

**Women's Evolving Role in Tribal Politics:
Native Women Leaders in 21 Southwestern Indian Nations**

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Introduction

American Indian women have a rich history of political involvement in the life of their communities. Their struggles to attain tribal sovereignty, preserve their cultures, and manage native lands and natural resources are unique to their status as colonized indigenous peoples. As tribal leaders, Native women have continually challenged federal, state, and tribal authorities to formulate and/or reform policy for the benefit of their communities.¹ For example, as Chief of the Seminole people, Alice Brown Davis fought the federal government to maintain native control over Indian education and to retain tribal lands.² Since the 1970s, an increasing number of women have held a variety of elected or appointed positions in their tribal governments. The transition of some leaders from community activist to tribal official has been documented among the Salt River Pima and Maricopa and the Seminoles as well as among several New Mexico tribes.³

The role and influence of American Indian women is increasingly gaining prominence in the governance of Indian nations. In some Indian nations women are being elected as chief executive officer where they serve as Chair, President, or Governor of the Tribal Council or Tribal Business Council. Women have also been appointed or elected to Vice-Chair, Vice-President, Secretary, or Treasurer of their tribe. Native women's leadership is seen most frequently in the legislative branch and in the executive where they serve in the administration of tribal governments.⁴ This is particularly evident in the Southwestern United States where Apache, Shoshone, Paiute, and Navajo women hold key policymaking positions within their nations' executive, legislative, and judicial branches. Recently, and a "first" in New Mexico, a tribal Governor sought and obtained state status for her tribe in order to establish water quality standards and protect her pueblo's natural resources.⁵ The majority of the 20 Pueblo

nations, however, prohibit women from formally participating in tribal politics. This demonstrates the tremendous variation that exists among the forms of governance and political practices of Indian nations in the United States, despite their common status as sovereign, yet domestic dependents of the federal government.

This study explores the role of Southwestern Native American women leaders in tribal politics, and their right to participate equally with men in their nations' governance. Using data from personal interviews with officials from 21 Indian nations in Arizona, New Mexico, Nevada, and Utah I address the following research questions:

- What are the characteristics of women in tribal leadership?
- What role do these leaders play in tribal politics? Why do they participate?
- What are their political goals? What are their policy priorities?
- What sorts of constraints to participation do women face?
- What institutional or social conditions enable women to hold formal positions of political leadership within their tribes?

By studying the political participation of American Indian women leaders we can gain a greater understanding of their political goals, their contributions to their communities, and the conditions that lead to women's equal and legitimate involvement in tribal politics.

Women's Historical Role in Native Communities

Today, of the more than 550 federally recognized Indian nations, 21 are located in Arizona, 24 in New Mexico, 26 in Nevada, and four in Utah. Archeological remains date native peoples as living in the Southwest as far back as 10,000 B.C.⁶ Relative newcomers such as the Apaches and Navajos migrated to the region around 1400 A.D. Prior to European contact, the aboriginal people of Southwestern North America lived in bands as hunters-gatherers and in horticultural or agricultural communities distinguished

largely by female-male reciprocity and complementarity.⁷ Individuals were ascribed gender specific roles and responsibilities, which in many cases were based on egalitarian norms that included shared decision-making.⁸ While the lifestyles of these tribes varied, for example, Athabascans were hunters-gatherers and Pueblos were agriculturalists, their cultures were similarly characterized by social and religious systems in which a matriarchal figure held a central position.⁹ Such female-centered systems contributed to women having political clout, personal autonomy, and to their exercising authority even where their sex was excluded from holding formal governmental positions such as that of War Chief or Medicine Man.¹⁰ Many of these societies were matrilineal and/or matrilocal and these arrangements may have facilitated women's holding valued economic, religious, and/or social positions within their tribe.¹¹ For example, in matrilineal and matrilocal societies such as the Navajo, women owned and controlled wealth including dwellings, food supplies, tools, livestock, and other resources.¹² In a great many indigenous societies, women made decisions that affected the survival and well-being of their communities. Women and men played different yet complementary roles, exercising power over aspects of tribal life for which they were uniquely responsible. In some tribes, such as the Tohono O'odham and the Yaqui (Yoeme), women controlled the use of community resources such as food or they oversaw the preservation of their culture.¹³

In the sixteenth century, Spanish conquest of the region led to significant changes in the lives of the native residents. The goal of the *conquistadores*, like that of the English on the east coast of North America, was to expand the crown's territories for the purpose of enriching Spain's influence and wealth as a European power. The plunder of New Spain's natural resources was facilitated by the exploitation of the area's inhabitants through their simultaneous enslavement and forced conversion to

Catholicism. Gradually, these factors contributed to corruption of the cultural traditions, social practices, and religious belief systems of the peoples of the Southwest.¹⁴

Patriarchal institutions and social systems supplanted those previously indigenous forms. The social and economic transformation from egalitarian or ranked relations of production to pre-industrial stratified societies had far-reaching consequences for native communities resulting in the degradation of the role and status of aboriginal women, in particular.¹⁵ Many of the tasks traditionally assigned by sex in Indian communities were altered by Roman Catholic missionaries intent on imposing their patriarchal values. In pre-colonial native societies particular activities such as homebuilding, weaving, and pottery making defined the gendered roles of women and men and served to maintain a complementarity between the sexes. As their roles were modified, and the balance between women and men's access to and control of resources was upset, the status and autonomy of women was affected negatively.¹⁶ Furthermore, native social structures that generally valued knowledge, skill, and maturity - qualifications obtainable by both sexes - were replaced by a rigid colonial hierarchy based on race, ethnicity, ancestry, occupation, ownership of land, religion, and sex.¹⁷

