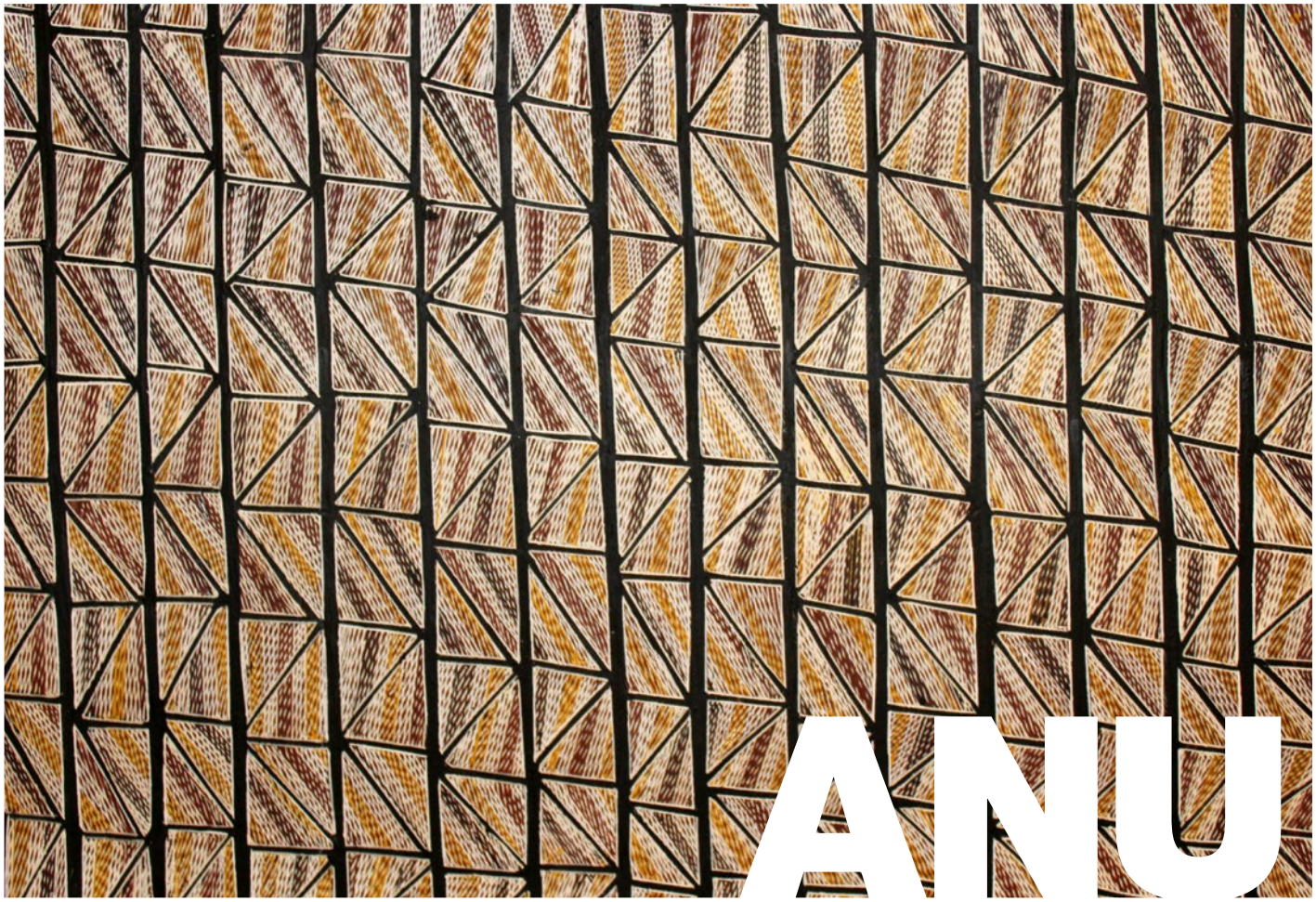
Australian National University



INDIGENOUS IDENTIFICATION CHANGE BETWEEN 2011 AND 2016: EVIDENCE FROM THE AUSTRALIAN CENSUS LONGITUDINAL DATASET

N BIDDLE AND F MARKHAM

Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research
ANU College of Arts & Social Sciences

CAEPR TOPICAL ISSUE NO. 1/2018

Series Note

The Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR) undertakes high-quality, independent research to further the social and economic development and empowerment of Indigenous people throughout Australia.

For more than 25 years, CAEPR has aimed to combine academic and teaching excellence on Indigenous economic and social development and public policy with realism, objectivity and relevance.

CAEPR maintains a substantial publications program, including Research Monographs, Discussion Papers, Working Papers and Topical Issues. All CAEPR Topical Issues are refereed and are produced for rapid distribution to enable widespread discussion and comment.

