

April 2014

Assessing the Threat of Human Trafficking in Texas



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Human Trafficking in Texas

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A State Intelligence Estimate

Produced by the Texas Department of Public Safety

In collaboration with other law enforcement and homeland security agencies

April 2014

This report is the **UNCLASSIFIED** version of a Law Enforcement Sensitive assessment. The reports' conclusions and judgments are the same. However, all information and citations from the original assessment that are confidential by law or excepted from public disclosure requirements have been redacted from this unclassified version. Most of the redacted information relates to anecdotes that serve as examples underlying the judgments and conclusions. Among this redacted information is a body of investigative and intelligence information relating to the involvement of gangs and Mexican cartels in certain aspects of human smuggling and human trafficking activity in Texas.

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Executive Summary

(U) Human trafficking involves the recruitment, harboring, transporting, or procurement of a person for labor or services for the purpose of involuntary servitude, slavery, or forced commercial sex acts. In Texas, this crime is committed by criminal organizations and individual criminals who target male and female victims of different ages, nationalities, and socioeconomic classes.

(U) Measures currently being used to assess human trafficking in Texas provide a limited view of this criminal activity. Examples include: Texas accounted for approximately 10 percent of human trafficking tips received by the National Human Trafficking Resource Center (NHTRC) hotline in 2013; 957 suspected victims and 1,057 suspected human trafficking incidents have been reported by Texas-based reporting agencies to federal databases since 2007; 99 inmates were incarcerated in Texas prisons with a conviction of human trafficking or compelling prostitution, as of January 2014; and the number of state charges of human trafficking and compelling prostitution in Texas increased from 20 and 54 in 2010 to 101 and 74 in 2013.

(U) Developing a comprehensive understanding of the threat of human trafficking requires consideration of multiple related offenses, such as compelling and promotion of prostitution, sexual exploitation, forced labor, human smuggling, and other crimes.

(U) Sex trafficking is the fastest growing business of organized crime, and the third-largest criminal enterprise in the world. Child victims are a particular concern. The average age at which girls first become victims of prostitution is 12 to 14, according to one study. Traffickers are increasingly active on social media, which they use to target victims and advertise to customers.

(U) Sex traffickers in Texas target juvenile runaways, illegal aliens, and other vulnerable victims, using force, fraud or coercion to compel them into the sex trade. Often, victims are manipulated by traffickers to remain with them due to their emotional or financial dependency on the trafficker for food, housing, and other needs.

(U) Members and associates of multiple gangs have been reported to be involved in sex trafficking operations in Texas. These include Barrio Azteca, Black Gangster Disciples, Bloods, Crips, Mara Salvatrucha, Sureños, and Tango Blast. Gangs and gang members are attracted to the lucrative nature of this activity due to the potential for large and renewable profits and the perceived lower risk of detection.

(U) Labor traffickers often recruit, transport, and employ legal and illegal immigrants who they bring into the United States for the purpose of forced labor and indentured servitude. These immigrants originate from various countries around the world. Labor trafficking victims can be exploited in both rural and urban areas in a variety of industries. There is limited reporting regarding labor trafficking in Texas.

(U) Although human smuggling is distinct from human trafficking, there is substantial overlap in many cases. In some instances, human smugglers have been hired to transport sex trafficking victims, and in many other cases crimes that initially begin as human smuggling

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evolve into human trafficking or a related crime: illegal aliens who voluntarily enter into an agreement with an alien smuggling organization ultimately are kidnapped, moved or held against their will, assaulted, or otherwise exploited, and the smugglers are associated with gangs and Mexican cartels and engaged in other criminal enterprises, which renders the traditional smuggling-trafficking distinction misleading. Indeed, the terms “human smuggling” and “alien smuggling organization” are rarely accurate descriptions of the criminal activity that is occurring or the groups responsible for it.

(U) Mexican cartels facilitate, control, or benefit from nearly all human smuggling activity along the Texas-Mexico border. Alien smuggling organizations are increasingly active in Texas, as reflected in the increasing number of illegal alien apprehensions; in FY2013, 243,550 illegal alien apprehensions were reported in Texas sectors, a 94 percent increase since FY2011. These included 28,352 apprehensions of unaccompanied alien children (UACs), a 221 percent increase from FY2011. Alien smuggling activity occurs throughout Texas but is concentrated in the Rio Grande Valley, where illegal alien apprehensions are at historically elevated levels, and include greater numbers of other-than-Mexicans (OTMs) and UACs than any other sector along the US-Mexico border. UACs are often brought to the U.S. to reunite them with family members, and they are particularly vulnerable to exploitation.

(U) The sexual exploitation of children includes sexual assault and enticement of children, as well as the manufacturing, distribution, and possession of child pornography. Often, human trafficking presents elements of some or all of these crimes. Sexual predators seek out children on the Internet and in the community, attempting to lure them into situations in which they can be exploited. In some cases, sexual predators target children in their families or the families of their acquaintances, and predators also abuse positions of trust that give them access to children through churches, schools, and other institutions. Texas has a total of 80,173 registered sex offenders; of that total 60,704 registrants have been convicted of sex crimes against a child. There were 7,757 total arrests for sexual assault of a child in 2012 and 7,699 total arrests for the same offenses in 2013.

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Acknowledgments

(U) The Texas Department of Public Safety collaborated with law enforcement, homeland security, and other government agencies across Texas and the United States in the production of this State Intelligence Estimate. Their contributions were invaluable to developing an accurate and complete assessment. This collaboration underscores the commitment among agencies across the state to share information, intelligence, and capabilities to effectively address public safety threats across all jurisdictions and disciplines at all levels, and we are grateful to the numerous agencies that contributed to this assessment.

Austin Police Department
Houston Police Department
Office of Attorney General, State of Texas
Texas Department of Criminal Justice
Federal Bureau of Investigation
Immigration and Customs Enforcement
Customs and Border Protection
US Department of Homeland Security
US Department of Justice
US Department of State
Human Smuggling and Trafficking Center
National Center for Missing and Exploited Children

State Intelligence Estimates

(U) To enhance the state's ability to detect, assess, and prioritize threats to the safety and security of its citizens, the Texas Department of Public Safety implemented a State Intelligence Estimate process after consultation with the National Intelligence Council, based in part on the model of the National Intelligence Estimate.

(U) State Intelligence Estimates are multi-agency assessments on issues relating to homeland security and public safety in Texas. They serve as the most authoritative and comprehensive analysis of these issues, and they are designed to provide law enforcement and government officials with the most accurate evaluation of current information on a given topic. State Intelligence Estimates are intended to provide an assessment on the current status of an issue, but they may also include estimative conclusions that make forecasts about future developments and identify the implications for Texas.

(U) Unlike reports and assessments produced by an individual agency or center, State Intelligence Estimates draw on the information and expertise of multiple law enforcement and homeland security agencies across Texas. Such an approach is essential to developing a comprehensive assessment of issues that affect the state as a whole. By incorporating the perspectives and information from multiple agencies, the Texas Department of Public Safety is better able to produce assessments that support the development of proactive strategies and policies to address current and evolving threats to the state.

(U) Source Summary Statement

(U) This assessment is based on information from multiple sources, including reports from law enforcement agencies; investigative records; data regarding illegal alien apprehensions; raw intelligence information; finished intelligence products; publicly available court filings; other public records; and other information. Some of the investigative records and court filings may relate to ongoing investigations that have not resulted in charges or convictions. Although we are unable to confirm the accuracy of all the information derived from each of these sources at this time, we consider this reporting to be generally reliable for providing accurate judgments for this assessment.

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Introduction

(U) Criminal organizations – including Mexican cartels and transnational gangs – and individual criminals engage in a wide range of illicit activity in Texas. Among the vilest crimes in which these organizations and other criminals are engaged is the exploitation and trafficking of children and other vulnerable victims. These crimes are also carried out and enabled by human smugglers, prostitution rings, manufacturers and viewers of child pornography, sexual predators, and other criminals. Regardless of who perpetrates these crimes or their motives, this category of criminal activity is especially heinous, as it takes advantage of children and vulnerable individuals and subjects them to violence, extortion, forced labor, sexual assault and/or prostitution.

(U) Measures of Human Trafficking in Texas

(U) Estimates vary for the number of trafficking victims in Texas or the United States, and the available data is not comprehensive. These data limitations are due to several challenges, such as the under-reporting of trafficking to law enforcement, definitional differences or variations, and varying criminal charges for crimes other than trafficking.¹² Some examples of available estimates and measures, for both Texas and the US, are listed below.

(U) Approximately 100,000 children are estimated to be in the sex trade in the United States each year, according to the Polaris Project, a US nongovernmental organization that studies human trafficking.¹³ In 2013, Texas ranked second in the nation with 2,236 incoming tips (calls, emails, tip forms) received by the Polaris Project's National Human Trafficking Resource Center (NHTRC) for human trafficking tips.¹⁴

(U) There were 709 human trafficking-related incidents, 609 reported victims, and 176 suspects arrested in Texas between January 1, 2007, and January 9, 2014, based on the limited information entered into the Human Trafficking Reporting System (HTRS) by Texas-based reporting agencies.^a

(U) Two FBI Innocence Lost Task Forces – one based in Dallas and one in Houston – report data on child victims of human trafficking. Combined, HTRS and Innocence Lost data reports a total of 957 reported victims and 1,057 reported human trafficking-related incidents from January 1, 2007, to January 9, 2014.¹⁵

(U) According to the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) as of January 2014, 24 inmates are currently serving sentences for a human trafficking-related offense, and 75 inmates are serving sentences for compelling prostitution.¹⁶

(U) The number of state charges for Trafficking of a Person (Texas Penal Code §20A) and Compelling Prostitution (Texas Penal Code §43.05) in Texas has increased annually over the past four years, according to data from the Texas Crime Information Center. In

^a HTRS is a secure, online portal where Department of Justice (DOJ)-funded task forces and voluntary participants from other law enforcement agencies enter data on suspected human trafficking incidents, offenders, and victims.

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2013, there were 101 Trafficking of a Person charges and 74 Compelling Prostitution charges, up from 78 and 68 in 2012, 35 and 63 in 2011, and 20 and 54 in 2010.

(U) However, these existing measures of human trafficking provide a limited view of this criminal activity. A comprehensive assessment of the threat of human trafficking and related crimes should reflect a thorough understanding of the nature of this criminal activity. This approach requires consideration of all human trafficking-related offenses, such as compelling and promotion of prostitution, sexual exploitation, forced labor, human smuggling, and other crimes.

(U) One aspect of these cases involves the extent to which force, fraud, or coercion was used by the perpetrator, or whether the victim consented or participated voluntarily. While each case is unique, it is common for a victim to initially consent to some activity, but for the consent to change over time. However, there is no need to prove force, fraud, or coercion in human trafficking cases involving a victim under 18 years of age.

