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# 2020 ELECTION INSIGHTS

Early Industry Benchmarks, Impact on Path to  
Conversion, and Best Practices

By Mather Economics  
November 30, 2020

## JOURNALISM IS YOUR VALUE PROPOSITION

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High-quality and unique content that engages your local readers directly impacts the subscription business model.

Through our ongoing work with clients, we have identified strategies, tactics, and content that lead to successful subscriber growth.

This report presents industry benchmarks from Listener™ using **relevant content performance metrics** to manage a subscription business model.

The focus of this report is election coverage for the period of October and November 2020 and the impact of this content on **\*path to conversion**.

## TOP 3 KEY TAKEAWAYS

### ENSURE SUPPLY MEETS DEMAND

In October and November, election content accounts for:

**12%** of articles published

**16%** of article page views

**18%** of path to conversion

Election content shows a high yield when comparing the ratio of content produced vs. impact on path to conversion.

### USE UNIQUE STORY-TELLING FORMATS

**Endorsements** show a high impact on path to conversion but relatively few page views.

**Voter Guides** show a high impact on path to conversion and page views but are a small amount of published content.

**Results Pages** have a low impact on path to conversion but high article page views.

### INVEST IN YOUR VALUE PROPOSITION

Best in class publishers align the newsroom and business units to deliver the highest value to paying readers.

Data allows the newsroom to measure articles that are read on the path to conversion, directly impacting subscription growth.



# BEST PRACTICES FOR SUCCESS IN 2021: ELECTIONS, COVID-19, AND OTHER CONTENT

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## Strategic Direction

- Executives communicate vision and goals for election coverage within organization.
- Functional teams are assembled to execute on goals, including marketing, newsroom, and technology/analytics.

## Newsroom

- Outline the scope of election coverage in advance to enable adequate resource allocation, development time, and an optimal publication schedule.
- Ensure that the newsroom is operating in a cohesive manner and take steps to deliver balanced coverage.
- Analyze the performance of election content and allow data-driven insights along with editorial expertise to guide ongoing strategy.
- Syndicated content can help fill out gaps in coverage though users tend to pay for locally produced unique content.
- Ensure the cost of producing each article or format is in sync with the impact on path to conversion.

## Marketing

- Communicate the value of your election coverage across channels and throughout key points in the election cycle based on insights within this document.
- Highlight the publisher's commitment to providing diverse and credible election coverage. Remind readers that your content enables them to make informed decisions at the ballot box.
- Develop an election-oriented communication series to educate readers on how to access election coverage on the site via welcome messaging, soft-modeling, and email communication.

## BEST PRACTICES CON'T.

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### Tactics & Execution

- Consider the following when determining which content should be open, metered, or premium (subscriber-only):
  1. Is the content widely available from other news sources?
  2. What is the revenue opportunity associated with advertising/sponsorship opportunities or through blocking content?
  3. How does the content align with your value proposition?
- Place a portion of election content behind a registration wall to support ongoing engagement, acquisition, and retention efforts.
- Use personalization based on how each user engages with election-specific content.
- Promote features which drive engagement across channels such as special topic newsletters, interactives, podcasts, video content, personalized desktop/mobile notifications, etc. Measure the impact using path to conversion.
- Ensure a strong recirculation strategy to encourage new users to the site to engage with non-election content.

### Product & UX

- Simplify content discovery and engagement with the variety of election content available by compiling into a centralized section on the site.
- Consider the features of high-performing content noted in this document when formulating specialized coverage pages such as voter guides and endorsements.
- Develop mobile-friendly election content.

