lower educated women were more likely to cohabit than highly educated women.

Over the last decades, however, cohabitation spread throughout the educational spectrum, becoming common even among college-educated women (Esteve, et al. 2012). It also became habitual in cities and highly developed regions of most Latin American countries (Esteve et al. 2016). The diffusion of cohabitation to higher status groups and urbanized settings fuels debate on whether it has taken on a new form related to changing values predicted by the second demographic transition (e.g., Esteve et al. 2012; Esteve et al. 2016) or rather it corresponds to increasing economic uncertainty among all segments of the population (e.g., Solís and Ferraris 2014; García and Rojas 2004). Many scholars agree, nonetheless, that different forms of cohabitation coexist in the region (e.g., Esteve et al. 2012; Covre-Sussai et al. 2015; Perez Amador 2016). Parrado and Tienda (1997), for instance, recognized that during the twentieth century rise in cohabitation in Venezuela, cohabiting women were no longer uniquely characterized by lower levels of education and residence in rural settings in poorer regions of the country, but also by higher levels of education and residence in urban settings. They considered the latter to be a modern type of cohabitation rising alongside the former more traditional type.

Education as a proxy of SES

Studies often differentiate types of cohabitation by using information on its prevalence across socioeconomic strata and its evolution from early cohorts through successive generations. Measures of socioeconomic strata, however, are frequently limited to educational attainment. Resembling the study of Parrado and Tienda (1997), cohabitation in low-educated women is assumed to be traditional, while cohabitation among middle and highly educated women is expected to be a modern form. Although this seems rather simplistic, and some studies do offer more comprehensive classifications based on a wider array of demographic characteristics (e.g., Covre-Sussai et al. 2015 Binstock et al. 2016; Castro-Martin and Dominguez-Rodriguez 2016; Perez Amador 2016),

the use of education as proxy of socioeconomic status and as criteria for classification is extensive and central.

However, in our endeavor of addressing whether the differentials in the likelihood of cohabitation across socioeconomic strata, which have been traditionally very large, have lessened over time along with its increasing overall rates, the use of education as a proxy of socioeconomic status is problematic because the educational composition of the Latin American female population has change considerably precisely during the times of cohabitation's widespread growth. Educational expansion in the region means that the highest educational stratum, often composed by women with college education, is becoming a larger, more heterogeneous, and less selective group; whereas the lowest educational stratum, often composed by women with primary education, is becoming a more selective and smaller fraction of the population. Thus, an accurate social-stratification definition of what is low and high education as proxy of socioeconomic status ought to change over time as educational levels increase within and across Latin American societies.

In this context, income could serve as a better proxy of socioeconomic status. Although there is not as much research on the association between income and cohabitation, as there is on its association with education, findings suggest that cohabitation decreases as income level increases (Sanchez Peña and Perez Amador 2016; Laplante, et al., 2019). As expected, this is consistent with the known negative gradient between education and cohabitation, since both are components of the position of women (and couples) in the social structure. Still, income and education measure different aspects. Education has the potential of shaping attitudes, values, and aspirations, and it is possibly related to the social meaning attached to cohabitation. A higher educational attainment may enhance income, social mobility, and prospective opportunities; however, income level could be better related to the current opportunities that discern the impact of socioeconomic inequalities in union formation. Therefore, in assessing whether the differentials in the likelihood of cohabitation across socioeconomic strata have lessen over the course of cohabitation's explosive growth in Latina America we use income as proxy of socioeconomic status and measure the effects of education separately.

Research Questions

This project is organized around three questions: the first investigates and to what extent the level of household income is related to the probability of cohabiting rather than being married. The second research question analyzes the extent to which the effects of household income on the probability of cohabitating have changed across cohorts. Finally, the third research question considers whether cohort differences in the effects of household income on the probability of cohabitating are due to, or mediated, by women's level of education and labor force participation as these strong correlates of cohabitation have undergone important transformations during the period of cohabitation expansion.

