

**FROM PROTESTS, TO THE BALLOT BOX, AND BEYOND:
BUILDING INDIGENOUS
POWER**



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Photo Courtesy of Josue Rivas (Mexico/Otomi)

PREFACE

Native peoples have burst into the consciousness of many Americans over the course of the last year. From the organizing power against racist Native sports mascots, major victories against oil pipelines that undermine Tribal sovereignty, and the McGirt v. Oklahoma Supreme Court decision that affirmed Native lands, Native peoples have interrupted the dominant narrative of who we are in the 21st Century. However, as the United States continues to face a global pandemic and attempts to undermine democracy, Native communities have also been negatively impacted by COVID-19, chronic inadequate funding, and the active exclusion of Native voices from national conversations.

As we continue to build a collective movement for justice and walk beside all those in the United States who are ready to address the array of systemic problems revealed by the pandemic, we

all must better understand the needs and concerns of our communities. Native and Indigenous peoples are often excluded from the collection and reporting of data. When included, the data is inaccurate or views Native people as a monolith.

As we began the Indigenous Futures Project, our organizations were intentional about ensuring we worked collaboratively in service of our community to shape a future where Native peoples are valued, seen, and safe. Our collective power is our strength, we know it was critical to work closely with each other, grassroots organizers, and Indigenous researchers to collect data and information that was nuanced, representative, and respectful of our community. As a result, the Indigenous Futures Survey (IFS) is the largest research project ever conducted in Indian Country with participation from over 6,400 Native peoples from across the country, representing 401 tribes

and from all 50 states. We had a diverse and representative sample across age, gender and geography. This survey is the first step in a years-long process to understand the motivations, priorities, and changing demographics and beliefs of our community.

This report reveals insight from the IFS pertaining to voting, voting behavior, and political engagement. Democracy is the cornerstone of the United States government and remains an aspirational value of the country. However, voter suppression, campaign finance fraud, and the ongoing systematic disenfranchisement of Indigenous, Black, and other communities of color has inhibited the creation of a truly representative democracy. These anti-democratic efforts have generated national discussions on voting norms and behaviors, conversations that often neglect to include Native peoples.

Many national narratives dismiss the Native vote as inconsistent, Native people as unengaged, or our population as too small to make a difference in elections. But the political power of Native peoples has been more visible in recent years. From the collective action at Standing Rock, to

the first two Native women elected to Congress in 2018, Native peoples have shown time and time again that we are essential to shaping and creating a more representative democracy. As the 2020 election approaches, there is increasing awareness of the importance and potential impact of an engaged Native electorate, especially in 7 swing states: Michigan, Wisconsin, North Carolina, Arizona, Colorado, Minnesota and Nevada.

The right to vote was a hard-fought and recent victory for Native peoples. Native peoples were not granted citizenship by the federal government until 1924. Utah became the last state to allow Native peoples to vote in 1962. As Congresswoman Debra Haaland (NM-1st) has said, “Voting is sacred.” It is sacred precisely because those in power tried so hard to extinguish our visibility and keep Native peoples from participating in this democracy and govern our own collective land base—and continue to do so.

As we face the election of a lifetime, it’s imperative that Native peoples, perspectives, and issues are present in conversations about the future of this country. Native peoples not only vote in Tribal, state, and national elections, but



also participate in protests and community and grassroots organization-led actions and contact public officials. In fact, the Native vote will help determine the outcome of 77 presidential electoral votes, a margin that determined the outcome of the 2016 presidential election, in addition to critical Senate, House, and local races.

We hope that you use these research findings as an opportunity to have more inclusive conversations about our community when discussing the upcoming election. As we continue to support the building of a collective movement for justice, racial justice and sovereignty, the use of data, collected, analyzed, and presented by Native peoples for Native peoples is key. The recognition and inclusion of Native peoples and the recognition of our inherent, moral and legal rights as sovereign nations are key to building a more inclusive and

representative democracy, and our collective, ancestral knowledge as a community will ensure a safer future for all communities.

Project Partners:



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INTRODUCTION

GETTING IN "GOOD TROUBLE"

The 2020 Indigenous Futures Survey is the first ever study, conducted for Indigenous Peoples and led by Indigenous Peoples, aimed at understanding the priorities and needs of Indigenous individuals and communities in the United States. For too long, Indigenous Peoples' voices have been omitted from important conversations, reduced in importance to a mere asterisk on graphs and lumped into an ambiguous category labelled "other". Too often, the goal of research is to learn about Indigenous Peoples. The purpose of the Indigenous Futures Survey is to learn from Indigenous Peoples--how we think about ourselves, what we find important, and what galvanizes us to make change; to give Indigenous Peoples a platform; and to hold politicians, educators, policy makers, and researchers accountable to hear our collective voice and to preclude them from claiming a dearth of data.

The first annual Indigenous Futures Survey was conducted by researchers at the University of Michigan and the University of California, Berkeley in partnership with the Center for Native American Youth, IllumiNative, and Native Organizers Alliance. From June 23rd to August 15th, Indigenous Peoples over the age of 18, across the U.S. took the survey online in exchange for the chance to be entered into a raffle for various prizes. We planned to send representatives

into tribal and urban Native communities to conduct in-person surveys, but the COVID-19 pandemic prevented this recruitment strategy. Yet, even with this setback, the online survey link was sent out by at least 46 Native organizations, 75 tribes, 60 tribal colleges/universities or college/university Native student organizations, and 5 Native media outlets. Overall, 6460 Indigenous People, living in all 50 states, as well as the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and Guam, and representing more than 400 federally- and state-recognized tribes, completed the study. Six percent of our sample identified as First Nations, a term used to refer to Indigenous People in Canada. While we anticipate that the First Nations people who participated in the study reside in both the U.S. and Canada, we are not able to determine specifics from our survey. In the future, efforts will be made to address this shortcoming. Given the constraints of the COVID-19 pandemic, we know we can do better in terms of capturing Indigenous voices. That said, the first annual Indigenous Futures Survey includes sub-populations of Indigenous Peoples that are almost never discussed, such as urban, college educated, LGBTQ2S+, and Republican or conservative people. We look forward to further amplifying Indigenous voices in the future.

With 2020 being a national and state election

year, the first report from the 2020 Indigenous Futures Study takes a closer look at what motivates voting and political engagement among Indigenous Peoples. We were particularly interested in what issues, experiences, and identities motivate Indigenous People to stand up politically or as the late distinguished Senator John Lewis proclaimed, get in "good trouble." To do this, the report combines statistical findings with quotes from Indigenous People who participated in the survey. What this report clearly reveals is that Indigenous Peoples:

- Vote and are politically active and engaged in a variety of ways.
- Feel as though our voices are not being heard, that politicians do not care, and that our individual and community's needs and priorities are not being adequately addressed.
- Do not trust the U.S. government and are worried about the direction of the country.
- Prioritize improving mental health, caring for tribal elders, and addressing violence against women, children, girls, and LGBTQ2S+ individuals.

These findings suggest at least three steps we can take to honor Indigenous voices and empower Indigenous Peoples. An important first step is motivating Indigenous People to vote and to continue advocating for the needs and priorities of our communities. Second, listen and gain an accurate understanding of the contemporary issues faced by Indigenous communities and sub-groups. Third, stand with Indigenous Peoples as

we take the first of many steps to build the future we want to see for the next generations.

We want to end by thanking the thousands of Indigenous People who shared their voices with us. In the future, we will continue to lift up our people's voices and to hold up the diversity of perspectives, needs, and concerns in the best way we can. Thank you to the individuals who spent months developing and carrying out the study. Special thanks to the core teams from Center for Native American Youth--Nikki Pitre, Kendra Becenti, and Cheyenne Brady, Illuminative--Crystal Echo Hawk, Leah Salgado, and Savannah Romero, and Native Organizers Alliance--Judith LeBlanc and Shelley Means. We are grateful for the partnership and the knowledge you shared with us.

In Solidarity,

The 2020 Indigenous Futures Research Team

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Hannah Feliz Ramil *(Filipino American)*



DEFINING IMPORTANT TERMS

We want to acknowledge that identity labels shift over time, generations and place. Furthermore, some labels speak more to particular individuals and their experiences.

While the majority of survey participants who participated in the Indigenous Futures Survey report identifying as Native American (94%), there were still others within this group who stated that either 1) they prefer another term or 2) they are another Indigenous group. In this report, we use the term “Indigenous Peoples” to be maximally inclusive of the diverse background of our survey participants. Notably, in creating this report, we debated whether to use “Indigenous Peoples” or “Native Peoples”, which are often used interchangeably. Ultimately, for consistency with the title of the survey, the “Indigenous Futures Survey”, we chose “Indigenous Peoples”. We use other identity labels, when presenting results about specific Indigenous subgroups. See definitions of terms below:

RACIAL/ETHNIC IDENTITY LABELS

Indigenous Peoples:

A term used to represent the original inhabitants of a geographic location.

Native American:

A term used to represent the Indigenous Peoples of the land that is referred to as the United States.

First Nations:

A term used to represent the Indigenous Peoples of the land that is referred to as Canada.

Alaska Native:

A term used to represent the Indigenous Peoples of the land that is referred to as Alaska.

Native Hawaiian:

A term used to represent the Indigenous Peoples of the land that is referred to as Hawai’i.

GENDER IDENTITY LABELS

Two Spirit:

While the term encompasses different meanings from a diversity of Indigenous groups, it is commonly used to identify Indigenous Peoples who embody both masculine and feminine spirits. This term is used exclusively by Indigenous Peoples.

Transgender:

A term that may be used by people whose gender identity is different from the sex they were assigned at birth

Non-Binary or Genderqueer:

Terms that may be used by people who do not identify exclusively with male or female gender orientations or by those whose gender changes over time. Although they are similar in meaning, there are subtle nuances that lead people to identify with one term over the other.

Gender Non-Conforming:

A term that may be used by people who do not adhere to traditional gender norms

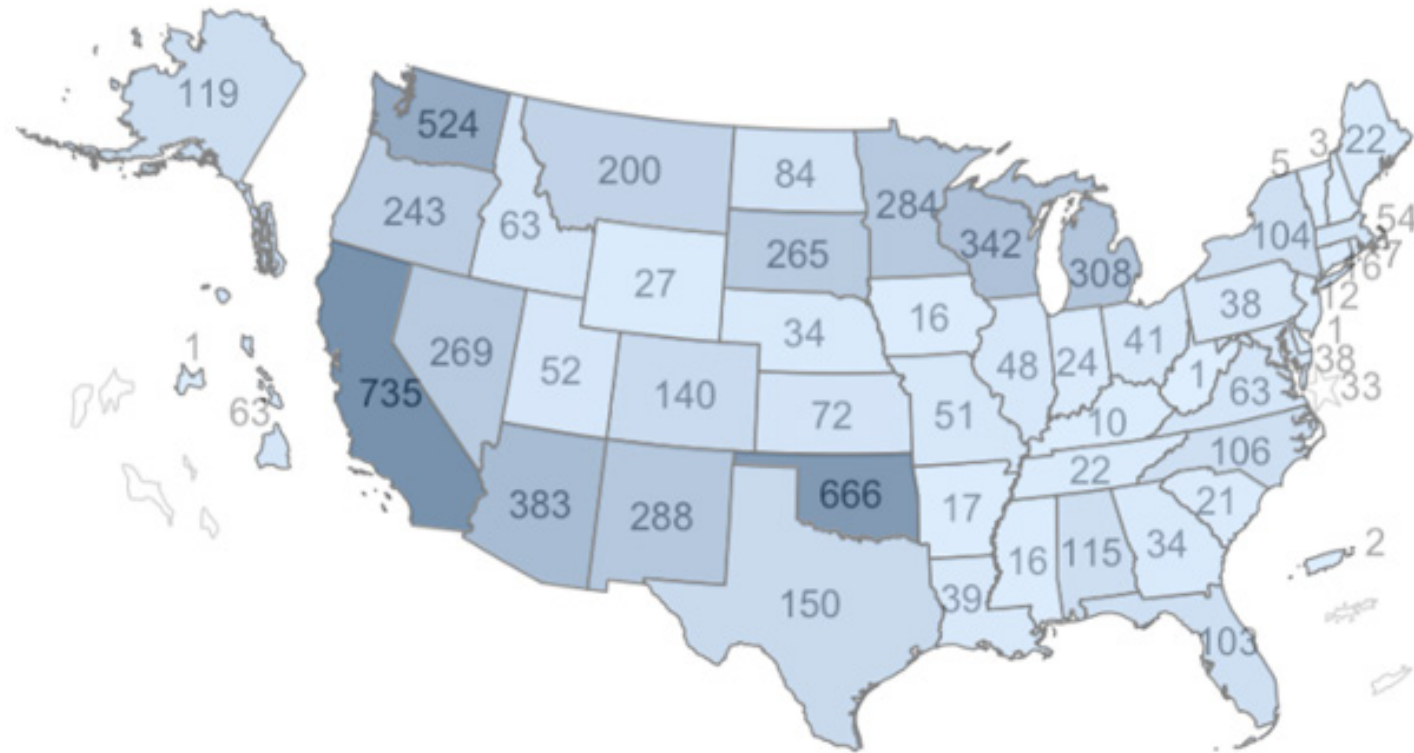


STUDY DEMOGRAPHICS

Traditional surveys largely omit Indigenous Peoples. In this unprecedented endeavor, we aimed to highlight diversity of Indigenous Peoples and communities. As this demographics section highlights, Indigenous Peoples in our survey hail from more than 400 different tribal affiliations, all 50 states, and a variety of residential spaces (i.e., reservations, small towns, and cities). They

also represent a notable range of genders, ages, incomes, and education levels. However, there are certainly segments of Indigenous populations (i.e., men, First Nations, and LGBTQ2S+ people) we need to continue to reach out to. This section provides a brief snapshot of the Indigenous Futures Survey participants.

