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## **Multi-Sector Human Trafficking Task Forces in the United States: Typologies and Overlapping Jurisdictions**

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## **Abstract**

Over \$150 million USD have been allocated to establish and implement multi-sector anti-trafficking entities around the United States (US). This article focuses on the development and cooperation of human trafficking task forces, anti-trafficking institutions established to combat human trafficking around the US. We use task force as an encompassing term for over 200 human trafficking multi-sector coalitions, working groups, and/or commissions throughout all 50 states at different levels of jurisdiction. Our research determines the origin, scope, and variation of this anti-trafficking institution in the US. We created a typology of human trafficking task forces to show task force variation, the overlapping task force distribution, and task force leadership. We categorized seven different types of human trafficking task forces in the US from the grassroots level to those created by the Department of Justice. We found some task forces do not serve all victims but focus on sex trafficking and/or child victims, reaffirming the deserving-versus-undeserving victim dichotomy.

**Keywords:** Task Force, Multi-Sector, Jurisdictions, Typology, Human Trafficking, Cooperation

The adoption of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act in 2000 ushered in a new wave of approaches to combat the problem of human trafficking in the United States (US) and large amounts of funding soon followed. Multi-agency responses known as human trafficking task forces have emerged as the ideal model used in different jurisdictions and levels of administration to combat the complex phenomenon of trafficking in persons across the US and around the world. We define a human trafficking task force as a group of individuals from at least two different agencies across different sectors (such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), police, and community members) working together to combat trafficking in a concerted manner. Task forces work in a variety of areas including victims' services, policing, awareness raising, lobbying for legislation, and educating the public on the issue of human trafficking. In this paper, we use task force as an encompassing term for these different multi-sector entities such as coalitions, working groups, alliances, networks, and/or commissions formed to

collaborate on issues of human trafficking. Our main goal in this paper is to analyze the development and cooperation of human trafficking task forces focusing on the origin, scope, and variation of this anti-trafficking institution in the US.

Task forces are an effective way to combat human trafficking and are the “preferred organizational structure for both enforcing human trafficking laws and rendering assistance to victims.”<sup>1</sup> According to the Polaris Project human trafficking commissions or task forces are indispensable tools for states seeking to end human trafficking as they create the space for a coordinated multi-agency response to trafficking.<sup>2</sup> Task forces are more advantageous because they bring together entities that would not normally gather to collaboratively work on complex problems. These disparate groups come together in a task force setting to “achieve something that may be more difficult, or in many cases not possible, to achieve on their own.”<sup>3</sup> Task forces are also a driving force in human trafficking investigations around the US. Arrests and the odds of an arrest are increased by over 39 times when agencies are in a county that has a human trafficking task force.<sup>4</sup> Law enforcement agencies participating in task forces identified and investigated more cases, made more arrests, and the cases were more likely to result in formal charges than agencies not affiliated with task forces.<sup>5</sup> Since 2004, over \$150 million USD in federal funding has been allocated to establish and implement multi-disciplinary anti-trafficking task forces around the US<sup>6</sup> and because of the considerable resources spent on this anti-trafficking institution, we are interested in examining it more critically.

While most research on human trafficking focuses on criminal justice approaches, and to a lesser extent victims services, this paper seeks to analyze different institutional approaches with the cooperation and collaborations of human trafficking task forces around the US. The paper begins by outlining the previous literature on human trafficking task forces and our research methods. We argue that task forces are an important anti-trafficking institution<sup>7</sup> and introduce our typology which categorizes the assortment of task forces around the US. Then we discuss the

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<sup>1</sup> Lin Huff-Corzine and Sarah Ann Sacra, Jay Corzine, Rachel Rados, “Florida’s Task Force Approach to Combat Human Trafficking: An Analysis of County-Level Data” *Police Practice and Research* 18/3 (2017): 245–258.

<sup>2</sup> Polaris Project. 2015. Human Trafficking Issue Brief: Task Forces [Policy brief]. <https://polarisproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/2015-Task-Forces-Issue-Brief-Final.pdf> (accessed May 6, 2021).

<sup>3</sup> Amy Farrell and Jack McDevitt, Stephanie Fahy, *Understanding and improving Law Enforcement Responses to Human Trafficking: Final Report* (Research Report No. 222752, 2008). Retrieved from The Institute on Race and Justice at Northeastern University, 92. <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/222752.pdf> (accessed November 4, 2019).

<sup>4</sup> Huff-Corzine et al.

<sup>5</sup> Farrell et al 2008.

<sup>6</sup> Jennifer A. L. Sheldon-Sherman, “The missing “p”: Prosecution, prevention, protection, and partnership in the trafficking victims protection act.” *Penn State Law Review* 117/2 (2012): 443–501.

<sup>7</sup> Anti-trafficking institutions are defined as a “formal or informal government institution created directly or indirectly as a result of human trafficking policy to implement different aspects of human trafficking policy. These anti-trafficking institutions are the formal (constitution, legislative, electoral) and informal (norms, rules) structures that determine the allocation of resources in policymaking” Laura Dean. *Diffusing Human Trafficking Policy in Eurasia* (Bristol, UK: Policy Press, 2020), 7.

breakdown of task forces by level of administration and geographical area, types of cooperation, and overarching themes throughout this anti-trafficking institution. We determine that there is a large disparity in task forces from the grassroots level to the state and federal level across the US and that some task forces do not serve all victims. Certain task forces focus on sex trafficking and/or child victims, reaffirming the deserving and undeserving victim dichotomy. We found that sometimes this cooperation is siloed into policing and victims' services entities, which can undermine the purpose of cooperation and the multi-agency task force approach. These findings can identify the landscape for human trafficking task forces in the US and inform the formation and policy development with task forces in the future.

## **Literature Review: Task Force Cooperation Across Sectors**

The literature suggests that cooperation across agencies is integral to combating trafficking from both the policing and social service sides,<sup>8</sup> but it remains an understudied aspect of human trafficking across different networks and sectors throughout the entire country. Task forces have often been a research site for studies on collective action in the anti-trafficking movement,<sup>9</sup> as a starting point for research contacts,<sup>10</sup> or a source of human trafficking research,<sup>11</sup> but more investigation into this anti-trafficking institution across the US is necessary. Anti-trafficking institutions such as task forces are more successful in identifying cases under new human trafficking laws due to increased resources and investigative strategies,<sup>12</sup> showing the importance of further research on human trafficking institutional approaches. Case study research has examined state level task forces in Michigan,<sup>13</sup> Missouri,<sup>14</sup> Georgia,<sup>15</sup> and Florida,<sup>16</sup> city and county level task forces in Boston, Massachusetts, Harris County, Texas, Phoenix,

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<sup>8</sup> Kirsten Foot. *Collaborating against Human Trafficking: Cross-Sector Challenges and Practices* (Lanham MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015).

