



WILL NIBRS REPORTING INCREASE CRIME STATISTICS?

TIPS FOR RESPONDING TO QUESTIONS ABOUT THE IMPACT OF NIBRS

Law enforcement agencies are likely to experience an increase in crime statistics following a transition to the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS), even though there may not be a change in the number or type of offenses committed within the jurisdiction.

Knowing the benefits of NIBRS, anticipating questions from the public, and proactively communicating information about NIBRS will help agencies successfully describe changes in crime reporting practices.

NIBRS will become the national standard for reporting crime data on January 1, 2021, replacing the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program's Summary Reporting System (SRS). NIBRS and SRS use different methods for counting crime, and law enforcement agencies should understand how these differences affect their crime statistics. Crime counts may increase because under SRS

reporting rules, only the most serious criminal offense is counted, regardless of the number of offenses that occur during an incident; NIBRS captures up to 10 offenses per crime incident, allowing for offenses excluded under SRS reporting rules to be recorded.

For most agencies, the impact of transitioning to NIBRS on crime statistics is expected to be low, with certain offense types affected more than others. Property offenses, public-order crimes, and drug violations are more likely to be affected by changes in crime reporting than are serious, violent crimes. Only about 1% of crime incidents recorded in NIBRS involved two or more Part 1 offense types. That is, it is very rare for a murder, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny, motor vehicle theft, or arson (i.e., Part 1 offense) to co-occur in an incident.



KEY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SRS AND NIBRS—A BRIEF PRIMER

SRS	NIBRS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">» Outdated, 90-year-old system of counting crime that does not meet the needs of 21st-century policing» Will be retired December 31, 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none">» Modern system capturing the detailed information necessary for making informed decisions about crime» Will become the national crime reporting standard on January 1, 2021
<ul style="list-style-type: none">» Limited to an aggregate monthly tally of crime	<ul style="list-style-type: none">» Captures circumstances and context for crime in addition to counts, providing more meaningful data
<ul style="list-style-type: none">» Records limited data for 10 offense types and reported arrests for 20 additional crimes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">» Collects incident-specific data for 52 offenses and reported arrests for 10 additional offenses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">» The most serious offense in an incident is reported; additional offenses are excluded	<ul style="list-style-type: none">» Includes up to 10 offenses per incident and provides a more precise account of crime
<ul style="list-style-type: none">» Does not collect contextual information about the crime, the victim, or the offender	<ul style="list-style-type: none">» Captures 58 data elements about the crime, including characteristics of the victim and offender, their relationship, type of injury or loss, location, and weapons involved
<ul style="list-style-type: none">» Cannot be used to answer important questions about the nature of crime	<ul style="list-style-type: none">» Can be used for tactical or strategic analysis at the local, state, and national levels

EXPERT TIP #1:

Understand whether your agency's post-NIBRS increase in crime is due to a change in data reporting practices or a change in offending.

Do not directly compare NIBRS crime counts to historic SRS counts when discussing changes in crime. When crime incidents involve multiple offenses, NIBRS includes offenses that were previously unrecorded in SRS because SRS reporting rules specify that only the most serious offense is recorded. To determine whether your jurisdiction experienced an actual change in offending, convert NIBRS data to the SRS format. Many agencies continue to publicly report crime counts in the SRS format so stakeholders have access to crime trends.

See the NIBRS Pre-Certification Tool (<https://nibrs.search.org/nibrs-web>) for assistance in converting NIBRS data to SRS format.

EXPERT TIP #2:

Anticipate questions about differences between SRS and NIBRS crime counts and understand the impact of NIBRS on your agency's crime counts.

Assess how NIBRS reporting rules will affect your agency's crime statistics before publicly releasing incident-based data, and be prepared to answer questions about specific changes within your jurisdiction. When a single offense type occurs during a crime incident, SRS and NIBRS will record identical crime counts. Single-offense incidents account for about 88% of incidents recorded in NIBRS, meaning only about 12% of crime incidents will be affected by changes in reporting practices.¹ Undertake efforts to better understand the nature and prevalence of multiple-offense incidents and be able to discuss the impact of these incidents on crime counts.

¹Hendrix, J.A., & Martin, K. (2019, October). *Multiple offense incidents in the National Incident-Based Reporting System*. Prepared for the U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, Washington, DC. Retrieved from https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/NCSX_MOI_REPORT.pdf



EXPERT TIP #3:

Build community trust by educating the public about your agency's transition to NIBRS.

Don't let changes in crime reporting be a surprise to anyone. Policing is in the national spotlight, and the media and the public are consumers of crime data. Determine who will be affected by the change in how offenses are recorded—including elected or appointed officials, the media, the public, and victim advocacy groups—and anticipate their concerns related to crime statistics.

KEY STEPS IN COMMUNICATING INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR AGENCY'S TRANSITION INCLUDE

- 1 understanding the differences between SRS and NIBRS,
- 2 knowing your crime data,
- 3 knowing your audience,
- 4 being open about changes in crime reporting, and
- 5 capitalizing on NIBRS benefits.

EXPERT TIP #4:

Manage your NIBRS messaging by focusing on the positive aspects of the transition to incident-based reporting.

NIBRS collects detailed information about each criminal incident. Those data can be used to answer important questions about the nature of crime and victimization, something that is not possible with SRS data. For example, while the SRS captures only the total number of aggravated assaults that occur during a month, NIBRS provides additional context, including information about how many assaults were domestic, whether they occurred in a public place, and at what time of day the assault happened. The comprehensive data collected through NIBRS will enable your agency to better understand offending, develop strategies for combatting crime, and more effectively respond to questions about crime in your community.

(See the video *NIBRS: Enabling Operational Advantages* at <https://youtu.be/fw967gqhw5Y> to learn more about how NIBRS can benefit law enforcement.)

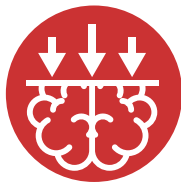
BENEFITS OF NIBRS



Provide a more accurate picture of crime

Data Uses

- » Understand the nature of multi-offense incidents
- » Develop policies that improve public safety



Provide context for understanding victimization and offending

Data Uses

- » Reveal patterns in victimization
- » Explore characteristics of suspected offenders



Provide better data for addressing citizen concerns

Data Uses

- » Help target resources for crime prevention, investigations, and victim services
- » Improve transparency and accountability



Provide standardized data

Data Uses

- » Perform analytical comparisons across jurisdictions
- » Identify emerging crime trends