INDUSTRY  
ELECTION  
BENCHMARKS

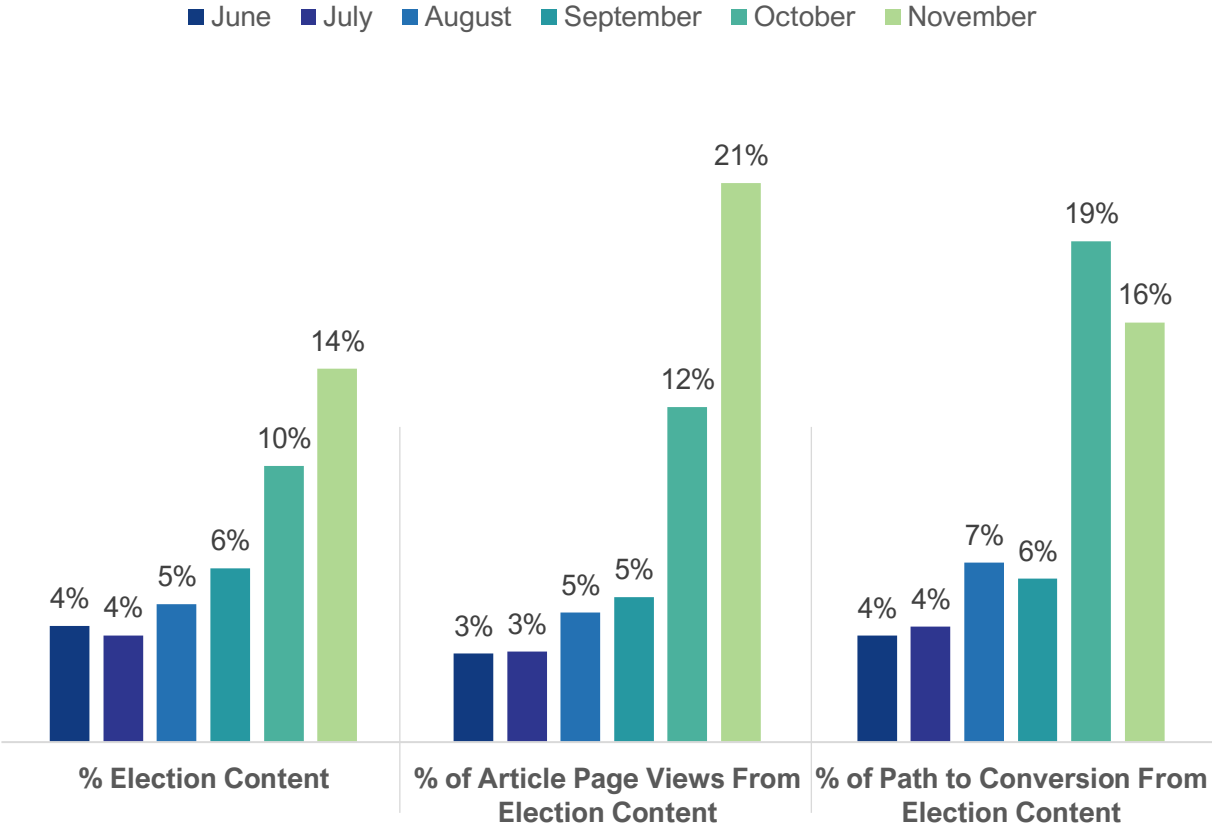
19%  
OF TOTAL PATH TO  
CONVERSION IN  
OCTOBER

As expected, production of election content peaks in November, accounting for **14%** of all content published.

Article page views of election content roughly follow article publication, also peaking in November.

In contrast, election content that appears on the path to conversion more than **triples from 6% in September to a peak of 19% in October.**

Election content has an outsize impact on path to conversion vs. article page views in most months though peaks in October.



November data includes 11/1—11/21

## TYPES OF ELECTION CONTENT

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In addition to analyzing overall election coverage, Mather evaluated the following formats commonly used to cover the election.