<sup>9</sup> Taylor Houston, "A Gender Integrative Approach to the Anti-CSEC Movement in Georgia" *Journal of Human Trafficking* 3/3 (2017): 193-210.

<sup>10</sup> Anthony Marcus and Ric Curtis, "Implementing Policy for Invisible Populations: Social Work and Social Policy in a Federal Anti-Trafficking Task Force in the United States." *Social Policy and Society* 13/4 (2014): 481-492.

<sup>11</sup> Jennifer Lynne Musto and Danah Boyd, "The Trafficking-Technology Nexus" *Social Politics* 21/3 (2014): 461-483.

<sup>12</sup> Amy Farrell and Jack McDevitt, Stephanie Fahy, "Where are all the victims? Understanding the determinants of official identification of human trafficking incidents." *Criminology and Public Policy* 9/2 (2010): 201-233.

<sup>13</sup> Tonisha R. Jones and Faith E. Lutze, "Anti-Human Trafficking Interagency Collaboration in the State of Michigan: An Exploratory Study" *Journal of Human Trafficking* 2/2 (2016): 156-174.

<sup>14</sup> Abby Duncan, "A tale of two districts: Lessons learned from Missouri's human trafficking task forces" *St. Louis University Public Law Review* 33/1 (2013): 191.

<sup>15</sup> Houston.

<sup>16</sup> Huff-Corzine et al.

Arizona,<sup>17</sup> and internationally including the United Kingdom<sup>18</sup> and Asia Pacific region.<sup>19</sup> These case studies focus on in-depth explorations of one task force, revealing the significance of this institution as subject of research. Existing case study research also demonstrated that cross case comparisons are the next step in task force research. Many task force articles are restricted in their scope by only looking at specific geographic areas, levels of administration, or one type of human trafficking,<sup>20</sup> specifically sex trafficking.<sup>21</sup>

Research has determined several things concerning the scope and variation of task forces around the US. Increased investigations, prosecutions, and convictions in the Department of Justice (DOJ) and US Attorneys' offices were attributed to the work of human trafficking task forces.<sup>22</sup> This success was so paramount that every US Attorneys' office in the US is now required to "establish or participate in a United States Attorney-led task force on human trafficking."<sup>23</sup> While the majority of the literature focuses on the DOJ task forces, we hope to move beyond this emphasis and examine task force scope and effectiveness across different types of task forces in the US.

Another facet of previous task force research emphasizes the challenges of cooperation within task forces focusing on social services<sup>24</sup> and police.<sup>25</sup> We expand this research, revealing the type of cooperation across different agencies, jurisdictions, and the landscape of task forces across the US. Partnerships across the areas of prosecution, protection, and prevention are a necessary component of anti-trafficking work through pooled resources and collaboration. The Polaris Project found that "coordinated strategies [on investigations rehabilitation through human trafficking task forces] result more investigations and prosecutions, as well as better assistance

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<sup>17</sup> Farrell et al. 2008.

<sup>18</sup> Jackie H. Harvey, and Rob A. Hornsby, Zeibeda Sattar, "Disjointed Service: An English Case Study of Multi-agency Provision in Tackling Child Trafficking" *The British Journal of Criminology* 55/3 (2015): 494–513.

<sup>19</sup> Ralf Emmers, and Beth Greener-Barcham, Nicholas Thomas. "Institutional Arrangements to Counter Human Trafficking in the Asia Pacific" *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 28/3 (2006): 490–511. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/211091>

<sup>20</sup> Harvey et al.

<sup>21</sup> Lara B Gerassi and Andrea Nichols, "Heterogeneous Perspectives in Coalition and Community-Based Responses to Sex Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation: Implications for Practice" *Journal of Social Service Research* 44/1 (2018): 63–77.

<sup>22</sup> Duncan.

<sup>23</sup> Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act. 2012 Pub. L. No. 2112-55, § 105(a), 125 Stat. 552, 606, 2011 as referenced in Duncan, 191.

<sup>24</sup> Lara B. Gerassi and Andrea Nichols, Erica Michelson, "Lessons Learned: Benefits and Challenges in Interagency Coalitions Addressing Sex Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation." *Journal of Human Trafficking* 3/4(2017): 285–302.

<sup>25</sup> Barbara Limanowska, and Helga Konrad, "Problems of anti-trafficking cooperation." In C. Friesendorf (Ed.), *Strategies against human trafficking: The role of the security sector* (2009) 427–458. Vienna, Austria: National Defence Academy and Austrian Ministry of Defence and Sports.

for survivors and greater awareness amongst the general public.”<sup>26</sup> Cooperation in task forces is also linked to program sustainability as initial forms of funding expired, “agencies no longer compete for the same grants, and they get to enjoy the economies of scale that collaboration brings.”<sup>27</sup>

Other task force research has examined the dynamics and perspectives among coalition members, ways coalition members’ views shape their work, and collaborative relationships within coalitions.<sup>28</sup> Tensions between NGOs and law enforcement related to task force focus have emerged, as well as, strains with different layers of law enforcement.<sup>29</sup> For Marcus and Curtis task force members in New Jersey struggled with “little agency in the face of bureaucratic rules, penurious funding, heavy caseloads, and a set of policies that they knew and readily admitted were hated by clients.”<sup>30</sup> Religion was also a source of friction within coalitions as religious identities, “challenged some providers in coordinating services for the LGBTQ community or women with a history of or considering abortions.”<sup>31</sup> A lack of communication and information sharing amongst different agencies produced “mistrust among the different agencies and the belief that border security concerns could be prioritized over the welfare of the trafficked child, or that inappropriate data security or data confidentiality concerns would prevent movement of relevant intelligence.”<sup>32</sup> Immigration issues can also lead to friction in the groups especially if there are different approaches to how foreign-born victims should be identified and whether agencies prioritized victim status over immigration status. Membership in task forces increased the education of law enforcement officials concerning other issues related to human trafficking such as human smuggling and drugs which have similar investigation mechanisms.<sup>33</sup> We expand upon this previous literature by outlining the characteristics and linkages to other themes such as sexual assault, domestic violence, and prostitution in our data.

