



A Guide to Understanding NIBRS

About the NIBRS

NIBRS is an incident-based reporting system in which law enforcement collects data on each crime occurrence. Designed to be generated as a byproduct of local, state, and federal automated records systems, in 2011, the NIBRS collected data on each incident and arrest within 22 crime categories made up of 46 specific crimes called Group A offenses. For each of the offenses coming to the attention of law enforcement, various facts about the crime are collected. In addition to the Group A offenses, there are 10 Group B offense categories for which only arrest data are reported. (See Appendix A—NIBRS Group A Offenses and NIBRS Group B Offenses.)

The most significant difference between NIBRS and the traditional Summary Reporting System (SRS) is the degree of detail in reporting. In reporting data via the traditional SRS, law enforcement agencies (LEAs) tally the occurrences of eight Part I crimes. NIBRS is capable of producing more detailed, accurate, and meaningful data because data are collected about when and where crime takes place, what form it takes, and the characteristics of its victims and perpetrators. In order to obtain important data, facts recorded and preserved about the incident are organized into specific categories or segments. The vehicle used in recording these facts is a "data element." Data elements, given proper data values (much like answers to questions), provide information about a criminal incident and its associated victims, offenders, property, arrestees, etc.

The goals of the NIBRS are to enhance the quantity, quality, and timeliness of crime data collected by law enforcement and to improve the methodology used for compiling, analyzing, auditing, and publishing the collected crime data. The NIBRS offers law enforcement more comprehensive data than ever before for planning, training, management, and operations. A major advantage of NIBRS, beyond the increase in data collected, is the capability to break down and combine crime offense data into specific information.

Originally designed with 52 data elements, in 2011, the NIBRS had expanded to capture up to 57 data elements via six types of data segments: administrative, offense, victim, property, offender, and arrestee. (See Appendix B—NIBRS Offense Segments.) Although, in the late 1980s, the FBI committed to hold all changes to the NIBRS in abeyance until a substantial amount of contributors implemented the system, modifications have been necessary to meet growing challenges in the fight against crime. As intended, the system's flexibility has permitted the addition of new data elements. Currently the FBI is modernizing its legacy



mainframe-based UCR system to improve its ability to collect, analyze, and report on national crime statistics. Once this upgrade is completed, the system will again be updated to meet the latest NIBRS reporting requirements.

Reporting Procedures and Units of Count

A Group A Incident Report may consist of many possible combinations of circumstances. The report may include a single-offense incident, i.e., an incident with only one offense type, or a multiple-offense incident, i.e., an incident with more than one offense type; up to ten offense types can be reported in one incident. Furthermore, these circumstances can range from one victim and offender situation to a set of multiple victims, offenders, offenses, property loss, and arrestees. In reporting NIBRS data with a Group A Incident Report, there are four basic units of count:

- 1) Incidents—count one incident for each Group A Incident reported via the Administrative Segment with a unique incident number, i.e., LEA case number, followed by a minimum of the offense, victim, and offender segments.
- 2) Offenses—count one offense for each victim of Crimes Against Persons and each unique offense type for Crimes Against Property and Crimes Against Society.
- 3) Victims—count one for each victim, i.e., victim segment, connected to each offense type in the incident (in a multiple-offense incident, a victim is counted for *each* connected offense type in a table reflecting offense categories).
- 4) Known Offenders—count one for each offender, i.e., offender segment, connected to each offense type in the incident.

(See Appendix A—NIBRS Group A Offenses and NIBRS Group B Offenses for a respective listing of crime categorizations of Crimes Against Persons, Crimes Against Property, and Crimes Against Society.)

In addition to characteristics such as the age, sex, and race of victims, offenders, and arrestees, the Group A Incident Report captures other details. These include, but are not limited to clearances (by arrest or exceptional means, i.e., when an element beyond law enforcement's control precludes the arrest of a known offender); the value of property; the offender's bias motivation (if present) toward the victim's real or perceived race, religion, ethnicity, sexual



orientation, or physical or mental disability; and information regarding law enforcement officers killed or assaulted.

