

The National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS): Benefits and Issues

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The National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS): Benefits and Issues

Since 1930, the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI's) Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) program has collected and published nationwide crime statistics. Federal, state, local, and tribal law enforcement agencies voluntarily submit data on reported crimes that occur in their jurisdictions to the FBI. The FBI then compiles this submitted data, publishes reports based on analysis of it, and makes the raw data available so that legislators, researchers, and law enforcement agencies can better understand and address crime in the United States.

The FBI has historically collected crime data from federal, state, local, and tribal law enforcement agencies through a Summary Reporting System (SRS), but more recently introduced the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS). On January 1, 2021, the FBI attempted to fully transition law enforcement agencies from SRS reporting to NIBRS; however, due to many local agencies still having not transitioned to NIBRS, the FBI opted to accept data in either format for 2022 and 2023 submissions. This report provides background on the development and adoption of NIBRS as well as some of the benefits and potential issues related to this change.

The transition to NIBRS is intended to yield many benefits, including improved specificity, more detail, and greater analytical flexibility of national crime data. NIBRS expands the number of crimes for which data are collected from 30 to 81 different offenses. NIBRS also captures details about these crimes that were not previously measured in SRS. For example, NIBRS allows police to report, when known, the relationship between the victim and offender; the types of property damaged or drugs seized; and when applicable, bias motivation (e.g., race, religion, sexual orientation, disability, gender, gender identity). Perhaps the most significant change in NIBRS is the elimination of the hierarchy rule that applied to data collected via SRS. The hierarchy rule required police to report only the most serious offense if an incident included several crimes. For example, if an aggravated assault and a burglary occurred within a single incident, only the aggravated assault was reported to the FBI via SRS. In contrast, NIBRS allows law enforcement to report up to 10 co-occurring offenses per single incident.

There are concerns about how this crime data format transition may affect crime rates, agency participation rates, and access to federal grants. The elimination of the hierarchy rule has raised concerns that counting all crimes that occurred during an incident will make it appear as if crime has increased; however, these concerns may not be warranted in many situations. Across multiple studies that examined the effect of transitioning to NIBRS, none found significant changes in reported crime rates, though they do indicate that reporting in the NIBRS format may have more of an influence on crime rates in smaller or lower-crime jurisdictions. Another concern is that fewer agencies will participate in NIBRS compared to SRS and as a result data quality will suffer. Lower agency participation rates can have consequences for understanding both current levels of crime and trends over time. Policymakers might consider whether to direct the FBI or the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) to examine data gaps and determine where it may be advisable to target resources to increase NIBRS participation.

A final concern relates to federal grants that base funding on UCR crime data. Several federal grants, most notably the Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grants (JAG) program administered by the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA), use UCR crime data to calculate allocations for state, local, and tribal governments. Some stakeholders fear that jurisdictions that struggle with the transition to NIBRS may be denied funds determined by the reported number of crimes if they are unable to report their data to the FBI. As such, BJA and BJS have made efforts to account for the transition to NIBRS when determining certain grant funding allocations.

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Introduction

Since Congress authorized the U.S. Attorney General and Department of Justice (DOJ) to “acquire, collect, classify, and preserve identification, criminal identification, crime, and other records”¹ in 1930, the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s (FBI’s) Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) program has collected nationwide crime data.² Federal, state, local, and tribal law enforcement agencies³ voluntarily submit data about reported crimes that occur in their jurisdictions to the FBI. The FBI then compiles this submitted data, publishes reports based on analysis of it, and makes the data available so that legislators, researchers, and law enforcement agencies can access it to better understand and address crime in the United States. The FBI historically collected crime data for the UCR program from law enforcement agencies through the Summary Reporting System (SRS).

SRS began as a paper-based system in the 1930s and, although it has advanced over time to incorporate more crimes and electronic submissions, its scope remains limited.⁴ SRS captures data in two categories of crimes, labeled Part I and Part II offenses.⁵ There are 10 Part I offenses: 4 violent offenses (criminal homicide, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault), 4 property offenses (burglary, larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft, and arson),⁶ and 2 human trafficking offenses (commercial sex acts and involuntary servitude). Data are collected on the number of Part I offenses reported to police as well as the number of arrests. There are also 20 Part II crimes (e.g., fraud, gambling, drunkenness, vandalism) for which the FBI only collects arrest data.⁷ The SRS classification schema of offenses and associated definitions was intentionally designed to be general enough to be universally applicable across the various jurisdictions of the United States and their respective criminal codes.⁸

NIBRS was developed by the FBI to address several shortcomings of SRS. First, NIBRS expands the number of crimes for which data are collected. NIBRS groups crimes into two categories labeled Group A and Group B offenses. Group A includes 71 offenses in 28 categories and Group B includes 10 offenses. Crimes are further categorized into crimes against persons (e.g., negligent manslaughter), crimes against property (e.g., arson), and crimes against society (e.g., prostitution) based on the presumed victim of the crime (for a complete list of crimes captured in both the SRS and NIBRS programs, see the **Appendix**).⁹ NIBRS also collects details about these crimes that

¹ 28 U.S.C. §534.

² U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, *National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS)*, <https://www.fbi.gov/how-we-can-help-you/more-fbi-services-and-information/ucr/nibrs> (hereinafter, “NIBRS”).

³ This includes university/college police departments that also submit data to the FBI. U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, *UCR Summary of Crime in the Nation, 2023*, p. 21, <https://cde.ucr.cjis.gov/LATEST/webapp/#/pages/explorer/crime/special-reports> (hereinafter, “UCR 2023”).

⁴ NIBRS.

⁵ U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Criminal Justice Information Services Division, Uniform Crime Reporting Program, *Summary Reporting System User Manual*, pp. 20-22 (hereinafter, “SRS User Manual”).

