

# THE TEXAS UNIFORM CRIME REPORTING PROGRAM

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## **PURPOSE OF UCR**

The objective of the Uniform Crime Reporting program is to produce reliable crime statistics for law enforcement administration, operation, and management. This information is also available as a measure of the fluctuations in the type and volume of crime in Texas. The means utilized to attain these objectives are: to measure the extent, fluctuation, distribution, and nature of crime through the collection of data on the eight serious Crime Index Offenses; to measure the total volume of serious crime known to police; to show the activity and coverage of law enforcement agencies through arrest counts and police employee strength data.

## **HISTORY OF UCR**

### **The National Program**

The Uniform Crime Reporting program of the Federal Bureau of Investigation grew from the need for a national view of law enforcement statistics. In the 1920's, the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) formed the Committee on Uniform Crime Records to develop a uniform system of police statistics. The IACP's voluntary national crime collection program began, in 1930, with the participation of 400 police agencies representing some 20 million citizens in 43 states. In that same year, the U.S. Congress authorized the Federal Bureau of Investigation to serve as the national clearinghouse for the crime statistical information collected by the program.

In UCR, crime reports are obtained from law enforcement agencies throughout the nation based on uniform classifications and procedures of reporting. In an effort to provide as complete a picture of crime in the United States as possible, the Committee on Uniform Crime Records of the

IACP chose to obtain data only on offenses that become known to police. A meaningful overview of crime was made available through examination of the seven Crime Index offenses selected for their seriousness, frequency of occurrence and likelihood of being reported: murder, forcible rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny-theft and motor vehicle theft. By mandate of the U.S. Congress, arson became the eighth index offense in 1979.

In the early planning stages of UCR, it was recognized that the differences among state and local criminal codes precluded the possibility of creating a national crime total based upon an aggregate of local statistics. To provide for national uniformity, the IACP adopted standardized definitions of crimes to overcome the problems posed by the variations in state and local definitions of crimes. Reporting agencies were required to interpret local criminal acts in the context of the standard national definitions before submitting their crime totals. Because of the differences among the state codes, there is no possibility in a program, such as UCR, to distinguish between crimes by designations such as 'felony' or 'misdemeanor.'

### **The Texas Program**

On January 1, 1976, the State of Texas adopted the Uniform Crime Report as its official statewide crime report. The Department of Public Safety accepted the responsibility to collect, validate and tabulate UCR reports from all reporting jurisdictions in Texas. To handle this task, the Uniform Crime Reporting Section was established within the Identification and Criminal Records Division (now Crime Records Service) to coordinate the collection, processing and publication of information regarding the extent of major crime in Texas.

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## METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION

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### Reporting Procedures

Law enforcement agencies report the number of known index crime offenses from their records of complaints from victims, reports from witnesses and from crimes discovered by the agency during its operations. Reports that are later determined to be unfounded are eliminated from the totals. The resulting number of 'offenses known to law enforcement officials' is reported without regard to whether arrests were made, stolen property recovered or prosecution took place. Agencies report additional information on the value of property stolen and recovered, the circumstances surrounding homicides, family violence, hate crimes, and reports of persons arrested for all crimes. The arrest reports are categorized on the basis of age, sex, race and ethnic origin.

Each contributing agency compiles and submits its own crime reports to the UCR program on a monthly basis. To maintain quality and uniformity in the data received, UCR field representatives provide training on detailed procedures for scoring and classifying offenses.

### Verification Procedures

A major concern in the collection of crime statistics is the validity and uniformity of the data received. With the receipt of voluntary monthly reports from 956 jurisdictions, the problem of attaining uniformity is readily apparent. Each incoming report is examined for accuracy and reasonableness through the use of numerous cross-checking procedures. While minor errors are corrected by the UCR report verifiers, unusual variations are brought to the attention of the submitting agency by direct contact of a UCR field representative.

### Field Representation

In compliance with national guidelines and in an effort to ensure the accurate reporting of crime information, the Texas Uniform Crime Reporting Program has assigned five persons to assist local agencies in crime reporting procedures. Each field representative is assigned a specific area (see map in Appendix), and is responsible for assisting local police agencies in the resolution of reporting problems, and contacts non-reporting agencies to

enlist their participation in the program.

A great deal of the success of Texas' UCR Program has been due to the full-time field staff assigned to assist local agencies in crime reporting procedures. The program's philosophy is that personal contact is invaluable to the accuracy and uniformity of UCR data received. To further this process, a full-time trainer conducts on-site training programs for local agencies.

### Offense Estimation

The Texas UCR program enjoys a high rate of participation among Texas' law enforcement jurisdictions. In 1999, 956 Texas Law Enforcement agencies submitted reports to the DPS' UCR Section. Because UCR relies upon the voluntary participation of these agencies to give a true picture of the total crime in Texas, it is necessary to estimate the crime totals for non-reporting agencies. Using the known crime experiences of similar population areas within the state, crime volumes for non-reporting agencies are proportionally estimated. Through this application of standardized estimating procedures, index crime totals are directly comparable between specific years.

