

# NAVAJO NATION PRESIDENTIAL ELECTORAL COMPETITION

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## Abstract

Findings presented in this study show that competition in the four most recent Navajo Nation Presidential General Elections, the second round in the non-partisan majority run-off electoral system, reflect choices made about specific candidates, with concentrations of support for Jonathan Nez and opposition to Joe Shirley Jr., rather than a 'nationalizing' trend toward reduced competition at the national and chapter levels of government. Voter support for repeat candidates in the Primary Election or first round contests is revealed to be weak. However winning candidates in the General Election perform well in chapters where they performed well in the Primary Election.

## Résumé

Dans cette étude on présente des résultats d'enquête montrant que dans les quatre plus récentes élections présidentielles de la nation navajo (seconde ronde du système électoral majoritaire non-partisan), la compétition portait sur des choix liés à des candidats individuels (plus spécifiquement, la concentration d'appuis pour Jonathan Nez et l'opposition à Joe Shirley Jr.), plutôt que sur une tendance « nationale » tendant à réduire l'importance de la compétition aux paliers inférieurs gouvernementaux. On montre que l'électorat n'appuie que faiblement les candidats de l'élection primaire ou du premier tour. Par contre, les candidats remportant l'élection générale font bonne figure aux paliers qui étaient les leurs lors de l'élection générale.

## Introduction

This study is prompted by the 2018 Navajo Nation presidential election, a lopsided victory for serving Vice President Jonathan Nez and a crushing defeat for previous two-term President Joe Shirley Jr. In this uneven race, Nez polled nearly twice the number of votes as Shirley: 39,290 to 19,799. The previous 2014-2015 election was almost as disastrous for Shirley, in marked contrast to the close contests won by Shirley in 2006 and Shirley's serving Vice President Ben Shelley in 2010. Do the two most recent elections reflect responses to the charismatic and controversial Shirley (Smith, 2018; Fonseca, 2018), or alternatively, or perhaps additionally, do they reflect a "nationalization" or homogenization, presenting lessened competition across levels of governance in the Navajo Nation? This inquiry is justified by the scale and example of the Navajo Nation and the intriguing possibility of nationalized non-partisan elections.

The Navajo Nation matters in American politics in part because of its immense scale. With an area larger than that of 10 American states, 20 Mexican states and two provinces in Canada, the Navajo Nation possesses the largest contiguous territory governed by Natives in North America.<sup>1</sup> The next largest, the Uintah and Ouray Reservation, has roughly one fourth as much area and a resident population roughly one-tenth as large. With a resident population of approximately 175,000, the overwhelming majority of whom are enrolled tribal members, and another 100,000 enrolled tribal members living outside its territory, many in adjacent areas of Arizona, New Mexico and Utah, the total resident and enrolled population (several thousand non-Navajo, both Native American and non-Native American, are also resident) is comparable to typical medium-sized municipalities in North America and is larger than four Canadian provinces and territories.

Navajo Nation Presidents are influential figures in Arizona and New Mexico state politics and more generally as opinion leaders among Native Americans. Statewide and local candidates and U.S. presidential candidates prize their endorsements (Russell, 2004). Overlapping state and reservation jurisdictions make them important partners in policy making. So the intensity of competition for the office of Navajo Nation President is potentially consequential not only for those living within its borders but also outside.

Whether non-partisan electoral systems present a "nationalization" or homogenization of competition intensity is a novel question because previous research on the phenomena has focused on parties and party systems. The answer derived from this investigation matters because it contributes to the regrettably sparse literature about elections in a large class of governments rarely the subject of electoral research.<sup>2</sup> The outcomes of elections in the 574 Native American governments in the Unit-

ed States affect decision-making about public service provision as well as the distribution of monies from gaming, mining, grazing and lumbering to some of the poorest, and a handful of the wealthiest, minority populations in country. Although varying in constitutional structure—those with large areas or resident populations tend to be presidentialist while those with smaller areas or resident populations tend to be parliamentarist—Native American governments all conduct non-partisan elections and many conduct majority runoff elections. Among those with presidentialist constitutions, the Mescalero Apache Tribe chooses a President, Vice-President and its Tribal Council using majority runoff elections (Constitution of Mescalero Apache Tribe), while the Tohono O’odham Nation chooses a Chairman and Vice-Chairman using majority runoff elections and its Tohono O’odham Nation Council using First-Past-the-Post elections (Constitution of the Tohono O’odham Nation). Among those with parliamentary constitutions, the Ho-Chunk Nation elects its Legislature in majority runoff elections (Ho-Chunk Nation Code), as does the Blackfeet Tribe to choose members of its Blackfeet Tribal Business Council (Constitution and By-Laws of the Blackfeet Tribe of the Blackfeet Indian Reservation of Montana).<sup>3</sup> The similarities in electoral systems as well as other government institutions are attributable to the imposition of nearly identical constitutions by the Bureau of Indian Affairs in the 1930s (Miller, 2013, p. 120), with most of the differences accumulating since then via amendments.

