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Media reporting of corruption

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Abstract

Are policy responses related to experiences or perceptions of corruption? This article examines newspaper reporting of corruption in an Australian jurisdiction and compares these with perceptions of corruption and experiences of corruption in the community. The policy challenge is to understand the gaps between media reporting about corruption, the perceptions of corruption they help generate and peoples concrete experiences of corruption. Research cited in this article shows that corruption tends to be perceived at a higher level than the evidence would suggest in both high income and low income countries. Such perceptions have policy relevance as they can shape the structure of national integrity systems. This leads to our research question: how does the media portray corruption and asks whether policy responses are related to experiences or perceptions of corruption? The lessons here can be applied in other jurisdictions.

Keywords: corruption; Australia; Victoria; perceptions; media reporting of corruption.

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Media reporting of corruption

Introduction

A study of perceptions of corruption was conducted in Victoria, Australia's second most populous state. It was commissioned by the newly formed Independent Broad-based Commission Against Corruption (IBAC). One component of that study was to examine media reporting of corruption in Victoria. Between 2010 and 2012, the Victorian print media made nearly 5000 references to corruption. Superficially, this number of reports generated in the media of a single state is notable, because Australia is generally not regarded as a country with a corruption problem. This article analyses the print media reporting of corruption in Victoria at this time and places it in a political context. The analysis finds public perceptions of high levels of corruption in the Victoria and low reporting of actual corrupt events. However, perceptions of corruption are important—these perceptions drive political responses and in turn, shape political campaigns.

Our research analyses the media reporting and identifies 149 corruption related events in the time under review. Of these, we examine three corrupt events which received heavy press coverage. The first was a series of ten events collectively named the Victoria Police management scandal. In a strictly academic or judicial sense, the events of this scandal were not corruption per se. The scandal was a political and organisational power struggle for the leadership of the police service. This struggle involved the union, the highest ranks of the police, politicians and their advisors – a number of whom lost their positions in the process. The second event related to the murder of gangland figure Carl Williams while in prison. Williams' connections to organised crime and alleged knowledge of police corruption re-cast him as a star witness in the murder investigation of two police informants. It was this role as informant that led to his demise. The murder itself had no hint of corruption by prison authorities, in this case the role of officialdom was a failure to keep him safe under the circumstances. The final case *is* a classic case of corruption with a heavy dose of salaciousness. A municipal council inspector responsible for the management of *legal* brothels received more than \$130,000 in bribes from owners of *illegal* brothels in exchange for warnings about raids from local, state or federal authorities. The officer was convicted for receiving these bribes. Although only one of the three closely scrutinised cases has been proven in court, all cases contributed to keeping corruption in the forefront of public consciousness and a topic on the political agenda of the state, and provoked public policy responses.

Context

In the developed world, we like to think of corruption as a problem of greater significance and salience for the ubiquitous other – the developing world and less developed countries. The reasons for this are varied. For example, Johnston (2005: 36-48) uses a series of syndromes to explain the shift in corrupt activity from the highly visible solicitation of bribes in oligarchic societies toward influence markets in well-established political economies. Furthermore, many developed societies have implemented integrity systems, networks of institutions and agencies to address the more commonly perceived acts of corruption (Huberts et al. 2008; Huberts and Six 2012; Prenzler and Faulkner 2010; Pope 2000; Prasser 2012; Uhr 2005). There is also an almost competitive spirit among nations to improve their standing internationally on a variety of league tables, (TI 2013, 2011), with movement being a source of national pride or shame, depending on the direction. Yet despite these syndromes, integrity systems and rankings, corruption persists as an issue in the public mind, its scale often distorted by media reporting. Research shows that corruption tends to be perceived at a higher level than the evidence would suggest in both high income (Bean 2008; McAllister 2014) and low income countries (Rose and Mishler 2007). Such perceptions have policy relevance as they can shape the structure of national integrity systems. This leads to our research question: how does the media portray corruption and asks whether policy responses are related to experiences or perceptions of corruption?

Corruption control in rich countries is as important, if not more so, than corruption control in poor countries – if for no other reason than to set an example. Although, of course, economic, legal, social and moral imperatives for the public good and citizen demands to punish offenders are also important reasons for implementing effective corruption controls (Yap 2013). Under the auspices of the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC) (UNODC 2003), nearly every developed nation³ has agreed to outlaw corrupt conduct and establish anti-corruption agencies. Under Australia’s federal system, integrity and anti-corruption agencies exist at both the national and state level. Table 1 lists these agencies.

[INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

³ The notable exceptions being Germany, Japan and New Zealand, all of whom have signed the UNCAC, but have not yet ratified it through their domestic law.

Following a change of government in 2012, the Independent Broad-based Commission Against Corruption (IBAC) was established in Victoria. This agency was intended to have a broader approach to the investigation of corruption in the state beyond the existing Office of Police Integrity (OPI), the functions of which were eventually subsumed into the IBAC in early 2013. This study drew on analysis of Victorian responses in a national poll on corruption perceptions (McAllister et al. 2012), data-gathering through focus groups conducted with a cross-section of the Victorian community, surveys of senior civil servants and agency heads as well as a detailed qualitative review of other integrity agencies within Victoria and similar agencies in other states of Australia (Graycar 2014). A separate tranche of data was gathered through an extensive review of the print media in Victoria over a two-year period. The original findings are informative on how the media portrays corruption and how this portrayal feeds into public perceptions of corruption.

This article analyses the data using the TASP (Type, Activity, Sector, Place) methodology developed by Graycar and his colleagues (Graycar and Prenzler 2013: 11; Graycar and Sidebottom 2012: 386). This method uses the corrupt event as the unit of analysis, examining the **type** of corruption, which **activities** are corrupted, the **sector** in which the corruption occurs and the **place** it happens (see Table 2). The analysis is further framed by the types of corruption defined within § 3A of the *IBAC Act* (2011). From this perspective, a picture emerges of the gaps between the media portrayal of corruption, public perceptions and the actuality of corrupt acts. While an advanced democracy such as Australia has comparatively little corruption, media reporting shapes public perceptions and has an amplifying effect upon issues and their perceived significance (Ansolabehere et al. 2005: 215). This effect can exceed the true significance of the issue at hand. This research is aimed at improving our understanding of the relationship between how the media portrays corruption and how the public then perceives it.

Methodology

Measuring corruption is problematic. Researchers are confronted by the fact that corruption is a crime where the parties in the know have a vested interest in keeping the real victims – broader society – in the dark (Graycar and Prenzler 2013: 34-35). This article does not aim to measure corruption, what it does is examine what the public *knows* of corruption –

knowledge drawn from the print media; and what the public *thinks it knows* – expressed through a series of focus groups and polling (McAllister et al. 2012; Graycar 2014). The method for this research focuses on the media analysis, focus group and polling methodology are located in Graycar (2014) and McAllister et al. (2012) respectively.