All CAEPR publications are available in electronic format for free download from CAEPR's website:

caepr.anu.edu.au

CAEPR is located within the Research School of Social Sciences in the College of Arts & Social Sciences at the Australian National University (ANU). The Centre is funded from a range of sources, including ANU, the Australian Research Council, industry and philanthropic partners, and Australian state and territory governments.

As with all CAEPR publications, the views expressed in this Topical Issue Paper are those of the author(s) and do not reflect any official CAEPR position.

Dr RG (Jerry) Schwab
Director, CAEPR
Research School of Social Sciences
College of Arts & Social Sciences
The Australian National University
March 2018

Indigenous identification change between 2011 and 2016: evidence from the Australian Census Longitudinal Dataset

N Biddle and F Markham

Nicholas Biddle is an Associate Professor at the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, and Deputy Director of the Centre for Social Research & Methods, Research School of Social Sciences, College of Arts & Social Sciences, Australian National University. **Francis Markham** is a Research Fellow at the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Research School of Social Sciences, College of Arts & Social Sciences, Australian National University.

Topical Issue No. 1/2018

An electronic publication downloaded from <caepr.anu.edu.au>.

For a complete list of CAEPR Topical Issues, see <caepr.anu.edu.au/publications/topical.php>.

Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research
Research School of Social Sciences
College of Arts & Social Sciences
The Australian National University

Acknowledgments

The authors are grateful for valuable comments provided on an earlier draft of this paper by Annick Thomassin, Boyd Hunter, Danielle Venn, Deirdre Howard-Wagner, Frances Morphy, Jon Altman, Nicole Watson and Rob Bray. Any errors and opinions are those of the authors alone.

Acronyms

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACLD	Australian Census Longitudinal Dataset
ANU	The Australian National University
CAEPR	Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research
HILDA	Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia

Contents

Series Note	ii
Acknowledgments	iv
Acronyms	iv
Introduction	1
Identification change – 2011 to 2016	2
The geography and demography of identification change	4
The contribution of identification change to changes in aggregate socioeconomic outcomes	5
Discussion and concluding comments	6
Notes	8
References	8

Tables and figures

Fig. 1. Four groups based on Indigenous identification in the 2011 and 2016 censuses, scaled proportionately except for the 'never identified'	2
Fig. 2. Schematic visualisation of the components of population change, 2011–16	3
Fig. 3. Net identification change by age in 2011	4
Fig. 4. Net identification change by state/territory of usual residence in 2011	5
Fig. 5. Employment-to-population ratio for Indigenous people aged 15 years or more, national population	6

Introduction

Between 2011 and 2016 the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) estimates that the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander[1] population grew by 128 500 people, or around 19% (ABS 2017a). This growth was much faster than the growth of the total Australian population. This can be explained in part by the fact that Indigenous women tend to have more children than non-Indigenous women. The 2011 Census suggests that Indigenous women aged 15 years and over had an average of 2.1 children, compared with 1.7 for non-Indigenous females (Yap & Biddle 2012). It can also partly be explained by the observation that most Indigenous children (68% in 2008) have at least one non-Indigenous parent, according to the best available data (ABS 2009, Gray 2002).

However, the growth in the Indigenous population was also much faster than was projected based on the characteristics of the Indigenous population in 2011, as well as our best estimate of mortality and fertility rates. Specifically, according to analysis of the 2016 Census population estimates and 2011 Census-based projections, CAEPR researchers have estimated that 'around 42 000 more Indigenous people were identified to be resident in Australia in 2016 than the ABS had predicted in projections based on the 2011 Census' (Markham & Biddle 2017a:4).

One potential explanation for this faster than projected growth is improvements in the enumeration strategy. That is, more people who identify as being of Indigenous origin are filling out a Census form or having a form filled out on their behalf, or more people who identify as being of Indigenous origin are responding to the ABS Post-Enumeration Survey. While this is possible (and the ABS continues to invest in improvements in enumeration), it is difficult to identify specific changes to practice that are likely to have had such a large effect. It is also possible that estimates of fertility and mortality used for the 2011 Census-based projections were inaccurate. This is an area for further analysis once that data becomes available (in September 2018).

The third possible explanation is that there are a significant number of people who chose to identify as being a person of Indigenous origin in 2016, but who did not choose to do so in 2011, and that this was greater than the number of people who changed their identification in the opposite direction over the period.

