

DISCUSSION PAPER SERIES

IZA DP No. 18048

**Institutions, Development,
and Parenting in Latin America**

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ABSTRACT

Institutions, Development, and Parenting in Latin America

This study examines how institutional quality and economic inequality influence parenting decisions across Latin America. Parenting is conceptualized as a strategic response to structural conditions, where families adapt both long-term approaches and short-term disciplinary tactics to local environments. Unlike much of the existing literature, which focuses on high-income countries, this analysis integrates parenting styles and disciplinary practices, emphasizing the role of behavioral control in low- and middle-income contexts. Using cross-country data from the World Values Survey (WVS) and the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS), the study presents stylized facts and investigates cross-sectional associations between governance, inequality, and parenting behaviors. Results indicate that families adjust their strategies in response to institutional environments, particularly in settings with limited public support and uncertain intergenerational mobility. These findings highlight the importance of considering governance and inequality as key drivers of parenting practices in developing regions.

JEL Classification: D1, D63, J1

Keywords: parenting, inequality, institutions, Latin America

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1 Introduction

Parenting constitutes a central mechanism through which human capital, values, and aspirations are transmitted across generations. Within the development economics literature, parental behavior is often analyzed in terms of time and resource allocation, yet less attention is paid to parenting as a broader strategy for shaping children’s preferences and behaviors in response to structural conditions. This chapter adopts that broader perspective by examining how inequality and institutional quality influence parenting styles and disciplinary practices across Latin America, a region marked by persistent income disparities, institutional fragility, and strong familial networks.

A growing literature highlights that parental investment decisions are responsive to both children’s evolving abilities and their surrounding environment. Parents adjust their involvement in learning, social interaction, and media use depending on the child’s developmental stage (Nicoletti and Tonei, 2020). Contextual elements, including household routines and the division of domestic labor, also shape the structure and intensity of these investments (Price et al., 2021; Giménez-Nadal et al., 2019). These findings reinforce the view that parenting is not static but adaptive, responding to both micro-level household dynamics and broader structural conditions. Importantly, parenting practices play a critical role in shaping children’s emotional development and motivation, which are key predictors of long-term social and economic success (Cunha et al., 2006; Heckman et al., 2006).

One influential framework for understanding parental strategies is the classification of parenting styles, first introduced by Baumrind (1967). These styles, authoritarian, authoritative, permissive, and neglectful, differ based on parental responsiveness and control. Authoritative parenting, combining warmth and structure, is generally associated with favorable outcomes in children’s academic, emotional, and social development (Ulferts, 2020), whereas authoritarian parenting, characterized by high control and low responsiveness, is often linked to negative consequences.

Building on this typology, Doepke and Zilibotti (2017) introduce a theoretical model that treats parenting as a utility-maximizing decision shaped by structural conditions. In their framework, economic inequality, the returns to education, and institutional quality influence parents’ strategic choices. In unequal societies with weak redistribution and high educational stakes, parents tend to emphasize hard work, discipline, and conformity, leading to more controlling

styles. Conversely, in societies with low inequality and generous welfare systems, parents adopt more permissive strategies that promote autonomy. Their empirical evidence, based on OECD countries, shows consistent correlations between economic indicators and parenting styles.

This chapter builds on that framework but applies it to the Latin American context, where institutional provision is less universal or consistent and extended family networks play a central role in daily life. In this setting, the family, especially the extended family, acts as a key provider of socialization, emotional support, and caregiving (Ayón et al., 2015; Domènech Rodríguez et al., 2009; Hamel et al., 2023). Evidence from other regional contexts further reinforces the importance of family in shaping long-term outcomes. For instance, Albanese et al. (2016) show that in Italy, the values transmitted by parents significantly influence not only children’s behaviors and attitudes but also their beliefs and preferences well into adulthood. While the study is set outside Latin America, it underscores a broader mechanism through which parenting practices contribute to the intergenerational persistence of norms, an especially relevant insight in Latin America, where family structures play a central role in socialization and long-term identity formation.

In addition to parenting styles, disciplinary practices, ranging from reasoning to physical punishment, are an essential dimension of parenting. These practices also appear to respond to structural conditions. For example, increases in unemployment rates are associated with more frequent use of violent or even abusive discipline strategies (Brown and De Cao, 2024). Norms surrounding physical punishment differ by country, but coercive discipline has been shown to carry significant risks for children’s socio-emotional adjustment (Bornstein, 2013).

Latin America offers a compelling context for examining how structural features shape parenting. Over the past decades, the region has undergone two phases in its inequality trajectory: a sharp rise in the 1980s and 1990s due to macroeconomic crises and liberalization, followed by a decline beginning in the late 1990s, driven by narrowing skill premiums and expanded social transfers (Gasparini et al., 2011; Lustig et al., 2013). Despite these gains, inequality remains high by global standards, and social mobility is limited. Recent studies document strong intergenerational persistence in socioeconomic status, though educational mobility has improved, particularly among children from lower-income households (Neidhöfer et al., 2018; Neidhöfer, 2019). These trends are deeply intertwined with institutional capacity. Governance indicators, developed by the World Bank, track state effectiveness, rule of law, and corruption, capturing key dimensions of institutional quality that shape daily life (Kaufmann et al., 2000). A wide

consensus in development economics underscores the importance of institutions in explaining long-run outcomes (Rodrik et al., 2004).

This work, thus, investigates how parenting styles and discipline practices vary across Latin America as a function of these economic and institutional characteristics. It draws on two complementary data sources: the World Values Survey (WVS), used to construct indices of parenting styles; and the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS), which provide information on child discipline. National-level indicators of inequality, development, and governance are then used to explore correlations between structural conditions and parenting behavior, following the approaches of Doepke and Zilibotti (2017) and Pesando et al. (2024).

The findings show that countries with stronger institutions and lower inequality tend to exhibit more permissive or authoritative parenting, while those with weak governance and higher inequality are more likely to display authoritarian styles. Patterns for disciplinary practices are more ambiguous, but better institutional quality and improved economic conditions are generally associated with lower use of coercive discipline.

The remainder of the chapter is organized as follows. Section 2 presents the theoretical foundation. Section 3 reviews institutional legacies and inequality in Latin America. Section 4 details the data and creation of variables. Section 5 documents stylized facts on parenting values and disciplinary practices. Section 6 reports the empirical analysis. Section 7 concludes with a discussion of implications for development and future research.

2 Theoretical Framework: Parenting as a Strategic Response

This section develops the theoretical foundation based on the model introduced by Doepke and Zilibotti (2017), which conceptualizes parenting as a strategic response to structural conditions. In their framework, parents are altruistic and forward-looking, and they choose among authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive parenting styles depending on the expected returns to shaping children’s preferences. The extent of parental control is modeled as an optimal response to three key environmental variables: income inequality, intergenerational mobility, and institutional quality. In highly unequal and uncertain environments, the incentives to exert control over children’s behaviors and preferences increase. Conversely, in more secure and equal settings, parents are more likely to promote autonomy and self-expression.

Doepke and Zilibotti’s model rests on two central mechanisms: parents care about their

children’s well-being (altruism), but they also seek to shape their children’s values to align with their own goals and beliefs (paternalism). The choice of parenting style is driven by perceived economic returns to value transmission. In contexts where adopting parents’ preferences or strategies is more advantageous for children, parents opt for more controlling styles.

The model implies that parenting styles will differ systematically across countries depending on structural characteristics. Low inequality, high social mobility, and robust institutional environments are associated with permissive styles. High inequality, low mobility, and weak institutions favor authoritarian and authoritative styles, depending on whether parents use control harshly or strategically.

This research accepts and implements the Doepke–Zilibotti framework to the Latin American context, where high inequality, moderate to weak state capacity, and strong familial networks are pervasive. It proposes a dual-level framework that jointly considers parenting styles, the strategic orientation toward autonomy or control, and discipline practices, the methods through which these orientations are operationalized. In institutional contexts marked by voids and high household stress, coercive discipline may arise not as a parental preference but as a constrained coping strategy.

