

Trajectories of cohabitation in Argentina between 1995-2003

Multiple actors or multiple destinations?

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Introduction

In Argentina, over the last decades, consensual unions and out-of-wedlock births have been rising. Nationwide, the trend started in the 1980's and strengthened in the 1990's. Available data show that while, in 1980, 11.5% of women living in a union where not married, this proportion had risen to 25.5% by 2001. Likewise, whereas, in 1980, 29.6% of births occurred out of wedlock, the proportion had risen to 57.6% by 2000.

Although, at the national level, the demographic transition ended much earlier in Argentina than in most Latin American countries — the fertility transition is considered over by the end of the 1930's (Torrado, 1993: 73 ss.) — there are still regional and social differences in nuptial and reproductive behaviours. This is mainly due to regional differences in social morphology. These differences arose as consequences of unequal economic and social development under the two models of development which drove the Argentinean economy from the last third of the 19th century until the 1980's: the agro-exporter economic model (1870-1930) and the “industrialisation by substitution of imports” economic model (1930-1976). These models mainly benefited the socio-economic sectors rooted in the main urban area of the country — the Buenos Aires metropolitan area — and the “pampeana” area. These two regions hosted most of the overseas migration tides that landed in Argentina during the first decades of the 20th century and they now account for more than 60% of the total population.

By the end of the 1970's, Argentina shifted to a new model of economic development that relied on deindustrialization. Under this economic model, social inequality increased and poverty — measured as the proportion of individuals who live in a household whose income does not allow buying a basic basket of goods and services — reached levels never seen in the history of the country. Furthermore, poverty became heterogeneous: portions of the middle class were hit by deprivation and became “new poors” (Torrado, 2004).

In Argentina, as in other countries of Latin America, consensual unions have been historically more common in the lower social classes. For people of higher classes, marriage, among other things, was a marker of class membership and living in consensual union a social stigma. The recent increase of consensual union in all regions and all social classes is of special interest because it shows that, although it does not spread in the same fashion in all classes, it looks as if it were becoming acceptable in social classes that rejected it not so long ago. It is because it is now common in all of society that consensual union — be it an initial step towards marriage or the permanent state of a couple in which at least one spouse had already lived with

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some else —, its causes and its consequences for the family life and the life course is now a topic of interest in Argentina

Research on consensual unions, marriage and fertility in developed countries has shown that basically, consensual union can be thought of in three different ways: a) a “cheap” form of marriage; b) as a step in a process that leads to marriage and c) as an alternative to marriage.

The first interpretation has been developed by Oppenheimer, Kalmijn and Lim (1997). According to them, consensual union is chosen as a form of union when the economic insertion of young men is delayed, for instance when unemployment levels are high or when wages are too low to meet the needs of a family. As a consequence, in a society in which consensual union is seen as a cheap form of marriage, consensual unions are more common in the lower social classes. Where consensual union is a cheap form of marriage, the hazard of giving birth should be greater among married couples than among cohabiting couples, whereas women who live in a consensual union should have the same hazard of giving birth than women who live alone.

The dynamics of consensual union as a step in a process that leads to marriage has been studied by Blossfeld, Klijzing, Pohl and Rohwer (1999) and by Blossfeld and Mills (2001).

Among childless couples, the hazard of a birth is greater for married couples than for cohabiting couples. However, this difference hides the fact that some of the children born to married couples are conceived before their parents’ wedding. Looking at the sequence of events, one sees that the hazard of converting a consensual union into marriage increases soon after the conception of the child and decreases sometime before birth. In a society that accepts consensual union but in which marriage is the normal context for nurturing children, the hazard of conceiving the first child is lower among cohabiting couples than among married couples, but this difference is not as large as in the hazards of giving birth to the first child. Furthermore, cohabiting couples who do not get married before or soon after the birth of their first child are not likely to do it afterwards and will thus nurture their child outside what is considered the normal context to do it in their society.

Finally, in a society in which consensual union is an alternative to marriage, choosing one or the other is largely irrelevant. Consensual unions may be everlasting, and having children does not induce converting them into marriage. Cohabiting couples may have a higher hazard of dissolution than marriage, a lower hazard of getting children, and some may decide to get married when expecting a child. However the differences in the hazards of birth and separation are smaller than in a society in which consensual union is a step towards marriage and marriage the normal context for family life. This pattern would be related to the latest stage of the “second demographic transition” and would be typical of some countries of Northern Europe (Kiernan, 2000, 2002) and at least one region of Canada (Lapierre-Adamcyk, Le Bourdais and Marci-Gratton, 1999).

Until now, studying the formation of unions in Argentina has been limited by the lack of appropriate data. However, taking into account what has been observed in developed countries, the trends that have been documented using data from the *Census* and the *Vital statistics* allow putting forward the following hypothesis:

a) consensual union is an adaptive response to bad economic circumstances, which would explain its greater incidence in lower classes and its recent diffusion within the urban middle-class, hard hit by the economic crisis and the lowering of living standards. If this were true, the

proportion of unions that are marriages rather than consensual should increase, at least among the urban middle-class, as soon as the economic conditions improve.

b) the diffusion of consensual union is a consequence of the weakening of religious and legal control over private life, of the greater autonomy of individuals and of the existence of more egalitarian gender relations. These changes would have been fostered by transformation in the status of women and by the separation between sexuality and procreation, a consequence of contraceptive technology. Marriage, religious or civil, would no longer be the prevailing normative form. This would not imply that consensual union would be chosen for the same reasons and lived in the same way by all those who choose it. Motives and dynamics should vary according to stages of the life course.

c) given the strong meaning marriage has had as a marker of class membership, it is unlikely that consensual union is spreading in the same way in all social classes. As a response to the economic crisis, it should not be used in the same way by people from different social classes.

The purpose of this paper is to study empirically a) which social groups have shown a greater probability to live in consensual union over the last decade; b) which social groups have shown a greater hazard of converting consensual unions into marriage; and c) how the choice of marriage or consensual union has been affected by the economic crisis of the second half of the 1990's and the beginning of the 2000's.

Data and method

2.1 The sources of data for the study of marriages and consensual unions

In Argentina, the sources of data for the study of nuptial and reproductive behaviour are: the *Census of population, households and lodging*, which is taken regularly since 1960; the *Vital statistics* that constantly record births, deaths and marriages; and the *Encuesta Permanente de Hogares* (EPH)¹, a rotating panel survey of households and the labour force whose main purpose is measuring labour force participation, unemployment, and poverty in the urban population of the country, whose panel design allows to study some aspects of nuptiality through the use of some techniques of longitudinal analysis.

The *Census* source has two limitations for our purposes: a) its information on couples is strictly cross-sectional, which does not allow to study the conversion of consensual unions into marriages; b) censuses conducted between 1960 and 1991 aimed at gathering information on *legal* marital status (being single, married, separated, divorced or widower) more than on *actual* marital status (currently living or not as a couple regardless of legal status) and collected the information through a single question using non mutually exclusive answers.² The 2001 census introduced modifications that provide a more accurate picture of current reality, but impair comparability with prior censuses, thus hampering any attempt at studying long-term trends.

¹ The *Encuesta Permanente de Hogares* is an survey developed by the Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos (National Institute of Statistics and Censuses, INDEC) since 1972. Currently, it provides socio-economic data on 28 urban areas of the country. It collects information using a household questionnaire (for information on housing and on the social-demographic characteristics of the household) and an individual questionnaire (for the economic, educational and migration characteristics of each member of the household.)

² See points 2.2

The *Vital statistics* also have limitations of their own: a) they only record marriages, leaving aside consensual unions; b) divorce, allowed since 1987, is not registered for statistics purpose.

