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Rhetorical Bipartisanship: National Party Platforms and American Indian Politics

CHARLES C. TURNER

On December 1, 2000, Democratic challenger Maria Cantwell, a former Representative and Internet entrepreneur, was finally able to declare victory over incumbent Republican Slade Gorton in a closely fought Washington Senate race. The contest came down to just over a two-thousand-vote difference out of nearly two-and-a-half million ballots. Though an array of factors contributed to this outcome, it would be difficult to overlook the role played by American Indian interests. Gorton, a staple of Washington politics for over four decades, gained notoriety early on for opposing tribal fishing rights and eventually came to be labeled an “Indian fighter” and “the champion for the anti-Indian effort.”¹ Gorton’s opposition to tribal sovereignty and efforts to reduce funding for Indian programs angered Indians from across the political spectrum. Such a reputation led American Indians and their allies to donate over \$1 million to The First American Education Project in an effort to unseat the three-term senator. This financial contribution, likely coupled with the votes of many of the approximately 94,000 American Indians in Washington, helped produce a narrow victory, not only for Cantwell but for American Indians throughout the country.

In this particular case, Indian interests paralleled those of the Democratic Party, but was this a coincidence or part of a larger pattern? In an effort to explore the relationship between American Indian interests and political parties in greater depth, this article examines the role that major party platforms have played in addressing American Indian concerns over the past half century.² The following investigation compares Democratic and Republican party platforms from 1948 to 2000 to identify consistency and change in party rhetoric over time. This investigation confirms that both parties have made efforts to define policy positions that show support for American Indian interests, but the breadth and intensity of party commitment has ebbed and flowed over time and the parties have emphasized different, though not always contradictory, policy objectives.

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AMERICAN INDIANS AND POLITICAL PARTIES

In seeking to define the relationship between American Indians and the Democratic and Republican parties, one can traverse a variety of methodological paths without coming to an unambiguous conclusion. It would seem that neither major party can accurately claim to be the more supportive of, or supported by, American Indians. According to the Center for Responsive Politics, tribes and other Indian organizations made about 45 percent of their soft money donations to the Republicans in 1998, but over 78 percent to the Democrats in the 2000 election cycle.³ At the Democratic Convention in 2000, nearly one hundred American Indians served as delegates, while only eight played that role at the Republican Convention. On the other hand, Richard Nixon is widely acknowledged as being the most pro-Indian modern president and Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell of Colorado, the only Indian currently serving in federal elected office, switched his affiliation from Democrat to Republican in 1995.

A typical source of political information—voting demographics—is virtually nonexistent for American Indians due to their small percentage of the population nationwide. In the 2000 National Election Studies, for example, only four of the 1,807 interviewees were identified as American Indian.⁴ Daniel McCool's review of regional studies from the 1950s through 1980 concludes that in Indian voting, turnout is often low, choices are moderate, and partisan voting fluctuates. Aggregating data from seven Arizona tribes over the course of eighty-one voting opportunities, McCool found the Democratic candidate received a majority forty times and the Republican forty times, with one case resulting in a tie.⁵

Given these observations, how has the scholarship on federal Indian policy presented the relationship between American Indians and political parties? Some typical responses have been that Indian policy is either nonpartisan or bipartisan, or that Democrats' actions are more pro-Indian than Republicans' are.⁶ The latter, and less frequent, conclusion tends to focus specifically on legislative outcomes, such as the claim that liberal Democrats have fought against cuts in American Indian self-governance funding because they are "traditional friends of the Indian."⁷ In another study, Charles Turner's analysis of floor votes reveals that Democrats have been significantly more likely to vote in favor of a pro-Indian position than Republicans.⁸

Despite some indications of Democratic favoritism, much of the scholarship which addresses the role of parties in Indian politics over the course of the last four decades has reached a conclusion of nonpartisanship.⁹ S. Lyman Tyler, William Benham, Emma Gross, and Mary Cooper all conclude that party labels are unimportant and that bipartisanship or nonpartisanship is the norm for Indian issues.¹⁰ Tyler puts forth the traditional and typical line of reasoning on members' voting decisions in regard to American Indian issues when he contends that "party politics has tended to have little significance in influencing voting on Indian bills."¹¹ Benham remarks that "it is evident that party politics tend to have little significance on Indian bills historically, as well as presently."¹² Gross emphasizes the bipartisan nature of American Indian policy, noting "a pervasive value for bipartisanship or nonpartisanship."¹³ Finally, after attributing the battle over an Indian assistance funding program

to divided government, Cooper assures her reader that “Indian policy is not a strictly partisan issue.”¹⁴ Thus, the question for the present investigation becomes: How does one reconcile claims of nonpartisanship with those which suggest a partisan difference?

One may find an answer to this question by considering the difference between types of political rhetoric—between what one might call popular and professional forms of rhetoric.¹⁵ That is, political rhetoric aimed at a public audience might take on different objectives and produce different outcomes than rhetoric which is a direct part of the lawmaking process. Practitioners of popular rhetoric, with its public audience, might tend to stress issues for which they believe widespread agreement exists. When politicians practice professional rhetoric, however, their primary interest might not be in winning votes or support, but in constructing a public policy most in line with their ideology. Since it is popular rhetoric that often determines political outcomes—by persuading the public to elect one stripe of public official rather than another, for example—an examination of its effect on American Indian politics should not be overlooked.

