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**Tracking Traffickers: Investigating the Relationship Between Human Trafficking and Ports
of Entry**

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Abstract

Human Trafficking is defined as obtaining a person and subjecting them to some sort of servitude against their will. The purpose of this study is to determine if reports of human trafficking occur at higher rates in areas with International Ports of Entry, such as international airports, border control points, or ports for boats. In order to do this, the study utilizes data from the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) program run by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) collected from 2013-2020. This data was then added to a program named Business Analyst 2019, a type of Geographic Information System (GIS) designed to analyze trade and develop maps to show data, developed by Esri, the leading supplier of GIS Software, and analyzed at the county level. Using maps to show the illicit trade of human trafficking allows for a better visualization of where hotspots are throughout the US. Additionally, the software provides us the ability to show trends over time, which could inform law enforcement response at the local, state, and federal levels.

Tracking Traffickers: Investigating the Relationship Between Human Trafficking and Ports of Entry

Human trafficking is an extremely serious crime that is unfortunately very prevalent in society today. According to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's "Blue Campaign", which aims to fight human trafficking, it is defined as "the use of force, fraud, or coercion to obtain some type of labor or commercial sex act." (What is Human Trafficking?, para. 1) This differs from human smuggling, which is when the individual wants to be moved across a border, typically for work or a better life. Although we have a definition of what this crime is, determining where it is most common is important as well. If researchers can determine the "where" of human trafficking occurs, we can begin to answer why it occurs where it does. The purpose of this paper is to determine where reports of human trafficking are occurring based on data collected by the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) program and use maps to visualize that information. Additionally, this paper aims to see if those hotspots are near international ports of entry.

Literature Review

Human Trafficking Internationally

By nature, human trafficking is not a crime that exists in one country or region. It is a global issue that affects nearly every country. For this reason, it makes sense to look to other countries and determine how they have investigated this important issue. However, human trafficking is a portion of the larger issue of modern slavery. The International Labor Organization (ILO) investigates modern slavery and reports on its prevalence throughout the world. A portion of their 2022 report is dedicated to forced labor exploitation and forced sexual exploitation. According to the ILO, "forced labor exploitation touches virtually all parts of the

global economy” (International Labor Organization, 2022). The report also notes that migrant workers are sometimes forced to use smugglers to get across the border (International Labor Organization, 2022) and although some smugglers may use covert means of entry, others may use officially recognized international ports of entry. Although this qualifies as human smuggling as opposed to human trafficking, they can both use similar routes. Because of this, the information about smuggling can be reasonably applied to trafficking, with some slight variation and some exceptions. The portion of the ILO’s report focusing on forced sexual exploitation deals more with trafficking than the previously mentioned section. Specifically, it points out that it is a global phenomenon and traffickers typically use deception to victimize people (International Labor Organization, 2022). The most relevant detail from this report was that individuals who move people across borders use both recognized and unrecognized routes to do so.

Fitzgerald focused on a specific country, as opposed to the entire world. In her study, she chose to look at the United Kingdom’s response to human trafficking, specifically in terms of sex trafficking (Fitzgerald, 2012). In this study, the author notes that much of the UK’s response is centered around immigration and border control (Fitzgerald, 2012). This study shows that the UK does not view border control in the traditional sense, instead their border control extends to source countries for human trafficking (Fitzgerald, 2012). One way that the UK has strengthened its border security is through raising awareness of human trafficking among visa issuing posts to prevent attempted trafficking or smuggling (Fitzgerald, 2012). This report supports the theory that human trafficking is related to immigration and ports of entry. Therefore, if human trafficking in the UK is often centered around international ports of entry, it can be assumed that

the same pattern could exist in the United States. However, an analysis of the response to human trafficking in the United States is required to see if the pattern exists there as well.

