

OBSTACLES PERSIST: ACCORDING TO THE DATA

BARRIERS TO POLITICAL PARTICIPATION FACED BY NATIVE AMERICAN VOTERS



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Native Americans face barriers to voting at every stage of the electoral process, and those barriers are not random. They are rooted in decades of exclusion, chronic underinvestment in rural and tribal infrastructure, and election administration systems that were not designed with Indian Country in mind. Geographic isolation, unreliable mail service, nonstandard addressing systems, limited internet access, and inadequate polling resources all combine to make voting harder in heavily Native American counties than anywhere else in the country. The consequences are measurable.

This paper examines the full voting process in Indian Country. Each section follows a stage that voters must successfully navigate, which includes registering, staying on the rolls, choosing a voting method, casting a ballot, and resolving any issues that arise before their ballot is counted. That framing reflects a core premise of the analysis: voting is not a single act. It is a sustained process that places real and recurring demands on voters, and disparities can emerge at any point along the way. Tracking the process end to end makes those disparities visible and connects them to the structural conditions that produce them.

The data powering this analysis come from the U.S. Election Assistance Commission's Election Administration and Voting Survey (EAVS) for 2020, 2022, and 2024. The EAVS is the most comprehensive source of election administration data available at the county level, covering everything from registration activity to ballot disposition. Tracking three election cycles across presidential and midterm years allows us to distinguish persistent structural disparities from election-specific variation and to identify where conditions are improving and where they are not. The analysis uses three geographic groupings for comparison. Select Counties are 30 counties where Native Americans constitute more than 25% of the population, and they are the primary unit of analysis. Focus States are the 13 states with the highest overall Native American populations and provide a regional comparison. National figures provide a broader baseline. The highlights below summarize the key findings across each stage of the voting process. Generally, more voting issues arose in 2024 than in previous years, indicating an increase in obstacles to voting in Indian Country. Comprehensive policy recommendations follow the full report.

Key Findings

REGISTRATION

1. New voter registrations in Select Counties declined 59% from 2020 to 2024. Nationally, registrations declined 22% over the same period and showed a partial rebound from 2020 to 2024. Select Counties showed no rebound.
2. The typical pattern of higher registrations in presidential election years did not hold in Select Counties. Despite 2024 being a presidential year, registrations fell 53% from 2022 levels.
3. The DMV accounted for roughly half of all new registrations in Select Counties in 2024 but carries a rejection rate above 5% each year, about double the Focus State rate.
4. DMV rejections grew 176.8% as a share of total rejections in Select Counties from 2020 to 2024, while declining as a share nationally and in Focus States.
5. Mail rejections grew 224.4% as a share of total rejections in Select Counties over the same period, while declining nationally and in Focus States.
6. Automatic voter registration produced roughly 3,000 additional registrations per county in adopting states but reached only one of the 30 Select Counties.

7. Regression analysis in Focus States confirms that higher Native American citizen voting age population (CVAP) shares are associated with higher registration rejection rates, a finding that is statistically significant. All else equal, a 100% Native county would have a rejection rate 2.8 percentage points higher than a county with no Native residents, against an average county rejection rate of 1%.

TURNOUT

8. Turnout in Select Counties ran 4 to 5 percentage points below Focus State averages in presidential years and about 1 percentage point below in the 2022 midterm election.
9. The turnout gap documented here is smaller than in other research, including prior work by the authors. These figures represent the most conservative available estimate of the disparity. Select Counties contain large non-Native populations, which dampens the signal, and county-level turnout data from 30 counties are less effective than surveys, exit polling, or other methodologies at capturing racial group-specific turnout patterns.

VOTER ROLL

10. Confirmation notices in Select Counties grew 178% from 2020 to 2024, compared to roughly 40% nationally and in Focus States.
11. Ninety percent of confirmation notices in Select Counties went unanswered in 2024, compared to 59% nationally. Successful return rates in Select Counties were about three times lower than national and Focus State averages in 2020 and 2022.
12. In Select Counties, 87% of confirmation notices sent in 2024 were triggered by undeliverable mail. Nationally, undeliverable mail accounted for only 11% of confirmation notices.

VOTING METHODS

13. Mail voting in Select Counties was lower than national and Focus State rates across all three election cycles, including during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic surge. In-person Election Day voting remained elevated even during the pandemic.
14. Provisional ballot use in Select Counties more than doubled as a share of total votes cast from 2020 to 2024, growing far faster than national trends.

MAIL BALLOT REJECTIONS

15. Mail ballot rejections grew in Select Counties from 2020 to 2024, despite fewer mail ballots being cast in 2024. The effective rejection rate increased even as mail voting declined.
16. Signature issues, both non-matching and missing, accounted for just over 40% of mail ballot rejections in Select Counties in 2020 and 2022.

BALLOT CURING

17. The EAVS tracked ballot curing for the first time in 2024. Of 1,082 ballots entering the curing process in the 10 Select Counties that reported data, 78% were successfully cured, compared to 53% nationally. This finding is heartening because it shows the cure process can be effective in avoiding ballot rejections but deserves caution and follow-up.
18. Provisional ballots in Select Counties more than doubled from 2020 to 2024. Their share of total votes cast more than doubled as well.

PROVISIONAL BALLOTS

19. The provisional ballot rejection rate in Select Counties fell from 65.8% in 2020 to 40.8% in 2024, a meaningful improvement. However, 40.8% remains roughly double the national rate of 24.9%.
20. Only 34.2% of provisional ballots in Select Counties were counted in 2020, rising to 59.2% in 2024, still well below the national counted rate of 74.1% and the Focus State rate of 77.7%.
21. Outdated registration drove roughly 33.1% of provisional ballot use in Select Counties in 2024, with not being registered accounting for another 26.8%. Registration problems drove 60% of provisional ballot use in Select Counties compared to 45% nationwide.
22. Wrong precinct and wrong jurisdiction rejections accounted for 67.5% of provisional ballot rejections in Select Counties in 2022, compared to 19.1% nationally, a gap of 48.4 percentage points.
23. Regression analysis finds that a county with 100% Native American CVAP would have a provisional ballot rejection rate 30 percentage points higher than a county with no Native residents, one of the largest effect sizes in the study.

TOTAL REJECTIONS

24. Total rejections across all types in Select Counties declined from 7,474 in 2020 to 5,176 in 2024, and the combined rejection rate fell from 1.7% to 1.2% of the CVAP.
25. The composition of rejections shifted significantly. Mail and provisional ballot rejections, which occur after voters have already attempted to cast a ballot, grew from 35% of total rejections in 2020 to 67% in 2024.
26. Regression analysis in Focus States confirms that Native American population share has a positive and statistically significant effect on the combined rejection rate. A 100% Native county would have a combined rejection rate 1.4 percentage points higher than a county with no Native residents, nearly twice the average combined rejection rate of 0.57%.



INTRODUCTION

For Native Americans, the right to vote has never been equally accessible. Even after the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924, states used literacy tests, poll taxes, residency requirements, and outright legal exclusions to deny Native communities access to the ballot. The 1965 Voting Rights Act dismantled many of those mechanisms, but the barriers did not disappear. They evolved. Today, Native voters face structural obstacles that reflect both historical exclusion and contemporary inequity: remote polling locations, unreliable mail service, registration systems that cannot accommodate nonstandard addresses, ballots available only in English, and identification requirements that do not recognize tribal IDs. Even when Native voters do participate, their ballots are more likely to be rejected for reasons that reveal systemic failures, incomplete paperwork, or procedural errors magnified in underfunded election systems.

The consequences reach far beyond the ballot box. Native Americans are one of the fastest-growing populations in the United States, yet their political representation remains severely limited. Every rejected ballot compounds a history of exclusion and erodes trust in institutions that have long failed Native communities. Because voting shapes how resources are allocated and policies are made, barriers to participation perpetuate cycles of underinvestment in healthcare, education, housing, and infrastructure in Native communities on and off reservation. Full access to the ballot is not simply a matter of civic engagement. It is a matter of sovereignty, self-determination, and equity.

Native voters are too often invisible in national conversations about election policy. Analyses of ballot rejection patterns rarely center Native communities, even though the data show disproportionately high rates of disenfranchisement at every stage of the process. By examining these trends across three election cycles, this report calls attention to the urgent need for reforms that can strengthen protections for Native voters. Policymakers and election officials must address inequities in registration systems, ensure equitable access to polling and mail voting, provide robust language assistance for the 103 jurisdictions and 236,942 Native community members covered by Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021), and recognize the validity of tribal identification. Expanding access to the ballot for Native Americans is not simply about correcting disparities in election outcomes. It is about affirming the fundamental right of Native people to participate in a democracy that has long denied them full inclusion.

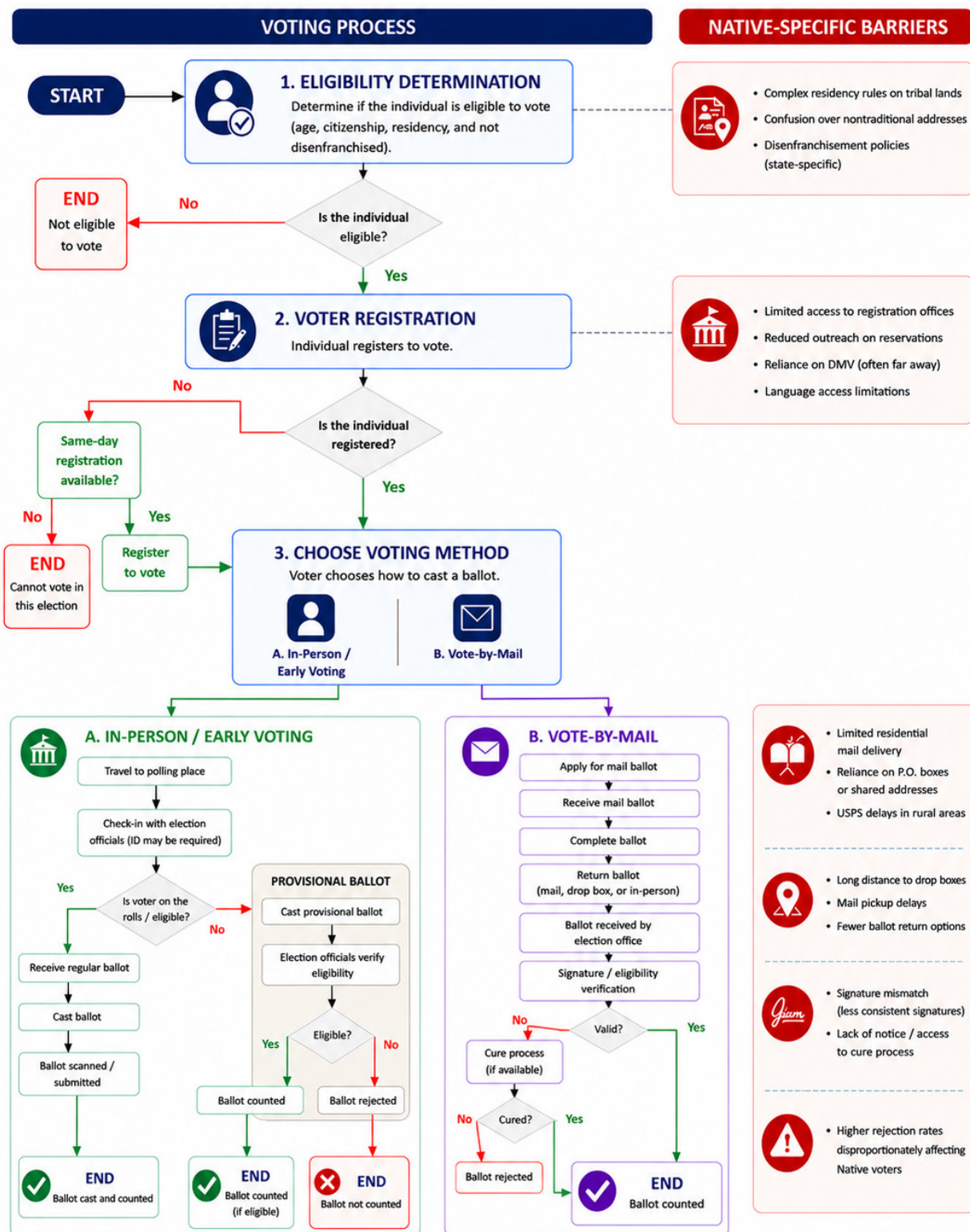
Voting is not a single act. It is a sequential process in which each stage depends on the one before it, and failure at any point can end a voter's participation entirely. A voter who cannot register cannot cast a ballot. A voter whose registration is rejected or whose name is removed from the rolls without their knowledge may arrive at the polls only to be turned away or handed a provisional ballot that carries a high risk of rejection. A voter who relies on mail voting in a community with unreliable delivery may never receive a ballot or may send one back that arrives late or not at all. A voter whose mail ballot is flagged for a minor error depends on a curing process that itself relies on mail notification and internet access, two resources that are less available in Indian Country than anywhere else in the country. These are not independent problems. They are links in a chain, and when one breaks, the others bear more weight. The disproportionate barriers Native voters face at registration compound into higher provisional ballot rates, which compound into higher rejection rates, which compound into lower turnout and diminished political voice. Understanding voting access in Indian Country requires examining the full chain, not just individual points of failure.

