Occasionally American Indian: Joining, Leaving, and Staying in the American Indian/Alaska Native Race Category between 2000 and 2010

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Brief abstract:

The number of American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) responses in successive censuses has increased for decades. We decompose the newest decennial increase –2000 to 2010 – using uniquely-suited linked data which allows us to know a person's race response(s) in both years. For example, we describe the characteristics of those who self-reported single-race non-Hispanic AIAN in both censuses (727,000), and compare them to those who joined that population (308,000) and those who left that population by 2010 (299,000). We test prior ideas about who joins, stays, or leaves the populations of single-race and multiple-race Hispanic and non-Hispanic AIANs. For example, we ask whether most "new" AIAN people previously reported single-race white with AIAN ancestry, are well-educated, and/or are living in non-traditionally AIAN areas. We provide substantial information about previously unseen groups – those who joined or left the AIAN response group, and those who remained AIAN between 2000 and 2010.

Since at least 1960, each census has had more people mark the American Indian and Alaska Native (hereafter American Indian or AIAN) box on the race question than was expected. Each decade, the AIAN population increases more than is possible through birth or international immigration (Passel 1976, 1997; Passel & Berman 1986; Eschbach 1993, 1995; Eschbach et al. 1998; Harris 1994; Liebler & Ortyl 2013). Demographers have followed each decade's error of closure with interest but with limited data – because the censuses are cross-sectional not longitudinal, only net changes could be assessed (see Perez & Hirschman 2009). Qualitative sociologists (e.g., Liebler 2001; Nagel 1996; Fitzgerald 2007; Sturm 2011) have spoken with people who experienced identity awakenings as American Indian and thus changed their race response, but these researchers, too, are faced with limited data – small-scale studies cannot give a sense of population prevalence.

We continue and expand this tradition of study. Our work is a continuation in that it focuses on a new decade of American Indian population growth – from 2000 to 2010. The total number of people reporting AIAN alone or in combination with another race was 4.1 million in 2000 and 5.2 million in 2010 (Grieco & Cassidy 2001; Humes et al. 2011). This population increase, like other decennial increases in the past 50 years, probably includes some growth through changing identification, as well as birth and international immigration. Our work is an expansion in that we are the first researchers to have the benefit of linked data through which we know a person's responses in two adjacent censuses (both 2000 and 2010). In other words, we are not limited to studying net increases and can instead show characteristics of those who join AIAN, those who leave AIAN, and those who remain AIAN in both data sets.

Theoretical Focus

Our study breaks new ground in terms of population coverage and depth of information, but we can look to previous research and American history for expectations about which types of people joined, left, and stayed in the AIAN population between 2000 and 2010.

Joiners: Prior qualitative and demographic research has concluded that most of the "new" American Indians in past years have been former whites, especially people with relatively high education and/or who live outside of legally-defined American Indian areas (c.f., Eschbach et al. 1998; Sturm 2011; Fitzgerald 2007; Census Office 1894). We draw on ideas from whiteness studies and studies of white ethnicity (e.g., Gans 1979; Hout & Goldstein 1994; Lieberson & Waters 1993; Waters 1990) by asking whether changing a race response is a (rather ironic) application of white privilege. Are the joiners former whites? Are they coming from a place of social privilege (e.g., high education or income)?

Leavers: Federal and informal policies and practices pushed American Indian assimilation heavily in the early twentieth century. Also, the "one drop" social rule of blackness, though fading, may still be self-applied to suppress AIAN responses by part-blacks (c.f. Khanna & Johnson 2010). Are these forces pushing some people to leave the enumerated AIAN race population?

Movers: Joiners and leavers are two types of movers. Perhaps there are some types of people who feel relatively free to join and leave race groups. In that case, we would expect the characteristics of the leavers to be similar to those of the joiners. One group who might be especially likely to be movers is Central and South American indigenous people, who are technically considered "American Indian" according to the 1997 revision of the federal definition of race groups (OMB 1997), but who may be relatively unattached to the response category and thus fluctuate in their answers. Similarly, prior research with people of mixed racial heritage

shows that many have dynamic racial identities and relatively non-stable patterns of race response.

