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Information and Technology
Capabilities of Mississippi Law
Enforcement Agencies

Mississippi Statistical Analysis Center

Information and Technology Capabilities of Mississippi Law Enforcement Agencies

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Greenwood Police Department
Gulfport Police Department
Hattiesburg Police Department
Indianola Police Department
Itawamba County Sheriff's Department
Jackson Police Department
Jackson County Sheriff's Department
Jasper County Sheriff's Department
Leake County Sheriff's Department
Leland Police Department
Madison County Sheriff's Department
Magnolia Police Department**

**McComb Police Department
Meridian Police Department
Monroe County Sheriff's Department
Natchez Police Department
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Newton County Sheriff's Department
Oktibbeha County Sheriff's Department
Panola County Sheriff's Department
Pascagoula Police Department
Pearl Police Department
Perry County Sheriff's Department
Picayune Police Department
Poplarville Police Department
Port Gibson Police Department
Purvis Police Department
Ridgeland Police Department
Sunflower Police Department
Tippah County Sheriff's Department
Tupelo Police Department
Union Police Department
Vaiden Police Department
Warren County Sheriff's Department
Water Valley Police Department
Wayne County Sheriff's Department
West Point Police Department
Wiggins Police Department
Wilkinson County Sheriff's Department
Winston County Sheriff's Department**

Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	3
OVERVIEW	3
WHY THIS REPORT?	3
WHAT THE RESEARCH LOOKED AT	3
DATA COLLECTION AND SAMPLE	3
CRIME TRENDS AND CRIME REPORTING	7
INTERNET TECHNOLOGY	10
TERRORISM	17

Overview

Why this report?

The growth of high technology in our everyday lives continues at an exponential rate. Computers have grown from a mere time saving tool to a critical component of almost every organization, both public and private. Nowhere is the importance of information more pronounced than in law enforcement. In this age of information, the absence of technology within a law enforcement agency is a serious impediment to efficiency and effectiveness.

This study is an attempt to assess the level of technology used by law enforcement in Mississippi on a local level. It is known that federal agencies operating within the state do so with innovative technology. It is also apparent that state agencies operate with relatively a high level of technology. Information rich web sites such as those of the Mississippi Department of Corrections and the Mississippi Department of Public Safety evidence this. The extent to which Mississippi's local law enforcement agencies have modern technology and the necessary training to efficiently utilize it has not been previously evaluated.

After the events of September 11, terrorism became a very real threat to the American people, and thus a concern to those professionals whose job it is to protect them. Because it is a new kind of threat, law enforcement agencies are often missing the most powerful weapon against terrorists—information. A great amount of timely information is available on the internet, still outside the sluggish world of paper publication. Can Mississippi's local law enforcement agencies access this information? Do they need training beyond what is currently available to them? Until now, no one has sought to answer these questions in a systematic way.

What the Research Looked At

This study examines three critical elements of Mississippi's law enforcement information infrastructure: information technology, crime trends and reporting, and terrorism. Each of these elements draws upon the opinions of Mississippi's law enforcement administrators and certain facts about their respective departments. On each issue, law enforcement administrators were asked if any sort of training would be beneficial to their departments.

Data Collection and Sample

The data for this study were gathered by the Mississippi Statistical Analysis Center (SAC) using a survey instrument (*Mississippi Law Enforcement Executive Survey*) developed for that purpose. Surveys were mailed to agency heads for all local law

enforcement agencies identified in the SAC's *Mississippi Justice Agency Directory* (2001). Responses (N = 56) represent both sheriff's departments and police departments. The size of departments ranged from 4 to 438 sworn officers, with a median of 15.5. The participating departments are comprised of 2110 sworn officers, and 1137 civilian staff. This represents a return rate of 22% of all police and sheriff's departments within the state. Personnel statistics are itemized in Table 1.

Table 1**Personnel by Agency**

	Department	Civilians Employed	Sworn Officers
1.	Aberdeen PD	5	19
2.	Batesville PD	9	40
3.	Bay St. Louis PD	9	38
4.	Beaumont PD	0	4
5.	Belzoni PD	5	10
6.	Byhalia PD	4	10
7.	Carthage PD	4	13
8.	Clarke SO	12	13
9.	Clay SO	21	10
10.	Collins PD	4	17
11.	Corinth PD	17	40
12.	Decatur PD	0	7
13.	Edwards PD	2	6
14.	Fulton PD	0	9
15.	Greene SO	8	8
16.	Greenville PD	69	112
17.	Greenwood PD	18	53
18.	Gulfport PD	96	203
19.	Hattiesburg PD	100	116
20.	Indianola PD	7	32
21.	Itawamba SO	6	12
22.	Jackson PD	250	438
23.	Jackson SO	63	68
24.	Jasper SO	15	13
25.	Leake SO	50	12
26.	Leland PD	9	19
27.	Madison SO	50	36
28.	Magnolia PD	1	16
29.	McComb PD	19	35
30.	Meridian PD	16	95
31.	Monroe SO	7	20
32.	Natchez PD	30	55
33.	Neshoba CO	1	13
34.	Newton SO	8	7
35.	Oktibbeha SO	3	18
36.	Panola SO	32	15
37.	Pascagoula PD	31	59
38.	Pearl PD	14	52
39.	Perry SO	0	8
40.	Picayune PD	23	29
41.	Poplarville PD	1	10
42.	Port Gibson PD	5	8
43.	Purvis PD	3	8

