

Media reality or 'real' reality

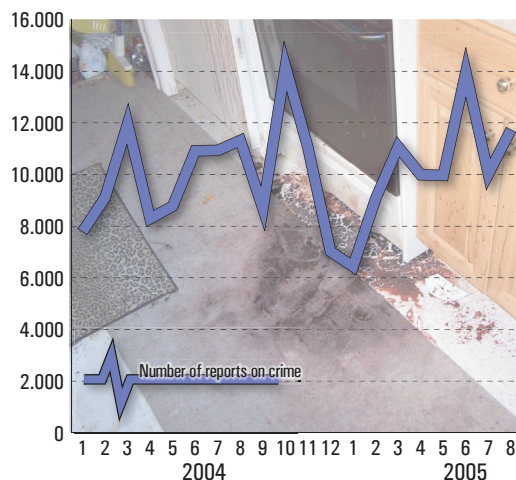
Media analysis of crime coverage shows discrepancy between portrayal of crime and statistics

The recently released crime statistics suggest that actual crime has decreased for most categories in the recent years, yet media's coverage on crime has proportionally increased. These are the findings of **Media Tenor's** analysis of the coverage of leading South African media's coverage of crime during the period of January – August, 2005 (and compared to the same period in 2004). In plain numbers, 2004 saw a total of 79,081 reports on crime and 2005 82,230.

In total, 9% of all coverage in news, business and opinion pages in the daily newspapers analysed focused on crime, 8% on television (with **e-tv** considerably higher than **SABC**) and 6% in weekly publications. At the same time, the proportional share of coverage on crime versus crime fighting has decreased (2004: crime fighting 18% of all crime coverage; 2005: 16%). Amongst the findings are:

- Coverage of murder in 2005 increased compared to 2004 by 16%
- Coverage of corruption and scandals slightly decreased by 8%
- Violent crime coverage increased by 13%
- Fraud coverage increased by 27%
- Rape/abuse increased by 14%

Number of reports on crime in South African media 2004 – 2005



Number of reports

Source: Media Tenor
01/01/2004 - 08/31/2005

Basis: 202,233 reports
in 31 South African media

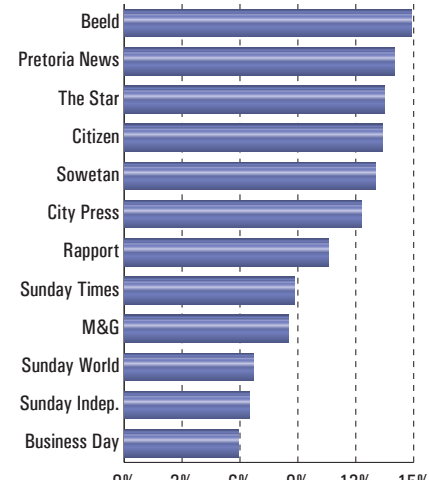
- Kidnapping decreased by 62% (2004 saw an intense focus on the Leigh Matthews kidnapping)
- Child abuse coverage increased by 50%

However, some types of crime have virtually 'disappeared' from the media's attention, such as sexual harassment (12th most reported on crime type in 2004, 29th in 2005), racially motivated crimes (17th in 2004, 38th in 2005).

A clear line in terms of racial focus of crime is also visible when analyzing some of the leading publications in this country: **Sowetan**, **Sunday World** and **City Press** focus predominantly on crime committed against black people (between 62% and 69% of all reports), while **Beeld** and **Report** focus more on crime committed against white people (between 54% and 55% of all reports). The highest focus on crime amongst individual publications can be found in **Rapport** (11%) and **City Press** (12%) with **Sunday Independent** and **Sunday World** with the lowest share of coverage (7%).

