NATIONAL CONGRESS OF AMERICAN INDIANS

POLICY RESEARCH CENTER

June 6, 2022

Research Policy Update
Native Vote Report: 2020 AI/AN Turnout and Registration Data

The National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) Native Vote initiative is a nonpartisan effort to promote American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) voter engagement throughout Indian Country. The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of total turnout and registration rates during the 2020 presidential election for counties and voting districts that have a majority of AI/AN voters.

Strategies to Estimate AI/AN Voter Turnout and Registration Data

Voter turnout is defined as the percent of eligible voters that actually voted in an election. **Voter registration** is the percent of voters that registered to vote out of all eligible voters in a particular election. Turnout and registration data are not collected by race and ethnicity. Polling groups sometimes conduct surveys to estimate turnout and registration data by race and ethnicity, but these polls are often conducted in more urban areas or only include people who are on existing respondent panels, in which AI/ANs—especially those living on reservations—are commonly underrepresented. If AI/AN turnout and registration data were readily available, voter engagement efforts would have more specific information for planning and execution of strategies to engage and mobilize voters.

The NCAI Policy Research Center developed a strategy to use new 2020 Census voting-age population data for AI/ANs to determine counties and voting districts that have a population in which the majority of the population is represented by AI/AN voters, who are typically a minority of the total population in most areas of the country. These "AI/AN majority minority" counties and voting districts can help estimate AI/AN turnout and registration data that otherwise is not directly available.

This report first outlines turnout data within counties that have a majority minority population specifically for AI/ANs of voting age, followed by turnout and registration data within majority minority voting districts for AI/ANs of voting age. This report uses the IPUMS (formerly known as the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series) National Historical Geographic Information System (NHGIS) tabulations of the 2020 Census P.L. 94-171 Redistricting Data File derived from

the Legacy Format to identify voting districts that have majority minority AI/AN voting-age population percentages. The AI/AN voting-age population is AI/ANs who are 18-years-and-older and who reported their race at the time of the 2020 Census as either AI/AN alone or AI/AN in combination with some other race(s).

The report also uses data from the Redistricting Data Hub, which compiles precinct (voting district) level data from state sources on turnout and registration counts at the state level. This report also draws on data from Dave's Redistricting App (DRA), which is a mapping tool used by redistricting stakeholders to draw and analyze potential voting maps combined with state voter turnout data. All turnout and registration data in this analysis is from the 2020 presidential election on November 3, 2020.

Voter Turnout Data – AI/AN Majority Minority Counties

When voters cast a ballot or register to vote, race and ethnicity information is not collected, making analysis of racial and ethnic voting patterns challenging to conduct. However, identifying majority minority voting districts for AI/AN by their voting-age population as a percentage of the total county voting-age population allows for analysis of turnout and registration patterns in key AI/AN areas of the country. For example, if the AI/AN voting-age population is 50 percent or more of the total voting-age population in a county, that county is considered to be an AI/AN majority minority county.

For selected counties, **Table 1** shows counties that are majority minority for AI/AN voting-age population and the voter turnout rate in each county for the total voting-age population of that county in the 2020 Census. Since AI/AN voters are the majority in these counties, AI/AN voter turnout rates may be assumed or estimated to be similar to county turnout rates. The counties are listed in descending order of the percent of AI/AN voting-age population in the county, and only those that are greater than 50 percent of the total voting-age population of the county are listed.

Table 1: 2020 Turnout Rate for Counties with AI/AN Majority Minority Voting-Age Population

State	County	2020 Total County Voting-Age Population	2020 AI/AN Alone or in Combination Voting-Age Population	2020 AI/AN Voting-Age Population Percentage in County	2020 Turnout for Total Voting-Age Population in County	2020 Turnout Rate in County
Alaska	Kusilvak Census Area	4947	4732	95.7%	2162	44%
South Dakota	Oglala Lakota County	8605	8077	93.9%	3200	37%
South Dakota	Todd County	5615	4971	88.5%	2539	45%
North Dakota	Sioux County	2544	2191	86.1%	1186	47%
Alaska	Bethel Census Area	12130	10310	85.0%	5078	42%
Alaska	Northwest Arctic Borough	4986	4180	83.8%	1913	38%
Wisconsin	Menominee County	2893	2396	82.8%	1590	55%
South Dakota	Buffalo County	1196	980	81.9%	549	46%
New Mexico	McKinley County	52680	41445	78.7%	26486	50%
South Dakota	Dewey County	3595	2827	78.6%	1966	55%
Alaska	Nome Census Area	6751	5292	78.4%	3349	50%
South Dakota	Ziebach County	1570	1204	76.7%	906	58%
Alaska	Dillingham Census Area	3319	2519	75.9%	1873	56%
Alaska	Yukon-Koyukuk Census Area	3918	2919	74.5%	2956	75%
North Dakota	Rolette County	8161	6072	74.4%	3804	47%
Alaska	Lake and Peninsula Borough	1025	748	73.0%	445	43%
Arizona	Apache County	49105	34881	71.0%	35172	72%
Montana	Glacier County	9448	6479	68.6%	5617	59%
South Dakota	Corson County	2551	1727	67.7%	1283	50%
Montana	Big Horn County	8747	5568	63.7%	4784	55%
South Dakota	Bennett County	2267	1357	59.9%	1183	52%

