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Families in Latin America
Dimensions, Diverging Trends, and Paradoxes

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INTRODUCTION

Latin America is the most unequal continent in the world. According to World Bank data, the richest 10% accumulate more than 40% of the wealth. Latin American inequality has historical roots and has been exacerbated in recent times after decades of neoliberal reforms that neither generated sustained economic growth nor bridged the gap between the very few rich and the very large number of poor. Inequality affects Latin America in many ways (e.g., health, education) and family life is no exception (World Bank 2003). A pattern of social disadvantage emerges in every category of family formation: The evidence shows that early union formation and childbearing, cohabitation, single motherhood, and union dissolution are more common among women with low education than among those with higher education (secondary and beyond completed). Although this pattern holds true across Latin America, the effects of educational and income inequality interact in numerous ways, varying considerably from context to context.

Geohistorical legacies are of paramount importance in understanding family diversity in Latin America. At the individual level, ethnicity and religion frequently interact with themselves and with education, adding endless variations to the relationship between social status and family behavior. For instance, two individuals with similar profiles regarding education, ethnicity, and religion may show quite different family behavior depending on the region where they live, proving that "individuals have histories but regions have much longer histories" (Esteve and Lesthaeghe, 2016, p. 269). This conclusion was originally drawn from cohabitation analysis but, as we will show in this chapter, it can be

generalized to other family dimensions as well. To sum up, this underscores the importance of context in the analysis of families in Latin America.

In addition to geohistorical legacies, the historical presence in Latin America of family forms that are considered a recent phenomenon by Western standards (i.e., cohabitation, union instability, and single motherhood not connected to widowhood) complicates, from a theoretical perspective, any attempt to apply Western theoretical frameworks to Latin America, in particular the male bread-winner model (Becker 1973), the second demographic transition (Lesthaeghe 1995), diverging destinies (McLanahan 2004), patterns of disadvantage (Perelli-Harris et al. 2010), and the two halves of the gender revolution (Goldscheider, Bernhardt, and Lappegård 2015). Elements of all these theories can be glimpsed. Fertility has declined rapidly across the region, sinking below replacement levels in a growing number of countries (CELADE 2013). Unmarried cohabitation has soared and marriage rates have plummeted at the same pace (Esteve, Lesthaeghe, and López-Gay 2012). More children have been born out of wedlock (Laplante et al. 2015), unions have become more unstable, and more households are now headed by women (Liu, Esteve, and Treviño 2016). However, closer scrutiny of family trends reveals some differences from Western experience. Age at union formation and childbearing has barely changed (Esteve and Florez-Paredes 2014). Household sizes have diminished but retained similar levels of internal complexity (Arriagada 2004). Furthermore, trends over time and variations across regions reveal a significant paradox: A lack of correlation between micro- and macro dimensions of family behavior and change.

Within this context, this chapter summarizes trends in family life in Latin America over the last four decades, analyzing the rich collection of census and survey microdata available in the region and the literature on family dynamics. The chapter is organized into four main sections: Dimensions, trends in independent family indicators, divergence by education, and para-doxes. In the dimensions section, we describe family regimes in Latin America across four factors/dimensions and show their variation across 368 regions and 15 countries. In the trends section, we document changes over time since the 1970s with reference to the key variables contributing to each of the four factors. For a selection of countries – Mexico, Colombia, and Brazil– we explore in the third section divergence by education in women's partnership status, extended co-residence, and household headship. And finally, in the paradoxes section, we analyze the lack of correlation between the micro- and macro dimensions of family change over time and across space. In short, this chapter provides a systematic characterization of family regimes in Latin America, trends in key indicators, divergence by educational status, and paradoxes of Latin American family change.

DIMENSIONS

The concept of a family system has been widely used to refer to the set of characteristics defining the structure and functioning of families in a society (Laslett 1970; Reher 1998). By definition, family systems have multiple dimensions, among them, when and who to marry, intergenerational transmission of property, filial obligations toward parents, and a long et cetera (Fauve-Chamoux 1984). Most research so far has been devoted to Europe and its internal diversity (e.g., Hajnal 1965), and Asia. Research on family systems in Latin America is rather scarce, scattered, and focused on specific subpopulations. Systematic study of the regional scale of the main dimensions of family change and its geographic boundaries is lacking (see exceptions in Arriagada 2009; De Vos 1987; Quilodran 1999). Recent availability of census microdata, through the Integrated Public Use of Microdata Series (IPUMS) international project, offers an opportunity for a partial yet broad description of variations in family life across Latin America. Obviously, there are many features of family systems that are well beyond what a census can measure, but there are others for which censuses can provide reasonable approximations (e.g., marriage timing, type of union, household composition, and female headship).

Hence, in this section we ask which main dimensions characterize family regimes in Latin America. We aim to identify independent dimensions of family life and trace their respective geographies using subnational-level data to account for within-country differences. We use factor analysis to identify the main dimensions emerging from 18 family life indicators calculated for 368 regions spread through 15 Latin America countries. Data come from IPUMS census microdata (Minnesota Population Center 2015). The chosen indicators are percentages of women at various ages regarding their situation with respect to marriage, cohabitation, childbearing, union dissolution, household headship, and living arrangements. In Appendix 2A.1, we show the list of the eighteen indicators for 2000 and their contribution (in technical terms, factor loads) to each dimension. The same analysis was carried out using data from the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s census rounds. The dimensions emerging from all these rounds were virtually the same, which demonstrates their stability over time. Hence, we only present results from the 2000 round.

One of the advantages of factor analysis is that it identifies groups of indicators that are independent of each other. Mere identification of such groupings is, per se, a very relevant result, because it allows characterization of family regimes on an empirical basis. Little is known about the dimensions that structure families in Latin America, and even less about the degree of independence among them.

First dimension: Union and Childbearing Calendars

The analysis yielded four factors or dimensions. The first dimension, *union and childbearing calendars*, refers to the age at which transitions to first union and first child occur. This factor mainly captures timing dimensions of fertility initiation and union formation, but it also includes two other variables, namely the proportion of women in unions at ages 15–44 and the proportion women both single and childless women in the age range of 15–19. The timing of union formation is closely correlated with the timing of childbearing, as, for most women, the two transitions occur within a relatively short period of time. Early transitions are associated with high intensity of union formation and childbearing. This dimension distinguishes between regions where men and women form unions and have children early in life and those where unions and children come later. Regarding internal differences, Map 1 in Figure 2.1 shows the factor scores for each region. Lighter colors indicate late transitions to union formation and childbearing and darker ones the opposite. At one end, Uruguayan, Chilean, and Argentinian (Southern Cone) women experience these transitions later than in any other regions in Latin America. At the opposite end, are women from Central America (e.g., Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, and Mexico). Between these two poles, there are countries with sizeable internal variations. Brazilian women in the Amazon and in the northern states show dramatic differences from those in the southern states, where there has been much recent European immigration. Even in comparatively smaller countries like Bolivia, internal variations are huge. The Andean states (Colombia, Venezuela, Peru, and Bolivia) show the largest internal variations, as they combine areas with extremely diverse ethnic, religious, and economic backgrounds.

