

IDENTITY DOCUMENTS & NATIVE COMMUNITIES

Identity documents (IDs) are vital keys necessary to open the doors to so many parts of everyday life. However, there are key system-level failures that create significant obstacles to IDs for many people, causing severe, yet avoidable harm. This infographic highlights some of the unique impacts on Native communities. See MAP's [new report](#) to learn more about the obstacles to ID, the harms caused from a lack of ID, and recommendations for improving ID access for everyone.

SYSTEM FAILURES CREATE OBSTACLES TO ACCURATE ID



Burdensome documentation requirements often mean a person needs one form of ID (such as a birth certificate) to get another ID (such as a driver's license). But many older Native Americans were born at home on reservations and were never issued a U.S.-government birth certificate. Furthermore, tribal IDs may not be recognized or accepted for many purposes, including for U.S.-issued IDs. Additionally, IDs often require a permanent address, but the majority of Native Americans live in rural and small-town areas where such addresses are less common, instead relying on P.O. boxes or shared, centralized delivery locations that may not be accepted for use on a U.S.-issued ID.



IDs are needlessly expensive, with a new driver's license costing an average of 4.1 hours of work at minimum wage—not including the costs of time waiting at or traveling to an ID office. And, due to centuries of discrimination and forced displacement, Native American communities face far higher rates of poverty and unemployment. More than 1 in 5 Native Americans live below the poverty level, far above the national rate.



The **limited availability of ID services** especially impacts Native communities, the majority of whom live in rural and small-town areas, which generally have fewer ID-issuing locations and fewer open hours for those locations that exist. Traveling to other locations adds additional costs and obstacles to getting ID—and especially for those with limited financial means or without access to reliable transportation.

LACK OF ID CAUSES CONCRETE, YET AVOIDABLE HARM



Lack of ID or a recognized ID limits access to **essential services and everyday life**, including being unable to travel or to enroll in key services like banking. In Alaska, for example, indigenous communities were told by the TSA they couldn't use their tribal IDs for travel. Additionally, having a bank account is critical for economic security and stability, but requires an ID. In 2019, the FDIC reported that 16.3% of American Indian and Alaska Native households were "unbanked"—meaning no one in the household had a checking or savings account—more than three times the nationwide rate (5.4%), and more than six times the rate among white households (2.5%).

