PERCEPTIONS OF UNIVERSAL BALLOT DELIVERY SYSTEMS

FINDINGS FROM A SURVEY WITH REGISTERED VOTERS IN THREE AREAS IN RURAL (REGION IV) ALASKA

PREPARED FOR

ALASKA DIVISION OF ELECTIONS

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Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study were determined by the Elections Policy Work Group convened by the Alaska Division of Elections to discuss how to make Alaska's election system as effective, cost efficient, and responsive to Alaska voter needs as possible. The group recommended exploring a hybrid or universal system that includes early in-person voting and vote-by-mail. Maximizing access to the ballot for all Alaskans is a priority for the Working Group with an emphasis on access for those in rural areas. To assess rural voters' perceptions about different voting methods, 412 individuals registered to vote in the Bethel, Dillingham, and Kusilvak Census Areas were interviewed. This report contains the findings from those interviews.

The authors thank the 412 registered voters who shared their time, opinions, and voting experiences with our interviewers.

Summary

A total of 412 registered voters in the Bethel, Dillingham, and Kusilvak Census Areas completed surveys with ISER interviewers in March and April of 2018. The majority (74%) of respondents reported their race as Alaska Native and 13% were White.

Near the beginning of the survey, interviewers asked respondents how they preferred to receive their ballot and 60% said they preferred to get it in person on Election Day, 21% would prefer to receive it by mail, and 17% would prefer to receive their ballot online. After respondents heard a description of three voting methods being considered: 1) keep voting the way it is now; 2) mail out and mail back; and 3) receive ballot in the mail and have different ways to return it their preferences changed somewhat. Of the three methods, keep voting the way it is now was the first choice by 49% of respondents, followed by 36% for option 3, and 14% for option 2. Respondents had little experience with voting methods other than in-person.

When asked what made it difficult for them and other members of their community to vote, personal reasons, such as being sick or out of town, was the most frequent (37%) response. About two-thirds (64%) reported personal reasons made it difficult for people in their community to vote followed by 46% saying that the ballot being written in English made it difficult for people in their community. Over half (56%) of respondents reported they are satisfied with their mail service, only 17% of those who were satisfied said they would prefer to receive or return their ballot by mail.

Background

The Alaska Division of Elections (DOE) is at a critical juncture: Alaska's voting equipment and technology are outdated, difficult to repair, and prone to failure. At the same time, there are concerns about the security of the voting process and increasing numbers of voters are choosing to cast their ballots in ways other than the traditional voting in person at their local precinct.

The Division is considering alternative voting methods for state and federal elections. The DOE uses a precinct-based ballot tabulation system. Because some alternatives to precinct-based ballot tabulation voting are less expensive, several other states are examining these alternatives as well. Lt. Governor Byron Mallott convened an Election Policy Work Group to explore how to make Alaska's election system as effective, cost efficient, and responsive to Alaska voter needs as possible. The Work Group will make recommendations on the administration of elections and identify cost-saving measures. The group recommended exploring a hybrid or universal system that includes early in-person voting and vote-by-mail (VMB) as options. Maximizing access for all Alaskans with a focus on access to the ballot in rural areas is one of the Group's guiding principles, which the group stated as, "If it doesn't work for rural Alaska, it doesn't work for Alaska."

This study obtains Southwest Alaska (Bethel, Dillingham, and Kusilvak Census Areas) registered voters' experiences with, and attitudes toward, different methods of voting and their perceptions of the reliability of the U.S. Postal Service in their respective areas. It was important to obtain their perceptions of the mail service because the Working Group is considering incorporating VBM options in rural Alaska. Registered voters' perceptions of their mail service may influence their attitudes toward voting by mail. All respondents are registered voters in one of three census areas in Southwest Alaska, areas heavily dependent on mail service.

Three states in the U.S. — Oregon, Washington, and Colorado—use solely a VBM system. An additional 18 states, including Alaska, have the option to hold some elections by mail. In April 2018, the Municipality of Anchorage held its first vote-by-mail election in combination with Election Day voting at the polls. The Kenai Peninsula Borough uses a "hybrid in-person and by-mail system" in which smaller communities, like Copper Landing, Hope, and Tyonek, already vote by mail (Earl, 2018).

Oregon first used VBM for statewide ballot measures in 1998 when a "citizen's initiative to adopt all-mail voting throughout the state was approved by 69.4 percent of voters" (NCSL-ET, 2017). In 2012, voter turnout in Oregon's general election was among the highest in the nation at 83% and Washington had an 81% voter turnout for the same election (Hernandez, 2017). The 2018 Anchorage Municipal election in Alaska had the highest voter turnout (36.3%) in the last 10 years (see Appendix A) (Municipality of Anchorage, 2018).

Southwell and Burchett (1997) surveyed voters in Oregon after the Senate election in January 1996 to understand the general public opinion on VBM elections, including possible "election difficulties, irregularities, or undue influence occurring during this election period"

(pp. 54). Over three-quarters of Oregonians who voted in the 1996 Senate elections indicated they preferred VBM compared to 15.4% who indicated they prefer going to their polling place. Over two-thirds (78.5%) indicated they prefer VBM because it is easier or more convenient. In a follow-up study, Southwell (2004) found similar results among registered voters in Oregon, with 81% of voters indicating they preferred VBM. Females were more likely than males (83% versus 78%, respectively) to say they preferred to vote-by-mail, but found no major differences between age groups or races. However, Alvarez (2010) looked at data from the Survey of the Performance of American Elections that assessed voter experiences in the 2008 Presidential Election and found that nationwide only about 15% of voters supported all-mail or VBM elections. Looking at these data by state, Alvarez (2010) found the highest support for VBM elections in states that already have this system in place with Oregon at 66% and Washington at 55% of voters supporting this method. Only about 12% of voters surveyed in Alaska were in support of VBM elections (Alvarez 2010).

Proponents of VBM elections argue this method saves money, increases voter turnout, and is more desirable and convenient to voters because it eases the "burdens of voting for those individuals who have hectic schedules or experience unforeseen crises on Election Day" (Southwell and Burchett, 1997) because voters have the option to vote from home. Additionally, elderly or rural voters may benefit from the convenience of VBM elections because it saves them a trip to the polling place that may be many miles away or difficult to reach (NCSL-ET, 2017). Since vote-by-mail ballots are mailed out to all registered voters weeks before Election Day, voters have more time to think about and research candidates and ballot measures, which may help voters "make more informed choices" (NCSL-ET, 2017). This added convenience for voters may increase voter turnout, which has been "proven to be true for small elections, [but] studies don't show a marked increase in turnout for larger general elections" (Underhill, 2017). The State of Oregon reported the cost of vote-by-mail elections to be "one third to one half the amount required for polling place elections (Southwell, 2010, pp. 109). The National Conference of State Legislatures Elections Team (NCSL-ET) (2017) mentions an average cost savings of 40% following the 2014 all-mail general election in Colorado.

On the other hand, opponents of vote-by-mail argue this method increases the risk of voter fraud and "undue influence on the voter" (Southwell and Burchett, 1997, pp. 53). Ballot harvesting, when "activists or political parties can collect voted ballots from voters," is also a concern of VBM opponents because "voters are more susceptible to intimidation and coercion" (NCSL-ET, 2017). This coercion may come from activists, political parties, or even spouses and employers of registered voters (Hernandez, 2017). Additionally, opponents argue VBM elections will supplant the tradition of going to the polling place as a social event and VBM elections may lead to a "loss of camaraderie of the polling place" (Southwell and Burchett, 1997, pp. 53) among voters.

Mail service is "not uniform across the nation" (Underhill, 2017) and may unintentionally limit access for voters in rural areas who may not have a street address by conventional post office standards or they may share P.O. boxes with others. According to an article published

by the Anchorage Daily News (Kelly, 2018), about 40,000 ballots were returned undeliverable despite efforts by the Anchorage Municipality to encourage voters to ensure their voter registration information was up to date. Underhill (2017) describes that most election materials are at a college level and without the support of polling place staff, voters may find it difficult to understand the ballot and thus discourage them from voting.

Opponents also argue, "savings are nullified by increased postage costs" (Hernandez, 2017). Election costs for Anchorage's first VBM municipal election nearly doubled compared to traditional polling-place elections and cost the city more than $1 million, up from approximately $600,000 in 2017. This cost increase was due to equipment purchases, "cautiously overstaffed vote centers," and printing costs for postcards and ballots. In addition to the $1 million price tag to run the election in Anchorage, the city "also spent $1.2 million on equipment and other one-time capital investments, like a high-tech mail sorter and tenant upgrades to a new election headquarters" (Kelly, 2018). However, projected costs for the 2019 election are roughly $850,000.

Although the Anchorage Municipality VBM election in April 2018 yielded promising results for future voter turnout, the Fairbanks North Star Borough assembly voted down a VBM proposal in 2015 amid concerns voiced by the Fairbanks City Council. According to an article published in the Fairbanks Daily News Miner, these concerns included worries about the increased cost of elections by about $91,000 per year for the cost to print and mail the ballots" as well as concerns about closing a majority of the polling stations, leaving only two locations for voters to drop off ballots (Buxton, 2015). VBM elections in some smaller communities in the Kenai Peninsula Borough have seen higher voter turnout, but it is "not an across-the-board trend" with some communities reporting voter turnout as high as 33% and others as low as 6% (Earl, 2018). Vote-by-mail elections in Alaska present challenges and opportunities unlike those in other states in the nation. VBM elections at the city, borough, and state level are subject to legal and procedural standards that make implementation complex, and thus will require thoughtful analyses before implementation.