The EPH records information on marital using the same question that censuses did before 2001 and thus suffer similar limitation. However, its rotating panel allows following individuals and couples over time, making it the only source of data within the national statistics suited for individual level longitudinal analysis. This is why we use it in this paper.

2.2 The measurement and analysis of marital status through the EPH

Although they allow us to study consensual unions and marriage, the data from the EPH still have limitations.

As pointed out before, the EPH gathers some information about the legal and actual marital status of each member of a household. The first limitation is that, as censuses prior to 2001, it uses a single question with non-mutually exclusive answers. These categories are: single, united, married, separated or divorced, and widower. The main problem comes from the inclusion of the “united” category, which aims at capturing the state of those who live as a couple with someone without being married with this person. People can be “single” and “united” at the same time, “divorced” and “united” at the same time, or “widow” and “united” at the same time. This question mixes two different notions, legal and actual marital status, and, as a result, the information it gathers is accurate for none and the answers depend on what the interviewed has considered significant to answer at the time of the survey. (Torrado, 2003).³

Another limitation of the EPH is that, like census, it records kinship relations within the household solely through relationships with the head of the household. As a consequence, it is always possible to identify the couple in which lives the head of the household, but not always possible to identify couples which do not include the head of the household, such as those which include one of the sons or daughters of the head of the household, which are not uncommon in extended family households (Street, 2005).

In order to circumvent some of these limitations, we use the following rules: a) to limit the analysis to couples made up by the head of household and their partner; b) to jointly consider the answers given by both partners to the single question on marital status to identify whether the couple lived in a marriage or a consensual union. Therefore, we classify as married a couple in which both spouses identified themselves as “married” and as living in a consensual union a couple in which at least one spouse provided any answer other than “married”, — that is single, united, separated/divorced or widower. Furthermore, in order to focus on reproductive years, we chose to limit the analysis to couples in which the woman is aged between 15 and 49 years. Data

³ Actually, the problem runs deeper. The concept behind these lists derives from the traditional Christian doctrine of matrimony as a bond as it was included in the positive laws of western countries. In its original formulation, it allows only four states: never being married, being currently married, being *legally* separated —that is having been granted by a court (until Reformation, by an ecclesiastical court) the permission not to live with one’s spouse —, and having been freed from the bonds of marriage by the death of the spouse. Reformation added divorce, which is the state of someone who has been freed from the bonds of marriage by the sovereign. Annulment, even when recognized by positive laws, never was part of that list. *De facto* separation, which is not living with one’s spouse without the explicit permission of a court, was illegal and definitely not considered as a marital status. Given that nowadays, no one seeks legal separation and everyone believes that forcing spouses to live together would be against basic human rights, separation has lost its original meaning and is interpreted in a way that makes the list incoherent: with the current meaning of separation, anyone can be married and separated at the same time.

show that more than 98% of people who meet these criteria actually declared themselves to be “united”.

The EPH does not record the rank of the current union. Consensual union is more common among couple in which at least one of the spouses has been married. It is obviously the only option if one of the spouses is still married to their former spouse. It is also known to be a common choice among couple in which at least one of the spouses is divorced (Street, 2005b). Given that the EPH does not record the rank of the current union and that almost all those who live together declare themselves to be united, there is no way to control for the previous marital history of the spouses.

In the analysis of the current type of union, we are interested in the probability for a couple to be married or to live in consensual union at the time of their first interview as part of the EPH’s sample. This is a cross-sectional analysis and we carry it out using logistic regression. Logistic regression is a linear model which can be written down in several ways. One way is to express it using probability as its dependent variable:

$$\Pr(Y_i = y_i) = \frac{1}{1 + e^{(-\sum \beta x_i)}}.$$

In this formulation, i stands for the units of analysis — here, the couples who either are married or live in a consensual union —, \mathbf{x}_i is the vector of independent variables, and $\boldsymbol{\beta}$ is the vector of parameters to be estimated. In this formulation, the dependent variable is easy to understand but the coefficients do not have any easy interpretation. Logistic regression can also be written down using a non-linear transformation of the probability as the dependent variable:

$$\ln \left(\frac{\Pr(Y_i = y_i)}{1 - \Pr(Y_i = y_i)} \right) = \boldsymbol{\beta} \mathbf{x}_i$$

In this formulation, the dependent variable is not so hard to interpret and the coefficients have a straightforward and simple interpretation. In this paper, we use both representations. In the tables, we report results from the equation in which the coefficients are easier to interpret. In Figure 2, we represent the results as probabilities of belonging to one category rather than to the other.

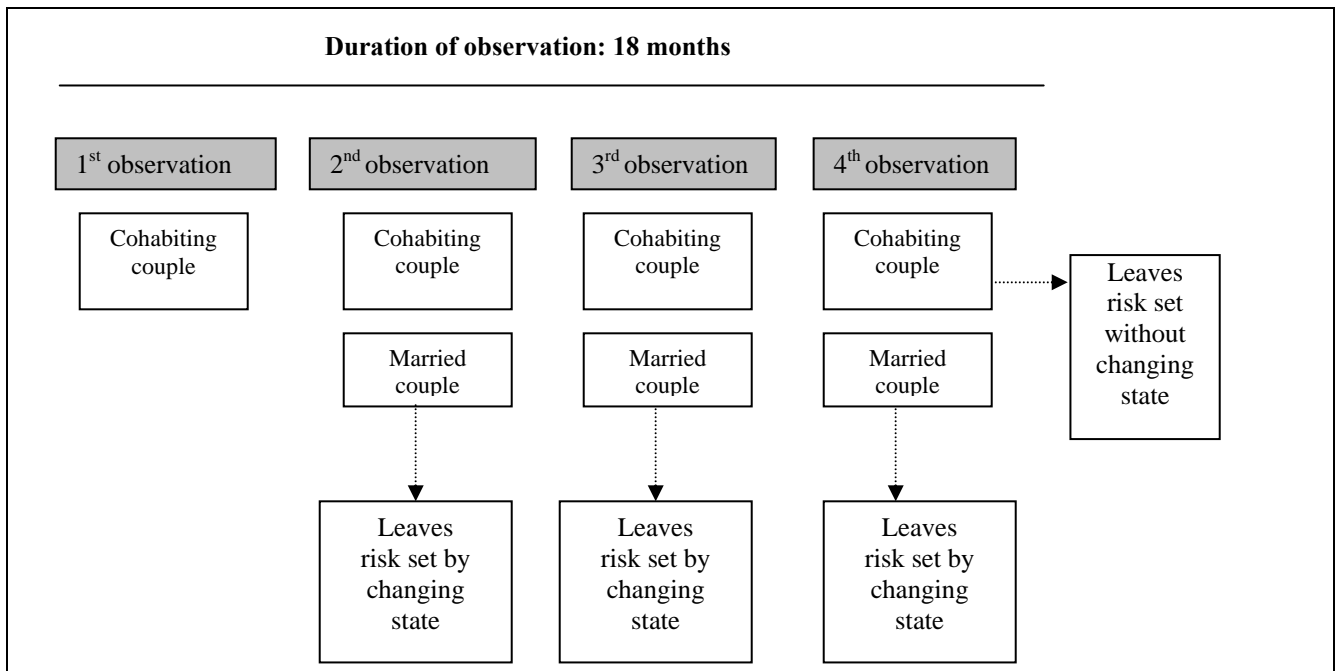
The sample design of the EPH involves strata, clusters, and unequal sampling probabilities. Models are estimated using sampling weights. The data bases made available to researchers allow recognizing some of the stratification scheme, but, in order to protect the privacy of the respondents, do not contain any information on cluster membership. Variances of the estimates are estimated correcting for stratification and based on the number of units of analysis, rather than on the sum of weights, using the linearization method.

