

# Factors Affecting International Marriage Survival: A Theoretical Approach

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## **Abstract**

The factors affecting the survival of international marriages (i.e., couples in which the spouses come from different countries) are analyzed. Employing the concept of the ‘liability of foreignness’ we build a model in which micro (individual), meso (cultural) and macro (state integration policies) level factors interact to predict the differential rates of international marriage survival across immigrant groups and host countries.

## **Introduction**

Increased international migration had brought the integration of immigrants to the forefront of sociopolitical topics in Western countries. Although the economic and political aspects of immigrant integration have been scrutinized, little is known about immigrants’ social interactions with the native population. Interethnic marriages have been posited as a factor that undermines racial barriers and, thus, contribute to the integration between immigrants and natives (Bossard 1939, Kennedy 1943, Price 1982, Giorgas and Jones 2002). While the probability of people from different ethnic groups to intermarry has been widely examined, few researchers have focused on the success or failure of these intermarriages. Those who did (Crester and Leon 1982, Rankin and Maneker 1987, Ho and Johnson 1990, Phillips and Sweeney 2005) studied marriages between people from different ethnic groups, omitting the place of birth of spouses as a factor that may also contribute to the survival of the union. We believe that being born abroad may also affect the survival of the union.

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The scant studies of divorced couples comprised of immigrants and natives (Neyrand and M'Sili 1997, Kalmijn et al. 2005, Cao et al. 2008), explain differences in divorce rates by individual and cultural factors, such as gender, country of origin, and religion of both partners. These empirical studies conducted in a single country ignore environmental factors such as national integration models (i.e., multiculturalism, assimilation, melting pot) and immigration policies. We assert that the integration of immigrants and, thus, the success of international marriages may also be affected by environmental factors. Particularly, we argue that different immigration histories, policies, and integration models may affect the integration of newcomers and thus, the duration of international marriages.

The aim of this paper is twofold: (i) to build a conceptual framework for the survival of 'international marriages' (i.e., couples in which at least one of the spouses is foreign-born), and (ii) to provide a theoretical model to assess the effects of the opportunity cost of migration and of the couples' internal cultural differences on the success of international marriages in two scenarios: in countries with favourable environmental conditions for the integration of immigrants and in integration-adverse countries. The opportunity cost of migration of foreign-born partners is measured by their liability of foreignness, i.e., their reaction to migration-related stress factors such as communication problems, socio-cultural changes, economic problems, and the loss of family and social support. We believe that other individual factors, such as human capital endowments and time elapsed since migration, may increase or decrease the level of liability of foreignness.

This paper is organized as follows: in the next section we review the literature to arrive at a theoretical framework on international marriage survival; second, based on this conceptual framework, a model including the determinants of international marriage survival is proposed; some hypotheses and policy implications are presented in the concluding section of the paper.

### **Mixed marriages and divorce: a conceptual framework**

Marriages comprised of immigrants and natives have been called "intermarriages",

“mixed marriages”, “interethnic” or “interracial” marriages (where partners are from different ethnic groups), “nationality intermarriages”, and “cross-cultural marriages”. The term ‘cross-cultural marriages’ was coined by Falicov (1995) to refer to unions where spouses came from different ethnic, racial, religious, social, or nationality groups, whereas ‘nationality intermarriages’ narrowed the concept to unions between partners of different national origins (Kalmijn *et al.* 2005). In keeping with Kalmijn *et al.* (2005), this paper focuses on the survival of couples where at least one partner is an immigrant. However, we believe that ‘international marriage’ describes this type of union more accurately. In this paper, the concept of ‘marriage’ will be used to describe international couples who live together, regardless of whether they are officially married or not. Likewise, ‘partner’ and ‘union’ will be used as synonyms for ‘spouse’ and ‘marriage’, respectively. Finally, marital success can be measured in at least two ways: by the satisfaction level of the partners and by the duration of the union (which may or may not be a result of marital satisfaction). Due to data availability for potential empirical studies on this topic and conceptual accuracy, we suggest to analyze the survival of international marriages in terms of the number of years lived together.<sup>2</sup>