⁶ U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Crime in the U.S. 2019*, <https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2019/crime-in-the-u.s.-2019>.

⁷ Law enforcement agencies were able to report runaways in SRS as a Part II offense, but as of 2009 this was no longer required. The FBI does not report data on runaway offenses, and as a result runaway is not counted as one of the official Part II offenses.

⁸ U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigations, *About the UCR Program*, September 2018, p. 3, <https://le.fbi.gov/file-repository/about-the-ucr-program.pdf/view>.

⁹ U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Criminal Justice Information Services Division, Uniform (continued...)

were not previously captured by SRS. For example, NIBRS allows law enforcement agencies to report for each offense, if known, the relationship between the victim and offender; the types of property damaged or drugs seized; and, when applicable, bias motivation (e.g., race, religion, sexual orientation).¹⁰ It is important to note that NIBRS is intentionally dynamic in structure, with the FBI frequently revising data definitions and adding to data elements based on input from the law enforcement community, task forces, and working groups.¹¹

Perhaps the most significant change from SRS to NIBRS is the elimination of the hierarchy rule that applies to SRS submissions.¹² The hierarchy rule required law enforcement agencies to report only the most serious offense if an incident included several crimes.¹³ For example, if an aggravated assault and a burglary occurred within a single incident, only the aggravated assault was reported to the FBI via SRS. In contrast, NIBRS allows law enforcement to report up to 10 co-occurring offenses per single incident.¹⁴ As a result, the FBI promotes NIBRS data as a more accurate representation of the incidences of various types of crimes committed in the United States compared to SRS data.¹⁵

NIBRS was made available to law enforcement agencies beginning in the late 1980s.¹⁶ During the ensuing years, agencies could report their crime data in either the SRS or NIBRS formats. In 2016, the FBI announced that it would retire the SRS program in January 2021 and only accept NIBRS data.¹⁷ The FBI had estimated that it would take law enforcement agencies between one to two years to convert their record management systems to the NIBRS format.¹⁸ To aid agencies in meeting the January 2021 deadline, federal grants like the Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grants (JAG) allowed grantees to use funds to help cover the cost of conversion. In fact, from FY2018 to FY2020 JAG recipients that were not NIBRS-certified¹⁹ were required to use 3% of any JAG award toward that purpose.²⁰ However, many agencies were not able to transition to NIBRS by the January 2021 deadline, raising concerns about the completeness of the

Crime Reporting Program, *2023.0 National Incident-Based Reporting System User Manual*, June 2023, pp. 9-14 (hereinafter, “*NIBRS User Manual*”).

¹⁰ *NIBRS User Manual*, pp. 78-79.

¹¹ *NIBRS User Manual*, pp. i-vi. For up-to-date releases on NIBRS task forces, working groups, and emerging updates, see the FBI’s quarterly updates published in *UCR Program Quarterly* at <https://le.fbi.gov/informational-tools/ucr/ucr-program-quarterly>.

¹² *NIBRS User Manual*, p. 149.

¹³ *SRS User Manual*, pp. 23-24.

¹⁴ U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, *30 Questions and Answers about NIBRS Transition*, <https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/ucr/30-faqs-about-nibrs-transition-oct-2018.pdf/view>, p. 8 (hereinafter, “*30 Questions*”).

¹⁵ *30 Questions*, p. 9.

¹⁶ See CRS Report RL34309, *How Crime in the United States Is Measured*, by Nathan James and Logan Rishard Council, pp. 9-10.

¹⁷ U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, *The FBI’s Transition to a National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS)-Only Data Collection*, <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/nibrs.pdf>.

¹⁸ *30 Questions*, p. 13.

¹⁹ NIBRS-certified means that the entity submitting NIBRS data met the FBI’s UCR program standards. For more information on the criteria the FBI uses for NIBRS certification, see *NIBRS User Manual*, pp. 142-143.

²⁰ For more information on the JAG program, see CRS In Focus IF10691, *The Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) Program*, by Nathan James.

2021 data.²¹ Thus, the FBI opted to accept both NIBRS and SRS formats for its 2022²² and 2023 UCR crime data submissions.²³ It appears that, as of the cover date of this report, the FBI is still accepting both SRS and NIBRS formats for submissions of 2024 UCR data.²⁴

The most recent data released by the FBI indicate that in 2023, 73.2% of law enforcement agencies reported data to the UCR program in the NIBRS format and 12.0% reported in the SRS format, with the combination of both formats covering about 94.3% of the entire U.S. population.²⁵ These data also indicate that, although there was not full participation in the UCR program, a majority of agencies did report crime data to the FBI. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), as of May 2024, all 50 states plus Washington, DC, are NIBRS-certified. However, the percentage of law enforcement agencies submitting NIBRS data in each state ranges from 11% to 100%.²⁶ This report discusses the expected benefits of the NIBRS program as well as possible sources of concern.

The National Crime Statistics Exchange (NCS-X)

In 2013, the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) and FBI partnered to launch the NCS-X, “an initiative to develop a statistical system of incident-based data, on crimes reported to law enforcement, to generate nationally representative estimates of the volume and characteristics of crimes.”²⁷ Because the FBI has yet to achieve full participation in UCR or NIBRS, crime rates and statistics are bound by the available data. This is not an uncommon issue and statisticians frequently use data from a subset, or sample, of a population to generate estimates about the full population.²⁸ Statistics calculated using a sample of a population are referred to as *estimates*. The NCS-X is designed to incorporate incident-based crime data from a stratified random sample of 400 additional law enforcement agencies reporting to NIBRS to generate national crime estimates of the volume and characteristics of crimes.²⁹ It is important to note that because crime reporting has always been voluntary for state and local law enforcement, the FBI and BJS have long used estimation procedures to fill gaps in the submitted data, even with SRS data, to infer national crime rates based on data submitted by participating agencies.³⁰ Estimates

²¹ U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Estimates Will Help Fill in Crime Statistics Gap: Transition to NIBRS crime statistics ongoing,” press release, August 11, 2022, <https://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/estimates-will-help-fill-in-crime-statistics-gap-081122>.