## Research Methods

We constructed an original database on human trafficking task forces around the US from the establishment of the first task forces in 2000 until 2018. The database contains information on the service location, membership, cooperation, and partnerships, structure, and leadership. We used open-source information on these different task forces such as websites, meeting minutes,

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<sup>26</sup> Polaris Project, 1.

<sup>27</sup> Kelly Ann Yeo-Oxenham, K. E. and Dylan Rose Schneider, “Partnership and the 3Ps of Human Trafficking: How multi-sector collaboration contributes to effective anti-trafficking measures” *International Journal of Sustainable Security* 2/1 (2015): 102–106, 105.

<sup>28</sup> Gerassi and Nichols.

<sup>29</sup> Sheldon-Sherman.

<sup>30</sup> Marcus and Curtis, 490.

<sup>31</sup> Gerassi and Nichols, 63.

<sup>32</sup> Harvey et al., 507.

<sup>33</sup> Farrell et al. 2008.

Facebook pages, Twitter, newspaper stories, and government reports to compile the various data points displayed in Appendix 1. In order to be included in our database the task force had to include more than one agency and we had to be able to determine from publicly available data: the name of the task force, service locations, and task force membership information.

We began with the names of task forces taken from lists of Enhanced Collaborative Model Human Trafficking Task Forces and other DOJ funded task forces. We noted any mentions of other task forces in documents from this list and then cross-checked that with data from the matrix of Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) funded human trafficking services grantees and task forces. After finding the task forces' name we searched by name for the data points in Appendix 1 compiling the information in our database. We then moved onto state level task forces with internet searches by state and terms such as human trafficking, sex trafficking, and labor trafficking combined with task force, coalition, working group, and network. We cross checked this list with all the information sheets on the statewide collaboration efforts published by the National Human Trafficking Training and Technical Assistance Center.<sup>34</sup> We then shifted to the local and regional level, again starting with a list of task force names from all our previous searches and then conducting searches for the remaining data points outlined in Appendix 1. Once we had names of the task force, we framed our searches on the scope of human trafficking task forces focusing on types of trafficking victims served, elements of multi-agency cooperation, memorandums of understanding, mission statement, protocols, operating procedures, and how the task forces were established. Task forces with no public information available online such as a website or Facebook page or publish any information on twitter, in newspaper stories, or in government reports, were not included in our dataset. We posit that open-source searches, triangulated with information from publicly available sources was the best and most systematic way to collect information on task forces across the US. We formulated the database for comparisons across states, agencies, and rural versus urban areas to find overarching themes and understand the variation of these task forces around the US. The database was constructed in Google forms due to the ease of cooperation. We examined the similarities across the US in their mission, approaches, and protocols. We compiled this descriptive information to analyze overarching themes on this anti-trafficking institution across one country, the US. Open-source data were triangulated with information from different sources is a limitation to our dataset. However, we focused on overarching trends of human trafficking task forces in the US and had a sample size of 227. Though this is not an exhaustive list of every single task force in the US, it provides enough information to make preliminary conclusions on the origin, scope, and variation of this anti-trafficking institution in the US. We also were not able to locate certain data points on several task forces because they simply did not have that information available publicly, which is another limitation of this study. Again, we argue that this is a sizeable but not representative sample of all task forces in the US due to the limited data, but we believe that we acquired enough data to draw some preliminary conclusions on the overall scope, characteristics, and missions that move the conversation on human trafficking task forces as sites of research forward.

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<sup>34</sup> National Human Trafficking Training and Technical Assistance Center. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/otip/training/nhttac> (accessed November 4, 2019).

We posit the best way to make sense of the 227 different task forces is to categorize them so we created a task force typology of the purpose and level of administration across the US. The typology allowed us to group the task forces by common themes and objectives which can help predict task force leadership, membership, and how they operate and will function in the future. We conducted an initial cycle of coding to categorize each task force in our database using a priori codes for the types of task forces developed in advance, based on our research of the different task forces. The first cycle included open coding, in which we identified emergent themes based upon the different task forces. For example, the faith-based code emerged from the coding as we realized that several task forces were established for that purpose. Though the literature recognized religion as a point of friction for task forces, we did not expect to find entire task forces with faith-based aims and goals. We also found that we needed to differentiate between local task forces as the local government started some while others were organic grassroots movements. We designed one code for each task force with no overlap and focused on their current categorization as of 2018. Our goal in the first-level coding was to find the overarching goal of the task force and categorize the different task forces according to our emerging classifications. In the second cycle of coding, we standardized the codes and used focused coding methods to streamline the categorizations. The first and second cycles of coding were completed collaboratively by both authors and discrepancies were highlighted to discuss and code as a team. We then formulated the data to map the service locations and overlapping jurisdictional coverage using Tableau 2018 software. With longitude/latitude coordinates, this software allowed us to map the task force coverage across the US and present a visual map to demonstrate the dispersion.

### **Administration of Human Trafficking Task Forces**

In total, we located 227 multi-sector anti-trafficking institutions across 50 states and Puerto Rico, American Samoa, Northern Mariana Islands, and Guam. Task force was by far the most widely used term with 110 different entities using this terminology. The second most widely used term was coalition with 66, then there were six councils, seven alliances, five networks, four collaboratives, four commissions, three working groups, three committees, and two partnerships. There were 19 remaining entities that did not fit into any of these categories such as the Laboratory to Combat Human Trafficking or the Northern Virginia Human Trafficking Initiative (NOVA-HTI). The Western District of New York Human Trafficking Task Force and Alliance and Colorado Human Trafficking Council Task Force also used both alliance and task force, so there is overlapping terminology. Figure 1 shows the distribution of task forces by level of administration (national, state, tribal, county, and city) and demonstrates the dispersion of task forces across these different geographic areas. Using open-source data, we identified two federal level task forces, 68 state task forces, 62 regional task forces, 2 tribal task forces, 77 county task forces, and 18 city task forces. Though these task forces constitute different geographic areas and sizes, they do not always include government officials at that level of administration and are not under the authority of government agencies. Therefore, the level of administration here focuses on the geographic area of the task force aligning with administrative boundaries but many times having no other affiliation with that level of government. State level task forces cover an entire



state or territory such as Guam or Puerto Rico, regional level task forces are comprised of a region or numerous counties, county task forces are one county, and city task forces span an entire city. California, Nevada, Virginia, South Dakota, and Pennsylvania are the five states with no state level human trafficking task forces and 17 states have more than one state level task force.<sup>35</sup> Consequently, we can already see the overlapping jurisdictions on the state level and these jurisdictional clashes only increase when we move on to other levels of administration. Overlapping jurisdictions with other task forces can be problematic because it spreads out task force members resources and time over numerous entities that might have similar goals, watering down the influence and impact of task forces. We could also see conflict and territorial clashes competing for human trafficking cases and victim rehabilitation services.

