

Mavisakalyan, Astghik; Tarverdi, Yashar

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Identity and support for policies towards Indigenous people: Evidence from Australia

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WIDER Working Paper 2022/55

Identity and support for policies towards Indigenous people

Evidence from Australia

Astghik Mavisakalyan¹ and Yashar Tarverdi²

May 2022

Abstract: This paper adds to knowledge on the role of politicians' and voters' identities in influencing policy-making in societies marked by ethnic inequality. The outcome we investigate is the initiatives and policies targeting Indigenous populations in the context of Australia. We ask whether and how politicians' and voters' identities, defined based on a range of their observable characteristics, shape initiation and support of Indigenous-focused policies. Drawing on data on the voting history of members of the two houses of the Australian parliament, we provide an analysis of law-making behaviour and show that political ideology, and to some extent politicians' propensity to act rebelliously and diligently, are significant determinants of their agreement on Indigenous-focused policies. Our complementary analysis of voters' attitudes and preferences on issues concerning Indigenous Australians points to the high relevance of political ideology, and in doing so, highlights the alignments in the behaviours of politicians and voters.

Key words: politician identity, voter preferences, political ideology, ethnic inequality, law-making, Indigenous Australians

JEL classification: D70, J15, P16

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¹ Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre, Faculty of Business and Law, Curtin University, Perth, Australia; ² School of Economics, Finance and Property, Faculty of Business and Law, Curtin University, Perth, Australia; corresponding author: astghik.mavisakalyan@curtin.edu.au

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Katajanokanlaituri 6 B, 00160 Helsinki, Finland

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1 Introduction

Ethnic inequalities are endemic and costly (Cederman et al. 2011; Fleming et al. 2020; Lessmann and Steinkraus 2019). Reducing such inequalities is a global priority and is underscored in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially in SDG 10: Reducing Inequality. While there are numerous policy initiatives around the world targeted at reducing ethnic inequalities, knowledge around the way such initiatives come about is largely lacking. This study aims to understand the process of initiation and support of policy initiatives addressing ethnic inequalities. Specifically, we provide inferences around the role of politicians' and voters' identities in these processes.

Our focus is on the initiatives targeting the Indigenous populations who have significantly poorer health and wellbeing outcomes relative to non-Indigenous populations across many parts of the world (Anderson et al. 2016; Stephens et al. 2005). We study the case of the Indigenous Australians—one of the most disadvantaged First Nations in terms of a wide range of socio-economic measures (Duncan et al. 2019; Hunter and Daly 2013). We ask whether and how politicians' and voters' identities, defined based on their observable characteristics, shape support of initiatives targeted at issues concerning the Indigenous population of Australia. Theoretically, our work is inspired by the concept of identity by Akerlof and Kranton (2000, 2010), defined as a sense of belonging to a social category that has implications for how people behave due to costs associated with non-compliance with norms. 'Citizen candidates' models that propose that in the absence of complete political commitment, politicians implement policies consistent with their preferences are of further relevance to our work (Besley and Coate 1997; Osborne and Slivinski 1996).

Despite the significant disadvantage faced by Australia's Indigenous population, it is only relatively recently that we have seen some instances of coordinated intergovernmental efforts to engage with issues concerning Indigenous Australians. Policies related to the Indigenous population took a critical turn in 2008 when Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd issued an official apology to Indigenous Australians for forced removals of Indigenous children, known as the 'Stolen Generation'. As part of the apology, the government committed to ensuring that the Australian Indigenous populations have equal life chances to all other Australians, including initiation of the National Indigenous Reform Agenda, which features a set of targets known as Closing the Gap. However, little is known on the processes underlying these initiatives, including the determinants of support extended by individual politicians and voters.

Given the lack of knowledge on these processes, our analysis is deliberately open-minded and exploratory in focusing on a range of observable characteristics of politicians and voters and how their identities, as captured through such characteristics, shape their support on issues concerning Indigenous Australians. We utilize two datasets in analysing the preferences around the expressed support for Indigenous-focused initiatives at the level of politicians and voters. In both pieces of analysis we find that individual characteristics, especially political ideology, are significant determinants of support on issues concerning Indigenous Australians. Identification with Greens, and to a lesser extent with the Labor Party, is a positive correlate of such support among both politicians and voters, whereas identification with the Liberal Party has the opposite effect. Predisposition to acting rebelliously as well as diligently are both correlated with politicians' support for pro-Indigenous policies. In the general population, on the other hand, the propensity to have a supportive predisposition on Indigenous issues increases with educational attainment and decreases with religiosity. Overall, these results suggest that identities of politicians and voters play an important role in Indigenous policy-making, and highlight alignments in the behaviours of politicians and individual voters.

Our study is related to several strands of literature. There is a sizeable body of work on ethnic equality initiatives and policies in various contexts which focuses on analysing their impact (Bhavnani 2017; Dunning and Nilekani 2013; Gulzar et al. 2020; Jensenius 2015, 2017). In contrast, the literature con-

cerned with studying the initiation of such policies is relatively small (Arauco et al. 2014; Vergara-Camus 2016). Our study adds to the emerging body of work in the latter area. Through focusing on the identity of politicians in support of ethnic equality issues and initiatives, our study also feeds into the growing empirical literature that shows that politicians' identities matter for policy-making (Besley et al. 2011; Bhalotra et al. 2014; Jones and Olken 2005; Mavisakalyan 2014; Mavisakalyan and Tarverdi 2019). This paper contributes to expanding this literature by focusing on an under-researched context and outcome.

Through its focus on Indigenous disadvantage in Australia, this study relates to a large body of work that is concerned with documenting Indigenous–non-Indigenous inequalities and their drivers, highlighting the role of colonization, racism, discrimination, and historical trauma (Duncan et al. 2019; Kalb et al. 2014; King et al. 2009; Paradies 2016) and the protective role of cultural attachment (Dockery 2010, 2020). While there are studies that evaluate the impact of Indigenous-focused policies (Beks et al. 2019; Chando et al. 2021; Lokuge et al. 2017), evidence on the determinants of such policies is largely lacking.

A clear finding that emerges from this study is the relevance of political ideology for Indigenous-focused policy preferences and initiatives, which relates to the literature that engages with the links between political ideology and its role in shaping attitudes towards minorities (Bailey and Williams 2016; Poteat and Mereish 2012; Rich 1986; Sidanius et al. 1996; Whitley Jr 1999). The closest to our study is that by Langford and Ponting (1992), which draws on a nationally representative dataset of individuals in Canada to show that a moderate to large proportion of the variation in non-aboriginal responses to aboriginal issues can be explained by prejudice, economic conservatism, and perceived conflict of group interests. Our study, however, is distinct in terms of combining analysis of behaviours of both politicians and the general population and focusing on the case of Indigenous Australians, which has received relatively little attention in the context of this literature.

We first provide some background on the current study, including an overview of Indigenous disadvantage in Australia (Section 2). In Section 3 we present our study of politicians, including a discussion of our empirical approach and results, followed by the analysis of the general population presented in Section 4. We conclude with a discussion of the implications of our findings in Section 5.

2 Background

2.1 Identity and political preferences

This paper posits that identity has implications for political preferences. Akerlof and Kranton (2000, 2010) define identity as a sense of belonging to a social category. A person can be represented in terms of a range of social categories, including their gender, religion, political orientation, etc. As Akerlof and Kranton (2000, 2010) argue, identity changes 'payoffs' from different actions since, on one hand, following the behavioural prescriptions associated with a social category affirms one's identity and, on the other hand, violating the prescriptions instigates anxiety and discomfort in oneself and in others.

Akerlof and Kranton (2000: 726) note that 'politics is often a battle over identity'. Certain political or religious affiliations, for example, may at times come with rhetoric that may foster social or ethnic divisions in a society, while others may mitigate these. Moreover, identification with different social groups may mean having different preferences over outcomes. Identity extends to voting behaviour—there are systematic differences in voting and political preferences by class, race, and religious affiliation after measures of economic self-interest are accounted for (Glaeser and Ward 2006; Luttmer 2001).

Thus, based on their social identities, individuals might choose courses of action that determine the aggregate outcomes in the society (Shayo 2009).

But what about the role of identity in politicians' behaviours and choices? The Downsian model predicts that policy outcomes are determined by the preferences of the median voter, and therefore the politicians' own preferences should not matter (Downs 1957). However, on the other hand, 'citizen candidates' models by Osborne and Slivinski (1996) and Besley and Coate (1997) propose that in the absence of complete political commitment, politicians implement policies consistent with their preferences. Both of these scenarios are relevant for our analysis, although we are not able to directly test these in our framework.

