

Results of the 2008 Mississippi Crime Poll

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The Mississippi Statistical Analysis Center was created by executive order of Governor Ronnie Musgrove in October of 2000. The mission of the MS-SAC is to provide sound statistical information in order to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the state's criminal justice system.

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A Message from the SAC staff:

We are pleased to provide the second in a recurring series of reports relating the experiences of Mississippi residents as victims of crime as well as their beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes regarding various dimensions of crime and justice. Ideally, the results contained herein will provide state policy makers with relevant empirical information to bridge the gap that often exists between public perception and executive/legislative action. Dimensions such as confidence in local police, prosecutorial discretion, judicial fairness, correctional policy and the death penalty are examined. Suggestions for improving or expanding future versions of the Mississippi Crime Poll as well as questions regarding interpretation or implications are welcome.

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Section I.
2008 Self Reported Criminal Victimization

The first section of this report contains questions concerning victimization of crimes not covered in the 2004 Crime Poll. These new questions concern victimization of the following offenses: property theft, identity theft, auto theft, stalking, physical assault, sexual assault, and murder. The respondents were also asked, in various manners, if they had contacted by the police in continuation with such victimizations.

A. Property Theft

With regard to criminal victimization in the form of property theft, 21.2% of those surveyed (106) indicated that they had something stolen from either the inside or outside of their home, garage or other building. Of these, only 57% (60) indicated having reported the crime to the police. By comparison, 41.3% (46) indicated having not reported the crime to the police. When asked to speculate on the identity of the person who committed the property theft, the largest portion of self-identified victims (58.6%, 54) reported having absolutely no idea who had been the perpetrator. By comparison, the remaining self-identified victims indicated a belief that the responsible party was a spouse, former

spouse or significant other (0.4%, 2), family member (1.8%, 9), someone they knew well but who was not a family member (1.8%, 9), a casual acquaintance (1.6%, 8) or a stranger (3.4%, 17).

B. Auto Theft

Turning specifically to the crime of auto theft, only 8.2% (41) of those surveyed indicated that they had a vehicle stolen, used without permission, or had parts or contents stolen. Of these, 70%, (28) indicated having reported the crime to the police. By comparison, only 17.5% (12) indicated having not reported the crime to the police.

C. Stalking

Focusing on crimes of a more interpersonal nature, only 6.2% (31) of those surveyed indicated having been the victim of some variety of stalking. By comparison, the overwhelming majority of survey participants (93.8%, 469) did not report any such incidents. Of the 31 self-identified stalking victims, a majority (54.8%, 17) did not report the incident to police whereas 45.2% (14) indicated having reported the incident to authorities. When asked to categorize the stalker's identity, only 30 participants chose to respond (1 less than reported having been a victim). Of these,

slightly less than one-fourth of self-identified victims (23.3%, 7) indicated that the perpetrator was someone they knew well, but was not a family member. Exactly 50% (15) indicated now knowing the identity of their stalker. Only 16.7% (5) of those who agreed to answer this particular question identified their stalker as a spouse, former spouse or significant other. Two (6.7%, 2) said that the stalker was a person they described as a casual acquaintance, with the remaining one respondent (3.3%, 1) reporting that the stalker was a family member.

D. Identity Theft

With specific attention to the growing concern over identity theft, slightly less than one in every ten participants (9.2%, 46) reported being the victim of any form of identity theft resulting in financial loss or economic harm. Of these self-reported victims 69.6% (32) reported the crime to the police whereas 30.4% (14) did not. When asked to categorize the type of person who committed the theft, only 44 participants chose to respond (2 less than reported having been a victim). By far the largest portion of victims (81.8%, 36) indicated that they did not know who had stolen their identity. By comparison, a much smaller portion indicated the belief that it was a

casual acquaintance (13.6%, 6) or family member (4.5%, 2) who had perpetrated the crime.

E. Domestic Violence

When participants were asked if their current, former spouse or significant other had ever inflicted physical abuse by means of hitting, kicking, slapping, pushing or choking them, only 2.4% (12) participants indicated in the affirmative. Of these self-identified victims, three-fourths (75%, 9) reported a spouse, former spouse or significant other as the aggressor. Only a single person (8.3%, 1) indicated that the actor was another family member other than a spouse, former spouse or significant other. Another single participant (8.3%, 1) categorized the aggressing party as “other” while still one more (8.3%, 1) refused to answer. Of the 2.4% (12) of participants who indicated being the victim of domestic violence, 58.3% (7) reported the incident to police. Another one-third (33.3%, 4) did not report the crime and a single person (8.3%, 1) refused to answer.