Research by **Media Tenor's** partners in Namibia, the Institute for Public Policy Research on the correlation between media coverage of corruption in Namibian and actual cases of corruption (sample from Independence till recent) indicated that the actual number of corruption cases had decreased while the volume of coverage on corruption had actually increased. Basically, individual corruption cases enjoyed a greater focus then before, and this lead to Namibians feeling that their country had become

Share of crime topics in opinion-leading South African media

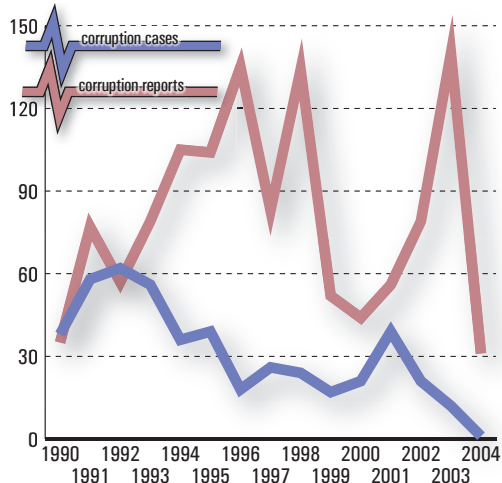


Share of topics

Source: Media Tenor
01/01 - 08/31/2005

Basis: 100,132 reports
in this media

Namibia: Number of reports on corruption vs actual corruption cases

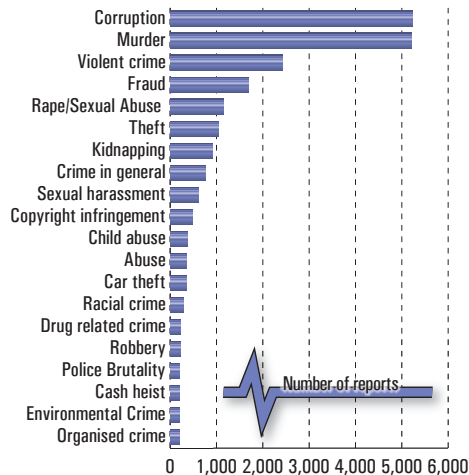


Number of reports; number of corruption cases

Source: Namibia Institute for Democracy 2004

more corrupt, as reflected in the latest Transparency International Corruption Survey in Namibia. The results of this correlation pose serious questions about the effects that crime coverage in South African media has on the public perception. It would not be a surprise if people continue to show a mistrust towards the crime statistics if indeed they base their personal assumptions on the coverage by the media. In 2004, the Institute of Security Studies (ISS) in South Africa released results of a survey that showed that more than half of all South Africans believe that crime has increased over the past three years and feelings of safety have declined substantially since 1998. And while statistics are not necessarily unquestionable in terms of the interpretation, a possible correlation between increased crime coverage in the media and public perception seems to emerge. While media will cite 'public interest' as a reason for increasing coverage on crime (and particularly corruption against government officials) it somehow does not apply the same decision when reporting on, e.g. HIV/Aids, where the statistics indicate a sharp increase of infections (less than 1% of total coverage in the media). A case of Agenda Setting and Cutting at the same time by the media in a country in dire need for good news? No one questions the role of the media in trying to set the agenda on issues that need special attention such as gender violence and crime against children. And no one would expect that media follow statistics and reduce their coverage on particular crime issues just because statistics indicate a decline. If they do, they would neglect their duties as agenda setters. But the intensity and

Top crime in South African media January - August 2005



Number of reports

Source: Media Tenor 01/01 - 08/31/2005

Basis: 22,160 reports in 31 South African media

relevance of coverage that some of the crime related issues receive seems to be unbalanced towards other issues. But despite polls indicating that people are tired of reading/listening to negative news – they continue to dominate. ws

Basis:

Media: 31 opinion-leading South African media
Time frame: 01/01 - 08/31/2004; 01/01 - 08/31/2005
Analysis: 82,230 reports January - August, 2005; 79,081 in 31 South African leading media January - August, 2004
Other sources: Crime statistics based on South African Police Services, based on ISS website

	Up or Down Crime Statistics	Up or Down Media Coverage
Murder	↓ 5,2%	↑ 16%
Rape	↑ 4,5%	↑ 14%
Violent crime	↓ 4%	↑ 13%
Child abuse	↓ 16%	↑ 50%
Kidnapping	↓ 14%	↓ 62%
Fraud	↓ 3%	↑ 27%

Statistics based on South African Police Services, based on ISS website and Media Tenor research