(U) In some cases, sex trafficking victims initially consented to commercial sex for an individual or organization. Later, after being forced to work additional hours or being held captive, the victims' involvement often is no longer voluntary, and the situation becomes trafficking for adult victims. Consent and voluntary participation are not relevant in determining the offense for sex trafficking victims who are minors. Likewise, some labor trafficking victims may initially agree to perform work to pay off travel-related expenses, only later to find that the price has increased, and they are forced to work for a longer period of time with little or no pay. Others come to the United States under what they believe to be legitimate circumstances, only to be forced into other work with little or no pay after arriving.

(U) A similar dynamic often applies to human smuggling in Texas. Illegal aliens who hire a human smuggler to be brought to the United States initially agree to be transported by a smuggler. Frequently, however, their participation becomes involuntary when they are held in stash houses and extorted to pay increased smuggling fees, or when the guard of a stash house uses threats, intimidation, or violence to ransom them to family members.

(U) Definitions and Vulnerabilities

(U) Human trafficking involves the recruitment, harboring, transporting, or procurement of a person for labor or services for the purpose of involuntary servitude, slavery, or forced commercial sex acts.¹⁷ Trafficking is exploitation-based, and does not require movement across borders. It is a hidden crime, as victims often do not seek help due to their immigration status, language and cultural barriers, fear of their traffickers, inability to make an outcry, and other factors. Human trafficking involves both sex trafficking and labor trafficking.

(U) Victims of human trafficking in Texas cannot be easily categorized, since they include different ages, nationalities, genders, and socioeconomic classes. However, one commonality among both domestic and international victims often involves some form of vulnerability.

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(U) Domestic victims include juvenile runaways, foster care children, other at-risk minors, and vulnerable adults who are targeted by traffickers.¹⁸ Many of these victims are targeted on social media websites, within schools, at public transportation stations, at shopping malls, and near homeless shelters. Traffickers are skilled manipulators who groom victims through false promises of affection and wealth, by taking control of basic needs such as providing food and shelter, and by using threats and violence.¹⁹

(U) International victims include documented persons and illegal aliens who contract smugglers to transport them into the US only to be exploited along the journey, foreign nationals whose travel expenses are repaid through debt bondage, immigrants who are promised employment and hopes of a better quality of life in the US, and refugees trying to escape oppression, poverty, or conflict in their home country.^{20 21 22}

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(U) Large-Scale Houston Sex Trafficking Ring

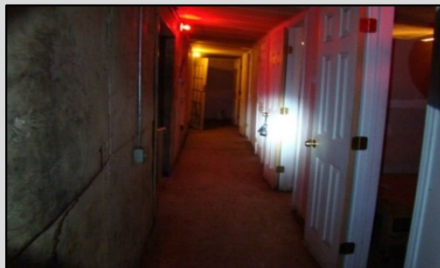
(U) The operation of a large sex trafficking ring in Houston was revealed during the culmination of a law enforcement investigation in October 2013 that included charges against 14 defendants and the rescue of 12 victims. According to the court records, from August 1999 until October 2013, the female matriarch running the sex trafficking enterprise paid human smugglers to illegally bring her victims into the US.²³ The trafficking victims were undocumented Mexican and Honduran nationals as young as 14 years of age. The victims were recruited by means of fraud and coercion to engage in prostitution in the US. The conspirators relied on pimps to provide the women and young girls. Pimps would beat the victims if they spoke to a customer, took too long with a customer, or if a customer was dissatisfied.

(U) The sex trafficking enterprise operated in four Houston brothels/bars. In addition, the defendants utilized nearby hotels, charging victims an additional fee to leave the brothel with the customer. The bar was located in the lower level of these establishments, while the second level provided rooms for prostitution. The trafficking victims were to remain locked in a room unless a special client or big spender paid to have sex with one of them. Some victims were also locked in a room at the home of the matriarch, who told them that they “couldn’t leave” until they paid her back the money she had spent on them for perfume, food, clothing, and rent. She ensured that the girls remained in debt to her by continually increasing the amount of money they owed to her.

(U) For every commercial sex act, the enterprise also charged a \$20 fee, which included a \$5 admission ticket and \$15 to gain access to a prostitution room and condoms. In an 18-month period, the enterprise acquired \$1,265,820 from the \$20 fee alone. At the end of each day, the money that was paid to the girls for commercial sex was taken from them. The matriarch determined the rates for individual sex acts based on the age and attractiveness of the female. Customers were allowed oral sex, anal sex, and to spank a victim as long as they did not hit the victim in the face. Although rates varied by girl, customers were charged \$500 for an hour and \$250 for a half hour with the youngest and prettiest victim. Another victim’s rate was reported as \$70 for 15 minutes of illegal sexual services.

(U) In order to conceal illegal proceeds, conspirators of the enterprise laundered money on various occasions and solely used cashier’s checks totaling less than \$10,000 to avoid the bank’s financial reporting requirements. Conspirators also acted as security and lookouts in the parking lots of the bars/brothels to avoid detection by law enforcement.

(U) Figures 1 and 2. Images of a different Houston cantina used for sex trafficking, 2010;



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1. Sex Trafficking and Compelling Prostitution

(U) Sex trafficking and compelling prostitution involve forcing victims into prostitution or the sex trade for the benefit of the trafficker and against the victims' will; although force, fraud, or coercion does not have to be proven in the case of minors involved in commercial sex. Sex trafficking continues to be a problem around the world, including in Texas. It is the fastest-growing business of organized crime and the third-largest criminal enterprise in the world.²⁴ Sex trafficking involves domestic and international victims, males and females, and children and adults. The trafficking of children is a particular concern. The average age at which girls first become victims of prostitution has been estimated at 12 to 14, and boys and transgender youth at 11 to 13, according to one study.²⁵

(U) In some cases, the victims of sex trafficking initially voluntarily and willingly travel with and engage in prostitution for a trafficker, but are eventually forced to continue working against their will, held captive, and have their access to food, friends, and family restricted by the trafficker. Often, victims are undocumented aliens or juvenile runaways who are vulnerable and manipulated or groomed by traffickers to remain with them due to their emotional or financial dependency on the trafficker for food, housing, and other needs.

(U) Sex trafficking organizations use a variety of methods and means to target and recruit victims and to advertise the victims' illegal sexual "services" to customers. Many sex traffickers rotate victims through various cities and locations and operate out of hotels or with little infrastructure. Sex trafficking operations have the potential to be highly profitable, and some gangs and other criminals reportedly consider sex trafficking and compelling prostitution to be a lower risk and more lucrative than other criminal activity such as drug trafficking, robbery or theft.

(U) Sex traffickers target and recruit victims to work as prostitutes through various means. In some rare cases, traffickers have kidnapped victims for the sole purpose of forcing them into prostitution. However, in many cases, traffickers seek out victims from the most vulnerable populations – such as juvenile runaways and illegal aliens – or approach them online or in person with false promises of affection or legitimate work, and ultimately use force, fraud or coercion to compel them into prostitution. Occasionally, trafficking victims initially consented to commercial sex for a trafficker, but are eventually forced into a trafficking situation under the trafficker's control.

(U) In March 2014, four suspects were charged for sex trafficking of minors in Houston. The criminal complaint alleges that the female minors were forced to prostitute and were also severely beaten by a male suspect in some occasions. One suspect charged in this case is a female who supplied a vehicle and transported the minors to dates for commercial sex acts. Another female suspect also participated in commercial sex acts herself.²⁶

(U) In June 2012, federal law enforcement arrested two suspects in El Paso. From August 2007 through February 2012, together, the defendants conspired to implement a prostitution scheme involving a minor. The defendants recruited females in Mexico by

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placing ads in a Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, newspaper offering jobs in the United States. Once recruited, the defendants arranged to transport the females to El Paso and harbor them in local motels to work as prostitutes.²⁷

(U) Children who are missing are vulnerable to exploitation and trafficking. These include juvenile runaways, whom we consider to be potentially at high risk. In Texas, 44,741 children (age 17 or younger) were reported missing in 2013.²⁸ Of these, we estimate that approximately 75 percent were juvenile runaways, though the precise number is not known.

(U) Traffickers keep their victims under their control by making victims dependent on them for food, shelter, supplying drug habits, and restricting their access to communication with friends and family. In addition, traffickers take nearly all of the money that victims receive from commercial sex, which essentially makes the victims financially dependent on them. Many traffickers physically and sexually assault their victims and threaten to assault or kill their family members if the victims attempt to escape. In some cases, they deliberately drug them.

(U) In February 2011, 10 individuals were arrested and charged in a major sex trafficking ring that began back in 1999 in Houston, Texas. The co-owners (brother and sister) of two Houston area cantinas were accused of recruiting Mexican women and girls to travel to the United States with the false expectation of legitimate jobs in restaurants and bars. The siblings along with other suspects used force and coercion to compel their service as prostitutes. The commercial sex acts allegedly took place at locations adjacent to one of the bars/cantinas owned by the primary suspects. Between 2003 to 2011, the suspects changed their tactics and depended on pimps to supply young women and minors for the use of prostitution. The siblings charged the girls a \$4,000 smuggling fee, which was taken from their prostitution earnings.²⁹

(U) Internet advertisements are one of the primary ways that sex traffickers seek out potential customers, such as on websites that permit classified ads to be posted by users. Increasingly, traffickers are using social networking websites to seek potential customers. In other cases, trafficking victims are forced to seek out customers on the street, or their trafficking operations use front businesses – such as bars, strip clubs, or massage parlors – to operate. Many sex traffickers take explicit photographs or videos of their victims as part of their advertisements, which, in the case of minor victims, results in the production and distribution of child pornography.

(U) In August 2013, a 24 year old male was arrested and indicted on sex trafficking charges involving a 15 year old female in the Houston, Texas area. The criminal complaint includes that the female victim was forced to perform sex acts with individuals for money and give all of her earnings to the suspect. He posted commercial sex advertisements of the minor on websites in Colorado and Texas. The victim was forced to earn \$500 a night and when she met this quota, the suspect would “reward” her by having sex with her. The suspect also gave the victim alcohol and marijuana, and only gave her food at his discretion.³⁰

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(U) In May 2013, two men from north Texas were each sentenced following their guilty pleas in July 2012 to sex trafficking charges. In June 2011, a 16-year-old girl had been prostituted by one of the defendants in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. He promised her that she could earn more money by working for him. He photographed her in lingerie and in the nude to advertise her online, drove her to hotel rooms, and directed her to have sex with men for money. He took all of the proceeds, and provided her food, clothing, and condoms. Another female, who worked as a prostitute for the second defendant, was arrested for prostitution in July 2011 after police officers saw ads for her on the Internet and arranged to meet her at a hotel in Arlington. The second defendant and second victim had dated until he convinced her that she could make a lot of money if she worked for him as a prostitute. She eventually agreed, and began working for him in May 2011. He placed ads for her on websites that advertised prostitution and received all of the money she earned. He provided her with food, gas, clothing, hotel rooms, and condoms. The victim feared the second defendant; while she was working for him, he choked her, held her against a wall, poured drinks on her head, pulled her hair, and threatened to harm her.³¹

(U) Sex Trafficking and Minor Victims

(U) While force, fraud, and coercion are elements of human trafficking incidents involving adult victims, it is essential to understand that these elements are not relevant in determining the offense for sex trafficking victims who are 17 years of age or younger. The below example represents the first human trafficking prosecution by the Texas Attorney General's Office under the new state trafficking law.³² The case involves a defendant who provided the use of her trailer, arranged "dates," and provided food, shelter, and clothing at times for the victim, in violation of the state's human trafficking and compelling prostitution laws, which clearly prohibit a person from in any way assisting a minor to engage in sex for money.