Survey Findings

This section discusses major findings from the study with registered voters in Region IV of Alaska. These findings statistically represent all registered voters in the Bethel, Dillingham, and Kusilvak Census Areas within Region IV. After signing a confidentiality agreement with DOE, the authors of this report received a file that contained names, addresses, and phone numbers of registered voters. This file contained 14,449 registered voters. A total of 412 interviews were completed.
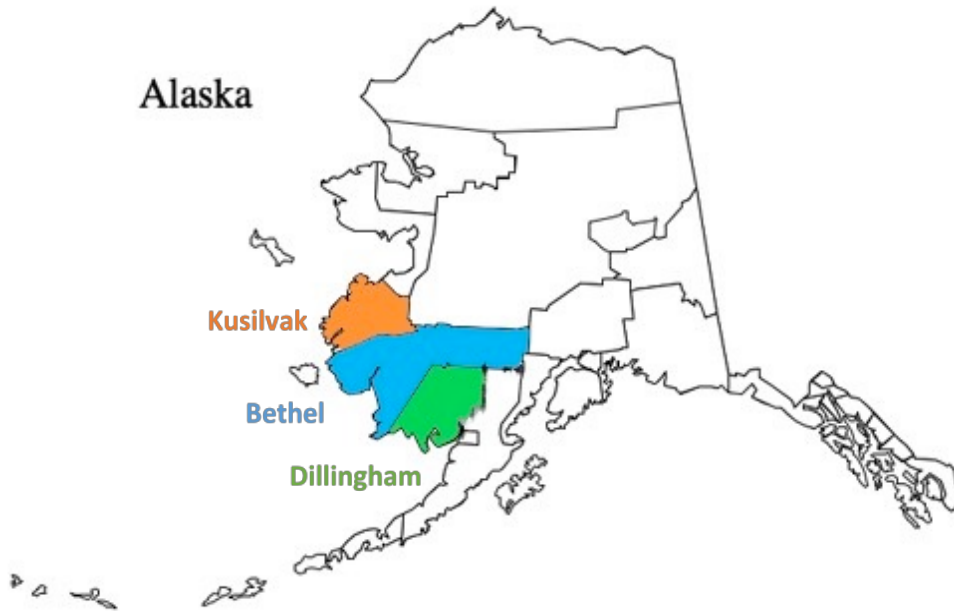
Voting Experience

When asked about experience with different ways of receiving a ballot, 87% of respondents have received a ballot in person where they went to vote, 26% have received a ballot through the mail, and very few have received a ballot online or by fax (respondents could have experience with multiple methods). The percentages are similar when asked about ways of returning a completed ballot.

Respondents who said, in any election, they ever recevied or returned a ballot...
(n=410)

	By mail	Online	By fax	In person
Received	26%	4%	1%	87%
Returned	19%	3%	1%	89%
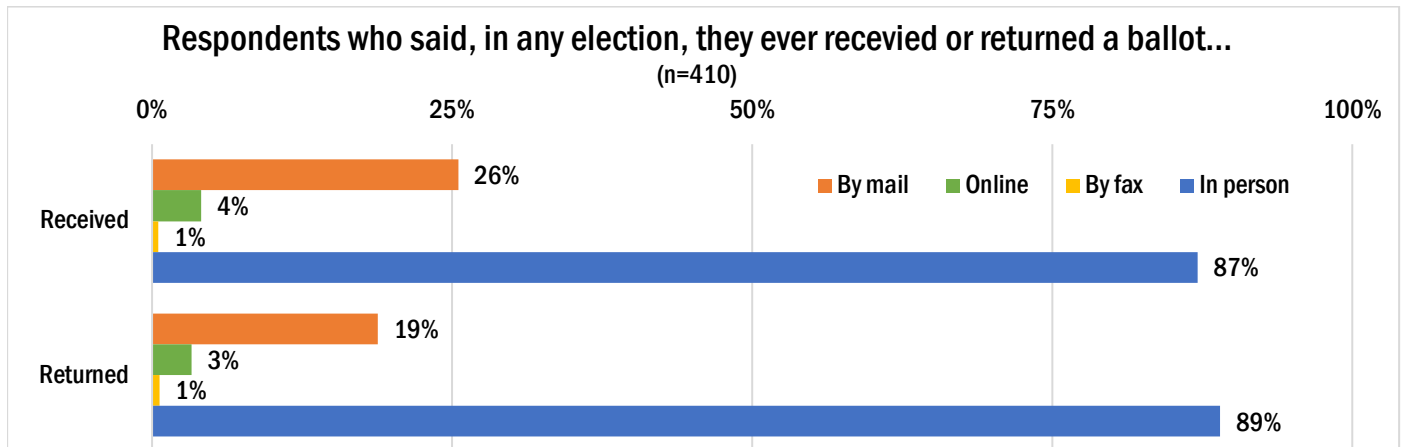
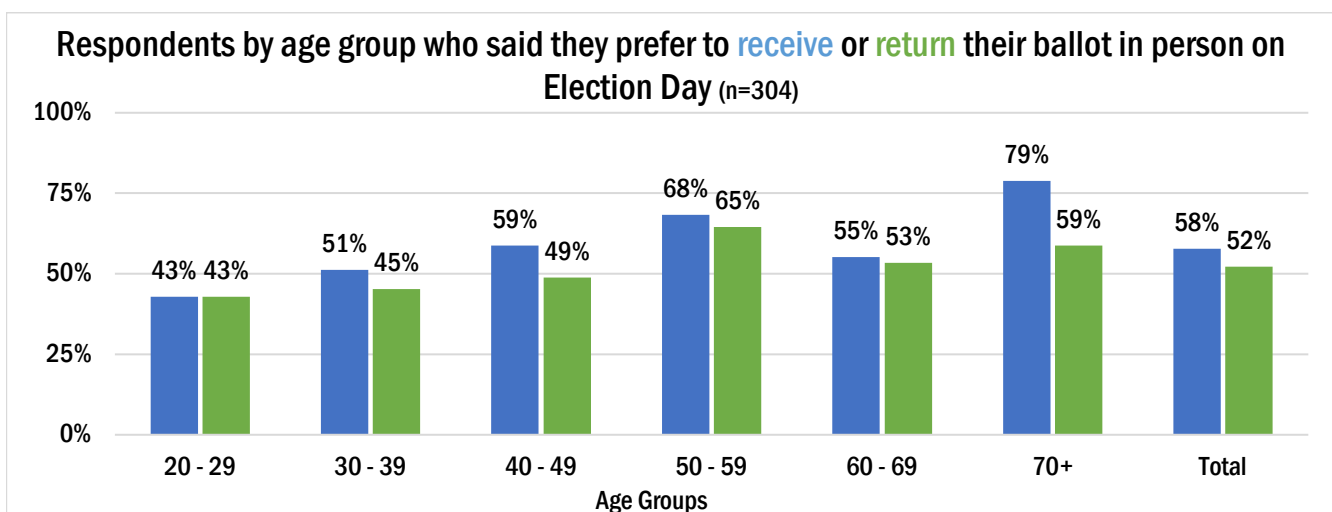There were few differences between the methods for receiving or returning ballots. The majority of those interviewed in each census area indicated they had both received and returned their ballot in person. Dillingham Census Area respondents reported slightly more experience with voting in-person and also a higher percentage that reported voting in every election. Very few people in any census area stated that they never voted.

Voting Preference

Interviewers asked how participants would prefer to receive and to return their ballot. Roughly, 60% prefer to receive their ballot in person on Election Day and 53% prefer to return their completed ballot this way. Accounting for this decrease may have been the added option to return their ballot in-person before Election Day. In all census areas, at least half of participants reported they would prefer to get or return their ballot in person on Election Day.

About 21% of participants would prefer to receive and 17% would prefer to return their ballot by mail, 16% would prefer to receive it online, and 14% would prefer to return it online. Returning their ballot online was not an option that was read to participants—unlike the other options—but when asked if there were another way they would like to return their ballot, online was the most frequent response. One respondent said, "I want online voting. It is easier." Another respondent referring to the Alaska Permanent Fund dividend said, "online would be popular…having it on the state website or some website, such as your state account used for dividend would work" or "I think online would be the most cost effective through the myAlaska account, and it would be the fastest, and it is the most accurate because there wouldn't be any questioned ballots if you vote online."

Differences in voting preferences by age group were explored. Older respondents reported a stronger preference to receive or return their ballot in person on Election Day than younger respondents, but regardless of age, most preferred to receive and return their ballots in person on Election Day than any other method. When compared to the almost 90% of respondents who had experience with voting in person, this could reflect several tendencies: a higher level of civic engagement among older respondents, the importance of the tradition of voting, the social aspect of seeing friends and family, or the lack of familiarity with other ways of voting. One respondent said, "Don't fix something that's not broken."

