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The role of education in intergenerational class mobility trends in Argentina: mediating and moderating effects across cohorts, born 1938–1996

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the role of education in intergenerational class mobility in Argentina comparing cohort from 12 nationally representative probability-sample surveys collected between 2003 and 2021 (13,175 men, 12,698 women). Education is hypothesized as having a dual role. Education is a mediator between origins and destinations, an indirect effect in two steps". Inequality of Educational Outcomes (OE) and Occupational Class Returns to Education (ED). Education may also act as a moderator, if the direct origin–destination effect (OD|E, the origins-destination association controlled for education), declines with higher education. Against the backdrop of modernization theory—predicting declining OE and OD|E and strengthening ED—, we investigate which trends materialize. Using margin-free odds-ratio models, trends are assessed by comparing constant, unconstrained, and linearly constrained UniDiff parameters. Results indicate significant weakening of the OE and ED mediating associations, alongside a modest strengthening of the direct OD|E association. No moderation effect is found.

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Class mobility; birth cohorts; educational expansion; mediation; moderation

Introduction: mediation and moderation in the OED model

Stratification sociology has long been concerned with questions about the role of education in shaping intergenerational occupational class mobility, and in particular whether and how the ubiquitous process of educational expansion promotes such intergenerational mobility. Although not always clearly delineated in this literature (but see Jorrat and Marqués-Perales (2022)), education is hypothesized as having a dual role. (Figure 1). On the one hand, education ***mediates*** the relation between origins and destinations *via* an ***indirect*** effect. This indirect effect involves two steps: social origins determine education attainment (OE), and educational attainment determines labor market outcomes (ED). The relevant question for research thus is not only to examine the strength of the effect of social origins on educational attainment, but also the strength of the

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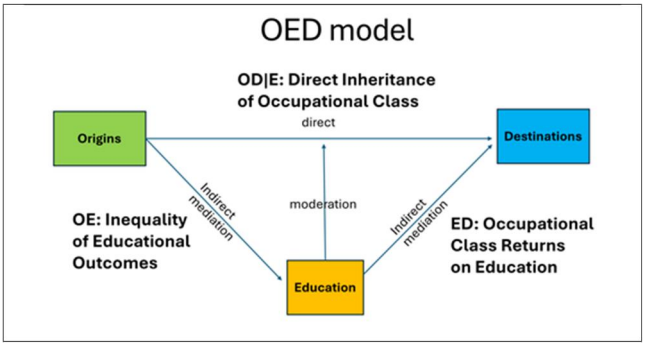

Figure 1. Diagram of mediation and moderation effects of education in the association between origins and destination. *Note*: Own adaptation of figure by Jorrat and Marqués-Perales (2022).

subsequent step in the process, as these two steps combine to form the indirect effect. On the other hand, researchers have also proposed that higher education generates intergenerational mobility by ***moderating*** the causal relation between origins and destinations, and in particular by weakening the ***direct*** effect of origins on destinations, net of educational mediation (OD|E).[1]

The **mediating role of education** between origins and destinations has been the subject of research ever since the classic status attainment model of Blau and Duncan (1967:170), who showed that for American men in 1962 about half of the association between father's occupation and occupation at entry in the labor market was mediated by education, and that this share was even larger for these men when current occupation was examined.

Although the mediated effect consists of two steps, most research has focused on the first step, inequality of educational outcomes (OE). For instance, in support of the mediating role of education, Breen (2010) points out that education is usually regarded as a major "channel" of intergenerational mobility, noting that a highly debated question has been to see if "inequalities in educational attainment according to social background diminished or remained more or less unchanged" (p. 366). Likewise, Jonsson (1996:113) highlights that in particular a weaker association between origins and education drives progress toward equality of opportunity: "the weaker the association between origin and education, the closer we come to the classical liberal goal."

The most commonly held hypothesis on inequality of educational outcomes has been that processes of modernization will decrease the strength of this effect. Importantly, modernization theory (Parsons 1970) is the standard account of societal evolution that sociology has developed, and remains widely accepted in public political and social debate. Various dimensions of the modernization process, such as technological and economic developments, industrialization and tertiarization of the labor force, bureaucratization, urbanization, globalization, the rise of gender equality, the growth of mass communication and transport, and the spread of modern values ('universalism') would all contribute to this equalization. However, a special place in this argument has been reserved for the ubiquitous expansion of educational distributions. As students stay longer in education and newer cohorts receive more education than previous cohorts, this is transposed into the expectation that educational opportunities would 'open up for

all'. This argument has found further support in the widely observed effect in research on educational transitions, that has shown that school continuation is much less affected by social background at higher transitions, that are made at a more advanced age (Mare 1981; Shavit and Blossfeld 1993). If the explanation of the 'Mare pattern' is (at least partly) that students who make decisions at a later age are less influenced by their parents, it seems plausible that educational expansion leads to less inequality of educational outcomes and hence to more intergenerational mobility.

The **moderating role of education** has been proposed by many, but is in recent stratification literature most often attributed to Hout (1988). In a seminal contribution on trends in the US, Hout (1988) challenged the claim that "no amount of education can overcome origins," arguing instead that the effects of social origins vary across educational levels and that "a college degree can do it" (p. 1391). Based on this idea, Pfeffer and Hertel (2015) developed the argument of a "compositional effect" (p. 148), referring to the weakening of the origin–destination association as educational distributions expand. Drawing upon Torche (2011), they claim that the hypothesized moderation holds in the United States, where "a college degree continues to mitigate the direct effect of socio-economic origins on socio-economic destinations," whether measured by social class or other indicators (p. 6).

The arguments in favor of a moderation effect of education are related, but not identical to the arguments that lead to the expected equalization of educational outcomes by social background. The moderation hypothesis holds that a higher education makes students independent of their parents, to begin because graduates from tertiary education are at their point of transitioning to the labor market older than their peers who leave education at the secondary or primary level. Another argument is that graduates from higher education most likely enter jobs that have very strict credential requirements: you cannot become a doctor without completing medical school. Parents who want to transfer their professional occupations to their children, have to use the school system to accomplish this goal. The direct transfer of occupational positions, unmediated by education (OD|E), should be largely confined to occupations without strict credential requirements, such as entrepreneurial, managerial and political positions. Despite the plausibility of these arguments to support the moderation hypothesis, much recent evidence has failed to show any moderation role of education in promoting mobility (e.g. Jonsson 1996; Breen and Jonsson 2005; Breen and Karlson 2014; Salata and Cheung 2026) and has called into question whether the moderation effect holds outside the US.

While the arguments to expect a weakening of the indirect effect O → E → D because of the weakening of OE component are well developed, there is a conspicuous missing link in this reasoning. Trends in the total association OD, as well as in the indirect effect itself (O → E → D) are also determined by what happens to the occupational returns to education (ED). In classic modernization theory the ED relationship has been the focus of the rise-of-meritocracy (or from-ascription-to-achievement) argument, which holds that in modernizing contexts education will become an ever more important determinant of selection into occupations. Seen from the indirect effect perspective, such a rise-of-meritocracy argument could countervail the weakening of the OE association and make that the direction of trend in the indirect effect is uncertain. Surprisingly, recent empirical evidence has not at all confirmed the rise-of-meritocracy

argument, once firmly established as a component of modernization theory (e.g., Treiman 1970). Cross-national comparative analysis of OED relationships (Breen 2004; Breen and Müller 2020) rather seems to agree upon one consistent pattern of change: the association between education and occupation is *not* strengthening over time, but is rather weakening.

Previous studies on the mediating and moderating roles of education in intergenerational class mobility in Argentina (Jorrat 2016; Dalle 2018; Solís and Dalle 2019; Fachelli 2019; Boado and Fachelli 2020; Jorrat et al. 2024; Jorrat and Marqués-Perales 2022; Jorrat et al. 2025) report little evidence that education, whether conceived as a mediator or moderator, significantly affects class mobility. In some cases (e.g., Jorrat 2016), this has led to the conclusion that educational expansion is unlikely to foster greater mobility at all. For example, Jorrat (2016:200–201), after analyzing eight national surveys concludes that "all three-way models are consistent with a constant-association specification",—echoing Goldthorpe's statements for Britain (Goldthorpe 2012).