The extant literature on the survival of international marriages focuses on the individual, namely cultural factors, to explain the causes of marital disruption. Kalmijn *et al.* (2005) rigorously analyzed the effect of religion and nationality heterogamy on the risk of divorce in the Netherlands while they ignored other possible explanatory factors. Cao *et al.* (2008) explored the effect of heterogeneity in some variables, such as the citizenship and the origin of the partners, on marital instability. They found that couples in which both partners were Swiss were way less likely to divorce than couples in which one partner was Swiss and the other from a non-Western country. They explain this result by cultural differences. In contrast, couples where partners both come from non-Western countries also were at high risk of divorcing. According to the authors, this could be explained by the additional challenges caused by migration. As in the case of the study by Kalmijn *et al.* (2005), we believe that the geographical dimension, which could be

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<sup>2</sup> Marriage duration in our theoretical model will be defined by a numeraire, with the average duration of a native-born marriage as the denominator and the duration of a marriage including one foreign-born as the numerator. This measure will allow cross-country comparisons.

explored by conducting cross-country studies, is missing from Cao *et al.*'s (2008). Finally, Phillips and Sweeney (2005) analyzed variations in patterns of marital instability in the United States and explained them by inter-ethnic differences in the exposure to risk factors for divorce, such as socio-demographics, human capital, and cultural factors.

We believe that international couples, as opposed to interethnic couples from the same country, face additional challenges to those cited in the literature review. These challenges include the impact of migration on one or both partners (as in the case of international couples in which both partners are immigrants) and the partners' need to integrate into a new environment. For the same reason, we think that environmental factors in the host society, which can facilitate or hinder the labour and social integration of newcomers, can be a significant force in explaining the success or failure of international marriages. Therefore, as shown in Figure 1, we suggest a theoretical framework which involves the interaction of micro (individual), meso (cultural) and macro (environmental) level factors to analyze the survival rates of international marriages. Cultural factors are included in the meso level because they are related to both individual and environmental factors, and, thus, interact with the micro and macro levels. Due to scant studies on international marriage survival, the broad approach adopted in our theoretical model comprises psychological insights as well as factors gleaned from empirical studies on mainstream and interethnic marriages.

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Insert Figure 1 about here

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### *Individual factors*

Some of the individual factors analyzed in the literature to explain marital disruption include human capital endowments, social networks, and socio-demographic characteristics of the partners. Human capital endowments are the educational level of the partners: the higher the level of education, the lower the probability of marital disruption (Heaton 2002, Raley and Bumpass 2003, Phillips and Sweeney 2005). In the case of international marriages, we argue that highly educated couples should have more resources to overcome the challenges caused by migration and the attendant need to adjust to a new environment. In turn, this will have a positive effect on the duration of

these marriages.

We suggest that the language skills of the partners may also affect the survival of international marriages. The underlying reasoning behind this assertion is twofold: first, good communication is a key factor in the success of any kind of relationship; second, the knowledge of the host country's language facilitates the labour and social integration of the foreign-born, which in turn would have a positive effect on the marital relationship.

Socio-demographic factors affecting divorce patterns, as cited in the literature, include: age at marriage, marital history of the parents, previous marriages, and premarital births. Marrying at an early age, previous marriages, and premarital births were found to increase the risk of marital disruption in the United States (Heaton 2002, Raley and Bumpass 2003). In their empirical study conducted in the United Kingdom, Kierna and Cherlin (1999) report that the offspring of divorced parents were more likely to have dissolved their first partnerships by the age of 33.

Our theoretical framework also includes the presence of children and household income in the socio-demographic factors influencing marital stability. We suggest that couples who have children would make a bigger effort to overcome marital difficulties than those who do not, thus lowering the risk of a divorce. In addition, high income couples would not suffer the negative effect of stress-inducing economic problems; this would also reduce the likelihood of marital disruption.

The factors cited so far apply to the survival of both international marriages and mainstream couples. Nevertheless, we argue that international couples face additional difficulties caused by migration. Hovey (2001) identifies five categories of stress factors related to migration: stressors of the migration process and trajectory; language and communication problems; environmental stressors related to socio-cultural changes; economic, unemployment, and marginality problems; and the loss of family and social support. We suggest that the liability of foreignness of foreign-born partners could be measured by looking at their reaction to these stress factors. Furthermore, we believe that other individual factors such as newcomers' human capital endowments and the time elapsed since migration may increase or decrease the degree of liability of foreignness.

Below we present some migration-related, cultural, and host-country environmental factors which could help in explaining further the marital stability of international couples.

The migration histories (time of migration, reasons, paths) of partners and their acculturation strategies in the host country are individual factors that will help explain marriage survival rate differences for both international and immigrant couples where partners originate from the same country. If the migration of one of the partners in an international couple happens prior to their union, one would expect that, the integration of one of the foreign-born partner having begun, this would have a favourable effect on the duration of the marriage. Conversely, the effect of the liability of foreignness on marital success will be negative and greater if international couples migrate after they are married.

