SECTION I
Summary of the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program

The Uniform Crime Reporting Program is a nationwide, cooperative statistical effort of nearly 17,000 city, county, and state law enforcement agencies voluntarily reporting data on crimes brought to their attention. During 2000, law enforcement agencies active in the UCR Program represented nearly 254 million United States inhabitants or 94 percent of the total population as established by the Bureau of the Census. The coverage amounted to 96 percent of the United States population in Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs), 87 percent of the population in cities outside metropolitan areas, and 88 percent in rural counties.

Since 1930, the FBI has administered the Program and issued periodic assessments of the nature and type of crime in the Nation. The Program's primary objective is to generate a reliable set of criminal statistics for use in law enforcement administration, operation, and management; however, its data have over the years become one of the country's leading social indicators. The American public looks to Uniform Crime Reports for information on fluctuations in the level of crime, and criminologists, sociologists, legislators, municipal planners, the media, and other students of criminal justice use the statistics for varied research and planning purposes.

Historical Background

Recognizing a need for national crime statistics, the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) formed the Committee on Uniform Crime Records in the 1920s to develop a system of uniform police statistics. Establishing offenses known to law enforcement as the appropriate measure, the Committee evaluated various crimes on the basis of their seriousness, frequency of occurrence, pervasiveness in all geographic areas of the country, and likelihood of being reported to law enforcement. After studying state criminal codes and making an evaluation of the recordkeeping practices in use, the Committee completed a plan for crime reporting that became the foundation of the UCR Program in 1929.

Seven offenses were chosen to serve as an Index for gauging fluctuations in the overall volume and rate of crime. Known collectively as the Crime Index, these offenses included the violent crimes of murder and nonnegligent manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault and the property crimes of burglary, larceny-theft, and motor vehicle theft. By congressional mandate, arson was added as the eighth Index offense in 1979.

During the early planning of the Program, it was recognized that the differences among criminal codes precluded a mere aggregation of state statistics to arrive at a national total. Further, because of the variances in punishment for the same offenses in different state codes, no distinction between felony and misdemeanor crimes was possible. To avoid these problems and provide nationwide uniformity in crime reporting, standardized offense definitions by which law enforcement agencies were to submit data without regard for local statutes were formulated. The definitions used by the Program are set forth in Appendix II of this publication.

In January 1930, 400 cities representing 20 million inhabitants in 43 states began participating in the UCR Program. Congress enacted Title 28, Section 534, of the United States Code authorizing the Attorney General to gather crime information that same year. The Attorney General, in turn, designated the FBI to serve as the national clearinghouse for the data collected. Since that time, data based on uniform classifications and procedures for reporting have been obtained from the Nation's law enforcement agencies.

Advisory Groups

Providing vital links between local law enforcement and the FBI in the conduct of the UCR Program are the Criminal Justice Information Systems Committees of the IACP and the National Sheriffs' Association (NSA). The IACP, as it has since the Program began, represents the thousands of police departments nationwide. The NSA encourages sheriffs throughout the country to participate fully in the Program. Both committees serve in advisory capacities concerning the UCR Program's operation.

To function in an advisory capacity concerning UCR policy and to provide suggestions on UCR data usage, a Data Providers' Advisory Policy Board (APB) was established in August 1988. The Board operated until 1993 when a new Board, designed to address all FBI criminal justice information services, was approved. The Board functions in an advisory capacity concerning UCR policy and data collection and use. The UCR Subcommittee of the Board ensures continuing emphasis on UCR-related issues.

The Association of State Uniform Crime Reporting Programs and committees on UCR within individual state law enforcement associations are also active in promoting interest in the UCR Program. These organizations foster widespread and more intelligent use of uniform crime statistics and lend assistance to contributors when the needs arise.

