

The changing demographics of cohabiting unions in Latin America

Salvador Rivas
Julieta Perez-Amador
Extended Abstract

Context

Cohabiting unions and marriages 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 specific regions within countries. Recent research has documented the significant rise of cohabitation in Latin American countries beginning in the 1970s but to a much larger extent during the 1990s (e.g., Esteve, Lesthaeghe and López-Gay 2012; Fussell and Palloni 2004). Esteve et al., suggest cohabitation arose in countries and regions with and without traditional forms of cohabiting unions, and across different social strata.

This paper follows this line of research and aims to contribute to the understanding of the continuity and change in the nature of Latin-American cohabitation. Most previous research analyzes cohabitation trends at the country level, which often hides the possibility of within-country diversity and therefore treats cohabitation as a singular, or one-dimensional, phenomenon. Nonetheless, it is quite possible that old and new forms of cohabitation are coexisting across the region. One way to explore this possibility is by exploring the extent to which the demographics of cohabitation have changed through time, across and within countries. We explore this avenue by pooling individual-level census data from IPUMS International (1970-2000) and estimating multilevel multinomial logistic models, to analyze within- and between-country cohort variation in the effects of demographic variables on the probability of cohabiting. Using one wave of mid-2000s data from the Luxembourg Income Study, We further complement this analysis by providing a snapshot picture of the role of income in this region on the probability of cohabiting.

Research Questions

This project is organized around four questions: the first investigates the extent to which cohabitation has increased across birth cohorts of Latin-American women (i.e., are younger cohorts more likely to cohabit?), and to what extent does this vary across countries. Second, we consider whether cohort differences are due to, or mediated, by the individual's level of education, labor force participation and occupation as these strong correlates of cohabitation have undergone important transformations during the focus period of study (for example, is cohort differences in the probability of cohabitation due to the changing educational composition of the population). The third research question analyzes the extent to which the effects of individual

predictors have changed across generations (i.e., are the demographics of cohabitation changing?). Finally, the fourth research question asks whether and to what extent country-level factors, such as level of cohabitation or level of development, explain cross-country variation in person-level cohabitation.

Method

In order to answer my research questions, we use data from two international data archives: IPUMS International and Luxembourg Income Study (LIS). Both sources provide harmonized data that facilitate international comparisons and include some Latin American countries. By providing multiple censuses per country, data from IPUMS-I allows the analysis of continuity and/or change in the demographics of cohabitation. The countries selected from this source are Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Mexico, Peru and Uruguay. The period of analysis is 1970-2000. Unfortunately, most of the Latin American censuses lack reliable income information, thus we complement the analysis by using household income survey data provided by LIS. This latter analysis, however, only aims to provide a snapshot of the association between income and cohabitation since LIS has but one wave of Latin American data (collected circa 2005). Four countries are selected from this source: Colombia, Mexico, Peru and Uruguay.

For the analysis, we select female respondents aged 25-29 who are single, cohabiting or married at the time of census or survey. We estimate a set of nested multilevel multinomial logistic regression models with random intercepts and slopes. We use individuals and countries as levels and test the significance of cross-level interactions. This approach allows not only to account for the dependency of observations within countries, but more importantly, to assess to what extent to which the effect of key demographic variables on cohabitation varies significantly across countries and to what extent the variance of those effects can be explained by macro-level variables.

The dependent variable in the analysis is a categorical indicator of whether a woman is cohabiting, married or single (reference category). Individual level predictors include birth cohort, education, employment status and occupation. Control individual variables are rural/urban residency and motherhood status. Country-level predictors are the level of cohabitation as a measure of its “institutionalization” and, as a control variable, the Human Development Index (available from 1980). The analysis conducted with LIS data includes also a measure of personal income from labor.

Model 1 includes the variable cohort (COH) and the control variables rural/urban residency (URB) and motherhood status (MOM). It also includes a random effect of cohort. This model addresses whether there is a cohort difference in the probability of cohabiting or being married (vs. being single) and whether it varies across countries. In model 2 individual variables education (EDU), employment status (EMP) and occupation (OCC) are added. This model addresses whether the

cohort change within and across countries can be explained by this individual-level factors. In model 3 interactions between individual-level variables and cohort are included to investigate if the association between these predictors and the probability of cohabiting have change over time, thus answering my main research question - the extent to which the effects of individual predictors have changed across generations. Finally, model 4 includes country-level predictors and examines cross level interactions.

Analysis with LIS data is limited to assess the association between income and the probability of cohabiting or marry (vs. raising single) while controlling for the other sociodemographic variables investigated with census data. Nonetheless, it assess to what extent this relationship varies significantly across countries and to what extent the variance of those effects can be explained by macro-level variables. Unfortunately, no cohort change in this relation can be investigated.

Expected Results

We expect to observe important cross-country variation in the effects of socioeconomic characteristics on the probability of cohabitating, but country differences in the institutionalization of cohabitation might account for at least some part of the variation given the wide differences in the level of cohabitation within countries. We also expect to see important cohort changes in the effect of education and employment status on cohabitation both within and across countries.

References

Esteve, Albert, Ron Lesthaeghe and Antonio López-Gay (2012). The Latin American Cohabitation Boom, 1970-2007. *Population and Development Review*, 38(1): 55-81.

Fussel, Elizabeth and Alberto Palloni (2004). Persisten Marriage Regimes in Changing Times. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 66(5): 1201-1213.