To guide the empirical exploration, this study discusses three interrelated pathways through which structural conditions could, on average, shape parenting behavior in Latin America. These pathways draw on the theoretical foundations of the Doepke–Zilibotti model and are adapted to reflect the socio-economic realities and institutional gaps of the region.

First, structural conditions influence parental preferences and beliefs. Parents’ expectations and goals for their children are typically shaped by their trust in institutions, perceptions of community safety, and beliefs about intergenerational reciprocity. In Latin America, where public trust in formal institutions is often limited and family bonds are culturally emphasized, parents may, on average, place greater importance on obedience, perseverance, or emotional closeness than on independence and self-expression. These beliefs are not only culturally embedded but also forward-looking adaptations to perceived environmental risks and opportunities.

Second, parenting decisions are shaped by constraints and resource limitations. Even when parents value autonomy-promoting strategies, the feasibility of implementing these approaches may be curtailed by limited access to early childhood education, income support, or quality healthcare. In such settings, high-control or coercive parenting may emerge as an adaptive strategy to manage stress and maintain order, particularly in lower-income households. On

average, the scarcity of institutional support increases the likelihood that parenting strategies will be driven by necessity rather than intention.

Third, the intersection of inequality and gender norms produces a pronounced gendered burden in caregiving. In Latin America, caregiving and disciplining responsibilities fall disproportionately on women, especially in low-income households. These gendered dynamics are shaped by both structural disadvantage and societal expectations. Time scarcity, limited economic autonomy, and the unequal distribution of domestic labor can lead mothers to rely more frequently on instrumental or reactive forms of discipline. On average, maternal stress and limited autonomy constrain the expression of ideal parenting strategies, particularly among disadvantaged women.

Together, these three dimensions highlight how parenting in Latin America is not simply a matter of cultural tradition but a strategic response to overlapping structural conditions.

This theoretical framing informs the design of the empirical analysis, which uses values reported in the World Values Survey (WVS) and discipline practices in the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) to explore how parenting strategies co-vary with inequality and state capacity.

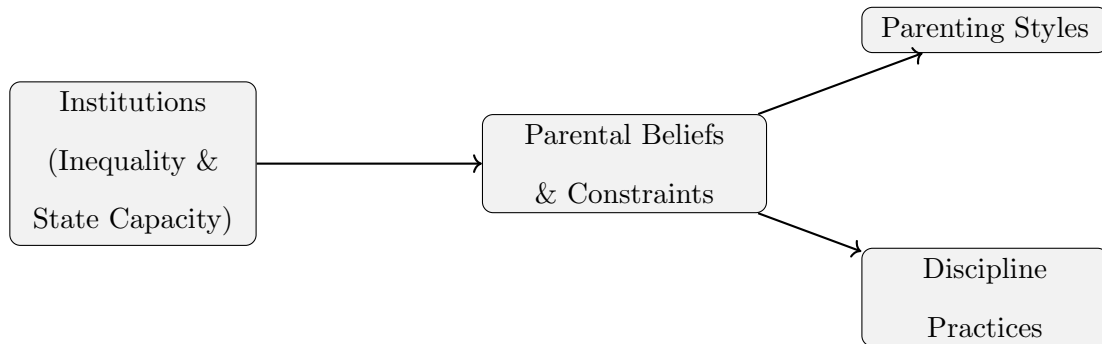


Figure 1: Implementation of the conceptual model: structural conditions, parental beliefs, and parenting strategies

Figure 1 presents the implementation logic used in this chapter. It illustrates how institutional features such as inequality and state capacity influences parents' beliefs and constraints, which in turn influence the choice of parenting style and discipline method. These decisions, while not modeled directly here, are ultimately expected to influence children's socio-emotional outcomes and the intergenerational transmission of norms.

3 Institutional Legacies and Inequality in Latin America

Latin America exhibits enduring inequalities and uneven state capacity, which have shaped the environments in which families raise their children. The region’s institutional landscape has been influenced by historical legacies of colonial extraction, state-building processes that often prioritized elite interests, and more recent periods of economic liberalization, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s, that were not always accompanied by expanded welfare provision. These long-standing dynamics have contributed to persistent differences in access to essential services such as education, healthcare, and social protection. However, the institutional trajectory of the region is not one of linear deterioration. In contrast to earlier decades, the early 2000s marked a shift toward greater social investment, including the expansion of conditional cash transfer (CCT) programs, which contributed to a reduction in inequality in many countries and signaled the emergence of a more redistributive state in parts of the region.

3.1 State Formation, Governance, and Parenting Strategies

The quality of governance plays a key role in shaping Latin America’s institutional environments. Kaufmann et al. (2000) classify governance indicators into three broad domains: how governments are selected and held accountable; the quality of policy formulation and implementation; and the degree of respect for institutions governing economic and social interaction. They argue that governance quality varies systematically across countries and is deeply rooted in political and historical processes—particularly in formerly colonized regions.

In this regard, Acemoglu et al. (2001) propose that different colonial strategies led to the establishment of distinct institutional regimes. In regions where European settler mortality was high, colonial powers developed extractive institutions with few protections for property or political rights. These institutions persisted after independence, limiting long-term development. In contrast, regions with lower settler mortality were more likely to receive inclusive institutions aimed at safeguarding rights and enabling economic growth. Acemoglu et al. (2002) extend this argument by showing that regions that were more developed before colonization ended up poorer in the long run due to the imposition of extractive institutions in economically valuable areas. These findings suggest that Latin America’s institutional weaknesses have deep historical roots that continue to shape patterns of inequality and development.

The consequences of these institutional trajectories extend to the ways in which states exer-

cise authority and distribute resources. O'Donnell (1994) argues that Latin American democracies often exhibit "delegative" tendencies, where elected leaders enjoy broad authority without robust checks and balances, undermining institutional consolidation and reinforcing elite dominance. These dynamics contribute to uneven governance outcomes and perpetuate structural inequality, especially in settings where the rule of law is weak or selectively applied.

These broader legacies are reflected in present-day institutional fragmentation. Institutional arrangements marked by ethnic, racial, and geographic segmentation continue to leave a visible imprint on contemporary patterns of inequality. In many areas, the uneven enforcement of laws, the prevalence of informality, and limited trust in public institutions shape how families engage with the state. As documented by Perry et al. (2007), informality in Latin America arises not only from regulatory burdens but also from exclusion from public goods and services. Saavedra and Tommasi (2007) emphasize that informality stems from the state's failure to ensure universal provision of public goods and legal protections. This undermines the social contract, fosters segmented citizenship, and weakens citizens' willingness to comply with the state's authority.

These institutional shortcomings not only affect access to services but also influence how families perceive risk and plan for the future. In environments marked by uncertainty and weak state guarantees, households may adopt precautionary behaviors, emphasizing security, conformity, and interdependence within the family unit. Such strategies can shape parenting goals and practices, reinforcing norms that prioritize discipline, obedience, and close familial bonds over individual autonomy.

Culture also plays a crucial role in shaping parenting practices. From an economics perspective, as discussed in Doepke and Zilibotti (2019), parenting strategies respond to institutional and economic incentives. Differences in institutional and policy design are often considered key drivers of development disparities across countries, as they determine the frameworks within which norms and behaviors evolve (Rodrik et al., 2004; Acemoglu and Robinson, 2013). From a psychology perspective, Bornstein (2013) emphasizes that culture influences when and how children are cared for, the degree of autonomy they are allowed, the emphasis placed on nurturance versus discipline, and the specific values that are prioritized.

Agostinelli et al. (2025) develop a model to study the bidirectional interaction between culture and parenting, showing that this relationship operates as a self-reinforcing feedback loop. Cultural norms and social environments guide parenting choices, while parenting practices

transmit and adapt these values to the next generation. Parents' decisions regarding discipline, autonomy, social exposure, and neighborhood selection both reflect and reshape local culture, which in turn influences future parenting strategies. Through this mechanism, parenting not only responds to cultural and institutional conditions but also contributes to the persistence of social stratification and long-run inequality.

