



Measuring the Global Media Profile of Toronto

About this study

The study examined coverage of “Toronto” in 29 newspapers from around the world between 21 May 2012 and 20 May 2013. The study excluded references to Toronto-branded professional sports teams and Toronto-named business such as “Toronto-Dominion.”

Each item was coded for topic of the article (e.g., business, travel, arts/entertainment, research, etc.), prominence of the Toronto mention, tone towards Toronto, and what about Toronto was cited. Tone was based on whether a person would be more/less likely to visit/support/immigrate or like the city based on the content of the item. Nine tone factors were examined, including crime/security, governance, arts/culture scene, research leader, business/investment opportunities, and livability/friendliness.

Coverage was measured based on a person’s likely exposure to a news item (or estimated audience exposure) referred to in the report as [impressions](#). Estimated audience exposure factors in newspaper readership ([World Press Trends 2010](#)) as well as prominence and placement of mention. Brief mentions in sections with lower known readership garnered a lower weighting compared to more prominent, front-page mentions.

Introduction

The recent allegations that Toronto mayor Rob Ford purportedly used crack cocaine in the presence of known drug dealers is a big story in Toronto and across the country. One of the biggest criticisms directed at the Mayor’s (lack of) response is that the **story has harmed Toronto’s reputation globally**. Pointing to recent skits on *The Daily Show with John Stewart* and *Jimmy Kimmel Live*, and posts on BBC, *Slate*, *Politico* and the *New York Times*, a big part of the story about the Mayor is that it has brought unwelcome and unprecedented international media attention to Toronto. CBC’s *The National* as well as CTV have aired reports on the level of international media attention to the Rob Ford story, and the degree of international coverage has supported arguments by several Toronto-based columnists calling for the Mayor to resign, including the [Toronto Star’s Jim Coyle](#) and the [Globe and Mail’s Margaret Wente](#). [Heather Mallick, writing for the Toronto Star](#), headlined her column that international media attention to the Rob Ford story has “ruined the city’s reputation for good.”

No one disputes that the Rob Ford video has attracted international attention. However, the way the media have reported this facet of the story suggests to its readers two things that may or may not be true:

- a) **people outside of Canada rarely see news involving Toronto**, and
- b) **because (a) above is true, international coverage of the Rob Ford story is a big part of what they do see about Toronto**, and therefore most people see negative stories about the city.

We decided to examine Toronto’s profile internationally in 29 major international newspapers over the last twelve months, looking at both the subject and tone of coverage and measuring it by its estimated audience reach, to determine categorically what people outside of Canada see about this country’s biggest city. What is the general tone towards Toronto? What issues and events shape the city’s international profile? And where does the Rob Ford story really rank in terms of Toronto’s coverage around the world.

EUROPE/MIDDLE EAST/AFRICA

Allgemeine Zeitung (Germany)
El Mundo (Spain)
El Pais (Spain)
Jerusalem Post (Israel)
Johannesburg Star (South Africa)
La Stampa (Italy)
Le Figaro (France)
Le Monde (France)
Le Parisien (France)

Neue Zürcher Zeitung (Switzerland)
NRC Handelsblad (Netherlands)

UK/IRELAND

Daily Mail (UK)
Daily Telegraph (UK)
Irish Times (Ireland)
London Times (UK)

AMERICAS

El Universal (Mexico)
Los Angeles Times (USA)
New York Times (USA)
O Globo (Brazil)
Reforma (Mexico)
USA Today (USA)

ASIA/OCEANIA

The Australian (Australia)
Daily Yomiuri (Tokyo)
Herald Sun (Australia)
Hindustan Times (India)
New Straits Times (Malaysia)
South China Morning Post (Hong Kong)
Sydney Morning Herald (Australia)
The Times of India (India)

Discussion of results

There are four main points to be made about Toronto's global media profile.