Research questions and contributions

Previous studies on intergenerational class mobility in Argentina have relied mainly on pooled surveys from the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area (AMBA) or on a small number of national surveys.[2] The present study revisits the relationships in the OED model in Argentina comparing birth cohorts in twelve national surveys conducted between 2003 and 2021. While the data still cover a relatively short historical period, it encompasses five birth cohorts (1938–1951 to 1985–1996), spanning nearly fifty years. For individuals aged 25–65 (which we assume to be the age of occupational maturity), estimated labor market entry ranges from ca. 1960 to 2020, thus covering almost six decades. Hence, our analysis seeks to assess how the mediating and moderating roles of education in stratification and mobility evolved at the national level. Specifically, we examine for this database:

1. How the total effect of origins on destinations (OD) has developed over cohorts;
2. How the total effect of origins on destinations is mediated by education and how this mediation has changed over cohorts;
3. Whether and how the direct effect of origins on destinations (OD|E) is moderated by level of education and how this has changed over cohorts.

We examine these processes for men and women separately, on the argument that occupational distributions and occupational careers differ by gender, which may affect the relationships in the OED model, as well as the trends therein. However, after testing these differences in associations between genders, we address the process for men and women jointly.

Our aim is to contribute to the emerging literature on stratification in Argentina (and Latin-America more generally) by analyzing a database that is larger, more representative and more rigorously harmonized than in previous research. At the same time, we use models closely related to OED research on Latin-America (Costa Ribeiro 2023; Solís and Dalle 2019; Jorrat et al. 2024; Torche and Costa Ribeiro 2010; Torche 2014)

and some European countries (Vallet 2013, 2022; Breen and Jonsson 2005; Breen 2010; Bukodi and Goldthorpe 2013). In particular, we measure occupational positions by the internationally acknowledged EGP categories, use odds-ratio models to study relative mobility cleansed from (changes in) marginal distributions, and test trend hypotheses using statistically powerful models with log-multiplicative UniDiff parameters. Our analysis closely follows established practices in this literature, in particular the examples of Vallet (2015) on France and Breen et al. (2009) on eight European countries.

Historical-contextual background

Political and economic developments in Argentina

Argentina has often been recognized for its strong economic performance and relatively high standard of living in the early twentieth century (1900–1930), on par with other so-called "countries of new settlement," such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and even the United States (Taylor 1992, 2018; Míguez 2005, 2008; Gerchunoff and Llach 2010; Gerchunoff and Hora 2021; but see LLach 2020 for qualifications to these arguments). However, following the global crisis of the 1930s the country's trajectory diverged significantly from that of its peers. The early process of modernization faded and was followed by what Waisman (1987) has described as a "reversal of development". The economic effects of the 1930s crisis lingered until 1937. While the WW2 years were difficult, postwar export growth boosted the economy for a short while. From 1949 onwards, stagnation reemerged during Juan Domingo Peron's first presidency (1946–1955). Early Peronist policies may have affected social stratification in Argentina by expanding social rights, unionization, and access to welfare. This improved the political position of the working class, but left long-term patterns of inequality intact.

Between 1960 and 2020, the time in which our cohorts left school and entered the labor market, Argentina has a unique history of economic decay, with repeated periods of hyperinflation and high unemployment, punctuated by at least three national defaults, in 2001, 2015 and 2020 (Reinhart and Rogoff 2009; Levy Yeyati and Panizza 2011). The same period is characterized by political turmoil. Three military coups took place between 1962 and 1976, each followed by dictatorial rule or authoritarian regimes. The mid-1970s was defined by profound political upheaval, from Perón's return (elected in 1973) and death, to Isabel Perón's presidency and the 1976 military coup. Historians have speculated that, after the 1966 and 1976 coups, occupational stratification in Argentina became more rigid, with fewer opportunities for upward mobility among working-class groups (O'Donnell 1982; Torrado 1994). The authoritarian regimes, to a significant extent, might have reinforced class-based inequalities by weakening labor protections, suppressing unions, and reducing workers' bargaining power (O'Donnell 1982). Moreover, economic restructuring reduced industrial and public-sector employment, perhaps—to a certain extent—undermining traditional channels of social mobility (Torrado 1994; Beccaria 2002).

A return to democracy took place after the Malvinas/Falklands war of 1982. The period between 1983 (when Alfonsín was democratically elected as president) and 2003 witnessed significant transformations across political, economic, educational, and

stratification dimensions. Market liberalization and privatization increased unemployment and informal employment, culminating in the 2001–2002 crisis (Beccaria 2002; Gerchunoff and LLach 2010). Democratic governance consolidated after 1983, but state capacity weakened and political dissatisfaction grew again (Levitsky and Murillo 2005). Historians suggest that the associated rise of income inequality caused social polarization, and downward mobility of middle and working classes (Torrado 1994; Kessler 2014).

The 2003–2015 period was dominated by the governments of Néstor and Cristina Kirchner. *Kircherismo*'s economic strategy focused on expanding the domestic market through rising public spending, which ultimately led again to high inflation, debt default, and weak (private) job creation. In fact, the Argentinean economic crisis of 1998–2002 was the worst financial, political, and social collapse in the country's modern history. Triggered by the rigidity of the Ley de Convertibilidad del Austral 23 928 (which pegged the Argentine currency at parity with the US dollar) and unsustainable foreign debt, the crisis erupted in late 2001, leaving more than half the population below the poverty line.

Education

In line with its early modernization, Argentina established free, public, compulsory, and secular *primary education* very early (Ley 1420 in 1884). It took place before most developed countries at the time. Only many years later *compulsory secondary education* emerged, which had to wait until the National [Education] Law 26.206 of 2006. Meanwhile, secondary education had expanded autonomously by the end of the 1980s, more so in the 1990s. Importantly, fundamental reorganizations of schooling took place in 1992, among them an integration of primary education with the early years of secondary levels (EGB: *Educación General Básica*), which was later (2006) suspended.

Argentina also witnessed early university reforms (1905, 1912, 1918). The most relevant was the 1918 University Reform, with an extended impact in Latin-America. It introduced university autonomy and student participation in the university's governance and laid the foundations for a public, tuition-free university system that later expanded geographically across the country, limiting the development of elite institutions, and promoting relatively open access supported by state subsidies. However, after several political struggles, fee-paying private universities were allowed in 1974. This generated the present dual system in tertiary education in the country. Nowadays, between 20% and 25% university students attend private institutions: their graduates quadrupled from 1995 to 2015 (Clarín, 31-01-2018). This duality of strictly public versus strictly private universities may have increased inequality of education outcomes: Chiroleu and Marquina (2017) document that students in private universities come from families with higher educational and occupational resources than those in the public sector.

Census data (see Figure 2) confirm that among persons aged 25 and over, the completion of secondary education increased substantially in our period of study, doubling from about 10% to nearly 20% between 1980 and 2010, and reaching approximately 25% by the 2022 census. The share of the population with completed secondary education or more increased from 17.3% in 1980 to 43.2% in 2010—an expansion of roughly

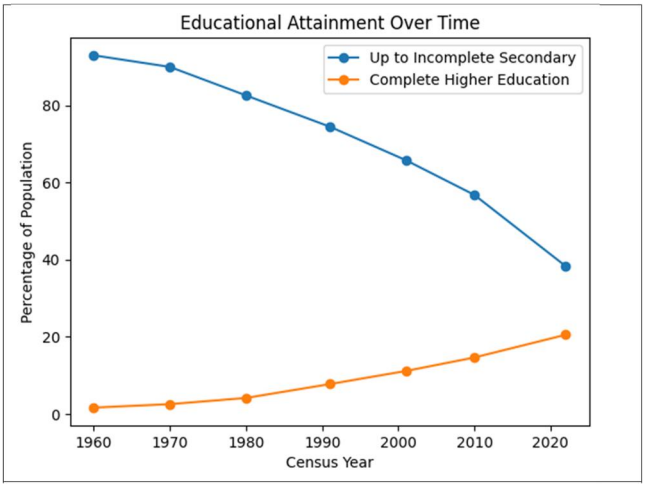

Figure 2. Evolution of lower [upto complete secondary] and higher [complete tertiary and university] educational levels, across national censuses (1960–2022). *Source:* Own elaboration using information from the *Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos* (INDEC). The 2020 Census was carried out in 2022. Census results can be viewed and downloaded from the digitized publications of the National Population Censuses from the INDEC Library: https://www.indec.gob.ar/indec/web/Institucional-Indec-BibliotecaEnLinea. See also Di Pietro et al. (2014).

2.5 times. Notice that at the same time the number of persons with lower education declined more dramatically than the rise of higher educated.