Respondents by age group who said they prefer to receive or return their ballot in person on Election Day (n=304)

Age Group	Receive	Return
20 - 29	43%	43%
30 - 39	51%	45%
40 - 49	59%	49%
50 - 59	68%	65%
60 - 69	55%	53%
70+	79%	59%
Total	58%	52%

Voting preferences were also compared to how often participants reported they vote. Among those who reported they vote in every election, 61% said they prefer to receive their ballot
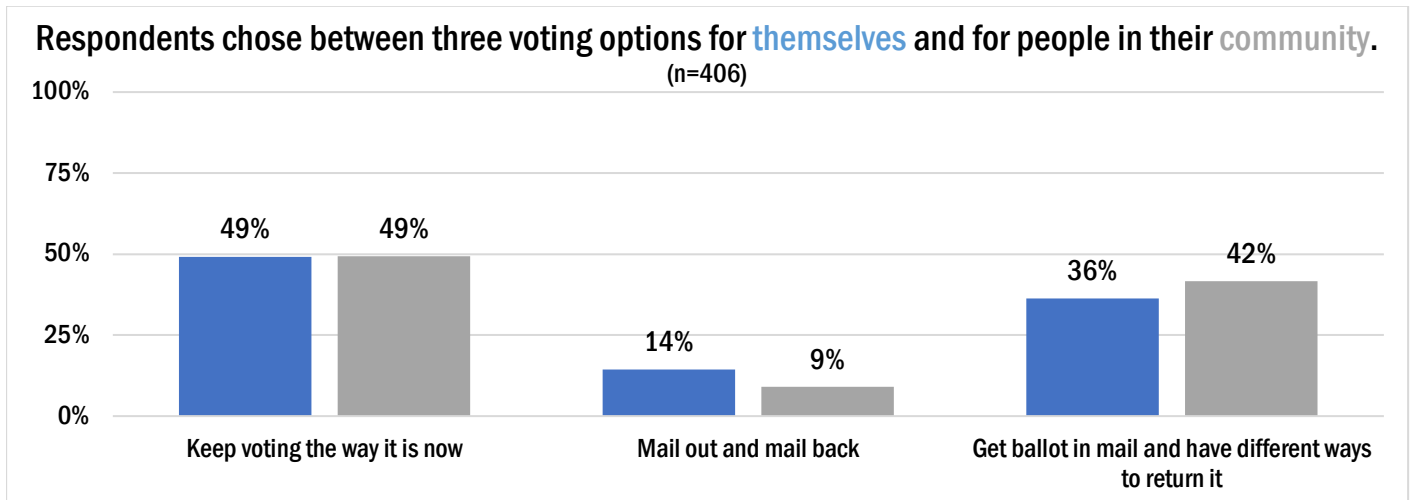
in person on Election Day and 57% said they preferred to return it this way as well. Nineteen percent said they preferred to receive their ballot by mail and 12% said they preferred to return it by mail.

Three Options for Voting

Participants heard a description of how voting might change and given three voting options:

> *The State is considering replacing traditional Election Day voting places with Vote Centers in every community. Vote Centers would offer help to voters who need it, but are different from how you vote now because they would be open two to three weeks before Election Day. You would get your ballot in the mail and would have different ways to return it, such as by mail or to a ballot drop box at the new Vote Center. If you didn't want to use the ballot you received in the mail or if something happened to it, you could still vote in person at the Vote Center up to and on Election Day.*
>
> 1. *Voting would remain the same as it is now;*
> 2. *Mail out and mail back: Receive the ballot by mail two to three weeks in advance and return it by mail; and*
> 3. *Receive the ballot by mail in advance and be able to return it by mail or in person at a vote center.*

Respondents chose between three voting options for themselves and for people in their community.
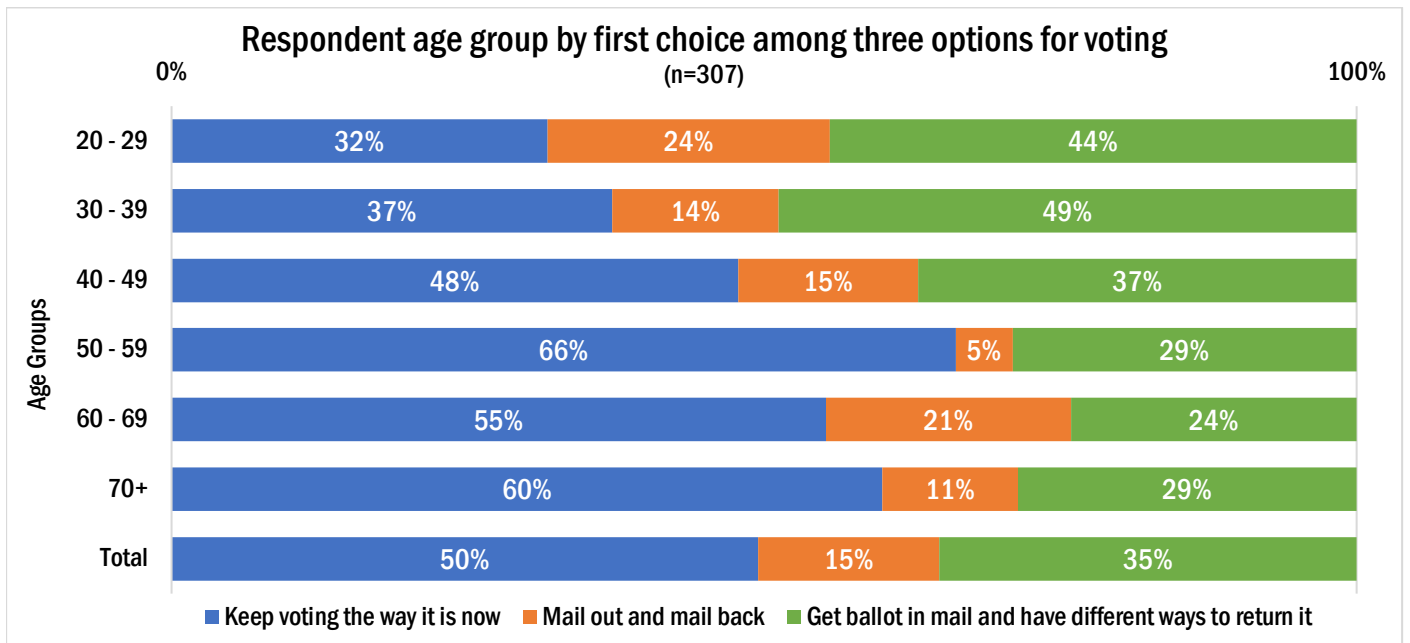(n=406)

Participants were asked to select their first choice for themselves and then for members of their community. After receiving information about the three voting options, about half of the participants chose to keep voting the way it is now and the same percentage thought that of members of their community would feel the same. Over one-third (36%) of respondents selected receiving their ballot by mail and having different ways of returning it, and 42% felt that community members would chose this method.

Interviewers asked respondents to explain the reason for their first choice. A third (34%) of respondents who chose to keep voting the way it is now as their first choice said they did so because it is the most reliable, efficient, or convenient method for them; 18% said it is the

most secure or trusted method; 17% mentioned the tradition of voting in person; and 11% talked about the social aspect of voting in person. Among respondents who chose the mail out and mail back option, over two-thirds (68%) said this was their first choice because it is the most reliable, efficient, or convenient method for them. Unexpectedly, 15% said they have no reason, that they just liked the idea.
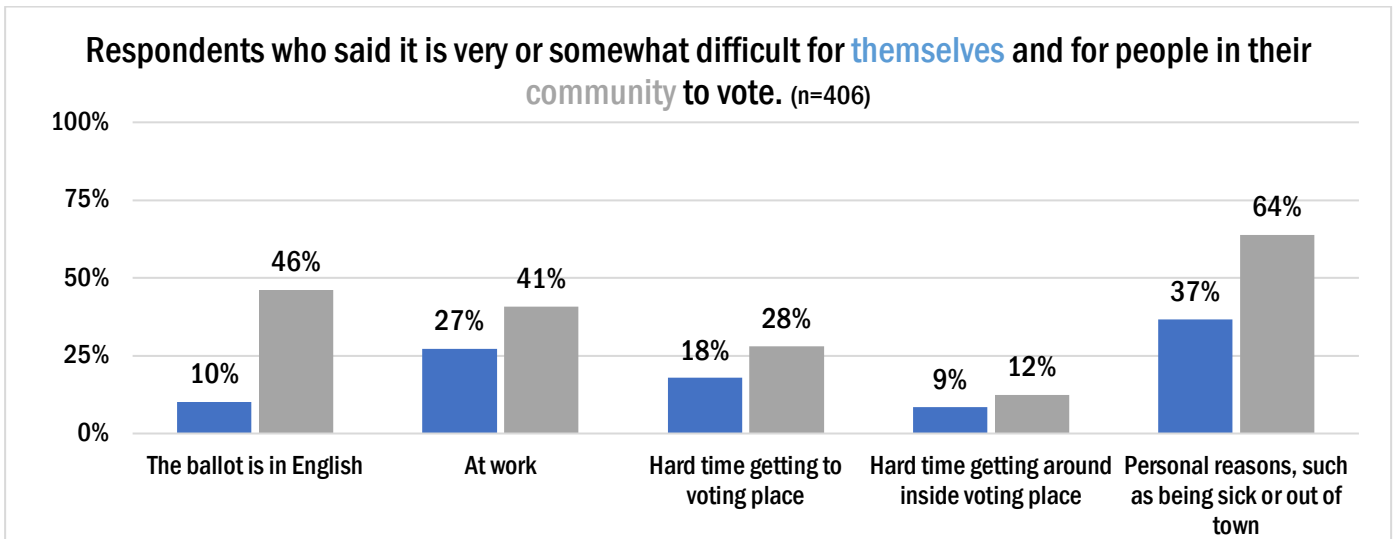
Just over half (55%) of respondents who picked the third option (get the ballot in mail and have different ways to return it) said this was their first choice because they liked the flexibility and different options of this method and 23% thought it would be the most reliable, efficient, or convenient method. Other comments described that they would have more time to research candidates and ballot measures.

Looking at the three options for voting by age group revealed trends similar to their voting preferences with higher percentages of those over 50 choosing option 1, keep voting the way it is now. A larger proportion of younger participants chose option 3 where they would get their ballot in the mail and have different ways to return it.

Respondent age group by first choice among three options for voting
(n=307)

Age Groups	Keep voting the way it is now	Mail out and mail back	Get ballot in mail and have different ways to return it
20 - 29	32%	24%	44%
30 - 39	37%	14%	49%
40 - 49	48%	15%	37%
50 - 59	66%	5%	29%
60 - 69	55%	21%	24%
70+	60%	11%	29%
Total	50%	15%	35%

Difficulties with Voting

Respondents answered questions about what made it difficult for them to vote given certain situations and what might make it difficult for people in their community to vote. Interviewers reported that respondents commented that while it was not difficult for themselves in many situations, it was more difficult for elders. "Elders need extra assistance in translation from English to Yup'ik." The chart below reflects these concerns about others in their community.

