

Why do American Indians vote Democratic?

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Prepared for Presentation at the 2014 Western Political Science Association Annual Meeting, Seattle, April 17-19, WA

* This paper has been accepted for publication by *Social Science Journal*.

ABSTRACT

We examine the relationship between a relatively large population of American Indians in eastern Oklahoma and the slow pace of that region's partisan realignment. With a 2012 exit poll, we empirically examine whether American Indians' cultural ties and their socio-economic characteristics affected their vote choices. Because of their greater poverty, American Indians are more economically progressive and vote more Democratic than their white counterparts.

American Indians' socio-economic circumstances play a greater role than their cultural ties in their vote decisions and significantly influence why they are slower to abandon the Democratic Party in eastern Oklahoma.

Keywords: American Indians, Partisan realignment, Vote choices, Socio-economic circumstances, Populism

The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between a relatively large population of American Indians in eastern Oklahoma and the slow pace of that region's partisan realignment. To do that, we examine the voting behavior of American Indians in eastern Oklahoma with an exit poll conducted in the 2012 presidential election. Decades of research demonstrates that voting behavior in presidential elections is largely determined by party identification (Campbell et al., 1960; Finkel, 1993; Lazarsfeld et al., 1944) and retrospective evaluations (Fiorina, 1981; Key, 1966; Kinder et al., 1989; Lewis-Beck, 1988). The outcomes of presidential elections can be explained by a few variables, such as presidential approval and economic performance (Kramer, 1971; Markus, 1988). Forecast models have shown that the national popular vote can be predicted using a similar set of variables (Abramowitz, 1988; Campbell, 1992; Erikson & Wlezien, 1999; Holbrook, 1991; Lewis-Beck & Rice, 1992). We will examine whether such variables as party identification, presidential approval, and economic performance also play a significant role in explaining the voting behavior of American Indians in eastern Oklahoma.

Another factor that may influence American Indian voting behavior is their minority status. There are important reasons, however, to distinguish American Indians from other minorities in the United States. Not only are they the original inhabitants of the continent, but American Indian tribes also have special treaty status with the U.S. government as sovereign nations. They are, in effect, nations within a nation. In addition, according to the 2010 census, 44% of those who self-identify as American Indian have a racially mixed background, and 63% are a mixture of American Indian and white. It is, therefore, by no means certain that American Indians will vote according to a pattern that is similar to that of other racial or ethnic minorities.

Wilkins (1994), for example, argues that equating the American Indian experience with the struggle of other minority groups ignores the unique “government to government” relationship between Indian tribal nations and state and national governments. In fact, Wilkins (2002) goes so far as to title a chapter in his book on American Indian politics, “Indian Peoples Are Nations, Not Minorities.” This is so, but it tells us little about how individual American Indians vote. Peterson (1997) finds that socioeconomic theories of voter turnout do not accurately explain American Indian voting patterns and Deloria (1985) insists on the uniqueness of American Indian political behavior:

A great deal has been written about the political participation of other minority groups, especially African-Americans and Mexican-Americans. No other voting group voting data is comparable to the Indian experience, however, nor can the same generalizations be made about Indian voting. Indians are unique in many ways and one is the way they vote (Deloria, 1985, p. 130).

Deloria, however, does not empirically test in what way American Indian voting behavior is unique. There is, in fact, a scarcity of empirical studies on American Indian voting behavior. Of those available, focus on turnout (McCool, 1982; Peterson, 1957; Peterson, 1997; Ritt, 1979) and on party identification. In studies on party identification, more Indians see themselves as Democrats than as Republicans (DeLoria, 1985; Turner, 2002; Wilkins, 2002), although there is some variation between tribes and between reservation and non-reservation Indians (McCool, 1982; Kunitz & Levy, 1970). Some tribes support the Democratic Party because they believe it has taken a more genuine stance in favor of American Indian issues, but many individual American Indians have decided to identify with the Democratic Party because it has placed American Indians within a broader class of disadvantaged Americans that it seeks to aid through federal support (Cooper, 1996). Studies also show that while American Indians are more likely to identify with the Democratic Party than are whites, they are less likely to identify with the

Democratic Party than are African- or Hispanic-Americans. Similarly, in regard to political attitudes, studies indicate that American Indians are not as liberal as African-Americans, but not as conservative as whites (Ritt, 1979).

Other studies find that both American Indian behavior and attitudes are determined by self-interest (Engstrom & Barrilleaux, 1991). In fact, Ritt points out that "[a]lthough perceptive authors such as Vine Deloria have said that Indians have feelings distinct from other Americans, this statement appears to be somewhat exaggerated. . . . It does not appear to be true with regard to their political feelings" (1979, 67). Bahr and Chadwick (1974) show that American Indians and whites possess similar views on certain social and economic issues. Murdock (1983) also finds that, through the political socialization process, American Indian children exhibit an attachment to the national political system that is similar to that of their white counterparts. Cornassel and Witmer II (1997, 2008) argue that issues, rather than cultural ties, are the primary reason that American Indian tribes support particular candidates for federal and state office during primary and general election campaigns. Min and Savage (2012) demonstrate that socio-economic factors, not their unique cultural identity, are the main factor determining the political attitudes of individual American Indians.

We contribute to this question by examining the voting behavior of American Indians in eastern Oklahoma. We argue that American Indians' socio-economic circumstances have a significant effect on their vote decisions. American Indians in the region are populists in the sense that they are religiously conservative and economically liberal. Their economic liberalism makes American Indians more reluctant to abandon the Democratic Party. The 2nd Congressional District is one of the poorest congressional districts in the nation (Min & Savage, 2012). As can be seen in Table 1, within this poor district, American Indians are even poorer

than whites and the regional average. Greater poverty levels among American Indians affect their attitudes on economic issues and, thus, they are more supportive of government intervention in the economy. Because the Democratic Party is more supportive of government intervention in the economy, American Indians are more likely than whites to vote Democratic.