Methods

In order to answer our research questions, we use data from the Luxembourg Income Study Dataset (LIS), which provides harmonized data that facilitate international comparisons and include some Latin American countries. By providing multiple waves per country, data from LIS allows the analysis of continuity and/or change in the effect of income on cohabitation. For the analysis, we select female respondents aged 25-29 who are cohabiting or married at the time of survey. We use data from 2006 y 2016 to identify changes across cohorts in five countries: Chile, Colombia, Panama, Paraguay, and Peru. The indicator they used is the share of women cohabiting (or living in consensual unions) among women aged 25–29 residing in a union.[1]

We estimate a set of nested logistic regression models to assess the extent to which (1) the probability of cohabiting varies by income level, (2) the effect of income on cohabitation varies across cohorts, and (3) those relationships vary across countries. We run separate models by country. The dependent variable in the analysis is a categorical indicator of whether a woman is cohabiting or married (reference category). Key predictors are household income measure in quintiles and cohort (old *circa* 2006 vs. young *circa* 2016). Control predictors include women's education and employment status, rural/urban residency, and household structure. Model 1 includes the variable cohort (COH) and household income (HIQ). In model 2 interactions between household income and cohort are included to investigate if the association between these predictors and the probability

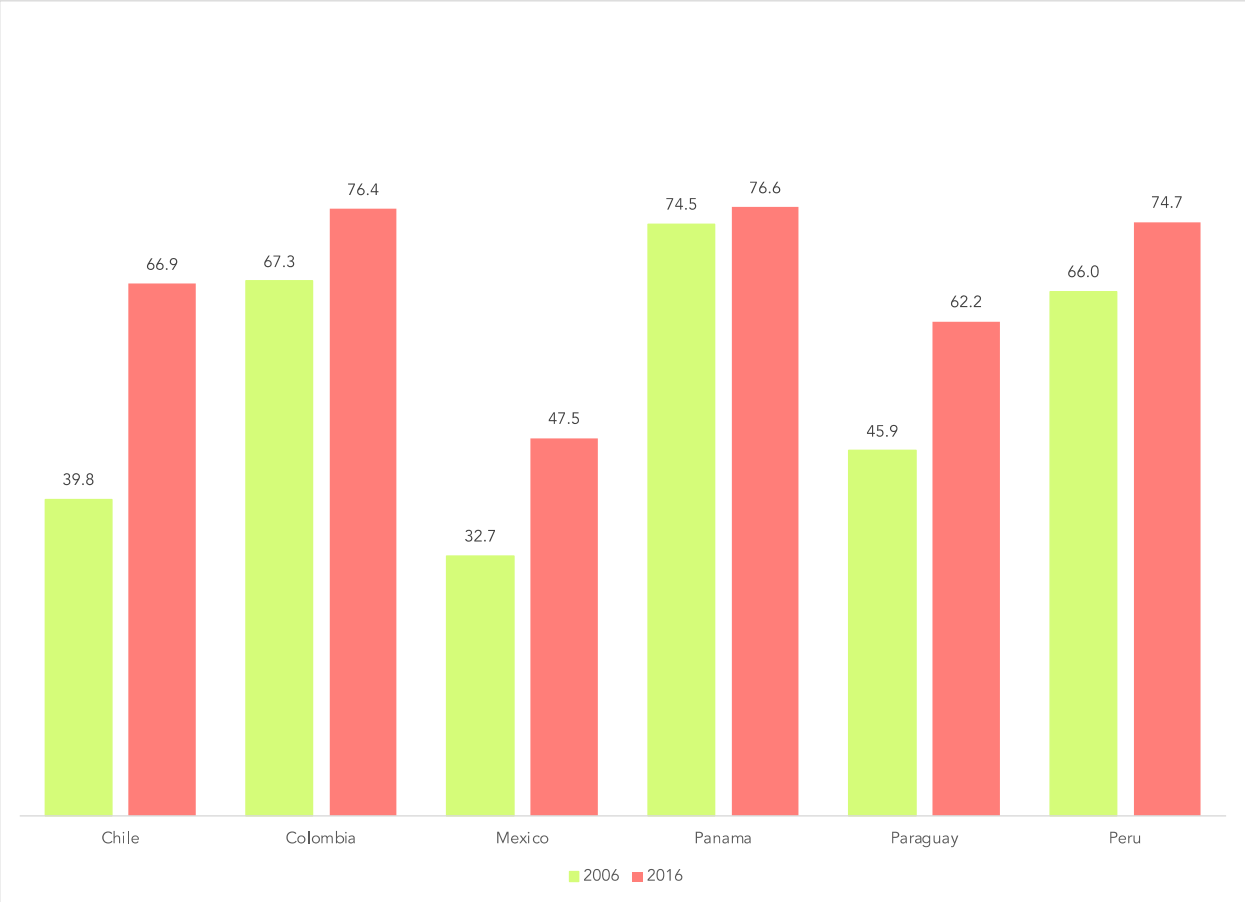
[1] The analysis focuses on current unions because Latin American surveys used in LIS do not have retrospective union histories, which would allow us to examine cohabitation as part of the dynamics of the process of union formation. We analyze women aged 25–29, because at these ages most women in the region have completed their education and have entered their first partnership.

of cohabiting have change over time, thus answering our main research question. Finally, model 3 adds control variables women's education (EDU), employment status (EMP), rural/urban residency (URB) and household structure (HHS).