In 1848, as a result of the Mexican-American war, control over the region passed to the United States. American colonization soon prompted dramatic new social, economic, and political changes for the indigenous peoples of the Southwest, including an assault on native people, their culture, religious beliefs, livelihood, customs, language, and way of life. The United States sought to assimilate the native population by displacing many of the tribes to reservations, reducing severely their land base and indigenous food sources, and removing Indian children to government and mission boarding schools, forbidding the speaking of aboriginal languages, and prohibiting Indian people their traditional religious practices.¹⁸ Within the new American political system, Indian men and essentially all women were disenfranchised. Native peoples, in

particular, faced a long, hard battle to secure even basic civil rights.¹⁹ They were denied continually the right to participate in state and local politics. For example, although Congress made all Indians citizens of the United States in 1924, New Mexico, Arizona, and Utah continued to deny American Indians voting rights. These states claimed that since Indian tribes and reservations were subject to federal jurisdiction, Indians were not citizens of the state and, therefore, were not eligible to vote in state and local elections. It was not until 1948, after lengthy litigation, that Indians were finally given the franchise within these states.

The IRA and Modern Tribal Government

In 1934, the U.S. Congress passed the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) under which tribes were induced to organize with written constitutions and charters of incorporation such as those granted to business enterprises. The IRA, also known as the Wheeler-Howard Act, compelled Indian nations to adopt an organizational structure approved by the U.S. government but contrary to traditional forms of native governance that were largely participatory in nature, generally inclusive of both sexes, and frequently based on consensus decision-making. In effect, the federally sanctioned "reforms" imposed a structural hierarchy upon tribes and actually limited the political participation of tribal members, who, in many cases, had previously enjoyed a greater role in self-governance. In particular, women from traditionally egalitarian tribes found their political influence diminished. Native scholars argue that the IRA was "designed to undercut the unity marking traditional native societies, replacing it with a permanent divisiveness," and that "grassroots native resistance to the law was immediate, outspoken, and sustained."²⁰

Even with the significant cultural, social, and political changes that resulted from the IRA, tribes willing to comply with the federal requirements gained certain

advantages. A complete reversal of previous U.S. government policy, the IRA provided for the return of unsold allotted lands to tribes, established day schools on reservations instead of off-reservation boarding schools, encouraged the practice of traditional cultural activities, and recognized the authority of tribal governments promoting both self-determination and economic development. Amendments to the Indian Reorganization Act have included provisions that allow certain rights of home rule for Indian nations, the conservation and development of Indian lands and resources, the right of Indian nations to form business and other organizations, establishment of a credit system for Indians, and provision of vocational education for Indians. While these measures returned a degree of autonomy to Indian nations, the loss of their traditional forms of governance created an imbalance in the distribution of power within many tribes, further altering their indigenous cultures.

Despite the U.S. government's efforts to assimilate Indian nations into the dominant culture, over 550 tribes continue to function as sovereign nations today. In fact, tremendous variation exists with regard to both their forms of governance and political practices.²¹ Some tribes have constitutions while others have tribal codes similar to a system of municipal ordinances, which carry the force of law. Although many Indian nations adopted elements of the IRA, others did not. For example, most Pueblos continue using their traditional theocratic forms of government and/or retain significant features of the Spanish colonial system of governance. Ironically, because of the blurring of religion and politics, numerous Pueblos continue to exclude women (and lay men) from participation in tribal politics. In the case of the Pueblo tribes, traditional religious practices have provided the justification for maintaining exclusionary political systems up to the present. In many of these theocratic or "traditional" Pueblos, the civil rights and civil liberties guaranteed to citizens of the United States are not recognized by, nor are they extended to, tribal members. While these limitations on the rights of individuals

affect both women and men, they especially impact women.²² Of the 20 Pueblos, seven have written constitutions and eight allow for varying degrees of women's participation in tribal government. A smaller number currently allow women to hold political office including such policymaking positions as governor, lieutenant governor, and council member.²³ In most Pueblos, however, women are prohibited from attending tribal council meetings, from voting (where tribal elections exist), and from holding tribal office. Their disenfranchisement has discouraged many Indian women from seeking public office, either at the tribal or non-tribal level. Other women, such as some of the native leaders interviewed for this project, have found opportunities for political participation in the administration of tribal government.

Design of the Research Study

Twenty-one women holding leadership positions in their tribal government were invited to participate in this study. The leaders, from eight Indian nations in Arizona, eight in New Mexico, three in Nevada, and two in Utah were interviewed in July and August of 2001. Representing 21 different Indian nations, the leaders were Apache, Dine (Navajo), O'odham, Paiute, Pima, Pueblo, Shoshone, Yoeme (Yaqui), or Yavapai. It is important to point out that generalization to the larger population of Native women leaders across the United States is not intended, nor would it be appropriate, since this group is small and the individuals were not randomly selected.

Interviews were conducted in person, most often at the leaders' tribal office, and lasted, on average, one and one-half hours. I used an interview guide as the basis of my questions and recorded responses on audiocassette and by taking handwritten notes. Many of the leaders expressed concern that their responses remain confidential, therefore, to protect their identity, and so that no quote is directly attributable to any

individual, pseudonyms have been used throughout. Table 1 lists each leader’s nation, the tribes comprising it, and the state in which the tribe is located.

