

Varying Actors, Varying Aspirations: Climate Change Policy and Native Nations

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Our Questions

- How do tribal governments balance their environmental, political, and economic concerns?
- What are typical climate change responses by tribal governments?
- How do tribal governments choose to communicate their approaches to climate change?
- How does the discussion of climate change play out among tribal voices?

Preview of Findings: In our sample, we find

- Political opportunities and constraints affect climate change policies
- Environmental and economic circumstances do not
- Nearly all tribes are engaging in some form of adaptation, but
 - activities may be siloed
 - activities may not acknowledge climate change
- Mitigation plans are rare

What's a Tribal Government?

- 566 federally-recognized American Indian tribal governments
- Sovereign governments with recognized land bases
- Powers recognized in treaties and statutes
- Treaties gave up powers expressly stated and no others
- When tribes' political power is weak, federal and state encroachment occur

Our Expectations

- Tribes are not unconditional environmental stewards
- Tribes have some qualities in common with national, state, and local governments
- Tribes have very distinct concerns
- Tribes vary: effective tribal governance is tribe-specific, contextual, pluralist (Cornell and Kalt, Bruyneel, Alfred, Schouls, Rowse)

Methods: we draw a sample of 25 tribal governments' websites

- We identify 5 regions where tribal government websites are ubiquitous
- In each region, we draw a random, stratified sample of 5 tribes
- Sampling is weighted by American Indian/Alaska Native population within tribes' boundaries

Pacific Northwest



Southwest



Oklahoma



Upper Plains



Qualitative Findings

Tribes raise four common themes

1) Climate and culture are intertwined

- “Most importantly for Tulalip, climate change can affect the traditional lifeways and practices, and the spiritual and cultural health of the community.” -Tulalip Tribes
- “[N]atural resources are cultural resources. There is no separation between how the bands manage and interact with a resource and how their culture endures: one is dependent on the other.” -Fond du Lac Band of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe

Qualitative Findings

2) Climate policy must serve political sovereignty

- “This battle is really about more than just one tribe. It’s about protecting our sovereign rights. It’s about defending our precious water and Mother Earth.” -Oglala Sioux Tribe
- “It is important to look at the pollution and damage caused to our property from the energy companies. . . . Why are our lands allowed to be contaminated by pipelines and now we cannot build homes on our land using federal program funds that were appropriated for us?” –Sac and Fox Nation

Qualitative Findings

3) Climate policy must serve economic sovereignty

- **“The [Navajo Generating Station’s] Replacement Lease establishes a True Path to Economic Sovereignty”** -Navajo Nation. Emphasis in original.
- “Native people can and should be part of the solution for a sustainable future and for the development of clean, safe energy. We must have a seat at the table before decisions are made impacting the safety, health and natural resources of our communities because economics can no longer be built on the backs of Native people.” – Cherokee Nation

Qualitative Findings

4) Climate policy hinges on collaboration with other tribes and non-tribal governments

- “[Our plan] will necessitate the assignment of implementation responsibilities, multi-reservation collaboration, partnerships with state, federal, and local managers” –Fond du Lac Band
- Many tribes put great effort into expanding intertribal collaborations and collaborations with non-tribal governments

Quantitative Analysis: Six Dichotomous Dependent Variables

- 1) Cross-sector climate change adaptation plan
- 2) Sector-specific adaptation steps that focus explicitly on climate change
- 3) Sector-specific adaptation steps that don't necessarily focus explicitly on climate change

We examined sectors of

natural disaster planning

agriculture

food sovereignty

Quantitative Analysis: Six Dichotomous Dependent Variables

- 4) Cross-sector climate change mitigation plan
- 5) Sector-specific mitigation steps that focus explicitly on climate change
- 6) Sector-specific mitigation steps that don't necessarily focus explicitly on climate change

