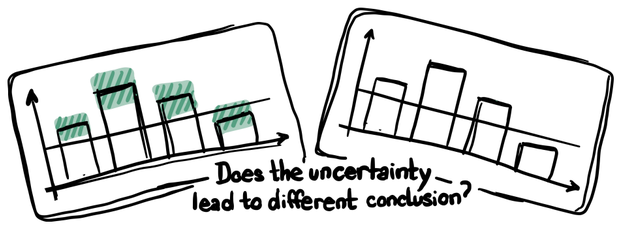
UNCERTAINTY4DDJ

Practice-Oriented Heuristics Cheat Sheet

On this page you can find ten practical guidelines for designing and communicating uncertainty in data journalistic settings.

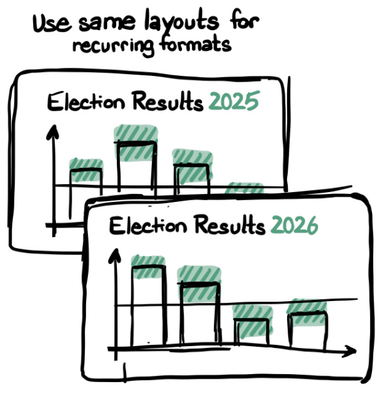
H1 Neccesity Check



Evaluate whether and how uncertainty visualization affects the interpretation of the story. Include explicit visual uncertainty when it substantially affects the interpretation or takeaway. Otherwise, use a representation of uncertainty that adds less complexity.

If the story is "party A clearly leads", the chart communicates uncertainty only through a textual annotation. If the story is "race is close, no reliable lead", the chart displays ranges because uncertainty directly affects the interpretation.

H2 Consistent Uncertainty Formats

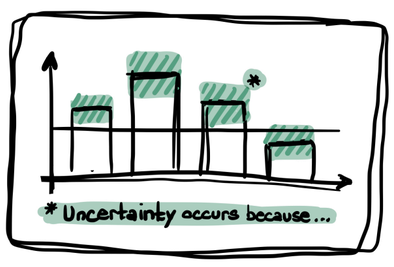


Reuse consistent uncertainty conventions across recurring or related visualizations when they represent the same uncertainty construct. Consistency can help readers build familiarity with how uncertainty is encoded over time.

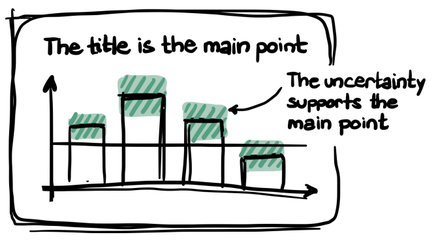
Readers encounter the same uncertainty-range format across recurring election-poll coverage, such as a poll tracker and election articles published throughout a campaign. Because the uncertainty encoding remains consistent, readers can build familiarity with how polling uncertainty is represented.

H3 Uncertainty Source Attribution

Explicitly identify the source of uncertainty to support accurate reader interpretation. Clarify whether it stems from sampling error, model assumptions, or incomplete data, and translate technical causes into accessible language.



A short explanatory note states that the range reflects sampling uncertainty, while differences between polling institutes may also stem from methodological choices.

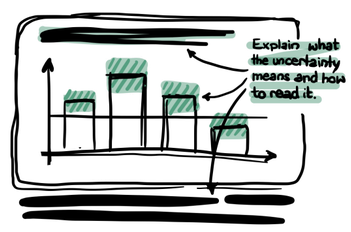


H4 Uncertainty-Framed Insights

Design the uncertainty visualization in relation to the intended primary insight. Use visual hierarchy and accompanying text to anchor interpretation and avoid obscuring the intended message.

The headline communicates the primary takeaway ("Party A remains ahead of Party B"), while the uncertainty range is shown as supporting context rather than competing with the main message.