Cohorts' historical experiences

Linking historical politico-economic events to mobility trends is inherently challenging. As will be detailed below, the present study examines the fate of five birth cohorts: (1) 1938–1951, (2) 1952–1962, (3) 1963–1973, (4) 1974–1984, and (5) 1985–1996. Notice that these birth cohorts need to be considered at their time of adolescence and early adulthood, as students take decisions about leaving education and entering the labor market at around 15–20 years of age, and reach occupational maturity (Goldthorpe et al. 1978) at age 25 or later. While the cohorts are born in a period range of about 11 years, the time at which their members were in their sensitive years (taking decisions about school continuation, entering the labor market and attaining a stable occupation) spreads out to about 20–25 years for each cohort. Also notice that the question about social origins—father's occupation when offspring were around 14–15 years old—refers to a time somewhat earlier. Finally, it is important to note that some cohort-specific events may have had effects well beyond the temporal boundaries of the cohorts themselves. The reported labor-market entry periods below are therefore approximate. They are obtained by adding 20 years to the earliest birth year and 25 years to the latest birth year of each cohort, thereby providing variation in the age at labor-market entry linked to differences in educational attainment. The resulting 15-year intervals are intended to suggest historical context rather than precise estimates of entry dates. Given these caveats, it is still informative to characterize the five cohorts with respect to the most dramatic historical events they experienced in their sensitive years.

Cohort 1: 1938–1951 (labor market entry between 1958 and 1976)

The older members of this cohort entered primary education during the rise of Peronism, when labor rights and unions were gaining strength. This cohort experienced the aftermath of Perón's ousting in 1955 and the short-lived civic-military government of 1962–1963. Economic growth resumed at the time, although with fluctuations. While not unfavorable years, Argentina underperformed relative to other countries during the global boom that lasted until the 1973 oil crisis. Military intervention in national universities suppressed their autonomy, prompting the exile of hundreds of top-tier scientists and intellectuals. Furthermore, the 1970s witnessed a period of rapid expansion in private-sector educational enrollment and the creation of numerous new national universities.

Cohort 2: 1952–1962 (labor market entry between 1972 and 1987)

This cohort was in adolescence and early adulthood through one of Argentina's most turbulent periods: Perón's return and death, Isabel Perón's presidency, and the 1976 military coup. During the military dictatorship, the education system was decentralized and national primary schools were transferred to provincial jurisdiction, creating significant regional disparities in funding and educational quality. Economic growth until 1974 was followed by instability, chronic inflation, and the severe crises of the 1980s, Latin-America's "lost decade." A process of bitter labor conflicts, economic deindustrialization and financial speculation began, destroying manufacturing jobs and pushing the workforce toward the service sector and self-employment. This cohort then experienced the 1976 coup, the intensification of guerrilla warfare, followed by the escalation of state terrorism and the destruction of the guerrilla movement, which by 1979 was virtually defeated and under persecution. Finally, in adolescence this cohort experienced the Malvinas/Falklands War and the definitive collapse of the last phase of the military dictatorship, concluded by the first electoral defeat of Peronism without proscription at the hands of Alfonsín in 1983.

Cohort 3: 1963–1973 (labor market entry between 1983 and 1998)

This cohort came of age after Argentina's democratic restoration in 1983, which marked a new political era. Yet the debt crisis and the "lost decade" continued to weigh heavily on the economy, resulting in stagnation. In late 1980s, there was hyperinflation and state sovereign default. Between 1988 and 1998, the Argentine economy transitioned from one of its worst hyperinflationary crises to a period of profound structural transformation. In 1993 a Federal Education Law extended compulsory education to 10 years (effectively to age 16). This cohort witnessed the return of Peronism under Menem (1989–1999). Menem's neoliberal reforms, privatizations, and currency convertibility plan made growth resume temporarily.

Cohort 4: 1974–1984 (labor market entry between 1994 and 2009)

If we look at the conditions of this cohort in maturity, we find more inflation, deindustrialization, financial liberalization, rising foreign debt (Basualdo 2006); budget cuts and political repression of universities led to a deterioration in the quality of public higher

education—teaching conditions, institutional resources, and academic training—and to higher dropout rates and reduced chances of degree completion among students from disadvantaged backgrounds (Tiramonti 2004). In 2006, another National Education Law repealed the 1993 law and reinstated the traditional primary and secondary school structure. It established compulsory education from the age of four through the completion of secondary school. In 2001–2002 there was again a profound economic crisis, linked to social and political turmoil; monetary default and repeated mass protests. In 2003–2009, the Kirchner administrations made some relevant economic recovery (including improved financial situation of academic research), with a re-regulation process.

Cohort 5: 1985–1996 (labor market entry between 2005 and 2021)

Between 2010 and 2021, Argentina experienced once again political alternation and economic volatility. The economy underwent a cycle of structural stagnation, marked by recurring debt crises, high inflation, and currency controls. Following massive capital flight, the government implemented restrictions on the purchase of US dollars, marking the beginning of a heavily regulated foreign exchange market. By this time, the labor market situation underwent severe structural deterioration, characterized by the stagnation of formal private-sector employment, rising job precariousness, and a critical spike in unemployment during the pandemic. There was an alternation between Kichnerismo 2010–2015 plus 2019–2021, and Macrismo 2015–2019 governments. Some expansion of social rights took place. Rising inflation, balance of payment crises, growth of public debt tended to predominate, with a partial recovery in 2021. Kirchnerismo's economic policies were characterized by the promotion of the internal market and an unsustainable expansion of public spending, which in the end led to very high inflation, default on the public debt, and consequently low rates of investment and private job creation.

Data, variables, survey harmonization, and basic tables

Our analysis draws on twelve national population probability-sample surveys conducted between 2003 and 2021, making this dataset the most comprehensive currently available. Most of these surveys were collected by CEDOP (*Centro de Estudios de Opinión Pública, Universidad de Buenos Aires*), linked to the International Social Survey Programme [ISSP], with sampling and measurement procedures as specified by ISSP. Three surveys were conducted by a different institution, but with similar methodologies. All surveys employed multi-stage sampling, with random selection at each stage. In addition, in four of the surveys sampling was stratified by using sex and age quotas in the final stage. After selection on ages 25–65 and valid measures of occupations and education, the complete data refer to 13,175 men and 12,698 women, born between 1938 and 1996. Details on data sources and sampling are in Online Appendix 1.

Construction of the variables

All surveys employed a detailed occupation coding scheme, the International Standard Classification of Occupation 1988 (ILO 1990), as specified by the ISSP methodology.

Education was measured by highest attained level which were post-harmonized to nine qualification, ranging from 'No formal education' to 'Tertiary education completed' [Licenciado].

The five birth cohorts are about 11 years wide and defined as: (1) 1938–1951, (2) 1952–1962, (3) 1963–1973, (4) 1974–1984, and (5) 1985–1996. As explained above, the analysis covers a period of roughly 50 years in terms of birth cohorts (1938–1991) and about 60 years of labor market entry—or "class positioning"—(1960–2020).

The three educational levels reflect major transitions in educational attainment in Argentina. The first category comprises individuals with less than complete secondary education. The second includes those who completed secondary education but did not pursue or complete tertiary or university studies. The third consists of individuals who completed tertiary or university education.

Following established practice in social mobility studies, we employ the EGP class scheme (Erikson et al. 1979; Erikson and Goldthorpe 1992), which defines 11 categories, that we aggregated to seven as: (I) Higher-Grade Managers and Professionals; (II) Lower-Grade Managers and Professionals; (III-a) Routine Non-Manual; (IV-abc) Small Self-Employed; (V–VI) [Supervising and] Skilled Manual; (III-b) Lower-Grade Service and Sales; (VII-ab) [Elementary or] Unskilled Workers. While III-b (when separated from class III-a) is sometimes merged with the Unskilled Workers class, prior analysis of the mobility patterns—detailed in Online Appendix 2—suggest that III-b consistently ranks higher than the Unskilled Workers class. Therefore, we retained III-b as a separate category, positioned second-to-last in the scheme used.

Quality of data harmonization

Our data consist of the counts in a four-way Cohort × Origin × Destination × Education crosstabulation with $5 \times 7 \times 7 \times 3 = 735$ cells, separately for men and women. The successful harmonization of surveys was tested in several ways, following procedure suggested by Vallet (2015) and Breen et al. (2009). Online Appendix 3 gives further details on the adequate harmonization of the surveys.