(U) On April 26, 2013, a female suspect was arrested for various charges associated with prostitution activity occurring out of her trailer in Madisonville, Texas. Around the age of 14, the victim met the 29-year-old female defendant. They soon became close friends, and the defendant arranged for the victim to have her first prostitution encounter in another town. They remained friends over the years, and the defendant moved to a trailer in Madisonville, Texas. In the summer of 2012, the victim was 17 years old. She and other females, mostly in their twenties, were coming to the defendant's trailer to engage in sex for money. The defendant brokered the "dates" and would receive five dollars from each female and five dollars from each "john" per prostitution encounter. The defendant demanded this money as consideration for arranging the "dates" and allowing the females to use the middle bedroom of her trailer. A Madison County jury found the defendant guilty, and she was sentenced to 15 years imprisonment for Trafficking of a Minor and 10 years imprisonment for Compelling Prostitution of a Minor by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice.³³

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(U) In February 2013 in Waco, a Killeen man was sentenced for sex trafficking of children. His prostitution venture occurred from November 2011 until August 2012, in which minor females utilized cell phones and an identified website to take photographs, post prostitution advertisements, recruit new girls, and communicate with purchasers. In May 2012, officers responded to a call that a 16-year-old runaway was frightened to leave the man's residence and needed assistance in escaping. Killeen Police Department rescued the minor from the residence. During the course of this investigation, authorities identified another minor as being sexually trafficked by the man, as well as a third minor who was being actively recruited. The suspect was arrested in August 2012 when he arrived at an agreed upon location in Killeen to pick up the third minor.³⁴

(U) Interdiction for the Protection of Children

(U) In 2009, the Texas Department of Public Safety, with the assistance of the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Behavioral Analysis Unit and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, developed the Interdiction for the Protection of Children (IPC) program to train patrol officers on the detection, interdiction and rescue of child victims of crimes and the proper handling of these victims. DPS has provided IPC training to more than 3,030 officers in Texas and approximately 4,080 officers outside of Texas. IPC has been responsible for uncovering crimes affecting children and arresting the perpetrators in incidents involving:

- Sexual Assault of a Child
- Human Trafficking
- Abduction
- Possession of Child Pornography

(U) DPS officers rescued 39 missing or endangered children in 2013, and 29 in 2012. Since 2010, DPS can account for 112 IPC-related child recoveries.³⁵

(U) In May 2010, a DPS Trooper conducted a stop of a vehicle in Wise County with several adults and three child occupants. During the investigation, it was determined the adult and child passengers had been transported to Dallas, where they were then transferred to different vehicles with the intent to be transported throughout various locations in the nation. Eight of the passengers were identified as victims of trafficking.

(U) In August 2012, during a traffic stop in Chambers County, a DPS Trooper identified an adult male and 16-year-old female. The Trooper suspected the child may be a victim of sexual assault. After notifying DPS CID and Texas Rangers, it was determined the child was a victim of sexual exploitation.

(U) In April 2013, a DPS Trooper conducted a traffic stop in Angelina County and identified the adult and child occupants to be in possession of illegal drugs. The child was identified as missing and ultimately disclosed of exposure to commercial sexual exploitation, and provided information of another child victim located in Harris County. The second child was later identified and recovered.

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(U) In July 2012, a Houston man was charged for transporting a minor for a commercial sex act. The suspect was stopped by immigration officers in the United Kingdom (UK) after he and a minor arrived in London on a flight originating in Houston. UK officials suspected something was amiss with a 35-year-old man traveling with an unrelated 15-year-old boy. Both individuals were returned to Houston on separate flights. Upon arrival in Houston, they were met by immigration authorities. The investigation revealed that the suspect allegedly runs a massage business out of his home and he was using the 15-year-old boy to give massages. The individuals paying for the massages were allowed to fondle the child during the massage and the child was required to sexually gratify the customers.³⁶

(U) Sex traffickers routinely transport trafficking victims between multiple cities to expose them to new markets. This tactic results in highly mobile trafficking operations that are fluid and challenging to investigate and interdict. Large special events – such as sporting events, music events, and conventions – that bring large numbers of visitors to a city can prompt traffickers to travel to that city in order to exploit their victims, based on the perception of increased demand for commercial sex. In other cases, traffickers choose to stay local and conduct their business in one city as opposed to commuting to and from others.

(U) In Houston in May 2013, one couple was detained on sex trafficking and child pornography production charges. One or both of the individuals had been in Florida, Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas, and New Mexico. Between April and September of 2011, the defendants allegedly filmed their engagement in sex with a 17-year-old girl. The female defendant posted advertisements for commercial sex for both herself and the victim in Louisiana, Houston, and other cities in Texas. The victim gave the defendants the money she earned from commercial sex. During this investigation, the couple, along with the woman's sister, were arrested in Arkansas and charged with similar sex trafficking offenses involving a different minor victim.³⁷

(U) *Human Trafficking at Large Special Events*

(U) Large numbers of domestic and international tourists attending high profile sporting events in Texas, such as the NFL Super Bowl, the NBA All-Star game, and the Formula One US Grand Prix, increase the potential for human trafficking and commercial sex. Recognizing the potential of increased trafficking during these events, Texas law enforcement agencies take proactive steps to identify and prevent trafficking.

(U) In 2011, Texas hosted the Super Bowl at Cowboys Stadium in Arlington. The North Texas Trafficking Task Force (NTTTF) proactively developed anti-trafficking efforts that resulted in 133 prostitution-related arrests in Dallas through Super Bowl Sunday.³⁸

(U) The Austin area hosted the Formula One US Grand Prix racing event at the Circuit of the Americas in 2012 and 2013. During the event, law enforcement partnered with local non-profit partners to combat the anticipated increase in sex trafficking.³⁹

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(U) Sex trafficking operations have the potential to generate large and renewable profits, and some criminals reportedly consider sex trafficking and compelling prostitution to be more lucrative and a lower risk than other criminal activity. When a drug trafficker, for example, makes a sale, that product is gone. However, when a human trafficker sells a person for sex, the product returns to the trafficker, who can re-sell the victim repeatedly for a new profit.

(U) Each organization or trafficker charges a different fee based on various factors including the sexual acts, length of time, location, and any special requests. Thus, the weekly revenue earned by each sex trafficking organization and trafficker varies. The following are weekly revenue estimates of sex trafficking:

(U) *Enterprise:* A sex trafficking enterprise with 5-10 victims who see six customers a day, seven days a week, can earn between \$37,800 to \$75,600 each week.

(U) A recently dismantled human trafficking ring in Houston varied their prices based on the age and appearance of the female victims. The trafficking ring also charged a \$20 admission fee, which included a condom and a room. This admission fee alone made the enterprise \$1,265,820 in just 18 months.⁴⁰

(U) *Individual Trafficker(s):* Individual traffickers – or pimps – with two victims who see six customers a day, seven days a week can earn between \$1,120 to \$8,960 per week.

(U) Pimps in Dallas earn an average weekly gross cash intake of \$12,025, according to the Urban Institute's Justice Policy Center, which conducted a study that estimates the underground commercial sex economy in eight major cities. Among the seven other cities, the highest average weekly earnings per pimp are in Atlanta with \$32,833 and the lowest average weekly earnings are in San Diego with \$11,129.⁴¹

(U) Sex traffickers in Texas range from individuals to organized enterprises. Many gangs in Texas and elsewhere in the United States are currently engaged in sex trafficking and compelling prostitution. Individual gang members also engage in this activity, possibly independent of the operations of the gang; we have limited information regarding Mexican cartels directly involved in identified sex trafficking operations in Texas. Some sex trafficking organizations appear to operate independently, and are unaffiliated with gangs or other criminal organizations.

(U) Throughout the United States, gangs have expanded into human trafficking involving minors and adults due to the potential for high, renewable profit and low risk of detection. Gangs are frequently recruiting victims through false promises of wealth and affection, but continuously compel the services of their victims through forceful means.

(U) Gangs involved in sex trafficking in Texas

- Barrio Azteca
- Black Gangster Disciples
- Bloods
- Crips
- Mara Salvatrucha
- Sureños
- Tango Blast

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(U) In January 2014 in El Paso, an El Paso County juvenile probation officer along with five El Paso gang members were charged for their roles in a sex trafficking scheme. According to court records, the defendants have been involved in forced prostitution of adults and juveniles by the Folk Nation/Gangster Disciples street gang between May 2012 and March 2013. The defendants used force, fraud, and coercion to compel their victims into prostitution in El Paso and Killeen, Texas as well as New Mexico, Colorado, and Nevada.⁴²

(U) In addition to gang members engaging in sex trafficking as part of the gang's operations, individual gang members have been identified as running sex trafficking operations. In some of the cases, we are not aware of information connecting the sex trafficking operation to the gang, making it possible that the gang members are engaged in this activity as individuals, independent of the gang.

(U) In 2011, a ranking member of the 59 Bounty Hunters, Houston's largest Bloods subset, was convicted of sexually assaulting a 16-year-old runaway. The subject allegedly ran a \$10,000-per-night prostitution ring of 5-10 young females at a time and recruited teens from a high school.⁴³

(U) Sexually Oriented Businesses and Sex Trafficking

(U) In Texas and other places around the world, human trafficking victims are often forced to work in sexually oriented businesses (SOBs), though evidence of sex trafficking can be difficult to detect. Among other establishments, certain massage parlors, spas, adult book stores, tea houses, and nude modeling studios can be considered SOBs. The examples presented below involve prostitution in SOBs. While in some cases there is no explicit evidence indicating human trafficking, these cases indicate a circumstantial connection between SOBs and sex trafficking.⁴⁴

(U) In June 2013, the investigation of a prostitution ring resulted in the identification of 9 massage parlors and the arrest of 20 individuals in Dallas, Plano, and Hurst, Texas. The prostitution ring was headed by a Richardson man who ran a network of brothels fronted as Asian massage establishments. This was a business enterprise in which the prostitutes were transported from other states such as Nevada, Georgia, and California.⁴⁵

(U) In January 2013, three subjects were charged for their roles in a human trafficking scheme that was based at a Houston-area SOB. The men recruited several victims, including minors, to work as prostitutes at SOBs that were "disguised as legal modeling studios, health spas, and massage parlors." The traffickers frequently assaulted and threatened the women – one of whom was branded – into compliance.⁴⁶

(U) In Williamson County, two defendants were indicted for human trafficking after authorities discovered they were using massage parlors as fronts for prostitution. The victims were forced to live at the massage parlors, and were shuttled between the parlors and an apartment complex, where they were forced to prostitute themselves.⁴⁷

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(U) Other sex trafficking rings are also run and operated by various individuals working together who do not have gang affiliations. These are cases of individuals who collaborate to recruit, control, and advertise their victims and then keep all of the revenue they receive from their prostitution activities.

