September 12, 2012

Mr. Matthew Ericson
Deputy Director for Information Graphics
The New York Times

Dear Mr. Ericson:


Upon viewing the overview map representing U.S. states, I immediately grasped the concept of states sized by the number of electoral votes. The coloring and shading also provide a clear visual understanding of the significance each state may have in the election outcome. The pre-attentive visualization truly captures viewers’ attention with the topic presented and helps users analyze and interpret information with little effort. The graphics is exceedingly intuitive and self-explanatory.

On the other hand, I was rather curious regarding the decision made for state name abbreviation shown in the graphics. At first, I considered it somewhat inconsistent with names like “Calif.” and “N.D.” displayed. However, as I interacted with the graphics I realized how the state names labeled for each circle have made it easier for me to recognize without having to go through the mental process of converting code such as “MT” to the state name “Montana.”

Furthermore, I thought it would be interesting to understand the design choice made on using circles to define the regions and votes for each presidential candidate. While the circles yield appealing user interaction, it does not seem to make good use of afforded due to the gaps between the circles and some circles crowded on the edge that users may have difficulty viewing (Please see the image beside for illustration). I was wondering if square shapes like treemap structure would be more suitable in terms of representing the number of votes by size.

In addition, from the standpoint of easing user interaction, wouldn’t be nice if users can
select multiple circles together to move around as a group instead of repeating the drag-and-drop action several times? It would also be helpful if a user can click on one of the shaded circle then directed to the text below the graphics for further information.

I also noticed the map navigation bar seems to give users the impression of progression or chronological development, but they are in fact unrelated scenarios and events. Perhaps, the scenarios could be categorized and presented to users differently on the navigation bar to visually distinguish the difference between the scenarios (illustrated in the mock-up below).

Mock-up of possible organization for the navigation bar

Nevertheless, it was such an rewarding experience interacting with the visualization. It has certainly helped me gain insights on what the 2012 presidential election outcome could be. Thank you and your incredible team for providing such visually attractive and useful graphics on The New York Times website.

Sincerely,
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