



ILLUMINATIVE

NATIVE POWER & VISIBILITY IN A CHANGING AMERICA



ILLUMINATIVE'S LOVE LETTER TO INDIAN COUNTRY

Research has always been fundamental to how IllumiNative built power and shifted narratives. For too long, research about Native peoples was conducted without us, producing findings that erased Indigenous voices and histories and reinforced ineffective solutions.

Credit: Evan Benally Atwood (Diné)

After seven years, IllumiNative will sunset at the end of 2025. In our closing moments as an organization, we conducted our final research to gather critical insights into the priorities of Native peoples today and the perceptions non-Native people have about us, our cultures, our stories, and more. This research is our final love letter to Indian Country. We hope it can be a guide for our partners, community leaders and allies as you continue the work to advance self-determination, justice, and equity for Native peoples.

This booklet contains a summary of the high-level research findings. Full findings, a podcast, and more will be available at illuminate.org in December 2025.



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Cover photo credits:

Top left: Cara Romero (Chemehuevi), Top right: Kali Spitzer (Kaska Dena from Daylu/Jewish from Transylvania, Romania), Middle left: Tailyr Irvine (Salish and Kootenai), Middle right: Josué Rivas (Mexica/Otomi), Bottom middle: Karalyn Radford (Oglala Lakota), Bottom Left: Evan Benally Atwood (Diné)

RESEARCH SUMMARY: THE PRIORITIES OF NATIVE PEOPLES



Lake Research Partners (LRP), a national public opinion and political strategy research firm, partnered with IllumiNative to conduct national focus groups and the Indigenous Futures Survey as a continuation of the 2023 Native Visibility Power Project. LRP conducted 8 focus groups among **Native registered voters** from May 28 - June 16, 2025 as outlined in the table below.

Location	Composition
Tahlequah, OK	Cherokee Tribal residents in Oklahoma
Virtual	Older Native men over 40
Virtual	Young Native men under 40
Virtual	Young Native women under 40
Denver, CO	Urban Native residents in Denver, CO
Virtual	Older Native women over 40
Seattle, WA	Urban Native residents in Seattle, WA
Gallup, NM	Navajo Tribal residents in Arizona and New Mexico

LRP also designed and administered a mixed-mode Indigenous Futures Survey from August 7-24, 2025, using professional telephone interviewers, text-to-online (a portion of the sample received a text to their cell phone with a link to complete the survey online), and an online panel. The survey reached 1,000 Native American/American Indian, Native Hawaiian, and Alaska Native voters nationwide. An online-only version of the same survey was fielded August 11-26, 2025, and reached 1,728 Native voters from a unique link circulated by IllumiNative.

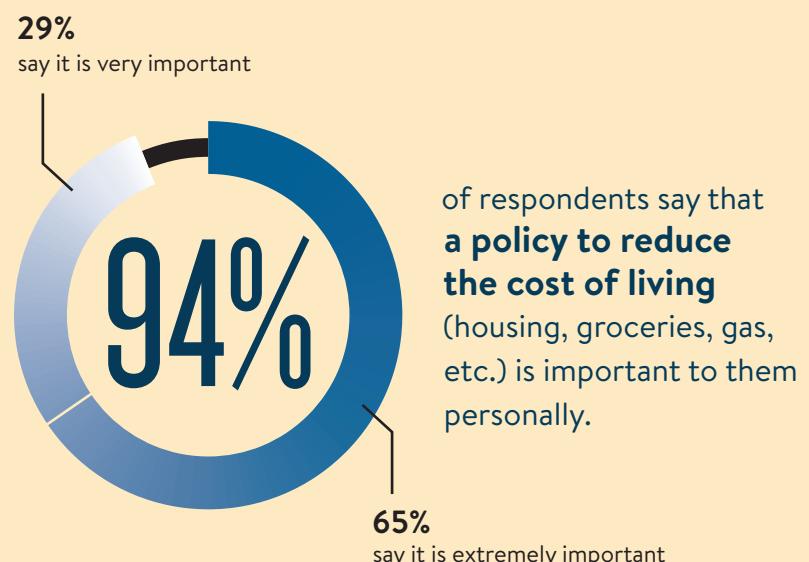
Results may not add to 100% due to rounding or multiple answers.