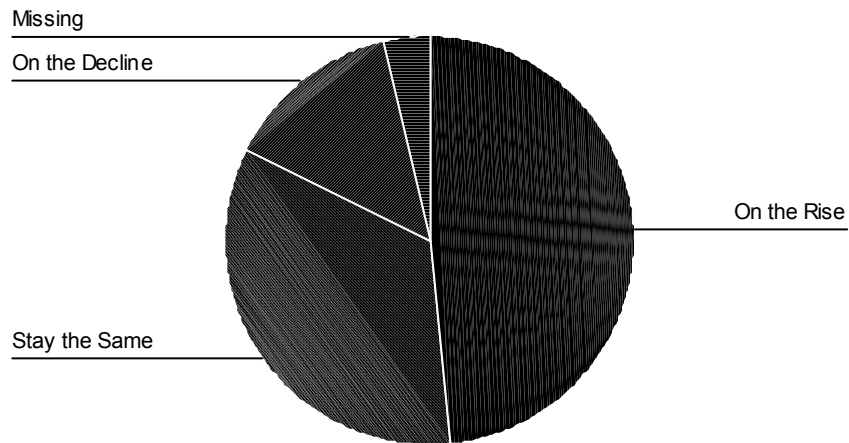
Personnel by Agency (Continued)

44.	Ridgeland PD	29	43
45.	Sunflower PD	0	5
46.	Tippah SO	7	13
47.	Tupelo PD	20	109
48.	Union PD	7	10
49.	Vaiden PD	0	4
50.	Warren SO	11	39
51.	Water Valley PD	7	11
52.	Wayne SO	6	10
53.	West Point PD	7	26
54.	Wiggins PD	8	18
55.	Wilkinson SO	7	10
56.	Winston SO	1	6
Sum		1137	2110
Mean		20	38

Crime Trends and Crime Reporting

Law enforcement executives were asked their opinions about the violent crime trend in their jurisdiction. The majority (50.0%) believed that violent crime was on the rise. Another 35.2% believed that the rate was staying the same. Only a few (14.8%) made the optimistic appraisal that violent crime was on the decline. These percentages are represented graphically in figure 1. There was no significant correlation between opinions about the violent crime trends and agency size as measured by the number of sworn officers employed.

Figure 1
Violent Crime Trend



Homicide and Aggravated Assault counts reported are summarized in Table 2. Five of the responding agencies did not report aggravated assault statistics, only homicides.

Table 2

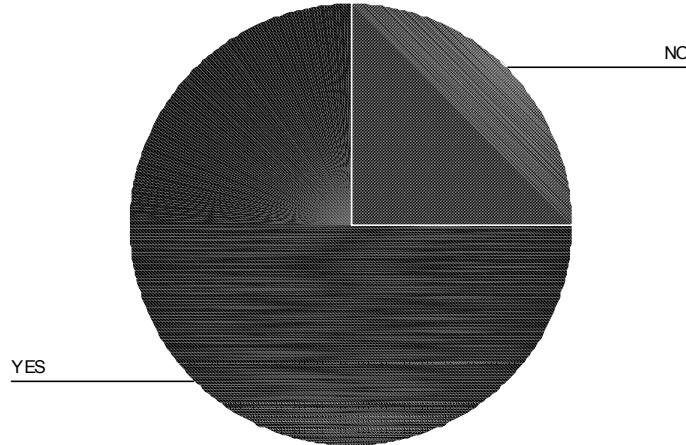
Homicide and Aggravated Assault Counts

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Homicides in 2001	56	0	50	2.43	6.76
Aggravated Assaults in 2001	51	0	163	21.59	30.50
Valid N	51				

Law enforcement executives were also asked whether their agencies participated in the FBI's Uniform Crime Report Program. The majority of respondents (75%) did participate. This percentage is represented graphically in Figure 2.

Figure 2

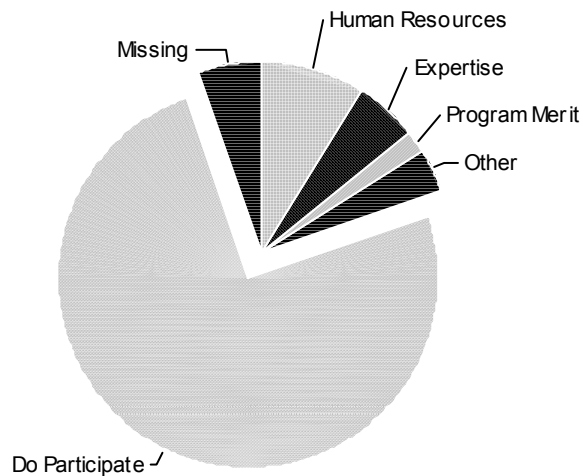
Uniform Crime Report Participation



Respondents were also asked to provide information as to why they did not participate in the Uniform Crime Report. The majority of respondents (75%) did in fact participate in the UCR. The most prevalent reason for not participating in the UCR was a lack of human resources, making up 8.9% of the total responses. The next most common reason for not participating was a lack of expertise on the part of personnel. Only a small fraction of respondents believed that the UCR program had no merit (1.8%). These percentages are depicted graphically in Figure 3.

