

PROMISES BROKEN OR KEPT; PRESIDENT BIDEN'S 2020
COMMITMENT AND ADMINISTRATIVE ACTIONS TOWARD
TRIBAL NATIONS THROUGH TRIBAL MEDIA ANALYSIS

by

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A THESIS

Presented to the Department of Political Science
and the Robert D. Clark Honors College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Arts

May 2024

An Abstract of the Thesis of

Aidan Wrobel for the degree of Bachelor of Arts
in the Department of Political Science to be taken June 2024

Title: Promises Broken or Kept; President Biden’s 2020 Commitment and Administrative
Actions Toward Tribal Nations Through Tribal Media Analysis

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Native Americans have endured centuries of systemic discrimination from the United States Federal Government, including severe voter disenfranchisement, and yet mobilized to the polls in an unprecedented turnout to elect Joseph Biden for presidency in 2020. This thesis explores themes of historical oppression, mobilization motivators, and presidential powers to understand President Biden’s commitment to upholding tribal self-governance and Nation-to-Nation relationships in his 2020 campaign. The study examines general attitudes in Native communities toward President Biden’s administrative actions through the analysis of tribal media to determine if Native Americans will return to the polls for President Biden in the 2024 presidential election. Utilizing the NewsBank database, articles were pulled from two tribal media sources; the Navajo Times and Indian Country Today. This thesis utilized discourse analysis to assess language and the mention of specific legislation to deduce generally positive or negative sentiments regarding President Biden’s action or inaction relating to tribal concerns. This study revealed an overwhelmingly positive sentiment regarding President Joe Biden’s fulfillment of campaign promises and dedication to Tribal Nations indicating support for his re-election campaign in 2024 in relation to his tribal commitments.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my thesis committee, Professor Alison Gash and Professor Ellen Fitzpatrick, for guiding me through this research process; helping me refine my interests, providing me with essential resources, and communicating immense encouragement and support. I would like to thank Gabriele Hayden, the Head of Data Services at the University of Oregon's Knight Library, for assisting me in the formulation of my research approach and methods. I would like to extend my gratitude to Professor Michael Moffitt for being an influential educator in my academic career, inspiring the union of authenticity and compassion with research. Further, I would like to thank Professor Carol Stabile, Dean of the Robert D. Clark Honors College, for her endless kindness and wisdom throughout my time in the Honors College. Lastly, I would like to express my love and gratitude to my partner, friends, and family who have provided me with immense moral support during this academic pursuit. Thank you to my family for conveying sincere interest in my research, my roommates and partner for lifting me above my doubts, and my friends who sat with me in the library for hours on end. This research would not have been remotely as rewarding and fulfilling if it were not for the countless supportive people in my life cheering me on.

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Introduction and Research Questions

Introduction

In the 2020 Presidential Election, the United States witnessed an unprecedented voter turnout for the Native American demographic. The historic turnout raises the questions of what historical governmental systems of oppression have impacted voter participation in Native American communities, and what elements motivated voters to mobilize to the polls and elect President Joe Biden. This thesis breaks down the historical framework that objected Tribal Nations to disenfranchisement, neglect, and brutality, identifying the everchanging relationship between tribal governments and the United States federal government. The research further identifies the modern impacts of governmental oppression; institutional discrimination, disproportionate health consequences, excessive unemployment, voter suppression, and more. Voter suppression presents a severe concern in tribal communities, resulting in the governmental silencing of native perspectives. The pattern of silencing native voices highlights the significance of turnout in the 2020 Presidential Election.

President Joe Biden's 2020 campaign outlined a clear dedication to Native Americans and Tribal Nations. His plan detailed commitments to strengthen healthcare access and quality, address the climate crisis, and invest in protection, education, and community development for tribes. Once elected, President Biden passed executive orders to increase federal resources for native communities and conservation efforts for tribal land. The bulk of this study includes a discourse analysis of tribal media to determine whether tribal members have responded positively or negatively to Biden's administrative action, specifically regarding his 2020 campaign promises. The analysis pulls data from two tribal outlets; the Navajo Times and Indian Country Today. The Native American population swung Arizona in favor of President Biden,

ultimately helping him secure the presidential electoral victory. President Biden will need victories in swing states, including Arizona, in the upcoming presidential election. Considering the Navajo Times publishes articles for the Navajo Nation in Arizona, it is imperative to develop an understanding of a sense of content or dissatisfaction amongst Native Americans regarding President Biden's administrative actions. Determining the general attitude will indicate the likelihood of Native Americans returning to the polls and helping secure Biden the swing state in 2024. Indian Country Today is a news outlet that reaches native communities nationally, reporting on governmental actions broadly relevant to all native people and communities. Analyzing a national media outlet allows a broader understanding of widespread native perceptions.

Research Questions

Q1: What promises did President Joseph Biden make regarding tribal nations in his 2020 campaign for the presidency?

Q2a: Did Native American voter turnout in the 2020 election sway in favor of President Joe Biden?

Q2b: If the Native American community primarily voted for President Joseph Biden, what were their motivations for mobilization?

Q3: Did tribal media report on President Joseph Biden generally negatively or positively throughout his administration regarding his commitment to tribal nations?

Q4: What do the general attitudes represented in tribal media suggest about Native American voter turnout in the 2024 presidential election?