ENDORSEMENTS

VOTER GUIDES

ELECTION RESULTS

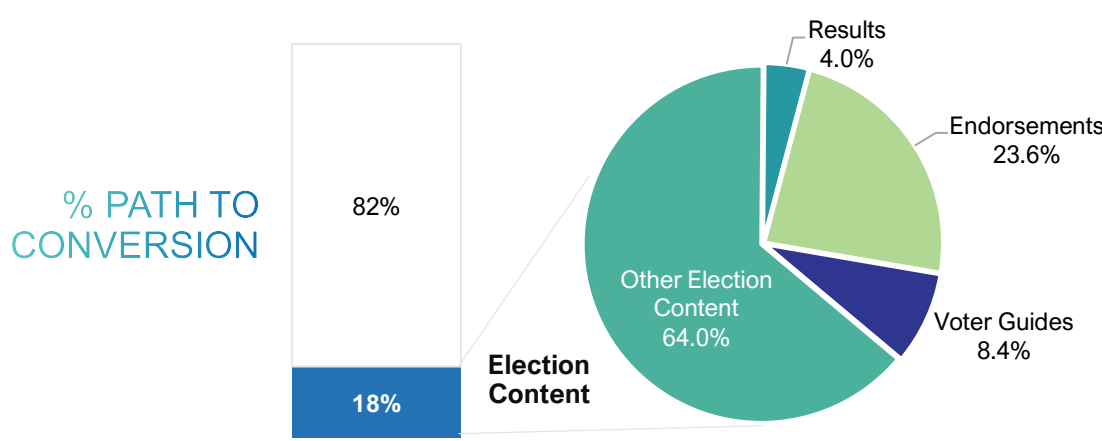
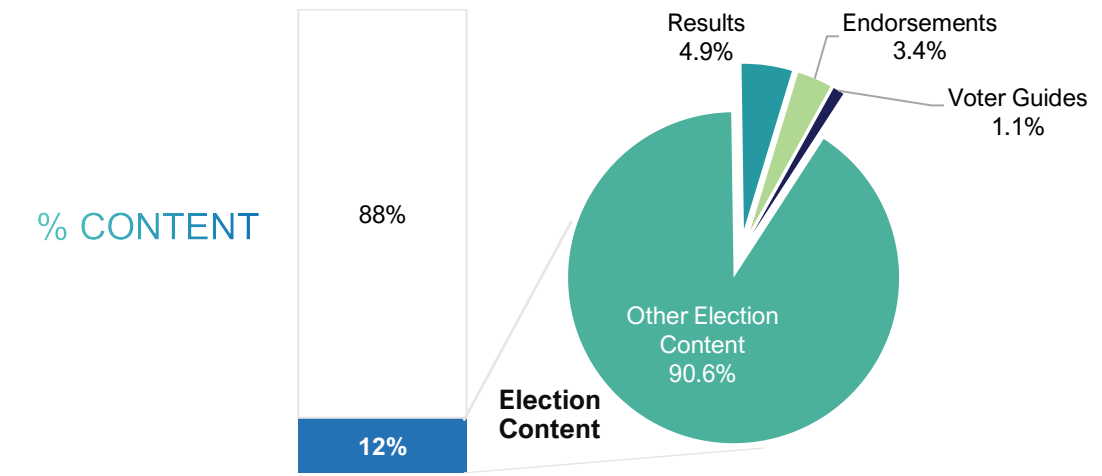


# UNIQUE STORY-TELLING BENCHMARKS

In October and November, election content accounted for 12% of all articles published and 18% of all path to conversion page views.

**Endorsements** account for the greatest percent of path to conversion within election content (24% after other election content).

**Voter Guides** show efficient path to conversion performance within election content compared to the % of content published (8% of path to conversion from 1% of content).



