

Native American tribes warn members about ICE confrontation

By [Erin Alberty](#), *Axios* January 28, 2025

<https://www.axios.com/local/salt-lake-city/2025/01/28/native-americans-ice-immigration-trump-birthright-citizenship>

Tribal nations [in Utah](#) and throughout the U.S. are telling their citizens to hold tight to their IDs amid reports that U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents have been targeting Indigenous Americans.

Why it matters: Heirs to a devastating legacy of [forced removal](#) from ancestral homelands, Native Americans now are being given reason to worry they may get caught up in deportation roundups.

Driving the news: Navajo Nation officials [told CNN](#) on Monday that at least 15 Indigenous people in the southwest U.S. have reported being questioned or detained by immigration officers since Wednesday.

- "Our people are reaching out to us directly, and their needs are urgent," Navajo Nation Council speaker Crystalyn Curley said in a [statement](#) last week.
- "Despite possessing Certificates of Indian Blood (CIBs) and state-issued IDs, several individuals have been detained or questioned by ICE agents who do not recognize these documents as valid proof of citizenship," the statement read.

ICE offices in Utah and Washington, D.C., did not immediately respond to Axios' requests for comment.

Zoom out: [Warnings](#) and [advice](#) fanned out in recent days from tribal [governments](#) wary of potential [intrusion](#) on their [sovereignty](#) or harm against their citizens.

- The Mescalero Apache Tribe in New Mexico [announced](#) that a member was confronted by ICE agents last week and was asked for ID — first in Spanish, although the member spoke English.

What they're saying: Ute Indian Tribe Business Committee — the tribe's governing body — promised in a [statement](#) Saturday to "aggressively defend our rights and interests."

- The tribe offered legal counsel to members who are "improperly detained or questioned," as did the [Paiute Indian Tribe of Utah](#).

The San Juan Southern Paiute Tribe, whose land crosses the Utah-Arizona border, [advised](#) its citizens to record encounters with ICE, ask for agents' badges and keep the door closed and ask for a warrant if approached at home.

Zoom in: Many tribal governments are urging their residents to report any encounters with ICE.

- The Ute Indian Tribe urged citizens to make an immediate report if they spot ICE agents on the Uintah and Ouray Reservation.

Between the lines: Congress did not grant citizenship to Native Americans until 1924 — a development President Trump's lawyers cited in their [attempt to justify](#) his temporarily-[blocked](#) executive order to overturn birthright citizenship.

- His attorneys last week invoked an 1884 U.S. Supreme Court ruling that denied citizenship to members of tribes to argue that "birth in the United States does not by itself entitle a person to citizenship."
- Some [tribal leaders](#) saw the argument as a threat against members' citizenship.

Context: Constitutional protections may offer little reassurance to a population whose history is [littered](#) with [legal agreements](#) that were [broken](#) by the U.S. government.

The intrigue: Many Indigenous elders struggle to prove they were born here in the first place, Navajo Nation Councilwoman Eugenia Charles-Newton [noted](#) in a recent Facebook video.

- "Some of our elders — they were born at home. It was hard for them to get an ID. It's hard for them to get documents that prove they were born at home, in a hogan," she explained.