This report does exactly that. Using U.S. Election Assistance Commission Election Administration and Voting Survey (EAVS) data from 2020, 2022, and 2024, combined with county-level demographic data from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey, we trace the voting process in Indian Country from beginning to end. The EAVS is the most comprehensive source of election administration data and is available at the county level. The survey is technically voluntary, but all 56 states and territories and 100% of the 6,461 local jurisdictions reported at least some data in 2024, as they did in 2020 and 2022.¹ We analyze registration patterns and rejections, confirmation notices and voter roll purges, turnout and voting methods, mail ballot rejections, drop box use, mail ballot cures and outcomes, provisional ballot use and reasons, provisional ballot rejection rates, and we calculate an overall rejection

rate. The analysis centers three geographic groupings: Select Counties, 30 counties where Native Americans make up more than 25% of the total population; Focus States, the 13 states with the largest overall Native American populations; and national figures as a broader baseline. Together, these data allow us to document not just where the system is failing Native voters, but how those failures connect across the full arc of the voting process.

The flowchart below illustrates what that chain looks like in practice, stage by stage, barrier by barrier, for Native voters trying to make their voices heard in a system that has never been designed with them in mind. This report details each of those pain points, documents the data behind them across three federal election cycles, and makes the case for the targeted reforms that Native communities cannot afford to wait any longer to receive.

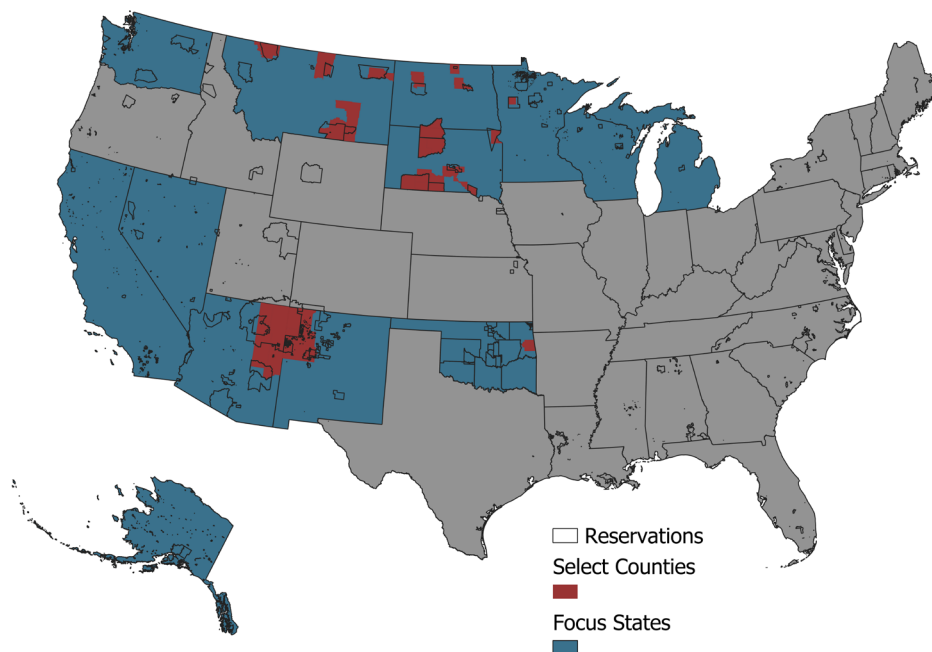
THE VOTING PROCESS AND NATIVE-SPECIFIC BARRIERS



FOCUS STATES AND SELECT COUNTIES

To better understand voting patterns and issues affecting Native voters, we define Focus States as the thirteen states with substantial Native American populations² and we group counties with 25% or more Native American population in those Focus States into what we call Select Counties. There are 30 Select Counties within the 657 counties and jurisdictions in the thirteen Focus States.³ Not all Focus States have Select Counties. For example, California, Nevada, and Washington are Focus States but they do not have any counties with a Native American population above 25%.

By narrowing down to Focus States and Select Counties, we can analyze a subset of areas with similar geography and demography and compare those subsets to the national baseline. Finally, we analyze the 2020, 2022, and 2024 elections (two presidential years and one midterm) to capture patterns across time.⁴ This also provides baseline trends for future election analyses.



The following table breaks down the Select Counties by Focus State to show the basic demographics and geographic characteristics in our study area for 2024. It includes the total Native population and the average percentage of those counties covered by reservation territory.⁵ For example, Apache and Navajo counties in Arizona collectively have 92,043 Native residents, on average 56.7% of the residents are Native and 68.8% of their land area in the two counties is reservation territory.⁶

Population of Select Counties in Focus State

Focus State	# of Counties	# Native Residents	Avg. % Native	Avg. % Reservation
Arizona	2	92,043	56.7	68.8
Minnesota	1	1,850	34.4	100
Montana	5	29,823	54.6	48.2
New Mexico	3	111,630	52	37.1
North Dakota	4	18,112	59.9	37.8
Oklahoma	2	23,190	36.4	100
South Dakota	12	42,169	61.9	72.4
Wisconsin	1	3,337	78.4	98.9
Total	30	322,154	57	63.6

The 30 Select Counties have 621,108 total residents and a citizen voting age population (CVAP) of 446,205. About half of the total population (322,154) and half of the CVAP (225,860) are Native American. For the counties where we have data in 2024, there are just over 400,000 registered voters.

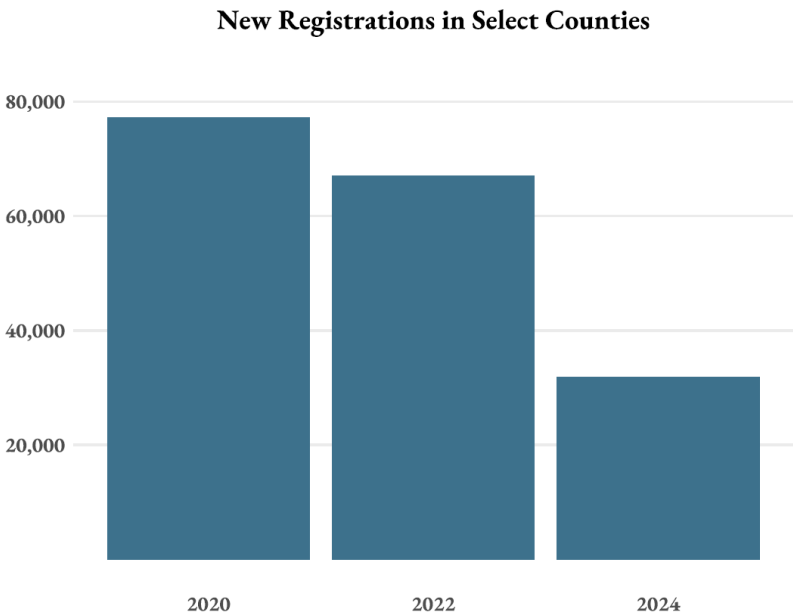
We created tables, found in Appendix A, to summarize voting problems faced in Select Counties in 2020, 2022, and 2024. The tables highlight the specific voting issues faced by different counties and how they differ over time.

REGISTRATION

Registration is the first and most essential step in the voting process. Without it, otherwise eligible voters cannot cast a ballot. For Native communities, registration is often more than a bureaucratic formality. Geographic isolation, lack of standard residential addresses, and limited internet access create barriers that make registration significantly harder than it is for most other voters (Democrats Committee on Housing Administration, 2024; Gall, Stout, and Neswood, 2024; Native American Rights Fund, 2020). This section examines new voter registrations, registration sources, and rejection rates across Select Counties, Focus States, and the nation from 2020 to 2024. The patterns reveal compounding barriers that fall disproportionately on Native voters and set the conditions for the disparities that appear at every subsequent stage of the voting process.

There were about 33.3 million new voter registrations that were accepted nationwide in 2020, 22.8 million in 2022, and 26.1 million in 2024.⁷ This follows the historic pattern where presidential years have more registrations and participation than midterm elections.

However, that typical pattern does not hold when looking at Select Counties. New registrations were highest in 2020 at 77,203 followed by steady declines in 2022 and 2024. Despite being a presidential election year, the 31,804 new registrations in 2024 were a 53% decrease from 2022 and a 59% decrease from 2020. The chart illustrates the steady decline across elections since 2020.



Change in Voter Registration

Category	2020	2022	2024	2020 → 2022 (% Change)	2022 → 2024 (% Change)	2020 → 2024 (% Change)
Nationwide	33.3 million	22.8 million	26.1 million	-31.5	14.5	-21.6
Focus States	10.6 million	6.4 million	7.8 million	-39.7	22.2	-26.4
Select Counties	77,203	67,045	31,804	-13.2	-52.5	-58.8

From 2020 to 2024, new voter registrations declined across all geographic categories, though the patterns differed. Nationwide, registrations fell 31.5% between 2020 and 2022 but partially recovered by 14.5% from 2022 to 2024, resulting in a net decline of 21.6%. The same general pattern is observed in the Focus States. However, there were steep decreases in Select Counties, where registrations decreased 13.2% initially and then plunged 52.5%, for an overall decline of 58.8%. These trends suggest that while the national picture shows some rebound, Select Counties experienced sustained and significant reductions in new voter registrations.

These trends clearly show that Native American communities and voters face disproportionately large barriers to voter registration, including limited access to resources and systemic disenfranchisement. As registration is the first step in civic participation, these declines limit opportunities for individuals to vote, influence policy, and shape community priorities. Persistent low registration rates risk reducing political voice and reinforcing structural inequities, underscoring the need for targeted efforts to remove barriers and ensure full participation in the democratic process.

Registration Sources

Understanding how voters register provides insight into accessibility, outreach effectiveness, and potential barriers for Native American voters. Voter registration can occur through a variety of channels, each playing a critical role in enabling citizens to participate in elections. The most common places to register are Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) offices. Other options include online portals, which allow eligible voters to register electronically; mail-in registration, which provides a paper-based option for those unable to register in person; and in-person registration at election offices, which allow voters to register or update their information directly. Additional sources include registration drives organized by community groups, and National Voter Registration Act (NVRA) agencies like public assistance and disability offices mandated to offer voter registration. “Other” miscellaneous sources capture registrations that do not fit neatly into these categories.

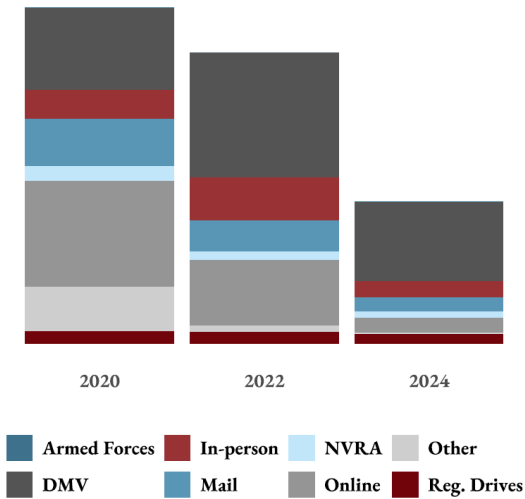
Nationwide, the DMV is the most popular source of new registrations across all three elections. About 38.8% of new registrations were from the DMV in 2020, 58.1% in 2022, and 34.8% in 2024. Online registrations were the second largest source in 2020 and 2022 at 28.4% and 13.9% respectively, likely because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Automatic registrations, first introduced as its own separate category in EAVS data in 2024, overtook online registrations in 2024 as the second most popular source, accounting for about 24.8% of new registrations. Automatic voter registration is a system that registers eligible citizens to vote automatically when they interact with a government agency, such as a DMV, rather than requiring a separate registration action.

Registration Sources Nationwide

Registration Source	2020	2022	2024
DMV	38.8%	58.1%	34.8%
Online	28.4%	13.9%	18.4%
Mail	14.4%	10.5%	8.1%
In-person	8.3%	6.5%	6.7%
Other	4.3%	4.3%	1.8%
Registration Drives	1.7%	1.6%	2.4%
NVRA	1.7%	1.3%	0.8%
Automatic	—	—	24.8%

In Select Counties, registering online was the most common way in 2020 when the pandemic started - see the table of New Registration Sources in Focus States and Select Counties and the chart of New Registration Sources in Select Counties. Online and DMV sources accounted for over half of all registrations in 2020 and around two thirds of new registrations in the succeeding election years. Mail and in-person methods are a smaller portion of new registrations, typically accounting for about 20% to 25% of new registrations combined. The share of mail, in-person, and registration drive registrations in Select Counties is higher than in Focus States each year. While Focus States heavily rely on the DMV for voter registration, we see that Select Counties were especially reliant on the DMV in 2024, accounting for around half of all registrations. Looking at changes in 2024, automatic voter registration and online registrations grew in importance nationwide and in Focus States in 2024 while Select Counties saw the share of online registrations shrink.

New Registration Sources in Select Counties



New Registration Sources in Focus States and Select Counties

Registration Source	Focus States			Select Counties		
	2020	2022	2024	2020	2022	2024
DMV	31.9%	49.9%	19.6%	24.3%	42.6%	57.2%
Online	35.8%	15.0%	19.1%	31.6%	22.7%	11.4%
Mail	6.8%	5.7%	6.8%	14.3%	10.9%	11.0%
In-person	6.8%	6.1%	4.9%	8.6%	14.6%	11.4%
Other	7.2%	8.8%	1.7%	13.1%	1.9%	1.0%
Registration Drives	1.5%	1.3%	2.2%	3.8%	4.3%	7.5%
NVRA	0.9%	0.7%	0.7%	4.3%	2.8%	4.0%
Automatic	—	—	45.0%	—	—	0.4%

The trends also reveal potential access disparities. Geographic isolation, addressing issues, limited internet access for Native Americans, and rural populations limit the feasible registration options (Gall, Stout, and Neswood, 2024; Jones and Grange 2024). Meanwhile, registration drives and NVRA programs, though small in scale, can have targeted impacts in high-need communities, including counties with historically low registration rates, although these methods have their own drawbacks with higher rejection rates as we will see in the next section.