Chapter One: Theoretical Background

Historical Framework

The battle between tribal governments and the United States government's definition of tribal sovereignty and a tribe's right to self-governance has been fought since the emergence of American "discovery." To better understand President Joe Biden's commitment to tribal self-governance and rebuilding nation-to-nation relationships, it is imperative to analyze key moments in history that define the relationship between the United States government and tribal governments, specifically related to authority, jurisdiction, and self-determination. The Constitution of the United States contains a section commonly referred to as the Indian Commerce Clause. This clause identifies Indian Tribes as a separate entity with which the government must regulate commerce, ultimately recognizing that native tribes possess inherent authority over their nation.¹ Considering tribes had governed themselves for millennia before American settlement, tribal definitions of self-governance consisted of jurisdiction over their economy, infrastructure, education, cultural resources, and health care.² The United States, however, had a perception of tribal self-determination that shifted throughout the decades, reflected in the passing and overturning of laws.

Federal Indian Law laid a framework for understanding the relationship between the United States branches of government and tribes as governing nations. The foundational principles of Federal Indian Law stem from three 1820s-1830s Supreme Court cases ruled by Chief Justice John Marshall, referred to as the Marshall Trilogy, in addition to Andrew Jackson's Indian Removal Policy. The first case of the Marshall Trilogy was *Johnson v. M'Intosh*,

¹ Price, "Research Guides."

² d'Errico, "Native Americans in America," 9.

establishing the Doctrine of Discovery; the legalization of conquest and colonization. The case permitted the United States government to extinguish tribal titles to land while simultaneously recognizing tribes as separate political entities and governments.³ The second case, *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia*, pertained to issues of the federal government's jurisdiction over foreign and domestic states. Georgia declared tribes as foreign states, whereas the Supreme Court ruled tribes were instead domestic dependent states.⁴ *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* set a precedent of an enforceable federal moral obligation to tribal governments, referred to as the federal trust relationship, granting Georgia the jurisdiction to remove tribes from their land forcibly. The last case in the Marshall Trilogy was *Worcester v. Georgia*, a case that reversed the ruling in *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia*, determining states lacked jurisdiction and possessed limited authority over tribes.⁵ The Marshall Trilogy established Federal Indian Law, declaring tribes as individual political entities within the confines of the United States federal government.

The additional policy that significantly shaped Federal Indian Law and precedent was President Andrew Jackson's Indian Removal Act of 1830. The Indian Removal Policy sought to remove and relocate Eastern Native American tribes to the West instead of focusing on assimilating tribes to Western civilization. Tribes, at the time of the policy, practiced appeasement with the federal government, recognizing the federal government's trust relationship and moral obligation of protection.⁶ Jackson's relocation was supposedly voluntary; however, he manipulated the tribe's reliance on federal protection and threatened to strip away

³ Strommer and Osborne, "The History, Status, and Future of Tribal Self-Governance Under the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act," 9.

⁴ Strommer and Osborne, 11.

⁵ Strommer and Osborne, 12.

⁶ Office of the Historian, "Milestones in U.S. Foreign Relations."

federal preservation, ultimately forcibly removing tribal members from their land.⁷ The Cherokee Nation sued the state of Georgia in 1831, *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia*, in opposition to the attempts of removal. The Supreme Court did not grant sovereignty to tribes in *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia*, but one year later reversed their ruling in *Worcester v. Georgia*. President Andrew Jackson ignored the Court's ruling and pursued relocation of the Cherokee Nation. Federal troops and Georgia's state militia enforced the tribal nation's displacement to Oklahoma, resulting in the Trail of Tears; the identification of the extreme cultural upheaval and loss of life experienced by the Cherokee Nation in their forced movement west.

Following the Trail of Tears, the United States government oscillated in terms of federal definitions and recognition of tribal sovereignty. In 1871, Congress identified tribes as dependent nations under the jurisdiction of Congress and banned the creation and implementation of treaties, ultimately ending government-to-government relationships.⁸ The General Allotment Act of 1887, or Dawes Act, aimed to civilize tribal nations with individual allotment and titles of tribal land, stripping 90 million acres of land from tribes by 1934.⁹ The Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 sought to undo the damage and erasure caused by the Dawes Act, prohibiting allotment and attempting to revitalize tribal self-governance. Following the Reorganization Act, the United States entered the Termination era in the 1950s, ceasing the federal recognition of tribes. Under John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson's administration in the 1960s, they returned to embracing tribes and their right to self-determination. The Indian Civil Rights Act of 1968 granted protection to tribes and tribal members similar to that of the rights granted in the

⁷ Strommer and Osborne, 12.

⁸ "25 USC Ch. 3: AGREEMENTS WITH INDIANS."

⁹ Strommer and Osborne, 14.

U.S. Constitution.¹⁰ President Richard Nixon's administration ushered in a new era of Federal Indian Policy to put an end to federal policies destructive to tribal self-determination. Nixon increased funding for the Bureau of Indian Affairs, signed an act in favor of Indian Healthcare, and laid significant groundwork for tribal rights to land and self-governance.¹¹ The new era of Federal Indian Policy prompted legislation regarding tribal consultation, program operations, and general Native American welfare.