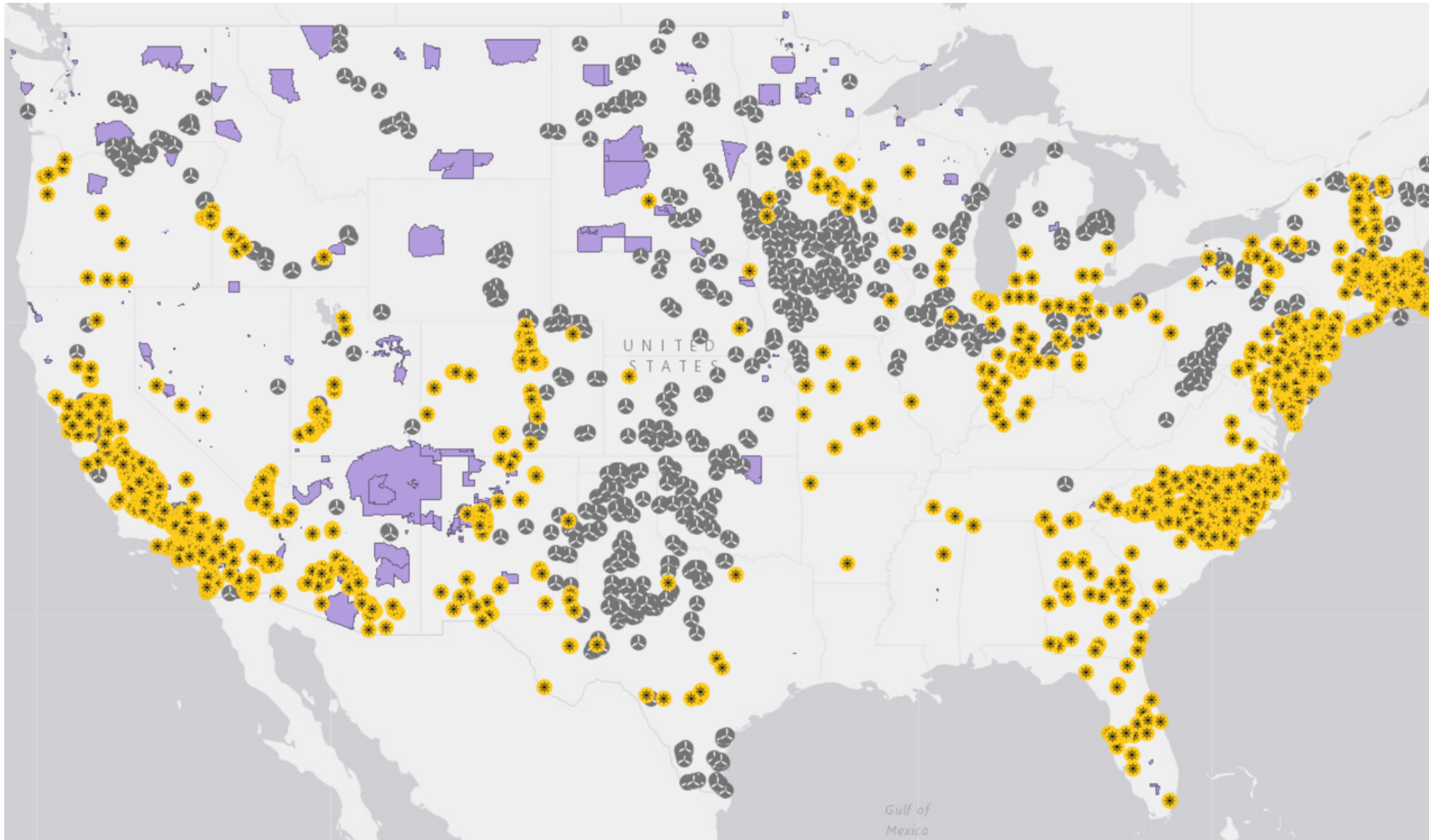
We examined sectors of


renewable energy

energy efficiency

recycling

opposition to off-reservation fossil fuel industry



-  Solar Power Plant
-  Wind Power Plant
-  Indian Lands

Frequencies

9 tribes: Cross-sector climate change adaptation plan

11 tribes: Sector-specific adaptation steps that focus explicitly on climate change

23 tribes: Sector-specific adaptation steps that don't necessarily focus explicitly on climate change