Moreover, the liability of foreignness and the well-being of foreign-born partners may vary depending on the causes of migration. Whereas certain categories of migrants, such as students and highly-skilled workers, may adjust relatively more easily to a new environment, refugees and low-skilled workers may experience additional difficulties adapting: lack of work permit, long work hours, little time for social interactions, and low self-esteem. However, the frustration of highly-skilled immigrants who work in low-paid, low-skilled jobs may also have a negative effect on their relationships.

Immigrants with previous migration experience (i.e., who have lived in other countries) are more likely to integrate faster and to overcome the liability of foreignness more easily than those who migrate for the first time and, thus, to stay in their marriage longer.

The nature of the migration project - the purpose of migration, the expected duration of stay in the host country, the prospect of family reunification, citizenship acquisition, and out-migration plans - of the foreign-born may also have an effect on the marital stability of international couples. For instance, migrants who want to go back to their country of origin after spending a given number of years and saving some money in the host country where they married, are more likely to divorce, depending on their willingness to move to their partner's home country. In contrast, those partners who plan to bring family

members to the host country or apply for citizenship have long-term plans and, thus, would be more prone to remain married.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, the acculturation of foreign-born partners may also affect the survival of international couples. Berry (1998) identified several strategies based on the maintenance of one's own culture and participation in the new society. Four scenarios could result from adopting these strategies: integration (both persons' cultures are maintained and the interaction with the new environment is positive), assimilation (couples participate in the host culture while rejecting their own), separation (the opposite of assimilation), and marginalization (people either maintain their own culture or espouse the new society). We argue that the married foreign-born who either integrate or assimilate into the host country are likely to remain married longer.<sup>4</sup>

### *Cultural factors*

The literature (Kalmijn *et al.* 2005, Cao *et al.* 2008) tends to explain the higher propensity of mixed marriages for divorce by internal cultural differences between partners. We suggest that the effect of cultural factors on international marriages could be explained by internal cultural distances, especially by the partners' attitudes towards 'familism', and by religion, rather than by the wider concept of 'ethnicity'.

Hofstede (1980: 43) defines culture as 'the collective mental programming of the people in an environment (...) that is different from that of other groups, tribes, regions, minorities or majorities, or nations'. He states that culture is not an individual characteristic, but that it involves people conditioned by the same education and life experience in the contexts of family, profession, and nation. According to him, the cultural mental programming at the national level is shaped by the distance from power, uncertainty avoidance, individualism-collectivism, and masculinity-femininity. The first

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<sup>3</sup> This may vary depending on the host country. For instance, in Canada there are not conditions that state the spouses even have to live together, while in other countries such as Australia and the United States the authorities follow up to see if the marriage is genuine (*The National Post*, April 6, 2009).

<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, this is not as obvious in the case of international couples who live in a third country, since the lack of external social interactions could result in higher cohesion between spouses.

dimension refers to the extent to which a society accepts the fact that power in institutions and organizations is distributed unequally. The second dimension indicates the extent to which a society feels threatened by uncertain situations and tries to avoid them 'by providing greater career stability, establishing more formal rules, not tolerating deviant ideas and behaviours, and believing in absolute truths and the attainment of expertise' (Hofstede 1980: 45). Although we think that all the four dimensions suggested by Hofstede may contribute to boost or hinder couples' internal cultural differences, we highlight the importance of individualism-collectivism and masculinity-femininity.

According to Hofstede, individualism implies a loosely knit social framework in which people only take care of themselves and of their immediate families. On the other hand, collectivism is characterized by a tight social framework in which people distinguish between their own group and others, while expecting that the members of their group will look after them in exchange for absolute loyalty to the group. This concept correlates with national values towards the family and marital attitudes. We would like to extend it by introducing the concept of 'familism'. Garzon (2003) defines familism as a model of social organization based on the prevalence of the family group in which the needs and well-being of the family are more important than those of any individual family member. He explains that it is part of a traditional view of society that highlights loyalty, trust, and cooperative attitudes within the family group, which emphasizes the importance of having children as a mean of self-realization. We would expect that partners from countries characterized by a higher level of collectivism and familism would be more tolerant of marital differences than their counterparts, and that this would in turn make marriages last longer. In contrast, couples in which both partners come from more individualistic countries would be more likely to divorce than the former, *ceteris paribus*.

