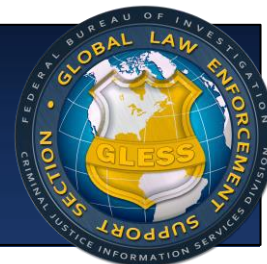


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EFFECTS OF NIBRS ON CRIME STATISTICS, 2019

Data users came to rely on the aggregate crime data collected and published by the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) under the Summary Reporting System (SRS). Those aggregate counts provided snapshots of crime and served the law enforcement community and the public well since 1930. However, the FBI recognized the need for more robust crime data and has transitioned from traditional aggregate statistics provided by SRS to the more comprehensive information collected under the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS). As this change occurred, some data users anticipated how the change would affect crime volumes and rates for jurisdictions across the nation.

Although some individuals might perceive the additional data collected through NIBRS as an apparent rise in crime, a closer look at how NIBRS provides more data also shows why it replaced the SRS as the UCR data standard. This report addresses the following ways more data are obtained via NIBRS:

- Without the SRS Hierarchy Rule, NIBRS captures more offenses when two or more occur in the same incident.
- With expanded offense categories, NIBRS captures more offenses to establish a broader baseline for crime.
- With greater specificity for reporting, NIBRS captures more detailed information about each crime occurrence.

NIBRS Captures a More Accurate Account of Offenses Without the SRS Hierarchy Rule

Table 1 presents the number of incidents reported via NIBRS, along with the number of offenses reported per incident. One offense was involved in 88.4 percent of the incidents. The remaining 11.6 percent of the incidents included multiple offenses.

Table 1. Number and Percentage of NIBRS Incidents with One or More Offenses, 2019		
Number of Offenses Reported in an Incident	Number of Incidents	Percentage of Incidents
1	5,807,837	88.4
2	679,693	10.3
3	74,525	1.1
4	9,208	0.1
5	1,347	a
6	215	a
7	37	a
8	6	a
9	2	a
Total	6,572,870	100.0 ^p

^a Less than one-tenth of one percent.

^b Due to rounding, percentages do not add to 100.0 percent.

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When law enforcement agencies report crime data via NIBRS, the number of offenses may appear to increase in some instances. This increase in crime volume after transitioning to NIBRS can be explained in part through a discussion of the Hierarchy Rule, which was employed by SRS. The SRS Hierarchy Rule required law enforcement agencies to report only the most serious offense occurring within an incident. The reporting order of the Part I offenses under the SRS Hierarchy was as follows: murder, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny, and motor vehicle theft. Therefore, if a victim was robbed then murdered, only the murder was reported under SRS; the robbery was not counted. (Two human trafficking offenses and arson were exceptions and would have been reported in addition to those in the Hierarchy.) In contrast, NIBRS allows law enforcement to report up to ten offenses within a criminal incident. For example, if a victim is robbed then murdered, NIBRS captures both the robbery and the murder. Counting all the offenses in an incident as NIBRS does, rather than employing the Hierarchy Rule, results in a more comprehensive picture of the crime problem.

A comparison of NIBRS data (as submitted for the seven crimes initially collected) with a version of those data after the Hierarchy Rule was applied gives perspective to the differences between NIBRS and SRS. Table 2 shows the number of offenses not counted when 2019 NIBRS data were converted to the SRS format, i.e., the Hierarchy Rule was applied for trending purposes. According to the Hierarchy Rule, murder is the most serious offense, so all were reported. However, many other offenses in Table 2 were not counted due to the Hierarchy Rule. There were 1,384 rape offenses involved with an incident during which a murder also occurred, so neither those rape offenses—nor the rape victims—were counted in SRS. Similarly, nearly 14,000 motor vehicle thefts were not counted in SRS because a more serious offense occurred in the same incident.