Data

To identify relevant press reports we searched the *Factiva* database for the period 1 October 2010 – 30 September 2012 for a range of corruption related keywords and their conjugations within selected publications. The terms were: ‘corrupt*’, ‘rort’, ‘bribe*’, ‘kickback*’, ‘nepotis*’, ‘crony*’, ‘whistleblow*’ and ‘integrity’.⁴ Each media article (n=4,925) was coded to refine the raw data and classify the reported corrupt events. The refinement process excluded reports that did not relate to corrupt activity in the academic or legal sense (n=1,637); popular culture and entertainment references to corruption (e.g. the *Dark Knight* movie) (n=490); reports related to other legal jurisdictions (n=1,937); and those of an historic nature (n=49). This left 812 reports related to contemporary corruption in Victoria (Table 2). The reports related to corruption in Victoria were subsequently coded according to a modified version of the TASP model (Graycar and Prenzler 2013: 11; Graycar and Sidebottom 2012: 386), which included specific offences under the IBAC legislation and limited *place* to those relevant to Victoria (Table 2).

[INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

Coded data was recorded on a spreadsheet for analysis. The results are discussed in the following section.

Table 3 details the number of keyword hits within major metropolitan, regional and local papers. Data on newspaper circulation and the number of articles related to corruption in the state are included.

⁴ The use of ‘*’ captured all conjugations – e.g. ‘corrupt*’ captured corrupt, corrupts, corrupted, corruptible, corruption, corrupting, corruptible etc.

[INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE]

Like other research (e.g. Ansolabehere et al. 2005; Prenzler and Faulkner 2010) the data gathering here focused on newspapers, not the electronic media. Ansolabehere and his colleagues (2005: 215) argue that survey data indicated local opinion was formed from newspapers, rather than television reporting. Media sources also acknowledge the higher quality of print journalism over the electronic variety. The long-time journalist, Helen Thomas claims ‘With the exception of serious documentaries, there is no way a TV news snippet of half a minute can match an in-depth newspaper account’ (Thomas 2006: xiv). How local perspectives on corruption are formed is important for comparison with the data generated by focus groups. These focus groups indicated that the public believed corruption awareness depended heavily on what is detected and reported on and that the media was essential in providing information on public sector corruption (Graycar 2013: 8).⁵ Furthermore, significant corruption events were covered by both television and the print media. Therefore the additional effort to survey electronic coverage was deemed unnecessary.

Results

Overall

Before focusing on Victoria, the big picture from the initial search reflects some interesting findings. Figure 1 shows that the majority of press reports about corruption in the local media do not relate to Victoria. Events in Victoria account for only 16.5 per cent of the total reports, or 29 per cent of total reports that relate to actual corrupt behaviour. The largest single segment refers to reports that do not relate to corruption at all (e.g. discussion on the *integrity* of a building, or the *kickback* in the steering of a car), followed by international incidents. The international incidents were dominated by references to issues such as WikiLeaks (e.g. Dorling 2011), the *News of the World* scandal in Britain (e.g. Washington 2011) and corruption in countries where Australia is significantly involved—Afghanistan, Papua New Guinea, China and Indonesia. In total, reference is made to corrupt activities (real

⁵ This finding was despite the Australian media emerging as the institution with the highest levels of perceived corruption (McAllister *et al.* 2012), a result linked to the ongoing press coverage of the *News of the World* hacking scandal.

or fictional) on average 4.5 times a day. This may contribute to explaining why the focus groups indicated the belief that corruption is prevalent (see Graycar 2014).

Other observations that can be drawn from Figure 1 are the relatively large segments of reporting that relate to fictional references and ‘other Australian’ (OA) jurisdictions. Those in the fictional category mostly refer to film and television; whereas the OA references primarily report matters under federal jurisdiction—the allegations against former Health Services Union (HSU) officials and the allegations of foreign bribery by an Australian company, Note Printing Australia dominated these reports.

[INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Although other jurisdictions have well-established anti-corruption authorities—New South Wales, Queensland and Western Australia⁶—there is remarkably little reporting of these in the Victorian press. Between these three, only 74 reports appeared in the Victorian press about corruption in these states over the two year period. This reflects a level of parochialism in press reporting of corruption.

Victoria

Focusing on the 812 media reports about corruption in Victoria, the majority of press reports appear in the major metropolitan daily papers *The Age* and *Herald Sun*, which are sold statewide. Regional and local papers have little coverage on corruption. In the regional papers, much of the reporting is reflected in the metropolitan dailies. This duplication is unsurprising as the *Herald Sun* and Leader group of papers are both owned by News Limited. This finding is indicative that local press has little, if any, influence on the formulation of public opinion about corruption and is thus contradictory to the original research expectations.

[INSERT FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE]

Although 812 media reports featured corruption, this did not reflect a similar number of instances of corruption related events – multiple reports on the same event were often made and this was dependent on the level of public interest. Drilling the data further found a total of 149 separate corrupt or corruption related events were reported. The most prevalent matters are outlined in Table 4. In addition to these, some broad clusters of reports were

⁶ The South Australian ICAC and Tasmanian Integrity Commission were established during the media survey period. Neither rated a mention in the Victorian press.

identified relating to OPI investigative outcomes (n=35); various issues with different local councils (n=34); corruption in sport (n=22); and criticism of the OPI performance (n=11). The reports on the Yarra brothels (Table 4) were separated from the cluster of local council corruption as it related to serious corrupt activity. Most of the other council related issues were reported with less than four press articles.

[INSERT TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE]

Figure 3 gives the full summary of the press reports of corruption related matters.

[INSERT FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE]

Figure 3 illustrates that corruption occurs in many domains. Corruption in sport (n=22), the private sector (n=8) and unions (n=8) indicate the problem is not unique to the political domain. Even the academic world (n=8) is not free from corrupt events. Furthermore, the police management crisis (n=225) comprised ten sub-events (see Table 6), which occurred in both the police force and the parliament. While this paper is focussed on public and political issues, it should be noted that corruption has the potential to affect any sector of society, and no one event is necessarily limited to a single sector or place.

IBAC Offence categories

The IBAC legislation details specific legal categories of corruption. These are listed in Table 2. Of the 149 corruption related events as opposed to discrete reports, 25 could not be classified under any of the offences. These indeterminate events most often refer to *anti-corruption* events, such as the release of the Ombudsman's or OPI reports, corruption as an election issue, notable changes within anti-corruption agencies and the like. This category also includes several civil society anti-corruption initiatives such as the occupy protests (n=7). These 25 events kept corruption in the spotlight as they represent 183 media reports, therefore they have been retained as part of the overall analysis.