²² U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, “FBI Releases 2022 Crime in the Nation Statistics,” press release, October 16, 2023, <https://www.fbi.gov/news/press-releases/fbi-releases-2022-crime-in-the-nation-statistics>.

²³ U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, “FBI Releases 2023 Crime in the Nation Statistics,” press release, September 23, 2024, <https://www.fbi.gov/news/press-releases/fbi-releases-2023-crime-in-the-nation-statistics>.

²⁴ This is based on a recently published FBI report on arson offenses from 2015-2024 that states that both SRS and NIBRS data were used in the analyses. See U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Arson Offenses: 2015-2024*, June 2025, p. 1, <https://cde.ucr.cjis.gov/LATEST/webapp/#/pages/explorer/crime/special-reports>.

²⁵ The remaining 14.8% of law enforcement agencies did not report any data to the UCR program. *UCR 2023*, p. 2.

²⁶ U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS), 2024, <https://bjs.ojp.gov/national-incident-based-reporting-system-nibrs>.

²⁷ U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, “National Crime Statistics Exchange (NCS-X),” <https://bjs.ojp.gov/programs/national-crime-statistics-exchange> (hereinafter, “NCS-X”).

²⁸ Christian Heumann and Michael Schomaker Shalabh, *Introduction to Statistics and Data Analysis* (Springer International Publishing Switzerland, 2016), p. 181 (hereinafter, “*Introduction to Statistics and Data Analysis*”).

²⁹ For more detailed information on the sampling technique employed by NCS-X, see <https://bjs.ojp.gov/programs/national-crime-statistics-exchange#2-0>.

³⁰ Marcus Berzofsky et al., *Estimation Procedures for Crimes in the United States Based on NIBRS Data*, Bureau of Justice Statistics and Federal Bureau of Investigation, August 2022, p. 3, <https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/epcusnibrsd.pdf>.

such as these are subject to error arising from sample characteristics (i.e., differences between the obtained sample value and true population value) and other issues such as erroneous reports.³¹

Benefits of NIBRS

According to the FBI, the transition to NIBRS will provide insight into “when and where crime takes place, what form it takes, and the characteristics of its victims and perpetrators” with a level of precision not possible with SRS data.³² For example, NIBRS captures a larger variety of crimes than SRS (see the **Appendix**).³³ NIBRS also collects more details about each incident that were not previously included in SRS data (e.g., the time of day and the relationship between the victim and offender).³⁴ Further, NIBRS allows users to distinguish between completed and attempted crimes.³⁵ NIBRS also expands the *hotel rule* to include storage facilities and revised its guidance on reporting burglaries of hotel rooms and storage units.³⁶ Prior to the revision, the hotel rule stated, “If a number of units under a single manager are the object of a Burglary and the manager, rather than the individual tenants/renters, will most likely report the offenses to the police, the agency should report the Burglary to the FBI’s UCR Program as a single incident.”³⁷ Under the updated rule, law enforcement should report an offense at a qualifying location as a single incident against a single object while also recording the number of units affected.

As discussed previously, perhaps the most significant change between SRS and NIBRS that affects how crimes are counted is the elimination of the hierarchy rule. Under this rule, when a law enforcement agency reported data about a given incident to SRS, in almost all cases it was only able to report one offense per incident.³⁸ If multiple offenses occurred within a single incident, only the most serious crime (per the SRS hierarchy) was reported to the FBI.³⁹ This rule likely stemmed from the constraints of data collection when SRS was still a paper-based reporting system. The effect of the hierarchy rule has been to undercount the number of offenses that become known to law enforcement agencies.⁴⁰ NIBRS does not apply the hierarchy rule to agency data and allows law enforcement agencies to report up to 10 co-occurring offenses per

³¹ For more information see CRS Report RL34309, *How Crime in the United States Is Measured*, by Nathan James and Logan Rishard Council, pp. 26-27.

³² U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Benefits of NIBRS Participation*, https://ucr.fbi.gov/nibrs/2016/resource-pages/benefits-of-nibrs-participation-2016_final.pdf (hereinafter “*Benefits*”).

³³ Many resources about the benefits of NIBRS cite the expansion of the definition of rape to include both male and female victims. NIBRS included this expanded definition from its inception, though in 2013 SRS also expanded its definition of rape to the following: “Penetration, no matter how slight, of the vagina or anus with any body part or object, or oral penetration by a sex organ of another person, without the consent of the victim.”

³⁴ *NIBRS*.

³⁵ *NIBRS*.

³⁶ *NIBRS User Manual*, p. 19.

³⁷ *NIBRS User Manual*, p. 19.

³⁸ *SRS User Manual*. There are a few exceptions to the hierarchy rule. Arson and both forms of human trafficking are always counted regardless of whether multiple offenses occurred (p. 23). Motor vehicle theft is a special case of larceny-theft, and is therefore counted in a separate category (pp. 25-26). Justifiable homicide, “by definition, occurs in conjunction with another offense(s). Therefore, the crime being committed when the justifiable homicide took place is reported as a separate offense.” (p. 30).

³⁹ *Benefits*.

⁴⁰ *Benefits*.

single incident.⁴¹ There has been some concern that the elimination of the hierarchy rule may make it appear as if there has been a large increase in crime; however, present data do not support this conclusion (see more discussion of this in the “Transition to NIBRS Influencing Crime Rates” section).

The Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) has outlined several additional benefits of NIBRS for crime victims.⁴² First, the elimination of the hierarchy rule is expected to reveal information on co-occurring victimizations. With SRS data, it was not possible to study incidents involving multiple offenses perpetrated against the same victim or victims. NIBRS also allows for improved examination of incidents involving multiple offenders. Data on co-offenders might allow law enforcement and criminologists to better understand juvenile offenders, who are more likely than adults to offend in groups, due in part to adolescents being much more susceptible to peer influence than their adult counterparts.⁴³ In addition, NIBRS collects information about weapons used by offenders (e.g., firearm, automatic rifle, knife/cutting instrument, motor vehicle) that was not included in SRS data.⁴⁴ Collecting this type of data may aid law enforcement initiatives and inform legislation regarding weapons used during the commission of a crime. Collection of more granular crime data, including victim demographics and bias motivation, may help in developing better victim services programs. NIBRS collects data on the age of victims, whether the offense was cleared (e.g., a suspect was arrested), as well as the relationship between the victim and offender.⁴⁵ NIBRS also allows agencies to identify up to five co-occurring bias motivations per offense type when a crime appears to be driven by an offender’s biases.⁴⁶ The measured biases include race/ethnicity/ancestry, religion, sexual orientation, disability, gender, and gender identity. Each of these data elements may prove vital for compliance with the Hate Crime Statistics Act (P.L. 101-275), which requires the Attorney General to collect and report data from local law enforcement on hate crime incidents in the country each year. Under the SRS format, agencies had to report hate crimes separately from their general crime data, whereas with NIBRS bias motivation is a standard data element that can be reported for each criminal incident to which it applies.⁴⁷

Although domestic violence offenses such as intimate partner violence and certain elder abuse offenses are not listed as Group A or Group B offenses, the data on victim-offender relationships will allow researchers and law enforcement agencies to examine these types of offenses. NIBRS data can be filtered by age, sex, race, weapon, location, and offense type, as well as by the following victim-offender relationships: spouse, parent/step-parent, sibling/step-sibling, child/step-child, grandparent, grandchild, in-law, boyfriend/girlfriend, child of boyfriend/girlfriend, homosexual relationship, ex-spouse, and other family member.⁴⁸ These data permit more precise analyses, such as identifying common correlates or predictors of domestic violence or elder abuse, which is not possible using SRS data. This precision may, in turn, help

⁴¹ 30 Questions, p. 9.

⁴² U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office for Victims of Crime, *Eight Benefits of NIBRS to Victim Service Provides*, <https://ovc.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh226/files/pubs/NIBRS/index.html>.

⁴³ Sally-Ann Ashton and Anna Bussu. “The Social Dynamics of Adolescent Co-Offending.” *Youth Justice* 23, no. 3 (December 2023): 350–71. U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, National Institute of Justice, *Co-Offending and Patterns of Juvenile Crime*, December 2005, <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/210360.pdf>, p. ii.

⁴⁴ *NIBRS User Manual*, p. 93.

⁴⁵ *NIBRS User Manual*, pp. 119, 67, and 150.

⁴⁶ *NIBRS User Manual*, pp. 78-79.

⁴⁷ See CRS Report R46318, *Federal Data on Hate Crimes in the United States*, by Nathan James and Nathan Kemper.

⁴⁸ See the EZANIBRS system for an example of these filters at <https://www.ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/ezanibrsdv/asp/selection.asp>.

develop more-targeted policies or intervention strategies. However, many crimes are often unreported or underreported and, as a result, the National Crime Victimization Survey is an essential source of information about crimes that are not reported to the police.⁴⁹

National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS)

BJS administers the NCVS, which captures information about criminal victimization in the United States.⁵⁰ The NCVS is not a part of UCR data collection, but the survey addresses important gaps in the understanding of crime in the United States. The NCVS is conducted via interviews with a subset (i.e., sample) of the population about the nature of any criminal victimizations (i.e., frequency, characteristics, and consequences) they may have experienced. This interview-based methodology enables the NCVS to collect data on crimes both reported and unreported to law enforcement. The survey provides key information about crime, including crimes that were not reported to law enforcement.⁵¹ Thus, the NCVS is a valuable data source in addition to UCR when examining the totality of crime in the United States.⁵² As with the NCS-X, NCVS statistics generated via sampling procedures are subject to error arising from the nature of the sample and the participants.⁵³

Potential Issues Related to the NIBRS Transition

Transition to NIBRS Influencing Crime Rates

As noted earlier, the elimination of the hierarchy rule has raised concerns that using NIBRS data to calculate crime rates might give the false impression that crime has increased. In particular, reporting all crimes that occurred during an incident, as opposed to only reporting the most serious crime, may lead to a perception that crime rates have worsened rather than that the reporting of crime is now more complete. However, these concerns may not be warranted. First, the transition to NIBRS has not occurred all at once. The adoption of NIBRS has been gradual and geographically diffuse, and all states have at least one agency already submitting NIBRS data to the FBI. Although the FBI's annual UCR crime report, "Crime in the United States," continued to use data submitted in the SRS format up through the 2023 release,⁵⁴ the FBI has also produced specialized reports using NIBRS data at the national level and for individual states.⁵⁵ These FBI publications and local reports from agencies that have been collecting NIBRS format data for longer periods may provide agencies with baselines for comparison about how adopting NIBRS may influence their crime data.

Multiple studies have demonstrated that transitioning to NIBRS did not result in significant increases in reported crime rates. The first study, published by BJS in 2000, included 1,131 law

⁴⁹ Darlene Hutchinson, *Fewer than Half of Victims Report Violent Crimes*, U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, December 14, 2017, <https://www.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh241/files/archives/blogs-2017/2017-blog-ncvs.htm>.