Modern Struggles and Voter Disenfranchisement

To this day, the United States Judiciary and Executive Branch struggle to define tribal sovereignty and accurately apply constitutional beliefs and legislative power regarding tribal self-governance. The history of governmental oppression combined with the current systemic forces of disenfranchisement have left Native American tribes with bare-bones support to uphold the welfare of their communities. North American Indigenous communities endure the most severe poverty experienced by any populous in the nation.¹² Additionally, Native Americans are more likely to be unemployed, experience more significant health issues and consequences, as well as face interpersonal and institutional discrimination. Tribal members who live on reservations confront housing crises, insufficient infrastructure, and severe complications with sanitation and access to water.¹³ Discrimination takes form in all aspects of tribal members' livelihoods; safety, health, education, and governmental institutions. A specific type of

¹⁰ U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, "Getting Uncle Sam to Enforce Your Civil Rights."

¹¹ Richard Nixon Foundation, "President Nixon."

¹² Sanchez and Foxworth, "Social Justice and Native American Political Engagement," 474.

¹³ Sanchez and Foxworth, 474.

disenfranchisement integral to the research of this paper is historical and current voter suppression of Native American voices. Having a better understanding of voter disenfranchisement will allow for a clearer picture of the significance of Native American voter mobilization for President Joe Biden in the 2020 presidential election.

According to many historians, there are two categories of voter suppression; first generation voter suppression and second-generation suppression. The first generation of voter suppression refers to the outright banning of minorities from voting and participating in elections.¹⁴ The second generation of voter suppression refers to the era after being granted the right to vote, the intentional discrimination, and limitations enlisted by local, state, and federal governments to prevent access to voting. The first generation of voter suppression for Native Americans did not end with the passing of the 15th Amendment to the Constitution in 1869, granting all citizens the right to vote in an election regardless of race. Native Americans were not permitted to vote based on lacking a status of citizenship. It was not until more than half of a century passed that Native Americans were recognized as American citizens in the passing of the 1924 Snyder Act, federally granting tribal members the right to vote in United States elections. Despite the ruling, states refused to acknowledge federal recognition of Native Americans as citizens and sought ways to prevent Native Americans from accessing the polls and ballot box. States opted for strict Voter ID laws, limiting accessibility and launching the second generation of voter suppression for tribal members to endure. Each state has the right to regulate voter laws and to suppress Native American voices, states would enact laws that placed a disproportionate burden on tribes and tribal members. These burdens have included proper identification that tribal members did not possess, voting polls long distances from reservations, proof of addresses

¹⁴ Schroedel and Aslanian, "Native American Vote Suppression," 2.

that did not have exact identification on reservations, poll taxes, and more. Tribes must have access to voting in elections considering the implications of federal policy on tribal land rights, resources, social services, government status, and jurisdiction. Despite the challenges of voting accessibility, Native Americans were incredibly influential in the 2018 and 2020 election cycles, mobilizing in unprecedented quantities.¹⁵ ad Native Americans have proven to be consequential electoral sub-groups because their vote behaved as determining factors in swing states in favor of President Joe Biden.

President Joe Biden's Campaign Promises

Throughout his campaign, President Joe Biden made multiple promises regarding Native Americans' rights to tribal sovereignty, safety from violence, representation, and land rights. A key document that outlined said goals for the Biden-Harris administration was titled the "Biden-Harris Plan for Tribal Nations."¹⁶ Within the first two paragraphs of the address, the administration acknowledged the necessity to rebuild the Nation-to-Nation relationships between the U.S. government and tribal governments, uphold the federal trust relationship, and empower self-governance for tribal communities. The document then provides a list identifying the eight missions attached to the Plan for Tribal Nations.

Strengthen the Nation-to-Nation relationship

Provide reliable, affordable, quality health care and address health disparities

¹⁵ National Congress of American Indians and Native American Rights Fund, 2021 Addendum to Obstacles at Every Turn.

¹⁶ "Biden-Harris Plan for Tribal Nations | Joe Biden for President."

Restore tribal lands, address climate change, and safeguard natural and cultural resources

Ensure Native communities are safer and tackle the crisis of violence against Native women, children, and the elderly

Expand economic opportunity and community development in Native communities

Invest in education and youth engagement

Meet obligations to and commemorate Native veterans

Ensure Native Americans can exercise their right to vote¹⁷

The document further outlines the paths in which the administration planned to address each mission. To strengthen the Nation-Nation relationship, the Biden-Harris administration promised to reinstate White House Tribal Nation Conferences, appoint Native Americans to high-level governmental positions to expand perspective in traditional governmental roles, strengthen self-governance, fulfill treaty and governmental obligations, as well as promote various forms of tribal consultation. The approaches the administration mentioned to ensure quality healthcare and address health disparities included the increased funding of the Indian Health Service, ensuring and pipelining access to healthcare and coverage, increasing educational understandings of Native health data, and expanding mental health treatment, awareness, and support. Under the category of the restoration of tribal land and addressing climate change the plan included securing reservation boundaries, protecting and conserving natural and cultural resources, in addition to consulting and partnering with tribes regarding the most pressing climate change matters for tribal land. To address violence endured by Native Americans and a lack of safety on tribal land the Biden-Harris plan includes expanding special criminal jurisdiction, increasing funding for tribal justice systems, and federal resources for

¹⁷ “Biden-Harris Plan for Tribal Nations.”

prevention and support for survivors of violence. To expand economic and community development the administration planned to invest in infrastructure, clean energy, housing, native small businesses, agriculture, and education. The administration sought to commemorate Native veterans by demonstrating respect and ending homelessness for the demographic, in addition to making resources for veterans more accessible to Native veterans. Lastly, the Biden-Harris Plan for Tribal Nations wanted to ensure the right for Native Americans to have an abundance of access to voting in all elections.

