



2023 Indigenous Futures Survey

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

April 2024

Background

Since 2020, the Indigenous Futures Survey (IFS) has represented the largest Native-led nationally representative survey designed to capture the voices, perspectives, and concerns of Native/Indigenous people living in the United States. Co-led by IllumiNative and Native Organizers Alliance (NOA), the IFS is a multi-year research project designed to illustrate the authentic lived experience of Native/Indigenous peoples, their priorities, and the systemic challenges they face. The survey development and analysis of IFS 3.0 was supported by Kauffman and Associates Inc. (KAI).

The aim of the IFS 3.0 is to understand and identify motivation and barriers for civic engagement and ways to increase power building for Indigenous Peoples. Findings from this survey will be used to help educate leaders and allies on the needs and priorities of Indigenous Peoples, and support advocacy efforts and power-building efforts including those presented in the 2024 presidential election.

2023 Survey Topics

Survey Instrument Research and Development

The 2023 IFS was developed based on previous versions of the survey, other existing validated instruments, and through close collaboration with IllumiNative and the NOA. The survey was designed to collect quantitative data through questions about experiences, thoughts and beliefs around the areas of cultural identity, civic engagement, perceived discrimination, trust in institutions, and representation.

In addition to questions on the main survey topics, the survey included items designed to collect demographic data including factors such as age, race, education, employment, income level, and place of living. To gather a more detailed understanding of where respondents were from, geographic data including state of residence and zip code were collected. Respondents were also asked questions around communication preferences, including how they learned about the survey.

The survey was created using Qualtrics online survey software and was designed to accommodate a wide range of reading levels for those whose primary language may not be English. Paper surveys were distributed during outreach events by IllumiNative and NOA team members to make sure community members without internet access were able to participate. Survey items were organized and grouped into sections according to subject.

Methods

Survey Design and Testing

Upon completion of the first draft of the survey, KAI conducted pilot testing to make sure the flow of the survey questions and response process were user-friendly and easy to understand. Feedback from the pilot testing was used to develop the final draft of the survey.

To conduct the pilot testing, KAI identified key stakeholders from IllumiNative and NOA who had an interest in the survey's results and lived or professional experience in the subject area. Stakeholders were asked to provide feedback on the electronic survey instrument only using a designated pilot testing link. Feedback was specifically elicited on the feel and flow of the survey; the length, including the number of questions and the amount of time needed to take the survey; language used, including the reading level; range and relevancy of topics.

Pilot testing was conducted as an ongoing iterative process. After each stakeholder group had been solicited for feedback, the changes were incorporated into the survey, and a second draft was submitted for approval. Once

changes were incorporated, a final draft was submitted to IllumiNative and NOA for approval. The paper survey is available for viewing in Appendix A.

Stakeholder Engagement

To leverage support for community engagement, recruitment of participants intentionally focused on stakeholders such as community partners, organizations, and networks. Online marketing via social media platforms, radio stations, and tribal websites was used to garner support for the survey. Before participating in the survey, respondents were shown information introducing them to the study, as well as where to direct questions about the study. Additionally, the survey introduction outlined its purpose and emphasized that participants' responses would help identify motivations for civic engagement, voting, and desired ways of power building for Indigenous Peoples—which may support them and or their fellow community members.

Data Collection

The survey was administered between October 11, 2023 to January 15, 2024 in both electronic and paper formats. Hosted through Qualtrics, the online survey was primarily distributed via a link provided on social media platforms by IllumiNative, NOA, and their partner organizations. The paper surveys were distributed by IllumiNative, NOA, and fellows to individuals with limited or no access to the internet, primarily elders in the community. After the paper surveys were completed, the representatives or fellows from the organizations would enter the responses into the online version of the survey and destroy the paper copy of the survey to complete the data collection process and ensure data security.

Eligibility and Consent

Adults who self-identify as Native American or Indigenous from the Americas and were at least 18 years of age were eligible to complete the survey. The term “Indigenous” was used throughout the survey to be inclusive of all Indigenous Peoples of the Americas, including but not limited to, those who identify as First Nations, Native Hawaiian, American Indian or Alaska Native. Community members were provided information about the purpose of the survey, told that their participation was completely voluntary, and that they could skip any questions they do not wish to answer. In addition, they were told that all survey data would be kept confidential, and results would be reported in a summary.

