American Indian Identity's Influence on Party Identification\*

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ABSTRACT: Surprisingly little research has examined the political attitudes and behaviors of American Indians. This paper helps fill the void by examining their party identification. Specifically, we expect that American Indians who have a greater identity and closeness to their American Indian heritage will be more likely to be Democrats because the Democratic party has an image and policy positions that are thought to be better for racial and ethnic minorities including American Indians. To test this we survey 300 American Indians using an opt-in internet panel maintained by Survey Sampling International. We measure identity and closeness to American Indian heritage with identity (race), linked fate, attachment (linked fate), primary identity with tribe/US/American Indians, group consciousness (perceptions of discrimination and need for collective action), growing up on the reservation, language, lineage (number of American Indian grandparents) and living in Oklahoma. We find evidence that those who identify with another minority race, primary identity with their tribe, who believe American Indians are held back, live in Oklahoma and grew up on a reservation were more likely to be Democrats. However, we also found that those who were more proficient in their tribal language and had more American Indians grandparents were more likely to be Republicans. We argue that this offers general support for our expectation.

Since the U.S. government has a trust responsibility toward American Indians, and runs many programs for them such as schools and Indian Health Services, Congress has considered more legislation addressing American Indian issues than the issues of any other single group (Kickingbird et al 1999, 16). Yet, very little political science research has examined the political behaviors and attitudes of American Indians. In this paper we help to fill some of that void by examining American Indians' party identification. We chose to examine party identification since it structures political behaviors such as voting behavior, other attitudes and issue positions.

Although understanding the party identification of American Indians is critical, scarce research has been conducted by political scientists to understand these partisan attachments. The little research that has been done has been intermittent over 50 years, suffers from inconsistent results and often looks at party voting instead of attachment. In the 1960s, Kunitz and Levy (1970) examined the voting behavior of the Navajo, and found individuals living on the reservation tended to vote Republican and those off the reservation Democratic. They explained this by arguing that urban Indians have more contact with other minorities so are more likely to see the Democratic party's support of other minority rights as relevant to their lives. Almost 10 years later using NORC data from 1972 and 1976, Ritt (1979) found that American Indians were more Democratic than whites but not more so than other minorities and more independent than all other racial/ethnic groups. Ritt also found that American Indians who were female, urban and older were more likely to be Democrats, but ideology was not strongly related to party. McCool (1982) examined voting by precinct in Arizona between 1952 and 1980 and concluded that party voting varied from tribe to tribe and there was much split ticket voting. Thus American Indians' voting was affected more by issue positions than partisan loyalties. Looking at voting of American Indians in Oklahoma in the 2000s, Min and Savage (2012, 2014) found that American Indians vote Democratic and that their low levels of socio economic status, not cultural ties or identity explain their Democratic voting patterns. Clearly some of the inconsistencies in the findings were the result of time. For example, American Indians may have been more likely to be Republicans in the 1960s and 1970s than today since President Nixon was seen as supportive of American Indian policies. Many of the studies too suffer from examining just one tribe or state or were based on bivariate analyses. Thus, there is much room to improve our knowledge of American Indians' partisanship.

Here we add to our understanding of American Indian party identification by using a national sample of 300 American Indians to estimate their partisan attachment and then explain variation in their attachment. Most specifically we believe that the stronger American Indians’ attachment to their heritage the more likely they will be to identify as Democrats. This is because the Democratic and Republican parties are divided on issues of race[[1]](#footnote-1) to such a degree that race is a dominant factor in affecting party identification (Carmines and Stimson 1989, Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002, Abramson, Aldrich and Rohde 1989, Brewer and Stonecast 2001, Mangum 2013, Hajnal and Rivera 2014; but see Abramowitz 1994 and Abramowitz and Sander 2006 for a contrasting view). More specifically the parties also differ on American Indian policies such that Democrats are more supportive of pro-American Indian policies (see discussion below). Further, racial attachment is not the only factor likely to affect party identification (Abramowitz and Sanders 2006, Min and Savage 2014, 2012). Therefore we also explore the degree to which socio-economic factors affect American Indians' party identification.

The Origins of Party Identification and Race

There are two dominant views about the origins of party identification. The first view sees party identification as a psychological attachment or a personal identity. Its origins can be found in the American Voter (Campbell, Converse, Miller and Stokes1960) but it has been resurrected somewhat by Green, Palmquist and Schickler (2002). Green et. al. (2002) say party identification or attachment is analogous to a religious identity:

"Like members of political parties, members of a religion or religious denomination comprise an identifiable social group, cleave to distinctive underlying doctrines and maintain (in varying degrees) an adversarial relationship toward other religions. And like party identification, religious identification is often acquired early in life as a product of one's family environment or early adult socialization. As a member of a religion, one is indoctrinated into that religion’s precepts, much as partisans learn the slogans and nostrums of their party. ... A more common avenue for shifting religious affiliation is a changing small-group environment, in particular, marriage to a person of another faith. (page 8)"

The other perspective is that party identification is an evaluative running tally (Fiorina 1981). Americans may be socialized to support one party and start adulthood with a predisposition to support one party or the other but then evaluate the parties' performances in office and adjust their party identification. In this case, party identification is not really an identification in the psychological sense but a temporary support for a party. While academics may argue about which definition comes closest to describing American party allegiance, it is likely that one definition or approach better describes some Americans and the other definition other Americans. Regardless of whether party ties are an attachment or an evaluation race is likely to shape American's party identification.

