Exchanging Race for Religion? Interracial Unions and Religion in Brazil, 1980-2010

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Abstract

This paper presents a twofold objective. First, it analyzes interracial marriage rate differences according to religious affiliation. Secondly, it compares the most relevant interracial marriage changes from 1980 to 2010 using loglinear models. The first analysis focuses on results until 2000. They indicate that when spouses or partners have the same religion, the marriage percentage distribution remains practically the same as the total distribution. However, when analyzing marriages between religiously heterogamous partners, all racially homogamous marriages decrease, and all interracial marriages increase. Additionally, all the model association coefficients demonstrate that having the same religion is important not only for interracial marriages but also for all homogamous couples. In Brazil, the strength of religious belief is highly relevant to unions, even for interracial couples. Religion has considerable power over partner choice. Although interracial unions increased between 1980 and 2000, religious heterogamous unions changed at a different pace. In the last decade, changes in the Brazilian religious scenario and racial composition motivated the 2010 analysis.

Religion and interracial marriage in Brazil

The Brazilian population has experienced important changes to its religious affiliation over the last four decades. In 1970, 92 percent of the population declared themselves as Catholic, and 30 years later, the proportion had fallen to 74 percent. In 2010, the figure fell even further to 64.6 percent. The proportion of Protestants almost tripled between 1970 and 2000 (5 percent to 15.4 percent) and reached 22.2 percent in 2010. Those who declared no religion increased from 1 percent to 8 percent between 1970 and 2010. In 2000, 53.7 percent declared themselves as “branco” (white), 38.5 percent considered themselves “pardo” (brown or mixed), and 6.2 percent reported themselves as being “preto” (black). Ten years later, the last two figures rose to 43.1 percent and 7.6 percent, respectively. For the first time in history therefore, more than half of Brazilians considered themselves either mixed or black. In addition, the country has the largest Afro-descendent population outside of Africa, around 15 million black and 82 million mixed race individuals as of 2010.

This paper presents a twofold objective. First, it analyzes interracial marriage rate differences according to religious affiliation. Secondly, it compares the most relevant interracial marriage changes from 1980 to 2010 using census data (IPUMS) and loglinear models.

Concerning interracial marriage, a key question is if a spouse of a lower social race/skin color status should offer some form of compensation for variations in religious affiliation.

The analysis was performed for all women from 20 to 29 years of age and their husbands/partners, differentiating between formally married women and those in consensual unions.

The results from 1980 to 2000 suggest when the husband/partner and his wife/partner had the same religion, practically no change existed in the marriage distribution percentage compared to the overall distribution. However, when analyzing marriages between partners of different religions, all homogamous marriages decreased, and all interracial marriages increased. Additionally, the model association coefficients show that having the same religion is important not only for interracial marriages but also for homogamous couples (Tables 1, 2, and 3). Therefore, the strength of religion is highly relevant to unions in general, and religion can be disconsidered as an “equalizer” of racial differences in Brazil. Although interracial unions increased from 1980 to 2000, heterogamous unions by religion have changed at a slower pace.

TABLE 1: Selected odds ratios estimated to race and religion, adjusted model (Model A7) – Brazil, 1980, 1991, and 2000

Race/color man	woman religion	man religion	Odds ratio		
			white woman	black woman	pardo woman
White	Catholic	Catholic	1.000	1.000	1.000
		Protestant	1.000	ns	0.135
		Pentecostal	1.000	ns	0.421
		No religion	1.000	0.304	ns
	Protestant	Catholic	1.000	ns	0.468
		Protestant	1.000	0.093	0.439
		Pentecostal	1.000	ns	ns
		No religion	1.000	ns	ns
	Pentecostal	Catholic	1.000	ns	1.327
		Protestant	1.000	ns	ns
		Pentecostal	1.000	ns	1.154
		No religion	1.000	ns	1.770
	No religion	Catholic	1.000	ns	ns
		Protestant	1.000	ns	ns
		Pentecostal	1.000	ns	ns
		No religion	1.000	ns	1.322
Black	Catholic	Catholic	1.000	1.000	1.000
		Protestant	ns	ns	ns
		Pentecostal	ns	ns	ns
		No religion	0.466	0.440	0.637
	Protestant	Catholic	ns	0.062	ns
		Protestant	0.284	0.115	0.125
		Pentecostal	ns	ns	ns
		No religion	ns	ns	ns
	Pentecostal	Catholic	ns	0.547	0.183
		Protestant	ns	ns	ns
		Pentecostal	ns	0.630	0.738
		No religion	ns	ns	ns
	No religion	Catholic	ns	ns	ns
		Protestant	ns	ns	ns
		Pentecostal	ns	ns	ns
		No religion	ns	1.678	1.545
Pardo	Catholic	Catholic	1.000	1.000	1.000
		Protestant	0.103	ns	0.125
		Pentecostal	ns	ns	0.509
		No religion	ns	0.391	1.189
	Protestant	Catholic	0.379	ns	0.454
		Protestant	0.483	ns	0.364
		Pentecostal	ns	ns	ns
		No religion	ns	ns	ns
	Pentecostal	Catholic	ns	0.314	1.310
		Protestant	ns	ns	ns
		Pentecostal	1.317	0.458	ns
		No religion	1.524	ns	1.548
	No religion	Catholic	ns	ns	ns
		Protestant	ns	ns	ns
		Pentecostal	ns	ns	ns
		No religion	1.349	1.478	1.579