[Table 1 about here]

1. American Indians and partisan alignment

We investigate whether a relatively large population of American Indians in eastern Oklahoma has affected the slow pace of that region's partisan realignment. There has been a well-documented partisan realignment occurring in the southern states for the past half century (Aistrup, 1996; Black & Black, 2002; Lublin, 2004). The once Democratic "solid south" (Grantham, 1992) has become predominantly Republican (Black, 2004; Knuckey, 2006). As Aistrup (1996) document almost two decades ago, the realignment has proceeded in a top-down secular fashion, with southern voters starting to vote Republican in presidential races long before they began to vote Republican in Congressional elections.¹ It took even longer for southern voters to start voting Republican in state and local elections.

Since 1972, southern states have, for the most part, supported Republican presidential candidates, but until 1994 most southern members of Congress were still Democrats. After the 1994 mid-term elections, Republicans began to dominate southern Congressional elections, but the number of Republicans in southern state legislatures was still below 40% (Aistrup, 1996, p. 67). Over the past two decades, Republican strength has gradually seeped down to the state and

¹ V.O. Key (1955) originally made the distinction between critical realignments, which occurred quickly in dramatic fashion, perhaps in a single election, and secular realignments, which are gradual and occur over a series of elections.

local levels. In most parts of the South, this top-down process has been completed. Republicans dominate in state and local races as well as in southern Congressional representation and in presidential preference (Black & Black, 2002; Lublin, 2004). By 2002, registered Republicans made up 44% of the southern electorate while registered Democrats accounted for only 36%. (Black 2004, pp. 1001-1002).

In some parts of the South, however, as late as 2012, the Democratic Party is still dominant. In most of these Democratic regions, African- or Hispanic-Americans have a significant presence. In minority-majority districts, for example, no realignment has occurred. In other areas of the South, the top-down realignment, from Democratic to Republican dominance, is still in process. Because African- and Hispanic-Americans are more likely to vote Democratic, it is no mystery that those regions are either not part of the southern realignment or are slower to realign.

It is puzzling, however, that some predominantly white regions in the South, while realigning, are doing so at a much slower pace than the South in general. Eastern Oklahoma is one of those regions that are realigning at a much slower rate.² African- and Hispanic-Americans make up less than 8% of the population in the 2nd Congressional District, which encompasses all of eastern Oklahoma. However, while the rest of the state has completed the top-down realignment—in the sense that Republicans dominate all levels of elections—eastern Oklahoma is still in the process of transitioning from loyalty to the Democratic Party to loyalty to the

² While Oklahoma was not a state during the Civil War, it is what might be considered a border state, in that the eastern part of the state—particularly the southeast, which is sometimes referred to as “Little Dixie”—is more “southern” in a cultural sense than the western part. In this sense, Oklahoma is similar to Texas, which is considered a southern state because it was part of the Confederacy during the Civil War. Politically, the state has followed generally the same partisan alignments and realignments as the southern states. According to the Oklahoma State Election Board (<http://www.ok.gov/elections/>), 83% of voters in Oklahoma were registered as Democrats in 1960. That percentage had dropped to 63% by 1995 and only 47% of the state’s voters were registered as Democrats in 2012. Oklahoma has experienced the secular realignment from the Democratic to the Republican Party during the same period that the traditional southern states have.

Republican Party. The realignment is occurring in a top-down manner. Voters in eastern Oklahoma first abandoned the Democratic Party in presidential elections, and then began voting Republican in U.S. Senate elections. House of Representative elections have been dominated by Democrats in the 2nd Congressional District, but a Republican won the seat in 2012 and the Republican Party is likely to hold the seat in the future. In Oklahoma State Senate and House races, however, Democrats still dominate in this part of the state, and the same is true for county and city level elections.³

We empirically examine which factors affected American Indians' Democratic votes in the 2012 elections. One reason for their Democratic votes may be a strain of populism in the region. By populism, we mean an ideological perspective that is liberal on economic issues and conservative on religious issues (Min & Savage, 2012). In addition, we believe that a relatively large American Indian population in the region has contributed to the slow pace of eastern Oklahoma's partisan realignment. American Indians play the same role as other minorities in the South—notably African- and Hispanic-Americans—in resisting a region's realignment from the Democratic to the Republican Party.⁴ American Indians, even more than the other racial groups in the region, exhibit a populist perspective. While they are just as conservative as whites in the region on religious issues, American Indians are significantly more liberal than whites on economic issues. We argue that this economic liberalism is traced to the fact that American

³ Despite the fact that eastern Oklahomans voted Republican in the 2012 presidential and congressional elections, registered Democrats outnumber Republicans in the 2nd Congressional District by a 2 to 1 margin. As of October 30, 2012, District 2 had the following partisan registration breakdown according to the Oklahoma State Election Board: 260,436 Democrats (63%), 110,170 Republicans (27%) and 39,751 unaffiliated/other (10%). http://www.ok.gov/elections/Voter_Registration/Voter_Registration_Reports/index.html

⁴ According to the 2010 census, American Indians make up 18.8% of the population of the Second Congressional District, while African- and Hispanic-Americans make up only 7.9%. Another 7.3% of the district's population is mixed race, probably due to the fact that American Indians are more likely to marry into other races—mostly white—than any other racial group. Of those Americans who identified themselves as American Indian, 43.8% reported being of mixed race. Only 3.2% of whites and 7.4% of blacks identify themselves as mixed race. Of the mixed raced American Indians, 62.8% reported that they were mixed American Indian and white. When the percentage of American Indians and those of mixed race are combined with African- and Hispanic-Americans, the combined percentage of minorities in the district is 34%.

Indians are, on average, poorer than whites. Because of this poverty, they have more liberal attitudes than whites when it comes to government intervention in the economy. In turn, their attitudes on economic issues significantly affect their vote choice and, thus, they are more likely to cast their ballots for Democrats. Although American Indian voters are, like their white counterparts in the region, realigning from the Democratic to the Republican Party, their socio-economic circumstances make them more reluctant to abandon the Democratic Party and significantly influence eastern Oklahoma's much slower realignment than the rest of the state.