Redesign of UCR

Although the UCR Program remained virtually unchanged throughout the years in terms of the data collected and disseminated, a broad utility had evolved for UCR by the 1980s. Recognizing the need for improved statistics, law enforcement called for a thorough evaluative study that would modernize the UCR Program. The FBI fully concurred with the need for an updated Program and lent its complete support, formulating a comprehensive three-phase redesign effort. The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), the Department of Justice agency responsible for funding criminal justice information projects, agreed to underwrite the first two phases. Conducted by an independent contractor, these phases were structured to determine what, if any, changes should be made to the current Program. The third phase would involve implementation of the changes identified. Abt Associates Inc. of Cambridge, Massachusetts, overseen by the FBI, BJS, and a Steering Committee comprised of prestigious individuals representing a myriad of disciplines, commenced the first phase in 1982.

During the first phase, the historical evolution of the UCR Program was examined. All aspects of the Program, including the objectives and intended user audience, data items, reporting mechanisms, quality control issues, publications and user services, and relationships with other criminal justice data systems, were studied.

Early in 1984, a conference on the future of UCR, held in Elkridge, Maryland, launched the second phase of the study that examined the potential of UCR and concluded with a set of recommended changes. Attendees at this conference reviewed work conducted during the first phase and discussed the recommendations that should be considered during phase two.

Findings from the evaluation's first phase and input on alternatives for the future were also major topics of discussion at the seventh National UCR Conference in July 1984. A survey of law enforcement agencies overlapped phases one and two.

Phase two ended in early 1985 with the production of a draft, *Blueprint for the Future of the Uniform Crime Reporting Program*. The study's Steering Committee reviewed the draft report at a March 1985 meeting and made various recommendations for revision. The Committee members, however, endorsed the report's concepts.

In April 1985, the phase two recommendations were presented at the eighth National UCR Conference. Various considerations for the final report were set forth, and the overall concept for the revised Program was unanimously approved. The joint IACP/NSA Committee on UCR also issued a resolution endorsing the *Blueprint*.

The final report, the *Blueprint for the Future of the Uniform Crime Reporting Program*, was released in the summer of 1985. It specifically outlined recommendations for an expanded, improved UCR Program to meet future informational needs. There were three recommended areas of enhancement to the UCR Program. First, offenses and arrests would be reported using an incident-based system. Second, data would be collected on two levels. Agencies in level one would report important details about those offenses comprising the current Crime Index, their victims, and arrestees. Law enforcement agencies covering populations of over 100,000 and a sampling of smaller agencies that would collect expanded detail on all significant offenses would be included in level two. The third proposal involved introducing a quality assurance program.

To begin implementation, the FBI awarded a contract to develop new offense definitions and data elements for the redesigned system. The work involved (a) revising the definitions of certain Index offenses, (b) identifying additional significant offenses to be reported, (c) refining definitions for both, and (d) developing data elements (incident details) for all UCR offenses in order to fulfill the requirements of incident-based reporting versus the current summary reporting.

Concurrent with the preparation of the data elements, the FBI studied the various state systems to select an experimental site for implementing the redesigned Program. In view of its long-standing incident-based Program and well-established staff dedicated solely to UCR, the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division (SLED) was chosen. The SLED agreed to adapt its existing system to meet the requirements of the redesigned Program and collect data on both offenses and arrests relating to the newly defined offenses.

To assist SLED with the pilot project, offense definitions and data elements developed under the private contract were put at the staff's disposal. Also, FBI automated data processing personnel developed Automated Data Capture Specifications for use in adapting the state's data processing procedures to incorporate the revised system. The BJS supplied funding to facilitate software revisions needed at the state level. Testing of the new Program was completed in late 1987.

Following the completion of the pilot project conducted by SLED, the FBI produced a draft of guidelines for an enhanced UCR Program. Law enforcement executives from around the country were then invited to a conference in Orange Beach, Alabama, where the guidelines were presented for final review.

During the conference, three overall recommendations were passed without dissent: first, that there be established a new, incident-based national crime reporting system; second, that the FBI manage this Program; and third, that an Advisory Policy Board composed of law enforcement executives be formed to assist in directing and implementing the new Program.

