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Alaska Electoral Reform:
The Top 4 Primary and Ranked-Choice-Voting

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Abstract

Why did Alaska develop a top 4, Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) system? This article explains the role a blanket primary played in the evolution of Alaska's nominating process, beset by demands of the rising Alaska Republican Party (ARP) to protect its rights as a political association while the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *California* v. *Jones* constrained states' interests.

In 2019-2020 reformers proposed a new system emphasizing a nonpartisan primary with RCV, which political party leaders opposed. Voters narrowly approved the ballot measure in the 2020 general election; it was used for the first time in a special election, and primaries in 2022 and the following general election. The most significant outcomes were the election of Mary Peltola, a Democrat (and Alaska Native) to the state's sole seat in the U.S. House of Representatives, and reelection of Republican Lisa Murkowski, senior U.S. senator, who defied former President Donald Trump.

The article presents information on major political party registrations, showing switching dominance (from Democratic to Republican). However, from 1970 to 2023, a majority of registrants were either nonpartisan or undeclared, a different pattern than found in the other states. The report compares Alaska's experience with those of other states using RCV, and concludes with a discussion of the broader implications of the Alaska case.

Introduction

In 2022, the Top 4 and Ranked-Choice-Voting (RCV) excited Alaskans and captured national attention. The new system benefitted mostly moderate candidates in statewide races who built coalitions of voters around median policy positions of the electorate. In the down ballot races following legislative redistricting, however, RCV benefitted some extreme candidates in same party races and less competitive districts.

Overall, changes adduced from the Top 4 primaries and RCV did not greatly affect the formation of governing coalitions (the organization of bipartisan coalitions is normal in Alaska politics). It is too early to say whether the reforms will reduce polarization of elected lawmakers, a phenomenon observed throughout the United States. On a positive note, the Alaska Division of Elections (ADOE) in the Lieutenant Governor's office prepared groups and the public well for the reforms, and monitored the electoral process carefully.

To clarify discussion at the start, I review definitions showing the variety of ways states organize electoral choice (see also National Council of State Legislatures [NCSL] 2020).

Major Kinds of Primary Elections and their Incidence

In the *closed primary* system, voters need to be registered in a party to participate in its primary election. For example, a person registered as Republican may vote only in the Republican primary, and at the polling station will receive a ballot listing only candidates seeking the Republican nomination. Voters who have not declared a party preference or registered as nonpartisan/undeclared (or Independent) may not vote in the primary election. Closed primaries also differ by degree. The most closed primaries are those requiring voters to be registered for 30 days or longer before the primary, and they may not change party registration during this period.

In a *partially closed primary*, only party members and voters registered as Independents (or nonpartisan/undeclared) may vote in a party primary. A semi-closed primary usually allows voters to change party registration as late as election day. This type is what Republicans in Alaska called the "classic closed."

In a *partially open primary*, political parties choose to allow the members of some, but not all, other parties, as well as voters who are registered as nonpartisan/undeclared/Independents to vote in their primary. Such primaries require voters to publicly request a party ballot. This system is less common than other types. In Alaska, it was used only briefly in the 2004 Democratic primary (Alaska Division of Elections[ADOE] 2021), which was open to all registered voters other than Republicans.

In an *open* primary system, voters do not need to be registered members of a party in order to vote in the party's primary. A person registered as a Republican may vote in the Democratic primary. Voters unaffiliated with any party may vote in the primary of any party on the ballot. Open primaries differ by degree. For example, the most open primary (called the "classic open primary") allows voters to decide in the voting booth which primary to vote in.

In the *blanket* primary system, all voters have a single ballot, which groups candidates of parties by office; voters may switch from one party to the next as they navigate the list of offices. For example, a voter may opt for a Democratic candidate for governor, a Republican candidate for U.S. representative, a Democratic candidate for state senator, irrespective of the voter's own party affiliation (or lack of party ID). Of the conventional party primaries this form is the most open, because it constrains voters less than any of the other kinds of primaries. Because this form is the least exclusive, in the 1960s and 1970s it was called the "free love" primary.

Outline of Sections

The first substantive section traces the evolution of the primary system through three stages. In the first stage, a non-voting delegate was seated in the House of Representatives (1906). The second stage covers the period from the late 1940s until the early 1990s, when mounting legal actions challenged the dominance of the blanket primary. The third stage focuses on the U.S. Supreme Court decision (*California Democratic Party* v. *Jones,* 2000*)*, which found the blanket primary unconstitutional on First Amendment grounds. The Republican Party of Alaska (RPA) then sought to close its primaries to all but registered Republicans, Independents, and

nonpartisan/undeclared voters. This contradicted the role of the ADOE in managing state elections.

Next, discussion briefly turns to the debate in 2019-2020 over electoral reform, which culminated in Ballot Measure #2 of the 2020 election. As expected, Republican and Democratic leaders opposed the reform, but a new group calling themselves Alaskans for Better Elections emphasized the need for more choices. Voters narrowly approved the Top 4 and RCV system. To some observers the change was transformative.

Two sections assess the outcomes of the Top 4 and RCV system. The first includes the special election to fill Alaska's sole seat in the U.S. House of Representatives, when long-serving Congressman Don Young expired on a return trip from DC to Alaska. It also includes primary races in the August primary for the House seat, one of Alaska's U.S. Senate seats (held by Lisa Murkowski), 59 of 60 seats in the Alaska Legislature (significantly affected by legislative redistricting following the 2020 Census), and the state governorship. The second section considers the campaigns from the August primary to the November 8, 2022 general election, and explains the wins for many centrist candidates and losses for more extreme candidates. Had RCV not been in effect, it is improbable that this would have occurred. The state senate organized as a large coalition immediately after votes were counted, while the house formed a narrower majority (dominated by Republicans) on the second day of the session.

The next section presents information on changes in major political party fortunes since statehood in 1959, in a graph showing the percentage of Democrats and Republicans in contrast to the percentage of nonpartisan and undeclared voters. Additionally, it considers electoral trends in the 2022 election year, which illustrate how representative some of the voters' choices were. This section compares Alaska's experience with those of other states having Top-2 and Top-4 primaries and RCV.

The article ends with a summary and conclusion, drawing out implications of the Alaska case for other regions using Top 4/5 primaries and RCV.

Evolution of The Alaska Primary System

Early History

When the U.S. purchased Alaska from Russia in 1867, the Congress managed its political affairs. In 1906, Congress enacted a law (34 Stat. 169) to provide for the election of a delegate (non-voting) from Alaska to be seated in the House of Representatives. The election process was "open." Eligible voters cast ballots for either of the candidates nominated by conventions of the Democratic and Republican parties. The primary law was used to elect delegates, attorneys general and to fill vacancies in the legislature. The governor was appointed by the U.S. President until statehood in 1959 (Alaska Office of the Governor, Division of Elections 2021).

The territorial legislature reached consensus to test public support for a blanket primary in a 1946 referendum. The proposition gained 78 percent of the vote, and this type lasted for a dozen years. Then the First Alaska State Legislature established a single ballot open primary in 1959. However, at the request of Governor Walter J. Hickel (R), legislators restored the blanket primary in 1967. This continued until 1992 when the Republican Party of Alaska (ARP)

emphasized its party rules as a private association, and the primary system changed from the blanket system to a partially closed system with two ballots.