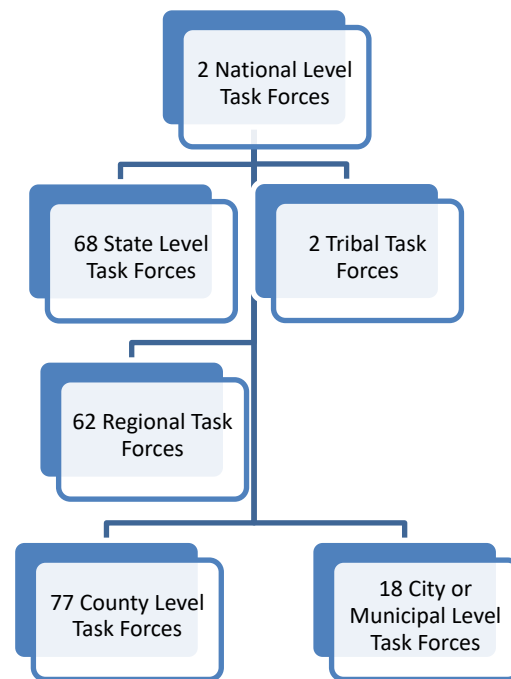
We determined that county level task forces are the most prevalent type of sub-national task force by level of administration. City or metropolitan level task forces were the smallest type of sub-national task force in our research. This findings diverge from previous research that found most task forces served metropolitan areas while a smaller number of task forces served entire states, territories or larger regions.<sup>36</sup> Many of these task forces have similar activities, so Figure 1 shows how task forces can overlap in their jurisdictions. California had the largest number of task forces with 27 but it still did not have complete coverage of the state. Ohio had the second largest number of task forces within the state with 24. These task forces were established through the Ohio Attorney General's Human Trafficking Commission grant from the Department of Health and Human Services. Although not all the coalitions were active in the state, there were resources available on starting a coalition which provided an outline for many of these entities to begin finding local partners and organizing meetings.

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<sup>35</sup> The states include North Dakota, North Carolina, New Jersey, New York, Nebraska, Kentucky, Michigan, Missouri, Montana, Massachusetts, Ohio, Delaware, Connecticut, Arizona, Texas, Washington, and Hawaii.

<sup>36</sup> Farrell et al. 2008.

Figure 1. Human Trafficking Task forces by Level of Administration



Note: This figure shows the dispersion of 227 human trafficking task forces in the US by level of administration.

Georgia, Idaho, Iowa, Maine, Mississippi, Nevada, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Utah, Vermont, and Wyoming only had one task force within the state. The District of Columbia and several territories like Puerto Rico, American Samoa, Northern Mariana Islands, and Guam had one task force and this suggests the task force coverage spans beyond the 50 states. It also shows that four of the five permanently inhabited US territories have human trafficking task forces and the US Virgin Islands is the only territory without a task force. We found two task forces completely devoted to working with native communities. The New Mexico Tribal Task Force membership consists of “leaders from pueblo and reservation communities, tribal law enforcement officers, tribal courts, the state Attorney General’s Office, and directors from agencies that provide social and health services to Native Americans”<sup>37</sup> while other task forces include tribal entities in their membership, have partnerships with the Bureau of Indian Affairs, or have a special committee devoted to Native American/Tribal Initiatives. These findings demonstrate the significant task force variation, as some have multiple layers of human trafficking task forces at different levels of administration.

<sup>37</sup> New Mexico Tribal Task Force on Human Trafficking, *Human Trafficking- Tribal Task Force*. <https://www.justice.gov/usao-nm/blog/human-trafficking-tribal-task-force> (accessed November 4, 2019).

## Typology of Human Trafficking Task Forces

Based on our data, we created a typology of human trafficking task forces to further show task force variation, the overlapping distribution, and the overarching goal of the task forces. Again, a typology is necessary to go beyond administration level and analyze the diverse spectrum of task forces in one country, the US and is a starting point for examining the characteristics, outcomes, and effectiveness of human trafficking task forces as institutions. We determined that there were seven different types of human trafficking task forces in the US and focused on their current categorization as of 2018. The first two categorizations are task forces that are affiliated with the DOJ or United States Attorneys. We categorized a task force as DOJ if it received a DOJ grant from the OVC or BJA and the primary purpose of the task force was to implement this grant. Many task forces received grants but are not categorized as DOJ because they did not rely solely on this grant for the function of the task force. A United States Attorneys designation meant that the task force was based out of or headed by the States Attorneys office. The next two task force categories were established by or affiliated with the state legislature or attorney general's office. We did find a few task forces that were affiliated with governor's offices, but most of these were initiated due to legislation from the legislature. The final three task forces were county or city-based task forces established by local government entities categorized as local government, concerned citizens turned anti-trafficking advocates which we categorized as grassroots task forces, or faith-based entities.

Table 1. Typology of Human Trafficking Task Forces

Type of Task Force	Description
Department of Justice	Task forces that were started from a Department of Justice grant and the main purpose of the task force was to implement this grant.
States Attorneys	Task forces that were started by federal-level states attorneys offices housed in the Department of Justice.
Attorney General	Task forces that were started by state-level attorney generals.
Legislative	Task forces that were developed as a result of legislation in the state legislature.
Local Government	Task forces that were started by local government officials, law enforcement, or district attorney's offices.
Grassroots	Task forces that were started by civil society organizations or private citizens.
Faith-based	Task forces that were started by religious organizations.

Note: This typology was developed after coding 227 task forces in the United States for their origin and scope.

We coded each distinct task force according to this typology using the task force's intended aims and mapped them across the US. Figure 2 shows the geographic distribution of task forces across the US. The most prominent type of human trafficking task force was grassroots consisting of 33% (74) of all human trafficking task forces, followed by local task forces with 25% (57) of all task forces. DOJ task forces were 14% (33) of all task forces. The remaining types of task forces were legislative 10% (22), attorney general 9% (20), states attorney 5% (12), and faith based 4% (9). Mapping the task forces by typology demonstrates that local task forces were the most prevalent type of task force consisting of 58% of all types of human trafficking task forces. This suggests task forces are most prominent on the local level contrary to the existing research which is focused on federally funded task forces. Consequently, our research reveals the importance of this typology and suggests a need to expand task force research to other task force types beyond the DOJ specifically grassroots and local task forces.

