

# Ucr vs nibrs



## Comparison of the Two Primary Crime Data Sources Used In the United States, the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) and the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS)

The two primary sources of crime data employed in the United States of America to routinely monitor the nature and degree of crime are the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) and the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS). The data for these two sources is gathered, organized and analyzed by various federal US agencies such as the Bureau of Justice Statistics and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). The data from these two sources is used by crime data analysts to determine the nature and intensity of various law breaches and to get information regarding the background, behavior and personality of the criminal offenders. The Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) consists of data collected by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) from more than 17, 000 local police departments throughout the USA. A much improved version of Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) is known as the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS). The NIBRS holds an extremely large degree of information about various crimes committed throughout the USA. The information contained within the NIBRS is organized in various complex ways. In the paragraphs to follow a detailed discussion will be carried, comparing and contrasting various important features of the UCR and the NIBRS.

### **Contrasting Features of UCR and NIBRS**

#### **Number of offenses tracked**

The number of offenses tracked is one of the most important points of differentiation between UCR and NIBRS. Uniform Crime Reports (UCR)

records crime reported and arrests made for the 8 Part I offenses and reports arrest counts for Part II offenses while in the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) Part I and Part II crime categorization was replaced by Group A and Group B offenses (Samaha, 2005).

Uniform Crime Reports (UCR): The data collected from local police departments across the USA is used to compile Uniform Crime Reports (UCR). At the UCR this data is then categorized into two groups, Part I offense and Part II offense (Lynch & Addington, 2006). The first group, Part I offense includes list of 8 index offenses including:

1. Murder
2. Rape
3. Robbery (personal and commercial)
4. Aggravated assault
5. Burglary (household and commercial)
6. Larceny-theft
7. Motor vehicle theft
8. Arson

It is the responsibility of police department across the USA to record every reported occurrence of such crimes and then pass on the data to the FBI. At UCR the criminal data belonging to Part I offenses is further broken down in terms of the city, county, metropolitan area and the geographical division in which the incident occurred.

All the other types of crimes which are of less serious nature and for which local police departments have little to no information are included in the list

of Part II offenses. In totality UCR lists 21 crimes in the list of Part II offenses. Vandalism, drug trafficking, liquor law violation, fraud, embezzlement, gambling, suspicion, disorderly conduct, carrying and possessing weapons and other such crimes of non-violent nature and included among the list of Part II offenses.

National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS): The most important point of difference between UCR and NIBRS is that in the NIBRS the classification of crimes in the form of Part I and Part II offenses is discarded in the favor of Group A and Group B classification of offenses. National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) contains information on 46 ' Group A' offenses that represent 22 index crime categories rather than only focusing on eight index offenses as in the case of UCR.

The 22 ' Group A' index crime offenses are listed below:

1. Homicide (negligent manslaughter, murder/non-negligent manslaughter, justifiable homicide-It is not categorized as a crime)
2. Forcible sex offenses
3. Robbery
4. Assault (Aggravated assault, simple assault and intimidation)
5. Burglary (breaking and entering)
6. Larceny (Theft offenses)
7. Motor vehicle theft
8. Arson
9. Bribery
10. Non-forcible sex offenses

11. Counterfeiting/forgery offenses
12. Destruction/damage/vandalism of victim's property
13. Drug/narcotic offenses
14. Pornography/obscene material
15. Prostitution
16. Embezzlement
17. Extortion/blackmail
18. Fraud
19. Gambling offenses
20. Kidnapping/abduction
21. Stolen property offenses
22. Weapon law violations

The ' Group B' consists of 11 criminal offenses. This group covers all kinds and types of crimes not contained in the ' Group A' offenses.