These patterns highlight the importance of policy and outreach interventions. For example, in 2024, automatic registration became the dominant source, accounting for one quarter of new registrations nationwide. This substantial increase reflects the adoption of automatic voter registration policies in states such as Alaska, California, Minnesota,

Nevada, and Washington, which streamlined the registration process and made it more accessible for many residents. Controlling for population, counties with automatic registration have about 3,000 more new registrations in 2024 compared to counties without. While automatic registration can help increase participation among Native American populations living in these states, its impact is uneven: the counties with the highest percentages of Native American residents are largely in states that have not implemented automatic registration. Out of the 30 Select Counties, Mahnomen County in Minnesota was the only one to report automatic registrations in 2024, as it is the only Select County in a state with automatic registration. As a result, these communities remain reliant on traditional registration methods, such as in-person DMV visits or mail-in applications, which can be logistically difficult due to geographic isolation, limited transportation options, and under-resourced election infrastructure for tribal communities.

Broadly, these trends highlight a growing divide: states with automatic registration have seen large gains in new registrants, reflecting the efficiency and accessibility of this method, while states without it, especially those containing many Native-majority counties, have experienced slower growth in registration. This pattern underscores the importance of policy interventions that specifically target historically underserved communities.

Rejected Registrations

Turning to registration rejections, we find that counties in Focus States with higher percentages of Native Americans face higher overall registration rejection rates. We also find that Select Counties have consistently higher DMV rejection rates compared to Focus States overall. Given the large volume of registrations handled by the DMV, as outlined above, this poses a significant problem for Native voters, especially those in counties with larger Native American populations.

The table below, Rejected Registrations by Source, shows the distribution of rejected registration by source nationwide, in Focus States, and in Select Counties. Nationwide, the DMV accounted for the highest share of rejected registrations across all years. In 2020, 35.1% of rejected registrations came from the DMV. That grew to more than half in 2022 and then dropped in 2024. Online methods are also a consistent source of rejections nationwide.

In the 30 Select Counties, rejected registrations declined from 4,884 in 2020 to about 1,700 in 2024. This is a positive trend. Notably, however, rejections from DMVs steadily increased to 56.5% in Select Counties. And the share of rejected registrations from mail sources increased in 2024 for Select Counties while it decreased nationally and in Focus States. Given the issues with mail service and delivery in heavily Native American areas, this is particularly problematic. Unfortunately, the EAVS dataset does not provide the reasons for rejecting a registration.

Rejected Registrations by Source

Source	Nationwide			Focus States			Select Counties		
	2020	2022	2024	2020	2022	2024	2020	2022	2024
DMV	35.1%	50.9%	30.9%	6.6%	16.2%	3.7%	20.4%	43.3%	56.5%
Online	25.1%	15.0%	13.3%	49.1%	48.3%	34.1%	53.3%	30.4%	14.0%
Mail	15.5%	9.0%	6.2%	13.4%	5.3%	4.1%	4.3%	4.3%	14.0%
Registration Drives	6.2%	6.2%	6.7%	7.3%	3.9%	5.8%	4.2%	4.2%	9.3%
NVRA Agencies	4.7%	6.3%	7.1%	1.7%	4.5%	1.2%	7.3%	3.3%	3.9%
Other	17.2%	6.7%	6.5%	5.5%	22.6%	13.5%	6.4%	3.0%	0.1%
In-person	10.9%	6.2%	2.5%	2.0%	10.1%	2.6%	4.0%	11.1%	1.8%
Automatic	—	—	14.7%	—	—	33.5%	—	—	0.0%
Total Rejections	2.8 M	1.9 M	2.8 M	771,474	409,603	637,613	4,884	3,591	1,699

Another way to understand registration rejections is to calculate a rejection rate by source which allows us to understand which registration methods are more likely to reject registration attempts. To calculate the rejection rate by source, we divide the number of rejected registrations by the total of both accepted and rejected registration attempts by source, omitting duplicate or updated registrations. For example, if 1,000 forms are submitted from registration drives and 250 are rejected, the registration drive rejection rate would be 25%.

The table below, Rejection Registration Rates by Source, shows nationwide, Focus States, and Select Counties results. The national rejection rate was 8.8% in 2020, 8.5% in 2022, and 10.8% in 2024.⁸ The overall rejection rate was around 5%-6% in Select Counties from 2020 to 2024. NVRA agencies, non-NVRA agencies, disability agencies⁹, and armed forces offices have high rejection rates but also typically do not handle many registrations. On the other hand, registrations submitted at the DMV, in the mail, and in-person face lower rejection rates while handling large numbers of applications. It is also striking that registration drives have a rejection rate of about 24% nationwide.

The DMV rejection rate in Select Counties is a little over 5% each year which is nearly double the rejection rate in Focus States. While this rejection rate is lower than the national DMV rejection rate, which increased to 10% in 2024, Select Counties still have a high rate compared to other counties within the same states. Furthermore, the share of registrations processed by the DMV is falling nationwide and in Focus States. The combination of increasing DMV reliance and a growing DMV rejection share creates a significant concern for voter registration in Indian Country.

Registration Rejection Rate by Source

Source	Nationwide			Focus States			Select Counties		
	2020	2022	2024	2020	2022	2024	2020	2022	2024
Reg. Drives	25.8%	24.3%	23.8%	33.3%	16.1%	19.1%	6.6%	5.0%	9.0%
NVRA Agencies	23.8%	30.7%	53.5%	13.8%	30.6%	13.4%	9.7%	6.0%	5.0%
Disability Agencies	14.8%	20.4%	48.9%	9.4%	55.2%	9.9%	7.8%	5.6%	50.0%
In-person	13.2%	9.1%	5.3%	3.4%	12.5%	5.3%	2.9%	3.9%	1.2%
Online	10.0%	10.7%	8.9%	19.1%	26.8%	17.2%	9.7%	6.7%	6.3%
Non-NVRA Agencies	9.6%	18.6%	56.0%	15.4%	25.6%	17.4%	0.0%	1.3%	15.0%
Armed Forces	9.6%	13.2%	51.2%	3.0%	6.3%	2.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Mail	9.4%	7.5%	8.9%	14.4%	6.3%	5.3%	1.9%	2.1%	7.2%
DMV	8.9%	7.7%	10.0%	2.8%	2.5%	1.5%	5.1%	5.2%	5.2%
Automatic	—	—	6.4%	—	—	6.1%	—	—	0.0%
Polling Place Reg.	—	—	3.1%	—	—	1.4%	—	—	1.3%
Overall Rej. Rate	8.8%	8.5%	10.8%	8.0%	7.0%	8.1%	6.0%	5.1%	5.6%

The table below, Percent Change in Share of Registration Rejections By Source from 2020 to 2024, shows the change in share of rejections between 2020 and 2024 for major registration sources. Overall, the number of rejections declined by 1.9% nationally and 65.2% in Select Counties. While rejections from the DMV decreased as a share of rejections nationwide and in Focus States, the share of DMV rejections grew by 176.8% in Select Counties. Similarly, mail rejections made up a smaller percentage of rejections nationwide and in Focus States but grew by 224.4% in Select Counties. The share of rejections from registration drives also grew in Select Counties by 120.4% in 2024 compared to 2020, much higher than the 9.1% increase nationwide and the 19.8% decrease in Focus States. These patterns show that while DMV, mail, and registration drive rejections were gradually decreasing as the sources of registration rejections nationwide and in Focus States, Select Counties were generating a much higher number of rejections from these sources. Targeted interventions are necessary to address these trends.

Percent Change in Share of Registration Rejections By Source from 2020 to 2024

Source	Nationwide	Focus States	Select Counties
DMV	-11.8%	-44.7%	176.8%
Online	-46.9%	-30.4%	-73.8%
Mail	-59.9%	-69.2%	224.4%
Registration Drives	9.1%	-19.8%	120.4%
NVRA Agencies	52.5%	-29.3%	-47.1%
Other	-62.3%	145.0%	-99.1%
In-person	-77.1%	26.2%	-53.9%
Total Rejections	-1.9%	-17.4%	-65.2%

We also use correlations and regression models to understand the relationship between Native populations and rejected registrations to test if the percentage of Native residents impacts the percentage of registrations that are rejected. The regression model controls for college education, percent rural, income, home values, percent poverty, percent with broadband access, percent of the county that is reservation territory, percent turnout, state, and year. The dataset has nearly 1,900 observations across thirteen Focus States and three election years.

A regression model shows a positive and statistically significant relationship between Native American CVAP and registration rejection rate in the Focus States, meaning that counties with a higher percentage of citizen voting age Native American residents also have higher registration rejection rates.

The model results suggest that all else equal, a county with a 100% Native American CVAP would have a 2.8 percentage point higher registration rejection rate than a county with 0% Native American CVAP.¹⁰ Given that the average registration rejection rate is 1% in the thirteen Focus States, this is a notably large effect.

Registration is the foundation of electoral participation, and the data show that Native voters face compounding barriers at this first and most critical step. New registrations in Select Counties declined nearly 59% from 2020 to 2024, far outpacing national trends. Rejection rates at the DMV, the most common registration source in Indian Country, are roughly double those in Focus States and growing. Undeliverable mail and address infrastructure problems drive higher rejection rates from mail sources as well. Automatic voter registration, which produced substantial gains elsewhere, has reached only one of the 30 Select Counties. Regression analysis confirms what the descriptive data suggest: counties with higher Native American populations have statistically significantly higher registration rejection rates, all else equal. These are not isolated administrative problems. They are interconnected failures that compound one another and set the stage for the disparities documented throughout the rest of this report.

VOTER PURGES

In addition to rejected registration applications, voters who are already registered are periodically removed from the registration list for various reasons, also known as a voter purge. Voters might move, die, or fail to participate in multiple federal elections which can all lead to a voter being removed from the registration list. For Native American communities, voter purges can pose particular challenges due to nontraditional addresses, lower access to the internet, and a lack of road infrastructure increasing the risk of inadvertent disenfranchisement (Democrats Committee on Housing Administration, 2024; Gall, Stout, and Neswood, 2024; Native American Rights Fund, 2020).

The first step in the voter removal process typically requires election officials to send voters confirmation notices which ask voters to provide information to confirm their continuing eligibility as a voter. Failure to respond to these mailings or postcards typically begins the voter removal process. In some states voters may be placed in suspended or inactive status which typically requires the voter to provide more information when voting or results in voters being removed if they do not participate in the next few elections. The number of confirmation notices sent nationwide has increased steadily from 2020 to 2024. In Select Counties, confirmation notices went from 41,712 in 2020 to 31,284 in 2022, before jumping to 116,004 in 2024. While confirmation notices grew by about 40% between 2020 and 2024 nationwide and in Focus States, they grew by 178% in Select Counties.

Confirmation Notices Sent and Status

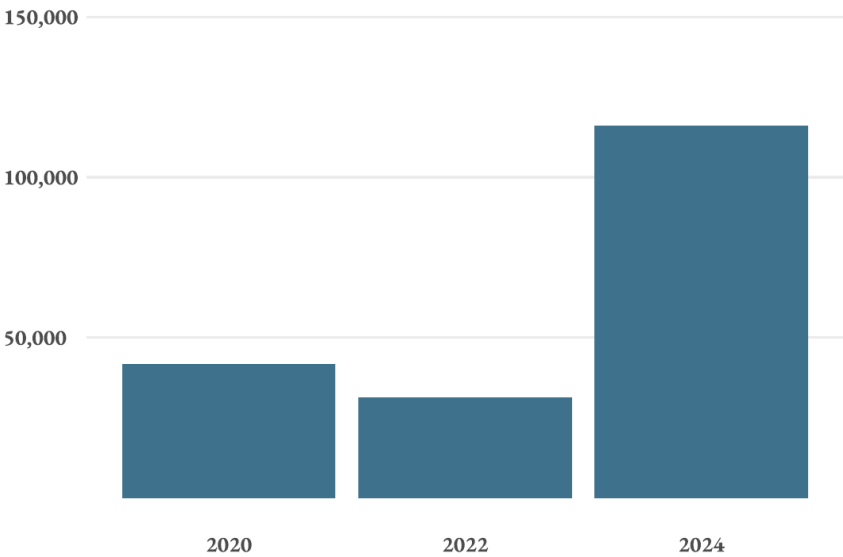
Outcome	Nationwide			Focus States			Select Counties		
	2020	2022	2024	2020	2022	2024	2020	2022	2024
Undeliverable	9.9%	11.5%	7.1%	10.4%	15.9%	6.4%	24.7%	31.5%	4.6%
Successfully Returned	10.1%	7.1%	6.1%	7.9%	7.4%	2.0%	2.6%	2.1%	3.9%
Invalidated	6.8%	4.1%	2.4%	9.2%	3.9%	1.3%	0.4%	0.5%	0.02%
Unreturned	61.4%	48.7%	59.3%	67.8%	57.7%	77.7%	72.2%	65.9%	90.2%
Confirmation Notices Sent	28.2 M	26.6 M	39.2 M	11.3 M	8.7 M	16.1 M	41,712	31,284	116,004

As the table above shows, there is a large difference in the share of undeliverable confirmation notices in Select Counties compared to Focus States and nationwide in 2020 and 2022. Nearly a quarter of confirmation notices were undeliverable in Select Counties in 2020 while 10% were undeliverable in Focus States and nationwide. In 2022, the share of undeliverable notices in Select Counties was nearly double the Focus State share and nearly three times the national share. In 2024, as the number of confirmation notices in Select Counties nearly tripled from 41,712 to 116,004, the undeliverable share fell below 5% in Select Counties which is lower than the share in Focus States and nationwide.

