**WON BY ONE**

A list of those instances in which decisions of sometimes huge import have been won or lost by one vote, and one voter who was sometimes bribed, cajoled or threatened, was published in *Defining Democracy*, Springer 2012. The list, however, continues to grow, and if any readers know of further instances, do please let us know.

It also includes some equally close elections, where the margin between victor and vanquished was either just one vote, or of the order of less than one per cent.

**C.2 Decisions**

1246 Mongolia A *khuriltai,* a gathering of all the nobles*,* elected the new Khaghhan, Güyüg, “by a majority of one,” said one, but *The Cambridge History of China*, Vol 6, p 385, has its doubts.

23.2.1782 Britain ‘At two in the morning,’ (*Hansard*), a motion to end Britain’s participation in the US war of independence, (in which Jean-Charles de Borda captains a French frigate), is lost by one vote: 194 to 193.

9.1.1794 USA A petition is submitted to the House of Representatives to recognize German as an official language; it is rejected by 42–41. Hence the Muhlenberg legend, named after Frederick, the first speaker, although he himself abstains.

22.1.1799 Ireland In the Dublin parliament, Lord Castlereagh wins a vote on the union of Ireland and Britain by one vote.

23.3.1831 Britain The second reading of the First Reform Bill, extending the male franchise, reducing the number of “rotten boroughs”, but not yet introducing the secret ballot, is passed by just one vote.

27.3.1866 USA President Johnson vetoes the Radicals’ Civil Rights Bill, so the Radicals try to impeach him. By a single vote, however, they fail to gain the necessary two-thirds majority in the Senate.

30.1.1875 France Much to the surprise of the monarchists, the National Assembly passes a rather innocuous law which, as it were by default, recognizes the Third Republic; the vote is 353–352. Mare´chal Patrice de Mac-Mahon, a monarchist (of Irish descent) becomes the president, but he is perhaps best remembered for another mistake: “Typhoid fever is a terrible sickness,” he says, “Either you die from it or you become an idiot. And I know what I’m talking about, I had it”.

30.3.1900 Netherlands The conservative minister F.D. graaf Schimmelpenninck achieves notoriety by falling off his horse. He thus fails to vote against a bill for compulsory education which is passed by one vote, 50 to 49.

-.-.1903 Russia The Russian Social Democratic Workers’ Party, meeting in London, splits into the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks (the majority and the minoruity) by 19 votes to 17, with 3 abstentions.

16.8.1927 Ireland On paper, the FF opposition has a majority of one; a vote of no confidence is called. Alas, come the vote, one of its members, a Mr Jinks, the member for Sligo, is missing. The result is a tie. The speaker then uses his casting vote and the Taoiseach, WT Cosgrave, survives, just. The opposition shouts, ‘One vote! Resign, resign!’ but he replies, ‘One vote! That is democracy.’ (Letters, Irish Times, 7.3.1996). The ‘accepted version [of history, however,] is that Mr Jinks [is] plied with drink and put on the train to Sligo by [one] Mr Smylie of the Irish Times’. (Jordan 2006: 154) Mindful of his good fortune, Mr Cosgrave gives a race horse the name Jinks and it wins the 1929 Two Thousand Guineas.

14.5.1959 Sweden In a 1957 three-option referendum on pensions, 46% say “this”, 15% “that”, 35% “the other” and 4% nothing. So “this” wins, say “these”. But “those” and the “others” say they have an “anti-this” majority. So parliament votes, “these” against “those”, 115–114, with one abstention.

24.8.1963 Norway In 1961, parliament consists of 74 Conservative, 74 Labour and 2 Socialist, so the two left-wing parties form the government. A report into coal mine accidents leads to a vote of confidence, the two Socialists switch, and the Conservatives take over. However, when the latter present their programme for government, the Socialists switch back again.

14.12.1964 Sri Lanka In June 1964, two parties form the government. The junior partner then splits into two, but there is also dissension in the senior partner, and the Leader of the House crosses the floor to defeat the government on its “throne speech” by just one vote.

