It is well observed over the past decades that intermarriage has been increasing in Western societies both for interethnic/interracial unions (Haandrikman 2013; Muttarak 2010; Rosenfeld 2008; Spörlein, Schlueter, and van Tubergen 2014) and interreligious marriage (Lehrer 1998; Sherkat 2004). A decline in hostile attitudes toward intermarriage, decreasing demographic differences across groups, and a rise in the number of native-born individuals with migration background have contributed to a continuing increase in interethnic/interracial unions. While interethnic/interracial marriage has been classically regarded as the litmus test of immigrant assimilation (Gordon 1964), religious intermarriage might signify other aspects of social development in a society. The modernization theory suggests that a decline in the salience of religion in social life can primarily explain the increase in the rates of intermarriage across religious groups. As other forms of stratification, such as formal education and skill, have gained importance in determining an individual's position in a society, ascriptive characteristics such as race and religion play less of a role in assortative mating (Kalmijn 1991).

Similar to other ‘modern’ European countries, Austria has been experiencing secularization characterized by an increase in the number of people without religious affiliation, a decline in church membership, and a rise in religious pluralism (Goujon, Skirbekk, Fliegenschnee, and Strzelecki 2007). Meanwhile, the country has undergone various demographic changes, namely, a decline of fertility among its Catholic population along with a considerable rise in migration whereby immigrant women have, on average, higher fertility rates than native Austrians. Such demographic dynamics substantially contributed to the religious diversification of the country (Goujon and Bauer 2015). This raises an important question on how these demographic and societal transformations shape personal preference and structural opportunity in partnership choice.

Empirical evidence from Germany (Hendrickx, Schreuder, and Ultee 1994), the Netherlands (Hendrickx, Lammers, and Ultee 1991), and Switzerland (Schoen and Thomas 1990) consistently demonstrates a decline in religious homogamy among Catholics and Protestants. The previous study from Austria by Lutz (1985) also documents an increase in religious intermarriage between 1970 and 1983. Such an increase particularly concerned marriages between Protestant women and Catholic men, or men

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without religious affiliation, and was notably pronounced in the regions where Protestants were the majority group, such as Burgenland. The study also investigates the religious affiliation of children born in interreligious couples and finds that these children are more likely to grow up without any religion than children born to endogamous Protestant or Catholic couples (Lutz 1985). Given a steady increase of foreign citizens in Austria since the mid-1980s (Statistics Austria 2013) and a continuing decline of the Catholic population, the changing religious composition can influence an opportunity to meet and form a union with out-group members.

Endogamy and homogamy are primarily determined by three social forces, namely, the preferences for certain spousal characteristics, the influence of ‘third parties’ or the social group, and the context of the marriage market (Kalmijn 1998). First, typically preferences of marriage candidates are to marry someone who is similar in terms of, for example, economic status, education, religion, and cultural background. As education and/or occupational status became an important attribute in modern societies, this weakened the importance of ethnicity or religion in preferences for spouse's characteristics. It is therefore expected that higher educational attainment increases the chance of forming a partnership across religious boundary likewise. Second, ‘third parties’ such as the family, the church and the state may discourage intermarriage through sanctions in various forms. While interfaith marriages were denounced by the Catholic church and various Protestant denominations for the past centuries, the mass movement in secularization in Austria since the late 1960s (Goujon, Skirbekk, Fliegenschnee, and Strzelecki 2007) diminished the role of religious institutions in social life. Thus, it is assumed that interreligious partnerships increase over time as the country becomes more secularized. Lastly, endogamy and homogamy is also determined by an opportunity to meet out-group members, i.e. group size and how a group is dispersed geographically. Migration substantially changed religious landscape in Austria and contributed to an increase in religious diversity, which subsequently is expected to raise intergroup contact and interreligious partnership formation likewise.

Hence, this study aims to investigate trends and patterns of interreligious partnerships in Austria over the period 1971–2001. Specifically, this study examines: (1) how individual characteristics in particular educational attainment and religious affiliation shape interreligious partnership patterns; (2) the role of educational assortative mating on trends in interreligious unions; and (3) how changing religious composition in region of residence influences interreligious partnership formation.

Data and Methods

This analysis is based on the 1971, 1981, 1991, and 2001 population censuses, consisting of 10% samples of households in Austria. Data are obtained from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS), maintained and publicly made available by the University of Minnesota (Minnesota Population Center 2014). Apart from a large sample size, another advantage of using the micro-census data is the availability of information for all members in a household. We are able to identify family interrelationships among individuals within