2. Research design

To examine the voting behavior of American Indians in eastern Oklahoma, we conducted an exit poll during the 2012 elections in the region. Taking into account our funding limitations, we had to choose twenty polling stations with the highest percentage of American Indians in eastern Oklahoma. Adair and Cherokee counties were chosen because they have a higher percentage of American Indians than any other counties in eastern Oklahoma or, for that matter, in the state of Oklahoma. The 2010 census lists Adair County's American Indian population at 43% and that of Cherokee County at 34%, and this compares to 18.8% for CD2 as a whole and 8.6% for Oklahoma as a whole.⁵ Forty pollsters covered the twenty polling stations in the two counties that the county election boards told us had the highest average turnout of voters. On election day, pollsters solicited responses from all exiting voters, and American Indians were identified through self-selection.

Our exit poll (Appendix A) measured the voting behavior of respondents in the 2012 presidential, congressional, state senate, and state house elections. Respondents were asked why

⁵ Oklahoma's 2010 Census Population—Demographic Profile. Oklahoma Department of Commerce. <http://okcommerce.gov/data-and-research/demographics-and-population-data/>

they voted the way they did, and a special set of questions was reserved for respondents who identified themselves as American Indian. The questions reserved for American Indians asked about the influence of tribal affiliation, tribal leaders, and tribal issues on respondents' votes.⁶ Besides other demographic information, respondents were also asked questions designed to measure their attitudes on a range of economic, religious, and social policy questions. The total number of observations is 1,286, of which 32% are American Indian.⁷

We first examine how American Indians voted compared to other racial groups in eastern Oklahoma. We then investigate the extent to which American Indians' cultural ties and socio-economic characteristics affected their vote decisions. Finally, we conduct a logistic regression analysis to more rigorously examine which factors influence American Indians' vote decisions. The findings show that American Indians' socio-economic circumstances, rather than their cultural ties, significantly affected their vote choices in the 2012 elections.

3. Results

Our exit poll shows that a minority of voters voted Democratic in the presidential (41.7%) and congressional (39.9%) elections, while a majority cast their ballots for Democratic candidates in the Oklahoma State Senate (53.6%) and State House (53.3%) elections. These findings reflect the top-down nature of the realignment in the region because although a majority of respondents voted Republican in the presidential and congressional elections, a majority voted Democratic in the Oklahoma state legislative races.

⁶ These questions were suggested by Cortassel and Witmer (2008). Their book is on the relationship between tribal and state governments. Their survey was of tribal governments while ours is of individual American Indian voters.

⁷ As for the racial composition of the respondents in our exit polls, 64% of respondents were white, 32% identified themselves as American Indian, and the remaining 4% consisted of all other racial or cultural backgrounds. The 32% of respondents who are American Indian is slightly lower than, as stated above, the percentage of American Indians in the two counties.

[Table 2 about here]

Table 2 shows the percentage of whites, American Indians, and other racial and ethnic groups that voted for Democratic candidates in the November 2012 elections. American Indians were more likely to vote Democratic than were whites in all elections. Even though a majority of American Indians voted Republican in the presidential and U.S. House elections, they were significantly more likely to vote Democratic than were the white respondents. In the state legislative elections, the American Indian Democratic vote was between 11 and 14 percentage points higher than the white Democratic vote. In addition, top-down voting was particularly significant among American Indians because over 60% voted Democratic in the state Senate and state House elections. The gap between the percentage of American Indians who voted Democratic in the U.S. House election (44.1%) and the Oklahoma State House election (62.2%) was 18.1 percentage points. This finding confirms those of Ritt (1979), DeLoria (1985), Turner (2002), and Wilkins (2002), who find that American Indians are more likely to vote Democratic than Republican. Our findings also support Ritt's finding that, although American Indians are more likely to vote Democratic than whites, they are less likely to do so than African- or Hispanic-Americans.

From above, some scholars trace this tendency to issues involving American Indians, while others trace it to socioeconomic factors. To examine whether American Indians' vote decisions are affected by their cultural ties or by their socio-economic circumstances, we first measure the influence of cultural ties on American Indians' vote choices. In our exit poll, we asked American Indian respondents which factors most affected their vote decisions. Among the options were cultural ties, such as their tribal affiliation, the advice of tribal leaders, or issues

related to tribal sovereignty, and non-cultural factors, such as the party affiliation and the economic policies of the candidates. Table 3 reports the results of the analysis.

[Table 3 about here]

Less than 20% of American Indians responded that, taken together, their cultural ties most influenced their vote in the presidential (15%), congressional (17%), or state legislative elections (18%). Instead, more than 30% of American Indians answered that the economic policies of the candidates mattered most in deciding their vote for the presidential (36%), congressional (33%), and state legislative (33%) elections. In addition, party identification mattered most for 8% of presidential, 13% of congressional, and 14% of state legislative voters. The findings show that American Indians' cultural ties did not play a significant role in their vote decision in this particular election.

[Table 4 about here]

We also examine whether there is a difference in vote choice between American Indians who answered that their cultural ties mattered most for their vote decisions and those who did not.⁸ Table 4 shows that American Indians who indicate that their cultural ties are the greatest influence on their vote were more likely to vote Democratic than those who did not. The majority of the former voted for the Democratic candidates in the presidential (75%) and congressional (57%) elections, while only 44% and 42% of the latter voted Democratic. In the state legislative elections, the former voted Democratic by 10 and 13 percentage points higher

⁸ It should be noted that American Indian cultural issues did not play a major role in any of the 2012 election campaigns.

than the latter. Our findings lend some support to the notion advocated by Corntassel and Witmer (2008) that American Indians lean toward the Democratic Party partly because of what they see as its more genuine stance in favor of American Indian issues. The overall findings indicate that American Indians' cultural ties contribute to their support for Democratic candidates, but the impact of cultural ties is limited because less than 20% of American Indian respondents consider their cultural ties to be the most important factor in their vote choice.