[INSERT FIGURE 4 ABOUT HERE]

Figure 4 shows that breach of trust was the most common offence. Private sector corruption is included in this category, unless there was clear indication within the report that the matter could be better classified elsewhere. For example when estate agents were banned from accessing property ownership records, it was clearly the misuse of information. Another

example was employees of a large supermarket chain receiving kickbacks, categorised as dishonest performance. Actions of police officers that were criminal in nature—such as assault, bullying, theft etc.—were treated as breaches of trust, rather than the more corruption specific categories. This is because these activities do not depend on the alleged offenders holding public office.

The category for misuse of information or material was dominated by instances where it was information subject to the breach (n=23), rather than material (n=2). Several of the categories related to the police management crisis fell into this category—media leaks, the misuse of crime statistics, criticism of Commissioner Overland, politicking at the top of Victoria Police, and the Commissioner’s resignation. Relatively few reports related to attempts by external parties to affect the performance of public employees and only a single instance could be classified as a conspiracy. This seems indicative that corruption in the form of offered inducements *to* public officials is an uncommon practice in Victoria.

Types, activities, sectors, places

The research now turns from the legal analysis to the academic model and applies the Graycar and Sidebottom (2012: 386) TASP analysis (Types, Activities, Sectors, Places). Corruption in Victoria is a classic case of an influence market, which is in line with expectations of developed democratic economies described by Johnston (2005: 36-48).

Types of Corruption

The dominant types of corruption reported in the Victorian press are those one would expect in Johnston’s (2005) influence markets – the misuse of information, more than the misuse of material; abuse of discretion; conflict of interest; perverting the course of justice; and discrimination. A small minority of corruption events had a direct economic element – bribery, kickbacks, self-dealing fraud and theft comprised only 28 per cent of the total events reported.

[INSERT FIGURE 5 ABOUT HERE]

As expected, most of the types of corruption in these reported events are typical of a democratic free-market economy. Misuse of information, abuse of discretion and conflict of interest are the most common corruption types. When perverting the course of justice, discrimination and nepotism / cronyism are added, the types of corruption, which do not generally have an immediate economic benefit, outnumber those that do—bribery, kickbacks,

fraud and theft—at a ratio of nearly 3:1. Figure 5 also provides a more nuanced look at the anti-corruption events, breaking them down into events related to integrity reporting by agencies (n=11) and anti-corruption events (n=6). Several events (n=8) defied classification, although they all undoubtedly were corruption related – such as reports of a suppression order on a book that detailed police corruption (Steger 2010).

Corrupted Activities

Following the pattern of corruption in rich countries – most corrupted activities are outside those directly involved in economic activity. Buying goods and services, sponsorship arrangements, partnerships with the private sector, disposal of public assets and grant administration represent 16.8 per cent of all reported incidents. The activity most affected by corruption is the delivery of programs and services to the public, more specifically policing and justice services (n=21).

[INSERT FIGURE 6 ABOUT HERE]

Procedural compliance fell into two categories of reports. The first relates to public compliance with procedure, and the second deals with the failure of officials to comply with internal procedures. The latter category dominated (n=18) this activity type. The exceptions to this pattern included bribes paid to the Victorian Building Commission to not enforce regulations (see Baker and McKenzie 2012) an attempt to bribe a police officer (Hurley 2011) and the activities of the Brotherhood lunch club (see Moor 2011).

Sponsorship arrangements include political party funding and corruption in sport. In the case of political party funding the delineation between public and private activity becomes blurred (McMahon and MacArthur 2011). It is therefore more useful to consider politics as the sector in which corruption is occurring, rather than the allegedly corrupt activities.

Corrupted Sectors

In this time, the media focused largely on corruption within the police (n=44) and judicial (n=18) sectors. A few issues can be categorised in a number of ways. The most significant of these was the murder in jail of the drug trafficker and murderer Carl Williams (discussed in detail below) span both police and corrections, even though it has been categorised as a police incident. This is because a large number of reports linked the murder to William's cooperation with a police corruption investigation. Any failures of the Corrections

Department in relation to the murder were not portrayed in the media as a result of corruption.

[INSERT FIGURE 7 ABOUT HERE]

The incidents that comprise the Victoria Police management crisis (discussed below) are divided between the police and politics sectors. Each incident has been categorised in accordance with the dominant sector reported for each. The events categorised N/A include the press reports on anti-corruption activities. The civil society activities of the occupy movement and various reports of the ombudsman and OPI are within this category. Furthermore, this category also include the extensive reporting on corruption as an election issue (n=52 reports) and the establishment of the IBAC (n=82).

Although a Royal Commission on Trade Union Corruption commenced in 2014, only ten events (39 reports) relate to corruption in construction. This includes the aforementioned bribery in the Victorian Building Commission. Recent poll data indicates 45 per cent of Australians believe unions—often associated with corruption in building and construction—have too much power (McAllister and Cameron 2014: 53). Further data suggests more Australians believe unions are corrupt (38 per cent) than those who believe they are not (24 per cent) and that unions are perceived as the second most corrupt institution in Australia after the media (McAllister et al. 2012: 13). However, it is most likely the opinion data on unions is driven by the reporting of union corruption nationally (noted when coding for the OA data in Figure 1), rather than locally. This shows that place matters.

Corrupted places

Analysis of the places where corruption occurred can be grouped into three broad categories. The police and judicial agencies dominate with 63 events detailed in over 300 press reports. Nearly all the other executive departments and agencies of the Victorian government register at least one report of corruption. Only three do not – Visit Victoria, the Department of Primary Industries and the Department of Premier and Cabinet. The final category, that of local government fares the best, with only 69 press reports of 19 corrupt events. Of the 79 Victorian local councils, only 19 reports of corruption in 15 councils appeared in the media. This is contrary to perceptions. Only 11 per cent of Australians view local government as not at all corrupt (McAllister et al. 2012: 26). This is perhaps indicative of a general lack of

scrutiny of local councils by local papers, which is further reinforced by the general lack of corruption reporting in this form of press (see Figure 2).

[INSERT TABLE 5 ABOUT HERE]

Victorian corruption issues in context

It would be impossible in the space of a single article to adequately describe all of the 149 corruption related events reported in over 800 press reports. However, three events are presented below as discrete illustrative cases – the Victoria Police management crisis; the murder of underworld figure Carl Williams in jail; and the corrupt relationship between a Yarra City Council inspector and a network of brothels in the area.

As will be seen, the Victoria Police management crisis is linked to the murder of Williams, illustrating how corrupt events can overlap each other. The police management crisis was chosen because more than a quarter of all the press reports that were coded for corruption in Victoria were linked to this complex series of events (see Table 6). The Williams' murder provides a nexus between reality and the representation of corruption in popular entertainment media—as mentioned previously, nearly 500 of the original keyword hits related to fictitious representations of corruption (see Figure 1). Finally, the Yarra brothels event provides a classic case of corruption, with little of the complexity surrounding the other illustrative cases. While public perceptions of corruption in Victoria often focus on the local councils, the Yarra brothels event is a case in point, it is also an exception to local council behaviour, rather than the publicly perceived rule.

