# Repeat Voting:
# Two-Vote May Lead More People To Vote[*]

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## Abstract

A ***repeat voting*** procedure is proposed, whereby voting is carried
out in two identical rounds. Every voter can vote in each round, the
results of the first round are made public before the second round,
and the final result is determined by adding up all the votes in both
rounds. It is argued that this simple modification of election proce-
dures may well increase voter participation and result in more accurate
and representative outcomes.

Suppose that it is two weeks after the Brexit vote, and there is a new vote
on the same issue—what will the result be? Given the way the original vote
went, will people change their minds and vote differently? Will the original
results cause people who had not voted to cast their vote in this second
round? Will the final result be different?[1] (There are no clear answers to

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[1]Before the Brexit vote, a petition that called for a second vote in case of low partic-
ipation and a narrow winning margin was launched; it got 22 signatures before the vote,
and more than 2 million signatures in the two days after the result was announced. (In-
terestingly, the initiator was a "leave" supporter who believed that "leave" would lose.)
See, e.g., `http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-eu-referendum-36629324`

any of these questions, but one can easily provide arguments either way.) Now carry out a similar thought experiment regarding the latest presidential election in the U.S., or whatever your latest favorite, or unsettling, election is ...

Democratic elections are beset by many problems. One issue is low voter turnout, which at times is only one-half of the eligible voters or even less. Another issue is excessive reliance on polls: polls affect voters, despite repeatedly turning out to being quite far from accurate. This also relates to the low-turnout issue: "I will not waste my time voting, as my candidate is in any case sure to win" (or "... sure to lose"). Polls may also lead people not to cast their vote for their preferred candidate, if, for example, they do not want him or her to win by too large a majority, or if they want to voice a certain "protest" through their vote—only to find out that in the end their candidate did not win at all. Yet another issue concerns unexpected events that occur extremely close to election time, too late to be able to be addressed by the candidates, such as a terrorist attack, the publication of false information, bad weather, and so on. What is common to many of these situations is that people might want to change their vote, or their non-participation in the election, once they see the actual results and how these came about.

To address these and other issues, I propose the use of the following REPEAT VOTING procedure.

A. **Voting is carried out in two rounds.**

B. **Every eligible voter is entitled (and encouraged) to vote in each of the two rounds.**

C. **All the votes of the two rounds are added up, and the final election result is obtained by applying the current election rules[2] to these two-round totals.**

D. **The results of the first round are officially counted and published; the second round takes place, say, two weeks after the**

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[2]Be they plurality, special majority, electoral college, and so on.

**first round, but no less than one week after the official publication of the first round's results.**

What are the *advantages* of repeat voting?

1. *Polls.* The first round becomes a de facto giant opinion poll; however, because the votes of the first round count, it is a much more truthful poll (in contrast to the usual pre-election polls, where giving untruthful answers—whether intentionally or not—carries no cost[3]). The combination of the large sample size and incentivized truthfulness makes the results of the first round a significantly more accurate predictor of the electorate views. It is thus crucial for the votes of the first round to count no less than the votes of the second round, which explains why we are adding up the votes of the two rounds, rather than having only the second round determine the outcome.

2. *Participation.* Voters who do have a preference that is not however strong enough to make them vote in the first round may well be led to vote in the second round because of the results of the first round. Thus, participation in at least one round of the election is expected to increase. It is better that people vote even in one round than not at all.[4] One indirect advantage is that people who vote may feel closer to the elected officials, and to the democratic system in general.

3. *Representative results.* The final results may be more representative, because the second round makes it possible for the voters as well as for the candidates to "correct" any problems of the first round. This includes the effects of wrong predictions by the polls, as well as any special circumstances and events that occurred close to election time

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[3]Someone once quipped that Israelis tell the truth in polls, but lie when they cast their vote.

[4]Voters who have strong or extreme positions will most probably vote in both rounds; their relative weight in the final result will decrease when enough people are motivated to vote in the second round (which may well happen if such extreme positions get higher shares of the vote in the first round).