The *NY Times* has published almost 270 items about Toronto in the last year alone. The world's largest newspaper outside of Tokyo, *The Times of India*, has published over 160 items, particularly about the city's film industry scene and Indian population. On average, major global newspapers were publishing almost seven items a month about the city.

First, there is in fact a lot of media coverage around the world about Toronto...

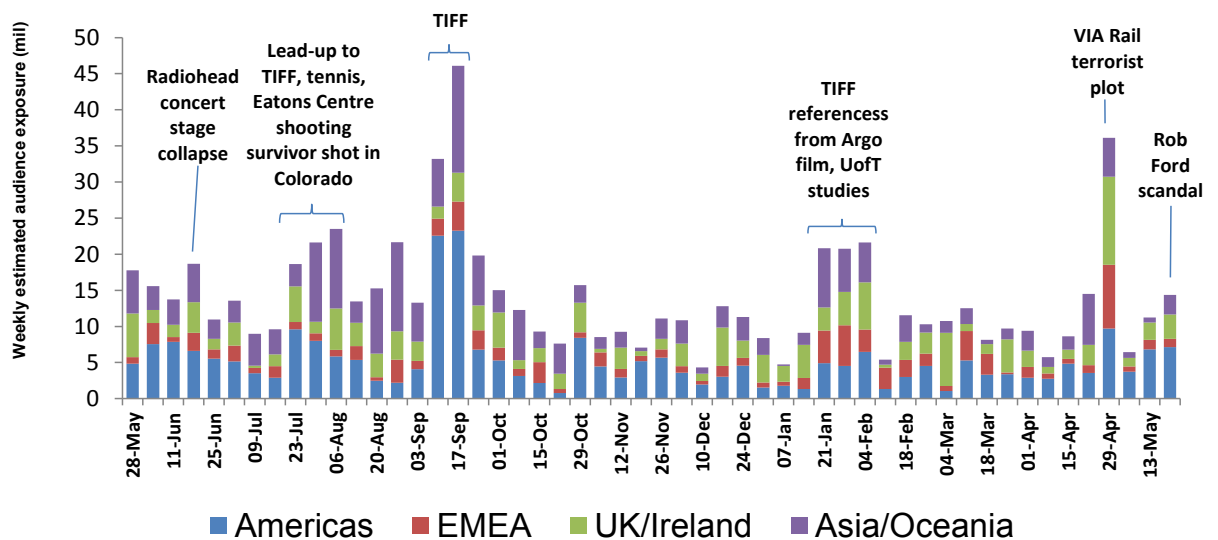
Whatever the impression that the recent Rob Ford scandal may have left with Torontonians about their media profile globally, the truth is that every day, major world newspapers are reporting stories involving this city.

Our sample of 29 newspapers revealed **over 2300 stories about the city over the last twelve months**. Over **28% of the items were prominent stories** in which a city issue or event was the subject of the article.

Not surprisingly, it has been the *New York Times* that has published the most about Toronto, publishing 269 news items over the period (and to reiterate,

FIGURE 1

Tracking major events behind Toronto's global media profile by region, by week



Over the last twelve months, Toronto's global media profile was highest last September from the Toronto International Film Festival, and again in late April 2013 when news surfaced of a Canadian-based terrorist plot to sabotage a Toronto-New York VIA Rail train.

Based on total volume of coverage concerning Toronto in 29 global newspapers, by week, by region. For the period 21 May 2012 to 20 May 2013. Measured in millions of impressions. N=2368.

excluding references to Toronto's professional sports teams), of which two items have been about Rob Ford. At the same time, America's 'newspaper of record' has published major stories about many other topics about the city, including its [bookstores](#), [High Park locavores](#), the [growing arts scene in Bloordale Village](#), the [death of 900 birds associated with a Toronto office tower](#), and many other stories, over 50 of them prominent about the city. The *LA Times* has published over 170 items in the last year, almost three-quarters has concerned arts and culture, particularly the city's film industry and the Toronto International Film Festival. *The Times of India* — the world's largest paper by circulation outside of Tokyo, published over 160 items, along with Mexico's *Reforma*. There was an average of 82 news items published about Toronto on average over the last twelve months in the newspapers surveyed, and only one newspaper — Frankfurt's *Allgemeine Zeitung*, published less than ten items. In short, there are lots of news stories, big and small, about Toronto, reported every day.

