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National Household Survey: Aboriginal Peoples

Response mobility and the growth of the Aboriginal identity population, 2006-2011 and 2011-2016

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Response mobility and the growth of the Aboriginal identity population, 2006-2011 and 2011-2016

by Vivian O'Donnell and Russell LaPointe

Introduction

The Aboriginal¹ population in Canada is growing at a remarkable pace. Between 2011 and 2016, the Aboriginal identity population increased 19.5%, compared to a 4.2% increase in the non-Aboriginal population. Growth in the previous census period of 2006 to 2011 was also significant; the Aboriginal identity population increased 19.8% while the non-Aboriginal population increased 5.2%. What can account for this growth? While birth rates in the Aboriginal population have remained relatively high,² there are non-demographic factors to consider.³ This study examines response mobility, which refers, in this context, to the phenomenon by which people provide different responses over time to census questions about Indigenous identity.

Response mobility (or ethnic mobility⁴) has been observed in several countries, including Australia, the United States and New Zealand.⁵ It has been identified as a factor of growth in the Aboriginal identity population in Canada for several decades.⁶ This study builds upon this work by using an integrated dataset that includes census information up to the 2016 Census.

Several factors may contribute to response mobility. Previous research⁷ about the Aboriginal identity population has found that having a certain degree of mixed ancestry can be correlated with response mobility. Social factors, legislative changes and court decisions can also have an impact on the way that people respond to census questions. The census form is usually filled in by one person on behalf of all members of a household, and different people may have filled in the form from one Census to the next. A respondent may have newly discovered Aboriginal ancestry and is now identifying as an Aboriginal person. Changes to the question wording or instructions on the questionnaire may influence the way that respondents answer. Even when wording stays the same, the way that people perceive the census categories may evolve and change over time.

Understanding response mobility is important because of its potential impacts on the size, composition and characteristics of the Aboriginal identity population. This study examines the patterns of response mobility to the Aboriginal identifier questions from 2006 to 2011 and 2011 to 2016. It first outlines how the Aboriginal population is counted in the Census and then describes the integrated Census dataset that is used as the data source for this analysis. Patterns of response mobility are presented at the national level for the total Aboriginal identity population to show the magnitude of “exchange” between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations. More detailed information is then provided about “movement” between the different Aboriginal identity groups and the non-Aboriginal population. Regional analysis is also provided, looking at net response mobility in the provinces and territories.

The Aboriginal identity population

How is the Aboriginal population measured in the Census? Table 1 summarizes the Aboriginal identifier questions on the census questionnaire that are used to derive the Aboriginal identity population. Included in the Aboriginal identity population are those who self-identify as an Aboriginal person (that is, First Nations, Métis or Inuit) in Question 18 and/or who report being a Status Indian and/or a member of a First Nation/Indian band in Questions 20 and 21. As such, the Aboriginal identity population, as a concept, is a mix of self-identification and legal status. While the questions used to create the Aboriginal identity population in 2011 and 2016 were the same, there were changes from 2006 to 2011. A notable one was the 2011 addition of the term “First Nations” to Question 18 with the accompanying note that “First Nations (North American Indian) includes Status and Non-Status Indians” (Table 1).

1. While the term “Indigenous” is increasingly being used in place of “Aboriginal”, in this paper the term “Aboriginal” is used to maintain consistency with the terminology of the data sources (Census, National Household Survey).

2. Morency et al., 2018.

3. Non-demographic factors of growth would include improved coverage (in the case of the First Nations population, this would also include fewer incompletely enumerated reserves over time). For further information on these factors, see Statistics Canada, 2019.

4. “Ethnic mobility” is the most commonly used term in the Canadian literature. This study considers legal status (Registered Indian Status) in addition to changes in self-identification and therefore opts for the broader term of “response mobility”.

5. Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018; Statistics New Zealand, 2015; Liebler et al., 2017; Perez and Hirschman 2009.

6. Guimond, Eric, 1999; Guimond, Eric, 2003; Caron-Malenfant, Éric et al., 2014.

7. Guimond, Eric, 2003, Caron-Malenfant et al., 2014.

Table 1
Aboriginal identifier questions, 2006 Census, 2011 National Household Survey and 2016 Census

Census 2006 – 2B (Long Form)	2011 NHS: N1 questionnaire and Census 2A-L-2016 (long form questionnaire)
18. Is this person an Aboriginal person, that is, North American Indian, Métis or Inuit (Eskimo)?	18. Is this person an Aboriginal person, that is, First Nations (North American Indian), Métis or Inuk (Inuit)?
If “Yes”, mark “X” the circle(s) that best describe(s) this person now.	Note: First Nations (North American Indian) includes Status and Non-Status Indians. If “Yes”, mark “X” the circle(s) that best describe(s) this person now.
21. Is this person a Treaty Indian or a Registered Indian as defined by the <i>Indian Act</i> of Canada?	20. Is this person a Status Indian (Registered or Treaty Indian as defined by the <i>Indian Act</i> of Canada)?
20. Is this person a member of an Indian Band / First Nation?	21. Is this person a member of a First Nation/Indian band? If “Yes”, which First Nation/Indian band? For example, Musqueam Indian Band, Sturgeon Lake First Nation, Atikamekw of Manawan.