The research suggesting a closer connection between pro-Indian policy and the Democratic Party tends to focus on professional rhetoric—the legislative track record of American Indian policy. Turner, for example, examined Indian bills in committee and on the floor and explored the decision-making strategies of members in the House and Senate. This focus judged parties based on the legislative record, on their professional rhetorical claims (often in the form of votes) made in the chambers where they worked. Democrats and Republicans had different approaches to Indian policy in their capacity as lawmakers. While this may be a legitimate approach if one is solely interested in policy outcomes, it is not necessarily the same assumption that has been made by scholars of Indian legislation in the past. To be sure, there is more to politics than legislation, and the perception of political parties is based on more than a voting record. What, then, have scholars observed that has led them to the conclusion that American Indian policy is a bipartisan, or even nonpartisan, political arena?

The answer may lie in something the above-mentioned scholars have in common. All four who determined that American Indian policy is nonpartisan based their conclusions to a large extent on either firsthand conversations and interviews with politicians, aides, and bureaucrats in Washington, D.C., or on secondhand interpretations of the public statements of these individuals. In other words, they all observed a primarily popular rhetoric. Tyler relies heavily on commission reports and statements in the *Congressional Record* in his largely historical account.¹⁶ Benham’s work, while certainly focusing on substantive legislation, appears to base many of its conclusions on statements made by legislators in committee reports and in published committee hearings, rather than on voting records or other forms of legislative action. Gross relies on interviews with congressional staffers and other policy experts whom she asks to describe the interests of legislators. Finally, Cooper’s claim seems to be based largely on the generalized rhetoric and policy positions of only three legislators.¹⁷ In none of these cases were voting records analyzed. In

other words, these scholars primarily observed rhetoric designed for public consumption, not that employed in the politicians' capacities as lawmakers. They based their statements about the role of political parties on the subjective claims and aspirations of politicians, not on their specific lawmaking actions. This distinction is not to suggest that the conclusions of these scholars are invalid—or that they are less important than conclusions based on policy outcomes—simply that they are measuring different phenomena. One might then conclude that in the field of American Indian politics professional rhetoric—defined as the voting and bill sponsoring activities of legislators—is partisan while popular rhetoric—defined as public statements made by politicians—is nonpartisan.

If this distinction is accurate, then one would expect to find evidence of this difference in a comparison of these forms of rhetoric. While previous empirical research suggests that parties do matter in the professional rhetoric of American Indian policy, what follows will explore whether there is any empirical evidence to suggest that parties do not matter in the popular rhetoric of Indian policy. Though overt political action (professional rhetoric) is necessary to change laws and implementation strategies, popular political party rhetoric is foundational—it serves as the public's introduction to the party's stance on a variety of political issues. This popular rhetoric defines a party's agenda, attracts or drives away potential voters, and often sets the course for future political action. By helping define the circumstances in which parties matter or do not matter, this exploration will help provide a more comprehensive picture of the political nature of American Indian policy. Since party platforms are the *sine qua non* of parties' popular rhetoric, they will provide the focus for this investigation. Moreover, since no previous study systematically examines the role Indian interests play in political party platforms, this investigation provides a needed substantive addition to the scholarship of American Indian politics.

PARTY PLATFORMS AND RHETORICAL BIPARTISANSHIP

American political parties have been issuing official statements of party beliefs, goals, and ambitions since 1840.¹⁸ The presently constituted Democratic and Republican parties have been writing platforms in presidential election years since 1856.¹⁹ These documents are the most consistent statements of how parties present themselves to the American public.²⁰ They are the most official and well-documented form of popular political rhetoric. As Porter and Johnson note,

the platforms usually assert certain party principles and objectives which, stated generally, serve as a catalyst for the factions within the party and the voters represented by these factions. . . . The platforms are instruments of parties attempting to gain control of the government. In a democracy where majority votes are needed to achieve this control, a degree of consensus is demanded. The platforms represent an endeavor to unite the party and amalgamate as many interest groups as possible to obtain a workable consensus. Given the confed-

erate nature of our parties, the economic, social, sectional, racial, and other interests abroad in the nation, the platforms represent an accommodation of these interests in any one election year and an illustration of the emphasis these forces place upon particular issues. Of necessity, the platform pronouncements often must be vague to encompass the party regulars and to attract new adherents. They must be designed to offend as few people as possible, but at the same time, they are significant reflections of interest group strengths within the party organization.²¹

Put another way, platforms signal support for certain political positions in order to attract the votes of both party members and non-members.²² As a result, they often seek to cast as broad a net as possible without offending core party principles.²³ Thus, issues on which there is a large amount of agreement between the two parties might suggest a desire to capture nonaligned votes, or may represent sincere overlap of beliefs and goals. On the other hand, one is likely to find direct disagreement and argumentation between party platforms on issues that represent key defining differences between party ideologies.²⁴