Second Dimension: Household Complexity

The second dimension captures *household complexity*. All the original indicators (see Appendix 2A.1) measuring the complexity of living arrangements contribute to this (e.g., percentage of extended households, of children aged 0–4 in nuclear households, and of children aged 0–4 not related to the household head, among others). Positive values (darker colors in Map 2 of Figure 2.1) indicate complex household structures, which basically mean a high proportion of members and young children not directly related to the household head. Nicaragua, Venezuela, Panama, and El Salvador present the highest levels of household complexity. At the opposite extreme, Uruguay and Argentina show the lowest levels of household complexity. Showing some independence across

Early Transitions to Union and Childbearing

Household Complexity

Low (<–0.7)
Medium – Low (–0.7 to 0)
Medium – Higth (0 to 0.8)
High (>0.8)
No data

Low (<–0.6)
Medium – Low (–0.6 to 0)
Medium – Higth (0 to 1)
High (>1)
No data

Cohabitation

Female Households Heads Not in Union

Low (<–0.8)
Medium – Low (–0.8 to 0)
Medium – Higth (0 to 0.7)
High (>0.7)
No data

Low (<–0.9)
Medium – Low (–0.9 to 0.14)
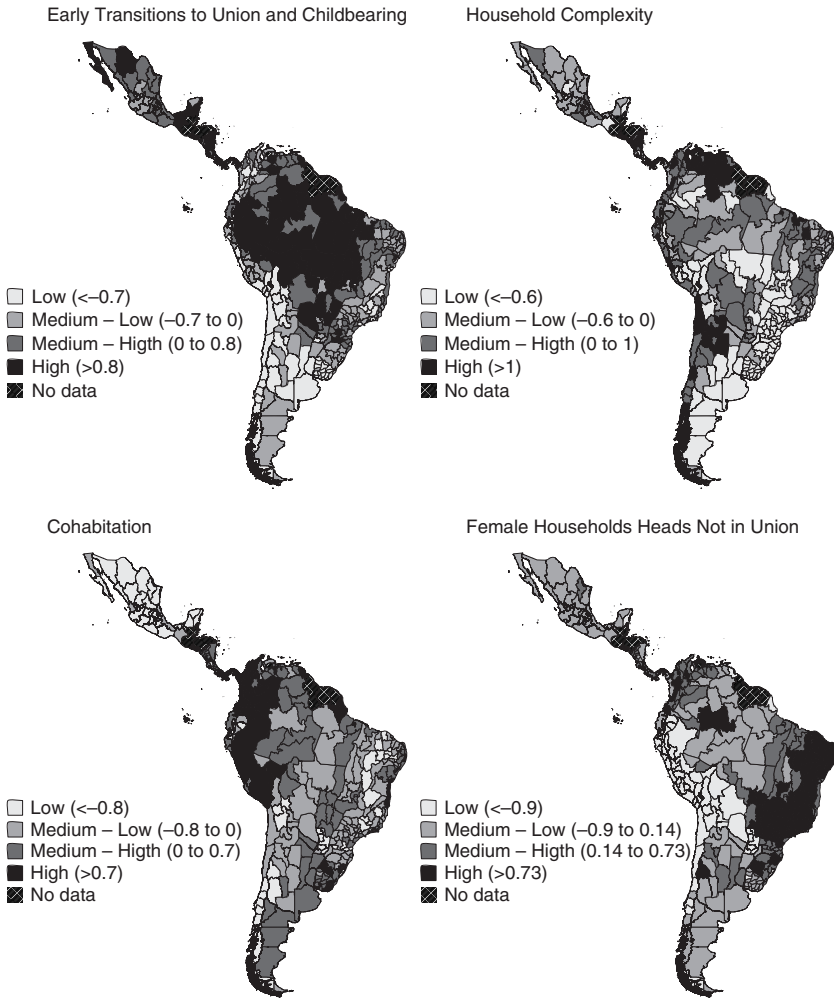Medium – Higth (0.14 to 0.73)
High (>0.73)
No data

FIGURE 2.1　Maps of four dimensions that characterize families in Latin America, 2000

Caption for top left map: Early transitions to union and childbearing
Caption for top right map: Household complexity
Caption for bottom left map: Cohabitation
Caption for bottom right map: Female household heads not in union

dimensions, Chile breaks with its concurrence with Uruguay and Argentina in terms of late marriage while still revealing relatively high levels of household complexity. Costa Rica, in contrast, shows relatively early transitions to union formation and childbearing but low levels of household complexity.

Third Dimension: Married and Unmarried Cohabitation

The third dimension refers to the type of union. It distinguishes between *married* and *unmarried cohabitation*. In Map 3 of Figure 2.1, we show the factor scores for the third dimension emerging from the analysis. This dimension is constructed from all the indicators measuring the marital or nonmarital status of unions. Positive values (darker colors) indicate high levels of cohabitation, and negative values (lighter colors) the opposite. The geography of high levels of cohabitation has a distinctive profile: The highest levels of cohabitation appear in the non-Andean regions of the Andean countries (Colombia, Venezuela, Peru, and Ecuador) followed by Uruguay and Central America. Lower levels of cohabitation, hence higher marriage levels, are found in Ecuador (with some internal differences), Mexico, Chile, and Paraguay. The patterns of marriage and cohabitation basically mirror the path of history. Contrary to many Western societies, cohabitation coexisted with marriage since colonial times as a form of organizing unions among those who did not have access to the institution of marriage for many reasons. The implementation of European marriage in Latin America was uneven across regions and across population strata, as is reflected in Map 3.

Fourth Dimension: Nature of Female Household Headship

Finally, the fourth dimension, *female household headship*, consists of indicators regarding the type of female household heads rather than their numbers. It distinguishes between female household heads not in union (presumably raising children without the support of fathers) and female heads in union. Positive values (darker colors) indicate the presence of female-headed households in which women are not in union, whereas negative values and lighter colors indicate female household headship among women in union. Female household heads in Brazil, Costa Rica, Panama, and Colombia show the largest proportion of women not in a union and with children, compared to the much lower trend in Bolivia, Paraguay, and Peru. The latter countries have lower proportions of women not in union and with children than the former.