The published scholarly research on Native American government elections is small and that on Navajo Nation elections vanishingly small. Research reporting the results of an exit poll of 50 Navajo Nation voters conducted in 1994 appears to be the most recent contribution (Russell & Henderson, 1999). Native American participation in U.S. elections is better understood than anything about Native American government elections (Peterson, 1997, p. 322). So the research reported here fills some of the large lacuna in knowledge about elections that directly or indirectly affect the lives of more than five million U.S. citizens.

## Background and Literature Review

Navajo traditional values of communal accord and tribal unity are expressed as *hozho*, or harmony and balance, and reflected in the norm favoring consensus decision-making ideally achieved through patient, respectful persuasion (Orr, 2017, p. 137). Humility rather than ambition is endorsed as a praiseworthy attribute of leaders. Navajo candidates typically compete for elective office with campaign messages invoking traditional values and economic development, often accompanied by denunciations of corruption and promises of prosperity (Needham, 2014, p. 222; Smart, 2002). In common with many other Native govern-

ments in the United States, limited employment opportunities and lack of official transparency have led to perceptions that officials violate their fiduciary responsibility in leasing tribal resources and engage in nepotism in government employment (Carmean, 2002, p. 92; 107). The Navajo Government also suffers from a reputation for hostility to entrepreneurship (Miller, 2013, p. 1210).

Navajo Nation elections are non-partisan at all levels: national, agency-wide and chapter. Candidates run for offices as individuals, their names appearing on ballots without party labels. This is arguably consistent with the traditional values of communal accord and tribal unity among Navajo. Although non-partisanship serves as a barrier to directly linking Navajo Nation electoral politics with U.S. national, state and local politics, it does not prevent clientelism (Brugge, 1994, p. 101-102). Evocations of ethnic solidarity performed for both enrolled Navajo and observing non-Navajo disguise tension between native government "insiders" and "outsiders," between those who benefit from elective office, employment, or contracts in the Navajo Nation, and those who do not. That personalist networks are important in competition is suggested by the electoral support for "favorite son" presidential candidacies in specific chapters. Thus in the first round of the electoral cycle in 2018, candidate Tom Chee received only 1.27% of the vote overall in a 12-candidate contest, but received 50% of the vote in Leupp Chapter. Note too that competing in the non-partisan politics of the Navajo Nation presents no barrier to Navajos also competing in the partisan electoral politics in Arizona and New Mexico. Thus Shirley could run for President of the Navajo Nation while also serving on the Apache County Board of Supervisors in Arizona (Balcom, 2018).

The Navajo Nation President and Vice President are elected on a single ticket under a majority runoff electoral system. The first round is the "Primary Election," and the second round is the "General Election." Not to be confused with U.S. major party primary contests, the term "Primary Election" is conventionally used to identify the first round in majority runoff elections conducted by Native Governments. Consistent with other majority runoff electoral systems, the two candidates receiving the most votes in the Primary Election then proceed to the General Election, which is decided by a majority vote. Vice Presidential candidates are selected by General Election Presidential candidates after the Primary Election and often from among unsuccessful Primary Election Presidential candidates. Pippa Norris notes that majority runoff electoral systems tend to encourage centrist party politics and reinforce the legitimacy of the eventual winner (2004, p. 49). The majority runoff may perform the latter function in the electoral cycles examined here as General Election candidates are compelled to appeal to both the voters who chose unsuccessful Primary Election candidates and voters who register between rounds.

Three recent major political crises shape opinion on the Navajo Nation. The first was the crisis in the late 1980s over the concentration of formal and informal power in the Office of the Navajo Nation Council Chairman. Peter MacDonald was elected to three consecutive terms from 1970 to 1982 and reelected to a fourth term in 1986. His fourth term was characterized by controversy and scandal, including an indictment for mismanagement of Federal program funds (Wilkins, 2002, p. 109-110). That crisis reached a crescendo with the eruption of deadly violence on July 20, 1989, between the MacDonald's supporters and those of opposition council members led by Daniel Tso (Donovan 2009). One consequence was the adoption of a formal constitution based on a presidential or separation of powers structure (Kalt, 2007, p. 98; Iverson, 2002, p. 296-297; Morris, 1991). However, it also reinforced suspicion of government "insiders" and may have reduced the value of incumbency for elected officials seeking reelection.