1. Victoria Police Management Crisis

A small number of events can be reported extensively and thus give the impression that something is badly out of control or is occurring with undesirable frequency. During the period under review, the Victoria Police experienced a struggle for power by players at the top of the organisation. There were claims and counterclaims of wrongdoing, leaks to the media, allegations of misuse of information, and numerous investigations—all of which were conveniently labelled corruption. Described by the media as the Victoria Police management crisis, this eventually resulted in several key senior figures in law enforcement leaving their positions – either through resignation or dismissal.

More than a quarter of the media reports on Victorian corruption related to the police management crisis. The crisis included 10 reasonably discrete but related events. It is impractical to try and completely disentangle which report is precisely in which category. However, in combination, these events illustrate a complex web of allegations and counter allegations of corrupt, unethical or dishonest behaviour by those charged with managing the Victoria Police. These discrete events are analysed using the TASP framework in Table 6. A brief description of each follows.

- *Police internal politics* (n=15) Reports concerning the tension between the police union and Chief Commissioner.
- *Criticism of Commissioner* (n=9) Press commentary on the performance of the Chief Commissioner Simon Overland, particularly in regard to his relationships with the union and Deputy Commissioner Ken Jones.
- *Media leaks* (n=15) An OPI investigations into media leaks from the Victoria Police.
- *Crime statistics* (n=15) Reports related to the Commissioner releasing misleading crime statistics prior to the state election being called. This led to an ombudsman report critical of the Chief Commissioner and preceded the Commissioner's resignation (See Brouwer 2011).
- *Ken Jones dismissal* (n=61) Reports about the dismissal of the Deputy Commissioner Jones, the OPI investigation into whether he had leaked to the media or not and speculation as to whether he would have made a better Commissioner than Overland.
- *Commissioner's resignation* (n=53) Chief Commissioner Overland resigned after losing the confidence of the government based on the previous release of unqualified crime statistics.
- *Ministerial advisor dismissed from Police* (n=7) Tristan Weston, an adviser to the Police Minister was dismissed from the Victoria Police in relation to media leaks (event 3 above). Weston had previously stood as Liberal Party candidate. The police minister later hired Weston as an adviser.
- *Tilley and Weston Resignations* (n=42) The Parliamentary Secretary for Police, Bill Tilley and Weston both resign over their involvement with police Deputy Commissioner Jones and manoeuvres against Chief Commissioner Overland.
- *Strong and Jevtovic Resignations* (n=7) The head and deputy head of the OPI chose to resign rather than go to the IBAC.

- *Political fallout* (n=1) An adviser to the Premier of Victoria involved with the police management crisis was removed from his position.

While the term ‘corruption’ commonly appeared in these reports, investigations by integrity agencies – the State Ombudsman and the OPI – did not uncover evidence of direct personal material benefit, nor evidence of external criminal elements corrupting the actors concerned. However, the Ombudsman’s report found Chief Commissioner Overland had released unqualified crime data prior to the state election. This data ‘could reasonably be perceived to be misrepresenting the fuller picture of [crime] trends [and the] crime statistics were subsequently used for political purposes during a public debate by the then new Police Minister three days before the election’ (Brouwer 2011: 5). In his own defence, the Chief Commissioner pointed out he had been

...in a bit of a Catch 22 situation: if I release the data [when the government was in] caretaker mode, I can [be] accused of being politically motivated; if I didn’t release the data in the caretaker mode, I can be accused of being politically motivated ...
(Chief Commissioner Overland quoted in Brouwer 2011: 29)

Overland resigned following the release of the Ombudsman’s report. This specific event – the release of unqualified crime statistics for political purposes – and the associated leaks to the media were central to 30 press reports. The Chief Commissioner’s resignation after the Ombudsman’s report generated another 53 articles. In this, as with the other events surrounding the Police Management Crisis, corruption control is a political process or the ‘checking the abuse of power through countervailing political force and contention’ (Johnston 2012: 57). While no findings were made that the Chief Commissioner had acted corruptly or for his own benefit, the public perception of corruption had the tangible effect of ending his tenure.

2. *Carl Williams murder*

Organised crime and corruption often go hand-in-hand and the murder of underworld figure Carl Williams is evidence of this. Jailed in 2004, Williams had been a key actor in drug trafficking and a series of gangland murders in Melbourne during the late 1990s and early 2000s (Brouwer 2012: 157). Williams’ criminal activities became the subject of the first of the *Underbelly* television series, which dramatised and glorified organised crimes in

Australia. Williams' character was central to the first series, aired in 2008. Although screening in Victoria was delayed due to a Supreme Court injunction as the series was considered prejudicial to related and ongoing criminal trials (The Age 2008), Williams' notoriety received a significant boost. This reinforces the public perceptions of high levels of corruption in segments of Victorian society.

Williams was murdered in prison by a fellow inmate some 18 months after the airing of the *Underbelly* series. At the time of his death, Williams had been cooperating with an OPI investigation into allegations that corrupt police had been involved in the murder of two witnesses—Terrence and Christine Hodson (Brouwer 2012:8). The Hodson murders and the associated allegations of police corruption had been reported on ten times (see Table 4) prior to Williams' death. Williams' murder in prison generated 43 press reports. Furthermore, speculation about police corruption relating to Williams' murder rose as police investigating the Hodson murders had recommended to prison authorities Williams be housed with the prisoner who eventually killed him (Brouwer 2012: 8). Williams himself had made it clear to police unless he had the cellmate of his choice, he would cease cooperating (Brouwer 2012: 22-32). The strong media interest, fuelled by Williams' high profile, illustrates the nexus between the popular media, press reporting and the public's perceptions of corruption.

