



School of Government & Public Policy

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*Postal Access and Voting Equity for
Native Americans*

Synopsis: Vote by mail is an important tool to extend access to voters with time, resource, or physical constraints. While voting by mail is relatively easy for most individuals, who have United States Postal Service (USPS) residential mail service, it is much more difficult for those with non-standard mail service. In this paper, we examine how decisions taken by the USPS in the latter part of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have resulted in deeply entrenched structural inequities in the access to mail services on the Navajo Nation in Arizona when compared to rural non-reservation communities. Eighty-nine percent of current post offices were established during the settler colonial period in which sites were chosen primarily to advance military objectives and serve interests of Anglo-American settlers. The resulting inequitable pattern of postal access remains, resulting in inferior mail service on the Navajo Nation, adversely impacting many aspects of life. Post offices are fewer and farther on reservation communities, there are fewer service hours, and we show in a mail experiment that letters posted on reservations are slower and less likely to arrive. This research fits within the growing body of American political development research on path dependent processes and “spatial racism” within geography.

Melissa Rogers is an Associate Professor of Political Science and Co-Director of the Inequality and Policy Research Center at Claremont Graduate University. Her research examines how spatial inequalities impact politics, focused on developing nations and Native Americans.

Wednesday, October 2 at Noon

Social Sciences Building | Room 311