The source of Alaska's electoral law was either federal or territorial law until the First Alaska Legislature (1959-60). It directed the Legislative Council to devise a comprehensive state election code for the legislature. The Legislative Council prepared a draft code, which became the basis of Alaska's elections in general and particular election procedures (Alaska Legislative Council 1956, 1960).

Legal Challenges to Blanket Primaries

The ARP led most of the attempts to invalidate the Alaska blanket primary. In 1990, following a statewide convention at which a change was made to party rules, the ARP sued to modify the blanket primary to a "classic closed" primary (*Doyle and ARP v. State)*. ADOE declined to make the change; the Alaska Democratic Party and Alaska Federation of Natives opposed the ARP request, arguing that it would harm minority voters in violation of the Voting Rights Act (VRA) of 1965 (Harrison 1991).

Two years later the ARP made its second challenge to the constitutionality of the blanket primary in federal district court (*Zawacki v. State*) (A92-414 CIV (D, Alaska 1992). The federal district court deferred to the U.S. Supreme Court *Tashjian* decision, establishing that political parties had associational rights. (See *Julia H. Tashjian, Secretary of State of Connecticut* v. *Republican Party of Connecticut et al.*[479 U.S. 208{1986}].) These appeared to have been violated in Alaska's statutorily mandated blanket primary. This resulted in Alaska returning to a partially-closed system with two ballots, one for Republican candidates (allowing only Republican and nonpartisan/undeclared voters) and the second open for all other party candidates and voters (Young 2001).

A number of cases at the state level indicated continued support for the blanket primary. For example, in 1992, a superior court asked the Alaska Supreme Court to weigh in on whether a lieutenant gubernatorial candidate (Jack Coghill), first running as the Republican Party candidate, could withdraw and accept another party's nominating petition (the Alaska Independence Party led by Walter J. Hickel) (*O'Callaghan v. State)*. The Supreme Court affirmed the lower court's decision. In another case directly challenging blanket primaries, Alaska Supreme Court Justice Matthews noted: "The State's interests in encouraging voter turnout, maximizing voters' choice among candidates, and ensuring that elected officials have relatively broad-based constituencies are served by the blanket primary statute" (McBeath 1994).

The U.S. Supreme Court case *Democratic Party, et al., v. Bill Jones, Secretary of State of California, et al.* was pivotal in the articulation of the ARP's contention that its party rule trumped state primary strictures. Justice Antonin Scalia wrote the majority opinion: The political association's right to exclude was more important than the state's candidate selection process, and for this reason, state interests had to be narrowly tailored. In Justice Scalia's view, none of the state interests were compelling. They could be exercised "without severely burdening a political party's First Amendment right of association" (*California Democratic Party* v. *Jones*).

Soon after the *Jones* decision, the ARP asked for a closed primary. The ADOE responded by creating emergency regulations, which returned to the partially closed primary system.

O'Callaghan again challenged the legality of the regulations, and his complaint was appealed to the Alaska Supreme Court, which made a multi-part decision. The court found no constitutionally significant difference between Alaska's primary election law and the California law that had been found unconstitutional. Thus, it had no choice but to rule that the blanket primary statute could not be sustained in light of *Jones* (*O'Callahan v. State, Director of Elections, 6 P.3d, 730*).

Partisan Challenges to the Alaska Division of Elections' (ADOE) Management of Elections

In the controversy over party-rule ballots versus the blanket primary, the ADOE had significant influence when it could determine whether preclearance requirements of the VRA had been met. But in 2013 the U.S. Supreme Court (SCOTUS) in a 5-4 vote declared that a section of the VRA was unconstitutional (Liptak, 2013), and the nine states including Alaska covered by it were free of its oversight. Section 4 of the VRA had established that minor or major changes to voting procedures needed to receive clearance from the Justice Department or a DC federal court. Section 5 set out the preclearance requirement (implemented by state election officials), but it is not likely that Congress will act to preserve it in the near term.

This left the ADOE with three functions—determining members of political parties, regulating primaries and general elections, and managing voting. The strongest objections to these purposes came from the ARP, but the Democrats and minor parties fought ADOE regulations as well.

Alaska's Twenty-Second Legislature specified in 2001 (HB 193) that a primary election ballot needed to be submitted for each political party. From 2006 to 2016, voters were given a choice of three ballots; the ARP elected to have only Republican candidates on its primary ballot and only those voters registered Republican, nonpartisan or undeclared. The Alaska Democratic Party, the Libertarians, Alaska Independence, and the Green Party agreed to be on a combined party ballot available to all registered voters. The third ballot included only ballot measures for voters disinclined to vote for any candidates, and available to all registered voters. From 2008 to 2016, the ARP called its ballot the Republican Candidate and Ballot Measures ballot.

After 2016, the Alaska Republican Party took its firmest position: It set rules for membership— people who supported the political program of the party—and decided who could appear on the ballot as an ARP candidate. The catalyst was three Republican incumbents (Paul Seaton, Gabrielle LeDoux, and Louise Stutes) who joined a Democratic Party-led coalition in the House of Representatives, when Republicans had a majority of the seats after the 2016 election and could have controlled the body without Democrats. Party chair Tuckerman Babcock referred to the April 2016 ARP state convention, which adopted the rule: "No person may use the word Republican on any ballot or in any campaign as part of a description of himself as a candidate unless that person is an ARP candidate, selected according to ARP Rules." The memo continued: "There can be no more clear act to separate from our Party than to act in a manner that places the opposition party in power and advances the opposition party agenda. It is a complete absurdity to argue that the State has a superior interest in forcing the ARP to permit such turncoats to seek the nomination of the Alaska Republican Party" (Babcock 2016).

The Director of the Division of Elections, Josie Bahnke, took a limited view of state courts' ruling that a subsection of Alaska's candidate eligibility statute was unconstitutional. She disagreed with Chairman Babcock's analysis that ADOE was obliged to implement the ARP

leaders' wish that objectionable party members be excluded from the primary election, remarking: "But nothing in . . . (judicial rulings) creates a new right for party leadership to eliminate candidate choices for the party's voters" (Bahnke 2018). Her decision was to allow any eligible Republican who filed a timely declaration of candidacy to appear on the ballot.

In early 2018, the Alaska Republican Party was preparing to sue ADOE for its failure to implement party rules. However, the ARP did not meet an early May 2018 deadline for filing a challenge. The stated reason was that "senior party officials" considered the costs of instituting litigation. Realizing that it would divert funds from candidates and campaigns, the party did not contest the state's decision (Stone 2020). A major diversion was the 2018 race for governorship, as scandal beset Lieutenant Governor Mallott, weakening significantly the re-election prospects of Bill Walker, and opening opportunities for Mike Dunleavy, the conservative Republican candidate. ARP chair Tuckerman Babcock dedicated party resources to support Dunleavy, and became chair of the transition team once Dunleavy was elected. He continued to serve as chief-of-staff until early 2019.

Although party leaders dropped their suit against ADOE, they left no doubt that the three incumbents would receive no central party support and would encounter opposition in the primary and general elections of 2018. Actions (and threats) of party leaders changed the outcome in Rep. Paul Seaton's district in Homer. As a member of the House coalition he had advocated for a state income tax, and decided to avoid the Republican primary and run as a nonpartisan in the "all-other" primary. In the general election Seaton faced Sarah Vance, the Republican candidate who had never held office (but had led a successful recall campaign against city council members). She campaigned to protect the Alaska Permanent Fund among other popular stances and won 58.5 percent of the vote (Pacer 2018).

