

Crime, race, media

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Who's to blame?

- These people don't know a good story if it hits them in the face; they are sitting up in Stellenbosch, or down in bloody Grahamstown, pontificating on the state of the media. They constantly bemoan the state of the nation's media and completely disregard the fact that their bloody departments produce half the bloody people who work in it. You know a little introspection might be required ... [Karl Brophy]

Academic traditions – some history

- The Jewish Century (Yuri Slezkine)
- World War II and the shaping of British and American academe
- Britain: Isaiah Berlin, Panofsky
- US: Reich, Lazarsfeld, Adorno, Marcuse

Academic traditions – some more recent history

- After Sharpeville
- Zuckerman, Trapido, Marks, Wolpe
- Stanley Cohen
- Flooding the insular British traditions
- Nomadism now the rage – one third of UK academics from abroad

Media theory on crime

- Cohen and 'Moral Panics'
- Gerbner and the cultivation of fear: 'scary world' syndrome
- Hall et al and *Policing the Crisis*
- In many ways, the critical views of outsiders moving from a more to a less violent society

Liberal view of crime

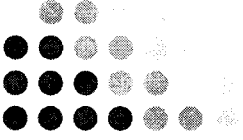
- 'Crying wolf' syndrome
- Racial bias of crime reporting
- Almost uniform findings of work
- Jerry Kang as most recent and sophisticated – lengthy article in the *Harvard Law Review*
- Pres Mbeki's view on crime in this critical tradition and he cites Kang

Influence of critical academic view?

- Internationally, the critical academic tradition lost – Cultural Studies Now conference
- In South Africa, established view of criminologists, people commenting for media
- Its effect felt – see Geldenhuys in *Sunday Times* on SA murder rate – 8% higher than US, for 800%

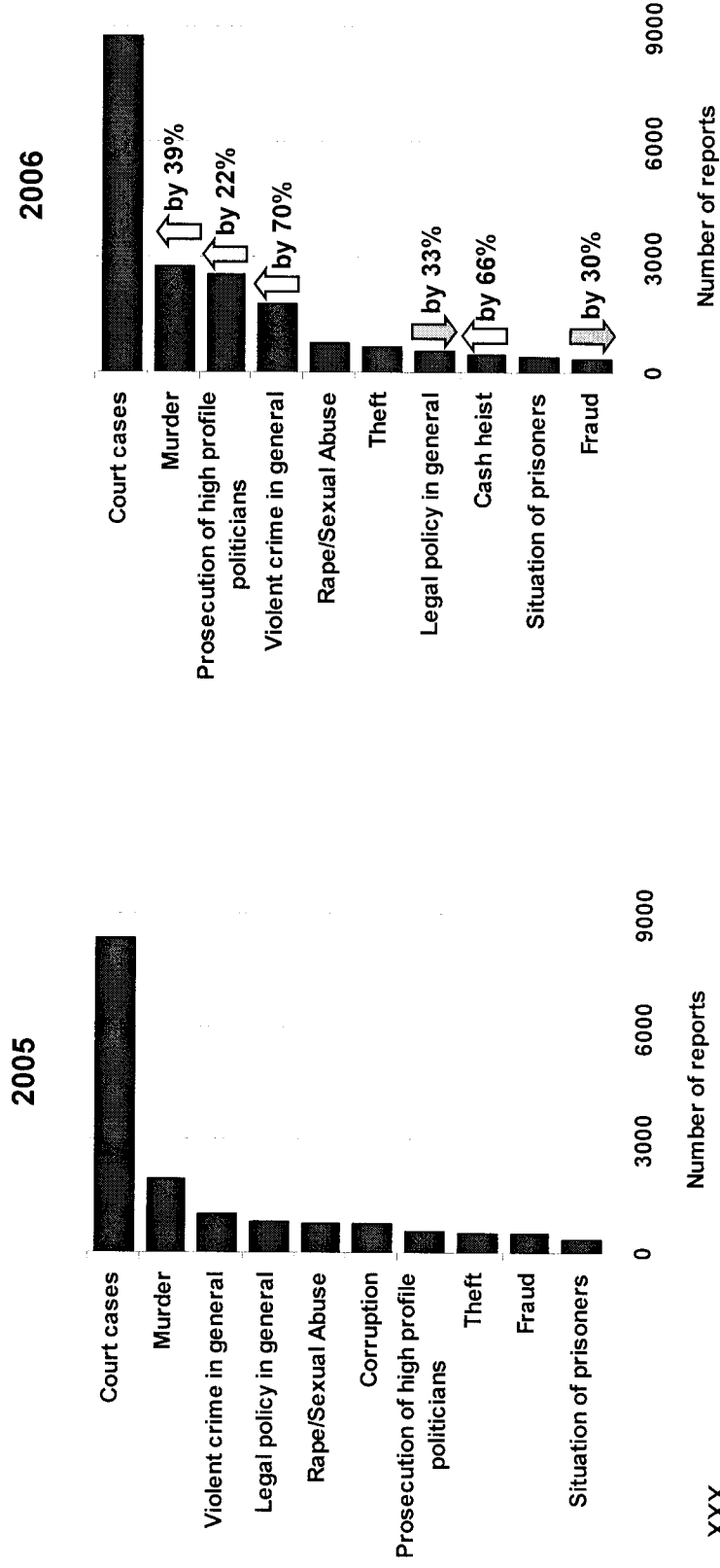
Evidence for this view?