27.4.1972 Germany The CDU opposition puts Chancellor Willy Brandt’s policy of detente to a constructive vote of no-confidence (Sect. 1.1.2.3) but they fail to get an absolute majority by two votes. On the morrow, the budget vote is tied, 247 to 247.

28.3.1979 UK James Callaghan loses a vote of confidence, not least because Frank Maguire MP, the republican publican, abstained.

17.1.1982 Ireland Mr Jim Kemmy, a former member of the Labour Party, votes against the FG/Labour Party coalition budget, which is thus defeated by 82 votes to 81. In the subsequent election FF is returned to power and Charlie Haughey to the post of *Taoiseach*.

17.5.1989 China The Politbureau Standing Committee meets to discuss imposing martial law on the students’ protests in Tiananmen (Tiān‘ānmén ) Square, and one “version has it that [they] did vote and split 2-2, with one abstention.” (*Tiger Head, Snake Tails* by Jonathan Fenby, Simon and Schuster, 2012, p 180.)

22.7.1993 UK Feelings are high. The ‘stretcher vote’ – mps who are desperately ill, i.e., on stretchers, are being brought in to the lobbies by both sides. Come the vote, the tellers fail to note an ‘overcount’ of one Labour vote, so a Labour amendment to John Major’s government’s proposal on the Maastricht Treaty is a tie, 317 votes both for and against; so the speaker uses her casting vote in accordance with the 1867 decision “not to create a majority where none exists”.

1994 Finland ‘Most decisions in the Finnish Parliament [c. 85%] are made without voting,’ but even on this limited agenda, there were ‘8 such [won or lost by one] votes’ in 1994 ‘plus 3 ties’. (Correspondence from the Finnish embassy.)

-.-.1994 Hong Kong A private members’ bill for the Legislative Council to be fully elected loses by one vote, not least because Lord (Chris) Patten, the Governor, votes against.

27.11.1997 Austria In the National Council, one law on homosexuality is “defeated” by 91:91, but another is passed by 90:89.

9.10.1998 Italy The government of President Romano Prodi collapses by 313–312 votes because one member of Prodi’s coalition changes sides.

17.4.1999 India The 14-party coalition is brought down by 270 votes to 269; a genral election follows, and Atal Behari Vajpayee returns to power at the head of a 24-party coalition.

9.11.1999 Moldova While Estonia thinks an absolute majority in a 101-member chamber is 51, the Moldovan constitutional Court says it is 52. The latter government with this minimal level of support collapses after only 8 months in power.

18.5.1999 Netherlands De nacht van Wiegel, the Wiegel-night. A law to introduce referendums into the Dutch constitution fails by one vote. On the next day, the government collapses as a result of the Dutch liberal, Mr Wiegel, who votes against.

1999–2000 Denmark ‘In the parliamentary year 1999–2000, five votes are decided with a margin of only one vote,’ says a letter from the Danish Embassy; ‘this happens quite often.’

4.8.2000 EU 273 votes are in favour while 273 are against the European proposal to ease cross-border take-overs for the multi-nationals.

28.11.2004 Switzerland The canton of Bern holds a multi-option referendum, on three majority votes. Option ***A*** beats ***B*** by 51.6% to 48.4%. Option ***B*** beats ***C*** by 50.6% to 49.4%. And option ***C*** beats ***A*** by 51.1% to 48.9%. So the winner is… well it’s obvious isn’t it? Well, yes, OK, it was ***A***. Eh?

19.5.2005 Canada On its first reading, much to everyone’s surprise, the minority government’s budget is supported by the opposition. Come the second reading, however, amidst allegations of government corruption, the vote is 152:152. The speaker now uses his casting vote to maintain the debate, which then centres on accusations of the opposition cajoling one of the independent MPs by bribery.

24.7.2005 Bulgaria By a margin of one vote, Sergei Dmitriev Stanishev is approved as PM. The cabinet he then proposes, however, is disallowed by the same margin.

30.8.2008 Turkey 6 of the 11 judges on the Constitutional Court voted to outlaw the Justice and Development Party for being “too Islamic”, but thus failed to get the required weighted majority of 7 votes.