Another reason people may change their race response is that their lives have changed. Given the impact of local area characteristics on racial identity and identification, we might find that joiners and leavers are different from stayers in terms of whether they moved, and in terms of characteristics of where they moved to/from. Similarly, family dynamics affect how people see themselves. Perhaps the movers are more likely to have left their parental home between 2000 and 2010, been married or divorced, or had their first child.

Stayers: Racial identity, though widely known to be mutable, is generally thought to be central to self-conception. The stayers – those who retained their 2000 AIAN race response in 2010 – may have a relatively strong sense of themselves as American Indian and may experience the social world as such. Perhaps some stayers would have left the population if they had experienced geographical or family changes, so we assess the extent of these types of changes and compare them to those experienced by the movers.

Are the stayers substantially different from the joiners and/or the leavers in terms of their social, economic, demographic, and family characteristics? In most studies of policies, programs, and social inequalities, the intended focal population is the population of stayers. For this reason, we provide detailed information about the characteristics of people in the stayers group, as well as the leavers and joiners.

Data and Research Methods

The U.S. Census Bureau has endeavored to link individuals' census records as part of an effort to understand response variability and reduce future data collection costs. We use internal Census Bureau data from the 2000 and 2010 censuses in which individuals' responses have been

linked across years by the Census Bureau's Center for Administrative Records Research and Applications (CARRA). CARRA uses probability record linkage techniques and personal information such as name and date of birth to assign a Protected Identification Key (PIK) to facilitate unduplication and record linkage (see Wagner and Layne 2013), then anonymizes the data so that it can be used for Bureau statistical purposes and for research such as this study. Our primary data source contains individuals who were present and could be assigned a PIK in both the 2000 and 2010 full-count decennial censuses.

To create the data set used for this research, we began with the full count data from Census 2000 and matched individuals to themselves in 2010. Individuals could be counted in 2000 but not be included in our data because they had died, left the country, or could not be assigned a PIK[1] in Census 2000. Similarly, individuals could be counted in 2010 but not be matched to 2000 because they had not yet been born, did not live in the United States, or could not be assigned a PIK; about 30 million people who participated in the 2010 Census are not included in our data. Further, we use decennial census data that has undergone limited processing, allowing us to more accurately match race responses across data files.

The full-count short form decennial censuses asked a small number of questions. To supplement our information about respondents, we use any available 2000 long-form data and American Community Survey data for each person. About 17 percent of the U.S. population answered the 2000 Census long form and another 0.5 to 1.5 percent answered the American Community Survey each year since 2001. In all, we expect to have supplementary information for over a quarter of the people in our basic sample. We limit our discussion to data that was

[1] If the individual does not have a social security number or an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (e.g., foreign guests) then the person could not be linked using this method. Also, if name or date of birth was not provided for an individual, then they could not be assigned a PIK.

gathered directly from respondents (about themselves or people in their household), rather than data that was gathered from proxy respondents, group quarters respondents, or was missing and allocated by the Census Bureau.

About 4.0 million individuals marked the AIAN box in 2000 and 5.2 million did so in 2010. Our sample, includes 4.4 million people who: (a) were present in the U.S. in both 2000 and 2010, (b) marked AIAN in one or both of these censuses, and (c) were able to be assigned a PIK in both years. The remaining AIAN respondents could not be matched to themselves across the two censuses, for one of the reasons described above.

Our primary focus is on people who joined, left, or stayed in the non-Hispanic and Hispanic AIAN single-race populations. To the extent feasible, we also present information about people who joined, left, or stayed in the AIAN multiple-race population. Previous studies (e.g., Alba & Islam 2009; Duncan & Trejo 2011) and the data show that many people also switch their Hispanic origin response (yes/no) and we attend to this complication as well when decomposing the various population flows.

Expected Findings

Most results will be presented in descriptive form because we are presenting new and unfamiliar information about who joins, who leaves, and who stays. We intend to provide practical information for analysts studying the American Indian population using the cross-sectional data, focusing on (a) detailed characteristics of stayers and how those have changed over time, and (b) how the observed characteristics of AIAN populations in 2000 and 2010 cross-sectional data change when leavers and joiners are included or excluded from the population counts..

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