THE RISING COST OF LIVING IS A TOP CONCERN

Research by LRP

Native communities are being hit hard economically—54% of respondents say their family is doing just fair or poor financially—and have growing concerns over the affordability of necessities, such as food, utilities, and housing.

The economic concern most identified by respondents is the **rising costs of basics like food and utilities**.



Of the issues respondents want elected officials to address, **2 of the 3 top issues focus on affordability**



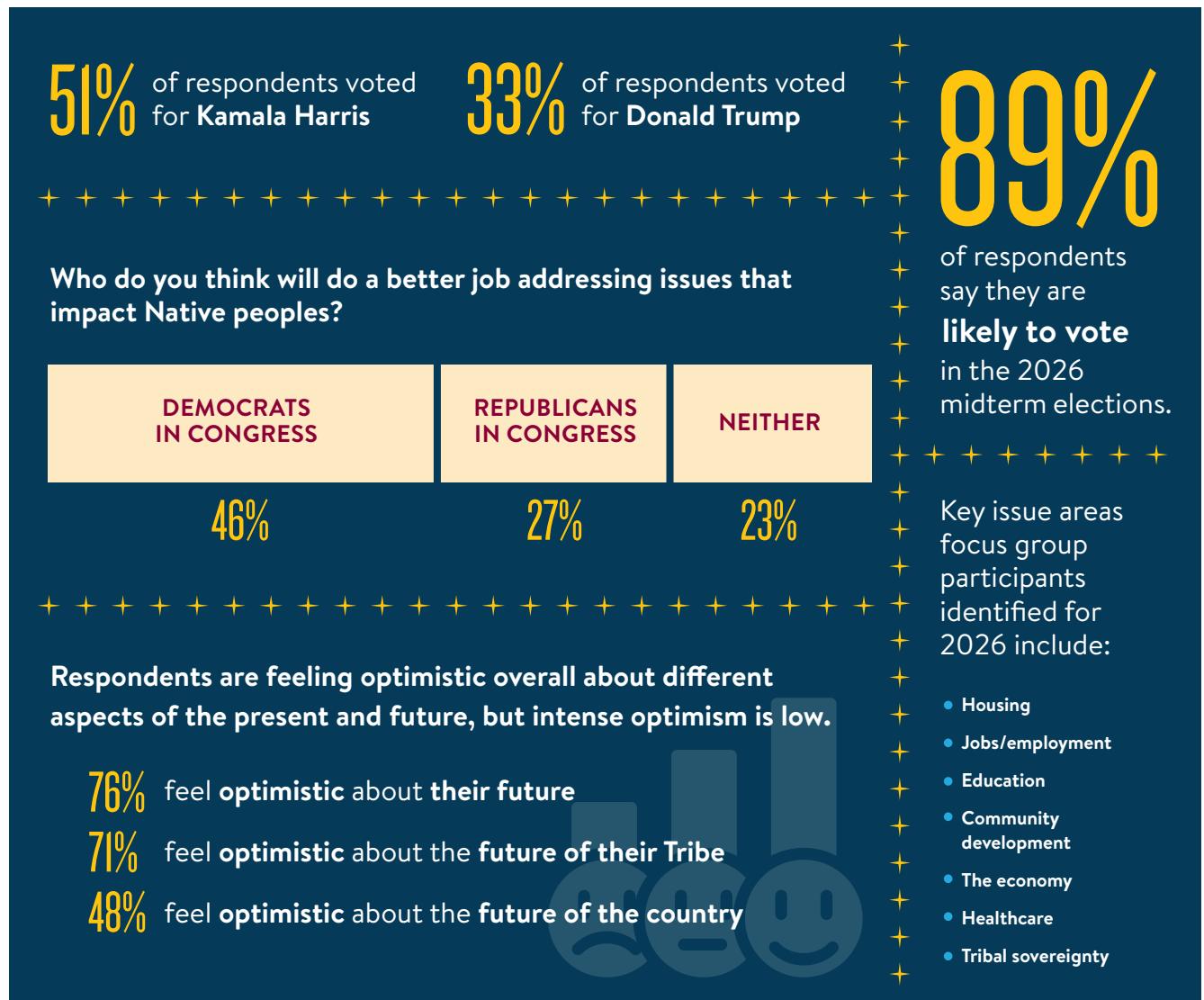
“ Barely making it, trying to stay above water. Not trying to get behind on bills. But it’s pretty hard ‘cause everything’s going up, gas prices are going up. Not a lot of jobs here and there.