3.2 Trends in Inequality and Redistribution

These institutional factors also help explain Latin America's distinctive trajectory of inequality. On average, the region remains one of the most unequal in the world, exhibiting higher income inequality than would be expected given its level of development (Gasparini and Cruces, 2021). Over the past thirty years, inequality trends have followed two distinct phases. During the 1980s and 1990s, inequality generally increased, particularly in countries facing macroeconomic crises and limited institutional protection through labor and social policy (Gasparini et al., 2011; Gasparini and Lustig, 2011; Alvaredo and Gasparini, 2015; Levy and Schady, 2013).

In contrast, since the early 2000s, many countries in the region have experienced a decline in inequality. This trend, particularly evident between 2002 and 2017, has been attributed to both market and non-market factors. On the market side, a narrowing wage gap between skilled and unskilled workers, due in part to the expansion of basic education and a shift in the relative supply of skilled labor—played a key role. On the policy side, the rise of targeted income transfer programs, particularly conditional cash transfers (CCTs), contributed significantly to redistribution. According to Gasparini and Cruces (2021), these redistributive policies became possible through increased fiscal space, political will, and a renewed emphasis on social policy. The overall decline in the skill premium also reflected favorable external conditions and stronger macroeconomic fundamentals, such as low inflation and stable growth, which supported labor demand and formalization.

These broader regional trends are reflected in national-level analyses. Lustig et al. (2013) examine inequality trajectories in Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico, highlighting how changes in the relative supply and demand for skilled labor help explain the observed reductions. In Argentina, the decline was largely demand-driven; in Mexico, more supply-driven; and in Brazil, both forces were at play. In all three countries, the expansion of basic education appears to have increased the relative supply of low-skilled labor, narrowing human capital disparities and reducing wage inequality. However, these improvements may partly reflect temporary conditions,

such as favorable international markets and post-crisis adjustments, rather than permanent structural change.

3.3 Intergenerational Mobility and Human Capital

Despite recent gains, the region has historically been characterized by low intergenerational mobility, with strong persistence in education and income across generations (Torche, 2014). Yet, recent evidence shows upward trends in educational mobility among younger cohorts, primarily due to the expansion of schooling among disadvantaged groups (Neidhöfer et al., 2018). For instance, Molina Millán et al. (2020) find that exposure to CCTs during early schooling years is associated with higher rates of secondary school completion and increased likelihood of university attendance, suggesting long-term gains in educational attainment.

This trajectory contrasts with that of other regions, where inequality has continued to rise and mobility has stagnated. Latin America stands out for its recent decline in inequality and increased social mobility among cohorts born in the 1970s and 1980s. These mobility gains have been found to correlate positively with economic growth and progressive public education spending, and negatively with income inequality, poverty, high returns to education, and assortative mating (Neidhöfer, 2019). The study also shows that high inequality restricts mobility for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, while children from more advantaged families are more likely to maintain or improve their relative positions. This association holds even after accounting for cross-country differences and institutional variation.

Mobility patterns, however, differ markedly across countries. In Uruguay, for example, Leites et al. (2022) find that macroeconomic volatility negatively affects intergenerational earnings mobility. Children whose parents lost jobs during downturns tend to earn less in adulthood, especially those from middle- or upper-income households, a pattern interpreted as the result of lost job-specific human capital and weakened social networks. In Brazil, César et al. (2023) show that labor demand shocks triggered by trade exposure not only depress adult earnings but also adversely affect children’s educational and employment outcomes, thereby lowering upward mobility over time.

Taken together, these studies suggest that while social mobility has improved in some parts of Latin America, parenting decisions remain shaped by long-standing exposure to structural volatility, persistent inequality, and fragmented state institutions. Even amid recent progress, many families continue to face insecure environments and limited public support. In such con-

texts, strategies that emphasize control, discipline, and intergenerational bonding may represent adaptive responses to ongoing economic and institutional uncertainty.

These macro-institutional factors offer essential context for understanding parenting in Latin America. The interaction between historical legacies, persistent inequality, and structural volatility shapes not only the opportunities families face, but also the logic behind their parenting goals and practices. This supports the idea that parenting is best understood as a context-sensitive strategy, one that responds to both long-run institutional legacies and short-run economic constraints.

4 Data and Methods

This section outlines the data sources and analytical approach employed to investigate the relationship between parenting styles, disciplinary methods, and broader structural factors in Latin America. Utilizing rich microdata from the World Values Survey (WVS) and the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS), combined with country-level measures of governance and inequality, this study adopts a comprehensive strategy to capture both individual-level behaviors and their contextual determinants. The following subsections detail the construction and classification of parenting styles and discipline categories, the institutional and economic indicators integrated into the analysis, and the statistical methods used to uncover empirical associations.

4.1 Parenting Styles: Data and Classification

The classification of parenting styles (PS) follows the framework established by Doepke and Zilibotti (2017). This study uses the World Values Survey (WVS) as the primary data source to construct the three parenting categories analyzed.

The WVS* is an international research program initiated in 1981 and currently managed by the University of Michigan, USA. It conducts representative, comparative social surveys approximately every five years across nearly 100 countries, covering about 90 percent of the world’s population. This large-scale, cross-country dataset encompasses nearly 400,000 interviews globally and spans countries with diverse income levels. The survey includes questions on a wide range of beliefs and values, such as those related to economics, democracy, religion, gender equality, social capital, and subjective well-being.

* (Inglehart et al., 2014)

Following Doepke and Zilibotti (2017), the parenting styles variable is constructed using responses to the question: “*Here is a list of qualities that children can be encouraged to learn at home. Which, if any, do you consider to be especially important? Please choose up to five!*”[†] This question serves as the basis for classifying parenting styles into three mutually exclusive categories: authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive.

Parents who select *obedience* among their chosen qualities are classified as authoritarian. Among the remaining respondents, those who select *hard work* are categorized as authoritative. Finally, respondents who neither select obedience nor hard work but choose *independence* or *imagination* (or both) are labeled permissive.

Table 1 summarizes the country and wave coverage of the WVS data used in this study. The sample includes twelve Latin American countries: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Peru, Puerto Rico, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uruguay, and spans multiple survey waves from the 1990s through the 2020s, with variation in country participation across waves.

Table 1: WVS Sample Coverage by Country and Year

Country	Wave/Years					
	2	3	4	5	6	7
Argentina	1991	1995	1999	2006	2013	2017
Brazil	1991	1997	2006	2014	2018	
Chile	1990	1996	2000	2006	2012	2018
Colombia	1998	2012	2018			
Dominican Republic	1996					
Ecuador	2013	2018				
Guatemala	2004	2020				
Mexico	1996	2000	2005	2012	2018	
Peru	1996	2001	2006	2012	2018	
Puerto Rico	1995	2001	2018			
Trinidad and Tobago	2006	2010				
Uruguay	1996	2006	2011	2022		

[†]The list of qualities includes independence, hard work, feeling of responsibility, imagination, tolerance and respect for others, thrift and saving money, determination and perseverance, religious faith, unselfishness, and obedience.

4.2 Child Discipline: Data and Classification

The Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) is used to construct three categories of child discipline. MICS is among the largest household survey programs worldwide focused on children and women, covering 116 countries with many surveyed across multiple rounds to produce trend data. The surveys collect information on a wide range of indicators related to children, adolescents, women, and more recently men. Topics include fertility, mortality, contraceptive use, unmet need, maternal and newborn health, female genital mutilation, menstrual hygiene management, child illness and treatment, and child development and nutrition, among others. These cross-sectional surveys are designed to be nationally and subnationally representative, enabling comparisons across countries and over time (Khan and Hancioglu, 2019).

The Child Discipline (CD) module within MICS is adapted from the Conflict Tactics Scale to characterize eleven disciplinary practices in diverse cultural contexts. In earlier waves, the module focuses on one randomly selected child aged 2 to 14, whereas in the latest editions, it covers all children aged 2 to 4[‡]. To maintain consistency, this study restricts the sample to one randomly selected child aged 2 to 4 per household. Since the information captured refers to only one child per household at random, it does not capture potential within-household variation in disciplinary practices, and as such, interpretations should be understood at the household level, rather than child-specific.