It seems, then, that if the two major parties agree on an issue in their platforms, it is an indication that *rhetorical bipartisanship* has occurred. Irrespective of practical policy decisions and substantive legislative or executive action, competing parties that make similar statements in their platforms are declaring their goals to be similar.²⁵ For example, the 1976 Democratic platform states: "we seek ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment [ERA]" and the 1976 Republican platform declares: "the Republican Party reaffirms its support for ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment." Thus, it seems reasonable to conclude that, in 1976, the ERA was rhetorically bipartisan—even if the professional rhetoric (i.e., voting or other legislative action) that each party then pursued regarding the ERA was substantially different. Since national party platforms are a consistent place to search for such agreement or disagreement in popular rhetoric, this research examines party platform coverage of American Indian concerns. If there is evidence of bipartisanship, this will tend to validate the conclusions of scholars who have found Indian politics to be a bipartisan arena and, in part, confirm the suspicion that their reasons for arriving at that conclusion may be based on popular rhetoric. If there is little or no indication of bipartisanship, this will suggest that either the claims of these scholars are misguided or that they have based their conclusions on something other than popular or professional rhetoric. Of additional interest, Pomper and Lederman conclude that, in the field of civil rights (which includes Indian affairs in their analysis), pledges made by one party and ignored by the other are the most common occurrence, representing about 63 percent of all claims between 1944 and 1976, followed by bipartisan pledges (35 percent) and conflicting pledges (2 percent).²⁶ Thus, a comparison to Indian affairs legislation might indicate whether Indian affairs legislation is more or less rhetorically bipartisan than the average civil rights issue.

While the results in Table 1 provide a numerical indication of the similarities and differences between political parties, this study is decidedly qualitative.²⁷ The method employed here inductively creates categories for each of the themes discussed in the platforms. This approach, sometimes called thematic analysis, resulted in the coding of fourteen American Indian topics, or themes, discussed in the party platforms.²⁸ The author identified every mention of American Indians in the two major party platforms and coded them according to the topic addressed.²⁹ This resulted in fourteen separate topics (as noted in Table 1), each of which was addressed by both parties at least once. Interestingly, though there were differences in policy strategy and emphasis, there were no major issues addressed by one party and ignored by the other. The strength of this approach is that it allows one to observe the two parties' discussion of American Indian policy in a similar forum and at regularly spaced intervals over a long period of time. Since American Indian topics were always a very small percentage of the total platform, and since platform length varied greatly both between parties and within parties over time, a focus on the substance of the topics mentioned largely avoids misleading quantitative results. For example, the 1988 platforms devote roughly the same percentage of space to Indian issues, but since the Republican platform is nearly eight times longer than the Democratic platform, the Republicans are able to address many more Indian concerns than the Democrats.³⁰ A limitation of this approach is that it does not allow for tests of significant difference the way that a quantitative approach could. Moreover, this analysis does not account for each party's discussion of broad issues, such as unemployment, that may be of great interest to American Indian communities, except when they are mentioned within the specific context of Indian policy. It is to be hoped that the advantages gained by addressing the substantive content of platforms year by year reveal enough about party attitudes toward American Indians to make this study valuable in spite of such limitations. Analysis of how issues and conditions affecting American Indians are interpreted by the political parties provides a level of nuance that a discussion of numbers alone cannot achieve. This section also explores how the rhetoric of Democratic and Republican platforms reveals the evolution of distinct partisan issue agendas. These two goals—exploring the extent of rhetorical bipartisanship and observing the development of different partisan-issue emphases—will best be served by a chronological discussion of party platforms followed by a summary of the key similarities and differences.

THE CHRONOLOGY OF AMERICAN INDIAN POLICY IN PARTY PLATFORMS

Bipartisan Paternalism (1948–1952)

While explicit discussion of federal policy toward American Indians is found in political party platforms as far back as 1872, the present discussion will begin with the first post–World War II action—in this case, the platforms of

Table 1
American Indian Topics Covered in Party Platforms

	1948	1952	1956	1960	1964	1968	1972	1976	1980	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000	totals
Health		D, R	D, R	D, R	D	D, R	D, R	R	D		R	R	R	R	17
Education		D, R	D, R	D, R	D	D, R	D, R		D		R	R			15
Economy (general)		D	D, R	D	D	D, R	R		D	D		R		D, R	13
Employment/Job training		D	R	D	D	D, R	R	R	D	D	R	R			10
Economic development		R			D	D	R	R	D		R	R	R	R	10
Culture/Religion		D	D, R	D	D	R	D		D			D, R	R	R	11
Claims/Treaties		D	D, R	D	D	D	R	D	D	D	D	D	R		11
Assimilation/Acculturation		D	R												2
Self-determination			D, R	D, R	D	D	D, R	R	D, R	D, R	R	R	D, R	D, R	18
Citizenship/Rights		D, R	D, R		D	R	D, R	D	D	D					11
Enhance/Reform BIA		R					D, R	D		D			D, R	R	8
Human resources			D	D			R								3
Natural resources			D	D			D, R	D, R	D	D	R	R			10
Housing					D	D, R			D		R				5
Issues addressed	D=0 R=0	D=8 R=5	D=9 R=9	D=8 R=3	D=7 R=0	D=8 R=7	D=7 R=11	D=4 R=6	D=11 R=1	D=6 R=1	D=1 R=7	D=2 R=8	D=2 R=6	D=2 R=6	D=77 R=70
Number of locations	D=0 R=0	D=1 R=1	D=1 R=1	D=1 R=1	D=2 R=0	D=2 R=3	D=6 R=3	D=1 R=1	D=10 R=1	D=3 R=1	D=1 R=1	D=1 R=1	D=1 R=1	D=1 R=1	D=31 R=16
Separate plank?	D=N R=N	D=Y R=Y	D=Y R=Y	D=Y R=Y	D=Y R=N	D=Y R=Y	D=Y R=Y	D=Y R=Y	D=Y R=Y	D=Y R=Y	D=N R=Y	D=N R=Y	D=N R=Y	D=N R=Y	D=9 R=12