Respondents who said it is very or somewhat difficult for themselves and for people in their community to vote. (n=406)

Category	themselves	community
The ballot is in English	10%	46%
At work	27%	41%
Hard time getting to voting place	18%	28%
Hard time getting around inside voting place	9%	12%
Personal reasons, such as being sick or out of town	37%	64%

One respondent said, "[It] might be difficult for some elders to have a ride, since villages are spread out, and we are more and more dependent on 4 wheelers, automobiles, and snow machines to get to places. I just think transportation would be the main issue. Some people that don't know the system well also might miss the vote because they are out of town. I think it's important to have some sort of system in place to help elders understand how to vote and get to a vote place."

Getting around inside the voting place was the lowest noted of the five difficulties listed. A majority (92%) of respondents stated it was not at all difficult to vote for that reason, while 8% said it was somewhat or very difficult. Among those, two respondents voiced concerns about stairs and the lack of a handicap accessibility within their voting place. As explained by one, "They have had the elections at a place that does not have a handicap ramp, it's downstairs at a school, and I have [a medical condition]. They should have it on the floor level."

When asked if anything else had made it difficult for them to vote, respondents' answers included: childcare, travel for work or medical reasons, being busy or tired after work, long lines at the vote center, transportation, weather, trouble reading the ballot print (too small), trouble reading English and the lack of translators, discontent with a two-party system, and not knowing that it was a voting day or that an election was taking place.

Mail Service

Participants answered a series of questions about their mail service. Almost all participants receive their mail at a post office box with 62% receiving their mail at a box they share with others and 32% at a box they alone use. Participants were asked for their perceptions of the status of the mail they send and receive. The safety and security of their mail did not appear to be a big concern, but only about half the sample was certain mail would arrive on time.
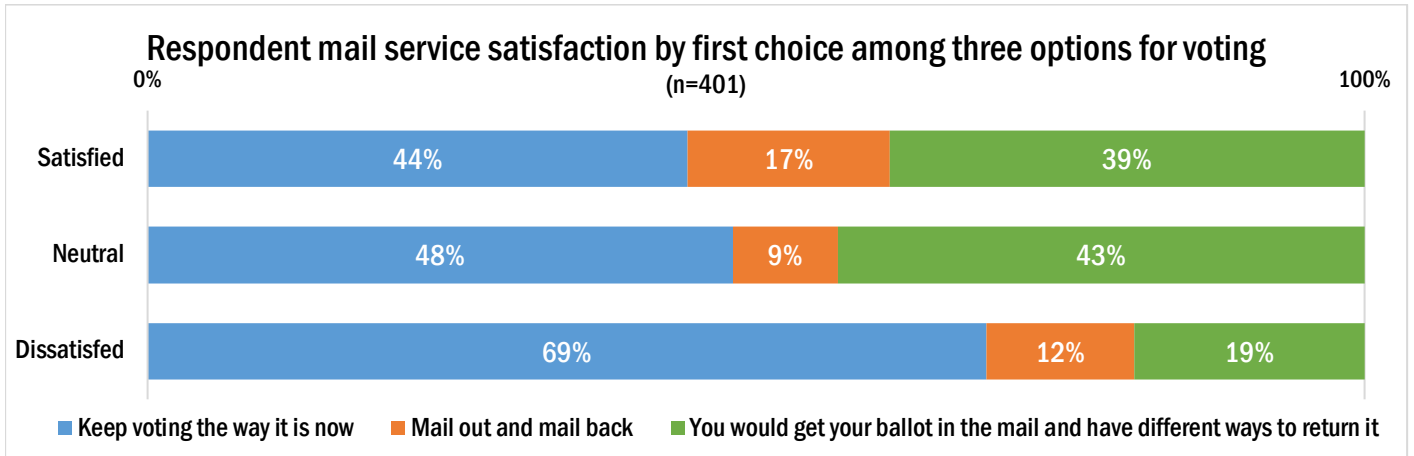
When asked what makes them think they will not get their mail on time, 93% of all responses include the term "weather." Other responses mention problems with the aircraft mail carrier, including that it is not to be trusted and that they suspected the carrier of holding the plane until it is full, being slow, or being lazy. Although less frequent, others mentioned problems with limited or inadequate post office staff, shortened post office hours that exacerbates the problem, or limitations and delays due to plane maintenance.

Participants who are very or somewhat certain that the mail they send and get will... (n=400)

	0%	100%
Not be damaged.	send 80%	get 84%
Not be opened.	send 81%	get 84%
Get there on time.	send 49%	get 48%

When asked for an overall assessment of their mail service 56% of participants reported that they were satisfied or very satisfied with their mail service, 26% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, and 18% were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. Respondents in each census area reported overall satisfaction with their mail service.

Participant satisfaction with their mail service was compared to their choice of the three voting methods. Over two-thirds (69%) of those who said they are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their mail service preferred to keep voting the way it is now. However, even among those who said they are satisfied with their mail service, only 17% said they would prefer to receive and return their ballot by mail. Regardless of mail satisfaction, most said
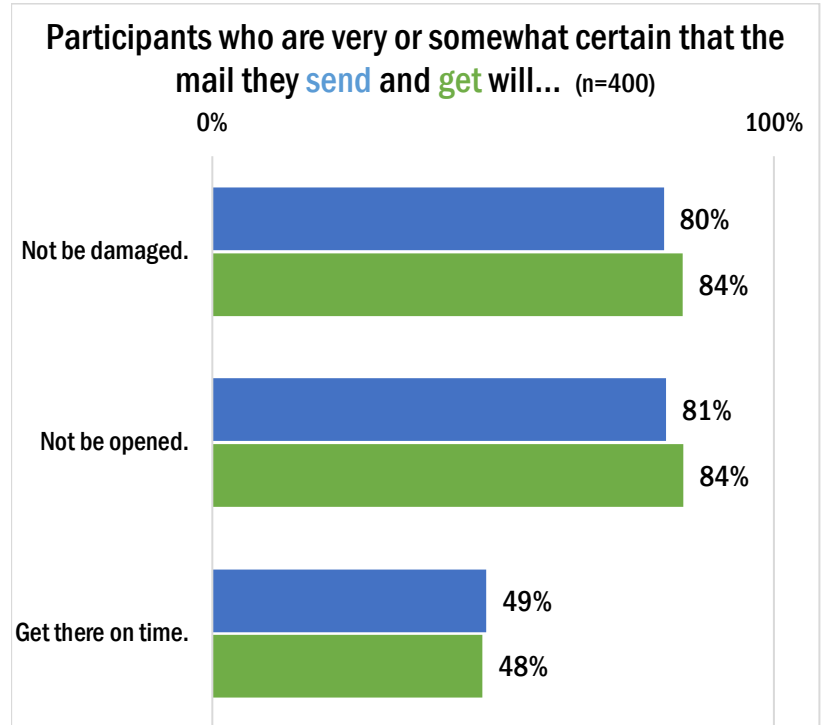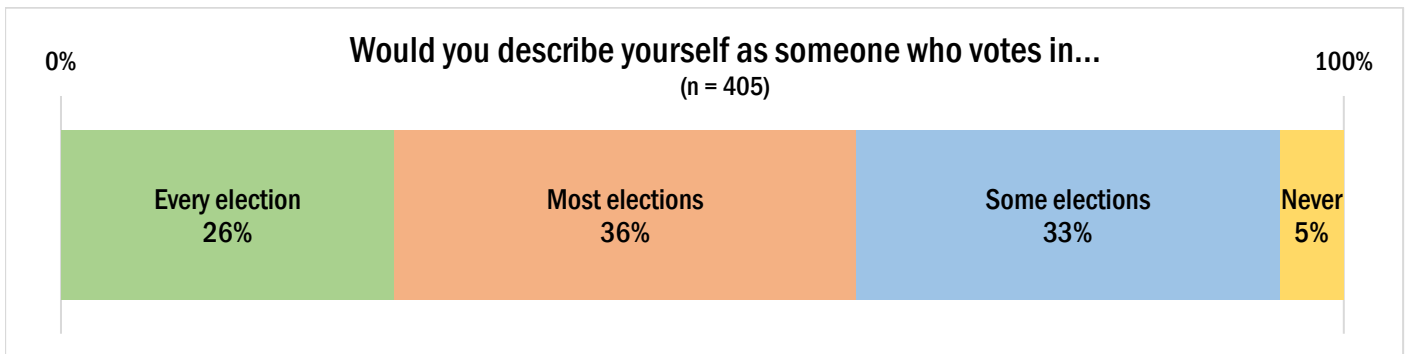
they preferred to keep voting the way it is now, followed by the third option where voters would get their ballot in the mail and have different ways to return it.

Respondent mail service satisfaction by first choice among three options for voting

0%   (n=401)   100%

Satisfied	44%	17%	39%
Neutral	48%	9%	43%
Dissatisfed	69%	12%	19%

■ Keep voting the way it is now   ■ Mail out and mail back   ■ You would get your ballot in the mail and have different ways to return it

Voting Behavior

Sixty-three percent of respondents reported voting in the 2016 presidential election and almost all (96%) of these respondents reported that they voted at their local voting place. Over 75% of the sample reported they vote in federal, state, and local elections. When asked how frequently they vote, just over a quarter (26%) of respondents said they vote in every election, 36% vote in most elections, and 5% said they never vote.

Would you describe yourself as someone who votes in…

0%   (n = 405)   100%

Every election 26%	Most elections 36%	Some elections 33%	Never 5%

Respondents' Thoughts and Concerns

The final question in the survey was, "Do you have any other thoughts and concerns that I can relay to the Division of Elections?" A total of 96 respondents gave comments.