(U) In January 2014 in Lubbock, a 19-year-old female pleaded guilty and was sentenced for conspiracy to commit sex trafficking of a child. In 2011, the female defendant and a 25-year-old male were arrested after they were implicated in a prostitution operation that advertised the prostitution services of the female defendant and a female victim. The male defendant took pictures of the female victim and posted them on the Internet to advertise her under “escort” services.⁴⁸

(U) In March 2013, two individuals from North Texas were charged with sex trafficking of a child by force, fraud, or coercion. From September 2012 through January 2013, the defendants compelled a 15-year-old to engage in commercial prostitution activities that were advertised on the Internet. The victimization involved numerous commercial sex acts during this time and the victim turned over all the money from the prostitution to one of the defendants.⁴⁹

(U) Some sex trafficking and compelled prostitution is conducted by individuals who are not affiliated with gangs or other organizations. Most commonly, these traffickers are referred to as pimps. In addition to coercing and physically assaulting their victims, pimps are known to keep all or most of the victims’ prostitution earnings. They are typically in charge of marketing their victims and transporting them to and from their meetings with customers.

(U) In March 2014 in San Antonio, a 20-year-old female pleaded guilty to sex trafficking of children. The defendant was found guilty of her involvement in prostituting a 15-year-old female. Her involvement included enticing and encouraging the minor female to engage in commercial sex acts for money. The defendant also admitted to using a mobile phone, which was provided by a male co-defendant, to take pictures of the victim in order to advertise the minor under the “escort” section on an Internet website; these advertisements were promoted on behalf of two male co-defendants in this case. All three defendants participated in handling advertisement inquiries and traveling to transport the victim to several locations to engage in commercial sex.⁵⁰

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2. Labor Trafficking

(U) Forced labor is defined as “labor or services, other than labor or services that constitute sexual conduct, that are performed or provided by another person and obtained through an actor’s use of force, fraud, or coercion.”⁵¹ Labor trafficking victims can include individuals working in homes, farms, factories, restaurants, or any other type of business. Identifying the presence of labor trafficking and labor exploitation in Texas is a considerable challenge for law enforcement authorities.⁵²

(U) Labor traffickers often recruit, transport, and employ legal and illegal immigrants who they bring into the United States for the purpose of forced labor and indentured servitude. These immigrants originate from various countries around the world. Texas’ geography also increases its vulnerability to labor trafficking: it has large agricultural and travel industries, and legal and illegal foreign travel through airports, seaports, and land ports of entry, and travel industries.⁵³

(U) Compared to other types of trafficking, we have limited reporting on labor trafficking in Texas. Forced labor victims behind closed doors at restaurants or other businesses can be largely invisible to the public or law enforcement, impeding the identification and detection of these crimes. Victims can be reluctant to report their circumstances due to their immigration status and lack of awareness of labor laws.

(U) Labor traffickers in Texas have reportedly demanded that their victims work as much as 12 hours a day, 6-7 days per week, with either less than fair wages or no paycheck at all. In some cases, victims of forced labor are kept in locked homes overnight, brutally beaten, and forced to consume drugs in order to stay awake to work long hours.

(U) Figures 3 and 4. Image of a Laundromat inside one suspect’s Beaumont home, which suspects had essentially turned into a dormitory where residents had to pay in order to use the machines; and image of the inside of one Beaumont home where suspects housed every employee who worked in their restaurants, January 2014.



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(U) On January 30, 2014, 32 individuals were arrested in Beaumont, Texas for RICO and immigration violations, including encouraging and inducing aliens to reside in the US. The defendants operated two employment referral businesses in Houston. The businesses were advertised in Chinese newspapers and magazines as a “take-out and delivery service” for restaurants, but instead of delivering food, they delivered illegal aliens already in the US to restaurant owners and managers looking for cheap labor. They recruited unauthorized aliens from Central America and Mexico to work in the Chinese restaurant industry. The victims worked twelve hours a day, six days a week, and were not permitted to receive tips or get paid overtime. They were not provided any insurance benefits, food safety training, health examinations, or job training, and they were paid far less than the minimum wage. Additionally, the business operators provided unfavorable living arrangements either at their residence or at another off-site residential location; 18 people were housed in a 2,000-square-foot house, for example.⁵⁴

(U) Fig. 5. Image of the tight living quarters persons had to endure while working for their trafficker.



(U) In August 2013, two defendants were charged for willfully and knowingly falsifying statements made on government documents from June 2012 to November 2012. They submitted an incomplete list of employees and made false statements to the Department of Labor as to the identity and number of people employed at an identified business in Porter, Texas. The defendants were also charged with one count of engaging in threats and intimidation in order to prevent or delay people from testifying.⁵⁵

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(U) Some alien smuggling organizations have been reported to force or recruit illegal aliens to perform labor, including working as drug mules.⁵⁶ It is difficult to evaluate how frequently illegal aliens involved in drug trafficking were coerced or forced, and it is likely that some apprehended illegal alien drug traffickers falsely claim that they were forced to carry drugs in an effort to avoid prosecution on drug charges.

(U) Fig. 6. Image of illegal aliens attempting to carry loads of marijuana across the Texas-Mexico border.



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(U) Male Human Trafficking Victims

(U) Victims of human trafficking are not limited to a specific gender or ethnicity. While the majority of data reports females as the victims of human trafficking, males are just as vulnerable to the crime. In 2013, approximately 16 percent of tips to the National Human Trafficking Resource Center (NHTRC) involved human trafficking of male victims.

(U) Sex trafficking is the more documented and more commonly reported form of human trafficking, compared to labor trafficking.⁵⁷ Additionally, many anti-human-trafficking efforts specifically focus on female domestic minor sex trafficking because female sex trafficking is more visible and easier to identify by law enforcement.^{58 59} Many data sources focus their research on female sexual exploitation.⁶⁰ With much emphasis placed on identifying female victims, male victims are often overlooked and their cases under-reported.⁶¹ As a result, law enforcement agencies may miss opportunities to rescue male victims of human trafficking, and law enforcement statistics can inaccurately represent the problem of both sex and labor trafficking.

(U) Outside of Texas, male sex trafficking is documented in Mexico and Central America, where boys are vulnerable to sexual exploitation while en route to the United States.⁶²

(U) There has been limited reporting of male labor trafficking in Texas, although males are reportedly used as drug mules by smugglers while crossing into the United States. Male forced labor is documented in the United Kingdom and Mexico, where males are forced into illegal drug production and transportation; and in South America, where male victims are trafficked in agriculture, construction, mining and logging, and other industries.⁶³

(U) We assess that male victims will continue to be trafficked for commercial sex and labor purposes in Texas, but we expect continued challenges in identifying these cases.

3. Crimes Associated with Human Smuggling

(U) Human smuggling along the Texas-Mexico border involves aliens voluntarily hiring smugglers to illegally transport them into or through Texas. This offense includes bringing illegal aliens into the country, as well as the unlawful transportation and harboring of aliens already in the United States. This type of crime traditionally has been considered distinct from human trafficking, however there is often substantial overlap.

(U) In many cases, illegal aliens who voluntarily enter into an agreement with an alien smuggling organization (ASO) are ultimately kidnapped, moved or held against their will, assaulted, or otherwise exploited, and the ASOs are associated with gangs and Mexican cartels and engaged in other criminal enterprises, which renders the traditional smuggling-trafficking distinction misleading.

(U) Indeed, the terms “human smuggling” and “alien smuggling organization” are rarely accurate or complete descriptions of the criminal activity that occurs or the groups responsible for it. One reason is that the ASOs’ interaction with their human cargo is rarely limited solely to smuggling, and also routinely includes kidnapping to increase their profits. Moreover, criminals affiliated with ASOs are also engaged in the smuggling of drugs and weapons.

(U) Many illegal aliens who are transported by ASOs into and through Texas are vulnerable to or become victims of trafficking or other crimes, including kidnapping, extortion, assault, sexual assault, forced prostitution and forced labor. There are also instances where illegal aliens are abandoned in remote areas or involved in smuggling-related vehicle crashes, resulting in their deaths. We have moderate confidence in our estimate that this likely results in as many as 100,000 victims in Texas each year, including as many as 10,000 children. These conclusions are based on a large volume of information regarding the organized criminal nature of ASOs, common human smuggling tactics, ASOs’ use of violence against illegal aliens, and illegal alien apprehensions.

(U) We assess that nearly all ASOs operating in Texas are connected either directly or indirectly to gangs and/or Mexican cartels. Through these relationships, we assess that the Gulf Cartel, the Juarez Cartel, and Los Zetas control, facilitate, or benefit from nearly all human smuggling activity along the Texas-Mexico border; we have limited reporting regarding other cartels involved in this activity in Texas. The ASOs’ criminal connections also facilitate them engaging in other cross-border criminal enterprises beyond solely human smuggling, such as the trafficking of drugs, currency, and weapons.

(U) Leaders, members, and associates of the Gulf Cartel, Los Zetas, and the Juarez Cartel are involved in human smuggling operations along the Texas-Mexico border, and some limited information indicates the Sinaloa Cartel is also engaged in human smuggling in Texas. In some cases, the leaders and members of these cartels command and control human smuggling operations or employ cartel operatives to operate or oversee ASOs. In other cases, cartel members and associates participate in human smuggling operations, possibly independent of the orders or oversight of cartel leaders.

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(U) In September 2012, 28 people were arrested as part of a federal investigation into a human smuggling organization, which is suspected of using stolen vehicles to transport more than 100 illegal aliens from Laredo to staging areas in San Antonio. The organization is suspected to be connected to Los Zetas.⁶⁴

(U) Some cartel-ASO connections are less direct, and are limited to ASOs being required to pay money to a cartel for operating in its territory – sometimes referred to as a *cuota* or *piso*. Even with an indirect relationship, the cartels facilitate or benefit from the ASOs' operations, and, in many cases, they set rules on whether, how, or where ASOs may operate. We assess with high confidence that nearly all ASOs in Texas have at least this type of connection to the Gulf Cartel, the Juarez Cartel, and Los Zetas, based on a body of reporting and our knowledge of the cartels' control of smuggling routes and plazas along the border.

(U) Smuggling of Special Interest Aliens

(U) Among the illegal aliens being smuggled into and through Texas are special interest aliens (SIAs), defined as citizens of countries where terrorist organizations are known to be present. Depending on their country of origin, SIAs may travel through a variety of countries en route to the United States. Their travel across the Texas-Mexico border is facilitated by ASOs.

(U) Although most of the immigrants from these countries are likely fleeing economic hardship and war, a small number of documented instances since 2010 in which Texas-bound individuals were linked to foreign terrorist groups illustrate the continuing potential threat this small subset of illegal immigrants poses.

