

Majority of British public want David Cameron to act on...

Published: January 13, 2026, 3:12 am

I am pleased to share this Global Witness press release:

A ComRes poll commissioned by Christian Aid and Global Witness and carried out immediately before [1] the Panama Papers exposé broke found overwhelming support among Brits for UK government action on the UK's tax havens — its 'Overseas Territories'. Major findings include:

- * Over three-quarters (77%) of British adults agree with the statement that “David Cameron has a moral responsibility to ensure that the UK's Overseas Territories are as transparent as possible”. Agreement is even stronger among Conservative supporters (80%) and older Britons (85% for those aged 45+)
- * 81% of British adults agree with the statement that “All companies, whether they are registered in the UK or its Overseas Territories, should be legally required to reveal their ultimate owners”. Agreement is even stronger among Conservative supporters (87%) and older Britons (89% for those aged 45+).
- * 69% of British adults agree with the statement that “It is damaging to the UK's international reputation to be linked to so-called ‘tax havens’”. Agreement is even stronger among older Britons (74% for those aged 45+).

Toby Quantrill, tax justice expert at Christian Aid said: “The findings are clear. If David Cameron were to require the UK's tax havens to publicly reveal companies' real owners, as the UK will shortly do, then British voters including Conservative voters would support him.”

Robert Palmer, anti-money laundering expert at Global Witness said: “David Cameron is hosting an anti-corruption summit in London next month. He should use it to require the UK tax havens to open up. He has the powers to do this, and this poll shows how much support there'd be for him showing such leadership.”

Much of the wrongdoing exposed by the Panama Papers relies on the anonymity provided by incorporating a company in a secrecy jurisdiction. Anonymously-owned

companies are the main method used by tax evaders and the corrupt to hide their identity and therefore hide their money. This theft of public money harms people all over the world, as it robs countries of funds they should be spending on their citizens, whether funding health services, education or building roads. The effects are at best damaging, at worst catastrophic; in the UK contributing to the need for austerity measures and cuts to public funding, in many of the world's poorest countries leading to death, conflict and extremism.

[A 2011 World Bank study](#) found that, for the corrupt, the UK's Overseas Territories are the most popular places in which to incorporate. The British Virgin Islands are particularly infamous for the level of secrecy they provide and indeed [half of the companies in the Panama Papers were incorporated in the British Virgin Islands](#).

David Cameron has himself stated that the UK's overseas territories should do more to become transparent, while anti-corruption champion Sir Eric Pickles has said that the [government could legislate](#) to make this happen. The UK has used its powers over the Overseas Territories a number of times in the past, — for example by requiring the Caribbean Territories to abolish the death penalty and decriminalise homosexuality”.
[2]

The UK has the power to make its tax havens far less attractive to criminals, by requiring the Overseas Territories to create public registers of the real owners of companies. The move would stop people being able to hide illicit activities behind shell companies. This would bring them into line with mainland UK, where the Prime Minister has already committed to creating such registers.

In May this year, the UK is hosting [an international anti-corruption summit](#). These results show that without decisive action to act on the tax havens at the forthcoming summit, its efforts to stamp out global corruption cannot be seen as credible, nor can the summit be seen as a success by the public.

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[2]

Notes to editors

[1] ComRes carried out a poll of 2,046 British adults online between 1-3 April 2016. Data were weighted by age, gender, region and socio-economic grade to be representative of all adults in Great Britain aged 18+. A full breakdown of the survey results can be found at www.comres.co.uk. **The Panama Papers stories first broke on the evening of 3 April.**

[2] For example:

Corruption in the Turks and Caicos Islands

The UK government suspended the Ministerial government and the House of Assembly in the Turks and Caicos Islands in 2009 following allegations of systemic corruption and administrative incompetence. [\[ii\]](#) **The Governor, who is appointed by the UK government, was given the power to take charge of government matters, subject to instructions from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Direct rule from London was imposed despite opposition and criticism from other Caribbean countries.** [\[iii\]](#) **Self-government was restored in 2011.** [\[iiii\]](#)

Abolishing the death penalty

In 1991 the UK government, by Order in Council, abolished capital punishment for the crime of murder in the Caribbean overseas territories (Anguilla, the British Virgin Islands, the Cayman Islands, Montserrat and the Turks and Caicos Islands). [\[iv\]](#) **The exception to this legislative step was Bermuda, which is considered the most autonomous overseas territory. However the UK Government threatened that it would consider using the ‘unprecedented step’ of imposing such a change on Bermuda if it did not voluntarily introduce domestic legislation.** [\[v\]](#) **This threat had the effect of causing the Bermuda legislature to pass its own domestic legislation to reflect the similar terms of the Order.**

Decriminalising homosexuality

In 2000 the UK legislated against the will of the Caribbean territory Governments when it decriminalised homosexual acts by Order in Council. [\[vi\]](#) **While the overseas territories were given an opportunity to adopt the necessary legislation themselves, the UK government adopted the Order when it became clear that the territories were unwilling to legislate themselves.**

[\[i\]](#) **The Turks and Caicos Islands Constitution (Interim Amendment) Order 2009 (SI 2009 No. 701)** [\[iii\]](#) **David Brown, ‘Plan to seize control of Turks and Caicos approved by British MPs’, *The Times*, 1st April 2009.** The action was also subject to unsuccessful legal challenge: ***R (on the Application of Misick) v Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs* [2009] EWHC 1039 (Admin)** [\[iiii\]](#) **The Turks and Caicos Islands Constitution Order 2011 (SI 2011 No. 1681), ss 97-105** [\[iv\]](#) **The Caribbean Territories (Abolition of Death Penalty for Murder) Order 1991 (SI 1991/988)** [\[v\]](#) **Foreign and Commonwealth Office White Paper ‘Partnership for Prosperity and Progress: Britain and the Overseas Territories’, March 1999, p 21, paras 4.3 and 4.7.** [\[vi\]](#) **Caribbean Territories (Criminal Law) Order 2000.**