Table 2. Number of Offenses and Change, NIBRS versus SRS, 2019

Offense Type	Number of Offenses Submitted Via NIBRS	Number of Offenses Counted After Application of the Hierarchy Rule	Number of Offenses Not Counted After Application of the Hierarchy Rule	Percent Change in the Number of Offenses After Removal of the Hierarchy Rule
<i>Crimes Against Persons</i>				
Murder	6,590	6,590	0	0.0
Rape	64,041	62,657	1,384	2.2
Aggravated Assault	337,793	333,793	4,000	1.2
<i>Crimes Against Property</i>				
Robbery	92,934	92,365	569	0.6
Burglary ¹	476,549	487,353	-10,804 ¹	-2.2 ¹
Larceny	2,193,678	2,119,244	74,434	3.5
Motor Vehicle Theft	318,516	304,800	13,716	4.5

¹ In contrast to the other crimes, the number of offenses for the property crime of burglary decreased 2.2 percent when reported via NIBRS due to counting rules. NIBRS counts one offense of burglary when the location is a storage facility, while SRS counts the number of storage units burglarized. (However, NIBRS captures additional details through various data elements.)

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Some law enforcement administrators have been concerned about the appearance of an increase in crime after transitioning to NIBRS. However, those increases are largely a result of counting the crimes omitted after the Hierarchy Rule was applied. An analysis of the 2019 NIBRS data, as reported by those agencies submitting at least one incident report, further measures how these increases can look when data users compare the two reporting methods. Nearly 90 percent of the incidents submitted to the FBI UCR Program in 2019 involved only one offense. (See Table 1 on page 1.) The remaining incidents included more than one offense. The percent changes in Part I crimes when the Hierarchy Rule was not applied and those offenses are counted are relatively minimal and outlined below.

Crimes Against Persons

- Murder: No change.
(All offenses are reported under both data collection systems.)
- Rape: Increased 2.2 percent.
- Aggravated Assault: Increased 1.2 percent.

Crimes Against Property

- Robbery: Increased 0.6 percent.
- Burglary: Decreased 2.2 percent. (When the location of an incident is a storage facility, SRS counts the number of storage units, while NIBRS counts one offense of burglary. Therefore, the number of burglaries experienced a decrease under NIBRS in 2019.)
- Larceny: Increased 3.5 percent.
- Motor Vehicle Theft: Increased 4.5 percent.

NIBRS Establishes a Broader Baseline for Crime with Expanded Offense Categories

SRS measured crime by counting the aggregate volume of offenses reported for the most serious crimes, commonly referenced as Part I offenses. Those ten offenses include the seven reported in accordance with the Hierarchy Rule, as well as two human trafficking offenses and arson. This measurement served law enforcement and the public for many years.

However, based on the need for a more precise account of crime, the FBI UCR Program transitioned to a NIBRS-only data collection on January 1, 2021. The 28 expanded offense categories in NIBRS detail 71 offense types, referenced as Group A offenses. (See Table 3.)

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Table 3. Offenses Collected in NIBRS

