

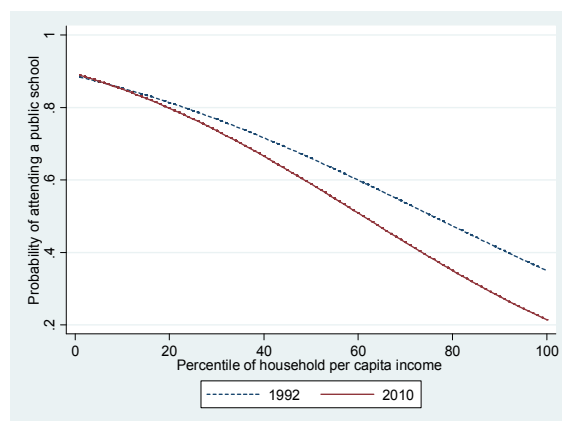
School segregation in Argentina

For decades, public school was considered an essential mainstay for social cohesion and equality of opportunity in Argentina. It was one of the few places where people from different social strata had daily and direct contact and received a similar service. There is a widespread perception that this cohesive role of public education has weakened over time, given the increasing migration of the less economically disadvantaged group from public to private schools. This selective migration is shaping the phenomenon of school segregation by which children from different socioeconomic levels are no longer “mixed” during their education, since they attend different types of institutions.

Despite of being a widely recognized phenomenon, with constant allusions in public debate, there are not studies that provide a systematic measurement of school segregation in Argentina. In an effort to advance in this direction, Gasparini, Jaume, Serio and Vazquez (2011)¹ provide empirical evidence to measure this topic by making use of all major household surveys that have been implemented in the country (Encuesta Permanente de Hogares, Encuesta de Condiciones de Vida and Encuesta Nacional de Gastos de los Hogares). The authors define school segregation as the unequal distribution of students from different socioeconomic levels between public and private schools (with the subsequent loss of interaction between students from different social strata), and study the trend of this phenomenon in Argentina since the early 1990s.

The trend of the probability of attending a public school is an important factor when studying school segregation in Argentina. Figure 1 shows the relationship between the percentile of household per capita income and this probability, in Greater Buenos Aires for 1992 and 2010. In both years, the higher the purchasing power of the family, the less likely an individual is to attend a public school. In turn, between 1992 and 2010 this probability has remained relatively unchanged for the poorest 20 percent of the population, while it has substantially decreased for the rest, indicating the migration of middle and upper classes to private schools during the period analyzed.

Figure 1. Probability of attending a public school in GBA



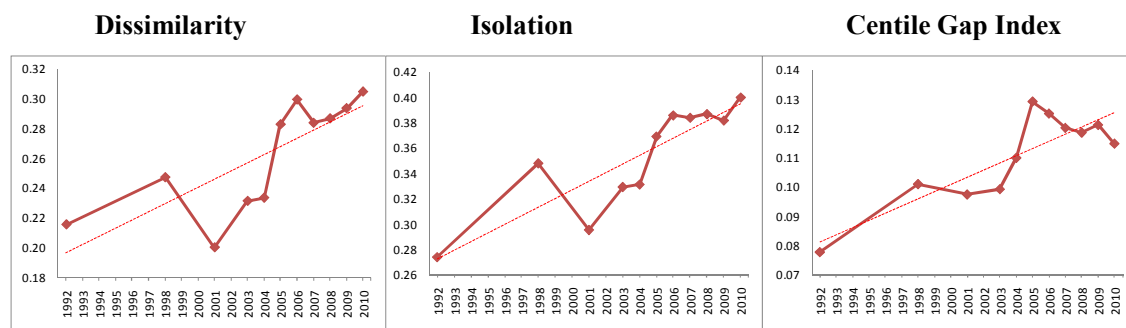
Source: This figure is based on one from Gasparini, Jaume, Serio and Vazquez (2011), with updated data from the EPH.

The indices developed in the literature to measure segregation are useful to quantify the levels and the evolution of this phenomenon. Figure 2 presents the Dissimilarity Index, the Isolation Index and the

¹ “La segregación escolar en argentina. Reconstruyendo la evidencia”, by Leonardo Gasparini, David Jaume, Monserrat Serio and Emmanuel Vazquez (2011), CEDLAS Working Paper Series – forthcoming.

Centile Gap Index² between 1992 and 2010 in Argentina. The illustration suggests an increase in the level of segregation during the 1990s, which was a period of significant reforms in the educational system, increasing inequality and growing in middle and upper classes' level of income, which could have resulted in an increasing migration of students from advantaged sectors to private schools. This growth was interrupted since 1998, possible due to the loss of purchasing power of families facing the economic recession.³ Since 2001, school segregation rose according to the three analyzed indicators. This latter period is the one which presents the greater increase in segregation between *poor* and *non-poor* students. Indeed, for the first time in the history of Argentina, student enrollment in public schools dropped, while it grew in private institutions. The growth of income, jointly with progressive deterioration of public education, may have played a key role in this process.

Figure 2. School segregation in Argentina



Source: Gasparini, Jaume, Serio and Vazquez (2011) based on microdata from the EPH and ECV.

Note: A linear trend is also incorporated in each panel.

Even though it is not possible to construct a series that is perfectly consistent over time, these estimates suggest that the degree of school segregation in Argentina has increased substantially since 1992. This result is interesting *per se*, but is also especially relevant given its potential negative consequences on educational and social outcomes. Increasing segregation happens in periods of rising inequality in Argentina, but it does not seem to be a pure reflection of the latter: school segregation has increased even in periods of stable or decreasing income inequality

² The first two indices require separating students into groups according to their socioeconomic level, so students are classified as *poor* and *non-poor* according to whether or not they belong to the first quintil of household per capita income distribution. The Dissimilarity Index can be interpreted as the proportion of *poor* students that would have to change their type of school so that they would be equally distributed between public and private schools as the *non-poor*. In the same way, the Isolation Index represents the probability that a *poor* student interacts with others of the same status in the type of school he attends. Finally, the Centile Gap Index uses information about students' income to assess the average percentilic difference between students that attend each type of school and the median percentile in each of them; the further away the percentiles interacting in each type of school are, the lower the index and the segregation..

³ It is possible that families that sent their children to private schools before the recession found it impossible to afford it in the midst of the crisis, and therefore decided to transfer them to public schools, reversing part of the aforementioned selective migration.