Sources: Statistics Canada. Questionnaires from the 2006 Census, the 2011 National Household Survey, and the 2016 Census are available on Statistics Canada’s website at <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/index-eng.cfm> (accessed October 9, 2019).

In this paper, the Aboriginal identity population is divided into the First Nations, Métis and Inuit population groups (based on single responses to question 18). Using responses to question 20, the First Nations population is further divided into those who reported being a Status Indian (First Nations Status Indians) and those who reported that they were not a Status Indian (First Nations Non-Status Indians). The category ‘Other’ captures the rest of the Aboriginal identity population: those who identified with more than one Aboriginal group and those who did not identify as First Nations, Métis or Inuit but who indicated being a Status Indian and/or a member of a First Nation/Indian band. The ‘Other’ category comprises a relatively small part of the population, and most of the analysis will focus on First Nations Status Indians, First Nations Non-Status Indians, Métis, and Inuit (Table 2).

Table 2
Aboriginal Identity Population in 2006, 2011 and 2016, Canada

Census year	Aboriginal identity group					Total Aboriginal identity population
	First Nations Status Indians	First Nations Non-Status Indians	Métis	Inuit	Other ¹	
			number			
2006	563,670	132,645	388,465	50,345	34,310	1,169,435
2011	637,660	213,900	451,795	59,440	37,890	1,400,685
2016	744,855	232,375	587,545	65,025	43,980	1,673,785

1. “Other” includes ‘Multiple Aboriginal responses’ (those who reported being First Nations, Métis and/or Inuit as a multiple response) and ‘Aboriginal responses not included elsewhere’ (those who reported ‘No, not an Aboriginal person’ but reported being a Status Indian and/or a member of a First Nation/Indian band).

Note: Counts have not been adjusted for incompletely enumerated reserves.

Sources: Statistics Canada, censuses of population 2006 and 2016; 2011 National Household Survey.

Data source

This analysis is based on the integration of records from the 2006 Census, the 2011 National Household Survey (NHS) and the 2016 Census, which allows users to retrieve the same respondent’s information at different points in time. In this study, responses of individuals to the 2006 Census are compared to their responses in the 2011 NHS, and the responses of individuals in the 2011 NHS are compared to their responses in the 2016 Census.⁸

It is important to note that only those living in private dwellings who were respondents in both census years could be included. Therefore, excluded from the dataset are those who were younger than the age of 5 in the second census period, individuals who migrated to Canada between cycles, individuals who died or left Canada between cycles, and individuals who lived in a collective dwelling in either census period. The integrated dataset is weighted to represent the total Canadian population according to these eligibility criteria. For the 2011-2016 integrated

8. The two linked time periods are examined separately (2006-2011 and 2011-2016) rather than following the same respondents over the three periods (2006-2011-2016). This is because the Aboriginal identifier questions are administered to a sample of the population, and the number of respondents who would appear in all three periods would be too small for in-depth analysis.

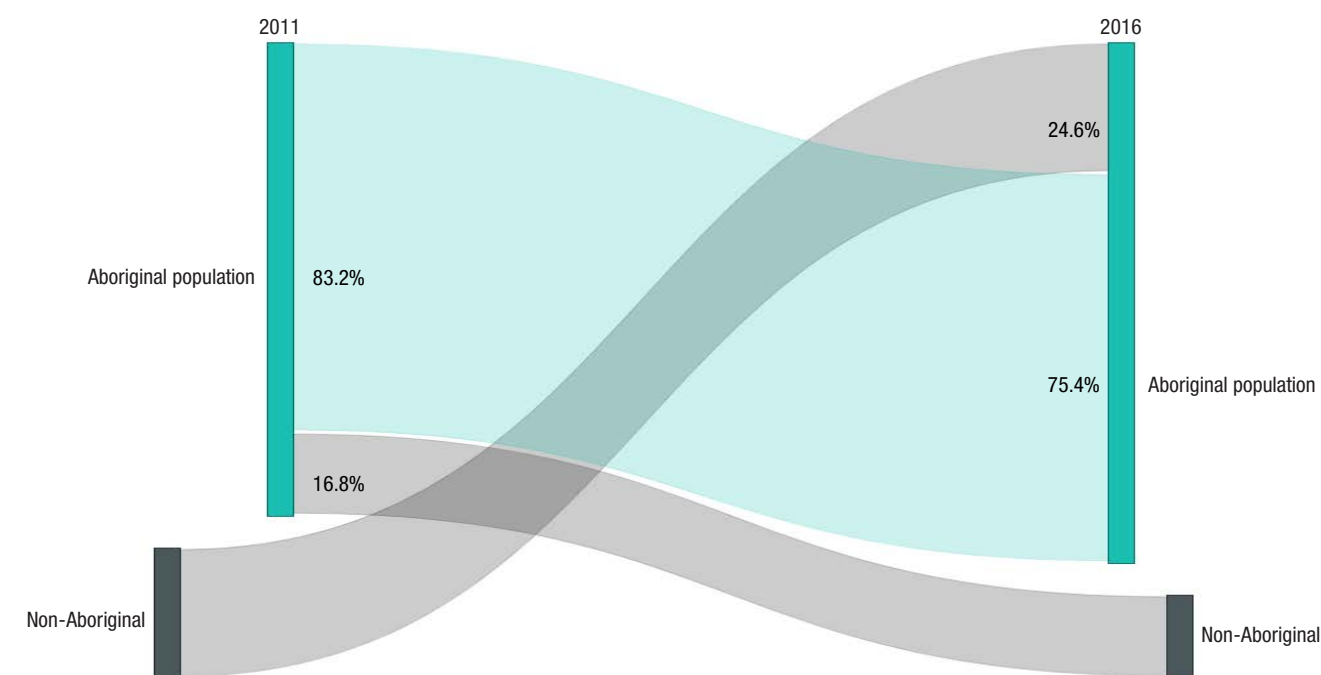
dataset, the sum of weights represents the Canadian population in 2011 who was still alive and present in Canada in 2016. For the 2006-2011 integrated dataset, the sum of weights represents the total Canadian population in 2006 who was still alive and present in Canada in 2011. Using the weighted counts from the integrated dataset, percent distributions were calculated.

