

How do Native American Women Win Elections in Non-Native Districts?

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Abstract

In light of the recent tensions between Native American tribes and non-tribal elected leaders over such issues as environmental protection and treaty violations, caused in part by the United States' disproportionately Caucasian electoral representation, I aim to bring light the obstacles that Native Americans face in electoral politics. I analyze state legislative elections in which Native American candidates win. Using the data from the 2016 National Census and from University of North Dakota, Professor Mark Trahan. I hypothesize that the reason many Native American candidates win is because they are tied to non-native elements of the community. The two candidates that stuck out to me are Minnesota State Representatives, Peggy Flanagan and Susan Allen. They are in primarily Caucasian districts with large ties to the political parties in their districts and tend not to emphasize native issues. I argue that the way for native candidates to win is to appeal to non-natives and to make their political issues more mainstream.

Introduction

This paper considers the obstacles that minorities face in elections, from that I dive into what Native American's face while running as candidates in Non-Native districts. More specifically the obstacles that Native women face as candidates in districts where they do not seem to be the more likely candidate. The reason this needs to be studied is because it is 2018 and we still have yet to see the day that the United States is led by a woman president. Out of the "190 heads of state — nine are women. Of all the people in parliament in the world, 13 percent are women... (Sandberg, 2010)." This is a question to let you the reader understand more. I want to tell you how important it is to understand this problem. I look at what obstacles the Native candidate's face in each district, while factoring in political party, gender and campaign. I look at the Census data from 2016 and compile a spreadsheet with the racial demographics of each district, the share of the winning candidate's vote, who their opponent was, and their campaign and district history to figure out how Natives win, as well as literature from various other political scientists. I outline my analysis to raise the question as to what the candidates do in order not to just win but be incumbents in districts where the Native population is relatively low. My analysis from the background of specific women candidates and how they campaigned (the platforms and promises they talked about), as well as the history of that district (is it leaning liberal or conservative?). I wanted to figure out not only how Natives win but what the obstacles are along the way. To better understand my research, I have stated questions that summarize it.

These questions are:

What obstacles have minority candidates faced?

What obstacles have Native American's faced as candidates?

What obstacles have Native American women faced as candidates?

Why do we need to talk about this topic?

How are Native American candidates campaigning in Non-Native districts?

What are the influences, if any, on candidates with regard to their campaign, gender, and district that are Non-Native?

Literature Review

In the previous literature the focus was on the barriers that women have from a young age. There were studies on the effects of politics in high schools as well as in college. There were males and females surveyed to see how they differed (see Fox & Lawless, 2014). In the study, they wanted to understand the upbringing of college students and high school students on their views of politics and if they wanted to be in any leadership roles (student government and mock trial). There were differences, the males were greatly encouraged to pursue leadership roles where the females were not. The males had greater encouragement from a parent, and/or teacher to join politics. The males in college were more likely to major in politics than their female counterpart. This study does not say that all females are in this category, they do suggest the upbringing of a female who does pursue politics and eventually office. The study concluded that the males had more confidence in participating and winning a campaign election.

In their literature they did not dive into the personal story of the individual person that is what I plan to do in order to understand how natives win. I am going to explain what the campaign platforms are based on and what their racial makeup of the district of each of the candidate's districts.

Secondly I wanted to understand the gender differences, in the literature before the studies were on how many women opt out of politics. An obstacle that many women face in

politics is that “Democratic party leaders may not coalesce around a candidate of color out of fear of alienating white voters (Sanbonmatsu, *The Candidacies of U.S. Women of Color for Statewide Executive Office*, 2013).” Another obstacle would be that the more national the elections are the more competitive the races and therefore the more reason the party will not go with a woman, let alone a minority woman in either parties. I feel like majority of the time women are not seen as equally capable of the job, in many studies, “they found that, while the ambition framework better explains men's decisions to run for office, women are much more reliant on the existence of organizational and party support (Susan Carrol, 2013).” So therefore, without that support, woman can't see they have a real chance to win. Another obstacle that I see over and over again, is that political parties will use a tactic called a sacrificial lamb meaning that the party will back a candidate knowing that they will lose just to seem more diverse.