November data includes 11/1—11/21



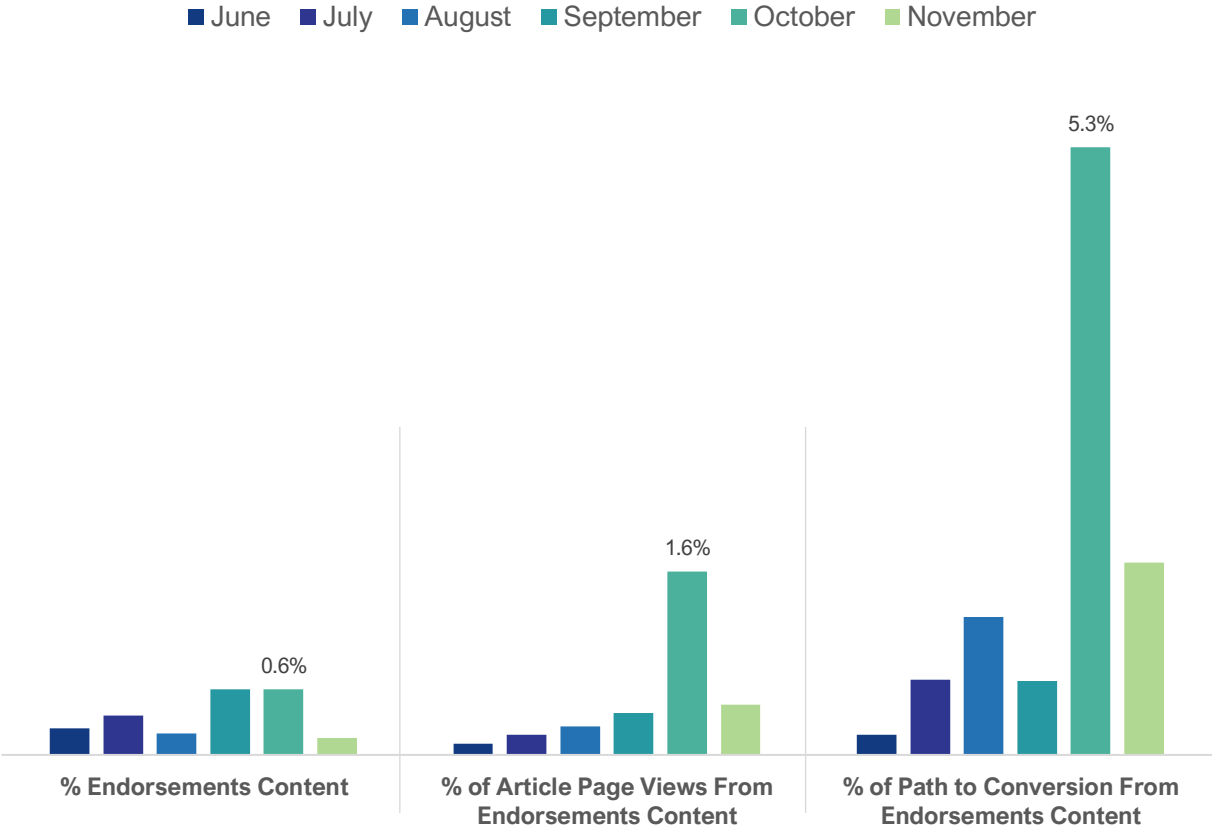
# ENDORSEMENTS BENCHMARKS

5.3%  
OF TOTAL PATH TO  
CONVERSION IN  
OCTOBER

Endorsements were published in both September and October, but **interest is much higher in October.**

The high percentage of PTC and much lower percentage of pageviews from Endorsements indicate they do not reach a wide audience but are **highly valued by core users** who are more likely to subscribe.

Endorsements are a highly impactful and efficient type of content with respect to **path to conversion.**



November data includes 11/1—11/21

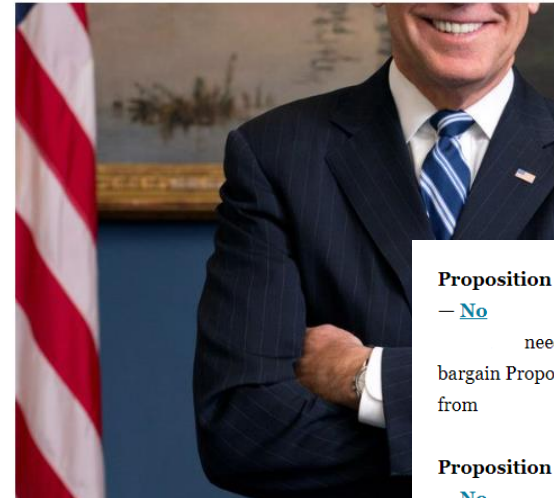
## ENDORSEMENT BEST PRACTICES

Top-performing Endorsement pages provide in-depth editorials on candidates, concise ballot recommendations, and establish trust and transparency for potential subscribers.

- All endorsements are **accessible from a single page**.
- Publisher's declaration is clearly stated and is paired with the key takeaways supporting the recommendation.
- Breaks down the impact of local and national policies/candidates to the reader in **clear and plain language**.
- Enables readers to further research key topics via **embedded links** to more in-depth analysis and official sources of information.
- Links to additional election content to support **recirculation strategy**.

Endorsement: Save our democracy.

AUG 23, 2020 AT 5:19 AM



### Proposition 22 (treating app drivers as independent contractors)

— [No](#)

needs a better approach to gig workers. But rather than accepting the bad bargain Proposition 22 presents, voters should demand a better, broader answer from

### Proposition 23 (dialysis clinic requirements)

— [No](#)

There's no evidence that the measure would protect the health and safety of dialysis patients, but there's plenty of evidence that it is being improperly used as a labor organizing tool.