Figure 3

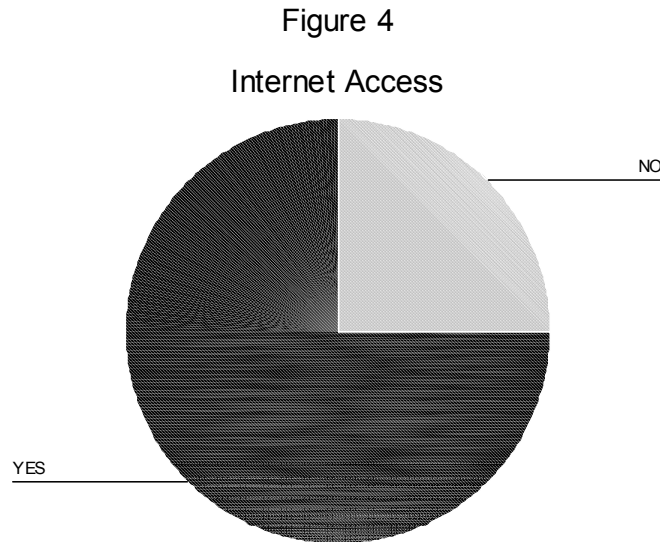
Reason for Not Participating In UCR



Respondents were asked whether their agencies would find training or technical assistance valuable. A large percentage (50%) indicated that training and technical assistance in participating in the UCR would be valuable. Another 48.2% indicated that they were not interested in UCR training and technical assistance. Examination of the open ended question concerning the nature of the desired training revealed that agencies had trouble understanding the FBI's coding scheme and desired training in that regard. Several agencies also indicated that they desired assistance in using computers to automate the UCR reporting process.

Internet Technology

Respondents were asked to indicate whether their agencies had access to internet resources such as the World Wide Web. The majority (75%) indicated that they did have some form of internet access. These percentages are represented graphically in Figure 4.



Respondents were asked to indicate which personnel had this internet access. The overwhelming majority of agencies that had internet access limited that access to administrative and investigative units (51.8%). Only 8.9% of the responding agencies indicated that internet access was provided to all personnel. These percentages are represented graphically in Figure 5.

Respondents were also asked to indicate whether their agencies had a web site. The majority (75%) did not. Respondents were asked to indicate who maintained their site if indeed they had one. Most were maintained by an in house webmaster (20%). Only 5.4% of respondents reported using a private company for web design and maintenance. These percentages are represented graphically in Figure 6.

Figure 5
Who Has Net Access

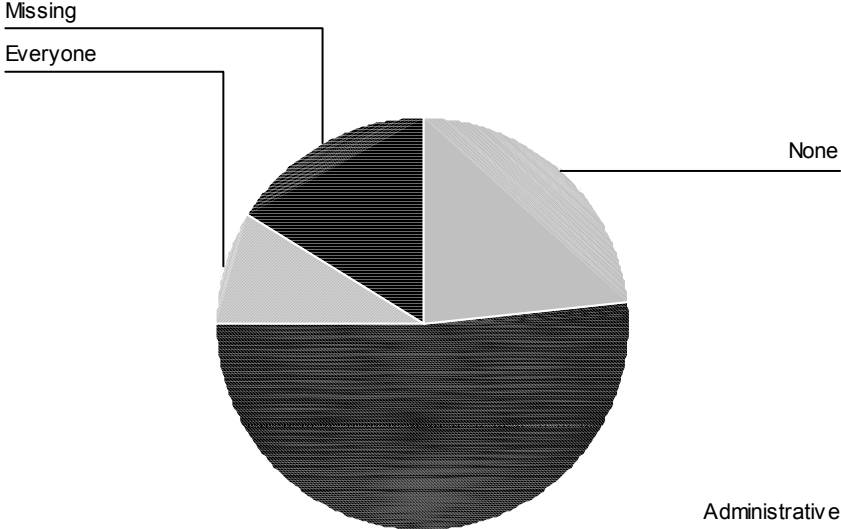
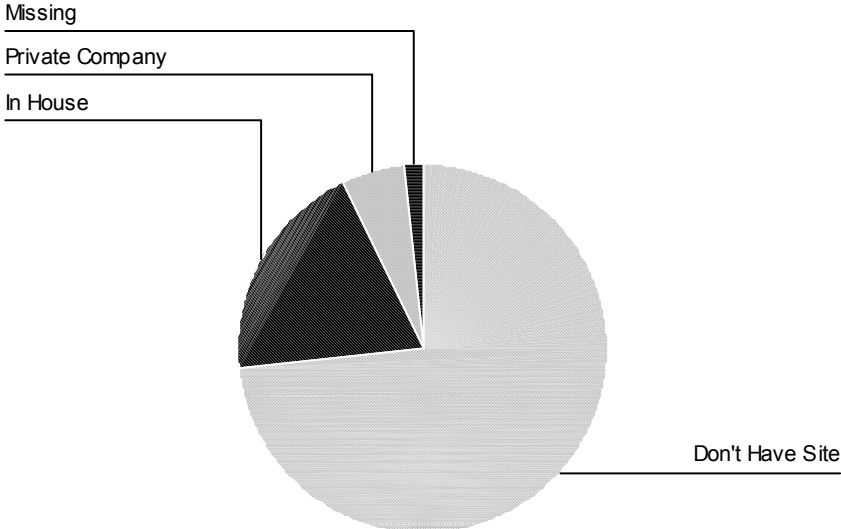


