

The Stability of Interethnic Unions among Immigrants and Their Descendants in France

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Abstract

Using the data from the new TeO2 survey, we aim to explore the patterns of (in)stability of interethnic unions among immigrants and their descendants in France. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first French quantitative study looking at the separation risk in interethnic unions. We define interethnic unions as unions between an immigrant or a second-generation descendant of immigrants on the one hand, and a native person or a person of a different foreign background on the other. The descriptive analysis is based on Kaplan-Meier survival analysis, whereas discrete-time logistic regression is used in the multivariate analysis. Our results show that exogamy is associated with an increased separation risk, both among immigrants and second-generation descendants of immigrants. This result is particularly pronounced among immigrant women and second-generation men. On the other hand, co-ethnic unions between one immigrant partner and one second-generation partner do not show a higher separation risk, as compared to endogamous unions between two immigrants or two second-generation partners. The study also explores whether the increased separation risk in interethnic unions can be explained by partner differences with respect to other dimensions of social affiliation. We find that the lower stability of interethnic unions may be partly explained by religious differences between the partners.

The Stability of Interethnic Unions among Immigrants and Their Descendants in France (extended abstract)

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Introduction

The significant increase in the influx of migrants to European countries during the previous decades transformed these once relatively homogeneous societies into places of meeting and interaction of different cultures. Intermarriage has been viewed as one of the backbones of the new European diversity. It is namely widely believed, although this view is not entirely uncontested, that intermarriage is an important indicator of social integration of minorities. This belief dates back to American sociology from the 1920s - on the Bogardus scale of social distance, the willingness to marry a member of another community was the strongest indicator of the absence of social distance towards that community (Bogardus, 1925). Moreover, viewed from this perspective, apart from being an indicator, intermarriage is also an agent of social interaction (Kalmijn, 1998). It facilitates better acquaintance with different cultures and contributes to the reduction of prejudices and social distance between the groups to which the partners who build the union belong. Besides, the children of mixed marriages often build their own identity on the feeling of belonging to both groups. However, the enthusiasm about mixed unions being factors contributing to social cohesion is somewhat undermined in the light of the evidence that most studies from the principal destination countries show that exogamous unions are less stable than endogamous unions (see Kulu and Gonzalez-Ferrer, 2014 for a review). Our objective is twofold. First, we perform a longitudinal study of the stability of interethnic unions in one of the countries with the longest tradition of immigration in Europe, namely France. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first French quantitative study looking at the separation risk in interethnic unions. Second, we explore how ethnicity interacts with another dimension of social affiliation, religion, in shaping the patterns of stability of mixed unions.

Theoretical background and hypotheses

The complexities of contemporary multicultural societies suggest that neither exogamy nor endogamy are binary concepts with clearly defined boundaries. Therefore, we distinguish between two types of exogamy in this study: a union of an immigrant or a descendent of immigrant 1) with a native partner; and 2) with an immigrant or second-generation partner of a different origin (the latter will also be referred to as "minority exogamous union"). On a similar note, departing from the assumption that the experience of migration (or the lack thereof) and different degrees of exposure to the mainstream society over the life-course can lead to substantial within-community cultural differences (Eeckhaut et al., 2011), we also distinguish between two types of endogamy among immigrants and second-generation descendants: 1) a union between two immigrants born in the same country, or a union between two second-generation descendants of immigrants of the same origin; and 2) a union between an immigrant and a second-generation partner of the same origin.

Our first hypothesis is based on the homogamy theory, which predicts that the risk of separation will be lower if the partners share the same values and attitudes (Smith et al., 2012; Kulu and Gonzalez-Ferrer, 2014). This implies that, generally speaking, we expect mixed unions to be more vulnerable than endogamous unions (H1). The second hypothesis acknowledges the homogamy theory, but also adds the dimensions of the so-called immigrant solidarity, according to which immigrants, regardless of their origin, share an important common experience – migration to another country. This creates a sense of solidarity and kinship with other migrants (Just and Anderson, 2015), which may offset possible cultural differences in minority exogamous unions. Taking this into account, and assuming that there is some intergenerational transmission of immigrant solidarity (in which case it may as well be labelled inter-minority solidarity), we can expect minority exogamous unions to be less likely to break up as compared to unions with a native partner (H2). Further, the mechanisms leading to possible intra-community cultural differences across generations of foreign-background population lead us to expect that unions between two immigrants from the same country (or two second-generation descendants of the same origin) will be more stable than those between an immigrant and a second-generation descendant of immigrants of the same origin (H3). Finally, we take into account that exogamy can also be defined with respect to other dimensions of social affiliation, such as religion. As previous research shows that, similar to interethnic unions, interreligious unions are characterized by a higher risk of separation as well (Kalmijn et al., 2005), we predict that the separation risk in interethnic unions will be less pronounced once we control for differences in religion and religiosity between partners (H4).