(U) ASOs are also affiliated with gangs, including large violent transnational gangs, and ASO members and operatives include gang members. Gangs connected to ASOs or otherwise involved in human smuggling in Texas include Tango Blast, Texas Syndicate, Barrio Azteca, Texas Mexican Mafia, MS-13, and others.

(U) In October 2013, during a traffic stop in Robstown, Texas, officers located seven illegal aliens inside the vehicle. The driver, who was a Tango Blast member from Houston, had been in federal prison for selling narcotics.⁶⁵

(U) In Brackettville, Texas in September 2013, US Border Patrol agents conducted a traffic stop on an SUV. Five passengers in the rear of the vehicle admitted to being in the US illegally. The driver was a US citizen with suspected affiliations with Tango Blast. The front seat passenger, also a US citizen, had connections with the Texas Mexican Mafia.⁶⁶

(U) In September 2013, a Dimmit County Sheriff's Office deputy assisted US Border Patrol agents with a traffic stop on a black pickup truck. The two suspects admitted to looking for a group of illegal aliens that they were supposed to pick up. The suspects had confirmed gang affiliation with the Southeast Crips. The vehicle was impounded and the suspects were released.⁶⁷

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(U) In August 2013, deputies conducted a traffic stop on a vehicle near Hebronville, Texas. The two subjects were identified as Tango Blast gang members and scouts for a red pickup truck utilized for illegal alien smuggling. The US Border Patrol confirmed that several illegal aliens were apprehended in the area of the traffic stop. The two gang members were arrested and the vehicles were seized.⁶⁸

(U) On January 15, 2013, a US Border Patrol agent observed a black vehicle near Big Wells, Texas. When the agent initiated a traffic stop, the vehicle failed to yield. A Dimmit County deputy assisted in the pursuit. The pursuit ended when the vehicle rolled over on the side of the highway. Two subjects were airlifted, and one was transported to a hospital via ambulance. The driver was identified as a US citizen and a member of the Texas Syndicate gang. Both passengers were identified as illegal aliens and possible foot guides. The vehicle was impounded.⁶⁹

(U) ASOs move illegal aliens through a series of human stash houses where they may be held against their will or not free to leave, with the stash houses physically secured or watched by armed guards. In the stash houses, ASOs regularly use violence, threats, or intimidation against illegal aliens who are held as their hostages as they extort ransom payments from their family members. In some cases, ASO members have murdered or contributed to the death of illegal aliens in their custody.

(U) After smuggling a group of illegal aliens across the border, ASOs conceal them in human stash houses, with ASOs also using stash houses on the Mexican side of the border. In Texas, stash houses may be houses, ranches, business locations, mobile homes, hotels, or apartments.

(U) ASOs generally make use of multiple stash houses, moving illegal aliens from one to another as they transport them along a route that includes various cities and locations. The length of stay in a stash house may range from a few hours to several weeks. Most stash houses are characterized by squalid conditions, and they are ill-equipped to safely hold large numbers of people. Some stash houses are used by multiple smugglers or ASOs.

(U) The operation of stash houses in Texas is common. In the Rio Grande Valley sector alone, law enforcement responded to 237 stash houses, apprehending 4,752 illegal aliens in FY2012, up from 178 stash houses with 1,945 illegal aliens in FY2011.⁷⁰

(U) ASOs use a variety of means to hold illegal aliens in stash houses, including violence, threats, bars and chains on windows and doors, and armed guards – some of whom have been identified as members or associates of gangs. Illegal aliens often pay ASOs a portion of the smuggling cost up front, with an agreement to pay other installments during later legs of the journey. However, once the victims are in the custody of the ASO or the guard of a stash house, the smugglers and guards frequently increase the payment amount or demand additional money, and they routinely threaten captive illegal aliens as they hold them hostage and extort ransom payments from their families.⁷¹ In some cases, illegal aliens may continue to be extorted even after they have been smuggled and released, according to limited reporting.

(U) We currently lack complete information regarding all law enforcement discoveries of human stash houses in Texas, and the available reporting of stash houses⁷² also offers an

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incomplete view. In some cases, the available information regarding a stash house includes clear evidence that illegal aliens were held against their will. In other cases, the limited information available to us does not specifically indicate that the individuals were held against their will, though it also does not explicitly rule it out. Based on our knowledge of ASO tactics and the available information on stash houses, we judge that it is rare for illegal aliens in stash houses to be completely free to leave.

(U) In October 2013, law enforcement coordinated a perimeter with US Border Patrol agents on the ground to locate illegal aliens who had absconded from a stash house. Additional concerns were that a firearm was missing from the stash house in Sullivan City. A total of 28 illegal aliens were rounded up during the search. They had been held against their will for additional money.⁷²

(U) In October 2013, law enforcement officers conducted a search of a suspected human stash house in Alamo, Texas after receiving information that several smugglers harbored large numbers of illegal aliens there. As a result, four principals were arrested and 67 illegal aliens detained. The illegal aliens were held against their will for additional money.⁷³

(U) Fig. 7. Image of the inside of a human stash house discovered during a human smuggling investigation in Hidalgo County, Texas. Law enforcement located 86 illegal aliens in two houses on this property, January 2014.



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(U) In January 2013, law enforcement officers responded to a stash house in Hidalgo County, identifying 53 illegal aliens. The four male suspects were identified as MS-13 gang members. The illegal aliens stated that the suspects used a pistol, a machete, and a wooden paddle to threaten and intimidate them.⁷⁴

(U) Figures 8 and 9. Images of a human stash house located in Hidalgo County, Texas following a traffic stop on two vehicles during a human stash house operation. Law enforcement discovered 48 illegal aliens in the residence, February 2014.



(U) On November 28, 2012, a 23-month-old child was recovered after being smuggled into the United States from Mexico. The mother had been separated from the child following their illegal entry into the United States; she was later apprehended. The girl's mother informed officers that she was in contact with smugglers about her daughter, and that the smugglers were seeking additional money to return the child. Contact was made with an individual in Houston alleging to be the child's babysitter. After a series of calls, the child was delivered to federal agents in Houston. Information developed by the investigation revealed that smuggling arrangements were made to have the child transported to New York for a fee of \$9,000.⁷⁵

(U) In November 2012, two Mexican nationals pleaded guilty to their roles in an ongoing conspiracy to hold hostage and harbor smuggled aliens for ransom payments. The subjects operated a stash house in Houston, Texas, where illegal aliens were forced to undress and were informed they had been "sold" and would not be released until family members made payments to the men holding them hostage. While held hostage at the residence, victims reported they were held in their underwear, in locked rooms with boarded up windows and in deplorable conditions. The victims also indicated they were guarded by men constantly armed with a handgun. Victims reported they were not allowed to leave the residence until payment was sent for their release. Some victims said they were threatened with harm or death if payment was not received.⁷⁶

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(U) Some female illegal aliens have been sexually assaulted or threatened with sexual assault by their smugglers. In some cases, ASOs are suspected of forcing or compelling women and girls to work as prostitutes or delivering smuggled women and girls to sex traffickers.

(U) On October 21 and 22, 2012, a human smuggler harbored illegal aliens in Mission, Texas. He and others attempted to extort more smuggling fees from the smuggled aliens. During this time, the smuggler sexually assaulted one illegal alien and attempted to sexually assault another. On October 22, the smuggled aliens called 911 for help, after which time law enforcement arrived and soon arrested the smuggler, who was later convicted and received an enhanced sentence because he had raped the victim multiple times.⁷⁷

(U) From October 1 to 4, 2012, two human smugglers harbored illegal aliens in Alamo, Texas. While at the stash house, they threatened multiple illegal aliens with injury or death if they did not pay more money. During this time, one of the smugglers sexually assaulted one smuggled alien. Further investigation revealed that he had also sexually assaulted another illegal alien in San Juan, Texas, in September 2012. They were later convicted in federal court; upon imposing the sentence, the court noted that the smuggler was calculating in separating some women from the other smuggled aliens, and the judge enhanced his sentence based on his repeated sexual assaults.^{78 79}

(U) On March 15, 2012, a human smuggler who had been illegally living in the Laredo area after losing his border crossing card in 2003 encountered an undocumented female from Honduras who had never been to the US and had limited education. At 11:30 p.m. on the day of encounter, the smuggler picked up the undocumented alien, whom he was supposed to take to a tractor trailer for further transportation north. However, he instead took her to a secluded area, where he sexually assaulted her for hours in a vehicle. Afterwards, he took her to a motel where he assaulted her again. In addition to the assault, he took \$800 from the undocumented alien as a form of payment for smuggling fees.⁸⁰

(U) In November 2011, a human smuggler was sentenced for his role in a smuggling operation involving a stash house in Brownsville. Investigators learned that a 29-year-old woman and her family had traveled by bus to Reynosa, Mexico, crossed the river on the following day, and were transported to the stash house by the defendant. Upon arrival, he patted them down one by one and robbed them of their money. Later, when the woman's 21-year-old niece and 13-year-old daughter began to cry, the defendant threatened to kill them and told them he was with the Zetas. The following day, he sexually assaulted the woman in the stash house after threatening to rape her daughter if she did not comply.⁸¹

(U) In some rare cases, groups of illegal aliens have been kidnapped or hijacked by criminals from smugglers in Texas, subjecting them to further exploitation. In Mexico, the kidnapping or hijacking of immigrants bound for the United States is common.

(U) In January 2012, six defendants were sentenced after they drove to a location near El Campo, Texas, targeting a load of 13 illegal aliens being transported by another alien smuggler in August 2009. They fired gunshots into the pickup truck in order to hijack it.

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The defendants then dragged the driver from the pickup, and pistol-whipped him until he was severely injured. One defendant drove off with the smuggled load of 13 aliens, with the three other defendants following in separate vehicles. The smuggled aliens were taken to a Houston stash house. Two defendants placed calls to the aliens' relatives demanding money to be paid by wire transfer for their release. Eventually a concerned citizen contacted police on behalf of two aliens who escaped on the way to the stash house. Officers then made two arrests. Three female aliens found at the apartment stated that they had been sexually assaulted by three defendants.⁸²

(U) ASO members have murdered or contributed to the death of several illegal aliens while being held captive or in transport.