TRENDS IN INDEPENDENT FAMILY INDICATORS

As noted above, the main (census-observable) dimensions that define family regimes in Latin America have remained relatively stable between 1970 and 2010. Nevertheless, many of the indicators contributing to these dimensions
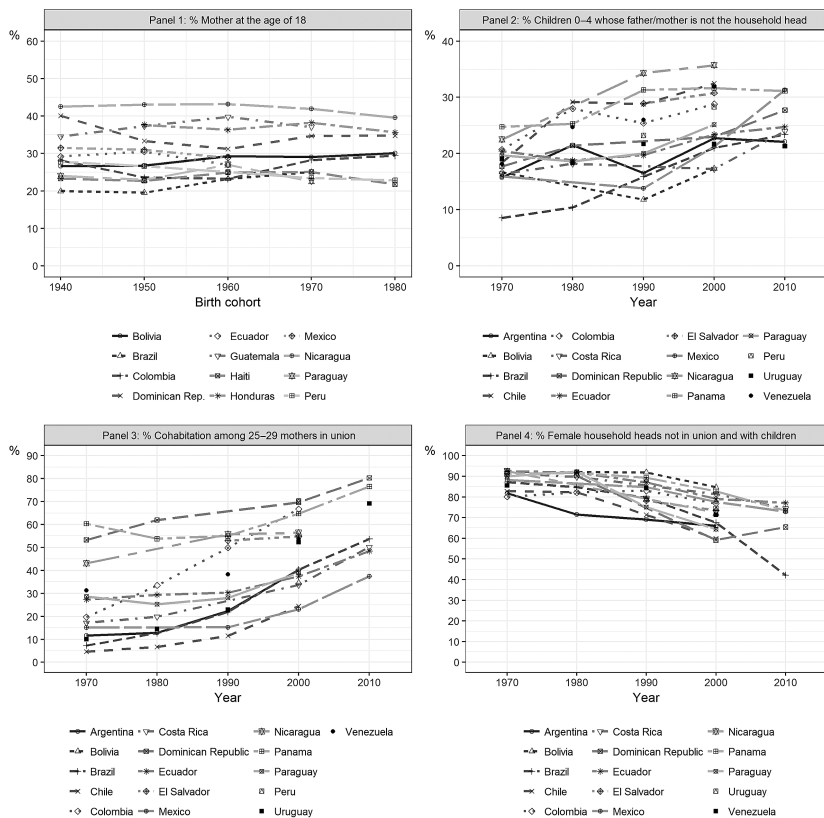
FIGURE 2.2 Trends in selected key family life indicators in Latin America over recent decades and cohorts

Caption for Panel 1: % mothers at the age of 18

Caption for Panel 2: % children aged 0–4 whose father/mother is not the household head

Caption for Panel 3: % cohabitation among 25–29-year-old mothers in union

Caption for Panel 4: % female household heads not in union and with children

have changed dramatically over time. We now summarize the major trends in a selection of key variables representing each dimension. Figure 2.2 provides graphic representation of the trends in four separate panels.

Age at First Child

Panel 1 of Figure 2.2, using all the available Demographic and Health Survey data in Latin America, shows the percentage of women by birth

cohort who were mothers by the age of 18 in twelve Latin American countries. The timing of first childbearing has remained relatively stable over time, as has the percentage of women in a union at the age of 18 (results not shown). This suggests that trends in union formation and childbearing are strongly correlated. At later ages (e.g., 20 or 22), trends are equally stable. Such stability has been corroborated by many authors and is one of the salient characteristics of recent trends in family formation in Latin America, and sets Latin America apart from other regions where childbearing and union formation are increasingly postponed (Fussell and Palloni 2004; Heaton and Forste 1998; Martin and Juárez 1995). This has occurred amidst marked declines in fertility, increased access to contraception, even at early ages, and substantial improvements in education and female labor force participation. Signs of postponement are still modest and reduced to a small number of countries and mainly among higher educated groups (Binstock 2010; Cabella and Pardo 2014; Guzmán et al. 2006; Rosero Bixby, Martin, and Martín-García 2009).

Extended Households

Regarding household complexity, in Panel 2 of Figure 2.2, we represent the percentage of children aged 0–4 whose father/mother is not the household head. On average, one in every four children is not the son or daughter of the household head. They may be living with other relatives, including grandparents, uncles, aunts, or nonrelatives. The percentage of children in these households ranges from 8.5% in Brazil in 1970 to 35.7% in Nicaragua in 2000, but for the vast majority of countries, values are within the 15% to 30% range. On average, these percentages have increased by 8% points between 1970 and 2010.

This indicator is highly correlated with the percentage of extended households. Both indicators contribute positively to the factor on household complexity (see Appendix 2A.1). The percentage of extended households ranges, for the majority of countries, within the 20% to 30% range, and has remained constant over time (results not shown). This shows that household complexity is quite widespread in Latin America, in particular Central America. However, comparison to the meaning and function of extended households differs from that which has been described for parts of Europe (Fauve-Chamoux and Ochiai 2009). Extended households in Latin America are not seeking to secure exploitation of land and transference of property but, rather, to cope with social vulnerability and provide a refuge for family

members in insecure situations (Goldani and Verdugo 2004). Few extended households in the region include two adult couples; most are comprised of a couple co-residing with other relatives (not in a union). These results reflect a very fluid system of living arrangements, in which preexisting nuclear households incorporate other relatives in need of housing (De Vos 1987). Latin America presents strong families concerned with coping with poverty, vulnerability, and uncertainty rather than with protecting family assets. For example, close to 70% of single mothers reside with their parents, and this high level has remained stable over the last three or four decades (Esteve, García-Román, and Lesthaeghe 2012).

Cohabitation

Panel 3 of Figure 2.2 shows the percentage of unions that are cohabiting but not married among mothers aged between 25 and 29, by census round and country. Among these young mothers, cohabitation is increasingly the context for childbearing. The percentage of cohabiting mothers has multiplied since the 1970s by three times or more in a number of countries, including Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, and Uruguay. Based on the latest figures available, childbearing within is more frequent than outside cohabitation in ten out of the sixteen countries represented in Panel 3.

Of all dimensions considered in this analysis, cohabitation is the one that is changing fastest. Marriage rates have dropped across Latin America. The decline of marriage has been completely offset by the rise of cohabitation. Hence, age at union formation has barely changed. The rise of cohabitation cannot be attributed to a single factor. Some authors suggest a partial fit to the theory of the second demographic transition (Esteve and Lesthaeghe 2016), whereas others emphasize a continuation of the historical pattern of disadvantage (Rodriguez Vignoli 2005). Analysis of World Values Survey for Latin America shows a major transformation of values toward post-materialist values consistent with the second demographic transition, including greater acceptance of homosexuality, euthanasia, and abortion, especially among the better-educated respondents (Esteve, García-Román, and Lesthaeghe 2012). However, the absence of postponement in union formation and childbearing does not fit with second demographic transition theory, and neither does the fact that a large part of early cohabitation takes place in complex and extended households (Esteve, García-Román, and Lesthaeghe 2012).

