

The Toronto and Montreal Mayoral Scandals: Anything but
Contradictory to Canada's International Image to the Informed
Observer

Canada, a nation that has long been viewed in the international arena as one of the world's least corrupt societies, has seen its international reputation tarnished in recent weeks by a string of high profile political scandals. For the past month, protesters in Toronto have been calling for the resignation of Mayor Rob Ford over news of an alleged video showing the politician smoking crack-cocaine (Argitis and Tomesco). Meanwhile, Montreal Mayor Michael Applebaum was arrested on June 16, 2013, by Quebec's anti-corruption police over fraud allegations linked to two real estate transactions that involved "tens of thousands of dollars" in illegal payments between 2006 and 2011 (Argitis and Tomesco). Upon close analysis and examination, it becomes evident that nobody should be surprised by the recent events. The scandals are anything but contradictory to Canada's international image - at least, that is, for the more informed observer who is capable of looking beyond politicized perceptions.

For many years, Canada's international image could certainly be described as exceptional, at least with respect to

perceptions about corruption. As a case in point, since the organization's founding in 1993, Transparency International has consistently rated Canada as one of the world's least corrupt nations. Between 2006 and 2010, in fact, Transparency International ranked Canada in the top 10 of the organization's corruption perception index (CPI), most impressively reaching as high as number six in 2006 (Argitis and Tomesco). Even more, Canada has bolstered its reputation as a conscientious player in international politics by taking proactive steps to control corruption within its borders and in the global marketplace. Earlier this year, for instance, Quebec's Permanent Anti-Corruption Unit (UPAC) announced its plans to expand its anti-corruption efforts by casting its investigative net beyond Montreal into smaller cities, boroughs, and provinces. These efforts have been further supported by the establishment of a dedicated and fully resourced police department responsible for monitoring and enforcing anti-corruption laws and policies (Crane and Matten). The arrest and prosecution of a number of corporate and political wrongdoers seems to have shown the world that Canada and the UPAC mean business. All considered, the general consensus among the international anti-corruption community has long been such that Canada is viewed as a leader

in the fight against corruption, at least by those who do not question politicized accounts.

Given Canada's longstanding and almost rosy reputation as one of the world's least corrupt nations, it is certainly not surprising that the recent scandals in Toronto and Montreal caught so many people by surprise and captured the imaginations of literally millions. Simply put, people are shocked and amazed that high ranking Canadian officials would even be accused of the types of indiscretions and crimes allegedly committed by Mayor Ford and Mayor Applebaum, let alone be arrested and subjected to impending prosecution. It would, therefore, seem at this point in the discussion that the answer to the fundamental question concerning how these scandals contradict the international image of Canada and the Canadian government is a foregone conclusion. Stated in different terms, the facts would appear to suggest that the scandals are grossly contradictory of Canada's international image as a nation relatively free of corruption.

The problem with the above prima facie inference is that informed researchers argue that Canada's prevailing international image as a low corruption nation is not only misleading, but even false. The point, more exactly, is that for those who hold a more informed opinion and image of Canada, the

recent scandals are anything but contradictory. Researchers Andersson and Heywood point out, for example, that the annual Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), published by Transparency International, has had a pivotal role in focusing attention on corruption and, by extension, seemingly providing Canada with not only a passing grade, but even raving reviews (Andersson and Heywood). Misconceptions and exaggerations arise, in other words, because Transparency International's theoretical framework and methodologies are seriously flawed.

In elaborating on Transparency International's paradigmatic difficulties, the organization's model is based on a definition of corruption that creates conceptual contradictions such that corruption in developed nations like Canada is often overlooked. Even further, Andersson and Heywood explain that "the CPI measures perceptions rather than, for example, reported cases, prosecutions or proven incidences of corruption" (Andersson and Heywood). This is a big problem because perceptions are not necessarily based on facts or solid evidence, but rather conjecture. Or, as Andersson and Heywood put it, "there can be a striking disjuncture between perceptions and personal experience of corruption" (Andersson and Heywood).

In further expounding on the main source of Canada's misconstrued international image, "the CPI is a composite index

which draws upon a series of surveys mainly aimed at Western business leaders and expert assessments of perceived corruption" (Andersson and Heywood). Results of the survey become subject to cultural bias and misinterpretation because the Western respondents answer the survey according to specific business transactions in a country that is not their own. The CPI score is additionally dependent on the total number of countries being surveyed. Put another way, not only is the score tallied according to the perception of a business person of a different country, but the score is computed according to how many other countries participated in the survey. Thus, the ranking invariably does not represent the objective facts but becomes, instead, a reflection of politics. The critical problem, in a few words, is that the CPI has a powerful influence on the way people think about corruption in the world, yet Transparency International's methods are unscientific, excessively subjective, and highly prone to error.

If the above theoretical critique is not enough, the facts about corruption in Canada should speak for themselves. In the last nine months, investigations have revealed that Canada's political landscape is just as mired in dirty dealings as many other countries in the world. For example, Montreal's now former mayor, Gerald Tremblay, resigned after he was charged with

bribery and possible connections to organized crime (Simpson). Then, London, Ontario Mayor, Joe Fontana, was charged with fraud and other crimes, including using government funds to pay for his son's wedding reception back in 2005; Fontana has yet to be impeached or prosecuted (Simpson). Next, during his 23-year service as Mayor to Quebec's third largest city, Laval, Gilles Vaillancourt was charged with operating an "organized and structured network" of criminals and gangsters (Simpson). If one adds these cases and the many others not noted in this report to the corruption assessment of Canada (e.g., the notorious Mayor known for spitting his gum in the street and kicking kids in the face), it becomes obvious that Transparency International might want to re-compute its scorecard for Canada.

In the end, the political scandals in Toronto and Montreal have captured the imaginations of the global audience because they appear to expose a widespread problem with corruption in a nation that many have long perceived as an international poster child of political uprightness and integrity. The problem, however, is that this winsome international image of Canada is a gross misrepresentation of the truth. Not only are Transparency International's research efforts methodologically flawed, but the organization's reports do little more than feed the political perceptions machine. Additionally, the many

substantiated cases of corruption in Canada provide sufficient evidence of the realities of widespread and longstanding corruption in the country. The conclusion can, therefore, be drawn that the scandals in Toronto and Montreal are anything but contradictory to Canada's international image - at least, that is, for the more informed observer who is capable of looking beyond politicized perceptions.

Works Cited

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