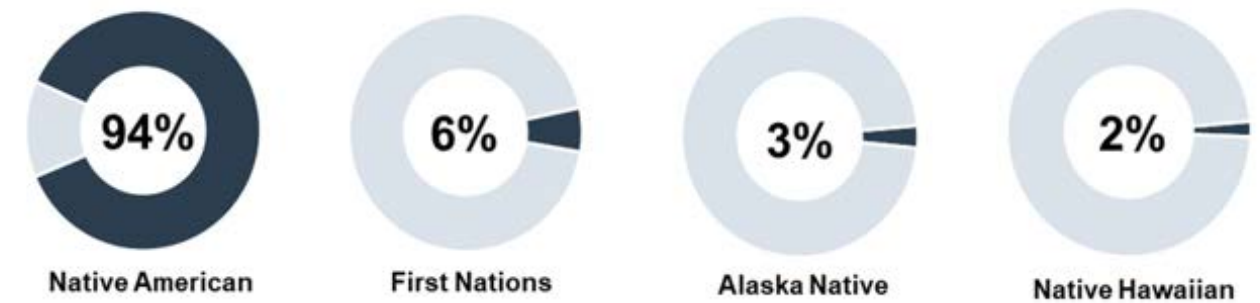
Who took the Indigenous Futures Survey?



Note: Darker shades denote more participants, whereas lighter shades denote fewer participants.

**6,460 INDIGENOUS PEOPLE REPRESENTING
401 TRIBES, VILLAGES AND INDIGENOUS
COMMUNITIES SHARED THEIR VOICE**

TOP 4 INDIGENOUS IDENTITIES PARTICIPANTS IDENTIFIED WITH:



Note: Percentages do not sum to 100% because people could identify with multiple groups.



Photo Courtesy of Cara Romero (Chemehuevi Indian Tribe)

TOP 10 MOST REPRESENTED TRIBES

1. Navajo Nation (9%)

2. Cherokee Nation (4%)

3. Poarch Band of Creek Indians (3%)

4. Osage Nation (3%)

5. Muscogee (Creek) Nation (3%)

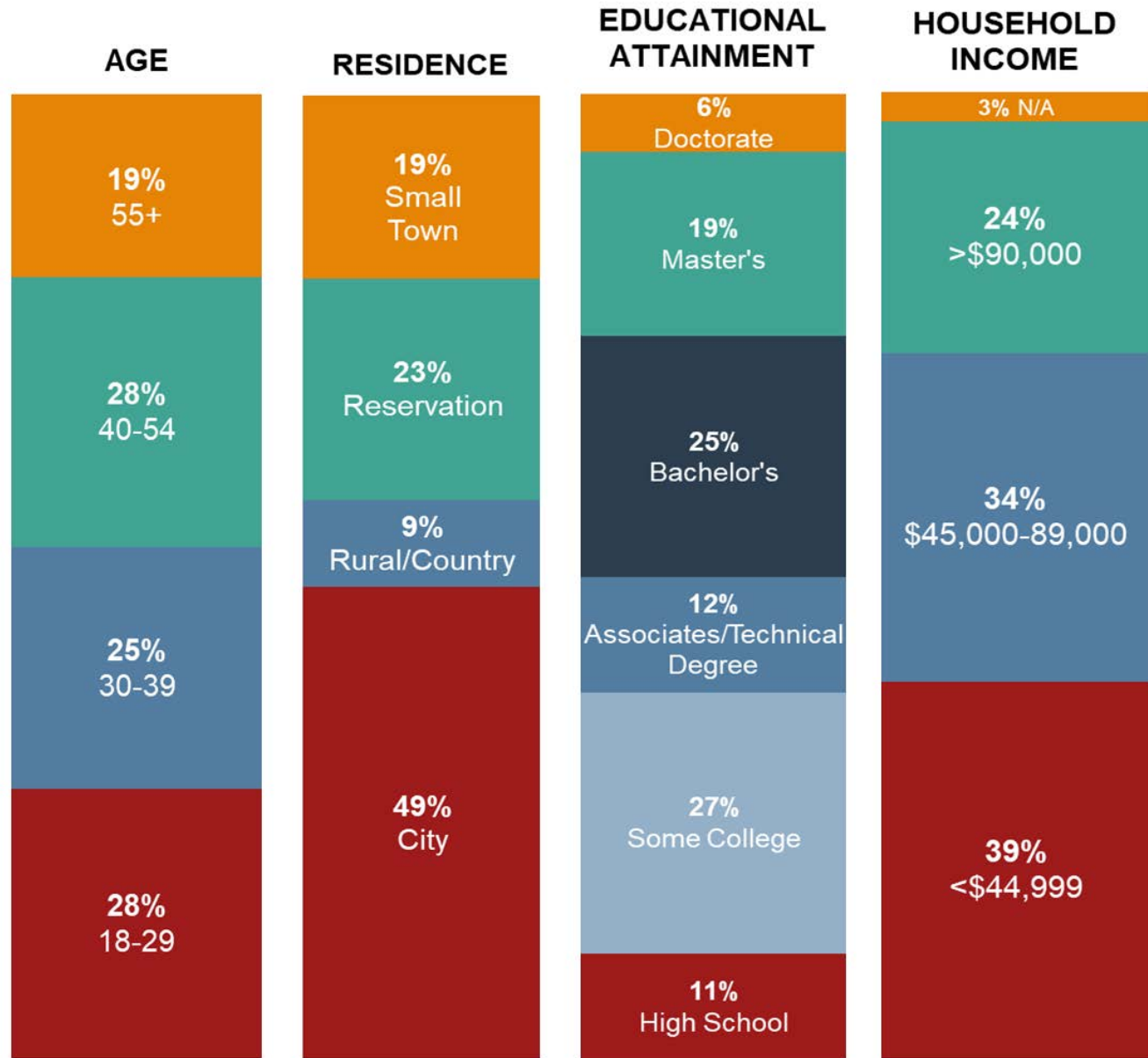
6. Oglala Sioux Tribe (2%)
7. Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma (2%)

8. Minnesota Chippewa Tribe (2%)

9. Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians (2%)

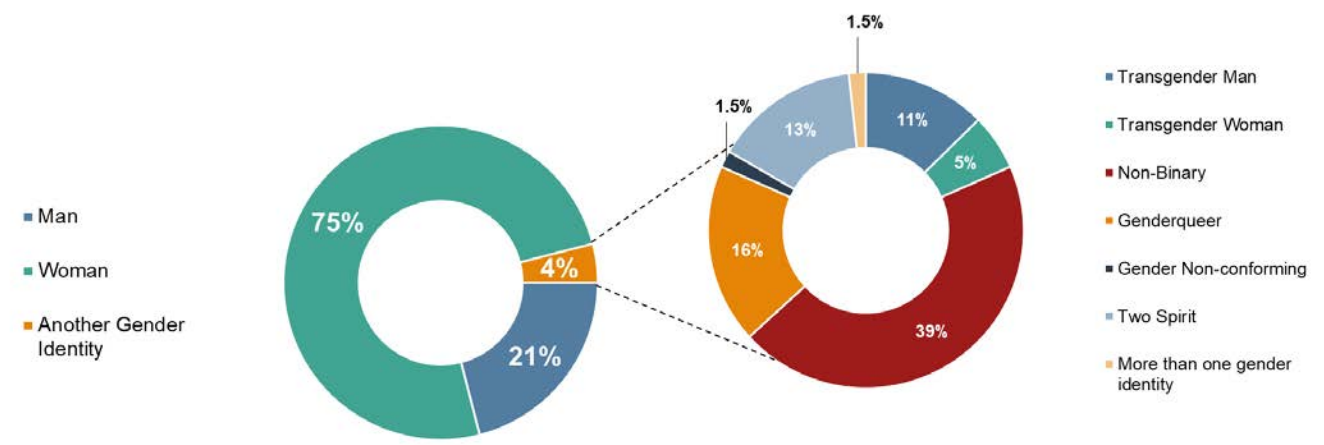
10. Oneida Nation of Wisconsin (2%)

Beyond gender, participants ranged in age from 18 to 89 years old, with the average age being 40 years old. Furthermore, the average household income of participants is between \$45,000 and \$60,000, with more than half of the sample having some college education. The breakdown for the whole sample on these key demographics:



GENDER

Although the Indigenous Futures Survey represents a diversity of gender identities, women are most represented in the survey.



INDIGENOUS IDENTIFICATION

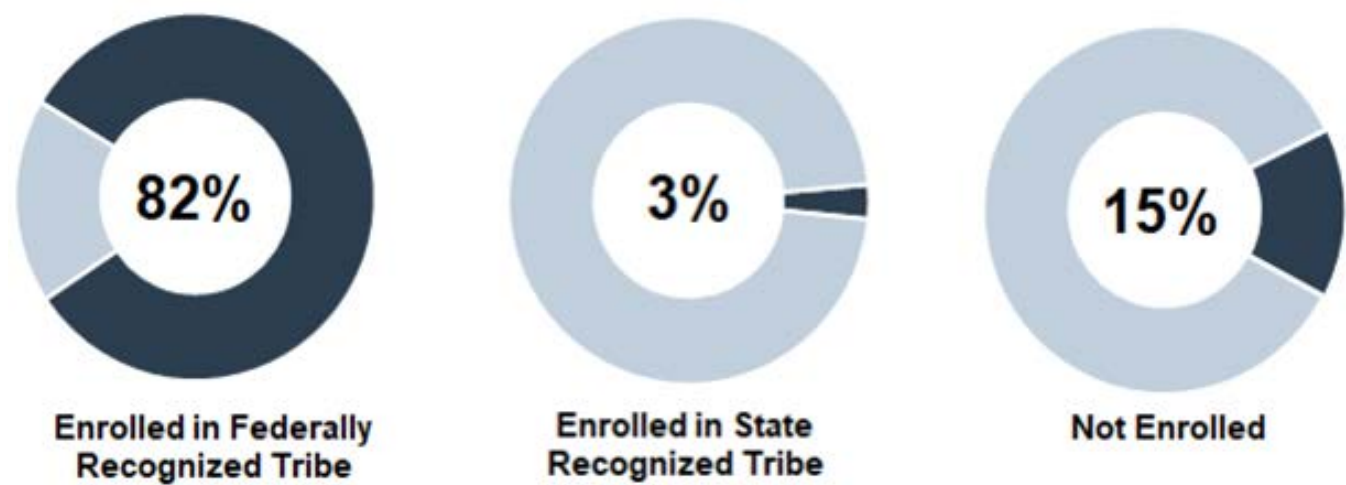
We aim to highlight a more nuanced and dynamic snapshot of how Indigenous people identify and engage with being Indigenous. This section will cover the following aspects of Indigenous identity: enrollment status, enculturation (i.e., engagement in Indigenous cultural activities), identity centrality (i.e., importance of being Indigenous to wellbeing), and preferences for different Indigenous labels.

“To be seen as diverse nations not a monolithic whole”

- Liberal Indigenous female adult

Enrollment

In the U.S., one way in which Native American and Alaska Native identity is measured is by enrollment in a federally or state recognized tribe. Given that our survey was open to Indigenous People more broadly, we must exercise caution in interpreting the “not enrolled” category as this distinction, or language, is not traditionally used by First Nations or Native Hawaiian individuals. In the larger forthcoming Indigenous Futures report, we will further break apart the not enrolled group, but given that the majority of our sample is Native American and enrolled, further data in this report will not be broken down by this identity measure.



Note: Enrollment was self-reported

Enculturation

Another important aspect of identity is enculturation, which refers to how Indigenous people engage with culture through various behaviors and activities, such as speaking Indigenous languages and attending ceremonies.

In our sample, 47% of Indigenous people report participating in cultural activities frequently or most of the time. The top 4 most practiced cultural activities across the entire sample include:



Identity Centrality

Identity centrality refers to the importance of Indigenous identity to an individual’s psychological wellbeing. While people may vary in the extent to which they feel attached to their

Indigenous identity, on average, participants in our sample reported that they were highly attached to being Indigenous.



Preferences for Indigenous Identity Labels

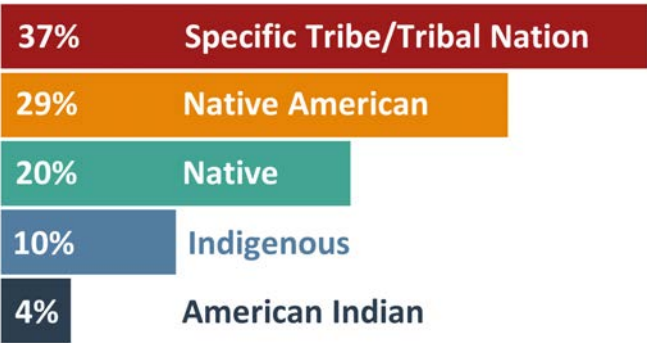
To examine the identity labels Indigenous Peoples prefer, we examined both the breadth of identity labels participants personally use to identify themselves as well as the single term they report most often using. First, with respect to the breadth of identity labels, we found that Indigenous Peoples use multiple different identity labels to describe themselves. The most commonly used terms are: peoples’ specific tribe/tribal nation (68%), “Native American” (64%), “Native” (52%), and “Indigenous” (51%). Notably,

only 27% of Indigenous Peoples use “American Indian,” which suggests that this identity label, which was once most commonly used, is now out of favor. Second, with respect to the identity label Indigenous Peoples “use most often,” we find clear differences mapping on to the diversity of Indigenous communities. We individually highlight how Native Americans, First Nations, Alaska Natives and Native Hawaiians most often identify themselves.

