

**Summary:**

This study analyzes the effects of legislative prohibitions on marriage bars in Kentucky and North Carolina on married women's labor force participation. The authors employ a difference-in-differences design, comparing Kentucky and North Carolina with neighboring states that did not pass similar laws. The findings indicate that these prohibitions overall increased women's labor force participation, with a rise in employment among married women driven by two factors: married women who were not previously in the labor force entering the teaching profession, and unmarried women teachers getting married but remaining in the workforce. Using linked census samples, the authors find that the prohibitions may have displaced some unmarried women, but they conclude that the overall effect of the policy was positive.

**Comments:**

This study sheds light on the important issue of gender discrimination by examining legislative prohibitions on marriage bars in teaching. The analysis of how the prohibition of marriage bars affected married women's participation is both novel and relevant, contributing to our understanding of the historical dynamics of women's labor force participation.

That being said, I have two primary concerns, which I discuss below. The first is the timing and details of the legislation. And the second is about generalizing these estimates to other settings.

1. The authors employ a difference-in-differences design to estimate the overall effect in two treated states, North Carolina and Kentucky. The legislation was passed in 1933 in North Carolina and in 1938 in Kentucky, with a slightly different focus: Kentucky's legislation concentrated more on experienced teachers.
  - a. Since the outcomes are based on the 1940 Census (conducted in 1939), teachers in Kentucky may not have had enough time to react to the legislation. As a result, the findings may predominantly reflect the changes in behaviors of teachers in North Carolina.
  - b. Since one of the main analyses focuses on unmarried women (with the median age of marriage in the 1930s being in the early 20s), the law may not have been as binding in Kentucky.
  - c. For these reasons, it would be interesting to see state-specific effects. The authors conduct robustness checks with varying matched counties designs. However, could you provide state-specific effects, perhaps using a synthetic difference-in-differences design?
    - i. Raw plots of the time trends for these outcomes in North Carolina, Kentucky, and control states would also be helpful.
2. Table 3 shows that the prohibitions led to a decrease in the likelihood that unmarried women teachers got married and exited the labor force, while Table 5 finds that these

women are more likely to leave the labor force and remain unmarried. The authors interpret these results as suggestive evidence that the prohibitions pushed unmarried women out of the labor force.

- a. If I understood correctly, the overall effects should be interpreted as indicating that unmarried women are more likely to remain in the labor force following the prohibitions. The interpretation could have important implications for understanding the overall impact of the policy.
    - i. Also, do the prohibitions affect women's education decisions?
  - b. Relatedly, it would be helpful to see a summary statistics table of women who were unmarried and teaching in 1930, with all six outcomes that sum to 1: married teacher in 1940, married non-teacher in the labor force in 1940, married not in the labor force in 1940, unmarried teacher in 1940, unmarried non-teacher in the labor force in 1940, and unmarried not in the labor force in 1940.
3. The 1930 and 1940 Censuses collect data on the age at first marriage. Another interesting outcome the authors might consider is the age at marriage. Do the prohibitions affect women's decisions about when to marry and their subsequent fertility choices? Understanding these factors would provide a fuller picture of the policy's impact.
4. It would be helpful for this paper to think more about how these estimates generalize to other settings, or to situate in a larger literature of employment discrimination. There are many other cases where state statutes provide protection from employment discrimination (like age, political affiliation, military discharge status, criminal status etc.).
5. The clustering of standard errors is at the county-level which can be too restrictive – the treatment is at the state-level, so I would try at this level.
6. Some evidence that North Carolina, Kentucky, and the control states received similar levels of aid following the Great Depression would also be helpful in alleviating concerns. If the New Deal program provided more aid through public works programs in a differential manner, then the outcomes for married women might have evolved differently between 1930 and 1940.