D represents the Democratic Party and R represents the Republican Party.

1948.³¹ In 1948, for the only time in the era under study, neither the Democratic nor the Republican party mentioned American Indians in its national platform. Though little can be said about nothing, it is important to start at this point in order to appreciate the national mood that would soon lead to change. Interest in American Indian policy was at an ebb, and it is likely that such inattention allowed for the development of the decidedly anti-tribal termination and relocation policies of the 1950s.³² By 1952 American Indian policy found its way back into both party platforms. While both parties dedicated a three-paragraph plank to American Indians that generally supported the health and well-being of indigenous people, the paternalistic and assimilationist tenor of the pledges is a product of the time. The Democrats, for example, proclaimed that “the American Indian should be completely integrated into the social, economic and political life of the nation.”³³ The Republicans echo this paternalism in their description of “our national responsibility for improving the condition of our Indian friends.”³⁴ Up to this point, rhetorical bipartisanship seems to be a reasonable conclusion, as both parties are vaguely interested in “helping” and incorporating American Indians into mainstream American society.³⁵

Termination Conflict (1956–1964)

By the 1956 platforms, some notable partisan differences begin to appear. Even though both parties discuss the same number of issues and, in most cases, the same substantive issues, the rhetoric each uses suggests that a division may be emerging. Termination of federal-tribal relationships is the main course of action the federal government was pursuing at this time, and it is clear from the platforms that the parties are not in agreement on this approach. The Democrats call for a “reversal of the present policies which are tending toward the erosion of Indian rights, reduction of their economic base through alienation of their lands, and repudiation of federal responsibility.”³⁶ The Republicans, on the other hand, appear very satisfied with the direction of the status quo: “we shall continue to pursue our enlightened policies which are now producing exceptional advances in the long struggle to help the American Indian gain the material and social advantages of his birthright.”³⁷ While they use the term *enlightened* the Republican point of view is obviously paternalistic in retrospect. The Republicans congratulate themselves for their “progressive programs” which have prepared “our Indian citizens for participation in *normal community life*.”³⁸ Clearly, the rhetoric has begun to change. While both parties were content to pursue assimilation and termination of federal responsibility to tribes in 1952, by 1956 party philosophies were in conflict. Though both parties had supported the 1953 legislation that made termination the official federal policy and that began shifting responsibility for tribal issues to the states, the Democrats appear to regret this approach by 1956 while the Republicans continue to embrace it. While the platforms themselves do not reveal the cause of conflict, two explanations seem likely. First, Democrats are reacting to a Republican administration. Glenn Emmons, President Eisenhower’s Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) commissioner, had

been instrumental in carrying out the assimilationist approach of the 1950s, and the language of the Democratic platform suggests an effort to capitalize on opposition to an unpopular bureaucracy. Second, as evidenced by this and subsequent platforms, the Democratic Party is in the process of evolving into a more liberal civil rights party. The Democratic discussion of rights and responsibilities regarding Indians is one example of this broader trend.

Differences become even more pronounced by 1960, when the Democrats cover more than twice as many issues as the Republicans. While the Republicans soften their tone somewhat on termination, they only condemn the action when it is "precipitous" and lacks tribal approval.³⁹ The Democrats, on the other hand, vow to "end practices" that remove federal responsibility.⁴⁰ The Democratic plank is also much more adamant in its condemnation of past policy, noting that "the unique legal and moral responsibility" of the federal government toward American Indians takes the form of "restitution for the injustice that has sometimes been done them."⁴¹

By 1964, this rift is undeniable, as the Democratic platform spends a significant amount of space covering a variety of Indian concerns while the Republican platform fails to mention American Indians at all. Of possibly even greater importance is the location of this discussion within the Democratic platform. While previous mentions by both parties were typically located in a section of the platform called Governmental Affairs or Government Operations, the 1964 Democratic platform first mentions American Indians in a plank titled Democracy of Opportunity. Since this plank encompasses a broad range of civil rights and liberties issues, it would appear that the Democratic Party has begun to view Indian affairs as more of a civil rights issue than a governmental affairs issue.⁴² Moreover, while the differences noted in 1956 and 1960 could perhaps be passed off as Democratic opposition to a Republican administration, the 1964 platform comes at a time of unified Democratic government. That Democrats would devote significant attention to American Indian concerns at such a time while the Republican Party has nothing to say on the topic suggests ideological divergence. In a presidential election that asked Americans to choose between a large or small role for the federal government, the Democrats found a place for American Indians within their framework, but the Republicans had not yet developed a New Federalist approach to American Indian concerns.