Figure 2. Dispersion of Human Trafficking Task Forces Across the United States 2018

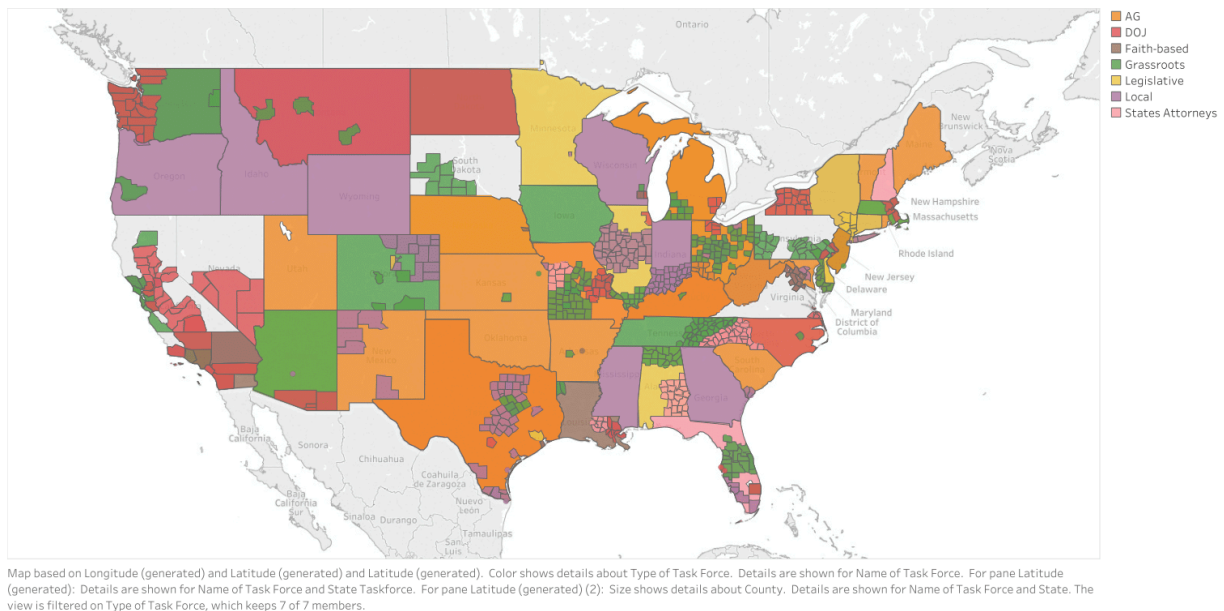


Figure 2 demonstrates the coverage of task force typologies across the US. It reveals that attorney general task forces are focused in the center of the US and local task forces are also prevalent on the state level in the west. Mapping the task forces across the US reveals the dispersion of the task force typology over different geographic areas. It shows the gaps and significant intersections of task forces, as some areas of the US have a state, county or regional, and city task forces, clearly overlapping in jurisdiction while others have no task force coverage at all. The map reveals the most overlap of different task force levels in Florida, California, Ohio, and Missouri. However, a closer comparison of the data reveals the most overlapping jurisdictions are found when an area has task forces at numerous levels of administration such as city, county, region, and state task forces. Some of the city level task forces are already located in

a state and county level task force. For example, there are two city task forces in Los Angeles and three regional task forces which shows that there are five different task forces operating in Los Angeles with significant overlap in jurisdictions. The area of Seattle and King County in Washington state also has a lot of overlap with four different task forces on the city, region and state levels and Chattanooga Tennessee has three different task forces at the city, region, and state level.

Though these are the regions of the country with the most overlapping jurisdictions, 27 states have at least two levels of overlap with a state and regional, county, or city task forces. There is further overlap with the state task forces, as mentioned previously 17 task forces in 45 states have more than one state level task force. Legislative and attorney general were the most common combination of state level task forces. Delaware has two legislative task forces and Michigan had two attorney general task forces so overlapping typologies within states is also evident. Mapping the task force data shows that five states with no state level task force discussed earlier, can make up partly for this absence in county or regional level task forces. We also found that there are 11 states with only state level task forces and no sub-state level task forces.

### **Task Forces Overarching Mission**

In total, 171 task forces listed their strategy, mission, or overall goal in open-source data. Mission statements can signal the priorities of the task force but our data are also limited as some task forces might have mission statements but not list them. For those that did post their mission statements, we examined these missions to determine the overarching themes across the different types of task forces in the US. Some mission statements were one sentence while others laid out an in-depth approach with as many as 15 points to the work and overall goal of the task force. Despite these differences in length, scope, and geographical area across task forces, several themes emerged in the different mission statements. The most prevalent theme in the mission statements was one of cooperation across different entities in the task forces' geographical area and sometimes beyond. Forty-seven task forces mention cooperation or collaboration and 22 mention a comprehensive response. Many task forces in different jurisdictions sought to combat human trafficking (31 task forces) and fight to end human trafficking or modern slavery (8 task forces) verbiage often used in the US anti-trafficking movement. One mission statement from the Missouri Attorney General Human Trafficking Task Force said "to protect and advance the interests of the state and its citizens through the judicial and legislative process and to serve as the people's lawyer, fighting for openness and justice, especially for those who have no voice."<sup>38</sup> This state-centered approach demonstrates the mentality of rescuing victims and purports a savior complex where task forces feel the need to speak for victims that cannot speak.

Another common theme is protecting people, mostly children, from vulnerabilities mentioned in 21 task force mission statements. The Women Against Child Trafficking task force said "Our mission is to protect children/teens from predators who profit from selling children/

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<sup>38</sup> Missouri Attorney General Human Trafficking Task Force. Human Trafficking Task Force. <https://www.ago.mo.gov/home/human-trafficking/task-force> (accessed November 4, 2019).

teens into sexual slavery.”<sup>39</sup> This powerful mission statement sends a message about how task forces view trafficking victims and their role as rescuers resulting in their privileging their own voice over those of an allegedly “voiceless” victim. Thirty-three task forces discussed that their work proactively investigates human trafficking. One task force stated they “ensured a safer community: one victim, one case, one intervention at a time,”<sup>40</sup> while others discussed how they are targeting demand “by conducting massage parlor and ‘John’ stings throughout the county.”<sup>41</sup> These different approaches of human trafficking task force missions align with the carceral turn in feminist advocacy of the anti-trafficking movement in the US, as described by Bernstein.<sup>42</sup> This turn promotes increased policing, surveillance, and punitive agendas in order to catch human traffickers.<sup>43</sup> There were also many task forces that sought a victim-centered approach, empowering (10 task forces) and restoring survivors (nine task forces). The Sonoma County Human Trafficking Task Force stated that their mission is to “put an end to this vicious crime and support those survivors to reclaim their lives in dignity and with respect.”<sup>44</sup> This statement shows the variety of approaches and missions in human task forces around the US and demonstrates the diversity of these anti-trafficking institutions not only across typology, geography, subcommittees but also mission and goals.