How do Native Americans most often identify themselves?

Note: Native Americans account for 94% of sample

Most Native American participants identify themselves to others using their **Specific Tribe or Tribal Nation**, while some prefer to identify themselves as **Native American**, **Native** or **Indigenous**. Notably, American Indian, which used to be a common term for Natives in North American has generally fallen out of favor.



How do First Nations people most often identify themselves?

Note: First Nations people account for 6% of sample

Most First Nations participants identify themselves to others using their **Specific Tribe or Tribal Nation**, while some prefer to identify themselves as **Native**, **Indigenous**, **Native American** or **First Nations**. One complication with this finding is that we do not know how many of the First Nations participants are living in the U.S. vs. Canada. One possibility is that First Nations living in the U.S. may be more apt to use terms more commonly used in the U.S.



How do Alaska Natives most often identify themselves?

Note: Alaska Natives account for 3% of sample

The majority of Alaska Native participants identify themselves as Alaska Native. Some identify themselves with their **Specific Tribe or Tribal Nation** or as **Native**, while a minority identify as **Indigenous** or **Native American**.



How do Native Hawaiians most often identify themselves?

Note: Native Hawaiians account for 2% of sample

The majority of Native Hawaiian participants identify themselves as **Native Hawaiian**. Less than 1 in 10 participants identify themselves as **Native**, **Indigenous**, **Native American** or with their **Specific Tribe or Tribal Nation**.



INDIGENOUS PEOPLES VOTE

“Generations have led us to this pivotal moment in time, now it’s our time to create those long lasting changes.”

– Liberal Indigenous youth

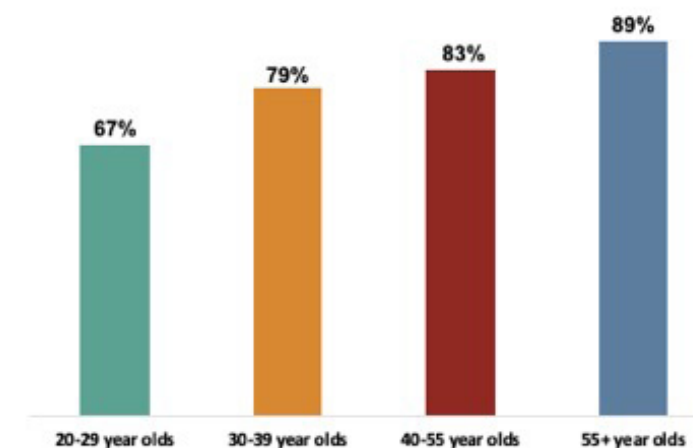
Despite the fact that Indigenous Peoples face significant voting barriers, the most conclusive finding from the survey is that Indigenous Peoples are politically active and vote in high numbers.

A vast majority of participants (77%) reported voting in the last local, state, and/or national election. An additional 5% of participants were not old enough to vote, and 4% were old enough but were not registered.

This section provides a closer look at Indigenous Peoples’ voting behavior and experiences. We provide meaningful information about the 77% of participants who voted--who they are, where they live, what motivates them to vote, and what they want to prioritize for the future, as well as information about those who do not vote.

Note: Participants under 20 years of age are not included in this section, because they were not old enough to vote in the 2018 elections.

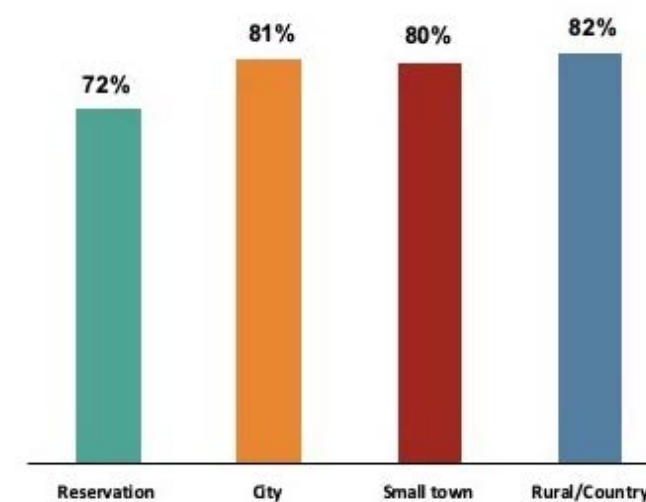
WHO VOTES?



Indigenous Elders are most likely to vote.

Young people (20- to 29-years-old) reported lower rates of voting in the last local, state, and/or national election than older adults.

The two most common reasons why young people reported not voting include 1) not updating their address after they moved (32%) and 2) thinking voting doesn’t matter (18%).

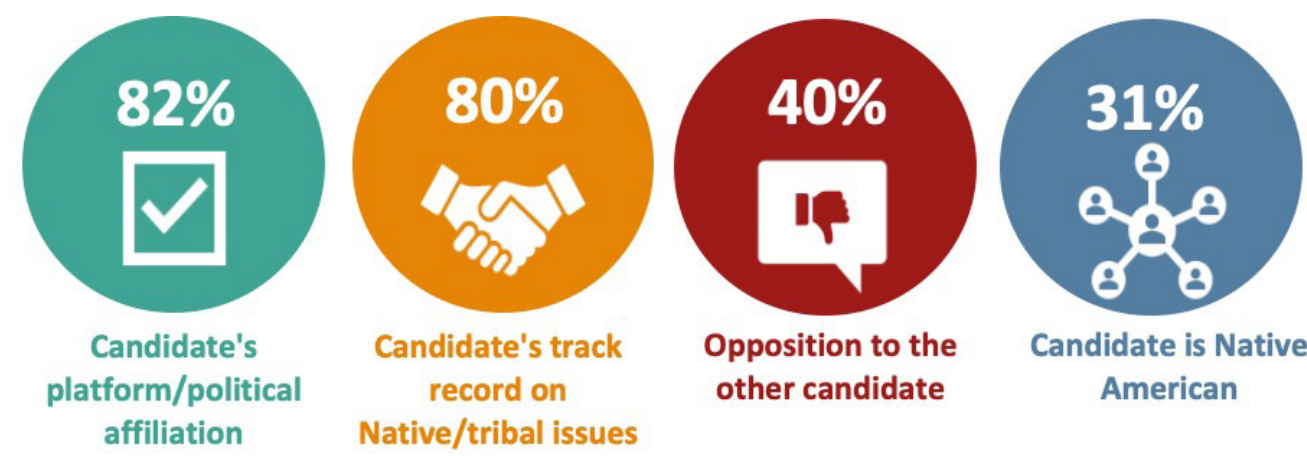


Indigenous Peoples living in the country, small towns, and cities are more likely to vote.

People living on reservations reported lower rates of voting in the last local, state, and/or national election because they 1) think voting doesn’t matter (25%) and 2) are not updating their address after they move (19%).

Note: Voting behavior does not differ by gender.

Indigenous Peoples are motivated most by a candidate's platform and track record on Native and tribal issues.



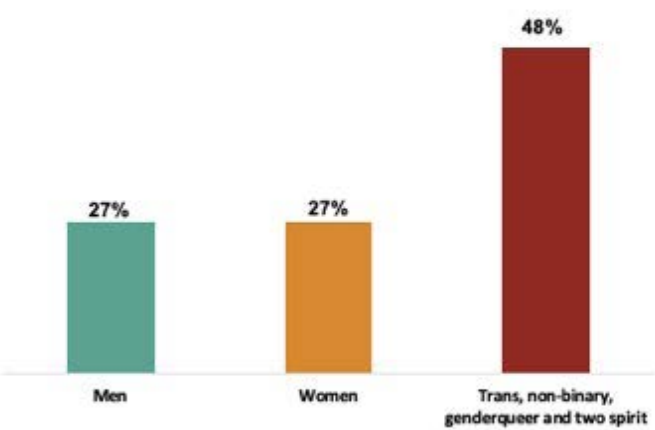
Note: Influences on voting behavior do not vary by age, gender, or place of residence.



Indigenous Peoples Face Barriers to Voting.

Despite high rates of voting, overall, 27% of participants reported experiencing at least one barrier to voting. The four most common voting barriers Indigenous Peoples report are:

1	Not receiving absentee ballot on time	32%
2	Not being able to access polling due to work hours	27%
3	The polling place being too far away	19%
4	The line to vote was too long	17%

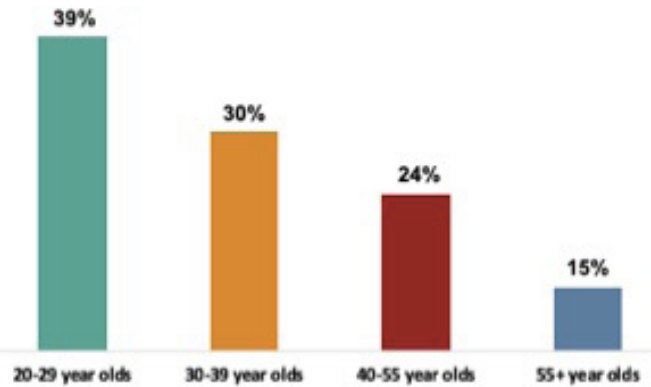


Indigenous trans, non-binary, genderqueer, and two spirit Peoples experience more barriers.

People who identify as **trans, non-binary, genderqueer and two spirit** were more likely to report experiencing barriers to voting than men and women.

Indigenous young people experience more barriers to voting.

Young people (20- to 29-years-old) were more likely to report experiencing barriers to voting than older age groups.



Where do Indigenous Peoples stand politically?

Despite the fact that Indigenous Peoples vote and are politically active, how they vote varies dramatically. This section dives deeper into Indigenous Peoples’ political orientation and identities, and the issues they prioritize.

Indigenous Peoples are politically diverse.

Although the majority identify as liberal, more than one-third of Indigenous participants identify as moderate or conservative.

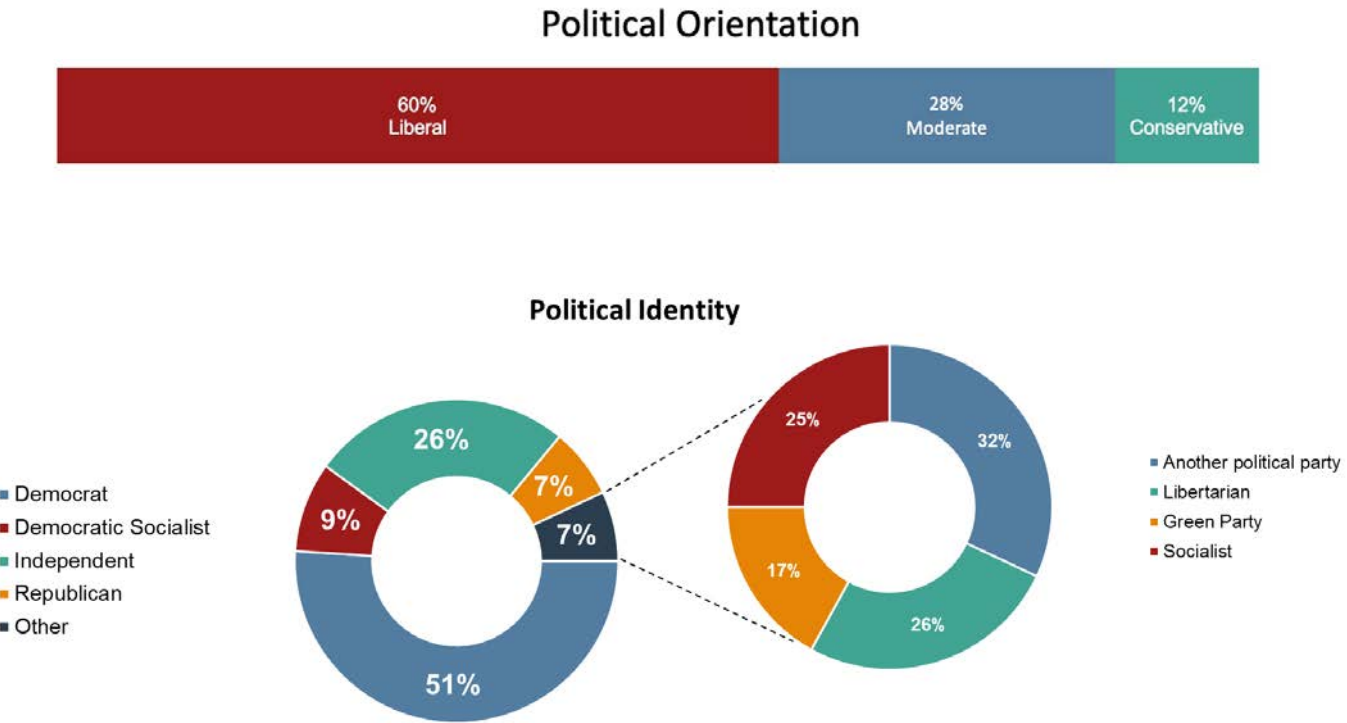


Photo Courtesy of Cara Romero (Chemehuevi Indian Tribe)

PROFILES OF THE 4 MOST REPRESENTED POLITICAL IDENTITIES



51% of Indigenous Peoples identify as **Democrats**.

- 80% identify as women, 18% as men, and 2% as trans, non-binary, genderqueer or two spirit
- 24% are 18 to 29 years old, 25% are 30-39, 32% are 40-55, and 19% are older than 55
- 36% report annual income under \$44,999, 36% between \$45,000-\$89,999, and 28% over \$90,000
- 55% have a 4-year college degree or further education, and 45% have less than a 4-year college degree
- 50% reside in cities, 17% in small towns, 26% on reservations, and 7% in the country
- 67% are liberals, 25% are moderates, and 8% are conservatives

9% of Indigenous Peoples identify as **Democratic Socialists**.

