

Religious Intermarriage in Canada and Implications for Assimilation and Integration

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Introduction

This research examines the role of religion as social boundary. Religious intermarriage is a key indicator of assimilation and integration in multicultural societies, and the growing religious diversity in Canada provides a motivation for this study.

Religion as Social Boundary

The relative importance of religion in social life has waxed and waned throughout history. While modernization and secularization theories suggest a waning of the influence of religion on everyday life, as scientific knowledge and rational thought gained ascendance, events including the attacks of September 11, 2001 and ongoing wars in Iraq, Syria, and elsewhere present a powerful counter trend. Religion continues to be a key social boundary.

Another important demographic trend has contributed to the importance of religion as social boundary. Recent global migration trends have brought large numbers of immigrants of different religious backgrounds from the majority populations to many countries, including Canada.

While ethnocultural diversity has always been present in Canada, given its long history of immigration, recent immigration has expanded this diversity and accentuated the role of religious diversity. The growth of religious minorities in many societies has fuelled discussions about the role of religious social boundaries that may impede assimilation and integration.

The Canadian census is conducted every five years, and a question on religion is included every ten years in alternating censuses. This allows researchers to track religious trends in Canada (Bibby, 2000; Kalbach, 2011), unlike in the United States. While immigrants from Asia, Africa, Latin America, and other non-traditional sources (that is, other than Europe and North America) have increased religious diversity in Canada, most Canadians continue to report a Christian religious affiliation (including Catholic, Protestant, and Christian Orthodox).

There are two important specific trends, however. First, there is an increased percentage reporting no religious affiliation, which was less than 1 percent as recently as 1961, but had increased to 12 percent in 1991 (Bibby, 2000) and 17 percent in 2001 (Kalbach, 2011). Second, there have been smaller increases in the percentage reporting non-Christian religions, including Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam (Kalbach, 2011).

Endogamy (Inmarriage) and Exogamy (Intermarriage)

Many factors influence choice of marital partner, including subjective or personal preferences, third party interference, for example, parents, peers, and laws, and other structural constraints

including opportunities to meet potential partners of similar or different social groups (see Fong and Chan, 2011, for example, on the role of religion in residential patterns).

However, endogamy, or marriage within a social group, has long been the dominant pattern in most societies. Endogamy preserves and perpetuates social groups and protects social groups from erosion or even elimination.

Significance of Exogamy or Intermarriage

Social norms governing marriage play critical roles in preserving the status quo of various social groups in society. For example, marriage between people of the same race reflects and maintains rules about race and racial boundaries. When people marry outside of their social group, such exogamy or intermarriage can have positive or negative implications. On one hand, intermarriage signals the erosion of group boundaries and marital and social assimilation of various groups. As new families form across various social groups, greater social cohesion uniting multiple social groups is promoted. On the other hand, intermarriage could dilute useful social identities and groups. For some smaller groups, intermarriage may eventually lead to their disappearance as a social group.

Religious Exogamy or Intermarriage

As with other forms of intermarriage, religious exogamy challenges the conventional preference for endogamy. The pioneering work during the 1940s and 1950s of R.J. Kennedy on the “single or triple melting pot” in New Haven, Connecticut in the United States showed that while ethnic boundaries between various European-origin groups were eroding, as indicated by growing ethnic intermarriage, such intermarriages were largely confined to religiously similar groups (specifically, Protestants, Catholics, and Jews). Before the 1960s, about 20 percent of married couples in the U.S. were in religious intermarriages. More recent work on religious intermarriage indicates that religious boundaries against intermarriage have considerably weakened for Protestant, Catholics, and Jews in the United States (Rosenfeld, 2008). However, because the U.S. census and related surveys does not ask Americans for their religious affiliation, research on religious exogamy in U.S. census data has been constrained by data availability.

As indicated above, unlike the U.S. census, the Canadian census had collected information on religion every ten years. Although the 2011 long-form census would have included data on religion, it was replaced by a national household survey (see the section on data, below) which collected information on religion, permitting research on religious exogamy.

Research Objectives and Contributions

First, we describe the main patterns and forms of religious intermarriage in Canada. The unique availability of nationally representative data on religion allows us to provide up-to-date

information on the extent of religious intermarriage in Canada, and implications for the role of religion as social boundary in impeding assimilation and integration. Of particular interest is whether newer and smaller religious groups such as Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims are participating in religious intermarriage.

Second, we examine key factors that influence religious intermarriage, including race (or visible minority status), ethnic origin, immigrant generation, education, and gender. This analysis contributes new knowledge on the relative importance of several factors that have been shown to influence marriage and the assimilation of various groups, for example, is religion more important than race or immigrant generation or education?