F. Physical Assault

Other than domestic violence, only 3.8% (19) of participants indicated that they themselves or someone else in their

household had been the victim of a physical assault. When asked to categorize the identity of the person who committed the physical assault, only 18 participants chose to respond (1 less than reported having been a victim). The largest portion of these self-identified victims or household members related to those who were physically assaulted (72.3%, 13) reported not knowing the attacker's identity. Of those remaining, the attacker was either categorized as a casual acquaintance (11.1%, 2), spouse, former spouse or significant other (11.1%, 2) or family member (5.6%, 1). Of the 19 participants who indicated being the victim of a physical assault, slightly greater than two-thirds (68.4%, 13) reported the incident to police. The remaining 31.6% (6) did not report the assault to law enforcement.

G. Sexual Assault / Rape

Of the 500 resident surveyed, only 0.8% (4) reported that they themselves or someone else in their household had been the victim of a sexual assault / rape, all 100% of whom reported the crime to police. When asked to categorize the identity of the perpetrator of this crime, 1 participant indicated that the actor was a spouse, former spouse or significant other. Another identified the actor as someone they knew well, but was not a family member. An additional

respondent said that actor was a casual acquaintance, and the remaining case indicated that they did not know the person who committed the sexual assault / rape.

H. Murder

With regard to murder, 1.2% (6) respondents indicated that someone in their household had been the victim of such a crime. Of these 6 murders, (4) were attributable to shootings. Another (1) was attributed to a DUI accident and a final death (1) was due to unspecified causes. Not surprisingly, 100% of these murders were brought to the attention of police.

I. Contact with the Police by Arrest

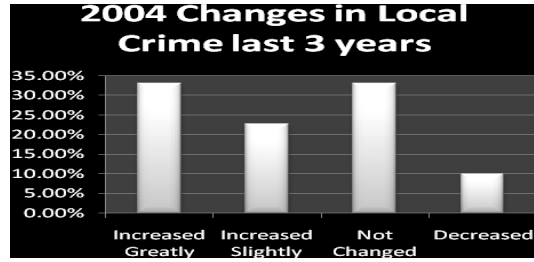
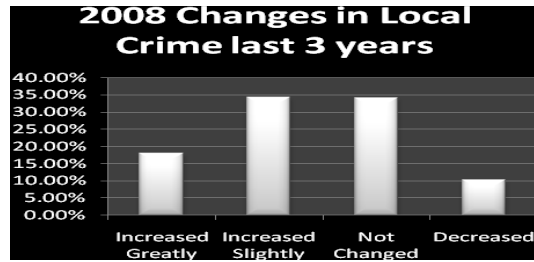
Survey participants were also asked if they or anyone in their household had been arrested by the police during the time frame of interest. Out of 500 respondents only 6.8% (34) indicated such contact. Another 1% (5) of subjects refused to answer the question, leaving an overwhelming majority of participants (92.2%, 461) who reported that neither they nor anyone in their household had been arrested by the police during 2008.

Section II.
Comparative Results between 2008 and 2004 perceptions regarding Mississippi's Criminal Justice System.

This section compares perceptions of crime and Mississippi's Criminal Justice system between years 2004 and 2008.

A. Changes in Local Crime

Participants were asked how much they believed crime had changed in their local communities over the past three years. In response to this inquiry 18% (90) of those polled indicated the belief that local crime had increased greatly. Roughly one-third (34%, 170) reported no perceived change. An almost equal percentage of respondents (34.2%, 171) expressed the perception that crime within the local community had only slightly increased over the last three years. A combined 10.2% reported that crime had either decreased slightly (7.8%) or greatly (2.4%) during the same time span. The pattern of responses obtained for each of these items and how they compare to responses from the 2004 Crime Poll are reported below.



i. Most Serious Forms of Local Crime

Respondents were asked to rank order a variety of criminal offenses within their local communities from most to least serious. Among these Burglary (34%) ranked highest, followed by Drug Sales (20%) then DUI (19.10%). Other offenses, and the order in which they were ranked, are reported in the following table.

2009 Offenses	Percentage
Burglary	34.0%
Drug Sales	20.0%
DUI	19.1%
Vandalism	17.2%
Robbery	9.9%
Driving without License	6.1%
Panhandling	2.8%
Vehicle Theft	2.4%
Rape/Sexual Assault	0.2%
Public Drunk	0.2%
Fighting	0.2%

2004 Offenses	Percentage
Drug Sales	17.3%
Robbery	15.1%
Burglary	14.4%
Vehicle Theft	7.0%
DUI	5.5%
Vandalism	4.9%
Driving without license	4.8%
Rape/Sexual Assault	4.5%
Fighting	3.7%
Public Drunk	2.4%

ii. Factors Affecting Local Crime Rate

Participants were asked to rank order various factors affecting the crime rate within their local communities from most to least influential. Among these, parental discipline (58.5%) ranked highest, followed by illegal drugs (33%), then unemployment (19.4%) Other factors, and the order in which they were ranked, are reported in the following table.