Next, we investigate the influence of socio-economic characteristics on American Indians' vote decisions. We believe that American Indians' religious conservatism and economic liberalism both influence their vote choice. To test this proposition, we first compare American Indians' attitudes on religious issues to those of other racial and ethnic groups in eastern Oklahoma. Although the results of the analysis are not reported here,⁹ they show the majority of American Indian respondents are religiously conservative. We also see little difference between white and American Indian respondents, although American Indians are slightly more conservative than whites. When asked whether public schools should be allowed to start each day with a prayer, for instance, 64% of whites and 68% of American Indians agreed with the statement. The findings suggest that American Indian attitudes in regard to religious issues are not different from that of whites and other ethnic minorities. The shared religious conservatism of respondents could be attributed to a consequence of sharing the same conservative regional socialization.¹⁰

[Table 5 about here]

⁹ The results of the analysis are available from the authors.

¹⁰ Our exit poll shows that eastern Oklahoma is an ideologically conservative region where 42% of whites and 39% of American Indians identified themselves as conservative.

We also investigate whether voters' attitudes on religious issues are linked to their votes for Democratic candidates and if there are significant differences in this relationship between whites and American Indians. Table 5 shows that respondents who are liberal on the religious issues are more likely to vote Democratic. The majority of whites and the vast majority of American Indian respondents who took the liberal position on all of the religious issues answered that they voted Democratic. In addition, more American Indians who took moderate or conservative positions voted for Democratic candidates than their white counterparts. Regarding the question of whether religion is a private matter that does not belong in the public schools, for example, 22% of whites who took the conservative position and 44% who took the moderate position voted for Barack Obama in the presidential election. Among American Indian respondents, 34% of those who responded conservatively and 54% who responded moderately voted for Obama. These findings suggest that while American Indians' attitudes on religious issues affect their vote decisions, they are more likely to vote Democratic than their white counterparts.

Considering that American Indians voted more Democratic than whites even though they are just as conservative as whites on religious issues, poverty significantly affected American Indians' vote decisions. While both whites and American Indians are more likely to vote Democratic at lower income levels, American Indians have lower incomes than whites, Table 1. American Indians are thus more likely to be liberal than whites when it comes to government intervention in the economy, and American Indians are slower to abandon the Democratic Party than whites. To test this proposition, we first compare American Indians' attitudes on economic issues to other ethnic groups in the exit poll. Although we do not report the results of the analysis

here,¹¹ the majority of American Indian respondents expressed economic liberalism by supporting government intervention in the economy. American Indians favored the liberal position by an almost 3 to 1 margin over the conservative position. In addition, American Indian responses are significantly more liberal than those of white respondents. When asked whether the government ought to take steps to make sure that the gap between the rich and the poor in America is reduced, for example, 48% of whites and 64% of American Indians agreed with the statement. It is significant that the majority of voters favor liberal positions on economic issues in an ideologically conservative region where only 20% of both whites and American Indians identified themselves as liberal.

[Table 6 about here]

We also examine the degree to which income affects voters' attitudes on economic issues. Income is clearly linked to voters' attitudes on the economic issues (Table 6): the less voters earn, the more likely they are to take a liberal position on the economic issues. When asked whether the government ought to help people get doctors and hospital care at lower cost, for example, 68% of white respondents and 74% of American Indians who earned less than \$25,000 per year took the liberal position, while only 38% of whites and 46% of Indians who earned more than \$100,000 took a liberal position. Although their positions on economic issues are related to income, American Indians are more likely to take a liberal position on government intervention in the economy than their white counterparts at any income level. When asked whether the government ought to take steps to make sure that the gap between the rich and the poor in America is reduced, the gap between the percentage of whites who earned less than \$25,000 and

¹¹ The results of the analysis are available from the authors.

answered in the liberal way (62%), and their American Indian counterparts (77%) is 15 percentage points. These findings indicate that, not only does poverty among American Indians' influence their attitudes on economic issues, they are more supportive of government intervention in the economy than their white counterparts at all income levels.

[Table 7 about here]

We next examine whether voters' attitudes on economic issues are related to their votes for Democratic candidates, and whether there are significant differences in the relationship between whites and American Indians. The results of the analysis show that respondents who take liberal positions on the economic issues are more likely to vote Democratic than those who take moderate or conservative positions (Table 7). The majority of both white and American Indian respondents who took liberal position on all economic issues responded that they voted Democratic. In addition, more American Indians who took the moderate or conservative position on the economic statements voted Democratic than their white counterparts. As for the question of whether the government ought to help people get doctors and hospital care at lower cost, only 5% and 31% of whites who answered in the conservative and moderate way, respectively, voted Democratic in the presidential election, while 13% and 39% of their American Indian counterparts voted for Barack Obama. These findings indicate, first, that American Indians' attitudes on economic issues are strongly tied to their vote decisions. Second, even though American Indians who take conservative positions on the economic issues are less likely to vote Democratic, they are more likely to vote Democratic than are whites.

Finally, we examine which factors influence American Indians' vote decisions in the presidential, congressional, and state legislative elections with logistic regression analysis. The

dependent variable is vote choice. It is coded 1 if a respondent voted Democratic, and 0 if otherwise. The independent variables are both those central to this study and those that are the focus of the past several decades of voting behavior research. Among the variables that may have an effect on voter choice are: income, voters' attitudes on economic and religious issues, ideology, presidential approval, party affiliation, and the socio-demographic variables of gender, education, and age.¹²

For the variables, Economic Issues and Religious Issues, we create an economic index and a religious index. We create the economic index by accumulating scores on the three questions used in Table 6 on government intervention in the economy. A respondent chose one of five categories (1 – 5) for each question and the scores of the index range from 1 to 15. A smaller value on the index indicates that a respondent is more economically conservative. We also create a religious index by accumulating scores on the three questions in Table 5 about religious issues. A respondent selected one of five categories (1 – 5) for each question and the scores of the index range from 1 to 15. A smaller value on the index indicates that a respondent is more religiously conservative.¹³

[Table 8 about here]

¹² To measure the influence of the status of the economy on vote choice, we include a variable, Economy, in the presidential and congressional elections. For the presidential election, it is coded 1 if a respondent chose 'The status of the economy' as the most important factor for his/her vote for president and 0 if otherwise. For the U.S. House election, it is coded 1 if a respondent answered that 'My concern about big government' mattered most for his/her vote and 0 if otherwise. Meanwhile, we include a variable, State Connection, to measure the influence of a candidate's connection to the local community on vote choice in the state legislative elections. It is coded 1 if a respondent responded that 'The candidate's connection to the local community' mattered most in deciding his/her vote and 0 if otherwise.

