Alex Tunner, P.Eng.
West Vancouver, BC

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Submission to The Special Parliamentary Committee on Electoral Reform

Balanced Voting:

A two-step process is suggested (on pages 2, 3) to achieve a balance among several electoral objectives. First, voting for a representative at the riding level; second, applying a *"proportionality check"* at the national (or regional²) level to ensure fair proportionality.

1. ***Riding level –*** Voters would have a ***first and second choice*** in selecting a riding representative. Most voters could make a reasonable second choice, but further ones could include "not wanted". Having a first and second choice at the riding level would improve proportionality, but not sufficiently.

2. ***National (regional²) level –*** To ensure fair proportionality, a ***"proportionality check"*** would allocate, where required, "at-large, top-up" seats from a list of each party's highest-placed unelected candidates.

Such a two-step process, balanced to reach desired objectives, would substantially rectify shortcomings of the current FPP system. It was demonstrated in 2004, in a submission to the BC Citizens' Assembly.

Majorities required to win in ridings would be closer to "true" majorities,
Proportionality in parliament would be improved, and all votes would count.

Process:

The following should be considered to achieve a practical, implementable outcome of the ERRE process.

- **A good process** on Electoral Reform is underway, with a well constituted ERRE Committee. Furthermore, Parliament is a fair cross-section of Canadian voters – as good as a Citizens' Assembly.

- The ERRE process should **produce a result,** and not reject "good" in favour of endless search for non-existent "perfection". Confucius said: "Better a diamond with a flaw than a pebble without".

- **Avoid a referendum** – it can never be "perfect" under the current circumstances. It will always be fraught by "the question", "the turnout" and "other issues" influencing the result.

- **A free vote in Parliament** should decide. "Your representative owes you not only his industry, but also his judgement" – Edmund Burke.

- As a special **"fairness adjustment"** of a free vote in Parliament, consider adjusting the votes of members according their party's **"proportionality factor".**

Thus, for example, every Liberal vote would count for 0.73 votes, and the one Green vote for 11.90 votes.

Party	% of votes	Seats	% of seats	Proportionality Factor
Liberal	39.47	184	54.44	0.73
Conservative	31.89	99	29.29	1.09
New Democratic	19.71	44	13.02	1.51
Bloc Quebecois	4.66	10	2.96	1.57
Green	3.45	1	0.29	11.90
Other	0.82			
Total	100.00	338	100.00	1.00

Electoral Reform – "<u>Balanced Voting</u>"

__Balanced Voting__ – A modest "tweak" of the current system.
__1.__ Ridings & election process remain unchanged, with a __second choice__ on the ballot.
__2.__ Riding results determine "at-large, top-up" candidates, to meet __proportionality targets.__

Introduction:

The main problems with Canada's current *First Past the Post (FPP)* electoral system are: *"false majorities",* whereby candidates often "win" a seat with votes in the 30% range (even 28% !!); *"lack of proportionality",* whereby the number of seats a party wins nationally does not reflect its share of votes; *"lost votes",* whereby votes for losing candidates have no effect on final results – a particularly critical problem for small parties.

Most voters favour a system to mitigate, if not eliminate, these shortcomings. However, there is a dilemma. Canadian voters are not inclined support major electoral changes. This was the case in British Columbia (where BC-STV, though strongly supported by 58%-42% in 2005, lost by 61%-39% in 2009), Ontario (where MMP lost by 63%-37% in 2007), and Prince Edward Island (where MMP lost by 64%-36% in 2005). Further, while 70% of voters declare support for a referendum on electoral reform, nowadays they tend to defeat referenda irrespective of issue. Moreover, surveys show that voters are satisfied with FPP (62%), and do not consider electoral reform important (52%).

Thus, experience suggests that moderate changes to the current system could be the answer – possibly without the need for a referendum. A logical approach would be to first agree on the objectives (values) a reformed electoral system should meet, and only then consider what system would be best. Current debate is focused almost exclusively on the merits of systems used elsewhere – PR, AV, MMP, STV and others. Why not start by thinking about the attributes voters would like to see in a reformed system? There are many important considerations beyond "proportionality".

How about devising a "made in Canada" system to meet Canadian objectives? Clearly, "perfectly" meeting all of a given set of objectives within a single system is impossible, since some are contradictory. However, they could be met "well enough" for practical purposes in a reformed system. For example, while some may regard it "ideal" for electoral districts to have exactly equal numbers of voters, other factors must also be considered to achieve a fair balance – e.g. regional differences, geography, parliamentary seats.