11.3.2010 Sweden The government recognizes the 1915 Ottoman genocide in Armenia by 131–130.

14.12.2010 Italy In 2008, Silvio Burlusconi’s coalition gains only 47% of the vote but 55% of the seats. So when one of his coalition partners withdraws, the vote of no confidence becomes inevitable. He should have lost by one but he survives by 314 votes to 311, because two members of the Values Party change sides. There are many allegations of vote buying.

28.6.2012 USA To the surprise of many, the Supreme Court of the United States upholds the status of the Affordable Care Act (dubbed Obamacare by some) by 5 votes to 4.

17.3.2015 Israel Benjamin Netanyahu concocts a coalition with a majority of one. One year later…

22.5.2016 …Moshe Yaalon resigns and Avigdor Liberman of the extreme right Yisrael Beitenu party joins, a tail to wag the dog.

10.7.2016 Abkhazia A referendum on early elections is lost by 50.4 to 49.6%, but given that the turnout was only 1.2%, the result was declared invalid.

3.10.2016 Columbia A referendum on the peace-deal with Farc was lost by 50.21% to 49.78%. To vote ‘no’ to peace, however, does not mean the opposite of ‘no’ – namely ‘yes’ – to the opposite of peace, war.

3.4.2017 UK The British House of Commons take two (of heaven knows how many) votes on Brexit; one is a tie, on which the Speaker then casts his casting vote, and it thus loses by one; and next comes a joint-party non-governmental motion, which wins by one.

23.4.2017 Ireland Although the Citizen’s Assembly was instructed by the Dáil to take majority decisions, it sometimes used multi-option voting and, in the event of a tie with both options well below a majority, the chair somewhat bizarrely used a casting vote.

5.10.2021 Wales One of the Tories couldn’t get his zoom to work, so the vote on a Covid pass was passed by 28 to 27.

**C.3 Elections**

17.2.1801 USA In the electoral college vote for the presidency, Thomas Jefferson wins 73 votes but so does another member of the same party, Aaron Burr. After 35 ballots spread over 6 days, the House of Representatives chooses the former.

4.3.1877 USA Samuel Tilden (Democrat) wins 4.3 million votes, while Rutherford Hayes (Republican) gains only four million. This gives Tilden 184 votes in the electoral college to Hayes’ 166, with 19 votes in three states in dispute. A bipartisan commission of 8 Republicans and 7 Democrats decide, by 8 to 7, that all 19 go to Hayes. So Hayes, the loser, wins, 185–184.

6.11.1888 USA Grover Cleveland (Democrat) won 5,534,488 votes, while his (Republican) opponent, Benjamin Harrison, won 5,443,892. And Cleveland lost! He had just 168 votes in the electoral college, whereas Harrison had 233.

19.9.1949 Germany To become West Germany’s first post-war Chancellor, Konrad Adenaur needs a majority of the 402 MPs which is 201; he gets just 202; so “he wins by one vote, his own.”

17.1.1956 Finland Beating his rival for the presidency by 151–149, Urho Kekkonen goes on to become the country’s longest serving president, surviving in office until 1982. (The rules have now been changed to limit the office holder to just two terms.)

14.5.1960 Kenya At the inaugural meeting of the Kenya African National Union, which later became Kenya’s one and only party, Jomo Kenyatta is chosen as President, and the late Tom Mboya is elected General Secretary by one vote. He is assassinated on 5.7.1969.

1.6.1961 Zanzibar A coalition of two parties wins 49.4% of the FPTP vote, thus to win 13 seats; while their opponents with 50.6% get 10.

17.8.1970 Lebanon Suleiman Frenjieh fails to get a two-thirds majority in the first round; the second round is declared invalid when the total number of votes in the 99-person chamber tops 100; but ‘Franjieh’s gunmen [bring] their firearms into the chamber.’ (Fisk 2001: 76) He now wins by 50 votes to 49.

-.-.1975 Portugal In the wake of the “carnation revolution”, democracy was re-instated and a newly elected parliament had to choose a government. In more than one instance, the vote was tied, so Gen. Otelo Saraiva de Carvalho of the *Directório* (Directorate) decided himself.