— Navajo Tribal resident

PESSIMISM IN POLITICS AND A CAUTIOUS VIEW OF THE FUTURE

Research by LRP

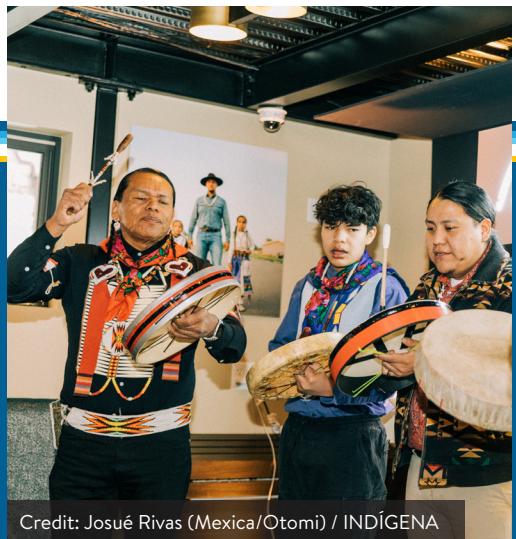
Understanding the voting patterns of past elections, as well as voters' plans for future elections, provides insight into the diverse positions and priorities of Native voters. Respondents conveyed a general lack of confidence in either political party to address the issues impacting Native peoples—with focus group participants describing Republicans as “greedy” and “racist” and Democrats as “weak” and a “trainwreck.” While three-quarters of respondents generally feel optimistic about their personal futures, less than half felt optimistic about the future of the country as a whole.



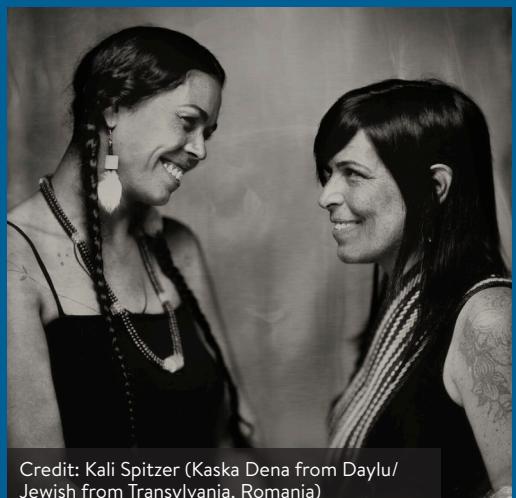
CONNECTION & ISOLATION: THE OVERLAP OF IDENTITY AND BELONGING

Research by LRP

Respondents shared feelings of both connection to and isolation from their Native families, communities, Tribes, and nations. A notable portion of respondents say they feel both connected and isolated at the same time.



Credit: Josué Rivas (Mexica/Otomi) / INDÍGENA



Credit: Kali Spitzer (Kaska Dena from Daylu/ Jewish from Transylvania, Romania)

86% of respondents indicate **feeling either somewhat or very connected** to their community, Tribe, or nation.



46% of respondents have **felt somewhat or strongly isolated** from their community, Tribe, or nation.



39% of respondents indicate that they **feel connected** to their community, but have also felt isolated.



Those who are more likely to feel **connected but isolated** are:



Women who are 40+ years of age



Those who live in an urban area

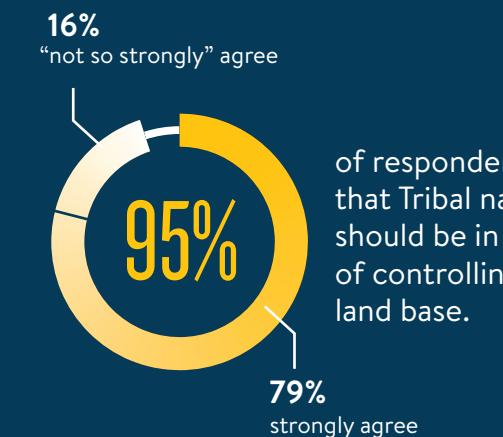


Those who live in the South or West regions of the US

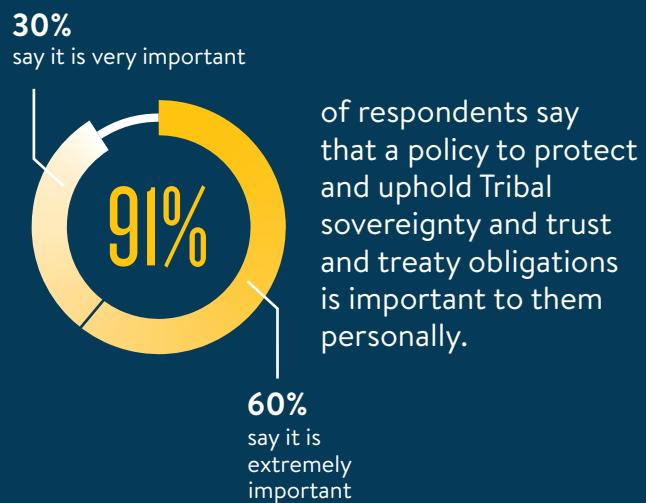
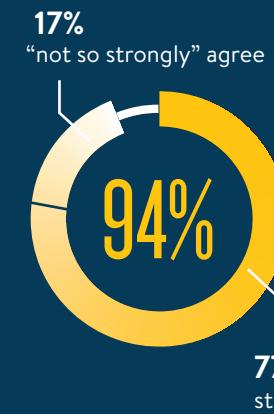
PRESERVING NATIVE CULTURE AND TRADITIONS IS A PRIORITY

Research by LRP

Preserving Native cultures and traditions is a clear priority for Native people, with the vast majority—more than 9 in 10—agreeing with statements in support of cultural preservation, self-determination, and tribal sovereignty.



62% believe it is extremely important

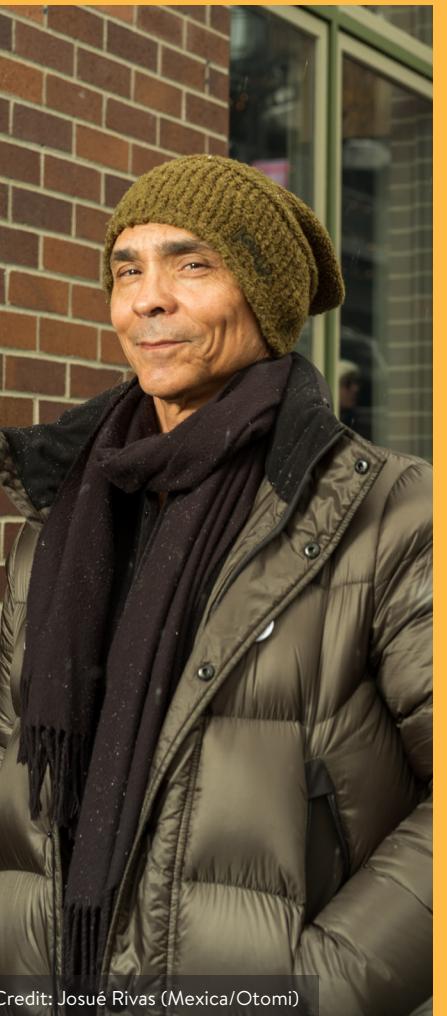


“ Deep inside we shouldn’t have to feel like, ‘Oh let me represent America more or let me represent Cherokee more.’ ”

— Cherokee Tribal resident

“ I think that we need to restore our cultures; we need to make that a focus. ”

