

# Media Representation of Crime vs. Official Crime Data

By Katrina Lacey

## Number of Crimes by Specific Crime Type from Greenville County Data

Assault	10
Auto Theft	88
Auto breaking	157
Burglary	358
Larceny	300
Weapon Offense	27
Drug Offense	105
DUI	17
Fire Calls	6
Prostitution	26
Robbery	32
Arson	2

All September 2006 Crimes in Greenville County

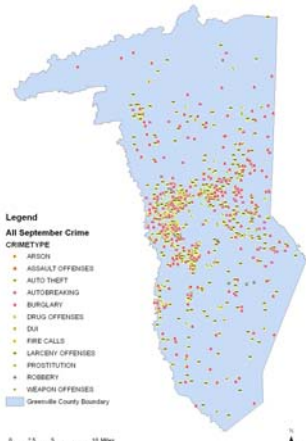


Figure 1.2

The map shown above, figure 1.1, shows all reported crimes in Greenville County in September 2006. The table to the left of the map (Figure 1.2) is a break down of specific crimes and number of times it occurred. The text below (Figure 1.3) defines the crimes committed in Greenville in September 2006 according to the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

## Offense Definitions for Uniform Crime Reporting

Figure 1.3

- Violent Crimes**  
**Assault offenses:** An unlawful attack by one person upon another for the purpose of inflicting severe or aggravated bodily injury. This type of assault usually is accompanied by the use of a weapon or by means likely to produce death or great bodily harm. Simple assaults are excluded.
- Property Crimes**  
**Weapons:** carrying, possessing, etc. – The violation of laws or ordinances prohibiting the manufacture, sale, purchase, transportation, possession, concealment, or use of firearms, cutting instruments, explosives, incendiary devices, or other deadly weapons. Attempts are included.  
**Burglary (breaking or entering):** The unlawful entry of a structure to commit a felony or a theft. Attempted forcible entry is included.  
**Larceny-theft (except motor vehicle theft):** The unlawful taking, carrying, leading, or riding away of property from the possession or constructive possession of another. Examples are thefts of bicycles, motor vehicle parts and accessories, shoplifting, pocket-picking, or the stealing of any property or article that is not taken by force and violence or by fraud.  
**Auto theft:** The theft or attempted theft of a motor vehicle. A motor vehicle is self-propelled and runs on land surface and not on rails. Motorboats, construction equipment, airplanes, and farming equipment are specifically excluded from this category.  
**Vandalism/Auto Breaking:** To willfully or maliciously destroy, injure, disfigure, or deface any public or private property, real or personal, without the consent of the owner or person having custody or control by cutting, tearing, breaking, marking, painting, drawing, covering with filth, or any other such means as may be specified by local law. Attempts are included.
- Violent Property or Public Order**  
**Robbery:** The taking or attempting to take anything of value from the care, custody, or control of a person or persons by force or threat of force or violence and/or by putting the victim in fear.  
**Arson:** Any willful or malicious burning or attempt to burn, with or without intent to defraud, a dwelling house, public building, motor vehicle or aircraft, personal property of another, etc.
- White Collar**  
**Fraud:** The intentional perversion of the truth for the purpose of inducing another person or other entity in reliance upon it to part with something of value or to surrender a legal right. Fraudulent conversion and obtaining of money or property by false pretenses. Confidence games and bad checks, except forgeries and counterfeiting, are included.  
**Embezzlement:** The unlawful misappropriation or misapplication by an offender to his/her own use or purpose of money, property, or some other thing of value entrusted to his/her care, custody, or control.
- Public Order**  
**Prostitution and commercialized vice:** The unlawful promotion of or participation in sexual activities for profit, including attempts. To solicit customers or transport persons for prostitution purposes; to own, manage, or operate a dwelling or other establishment for the purpose of providing a place where prostitution is performed; or to otherwise assist or promote prostitution.  
**Drug abuse violations:** The violation of laws prohibiting the production, distribution, and/or use of certain controlled substances. The unlawful cultivation, manufacture, distribution, sale, purchase, use, possession, transportation, or importation of any controlled drug or narcotic substance.  
**Driving under the influence:** Driving or operating a motor vehicle or common carrier while mentally or physically impaired as the result of consuming an alcoholic beverage or using a drug or narcotic.