US Efforts

Although human trafficking is seen as an international crime, that does not mean that it is exclusively investigated by federal agencies. One study aimed to identify issues that law enforcement faces at the multiple levels when trying to combat human trafficking, as well as how they are investigating these crimes (Farrell et al., 2019). The first challenge identified in the study is that there is disagreement on what exactly labor trafficking is (Farrell et al., 2019). Without a definitive idea of what labor trafficking is or where it occurs the most, it is hard for law enforcement to be able to investigate it. Additionally, if the definition changes from agency to agency, it inhibits collaboration between law enforcement when investigating labor trafficking. This issue is exaggerated even more when investigations span the country, since labor trafficking may look different in New York City than it would in rural Iowa, for example. The second challenge is whether agencies are equipped with the proper knowledge and manpower for these investigations (Farrell et al., 2019). For example, most officers receive very little training on human trafficking, and some of those who investigate it are from vice or drug investigation units (Farrell et al., 2019). Both challenges are problematic for different reasons. One issue with officers not receiving training on human trafficking is that they will have issues recognizing it when it occurs. If officers are unable to recognize human trafficking, that means that law enforcement agencies must rely on other means to determine if human trafficking is occurring in their jurisdiction. This lack of training carries over to investigators transferred from vice or drug units to human trafficking units (if one exists). If these investigators are not taught how to investigate human trafficking, they will treat it like a vice or drug case. While on the surface, this

may not seem like an issue, different types of crimes require different investigation methods. Applying the wrong methods to a crime could significantly hinder the investigative process if it doesn't destroy the case altogether. The final challenge mentioned was relying on established investigative practices (Farrell et al., 2019). This study specifically points out the use of prostitution enforcement techniques to investigate sex trafficking (Farrell et al., 2019). Not only is this problematic for the reasons mentioned above for the previous challenge, but prostitution and sex trafficking differ in important ways. Although sex trafficking can lead to forced prostitution, treating sex trafficking as though it is the same as voluntary prostitution is a mistake. Overall, this study makes it appear as though what US law enforcement needs most in the fight against human trafficking is information and training.

A recent report from the Government Accountability Office (GAO) aims to analyze federal law enforcement's response to human trafficking (Government Accountability Office, 2022). Specifically, it highlights three main ways that federal law enforcement agencies can improve their response to this issue. Out of these three, two are most relevant to this research. The first conclusion by the GAO is that insufficient staffing and unclear roles have hindered attempts to combat human trafficking (Government Accountability Office, 2022). Notably, some Customs and Border Protection (CBP) investigations had to be closed without resolution due to insufficient staffing for the caseload that they had. This detail is important for multiple reasons. First, it shows that a significant number of human trafficking cases occur in and around ports of entry, which are protected by CBP. Second, it shows that trafficking is a larger problem than people, including federal agencies, anticipated. The second conclusion is that there have been issues with data reliability and information sharing (Government Accountability Office, 2022). Since CBP had incomplete and inconsistent data (Government Accountability Office, 2022), this

could have also factored into why CBP did not combat human trafficking effectively. Without complete and accurate data, it is extremely difficult for law enforcement to fully understand the nature of human trafficking within the United States. As established previously, without the proper information and understanding of the crime, law enforcement cannot effectively investigate these crimes.

The purpose of this research is to identify hotspots of human trafficking within the United States and see if those hotspots are located near federally recognized international ports of entry. This research utilizes mapping software to display hotspots of human trafficking with the goal of determining where human tracking cases occur most frequently and to determine if those hotspots are near international ports of entry. My hypothesis is that cases of human trafficking will occur more often in counties with international ports of entry.

Materials and Method

Materials

Esri's Business Analyst 2019

Business Analyst 2019 is a type of Geographic Information System (GIS) software designed by Esri, one of the premier GIS software providers. The purpose of this software is to analyze different datapoints or statistics related to business and trade. Additionally, the software has a tool for adding data called ArcGIS Online, which was used to import location data for the ports of entry, US Counties, and State borders. Although the software is typically used to analyze legal trade of almost any type, for the purposes of this research it is being used to analyze illicit trade.

Method

Initial Human Trafficking data was downloaded from the FBI's Crime Data Explorer website (Federal Bureau of Investigation Crime Data Explorer). This data was collected by the FBI through their UCR program, consisting of voluntary reports from local, state, and tribal law enforcement agencies. This Excel file contained all reports of 1 or more cases of human trafficking from the years 2013 to 2020 (Federal Bureau of Investigation Crime Data Explorer). The file has since been updated to include 2021, but at the time of the research only went up to 2020. After downloading this file, the data was combined based on the county containing the jurisdiction of the reporting agency and sorted by year. In the case of an agency that is in multiple counties, such as a city department within multiple counties or a state agency, the best approximation of where the case was located was used. In these cases, Google Maps was used to show the borders of the cities and the counties containing them. Whichever county contained most of the city's land received the human trafficking reports from that city. In the case of state agencies, some of these agencies also reported the county or city the division reporting the incident was located in. In these instances, the reports were attributed to the matching county. Reports that did not contain a location were left out of the map due to a lack of locational data. Due to the low number of counties reporting in 2013-2017¹, I chose to analyze 2018, 2019, and 2020.