With the attachment view, race can affect party identification through people’s attachments to social groups (Mangum 2013; Green et al 2002). Mangum (2013) uses identity theory to argue that people categorize themselves as a race, learn the interests of the race, internalize those and then identify with the party that reflects those interests. Further he argues that this is likely because the parties take different positions on race issues. He looks at three aspects of racial psychological attachments: categorization (simply seeing oneself as having a particular race), identification (how close they are to their race) and group consciousness (is one's race treated fairly). He finds that categorization and identification are strongly related to party identification even after other issues and ideology are controlled. The *American Voter* (Campbell, Converse, Miller and Stokes 1960) which saw party identification as an attachment noted the importance of social groups in the development of a party identification.

Individuals' race is likely to affect their party identification with the evaluative view of party identification as well. Race can affect party identification if individuals evaluate the parties at least in part by the their positions on issues: such that voters who want greater civil rights for minorities will pick the party that takes stands consistent with this position or is identified as “good” on civil rights. With this approach voters who prioritize American Indian policy will choose a party that supports their preferred American Indian policies. It seems reasonable that people with close cultural ties and attachment to an American Indian heritage will be more likely to have such a prioritization than will others, even among people who identify as American Indian.

For race to affect party identification, however, the parties have to differ in their position or image related to racial issues, and this seems likely. Carmines and Stimson (1989) argue that since the 1960s race has evolved into an issue that differentiates the parties such that elites and masses who identify as Democrats differ dramatically from those who identify as Republicans on issues related to race. Today, too, Americans who are of a minority group identify as Democrats at significantly higher levels than do white Americans. For example, according to a Pew study where as 49% of whites are affiliated with the Republican Party and 40% with the Democratic Party, the figures are 11% to 80% for African Americans, 23% to 65% for Asian Americans and 26% to 56% for Hispanics (http://www.people-press.org/2015/04/07/a-deep-dive-into-party-affiliation/). To put this in perceptive, the gender gap in party identification pales in comparison to the race gap. Men are evenly divided in their party support (44% to 44%) while 52% of women are affiliated with the Democratic Party and 36% with the Republican Party. People affiliated with the different parties too have different views toward race. For example, according to a different Pew study just among whites, 59% of Republicans say there is too much attention played to race compared to only 21% of Democrats (http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2016/06/27/on-views-of-race-and-inequality-blacks-and-whites-are-worlds-apart/).

Many scholarly studies too have found a relationship between race and party identification (Carmines and Stimson 1989, Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002, Abramson, Aldrich and Rohde 1989, Brewer and Stonecast 2001; Mangum 2013). Even though much of this research has focused on African Americans, Hajnal and Rivera (2014) also found that attitudes toward immigration and Hispanics are strongly related to party identification. Although much research finds a strong race and party relationship, the research by Abramowitz (1994) and Abramowitz and Sanders (2006) are the exceptions. They examine only white Americans and find little evidence that race has a significant effect on party identification once other issue positions are taken into account. However, as Morales (1999) notes, race may have indirect effects through other issues such as social and economic welfare issues that have racial underpinnings. Additionally, the effects of the racial divisions among the parties may have greater effects on racial and ethnic minorities' party affiliation than that of whites.

Although racial attitudes and identity are highly related to party identification, the above research has not examined American Indians. The research on the parties' differences on American Indian issues is more mixed, but generally supports the view that the Democratic party is more likely to support policies seen as pro American Indian, i.e. support more resources to American Indian programs, recruit American Indian politicians and support policies to strength tribal sovereignty. Historically, it was felt that American Indian issues were non-partisan (Tyler 1964, Turner 2002). For example, Deloria's (1988) examination of termination policy in the 1950s and 1960s, found termination was supported by Democrats and Republicans alike. In addition, after examining the history of US policy toward American Indians, Tyler (1964, 5) states

"Party politics has tended to have little significance in influencing voting on Indian bills. The chairmen and senior members of Indian affairs and appropriation committees have usually wielded a strong influence regardless of policy, with the vote on controversial bills ending to line up along regional rather than party lines. Again there is some indication that this pattern may not continue. "

Note the last sentence in the quote from 1964. The parties have diverged more on race generally since the 1960s and party differences on American Indians may differ more today than in the past. In Turner's (2005) analysis of roll call votes and committee work over the last half of the 20th century he finds strong evidence that American Indian policies are partisan with Democratic members of Congress more likely to support pro-American Indian legislation. He does find some evidence of bipartisanship in the 1960s but otherwise the parties differ on American Indian issues with Democrats more liberal or supportive. For example, he finds that about a third of the variance in roll call votes on American Indian issues can be explained by party. Turner's conclusions have been largely confirmed by Conner (2014) who also finds Democratic members of Congress to be more supportive of American Indian policy particularly as the analysis moved from the 1970s to the 1990s.