Montana	Roosevelt County	7460	4372	**58.6%**	4017	**54%**
South Dakota	Mellette County	1285	709	**55.2%**	769	**60%**
South Dakota	Jackson County	1915	1021	**53.3%**	1115	**58%**
Nebraska	Thurston County	4510	2390	**53.0%**	2325	**52%**
Oklahoma	Adair County	14420	7435	**51.6%**	7108	**49%**
Utah	San Juan County	10342	5286	**51.1%**	6877	**66%**
Montana	Blaine County	4965	2511	**50.6%**	3117	**63%**

Source: Steven Manson, Jonathan Schroeder, David Van Riper, Tracy Kugler, and Steven Ruggles. IPUMS National Historical Geographic Information System: Version 16.0 [U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2020 Redistricting Data (Public Law 94-171) Summary File, Table PL3]. Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS. 2021. http://doi.org/10.18128/D050.V16.0; Dave's Redistricting, 2022. https://davesredistricting.org/

As **Table 1** shows, twenty-eight counties or county equivalents are majority minority for AI/AN voting-age population and had a total average voter turnout rate of 53 percent with a range of 42 percent to 72 percent. In 2020, the national turnout rate was 67 percent, which means that these counties were on average 14 percentage points lower than the national turnout rate. The five counties with the highest and lowest turnout rates and their percent of AI/ANs who were of voting age in the 2020 Census are shown in **Table 2**.

Table 2. Highest and Lowest Five Counties in 2020 Voter Turnout with AI/AN voting-age population

County	2020 Voter Turnout Rate in County	2020 AI/AN Voting Age Population Percentage in County
Highest Voter Turnout Rate		
Alaska (Yukon-Koyukuk Census Area)	75%	74.5%
Arizona (Apache County)	72%	71.0%
Utah (San Juan County)	66%	51.1%
Montana (Blaine County)	63%	50.6%
South Dakota (Mellette County)	60%	55.2%
Lowest Voter Turnout Data Rate		
South Dakota (Buffalo County)	46%	81.9%
South Dakota (Todd County)	45%	88.5%
Alaska (Kusilvak Census Area)	44%	95.7%
Alaska (Lake and Peninsula Borough)	43%	73.0%
North Dakota (Sioux County)	42%	85.0%

Source: Steven Manson, Jonathan Schroeder, David Van Riper, Tracy Kugler, and Steven Ruggles. IPUMS National Historical Geographic Information System: Version 16.0 [U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2020 Redistricting Data (Public Law 94-171) Summary File, Table PL3]. Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS. 2021. http://doi.org/10.18128/D050.V16.0; Redistricting Data Hub, 2022. https://redistrictingdatahub.org/; Dave's Redistricting, 2022. https://davesredistricting.org/

These turnout data reveal that voter turnout data is not necessarily the same as the AI/AN voting-age population percentage for the county, and since non-AI/ANs may have also voted in the county, this data does not tell the exact proportion of AI/ANs who voted. While this analysis is an estimate or proxy for AI/AN voter turnout data in counties with AI/AN majority minority populations, it may still be helpful for voter engagement efforts where Native Vote teams may be able to interpret these data in local context. Many of the counties in these tables are in rural or remote areas which may impact voter turnout rates and have relatively small numbers of voters where every single vote could make a difference in the results of an election.

State Voter Turnout and Registration Data in AI/AN Majority Minority Voting Districts

While voter turnout data within counties is useful, examining voter turnout and registration data at the state level for voting districts that are majority minority for voting-age AI/ANs provides a clearer picture of voting patterns in key areas for AI/ANs. In 2020, 779 voting districts in 35 states were majority minority for voting-age AI/ANs.

Table 3 shows the 35 states with majority AI/AN voting districts, the percent of total voting districts in the state with majority AI/AN population counts, the average voting district turnout rate for all AI/AN majority minority voting districts in the state, and the average voting district registration rate for all AI/AN majority minority voting districts in the state.

Table 3: 2020 Turnout and Registration Rate for Voting Districts with AI/AN Majority Minority Voting Age Population

State	Percentage of AI/AN Majority Minority Voting Districts in the State	2020 Average AI/AN Majority Minority Voting District <u>Turnout</u> Rate	2020 Average AI/AN Majority Minority Voting District <u>Registration</u> Rate
Alaska	30.7%	47.3%	89.1%
Arizona	7.2%	58.3%	87.8%
Arkansas	0.1%	14.3%	28.6%
Colorado	0.0%	38.6%	73.9%
Florida	0.1%	0.00%	76.7%
Georgia	0.1%	0.00%	12000.0%
Idaho	0.4%	37.1%	33.7%
Indiana	0.0%	0.00%	80.0%
Iowa	0.1%	0.00%	247.5%
Kansas	0.5%	0.00%	81.6%
Kentucky	0.1%	0.00%	100.0%
Louisiana	0.1%	0.00%	97.1%
Maryland	0.0%	700.00%	800.0%