31.12.1989 Poland In a joint meeting of both houses of parliament, Wojciech Jaruzelski is elected president by one vote.

29.12.1996 Madagascar In the trs presidential elections, [Didier Ratsiraka](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Didier_Ratsiraka) won by 50.7% to 49.3%. In a subsequent election, on 16.12 2001, he lost the first round to [Marc Ravalomanana](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marc_Ravalomanana) by a whisker, so the latter declared himself the president without a second round, and violence broke out.

-.3.1999 Switzerland When parliament was voting for its government, a Mr. Deiss was preferred to a Mr. Hess by 120 votes to 119. While for the post of Justice Minister, both Mrs Metzier and Mrs. Roos both got 122 votes.

10.10.1999 Portugal In the general election, the socialists win exactly half of the seats in parliament, 115 out of 230.

16.5.2000 Dominican Republic Hipólito Mejía winds the presidential election on 49.9% of the vote.

2.11.2001 NI The First Minister David Trimble loses the unionist majority by 30 to 29. So some of the MLAs designated as “others” (Sect. 2.2.1.5) become “unionist”, just for the day, and he now gains the necessary 31 out of 60 majority.

10.12.2001 Trinidad and Tobago The United National Congress gets 18 seats from 49.9% of the vote, while the People’s National Movement also gets 18 seats, from the slightly smaller total of 46.5%.

5.4.2006 Iraq Mr Ibrahim Jaafari wins the nomination to head the next government by a single vote but his Shia bloc, with the biggest minority from the December 2005 elections, is still short of an overall majority.

3.2.2008 Serbia In the second round of the presidential election, Boris Tadić of the Democratic Party is re-elected with 50% of the vote. His rival, Tomislav Nikolić of the Serb Radical Party, whose leader Vojislav Šešelj has been indicted for war crimes and is in The Hague, gains 48%.

7.12.2008 Ghana In the parliamentary elections, the National Democratic Congress wins 114 seats, which is exactly half of the parliament, and in the second round of the presidential elections held on 28th, John Atta Mills wins 50.2% of the vote while his rival Nana Akufo-Addo gains 49.8%. Unlike the events which followed the election in Kenya (Sect. 3.3.1.2), the changeover in Ghana is peaceful.

7.3.2010 Iraq With 24.7% of the vote, the party of the former PM, Iyad Allawi, gains 91 seats out of 325, while the PM, Nouri al-Maliki, with 24.2%, wins 89. (See also Sect. 3.3.5.2 and chronology 2010.)

6.5.2010 UK The UK general election is won by none. The Tories get 306, Labour 258, Lib-Dem 57, DUP 8, the Scottish Nationalist Party, SNP, 6, SF 5, Plaid Cymru 3, SDLP 3, Alliance 1, GP 1, Ind. 1. A majority equals 326, or 323 if SF stays away. So there could be a minority administration:

(a) 306 or (b) 306 + 8 or (c) 258 + 57,

or a majority one:

(d) 306 + 57 or (e) 258 + 57+ 6 + 3 + 1 + 1 + 1 or (f) 258 + 57+ 8 + 6, or

(g) some other combination, or there could be (h) a GNU.

After just 5 days of negotiations, a coalition government is formed, (d) 306 + 57, heralding, they say, a new era of consensual politics.

21.8.2010 Australia In Dec. 2009, Tony Abbott is elected leader of the Liberal Party by one vote, 42–41 with one abstention. In the 2010 general election, he ties with Jackie Gillard of the Labour Party at 72 seats each, but the latter forms an administration with the help of one GP MP and some independents.

14.4.2013 Venezuela In the post-Chavez presidential elections, Nicolás Maduro wins 50.6% while his opponent, Henrique Capriles gets 49.1. The results are disputed.

15.6.2014 Columbia Presidential elections. Juan Manuel Santos was 2nd in the first round, but 1st in the second with 50.95%.

22.5.2016 Austria Alexander Van der Bellen, an independent (though sponsored by the Greens) beats Norbert Hofer of the Freedom Party by 50.3% to 49.7%.