Data

This study uses data from the 2011 National Household Survey (NHS) conducted by Statistics Canada. The NHS is a voluntary, self-administered survey. From the 2011 Census of Population dwelling list, the survey selected a random sample of 4.5 million dwellings, accounting for almost 30 percent of all private dwellings in Canada. The overall response rate for the NHS was 68.6 percent. This is similar to the response rate for other voluntary surveys conducted by Statistics Canada. The final responses are weighted so that the data from the sample accurately represent the NHS target population (Statistics Canada, 2013).

This study focuses on individuals aged 18 to 74 who are in a legal marriage or common-law union. Our partner-matched data contains about 1,517,700 couples. Our focal variable, religion, is classified into 10 broad groups: mainline Protestant; conservative Protestant; Catholic; Christian Orthodox; Jewish; Buddhist; Hindu; Sikh; Muslim; no religion. About 14,000 couples (less than 1 percent of all matched couples) in which either the male or female partner did not identify himself/herself with any of the ten groups are excluded from the study.

Other main variables include ethnicity, race, immigrant generational status, education, age, and marital status (legal marriage vs. common law).

Ethnicity includes the following broad groups: North American Aboriginal; Other North American (Canadian, provincial or local, and American); British; French; other European; Latin, Central and South American; Caribbean and African; West Central Asian and Middle Eastern origins; South Asian; East and Southeast Asian; and multiple origins.

Race is simply classified as whites versus non-white to reduce its overlapping with ethnicity.

Immigrant generational status includes 1st generation (immigrants who arrived aged 12 and older); 1.5 generation (immigrants who arrived at age 12 or younger); 2nd generation (Canadian-born to two immigrant parents); 2.5 generation (Canadian-born to one immigrant and one Canadian-born parents); and 3rd-and-higher generation (Canadian-born to two Canadian-born parents).

Education has five categories: less than high school graduation; high school; some postsecondary; bachelor's degree; and graduate degree.

Preliminary Descriptive Findings

Tables 1 and 2 show descriptive statistics of the study population.

From Table 1, we see that most report a Christian religion (40 percent Catholic, 27 percent mainline or conservative Protestant). However, almost one-quarter, 24 percent, report no religion.

Table 2 shows the mean age, percent female, percent university graduate, and percent visible minority by religion. Several religious groups have notably high percentages who are university graduates, including Jews (53 percent) and Christian Orthodox, Hindus, and Muslims (over 35 percent). Most Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims are also visible minorities.

Endogamy by Religion and Gender

Table 3 shows endogamy rates by gender and religion. The overall endogamy rate is about 80 percent, meaning that about 20 percent of the couples in our sample are in inter-religious unions.

Males who report Jewish, Muslim, or no religion are less endogamous than females from these religions, while Protestant (both mainline and conservative), Catholic, and Buddhist females are less endogamous than males from these religious backgrounds. There are no noticeable gender differences in endogamy among Orthodox Christians, Sikhs, and Hindus.

Religion of Wife by Religion of Husband

Table 4 shows religion of wife by religion of husband. The diagonal cells (in bold) indicate the percent of husbands in endogamous unions (that is, husband and wife have similar religion). Reading across rows shows the religion of wives who are married to husbands of a given religion.

The main findings show that: (i) Mainline Protestant, Orthodox Christian, Jewish, and no religion husbands have higher than average exogamy rates (that is, the diagonal cells for these husbands are lower than 80 percent). Mainline Protestant husbands are most likely to intermarry, with 30 percent in inter-religious unions, followed by Orthodox Christian husbands (27 percent), no religion husbands (26 percent), and Jewish husbands (22 percent). (ii) Exogamous couples are mostly composed of a Protestant husband with a Catholic wife, or an Orthodox Christian husband with a Catholic wife, or a Jewish husband with a Catholic or other Christian (mainline or conservative Protestant) wife. (iii) Exogamous husbands with no religious affiliation usually have wives who report either Protestant or Catholic affiliation. (iv) Over 90 percent of Hindu (92 percent) and Sikh (97 percent) husbands are endogamous while the percent of Buddhist husbands with Buddhist wives is quite close to the average, at 82 percent.

Religion of Husband by Religion of Wife

Table 5 shows religion of husband by religion of wife. The diagonal cells (in bold) indicate the percent of wives in endogamous unions (that is, wife and husband have similar religion). Reading down each column shows the religion of husbands who are married to wives of a given religion.