Factors that affect Crime 2008	Percentage
Lack of Parental Discipline	58.5%
Illegal Drugs	33.0%
Unemployment	19.4%
Breakdown of Family	17.2%
Alcohol	1.4%
Moral Decline	1.4%
Gangs	1.0%
Change in Population	0.8%
Violence in TV/Movies	0.8%

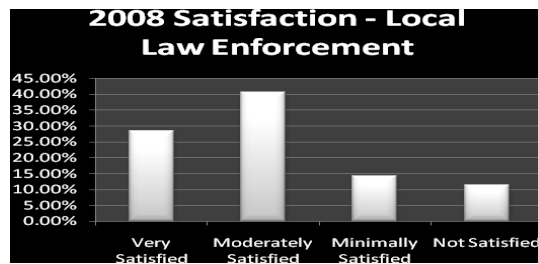
Factors that affect Crime 2004	Percentage
Lack of Parental Discipline	24.6%
Illegal Drugs	17.6%
Breakdown of Family	12.0%
Moral Decline	10.8%
Gangs	5.9%
Alcohol	5.2%
Unemployment	4.6%
Violence in TV/Movies	0.8%

B. Quality of Law Enforcement Service, Adequacy of Local Resources & Expansion of Radar Authority

Four items were developed to assess perceptions regarding the quality of law enforcement service and adequacy of resources. Two of these items solicited perceptions regarding quality of service at the local and state levels. A third question addressed the adequacy of local police resources, while the final item dealt with whether or not radar authority should be expanded to all law enforcement agencies state-wide. The pattern of responses obtained for each of these items and how they compare to responses from the 2004 Crime Poll are reported below.

i. Quality of Local Law Enforcement Service

With regard to quality of law enforcement service at the local level, the largest percentage of respondents indicated being moderately satisfied (40.6%, 203), with an additional 28.4% (142) being very satisfied with local police services. In contrast, a combined 25.6% (128) of respondents reported being either minimally (14.2%, 71) or not satisfied at all (11.4%, 57). Worth noting is the finding that slightly less than seven out of every ten Mississippi residents (69%, 345) polled for this survey indicated being moderately or very satisfied with the quality of service provided by law enforcement within their local communities.



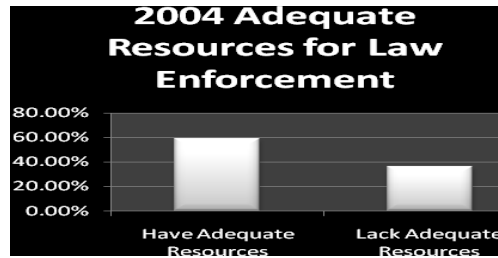
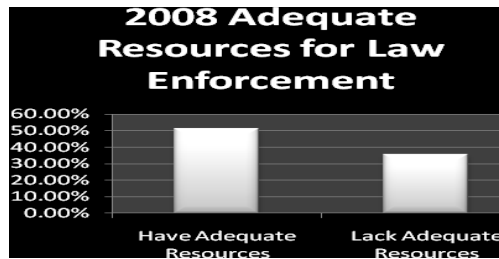
ii. Quality of State Law Enforcement Service

With regard to quality of law enforcement service at the state level, slightly greater than three-fifths of all respondents (59%, 295) indicated being moderately (43.6%, 218) to very satisfied (15.4, 77). A combined 30% (150) of respondents reported being either minimally (18.85, 94) or not satisfied at all (11.2%, 56) with the quality of law enforcement service at the state level. A remaining 11% (55) of respondents reported no opinion or indicated no basis for answering the question.



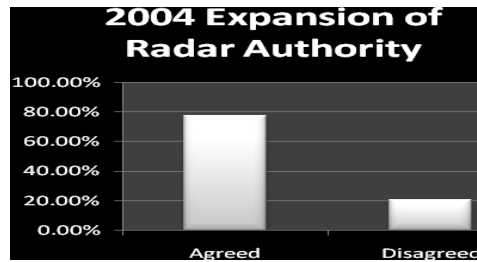
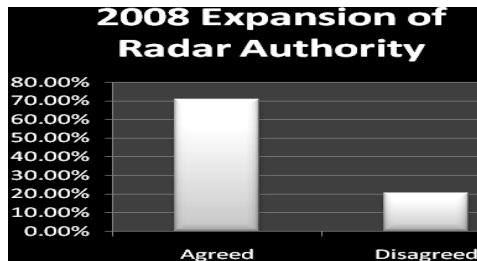
iii. Adequacy of Local Law Enforcement Resources