The majority of confirmation notices in Select Counties go unanswered by voters, increasing from 72% in 2020 to 90% in 2024. These are notices that were not returned as confirmed, invalidated, or undeliverable. In 2024 59% of confirmation notices went unanswered nationally and 77.7% in Focus States. Successfully returned confirmation notices, where the voter replies and stays registered, are typically lower in Select Counties compared to Focus States and nationwide. While nationwide successfully returned rates declined from 10.1% in 2020 to 6.1% in 2024, it was still above the 3.9% rate in Select Counties in 2024.

The percent of notices that came back as undeliverable was significantly higher in Select Counties than nationwide or in Focus States most years. *The Disconnected Democracy* report (Gall, Stout, and Neswood, 2024) shows that unequal mail service and unreliable addressing systems create major barriers for Native American voters. Statistical models controlling

Confirmation Notices in Select Counties



for income, education, poverty, and rural/urban status confirm that high Native American CVAP areas are still strongly correlated with poor mail service, showing the issue is not simply socioeconomic. Mail and address issues clearly affect voter registration, but their impact extends to voter removals as well. This is a consequence that causes significant disenfranchisement, often without the voter’s knowledge until they attempt to cast a ballot. We explore those consequences in the reasons for removal below and later in this paper.

Reasons for Confirmation Notices

In 2024, EAVS added a question about why confirmation notices were sent. The table below compares the reasons across geographies. In Select Counties, 87% of confirmation notices sent in 2024 were due to undeliverable mail while that reason only accounts for 12.1% in Focus States and 11% nationwide. This is a massive difference that is a direct implication of the mail and addressing issues we’ve explored. The comparison shows that addressing and unreliable mail service in Native American areas has an outsized impact on the voting process. Failing to respond can jeopardize a voter’s registration status and ultimately prevent them from casting a ballot if the issue goes unresolved. Often, voters are unaware of the issue until they attempt to cast a ballot, at which point they are directed to vote provisionally, as discussed below.

Nationwide, 23.5% of confirmation notices are sent because a voter moved but that is only 1.9% in Select Counties. Native Americans tend to be less transient than voters outside of those areas (Sandefur and Jeon, 1991; U.S. Census Bureau, 2024). Notably, routine notices sent to all registered voters are the top trigger nationwide, accounting for 40.8% of confirmation notices.

Reasons for Sending Confirmation Notice in 2024

Reason for Notice	Nationwide	Focus States	Select Counties
Undeliverable mail	11%	12.1%	87%
Has not voted recently	7.2%	4.1%	4.4%
Voter may have moved	23.5%	20.6%	1.9%

Reasons for Purges

Having seen the mail issues faced by Native American voters in the confirmation process, we now turn to the actual voter purges. The table below shows the reasons for removals. In all three geographies, there was an increase in purged voters from 2020 to 2024 indicating more aggressive voter roll cleaning overall, although using regression analysis we find a negative and significant relationship where the share of voters removed is lower in counties with a larger percentage of Native residents.¹¹

The reasons for purging voters, shown below, vary across geography. First, failure to respond is typically higher in Select Counties, likely for the reasons we discussed above with the undeliverable mail issues which show that even seemingly routine maintenance has an outsized impact for Native voters. As we saw above with confirmation notices, fewer voters in Select Counties face purges due to having moved. These patterns are not incidental. They reflect the intersection of inadequate rural addressing infrastructure, criminal legal system disparities, and residential stability, all of which carry distinct policy implications for how list maintenance practices are designed and applied in counties with significant Native American populations.

Reasons for Purging Voter from the Registration Rolls

Reason	Nationwide			Focus States			Select Counties		
	2020	2022	2024	2020	2022	2024	2020	2022	2024
Moved (%)	29.7%	26.6%	29.7%	27.2%	19.7%	25.8%	12.2%	11.7%	11.8%
Deceased (%)	21.6%	25.4%	20.9%	26.4%	34.5%	20.2%	32.4%	43.3%	35.4%
Failure to Respond (%)	29.7%	24.8%	32.0%	25%	29.8%	46.0%	36.2%	33.8%	44.4%
Other (%)	8.8%	12.1%	3.1%	14.5%	5.5%	3.0%	10.6%	4.1%	0.4%
Felony (%)	1.5%	1.3%	1.4%	1.5%	1.5%	0.9%	4.4%	6.3%	5.7%
Total Purged (#)	18 M	19.3 M	20.9 M	3.6 M	4.3 M	5.5 M	22,318	27,346	25,755

The voter purge data tell a clear and troubling story. Confirmation notices in Select Counties nearly tripled from 2020 to 2024, driven overwhelmingly by undeliverable mail rather than voters moving or becoming ineligible. Ninety percent of those notices went unanswered in 2024. The result is removal from the rolls, often without the voter's knowledge, surfacing only when they attempt to cast a ballot. At that point, voters face a difficult choice: cast a provisional ballot that may or may not be counted or leave without voting at all. Both outcomes represent a form of disenfranchisement rooted in an administrative process the voter never knew was happening. Compounding this, Native voters in these communities are less likely to have reliable internet access, limiting their ability to check their registration status online, receive digital notices, or correct problems before Election Day. The removal patterns for felony convictions and deceased voters add further layers of disparity rooted in systemic inequities that reach well beyond election administration. Taken together, the confirmation notice and purge data show that standard list maintenance practices, designed as neutral administrative procedures, function as a disproportionate burden on Native voters when applied in communities with inadequate mail infrastructure, limited internet access, and nontraditional addressing systems.

VOTES CAST

Understanding the number of ballots actually counted is critical to evaluating voter participation. While registration trends help show who is eligible, the measure of votes cast reflects who was able to navigate the electoral process and have their ballot counted. Disparities in turnout are already well documented. In *Turnout in Federal Elections* (Gall, Stout, and Neswood, 2024), we use a different data set to show that Native American voter turnout is consistently and significantly lower than that of non-Hispanic whites, both nationally and in states with large Native populations. Across six federal election cycles, Native turnout averaged about 37.2%, roughly 20.5 percentage points below white turnout nationally and 25.7 points lower in the 13 states with large Native American populations. The turnout gap has widened over time, increasing by about six points in presidential and midterm elections nationwide, and by even more in the focus states, where presidential election gaps grew by nearly 12 points. Native Americans also have among the lowest turnout of all racial and ethnic groups, with whites consistently exceeding overall national averages. Our analysis here allows us to explore and understand the complexities around this striking disparity.

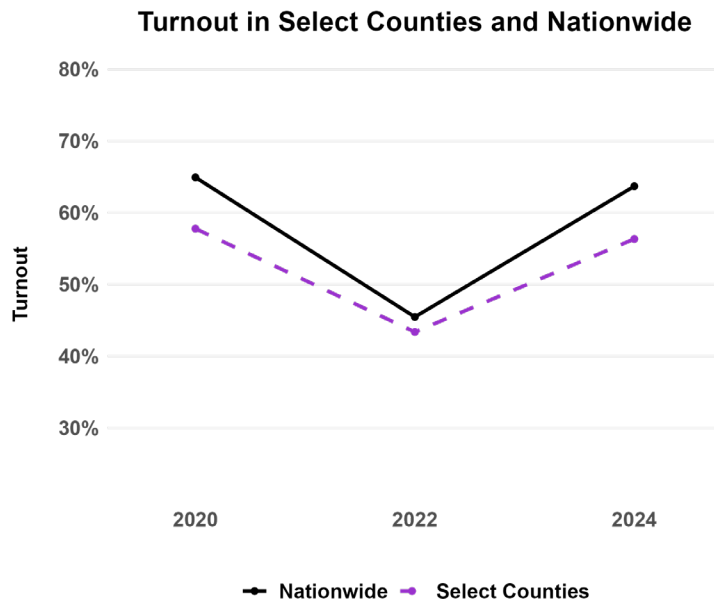
The table below shows the number of votes cast in the Select Counties. The highest number of votes were cast in 2020 at 261,241. Total votes fell to 196,087 in the 2022 midterm election before rebounding to 254,740 in 2024. Compared to the turnout in the 13 Focus States, the turnout rate was about 4 to 5 percentage points lower in Select Counties in the 2020 and 2024 presidential election years and about 1 point in the 2022 midterm election. This is a conservative estimate. While the Native population in Select Counties is at least 25%, there are still large non-Native populations. The turnout gap seen here in county-level data is smaller than turnout gaps found using survey data or exit polls that can directly distinguish between racial and ethnic groups (McDonald, n.d.)

Turnout in Select Counties

Year	Votes Cast	% Turnout	Select County vs Focus State Turnout Gap
2020	261,241	57.8	-4.9 pp
2022	196,087	43.3	-1.3 pp
2024	254,740	56.3	-4.4 pp

Total turnout typically decreases in midterm elections but the difference in turnout rates between Select Counties and counties nationwide is lower in the midterm than in presidential elections. This finding fits with other research showing that turnout on tribal land does not surge in presidential election years the way it does elsewhere (Jones and Grange, 2024). A few explanations are possible. First, Select Counties might have a core of reliable voters that turn out every two years, but a much smaller pool of occasional voters compared to Focus States overall. While presidential elections may draw more of the occasional voters statewide, there may not be as many of these occasionally interested voters in Select Counties. A second possibility is that election resources like polling places and early voting options

are more widely available and easily accessible statewide than in Select Counties. Thus, the lack of convenient voting options can hold back participation in these counties during high-turnout presidential elections. It can also be a mix between these two explanations, among other possibilities.



The turnout gap is not simply a measure of voter engagement. It reflects the compounding effect of barriers documented throughout this report, starting with registration. The decline in new registrations from 2020 to 2024 and the stagnation in votes cast are connected, and both point to structural failures that reach well beyond Election Day.

VOTING METHODS

Voters can cast their ballots through several methods. Mail voting allows voters to receive and return their ballot through the postal system or secure drop boxes, though eligibility and requirements differ. Early in-person voting enables voters to cast their ballot before Election Day at designated locations, with the length of the early voting period determined by each state or county. In-person Election Day voting remains the most common method, with voters casting ballots at local polling places on Election Day itself. Provisional voting, discussed in more detail in later sections, is designed as a safeguard, allowing individuals whose eligibility is in question to submit a ballot that is counted only after their registration or eligibility is verified. Together, these methods shape how elections are conducted and experienced across the country, and the following section explores how their use has shifted over time and across geographies.

The table below shows the voting methods across years nationwide, in Focus States, and in Select Counties, keeping in mind that state laws can significantly impact the voting options available to voters. There are a few key patterns. First, there is a notable decline in mail voting from 2020 to 2024. Nationwide, 43.3% of ballots were cast by mail in 2020 and this fell to 29.8% in 2024. The higher rate of mail voting in 2020 was presumably due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In-person early voting is more widely used in the presidential years than in the 2022 midterm while in-person Election Day voting is higher in 2022 than the presidential election years. Lastly, provisional balloting is a small percentage but does notably increase in presidential election years.

Voting Method

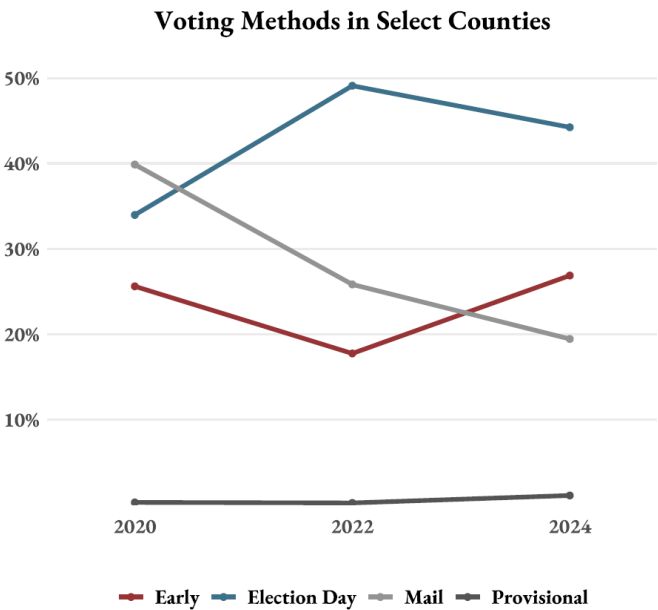
Voting Method	Nationwide			Focus States			Select Counties		
	2020	2022	2024	2020	2022	2024	2020	2022	2024
Mail	43.3%	31.5%	29.8%	67.4%	59.1%	56.9%	39.9%	25.8%	19.5%
In-person Early	25.9%	19.0%	31.1%	9.9%	6.7%	14.0%	25.6%	17.8%	26.9%
In-person Election Day	28.8%	45.4%	33.0%	19.4%	31.9%	26.2%	34.0%	49.1%	44.2%
Provisional	0.8%	0.5%	0.8%	0.8%	0.3%	0.8%	0.3%	0.3%	1.1%

Select Counties generally follow the national and Focus State patterns but have some notable differences. First, mail voting hit a high in all geographies during the pandemic and fell continuously in following years. That said, mail voting was lower across all years in Select Counties, reflecting the lack of reliable mail service in many Native communities. Conversely, in-person Election Day voting was higher in Select Counties, even during the pandemic. This is consistent with research documenting the distrust Native voters have in voting systems and the widespread belief that voting in person leaves less room for issues (Rogers, Schroedel, and Dietrich, 2023; Schroedel, Berg, Dietrich, and Rodriguez, 2020; Schroedel, Rogers, Dietrich, Johnston, and Berg, 2020). Lastly, more voters had to cast provisional ballots in Select Counties in 2024 compared to previous years and compared to voters across the country. We explore provisional ballots later in this paper.