Results

Figure 2 presents the percent of women aged 25-29 who are cohabiting among those living with a partner (in cohabitation or marriage) in the various Latin American countries in our study. In general, we find significant growth in cohabitation between old and young cohorts. The greatest increases are observed in countries that had relatively lower levels of cohabitation in 2006. Mexico and Paraguay experienced a 15-point gain in the percentage of cohabitation, while Chile gain almost 30 points. By contrast, in Colombia, Panama, and Peru changes were not as dramatic because levels of cohabitation were already high in 2006; nonetheless, by 2016, around two thirds of women in these countries who were living with a partner were cohabiting rather than being married.

Figure 2. Proportion of Cohabitation among Women 25-29 years old in union, 2006 and 2016



Source: Own estimations based on data from the Luxembourg Income Study Database (LIS). Women 25-29 years old living with a partner.

Data in Figure 3 show that, between 2006 and 2016, cohabitation has increased across the income distribution, in all countries. Except for Chile, there is a strong negative gradient between the level of income and the presence of cohabitation: the higher the position of women in the distribution of household income, the lower the cohabitation rate. Nonetheless, in most countries, the income-cohabitation gradient seems to be losing strength.

In Colombia, in 2006, 77% of partnered women in the bottom quintile of the income distribution were cohabiting, compared with 72% of those in the middle quintile and 53% of those in the top quintile. In 2016, the corresponding figures are 83% of those in the bottom quintile (an increase of 5 percentage points compared to 2006), 77% for those in the middle quintile (an increase of 5 percentage points) and 63% for those in the top quintile (10 percentage point increase). More notably, in 2006, the percentage of women in the bottom quintile cohabiting was 1.46 times more than that of those in the top quintile, whereas in 2016, it was 1.31 times more.