Survey participants were also asked if they believed that local law enforcement agencies have adequate resources to prevent crime effectively within their local communities. Slightly greater than one-half of respondents (51.2%, 256) indicated the belief that local police possess adequate resources to prevent crime. By comparison, 35.4% (177) reported the opposite perception. A final portion of respondents were either undecided (10.2%, 51) or gave qualified answers (3.2%, 16).



iv. Expansion of Radar Authority

The final item in this section addressed the long-standing debate surrounding legislative restrictions on radar authority. Specifically, participants were asked, “Do you think that it is a good idea to give all law enforcement agencies radar authority for purposes of enforcing the speed limit and preventing accidents?” Roughly seven out of every ten respondents (70.6%, 353) agreed with this statement, whereas only two out of every ten (20.6%, 103) expressed disagreement. A remaining 8.8%, (44) were either undecided (8%, 40) or gave qualified answers (0.8%, 4).



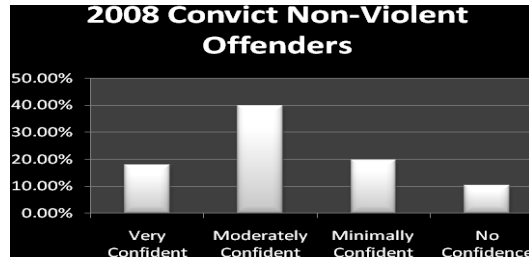
C. Prosecutorial Ability, Responsible Use of Plea Bargaining & Impartial Handling of Cases

Five items were developed to assess perceptions of local prosecutorial ability and judgment. Two of these items solicited opinions regarding the ability of prosecutors to obtain convictions against non-violent and violent offenders, respectively. A third item examined the responsible use of prosecutorial judgment in plea bargaining. Two final items assessed confidence in the ability of prosecutors to resolve cases fairly without regard to the race, wealth or gender of criminals and victims, respectively. The pattern of responses obtained for each of these items and how they compare to responses from the 2004 Crime Poll are reported below.

i. Ability to Convict Non-Violent Offenders

When asked about the ability of local prosecutors to obtain convictions against non-violent offenders, a combined 57.6% (288) of survey participants were moderately (39.8%, 199) to very (17.8%, 89) confident. Slightly less than two in ten of those polled (19.6%, 98) expressed minimal confidence, while only 10.4% (52)

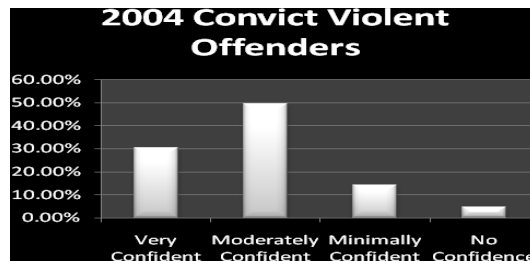
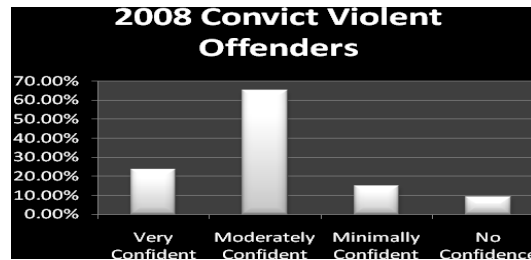
reported no confidence at all. A final 12.2% (61) of respondents were either undecided (11%, 55) or gave qualified answers (1.2%, 6).



ii. Ability to Convict Violent Offenders

When asked about the ability of local prosecutors to obtain convictions against violent offenders, a combined 65% (325) of survey participants were moderately (41.4%, 207) to very (23.6%, 118) confident. Only 14.8% (74) expressed minimal confidence, with an additional 9% (45) reporting no confidence at all. A final 10.8% (54) of

respondents were either undecided (10.4%, 52) or gave qualified answers (0.4%, 2).



iii. Confidence in the Responsible Use of Plea Bargaining

Roughly one-half of those surveyed (50.2%, 251) were moderately (37.8%, 189) to very (12.4%, 62) confident that prosecutors use responsible judgment in deciding which criminal cases should be plea bargained and which ones should be tried in court. Another one in five respondents (20.2%, 101) expressed minimal confidence on this dimension of prosecutorial discretion.