On primary election eve in 2018 LeDoux (East Anchorage) trailed behind a newcomer who had raised no money for the race and had not campaigned against her. She established a lead when absentee and early ballots were counted, but the ADOE reported irregularities among absentee ballots, and the Republican party allegedly considered a write-in campaign against her in the general election (Landfield 2018). LeDoux denied the allegations against her, and in the general election rolled to victory with 67 percent of the vote, but the charges of illegality dogged her (Brooks 2022). She was badly beaten in the August 2020 primary.

Louise Stutes (Kodiak, Cordova) also faced a strong candidate in the 2018 primary, but she won 55 percent of the vote. She went on to garner 54 percent of the ballots in the three-way race of the general election, beating a Democrat and nonpartisan candidate (Bauman 2018). Of the three, Stutes resisted ARP attacks most skillfully. She was unopposed in both primary and general elections of 2020, and broke a deadlock in organizing the House by serving as Speaker for the 32nd legislature.

The strategy called "primarying" required party leaders to find strong opponents to targeted incumbents believed to be disobedient to party rules and disloyal. Party leaders denied them financial assistance and vital information on changes in their districts. Of course, some Republican incumbents faced primary opposition from forces within the party, but it was for reasons, such as differences in policy and ideology.

Debate Over Electoral Reform

Before the major reform initiative of 2020, Alaska operated a hybrid system with the Republican primary run as a partially-closed (classic closed) primary, in which only Republican, nonpartisan and undeclared voters could vote. The other was called "The Alaska Democratic and Alaskan Independence Candidate" ballot, a combined ballot, in which voters regardless of registration—including Republicans—could vote for the candidates of the two parties (ADOE 2020). (The Alaska Libertarian Party no longer appeared on the ballot as its numbers had dropped below the 3 percent statutory limit, as had occurred earlier for the Alaska Green Party.)

The 2020 election season occurred during the national Covid-19 pandemic, with federal, state, and local limitations on gatherings including political events. It was a presidential election year, which typically boosts turnout. President Donald Trump's popularity had fallen with the onset of Covid, yet turnout of military voters was high because of bold policies of the Trump administration (e.g., relaxation of tensions with North Korea, aggressive U.S. positions on trade issues with China). Also affecting turnout was Ballot Measure #1, which proposed a rollback of the state's oil tax credit system, arousing organized opposition from the oil/gas industry and business leadership.

A second ballot measure followed a different pattern. It used the initiative process to solve problems the legislature was unlikely to tackle, such as lack of competitiveness in elections. Ballot Measure #2 asked voters to approve a top-four primary system for state and federal elections including Ranked-Choice-Voting (RCV), among other reforms. The measure read:

> This act would get rid of the party primary system, and political parties would no longer select their candidates to appear on the general election ballot. Instead, this act would create an open nonpartisan primary where all candidates would appear on one ballot. Candidates could choose to have a political party preference listed next to their name or be listed as "undeclared" or "nonpartisan." The four candidates with the most votes in the primary election would have their names placed on the general election ballot (Sbano 2020).

Reform advocates argued that it would increase competition in electoral contests, offer voters more choices, and increase the representativeness of candidates, and avoid splitting of votes (a situation arising when viable candidates fail to gain a place on the general election ballot).

Marshalling support for the initiative was reform leader Scott Kendall, a lawyer who had been chief-of-staff for former Governor Bill Walker. Co-chairs of Alaskans for Better Elections (ABE) were Bonnie Jack (a member of Alaskans for Integrity) and Bruce Botelho (former Alaska AG and Mayor of Juneau). Their campaign emphasized two points: First, top four primaries were more competitive because non-partisan/undeclared, and third-party candidates could move to the general election ballot more easily than in standard open primaries. Voters would then have more choice (options in addition to major party candidates). Second, top-four primaries reduced the influence of primary voters (who tended to be more extreme in their stances and ideologies) as compared to general election voters, a larger number, who were more representative of the general population (McGuire 2020). A significant part of the funding for the ABE came from sources outside Alaska.

As might be expected, opponents of the proposed reform were Republican and Democratic party leaders. Indeed, the Statement in Opposition to Ballot Measure 2 that appeared in the Official Election Pamphlet, was co-authored by former U.S. Senator Mark Begich (a Democrat) and former Republican Governor of Alaska, Sean Parnell (ADOE 2020a). Opponents of the proposed reform thought that none of its supposed advantages would materialize. Instead, they argued that proposed changes would weaken political parties, resulting in a "jungle primary" (in which every candidate looked to his/her own interest, without regard to partisan loyalties) (ADOE 2020b). They implied that the proposed reform would reduce turnout at primaries.

The vote on Ballot Measure 2 was close. Some 174,032 of those voting in the November 3, 2020 general election voted "yes" (50.55 percent), and 170,251 voted "no" (49.45 percent)—a spread of less than 4,000 votes. Within a month of the election, the Alaska Independence Party, Scott Kohlhass, Robert M. Bird, and Kenneth P. Jacobus sued to enjoin the use of the new primary and general election system in the 2022 elections, alleging they were unconstitutional. The plaintiffs contended that the top-four primary and RCV violated the First and Fourteenth Amendments of the U.S. Constitution and Article I of the Alaska Constitution.

Alaska Superior Court Judge Gregory Miller upheld the constitutionality of the Ballot Measure based on the U.S. Supreme Court's decision (written by Justice Clarence Thomas) in *Washington State Grange v. Washington State Republican Party (2008)*, which says, "(S)tates have the right to adopt various election methods, that 'freedom to associate' carries with it the equal right to not associate, and that political parties do not have the constitutional right to force states to run the parties' nominating process" (Ballotpedia 2020). (From the perspective of the Supreme Court majority, the "l-852" initiative did not severely burden associational rights, and the top-two primary could move forward.) Overall, Judge Miller concluded that the plaintiffs had not met the burden of showing that any part of the new law was facially unconstitutional. His decision was appealed to the Alaska supreme court, which affirmed Miller's ruling on July 29, 2021 (Ballotpedia 2021).

As noted below, voters and pundits alike initially were confused about how the reform would work and whether it would last. Yet the design of the Alaska system sets it apart from that used elsewhere. RCV is used in more than two dozen municipalities, including large cities such as New York City and San Francisco, but it has not yet been proposed for any Alaska municipality. Six states use RCV for military ballots (Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia and South Carolina), but this too does not apply to the situation in Alaska where military ballots are combined with all others. Three states use RCV for the Democratic Party presidential primary (Colorado, Nevada, Nebraska), but in Alaska it is used for all parties and groups.

Outcomes of Top 4 Primaries, 2022

Although several states (and more than 20 local governments) apply some provisions of the RCV system, Alaska was the first state to use a top-four primary system for both state and federal elections (Sbano 2020; see also Singer 2020, and Bohrer 2022a). This section considers the special election to fill Alaska's sole seat in the U.S. House of Representatives and the races in the August 16th primary for the House seat. It also includes the race for Alaska's senior U.S. Senate seat (held by Lisa Murkowski). Too, 59 of 60 seats in the Alaska Legislature and the state governorship are covered.

Congressman Don Young was the longest-serving member (and thus "Dean") of the House. He competed against Nick Begich in the 1972 race but lost even though the incumbent's plane crashed before the election. He won a special election called in 1973 and held the seat until March, 2022, when he had a heart attack on a return flight to Alaska from DC. Governor Dunleavy issued a proclamation shortly thereafter, announcing a special primary election on June 11th for a term ending in January 2023. The general election using new rules would be on August 16th. However, the 16th of August was the official date of the Alaska primary, so on one side of the ballot voters picked the "top-four" for each office—including the Alaska seat in the House of Representatives—while on the other side they voted in the RCV election. Many voters were confused.