The differences in voting methods point to specific vulnerabilities for Native voters. Because voters in Select Counties rely heavily on in-person Election Day voting, any disruption to that single pathway carries outsized consequences. Reduced polling locations, relocating polling sites, long lines, staffing shortages, or technical problems on Election Day leave these voters with fewer alternatives than voters who routinely use mail or early voting options. That lack of flexibility increases the risk of disenfranchisement and likely contributes to the higher provisional ballot rates seen in Select Counties, as voters who encounter problems at the polls have little choice but to submit a provisional ballot or leave without voting. Mail voting does not fill that gap. Unreliable mail delivery and historical distrust of government institutions make absentee voting a poor substitute for many Native voters. The result is a community that is structurally dependent on one voting method, in an environment where that method is often under-resourced and vulnerable to disruption.

Drop Boxes

The EAVS data tracked drop box returns in 2022 and 2024. Only three Select Counties reported drop box returns to EAVS including Apache and Navajo counties in Arizona, and Cibola county in New Mexico. Navajo County’s drop box share grew from 25% to 26.2% over



that period; Apache County's rose more sharply, from 8% to 19%. Together in 2022, the two counties recorded about 12,000 drop box returns out of 68,000 ballots cast; that figure rose to 19,874 in 2024. But the counties have different use patterns. For example, in Navajo County, Arizona, 25% of all ballots were submitted via drop boxes. That increased to 26.2% in 2024. But in Apache County, Arizona, only 7.6% were returned via drop box in 2022. That increased substantially to 19% in 2024. And in Cibola County, New Mexico it was a small 0.1% in 2022 and 2.2% in 2024.

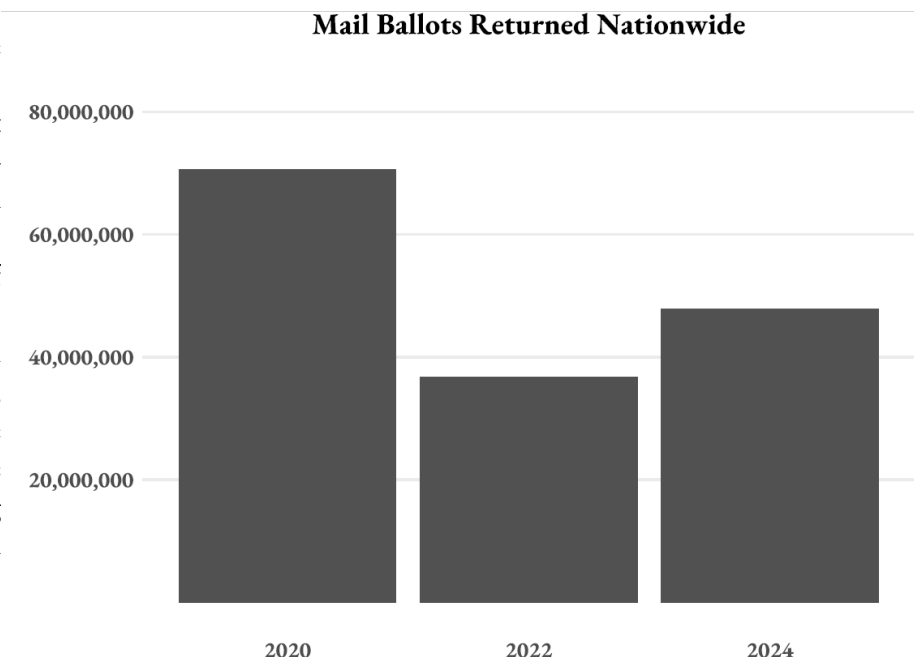
Drop box availability, at least in Apache County, followed a counterintuitive and concerning pattern: fewer drop boxes are available during presidential elections, when turnout is highest, than during midterm elections, when turnout is lower. According to the EAVS data, there were 10 drop boxes available in the 2022 midterm and that number fell to 6 in the 2024 presidential election. Yet, despite fewer options, voters used drop boxes at a much higher rate in 2024, with the share of ballots returned via drop box climbing from 7.6% to 19%. That gap between supply and demand is a problem. When drop box availability shrinks in high-turnout years, the burden falls hardest on voters who are already navigating long distances, unreliable mail service, and limited Election Day polling options.

REJECTED MAIL BALLOTS

One of the earliest opportunities for voters to officially cast a ballot is to vote by mail. EAVS data includes the number of mail ballots rejected and the reasons for rejection. A rejected mail ballot is a ballot that a voter casts by mail (sometimes called absentee or vote-by-mail) that election officials ultimately do not count toward the official results. Typically, rejection happens because the ballot fails to meet specific legal or procedural requirements like ballot arrival deadlines, a signature issue, incomplete or incorrect information, or improper witness documentation. While rejection rates are generally low nationwide, they affect tens of thousands of voters in every major election.

Voting by mail is less common in Select Counties compared to counties overall, as documented in the Voting Methods section and in the literature, and we see that here, too (Democrats Committee on Housing Administration, 2024; Jones and Grange, 2024; Native American Rights Fund, 2020). The highest number of mail ballots returned nationwide was in 2020 at nearly 70 million due to the COVID pandemic. It then decreased by almost half to 36 million in 2022 and rebounded to 47 million in 2024. Nationwide, there were between about 550,000 and 582,000 rejected mail ballots every election.

In Select Counties, 959 mail ballots were rejected in 2020, 677 in 2022, and 1,271 in 2024. The increase in mail ballot rejections is especially notable in 2024 because fewer ballots were cast by mail in that year compared to 2020 and 2022. Signature issues were a leading reason. Of all rejected mail ballots in 2020, 25.6% were due to non-matching signatures and 18.3% lacked a voter's signature. Overall, signature issues are prevalent nationwide but non-matching signatures were more of a problem in Focus States and missing signatures were more of a problem in Select Counties.



Mail Ballot Rejection Reasons

Reason	Nationwide			Focus States			Select Counties		
	2020	2022	2024	2020	2022	2024	2020	2022	2024
Non-matching signature	28.1%	23%	34%	40.8%	24.2%	41.9%	25.6%	29.7%	24%
Other	20.5%	30.2%	15.8%	16.8%	36.3%	6.8%	30.8%	4.9%	25.1%
Missed deadline	11.9%	22.9%	17.8%	11.1%	23.6%	17.4%	4.8%	28.2%	8.5%
Missing signature	11.9%	9.2%	9.2%	13.1%	6.4%	9.2%	18.3%	13%	7.1%
Already voted	8.7%	3.2%	9.4%	1.5%	3.5%	15.5%	9.2%	18%	1.2%
No witness signature	3.3%	1.6%	3%	1.9%	0.7%	0.8%	1.8%	1%	0.5%
Deceased	1.2%	0.9%	1.3%	2.3%	1.2%	2%	0.7%	0.2%	1.0%
Not eligible	—	—	2.1%	—	—	3.9%	—	—	0.1%
Total Rejections (#)	560,643	549,796	582,195	195,926	340,558	283,107	959	677	1,271
Rejection Rate	0.8%	1.5%	1.2%	0.7%	1.8%	1.2%	0.9%	1.1%	1.6%

Non-matching and missing signatures remain a persistent rejection cause across all three election cycles across all geographies. Rejections due to deadlines also spiked. In 2022, it jumped from 4.8% to 28.2% in Select Counties and from 11.1% to 23.6% in Focus States, then declined in 2024 to 8.5% and 17.4%, respectively. But the 2022 spike in deadline rejections was not isolated to Indian Country. It occurred across all geographies. This pattern coincides with a period of significant USPS network disruption. Postmaster General Louis DeJoy's consolidation of regional mail processing centers was well underway by 2022, and the USPS Office of Inspector General found that a substantial share of processing facilities reviewed were not following proper election mail procedures (USPS OIG, 2023). The result was a system that was slower and less reliable precisely when mail ballot volume was high.

This context matters for how the 2022 data are interpreted. The 2022 spike in late rejections reflects a period of documented, nationwide risks and inconsistencies in election mail handling, rather than voter behavior or local election administration. For Native voters in rural and remote communities, that breakdown hit harder. Greater distances from regional mail processing hubs, limited access to alternative ballot return options, and fewer days of buffer before deadlines all amplify the consequences of any delay in the mail system. That might help explain why the pattern was geographically concentrated in counties like Apache and Navajo. Apache County accounted for 86% of late ballot rejections in Select Counties in 2022, and Navajo County drove 58% in 2024. The decline in late ballot rejections in 2024 further supports this interpretation: as USPS stabilized its operations, late ballot rejection rates fell, though they remained elevated in Focus States.

Mail ballots can also be rejected because the voter already cast a ballot. In 2020, 9.2% of mail ballots in Select Counties were rejected for this reason. This nearly doubled to 18% in 2022 and then fell to 1.2% in 2024. In Focus States, this was a much smaller issue in 2020 and 2022, but a large issue in 2024 when 15.5% of ballots were rejected for this reason. It is possible this reflects distrust or uncertainty in the voting system. Especially in 2020 and 2022 when voters were newly adapting to a voting system more amenable to mail ballots, voters wanted to make sure their vote was counted either through the mail or in-person. In any case, it shows how confusion or distrust in election systems can lead to unnecessary extra efforts from voters.

The table below shows trends from 2020 to 2024 in mail rejections. Overall, total rejection increases were significantly higher in Focus States and Select Counties than nationwide with a gap of 40.7 percentage points and 28.7 percentage points, respectively. Rejections for missed deadlines increased 54.8% nationally, 126.1% in Focus States, and 134.8% in Select Counties which is strong evidence that the USPS network disruptions hurt Focus States and particularly Select Counties. Non-matching signatures also grew as an issue with rejections increasing nationwide, in Focus States, and Select Counties in 2024 compared to 2020. Select Counties saw fewer rejections for missing signatures,

already voting, and no witness signatures in 2024. In Focus States, rejections for already voting increased by a massive 1,373%, mostly driven by a large increase in Michigan. Apache County had a significant impact on the overall percentage of rejections. In 2024, 59% of mail ballot rejections in Select Counties were from Apache County which impacts both the overall increase in mail ballot rejections in Select Counties and the rejection reasons.

Mail Rejection Trends from 2020-2024

Rejection Reason	Nationwide	Focus States	Select Counties
Non-matching signature	25.7%	48.5%	24.5%
Other	-20.1%	-41.9%	8.1%
Missed deadline	54.8%	126.1%	134.8%
Missing signature	-19.9%	1.4%	-48.6%
Already voted	11.5%	1373.6%	-83.0%
No witness signature	-4.1%	-36.4%	-64.7%
Total Rejections	3.8%	44.5%	32.5%

The high and fluctuating rates of mail ballot rejections in Select Counties highlight significant barriers for Native American voters. Issues such as missed deadlines, missing signatures, and administrative “other” errors are amplified by poor mail service, long distances to election offices, and limited ballot drop boxes. Signature verification rules and inconsistencies in government records further increase the risk of ballot rejection. These trends underscore the need for targeted interventions such as expanded in-person voting, improved mail infrastructure, and robust ballot cure processes to ensure that Native Americans have equal and reliable access to the ballot.

The EAVS data give us a few insights into mail voting in Native American areas. First, Native American communities saw a large increase in the number of rejected mail ballots in 2024, however, regression analysis did not find a statistically significant relationship between Native populations and a higher mail ballot rejection rate. Second, signature issues in the form of non-matching signatures and missing signatures are persistently common reasons for mail ballot rejections in highly Native counties. Lastly, drop box use as reported by EAVS data is not pervasive in highly Native American counties. Only Apache and Navajo counties in Arizona reported substantial use and only about 26% of mail ballots at most were returned via drop boxes.

Cured Ballots

Ballot curing is the process available in many states for voters to fix minor mistakes to ensure that their mail ballot is counted. For example, if a voter forgot to sign the ballot, doesn’t have the required ID, or an election worker flagged the ballot for a non-matching signature, the voter has an opportunity to correct that issue with the election office. There are several ways that elections offices reach out to voters to alert them of a need to cure their ballot. Some jurisdictions mail, email the voters, and some send text messages or call. Finally, a few states, like Arizona, have online ballot tracking systems. However, these systems run the risk of disproportionately disenfranchising Native American voters because of the reliance on mail service and internet access.

EAVS began tracking ballot cures and outcomes in the 2024 data and 30 states provided data. In those states, 14% of ballots were cast by mail and about 578,000 ballots, or 1.5%, went through the curing process. Of those, 53% were successfully cured and counted and 46% were not cured.

Seven Focus States and 10 Select Counties¹² provided data on ballot curing. In the Select Counties, about 21% of ballots were returned via mail and 1.6%, or 1,082, went through the ballot curing process. Of those, 78.1% of ballots were successfully cured and 21.9% were not. Big Horn County Montana accounted for the most cured ballots with 456.

California’s curing totals are large enough to shape both the Focus State and national averages in meaningful ways. With 153,097 ballots entering the curing process and a failure rate above 55%, California accounts for a disproportionate share of the national curing volume and pulls the overall success rate down. Because California is also one of the seven Focus States reporting curing data, its numbers similarly drag down the Focus State aggregate.