...and second, not a lot of it is about Rob Ford.

Admittedly, several major newspapers from around the world reported on the Mayor Ford story, including the *New York Times*, *Daily Telegraph*, *The Times of London*, Australia's *Herald Sun*, and Hong Kong's *South China Morning Post*, as well as several major news outlets we did not survey, including the *Daily Mail* and *The Guardian* in the UK, *Mural* in Mexico, *Sing Tao* in Hong Kong (even the *Sunday Tasmanian!*), not to mention a report on CNN's *Situation Room* and various digital news feeds.

However, when viewed against all the coverage that Toronto experiences over the course of a year, or even a typical month, **Mayor Rob Ford has actually a minor factor in the city's global news coverage.** Overall, it is estimated that only 1.2% of Toronto's global media exposure over the last twelve months concerned its mayor. Of Toronto's total global media exposure in the newspapers surveyed, Mayor Ford accounts for:

- 2.8% of coverage since the start of 2013;
- 2% of all prominent coverage about the city;
- 12% of the coverage in *USA Today* — the highest share recorded among the newspapers examined;
- 2.3% of the city's profile in the *New York Times*;
- 0.3% of coverage in newspapers in Asia and Australia; and
- 0% of coverage in European newspapers.

Rob Ford accounts for barely 1% of Toronto's media profile, a less than 3% since the start of 2013. Toronto experienced an average week in terms of media exposure during the week when allegations about his use of crack cocaine surfaced. The Mayor was part of larger share of the city's negative coverage (9% over the last twelve months, and 15% since the start of 2013), but other news, such as the VIA Rail terrorist plot, the collapse of the Radiohead stage, and the Eaton Centre shootings, were bigger negative events for the city than Mayor Ford.

In fact, despite Mayor Ford's recent profile, the seven-day period ending May 20 was actually a typical week for Toronto in terms of global media profile.

Mayor Ford does, however, account for a **higher share of the negative media coverage** about Toronto — 9% over the last twelve months, and 15% since the start of 2013. However, other stories have had a bigger negative impact on the city's global profile, including the shootings in 2012 in the Eaton Centre shopping mall, the deaths caused by a collapsing stage at a Radiohead concert, and the more recent news of a thwarted terrorist plot against a Toronto-New York VIA Rail train, with one of the suspects living in Toronto.

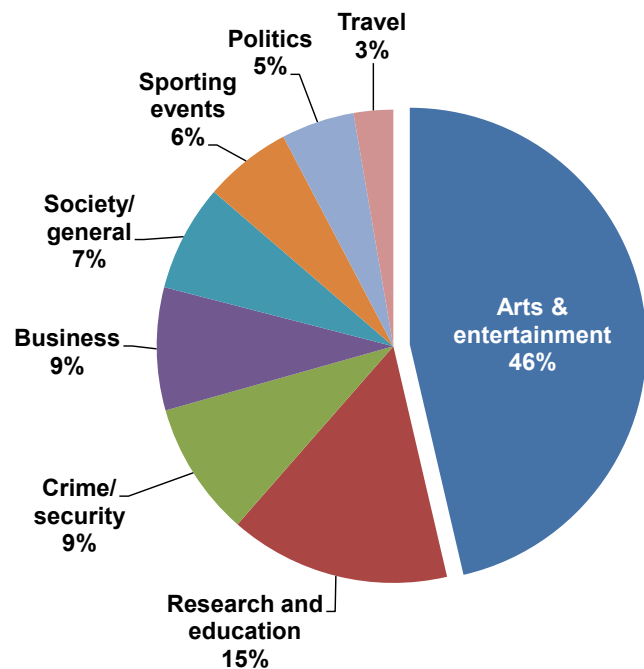
Third, most of what people see about Toronto is about the city's cool arts and culture scene, or about research coming out of its universities and hospitals.

