



# NIBRS Participation Rates and Federal Crime Data Quality

May 24, 2022

Since 1930, the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI's) Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) program has collected and published annual crime data. These data are typically delayed by about nine months, and since 2020 the FBI has also released quarterly crime data. Although the release of 2021 crime data is not anticipated until late summer or fall 2022, data for the first quarter of 2021 was expected to be released in early 2022. However, the FBI has announced that [due to low participation rates](#) it was unable to release all of the quarterly 2021 crime data.

The FBI stated that it was not releasing the expected quarterly data due to agency participation falling below a 60% participation threshold. For 2021, the FBI has received data from [9,881 of the 18,818 law enforcement agencies](#) (LEAs) in the country (53%). Because this falls short of the 60% threshold, the FBI released 2021 quarterly data from "individual city agencies with populations of 100,000 or greater" but stated that it would not release data by region or aggregate population. [The FBI plans to release the full year of 2021 data](#) with confidence intervals to indicate a lack of precision in the data; however, the FBI said it would not publish percentage change estimates or compare estimates to prior years. The FBI further stated that it will not release state-level estimates if the participating LEAs in a state cover less than 80% of the state population. Given these participation rates, Congress may consider a range of options to expand implementation of the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS).

## The National Incident-Based Reporting System

The UCR program collects voluntarily submitted crime data from federal, state, local, and tribal LEAs. Previously, the FBI used the Summary Reporting System (SRS) to collect these data; however, [on January 1, 2021, the FBI retired the SRS program](#) in favor of NIBRS. The shift to NIBRS is expected to yield many benefits, including [improved reliability, accuracy, accessibility, and timeliness of national crime data](#). NIBRS captures a [larger variety of crimes](#) and more details about each incident (e.g., the time of day) than did SRS. Perhaps most notably, NIBRS eliminated the hierarchy rule, which under SRS required an LEA to report only the most serious offense if an incident included several crimes. In contrast, NIBRS allows law enforcement to report [up to 10 co-occurring offenses per single incident](#).

In a 2018 [guidance document](#), the FBI estimated that it would take individual LEAs up to two years to transition from SRS to NIBRS. NIBRS is more complicated than SRS and the conversion may require

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IN11936

financial and technical resources that LEAs are not able to access or spare. For example, [an initial cost estimate](#) for setting up NIBRS in Anderson, SC, a town with approximately 27,000 residents and 100 sworn police officers, ranged from \$130,000 to \$200,000. Federal grant funds have been made available to help agencies make the shift to NIBRS. In FY2017, NIBRS conversion was added as an area of emphasis for [Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grants \(JAG\) grants](#). From FY2018 to FY2021, the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) required JAG recipients that were not certified as NIBRS-compliant to dedicate 3% of any JAG award toward that end. The Jabara-Heyer NO HATE Act (P.L. 117-13) also authorized grant funding to create state-run hate crime reporting hotlines and aid states or units of local government in implementing NIBRS. The FY2022 Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act (P.L. 117-103) included \$5 million for this effort.

## Effect of NIBRS Participation Rates on Crime Data and Grant Funding

Some observers have expressed concerns that crime data quality might suffer if fewer agencies participate using NIBRS compared to SRS. Lower participation rates can have consequences for understanding crime both in a given year and over time. Data quality concerns may arise from low rates of overall participation, but also if participation drops in certain types of LEAs. For example, if LEAs from non-metropolitan or rural areas participate in NIBRS at a lower rate than agencies from more populous areas then the data may not sufficiently capture regional variability. Some observers have also raised concerns stemming from non-participation by many of the nation's largest law enforcement agencies, [including both the NYPD and LAPD](#). Large metropolitan areas can drive major crime trends in their states and nationally and the absence of their data could detrimentally affect the scope and precision of the NIBRS data.

The majority of the states and Washington, DC, had at least one agency that reported crime data using NIBRS during 2020. According to [the FBI's participation data](#), Alaska, New Jersey, Florida, and California were the only states that had no agencies using NIBRS in that year. None of the territories had agencies reporting using NIBRS, although low participation rates in criminal justice data collections are common in the territories. FBI data indicate that 54% of agencies nationwide reported data using NIBRS and 32% reported using SRS in 2020. Combined, these rates exceeded the 60% threshold. However, the NIBRS participation rate fell in 2021 (53%) compared to 2020 (54%). NIBRS and SRS were both in place for 2020 crime data, but for 2021 only NIBRS submissions are allowed and it is not clear how many agencies using SRS in 2020 were able to report using NIBRS in 2021.

Crime data collected via UCR are used to determine allocations for state and local governments for several federal grant programs, most notably the [JAG program](#). Half of a state, local, or tribal government's JAG award is determined by the number of violent crimes (i.e., homicide, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault) reported to UCR. Agencies that do not report using NIBRS may cause their state or local governments to lose out on funds to which they would otherwise be entitled. Similar funding calculations based on violent crimes reported to UCR are also in place for the DNA Capacity Enhancement and Backlog Reduction (CEBR) program as well as the hiring program at the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office).

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