Mobilization for President Joe Biden

Native American Voting Bloc

To determine the statistics of Native American voter turnout in the 2020 election, data from the 2020 Election Eve Poll and the Census Bureau were utilized. The Election Eve Poll consists of twenty-two organizations convening to conduct a national multi-racial poll regarding election turnout. The research was conducted through telephone interviews and online surveys, collecting a total of 1,300 interviews with self-identified Native Americans. This research effort is the largest sample available regarding Native American turnout in the 2020 election.¹⁸ The data revealed that Native Americans are less likely to identify with a political party but lean towards the Democratic Party.¹⁹ In the 2020 election, 60% of Native American voters cast a vote for President Joe Biden. Native Americans who lived in more urban areas were more likely to vote for the Biden-Harris ticket. Additional data reveals that 57% of Native Americans were contacted by a political party, campaign, or community organization and encouraged to register

¹⁸ Sanchez and Foxworth, 481.

¹⁹ Koch, "American Indians Are Less Likely to Claim Identification with Major American Political Parties."

to vote or to vote for a specific candidate.²⁰ Data from the 2018 national election uncovered that 59% of Native American youth encouraged their friends and family to register to vote, 35% attended a demonstration or protest, and 27% of the youth volunteered for either a specific candidate or an organization dedicated to voter outreach.²¹ According to a report published by The Native American Rights Fund, NARF, the actual turnout of Native American voters in the 2020 presidential election could not be determined. The National Congress of American Indians had trouble measuring turnout and consequently could not calculate specific data.²² Despite a lack of concrete data representative of turnout, NARF declared Native American voters participated in the 2020 election at an unprecedented level of turnout. The organization credits the extraordinary work of advocates, litigation from tribal governments and members, as well as grassroots campaigns committed to voting rights education and voting assistance as the catalyst for increased turnout in 2020. Not only was it the work of external resources mobilizing Native Americans to vote, but the rise in overt social injustice against communities of color further mobilized Native Americans to the polls.

Motivations

Leading up to the historic turnout in the 2020 presidential election, three key motivators were inspiring Native Americans to take to the polls; land right restrictions under former President Donald Trump, disproportionate impacts of the Coronavirus pandemic on tribes, as well as increased state violence targeting black people in America. President Donald Trump's

²⁰ Sanchez, "What Might We Expect from Native American Voters in the Upcoming 2022 Election?"

²¹ Sanchez, "What Might We Expect."

²² Tucker, De León, and McCool, "Obstacles at Every Turn: Barriers to Political Participation Faced by Native American Voters."

administration proved to be concerned with business interests over the existence and protection of sacred tribal land. Throughout his term, Trump stripped away significant amounts of land from tribal national monuments, including Bears Ears and the Grand Staircase-Escalante in Utah.²³ Additionally, Trump approved pipeline projects that posed serious health consequences to surrounding tribal reservations, including the Dakota Access and Keystone Pipelines. He posed both restrictions of national monuments and approval of pipeline projects as decisions made in the nation's best interest. Projects that sacrificed tribal land under President Donald Trump's administration possessed qualities in favor of fossil fuel production and industrial enterprises.

The second notable motivator for Native American voter mobilization in the 2020 presidential election included the disproportionate impact of the Coronavirus pandemic on the Native American population. According to the Centers for Disease Control, Native Americans were roughly three times more likely to be infected with COVID-19 and five times more likely to be hospitalized as a result, in comparison to white Americans.²⁴ Further, the Social Vulnerability Index, utilized by public health officials and agencies, determined Native communities were more vulnerable to widespread disease in comparison to other demographics.²⁵ The assessment of social factors determined tribes and tribal members experienced a greater likelihood of exposure through their living or occupational circumstances, limited access to information regarding proper prevention strategies, as well as limited access to

²³ Penn-Roco, "Trump's Dismantling of the National Monuments: Sacrificing Native American Interests on the Altar of Business."

²⁴ Raifman and Raifman, "Disparities in the Population at Risk of Severe Illness From COVID-19 by Race/Ethnicity and Income."

²⁵ Hathaway, "American Indian and Alaska Native People."

COVID-19 testing and care.²⁶ The severe impacts of the pandemic highlighted an inequity endured by Native Americans in governmental healthcare and support, inspiring advocacy in tribes.

Lastly, Native American communities were called to action for the Black Lives Matter protests of 2020, inspiring further political action in the polls. Protests erupted in May of 2020, a pouring outrage regarding the brutal murder of a black man, George Floyd, committed by a Minneapolis police officer. The Black Lives Matter Movement organized protests nationwide, centering issues of systemic racism and police violence against citizens of color.²⁷ Similar to the experiences of Black Americans, Native Americans are the most likely demographic to experience police brutality and death at the hands of law enforcement. Tribal members joined protests in solidarity with combatting racial injustice and targeted violence against communities of color. Additionally, many indigenous organizations joined the movement, aiming to uplift and center Black voices and experiences.²⁸ The uprising in political action and participation before the presidential election in the Black Lives Matter protests encouraged Native Americans to vote in the election. Ultimately, the unprecedented turnout boils down to indigenous communities ensuring their voice would be heard and considered in federal government decision-making.

