The Domino Effect: Explaining the Start and Growth of Institutionalized Response to Human Trafficking as a Social Problem in the United States

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Introduction

Work which examines how public concern becomes translated into social and governmental institutional change has long been reliant on the theoretical concept of the "social problems cycle." However while observed historical patterns often appear to follow the general pattern of- public and media concern, calls for action, and policy response- observing and actually measuring the causal mechanisms at play has proven difficult. As a result, our understanding of how the cycle of social problems operates has remained theoretical, general, and sometimes vague. In this project, I begin to address questions posed by this sociological "black box" by empirically modelling both potential causal factors and outcomes during a twenty year period in which the United States experienced a cycle of social problem attention and response regarding human trafficking.

I use a novel data set combining census information, news articles from the Access News Database, and government and internet records about anti-human trafficking organizations in the U.S. By empirically testing three hypothesized factors about what influences institutional responses to social problems in the case of human trafficking responses, I demonstrate the benefit of quantitativley measuring and testing social problems cycles by detangling and describing the relationship between media, politics, and environment and the institutionalization of human trafficking as a social problem in the form of human trafficking task froces around the country. Particularly I find that media matters at the national but NOT local level, that region matters much more than population factors, and that the political party in charge of each state affects task force creation in a different way than expected. Further, by measuring how these factors impact the *start* of each state's institutional task force response to human trafficking compared to how they effect the *growth* of this institutional, I demonstrate that they operate differently over time: once states have begun to form task forces due to external influences, those influences cease to be a meaningful influence on further task force creation. Initial institutionalization serves as a domino which once "pushed" serves as an internal motivator to explain task force growth over time. I describe how the "domino effect" causal mechanism and further quantitative investigations of social problems can enrich future explorations of social problems and institutionalization.

Theoretical Frameworks

The Cycle of Social Problems

Organizational and institutional responses to public problems are a distinctly *social* phenomenon. For decades sociologists have theorized about the way social concern around

particular problems comes into being and manifests itself into social change. Joseph R. Gusfield describes this puzzle thus:

> Human problems do not spring up, full-blown and announced in the consciousness of bystanders. Even to recognize a situation as painful requires a system for categorizing and defining events. All situations that are experienced by people as painful do not become matters of public activity and targets for public action. Neither are they given the same meaning at all times and by all peoples. . . Those committed to one or another solution to a public problem see its genesis in the necessary consequences of events and process.
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> -pg.3

Our collective social problems exist not only in the practical difficulties that confront us but also in the *collective meaning we give them and the way we organize solutions to them*. Gusfield demonstrated this phenomenon by exploring the "events and processes" that led drunk driving to go from an apparent unproblematic consequence of driving automobiles to an actionable social problem with defined social actors who were assigned both responsibility for causing the problem and responsibility for fixing it (1981). A few years perviously, Stanley Cohen published his book outlining a theory of moral panics which describes the "events and processes" which create and govern responses to some social problems as cycles in which media and public attention becomes fixed on exaggerated or distorted events which in turn lead to institutionalized response (1972).

The idea that social problems are socially constructed has influenced work across a broad range of disciplines. A vast body of literature have explored the problem-creation cycle from various lenses including organizational efforts to create meanings and solutions around social problems through social movements (Guigni 1998; Meyer and Minkoff 2004; Hilgartner and Bosk 1988) as well as discursive media and political practices around problem creation (Watney 1978; Bail 2015; McDonnel, Bail and Tavory 2917; Farrell and Fahy 2010). While human meaning-making is itself interesting, understanding collective social problem-making and problem-solving is of particular importance because of its effect on social institutions and our collective organized existence. Once a problem is defined as a "problem" it becomes actionable and may lead to social and institutional change particularly through policy and policy implementation (Hall et al 1978; Gusfield 1981). However, not all problems that become actionable are acted upon in the same way. Some social problems result in substantial policy response and institutional change while others do not. Here, I am primarily concerned with directly measuring and considering the organizational-institutional changes which result from the creation of and attention to a social problem. I evaluate how pervasive ideas about the cycle of social problems explains (or fails to explain) a governmental and institutional response to a perceived social problem.