LEAs also report arrest information for 10 additional crimes via the Group B Arrest Report. These arrest data include information about the age, sex, race, and ethnicity of arrestees; arrest offense code; weapon arrestee was armed with; resident status of the arrestee; and disposition of the arrestee who was under age 18.

Editing Procedures and Data Validity

Data reliability is a high priority of the FBI. The UCR Program thoroughly examines each NIBRS submission for accuracy and deviations in crime data from month to month, and from present to past years' data that may indicate errors. In performing these quality control measures, the UCR staff members compare aggregated data from agencies of similar population size to identify any unusual fluctuations in an agency's crime counts and study the monthly submissions to evaluate periodic trends prepared for individual reporting units. While large variations in crime levels may indicate modified records procedures, incomplete reporting, or changes in the jurisdiction's geopolitical structure, the FBI brings any deviations to the attention of the state UCR Program or reporting agency that contributed the data. Any significant increase or decrease becomes the subject of a special inquiry to prompt the reporting agency to verify or correct its data if needed.

Ultimately, the UCR Program relies on the good faith reporting of the LEAs that voluntarily contribute data to the UCR Program via the NIBRS. Although the FBI makes every effort through its editing procedures, training practices, and correspondence to ensure the validity of the data it receives, the accuracy of the statistics depends primarily on the adherence of each contributor to the established standards of reporting. It is the responsibility of each state UCR Program or individual contributing LEA to submit accurate statistics or correct existing data that are in error.

Caution to Users

Data users should exercise care in making direct comparisons between data in this publication and data in *Crime in the United States* or other published NIBRS data. Because there are often differing methodologies used in preparing data for publication and differing levels of participation, some data may not be comparable from year to year. In addition, because the NIBRS is not yet national in scope, data users should be cautious in extrapolating conclusions



from published data; data quality issues with the NIBRS are still evolving and statistical compatibility with other crime information systems remains to be studied.

Availability of NIBRS Data

NIBRS 2011 is the first compilation of annual data made available for publication. Users can access *NIBRS 2011* at www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/ucr/. In addition, previously published special studies using NIBRS data are available at <http://www.fbi.gov/stats-services/crimestats>. These studies include the following:

- The Measurement of White-Collar Crime Using Uniform Crime Reporting Data
- The Structure of Family Violence: An Analysis of Selected Incidents
- Crime in Schools and Colleges: A Study of Offenders and Arrestees Reported via National Incident-Based Reporting System Data

Finally, NIBRS flat files containing annual data are available for 1991-2011 on compact disc. Requesters should e-mail the national program at cjis_comm@leo.gov and include their name, mailing address, and telephone number, as the files are too large to send via e-mail.

Benefits of NIBRS Participation

When used to its full potential, the NIBRS identifies with precision when and where crime takes place, what form it takes, and the characteristics of its victims and perpetrators. Armed with such information, law enforcement can better define the resources it needs to fight crime, as well as use those resources in the most efficient and effective manner.

Although most of the general concepts for collecting, scoring, and reporting UCR data in the SRS apply in the NIBRS, such as jurisdictional rules, there are some important differences in the two systems. The most notable differences that give the NIBRS an advantage over the SRS are:

- No Hierarchy Rule—In the SRS, the Hierarchy Rule requires LEAs to report only the most serious offense per incident; therefore, they do not report lower-listed offenses in multiple-offense incidents. In the NIBRS, LEAs report every offense occurring during an incident provided the offenses are separate and distinct crimes, not just as part of another offense, i.e., a “mutually exclusive” crime. (For more information about mutually exclusive offenses, refer to the *NIBRS Technical Specification*, Data Element 24, Victim Connected to UCR Offense Code, at www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/ucr/.)