The second crisis was a financial scandal that engulfed much of the Navajo Nation's political class in 2010, and provides context for understanding the 2018 presidential election. Resentment toward elected and appointed officials, always simmering given the depressed economic and social conditions on the largest reservation in the United States despite cultural norms against its direct expression, flared when more than 142 officials were indicted in 2010 for participation in a scheme to convert discretionary funds to private use. Incumbent President Joe Shirley Jr. and running mate Ben Shelly had been elected in a relatively close contest in 2006 against Lynda Lovejoy and Walter Phelps. Engulfed in the scandal, Shirley did not run and instead endorsed his serving Vice President Ben Shelly and running mate R.J. Jim against Lynda Lovejoy and running mate E. Tulley.

The third event was a ballot controversy that inflamed cultural discord and extended the election cycle. In 2014, the Navajo Supreme Court ruled in favor of an appeal from a decision of the Navajo Board of Election Supervisors brought by two Primary Election or first-round candidates, neither of whom had won enough votes to qualify for a General Election or second round ballot positions. Their appeal challenged one of the apparently successful General Election or second-round candidates for failing the Navajo language fluency requirement in the Navajo Constitution (Stucki, 2017, p. 843-844). A graduate of Annapolis Naval Academy and former Marine Corps officer who had been elected to the Arizona State House of Representatives in 2008, and untainted by direct or indirect association with the 2010 financial scandal, Chris Deschene was attractive as a reform candidate (Stucki, 2017, p. 843-844). However, like many younger Navajo, he was unfluent in Navajo. His supporters were both disappointed (and aware that the main beneficiary of the court decision was Joe Shirley Jr. (Turkewitz, 2015). The struggle to keep his place on the General Election ballot ended with the veto by Presi-

dent Ben Shelley of legislation passed by the Navajo National Council to allow voters to determine the Navajo language fluency of candidates and the removal of two defiant members of the Board of Election Supervisors and a ban on their candidacies from elective office for five years by the Navajo Nation Supreme Court. To some observers, it appeared that government insiders had used their power to thwart popular will. When the postponed presidential runoff was finally conducted as a special election in 2015, Russell Begaye and his running mate, Jonathan Nez, had defeated Joe Shirley Jr. and his running mate, Dineh Benally, by 25,902 to 15,245 votes.

After failing to make it into the 2018 General Election, Begaye surprisingly endorsed his rival Shirley rather than his own Vice President Nez, arguing that the former would be better able to deal with the impending loss of roughly one-third of tribal revenue from the scheduled closing of the coal fired Navajo Generating Station in Page, Arizona, and the coal mine that supplies it in Kayenta, Arizona (Balcom, 2018, *Associated Press*).

Although neither Shirley nor Nez were incumbents, both possessed the name recognition associated with incumbents: the former as a two-term former president and the latter as a serving Vice President. What distinguished them most were their campaign messages, with Nez offering job creation by making the Navajo Nation business friendly and Shirley offering experience managing existing government and corporate relationships (Yurth & Allen, 2018). Philosophical and religious differences were also in play in the rival messaging, with Nez cast as a socially conservative Christian and Shirley as socially liberal (Yurth, 2018). Shirley's defeat in the 2018 General Election was more complete than it had been in the 2015 General Election, with he and his running mate, Buu Van Nygren, losing to Jonathan Nez and his running mate, Myron Lizer, by 41,261 to 20,751 votes. The fourth row of Table 1 shows that the margins of victory in the 2006 and 2010 General Elections were markedly smaller than in the 2015 and 2018 General Elections.

The fifth row of Table 1 presents the differences between voter turnout in the Primary Election and General Election. Navajo Nation elections differ from most U.S. majority runoff elections in that potential voters may register to vote after the Primary Election and then participate in the General Election. That means voter turnout can be, and typically is, higher in the General Election than the Primary Election.

**Table 1. Summary Statistics: Presidential Election Cycles**

	2006 General Election	2010 General Election	2014-2015 General Election/ Special Election	2018 General Election
Winning Ticket	Joe Shirley, Jr. and Ben Shelly	Ben Shelly and R.L. Jim	Russell Begay and Jonathan Nez	Jonathan Nez and Myron Lizer
Defeated Ticket	Lynda Lovejoy and Walter Phelps	Lynda Lovejoy and E. Tulley	Joe Shirley, Jr. and Dineh Benally	Joe Shirley, Jr. and Buu Van Nygren
% Margin of Victory	6.54	4.98	25.89	33.07
% Change in Turnout Between Rounds	+17.36	+14.02	-9.54	+6.89
Total Number of Primary Election Candidate	11	11	17	18
Effective Number Primary Election Candidates	5.37	4.38	6.04	4.67
Effective Number General Election Candidates	1.99	1.99	1.87	1.82