TABLE 1
Indian Nations Represented by the Leaders

<u>Indian Nation</u>	<u>Peoples</u>	<u>State</u>
Ak-Chin	O’odham-Pima	AZ
Ft. McDowell	Yavapai-Mohave-Apache	AZ
Hopi	Pueblo	AZ
Navajo	Dine (Navajo)	AZ/NM
Pascua Yaqui	Yaqui	AZ
Salt River	Pima-Maricopa	AZ
Tohono O’odham	O’odham	AZ
Yavapai-Apache	Yavapai-Apache	AZ
Goshute	Shoshone-Paiute	UT
NW Shoshone	Shoshoni	UT
Duck Valley	Shoshone-Paiute	NV
Fort McDermitt	Paiute-Shoshone	NV
Pyramid Lake	Paiute	NV
Jicarilla Apache	Apache	NM
Acoma	Pueblo	NM
Isleta	Pueblo	NM
Laguna	Pueblo	NM
Pojoaque	Pueblo	NM
San Felipe	Pueblo	NM
Santa Ana	Pueblo	NM
Zuni	Pueblo	NM

*The Navajo Nation, although extending into three states, is located largely within Arizona.

The interview guide was designed to accomplish numerous objectives. First, information was collected about each participant’s demographic characteristics, the history of their political involvement, and their current life situation. Second, leaders were asked about their political socialization (how they learned about and became interested in politics), their motives for participation, and their ideological orientation (their political philosophy or worldview). Third, leaders identified their political goals, public policy

agenda, and role in the policymaking process. Lastly, I inquired about barriers to women's political participation and strategies for women's entry into tribal leadership and governance.

The use of loosely structured interviews administered in person and employing open-ended questions, provided project participants with an active role in the research process by encouraging them to develop their own answers and to pursue themes they felt were relevant.²⁴ This interviewing technique allows the researcher to seek explanations from respondents, to ask "why" and "how," to backtrack, or to pursue new directions of inquiry with the research participant.²⁵ The researcher then compares and contrasts the data looking for specific patterns of interrelationship among many categories. The patterns discovered assist in the development of theory and provide an understanding of the phenomena under investigation.²⁶ This is particularly helpful for researchers working in new fields of inquiry such as this, where little if any theory currently exists.

Discussion of the Research Findings

Leaders' Demographic Characteristics

Table 2 reveals the leaders' demographic characteristics including their length of community service, use of a language other than English at home, level of education, age, and domestic status. Community service was defined as either paid or unpaid work, which directly benefited the community. The average length of community service was 20 years, although it varied considerably with leaders reporting from between five to 42 years of public service experience. The great majority of the leaders were bilingual in English and their first (or "home") language. Three of the 17 bilingual speakers were fluent in Spanish, the language they spoke at home, while the other 14 first spoke their native North American language and later learned English in school.

TABLE 2
Leaders' Demographic Characteristics

<u>Leader</u>	<u>Exper.</u>	<u>Language</u>	<u>Educ.</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Mate</u>	<u>Kids</u>
Carla	22	Odham	13	49	No	0
Betty	5	Yavapai	14	45	Yes	3
Frances	20	Hopi	15	53	Yes	0
Brenda	17	Dine	15	52	No	2
Mary	21	Spanish	14	48	Yes	1
Louise	21	English only	14	66	Yes	0
Monica	21	Odham	14	43	No	5
Roberta	7	Spanish	13	38	Yes	2
Susan	8	Shoshone	14	41	No	4
Darla	10	English only	16	50	No	0
Teresa	42	Shoshone	13	61	Yes	0
Carol	25	Paiute	14	55	No	0
Leah	35	English only	15	46	No	0
Marlene	15	Apache	16	46	Yes	0
Grace	35	Keresan	16	48	Yes	0
Shelly	10	Tiwa	20	48	Yes	0
Helen	20	English only	14	56	Yes	0
Dana	17	Spanish	14	44	No	3
Cathy	20	Keresan	16	26	No	0
Maggie	38	Keresan	18	54	No	1
Heather	14	Zuni	12	51	Yes	1

The average level of education for the leaders was 14 years, but their educational experience ranged from a high school diploma or GED (the equivalent of 12 years) to completing post-graduate studies (20 years in the case of one leader who had earned two masters degrees). The mean age of the leaders was 49, although their ages spanned from 26 to 66 years. Of the 21 leaders, 11 reported having a live-in mate at the time of the interview while nine had one or more children under the age of 18 living at home.

A scholar examining the presence of Native women on tribal councils found their educational attainment to be a critical factor in their political success. Miller explained that state-sponsored education and technical training have provided Native women with expertise that makes them valuable resources to their tribes and allows them to fill

important tribal positions.²⁷ Women's administrative expertise, coupled with their centrality in the family network and a favorable economic opportunity structure, has enabled them to attain political office within particular tribes.²⁸

Women's Leadership Role in Tribal Politics

Table 3 lists each leader's official position, indicating their political or administrative role. While 17 (81%) of the 21 leaders interviewed were elected officials within their tribal governments, four (19%) held professional positions within their tribal administration.