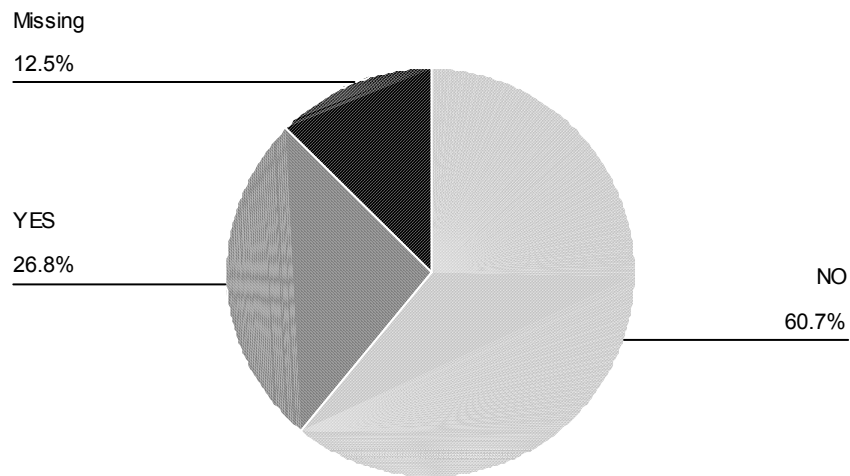
Figure 6
Who Maintains Web Site



Respondents were asked whether their agencies would be interested in receiving training and technical assistance in establishing an internet presence. The majority of respondents indicated that internet technology training was not desired (60.7%). Several departments did, however, express a desire for assistance in developing an internet presence (26.8%). The open-ended questions indicated that assistance in creating a web page was desired by several agencies.

Figure 7

Interested in Internet Training/Assistance



Respondents that indicated they did not use the internet were asked to indicate the primary reason. The vast majority of respondents that did not use the internet cited lack of funding for technology (28.6% of all respondents) as the reason. Close behind lack of funding was a lack of technology training within the agencies (19.6% of all respondents). These percentages are represented graphically in figure 8.

Executives were asked whether their agencies provided E-mail accounts for personnel. Despite the fact that most agencies reported internet access, few offered official E-mail accounts to personnel. These percentages are depicted in Figure 9.