- 74% identify as women, 18% as men, and 8% as trans, non-binary, genderqueer or two spirit
- 42% are 18 to 29 years old, 29% are 30-39, 21% are 40-55, and 8% are older than 55
- 42% report annual incomes under \$44,999, 37% between \$45,000-\$89,999, and 21% over \$90,000
- 59% have a 4-year college degree or further education, and 41% have less than a 4-year college degree
- 64% reside in cities, 18% in small towns, 10% on reservations, and 8% in the country
- 94% are liberals, 6% are moderates, and 1% wconservatives

26% of Indigenous Peoples identify as **Independents**.

- 69.5% identify as women, 26.5% as men, and 4% as trans, non-binary, genderqueer or two spirit
- 31% are 18 to 29 years old, 25% are 30-39, 28% are 40-55, and 16% are older than 55
- 47% report annual income under \$44,999, 33% between \$45,000-\$89,999, and 20% over \$90,000
- 42% have a 4-year college degree or further education, and 58% have less than a 4-year college degree
- 45% reside in cities, 20% in small towns, 24% on reservations, and 11% in the country
- 49% are liberals, 40% are moderates, and 11% are conservatives

7% of Indigenous Peoples identify as **Republicans**.

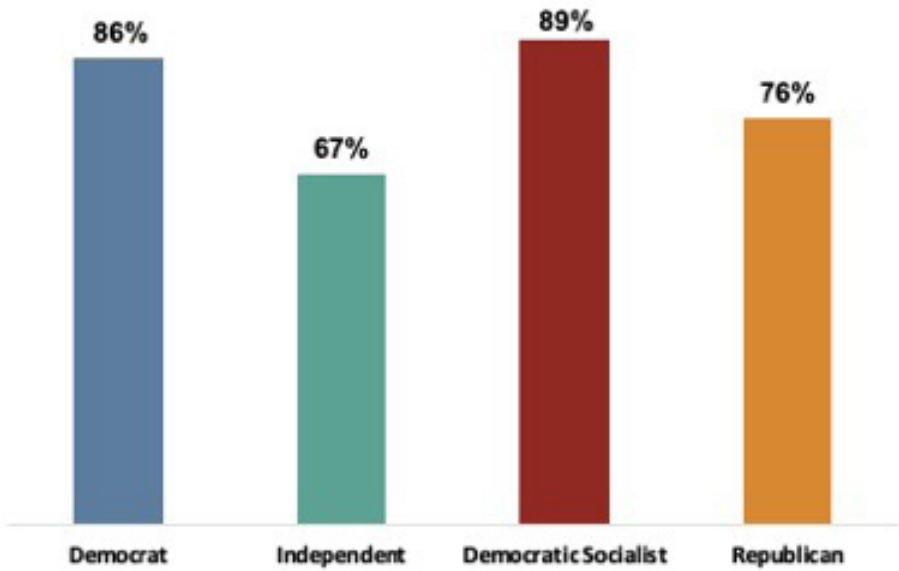
- 68% identify as women, 31% as men, and 1% as trans, non-binary, genderqueer or two spirit
- 17% are 18 to 29 years old, 16% are 30-39, 38% are 40-55, and 29% are older than 55
- 34% report annual income under \$44,999, 34% between \$45,000-\$89,999, and 32% over \$90,000
- 31% have a 4-year college degree or further education, and 69% have less than a 4-year college degree
- 39% reside in cities, 27% in small towns, 16% on reservations, and 18% in the country
- 4% are liberal, 32% are moderate, and 65% are conservative

Indigenous Democrats and Democratic Socialists are most likely to vote.

The majority of participants across parties voted in the last local/state/national election.

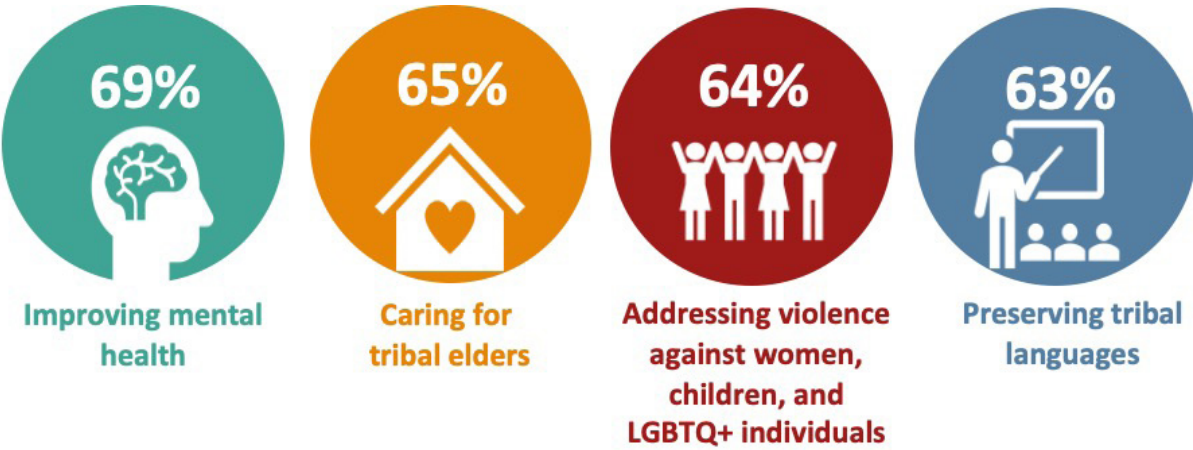
Democratic Socialists reported the highest rates of voting.

Independents reported the lowest rates of voting.



Priorities for Indigenous Communities.

The majority of participants agreed that addressing issues related to undoing the negative effects of policies and practices that sought to destroy Indigenous communities and revitalizing tribal core values is most urgent. The top four priorities include:



THESE PRIORITIES VARY BY
POLITICAL IDENTIFICATION.

	DEMOCRATIC	INDEPENDENTS	DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISTS	REPUBLICANS
1	IMPROVING MENTAL HEALTH 69%	IMPROVING MENTAL HEALTH 69%	ADDRESSING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN, CHILDREN, AND LGBTQ2S+ INDIVIDUALS 73%	CARING FOR TRIBAL ELDERS 62%
2	CARING FOR TRIBAL ELDERS 66%	PRESERVING TRIBAL LANGUAGES AND CULTURE 65%	IMPROVING MENTAL HEALTH 73%	IMPROVING PHYSICAL HEALTH 56%
3	ADDRESSING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN, CHILDREN, AND LGBTQ+ INDIVIDUALS 65%	CARING FOR TRIBAL ELDERS 65%	ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS 65%	IMPROVING MENTAL HEALTH 53%
4	INCREASING ACCESS TO QUALITY HEALTHCARE 64%	ADDRESSING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN, CHILDREN, AND LGBTQ2S+ INDIVIDUALS 63%	PRESERVING TRIBAL LANGUAGES AND CULTURE 63%	QUALITY K-12 EDUCATION 51%

Note: The order of priorities denotes extreme urgency by political identification.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES ARE CIVICALLY ENGAGED

“My dream is to have all our Native people speak up for each other...I want to see people that live in and outside of our Native communities coming together for the good of all.”

–Moderate Indigenous Female Adult

Beyond voting, Indigenous Peoples actively participate in activities that serve the public good. Of the nine civic activities listed below, the majority of participants (95%) reported engaging in at least one within the last five years.

- Attended a protest following the murder of George Floyd
- Attended a protest prior to the murder of George Floyd
- Attended a political rally or other election
- Donated money to a political party
- Participated in a community action group/grassroots organization
- Contacted a public official
- Signed a petition
- Shared political content in an online platform (e.g., on Twitter, Facebook, Reddit, Instagram, TikTok)

Top 5 Civic Activities



82%

Signing a petition



77%

Sharing political content in an online platform



49%

Participating in a community action group/grassroots organization



47%

Contacting a public official



37%

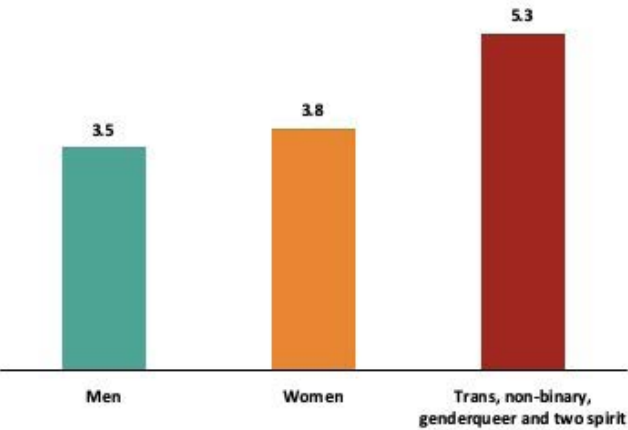
Attending a protest prior to the murder of George Floyd

Note: Rates of engaging in each of the top 5 civic activities did not differ by gender, age, place of residence.

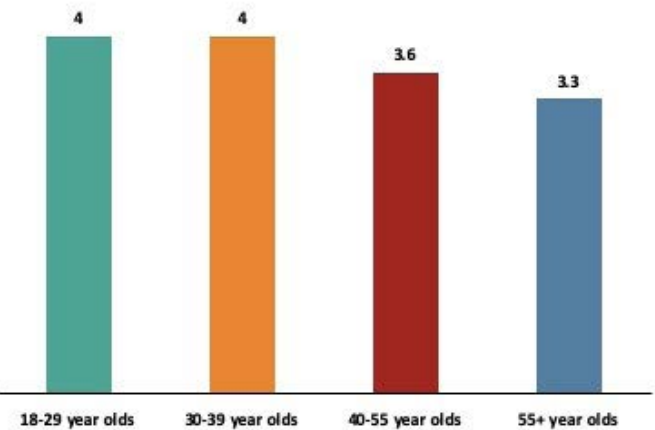
Civic engagement differs by gender, age, place of residence, and partaking in Indigenous cultural activities.

Indigenous trans, non-binary, genderqueer and two spirit peoples engage in more civic activities.

People identifying as **trans, non-binary, genderqueer and two spirit**, on average, report participating in more civic activities than men and women.

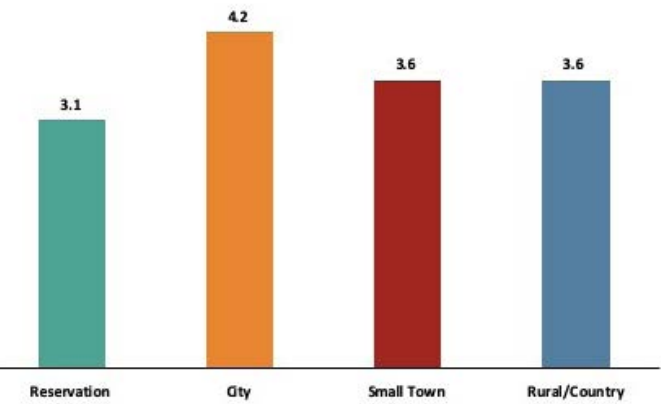


Indigenous Peoples under 40 engage in more civic activities.



18- to 39-year-olds, on average, report engaging in more civic activities than older adults (40+ year-olds).

Indigenous Peoples living in cities engage in more civic activities.

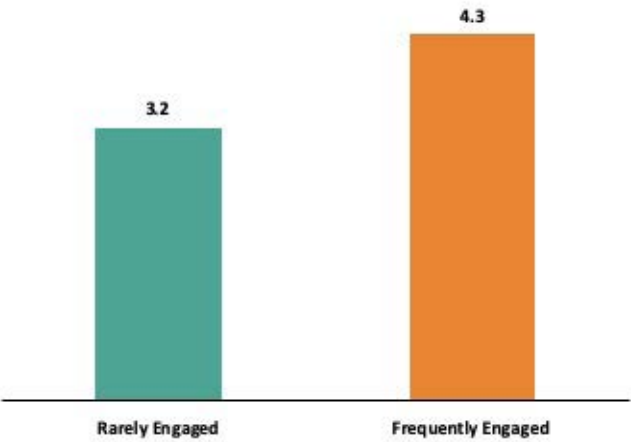


This may, in part, be because civic activities occur more often in cities.

People living on **reservations**, on average, report engaging in the least number of activities which may, in part, be because of the remoteness of many reservation communities.

Indigenous Peoples who participate in more cultural activities engage in more civic activities.

People engaging **frequently** in Indigenous cultural activities, on average, report participating in more civic activities than people engaging in Indigenous cultural activities less frequently.





INSPIRING THE YOUTH VOTE

“I would like for our future generations to...know they have the power to make important change in their communities, government and world.”