⁵⁰ The NCVS dashboard (N-DASH) provides an interface to interact with NCVS data via custom charts and tables. See <https://ncvs.bjs.ojp.gov/Home>.

⁵¹ U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Criminal Victimization, 2023*, Summary, September 2024.

⁵² See CRS Report RL34309, *How Crime in the United States Is Measured*, by Nathan James and Logan Rishard Council, pp. 17-31.

⁵³ See CRS Report RL34309, *How Crime in the United States Is Measured*, by Nathan James and Logan Rishard Council, pp. 26-27.

⁵⁴ *UCR 2023*.

⁵⁵ For example, see U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Violence Against American Indian or Alaska Native Females: 2021-2023*, <https://cde.ucr.cjis.gov/LATEST/webapp/#/pages/explorer/crime/special-reports>.

enforcement agencies.⁵⁶ The study compared the crime rates calculated using SRS data (i.e., with the hierarchy rule in place and hotel rule not applied to storage facilities) to those obtained using NIBRS data and found, on average, a 2% increase in the overall crime rate. The murder rate remained unchanged, which was to be expected as it is at the top of the SRS hierarchy. Rape, robbery, and aggravated assault rates increased, on average, less than 1% when using NIBRS data. The largest changes were observed in larceny and motor vehicle theft rates (3.4% and 4.5% higher, respectively). These increases were likely attributable to the absence of a hierarchy rule.⁵⁷ The burglary rate was, on average, 0.5% lower in NIBRS (the authors credited this shift to changes in the hotel rule).⁵⁸ The study also compared the influence of NIBRS in jurisdictions with varying levels of crime. The results of the study indicated that jurisdictions with relatively high crime rates may not observe significant changes, but transitioning to NIBRS may have more of an influence in smaller or lower-crime jurisdictions. For instance, the Baltimore Police Department conducted a direct comparison of their own agency data between NIBRS and SRS formats for calendar year 2024 and found a similar pattern of differences to those observed by BJS (with the noticeable difference that Baltimore's NIBRS data produced a burglary count 4.7% *higher* than SRS data).⁵⁹ In contrast to these findings, according to the authors of the BJS study:

a jurisdiction that experienced in a year two robberies, one of which was in conjunction with a murder, would count one robbery under Summary UCR and two under NIBRS. Though the actual count differed by one, the percent difference was 100%. Such jurisdictions should rely on the actual numbers rather than percent differences to express changes in measurement or over time.⁶⁰

A second study investigating the impact of transitioning from SRS reporting to NIBRS reporting was published by the FBI in 2014.⁶¹ This study examined data from the 6,299 agencies that reported in the NIBRS format in 2014 and compared the difference in national-level crime rates that resulted from the application or elimination of the hierarchy rule. Overall, the calculated national crime rate⁶² increased by 2.1% when comparing NIBRS to SRS, which was attributed to the joint influence of the elimination of the hierarchy rule and the ability to report co-occurring offenses.⁶³ This study found the following differences in offense-specific crime rates when comparing NIBRS to SRS: less than a 0.1% increase for rape, a 0.6% increase for robbery and aggravated assault, a 1.0% increase for burglary, a 2.6% increase for larceny, and a 2.7% increase for motor vehicle theft. This is consistent with the results reported in the BJS study. These results indicate that, on average, crime rates may increase, but by relatively small percentages, during the transition from SRS to NIBRS. The type of offenses in which increases appear to be the largest is property crimes.

⁵⁶ U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report, *Effects of NIBRS on Crime Statistics*, July 2000, p. 2 (hereinafter, "BJS, *Effects of NIBRS on Crime Statistics*").

⁵⁷ BJS, *Effects of NIBRS on Crime Statistics*, pp. 7-8.

⁵⁸ BJS, *Effects of NIBRS on Crime Statistics*, p. 5.

⁵⁹ Baltimore Police Department, "National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS)," press release, 2025, <https://www.baltimorepolice.org/nibrs#:~:text=Is%20there%20a%20maximum%20number,recorded%20per%20incident%20under%20NIBRS>.

⁶⁰ BJS, *Effects of NIBRS on Crime Statistics*, p. 3.

⁶¹ U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigations, Uniform Crime Report, *Effect of NIBRS on Crime Statistics*, Executive Summary, 2014 (hereinafter, "FBI, *Effect of NIBRS on Crime Statistics*").

⁶² This was calculated using the total counts for murder, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny, and motor vehicle theft.

⁶³ FBI, *Effect of NIBRS on Crime Statistics*.

More comparatively recent studies conducted by academic researchers have found similar results. One study compared a sample of SRS and NIBRS data from a subset of states that reported complete NIBRS data in 2019. The researcher found that, compared to NIBRS, SRS reporting tended to undercount instances of gun violence.⁶⁴ The author of the study goes on to say:

Contrary to prior studies, underestimation of gun violence in the SRS may be substantial.... In particular, the difference in measuring gun violence is primarily due to underreporting of aggravated assaults with a firearm in the SRS. While the hierarchy rule suppression contributes to the underreporting, it is not the primary source of the increase in NIBRS aggravated assaults with a firearm.⁶⁵

Thus, other changes related to the transition to NIBRS beyond elimination of the hierarchy rule (e.g., reporting of weapon used during offense if applicable) may contribute to NIBRS providing more accurate crime data than SRS. A relatively recent review of the relevant scientific literature from the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) Bibliography of Data-related Literature arrived at similar conclusions regarding the influence of the transition to NIBRS on crime rates and reinforced the notable benefits of increased accuracy and richness in detail compared to SRS reporting.⁶⁶