²⁶ Thakur et al., “The Structural and Social Determinants of the Racial/Ethnic Disparities in the U.S. COVID-19 Pandemic. What’s Our Role?”

²⁷ Reny and Newman, “The Opinion-Mobilizing Effect of Social Protest against Police Violence.”

²⁸ Belfi, “Native Solidarity with Black Lives Matter as Both Communities Confront Centuries-Long State Violence.”

Presidential Powers

Agenda Setting

To understand the significance in impact of electing a President of the United States for Tribal Nations, it is important to comprehend the President's role in agenda setting as well as the power of executive orders. Agenda setting is one of the most powerful and influential tools a President possesses during their administration. Presidential initiatives are more likely to advance in Congress in comparison to other proposals, significantly swaying policymaking and the hearing of legislation.²⁹ There is an abundance of scholarship that indicates the promises a president makes in their campaign, are issues then emphasized on congressional floors.³⁰ The cause for this influence is the president's power to focus the attention of the nation on specific issues, ultimately motivating Congress to actively represent their constituents by addressing the topics they deem significant. Tribal Nations have experienced harm and neglect from the federal government regarding legislation for centuries. A president who intends to set the agenda with policy in favor of tribal sovereignty and consultation is an incredibly useful advocate for Tribal Nations.

Executive Orders

An additional powerful tool granted to the President of the United States is the ability to enact policy through the passing of executive orders. An executive order is a presidential directive with the capacity to authorize constitutionally confined actions including; the reorganization of branches, establishment of policy, the interpretation and implementation of

²⁹ Rutledge and Larsen Price, "The President as Agenda Setter-in-Chief."

³⁰ Fagan, "Marching Orders?"

law, as well as altering regulatory processes.³¹ Executive orders can be issued as symbolic presidential declarations of intent or a route for presidents to pursue policy agendas aggressively. In the case of President Joe Biden, he has passed 138 executive orders during his administration so far. According to the Federal Registrar, twenty-three executive orders include the key terms, “Native American” or “Tribe.” Three of his executive orders mention “Native Americans” or “Tribal Nations” in the title of the order; “Reforming Federal Funding and Support for Tribal Nations To Better Embrace Our Trust Responsibilities and Promote the Next Era of Tribal Self-Determination,” “Improving Public Safety and Criminal Justice for Native Americans and Addressing the Crisis of Missing or Murdered Indigenous People,” and “White House Initiative on Advancing Educational Equity, Excellence, and Economic Opportunity for Native Americans and Strengthening Tribal Colleges and Universities.” The additional executive orders address issues such as environmental justice, accessibility in the federal workforce, strengthening healthcare, promoting voting, and more.³² The executive orders call on the government to require a myriad of actions including the reformation of federal processes to provide easier access to federal funding for tribes as well as requesting governmental agency coordination and flexibility with Tribal Nations. The promises made during President Joe Biden’s campaign motivated Native Americans to take to the polls. This thesis intends to determine whether Tribal Nations have received Joe Biden’s actions positively or negatively throughout his administration.

Swing States

The Native American voter turnout in the 2020 election was incredibly influential, specifically in swing states such as Arizona and Wisconsin. Some scholars determined the

³¹ Mayer, “Executive Orders and Presidential Power.”

³² “Search Results for Executive Orders by President Joe Biden Related to ‘Native American’ (01/01/2021 - 05/18/2024).”

turnout helped President Joe Biden secure his electoral victory.³³ Swing states are states in elections that do not consistently lean towards one political party and tend to flip back and forth between parties. Consequently, these states become strategic battlegrounds for running candidates to gain the required number of electoral votes to win. President Biden approached Arizona tribal leaders and campaigned for the tribes with the “Biden-Harris Plan for Tribal Nations.” This action highlights the decision of this research to focus on tribal media from the Navajo Nation, determining whether tribal members will return to the polls for Biden in his 2024 presidential campaign and help him secure the swing state of Arizona.

³³ Longmont and Albuquerque, “Celebrating the Native American Vote in the 2020 Election | First Nations Development Institute.”

Chapter Two: Study Overview

Purpose & Objective

The purpose of the study is to conduct a discourse analysis on specific tribal media sources to investigate general sentiments regarding President Joe Biden's commitment to Nation-to-Nation relationships throughout his term of presidency. When analyzing tribal media, there will be a focus on themes relevant to Biden's initial campaign promises regarding tribal nations. This research concerns media reactions to presidential action in addition to a president's fulfillment of campaign promises, and includes two different sources of tribal media; one newspaper source dedicated to covering primarily news relevant to their state and specific tribe, the Navajo Times of the Navajo Nation, as well as a national news source committed to documenting national news relating to Native American issues, Indian Country Today. Navajo Nation is a tribal nation that extends to the states of Utah, New Mexico, and Arizona.³⁴ As previously mentioned in the Theoretical Background of this thesis, Arizona was a key swing state that tribal members were able to help swing in favor of President Joe Biden in the 2020 presidential election. Analyzing media from Indian Country Today will hopefully provide widespread sentiments held by tribal members throughout the nation. It is significant to gauge and have a general understanding of attitudes represented in the Navajo Times as well as Indian Country Today to discuss predictions of Native American voter mobilization in the 2024 presidential election. Ultimately, the objective of this discourse analysis is to determine whether Tribal Nations think predominantly positively or negatively regarding President Joe Biden's

³⁴ "Navajo Nation, History."

administration, specifically his action or inaction regarding Nation-to-Nation relationships and upholding tribal sovereignty.