Figure 8
Reason for Not Using Internet

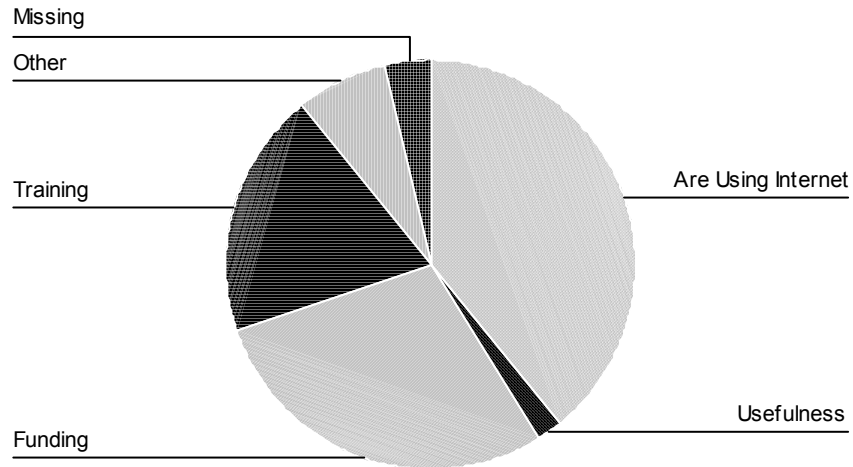
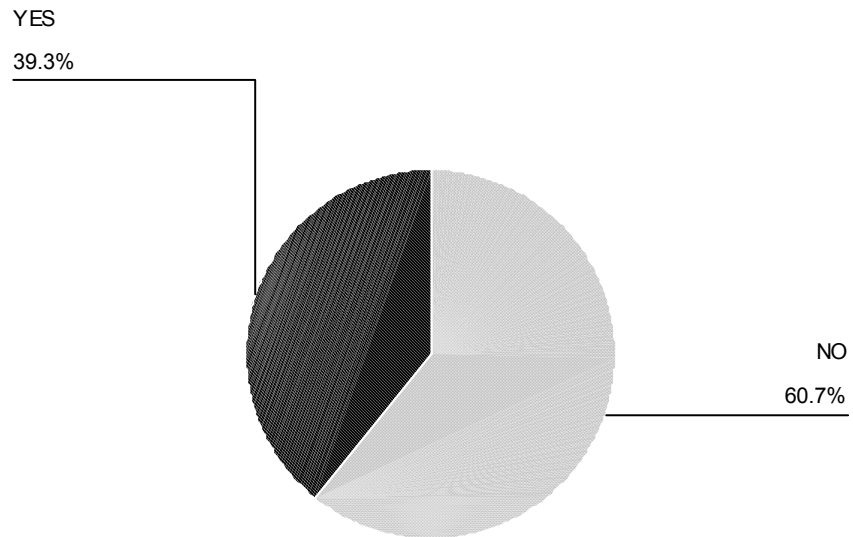
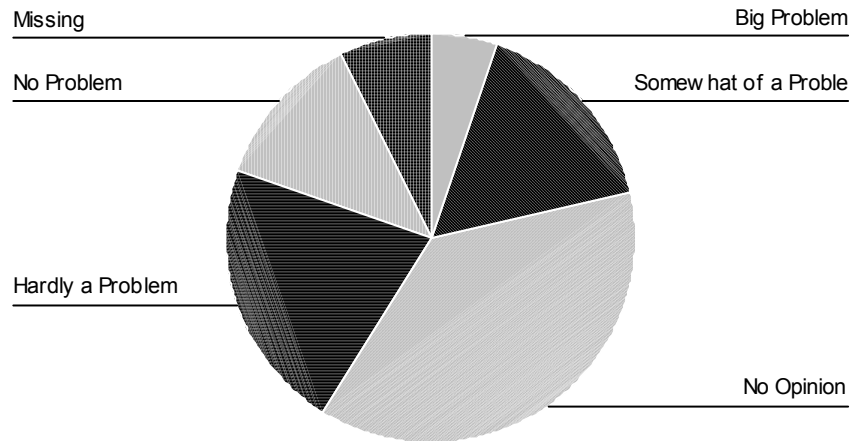


Figure 9
Agency Provides E-mail



Executives were also asked about their opinions on the magnitude of computer crimes in their jurisdiction. The majority (37.5%) indicated having no definite opinion. 21.4% believed that computer crime was hardly a problem as all. Only 5.4% of the law enforcement administrators surveyed believed that computer crime was a big problem in their jurisdiction. These percentages are represented graphically in Figure 10.