What obstacles have minority candidates faced?

First I wanted to point out that minority candidates are running more than in the past. Women of color are the most represented group of minorities according to Rutgers. The “data from the Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP) show that women of color fare much worse in statewide elections compared with other levels of office (Sanbonmatsu, *The Candidacies of U.S. Women of Color for Statewide Executive Office*, 2013).” The states where women are in state congress are states with more diverse population, with that being said I see an obstacle to be that women need to find a way to connect with the rural voters outside of the metro area that is not as diverse. This is an obstacle that many candidates, not just women of color face. “In the gender and politics literature, some evidence indicates that women candidates for statewide executive positions face initial skepticism from voters about their credentials, and that voters may be more comfortable with women holding legislative rather than executive

positions (Dittmar 2012).” With this said, “The ongoing underrepresentation of racial and ethnic minorities in most levels of office continues to warrant our attention (Shah, 2013).” I wanted to explore the campaigns platforms and the demographics of their districts. “Historically, relatively few minority candidates have even attempted to run for office in districts that did not have a majority-minority population. Even fewer of those who have tried have actually been elected in districts where the majority of the voting population is white (Caliendo, 2006).” According to the numbers from the PEW research center, “blacks and hispanics aren't just underrepresented in political office; they're also underrepresented on the ballot. Just 5 percent of candidates are black, compared to their 12 percent share of the population, and just 6 percent of candidates are Hispanic, even as the fast-growing population is now 15 percent of the United States (Motel, Who runs for office? A profile of the 2%, 2014).”

There are other setbacks as well such as no political ambition growing up in society. The fact that many people can be born into politics is as real as the joke is today. Look at politics today, “more than three-quarters of the U.S Congress, for instance, have previous political experience (Cannon D. T., 1990).” This a serious topic that gives many people the idea to just not run. One might argue that someone will always be misrepresented if they never try and represent themselves. In the research from Fox and Lawness, they comprise a study detailing what a person would need to have to have political ambition. “Based on the insights of ambition theory, assumptions can be made about the differences between the calculations of candidates who are current officeholders and those of amateurs: the greater the risks of running, the higher the probability of winning must be before the experienced candidate will decide to run (Cannon D. T., 1993).” Another reason why many amateur candidates may not run for candidacy is because “with the exception of general gauges of political interest, financial security, and

political experiences ... (Fox & Lawless, 2014).” This can really say a lot in why many people do not run for office, and why our politicians are all the same¹.

What obstacles have Native American’s faced as candidates?

The obstacles that Native Americans face in the campaign trail is fascinating. Besides being the least represented in politics out of any other minority, there are stereotypes that Native Americans are one policy driven, although according to the National Congress of Native Americans, the key factors that bring Natives out to vote are, tribal government sovereignty, Indian child welfare, education, water, energy, gaming, environmental impact issues, and federal budget and spending ((National Congress of American Indians, 2018).” Issues that Natives care about are not always on the ballot, making it less likely for Natives to participate.

Another obstacle that Natives face is a lack of representation in office. The one key motivator among political scientists are that the people are willing to seek a political position if they see people that look like them in that same position. For Natives they do not see that. “If representation in Congress was proportional to the US Native population, we would have 2 Native Senators and 7 Native Members of the House (National Congress of American Indians, 2018).” This is not just the only alarming information, “although accurate numbers at all levels of government are hard to ascertain, data from the Gender and Multicultural Leadership project estimate the percent of black, Latino, Asian, and Native American legislators at close to 20 percent, with the majority of racial minorities serving in subnational and sub state legislative offices (Shah, 2013).” The Native community is isolated in the Reservations. There is a lot of poverty and lack of education among the tribal lands. This lack of power is a big reason why there are not a lot of Native legislators.

¹ “Our data show that those who say they have sought office tend to be white, male and well-educated. In fact, while women account for half of the adult population, they are just a quarter of those who say they have run for office (Motel, Who runs for office? A profile of the 2%, 2014).”