A decision to identify as being of Indigenous origin (or not) in a census should not in any way be interpreted as a reflection on an individual's Indigenous identity, which is a quite separate matter from what box is ticked on a census form. As Kukutai and Rarere (2013:3) note, 'conventional demographic studies still tend to reify state-imposed statistical categories as objective descriptors of an underlying social reality, even though such categories may be incongruent with how Indigenous peoples think about themselves.' Indeed, identity may not be something that can be captured adequately on any simple survey questionnaire. The census defines Indigeneity by asking the person completing the household form: 'Is the person of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin?' This is quite different to definitions of Indigeneity endorsed by Indigenous peoples in transnational bodies. For example, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples makes clear that only Indigenous peoples themselves have the right to determine who is and is not Indigenous (United Nations, 2008). This is reflected in the Australian Government's three-part definition of Indigeneity, adopted in the 1980s, which defines an Indigenous person – for legal and administrative purposes – as being a person 'of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent who identifies as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and is accepted as such by the community in which he (she) lives' (Gardiner-Garden 2003). Nevertheless, in this paper we have analysed changing patterns of identification using the census, because these data do inform the government's understanding of the Indigenous population – including monitoring progress against Closing the Gap targets – and for that reason it is of research and policy interest.

People of Indigenous origin may choose not to disclose their ancestry for many reasons. Given Australia's history of discrimination against Indigenous people, including the removal of Indigenous children, fear of discrimination from the state is likely to be prominent among them. Consequently, a decision to identify as a person of Indigenous origin in the census for the first time should be welcomed. Our focus here on 'new identifiers' should not in any way be interpreted as a reflection on or value judgment about those individuals' Indigenous identity. In this paper we analyse some of the population-level patterns of identification change only in order to reflect on what it might mean for social policy.

Historically, it has been very difficult to measure identification change, or 'ethnic mobility' as it is sometimes called, accurately. This is because accurate measurement requires data that has information on the Indigenous status of the same person at two points in time. It is not possible to measure identification using repeated cross-sections of data. Nor is it possible to

measure identification change using longitudinal surveys like HILDA (Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia) that ask for a person's Indigenous status only once.

Following the 2011 Census, the ABS released a sample of 5% of 2006 Census records that were linked through time to the 2011 Census. This data is anonymised, and released only in highly processed forms that make the re-identification of individuals impossible. The 2006–11 Australian Census Longitudinal Dataset (ACLD) had information on how a person reported their Indigenous status in 2006, and in 2011. This dataset was used to show the size and characteristics of identification change between 2006 and 2011.

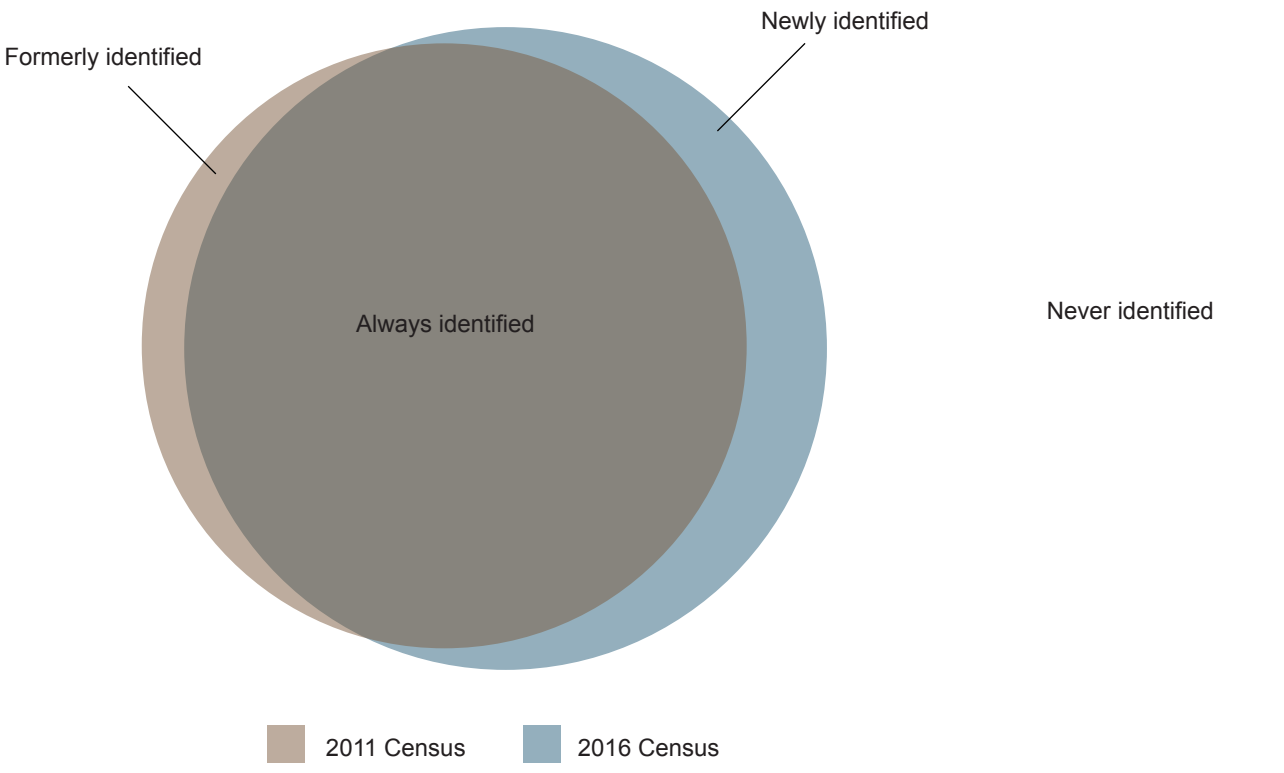
On Tuesday 27 February 2018, the ABS released the 2011–16 ACLD (ABS 2018), which contained information on a sample of 2011 records linked to the 2016 Census. This dataset allows us to investigate the size and characteristics of identification change over that period, with information available on 23 059 people who identified as being of Indigenous origin in 2016.

