

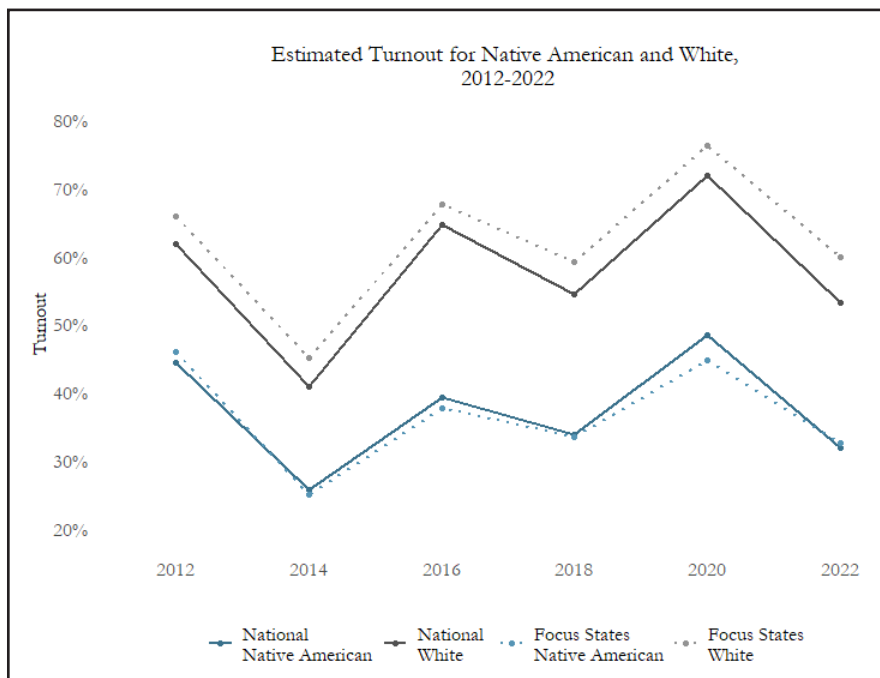
# ELECTION INEQUITIES IN INDIAN COUNTRY: Understanding Native American Turnout in Federal Elections

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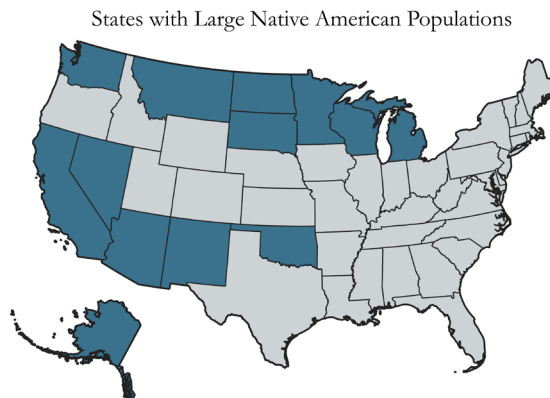
Native Americans are among the fastest growing groups in the nation and Native American voters increasingly hold determinative power in elections, especially in the many areas where populations are concentrated, like reservations. Despite a recent trend of modest growth in turnout, Native American participation trails other racial and ethnic groups. This is due to the considerable obstacles Native Americans face for voter registration and turnout including a lack of home mail delivery and residential addresses on homes, geographic isolation, poor road networks, and technological barriers, among many others.<sup>1</sup> We estimated turnout for the last six federal elections because turnout is a key indicator for understanding inequalities in political participation and working towards equitable solutions for Native American communities.<sup>2</sup> To better understand the issues, we looked nationally and focused

in on 13 states with relatively high Native American populations. Results highlight the considerable work ahead of us.

The solid lines in the chart to the left represent turnout at the national level for non-Hispanic white voters (shown in gray) and Native American voters (shown in blue). Our focus states, spotlighted in the map, have the largest Native American populations and are represented by the dotted lines.<sup>3</sup> Nationally, Native American turnout over the six election cycles averaged 37.2%—a whopping 20.5 percentage points lower than non-Hispanic white turnout. And the gap increased between 2012 and 2022 growing by 6 points in presidential elections and 6.2 points in midterm elections.