Department of Justice – Federal Bureau of Investigation  
 Release Date: September 2006  
 Sources:  
 Marlene Brandon, Diane Santiago, and George A. Weatherly, "Crime Stories as Television News: A Content Analysis of National, Big City, and Small Town Newsweek," *Journal of Crime Justice and Popular Culture* 7 (1999): 30-53.  
 The Greenville News  
 Greenville County Law Enforcement GIS Data  
 Data Type: Shapefile Feature Class  
 Coordinate System: Projected  
 Projected Coordinate System: NAD\_1983\_UTM\_Zone\_17N  
 Projection: Transverse Mercator

## Abstract

Whether on the television, in the movies, playing video games, or reading the paper, the media affects how we as Americans view crime. The media shapes our ideas about who commits crime, where crime is committed, what types of crime are committed the most, and how often crime is committed. Because most people do not know criminals personally, they oftentimes rely on media portrayals for intimate details. My project focuses on crime in the media. More specifically, it deals with crime in The Greenville News and crime reports from Greenville County Law Enforcement Center. Using spatial GIS data and a media database I created, the representation of crime in the media is compared to that presented in Greenville County's official crime statistics. In general, the media does not give an accurate portrayal of crime. The percentages of crimes reported and crimes committed from the crime data are not proportionate. This data could be used by the media to better depict crime in the Greenville area, or for crime education. The results are used here to identify any discrepancies between the American perception of crime and official crime data.

## Percents and Numbers By Crime Type (Figure 1.4)

Type of Crime	Number of Stories Concerning Crime Type in Media	Number of Crime Type Reported in Greenville County Crime Data
Violent	46 [48.94%]	10 [0.89%]
Property	7 [7.45%]	930 [82.45%]
Public Order	12 [12.77%]	148 [13.12%]
White Collar	23 [24.47%]	0 [0.00%]
Violent Property	4 [4.26%]	34 [3.01%]
Crime Report	1 [1.06%]	0 [0.00%]
Unknown	1 [1.06%]	0 [0.00%]
<b>Totals</b>	<b>94 [100%]</b>	<b>1128</b>

## Introduction, Background Research, and Data Collection Methods

My objective in this project was to compare the media representation and American perception of crime with official crime data. I created this project to uncover the truth about crime. Media data for this study was obtained between Sunday, October 15, 2006 and Saturday, November 4, 2006 from The Greenville News newspaper. I collected the data from three sections, the Front/Main Section (including the Opinion pages), the Business Section, and the Metro Section. I focused solely on domestic crime, not international. I used a spread sheet including fields for title, day, and date of the article, type of crime, section of the newspaper, social characteristics of the offender and victim, and relationship between the offender and victim. I created a database with all 94 articles concerning crime for the three weeks, along with a code book. For the official crime data, I contacted Sergeant Dan Kelly with the Greenville County Law Enforcement and GIS office. He sent me the most recent crime data he had available: September 2006. The crime data included crime type, date of the crime, zip code, City, and property type where the crime was committed. He could not give me any social characteristics for the offenders and/or victims in order to protect their privacy. During my background research about crime in the media, I did not come across any spatial representations of crime and the media together. There were, however, quite a few sociological papers about crime and the media that I referred to and used as inspiration and guidance.