Identification change – 2011 to 2016

For a single cross-section, we can think of two populations of interest – the Indigenous population (comprising those who identified as being of Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, or both), and the non-Indigenous population. There is a third population that is often excluded from analysis – those whose Indigenous status is not stated. In this paper, we combine the 'not stated' population with the non-Indigenous population because population statistics for Indigenous Australians are usually constructed by excluding those people who did not state their Indigenous status. Combining the not stated and the non-Indigenous population into a 'not Indigenous' population, with a linked dataset across two waves, we can expand that classification to four groups (see Fig. 1):

- the 'always identified' in the census – those who identified as Indigenous in both the 2011 and 2016 censuses
- the 'never identified' in the census – those who identified as being non-Indigenous or who didn't state their Indigenous status in both the 2011 and 2016 censuses

FIG. 1. Four groups based on Indigenous identification in the 2011 and 2016 censuses, scaled proportionately except for the 'never identified'



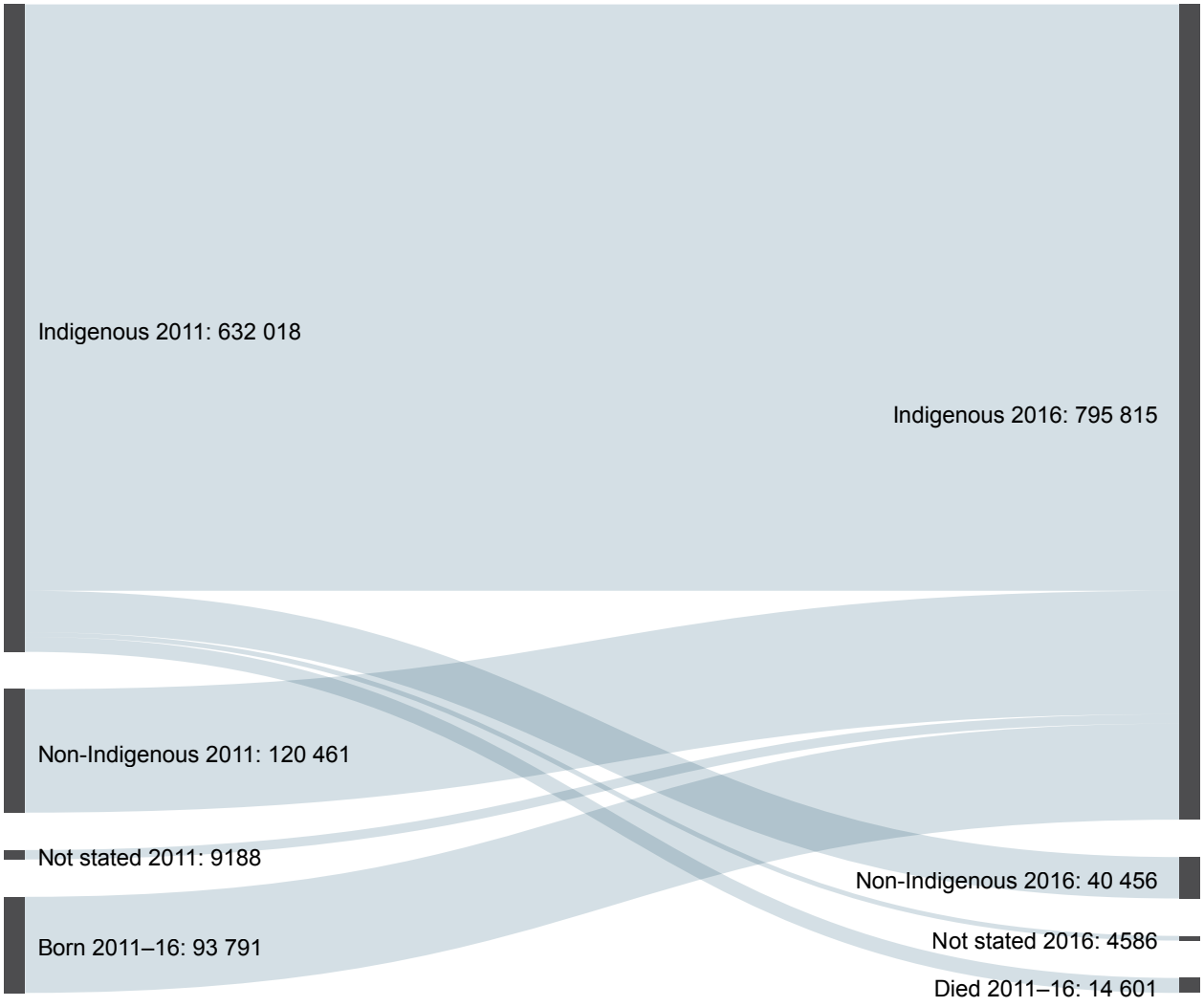
- the 'newly identified' in the census – those who did not identify as being Indigenous in the 2011 Census, but who did identify as such in the 2016 Census
- the 'formerly identified' in the census – those who identified as Indigenous in the 2011 Census, but did not identify as such in the 2016 Census.

