



# Update on the NCVS Instrument Redesign

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The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) last redesigned the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) in 1992. Much has changed since that time, both in the nature of crime and in public willingness to participate in surveys. As such, BJS initiated a multiyear effort to improve the efficiency, reliability, and utility of the NCVS. The effort had three main goals: modernize the organization and content of the NCVS instrument, increase the quality of information collected and efficiency of the instrument flow, and improve the measurement and classification of crime. To that end, BJS is redesigning the entire survey instrument, which includes a household roster, a victimization screener, and a detailed crime incident report (CIR). Each of these instrument components were examined in the NCVS Instrument Redesign Field Test.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>See *National Crime Victimization Survey Redesign Field Test Topline Report: Comparing Condition 1 and Condition 2 by Interleaving Treatment* (NCJ 303980, BJS, March 2022) for more information.

This summary provides an update on the redesign effort, detailing BJS's decisions on the new survey instrument based on findings from the NCVS Instrument Redesign Field Test. It also provides a timeline for this multiyear redesign project, including anticipated milestones for its implementation phase.

The new NCVS core survey instrument—

- maintains a two-stage measurement approach in screening and classifying criminal victimization
- features updated crime screening questions that improve the quality of information collected and allow for more efficient flow through the CIR
- collects expanded information on victimization incidents and victim help-seeking
- introduces noncrime questions on police performance and community safety.

## National Crime Victimization Survey

The National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) is the nation's primary source of information on criminal victimization. Each year, data are obtained from a nationally representative sample of about 240,000 persons in about 150,000 U.S. households. Persons age 12 or older are interviewed on the frequency, characteristics, and consequences of criminal victimization in the United States.

The NCVS collects information on nonfatal personal crimes (i.e., rape or sexual assault, robbery, aggravated assault, simple assault, and personal larceny) and household property crimes (i.e., burglary or trespassing, motor vehicle theft, and other types of theft), both reported and not reported to police. Survey respondents provide information

about themselves (e.g., age, sex, race, ethnicity, marital status, education level, and income) and whether they experienced a victimization.

For each victimization incident, respondents report information about the offender (including age, sex, race, ethnicity, and victim-offender relationship), characteristics of the crime (including time and place of occurrence, use of weapons, nature of injury, and economic consequences), whether the crime was reported to police, reasons the crime was or was not reported, and experiences with the criminal justice system. For more information, see the NCVS data collection page at <https://bjs.ojp.gov/data-collection/ncvs>.

During the first phase of the redesign effort, BJS conducted a comprehensive assessment of the instrument to determine survey item use by BJS and NCVS data users; survey items with problematic language or placement; and gaps in the content of the instrument. From this assessment, BJS revised the survey content, streamlined the victimization screening questions, and developed a testing plan. BJS then tested the revised instrument using multiple rounds of interviews with respondents that focused on comprehension of the questions and navigation through the instrument. BJS also tested data collection field procedures through a small-scale pilot test. The results of the testing informed the design of a new NCVS instrument that was assessed through a large-scale national field test.

## The NCVS Instrument Redesign Field Test

BJS, in collaboration with Westat, conducted a large-scale national field test from October 2019 to March 2020 to compare the performance of the current NCVS instrument and procedures (Condition 1) against the redesigned instrument (Condition 2) (table 1). Condition 2 included two versions of the new instrument that differed on where follow-up probes were included when a respondent reported an incident:

- **Interleaved:** included follow-up probes within the crime screener.
- **Noninterleaved:** included follow-up probes at the beginning of the CIR.

**TABLE 1**  
NCVS Instrument Redesign Field Test design

	Condition 1	Condition 2
Instrument	Current NCVS	Redesigned NCVS
Mode	In person or telephone	
Interview type	Interviewer administered	
Number (N) of respondents <sup>a</sup>	3,000 persons age 12 or older	5,000 persons age 12 or older
Interleaving <sup>b</sup>	Not applicable	Yes (N = 2,500) No (N = 2,500)
Data collection period <sup>c</sup>	October 2019 – March 2020	

Note: NCVS denotes National Crime Victimization Survey. For additional information, see *National Crime Victimization Survey Redesign Field Test Topline Report: Comparing Condition 1 and Condition 2 by Interleaving Treatment* (NCJ 303980, BJS, March 2022).