Comments ranged from expressions of gratitude for the DOE, "I just want to thank you guys for conducting the survey as it is a pressing issue" to reiterating concerns about specific voting methods. One voter said, "The turnout at the voting center would improve if the ballot is mailed to the public and having various options would greatly increase it, a lot like Anchorage." Whereas another said, "The more complex voting is made, the more likely a

decrease in security will be created. Motivation, not increasingly complicated and expensive schemes, is the key to voting."

Regardless of varied opinions, a popular topic re-visited in comments was online voting. Of the 96 comments, 25% discussed either support for or opposition to online voting--11% were in support and 14% opposed. The two primary concerns with online voting were (1) hacking or Russian tampering, or (2) lack of internet accessibility in rural Alaska. Both those who supported and opposed online voting voiced these concerns. One respondent said, "...no electronic voting, especially with the Russia collusion." Whereas another, in support of online voting said, "We need online voting more with security, so they cannot hack into it. It will be faster and more convenient" or "I like the way that we go online, in our Bristol Bay Native Corporation." Others had different reasons for their opposition, such as "I think the old is way is better, computers change everything..." Some directly addressed connectivity limitations, "I do not have internet connection" or "I live out here in the bush, I wouldn't get into voting online because they haven't even secured the cell service out here" and "The online aspects; I'm concerned about availability in the bush."

Respondent Characteristics

When asked what race or races they considered themselves, 74% of respondents reported being Alaska Native and another 3% reported being Alaska Native and another race or races. Thirteen percent reported being White, and the remaining 10% were of some other race. As summarized in Table 1, this is comparable to U.S. Census population numbers for the Bethel, Dillingham, and Kusilvak Census Areas[1] where 81% of those ages 20 and older are Alaska Native/American Indian, 13% are White, and 5% are of some other race. Just over half (54%) of respondents were male, which is also comparable to Census numbers where 52% of the resident population are male.

Almost half (48%) of respondents reported that Yup'ik and English were the languages spoken in their household, 39% reported English only, 5% reported Yup'ik only, and 5% reported speaking Yup'ik and another language or languages.

One-quarter (26%) of respondents chose not to answer the question, "What year were you born?" However, interviewers reported that some respondents said they were worried about someone trying to

Table 1. Survey respondents by age group (n = 412) compared to Census population numbers[1]

Age group	Survey	Population
20 - 29	16%	28%
30 - 39	10%	20%
40 - 49	11%	16%
50 - 59	15%	19%
60 - 69	14%	12%
70+	8%	7%
Didn't answer	26%	-

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[1] This study represents registered voters in the Bethel, Dillingham, and Kusilvak census areas in Alaska. However, demographic data on registered voters by census area is not readily available, so the authors instead used total census area population. The findings from this study are not designed to represent all individuals living in any of the three census areas.

steal their identity. Surprisingly, respondents' ages were relatively evenly spread across the spectrum, despite fewer answers to this question.

Methods

A sample of registered voters received a personalized letter explaining that the State of Alaska is considering changing the way people in Alaska vote and is conducting a survey to obtain registered voters' perceptions of different voting methods. The letter invited the recipient to complete the survey by entering the personalized electronic link in a web browser. Reminder postcards were mailed to those who had not completed the survey online roughly two weeks after the estimated arrival of the announcement letter. The reminder postcards also included the personalized link for each recipient as well as an 800-number to complete the survey over the phone.

While the letters and postcards were in the mail, six interviewers were trained in proper survey research techniques. A training manual was designed specifically for the project. Training focused on two topics: the ethical conduct of research and scientific collection of information. Each interviewer signed a pledge of confidentiality, which states that the interviewer will not discuss anything learned in an interview. Much of the training and practice emphasized reading the survey questions exactly as written and how to ask probing questions to obtain an informative response without offering an opinion.

Approximately one week after mailing the postcards, interviewers began calling recipients who had not responded online and interviewed them via telephone. Interviewers received the individual's name, phone number, and the community where the person registered to vote. At the outset, 400 phone numbers of registered voters were assigned to the six interviewers. An assigned phone number could not be replaced with a new number unless:

- It was a non-working number
- The individual declined to participate in the survey on two separate phone calls
- Repeated attempts at contact over at least seven days, with morning, afternoon, and evening calls on varying days of the week, failed to reach anyone
- The individual was no longer registered to vote (registered in another state, voting rights had been taken away)
- The person answering the phone did not know the voter
- The individual could not be interviewed (away for the entire study period, language barrier, deceased, health problem)

DOE supported the effort to recruit registered voters by running local radio Public Service Announcements informing the public about the study and the importance of their participation.

Sampling

As summarized in Table 2, over half (59%) of registered voters in the sample frame were concentrated in the Bethel Census Area. In order to ensure inclusion of registered voters from smaller communities, the study employed stratification by precinct and community within census area boundaries. Within each census area, the population was further stratified into "hubs" and "villages," which yielded the following five strata: Bethel Hub, Bethel Villages, Dillingham Hub, Dillingham Villages, and Kusilvak (see Appendix B).

Table 2. Number and Percent of Registered Voters for Sample Design

Census Area	Registered Voters	
	#	%
Bethel	8,553	59%
Hub	2,731	19%
Villages	5,822	40%
Dillingham	2,710	19%
Hub	1,270	9%
Villages	1,440	10%
Kusilvak	3,186	22%
Total	14,449	100%

1. Bethel Hub includes precincts 38-808 and 38-810
2. Bethel Villages includes all other precincts within the Bethel Census Area in as well as precinct 37-746 (Sleetmute)
3. Dillingham Hub includes precinct 37-714
4. Dillingham Villages includes all other precincts under Dillingham Census Area
5. Kusilvak Census Area was not subdivided; it includes all precincts in Kusilvak Census Area

Registered voters were randomly selected from each of the five strata. For the results to represent all registered voters in the Bethel, Dillingham, and Kusilvak Census Areas, weights were applied to the sample. Weights are applied to survey data when certain groups within the sample (e.g., a census area) are over-or under-represented. Weights are calculated by dividing the percentage of registered voters in each census area by the percentage of survey respondents in that census area. If the survey was perfectly representative, then the weight would be equal to one. The weights are applied to the survey responses in the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) (analytical software) prior to analysis. All results presented in this report reflect these weighted values.

Data Collection

Interviewers spoke to 392 registered voters in Southwest Alaska by telephone between March 10, 2018 and May 1, 2018 and 20 registered voters completed the survey online themselves. This gave a total of 412 completed surveys. Interviewers called 836 phone numbers to obtain the 392 completed interviews. In some cases, this meant calling a voter multiple times.

The best single measure of the validity of a survey sample is the response rate. The response rate is calculated by dividing the number of completed interviews by the sum of the refusals,

telephone numbers never answered, and other circumstances that caused the respondent to be unable to be interviewed after subtracting the sum of the non-working numbers. The response rate in this survey was 70 percent, a rate considered by survey researchers to confirm the validity of the sample.

Data Analysis

Interviewers and online participants recorded answers electronically in Qualtrics. The questionnaire did not ask for names, addresses, or phone numbers, so these were not in Qualtrics. Qualtrics automatically collects a participant's IP address. For the majority of the respondents the IP address was ISER. For the 20 respondents who completed the survey online Qualtrics had an IP address for that individual. The IP address was removed from all surveys before exporting the data into Excel. The data was cleaned in Excel and then imported it into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for analysis.

Notes for Users of this Report

The authors urge caution when reviewing the responses to certain questions.

Data on respondents' voting history and habits come from the respondents themselves. The authors assume that there is an element of what is known as "social desirability" or giving what is perceived as a desirable answer; however, it is not known whether or how much of a role this might have played in participants' answers.

A number of respondents reported fearing that interviewers might be attempting to steal their identity. This fear may have played a part in refusals to participate in the survey. It is possible this is why 26% of respondents refused to give the year they were born.

Interviewers reported that some respondents had difficulty answering when asked how they felt others in their community might respond. This was evident especially when asked to choose the method of voting that others in their community might prefer.

Respondents can choose to skip questions, so the number of respondents (n) is included in all figures. If the number is low, be more cautious about the results.

During interviewing, several indicators were tracked to monitor productivity and the response rate. The authors had anticipated that phone numbers for registered voters would be accurate and current because the numbers came from the March 2017 Permanent Fund Dividend (PFD) applications. However, interviewers reported a high percentage of non-working numbers, approximately 24% of all numbers interviewers attempted to contact. A list of the remaining 286 registered voters in our sample was sent to the DOE so it could update phone numbers with March 2018 PFD data. However, of these non-working numbers, only six phone numbers were able to updated. It was very surprising that respondents didn't have their current phone numbers in the PFD files.

Conclusions

In the three census areas where interviewers spoke with registered voters, most support was for keeping voting the way it is now. However, once the respondents heard more

information about the different methods of voting, support for voting in person on Election Day dropped from 60% to 49%. Support for receiving and returning the ballot by mail, roughly 16%, decreased slightly to 14% after hearing more information. And while initially 21% preferred to receive their ballot by mail, after hearing more information 36% choose to receive their ballot by mail and have different ways to return it including the vote center.

There was considerable interest in voting online, even when the survey didn't offer it as an option, respondents raised the possibility. Some respondents were simply intrigued with the idea of being able to vote online. However, concerns about security and, to a degree limits to connectivity, may have tempered respondents' support.