Missing from that classification, but included in one or other of the 2011 and 2016 Census counts, are: those who were born in between 2011 and 2016; those who left Australia between 2011 and 2016; those who died between 2011 and 2016, and those who moved to Australia over the same period. Also missing are those who should have been counted in the census but were never included on a returned census form, and those who were overseas on census night in 2011 or 2016.

Using the ACLD, we can identify the size of different components of population change (Fig. 2). By far the largest population in the ACLD is those who have never identified in the 2011 and 2016 censuses. It is estimated (based on the population weights on the survey) that there were 20 332 962 in-scope Australians[2] who did not identify as being of Indigenous origin in either census. The next largest group is the 572 375 people who were estimated to have identified as being of Indigenous origin in both the 2011 and 2016 censuses. These are the two populations that we usually think about when we are analysing and interpreting Indigenous socioeconomic and demographic change.

The other two groups, however, were also quite large. According to the ACLD, it is estimated that there were 45 042 people in Australia who identified as being of Indigenous origin in the 2011 Census, but who did not identify as such in the 2016 Census. While this is a large

FIG. 2. Schematic visualisation of the components of population change, 2011–16



number relative to the 2011 population estimate, the newly identified is larger still. Specifically, it is estimated that there were 129 649 Australians who did not identify as Indigenous in the 2011 Census, but who did in 2016. The net increase from identification change was therefore estimated to be 84 607, or 13.7% of the in-scope Indigenous population in 2011.

There were also a large number of births of Indigenous children between 2011 and 2016 – the ABS estimates that there were around 93 791 Indigenous 0–4-year-olds as of June 2016. Although we don't have estimates for the total number of deaths between the two censuses, recent data from the ABS (2017b) suggests that there were 14 601 deaths over the 2012–16 calendar years. Combining these two figures, the increase in the Indigenous population due to identification change was greater than the increase due to the excess of births over deaths.

It is important to remember that there is some uncertainty around estimates from the ACLD. In particular, some of those individuals who were recorded as changing their identification may be due to errors in the process that the ABS use to link 2016 and 2011 census records. We have not attempted to quantify the uncertainty around the estimates presented in this document. However, to test the challenges with missed and false links, we examined some of the 'consistency flags' on the ACLD. We found that those who 'newly identified' in the 2016 Census were no more likely to have inconsistent data on age, sex and country of birth than those who 'always identified' or 'never identified' in the 2011 and 2016 censuses. There is less consistency, however, with the 'formerly identified.' This would suggest that, if anything, the net identification change might be under-estimated.

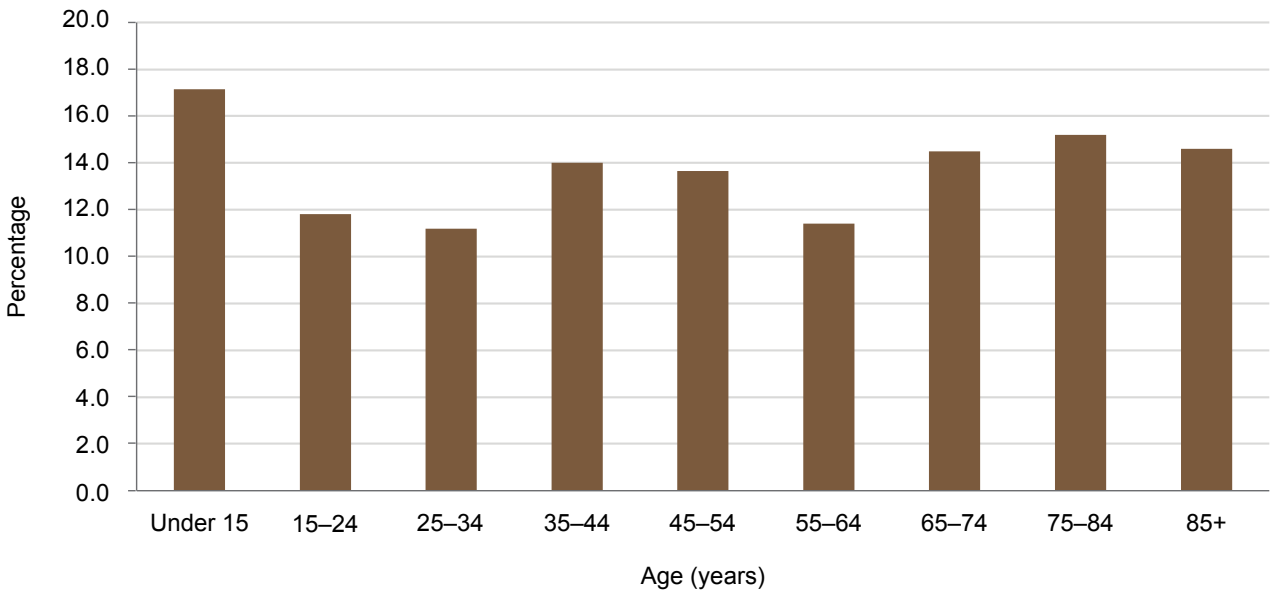
The geography and demography of identification change