Hypothesis

The hypotheses for this research study stems from the understanding of historically broken promises and presidential administrations' failures to support tribal communities in the United States accurately. These hypotheses existed before conducting research for the Theoretical Background of this thesis.

H1a: Sentiments expressed in Navajo Times will primarily contain negative implications and perceptions of Joe Biden's presidency and administration.

H1b: The general attitude portrayed in Navajo Times will reflect the perception that President Joe Biden has not fulfilled his campaign promises.

H2a: Sentiments expressed in Indian Country Today will primarily contain negative implications and perceptions of Joe Biden's presidency and administration.

H2b: The general attitude portrayed in Indian Country Today will reflect the perception that President Joe Biden has not fulfilled his campaign promises.

H3: There will be language in the articles from both media sources that frequently appear, indicating general positive or negative sentiments.

Chapter Three: Methods

Discourse Analysis

The method utilized in this research is the qualitative process of discourse analysis. The definition of discourse analysis as a research method extends into vast interpretations and approaches, however, the overarching understanding is an analysis of the connection between language and social life to better comprehend the communication of ideas.³⁵ In a social science studies context, an example of discourse analysis includes the examination of public conversations to understand an issue being addressed. This approach is an exploration of general attitudes through what people are saying and how they are saying it, ultimately attempting to decode the meaning endowed throughout the conversation or text.³⁶ This method's significance is analyzing a wide range of narratives to understand lived experiences within a society or culture. The discourse analysis utilized in this research examines specific language and concepts mentioned in tribal media articles to establish general sentiments regarding President Joe Biden's administrative promises and actions.

Research Design

This research was conducted through the NewsBank Inc. Database, under Access World News - Historical and Current / All Databases. In the “Advanced Search” of this database, three alternating keywords and date ranges specific to President Joe Biden’s administration were employed. For Navajo Times, the first keyword was, “Navajo Times,” under the selected field “Source.” The second keyword was, “Biden,” under the selected field “Lead/ First Paragraph.”

³⁵ Johnstone and Andrus, *Discourse Analysis*.

³⁶ Kanazawa, *Research Methods for Environmental Studies*.

The third keyword alternated between three categories. When determining the categories for the research, President Biden's campaign promises and the themes that overlapped best with the motivations for voter mobilization in Native American communities were referred to often. The three issues that were both guaranteed in Biden's administrative plan for tribal nations and prominent motivators towards the polls boiled down to; restoration of tribal land, healthcare, and protection for Native American communities. To have keywords for these categories, there was a simplification of the themes into one or two words that could then be entered into the search engine. For the restoration of tribal land, the keywords "land" and "restore" were utilized. For healthcare, the keyword "health" resulted in a significant number of articles. Lastly, regarding the protection of Native American communities, the keywords "violence" and "woman" were inputted. For the alternating third keyword, the word was under the selected field "All Text." Lastly, the date range was between the years 2020 and 2024, covering the entirety of President Biden's administration up until the current date. For Indian Country Today, the method was identical to the research for the Navajo Times, except for the keyword under the selected field "Source." In place of "Navajo Times" under "Source," it was instead "Indian Country Today."

To conduct this discourse analysis, the entirety of each article was read to determine whether the article leaned "positive," "negative," or was entirely "unrelated" to President Biden and the specific theme. It is important to note that any article published before President Biden's election was categorized as "unrelated." For each article, extensive notes were taken on the exact language indicative of positive or negative attitudes toward President Biden. Additionally, notes contained specific legislation passed or being pushed by Biden's administration. This research compares President Biden's fulfillment of campaign promises and executive orders.

Based on the language and discussion of legislation, the articles were categorized under “positive” or “negative” and capable of determining the general sentiments of President Joe Biden’s actions and inaction in tribal communities.

Chapter Four: Results

Access World News - Historical and Current - All Databases - News Bank

Main search: “Insert News Source” under the category Source

Date Range: 2020-2024

Key Term: “Biden,” specifically in “Lead/First Paragraph”

Key Term: “Insert Alternating Keyword” in “All Text”

Categories	Navajo Times	Indian Country Today
Restoration of Tribal Land	Keywords: Land Positive: 58% Negative: 21% Unrelated: 21%	Keywords: Land Positive: 61% Negative: 11% Unrelated: 28%
	Keywords: Restore Positive: 50% Negative: 25% Unrelated: 25%	Keywords: Restore Positive: 50% Negative: 25% Unrelated: 25%
Healthcare	Keywords: Health Positive: 62% Negative: 10% Unrelated: 28%	Keywords: Health Positive: 55% Negative: 20% Unrelated: 25%
Protection for Native Communities	Keywords: Violence Positive: 67% Negative: 0% Unrelated: 33%	Keywords: Violence Positive: 50% Negative: 13% Unrelated: 37%
	Keywords: Woman Positive: 67% Negative: 0% Unrelated: 33%	Keywords: Woman Positive: 40% Negative: 20% Unrelated: 40%

Table 1

Discussion

The initial analysis and discussion of the study are broken down into three categories of the themes utilized to conduct the research; Restoration of Tribal Land, Healthcare, and Protection for Native Communities.