Michigan	0.0%	1766.7%	N/A
Minnesota	0.8%	49.0%	71.0%
Mississippi	0.2%	0.0%	41.7%
Missouri	0.1%	88.5%	93.7%
Montana	5.1%	145.3%	180.6%
Nebraska	0.3%	0.0%	86.7%
Nevada	1.1%	58.4%	89.9%
New Hampshire	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%
New Mexico	6.2%	43.7%	63.6%
New York	0.1%	2516.4%	998.0%
North Carolina	0.4%	49.1%	69.5%
North Dakota	1.5%	33.3%	N/A
Ohio	0.0%	33.3%	33.3%
Oklahoma	1.2%	0.0%	181.5%
South Dakota	8.0%	41.5%	81.0%
Texas	0.1%	191.6%	398.2%
Utah	0.7%	95.6%	129.1%
Vermont	0.4%	0.0%	0.0%
Virginia	0.1%	16.7%	50.0%
Washington	0.6%	3.5%	169.7%
Wisconsin	0.6%	53.3%	87.2%
Wyoming	0.6%	37.0%	37.8%

Source: Steven Manson, Jonathan Schroeder, David Van Riper, Tracy Kugler, and Steven Ruggles. IPUMS National Historical Geographic Information System: Version 16.0 [U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2020 Redistricting Data (Public Law 94-171) Summary File, Table PL3]. Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS. 2021. http://doi.org/10.18128/D050.V16.0; Redistricting Data Hub, 2022. https://redistrictingdatahub.org/; Dave's Redistricting App, 2022. https://davesredistricting.org/

Caution is recommended when interpreting this data since it is a combination of different data sources—including the 2020 Census voting age population data for voting districts and state turnout and registration data for voting districts—all of which may have issues with quality and completeness. As indicated in **Table 3**, only five states had over five percent of their voting districts as AI/AN majority minority (Alaska, Arizona, South Dakota, New Mexico, and Montana).

The turnout and registration rates in columns three and four of **Table 3** are the average turnout and registration rates for all AI/AN majority minority voting districts in the state together, and the data for the individual AI/AN majority minority voting districts may vary widely within each state. Also, the AI/AN voting-age population in the 2020 Census may have been undercounted in some areas with high numbers of AI/ANs, and since it is the denominator for the calculation of turnout and registration rates in those voting districts, some rates could be artificially inflated. Values over 100 percent likely indicate an undercount in the 2020 Census total voting age population when combined with actual turnout and registration data to calculate the rate.

Some states do not have registration rates in **Table 3**. Data on registration is not available for 98 voting districts. North Dakota is the only state that does not have voter registration requirements. **Table 4** summarizes average turnout and registration rates in the states with the highest percentage of AI/AN majority minority voting districts of all their voting districts.

Table 4. 2020 Average State Voter Turnout with Registration Rates in States with Greater than Five Percent of Voting Districts being AI/AN Majority Minority Voting Districts.

State	2020 Average Voter Turnout in State AI/AN Majority Minority Voting Districts	2020 Averate Voter Registration in State AI/AN Majority Minority Voting Districts
Highest Average Voter Turnout		
Montana	145.3%	180.6%
Arizona	58.3%	87.8%
Alaska	47.3%	89.1%
New Mexico	43.75	63.6%
South Dakota	41.5%	81.0%

Source: Steven Manson, Jonathan Schroeder, David Van Riper, Tracy Kugler, and Steven Ruggles. IPUMS National Historical Geographic Information System: Version 16.0 [U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2020 Redistricting Data (Public Law 94-171) Summary File, Table PL3]. Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS. 2021. http://doi.org/10.18128/D050.V16.0; Redistricting Data Hub, 2022. https://redistrictingdatahub.org/; Dave's Redistricting, 2022. https://davesredistricting.org/

Discussion

The lack of accurate AI/AN voter turnout and registration data is a challenge for voter engagement efforts, especially when every single vote counts. While states and counties do not collect voter data by race and ethnicity, this analysis used other data as a proxy to estimate voter turnout and registration data for AI/AN majority minority counties and voting districts based on 2020 Census and state data on county and voting district turnout and registration data. This information on turnout rates and registration rates has limitations but can provides a more holistic picture of voting patterns for key areas with high populations of AI/ANs.

While existing data cannot accurately reflect AI/AN turnout and registration rates for the entire population group, these rates may better inform voter mobilization efforts in these regions of the country, as well as provide evidence to continued barriers to voting on reservations and in locations with high numbers of AI/ANs. The NCAI Policy Research Center is reviewing other possible analyses including using data for voting districts that are entirely located within reservations, but this data has greater caveats and limitations than the data included in this brief. Any additional analyses will be published on the NCAI Policy Research Center Publications webpage and NCAI's Native Vote website in the future.