Additionally, although the literature on party identification offers some support for the bi-partisan theory (McCool 1982, Kunitz and Levy 1970), the preponderance of the research and the more recent research suggests most American Indians are Democrats (Min and Savage 2012, 2014, McClain and Stewart 2014, p 100, Herrick, Pryor, Davis and Mendez 2016, Ritt 1979). Additionally Stubben's (2006) examination of tribal leaders in the mid 1990s found 61% to be Democrats and 10% Republicans (p. 168). Although Min and Savage (2012, 2014) find that socio-economic status had a greater effect on American Indians' party identification than cultural ties, their measure of cultural ties was limited. They only examined responses to a direct question on whether the tribe or its leaders directly affected their vote. This question likely suffers from social desirability (people do not want to say someone influenced their vote) and does not really measure individuals' identity.

So far our argument is that American Indians are likely to be Democrats because the Democratic Party has an image and takes positions that are important to racial minorities, including American Indians. However, American Indians differ dramatically in their identity as American Indians and experiences as American Indian. Due in part to assimilationist policies of the US that either encouraged or forced (depending on the policy) American Indians to abandon their tribes, American Indians vary in their relationship to their tribe. Some American Indians have been raised without much knowledge of their tribal heritage while others have been raised in families that cherished and shared that heritage. In addition, there has been much intermarriage between American Indians and other racial groups, particularly whites,[[2]](#footnote-2) which may dilute individuals' attachment to their tribe. Strum (2010) gives an interesting analysis of the difference between what she calls race shifters and tribal members. Race shifters are individuals who were raised white, often have a Caucasian appearance, and who as adults start to identify as American Indian.[[3]](#footnote-3) Some race shifters have legitimate ancestral claims as American Indians, and some eventually gain membership into recognized tribes. However, many race shifters have dubious American Indian ancestry, practice a butchered version of American Indian cultures (one that may be based on stereotypes and combine multiple tribal cultures) and some have even created their own tribes.

Assuming that race issues are significant factors influencing individuals' party identification and American Indians differ in their attachment to their American Indian heritage, it would follow that American Indians who have a stronger attachment and ties to their heritage will be more likely to be Democrats. Here we see their attachment to their heritage as comprising several elements: racial categorization, identity, attachment, group consciousness, ties to their heritage, and lineage. By racial categorization we simply mean that individuals see themselves as being of a particular race or mix of races. Since our population is American Indians, everyone classifies himself or herself as American Indian; however, some also classify themselves as belonging to other races. We expect those who classify themselves as American Indian and white will be less Democratic than American Indians who only classify as American Indian or American Indian and another minority race. By identity we refer to how important being American Indian is to individuals, whereas attachment means if they have high levels of linked fate (the belief that what happens to American Indians generally affects them personally). We expect those who are more strongly attached to their American Indian identity or those with a perception of a linked fate will be more likely to be Democrats. Consciousness can be defined as a feeling of dissatisfaction with the way one's group is treated in society and a desire to do something about it. And we expect those who have strong group consciousness to be more Democratic than others. Lastly, ties to heritage means that individuals have contact with their tribe and tribal way of life and lineage refers to their ancestral ties. Again we expect those who have more contact with their tribe or more American Indian ancestors will be more likely to be Democrats.

Research Design

To test our expectations we use a survey using an opt-in panel sample maintained by Survey Sampling International (SSI). Opt-in panel studies can produce high quality representative, although not probability, samples if done correctly (Ansolabehere and Schaffner 2014). SSI has been conducting online surveys for over 15 years and works with other organizations to ensure the representativeness of its panels. It maybe too with the recent declines in response rates with phone surveys that panel samples are better than other methods. In addition, and of particular importance for this project, they provide a means to identify a national sample of American Indians[[4]](#footnote-4) as SSI knows the demographic traits of its sample and can pre-select American Indians for our sample.

The survey was conducted in March 2016 and resulted in 301 questionnaires completed by American Indians over the age of 18. In other work we examine the representativeness of this sample by comparing these results to those of American National Elections Studies and Current Population Surveys (Herrick, Mendez, Davis and Pryor 2016). We find that once we weight the data using CPS estimates of American Indians’ levels of education and gender the sample is comparable to the other studies' samples in gender, race, voter registration rates, levels of political trust, party identification and political interest, although the sample respondents still have disproportionally high levels of education.