The main respondent, typically the mother, is asked whether she or anyone else in the household employed any of the following disciplinary methods during the month preceding the interview. These are grouped into three sets: first, non-violent discipline methods, including taking away privileges, explaining the child’s wrong behavior, and giving the child something else to do; second, emotional or psychological discipline, such as shouting, yelling, screaming, or calling the child names like dumb or lazy; third, physical discipline, which encompasses shaking the child, spanking or hitting the child on the bottom with a bare hand, hitting with objects such as belts or sticks, hitting or slapping on the face, head, ears, hand, arm, or leg, and beating the child repeatedly as hard as possible.

These groupings form the basis of three disciplinary categories used in the analysis: non-violent discipline, emotional/psychological discipline, and physical discipline, following Pesando et al. (2024).

Table 2 summarizes the countries and survey years included in this analysis. The dataset

[‡]In addition, one randomly selected child aged 5 to 14 is included.

covers thirteen countries: Argentina, Belize, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guyana, Jamaica, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uruguay, spanning from the 2000s through the 2020s.

Table 2: MICS Sample Coverage by Country and Year

Country	Years		
Argentina	2011	2020	
Belize	2006	2011	2015
Costa Rica	2011		2018
Dominican republic	2014	2019	
El Salvador	2014		
Guyana	2006	2014	2019
Jamaica	2005	2011	
Mexico	2015		
Panama	2013		
Paraguay	2016		
Suriname	2006	2010	2018
Trinidad and Tobago	2006	2011	
Uruguay	2013		

4.3 Institutional and Economic Indicators

The economic and institutional indicators utilized in this analysis are grouped into two main categories: governance quality and inequality measures.

The first category comprises governance indicators developed by the World Bank as part of the Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI) project (Kaufmann et al., 2010). These indicators are measured annually and capture perceptions of governance quality across countries over time. The six dimensions included are as follows:

Control of corruption, which assesses the extent to which public power is exercised for private gain, encompassing both petty and grand corruption as well as the “capture” of the state by elites or private interests; government effectiveness, reflecting perceptions of the quality of public services, the competence and political independence of the civil service, the quality of policy formulation and implementation, and the credibility of the government’s commitment to such

policies; political stability and absence of violence/terrorism, measuring the likelihood of political instability and politically motivated violence, including terrorism; regulatory quality, capturing the government’s ability to formulate and implement policies and regulations that facilitate private sector development; rule of law, gauging confidence in and adherence to societal rules, including contract enforcement, property rights, police and judicial quality, and the prevalence of crime and violence; and voice and accountability, reflecting the extent of citizens’ participation in selecting their government, freedom of expression and association, and media freedom.

The second category concerns inequality. For the analysis of parenting styles, inequality is measured using the ratio of average income in the top decile (decile 10) to that in the bottom decile (decile 1). For child discipline analysis, the income share held by the top 10% of the population is used, depending on data availability across countries and years. Additionally, educational intergenerational persistence is included as a structural dimension of inequality. These inequality indicators are sourced from CEDLAS (2024), the World Bank’s Poverty and Inequality Platform (Bank, 2024), and Neidhöfer et al. (2018), respectively.

All governance and inequality indicators are standardized to facilitate interpretation and integrated at the country-year level for use in the empirical analyses.

4.4 Analytical Strategy

This study undertakes a descriptive analysis to investigate the relationships between parenting styles (PS), child discipline (CD), and economic development indicators, drawing on the theoretical and empirical frameworks of Doepke and Zilibotti (2017) and Pesando et al. (2024). Initially, a graphical exploration is conducted to visually assess correlations between parenting and discipline categories and macro-level indicators of inequality, social mobility, and institutional quality. This approach helps to establish broad patterns and potential linkages across countries in Latin America.

Following this descriptive overview, multinomial logistic regression models are employed to quantify the relative likelihood of different parenting style categories, with the authoritarian style serving as the reference group. These regressions control for individual respondent characteristics (such as age, education, and socioeconomic status) as well as country-level fixed effects to account for unobserved heterogeneity. This method allows for an examination of how structural factors relate to shifts in parenting approaches within and across countries. Standard errors are clustered at the country level to account for intra-country correlation. Given the cross-sectional nature

of the data and the potential for omitted variable bias, the estimates should be interpreted as descriptive associations rather than causal effects. Nonetheless, the patterns offer valuable insight into how structural conditions are reflected in parenting behavior.

In line with common practice in cross-country development research, the analyses rely on unweighted statistics. This choice avoids the disproportionate influence of highly populated countries on the results, thereby ensuring that patterns identified are not dominated by a few large nations but instead reflect broader regional tendencies. Consequently, the focus remains on uncovering overarching patterns of parenting and discipline in relation to institutional and economic conditions throughout Latin America.

The theoretical foundation provided by Doepke and Zilibotti (2017) frames parenting styles as strategic adaptations shaped by parental altruism and paternalism in intergenerational preference transmission. Their model highlights the sensitivity of parental investment decisions to economic incentives and social environments, which motivates the investigation of how macro-structural factors influence parenting behaviors empirically in the region in this study.

5 Parenting and Discipline in Latin America: Stylized Facts

This section presents a descriptive overview of parenting styles and child discipline practices across Latin America, drawing on harmonized survey data from the World Values Survey and Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys. By examining cross-country distributions and temporal trends, the section highlights regional variation and evolving patterns in how families raise and discipline children. These stylized facts provide essential context for understanding the social and institutional factors shaping parenting behaviors and set the foundation for the subsequent empirical analysis.

Table 3 presents the average distribution of parenting styles by country over all surveyed years, revealing substantial variation across the region. Countries such as Brazil, Chile, Mexico, and Peru show a pronounced dominance of authoritarian parenting styles, each with over 55% of respondents aligning with this approach. Uruguay, while also having authoritarianism as the majority style, displays a notably lower share at approximately 44%, indicating a comparatively greater acceptance of alternative parenting norms. Argentina presents a more balanced distribution, with authoritarian parenting at 40%, and narrower gaps between the different styles compared to other countries. The difference between the most and least prevalent parenting

styles within countries varies significantly: Peru and Brazil exhibit disparities approaching 50 percentage points, while Argentina's distribution is more even, with differences below 20 points.

Figure 2 illustrates the temporal dynamics of parenting styles over the last three decades. The permissive style traces a U-shaped curve, declining from about 24% in the early 1990s to 17% by the mid-2000s, maintaining that level until 2010, and then rising again to 21% by 2022. This may reflect cycles of optimism and disillusionment with societal progress. The decline from the 1990s to mid-2000s could be linked to rising concerns over insecurity and job instability, while the rebound in later years may coincide with increasing political participation and expanded access to education, which could renew emphasis on children's autonomy. The authoritative style steadily declines from roughly 27% at the start of the 1990s to 20% in the early 2000s, followed by a resurgence to 28% in the recent decade. Conversely, the authoritarian style, the most prevalent across all years, shows a sustained increase of about 10 percentage points from 49% in the early 1990s to a peak of 61% by mid-2010s, before declining back to approximately 50% in the following years. These trends may reflect broader institutional and social shifts in the region, such as changing economic conditions, evolving governance quality, and the expansion of social policies, which influence parental expectations and disciplinary practices, particularly since permissive and authoritative style behave like mirroring the authoritarian.

Table 4 reports average child discipline categories by country. Physical discipline is the most prevalent method in all countries except Uruguay, where non-violent approaches are comparatively higher. Psychological discipline consistently ranks third in prevalence across the region, with Jamaica, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago as exceptions where it is more common than non-violent methods. This distribution suggests that coercive disciplinary methods remain entrenched in Latin American parenting culture, although some countries show evidence of shifting toward less physically punitive practices.

Figure 3 depicts the evolution of child discipline categories over time. Non-violent discipline increased notably between 2005 and the mid-2010s before experiencing a decline towards 2020. Psychological discipline remains relatively stable throughout the period, fluctuating around 15%. Physical discipline follows a U-shaped pattern, starting at 73% in 2005, declining to 55% by mid-2010s, then rising slightly to 58% by 2020. These patterns mirror the trends observed in parenting styles and may be influenced by broader structural factors such as institutional reforms, public awareness campaigns, and shifts in social norms.