Restoration of Tribal Land

For the database of the Navajo Times, the search engine, under the specific requirements of the search, produced 24 articles under the keyword “Land” and 8 articles under the keyword “Restore.” Under “Land,” 14 articles were positive, 5 were negative, and 5 were unrelated. The 8 articles under “Restore” were categorized as 4 positives, 2 negative, and 2 unrelated. The compilation of sources published by Indian Country Today in the NewsBank database produced 26 articles. For the keyword “Land,” there were 18 articles; 11 positives, 2 negative, and 5 unrelated. For the keyword “Restore,” there were 8 articles; 4 positives, 2 negative, and 2 unrelated. The determining factor of positive or negative sentiments relied on the analysis of language and mentioning legislation, speeches, summits, etc. in favor of tribal sovereignty or opposition to President Joe Biden’s campaign commitments. In terms of positive language, many articles utilized phrases such as “monumental, victory, commitment, healing, historic and unprecedented.” Each phrase used to comment on an action committed by Biden, or his administration indicated general positive impacts on tribal communities.

The use of language such as “monumental”, “historical”, and “unprecedented” suggested President Joe Biden has been enacting significant changes that tribes have not experienced under the United States federal government. Indian Country Today’s article, “Biden Designates Avi Kwa Ame a National Monument,” quotes Fort Mojave Indian Tribal Chairman Timothy Williams when discussing the unprecedented nature of President Biden’s commitment to

tackling the climate crisis and providing opportunities for tribal communities. "Under his leadership, we have a seat at the table, and we are seeing an unprecedented era and opportunity for our tribal communities." Avi Kwa Ame, or Spirit Mountain, is considered sacred land to the Mojave people, Hopi, Chemehuevi Paiute, and Yuman tribes. Under the Antiquities Act, President Biden declared governmental protection for over 500,000 acres of land surrounding Avi Kwa Ame in Nevada. President Biden's proclamation detailed Avi Kwa Ame as an area with diverse scientific and natural resources, land significant to Tribal Nations' creation stories, and a living landscape that possesses "historical, traditional, cultural, and spiritual significance."³⁷ The governmental proclamation ensures the land cannot be dispositioned, sold, or subjected to mining or mineral and geothermal leasing. Ultimately, the proclamation guarantees governmental and institutional respect for this sacred land, protecting tribal access to cultural tradition and knowledge.

The word "commitment" appeared in many articles regarding land rights about President Joe Biden upholding his commitments in his 2020 presidential campaign. The Navajo Times published an article titled, "Biden Designates National Monument Near Bidáá' Ha'azt'i'," describing Biden's proclamation to establish roughly one million acres of land under the Baaj Nwaavjo I'tah Kukveni Ancestral Footprints of the Grand Canyon National Monument. The article identifies the proclamation as a step in fulfilling one of Biden's earliest executive orders to restore 30% of the nation's land and water by 2030. The "Executive Order on Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad" positioned the climate crisis at the forefront of the United States' foreign policy and national security. The executive order outlined goals and policy plans to effectively tackle the crisis, including tribal consultation and climate diplomacy regarding

³⁷ The White House, "A Proclamation Establishing the Avi Kwa Ame National Monument."

issues of conservation, rebuilding infrastructure and sustainable economic practices.³⁸ Additional evidence of positive sentiments toward President Biden in this article included the mention of tribal members and leaders joining Biden for the ceremony and participating in acts of tribal consultation. Articles that indicated negative sentiments about Biden's presidential action consisted of concepts of dissatisfaction rather than specific language. Articles deemed negative contained issues of calling on President Biden to act or fulfill his campaign promises, addressing lengths of time of inaction, and a lack of proper tribal consultation.

Healthcare

In the database regarding the Navajo Times, 29 articles were produced under the keyword "Health." A total of 18 articles out of the 29 were labeled positive, three were negative, and 8 were unrelated. For Indian Country Today, the database produced 20 articles; 11 positive, 4 negative, and 5 unrelated. The most common topics discussed in the Navajo Times and Indian Country Today were federal funding for native healthcare and governmental COVID-19 responses. President Biden pushed for two key pieces of legislation that significantly impacted Tribal Nations positively regarding health; the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and the American Rescue Plan. The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act secured \$1.2 trillion for infrastructure and transportation development. The act set aside \$11 billion in federal investment for Indian Country, the largest investment in Tribal Nations, to help address climate resiliency, healthcare funding, transportation, and better-developed sanitation facilities. Specifically, the Act will enable Tribal Nations to repair roads and bridges, develop ports and inland ports for the efficient and safe travel of people and goods, and funding for freshwater fish passage.³⁹ The

³⁸ The White House, "Executive Order on Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad."

³⁹ U.S. Department of Transportation, "Fact Sheet: Bipartisan Infrastructure Law Will Deliver for Tribal Nations."