(U) On April 10, 2013, a Mexican national and a Laredo citizen were arrested on state charges of felony murder, human smuggling, and engaging in organized criminal activity. On January 20, 2012, a group of illegal aliens were hiding inside the air dam compartment of a tractor when one of the females fell from the moving vehicle while it was traveling on Interstate Highway 35 in Kyle, Texas. The woman died from her injuries. This investigation revealed that the arrested defendants were operating an alien smuggling ring in Laredo using local truck stops to move their human cargo farther north. At the truck stops, the duo instructed the smuggled aliens to hide inside the air dam compartment, which was located on top of the tractor-trailer cab.⁸³

(U) In October 2012, the US Attorney General's Office authorized federal prosecutors to seek the death penalty against a US permanent resident from El Salvador for harboring aliens in a manner that resulted in the death of two Honduran men. On or about November 7, 2006, illegal aliens were delivered to an address in southwest Houston. Some of the aliens started a fire at the warehouse where they were being held in a failed attempt to escape. As a consequence, the aliens were allegedly beaten by the suspects as punishment. Two of the smuggled aliens who attempted to escape died as a result of the beatings. The defendant then had the bodies of the deceased victims moved from the warehouse to a vacant lot in Fort Bend County.⁸⁴

(U) In April 2012, two suspects were charged with smuggling a group of illegal aliens from Houston to Los Angeles – and leaving one alien dead in August 2012. Shortly after leaving Houston, the defendants spoke by cell phone with one alien's wife to arrange a \$650 payment. Later, one suspect called the wife back and told her that her husband was having health problems and would be dropped off near Amarillo, Texas. The wife informed the suspect that her husband had diabetes and needed insulin medication. The suspect advised the alien's wife not to bother sending the money because she was dropping him off short of California, which was their final destination. The alien's body was later discovered in a ditch at a rest stop outside Vega, Texas. The alien was identified after his son contacted authorities and reported his father's last known whereabouts as outside Amarillo. According to an autopsy report, the alien died from lobar pneumonia, and would have survived if he had received medical treatment.⁸⁵

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(U) ASO Transportation of Sex Trafficking Victims into the United States

(U) Some international sex trafficking organizations use ASOs to transport victims across the US-Mexico border en route to destinations throughout the United States.

(U) As of October 2013, suspects involved in a sex trafficking organization operating in Houston paid human smugglers to illegally bring victims into the US. The trafficking victims were undocumented Mexican and Honduran nationals as young as 14 years of age. These minors and females were recruited by means of fraud and coercion to engage in prostitution in the US.⁸⁶

(U) Similar networks have been disrupted or are currently active in other locations. These cases highlight the extent to which human smuggling and human trafficking can be intertwined, as the trafficking networks in these cases relied on ASOs to smuggle women and girls for trafficking purposes, blurring the line between when they were being smuggled and when they were being trafficked. These cases also provide an indication of the nature of the human trafficking threat in Texas, which serves not only as a destination for trafficked victims but also as a transit route for victims destined for other locations within the US.

(U) The tactics used by ASOs to transport illegal aliens between stash houses and other locations are diverse, and routes typically involve a combination of different means of transportation. These ASO tactics also involve dangerous means and methods that subject illegal aliens to high degrees of risk, resulting in hundreds of deaths in Texas.

(U) ASOs commonly transport illegal aliens across the Rio Grande River between ports of entry by swimming, on small rafts or boats, or with flotation devices such as inner tubes. Less commonly, ASOs smuggle illegal aliens through ports of entry using fraudulent documents, concealment within a vehicle, or a witting corrupt law enforcement officer.

(U) Through some legs of a route through Texas, ASOs lead illegal aliens by foot through rugged and remote terrain, often in dangerous conditions and without adequate equipment or supplies. Illegal aliens who are not capable of keeping pace with the group are frequently left behind.

(U) ASOs also use a variety of commercial and personal vehicles to transport illegal aliens. Some of these vehicles are modified to hold or conceal large groups of people. ASO vehicle smuggling is characterized by carrying an excessive number of passengers, concealing them in unsafe ways, or driving recklessly or dangerously. Less commonly, smugglers use other means such as trains and aircraft to transport illegal aliens into and through Texas.

(U) In September 2013, a Mexican illegal alien who had been living in Laredo, was sent to prison for assaulting Border Patrol (BP) agents and transporting aliens. The defendant had prior convictions for transporting aliens in 2009, entering illegally in the same year as well as damages to a BP unit he rammed while trying to elude

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apprehension, and assaulting BP agents in 2008. BP agents saw him loading persons onto his truck in Jan. 2013 and upon seeing the agents, the defendant sped away from the riverbanks with aliens in the cab and some in the bed of the truck. One alien who hung onto the truck's rear bumper was dragged for some distance. After a short pursuit through a residential area in which the truck traveled on sidewalks and knocked down a stop sign, he eventually lost control and stopped, facing the agents' vehicles. With persons still in the bed of the pickup truck, the defendant rammed the BP vehicles, injuring one of the agents. He then sped away until he lost control again and crashed into a nearby ditch. The persons in the bed managed to remain in the truck, but were treated for injuries at a hospital. The defendant was apprehended almost immediately by the agents after abandoning his truck and the passengers. Two passengers were identified as aliens illegally in the United States who said they had paid smugglers to get a ride from him.⁸⁷

(U) In March 2013 in Laredo, a Florida man was convicted for transporting undocumented persons. The defendant worked for a small trucking company with five to six drivers that moved sodas, tomatoes, tiles, and crates, as well as human beings like cargo. Drivers were caught with undocumented persons in the back of their vehicles on multiple occasions, at various checkpoints in South Texas. In particular, the defendant was caught at the I-35 Border Patrol Checkpoint north of Laredo with 14 undocumented persons in the back of his tractor trailer; these persons were packed like cargo in a small space between wooden crates with little room to move. On another occasion, 13 undocumented aliens were packed in small spaces amongst tomatoes in the defendant's trailer. The defendant and others transported these people similarly: they were crossed into the US, housed for a couple of days, and then taken to the brush along an isolated road near McAllen and told to wait for a trailer. When a trailer arrived, they ran into the back. They never saw the drivers.⁸⁸

(U) On February 6, 2013, two smugglers were transporting illegal aliens from Falfurrias to Houston when a sheriff's deputy attempted to conduct a traffic stop. A vehicle pursuit ensued. After losing sight of the vehicle, deputies discovered several individuals at the end of an open field standing on top of what appeared to be the same vehicle, which was now submerged under water. A total of 13 individuals, including both defendants, were apprehended by deputies with assistance from troopers. Investigators later determined that the 13 were in the US without proper documentation, and they placed them under arrest. A Texas DPS dive team dispatched to the scene recovered three bodies from the bottom of the water near the vehicle.⁸⁹

(U) In November 2012, a Houston man was sentenced to 6 ½ years in prison for conspiracy to transport 14 illegal aliens within the United States and causing serious bodily injury. The 22 year old defendant was ordered to pay restitution to the victims' families. The defendant was driving a truck loaded with several illegal aliens, one of whom was killed after he was involved in a pursuit with Border Patrol agents. Several people were observed in the cab with several more ducking down in the bed of the truck. The driver then turned off the headlights and drove straight through a fence and into a privately owned ranch. Agents caught up to the vehicle and saw several injured individuals lying on the ground near the truck. A deceased person was pinned under the truck's front tire and another was pinned under the rear axle of the truck, who appeared to

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still be breathing but unresponsive. Near the crash site, CBP agents located seven more individuals involved in the crash. The driver admitted he was being paid \$125 for each alien he smuggled.⁹⁰

(U) In June 2012, a Mexican national was arrested near the McAllen-Miller International Airport after he was observed dropping off a small group of people at the airport. During a ramp check inspection, the same five people were identified as illegal aliens and were boarding a charter plane destined for San Antonio, Texas. The suspect had allegedly, along with other individuals, picked up the illegal aliens from the Rio Grande River before taking them to several stash locations in the area. On the same day, he drove one of the aliens to the airport to purchase the flight to San Antonio for the five aliens. He then picked up all five aliens later that day from the final stash location before dropping them off at the airport.⁹¹

(U) In recent years, hundreds of illegal aliens have died while entering or transiting through Texas. These include deaths caused by environmental exposure (heat and cold), train and motor-vehicle-related deaths, drownings, other causes, and cases in which skeletal remains were recovered or a cause could not be determined. Between FY2008 and FY2013, 2,453 deaths of suspected illegal aliens were reported along the US-Mexico border, including 1,074 in Texas sectors.⁹² Such deaths in Texas sectors increased 50 percent from 157 in FY2011 to 235 in FY2013. An even greater number of illegal aliens have been rescued from such conditions by law enforcement; since FY2008, 8,721 people have been rescued along the border, including 4,536 in Texas.⁹³

(U) Fig. 10. Image of 21 smuggled illegal aliens sitting inside and around an SUV in Hidalgo County, Texas. The illegal aliens were discovered inside the vehicle after a pursuit and bail-out ensued with law enforcement, January 2014.



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(U) On March 20, 2013, at approximately 11:00 p.m., a Kingsville Police Department officer observed a pickup truck violate state traffic law by disregarding a stop sign. The officer attempted to conduct a traffic stop on this vehicle, but the vehicle fled, leading to a brief pursuit. The driver crashed into a vehicle barrier on General Cavazos Avenue in Kleberg County that had been deployed by the Kingsville Naval Air Station. A total of 15 illegal aliens were discovered at the scene. Seven were killed. One was identified as the smuggler and was charged in April 2013 with one count of conspiring to transport aliens, 14 counts of transporting an alien, and one count of illegal re-entry after deportation.⁹⁴

(U) In November 2012, a south Texas man pleaded guilty to alien smuggling and harboring that resulted in the death of a 24-year-old Mexican national in September 2011. For five years the defendant coordinated transporting aliens around the US Border Patrol Checkpoint in Falfurrias. On Sept. 15, 2011, he arranged for about 20 illegal aliens to hike around the checkpoint. After walking around the checkpoint, the aliens were driven to a stash house on the defendant's property. After the group arrived, two brush guides drove to the stash house with an additional alien who died from exposure and dehydration. The defendant and two others loaded the victim's body into a pickup truck and drove it to a public intersection. He called the emergency operator from a payphone and directed police to the body. Following his arrest, he admitted his role in the smuggling operation and his involvement in disposing of the body.⁹⁵

(U) In May 2012, an alien smuggler was unlawfully transporting about 13 illegal aliens to Houston in a pick-up truck. He was driving through Kleberg County when a sheriff's deputy attempted to stop him for a traffic violation. Trying to evade the deputy, the smuggler led him on a high-speed chase that ended with the truck being driven into an open field through several barbed-wire fences. The victim was located in the bed of the truck where it is believed that one of the loose barbed wires severed his leg. When the smuggler eventually stopped the vehicle, almost all the occupants fled into nearby brush. The victim and his son remained at the scene where the victim eventually expired due to blood loss. USBP agents and local law enforcement located 11 of the illegal aliens in the brush. The smuggler admitted to law enforcement officers that he was the driver of the truck, and that he came to Falfurrias to pick up and transport a group of illegal aliens to Houston. During interviews, the illegal aliens explained that they yelled at the smuggler to slow down after he had accelerated rapidly in his attempt to evade the deputy.⁹⁶

(U) In May 2012, the leader of a human smuggling ring was sentenced for smuggling that resulted in the death of a Honduran national. According to court documents, on September 15, 2010, the Border Patrol had been tracking suspected crossings of illegal aliens through the brush in the vicinity of Highway 277 between Eagle Pass and Carrizo Springs. That day the Border Patrol detained several illegal aliens who told agents that one man had been abandoned in the brush. The Border Patrol responded to the location and encountered a deceased Honduran national.⁹⁷