Alaskans were surprised at the large number of candidates who filed for the special primary—51 at the outset, dropping to 48 by the time of the primary. They were amused at some, such as Santa Claus (a member of the North Pole city council who had his name changed to fit the town's theme) and wondered about the practicality of others, such as the Lady Donna Dutchess. Nearly a dozen had political experience at the state or local levels, the most notable of whom was former governor and 2008 vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin. An interesting twist was the first venture into politics of Nick Begich's grandson, Nick Begich III, the millionaire operator of a successful software company. Two months before the special election, political influencers helped shape the race. Former President Donald Trump endorsed Sarah Palin (as she had endorsed him in 2016 when he was behind on the campaign trail), and this gained her first place in the primary. The ARP endorsed Nick Begich III and he gained 30,000 votes, second largest in the primary. Al Gross, an orthopedic surgeon whose father was AG in the Hammond administration, and who had been handsomely-funded by Democratic donors when he ran against Dan Sullivan for the U.S. Senate seat in 2020 also filed for the open seat. He ran as an independent candidate, and won 20,000 votes (scoring third). Ten days after the primary he withdrew, saying "(I)t is just too hard to run as a nonpartisan candidate" (Bohrer 2020b). Earlier he had told Democratic party leaders that he would not necessarily caucus with the Democrats if elected, and the lack of loyalty (and a lackluster performance in 2020) caused the ADP to favor Mary Peltola, the fourth-ranked candidate. Peltola is an Alaska Native who had served in the state house 10 years representing Bethel (and heading the Bush caucus). She was a commercial fisherman and strong supporter of the industry, but she also took supportive stances on oil/gas and some mining issues.

Mary Peltola won a plurality of votes for the RCV part of the election, followed by Sarah Palin, and Nick Begich III. Al Gross withdrew from the race too close to the election to allow the fifth-place finisher (Tara Sweeney, also an Alaska Native who had served as assistant secretary of Indian Affairs in the Interior Department during the Trump administration) to move up, but she had less than 2 percent of the vote. This left just three candidates for the ranked-choice part of the new system, which was announced on August 31st and certified on September 2. In the "regular" primary, the alignment of candidates was similar, with Peltola first, followed by Palin and Begich. Tara Sweeney was in a distant fourth place, but announced her withdrawal from the race (because, she reasoned, her campaign finances would not support a costly contest against much better-known candidates). This withdrawal left enough time for the fifth-ranked person, Chris Bye, a Libertarian candidate from Fairbanks, to join the top-four (Samuels 2020c). As

winner, Mary Peltola gained name recognition nationally and her fundraising prospects skyrocketed. But Sarah Palin showed no signs of powering down her campaign and aimed to collect votes in the November election from Begich supporters.

Alaska's Senior U.S. Senate Seat

The second federal race in Alaska was that of incumbent senator Lisa Murkowski, one of the few remaining moderates in the Senate. She earned the ire of former president Trump when she voted to convict him in his second impeachment trial in the Senate after the January 6th (2021) attack. Trump pledged to have her defeated at the polls when she came up for re-election, and enthusiastically supported and endorsed Murkowski's main opponent, Kelly Tshibaka. Republican party leaders who disliked Murkowski as much as Trump did even set up a Republican Purity Committee to purge her from party membership. They asserted that to have one's name on the ballot as a Republican required being certified by the ARP steering committee as a member. (This ruse violated state law, which left candidates in charge of their ballot designation [Cole 2022].)

Although Tshibaka was born in Alaska, she went Outside for higher education (including a law degree at Harvard) and worked in DC as chief data officer in the U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General and as acting Inspector General of the Federal Trade Commission. She returned to Alaska to serve in Governor Dunleavy's cabinet as Commissioner of Administration. The third candidate was Democrat Pat Chesbro, a retired school teacher and union representative. The fourth candidate was a retired mechanic from Palmer, Buzz Kelley (Samuels 2022b). Most pundits suspected he won 3,450 votes because uninformed voters thought he was Kelly Tshibaka.

In the primary, Murkowski led with 47 percent of the vote, Kelly Tshibaka followed with 39 percent, Chesbro with 6.2 percent, and Kelley less than 2 percent. Because winning the seat required 50 percent plus 1 vote, this race continued to the general election.

The Alaska Legislature

In the August 16th primary, 59 of the 60 legislative seats were contested, and they produced interesting results. Because the state capital Juneau is some distance from where most Alaskans live (and not connected by the road system), turnover rates are higher than in most other state legislatures. Also, 2022 was the first year for the actions of redistricting to have an effect. The Reapportionment Board had three Republican members (John Binkley, chair, Bethany Marcum and Budd Simpson) and two Native Alaskans (Melanie Bahnke and Nicole Borromeo, undeclared voters). Nearly all redistricting in state history lands in court because of alleged violations of state constitution strictures on compactness, contiguity and common socio-economic interests of new boundaries. The board unanimously approved the House map, and the lower court and Alaska Supreme Court made only minor changes to it (Buxton 2021). However, Bahnke and Borromeo strongly opposed the plan for Senate districts in Anchorage, and urged lawsuits against it. The Supreme Court agreed with the minority, calling the proposal "an unconstitutional political gerrymander violating equal protection under the Alaska Constitution" (Brooks 2022a).

The revised redistricting plan was not ready for candidates until after the primary, which resulted in 11 candidates withdrawing from the general election ballot. Most of the candidates who dropped out faced insuperable odds because of new boundaries (Maguire 2022), which made those races overall less competitive. Compared to races in partially-closed or open races previously, there were more same party races in the primaries; but also, there were more races populated by minor party (such as Alaska Independence) or nonpartisan candidates.

The objective of Republican conservatives in the primary was to send to Juneau representatives who would support initiatives of the Dunleavy administration. First in importance was economic benefits from the Alaska Permanent Fund (PF) (a state rainy day account that since 1982 has issued annual "dividends" to eligible Alaskans). Other Dunleavy proposals included stopping "federal overreach" of the Biden administration, facilitating development of natural resources (including mining), and protecting "family" social values (e.g., opposition to abortion, same-sex marriage, etc.). In the 2020-21 legislative session, although there were 21 Republicans in the house, the majority coalition was led by Democrats (including 3 Republicans and 1 Independent). In the state senate three-quarters of the seats were held by Republicans, but a narrow majority opposed the governor's plan for full PF dividends and unrestrained spending of PF earnings reserves.

The Gubernatorial Election

Following his election in 2018, Governor Dunleavy made a series of decisions which antagonized large swaths of the Alaska public—K-12 school teachers, the state university faculty, labor union members, low-income people, and interests such as the state ferry system (which an early economic advisor said should be closed). A recall movement began, rapidly collecting enough signatures to be put on the ballot, but was delayed because of the pandemic (and very aggressive counter-measures of the governor's friends and allies). Retirement of chief-of-staff Babcock and his replacement by Ben Stevens (son of former U.S. Senator Ted Stevens) restored some credibility to the office in 2019. Timing helped Dunleavy: first the Covid-19 epidemic, and then the sharp jump in oil prices of 2021-2022, which greatly enlarged state profits. Thus, the re-election campaign became Dunleavy's race to lose.