— Native woman over 40

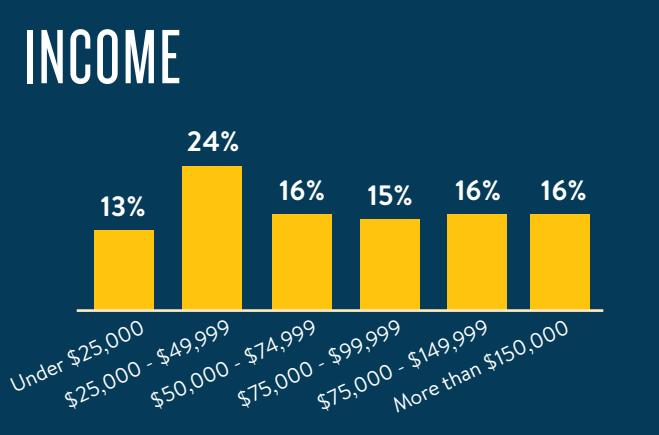
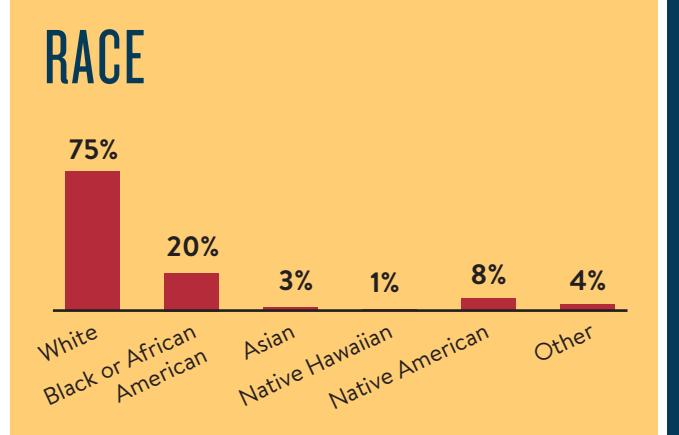
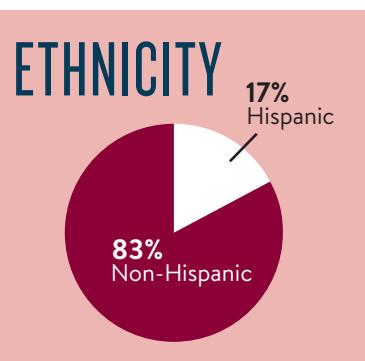
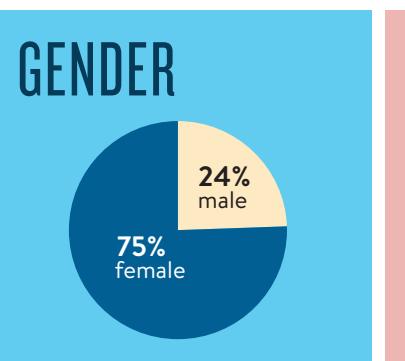
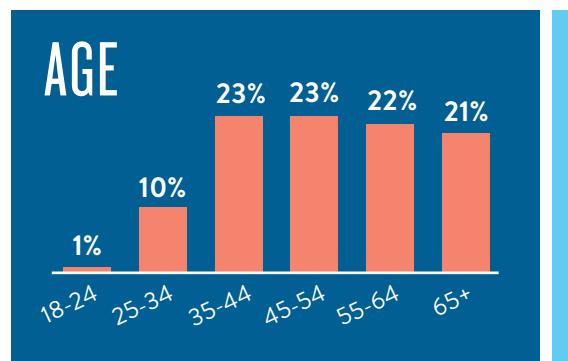


RESEARCH SUMMARY: NON-NATIVE PEOPLE'S PERCEPTIONS



Nielsen is a global leader in audience measurement, data, and analytics, shaping the future of media. In 2025, IllumiNative partnered with Nielsen to update the 2023 Native Visibility + Power-Building survey to gather insights into **non-Native people's views and perceptions of Native peoples and our cultures and stories**. This online survey included updated questions on media consumption and political perception. It was fielded September 4-18, 2025, and 5,813 adults completed the survey.

The demographics of survey respondents are as follows:



OPPORTUNITIES FOR NON-NATIVE ALLYSHIP

Research by Nielsen



There remains a gap in non-Native people's understanding of Native peoples. This gap could, in part, be explained by a lack of Native representation in national education and media, where stories of Native peoples are often missing or inaccurate. However, nearly half of respondents (45%) said they often or sometimes seek out information related to Native peoples, and even more people expressed a desire to be an ally to Native peoples.

36% of non-Natives say they are **somewhat or very informed about Native Americans.**



44% said their education about Native Americans **did not cover anything past the year 1900.**



76% believe Native peoples must be a declining population because they **do not often hear about Native Americans in the news or entertainment space.**