2.3 The measurement and analysis of the conversion of consensual union into marriage using data from the EPH

Up to the beginning of 2003, the EPH used a rotating panel design and was conducted twice a year in May and October. One fourth of the sample was renewed with each wave. Each household was thus observed four times over an 18-month period. These four measurements over an 18-month period allow for the use of the EPH for the study of change through longitudinal analysis.

Couples living in consensual union were followed by combining, into micro-panels, data from the successive waves in which they were part of the sample. In order to be able to measure change in their status, we considered only couples who stayed in the sample for at least one wave after the wave in which they were first identified as living in consensual union. Between the first wave of 1995 and the first wave of 2003, we found 9465 couples from which 679 got married before they left the sample (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Selection of the units of observation in the EPH



Couples made up of head of household (a) and their spouse.

The EPH does not record the date of the beginning of the union nor the duration of the union at the time of survey. As a consequence, it is not possible to analyse changes of state, such as the conversion of consensual union into marriage, with models that explicitly consider the evolution of the hazard over the time spent in the state of origin. However, it is possible to follow a different modeling strategy, taking advantage of the panel design we just described (see section 2.3).

Rather than a conventional hazards model that models time as duration, we use a model in which time is modeled as the amount of time under observation, the *exposure*. In such a model, it is assumed that the *relative incidence* of the change of state (the name given to *relative hazard* in this context) does not vary according to duration in the state of origin, but does vary according to the effects of the other independent variables.

The model we use is a modified form of Poisson regression⁴ in which the exposure time is fractioned among the combinations of the values of the independent variables. This allows using time-varying independent variables, as in conventional hazards models. This modified form of Poisson regression may be expressed as

⁴ The basic idea of Poisson regression was first presented by American sociologist James Coleman (1964: 379 ss.)

$$\Pr(Y_{it} = y_{it}) = \frac{e^{-\lambda_{it}} \lambda_{it}^{y_{it}}}{y_{it}!}, \quad y_{it} = 0, 1, 2, \dots$$

where $\ln \lambda_{it} = \boldsymbol{\beta}' \mathbf{x}_{it} + \ln(E_t)$, i stands to the units of analysis, — here, couples who live in consensual union —, t refers to one of several successive combinations of values of the independent variables, E_t represents the fraction of exposure time that correspond to the t^{th} of these combinations, \mathbf{x}_{it} is the vector of the independent variables, and $\boldsymbol{\beta}$ is the vector of the parameters to be estimated.

The model allows for time-varying sampling weights and we use them in the estimation of point estimates; variances were estimated using the correction described in the preceding section.

We used data from May 1995 to May 2003. The data bases made available to researchers do not allow following households and individuals from one wave to the next before May 1995. The sampling design of the EPH was changed in October 2005 in such a way that households and individuals which entered the sample before this date cannot be traced in the following waves.

2.4 The independent variables

We want to know which social groups have shown a greater probability to live in consensual union over the last decade; which social groups have shown a greater hazard of converting consensual unions into marriage; and how the choice of marriage or consensual union has been affected by the economic crisis of the second half of the 1990's and the beginning of the 2000's.

We approximate social groups by using information on the woman's age, the occupational categories and the level of education of both spouses, the level of income of the household and the geographic region they reside in.

We use woman's age in two different ways: as a five-year intervals class variable and as a continuous variable, the latter mainly to estimate curvilinear quadratic effects.

Information on occupation is summarized in a five category variable: inactive, unemployed, self-employed, employed, or employer.

Education is measured as a four category variable which combines information on the highest level of education attained and the highest level of education completed. The four categories we use are: 1) incomplete primary education, 2) complete primary education or incomplete secondary education, 3) complete secondary education or incomplete postsecondary education and 4) complete postsecondary education. In the tables, for sake of simplicity, we use the following simplified labels: 1) incomplete primary, 2) incomplete secondary, 3) incomplete postsecondary and 4) complete postsecondary.

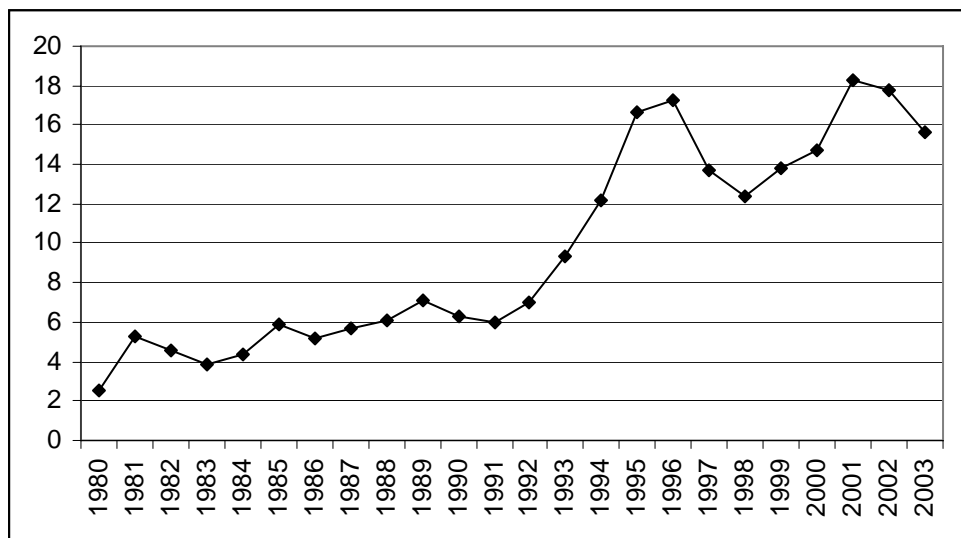
Household income is measured as decile of monthly total family income.

Regions are measured using INDEC's statistical regions: Greater Buenos Aires, Northeast, Northwest, Cuyo, Pampeana and Patagonic.

The changing economic condition of Argentina is measured by dividing the 1995-2003 period into three different subperiods according to the different stages of the crisis that unfolded over these years. These three subperiods are defined on the basis of the evolution of an indicator of the global economic conditions likely to affect people, the unemployment rate.

Figure 2 shows the evolution of unemployment rate in urban areas. Unemployment increased from the beginnings of the 1990's up to October 1997, a period in which economic policies aimed at implementing the so-called "structural adjustments". From October 1997 until year 2000, unemployment decreases. It starts rising again in 2000 and reaches its higher levels in 2001 and 2002, at the peak of the economic crisis and following the crash of the government backed parity between the US dollar and the Argentinean peso. Thus our first subperiod begins in May 1995, the date of the first wave of the EPH for which we can follow individuals from one wave to the next, and ends in May 1997, before the unemployment rate starts rising. The second subperiod begins in October 1997, when the unemployment rate starts rising, and ends in October 2001, before the devaluation that followed the end of parity. The last subperiod begins in May 2002, after the peak of the crisis and ends in May 2003, the last wave of the EPH for which it is possible to follow individuals from one wave to the next.

Figure 2: Unemployment rate. All urban areas, Argentina
1980-2003



Source: EPH. Up to 2003: October curve. Year 2003: May curve

3. Results

Background information

Some background information on the history of Argentinean family law may help understanding the results.

Argentina is a federation. Civil law is a power of the federal authorities. The Argentinean Civil Code, first adopted in 1869, is inspired from the French Civil Code.