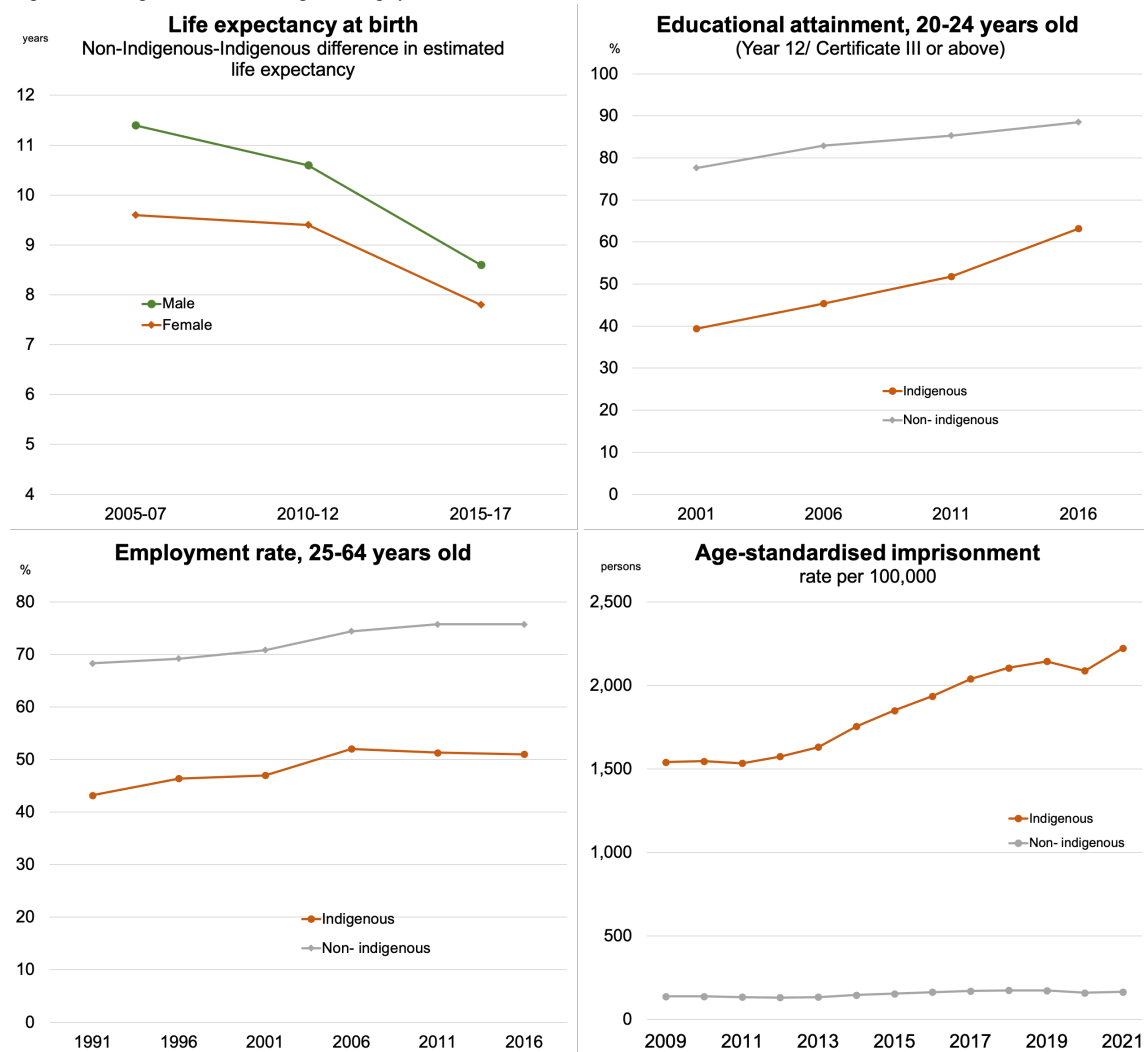
2.2 Indigenous disadvantage in Australians

Australia presents one of the great number of instances where colonization has had dire consequences for the way of life and wellbeing of Indigenous people. Estimates of Australia's Indigenous population prior to European contact vary from 300,000 to over one million, with a figure of 750,000 commonly accepted (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission 1998). Based on the latest Australian Census estimates, the Indigenous population of Australia as at 30 June 2016 was 798,400 people, or 3.3 per cent of the total Australian population.

Indigenous Australians are among the most disadvantaged minority groups in contemporary Australian society, based on figures relating to many important aspects of life. As Figure 1 demonstrates, in spite of some improvements over time, relative to non-Indigenous Australians, Indigenous Australians have significantly lower levels of life expectancy, education, and employment, and are at disproportionately higher risk of imprisonment. For example, as of 2015–17, the gap in life expectancy between non-Indigenous and Indigenous populations was 8.6 years for males and 7.8 years for females. Similarly, by 2016, only 63.2 per cent of Indigenous Australians aged 20–24 years had attained Year 12 or a non-school qualification or above, relative to 88.5 per cent among the non-Indigenous population. There are striking differences in employment rates too, with only 51 per cent of Indigenous individuals employed as of 2016, relative to the nearly 78 per cent employment rate among non-Indigenous individuals. Furthermore, the age-standardized rate of Indigenous prisoners was 2,222.7 per 100,000 adult population in 2021—a significant over-representation relative to the non-Indigenous population.

In spite of the long-standing nature of Indigenous disadvantage in Australia, it is only in recent years that the situation has been the subject of coordinated intergovernmental attention, with occasional instances of recognition such as the reconciliation bridge walks, Closing the Gap targets, and symbolic gestures such as the apology to the Stolen Generation in 2008. However, based on an overview of five distinct periods in Australian history, (Davis 2015: 42) highlights 'the ad hoc nature of laws, insecure rights and the disruptive manner with which law and policy is applied to indigenous communities'. Unsurprisingly, in spite of existing initiatives, the Indigenous disadvantage in Australia continues to persist, and there is a strong imperative to understand the processes underlying the initiation of actions focusing on Indigenous Australians—the focus of the current paper.

Figure 1: Indigenous–non-Indigenous gaps in selected outcomes



Source: authors' creation based on Closing the Gap Data Repository accessed at: <https://www.pc.gov.au/closing-the-gap-data>.

3 Study of politicians

We start with an analysis of policy-making on issues concerning Indigenous Australians. To that end, we draw on a unique dataset of voting in the Australian federal parliament and ask the following questions: How have the parliamentarians voted on recent Indigenous-focused policy initiatives? How does the identity of parliamentarians, captured through individual observable characteristics, shape their position on such initiatives?

3.1 Empirical approach

Our analysis of Australian parliamentarians' agreement on policies concerned with Indigenous Australians is based on a simple model where the level of agreement on a policy is the dependent variable and individual characteristics of parliamentarians constitute our main explanatory variables of interest. Equation (1) formally presents the model, where $AG_{i,j}$ is the agreement level of parliamentarian i for policy j , X_i is the vector of individual characteristics, Geo_i and Pol_j represent jurisdictional and policy

fixed effects respectively, while u_{ij} is the error term:

$$AG_{ij} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_i + \beta_2 Geo_i + \beta_3 Pol_j + u_{ij} \quad (1)$$

The main source of data is the *They Vote For You* (TVY) project, which was developed by the OpenAustralia Foundation—an independent, non-partisan not-for-profit organization. The project, founded by a donation from Google, scrapes the data from the Australian Parliament’s website and publishes transcripts of votes and discussions (called Hansard), and provides a relatively clear voting history for each member of parliament.

TVY groups related motions and divisions into a number of policy groups. Our dependent variable, $AG_{i,j}$, is specifically captured through the share of supportive votes by member i of the House of Representatives or the Senate for motions and divisions related to a policy j .¹ In addition to the level of agreement, which is our outcome measure, TVY contains several measures on parliamentarians derived from their voting history. These include the number of rebellious votes (also known as crossing the floor), which captures the number of votes against the party whip,² and the total number of attended votes. We use these measures to create a ratio of rebelliousness (the percentage of rebellious votes in the total attended votes) and attendance rate (the percentage of attended votes in all possible votes) to proxy for individual characteristics of parliamentarians, such as their predisposition to act rebelliously and their diligence. Another individual characteristic we include in our analysis is the gender of the parliamentarians. We use the data from the US Social Security Administration, which includes the name and gender of all US citizens registered between 1880 and 2017, to assign gender to the politicians based on their first names.³

Similar to most other countries with the Westminster system, the Australian Parliament has two ‘houses’: the Senate and the House of Representatives. The Senate is also known as the Upper House, while the House of Representatives is referred to as the ‘parliament’ or Lower House. TVY provides data on the political party association in both houses. While the parliamentarians are much more heterogeneous (in terms of their political orientation) in the senate, the majority still belongs to one of the major political parties: the Australian Labor Party or the Liberal–National Coalition (LN) with some representatives from the Australian Greens. We consider the political orientation of each parliamentarian as part of the set of their individual characteristics that proxies for political ideology, and as such could have implications for the level of agreement on policies.

While TVY provides voting history data from both the Upper and the Lower House, data on the associated electorates is available for politicians in the Lower House only; for the senators, there is only data on the associated State/Territories. To ensure the representativeness of our analysis over the entire pool of politicians, our baseline analysis includes state fixed effects to capture the jurisdictional differences. However, it is possible to explore the impact of electorates’ socio-economic characteristics on politicians’ behaviour limited to the sample of parliamentarians in the Lower House, and we pursue this as a robustness check. Given that our analysis is based on a pooled sample of policies, we additionally control for policy fixed effects in all regressions.

¹ ‘A division is a formal vote on a motion in the House of Representatives or the Senate. A motion is a formal proposal put to the House or Senate to take action of some kind. When a division is called on a particular motion, Members of Parliament (MPs) in the House of Representatives or Senators in the Senate divide themselves into two groups: one that votes Yes and one that votes No.’ In cases where the motion or division opposes the main purpose of the policy supporting Indigenous people, a negative vote is considered as supportive.

² Labor Party members are not allowed to rebel. In the Liberal Party, backbenchers are officially allowed to rebel but this is becoming increasingly uncommon in practice. Currently in the Australian Federal Parliament MPs and senators nearly always vote along party lines.

³ In the case of unisex names, the nominated gender corresponding to the higher proportion is used. Missing cases were interpolated manually.

3.2 Descriptive analysis

To capture the politicians’ views on different topics, the TVY project groups proposals, motions, and questions into groups called ‘policies’. Each policy has a common theme and tracks all the votes for each of the motions and proposals within. There are 4,540 divisions and motions captured on the TVY website, which are grouped into 269 policies from which just six can be linked to Indigenous Australians. Table 1 lists these six policies and the associated number of divisions and motions.⁴ It is important to note that the numbers presented in Table 1 are a stock-take of all divisions and motions related to the policy and do not reflect the time dimension. For example, five motions and divisions related to the ‘Close the Gap’ policy occurred in 2007, 2020, and 2021.