There was “flow” both into and out of the Aboriginal identity population in both census periods

Using the integrated dataset, responses of individuals to the Aboriginal identifier questions can be tracked from one census period to the next to see if the responses of individuals remained ‘consistent’ or if their responses changed (indicating response mobility). Chart 1 summarizes the movement or ‘flow’ both into and out of the Aboriginal identity population at the national level.

Of the 2011 Aboriginal population in the integrated dataset, 83.2% would go on to identify as Aboriginal in 2016. The remaining 16.8% would flow out of the Aboriginal population into the non-Aboriginal population in 2016 (Chart 1). Those who identified as Aboriginal in both 2011 and 2016, that is, the consistent flow, represented 75.4% of the 2016 Aboriginal population. The remainder is accounted for by the inflow of individuals from the non-Aboriginal population into the Aboriginal population. About one in four (24.6%) of the 2016 Aboriginal population in the integrated dataset had identified as non-Aboriginal in 2011.

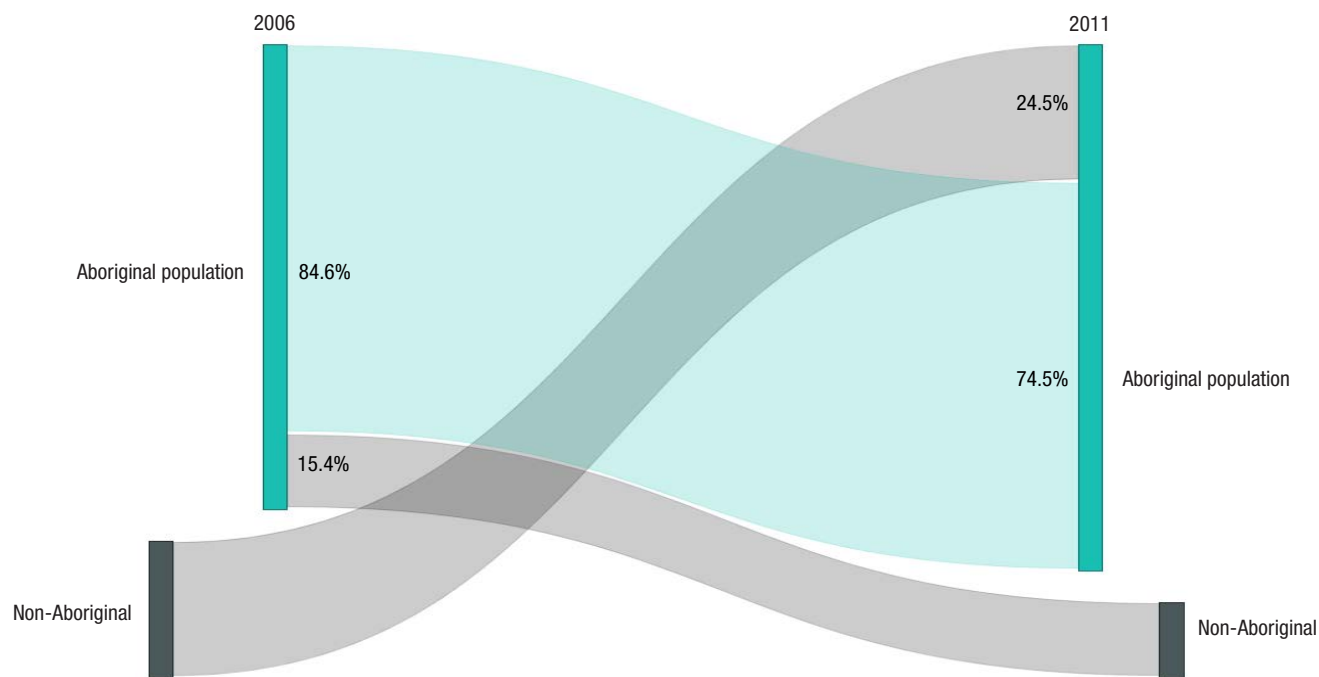
Chart 1
Response mobility between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations, 2011 NHS – 2016 Census integration, Canada



Sources: Statistics Canada, 2011 National Household Survey; 2016 Census integration.