The last dimension of Hofstede's model refers to the level of masculinity or femininity of countries. This criterion describes the extent to which the main values of any society are 'masculine'. Some examples of masculine values and characteristics would be assertiveness, materialism, disregard for other people, clear differentiation of gender roles, strong work orientation, and 'machismo'. We argue that the greater the masculinity-femininity gap between the countries of origin of partners, the greater the likelihood of



marital dissolution. Furthermore, we state that this difference would be accentuated when the man comes from a mainly masculine society and the woman from a feminine society. When both partners come from countries with a similar masculinity-femininity orientation, and especially when they come from feminine societies, differences should not be pronounced.

Finally, religion has also been identified as a factor in marital instability (Lehrer and Chiswick 1993, Booth *et al.* 1995). Kalmijn *et al.* (2005) compared Dutch partners with various religious affiliations. They compared couples with different combinations of unaffiliated, catholic, reformed, orthodox, other protestant groups, and Jewish partners, and found a modest relationship between religious heterogamy and divorce, but a strong correlation between nationality heterogamy and divorce. Interestingly, unions of non-believers were most likely to fail, owing to the ‘main-effects’ hypothesis: the more traditional the value orientation of religious or national groups, the least likely their members are to divorce. Along similar lines, we add that, when one partner belongs to a religion with a traditional value orientation and the other does not, the likelihood of marital instability will lie between that of very traditional homogeneous couples and non-traditional ones.

### *Environmental factors*

Unlike individual and cultural factors, environmental factors have not been addressed in the literature on mixed marriages as predictors of marriage survival. Nevertheless, we believe that cross-country differences in integration models, immigration policies, attitudes towards migration, and the presence of ethnic enclaves may facilitate or hinder the integration and well-being of foreign-born partners in international couples. In turn, this would affect their marital stability.

We state that the integration of immigrants and thus, the success of international marriages may vary depending on the host country’s integration model (i.e., multiculturalism, assimilation, melting pot). We suggest a comparison between countries with a multiculturalism model (e.g., Canada) and those based on assimilation (e.g., France), two theoretically opposite approaches. In the latter model minority groups tend

to adopt mainstream cultural patterns and lifestyles and renounce their original cultural background, whereas in the first model the pacific coexistence of various groups is considered an asset. We argue that the opportunity cost of migration of the foreign-born partners will be greater in societies where assimilation prevails: since all individuals are to be treated as equals, regardless of their origin and immigrant particularities, integration policies are scarce. On the contrary, within multiculturalism not only are *ethnic* groups recognized as contributors to society as a whole, but policies to facilitate the integration of newcomers are also promoted. Thus, we believe that the opportunity cost of migration will be lower in the multiculturalism model than in the assimilation model and that, as a result, international couples will be likely to remain married longer.

National immigration policies are usually consistent with integration models. However, not all countries have adopted clear and comprehensive theoretical integration models, but a combination of characteristics of various models and policies. Thus, we postulate that, regardless of the integration model, and controlling for other factors, international couples who live in countries where policies facilitate the labour, linguistic and social integration of newcomers will remain married longer than couples living in countries where integration is not encouraged.

Specific integration models and immigration policies lead to variations in profiles and numbers of immigrants at the national, regional and municipal levels. Two opposite arguments can be formulated about the relationship between numbers of immigrants and integration: on the one hand, the higher the number of immigrants in a given country, the more sophisticated its immigration policies. In addition, in countries where immigration is encouraged, native people are more familiar with immigrants and thus, are expected to be more tolerant than in countries with low immigration rates. On the other hand, high immigration rates, especially in periods of economic recession, can give rise to xenophobic political discourses and attitudes. Nevertheless, attitudes towards migrants are not only influenced by immigration models and policies, but can also be manipulated by the mass media. Extreme negativity towards migrants may lead to certain situations (one partner wanting to leave the country and the other not) in which marital stability could be threatened.

Finally, the existence of enclaves of the same ethnic group as partners of international couples could facilitate their initial integration and, thus, decrease the negative effect of their liability of foreignness on marital stability.

In this section we reviewed the literature on mixed marriages and international marriages to build a conceptual framework and isolate factors affecting the survival of international marriages. In addition to the individual and cultural factors discussed in the literature, environmental factors should be considered to analyze international marital survival in an international context. Next we present a theoretical model comprising these three groups of interacting factors and derive some hypotheses on their effect on international marriage survival in the concluding section of this paper.