3. Yarra Brothels

Press reporting on corruption appears to favour reporting the sensational, as can be seen by the Williams' case above. Newspapers, after all are a business, and sensation sells. The third case examined here reflects this. Between 2002 and 2010, the Coordinator of Planning Enforcement for Yarra City Council accepted \$134,260 in bribes from the operators of three illegal brothels. The payments into a gambling account were made in exchange for early warnings about any impending raids by authorities. This council officer, had been involved in the investigation of other illegal brothels, investigations which included local, state and federal authorities – each with a different role in policing the legal and illegal sex industry (McKenzie and Beck 2011a, 2011b). Furthermore, the investigation revealed federal agencies had intelligence about the corrupt officer as early as 2002 (McKenzie and Beck 2011a). One of the bribers operated both legal and illegal brothels, which placed the council officer in contact with them as part of their duties, thus highlighting the vulnerability of certain high risk functions to corruption (Gorta 2006: 209-10).⁷ The bribed council officer

⁷ Although not part of this analysis, it is worth noting that this council officer falls into 8 of 15 high risk functions identified by Gorta (2006: 209-10). These are '1. Inspecting, regulating or monitoring the standards of

had a high profile in fighting illegal brothels, having testified before a Commonwealth Parliamentary Committee on the issue (Joint Committee on the Australian Crime Commission 2002). The evidence furnished to the parliamentary committee by this officer and others outlined how the policy decision to decriminalise brothels in Victoria had led to unintended consequences. The consequences included an increase in the number of illegal brothels under the cover of the legal ones and confusion as to which level of government was responsible for what under the new arrangements (Joint Committee on the Australian Crime Commission 2002). Ironically, the council officer was directly asked whether he had heard of illegal brothels being tipped off before raids—to which he answered ‘no...’ (Joint Committee on the Australian Crime Commission 2002: 10). This event therefore included a number of factors to make a good story – sex, organised crime, corruption, gambling, illegal immigration and multi-level government incompetence.

Taking a broader view, it is apparent the media milked this story for all it was worth. The 28 press reports that featured this event came in waves. The first concerned a series of raids on illegal brothels by state and federal authorities. These raids also included the offices of the Yarra City Council and revelations of a corrupt official soon emerged. The second wave followed the resignation of the council officer, who approached the media to explain his involvement. Court proceedings against the officer and his guilty plea comprised the third wave of reports, and the final reports repeated much of the details as the bribers were processed through the courts. The event remained in the press from early November 2010 until September 2012 – nearly the entire period under analysis. While the press see it as legitimate to frame such stories (cf. Street 2011 chapter 2), the end result was this event kept corruption in the public view, despite it being a single – although significant – event.

[TABLE 6 ABOUT HERE]

Table 6 is structured to reflect the TASP analysis and shows the overwhelming propensity for information to be misused during the police management crisis, for example. This is consistent with the influence market model presented by Johnston (2005) – the

premises, businesses, equipment or products; 2. Providing a service to new immigrants [in this case sex-workers]; 3. Issuing qualifications or licences to indicate their proficiency or enable them to undertake certain types of activities; 4. Providing a service to the community where demand frequently exceeds supply; ... 6. Issuing, or reviewing the issue of, fines or other sanctions; ... 10. Making determinations/handing down judgements about individuals or disputes; ... 12. Having discretion concerning land re-zoning or development applications; ... 15. Having regular dealings with the private sector other than for the routine purchasing of goods and services.’

influence trading focussed on removing the Commissioner to the benefit of other involved in the crisis. The Williams' murder had a peripheral relationship between perverting the course of justice in respect of the Hodson murders. Whereas straightforward bribery altered the behaviour of the officer entrusted to control the activities of legal and illegal brothels.

Conclusion

Because things like corruption are difficult to measure and define does not mean they can or should be ignored in a political setting. The implication of corruption at the highest levels of the Victoria Police had notable political impact as shown above. It can be seen clearly how this complex set of events incorporated various abuses of office, most of which related to the misuse of information in a highly politicised environment. At a different level and in a different setting, corruption surrounded the life and death of Carl Williams. His actual death, according to the Victorian Ombudsman, amounted to the failure of a system to adequately protect him (Brouwer 2011) – not so much corruption as incompetence. However, Williams' murder further reinforced public perceptions that Victoria is corrupt and the solutions, as Johnston (2012) alluded to anti-corruption efforts, are political processes. Only the Yarra brothels case reflects classical elements of what academics and anti-corruption practitioners would call corruption, and this resulted in a criminal conviction (McKenzie and Beck 2011b). Even in this, politics had played a part of the process, with the policy decision to decriminalise brothels resulting in the unintended consequences outlined above. Yet the other events – mostly unproven, untested or otherwise resolved—go a long way to explaining how a relatively unsophisticated public can perceive their society as being much more corrupt than the evidence otherwise implies.

This article has used media reports to tease out the political salience of how these perceptions played during the election campaign in Victoria, with corruption often working its way into the conversation between politicians and the electorate (see Figure 3). Understanding the events and responses casts light on the context. In a policy sense, the necessity for the IBAC to replace the OPI developed in the public mind through both the media coverage of the proposal and the criticisms of the OPI (see Figure 3 for both). It is therefore clear that corrupt events and anti-corruption efforts carry political weight. However, what this and other studies cannot show is how much political weight corruption has – how many corrupt council officers, murdered inmates or undermined police commissioners equate to the actions of a cabinet officer enriching themselves and their friends, as was the case next door in New South Wales (ICAC 2013a, 2013c, 2013b)? Identifying such a tipping point may

be impossible, but how corruption and perceptions of corruption influence policy-making is not.

Our research distils data gathered from newspaper reporting of corruption and has determined that relatively few tangible cases of corrupt conduct—as defined by legislative fiat—have resulted in consistent media reporting of corrupt public authorities, distorting citizen perceptions. These perceptions are further fuelled by reports from further afield, as well as dramatized portrayals of official corruption in the entertainment media. All this adds to the gap between perceptions and measurable realities. This gap has policy relevance when formulating responses to corruption.

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Tables and Figures

Note for editors – Figures can be altered to greyscale or other formats suitable for publishing if required.

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Table 1. Australian integrity agencies – year established

Jurisdiction	Ombudsman	Dedicated anti-corruption agency
Commonwealth	1976	2006 – Australian Commissioner for Law Enforcement Integrity (ACLEI)
Victoria	1973	2004-2013 – Office of Police Integrity (OPI) 2012 – Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission (IBAC)
New South Wales	1974	1988 – Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) 1996 – Police Integrity Commission (PIC)
Queensland	1974	1989-2002 – Criminal Justice Commission (CJC) 1997-2002 – Qld. Crime Commission (QCC) 2002 – Crime and Misconduct Commission (CMC) 2009 – Integrity Commissioner
Western Australia	1971	1996-2004 – Anti-Corruption Commission 2004 – WA Corruption and Crime Commission (WACCC)
South Australia	1972	2012 – Independent Commissioner Against Corruption (SA ICAC)
Tasmania	1978	2010 – Integrity Commission
Australian Capital Territory ^a	1989	-
Northern Territory	1978	-

^a. The ACT attained self-government in 1989, prior to that the Commonwealth Ombudsman had jurisdiction

Table 2. Corruption typology: Corrupt behaviours in four dispositions superimposed with a Victorian context