The patterns were similar in the previous census period of 2006 to 2011. Of the 2006 Aboriginal identity population, 84.6% went on to identify as Aboriginal in 2011. The remaining 15.4% flowed out of the Aboriginal population into the non-Aboriginal population (‘outflow’). The consistent flow represented 74.5% of the Aboriginal identity population in 2011, with 25.5% of the 2011 Aboriginal identity population in the integrated dataset previously identifying as non-Aboriginal. (Chart 2)

Chart 2
Response mobility between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations, 2006 Census – 2011 NHS integration, Canada



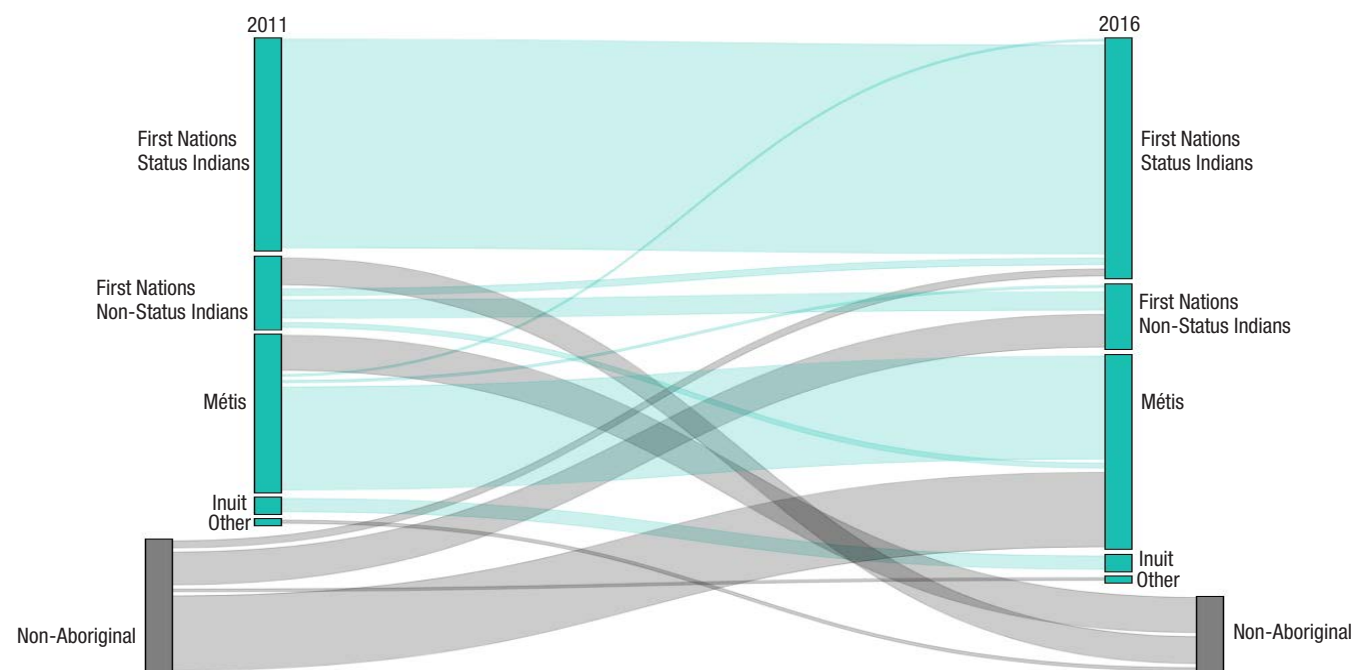
Sources: Statistics Canada, 2006 Census; 2011 National Household Survey integration.

Charts 1 and 2 illustrate the “movement” of respondents between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations at the national level in the two census periods being considered (2011 to 2016 and 2006 to 2011), as some individuals flowed out of the Aboriginal population while others flowed in. In both census periods, the number of people flowing in outnumbered those flowing out, resulting in a net gain in the population. Using the integrated dataset, it is possible to consider more detailed flow patterns. The next section examines response mobility between different Aboriginal population groups and the non-Aboriginal population.

Response mobility was highest in the First Nations Non-Status Indian population and the Métis population

Chart 3 illustrates “flow” patterns between First Nations Status Indians, First Nations Non-Status Indians, Métis, Inuit and the non-Aboriginal population from 2011 to 2016. Response mobility is more prevalent in the Métis and First Nations Non-Status Indian populations, and less prevalent in the First Nations Status Indian and Inuit populations. While there is flow between the Aboriginal identity groups (for example, movement from First Nations Non-Status to Métis), much of the “exchange” occurs with the non-Aboriginal population.

Chart 3
Response mobility between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal population groups, 2011 NHS – 2016 Census integration, Canada



Notes: The percent distribution was calculated using the total population that had identified as Aboriginal in either census period. Only percentages greater than or equal to 1% are displayed.
Sources: Statistics Canada, 2011 National Household Survey; 2016 Census integration.

Response mobility between Aboriginal groups can be examined by first considering the “outflow” from different population groups; in other words, looking at how the people in each Aboriginal population group in 2011 went on to identify in 2016 (Table 3A). Among those who identified as First Nations Status Indians in 2011, 94.0% provided the same response in 2016. The remaining 6% moved into the other population groups (2.0% into the non-Aboriginal population and 4.0% into the other Aboriginal population groups). Inuit also had a relatively high percentage of consistent responses. Of those who reported being Inuit in 2011, 89.9% reported the same way in 2016. The remainder moved into the non-Aboriginal population (6.2%) or into the other Aboriginal population groups (3.9%).