Marginal distributions

We start the analysis of intergenerational mobility by reporting how the marginal distribution of occupations and education have changes over cohort.

Occupational class distributions by cohort

Table 1 shows the marginal distributions of the seven EGP class categories by cohort, for men and for women, as well as their fathers. For men, the most important changes across cohorts are the decrease of the Small Self-Employed (IV-abc) and the increase of the Lower-Grade Professionals (II) and the Routine Non-manual employees (III-a). This is somewhat similar for women, but we have to add the decrease of the Unskilled Workers in the youngest cohort. We see less dramatic developments among the fathers, with a consistent decrease of the Unskilled Manual Workers (VII-ab) and a modest increase of Managers and Professionals (I + II).

Table 1. Distributions of *EGP* classes (%) over birth cohorts.

Cohorts	1938–1951	1952–1962	1963–1973	1974–1984	1985–1996	Total
Origins						
I	7.7	7.5	7.7	8.0	8.6	7.9
II	5.7	6.5	6.8	6.7	9.3	6.9
III-a	5.2	4.9	5.2	6.1	6.2	5.5
IV-abc	30.5	30.0	28.4	29.8	30.7	29.6
V + VI	14.4	15.8	16.0	14.5	11.8	14.9
III-b	4.0	4.4	4.2	5.0	6.2	4.7
VII-ab	32.6	30.8	31.5	29.9	27.1	30.5
N (100%)	2310	5763	7228	7543	3029	25873
Men						
I	12.3	13.0	12.2	12.1	7.0	11.8
II	7.9	10.4	11.2	11.7	15.4	11.3
III-a	6.3	5.0	6.2	5.6	7.3	5.9
IV-abc	33.1	30.4	29.0	20.4	19.2	26.0
V + VI	13.0	14.2	12.3	16.0	15.5	14.2
III-b	3.0	3.9	4.6	6.4	9.3	5.4
VII-ab	24.4	23.1	24.5	27.8	26.4	25.4
N (100%)	1210	2907	3468	3886	1524	13175
Women						
I	9.8	13.5	11.6	12.5	9.4	11.9
II	11.6	12.5	14.0	14.4	17.6	14.0
III-a	16.5	15.4	15.9	14.5	12.6	15.1
IV-abc	18.5	17.7	16.1	13.8	13.4	15.7
V + VI	5.3	3.9	3.7	3.9	4.6	4.1
III-b	11.8	13.0	12.4	17.0	23.2	15.1
VII-ab	26.5	24.0	26.3	23.9	19.2	24.2
N (100%)	1100	2856	3580	3657	1505	12698

Men and women aged 25–65 years, with complete information on origin and destination occupations.
Note: see text and Online Appendix 2 for definition of EGP categories. *Source*: calculations from ARGMOB_2003-2023 database.

When comparing origins (fathers) and male destinations we see that upper class (I and II) has expanded—although class I declines in the youngest cohort, perhaps because professionals have not yet had time to reach career maturity—while the Small Self-employed (IV-abc) declines sharply in the last two cohorts. By contrast, the manual working class (VII-ab) shows a steady decrease between origins to destinations, although at a diminishing rate, with the most pronounced decline observed in the three oldest cohorts.

For women, when comparing origins and destinations, the trend for the Higher-Grade upper class (I) is erratic, declining around the mid-1960s, whereas the Lower-Grade upper class (II) and Routine Non-manual Employees—both higher-grade (III-a) and lower-grade (III-b)—show steady growth. Like men, the female Small Self-Employed, Skilled Workers and Lower-Grade Supervisors (V + VI), and the Manual Workers class (VII-ab) all experience notable declines. As highlighted by classes IV and V + VI, daughters generally do not follow their fathers' footsteps as much as sons do.

Across both sexes, the upper classes I and II expand, while intermediate classes (III-a and IV) grow for women, but not for men. The manual working class VII decreases for both men and women, although the decline is less pronounced among men.

Table 2. Educational levels by birth cohorts.

Educational Levels	1938–1951	1952–1962	1963–1973	1974–1984	1985–1996	Total
Men						
Less than Secondary	61.2	52.7	45.4	40.0	36.9	45.9
Secondary + Inc. Higher	24.9	31.4	37.3	42.6	45.5	37.4
Complete Higher	14.0	15.9	17.3	17.4	17.6	16.7
N (100%)	*1210*	*2907*	*3468*	*3886*	*1524*	*13175*
Women						
Less than Secondary	56.2	44.4	37.2	31.6	27.5	37.7
Secondary + Inc. Higher	27.3	31.5	36.2	40.8	47.5	37.0
Complete Higher	16.5	24.2	26.6	27.5	25.0	25.3
N (100%)	*1100*	*2856*	*3580*	*3657*	*1505*	*12698*

Men and women 25–65 years of age with complete information on origin and destination occupations.
Note: see text for definition of educational levels. *Source*: calculations from ARGMOB_2003-2023 database.

Educational distributions by cohort

Table 2 examines the relationship between birth cohorts and educational attainment. For both sexes, the proportion of individuals completing higher education rises after the first cohort and then stabilizes. In line with the census data shown in Figure 2, much more dramatic development is found at the lower and middle levels of education. Specifically, among men, higher education increased by 3.6 percentage points, middle-level education rose by 20.6 points, and the share with low education declined by 24.3 points from the oldest to the youngest birth cohort. An even more dramatic pattern is observed among women, with corresponding changes of 8.5, 20.2, and 28.7 percentage points, respectively. Importantly, the figures indicate that the most substantial shifts occurred at the lower end of the educational distribution, which experienced a marked contraction.

Components of absolute mobility

Intergenerational mobility is commonly analyzed in two forms: absolute and relative (Breen 2004, 2019). ***Absolute mobility*** refers to observed[3] ***differences*** between origins and destinations—the proportion of individuals who changed class position. When class positions are rank-ordered this allows for the identification of upward and downward moves. ***Relative mobility*** reflects the strength of the ***association*** between origins and destinations and is also known as 'social fluidity'.

Table 3 presents standard descriptive statistics about ***absolute mobility***. As noted in the literature, observed mobility conflates structural mobility—stemming from differences between the marginal distributions of origins and destinations—with relative mobility, which is about the association between origins and destinations (Ganzeboom et al. 1991; Xie and Killewald 2013). Breen and Jonsson (2005:237) emphasize that variations in observed flows largely reflect changes in marginal distributions of origins and destinations rather than differences in relative mobility. While sociologists often argue that measures of absolute mobility "misframe" mobility regimes (e.g., Hout 2015:28), we feel that it is nevertheless relevant to describe components of absolute mobility and analyze how it changes over cohorts, as this is the way how members of society experience and discuss[4] social mobility.

Table 3. Components of absolute mobility by birth cohorts. .

Cohorts	1938–1951	1952–1962	1963–1973	1974–1984	1985–1996	Total
Men						
Structural Mobility #	10.9	10.2	10.7	13.1	14.7	10.0
Gross Mobility	67.8	68.3	67.9	69.4	72.6	69.0
Horizontal	15.3	16.2	17.1	16.4	18.4	16.8
Vertical Mobility	52.5	52.1	50.8	53.0	54.2	52.2
Upward Vertical	33.6	33.2	31.1	29.8	27.2	30.9
Downward Vertical	18.9	18.9	19.7	23.2	27.0	21.3
UP / DV	1.8	1.8	1.6	1.3	1.0	1.5
Women						
Structural Mobility #	26.4	30.2	29.6	31.9	31.5	30.4
Gross Mobility	74.2	75.4	75.4	77.4	78.5	76.1
Horizontal	21.2	19.5	20.7	21.7	21.9	20.7
Vertical Mobility	53.0	55.9	54.7	55.7	56.6	55.4
Upward Vertical	28.1	31.6	30.1	29.3	27.6	29.7
Downward Vertical	24.9	24.3	24.6	26.4	29.0	25.7
UP / DV	1.1	1.3	1.2	1.1	1.0	1.2

Men and women, aged 25–65 with complete origins and destinations.
Structural mobility measured as sum of absolute differences in marginal distributions of origins and destinations [dissimilarity index].

