



NATIVE GOVERNANCE CENTER

2020 Campaign Trail: How to Talk about Sovereignty

For the first time in history, [United States presidential candidates will hold a forum specifically focused on Native American issues](#).

Here at [Native Governance Center](#), we center all of our work on **Tribal sovereignty**. On the rare occasion when political figures decide to put Indian Country on the agenda, they apply a deficit lens and propose only surface-level solutions to centuries-old problems. **We believe that it's imperative to focus on the root causes behind the issues impacting Indian Country and acknowledge the key role that Tribal sovereignty and governance play in Tribal nations' ability to thrive.**

If we were to provide candidates with a set of recommendations on how to talk about Tribal sovereignty on the campaign trail, here's what we'd say:

1. Tribal nations are independent, sovereign **nations**. The United States Constitution (Indian Commerce and Supremacy clauses) establishes this. See [Why Treaties Matter](#) for more.
2. Native nations are **resilient**, despite [facing widespread invisibility](#). They're stronger than you think.
3. Tribal governments that **align with Native culture and values** are more likely to succeed. The [research proves it](#).
4. **Strong Tribal governments** facilitate positive economic development outcomes, both within Native nations and in surrounding communities. See [success stories from Honoring Nations](#) for more.
5. **Native nations are invested in rebuilding** their governments and strengthening their communities on their own terms.
6. Tribes govern themselves with **constitutions**. [Constitutions can be written or oral](#).
7. Many Tribal constitutions are **not based on Native values and governance systems** that have historically worked for Native people. For example, the [Indian Reorganization Act imposed non-Native constitutions on many Tribes](#).
8. To succeed, Tribal "consultation" must be a **truly equal partnership** where [both entities are heard and respected](#).
9. **Partnerships work**. Tribal-state and Tribal-county collaboration have resulted in [positive outcomes for both Native and non-Native governments](#).
10. [It's a mistake to ignore Native issues on the campaign trail](#). **Indian Country should be addressed regularly**, not just at "Native" political forums. Native people notice when their concerns are tokenized.

Want to learn more? Reach out to us at hello@nativegov.org or (651) 571-0826. We're also on the web (nativegov.org) and social media (@nativegov).