Of those who reported being Métis in 2011, two thirds (66.3%) reported the same way in 2016 while one quarter (24.3%) identified as non-Aboriginal in 2016. Another 7.7% moved into the First Nations population, distributed fairly evenly between Status and Non-Status Indian populations (Table 3A).

The percentage of Non-Status Indians moving into the non-Aboriginal population was relatively high. Of those who reported being First Nations Non-Status Indians in 2011, 41.2% moved into the non-Aboriginal population in 2016. Another 14.5% moved into the First Nations Status Indian population, and 12.2% identified as Métis. Less than a third (30.0%) of those in the 2011 First Nations Non-Status Indian population reported the same way in 2016. (Table 3A)

Table 3A
How the 2011 Aboriginal population identified in 2016 (outflow), Canada

2016 identity group	2011 identity group				
	First Nations Status Indians	First Nations Non-Status Indians	Métis	Inuit	Other
	percent				
First Nations Status Indians	94.0	14.5	3.7	1.8	19.7
First Nations Non-Status Indians	1.6	30.0	4.0	0.4	6.1
Métis	1.6	12.2	66.3	1.2	15.1
Inuit	0.1	0.2	0.1	89.9	0.7
Other	0.7	2.0	1.6	0.5	8.7
Non-Aboriginal	2.0	41.2	24.3	6.2	49.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding.

Source: Statistics Canada, 2011 National Household Survey; 2016 Census integration.

Table 3B shows the “inflow” from different population groups; in other words, it shows how individuals in each Aboriginal population group in 2016 had identified in 2011. Over half (52.4%) of the 2016 First Nations Non-Status Indian population in the integrated dataset had reported being non-Aboriginal on the previous census (Table 3B). There was also a significant inflow from the non-Aboriginal population to the 2016 Métis population. Of those who identified as Métis in 2016, 39.1% had identified as non-Aboriginal in 2011.

Table 3B
How the 2016 Aboriginal population identified in 2011 (inflow), Canada

2011 identity group	2016 identity group				
	First Nations Status Indians	First Nations Non-Status Indians	Métis	Inuit	Other
	percent				
First Nations Status Indians	87.1	5.1	1.8	0.8	12.0
First Nations Non-Status Indians	4.5	32.0	4.6	0.6	10.8
Métis	2.5	9.1	53.3	0.5	18.7
Inuit	0.1	0.1	0.1	91.0	0.7
Other	1.2	1.3	1.1	0.5	9.2
Non-Aboriginal	4.6	52.4	39.1	6.6	48.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

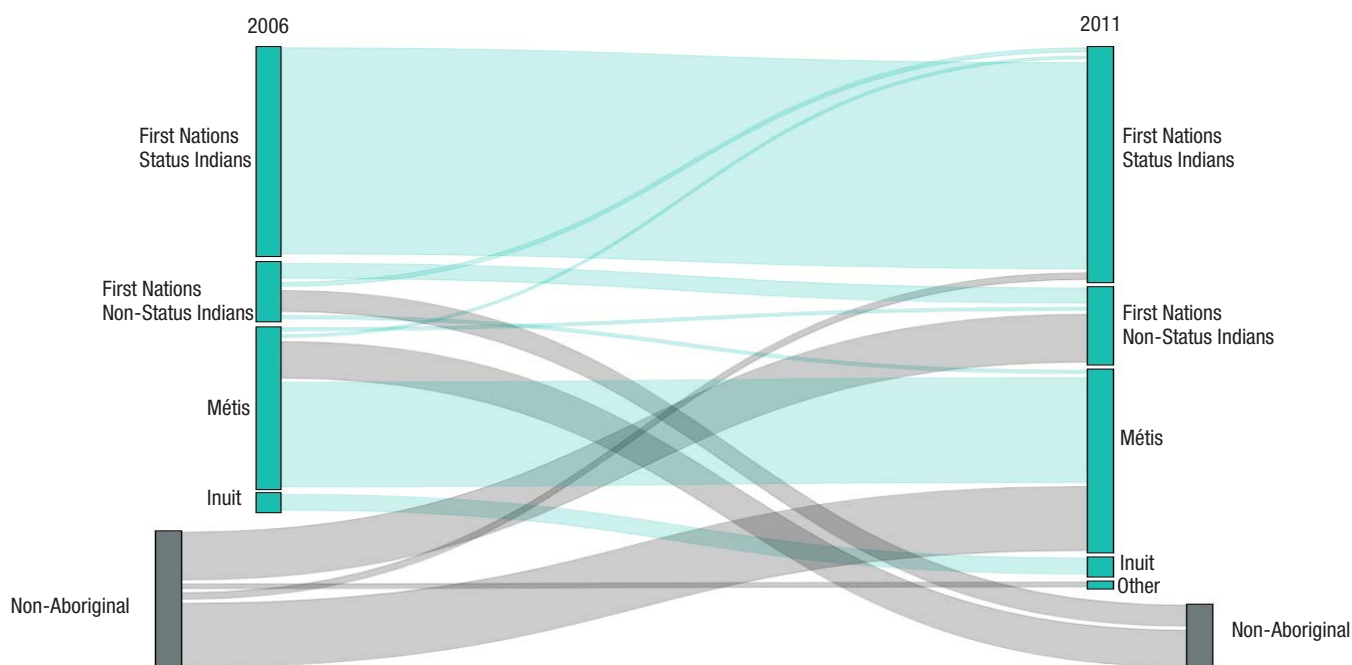
Source: Statistics Canada, 2011 National Household Survey; 2016 Census integration.

