

Best Practices for media reporting on RCV elections Round 1 Testing

March 8, 2023

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Project overview

CCD tested a variety of ways in which press articles display the results of an RCV election.

We wanted to learn:

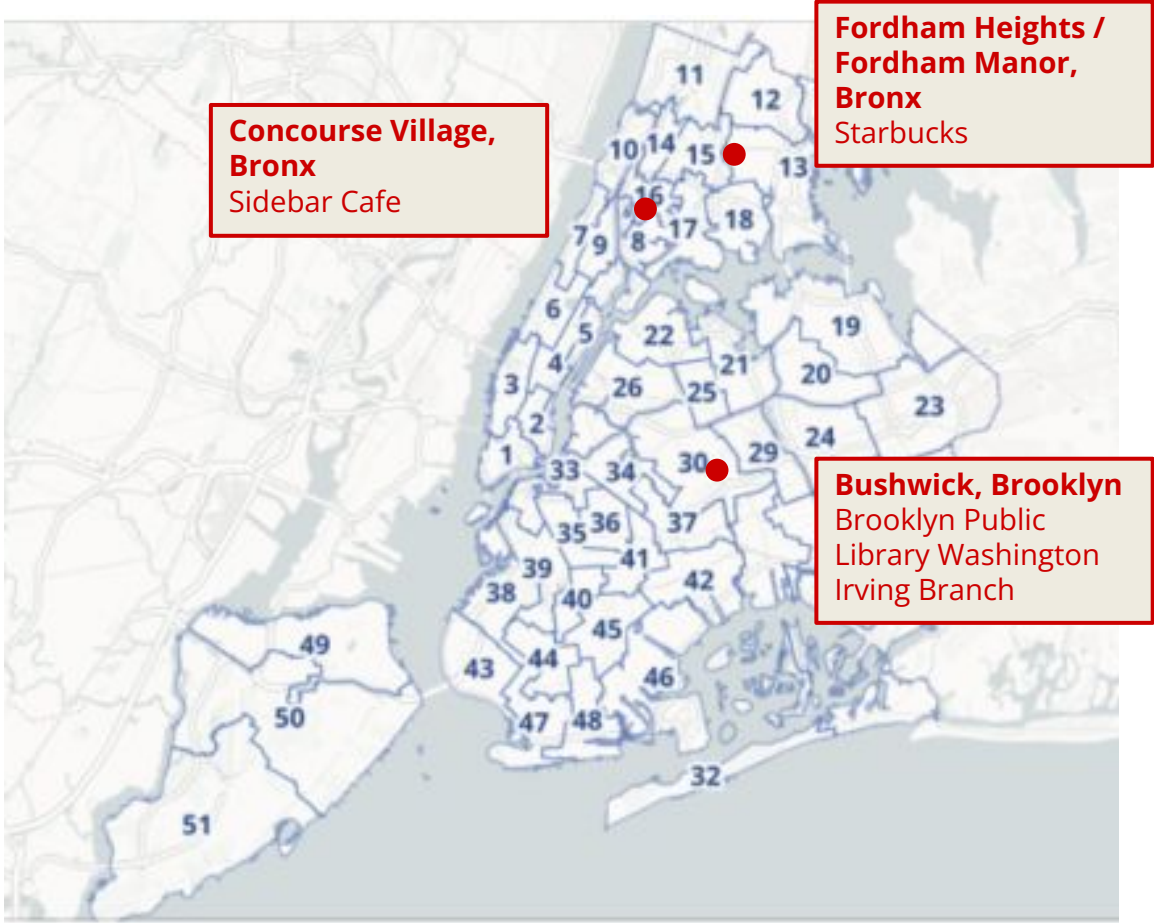
- Which best practices have the highest impact on people's understanding of RCV election results?
- Do people understand the status of the results?
 - If results aren't final, do people understand when they will be final?
 - How do people know that the results of an election are final?
- Do people understand who won and how?