Table 1: Policy proposals focused on issues of concern to Indigenous Australians

Policy	Description	Number of motions and divisions
Close the Gap	The federal government needs to make closing the gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and other Australians a priority.	5
Enquiry into Aboriginal deaths	The federal government should implement all the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody in partnership with First Nations communities.	1
Increase Aboriginal land rights	The federal government should increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander land rights by, for example, increasing their legal recognition and protection.	9
Increase heritage protection	The federal government should increase the protection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage sites.	10
Change in Australia Day	The date of Australia Day should be changed from 26 January, which was the day the First Fleet arrived at Port Jackson, Sydney, and is a day of mourning for many Australians.	7
Enrich First Nation identity	The Constitution should be amended to include a requirement for an Indigenous voice to federal parliament, such as that envisaged by the Uluru Statement from the Heart.	2

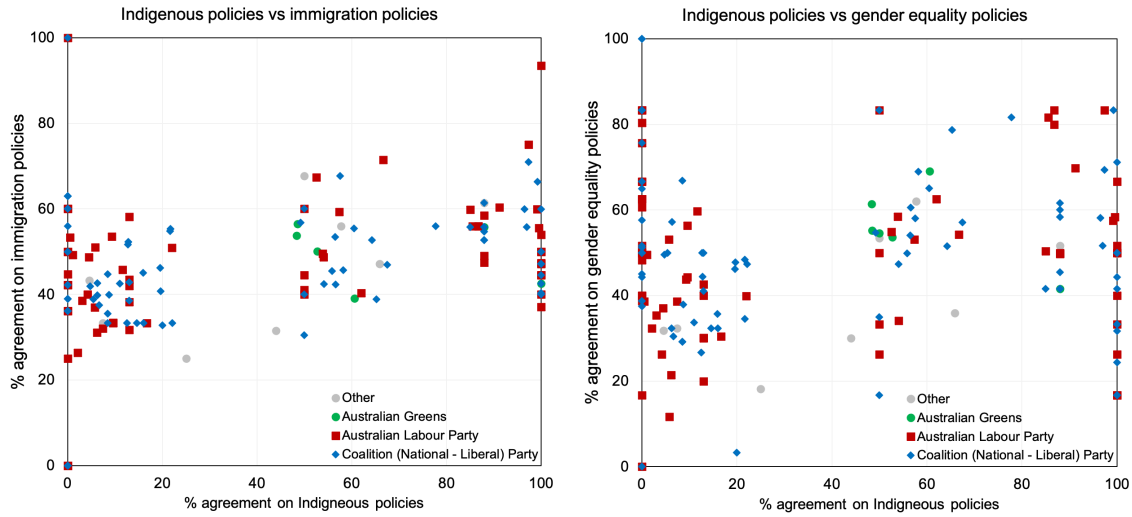
Source: authors’ compilation based on TVY data.

Policies under consideration are concerned with key issues of relevance to Indigenous disadvantage, including the large gaps in outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations and the significant number of Indigenous deaths in custody.⁵ Other important issues the policy proposals have engaged with include Indigenous land rights, cultural heritage protection, and constitutionally enshrined voice in parliament. To provide further insights on the issues of concern in these policy proposals, Figure 2 presents the key themes featured in the summaries of policy texts captured through word frequency. Land, health, custody deaths, and rights appear to be dominant themes captured through this exercise. Additionally, Figures A1–A6 in Appendix A provide further information on the timeline, initiators, and outcomes of key initiatives raised under each policy proposal. As these figures demonstrate, the policy initiatives included in the sample have been raised by the representatives of the Green Party and, to a lesser degree, the Labor Party, and many of these have failed to pass in parliament.

⁴ Our data only includes the motions and divisions discussed in either houses of parliament and does not include changes, policies, and actions carried out by the executive arm of the government. For example, the initial official apology to the Stolen Generation delivered by former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd is not included in our sample.

⁵ In some instances, however, motions may present occurrences of political ‘grandstanding’ as opposed to being genuinely concerned with resolving an issue concerning the Indigenous population. Identifying the true motive behind each initiative is outside the scope of this project. Instead, we take the initiatives at face value, and look into the factors that determine the support expressed for them.

Figure 3: Agreement on key policies among parliamentarians



Note: agreement is the proportion of supportive votes for each set of policies. Within each graph, the sample is restricted to those politicians who voted on both policies. 'Other' political parties includes independents and parties with fewer representatives in both houses.

Source: authors' creation based on TVY data.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics: study of politicians

Variable	Definition of variable	Mean
Level of agreement	Continuous variable; percentage of Yes votes for divisions related to the policy	41.504 (41.823)
Female	0-1 binary variable; equals 1 if respondent is female	0.415 (0.493)
Rebellious rate, %	Continuous variable; percentage of votes against majority vote of associated party	0.029 (0.095)
Attendance rate, %	Continuous variable; percentage of attended votes over all possible votes	78.976 (12.855)
LN Coalition	0-1 binary variable; equals 1 if associated with the LN Coalition	0.424 (0.495)
Labor Party	0-1 binary variable; equals 1 if respondent is associated with the Labor Party	0.366 (0.482)
Australian Greens	0-1 binary variable; equals 1 if respondent is associated with the Green Party	0.085 (0.280)
Other political parties	0-1 binary variable; equals 1 if respondent is associated with other parties	0.124 (0.330)
If Lower House	0-1 binary variable; equals 1 if politician is in the Lower House	0.240 (0.428)
Enquiry into Aboriginal death	0-1 binary variable; equals 1 for the given policy	0.143 (0.351)
Increase Aboriginal land right	0-1 binary variable; equals 1 for the given policy	0.333 (0.472)
Increase heritage protection	0-1 binary variable; equals 1 for the given policy	0.145 (0.353)
Enrich First Nation identity	0-1 binary variable; equals 1 for the given policy	0.140 (0.347)
Close the Gap	0-1 binary variable; equals 1 for the given policy	0.145 (0.353)
Change in Australia Day	0-1 binary variable; equals 1 for the given policy	0.093 (0.291)

Note: standard deviations in parentheses. $N = 516$.

Source: authors' calculations based on TVY data.

3.3 Estimation results

As outlined earlier, the main focus of our analysis is to uncover the determinants of politicians' agreement on policies concerning Indigenous Australians. To that end, we estimate Equation (1) and present the results in Table 3.

We estimate a positive significant coefficient on the Female dummy in column (1); however, it loses its significant in subsequent models where controls for party association of politicians are included. Rebellious votes appear to be correlated with higher level of agreement with Indigenous-focused policies across most specifications. The results also show that 'diligent' politicians tend to agree more on such policies. More importantly, the impact of political ideology seems to be robust and consistent after controlling for several available individual characteristics, as well as the state jurisdiction of the electorate. Parliamentarians associated with a right-wing ideology (proxied by association to the NL Coalition) are more likely to be in disagreement with Indigenous-focused policies, whereas Labor Party associates, and to a much higher degree the associates of the Greens, are likely to be in agreement.

In columns (6) and (7) we conduct the analysis in separate sub-samples of men and women. Some heterogeneities in the results emerge. Among male parliamentarians, attendance and rebellious votes do not have any association with support for policies, while for female parliamentarians there is a highly significant association between rebellious votes and support for policies. On the other hand, the estimated positive coefficients on Labor and Green Party membership are larger in size in the male sub-sample relative to the female sub-sample—that is, the political ideology plays a potentially larger role for male decision-making on policies concerning Indigenous Australians.

The identity of politicians appears to matter in voting for policies, which is consistent with the 'citizen candidates' models by Osborne and Slivinski (1996) and Besley and Coate (1997). On the other hand, the Downsian model predicts that the policy outcomes are determined by the preferences of the median voter (Downs 1957). To engage with the possibility that the characteristics of own electorates might contribute to decisions to support Indigenous policies, we restrict the analysis to the Lower House of parliament, where we are able to identify the home electorates of parliamentarians precisely. We then generate a series of measures to capture the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of electorates, drawing on the latest 2016 wave of the Australian Census of Population and Housing. These include the shares of Indigenous and overseas-born populations of the electorate alongside the shares of different age cohorts in the population. We also control for SEIFA scores—aggregate measures summarizing different aspects of the socio-economic conditions in the area available from the Census; higher scores mean better socio-economic conditions. This is complemented with measures of educational attainment to capture the socio-economic profile of electorates. We control for the shares of builders, boomers, generation X, and generation Y, representing individuals aged 65 and above, 50–64, 35–49, and 20–34, respectively.

We start the analysis by re-estimating the baseline model in the separate sub-samples of Upper and Lower Houses of parliament, presented in columns (1) and (2) of Table 4. In both sub-samples, the positive significant association between the share of rebellious politicians and support for policies is present. We also observe the strong correlation between the measures of political ideology and support for Indigenous policies. Attendance rate, however, loses its significance in the Upper House sub-sample and is negative and statistically significant in the Lower House sub-sample. The latter is likely to be the outcome of the combination of two factors: the relatively higher representation of right-wing politicians in the Lower House, and the relatively higher probability of attendance of right-wing politicians in the Lower House relative to the Upper House. In Table A1 in Appendix A we show descriptive statistics that are consistent with this scenario. In particular, members of the Liberal Party are more likely to be in the Lower House relative to the members of the Australian Greens. On the other hand, members of the Liberal Party are more likely to attend in the Lower House than in the Upper House (79 vs 88 per cent

attendance rate). Conversely, the attendance rate of the Australian Greens in the Upper House is 91 per cent, while it is lower in the Lower House at under 87 per cent.

Table 3: Baseline results: study of politicians

	All (1)	All (2)	All (3)	All (4)	All (5)	Females (6)	Males (7)
Female	10.94*** (3.761)	-0.755 (2.496)	0.248 (2.503)	0.804 (2.220)	0.338 (2.217)		
Rebellious rate, %	-41.250** (19.310)	37.260*** (13.060)	38.270*** (12.970)	35.100*** (11.530)	35.650*** (11.560)	60.400*** (18.050)	5.603 (17.830)
Attendance rate, %	0.116 (0.144)	0.291*** (0.102)	0.143 (0.114)	0.132 (0.101)	0.206** (0.101)	0.100 (0.158)	0.151 (0.140)
LN Coalition		-18.720*** (3.865)	-19.740*** (3.854)	-21.640*** (3.425)	-25.220*** (3.517)	-22.800*** (7.104)	-22.380*** (4.276)
Labor Party		45.430*** (4.053)	42.740*** (4.133)	41.340*** (3.668)	38.600*** (3.784)	35.130*** (7.699)	46.610*** (4.340)
Australian Greens		67.560*** (5.570)	70.030*** (5.598)	69.380*** (4.964)	65.500*** (4.978)	68.490*** (9.258)	72.260*** (7.257)
If Lower House			9.274*** (3.239)	25.120*** (4.049)	25.910*** (4.142)	34.280*** (7.251)	26.440*** (5.125)
Enquiry into Aboriginal deaths				25.750*** (4.395)	26.390*** (4.302)	29.990*** (6.349)	23.660*** (5.583)
Increase Aboriginal land right				-0.111 (4.669)	0.195 (4.581)	2.523 (6.706)	-3.267 (5.979)
Increase heritage protection				0.410 (4.384)	1.058 (4.293)	2.870 (6.349)	0.066 (5.567)
Enriched First Nation				24.960*** (4.418)	25.830*** (4.337)	33.350*** (6.388)	19.830*** (5.637)
Close the Gap				33.550*** (4.384)	34.190*** (4.292)	37.310*** (6.349)	32.300*** (5.564)
Constant	29.030** (11.910)	3.266 (8.842)	13.530 (9.484)	-0.252 (8.922)	2.891 (10.920)	-3.376 (13.62)	19.270 (13.47)
Jurisdictional FE	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	516	516	516	516	511	214	297
R-squared	0.024	0.591	0.598	0.687	0.705	0.708	0.742

Note: standard errors in parentheses. * Significance at 10 per cent; ** 5 per cent; *** 1 per cent levels.