I particularly want to draw a distinction between the framing concept of a "social problems cycle" and literature that focuses on "political opportunity structures" which comes out of social movement theory. Scholars of the latter will no doubt notice many parallels between their work and mine. While I certainly draw on some insights from this body of work, I find my current project most successfully speaks to the concept of social problems generally rather than

social movements specifically. The primary reason for this is that while social movements can be a powerful change agent in creating and influencing responses to social problems, I do not seek to make this particular type of social entity the primary focus of my current inquiry. Social problems may come out of social movements but they are created in and through many other types of social forces as well. Indeed, in the case I study, the role of "social-movement" organizations and activities such as protests and other activism per se in instigating and sustaining responses to the social problems often pales in comparison to the influence of government and other social forces and is not always present. Determining the influence of and on social movement organizations involved in anti-human trafficking efforts is certainly a worthy endeavor but in this project I attempt to take a broader view where insitutional change is my primary variable of interest rather than social movement activity.

Scholars have outlined a general pattern that seems to describe public problem creation and institutional response in modern societies. While recent theorists have certainly suggested refinements to the theory of public problems and social change, the basic theoretical understanding of the model of a social problem cycles described by Gusfield and Cohen remains: public and media attention, calls for social change, implementation and institutionalization of social change (Goode and Ben-Yehyuda 1994; Best 2008 Hilgartner and Bosk 1988, McRobbie & Thornton 1995; Critcher 2008; Garland 2008). By "institutional" change in this pattern I mean concrete and enduring organized responses formed by influential social actors. In the case of human trafficking these social actors are primarily government entities but may also include other such as religious organizations, capatilists. Importantly, this definition of "institutional change" includes not only a legal or policy change but more importantly the *implementation* of policy. Not all attempts to induce institutional and organizational change vis-a-vis a social problem are successful but ones that are seem to follow this general pattern and have been observed across a diverse group of cases from the concept of muggings in the UK to pornography in the United States (Hall et al 1978; Watney 1997).

The challenge which faces scholars is that while historical events often appear to follow the basic social-problem pattern, actually detangling the empirical causal mechanisms at play can be extremely difficult. Take for example Joel Best's conceptual diagram of the cycle of social problems in which events, actors, and paths of influence are constantly overlapping, and reciprocal (2008). How do we trace the causal lines between newspaper articles and politician's legislative or executive responses? How do we understand when public concern actually translates into collective organized action? In addition to this complexity, many of these factors are difficult to measure: how do we determine how *much* public concern exists and how it changes over time (Garland 2008)?

To surmount these challenges most work on social problems focusses on describing the historical events and time-lines surrounding a particular social problems case such as drunk driving, pedophilia, etc as well as the meaning-making that particular actors do arround the problem (Cohen 1972; Garland 2008; Critcher 2008). Yet, this work often treats the cycle and concept of a social problem itself as a taken-for granted truth rather than a subject to interrogate (Thompson, Thompson & Kennet 1998; Farrell and Fahy 2010). We see that an institutional

response to a social problem has occurred and can describe the events that surrounded it. However, the processes that actually lead to concrete changes in the make-up of our social institutions and organizations remain somewhat vague. And thus, our predictions and specific knowledge about how and why current and future social problems result in institutional change constitutes a sociological "black box" of sorts when it comes to social-problems literature. While I have drawn a distinction between social problems literature and social movements literature, here the latter offers some helpful precedent. Despite the difficulty in operationalizing measures like public concern, and institutional change, scholars of social movements have been doing so for quite some time to explain institutional change as a result of social movements (Meyer and Minkof 2004 ref).

Here, I propose that our conceptions of social problems and institutional change can similarly benefit from quantitative investigations. Rather than rely solely on theoretical and logical understandings of the cycle of social problems, I instead categorize, measure and empirically test the causes and outcomes related to a moral problem cycle. I focus on factors that explain the start of the institutionalization process as well as it's growth over time. This allows me to empirically test claims about how this cycle works and suggest adjustments and nuances accordingly. This approach offers evidence that affords a new angle to consider the efficacy of current theories about social problems cycles. Specifically, I statistically model how public and media attention on the issue of human trafficking as well as social, geographic, and political factors have influenced government and institutionalized response in the formation of human trafficking task forces in the United States. Can we find evidence that a particular type of institutional response to a social-moral problem is empirically related to factors that our current understandings of social problems suggests it should? What details can such a project tell us about the causal change mechanisms at play in the institutionalization of social problems?