Summary of Ballots Cured in 2024

	Nationwide	Focus States	Select Counties
Counties	2,022	286	10
Ballots Cured	578,327	335,493	1,082
% of Mail Ballots Cured	1.6%	1.6%	1.6%
Sucessfully Cured	309,076	190,089	845
% Successfully Cured	53.4%	56.7%	78.1%
Failed to Cure	261,288	145,079	237
% Failed to Cure	45.2%	43.2%	21.9%

Given the well-documented barriers to mail delivery, internet access, and administrative outreach in Indian Country, one would expect the curing process to break down for Native voters in Select Counties at least as often as it does elsewhere, if not more so. That it does not, at least in the counties and election cycles where data are available, is a genuinely heartening result. It suggests that when the curing process reaches Native voters, they respond. Whether that reflects targeted outreach by local election officials, the role of tribal organizations in connecting voters to the process, or some other factor is not yet clear from the data.

This finding deserves serious attention and follow-up. With this level of curing data only available for the first time in the 2024 EAVS, one election cycle is not enough to draw firm conclusions. Subsequent years will be critical for determining whether this pattern holds, whether it reflects a real structural strength in how Select Counties administer the curing process, or whether it is an artifact of the limited number of counties and ballots captured in this first round of data.

PROVISIONAL BALLOTS

Provisional ballots are typically used when election workers are unsure of a voter’s eligibility. Common triggers include the voter not appearing on the rolls, lacking required ID, or a signature mismatch flagged by election workers. If the voter can follow up with the election office to prove identity or otherwise fix the issue, the ballot gets counted. Provisional ballots, however, are a vote of last resort and run a higher risk of being rejected.

In 2020, 1.7 million provisional ballots were cast nationwide. There were nearly 702,000 in 2022 and 1.7 million in 2024. Of those, about 21% of provisional ballots were rejected in 2020 and 2022, increasing to 25% in 2024.

Summary of Provisional Ballot Use

Provisional Ballots	Nationwide			Focus States			Select Counties		
	2020	2022	2024	2020	2022	2024	2020	2022	2024
Total Provisional Ballots	1,700,643	701,688	1,713,192	395,780	120,545	441,207	2,479	1,699	5,409
% of Total Votes	1.1%	0.6%	1.1%	0.9%	0.4%	1.1%	1.0%	0.9%	2.1%
Fully/Partially Counted	1,016,331	549,752	1,268,757	319,558	98,575	343,013	848	814	3,203
Counted Rate	59.8%	78.4%	74.1%	80.7%	81.8%	77.7%	34.2%	47.9%	59.2%
Rejected	362,230	148,804	425,883	54,130	19,255	80,024	1,631	885	2,206
Rejection Rate	21.3%	21.2%	24.9%	13.7%	16%	18.1%	65.8%	52.1%	40.8%

In Select Counties, the picture looks entirely different. Provisional ballots more than doubled from 2,479 in 2020 to 5,409 in 2024, and their share of total votes cast doubled as well. The overall rejection rate fell sharply from 65.8% to 40.8%, a meaningful trend in the right direction. But a 40.8% rejection rate still means roughly 4 in 10 provisional ballots in Select Counties were not counted, much higher than the national rate of 24.9%. The counted rate tells the same story in reverse. Only 34.2% of provisional ballots in Select Counties were counted in 2020, rising to 59.2% in 2024, still well below the national rate of 74.1% and the Focus State rate of 77.7%. Progress is real, but the gap remains large.

Change in Provisional Ballot Use from 2020 to 2024

	Nationwide % Change 2020→2024	Select Counties % Change 2020→2024
Provisional Ballots Cast	0.7%	118.2%
Fully/Partially Counted	24.8%	277.7%
Rejected	17.6%	35.3%
Rejection Rate	+3.6 pts (21.3% → 24.9%)	-25 pts (65.8% → 40.8%)

Provisional ballot trends in Select Counties reflect the cumulative weight of barriers documented throughout this report. Unreliable mail service, address infrastructure gaps, and administrative hurdles push Native voters toward provisional ballots at higher rates and leave those ballots more likely to be rejected (Democrats Committee on Housing Administration, 2024; Friel and Pablo, 2022; Gall, Stout, and Neswood, 2024; Native American Voting Rights Fund, 2020). The decline in rejection rates from 2020 to 2024 is a meaningful sign that targeted improvements in ballot processing and voter education can move the needle. But progress from a very high baseline is not enough. A provisional ballot rejection rate much higher than the national average means that too many Native voters are casting ballots that do not get counted, often because of problems that began long before they walked into a polling place. Addressing those upstream failures, in registration, mail delivery, and election infrastructure, is the only way to make the provisional ballot safety net work as it was intended.

Reasons for Provisional Ballot Use

The table on the next page breaks down nationwide, for Focus States, and for Select Counties (excluding Apache County) provisional use reasons in 2024.¹³ It reveals distinct patterns in provisional ballot usage across regions. Nationwide, the largest single reason for provisional ballots was “Not registered” at 35.7%, followed by outdated registration, failure to surrender a mail ballot¹⁴, and election day registration. This suggests that procedural barriers, especially related to voter registration, drive a substantial share of provisional ballot use nationwide.

In Focus States, the share of provisional ballots for “Not registered” is even higher at 56.3%, indicating that registration gaps are an even more prominent driver in these states. Other reasons such as outdated registration (17.6%) and election day registration (6.6%) are secondary. Failure to surrender a mail ballot is negligible (1.5%).

Reasons for Provisional Ballot Use in 2024

Reason	Nationwide		Focus States		Select Counties	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Not registered	611,323	35.7%	248,383	56.3%	505	26.8%
Registration not updated	166,731	9.7%	77,469	17.6%	623	33.1%
Did not surrender mail ballot	165,396	9.7%	6,707	1.5%	0	0%
Election day registration	165,192	9.6%	28,944	6.6%	38	2.0%
Not a resident	80,376	4.7%	18,473	4.2%	250	13.3%
Other	79,891	4.7%	23,992	5.4%	394	20.9%
No ID	42,059	2.5%	10,290	2.3%	33	1.8%
Official challenge	6,131	0.03%	510	0.1%	6	0.3%

Select Counties display a different pattern. The top reason is having outdated registration, accounting for about 33% of provisional ballots. Voters not being registered was the second most common reason at 26.8%. Combined, these registration issues account for 60% of provisional ballot use. As discussed in the registration section, registration issues are disproportionately found in Select Counties. And so here we see another example of how problems with registration trickle down to problems throughout the voting process and underscore the need for reform across all aspects of election administration.

We calculate a provisional ballot use rate as the number of provisional ballots cast, including both counted and rejected, divided by total turnout. The average provisional ballot use rate is 0.48% in Focus States. In those states, there is a positive and statistically significant correlation between percent Native American voting age population and provisional ballot use rate, meaning that counties with a larger percentage of citizen voting age Native residents have a higher share of provisional ballots.¹⁵

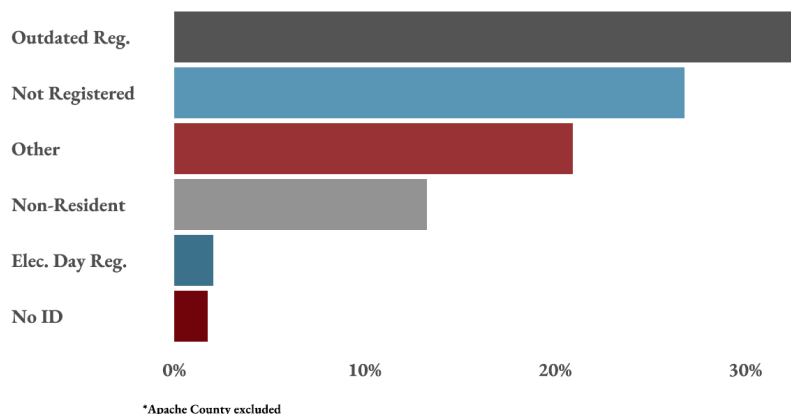
The regression model for counties in Focus States with control variables shows a small relationship between Native American CVAP and provisional ballot use.¹⁶ The regression model results show that a county with 100% Native American CVAP would have a 0.7 percentage point higher provisional ballot use rate.

Overall, the trends highlight that registration-related problems dominate provisional ballot use, but the distribution differs by geography. Select Counties show higher relative contributions from administrative or ambiguous “Other” reasons, suggesting local procedural hurdles disproportionately affect Native voters. Nationwide, failure to surrender mail ballots remains relevant, while in Focus States, registration gaps are the overwhelming factor. These patterns point to the need for region-specific interventions, including improving voter registration accuracy, early registration opportunities, and clearer administrative guidance, particularly in Native communities where procedural and administrative barriers are more pronounced.

Reasons for Provisional Ballots in Select Counties: 2024

Rejected Provisional Ballots

Provisional ballots are a critical safeguard in the electoral process, but these ballots are frequently rejected. Because of this, examining provisional ballot rejection trends provides insight into broader obstacles in the electoral system and highlights areas where reforms are necessary to ensure that all ballots are counted.



Common reasons for provisional ballot rejection include voting in the wrong precinct or jurisdiction, missing or mismatched registration information, casting multiple ballots, or failing to provide required identification. The table below shows the reasons for provisional ballot rejections.

The most common reason for rejection nationwide is failing to register. While Focus States are similar, we see voting in the wrong jurisdiction produces more rejections in those geographies. This is further emphasized in the Select Counties where voting in the wrong jurisdiction or wrong precinct accounts for over one third of rejections in 2020 and 2024 and two thirds in 2022. As established in the Obstacles at Every Turn report (NARF, 2020), several structural barriers to polling place access, including the use of arbitrary population thresholds to determine where polling places are established, can result in some communities, particularly on reservations, not having polling places at all or losing existing sites. It also documents the use of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) as a justification to deny polling places on reservation lands, a practice that can lead to polling locations being moved off reservations or never established there in the first place. Additionally, the report highlights issues related to distance, travel time, and limited office hours, which often reflect the centralization or relocation of voting sites farther away from affected communities, further limiting access to in-person voting.

Reasons for Rejected Provisional Ballots

Reason	Nationwide			Focus States			Select Counties		
	2020	2022	2024	2020	2022	2024	2020	2022	2024
Not registered	51.5%	44.2%	49.4%	40.7%	36.3%	20.4%	48%	20.5%	26%
Other	20.6%	12.2%	15.7%	19.1%	19.5%	25.2%	3.9%	4.2%	19.6%
Wrong jurisdiction	8.1%	13.2%	12.5%	15%	18.9%	26.5%	14%	32.1%	13.6%
Already voted	4.9%	4.9%	3.3%	6.3%	3.7%	5%	5.2%	2.2%	3.8%
No ID	3.4%	4.5%	5.4%	3.6%	5.2%	8.6%	0.7%	0.3%	0.5%
Wrong precinct	3.3%	5.9%	5.3%	5.7%	7.3%	2.3%	22.4%	35.4%	21.5%
Incomplete	2.9%	4.0%	4.8%	6.1%	4.4%	8.3%	2.1%	4.6%	12.6%
Total Rejections (#)	363,042	148,601	425,862	54,130	19,255	80,026	1,631	885	2,210
Rejection Rate	21.4%	21.2%	24.9%	13.7%	16.0%	18.1%	65.8%	52.1%	40.9%

The gap in provisional ballot rejections between Select Counties and counties nationwide for voting in the wrong precinct or wrong jurisdiction is extreme. In 2022, 67.5% of rejected provisional ballots in Select Counties were rejected for being cast in the wrong precinct or the wrong jurisdiction. Nationwide, only 19.1% of provisional ballots were rejected for those two reasons. This 48.4 percentage point gap shows that this is an issue especially affecting voters in highly Native areas, especially in midterm elections. The disparity is still present in presidential elections though. In 2020, those two reasons were 36.4% of all provisional rejections and in 2024, they were 35.1%. Nationally, those two categories totaled 11.4% in 2020 and 17.8% in 2024, a discrepancy of 25 percentage points in 2020 and 17.3 percentage points in 2024. The disparity is large even if we remove Apache County from the analysis. In that case, the share of rejections for voting in the wrong precinct or jurisdiction would be 30.7% in 2020, 56.2% in 2022, and 30.1% in 2024 which is still much higher than national rates.

We calculate a provisional ballot rejection rate that is the percentage of rejected provisional ballots out of the total provisional ballots submitted. A regression model using national data with over 8,000 observations shows a very strong, statistically significant positive relationship between Native CVAP and provisional ballot rejection rates. Holding all the control variables equal, a county that is 100% Native would have a 30 percentage point higher provisional ballot rejection rate than a 0% Native county.¹⁷ The effect is linear, meaning that a 50% Native county would have a 15 percentage point higher rejection rate than a 0% Native county. To put the size of these effects into

context, the average rejection rate for provisional ballots is 34% in the dataset and about half of counties have a rejection rate below 25%. The national rejection rate in 2024 was 24.9%. If the provisional rejection rate were 30%, then nearly 90,000 more provisional ballots nationwide would have been rejected in 2024.

