



ILLUMINATIVE

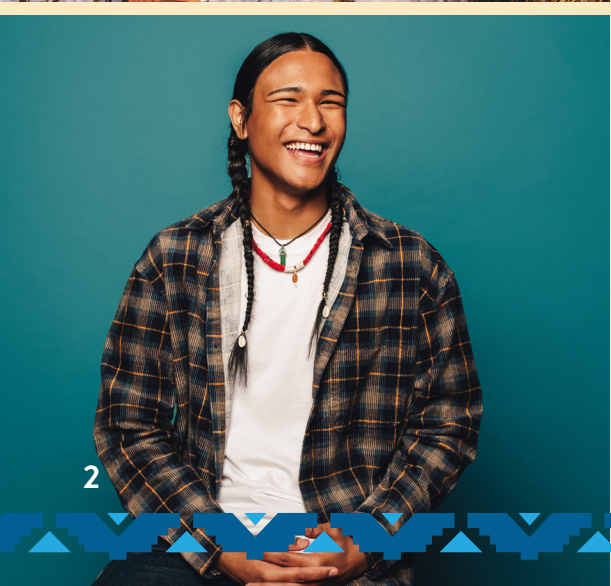
# NATIVE POWER & VISIBILITY IN A CHANGING AMERICA







Credit: Evan Benally Atwood (Diné)



# 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.

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 [illuminative.org](https://illuminative.org) in December 2025.*



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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

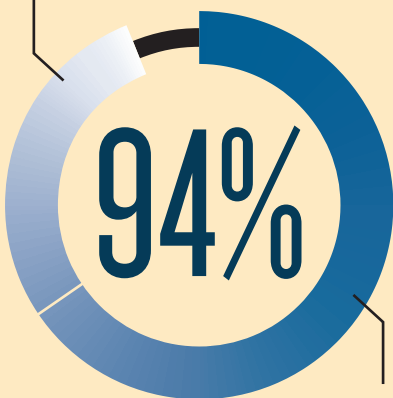
Research by LRP

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.**



29% say it is very important



of respondents say that **a policy to reduce the cost of living** (housing, groceries, gas, etc.) is important to them personally.

65% say it is extremely important

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

26%

Inflation and rising prices

21%

The economy and jobs

21%

Tribal sovereignty

“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.

51% of respondents voted for **Kamala Harris**

33% of respondents voted for **Donald Trump**

Who do you think will do a better job addressing issues that impact Native peoples?

DEMOCRATS  
IN CONGRESS

46%

REPUBLICANS  
IN CONGRESS

27%

NEITHER

23%

Respondents are feeling optimistic overall about different aspects of the present and future, but intense optimism is low.

76% feel optimistic about **their future**

71% feel optimistic about the **future of their Tribe**

48% feel optimistic about the **future of the country**

89%

of respondents say they are **likely to vote** in the 2026 midterm elections.

Key issue areas focus group participants identified for 2026 include:

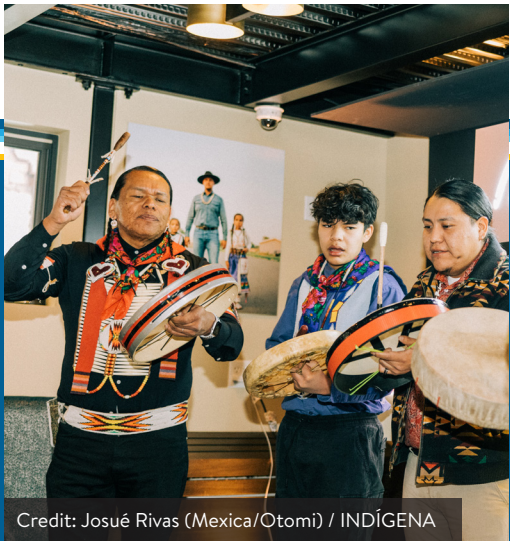
- Housing
- Jobs/employment
- Education
- Community development
- The economy
- Healthcare
- Tribal sovereignty



# 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 (Mexico/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.

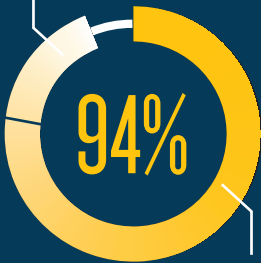
**16%**  
“not so strongly” agree



of respondents agree that Tribal nations should be in charge of controlling their land base.