A combination of factors would therefore seem to be the most plausible explanation. Women with high levels of education are not only choosing

cohabiting unions over marital unions more often but they are also post-poning union formation and childbearing, whereas the least-educated women are choosing cohabitation more but without postponement. Recent research suggests the presence of (at least) three types of cohabitation: Traditional, blended, and innovative. Each type has its specific traits with regard to age at union formation, education, number of children, and stability (Covre-Sussai et al. 2015). Traditional cohabitation is defined by early union formation and childbearing and is more frequent among women with low levels of education. At the opposite end, innovative cohabitation is associated with later union formation and a higher level of education. In between the traditional and the innovative cohabitation, the blended cohabitation has features of both types (e.g., early pregnancy and a higher level of education). Future research should inquire further into the different meanings of cohabitation and their implications for union stability and consequences for children.

Female-Headed Households

Finally, female headship has increased dramatically since the 1970s (Liu, Esteve, and Treviño 2016), but still the vast majority of female household heads are women not in a union and with children. Panel 4 of Figure 2.2 shows the percentage of female heads between the ages of 35 and 44 who were mothers but were not in a union at the time of the census, either because they were single mothers or because they were separated, divorced, or widowed. In the 1970s, more than 80% of female heads across all countries fell into this category. These high figures remained relatively stable until the 1990s. The rise of headship rates among married and cohabiting women or among single women (without children) has slightly changed the profile of female heads. By the 2000s, the proportion of female heads with children and not in a union had decreased by 16% points on average. The rise in female headship among women in union is mainly due to an increasing propensity among women to report as house-hold heads, even in the presence of their spouses (Liu, Esteve, and Treviño 2016). Census forms have also reflected (and perhaps induced) this change, as they adopt more gender-neutral definitions of household headship.

Despite recent trends, the historically high levels of female-headed households in Latin America continue to be associated with the notable presence of single mothers resulting from short-lived unions due to union dissolution. Although families provide "shelter" to single mothers, many

are on their own. Female-headed households have been associated with the feminization of poverty (Arias and Palloni 1999; Buvinic and Gupta 1997), but recent research has challenged the supposed relationship between female headship and poverty (Chant 2003; Liu, Esteve, and Treviño 2016; Medeiros and Costa 2008), showing that the living conditions of female-headed households are not necessarily worse than in those headed by males (Chant 2003, Chant 2007; Medeiros and Costa 2008; Moser 2010; Quisumbing, Haddid, and Peña 2001), and also that female-headed households are extremely diverse.

DIVERGENCE BY EDUCATION IN WOMEN'S TIMING AND CONTEXT OF CHILDBEARING, HOUSEHOLD COMPLEXITY, AND HOUSEHOLD HEADSHIP

Most of the indicators and trends described here show a steep educational gradient. Education is one of the most significant stratifying dimensions of social and demographic behavior, and Latin America is no exception. There is ample evidence that, in Latin America, education is a strong predictor for the age at which union formation and childbearing occur, as well as whether unions are marital or not. Furthermore, access to education is constrained by social class. Despite major progress in universalizing access to primary and secondary education, schools continue to reproduce inequality (OECD 2013a).

Here we investigate whether family inequality is increasing over time. We explore divergence by education in the four family dimensions identified in the dimensions section: Timing at union formation and childbearing; household complexity; cohabitation vs. marriage; and nature of female household headship. We present results only for Colombia, Brazil, and Mexico, which are three of the largest and most populated countries in Latin America.

Timing and Context of Childbearing

The first and third dimensions are analyzed together in Figure 2.3 (see exact figures in Appendix 2A.2A). Three-dimensional histograms with stacked bars represent, on the z-axis, the percentage of mothers among women aged between 25 and 29. Among mothers, we distinguish between married, cohabiting, or single (not in a union). On the x-axis, we represent change over time, showing data from various census rounds. On the y-axis, women are classified according to their level of education: Primary or lower; secondary completed; and university.

MEXICO
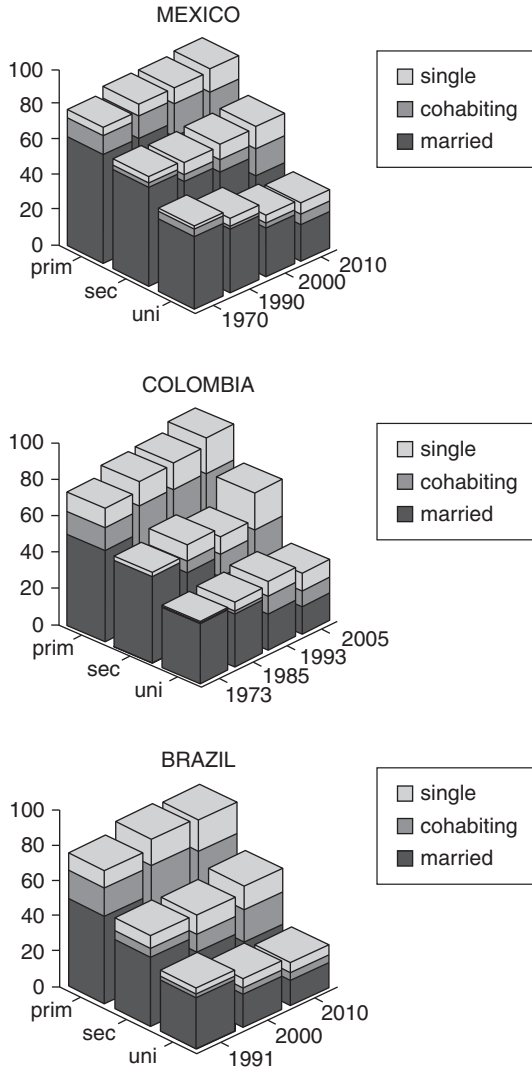
COLOMBIA

BRAZIL

FIGURE 2.3 Percentage of mothers among women aged from 25 to 29 by union
status, educational attainment, and census round
Caption for top: Mexico
Caption for middle: Colombia
Caption for bottom: Brazil

Despite being three different countries, the patterns and trends in Mexico, Brazil, and Colombia are quite similar. First, the percentage of women who are mothers is highest among those with primary or lower education, intermediate among women with only secondary education, and motherhood is

least common at ages 25–29 among women with a university education. This indicates that highly educated women have children, if any, at later ages when compared with women of lower levels of education.