How we tested

We tested in neighborhoods that had low ranking participation in 2021

Borough	
Brooklyn	11
Bronx	7
Manhattan	1



We spoke to 19 people over 3 days

Race or Ethnicity	Participants
Black or African American	9
Hispanic or Latino/e	2
Asian	2
Black, not from the US	1
Native American	1
White or Caucasian	1
American	1
Arab, Amazigh, Turk	1
Did not say	1

Education Level	Participants
8th Grade	1
11th Grade	1
Some College	4
Associate or Bachelor Degree	3
Master's Degree	4
Did not say	6

Gender	Participants
Male	12
Female	7



Most participants had voted before, but about half had never heard of RCV or were not sure what it is

Have you voted before?	Participants
Yes	10
No	2
Did not say	7

How familiar are you with RCV?	Participants
Never heard of it	5
Know about it but have not voted	4
Heard of it, but not sure what it is	2
Already voted in an RCV election	2
Did not say	7



We asked how people got their election news

Source	Number of participants
General search engine (Google, Yahoo)	10
Specific website (CNN, MSNBC)	7
Local television/website	5
Network television (unspecified news channel)	4
Facebook, Twitter, Instagram	3
Youtube	1
General newspaper	1
Word of mouth	1



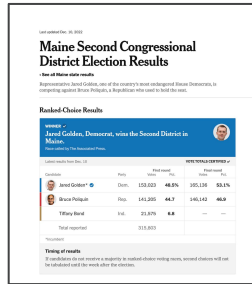
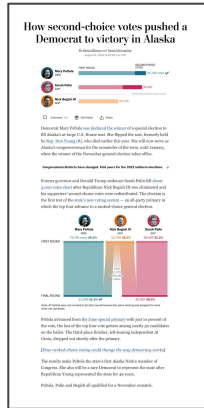
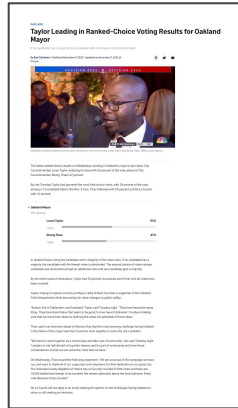
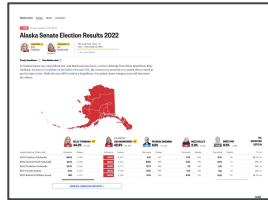
How we tested

1. We asked participants to choose 3-4 result displays from a packet of 10 samples. We removed outlet information from the samples.
2. Based on their selections, we asked questions like:
 - Can you tell me who won in this election? If yes, can you tell me what led you to that conclusion? If not, what makes it challenging to find this information?
 - Let's say one of your family members wants to learn about RCV results. How would you explain these results to them?



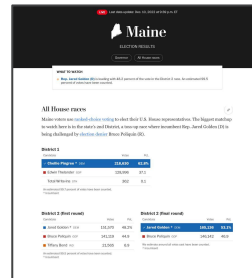
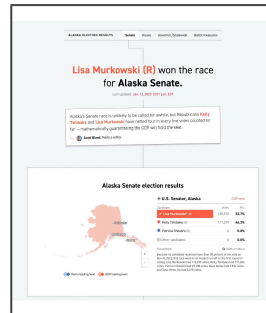
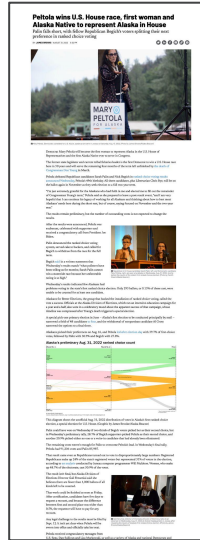
Top Third