Source: authors' calculations based on TVY data.

Table 4: Robustness checks: study of politicians

	Upper House (1)	Lower House (2)	Lower House (3)	Lower House (4)	Lower House (5)	Lower House (6)	Lower House (7)	Lower House (8)
Female	-0.554 (2.509)	-3.549 (3.210)	-2.549 (3.292)	-3.295 (3.441)	-2.320 (3.271)	-2.465 (3.519)	-2.712 (3.700)	-3.908 (3.921)
Rebellious rate, %	41.370*** (13.180)	51.930** (22.170)	54.120** (22.170)	47.750** (23.160)	49.350** (22.200)	48.200** (22.360)	48.650** (23.790)	42.590* (24.850)
Attendance rate, %	0.055 (0.119)	-0.442** (0.178)	-0.381** (0.169)	-0.415** (0.172)	-0.388** (0.168)	-0.391** (0.169)	-0.398** (0.178)	-0.499** (0.199)
LN Coalition	-23.420*** (3.890)	-6.265 (7.392)	-8.428 (7.264)	-7.104 (7.383)	-7.899 (7.177)	-7.314 (7.234)	-7.262 (7.603)	-4.142 (8.337)
Labor Party	29.800*** (4.239)	81.780*** (7.230)	80.630*** (7.252)	84.150*** (7.589)	80.080*** (7.152)	81.610*** (7.389)	83.410*** (8.349)	84.360*** (9.092)
Australian Greens	66.230*** (5.301)	86.020*** (15.830)	86.200*** (15.840)	103.400*** (19.000)	87.270*** (15.680)	94.520*** (16.940)	103.600*** (19.440)	102.100*** (20.330)
Increase Aboriginal land right	-2.866 (4.674)	54.690*** (11.530)	54.710*** (11.700)	52.250*** (12.100)	53.520*** (11.650)	51.140*** (11.890)	51.750*** (12.470)	52.200*** (12.720)
Close the Gap	34.670*** (4.344)	11.920 (18.020)	12.320 (18.360)	10.950 (18.470)	11.630 (18.240)	10.530 (18.370)	10.760 (18.830)	10.620 (19.020)
Enquiry into Aboriginal deaths	25.990*** (4.344)							
Increase heritage protection	1.877 (4.355)							
Enrich First Nation identity	25.490*** (4.380)							
Indigenous population, %			0.045 (0.281)	0.048 (0.331)			0.122 (0.424)	0.048 (0.555)
Overseas-born, %				0.090 (0.210)			0.063 (0.227)	-0.006 (0.257)
Builders, %				-0.694 (0.965)			0.141 (1.499)	-0.252 (1.712)
Boomers, %				-0.302 (1.688)			0.157 (1.829)	-0.640 (1.987)
Generation X, %				-1.331 (1.699)			0.122 (2.725)	-0.329 (3.115)
Generation Y, %				-1.243 (1.086)			-0.447 (1.571)	-0.717 (1.744)
SEIFA score					-0.032 (0.025)	-0.007 (0.059)	0.013 (0.081)	0.001 (0.089)
Tertiary education and above, %						-0.325 (0.500)	-0.410 (0.644)	-0.295 (0.751)
Certificate-level education, %						-0.140 (0.768)	-0.413 (0.904)	-0.180 (1.005)
Other education, %						-0.793 (0.967)	-0.603 (1.265)	-0.485 (1.540)
Constant	16.980 (12.280)	3.551 (23.430)	-7.947 (18.260)	77.750 (99.040)	25.850 (32.210)	20.560 (53.440)	12.220 (148.600)	68.420 (164.000)
Jurisdictional FE	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	Y
Observations	392	119	114	114	114	114	114	114
R-squared	0.679	0.920	0.912	0.915	0.913	0.914	0.916	0.920

Note: standard errors in parentheses. * Significance at 10 per cent; ** 5 per cent; *** 1 per cent levels

Source: authors' calculations based on TVY data.

The analyses in subsequent columns of Table 4 are limited to the Lower House sub-sample. In columns (3) and (4) we introduce the measures of demographic characteristics of electorates, the share of Indigenous population first, complemented with measures of overseas-born population and age-based cohort shares next. None of these variables are statistically significantly related to support for policies. In columns (5) and (6) we introduce measures of socio-economic profile of electorates: SEIFA score first, then complemented with measures of educational attainment. Again, none of these are significantly correlated with support for policies. Column (7) presents the results where these electorate characteristics are controlled for jointly, while the analysis presented in column (8) additionally controls for state fixed effects. The key findings of this analysis with electorate characteristics are in line with those without

these characteristics, reported in column (2). None of the electorate-level variables appear to be correlated with support for policies, which goes against the prediction of the Downsian model. It should be noted, however, that this analysis is based on a smaller sub-set of politicians, which limits the inferences that can be drawn based on it.

4 Study of the general population

We find that political ideology is a core determinant of politicians' agreement on policy proposals addressing issues concerning Indigenous Australians. But what are the preferences of the general population on these issues? Is political ideology key to having a supportive attitude on such issues for ordinary Australians? Are there other factors that play a role as well? Next, we turn to addressing these questions in an empirical study of a representative cross-sectional survey of the Australian population.

4.1 Empirical approach

Our analysis of individual Australians' views on issues concerning Indigenous Australians is based on a standard model in which the propensity for holding a supportive attitude, $Support_i^*$ for an individual i is assumed to depend on a series of individual controls K_i for party identification and standard demographic and socio-economic characteristics, as well as state fixed effects $State_i$. Unobserved factors ε_i further contribute to the propensity for holding a supportive attitude on issues concerning Indigenous Australians, leading to an equation of the form:

$$Support_i^* = K_i\gamma + \delta State_i + \varepsilon_i \text{ for all } i = 1, \dots, N \quad (2)$$

Observed support status $Support_i$ is assumed to relate to latent propensity through the criterion $Support_i = 1(Support_i^* \geq 0)$, so that the probability of holding a supportive attitude under an assumption of normality for ε_i becomes

$$\Pr(Support_i = 1 | K_i, State_i) = \Phi(K_i\gamma + \delta State_i) \quad (3)$$

Data for this analysis is derived from the Australian Survey of Social Attitudes (AuSSA)—an annual national postal survey of adult Australians randomly drawn from the Australian Electoral Roll, which contains 95 per cent of the citizens aged 18 and above. As such, the respondents are representative of the population of Australian voters. Conducted since 2003, AuSSA is the main source of data for studying the social attitudes, beliefs, and opinions of Australians.

Our analysis employs the 2016 wave of the survey conducted between June and October 2016, which contains a set of questions that capture the attitudes on issues concerning Indigenous Australians (AuSSA 2016). The 2016 survey sampled 5,000 respondents and the response rate was 25 per cent.

The AuSSA 2016 asked individuals' views on the following statements about the situation of Aboriginal people in Australia today, with possible response categories including strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, and strongly disagree:

1. Aboriginal people's level of disadvantage justifies extra government assistance.
2. Granting land rights to Aboriginal people is unfair to other Australians.
3. Aboriginal people should not have to change their culture to fit into Australian society.
4. Aboriginal people are now treated equally to other Australians.

We employ the responses to these questions to derive four key outcomes of interest, presented in Table 5. We change the direction of questions (2) and (4) to ensure that the statements and their responses are framed in the same direction, facilitating the interpretation of the results. Accordingly, to ensure that the outcomes are consistently capturing the support on issues concerning Indigenous Australians, we

employ either the combination of ‘strongly agree’ and ‘agree’ responses (questions (1) and (3)) or the combination of ‘strongly disagree’ and ‘disagree’ responses (questions (2) and (4)) in the construction of the binary variables presented in Table 5.

The survey additionally asks individuals whether they usually think of themselves as close to any particular political party and, if yes, which party that is. We use this information to distinguish between individuals who pick one of the three major parties—the LN Coalition, the Labor Party, and the Greens—vs those who pick other or no party. Additionally, our analysis includes standard demographic and socio-economic information on individuals, including their gender, age, ethnicity, family status, educational attainment, employment status, and religion.

4.2 Descriptive analysis

The definitions and sample means of all the variables employed in the analysis are presented in Table 5. Around 50 per cent of individuals in the sample agree that Aboriginal people’s disadvantage justifies extra government assistance, while 48 per cent do not believe that granting land rights to Aboriginal people would be unfair to other Australians. Around 57 per cent of individuals agree that Aboriginal people should not have to change their culture to fit and 55 per cent do not believe that Aboriginal people are treated equally to other Australians.

In the sample there are individuals who think of themselves as close to the Liberal Party (27.5 per cent), the Labor Party (20 per cent), and the Greens (7.5 per cent), with the rest identifying with other parties. Over 48 per cent of the respondents are female, and the average age in the sample is nearly 54. Around 3 per cent of individuals identify as Indigenous; however, dropping these individuals from the sample makes no substantive difference to the results of the analysis. Nearly 28 per cent in the sample were born in a country other than Australia.

The educational attainment in the sample is rather high, with 36 per cent possessing a tertiary qualification and 35 per cent a post-secondary qualification. Over 61 per cent of respondents are employed, and over 60 per cent have a religion, with the majority of these comprising Christians.

