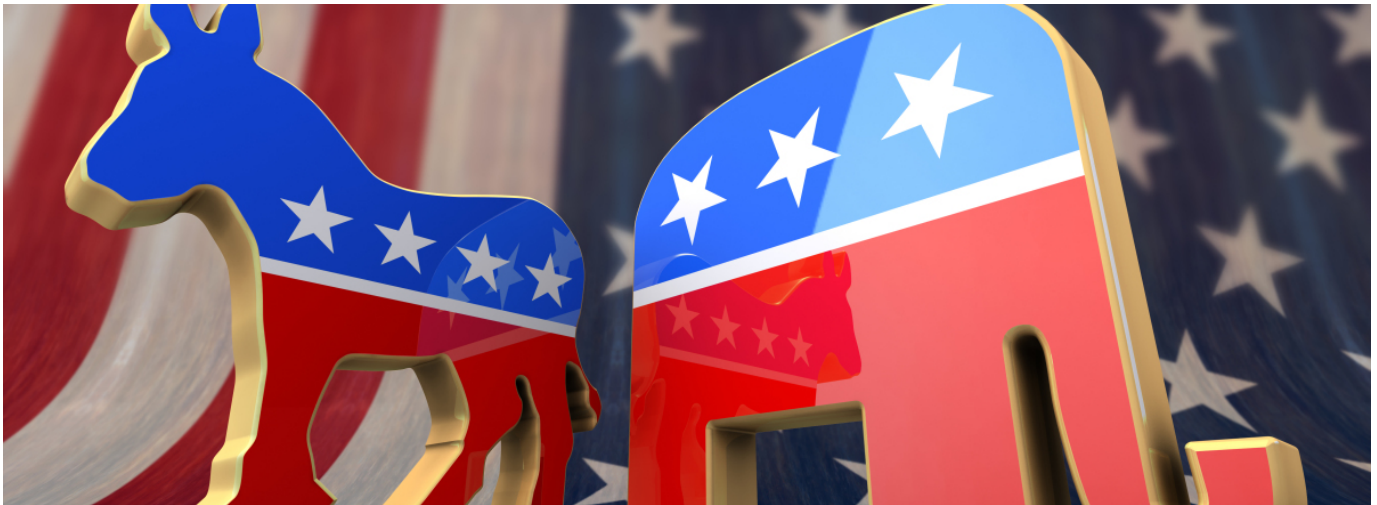


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The Demographic Both Party Platforms Missed: Child Sex Abuse Victims

25 JUL 2016 | [MARCI A. HAMILTON](#)



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The wild ride of this year's presidential election has left many looking for landmarks that will guide their choice for the next president. One place to figure out who stands for what lies in the 2016 Republican and Democratic Platforms. So I decided to explore how each party deals with children.

It would not have been irrational to assume that this would be the year when the epidemic of child sex abuse might find its way onto a platform. After all, *Spotlight* won the Oscar Award for Best Picture. Institutions in every category that have recklessly dealt with the sexual abuse of children continue

to fall over themselves as they choose between defensive silence, self-serving denials, and lame mea culpas. Indeed, there have been so many institutions outed, it is impossible to name them all here. Suffice it to say that tony prep schools, universities, sports, and religious organizations have had some problems. Pitched battles between fragile adult survivors of abuse and the Catholic bishops over statutes of limitations for child sex abuse and rape have dominated politics and headlines.

And talk about a demographic: 20-25 percent of the American public is sexually abused as children. That is an “interest” that might well persuade a voter to cross party lines, depending on the Party’s message on child sex abuse. For this large number of Americans, however, the Platforms just nibble around the problem.

One needs to cast a wide net for “children” in each Platform to find some indication of how the Party views the epidemic of child sex abuse. Neither uses the phrase “child sex abuse.”

The Republican Platform on Children

One child-related Republican plank that decidedly does not apply to victims of sex abuse is the Republican Platform’s constitutional right for “unborn” children. There is also the issue of “minimizing the separation of children with disabilities from their peers.”