### Proposition 24 (consumer data privacy)

— [Yes](#)

The state's groundbreaking data privacy law has come under attack in the Legislature. This measure would expand the protections for personal data and bar the Legislature from weakening them, while leaving the door open for improvements.

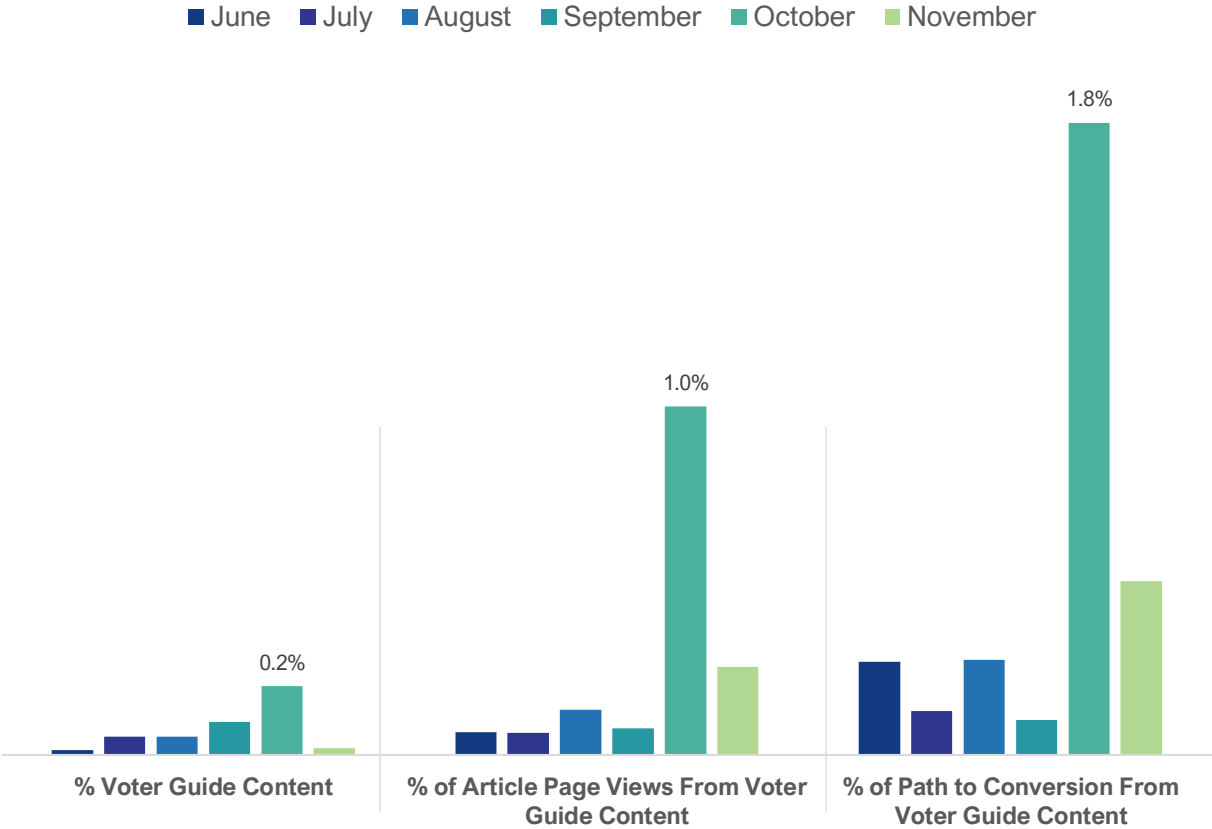
# VOTER GUIDE BENCHMARKS

1.8%  
OF TOTAL PATH TO  
CONVERSION IN  
OCTOBER

Voter Guide content is generally published in October and page views grow accordingly.

Though an overall small impact on path to conversion, Voter Guide content produced an **outsize impact on page views and path to conversion** from a small volume of content published.

Voter guides are an efficient means to both **engage and convert** users.



November data includes 11/1—11/21

# VOTER GUIDES BEST PRACTICES

Top-performing Voter Guides offer simplified ballot summaries, side-by-side candidate profiles, and personalized planning features.