- Revised, Expanded, and New Offense Definitions—The FBI UCR Program revised several SRS offense definitions for NIBRS-reporting purposes (e.g., the definition of assault to include the offense of Intimidation, the definition of burglary to include self-storage units with regard to the Hotel Rule [i.e., since all units are under a single manager, the burglary will count as one offense, but up to 99 individual units can be reported]). Furthermore, the NIBRS defines and collects many specific sex offenses, including such crimes as sodomy, sexual assault with an object, and fondling, and sex offenses, nonforcible, including such crimes as statutory rape and incest.
- More Specificity in Reporting Offenses—Using the NIBRS, in 2011, law enforcement could report offense and arrest data for 22 Group A offense categories (including 46 specific crimes) rather than the 8 Part I offenses in the SRS. In addition, the NIBRS captured arrest data for 10 Group B offense categories (including 10 crimes), while the SRS collected arrest data for 20 Part II crimes.
- Distinguishing between Attempted and Completed Group A Crimes—Except for the offenses of rape and burglary, the SRS does not differentiate between attempted and completed Part I crimes. The NIBRS recognizes the difference between attempted and completed Group A crimes.
- Because the SRS collects most of its crime data in the form of categories (e.g., age groupings and property value groupings), it provides very little capability to break down the resulting data into specific subcategories. However, because the NIBRS collects the details of crime incidents, it allows much greater specificity in reporting. Some of those details include type of victim, residential status of victim and arrestee, weapons data for several crimes, and the value of property stolen or recovered.
- Additional Scoring Category—In addition to the categories of Crimes Against Persons (e.g., murder, rape, and aggravated assault) and Crimes Against Property (e.g., robbery, burglary, and larceny/theft) in the SRS, the NIBRS offers the category of Crimes Against Society. These crimes are not against persons because they do not actually involve an injured party; nor are they against property because property is not the object of the crime. Program developers created the category to represent society’s prohibitions of engaging in certain types of activity, such as drug/narcotic offenses, gambling offenses, pornography/obscene material, and prostitution offenses.
- Expanded Victim-to-Offender Relationship Data—In the SRS, law enforcement reports the relationship of the victim to the offender (e.g., the victim was the husband, wife, employer,



or employee, of the offender) only for homicides (i.e., murder and nonnegligent manslaughter, manslaughter by negligence, and justifiable homicide). In the NIBRS, however, law enforcement reports an individual victim's relationship to the offender(s) when the individual was the victim of a Crime Against Person, such as an assault offense, homicide offense, kidnapping/abduction, or sex offense. Victim-to-offender relationship data are also reported for robbery (Crimes Against Property) because one of its elements is an assault, which makes it a violent crime. (The NIBRS also collects other types of victims, i.e., business, financial institution, government, religious organization, and society/public.)

- **Expanded Circumstance Reporting**—The SRS and the NIBRS both provide for collecting circumstance data for homicides, but the NIBRS also allows law enforcement to report circumstance data for aggravated assault. Furthermore, the NIBRS permits the entry of up to two circumstance codes for each murder or aggravated assault.
- **Expanded Collection of Drug-Related Offenses**—In the SRS, the subcategories of drug violations are limited to sale/manufacturing and possession. However, in the NIBRS, LEAs can report the unlawful cultivation, manufacture, distribution, sale, purchase, use, possession, transportation, or importation of any controlled drug or narcotic. Agencies can also report the suspected drug type in one of the expanded drug-type categories. In the event of a drug seizure, agencies can report the estimated quantity. The NIBRS also allows agencies to report the unlawful manufacture, sale, purchase, possession, or transportation of drug equipment (paraphernalia).
- In addition to capturing actual drug offenses, LEAs using the NIBRS can report whether offenders of various other offenses were suspected of having used drugs or narcotics during or shortly before the commission of the crime(s).
- **Capturing Computer Crime**—To combat the growing problem of computer crime, (i.e., crimes directed at and perpetrated through the use of computers and related equipment) the NIBRS provides the capability to indicate whether a computer was the object of the reported crime and to indicate whether the offenders used computer equipment to perpetrate a crime.
- **Association of Update Reports**—LEAs handle information updates, such as unbounding an offense with subsequent submissions via the SRS, but there is no way to tie the update to the original offense. In the NIBRS, however, updated information is available with, and directly tied to, the original incident.