Bipartisan Progressivism (1968–1976)

A third phase of platform activity emerges in 1968, as the 1968, 1972, and 1976 platforms present a heightened awareness of Indian concerns by both parties. The Democrats pledge a "new and equal federal-Indian partnership" and the Republicans acknowledge that American Indians "suffer disproportionately" and that this is "a national disgrace."⁴³ Importantly, it is during this era that both parties begin to include American Indians in more general discussions of racial and ethnic disadvantage (e.g., housing, bilingual education). This should not be surprising, given that the Indian civil rights movement spans these three platform years.⁴⁴ What is notable is the extent to

which the platforms are in agreement, exhibiting a high degree of rhetorical bipartisanship. Clearly, little substantive difference exists between the Democrats' 1968 demand that "we must continue and increase federal help in the Indian's battle against poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, ill health and poor housing" and the Republican observation in the same year that "inequality of jobs, of education, of housing and of health blight [American Indians'] lives today."⁴⁵ In 1976 as well, portions of the platforms are virtually indistinguishable. The Republicans state: "we pledge to continue to honor our trust relationship with [Native Americans]" while "the Democratic Party reaffirms and strengthens its legal and moral trust responsibilities to the American Indian."⁴⁶

Democratic Attentiveness (1980–1984)

Platform rhetoric begins to diverge again in 1980, as the Democrats pledge efforts in eleven different areas of Indian policy—mentioning Indian concerns in an unprecedented ten separate locations within the platform—while the Republicans restrict themselves to a single, brief mention of self-determination. This pattern continues in 1984, though this time both parties take pains to acknowledge past injustices. The Republicans use this apology as grounding for a foreign policy position when they "urge the nations of the Americas to learn from our past mistakes and to protect native populations from exploitation and abuse" and the Democrats both note the "troubled record" of the BIA and observe that "we have long failed to treat the original inhabitants of this land with the dignity they deserve."⁴⁷ This divergence of rhetoric in the early 1980s should not be surprising given the broader political context.⁴⁸ This was the Reagan era—a time when the Republican Party took an ideological and rhetorical turn in favor of law and order and small government. It should not be surprising that Ronald Reagan's Republican Party would view Indian policy through the lens of New Federalism. The Reagan Administration saw the BIA and other federal Indian agencies as bureaucracies that needed trimming, and trim them it did. Reagan's first budget asked for "a \$136.9 million decrease in Indian Health Service (IHS) funding, a \$72.9 million cut from the BIA, and the termination of funding for the construction of reservation water and sanitary facilities."⁴⁹ Though Democratic opposition staved off many budget cuts, the Republican administration was able to decrease the role of the BIA and other agencies by writing more restrictive rules for eligibility.⁵⁰ Clearly, the Republican definition of self-determination meant less financial assistance from the federal government.

Republican Attentiveness (1988–2000)

Curiously, the pattern of greater coverage by the Democratic Party reverses itself in 1988 as the Republicans seem to develop a new commitment to Indian affairs while the Democrats drop their practice of including a separate plank for Indian concerns. The Republicans needed nineteen lines to expound on their approach to American Indian policy in 1988, sixteen in 1992, and thirteen in 1996.⁵¹ On the other hand, the Democrats merely stat-

ed a belief that “our treaty commitments with Native Americans [should be] enforced by culturally sensitive officials” in 1988 and simply included “respect Native American culture and our treaty commitments” among a laundry list of civil rights goals in 1992.⁵² In fact, Democratic platform rhetoric on American Indian issues became so inconsequential that the 1996 draft platform—the document adopted by the platform committee—left American Indians out entirely. It was only through a process of “minor technical corrections” that Indians were mentioned at all.⁵³ In 2000 the parties sustained this trend, with the Democrats’ briefer remarks balancing a commitment to improved conditions with pride in recent progress, while the Republican platform was critical of bureaucratic mismanagement and stressed “political self-determination and economic self-sufficiency” as the “twin pillars of an effective Indian policy.”⁵⁴ Clearly, by the 1990s the Republicans had found a meaningful way to connect their economic libertarianism and New Federalism in a positive way to the self-determination goals of American Indians. At the same time, Democrats appeared to be content with saying very little about specific American Indian concerns. Though, in all fairness, Republican platforms tended to be much lengthier overall in this era, and the Democrats likely intended the inclusion of American Indians in their broad statements about disadvantaged American minority groups, one cannot ignore this shift in specific platform rhetoric.