The ACLD can be used to examine the characteristics of Indigenous identification change. First, we can look by age. Fig. 3 gives the net flows into the Indigenous population due to identification change for nine age groups.

In both relative and absolute terms, the largest amount of identification change quantified in the ACLD between 2011 and 2016 occurred in the youngest age group (those aged 0–15 years in 2011). There was a 17.1% increase in that population due to identification change, or 34 237 people newly identifying as being of Indigenous origin in the census. For the other age groups, identification change was lower for those in the teens to mid-thirties, and slightly higher for those aged 65 years or over. However, because the last three age groups had a low population base in 2011, the contribution of those age groups to identification change is relatively low. Overall, the relationship between age and identification change appears to be complex and non-linear.

Geographically, the vast majority of those who changed how they indicated their Indigenous origin in the census lived in urban parts of Australia in 2011. In net terms, there were 42 400 net new identifiers who lived in major cities in 2011, a population increase of 20.3% from 2011. This was followed by 23 343 who lived in inner regional areas (17.9% growth),

FIG. 3. Net identification change by age in 2011



14 729 who lived in outer regional areas (11.5% growth), and only 3507 (2.5% growth) who lived in remote or very remote parts of the country. As in previous censuses, most people who changed how they indicated their Indigenous origin predominantly lived in urban and regional areas.

Given the different geographic characteristics of the eight Australian states and territories, we would expect differences by jurisdiction. While there were differences, it did not completely follow the relative share of major city/regional/remote Indigenous people in the jurisdictions. It would appear that state/territory also matters (as summarised in Fig. 4).

For three jurisdictions in Australia, there was a net increase of the Indigenous population due to changing patterns of identification in the census by more than 20% – Victoria (21.5%), the Australian Capital Territory (20.9%), and New South Wales (20.8%). However, because New South Wales had such a large population in 2011 relative to those other two jurisdictions, net identification change in that state made up 48.0% of the total identification change. This is almost double the next greatest contribution (Queensland, 24.3% of total identification change).

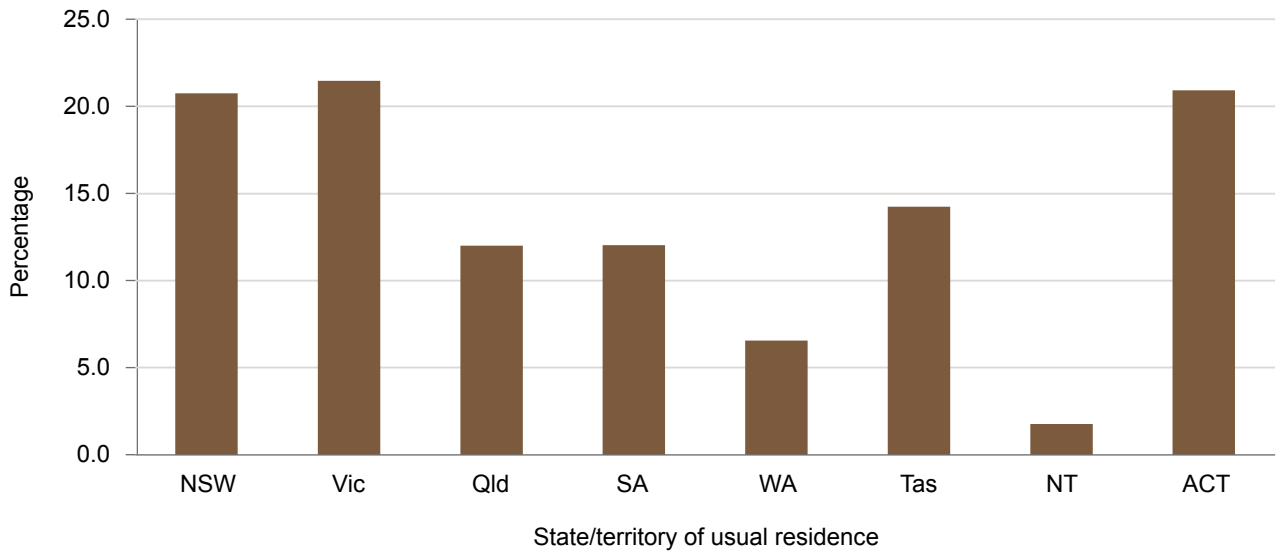
At the other end of the spectrum, there was very little net identification change in two jurisdictions – the Northern Territory (1.8%) and Western Australia (6.5%). Given that changing patterns of identification in the census made little contribution to population growth in these two jurisdictions, it is not surprisingly Indigenous population growth was relatively low in these jurisdictions between 2011 and 2016.

