

Can You Report Tactical Voting In A Balanced Way?

This post was originally posted on [Charlie Beckett's blog](#) on May 4th.

[Charlie Beckett](#) is the Director of POLIS.

Conservatives like @iaindale are rightly anxious that the tactical voting surge could help rob the Tories of a majority. He fears that reporting the possibility of tactical voting is akin to advocating it:



“The BBC should be very careful about how it covers this tactical voting story. Reporting it is fine, but promoting it isn’t.”

It's a tricky one, especially in the Internet age when it is relatively easy to give a guide to how to vote tactically online. There are plenty of [websites devoted to campaigning for tactical voting](#). But you can use constituency information from the [BBC Election Guide](#) to do it yourself.

Of course, it's not that simple. Boundaries have been re-drawn, candidates have personal pulling power, and there are local issues. The whole Lib Dem surge has brought some seats into play that looked safe Labour or Tory bets a month ago. So there is actually a legitimate demand from the voters for some guidance on this. Surely the BBC, as well as the partisan newspapers, should provide that?

The paradox is that the broadcasters are generally seen as impartial conveyors of political information so if they start to give guidance to the tactical voting choices at constituency level then people may start believing them. At that point, it could be argued, they are getting too close to advocating a particular voting choice.

It is perfectly legitimate for the BBC to cover the general story that politicians are advocating tactical voting. With the polls suggesting a hung parliament it is the hot issue over the next few days. But I agree with Iain that the BBC in particular needs to leave the finer detail to the campaigning websites and the newspapers and get back to the policy issues.

Of course, if we do get a deeply hung parliament then that will also raise all sorts of interesting procedural issues for journalists – especially the BBC. Generally, governments – especially new ones – are given the dominant position in news coverage and allowed to dictate terms and set agendas because they have the popular mandate. But if we have a minority administration it raises the question of just how to balance stories. But let's leave that one to after May 6th eh?