Slightly greater than one in ten (11.4%, 57) reported no confidence at all in the responsible use of plea-bargaining discretion by local prosecutors. A final 18.2% (91) of respondents were either undecided (18%, 90) or gave qualified answers (0.2%, 1).



iv. Ability to Resolve Cases Without Regard to a Criminal's Race, Wealth or Gender

Roughly one-half of those surveyed (51.8%, 259) were moderately (33%, 165) to very (18.8%, 94) confident in the ability of local prosecutors to resolve cases fairly without regard to a criminal's race, wealth or gender. By comparison, two out of every ten

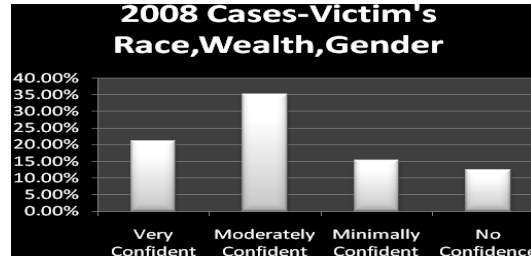
respondents (20.4%, 102) expressed minimal confidence with an additional 12.6% (63) indicating no confidence at all on this particular dimension of prosecutorial responsibility. A final 14.8% (74) were undecided in their responses.



v. Ability to Resolve Cases Without Regard to a Victim's Race, Wealth or Gender

Slightly greater than one-half of those surveyed (56.2%, 281) were moderately (35.2%, 176) to very (21%, 105) confident in the ability of local prosecutors to resolve cases fairly without regard to a victim's race, wealth or gender. By comparison,

slightly less than three out of every ten respondents (27.8%, 139) expressed either minimal (15.4%, 77) no confidence at all (12.4%, 62) on this particular dimension of prosecutorial responsibility. A final 15.4% (77) were undecided in their responses.



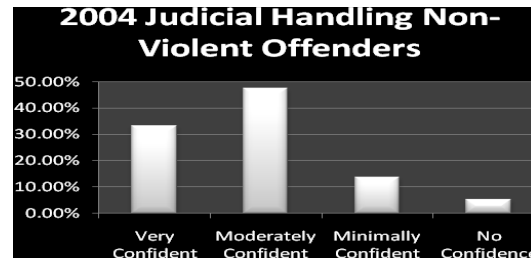
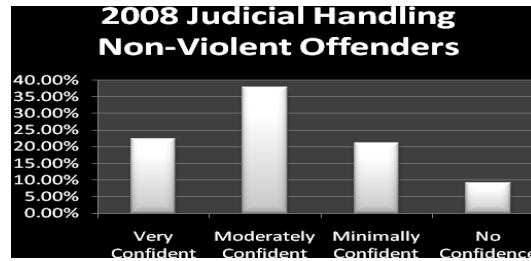
D. Confidence in Judicial Ability & Fairness

Four items were included to assess residents' beliefs regarding the state judiciary. The first two items addressed confidence in the ability of state courts to ensure that offenders, both non-violent and violent, are held accountable for their

actions. A third item sought to ascertain confidence in the ability of state courts to treat defendants fairly without regard to race, wealth or gender. The final items within this section solicited responses regarding the extent to which the opinions of victims are taken into consideration in determining the punishment an offender will receive. The pattern of responses obtained for each of these items and how they compare to responses from the 2004 Crime Poll are reported below.

i. Judicial Handling of Non-Violent Offenders

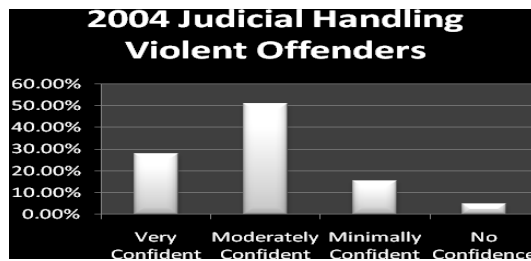
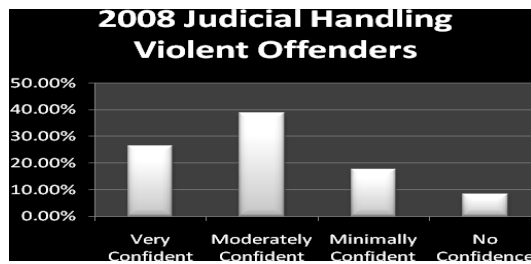
The first item asked those polled to indicate level of confidence in the ability of state courts to ensure that non-violent offenders are held accountable for their actions. Three out of every five participants (60.2%, 301) were either very (22.4%, 112) or moderately (37.8%, 189) confident in the ability of state courts to meet this objective. A combined three out of every ten (30.2%, 151) participants reported either minimal (21%, 105) or no confidence at all (9.2%, 46) on this dimension of judicial responsibility. A final 8.8% (44) were undecided in their responses.



