

To: ProgressNow Arizona  
From: Joshua Ulibarri, Lake Research Partners  
Re: Brief Summary/Narrative Project FGS Among Navajos in Arizona  
Date: September 14, 2018

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Lake Research Partners completed a phone-focus group among Navajos living in Arizona on July 24, 2018. The single phone-focus group included men and women who were in their mid-twenties to their early-fifties. Unlike the recruit for the work among African Americans and Asian Pacific Islanders, this group was recruited—not from a voter file—but instead by a Native American woman organizer who has recruited for similar projects across the country. While there was an attempt to recruit respondents from the reservation, this proved complex and unachievable. Every recruit had deep connections to the reservation and went back often, but did not, at the time of the research, live on the reservation. To this point, the team has received a link to the recording. This memo is brief to convey the biggest findings and what they may mean for organizing and turning out the Navajo vote this fall. As always, do not hesitate to call Joshua with any questions.

There is one big caution that must be communicated. These findings come from one phone-focus group over a 90-minute period and from a discussion among ten people. While the findings may seem true and accurate given other conversations members of the team are having, we may be reinforcing previously held beliefs without enough research to check that thinking. This community has not been given a lot of time and commitment when it comes to research and ProgressNow and its allies deserve credit for committing the funding to this work.

Here are the major findings:

- 1. Navajos participating in this focus group are disappointed and discouraged.**  
They are disappointed that racism and discrimination still plagues their people and that the system makes things worse. They are discouraged that for all the talk about “change,” not enough advancement is happening for Navajos in Arizona. From education, to racism, to the environment, these Navajos participating in this group are frustrated with the overall direction of Arizona, and how it affects Navajos.
- 2. Participants in this group, who are living off the reservation, still relate a lot to the reservation and reflect on the reservation when answering general questions about Arizona.** Many times, whether discussing education or the economy, the conversation would go back to what people on the reservation are experiencing. Most of these participants lived in Maricopa, but talked

Lake Research  
Partners  
1101 17th St., NW  
Suite301  
Washington, DC 20036

Tel:202.776.9066  
Fax:202.776.9074

Partners  
Celinda Lake  
Alysia Snell  
David Mermin  
Dr. Robert G. Meadow  
Daniel Gotoff  
Joshua Ulibarri

about the rural economy, rural schools, and the environment, in ways that connected to the reservation and less so to the suburbs or exurbs where they were living. This is important from a messaging standpoint because first, we want to meet these targets where they are and reservation life is still very important to them. Secondly, because they were focused on the reservation in many points of conversation, this may reflect what Navajos on the reservation are thinking.

3. **The reservation is still home, for most participants.** Family is there, their culture is there, and though they didn't use this language, they likely feel less isolated and more comfortable around people who look like them, sound like them, and share their experience. Again, we did not delve too deeply into this topic, but just from our surface conversation it was clear how much the reservation meant to these participants. Though this is untested, and we likely cannot test this before we may need to use it, a "vote for her" message connecting to mothers, sisters, and little cousins on the reservation may resonate as a reason to vote for more school funding, more economic investment, and for candidates that share these priorities.
4. **Culture and race was an important part of this conversation.** These participants felt discriminated against and held back, but for them it was more systemic than personal. Their people were being held back, mistreated, discriminated against, ignored, and they wanted that reflected in the conversation. There was less reflection on the personal kinds of conversations we heard in the African American group (for example talking to a young son about how to behave around police), but we should be mindful that these participants are focused on the same issues and have many of the same emotions around it.
5. **The race and culture discussion is also important to how these participants—especially Navajo women—feel about immigration.** While there was concern that there would be more pushback on a progressive immigration discussion, there isn't evidence from this work to support that concern. Again, we want to be clear, there were no one-liners in this group about "no Dream Act for African Americans" or "they should immigrate the 'right' way" as we saw with the other work for this project. It doesn't mean it is not real, but it does mean it was not reflected in this group. Instead, these respondents discussed how sad it was to see families separated at the border and to hear discussion of the wall as well as how awful the constant threat of deportation must be for their Latinx neighbors. The current mistreatment of Mexicans and other Latinx immigrants and refugees weighed heavily. It seems like the kind of discrimination they think Latinx immigrants face feels more similar to the discrimination they may face compared to how African Americans related in the same situation. This focus was a little stronger

among women, especially at it pertained to family separation, but the men also talked about the wall. You could feel the tension around Trump building a wall on land and territory that used to belong to Native Americans, only to keep out other people of color and then to separate their families. *Finally, we want to caution that this was a conversation with Navajos who are living off the reservation and this discussion may sound different if it were among Navajos on the reservation.*