TABLE 3
Leaders' Office and Type of Position

<u>Leader</u>	<u>Indian Nation</u>	<u>Type</u>	<u>Position</u>
Carla	Ak-Chin	Elected	Chair
Betty	Ft. McDowell	Elected	Council
Frances	Hopi	Appointed	Secretary*
Brenda	Navajo	Elected	Council
Mary	Pascua Yaqui	Elected	Secretary
Louise	Salt River	Elected	Vice Pres.
Monica	Tohono O'odham	Elected	Chair
Roberta	Yavapai-Apache	Elected	Council
Susan	Goshute	Elected	Council
Darla	NW Shoshone	Elected	Chair
Teresa	Duck Valley	Elected	Council
Carol	Fort McDermitt	Elected	Vice Chair
Leah	Pyramid Lake	Elected	Council
Marlene	Jicarilla Apache	Elected	President
Grace	Acoma	Admin.	Planner*
Shelly	Isleta	Elected	Council
Helen	Laguna	Elected	Council
Dana	Pojoaque	Elected	Secretary**
Cathy	San Felipe	Admin.	Administrator*
Maggie	Santa Ana	Admin.	Ed. Director*
Heather	Zuni	Elected	Council

* Administrative position

** Holds dual political and administrative positions

In three of these four cases, women are prohibited from serving on their nation's chief decision-making body, the tribal council. Nevertheless, the majority of the leaders interviewed were elected to their nations' government. Of these, two held top positions within the executive branch as president and vice president, six served on the tribal council - their nations' legislative body - as council chair, vice chair, or council secretary, while the remaining nine officials served as members of their tribal council. One leader served the dual role of council secretary and tribal administrator. While all of the elected leaders participated in policymaking, the two within the executive were also responsible for overseeing policy implementation through their tribal administrations. Only four of the leaders, a tribal planner, tribal administrator, tribal secretary, and department director, held administrative positions to which they were either appointed by council or hired by the nation's chief executive officer. Each of these four officials had administrative, managerial, budgeting, and program responsibilities that required their participation in policy formulation, interpretation, and implementation.

Leaders' Motives for Political Involvement

To get at the leaders' motives for becoming active in politics, they were asked when and why they first became involved in public life in their community. As indicated in Table 4, most leaders provided more than one explanation. I have grouped their responses under six broad headings: (1) Public Service Ethic, (2) Improving the Quality of Life, (3) Civic Duty, (4) Professionalizing Tribal Government, (5) Political Reform, and (6) Building Tribal Unity. Mentioned by 18 of the 21 leaders, the most frequently cited reason for becoming politically active was what I have termed, a "public service ethic." Sometimes expressed as a desire to help others, several women described this strongly held value as an important part of her upbringing. Leaders whose families stressed the

value of giving back to the community believe that public service is an honorable and gratifying endeavor.

TABLE 4
Leaders' Motives for Participation

Public Service Ethic	18
Improve Quality of Life	9
Civic Duty	7
Professionalize Tribal Government	6
Political Reform	5
Build Tribal Unity	<u>2</u>
TOTAL	47

Nine leaders were motivated to enter public service specifically to improve the quality of life for tribal members by addressing their concerns and providing needed services and/or programs. Civic duty, the reason given for political involvement by seven of the leaders, differs slightly from the public service ethic. Described as a responsibility of citizenship, leaders explained that in order to fulfill their duty as a member of their community, they must participate actively in its maintenance (or governance).

Six leaders entered politics specifically to increase the professionalism of their tribe's administration. While the problems cited ranged from political corruption to inefficiency, these leaders generally sought to make tribal government more efficient in its use of resources, more effective in its provision of programs and services, and more responsive to the needs of the people. Five leaders saw the necessity for political reforms, and, therefore, became involved in tribal politics in order to produce change. The desired changes included policy reforms that would allow for greater political inclusion of women and youth into community decision-making, and which would open up decision processes to community scrutiny.

Finally, only two leaders were motivated to enter public service by a need for tribal unity. Each leader, however, expressed significant concern for the future well-being

of her community and saw building a sense of unity among tribal members as a way to effectively address their common problems. Unity equated with cohesion and strength, and offered hope to leaders whose communities struggle with a variety of social and economic challenges. Other studies have similarly found that Native women enter politics because of a sense of civic duty, because they were socialized to value public service and have family members active in politics, because they seek to empower others, and because they desire to improve the well-being of their communities.²⁹ For example, McCoy found that female leaders conceptualized politics as “a public service and obligation of citizenship” - as both these findings and other scholarship indicate.³⁰

Leaders' Political Goals and Policy Priorities

Leaders were asked about their goals for the tribal administration as well as which policy issues were of particular interest to them, and what they wanted to accomplish regarding these issues. The leaders provided a total of 186 responses, each woman identifying roughly nine policy areas of priority. To facilitate discussion of the research findings, I have grouped these policy goals under three different headings: (1) Politics and Administration, (2) Community Development, and (3) Services and Programs.

The leaders' 56 policy goals relative to tribal politics and administration are divided into six categories listed in Table 5A: Professionalizing tribal government, sovereignty and self-determination, intergovernmental relations, empowering tribal members, tribal enrollment, political reform, and building tribal unity. Of the 21 leaders, 15 sought to increase the professionalism of their tribal administration. As with the leaders who mentioned this as a motive for entering politics, the women concerned with improving the effectiveness, efficiency, and responsiveness of tribal government believed that they could bring positive change to the organization. For example, one

leader was especially concerned with favoritism, which resulted in particular tribal members being granted jobs, services, or special privileges for their patronage or because of their family connections. As a council member, “Betty” worked to create a system to protect both tribal employees and tribal members from the push and pull of politics.