- Easily **accessible via the homepage** and promoted on any election-related pages.
- Provides access to ballot measure summaries, links to endorsements, and voting FAQs **from a single page**.
- Offers opposing candidate Q&As alongside one another.
- **Links to off-site official sources** for more information on voter registration and polling locations.
- **Interactive tools** like "Build My Ballot" enable the reader to focus on the information relevant to them and can help grow known users by providing the feature in exchange for the reader's email address.
- Links to additional content to support **recirculation strategy**.

## Welcome to the Fall 2020 Election Voter Guide.

Voting for this election ended Nov. 3, 2020. Voter data is deleted after every election, according to our [voter data policy](#).

Enter your home address to begin:

ex: 1954 St. [Use my location](#)

BUILD MY BALLOT

☐ By checking this box and submitting my home address, I agree to [Addendum](#), which together govern the use of my information.

[Terms of Service](#), [Privacy Policy](#), and [Voter Guide Privacy Policy](#)

You can also browse a list of [all 308 candidates](#)

### ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Our Voter Guide for the November 3, 2020 election allows voters to compare candidates' responses to issues, unedited, side-by-side. You can also find out where you can vote, and where you can find out where you can vote.

### Voter Guide:

### 111 Local candidates on the issues

Here's who's running for Congress, state Legislature, sheriff, property appraiser, tax collector, school board, county commissioner and many more.



Who are the candidates running for local office in \_\_\_\_\_? And where do they stand on the most important issues? The \_\_\_\_\_ 2020 Voter Guide has the answers.

Voting has already begun in \_\_\_\_\_. Check with your local supervisor of elections to find out where you can turn in a mail ballot, visit an early voting site or vote on Nov. 3.

Use our guide below to compare candidates for all kinds of local offices. For best results, use a modern browser such as Chrome or Safari.

In addition to local candidates, all \_\_\_\_\_ can vote on [proposed constitutional amendments, explained here](#). (And of course, there is also a race for U.S. president.)

For opinions on who to elect, [read the Editorial Board's recommendations](#). (The Editorial Board is entirely separate of the newsroom.)



ELECTION  
RESULTS  
PAGES  
BENCHMARKS

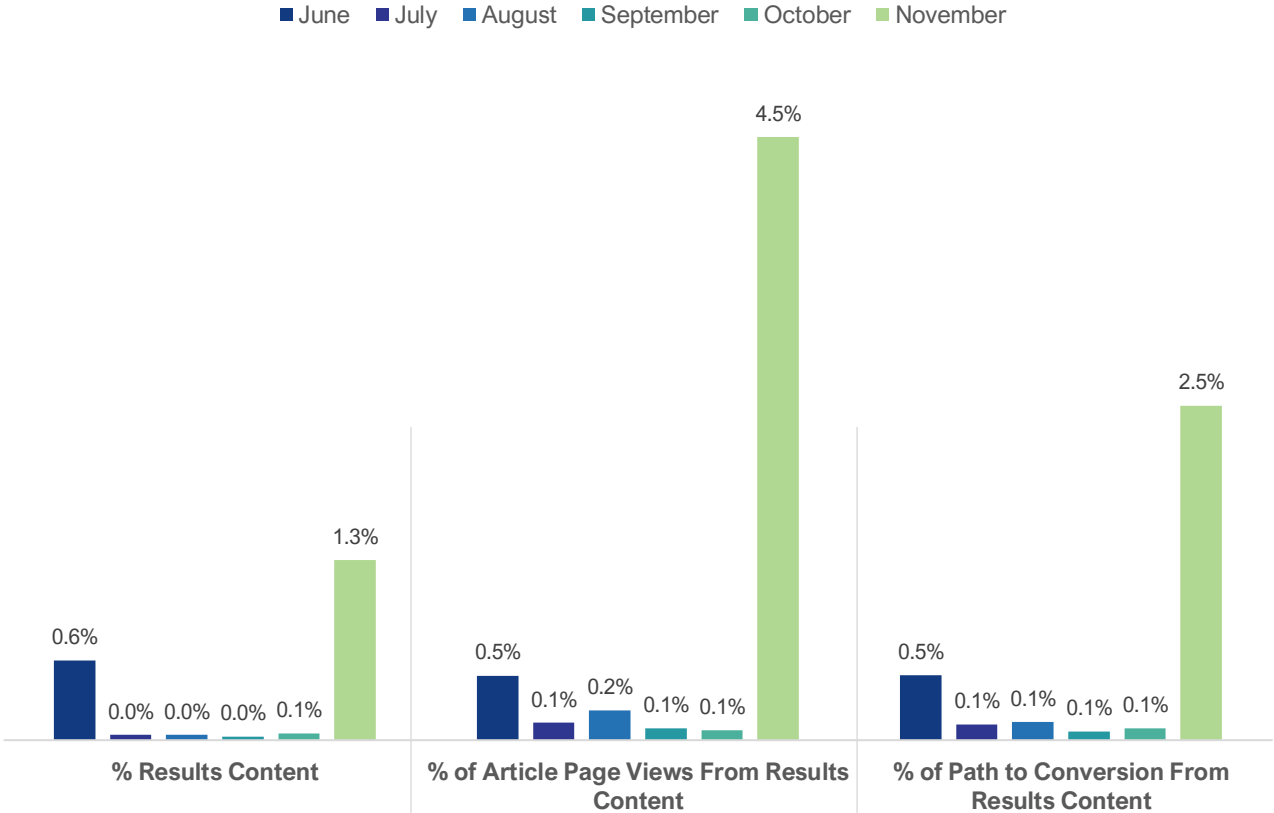
2.5%  
OF TOTAL PATH TO  
CONVERSION IN  
NOVEMBER