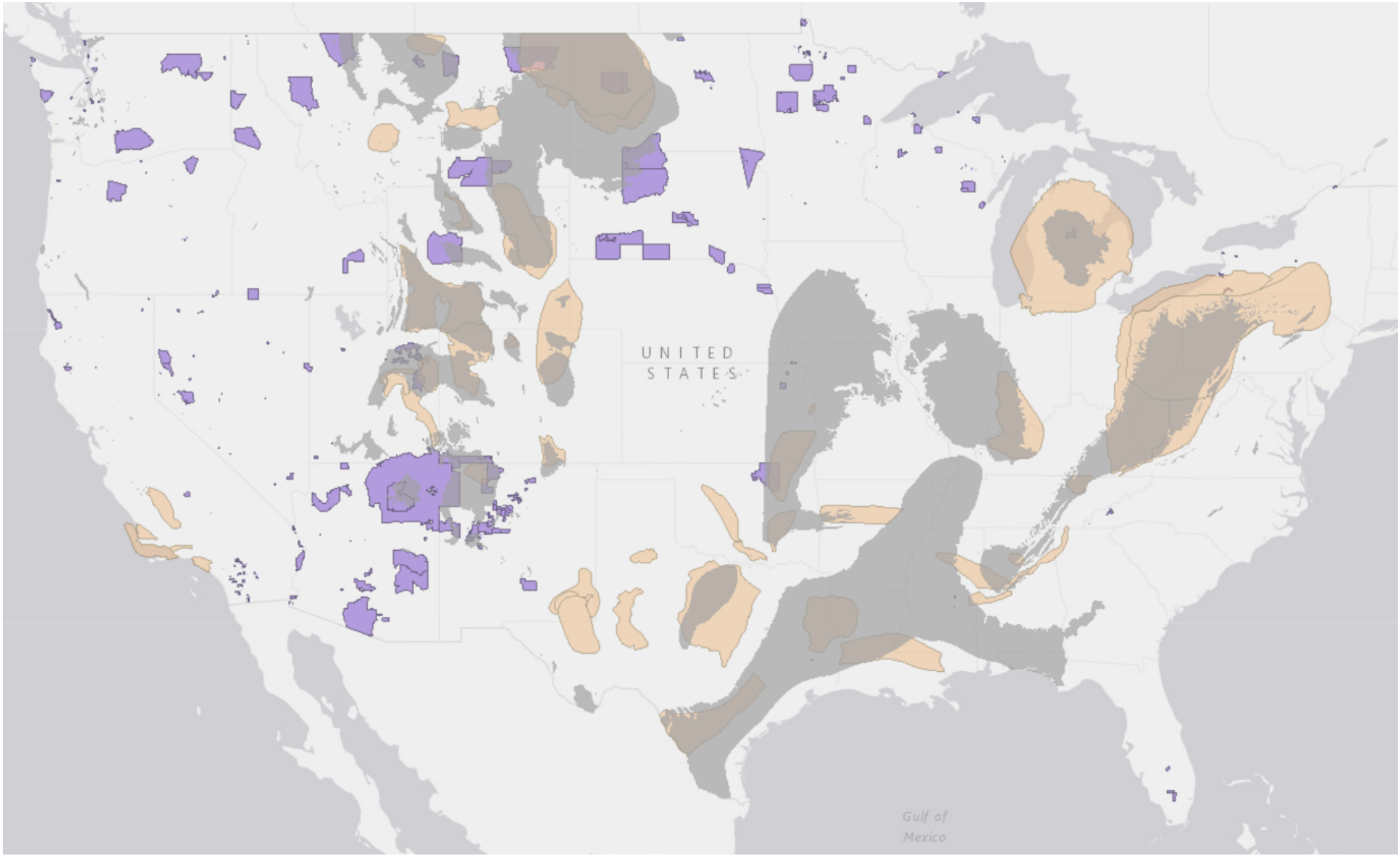
3 tribes: Cross-sector climate change mitigation plan

14 tribes: Sector-specific mitigation steps that focus explicitly on climate change

17 tribes: Sector-specific mitigation steps that don't necessarily focus explicitly on climate change