PLATFORM CONCLUSIONS

Party platform rhetoric appears to cover five eras since 1948: bipartisan paternalism (1948–1952), conflict over termination policy (1956–1964), bipartisan progressivism (1968–1976), Democratic attentiveness (1980–1984), and Republican attentiveness (1988–2000). But what do these divisions reveal about bipartisanship? With the exception of the 1956–1964 era, the official statements of party belief and policy pledges reveal very little conflict. Although differences in emphasis certainly exist—Republicans are generally more concerned with economic development and Democrats with claims settlements and treaty obligations—they are not mutually exclusive differences. There is a large amount of overlap in issues covered and, over the entire period, Republicans address only about 9 percent fewer total issues than Democrats. And, though Democrats were more likely to address Indian concerns at multiple locations within their platforms, Republicans were more likely to devote a separate subheading to American Indians. Moreover, with the exception of 1956, every pledge is either a one-party pledge or a bipartisan pledge. After examining official party rhetoric, then, one is forced to conclude that there is little official partisan conflict in American Indian policy. American Indian party rhetoric is very similar to the coverage of other platform issues in that, as noted by Pomper and Lederman, one-party pledges and bipartisan commitments greatly outnumber conflicting remarks.⁵⁵

The question then arises: Are scholars right to conclude that American Indian policy is a bipartisan arena? The answer *can* be yes, but only if one is willing to conclude that virtually all policy arenas are bipartisan and only if

one preferences popular rhetoric over professional rhetoric. As Pomper and Lederman observe, the vast majority of platform pledges—in every policy area and in every platform from 1944 to 1976—are either one-party pledges or bipartisan pledges.⁵⁶ Indeed, over that time period only 2 percent of all civil rights pledges were in partisan conflict. When one observes the parties' popular rhetoric, Indian policy appears bipartisan, but then again so does everything else.

On the other hand, as the conclusions of previous research suggest, bipartisanship is not the typical outcome for Indian legislation. Statistically significant differences in four of the last five decades indicate that congressional Democrats have been more likely to support Indian positions in professional rhetoric than have congressional Republicans.⁵⁷ The one exception is the 1960s. In that decade, both popular and professional rhetoric indicate that political attitudes about American Indians were in flux. The observation that popular rhetoric moved from partisan conflict to partisan agreement during this time period helps clarify this departure from typical congressional voting patterns. At the same time, however, it masks, or smooths over, legislative rifts that were beginning to emerge. By the 1970s, for example, platforms indicate bipartisan support for progressive Indian policy. They fail to indicate, however, that congressional Democrats voted for these policies at significantly higher rates than did their Republican counterparts. For example, though the 1976 platforms were nearly indistinguishable in their commitment to trust responsibilities, the typical House Democrat supported American Indian positions 94 percent of the time while the typical Republican was supportive in 78 percent of votes. Thus, the finding here that American Indian issues are rhetorically bipartisan must be presented with caution—agreeing in the popular rhetoric of platforms and in the professional rhetoric of legislative action are not the same thing.

Scholars who have focused largely on *popular political rhetoric* have found bipartisanship in American Indian legislation. On this issue, the present findings concur. At the same time, *professional political rhetoric* often reveals conflict. In October 1998, 80 percent of House Democrats voted in favor of a bill to improve the procedure for granting federal recognition to Indian tribes while 81 percent of Republicans opposed the measure.⁵⁸ That such conflict is prevalent even in an era of rhetorical bipartisanship suggests that, in Indian policy as elsewhere, scholars should observe what legislators do, not just listen to what they say. With that caution in mind, there is much to learn about American Indian politics from party platforms. American Indian affairs is an area where each of the major parties has carved out a policy niche that is both in line with broader party philosophy and which addresses Native concerns. Democrats and Republicans both state that they want to improve federal relations with American Indians, but they often want to achieve this goal in very different ways. By observing both popular and professional rhetoric one can begin to see precisely where these differences exist. The Democratic Party has placed American Indians within a broader class of disadvantaged Americans that it seeks to aid through federal support while the GOP has seen self-determination as a route to shrinking federal financial and bureaucratic support

for tribes. It is hoped that this review of the parties' popular rhetoric over the last half century has helped reveal how such differences come to exist—even in a field that can be considered rhetorically bipartisan.

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NOTES

1. The first quotation is from Paul Shukovsky, "Sincerely Yours," *Common Cause* (Fall 1995): 22–23. The second is from W. Ron Allen, quoted in Solveig Torvik, "A Career Built on Conflict, Loyalties: In 40-Year Political Span, Gorton Forged Ahead, Rarely Looking Back," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, 2 December 2000.

2. To be sure, party platforms tend to be the focus of presidential campaigns, while much of American Indian policy develops in Congress. That being said, political parties and their platforms are influential in both branches and this study explores some of the connections between them.

3. Center for Responsive Politics, [<http://www.opensecrets.org>], 8 June 2001.

4. See National Election Studies, [<http://www.umich.edu/~nes/>], 8 June 2001.

5. See Daniel McCool, "Indian Voting," in *American Indian Policy in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Vine Deloria Jr. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), 105–133.

6. A third alternative, saying nothing about the role of political parties, is prevalent but difficult to measure. To be sure, many scholars have written extensively about American Indian politics without ever directly addressing the role of political parties (see, for example, Francis Paul Prucha, "American Indian Policy in the Twentieth Century," *The Western Historical Quarterly* [January 1984]: 5–18). Though it is tempting to assume that such silence indicates that an author believes partisanship in Indian politics to be unimportant, such a conclusion would be mere speculation.