(see the second paragraph of the paper; it is unlikely that such unexpected events will happen both times). All this, again, can only increase the robustness of the results: they become more trustworthy and more accepted.

4. *New reference point.* The results of the first round become a new reference point, which may well affect a person's choice in the second round: *imagining* a new situation and *being* in a new situation are not the same thing.[5]

5. *Strategic voting.* People seem to be more strategic in their voting than is usually believed (again, see the examples in the second paragraph above), but under current procedures they base their strategic decisions on possibly inaccurate polls. Repeat voting provides a much more solid basis. In close elections it is conceivable that the voting of the second round may be less strategic (and the other way around when there is a large winning margin in the first round).[6]

What are the possible *disadvantages* of repeat voting?

1. *Costs.* A second round adds costs (however, in future voting that may be conducted online, these costs would become much smaller). The

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[5]Robert J. Aumann, awarded the Nobel Prize in Economics in 2005, tells the following story (S. Hart, "An Interview with Robert Aumann," *Macroeconomic Dynamics* 9, 2005, page 711; reprinted in: Paul A. Samuelson and William A. Barnett, editors, *Inside the Economist's Mind: Conversations with Eminent Economists*, Blackwell Publishing 2006). In 1956 he had two offers: one from Bell Labs in New York, and another from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. It took him a long time to make up his mind, and he chose Bell Labs. He phoned them and told them that he accepted their offer. Once he put down the phone, he immediately started imagining the next few years at Bell Labs, and reached the conclusion that he had made the wrong choice. A day later he phoned Bell Labs and asked them if he could change his mind—which they graciously agreed to. How come a leading game theorist couldn't understand all this before he made his initial decision? Aumann's answer is that until he found himself in the new situation of someone going to Bell Labs, he could not really grasp what it meant!

[6]An interesting related instance concerns the minimal threshold for a party to be represented in a parliament. Many potential entrants try to convince voters that they have support that is higher than the threshold and so voting for them would not be a "waste" of one's vote. In many cases, however, it turns out that these parties do not pass the threshold; once this is seen in the first round, there will be many fewer such wasted votes in the second round.

additional electoral campaign between the two rounds also increases the costs (but one should remember that two rounds are already used in various elections, albeit not two identical rounds as proposed here). One way to save costs is to carry out the second round only when the results of the first round are close (for instance, when the winning margin is below a certain threshold that is specified in advance).[7]

2. *Participation.* There may be fewer voters in the first round ("I will have a chance to vote in the second round").

3. *Bandwagon effect.* Voters with strong or extreme positions, who are much more likely to vote in the first round, may have a big effect on the results of the first round, which may then have a bandwagon effect on the whole election.

One can think of other ways to overcome the issues pointed out above. For example, one can repeat the vote three times, with the winner having to win at least two rounds (this applies only to two-outcome elections, however, not to multi-candidate and parliamentary elections, and is inherently more complicated).[8] Another possibility is to make voting mandatory (as in certain countries); while this may resolve the participation issue, it does not resolve the significant "polls issue" discussed in advantage #1 above. Yet another is to have the votes in the two rounds of repeat voting weighted differently (for instance, depending on the total number of votes in each round[9]); at this point, however, it seems best to leave it as simple and straightforward as possible.

In summary: REPEAT VOTING is a simple modification of election procedures that is capable of increasing voter participation and yielding more accurate and representative results. Everyone deserves a second chance, as the saying goes. Shouldn't this include voters and candidates?

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[7]Suggested by Motty Perry and Steve Brams.

[8]This procedure was also suggested by Shachar Kariv.

[9]For example, averaging the percentages of votes that each candidate received in the two rounds (which amounts to giving weights to the two rounds that are inversely proportional to the total number of votes in each) may perhaps increase participation in that round where there are fewer voters (probably the first round).