What obstacles have Native American woman faced as candidates?

There have been no Native American women Governor, or member of the Executive Branch of government. “In fact, while women account for half of the adult population, they are just a quarter of those who say they have run for office (Motel, Who runs for office? A profile of the 2&, 2014).” The Standing Rock Sioux Reservation, No Dapl (environmental protection protest) brought Native people to the mainstage. I believe the big obstacle that they face is that they come off as not relatable. For Natives, as “Allen told the *Post*: “You can be a part of an institution that is predominantly white and not have to lose your identity. I can be here without having to lose my identity to do it, and previous generations, I don’t think they had that (Trahant, She Represents. A Survey of Native Women Politicians Who’ve Been Elected, 2017).”

“The central argument is that, as of the twenty-first century, the parties have distinctive cultures that hold consequences for their respective abilities to produce, recruit, and support women elected officials (Elder).” Meaning more democratic people in the urban areas are more likely to vote for a minority women. This is interesting because the people that vote the most according to the Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP) is women by in large.

For instance, “Idaho’s Rep. Paulette Jordan, Couer d’Alene, is not only the only Native American in the legislature, she’s the only Democrat elected north of Boise. She told the *Spokane Spokesman Review*: “How can we continue to fight for balance in the state, with the overwhelming odds? That’s part of the beauty of our connection to our ancestors. We know that they’re always walking with us, guiding us and helping us in this lifetime ... the fact that we’re still here – we still have the beauty, the inner identity, our connection to everything, to the land, to the earth itself, to our relatives both tribal and non-tribal alike (Trahant, She Represents. A Survey of Native Women Politicians Who’ve Been Elected, 2017).” We have stories about

Natives wanting to join so that they can show the world our values and still change Indian Country. In talking about Native women in politics I cannot forget that Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, Winona LaDuke was quoted on her 2016 run for Presidency, “Can men of privilege ... who do not feel the impact of policies on forests, children or their ability to breast-feed children ... actually have the compassion to make policy that is reflective of the interests of others? At this point, I think not (Trahant, *She Represents. A Survey of Native Women Politicians Who’ve Been Elected*, 2017).”

Analysis

Why do we need to talk about this topic?

The history of the Native American people is grave and full of inequalities. Native Tribes did not know how to communicate or assimilate into another cultures customs, therefore they were not treated as equals rather second class citizens. There were many disputes over land among the settler’s and various tribes that have been going on today. In the recent rise of the environmental protest against the pipeline in North Dakota, we learned about how much of the population of the country did not know about Native Americans. I want to focus on local elections because there are only one percent of Natives in office today, the majority are state representatives. In the years to come there are predictions, by Professor Mark Trahan of the North Dakota University, that an influx of Native Americans, especially “Native women are going to run for office in the upcoming election (Trahant, #NativeVote18 The election math behind Paulette Jordan’s campaign in Idaho , 2018).”

The data I compiled is from a North Dakota University professor Mark Trahan along with the Census data from 2016. I wanted to begin to understand the makeup of the candidates. I wanted to understand if a Native man is more likely to be elected over a women, if a political

party had an influence on the race or the candidates, if there was a trend in the political party endorsements of each candidate and to better understand the demographics in race and income and how those factor into the candidate selection.

In the making of the excel spread sheet, I did want to point out that there are gaps, due to the fact that Native candidates are not in abundance. “In 2016, there were 40 American Indians elected to state legislative seats around the nation, including Minnesota (Bierschbach, 2017).” There are large clusters in some areas and scarce in others. In the future, I want to do in the research.

How are Native American Candidates Campaigning in Non-Native districts?

In order to first accurately answer my question I did a data table to help me understand how many Natives are wining in districts that are Non-Native. In the graph, you can see the winning Native women’s share of the votes they received in the district that is predominantly Native American.