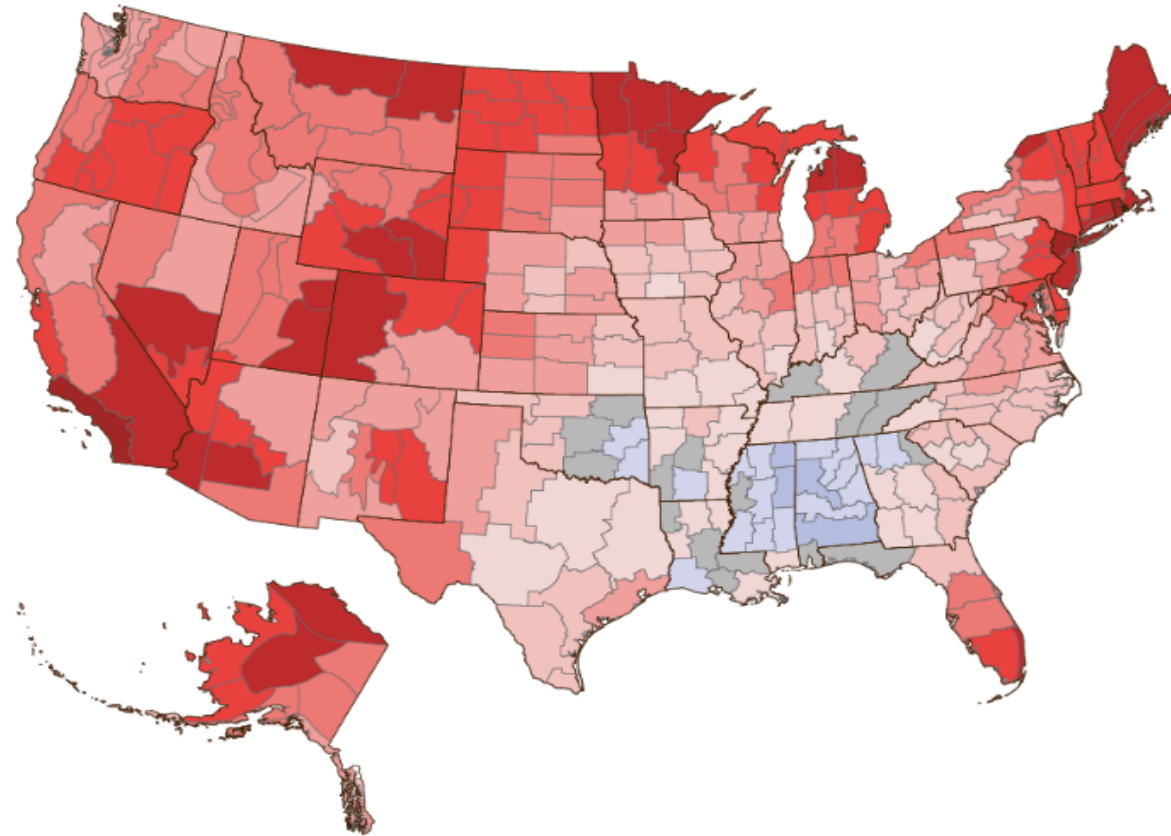
Independent Variables

- Economic resources
 - Tribal lands include coal and oil
 - Extent of casino operations
 - Square footage
 - Number of slot machines
- Extreme weather exposure
 - temperature change
 - annual average rate 2001-2015
 - precipitation change
 - annual average rate 1901-2015.