Then there are the issues that have some relation to the scourge of child sex abuse: For example, the RNC has a section on pornography: “Pornography, with its harmful effects, especially on children, has become a public health crisis that is destroying the lives of millions.” This seems like a serious commitment to the prevention of child sex abuse, though the next line seems

to take it away: “We encourage states to continue to fight this public menace and pledge our commitment to children’s safety and well-being. . . . We urge energetic prosecution of child pornography. . . .” Pornography is a classic example of problem with negative externalities that cannot be solved by states individually. It requires national action, in conjunction with countries all over the world, so why is the RNC pointing to the states to stop what is a global market in child pornography? More importantly, why would a presidential platform “*urge* energetic prosecution?” Does that mean it is not urging vigorous federal prosecution of child pornographers? Who and what are the Republicans protecting here, if anyone?

Finally, the RNC Platform opposes “human trafficking.” Now, this is a crime for which the Republicans appear to be suggesting federal prosecution: “We will use the full force of the law against those who engage in commercial sexual exploitation. . . .” Hear hear.

Yet, this phrasing is odd, and so here is my question for the Republican Platform drafters: what about the *noncommercial* sexual exploitation that happens in the United States every single day? In families, schools, churches, on teams, and anywhere children live or play. There should not have to be an exchange of money for the Republicans to oppose child sexual exploitation.

To summarize, the Republicans are pledging to fight sexual *images* of children and *prostituting* them, with which all good people should agree, to be sure, but they are mum on the child sex abuse crisis that is in everyone’s news feeds every single day. The Platform also rejects ratification of the international Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The Democratic Platform on Children

The Democratic Platform does not have an “unborn” child plank, but does have a plank to “end raids and roundups of children and families” in the immigration context. There is also a lengthy plank on making education—including early childhood education—a priority. This section includes a promise to ensure “children have health care, stable housing free of contaminants, and a community free of violence in order to minimize the likelihood of cognitive delays.” Sprinkled throughout other sections are various promises to end child labor, provide children mental health care, feed the hungry, count them in the Census, and let them opt out of standardized tests.

The Democrats do join the Republicans in their stand against trafficking: “We will stop the scourge of human trafficking and modern slavery of men, women, boys, and girls. We will use the full force of the law against those who engage in modern-day forms of slavery, including the commercial sexual exploitation of children. . . .” There is that phrase again: “commercial sexual exploitation.” Again, there is no acknowledgment of the epidemic of noncommercial child sexual exploitation that afflicts American children border to border.

It is not terribly surprising to see neither Platform paying much attention to children, or to child sex abuse. There are many reasons for this omission: Adults prefer and protect adults. Children don’t vote. Denial. A bystander culture. Willed ignorance. Yet, these reasons, whether individual or taken together, don’t solve the problem.

A Proposed Plank for the Epidemic of Child Sex Abuse

Neither party has stepped up for the millions of sex abuse victims and, therefore, the Platforms should be disappointing to these victims, their families, and friends. But this is an epidemic that hurts every American, and there is a cost-benefit ratio that both parties need to consider. Taxpayers and the healthcare and insurance industries pay for the lost productivity and medical costs that flow from this epidemic. Preventing sex abuse, identifying hidden child predators, and providing treatment and justice to existing survivors would yield tremendous savings that could go toward other challenges like education.

Here is a draft plank to address the scourge of child sex abuse in the United States: “Best estimates suggest that 20-25 percent of American children are subjected to sexual abuse. The science of child sex abuse has established that the trauma of child sex abuse often has lasting effects, with victims experiencing a significantly higher rate of PTSD, addiction, suicide, and many other physical, mental, and emotional negative consequences than the population generally. Child sex abuse destroys childhoods, lives, and families, and deprives the United States of the talents and contributions of too many. The cost is typically borne by the victims rather than the institutions that created the conditions for the abuse. The justice system has routinely failed child sex abuse victims through unfairly short criminal and civil statutes of limitations. To turn the tide on this epidemic, (1) the federal government should incentivize the states to eliminate the criminal and civil statutes of limitations for child sex abuse and to revive expired civil statutes of limitations; (2) the President should appoint a National Commission on child sex abuse, similar to the Australian Royal Commission; and (3) Congress should amend the Religious Freedom Restoration Act to prevent its application in any case involving harm to a child.”

I know, I know. Kids don't vote, but adults do, and with 20-25 percent of the population sexually abused when they were children, that's a "faction" worth appealing to.

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