10-12 votes each



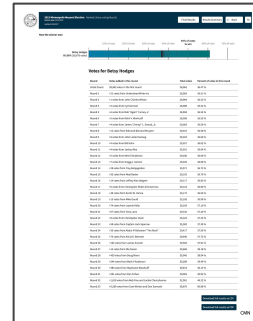
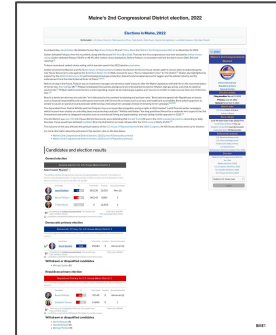
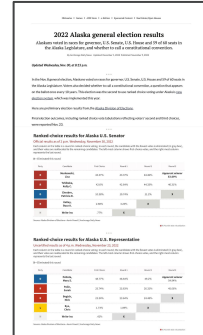
Middle Third

4 votes each



Bottom Third

2-3 votes each



NBC, NBC Local, NYTimes, WaPo

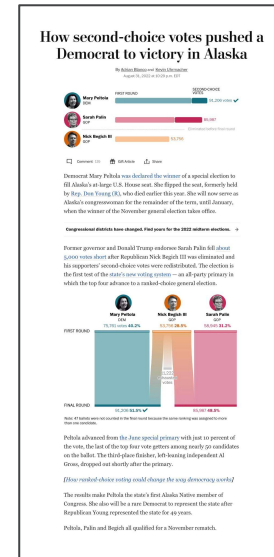
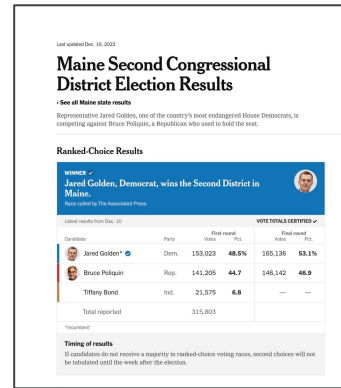
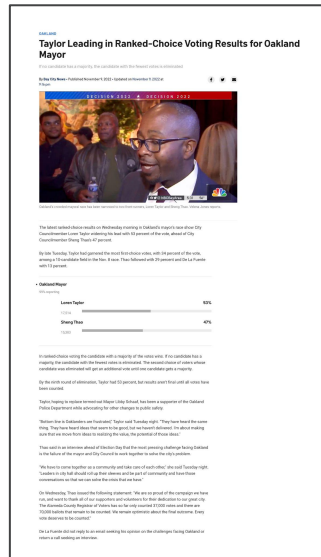
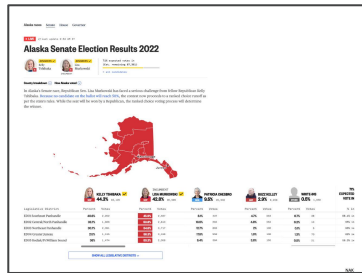
Politico, AK Beacon, WaPo

Ballotpedia, CCD, Anchorage Daily News

What we learned

Overall findings

The top 4 samples included pictures of the candidates



"I liked [it] because there's pictures of all the candidates, not just names. You see who's running"
 -FS01



People want their results displays to be “simple.” What do they mean?

Most participants described their favorite samples as “simple.”

These samples included a variation of percentages, checkmarks, and highlighting.

- In most cases, “simple” meant quick to read through.
- Some participants referred to percentages, checkmarks and highlighting to determine a winner/leader.
- Even in less popular samples, checkmarks were cited as simple elements within a complex layout.
- Most participants cited samples with many data sets as unnecessary, overly complex, and for academics.



Percentages provide clarity in different situations

Participants looked to percentages to learn who won, even if they were wrong.

- When asked how participants would explain results to a friend or family, percentages were mentioned as an element in the explanation.
- Some believed they were seeing a clear winner when results were not final determined
- Few were able to identify the round being shown or if the results were final.

