

First Nations: Indigenous Voters, who lean Democratic, could decide Wisconsin's governor

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Polls are showing the race for Wisconsin's next governor should be tight, meaning the vote from Indigenous communities could be one of the deciding factors.

If voter turnout is high among tribal members in Wisconsin, it could significantly help Democratic candidate David Crowley over Republican Tom Tiffany.

In the 2020 presidential election, the Indigenous vote in Wisconsin and Arizona, another swing state, was credited with clinching Joe Biden's victory in each state. Biden won Wisconsin by just over 20,000 votes; he won Arizona by just over 10,000 votes. Given there are about 70,000 Indigenous voters in Wisconsin and about 310,000 in Arizona, and Indigenous voters historically lean heavily Democratic, the impact was profound.

But it is important to note the Indigenous vote is not monolithic and depends on many factors.

Most tribal governments are careful not to endorse candidates, and some will donate almost equal amounts to both campaigns if they donate at all.

One issue of particularly high importance for Indigenous voters is environmental protection. In Wisconsin's recent history, it's been the Democrats who are more likely to support environmental protections.

As a congressman, Tiffany has supported mining and logging expansion in the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest Nation, which tribes have opposed. He's also been a staunch ally of Donald Trump, who has angered Indigenous voters with proposed budget cuts, opposition to diversity, and challenges to birthright citizenship. The Trump administration also has disparaged Indigenous Peoples Day, and hailed Christopher Columbus, who is seen across Indian Nation as an invader who opened the door to disease, land theft and cultural erasure.

Having said that, tribes in Wisconsin and across the country have worked with and supported Republicans.

In Wisconsin, Menominee tribal officials expressed optimism last year that the Trump administration would move forward their Kenosha casino project by lessening federal administrative hurdles. Tiffany and Crowley have both stated their opposition to the project – Tiffany saying he did not want to expand gaming at all in Wisconsin, Crowley saying it would divert money from the Potawatomi Casino & Hotel in Milwaukee.

Still, Menominee County, which runs congruent with the Menominee Reservation, has voted overwhelmingly in favor of Democrats for decades.

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