(Appendix Table 1)

With that we can see how there quite a few Native candidates that win in a non-Native district and there are some that simply make sense. The candidate is Native in a primary Native district, I would expect to have them win the majority share of the Native vote. But in looking at this graph I can see that there are some that do not follow this path. I could see that there are a few individuals that I wanted to better understand, they were winning more as an incumbent or majority share winner in a Non-Native district. I wanted to better understand their district, their campaign, and the personal story of each.

(Appendix Table 2)

The Representatives that I did want to elaborate on are Sally Ann Gonzales, Paulette Jordan, Jamie Becker-Finn, Mary Kunesh-Podein, Peggy Flanagan, Susan Allen, Georgene Louis, and Tawna Sanchez, in order to understand if they campaigned differently compared to the other candidates.

Representative Sally Ann Gonzales, represents Arizona district 3. “Gonzales, earned her B.A. from Arizona State University in 1985 and her M.A. from the University of Arizona in 1994. Her professional experience includes working as a bilingual classroom teacher for Tucson Unified School District and Program Coordinator of Manos a La Vida for the University of Arizona from 1995 to 1996 (BallotPedia, 2018).” She has been in her position for seven years and an incumbent in her district, she is a democrat and is very involved in energy and public safety. Her district is comprised of a large Hispanic population which makes her campaigning geared towards the issues that are important to them, followed by a Caucasian demographic of about 30 percent. The issues of her district are one that her district shares the border with Mexico. The area where most of her constituency live is in the city of Tucson. This is a very up and coming art area. The area is leaning in the liberal direction, the district voted for Clinton in the 2016 presidential.

Representative Paulette Jordan, is a democrat. She is no longer serving the district. “Jordan is a former Democratic member of the Idaho House of Representatives, representing District 5A from 2014 to 2018. On February 8, 2018, she announced her intent to resign in order to focus on her run for governor (BallotPedia, Paulette Jordan, 2018).” Prior to her run for Governor and her seat as a representative, Jordan was Councilwoman Coeur d'Alene Tribal Council. Her district is comprised of a large Caucasian presents, about 80 percent of her district. Her district voted for Clinton in the presidential election, showing a lean towards more liberal.

Representative Jamie Becker-Finn, represents Minnesota district 42B. Becker-Finn, is a democrat women who grew up on Leech Lake reservation attending the Cass Lake area schools until college. “Her mother Teri is Norwegian, so many people don't realize she has American Indian heritage. During the campaign, someone asked her if she wanted to "make a big deal" about being American Indian because her suburban constituency is mostly white (Bierschbach, 2017).” She “served a year with AmeriCorps at a youth center that provided free after-school care for kids. Then she worked as a Legislative Assistant at the Minnesota House of Representatives (Becker-Finn, 2018).” For Beaker she had come from a political family, “Becker-Finn's father was a senator, and for her "it always seemed possible (Bierschbach, 2017)." The district that she is from is a suburb of the Metropolitan area. There are private sector jobs that mix the retail and manual labor of the town.. This area is a strong democratic area, the community has been voting democrat for eleven straight presidential elections.

Representative Mary Kunesh-Podein, represents Minnesota district 41B. She is a democrat and before she was a representative “she has worked as a library media specialist for Robbinsdale Area Schools, served as chair of the New Brighton Parks, Recreation and Environmental Commission, and is a former member-elect of the New Brighton City Council (BallotPedia, Mary Kunesh-Podein, 2018).” She is an advocate of agriculture and education. The district she lives in is located near a metro area making it very diverse, there are overwhelmingly more Caucasians and African Americans. Her district is leaning liberal, they voted for Clinton in the presidential election.

Representative Peggy Flanagan, represents Minnesota district 42B. Flanagan is heavily tied to the Democratic Party. She moved to the St. Louis Park area at a young age because her mother believed there would be opportunities in the metro area. She went to school in the area as

well as college. She is a citizen of the White Earth Ojibwe. She is now running on the ticket with Tim Waltz, as a Lieutenant Governor. The district that she ran in is a diverse democratic area that has been voting democrat for the past eleven years in presidential elections. She is an incumbent that has her districts interests in the front. The district that she is from form multiple suburbs of the capital. The area is a growing in infrastructure.

