Portland (ME) Mayoral Election with Ranked Choice Voting: A Voter Survey
By Dorothy Scheeline and Rob Richie, January 2012

In November 2011, voters in Portland (ME) participated in their first election for mayor in nearly a century, following a charter amendment approved by voters in 2010 that established that the mayor would be elected by the instant runoff voting form of ranked choice voting. 15 candidates ran for office. In the election, won by Michael Brennan, no candidate won more than 27% of first choices, making the use of ranked choice voting an important component of the election.

FairVote is a non-profit, non-partisan election reform and research organization based in Takoma Park (MD). On November 3, it conducted a one-day survey of 122 early voters in Portland's mayoral election. Every voter was approached between the hours of 8:00 am and 9:00 pm, with the survey-taker not indicating any position on ranked choice voting. City records show 170 people voted that day, meaning 72% of early voters on November 3rd participated in the survey.

The full survey results and the survey form itself can be found in this document. They reveal that Portland voters find their new ranked choice voting (RCV) ballot easy to use and have experienced a mayoral campaign that has promoted civic engagement.

Survey results indicated that voters saw RCV more positively than negatively:

- **More positive campaigns**: 41% of respondents felt there was less negative campaigning than usual, as opposed to only 9% percent who found it more negative.
- **More sincere voting**: 45% of respondents felt more inclined to vote for their preferred candidate than in past elections, as opposed to only 1% percent (1 person) who said they were less inclined.
- **More information about election:** 39% of respondents said they gathered more information about candidates than in past elections, as opposed to 9% who said they gathered less information.
- **More support for using RCV**: 28% of respondents strongly supported RCV for electing the mayor, as opposed to only 8% that strongly opposed it. Overall, more than twice as many respondents supported RCV for mayoral elections than opposed it.

Voters also indicated that most voters found the ballot easy to use:

- **Instructions and ballot design**: 94% said they understood the voting instructions and design fully, 5% partially understood them and only 1 person was confused.
- **Ranking candidates easy**: 40% of vote found the concept of ranking candidates very easy as opposed to 4% who found it very hard. A total of 66% found it easy.
- **Voters ranked candidates**: Nearly three times as many voters ranked more than five candidates as ranked only one. 88% ranked at least two candidates.

These results show that most voters not only understand the ranked choice system, but are using their rankings in the way that benefits them, by ranking as many candidates as they prefer. The

majority of voters are choosing to rank multiple candidates, and not a single respondent who chose to rank only one candidate did so due to not understanding.

The City of Portland spent little to no money on voter education, but did excellent work on the most important task for helping ranked choice voting work well: developing a simple ballot design and clear voter instructions. The city's civic community and the mayoral candidates themselves deserve great credit for their voter education work.

A graduate of Northeastern University, Dorothy Scheeline is a Democracy Fellow at FairVote. She helped develop and conduct this survey. Rob Richie is the Executive Director of FairVote. Further information about the election can be found at PortlandVotes123.com and FairVote.org.

Full Results by Question

1.) How often would you say you vote in elections?

0.0% : Never before this time
1.6%: Occasionally
13.9%: Usually
84.4% : Always

2.) Before coming to vote, did you know you would be asked to rank your choices for mayor?

86.7%: Yes
13.3%: No

3.) Before coming to vote, how familiar were you with Ranked Choice Voting (RCV)?

25.6%: Very familiar
43.8%: Somewhat familiar
18.2%: Not very familiar
12.4%: Not at all familiar

4.) If you knew about RCV before coming to vote, how did you find out about it (check all that apply)?

16.4%: City literature &/or website
13.9%: Candidate campaign literature &/or website
26.2%: Other literature or website/internet
6.6%: Presentation at club/organization
46.7%: Newspaper, Television or radio
18.0%: Family, friends, or neighbors
12.3%: Other
9.0%: Did not know about RCV before coming to vote

5.) Did you have to erase or cross out anything while voting and/or ask for a new ballot?

4.1%: Yes
95.9%: No

6.) How difficult or easy did you find the concept of ranking candidates?

39.7%: Very easy
26.4%: Easy
22.3%: Neither difficult nor easy
7.4%: Difficult
4.1%: Very difficult

7.) In the mayor's race, did you:

35%: Rank more than 5 candidates
52.5%: Rank 2, 3, 4 or 5 candidates
12.5%: Rank only 1 candidate

8.) If you never ranked more than 1 candidate, why didn't you rank additional candidates?

74.4%: Doesn't apply: I ranked more than 1 candidate
0.0%: I did not fully understand how RCV works
7.7%: I did not know enough about the candidates
15.4%: I just wanted to vote for only one candidate
3.8%: Some other reason

9.) Were the voting instructions &/or the ballot design easy or difficult to understand?

94.2%: I understood them fully
5.0%: I only partially understood them
0.8%: I was confused about them

10.) Compared to past city elections, how much information did you gather about the candidates?

39.2%: More than in past elections
48.3%: No difference
9.2%: Less than in past elections
3.3%: This is my first time voting in Portland

11.) Compared to past city elections, were you more or less inclined to vote for your preferred candidate?

45%: More inclined
54.2%: No difference
0.8%: Less inclined

12.) Sometimes voters feel like their vote is wasted. Compared to past elections, which best describes you?

9.2%: Felt *more* like my vote was wasted this time
61.7%: No difference
29.2%: Felt *less* like my vote was wasted this time

13.) Compared to past elections, did you feel like there was more or less negative campaigning?

8.6%: Felt there was more
50.9%: No difference
40.5%: Felt there was less

14.) How much do you support or oppose using RCV for Portland mayoral elections?