Animal Cruelty Animal Cruelty	Fraud Offenses—continued Credit Card/Automated Teller Machine Fraud Impersonation Welfare Fraud Wire Fraud Identity Theft Hacking/Computer Invasion Money Laundering*	Larceny/Theft Offenses—continued Shoplifting Theft From Building Theft From Coin-Operated Machine or Device Theft From Motor Vehicle Theft of Motor Vehicle Parts or Accessories All Other Larceny
Arson Arson		
Assault Offenses Aggravated Assault Simple Assault Intimidation		
Bribery Bribery	Fugitive Offenses Harboring Escapee/ Concealing from Arrest* Flight to Avoid Prosecution* Flight to Avoid Deportation*	Motor Vehicle Theft Motor Vehicle Theft
Burglary/Breaking & Entering Burglary/Breaking & Entering		Pornography/Obscene Material Pornography/Obscene Material
Commerce Violations Import Violations* Export Violations* Federal Liquor Offenses* Federal Tobacco Offenses* Wildlife Trafficking*	Gambling Offenses Betting/Wagering Operating/Promoting/ Assisting Gambling Gambling Equipment Violations Sports Tampering	Prostitution Offenses Prostitution Assisting or Promoting Purchasing Prostitution
Counterfeiting/Forgery Counterfeiting/Forgery	Homicide Offenses Murder and Nonnegligent Manslaughter Negligent Manslaughter Justifiable Homicide	Robbery Robbery
Destruction/Damage/Vandalism of Property Destruction/Damage/Vandalism of Property	Human Trafficking Human Trafficking, Commercial Sex Acts Human Trafficking, Involuntary Servitude	Sex Offenses Rape Sodomy Sexual Abuse With An Object Fondling Incest Statutory Rape Failure to Register as a Sex Offender*
Drug/Narcotic Offenses Drug/Narcotic Violations Drug Equipment Violations	Immigration Violations Illegal Entry into the United States* False Citizenship* Smuggling Aliens* Re-entry after Deportation*	Stolen Property Offenses Stolen Property Offenses
Embezzlement Embezzlement		Treason Treason*
Espionage Espionage*		Weapon Law Violations Weapon Law Violations Violation of National Firearm Act of 1934* Weapons of Mass Destruction* Explosives*
Extortion/Blackmail Extortion/Blackmail	Kidnapping/Abduction Kidnapping/Abduction	
Fraud Offenses False Pretenses/Swindle/ Confidence Game	Larceny/Theft Offenses Pocket-picking Purse-snatching	

* Offenses for federal and tribal law enforcement agency reporting only.

Source: *NIBRS User Manual* (<https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/ucr/ucr-2019-1-nibrs-user-manua-093020.pdf/view>)

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NIBRS Captures Detailed Information About Each Crime Occurrence

Through 59 data elements and numerous data values specifying information about the offense(s), NIBRS retains detailed information for each incident. Among those details, NIBRS collects the age, sex, race, and ethnicity of both victims and offenders for Group A offenses, as well as other information such as the relationship of the victim to the offender, date and time of the incident, location, and more. Conversely, SRS collected aggregated crime counts, and only collected the age, sex, race, and ethnicity of victims and offenders for murder. With NIBRS, a more complete account of an incident can aid in understanding the nature of crime in an area.

Scenario to Demonstrate Reporting Differences

Two young men saw a 25-year-old black female walking alone in a park at approximately 7 p.m. on September 7, 2019. The first man, who was white, held the woman at gunpoint, removed her wallet from her purse, and put it in his pocket. The second man, who was Asian, tried to kiss the woman and raped her when she resisted his advances. After the incident, both men ran away from the area.

Limited information was available in SRS.

- Only the rape would have been counted.
- The value of the property lost would have been reported separately. However, the robbery would not have been recorded.
- No other information would have been collected unless the attackers were arrested.

More detailed information is available in NIBRS.

- Both the rape **and the robbery** would be counted.
- The **age, sex, race, and ethnicity of the victim and offenders** (if known) would be reported.
- The **relationship of the victim to the offenders** would be recorded.
- The **date, time, and location of the incident**, along with the **type and value of property** stolen, would be reported.
- Any **weapon(s) used** and **related injury or injuries** would also be recorded.

Getting to NIBRS

The FBI's UCR Program collected aggregate crime counts under SRS for the Part I offenses of murder, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny, and motor vehicle theft since 1930;