Taken together, these results suggest that NIBRS does not significantly alter crime rates at the national level, but individual local agencies, especially in low-crime areas, may see notable increases in the reported numbers and rates of some offenses due to low base rates of crime. There are strategies law enforcement can use to help the public understand NIBRS data, and any related crime rate increases, in their proper context. One strategy is to present the raw counts of criminal offenses alongside percentages. This way, the public may better understand that a large percentage increase does not necessarily indicate a significant uptick in the frequency of crime.⁶⁷ Another strategy is for law enforcement agencies to present several years of data in both NIBRS and SRS formats to demonstrate how crime rates would have looked using both methods.⁶⁸ This approach may “demonstrate what the trend of crime rates would look like if the agency was still only reporting in the SRS. The converted data could help soften and explain the appearance of increased crime while lending even more transparency to the agency’s crime reporting to the public.”⁶⁹

Agency Participation

Another concern is that because of the increased burden on law enforcement agencies to report NIBRS data, fewer agencies will participate in NIBRS compared to SRS, and as a result data quality will suffer. As of 2024, every state as well as Washington, DC, was NIBRS-certified. Although all states had at least one law enforcement agency that participated in NIBRS, many agencies have not made the switch. Lower agency participation can have consequences for both understanding crime in a given year and longitudinal analyses. Despite these concerns, NIBRS participation has increased since the FBI made the official change in reporting procedures in

⁶⁴ Susan T. Parker, “Measuring gun violence in police data sources: transitioning to NIBRS,” *Injury Epidemiology*, vol. 9, no. 1 (May 2, 2022).

⁶⁵ Susan T. Parker, “Measuring gun violence in police data sources: transitioning to NIBRS,” *Injury Epidemiology*, vol. 9, no. 1 (May 2, 2022), p. 10.

⁶⁶ S. Burchart, “US Crime Statistics and the Transition to More Nuanced Offense Data.” Research Spotlight. Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research, November 2, 2023.

⁶⁷ FBI, *Effect of NIBRS on Crime Statistics*, p. 1.

⁶⁸ FBI, *Effect of NIBRS on Crime Statistics*, p. 1.

⁶⁹ FBI, *Effect of NIBRS on Crime Statistics*, p. 14

2021, with the percentage of the U.S. population covered by NIBRS agencies increasing from 76.9% in 2022 to 83.1% 2023 (or put another way, from 70.4% of law enforcement agencies participating in NIBRS in 2022 compared to 73.2% of law enforcement agencies in 2023).⁷⁰ It is worth noting though that this year-over-year increase in NIBRS population coverage of 8.1% was comparatively more modest than the previous year-over-year increase of 18.7% (from 64.8% population coverage in 2021 to 76.9% in 2022, or 62.7% of agencies in 2021 to 70.4% of agencies in 2022).⁷¹

Policymakers might consider whether to direct the FBI or BJS to examine where data gaps exist and whether they systemically vary by categories such as public safety budgets or rurality. As of May 2024, there were just three states with fewer than 50% of their agencies reporting NIBRS to the UCR program—Florida (18%), New York (31%), and Pennsylvania (11%).⁷² If these jurisdictions do not increase their participation in NIBRS now that SRS is being actively phased out, there may be a significant loss of information about crime in these states at the national level when the FBI no longer accepts SRS submissions. Identifying these gaps is important not only for appropriately gauging the reliability of conclusions drawn from NIBRS data, but also for determining where it may be desirable to target resources to increase NIBRS participation.

One barrier to participation in NIBRS could be the cost of setting up more complex data infrastructure and training staff in the appropriate technology. The transition may be especially difficult for smaller, or lower funded, agencies to achieve. In its most recent census of state and local law enforcement agencies, as of June 2018, BJS estimated there to be about 17,541 state and local law enforcement agencies in the United States, and the sizes of these agencies vary widely from employing 1 to thousands of full-time sworn officers.⁷³ Small agencies employing 24 or fewer full-time sworn officers are the most common at 69% of all state and local law enforcement agencies.⁷⁴ These smaller agencies may struggle to find the financial and technical resources to implement NIBRS, which often involves contracting a private vendor to overhaul the agency's electronic record management system (RMS) to match NIBRS specifications.⁷⁵ For example, an initial cost estimate for setting up NIBRS in Anderson, SC, a town with approximately 27,000 residents and 100 sworn police officers, ranged from \$130,000 to \$200,000.⁷⁶ These costs may be too high for many agencies and, as such, the FBI encourages smaller agencies to work together on solutions that pool resources or to coordinate with larger agencies to report on their behalf.⁷⁷

⁷⁰ *UCR 2023*.

⁷¹ U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, *UCR Summary of Crim in the Nation, 2022*, <https://cde.ucr.cjis.gov/LATEST/webapp/#/pages/explorer/crime/special-reports>, p. 2.

⁷² Bureau of Justice Statistics, "National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS)," accessed June 26, 2025, <https://bjs.ojp.gov/national-incident-based-reporting-system-nibrs>.

⁷³ For their census of state and local law enforcement agencies, BJS utilized the Law Enforcement Agency Roster (LEAR) database as their population of agencies to contact. LEAR includes the following types of agencies: local, county, regional, tribal, and special jurisdiction police departments, as well as sheriffs' offices (note that federal agencies are not included here). Andrea M. Gardner and Kevin M. Scott, *Census of State and Local Law Enforcement Agencies, 2018 – Statistical Tables*, Bureau of Justice Statistics, October 2022, pp. 1, 15, <https://bjs.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh236/files/media/document/csllea18st.pdf>, (hereinafter, *Census of Law Enforcement*).

⁷⁴ *Census of Law Enforcement*, p. 8.