Together, these stylized facts underscore a complex interplay between enduring authoritar-

ian tendencies and emerging shifts towards more permissive and non-violent approaches. The data reveal important heterogeneity across countries and time, suggesting that parenting and discipline in Latin America are responsive to both cultural traditions and changing institutional landscapes.

Table 3: Parenting style categories distribution by country

Country	Authoritarian	Authoritative	Permissive
Argentina	36.7%	43.6%	19.7%
Brazil	55.4%	35.2%	9.4%
Chile	57.1%	16.1%	26.8%
Colombia	59.9%	11.7%	28.4%
Dominican Rep.	57.2%	30.5%	12.3%
Ecuador	66.9%	18.9%	14.2%
Guatemala	60.7%	22.5%	16.8%
Mexico	61.2%	19.0%	19.8%
Peru	59.8%	27.8%	12.4%
Puerto Rico	58.2%	25.4%	16.4%
Trinidad and Tobago	75.0%	19.9%	5.1%
Uruguay	42.3%	17.0%	40.7%
Total	56.0%	24.5%	19.5%

Table 4: Child discipline categories distribution by country

Country	Non-violent	Psychological	Physical
Argentina	27.8%	21.4%	50.8%
Belize	23.9%	12.9%	63.1%
Costa Rica	42.2%	10.6%	47.3%
Dominican rep.	22.1%	19.9%	58.0%
El Salvador	35.8%	10.3%	53.9%
Guyana	16.2%	14.7%	69.2%
Jamaica	8.2%	11.3%	80.5%
Mexico	29.8%	16.2%	54.0%
Panama	42.2%	14.9%	42.9%
Paraguay	37.5%	10.6%	51.9%
Suriname	8.1%	20.7%	71.2%
Trinidad and Tobago	15.3%	18.6%	66.0%
Uruguay	38.9%	26.7%	34.4%
Total	25.3%	17.0%	57.7%

Figure 2: Evolution parenting styles

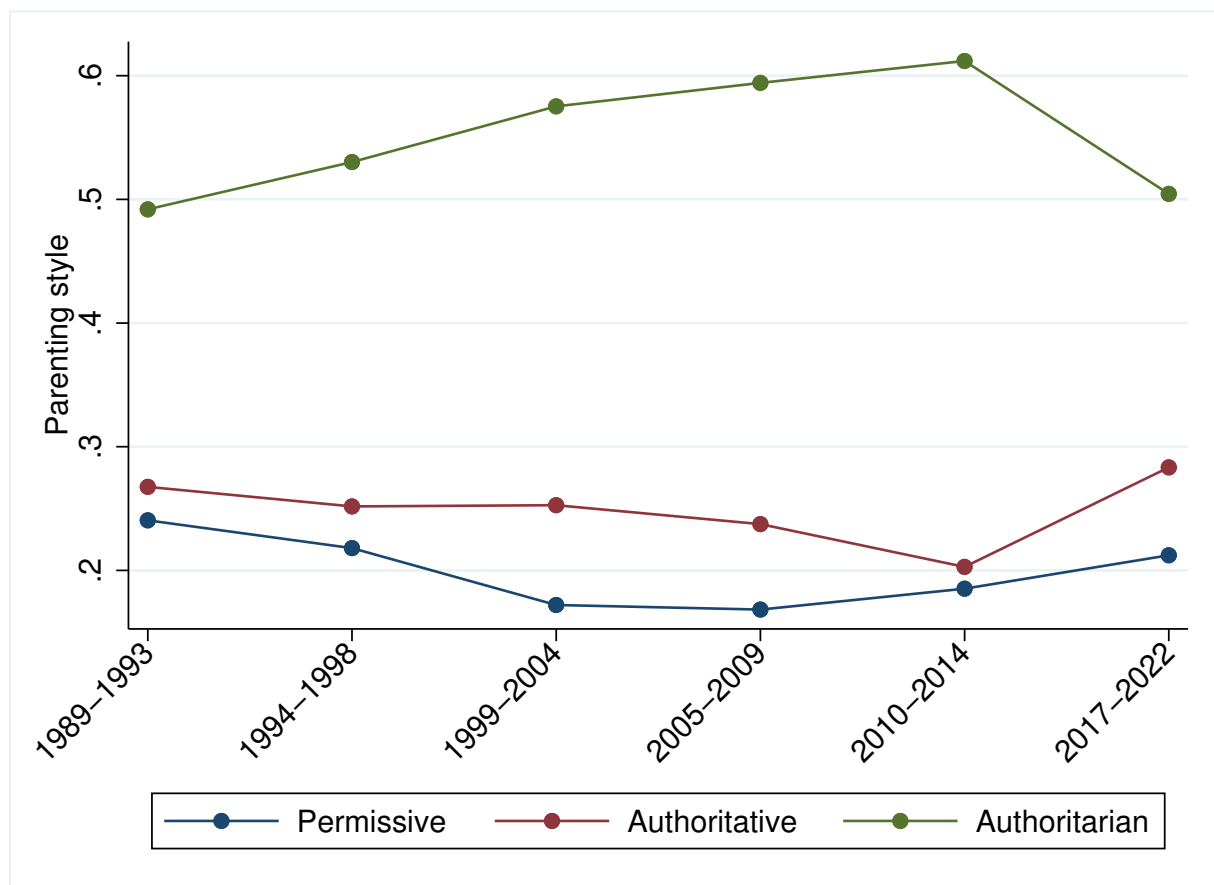
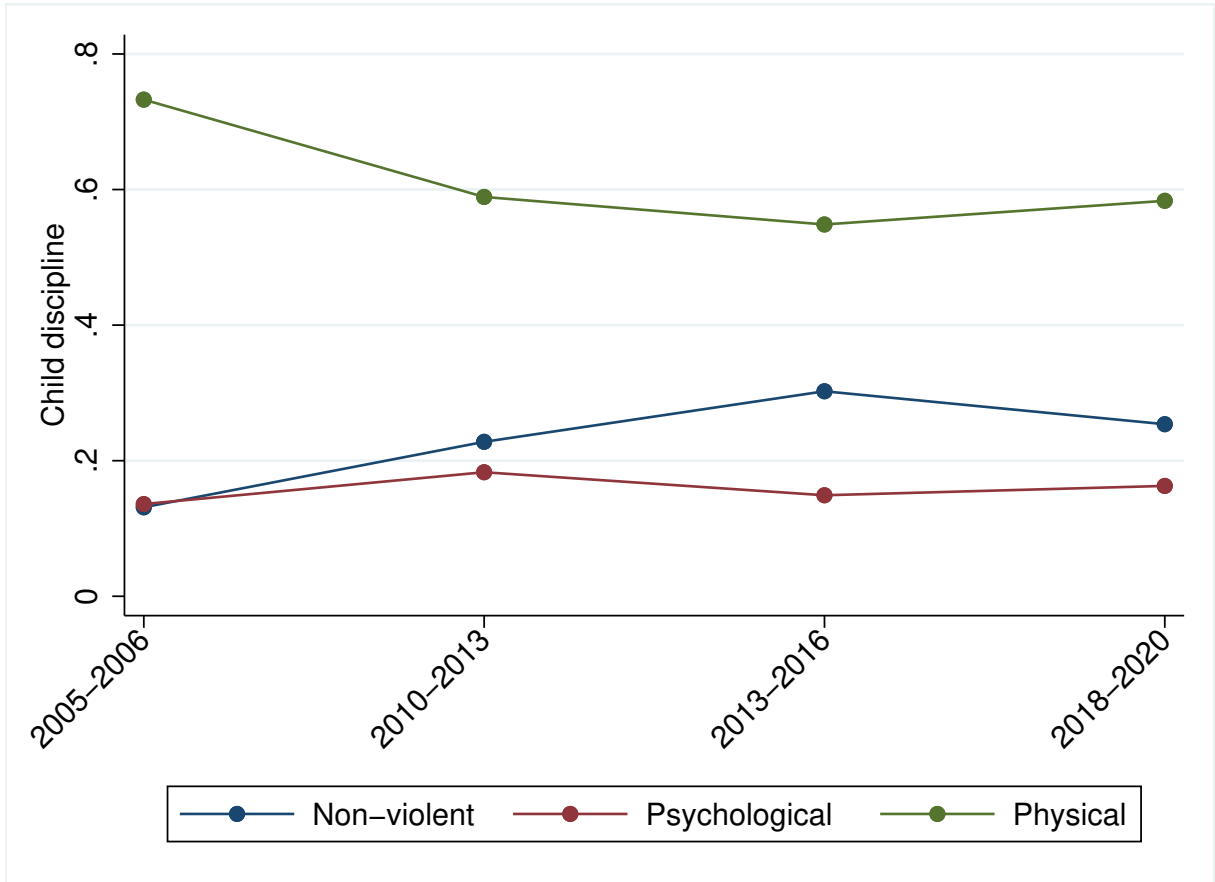