...We have created that chain of command, which allows [the tribal council] and each of the departments to work hand-in-hand, whereas before we didn’t have the chain of command. That’s when you got into the little “do me a favor” thing. That’s helped us to stay away from those things. (Betty)

Exercising and maintaining the nation’s sovereignty and right to self-determination was a goal mentioned by 12 leaders, although each of the 21 articulated the importance of sovereignty for the continued existence of Indian nations.

TABLE 5A
Leaders’ Policy Goals for Politics and Administration

Professionalize Tribal Government	15
Sovereignty & Self-determination	12
Intergovernmental relations	9
Empower Tribal Members	7
Tribal Enrollment	6
Political Reform	4
Build Tribal Unity	3
TOTAL	56

Related to the issue of sovereignty was a concern for developing strong, favorable, and enduring relationships with non-Indian entities including school districts, irrigation districts, municipalities, and county and state governments. Intergovernmental relations was a policy goal for nine leaders representing tribes that shared or competed with other jurisdictions for resources such as water, or services such as health care or schools.

Seven leaders pursued policies to empower tribal members by enabling them to play a greater role in community decision-making, by providing training or education to increase the community's leadership potential, or by other means leading to the incorporation of more community members into the political process. Enrollment issues, such as determination of an individual's membership in the tribe, were identified as a policy priority for six of the 21 leaders. Whereas five leaders were motivated to enter politics by their desire to implement political reforms, four leaders mentioned political reform as a policy goal. Proposed reforms included opening-up council decision-making processes to the community, incorporating women and youth into tribal politics, establishing regulations or changing rules or procedures, and amending the tribal constitution or tribal codes. Three leaders sought to develop policies to build tribal unity. Like the leaders motivated to enter politics by their concern for community cohesion, these women viewed increased unity among tribal members as a means of attacking common problems and of pursuing a collective vision for the future.

The leaders' 66 policy goals relative to community development are listed in Table 5B and, comprising seven broad areas, include economic development, self-sufficiency, infrastructure and utilities, housing, land acquisition and planning, natural resource development, and environmental protection. Not surprisingly, economic development, which included increasing employment opportunities for tribal members and facilitating business creation on the reservation, was a policy goal of 17 of the 21 leaders. Related to economic development was the goal of 11 leaders that their tribes achieve self-sufficiency, in part, by increasing tribal revenues. This would enable tribal governments to take-over the operation of key programs and services from the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) as well as reduce the nations' dependence on the federal government for resources, funding, and expertise.

TABLE 5B
Leaders Policy Goals for Community Development

Economic Development	17
Self-sufficiency	11
Infrastructure/Utilities	11
Housing	10
Land Acquisition & Planning	7
Natural Resource Development	5
Environmental Protection	<u>5</u>
TOTAL	66

The desire for autonomy and self-determination is evident in the following comments of a council member.

...This tribe at one time had nothing. We were just a dot on the map and it's through gaming that we took chances... ...We have prospered and we have invested for our future and I'm very proud of that because if ever gaming goes away, we're taken care of. ...We don't want our tribal members to be dependant on gaming. They have to become self-sufficient by working and investing in their own way... ...We have more of our young people coming back. Getting their education and working for us, and teaching the younger ones... (Betty)

Eleven leaders also identified infrastructure and utilities as a policy priority, including maintaining and/or constructing new roads, facilities, and buildings on the reservation as well as providing public utilities such as water delivery, wastewater treatment, electrical power, natural gas, and internet access to residents. About half of the leaders (10) supported housing policies to facilitate construction of new housing as well as to provide improvements to existing dwellings. It seems that, as the population ages, many Native Americans are coming home to the reservation to retire and, as a result, housing shortages are being felt in numerous Southwestern tribes.

Related to the issue of housing, infrastructure, and economic development is the issue of land acquisition and planning for land use, capital improvements, and provision of community services. Seven of the 21 leaders mentioned tribal acquisition of land and planning for their nations’ development as a policy priority. Similarly, development of their tribes’ natural resources, and concern for protecting the natural environment, were each policy goals articulated by five leaders. In each case, leaders were concerned with both the appropriate use and preservation of resources. Seeing themselves as guardians of the environment, they were well aware of the impact of their decisions on future generations.

Table 5C lists the leaders’ 64 policy goals relative to tribal services and programs, which are divided into seven categories including Education, Social Services, Cultural Preservation, Health Care, Children’s Programs and Rights, Senior Services and Programs, and Public Safety. Policies related to education, which included improving the quality of existing programs and adding new offerings as well as creating opportunities for post-secondary education, were a priority for 15 leaders.

TABLE 5C
Leaders’ Policy Goals for Services and Programs

Education	15
Social Services	12
Cultural Preservation	11
Health Care	9
Children’s Programs & Rights	9
Senior Services & Programs	4
Public Safety	<u>4</u>
TOTAL	64

This was followed by the support of 12 leaders for policies improving and/or increasing social services such as food distribution, substance abuse treatment, and recreational opportunities for tribal members. Cultural preservation was a policy priority for nearly as

many leaders (11), who concerned themselves with maintaining traditional art forms and community practices, and with keeping their native language alive.

Reflecting a concern with the health, well-being, and safety of tribal members, nine leaders each supported policies to improve health care and access to medical services, as well as to provide services to children and protect children's rights. While an interest in serving tribal elders was mentioned at some point in the interview process by nearly all of the leaders, four expressly included the provision of services for the elderly among their policy priorities. Specifically, health and nutritional programs were mentioned, as well as housing, recreation, opportunities for social interaction, and input into community decision-making. In general, elders were valued as cultural resources to the community, deserving of respect and dignity having earned their right to enjoy their latter years in comfort and safety. Finally, four leaders identified public safety as a policy concern, focusing on the provision of resources and personnel to law enforcement, emergency management, and the tribal courts.