Representative Susan Allen, represents Minnesota district 62B. Susan has been the incumbent of her district since 2012. She is a part of the democrat party. Her district is comprised of a diverse bunch. She is located in the metro of the area and the district is primarily Caucasian, Hispanic/Latino, and African American. The platform she campaigns on is energy, health and human services in the finical and policy aspect. Her district leans liberal, her district voted for Hillary in the presidential election.

Representative Georgene Louis, represents New Mexico district 26. "Louis' professional experience includes working as an attorney and as an adjunct professor at the University of New Mexico (BallotPedia, GeorgeneLouis, 2018)." She is running again in this upcoming election and she is a democrat. She champions state government, Indian, and veteran affairs. Her district is made up of primarily Hispanic/Latino. His does not mean that she does not meet with Native leaders, she wants to encourage more Natives to vote and be a part of elections. She is the incumbent since 2012. Her district leans liberal New Mexico was won by Hillary as well as in her district.

Representative Twana Sanchez, represents Oregon House district 43. "Earlier in life, Tawna was active in the fight for indigenous and women's rights. She protested coal and uranium on native reservations. She was a leader of international organizations like the Indigenous Women's Network and the International Indian Treaty Council (43, 2018)." She is a

firm believer in Indian Welfare, “She has also been active in state policy making, serving on the Oregon Family Services Review Commission and Oregon Child Welfare Advisory Commission (43, 2018).” Her district is primarily Caucasian. She is a firm believer in education, workforce training, and healthcare. Her district is liberal. They voted for Hilary in the last presidential election.

Native Americans are campaigning with ties to their communities and political party. They are setting policy and precedent with their continuities in mind and "to me, its integration," Allen said. "You can be a part of an institution that is predominantly white and not have to lose your identity. I can be here without having to lose my identity to do it, and previous generations, I don't think they had that (Bierschbach, 2017)." Being engaged in committees that will directly benefit the majority while still benefiting Natives. A few of the native have served in Tribal government before switching to mainstream politics. The women in all of these districts are representing a lot of Non-Natives while coming from Native politics.

What are the influences, if any, on candidates with regard to their campaign, gender, and district that are non-native?

I believed that the influence of a political party, the district itself and how the candidate campaigned were very important in how they won there elections in Non-Native districts. I believe that in the question of incumbency, we should note that they have a far greater percentage of being reelected and therefore are safe in there district. In that we have a cross tabulation that shows the gender of the candidate and the incumbency percentage.

(Appendix Table 3)

The data showed to have no statistical influence. We can see however, that men and women are winning in as the incumbent just as much as a man. The incumbency of men and women are

roughly the same percentage. Therefore, the Native Americans that are winning are winning at the same rate regardless of gender. With that said I did want to factor in political affiliation to the candidate. I predicted that the party that the community is involved with will vote for the candidate of the same party. For example in the candidates that voted for a democrat, they also voted for a democratic presidential nominee. The party did not have a statistical influence as you can see in my cross tabulation of political parties to contest and uncontested winners. In the crosstabs below you can see that the

(Appendix Table 4)

What I did find out what that the chances for a native candidate to win in a native districts are larger than a native winning in a white district. The few that do win are either incumbent's or they are running unopposed. I believe if there was more candidates running and more data than this would be an avenue that could make a difference.

Conclusion

In the research I have conducted as well as the case studies, I have found consistent similarities across the board. The similarities are that the candidates were majority democrat and they were all heavily tied to their district. The majority were affiliated with the party prior to running. Some of them were even the incumbent of their district. All of them were family orientated and “when it comes to legislating, their interests hit just about every major policy area in state government (Bierschbach, 2017).”