Yes, Toronto is cool, or at least its news coverage is pretty cool. In what will likely come as no surprise to Richard Florida, most of the coverage about Toronto is about its arts and culture scene, followed by science, research, and innovation

FIGURE 2

Breakdown of Toronto's coverage by subject

Almost half of all coverage that people outside of Canada see about Toronto concerns the city's arts and culture scene, particularly relating to film. Research studies and other activities from the city's universities account for 15% of its profile. Crime and security issues account for 9%. The city's politics comprises only 5%.



Based on percentage share of total volume of coverage concerning Toronto in 29 global newspapers, by major subject. For the period 21 May 2012 to 20 May 2013. Measured in millions of impressions. N=2368.

The arts scene in Toronto is by far its biggest source of global media attention. In India and Mexico, it accounts for over 60% of news about the city.

news mostly coming from the University of Toronto and other post-secondary institutions as well as hospitals operating in the city.

In India, the Toronto arts scene — specifically, its film industry after Toronto hosted the 2011 International Indian Film Academy awards ceremony — accounted for over 62% of Toronto-based coverage. Similarly, 60% of the coverage in the two Mexican newspapers surveyed were about film and other culture industry stories. Even in the US, 54% of coverage concerning the arts scene, although that may have been influenced by the two newspapers selected—the *Los Angeles Times* and the *New York Times* and their particular interest in the film industry. Even in the UK and Irish press, however, arts and entertainment comprised over 25% of Toronto's media coverage.

Research and education stories were another major source, particularly from research produced out of the University of Toronto, or from UofT faculty serving as experts commenting on global issues. Research and education stories accounted for 15% overall, and as much as 20% in the UK and Irish press.

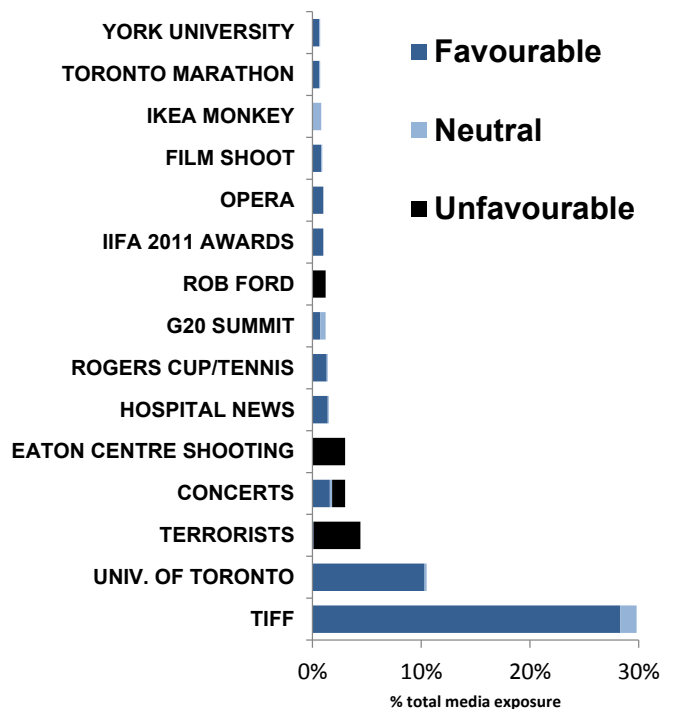
The one major negative subject—crime and security (including the VIA Rail

FIGURE 3

The top fifteen biggest sources of media coverage for Toronto in the last year

By far the biggest single source of global media coverage for Toronto is the annual international film festival. Overall, almost one-in-three seeing a news item about Toronto saw a report on TIFF. The University of Toronto is also a major source due to its research and its sought-after experts. Combined, these two sources accounted for 40% of Toronto's profile, and over half of its favourable media coverage.