Some of the reasons for limited support of voting by mail may be due to respondents' concerns with their mail service, but their lack of experience with other methods and the preference for staying with the traditional method are strong factors. As one respondent explained, "The active participation of being part of the process and democracy, exercising the privilege in person is important to the process. The problem is primarily people's willingness to go vote and participate." Yet, there was a pervasive sentiment among respondents that if another method would encourage more people to vote, there was support for it. One respondent said, "Well if they can make it better where more people can vote, then go for it. Some people are like me and like it the same way, they're stuck in a rut you know, just because that's how they've always done it. But if there is another way to vote, and it's going to encourage more people to vote, I say go for it, do it."

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Appendix A. Voter turnout in Anchorage Municipality General Elections, 2008 – 2018

Voter Turnout in Anchorage Municipality General Elections, 2008 - 2018

Year	Registered Voters	Votes Cast	% Voter Turnout
2008	200,533	46,850	23.4%
2009	196,245	58,714	29.9%
2010	201,369	39,096	19.4%
2011	197,420	45,200	22.9%
2012	198,512	71,099	35.8%
2013	210,150	42,344	20.1%
2014	199,606	46,890	23.5%
2015	206,033	57,536	27.9%
2016	209,909	51,999	24.8%
2017	212,782	49,370	23.2%
2018	218,388	79,295	36.3%

Appendix B. Precincts and Communities within Census Areas

Precincts and Communities within Census Areas

Census Area	Precincts	Communities
Bethel	37-746, 38-800, 38-802, 38-804, 38-806, 38-808, 38-810, 38-812, 38-814, 38-816, 38-818, 38-820, 38-822, 38-824, 38-826, 38-828, 38-830, 38-832, 38-834, 38-836, 38-838, 38-840, 38-842, 38-844, 38-846, 38-848, 38-850, 38-852, 38-854, 38-856, 38-858, 38-860	Sleetmute, Akiachak, Akiak, Aniak, Atmautluak, Bethel No. 1, Bethel No. 2, Chefornak, Chuathbaluk, Crooked Creek, Eek, Goodnews Bay, Kasigluk, Kipnuk, Kongiganak, Kwethluk, Kwigillingok, Lower Kalskag, Marshall, Mekoryuk, Napakiak, Napaskiak, Newtok, Nightmute, Nunapitchuk, Quinhagak, Russian Mission, Toksook Bay, Tuluksak, Tuntutuliak, Tununak, Upper Kalskag
Dillingham	37-702, 37-710, 37-714, 37-718, 37-724, 37-732, 37-736, 37-754	Aleknagik, Clarks Point, Dillingham, Ekwok, Koliganek, Manokotak, New Stuyahok, Togiak
Kusilvak	39-900, 39-904, 39-910, 39-916, 39-918, 39-922, 39-928, 39-930, 39-934, 39-940	Alakanuk, Chevak, Emmonak, Hooper Bay, Kotlik, Mountain Village, Nunam Iqua, Pilot Station, Scammon Bay, St. Mary's

Appendix C. Preliminary Findings Report (May 7, 2018)

Perceptions of Ways of Voting among Registered Voters in Bethel, Dillingham, and Kusilvak Areas of Alaska
For the Alaska Division of Elections

Preliminary Findings

Between March 10 and May 1, 2018 staff at UAA's Institute of Social and Economic Research completed interviews with 412 individuals registered to vote in the Bethel, Dillingham, and Kusilvak census areas in Southwest Alaska. These areas are part of the Division of Elections' Region IV. The findings are representative of registered voters in these three areas. The response rate in this survey was 70 percent, a rate considered by survey researchers to confirm the validity of the sample.

Voting Experience

When asked about experience with different ways of receiving a ballot, 87% of respondents have received a ballot in person where they went to vote, 26% have received a ballot through the mail, and very few have received a ballot online or by fax (respondents could have experience with multiple methods). The percentages are similar when asked about ways of returning a completed ballot.
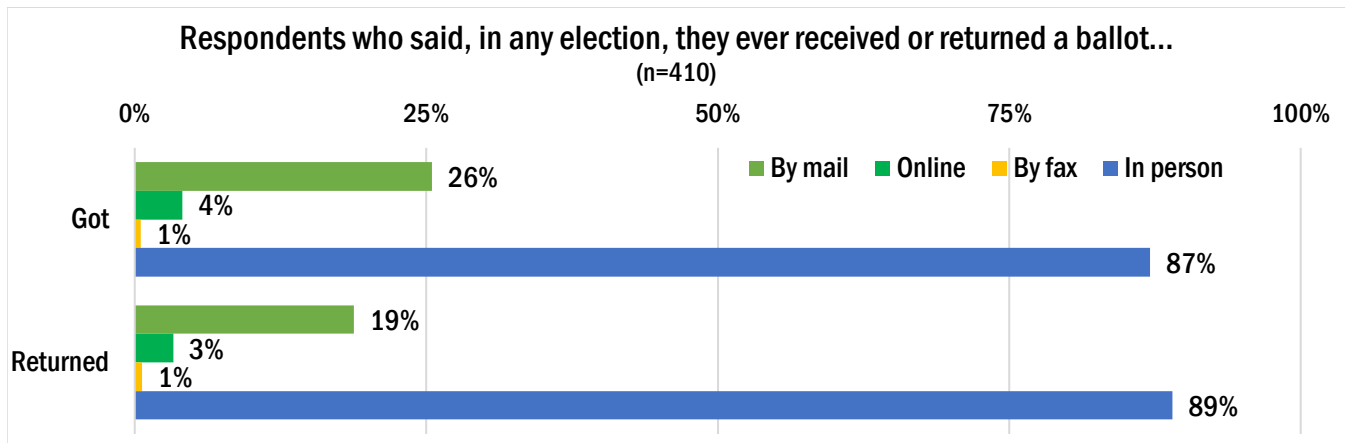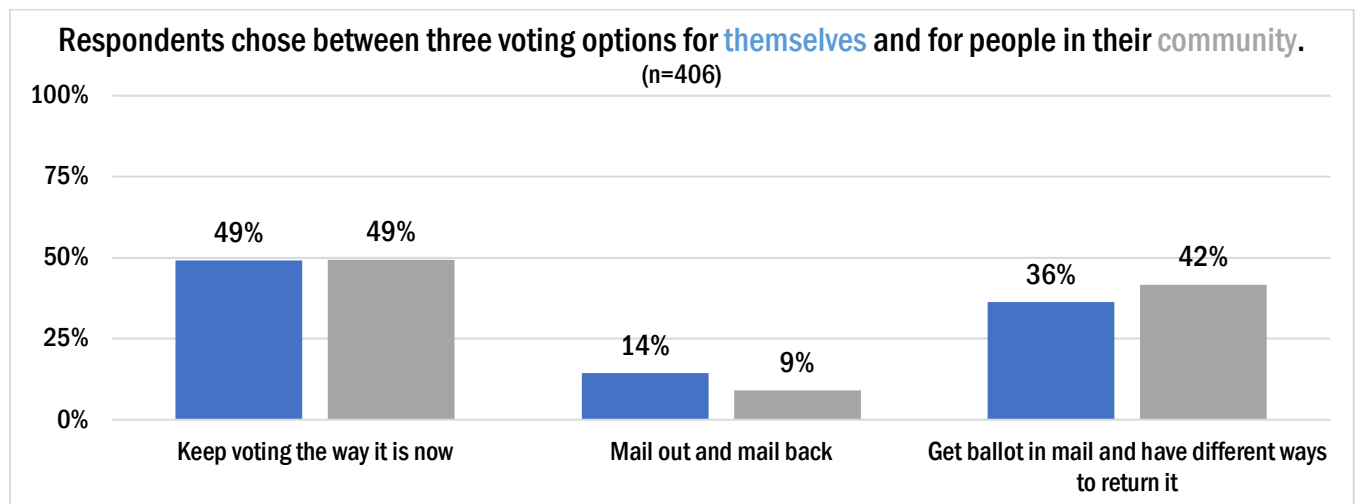

Voting Preference

Interviewers asked how the respondent would prefer to receive and to return their ballot and roughly 60% prefer to receive their ballot in person on Election Day and 53% prefer to return their completed ballot this way. About 21% of participants would prefer to receive and 17% would prefer to return their ballot by mail, 16% would prefer to receive it online, and 14% would prefer to return it online. Returning their ballot online was not an option that was read to participants—unlike the other options--but when asked if there were another way they would like to return their ballot, online was the most frequent response.

Three Options for Voting

Participants heard a description of how voting might change and given three voting options:

> The State is considering replacing traditional Election Day voting places with Vote Centers in every community. Vote Centers would offer help to voters who need it, but are different from how you vote now because they would be open two to three weeks before Election Day. You would get your ballot in the mail and would have different ways to return it, such as by mail or to a ballot drop box at the new Vote Center. If you didn't want to use the ballot you received in the mail or if something happened to it, you could still vote in person at the Vote Center up to and on Election Day.

> 1. Voting would remain the same as it is now;
> 2. Mail out and mail back: Receive the ballot by mail two to three weeks in advance and return it by mail; and
> 3. Receive the ballot by mail in advance and be able to return it by mail or in person at a vote center.