The contribution of identification change to changes in aggregate socioeconomic outcomes

As we have suggested elsewhere (Markham & Biddle 2017), changing patterns of identification in the census have the potential to impact on our understanding of changes in socioeconomic outcomes between censuses. If those who newly identified in the census had relatively higher socioeconomic status before their identification in the census changed (compared with those whose identification in the census did not change, or changed in the opposite direction), then this will tend to bias upwards any measured change in socioeconomic outcomes. To clarify, this does not mean that individuals' outcomes changed post-identification in the census. Rather, that the aggregate outcome for the statistical population identified as 'Indigenous' will change due to the entry of those deciding to identify as being of Indigenous origin into that statistical population. There is very strong evidence for this in the most recent ACLD.

Consider employment. This is one of the headline targets for the Closing the Gap policy agenda, and one that has been stubbornly slow to close. If you compare 2011 Census data to 2016 Census data as repeated cross-sections, then there was a slight increase in employment rates in non-remote areas for the Indigenous population

FIG. 4. Net identification change by state/territory of usual residence in 2011



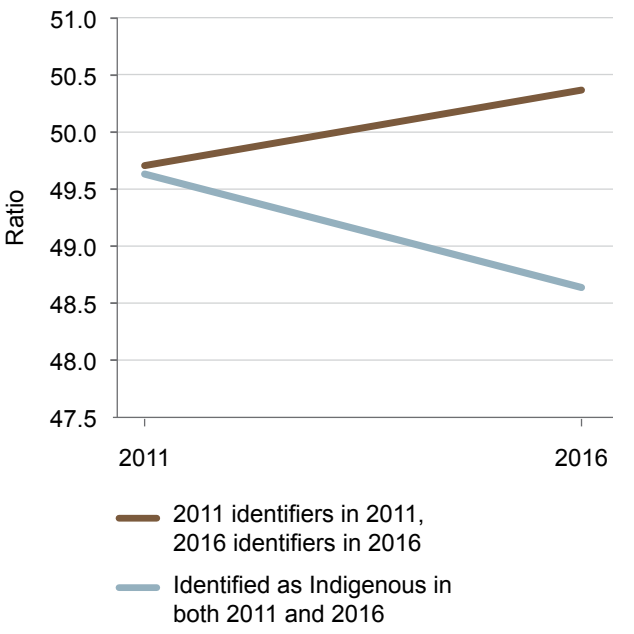
and a moderately large decline in remote areas (Markham & Biddle 2017b; Venn & Biddle, forthcoming). Given the size of the two populations at baseline, this represents a relatively steady employment figure.

If we look at the Indigenous population in the ACLD as two repeated cross-sections, the situation is not too dissimilar. Specifically, looking at all Indigenous adults aged 15 years and over at the time of each census, the employment rate of the 2011 ACLD Indigenous population in 2011 was 49.7%, and the employment rate of the 2016 ACLD Indigenous population in 2016 was 50.4%.

If we only used repeated cross-sections, we would think that Indigenous employment is improving, albeit relatively slowly. However, when we look at the employment rates using the linked population a very different picture emerges. Specifically, the employment rate for those who 'always identified' in the census was 49.6% in 2011 and 48.7% in 2016. That is, Fig. 5 shows that there was actually a worsening in employment outcomes between 2011 and 2016, not a small increase that has been reported elsewhere (e.g. PM&C 2018).

This seemingly paradoxical result can be explained by the fact that the employment rates of those who newly identified as Indigenous in the 2016 census (59.9% in 2011) were much higher than the employment rates for the always identified census population (49.6% in 2011) and the formerly identified census population (50.5% in 2011). The inflow of new individuals with a higher employment rate into the Indigenous population makes employment outcomes look like they are improving, when the data actually suggests employment outcomes are worsening. Put simply, if we track the same people over the period and exclude those who newly identified as Indigenous in 2016, then the employment gap is not closing – it is growing.