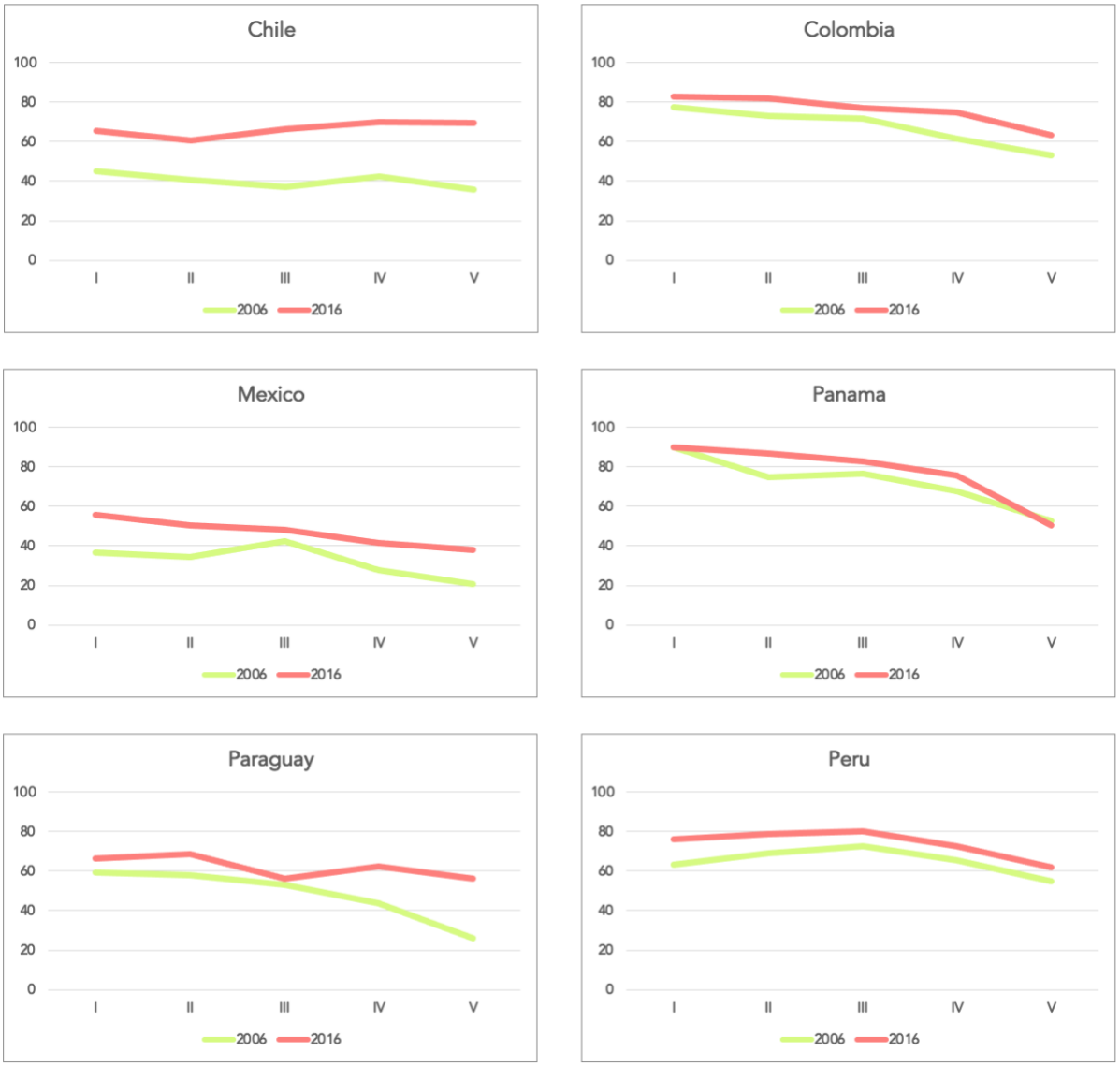
The rates of cohabitation by income level exhibited a very similar dynamic at the bottom and middle of the income distribution in Paraguay; increasing from 59% to 66% for those in the bottom quintile, and from 53% to 65% among those in the middle quintile; but, among women in the top quintile the proportion of those cohabiting increased 30 percentage points (from 26% to 56%). The magnitude of the growth in cohabitation at the top of the income distribution reduced by half the bottom-quintile to top-quintile cohabitation ratio: in 2006, the percentage of women in the bottom quintile cohabiting was 2.3 times more than that of those in the top quintile, whereas in 2016, it was only 1.2 times more.

In Chile, in 2006, 45% of partnered women in the bottom quintile of the income distribution were cohabiting, compared with 37% of those in the middle quintile and 36% of those in the top quintile. In 2016, the corresponding figures are 66% of those in the bottom quintile (an increase of 20 percentage points compared to 2006), 67% for those in the middle quintile (an increase of 30 percentage points) and 69% for those in the top quintile (33 percentage point increase). More importantly, in 2006, the percentage of women in the bottom quintile cohabiting was 1.26 times as that of those in the top quintile; by contrast, in 2016, the proportion of women in the top quintile cohabiting was 5 percentage points higher than that of those in the bottom quintile.

In Mexico, dynamics were somehow similar but increases in cohabitation where almost as high at the bottom as at the top of the income distribution, thus the reduction of the bottom-quintile to top-quintile cohabitation ratio was more of the magnitude of that in Colombia than of that in Paraguay. In Peru, cohabitation increased more at the bottom than at the top of the income distribution leaving the bottom-quintile to top-quintile cohabitation ratio rather stable. Similarly, the ratio remained stable in Panama because cohabitations gains occurred only in the middle of the income distribution.

Thus far, our results show increasing rates of cohabitation across the income distribution. There is indeed a strong negative gradient between the level of income and the presence of cohabitation, but in three out of five countries, the gradient is losing strength. Moreover, in Chile the negative gradient has rather disappeared. It seems that as cohabitation increased, income has become a less important factor in discouraging Latin American women from entering cohabitation. We further investigate this result in a multivariate analysis.

Figure 3. Proportion of cohabitation among women 25-29 years old in union by quintile of the household income distribution, 2006 and 2016.



Source: Own estimations based on data from the Luxembourg Income Study Database (LIS). Women 25-29 years old living with a partner.