Respondents chose between three voting options for themselves and for people in their community.
(n=406)

Participants were asked to select for themselves and then for members of their community. After receiving information about the three voting options, about half of the participants chose to keep voting the way it is now and the same percentage thought that of members of their community would feel the same. Among participants over one-third (36%) selected receiving their ballot by mail and having different ways of returning it and 42% felt that community members would chose this method.
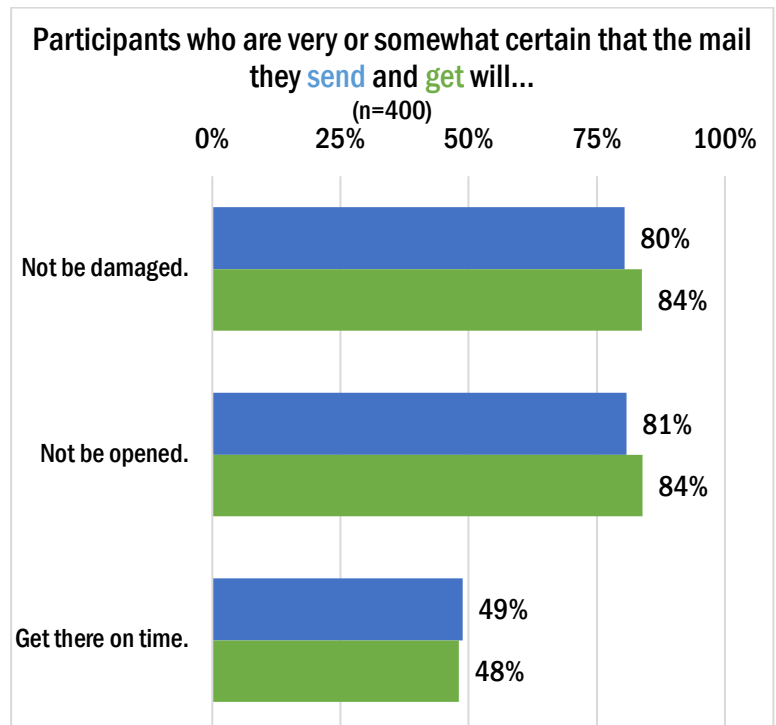
Difficulties with Voting

Respondents answered questions about what made it difficult for them to vote given certain situations and what might make it difficult for people in their community to vote. Interviewers reported that respondents commented that while it was not difficult for themselves in many situations, it was more difficult for elders. The chart below reflects these concerns about others in their community.
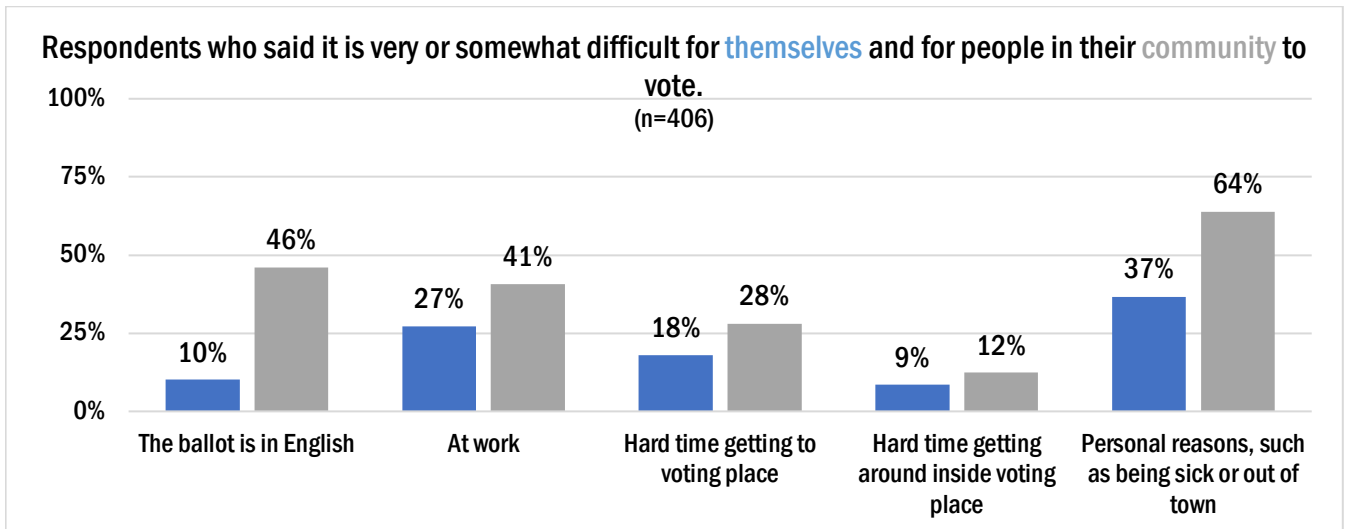
Respondents who said it is very or somewhat difficult for themselves and for people in their community to vote.
(n=406)

	Themselves	Community
The ballot is in English	10%	46%
At work	27%	41%
Hard time getting to voting place	18%	28%
Hard time getting around inside voting place	9%	12%
Personal reasons, such as being sick or out of town	37%	64%

Mail Service

Participants answered a series of questions about their mail service. Almost all participants receive their mail at a post office box with 62% receiving their mail at a box they share with others and 32% at a box they alone use. We asked participants for their perceptions of the status of the mail they send and receive. The safety and security of their mail did not appear to be a big concern, but the greatest uncertainty was whether mail would arrive on time.

When asked for an overall assessment of their mail service 56% of participants reported that they were satisfied or very satisfied with their mail service, 26% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, and 18% were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied.

Participants who are very or somewhat certain that the mail they send and get will...
(n=400)

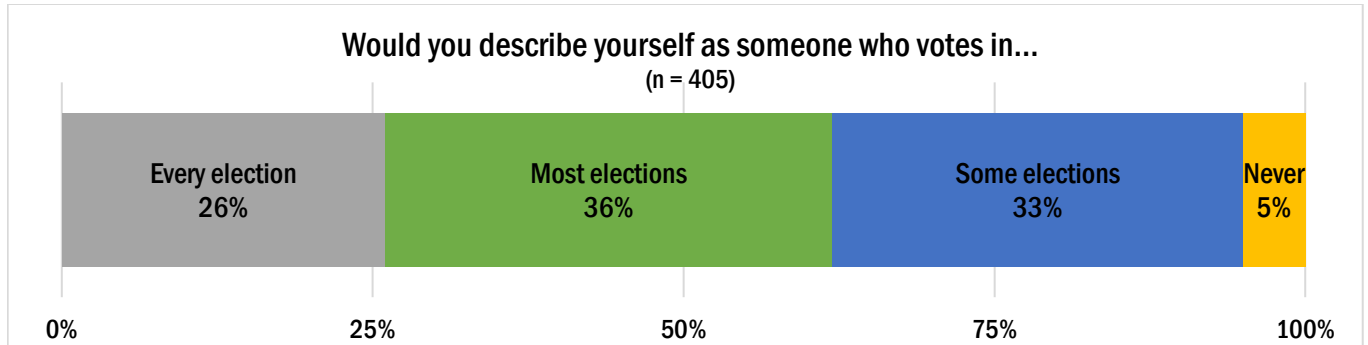|	Send	Get
Not be damaged.	80%	84%
Not be opened.	81%	84%
Get there on time.	49%	48%

Voting Behavior

Sixty-three percent of respondents reported voting in the 2016 presidential election and 96% of these respondents reported that they voted at their local voting place. A majority of the sample reported they vote in federal, state, and local elections. Just over a quarter (26%) of respondents said they vote in every election and only 5% said they never vote.

Respondents who vote in different types of elections (n=406)

Do you usually vote in...	%
Federal Elections	76%
State Elections	79%
Local Elections	75%

Would you describe yourself as someone who votes in...
(n = 405)

Every election 26%	Most elections 36%	Some elections 33%	Never 5%

0%   25%   50%   75%   100%

Respondent Characteristics

When asked what race or races they considered themselves, 74% of respondents reported being Alaska Native and another 3% reported being Alaska Native and another race or races. Thirteen percent reported being White, and the remaining 10% were of some other race. Just over half (54%) of respondents were male.

Almost half (48%) of respondents reported that Yup'ik and English were the languages spoken in their household, 39% reported English only, 5% reported Yup'ik only, and 5% reported speaking Yup'ik and another language or languages.

One-quarter (26%) of respondents chose not to answer the question, "What year were you born?" However, interviewers reported that some respondents said they were worried about someone trying to steal their identity. Despite fewer answers, ages were distributed relatively evenly across the spectrum.

Respondents by age group (n = 412)

Ages 20 - 29	16%
Ages 30 - 39	10%
Ages 40 - 49	11%
Ages 50 - 59	15%
Ages 60 - 69	14%
Ages 70+	8%
Didn't answer	26%

Further results will be available by the end of May 2018.

Appendix D. Survey Announcement Letter

(Month Day, Year)

Dear [First name] [Last name],

You are receiving this letter because we need your help.

The voting equipment we use in Alaska is over 20 years old and needs to be replaced within the next five years. It is hard to find parts to fix the machines if they break and they run on old computer systems. The Alaska Division of Elections (DOE) is the agency that must decide what kind of voting system we will have in the future. DOE is doing a number of things to help them in their decisions. One effort by DOE has been to hire the Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER) at the University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA) to conduct a survey of registered voters to learn what voters in this area think about different ways of voting.

We are asking for your help because the Division of Elections' records show you registered to vote in 2016 in this region. We have permission from the Division of Elections to use this list. We would like to learn what you, a registered voter, think about different ways of voting. If you are willing to take part in this survey, we will describe the different ways of voting the State is thinking about and then ask how you feel about those ways. We will also ask if you have every voted in any of these ways. We do not ask about who you voted for or if you belong to a political party. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions; we want to know how you feel and what you think.

Taking part in this survey is your choice. If you would like to take part in this survey, please enter your survey link below in a web browser (such as Google, Explorer, or Firefox) to get to the survey. Your survey link has your first and last initial, followed by six numbers.

[INSERT PERSONALIZED LINK HERE]

Before beginning the survey, you will read a Consent Form that explains the survey and your rights as a person in a research study. A copy of this Consent Form is with this letter for you to keep. If we don't get your completed survey online we will call you.

If you have any questions about the survey, please contact Virgene Hanna, at (907) 786-5431 or mhanna7@alaska.edu, or Jessica Passini, at (907) 786-5412 or jnpassini@alaska.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a member of a research study, please contact Sharilyn Mumaw, UAA Research Compliance Officer, at (907) 786-1099.

Thank you for your help!