ii. Judicial Handling of Violent Offenders

A related item asked participants to indicate level of confidence in the ability of state courts to ensure that violent offenders are held accountable for their actions. Roughly two out of every three respondents (65.2%, 326) were either very (26.4%, 132) or moderately (38.8%, 194) confident in the ability of state courts to meet this objective. Slightly greater than one-fourth (26%, 130) of respondents expressed either minimal (17.6%, 88) or no confidence at all (8.4%, 42) on this particular dimension of judicial

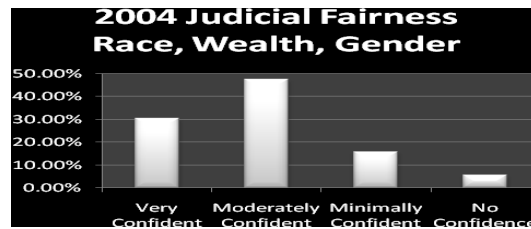
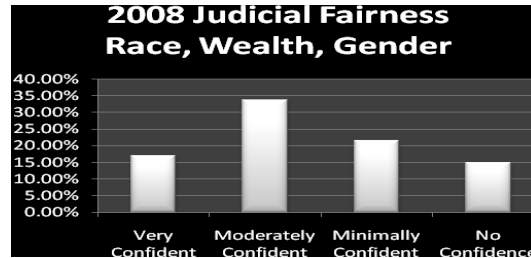
responsibility. A final 8.2% (41) of participants were undecided in their responses.



iii. Judicial Fairness in Handling Defendants Without Regard to Race, Wealth or Gender

A third item included within this section sought to assess confidence in the ability of state courts to treat defendants fairly without regard to race, wealth or gender. One-half of respondents (50.6%, 353) were either very (17%, 85) or moderately (33.6%, 168) confident in the ability of state courts on this dimension. By comparison, slightly greater

than one-third (36.6%, 183) expressed minimal (21.6%, 108), or no confidence at all (15%, 75) in state courts on this criterion. A remaining 12.2% (61) of residents were either undecided (11.6%, 58) or gave qualified responses (0.6%, 3).



iv. Judicial Consideration of Victims' or Relatives' Opinions

A final item within this section solicited perceptions regarding the extent to which state courts adequately consider the opinions of victims or their relatives in determining the punishment an offender will receive. Slightly less than one-half of participants

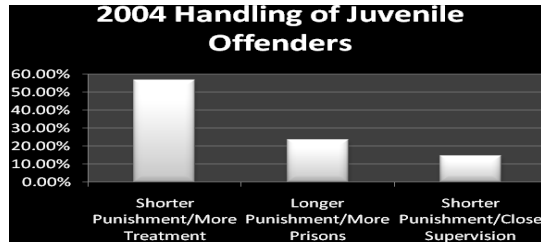
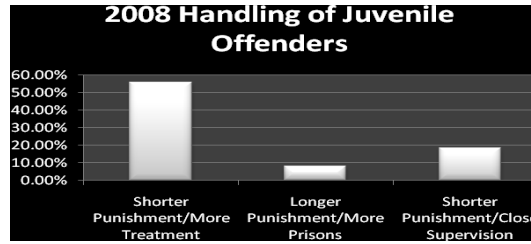
(49%, 245) were either very (15.8%, 79) or moderately (33.2%, 166) confident that state courts adequately consider victims' opinions in determining offender sentences. Of the remaining one-half who were not very or moderately confident, 23% (115) were minimally confident, another 12% (60) had no confidence at all, and a final 15% (75) were either undecided (13.8%, 69) or gave qualified responses (1.2%, 6).

E. Correctional Policies Regarding Various Types of Offenders

The items contained within this section were designed to assess attitudes regarding how various types of offenders should be handled by the state's criminal justice system. Specifically, four types of offenders were considered – juvenile, drug, non-violent and violent. Survey respondents were presented with options such as :1) “lock them up for as long as possible, even if it means building more prisons;” 2) “lock them up for a shorter period of time, but provide training and treatment;” and 3) “lock them up for a shorter period of time, but supervise them more closely after release.” The pattern of responses obtained for each of these items and how they compare to responses from the 2004 Crime Poll are reported below.