- Media Tenor figures
- Who are Media Tenor?
- What do they do?
- Advantages of their figures



Top crime related issues receiving coverage in the leading SA media: 2005 - 2006

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Comments

- Coverage increased faster than crime
- Coverage in 2007 even higher
- Are South African media creating a 'scary world'?
- Is there an anti-black, or anti-ANC agenda?
- Emergence of "Third Man" theme – appeal to outsiders (SWC, World Heritage Status).

Criticising the tradition

- Normative, not descriptive
- Statistically imprecise – see Waddington
- Central tenet is incoherent – how can all media always over-report crime?
- Logic that over-reporting crime is necessarily right-wing, or under-reporting left-wing
- Need more precise descriptions

Reversing the gaze – Karl Brophy on crime in Cape Town

- One of the criticisms of tabloids is that we sensationalize things; there is absolutely no necessity to sensationalize any news in Cape Town because it's sensational anyway. Like in the last number of months, we have a woman on trial for the youngest contract killing in the world. With a contract killing of a baby, you can't sensationalize that. You know I think South African newspapers are guilty of de-sensationalizing news. Like when the *Cape Times* or *Die Burger* or any other newspaper carries two to four paragraphs on page 8 or page 10 saying that there were 12 murders in Khayelitsha on the weekend, that's de-sensationalizing things.

Reasons not to cover?

- Brophy's point: what do we owe the dead?
- Why do we not pay it?
- Indifference
- Incompetence or inadequate means
- Not our audience
- Bad for business
- Bad for morale

Media ignoring of crime as right-wing or pro-business

- Brazilian comparison: tourist provinces play down crime
- US comparison: wealthy boroughs of New York inhibit crime coverage to keep up property values
- In Iraq, US military accused of playing down crime

Media as watchdogs of crime?

- Security guards killing those not on strike – 69 dead, no arrests
- Karyn Maughan's story on serial killers
- Slow response to serial killers
- Faster response in 19th century England
- Somali shopkeepers

Lost souls – paupers' graves

- Maughan: 10000 dead in paupers' graves annually. 300 a day.
- How many unknown? Varies from province to province
- In Cape Town, 2007, 170, of whom 146 unknown – 5 decomp, 3 skeletons.
- In New York, 24 in 10 year period (NYPD website)

Paupers' graves

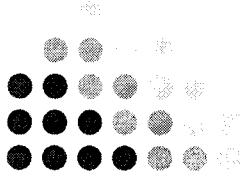
- Complex regional factors: HIV-Aids, crime
- Lack of media coverage – but see Star
- What it says about our society
- Breakdown of traditional mores, legacy of destructive modernisation
- Lack of imaginative engagement with poor black lives
- Poor policing, reporting, administration

An academic way forward?

- "Just proportionality" – the media coverage should fit the crime.
- Doris Graber's study in 1970s in Chicago.
- More crime = more coverage.
- Problems of measuring both not insuperable.
- Allows us to compare South Africa with international models