Civil marriage was established in 1888 by an amendment to the Civil Code, as part of a secularization process that altered the relation between the State and Catholic Church, and between the Catholic Church and the civil society, largely catholic. Until then, religious marriage had had civil effects. Since 1888, only civil marriage has civil effects and religious marriage is not allowed before civil marriage. Despite this secularism, the new law did not introduce divorce: the only way out of from the legal obligation to live with one's spouse remained petitioning for

separation from bed and board⁵, death remained the only way to dissolve a marriage and, of course, remarriage was impossible until death of the spouse. The wife remained subordinated to her husband as was maintained the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate children and the discrimination against the latter in matters of succession.

Things changed slowly during most of the 20th century. In 1926, the Civil Code was amended to introduce some elements of legal equality between husband and wife: a married woman became able to dispose of her assets, form contracts and perform contracted obligations without the permission of her husband. Divorce was introduced in the Civil Code in 1968, but pretty much with the meaning in has for Anglicans: divorce dissolved the matrimonial community and freed the spouses of their obligation to live together, but being granted such a divorce was an impediment to marriage; as a consequence, foreign states usually consider divorces granted under these provisions of the Argentinean Civil Code as legal separations by another name rather than divorces. The real advance was that spouses were granted the permission to petition for divorce by mutual consent.

The most important changes did not occur before the 1980's. In 1985, other amendments to the Civil Code introduced several important advances towards legal equality. The dispositions that established a distinction between legitimate and illegitimate children were repealed; all children became legally equal in matters of succession. Both spouses became legally equal with respect to their assets and their children. They became jointly bound to provide alimony to their children in case of separation, whoever had been granted custody. Several important changes occurred in 1987. A new amendment introduced the “divorcio vincular”⁶, which dissolves the matrimonial bound and gives the spouses the right to remarry. Spouses kept the right to petition for divorce by mutual consent. Another amendment replaced the regime of legal community by that of partnership of acquests, in which the common property of the matrimony is limited to what is acquired individually or jointly by the spouses during the marriage, with the exception of what is acquired by succession, bequest or gift which remains private. The minimum age to marry was raised to 16 for women and 18 for men.

People who live in consensual union are not entitled to the benefits and protection that derive from marriage, with one exception: although with some limitations, since 1985, spouses who live in consensual union are treated as if they were married with regard to retirement and pension benefits (Torrado, 2003:136-141).

Limitations

We use data from a sample of households and individuals to study couples. Notwithstanding that we had to limit ourselves to couples which include heads of households, a sample oh households and individuals is likely not an unbiased sample of couples.

Couples are included in the data we use because they existed as couples at the time of the survey. This means that the sampling probability of couples is proportional to their duration and thus that the sample is not isomorphic to the population of couples. There is no real practical solution to this problem. One consequence is that we can provide a reasonable estimate of the proportion of couples who live in consensual union or marriage at a given point in time, but we cannot estimate the proportion of couples which lived in consensual union before marriage. We

⁵ “Separación de cuerpos” until 1987, now “separación personal”. When possible, we translate notions from Argentinean civil law using the vocabulary used in the official English version of the Civil Code of Québec.

⁶ Literally “divorce of the bound”, usually translated as “absolute divorce”.

can estimate the effect of some independent variables on the probability of living in consensual union rather than being married at one point in time, but we cannot study the process by which people choose to initiate their union as a consensual union rather than a marriage.

If we were attempting to estimate the average duration of couples, our sample would likely overestimate the true average duration, assuming that we knew when the spouses started to live together, which we do not know. However, if we had this information, we could use statistical models that controls for the variation of hazard over time and we could estimate the effects of the independent variables net of this effect. Not being able to estimate the effects of the independent variables net of the possible duration dependence of the conversion of cohabitation into marriage is truly the only serious limitation of our analyses.

3.1 The probability of living consensually between 1995 and 2003.

Woman's age

Given the tendencies of the last decades, it is expected that the probability of living in consensual union will be higher among young people. Results show that this probability falls sharply as age increases, but stabilizes around age 39. The relation between age and the probability of living in consensual union does not change between 1995 and 2003, but the probability of living in consensual union increases between the first and the second of our subperiods. As a consequence, although younger woman remain more prone to live in consensual union than older woman, the proportion of women living in consensual union increases over time for all ages (Table 2 and Figure 3). That the probability of living in consensual union increases between the first and second subperiods may be interpreted in two very different ways: it may be that consensual union is spreading as part of a trend of normative change, or as a consequence of the economic crisis.

Table 1 All couples (marriage and consensual unions)
Description of the dependent variable and independent variables

Type of union	
Consensual union	0.2419
Marriage	0.7581
Total	1

Women's age	
15-19	0.018762
20-24	0.095632
25-29	0.163802
30-34	0.185873
35-39	0.183727
40-44	0.177989
45-49	0.174214
Total	1

	Occupation	
	of women	of men
Inactive	0.493390	0.027012
Unemployed	0.083700	0.094486
Self-employed	0.096927	0.210685
Wage-earner	0.312311	0.610126
Employer	0.013672	0.057691
Total	1	1

	Educational Level	
	of woman	of man
Incomplete primary	0.081141	0.088383
Incomplete Secondary	0.490385	0.521574
Incomplete postsecondary	0.345971	0.293373
Complete Postsecondary	0.082502	0.096670
Total	1	1

Deciles	Monthly total family income	
	Average value in pesos	
1° decil	146.92	
2° decil	282.72	
3° decil	387.74	
4° decil	497.64	
5° decil	615.10	
6° decil	756.10	
7° decil	930.96	
8° decil	1204.07	
9° decil	1644.82	
10°decil	3354.58	

Region of residence	
Greater Buenos Aires	0.6142
Northeast	0.0919
Northwest	0.0564
Cuyo	0.0281
Pampas	0.1959
Patagonian	0.0133
Total	1

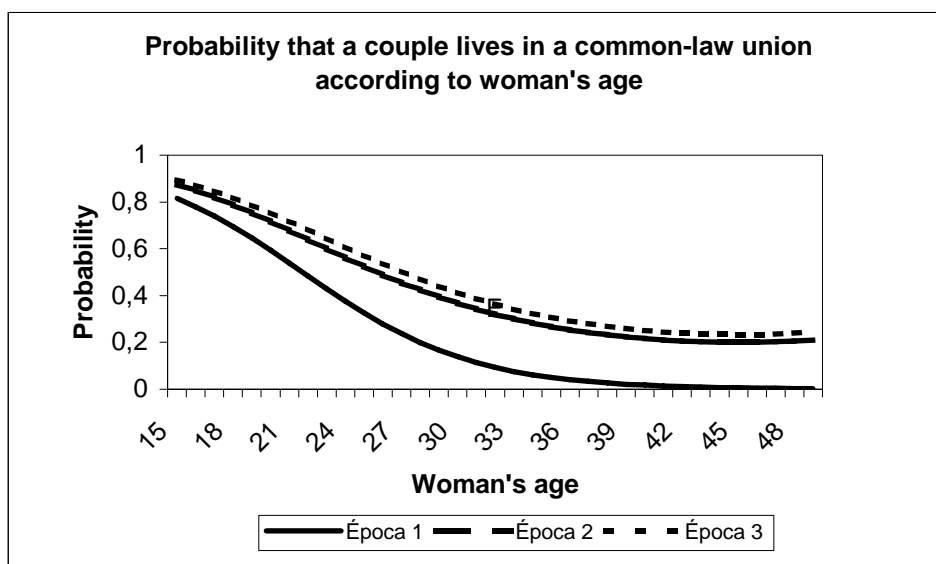
Table 2
Effect of woman's age according on the odds of living in consensual union

Comparison of models including woman's age and period

From October 1997 to the end of 2001	1.56***	1.59***
From the beginning of 2002	1.86***	1.93***
Woman's age		0.80***
(Woman's age) ²		1.00***

* p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001

Figure 3



Education level

If consensual union is still lower class behaviour, it should be more common among couples who have a low educational level. If the probability of living in consensual union is spreading among the younger generations regardless of social class, the association between education level and age should be a function of age itself: it should be weak or non existent among the younger and negative among the older. Table 3 shows the probability of living in a consensual union decreases as education level increases, and that this association is not a function of age. Thus, although consensual union is becoming more common across all ages, it still remains related to social class.