“Look at the names, look at the pictures, the percentages and see who has the highest.” –EW07



Maps give context to understand the election

Most mentioned that a map helps them understand data

- In cases where a participant didn't like the article, the map was one element that they did like
- When there was no map of the jurisdiction, participants mentioned that a map would help them understand the results

"It is alright because there is a map, it shows the area" -EL01

"I didn't choose this in my top [choices] because there was nothing I could associate with. Some pictures. Like who's who, or who's on top, or a picture of Alaska" -EW07



Rounds important but not crucial to understanding election results

Most participants mentioned rounds in their reactions. Very few participants found rounds to be confusing or overwhelming

“For district 1 they could have put final round because that's what it is. If I'm seeing first and final for one but only first for the other I'm confused. Is it finished do they need a final round?” -EW01

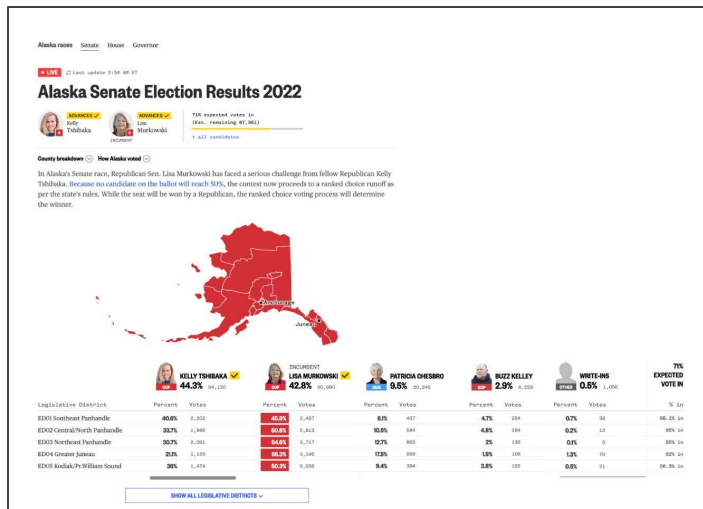
“They could have put a sentence in about what that means. That's not clear what that means.” -EW05



Findings by Article

NBC

AK Senate 2022 Interim results (72% in)



Most people had a difficult time identifying the leader

- Most people think Kelly won with the most votes
- Some people think Lisa won because of highlighted area
- Few participants say that Kelly and Lisa both advanced

This is simple because...


- People described the map as helpful to understanding results and statistics
- Picture of candidate's face connects percentages with candidate
- Percentages next to number of votes

NBC Local Oakland Mayor 2022 Interim results

Taylor Leading in Ranked-Choice Voting Results for Oakland Mayor

This candidate has a majority. The candidate with the highest votes is announced.

By Ray City News - Published November 8 2022 - Updated November 8 2022 at 9:40pm



Dakland's elected mayor has been determined to be Loretta Taylor and Sheng Thao. Video: Newsroom.

The latest ranked-choice results on Wednesday morning in Oakland's mayor's race show City Councilmember Loretta Taylor winning by lead with 53 percent of the vote, ahead of City Councilmember Sheng Thao at 47 percent.

By late Tuesday, Taylor had garnered the most first-choice votes, with 34 percent of the vote, among a 10-candidate field in the Nov. 8 race. That followed with 20 percent and De La Fuente with 13 percent.

• Oakland Mayor
Voting system:

Loretta Taylor	53%
12,214	
Sheng Thao	47%
11,800	

In ranked-choice voting, the candidate with a majority of the votes wins. If no candidate has a majority, the candidate with the lowest votes is eliminated. The second choice of voters whose candidate was eliminated will get an additional vote until one candidate gets a majority.

By the sixth round of elimination, Taylor had 53 percent, but results aren't final until all votes have been counted.

Taylor's longtime political mentor, Mayor Libby Schaaf, has been a supporter of the Oakland Police Department while advocating for other changes to public safety.

"Oakland has Oaklanders and Oaklanders are frustrated," Taylor said Tuesday night. "They have heard the same thing. They have heard ideas that aren't the good, but are needed delivered. The about making sure that we move from ideas to making the jobs, the potential of those ideas."

Thao said in an interview ahead of Election Day that the most pressing challenge facing Oakland is the future of the mayor and City Council to work together to solve the city's problem.

"We have to come together as a community and take care of each other," she said Tuesday night. "Oakland is city that should not get the blame and be part of community and have these conversations so that we can solve the crisis that we have."