¹³ The results of Likelihood Ratio test, shown as Model χ^2 in Table 8, show that the independent variables we employ in the models are jointly significant in explaining the dependent variable, American Indians' Democratic Vote, at .05 level. We also measure whether there is a specification error in the models to see if the models are properly specified and we need more variables in the models (if the model is properly specified, one should not be able to find any additional predictors that are statistically significant except by chance). We found that our models are correctly specified. The results of the analysis are available from authors.

Cultural ties only affect American Indian votes in the presidential election (Table 8). If respondents consider their cultural ties most important for their vote choice, they were more likely to vote for Barack Obama. Meanwhile, American Indians' attitudes on economic issues significantly influence their vote decisions in all elections: to the extent respondents take liberal positions on the economic issues, they are more likely to vote Democratic. This finding seems counter to the argument of Peterson (1997) that socioeconomic factors cannot be used to explain American Indian voting behavior. American Indians' attitudes on the religious issues have a limited effect on their vote choice because they were significant only in the presidential election.

Meanwhile, American Indians' poverty, measured by household income, does not affect their vote decisions. However, taking into account that their poverty is linked to their attitudes on the economic issues, the findings indicate that American Indians' poverty may influence their vote decisions (Table 6). Instead of directly affecting vote choice, poverty plays a significant role in how American Indians form their attitudes on government intervention in the economy. Then their attitudes on economic issues directly affect how they make up their minds in elections. Finally, such factors as ideology and presidential approval also influence American Indians' vote choices. To the extent respondents were ideologically liberal and approve of the job of the Obama administration, they were more likely to vote Democratic.

The findings indicate that the socioeconomic characteristics of American Indians play a greater role in explaining their vote decisions than their cultural ties. Contrary to the conclusions of Deloria (1985), Wilkins (1994 and 2002), and Peterson (1997), we find that American Indian voting behavior is explained in a way similar to that of other voters, by their economic self-interest. Because of American Indians' greater poverty, they are more economically liberal than their white counterparts. American Indians' attitudes on economic issues significantly affect their

vote choice and, hence, they are more likely to vote for the candidates of the Democratic Party than are whites. As a result, American Indian voters are slower to abandon the Democratic Party and thus play a significant role in contributing to the slow pace of the partisan realignment in eastern Oklahoma.

4. Conclusion

Our analysis suggests that American Indian voters, in general, are slower to abandon the Democratic Party than are whites in eastern Oklahoma. American Indians are responsible for the survival of the Democratic Party in the region primarily because of their poverty. While both whites and American Indians are more likely to vote Democratic at lower income levels, American Indians have, on average, lower incomes than whites. Lower incomes are related to the more liberal positions of American Indians when it comes to attitudes about government intervention in the economy, even though they are just as conservative as whites on religious issues. American Indians' attitudes on economic issues affect their vote decisions, and they vote more Democratic than whites. Taking into account that religious conservatism and economic liberalism each implies the notion of community, in the sense of shared religious values and shared economic burdens, we can speculate that American Indians in the region may be described as more communitarian, and less individualistic, than whites.

Our findings also suggest, however, that American Indians' voting behavior is not affected by their cultural ties. Over 80% of American Indian respondents did not choose the influence of tribal affiliation, tribal leaders, or tribal issues related to sovereignty as most relevant to their vote. Although we can speculate that communitarian tendencies are related to American Indian tribal culture, we should note that the American Indian vote corresponds to

income, with the highest income American Indians favoring Republican candidates at all levels. Economic factors appear to have had a greater impact than tribal affiliation on American Indian political behavior. The significance of this finding may be lessened by the fact that no cultural issues affecting American Indians are prominent in any of the campaigns in this particular election. Cultural ties may have stronger influences on voter choice if, for example, sovereignty issues had been prominent in any of the elections.

Finally, our analysis indicates that the top-down nature of the partisan realignment is more pronounced among American Indian voters, and American Indian voters are more likely than whites to vote a split-ticket in which they vote Republican for President or Congress and Democratic for Oklahoma State Senate and House. White respondents gave a majority of votes to Republican candidates at the presidential, congressional, and state legislative levels. American Indian voters, on the other hand, gave a majority of votes to Republicans at the presidential and congressional levels, but a sizable majority to Democrats at the state legislative level. A future study may examine more closely why American Indians exhibited more strongly than whites the top-down nature of the partisan realignment in eastern Oklahoma.

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Table 1
Household income distribution by racial groups

| | All | Indian | White |
|---------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Less than \$25,000 | 23.6% (288) | 28.2% (110) | 21.1% (163) |
| \$25,000 – 59,999 | 43.6% (531) | 40.8% (159) | 44.2% (342) |
| \$60,000 – 99,999 | 23.1% (281) | 21.3% (83) | 24.6% (190) |
| More than \$100,000 | 9.8% (119) | 9.7% (38) | 10.2% (79) |
| Total | 100% (1219) | 100% (390) | 100% (774) |

Source: Authors' Data (Available from the authors upon request).

Table 2
Democratic vote by race

| Race | <u>Vote</u> | | | |
|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| | President | U.S. House | State Senate | State House |
| Whites | 37.9% (308) | 37.3% (300) | 49.5% (385) | 48.0% (366) |
| Indians | 48.4% (195) | 44.1% (177) | 60.6% (240) | 62.2% (243) |
| Others | 53.9% (28) | 49.0% (25) | 64.0% (32) | 64.0% (32) |
| Total | (531) | (502) | (657) | (641) |
| χ^2 | 18.351 | 20.232 | 21.587 | 30.234 |
| <i>P-value</i> | 0.001 | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 |

Source: Authors' Data (Available from the authors upon request).