Source: Brazilian Census, 1980, 1991 and 2000 - IPUMS International Data
ns = not significant

TABLE 2: Selected odds ratios estimated to race and religion, adjusted model (Model B2) – Brazil, 1980, 1991, and 2000

Interation	Odds ratio
Race/color	
0 - Intraracial	1.000
1 - WP or PW or PB or BP	0.251
2 - WB or BW	0.094
Religion	
0 - Religious endogamy	1.000
1 - Cat./Prot. or Prot./Cat. or Cat./Pent. or Pent./Cat. or Pent./Prot. or Prot./Pent.	0.018
2 - One partner "no religion"	0.001

Source: Brazilian Census, 1980, 1991 and 2000 - IPUMS International Data
ns = not significant; W=white; P=pardo; B=black

TABLE 3: Selected odds ratios estimated to race and religion, adjusted model (Model B2) – Brazil, 1980, 1991, and 2000

Interation	Odds ratio - Consensual Union			Odds ratio - Married		
	1980	1991	2000	1980	1991	2000
Race/color						
0 - Intraracial	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000
1 - WP or PW or PB or BP	0.233	0.276	0.343	0.190	0.241	0.305
2 - WB or BW	0.079	0.109	0.217	0.041	0.075	0.152
Religion						
0 - Religious endogamy	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000
1 - Cat./Prot. or Prot./Cat. or Cat./Pent. or Pent./Cat. or Pent./Prot. or Prot./Pent.	0.005	0.023	0.042	0.015	0.017	0.017
2 - One partner "no religion"	0.000	0.001	0.002	0.000	0.001	0.001

Source: Brazilian Census, 1980, 1991 and 2000 - IPUMS International Data
ns = not significant; W=white; P=pardo; B=black

Changes in the Brazilian religious scenario and racial composition motivated the 2010 analysis. Did these changes also alter interracial and interreligious relations?

What does the 2010 Census say?

Concerning interracial marriage, a key question is if a spouse of a lower social race/skin color status should offer some form of compensation for this difference. One compensation could be having the same religion. Table 4 shows the 2010 data results. For example, in a marriage involving a white woman and black man, the chances of an endogamous Protestant union are higher than in endogamous black couples. However, in a marriage involving a black woman and white man, the chances of an endogamous Protestant union are lower than in endogamous black couples. When comparing endogamous unions among pardos, the chances of an endogamous Protestant union among white-“pardo” and “pardo”-white couples are higher.

This result shows that having the same religion may be an unimportant exchangeable feature in interracial marriages, at least Protestant ones.

When at least one partner has no religion, interracial marriage chances increase. On the other hand, interracial marriages increase the chances of exogamous marriages by religion.

In 2010, it became evident that religious compensation failed in interracial marriage.

TABLE 4: Selected odds ratios estimated to race and religion, adjusted model (Model A7) – Brazil, 2010

Race/color man	woman religion	man religion	Odds ratio		
			white woman	black woman	pardo woman
White	Catholic	Catholic	1.000	1.000	1.000
		Protestant	1.000	ns	0.895
		Pentecostal	1.000	1.308	1.349
		No religion	1.000	1.940	1.269
	Protestant	Catholic	1.000	1.422	1.147
		Protestant	1.000	1.070	0.930
		Pentecostal	1.000	1.496	1.371
		No religion	1.000	2.872	1.737
	Pentecostal	Catholic	1.000	1.876	1.673
		Protestant	1.000	1.622	1.456
		Pentecostal	1.000	1.353	1.258
		No religion	1.000	3.087	2.126
	No religion	Catholic	1.000	2.396	1.597
		Protestant	1.000	2.482	1.624
		Pentecostal	1.000	3.693	2.193
		No religion	1.000	1.942	1.401
Black	Catholic	Catholic	1.000	1.000	1.000
		Protestant	ns	0.730	0.777
		Pentecostal	1.823	1.365	1.569
		No religion	1.872	1.427	1.750
	Protestant	Catholic	1.193	ns	1.147
		Protestant	1.239	1.081	1.184
		Pentecostal	1.613	1.604	2.036
		No religion	2.352	2.468	2.741
	Pentecostal	Catholic	1.639	1.512	1.797
		Protestant	ns	1.888	1.370
		Pentecostal	1.628	1.370	1.566
		No religion	2.544	2.793	3.614
	No religion	Catholic	1.609	1.617	2.330
		Protestant	2.762	2.101	2.045
		Pentecostal	3.046	2.816	3.947
		No religion	1.820	2.375	2.219
Pardo	Catholic	Catholic	1.000	1.000	1.000
		Protestant	0.875	ns	0.580
		Pentecostal	1.491	1.372	1.095
		No religion	1.330	1.803	ns
	Protestant	Catholic	1.064	1.410	0.817
		Protestant	1.060	ns	0.764
		Pentecostal	1.550	ns	ns
		No religion	1.692	3.168	1.510
	Pentecostal	Catholic	1.509	2.222	1.402
		Protestant	1.252	1.553	ns
		Pentecostal	1.407	1.461	1.171
		No religion	1.886	3.983	2.009
	No religion	Catholic	1.222	2.492	ns
		Protestant	1.420	3.157	ns
		Pentecostal	2.282	4.070	1.855
		No religion	1.292	2.341	1.389

