

What's Happening With Mail Ballots?

A plain-language guide for Native voters | NCPI Resource Hub · Native Vote 2026 · September 2026

What changed

- **A presidential executive order** issued in March 2026 directs federal agencies to restrict voting by mail. It would have the Postal Service check every person receiving a mail ballot against a federal citizenship list and withhold ballots from anyone not on it.
- **In August, the Supreme Court** allowed parts of the order to move forward while lawsuits continue, and the Postal Service issued a new ballot mail rule with added verification and address requirements. Courts are still deciding what applies in November, and the rules may change again.

What it means in Indian Country

- **The rules fit our communities worst.** Many homes on Tribal lands have nontraditional addresses or use P.O. boxes, and the new requirements were written without Tribal consultation or any assessment of their impact on Native voters.
- **List-matching misses Native voters.** Tribal IDs often lack the birthplace and citizenship details federal databases look for, so eligible Native voters are more likely to be wrongly flagged.
- **The barriers were already growing.** NARF's new report, *Obstacles Persist: According to the Data*, found mail ballot rejections for missed deadlines rose 134% in counties where Native Peoples are over a quarter of the population, against 55% nationally, and voter registration rejections rose about 200% in those counties even as they fell nationwide.

What can be done (c3-safe)

- **Voter-facing:** Verify registration and mailing address now, request ballots early, save 1-866-OUR-VOTE, and use in-person options where they exist. Confusion is the near-term harm; accurate information is the counter.
- **Administrative:** Tribal Nations and partners can formally demand the Tribal consultation and impact assessment USPS skipped, and document every delivery failure this fall (that record feeds the litigation and any future NAVRA push).
- **Legal:** the challenges are active, with a preliminary injunction currently barring USPS from enforcing the envelope and portal registration provisions. NARF and NCAI are the coordination points; partners can feed affidavits and on-the-ground evidence. [SCOTUSblog](#)
- **Field:** county-level relationships for on-reservation ballot pickup and drop-off, and rides programs where mail becomes unreliable.

What has not changed

- **Your right to vote.** No court decision has taken that away.
- **States still run elections, and some protections held.** In June 2026, the Supreme Court upheld state laws that count ballots postmarked by Election Day even when they arrive after it.

Five things to do now

1. **Check your registration** and make sure the address on file matches where you actually get mail, including a P.O. box.
2. **Request your mail ballot early**, as soon as your state allows.
3. **Return it early**, by mail or at an official drop-off location, so no deadline change can catch you.
4. **Know your in-person options** as a backup, and help relatives who need a ride.
5. **Get help fast if something goes wrong:** call the free, nonpartisan Election Protection hotline at 1-866-OUR-VOTE (1-866-687-8683).

Where to learn more

Your Tribal or state election office · [nativevote.org](#) · [narf.org](#) · For the full data on Native voting barriers, see *Obstacles Persist: According to the Data* on the NCPI Resource Hub: [nativecivicpower.org/resource/obstacles-persist-according-to-the-data](#)

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