On Wednesday, Thao issued the following statement: "We are so proud of the campaign we have run, and want to thank all of our supporters and volunteers for their leadership for good city. The Alameda County Registrar of Voters has so far only counted 27,000 votes and there are 20,000 ballots that remain to be counted. We remain optimistic about the fact that someone every vote deserves to be counted."

De La Fuente did not reply to an email seeking his opinion on the challenges facing Oakland or return a call seeking an interview.

People had no problems finding the leader

- Most people referred to the percentage. Some people referred to the header.
- *But, did people realize there were more than 2 candidates?*

"If they're only reporting on the results I think this is perfect. If you're just showing me results, I don't need too much else" –EW01

This is simple because...

- Combination of picture of candidate, bar graph, percentages, and number of votes.

Other comments

- One person pointed out the lack number of votes next to percentages would be helpful. It took the participant some time to realize that the number of votes were under the candidate names.



New York Times

ME 2nd Congressional Election 2022

Last updated Dec. 10, 2022

Maine Second Congressional District Election Results

◀ See all Maine state results

Representative Jared Golden, one of the country's most endangered House Democrats, is competing against Bruce Poliquin, a Republican who used to hold the seat.




Ranked-Choice Results

WINNER ✓

Jared Golden, Democrat, wins the Second District in Maine.

Race called by The Associated Press.

Latest results from Dec. 10

Candidate	Party	First round		Final round	
		Votes	Pct.	Votes	Pct.
 Jared Golden* 	Dem.	153,023	48.5%	165,136	53.1%
 Bruce Poliquin	Rep.	141,205	44.7	146,142	46.9
Tiffany Bond	Ind.	21,575	6.8	—	—
Total reported		315,803			

*Incumbent

Timing of results

If candidates do not receive a majority in ranked-choice voting races, second choices will not be tabulated until the week after the election.

All participants found the correct winner

- Majority of people found the winner by a combination of checkmarks, highlighted texts, and percentages.

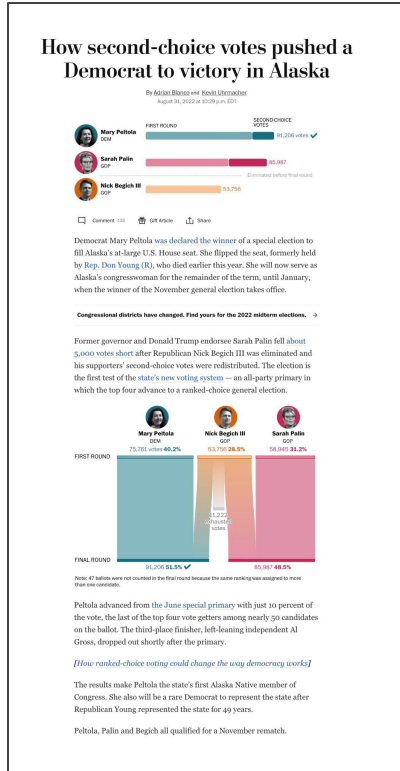
"If the point is to help the reader understand RCV, put that footnote in the bottom." –FS08

Other comments

- Some people mentioned wanting more information, like amount of transfer votes, map,



Washington Post AK Special Election 2022



All participants found the correct winner

- Participants cited pictures of candidates, percentages, colors and total vote numbers as clear indicators of the winner

This is simple because...

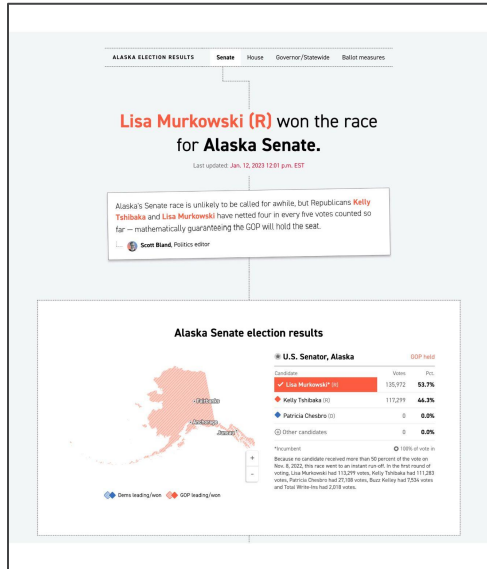
- Most people found this sample easy to understand, except for the Sankey diagram

"Sometimes it's too much graph, too many candidates that aren't even winning."