Second, the proportion of women who have become mothers by 25–29 years old have been almost stable among the first two groups (primary and secondary education), while over time, fertility postponement appears among women with a higher education. As shown in Figure 2.3, the percentage of highly educated women who are mothers has decreased, but the percentage for the other two groups has remained constant. Trends are diverging across educational groups. In Mexico, the percentage of women with a university education who are mothers has decreased from 47.1% in 1970 to 32.8% in 2010 and, in Brazil, from 40.3% to 23.9% between 1980 and 2010.

The most important transformation is the change in the partnership context of childrearing. This is most noticeable among women with secondary education or lower. For these two groups, the percentage of women who are mothers is stable, but the proportion of those rearing children within marriage is decreasing. Childbearing and child-rearing are increasingly taking place within the context of cohabitation and single motherhood. Trends unanimously point in this direction but the pace of change varies from country to country. Mexico has the highest proportion of mothers who are married mothers. It is still above 50% in all educational groups in 2010. In Colombia in 2005, married mothers represent less than 45% in all educational groups, dropping to 19% among the lower educated groups. Married mothers represent less than 50% in Brazil in 2010, except for those with a university education (58%). Mothers who are in cohabiting unions comprise a growing proportion of all mothers in all educational groups. The share of lone mothers, residual in the 1980s, now represent at least 15% of mothers in Mexico and 20% in Colombia and Brazil. Marriage predominates among highly educated women, but even among the highly educated, cohabitation and lone motherhood are becoming more common contexts for child-rearing. However, women with high levels of education are postponing childbearing and, accordingly, the trends in the partnership context of child-rearing are likely to be driven by selection effects.

In any case, the trends depicted so far show a clear educational gradient regarding age at childbearing and diverging trends with respect to change over time. Moreover, there is also a dramatic transformation of the family context of childbearing as marriage rates are plummeting and cohabitation and single motherhood are rising rapidly as well.

Household Complexity

Using three-dimensional stacked bar graphs, in Figure 2.4, we represent the percentage of women between the ages of 25 and 29 who reside in an extended household by year and educational attainment (see exact figures in Appendix 2A.2B). Additionally, we distinguish between mothers and non-mothers. Extended co-residence among young women has risen over time in the three countries and educational groups, except for Colombian women with primary or lower education. Mexico has experienced by far the largest increase in extended co-residence. Trends are similar across all educational groups, but the distribution between mothers and non-mothers is quite distinct, most probably because of higher educated women having children later. Half or more of women with primary and secondary education who live in extended households are mothers. Among women with a university education, this figure is lower than 50%, with the only exception of Colombia in 1993. In any case, and according to the most recent data, around one in three women in Mexico and one in four women in Colombia and Brazil reside in an extended household. In Mexico and Brazil, higher educated women are less likely to be in extended households, but in Colombia, the opposite pattern holds true. However, the gap between the higher and the lower educated group is no bigger than 5% points. This indicates that extended co-residence is quite widespread across all educational groups.

Household Headship

Figure 2.5 shows trends in female household headship among women aged 35 to 44 by year and educational attainment (see exact figures in Appendix 2A.2C). Female heads are classified according to their partnership and motherhood status. Female household headship has been on the rise in recent decades, in particular in Brazil and Mexico. Trends are less clear in Colombia because the 1973 data shows higher levels of female headship among women with primary or secondary levels of education than in 2005. In neither country is there any sign of a strong educational gradient in female headship. A look at the latest data indicates that the gap between the lower and higher educated women is less than 3% points. However, if we look at the distribution by partnership and motherhood status within educational groups, sharp differences emerge. Women with lower levels of education are more prone to head their
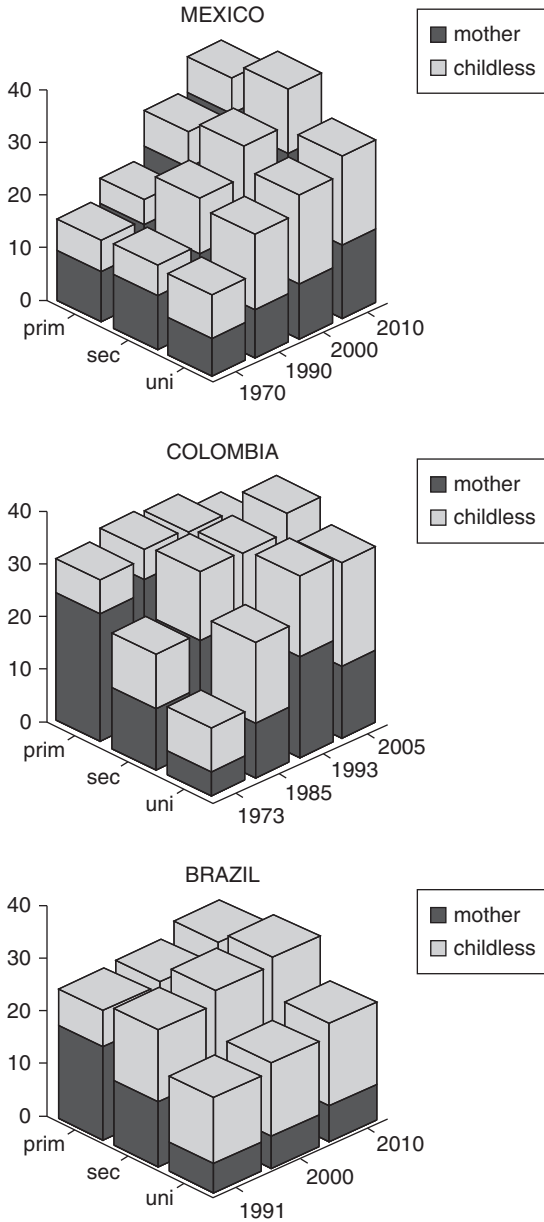
FIGURE 2.4 Percentage of women aged from 25 to 29 who reside in an extended
household by motherhood status, educational attainment, and census round
Caption for top: Mexico
Caption for middle: Colombia
Caption for bottom: Brazil
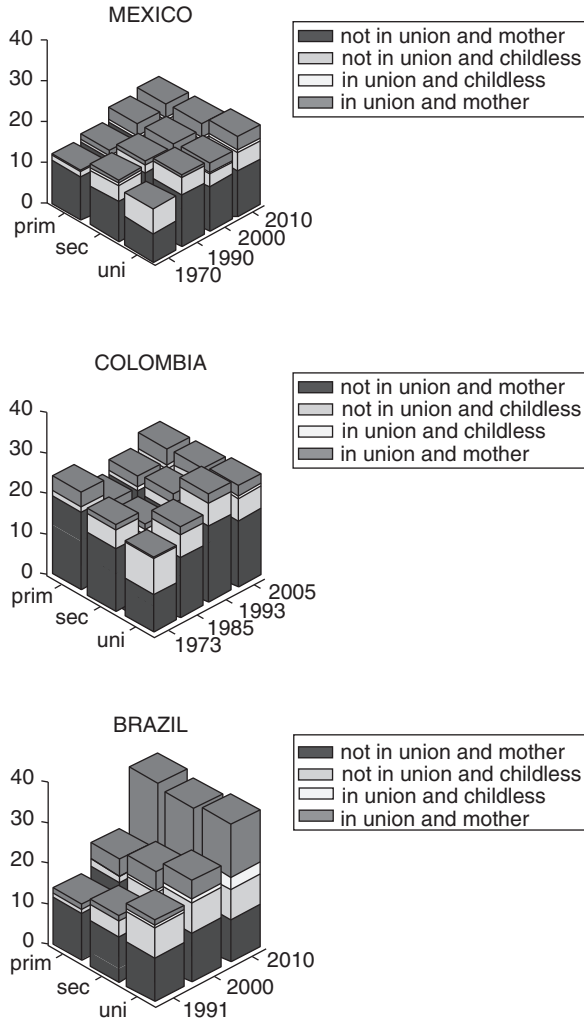
FIGURE 2.5 Percentage of women aged from 35 to 44 who are household heads by
partnership/motherhood status, educational attainment, and census round
Caption for top: Mexico
Caption for middle: Colombia
Caption for bottom: Brazil

