

NATIVE AMERICAN VOTING RIGHTS ACT

POSITION STATEMENT

The 21 Member Tribes of the Inter Tribal Association of Arizona support legislation to ensure the protection of voting rights for American Indians and Alaska Natives.

KEY POINTS

ITAA supports amendments to the Voting Rights Act that protect American Indian voters and permit the U.S. Attorney General to enforce the statute including:

- ★ **Improving access** to voter registration, polling locations, and drop boxes on tribal lands.
- ★ Requiring acceptance of tribal identification and **outlawing prohibition of tribal IDs**.
- ★ Establishing state-level **Native American Voting Rights Task Forces** to address unique voting issues in Indian Country.



BACKGROUND

While the Indian Citizen Act of 1924 granted American Indians United States citizenship, the right to vote was not protected until amendments to the Voting Rights Act were passed in 1970. Currently, legislators in Arizona are reviewing bills that harm tribal sovereignty and increase barriers for American Indian voters, such as stringent voter ID requirements that contradict eligible tribal IDs; limitations on polling locations that can reduce voter access on tribal lands; and attempts to violate voter privacy by publically publishing personal information. NAVRA would protect American Indian voters from damaging voter suppression bills introduced in Arizona and across the United States.

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- Support amendments to the Voting Rights Act that protect American Indian voters and permit the U.S. Attorney General to enforce the statute including:
 - Establishing state-level Native American Voting Rights Task Forces to address unique voting issues in Indian Country.
 - Improving access to voter registration, polling locations, and drop boxes on tribal lands.
 - Requiring acceptance of tribal identification and outlawing prohibition of tribal IDs.

Background

In 2017 and 2018, the Native American Voting Rights Coalition (NAVRC) held nine (9) hearings across the country testifying on the voting barriers experienced by American Indians throughout the United States. In 2020, the Native American Rights Fund (NARF) released a detailed report documenting the systematic and cultural challenges expressed during the hearings. In August of 2021, Representative Sharice Davids (D-KS-3) sponsored the Frank Harrison, Elizabeth Peratrovich, and Miguel Trujillo Native American Voting Rights Act (NAVRA), in the 117th Congress. The bill was referred to the Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Civil Liberties. In conjunction with NAVRA, Representative Terri Sewell (D-AL-7) introduced H.R.4, the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act, which included language to protect American Indian's right to vote. The latter of the bills passed the House, while the former remained in Committee. Neither bill was enacted into law.

While the Indian Citizen Act of 1924 granted American Indians United States citizenship, the right to vote was not protected until amendments to the Voting Rights Act were passed in 1970. Even after voting rights were secured, states continue to create challenges that negatively affect voter participation in tribal communities. For American Indian voters, participation in the political process is impacted by isolating conditions such as language barriers, limited access to polling locations, inconsistencies between state run voter registration services, and lack of state and county voter outreach on tribal lands. Without protections in place, new voting laws and practices will continue to be adopted. In Arizona, the state legislature is reviewing bills that harm tribal sovereignty and increase barriers for American Indian voters, such as stringent voter ID requirements that contradict eligible tribal IDs; limitations on Early Voting and Election Day polling locations that can reduce voter access on tribal lands; and attempts to violate voter privacy by publically publishing personal information. NAVRA would protect American Indian voters from these damaging voter suppression bills introduced in Arizona and across the United States. The Inter Tribal Association of Arizona strongly urges Congress to uphold its trust responsibility by enacting voting rights legislation to protect the constitutional right of American Indians to vote with the enactment of NAVRA.