- Identification of Common Problems or Trends—Aside from national data requirements, many individual LEAs have very sophisticated records systems capable of producing a full range of statistics on their own activities. Some local and state incident-based reporting systems include additional data elements and data values to satisfy their local and state needs. As a byproduct of all of those systems, the NIBRS provides more common links among agencies. As more LEAs use the NIBRS, it will allow the identification of common crime problems or trends among similar jurisdictions. Agencies can then work together to develop possible solutions or proactive strategies for addressing the issues.
- More Useful Data—Once LEAs submit the preponderance of data via the NIBRS, legislators, municipal planners and administrators, academicians, penologists, sociologists, and the general public will be better able to assess the nation’s crime problem. Law enforcement is a public service and as such requires a full accounting from the police commissioner, chief, sheriff, or director as to the administration of the agency and the status of public safety within the jurisdiction. By participating in the NIBRS, agencies will have statistics to fulfill this responsibility. The NIBRS furnishes information on nearly every major criminal justice issue facing law enforcement today. The data are available from all levels of law enforcement—city, university/college, county, state, tribal, and federal—aggregated at the level and in the manner best meeting the informational needs of the data user.

NIBRS Participation

Many LEAs have automated records management systems tailored to their individual needs for administration and operation; they forward only the data required by the NIBRS to participate in the UCR Program. LEAs participate in the NIBRS by submitting data to the FBI UCR Program either directly or through a state UCR Program. State UCR Programs streamline the collection of NIBRS data from the local LEAs under their administration, ensure consistency and comparability of data, and are able to provide a higher quality of service to the nation’s law enforcement community. The state UCR Programs function as liaisons between local agencies and the FBI. These UCR Programs, in most cases, also provide direct and frequent service to their participating LEAs and make information readily available. However, participation in the NIBRS is not limited to state governments or direct-reporting agencies. It is possible for territorial, tribal, and federal agencies to report UCR data via the NIBRS.

As more contributing LEAs become educated about the rich data available through incident-based reporting, and as their resources permit, more agencies are implementing the NIBRS. Although participation in UCR via the NIBRS has improved at a relatively slow rate over the last two decades, the last several years the national program has increased its outreach efforts to



boost the number of NIBRS participants. The program is also addressing the reasons most cited for not reporting NIBRS data; these reasons include funding issues, the lack of training about the NIBRS, and the perceived notion that the agency's crime count will rise. In response, the FBI is liaising with several states that have expressed interest in reporting via the NIBRS. In addition, the FBI is collaborating with the Bureau of Justice Statistics to transition the top 100 Most-in-Population agencies, as well as another 300 randomly selected agencies, from the SRS to the NIBRS. Furthermore, the national program has conducted and released the study *Effects of NIBRS on Crime Statistics* to help educate participants and others about the apparent increases in crime volumes when switching to the NIBRS and how the absence of the Hierarchy Rule factors into the new data. Finally, as the completion of the UCR redevelopment project draws near, the program will offer contributors tools that will facilitate participation in the NIBRS.

Additional NIBRS Resources

- The *NIBRS Technical Specification*, available on the FBI UCR Program's web site, details procedures for preparing NIBRS data submissions.
- The *NIBRS User Manual* includes offense definitions, classification examples, and training information.
- *UCR State Program Bulletins*, and *UCR Newsletters* are sent to state UCR Program managers and direct contributors via e-mail to provide new information, policy updates, and clarification of reporting issues.
- Training seminars and instructional materials on crime reporting procedures are available from the national program to assist law enforcement contributors in complying with UCR Program and NIBRS standards. In training sessions, UCR staff explain the purpose of the program, the rules of uniform classification and scoring, and the methods of assembling and reporting the data.

For More Information

LEAs should direct questions about specific facets of the UCR Program to the appropriate area. A listing of UCR Program contacts is available at <http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/ucr/contact-the-ucr-program>. For questions about the NIBRS publication, please direct your e-mail to cjis_comm@leo.gov.