FIG. 5. Employment-to-population ratio for Indigenous people aged 15 years or more, national population



Discussion and concluding comments

Changing patterns of how people identify as being of Indigenous origin in the census is a clear contributor to official estimates of Indigenous population growth. This is perhaps unsurprising, as there are many good social and historical reasons why many people are only now willing to identify as Indigenous on the census. While there is uncertainty in the precision of the estimates of the size of this population, our preliminary estimates suggest that net identification change between 2011 and 2016 was a greater contributor to Indigenous population growth than natural increase (the excess of Indigenous births over deaths).

Identification change in the census does not only change the size of the overall official Indigenous population – it also changes the composition. Compared with the previously identified, those who are newly identified are more likely to be young; to live in New South Wales, Victoria or the Australian Capital Territory; more likely to live in a major city; and more likely to be employed.

These data do not suggest that changing identification in the census in any way leads to an improvement in outcomes, nor is that the motivation for people's identification to change. On the contrary, the data show that the population of people newly identifying in the census as being of Indigenous origin had worse employment outcomes in 2016 (58.2%) than they did in 2011 (59.9%), reflecting the deterioration of employment outcomes for Indigenous people in general. Part of this may be due to ageing, but there is no evidence that identification change leads to socioeconomic change, or is even correlated with it. Rather, it is likely that there are a range of social and familial reasons why some people may change their identification, alongside the fact that the person filling out a census form on behalf of someone in 2011 might be different to the person who filled out the form in 2016. In no way do we suggest that

there should be any intervention to reduce identification change – on the contrary, to the extent that a reluctance to identify is due to discrimination, this should be seen as a positive development.

What analysis of this very rich dataset has shown is that the Indigenous population has always been much bigger than we previously thought. This is important not only for current policy, but also future planning, as we have no reason to expect that the process of identification change will not continue into the future.

Perhaps most importantly, we strongly advocate that identification change in the census be always kept in mind when assessing the progress toward targets related to Indigenous Australians such as Closing the Gap. Identification change in the census can – and does – give the misleading appearance that socioeconomic outcomes like employment are improving for Indigenous people, when in fact the opposite is happening. What may appear to be slow progress or steady outcomes across repeated cross-sections, may in fact mask worsening of outcomes for individuals. The success or otherwise of policy interventions should be assessed with this in mind.

Notes

1. In the remainder of the paper, we will use the term 'Indigenous' to refer to people of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin. Although this brief analysis has combined these two populations, understanding the potentially differing growth dynamics of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations is an important question worthy of future research.
2. The scope of the ACLD 2011–16 is the same as that of the 2011 and 2016 censuses, with the additional constraint that it excludes people who died or moved overseas between 2011 and 2016, and people who were born or arrived from overseas between 2011 and 2016.

References

ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) (2009). *Births, Australia*, 2008, cat no. 3301.0, ABS, Canberra.

—— (2017a). *Australian demographic statistics, Mar 2017*, cat no. 3101.0, ABS, Canberra.

—— (2017b). *Deaths, Australia*, 2016, cat no. 3302.0, ABS, Canberra.

—— (2018). *Microdata: Australian Census Longitudinal Dataset, 2011–2016*, cat no. 2080.0, ABS, Canberra.

Gardiner-Garden J (2003). *Defining Aboriginality in Australia*, Current Issues Brief 10 2002–03, Parliamentary Library, Canberra. https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/Publications_Archive/CIB/cib0203/03Cib10.

Gray A (2002). The future history of Aboriginal families. In: Briscoe G & Smith L (eds), The *Aboriginal population revisited: 70 000 years to the present*, Aboriginal History Inc, 109–131.

Kukutai T & Rarere M (2013). Tracking patterns of tribal identification in the New Zealand Census, 1991 to 2006. *New Zealand Population Review* 39:1–24.

Markham F & Biddle N (2017a). *Indigenous population change in the 2016 Census*, 2016 Census Paper 1, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Australian National University, Canberra.

—— (2017b). Radical rethink of Closing the Gap required, despite some progress, *The Conversation*, 4 December, https://theconversation.com/radical-rethink-of-closing-the-gap-required-despite-some-progress-86203.

PM&C (Australian Government Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet) (2018). *Closing the Gap Prime Minister's report 2018*, PM&C, Canberra.

United Nations (2008). *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf.

Venn D & Biddle N (forthcoming). *Labour market outcomes*, 2016 Census Paper 6, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Australian National University, Canberra.

Yap M & Biddle N (2012). *Indigenous fertility and family formation*, 2011 Census Paper 2, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Australian National University, Canberra.

CONTACT US

Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research
Research School of Social Sciences
ANU College of Arts & Social Sciences

Copland Building #24
The Australian National University
Canberra ACT 0200
Australia

T +61 2 6125 0587
W caepr.anu.edu.au

ANU CRICOS Provider Number: 00120C