Table 1 shows estimates of the effects of income quintiles and cohort on the logit of cohabiting. Estimates from model 1 suggest that in all countries but Paraguay, younger cohorts of women are more likely to live in cohabitation rather than being married, regardless of their level of household income. In general, the relationship between income level and the logit of cohabiting follows a negative gradient: the higher the quintile, the lower the logit of cohabiting. Panama and Paraguay fit this description entirely. However, in Colombia, women in the second quintile of the income

distribution are as likely as those in the bottom quintile to cohabit. In Mexico and Peru women in the second and third quintile are no different than those in the bottom quintile in their likelihood of being cohabiting, whereas those in the fourth and in the top quintile are increasingly less likely to cohabit than those in the bottom quintile of the income distribution. Chile is exceptional in this regard since there are no significant differences in the likelihood of cohabitation by income level.

In model 2, we allow the effect of income to vary across cohorts. Estimates for this model suggest that in Colombia and Panama, the negative effect of income on the logit of cohabitation is becoming less negative for the younger cohort, but only for women in the fourth and fifth quintiles. Similarly, the negative effect of income observed at the top of the income distribution in Peru is becoming less negative for the younger cohort. Results for Chile now also suggest that women in the top quintile are less likely than those in the bottom quintile to cohabit, like in Colombia, Panama and Peru, this negative effect has lessened among women of the younger cohort. In Mexico and Paraguay, by contrast, results suggest similar negative effects of income level for both cohorts.

The results just described are robust to controls added in model 3. Interestingly, once we hold education, job status, rural/urban residency, and household structure constants, the relationship between income level and the logit of cohabiting, which follows a monotonical negative gradient, has become systematically less negative across all levels of income for women in the younger cohorts in Colombia and Panama. The results from this model also confirm the persistence of a negative education gradient in cohabitation in all countries: women with medium and high education are increasingly less likely to cohabit than those with low education. Moreover, income and education have independent effects on the likelihood of cohabitation.

Therefore, our results show, very consistently, that younger cohorts of Latin American women are more likely to cohabit than older cohorts. They also suggest that cohabitation is negatively associated with income status in all countries but in Chile. However, in many of the countries analyzed, the negative effect of income on the likelihood of cohabiting is losing strength, suggesting that cohabitation is slowly permeating across social strata.

Table 1. Logistic Regression Estimates of the Effect of Income on the logit of cohabiting in Six Latin American Countries

Variable	Chile			Colombia			Mexico		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
	β	*β*	*β*	*β*	*β*	*β*	*β*	*β*	*β*
Income quintil (ref: Quintil 1)									
Quintil 2	-0.0796	-0.0994	-0.0700	-0.1005	-0.2737 *	-0.2332 *	-0.1221	-0.0698	-0.1212
Quintil 3	-0.0957	-0.1716	-0.1671	-0.3983 *	-0.5742 *	-0.4470 *	-0.1294	-0.0439	-0.1107
Quintil 4	-0.0393	-0.0997	-0.1185	-0.6414 *	-0.9609 *	-0.6890 *	-0.4177 *	-0.5288 *	-0.5440 *
Quintil 5	-0.1303	-0.3352 *	-0.3066 *	-1.2027 *	-1.4270 *	-0.9139 *	-0.5771 *	-0.7830 *	-0.6754 *
Cohort (ref: 1977-1981)									
1987-1991	0.9950 *	0.8144 *	0.9095 *	0.4608 *	0.1734	0.4077 *	0.6645 *	0.6419 *	0.6873 *
*Quintil * Cohort*									
Quintil 2 * 1987-1991		0.0701	0.0118		0.2435	0.3022 *		-0.0653	-0.0399
Quintil 3 *1987-1991		0.2204	0.1560		0.2452	0.2931 *		-0.1108	-0.0559
Quintil 4 * 1987-1991		0.1831	0.1175		0.4606 *	0.4827 *		0.1397	0.1466
Quintil 5 * 1987-1991		0.4537 *	0.3963 *		0.3165 *	0.2530 *		0.2599	0.2754
Educational level (ref: Low)									
Medium			-0.3108 *			-0.6525 *			-0.2474 *
High			-0.5930 *			-1.2645 *			-0.6325 *
Job status (ref: Not working)									
Self-employed			0.3330 *			0.0215			0.1027
Employer or employee			0.4162 *			0.1854 *			0.1850 *
Area (ref: urban)									
Rural			-0.1215			-0.2268 *			-0.2247 *
Household type (ref: non-nuclear)									
Nuclear			0.0052			0.0353			-0.1453
Constant	-0.2640	-0.2046	-0.1208	1.1287	1.3329	1.5410	-0.6568	-0.6402	-0.4182
AIC	8,046	8,045	7,983	22,242	22,236	21,670	8,831	8,835	8,783
BIC	8,086	8,113	8,091	22,289	22,315	21,796	8,872	8,903	8,892
n	6,055	6,055	6,055	19,363	19,363	19,363	6,665	6,665	6,665