Sincerely,

Virgene Hanna
Survey Research Director

Appendix E. Survey Reminder Postcard

5x3-reminder postcard

Front:

We want to hear from you!

Hello (First Name Last Name),

You are receiving this postcard as a <u>reminder</u> to please enter the link below in your web browser to take a survey of registered voters that **asks what you think about different ways of voting.** Or if you would like us to interview you over the phone, call us at 1-833-786-6777

[INSERT PERSONALIZED LINK HERE]

Your answers are very important to us. Thank you for your help!

If you have already completed the survey—thank you!

UAA Institute of Social

Back:

ISER/UAA   POSTAGE
1901 Bragaw St, Suite 301
Anchorage, Alaska
99508

First Name Last Name
Address
City, State
Zip

Appendix F. Consent Form

Voting Study for Alaska Division of Elections
Research Consent Form (1/5/18)

Study Leader:

Virgene Hanna
University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA)
(907) 786-5431
mhanna7@alaska.edu

About this Study:

You are invited to be in a research study that asks what you think about different ways of voting. The voting equipment we use now in Alaska is over 20 years old and needs to be replaced within the next five years. It is hard to find parts to fix the machines if they break and they run on old computer systems. The Alaska Division of Elections is paying for this study and wants to know how you and about 400 other voters think about different ways of voting. We will also ask questions about your experiences and concerns with voting in different ways. We do not ask questions about who you voted for in past elections.

Free to Choose:

Taking part in this survey is your choice. You do not have to answer these questions, you may stop at any time, and nothing will happen. You do not have to answer any question you do not want to answer.

Confidentiality:

Your answers to these questions will be confidential. This means that no one will reveal what you have said and no one will know who took part in this study. People who work at the Division of Elections will not know who answered the questions or see your answers. Only the study leaders at UAA can see your answers and everyone who works on this project has signed a pledge of confidentiality. We will write the report on this study so that no person can be identified. The Institutional Review Board at UAA may look at all answers if they think that the study leaders have not followed the rules of research.

Benefits:

The Alaska Division of Elections will learn voters' opinions about different voting systems from this study. There are no direct benefits to you from participating in this research.

Potential Risks:

It will take about 10 minutes for you to answer these questions. There are no known risks to you from answering these questions.

Contact People

If you have any questions about this study, please contact Virgene Hanna at the phone number or email address at the top of this page. If you have questions about your rights as a person in a research study, please contact Sharilyn Mumaw, Research Compliance Officer, at (907) 786-1099 or by email at simumaw@alaska.edu.

Signature

Agreeing to be in this research study means you have read, or been read, this page and are willing to answer the questions. If you have any questions, feel free to ask them now or at any time during this study.

Do you give your consent to be in this study?

Yes, I agree to be in this research study

No, I do not want to be in this research study.

There is a copy of this consent form online on ISER's website at www.iser.uaa.alaska.edu.

Voting Study for Alaska Division of Elections

There are several ways you can get and return your ballot.

Q1In any election, did you ever get a ballot...

(please select all that apply in each column)

	YES	NO
By mail	☐	☐
Online	☐	☐
By fax	☐	☐
In person where you went to vote	☐	☐

Display This Question:

  If In person is Selected

Q1.1 Was this at the official voting place in your community?

○ Yes

○ No

Q2 Did you ever get a ballot some other way?

○ Yes

○ No

Q2.1 How did you get your ballot?

_____

Q3 In any election, have you ever <u>returned</u> a completed ballot…

(please select <u>all that apply</u> in each column)

	YES	NO
By mail	☐	☐
Online	☐	☐
By fax	☐	☐
In person where you voted	☐	☐

Q3.1 Was this at the official voting place in your community?

○ Yes

○ No

Q4 Have you ever <u>returned</u> a completed ballot some other way?

○ Yes

○ No

Q4.1 How did you return your completed ballot?

_____

Q5 How would you prefer to get your ballot?

○ Online

○ By fax

○ By mail

○ In person on Election Day

○ Other (please explain) _____

Q5.1 Could you tell me your reasons for choosing to vote in person instead of some other way?_____

Q6 Could you tell me your reasons for choosing this way to get your ballot?

_____

Q7 How would you prefer to <u>return</u> your completed ballot?

○ By fax

○ By mail

○ In a ballot drop box before Election Day

○ In person on Election Day

○ Other (please explain) ___ _____

Q8 Could you tell me your reasons for choosing this way to return your ballot?

_____

Q9 The State is considering replacing traditional Election Day voting places with Vote Centers in every community. Vote Centers would offer help to voters who need it, but are different from how you vote now because they would be open two to three weeks before Election Day. You would get your ballot in the mail and would have different ways to return it, such as by mail or to a ballot drop box at the new Vote Center. If you didn't want to use the ballot you received in the mail or if something happened to it, you could still vote in person at the Vote Center up to and on Election Day.

Now I will describe three ways of voting.

The <u>first way</u> would be to keep voting the way it is now with voting in person on Election Day only. Absentee and early voting would still be available.

The <u>second way</u> would be to vote by mail. Your ballot would be mailed to you and you would have two to three weeks to complete the ballot and mail it back.

The <u>third way</u> would be to get your ballot in the mail and have different ways to return it up to and on Election Day, including the Vote Center.

Thinking about these three ways of voting, which way would be your first choice?

◯ 1) Keep voting the way it is now

◯ 2) Mail out and mail back

◯ 3) You would get your ballot in the mail and have different ways to return it up to and on Election Day, including the Vote Center.

Q10 Could you tell me the reasons this is your first choice?

_____

Q11 If your first choice wasn't available, which way would be your second choice?

◯ Keep voting the way it is now

◯ Mail out and mail back

◯ You would get your ballot in the mail and have different ways to return it up to and on Election Day, including the Vote Center.

Q12 Still thinking about these three ways, which way do you think people in your community would like best:

○ Keep voting the way it is now

○ Mail out and mail back

○ They would get their ballot in the mail and have different ways to return it up to and on Election Day, including the Vote Center.

Q13 Some people only vote in federal, state, or local elections.

Federal elections are when you vote for President, Senators, or House Representatives.

State elections are when you vote for Governor or State Legislators.

Local elections are when you vote for Tribal or city council members.

We would like to know the kinds of elections you vote in.

That is, do you usually vote in...

	Yes	No
Federal elections	○	○
State elections	○	○
Local elections	○	○

Q14 Did you vote in the 2016 Presidential election?

○ Yes

○ No

Skip To: Q12 If Did you vote in the 2016 Presidential election? = No

Q15 Did you vote at your local voting place?

○ Yes

○ No

Q16 Did you vote...

○ By mail

○ By fax

○ In person somewhere other than your local voting place

○ Other (please explain) _____

Q17 Now I would like to know how often you vote.

Do you vote in...

○ Every election

○ Most elections

○ Some elections

○ Never

Q18 These next questions ask about what might make it difficult to vote.

Is it very difficult, somewhat difficult, or not at all difficult for you to vote because…

	Very difficult	Somewhat difficult	Not at all difficult
The ballot is in English.	○	○	○
You are at work.	○	○	○
You have a hard time getting to your voting place.	○	○	○
You have a hard time getting around inside your voting place.	○	○	○
Personal reasons, such as being sick or out of town.	○	○	○

Q 19 Is there anything else that has made it difficult for you to vote?

_____

Q20 These questions ask about what might make it difficult for <u>people in your community</u> to vote.

In your opinion, is it very difficult, somewhat difficult, or not at all difficult for <u>people in your community</u> to vote because...

	Very difficult	Somewhat difficult	Not at all difficult
The ballot is in English.	○	○	○
They are at work.	○	○	○
They have a hard time getting to the voting place.	○	○	○
They have a hard time getting around inside the voting place.	○	○	○
Personal reasons, such as being sick or out of town.	○	○	○

Q21 Is there anything else that has made it difficult for <u>people in your community</u> to vote?

_____

These next few questions are about your mail service.

Q22 Do you get your mail...

○ At a Post Office Box that you share with other people

○ At a Post Office Box that only you use

○ At your home

○ At someone else's home

○ Other (please explain) _____

Q23 Are you very certain, somewhat certain, or not at all certain that the mail you <u>send</u> will...

	Very certain	Somewhat certain	Not at all certain
Not be damaged.	○	○	○
Not be opened.	○	○	○
Get there on time.	○	○	○

Q23.1 What makes you think this mail won't get there on time?

_____

Q24 Now thinking about the mail that comes to you, are you very certain, somewhat certain, or not at all certain that the mail you <u>get</u> will…

	Very certain	Somewhat certain	Not at all certain
Not be damaged.	○	○	○
Not be opened.	○	○	○
Be on time.	○	○	○

Q24.1 What makes you think you won't get your mail on time?

_____

Q25 With 5 being "very satisfied" and 1 being "very dissatisfied," overall how satisfied are you with your mail service?

○ Very satisfied (5)

○ Satisfied (4)

○ Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (3)

○ Dissatisfied (2)

○ Very dissatisfied (1)

Q26 In what community do you live? _____

Q27 What year were you born? _____

Q28 Are you male or female?

○ Male

○ Female

Q29 What race or races for you consider yourself to be? (please select <u>all</u> that apply)

☐ Alaska Native or American Indian

☐ Asian

☐ Black or African American

☐ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander

☐ White/Caucasian

☐ Other (please specify) _____

Q30 Are you Hispanic or Latino?

○ Yes

○ No

Q31 What languages are spoken in your household? (please select <u>all</u> that apply)

☐ Alutiiq

☐ English

☐ Inupiaq

☐ Spanish

☐ Tagalog

☐ Yup'ik

☐ Other (please specify) _____

Q32 Do you have any other thoughts or concerns about different ways of voting that I can relay to the Division of Elections?

_____
_____
_____