### **International marriage survival: a model**

A model is proposed to assess the effect derived from the interaction of migrants' liability of foreignness (individual factors) and the couples' internal cultural differences (cultural factors) on the survival of international marriages in two settings: in countries with favourable environmental conditions for the integration of immigrants and in those that do not facilitate it (environmental factors).

Based on Hovey's (2001) classification of migration-related stressors, we define the liability of foreignness of newcomers as their reaction to these stressors and include additional factors: the couples' human capital endowments and the time elapsed since migration. In particular, we argue that the sequence of the date of migration and marriage may affect the liability foreignness of the immigrant partner and thus, the marital stability of international couples, and we suggest the following two hypothetical situations. In case one, marriage precedes migration and, thus, the liability of foreignness is expected to be high. In the second case, migration precedes the union: the integration of the foreign-born future partner should have started and will be influenced by the time elapsed since migration. The negative effect of the liability of foreignness on marital survival would be lower for the latter couple.

The liability of foreignness of a couple is defined as the sum of the liability of foreignness of each partner. Thus, we expect that the degree of foreignness of international couples where one of the partners is native-born will range between the foreignness of native couples who belong to the ethnic majority group (which should be equal to 0) and that of international couples in which both partners are immigrants (the foreign liability of these couples is expected to be the highest). For future empirical studies on international marriage survival, we suggest creating an indicator to measure the degree of foreign liability of the couple.<sup>5</sup> This indicator would be built on individual factors such as the human capital of the foreign-born partner (including the knowledge of host countries' language), the number of years elapsed since migration, the causes of migration, the cultural distance between the sending and the receiving countries, the cultural distance between the sending and the receiving countries of the foreign-born partner's parents and the economic situation of the couple.

We build our concept of couples' internal cultural differences on Hofstede's (1980) individualism-collectivism and masculinity-femininity dimensions, on "familism", and on religion. Hofstede (1980) conducted an empirical study in 40 countries to classify them according to the four dimensions suggested in his model. This classification and national statistics on peoples' religious affiliation would help create an indicator to assess couples' internal cultural differences.

Finally, the environmental factors described in the previous section are combined to build the following two constructs: "integration-favourable" and "integration-adverse" environments. As for individual and cultural factors, and based on the variables described previously, we suggest creating an indicator to measure how favourable or adverse to integration a country, region, or city is.

We state that the effects of individual, cultural, and environmental factors on international marriage survival can not be analyzed separately. For instance, we argued that environmental stressors related to socio-cultural changes are one of the components

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<sup>5</sup> Natives who belong to the ethnic majority group should do not have any liability of foreignness, whereas natives from ethnic minority groups might. For the latter, we suggest that the cultural distance between the country of origin of their parents and the country where they were born should be taken into account to measure their liability of foreignness.

of the foreign liability of immigrants. The socio-cultural integration of immigrants with identical endowments and, thus, a similar liability of foreignness, will vary from one host country to another depending on cultural differences between the country of origin (e.g., Canada) and two possible destinations (e.g., the United States and India). Therefore, not only do individual endowments affect the degree of liability of foreignness of immigrants, but their interaction with cultural and environmental factors also does.

Figure 2 illustrates the role of the liability of foreignness, couples' internal cultural differences<sup>6</sup> and migration-related environmental factors on the probability of survival of marriages relative to the reference group comprising native-born couples. The ordinate on the left side ranges from zero to greater than unity to indicate that the foreign-born union is longer, as long as, or briefer than the native-born union, with native-born couples' marital survival being equal to one. In other words, the Y axis measures the survival rate of international marriages relative to native-born couples'. This concept will facilitate later cross-country comparisons. The X axis illustrates the degree of foreign liability of the couple, which ranges from zero (totally integrated) to one (maximum expression of foreignness). The environmental effect on international marriage survival is represented by continuous (e.g., A-A) and discontinuous lines (e.g., A'-A') which describe environments favourable and adverse to integration, respectively.

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Insert Figure 2 about here

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Note that, for purposes of illustration and, later, hypothesis testing, we offer eight stylized cases of unions (refer to samples and control groups in Figure 1). These cases are built on the composition of the union (involving all possible combinations between immigrant and native partners) and the sequence of marriage and migration, differentiating between cases in which migration follows the establishment of the union (T1), and those in which the couple marries after the foreign-born partner of the future union has migrated (T2). In the latter case, we would expect that the immigrant partner would be more integrated and, therefore, the liability of foreignness would be lower than in the first case. Since this paper aims to propose a theoretical model to analyze the survival of international couples,

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<sup>6</sup> Couples' internal cultural differences are not represented in Figure 2, but are used as an argument to explain the differences in marriage survival between couples with identical liability of foreignness.

we suggest two hypothetical main samples comprised of partners from different countries, and two other control groups for each time (i.e., T1 and T2) and ethnic composition in the case of natives.