The survey had 24 questions and many were used to test our expectations. To measure racial categorization we use the following question. "In addition to Native/American Indian, what other groups do you identify with, if any? (Check all that apply) White, Asian, African American, Hispanic/Latino and none". From this question we created a series of dummy variables: Only American Indian, American Indian and white, American Indian and other minority group (each coded 1 and 0). Attachment (linked fate) is measured with two questions. First, "Do you think what happens generally to other Native/American Indians will affect what happens in your life? And If yes, will it affect it a lot, some or not very much? " We created a single variable coded 1 if respondents answered no to the first question, 2 if they answered not very much” to the second questions, 3 if they answered “some” to the second question and 4 if they answered “a lot” to the second question. For identity, we use the question, "People identify with many different groups in society, which of the following identity is most important to you (your tribe, Native American Indians, and US Citizen)". This was measured as a series of dummy variables with US citizen as the reference group. A series of questions are used to measure consciousness, which includes a belief that American Indians are discriminated against by society, a desire for collective action to correct the problem and perceived commonality of goals within the American Indian community. To measure views about treatment in society we use two questions. The first question addresses consciousness based on the following statement: “If individuals who are Native/American Indian don't do well in life, it is because they are kept back because of their race; or they don't work hard enough to get ahead.” Respondents who indicated “kept back” are coded as a 1 and those who indicated “don’t work hard enough” are coded as a 0. Second, we measure discrimination with the following: “How much discrimination have you experienced from non-Native/American Indians, if any? (a lot, some, not very much, not at all).” A 1 is given for “not at all,” a 2 for not very much, a 3 for some and a 4 for “a lot.” To measure the degree to which respondents' desire collective action we use the following question: "Do you think that if various Native/American Indian groups worked together politically Native/American Indians would be better off, worse off or wouldn't it make much difference?" To measure commonality, we use the question, "To what degree do you agree with the following statement? Native/American Indians in the United States share FEW political interests and goals." Strongly agree was coded 5, somewhat agree coded 4, neither agree nor disagree coded 3, somewhat disagree coded 2, and strongly disagree was coded 1.

To measure individual's ties to their Native American heritage we use time spent on the reservation: "Please estimate the percentage of time you lived on a reservation during your childhood (until 18)? None (coded as a 1), less than 25% (coded as a 2), 25-50% (coded as a 3), 51% to 75% (coded as a 4) or more than 75% (coded as a 5)". This is not an ideal question since not all tribes have reservations but those who lived on reservations are likely to have had unique experiences as American Indians. Since this measure is not ideal, we also ask an additional question about living in Oklahoma, use of their tribal language as a measure of ties with their heritage. We measure whether respondents live in Oklahoma since Oklahoma does not have reservations as such and does have a unique history of being Indian territory, and has a large population of American Indians. For Oklahoma residency we asked which state the respondent lives in and code all Oklahoma residents as a 1, anyone as a 0. Language is coded as a 1 if the respondent does not speak the language, 2 if the respondent knows only a few words and 3 if the respondent has a larger vocabulary or is proficient. Finally, we measure individuals' lineage with the following question, coded 0-4: "Indicate how many of your biological grandparents were Native/American Indian by blood (If you are unsure guess)."

The dependent variable is party identification. To measure party identification we use the standard series of questions where respondents are first asked: "Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?" If the respondents said Democrat or Republican they are asked "Would you call yourself a strong (Democrat/Republican) or a not very strong (Democrat/Republican)?" and if they say Independent they are asked" "Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican or Democratic party?" From this we create the standard seven point scale; strong Democrat (coded -3), weak Democrat (coded -2), independent leaning Democrat (coded -1), independent (coded 0), independent leaning Republican (coded 1), weak Republican(coded 2), and Strong Republican(coded 3). Since there are questions as to whether party is a one-dimensional scale (for example see Alverez 1990), we do two analyses. First, we assume the scale measures levels of being Democratic/Republican and use ordered logistic regression. Second, we check to make sure American Indian attachment to their heritage is related to party identification and not strength of party attachments generally (an individual's attachment to their heritage could affect their likelihood of being an independent). To do this we use a three pronged measure of party identification (Democrat coded -1, independents coded 0, and Republicans coded +1) and use multinomial logistic regression. With the ordered logistic regression we measure whether American Indians with a greater attachment to their heritage are also more attached to the Democratic Party. With the multinomial logistic we can see if American Indians with greater attachment to their heritage are more or less likely to support political parties. It may be that American Indians with a strong heritage score lower on the seven-point scale because they are more likely to be Independents than Republican but are not strong Democrats.

Since more than attachment to one's American Indian heritage can affect their party identification we also control for education (socio economic status), age, and sex. Originally we were going to control for ideology but many respondents refused to answer the question and since our sample size was not large we opted to keep cases and not include ideology in the equation. For education, we code the highest grade completed: less than High School (coded 1), High School (coded 2), some College (coded 3), and college degree or graduate degree (coded 4). For age, we ask in what year they were born and for sex we ask them to identify: female coded 1 and non-females coded 0. To test for multicollinearity we examined correlations and none of the correlations were above 0.42.