Classification	Description
Type	Bribery, Extortion, Misappropriation, Self-dealing, Conflict of interest, Abuse of discretion, Patronage, Nepotism, Cronyism, Trading in influence, Pay to play, etc.
IBAC Act	§ 3A (1) For the purposes of this Act, corrupt conduct means conduct— (a) of any person that adversely affects the honest performance by a public officer or public body of his or her or its functions as a public officer or public body; or (b) of a public officer or public body that constitutes or involves the dishonest performance of his or her or its functions as a public officer or public body; or (c) of a public officer or public body that constitutes or involves knowingly or recklessly breaching public trust; or (d) of a public officer or a public body that involves the misuse of information or material acquired in the course of the performance of his or her or its functions as a public officer or public body, whether or not for the benefit of the public officer or public body or any other person; or (e) that could constitute a conspiracy or an attempt to engage in any conduct referred to in paragraph (a), (b), (c) or (d)—being conduct that would, if the facts were found proved beyond reasonable doubt at a trial, constitute a relevant offence.
Activity	Appointing personnel, Buying things (procurement), Delivery of programmes or services, Making things (construction / manufacturing), Controlling activities (licencing / regulation / issuing of permits), Administering (e.g. justice), etc.
Sector	Construction, Health, Tax administration, Environment and water, Forestry, Customs and immigration, Welfare systems, Agriculture, Urban Planning, Legal systems, etc.
Place	Countries, Regions, Localities, Cities / Towns, Organisations, Workplaces, etc.
Victorian context	State government departments / agencies / institutions, specific local government councils

Source: Graycar and Sidebottom (2012: 386); Graycar and Prenzler (2013: 11); IBAC Act (2011).

Table 3. Corruption reporting in the Victorian print media: October 2010 – September 2012

Owner	Publications	Daily Circulation Dec 2012	Keyword Hits	Reports of corruption in Victoria
Fairfax Media	The Age	566,000 (600,000 on Sundays)	2,556	352
	Bendigo Advertiser	12,000	219	17
	Ballarat Courier	16,000	275	30
News Limited	Herald Sun	1,116,000 (1,132,000 on Sundays)	1,110	307
	Geelong Advertiser	60,000	318	47
	mX	162,000	184	14
	Leader Group	1,630,000	263	45
Totals			4,925	812

Source: Factiva (2012); Fairfax Regional Media (2013); Roy Morgan Research (2013).

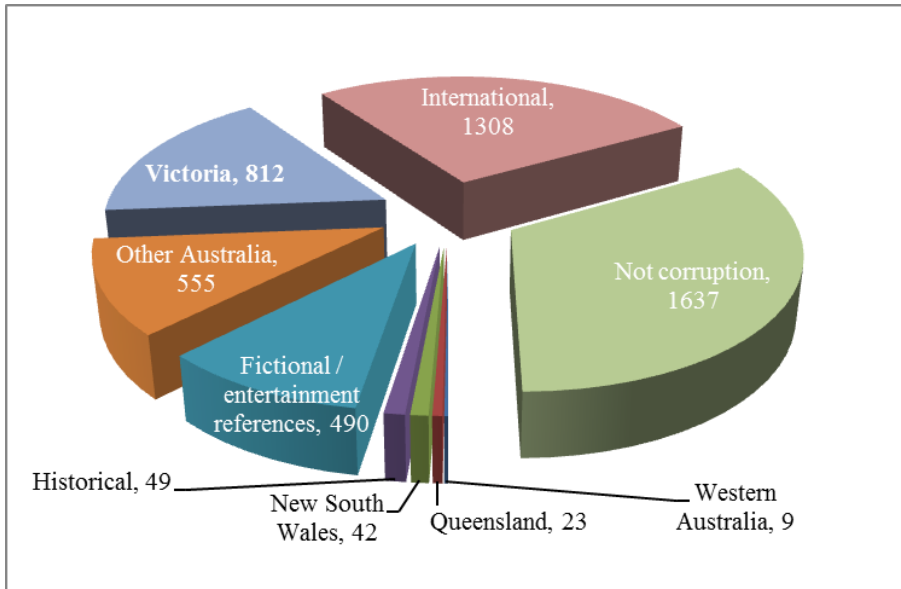


Figure 1. Distribution of reports after coding for geographic and other areas of reference (n=4919)

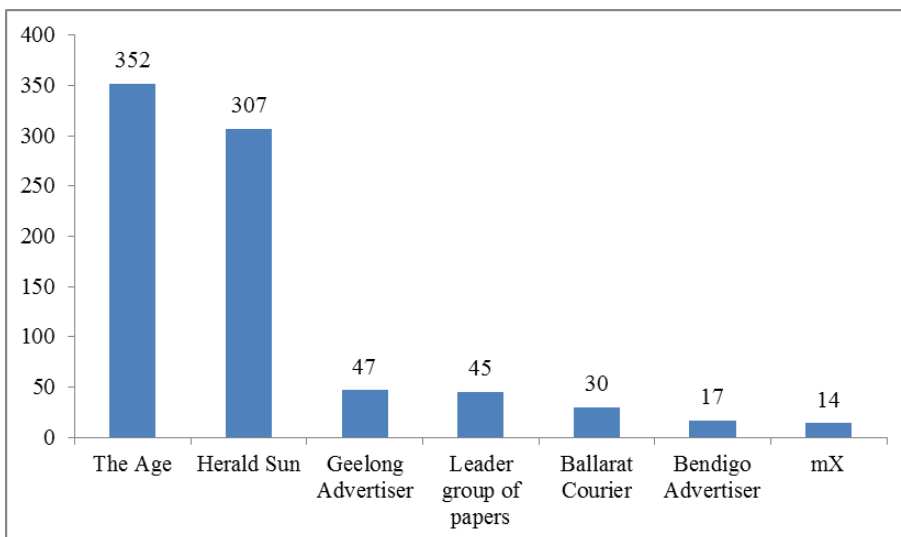


Figure 2. Print media reports of Victorian corruption (n=812)

Table 4. Highly reported corruption events in Victoria 2010-2012

Corruption related event	Press Reports	Synopsis
Police Management Crisis ^a	225	A dispute between police management and the union, exacerbated by political interference and politicised misuse of information resulted in the dismissal of the deputy commissioner, the resignation of the commissioner, the dismissal of the Premier of Victoria’s advisor and the resignation of the police minister and his advisor.
Establishing IBAC	82	The perceived failure of the OPI was used by the opposition to argue for a new anti-corruption agency. This was reported both independently, and as part of the election.
Election Issue	52	As per the above, corruption was an issue during the state election. However, not all articles in this genre referred to establishing the IBAC.
Carl Williams murder ^a	43	Underworld figure Carl Williams was murdered in prison. Reportedly for informing on corrupt police.
Yarra Brothels ^a	28	A Yarra Valley Council inspector received kickbacks and sex from illegal brothels.
Mokbel	18	Corruption related to underworld figure Tony Mokbel.
Hodson Murders	10	Investigation into a double murder of witnesses in Victorian anti-corruption investigation
Shaw misuse of car	10	A whistle blower claimed Liberal MP Geoff Shaw used his taxpayer-funded car for commercial gain in relation to Shaw’s hardware store.
Toner fraud	10	Employees responsible for procurement from Arts Victoria, a prison and a number of government schools paid massively inflated prices for toner print cartridges in exchange for gifts such as iPhones and shopping vouchers.