Table 3
Effect of woman's education and age on the odds of living in consensual union

Comparison of models including woman's age and education

Incomplete secondary	0.63***	0.46***	0.46***
Incomplete postsecondary	0.29***	0.22***	0.25***
Complete postsecondary	0.19***	0.18***	0.20***
Women's age		0.82***	0.82***
(Women's age) ²		1.00***	1.00***
Age*(Secondary incomplete)			1.0
Age*(Postsecondary incomplete)			0.99
Age*(Postsecondary complete)			0.98
Age ² *(Secondary incomplete)			1.00
Age ² *(Postsecondary incomplete)			1.00
Age ² *(Postsecondary complete)			1.00

* p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001

Table 4
Effect of being poor and woman's age on the odds of living in consensual union

Comparison of models including age and being poor

Unknown	0.36***	0.43***	1.43
Not being poor	0.50***	0.49***	0.48***
Woman's age		0.80***	0.80***
(Woman's age) ²		1.00***	1.00***
Unknown *Age			0.89*
No poor *Age			1.00
Unknown *Age ²			1.00*
Not being poor *Age ²			1.00

* p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001

Poverty

Table 4 shows that the probability of living in consensual union is higher among the poor couples. This effect is not altered when controlling for the age of the woman. Consensual union is clearly associated with economic hardship.

Education, occupation and homogamy

If marriage is still a marker of social class membership, the probability of living in consensual union should vary according to the social position and the social composition of the couple. We have already seen that consensual union is still more common among less educated people and among the poor. We will now look into the relationship between the probability of living in consensual union and the social structure of the couple itself, as it can be measured by homogamy of educational level and homogamy of occupation.

Of course, we expect homogamous couples to be more common than heterogamous couples, especially on education. However, if marriage is still a marker of social class membership, it should be more common among couples made of two spouses of higher social level than among all other couples.

Table 5 shows that, as expected, couples tend to be homogamous with respect to education level. Figures are percentages of women in each education level within education level of men. Plus and minus signs to the right of each figure indicate whether observed frequencies are greater or smaller than expected in the corresponding cell under the hypothesis that education levels of men and women are independent. All cells on the diagonal have observed frequencies greater than expected frequencies. Two cells neighbouring to the diagonal also have observed frequencies greater than expected frequencies. Other off-diagonal cells have observed frequencies smaller than expected frequencies.

Women's level	Men's educational level				Total
	1°Incomplete	2°Incomplete	3°Incomplete	3°Complete	
Primary incomplete	38.59+	8.36+	1.10-	0.21-	14.07
Secondary incomplete	54.91+	68.01+	27.37-	7.06-	57.76
Postsecondary incomplete	6.26-	22.23-	61.12+	46.75+	20.93
Postsecondary complete	0.23-	1.40-	10.41+	45.98+	7.23
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Desindustrialization, the economic crisis, high unemployment, limited unemployment insurance, and the absence of a general social welfare program have forced a large portion of the labour force into informal employment. These people are counted as self-employed, with the consequence that self-employment is no longer a high status category for professionals earning fees by selling services to regular flux of customers, but a rather low class category whose members live from irregular odd jobs.

Table 6 is built like Table 5, but using occupational status of both spouses rather than their education level. Its structure is quite different from that of Table 5. Whereas cases tended to cluster on the diagonal in Table 5, making clear that homogamy was an important factor, here the distribution of cases among the cells obey two different logics. One is homogamy, but the other derives from the fact that half of women are inactive.

Couples with inactive woman are common among all men's occupational categories. They are somewhat less common among couples where the man is unemployed or employer. In the first case, the most obvious explanation is that when the man is out of work, the woman seeks and sometimes finds work to replace the lost income. The relatively low proportion of couples where the woman is inactive and the man is employer is interesting, especially when considering the whole distribution of women within men who are employers: women who live with employers are proportionally more attached to the labour market than women living with men from any other occupational category except the unemployed. Some of these women, especially those who declare themselves to be employers, probably work within a family business. The point is that women who live with employers tend to be active: thus, inactivity of the woman does not seem to be associated with the social position of being employer. The contrast is even striking when one compares the proportion of inactive women among the employers to that among the employed: inactive women are more common among the latter than among the former.

Table 6
Homogamy of occupation
Distribution of women's occupation level according to men's occupation

Women's occupation	Men's occupation					%
	Inactive	Unemployed	Self-emp.	Employed	Employer	
Inactive	49.13-	36.76-	48.63-	52.11+	43.35-	49.34
Unemployed	5.80-	12.23+	8.18-	7.93-	8.58+	8.37
Self-employed	12.18+	12.82+	15.59+	7.22-	7.99-	9.69
Employed	31.88+	37.62+	26.77-	32.08+	27.73-	31.23
Employer	1.01-	0.56-	0.82-	0.66-	12.35+	1.37
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Inactivity is gendered. Before the age of retirement, it is an acceptable state for women, but not for men. Given that our sample is limited to women aged between 15 and 49, few couples include men old enough to be retired. Thus most couples in which both men and women are inactive are not living from delayed wages and thus are not getting their income from their work. One likely conclusion is that a large proportion of couples in which both spouses are inactive are probably poor and suffering from exclusion.

Homogamy explains part of the distribution of the cases among the cells of Table 5. It is especially strong among the employers, as we have already seen, and among the self-employed. Given the current structure of the Argentinean labour market, couples in which both spouses are self-employed are likely to be poor and lack any form of social protection.

Table 7
Effect of the spouses' education on the odds of living in consensual union

Comparison of models including education and period						
Woman, secondary incomplete	0.63***		0.76***	0.61***		0.73***
Woman, postsecondary incomplete	0.29***		0.44***	0.28***		0.42***
Woman, postsecondary complete	0.19***		0.39***	0.18***		0.36***
Man, secondary incomplete		0.55***	0.65***		0.53***	0.64***
Man, postsecondary incomplete		0.31***	0.48***		0.29***	0.47***
Man, postsecondary complete		0.15***	0.28***		0.14***	0.27***
From October 1997 to the end of 2001				1.65***	1.63***	1.66***
From the beginning of 2002				2.06***	2.00***	2.09***

The odds of living in consensual union decreases as the education level of each spouse increases. These effects are additive, as none of them changes when controlling for the education level of the other spouse. They do not change when subperiod is controlled for either. This means that, in any of the three subperiods, a couple made of two spouses who have completed some form of postsecondary education had less than one tenth of the odds (0.36-0.27 \cong 0.01) of a couple made of two spouses who have very little education of living in consensual union.