Further evidence of diminished competition in General Elections from the 2006 and 2010 electoral cycles to the 2014-2015 and 2018 electoral cycles is reinforced by the figures shown in the last three rows of Table 1: the total number of candidates in the Primary Election and Effective Numbers of candidates in the Primary and General elections. Although the increase in the total number of Primary Election candidates from 11 in both 2006 and 2010 to 17 in 2014-2015 and 18 in 2018 suggests an increasing competition, and an examination of their vote shares shows that many are weak candidacies. In 2006, seven candidates received less than 10% of the vote, and three candidates received less than 1%. In 2010, eight candidates received less than 10% of the vote, and two received less than 1%. In 2014-2015, 13 candidates received less than 10% of the vote and three less than 1%. In 2018, 14 candidates received less than 10% of the vote and six less than 1%. As in the New Hampshire

U.S. party presidential primary, the decision of what are revealed to be weak candidates to enter the contest may be motivated by some combination of inexpensive entry, miscalculation and risk acceptance. Campaigns may also have been launched as spoilers to draw votes away from similar candidates, in anticipation of exchanging a General Election endorsement for other political rewards such as appointive office, or ambition to be named a vice presidential running mate in the General Election.

The Effective Numbers of candidates in the Primary Election tell a different story than the total number of candidates in those races. Used to measure party system fragmentation (Taagepera & Shugart, 1998) and competition in interparty arenas such as U.S. major party presidential primary contests (Steger et al., 2002, p. 536-537), Effective Number measures capture overall competition intensity in arenas that commonly present more than two competitors. Effective Numbers are calculated by multiplying the percentage vote share of each party or candidate by itself, summing the results, and then dividing one by that sum. Larger figures indicate more intense overall competition. Rather than reveal increasingly intense competition as suggested by the total number of candidates, the penultimate row in Table 1 reveals neither increase nor decrease but instead random variation. What is more, the last row of Table 1 indicates a decline in competition from the 2006 and 2010 General Elections to the 2014-2015 and 2018 General Elections.

Much of what is known about non-partisan elections comes from studies of elections to municipal councils, statewide regulatory commission, and state courts in the United States. Non-partisan elections are a legacy of Progressive Era reforms sought to replace candidate party affiliation as voting heuristic with a "more rational" heuristic of information about candidate policy positions or personal character (Schleicher, 2007, p. 466-467). Voters have not fulfilled the expectations of the reformers. Rather than more accountable and more responsive local governance, critics charge, non-partisan elections may unfairly advantage minority parties by hiding the crucial party affiliation voting cue (Streb, 2008, p. 73), leading voters to substitute recalled candidate party affiliation not shown on the ballot as a voting cue (Squire & Smith, 1988, p. 178). Other critics charge that non-partisan elections result in low voter turnout and weaker competition, which insulates incumbents from challenges (Schleicher, 2007, p. 426; Schaeffner et al., p. 25). Bonneau, for example, found that state supreme court incumbents won re-election bids at higher rates in non-partisan than partisan elections (2005, p. 835). The problem with generalizing from such research is that the Navajo Nation is neither a municipal government, statewide regulatory commission, nor state supreme court, instead resembling an intermediate level of government such an American state, Mexican state or Canadian province. The better though still imperfect organizational analogies for

the Navajo Nation President and Council would thus be an American state governor and state legislature.

Much of what is known about majority runoff elections is drawn from studies of national level executive and legislative elections outside the United States (Birch, 2003) and from statewide and Congressional elections in the American South (Bullock & Johnson, 1992). General Elections for the Navajo Nation President-Vice President and Council present relatively low turnout rates. For example, approximately 26% of the voting age population cast ballots in the 2018 General Election. For Navajo living outside the borders of the Navajo Nation, U.S. elections may be perceived as more important. Low turnout notwithstanding, Navajo Nation elections present neither weak competition nor an incumbency effect. Uncontested elections for seats on the Navajo Nation Council are no more frequent than for seats in non-professional state legislatures in the United States (Squire, 2000). Incumbents running for re-election to the Navajo Nation Council are often defeated. For example, in the 2018 General Election, only 13 of the 24 Navajo Nation Council races featured incumbents, and only eight of those incumbents won re-election. Only three incumbents, including Jonathan Nez, ran unopposed. Although the context is different, a parallel may be drawn to incumbency disadvantage in municipal elections in post-communist Central and Eastern Europe, where voters prefer challengers over incumbents in an attempt to minimize official corruption (Klašnja, 2015). Navajo Nation voters may be acting similarly.