—FS07

Politico

AK Senate 2022



All participants found the correct winner

- Some people mentioned the checkmark and highlighting as indicators of a winner

This is simple because...

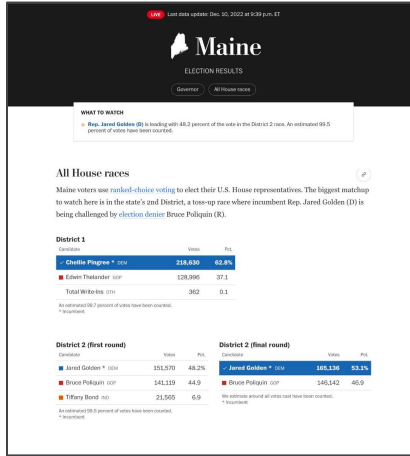
- Most people described this sample as easy to read, citing color and bolded text in title.

Other Comments

- Map added contexts to the election and statistics

"It's very surface level. Clearly answering the question I'm asking 'who won?' Everything is sound bites, conditioned as a society to read in pieces, articles should be the same. Everything should be to the point. If I want more, I'll go look at it." –FS06

Washington Post ME General Election 2022



District 1 doesn't
have round label
District 2 has two
round

All participants found the correct winner

- People identified the winner from looking at the percentages, highlighting, and term “final round”

This is simple because...

- Most people liked the map, highlighting, and check marks

Other Comments

- Confusion about two districts in two different rounds
- Some people felt that sample would be better if it included a graph and more information (how a candidate won, who is running for office)

Ballotpedia ME 2nd Congressional 2022

Maine's 2nd Congressional District election, 2022

Elections in Maine, 2022

Incumbent Rep. David Gohmert (R) defeated former Rep. Bruce Pollock (R) and Theryn Bond (R) in Maine's 2nd Congressional District on November 8, 2022. Gohmert defeated Pollock, then the incumbent, along with Bond and Bond in 2022. That was the first congressional race ever decided by runoff election in US; Gohmert defeated Pollock 50.6% to 49.4% after several close tabulations. Before Pollock, no incumbent had lost the district since 1908, and Gohmert won 77%.

To learn more about runoff election voting, which was also used in the 2022 election, see here.

Runoff election in US history The runoff election was the first time in US history. Gohmert, who had been the only House Democrat to vote against the 16th and 17th Amendments in 2021, showed the vote as "None Independent voter" for the district. Gohmert also highlighted his support for the 2021 runoff election and his support for the 16th and 17th Amendments in 2021. Gohmert also highlighted his support for the 16th and 17th Amendments in 2021.

Ballot map for the election Ballotpedia has a ballot map for the election. The map shows the location of the election and the location of the candidates. The map also shows the location of the candidates and the location of the candidates.

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Candidates and election results

General election

General election for U.S. House Maine District 2

Selected results:

Candidate	Party	Count	Percentage	Ballot
David Gohmert	R	163,126	50.6%	Win
Bruce Pollock	R	146,442	44.8%	2
Theryn Bond	R	0	0.0%	2

Democratic primary election

Democratic Primary for U.S. House Maine District 2

Candidate	Party	Count	Percentage	Ballot
David Gohmert	R	25,844	0	Advanced

Republican primary election

Republican Primary for U.S. House Maine District 2

Candidate	Party	Count	Percentage	Ballot
Bruce Pollock	R	23,149	0	Advanced
Elizabeth Carlson	R	14,999	0	1

Withdrawn or disqualified candidates

Democratic primary election

- Michael Guttman (R)

Republican primary election

- Daniel Dreyfus (R)
- Nancy Brown (R)
- Michael Peterson (R)

All participants found the correct winner

- highest percentage, number of votes, bolded

This is simple because...

