

Election Fraud: Britain's Conservative Party 'Broke the Law to Win the 2015 General Election'

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First, there was the evidence that the Conservative party broke the law in [three key by-elections](#). Now, the party faces allegations that dozens of its MPs broke the law to win their seats in the 2015 general election itself. The party, already under investigation over its campaign spending, now faces calls for an investigation into possible criminal conspiracy. But will it be held to account?

In the weeks before the 2015 general election, the Conservatives' "RoadTrip 2015" campaign buses criss-crossed the country, [helping Conservative candidates in marginal seats](#) to win their election campaigns. Those buses have since been [credited](#) with winning the general election for the Conservatives – including by David Cameron, who [told](#) the now [disgraced](#) head of RoadTrip:

We quite simply could not have done it without you.

Now [an investigation](#) by *The Mirror* suggests that the 24 Conservative candidates who were helped to victory by the buses failed to declare the cost of the buses, along with associated food and hotel expenses, in their election campaign spending.

If they had, 20 of them would likely have exceeded the strict [spending cap](#) that limits how much candidates can spend on election campaigns. The aim of that spending limit is to protect democracy by ensuring a level playing field between political parties. Breaching it or "making a false declaration as to election expenses" are both criminal offences.

The Conservative government holds a majority of [just 12 MPs](#). If *The Mirror* is right and 24 Conservative candidates broke the law before winning their campaigns, the result of the general election is a sham, the MPs could face prosecution, and dozens of by-elections could be called. But is *The Mirror* right?

Candidate spending vs party spending

The Conservative party has denied any wrongdoing, [saying](#) the costs for the buses did not need to be declared by local candidates and could be declared in the party's national campaign spend:

CCHQ [Conservative Campaign Headquarters] campaigned across the country for the return of a Conservative Government. Such campaigning would be part of the national return, not local return.

Party spending and campaign spending are defined by [Electoral Commission guidance](#) as:

- Party spending is “spending on campaigning to promote the party and its policies generally. For example, national newspaper adverts for the party, or leaflets explaining party policy. It also includes spending on promoting candidates at elections where the party nominates a list of candidates for a region, instead of individual candidates for local areas.”
- Candidate spending is “campaigning to promote a particular candidate or candidates in their local area. For example, leaflets or websites that focus on one or more candidates and their views.”

In the run-up to the election, the RoadTrip 2015 (now rebranded RoadTrip 2020) team seemed very clear that it was campaigning to promote particular candidates: And the candidates themselves seemed to think they were being promoted:

In fact, shortly after the election, Conservative Home explicitly [said](#) the campaign buses were deployed to “fill campaigning gaps in more remote or less well-staffed battleground seats”.

Commenting on *The Mirror's* allegations, election law expert Professor Anthony King [said](#):

It all seems pretty fishy. It sounds very plausible that this spending should have been declared by the individual candidates.

Labour MP John Mann was also [forthright](#):

It was explicit support to promote a particular candidate. There were costs and expenses such as the travel being provided. That's unquestionably an election expense for the candidate being promoted and they need to account for it.

Allegations of criminal conspiracy

UKIP has gone further. As *The Canary* [previously reported](#), a [Channel 4 News investigation](#) unearthed evidence that the Conservatives overspent in three key by-elections they fought against UKIP. Since then, Channel 4 has [found evidence](#) that one of the 24 MPs covered in *The Mirror's* investigation, Craig Mackinlay, failed to declare at least £21,151 in expenses, including accommodation and campaign buses, in his general election campaign. Mackinlay ended up beating Nigel Farage by [2,812 votes](#) in Thanet South.

The Electoral Commission has [launched an inquiry](#) into Conservative party spending, but it is not a prosecuting authority. So UKIP has now [asked the Director of Public Prosecutions to investigate](#) the party over Thanet South and the three by-elections:

UKIP believes that this conduct constitutes offences that are corrupt and illegal practices under sections 73, 75, 76 and 82 [of] the Representation of the People Act 1983 (RPA 1983)... These matters are of the gravest possible nature in a western democracy. The mere suggestion that the party of government potentially conspired, perhaps even at the highest level, to pervert the course

of a democratic election is one that requires your very serious personal attention.

The DPP says it has no powers to investigate, although it could invite the police to do so.

“Matters for the police”

John Mann MP has [suggested](#) that *The Mirror*’s allegations should also be investigated by the police:

It’s a matter for police and I’d expect there to be challenges to the results in those constituencies.

Professor Anthony King [has said](#):

I hope, if people complain, that the local police forces will take their complaints seriously.

But there’s a catch.

The 12-month time limit

To “ensure finality in elections,” there is a [12-month time limit](#) on prosecuting offences relating to election expenses. That time limit has already expired for the by-elections – and it is nearly up for any offences committed during the general election, which was held on May 7 2015.

But, as the Electoral Commission has pointedly [warned](#) Kent police, police forces can apply for an extension for investigating allegations. It said: “unless the police apply to the courts for an extension, which they are entitled to do under the Representation of the People Act, they will have missed the opportunity to investigate any allegations.”

Conservative Home has [pointed out](#) that “if just 901 people in the most marginal seats had voted Labour instead of Conservative, last month’s majority would never have been achieved: every one of those days spent campaigning was crucial”. Now it seems those 901 people may have been persuaded to vote Conservative using corrupt and illegal practices.

You might think that that holding a governing party to account over allegations that it cheated in a general election would trump concerns over “finality in elections”. But it doesn’t. If we want to protect our democracy, it seems, voters in affected constituencies may need to start complaining to their police forces. Quickly.

Get involved!

Do you live in one of the 24 seats whose Tory candidates were helped to victory by the RoadTrip campaign buses?

Amber Valley, Broxtowe, Bury North, Cannock Chase, Cheltenham, Chippenham, Dudley South, Erewash, Kingston, Lincoln, Morecambe and Lunesdale, North Cornwall, Northampton

North, Nuneaton, Plymouth Sutton and Devonport, Pudsey, Sherwood, South Thanet, Sutton and Cheam, Thornbury and Yate, Torbay, Weaver Vale, Wells or Yeovil.

If you do, consider [contacting your local police force](#) to make a complaint about your candidate's spending declaration – and to remind the police that they can apply to the courts for an extension to investigate the allegations.

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