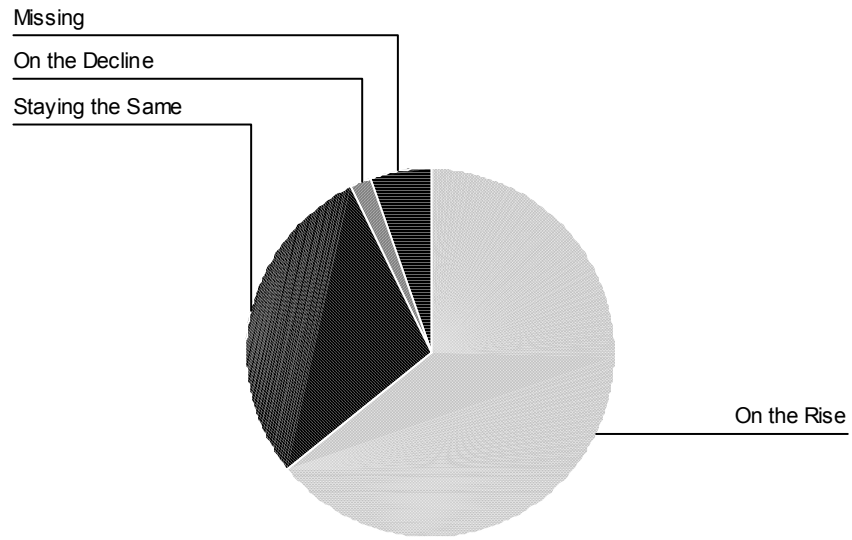
Figure 10
Computer Crime Problem



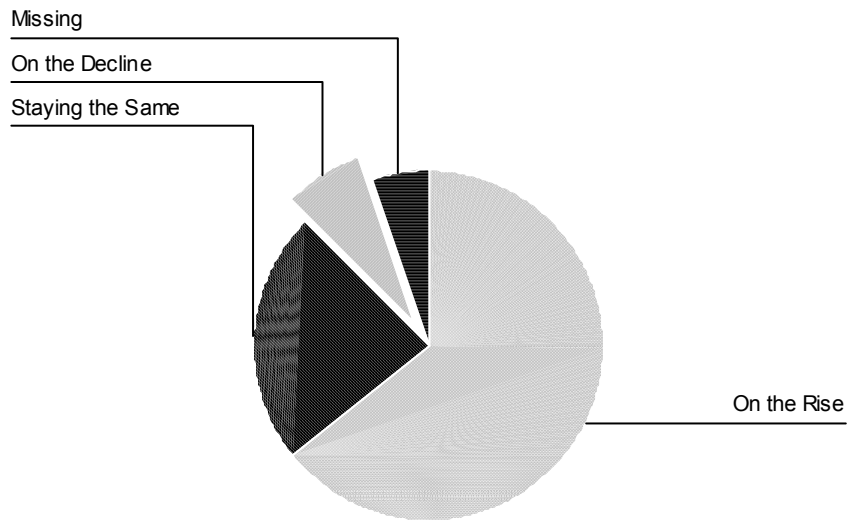
More specifically, executives were asked to assess the trend in *reported* computer crimes within their jurisdictions. The majority (63.4%) believed the reported computer crime was on the rise. 28.6% of respondents believed that reported computer crime was staying the same, while only 1.8% believed that reported computer crime was on the decline. Respondents were also asked about *unreported* computer crime. A few jurisdictions (7.1%) indicated a belief that unreported computer crime is on the decline. These percentages are presented graphically in Figure 11.

Figure 11

Reported Computer Crime Trend



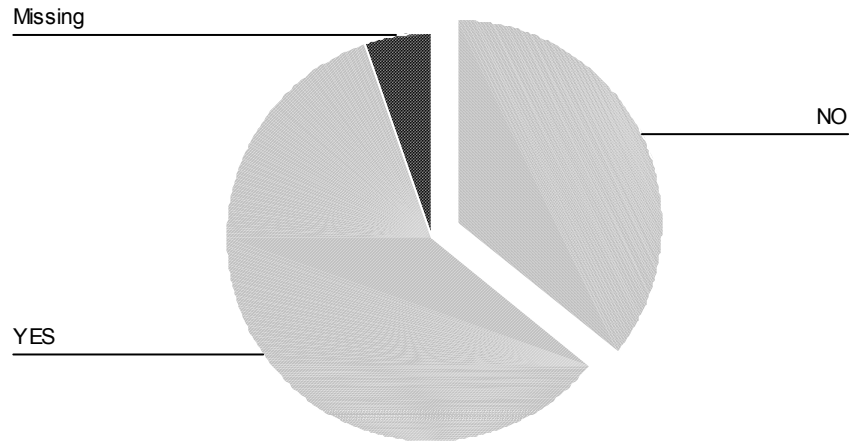
Unreported Computer Crime Trend



The law enforcement executives surveyed were asked whether they were interested in training related to computer crime investigation. The majority (58.9%) indicated that computer crime training would be valuable to their agencies. Only 37.5% indicated that they were not interested in any sort of computer crime training.

Figure 12

Interested in Computer Crime Training

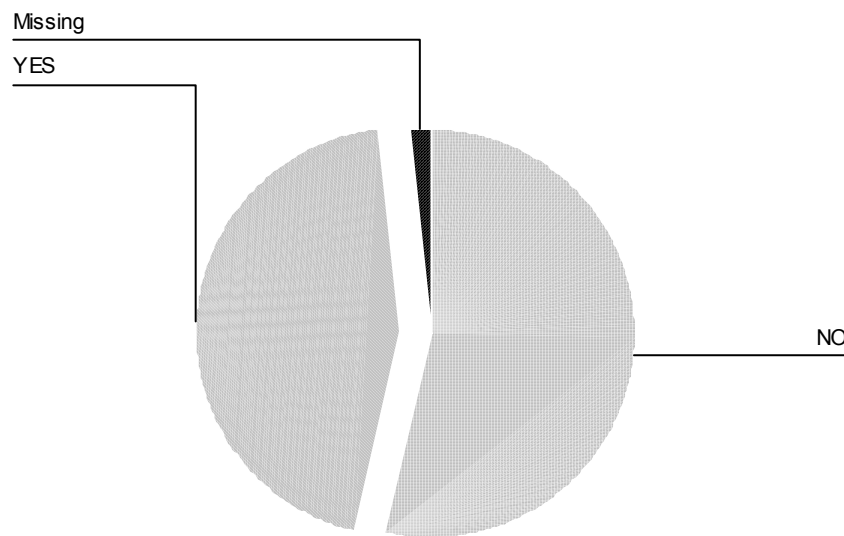


Terrorism

The law enforcement executives surveyed were asked if their departments had a plan in place regarding acts of terrorism. The majority (53.6%) did not have a plan. Slightly under half (44.6%), however, did have a plan. These percentages are depicted in Figure 13.