**79%**  
strongly agree

**17%**  
“not so strongly” agree



of respondents agree that Native people need to preserve their traditions and languages.

**77%**  
strongly agree

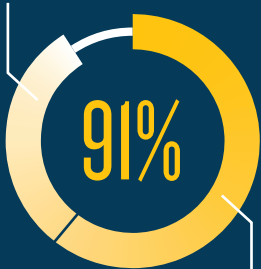
**30%**  
believe it is very important



of respondents believe it is important to make sure that Congress and the federal government do not infringe on the sovereign rights of Tribes.

**62%**  
believe it is extremely important

**30%**  
say it is very important



of respondents say that a policy to protect and uphold Tribal sovereignty and trust and treaty obligations is important to them personally.

**60%**  
say 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





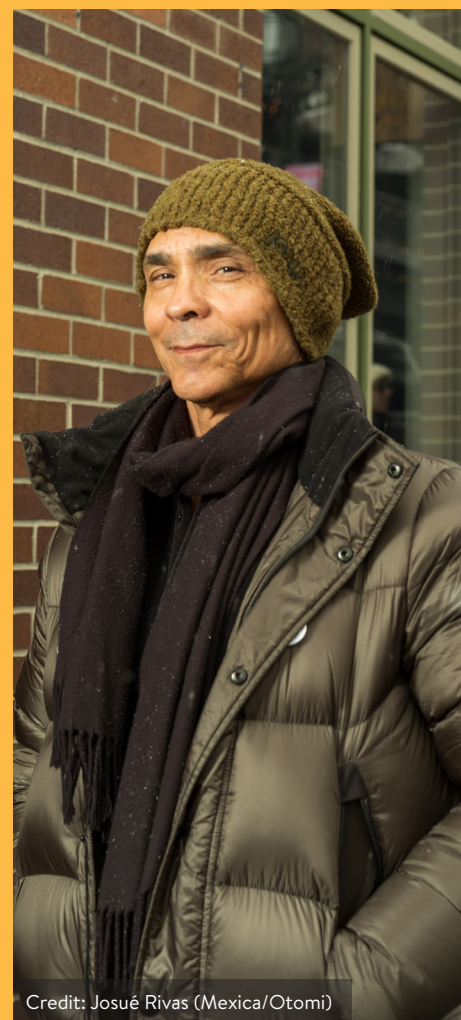
Credit: Josué Rivas (Mexico/Otomi)