American Rescue Plan addressed COVID-19's health and economic repercussions by investing \$20 billion in tribal governments with an additional \$4.5 billion allocation to native healthcare, housing, and the expansion of educational resources. The American Rescue Plan aimed to maintain vital public services in Tribal Nations, uphold tribal economies, investing in Native essential workers, and sanitation infrastructure.⁴⁰ Both the Navajo Times and Indian Country Today have articles that detail the profound impact these pieces of legislation have had on tribal communities. The sentiment consistently reiterates President Biden fulfilling his commitment to upholding tribal sovereignty. The articles that leaned negatively regarding President Biden and healthcare discussed issues of pipeline projects and the declaration of the end of the COVID-19 pandemic. The overwhelming attitude was an appreciation for Biden's administration focusing on addressing the health concerns of Tribal Nations.

Protection for Native Communities

The data for the category of Protection for Native Communities is divided between two keywords; "Violence" and "Woman." The Navajo Times had 9 articles under "Violence"; 6 positive, 0 negative, and 3 unrelated. For the term "Woman," the database found 6 articles; 4 positive, 0 negative, and 2 unrelated. Indian Country Today produced 8 articles for "Violence"; 4 positive, 1 negative, and 3 unrelated. The database found 5 articles in Indian Country Today under "Woman"; 2 positive, 1 negative, and 2 unrelated. These keywords resulted in a smaller pool of data to analyze regarding attitudes toward President Joe Biden's success or lack thereof in addressing violence in Native American communities. Articles from the Navajo Times and Indian Country Today primarily center on the reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act, the American Rescue Plan, and the representation of female Native Americans in

⁴⁰ U.S. Department of the Treasury, "Assistance for Tribal Governments."

government positions. According to the Navajo Times' article, "Violence Against Women Act Bolsters Protections for Tribes," the act protects against domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking. Specific to reservations and tribal governments, the act grants tribal courts jurisdiction over non-Native perpetrators of sexual violence. The act increases funds for services and support for survivors. The article elaborates that this act provides the support guaranteed in President Biden's executive order, "Improving Public Safety and Criminal Justice for Native Americans and Addressing the Crisis of Missing or Murdered Indigenous People." The executive order outlines comprehensive law enforcement, intervention, support services, and prevention. The White House has reported a decline in incidents of domestic violence and sexual assault in Native communities since the initial passing of the Violence Against Women Act in 1994.⁴¹ The article claimed the 2022 reauthorization of the act has empowered Native women to leave abusive situations and seek a path of justice and healing. The negative articles from Indian Country Today pertain to issues of violence regarding land rights and dangerous pipeline projects. All articles that directly relate to the protection of Native communities from abuse include positive attitudes toward President Biden's actions.

Evaluating the Hypotheses

The first hypothesis theorized the Navajo Times would primarily report articles with negative sentiments regarding President Joe Biden's administrative actions and conclude a failure to fulfill his campaign promises. The second hypothesis theorized a similar pattern in the data from Indian Country Today. Both hypotheses stemmed from the historical understanding of governmental institutions and figures tendencies to break promises or struggle achieving political success because of severe polarization. Research for the Theoretical Background, however,

⁴¹ Kristt, "Violence Against Women Act Bolsters Protections for Tribes."

began to indicate President Joe Biden possessed dedication and perseverance regarding Native American issues. Although the President undoubtedly cannot fulfill every promise made during his 2020 campaign, he has evidently dedicated extreme attention to tribal consultation and upholding the trust responsibility relationship between nations.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to determine the general attitude of Native American communities toward President Joe Biden's administrative actions regarding his 2020 campaign promises to Tribal Nations. In recent elections, Native Americans have proved to be a powerful and significant voting bloc. With motivations ranging from land rights restrictions, disproportionate infections of the COVID-19 pandemic, and a rise in social protests against police brutality and systemic racism, Native Americans had an unprecedented voter turnout for the 2020 election. President Biden had campaigned to Tribal Nations, promising to enact his "Biden-Harris Plan for Tribal Nations." The plan addressed many issues endured by Native communities including a lack of federal tribal consultation, a weak trust responsibility relationship between nations, and limitations to self-governance and jurisdiction. Native Americans took to the polls to elect Joe Biden to the presidency, swaying victories in essential swing states like Arizona and Wisconsin.⁴² The Native American voting bloc tipped the electoral scales in favor of President Joe Biden. The significance of this research was to determine whether Native Americans felt President Biden had fulfilled his campaign promises to infer if they would return to the polls for his re-election.

The discourse analysis of tribal media indicated that the general sentiment towards President Joe Biden is positive. Specifically, language that repeatedly emerged throughout the articles communicated themes of graciousness, relief, and optimism. This research, although clear in results, provides a rudimentary understanding of Native perspectives and opinions.

⁴² National Congress of American Indians and Native American Rights Fund, 2021 Addendum to Obstacles at Every Turn.

There is limited scholarship regarding Native Americans and political perceptions and participation. Moving forward, this research should expand into various forms of tribal media across the nation including; smaller newspapers, blogs, podcasts, social media, etc. Although the databases contained tens of thousands of articles published by the Navajo Times and Indian Country Today, the specific sorting of data and keywords limited the outcome of articles. This research is a step in the direction of increasing scholarship and collaboration with Native perspectives and it must continue.

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