Provisional ballots are often a “last resort” where voters have been unable to cast a regular ballot and do not have much, if any, recourse to address whatever issues have prevented them from casting a regular ballot. Voters might be able to overcome a rejected registration application if they have enough time. And voting by mail acts as a preventative tool because voters using mail ballots can cure them and avoid rejections before vote counting begins, even though address and mail delivery issues pose obstacles for Native voters (Democrats Committee on Housing Administration, 2024; Jones and Grange, 2024). But if voters show up on Election Day expecting to cast a ballot and find out that they are not registered, the rules and registration deadlines will likely prevent them from voting (unless the state allows same day registration).

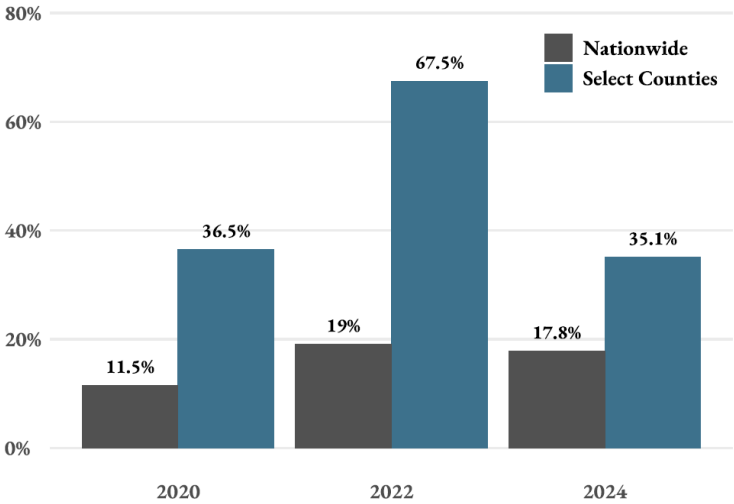
Current trends make it clear that provisional ballot use is increasing. Findings suggest that failing to register, casting ballots in the wrong precinct or jurisdiction, and incomplete provisional ballots are the most common reasons for rejecting provisional ballots in Select Counties. Efforts to ensure that voters are registered and go to the correct voting location might help to reduce rejected ballots in Native communities. Additionally, doing more thorough and effective voter outreach when polling places or precincts are moved year-to-year and lengthening the period before elections during which polling places can be moved can help with this problem. Vote centers, where voters within a county are allowed to cast ballots regardless of their precinct, can reduce strain on voters. Finally, more training for volunteer election workers can also help curtail the incomplete provisional ballots.

TOTAL REJECTIONS

At every stage of the voting process, a ballot or registration can be rejected. This section brings those stages together by calculating a combined rejection rate for each county, measured as the total number of registration rejections, mail ballot rejections, and provisional ballot rejections as a percentage of the county’s CVAP. Combining these rejection types into a single metric allows for a more complete picture of where voters are most likely to lose their participation at any point in the process.

The table below summarizes the three rejection categories, total rejections, and the rejection rate for Select Counties from 2020 to 2024. Total rejections declined from 7,474 in 2020 to 5,176 in 2024. As a percentage of the CVAP, the overall rejection rate for Select Counties also declined from 1.7% to 1.2%. While the decline in total rejections is a positive trend, the types of rejections in 2024 are more troubling. Rejected registrations have declined but mail ballot and provisional ballot rejections increased to their highest totals in 2024. Rejected ballots, mail and provisional, are 35% of the total rejections in 2020 but are 67% of total rejections in Select Counties in 2024. Rejected registrations are significant obstacles for voters because they are blocked from even the first step in the voting process, but mail ballot and provisional rejections are instances where voters specifically attempted to cast a ballot and were prevented from having their vote counted.

Provisional Ballots Rejected for Wrong Precinct or Wrong Jurisdiction



Total Rejections in Select Counties from 2020 to 2024

	2020	2022	2024
Rejected Registrations	4,884	3,591	1,699
Rejected Mail Ballots	959	677	1,271
Rejected Provisional Ballots	1,631	885	2,210
Total Rejections	7,474	5,153	5,176
Turnout	261,241	196,087	254,740
Overall Rejection Rate	1.7%	1.2%	1.2%

A regression model analyzing the combined rejection rate across all counties in the Focus States confirms what the individual section findings suggest: Native American population share has a positive and statistically significant effect on the combined rejection rate. All else equal, a county with a 100% Native American CVAP would have a combined rejection rate 1.4 percentage points higher than a county with no Native residents, after controlling for other factors. A 1.4 percentage point effect is 2.5 times larger than the average rejection rate of 0.57% in Focus State counties, emphasizing the large barriers that Native voters face.

What makes this finding particularly significant is that it captures cumulative disadvantage. A Native voter may face a rejected registration, successfully re-register, attempt to cast a mail ballot that does not arrive on time, and then submit a provisional ballot that is also rejected. Each of those rejection points is documented separately elsewhere in this report, but the combined rejection rate captures the full weight of a system that presents repeated opportunities to turn a voter away. The compounding nature of these rejections means that the overall burden on Native voters is greater than any single metric conveys, and that addressing one rejection type in isolation will not close the participation gap. The data make clear that Native voters do not face a single barrier. They face a gauntlet.



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings here support consideration of the following reforms.

Registration

1. Reform registration systems to accommodate nonstandard addresses. Registration systems that require standard residential addresses systematically exclude Native voters in communities without conventional street addressing. States should update voter registration systems to accept tribal addressing formats, P.O. boxes, and other nonstandard location descriptions, and train election officials to process them accurately.
2. Expand automatic voter registration to states serving Native communities. Automatic voter registration produced roughly 3,000 additional registrations per county in adopting states, but only one Select County sits in a state with automatic registration. Data suggest automatic voter registration may improve access. States should therefore evaluate whether automatic voter registration could reduce barriers documented here.
3. Audit and correct DMV registration rejection rates in Indian Country. The DMV is the most common registration pathway for Native voters and the source with the fastest-growing rejection share in Select Counties. States should audit DMV registration processing in counties with high Native American populations, identify rejection causes, and implement corrective procedures.
4. Add rejection reason data to the EAVS. The EAC should require jurisdictions to report why registrations are rejected. Without that information, elevated rejection rates at the DMV, by mail, and through registration drives cannot be targeted with precision. This should be a mandatory field in the 2026 EAVS.
5. Resource and improve community-based registration drives. Registration drives carry a 25% rejection rate nationally and a growing rejection share in Select Counties. Election administrators must work to reduce that rate through better training, real-time verification tools, and post-drive follow-up with voters whose registrations were rejected.
6. Invest in broadband infrastructure and digital registration access. Online registration declined as a share of new registrations in Select Counties even as it grew nationally. Federal and state broadband investments must explicitly prioritize tribal communities, and online registration platforms should be optimized for low-bandwidth environments. Online registration systems should also be built to accommodate registrations without standard residential addresses.

Voter Roll Maintenance

7. Reform confirmation notice procedures for communities with unreliable mail service. Sending mailed confirmation notices to voters in Update Leave areas and removing them for failure to respond is not a neutral procedure. States should develop alternative confirmation methods including in-person confirmation at tribal offices, phone or text outreach, and coordination with tribal governments to verify voter eligibility through existing community infrastructure.
8. Suspend removal for undeliverable mail pending alternative outreach. Voters should not be removed from the rolls solely because a mailed notice was undeliverable. Before initiating removal, election officials should be required to attempt at least one alternative form of contact. Federal guidance or legislation should establish this standard for jurisdictions with documented mail delivery disparities.
9. Exempt low-mobility populations from routine blanket confirmation notice campaigns. Because Native Americans are significantly less residentially mobile than other populations, blanket confirmation notice campaigns produce disproportionate harm in Indian Country without a corresponding benefit in identifying ineligible voters. Voter roll maintenance policies should account for residential stability patterns and modify procedures accordingly.

Voting Methods and Access

10. Protect and expand polling place access in Indian Country. States and counties should conduct tribal consultation before closing or relocating polling places serving Native communities. Staffing, equipment, and contingency planning for Election Day should reflect the reality that Native voters have fewer alternative voting options than most other voters.
11. Expand voting options on or near tribal lands. States should work directly with tribal governments to establish early and election day voting sites on tribal land, with hours and locations determined in partnership with the communities they serve.
12. Align drop box availability with turnout demand. Drop box availability should increase in presidential election years, not decrease. States and counties should establish drop box minimums for high-turnout cycles, treat presidential year availability as the floor for planning purposes, and make decisions about the number and placement of drop boxes in direct consultation with tribal governments.
13. Do not expand mail voting defaults without first addressing infrastructure gaps. Any expansion of vote-by-mail requirements or defaults should include alternative procedures for communities in Update Leave areas and other zones with documented mail service problems, developed in partnership with tribal governments.

Mail Ballot Rejections

14. Expand ballot curing outreach for signature issues through non-mail channels. Signature problems account for nearly 44% of mail ballot rejections in Select Counties. Curing notifications that depend on mail delivery will not reach the voters who need them most. States should develop supplemental curing outreach through phone, text, and partnerships with tribal governments.
15. Educate voters about mail ballot procedures and ballot status tracking. The high rate of mail ballot rejections for voters having already cast a ballot reflects a confidence gap in the voting system. Clear, accessible, culturally appropriate voter education about how mail ballots are processed, combined with ballot tracking tools that do not require broadband access, would reduce these rejections, and build trust.
16. Extend Ballot Receipt Deadlines. Late ballot rejections should not be treated as a proxy for voter behavior without accounting for systemic factors outside voter control like the USPS network disruptions around the 2022 elections. States should extend ballot receipt deadlines to a fixed number of days after Election Day, conditioned on a valid postmark. This change would have an outsized positive impact in Native communities, where distances from mail processing hubs are greatest and alternative return options are fewest.

Ballot Curing

17. Invest in non-mail curing outreach in Indian Country and track outcomes over time. The 78% curing success rate in Select Counties is encouraging but rests on one election cycle of data. Focus States should audit which curing outreach methods reach Native voters effectively and develop supplemental channels that reduce reliance on mail notification. The 2026 midterm will be the first real test of whether the 2024 pattern holds.

Provisional Ballots

18. Address registration problems upstream to reduce provisional ballot use. More than 60% of provisional ballot use in Select Counties in 2024 was driven by registration problems. These cannot be solved at the polling place. Automatic voter registration, reduced DMV rejection rates, reformed confirmation notice procedures, and improved address infrastructure are all upstream fixes that will reduce downstream provisional ballot use.

19. Prioritize voter outreach when polling places or precincts change. Rejections due to voting in the wrong precinct or jurisdiction are the defining feature of provisional ballot rejection in Select Counties. States should maximize out of precinct voting opportunities, lengthen the period before an election during which polling place changes are prohibited, require robust multilingual notification to affected voters when changes do occur, and mandate direct outreach to tribal governments when any polling place serving a Native community is moved or closed.
20. Expand same-day voter registration in states with significant Native American populations. Not being registered was the second leading cause of provisional ballot use in Select Counties. Same-day registration would allow voters who arrive at the polls unregistered or with outdated information to cast a regular ballot rather than a provisional one.
21. Invest in poll worker training on provisional ballot procedures in Indian Country. Incomplete provisional ballots are a persistent source of rejections that proper training can reduce. States and counties should ensure poll workers in precincts serving Native communities receive adequate training and should prioritize staffing these locations with trained workers.

Total Rejections

22. Treat the voting process as a system, not a set of isolated problems. Interventions at a single stage will not close the participation gap. Registration reform, mail ballot improvements, provisional ballot processing, and election infrastructure investments must be coordinated as parts of a unified strategy aimed at reducing cumulative rejection risk across the full voting process.
23. Direct federal and state resources to counties with the highest combined rejection rates. The statistically significant relationship between Native American population share and combined rejection rate means that high-burden counties are identifiable before each election. Federal and state election assistance programs should use this relationship to prioritize funding, training, and administrative support.

Data Availability and Record Building

24. Make the EAVS mandatory for all reporting jurisdictions. The Election Administration and Voting Survey is the most comprehensive source of election administration data available at the county level, yet participation is voluntary. While response rates have been high in recent cycles, voluntary participation creates structural vulnerability. Jurisdictions facing the most administrative capacity constraints, often the same ones serving the highest-need communities, are most likely to underreport or report incompletely. The gaps documented throughout this report in drop box data, ballot curing outcomes, and rejection reason data reflect that problem directly

Incomplete and inconsistent reporting also undermines the ability to track trends over time and conduct the kind of rigorous, multi-cycle research that this report represents. When jurisdictions opt out of reporting specific fields, or report inconsistently across election cycles, the resulting data gaps make it impossible to determine whether conditions are improving, worsening, or simply unmeasured. Researchers, advocates, policymakers, and election administrators all depend on complete and consistent EAVS data to identify disparities, evaluate interventions, and make the case for reform. A voluntary survey cannot reliably produce that foundation.

Congress should make EAVS participation mandatory for all jurisdictions administering federal elections, with minimum completeness standards across all survey fields. The EAC should be resourced to provide technical assistance to under-capacity jurisdictions so that the burden of compliance does not fall hardest on the places least equipped to bear it. Voluntary data collection produces voluntary accountability. For the communities documented in this report, that is not enough.

CLOSING

The data in this report tell a story that is both specific and systemic. Across three election cycles and every stage of the voting process, Native voters in Select Counties face barriers that compound one another and accumulate into a participation gap that is larger than any single metric conveys. Registration rejections feed into voter roll removals. Voter roll removals feed into provisional ballot use. Provisional ballots are rejected at roughly double the national rate. Mail ballots are less viable in communities where mail delivery is unreliable. Drop boxes are disappearing in presidential election years precisely when turnout is highest. Voting machines are scarcer in Native counties than in comparable counties elsewhere. No single one of these findings is an accident or an anomaly. Together they describe a system that presents Native voters with repeated opportunities to be turned away, at registration, at the mailbox, at the polls, and at the point where a ballot is counted or discarded.