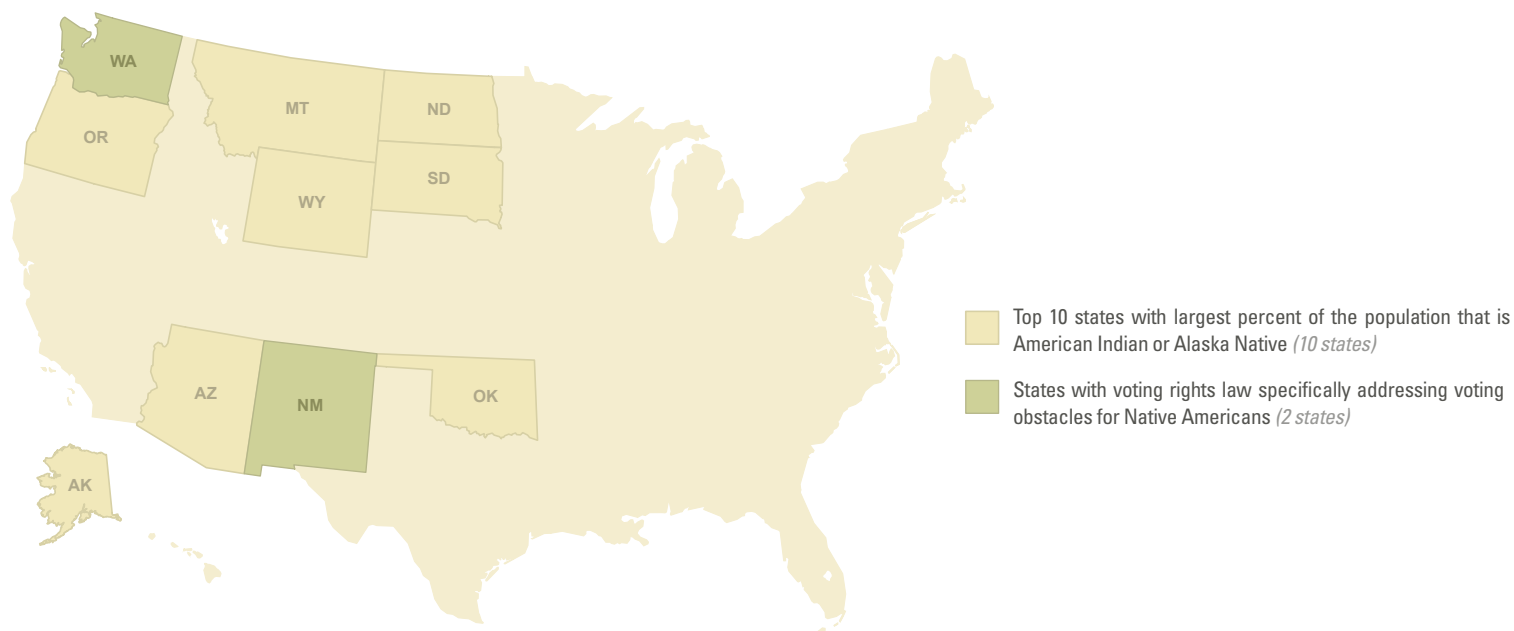


Without access to a U.S.-state-issued ID, many Native Americans **may face serious obstacles to voting**. For example, in the leadup to the 2018 midterm election, over 5,000 Native Americans in North Dakota lacked the required ID to vote because the state's new voter ID law did not recognize tribal reservations as a valid residential address. And, as shown on the next page, only two of the ten states with the largest Native populations, and only five states total nationwide, have passed voting protection laws for Native Americans.



Lack of accurate ID **harms health and wellbeing at a community level**. Research by the Center for American Progress shows Native Americans' "medical records and birth and death certificates are plagued by racial misreporting and racial misclassification," often misidentifying Native people as white. This undermines accurate data collection and research about questions as basic as the size of the Native population today, which in turn undermines efforts and funding to address the systemic economic, health, and other disparities affecting Native American communities today.

OF THE 10 STATES WITH THE HIGHEST SHARE OF AMERICAN INDIAN & ALASKA NATIVES, ONLY TWO HAVE PASSED NATIVE AMERICAN VOTING PROTECTIONS



Sources: MAP's [Native American Voting Protections Democracy Map](#) and U.S. Census Bureau population data.

Note: Three other states (California, Colorado, and Nevada) have enacted Native American voting rights protections, but these states are not in the top 10 states with the highest population shares of American Indians or Alaska Natives.

VOTER ID LAWS CREATE UNIQUE OBSTACLES FOR RURAL NATIVE AMERICANS

In 2018, a voter ID law went into effect in North Dakota requiring residential addresses but explicitly excluding P.O. boxes. An estimated 80% of Native people in North Dakota live in rural areas, which much more commonly rely on P.O. boxes. Tribal reservations also lack traditional residential addresses as required by this law. As a result, over 5,000 Native Americans lacked a type of ID that would allow them to vote under this new law.

The North Dakota Secretary of State informed tribal leaders that each of these over 5,000 voters would have to address this issue individually, and that they could call their county 911 coordinator to receive an address. However, this was not an actual solution. As reported by the American Bar Association, "most of the tribal reservations span multiple jurisdictions, creating inconsistencies and confusion for tribes. For Sioux County, where the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe is located, the 911 coordinator is the county sheriff, which posed a deterrent for community members wary of law enforcement. When a Standing Rock Sioux tribal member called to determine her residential address, the sheriff told her that he was transporting prisoners and could not assign addresses that day. Another voter was assigned a residential address corresponding to a nearby bar, exposing that tribal member to fraud [and therefore potential prosecution] if he voted based on that address."

While North Dakota tribes ultimately created their own emergency plans to produce residential addresses and corresponding eligible IDs for their members, these tribal governments were forced to undertake extraordinary efforts in order to ensure their tribal members could vote, and to expend resources they did not have in the first place. Native Americans face significantly higher unemployment and poverty rates, making it all the more difficult to afford to meet the costs of ID—and especially when new, strict laws refuse to recognize the residences of many Native Americans.

Adapted from: Patty Ferguson-Bohnee. 2020. *How the Native American Vote Continues to Be Suppressed*. The American Bar Association. Additional data sources detailed in link listed below.

Learn more about identity documents in MAP's new report:

THE ID DIVIDE: HOW BARRIERS TO ID IMPACT DIFFERENT COMMUNITIES AND AFFECT US ALL

<http://www.mapresearch.org/id-documents-report>