Data Analysis

Data Monitoring, Reviewing, and Cleaning

A total of 5,240 respondents completed the survey. All data was collected, entered, and stored in Qualtrics and housed on KAI's secure servers. Qualtrics is a robust, sophisticated platform that allows for the creation of customized variables. KAI used weekly quantitative progress reports generated from Qualtrics to ascertain the status of data collected. This monitoring process supported reaching sampling targets that are outlined in the sampling plan.

Ongoing data reviews were used to monitor individual and project-wide performance for the surveys. Performance issues were revealed and addressed in real-time, such as incomplete surveys or questions that were abnormally short or contained inconsistent responses. In addition, ongoing reviews were necessary to manage fraudulent responses such as bot detection and multiple submissions from a single user. Fraud detection was completed by creating and applying a specific set of filter criteria to the electronic survey responses. Data from the electronic survey in Qualtrics was downloaded and imported into Microsoft Excel.

Data Analysis

KAI conducted a data analysis using Qualtrics and R statistical program. Counts, percentages, and descriptive statistics were calculated, and the total number of responses and missing responses were also reviewed and analyzed for each indicator. The Key Findings section describes the results of the analysis. All responses are reported in aggregate.

Key Findings

The following key findings provide an overview of the demographics of survey respondents, civic engagement topics, trust in institutions, and perception of Native/Indigenous visibility.

Survey Population – Demographics

Age

The largest age group was those 65 years and older, while the smallest age group was those 18-24 years old.

- 65 years and older – 20.3%
- 55–64 years old – 18.4%
- 45–54 years old – 16.7%
- 35–44 years old – 18.1%
- 25–34 years old – 16.2%
- 18–24 years old – 10.2%

Region

There was limited representation from Hawaii, DC, or territories.

- Midwest – 21.7%
- Northwest – 12.2%
- Pacific – 11.4%
- Western – 10.5%
- Southern Plains – 9.8%
- Southeast – 9.5%
- Northeast – 7.7%
- Southwest – 6.3%
- Great Plains – 4.7%
- Rocky Mountain – 3.0%
- Alaska – 2.3%
- HI, DC, Territories – 0.8%

Gender

Most participants were female, but there was representation across all gender identities.

- Cisgender Female – 64.9%
- Cisgender Male – 25.6%
- Two Spirit – 5.0%
- Nonbinary – 2.2%
- Another Gender – 1.4%
- Trans Female – 0.5%
- Trans Male – 0.5%

Location

Most respondents lived in urban or suburban areas.

- Large city – 37.2%
- Small city or town – 26.3%
- Own tribe's reservation – 15.9%
- Rural area – 9.9%
- Bordertown near reservation – 5.9%
- Another tribe's reservation – 3.3%
- A different location – 1.6%

Education

Most participants had completed a bachelor's degree or graduate degree.

- Graduate degree – 22.3%
- Bachelor's degree – 21.4%
- Associates degree – 11.2%
- Technical degree – 3.5%
- Some college – 25.7%
- High school/GED – 12.1%
- Less than high school – 3.8%

Political Beliefs

Most participants identified as liberal or extremely liberal.

- Extremely liberal – 18.2%
- Liberal – 29.8%
- Moderate – 19.3%
- Conservative – 7.2%
- Extremely conservative – 1.5%
- Don't know – 8.3%
- None of these apply – 1.57%

Priority Issues in 2024

Participants ranked environmental protection and climate change, advancing tribal sovereignty/self-determination, and the economy and cost of living as the top three issues that would influence how they vote in 2024. Results were consistent across age, gender, region, location, education, and political beliefs with some exceptions. 18–24-year-olds ranked reproductive health, including abortion access over the economy. Two spirit,

nonbinary, and trans individuals consistently ranked addressing violence against women, children, and LGBTQ2S+ individuals as their highest priority issue. In the Southwest, healthcare access was a higher priority issue than the economy, while in Alaska, addressing mental health and substance use was a higher priority. Similarly, the Pacific, Northeast, and HI/DC/Territories ranked reproductive health over the economy. Conservative and extremely conservative participants ranked mental health over the environment as a priority, while liberal and extremely liberal participants chose reproductive health as a priority over the economy. The lowest priority issues across all categories were reforming the criminal justice system and immigration control.