## Serving Different Types of Victims

We analyzed the types of victims served by task forces in the US. Many task forces had very open parameters and stated they worked with both labor and sex trafficking victims. The Heart of Texas Human Trafficking Coalition detailed that they “serve all victims of human trafficking including foreign nationals (with or without immigration documents) and U.S. citizens, of all ages and sex, and individuals who identify as LGBTQ.”<sup>45</sup> While most task forces stated that they worked with all victims of human trafficking, there was a clear emphasis on sex trafficking in the activities of several task forces. Seventeen task forces stated that they only work with sex trafficking victims. This list includes six state level task forces in Nebraska, Idaho, Rhode Island, North Dakota, West Virginia, and Wisconsin, which means that in those states the highest-level task forces prioritize certain human trafficking victims over others and this sends a

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<sup>39</sup> Women Against Child Trafficking. <https://womenagainstchildtrafficking.weebly.com/> (accessed November 4, 2019.)

<sup>40</sup> Jefferson County Human Trafficking Subcommittee, Jeffco Connections (JC). <https://www.jeffersoncountycylc.com/human-trafficking> (accessed November 4, 2019.)

<sup>41</sup> Sacramento Together Against Human Trafficking. Sacramento Together. <http://www.sacramentotogether.org/index.html> (accessed November 4, 2019)

<sup>42</sup> Elizabeth Bernstein, “Carceral politics as gender justice? The “traffic in women” and neoliberal circuits of crime, sex, and rights” *Theory and Society* 41/3 (2012): 233-259. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11186-012-9165-9>.

<sup>43</sup> Bernstein.

<sup>44</sup> Sonoma County Human Trafficking Task Force, Help End Slavery In Sonoma County. <https://stopsonomaslavery.wordpress.com> (accessed November 4, 2019).

<sup>45</sup> The Heart of Texas Human Trafficking Coalition, Mission. <https://www.hothtc.org/> (accessed November 4, 2019).

clear message of worthy and unworthy victims. Of the 17 task forces that work with sex trafficking, three are faith-based task forces. This number is not large but since there are only 4 faith-based task forces total, this demonstrates an overwhelming emphasis from this type of task force on a particular type of trafficking victim.

Thirteen task forces stated that they only work with child victims and used terminology such as Commercial Sexual Exploitation of a Child (CSEC) and Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking (DMST) to describe the victims that they assist. This emphasis on child victims is even evidenced in the task force name: Women Against Child Trafficking in California. Again, we found that four state level task forces in West Virginia, Idaho, Wisconsin, and Alaska, limit the type of victims they serve and three of the four are also on the list above only working with sex trafficking victims. There is a strong emphasis on only assisting child sex trafficking victims in some task forces such as the Idaho Human Trafficking Task Force which states “the children we are trying to rescue and protect are often being sold to pedophiles who pay for the opportunity to rape a child.”<sup>46</sup> Limiting the task force’s scope to only one type of trafficking victim could leave coverage gaps and perpetuates the worthy and unworthy victim dichotomy that prioritizes female sex trafficking victims over other trafficking victims. Victim hierarchies like these can keep task forces, service providers, and police from identifying victims who do not fit into this “ideal victim” category.<sup>47</sup>

There are also task forces that combine human trafficking with other themes with the victims and survivors that they assist. The Contra Costa Alliance to End Abuse in California and the Wyoming Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault combine domestic violence and human trafficking. The Wichita Human Trafficking task force in Kansas works with victims of child abuse including instances of trafficking while the Middle District of Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force focuses on human trafficking and illegal arms trafficking. We also found task forces with links to prostitution, some explicitly in their name such as the State of Alaska Task Force on the Crimes of Human Trafficking, Promoting Prostitution and Sex Trafficking (PATH). One program Reducing Sexually Exploited & Trafficked described a new adult court diversion program for young adult women arrested for prostitution crimes which provides “wrap around trauma-based services by rescuing victims from the streets and structured rehab that has a focus on what is best for the child or young adult trapped in a trafficking situation.”<sup>48</sup> Verbiage that clearly demonstrates the blurred line between sex worker and trafficking victims in task force mission statements. This can be problematic with task forces that focus only on domestic minor sex trafficking victims and do not include the perspective of

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<sup>46</sup> Idaho Human Trafficking Task Force, Join the Fight. <https://www.operationshield.org/task-forces> (accessed November 4, 2019).

<sup>47</sup> Caroline Hoyle and Mary Bosworth, Michelle Dempsey, “Labelling the Victims of Sex Trafficking: Exploring the Borderland between Rhetoric and Reality” *Social & Legal Studies* 20/3 (2011): 313-329.

<sup>48</sup> Sacramento Together Against Human Trafficking.



consensual sex workers over the age of 18, drawing a line between those who view sex work as inherently exploitative and others who view it as legitimate work.<sup>49</sup>

## Task Force Characteristics

Task forces have a variety of different characteristics regarding structure, membership, and cooperation. Leadership in task forces is diverse and dependent on the type of task force, for example a legislative representative chairs most legislative task forces, whereas, attorney general task forces are chaired by the attorney general. Consequently, task force typology is important because it indicates the purpose and leadership of these task forces. Membership in task forces is also varied and dependent on the type of human trafficking task force. The literature discusses membership of most task forces which typically includes law enforcement from various jurisdictions, social service agencies, and NGOs.<sup>50</sup> Contrary to this finding, we found the membership to be much more diverse and dependent on the type of task force. For example, legislative task forces are focused on including legislators and law-making entities in various task force activities. Conversely, grassroots task forces include a diverse array of community members, businesses, faith-based leaders, and activists that work on human trafficking issues in their local community. The DOJ task forces consisted of states attorney's offices and police who work to prosecute and investigate trafficking crimes. Sometimes the membership is fluid and interested parties cycle in and out, while for other task forces, the membership is static. For example, in legislative task forces, the membership is outlined in the law and will often include a sunset clause on membership where people are elected to serve on the task force and there is an expiration time frame for their participation. Membership can also be very formal through an institutional appointment by the governor's office or closed such as the Cook County Task force in Illinois that seeks to preserve confidentiality of the human trafficking cases by limiting membership to invitation only in their subcommittees, however, others are open to the community. Additional task forces have membership applications and still others like the Lexington Human Trafficking Task Force in Kentucky are entirely open to the public and any interested parties. Some task forces elect their members instead of appointing them which again varies across the US and makes membership fluid and accountability difficult.