Our first main sample is made up of a native and an immigrant partner, whereas the second prototypical case involves immigrants from different countries (A and B) living in a third country. These two cases of international marriages are differentiated by the greater liability of foreignness of the latter couple, since one of the partners in the first sample is native-born. Since, by definition, native-born marriage partners do not suffer from a liability of foreignness, they will serve as our main reference and control group. However, we argue that native couples comprised of partners who belong to different ethnic groups (Ea and Eb) could also have different cultural references; we suggest incorporating them to our model as a second control group. Our last control group are couples in which both partners are immigrants from the same country (A and A) and, thus, with some degree of foreignness but without internal cultural differences. This sample is suggested as a control group to isolate the effect of the liability of foreignness on marital stability by controlling for internal cultural differences.

Figure 2 shows that the slope of any curve depicting the survival rates of given couples are functions of the liability of foreignness, couples' internal cultural distance, and environmental factors. The height of the intercept on the Y axis illustrates the lesser or greater degree of impact of any given level of liability of foreignness on the probability of union survival. The hypothetical effect of environmental factors is represented by the continuous and discontinuous lines.

Finally, we speculate that differences in marriage survival between couples with identical liability of foreignness could be explained by the internal cultural distance between them. For example, the couple of overachievers depicted in CC are able to overcome their liability of foreignness to such a degree that, in the extreme, the probability of their union surviving (0-P) exceeds that of the reference group. Couples B-B and C-C have additional characteristics, such as less significant internal differences, which cause the liability of foreignness to impinge on union survival to a greater degree than for couple A-A. That could be the case of two immigrants from the same country or from culturally

similar countries. The maximum survival rate for couple B-B is unity, which means that, with zero liability of foreignness (totally integrated), the duration of their union can equal that of a native-born couple. Our underachievers appear as couple A-A. Even when the degree of foreign liability of this couple is zero (i.e., total integration), their marriage survival rate is well below unity. We argue that this may be caused by greater internal cultural differences in couple A-A than in couples B-B and C-C. Couple A-A represents an international marriage, whether or not it is comprised of an immigrant and a native spouse or of two immigrants from different countries.

In two countries with different integration models, immigration policies, numbers of immigrants and attitudes towards migration, the slopes of each case may be more or less steep. For instance, let's take identical couples B-B and B'-B' to illustrate the effects of living under two different integrationist environments. It is argued that, with any given liability of foreignness, couple B-B is more likely to survive in an environment which facilitates the integration of newcomers. Conversely, with the same degree of liability of foreignness, partners in couple B'-B' are less likely to stay together in a society which does not facilitate the integration of immigrants.

Finally, the discontinuous vertical lines T1 and T2 represent couples characterized by the same composition, but a different sequence of migration and marriage times, with T1 describing couples who married before migration took place and T2 showing the opposite. For example, if any of the couples A-A, B-B, or C-C were married before migrating (T1), they would be more likely to separate due to the high liability of foreignness of the foreign-born spouse than if they were married after one of them migrates (T2). Based on the model described above, we conclude by offering some hypotheses on the probability of survival of international couples.

## **Conclusions**

We presented a conceptual framework and proposed a model to analyze the survival of international marriages. We suggested that the reaction of foreign-born spouses to a combination of their liability of foreignness, the couples' internal cultural differences, and migration-related environmental factors threaten the survival of international couples.

Below we present some hypotheses which could be tested with panel or administrative data sets.

Our first hypothesis states that the risk of failure of international marriages is greater than that of native couples. The underlying reasoning is twofold. First, we argue that foreign-born spouses in international couples face additional difficulties caused by migration, such as language and communication problems, socio-cultural and economic changes, unemployment and marginality problems, and the loss of family and social support, which we define as liability of foreignness. The reaction of foreign-born spouses to these challenges affects their well-being and their labour and social integration; this, in turn, influences the stability of their union. At this point a further set of secondary hypotheses can be posed: (i) the greater the liability of foreignness of a couple, the shorter their marriage. Furthermore, we argue that the reaction of foreign-born spouses to their liability of foreignness may depend on factors such as human capital endowments and time elapsed since migration. Thus, we posit that (ii) highly educated couples have more resources to overcome the challenges caused by migration; this, in turn, will have a positive effect on the duration of their union. Finally, (iii) the greater the time elapsed since migration of foreign-born spouses, the lesser their liability of foreignness. Based on this hypothesis we state that if the marriage takes place before the migration of the foreign-born spouse, the liability of foreignness is at its maximum given other control variables; unions that take place after arrival in the host country should last longer, *ceteris paribus*.