Data and methodology

We use recent data from the Trajectories and Origins Survey 2 (TeO2). The survey, conducted in 2019 and 2020, was designed with the aim to study the diversity of population in the metropolitan France (for more information, see Beauchemin et al., 2022). Some 27,000 respondents participated in the survey. Both immigrants and the second-generation descendants were oversampled, as some 10,400 respondents belonged to the former and around 8,300 survey participants belong to the latter group. The rest of the respondents are French natives.

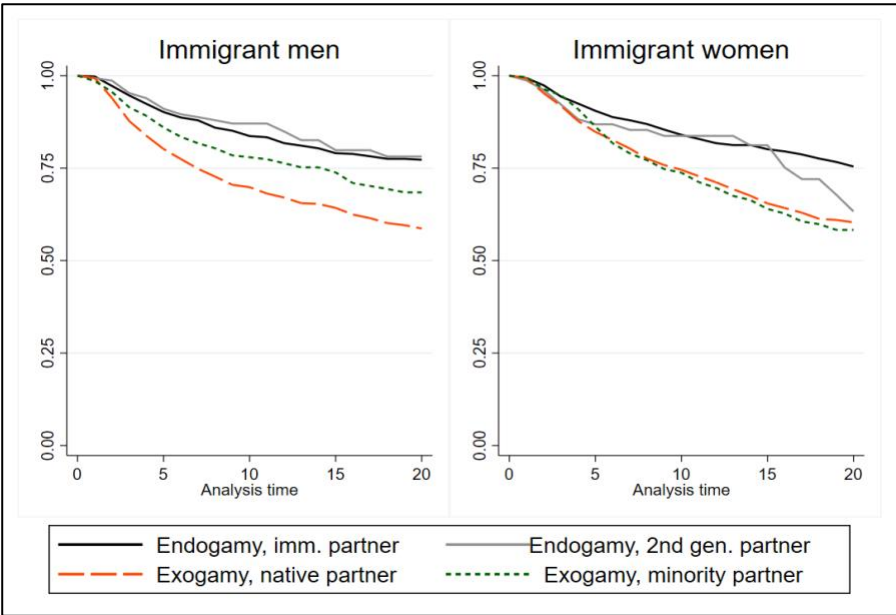
We focus on first unions, which are defined in the survey questionnaire as first cohabitations lasting at least 6 months. When analyzing the union stability among immigrants, we only include those respondents who met their partner after arrival in France. This is an event-history study that the survey respondents enter at the start of the cohabitation. They exit the study when they experience any of the following events, whichever comes first: 1) separation, 2) death of the partner, 3) at the time of the survey, if still in the first union. The descriptive analysis is based on Kaplan-Meier estimates of separation, whereas discrete-time logistic regression is used in the multivariate analysis. The principal dependent variable is separation. It takes value 1 if the respondent experiences a separation in the year t , otherwise it takes value 0. The main independent variable is the origin of the partner, which is categorized in the same manner for both immigrants and second generation: 1) union with a co-ethnic immigrant, 2) union with a second-generation co-ethnic descendant of immigrants, 3) union with a native partner, and 4) minority exogamous union.

Preliminary Results

Kaplan-Meier estimates of separation by partner's origin for immigrants are shown in Figure 1. Exogamous unions are more likely to dissolve than endogamous unions, among both men and women. There is practically no difference in the separation risk between the two types of

endogamous unions. At the same time, there is some distinction between the types of exogamy, as minority exogamous unions are more stable than those with a native partner among men. We do not find this difference among women though.

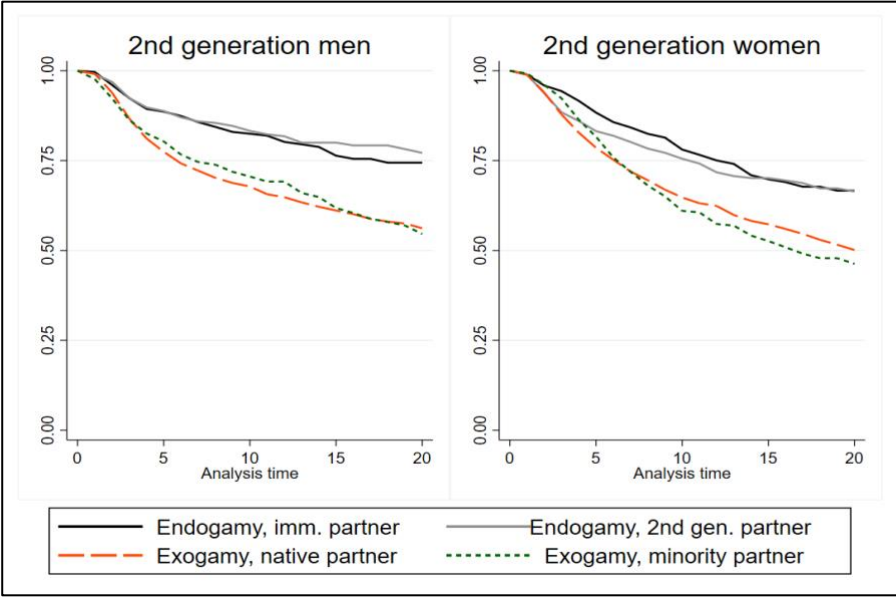
Figure 1: Kaplan-Meier estimates of separation by partner's origin among immigrants in France