Membership also depends on the type of task force and level of administration, as state level task forces include people on different levels of government (federal, state, and local), while county level has a more localized membership. Members can be involved in numerous task forces on the city and state level, so we see overlapping membership as well, especially with

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<sup>49</sup> This dichotomy is complex in the context of human trafficking because under United States law anyone under the age of 18 involved in commercial sex is automatically a victim of human trafficking, no force, fraud, or coercion is required. Some advocates argue this statute takes agency away from those who might choose sex work. Additionally, research suggests that criminalizing prostitution makes sex work more dangerous and ultimately does little to stop demand for prostitution (Ronald Weitzer. 1999. "Prostitution control in America: Rethinking public policy" *Crime, Law and Social Change* 32(1): 83-102.). Having task forces that blur the lines between these two interrelated phenomenon could cause further friction and promote a rescue mentality for individuals who might not want to be rescued.

<sup>50</sup> Huff-Corzine et al. 2017



different policing agencies. For the most part, the typical task force members include prosecutors, district attorneys, police on various levels including county, state, and federal law enforcement agencies, victims' service organizations, faith-based groups, government based social services, academics, and community stakeholders. Fewer task forces include medical professionals, judges, and politicians but again membership is very dependent on the type of task force as politicians are more often in legislative task forces versus other types. We also found evidence of future membership trends that businesses and hospitals are increasingly included as members or maybe even establish their own human trafficking task forces. Our findings expand on previous studies<sup>51</sup> and suggest that membership depends on the type of task force, again demonstrating the importance of the task force typology. For example, grassroots and local types of task forces are more likely to have district attorneys and public defenders as members versus federal law enforcement partners who are usually designated to higher administrative level task forces.

We also noted entities who were not listed as members of task forces and thus left out of the conversation and task force cooperation. We found very few task forces with sex workers organizations, labor organizations and unions, farm workers' rights groups, and migration organizations.<sup>52</sup> This demonstrates the voices that are excluded from human trafficking task forces, the main institution geared at combatting human trafficking around the US. Regarding the policymaking and legislative emphasis in task forces, it also shows how legislation and institutions are formed in the US without including people who are integral to the conversation. This also points to underlying differences in the anti-trafficking movement with the legalization, decriminalization, or abolitionist approach to prostitution as some groups are reticent to include sex workers due to their views on prostitution. As anti-trafficking task forces seek new and innovative solutions, the conversation and membership could be expanded to these groups.

Several task forces created formal and informal subcommittees on different themes which further demonstrates the aim and deepening cooperation of task forces around the US. Out of the 227 task forces we analyzed, 55 of them had formal subcommittees listed in open-source data constituting 24% of our data. This clearly limits our findings due to the availability of the data but we believe that some preliminary findings reveal the variety of task force subcommittees and provide a glimpse of the landscape for more in-depth research in the future. We found 199 different subcommittees or working groups within the 55 task forces. These subcommittees serve as an additional venue for information sharing and are usually divided into more specific themes better handled by a smaller concentrated group of experts. For example, law enforcement subcommittees that offer information on investigations or victims services subcommittees that focus on victim rehabilitation techniques. The most prevalent subcommittees were awareness/ outreach and community engagement (30 subcommittees), followed by victims' services (28), education and training (24), law enforcement (22), and legislation/governance (15). Several task

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<sup>51</sup> Farrell et al. 2008, 106.

<sup>52</sup> Some of these entities are challenging to include in task forces because these groups advocate for criminal activity i.e. prostitution or assisting individuals in violation of US immigration law which puts them at odds with law enforcement entities and could be one reason why they are left out of task forces. Additionally, these organizations are not as numerous as victim services organizations so they are not located in many geographic areas.

forces also had subcommittees for steering (9), research and data collection (9), judicial, legal, prosecutors, criminal justice (8), and demand reduction (6). In Florida, the Space Coast Human Trafficking Task Force's subcommittee with law enforcement and judicial officials is one of four subcommittees but it is the only closed group subcommittee which limits the membership and attendance. Our finding speaks to previous research that determined subcommittees of law enforcement generally meet without NGO representatives,<sup>53</sup> which could be problematic for identifying and assisting victims if the group is insular and only includes law enforcement due to statecraft and sensitive information about investigations. Although some subcommittees mention working across the committees, there is the possibility of creating tunnel vision where subcommittees are siloed into one sector and do not cooperate with other entities within the task force. This could consequently defeat the purpose and intent of multi-agency task forces. Thus, subcommittees are effective mechanisms to concentrate task force work but can simultaneously work against the collaborative goal of establishing task forces in the first place, but more research is needed to verify this observation.

We also examined the cooperation and solidification of formal partnerships among task force members, exemplified in published Memorandums of Understand (MOUs) and protocols. We were surprised at how few task forces discussed MOUs and protocols, which have been found to help “define boundaries on what information should be shared, formalize the process and responsibility of providing services to different types of human trafficking victims [and] establish more open and transparent lines of communication.”<sup>54</sup> There are numerous benefits to formalizing task force processes with MOUs and protocols but we only found that five task forces discussed MOUs and 33 mention protocols in our data which constitutes 2% and 15% of our study respectively. Of course, many task forces could have them and not discussed them in their open-sourced data but it could also suggest a lack of enduring cooperation. The Greater New Orleans Human Trafficking Task Force has signed MOUs among task force partners and identified their core team of individuals are those funded with a DOJ grant.<sup>55</sup> This finding suggests the integral role of the grant in the formation of these MOUs and puts into the question the effectiveness of this task force when the grant expires. The Human Trafficking Working Group Municipality of Anchorage stated that members signing MOUs are then officially established the working group,<sup>56</sup> so we see other task forces use it as a precursor to their official task force duties. Most of the protocols mentioned were geared toward identifying victims and referring them to receive assistance while others were aimed at specific aspects of task forces. For example, the Human Trafficking Coordinating Council in Delaware was working to develop a comprehensive plan to provide victims of human trafficking with services and they previously

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<sup>53</sup> Farrell et al. 2008.

<sup>54</sup> Farrell et al. 2008, 96.

<sup>55</sup> The Greater New Orleans Human Trafficking Task Force. 2018. “Our Role and Purpose” <http://www.nolatrafficking.org/> (accessed October 12, 2021).

