The Effect of Immigration Laws on Marital Matching in the United States

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This paper empirically examines marital matching using data on immigrants from the New Immigrant Survey (NIS) 1996 Pilot project and NIS 2003. Changes in U.S. immigration law over the period 1994–1997 provided a window of opportunity for undocumented immigrants to change their immigration status without leaving the country. Although prior research indicates that these changes were followed by an increase in marriage returns and had a positive effect on marriage rates, their impact on marital matching is not clear. In this paper, we use data gathered during (NIS-1996) and after the change in immigration laws (NIS 2003) to examine if “marriages of convenience” reflect different matching patterns compared to marriages that took place without the urgency of obtaining legal status within the U.S.

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