- Coal Field
- Tight Oil/Shale Gas Play
- Indian Lands

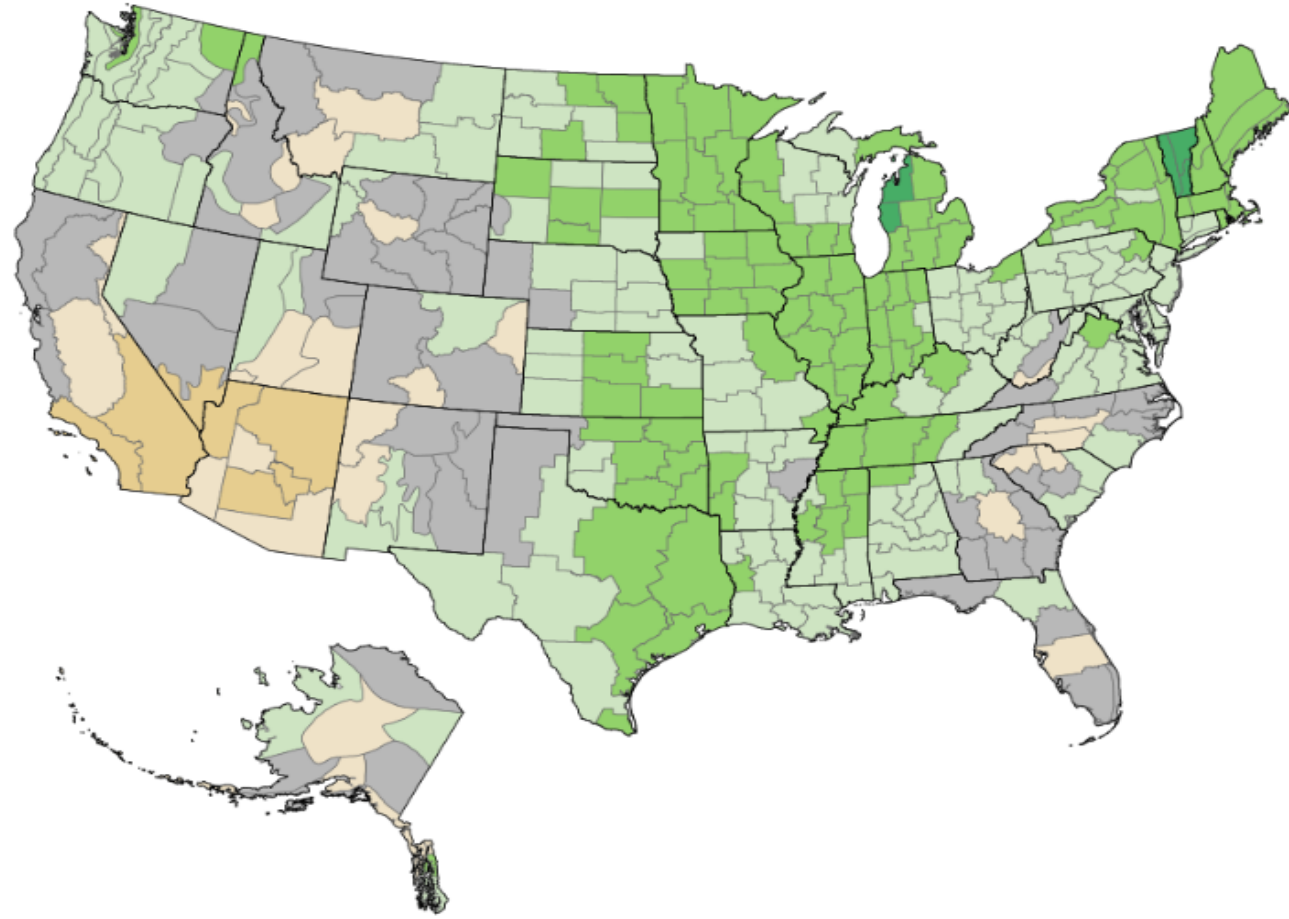
<https://www.eia.gov/state/maps.php>



Rate of temperature change (°F per century):



Gray interval: -0.1 to 0.1°F



Percent change in precipitation:



<https://www.epa.gov/climate-indicators/climate-change-indicators-us-and-global-precipitation>

Independent Variables

- Government capacity
 - Self-Governance Compact with the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA)
 - Tribes granted wider latitude in use of BIA grants
 - Honoring Nations award from the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development
- Intertribal collaboration
 - Membership in intertribal organizations that ITEP identifies promoting climate policy
 - Membership in intertribal organizations that tribes themselves identify as promoting climate policy
 - Creation of organization pre-dates Kyoto Protocol
- Partisan politics
 - Tribal lands within a state that voted for Hillary Clinton in 2016

Table 1: Fisher’s two-sided exact test for cross-tabulations

	Climate Change Adaptation			Climate Change Mitigation		
	Climate change adaptation plan	Climate change adaptation measures	Natural hazards/ food security measures	Climate change mitigation plan	Climate change mitigation measures	Renewable energy/ recycling measures
CLIMATE CHANGE EXPOSURE						
Above-average temperature increase		0.116		0.072		
ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY						
BIA self-governance compact	0.115				0.116	0.081
Intertribal collaboration	0.097					
STATE POLITICS						
Democratic	0.087				0.081	
REGION						
Northwest	0.040				0.009	

Wrap-up

- Wide range of climate change policies by tribal governments
 - Unusual to have no response
 - Unusual to have aggressive mitigation plans
- Politics and intergovernmental relations matter
- As with many other policy domains, tribes' principal challenge is the defense of sovereignty