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## ADVISORY GROUPS

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The IACP Committee on Uniform Crime Records continues to serve in an advisory capacity to the FBI in the operation of UCR. The National Sheriff's Association, in 1966, established a Committee on Uniform Crime Records to advise the Uniform Crime Reporting Program. This Committee actively encourages full participation in UCR.

Committees on Crime Records within the Texas Police Association and the Sheriff's Association of Texas are active in promoting interest in UCR, fostering widespread use of uniform crime statistics, and lending assistance to contributors when the need exists. The FBI also actively assists in the development of police statistical programs that are compatible with the national system. Nationally, state statistical programs provide the advantage of increased coverage of local law enforcement agencies and, thereby, help to assure the completeness and quality of crime information.

The Texas Uniform Crime Reporting Program is directly made possible by a grant from the State of Texas through the Criminal Justice Division of the Governor's Office.

## **ADDITIONAL UCR COLLECTIONS**

### **Family Violence**

Violence within Texas families has been recognized as a growing threat to the safety of Texans. In an effort to quantify the incidents of abuse occurring within Texas families, the 71st Texas Legislature directed the Department of Public Safety to collect information on family violence incidents. This data collection commenced with calendar year 1991 and is included in Chapter Five.

### **Hate Crime Data Collection**

Under mandate of state and federal law, in 1992, the Texas UCR program began collecting hate crime information. The Hate Crime Statistics Act of 1990 directed the U.S. Attorney General to collect data, "about crimes that manifest evidence of prejudice based on race, religion, sexual orientation, or ethnicity." Disability was added to the list of bias categories in 1997.

Shortly after passage of the national law, the Texas Legislature amended the Texas Government Code to require the Department of Public Safety to, "Establish and maintain a central repository for the collection and analysis of information relating to crimes that are motivated by prejudice, hatred, or advocacy of violence." The passage of this law impacted every law enforcement agency in Texas through the requirement that, "Local law enforcement agencies shall report offenses described by Subsection (a) in the form and manner and at regular intervals as prescribed by rules adopted by the department." The results of this effort are illustrated in Chapter Six.

### **Campus Crime**

In 1990, the federal Crime Awareness and Campus Security Act was enacted into law. The act requires eligible educational institutions to maintain certain crime and arrest data in accor-

dance with UCR definitions. Index Crime reports from Texas campus police departments are available in Chapter Nine of this report.

### **Incident Based Reporting**

Since its inception, the UCR program has provided a steady, reliable stream of information about crime in this nation. However, because UCR is a summary-based reporting system, data about individual crime incidents are not available. The summary-based methodology, despite its reliability, is limited in many aspects. Limitations of the summary system include a lack of information on offenses, arrests, and victim/offender relationships.

To take advantage of new technological capabilities, the FBI, in conjunction with the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), took part in a thorough study to modernize the UCR Program. The findings from this study were presented at the 7th Annual National UCR Conference in July 1984. The resulting document, *Blueprint for the Future of the Uniform Crime Reporting Program: Final Report of the UCR Study*, released in 1985, outlined the emerging Incident Based Reporting (IBR) system. With its implementation, IBR collects data on the circumstances of each crime incident in electronic form. The detail provided by IBR data greatly enhances the speed, availability, accuracy, and usefulness of crime statistics.

The Texas version of IBR, TIBRS, includes all national data elements as well as Texas-specific data. Although many years from full implementation, the Texas IBR program is currently collecting information from 50 IBR-certified agencies, including the Austin Police Department, which remains the largest IBR agency in the nation. At this time, there is not a separate publication for IBR data. IBR data is converted to summary for its inclusion in this publication.

## **CRIME FACTORS**

Statistics gathered under the Uniform Crime Reporting Program are submitted by the law enforcement agencies of Texas and are used to project a statewide picture of crime. Awareness of factors which influence the resulting crime statistics is necessary in order to draw fair conclusions. As these crime factors influence the crime experience of each community, comparisons of crime statistics between communities should not be

made without consideration of the individual factors present.

Crime is a social problem of grave concern in which the police are limited in their role of suppression and detection. As stated by the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Criminal Justice,

"The fact that the police deal daily with crime does not mean that they have unlimited power to prevent it, or reduce it, or deter it. The police did not create and cannot resolve the social conditions that stimulate crime... They do not enact the laws that they are required to enforce, nor do they dispose of the criminals they arrest. The police are only one part of the government; and the government is only one part of society. The criminal process is limited to case by case operations, one criminal or one crime at a time."

Set forth below are some of the conditions which affect the crime types and volume that occur in differing jurisdictions:

- Crime reporting practices of the citizenry.
- Public attitudes toward law enforcement and crime.
- The size, density and demographic composition of a jurisdiction's population.
- Economic status of the population and area unemployment rates.
- Population stability including the number of commuters, transients, and seasonal population variations.
- Climate.
- Cultural conditions, such as educational, recreational, and religious characteristics.
- Community family values.
- Law enforcement employment standards and relative strength.
- Policies of the prosecuting officials and the courts.
- The administrative and investigative efficiency of the local law enforcement agency, including the degree of adherence to crime reporting standards.

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Sources: Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Futures in Crime Analysis: Exploring Applications of Incident-based Crime Data*; Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Crime in the United States 1975*; Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Crime in the United States 1990*; President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Criminal Justice, *The Challenge of Crime in a Free Society*.