i. Handling of Juvenile Offenders

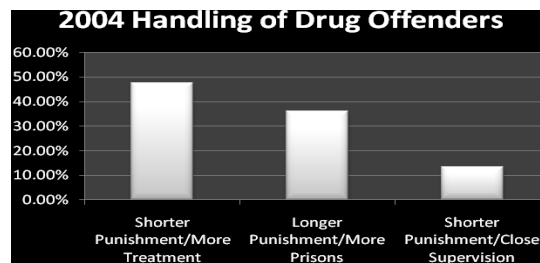
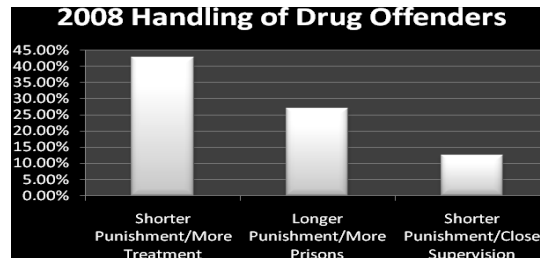
Greater than one-half (55.8%, 279) of those polled expressed the opinion that juvenile offenders are best handled by “locking them up for a shorter period of time, but provide training and treatment.” Less than one-fifth (18.4%, 92) of respondents agreed with the proposition that “we should lock them up for shorter periods, but more closely supervise them when they are released.” Only 8% (40) took the position that “we should lock them up for as long as possible, even if it means building more prisons.” 3.6% (18) of participants recommended not making any changes and that “the present system seems to be working just fine.” A remaining 13.4% (67) of residents were either undecided (8.4%, 42) or gave qualified responses (5%, 25).



ii. Handling of Drug Offenders

With regard to handling drug offenders, 42.8% (214) of participants recommended “locking them up for a shorter period of time, but provide training and treatment while they are in prison.” Slightly greater than one-fourth of those polled (27%, 135) suggested that the best way to handle drug offenders is to “lock them up for as long as possible, even if it means building more prisons.” Approximately one in every eight respondents recommended that “we should lock them up for shorter periods, but more closely supervise them when they are released.” Only 2.4% (12) of participants indicated the opinion that “we should not

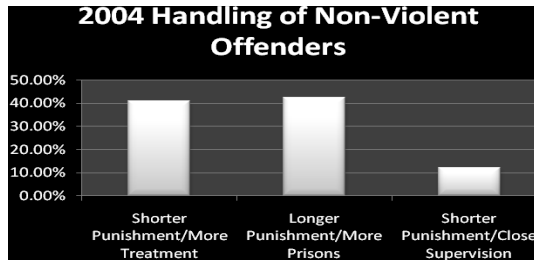
make any changes. The present system seems to be working just fine.” A remaining 13.2% (66) of residents were either undecided (7.8%, 39) or gave qualified responses(5.4%)



iii. Handling of Non-Violent Offenders

In considering how to handle non-violent offenders effectively, slightly less than one-half of respondents (48.2%, 241) recommended that “we should lock them up for shorter periods, but provide training and treatment while they are in prison.” An additional one-fourth (25.4%, 127) recommended that “we should lock them up

for shorter periods, but more closely supervise them when they are released.” Only 7% (35) participants suggested that “we should lock them up for as long as possible, even if it means building more prisons,” with even fewer still (5.6%, 28) indicating that “we should not make any changes.” A remaining 12.8% (64) of participating residents were either undecided (9%, 45) or gave qualified responses (3.8%, 19).



iv. Handling of Violent Offenders

With regard to violent offenders, the largest portion of participants (71.6%, 358) indicated that the best approach would be to “...lock them up for as long as possible, even if it means building more prisons.” Notably fewer respondents (9.6%, 48) suggested that “we should lock them up for shorter periods but provide training and treatment while they are in prison.” Only 4.2% (21) respondents indicated that “we should not make any changes.” Fewer still (2%, 10) were those who indicated that “we should lock them up for shorter periods, but more closely supervise them when they are released.” A remaining 11.6% (58) of participating residents were either undecided (6.4%, 32) or gave qualified responses (5.2%, 26).

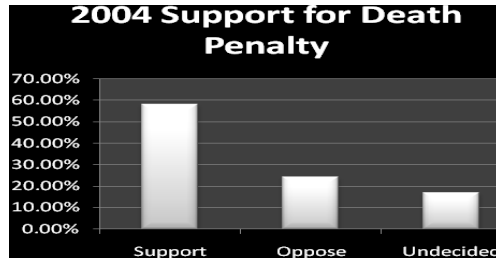
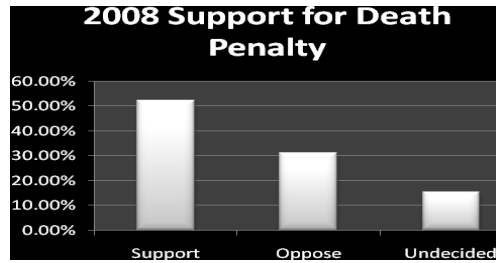