Navajo Nation elections differ from most majority runoff elections in the U.S. in that voters may register to vote between the two rounds and vote only in the second round. That means voter turnout may be higher in the General Election than in the Primary Election. There are no published quantitative election studies of non-partisan, majority runoff elections in which voters may register to vote between the two rounds and vote only in the second round. The "voter fatigue" which concerns observers of majority runoff statewide and Congressional elections in the American South and Oklahoma (Bullock & Johnson, 1992, p. 135) and of Presidential and National Assembly elections in France (Norris 2004, p. 49) is not evident in Navajo Nation elections. Participating only in the General Election may be a rational response given expectations about candidate choices in the General Election (Russell & Henderson, 1999, p. 26-27). For three of the election cycles examined in this research, turnout was higher in the second round than the first. That it fell between rounds in the 2014-2015 election cycle may reflect disinterest because of the longer than usual delay between rounds and dissatisfaction with the removal of Chris Deschene as a candidate in the second round. The correlation between the percentage vote share won by Deschene in the first round and the percentage difference in turnout between rounds is 0.2674, and statistically significant at the .05 level.

The twin literatures on the “nationalization” of elections, defined by American Politics specialists as increasing linkage between partisan voting in presidential and lower level office (Sievert & McKee, 2019, p. 1056) and defined by Comparative Politics specialists as the emergence of uniformity in partisan voting across subnational units of government (Jones & Mainwaring, 2003, p. 140), offer no studies of competition in elections comparable to those in the Navajo Nation or other Native American governments. Both literatures treat competition in the context of parties and party systems. Instead, their value for this study lies in directing attention to an alternative explanation for the decline in the intensity of competition across the election cycles: “nationalization” in the form of diminished competition intensity across elective offices.

## Methods and Data

To answer these questions, election and demographic data were collected at the chapter level of the Navajo Nation for the 2006, 2010, 2014-2015 and 2018 electoral cycles (Navajo Election Administration) for analysis. Unfortunately, chapter level data are not available from previous General Elections. The chapter was selected as the unit of analysis because relevant individual-level survey data is unavailable. Note that the chapter is simultaneously the immediate unit of government for much of the public service provision in the Navajo Nation and a focus of social and civic engagement through which identities form and opinions develop (Carmean, 2002, p. 47). Multiple studies have shown that locale has significant effects on political socialization (Raychaudhuri, 2018, p. 292). The large distances between communities across the Navajo Nation make the chapter an important locale for voters to share political information in conversation and for politicians to cultivate personal networks.

The dependent variable in the regression analysis is the percentage margin of victory for the winning presidential ticket in the General Election in each chapter. Independent variables in the analysis, also measured at the chapter level, include two measures of competition in the Primary Election for President, a measure of the change in voter turnout between the two rounds of the election cycle, measures of competition for seats in the Navajo Nation Council in the concurrent electoral cycle, a measure of competition in the preceding “midterm” General Election to three chapter-level executive offices, and one demographic measure.

Two measures of competition in the Primary Election for President are used in the regression analysis. The first is the percentage of the vote won in the Primary Election by the candidate(s) in the winning ticket in the General Election. With the sole exception of R.L. Jim’s selection by Ben Shelly to join his ticket in the 2010 General Election, losing Pri-

mary Election presidential candidates have not been chosen as General Election running mates. This variable allows investigation of the relationship between initial support in the Primary Election and subsequent support in the General Election. To date, candidates have not won majorities of the vote in the Primary Election. Winning the General Election requires attracting additional support either from voters who backed losing candidates in the Primary Election or from voters who were registered between the two rounds.

The second measure of competition in the Primary Election for President is the Effective Number of presidential candidates in that contest. The variable allows investigation of the degree to which the intensity of competition in the Primary Election is associated with the intensity of competition in the General Election. The percentage change in votes cast between the Primary Election and General Election was used to capture the effect of new registrations between the two rounds. The numbers of votes cast increased between the two rounds in every chapter in the 2006, 2010 and 2018 electoral cycles but decreased between the two rounds in all but three chapters in the 2014-2015 electoral cycle.

Two independent variables were included to assess "nationalization" of competition: competition in the concurrent General Election to the Navajo Nation Council and competition in the mid-term General Election to Chapter Executive Offices. Presidential candidates typically have experience in office in both the Navajo Nation Council and Chapter Executive Offices. Jonathan Nez, for example, was elected to both.

Between the 2006 and 2010 electoral cycles, the Navajo Nation Council underwent an electoral reform that reduced the number of seats from 88 to 24 and reduced the previous district size ranging from one to three seats to uniform single seat districts. This necessitated the adoption of two measures of competition: Effective Number for the 2006 General Election and the percentage margin of victory for the other three General Elections.