Three leaders challenged Dunleavey. Former governor Bill Walker, a moderate Republican; Les Gara (a Democrat and veteran Anchorage member of the state house), and Charlie Pierce, Republican, Kenai Peninsula Borough Mayor. Each gubernatorial candidate selected a female running mate to add gender balance and some regional balance to the ticket. The results of the primary placed Dunleavy with 40 percent of the vote, Walker and Gara with around 23 percent each, and Pierce with about 7 percent, all numbers that were expected to change in the general election. Dunleavy's prospects darkened somewhat when opponents filed an ethics complaint with the Alaska Public Offices Commission (APOC), alleging that his campaign had coordinated with an independent expenditure group planning to donate $3 million to his reelection. The complaint also charged him with "improperly subsidizing his campaign with public resources" by having state staff volunteer their time on campaign work (Samuels 2022e).

RCV and Outcomes of the 2022 General Election

This section assesses the campaign from the August primary to the November 8, 2022 general election. It explains the wins for many centrist candidates and losses for more extreme

candidates, with a focus on the Trump factor in the elections. It also considers whether RCV had a discernible impact on organizing the two houses of the state legislature.

House of Representative Seat

Now the incumbent of the Alaska seat in the U.S. House of Representatives, Mary Peltola acted out her promise to represent all Alaskans, including Republicans. She ensured continuity by retaining former Representative Young's chief of staff and other staff members (Rogerson and Samuels 2022d). She broadly invited constituents to visit her for the swearing-in ceremony. Among her first votes was to celebrate the first anniversary of the Infrastructure Renewal Act (IRA), but she also took votes of principle (opposing President Biden's request that Congress prohibit a railroad workers' strike). She garnered contributions large and small from lobbying organizations, dwarfing funds available to her competitors. As of October 19, she had "receipts" of $5.8 million compared to $1.7 for Sara Palin and $1.6 for Nicholas Begich [Ballotpedia, 2022]. When all the ballots were counted, she had nearly 49 percent, and claimed the full 2-year term with a final total of 55 percent of the vote.

Contender Sarah Palin left the state for several weeks of the campaign, assisting other conservative Republican candidates in Arizona among other places. Much of her campaign in-state was a replay of her role as attack dog for John McCain in the 2008 presidential election, with frequent mentions of "Drill, baby, drill." She had complaints with the Biden administration's purported socialist leanings, and federal overreach that frustrated development of Alaska's resources. As former President Trump's champion in Alaska, she reiterated his charge that RCV was created to steal the 2022 election from Republicans. Her campaign rhetoric emphasized "Vote the Red," but she continued to snipe at fellow Republicans in the race. Fundraising was problematic for Palin, notwithstanding Trump's endorsement. She still won 45 percent of the vote after Nick Begich and Chris Bye were eliminated.

Candidate Nick Begich III took extremely conservative positions on issues such as abortion, crime control, and homelessness, but moderated them somewhat with live audiences. Like Palin, he had agreed to a "Vote the Red" pledge, but lashed out at Palin repeatedly during the campaign. He was endorsed by one union, but lost the support of the state Republican party after Trump endorsed Palin. His campaign was largely self-financed. His third-place ranking was based on more than 64,000 votes, or 24.5 percent.

The final candidate, Alaska Libertarian Chris Bye, did not campaign, nor did he raise money; his vote tally was less than 2 percent.

U.S. Senate Seat

Lisa Murkowski, as the senior incumbent senator, took full advantage of her office and official responsibilities. She curbed her campaign time in Alaska and, in the Senate, reminded reporters that she was one of the few Republicans voting for the IRA. After the U.S. Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade, she worked with a coalition of legislators to ensure that pregnant women would have assistance through the Department of Health & Human Services (DHHS)--a courageous action for a Catholic. She also publicly endorsed Mary Peltola for the House seat. Murkowski began the campaign with a balance of nearly $2 million, which she tripled during the campaign. Minority Leader Mitch McConnell used the Senate Leadership Fund to direct millions

in attack ads at Murkowski's main opponent (Open Secrets 2022), which cost the senator hundreds of votes when the opponent charged her with double-dealing. Although in the primary election Lisa Murkowski outpolled Kelly Tshibaka, in the general election, initially, she was behind, but with the engagement of RCV quickly moved ahead. After ranked-choice votes were tabulated, Murkowski had 53.7 percent of votes, ahead of Tshibaka's 46.3 percent (Samuels 2022f).

Contender Kelly Tshibaka developed credibility problems as her general election campaign unfolded. While she reveled in former President Trump's endorsement, she stretched the truth: saying she had been homeless while she had been camping out with her parents; remarking that she had never violated personnel rules when she had not worked several hundred hours she had billed federal agencies. Her center-right positions opposed to abortion, LGBTQIA+ communities, and welfare-recipients seemed narrow. Also, many Alaskans did not believe that "God had told her" to run for the Senate or that she could speak in tongues. Some observers, however, found her easier to empathize with the more time they spent with her. The Trump connection initially cost her a gate fee at the Mar-o-Lago resort of $40,000, but the former president's hosting of an Anchorage rally in her honor brought in thousands of dollars. Nevertheless, Murkowski's experience in office and ability to deliver constituent services won her 2,016 more votes than Tshibaka on the first ranking. The fourth-ranked candidate, Buzz Kelly, had withdrawn from the race before the finish and endorsed Tshibaka, but less than 3 percent of the votes went to him before his elimination in the first ranking.

Pat Chesbro developed a calm, thoughtful campaign, and was unafraid to take liberal positions on relevant issues. Her first-rank votes totaled 10 percent. She did not formally urge her supporters to support Murkowski, but about two-thirds of those who made a second choice listed Murkowski.

Gubernatorial Election

Mike Dunleavy used incumbency in a different way than Peltola or Murkowski. He attended a number of events outside Alaska allowing him to burnish his conservative credentials, such as participating in the Conservative Political Action Committee (bolstering fossil fuel production) while being celebrated by the Conservatives for a Clean Energy Future as a "clean energy champion." His opponents castigated him for being missing-in-action for multiple campaign events. Campaign rhetoric emphasized positive actions he had taken as governor, such as (in the Trump administration) expanding oil/gas leasing in the area of federal land west of the Alpine field, and removing restrictions on a natural gas pipeline from the North Slope to tidewater. (He was endorsed by the former president on the condition that he not support Lisa Murkowski's reelection.) Because restrictions on large money contributions to campaigns had been lifted, Dunleavy benefitted from a $100,000 donation from Kenai land developer Bob Penney and $500,000 from his brother, financier Francis Dunleavy. When all the ballots had been counted, Dunleavy was the only incumbent to have topped 51 percent, winning the election before contenders had been ranked. Ethics and other complaints made little difference in this race.

The second and third contenders, Les Gara and Bill Walker, ran their campaigns in tandem (as did their lieutenant governor candidates). Gara took liberal Democratic positions consistently, and critiqued the Dunleavy administration for its over-reliance on oil/gas revenue, disinclination to assess any new tax (even an increase in the small fuel tax), and its continued hostility to

institutions of government and their programs, such as in health and safety. Like Pat Chesbro, he critiqued Dunleavy's refusal to expand the Medicaid program, most of the cost of which would be borne by the federal government. Gara took nearly 24 percent of the first ranked votes, putting him in second place. Walker fared less well, in third place with 20 percent. As a governor who had made tough decisions, such as declining to distribute "full" Permanent Fund Dividends when oil prices tanked, he was punished by the voters. Both campaigned against Dunleavy's plan to embed the PF dividends in the Alaska Constitution. The last in the contest was Charlie Pierce with less than 5 percent. More than one female staff member of the Kenai borough had charged Pierce with sexual harassment, and he withdrew before election day, asking his supporters to vote for Dunleavy.

