



## How do you get children interested in the general election? – by Harry Wallop

Dad-of-four Harry Wallop attempts to engage his children in political debate, with a little help from car cricket and the 'two cows' joke.

*'I am very keen the kids should share my nerdy fascination with elections'*

Last week I had the privilege of interviewing Sir David Butler, the **co-inventor of the swingometer**, and walking election encyclopaedia and able to rattle off stats and facts with an awesome alacrity for a man in his nineties. But what most impressed me was how he could remember the exact results of his prep school mock election results in 1935: "370 for the Conservatives, 70 for an independent Conservative (a flamboyant tailor's son), 16 votes for Liberals, 14 votes for Labour."

Do schools still do mock elections? I hope so. Though my children are very vague on any details.

I stood in my own one in 1992 as the Labour candidate. I lost badly. But that may be because my school was a boarding school in the Home Counties, where most of the pupils had as much enthusiasm for Neil Kinnock as digging up the 1st XI cricket pitch to build council housing.

I am very keen the kids should share my nerdy fascination with elections. Because what is parenting if it is not a ceaseless quest to foist your own interests on your uninterested children?

A serious point -- to improve voter turnout among the young, I feel, you need to start early. If they are not interested, even excited, about voting when they turn 18 what hope do they have of bothering to put an X in the box when they are listless 20-year-olds?

So far, my attempts have involved a twist on car cricket when you spot pub signs or registration plates on long journeys. Instead, you spot election posters and billboards. Sadly, we've seen very few, and one of the ones we did see was the one with Alex Salmond with Ed Miliband in his pocket.

"Is that an SNP one?" says the nine-year-old.

"But I thought Nicola whatshername was now in charge," says the 12-year-old.

I try to explain why it is, in fact, a **Tory poster**. There is a long pause as the children try to digest the idea.

"That's rubbish," says the seven-year-old, emphatically.

They have sat and watched the ITV **leaders' debates** -- as a ruse to stay up late. They were surprisingly engaged, helped by my reading out some of the funnier tweets doing the rounds, and their trying to recreate Leanne Wood's Welsh accent. Though with half an hour to go, both the seven- and nine-year-old were so bored they volunteered to take themselves off to bed.

One hit has been getting the nine-year-old to read "**The Accidental Prime Minister**", a new book by Tom McLaughlin, about a boy who ends up at Number Ten after his heckle goes viral.

"It had good characters. And it was funny," said the nine-year-old. Some politics were deftly slipped in, it would appear. "I didn't realise the chancellor was in charge of all the money," he said.

But perhaps the most successful has been the children's attempt to update the famous **Two Cows joke**. The one from the 1930s: "What's socialism? You have two cows, the government takes one and gives it to your neighbour. What's communism? You have two cows, the government takes both and gives you the milk. What's Russian communism? You have two cows, the government takes both cows and makes you queue to get your milk. By the time you get to the front the milk has gone sour."

So far, we've had: "What's Ukip? You have two cows. The government sends one back to Holstein. What's Green? You have two cows. The government forces you to farm them organically, but will tax you for causing too much environmental damage."

Okay, it's a work in progress. All ideas for a full update, involving New Labour, Cameron's Conservatives and the SNP gratefully received.