Problem of statistics

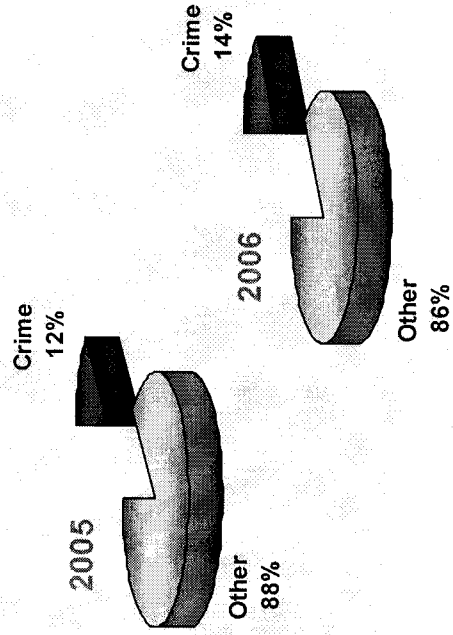
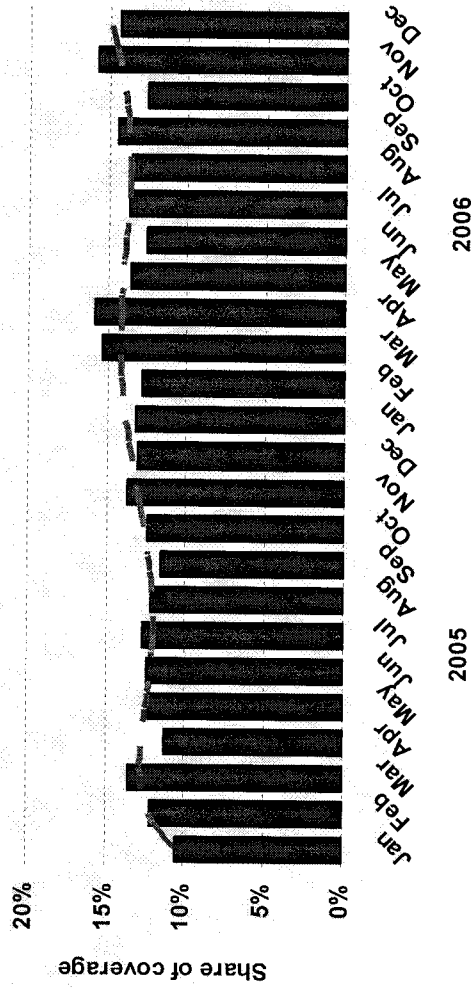
- Problems of relying on them
- Discrepancies between various ways of counting
- Issues like rape most problematical
- Murder the 'safest' but not unproblematical
- Statistics have become politicised
- Dangers of policing to statistics



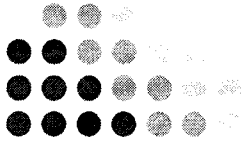
Coverage on crime in the leading SA media: 2005 - 2006