The Alaska Legislature

In both House and Senate races, centrist candidates outperformed conservative Republicans. For example, in the House, an Alaska Independence Party candidate, Tyler Ivanoff, challenged Democrat Neal Foster, a veteran legislator, with Foster edging out his competitor. In Kodiak and Cordova, Rep. Louise Stutes, a Republican, won 58 percent of the vote against a more conservative Republican challenger. Nonpartisan and independent candidates also defeated partisan rivals. In Ketchikan's House District 1, Rep. Dan Ortiz, a nonpartisan incumbent, led his Republican challenger by several points.

In the Senate, Republican Tuckerman Babcock ran for Senate District D, but lost outright to a more moderate (and less controversial) challenger, Jesse Bjorkman. In south Anchorage's Senate District E, Cathy Giessel, a moderate Republican, defeated Sen. Roger Holland, a conservative Republican who had beaten her two years previously (Bradner 2022).

This is not to suggest that conservatives failed to win any races. In Wasilla's House District 27, Republican incumbent David Eastman defeated two challengers, Stu Graham and Brendan Carpenter, both of whom were Republican. Eastman is a West Point graduate who lacked support from moderates because of what some perceived as obstructionist tactics. He is a member of Oath Keepers and was in DC at the time of the January 6th (2021) attack, but said he did not enter or approach the Capitol. His membership was challenged in court as making him ineligible to serve in the legislature under the insurrection clause of the Alaska Constitution. Alaska Superior Court Judge McKenna ruled that Eastman "did not have a specific intent to further the Oath Keepers' unprotected speech or conduct" (Samuels 2023); he lifted the order blocking elections officials from certifying Eastman as the winner of his state House race (Associated Press 2023)

In late November, 2022, Democrats and Republicans formed a bipartisan coalition in the Alaska Senate shortly before results of the general election were certified. The coalition included 9 Democrats and 8 Republicans, leaving out 3 center-right Republicans as the minority. The President of the Senate for the 33rd Alaska Legislature, Gary Stevens, commented: "Like past bipartisan organizations, we will be working in the middle—not the far-left or the far-right issues. . . . Nothing will happen without 11 members of this caucus agreeing that someone would go to the floor" (Samuels 2022g).

In the previous two legislative sessions, the House had not organized until weeks into the session. In 2023, however, the House elected a Speaker on the second day, forming a majority

composed of 19 Republicans, two Democrats and two independents. Unlike the center-left coalitions of the previous six years, this was a center-right majority, whose non-Republicans were the four-member Bush Caucus (representing Alaska Native rural areas of the state). Initially two Republicans stood apart from both majority and minority caucuses. Former Speaker Louise Stutes was "just out on my own," while David Eastman declined to participate in a coalition with Democrats. The new Speaker, Cathy Tilton (from Wasilla) mentioned the need to address Alaska's fiscal situation including a possible cap on state spending. Conflicting visions of the two houses seemed likely (Samuels & Maguire 2023).

Patterns and Lessons

Three factors help explain Alaska election reform: changing party fortunes, rules of party registration, and party ideologies and politics. I discuss each in turn, followed by a comparison of Alaska's top-four primary and RCV system with that of other states.

Changing Party Fortunes

When Alaska entered the union, Democrats controlled most state offices; in 2023 it is considered among the most "red (Republican)" states. Changes in party majority influence attitudes toward the openness of primaries. The state has experienced several different episodes of the blanket primary system. When at statehood Democrats were the majority party, they opposed the most open form of primary, fearing it would erode party discipline and loyalty and give advantages to Republicans (who might cross party lines in the primary to nominate the weakest Democratic candidate). Early on, the minority Republican Party supported the blanket primary, believing their candidates would be able to attract support of conservative Democrats and independent voters. Upon the elimination of the blanket primary, Republican leaders were also angered by the tendency of some party legislators to join Democratic-led coalitions, which diluted party loyalty and discipline. Over time, several positions of the parties altered because of changes in demography and economy. National changes too (e.g., rising prominence of gun rights and the environmental movement) made it easier for Republicans to win elections.

Rules of Party Registration

Alaska has had fewer strong political party organizations than other states, not only because it is sparsely populated but also because it has fewer economic interests. Virtually every other state has a developed agricultural industry and some type of manufacturing industry; Alaska has neither, and thus lacks robust farmers' organizations and private-sector labor unions. The hard facts of eking a living from the unforgiving weather and climate in most regions of the state, combined with the mythology of the Last Frontier, give prominence to individualism. When legislators developed a party registration system (and Alaska was one of the last states to do so), they were reluctant to require voters to identify with a political party, and most did not state a preference, when given the option to do so. Consistently in recent decades nonpartisan and undeclared voters have been the overall majority, as noted in Table 1:

Table 1—Voter registration with political parties and groups in Alaska (1970-2022)

Year	Total	Democrat	Republican	Nonpartisan/ Undeclared	Other

1970	111,734	29.1%	17.1%	52.5%	1.3%
1972	148,960	28.9%	16.5%	53.1%	1.5%
1974	169,350	29.0%	15.6%	53.7%	1.7%
1976	209,757	29.1%	15.2%	53.4%	2.3%
1978	237,925	29.2%	15.1%	54.0%	2.7%
1980	259,423	26.6%	16.5%	53.8%	3.1%
1982	270,513	24.1%	17.9%	54.6%	3.4%
1984	307,929	23.6%	20.1%	53.1%	3.2%
1986	293,788	22.3%	21.1%	53.7%	2.9%
1988	296,701	20.4%	20.7%	55.9%	3.0%
1990	300,483	19.3%	21.0%	56.2%	3.5%
1992	322,058	18.6%	22.0%	54.0%	5.4%
1994	325,260	18.2%	22.6%	53.1%	6.1%
1996	416,999	16.9%	24.6%	52.7%	5.8%
1998	456,914	16.7%	24.7%	52.0%	6.6%
2000	475,157	16.2%	24.6%	51.2%	8.0%
2002	462,265	15.7%	25.3%	51.0%	8.0%
2004	474,902	15.1%	24.9%	52.8%	7.2%
2006	468,939	14.3%	24.8%	53.7%	7.2%
2008	498,976	15.5%	25.8%	52.8%	5.9%
2010	497,247	15.0%	26.3%	52.7%	6.0%
2012	509,818	14.6%	27.2%	53.0%	5.2%
2014	512,125	13.8%	26.7%	54.4%	5.1%
2016	530,653	14.8%	27.2%	52.6%	5.4%
2018	575,049	13.2%	24.9%	57.1%	4.9%
2020	598,737	13.5%	24.8%	56.6%	5.1%
2022	602,420	12.9%	24.0%	58.0%	5.1%

Source: Alaska Division of Elections (percentages rounded), December 2, 2022. Data from 1995 to 2022 are drawn from the ADOE website; the 1970 to 1994 information comes from Archives, maintained by the Alaska State Library.

As mentioned, at statehood in 1959 Alaska was a Democratic state, and it remained so until 1988, when as a consequence of national forces largely, Republicans outnumbered Democrats, continuing to the present. However, at no point did the majority of registered voters fall into the party fold.