The main findings include: (i) Mainline Protestant wives have the lowest percent in endogamous unions (66 percent), followed by Buddhist wives (71 percent), Orthodox Christian wives (73 percent), and Conservative Protestant wives (76 percent). (ii) The overwhelming majority of Sikh (97 percent), Muslim (95 percent), and Hindu (93 percent) wives are married to husbands of similar religion. (iii) Unlike husbands, wives without a religious affiliation have relatively high endogamy percent (over 86 percent, compared with 74 percent for husbands without a religion). (iv) Exogamous wives are mostly Protestant with a Catholic or no religion husband, Orthodox Christian with a Catholic or Protestant or no religion husband, or Buddhist with a no religion or Catholic or Protestant husband.

Further Analyses

Descriptive findings described above indicate several important avenues to be further explored in multivariate analyses. In order to examine factors that influence inter-religious unions, we rely on two multivariate statistical methods.

First, we use log-linear models, which have been regularly employed for the analysis of intermarriage. We classify each of the variables in categories in order to analyze the cross-classification of religion, ethnic origin, immigrant generation status, and education for female and male partners, controlling for population composition.

We estimate log-linear models that fit the associations between partners' characteristics independent of the marginal distributions of partners' characteristics. We fit a baseline model that includes only the religious affiliation of each partner. We sequentially add variables on additional characteristics, using forward-selection log linear models, to examine the marginal effects of these variables. We assess the goodness of fit of the models by comparing the observed cell frequencies to those estimated by the model using the likelihood-ratio statistics, L^2 . The differences in L^2 values between models offer a measure of statistical significance of the added variables. Odds ratios for our final models indicate the inter-religious union patterns of males and females across levels of the other variables.

Second, we introduce a new model, a two-level nested logit. A nested logit model is a slightly more advanced discrete choice model than the commonly used models, conditional or multinomial logit (Train, 2007). The nested logit model is appropriate when the choice set can be partitioned into subsets, known as nests, in such a way that two properties hold: (1) For any two alternatives in the same nest, the ratio of probabilities is independent of the attributes of all

other alternatives in the nest and (2) For any two alternatives in different nests, the ratio of probabilities can depend on the attributes of other alternatives in the two nests. The property that the relative probabilities of alternatives are independent of the characteristics of all other alternative is known as the independence of irrelevant alternatives (IIA). IIA implies that the introduction of any alternative will have the same proportional effect on the probability of every other alternative. IIA is an assumption made in commonly used logit models. For the nested logit, we assume that IIA holds for property (1) but not for property (2) above. If the probabilities of two or more alternatives rise by a similar proportion, then they can be placed in the same nest because IIA holds between them.

The statistical logic of a two-level nested logit model has particular appeal for the analysis of inter-religious unions because this model seems appropriate when we think about a decision process that has two sequential levels to the choice problem. We model the first level as the decision of the male or female to either have an endogamous or exogamous partner. In this situation, the decision primarily depends on their individual characteristics.

If there is a decision to seek an exogamous partner, the second level is the decision about the particular partner. In the second level, the decision principally depends upon the characteristics of all possible partners. Note that each level of the nested logit model can take population composition into account. In the first level, the model can include the proportion of the individual's religious affiliation. In the second level, the model can include the proportion of each religion for possible partners. Although nested logit models have not been used before for the analysis of intermarriage, they have particular appeal and are examined in this paper for their potential usefulness.

Discussion and Conclusion

We discuss the main findings and implications for the broader question of religious diversity in Canada and assimilation/integration of religious minorities into Canadian society. We also discuss the significance of the main findings for thinking about the role of religion in multicultural societies with growing immigrant communities from different religious backgrounds.

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Table 1. Major Religious Groups, Canada, 2011^a

Religious Group	Number	Percent of Total	Percent of Persons in Opposite Sex Unions
Total	23,890,261	100.0	61.2
Mainline Protestant	3,396,007	14.2	67.0
Conservative Protestant	2,964,179	12.4	62.4
Catholic	9,491,650	39.7	61.7
Christian Orthodox	405,190	1.7	64.9
Buddhist	289,300	1.2	58.4
Hindu	357,909	1.5	68.0
Jewish	230,011	1.0	61.8
Muslim	695,932	2.9	63.1
Sikh	316,203	1.3	70.6
No religion	5,743,880	24.0	54.9

^a Population aged 18 to 74 years. Does not include 0.7 percent of the population who report various other small religious affiliations.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Major Religious Groups, Canada, 2011^a

Religious Group	Mean Age	Percent Female	Percent University Degree	Percent Visible Minority
Total	44.4	50.9	22.9	18.3
Mainline Protestant	49.7	54.3	21.3	3.0
Conservative Protestant	44.2	53.7	20.4	23.1
Catholic	45.6	52.1	19.7	10.6
Christian Orthodox	44.6	51.2	36.2	9.6
Buddhist	44.0	54.7	25.7	89.2
Hindu	41.3	50.1	37.9	99.4
Jewish	45.9	51.2	52.9	1.9
Muslim	38.9	48.6	38.4	87.8
Sikh	41.5	50.6	25.2	99.7
No religion	40.4	45.6	25.0	17.5

^a Population aged 18 to 74 years. Does not include 0.7 percent of the population who report various other small religious affiliations.