Results

The ranges, means and standard errors for all of our variables are reported in Table 1. They indicate that 21% of the respondents categorize themselves as white as well as American Indian, and 29% identify as American Indian and another race. Respondents have moderate levels of linked fate averaging a 2.26 on the 4-point scale. Only 16% of respondents identify most with their tribe, 45% as American Indian and the remaining as US citizens. Most respondents (62%) believe that if American Indians do not do well it is because their race kept them back. On average, they tend to have faced limited amounts of discrimination themselves (scoring 2.4 on the 4 point scale). Most respondents (68%) believe American Indians would be better off if they work together for change. They tend to be divided on whether American Indians have much in common (scoring 2.78 on the 5 point scale). The average respondent spent at least some time on a reservation growing up (scoring a 1.7 on a 4 point scale) but has limited knowledge of their tribal language (scoring 1.9 on a 3 point scale). Nine percentage of the respondents live in Oklahoma. Finally, the average respondent had two grandparents with at least some American Indian blood.

[Insert Table 1 here]

With regard to party identification, we find, as expected, American Indians are more likely to be Democrats than Independents or Republicans. The average respondent scored a -0.53 on the 7-point scale (Strong Democrats = -3 to Strong Republicans = 3). About 46% of respondents are Democrats, 25% Independent and 26% Republican. Given this, we set to test whether aspects of individuals' attachment to their native heritage affects their party identification by using ordered logistic regression with the seven point party identification scale as the dependent variable. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 2. The results offer general support for our expectation that American Indians with a closer attachment to their American Indian heritage have stronger attachments to the Democratic Party than do other American Indians.

[Insert Table 2 here]

First, in looking at racial categorization, we have three dummy variables and use American Indian and White as the reference group. We do so because we predict American Indians with no other categorization and American Indians with a non-White categorization to be stronger Democrats compared to American Indians who also categorize themselves as White. These results offer modest support for our expectation. First, we find American Indians who are also of another minority race to be significantly stronger Democrats than others. To give a sense of the size of the impact we calculated probabilities for different scores on key variables while setting the other variables as their median. An American Indian who identifies with another race has a 0.28 probability of being a strong Democrat, while an American Indian who identifies as White has a 0.19 probability. If we compared all categories of Democrat (strong, weak and leaning), these probabilities are 0.56 and 0.43 respectively. While this supports our expectation, the results show that American Indians who are also White do not differ from those who only categorize themselves as only American Indian.

Attachment and identity provide greater support for our expectations. First, respondent’s attachment/linked fate has a negative effect, meaning, those who think what happens to other American Indians impacts their own life are stronger Democrats. Those who indicate that what happens to American Indians affects their life a lot have a 0.22 probability of being a strong Democrat and a 0.48 probability of a Democrat at all. This is compared to only 0.13 and 0.33 for those who say what happens to American Indiana does not affect their life at all. For identity, we have three categories and use the US citizen identity as the excluded comparison. The results show that those with a tribal identity are significantly stronger Democrats than those with the US identity as expected. Those with a tribal identity have a .34 probability of being a strong Democrat and a 0.63 probability of being a Democrat compared to 0.19 and 0.43 for those with a US identity. And while not statistically significant, the same trend holds for those with an American Indian identity. These respondents are stronger Democrats than those with a US identity.

For group consciousness we expect those having a strong sense of consciousness (a dissatisfaction with the way one’s group is treated and who support collective action to enact change) to be more Democratic. First, we see that those who believe American Indians are kept back because of race, are stronger Democrats as expected. They have a 0.19 probability of being a Strong Democrat and 0.43 probability of being a Democrat while those who do not think American Indians work hard enough have probabilities of 0.11 and 0.28, respectively. However, we did not find any difference in terms of actual amount of discrimination experiences. This indicates that it is not personally experiencing discrimination that increases support for the Democratic Party but a perception that American Indians as a group are discriminated against that increases support for the Democratic Party. The relationship between a desire for collective action and party identification was not significant, but the coefficient sign indicates that those who believe in collective action are stronger Democrats. It may be that the question wording affected the results. Had we asked respondents whether they supported collective action instead of whether they thought it would improve the lives of American Indians the results may have been different. Lastly, the results were small and insignificant for commonality: the degree to which they see American Indians sharing a few interests.

The most inconsistent results concern how one's heritage and lineage affect party identification. We used three measures of heritage; time spent on a reservation as a child, proficiency in tribal language, and living in Oklahoma. Those who spent more time on reservation as a child were stronger Democrats (0.39 probability of being strong Democrat and 0.67 probability of being a Democrat) compared to those who spent no time on a reservation (0.19 and 0.43, respectively). In addition we find American Indians who live in Oklahoma are more likely to be strong Democrats compared to those not living in Oklahoma (0.33 and 0.19, respectively). However, those who have greater language proficiency were stronger Republicans. The probabilities for those with no language proficiency and being a strong Democrat was 0.27 and 0.54 for being a Democrat, compared to 0.13 and 0.33 for those with language proficiency. To try to understand the unexpected results concerning language proficiency, we looked at the party distribution for people with different levels of language proficiency and determined the relationship was not linear. In the bivariate, the 122 who do not speak any of their tribal language averaged -0.91 on the party ID scale (-3 = strong Democrat and 3 = strong Republican), the 114 who speak only a few word averaged -.31, the 50 who speak some averaged -0.26, and the 17 who are proficient averaged -0.43. This may indicate that the language measure is not measuring how one's attachment to one's heritage affects their party identification. Unfortunately we are not sure what that might be measuring.