Alaska has had several minor parties, but none nears the size of the Republicans and Democrats. For the most part, these have been protest parties, such as Joe Vogler's Alaska Independence Party (AIP), the National Reform Party of Ross Perot (contesting two elections in the 1990s), and the Alaska Libertarian Party. They brought excitement to many races and often were spoilers and even, under Wally Hickel in 1990, won the governorship. Their membership fluctuates, and some, such as the Greens, are listed in ADOE files as "groups" and not parties. Registration in all minor parties and groups has not exceeded 8 percent of total registered voters.

Voter registration data bear no direct relationship to population size in most years for several reasons. For example, voter registration is evidence of residency, and when Permanent Fund dividends are large (in 2022 they were $3,284, one of the largest payouts in the 41-year history of the program), there is a strong incentive for registration. The state has made access to registration easy by combining it with motor vehicle licensing.

One cannot vote legally without being registered, but turnout in elections does not correspond well to registration data. In most years, turnout in presidential elections is higher than in midterm elections, but it has been higher for exceptionally competitive gubernatorial elections, such as the 1982 race between Sheffield, Fink and Randolph (McBeath and Morehouse, 1994). In Alaska's 2022 midterm election, however, turnout was only a bit over 44 percent.

Party Ideology and Policy

American political parties often were considered highly pragmatic, as large tents (or coalitions) filled with different interest groups. At the time of the Great Depression, the New Deal coalition brought together farmers, laborers, intellectuals, people of color (African-Americans), and Catholics. The Republican Party was the party of business, both large and small, of Protestants, and of Caucasians. While Republicans labeled FDR as a socialist, he was instead a reformer, and the coalition was center-left. The Republican party had a conservative core represented by Robert Taft, but he lost to Eisenhower in the 1952 party convention, and as a whole the party has been center-right. In the twenty-first century, parties are ideologically polarized to a greater extent than at any time in the previous 120 years, and appear closer to the ideological divisions of European parties. Economic policies (such as economic development, resource exploitation) typically have been of greater prominence than identity (or diversity—racial and ethnic) and quality of life (e.g., the environment, sexual preference). (See, for example, Fiorina 2017, Gerstle 2022.)

The Alaska pattern varies somewhat from the national, in that as mentioned interests are narrower. Population dynamics differ substantially as the largest minority group is the state's indigenous population; African-Americans and Latinos are smaller percentages of the population than in most U.S. states. The presence of government, especially federal and state, is far more prominent than in nearly any other state, and parties tend to be uniform in their opposition to "federal over-reach." Regional differences (e.g., rural v. urban, Railbelt v. Southeast, Anchorage v. all others) remain significant. Some issues dividing the parties nationally such as gun control are less divisive in Alaska. Both parties also continue a policy orientation toward economic development, but it is less true in 2022 to say of the two parties as one newspaper did in 1947: "Either one would follow a program very similar to the other should it be placed in power" (*Anchorage Times*, 1947). The Republican Party in 2022 is more conservative than it was 50 years previously, and the Democratic Party is more liberal.

In Alaska's recent elections (both primary and general), fiscal issues have been prominent. Since the decline in oil/gas production from the North Slope fields, and growing volatility in global demand and supply of oil (directly influencing the price of Alaska's major commodity export), the state's reserves have been depleted. Candidates for office are called upon to address increased budget shortfalls: Do they favor reinstating the state's income tax? Imposing a statewide sales tax, which would affect the 94 municipalities already taxing sales? Using part of

the Permanent Fund (PF)'s earnings reserve to pay for government services, which over time influences the size of PF dividends? (See Shepro, Klimovich, and Thomas, 2016.)

Republican candidates have tended to prefer cuts in government services to enactment of taxes, and when evaluating taxes, prefer sales to income taxes. Democratic candidates are reluctant to recommend cuts in government services; they expect oil/gas corporations to pay higher taxes (most Republican candidates object to any tax increase). Some Democratic candidates have advocated reinstitution of the income tax. One of the most dramatic actions of the Walker/Mallott administration (2014-18) was reduction in size of the PF dividend, and incorporation of PF earning reserve funds into the budget. Michael Dunleavy's 2018 campaign for governor took ample advantage of this action (as well as of disarray in the incumbent bipartisan administration as Lt. Governor Mallott resigned months before the end of his term due to a scandal). Dunleavy's path to victory was laid with plans for sharp reductions in state spending and promises that "full" PF dividends would be restored to every eligible Alaskan. Because the legislature has the primary power to appropriate, legislative candidates in conservative districts have been challenged to commit to similar fiscal policies in the 2020 and 2022 elections.

Comparative Evaluations

A considerable literature has developed on RCV, and a very useful guide has been prepared by Drutman and Strano (2021). A brief section of this guide points to interaction effects of Top-4/5 primaries and RCV, and makes reference to Alaska (pp. 83-84). The authors suggest the Lisa Murkowski race is a partial indicator of the moderating impact of RCV. An even better case can be made for Mary Peltola's convincing win although facing daunting challenges.

There are a variety of state primary election types in the U.S., compiled by both the National Conference of State Legislatures and Ballotpedia. Those most relevant to this article are the "Top-2" states of Washington, California, Nebraska, and Louisiana. They can be compared regarding three dimensions. The first regards access to the ballot of third/other party candidates and governability. The second, comparing the RCV systems of Alaska and Maine, looks at the likelihood of electing moderate candidates and bias toward particular parties/ideologies (liberal v. conservative). The third dimension considers the influence of RCV in other countries.

Washington became the first state to use a "top-two" (also known as a "jungle primary") in 2004. Both the Republican and Democratic parties challenged the system in court because in their view it infringed on their rights to select nominees. The Supreme Court finally ruled in 2008 that the design was constitutional. In this type of primary, the two candidates who receive the highest percentage of votes overall advance to the general election, making it possible for two candidates from the same party to be on the November ballot (Zhou 2018).

California changed its primary system into a "top-two" contest in 2010. It applies to executive branch races (e.g., the governor), legislative races, and races for the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives. Nine of the California congressional districts had same-party candidates in 2012. In 2014 there were seven same-party races for House seats; in 2016, eight races for Congress had same-party run-offs. A general effect appears to be an increase in number of candidates for all races (Gomez 2018).

The states of Nebraska and Louisiana use the top-two approach for certain races. In Louisiana, all candidates run on the same ticket, and if no candidate receives more than 50 percent of the vote, the top two vote-getters have a runoff six weeks later. (There is no primary election, just the general.) Nebraska is the only state with a one-house state legislature, and its elections are on a nonpartisan basis, meaning that all candidates are on the same primary ballot, which has no partisan designations (NCSL 2020).

In these cases, the restriction of choices to two limits the access of third/other parties to the ballot. Unlike Alaska and Maine which have statewide RCV plans involving up to four choices, the top-two states provide no incentives for strategizing (and compromising extreme positions, thereby increasing governability). Further, having just two choices means several districts will have no competition.