<sup>56</sup> Human Trafficking Working Group Municipality of Anchorage. 2016 “Municipality, State to Sign Human Trafficking Working Group MOUs” <https://www.muni.org/Departments/Mayor/PressReleases/Pages/Municipality,StatetoSignHumanTraffickingWorkingGroupMOUs.aspx> (accessed October 12, 2021).

created a law enforcement agency protocol.<sup>57</sup> These findings demonstrate the prioritization of protocols, the disconnect between different entities, and the creation of different protocols which can impede cross-sector cooperation on human trafficking.

## Conclusions

Our study reaffirms that human trafficking task forces are the preferred model used in different jurisdictions and levels of administration across the US to combat the complex phenomenon of trafficking in persons. While this research focuses on the US, the model for this anti-trafficking institution is replicated internationally in the United Kingdom<sup>58</sup> and the Asia Pacific region.<sup>59</sup> We introduce a typology for understanding and categorizing human trafficking task forces around the US based on a compiled database of open-source information. Our research demonstrates how 227 different task forces at five different levels of administration have developed to combat human trafficking. Seven different types of task forces emerged: DOJ, United States Attorneys, legislative, attorney general, local government, grassroots task forces, and faith-based entities. While grants are mentioned in the literature as the reasoning for task forces, our research suggests the importance of the legislative process in advocating for multi-agency solutions to human trafficking and the grass roots nature of human trafficking task forces built from the ground up. Therefore, we found both top-down motivations from grants and legislation and bottom-up catalysts from the community advocates for the establishment of task forces.

We revealed the significant variation across the US with the types of victims served, task force membership and leadership, subcommittees of various task forces, and cross-sector cooperation through formal protocols and MOUs. We found that human trafficking task forces cover almost the entire US but there are definite inequalities based on those that have received state or federal grants and those that grow out of the community from the grassroots with no monetary support. We determined that some task forces, including several state level task forces do not serve all victims and focus on sex trafficking and or child victims, reaffirming the deserving and undeserving victim dichotomy. This limits the type of victims they serve which is problematic, especially on the state level, where this exclusion could have significant consequences. While some task forces limited their scope, others expanded it to include topics related to human trafficking such as sexual assault, domestic violence, child abuse, and illegal arms trafficking. These task force topics that we found differed from those in the literature limited to human smuggling and drugs.<sup>60</sup> We also determined that there was significant longevity in these human trafficking task forces with many existing for over a decade. This diverges from

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<sup>57</sup> The Exceptional Infinite. 2017. "The Human Trafficking Coordinating Council" <https://exceptionaldelaware.wordpress.com/tag/human-trafficking-coordinating-council/> (accessed October 12, 2021).

<sup>58</sup> Harvey et al.

<sup>59</sup> Emmers et al.

<sup>60</sup> Farrell et al. 2008.

the literature which argues that task forces are temporary and task specific<sup>61</sup> as members face impediments to working together as a team and difficulties switching alliances from their home agency to the task force.<sup>62</sup> Though we did find that some task forces are temporary in nature, the vast majority have existed for some time and have only deepened their cooperation.

Aligning with the literature,<sup>63</sup> we also found that sometimes the cooperation is siloed into policing and victims' services entities, which can undermine the purpose of cooperation and the multi-agency task force approach. Tunnel vision created by subcommittee work further insulated task force members into specific groups, working against the reasoning for establishing task forces in the first place. Membership and task force leadership mirror patterns found in previous research<sup>64</sup> and we added that they were heavily dependent on the task force type reinforcing the importance of our typology. We also found several voices left out of the conversation and excluded from task forces around the US such as sex workers organizations, labor unions and organizations, farm workers rights groups, and migration organizations. Mission statements focused on working to end human trafficking or modern slavery, protecting children from vulnerabilities, empowering and restoring survivors with a victim-centered approach, and promoting a state-centered approach prioritizing the rescue of victims. We found this to perpetuate a savior complex where task forces promoted a rescuer mentality in order to speak for victims that cannot speak and save victims that cannot help themselves. We also determined that some mission statements sought to investigate human trafficking and target demand representing a carceral turn in the anti-trafficking feminist advocacy which promotes increased policing, surveillance, and punitive agendas in order to catch human traffickers.<sup>65</sup> We revealed that very few task forces had MOUs or protocols to guide their work, a surprising finding considering the positive impact that these documents have had in previous task force work.<sup>66</sup>

Previous research focused only on DOJ task forces but our research affirms that task forces have evolved beyond this model and come in many varieties at different levels of administration. Top-down task forces, such as the DOJ and States Attorneys task forces dictated in grant requirements or legislative directives were identified. Nonetheless, these top-down task forces are balanced with bottom-up task force approaches, such as grass roots, faith based and local government. Our research demonstrates the significant scope and variation of task forces used to combat human trafficking in the US and why more research into this important anti-trafficking institution is necessary. We found variation in types of victims served, task force membership and leadership, structure, subcommittees of various task forces, and cross-sector cooperation through formal protocols and memorandums of understanding. We acknowledge the limits to open-sourced data on task forces and hope that future research can build on the findings

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<sup>61</sup> Farrell et al. 2008.

<sup>62</sup> Sheldon-Sherman.

<sup>63</sup> Farrell et al. 2008.

<sup>64</sup> Huff-Corzine et al.; Farrell et al. 2008; Sheldon-Sherman.

<sup>65</sup> Bernstein.

<sup>66</sup> Farrell et al. 2008, 96.

presented in this study and deepen the comparison and effectiveness of these task forces in the US with interviews and/or survey data from task force members. Our typology contributes to the literature by presenting a systematic way to analyze the variety of human trafficking task forces with open-sourced data in different jurisdictions and levels of administration. We believe that this typology can be applied to task forces in different countries, regimes, and levels of administration to understand further how this institution has developed around the world.

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### Appendix 1. Task Force Data Collection Questions for Systematic Analysis

1. Name of Task Force
2. Website Link
3. Address
4. Service Locations
5. Type of Victims they serve
6. Task Force Members
7. Task Force Leadership
8. How often do they meet?
9. Task Force Partnerships and MOUs
10. Structure or Framework; Subcommittee or groups
11. Why was the task force established?
12. If it was established by law, which law? Provide link to law if possible.
13. What is their strategy or mission? Annual goals?
14. Do they have a protocol or operating procedure?
15. Task force activities (awareness campaigns, collect data). What is the main function of the task force and what activities do they sponsor?
16. Other Interesting Information