Table 8
Effect of women's and men's education on the odds of living in consensual union
Effect of men's education within women's educational categories

	Women's education		
	1° incomplete	2° incomplete	3° incomplete
Secondary incomplete	0.85	0.56***	0.73
Postsecondary incomplete	0.75	0.39***	0.57**
Postsecondary complete	3.42	0.34***	0.30***

p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001

These results may hide a more complex relation between the education levels of the spouses. For instance, the effect of the level of education of the man could vary across the level of education of the woman. The variation of the effect of a variable across the values of another variable is typically estimated and tested using products. However, our sample does not contain enough women who have completed some form of postsecondary education to make such a test possible. As an approximation, we estimated separately the effect of men education level within subsamples of women based on their education level. Within the two of the three levels of education for which the estimation can be performed, the results are similar to those of Table 7: the odds of living in consensual union decreases with the level of education of the man. Things are not as clear within the subsample of women who have not completed primary education: the odds do not vary across the level of education of the man. A possible, but tentative, explanation would be that these women are equally unlikely to marry either because they are living with a man who has himself little education and thus form the kind of couple which has the higher odds of living in consensual union, or live with a man whose education level is clearly higher and thus form a heterogamous couple whose odds of getting married are low. Another possible explanation is that, on average, women with low education are older and that older women are more likely to live in a consensual after having been married and thus are less likely to marry again.

Table 9
Effect of woman's and men's occupation on the odds of living in consensual union
Effect of men's occupation within women's occupational categories

Man's occupation	Woman's occupation				
	Inactive	Unemployed	Self-emp.	Employed	Employer
Inactive	1.31	1.40	1.19	1.45*	9.50
Unemployed	1.04	0.64	0.95	0.92	3.42
Self-employed	0.87	0.86	0.77	0.88	6.52
Employer	0.32***	0.42	0.29**	0.63*	3.75

* p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001

Table 9 shows that inactive women, self-employed women and employed women who live with an employer are less likely to live in consensual union. There seems to be a pattern in which whatever the occupation of the woman, it is more likely to be married when living with an employer. Other results, not reported in a table, show that whatever their occupation, the coefficients associated with men who live with women who are employers are smaller than those associated with men who live employed women. These coefficients are not statistically

significant, probably because of the small number of cases involved, but suggest that couples in which only one of the spouse is an employer are more likely to be married if the man is the employer and more likely to live in consensual union if the woman is employer.

3.2 The risk of transforming a consensual union into a legal marriage between 1995 and 2003.

Marriage was traditionally the threshold of adult life, the entry into sexual division of roles and the legitimate framework for sexual activity and procreation. Individualization, changes in gender relations and in the social position of women have largely deprived marriage from its protective and initiatory functions. Most authors think that consensual union as a step in a process that leads to marriage is a trial that precedes a stage of more involved emotional commitment and of social and legal obligations. In such cases, marriage is still viewed as the legitimate context in which one raises a family and remains embedded in rituals that are part of symbolical, social and economic strategies.

The EPH's questionnaire does not collect information neither about the date of the beginning of the consensual nor about the date of the marriage date, which hinders determining how much time the couple has been at risk of converting their consensual union into marriage. The model we use in the analysis assumes that the hazard of converting a consensual union into marriage does not vary with respect to analytical time. Thus the effect of the imprecision of the time at risk is basically the effect of any measurement error: attenuating the effect of the independent variables. In other words, the measurement error may turn statistically insignificant the coefficients associated with some independent variables which truly have an effect on the conversion of cohabitation into marriage. This reduces our ability to estimate accurately the effects of the independent variable as if we using a smaller sample. The measurement error in the time at risk has another consequence: it hinders estimating correctly the average incidence. In other words, although using our data and method we can reasonably estimate the effects of the independent variables on the conversion of consensual union into marriage, we cannot provide an accurate estimate of the overall hazard of converting consensual unions into marriage. This said, and assuming that the hazard of converting a consensual union into marriage is constant, our model estimates that each year, about 13.8% of consensual unions would become marriages. This means that over a five-year period, half of consensual unions would be turned into marriages. Knowing that in our data, the timing of the conversion overestimates the time spent in consensual unions, the real figure is likely to be somewhat smaller. This estimate is an average, based on heterogeneous cases, mixing consensual unions among young people which are more likely to become marriages than unions among older people.

Table 10 Couples that live in consensual union.
 Description of the independent variables

Woman's age	
15-19	.0405
20-24	.1689
25-29	.2281
30-34	.1829
35-39	.1465
40-44	.1238
45-49	.1093
Total	1

	Occupation	
	of the woman	of the man
Inactive	.4929	.0315
Unemployed	.0974	.1257
Self-employed	.0865	.2334
Wage-earner	.3164	.5836
Employer	.0068	.0258
Total	1	1

	Education level	
	of woman	of man
Primary incomplete	.1407	.1557
Secondary incomplete	.5776	.5914
Postsecondary incomplete	.2093	.1969
Postsecondary complete	.0723	.0560
Total	1	1

Monthly total family income	
Average value in pesos	
1° decil	141.68
2° decil	272.32
3° decil	377.11
4° decil	485.31
5° decil	604.68
6° decil	744.89
7° decil	932.41
8° decil	1206.12
9° decil	1647.99
10° decil	3469.86

Region of residence	
Greater Buenos Aires	.6385
Northeast	.0969
Northwest	.0718
Cuyo	.0160
Pampas	.1637
Patagonian	.0131
Total	1

Data from the EPH allow us to analyse the hazard of converting consensual unions into marriage considering historical time (“subperiods”, here a time-varying covariate), women’s age, women’s and men’s educational level and occupational categories, and household income as

independent variables. We can also build time-varying covariates to test whether the unfolding of pregnancy or birth of a child increases the hazard of such a conversion.

Historical time

The hazard of converting a consensual union conversion into marriage increases from the first subperiod to the second. The point estimate associated with the third subperiod is similar to that of the second subperiod, but is not significantly different from the coefficient associated with the first subperiod (Table 11). The most likely interpretation is that the hazard increased from the first to the second subperiod and remained stable during the third.

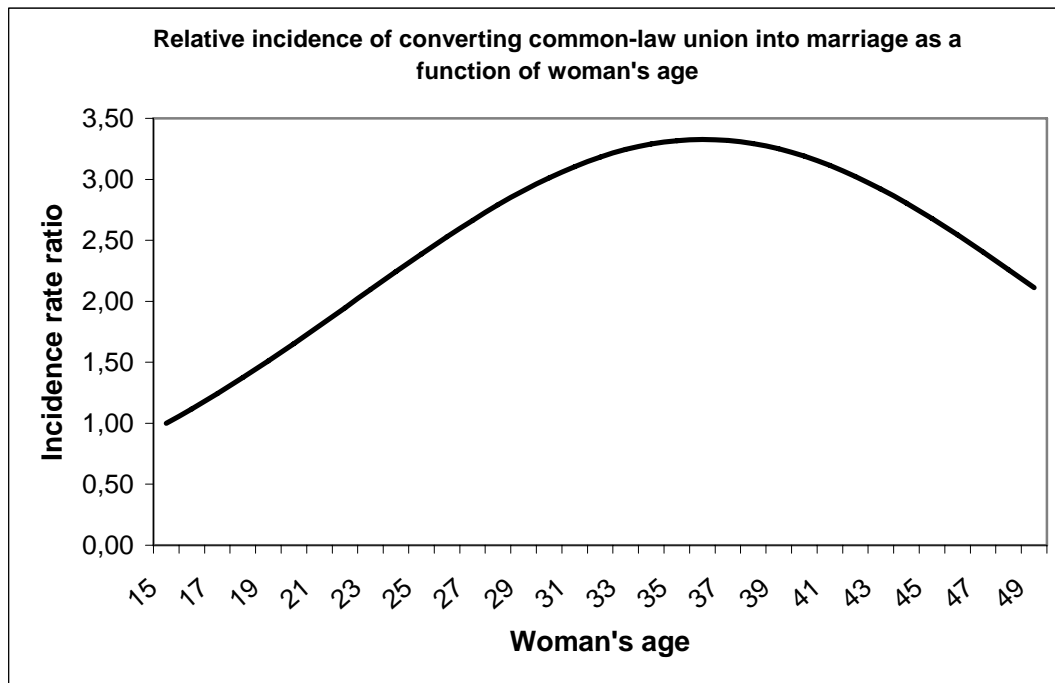
	IRR	P> t
From October 1997 to the end of 2001	1.41276	0.029
From the beginning of 2002	1.402136	0.128