Note: The number of observations is in the parenthesis.

Table 3
Cultural ties and American Indians' vote decisions

| | Presidential election | U.S. House election | State Legislative elections |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------|
| Tribal affiliation | 5.5% (22) | 6.9% (27) | 6.3% (25) |
| Endorsement of tribal leaders | 2.0% (8) | 3.1% (12) | 2.8% (11) |
| Tribal sovereignty | 7.5% (30) | 7.1% (28) | 9.1% (36) |
| Party affiliation | 8.3% (33) | 12.9% (51) | 14.3% (57) |
| Economic policies | 36.3% (145) | 32.7% (129) | 32.9% (131) |
| None of the above | 40.4% (161) | 37.3% (147) | 34.7% (138) |

Source: Authors' Data (Available from the authors upon request).

Note: The number of observations is in the parenthesis.

Table 4
American Indians' cultural ties and Democratic vote

| | Presidential election | U.S. House election | State Senate election | State House election |
|----------------|-----------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| Cultural ties | 75.0% (45) | 56.9% (37) | 69.6% (48) | 72.86% (51) |
| Other | 44.3% (148) | 42.2% (136) | 59.3% (188) | 60.4% (189) |
| χ^2 | 19.169 | 4.719 | 2.510 | 3.804 |
| <i>P-value</i> | 0.000 | 0.030 | 0.113 | 0.051 |

Source: Authors' Data (Available from the authors upon request).

Note: The number of observations is in the parenthesis.

Table 5
 Voters' attitudes on religious issues and Democratic votes

| Issue: Religion is a private matter that does not belong in the public schools. | | | | | | | | | |
|---|------------------------|---------------|-----------------|----------------|-----------------------|------------------------|---------------|-----------------|----------------|
| <u>Race</u> White | <u>Democratic vote</u> | | | | <u>Race</u> Indian | <u>Democratic vote</u> | | | |
| | Pres. | U.S. House | State Senate | State House | | Pres. | U.S. House | State Senate | State House |
| Con. | 22.1% | 23.1% | 36.5% | 35.8% | Con. | 34.3% | 33.0% | 50.9% | 53.3% |
| Mod. | 44.0% | 44.0% | 54.6% | 48.4% | Mod. | 54.4% | 49.3% | 61.2% | 66.7% |
| Lib. | 63.0% | 58.6% | 69.9% | 68.9% | Lib. | 72.1% | 63.5% | 79.1% | 77.5% |
| χ^2 | 115.30 | 87.91 | 69.51 | 66.08 | χ^2 | 41.96 | 27.39 | 23.21 | 17.77 |
| <i>P</i> | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 | <i>P</i> | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 |

| Issue: We all will be called before God at the Judgment Day to answer for our sins. | | | | | | | | | |
|---|------------------------|---------------|-----------------|----------------|-----------------------|------------------------|---------------|-----------------|----------------|
| <u>Race</u> White | <u>Democratic vote</u> | | | | <u>Race</u> Indian | <u>Democratic vote</u> | | | |
| | Pres. | U.S. House | State Senate | State House | | Pres. | U.S. House | State Senate | State House |
| Con. | 28.3% | 29.6% | 42.3% | 41.1% | Con. | 40.6% | 38.0% | 55.5% | 58.2% |
| Mod. | 59.4% | 53.5% | 67.4% | 62.1% | Mod. | 61.1% | 52.8% | 63.9% | 66.7% |
| Lib. | 77.6% | 69.1% | 77.1% | 77.7% | Lib. | 97.2% | 86.1% | 97.2% | 91.4% |
| χ^2 | 107.74 | 67.87 | 53.17 | 51.13 | χ^2 | 85.09 | 31.59 | 75.01 | 15.11 |
| <i>P</i> | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 | <i>P</i> | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 |

| Issue: Public schools should be allowed to start each day with a prayer. | | | | | | | | | |
|--|------------------------|---------------|-----------------|----------------|-----------------------|------------------------|---------------|-----------------|----------------|
| <u>Race</u> White | <u>Democratic vote</u> | | | | <u>Race</u> Indian | <u>Democratic vote</u> | | | |
| | Pres. | U.S. House | State Senate | State House | | Pres. | U.S. House | State Senate | State House |
| Con. | 24.7% | 25.6% | 38.2% | 37.8% | Con. | 37.8% | 34.0% | 52.7% | 55.8% |
| Mod. | 55.6% | 50.7% | 62.6% | 58.5% | Mod. | 57.1% | 61.9% | 66.7% | 69.4% |
| Lib. | 69.5% | 66.0% | 77.5% | 74.8% | Lib. | 82.0% | 68.9% | 86.9% | 81.7% |
| χ^2 | 115.44 | 89.34 | 77.32 | 64.48 | χ^2 | 41.38 | 34.33 | 25.39 | 15.48 |
| <i>P</i> | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 | <i>P</i> | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 |

Source: Authors' Data (Available from the authors upon request).

Pres.: Presidential Election.

Con.: Conservative; Mod.: Moderate; Lib.: Liberal.

P: *P*-value.