The second argument to support our first hypothesis is based upon the idea that internal cultural distances affect marriage survival. We suggest that couples who come from culturally identical or similar countries will share similar cultural values and have fewer internal challenges than those who come from culturally dissimilar societies.

Our second hypothesis reads as follows: the migration-related environment where international couples live may affect the integration of the foreign-born spouse and, thus, the duration of their union. International couples living in a favourable environment are more likely to stay together than couples living in adverse environments.



These hypotheses could be measured by comparing the marriage survival of the following sample couples: international couples who live in the country of one of the spouses and international couples who live in a third country married before, versus after, the migration of the foreign-born spouse. Homogeneous migrant couples, natives from the same ethnic group and natives from different ethnic groups would act as control groups.

We started this paper by stating that interethnic marriages can undermine racial barriers and, thus, contribute to the integration between immigrants and natives. We argue that empirical cross-country studies based on the model we suggested would provide some insight into the factors which contribute to the success or failure of international unions. If micro-level factors such as age, education, and linguistic abilities matter, then government immigrant selection techniques which take into account these factors will influence marital survival. On the other hand, where integration policies are paramount in determining survival rates, policy-makers should revise their policies to increase international marriage survival.

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Figure 1. Theoretical framework: Factors affecting international marriage survival

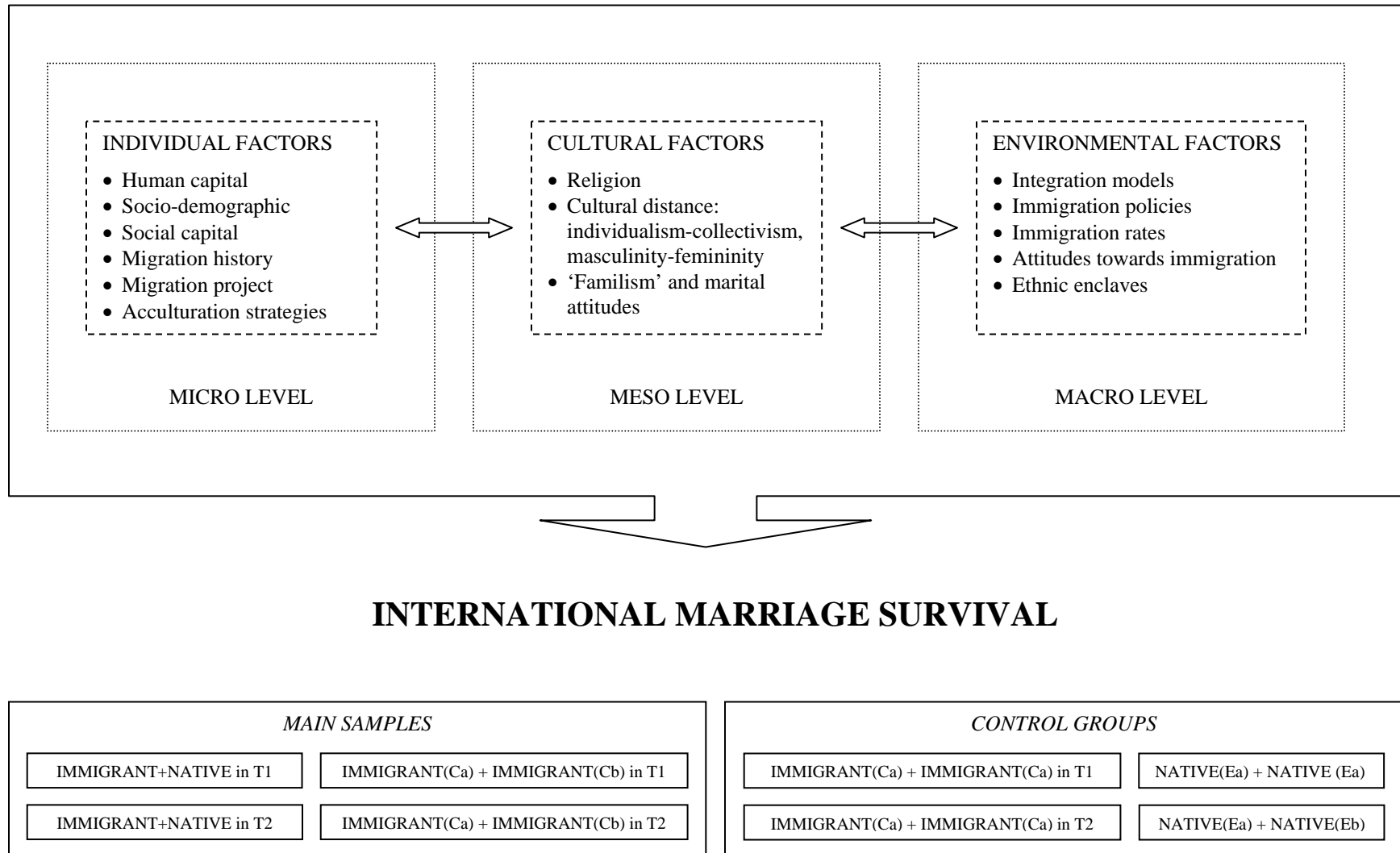
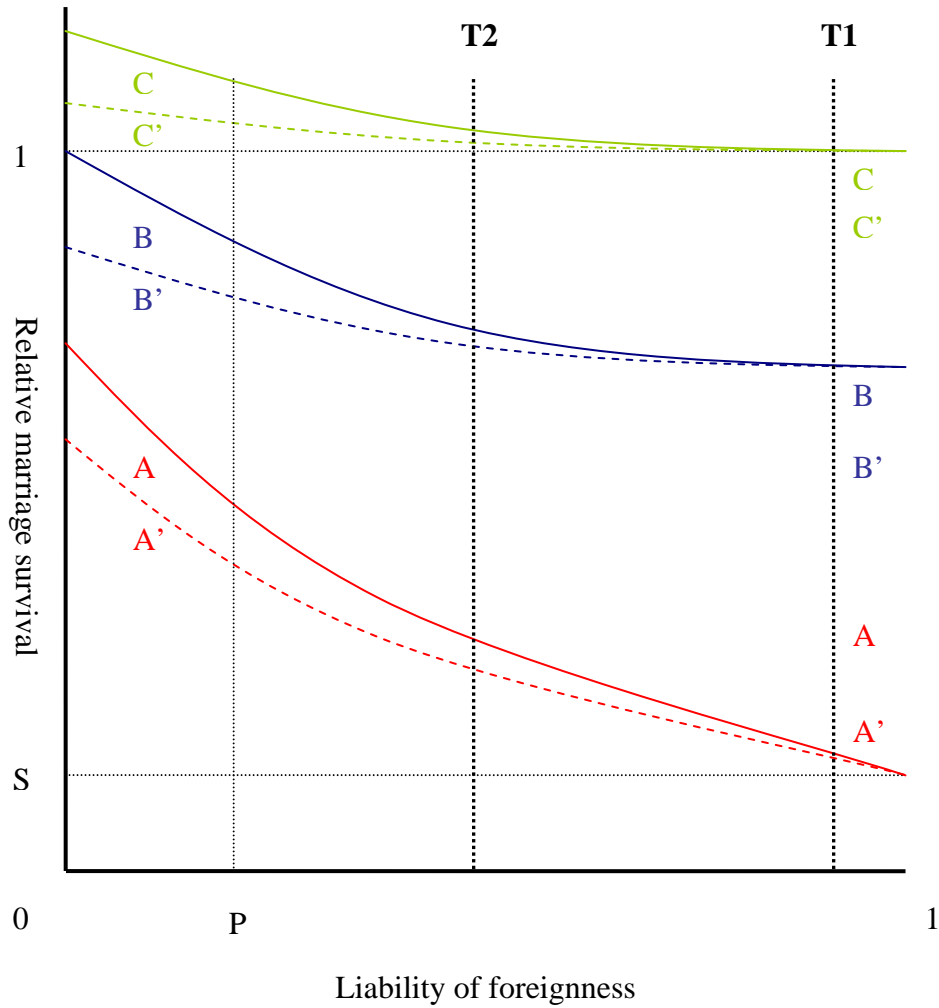


Figure 2. Effect of the liability of foreignness and couples' internal cultural differences on the survival of international marriages



—————	Integration-favourable environment
- - - - -	Integration-adverse environment