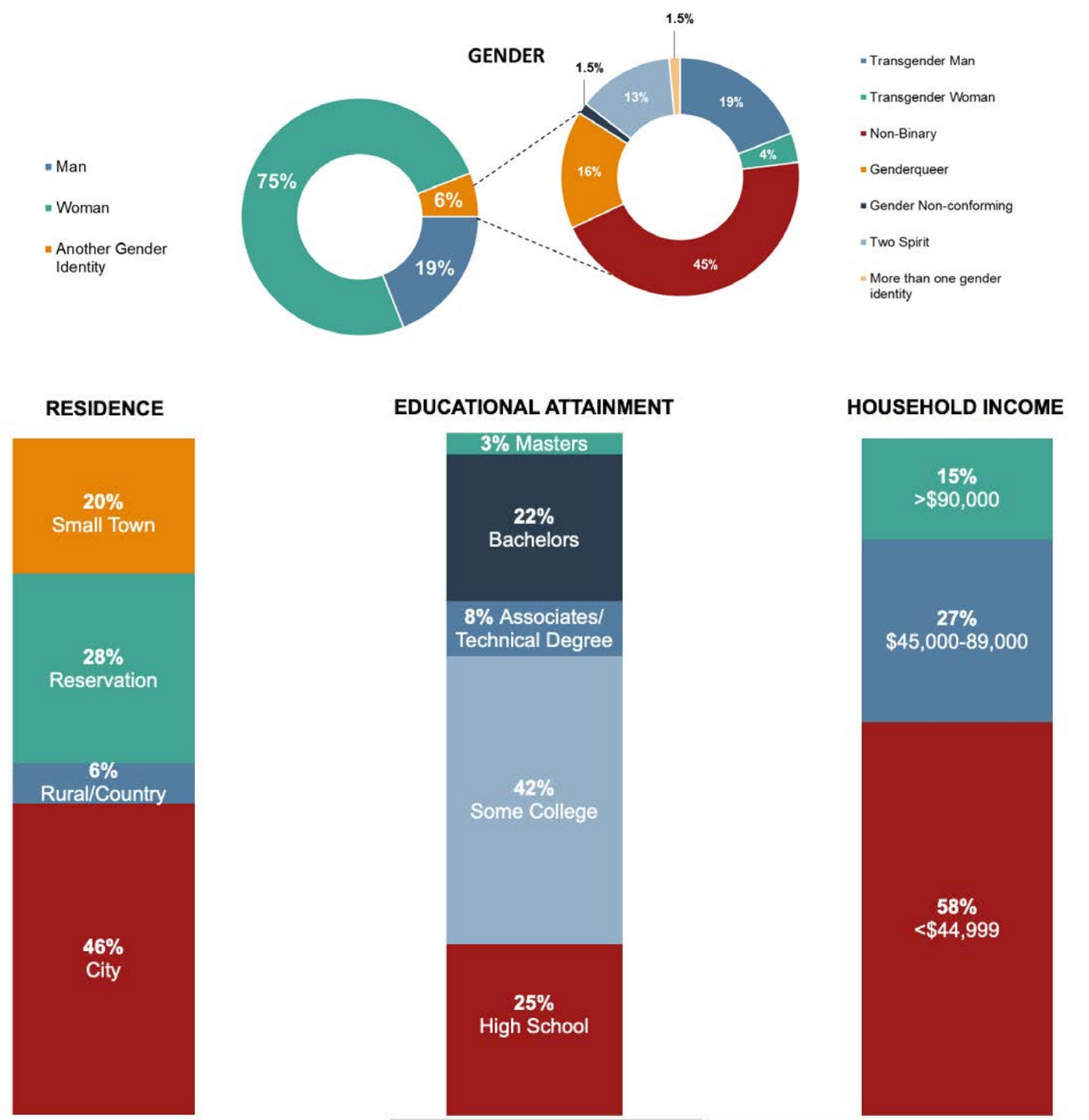
–Liberal Indigenous Female Adult

Indigenous youth (18- to 24-year-olds) represent our collective future and are crucial to creating long lasting changes. This section provides a closer examination of Indigenous youths’ voting behavior and experiences. We provide answers to

questions about who voted, what motivates them, and what they want to prioritize for the future, as well as information regarding what we know about youth who do not vote.

YOUTH DEMOGRAPHICS

Indigenous youth include 1,100 participants ages 18–24 years (17% of the total sample).



Indigenous Youth Vote... but experience barriers engaging the political system.

Despite the majority of Indigenous Youth reporting voting in the last local, state, and/or national election (62%), the rate of voting among this age group is lower than older age groups (24+ year-olds; 82%). While the data suggests that there are a variety of factors playing a role here (i.e., less support for a traditional two party system and less belief that voting matters), there are also concrete issues impacting their engagement, coupled with a belief that voting doesn't matter

(18% of those who do not vote). To inspire the youth vote, efforts must be made to connect to the issues most important to them and to alleviate the unique barriers they face.

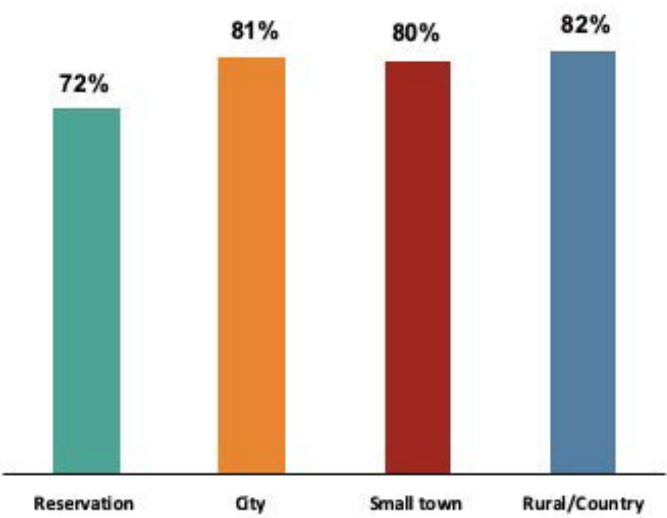
Note: Participants under 20 years of age are not included in this section, because they were not old enough to vote in the 2018 elections.

WHO VOTES?

Indigenous youth living in the country, small towns, and cities are more likely to vote.

Similar to older adults, youth living on **reservations** report lower rates of voting in the last local, state, and/or national election than people living in other places.

Note: Voting behavior does not differ by gender.



Indigenous Youth are motivated most by a candidate's platform and track record on Native and tribal issues.



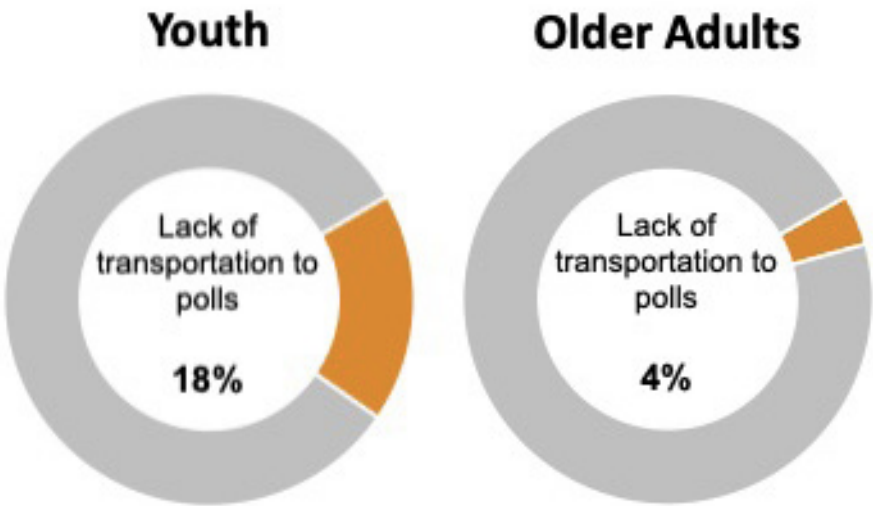
Note: Influences on voting behavior do not vary by gender or place of residence.

Indigenous Youth Face Barriers to Voting.

Youth (20- to 24-year-olds) are 1.5 times more likely to report experiencing barriers to voting than older age groups (24+ year-olds; 40% vs. 26%).

Among youth who report experiencing voting barriers, the four most common voting barriers include 1) not being able to access polling due to work hours (31%), 2) not receiving their absentee ballot on time (27%), 3) polling place being too far away (24%), and 4) lack of transportation to polls (18%).

Notably, lack of transportation to polls is a barrier disproportionately reported by the youth compared to older adults.



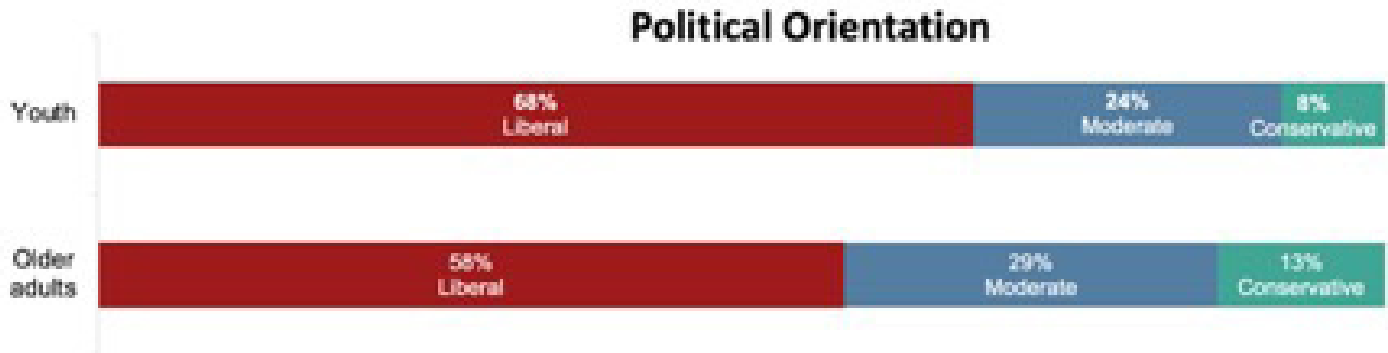
Where do Indigenous Youth Stand Politically?

Despite the fact that Indigenous Youth vote and are politically active, there is diversity in how (and whether) they engage the political system. Indigenous youth are less engaged with the traditional two-party system (i.e., less likely to report being Democrats or Republicans relative to the larger survey results) and endorse more efforts aimed at undoing the legacy of policies and practices that sought to destroy Indigenous communities (i.e., they prioritize stopping violence, enhancing mental health, and protecting tribal elders and language). This section dives deeper into Indigenous Youths' political orientation and identities, and the issues they prioritize.

Indigenous Youth are politically diverse.

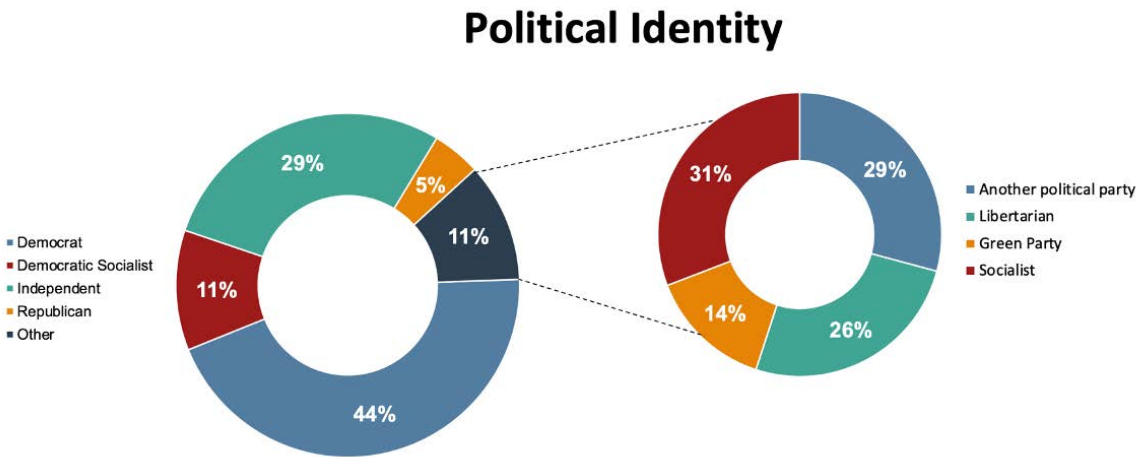
Although the majority youth identify as liberal, just under one-third identify as moderate or conservative. Notably, compared to older age groups, youth (18- to 24-year-olds) are more likely to be liberal and less likely to be conservative. This age difference of youth being more liberal and older age groups being more conservative is consistent with national data (Maniam & Smith, 2020). Yet, the political orientation data clearly shows that the majority of Indigenous Peoples, regardless of age, identify as more liberal.

Political Orientation



Youth Political Identity

In comparison to older adults, fewer Indigenous youth identify with the Democratic Party (44% vs. 52%) and the Republican Party (5% vs. 7%); and more youth identify with the Democratic Socialists of America (11% vs. 8%) and the Socialist Party (3% vs. 2%) or identify as politically Independent (29% vs. 26%).



Priorities for Indigenous Youth

The majority of participants report that addressing issues related to undoing the negative effects of policies and practices that sought to destroy Indigenous communities and revitalizing tribal core values is most urgent. The top four priorities include:



The top priorities for youth are similar to those found in the larger survey, with the difference being order of importance. For youth, protecting women, youth, and LGBTQ+ individuals against violence and preserving tribal language were seen as more urgent priorities than caring for tribal elders, although the percent who rank caring for tribal elders as urgent is fairly similar to the larger survey.



Photo Courtesy of Ryan Red Corn (Osage)

Indigenous Youth are Civically Engaged.

Indigenous youth (18- to 24-year-olds) are just as likely to report engaging in civic activities as older adults (24+ year-olds).

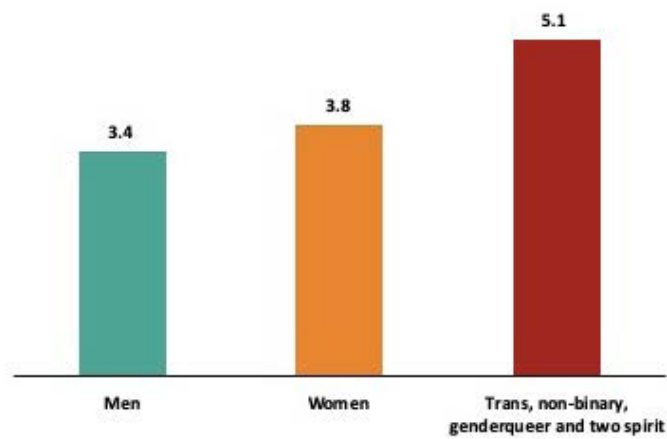
Top 5 Civic Activities Among Youth



NOTE: Rates of engaging in each of the top 5 civic activities did not differ by gender, age, place of residence.