After the data was combined and sorted, I began adding geographic data of counties, states, and international ports of entry. To find the data files for counties, I used the ArcGIS Online feature within Business Analyst 2019 to search for a Shape file that had a matching

¹ In 2008 Congress passed the William Wilberforce Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2008 which required the FBI to begin collecting data on human trafficking (Human trafficking - uniform crime reporting (UCR) program — FBI). Early reporting was very limited, however.

coordinate system as the rest of the map generated by the software. Then, I followed the same process to find the state borders Shape file. Finally, for the international ports of entry, I found multiple files containing airports, water ports, and border crossing points. To ensure I had accurate data and narrow down what was a federally recognized international port of entry and what was not, I cross referenced the files with the US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) website (Locate a Port of Entry, 2023) and made new layers only out of those ports that had some sort of CBP presence. I chose to narrow down the ports by CBP locations because that would be confirmation that they were truly federally recognized international ports of entry. After finding the files and narrowing them down accordingly, I began making the maps that I would use to display and analyze the information.

In order to build the maps, I began by making 2 copies of the counties layer, to create 3 in total. From there, I imported the separate Excel spreadsheets for 2018, 2019, and 2020 into Business Analyst and attached each of them to its own counties layer. Afterwards, I adjusted the symbology of each layer to show different colors based on the number of reports on a scale of green being lowest and red being highest. Then, I overlaid the ports of entry, giving each its own unique symbol. Finally, I added a title, legend, and a note of where the data was from on each individual map.

Results

My hypothesis for this study was that cases of human trafficking would occur more often in counties containing international ports of entry. For the year of 2018, there were 293 total counties that reported at least one case of human trafficking (Figure 1). Of those counties, 185 (63.14%) did not contain a port of entry and 76 (25.93%) contained one (Figure 1). Although the majority of reporting counties did not contain a port of entry, they were either adjacent to a

county that contained one, or part of a cluster of counties with at least one case each, one of which contained a port of entry (Figure 1). In 2019, the numbers were similar with 285 total counties reporting at least one case (Figure 2). Of those, 179 (62.81%) did not contain a port of entry and 69 (24.21%) contained one port of entry (Figure 2). There were 320 counties that reported at least one case of human trafficking in 2020, with 206 (64.38%) not containing a port of entry and 79 (24.69%) containing one port of entry (Figure 3). Another interesting detail was that Clark County Nevada, which contains Las Vegas and an international airport, had the highest number of reports each year (Figure 1, Figure 2, Figure 3).

Despite the 62%-64% of the reporting counties that did not contain an international port of entry, those that did typically had higher numbers of reports than those that did not. This study was also unable to definitively prove if the number of international ports of entry in a county were correlated with the number of reports. That being said, there appears to be no correlation. For example, Clark County, Nevada had the highest number of reports each year with only one port of entry (Figure 1, Figure 2, Figure 3), compared to Pima County, Arizona which has 3 ports of entry but one of the lowest numbers of reports (Figure 1, Figure 2, Figure 3). If we exclude the states that did not report or had data excluded based on the parameters set (California, New York, Nebraska, Kansas, Iowa, Mississippi, and Alabama), there were only 6 counties in the remaining 41 contiguous states that had international airports but no reports (Figure 1, Figure 2, Figure 3). Therefore, the hypothesis that counties with international ports of entry would have higher cases of human trafficking than those without international ports of entry was supported in the case of international airports. Border control points and water ports did not seem to be correlated with an increase in reports of human trafficking (Figure 1, Figure 2, Figure 3).

Discussion

There are a variety of different reasons that could explain why human trafficking seems to be centered around areas with international ports of entry, and in particular, international airports. In terms of why this crime appears to be reported most around international ports of entry, one explanation could be that traffickers are using these ports to traffic since they are established trade routes. An additional explanation could be that since law enforcement organizations such as CBP are in those counties at the ports of entry, they could be catching this type of crime more often since part of their job is to look for it. This explanation is somewhat less reasonable though, considering the GAO report detailing a lack of proper staffing. Additionally, previous literature noted that traffickers can use established trade routes (Fitzgerald, 2012), so it makes sense that these crimes would appear to happen nearer ports of entry.

