

Forget the bloggers, it's going to be the Flip election

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Political bloggers like to think that they will swing the next election. Big platforms like ConservativeHome and individual muck-rakers such as Guido Fawkes are billed as the websites that might win it.

But when I talk to MPs it is video that really scares them. Could this be the election when a punter with a Flip camera changes the course of a campaign?

The BBC's North America Editor Justin Webb followed the last couple of US elections (and the endless mid-term contests) and [speaking at Polis](#), he said that it was the guerilla video activists who made the most impact. He forecast a Flip Election in the UK for 2010.

The most famous precedent is [Republican George Allen](#) in West Virginia is a crucial mid-term back in 2006 when he threw away a good personal lead and the Republican's overall majority in the Senate with a chance racist remark [caught on camera](#).

And we all recall how the audio of Bill Clinton and Barack Obama caught by a citizen journalist working for the Huffington Post broke a [couple of awkward stories](#) during the last US Presidential poll.

Recently top Tory Alan Duncan was [shamed by off the cuff remarks](#) about MPs' expenses made to a journalist filming secretly on a mini-camera in the Commons.

This is all very candid camera and hardly counts as political reporting of great sophistication. But it breaks real stories because it reveals politicians' real feelings. Politics is now so manipulated, so theatrical, so shallow that we crave these moments of honesty, however brutal.

Of course, the real work of overall political reporting will still be done by mainstream media and above all, TV will dominate. I remember when I used to work in BBC political journalism and we would worry about whether to cover all those photo-opportunities. Now it is taken for granted that a campaign is largely made up of media stunts, posters, and videos produced by the Parties.

Some MPs have taken to other forms of new media such as Twitter which does offer some hope of more informal, personal and direct communication.

And the bloggers and websites such as ConservativeHome do offer an interesting alternative for activists and political junkies. I argue that through [Networked Journalism](#) they are now a vital part of the political media process.

But when it comes to the one-off moments which can liven up a campaign such as the infamous [Jennifer's Ear of 1992](#), I bet it will come from a camera the size of a fag packet.

Of course, as @wendyfry has raised in her Twitter responses to this blog, there are ethical issues around secret filming. But I think I would argue that it's no different to other journalists conducting undisclosed recording. If it's in the public interest and the only way to get the story then it is usually fine. See [this post](#) for more discussion about that aspect.

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