The dissimilarity index (DI) measures the differences between origin and destination class distributions—***structural mobility***—, indicating the proportion of cases that would need to change positions to make these distributions identical (Breen 2004:19; Treiman 2009:59). Structural mobility for women is three times that of men. Comparing cohorts, we find that structural mobility is on the rise for both men and women, but this gap narrows in younger cohorts. Breen and Luijkx (2004:46) observe that structural mobility remains stable or declines in many European countries, "suggesting that long-term structural change is gradually diminishing." In Argentina, by contrast, later cohorts suggest an upward trend in structural mobility, with the DI's rising for cohorts born in the mid-1970s. When the 1970s cohort entered the labor market and reached occupational maturity (around 1995–2005), Argentina experienced rising unemployment and an escalation of public debts, which culminated in the 2001 crisis. These are some of the structural changes within which occupational variations took place.

Gross mobility rates (i.e., mobility between the seven classes) for men fall within the 70%–80% range observed in 30 European countries for cohorts born between 1938 and 1985, and are even higher for women, consistent with the convergence between European countries described by Bukodi and Goldthorpe (2022:273–274). For the specification of "vertical" mobility, we adopt the tripartite grouping approach of Erikson and Goldthorpe (1992:44–46), which in our study corresponds to: (1) I–II, (2) III-a, IV-abc, V + VI, and (3) III-b, VII-ab. Although we feel that this ranking[5] is somewhat crude and arbitrary, using it leads to results that are similar to other countries. *Vertical mobility* refers to movement across the three broad layers, while *horizontal mobility* captures movements within these layers (Breen 2004:18). Women experience slightly more vertical mobility than men, driven largely by greater *downward mobility*, which exceeds *upward mobility* in the youngest cohort. In general, in Argentina upward mobility outweighs downward mobility across most cohorts, but this difference vanishes in the youngest cohort—in a context of higher male immobility and thus lower gross mobility. Despite such sex differences, vertical mobility remains relatively stable across the five

cohorts, echoing the trends reported by Bukodi and Goldthorpe (2022) for recent periods in Europe.

Notice that Table 3 shows all components of absolute mobility to be rather stable across cohorts, despite the strong changes in the occupational distributions that were found for both men and women in Table 2. This is not as surprising as it may be at first glance. The obvious reason is that the origin distribution also changes by cohort, making for no difference in structural mobility, and little difference for the other components of observed mobility.

Components of relative mobility

Relative mobility, in contrast to absolute mobility, reflects the strength of the association between origins and destinations and is also known as 'social fluidity'. As Breen (2019:447) notes, relative mobility refers to "the degree to which a person's destination depends on their origin." It is typically assessed using odds-ratios (or their logarithms), which capture the odds of moving associated with belonging to one group rather than another (Powers and Xie 2000:50). Strong origin–destination associations (i.e., large odds-ratios >1) imply low social fluidity, while weak associations (odds-ratios closer to 1) indicate almost perfect fluidity between classes. Odd-ratios have the virtue of being 'margin-free' as their particular value is insensitive to changes in the marginal distributions as described above, and thus embody the pure association between variables (Powers and Xie 2000:97).

We address differences in the association between tables with three models that vary in how the pattern of odds-ratios is constrained between tables. The **Constant Association** model constrains the pattern of odds-ratios to be the same between tables. In the **UniDiff** model the (log) odds-ratio patterns are constrained to be different between tables by a single multiplicative constant that we label UniDiff. These uniform differences are expressed relative to a reference pattern of log-odds-ratios[6] which is fixed at 1 and by default refers to the first table in the analysis. Finally, we consider **Linear UniDiff**, which introduces "a linear cohort trend in the strength of the association" while keeping the *pattern* of association constant (Pfeffer and Hertel 2015:156). This model is situated between Constant Association (all UniDiff parameters fixed at 1) and UniDiff (UniDiff parameters vary freely between tables), and provides a single degree-of-freedom test whether any steady change occurred.[7]

Our evaluation of model fit relies primarily on LR (Likelihood Ratio and BIC (Bayesian Information Criterion) tests (Raftery 1986). LR comparisons search for differences between models using null-hypothesis testing at the $p < .05$ significance level. BIC adjusts the LR values for sample size. Models with a more negative BIC are to be preferred over models with higher BIC. However, we also examine the pattern of change of the UniDiff parameters in a more qualitative way, by plotting the values of the UniDiff parameter by cohort.[8]

Three-way models of relative mobility: associations OD, OE, and ED

Three-way analyses are first used to examine OD-C, OE-C and ED-C (i.e., how the mediation pathways have developed across cohorts), as well as to test the moderation

hypothesis that a higher education mitigates OD|E. Results are presented separately for men and women. Table 4 and Figure 3 report all three-way associations for men aged 25–65.

Mediation for men

For OD-C (total intergenerational class fluidity by cohort), the association appears to be roughly constant across cohorts. UniDiff parameters increase up to the 1960s cohort,

Table 4. Models fitting three-way UniDiff parameters.

Models	LR	DF	BIC	DI	*p*: diff. LR
		Mediation			
OD-C: Trends in Intergenerational Class Fluidity					
Constant Association	177.02	144	**−1188.97**	3.86	CA vs LU 0.278
Linear UniDiff	175.85	143	1180.66	3.89	LU vs U 0.177
UniDiff	170.92	140	−1157.13	3.83	CA vs U 0.192
OE-C: Trends in Educational Inequality by Class Origins					
Constant Association	60.86	48	−394.45	2.14	C vs LU **0.001**
Linear UniDiff	50.60	47	**−395.22**	1.90	LU vs U **0.015**
UniDiff	40.19	44	−377.17	1.73	C vs U **0.000**
ED-C Trends in Class Returns to Education					
Constant Association	144.40	48	−310.91	3.23	C vs LU **0.000**
Linear UniDiff	104.26	47	**−341.57**	2.87	LU vs U **0.025**
UniDiff	94.93	44	−322.43	2.82	C vs U **0.000**

	UniDiff parameters by Cohort				
	1938–1951	*1952–1962*	*1963–1973*	*1974–1984*	*1985–1996*
OD (Linear −0.0220)	1	1.1082	1.1434	1.0401	0.9525
OE (Linear **−0.0638**)	1	1.0058	1.0207	0.9541	0.6561
ED (Linear **−0.0850**)	1	0.8840	0.8882	0.7870	0.5903

		Moderation			
OD-E: Variations in Intergenerational Class Fluidity by Education					
Constant Association	100.12	72	**−582.84**	2.70	C vs LU 0.937
Linear UniDiff	100.11	71	−573.66	2.70	LU vs U 0.726
UniDiff	99.99	70	−564.00	2.68	C vs U 0.938

	UniDiff parameters by Education Level		
	Lower	Middle	Higher
OD|E (Linear 0.0051)	1	1.0271	0.9991

Men aged 25–65, with complete information on origin and destination occupations. ($N = 13{,}175$).
Source: Calculations from ARGMOB_2003-2023 database. *Notes:* In bold: lowest BIC and significant test, $p < .05$.

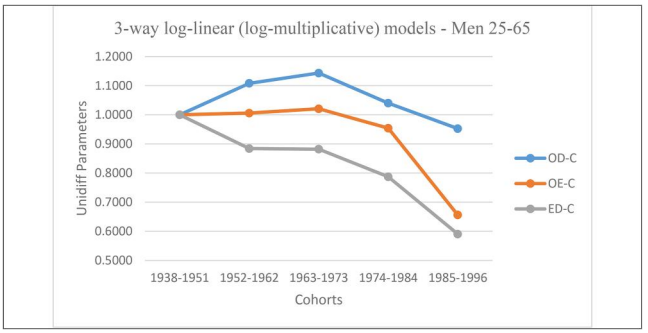

Figure 3. Log-multiplicative UniDiff parameters for three-way interactions across cohorts: OD-C, OE-C, ED-C. Men aged 25–65. *Source*: Calculations in Table 4.

then decline for the two youngest cohorts, but the statistical tests (BIC and p) favor the Constant Association model.

By contrast, for OE-C (trends in inequality in educational outcomes) and ED-C (trends in class returns to education), UniDiff and Linear UniDiff models are to be preferred over Constant Association. In OE-C, either UniDiff (according to LR) or linear UniDiff (according to both LR and BIC) are to be preferred. In ED-C, both UniDiff and linear UniDiff are preferred based on LR and BIC tests. The UniDiff parameters as shown in Figure 5 indicate that the OE association decreases for the two youngest cohorts, and that the negative linear UniDiff parameter for OE (**−0.0638** per cohort) mostly reflects changes in these two cohorts. The ED UniDiff parameters decline monotonically across cohorts and the negative linear UniDiff parameter (**−0.0850** per cohort) indicates a gradual (and statistically significant) weakening of the association between educational attainment and class destination. In conclusion, both steps in the indirect effect O → E → D indicate weakening of association and hence a weakening of the mediation.