Figure 3: Evolution child discipline



6 Empirical Associations Between Parenting and Structural Factors

This section explores the relationships between parenting styles (PS), child discipline (CD), and structural economic and institutional variables using predicted probabilities and multinomial logistic regressions. The results are visualized in four panels: Figures 4 and 5 present inequality measures for WVS and MICS respectively, while Figures 6 and 7 show governance quality indicators for the same datasets. Regression results complement these visualizations in Tables 5, 6, 7, and 8.

Starting with inequality, the results show that higher income inequality, measured by the decile 10 to decile 1 income ratio (Figure 4a), and greater educational persistence (Figure 4b) are associated with a significant increase in authoritarian parenting and a decline in permissive parenting, while authoritative parenting exhibits little variation. This pattern suggests that

in more unequal contexts, parents may prefer stricter, more controlling strategies, consistent with the need to navigate environments where social mobility is limited and children’s futures heavily depend on parental guidance (Doepke and Zilibotti, 2017). Importantly, the little systematic variation across inequality indicators of authoritarian style, suggests that this style may be rooted in more stable cultural or institutional legacies. Its persistence across contexts contrasts with the more flexible patterns seen in permissive or authoritative parenting. While both income inequality and intergenerational persistence are negatively associated with permissive and authoritative parenting, the effects are more pronounced for persistence. This suggests that perceived immobility, rather than inequality per se, may be more salient in shaping parental strategies.

For child discipline (Figures 5a and 5b), higher inequality corresponds to increases in physical discipline and non-violent discipline, with psychological discipline remaining relatively stable. This supports the interpretation that social stress and limited institutional protections in unequal settings reinforce, in some cases, coercive disciplinary methods.

Turning to governance quality, several indicators display meaningful associations with parenting styles. Improvements in control of corruption (Figure 6a), government effectiveness (Figure 6b), and regulatory quality (Figure 6d) relate to increases in permissive and authoritative parenting and decreases in authoritarian parenting. Political stability (Figure 6c) and voice and accountability (Figure 6f) also positively correlate with permissive parenting but show weaker effects on authoritative styles. Rule of law (Figure 6e) shows more modest associations. These findings indicate that better governance fosters parenting approaches that emphasize child autonomy and reduce reliance on strict control. The less consistent association between authoritative parenting and governance indicators may reflect the dual role of this style, which combines control with autonomy. In institutional environments where returns to effort are moderate or ambiguous, parents may adopt a flexible approach, mixing encouragement with supervision. This ambivalence is in line with the theoretical framework proposed by Doepke and Zilibotti (2017), where authoritative parenting arises when children’s future outcomes depend partly on their own effort but are also subject to risks outside parental control.

For child discipline (Figures 7a through 7f), governance indicators generally associate with declines in physical discipline and increases in non-violent disciplinary practices, though the relationships with psychological discipline are more complex and vary by governance dimension. For example, higher government effectiveness and regulatory quality are linked to increased

non-violent discipline and decreased physical discipline, while control of corruption and political stability show mixed patterns. These variations suggest that governance shapes disciplinary strategies in multifaceted ways, reflecting differing cultural and institutional influences across countries. While parenting styles reflect broad intergenerational strategies, discipline tactics are more reactive and immediate. The differentiated impact of institutional quality on discipline, especially the contrast between non-violent and physical strategies, may stem from the role institutions play in reducing perceived external threats. Stronger governance may reduce the need for coercive control by enhancing predictability and perceived fairness in the broader environment.

Revisiting the descriptive trends previously discussed (see Table 3 and Figure 2), countries like Brazil, Chile, Mexico, and Peru have persistently high authoritarian parenting shares, consistent with their historically high inequality and institutional challenges (Gasparini and Cruces, 2021; Cesar, 2024). In contrast, Uruguay and Argentina show more permissive and authoritative parenting, reflecting stronger institutions and social protections (Leites et al., 2022; Acemoglu et al., 2001). The U-shaped trend in permissive parenting corresponds with economic and policy shifts, such as the expansion of conditional cash transfers in the 2000s, which may reduce the perceived need for strict parenting (Molina Millán et al., 2020).

Child discipline patterns align with cultural norms and institutional contexts (Table 4 and Figure 3), where physical discipline remains common but non-violent methods have increased during policy emphasis on positive parenting (Hallers-Haalboom, 2015). Notably, Caribbean countries display distinct disciplinary profiles, highlighting regional diversity.

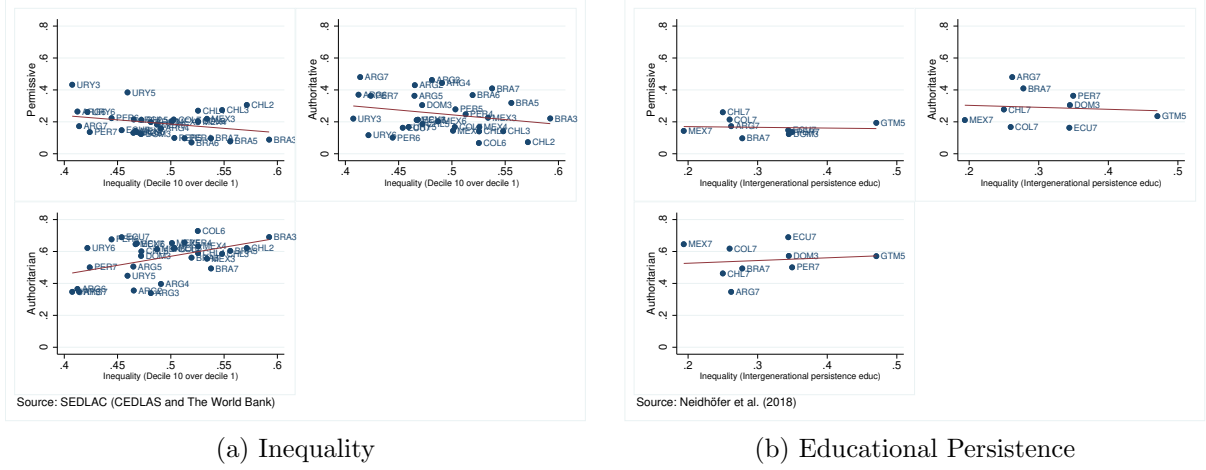
Together, these results reinforce theoretical expectations that parenting and disciplinary choices are adaptive responses to structural economic and institutional constraints (Doepke and Zilibotti, 2017). In contexts marked by inequality and weaker governance, intensive and coercive parenting prevail, while improvements in institutions and reductions in inequality support parenting styles that promote autonomy and well-being.

This empirical evidence underscores the critical role of macro-level structural factors in shaping family behaviors across Latin America, emphasizing the importance of governance reforms and social policies for positive child development trajectories.

These findings resonate with Latin America’s institutional history, where weak state capacity and persistent inequality have shaped household responses to uncertainty. As noted by Angeles and Elizalde (2017), colonial institutional arrangements continue to influence contemporary gov-

ernance structures. Likewise, Gasparini and Cruces (2021) emphasize how inequality dynamics interact with public provision gaps, reinforcing the family's role as a compensatory agent.

