In January, a 24-year-old man was charged with arson—one of eight “index crime” categories tracked nationwide by the FBI—after he allegedly set off a rash of car and building fires across Los Angeles.

Behind the news: Overall, index crimes, including arson, are down in Chicago, but in the past five years, four police districts on the North and Northwest sides posted an increase in at least four of the index crime categories.

Despite the increases, those police districts combined accounted for only 12 percent of the city’s most violent crimes last year.

Meanwhile, six of the highest crime areas, on the South and West sides of the city, experienced large decreases in the number of reported crimes.

Yet, those districts alone still accounted for 43 percent of all sexual assaults, murders, armed robberies and other violent crimes in 2011.

Arthur Lurigio, professor of psychology and criminal justice at Loyola University Chicago, said the jumps in individual categories could be due to either an increase in incidents and in reporting, or a change in police procedure.

Motor vehicle theft, for example, is always highly reported because it is tied to insurance while sexual assault is historically underreported because of stigma, he said.

“The news is that crime has been going down for the last 20 years, and we’re safer with regard to homicide and violent crime in Chicago than we have been since 1962,” he said. “But nobody feels safer.”