Election Results is the **largest category of special election content**, accounting for 1.3% of published articles in November.

Election Results is the only type of content with a PTC percentage lower than its pageviews percentage.

This indicates that Election Results **appeal to a broader audience**, many of whom are less likely to subscribe.

*Due to the definition of the PTC metric, more time may be needed to count all conversions attributable to Results pages. Mather Economics will provide appropriate updates as more data is gathered.*

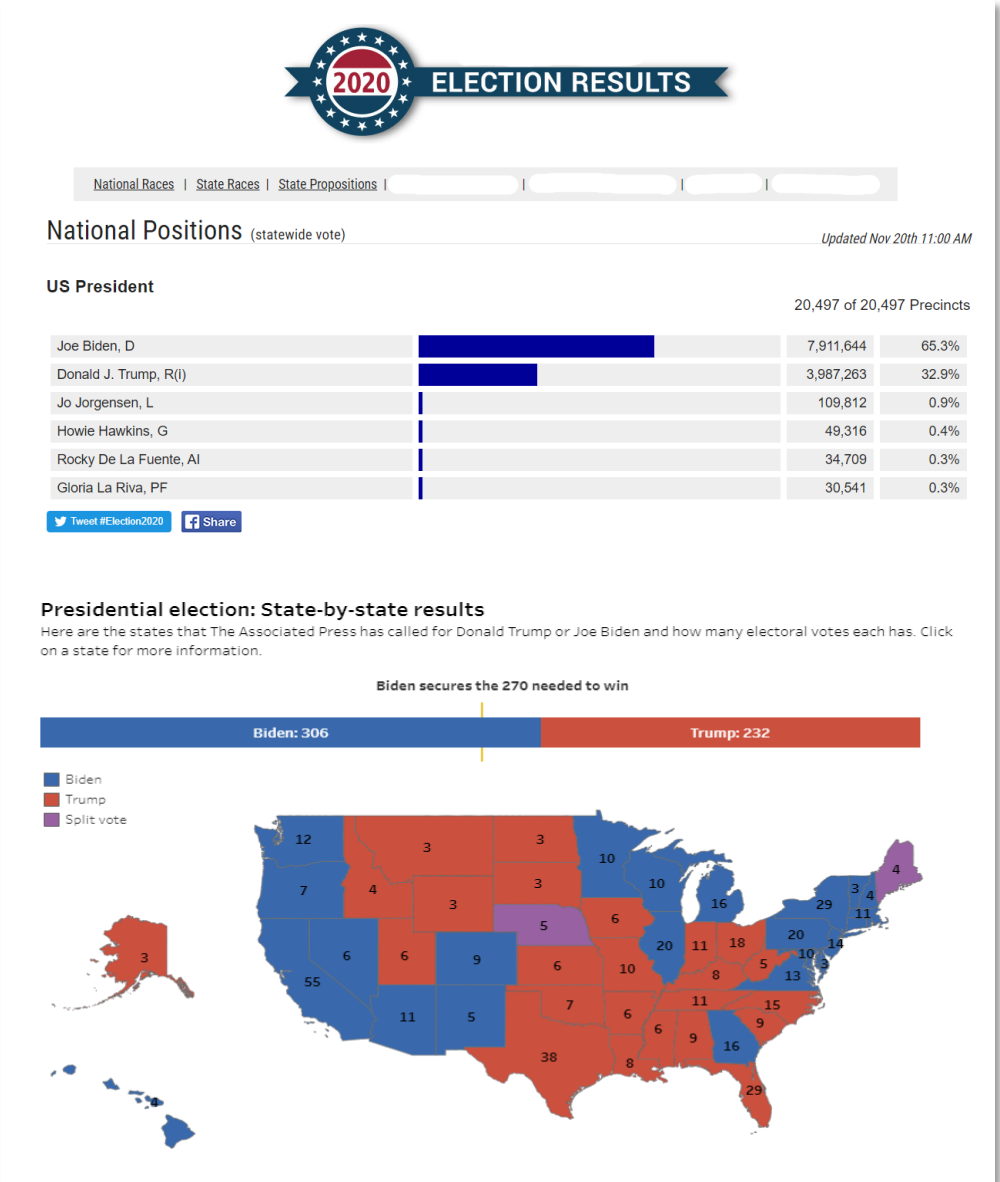
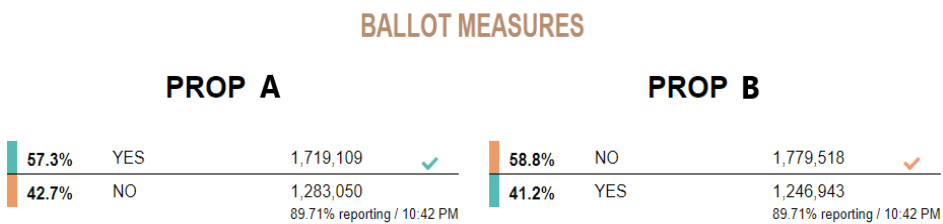


