

# "We are still here": Native Americans fight to be counted in U.S. census

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Image 1. Brandon Nez displays his flag on October 25, 2018, near his jewelry stand in Monument Valley which is in San Juan County, Utah. The county has been accused of racial gerrymandering. Photo: Rick Bowmer/AP Photo

The majority of people who live in San Juan County are Native American. San Juan County is in Utah. Two tribes live in the county. They are the Navajo Nation and the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe.

An elected group of people run the local government in San Juan. In 2017, most of the people in this group were white. The county's election maps had been divided unfairly. This led to more white people working in government positions. Because of this, native voters in the area had less power. This is against the law. In 2018, the Navajo Nation took San Juan County to court. The tribe won the lawsuit.

Later that year, the county elected a new government group. The group was mostly Native Americans. This was the first time this had ever happened. Information from the census helped the Navajo win their case.

The U.S. Census is an important tool. It has a strong influence on political power. The census is an official count of all the people that live in the country. The government does a census every 10

years. The results determine government representation. They influence local election maps. They also determine how much money an area will receive from the government. There will be a census this year.

### **A History Of Being Undercounted**

Historically, Native Americans have been undercounted in the census.

Charlaine Tso is on the Navajo Nation's tribal council. It is the tribe's ruling body. She said the miscount affects how much money the tribe has for services. "It impacts everything," she said.

Tso is on the Navajo Nation's Complete Count Commission. The group will work with the Census Bureau. In 2020, it wants every Navajo to be counted. The group believes that a lot of Navajos were not counted last time. The last census was in 2010. As a result, the tribe received less government money.

The problem does not just affect the Navajo Nation. In 2010, about 1 in 7 Native Americans were not counted.

### **Lack Of Trust Is A Problem**

Many factors make Indigenous people hard to count. The Census Bureau describes certain areas as hard to count people in. A third of Native Americans live in these areas. Other factors are poverty and uncertain housing.

Desi Rodrigues-Lonebear says another problem is lack of trust. Rodrigues-Lonebear is a member of the Northern Cheyenne tribe. She is also an expert in changing populations.

She has had to convince Indigenous Americans to take part in the census. Some of these people were her own relatives. She said it is challenging because, for their whole lives, they have wanted to be left alone by government officials.



"And you're coming to them and saying, 'But we really need you to fill out this form. We really need you to count,'" Rodrigues-Lonebear said.

### **Translation Services Are Being Cut**

Tribal leaders are worried about the 2020 census. For the first time, it will be done mostly online. However, more than a third of Native Americans do not have internet. This could mean even more Native Americans are not counted, said Natalie Landreth. She is a Chickasaw Nation member. Landreth is also a lawyer. She works for the Native American Rights Foundation. The group is called NARF, for short.

NARF also said the government is cutting census translation services. It used to pay for census information to be translated into many indigenous languages. Now the government will only pay for translation into Navajo. In parts of Alaska, three-quarters of households do not speak English.

Jessica Imotichey is a Chickasaw Nation member. She works for the U.S. Census Bureau. She said the government agency is working hard. It wants to make sure Native Americans are counted in 2020.

"[The census] is about representation, not just politically but also visibility," Imotichey said.

"Recognizing Native Americans and Alaskan Natives, that we are still here, that we still remain."

## Quiz

- 1 Which sentence from the introduction [paragraphs 1-4] explains WHY the Navajo Nation took San Juan County to court?
- (A) They are the Navajo Nation and the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe.
  - (B) An elected group of people run the local government in San Juan.
  - (C) The county's election maps had been divided unfairly.
  - (D) Later that year, the county elected a new government group.
- 2 Which question is answered in the section "Translation Services Are Being Cut"?
- (A) How many Native Americans were counted in the last census?
  - (B) Why are tribal leaders worried about the 2020 census?
  - (C) When did the government first offer census translation services?
  - (D) What languages are spoken by Native Americans in Alaska?
- 3 Which sentence from the article states a MAIN idea of the entire article?
- (A) The majority of people who live in San Juan County are Native American.
  - (B) Historically, Native Americans have not been counted in the census.
  - (C) Tso is on the Navajo Nation's Complete Count Commission.
  - (D) However, more than a third of Native Americans do not have internet.
- 4 The main idea of the section "Lack Of Trust Is A Problem" is that it is hard to count indigenous people for many reasons. Which key detail supports the section's MAIN idea?
- (A) Rodrigues-Lonebear is a member of the Northern Cheyenne tribe.
  - (B) She is also an expert in changing populations.
  - (C) She said it is challenging because, for their whole lives, they have wanted to be left alone by government officials.
  - (D) "And you're coming to them and saying, 'But we really need you to fill out this form.'"