Table 5: Descriptive statistics: study of the general population

Variable	Definition of variable	Mean
Government assistance	0–1 binary variable; equals 1 if respondent agrees Aboriginal people’s disadvantage justifies extra government assistance	0.495 (0.500)
Land rights	0–1 binary variable; equals 1 if respondent disagrees that granting land rights to Aboriginal people is unfair to others	0.467 (0.499)
Inequality	0–1 binary variable; equals 1 if respondent disagrees that Aboriginal people are treated equally to other Australians	0.550 (0.498)
Culture	0–1 binary variable; equals 1 if respondent agrees that Aboriginal people should not have to change their culture to fit in	0.574 (0.495)
Political ideology		
LN Coalition	0–1 binary variable; equals 1 if respondent thinks of themselves as close to the Liberal Party	0.275 (0.446)
Labor Party	0–1 binary variable; equals 1 if respondent thinks of themselves as close to the Labor Party	0.199 (0.399)
Greens	0–1 binary variable; equals 1 if respondent thinks of themselves as close to the Green Party	0.075 (0.264)
Other	0–1 binary variable; equals 1 if respondent thinks of themselves as close to other or no party	0.451 (0.498)
Other controls		
Female	0–1 binary variable; equals 1 if respondent is female	0.482 (0.500)
Age	Respondent’s age	53.819 (16.130)
ATSI	0–1 binary variable; equals 1 if respondent identifies as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander	0.029 (0.169)
Immigrant	0–1 binary variable; equals 1 if respondent was born overseas	0.278 (0.448)
Has spouse	0–1 binary variable; equals 1 if respondent has a spouse/partner	0.743 (0.437)
Tertiary education	0–1 binary variable; equals 1 if respondent has tertiary-level education	0.362 (0.481)
Post-secondary education	0–1 binary variable; equals 1 if respondent has post-secondary-level education	0.348 (0.477)
Secondary or lower education	0–1 binary variable; equals 1 if respondent has secondary- or lower-level education	0.290 (0.454)
Employed	0–1 binary variable; equals 1 if respondent is employed	0.611 (0.488)
Christian	0–1 binary variable; equals 1 if respondent belongs to a Christian religion	0.532 (0.499)
Other religion	0–1 binary variable; equals 1 if respondent belongs to other religion	0.074 (0.261)
No religion	0–1 binary variable; equals 1 if respondent doesn’t belong to any religion	0.394 (0.489)

Note: standard deviations in parentheses. $N = 1,060$.

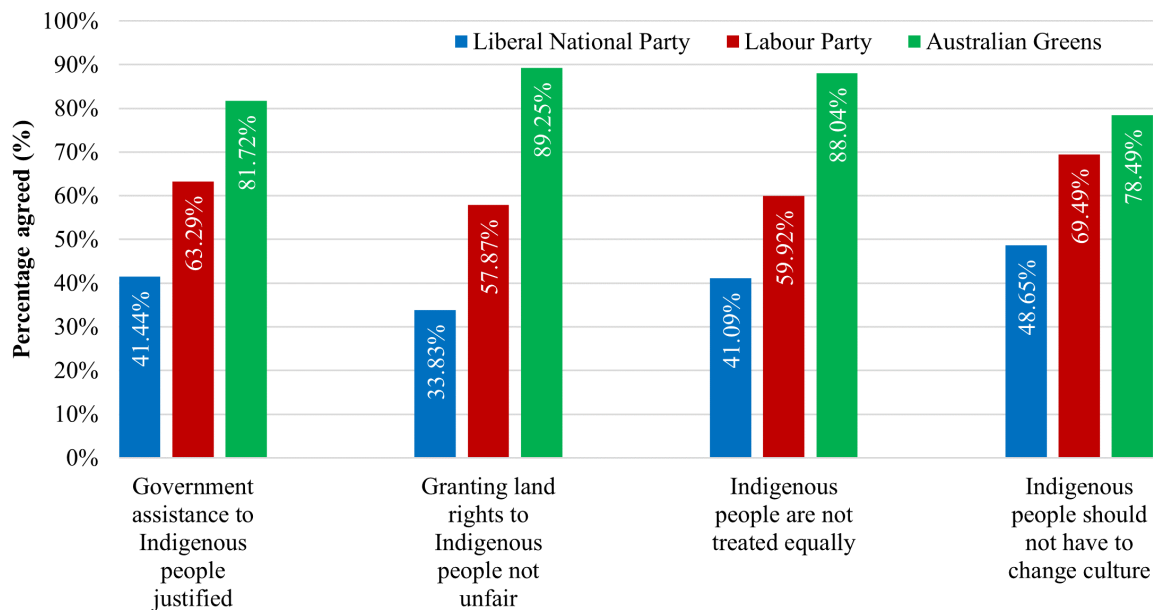
Source: authors’ calculations based on AuSSA data.

We start by asking whether, similar to politicians, individuals’ political ideology contributes to their views on issues concerning Indigenous Australians. In Figure 4 we look at the question descriptively, presenting the shares of individuals who express agreement on the core set of issues studied: (1) that government assistance to Indigenous people is justified, given the level of disadvantage they face; (2) that granting rights to Indigenous people is not unfair to other Australians; (3) that Indigenous people are not treated equally to other Australians; and (4) that Indigenous people should not have to change their culture to fit into Australian society. We see a clear pattern by political ideology emerge, with individuals who identify with the LN Coalition the least likely to agree with the statements, whereas

those who identify with the Greens are the most likely to do so. For example, only 34 per cent of those who identify with the LN Coalition agree that granting rights to Indigenous people is not unfair to other Australians, relative to 58 per cent agreement with the statement among Labor Party supporters and 89 per cent among Greens. Similarly, only 41 per cent of Liberals believe that Indigenous people are not treated equally, compared to 60 per cent among those who identify with Labor and 88 per cent among those who identify with the Greens.

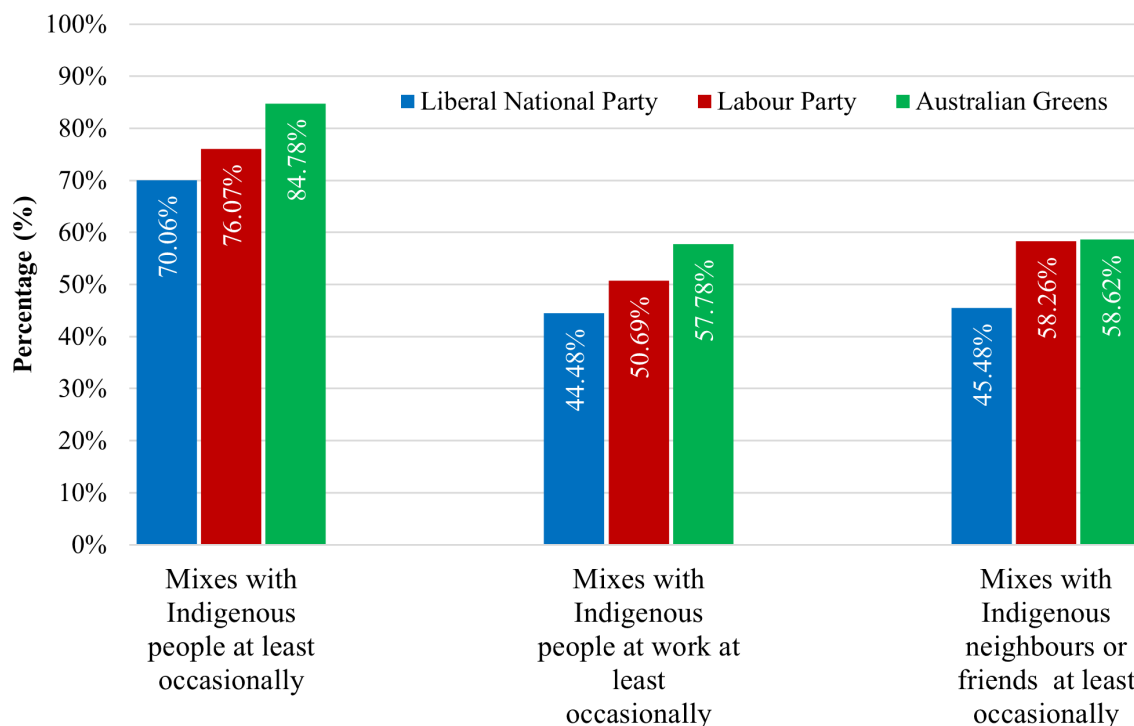
The intergroup contact theory of majority–minority relations suggests that prejudice to minorities might decline with contact with out-group members (Allport et al. 1954; Pettigrew and Tropp 2006)—a proposition that has received support in a number of recent empirical studies (Bursztyn et al. 2021; Finseraas and Kotsadam 2017; Finseraas et al. 2019; Ghosn et al. 2019; Scacco and Warren 2018). Are there systematic differences in patterns of interaction with Indigenous Australians by type of party identification? Figure 5 suggests that individuals who identify with the Greens, and to a lesser extent those who identify with the Labor Party, are more likely to mix with Indigenous people relative to those who identify with the LN Coalition. Looking at interactions across all contexts, 85 per cent of individuals who identify with the Greens report mixing with Indigenous people frequently, sometimes, or occasionally (as opposed to not mixing at all). Only 70 per cent of individuals who identify with the LN Coalition do so. Similarly, the share of individuals who report mixing with Indigenous people at least occasionally in the context of their work is 58 per cent among those who identify with the Greens, 51 per cent for those who identify with Labor, and down at 44 per cent for those who identify with the LN Coalition.

Figure 4: Attitudes on issues concerning Indigenous Australians in the general population by main party affiliations



Source: authors' creation based on AuSSA data.

Figure 5: Interactions with Indigenous Australians in the general population by main party affiliations



Source: authors' creation based on AuSSA data.

4.3 Estimation results

Next, we explore these relationships further in a regression analysis that additionally controls for a wide range of individual characteristics and state fixed effects, as presented in Equation (3). The results reported in Table 6 show that the patterns of association between party affiliation and support on issues concerning Indigenous Australians persist. We estimate consistently negative marginal effects on identification with the LN Coalition and positive marginal effects on identification with the Labor and Green Parties. For example, moving from other/no party identification to identifying with the Labor Party is associated with a 17 percentage point increase in the probability of expressing support on the statement that granting land rights to Indigenous people is not unfair to other Australians. However, identifying with the LN Coalition decreases the probability of expressing support on the statement by 6.4 percentage points.