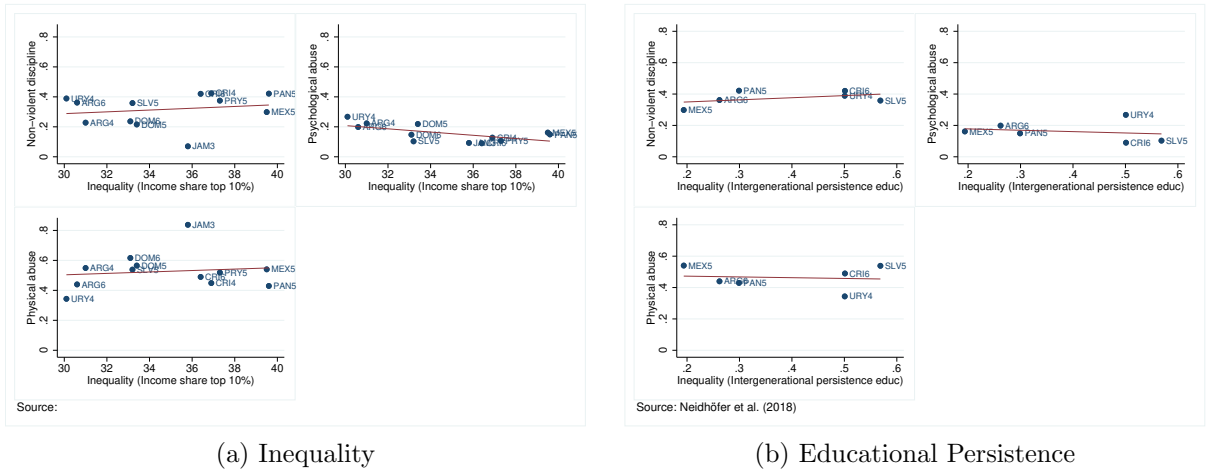
Figure 4: Inequality Indicators and Parenting Styles (WVS)



(a) Inequality

(b) Educational Persistence

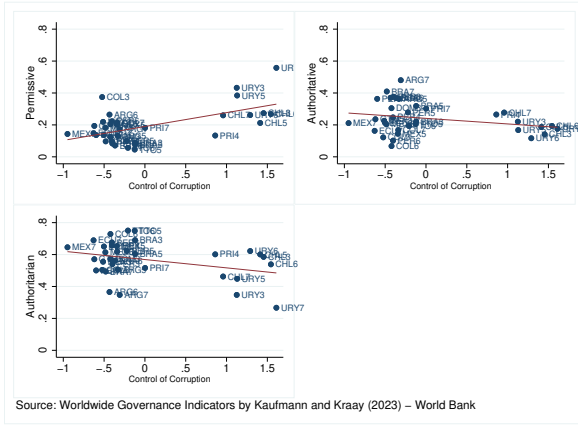
Figure 5: Inequality Indicators and Child Discipline (MICS)



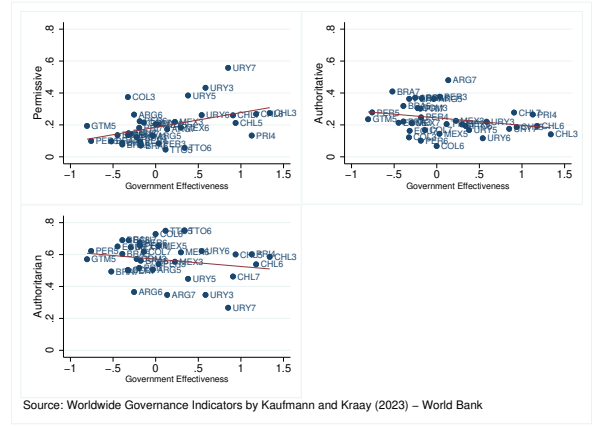
(a) Inequality

(b) Educational Persistence

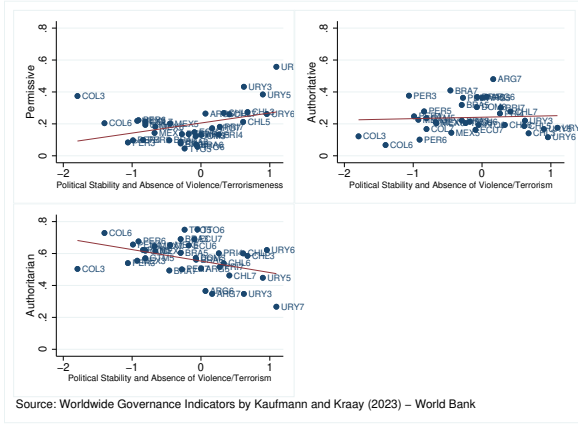
Figure 6: Governance Quality Indicators and Parenting Styles (WVS)