The VIA Rail terrorist threat, Eaton Centre shooting and the Radiohead concert stage collapse were among the top sources of negative coverage. Rob Ford ranked ninth as a subject of media coverage for the city.



Based on share of total volume of coverage concerning Toronto in 29 global newspapers, by tone, by major event. For the period 21 May 2012 to 20 May 2013. Measured in millions of impressions. N=2368.

TIFF is the single biggest factor generating coverage about the city globally. The festival alone accounts for almost 30% of city's global profile, and 37% of its positive coverage.

terrorist plot)—accounted for 9% overall, but was higher in certain regions, particularly in the European newspapers surveyed where the topic accounted for 17% (second only to arts and culture).

Among the specific topics that the global media report on concerning Toronto, one stands out: TIFF.* TIFF is a huge source of coverage for the city, comprising 29% of its global audience reach. By drawing major films and major movie stars, the event generated prominent coverage about the city that began to build in August and peaked during the two weeks of the festival in September. However, coverage of TIFF was evident throughout the sample period as films that premiered at the event were profiled in other countries. Coverage of TIFF surged again in mid-January, albeit less prominently, when the film *Argo* that premiered at TIFF won the Academy Award for Best Film. TIFF and the film industry in general in Toronto garnered significant media coverage in all regions surveyed, particularly in India and Mexico, where it comprised 40% of Toronto's coverage.

After TIFF, the University of Toronto, concerts (not just Radiohead, but also the Rihanna 777 tour stop and other music events) and the negative stories already mentioned, there were few other big, consistent sources of coverage about Toronto. Even Darwin the Ikea Monkey in the end comprised less than 1%. Outside of these top five sources, most coverage of Toronto is comprised of a mish-mash of tourism-related profiles, arts events, profiles involving some of the city's leading characters (such as Margaret Atwood and Conrad Black), and events such as the Slutwalk, the G20 summit, the Toronto Marathon and Rogers Cup tennis tournament.

Finally, Toronto's tone of coverage is pretty good

Tone for Toronto is strong: three-quarters of its media exposure is favourable, compared to only 13% that's negative.

Thanks to the profile of the arts community and its film industry, as well as the attention generated by research activities and its universities, 75% of coverage that other people see about Toronto would be considered favourable, and only 13% would be viewed as negative. As noted above, the attention to arts and entertainment events as well as research stories comprise half of all positive media coverage. In fact, TIFF and the University of Toronto alone account for 41% of total favourable media coverage.

Negative coverage has come from three main sources:

- 1) Terrorism** The VIA Rail plot garnered very prominent attention in April and has comprised one-third of the city's unfavourable media coverage over the last twelve months.

**Full disclosure: TIFF is a client of Cormex Research (they give us mostly movie tickets—very much appreciated), but this study is not part of any of the work we do for the festival.*

