

Fascism must be beaten, but it must be beaten fairly

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YouGov published a new poll yesterday through the relatively new online space that is called [The New World](#).

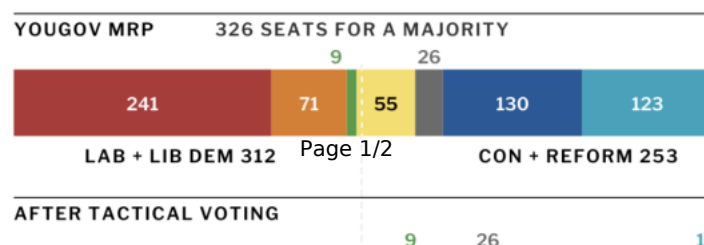
Peter Kellner wrote in a free email that I was sent by that publication, to which I have not as yet been persuaded to subscribe, that any polling data in the UK has now to be based upon carefully worded questioning of people as to their voting intentions, precisely because asking simply who they support as their first preference in any election does not provide an indication of the likely outcome of the election in question under the current Westminster parliamentary first-past-the-post electoral system.

There is a simple explanation. People in this country have, it would appear, got used to voting tactically and, as a consequence, many people no longer necessarily vote for who they want to represent them in Parliament. Instead, they vote to prevent someone from representing them in Parliament. In that case, where there appears to be a two-party race in their constituency, and they have little enthusiasm for either party, they will choose their least-worst option, even though they may have little enthusiasm for the person elected as a result.

Refreshingly, evidence suggests that this approach to voting has emerged as a consequence of the rise of the far right in UK politics. When Reform seems likely to be one of the two parties most likely to be elected in a constituency, many who might, by inclination, never willingly vote for the other available option may then do so. Those inclined to the left might vote Tory in that case. The same is also seen when Tories realise the choice in their constituency might be between Reform and Labour, and they, and perhaps supporters of other parties, might then switch their vote to Labour as a result.

This trend is reflected in the two charts noted here.

YouGov's MRP projection for the next election, and the same projection with tactical voting applied. Figures in the key are each party's seat change



The first shows the number of seats that might be won by parties in the Westminster Parliament if votes were cast in the way that voters' first preference might suggest. The second takes account of tactical voting and the changes in behaviour that I have noted above.

Unsurprisingly, these forecasts are very different, but only when it comes to the previously dominant first-past-the-post parties. For the SNP, the Liberal Democrats (almost) and other smaller parties, it is likely that the outcomes will be little changed by this tendency amongst voters to vote against the return of a Reform MP for their constituency. However, so strong is that tendency that the number of MPs who might be returned for Reform under the first-past-the-post system collapses from 123 seats to no more than 11, with consequent increases in the number of seats that might be held by both Labour and the Tories.

This does, of course, matter. It matters because it makes clear that people do not want neo-fascists in our Parliament, and recognise that the risk exists, and that they will make electoral sacrifices to prevent it happening. That is incredibly heartening.

This poll also says something that I think is profoundly significant, which is that there remains a decent majority in this country who hate the racism and abuse that Reform and other far-right parties promote, and that they will take active steps to prevent them securing power.

The poll result also implies that my concerns about first past the post, expressed in another post on this blog this morning, may be misplaced. That, however, is something with which I would not agree. That is because, as a democrat, I believe that people should be represented by those whose views they want to hear. In other words, whilst I would undoubtedly vote to prevent Reform from securing a seat in Parliament, I would much rather be able to vote for the person I wish to support, indicating an order of preference when doing so. If, as a consequence, more neo-fascist candidates were returned, I would accept that risk.

If we are to beat fascism, it has to be through argument, confrontation and exposure of the fantasy of their claims rather than by electoral suppression. I am sure that we can beat them, but I want that to be done fairly for the sake of creating Parliament. The alternative might be social tension that might be too great for our society to bear.

Fascism must be beaten, but it must be beaten fairly, which is precisely why we need electoral reform now, and not later as Labour is promising. Justice deliberately deferred is not justice at all.