The Alaska RCV case was first heralded as a success for moderates (in the special election for the seat in the House of Representatives). Sarah Palin led the field of 48 primary election candidates in the June 11, 2022 primary, followed by Nick Begich III, Al Gross, and Mary Peltola, but in the August 16th second-stage election Peltola defeated Palin. Peltola won 75,761 votes (40.2 percent), but drew 15,445 second-choice votes from Begich, giving her 91,206 votes in total or 51.5 percent. Palin won 58,945 first-choice votes (31.3 percent) and 27,042 second-choice votes from Begich, totaling 85,987 votes (48.5 percent). Palin blamed her loss on Alaska's "weird" RCV, but both she and Begich had undervalued the necessity of expanding the voter coalition (Samuels 2022a). The reelection of Republican moderate Lisa Murkowski was a second notable success for centrist candidates.

Maine has had RCV longer than Alaska, and with different outcomes. In the 2020 U.S. Senate election, Susan Collins was one of two U.S. senators nation-wide ranked as in a "toss-up" race, facing strong competition from the Democratic candidate Sara Gideon (Maine House Speaker). The third candidate in the race, Lisa Savage, a Green Party activist and teacher's union representative played a low-key role during the campaign, apparently not wanting to upset prospects for the Democratic candidate. She asked her first-choice voters to rank Gideon second, but this was not enough to defeat Collins (Cerrone and McClintock 2021). Savage's share of the vote was just 6.7 percent, and this diminishes support for the recently stated view that RCV brings advantage to liberals. However, Maine lacks much racial/ethnic diversity, and has a long tradition of independence and moderation in its public affairs. Cervas and Grofman look carefully at the partisan bias issue, noting: "(A) priori, there is no reason to believe that RCV has any partisan or ideological bias, even if it might be shown to favor (relative to a simple plurality) one party or another in particular circumstances" (Cervas and Grofman 2022).

Research on primary elections including RCV has been done primarily in the United States. However, RCV had its start 120 years ago in the lower house of the Australian parliament. A recent study by Benjamin Reilly compares RCV in Australia and America (focusing on the Maine case). The comparison indicates the way in which candidate and party endorsements affect the rankings of voters, promoting mutually-beneficial exchanges between parties, leading to stability (Reilly 2021).

RCV has many champions in game theory, and research has drawn on large-scale behavioral games that randomize participants to a variety of electoral systems. Among the parameters used are a variety of electoral rules and a range of political parties. A recent study indicates that

increasing the number of parties, which is a product of RCV, reduces animosity among the parties (Fischer, Lee and Leikes 2021). Yet contrasting evidence from Kousser, Phillips and Shor indicated that a citizen redistricting commission and the top-2 primary did not halt "the continuing partisan polarization of California's elected lawmakers or their drift away from the average voter in each district" (Kousser, Phillips and Shor 2018).

Summary and Conclusions

Alaska was the first U.S. jurisdiction to use the Top 4 primary and Ranked-Choice-Voting at both state and federal levels. It completed the first and second stage of the system in the special election to fill the remaining months of Congressman Don Young's term. The winner of the first (primary) stage on June 11th was former Alaska governor and vice-presidential candidate of the 2008 election, Sarah Palin. Yet the winner of the second (general election) stage on August 16th was Mary Peltola (the first Alaska Native to win a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives), because her first-choice voters and second-choice voters totaled 51.5 percent. Voter turnout in this mid-August event was the third highest in state history.

Sarah Palin called the outcome "weird", and her chief endorser, former President Trump said the election was rigged. But it was legitimate. To defeat Peltola in the November election when the two-year term's holder was decided, Palin needed to significantly broaden her strategy to attract votes from other candidates' supporters. She and the third-place finisher Nicholas Begich were unable to "rank the red," and Mary Peltola needed little more than favorable second-ranked votes of the other candidates to cross the line to victory. This observation applies also to the reelection of Lisa Murkowski. The centrist candidates won and more extreme candidates lost. It is not likely that this outcome would have occurred had RCV not been in effect.

Circumstances were different for the other races in 2022. Dunleavy was an incumbent governor who had survived a recall attempt; he benefitted from the Covid-19 pandemic and from wise counsel in identifying the needs of Alaskans. His two main opponents, Les Gara and Bill Walker, coordinated their campaigns well and positions on issues, but lacked the opportunities and resources of the governor. Upon his reelection Governor Dunleavy was gracious in identifying his goal as "to work with everybody to create an Alaska for the next 50 years" (Bohrer 2022).

Centrist candidates did better than conservative Republicans in state Senate races. Within days of certification of the Alaska Senate winners, a seventeen-member bipartisan coalition organized. In the minority were three center-right Republicans. The House surprised observers by forming a center-right coalition instead of center-left coalitions as in the previous six years. After determining outcomes in close races, Republicans held 21 House seats and within two days of the legislative session's start, had elected a speaker. Yet two Republicans stood outside the majority and minority; Republicans relied on the Bush Caucus for a working majority; and the minority of 12 Democrats and 3 Independents promises to capitalize on disagreements among Republicans to advance their agenda (Samuels and Maguire, 2023). Yet overall, bipartisan governing coalitions are the norm in Alaska politics.

Party leaders and many voters complained that the new electoral system was complicated and confusing during the early days of balloting; however, the state increased resources allocated to explanation of the changes. Legislators opposed to the new open primary election system and RCV (in the state House) already have pre-filed bills to significantly amend or eliminate it in

2023, when that action becomes possible. However, members of the Senate majority indicate little support for altering the new voting laws.

Implications of the Alaska Case

This case indicates that candidates for office need to broaden their appeals to the median voter positions on policy issues. To do so increases candidates' representativeness, and their democratic legitimacy. New competitors will need to display a willingness to "cross the line," join (even form) coalitions with like-minded candidates and coordinate campaigns. This entails development of pragmatic orientations and a focus on what can be accomplished in a legislative session. The process may involve unusual alliances, such as partisan/nonpartisan, partisan/ideological. This too will increase legitimacy of the electoral system as more voices are listened to.

The Alaska RCV experience has differences and similarities with other states' experiments. The Top 4/5 approach used in Alaska differs markedly from the Top 2 approach, which results in many more same-party races and thus a reduction in party competition. (However, Top 2 does not necessarily reduce competition of ideas, such as between moderate and extreme factions within one party.) Top 4 in Alaska had the effect of increasing the number of competitive legislative seats, but this effect was muddied by redistricting. By the 2024 presidential election season, this effect should be clarified.

The Alaska case is the product of an evolution different from that of other states. Since the onset of voter registration, the state has not compelled registrants to identify with a political party or group. As a result, throughout statehood, nonpartisan/undeclared voters have been the majority, numbering 58 percent in 2022. Alaska bears similarities to other natural resource states in the Rocky Mountain West, and like them undergoes economic boom-and-bust cycles. Resembling some natural resource states, Alaska has a rainy day fund, but on a per capita basis, the Alaska Permanent Fund (PF) is far larger, reaching $80 billion in 2020. And no other state distributes dividends to its population like those in Alaska, which puts dividend distribution politics at the top of the list of policy issues.

Some general lessons can be drawn from national vs. state-based experiences with RCV. Exogenous national influences do have a bearing on RCV wins and losses, chief of which in 2022 has been the Trump factor. His endorsements in the 2022 midterm elections worsened outcomes for the endorsed (with the exception of Governor Dunleavy). Other exogenous variables such as the interplay of federal and state judiciaries may put the gains from RCV in Alaska at risk. For example, were "Independent State Legislature theory" to be adopted by a majority of the U.S. Supreme Court in the upcoming *Moore v. Harper* case (concerning whether state legislatures power over elections can be limited constitutionally), voter-approved changes to election laws such as Alaska's adoption of RCV could be jeopardized (Jacobson and Sherman, 2022).

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