1. Curfew/loitering/vagrancy
2. Disorderly conduct
3. Bad checks
4. Drunkenness
5. Driving under the influence
6. Liquor law violations
7. Trespassing
8. Peeping Tom
9. Nonviolent family offenses
10. Runaways
11. All other offenses

## **Summary based versus Incident based reporting**

Uniform Crime Reports (UCR): The Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) system is also known as the traditional system of reporting or the summary based reporting system. This system is based on tallying the total number of incidences for Part I offenses as well as summing together the total number of criminals arrested for committing both Part I and Part II offenses. In other words, UCR data consist of total crime counts or summary data of the crimes reported from police departments across the country. In the UCR summary data 'group' is the unit of analysis; crime reports are only available for cities or counties and these may be summed up to determine aggregate level of crime across states and regions in the USA. This cumulative data is then submitted in the form of monthly summary reports to the FBI. It is for this reason UCR is also known as the summary reporting system (Department of Justice-FBI, 2004).

The fundamental drawback of the summary based reporting system is that no distinct description is available for defining the nature of offense, the offenders and the victims. This flaw in UCR system is exposed whenever criminal analysis is done at the basic level focusing on individual crimes, offenders and victim as it is possible to sum up individual units of analysis to a higher level, but it is not possible to disaggregate large grouped data to the individual level.

National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS): As compared to the UCR, National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) is a very effective crime reporting system that collects data on each single criminal offense and arrest (Siegel & Senna, 2007). This new system requires law enforcement

agencies to submit at least a brief account of each criminal offense and the resulting arrests (Regoli, Hewitt, & DeLisi, 2009). For each offense known to the local law enforcement authorities, information within the categories of incident, property, victim, offender and arrestee is gathered. In total information for 53 data elements within a total of 22 crime categories is gathered (Cole, Smith, & DeJong, 2012). The reports thus developed are highly detailed and meaningful and can prove to be highly beneficial for the local crime agencies. Armed with all-inclusive crime data these agencies can make a strong case against offensive criminals and serial law offenders.

### **Revised Crime Definitions in the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS)**

NIBRS revised some of the existing crime definitions found in the summary based reporting system (Hagan, 2003). For instance in the traditional UCR system, ' Manslaughter by Negligence' was defined as " The killing of another person through gross negligence" whereas in the NIBRS the definition was altered to exclude the word " gross", ' Manslaughter by Negligence' is now defined as " The killing of another person through negligence". Another point differentiating between UCR and NIBRS in this category is that in the UCR system ' Manslaughter by Negligence' includes all kinds of traffic fatalities whereas in the NIBRS the definition was modified so that the sub-category of Homicide, ' Negligent Manslaughter' now counts all traffic fatalities as negligent manslaughter except only the ' accidental traffic deaths' (Vito & Maahs, 2011).

Within the ' Assault' offense category the UCR does not provides a definition for the subcategory of ' intimidation'. It is simply stated as an example of

simple, not aggravated Part II offense. As compared to the summary reporting system the NIBRS provides a proper definition for 'intimidation'.

## **Hierarchy rule versus Individual offense reporting**

Uniform Crime Reports (UCR): The hierarchy rule employed by the traditional crime reporting system, Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) for classification of crimes resulted in a number of measurement errors. Under the domains of the hierarchy law if a criminal commits more than one offense in a single incident than only the most serious offense will be listed as the cause of the incident (Wilson, 2009). The example below taken from the FBI Uniform Crime Reporting Handbook effectively explains how the hierarchy rule operates (Maxfield & Babbie, 2010). A thief broke into a home, stole several items, put them in the car which belonged to the owner of the property. Just when the burglar was about to leave the owner returned and took the thief by surprise who knocked the owner unconscious by hitting him in the head with a chair. The burglar then drove away in the owners' car. Here the burglar committed a number of crimes the classification of these crimes according to the Hierarchy rule will be done as follows:

### **Nature of crime**

#### **Classification according to Part I and Part II offense system**

Burglary-Forced entry

5a

Larceny-Theft

6



## Motor Vehicle Theft

7a

## Aggravated Assault

4d

## Robbery-Other dangerous weapon

3c

After classification of the burglar's offenses only one offense, falling into the category of ' Robbery-Other dangerous weapon' (3c) was described in the UCR. This offense was listed as Robbery since it is the most serious crime among the list of list of offenses committed by the burglar. The lesser offenses were not accounted in that year's UCR totals. Thus, the validity and integrity of UCR is highly compromised for not counting all crimes committed in an incident (Regoli, Hewitt, & DeLisi, 2011).