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Volume of coverage on crime

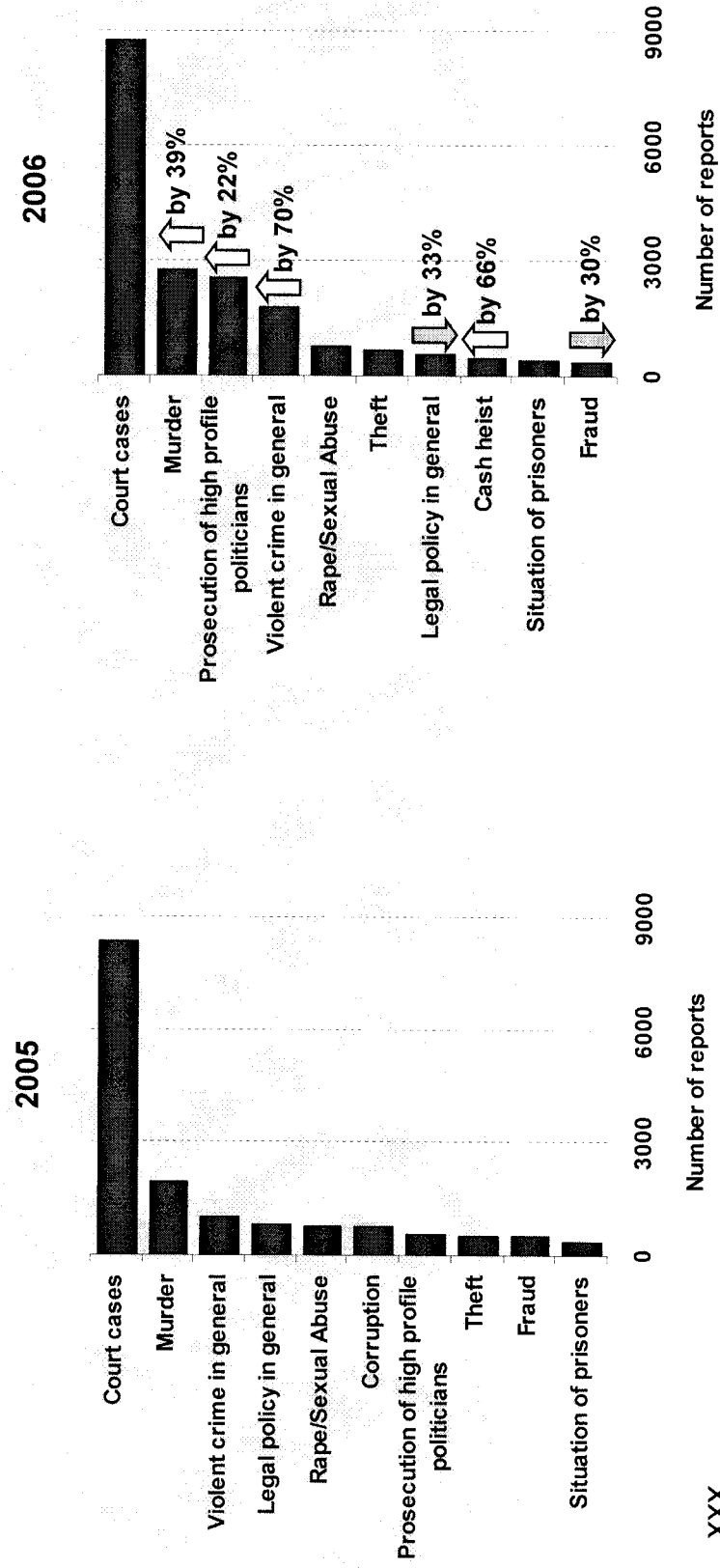


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Top crime related issues receiving coverage in the leading SA media: 2005 - 2006

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Overall comparison

- 18000 murders, 3000 media reports
- Figure low compared to Graber's figures of +-23%
- How to compare more closely?
- Local US TV news vs SA coverage
- Local TV news: violent crime dominates
- In general, two to three events per night
- In SA?

SABC 3 in 2006

Murder	55
Violent crime in general (non-politically motivated)	33
Suicide bombing	25
Politically motivated crime (e.g. terrorism)	22
Cash heist	16

E-tv in 2006

Murder	148
Violent crime in general (non-politically motivated)	49
Suicide bombing	28
Kidnapping	25
Politically motivated crime (e.g. terrorism)	22
Cash heist	19

Nguni news 2006

Murder	64
Violent crime in general (non-politically motivated)	35
Cash heist	16
Theft	13
Politically motivated crime (e.g. terrorism)	13

Venda / Tsonga News

Suicide bombing	61
Nuclear Terrorism / Dirty Bomb	18
Non politically motivated crime, other	13
Violent crime in general (non-politically motivated)	12
Politically motivated crime (e.g. terrorism)	7
Murder	6

Some conclusions

- E-tv covers more intensively
- SABC black stations cover more than white
- Incoherent, balkanised SABC news service
- Institutional factors (laziness, etc) matter
- SABC compared to US local news?
- Coverage about 10-15% of US
- Incidence of violent crime here considerably greater – 8 to 10 times more

SABC covering, or covering up?

- Fifty plus murders a day, one news broadcast a week? Adequate? News staff 700-1000.
- Just proportionality shows SA coverage at about 1 or 2% of US coverage
- Pres Mbeki a prisoner of this intellectual tradition
- Pres Mbeki's line likely to inhibit coverage further, given Kang's wish to influence rules

The racial argument about crime – why blacks are right

- Whites and mainstream media ignore bulk of crimes against blacks, as does SABC
- Media ignore causes and complexity of crime
- Media don't cover rural or poor South Africa properly
- Whites ignore or 'forget' historical roots of present crimes

The racial argument about crime – why whites are right

- Heavy media coverage leads to solved crimes
- Class, not race, now determines coverage
- Tone of schadenfreude in black comments
- State failing to protect all citizens
- Sense of cultural trauma unmistakable
- Jeffrey Alexander's work on Cultural Trauma

Cultural Trauma

- Not a simple relationship to violence or crime
- Post Soviet Eastern European elite's trauma
- Media signs of trauma? E-mails, responses
- Emigration
- Appeal to outsiders
- Reports from therapists
- Agents reporting are increasingly influential
- How to reduce trauma?

Cautious academic conclusions – work in progress

- Beware generalisations from USA or UK
- Simple comparisons offer a useful check
- Evidence suggests crime here under-reported, and reported in wrong places
- Under-reporting crime not an act of left-wing or non-racial virtue
- Cultural Trauma useful concept
- Media under-resourced intellectually and culturally