<sup>a</sup>Target number of completed person interviews.

<sup>b</sup>Interleaved included follow-up probes within the crime screener. Noninterleaved included follow-up probes at the beginning of the crime incident report.

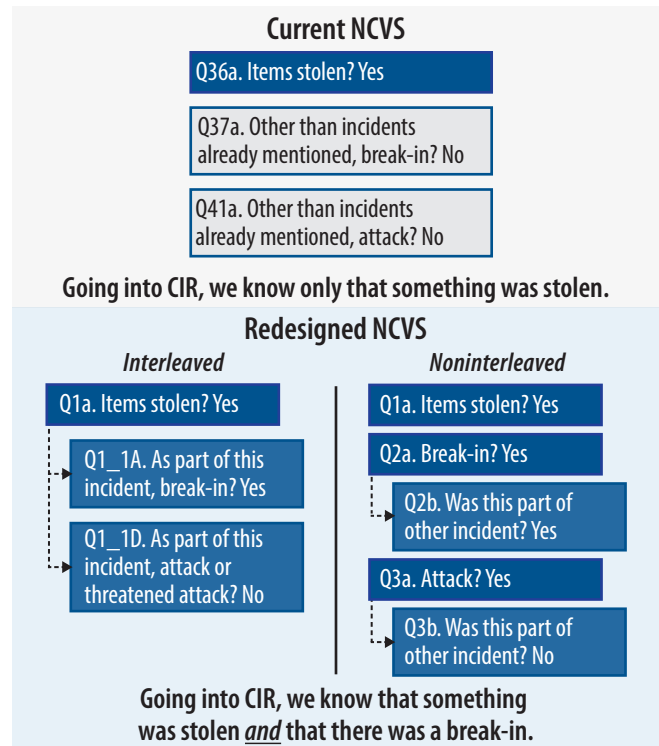
<sup>c</sup>Due to increasing risks related to the global COVID-19 pandemic, in-person data collection was suspended in March 2020.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, NCVS Redesign Field Test, 2019–2020.

As part of a third condition, a self-administered, web-based mode of the redesigned instrument, which included an in-person household roster, was also tested. This data collection was suspended earlier than planned due to increasing risks related to the global COVID-19 pandemic. BJS plans to conduct additional testing on a self-administered, web-based mode for the NCVS instrument before making any changes to the mode of data collection.

Both versions of the redesigned instrument gather more information on victimizations experienced by respondents than the current NCVS instrument does (figure 1). As illustrated in figure 1, when the respondent indicates that something was stolen, the **interleaved version** of the instrument immediately follows up with questions about whether the incident also involved a break-in or an attack. In the **noninterleaved version**, all questions in the theft screener are completed prior to advancing to the break-in screener, where the respondent confirms that the break-in incident was part of the theft. In comparison, the current instrument does not link the theft and break-in components of the incident until the CIR.

**FIGURE 1**  
Interleaving approach in the NCVS instrument



Note: CIR denotes crime incident report. NCVS denotes National Crime Victimization Survey.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2021.

### ***BJS will employ the noninterleaved version of the redesigned instrument***

Results from the NCVS Instrument Redesign Field Test demonstrated that the noninterleaved version of the instrument performed better than both the interleaved version and current NCVS instrument. The noninterleaved version—

- resulted in a higher proportion of incidents being properly classified as crimes
- provided more details critical to classifying the type of crime
- was generally easier for respondents to understand.

### **Highlights of the new NCVS instrument**

The new NCVS instrument (**figure 2**) retains the two-stage measurement approach of the current instrument for the screening and classification of criminal victimization. It is more conversational in style and promotes recall by asking respondents to consider each subset of examples or probes separately. The new instrument also improves measurement of victimization and incident characteristics.

#### ***Victimization screener***

The victimization screener is easier for respondents to understand and links components of an incident earlier in the instrument. These updates include—

- separating screening probes into shorter examples with yes/no responses in each screener series
- revising probe contents

- using more behaviorally specific language and expanding the screening probes for rape or sexual assault
- adding vandalism as a crime screener.