Variable	Panama			Paraguay			Peru		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
	β	*β*	*β*	*β*	*β*	*β*	*β*	*β*	*β*
Income quintil (ref: Quintil 1)									
Quintil 2	-0.1005 *	-0.2737 *	-0.2332 *	-0.5113 *	-0.6655 *	-0.5894 *	0.0070	-0.1227	-0.1305
Quintil 3	-0.3983 *	-0.5742 *	-0.4470 *	-0.7763 *	-0.8071 *	-0.6024 *	-0.2924	-0.4958	-0.5462
Quintil 4	-0.6414 *	-0.9609 *	-0.6890 *	-0.9420 *	-1.0973 *	-0.8848 *	-0.4244 *	-0.7415 *	-0.6565 *
Quintil 5	-1.2027 *	-1.4270 *	-0.9139 *	-1.7609 *	-1.7399 *	-1.3505 *	-0.7953 *	-1.4270 *	-1.2936 *
Cohort (ref: 1977-1981)									
1987-1991	0.4608 *	0.1734	0.4077 *	0.2466	0.0412	0.0659	0.6078 *	0.2083	0.2548
*Quintil * Cohort*									
Quintil 2 * 1987-1991		0.2435	0.3022 *		0.4565	0.4877		0.1935	0.1434
Quintil 3 *1987-1991		0.2452	0.2931 *		0.0816	0.0467		0.2919	0.2928
Quintil 4 * 1987-1991		0.4606 *	0.4827 *		0.4509	0.4533		0.4934	0.5068
Quintil 5 * 1987-1991		0.3165 *	0.2530 *		-0.0041	0.0697		0.9700 *	1.0484 *
Educational level (ref: Low)									
Medium			-0.6525 *			-0.4312 *			-0.1893
High			-1.2645 *			-1.2996 *			-0.9298 *
Job status (ref: Not working)									
Self-employed			0.0215			0.1602			-0.2683
Employer or employee			0.1854 *			0.5072 *			0.1015
Area (ref: urban)									
Rural			-0.2268 *			0.0983			-0.1467
Household type (ref: non-nuclear)									
Nuclear			0.0353			0.2662			0.0445
Constant	1.1287	1.3329	1.5410	1.8813	1.9512	1.6924	0.1309	0.3947	0.5721
AIC	22,242	22,236	21,670	1,451	1,457	1,428	1,583	1,584	1,572
BIC	22,289	22,315	21,796	1,483	1,509	1,512	1,614	1,635	1,654
n	19,363	19,363	19,363	1,406	1,406	1,406	1,180	1,180	1,180

Source: Own estimations based on data from the Luxembourg Income Study Database (LIS). Women 25-29 years old living with a partner.

Conclusion

The recent upsurge of cohabitation in Latin America has raised the issue of whether its nature have changed along with its rise. Most studies have found that cohabiting unions that boomed during the 1990s and 2000s permeated the educational spectrum while still maintaining a strong negative

gradient. Similarly, our results show that cohabiting unions among young women born in the late seventies and the late eighties exhibit a similar pattern. Our focus, however, was on the analysis of the income gradient in cohabitation and its evolution over time. Even after controlling for education and other demographic variables, we found this gradient to be negative and strong in five of the six Latin American countries in our analysis. Thus, while cohabitation has become an increasing common choice of union formation across all income strata; it is still more common in the middle and bottom strata. As in other countries such as the United States (Oppenheimer 2003) and Japan (Raymo et al. 2009), contemporary Latin American cohabitation may be continuing its function as an alternative to marriage for those with lower socioeconomic status (Castro Martin and Dominguez-Rodriguez, 2016; Binstock et al. 2016; Perez-Amador 2008, 2016). Pattern that is also in line with international trends in increasing socioeconomic disparities in family behavior (McLanahan 2004) and increasing economic uncertainty surrounding the transition to adulthood in modern societies (Mills et al. 2005).