The patterns of response mobility were similar in both census periods (2011-2016 and 2006-2011)

The general patterns of response mobility at the national level from 2006 to 2011 largely mirror the results from 2011 to 2016 (Chart 3). When considering how each Aboriginal population group in 2006 identified in 2011 (the “outflow”), First Nations Status Indians and Inuit had the highest percentage of consistent responses (93.0% and 93.2% respectively), while 65.9% of Métis and 31.9% of First Nations Non-Status Indians consistently identified. As in the other census period, there was a considerable “outflow” from the Métis and First Nations Non-Status Indian populations into the Non-Aboriginal population. About one quarter (24.5%) of the 2006 Métis population in the integrated dataset went on to identify as non-Aboriginal in 2011, while 41.5% of the 2006 First Nations Non-Status Indian population did so. (Table 4A)

When considering how each Aboriginal population group in 2011 had identified in 2006 (the “inflow”), significant movements from the non-Aboriginal population into the First Nations Non-Status Indian and Métis populations are observed. Of the First Nations Non-Status Indian population in the integrated dataset in 2011, 61.6% had reported being non-Aboriginal on the previous Census. Of those who identified as Métis in 2011, 35.6% had identified as non-Aboriginal in 2006. (Table 4B)

Chart 4
Response mobility between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal population groups, 2006 Census – 2011 NHS integration, Canada



Notes: The percent distribution was calculated using the total population that had identified as Aboriginal in either census period. Only percentages greater than or equal to 1% are displayed.
Sources: Statistics Canada, 2006 Census; 2011 National Household Survey integration.

Table 4A
How the 2006 Aboriginal population identified in 2011 (outflow), Canada

	2006 identity group				
	First Nations Status Indians	First Nations Non-Status Indians	Métis	Inuit	Other
2011 identity group	percent				
First Nations Status Indians	93.0	13.6	4.1	0.7	32.2
First Nations Non-Status Indians	2.0	31.9	4.3	1.2	10.1
Métis	2.3	12.1	65.9	1.1	13.9
Inuit	0.1	0.1	0.3	93.2	1.1
Other	0.6	0.8	1.0	0.3	12.7
Non-Aboriginal	2.1	41.5	24.5	3.4	30.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding.

Source: Statistics Canada, 2006 Census; 2011 National Household Survey integration.

Table 4B
How the 2011 Aboriginal population identified in 2006 (inflow), Canada

	2011 identity group				
	First Nations Status Indians	First Nations Non-Status Indians	Métis	Inuit	Other
2006 identity group	percent				
First Nations Status Indians	87.5	5.3	2.7	0.5	10.3
First Nations Non-Status Indians	3.4	22.8	3.8	0.2	3.3
Métis	2.8	8.4	56.9	1.9	11.5
Inuit	0.1	0.3	0.1	88.7	0.5
Other	1.8	1.6	1.0	0.7	12.3
Non-Aboriginal	4.4	61.6	35.6	8.0	62.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding.

Source: Statistics Canada, 2006 Census; 2011 National Household Survey integration.

These national-level findings reveal different patterns of response mobility for the different Aboriginal groups. For both census periods (2006 to 2011 and 2011 to 2016) the First Nations Status Indian population and the Inuit population had higher percentages of consistent responses, and the First Nations Non-Status Indian population and the Métis had lower percentages of consistent responses. While all Aboriginal identity groups experienced an outflow of individuals into the non-Aboriginal population, all groups experienced an inflow from the non-Aboriginal population. For all groups, this resulted in a net gain. This exchange with the non-Aboriginal population was particularly prevalent in the First Nations Non-Status Indian population and the Métis population.

These national-level results can mask substantial regional variation. The next section considers response mobility in the Aboriginal identity populations in the provinces and territories.

Response mobility was more common in provinces east of Manitoba

Response mobility impacts the growth of the Aboriginal identity population differently across the country. One way to get a better understanding of regional differences is to calculate a net response mobility for the Aboriginal identity population in each province and territory. Net response mobility is estimated by subtracting the number of individuals who no longer reported an Aboriginal identity from the number who began reporting an Aboriginal identity. A positive net mobility indicates that more people began reporting an Aboriginal identity response than stopped reporting it, indicating a net positive effect of response mobility on the growth of the population of interest.⁹ To facilitate comparisons between provinces and territories, net response mobility between two census years for a given province or territory is expressed as a percentage of the Aboriginal population in the first census year in that province or territory.

From 2011 to 2016, there was a positive net response mobility of 10.4% at the national level for the Aboriginal identity population (Table 5). Higher net response mobility rates were observed in the provinces east of Manitoba, with the highest net response mobility rate in Nova Scotia (49.7%). The other Atlantic provinces also had net response mobility rates that were higher than the national rate. Quebec had a net response mobility of 21.7% while Ontario (which had the largest Aboriginal identity population of all the provinces and territories) had a net response mobility of 14.2% (Table 5).