It is to be appreciated at this point that the three-way models refer to the full associations, conditioned by cohort. For how the partial associations OD|E and ED|O develop over cohorts, we refer to the four-way models in the next section.

Moderation OD|E for men: differences in OD by levels of E

We can use the three-way setup to test the moderation hypothesis, which holds that OD is weaker among the higher educated. The fourth panel of Table 4 shows the pertinent information for men, which indicates that there is no difference in OD|E association between tables defined by the three levels of education. The estimated UniDiff parameters are virtually identical between the three levels of education.

Mediation and moderation for women

For women (Table 5, Figure 4), like for men, the total association OD-C appears largely constant across cohorts. Like for men, the OE association pattern also remains largely constant across cohorts, but exhibits a slight decline in the most recent cohorts. Also similar to men, ED-C shows significant differences between cohorts, with UniDiff parameters monotonically falling below 1, particularly for the youngest cohort. The negative linear UniDiff parameter (**−0.0880** per cohort) suggests a rather strong and linearly declining trend in ED.

Finally, the fourth panel in Table 5 shows that there is no moderation effect OD|E for women either. Just like for men, the UniDiff parameters between the three education levels are virtually indistinguishable and the linear trend parameter is far from statistically significant.

It is to be noticed that while the statistical evaluation of models for women by BIC and H0-testing leads to different results than for men, the pattern of UniDiff parameters in Figures 3 and 4 is strikingly similar between men and women. The relevant question is whether the difference in cohort trends between men and women is significant. While there are significant gender differences in occupational and educational distributions across cohorts, the relevant trends analyzed in the three-way models are not

Table 5. Models fitting three-way UniDiff parameters.

Models	LR	DF	BIC	DI	*p*: dif. LR
			Mediation		
OD-C: Trends in Intergenerational Class Fluidity					
Constant Association	155.17	144	**−1205.52**	3.71	C vs LU 0.785
Linear Unidiff	155.09	143	−1196.14	3.72	LU vs U 0.968
Unidiff	154.84	140	−1168.05	3.73	C vs U 0.988
OE-C: Trends in Educational Inequality by Class Origins					
Constant Association	42.20	48	**−410.49**	2.08	C vs LU 0.327
Linear Unidiff	41.24	47	−402.02	2.08	LU vs U 0.473
Unidiff	38.73	44	−376.24	2.04	C vs U 0.482
ED-C Trends in Class Returns to Education					
Constant Association	136.65	48	−316.04	3.24	C vs LU **0.000**
Linear Unidiff	86.84	47	**−356.42**	2.57	LU vs U **0.001**
Unidiff	71.24	44	−343.74	2.48	C vs U **0.000**
	UniDiff parameters by Cohort				
	1938–1951	*1952–1962*	*1963–1973*	*1974–1984*	*1985–1996*
OD (Linear −0.0062)	1	1.0252	0.9964	1.0124	0.9760
OE (Linear −0.0219)	1	0.9403	0.9801	0.9692	0.8331
ED (Linear **−0.0880**)	1	0.8402	0.8385	0.7740	0.5529
			Moderation		
OD-E: Variations in Intergenerational Class Fluidity by Education					
Constant Association	126.56	72	**−552.48**	3.13	C vs LU 0.517
Linear UniDiff	126.14	71	−543.47	3.16	LU vs U 0.545
UniDiff	125.78	70	−534.40	3.17	C vs U 0.676
	UniDiff parameters by Education Level				
	Lower	Middle	Higher		
OD|E (Linear −0.0509)	1.0000	0.8851	0.8817		

Women aged 25–65, with complete information on origin and destination occupations. ($N = 12{,}698$).
Source: Calculations from ARGMOB_2003-2023 database. Notes: In bold: lowest BIC and significant test, $p < .05$.

significantly different between men and women. Hence it is relevant to estimate these trends on pooled data (shown in the Online Appendix 5), which simplifies the analysis in the remainder of this article.

Four-way models (C-OED). Changes across cohorts in OD|E and ED|O

Altogether, the three-way results indicate no clear trend in the total association between origin and destination, a firm trend toward more social fluidity in the indirect effect of origin on destination as mediated by education, and no confirmation of the meritocratising effect of education by moderating the direct effect of origin on destination. However, three-way results are not conclusive. This is in particular the case because the three-way test of (OD|E) does not take into account changes in the OE and ED. This limitation motivates the development of a four-way C-OED analysis. In this analysis we combined men and women, as the three-way analysis suggested that the association patterns do not differ between men and women and pooling the estimates will boost power.[9] To analyze four-way models, we closely follow the example of Vallet (2013, 2015) for men in France.[10] Vallet's approach is based on twelve models, each of which adds a cumulative step to a model in which changes in OD|E and ED|O are estimated. In the present text, we discuss seven of Vallet's models (results for models 8 to 12 are provided in Online Appendix 6).

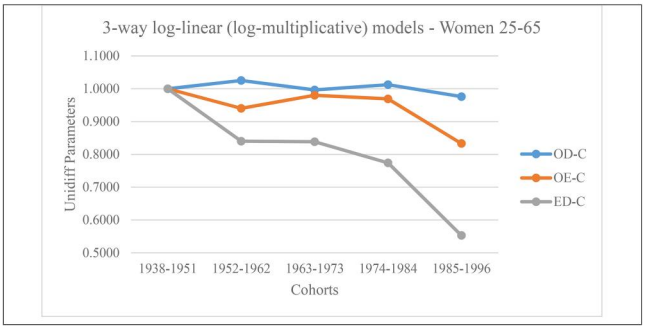

Figure 4. Log-multiplicative UniDiff parameters for three-way interactions: OD-C, OE-C, ED-C. Women aged 25–65. *Source*: Calculations in Table 5.

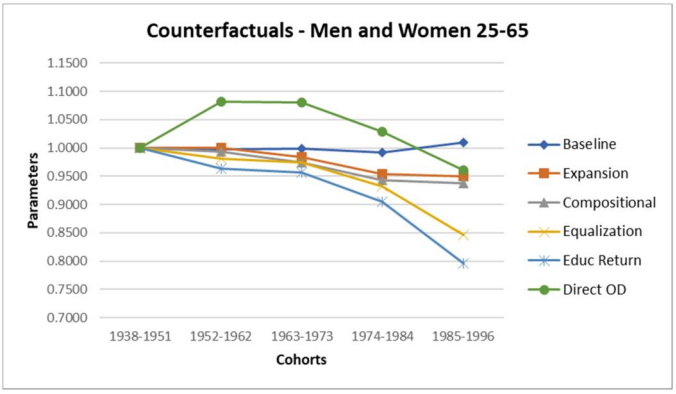

Figure 5. Counterfactual Simulations, men and women aged 25–65.

Table 6 presents the results of Vallet's models for the four-way C-OED table.[11] Models 1–4 all fit COE and CD associations with saturation, and then add the two-way saturated associations OD and ED one at a time (model 2–3) and together (model 4). It is to be appreciated that in the four-way design OD and ED are partial associations, i.e., conditioned on E and O, respectively. The baseline model 4 fits the four-way data clearly much better than models 1–3. With respect to model 4, Vallet (2020:112) notes for France: "For both men and women, destination class depends on both class of origin and educational attainment, but much more strongly on the latter than on the former". Unsurprisingly, this observation also applies to Argentina.

We then inserted three additional models not applied by Vallet, but in line with the logic used in three-way analysis above. Model 4a adds a UniDiffed trend effect in ED, and model 4b adds to this a similar elaboration on the trend in OD. Allowing ED|O to be changing over cohorts in model 4a improves the model fit by a considerable margin, like it did in the three-way analysis. The estimated parameters confirm once again the steady decline of the ED|O association, also now the confounding by O has been controlled. Allowing OD|E to be changing across cohorts in model 4b also improves the fit, but the change in fit is not statistically significant. However, the estimated parameters show a steady increase, and when (post-hoc) tested with a Linear UniDif constraint the

Table 6. Analysis of the four-way C-OED table—men and women aged 25–65 ($N = 25{,}863$).