⁷⁵ *NIBRS User Manual*, p. 152.

⁷⁶ U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Statistics Exchange, *Estimating Costs for Transitioning to the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS)*, https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/Local%20Agency%20-%20Estimating%20Cost%20for%20Transitioning%20to%20NIBRS_01232017.pdf.

⁷⁷ *30 Questions*, p. 12.

Access to Federal Grants

A final concern relates to federal grants that base funding on crime data reported to UCR. Several federal grants, most notably the JAG program, use UCR crime data to calculate allocations for state, local, and tribal governments. The JAG program funds criminal justice initiatives in all 50 states as well as the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam, the Virgin Islands, American Samoa, and the Northern Mariana Islands.⁷⁸ JAG funds are allocated using a statutorily defined formula.⁷⁹ Fifty percent of a state's JAG allocation is based on its share of the national population and the other half on the number of violent crimes (i.e., homicide, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault) reported to the FBI⁸⁰—specifically, “the state’s respective share of the average number of reported violent crimes in the United States for the three most recent years for which data are available.”⁸¹ Thus, there has been concern that agencies that are not yet NIBRS-certified could be denied funds determined by the reported number of violent crimes due to gaps in reporting during the transition period. In acknowledgment of this concern, BJA added the NIBRS set-aside requirement to JAG grants discussed earlier in this report. As stated by BJA, “the 3 percent requirement will assist state and local jurisdictions in working toward compliance, to ensure they continue to have critical criminal justice funding available through JAG when SRS is replaced by NIBRS in FY2021.”⁸² More recently, BJS, the agency that assists with calculating JAG allocations, addressed this potential concern in their methodology for the FY2023 JAG program. Namely, if a state had gaps in its violent crime estimates due to the transitioning to NIBRS midway through a year, “BJS prioritized complete years of data over partial years of data when calculating the local award allocations, only using partial years of data when no complete data were available.”⁸³ These represent efforts to avoid penalizing agencies that are in the process of transitioning to NIBRS.

Conclusion

Though there are valid concerns regarding the transition from SRS to NIBRS (e.g., gaps in national data while some agencies are still transitioning), the apparent consensus across the FBI,⁸⁴ BJS,⁸⁵ and researchers in criminal justice⁸⁶ is that NIBRS is an overall improvement over the previous SRS format. Indeed, none of the issues with NIBRS discussed in this report are concerns with the data format itself, but rather collateral problems that could arise with the transition

⁷⁸ See CRS In Focus IF10691, *The Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) Program*, by Nathan James.

⁷⁹ 34 U.S.C. §10156.

⁸⁰ See CRS In Focus IF10691, *The Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) Program*, by Nathan James and CRS Infographic IG10079, *The Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) Program*, by Nathan James.

⁸¹ See CRS In Focus IF10691, *The Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) Program*, by Nathan James.

⁸² U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Edward Byrne Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) Program Factsheet*, p.2, <https://bja.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh186/files/publications/2018-JAG-Fact-Sheet.pdf>. As discussed earlier in this report, the FBI allowed law enforcement agencies that were not yet NIBRS compliant to submit SRS data in 2022 and 2023.

⁸³ Lizabeth Remrey and Alexia Cooper, *Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) Program, 2023*, Bureau of Justice Statistics, August 2024, p. 12, <https://bjs.ojp.gov/document/jagp23.pdf>.

⁸⁴ FBI, *Effect of NIBRS on Crime Statistics*.

⁸⁵ BJS, *Effects of NIBRS on Crime Statistics*.

⁸⁶ S. Burchart, “US Crime Statistics and the Transition to More Nuanced Offense Data.” Research Spotlight. Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research, November 2, 2023.

process *away* from SRS (e.g., potential misinterpretation of crime rates based on previous rates). Furthermore, the FBI appears receptive to input from stakeholders on how to improve NIBRS data collection, meaning that it appears there is some room to address any issues that may arise. Certainly, NIBRS crime data holds a great deal of promise for increasing understanding of the complexity and nuance behind crime in the United States.⁸⁷

Congress could consider various issues. As discussed in the “Agency Participation” section, there is still variability in the degree to which some states have transitioned to NIBRS.⁸⁸ Congress could consider incentivizing adoption of NIBRS or, on the flipside, penalizing⁸⁹ states or specific agencies for not having made the transition yet via carving out or making conditional parts of law enforcement-focused grant programs (e.g., Byrne JAG program).⁹⁰ Given it is still undetermined as to how long the FBI will continue to accept SRS data submissions alongside NIBRS for the UCR program, Congress could also consider legislating a new deadline past which the FBI will no longer accept SRS format data. The number of agencies becoming NIBRS certified each year is increasing though,⁹¹ so Congress could also opt to do nothing and allow the FBI, in partnership with state, local, and tribal law enforcement agencies, to proceed with the transition how it sees fit.

The transition to NIBRS offers new opportunities for gleaning valuable information that Congress could also consider. With the increased richness and detail of NIBRS data as compared to SRS, Congress could consider mandating specialized reports on topics of interest. For instance, because NIBRS captures the victim-offender relationship, Congress could request that the FBI, BJS, or some other DOJ agency produce an annual report on domestic/intimate partner violence reported to law enforcement agencies in the United States. Similar types of legislation mandating data collection and reporting have been enacted by Congress in the past, such as the Hate Crime Statistics Act (P.L. 101-275). Such specialized reports could prove useful for evaluating existing policy and funding decisions as well as informing new legislation.

⁸⁷ *Benefits*.

⁸⁸ Bureau of Justice Statistics, “National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS),” accessed June 26, 2025, <https://bjs.ojp.gov/national-incident-based-reporting-system-nibrs>.

