

What will I do to improve participation in this year's elections?

When I decided to go back to school and finish my degree, I initially wanted to pursue a degree in business management. I took an American Indian Studies course as an elective, after which I decided to change my degree to American Indian Studies. I began learning about the history of our people and some of the heartbreaking disparities our previous generations faced. One of which was voting suffrage and the fight that Native Americans had to endure to gain the right to vote. Despite Native Americans being the original inhabitants of this land, we were and still are discriminated against when it comes to voting.

In 1924, President Coolidge signed the Indian Citizenship Act which granted citizenship to Native Americans. However Native Americans in the state of Arizona would have to wait until July 1948 to become registered voters. This was the direct result of the actions and advocacy of Frank Harrison and Harry Austin who challenged the Arizona Supreme court and the 1928 ruling of *Porter v. Hall*.

Learning the history of our people is important, learning how and why we face certain disparities is key in understanding why voting is so important to our people. Our population is largely funded and affected by the government. That is why it is so important to not only vote but to recognize that our voice as Indigenous people is strong. Representation matters and I believe that instilling parts of our Indigenous history in voter education can ignite a spark in voters.

In December of 2022 I began working as a Voter Education Organizer with Voices of Indigenous Voters, a voter education initiative of Morning Star Leaders. Through our

nonpartisan voter education workshops, we work to educate Indigenous youth in Arizona on the importance of state, local and federal elections, where to register to vote, the history of Native American voting rights as well as creative ways to be civically engaged in their communities. This work has taught me the importance of civic engagement and holding our elected officials accountable whether it is federal, state, or tribal issues. I take every opportunity to talk to my friends and family about voting and will continue to do so whether it is tribal, primary, general, or midterm election year.

What will I do to encourage my community's participation in this year's elections?

It has since been seventy-four years since tribal members in Arizona have had the opportunity to exercise their civic duty. And we as Native Americans are still facing voting disparities in our communities. There are many obstacles' voters can face in present day elections such as:

- Lack of post offices and postal services in rural tribal communities
- Lack of residential addresses
- Lack of proper voter ID requirements. (Tribal ID cards and/or certificate of Indian blood is a federal document and can be used as a use of identification to vote)
- Language barriers at the polls and on voting materials

The registration process and voting itself can be overwhelming but voter education can help individuals learn and understand their rights and the platforms that best suit their needs as a voter. By having these conversations, we can discuss openly the issues that

affect our communities most and begin working together to eliminate some of these barriers.

Being an advocate for your community does not mean you need to run for an elected office or help with campaigns. I plan to remind my family and friends to not only register to vote but to check on their voter registration and explore other opportunities to make their voices heard. There are many ways we can encourage our communities to be civically engaged such as register for Request to Speak (RTS) at the state capital, become a deputy registrar for your county or sign up to volunteer at a voting precinct.

Voting is a privilege, a privilege that our ancestors were not afforded. And to see Native American elected leaders in public office such as: Deb Haaland, Sharice Davids, Jasmine Blackwater-Nygren and Gabriella Cazares-Kelly is an amazing sight to see. Our very presence is a testament to the resiliency of our people, our voices deserve to be heard.

Register to vote.