By contrast, each of the Western provinces had relatively low net response mobility. Saskatchewan had the lowest net response mobility of any province or territory between 2011 and 2016 at 0.1%. Manitoba (5.2%), Alberta (5.0%) and British Columbia (7.2%) had rates below the national average. Of the three territories, Yukon had the highest net response mobility at 9.0%, while rates in the Northwest Territories and in Nunavut were both less than 1%. (Table 5)

9. Because this report uses the integrated dataset, only those who could be linked are included in the file. This captures the effect of response mobility but excludes the other factors of population growth (births, deaths, international migration).

Table 5
Total Aboriginal identity population, 2006, 2011 and 2016 and net response mobility rate for 2006-2011 and 2011-2016, Canada, provinces and territories

Region	Aboriginal identity population			Net response mobility rate of Aboriginal identity population	
	Census year			Census period	
	2006	2011	2016	2006-2011	2011-2016
	number			percent	
Canada	1,169,435	1,400,690	1,673,785	13.6	10.4
Newfoundland and Labrador	23,390	35,800	45,725	48.2	27.4
Prince Edward Island	1,725	2,230	2,735	x	25.7
Nova Scotia	24,115	33,850	51,490	42.9	49.7
New Brunswick	17,585	22,620	29,385	27.7	25.0
Quebec	108,095	141,915	182,890	27.6	21.7
Ontario	241,840	301,430	374,395	21.0	14.2
Manitoba	174,575	195,895	223,310	5.8	5.2
Saskatchewan	141,830	157,740	175,015	3.0	0.1
Alberta	187,935	220,695	258,640	7.4	5.0
British Columbia	195,400	232,290	270,585	12.9	7.2
Yukon	7,540	7,710	8,195	10.0	9.0
Northwest Territories	20,525	21,160	20,860	0.1	0.6
Nunavut	24,875	27,360	30,555	0.9	0.4

x suppressed to meet the confidentiality requirements of the Statistics Act

Notes: Census counts are provided for context only and do not reflect the population in the integrated dataset. Census counts have not been adjusted for incompletely enumerated reserves. The net response mobility rate was calculated by subtracting the number of people who stopped reporting being Aboriginal from the number of people newly reporting being Aboriginal as a percentage of the total Aboriginal population from the previous period.

Sources: Statistics Canada, Censuses of population 2006 and 2016; 2011 National Household Survey; and the 2006 Census; 2011 National Household Survey; 2016 Census integration.

These patterns were similar to that of the previous census period of 2006 to 2011. At a national level, the net response mobility for the Aboriginal identity population was 13.6%. The Atlantic provinces had the highest net response mobility rates in the country, with Newfoundland and Labrador having the highest rate (48.2%) of all the provinces and territories. The Western provinces had lower net response mobility rates than their eastern counterparts. Saskatchewan (3.0%) had the lowest rate of all of the provinces, while Manitoba (5.8%) and Alberta (7.4%) were also below the national average. Response mobility had little effect on the size of the Aboriginal identity populations in the Northwest Territories (0.1%) and Nunavut (0.9%).

Table 5 shows the Census and NHS Aboriginal identity population counts in each province and territory¹⁰. When considering the impact of response mobility on the growth of the Aboriginal identity population in the provinces and territories, it is important to consider the size of these populations. While the Atlantic provinces experienced the greatest percentage change, these provinces had relatively small populations to start with.

Conclusion

The Aboriginal identity population has been growing at a rate that far outpaces the growth of the non-Aboriginal population. While demographic factors such as high birth rates are contributing to this growth,¹¹ this study examined a non-demographic factor of growth: specifically response mobility to the Aboriginal identifier questions from 2006 to 2011 and from 2011 to 2016. The study highlights “flows” both into and out of the Aboriginal identity population. In both census periods, those who “entered” the Aboriginal population outnumbered those who “left”. Further, it highlights how response mobility impacts upon some Aboriginal identity groups more than others. Specifically, the First Nations Non-Status Indian and Métis populations had lower percentages of consistent responses than the First Nations Status Indian and Inuit populations. It also shows how response mobility varies across the country, with higher net response mobility rates in the Aboriginal identity population being observed in the provinces east of Manitoba.

Why would a respondent change their responses to the Aboriginal identifier questions on the Census over time? There are many possible reasons. Responses to the Aboriginal self-identification question (“Is this person an Aboriginal person, that is, First Nations, Métis or Inuk?”) may be influenced by many factors, including the

10. These counts, based on the 2006 and 2016 censuses and the 2011 NHS, are provided for context. They would not match counts from the integrated dataset.

11. The *Projections of the Aboriginal Population and Households in Canada, 2011 to 2036* provides an overview of different factors contributing to the growth of the Aboriginal identity population. See Statistics Canada (2015).

respondents' social environment, their understandings of their family history, and their understandings of the nature of First Nations, Métis and Inuit identity. Respondents may also be influenced by the perception that self-identification can lead to benefits for Aboriginal peoples in general, and for the individual personally.¹² Other research has shown that response mobility in the Aboriginal identity population is more common in regions with lower Aboriginal representation in the population, such as urban areas.¹³

Further, because the Aboriginal identity population concept is a mix of self-identification and legal status, changes in legislation can also have an impact. There have been some significant changes to the eligibility criteria for Registered Indian Status in the *Indian Act* in the time period being considered.¹⁴ For example, in 2011, the Qalipu Mi'kmaq First Nation in Newfoundland and Labrador was established as an Indian Band under the *Indian Act*. In the time leading up to its establishment and in the years following, there was a number of people who applied for band membership and registration as Status Indians. By August 2019, there were 22,573 individuals who had successfully registered as Status Indians and members of the Qalipu First Nation.¹⁵ The total number of applications, however, was approximately 104,000.¹⁶ Over the 2006-2011 and 2011-2016 time periods, the net response mobility rate in Newfoundland and Labrador was among the highest of all provinces and territories in Canada.