Measuring competition in the mid-term 2004, 2008, 2012 and 2016 General Elections for Chapter Executive Offices presented a different problem. Each chapter elects their own President, Vice-President and Secretary-Treasurer in contests that are often uncontested but may feature more than two candidates. Measuring competition for these offices separately using either a percentage margin of victory or the Effective Number would generate data fields overwhelmingly populated by scores of "one" and "two." As an alternative, an index of competition for all chapter executive offices was generated, providing the mean Effective Numbers of candidates in all three contests in an election cycle.

To capture the possible effect of the traditional-modern values cleavage, median age was included as a proxy in the analysis. These demographic data were collected from 109 of the 110 chapters' websites. Median age ranges from 44.4 to 23 across chapters, with a population

variation of 16.15, a reflection of the tendency of younger workers to migrate to the five larger “Agency Towns” for educational and employment opportunities.

Multicollinearity necessitated regression analysis using two models. Model 1 included the independent variables for the General Election winning ticket candidate(s)’s percentage of the vote in the Primary Election and the percentage change in turnout between the two rounds, together with measures of competition in the concurrent General Election for Navajo Nation Council and the preceding midterm General Election to Chapter Executive Offices, and the median age proxy for the traditional-modern cultural cleavage. Model 2 included the independent variables for the Effective Number of Primary Election candidates together with measures of competition in the concurrent General Election for Navajo Nation Council and the preceding midterm General Election to Chapter Executive Offices, and the Median Age proxy for the traditional-modern cultural cleavage.

## Findings

Of the 52 candidates who entered the four Primary Elections between 2006 and 2018, only five candidates entered more than once: Lynnda Lovejoy, Ben Shelly, Dale E. Tsosie, Donald Benally and Joe Shirley, Jr. Of them, Lovejoy, Shelly, Benally and Shirley each won more than 10% of the vote overall in their contests. Three of the candidates—Lovejoy, Shelly and Shirley—were also candidates in General Elections, though only Shelly won a General Election. Comparing percentage vote shares from Primary Election to Primary Election is a measure of the stability of support at the chapter level. Table 2 reports correlations coefficients for the percentage vote shares of those candidates in paired Primary Elections. Examination of the five underlined correlation coefficients show that only two—those for Lovejoy in 2006-2010 and those for Shirley in 2014-2018—are statistically significant at the .05 level. So Lovejoy drew on the same levels of support from the same chapters in 2010 as 2008, and Shirley drew on the same levels of support from the same chapters in 2014 and 2018. Support for the other three repeat candidates appears to have been less unstable.

**Table 2. Correlation Matrix, Primary Election Percentage Vote Shares**

	Lovejoy 2006	Lovejoy 2010	Shelly 2010	Shelly 2014	Tsosie 2010	Tsosie 2014	Benally 2010	Benally 2014	Shirley 2014	Shirley 2018
Lovejoy 2006	1.000									
Lovejoy 2010	<u>0.7119 •</u>	1.000								
Shelly 2010	0.2923 •	0.2255 •	1.000							
Shelly 2014	-0.1284	-0.2610 •	<u>0.0679</u>	1.000						
Tsosie 2010	-0.0623	0.0926	-0.1517	-0.2979 •	1.000					
Tsosie 2014	-0.0284	0.0091	-0.0265	0.0776	<u>-0.1687</u>	1.000				
Benally 2010	0.0318	0.0365	-0.1125	-0.1267	-0.0147	-0.0950	1.000			
Benally 2014	-0.1652	-0.0603	-0.1505	-0.0654	0.6973 •	-0.2355 •	<u>0.1099</u>	1.000		
Shirley 2014	-0.0872	-0.1339	0.1961 •	0.0076	-0.4893 •	-0.0910	-0.1141	-0.3331 •	1.000	
Shirley 2018	-0.1516	-0.1266	0.1157	-0.1066	-0.2161 •	0.0616	-0.1083	-0.1914 •	<u>0.7726 •</u>	1.000

N = 110.

• stat. sig. 0.05

Table 2 also reports ten additional coefficients for correlations between candidate percentage vote shares in election dyads that are statistically significant at the .05 level. For the purposes of clarity, the correlation coefficients not statistically significant at the .05 level are not shown. So, for example, Lovejoy's 2010 General Election rival Shelly won high-

er levels of support from the same chapters in 2010 that Lovejoy had in both 2006 and 2010. Interestingly, five of the additional correlation coefficients involve Shirley and, for four of those, the sign is negative. What that suggests is sustained opposition to Shirley by the supporters of Tsosie and Benally.