Figure 13

Has Terrorism Plan



Respondents that indicated they had a plan in place were also asked if their agencies had a plan in place before the events of September 11. Of all the agencies surveyed, 32.1% did not have a plan in place before the September 11 terrorist attacks but have subsequently created one. These percentages are depicted in Figure 14.

Respondents that indicated their agency did not have a plan were asked if they would have one in place in the near future. Of all respondents, 31.2% indicated that they did not have a plan, but were developing one or would begin developing one in the near future. Of all the agencies reporting, 19.6% indicated that they did not have a plan to deal with acts of terrorism nor did they plan to develop one in the near future.

Figure 14

Terrorism Plan Before 09-11-2001

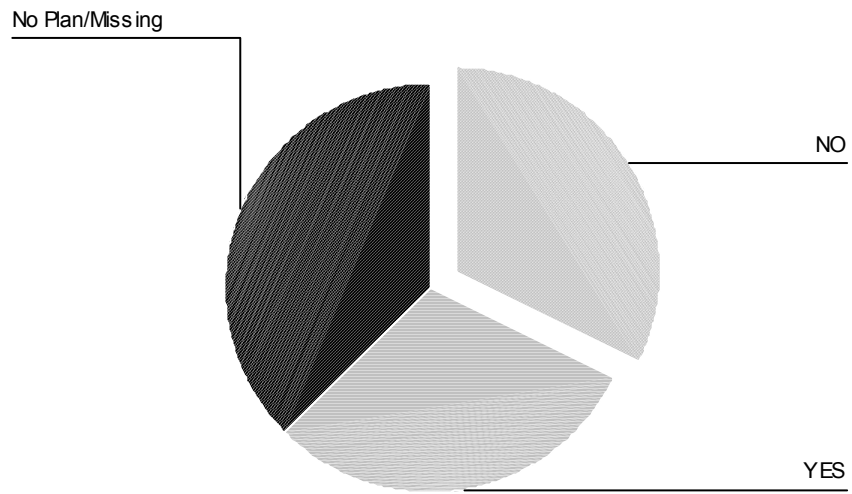
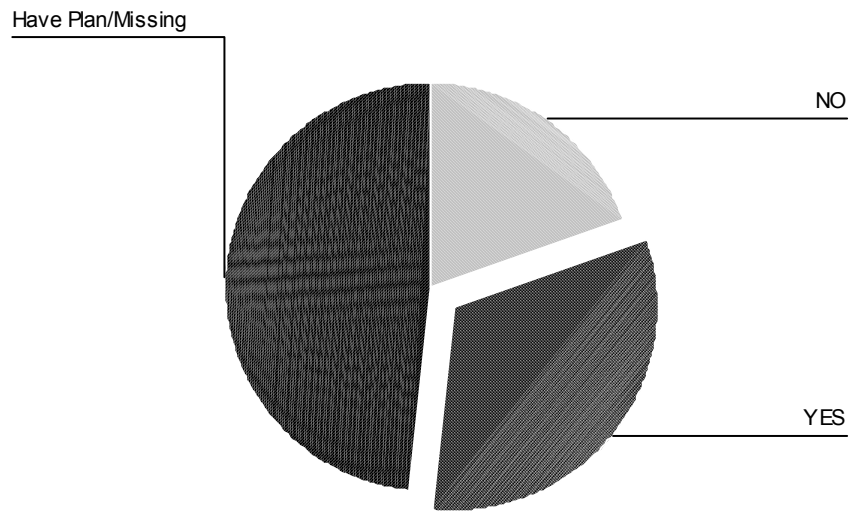


Figure 15

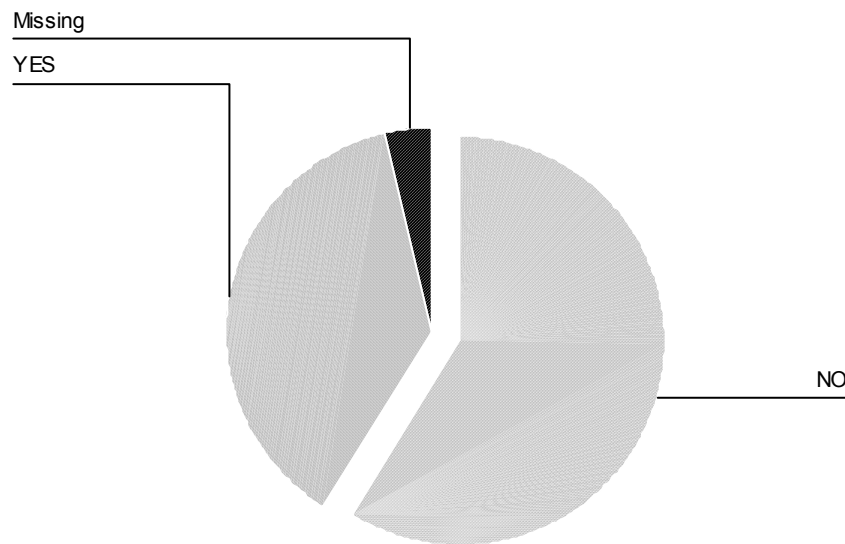
Terrorism Plan In Near Future



Respondents were asked if their agencies had participated in any sort of training concerning terrorism. The majority (58.9%) indicated that their agencies had not received any such of training. Of all responding agencies, 37.5% reported having received some training applicable to acts of terrorism. Examination of the open-ended portion of the question revealed that much of this training was not terrorism specific, but rather generalized training that might be applied to certain types of terrorist acts. S.W.A.T. and hazardous materials training were cited by several agencies.