Credit: Getty



Credit: Getty



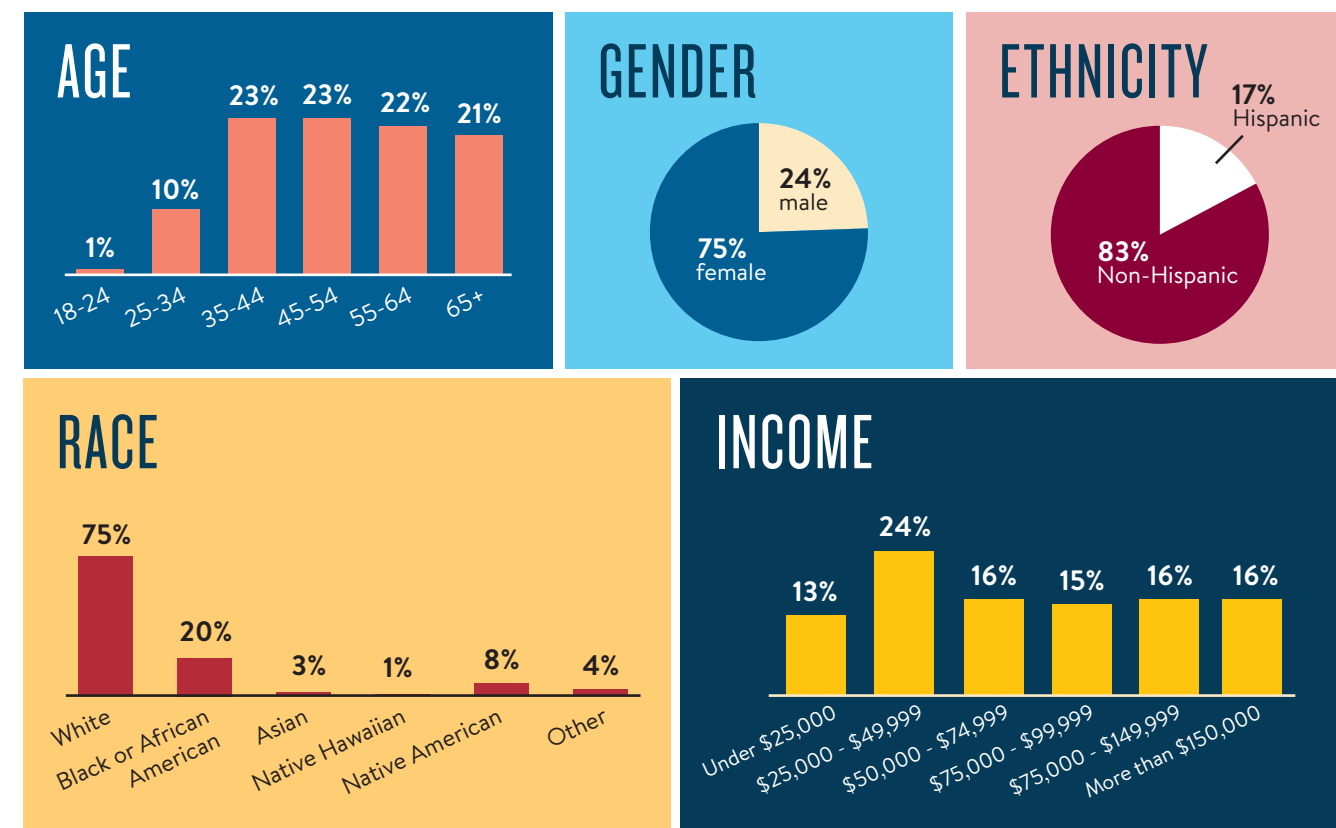
Credit: Josué Rivas (Mexico/Otomi)