- People had positive reactions to visuals even though sample wasn't a favorite.

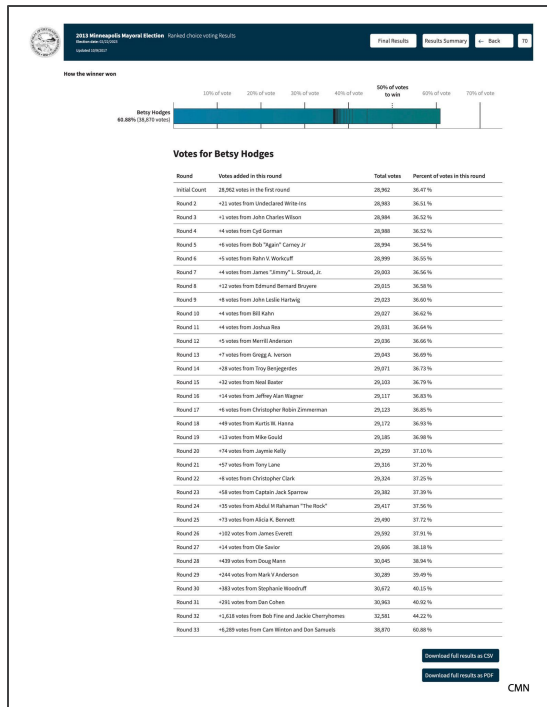
Other Comments

- Some people thought it was too much information

"I don't like this either too much detail for nothing"
-EW04

BME1

Center for Civic Design Minneapolis Mayor 2013



Most participants found the correct winner

- Candidate name, bar graph

Other Comments

- People described details as valuable, but for a specific audience
- Although most people identified the winner, they were confused by all the information

“Gives the detail of votes. for example if I voted for Tony, I know my vote was counted” –EL02



Anchorage Daily News AK General Election 2022

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2022 Alaska general election results

Alaskans voted in races for governor, U.S. Senate, U.S. House and 59 of 60 seats in the Alaska Legislature, and whether to call a constitutional convention.

By Anchorage Daily News | Updated December 1, 2022 | Published November 9, 2022

Updated Wednesday, Nov. 30, at 8:15 p.m.

...

In the Nov. 8 general election, Alaskans voted on races for governor, U.S. Senate, U.S. House and 59 of 60 seats in the Alaska Legislature. Voters also decided whether to call a constitutional convention, a question that appears on the ballot once every 10 years. This election was the second to use ranked choice voting under Alaska's 2022 election system, which was implemented this year.

Here are preliminary election results from the [Alaska Division of Elections](#).

Final election outcomes, including ranked-choice vote tabulations reflecting voters' second and third choices, were reported Nov. 23.

...

Ranked-choice results for Alaska U.S. Senator

Official results as of 2 p.m. Wednesday, November 30, 2022

Each column in this table is a round in ranked-choice voting. In each round, the candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated (in gray box), and their votes are reallocated to the remaining candidates. The left-most column shows first-choice votes, and the right-most column represents the last round.

X = Eliminated this round

Party	Candidate	First Choice	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3
R	Markenski, Lisa	43.37%	43.37%	44.40%	Apparent winner 53.67%
R	Tyrbuhka, Kelly C.	42.0%	42.64%	44.32%	46.32%
B	Chivers, Patricia M.	10.38%	10.74%	11.2%	X
R	Kelley, Burt A.	2.88%	3.25%	X	
H	Write-In	2.7%	X		

Source: Alaska Division of Elections - News Panel | Anchorage Daily News

...

Ranked-choice results for Alaska U.S. Representative

Uncertified results as of 4 p.m. Wednesday, November 23, 2022

Each column in this table is a round in ranked-choice voting. In each round, the candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated (in gray box), and their votes are reallocated to the remaining candidates. The left-most column shows first-choice votes, and the right-most column represents the last round.