Information about the redesigned UCR Program, called the National Incident-Based Reporting System, or NIBRS,

is contained in four documents produced subsequent to the Orange Beach Conference. Volume 1, *Data Collection Guidelines*, contains a system overview and descriptions of the offenses, offense codes, reports, data elements, and data values used in the system. Volume 2, *Data Submission Specifications*, is for the use of state and local systems personnel who are responsible for preparing magnetic tapes/disks/etc., for submission to the FBI. Volume 3, *Approaches to Implementing an Incident-Based Reporting (IBR) System*, is for use by computer programmers, analysts, etc., responsible for developing a local or state IBR system that will meet NIBRS' reporting requirements. Volume 4, *Error Message Manual*, contains designations of mandatory and optional data elements, data element edits, and error messages.

A NIBRS edition of the *UCR Handbook* was published to assist law enforcement agency data contributors implementing NIBRS within their departments. This document is geared toward familiarizing local and state law enforcement personnel with the definitions, policies, and procedures of NIBRS. It does not contain the technical coding and data transmission requirements presented in Volumes 1 through 4.

NIBRS collects data on each single incident and arrest within 22 crime categories. For each offense known to police within these categories, incident, victim, property, offender, and arrestee information are gathered when available. The goal of the redesign is to modernize crime information by collecting data presently maintained in law enforcement records; the enhanced UCR Program is, therefore, a by-product of current records systems. The integrity of UCR's long-running statistical series will, of course, be maintained.

It became apparent during the development of the prototype system that the level one and level two reporting proposed in the *Blueprint* might not be the most practical approach. Many state and local law enforcement administrators indicated that the collection of data on all pertinent offenses could be handled with more ease than could the extraction of selected ones. Although "Limited" participation, equivalent to the *Blueprint's* level one, remains an option, most reporting jurisdictions, upon implementation, go immediately to "Full" participation, meeting all NIBRS' data submission requirements.

Implementation of NIBRS is occurring at a pace commensurate with the resources, abilities, and limitations of the contributing law enforcement agencies. The FBI was able to accept NIBRS data as of January 1989, and to date, the following 21 state programs have been certified for NIBRS participation: Arkansas, Colorado, Connecticut, Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Michigan, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, West Virginia, and Wisconsin. An additional 15 state programs, several local law enforcement agencies in 2 non-program states, and 6 federal agencies (the Departments of Commerce, Interior, and Defense-Air Force; Federal Protective Service; the Tennessee Valley Authority; and the FBI) have submitted test tapes or disks containing the expanded data. Eight other state agencies, agencies in the District of Columbia and Guam, and other federal agencies are in various stages of planning and development.

Recent Developments

QUALITY ASSURANCE REVIEW—Initially implemented in June of 1997 as a pilot program designed to augment the current national UCR Program, the Quality Assurance Review (QAR) conducted by the Criminal Justice Information Services (CJIS) Audit Unit (CAU) became a permanent program in January 2000. The purpose of the QAR is to ensure that each state UCR Program adheres to summary and incident-based reporting methods that are consistent with UCR standards in order to achieve uniform crime reporting nationwide. Through a QAR, the accuracy and consistency of crime reporting is assessed during an on-site review of local case reports. The QAR also includes an examination of policies and procedures for collecting and compiling local agency statistics by the state repositories. Agencies are encouraged to avail themselves of the opportunity to assess the integrity of their data and to receive assistance in complying with Program requirements.

Since the outset of the QAR process, 138 agencies have been reviewed in 30 states and the District of Columbia. As increasing numbers of agencies participate in the QAR, the integrity and quality of UCR data will be greatly enhanced.

The CJIS Division's Programs Support Section is currently working on the conceptual design of a new set of publications to exhibit NIBRS data. The development of each component of the NIBRS publication series will demonstrate that the NIBRS data set provides richer and more detailed information about crime across a variety of geographic units than has been previously available. Recognizing that there is a responsibility on the part of the national Program to demonstrate the utility of NIBRS, each publication will:

- Demonstrate the potential uses of NIBRS.
- Convey a change in philosophical approach to crime analysis and publication.
- Provide for the development of tools to assist in the use and analysis of the NIBRS data.

The study presented in Section V of this book is an example of the type of topical analysis that NIBRS makes possible.

FIGURE 2.1

CRIME CLOCK