7. Shukovsky, "Sincerely Yours," 22.

8. Charles C. Turner, "The Politics of Minor Concerns: Congressional Dynamics and American Indian Legislation, 1947–1998" (Ph.D. diss., Claremont Graduate University, 2000).

9. This conclusion is based on an extensive survey of the literature on Indian politics, most of which does not address the issue of partisanship directly (see note 6).

10. S. Lyman Tyler, *Indian Affairs: A Study of the Changes in Policy of the United States Toward Indians* (Provo, Utah: Institute of American Indian Studies, Brigham Young University, 1964); William J. Benham, "The Role of Congress in Indian Affairs," ERIC Clearinghouse Document, ED178241 (December 1977); Emma R. Gross, *Contemporary Federal Policy toward American Indians* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989); Mary Cooper, "Native Americans' Future," *The CQ Researcher* 26 (12 July 1996): 601–624.

11. Tyler, *Indian Affairs*, 5.

12. Benham, "The Role of Congress," 13.

13. Gross, *Contemporary Federal Policy*, 86.

14. Cooper, "Native Americans' Future," 616.

15. I am indebted to anonymous readers for assistance with the clarity of this distinction. For a discussion of the changing forms of political rhetoric and how scholarship has approached them, see J. Michael Sproule, "The New Managerial Rhetoric and the Old Criticism," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 74 (1988): 468–486.

16. In fact, the work itself was originally prepared as a commission report in 1958. Though he makes reference to "studies of congressional interest in Indian bills as indicated by voting patterns" (p. 5), Tyler fails to provide citation for this claim and does not conduct such a study himself. The study he most likely refers to is J. Leiper Freeman, *The Political Process: Executive Bureau-Legislative Committee Relations* (New York: Random House, 1965). This work, though unpublished at the time, is cited as an unpublished manuscript by Tyler elsewhere. Freeman's investigation focuses mainly on the 1930s.

17. Cooper mentions Senators John McCain (R-AZ), Slade Gorton (R-WA), and Ben Nighthorse Campbell (D/R-CO). All three legislators are very outspoken on Indian affairs, making them very unlike the typical legislator.

18. For discussion of 1840 as a date of origin, see Kirk H. Porter and Donald Bruce Johnson, *National Party Platforms, 1840–1968* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1970).

19. Older platforms are catalogued in Porter and Johnson, *National Party Platforms*. More recent platforms are from Congressional Quarterly Inc., *Congressional Quarterly Almanac* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1972–1996). The 2000 platforms are from Democratic National Committee, "2000 Democratic Platform," [<http://www.democrats.org/hq/resources/platform/platform.html>], 22 August 2000, and from Republican National Committee, "Republican Platform 2000," [<http://www.rnc.org/2000/2000platformcontents>], 22 August 2000.

20. For an excellent discussion of the interaction of media and campaigns more broadly, see the collection of essays in Arthur H. Miller and Bruce E. Gronbeck, eds., *Presidential Campaigns and American Self Images* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994).

21. Porter and Johnson, *National Party Platforms*, vii.

22. For quantitative support of this claim, see John H. Kessel, "The Seasons of Presidential Politics," *Social Science Quarterly* 58 (December 1977): 418–435. To be sure, party rhetoric is a two-way street. Platform language can also be used as a method for rewarding supporters with public recognition. For a related point, see Matthew C. Moen, "Ronald Reagan and the Social Issues: Rhetorical Support for the Christian Right," *Social Science Journal* 27 (1990): 199–207.

23. See Jeff Fishel, *Presidents and Promises* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly, 1985), 27.

24. The assumption that parties are rational seekers of power is described in detail in Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957).

25. One cannot ignore, of course, the fact that there is often a relationship between platform rhetoric and policy outcomes. See Gerald M. Pomper with Susan S. Lederman, *Elections in America: Control and Influence in Democratic Politics* (New York: Longman, 1980). Pomper and Lederman observe that parties took action on about 60 percent of their civil rights platform pledges (the policy area in which they include Indian affairs) between 1948 and 1976 (though, to be sure, they did not always take action in the same manner in which they had pledged). More recent research with similar conclusions about the relationship between platforms and policy outcomes includes Alan D. Monroe, "American

Party Platforms and Public Opinion" *American Journal of Political Science* 27 (February 1983): 27–42; and Ian Budge and Richard I. Hofferbert, "Mandates and Policy Outputs: U.S. Party Platforms and Federal Expenditures," *American Political Science Review* 84 (March 1990): 111–131. Though these works all divide platform positions by subject matter, none considers American Indian policy as an independent category and it is not always clear which category Indian issues would be assigned to, or whether they would be assigned to the same or separate categories.

26. Pomper and Lederman, *Control and Influence*, 169.

27. Quantitative analyses of rhetoric are also possible. See, for example, the discussions of content analysis employed by Moen, "Ronald Reagan and the Social Issues," and by Kessel, "The Seasons of Presidential Politics."