Table 3. Percent in Endogamous Religious Unions by Gender, Canada, 2011

Religious Group	Endogamous Males	Endogamous Females
All Groups	79.2	79.2
Mainline Protestant	70.2	65.5
Conservative Protestant	80.9	75.7
Catholic	83.8	80.6
Christian Orthodox	73.0	72.6
Jewish	77.7	79.1
Buddhist	81.8	71.3
Hindu	92.1	92.6
Sikh	97.0	97.0
Muslim	91.9	95.0
No Religion	73.5	86.4

Table 4. Religion of Female Partner by Religion of Male Partner, Canada, 2011

Religion of Husband	Religion of Wife										Total	Number
	Mainline Protestant	Conservative Protestant	Catholic	Christian Orthodox	Jewish	Buddhist	Hindu	Sikh	Muslim	No Religion		
Mainline Protestant	70.2	3.9	21.1	0.5	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.0	0.1	3.7	100.0	236,056
Conservative Protestant	5.2	80.9	9.7	0.3	0.2	0.3	0.1	0.0	0.2	3.1	100.0	170,575
Catholic	8.2	2.9	83.8	0.6	0.2	0.3	0.1	0.0	0.1	3.9	100.0	599,224
Christian Orthodox	5.5	2.1	15.8	73.0	0.4	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.5	2.6	100.0	25,961
Jewish	4.6	3.0	7.9	1.4	77.7	0.4	0.1	0.0	0.1	4.8	100.0	14,799
Buddhist	1.9	2.3	6.8	0.2	0.2	81.8	0.3	0.0	0.2	6.4	100.0	15,839
Hindu	0.9	1.4	3.0	0.1	0.1	0.2	92.1	0.9	0.7	0.7	100.0	24,005
Sikh	0.2	0.4	0.7	0.0	0.0	0.1	1.0	97.0	0.1	0.4	100.0	21,579
Muslim	0.6	1.4	3.7	0.5	0.1	0.1	0.4	0.1	91.9	1.2	100.0	43,581
No Religion	7.5	4.3	12.9	0.4	0.3	0.7	0.1	0.1	0.2	73.5	100.0	352,130
Total	16.8	12.1	41.4	1.7	1.0	1.2	1.6	1.4	2.8	19.9	100.0	
Number	252,677	182,383	622,767	26,097	14,523	18,186	23,867	21,584	42,179	299,486		1,503,749

Table 5. Religion of Male Partner by Religion of Female Partner, Canada, 2011

Religion of Male Partner	Religion of Female Partner										Total	Number
	Mainline Protestant	Conservative Protestant	Catholic	Christian Orthodox	Jewish	Buddhist	Hindu	Sikh	Muslim	No Religion		
Mainline Protestant	65.5	5.0	8.0	4.8	3.6	2.6	0.9	0.2	0.3	2.9	15.7	236,056
Conservative Protestant	3.5	75.7	2.7	1.9	2.4	2.7	0.9	0.2	0.6	1.8	11.3	170,575
Catholic	19.4	9.6	80.6	13.5	6.4	8.2	2.0	0.5	1.3	7.9	39.8	599,224
Christian Orthodox	0.6	0.3	0.7	72.6	0.7	0.2	0.1	0.0	0.3	0.2	1.7	25,961
Jewish	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.8	79.1	0.3	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.2	1.0	14,799
Buddhist	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.2	71.3	0.2	0.0	0.1	0.3	1.1	15,839
Hindu	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.3	92.6	1.0	0.4	0.1	1.6	24,005
Sikh	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.9	97.0	0.1	0.0	1.4	21,579
Muslim	0.1	0.3	0.3	0.8	0.2	0.3	0.8	0.1	95.0	0.2	2.9	43,581
No Religion	10.4	8.4	7.3	5.3	7.2	14.1	1.6	0.8	2.0	86.4	23.4	352,130
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	
Number	252,677	182,383	622,767	26,097	14,523	18,186	23,867	21,584	42,179	299,486		1,503,749