What factors contribute to the voter turnout of Native Americans living on federally designated Native American Reservations?

Abstract

The lack of research on Native American voter turnout further perpetuates critical issues, including lower levels of education, high poverty levels, and the deficiency of social welfare programs. This research examines causes for Native American voter turnout for those living on reservations by using data from four states, Arizona, Michigan, Oregon, and South Dakota. The data for this project was accumulated using various state or municipal resources for the 2014 and 2016 general elections. I hypothesize that the leading indicators for voter turnout are the high poverty rates and high unemployment rates among Native Americans living on reservations. The findings of this research support that the variables that work best as predictors of voter turnout are the presence of gaming operations, median household income, and educational attainment. The findings also focus on the institutional barriers to obtaining the data that make this research possible and impactful, and suggests improvements for future research.

Introduction

- Research regarding Native American voter turnout is difficult due to lack of data resources and previous research.
- As potential explanatory factors, this research focuses on variables such as education, poverty, age, voter registration, median household income and the presence of gaming operations from four states: Arizona, Michigan, Oregon, South Dakota.
- Voter participation data is collected using voter statistics from each tribal reservation's respective county, as well as tribal data from the 2016 Arizona Election Report.
- Arizona, Michigan, Oregon, and South Dakota vary in population size, economic status, and geography. This variation allows pinpointing of similarities or differences from state to state and how these variables interact.
- This research is important in helping to pinpoint the factors that influence voter turnout. The Native American population is important to America's culture and history and is often overlooked, neglected, and manipulated.

Methodology

Figure 1: Results showed that reported voter turnout for Native Americans falls significantly lower than overall county turnout.

- Results show high school graduation rate, median household income, and presence of one or more casinos are the best indicators for predicting voter turnout rates among American Indians.
- The results from the Arizona tribal level data compared to the results from the county data also show that better, more reliable data are key to understanding the predictors of turnout, but also that the data collected through this research’s county-based method did not produce results that were that different from the tribal results.
- In addition, the results of this research supports that greater economic opportunities for Native Americans corresponds to higher voter turnout. The results of this project shows the significant need for further research on the topic of Native American voter turnout and political participation in general.