^a. See Table 6 for further analysis of these three events.

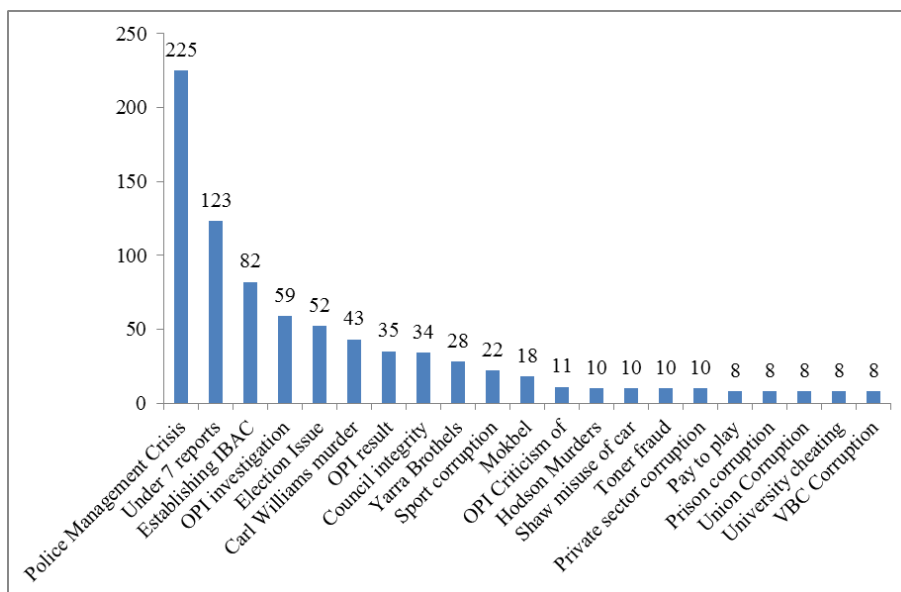


Figure 3. Media reports of Victorian corruption incidents 2010-2012 (n=812)

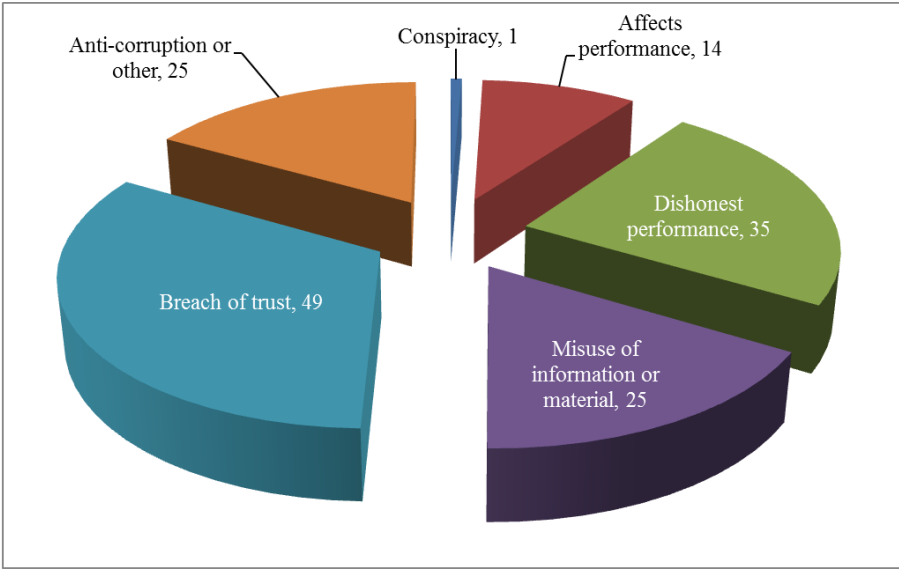


Figure 4. Events categorised by §3A offences of the *IBAC Act 2011 (Vic)*. (n=149)

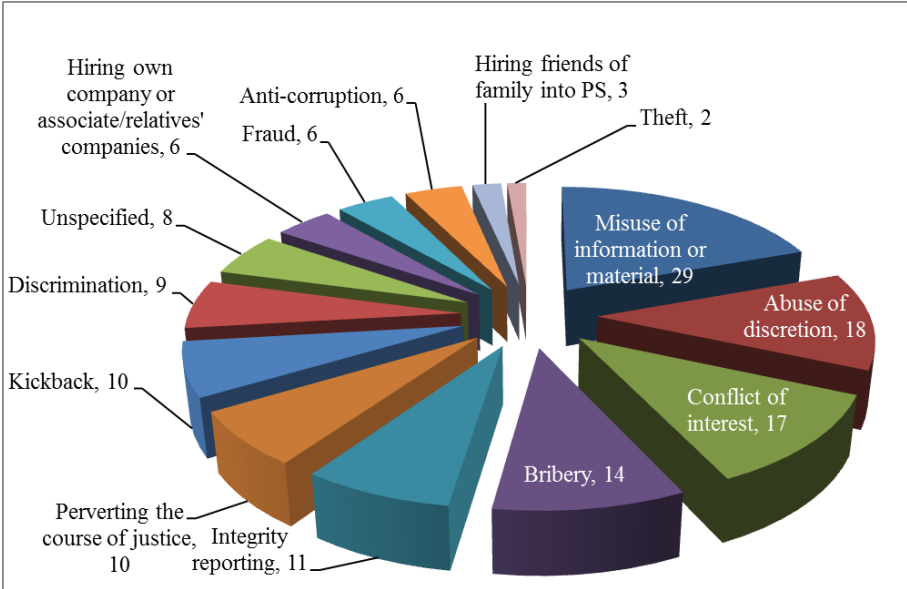


Figure 5. Types of corruption reported in the Victorian press 2010-2012. (n=149)