Two regression models were elaborated to assess the relative effects on competition in the General Election for President and Vice President with competition in the Primary Election for President, competition in the concurrent General Election for the Navajo Nation Council, competition in the midterm General Election for Chapter Executive Offices, and Median Age. Regression coefficients for Model 1 are displayed in Table 3. As examination of the third row indicates, the winning ticket's percentage of the vote in the Primary Election is positively associated with its percentage margin of victory in the General Election in all four electoral cycles, and statistically significant at the .05 level. Winning candidates tend to perform well in the General Election where they performed well in the Primary Election.

The coefficients for the association between competition in the General Election for President and Vice President and change in turnout between rounds was statistically significant at the .05 level only for the 2006 and 2018 electoral cycles. That effect vanishes in the two most politically "disturbed" electoral cycles, in 2010 when incumbent President Shirley does not run as had been expected and in 2014-2015 when Chris Deschene succeeds in the first round only to be denied a slot on the General Election ballot because of the constitutional challenge to his language fluency.

With respect to the proposed nationalization or harmonization of competition across levels of government, neither competition in the concurrent Navajo Nation Council Delegate contests nor competition in the Chapter Executive Offices was associated with competition in the General Election for President and Vice President at a statistically significant level of .05 in any of the electoral cycles. There is no evidence of nationalization in Model 1.

Median Age presented an association with the dependent variable statistically significant at the .05 level only in the 2018 electoral cycle. That the traditional-modern cleavage would have developed electoral significance only recently is improbable. However, older voters may have found socially conservative Nez a more attractive candidate than Shirley.

The R-squares indicate that the model explains roughly 26% and 43% of the variation in the dependent variable in the politically normal 2006 and 2018 electoral cycles and roughly 17% and 19% of the variation in the dependent variable in the "disturbed" 2010 and 2014-2015 electoral cycles.

**Table 3. Regression Coefficients, Model 1**  
**Dependent Variable = Presidential General Election % Margin of Victory**

	2006		2010		2014-2015		2018	
	N = 104		N = 106		N = 104		N = 105	
Independent Variable	Coefficient (Standard Error)	T-stat	Coefficient (Standard Error)	T-stat	Coefficient (Standard Error)	T-stat	Coefficient (Standard Error)	T-stat
General Election Winning Ticket's % Vote in Primary Election	.6235668 (.179052)	3.48 •	.381052 (.1152622)	3.31 •	.8677318 (.246549)	3.52 •	.80079 2.10 520 64	7.61 •
% Turnout Change	.6165549 (.1400871)	4.40 •	.0838241 (.1664023)	0.50	-.4073172 (.2182959)	-1.87	.4686333 (.2219779)	2.11 •
Concurrent Council Delegate Competition	.0472998 (.0497702)	0.95	-.002219 (.06034)	-0.04	.079124 (.0550997)	1.44	-.0266778 (.0382387)	-0.70
Previous Election Chapter Competition	-.0157724 (.0221709)	-0.71	-.0724278 (.0459598)	-1.58	-.0062729 (.034779)	-0.18	.0506866 (.0431866)	1.17
Median Age	-.0011049 (.003072)	-0.36	-.0012726 (.0028574)	-0.45	.0060784 (.0043279)	1.40	.012299 (.003129)	3.93 •
Constant	-.2041118 (.1499572)	-1.36	.1696953 (.1255242)	1.35	-.0728902 (.1429816)	-0.51	-.4292416 (.122469)	-3.50
R-sq.	0.2627		0.1686		0.1877		0.4328	
Adj. R-sq.	0.2251		0.1270		0.1463		0.4042	

• stat. sig. 0.05

The regression coefficients for Model 2 are displayed in Table 4. As examination of the third row indicates, there is a negative association,

statistically significant at the .05 level, between competition in the Primary Election and competition in the General Election in two of four electoral cycles. More intense first-round competition was associated with smaller margins of victory in the second round in 2006 and 2018, an effect not seen in the politically disturbed 2010 and 2014-2015 electoral cycles. Although it is speculation, voters may have used the information available from overall competition intensity in the first round as a voting cue in the second round in the absence of unexpected and controversial events but ignored it when unexpected and controversial events occurred. Thus had Shirley and Deschene been on the General Election ballots in 2010 and 2014-2015 respectively, the findings would likely also have revealed negative associations, statistically significant at the .05 level, between competition in the Primary Election and competition in the General Election for those electoral cycles.