In the national field test, changes to the administration of the screening probes in the redesigned instrument (Condition 2) resulted in higher violent and property victimization rates than those the current instrument produced (Condition 1). BJS will continue to monitor and assess the impact of these changes to the redesigned screener during the implementation phase.

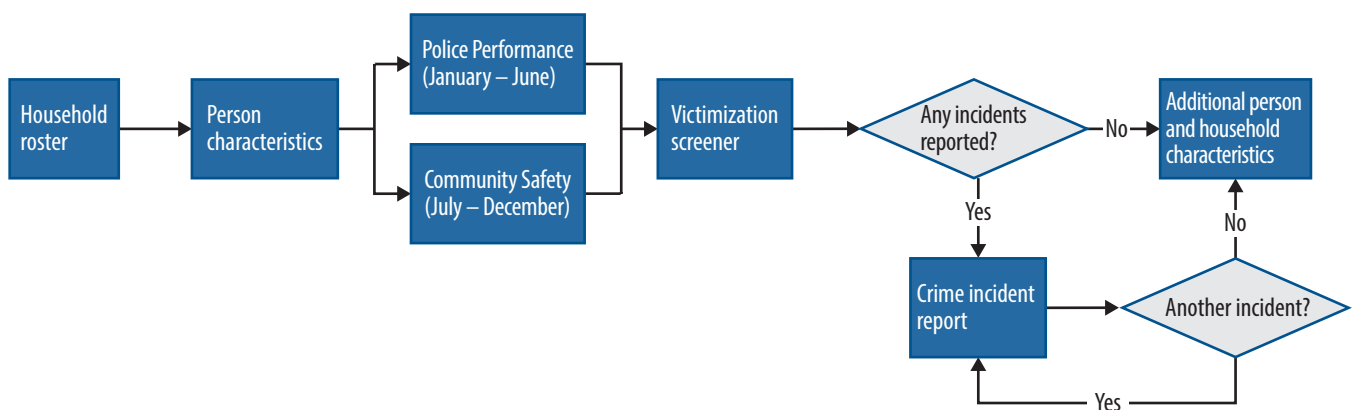
#### ***Crime incident report***

The CIR increases the amount of information collected about an incident. These updates include—

- improving the use of victimization screener responses to drive questions asked in the CIR
- revising items to improve measurement of key NCVS concepts (i.e., incident location and presence of respondent during incident)
- increasing information collected about rape or sexual assault incidents
- expanding measures of victim experiences, including use of victim services, satisfaction with police response, and consequences of victimization.

These improvements increased the amount of information collected about each incident and proved more efficient than the current NCVS in classifying victimizations in the national field test. These changes will provide valuable insight into victim experiences.

**FIGURE 2**  
**Flow of the new NCVS instrument**



Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2021.

## Police Performance and Community Safety modules

The new instrument includes two new periodic modules:

- The **Police Performance** module measures the types of contact with police and opinions about police performance.
- The **Community Safety** module measures indicators of public perceptions of community issues related to crime and neighborhood safety.

Both modules increase survey relevance for respondents, in particular for those who do not experience a victimization during their time in the survey panel. The modules will be administered to all respondents age 12 or older, and data collection will be rotated every 6 months (i.e., police performance will be collected from January through June, and community safety will be collected from July through December).

## The NCVS instrument redesign timeline

Figure 3 presents the timeline for this multiyear redesign project. BJS recently completed Phase 1 – Research and Testing, which culminated in the assessment of the redesigned instrument through a large-scale national field test.<sup>2</sup> BJS, in collaboration with the U.S. Census Bureau, which carries out the NCVS data collection, will next initiate Phase 2 – Implementation.