Our measure of lineage, number of grandparents who are thought to be American Indian, had a significant effect on party identification but not in the expected direction. The more American Indian grandparents an individual has, the more likely the individual is to be a Republican, not a Democrat. American Indians with one American Indian grandparent had a 0.23 probability of being a strong Democrat and 0.49 probability of being a Democrat, compared to 0.13 and 0.33 for those with four American Indian grandparents.

To better understand the effects of individuals' attachment to their heritage on party identification, we simplify the party identification variable, creating a three-point scale for Democrat (coded as -1), Independent (coded as 0) and Republican (coded as 1) and estimate a multinomial logistic regression. We use Democrat as the base category since we are interested in the effects of one’s heritage on identifying with the Democratic Party. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 3. These results tend to confirm the previous results suggesting that individuals' attachment to their American Indian heritage affects their support for the Democratic Party not for parties generally.

[Insert Table 3 here]

None of the variables significantly distinguish Democrats from Independents, but many do distinguish Democrats from Republicans. The results for racial categorization mirror the previous analysis when we look at the comparison of choosing the Democratic Party over the Republican Party. We find that American Indians who are of another minority race are stronger Democrats compared to American Indians who identify as White (probabilities 0.58 and 0.46 respectively) but that there is little difference in party between those who are only American Indian and those who are American Indian and White. For attachment or linked fate, the result for the comparison with Republicans is significant. Here, individuals with higher levels of linked fate or the sense that what happens to other American Indians impacts their own life are associated with an identification with the Democratic Party (probability of 0.49) compared to those who think it does not affect their life (probability of being a Democrat is 0.37). For identity, those with a tribal identity are more likely to be Democrats (probability is 0.57) than those with the US identity (probability is 0.46), as expected. The results are insignificant though signed correctly for American Indian identity. While none of the relationships between group consciousness (discrimination and need for collective action) and party identification are significant, the relationship between party and perceptions of discrimination (are American Indians kept back) is statistically significance. Those who believe American Indians are kept back because of race are more likely to be Democrats (probability is 0.46) compared to those who think American Indians are kept back because they do not work hard enough (probability is 0.38). Also as with the earlier analysis, the results for the comparison between Republicans and Democrats shows the more time spent on the reservation leads to an identification with the Democratic Party. Those with no time on the reservation have a 0.46 probability of being a Democrat compared to 0.68 for those who spent over 75% of their time on a reservation. In addition, American Indians living in Oklahoma are more likely to be Democrats (0.73 probability) compared to those not living in Oklahoma (0.46 probability). However, speaking the tribal language and having more grandparents with American Indian blood are associated with identification with the Republican Party, not the Democratic Party. Those who do not speak the language have a 0.54 probability of being a Democrat while those who are proficient have a 0.35 probability. Those with one American grandparent have a 0.52 probability of being a Democrat compared to only 0.36 for those with four American Indian grandparents.

A word about the control variables is needed. In none of the equations are any of the control variables significantly related to party identification, The traditional controls of education, age and sex are insignificant. We found this surprising so we examined bivariate correlations between party and sex, education and age. Of these correlations the only one that even neared statistical significance was sex (r = -.09 and p = .10). This indicates that many of the usual factors, such as socio economic status, have less effect on the party identification of American Indians than does their attachment to their heritage.

Conclusion

Although not all of our measures of individual's attachment to their native heritage were associated with stronger Democratic Party attachment, the results generally support our expectation that American Indians with strong attachments to their heritage have a stronger attachment to the Democratic Party than do others. Those who have higher levels of linked fate, those more likely to identify as members of a tribe as opposed to US citizens, those who believe American Indians are held back, those who spent more time on a reservation as a child and live in Oklahoma have stronger attachments to the Democratic Party than other American Indians. However, there were two measures of individuals' attachment to their heritage that were significant in the opposite direction: number of American Indian Grandparents and proficiency in their tribal language. Although further analysis of language proficiency leads us to believe it may not be tapping attachment to one's heritage, why having more American Indian grandparents would be associated with greater attachment to the Republican party remains a bit of a mystery.