**Table 4. Regression Coefficients, Model 2.**  
**Dependent Variable = Presidential General Election % Margin of Victory**

	2006		2010		2014-2015		2018	
	N = 104		N = 106		N = 104		N = 105	
Independent Variable	Coefficient (Standard Error)	T-stat	Coefficient (Standard Error)	T-stat	Coefficient (Standard Error)	T-stat	Coefficient (Standard Error)	T-stat
Effective # Primary Candidates	-.0510013 (.018673)	-2.73 •	-.0005009 (.010875)	-0.05	-.0135174 (.0158475)	-0.85	-.064253 (.0138088)	-4.65 •
Concurrent Council Delegate Competition	.0342454 (.0552992)	0.62	.0518718 (.0626245)	0.83	.0818725 (.057499)	1.42	.0096938 (.0431636)	0.22
Previous Election Chapter Competition	-.0204442 (.0243164)	-0.84	-.0985043 (.0477295)	-2.06 •	.0171728 (.0367417)	0.47	.0364313 (.04901)	0.74
Median Age	-.0002826 (.0034064)	-0.08	-.0044301 (.0028238)	-1.57	.0110397 (.004353)	2.54 •	.0118712 (.0035496)	3.34 •
Constant	.3819634 (.1831962)	2.08	.4063279 (.1120902)	3.63	-.0061349 (.1658317)	-0.04	.2257421 (.139199)	1.62
R-sq.	0.0802		0.0689		0.0917		0.2550	
Adj. R-sq.	0.0430		0.0320		0.0550		0.2252	

• stat. sig. 0.05

The Model 2 regression coefficients support the conclusion drawn from the results in Model 1 that there is no nationalization of competition across levels of government. That the coefficients for Median Age in Model 2 present an association with the dependent variable statistically significant at the .05 level in the last two electoral cycles does not contradict the findings in Model 1. Finally, the R-squares show that Model 2 explains markedly less of the variation in the dependent variable than Model 1. Comparing the R-squares between models also indicates relatively more of the variation in the dependent variable in the politically normal 2006 and 2018 electoral cycles.

## Discussion

This study contributes to what is known specifically about electoral politics in the Navajo Nation and more generally about electoral politics in comparable Native American governments, as well as what is known about the nationalization of competition in non-partisan, majority runoff electoral systems. Comparing correlation coefficients for the handful of repeat candidates in Primary Elections—only five out of 52 candidates in the four electoral cycles in this study—reveals that voter support in one electoral cycle may not reappear in the next electoral cycle. Multiple regression analysis revealed that winning candidates in the General Election tend to perform well in chapters where they performed well in the Primary Election. Also revealed in the absence of positive association at the .05 level between the percentage margin of victory in the general election and percentage change in voter turnout between rounds were the effects of the politically “disturbed” 2010 and 2014-2015 electoral cycles. These findings offer no support for the proposed nationalization of competition across levels of government. The intensity of competition in the presidential contest is unrelated to the intensity of competition for seats in the Navajo Nation Council or for chapter executive offices. Thus, the lower overall competition in the 2014-2015 and 2018 General Elections for President-Vice President compared with that in 2006 and 2010 General Elections reflects choices made about presidential candidates rather than a trend toward reduced competition at all levels. While analysis of individual-level data would be more convincing, analysis of these chapter-level data indicate concentrations of antipathy toward Shirley and attraction to Nez.

Are these results generalizable? Although there are no Native American governments with both contiguous areas and resident populations as large as the Navajo Nation, medium-sized governments like the Tohono O’odham Nation and Mescalero Apache Tribe share the same presidential constitutional structures, non-partisan majority runoff electoral systems and public policy problems. There too the tension

between traditional values of community accord and tribal unity on the one hand and electoral competition on the other is likely inescapable. Those commonalities may be enough to generate similar consequences: bases of voter support for candidates being unstable across electoral cycles and an absence of nationalization of competition between levels of government. Tohono O'odham and Mescalero Apache voters may also seek voting cues in Primary Election competition in their immediate locales.

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### Notes

1. Navajo Nation territory surrounds the largest Puebloan reservation, the Hopi and Arizona Tewa Reservation, which itself includes an exclave territory of the Navajo Nation.
2. That the scholarly literature on Native Government elections is small is evident in David E. Wilkins and Heidi Kiiwetinesook Stark's widely adopted textbook on *Native American politics, American Indian Politics and the American Political System* (2018), where it is given scant coverage by comparison with Native American participation in national and state elections.
3. Notable exceptions to this majority runoff generalization exist. The Assiniboine and Sioux Tribes of the Fort Peck Indian Reservation elect a Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Sergeant-of Arms and twelve other members of its Executive Board in a single non-transferable vote electoral system: multi-member district with a plurality decision rule (Constitution and By-Laws with Amendments Incorporated and Enrollment Ordinance No. 1 of the Assiniboine and Sioux Tribes of the Fort Peck Indian Reservation, Montana).

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