⁸⁹ It is important to reiterate, though, that submitting either SRS or NIBRS data to the FBI’s UCR program is currently voluntary for state, local, and tribal law enforcement agencies. See U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, *About the UCR Program*, September 2018, p. 1, <https://le.fbi.gov/file-repository/about-the-ucr-program.pdf/view>.

⁹⁰ See CRS In Focus IF10691, *The Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) Program*, by Nathan James.

⁹¹ *UCR 2023*, p. 2.

Appendix. SRS and NIBRS Offense Lists

Summary Report System (SRS)⁹²

Part 1 Offenses

(Note: The order of Part I offenses here also reflects the order in which the hierarchy rule was applied).

- Criminal Homicide
- Rape
- Robbery
- Aggravated Assault
- Burglary
- Larceny-theft (except motor vehicle theft)
- Motor Vehicle Theft
- Arson
- Human Trafficking, Commercial Sex Acts
- Human Trafficking, Involuntary Servitude

Part 2 Offenses

- Other Assaults (simple)
- Forgery and Counterfeiting
- Fraud
- Embezzlement
- Stolen Property (buying, receiving, or possessing)
- Vandalism
- Weapons (carrying, possessing, etc.)
- Prostitution (including commercialized vice, assisting or promoting prostitution, and purchasing prostitution)
- Sex Offenses (except rape and prostitution offenses)
- Drug Abuse Violations
- Gambling
- Offenses Against the Family and Children
- Driving Under the Influence
- Liquor Laws
- Drunkenness
- Disorderly Conduct

⁹² U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Crime Justice Information Services Division, Uniform Crime Reporting Program, *Summary Reporting System (SRS) User Manual*, pp. 20-22.

- Vagrancy
- All Other Offenses
- Suspicion
- Curfew and Loitering Laws (persons under 18)
- Runaways (persons under 18)⁹³

National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS)⁹⁴

Table A-1. NIBRS Group A Offenses

Offense	Crime Against
Animal Cruelty	Society
Arson	Property
Assault Offenses	
Aggravated Assault	Person
Simple Assault	Person
Intimidation	Person
Bribery	Property
Burglary/Breaking and Entering	Property
Commerce Violations	
Import Violations*	Society
Export Violations*	Society
Federal Liquor Offenses*	Society
Federal Tobacco Offenses*	Society
Wildlife Trafficking*	Society
Counterfeiting/Forgery	Property
Destruction/Damage/Vandalism of Property	Property
Drug/Narcotic Offenses	
Drug/Narcotic Violations	Society
Drug Equipment Violations	Society
Embezzlement	Property
Espionage*	Society
Extortion/Blackmail	Property
Fraud Offenses	
False Pretenses/Swindle/Confidence Game	Property
Credit Card/Automated Teller Machine Fraud	Property

⁹³ Runaway has not been a required-reporting offense in UCR since 2009, as it is not a criminal offense in all jurisdictions. Runaway data are stored in UCR when reported but these data are not reported by the FBI in UCR databases; the FBI no longer publishes information on runaways as a Part II crime.

⁹⁴ *NIBRS User Manual*, pp. 10-14.

Offense	Crime Against
Impersonation	Property
Welfare Fraud	Property
Wire Fraud	Property
Identity Theft	Property
Hacking/Computer Invasion	Property
Money Laundering*	Society
Fugitive Offenses	
Harboring Escapee/Concealing from Arrest*	Society
Flight to Avoid Prosecution*	Society
Flight to Avoid Deportation*	Society
Gambling Offenses	
Betting/Wagering	Society
Operating/Promoting/Assisting Gambling	Society
Gambling Equipment Violations	Society
Sports Tampering	Society
Homicide Offenses	
Murder and Nonnegligent Manslaughter	Person
Negligent Manslaughter	Person
Justifiable Homicide	Not a Crime
Human Trafficking	
Human Trafficking, Commercial Sex Acts	Person
Human Trafficking, Involuntary Servitude	Person
Immigration Violations	
Illegal Entry into the United States*	Society
False Citizenship*	Society
Smuggling Aliens*	Society
Re-entry after Deportation*	Society
Kidnapping/Abduction	Person
Larceny/Theft Offenses	
Pocket-picking	Property
Purse-snatching	Property
Shoplifting	Property
Theft From Building	Property
Theft From Coin-Operated Machine or Device	Property
Theft From Motor Vehicle	Property
Theft of Motor Vehicle Parts or Accessories	Property

Offense	Crime Against
All Other Larceny	Property
Motor Vehicle Theft	Property
Pornography/Obscene Material	Society
Prostitution Offenses	
Prostitution	Society
Assisting or Promoting Prostitution	Society
Purchasing Prostitution	Society
Robbery	Property
Sex Offenses	
Rape	Person
Sodomy	Person
Sexual Assault With An Object	Person
Fondling	Person
Incest	Person
Statutory Rape	Person
Failure to Register as a Sex Offender*	Society
Stolen Property Offenses	Property
Treason*	Society
Weapon Law Violations	
Weapon Law Violations	Society
Violation of National Firearm Act of 1934*	Society
Weapons of Mass Destruction*	Society
Explosives*	Society

Source: *NIBRS User Manual*, pp. 10-13.

Notes: *Reported only for federal and tribal law enforcement agencies

NIBRS Group B Offenses⁹⁵

- Bond Default
 - Failure to Appear*
- Curfew/Loitering/Vagrancy Violations
- Disorderly Conduct
- Driving Under the Influence
- Family Offenses, Nonviolent
- Federal Resource Violations*
- Liquor Law Violations
- Perjury*

⁹⁵ *NIBRS User Manual*, p. 14.

- Trespass of Real Property
- All Other Offenses

*Reported only for federal and tribal law enforcement agencies

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