F. The Death Penalty and Wrongful Execution

Three items were included to assess residents' attitudes regarding the death penalty and risk of wrongful execution. The first of these examined degree of support / opposition for capital punishment. A second item assessed support for the death penalty where alternatives exist. The final item sought to determine confidence in the ability of state courts to protect innocent defendants from wrongful execution. The pattern of responses obtained for each of these items and how they compare to responses from the 2004 Crime Poll are reported below.

i. Support for the Death Penalty

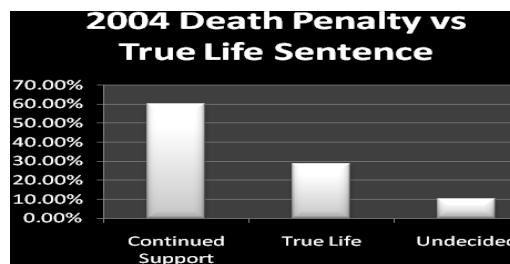
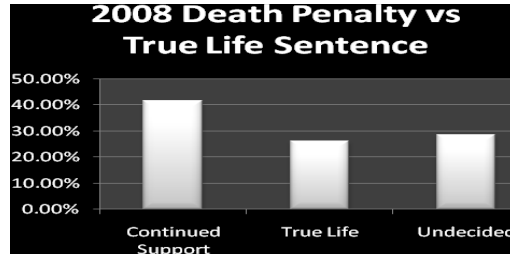
The first item asked participants to indicate whether they support or oppose the death penalty. In response, 52.2% (261) reported being in favor of the death penalty. By comparison, 31.2% (156) of those polled reported opposing the death penalty. A remaining 15.2% (76) of participating residents were either undecided (13.8%, 69) or gave qualified responses (1.4%, 7). Only a very small percentage (1.4%, 7) of participants refused to answer this question.



ii. Support for the Death Penalty Where Alternatives Exist

A second item within this section asked residents whether or not they would support the death penalty where there existed a true life sentence without the possibility of parole. Slightly greater than two out of every five (41.6%, 208) participants indicated that they would support the death penalty in this situation. By comparison, roughly one-fourth (26%, 130) indicated that they would not support the death penalty under such circumstances. A slightly larger percentage (28.6%, 143) was undecided on the matter. .

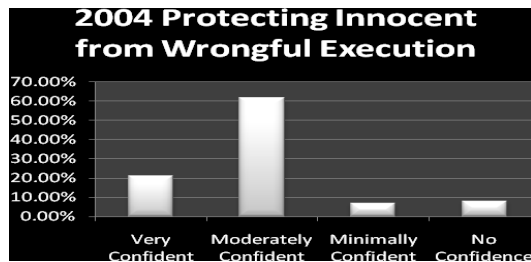
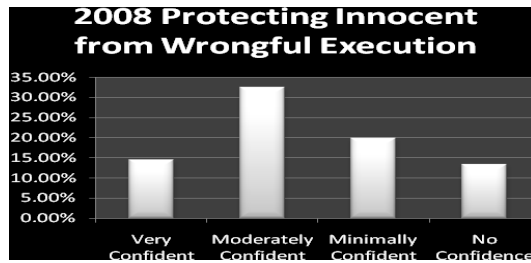
A remaining 3.8% (19) of participating residents either gave qualified responses (1.8%, 9) or refused (2.0%, 10) to answer this question.



iii. Protecting the Innocent from Wrongful Execution

The final item within this section assessed confidence in the ability of state courts to protect the innocent from wrongful execution. Just less than one-half of respondents (46.8%, 234) collectively indicated being moderately (32.4%, 162) to very (14.4%, 72) confident that Mississippi courts adequately protect innocent

defendants from wrongful execution. A combined 33.2% (166) expressed either minimal (19.8%, 99) or no confidence (13.4%, 67) in the power of state courts to protect innocent defendants from execution. Slightly less than one-fifth (17.6%, 88) of participants were undecided on this issue. A remaining 2.4% (6) of participating residents either gave qualified responses (1.2%, 6) or refused (1.2%, 6) to answer this question.



Section III.
Methodology

A. Data Collection

The data comprising the basis for this report was collected by telephone survey from a random sample of 500 adult Mississippi residents during the months of March, April, and May of 2009. Descriptive characteristics of the final sample are available upon request.

B. Data Tabulation

For most questions, survey participants were asked to provide responses along a continuum (e.g., Strongly agree to Strongly disagree, Very confident to No confidence, etc.). Missing data, refusals, and responses such as “Don’t know,” “No opinion,” “Neutral,” or “Other” were few in number, and therefore, generally not reported in the summary findings. Consequently, the percentages and frequencies will not total 100% for many sections and figures displayed. This information is also available upon request.