The encouraging findings in this report deserve acknowledgment. Provisional ballot rejection rates in Select Counties fell 25 percentage points from 2020 to 2024. Ballot curing success rates exceeded the national average in the counties where data were available. These are signs that targeted improvements in election administration can make a measurable difference. They are also reminders that progress from a very high baseline is not enough, and that one or two election cycles of improvement do not erase decades of structural disadvantage.

Throughout this report, each section closes with specific, actionable policy recommendations grounded in the data. Those recommendations are not aspirational. They are practical responses to documented failures, and they address every stage of the voting process where the data show Native voters are being turned away. The path to closing the participation gap in Indian Country runs through those specifics. What makes them achievable is not their complexity but their clarity. The data show what is broken. The recommendations point directly at the fixes.

The right to vote is foundational. For Native Americans, that right has been obstructed, delayed, and denied across two centuries of American history. The Voting Rights Act created a framework for protection, but the data in this report make clear that the framework is not fully functioning for Native communities. Closing the participation gap in Indian Country is not a technical problem waiting for a technical solution. It is a question of whether American democracy is willing to extend its guarantees to all its citizens. The data say it has not yet done so. The recommendations in this report point toward what it would take to begin.

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APPENDIX A

Voting Issues in Select Counties in 2020

County	State	% Native	Reg. Voters	Votes Cast	Reg. Rejected	Voters Removed	Mail Rejected	Prov. Rejected
Apache	AZ	71	55,792	35,776	4,007	1,673	250	937
Navajo	AZ	42	81,425	52,490	573	2,856	284	224
Mahnomen	MN	34	3,028	2,324	8	227	4	
Big Horn	MT	65	7,445	4,860	1	1,191	83	0
Blaine	MT	49	4,155	3,171	0	405	18	0
Glacier	MT	63	8,310	5,779	0	978	61	58
Roosevelt	MT	57	6,020	4,084	2	716	22	0
Rosebud	MT	38	5,032	3,809	0	619	2	0
Cibola	NM	43	14,894	8,945	13	760	15	64
McKinley	NM	75	44,785	26,626	64	1,756	2	50
San Juan	NM	39	78,401	52,490	7	4,284	38	1
Benson	ND	51		1,985			2	
Mountrail	ND	28		4,181			15	
Rolette	ND	77		3,845			13	
Sioux	ND	84		1,014			0	
Adair	OK	41	11,003	7,131	131	1,425	13	81
Cherokee	OK	32	26,079	17,770	71	2,385	47	65
Bennett	SD	56	2,027	1,190	0	128	0	5
Buffalo	SD	73	1,020	560	0	45	2	0
Charles Mix	SD	27	5,832	3,739	0	512	28	2
Corson	SD	67	2,582	1,292	0	139	1	7
Dewey	SD	75	3,647	1,982	0	193	0	0
Jackson	SD	62	1,990	1,129	0	74	1	0
Lyman	SD	40	2,309	1,614	0	179	1	1
Mellette	SD	62	1,204	784	0	131	2	0
Oglala	SD							
Lakota		91	8,831	3,245	1	503	32	125
Roberts	SD	36	6,667	4,351	3	695	6	11
Todd	SD	83	5,479	2,561	2	190	0	0
Ziebach	SD	70	1,769	924	1	83	1	0
Menominee	WI	78	2,071	1,590		171	16	0

Voting Issues in Select Counties in 2022

County	State	% Native	Reg. Voters	Votes Cast	Reg. Rejected	Voters Removed	Mail Rejected	Prov. Rejected
Apache	AZ	71	56,461	27,010	2,297	3,648	359	481
Navajo	AZ	42	77,286	40,974	1,109	8,577	223	290
Mahnomen	MN	34	2,889	1,677	2	234	9	
Big Horn	MT	65	7,101	3,312	2	707	12	4
Blaine	MT	49	3,971	1,875	0	302	6	3
Glacier	MT	63	8,119	3,116	0	665	26	1
Roosevelt	MT	57	5,704	2,628	0	584	9	0
Rosebud	MT	38	4,949	2,733	0	417	1	0
Cibola	NM	43	14,993	6,892	0	688	0	1
McKinley	NM	75	45,774	19,527	5	1,767	0	3
San Juan	NM	39	78,809	40,194	6	3,106	3	0
Benson	ND	51		1,506			0	
Mountrail	ND	28		2,640			1	
Rolette	ND	77		2,788			2	
Sioux	ND	84		606			4	
Adair	OK	41	11,001	5,244	91	1,368	2	16
Cherokee	OK	32	26,744	13,579	69	3,097	11	20
Bennett	SD	56	2,057	1,035	5	94	0	6
Buffalo	SD	73	993	404	0	42	0	0
Charles Mix	SD	27	5,807	3,143	1	217	0	11
Corson	SD	67	2,543	944	0	100	0	2
Dewey	SD	75	3,573	1,595	0	221	2	1
Jackson	SD	62	1,912	934	0	35	0	0
Lyman	SD	40	2,280	1,336	0	104	2	
Mellette	SD	62	1,209	634	1	55	2	1
Oglala Lakota	SD	91	8,580	2,469	1	347	0	42
Roberts	SD	36	6,672	3,592	1	284	3	3
Todd	SD	83	5,414	1,906	1	222	0	0
Ziebach	SD	70	1,724	694	0	62	0	0
Menominee	WI	78	2,036	1,100		403	0	0

Voting Issues in Select Counties in 2024

County	State	% Native	Reg. Voters	Votes Cast	Reg. Rejected	Voters Removed	Mail Rejected	Prov. Rejected
Apache	AZ	71	57,277	32,685	462	3,513	755	1,287
Navajo	AZ	42	78,980	51,386	650	4,995	262	665
Mahnomen	MN	34	2,984	2,208	0	237	12	
Big Horn	MT	65	7,702	4,543		292	13	97
Blaine	MT	49	4,236	3,093		197	8	11
Glacier	MT	63	8,370	5,191		392	76	3
Roosevelt	MT	57	6,181	3,998		258	13	7
Rosebud	MT	38	5,139	3,753		281	7	6
Cibola	NM	43	15,731	9,017	137	657	12	2
McKinley	NM	75	48,106	25,987	40	1,974	5	4
San Juan	NM	39	80,267	53,065	251	6,550	8	1
Benson	ND	51		2,030			13	
Mountrail	ND	28		4,108			2	
Rolette	ND	77		4,121			0	
Sioux	ND	84		963			0	
Adair	OK	41	11,667	7,283	77	1,222	11	24
Cherokee	OK	32	28,909	17,902	74	2,786	44	34
Bennett	SD	56	2,024	1,094	5	96	0	6
Buffalo	SD	73	993	463	0	34	2	0
Charles Mix	SD	27	5,895	3,675	0	206	6	14
Corson	SD	67	2,547	1,162	0	165	2	5
Dewey	SD	75	3,622	1,912	0	153	2	
Jackson	SD	62	1,955	1,153	0	51	0	
Lyman	SD	40	2,301	1,461	0	66	0	5
Mellette	SD	62	1,237	740	0	57	1	
Oglala Lakota	SD	91	8,789	3,037	1	451	3	26
Roberts	SD	36	6,700	4,186	1	383	9	10
Todd	SD	83	5,301	2,143	0	393	2	0
Ziebach	SD	70	1,706	798	1	108	0	3
Menominee	WI	78	2,119	1,583		238	3	0

APPENDIX B

Regression Results Table

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>					
	Rej. Reg. Rate (1)	Purge Rate (2)	Mail Rej. Rate (3)	Prov. Use Rate (4)	Prov. Rej. Rate (5)	Total Rej. Rate (6)
% AIAN CVAP	0.028*** (0.010)	-0.033** (0.015)	0.004 (0.004)	0.007** (0.003)	0.304*** (0.084)	0.014*** (0.004)
% Rural	0.001 (0.003)	0.003 (0.004)	0.001 (0.001)	-0.001 (0.001)	-0.067*** (0.014)	-0.001 (0.001)
% Bachelor's Degree	0.010 (0.011)	0.069*** (0.018)	0.004 (0.005)	-0.002 (0.004)	-0.049 (0.059)	0.004 (0.005)
Logged Median Income	-0.835 (0.648)	-1.712* (1.031)	0.186 (0.294)	-0.717*** (0.225)	2.672 (3.310)	-0.239 (0.261)
% Poverty	-0.041* (0.023)	0.080** (0.037)	0.013 (0.011)	0.004 (0.008)	-0.173 (0.112)	-0.011 (0.009)
Logged Median Home Value	0.125 (0.339)	-0.574 (0.540)	0.147 (0.148)	0.303** (0.120)	6.885*** (1.707)	0.161 (0.131)
% Broadband Access	-0.019 (0.019)	-0.003 (0.029)	0.012 (0.008)	0.005 (0.006)	0.043 (0.081)	-0.013* (0.007)
% Reservation	-0.005* (0.003)	-0.001 (0.005)	-0.003* (0.002)	-0.001 (0.001)	0.012 (0.034)	-0.002 (0.001)
% Turnout	0.009 (0.010)	-0.028* (0.015)	-0.012*** (0.004)	-0.005 (0.003)	-0.203*** (0.045)	0.009** (0.004)
Constant	10.970 (6.906)	31.745*** (11.144)	-3.455 (3.119)	5.887** (2.444)	-49.388 (34.300)	3.123 (2.762)
Observations	1,501	1,785	1,947	1,522	8,311	1,947
R ²	0.293	0.318	0.347	0.443	0.319	0.345
Adjusted R ²	0.283	0.310	0.340	0.436	0.315	0.338

Note:

*p < 0.01 **p < 0.05 ***p < 0.001

Fixed effects for state and year omitted from results table.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Not all jurisdictions complete every question. Some of this incompleteness is due to the diversity of state voting laws. For example, a question about automatic voting registrations or ballot drop boxes does not apply to states that lack those policies. In other cases, states are unable or unwilling to provide certain data. For example, Montana reports that its new voter registration system is not equipped to report the number of duplicate registrations. New Mexico reports the total number of rejected mail ballots but does not provide a more detailed breakdown of ballot rejection reasons. North Dakota did not report the number of rejected provisional ballots for any of the years under review here. Although numbers are small, Montana reported the number of rejected registrations in 2020 and 2022 but not in 2024 while Menominee, WI did not report them at all. While the EAC purports to work with jurisdictions to obtain the highest quality data possible, the EAVS inevitably contains inconsistencies and gaps. For instance, the total number of provisional ballot rejections reported by a county may not equal the county's total for each rejection reason.
- 2 Focus States: Alaska, Arizona, California, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Washington, and Wisconsin.
- 3 Select Counties: Apache and Navajo counties in Arizona; Mahnomen County Minnesota; Big Horn, Blaine, Glacier, Roosevelt, and Rosebud counties in Montana; Cibola, McKinley, and San Juan counties in New Mexico; Benson, Mountrail, Rolette, and Sioux counties in North Dakota; Adair and Cherokee counties in Oklahoma; Bennett, Buffalo, Charles Mix, Corson, Dewey, Jackson, Lyman, Mellette, Oglala Lakota, Roberts, Todd, and Ziebach counties in South Dakota; and Menominee County in Wisconsin.
- 4 When data are missing, those counties drop out of our analyses. For example, North Dakota is not included in regression analyses of rejected provisional ballots since the provisional ballot data are not reported in EAVS.
- 5 In this report, we calculate percent reservation for each county as the land area of a county that is covered by reservation land area according to Census reservation shapefiles. When considering reservation land, we do not include off-reservation trust lands.
- 6 EAVS data is reported at the election jurisdictional level, which is the county level in most states (the District of Columbia is treated as one county). However, Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Wisconsin report at the municipal level. For Wisconsin, these municipalities are assigned to their respective counties and municipalities split between multiple counties are assigned to the county they are mostly located within. EAVS data for Alaska is reported at the state level and is treated like a county for this report. Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont are included in the portions of the report that only use EAVS data, however, are excluded from sections that incorporate census data on demographics and other socioeconomic topics. The five territories of American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands are excluded from the analysis.
- 7 These registration numbers reflect the number of new registrations since the last federal election. For instance, the 2020 EAVS numbers cover the period from right after election day in 2018 until election day in 2020.
- 8 We omit duplicate registrations, registration changes, and "other" registration type submissions.
- 9 The large increases in these categories are due to the very small number of rejections which inflate the percentage increases.

- 11 p-value is < 0.05 and the adjusted R-squared is 0.31
- 12 These included Arizona, California, Michigan, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, and Washington. The included Select Counties are Apache AZ, Navajo AZ, Big Horn MT, Blaine MT, Glacier MT, Roosevelt MT, Rosebud MT, Cibola NM, McKinley NM, and San Juan NM.
- 13 Apache County is omitted from the provisional ballot reason analysis due to data reporting issues in their responses. They reported counted provisional ballots as “other” rather than specifying the reason for requiring a provisional ballot.
- 14 If a voter shows up to vote in person but requested and did not return a mail ballot, they are asked to vote a provisional ballot. This is a safeguard against accidental double voting and voter fraud.
- 15 Some counties report higher provisional ballot use than counted votes which is an example of the internal inconsistency sometimes evident in EAVS data. They are omitted from the analysis.
- 16 p value < 0.03 and the adjusted R-squared is 0.44
- 17 $p < 0.001$ and adjusted R-squared of 0.32



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