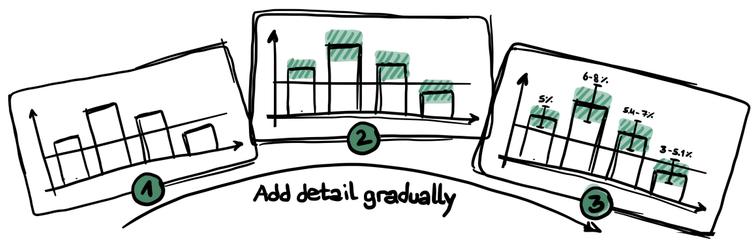
H5 Textual Framing



Integrate uncertainty representations with explanatory text where needed rather than relying on visuals alone. Explanatory text can clarify what the uncertainty represents and reduce the risk of misinterpretation.

The chart is accompanied by a short explanatory sentence stating that the shaded range indicates a range of plausible values rather than an exact result.

H6 Progressive Disclosure

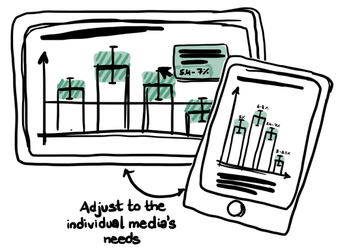


Structure uncertainty information so readers encounter it progressively rather than all at once. Layered presentation techniques, such as scrollytelling or optional interactive details, can manage information complexity while allowing interested readers to explore additional information.

The initial chart presents the uncertainty range with a brief explanation. Additional details, such as sampling methods, polling institutes, or methodological assumptions, become available through scrollytelling or optional interaction.

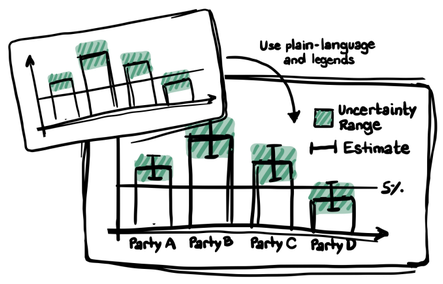
H7 Medium Adaptation

Adapt uncertainty representations to the constraints and affordances of each publication medium. Preserve interpretability when representations are resized, simplified, or stripped of interaction.



The web version shows interactive multi-party trend lines with uncertainty bands and details on demand, whereas a social media version uses a simplified static chart with uncertainty ranges and short textual explanations.

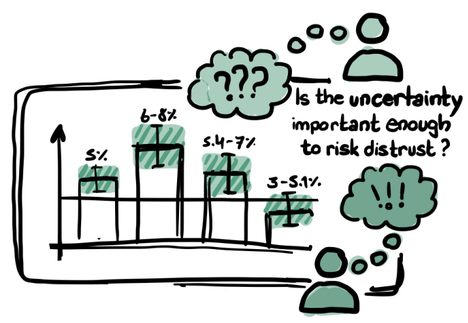
H8 Literacy Accessibility



Design for heterogeneous levels of audience numeracy and statistical literacy. Use visual clarity and plain language, minimize unnecessary jargon, and explain unavoidable technical concepts in accessible terms.

An explanatory note describes a 95% confidence interval in plain language rather than relying on the technical term alone.

H9 Trust Trade-Offs

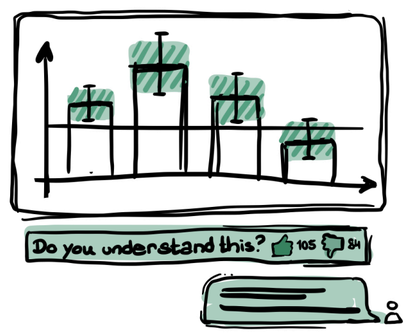


Recognize that communicating uncertainty can strengthen trust for some audiences while weakening it for others. Frame uncertainty to clarify why it is being communicated and how confidently the information should be interpreted.

The chart explains the role of uncertainty with statements such as "Polls are estimates, not outcomes" and "Range reflects survey uncertainty".

H10 Comprehension Evaluation

Evaluate whether readers interpret uncertainty as intended rather than relying solely on engagement metrics. Where feasible, complement behavioral metrics with measures that directly assess comprehension.



An in-article micro-check asking readers what an uncertainty range means could reveal misunderstandings that clicks and reading-completion metrics cannot.