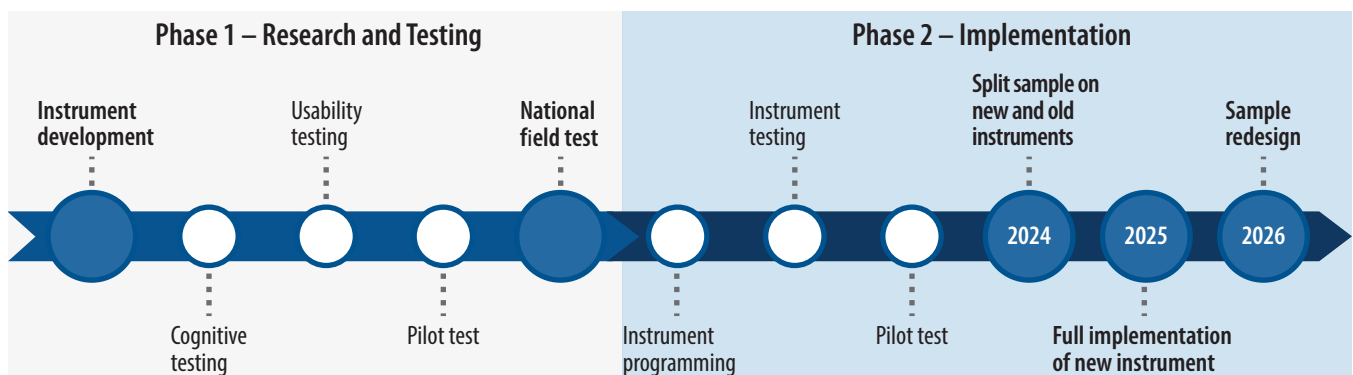
<sup>2</sup>See *Enhancing the Measurement of Hate Crime in the NCVS: Developing and Testing Improvements to the Survey Questions* (NCJ 301033, BJS, September 2021) and *NCVS Juvenile Testing and Redesign Report* (NCJ 304100, BJS, March 2022) for more information on additional testing activities.

The implementation phase involves introducing the instrument into the production environment. This includes instrument programming, instrument testing, and a pilot test to ensure that all data collection processes work correctly and meet statistical quality standards.

Once the new NCVS instrument is fully programmed and tested, a small-scale pilot test of it will take place. The pilot test will primarily assess data collection field procedures, the computer-assisted instrumentation, and case management systems, not the survey content. The pilot test will inform field protocols (i.e., listing all household members and interview procedures) and training needs for the larger split-sample field test and full-scale implementation of the new NCVS instrument. Pilot test data will be used to identify potential problems with the data collection field procedures. Any potential changes needed for data collection field procedures will be implemented before moving to the next step in the implementation process.

To maintain the ability to report criminal victimization data during the phase-in of the new NCVS instrument, BJS will employ a split-sample design. That is, a portion of the NCVS sample will be assigned the current instrument, and the other portion will be assigned the new instrument. This split-sample design will allow for some comparison between the old and new designs and provide a basis for measuring the redesign's impact on victimization rates. The split-sample approach should also inform whether statistical adjustments are needed to maintain the historical trend of victimization rates between the old and new instruments, which allows data users to compare estimates over time.

**FIGURE 3**  
NCVS instrument redesign timeline



Note: Phase 2 schedule is preliminary and subject to change.  
Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2021.

In 2024, BJS plans to split the NCVS sample with the goal of having a fully redesigned NCVS instrument in place by January 2025. To focus efforts on the implementation of the new instrument, BJS does not plan to administer any of the NCVS supplements (Identity Theft Supplement, Police-Public Contact Survey, School Crime Supplement, Supplemental Fraud Survey, and Supplemental Victimization Survey) in 2023 or 2024. In 2026, BJS is scheduled to update

the NCVS sample design to reflect changes in the U.S. population based on the 2020 decennial census. As part of the redesign, BJS is also evaluating other NCVS operations, including respondent communication, interviewer training, and data collection procedures. Additional information and details on the implementation phase of the redesign will be made available as work progresses.



The Bureau of Justice Statistics of the U.S. Department of Justice is the principal federal agency responsible for measuring crime, criminal victimization, criminal offenders, victims of crime, correlates of crime, and the operation of criminal and civil justice systems at the federal, state, tribal, and local levels. BJS collects, analyzes, and disseminates reliable statistics on crime and justice systems in the United States, supports improvements to state and local criminal justice information systems, and participates with national and international organizations to develop and recommend national standards for justice statistics. Doris J. James is the acting director.

This report was written by Jennifer L. Truman and Heather Brotsos.

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