If American Indians' attachment to their heritage did not affect their party it would suggest that their race or ethnicity has little effect on their party attachment. However, attachment did matter, and the control variables that normally explain attachment to party identification are not strong predictors for American Indians. This supports the work of Carmines and Stimson (1989) who argue that race is a dominant factor that differentiates the parties. Our work helps bridge the gap in the literature that explores the impact of race on party identification by examining an under-explored racial categorization and identity- that of American Indians. Our results in particular are significant in showing a more nuanced role that racial identity plays in party attachment, above and beyond traditional factors that we often expect to shape party identification.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Table 1. Descriptive Statistics | | | |  | | | |  |  |
|  | Range |  | Mean | |  | Standard error |
| Party Identification  American Indian and White | -3 to 3  0-1 |  | -0.53  0.21 | |  | 0.14  0.04 |
| American Indian and other race | 0-1 |  | 0.29 | |  | 0.06 |
| Attachment | 1-4 |  | 2.26 | |  | 0.12 |
| Tribal identity | 0-1 |  | 0.16 | |  | 0.03 |
| American Indian Identity | 0-1 |  | 0.45 | |  | 0.05 |
| Indians kept back | 0-1 |  | 0.62 | |  | 0.03 |
| Discrimination | 1-4 |  | 2.40 | |  | 0.07 |
| Collective Action | 0-1 |  | 0.68 | |  | 0.06 |
| Lack of commonality | 1-5 |  | 2.87 | |  | 0.07 |
| Time lived on reservation | 1-4 |  | 1.74 | |  | 0.10 |
| Live in Oklahoma | 0-1 |  | 0.09 | |  | 0.02 |
| Speak tribal language | 1-3 |  | 1.90 | |  | 0.10 |
| Grandparents with American Indian blood | 1-4 |  | 2.07 | |  | 0.19 |
| Education | 1-4 |  | 2.72 | |  | 0.16 |
| Age | 18-84 |  | 38.52 | |  | 1.31 |
| Female | 0-1 |  | 0.54 | |  | 0.06 |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Table 2 Explaining Determinants of Party Identification- Ordered Logit Analysis | |
|  |  |
| American Indian only | -0.01 |
|  | (0.35) |
| American Indian and other race | -0.48+ |
|  | (0.30) |
| Attachment | -0.21+ |
|  | (0.13) |
| Tribal identity | -0.78+ |
|  | (0.42) |
| American Indian Identity | -0.11 |
|  | (0.29) |
| American Indians kept back | -0.61\* |
|  | (0.29) |
| Discrimination | 0.01 |
|  | (0.12) |
| Collective Action | 0.15 |
|  | (0.28) |
| Lack of commonality | 0.05 |
|  | (0.11) |
| Time lived on reservation | -0.33\* |
|  | (0.14) |
| Live in Oklahoma | -0.73+ |
|  | (0.39) |
| Speak tribal language | 0.44\* |
|  | (0.19) |
| Grandparents with American Indian blood | 0.22\* |
|  | (0.10) |
| Education | 0.11 |
|  | (0.15) |
| Age | -0.01 |
|  | (0.01) |
| Female | -0.26 |
|  | (0.26) |
| cutpoint 1 | -1.66 |
|  | (0.82) |
| cutpoint 2 | -0.89 |
|  | (0.83) |
| cutpoint 3 | -0.49 |
|  | (0.84) |
| N | 296 |
| Prob>f | (0.01) |

Note: p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05, +p<0.10.

Party Identification: 7 point scale, -3 strong Democrat to 3 strong Republican

American Indian and White: 1 if respondent categorizes herself as American Indian and White, 0 all others.

American Indian and other race: 1 if respondent categorizes herself as American Indian and another race, non-White, 0 all others.

Attachment: “Do you think what happens generally to other Native/American Indians will affect what happens in your life?” 4 “A lot,” 3 “some,” 2 “not very much,” 1 “no”

Tribal identity: 1 if most important identity is respondent’s own tribe or NA, 0 all others

American Indian identity: 1 if most important identity is American Indian community, 0 all others

Consciousness: “If individuals who are Native/American Indian don't do well in life, it is because they are kept back because of their race; or they don't work hard enough to get ahead” 1 “Kept back because of race,” 0 “Don’t work hard enough”

Discrimination: “How much discrimination have you experienced from non-Native/American Indians, if any?” 4 “a lot,” 3 “some,” 2 “not very much,” 1 “not at all”

Collective action: “Do you think that if various Native/American Indian groups worked together politically Native/American Indians would be better off, worse off or wouldn't it make much difference?” 1 “better off,” 0 “worse off” or “wouldn't make much difference”

Commonality: Native/American Indians in the United States share FEW political interests and goals: 5 “strongly agree,” 4 “somewhat agree,” 3 “neither agree nor disagree,” depends” and “don’t know,” 2 “somewhat disagree,” 1 “strongly disagree”

Time lived on reservation: 1 “None,” 2 “less than 25%” 3 “25-50%,” 4 “51% to 75%,” 5 “more than 75%.”

Live in Oklahoma: 1 if respondent lives in Oklahoma; 0 all others

Speak tribal language: 1 “not at all,” 2 “only a few words”, 3 “more than a few words through proficient.”

Grandparents with American Indiana blood: number of biological grandparents (0-4) with American Indian blood.