Nonetheless, cohabitation increase has been spectacular at the top of the income spectrum in Chile, Colombia, and Paraguay, or as equal as those at the bottom in Mexico. At this end of the income distribution, cohabitation may have a different meaning. In this regard, scholars found that in this settings gender equality might be among the factors that make cohabitation attractive. In Brazil, for instance, Laplante, et al. (2019) found that cohabitation is a common choice among couples that have similar levels of education, are both in the labor force and both earn similar incomes; moreover, they found that the probability of a couple to be cohabiting increases as the share of the woman's income in the couple's income increases. The authors, therefore, argue that cohabitation might offer the same benefits as marriage to these independent women. Analyzing another aspect of gender equality, Sanchez Peña, and Perez Amador (2016) found that cohabiting unions were significantly more egalitarian than marriages regarding the division of housework; additionally, as household income increases, the gender gap in housework declines faster for cohabitation than for marriage, suggesting that cohabiting couples at the top of the income distribution are the most egalitarian unions in this regard.

Ours results also indicate that the negative income gradient in cohabitation is certainly losing strength in some of these countries. Nonetheless, the negative income gradient in cohabitation persists, making it obvious that the economic and social inequalities in Latin America manifest itself in the type of union women choose. As both income and education maintain negative relationships

with cohabitation, cohabiting unions at the bottom of the socioeconomic strata could face even more disadvantages than marriages. Analyzing 2010 census data in Brazil, Laplante et al. (2019), found that the negative income gradient in cohabitation persist at all levels of education and is particularly stronger in couples in which the woman is not in the labor force. Thus, women's economic independence and empowerment could be more are risk at the very bottom of the socioeconomic spectrum if legal frameworks do not protect women in both type of unions equally.

Several important limitations to this study must be acknowledged. First, these findings are limited by our use of cross-sectional data, which does not allow us to examine cohabitation at different stages within the process of union formation nor at different moments in the life course of women. The use of cross-sectional data also inhibits the analysis of income mobility within couples and its relation to the transition from cohabitation to marriage –or separation. Without longitudinal information about the timing of entering, the duration, and the destination of cohabitation, we cannot address whether cohabitation is taking on different roles, such as trial or substitution to marriage, across income levels. Finally, as we do not have information on values and attitudes related to the meaning given to cohabitation or marriage—they are extremely scarce in the region, we cannot suggest the existence of different meanings of cohabitation across the income strata.

Taken together, these findings suggest that as cohabitation has spread throughout the income spectrum in Latin America, possibly following different dynamics and meanings for different income levels, the negative income gradient in cohabitation persist in all countries but has lessened in most of them. Clearly, more evidence is needed to confirm this trend and the existence of different models of cohabitation across the socioeconomic strata. Nonetheless our results suggest that as cohabitation increases, income has become a less important factor in discouraging Latin American women from entering cohabitation. Therefore, like in many other countries across the globe, cohabitation in Latin American continues to rise and diversify, although with different pace of change across countries.

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A.1. Population distribution of variables in the model, percentage cohabiting, and sample sizes