households in the absence of a spouse/partner and with the presence of
children, whereas among female householders with university degrees,
the proportion of single women without children is always higher than
among women with secondary or lower education.

<div align="center">PARADOXES</div>

Study of family change in Latin America confronts the researcher with several paradoxes. All of these can be traced back to a lack of correlation between the micro and macro dimensions of change, or in other words, between individual behavior and social change. This occurs on both temporal and regional scales. On the regional scale, family variations across regions cannot be explained by the socioeconomic characteristics of the individuals inhabiting these regions. Here we highlight two of the main micro–macro paradoxes found in Latin America.

The Paradox of Unchanging Age at First Birth while Educational Attainment Has Risen

The first paradox concerns the timing of family transitions. Despite substantial improvements in educational attainment – and education is understood as being the most robust predictor of age at union formation and childbearing everywhere (Jejeebhoy 1995; Lloyd 2005; Martín and Juárez 1995) – the age at which Latin American women have formed their unions and become mothers for the first time has hardly changed. The stability of calendars has been possible because of a rejuvenation of family transitions within educational groups. In other words, women with analogous years of schooling but belonging to different birth cohorts (at least for those born between 1940 and 1980) have formed unions and had children at different ages. Hence, if rates within educational groups change over time, predicting the effect of the educational expansion on social change (assuming constant rates) will not yield reliable outcomes, which is exactly what has happened in Latin America.

However, this is not a matter of rejuvenation within educational groups but of offsetting effects across educational groups. As we have seen in the cases of Mexico, Colombia, and Brazil, women with high levels of education are postponing transitions while other groups are not postponing or speeding up the process. As we show in Figure 2.3, the percentage of mothers among 25–29-year-old women with primary and secondary education increased in all countries between the earliest and latest year. In Brazil, 76.2% of women with primary education were mothers in 1980, compared to 79.1% in 2010. For the same group, this figure grew from 73.8% to 84.8% between 1973 and 2005 in Colombia; and in Mexico, from 77.3% to 82.2% between 1970 and 2010. As for women with secondary education, mothers represented 48.4% in Brazil in 1980 and 54.3% in 2010;

in Colombia, the figures were 50.2% in 1973 and 65.8% in 2005; and in Mexico, 62.0% in 1970 and 63.0% in 2010. These figures suggest that women with secondary or lower education in more recent times are becoming mothers at younger ages than women with analogous levels of education born three or four decades previously. By contrast, the proportion of mothers among women with a university education has decreased in the three countries, dropping in Brazil from 40.3% to 23.9% between 1980 and 2010; in Colombia, from 34.4% to 33.5% between 1973 and 2005; and in Mexico, from 47.1% to 32.8% between 1970 and 2010.

The lack of correlation between educational expansion and postponement of childbearing has given rise to a methodological debate about absolute and relative years of schooling (OECD 2013b) and attempts to determine which measure is better able to predict the time at which women form unions and have children. The evidence from Latin America shows that the specific knowledge and skills associated with each additional year of schooling may not have triggered the expected postponement of family transitions. Access to education and, in particular, to quality education is influenced by social factors and, hence, years of schooling do not always mean more opportunities for social and economic progress (BID 1998; Hoffman and Centeno 2003; Juárez and Gayet 2014; Torche 2014). This is consistent with the fact that a relative measure of education based on quartiles of years of schooling is much more consistent with the pattern of stability (Esteve and Florez-Paredes 2014). Regardless of the absolute number of years of education, the least-educated women are systematically having children at similar ages. In support of this claim, family size preferences in Latin America have remained stable over time and, after controls, show no outstanding differences across educational groups, suggesting a normative (and homogenous) context for early childbearing (Esteve and Florez-Paredes 2014).

Social and Regional Trends in Cohabitation Going against Individual Gradients

The second paradox concerns the rise of cohabitation over time and its regional distribution. Analyses of individual profiles of cohabitants reveal a pattern of disadvantage. Across the board, women (and men) with low levels of education tend more toward cohabitation than marriage. Assuming this gradient, cohabitation should have declined as a result of the dramatic expansion of education. However, quite the opposite occurred. Unmarried cohabitation spread across all social groups and, most significantly, among the highly educated populations

(Esteve, Lesthaeghe, and López-Gay 2012). This occurred because women with analogous years of schooling in two different periods were showing quite distinct levels of cohabitation. Cohabitation has risen within each educational group, but the educational gradient has remained constant.

At the regional level, we encounter a similar paradox. Despite the importance of education at the individual and contextual level and, even more, the importance of race and religion as strong predictors of cohabitation, differences across regions remain intact after individual and contextual level controls. Multilevel models have proved that the regional variance in cohabitation rates do not change after controls, which suggests that two individuals with analogous characteristics may have very distinct cohabitation levels depending on the regions in which they live (Esteve and Lesthaeghe 2016). For instance, Blacks in Brazil with no education show very different probabilities of cohabitation depending on the region where they live. It might therefore be concluded that cultural and institutional legacies are of paramount importance when it comes to understanding the geographical distribution of cohabitation in Latin America, and realizing that individual variables, such as education and race, only add modest variations to general schemes.