Education: 1 “less than high school,” 2 “high school,” 3 “some college,” 4 “college” or “post-graduate”

Age: age in years

Female: 1 if female, 0 all others

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Table 3. Explaining Determinants of Party Identification- Multinomial Logit Analysis | | |
|  | Comparison | |
|  | Independents | Republicans |
| American Indian only | 0.55 | -0.11 |
|  | (0.52) | (0.50) |
| American Indian and other race | 0.02 | -0.88\* |
|  | (0.47) | (0.45) |
| Attachment | 0.21 | -0.33\* |
|  | (0.21) | (0.15) |
| Tribal identity | 0.16 | -1.08+ |
|  | (0.55) | (0.59) |
| American Indian Identity | -0.02 | -0.25 |
|  | (0.45) | (0.36) |
| American Indians kept back | 0.42 | -0.63+ |
|  | (0.41) | (0.37) |
| Discrimination | -0.25 | -0.06 |
|  | (0.20) | (0.17) |
| Collective Action | 0.02 | 0.32 |
|  | (0.44) | (0.41) |
| Lack of commonality | -0.07 | 0.09 |
|  | (0.15) | (0.14) |
| Time lived on reservation | -0.10 | -0.34+ |
|  | (0.18) | (0.19) |
| Live in Oklahoma | -0.70+ | -1.23 |
|  | (0.40) | (1.13) |
| Speak tribal language | -0.11 | 0.67\* |
|  | (0.29) | (0.28) |
| Grandparents with Am Indian blood | 0.09 | 0.29\* |
|  | (0.16) | (0.14) |
| Education | -0.14 | 0.29 |
|  | (0.20) | (0.23) |
| Age | 0.002 | -0.003 |
|  | (0.01) | (0.01) |
| Female | -0.70+ | -0.27 |
|  | (0.40) | (0.34) |
| Constant | -0.70+ | -1.23 |
|  | (0.40) | (1.13) |
| N | 296 | |
| Prob>F | 0.03 | |

Note: \*\*\*p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05, +p<0.10

Party Identification: 3 point scale, -1 strong Democrat to 1 strong Republican

American Indian and White: 1 if respondent categorizes herself as American Indian and White, 0 all others.

American Indian and other race: 1 if respondent categorizes herself as American Indian and another race, non-White, 0 all others.

Attachment: “Do you think what happens generally to other Native/American Indians will affect what happens in your life?” 4 “A lot,” 3 “some,” 2 “not very much,” 1 “no”

Tribal identity: 1 if most important identity is respondent’s own tribe or NA, 0 all others

American Indian identity: 1 if most important identity is American Indian community, 0 all others

Consciousness: “If individuals who are Native/American Indian don't do well in life, it is because they are kept back because of their race; or they don't work hard enough to get ahead” 1 “Kept back because of race,” 0 “Don’t work hard enough”

Discrimination: “How much discrimination have you experienced from non-Native/American Indians, if any?” 4 “a lot,” 3 “some,” 2 “not very much,” 1 “not at all”

Collective action: “Do you think that if various Native/American Indian groups worked together politically Native/American Indians would be better off, worse off or wouldn't it make much difference?” 1 “better off,” 0 “worse off” or “wouldn't make much difference”

Commonality: Native/American Indians in the United States share FEW political interests and goals: 5 “strongly agree,” 4 “somewhat agree,” 3 “neither agree nor disagree,” depends” and “don’t know,” 2 “somewhat disagree,” 1 “strongly disagree”

Time lived on reservation: 1 “None,” 2 “less than 25%” 3 “25-50%,” 4 “51% to 75%,” 5 “more than 75%.”

Live in Oklahoma: 1 if respondent lives in Oklahoma; 0 all others

Speak tribal language: 1 “not at all,”

2 “only a few words”, 3 “more than a few words through proficient.”

Grandparents with American Indiana blood: number of biological grandparents (0-4) with American Indian blood.

Education: 1 “less than high school,” 2 “high school,” 3 “some college,” 4 “college” or “post-graduate”

Age: age in years

Female: 1 if female, 0 all others

1. Although race is often defined by physical traits shared by a group a people and ethnicity by the culture of a people, the terms can be murky. This may be particularly true when considering American Indians since there is much variation in both culture and appearance from tribe to tribe. The assimilationist policies of the US government also means that people who may appear white can have strong cultural bonds and people who do not appear white have few cultural bonds. On top of this, there are many African Americans who are members of tribes due to the freedman policy following the civil war. As a consequence, in this paper we use the term race broadly to encompass both race and ethnicity. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The Pew Research Center (2015) estimates that 50% of the mixed race Americans are a mix of White and American Indian. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. According to Sturm (2010) most race shifters are true believers, whether or not they have any Indian blood, who find comfort in the communal and spiritual practices, while most Cherokee, the tribe they are most likely to claim ancestry in, believe many are seeking Indian services such as health care and find the appropriation of their culture offensive. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. It is difficult to generate a sample of American Indians since there is no list of American Indians. In addition there are about 560 tribes across the country, many people who identify as American Indian are not members of tribes and they make up less than 2% of the population. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)