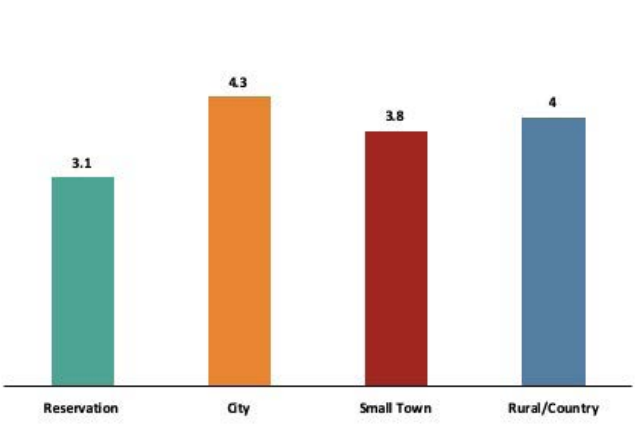
Amount of civic engagement differs by gender, place of residence, and partaking in Indigenous cultural activities.

Indigenous trans, non-binary, genderqueer and two spirit youth engage in more civic activities.



Youth identifying as **trans, non-binary, genderqueer and two spirit**, on average, report participating in more civic activities than men and women.

Indigenous Youth living in cities engage in more civic activities.



This may, in part, be because civic activities occur more often in cities.

Perhaps relatedly, youth living on **reservations**, on average, report engaging in the least number of activities. Given the remoteness of many reservation communities, youth in these areas find it particularly difficult to physically access engagement opportunities. This explanation is further supported by the higher rate at which Indigenous youth cite transportation issues as a barrier to voting.

Indigenous Youth who participate in more cultural activities engage in more civic activities.

Youth engaging frequently in Indigenous cultural activities, on average, report engaging in more civic activities than youth rarely engaging in Indigenous cultural activities.

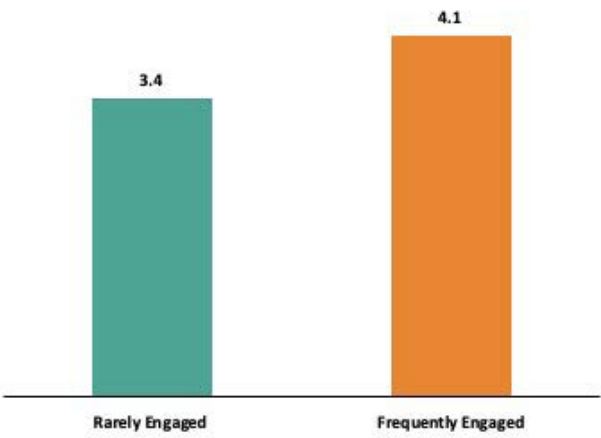


Photo Courtesy of Ryan Red Corn (Osage)

YOUTH TAKEAWAYS

The way Indigenous youth engage politically and civically both aligns and diverges from the overall sample in important ways. First, we find that Indigenous youth report lower rates of voting than other age groups. One reason for this finding is that youth experience more barriers to voting than older age groups, particularly around access to transportation to polling places. Thus, one practical step towards increasing the youth vote is to ensure access to polling places. Perhaps more troubling, however, is that 1 in 5 youth who did not vote report thinking that voting doesn't matter. When it comes to inspiring the youth vote, it is imperative that politicians not only listen to

the priorities of Indigenous youth, but also work to address these priorities thereby affirming the importance of voting. Second, despite the lower rates of voting, Indigenous youth engage in the political system. They are highly civically engaged. Indigenous youth are signing petitions, sharing political content, getting involved in grassroots organizing, and protesting to ensure their voices are heard, and that they are contributing to positive futures for their communities. Youth are the future, and it is imperative that we empower them to use their collective voices for the betterment of their families and communities.

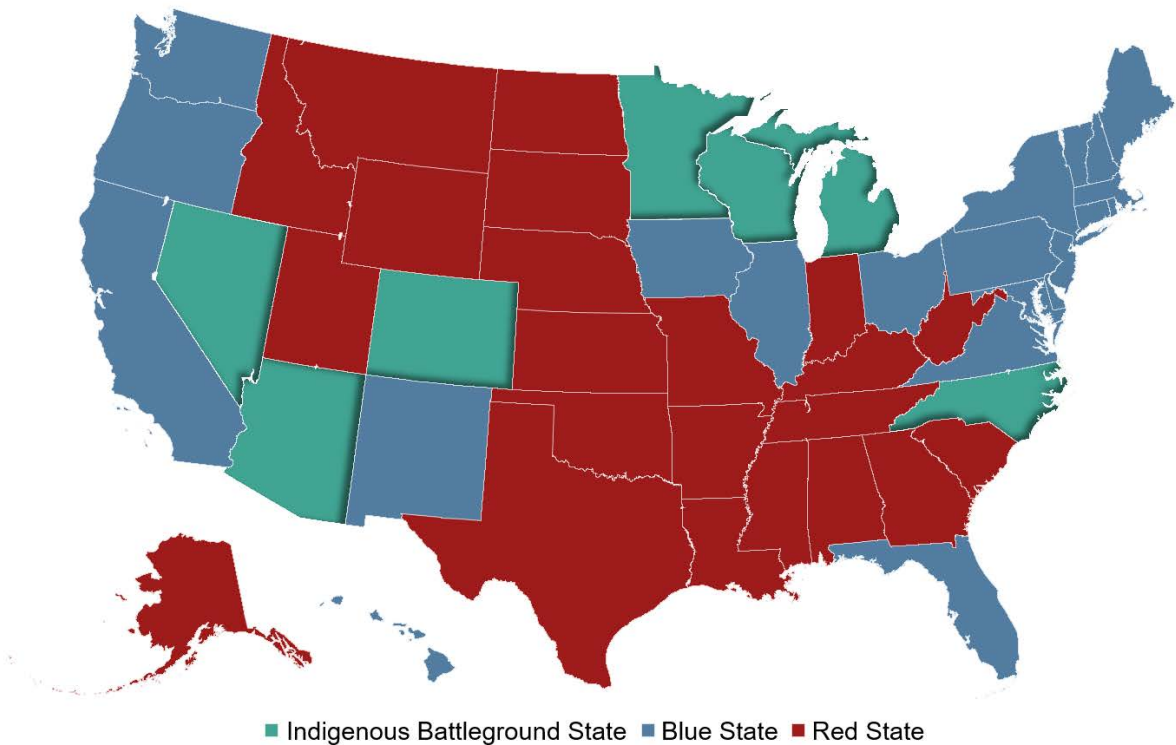


Photo Courtesy of Cara Romero (Chemehuevi Indian Tribe)

INDIGENOUS VOTERS IN BATTLEGROUND STATES

The 2020 United States election is likely going to be one of the most contentious in history. There is so much at stake for all Americans, but this may be particularly true for Indigenous Peoples and communities. Below we identify Battleground States for the 2020 US elections as

states with significant Indigenous populations of voting age. Large Indigenous voter turn-out in these Battleground States has the power to swing the outcome of major elections at the state and national level. The time is now to leverage the Indigenous vote in these Battleground States.



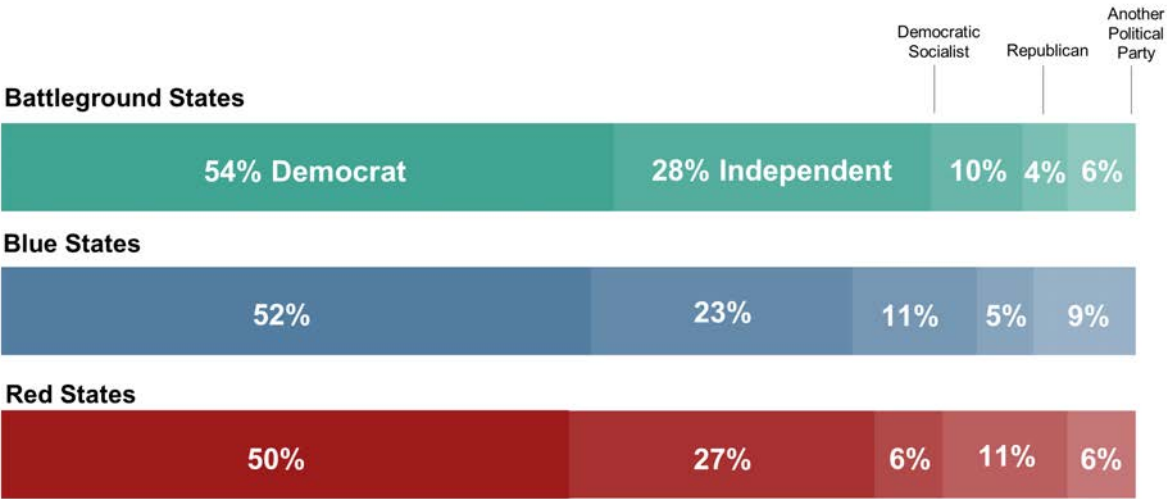
“[We must] push out people who had harmful and negative impacts on our communities . . . and get involved locally and nationally to fight for our sovereign rights and racial justice...for our future generations”

– Liberal Indigenous female adult

Indigenous Peoples in Battleground States Largely Identify as Democrats or Independents

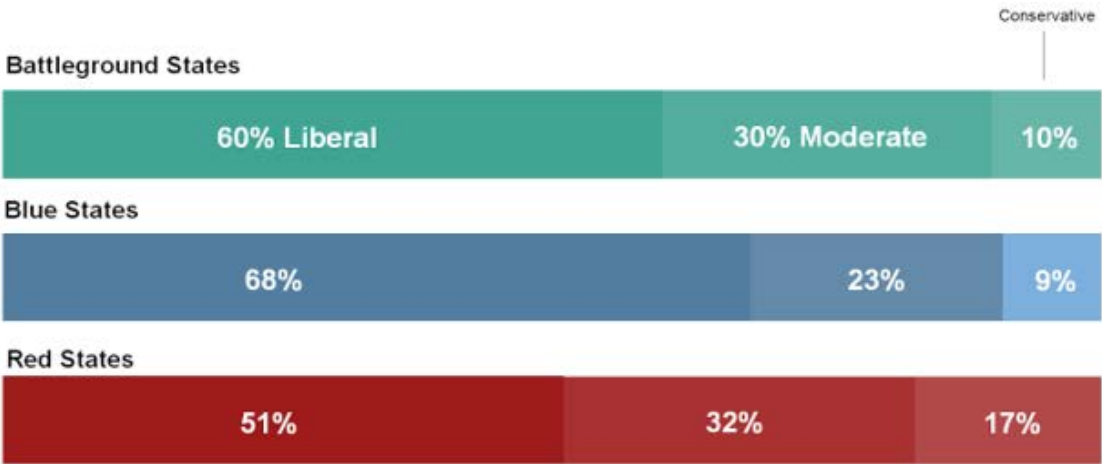
Understanding Indigenous Peoples’ political identities and political leanings in Battleground States with large Indigenous populations is critical to rallying the Indigenous vote. Indigenous Peoples who reside in battleground states predominantly identify as Democrats and

Independents, even more than Indigenous Peoples in other historically Red and Blue States. In regard to political orientation, Indigenous Peoples in Battleground States primarily identify as Liberal or Moderate.



Note: Political party breakdown did not differ from the overall sample.

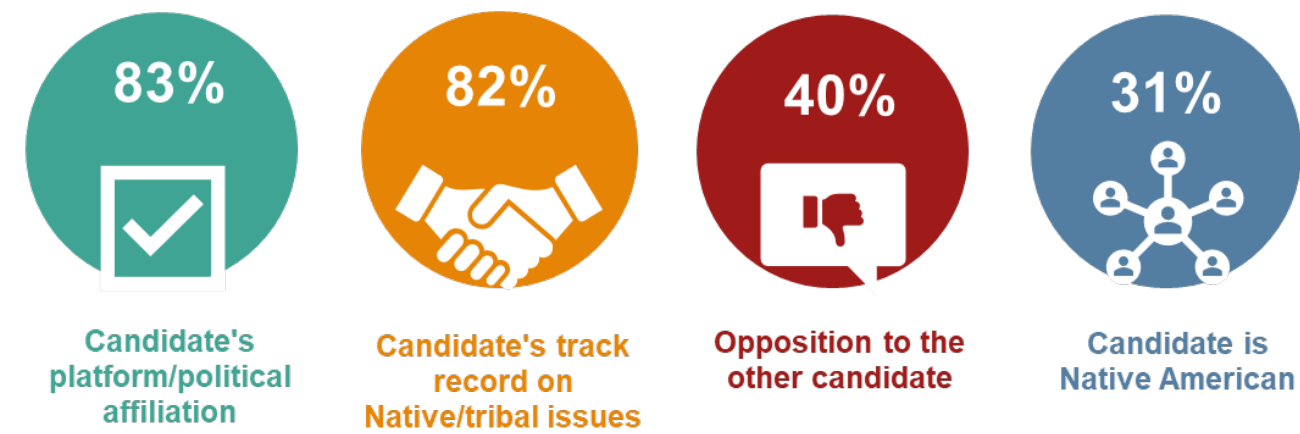
Indigenous Peoples in Battleground States Largely Identify as Liberals or Moderates



Indigenous Peoples Vote More in Battleground States than in Red and Blue States.