Source: Brazilian Census 2010
ns = not significant

The large proportion of religious endogamous marriages may complicate analyzing unions for social status compensation.

This tangle of possibilities for interpreting these parameters shows the importance of relying on topological models which allow analyzing a particular behavior data pattern.

The Table 5 topological model consists of two arrays, one for associations between race/skin color and the other for the religion association of couples. Their sum shows the effect of combining the four interest variables. A stronger barrier exists between religion and no religion. “W” represents the white race/skin color, “P” is “pardo” (brown), and “B” is black.

As expected, the odds of interracial marriage are much lower among whites and blacks than endogamous racial unions and marriages between whites and “pardos”. The religious endogamy is so high that the chance of an exogamous religious marriage is much lower than

an interracial marriage. Furthermore, the union barrier is strong among Catholics, Protestants, and Pentecostals who have partners with no religion. The summed effects of both arrays reveal that the chances of union are smaller with higher barriers of race/skin color and religion.

TABLE 5: Selected odds ratios estimated to race and religion, adjusted model (Model B2) – Brazil, 2010

Interation	Odds ratio
Race/color	
0 - Intraracial	1.000
1 - WP or PW or PB or BP	0.335
2 - WB or BW	0.241
Religion	
0 - Religious endogamy	1.000
1 - Cat./Prot. or Prot./Cat. or Cat./Pent. or Pent./Cat. or Pent./Prot. or Prot./Pent.	0.047
2 - One partner "no religion"	0.003

Source: Brazilian Census 2010

ns = not significant; W=white; P=pardo; B=black

Table 6 shows that interracial marriages are more common among consensual unions than among formal marriages. However in 2010, consensual unions increased less than formal marriages. Although less common, marriages between white women and black men and black women and white men presented the highest growth.

This may be an indication that informal couples are also more tolerant of religious differences. These couples could generally share nonadherence to formalizing their civil and religious unions. Exogamous unions with at least one nonreligious spouse are also very rare and practically unchanging.

This model showed one of the best adjustments and provided a strong barrier to religious exogamy and interracial marriages, especially when one spouse is nonreligious. Thus, religion and race/skin color are statistically associated, and religious endogamy weighs heavily in interracial marriages, regardless of race/skin color. In other words, the color barrier influence weighs less than the religious barrier. When the effect of religious differences is added to the effect of racial differences, the chance of union will be lower for white-black and black-white couples, especially if one partner is nonreligious.

TABLE 6: Selected odds ratios estimated to race and religion, adjusted model (Model B2) – Brazil, 2010

Interation	Odds ratio – 2010	
	Consensual union	Married
Race/color		
0 - Intraracial	1.000	1.000
1 - WP or PW or PB or BP	0.344	0.331
2 - WB or BW	0.263	0.225
Religion		
0 - Religious endogamy	1.000	1.000
1 - Cat./Prot. or Prot./Cat. or Cat./Pent. or Pent./Cat. or Pent./Prot. or Prot./Pent.	0.075	0.029
2 - One partner "no religion"	0.004	0.002

Source: Brazilian Census 2010

ns = not significant; W=white; P=pardo; B=black

In summary, the strength of religious belief is highly relevant to unions, even for interracial couples. Religion has considerable power over partner choice.

This paper contributes to the body of research on marital status by showing that quite relevant and precise variances still exist between formal and informal unions in Brazil. These variances may mask other issues affecting partner choice, even if the differences have been legally minimized or mitigated. The unique value of this study is showing the ongoing religious influence on family formation, primarily union types. As religious beliefs significantly affect partner selection, understanding this influence can help demographers better evaluate marital choices.