These findings mirror those of previous studies that have similarly examined the motives and policy preferences of Native women officials and activists.³¹ To illustrate, in her study of native leaders, McCoy found that women often enter tribal politics to make reforms while a majority run for office in order to "make things better," "find solutions to tribal problems," and work towards tribal self-determination.³² Specifically, she reported that leaders' most pressing policy concerns were tribal economic development, health care, education, housing, and tribal/federal relations - in that order.³³

Women's Political Participation

In order to gauge the level of participation of women in tribal governance and to assess whether the political environment generally welcomed women's involvement, the

leaders were asked a series of questions about women's access to, and role in, tribal politics. These research findings are recorded in Table 6.

TABLE 6
Women's Political Participation

<u>Indian Nation</u>	<u>Authority</u>	<u>Active</u>	<u>Equally Active</u>	<u>Constitution Adopted*</u>
Ak-Chin	No	40 yrs	40 yrs	0
Ft. McDowell	Yes	65 yrs	65 yrs	1936
Hopi	Yes	7 yrs	65 yrs	1936
Navajo	Yes	133 yrs	78 yrs	0
Pascua Yaqui	Yes	Always	Always	1988
Salt River	Yes	46 yrs	61 yrs	1940
Tohono O'odham	Yes	15 yrs	15 yrs	1937
Yavapai-Apache	Yes	34 yrs	64 yrs	1937
Goshute	Yes	11 yrs	61 yrs	1940
NW Shoshone	Yes	Always	100 yrs	1980
Duck Valley	Yes	40 yrs	65 yrs	1936
Fort McDermitt	Yes	26 yrs	65 yrs	1936
Pyramid Lake	Yes	Always	65 yrs	1936
Jicarilla Apache	Yes	33 yrs	Always	1937
Acoma	Yes	0	0	0
Isleta	Yes	10 yrs	54 yrs	1947
Laguna	Yes	1 yr	0	1949
Pojoaque	Yes	46 yrs	DK**	0
San Felipe	Yes	0	0	0
Santa Ana	No	0	0	0
Zuni	Yes	19 yrs	31 yrs	1970

* Tribes may adopt Articles of Association, legal codes, or other means of governing, without having a constitution.

**This leader responded, "I don't know."

When asked whether women have the same power and authority as men holding the same or comparable positions in tribal government, 19 of the 21 leaders responded, "Yes." Leaders were then asked how long women have been active in tribal politics. Recognizing that women have always been involved informally in their communities' governance, I wanted to know when they actively became "formal" or "legitimate"

political actors within their tribe. In most cases, the number recorded in Table 6 is an estimate, as leaders often gave the date of the first woman to serve on the tribal council as the beginning of women's active (and formal) participation in tribal politics. Despite the lack of accuracy that these responses potentially present, the information gives an approximation of the length of time that women have been formal political players within the 21 tribes. We can therefore conclude, with some degree of confidence, that whereas Pueblo women in Acoma, San Felipe and Santa Ana are barred from tribal politics, in the last two decades women in Hopi, Isleta, and Zuni pueblos have served as officials in their tribal government.

On the other hand, women of the Navajo, Northwestern Shoshone, Pascua Yaqui, and Pyramid Lake Paiute nations have participated as legitimate players in tribal politics for over 100 years. In fact, the leaders of these last three nations stated that women have "always" been involved. In yet other tribes, such as the Ak-Chin, Duck Valley, Jicarilla Apache, and Salt River, women began assuming formal leadership positions in the 1950s and sixties, at about the same time that non-Indian women began emerging as leaders in state and local politics.

Next, leaders were asked how long women had been legally able to participate in tribal politics to the same degree as men. As can be seen in Table 6, the responses vary considerably from "0," where pueblo women's political involvement is restricted, to several decades in the case of tribes that adopted tribal constitutions providing women and men the same right to self-governance. Leaders from the Navajo, Northwestern Shoshone, and Pyramid Lake nations acknowledged that women exercised political leadership in their tribes long before any formal legal authorization. In most of the 21 nations, however, women did not become formally recognized tribal leaders until or after adoption of a constitution, articles of association, or some other BIA sanctioned means of tribal governance.

Facilitating Women's Political Participation

In order to determine just how women participate in tribal politics, I asked each leader a series of questions, beginning with "What role do women play in tribal politics in your community?" As one leader answered,

To tell you the truth, there is only five of us women on the council and a lot of times I think that we're the ones that make a difference on the council floor and in some of these discussions. Like I said, being a Navajo, [the men] look at the role of the women leaders in politics as a mother and, therefore, when things sort of get out of hand we, as the women leaders, tell them "Hey, wait a minute. It's supposed to be like this. Your ideas are great but, realistically, this is the way it should be and this is how we should approach it." That's what we usually tell them and they listen. I would say we're not really mediators, we're equal with them. We're there with them as far as discussions and decision-making is concerned... We speak to them from a woman's standpoint. Based on the teachings and our traditional upbringing they have to listen to the woman. Based on that they have to have the respect for us and so they'll say, "Okay" and sit down with us and we'll go over the whole thing and discuss it, or whatever. A lot of times it's not easy but then we tend to put our foot down and tell them "This is the way it has to be." (Brenda)

More specifically, leaders were asked whether women were permitted to attend tribal council meetings, whether they could speak out at such meetings, whether women could vote in tribal elections, campaign for candidates seeking office, and run for tribal office themselves. These research findings are presented in Table 7.