In comparison to 77% of the overall sample, Indigenous participants living in Battleground States report slightly higher rates of voting in the last local, state or national election at 81%. An additional 6% of participants living in

Battleground States were not old enough to vote, and 3% were not registered to vote despite being old enough. Below we highlight the top four factors that participants report influence their vote in local, state or national elections.



Note: Influences on voting did not differ from the overall sample.

Indigenous Peoples in Battleground States are Civically Engaged.

In addition to voting, Indigenous Peoples in Battleground States create change through civic engagement. Out of nine activities, the majority of participants (94%) report engaging in at least one activity in the last five years. Below we list the top five activities participants engage in most often.



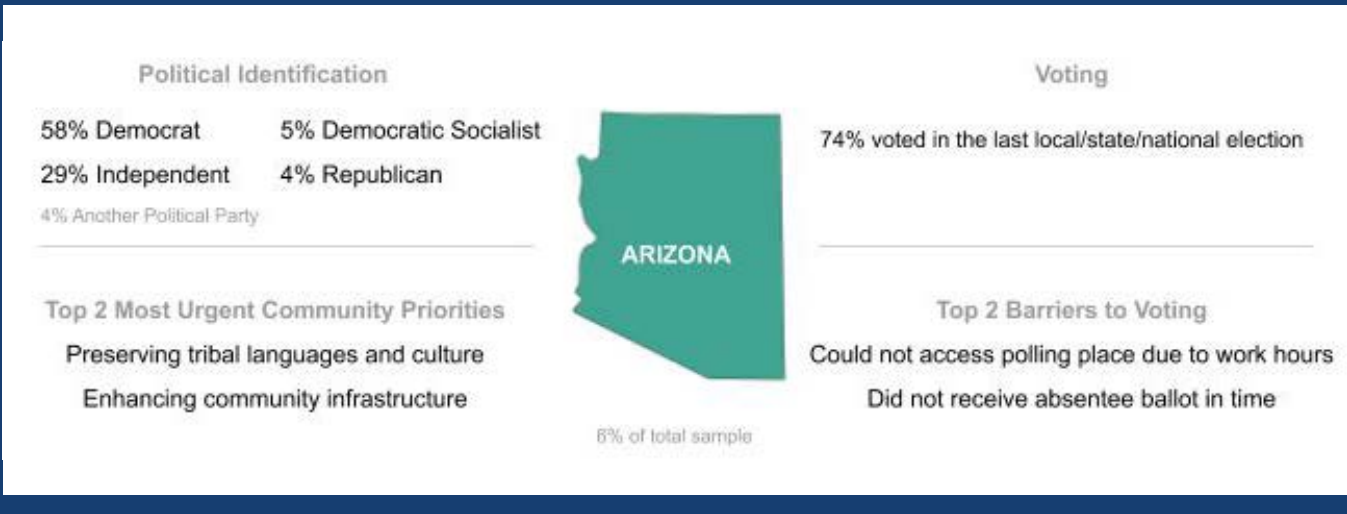
Note: Rates of engaging in each of the top 5 civic activities did not from the overall sample.

BATTLEGROUND STATES: INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AT A GLANCE

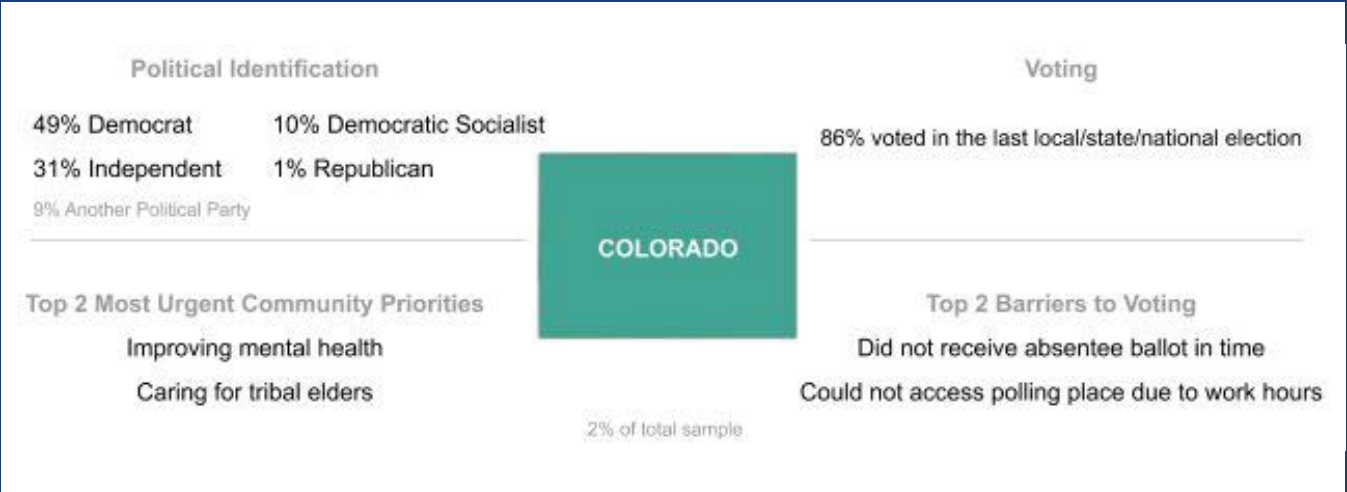
Indigenous Peoples living in Battleground States have the power to swing elections, therefore it is important to understand the unique characteristics of each battleground state--who lives there, what are their priorities, what barriers they face. In the following section, we provide a breakdown of

each state, in order to help inform strategies to leverage and inspire the Indigenous vote in these places. Although there are notable similarities in experiences, particularly when it comes to barriers to voting, there are notable differences in priorities and rate of voting by state.

ARIZONA



COLORADO



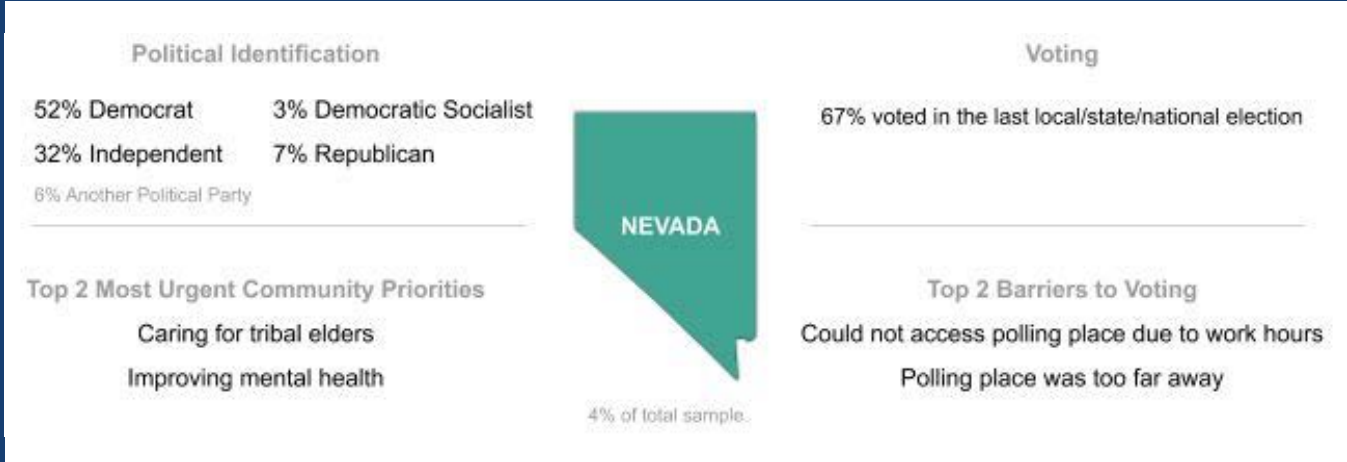
MICHIGAN



MINNESOTA



NEVADA



NORTH CAROLINA



WISCONSIN





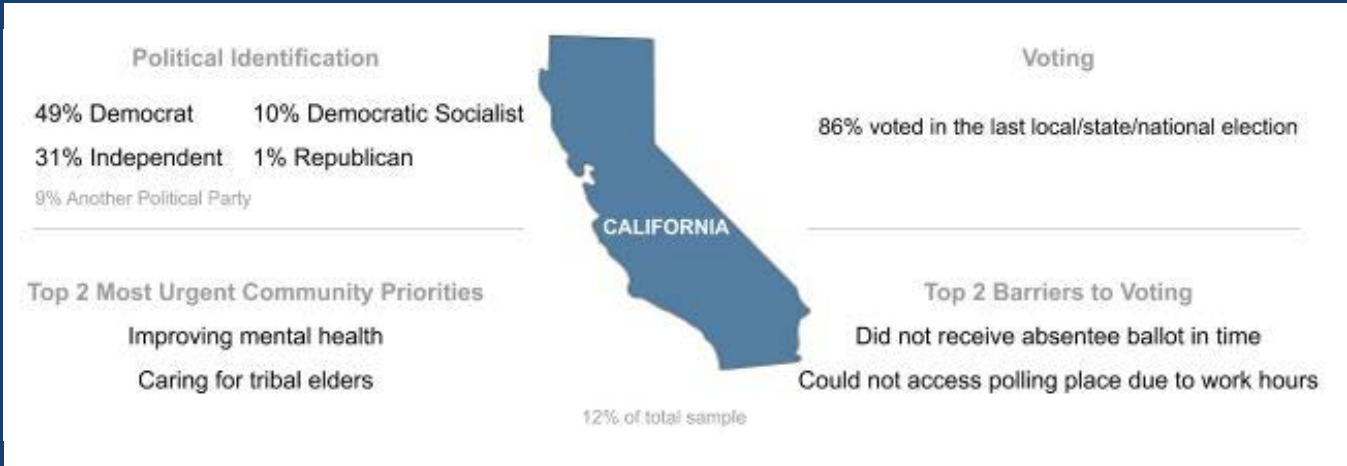
Photo Courtesy of Josue Rivas (Mexica/Otomi)

Impact States: Indigenous Peoples at a Glance

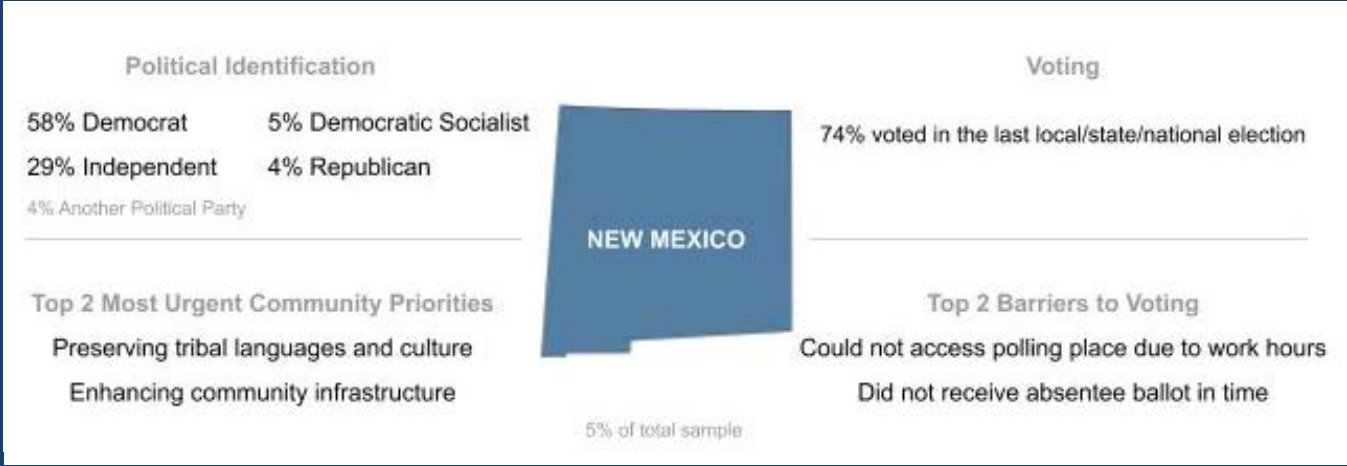
In addition to Battleground States, there are a number of Impact States in which Indigenous people can impact the outcomes at the local and state level and can create more immediate and

visible future changes in their own communities. These states are of key interest given their large Indigenous populations and the number of Indigenous people running for office.