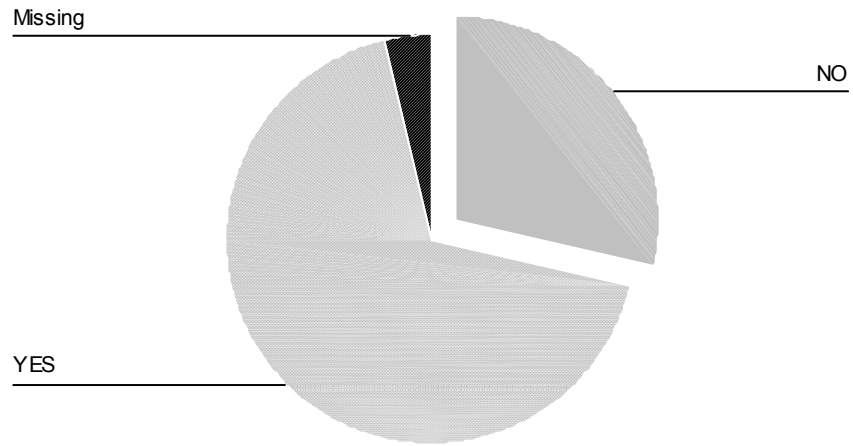
Figure 16

Received Terrorism Training



Respondents were also asked if they were interested in any sort of training regarding acts of terrorism. Of all the training related questions asked of respondents, the desire for counter terrorism training was the closest to universal. Of all respondents, 67.9% indicated that some sort of terrorism training would be valuable to their agencies. Less than a third (28.6%) indicated that they were not interested in any sort of counter terrorism training. These percentages are depicted in Figure 17.

Figure 17
Interested in Terrorism Training



Summary and Conclusions

The subject matter of this study seems diversified at first glance. There is, however, a common thread—information. Crime statistics are important for a variety of reasons. The foremost among these is to grasp what the most serious problems are so that adequate attention can be paid to them and solutions sought. It is indeed unfortunate that Mississippi does not do a better job of providing information to the UCR program. Examining crime patterns and trends is important on the local level, but extends beyond it. Local leaders must remember that they are part of a larger state and federal system. While there is nothing wrong with a certain degree of autonomy, local jurisdictions cannot function in a vacuum; trying to do so does a disservice to community residents. One way that failure to report crime data to the UCR harms communities is that federal funding for local projects may be lost. Most federal grant applications that concern local assistance require the grant writers to include crime information in the grant proposal. Without this information, grants cannot be written successfully.

The results of this study indicate that there is no single reason for Mississippi's poor crime reporting practices. The most often reported reason for nonparticipation was inadequate human resources. Following closely behind lack of human resources was a lack of expertise. These facts suggest that automation and training could improve crime reporting in Mississippi. Many agencies now use computers to automate participation in the UCR program. Training in proper reporting practices, especially when automated systems are utilized seems necessary. The value of such training depends largely on the size of the department in question. Small, rural agencies would benefit from training on how to correctly fill out the paper reporting forms, while larger agencies would benefit more from assistance with automation.

The results of this study suggest that Mississippi is not ready for paperless law enforcement. While the number of internet technology users is large and seems to be growing, there are still several agencies that do not have access to information available on the internet. Any person wishing to reach the entire law enforcement community in Mississippi cannot rely strictly on the internet. Traditional paper based methods must still be used. The results of this study suggest that the single most effective method of closing the "digital divide" among Mississippi's law enforcement community will be technical training.

Education seems to be the key to combating Cybercrime. The majority of law enforcement administrators in Mississippi believe that Cybercrime is on the rise and want training on how to fight it. The majority of respondents suggested that very basic computer skill training is needed. The fact that more agencies were interested in computer crime training specifically than were interested in general training on establishing an internet presence suggests a lack of understanding of how closely related these two concepts are. Indeed, it is impossible to adequately deal with Cybercrime without understanding how the Internet works.

While the findings of this study suggest room from improvement, the state of information technology in Mississippi is not as bad as it may first appear. It must be remembered that most of the agencies responding to this survey are small. A full third (33.9%) of agencies had less than ten sworn officers. Such agencies tend to depend on larger agencies for assistance in dealing with threats such as terrorism and Cybercrime. Only 28 Mississippi municipalities are large enough to be included in the FBI's *Offenses Known to Law Enforcement* table, which requires a population of at least 10,000.