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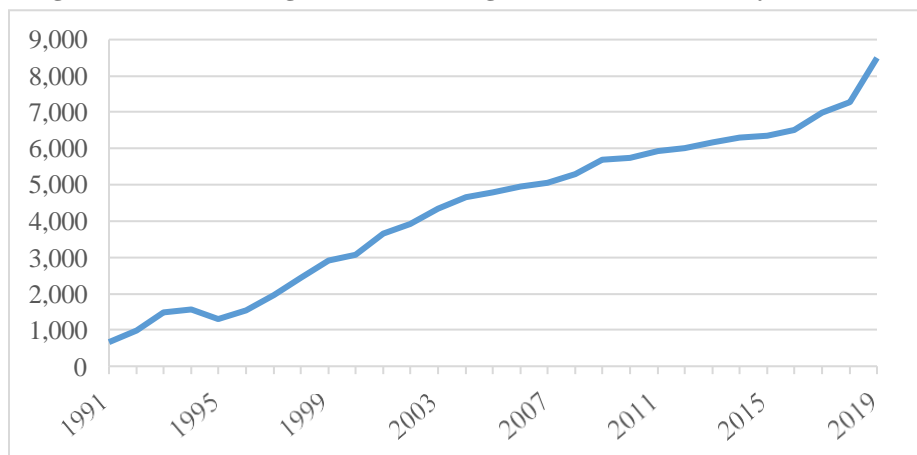
arson was added to the list of Part I offenses in 1979. The information collected in SRS, used to gauge crime in the nation, was invaluable and served those interested in the crime problem (e.g., policymakers, business and community leaders, researchers, and the public) for nearly 50 years. However, the FBI, its partner law enforcement agencies, and a myriad of stakeholders recognized the need for a new crime reporting program to include an expanded list of crime categories and the details involved with those crimes. A blueprint for this new data collection was developed and NIBRS is the result.

Although NIBRS is seen as a major improvement over SRS, not all law enforcement agencies are willing to make the change to this more robust and disaggregated system. In addition to having concerns about the expense involved with transitioning to NIBRS electronic data submissions, some law enforcement agency administrators fear switching from SRS to NIBRS will show an increase in the level of crime. For these and other reasons, growth in NIBRS participation is relatively slow, and the FBI UCR Program administered both SRS and NIBRS in tandem for many years.

In 2015, however, the apparent lack of detailed national data available through UCR to address more modern crime issues prompted law enforcement and the FBI to reevaluate the effectiveness of having two systems. Consequently, at the recommendation of the Criminal Justice Information Services Advisory Policy Board and with the support of national professional law enforcement organizations, the FBI committed to becoming a NIBRS-only data collection.

Since the FBI first began collecting UCR data via NIBRS, the number of law enforcement agencies submitting data through NIBRS increased from 663 agencies in 1991 to 8,497 in 2019. Those 8,497 participants represent more than 51 percent of the nation's law enforcement agencies submitting data to the FBI UCR Program. (See Figure 1.)

Figure 1. Number of Agencies Submitting Incidents via NIBRS by Year



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Increasing NIBRS Participation

The FBI has been working with federal, state, local, tribal, and college and university law enforcement agencies to provide resources to assist with the transition to NIBRS reporting. As a result, thousands of law enforcement agencies have committed to joining the FBI in making NIBRS the national data standard for UCR statistics so they will be more meaningful in addressing today's crime issues.

Conclusion

Law enforcement's initial apprehension about converting to NIBRS and its impact on the crime volume is understandable, especially because NIBRS counts more than one offense involved in an incident. The additional offenses reported due to the elimination of the Hierarchy Rule, along with the expanded offense categories available in NIBRS (e.g., drug smuggling, kidnapping, and fraud), do not necessarily show a marked increase in crime. With NIBRS, a more accurate reflection of the crime problem emerges, thereby, increasing the awareness of any particular crime threats to a specific area, which outweighs the apparent increase the numbers may show.

The wealth of information available from NIBRS will provide stakeholders (i.e., law enforcement executives, government and community leaders, academia, the media, data analysts, and the public at large) with data to better measure existing crime problems. In addition, stakeholders can use the data to help develop effective, proactive strategies for reducing crime through law enforcement programs and community initiatives. Ultimately, having a more accurate and robust picture of the crime situation in an area will allow for more efficient resource allocation and maximize public safety.

Additional Resources

For more information regarding the utility of NIBRS, visit <https://www.fbi.gov/services/cjis/ucr/nibrs>.