In the light of these results, researchers are puzzled when handling individual and contextual variables that are significantly correlated with cohabitation and other dimensions of family change while, at the same time, they cannot predict either social change or regional variability. Surprisingly, altitude turned out to be the most significant contextual-level variable in the Andean countries when accounting for the regional variance in cohabitation (Esteve et al. 2016a). At higher altitudes, there was more marriage than cohabitation. This came as a total surprise but, once again, it signaled the importance of institutional and cultural legacies closely connected with the history of colonization in Latin America. In the Andean countries, the highlands represent the areas of most intense colonization by the Spaniards. The most important civilizations were in the Andes, and it was in those areas where the penetration of the Catholic Church was more intense, and with it, the penetration of marriage. By contrast, in the lowlands, there are the inland and remote areas of the Amazonian tropical forests inhabited by sparse indigenous populations and the coastal areas, such as those of Ecuador and Colombia, with large plantation economies and a high Black population – descendants of slavery.

DISCUSSION

In a world where family forms and norms are in constant flux, Latin America comes into play challenging many of the assumptions and frameworks that

have been useful for understanding modern families in the developed world. Thanks to data offering a large regional coverage and available for a long period and, we have offered an overview of the main dimensions of family regimes, trends in key family indicators, and paradoxes between micro and macro perspectives of family change and regional variations. We have not directly addressed the consequences of such family decisions on inequality and children's outcomes, mainly because the data does not permit this.

We have identified four (independent) dimensions that define family regimes in Latin America and have explored variations across regions and countries in accordance with them. These are union formation and child-bearing calendars; household complexity; married vs. unmarried cohabitation; and the nature of female household headship. Some key indicators of these dimensions have remained stable while others have changed dramatically. The timing of union formation and childbearing remains much the same, as a result of opposite trends among educational groups: The least-educated speeding up the process and the highly educated postponing transitions. Household sizes have diminished but the household complexity has not, as shown by the constant proportion of extended households. Cohabitation, however, has increased dramatically, as well as the number of households headed by women.

A pattern of social disadvantage emerges in any cross-sectional profile of cohabitation, lone motherhood, and early childbearing. As shown for the cases of Mexico, Brazil, and Colombia, women with low levels of education have children earlier than more highly educated women. The family context of childbearing has changed dramatically for all groups, but it has changed the least among the highly educated. More and more, women are having and raising their children outside marriage, either in the context of cohabitation (the majority now in Brazil and Colombia) or as single mothers (the fastest growing category).

The rise of cohabitation and lone motherhood, and diverging trends between women with low and high levels of education, might invite one to draw parallels with the West, but the point of departure is completely different. By contrast to Europe, marriage was never universal in Latin America, and cohabitation, union instability, and female headship were normative dimensions of family life. Indeed, the rise of cohabitation observed in recent decades may give the false impression that it was rare in the distant past. Indeed, analysis of the 1930 census microdata for Mexico (the first Latin American census to ask about cohabitation) shows higher levels of cohabitation than those observed in other years, until 2000, and in some states (Esteve et al. 2016b), even higher than the figures for 2010. During the middle decades

of the twentieth century, the modernization of states came together with active policies to encourage marriage. In this context, the rise of cohabitation cannot merely be interpreted as a response to secularization but also to a rapid erosion of marriage which was never strongly institutionalized.

Why has marriage never become a universal institution? Why did government efforts to universalize marriage (after the 1950s) have such short-lived effects? Why did a significant majority of men have such a weak sense of commitment to their children and wives? More importantly, why have the expansion of education and modernization of Latin America societies had so little impact on family dynamics? Why is Latin America so full of interactions and regional differences? The answers to all these questions require research going beyond the short-term causes that may be driving recent family trends. They would seem to demand a study on how the economic, social, and political history of Latin America has unfolded over vast territories.

Comparative research with other societies, Europe and Asia, will also be necessary to understand why marriage did become universal in those societies. What were the prerequisites for marriage in those societies? Was it the need to organize the inheritance of property and to establish a line of descent? Was it the powerful influence of the church? Many of these prerequisites may not have appeared in some parts of Latin America. Institutionalization of the church was rather asymmetrical; access to property was constrained to certain groups, and settlement patterns and modes of production were also very diverse. In this sense, modern national boundaries encapsulate a wide range of types of social organization and family regimes, as shown by the series of maps presented in Figure 2.1. Furthermore, the evolution of modern economies in Latin America has not contributed toward increasing levels of security among the population, distributing the benefits of economic growth to the population as a whole, or improving the stability of work, or allowing people to plan their lives on the basis of long-term income.

Given the amount of considerable preexisting inequalities and their impact on family life, it would be unfair to single out family forms as drivers of inequality. We have no quarrel with the idea that, if data were available, we would certainly find different outcomes in terms of children's health, school attainment, and job quality depending on the family contexts of their mothers and fathers. Nevertheless, we would probably also discover all sorts of micro and macro paradoxes like the ones presented in this chapter, and differences in children's outcomes by family status might disappear after proper controls. All in all, one finds a puzzle of rich interactions, regional trends, and unexpected paradoxes that should, at least, stimulate social theorists to produce frameworks that encompass both individual-level predictors and the ways in which

they interact with the social context. It should not be forgotten that this is a society in which inequality is pervasive, access to resources is still mediated by social class, and expansion of education did not have the expected effect on family dynamics. The idea of a relatively homogenous society from which destinies start to diverge is not the case in Latin America. Destinies have been diverging for centuries.

APPENDIX 2A.1. *Results of factor analysis of family indicators in Latin America, 2000*

	Factor Loads			
	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
Indicators contributing to:				
Factor 1: Early transitions				
% women 15–19 in union	0.89	0.06	0.27	0.02
% women 15–19 with children	0.85	0.18	0.30	0.00
% women 15–44 in union	0.74	−0.48	0.01	−0.22
% women 15–19 not in union and without children	−0.87	−0.14	−0.29	0.00
Factor 2: Household complexity				
% extended households	0.15	0.88	0.13	−0.32
% children 0–4 whose father/mother is not the household head	−0.12	0.85	0.30	−0.11
% children 0–4 in nuclear households	0.01	−0.84	−0.34	0.35
Factor 3: Cohabitation vs. marriage				
% cohabitation among mothers 15–44	0.28	0.19	0.89	−0.12
% cohabitation among women 15–44	0.24	0.29	0.89	−0.16
% cohabitation among women 25–29	0.12	0.20	0.92	−0.19
Factor 4: Female household heads not in union				
% female household heads not in union and with children	0.03	−0.18	−0.14	0.93
% female household heads in union	0.04	0.24	0.19	−0.90
No Factor				
% childless among women 45–49	−0.49	−0.05	0.25	0.39
% of single and childless among women 45–49	−0.56	0.02	−0.16	0.64
% nuclear households	0.14	−0.61	−0.45	0.55
% household heads among women	−0.62	0.41	0.42	−0.28
% of female heads with children	0.56	0.69	−0.09	−0.05
% separated/divorced among women 15 or over	0.03	0.47	0.35	0.28

Source: Authors' calculations based on IPUMS international microdata.