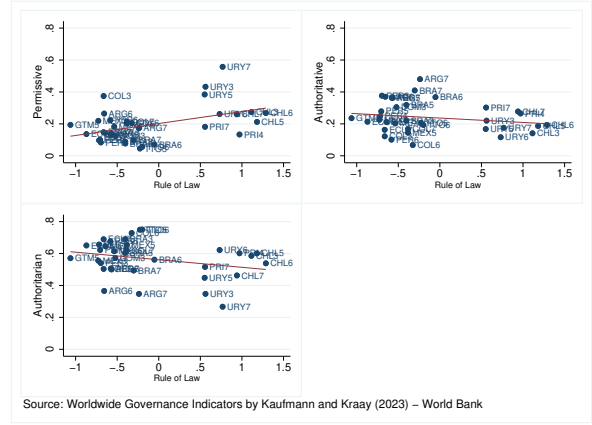
(a) Control of Corruption



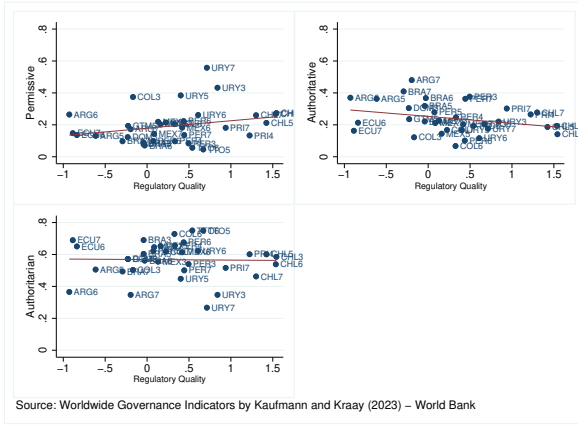
(b) Government Effectiveness



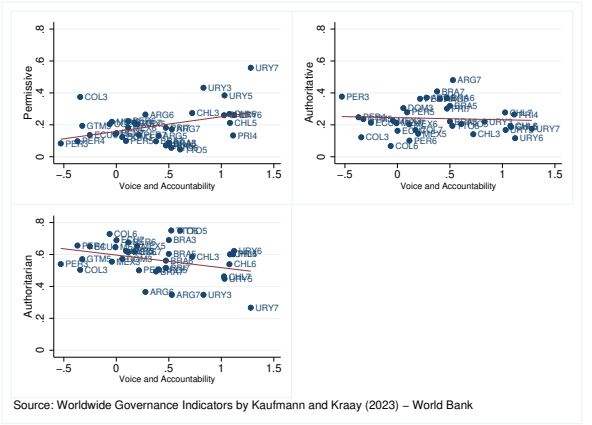
(c) Political Stability



(d) Regulatory Quality



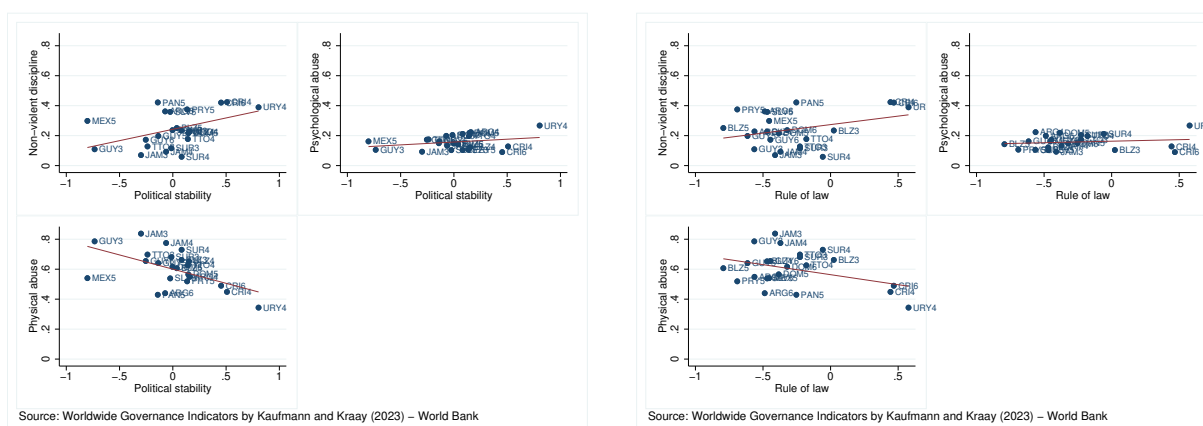
(e) Rule of Law



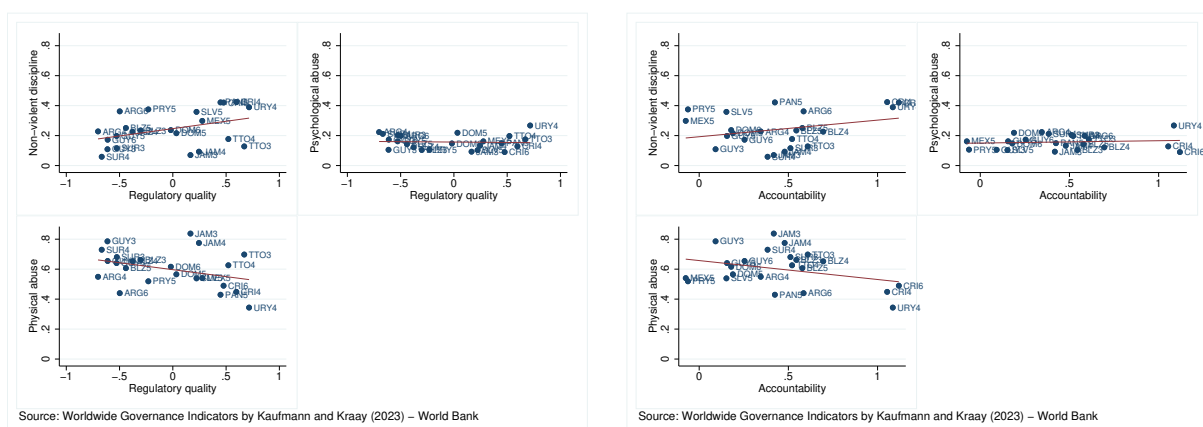
(f) Voice and Accountability

[illegible]

(b) Government Effectiveness



(d) Regulatory Quality



(f) Voice and Accountability

Table 5: Governance on parenting styles

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Parenting Style	Control of corruption	Government effectiveness	Political stability	Rule of law	Regulatory quality	Accountability
Authoritative	1.314* (0.715)	0.817* (0.462)	0.072 (0.559)	0.046 (1.142)	0.645** (0.251)	0.378 (0.807)
Permissive	0.540 (0.361)	0.444 (0.299)	0.259* (0.155)	-0.248 (0.383)	-0.767*** (0.236)	1.806*** (0.350)
N	26,762	26,762	26,762	26,762	26,762	26,762

Dependent variables are authoritative and permissive parenting style on the rows, authoritarian is the reference category. Independent variables are Governance indicators on the columns. Multinomial logistic models includes controls for gender, age, age squared, logarithm of GDP per capita (based on expenditure-side real GDP at chained PPPs, from Penn World Table 9.1). Wave and country fixed effects. Standard error are cluster at country-wave level. *, **, *** indicate statistical significance at the 10%, 5% and 1% level, respectively.

Table 6: Inequality on parenting styles

	(1)	(2)
Parenting Style	Inequality (Decile 10 over decile 1)	Intergenerational educ. persistence
Authoritative	-0.013* (0.007)	-26.563*** (0.702)
Permissive	-0.004 (0.007)	-65.851*** (0.952)
N	30,602	7,402

Dependent variables are authoritative and permissive parenting style on the rows, authoritarian is the reference category. Independent variables are inequality indicators on the columns. Multinomial logistic models includes controls for gender, age, age squared, logarithm of GDP per capita (based on expenditure-side real GDP at chained PPPs, from Penn World Table 9.1). Wave and country fixed effects. Standard error are cluster at country-wave level. *, **, *** indicate statistical significance at the 10%, 5% and 1% level, respectively.

Table 7: Governance on children discipline

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Child Discipline	Control of corruption	Government effectiveness	Political stability	Rule of law	Regulatory quality	Accountability
Non-violent	-0.242*** (0.009)	0.651*** (0.023)	-0.876*** (0.032)	-0.681*** (0.025)	2.605*** (0.094)	-2.870*** (0.103)
Psychological	0.917*** (0.010)	-2.464*** (0.026)	3.314*** (0.035)	2.577*** (0.027)	-9.855*** (0.105)	10.860*** (0.115)
N	74,554	74,554	74,554	74,554	74,554	74,554

Dependent variables are non-violent and psychological discipline on the rows, physical is the reference category. Independent variables are Governance indicators on the columns. Multinomial logistic models includes controls for gender, age, age squared, income logarithm of GDP per capita (based on expenditure-side real GDP at chained PPPs, from Penn World Table 9.1). Wave and country fixed effects. Standard error are cluster at country-wave level. *, **, *** indicate statistical significance at the 10%, 5% and 1% level, respectively.

Table 8: Inequality on children discipline

	(1)	(2)
Child Discipline	Inequality (Income share top 10%)	Intergenerational educ. persistence
Non-violent	-0.017*** (0.001)	0.917*** (0.054)
Psychological	-0.079*** (0.001)	3.872*** (0.186)
N	58,016	24,619

Dependent variables are non-violent and psychological discipline on the rows, physical is the reference category. Independent variables are inequality indicators on the columns. Multinomial logistic models includes controls for gender, age, age squared, income logarithm of GDP per capita (based on expenditure-side real GDP at chained PPPs, from Penn World Table 9.1). Wave and country fixed effects. Standard error are cluster at country-wave level. *, **, *** indicate statistical significance at the 10%, 5% and 1% level, respectively.

7 Conclusion

This chapter provides comprehensive evidence that parenting styles and child disciplinary practices in Latin America are deeply influenced by structural economic inequality and institutional quality. The analyses reveal that higher inequality tends to reinforce authoritarian parenting and physical discipline, reflecting adaptations to environments marked by uncertainty and limited social mobility. Conversely, stronger governance and better institutional frameworks encourage parenting approaches that promote child autonomy and greater use of non-coercive disciplinary methods.

The regional heterogeneity observed, where countries like Uruguay and Argentina exhibit more permissive and authoritative parenting compared to Brazil, Chile, Mexico, and Peru, underscores the enduring impact of institutional legacies and social policy environments on family behaviors. The documented U-shaped trend in permissive parenting aligns with periods of economic instability followed by expansions in social protections, highlighting the dynamic responsiveness of parenting to broader socio-economic conditions.

These findings support the theoretical perspective that parenting strategies are strategic responses to the perceived costs and benefits within specific social contexts (Doepke and Zilibotti, 2017). They also emphasize the vital role of institutional reforms and targeted social policies, such as conditional cash transfers, in shaping family environments conducive to positive child development.

In sum, improving institutional quality and reducing economic inequality emerge as key levers for fostering parenting and disciplinary practices that better support children's well-being and long-term prospects in Latin America. This underscores the importance of holistic policy approaches that address both macro-structural factors and family-level processes to promote equitable human development across the region.

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