Woman's age

The effect of woman's age on the hazard of converting consensual unions into marriages is curvilinear (Table 12 and Figure 4). It is relatively low among very young women, increases until age 39, and then decreases. If we relate these results with those we got from the cross-sectional analysis, we see that the proportion of consensual unions among couples decreases with age, but also that until age 39, the hazard of converting a consensual union into marriage increases. It seems that from early youth until the late 30's, consensual union is increasingly becoming a step towards marriage whereas the lower hazard among older women probably reflects that these women live in a couple of which one or both spouses has already been married and is either separated, thus unable to marry, or divorced, thus unable to get a catholic marriage — unique and indissoluble — and are not willing to get only a civil marriage.

	Coef.	P> t
Woman's age	.1123642	0.002
(Woman's age) ²	-.0026523	0.005
From October 1997 to the end of 2001	.3329373	0.035
From the beginning of 2002	.3341665	0.127
Constant	-10.85227	0.000

Figure 4



Education, occupation and homogamy

Table 13

Effect of woman's and man's occupation on the hazard of converting consensual union into marriage

Comparison of models with the couple's occupations and period (IRR)				
Woman, inactive	0.97	0.95	0.98	0.96
Woman, unemployed	0.42**	0.43**	0.44**	0.44**
Woman, self-employed	1.11	1.14	1.12	1.15
Woman, employer	0.45	0.35	0.47	0.37
Man, inactive		0.96	0.95	0.97
Man, unemployed		0.52*	0.52*	0.52*
Man, self-employed		0.91	0.89	0.91
Man, employer		1.29	1.42	1.32
From October 1997 to the end of 2001			1.37*	1.41*
From the beginning of 2002			1.36	1.43

* p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.00

Table 13 shows that that unemployment, either of the man or the woman, decreases the hazard of converting a consensual union into marriage; all other occupational statuses share similar hazards. The simplest explanation is that unemployment, unlike inactivity, is supposed to be a temporary status that follows a period of employment and should be followed by another one. When unemployed, people willing to marry are likely to postpone marriage after they start working anew.

Table 14
Effect of woman's and man's occupation on the hazard of converting consensual union into marriage

Models including man's occupations within woman's occupations categories

Man's occupation	Woman's occupation (IRR)				
	Inactive	Unemployed	Account	Wage-earner	Employer
Inactive	1.014388	1.253921	.1399256*	1.233375	4.39e-07***
Unemployed	.6436663	.2807456	.2546289	.5372022	4.39e-07***
Self-employed	1.053111	1.051083	.3002375**	.9633479	9.06649
Employer	.8470051	5.433723	1.18e-08***	1.823439	2.725499

* p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001

We do not find any statistically significant differences between men's occupational statuses among inactive women. This does not come as a surprise since half of women are inactive and that woman's inactivity is not a social status by itself. Two results are noteworthy: the variation in the hazard of conversion according to men's occupational status among self-employed women and employer women. Among self-employed women, the hazard of conversion is higher when they live with an employed spouse rather than with one who is inactive, self-employed or employer. The simple interpretation is that these women, in a precarious condition, are not willing to involve themselves more than necessary with someone whose situation is as bad as theirs, and are faced with a similar resistance from their spouse when they live with one whose situation is much better than theirs. Similarly, employer women who live in a consensual union almost never turn their union into marriage when their spouse is inactive or unemployed. In other words, it seems that the hazard of converting consensual unions into marriage decreases as increases the social dissimilarity between the spouses.

Another way to explore the relation between homogamy and the conversion of consensual union into marriage is to look at the effect of education. (Table 15 and table 16). First we see that the hazard of converting the union increases with the level of education of the woman, whereas the level of education of the man seems to have no effect. These effects are not affected when controlling for subperiods.

The sample contains relatively few women with high education level, which does not allow estimating the interaction between men's and women's occupational statuses. We thus we estimate the relative hazards of conversion for men's educational levels within women's educational levels. Most coefficients are not statistically significant, with one notable exception: women with lowest educational level whose spouse is of the highest educational level never marry.

Table 15

Effect of woman's and man's education on the hazard of converting consensual union into marriage

Comparison of models including education and period (IRR)				
Woman, secondary incomplete	1.46*	1.53*	1.45	1.51*
Woman, postsecondary incomplete	1.67*	1.55	1.63*	1.51
Woman, postsecondary complete	2.43**	2.00*	2.35**	1.95*
Man, secondary incomplete		0.90	0.80	0.89
Man, postsecondary incomplete		1.28	1.06	1.25
Man, postsecondary complete		1.72	1.28	1.66
From October 1997 to the end of 2001			1.37*	1.36
From the beginning of 2002			1.32	1.34

* p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001

Table 16

Effect of woman's and man's occupation on the hazard of converting consensual union into marriage

Man's education	Woman's education		
	1° Incomplete	2° incomplete	3° incomplete
Secondary incomplete	0.63	0.86	1.01
Postsecondary incomplete	0.33	1.08	1.57
Postsecondary complete	0.00***	0.58	1.62

* p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001

Table 17 shows that the hazard of converting consensual unions into marriage is low in the lowest two deciles, higher in middle deciles and as low as in the lowest deciles in the 8th and 9th deciles. In other words, the effect of total family income would be curvilinear if it weren't of the high level of the 10th decile.

Table 17

Effect of income on the hazard of converting consensual union into marriage

Comparison of models TFI and the period		
TFI Unknown	2.07	2.14
2° decile	1.76	1.79
3° decile	2.08**	2.11**
4° decile	2.12**	2.16**
5° decile	1.76*	1.78*
6° decile	2.86***	2.90***
7° decile	2.32**	2.36**
8° decile	1.71	1.73
9° decile	1.40	1.41
10° decile	4.04***	4.05***
From October 1997 to the end of 2001		1.45*
From the beginning of 2002		1.43

* p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001

Table 18 shows that converting a consensual union into marriage is more common in all regions of Argentina than in the Greater Buenos Aires which we use as reference category. Cuyo is the only region whose coefficient is not statistically different from that of the reference category, although its point estimate is somewhat greater than 1. If long lasting consensual unions

— that is consensual unions that are not converted into marriages— truly exist in Argentina, they should be found in Greater Buenos Aires rather than in any other region of the country.

Comparison of models including region and period			
	Northwest	3.85***	3.86***
	Northeast	1.64*	1.64*
	Cuyo	1.19	1.19
	Pampas	3.15***	3.13***
	Patagonian	6.49***	6.56***
From October 1997 to the end of 2001			1.41*
From the beginning of 2002			1.38

* p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001

Finally, if the pregnancy and couple's children birth effect are considered (Table 19). It is noticed that there is no a differential effect upon cohabitation conversion into marriage mainly between the third and sixth pregnancy's month if pregnancy existence is followed by a birth. This pattern is kept controlling the women's age effect and the fact of not having children, that is to say, even though it is the first child of the couple. This fact leads us to take the following considerations: a) that the decision to marry was adopted independently to the formation of a family, when children were born, b) that to expect and have a child should not be compatible, instrumentally, with registration in the register of births and symbolically, with the religious ceremony, c) that to expect and have a child can be done without the legalization of marriage.