National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS): The hierarchy rule does not exist under the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS). Under the NIBRS local law enforcement agencies are required to submit detailed information about all offenses committed in a single incident (Paynich & Hill, 2011). According to the handbook of NIBRS an incident is defined as " one or more offenses committed by the same offender or group of offenders acting in concert, at the same time and place" (Department of Justice -FBI, 2000).

In each criminal occurrence NIBRS collects information on up to 10 offenses. This includes detailed information about the victim, the offender, any

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witnesses and the nature and type of the offense. The NIBRS also provides information about the circumstances under which the criminal offense took place and the known characteristics of the victim and the offender such as their age, sex, race and the relationship between them (Broder & Tucker, 2011). If the example cited above, listed as Robbery under the UCR system, was reported under the NIBRS all the information concerning the nature of incident such as forced entry of the burglar, his act of stealing which includes stealing from home as well as vehicle theft, the injuries he caused upon the owner of the house and the date, time and location of the incident would have been reported (Walsh & Hemmens, 2010). NIBRS is of great assistance to criminal analysts by providing complete information about a particular incident.

### **Method of classifying crimes**

Uniform Crime Reports (UCR): The Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) sorts crimes into two broad categories; crimes against persons which includes offenses such as murder, assault, robbery, domestic violence and aggravated assault. The second category, crimes against property includes offenses such as burglary, robbery, larceny-theft, vandalism, arson, auto theft, forgery and fraud.

National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS): Like the summary reporting system, NIBRS distinguishes between crimes against persons and crimes against property, but unlike the UCR, NIBRS has included a third category of crime; the crimes against society. This new category was created to prohibit the people from engaging in morally degenerating activities. This category covers offenses such as gambling, drug violations,

pornography/obscene material, prostitution and other such vice crimes (Rantala & Edwards, 2000). These crimes are recorded as one offense per distinct operation. These crimes are also known as victimless crimes because these crimes are usually not committed against a person hence they cannot be listed in the category of crimes against persons. These crimes also cannot be labeled as a property crime since property is not the objective behind this category of crimes.

### **Attempted versus completed crimes**

Uniform Crime Reports (UCR): No mechanism existed in the UCR system for distinguishing between crimes that were completed and crimes that were left in the middle or in other words, were left incomplete. This led to serious confusions as many attempted or incomplete crimes were reported in the manner as if they were complete.

National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS): As compared to UCR, National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) makes a clear distinction between the attempted and completed crimes. In the NIBRS each criminal offense is labeled as either an 'A' which stands for 'Attempted Crime' or 'C' which means a "Completed Crime".

### **Means for data correlation**

Uniform Crime Reports (UCR): Many criminal investigations require data analysts to draw various correlations between the gathered information. The major flaw of Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) is that it seriously lacks mechanisms for developing effective correlations among data on offenses, arrests and victims. The summary reporting system only enables data

correlation in case of a homicide incident. In a homicide incident the UCR can correlate the age, race and sex of the criminal offender to the age, race and sex of the victim.

National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS): As compared to the summary based reporting system, the NIBRS uses both explicit and implied linkages for calculating the degree of correlation between different types of data values. The explicit linkages are used to connect together data elements such as offenders, offenses, victims, property, arrestees to the criminal incidents (Department of Justice -FBI, 2004). The implicit linkage, on the other hand is used to draw linkage between all the offenders and victims in any criminal offense, since each criminal offender in any criminal incident indirectly or directly participates in the commission of offense against the victims. The availability of incident specific information from National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) means that law enforcement agencies can not only draw complicated relationships between victims and offenders but also can determine correlation between these relationships and the offense information; a functionality lacked by the summary based reporting system.