One of the largest limitations for this study was the data set that was used. Although the FBI is generally considered a reliable source for data, the crime of human trafficking is not a mandatory report for the UCR, which is problematic. For example, from the years 2013-2020, not a single case of human trafficking was reported to the FBI from California. Additionally, this data only represents a fraction of the total amount of human trafficking cases that occurred, since crime as a whole is underrepresented by the UCR (Decker, 2019). Others were reported to human rights organizations that fight human trafficking, and for one reason or another those cases never made it into the UCR. Another limitation was having to exclude data due to a lack of geographical data necessary². This means that certain areas could have potentially had more

² Since the data was being analyzed at the county level, if an entry did not have a county listed, or some other location such as a city, that could be used to determine the county, it was excluded as outside the parameters of this study.

cases than the results show. Future research should aim to use multiple sources for data collection to ensure the most accurate picture of the problem as possible. Additionally, future research should try to either find the missing geographical data from this study or analyze human trafficking at the state level, so it is no longer an issue.

Conclusion

The maps as a whole show two important pieces of information: first, that human trafficking seems to be centered around international airports, and second, that it is also typically more common in the southern part of the country (Figure 1, Figure 2, Figure 3). This information can help inform law enforcement about where to look for human trafficking. Although every agency should be able to recognize it, those in the South, specifically Nevada, Texas, Georgia, and Florida, and around international ports of entry, should have a heightened level of awareness and education on the crime of human trafficking. This understanding will allow these agencies to better protect the citizens in their jurisdiction and prevent this terrible crime from being committed as often as it is.