(U) In May 2012, the ringleader of an alien smuggling organization responsible for the death of five people was sentenced following his conviction for conspiracy to transport aliens resulting in death, illegally transporting aliens resulting in death, aiding and abetting the illegal transportation of aliens, and aiding and abetting the harboring and

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concealing of an alien. On April 5, 2004, one female of Floydada, Texas, died as a result of a head-on collision involving her semitractor trailer and another semitractor trailer. The accident occurred in the early morning about 17 miles south of Pecos, Texas. Testimony revealed that the female was traveling northbound in the southbound lane, while transporting six illegal aliens in the cab of her semitractor trailer. Three aliens also died at the scene of the crash. A fifth individual of Kermit, Texas, also died when he crashed his vehicle into the overturned trailer, which could not be seen because of the weather conditions.⁹⁸

(U) In March 2012, two leaders of a Houston-based alien smuggling organization and seven of their associates were sentenced to federal prison for their roles in an alien smuggling operation that resulted in the death of an illegal alien. On Feb. 16, 2010, law enforcement responded to a motor vehicle accident that occurred near Falfurrias, Texas. At the accident scene, special agents identified one deceased individual, a Mexican citizen, and a badly damaged Toyota Tundra pickup truck. Further investigation revealed the Tundra carried about 17 illegal aliens from the McAllen area to Houston, where the illegal aliens would be further transported to other locations throughout the United States. However, as the aliens were transported north, the driver of the Tundra thought he was being followed by law enforcement. He then made a sudden turn causing the Tundra to flip over.⁹⁹

(U) Fig. 11. Image of a van rollover driven by a 15-year-old juvenile during a human smuggling attempt in Palmview, Texas, April 2012.



(U) On April 10, 2012, an illegal alien smuggler rolled a van suspected of carrying illegal immigrants near Palmview, Texas, when the smuggler attempted to elude US Border Patrol. Nine people died and six others were injured. Seven suspected smugglers, including the 15-year-old driver of the van, were arrested. Further investigation lead to the discovery of a stash house and 12 additional illegal aliens were taken into custody.¹⁰⁰

(U) We estimate with moderate confidence that as many as 100,000 illegal aliens – including as many as 10,000 children – likely became victims of exploitation or trafficking-related crimes perpetrated by ASOs in 2013 in Texas, though the actual number is not known.

(U) We judge that nearly all illegal aliens who enter or cross Texas make use of ASOs, which makes the number of illegal alien apprehensions one indication of the large scale of ASO activity in the state and the potential number of victims of exploitation or trafficking-related crimes. In FY2013, US Border Patrol reported 243,550 illegal alien apprehensions in Texas sectors.^b These included 28,352 apprehensions of unaccompanied alien children, as well as 6,190 children who were accompanied by adult family members.¹⁰¹ These numbers include only apprehensions and

^b Texas sectors include the Rio Grande Valley, Laredo, Del Rio, Big Bend, and El Paso sectors.

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do not account for the unknown number of illegal aliens who were successfully smuggled without being apprehended.

(U) Because crimes against illegal aliens in the custody of ASOs are rarely reported to law enforcement, it is ultimately not known precisely how many smuggled aliens become victims of trafficking-related crimes. However, based on our knowledge of ASO tactics and operations, we consider that nearly all illegal aliens in their custody are vulnerable to trafficking-related crimes or exploitation, and that a large proportion of them are actually victimized by crimes such as kidnapping, extortion, unlawful restraint, and assault. Even if we conservatively estimate that the number of total illegal aliens is only twice the number of apprehensions and that only 25 percent are exploited, it results in an estimate of as many as 100,000 victims, including as many as 10,000 children.

(U) Unaccompanied children are especially vulnerable to exploitation. Some ASOs that smuggle children may use multiple individual smugglers in various locations, which represents multiple opportunities for criminals to take advantage of them.

(U) ASO activity occurs throughout the Texas border region, concentrated in the Rio Grande Valley. It also extends to cities and areas in Texas farther from the border, with the Houston area, in particular, identified as a hub for this activity.

(U) We are concerned about the extent to which human smuggling activity is taking place in Texas, and the recent sharp increases of this activity in the Rio Grande Valley (RGV). Illegal alien apprehensions in the RGV Sector are at historically elevated levels, and include greater numbers of other-than-Mexicans (OTMs) and unaccompanied alien children (UACs) than any other sector along the US-Mexico border. Apprehensions of Mexican illegal aliens continue to be concentrated in the Tucson Sector, followed by the RGV. Total apprehensions are now highest in the RGV Sector, which represents a noteworthy change from previous years.

(U) The USBP reported 154,453 total apprehensions in the RGV Sector during FY2013, a 58 percent increase from FY2012, and more than double the number in FY2011. RGV Sector apprehensions are at their highest levels since FY1999.¹⁰²

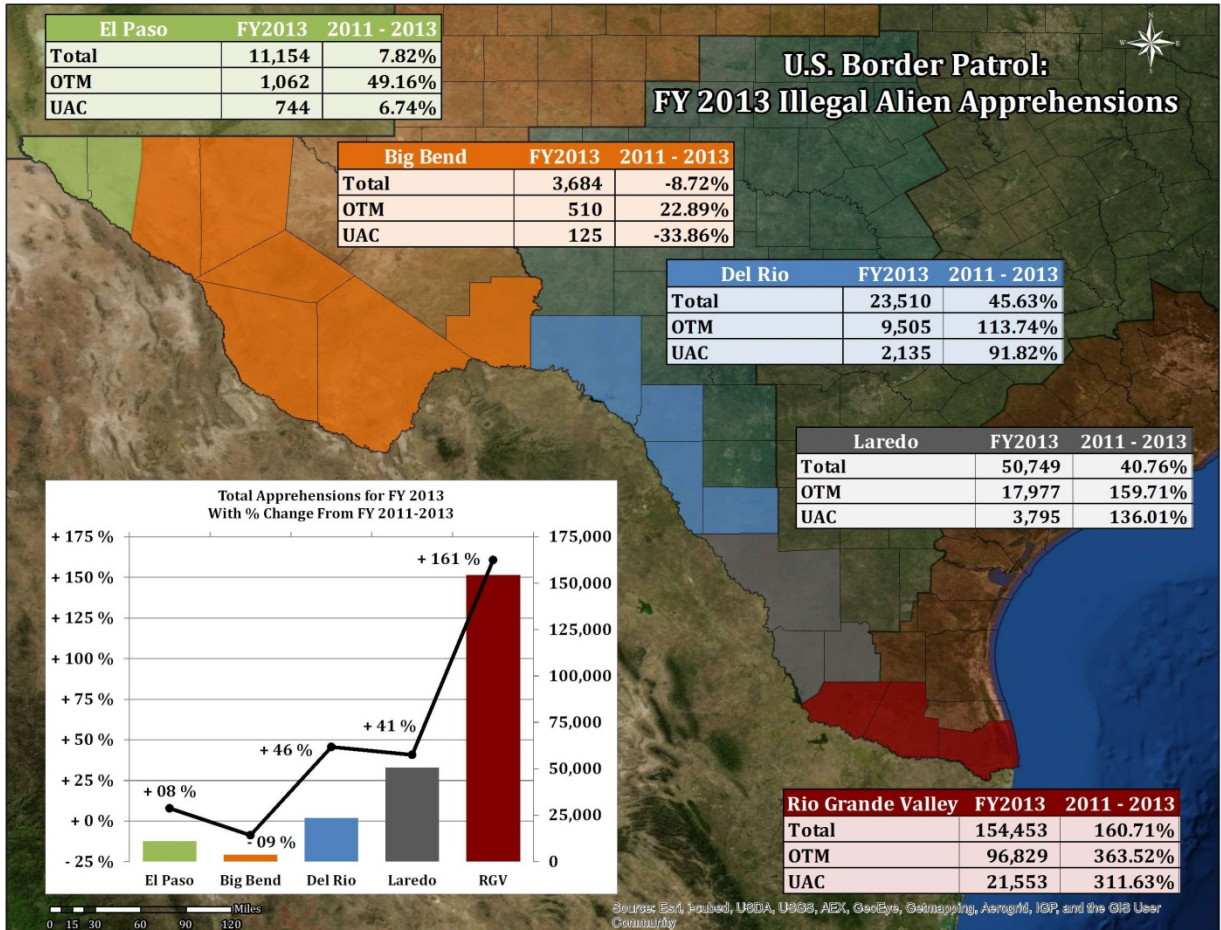
(U) Although the number of Mexican illegal alien apprehensions in the RGV increased 19 percent to 57,624 in FY2013, we primarily attribute the increase in total apprehensions in the RGV Sector to a sharp rise in OTM apprehensions, which increased 96 percent to 96,829 in FY2013 from FY2012, and have more than tripled since FY2011. OTM apprehensions in the RGV sector have reached the highest level since at least FY2000.¹⁰³

(U) UAC apprehensions in the RGV have increased rapidly through FY2013 when they reached 21,553, which represents a 100 percent increase from FY2012 and a 312 percent increase from FY2011. More than half of all UAC apprehensions along the entire US-Mexico border in FY2013 occurred in the RGV Sector alone. Most illegal aliens are vulnerable to exploitation by ASOs as they are smuggled into and through Texas, though we consider UACs to be especially vulnerable.

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(U) Due to these increases, the RGV Sector now accounts for a significant proportion of apprehensions along the US-Mexico border. In FY2013, the RGV Sector accounted for 37 percent of total apprehensions, 65 percent of OTM apprehensions, and 56 percent of UAC apprehensions along the US-Mexico border.

(U) Fig. 12. Map of FY2013 USBP illegal alien apprehensions in Texas sectors.



4. Other Sexual Exploitation of Children

(U) The sexual exploitation of children includes sexual assault and enticement of children, as well as the manufacturing, distribution, and possession of child pornography. Traditionally, these activities alone have not been considered human trafficking. However, many times, human trafficking will present elements of some or all of these crimes.

(U) We consider these crimes related to sex trafficking activities as they also involve the exploitation of children and influence the demand for victims. In many cases, the perpetrators of enticement and child pornography are also engaged in sex trafficking, either as sex traffickers or as solicitors of minor prostitutes. The 2005 National Juvenile Online Victimization Study revealed that 55 percent of people possessing child pornography either had sexually victimized a child or were caught attempting to do so by an undercover officer. Also, many sex traffickers target or recruit minor victims through enticement and create explicit photographs of them, which makes these activities potential indicators or byproducts of sex trafficking operations. Several sex traffickers are found to have illegally engaged in sexual activity with the minors they were prostituting, and are consequently also charged with sexual assault of a child. Texas currently has a total of 80,173 registered sex offenders; of that total 60,704 registrants have been convicted of sex crimes against a child. There were 7,757 total arrests for sexual assault of a child in 2012 and 7,699 total arrests for the same offense in 2013.