# 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:



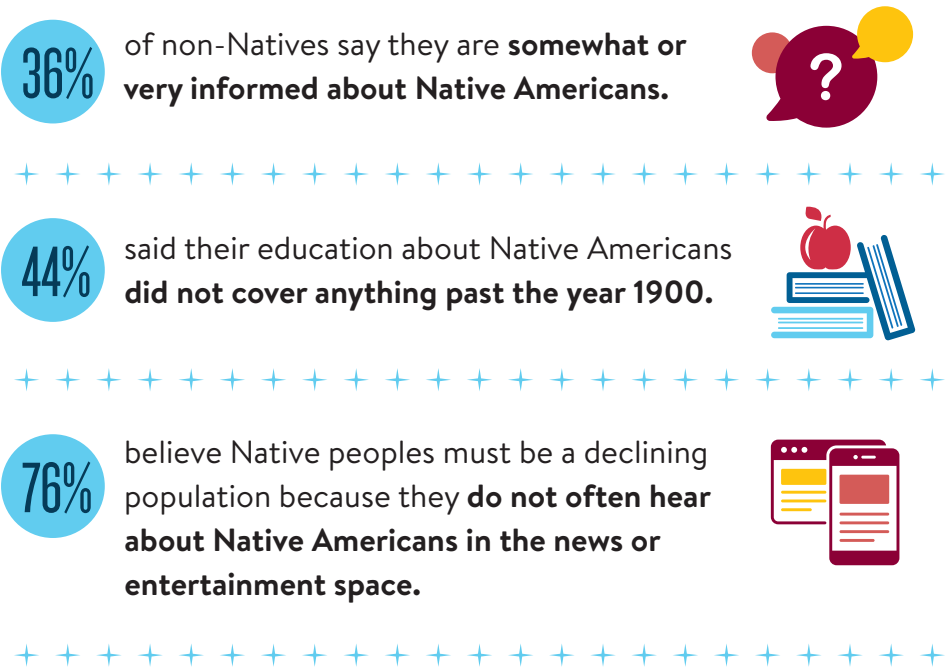


# OPPORTUNITIES FOR NON-NATIVE ALLYSHIP

Research by Nielsen



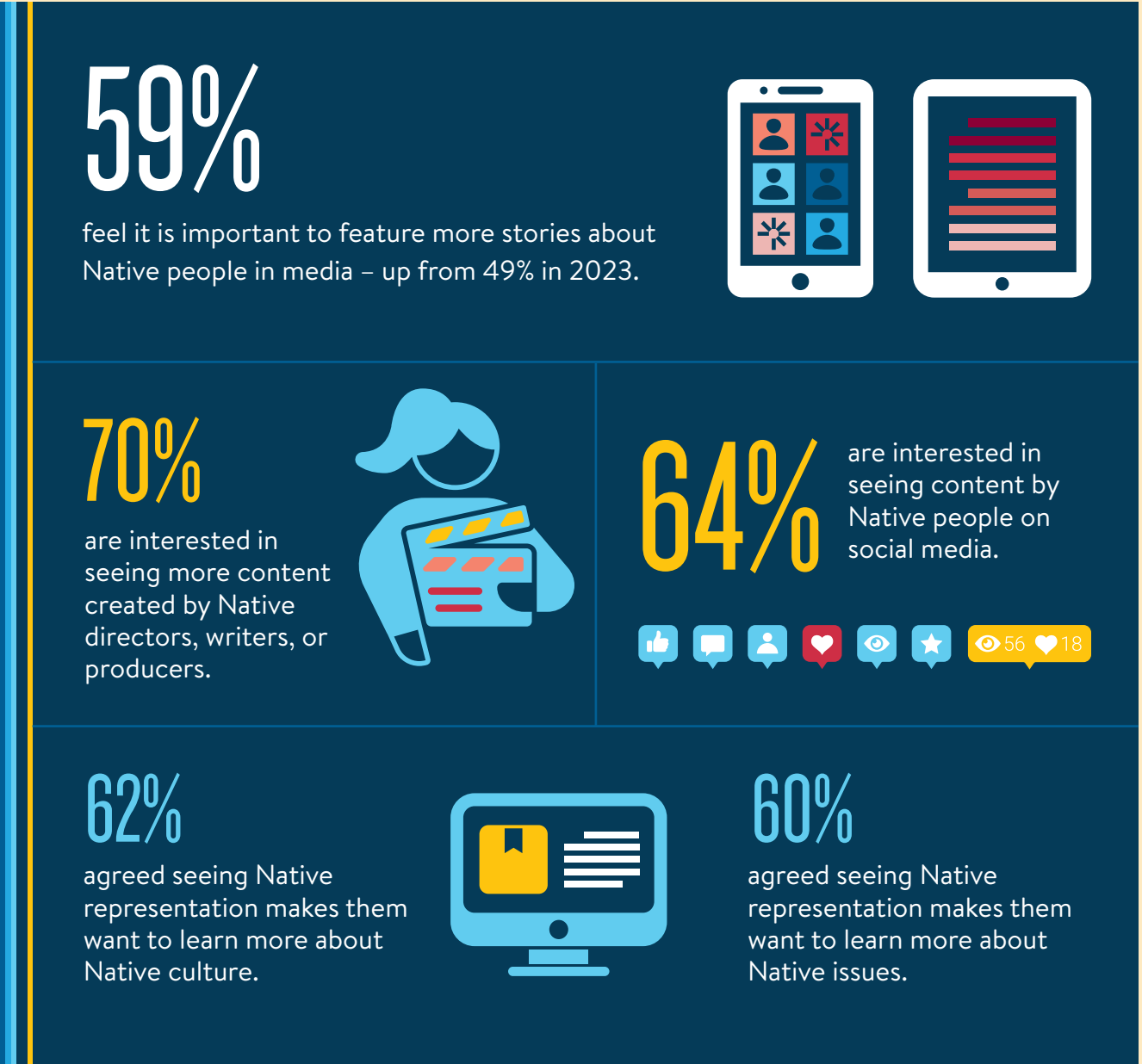
There remains a gap in non-Native people’s understanding of Native peoples. This gap could, in part, be explained by a lack of Native representation in national education and media, where stories of Native peoples are often missing or inaccurate. However, nearly half of respondents (45%) said they often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



# 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.



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

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