TABLE 7
Women's Political Rights

<u>Indian Nation</u>	<u>IRA</u>	<u>Attend</u>	<u>Speak</u>	<u>Vote</u>	<u>Campaign</u>	<u>Run</u>
Ak-Chin	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ft. McDowell	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Hopi	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Navajo	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Pascua Yaqui	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Salt River	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Tohono O'odham	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Yavapai-Apache	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Goshute	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
NW Shoshone	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Duck Valley	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Fort McDermitt	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Pyramid Lake	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Jicarilla Apache	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Acoma	No	No	No	No	No	No
Isleta	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Laguna	Yes	Yes ¹	Yes ¹	Yes	No ²	Yes
Pojoaque	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No ²	Yes
San Felipe	No	No	No	No	No	No
Santa Ana	No	No	No	No	No	No
Zuni	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

¹ Women may attend and speak at five of the six villages' meetings, but may be excluded from tribal council meetings.

² Political campaigning is prohibited.

With the exception of Laguna and Pojoaque Pueblos, where political campaigning is prohibited, women were permitted to participate fully in all aspects of political life within 18 of the 21 tribes.

Lastly, leaders were asked about their political perceptions. I wanted to know first, whether they believed women should participate equally with men in tribal politics and second, whether women should enjoy the same rights as men in all aspects of tribal life. These research findings are recorded in Table 8.

TABLE 8
Leaders' Political Perceptions

<u>Leader</u>	<u>Indian Nation</u>	<u>IRA</u>	<u>Equal</u>	<u>Rights</u>
Carla	Ak-Chin	No	Yes	No
Betty	Ft. McDowell	Yes	Yes	No
Frances	Hopi	Yes	Yes	Yes
Louise	Salt River	Yes	Yes	-
Monica	Tohono O'odham	Yes	Yes	Yes
Roberta	Yavapai-Apache	Yes	Yes	-
Susan	Goshute	Yes	Yes	Yes
Darla	NW Shoshone	No	Yes	Yes
Teresa	Duck Valley	Yes	Yes	Yes
Carol	Fort McDermitt	Yes	Yes	Yes
Leah	Pyramid Lake	Yes	Yes	Yes
Marlene	Jicarilla Apache	Yes	Yes	No
Grace	Acoma	No	Yes	No
Shelly	Isleta	Yes	Yes	No
Helen	Laguna	Yes	Yes	No
Dana	Pojoaque	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cathy	San Felipe	No	Yes	No
Maggie	Santa Ana	No	Yes	Yes
Heather	Zuni	Yes	Yes	No

At this time, most of the 20 Pueblo tribes, including Acoma, San Felipe, and Santa Ana, forbid or limit severely the participation of women in the governance of their communities. In these so-called "traditional" tribes, which operate as theocracies, government and religious life are intertwined, public officials are appointed by religious leaders rather than elected by the people, much of the decision-making occurs in secret, and few if any of the procedures for leadership selection or decision-making are generally known or written down. In contrast, all of the 21 leaders interviewed believe that women should be able to participate equally, with men, in their nations' governance. The leaders from the traditional pueblos recognized that this would require considerable change in the structure of their political institutions, such as the introduction of voting rights and open elections. When asked whether she thought women would ever be incorporated into tribal politics, a leader from a traditional pueblo explained,

...I don't know if that will ever happen if we continue to appoint our leaders. Traditionally, it's men who are appointed, but maybe if women are allowed in tribal council meetings or open meetings...or we have one of these community meetings... I think women should be allowed. ...Women bring a different perspective and women can definitely contribute to shaping the community. [They]...can make positive contributions...whether it's at the local level or at their homes, or in the schools. I think women come from a perspective...of the family – looking at the bigger picture...looking out for the children or looking out for your parents and your elders. Women have a lot to say. (Cathy)

Another leader replied,

... I think the only way that women would actually really ever play a role in tribal government is if we had a constitution and if we were allowed to vote. I think it would have to be part of our constitution...[T]he only way women can ever get into...the council is if we actually started voting. ...Back - I don't know how many years – they did have a female that was a tribal secretary, but I understand that they obliterated the position, or any opportunities for any other women to serve in that capacity, because I guess she couldn't hack the pressures from the men. She was saying that there was a lot of sexual harassment stuff going on back then. They would tease her and make comments that would belittle her, so she got frustrated and just quit. (Grace)

When asked whether she thought women in her pueblo should have the same opportunity as men to participate in tribal governance and how this would come about, another leader said,

Oh, definitely. If we're here to serve the community. I think there are a lot of ideas that women have that men can't see and vice-versa, so it takes a collection of minds to be creative and innovative enough to serve our community. It's got to [happen] when [the pueblo] goes to a voting system. More and more now I hear the men in the community, and a lot of women, saying it's time. It's time for us to vote-in people who will sit up there making...decisions for us. (Maggie)

When the leaders were asked whether women should enjoy the same rights as men in all aspects of tribal life, including traditional religious life, the responses were mixed. Of the 19 leaders who responded to this question, half said that particular aspects of religious life should remain segregated based on sex. As one leader explained,

Forever and ever we've had our societies – we have some that include the women, but there are other societies that only include the men, and that's just been our way of life. I don't want to change that and that's just the way it's always been and that's the way it should always stay. As women though, in the Yoeme [Yaqui] community, we have a lot of decision-making power. We have a lot of influence, but it's done and routed through the man. I'm fine with that. If that's what it takes to make the change, I don't care who brings it about and who gets the credit. I think that a lot of our women don't necessarily care if they get the credit for it – it's the end result that we care about. (Mary)

Leaders advocating distinct roles and responsibilities for women and men did not value one sex above the other. Instead, women's different role was seen as necessary and unique to her maternal function.