Table 6
Income and economic issues by racial groups

| | <u>American Indians (D/H)</u> | | | | | <u>Whites (D/H)</u> | | | |
|----------|-------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|----------|---------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Con. | 14.7% | 21.2% | 32.5% | 43.2% | Con. | 22.8% | 32.7% | 40.7% | 49.4% |
| Mod. | 11.0% | 12.8% | 14.5% | 10.8% | Mod. | 9.3% | 10.6% | 11.1% | 12.7% |
| Lib. | 74.3% | 66.0% | 53.1% | 46.0% | Lib. | 67.9% | 56.6% | 48.2% | 38.0% |
| χ^2 | 18.682 | | | | χ^2 | 25.419 | | | |
| <i>P</i> | .005 | | | | <i>P</i> | .000 | | | |

| | <u>American Indians (Gap)</u> | | | | | <u>Whites (Gap)</u> | | | |
|----------|-------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|----------|---------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Con. | 13.8% | 21.7% | 31.3% | 43.2% | Con. | 25.8% | 35.4% | 48.7% | 59.5% |
| Mod. | 9.2% | 10.8% | 16.9% | 13.5% | Mod. | 12.3% | 12.8% | 9.5% | 12.7% |
| Lib. | 77.1% | 67.5% | 51.8% | 43.2% | Lib. | 62.0% | 51.8% | 41.8% | 27.9% |
| χ^2 | 23.068 | | | | χ^2 | 37.919 | | | |
| <i>P</i> | .001 | | | | <i>P</i> | .000 | | | |

| | <u>American Indians (H/E)</u> | | | | | <u>Whites (H/E)</u> | | | |
|----------|-------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|----------|---------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Con. | 18.5% | 17.2% | 24.1% | 29.7% | Con. | 21.3% | 29.7% | 30.2% | 35.4% |
| Mod. | 10.2% | 10.8% | 16.9% | 24.3% | Mod. | 15.0% | 12.5% | 18.5% | 17.7% |
| Lib. | 71.3% | 72.0% | 59.0% | 46.0% | Lib. | 63.8% | 57.9% | 51.3% | 46.8% |
| χ^2 | 12.963 | | | | χ^2 | 11.805 | | | |
| <i>P</i> | .044 | | | | <i>P</i> | .066 | | | |

Source: Authors' Data (Available from the authors upon request).

1=Less than \$25,000; 2=\$25,000 - \$59,999; 3=\$60,000-\$99,999; 4=More than \$100,000.

D/H: The government ought to help people get doctors and hospital care at lower cost.

Gap: The government ought to take steps to make sure that the gap between the rich and the poor is reduced.

H/E: The government should provide fewer services in areas such as health and education to reduce spending.

Con.: Conservative; Mod.: Moderate; Lib.: Liberal.

P: *P*-value.

Table 7
 Voters' attitudes on economic issues and Democratic votes

Issue: The government ought to help people get doctors and hospital care at lower cost.

| <u>Race</u> White | <u>Democratic vote</u> | | | | <u>Race</u> Indian | <u>Democratic vote</u> | | | |
|----------------------|------------------------|---------------|-----------------|----------------|-----------------------|------------------------|---------------|-----------------|----------------|
| | Pres. | U.S. House | State Senate | State House | | Pres. | U.S. House | State Senate | State House |
| Con. | 5.1% | 8.4% | 15.5% | 14.5% | Con. | 12.8% | 14.7% | 26.9% | 27.5% |
| Mod. | 31.0% | 26.2% | 46.3% | 42.3% | Mod. | 39.2% | 39.2% | 53.1% | 57.1% |
| Lib. | 61.1% | 58.5% | 73.2% | 71.8% | Lib. | 63.0% | 56.4% | 74.8% | 76.3% |
| χ^2 | 225.12 | 182.73 | 214.58 | 209.02 | χ^2 | 70.54 | 48.61 | 65.76 | 67.29 |
| <i>P</i> | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 | <i>P</i> | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 |

Issue: The government ought to take steps to make sure that the gap between the rich and the poor in America is reduced.

| <u>Race</u> White | <u>Democratic vote</u> | | | | <u>Race</u> Indian | <u>Democratic vote</u> | | | |
|----------------------|------------------------|---------------|-----------------|----------------|-----------------------|------------------------|---------------|-----------------|----------------|
| | Pres. | U.S. House | State Senate | State House | | Pres. | U.S. House | State Senate | State House |
| Con. | 7.1% | 11.7% | 19.9% | 18.2% | Con. | 6.4% | 12.6% | 21.7% | 24.2% |
| Mod. | 40.9% | 38.7% | 55.0% | 52.9% | Mod. | 56.3% | 43.8% | 70.2% | 72.3% |
| Lib. | 63.1% | 58.3% | 73.6% | 72.5% | Lib. | 61.6% | 55.9% | 72.8% | 74.1% |
| χ^2 | 226.51 | 156.92 | 190.28 | 191.89 | χ^2 | 85.09 | 52.10 | 75.01 | 72.39 |
| <i>P</i> | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 | <i>P</i> | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 |

Issue: The government should provide fewer services in areas such as health and education to reduce spending.

| <u>Race</u> White | <u>Democratic vote</u> | | | | <u>Race</u> Indian | <u>Democratic vote</u> | | | |
|----------------------|------------------------|---------------|-----------------|----------------|-----------------------|------------------------|---------------|-----------------|----------------|
| | Pres. | U.S. House | State Senate | State House | | Pres. | U.S. House | State Senate | State House |
| Con. | 12.4% | 16.9% | 23.6% | 23.7% | Con. | 23.1% | 24.4% | 43.4% | 43.4% |
| Mod. | 27.1% | 28.2% | 44.6% | 42.1% | Mod. | 45.3% | 35.9% | 51.9% | 54.7% |
| Lib. | 54.8% | 51.2% | 65.2% | 63.0% | Lib. | 56.0% | 51.2% | 66.7% | 68.8% |
| χ^2 | 120.80 | 79.37 | 101.46 | 89.55 | χ^2 | 26.19 | 19.03 | 14.85 | 17.18 |
| <i>P</i> | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 | <i>P</i> | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 |

Source: Authors' Data (Available from the authors upon request).

Pres.: Presidential Election.

Con.: Conservative; Mod.: Moderate; Lib.: Liberal.

P: *P*-value.