A reformed voting system need not be "radical" to achieve a fair __balance__ among the objectives desired by Canadians. It could be along the following lines.

Objectives (values):

1. __Democracy__ – power vested in the people, with all representatives elected locally;
2. __Majority rule__ – reduced possibility of "false majorities" in ridings, but not necessarily 50%+1;
3. __Proportionality__ – good proportionality, fair to minor parties, but not necessarily "exact" percentages;
4. __All votes count__ – no "lost" votes in determining final election results;
5. __Strong government__ – reasonable possibility to elect majority governments;
6. __Limited change in seats__ – no significant increase or reconfiguration of parliamentary seats;
7. __Simplicity__ – simple riding ballot and a simple, transparent method of reaching final election results;
8. __Minimal changes__ – retain existing constituencies and electoral processes as much as possible.

Balanced Voting:

A two-step process is suggested to achieve balance among multiple electoral objectives. First, voting for a representative at the riding level; second, applying a "proportionality check" at the national (or regional[2]) level.

1. ***Riding level*** – Voters would have a ***first and second choice*** in selecting a riding representative. Most voters could make a reasonable second choice, but further ones could include "not wanted". Having a first and second choice at the riding level would improve proportionality, but not sufficiently.

2. ***National (regional[2]) level*** – To ensure fair proportionality, a ***"proportionality check"*** would allocate, where required, "at-large, top-up" seats from a list of each party's highest-placed unelected candidates.

Such a two-step process, balanced to reach desired objectives, would substantially rectify shortcomings of the current FPP system. It was demonstrated in 2004, in a submission to the BC Citizens' Assembly.

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Discussion:

1. The core principle should be ***democracy*** (demos = people; kratia = power) – power vested in the people. All MPs would be elected locally in constituencies, like today – no party lists (closed or open) prepared by un-elected "back room" officials, which tend to support party oligarchy (oligos = few; archo = rule).

2. Voters would have a ***first and second choice*** in voting. If no candidate has 50%+1 first choice votes, the one with the fewest would be dropped and his/her second choices counted. This would reduce "false majorities" and improve proportionality. Choices beyond the second are unrealistic – not a real "choice".

3. To further improve proportionality, a ***"proportionality check"*** would ensure that every party (those with, say, at least 2% of the national vote) has "fair" representation. Parties with less than 2%, together with independents, could be grouped into an "independent" category where, if greater than 2%, even independent or micro-party candidates could be elected, though unsuccessful at the riding level.

4. The ***"proportionality check"*** would list unsuccessful candidates nationally (or regionally[2]) by party, in decreasing order of their percent of riding vote. For every (say) 1% of first choice votes received by a party nationally (or, say, 3% regionally[2]), it would be entitled to a minimum of one seat. If the minimum is not reached at the riding level, the party would receive "at-large, top-up" seats to attain the guaranteed minimum proportionality target, with candidates selected from the "unsuccessful" list, starting at the top. Thus, the total number of MPs elected could vary from one election to the next.

5. "Exact" proportionality would make it unlikely that strong, single party governments could be elected. Yet, that's an important consideration for a majority of voters. "Reasonable" proportionality would allow for "flexibility", whereby majority governments could be elected.

6. Voters do not favour any significant increase in parliamentary seats, as could happen with MMP and its combination of "riding" and "party list" candidates. MMP does not guarantee exact proportionality.

7. The option to make a second choice on their ballot is the only change voters would see. They could vote for their preferred candidate, even if "no chance" locally, without concern that their votes would be "lost" – a win would be possible via the proportionality check. There would be no party lists or "run-offs".

8. Existing constituencies and the process of periodic boundary adjustments could remain unchanged. Voters would continue to have a local representative, cast their ballot locally, and see no change beyond the second choice. However, there would be major improvements over FPP.

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Notes:

1. PR = Proportional Representation; AV = Alternative Vote; STV = Single Transferable Vote; MMP = Mixed Member Proportional Representation; FPP = First Past the Post; SMP = Single Member Plurality (= FPP).
2. There could be five regions: Atlantic, Quebec, Ontario, Prairies, BC & North.
3. **For example** – A "party" could be recognized as such if it attains a minimum of 2% of the first choice vote nationally, and be guaranteed one seat for every 1% of first choice votes (or, 5% regionally, with one seat for every 3% of first choice votes).