28. For more on thematic analysis, see, for example, Richard E. Boyatzis, *Transforming Qualitative Information: Thematic Analysis and Code Development* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1998).

29. Efforts to insure reliability in coding included categorical consistency over time and between parties.

30. For a discussion of the change in platform size over time, see Fishel, *Presidents and Promises*.

31. In 1872 the Republican Party commended itself for a "wise and humane policy toward the Indians," (see Porter and Johnson, *National Party Platforms*, 46). Beginning much before 1948 in the present study would require analysis of parties so different from their present incarnation that the validity of any comparison would be limited. For an excellent and thorough discussion of the history of American Indian relations with the federal government, see Brian W. Dippie, *The Vanishing American: White Attitudes and U.S. Indian Policy* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1982); the essays in Vine Deloria Jr., ed., *American Indian Policy in the Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985); and David E. Wilkins, *American Indian Politics and the American Political System* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001).

32. Interestingly, in 1944 the Republicans had vowed to "take politics out of the administration of Indian affairs" (see Porter and Johnson, *National Party Platforms*, 46). Though they lost the election, the point was apparently well-taken. Termination of federal-tribal relations, the official approach to Indian policy taken during the late 1940s through the early 1960s, is explored thoroughly in several excellent studies, among them are Donald L. Fixico, *Termination and Relocation: Federal Indian Policy, 1945–1960* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1986); and Frederick E. Hoxie, "The Reservation Period, 1880–1960," in *The Cambridge History of the Native Peoples of the Americas*, part two, eds. Bruce G. Trigger and Wilcomb E. Washburn (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 183–258.

33. Porter and Johnson, *National Party Platforms*, 486–487.

34. *Ibid.*, 504.

35. This bipartisanship was echoed by Indian organizations as well. The leadership of the National Congress of American Indians, at its first convention in 1944 "asked the delegates to unite behind common Indian concerns instead of Democratic, Republican, or Socialist agendas" (Kenneth R. Philp, *Termination Revisited: American Indians on the Trail to Self-Determination, 1933–1953* [Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999], 14).

36. Porter and Johnson, *National Party Platforms*, 538.

37. *Ibid.*, 553–554.

38. *Ibid.*, 554 (emphasis added). “Normal community life” is likely a veiled message that Indians should be encouraged to seek work off of the reservation—to participate in the economy of “normal” (Anglo) America. I am indebted to an anonymous referee for this observation.

39. *Ibid.*, 617.

40. *Ibid.*, 597.

41. *Ibid.* For a thorough discussion of the legal/judicial history of Indian relations with state and federal governments, see Francis Paul Prucha, *American Indian Treaties: The History of a Political Anomaly* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994) and David E. Wilkins, *American Indian Sovereignty and the U.S. Supreme Court: The Masking of Justice* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997).

42. To be sure, Democratic recognition of American Indian policy as a civil rights issue may have also led to intra-party divisiveness. See the discussion of Northern and Southern Democrats in Turner, “The Politics of Minor Concerns.”

43. Porter and Johnson, *National Party Platforms*, 734, 749, 754.

44. For a discussion of the Indian civil rights movement and its impact on Indian politics, see Joane Nagel, *American Indian Ethnic Renewal: Red Power and the Resurgence of Identity and Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); and Troy Johnson, Joane Nagel, and Duane Champagne, eds., *American Indian Activism: Alcatraz to the Longest Walk* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997).

45. Porter and Johnson, *National Party Platforms*, 734, 754.

46. Congressional Quarterly Inc., *Congressional Quarterly Almanac* (1976), 909, 860.

47. Congressional Quarterly Inc., *Congressional Quarterly Almanac* (1984), 54-B, 94-B.

48. For a discussion of the reaction to the Indian politics of this era, see S. Scott Rohrer, “Indians Hit the Road Over Backlash in Washington,” *National Journal*, 26 August 1978, 1353–1355.

49. Samuel R. Cook, “Ronald Reagan’s Indian Policy in Retrospect: Economic Crisis and Political Irony,” *Policy Studies Journal* 24 (1996): 11–26, 15.

50. *Ibid.*, 16.

51. A comparison to 2000 would not be valid due to the differences in format between the published versions and the websites.

52. Congressional Quarterly Inc., *Congressional Quarterly Almanac* (1988), 88-A; (1992), 61-A.

53. This discrepancy is revealed through a comparison of the publication of the draft platform in Congressional Quarterly Inc., *Congressional Quarterly Almanac* (1996), D-59; and the Democratic National Committee’s publication of the final version. See Democratic National Committee, “1996 Democratic Platform,” [<http://www.democrats.org/hq/resources/platform/index.html>], 13 November 1999. An additional two sentences on American Indian policy appear in the latter document.

54. Republican National Committee, “Republican Platform 2000.”

55. To be sure, a one-party pledge might also conceal conflict. But since these cases indicate an unwillingness on the part of the silent party to engage in rhetorical conflict, they must still be considered rhetorically bipartisan.

56. Pomper and Lederman, *Control and Influence*, 169.

57. See Turner, “The Politics of Minor Concerns.”

58. Congressional Quarterly Inc., *CQ Weekly*, 10 October 1998, 2772.