Appendix A—Group A Offenses and NIBRS Group B Offenses

Group A Offenses

Offense Category	Offense Types	Crime Against
Arson	Arson	Property
Assault Offenses	Aggravated Assault	Person
	Simple Assault	Person
	Intimidation	Person
Bribery	Bribery	Property
Burglary/Breaking & Entering	Burglary/Breaking & Entering	Property
Counterfeiting/Forgery	Counterfeiting/Forgery	Property
Destruction/Damage/Vandalism of Property	Destruction/Damage/Vandalism of Property	Property
Drug/Narcotic Offenses	Drug/Narcotic Violations	Society
	Drug Equipment Violations	Society
Embezzlement	Embezzlement	Property
Extortion/Blackmail	Extortion/Blackmail	Property
Fraud Offenses	False Pretenses/Swindle/Confidence Game	Property
	Credit Card/Automated Teller Machine Fraud	Property
	Impersonation	Property
	Welfare Fraud	Property
	Wire Fraud	Property
Gambling Offenses	Betting/Wagering	Society



Group A Offenses (continued)

Offense Category	Offense Type	Crime Against
	Operating/Promoting/Assisting Gambling	Society
	Gambling Equipment Violations	Society
	Sports Tampering	Society
Homicide Offenses		
	Murder & Nonnegligent Manslaughter	Person
	Negligent Manslaughter	Person
	Justifiable Homicide	Person/Not a Crime
Kidnapping/Abduction		
	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
	All Other Larceny	Property
Motor Vehicle Theft		
	Motor Vehicle Theft	Property
Pornography/Obscene Material		
	Pornography/Obscene Material	Society
Prostitution Offenses		
	Prostitution	Society
	Assisting or Promoting Prostitution	Society
Robbery		
	Robbery	Property
Sex Offenses, Forcible		
	Forcible Rape	Person
	Forcible Sodomy	Person
	Sexual Assault With An Object	Person
	Forcible Fondling	Person



Group A Offenses (continued)

Offense Category	Offense Type	Crime Against
Sex Offenses, Nonforcible	Incest	Person
	Statutory Rape	Person
Stolen Property Offenses	Stolen Property Offenses	Property
Weapon Law Violations	Weapon Law Violations	Society

Group B Offenses

Offense Category	Offense Type	Crime Against
Bad Checks	Bad Checks	Property
Curfew/Loitering/Vagrancy Violations	Curfew/Loitering/Vagrancy Violations	Society
Disorderly Conduct	Disorderly Conduct	Society
Driving Under the Influence	Driving Under the Influence	Society
Drunkenness	Drunkenness	Society
Family Offenses, Nonviolent	Family Offenses, Nonviolent	Society
Liquor Law Violations	Liquor Law Violations	Society
Peeping Tom	Peeping Tom	Society



Group B Offenses (continued)

Offense Category	Offense Type	Crime Against
Runaway*	Runaway	Not a Crime
Trespass of Real Property	Trespass of Real Property	Society
All Other Offenses	All Other Offenses	Person, Property, or Society

**Note: In January 2011, the FBI discontinued the collection of arrest data for runaways. Agencies may continue to collect data on runaways, but the FBI will no longer use or publish that data.*



Appendix B—NIBRS Segments

- Incident Information
 - Incident Date
 - Incident Hour
 - Exceptional Clearance
 - Exceptional Clearance Date
- Offense Information
 - Offense Codes
 - Attempted vs. Completed
 - Offender Suspected Use (of alcohol, drug, or computers)
 - Location
 - Type and Number of Premises Entered
 - Type of Criminal Activity/Gang Information
 - Weapon/Force Used
 - Bias Motivation
- Property Information
 - Loss Type
 - Property Description
 - Value of Property
 - Date Recovered
 - Number of Motor Vehicles Stolen/Recovered
 - Drug Types and Amounts
- Victim Information
 - Connection to Offenses
 - Type of Victim
 - Age/Sex/Race/Ethnicity/Resident Status of Victim
 - Assault and Homicide Circumstances
 - Injury Types
 - Relationships to Offenders
- Offender Information
 - Age/Sex/Race of Offender
- Arrestee Information
 - Arrest Date
 - Type of Arrest
 - Arrest Offense Code
 - Arrestee Weapons
 - Age/Sex/Race/Ethnicity/Resident Status of Arrestee
 - Disposition of Minors
- Group B Arrest Information
 - Type of Arrest
 - Arrestee Weapons
 - Age/Sex/Race/Ethnicity of Arrestee
 - Disposition of Minor