58%

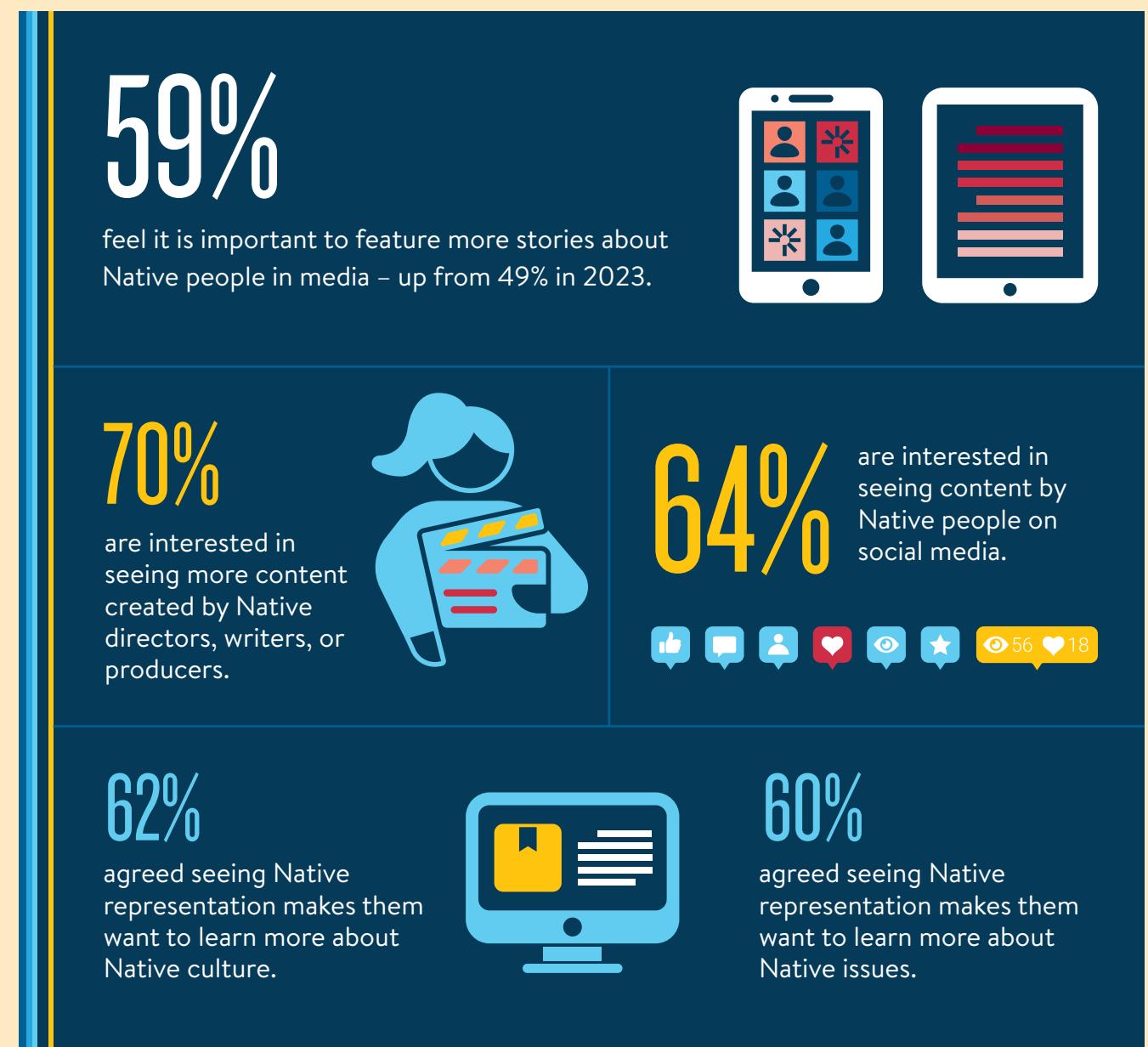
agreed that they want to be an ally but are not sure how.



THE POWER OF MEDIA TO INCREASE NATIVE VISIBILITY

Research by Nielsen

Entertainment and media, including social media, play a critical role in increasing the visibility of Native peoples and our stories. A majority of respondents want to see an increase in Native representation on their screens, saying such representation helps build a movement of solidarity and allyship.





IllumiNative officially sunsets at the end of 2025, but the work to increase the visibility of Native peoples continues. We're excited to launch Indigenous House, a visionary lifestyle brand and media platform powered by Indigenous cultures, creativity, and community. Together, with our digital cohort of Native creators, we're celebrating our community—where we've been, where we are now, and where we're going next—because no one tells our stories better than us. Stay tuned to see how this research will power innovative and creative storytelling that disrupts invisibility and shifts the narrative.



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Learn more at [illuminative.org](https://www.illuminative.org)

This research and more will be added to our updated website in December 2025.