	LR	DF	p	BIC	DI	p	
			Mediation				
Models							
(1) COE CD	12038.1	600		5939.7	26.14		
(2) COE CD OD	8542.4	564		2809.9	21.20		
(3) COE CD ED	2008.0	588		−3968.4	10.09		
4) COE CD OD ED	830.4	552		−4780.1	5.76		
(4a) COE CD OD β_cED	726.8	548	**0.000**	**−4842.8**	5.37		
(4b) COE CD β_cOD β_cED	720.7	544	**0.000**	−4808.5	5.39		
(4c) COE CD β_{Ic}OD β_cED	722.2	547	**0.000**	−4837.5	5.36		
(4c) vs (4a)	4.6	1				**.032**	
			ED and OD parameters by cohort				
	1938–1951	*1952–1962*	*1963–1973*	*1974–1984*	*1985–1996*		
ED|O (linear **−0.0889**)	1	0.876	0.871	0.789	0.562		
OD|E (linear **+.0487**)	1	1.213	1.245	1.261	1.317		
Moderation							
(5) COE CD β_EOD ED	830.3	550		−4759.85	5.75		
(4) vs. (5)	0.08	2	*0.961*				
			OD parameters by levels of education				
	Lower	*Middle*	*Higher*				
β_E	*1*	*1.021*	*1.010*				
(6) COE CD OD βoED	800.7	546		−4748.84	5.68		
(4) vs. (6)	29.7	6				**0.000**	
(7) COE CD β_EOD β_OED	773.2	544		−4756.03			
(5) vs. (7)	57.2	6				**0.000**	
(6) vs. (7)	27.5	2				**0.000**	
			ED Parameters by EGP origin class				
	I	*II*	*III-a*	*IV-abc*	*V + VI*	*IIIb*	*VI-abl*
β_OED	1	.982	.980	1.148	1.021	1.087	1.087

Own calculations from ARGMOB_2003-2021 database. # A constant of .012 was added to each cell to avoid empty cells problems. This made de effective $N = 25951.2$. Model estimation was conducted in LEM, according specifications in Vallet (2013:11) as provided in Online Appendix 3.

improvement relative to model 4 is statistically significant with an estimated linear increase of OD|E of ca. **4.**% per cohort. The decrease of association in the indirect effect is countervailed by a moderate rise in the direct association.

However, before drawing a hasty conclusion and major changes in OD|E, we should point out that the increase OD|E refers to a much smaller baseline effect than the decrease of ED|O. The becomes also clear from the development of the test statistic. While the increase in OD|E parameter appears to be rather dramatic, it is in fact only borderline significant.

Following these baseline results, models 5–7 aim to detect if education acts as a moderator of OD association. The log-multiplicative parameter (β) shows whether OD becomes weaker or stronger either across educational groups or origin classes. However, like in three-way models, there is no indication of any moderation effect: in Argentina, the OD association does not weaken among individuals with higher levels of education. In Model 6, the strength of the UniDiffed ED association is allowed to vary across class origins (O). While the BIC statistic still favors the baseline Model 4, the LR-test indicates that Model 6 is a significant improvement. The parameters of model 6 show ED to be weaker for non-manual classes and stronger for the manual working class (VII),

followed by the small self-employed (IV). Intriguingly, while the OD association does not vary across education levels, we find a significant variation in ED association by class origin suggesting that the link between education and destinations is slightly stronger for the lower classes.

Model 7 combines the two UniDiffed moderation effects. Again, this model is not better than the baseline Model 4 according to BIC, but the LR-difference test indicates significant improvement. Vallet (2013:11) notes for France that Model 7 "very clearly reveals that the second specification ('the strength of the ED association varies over O') dominates the first". In Argentina, we observe a similar domination. Notice that the first moderation—OD varying by education—is now marginally significant while the second moderation—ED varying over O—passes the critical test value by a wide margin.

Considering the C-OED models, Vallet (2013:12) concludes that in France "only limited changes in ED and OD effects across cohorts" are observed and the "static" Model 6 is to be preferred. For Argentina, substantial changes are detected for these effects, in particular in the ED-C part of the model: we see that the Model 7 should be clearly preferred over Model 6. In Argentina, variations in ED conditional on origins across cohorts appear to be more pronounced than variations across class origins if we look at any given point in time.

Counterfactual simulations of mechanisms driving intergenerational mobility in Argentina

Having examined changes in OE, OD|E, and ED|O within the C-OED four-way design, we now turn to exploring the impact that mechanisms may have for the degree of societal openness—or its absence—across birth cohorts. As Pfeffer and Hertel (2015:158) note, three-way nor four-way findings, while informative, are sufficient for capturing the overall role of education in social fluidity. For this we implement the counterfactual simulation approach developed by Breen (2010) and applied by Torche and Costa Ribeiro (2010) and Costa Ribeiro (2023) on Brazil, and Vallet (2015, 2017, 2020) on France. These simulations are based on the full four-way C-OED table and calculated for men and women pooled. Results for gender specific simulations are given in Online Appendix 7.

Starting from a model of no change, the simulation procedure successively adds to the model each of four mechanisms through which cohort differences in relative mobility may arise (as defined by Breen (2010)): educational expansion (CE), educational equalization (C-OE), educational returns (C-ED), compositional effects (OD|E), and changes in the direct origin-destination association net of education (C-OD|E). After each of the steps, a counterfactual table of expected frequencies OxDxC is generated, that are analyzed with the C-OD UniDif model. These UniDif parameters indicate to what extend the added mechanism causes the OD relationship to change over cohorts.

The order of the subsequent steps in this procedure is to some extend arbitrary and choosing a different order affects the changes in the pattern of UniDif parameters. However, as Breen (2010: Appendix) argues it is logical to first examine the contributions of changes in univariate distributions (CE and CD), then changes in bivariate associations (C-OE and C-ED), and finally the three-way association OD-E and changes

therein (C-OED). In this final step the model is fully saturated and the 'counterfactual' predicted values are identical to the observed ones. The predicted unidiffed OD associations are:

	Baseline	Expansion	Composition	Equalization	Educ returns	Direct OD|E
		CE	E-OD	C-OE	C-ED	C-EOD
Cohort 1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Cohort 2	0.9954	0.9985	0.9913	0.9796	0.9613	1.079
Cohort 3	0.9961	0.9814	0.9721	0.9721	0.9536	1.0774
Cohort 4	0.9887	0.9522	0.9414	0.9301	0.9028	1.0257
Cohort 5	1.0010	0.9487	0.9370	0.8460	0.7949	0.9594

These UniDiff values are plotted in Figure 5. Visual inspection suggests what the numbers also indicate: a) educational expansion contributes little; b) compositional effects contribute little, if at all, given the lack of variability of OD association over E; c) equalization of the ED association contributes somewhat, after the third cohort; d) declining educational returns ED contribute modestly, also after the third cohort; e) the largest contribution comes from changes in the direct OD association.

Sensitivity analyses

The results rest upon a number of analytical decisions, for which alternatives could have been considered. We examined the sensitivity of the results on three important points.

- **Confounding age effects**. The age of occupational maturity is assumed between 25 and 65. In this range men and women are assumed to make no job transitions that would matter for the associations in the OED model. [Notice that this assumption is not about *job* mobility, but about *class* mobility]. If the assumption is invalid, cohort differences would be confounded with aging differences. A test of this assumption is provided in the Online Appendix 8, which finds the OED relationships in the 30–55 age bracket to be not different from the 25–65 age bracket examined in the article.
- **EGP-aggregation.** For the EGP7 aggregation, alternatives could be considered. Online Appendix 9 replicates parts of the analysis with the alternative aggregation EGP8 in which Self-employed Farmers (IV-c) and Unskilled Farm Workers (VII-b) are assembled in a separate Farm Workers category. This aggregation was not preferred in the analysis above, because of the conceptual difference between the two groups, and the practical problem that farm destinations remain very sparse even after merging the two groups—which leads many empty cells in the four-way models. The analysis of the three-way models with the EGP8 specification leads to no different conclusions on the OED associations than the EGP7 aggregation in the article.
- **Approximation by OLS**. Inspired by the analysis by Salata and Cheung (2026), Online Appendix 10 replicates the analysis with linear OLS models on scaled continuous variables. While OLS models cannot be expressed in terms of

margin-free odds-ratios, these models can approximate the mediation and moderation in OED. These approximate models allow easily for testing analytical decisions in the main analysis, and can address more detailed specification of the variables. The results suggest that the conclusions on mediation and moderation are insensitive to (A) more detailed categorization of occupations, education and cohort, as well as (B) a relative position scaling of education.

Conclusions

We begin these concluding remarks by returning to our three research questions.