Among other characteristics of relevance to individuals' views on issues concerning Indigenous Australians, educational attainment is positively associated with supportive attitudes, with those with tertiary educational attainment significantly more likely to have such attitudes relative to those with secondary or lower educational attainment. On the other hand, religious individuals appear to be less likely to possess supportive attitudes on Indigenous issues relative to their non-religious counterparts.

Next, we turn to the analysis of patterns of interaction with Indigenous Australians in a regression analysis that controls for a range of individuals' observable characteristics and state fixed effects. The results reported in Table 7 suggest that the earlier established positive associations between party identification and interactions with Indigenous Australians are robust to controlling for a range of individual characteristics; however, the estimated marginal effect on identification with the LN Coalition is statistically insignificant. Other individual characteristics that are positively associated with the probability of mixing with Indigenous people include educational attainment, being employed, and coming from an Indigenous background. On the other hand, overseas-born individuals are significantly less likely to have interactions with Indigenous Australians.

Table 6: Determinants of attitudes on issues concerning Indigenous Australians in the general population: probit marginal effects

	Dependent variables:			
	Government assistance	Land rights	Inequality	Culture
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
LN Coalition	-0.017 (0.036)	-0.064* (0.035)	-0.086** (0.036)	-0.082** (0.038)
Labor Party	0.205*** (0.039)	0.170*** (0.040)	0.065* (0.039)	0.117*** (0.040)
Greens	0.351*** (0.053)	0.424*** (0.049)	0.313*** (0.050)	0.250*** (0.051)
Female	-0.033 (0.029)	-0.025 (0.029)	0.027 (0.029)	-0.003 (0.030)
Age	0.001 (0.001)	0.000 (0.001)	-0.002* (0.001)	-0.002 (0.001)
ATSI	0.065 (0.088)	0.137 (0.088)	-0.091 (0.088)	-0.004 (0.092)
Immigrant	0.022 (0.033)	-0.007 (0.032)	-0.046 (0.033)	-0.027 (0.034)
Has spouse	-0.039 (0.034)	-0.030 (0.033)	-0.014 (0.034)	-0.022 (0.035)
Tertiary education	0.227*** (0.039)	0.267*** (0.038)	0.191*** (0.039)	0.045 (0.040)
Post-secondary education	0.009 (0.038)	0.057 (0.036)	-0.018 (0.038)	0.021 (0.039)
Employed	-0.054 (0.035)	-0.048 (0.034)	-0.009 (0.034)	-0.018 (0.036)
Christian	-0.014 (0.032)	-0.100*** (0.032)	-0.106*** (0.032)	-0.015 (0.033)
Other religion	-0.018 (0.060)	-0.021 (0.059)	-0.130** (0.059)	-0.056 (0.061)
States	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Pseudo R^2	0.089	0.121	0.101	0.045
Mean of dependent variable	0.495	0.466	0.549	0.575
N	1,060	1,060	1,059	1,059

Note: standard errors in parentheses. * Significance at 10 per cent; ** 5 per cent; *** 1 per cent levels.

Source: authors' calculations based on AuSSA data.

Overall, the results of this analysis suggests that individuals identifying with the Greens or the Labor Party are on average more likely to have interactions with Indigenous people and this may, in turn, feed into the more supportive attitudes they exhibit towards issues concerning Indigenous people, as reported in the first part of the analysis. We provide further engagement with this possibility by re-estimating Equation (3) while controlling for our measure of interaction with Indigenous Australians on the right-hand side, and excluding the measures of party identification from the list of controls at the first instance. The results are reported in the odd-numbered columns of Table 8, and are statistically significant on two instances. Increased interaction with the Indigenous population is associated with increased probability of having supportive attitudes on issues concerning the land rights and cultural identity of Indigenous Australians. We then control for political identity of individuals—the results are reported in the even-numbered columns of Table 8. The significance of the marginal effect on our measure of interactions with the Indigenous population is preserved in the regression, where the dependent variable is individuals' judgements over the question of whether Indigenous people should not have to change their culture to fit into Australian society. In all other instances, the estimated marginal effects on this variable, while positive, are statistically insignificant.

Table 7: Determinants of interactions with Indigenous Australians in the general population: probit marginal effects

	Dependent variables:		
	Interactions in general (1)	Work interactions (2)	Personal interactions (3)
LN Coalition	-0.012 (0.034)	0.023 (0.035)	-0.046 (0.038)
Labor Party	0.057 (0.035)	0.089** (0.039)	0.086** (0.041)
Greens	0.158*** (0.041)	0.116** (0.057)	0.110* (0.060)
Female	-0.013 (0.027)	0.021 (0.029)	-0.021 (0.031)
Age	-0.000 (0.001)	-0.001 (0.001)	-0.001 (0.001)
ATSI	0.100 (0.096)	0.214** (0.091)	0.154 (0.099)
Immigrant	-0.074** (0.029)	-0.077** (0.033)	-0.114*** (0.035)
Has spouse	-0.031 (0.031)	0.049 (0.033)	-0.025 (0.036)
Tertiary education	-0.014 (0.037)	0.092** (0.039)	-0.049 (0.042)
Post-secondary education	0.108*** (0.033)	0.114*** (0.038)	0.067* (0.040)
Employed	0.063* (0.032)	0.328*** (0.034)	0.033 (0.037)
Christian	0.030 (0.029)	0.015 (0.031)	0.042 (0.034)
Other religion	0.021 (0.053)	0.089 (0.059)	0.068 (0.063)
States Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Pseudo R^2	0.058	0.141	0.055
Mean of dependent variable	0.736	0.473	0.517
<i>N</i>	1,061	1,008	990

Note: standard errors in parentheses. * Significance at 10 per cent; ** 5 per cent; *** 1 per cent levels.

Source: authors' calculations based on AuSSA data.

Table 8: Interactions and attitudes on issues concerning Indigenous Australians in the general population: probit marginal effects

	Government assistance (1)	Government assistance (2)	Land rights (3)	Land rights (4)	Inequality (5)	Inequality (6)	Culture (7)	Culture (8)
Interactions in general	0.036 (0.034)	0.008 (0.034)	0.064* (0.034)	0.030 (0.033)	0.040 (0.034)	0.018 (0.033)	0.071** (0.034)	0.058* (0.034)
LN Coalition		-0.018 (0.037)		-0.066* (0.035)		-0.085** (0.036)		-0.079** (0.038)
Labor Party		0.202*** (0.040)		0.169*** (0.040)		0.065 (0.040)		0.120*** (0.040)
Greens		0.362*** (0.053)		0.420*** (0.050)		0.312*** (0.051)		0.254*** (0.051)
Female	-0.006 (0.030)	-0.030 (0.030)	0.002 (0.030)	-0.022 (0.029)	0.039 (0.029)	0.025 (0.029)	0.021 (0.030)	-0.002 (0.030)
Age	0.000 (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)	-0.001 (0.001)	-0.000 (0.001)	-0.002** (0.001)	-0.002* (0.001)	-0.002** (0.001)	-0.002 (0.001)
ATSI	0.109 (0.091)	0.065 (0.088)	0.187** (0.090)	0.137 (0.088)	-0.067 (0.088)	-0.093 (0.088)	0.033 (0.092)	-0.011 (0.092)
Immigrant	0.020 (0.034)	0.023 (0.034)	-0.002 (0.034)	0.001 (0.033)	-0.045 (0.033)	-0.046 (0.033)	-0.018 (0.034)	-0.023 (0.034)
Has spouse	-0.039 (0.035)	-0.034 (0.034)	-0.035 (0.034)	-0.025 (0.033)	-0.023 (0.034)	-0.014 (0.034)	-0.024 (0.035)	-0.018 (0.035)
Tertiary education	0.238*** (0.040)	0.225*** (0.039)	0.279*** (0.039)	0.266*** (0.038)	0.204*** (0.039)	0.191*** (0.039)	0.057 (0.040)	0.048 (0.040)
Post-secondary education	0.004 (0.039)	0.008 (0.038)	0.050 (0.038)	0.055 (0.036)	-0.022 (0.039)	-0.020 (0.038)	0.010 (0.039)	0.013 (0.039)
Employed	-0.063* (0.036)	-0.053 (0.035)	-0.053 (0.035)	-0.047 (0.034)	-0.010 (0.035)	-0.013 (0.034)	-0.029 (0.036)	-0.023 (0.036)
Christian	-0.064** (0.032)	-0.016 (0.032)	-0.161*** (0.032)	-0.101*** (0.032)	-0.145*** (0.031)	-0.106*** (0.032)	-0.052 (0.032)	-0.015 (0.033)
Other religion	-0.055 (0.061)	-0.018 (0.060)	-0.067 (0.061)	-0.021 (0.059)	-0.162*** (0.061)	-0.130** (0.059)	-0.092 (0.062)	-0.058 (0.061)
States	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Pseudo R^2	0.049	0.089	0.071	0.121	0.073	0.100	0.021	0.049
Mean of dependent variable	0.492	0.493	0.461	0.464	0.547	0.548	0.578	0.576
N	1,063	1,054	1,064	1,054	1,062	1,053	1,063	1,053

Note: standard errors in parentheses. * Significance at 10 per cent; ** 5 per cent; *** 1 per cent levels.

Source: authors' calculations based on AuSSA data.

5 Conclusion

Australia's Indigenous population is significantly disadvantaged in terms of a wide range of observable outcomes, and policy interventions to address the issue are critical. Yet, there is a lack of understanding on how policies dealing with issues concerning the Indigenous population come about—a question that this paper attempts to engage with. In a study of Australia's parliamentarians and voters, we show that identity plays an important role in determining the expressed support for issues concerning the Indigenous population. Political ideology is an important determinant of politicians' and voters' preferences on Indigenous policies, and there is a strong alignment between the two groups in that respect. Politicians' propensity to act rebelliously and diligently also feeds into their stance on Indigenous-focused policies. Among voters, on the other hand, the propensity to have a supportive predisposition on issues concerning the Indigenous population increases with educational attainment and decreases with religiosity.