### **Collection of Weapon Information**

Uniform Crime Reports (UCR): The Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) only collects weapon information for criminal offenses such as murder, robbery and aggravated assault.

National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS): As compared to the summary based reporting system, the NIBRS records weapon information for all violent criminal offenses (Cohen & Wright, 2011).

## **Establishing Victim-to-Offender Relationship**

Uniform Crime Reports (UCR): In the Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) system the relationship of the victim to the offender (for example, the victim was the wife, husband, father, brother, son, employee or employer of the offender) is reported only in homicide events.

National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS): As compared to the summary based reporting system, in NIBRS the victim's relationship to the offender is reported for all crimes falling under the category of ' Crimes against Person' i. e., murder offense, assault offense, kidnapping/abduction offense, robbery offense, domestic violence and aggravated assault offense. The relationship between victims to offenders is also reported in case of a robbery since one main element of the robbery offense is an assault which renders it be a violent crime (Department of Justice -FBI, 2000).

## **Circumstance Reporting**

Uniform Crime Reports (UCR): In the Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) system the circumstance data is collected only in case of a homicide offense.

National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS): In the modified crime reporting system, NIBRS, the circumstance data is collected only for homicides as well as aggravated assaults.

## **Hotel Rule**

Uniform Crime Reports (UCR): According to the Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) system the hotel rule states that whenever multiple units of a facility for e. g., a hotel are burglarized and the manager reports the incident to the police rather than individual occupants the police will count the multiple burglary incident as a single offense (Burgess, Regehr, & Roberts, 2012).

National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS): In the NIBRS the hotel rule was modified and extended to mini-warehouses and self-storage warehouses.

## **Advantages and disadvantages of UCR and NIBRS**

There are several advantages as well as disadvantages of both UCR and NIBRS. Some of them are compared as below.

### **Advantages**

#### **UCR**

#### **NIBRS**

Extensive data coverage across various geographical areas.

Separately reports each offense that occurs in a criminal incident.

Special focus on crimes committed against law enforcement professionals.

Four times more inclusive crime categories as compared to UCR.

Standardized crime definitions.

Contains victimization information.

## **Disadvantages**

### **UCR**

### **NIBRS**

Hierarchy rule; reports only the most serious crime or event.

Implementation of NIBRS across local police departments has been quite slow.

Aggregates different offenses into same crime category.

Participation in NIBRS requires increased data entry requirements.

Measurement and reporting bias.

NIBRS does not utilize data that constitute a representative sample of the population, states or law enforcement agencies.

## **Implications of UCR and NIBRS**

The Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) system has collected, categorized and presented crime figures for the greatest part of the twentieth century. The UCR system greatly assisted law enforcement organizations in compiling a huge database comprising of reliable crime statistics. In the twenty first century UCR program went through major revisions, it is now being replaced by a more comprehensive and detailed crime reporting system called National Incident-Based Reporting System. The implications of such an effective and efficiently developed crime reporting system are many, it is expected that the NIBRS system will prove to be a frontline weapon for law enforcement agencies across the country.

## **Conclusion**

In the USA the two main sources for accessing criminal data are the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) and the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS). The UCR was the old and outdated system for keeping criminal records which was replaced by the revised and updated NIBRS in 1989.

There are a number of differences between the UCR and the NIBRS yet the most important difference is that UCR is basically a summary based reporting system while NIBRS reports criminal offenses at the incident level. The UCR collects data in a summary format also known as the aggregate or sum total methodology. The summary format for data collection meant that individual characteristics and circumstances of every criminal offense were lost. This problem was solved with the introduction of NIBRS system. The NIBRS not only collects aggregate data but also provides an effective methodology for maintaining the significance of each discrete unit of information. The computerized databases used by NIBRS greatly assist criminal analysts and researchers in making specific crime related queries.