

# A Measure for Social Integration Mixed Marriages between Muslims and Non-Muslims Are Accepted but Rare

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Researchers view mixed marriages and friendships as important indicators of the social integration of minorities. Besides the actual marriages and friendships between Muslims and non-Muslims, attitudes toward them also play an important role. In my PhD project at the WZB I examined attitudes toward intermarriage and the actual marriage behavior of Muslims in six European countries. What are the marriage patterns of the second generation? Is there a gender difference regarding the partner search? What roles do parents, the family and religion play? How do immigration and integration policies affect the search for a partner?

To find out how policy affects the partner search, various international comparative data sets were analyzed, especially the WZB's EURISLAM data set. This includes information on about 7,000 people in Belgium, Germany, France, United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Switzerland without immigration background, as well as Muslims with Yugoslav, Moroccan, Turkish and Pakistani backgrounds. Respondents in the 'Muslim' group had at least one Muslim parent. The countries studied have developed various religious rights and strategies regarding Muslims, so the question was whether Muslims are better integrated in countries with more liberal religious rights or if the liberal granting of religious rights reinforces the segregation of religious groups. The analysis shows that neither granting Muslims religious rights, as in the United Kingdom, nor having a restrictive policy, as in Switzerland, forces a return to the individual's religious group ('reactive ethnicity'). Integration policy neither promotes nor hinders social integration.

Family reunification policies do have an indirect effect on social integration and the choice of a partner. The Six Country Immigrant Integration Comparative Survey (SCIICS) shows that children of Turkish and Moroccan immigrants in Belgium, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Austria and Sweden increasingly seek partners in the country of immigration, and that making the family reunification policy stricter leads to fewer transnational marriages (to people from the parents' country of origin) and more marriages within the ethnic community living in the same country of residence.

Among the main factors that influence the partner search are the prospects and the size of the local marriage market. Pakistani immigrants in particular, who constitute just a small share of Muslims in Western Europe (except in the United Kingdom), fall back on help from family networks. Still, only a fraction of marriages are arranged. In the second generation, hybrid forms can be observed, in which children search for suitable partners with their parents. When many immigrants from the same country live in proximity, partners tend to be chosen from their own group. Especially for the second generation, this pool offers more possibilities of finding a partner who was similarly socialized, and who generally is less religious.

Transnational marriages offer highly qualified women the chance of finding a partner. Scientifically, this is interpreted as a strategy for emancipation because the geographic distance of transnational marriages allows women to live apart from the groom's family, which traditionally incorporates a bride into the household. Analysis shows that women with and without im-

**Summary:** Studying intermarriages and attitudes toward intermarriage in Western Europe provides insights into aspects of social distance between ethnic minorities and the majority population. Overall, the second generation accepts intermarriages to a greater extent than the first generation. However, if we look at actual marriages, we observe the persistence of marriage patterns across generations with the majority of marriages conducted within the family's own ethnic and religious group. Marriage decisions are related to parental preferences, family values and levels of religiosity.

migrant backgrounds tend to be more protected by their families than men, which results in lower rates of interethnic marriages. Religious groups sometimes interpret a woman's marriage as a partial loss, because they assume that the husband's religion will prevail and be transmitted to the next generation.

## Marriage Patterns Remain Stable

Closer examination of interethnic and interreligious relationships shows that, contrary to theory, interethnic marriages are not generally more frequent in the second generation when educational differences are taken into consideration, although Muslim members of the second generation clearly have more positive attitudes than their parents toward marriages between Muslims and non-Muslims.

Why do marriage patterns remain stable? Parental preferences for a specific marriage partner play a role in social integration, regardless of the children's age. The influence of ethnic communities and parental socialization goals are closely linked. For immigrant children, education does facilitate their emancipation from predefined structures and their parents' views of marriage, but socialization in school does not automatically lead to social integration, and the sense of being discriminated against makes integration more difficult.

Equally important is the role of parents without immigrant backgrounds who influence their children's interaction with 'immigrant' children. Middle-class parents tend to control their children's free time and social contacts more than parents from higher or lower walks of life. Since the social status of children with immigrant backgrounds is often below that of the receiving society, parents without immigrant backgrounds may associate interethnic contact with social decline and be more concerned about their children than better-off parents who send their children to exclusive schools, where there is almost no contact with immigrant children. The lack of opportunity for children and young people with and without immigrant backgrounds to develop close friendships subsequently affects their partner choice.

Beyond the major role that parents play in relation to children's social integration, various forms of religiosity and family values are linked to fewer intermarriages and more negative attitudes toward intermarriage. Religious practice that includes observing dietary rules and holidays, as well as wearing religious symbols, plays a larger role than simply self-identifying with a religion. This connection is more pronounced for some groups than others. In particular, immigrants from secular former-Yugoslavia are confronted with less acceptance of intergroup relationships on the part of the receiving society, while immigrants from more religious countries like Morocco and Pakistan indicate less willingness to marry someone from the receiving society. This can be explained by their greater religiosity.

Besides religiosity, ethnic differences are mainly explained by family solidarity. Muslim immigrants cultivate especially close parent-child relationships in which adult children assume responsibility for their parents, demonstrate their respect, accept their authority and consider it more important to protect the family's reputation than do children without immigrant backgrounds. Not only are the actual differences in cultural and religious values significant, but perceptions can also affect social distance: The more differences individuals perceive with regard to religiosity, parent-child relationships and pre-marital sex, the less likely they are to accept marriage with a Muslim (or a non-Muslim). Thus the dividing line between groups runs along family values and religiosity. This divide might explain why the divorce rate of interethnic couples is higher than those of ethnically homogeneous couples. But describing that precisely, as well as the consequences of intergroup relationships, must be left for future research. Earlier studies have indicated that interethnic marriages positively affect the integration of people with immigrant backgrounds into the job market.



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The integration of people with immigrant backgrounds is a bilateral process that is influenced by many factors. Both on the part of the receiving society and among immigrants, resentment of intergroup relationships remains. My work has shown how different family values, gender concepts and religiosity help explain this situation. As a driving force of integration, education creates the conditions for people with immigrant backgrounds to establish contacts. But the openness of the family of origin and the ethnic community are also important, as is acceptance by the receiving society.

### *References*

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