27.5%: Strongly support
20.8%: Support
29.2%: Neither support nor oppose
14.2%: Oppose
8.3%: Strongly oppose

OPTIONAL DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

15.) What is your age?

3.4%: 18 – 24
10.3%: 25 – 29
17.2%: 30 – 39
20.7%: 40 – 49
24.1%: 50 – 59
17.2%: 60 – 69
5.2%: 70-79
1.7%: 79 +

16.) What is your gender?

47.1%: Male
52.9%: Female

17.) What is your level of formal education?

0.8%: Did not finish high school
4.1%: High school graduate or GED
17.4%: Some college
33.9%: College Graduate
43.8%: Post-graduate study

18.) What is your race or ethnicity?

89.9%: White
2.5%: African American/Black
1.7%: Hispanic/Latino/Asian
5.9%: Other

19.) Were you born in the US?

92.3%: Yes
7.7%: No

20.) Please check the box that most reflects your household's total annual income.

17.7%: Less than $20,000
23.0%: $20,000-$49,999
19.5%: $50,000-$74,999
19.5%: $75,000-$99,999
20.4%: $100,000 +

21.) On most political matters, do you consider yourself:

26.1%: Very liberal
40%: Liberal
25.2%: Moderate
8.7%: Conservative
0.0%: Very conservative

FairVote: The Center for Voting and Democracy
Ranked Choice Voting Survey

You have been invited to participate in this voluntary survey because Portland is experiencing its first competitive mayoral election using Ranked Choice Voting. This survey is completely anonymous – **do not put your name on this form**

You are not obliged to complete the entire form so you can stop at any time. Upon completion, please fold and place the in the nearby box or return it to a survey-taker.

The survey should take approximately two minutes to complete. If you should have any questions, concerns or comments, please contact:

Fair Vote: The Center for Voting and Democracy
info@fairvote.org   www.fairvote.org

1.) How often would you say you vote in elections?
- [ ] Never before this time
- [ ] Occasionally
- [ ] Usually
- [ ] Always

2.) Before coming to vote, did you know you would be asked to rank your choices for mayor?
- [ ] Yes   [ ] No

3.) Before coming to vote, how familiar were you with Ranked Choice Voting (RCV)?
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- [ ] Somewhat familiar
- [ ] Not very familiar
- [ ] Not at all familiar

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- [ ] Presentation at club/organization
- [ ] Newspaper, Television or radio
- [ ] Family, friends, or neighbors
- [ ] Other
- [ ] Did not know about RCV before coming to vote

5.) Did you have to erase or cross out anything while voting and/or ask for a new ballot?
- [ ] Yes   [ ] No

6.) How difficult or easy did you find the concept of ranking candidates?
- [ ] Very easy
- [ ] Easy
- [ ] Neither difficult nor easy
- [ ] Difficult
- [ ] Very difficult

7.) In the mayor's race, did you:
- [ ] Rank more than 5 candidates
- [ ] Rank 2, 3, 4 or 5 candidates
- [ ] Rank only 1 candidate

8.) If you never ranked more than 1 candidate, why didn't you rank additional candidates?
- [ ] Doesn't apply: I ranked more than 1 candidate
- [ ] I did not fully understand how RCV works
- [ ] I did not know enough about the candidates
- [ ] I just wanted to vote for only one candidate
- [ ] Some other reason

9.) Were the voting instructions &/or the ballot design easy or difficult to understand?
- [ ] I understood them fully
- [ ] I only partially understood them
- [ ] I was confused about them

10.) Compared to past city elections, how much information did you gather about the candidates?
- [ ] More than in past elections
- [ ] No difference
- [ ] Less than in past elections
- [ ] This is my first time voting in Portland

11.) Compared to past city elections, were you more or less inclined to vote for your preferred candidate?
- ☐ More inclined
- ☐ No difference
- ☐ Less inclined

12.) Sometimes voters feel like their vote is wasted. Compared to past elections, which best describes you?
- ☐ Felt *more* like my vote was wasted this time
- ☐ No difference
- ☐ Felt *less* like my vote was wasted this time

13.) Compared to past elections, did you feel like there was more or less negative campaigning?
- ☐ Felt there was more
- ☐ No difference
- ☐ Felt there was less

14.) How much do you support or oppose using RCV for Portland mayoral elections?
- ☐ Strongly support
- ☐ Support
- ☐ Neither support nor oppose
- ☐ Oppose
- ☐ Strongly oppose

OPTIONAL DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

15.) What is your age?
- ☐ 18 – 24
- ☐ 25 – 29
- ☐ 30 – 39
- ☐ 40 – 49
- ☐ 50 – 59
- ☐ 60 – 69
- ☐ 70-79
- ☐ 79 +

16.) What is your gender?
- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female

17.) What is your level of formal education?
- ☐ Did not finish high school
- ☐ High school graduate or GED
- ☐ Some college
- ☐ College Graduate
- ☐ Post-graduate study

18.) What is your race or ethnicity?
- ☐ White
- ☐ African American/Black
- ☐ Hispanic/Latino/Asian
- ☐ Other

19.) Were you born in the US?
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

20.) Please check the box that most reflects your household's total annual income.
- ☐ Less than $20,000
- ☐ $20,000-$49,999
- ☐ $50,000-$74,999
- ☐ $75,000-$99,999
- ☐ $100,000 +

21.) On most political matters, do you consider yourself:
- ☐ Very liberal
- ☐ Liberal
- ☐ Moderate
- ☐ Conservative
- ☐ Very conservative

End of Survey

Thank you for your participation! Please fold your survey and return it to survey-taker.