The candidates that I did my case study on were not linked to their reservations directly, but they introduced bills that will directly impact Natives across Indian Country. The issues that they brought up did effect Indian country. One for example is, “Becker-Finn has introduced a bill to ban lead ammunition, which can poison venison and harm bald eagles; significant spiritual

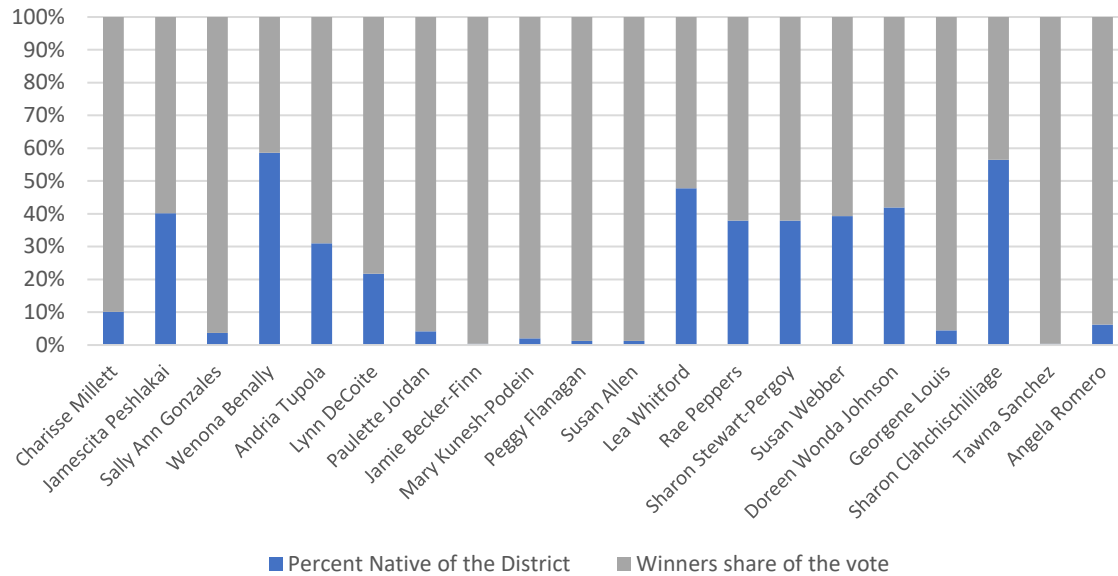
figures for American Indians (Bierschbach, 2017).” This not only will affect many tribes but many people, after all this is a national bird.

In the future studies, I would like to have a larger pool of candidates in order to have more data. I do know in upcoming elections there are a few new faces to the roster, such as Debera Haaland, an Albuquerque, New Mexico candidate. She is heavily involved in the Democratic Party and has been for many years. She is from a military family. “Haaland was an active member of presidential and gubernatorial campaigns, serving as the Native American vote manager for Diane Denish (D)'s gubernatorial campaign in 2010 and New Mexico Native American vote director for Organizing for America NM in 2012. She also served as chair of the state party and was the Democratic Lieutenant Governor nominee for New Mexico in 2014 (Haaland, 2018).” Her campaign deals a lot with healthcare, the environment and education. If she does win she will be the first Native congresswoman. The accomplishments she has not made her shy away from tribal issues, “Deb was the first Chairwoman elected to the Laguna Development Corporation Board of Directors, overseeing business operations of the second largest tribal gaming enterprise in New Mexico (Haaland, 2018).” With this change, I hope that this will allow for a sufficient amount of data to be collected in order to run more studies. I do want to dive deeper and understand what share of the vote they won and how this differs in the areas.

Appendix

Table 1

Comparing Native Women's Share of the Vote in a Native District



For this bar graph I gathered my data from an excel spread sheet compiled from the census data of the districts and University of North Dakota, Professor Mark Trahant, excel spreadsheet that I added to with information from secretary of state websites on the candidates and share of the votes. I then broke down that data and filtered out the men. Then I compared the women’s share of the vote against the districts Native population percentage. I table 1 the grey represents the winners share of the vote and the blue represents the percent Native the district is that they won their campaign in.

I then used the same data for table two but I filtered that out even more. I only wanted to include the women who won in low percentage Native districts. Thus by default finding Native

women who have won in Non-Native districts. The dark grey represents the winner’s share of the vote, and the blue represents the percentage of Native population that district is.