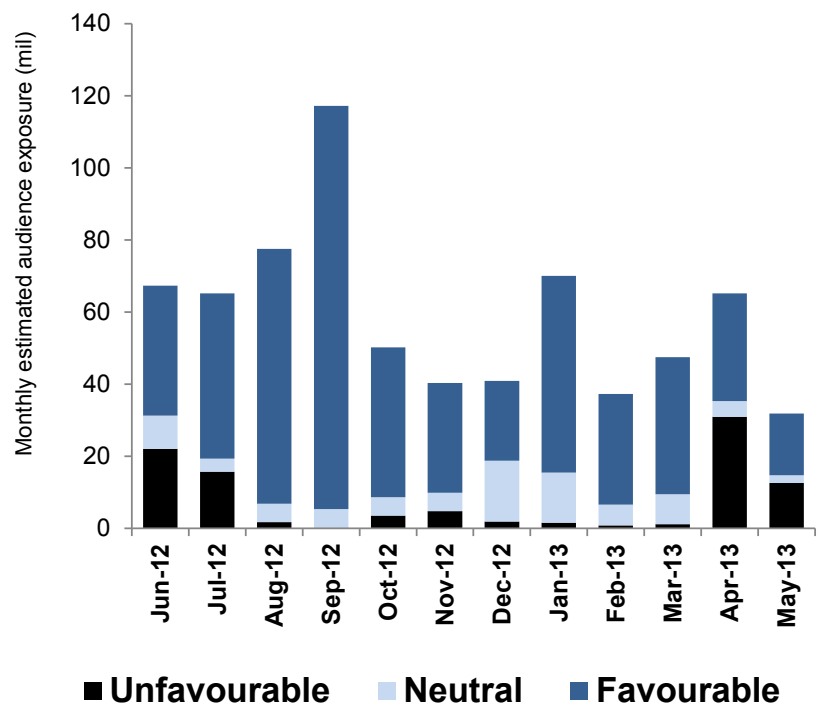
- 2) **Eaton Centre shootings** The shootings at the Eaton Centre in early June 2012 not only garnered immediate coverage, but also significant follow-up coverage in July when a survivor of the attack died in another mass shooting at a Colorado movie theatre premiere of the new Batman movie. The irony of the woman's death captured global media attention and led to many brief references to the initial Eaton Centre shooting. In all, the event has comprised 22% of total negative coverage for the city.
- 3) **Radiohead concert collapse** The collapse of a stage at Downsview Park in Toronto ahead of the Radiohead concert, claiming the life of a technician, garnered widespread media coverage that comprised 9% of all negative exposure.
- 4) **Rob Ford** As noted, Rob Ford has been the subject of 9% of the city's negative media exposure, mostly from the latest scandal, but also from scattered other unfavourable reports about his mayoralty over the last year.

FIGURE 4

Tone of coverage towards Toronto, by month

Toronto's tone of coverage has been generally favourable. Its strongest period over the last twelve months occurred in August and September, mostly in relation to events held at the Toronto International Film Festival.

The last four weeks have been among the weakest for the city, however, as the Rob Ford scandal followed an even bigger international media event: the plot by two men to sabotage a Toronto-New York VIA Rail train.



Based on total volume of coverage concerning Toronto in 29 global newspapers, by tone, by month. For the period 1 June 2012 to 20 May 2013 (May 2013 for an abbreviated period). Measured in millions of impressions. N=2297.

While negative coverage has been relatively low, it has not been a good few weeks for the city. The VIA Rail terrorist plot in late April, followed by the Rob Ford scandal, as meant that the city has meant that in the last four weeks, 57% of its media coverage has been negative—relatively unprecedented for the city over the last year surveyed, and even surpassing the June 2012 period following the Eaton Centre shootings and the Radiohead stage collapse.

In summary

Canadians (and particularly Torontonians) can be forgiven if they think that people outside the country have adopted a jaundiced view of the city, given the totally-bonkers nature of both the story involving Toronto's mayor and the media crush it has engendered.

Nonetheless, a more dispassionate and analytical look at the issue suggests that Toronto's global reputation has not been seriously harmed by the events involving the Mayor. The story is indeed a negative one, and the Mayor is one of the top ten biggest sources of coverage about the city — certainly more so lately. However, the truth is that people around the world are exposed to a lot of coverage about Toronto. Rob Ford is only a small part of that coverage, and not necessarily the most negative aspect the city has shown over the last year. The city's global media profile is very strong, thanks to its very vibrant cultural industries and leading research centres. Toronto, despite its mayor, is still a good news story.

About Cormex

The following media analysis report was prepared by Cormex Research as part of its MediaLAB project. Cormex Research is Canada's leading media content measurement and analysis firm, serving the country's top private, public and non-profit organizations since 1989. For more information, please contact our offices at (416) 504-8236, or visit our website at www.cormex.com.