Religiously mixed marriages in England and Wales

David Voas
Department of Social Science
University College London
Motivation and surprising finding

• Ethno-religious intermarriage is regarded as the most complete form of social integration.

• Its frequency is therefore of public interest.

• How prevalent are religiously mixed partnerships in England and Wales?

• Not very – and controlling for the size and educational success of minority groups, the frequency is declining.
Data source and acknowledgements

- 2011 Census Microdata (Household sample)
- Accessed via the ONS Virtual Microdata Laboratory at Drummond Gate
- My thanks to the ONS, and in particular to the VML team and service desk
Copyright and disclaimer

This work contains statistical data from ONS, which is Crown Copyright. The use of the ONS statistical data in this work does not imply the endorsement of the ONS in relation to the interpretation or analysis of the statistical data. This work uses research datasets that may not exactly reproduce National Statistics aggregates.
Issues for today

• The proportion of people in each religious group marrying into other groups.

• Differences by age, sex, ethnicity, country of birth, education.

• Differences by local authority district.

• The religious identities ascribed to children whose parents are from different religious groups.
Issues for another day

• The association between the prevalence of mixed marriage and other characteristics of the district (e.g. religious composition, deprivation).

• Changes between 2001 and 2011
Three types of integration

• Structural: Equality of access to education, employment, services, housing, etc.

• Cultural: Shared norms, values, culture, etc.

• Social: Social mixing and frequent interaction, in personal as well as impersonal relationships.
Social distance

For example the Bogardus scale:

Would you accept [group] as ...
• close relatives by marriage
• my close personal friends
• neighbours on the same street
• co-workers in the same occupation
• citizens in my country
• non-citizen visitors in my country
• Would exclude from entry into my country
Alternatively can look at actual contact rather than reported tolerance, e.g.

- Diversity in everyday contacts (in shops, pubs/cafés, schools, at work, etc.)
- Diversity of connections at social gatherings
- Diversity within network of close friends
- Intermarriage
Is intermarriage a good indicator of integration?

- High for some groups that continue to be disadvantaged in many respects, e.g. black Caribbeans

- Low in some groups that arguably are well integrated, e.g. modern Orthodox Jews

- Social assimilation does not necessarily correspond to structural integration
Religiously mixed marriage: problems of measurement

• Marriage to someone with a different religion may produce a change in affiliation:
  – Conversion to spouse’s religion
  – Shift to ‘no religion’

• Are we concerned with religious heritage / nominal identification or only with the practising faithful?

• Where partners were raised in different religions but one now has no religion, should the marriage count as mixed?
Approach to classification

• ‘Nones’ = no religion or religion not stated

• The overwhelming majority of nones are of Christian heritage, and hence few marriages between nones and Christians involve a mix of religious cultures.

• We could ignore nones and only count combinations of different religions as ‘mixed’ – but that would exclude marriages we might want to consider (e.g. white none of Christian heritage with someone from an ethno-religious minority).
Religiously mixed marriages include:

• Spouses have different religions (in 90% of cases, one of them is Christian).

• One spouse has no religion and the other is non-Christian and of different ethnicity.
This definition omits:

• Marriages between white Christians and non-whites with no religion (who might have been raised in a non-Christian religion).

• But there are few such marriages, and it is difficult to be confident that the minority partner is in fact of non-Christian heritage.
Census-related problems

• It is easy to identify and link the household reference person and spouse.

• It is surprisingly difficult to link spouses in concealed families.

• Such couples are not yet included. They are only 4% of the total; the individuals may be disproportionately from religious minorities, but the loss of mixed marriages is likely to be small.
Census microdata: the household sample

- 10% sample
- 5.7 million individual records
- 2.3 million household reference persons
- 1.0 million spouses of HH reference persons
- But some tables of religiously mixed marriages still end up with values less than 10!
Religion on the census

• Close to a third of census respondents have no religion or did not answer the question (which was voluntary).

• The remainder are labelled as Christian (59% of the total) or Buddhist, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, or other.
Basic descriptive statistics

- 31.4% of marriages include a no religion / NS partner
- Ignoring most partnerships involving nones, only 1.5% of marriages are religiously mixed.
- Religious homogamy is high among Christians, Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs.
Frequency of religiously mixed marriage by gender and religion (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>men</th>
<th>women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddhist</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>27.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>16.6</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sikh</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other religion</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>24.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Variation by other characteristics

Mixed marriage is higher for:

- Some ethnic groups (Indian higher than Pakistani and Bangladeshi; Arab highest of all)
- People born outside the UK
- Younger generations
- The more highly educated
Geographical variation

• The 25 districts with the highest proportion of religiously mixed marriages are nearly all found in London.

• Somewhat surprisingly, both Westminster and Kensington and Chelsea are in the top 4.

• Some areas with very diverse populations (e.g. Tower Hamlets, Leicester, Bradford) have relatively low prevalence of mixed marriage.
Children of religiously mixed marriages more likely to be classified as nones

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>% none</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Both Christian</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both same non-Christian religion</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both no religion / not stated</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One none, other some religion</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One Christian, other some other religion</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different non-Christian religions</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Does it matter which parent has which religion?

In general transmission doesn’t vary greatly by which parent is which religion, though there are a few exceptions (e.g. Jewish mother vs father).
Does it matter which religions are involved?

- In Christian–Muslim pairings, more of the children are identified as Christian (33%) than Muslim (28%), though none wins out (39%).

- Christian/Hindu and Christian/Sikh are similar, with a slightly enhanced bias towards Christian and none.

- In Christian/Buddhist pairings, few children end up as Buddhists.
Evidence on change: mixed marriages by generation are ...

- going up across the whole population
- staying steady among religious minorities
- declining among religious minority individuals with level 4+ qualifications
And hence the story has three parts:

- Religiously mixed marriages are becoming more common, both in absolute numbers and as a proportion of all marriages.

- Relative to non-Christian numbers, however, the frequency of mixed marriage has not risen across the generations.

- For well educated members of religious minorities, the frequency of mixed marriage has halved.
Religious minority men in mixed marriages, by qualifications (%)
To put it another way ...

- The probability of being in an inter-faith marriage is strongly associated with education.
- Young adults are more likely to be well educated than their parents.
- Nevertheless, the relative frequency of mixed marriages has not risen across generations in religious minorities.
- Thus controlling for structural integration, the extent of social integration (at least as measured by intermarriage) has actually declined.
Hypotheses

• Greater availability of co-religionist partners?

• Increased importance attached to religious identity?

• Tendency among educated young people of non-Christian heritage to identify as none if married to someone from a different group?

• Increasing inclination to cohabit rather than marry if partner has a different religion?