Trends in the total effect of social origins on destinations across cohorts

For men, the total association between origin and destination classes (commonly referred to as relative mobility or social fluidity) is largely stable across cohorts, but with minor fluctuations: initially for men there is a rise up to the 1960s cohort and then a slight decline among the two youngest cohorts. For women, the total association between origins and destination remains essentially constant but shows a slight decline in the youngest cohort, not significantly different from men. Taken over men and women together, the origin–destination association changes little across cohorts, providing scant evidence of increasing social fluidity, as anticipated by classical versions of modernization theory.

How is the total effect of origins on destinations mediated by education and how has this changed over cohorts?

The indirect effect of origins on destination as mediated by education, involves two steps. Inequality of educational outcomes declines, but mostly among the two youngest cohorts (and somewhat stronger for men than for women). Class returns to education decrease monotonically across cohorts, indicating a gradual weakening of the link between education and class destination, both for men and women. Together, these two trends indicate that the indirect effect is becoming smaller and this component of social fluidity is on the rise.

Paradoxically, these remarkable changes in the indirect effect have hardly affected the direct association between social origins and destinations net of education, which is only marginally increasing.

The weakening of the indirect education–destination association emerges from cohorts born in the 1960s onwards. These cohorts entered adulthood around the early 1980s, coinciding with the return to democracy of Argentina in 1983 under the Alfonsín administration. Subsequent cohorts experienced the 1992 EGB education reform during their secondary schooling years. Although it remains hard to connect historical events to trends in social mobility, it is striking that the timing of these institutional and political events closely parallels the patterns observed in our trend figures. The temporal coincidence suggests that shifts in the wider political and educational

context of Argentina may have contributed to changes in the strength of educational class returns. Of course, more explorations are needed on these lines.

Whether and how is the direct effect of origins on destinations moderated by education and how this has changed over cohorts?

The moderation hypothesis posits that having a higher education weakens the direct influence of social origins on class destinations. Pfeffer and Hertel (2015) have interpreted this effect as the "compositional effect". Under this name, the moderation hypothesis has been the subject of much recent research, with mixed results. Our results for Argentina provide little support for the expectation that education has increasingly served as a mechanism for attenuating the influence of social origins. We found no confirmation in the three-way design, neither in the four-way design, and no noticeable contribution in the counterfactual simulations. In Argentina the origin–destination association is constant across educational levels.

Educational expansion and social fluidity

In sum, the Argentinean case displays a nuanced trajectory of intergenerational class mobility, occasionally resembling but not fully replicating patterns of intergenerational class reproduction observed elsewhere. Although some increase in fluidity appears among cohorts born after the 1970s, these changes do not seem to result from an attenuation of the intergenerational link by educational expansion, but rather from reduced educational inequality and declining class returns to education. Unlike Brazil—where higher education more clearly weakened the influence of class origins, at least in early cohorts (Salata and Cheun 2026)—, Argentina more closely resembles Chile and Uruguay, where inheritance effects persist across educational levels. As our results suggest that the weakening indirect effect has been offset by an opposite change in the direct effect, the results also highlight the enduring role of social origins in shaping class destinations in Argentina, one way or the other. This underscores the need for further research on how institutional, political, and economic factors interact with educational changes, which may mitigate, yet not fully offset, the long shadow of parental background.

The recent literature on the OED relationships has very much focused on the moderation effect as a mechanism of how educational expansion would produce more social fluidity. However, as argued in the Introduction above, the decrease of the indirect effect may just as well be a result of educational expansion. We briefly repeat the arguments here. As students stay longer in education, more of them take the decision to leave the education system at ages when parents' influences matter less (Blossfeld and Shavit 1993), and at transitions in educational careers when parental resource matter less, the association between social origin and educational outcomes will weaken. Relatedly, education expansion may have been the cause of declining educational returns that we observe in Argentina and is an even stronger contributor to the decline of the indirect effect. Educational expansion causes credential inflation, which takes two forms. First, if the educational distribution is expanding faster than the occupational

distribution is upgrading, every new cohort will end up lower in the occupational hierarchy than the previous cohort [this is a form of structural mobility]. Second, if education expansion comes along with a contraction of the distribution [as it does in Argentina], this will diminish the possibilities for employers to select between lower and higher educated—leading to a decreasing association between education and destination.

We hasten to point out that our analysis has compared between cohorts, not between levels of educational expansion. While subsequent cohorts in Argentina are always higher educated, cohort membership is not identical to measuring educational expansion. To more directly explore the relationship between educational expansion and social fluidity, research needs to take into account the complete educational distribution, and at least distinguish between its level and dispersion. Within one country it will be hard to apply the distinction between cohort membership and educational expansion—for this we would need a broader cross-national perspective.

We add in this context that the literature on the OED model should start to make a distinction between the moderation effect proper, which is an individual-level comparison between higher and lower educated, and a composition effect proper, which would be a macro-level comparison between societies with different educational distributions.

Discussion

Contributions

We notice that our finding of weaker mediating role of education in the intergenerational transfer of occupational class is a new conclusion about Argentina which we would like to attribute to our larger, more recent and better harmonized nationally representative database, and the use of a cohort design and the statistically powerful UniDiff models. At the same time, we acknowledge that this weakening mediation cannot easily be interpreted theoretically, as it contradicts expectations from modernization theory in two respects. First, the anticipated contribution of less inequality of educational outcomes is only minor, and the unanticipated weakening of class returns to education is the major driver. Second, it remains unexplained why increase of relative mobility *via* mediation is not clearly visible in the total association.

Limitations and prospects

While our analyses of trends in intergenerational class mobility in Argentina has presented new findings, it awaits further research to test the conclusiveness of our findings. Such research should extend the database, not only by incorporating newer data, but also by reincorporating older data on developments in the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area and test whether and how patterns of class mobility in AMBA are different from the national pattern. Our reliance upon the UniDiff specification could also be challenged as these models are useful in detecting change of associations, but say little about the pattern and strength of association itself. As Vallet (2006:11) notes: "[UniDiff] is very powerful to detect a dominant trend in the data, but it may be also rather crude to accurately describe the change that has occurred."

Notes

1. OD|E denotes the partial (or direct) association between origins and destinations conditional on education, while OD refers to total association with no conditioning on education. In line with the literature, OD OE ED are shorthand for effects O → D, O → E, E → D respectively.
2. Dalle (2018) analyzed six national surveys collected in 2003–2010. Jorrat et al. (2024) analyzed six national surveys collected in 2007–2017.
3. In fact, the term "observed" mobility (Vallet 2015) would better fit the phenomena described in Table 3.
4. Public discourse about social mobility tends to focus heavily on changes in *upward* mobility which is only one of multiple components of absolute mobility and is entirely driven by changes in the marginal distributions.
5. Recall that these authors made their compression of the EGP class scheme to provide "*an instrument du travail*" (p. 46). It is clear that there is rank differentiation within their three broad EGP classes. We also feel that the grouping of class III-b with the working class may not fit with the Argentinean stratification.
6. Notice that UniDiff parameters inform only about differences in strength of association, but not about the pattern and strength of the association itself.
7. By way of illustration Online Appendix 4 shows the application of UniDif model on the ED relationship for men and women pooled.
8. Models were run using the Lem Program 1.0 (Vermunt 1997). For 4-way models with problems of sparse cells, we choose to add 0.12 to each cell, following suggestions from Breen and Luijkx (2007:108).
9. The separate results for men and women are available in the Online Appendix 5.
10. Vallet's methodology was also adopted in recent research on Brazil by Costa Ribeiro (2023), and by Jorrat et al. (2025) in their comparative analysis of Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay, but these authors (like Vallet) considered only the first five models.
11. Although our EGP class scheme differs somewhat from Vallet's, we believe these differences do not compromise the overall comparability of the findings. Vallet distinguishes categories I, II, III-a, IV-ab, IV-c, V + VI, and VII+III-b. The small size of IV-c as a destination in Argentina makes it difficult to treat it as a single category.

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Author contributions

RJ collected a major part of the data and created the harmonized comparative database. RJ conceptualized and drafted the article and conducted all statistical analyses. HG assisted with harmonizing the database and the statistical analysis. RJ and HG jointly rewrote the article in response to reviews, which involved a reconceptualization of the argument.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Replication materials

The data analyzed, together with syntax specifications, and more detailed results are available on at http://www.harryganzeboom.nl. The Replication Package has been anonymized to comply with the requirements of double-blind peer review.

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