[Women have] a supportive role because it takes two, and back through our history...it's always taken two. We come from a matrilineal society... We're very important within our society. We bear the children. Without women there would be nothing, we would not be a tribe. So, therefore, it's not a subservient role. It's a supportive role. (Helen)

The other nine leaders, while responding in the affirmative, simultaneously expressed considerable ambivalence about women having the same rights as men in all facets of tribal life. The following leader's comments are illustrative. They reflect the feelings of several other women who also believe in the importance of preserving social harmony by maintaining traditional roles unique to women and men.

I'll say no and yes. The reason why is, as a woman, ...our upbringing, our traditional teaching [says] there are certain values that you have to uphold. There are certain things that you can and cannot do. You can't overstep that boundary because it's only meant for a male person. ...The same for the men. There are some things that they can and cannot do...And, if you try to cross over, you can cause disruption or disharmony and everything becomes unbalanced. ...You work together as a team, almost like a marriage, so...in a marriage you have to come together, resolve things, and talk about things. In that sense, yes...I feel that [women and men] should be equal. (Brenda)

Other leaders felt that the time for change has come, that women are entitled to exercise the same rights and responsibilities of citizenship as men and that they should, therefore, enjoy the same rights in all aspects of tribal life.

[Yes,] I think they should [have the same rights]...we're living here together. I think we need to take a look at the future generations of children. Women

have...ideas that sometimes men don't have. Women are more family oriented and think in that realm. Men seem to, generally speaking, be detached from it. ...I think that both men and women should come together to decide. (Maggie)

Conclusions

Despite women's long-term political involvement in tribes such as the Apache, Navajo, Paiute, Shoshone and others, the number of Indian women in tribal politics throughout the country remains low. As late as 1990, the U.S. Department of Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, reported that there were only 61 female tribal leaders for more than 500 tribes.³⁴ Despite the greater inclusiveness of tribes such as the Navajo, women continue to face the same barriers and impediments that women generally do in American politics. And yet, like their non-Indian counterparts, Indian women make important contributions to their communities.

The 21 Native American women leaders from Southwestern tribes who participated in this study all hold key policymaking positions in the executive, legislative, or judicial branches of tribal government. They tend to be elected officials with considerable community service experience, in their late forties or early fifties, they speak their native language in addition to English, have some post-secondary schooling, a live-in mate, and grown children who live away from home. In general, these native leaders entered politics to help others, to improve community services and programs, to fulfill a civic responsibility, to professionalize tribal government and reform tribal politics, and to build tribal unity. The leaders each sought to address numerous policy issues mentioning 186 different objectives grouped under the three broad areas of tribal politics and administration, community development, and programs and services. Specific goals relating to politics and administration included improving the efficiency, effectiveness, and responsiveness of tribal government, ensuring tribal sovereignty and self-

determination, strengthening intergovernmental relations, and empowering tribal members. Community development policies sought to promote tribal self-sufficiency, and economic, infrastructure, housing, and natural resource development. Policy goals relative to services and programs addressed education, social services, cultural preservation, health care, and children's and seniors' needs.

While women in four of the pueblos face institutional and social constraints to political participation due to their theocratic governments, women in the majority of the 21 tribes are actively involved in tribal governance. Most of these politically inclusive tribes follow a written constitution that allows for the equal participation of women and men in politics and governance, and which maintains a separation between religious and state functions. All of the leaders interviewed, regardless of the form of their tribal government, expressed the need for women's representation in the public policymaking process and in tribal governance. This will be difficult to achieve in Indian nations where religious and governmental functions are combined, where leaders are appointed by a religious elite, and where women are excluded from participating in, or even observing, decision processes that affect the entire community. Traditional pueblos that exclude women from formal political leadership, such as Acoma, San Felipe and Santa Ana, benefit from the contributions of professionals to their tribal administrations. In each case, the leader I interviewed served in a high-ranking administrative position in pueblo government but, ironically, is barred from attending council meetings simply because of her sex. So while women play an important role in the operation of pueblo government programs and services, they are excluded from decision processes and have no say in the selection of their community leadership.

It appears that, as long as religion is used to justify the exclusion of women from governance, women will remain disenfranchised within their own communities. Opening political processes to public scrutiny and incorporating all adult members of the

community in decision-making will likely require a separation between traditional religious practices and government administration. This does not necessarily require radically changing traditional religious practices or sex-specific roles relative to these practices. In most of the 18 tribes that allow women's full participation in tribal politics, traditional religious practices requiring distinct roles for women and men remain intact.

Regardless of the form of tribal government, or the extent to which women are formally incorporated into their nations' politics and governance, American Indian women remain important and influential players in the social and political life of their communities. Based on this study's findings, women continue to hold positions of (both formal and informal) political leadership in many Southwestern tribes and their role as community leaders continues to evolve.

Endnotes

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³¹ See Prindeville (2000); Prindeville and Braley Gomez (1999); Hoikkala (1995); Chiste (1994); and Jaimes (1992).

³² McCoy (1992): 62.

³³ McCoy (1992): 64.

³⁴ McCoy (1992).