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Appendix

Business Analyst 2019 Maps

2018 Human Trafficking Reports

Human Trafficking Data acquired from the FBI's UCR Program

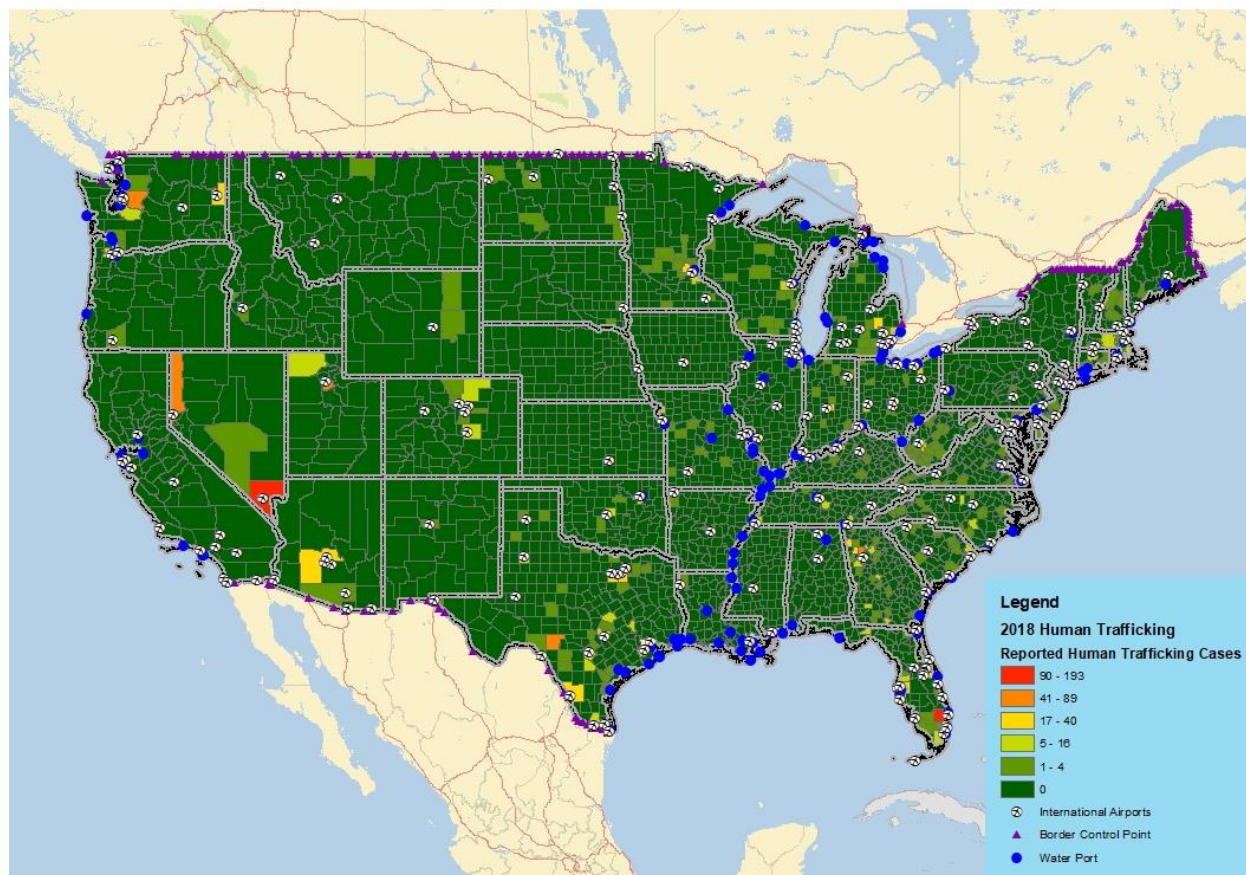


Figure 1: Map of human trafficking in the United States for 2018.

2019 Human Trafficking Reports

Human Trafficking Data acquired from the FBI's UCR Program

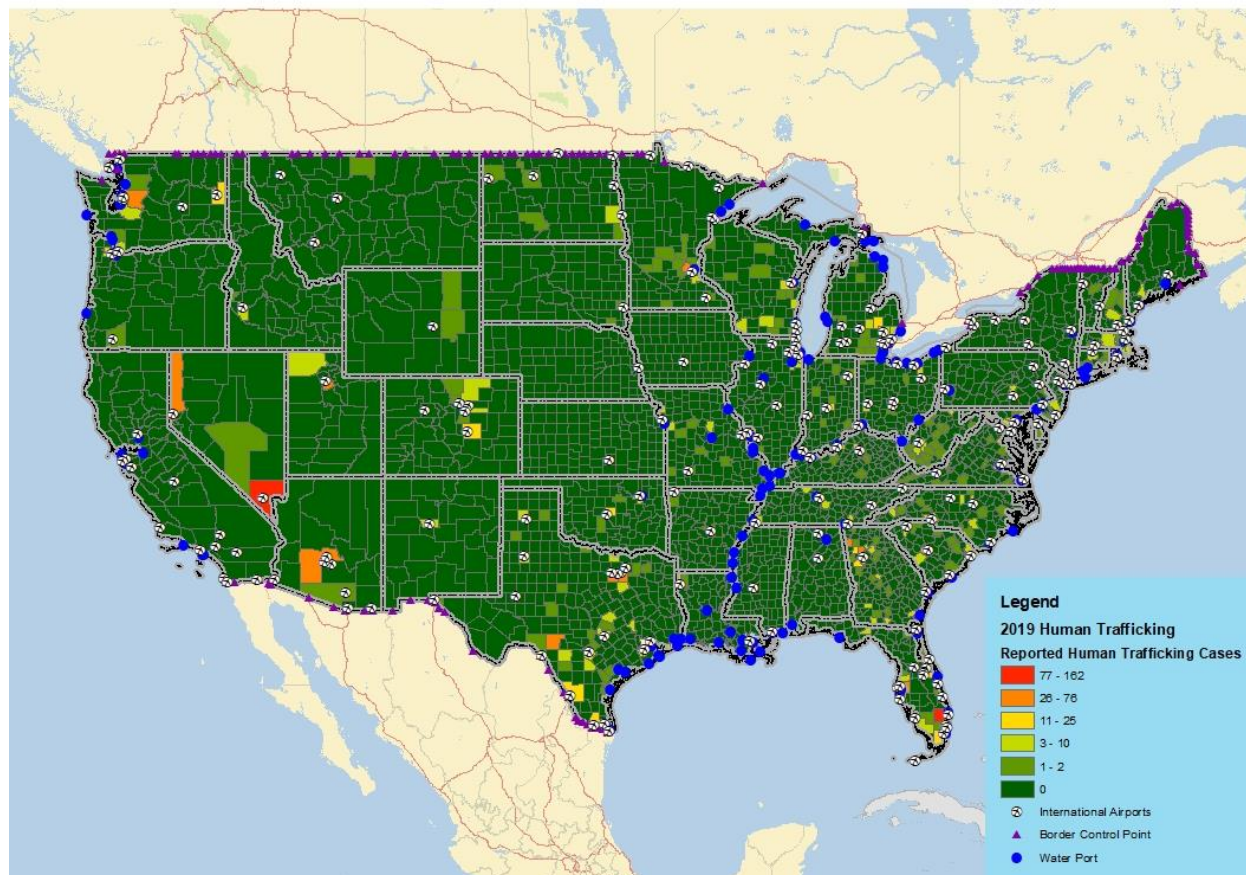


Figure 2: Map of human trafficking in the United States for 2019.

