

Who marries foreign-born?

Understanding intermarriage from the native's perspective

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Abstract.-

Research on intermarriage has paid modest attention to the societal, structural and individual factors that make non-immigrant and majority groups to marry out of their group. In this paper we argue that this topic is relevant to understand intermarriage patterns in homogeneous societies whose ethnic/origin heterogeneity has increased dramatically in recent years due to international immigration. Based on the Spanish experience, first, we investigate if there is selectivity in the men and women that marry or cohabit with foreign-born compared to those that marry native-born or remain single; and, second, we examine natives' choices of international migrants by gender. Are women more selective than men with regard to the origin and social attributes of their partners? Do traditional gender differences in attitudes towards marriage and spouse selection reinforce when marrying an international migrant? By lack of appropriate data, our analysis has to rely on various statistical sources and methods: Labor Force Surveys, marriage records and the 2007 National Immigrant Survey.

Motivation.-

Most research on intermarriage has focused on the societal, structural and individual factors that make immigrant populations or ethnic minorities to marry out of their group. Scholars have adduced numerous reasons to investigate intermarriage patterns either from a macro or micro level perspective. Despite criticisms, intermarriage rates have been repeatedly considered as a key indicator of integration, assimilation and social distance between groups. Often, low rates of intermarriage are considered as a weak sign of assimilation and strong social closeness. At the micro level, the fact that mixed marriages represent the union of two persons with different cultural background has attracted researchers' interest in the marital quality and duration of such couples. In the age of globalization and growth of transnationalism, mixed marriages are often seen as agents of cultural hybridation, in which partners with different tastes, views, and values must agree upon a wide range of issues concerning their life in common.

In most of the above mentioned topics, however, minority groups have captured most of the attention, while the societal, structural and individual factors that make non-immigrant and majority groups to marry out of their group have gone unnoticed. While this topic may not be relevant in multiethnic societies with long tradition in immigration, we argue that it retains higher relevance in more homogeneous societies whose ethnic/origin heterogeneity has increased dramatically in recent years due to international immigration. Many European countries fit into this pattern, and Spain is one them. From 1998 to 2008, the foreign-born population in Spain grew by almost 5 million persons, from approximately 1 to 6 million according to population register data. Along with this growth, the number of mixed unions registered in the marriage records grew from 5.623 in 1998 to 35.486 in 2007, from 4,3% to 17,4% of the total number of marriages.

Research questions.-

Based on the Spanish experience, the main goal of this paper is twofold. First, we investigate if there is selectivity in the men and women that marry or cohabit with foreign-born. In this regard, we expect to answer the following questions: To what extent the pool of eligible partners in the marriage market accounts for most of the selectivity? Net of marriage market constraints, do natives that marry foreign-born share the same socio-demographic characteristics compared to those marrying with other natives? If differences exist, do they differ by sex?

Second, we examine natives' selection in partner choice and differences between men and women. Again, we explore whether natives' selection in partner choice is solely conditioned by the pool of available candidates or there are specific preferences for some origins. Do these preferences differ by gender? Are women more selective than men with regard to the origin and social attributes of their international migrant partners? Do traditional gender differences in attitudes towards marriage and spouse selection reinforce when marrying an international migrant?

To meet our aims, we will draw hypothesis from two main areas of theoretical development: intermarriage (i.e. social exchange theory) and partner search or decision making theories.

Data and methods.-

By lack of appropriate data, our analysis has to rely on various statistical sources and methods to address the research questions posed in the paper. We'll combine data from Labor Force Surveys, marriage records and the 2007 National Immigrant Survey.

The most recent data source on international migration is the 2007 National Immigrant Survey. Unfortunately, this survey does not include Spanish-born unless they are married with or live with and international migrant. However, even in these cases, the information we have for non-migrants is limited to a short range of basic demographic characteristics. Thus, the socio-demographic traits of the Spanish-born married to international migrants cannot be investigated using this survey. We will only use this dataset to examine the distribution by origin of the international migrants that are married to Spanish-born men and women.

We will rely on Labor Force Survey data to investigate if there is selectivity in the men and women that marry or cohabit with foreign-born compared to those who do not or remain single. Marriage records will provide additional insights to these comparisons. We will explore recent marriage records to analyze age at first marriage patterns between Spanish nationals marrying other Spanish nationals and Spanish national marrying foreign-nationals.

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