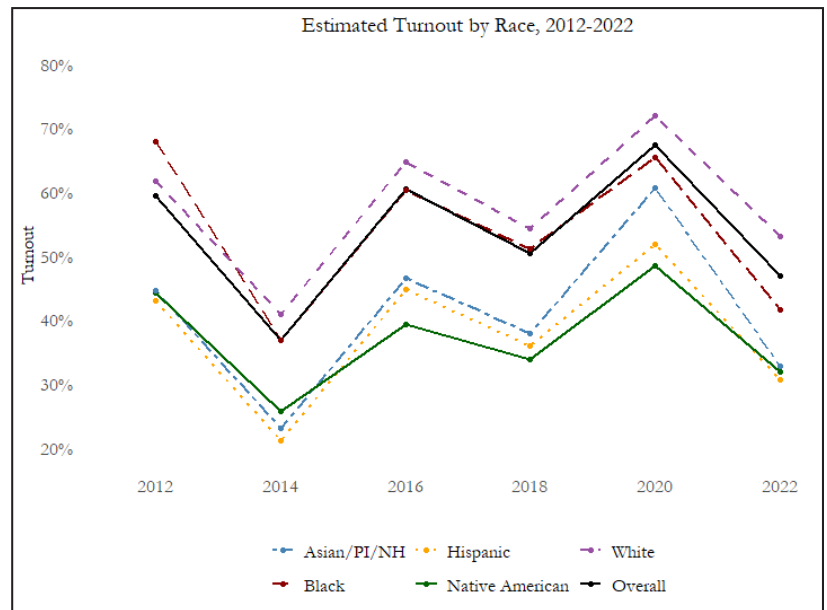
But turnout estimates are even worse in the 13 states with relatively large Native American populations. It's easy to see on the graph. Estimates for non-Hispanic white turnout are higher in the 13 focus states than nationally and, at the same time, Native American estimates are generally slightly lower. On average, Native American turnout in the focus states is a massive 25.7 percentage points lower than non-Hispanic white turnout. Overall growth in turnout is also slower. From 2018 to 2020 there was a 14.6-point increase in Native American turnout nationally but only a 11.2-point increase in the 13 focus states, a difference of 3.4 points. Finally, increasing turnout gaps since 2012 are also starker in the 13 focus states. Compared to



national estimates, the gap increased 11.7 points to a 31.5-point gap in presidential elections and increased 7.1 points to a 27.2-point gap in midterm elections.

The graph to the right shows estimated turnout by race and ethnicity for 2012 through 2022.<sup>4</sup> The average turnout for Native American voters was the lowest of any group from 2016 to 2020 and was among the lowest groups across all years. Meanwhile, non-Hispanic white turnout exceeds the overall turnout rate in every election.

The significant disparities in voter turnout underscore the critical importance of developing targeted, effective solutions to ensure equitable political participation. By recognizing and tackling these obstacles, we can work towards a future where Native American communities have an equal voice in the democratic process, reflecting their growing influence and rightful place in shaping our nation's political landscape. This is not just a matter of numbers; it is a matter of justice and inclusivity for one of the fastest-growing groups in the country.



### NATIONAL ESTIMATED TURNOUT BY RACE, 2012-2022

Year	Overall	Native	White	Asian/PI/NH	Black	Hispanic	Multiracial
2022	46.90%	31.90%	53.10%	32.70%	41.60%	30.60%	38.30%
2020	67.30%	48.40%	71.90%	60.60%	65.40%	51.90%	57.70%
2018	50.40%	33.80%	54.30%	37.90%	51.10%	35.90%	43.60%
2016	60.40%	39.20%	64.60%	46.60%	60.30%	44.80%	50.40%
2014	36.80%	25.80%	40.80%	23.10%	36.80%	21.10%	29.20%
2012	59.30%	44.30%	61.80%	44.60%	67.80%	43.10%	51.60%

#### ENDNOTES

1. James Thomas Tucker, Jacqueline De León, and Dan McCool, Obstacles at Every Turn: Barriers to Political Participation Faced by Native American Voters, Native American Rights Fund, 2020 <https://vote.narf.org/obstacles-at-every-turn/>.
2. We use the Census Bureau's Voting and Registration Supplement in the Current Population Survey to estimate turnout using the cpsvote package in R created by Lee, Gronke, and Foot (2020). Response bias and small sample sizes can affect survey results, but these estimates serve as one way to understand Native turnout in comparison to other racial and ethnic groups.
3. The states are Alaska, Arizona, California, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Washington, and Wisconsin.
4. We used the Census Bureau categories of non-Hispanic respondents by racial group and Hispanic respondents as an independent group.



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