Table 8
 Logistic regression analysis for the influence of factors on American Indians' Democratic vote

| | Presidential Election | U.S. House Election | | State Senate Election | State House Election |
|------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| Gender | -.295 | -.005 | Gender | .141 | .252 |
| Age | -.008 | .280* | Age | .199 | .484*** |
| Ideology | -.842** | -.597*** | Ideology | -.478* | -.640** |
| Income | -.170 | .059 | Income | .086 | .071 |
| Education | .349 | .056 | Education | .170 | .023 |
| Approval | 3.217*** | 1.095*** | Approval | 1.522*** | 1.352*** |
| Economic issues | .178** | .129** | Economic issues | .169*** | .152** |
| Religious issues | .177** | .075 | Religious issues | .052 | .013 |
| Economy | -1.767*** | -.281 | State connection | .006 | .594 |
| Party ID | 1.332** | 1.134*** | Party ID | -.219 | -.123 |
| Cultural ties | 1.177** | .385 | Cultural ties | -.108 | -.105 |
| Constant | -8.738*** | -4.741*** | Constant | -5.376*** | -4.570*** |
| N | 360 | 352 | N | 350 | 350 |
| Model χ^2 | 348.21 | 165.15 | Model χ^2 | 181.27 | 167.99 |
| Prob > chi2 | .000 | .000 | Prob > chi2 | .000 | .000 |
| Pseudo R2 | .698 | .342 | Pseudo R2 | .385 | .361 |

Source: Authors' Data (Available from the authors upon request).

***: Statistically significant at .01 level.

**: Statistically significant at .05 level.

*: Statistically significant at .1 level.

Appendix A

This poll is being conducted by the *Political Science Program at Northeastern State University*

YOUR ANSWERS ARE CONFIDENTIAL
Please check only one response for each question

1. Who did you vote for in the Presidential Election?
 Barack Obama (Dem) Mitt Romney (Rep)
 Other: Who? _____

2. Which **ONE** of the following mattered most in deciding your vote for President?
 He cares about people like me
 His positions on the issues
 He has the right experience
 He shares my values
 Party affiliation of the candidate
 The status of the economy
 Other: Specify _____

3. Which do you most identify yourself as?
 American Indian Asian
 Black Hispanic/Latino
 White Other

4. If you are an **American Indian**, which, if any, of the following most influenced your vote for President?
 your tribal affiliation
 the endorsement of tribal leaders
 issues involving tribal sovereignty
 the party affiliation of the candidates
 the economic policies of the candidates
 None of the above

5. Are you:
 Male Female

6. Who did you vote for in the 2nd District Congressional Election?
 Rob Wallace (Dem) Markwayne Mullin (Rep)
 Other: Who? _____

7. Which **ONE** of the following mattered most in deciding your vote in the 2nd District Congressional Election?
 My concern about big government

- My concern about Medicare and Social Security
- My concern about Oklahoma's water resources
- My concern about gun rights
- Whether the candidate shares my moral values
- Party affiliation of the candidate
- Other: Specify _____

8. If you are an **American Indian**, which Data are available from the authors upon request. of the following most influenced your vote for the 2nd District Congressional Election?

- your tribal affiliation
- the endorsement of tribal leaders
- issues involving tribal sovereignty
- the party affiliation of the candidates
- the economic policies of the candidates
- None of the above

9. To which age group do you belong?

- 18-29 30-44
- 45-64 65 or Older

10. In the Oklahoma State Senate Election I voted for the:

- Democratic Candidate Republican Candidate
- Other: Who? _____

11. In the Oklahoma State House Election I voted for the:

- Democratic Candidate Republican Candidate
- Other: Who? _____

12. Which **ONE** of the following mattered most in deciding your vote for the State Senate and House?

- The candidate's connection to the local community
- The candidate's positions on the issues
- The candidate's experience
- The candidate's moral values
- The candidate's party affiliation
- The endorsement of someone I respect
- Other: Specify _____

13. If you are an **American Indian**, which, if any, of the following most influenced your vote in the State Senate and House elections?

- your tribal affiliation
- the endorsement of tribal leaders
- issues involving tribal sovereignty
- party affiliation of the candidates
- economic policies of the candidates

None of the above

14. On most political matters, do you consider yourself:

Liberal Moderate

Conservative

15. My household's combined income is:

Under \$15,000 \$15-24,999

\$25-39,999 \$40-59,999

\$60-79,999 \$80-99,999

\$100,000 or More

16. What was the last grade of school you completed?

Did Not Complete High School

High School Graduate

Some College or associate degree

College Graduate

Post-Graduate study

17. Do you think the condition of the nation's economy is:

Excellent

Good

Not so good

Poor

18. Compared to four years ago, is your family's financial situation:

Better today

About the same

Worse today

19. Which comes closest to your feelings about the Obama administration?

Angry

Dissatisfied, but not angry

Satisfied, but not enthusiastic

Enthusiastic

20. Which ONE of the following issues is the most important facing the country?

Abortion Federal debt

Economy Healthcare

Energy policy Terrorism

Other: Specify

21. Government should help Americans get doctors and healthcare at low cost.

Strongly agree Agree

Neutral

Disagree Strongly disagree

22. The government ought to take steps to make sure that the gap between the rich and the poor in America is reduced.

Strongly agree Agree
 Neutral
 Disagree Strongly disagree

23. The government should provide fewer services in areas such as health and education in order to reduce spending.

Strongly agree Agree
 Neutral
 Disagree Strongly disagree

24. Which statement best describes the frequency with which you attend church?

Attend Church Regularly
 Attend Church Occasionally
 Do Not Attend Church

25. Religion is a private matter that does not belong in the public schools.

Strongly agree Agree
 Neutral
 Disagree Strongly disagree

26. We all will be called before God at the Judgment Day to answer for our sins.

Strongly agree Agree
 Neutral
 Disagree Strongly disagree

27. Public schools should be allowed to start each day with a prayer.

Strongly agree Agree
 Neutral
 Disagree Strongly disagree

28. Marriages between same-sex couples should be recognized by the law as valid, with the same rights as traditional marriages?

Strongly agree Agree
 Neutral
 Disagree Strongly disagree

29. Immigrants who are currently living in the U.S. illegally should be provided with a way to gain legal citizenship if they pass background checks, pay fines and have jobs.

Strongly agree Agree
 Neutral
 Disagree Strongly disagree

30. The decision of whether or not to have an abortion should be left up to individual women.

Strongly agree Agree

Neutral

Disagree Strongly disagree

Please fold questionnaire and put it in the box. Thank you.