By Crime Type: September Public Order Crimes in Greenville County

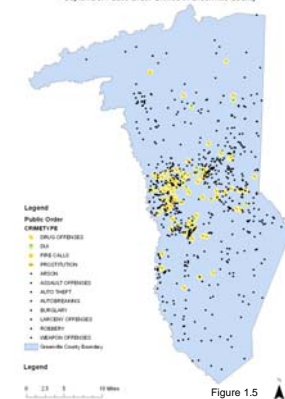


Figure 1.5

By Crime Type: September Violent Property Crimes in Greenville County

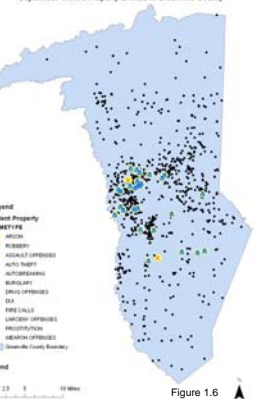


Figure 1.6

By Crime Type: September Violent Crimes in Greenville County

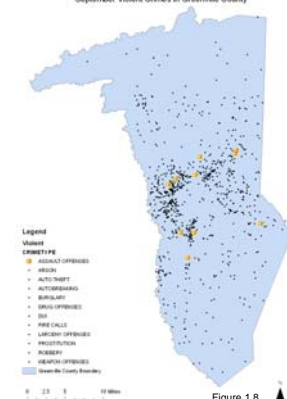


Figure 1.8

By Crime Type: September Property Crimes in Greenville County

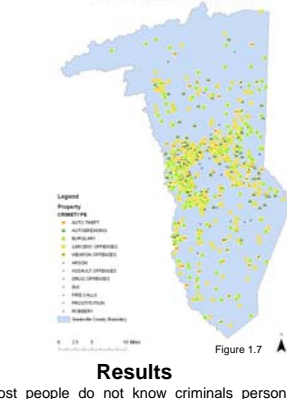


Figure 1.7

Tracts Most Affected by Crime with Racial Demographics

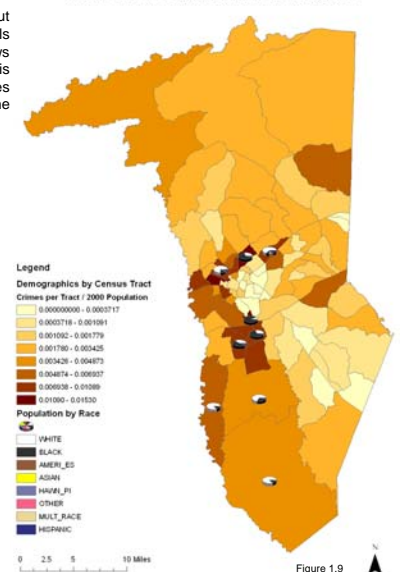


Figure 1.9

The above map (Figure 1.9) shows Greenville County separated into census tracts from the 2000 census. The darker orange areas depict the areas with the most crimes committed per total population. The areas with the highest concentration of crime each have a pie chart depicting the racial make up of that tract. It should be noted that there is not one race that dominates the populations. The table below (Figure 2.0) summarizes the number of articles per day dealing with crime, and the percentage of total stories reporting on crime.

## Media Coverage (Figure 2.0)

Date of Article	Number of Stories Concerning Crime	Percent of Stories Dealing with Crime
Sunday, October 15	4	6.67%
Monday, October 16	2	3.08%
Tuesday, October 17	4	6.15%
Wednesday, October 18	10	14.49%
Thursday, October 19	3	4.69%
Friday, October 20	4	6.45%
Saturday, October 21	4	5.71%
Sunday, October 22	1	1.43%
Monday, October 23	4	5.88%
Tuesday, October 24	6	7.25%
Wednesday, October 25	3	4.62%
Thursday, October 26	7	10.45%
Friday, October 27	4	6.45%
Saturday, October 28	7	10.29%
Sunday, October 29	3	4.23%
Monday, October 30	6	8.70%
Tuesday, October 31	1	1.59%
Wednesday, November 1	1	6.35%
Thursday, November 2	3	12.50%
Friday, November 3	9	6.35%
Saturday, November 4	7	10.29%

## Results

Because most people do not know criminals personally, they oftentimes rely on media portrayals for intimate details. After studying the official crime data and comparing it with the media representation of crime, it becomes obvious that the media does not accurately portray crime. One of the greatest distortions is that the newspaper coverage of crime exaggerates the prevalence of violent crime. The number of violent crimes committed versus reported (48.9% of the 94 articles in The Greenville News, versus 0.89% percent of 1,128 crimes committed in September) is not proportional, to say the least. White collar crime makes up nearly a quarter of articles concerning crime, while there is no official crime data concerning white collar crime. This may be due to the way in which crime is characterized by the media. Media creates the social reality of crime and exercises significant power over the interpretation of that reality. 64% of American adults think the press "accurately reflects how much crime there is" (Maguire, 1999 pg 30).

The maps above (Figures 1.5 -1.8) show the crime distribution and amount by crime type. Within each map, the specific crime is denoted with a crime analysis icon. To the left, the Offense Definitions provided by the FBI explains each crime reported in Greenville County, along with the type of crime it is.