

Why the Tories think it's OK to gamble on elections, an...

Published: January 17, 2026, 11:08 am

Why do the Tories think they can bet with insider information, as they obviously did before the election was called? It's because they think that the rules that society creates do not apply to them.

This was also, very obviously, true with regard to Covid regulations.

Those with the Tory mindset are privileged, usually wealthy, arrogant and inclined to look down on the rest of society. None of those are necessarily endearing features in themselves. The last two are most definitely not. But when they break the rules as a result of their holding such views, what astonishes Tories is that there are rules that might apply to them.

This would be irritating but for the fact that this attitude of exclusion from the general rules of life is not just about the behaviour of the idiots who have staffed 10 Downing Street during the last few years. It is much more important than that.

Over the last couple of days, I have (whilst also blogging quite a lot) been attending a workshop/seminar at the University of Sheffield on free spaces. In my terms, these are freeports, tax havens and the like. The discussion was, however, much wider, looking as well at the carving out of urban spaces for exclusive use by the wealthy as another particular aspect of this ideology that there should be places where the normal rules do not apply to those who happen to live, work or run businesses there, usually to their considerable economic and/or social advantage.

Working with Andrew Baker, my contribution was to discuss how we can appraise the impact of these spaces using a variant of tax spillover methodology. This will be developed over the coming months as we think there is something in this approach that allows a qualitative appraisal when quantitative approaches are likely to be very hard to use simply because of the absence of any reliable data.

However, at this moment, I want to draw attention to another paper on this issue that I wrote in 2009. It is called ['Defining the Secrecy World: Rethinking the language of](#)

'offshore'.

As is noted in the summary of the paper:

This paper sets out to show four things.

The first is that the existing language of the so-called 'offshore world' is inappropriate for the purposes of rigorous analysis of the issues to which that term has been applied. The paper offers a new language for this purpose. In that terminology, the term offshore is replaced by the term 'secrecy world'.

Second, it suggests that the assumption that the secrecy world is geographically located is not correct. It is instead a space that has no specific location. This space is created by tax haven legislation which assumes that the entities registered in such places are 'elsewhere' for operational purposes, i.e. they do not trade within the domain of the tax haven, and no information is sought about where trade actually occurs.

Thirdly, this paper shows that the illicit financial flows that are the cause of concern with the secrecy world do not flow through locations as such, but do instead flow through the secrecy space that secrecy jurisdictions create (secrecy jurisdictions being the new term tax havens).

As the paper shows, to locate these transactions in a place is not only impossible in many cases, it is also futile: they are not intended to be and cannot be located in that way. They float over and around the locations which are used to facilitate their existence as if in an unregulated ether. This suggests that any attempt to measure or regulate them solely on a national basis will always be problematic.

Finally, this paper suggests that the change in language that it promotes is consistent with existing understanding of the observed phenomena and adds new dimensions to the lexicon of offshore / the secrecy world.

We hope that this new language will allow regulators to extend the scope of their work whilst also reducing the scope for sophistc and casuistic arguments put forward by those who exploit the secrecy world for personal gain.

What's the relevance of this? Very obviously, this also applies to freeports.

But more than that, it shows that those capable of creating such spaces must also be capable of creating spaces in their own minds where they really do believe that the normal rules of society do not apply to them - because they actually create legal structures that say that this is not the case.

The trouble for the Tories - and also for all those politicians in Labour, the SNP and the LibDems who also believe in freeports - is that once you believe in this fiction, you do

four things.

First, you govern on the basis of fantasies, and not realities.

Second, you undermine the rule of law.

Third, you state that some people who are privileged within a society because the normal rules do not apply to them.

Fourth, you undermine democracy as a result.

And that is what is really happening in the UK right now.

But when you do that, you also begin to believe the fiction. And when you do so, you behave as if it is true and do not follow the rules of election gambling.

As for that paper, it changed the narrative on tax havens, quite literally. The term secrecy jurisdiction came into common use. More importantly, it changed the direction of international regulation of these spaces. moving it from tax onto secrecy. Changing a few words can help restore reality. But, it requires someone to point out the truth for that to happen.