2020 Human Trafficking Reports

Human Trafficking Data acquired from the FBI's UCR Program

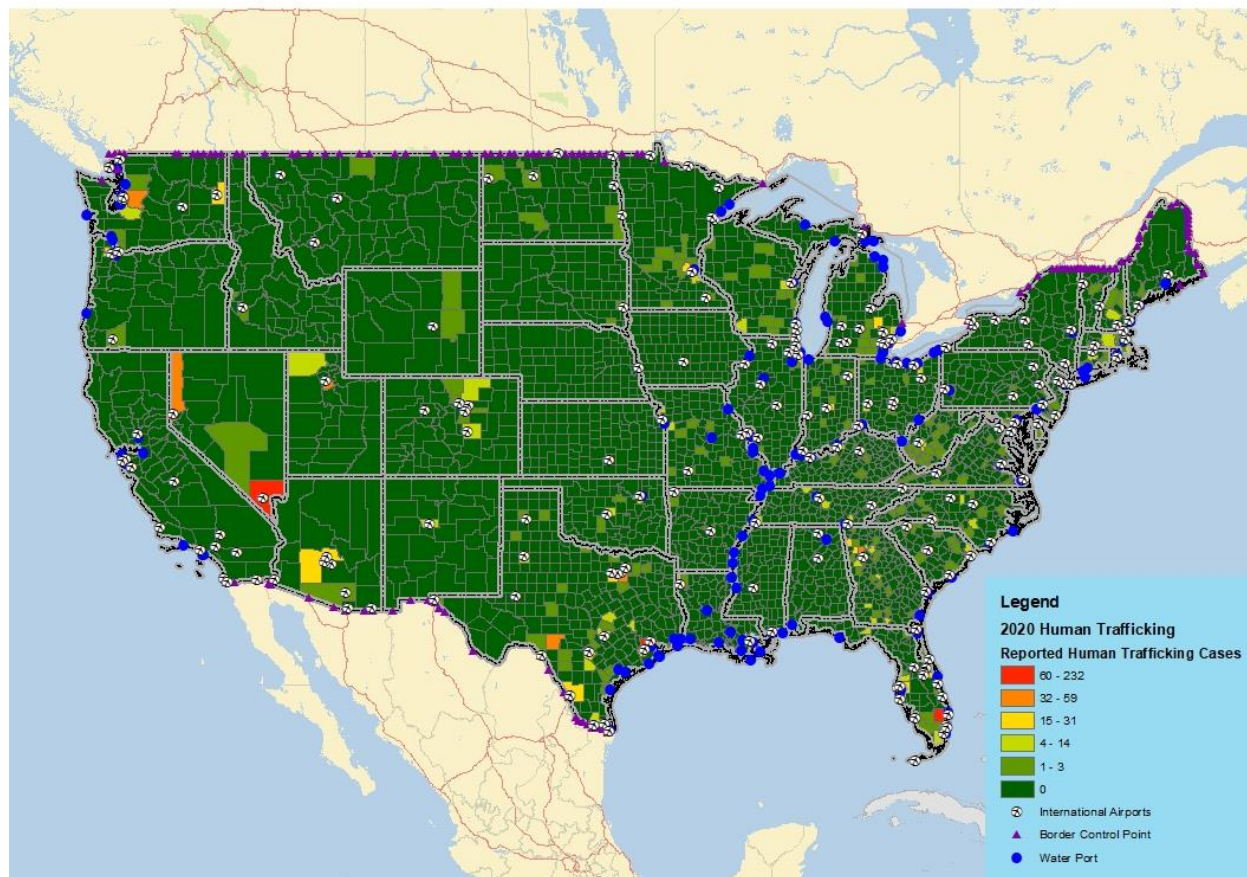


Figure 3: Map of human trafficking in the United States for 2020.