APPENDIX 2A.2A. *Percentage of mothers among women aged from 25 to 29 by union status, educational attainment, and census round*

Census round/ Partnership status	Mexico				Colombia				Brazil			
	Single	Cohabiting	Married	Total	Single	Cohabiting	Married	Total	Single	Cohabiting	Married	Total
1970s												
Primary or lower	4.7	61.5	11.1	77.3	10.8	50.1	12.9	73.8				
Secondary completed	3.5	56.4	2.1	62.0	2.6	47.0	0.6	50.2				
University completed	1.3	41.2	4.6	47.1	1.0	33.2	0.2	34.4				
1980s												
Primary or lower					13.2	40.8	25.0	79.0				
Secondary completed					8.9	40.3	7.0	56.2				
University completed					5.3	29.1	1.6	36.0				
1990s												
Primary or lower	6.2	61.7	12.5	80.4	14.6	29.1	36.2	79.9	9.8	49.6	16.2	75.6
Secondary completed	6.6	50.2	3.9	60.7	9.6	29.2	12.2	51.0	7.0	39.6	5.1	51.7
University completed	4.1	36.3	1.8	42.2	8.0	20.0	10.0	38.0	3.7	29.2	2.3	35.2
2000s												
Primary or lower	9.2	53.5	18.3	81.0	19.8	16.0	49.0	84.8	14.9	36.6	29.6	81.1
Secondary completed	8.3	46.4	7.4	62.1	20.0	18.8	27.0	65.8	10.5	29.4	10.4	50.3
University completed	4.6	27.7	2.4	34.7	9.8	15.0	8.7	33.5	5.1	18.8	3.5	27.4
2010s												
Primary or lower	12.8	40.8	28.6	82.2					17.4	23.4	38.3	79.1
Secondary completed	13.0	35.0	15.0	63.0					12.8	23.0	18.5	54.3
University completed	6.7	20.2	5.9	32.8					5.4	13.8	4.7	23.9

Source: Authors' calculations based on IPUMS international microdata.

APPENDIX 2A.2B. *Percentage of women aged from 25 to 29 who reside in an extended household by motherhood status, educational attainment, and census round*

Census round/ Motherhood status	Mexico			Colombia			Brazil		
	Mother	Childless	Total	Mother	Childless	Total	Mother	Childless	Total
1970s									
Primary or lower	5.1	10.5	15.5	6.2	24.7	30.9			
Secondary completed	5.8	10.3	16.1	10.7	11.5	22.2			
University completed	8.3	7.5	15.8	8.2	5	13.2			
1980s									
Primary or lower				5.7	27.3	33			
Secondary completed				13.1	21	34.2			
University completed				15.1	10.6	25.6			
1990s									
Primary or lower	4.8	15	19.8	4.6	28	32.6	6.8	17.5	24.3
Secondary completed	10.9	14.2	25.1	12	21.9	34.6	13.6	12.2	25.7
University completed	14.5	9.1	23.6	15.3	19.5	34.8	12.4	5.6	18
2000s									
Primary or lower	6.8	22	28.9	4.8	24.4	29.3	6.3	18.8	25.2
Secondary completed	12.4	19	31.4	12.3	25.4	37.7	14.7	13.6	28.3
University completed	16.9	10.4	27.3	19.9	13.7	33.6	13.7	5.9	19.6
2010s									
Primary or lower	6.7	28.7	35.4				7.3	20	27.3
Secondary completed	12.1	26.3	38.4				13.4	16.3	29.7
University completed	17.2	13.8	31.1				15.5	6.7	22.2

Source: Authors' calculations based on IPUMS international microdata.

APPENDIX 2A.2C. *Percentage of women aged from 35 to 44 who are household heads by partnership/motherhood status, educational attainment, and census round*

Census round/ Partnership– Motherhood status	Mexico					Colombia					Brazil				
	Mother not in union	Childless not in union	Childless in union	Mother in union	Total	Mother not in union	Childless not in union	Childless in union	Mother in union	Total	Mother not in union	Childless not in union	Childless in union	Mother in union	Total
1970s															
Primary or lower	1	10.7	0	0.4	12.1	1.1	19.2	0.1	3.5	23.9					
Secondary completed	4.1	9.5	0.5	0.9	15.0	4.4	15.4	0.2	1.1	21.0					
University completed	6.2	6.9	0	0	13.1	8.8	9.4	0	0.3	18.5					
1980s															
Primary or lower						0.8	14.7	0.1	2.1	17.6					
Secondary completed						2.5	13.8	0.1	1.5	17.9					
University completed						5.6	14.6	0.1	2	17.7					
1990s															
Primary or lower	0.6	11.4	0	1.2	13.3	0.6	17.1	0.1	2.6	20.3	1	11.5	0	0.9	13.4
Secondary completed	2.2	12.8	0.1	0.8	15.9	2.3	16.9	0.1	2	21.3	3.8	10.9	0.1	1.1	15.9
University completed	4.4	12.6	0.1	0.8	18.0	5.5	18.7	0.2	2.3	26.7	7.6	10.7	0.4	1.2	19.9

2000s															
Primary or lower	0.6	12.6	0.1	2.6	15.9	1.1	18.5	0.2	3.4	23.2	1.1	14.3	0.2	4.2	19.8
Secondary completed	1.7	12.3	0.2	1.9	16.0	2.7	18.2	0.2	2.7	23.8	3.6	13.3	0.5	4.1	21.5
University completed	3.6	11	0.3	1.9	16.9	6.1	15.9	0.4	2.6	25.1	7.4	11.9	1.1	4.3	24.6
2010s															
Primary or lower	0.6	13	0.1	3.4	17.1						1.5	14.9	1	15.8	33.2
Secondary completed	1.6	12.6	0.3	3.1	17.5						3.5	13.5	1.6	13.9	32.5
University completed	4.4	11.3	0.7	3.1	19.4						7	10.6	2.9	13.1	33.7

Source: Authors' calculations based on IPUMS international microdata.