That politicians' identity determines their voting over policies is consistent with 'citizen candidates' models which predict that politicians implement policies consistent with their preferences in a setup characterized by the absence of complete political commitment (Besley and Coate 1997; Osborne and Slivinski 1996). Moreover, we do not find that characteristics of the electorates have any explanatory power over politicians' voting choices, against the prediction of the Downsian model that policy outcomes should be determined by the preferences of the median voter (Downs 1957). Our analysis, however, is based on a small sample and is descriptive in nature; therefore our findings need to be taken with a degree of caution.

While our analysis shows that various dimensions of identity of politicians and voters might determine their stance on policies concerning the Indigenous population, we are not able to make causal claims in the current setup. The datasets that we have employed, while unique, are lacking important background details on individual politicians and voters, as well as their contexts and circumstances, and omission of such information may confound our estimates. Future research in this area would benefit from the use of richer datasets and quasi-experimental setup to establish causal effects. A dedicated survey of politicians to elicit their attitudes and insights alongside collection of more detailed background information would be particularly valuable in this space.

That certain dimensions of identity might prompt a stance against policies to address the Indigenous disadvantage calls for more research into why that might be the case. Our individual-level analysis highlights the potential role of education in supporting preferences for addressing the issues concerning the Indigenous population, including potentially targeting the racial bias among certain groups in society. Consistent with the intergroup contact theory, the prejudice against the Indigenous population is likely to decline with increased opportunities for contact and Indigenous cultural immersion. Understanding the nature of different contexts and the associated discourse that promote the racial bias among certain groups in society defined by political, religious, or other forms of affiliation or identification is an important area of research.

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Appendix A

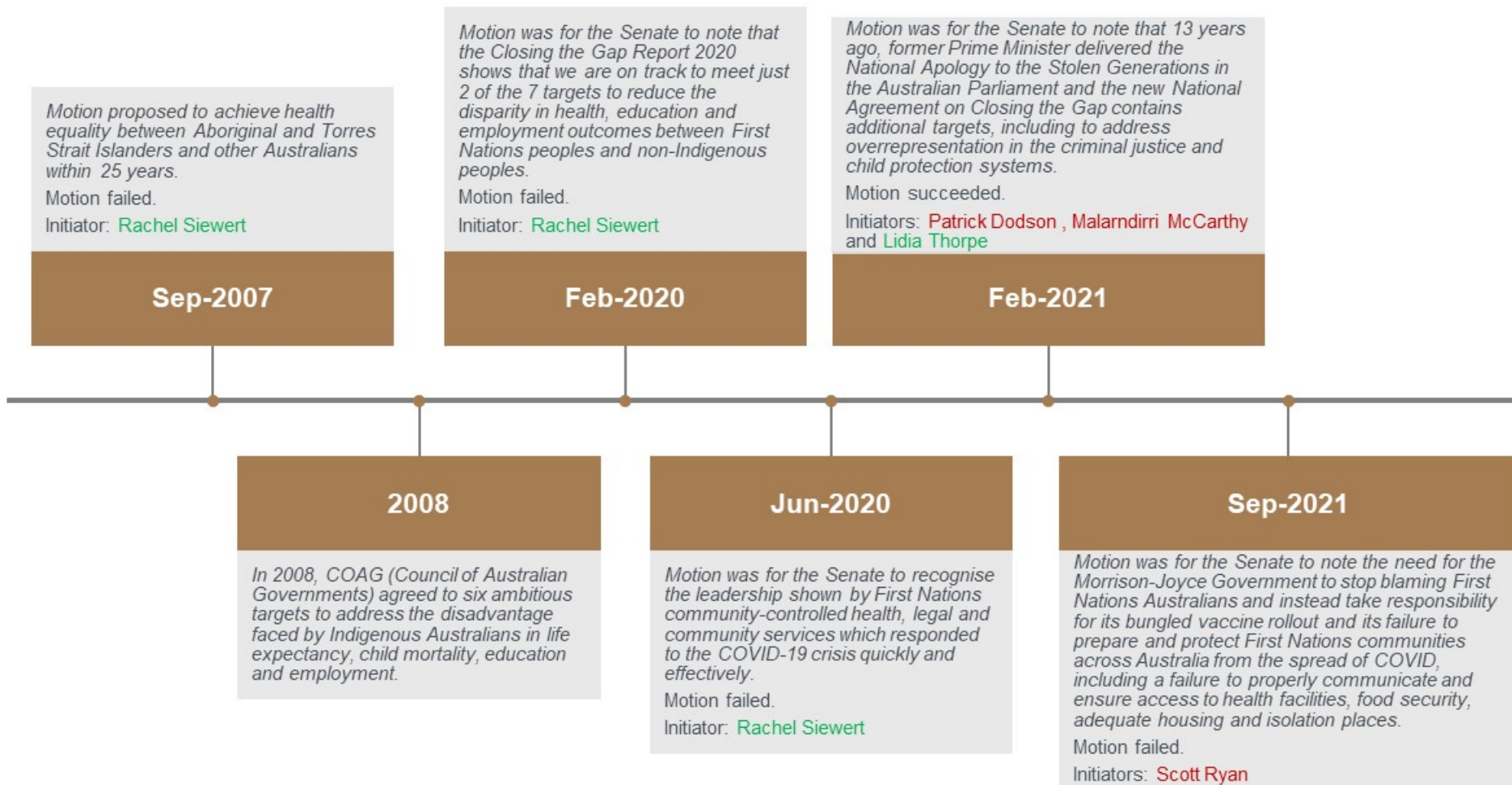
Table A1: Descriptive statistics: sample mean of Lower House representation and attendance rate by political party affiliation

Party	If Lower House, %	Attendance rate, %		
		If Lower House		All
		0	1	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
LN Coalition	0.269 (0.444)	79.27 (9.95)	88.22 (8.43)	81.68 (10.34)
Labor Party	0.306 (0.462)	67.15 (12.96)	87.95 (5.43)	73.53 (14.75)
Australian Greens	0.027 (0.150)	91.22 (6.52)	86.64 (0.00)	91.12 (6.48)
Other political parties	0.093 (0.293)	77.74 (6.45)	74.75 (23.68)	77.46 (9.11)

Note: column (1) reports the sample mean of Lower House representation conditional on political party affiliation; columns (2) and (3) report sample means of attendance rates conditional on political party affiliation and house of parliament; column (4) reports sample mean conditional on political party affiliation. Standard deviations in parentheses. $N = 516$.

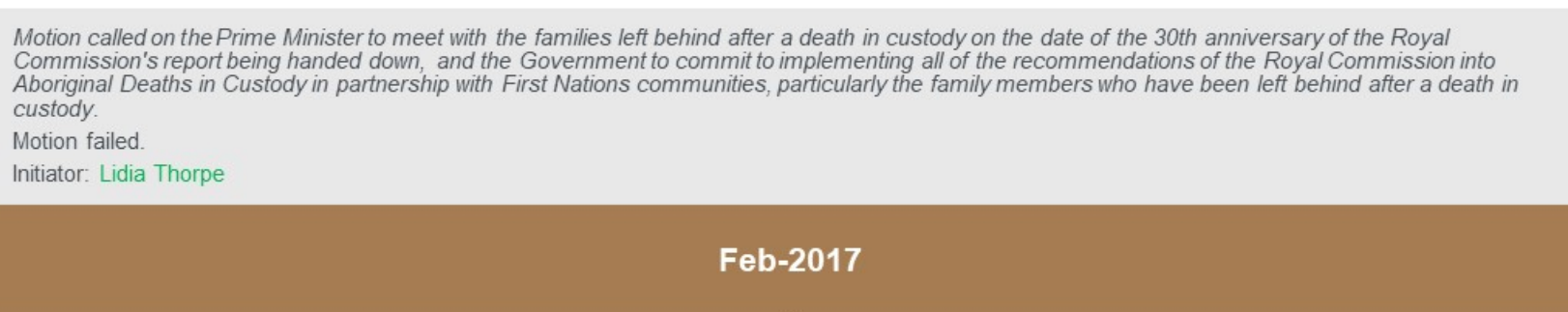
Source: authors' calculations based on TVY data.

