

# SECTION I





# Summary of the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program

The Uniform Crime Reporting Program is a nationwide, cooperative statistical effort of more than 17,000 city, county, and state law enforcement agencies voluntarily reporting data on crimes brought to their attention. During 2003, law enforcement agencies active in the UCR Program represented 93.0 percent of the total population. The coverage amounted to 94.9 percent of the United States population in Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs), 84.8 percent of the population in cities outside metropolitan areas, and 82.8 percent in nonmetropolitan counties.

Since 1930, the FBI has administered the Uniform Crime Reporting Program and continued to assess and monitor the nature and type of crime in the Nation. The Program's primary objective is to generate reliable information 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 the 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 crime 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 main offense classifications, known as Part I crimes, were chosen to gauge the state of crime in the Nation. These seven offense classifications that eventually became known as the Crime Index 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 category in 1979. (See Recent Developments at the end of this Summary for information on the suspension of the Crime Index.)

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 crime data collected. Since that time, data based on uniform classifications and procedures for reporting have been obtained from the Nation's law enforcement agencies every year.

## 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 (ASUCRP) and committees focus on UCR within individual state law enforcement associations and 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 needed.

## Redesign of UCR

Although UCR data collection had originally been conceived as a tool for law enforcement administration, by the 1980s, the data were widely used by other entities involved in various forms of social planning. Recognizing the need for more detailed crime 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 highly qualified 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 system.

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. 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 by the state. SLED completed its testing of the new Program 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 three documents. *Data Collection Guidelines* contains a system overview and descriptions of the offenses, offense codes, reports, data elements, and data values used in the system. *Data Submission Specifications* is for the use of state and local systems personnel who are responsible for preparing magnetic media for submission to the FBI. *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 the other three NIBRS publications.

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 25 state Programs have been certified for NIBRS participation: Arkansas, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Idaho, Iowa,

Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Nebraska, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Ohio, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, West Virginia, and Wisconsin. Among those that submit NIBRS data, eight states (Delaware, Idaho, Iowa, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia, and Vermont) submit all their data via NIBRS.

Twelve state Programs are in various stages of testing NIBRS. Eight other state agencies, as well as agencies in the District of Columbia, are in various stages of planning and development.

## Recent Developments

***Suspension of the Crime Index***—In June 2004, the CJIS APB approved discontinuing the use of the Crime Index in the UCR Program and its publications and directed that the FBI publish a violent crime total and a property crime total until a more viable index is developed. The Crime Index was first published in *Crime in the United States* in 1960. However, in recent years the Crime Index has not been a true indicator of the degree of criminality. The Crime Index was simply the title used for an aggregation of the seven main offense classifications, known as Part I crimes, for which data has been collected since the Program's implementation. The Crime Index was driven upward by the offense with the highest number, in this case larceny-theft, creating a bias against a jurisdiction with a high number of larceny-thefts, but a low number of other serious crimes such as murder and forcible rape. Currently, larceny-theft makes up nearly 60 percent of reported crime, and thus the sheer volume of those offenses overshadow more

serious, but less frequently committed offenses. The CJIS Division staff have been studying the appropriateness and usefulness of the Crime Index for several years and have brought the matter before many advisory groups including the UCR Subcommittee of the CJIS Advisory Board, the ASUCRP, and a meeting of leading criminologists and sociologists hosted by the Bureau of Justice Statistics. The consensus was that the Crime Index no longer served its original purpose, that the UCR Program should suspend its use, and that a more robust index should be developed.

***Creation of New Statistical Compilation Areas***—The UCR Program began publishing data aggregated into metropolitan areas in 1958. The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) criteria for metropolitan areas undergoes minor revisions with each decennial Census. Prior to the 2000 Census, the qualifying standards for a Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) included a combination of commuting data, population density data, and some indication as to major industry for the county to be considered metropolitan. Following the 2000 Census, the OMB bases its metropolitan designation solely

on the journey-to-work information collected in the decennial Census. The OMB’s current definition of an MSA is “a Core Based Statistical Area associated with at least one urbanized area that has a population of at least 50,000. The Metropolitan Statistical Area comprises the central county or counties containing the core, plus adjacent outlying counties having a high degree of social and economic integration with the central county as measured through commuting.” (Fed. Reg. 65(249): 82238). Based on the revised standards for defining MSAs, the UCR Program now refers to suburban counties as metropolitan counties, rural counties as nonmetropolitan counties, and central cities as principal cities. The Program will continue to use the current designations for suburban areas and cities outside of metropolitan areas. In addition, this publication now includes Metropolitan Division, subdivisions of an MSA that consist of “a core with a population of at least 2.5 million. A Metropolitan Division consists of one or more main/secondary counties that represent an employment center or centers, plus adjacent counties associated with the main county or

counties thought commuting ties,” (Fed. Reg. 65(249): 82238).

***Quality Assurance Review***—Effective October 1, 2003, the CJIS Audit Unit included the Quality Assurance Reviews (QARs) in the triennial audit of all systems managed by the FBI’s CJIS Division. As approved on by the CJIS Advisory Policy Board, each state Program is subject to a QAR every three years. Agencies interested in participating in a QAR should contact their state’s UCR Program manager for more details.

***NIBRS***—The detailed, accurate, and meaningful data produced by NIBRS benefit local agencies. Armed with comprehensive crime data, local agencies can better make their case to acquire and effectively allocate the resources needed to fight crime. Currently, 5,271 law enforcement agencies contribute NIBRS data to the national UCR Program. The data submitted by these agencies represent 20 percent of the U.S. population and 16 percent of the crime statistics collected by the UCR Program.



# CRIME CLOCK

**Every 22.8 seconds      One Violent Crime**

Every 31.8 minutes	One Murder
Every 5.6 minutes	One Forcible Rape
Every 1.3 minutes	One Robbery
Every 36.8 seconds	One Aggravated Assault

**Every 3.0 seconds      One Property Crime**

Every 14.6 seconds	One Burglary
Every 4.5 seconds	One Larceny-theft
Every 25.0 seconds	One Motor Vehicle Theft

*The Crime Clock should be viewed with care. The most aggregate representation of UCR data, it conveys the annual reported crime experience by showing a relative frequency of occurrence of Part I offenses. It should not be taken to imply a regularity in the commission of crime. The Crime Clock represents the annual ratio of crime to fixed time intervals.*