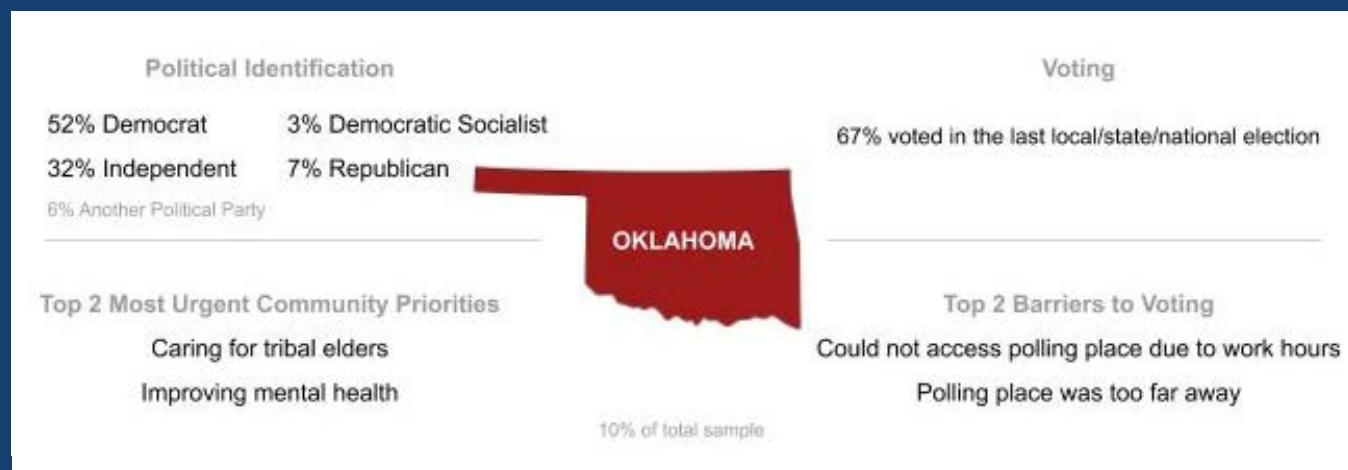
CALIFORNIA



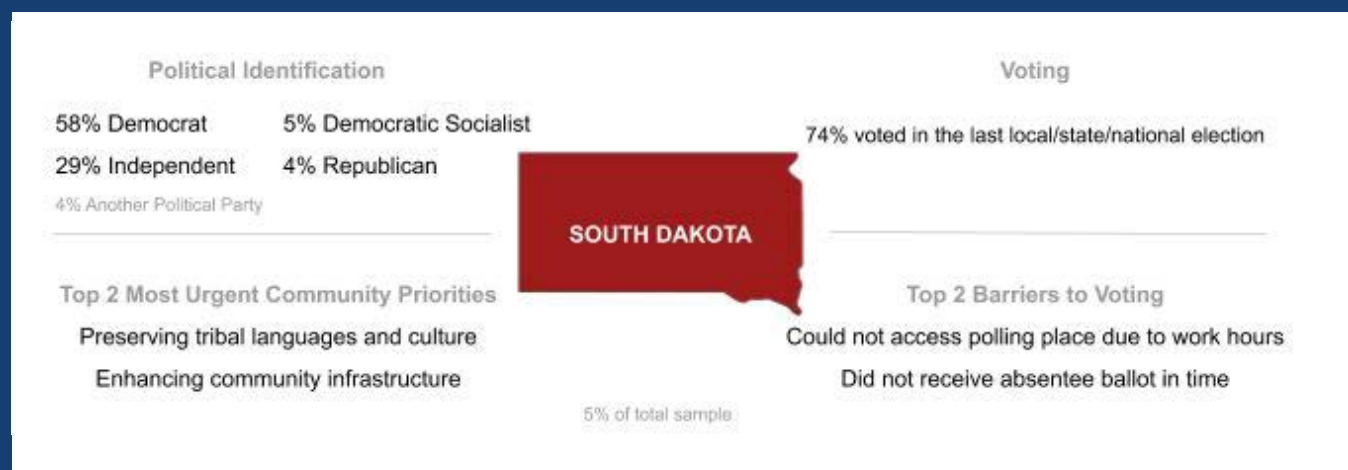
NEW MEXICO



OKLAHOMA



SOUTH DAKOTA

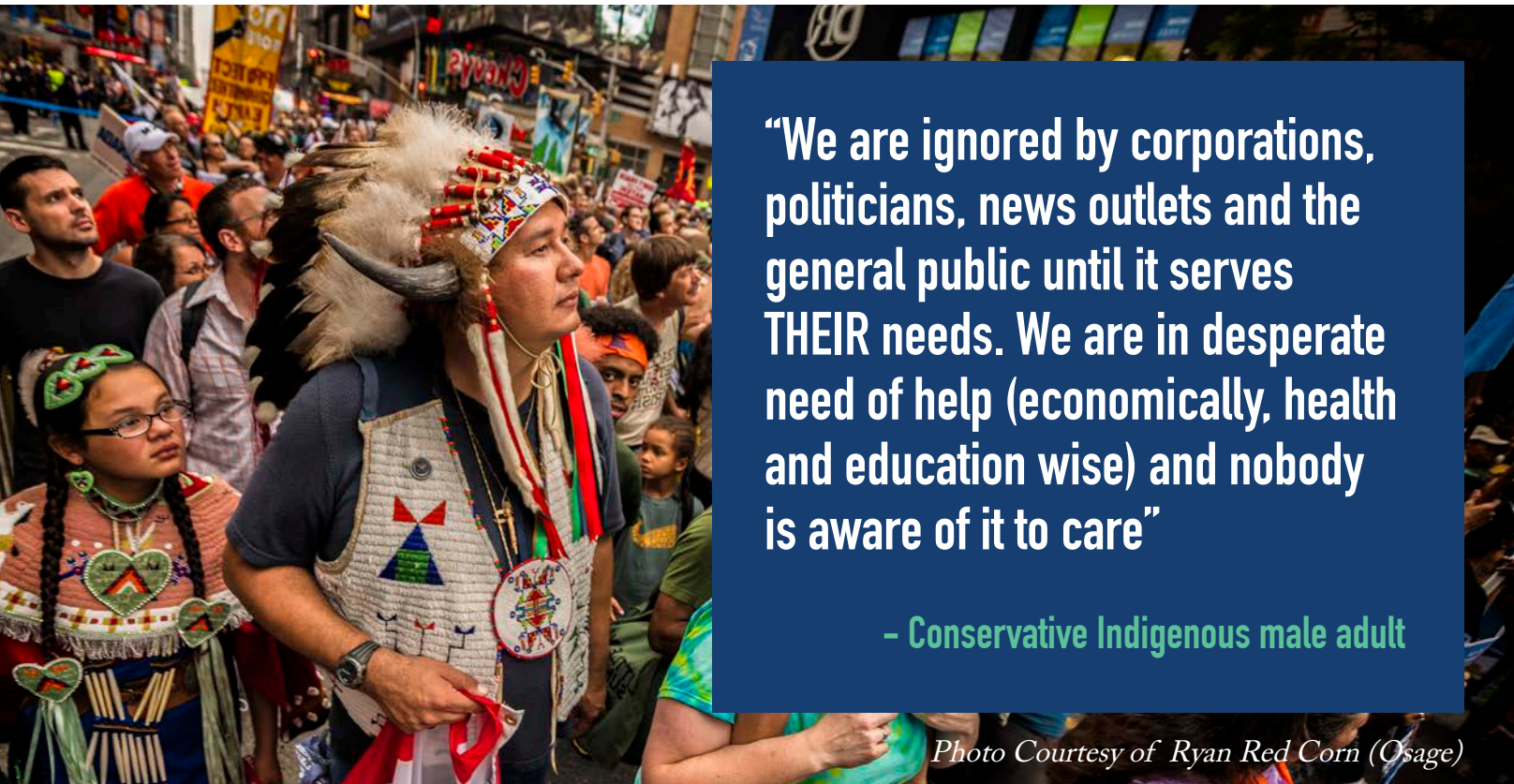


MONTANA



Photo Courtesy of Ryan Red Corn (Osage)

MOTIVATING “GOOD TROUBLE”



“We are ignored by corporations, politicians, news outlets and the general public until it serves THEIR needs. We are in desperate need of help (economically, health and education wise) and nobody is aware of it to care”

- Conservative Indigenous male adult

Photo Courtesy of Ryan Red Corn (Osage)

This quote illustrates the systemic oppression and invisibility of contemporary Indigenous Peoples. Past research links such experiences of injustices to voting behavior and civic engagement (Caillier, 2010; Otjes, Stroebe & Postmes, 2019; Schildkraut, 2005). In this section, we highlight feelings and experiences that may motivate Indigenous Peoples to vote and to engage politically as a form of protest against systemic inequalities.

While the overall Indigenous Futures Study addresses the issues and concerns of various

Indigenous groups within the U.S., there were a subset of survey items specifically geared toward addressing issues in the U.S. Given this, the items used in the survey on invisibility, discrimination, trust in the U.S. government, and hope for the future of the U.S. use “Native American” rather than Indigenous. While the participants who complete the questions stem from a diversity of Indigenous perspectives, we report here a collective perception of these issues, as they pertain to the U.S.

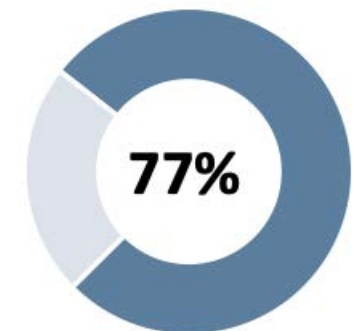
INVISIBILITY OF NATIVE PEOPLES

“[My hope for future generations is] greater acknowledgement by America that Native Nations and Native People still exist in Native Communities with strong, intact traditional ways of life.”

- Liberal Indigenous male adult

No “Real” Natives

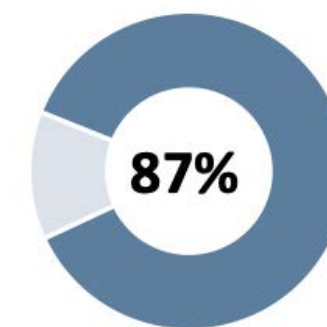
Most participants believe that the average American does not think that there are any “real” Native Americans left. These perceptions align with past research demonstrating the non-Native individuals fail to think about or understand the experiences of contemporary Native peoples, including experiences related to racism and systemic inequality (Fryberg & Eason, 2017; Reclaiming Native Truths, 2018).



Feel that the average American thinks there are no “real” Native Americans left.

“[I want us] to not be overlooked, left out of the conversation political or otherwise; to not feel like... disappearance is the ultimate goal of the Federal government.”

- Liberal Indigenous female adult



Feel that the average American does not care about the experiences of Native peoples.

Americans Do Not Care

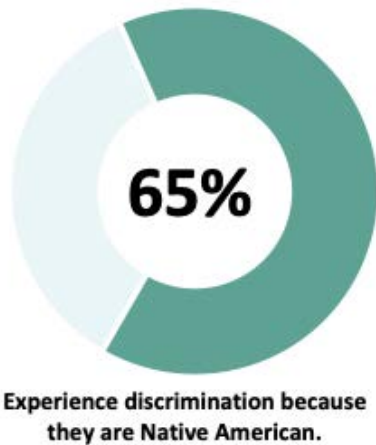
A majority of participants report that they believe other Americans do not care about the experiences of Indigenous Peoples. Prior research suggests that not only is this lack of care true, but that it is linked to a lack of support for policy issues facing Native communities (Reclaiming Native Truths, 2018).

EXPERIENCES OF DISCRIMINATION

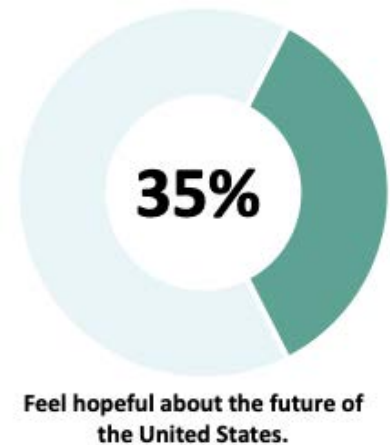
“I want to see our government admit to its systemic racism.”
– Moderate Indigenous male elder

Experiences of Discrimination

65% of participants indicated that they experience discrimination because they are Native American. Despite the high rates of reported discrimination, only 1 in 3 participants believe that non-Native people are aware of the discrimination that Native Americans experience. This suggests that participants perceive a strong disconnect between their own experiences and others’ beliefs about their experiences.



“It’s hard to see past this year’s election in November. I think a lot of our future depends upon that.”
– Liberal Indigenous transgender male adult

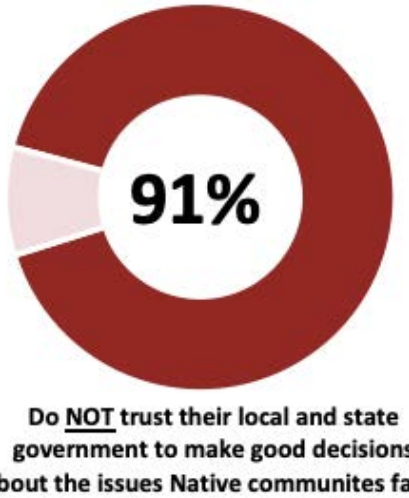
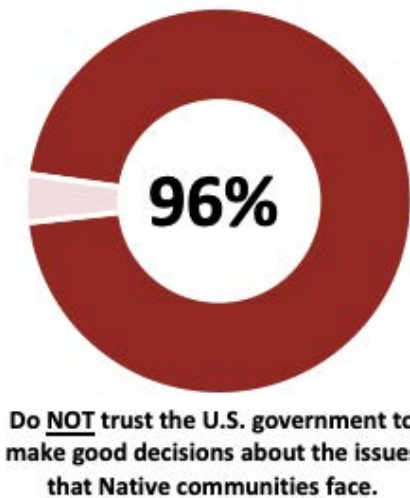


Hope in the Future

A minority of participants feel hopeful about the future of the United States, while 90% feel worried about the direction the United States is heading. This worry may move participants to vote and to be the change they want to see in the country.

TRUST IN GOVERNMENT

“I know voting matters. But I feel OUR voice is never heard.”
–Indigenous participant, unknown age, or political leaning



Very few participants trust the government, with almost no participants (4%) trusting the federal government, and very few (9%) trusting their local and state governments. Participants trust

their tribal government considerably more than the federal government, with over 10 times as many participants trusting their tribal government (42%) than the federal government (4%).



“[I want future generations to] get educated and excited about voting, census and running for Tribal government and then onto Congress. We have to be the change we want to see for our next 7 generations.”

– Moderate Indigenous female adult



Photo Courtesy of Ryan Red Corn (Osage)



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