November data includes 11/1—11/21

# ELECTION RESULTS BEST PRACTICES

Top-performing Results pages are light on text, visually engaging, and interactive.

- National, state and local election **results accessible via a single page.**
- Frequently-updated visualization used to convey results in a **simplified visual format.**
- High-level copy with **links to more in-depth coverage.**
- Interactive tools like live maps and other charts which **enable readers to filter down to the results that matter to them most.**
- Links to additional content to **support recirculation strategy.**



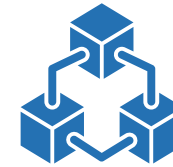
## \*PATH TO CONVERSION

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Mather Economics pioneered the **path to conversion** metric as a north star for the newsroom and a framework for easily evaluating the economics of content.

PTC is a page view but is only counted from users who subscribe. It is derived by tracking every page view from users who converted across all digital channels and products.

A 30-day window is used to look historically at each user's activity from the point of conversion. Each article that was read in this window of time is flagged and the page views from the converted users are attributed to the path to conversion.



PTC is the right metric for publishers seeking digital transformation who want to go beyond tracking total page views but still want simplicity and accessibility to gain buy-in from key stakeholders. It is also used to identify opportunity for **premium content**.

In contrast to a last-click conversion, PTC is a “multi-touch” attribution metric that correlates all articles relevant for subscription growth.

As publishers mature, PTC is often used as part of a lifetime value formula for content and audience.



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## ABOUT MATHER ECONOMICS

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Mather Economics provides turnkey services that blend **data gathering** using Listener™, **audience & content analytics** by our economists and data scientists, and **strategic consulting** led by our senior consultants for an affordable fee.

Many companies struggle to apply analytics and operationalize investments in technology. Mather provides an **intelligence layer** to push recommendations into the existing tech stack and has out-of-the-box integrations with popular fulfillment systems.

Over 500 global brands access Mather's **best-in-class digital subscription capabilities and services** to accelerate subscription revenue growth and achieve digital transformation.



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