(U) Sexual predators seek out children on the Internet and in the community, attempting to lure them into situations in which they can be exploited.^{104 105} These criminals prey on children through blackmail, false claims about themselves, or promises of affection or rewards.¹⁰⁶ In some cases, sexual predators abuse positions of trust that give them access to children through schools, churches, and other institutions, and predators often target children in their families or the families of their acquaintances. In some cases, there is a distinct overlap between predators both exploiting children and producing and/or possessing child pornography.¹⁰⁷

(U) On April 17, 2013, a photographer from McKinney, Texas, was indicted and charged with 24 counts of sexually exploiting a child, and one count of possessing child pornography. From 1999 to 2007, he coerced or persuaded minors to engage in sexually explicit conduct for the purpose of photographing such conduct.¹⁰⁸

(U) Between July and August 2012 a man residing in Mexico initiated contact and engaged in numerous online chats with an undercover investigator who was posing as a 14-year-old girl. During their first chat, the defendant was informed several times that the girl he had initiated contact with was 14 years old. The online conversations soon turned personal and the defendant told the undercover investigator he wanted her to become his girlfriend. He asked her to keep their relationship a secret and tried to entice her to travel to Nuevo Laredo so that they could meet. He also steered the online chats towards sex and repeatedly asked the undercover investigator about sex. After a month of online chatting, the defendant made plans to visit the girl and have sex with her while her

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mother was away at work. He arrived at the Laredo apartment address given to him by the undercover investigator and he was subsequently arrested.¹⁰⁹

(U) In April 2012, Pharr PD contacted ICE-HSI concerning the solicitation of a minor for sexual purposes. Special agents recovered a cellular telephone that was being used by a 14-year-old girl to receive messages from men requesting sex in exchange for money. Posing as the minor, special agents began conversing with the unknown men via text messages on the cell phone. During this investigation, three men were arrested and charged with enticing a minor. In their respective guilty pleas, all three men admitted they intended to have sex with an individual whom they believed was a minor, and that they were going to pay the minor between \$80 and \$100. Evidence presented indicated that one of the defendants had taken a photograph of the victim on her cell phone that showed sexually explicit conduct.¹¹⁰

(U) In other cases, sexual predators with easy access to children abuse their positions of trust and authority to victimize innocent children. These sexual predators seek out children in schools, churches, other institutions, or within their own families or the families of acquaintances.^{111 112}
¹¹³ In some cases, individuals in these positions will also be arrested for possession of child pornography.¹¹⁴

(U) In September 2013, a Houston-area elementary school music teacher was arrested for producing child pornography. He allegedly used a Facebook profile to solicit sexually explicit photographs from boys, which constituted child pornography. He used the images he received from at least one victim to extort additional images from him. Authorities executed a search warrant at his residence and seized a laptop computer and several thumb drives, cell phones, and digital cameras. One external portable hard drive was forensically analyzed, and is alleged to contain more than 150 files with images depicting different boys ranging in age from 12 to 17, and in various stages of undress.¹¹⁵

(U) In February 2013, a Houston man pleaded guilty to distribution and possession of child pornography. During an August 2012 search warrant at his residence in Houston, authorities discovered several images and videos of child pornography on a thumb drive and multiple hard drives. One of the videos included a minor child victim performing oral sex on an adult male. A forensic exam on the devices resulted in a total of approximately 1425 images and 277 videos of child pornography. The defendant confirmed he was a third grade teacher at an elementary school. He also admitted he had received, viewed and downloaded child pornography for approximately five years.¹¹⁶

(U) In January 2013, a church youth minister was sentenced after pleading guilty in October to solicitation of material relating to the sexual exploitation of children. By pleading guilty, he admitted that he had sexually explicit instant messenger chats with multiple minors on both his work and home computers. He also admitted that he recorded video and still images of two children while they were changing clothes prior to a church performance and used those recordings to solicit other sexually explicit images of children.¹¹⁷

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(U) In Corpus Christi, a local "English as a Second Language" teacher was sentenced to federal prison in January 2013 for possessing child pornography. During sentencing, the US Attorney highlighted the defendant's crime and his troubling history of employment, which placed him around children. He was previously employed as a high school teacher, worked at a special-needs school and at a runaway shelter. After officers received information that the defendant possessed child pornography, they gained entry into his home, and discovered several electronic media storage devices that contained child pornography in addition to the child pornography he had discarded in a community dumpster at an earlier time. A subsequent computer forensic analysis was performed on the seized items, and numerous child pornography images and videos were discovered.¹¹⁸

(U) Child pornography is primarily distributed on the Internet. While the production of child pornography is a clear violation and exploitation of a child, it is also a permanent record of the sexual exploitation of children, and this victimization continues every time an image or video is transmitted, downloaded, shared, or viewed. These videos and images show children – including infants, toddlers, young children, and teenagers – appearing nude or engaged in sexual activity, including images and videos of children being raped and sexually assaulted.¹¹⁹ Although some individuals independently victimize children and keep their child pornography to themselves, there are other predators who share and trade images with friends and/or online networking websites and forums.

(U) In November 2013, a 42-year-old Houston man was arrested for sexual assault of a child in Pearland, Texas. The investigation originated in Liberty County, where investigators found abandoned SD cards in the defendant's former home. The SD cards contained graphic images of hundreds of photos of the predator sexually assaulting young female children between the ages of one and six.¹²⁰

(U) In April 2013, a man from Houston was sentenced following two convictions of production of child pornography and another count of possession of child pornography. The investigation revealed the man took child pornography photographs of two very young girls for whom he was caring. He produced more than 200 images, though not all the child pornography involved the girls. Three of the victims' relatives appeared and spoke at the sentencing, describing the effects that his criminal acts have had. He was further ordered to pay restitution.¹²¹

(U) In December 2012, a Lubbock, Texas man was sentenced to 30 years in federal prison and a lifetime of supervised release following his guilty plea to six counts of production and attempted production of child pornography involving six separate victims. He admitted that on various dates between December 2009 and December 2011, he used six individual minor females, including some younger than 12 years old, to produce images and videos of the minors engaged in sexually explicit conduct. At times he photographed himself, together with the minor female, engaged in sexually explicit conduct.¹²²

(U) On August 31, 2012, agents executed a federal search warrant at a Houston residence. They discovered several images and videos of child pornography on a thumb drive connected to a computer. One of the videos included a known minor child victim

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being sexually exploited by an adult male. Child pornography was also found on the desktop computer and five additional thumb drives found in the residence. A forensic exam on the devices identified 1,425 still images and 277 videos of child pornography. The suspect confirmed he was a third grade teacher at an elementary school. He also admitted he had received, viewed and downloaded child pornography for about five years.¹²³

(U) In May 2012, a male approached a child inside an identified store in Port Arthur, Texas, to help find a particular toy. During the conversation, he asked for the child's cell phone number, which the child gave him. Later that evening, he began sending the child text messages thanking the child for assisting him. An adult family member saw the text messages and contacted police, who assumed the child's identity, and continued the text conversation with the suspect. The defendant's text messages became sexual, and a meeting was arranged between him and the police posing as the child. The man arrived at Port Neches Park for what he believed to be a sexual encounter with the child and was arrested by police. He later pleaded guilty.¹²⁴

(U) Sexual predators also utilize other means to share, trade, and obtain child pornography. In several cases, these individuals download child pornography and distribute their authored images through the Internet, peer-to-peer file sharing, and in newsgroups.^{125 126 127} They network with other sexual predators, thus exchanging ideas, stories, and pornographic videos and images of children.¹²⁸ In some cases, sexual predators trade images with friends and acquaintances via text message.

(U) In April 2013, a man from Scurry, Texas, pleaded guilty to charges of transporting and possessing child pornography. He admitted that he obtained images of child pornography from peer-to-peer users/members in his private network of contacts, and that he downloaded, viewed, and shared images of child pornography. A forensic evaluation of his laptop and thumb drive revealed more than 1,600 still images and 194 videos of child pornography. His laptop also included lewd and lascivious photographs and a video, which he admitted taking of boys under six years old. He also admitted that some of the images and videos he possessed depicted sadistic images of prepubescent minors. He admitted that he engaged in several chats with other members of his peer-to-peer network, in which he and the others discussed their interest in molesting and sexually assaulting children under six years old.¹²⁹

(U) In April 2013, a man in Houston was sentenced to federal prison following two convictions of production of child pornography and another count of possession of child pornography. The investigation revealed that he took child pornography photographs of two very young girls for whom he was caring. He produced more than 200 images, though not all the child pornography involved the girls.¹³⁰

(U) In December 2012, law enforcement arrested a man from Corpus Christi after he came to their attention through an undercover investigation, at which time he was identified as a person who had been distributing images of child pornography online. A search warrant executed at his home resulted in the discovery of several electronic storage devices that were found to contain images of child pornography. A closer

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inspection of those images resulted in the discovery of his prior sexual abuse of a family member. The victim was interviewed, and described more than four years of continuous sexual assault suffered at the hands of the defendant.¹³¹

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5. Outlook

(U) We are concerned about the recent sharp increases in illegal alien apprehensions in Texas and particularly in the Rio Grande Valley, which we consider to be indicative of highly active alien smuggling organizations in the area. We are especially concerned about the increase in the number of unaccompanied alien children apprehensions in Texas. Given the recent indications that many children and other illegal aliens are routinely kidnapped and extorted, and in some cases forced into sex trafficking, we expect increases in this activity along the Texas-Mexico border and elsewhere in the state.

(U) We consider sex trafficking organizations' use of ASOs operating in Texas to address the illicit demand for commercial sex with children particularly alarming as it is difficult to detect and rescue these children before they become victims in Texas and elsewhere. This activity may appear to be human smuggling, but in many cases it is the vilest kind of human trafficking. We expect this trend to continue as the demand remains high and the risk of interdiction is relatively low.

(U) As the use of social media continues to expand and evolve within the general population, we anticipate continued growth and change in sex traffickers' use of this technology to communicate, recruit potential victims, and advertise to customers. Sex traffickers will likely continue to seek new websites to use, shifting their tactics in response to enforcement actions or changes in website policies. Due to the prevalent use of this technology by minors, we are concerned about the increased online exposure of vulnerable minors as this trend progresses.

(U) Gang involvement in sex trafficking will likely continue to expand, carried out both by gangs as organizations and by individual gang members independent of the rest of the gang. We assess that gangs and gang members are attracted to the lucrative nature of sex trafficking, with the potential for large and renewable profits.

(U) Large special events and industrial expansion results in the increased demand for illicit sex and therefore can attract sex trafficking operations from around the state and nation. The recent growth of oil and gas exploration and production in several areas of Texas is a potential concern, though we currently lack any definitive reporting regarding forced prostitution associated with all of these emerging areas.

(U) Texas will likely continue to be vulnerable to labor trafficking, though we expect continued challenges in identifying victims and perpetrators of these crimes.

(U) Sexual predators and manufacturers and viewers of child pornography constitute a continuing threat to children. We are concerned about the overlap between these crimes and human trafficking among both perpetrators and consumers.

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