Variable	Chile				Colombia				Mexico			
	Wave 2006		Wave 2016		Wave 2006		Wave 2016		Wave 2006		Wave 2016	
	Population distribution	% Cohabiting	Population distribution	% Cohabiting	Population distribution	% Cohabiting	Population distribution	% Cohabiting	Population distribution	% Cohabiting	Population distribution	% Cohabiting
Type of union												
Cohabitation	39.8		66.9		67.3		76.4		32.7		47.5	
Marriage	60.2		33.1		32.7		23.7		67.3		52.5	
Income quintil												
Quintil 1	17.8	45.2	16.1	65.6	18.7	77.3	19.1	82.7	21.7	36.6	23.9	55.8
Quintil 2	19.2	40.4	16.7	60.5	20.1	72.9	22.3	82.0	23.2	34.2	22.6	50.5
Quintil 3	15.4	37.0	16.1	66.5	21.4	71.8	20.7	77.1	19.5	42.3	17.5	48.3
Quintil 4	19.1	42.5	19.2	70.0	20.3	61.7	20.2	75.0	16.7	28.0	16.9	41.7
Quintil 5	28.6	35.8	31.9	69.3	19.6	52.9	17.8	63.2	18.9	20.6	19.1	37.9
Educational level												
Low	32.1	45.0	13.6	68.0	50.0	78.7	33.7	85.4	74.0	36.5	61.8	51.7
Medium	48.9	41.3	50.9	67.1	37.4	62.3	42.1	77.3	17.0	24.8	25.5	44.6
High	19.0	27.3	35.5	66.2	12.6	37.1	24.2	62.0	9.0	16.5	12.7	32.5
Job status												
Not working	54.3	38.3	39.3	59.3	54.7	71.1	44.6	78.5	56.7	32.0	52.1	48.5
Employer or employee	37.8	42.2	50.6	73.8	25.6	61.9	31.9	73.7	24.1	32.3	34.7	45.9
Self-employed	8.0	38.9	10.2	62.3	19.8	63.7	23.4	75.9	19.3	35.2	13.2	47.5
Area												
Urban	87.0	40.0	90.2	67.1	74.9	65.3	75.6	75.4	77.4	33.5	71.2	47.3
Rural	13.0	38.5	9.8	65.1	25.1	73.2	24.4	79.4	22.6	30.1	28.8	47.9
Household type												
Nuclear	90.3	39.2	89.4	67.4	83.0	67.0	81.7	76.5	87.2	32.0	89.6	47.7
Other	9.7	45.4	10.6	62.5	17.0	68.8	18.3	75.7	12.8	37.5	10.4	45.2
n	3,466		2,589		5,375		13,988		1,714		4,951	

Variable	Panama				Paraguay				Peru			
	Wave 2006		Wave 2016		Wave 2006		Wave 2016		Wave 2006		Wave 2016	
	Population distribution	% Cohabiting	Population distribution	% Cohabiting	Population distribution	% Cohabiting	Population distribution	% Cohabiting	Population distribution	% Cohabiting	Population distribution	% Cohabiting
Type of union												
Cohabitation	74.5		76.6		45.9		62.2		66.0		74.7	
Marriage	25.5		23.4		54.1		37.8		34.0		25.3	
Income quintil												
Quintil 1	24.0	89.7	18.7	90.0	14.5	59.3	20.4	66.3	23.0	63.2	21.9	76.1
Quintil 2	21.7	74.8	23.6	86.6	16.7	58.0	23.6	68.5	25.3	68.8	23.0	78.6
Quintil 3	21.5	76.7	17.4	82.8	20.9	53.2	17.4	56.3	20.7	72.4	21.2	80.0
Quintil 4	18.1	67.8	18.6	75.4	22.4	43.9	17.3	62.3	18.4	65.6	17.9	72.3
Quintil 5	14.2	52.7	21.4	50.6	25.5	26.2	21.4	56.2	12.2	55.0	15.6	62.1
Educational level												
Low	54.3	85.1	41.6	87.8	68.6	54.0	53.2	65.8	55.7	67.3	44.4	80.2
Medium	35.0	68.6	41.8	74.3	19.2	33.8	34.3	62.8	32.9	69.9	40.5	73.9
High	10.8	39.9	16.6	54.2	12.2	19.4	12.5	45.5	11.5	48.7	15.2	60.6
Job status												
Not working	55.8	74.4	50.7	82.5	51.5	51.8	49.5	64.0	33.8	69.5	33.5	74.9
Employer or employee	29.3	71.1	34.8	65.5	23.6	33.1	25.8	61.7	19.4	66.0	21.1	75.9
Self-employed	14.9	81.3	14.5	82.4	24.9	46.0	24.7	59.0	46.8	63.4	45.4	74.0
Area												
Urban	59.4	69.4	69.3	72.0	58.7	43.4	56.3	62.6	70.9	66.1	74.8	74.2
Rural	40.1	81.7	30.4	87.7	41.3	49.6	43.7	61.7	28.6	65.6	24.8	75.9
Household type												
Nuclear	80.0	74.2	81.4	78.6	83.3	45.4	87.5	63.1	83.8	66.3	89.3	75.0
Other	19.5	75.1	18.3	68.7	16.7	48.4	12.5	56.0	15.7	64.4	10.3	71.3
n	875		537		448		732		1,584		1,864	

Source: Own estimations based on data from the Luxembourg Income Study Database (LIS). Women 25-29 years old living with a partner. All percentages are weighted.