Figure A1: Key steps in Close the Gap proposal



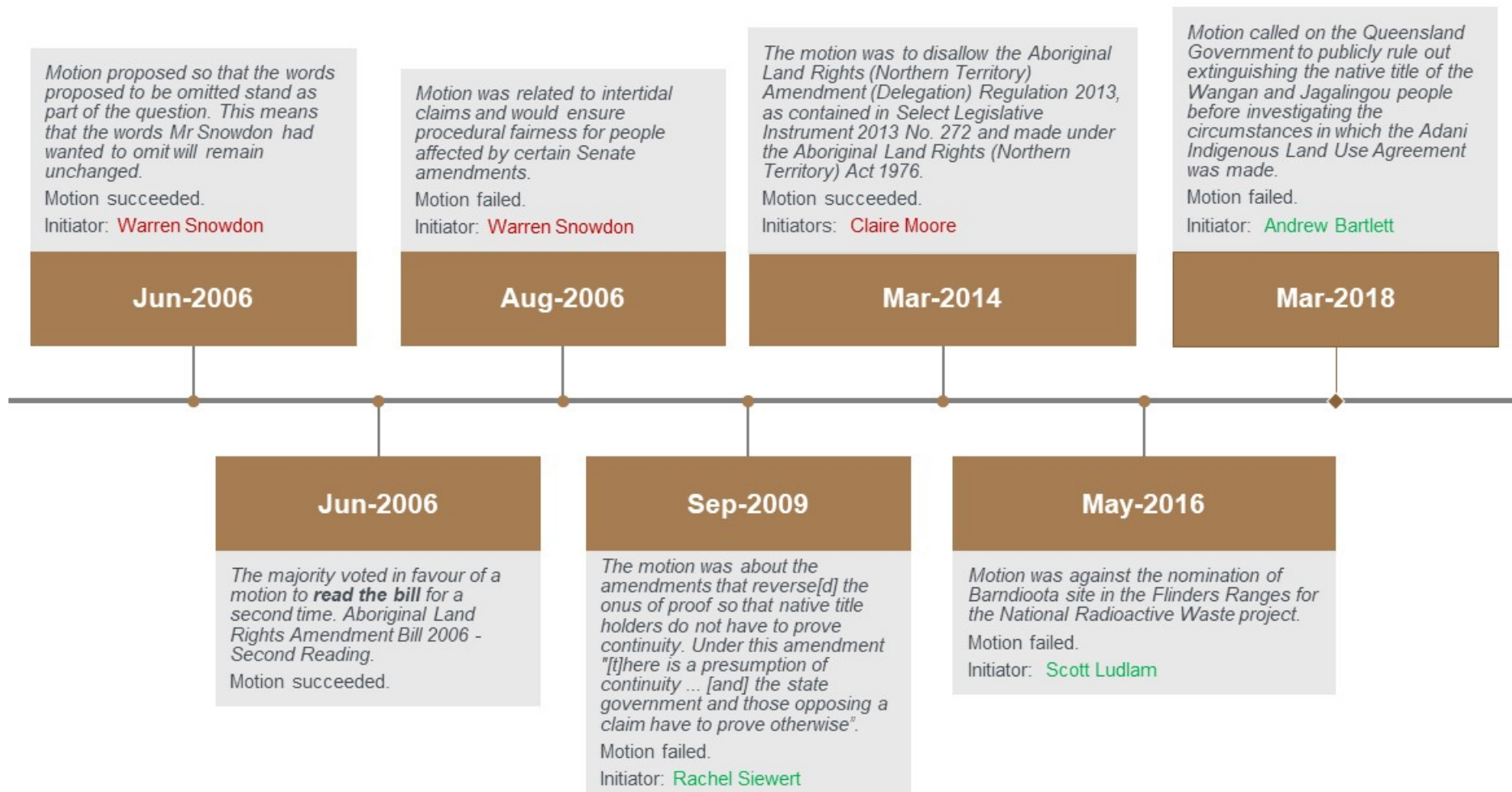
Source: authors' creation based on the TVY project.

Figure A2: Key steps in enquiry into Aboriginal deaths



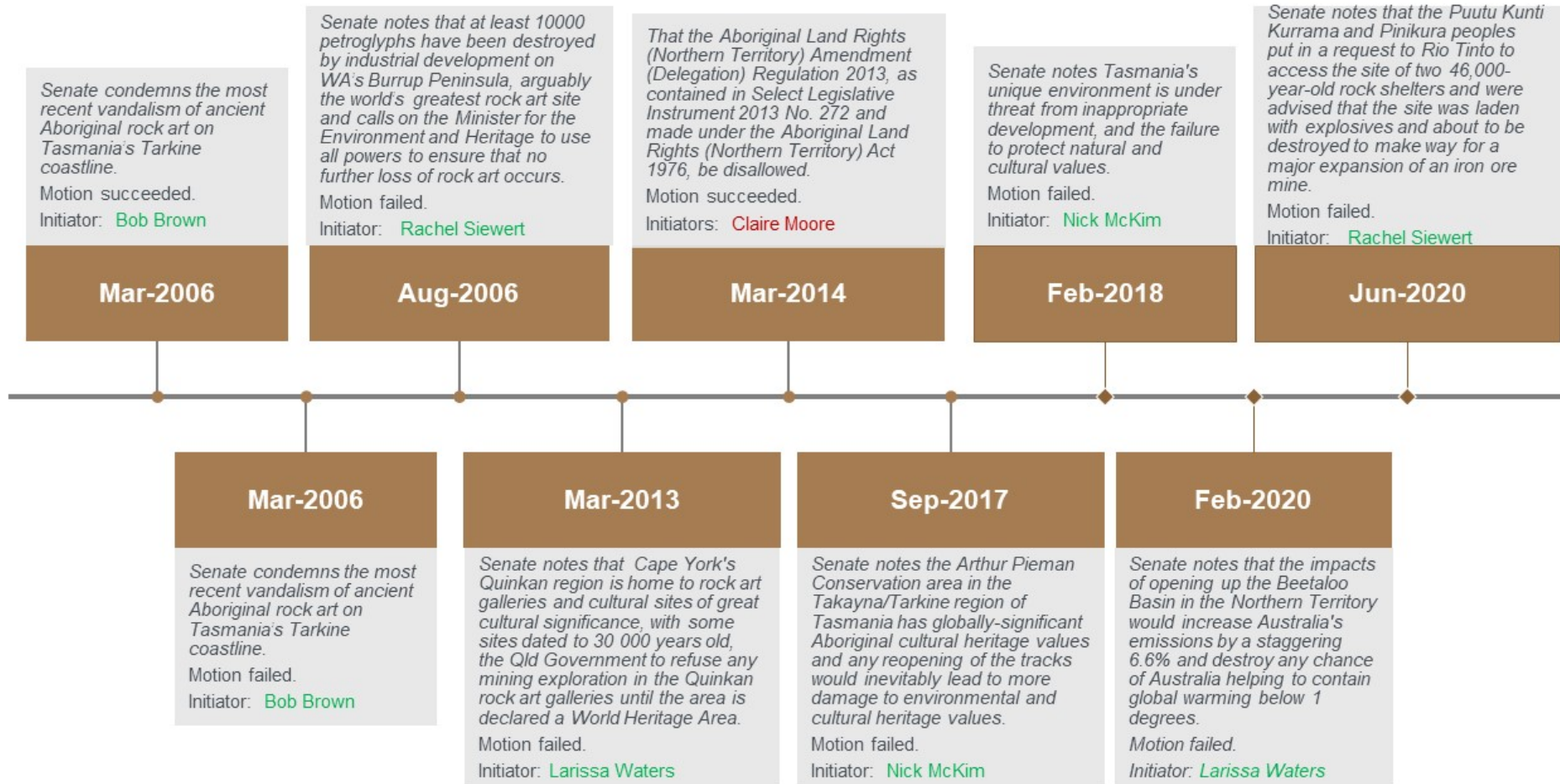
Source: authors' creation based on the TVY project.

Figure A3: Key steps in proposal on increasing Aboriginal land rights



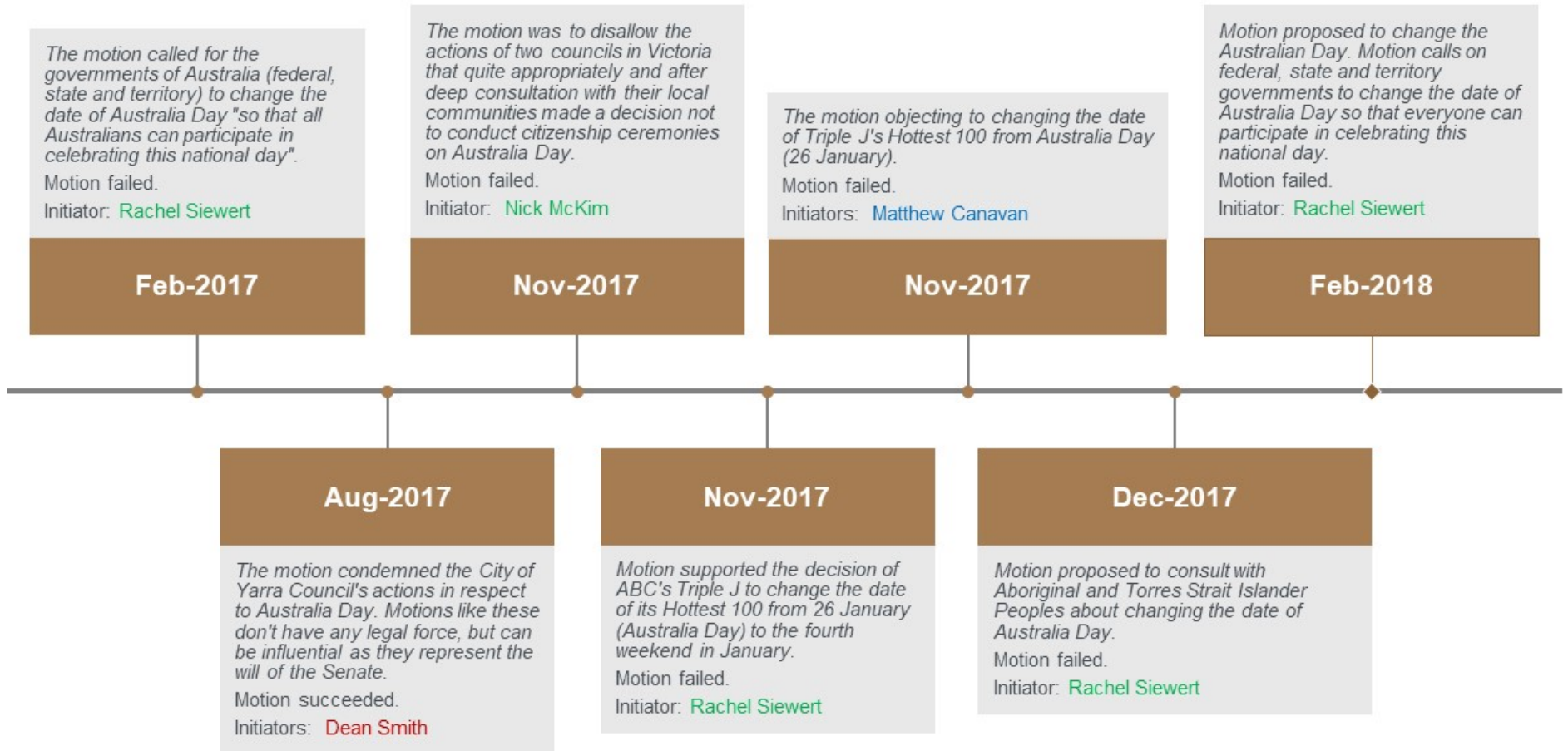
Source: authors' creation based on the TVY project.

Figure A4: Key steps in proposal on increasing heritage protection



Source: authors' creation based on the TVY project.

Figure A5: Key steps in proposal on change in Australia Day



Source: authors' creation based on the TVY project.

Figure A6: Key steps in proposal on enriching First Nation identity



Source: authors' creation based on the TVY project.