Questionnaire changes can also lead to response mobility. For example, a recent study regarding ethnic origins found evidence that examples on the questionnaire can provide a boost to those origins which are included among the examples, compared to those which are not.¹⁷ In the case of the Aboriginal identifier questions, the term "First Nations" was introduced in Question 18 in 2011, along with the instruction note: "First Nations includes Status and Non-Status Indians." (See Table 1) While this study did not specifically set out to measure the impact of the inclusion of this note, it is evident that there was an increase in the number of respondents reporting as First Nations Non-Status Indians. It may be that this note influenced more people without Registered Indian Status to report being First Nations.

While it is difficult to pinpoint precisely why a respondent might change their responses to the Aboriginal identifier questions over time, response mobility is an important phenomenon to understand. This study builds on previous studies and is designed to provide a foundation for understanding the impact of response mobility on the changing size, composition, and characteristics of the Aboriginal identity population between recent census periods. Future research will examine the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of respondents who "move" both into and out of the Aboriginal identity population compared to those who provide consistent responses. This will be done to help understand the effect of response mobility on measurements over time. For example, researchers, policy makers and policy evaluators may question to what extent observed differences in the economic and social conditions in the Aboriginal population between census periods are the result of actual changes within the population that took place over that five-year period, and how much is due to new additions to the Aboriginal population. By considering socio-economic characteristics of those who moved into and out of the Aboriginal population (such as education level, employment status, and income level), one can better discern the nature and magnitude of the impact of response mobility on socioeconomic characteristics.¹⁸

Finally, it is important to note that while there may be some fluidity in reporting to the Aboriginal identifier questions, it is clear that Aboriginal identity concepts are meaningful. Unique socioeconomic, demographic and cultural characteristics of First Nations people (both status and non-status), Métis and Inuit are observed when compared to the non-Aboriginal population in each of the time periods examined.¹⁹ Studies on response mobility help contextualize and provide further insight into Aboriginal population growth and the changing characteristics of the Aboriginal identity population over time.

12. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (2012) conducted focus group research regarding the increasing propensity to identify as Indigenous, and found that disclosing one's Indigenous status was commonly attributed to a sense of pride and confidence in their identity, the perception that disclosing this information can lead to benefits for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the individual personally, and the perception that disclosing this information can promote recognition for issues related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

13. Caron-Malenfant, Éric et al., 2014.

14. Recent amendments to the *Indian Act* regarding eligibility for Indian status include *Bill C-3 Gender Equity in Indian Registration Act* and *Bill S-3, An Act to amend the Indian Act* in response to the Superior Court of Quebec decision in *Descheneaux c. Canada*.

15. Indigenous Services Canada. 2019. [First Nations profiles](http://fnp-ppn.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/fnp/Main/Search/FNRegPopulation.aspx?BAND_NUMBER=34&lang=eng) (http://fnp-ppn.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/fnp/Main/Search/FNRegPopulation.aspx?BAND_NUMBER=34&lang=eng)

16. Indigenous Services Canada. 2019. [History of the Qalipu Mi'kmaq First Nation enrolment process](https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1372946085822/1568916687154). (<https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1372946085822/1568916687154>)

17. Smith, Trevor et al., 2019.

18. For more information about the impact of response mobility on changing characteristics of the Aboriginal population in the 2001-2006 time period, see Caron-Malenfant, Éric et al. (2014). Also see Siggner (2003).

19. Carter et al (2010) state the following about the "fluid" nature of ethnic identity in the New Zealand context: "...it [does not] mean that ethnicity is a weaker social variable because of its "volatility"; one only has to look at the stark differences in social and health outcomes by ethnicity in New Zealand to appreciate that, despite being a dynamic construct, it is also an extremely powerful determinant of social inequalities." (p.43)

Methodology

The methodology used in this study is similar to that of a recent study which looked at changes in responses related to ethnic origin questions.²⁰ To determine whether people changed their answers, data from the 2006 Census and 2011 NHS were integrated, and data from the 2011 NHS and 2016 Census were integrated. The subsamples for each integrated dataset consisted of anyone who had identified as Aboriginal in either census period being considered. The subsample from 2011 to 2016 included 180,857 respondents, and the subsample from 2006 to 2011 included 155,206 respondents. Each record was assigned a weight to provide estimates for changes in the total in-scope population. Limitations to the dataset include the fact that not everyone who answered in both census periods could be integrated. A second limitation is the possibility that two different people may have been incorrectly connected as part of the integration process. This can lead to the appearance of a change in response that did not actually occur. Any coverage or data quality issues with either cycle would also impact the integrated dataset. The estimates from the 2006 and 2016 Census long-form questionnaires were derived from a mandatory survey, while the estimates for the 2011 NHS were derived from a voluntary survey. All analysis is performed using percentages rather than frequencies. The weights for the integrated dataset were generated only for comparison and growth calculations, and not for frequencies.

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20. Smith and McLeish, 2019

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