Plans to Vote in 2024

Between 80–85% of participants indicated they planned to vote in the next local, state, or federal election. For all elections, except tribal elections, voting increased with age. For tribal elections, the percentage of those planning to vote varied only slightly by age. For state and federal elections, the percentage of those planning to vote increased between 18–24-year-olds and 35–44-year-olds, then dropped slightly among 45–54-year-olds, before increasing again for all age groups. Those who lived in the Rocky Mountain region or Alaska were consistently the most likely to vote in any of the next elections. Examining voting plans by political beliefs—those who did not know how they identified politically or felt that none of the listed categories applied to themselves—were consistently the least likely to plan to vote in their next local, state, or federal elections.

Barriers to Voting

Mentioned by 12% of participants, “another barrier” was the third most common barrier answer to the prompt asking what barriers participants had experienced when voting. Overall, participants provided examples specific to tribal elections, lack of information about voting, and barriers to voter registration. For tribal elections, participants commonly reported they did not meet specific tribal requirements, such as living on reservations, or were not aware of tribal elections. For elections in general, there was an overall lack of awareness around when and where elections were held, and what the voting requirements were, such as a photo ID. Finally, participants reported experiencing many barriers just registering to vote, including disenfranchisement of their rights due to past criminal convictions, or strict state laws regarding address and residency requirements that prevented them from registering.

Trust in Institutions

Overall, participants reported high levels of distrust in the press/media and law enforcement (>60%) and even higher levels of distrust in ICE and the border patrol (>75%). By age, 18–24-year-olds were the least likely to trust the press/media, law enforcement, or ICE/border patrol. For locations, distrust in the press/media was concentrated in rural areas, while distrust in law enforcement or ICE/border patrol was concentrated in urban areas. Participants reported the highest levels of trust for community-based organizations such as nonprofits (>75%) and colleges or universities (>60%). By age, more 25–34-year-olds than any other age group reported being somewhat or very confident in community-based organizations, while more of those 65+ years and older reported being somewhat or very confident in colleges and universities.

Visibility and Representation

Just under two-thirds (66%) of participants agreed or strongly agreed that the average American citizen thinks that there are hardly any Native American or Indigenous people left. Those who identified as extremely liberal were more likely to strongly agree or agree with this statement (83%) than any other group. Similarly, those who had completed a graduate degree were more likely to agree with this statement than any other group (82%).

Almost 90% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the average American citizen does not understand the experiences of Native/Indigenous people. Those participants living in a rural area or a border town near a reservation were the most likely to agree or strongly agree with this statement (93%).

Still, over 67% of participants also agreed or strongly agreed that Native/Indigenous people were becoming more visible in mainstream society. Interestingly, those who identified as extremely conservative were the least likely to strongly agree or agree with this statement (54%), while those who identified as extremely liberal were the most likely to agree or strongly agree (74%).

Recommendations

Priority Issues in 2024

- Target environmental protection and climate change, advancing tribal sovereignty/self-determination, and the economy and cost of living as the top three issues to get out the vote in 2024.
- Tailor results by age, gender, region, and political beliefs, ensuring that priority issues for those who differed from above are reflected.

Plans to Vote in 2024

- Develop and circulate toolkits that help voters make a plan to vote. Include information on why voting is important, how to find information on where and when their elections are taking place, how to check voter registration, and how to register to vote.
- Raise awareness of the importance of having a voting plan in place prior to election day.
- Perform outreach to individuals who may feel disenfranchised or disconnected from political parties, affiliations, or beliefs, as they are least likely to vote in upcoming elections.

Barriers to Voting

- Along with the voting plan, make sure there are support efforts in place to help people get to the polls on election day. Offer transportation services or Uber gift cards to help overcome transportation barriers.

Trust in Institutions

- Leverage high levels of trust as an established community-based organization to target individuals, particularly those in the 25–34-year-old age group.
- Leverage high levels of trust in colleges and universities by partnering with tribal colleges/universities (TCUs) to hold get out the vote events and raise awareness.

Visibility and Representation

- Build visibility of Native Americans and provide accurate Native/Indigenous representation in the media through developing culturally appropriate voting materials.
- Advocate for the inclusion of Native/Indigenous people in election/voting polls as its own group and not as an “other” race category.