

Is President Ma Ying-jeou's (馬英九) government corrupt? To answer this question, one need not resort to opinion polls, since there are academics in Taiwan conducting specialized research into this question. Chen Shih-meng (陳希明) teaches a political economy course at National Taiwan University (NTU), and the study of corruption is one of the specializations offered. To gauge corruption levels, Chen takes daily media reports of corruption cases and uses various methods to come up with empirical results. Any one who wants to know whether the Ma administration is corrupt can always ask Chen.

The Economist recently featured an article on Transparency International's (TI) 2013 Global Corruption Barometer report. According to the report's findings, Taiwan ranks very high among corrupt countries, at No. 18 in the world. This news came as no surprise. Local media outlets all carried stories about the report, and the more the Ma government attempted to refute the findings, the more news articles came out.

What is interesting is that on Thursday last week — the day the news broke — local media also reported that People First Party (PFP) Legislator Lin Cheng-er (林政則) was found guilty of vote buying, and that former Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) legislator Chung Shao-ho (鍾少豪) was sentenced to eight years in prison for bribery. As the Judicial Yuan, the Ministry of Justice and the Agency Against Corruption were busy refuting TI's report, these two corruption scandals became perfect examples of what the report is talking about.

On Friday last week, Ma had the Presidential Office rejecting the report, saying that neither Taiwan nor Taiwanese found it acceptable. However, according to an opinion poll run by the Chinese-language Apple Daily on Thursday, 75 percent of respondents said they agreed with TI's report. So, it was Ma who could not accept it, not Taiwanese. Ma needs to be careful. It is he who has lost face; he should not seek to involve the public.

On Friday last week, local media reported that two prosecutors in Nantou County allegedly visited a hostess bar; that the government-sponsored rock musical Dreamers (夢遊者) cost NT\$200 million (US\$6.7 million) and that the agencies responsible for it were censured by the Control Yuan; and that Nantou County Commissioner Lee Chao-ching (李朝卿) of the KMT was on trial for bribery. Then on Saturday, Taiwan High Court prosecutor Chen Yu-chen (陳玉成) was also

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Wednesday, 17 July 2013 08:30

accused of taking bribes, along with Shaw Kuo-ning (邵國寧), the brother-in-law of Greater Taichung Mayor Jason Hu (胡志強).

So, is the Ma administration corrupt? Some say that voters always know what is really going on. After being in office for five years, voters have seen through Ma and opinion polls only confirm what everybody already knows.

In all honesty, it is not only voters that are clear about what is going on. The Ministry of Justice also knows what is going on. The day TI released its findings, the ministry cherry picked the more flattering parts, put them online and issued a press release. Clearly, then, the ministry accepts and trusts this barometer.

The most ironic move of all is that the ministry subsequently used research it had commissioned NTU politics professor Hung Yung-tai (洪榮泰) to conduct, which stated that only 3.3 percent of Taiwanese have ever paid a bribe. However, can fabricated surveys conducted by interested parties have any credibility? Will the public trust them?/p>

The Ma administration has questioned TI's decision to use a Chinese market research agency to conduct the survey, saying this gives cause to doubt the findings. However, when it comes down to it, there can be but two interpretations of the TI report's findings: that they were part of a deliberate smear campaign, or that they were fair.

If the former is true, it is clear that Ma has sold himself out to the Chinese Communist Party and that China still views Taiwan as its enemy. If the second is true, there is no point at all in Ma protesting it. So, regardless of whether it was a smear tactic, Ma ends up a loser.

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Translated by Drew Cameron

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Source: [Taipei Times - Editorials 2013/07/17](#)