6. **That said, the men were slightly more sensitive to the immigration conversation and what it means to be Native American in Arizona.** We want to avoid the trap of overstating any findings, especially on race and equality issues. One man in particular said he was teased at work because he looks Mexican. He was teased by Anglos who said he should speak Spanish. Another had said his Anglo coworkers had said “aren’t you all rich and have casinos.” And while that conversation is more about discrimination overall, it took place in the same space as the “why don’t you speak Spanish” moment. Again, not to overstate the meaning, but there seems to be some struggle among Native American men, especially, about existing for so long in a “white man’s world” to now have to find space in a state where the population is rapidly becoming more Latinx.
7. **The Navajo Nation election is very important and when you listen to these participants it is much more of a personal priority to vote in this election than in others.** They said all elections are important, but the way they will change their day, for example, and just the overall tone to the conversation highlights how important the Navajo Nation election is. That election is about their people, their culture, and their responsibility. It may also feed a gap they have for not being on the reservation. As discussed when planning this group, they talked about the festivity around voting, how they gather together and eat and vote. It is not just casting a vote, but also being part of something. It does not feel political, but cultural. It would be impossible to transfer those feelings to the other elections they face. Those elections still carry weight, but fall short.
  - a. There were a few participants who vote in the Navajo Nation elections, but absentee. They work or live too far away and cannot afford to take off a day. A couple respondents were uncomfortable with absentee voting, worrying that their vote would not count. We faced this in the African American group as well. There may be some resistance in joining PEVL for this reason and some education may be needed.

8. **Both political parties are damaged, and this can be more of a problem for progressive candidates, of course.** Republicans are seen as a party that is fake and selfish. There is little Republican outreach, according to these participants, and when it comes, it feels disingenuous. For the Democrats, it is more complicated because these respondents see Democrats as weak and not getting things done. The female participants were stronger Democrats, more progressive in nature, and had warmer feelings for the party. The male participants, on the other hand, disliked the Democrats less than Republicans, but were critical that Democrats were weak and didn't deliver. The tone among women was disappointment, as if Democrats tried and failed, while men were frustrated about promises made but not kept. As you will see at the end of this memo, the way to close this gap is through authenticity and repetition. They are not seeing enough from progressives, and it doesn't feel as real as it can be.
9. **Education is the dominant issue.** This is unsurprising, but it is good to confirm that we can be on the same overall issue with our different targets. This conversation covered both the reservation and schools off the reservation. For the reservation, there was definite talk about how their schools are underfunded, left behind, and that it was deliberate to leave behind the reservations. Ducey was also a core part of this conversation, and his lack of leadership on the issue frustrated the participants. At the time, they felt like they would vote for the #InvestinEd proposition, even though they were unclear on what it did exactly.
10. **The environment conversation is complex but relevant.** Because this was a conversation of Navajos who live off the reservation, the discussion may have more of a progressive tone to it. The women in the group spoke a lot about clean air and water and the need to push away from coal. The men in the groups also talked about the need to push away from coal (though with perhaps slightly more regret); instead the men tended to talk about a potential lack of resources coming soon, particularly water. Women related more to their families and their children's health, which is not uncommon. Men related more to what we have or what we are losing. They are both providers, but approach the environmental conversation from different views. As for coal, however, all agreed that we needed something in their community that was more long term, while coal is a short-term need, it does not answer long-term conversations about making life on the reservation or in Arizona more enjoyable. This conversation, alone, does not provide any evidence that a progressive environmental conversation will repel targets in this community.
11. **Lastly, as for issues, we did not have enough time, nor the safest of places, to discuss things like #metoo and #timesup.** But, two women mentioned

“murders of indigenous women.” We highlight indigenous deliberately because that is the language they used. We think if this was just a conversation among women led by a woman, that it would have more legs. This may be esoteric for a political campaign, but it seems relevant to show thoughtfulness and commitment to deal with something that uniquely impacts the Navajo community.

12. **What really comes across now, after three of these groups, is authenticity.** These groups, and especially the Navajo participants, hear the larger debate about change and it falls short. It doesn't feel like it includes them. It doesn't sound like it comes from people who lived their lives. And it doesn't come from people who look like them. Conveying a message of change, or the need to vote, needs to be personally relevant and authentic—more so than the appeals they seem to be hearing now.