Pregnancy and birth

In Table 19 we see that neither pregnancy followed by a birth nor birth of a child increases the hazard of converting a consensual union into marriage. Actually, the hazard decreases between the 3rd and 9th months of pregnancy. This pattern holds even when controlling for age of the woman or whether the couple already has at least one child.

These results are truly different from what is common in societies in which consensual union is a step towards marriage. Here, the decision to marry is not rushed by the imminent arrival of a child and is actually postponed when the arrival of a child is imminent. This means that, at least for some couples, family formation is not incompatible with consensual union which implies that some couples do become families without the administrative act of marriage as well as the religious ceremony and are thus doing away with both legal and symbolical aspects of the conventional and traditional path to family formation. It also means that couples who live in consensual union do not feel pressed to seek legitimating the child, whether legally, socially or symbolically.

Table 19
Effect of pregnancy and birth on the hazard of converting consensual union into marriage

	IRR	P> t
From 0 to 3 months of conception	.5427073	0.544
From 3 to 6 months of conception	4.74e-09	0.000
From 6 to 9 months of conception	.2320225	0.070
From 0 to 3 months of birth	1.163352	0.842
From 3 to 6 months of birth	1.84361	0.392

4. Discussion and conclusion

In the period we study, that is between 1995 and 2003, 24.2% of the couples in which the woman is aged between 15 and 49 live in a consensual union. Of these, and given the limitations we explained, 13.8%, on average, are expected to turn their union into a marriage each year.

The proportion of couples who live in consensual union increased over the period we study in all age groups. The hazard that a couple who lives in a consensual union turns its union into a marriage also increases over the period. These two findings are somewhat contradictory and do not tell a simple story. If the proportion of couples who live in a consensual union had increased and the hazard of converting such a union into a marriage had decreased, it would have been possible to suggest that cohabitation is spreading and is becoming an alternative to marriage. Such an interpretation would have even been easy to sustain given that neither pregnancy nor the birth of a child increase the hazard of getting married. However the increase in the probability of living in a common union coincides with the unfolding of a serious economic crisis and the fact that this increasing probability comes with an increase in the conversion of consensual unions into marriage rather suggest that a large proportion of the couples who lived in a consensual union in the period we study did so because of the economic conditions and formalized their union as soon as they saw possible to do it. Thus evidence suggests that during this economic crisis, cohabitation has been used as a cheap and temporary substitute to marriage.

That neither pregnancy nor the birth of a child increases the hazard of converting consensual union into marriage was truly unexpected. That this hazard actually decreases between the third and sixth months of pregnancy and possibly also the sixth and ninth was even more unexpected. The low hazard during pregnancy calls for some creative interpretation. The most likely seem to be related to some traits of the Argentinean society. In Argentina like in most countries whose civil law is inspired by the French civil code, religious marriage has no civil effect. However, unlike in France, the civil marriage is a purely administrative act and not a celebration. Thus most Argentineans get a religious marriage as well as the civil one. Given that most Argentineans are catholic, getting married in church while the bride is obviously pregnant could be avoided for at least two reasons. First, given the strong prohibition, by the Catholic Church, of any form of out of wedlock sexual relationships, an obviously pregnant bride could be seen as distasteful, shocking or provocative. Second, catholic priests are instructed to hard press couples seeking a religious marriage for a commitment to baptize and provide religious instruction to their children; people who had chosen to live at least temporarily in a consensual union may try to avoid that kind of pressure at a time they would be more vulnerable to it. Furthermore, every marriage, whether solely civil or civil and religious, comes with a wedding party whose preparation is likely to be considered too much of a burden for a pregnant woman;

this alone would favour having the wedding either before or after pregnancy. Finally, Argentinean Civil Code currently makes no distinction between children born from married or unmarried parents, thus marriage as a way to legally insure the legitimate status of the child is pointless, which may explain why pregnancy does not accelerate the conversion of consensual union into marriage. This said, the really interesting finding is truly that neither pregnancy nor the birth of a child increases the hazard of turning the consensual union into a marriage. Even though we see that the increase in cohabitation over the 1995-2003 period is likely to be a consequence of the economic conditions and the consensual union a temporary solution, the fact that a child will be born outside of wedlock does not accelerate the conversion. These results suggest, if they not prove, that Argentinean people who live in a consensual union still favour marriage and may get married when they feel the times allow for it, but they will not do it in a bad economic context even if they expect or have a child. Apparently, their decision is based on practical business-like motives rather than conventional moral.

Such an interpretation fits well with the results we get for the relation between the age of the woman and both the probability of living in a consensual union and the hazard of turning such a union into matrimony. Young women are more likely to live in a consensual union than women in their thirties and although the proportion of couples who live in consensual union increased over the period we study, the relations between age of the woman and both the probability of living in consensual union rather than in matrimony and the hazard of getting married do not change. Apparently, consensual union is a step in a process that should lead to marriage at some point and, although we lack the information on previous unions, it is tempting to suppose that among those who live in consensual union, the union that will become a marriage will not necessarily with the first union. If this interpretation were correct, consensual union could be seen as part of a learning or a searching process. Such a use of consensual union and its role in a process that should eventually lead to marriage departs from conventional behavioural patterns while keeping marriage relevant. The rightmost part of the relation between the age of the woman and the hazard of turning a consensual union in matrimony shows that women in their forties are less likely to do so. This fits with the idea that in a traditionally catholic society, unlike in a protestant society such as that of the USA, marriage will usually be a once in a lifetime experience and unions that follow marriage will tend to remain consensual. One could actually muse over the idea that in a society where rules make marriage a once in a lifetime experience, cohabitation could be fostered by the need to find the really perfect match as well as by the low convertibility of such unions that follow a broken marriage.

Living in matrimony or a consensual union is clearly related to social position if not to social class. The probability of living in a consensual union decreases as the education of the woman increases while the hazard of converting it in matrimony increases. For both sexes, being unemployed reduces the hazard of converting a consensual union in matrimony. We find that cohabiting couples in which man and woman are socially very dissimilar, either by their education or by their occupation, are less likely to formalize their union. People with very low income are less likely to turn a consensual union in matrimony, presumably for lack of economic resources, while people with average income and very high income are more likely to do so. This fits with the idea that people tend to marry when they think their economic circumstances allow for it. However the behaviour of the people who belong to the 8th and 9th decile of the total family income distribution does not fit in such a neat explanation. One could suggest that the couples who belong to these deciles are probably made of two highly educated and well earning individuals and that in such a situation, the woman would not necessarily seek the economic

protection that marriage traditionally offers to women. It would be possible to interpret the behaviour of the couples who belong to the 10th decile as related to the fact that some of their earnings may come from capital rather than work and that the spouse who does not own the capital in the first place would prefer to insure its economic situation through marriage. However, if this were to be true, we should have found traces of such processes in the effects of education and we did not. More thorough analyses are probably needed.

The main conclusion is that in Argentina, during the period we studied, two different processes seem to lead people to live and remain in a consensual union. One is clearly related to economic factors, either individual or contextual, the overall effect being that better economic circumstances favour marriage over consensual union. The second process, of a very different nature, is that consensual union seems to be a tool in a learning or a searching process, as well as a common solution for unions that follow a broken marriage. Marriage is clearly favoured over consensual union, but the processes that make people chose to marry at some point in their life do not follow conventional moral patterns. If the second demographic transition is marching into Argentina, it seems that it is changing how and why people get married rather than substituting consensual union to marriage.

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