Source: TeO2 Survey, own calculations

The results for the second generation are shown in Figure 2. The main conclusions for second-generation descendants of immigrants are arguably similar to those for immigrants. Endogamous unions are less likely to end in a separation than exogamous unions, and this is again the case for both men and women. However, among men we no longer see the distinction between unions with a native and minority exogamous unions. In other words, among both men and women the curves overlap for the two types of endogamous unions as well as for the two types of exogamous unions. The principal gender difference in the second generation consists in the general propensity to experience a separation of the first union as Figure 2 suggests that it is somewhat higher among women.

Figure 2: Kaplan-Meier estimates of separation by partner's origin among second-generation descendants of immigrants in France



Source: TeO2 survey, own calculations

Table 1 shows the results of the preliminary multivariate analyses for immigrants. The coefficients for Model 1 suggest that the principal conclusions of the Kaplan-Meier model remain largely unaffected once we control for age at the start of cohabitation, duration of union, and geographical origin. In other words, the risk of separation is higher in interethnic unions, and this difference is statistically significant. Among men, it is somewhat less pronounced in minority exogamous unions. On the other hand, there is no statistically significant difference in separation risk between the two types of endogamous unions. Model 2 additionally controls for differences between partners in religion. It shows that the risk of separation is lowest in unions in which both partners belong to the same religion whereas it is higher in mixed-religion and mixed-religiosity couples. These patterns are more pronounced among men. Model 2 also shows that the coefficients for interethnic unions are substantially lower than in Model 1. The reduced coefficients for interethnic marriages after controlling for religion suggest that the increased vulnerability of such marriages in France is not solely attributed to ethnic differences, but also partially influenced by religious disparities.

Table 1: Separation risk among immigrants, by partner origin, discrete-time logistic regression, odds ratios

	Immigrant men		Immigrant women	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Type of union:				
Union with a co-ethnic immigrant	1	1	1	1
Union with a co-ethnic 2 nd generation	0.80	0.81	1.33	1.27
Union with a native	1.84***	1.30**	1.94***	1.55**
Minority exogamous union	1.36**	1.11	1.90***	1.65***
Religiosity and religion in the union:				
Non-religious couple		1		1
Same religion		0.52***		0.64***
Different religions		1.70***		1.26
Only one partner religious		1.31*		1.25*
Unknown		2.76***		1.64***
Person-years	30,443		27,957	

Source : TeO2 Survey, own calculations; * p < 0.10; ** p < 0.05; *** p < 0.01

Table 2 shows the results for second-generation descendants of immigrants. Whereas there are some differences in the magnitude of the coefficients, the principal conclusions mainly overlap with those for immigrants. Model 1 indicates that there is a higher risk of separation in both types of interethnic unions. Yet, contrary to what was the case among immigrant men, the risk of separation in minority exogamous unions is not lower. There is no statistically significant difference between the two types of endogamous unions. Finally, Model 2 shows that the coefficients for interethnic unions decrease once we control for religion and religiosity of the partners.

Table 2: Separation risk among children of immigrants, by partner origin, discrete-time logistic regression, odds ratios

	2 nd generation men		2 nd generation women	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Type of union:				
Union with a co-ethnic immigrant	1.21	1.26	0.79	0.80
Union with a co-ethnic 2 nd generation	1	1	1	1
Union with a native	2.01***	1.58***	1.53***	1.30**
Minority exogamous union	2.01***	1.71***	1.55***	1.38**
Religiosity and religion in the union:				
Non-religious couple		1		1
Same religion		0.48***		0.61***
Different religions		0.93		1.27*
Only one partner religious		1.10		1.13
Unknown		1.83***		1.47**
Person-years	31,689		36,632	

Source : TeO2 Survey, own calculations; * p < 0.10; ** p < 0.05; *** p < 0.01

In summary, the preliminary results of our analysis lend a strong support to the homogamy hypothesis (H1), as exogamous unions among immigrants and their descendants are exposed to an elevated separation risk. This concerns both unions with natives and those with immigrants and their descendants of a different unions. The hypothesis on separation risks in different types of exogamous unions (H2) receives only a partial support. Unions with a native partner are indeed more vulnerable than minority exogamous unions among immigrant men, but the separation risk in the two types of exogamous union is roughly the same in other groups under the study. Contrary to our expectations stated in the hypotheses on within-community differences (H3), co-ethnic unions between one immigrant partner and one second-generation partner do not show a higher separation risk, as compared to endogamous unions between two immigrants or two second-generation partners. Finally, in line with our predictions (H4), the separation risk in interethnic unions is indeed less pronounced once we control for religious differences between the partners.

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