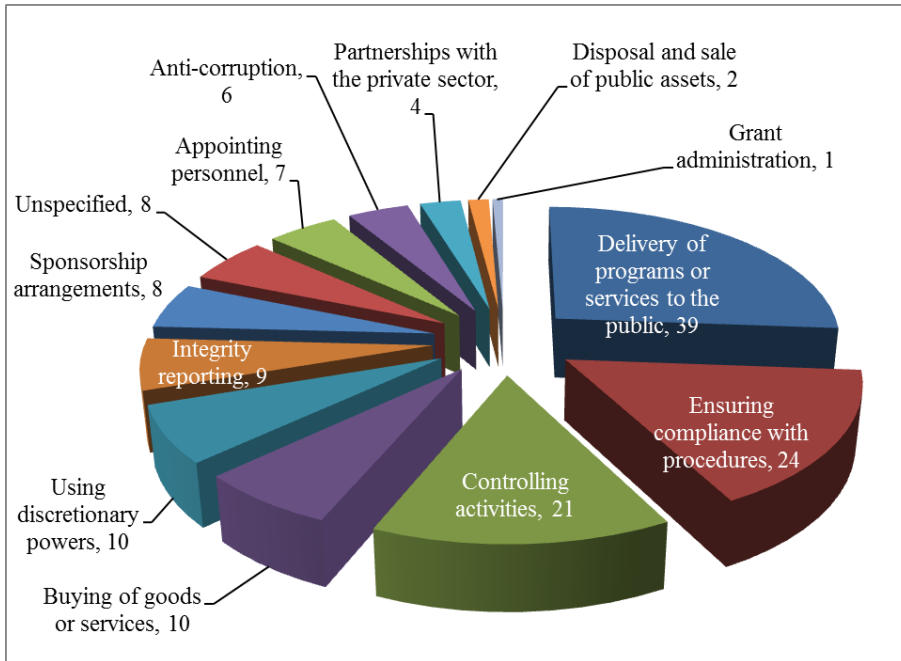


Figure 6. Corrupted activities reported in the Victorian press 2010-2012. (n=149)

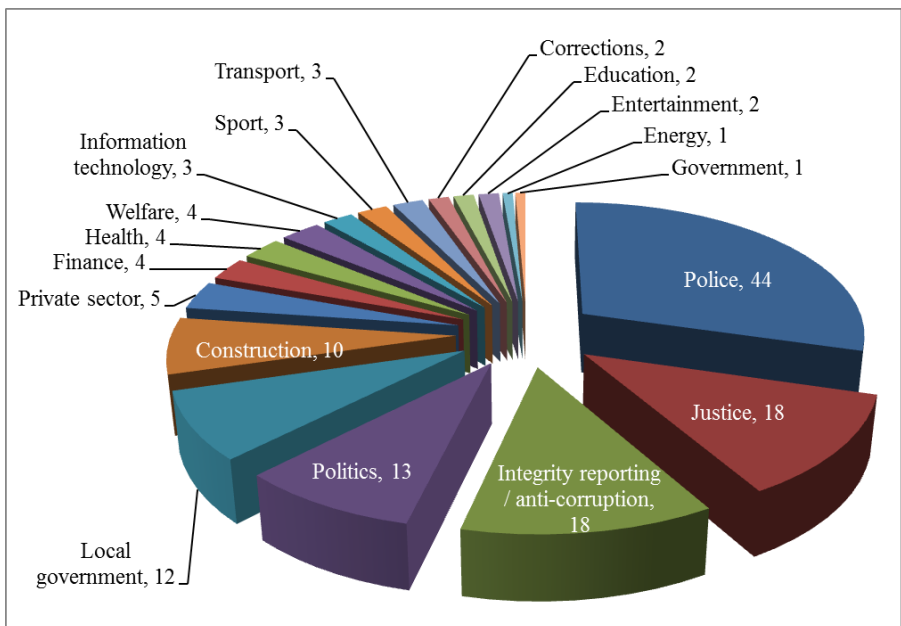


Figure 7. Sectors where corruption has been reported in Victoria 2010-2012. (n=149)

Table 5. Where corrupt events took place (n=149)

Place	Number of events	Press reports	Place	Number of events	Press reports
<u>Police and Justice</u>			<u>Local Government</u>		
Victoria Police	52	300	Greater Geelong City Council	4	6
Corrections Victoria	3	7	Boroondara City Council	1	1
Department of Justice	3	8	Casey City Council	1	1
Judiciary (Magistrates, County, Supreme courts)	3	5	Greater Shepparton City Council	1	1
Office of Police Integrity	1	3	Glen Eira City Council	1	3
Ombudsman	1	1	Darebin Council	1	1
Sub-total	63	324	Hepburn Shire Council	1	3
<u>State Government</u>			Hume City Council	1	3
Parliament	10	90	Latrobe City Council	1	1
Department of Human Services	5	9	Manningham City Council	1	5
Department of Planning & Community Development	3	13	Maribyrnong Council	1	1
Department of Health	2	4	Melbourne City Council	1	1
Department of Treasury and Finance	2	2	Moreland City Council	1	3
VicRoads	2	3	Whittlesea City Council	1	11
Art Victoria	1	8	Yarra City Council	1	28
Department of Education and Early Childhood Development	1	9	Sub-total	19	69
Department of Transport	1	1	<u>Other</u>		
Department of Business and Innovation	1	1	Private Sector	18	45
Department of Sustainability and the Environment	1	1	n/a ^a	18	230
State Revenue Office	1	1			
State Services Authority	1	2			
Sub-total	31	144	Sub-total	36	275

^a mainly anti-corruption / integrity agency reports, establishing the IBAC and corruption as an election issue.

Table 6. TASP analysis of the three cases

Corruption related event	Type (IBAC Act)	Activity	Sector	Place
<u>Police management crisis (N=225)</u>				
Police internal politics (n=15)	Abuse of discretion (§ 3A (1)(c))	Appointing personnel	Police	Victoria Police HQ
Criticism of Commissioner (n=9)	Misuse of information (§ 3A (1)(d))	Delivery of programmes/services to the community	Police	Victoria Police HQ
Media leaks (n=15)	Misuse of information (§ 3A (1)(d))	Delivery of programmes/services to the community	Police	Victoria Police
Crime statistics (n=15)	Misuse of information (§ 3A (1)(d))	Ensuring compliance with procedures	Police	Victoria Police HQ
Jones dismissal (n=61)	Misuse of information (§ 3A (1)(d))	Appointing personnel	Police	Victoria Police HQ
Commissioner resigns (n=53)	Misuse of information (§ 3A (1)(d))	Ensuring compliance with procedures	Police	Victoria Police HQ
Ministerial advisor dismissed from police	Misuse of information (§ 3A (1)(d))	Ensuring compliance with procedures	Police Politics	Victoria Police Parliament
Tilley and Weston resign (N=42)	Misuse of information (§ 3A (1)(d))	Appointing personnel	Politics	Parliament
Strong and Jevtovic resign (n=7)	n/a ^a	n/a ^a	Police	OPI
Political fallout (n=1)	Hiring of family / friends into public sector (§ 3A (1)(c))	Appointing personnel	Politics	Parliament
<u>Williams murder (n=43)</u>	Perverting the course of justice (§ 3A (1)(b))	Using discretionary powers	Police Prisons	Victoria Police Corrections Victoria – Barwon Prison
<u>Yarra brothels (n=28)</u>	Bribery (§ 3A (1)(b))	Controlling activities	Local Government	Yarra City Council

^a. These reports do not relate to corrupt activity per se, but do have the effect of keeping corruption on the public agenda as part of the Victoria Police management crisis.