Table 2

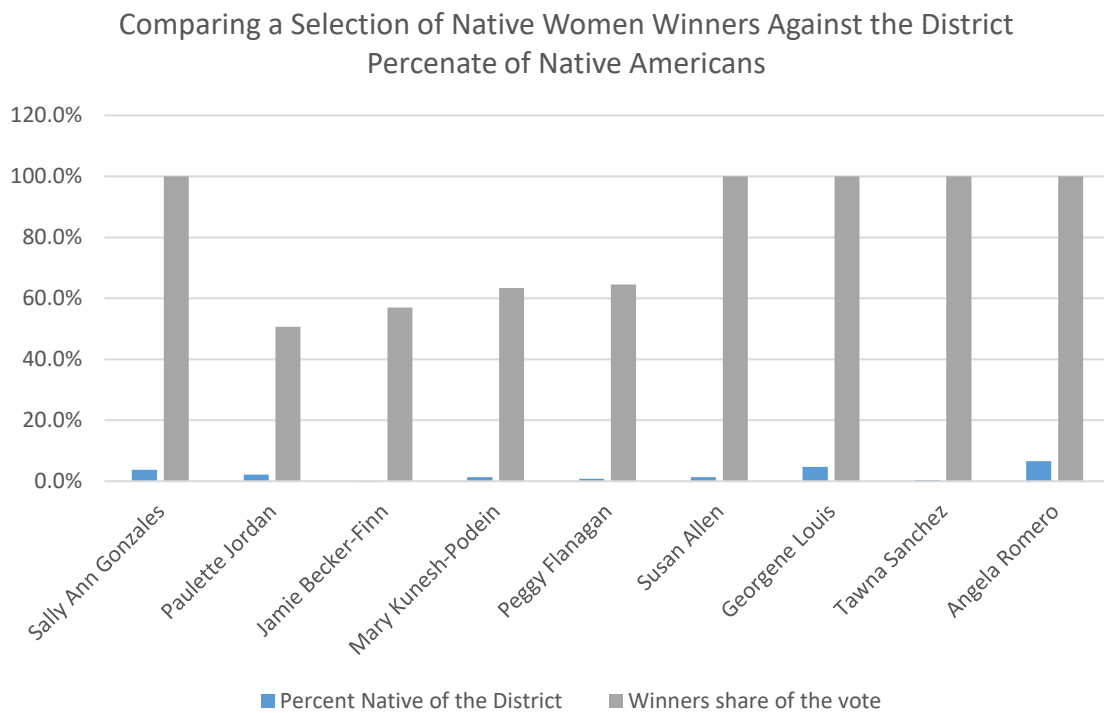


Table 3

Comparing Gender in Relation to Challenger

		The Gender of the Candidate		
		Male	Female	Total
Whether the Race Had a challenger	No Challenger	18	13	31
		50.0%	54.2%	51.7%
	Challenger	18	11	29
		50.0%	45.8%	48.3%
Total		36	24	60
		100%	100%	100%

Chi Square= .752, Sig= .797, Lambda= .000

In the top cross tabulation I input my excel document unto SPSS (a program that allows my data to be run under complex scenarios to better understand how my data can be presented). Table 3 is comparing the gender of the candidate to see if it has any effect of the race having a challenger or not. The data I ran was inconclusive because my chi-square was .752. This means that both men and women are being challenged or not challenged at an equally rate.

Table 4

Which Political Party will be most likely to have a challenger in a Native American race?

		Whether the Race		
		had a challenger	Total	
Political Party	Democrat	No Challenger 24 77.4%	Challenger 23 82.1%	47 79.7%
	Republican	7 22.6%	5 17.9%	12 20.3%
Total		31 100%	28 100%	59 100%

Chi Square= .653, Sig= .752, Lambda= .000

For the cross tabulation of table 4 I used the same data I ran through SPSS on the table 3. The only thing I did differently is that I ran the challenger to see if that had any effect on my political party. I found out that this too was insignificant as my chi-square is .653. This let me know that if the candidate was a democrat or republican, they will be challenged in both cases.

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