X = Eliminated this round

Party	Candidate	First Choice	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3
D	Pelley, Mary S.	48.77%	48.64%	49.2%	Apparent winner 54.54%
R	Pelle, Sarah	25.74%	25.83%	26.32%	45.98%
R	Beagle, Nick	23.34%	23.64%	24.43%	X
L	Whe, Chris	3.73%	3.89%	X	
H	Write-In	4.2%	X		

Source: Alaska Division of Elections - News Panel | Anchorage Daily News

People had trouble identifying the apparent winner

- Participants were confused about the language “apparent winner”
- Apparent winners were not easy to find

“Tables make you do a lot of work” –FS08

Other Comments

- People would have liked to see a map or picture of candidates
- Tables were confusing and laborious for some
- Some participants dragged their index fingers through the table to better understand the data

Best practices

Updates, additions, and new questions
from testing

We confirmed some best practices as is

Best Practices

Clearly name that it is a RCV election.



Focus on the final round to convey who won the election, not who was ahead in 1st-choices.



Label the rounds in the data visualization.



Include both written and visual explanations.



When sharing 1st-round or interim results, use cautious language about the outcome like “in the lead”



We made updates to some best practices based on what we heard

Candidate Best Practices

Updated Best Practices from testing

First, share who won. This is most important for final results.

First, name the winner/leader in the article header.

Explain the counting process, so people know which how candidates are eliminated and what happens to those votes.

Explain the counting process, so people know which how candidates are eliminated and what happens to those votes.
Define RCV vocabulary like eliminated candidate, transferred votes, inactive ballots etc.

Use bar charts or simple tables.

Use bar charts or simple tables that **include both the percentage and vote totals so people can cross reference.**

Include inactive ballots in the results list.

Include inactive ballots in the results list **with a definition of inactive ballots.**

Show how many ballots are redistributed.

Show how many ballots are redistributed with a definition of **redistributed ballots.**



We identified some new best practices, including some things to not do

Candidate Best Practices

New Best Practices from testing

- | | |
|---|--|
| - | Many participants were interested in additional information about candidates. Link to additional information about the candidates. |
| - | Include candidate photos next to names. |
| - | Use color to differentiate between candidates OR to indicate the winner, not both. |
| - | Use color highlights, bold, and/or a checkmark to identify the winner. Do not use color highlights or checkmarks for candidates moving to the next round. |



We want to focus on a couple of our candidate best practices in the next round of testing

Candidate Best Practices

Don't use complex visualizations like Sankey diagrams in isolation.

Include and label all (available) rounds of counting.

Include a summary of how votes accumulated for the winner including redistributed votes.

When sharing 1st-round or interim results, include a status of the counting. Use a timeline, the number of ballots still to be processed, and/or when the full results are expected.

Updates from testing

If you use a map, pair it with other data visualizations. *We will look closer at this BP in R2 testing.*

When all rounds were included, participants felt overwhelmed by the amount of information. Some participants were confused about whether or not all rounds were included when the sample included "first round" and "final round". We will look closer at these BPs in R2 testing.

Few participants noticed the status of results. We will look closer at this BP in R2 testing.



Next Steps

What we want to learn from second round testing

We're going to design some results displays based on what we learned to test in the next round. We know that people want to know what happened to their ballot. So, we will give people a scenario of having picked a candidate that they then search for in the results display.

Closer look at:

- Results displays including more than 1 contest
- Visually communicating the status of results
- Relationship between the map and other data visualizations
- How many rounds are present in the data visualization
- Differences between tables and bar graphs



Round 2 Testing Plan

When end of March

Where One location per day:

- Bronx
- Brooklyn

Who Approximately 10 participants per location = 15–20 total

What

- Intercept sessions
- 10–15 minute sessions
- Testing static samples
- Materials will be in English



Next Steps

- **March 16** We will share more details about the next round of testing
- **March 20-21** Round 2 Testing
- **Week of April 3** Proposed next meeting



Thank you

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