The Case of Human Trafficking

The social problem cycle I measure and explore is the social and institutionalized response to human trafficking in the United States from 1999-2019. Human trafficking, or commercial/financial gain through selling or taking advantage of another person's body or labor, seems to have been ubiquitous throughout much of human history. Forms of legal slavery have existed both in ancient and modern times. However, the modern global wave of attention on human trafficking focusses mainly on forms of this exploitation that are (at least on paper) *illegal* or considered morally wrong by mainstream culture and society (Faerell and Fahy 2010; Bernstein 2018). Human trafficking as a global social problem rose to prominence around the turn of the century. In 2000 the United Nations' Resolution to Combat International Crime included a land-mark protocol aimed at "Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons". Various member nations passed their own domestic laws criminalizing human trafficking such as the United State's "Trafficking Victims Protection Act" or TVPA first passed in 2000. While, human trafficking was initially seen as an international issue, human trafficking has increasingly become thought of as a *domestic* issue as well. The TVPA and it's reauthorizations criminalizes

all labor or commercial sex done under “force, fraud or coercion” (Victims of Human Trafficking Protection Act 2000).

The institutionalization of anti-human trafficking efforts in the United States present an interesting case for modeling and testing theories about social problems for a number of reasons. First, they have been going on for a long enough period of time to allow me to observe quite a bit of variation in start and growth of task force formation. Second, the idea of human exploitation as a social problem is one that has frequently been named and debated in the U.S. public sphere throughout its history. Third, scholars observe that modern anti-trafficking efforts are a nexus for many intersecting social differences and inequalities which often feature in all types of modern social problems such as class, race, gender, sexuality, nationalism and religion (Agustin 2007; Weitzer 2007; Bernstein 2010; Bernstein 2018).

The passage of the TVPA could be seen as marking the culmination of a social-problems cycle: human trafficking became defined as a social problem, key claims-makers earned enough media attention to get political traction, and then the problem was institutionally addressed through national law. However, in terms of understanding the process of institutional change and the mechanisms that influence it, the TVPA was only the beginning. While it signaled that the national government was symbolically concerned about human trafficking as a social problem, actually *implementing* that concern has proved to be a complex endeavor and has mostly taken place at the state and local level where most law enforcement and social service entities actually encounter so-called traffickers and victims or survivors face to face. The facts of the problem, the way it is defined and the way its solutions are defined ensures that real change may begin at the national level but must culminate at the local level.

Consider for example that while the federal government believes that thousands of incidents of trafficking occur every year, only a small number of federal trafficking cases are successfully identified and prosecuted each year (The Department of Justice 2020). The federal government must rely on local law enforcement to notify them of potential cases that fall under their jurisdiction. Another primary concern of the federal response to human trafficking is victim services. While the national government offers some types of assistance like T (trafficking) visas and funding through the Office for Victims of Crime, when it comes to actually connecting victims to those services they rely on local governments, social workers and non-profits to help victims fill out visa forms, and provide housing and other assistance. Indeed, the federal government spends millions of dollars every year on anti-human trafficking efforts by simply offering grants and other funding directly to state and local entities (travel.state.gov 2020; Department of Justice Office of Public Affairs 2020). Further, while many organizers who have rallied to fight human trafficking rely on federal resources to begin or sustain their efforts, many othersreceive little or no federal assistance at all. These efforts are formed and sustained by volunteers, local donations and local governments who care about the issue of human trafficking in their communities.

Thus when it comes to actually spreading awareness, and implementing change, the true action of the institutionalization of this social problem primarily happens at the state and local level. And It has been extremely varied and complex across both states and regions. In addition to federal and local governmental influence, the growth and success of anti-human trafficking efforts is also subject to local public perception and social stake-holders such as business and religious entitites. One prominent type of these institutionalized efforts is the anti-

human trafficking task force: a collaboration of diverse federal and local government entities organizations and stake-holders which forms to collectively address human trafficking in their local state or communities. These groups commonly include representatives form law enforcement, attorney general and governor's offices, local social services, religious groups, for-profit industries, etc. This type of collaboration as a model for intervention was enshrined in the TVPA which created the President's Task Force. The human trafficking task force is seen as the gold standard of effective institutional response to prevent and address human trafficking. The federal government frequently offers grants specifically to fund state, regional, and municipal task forces (Department of Justice Office of Public Affairs 2020) and state and local governments have often included the creation of these task forces in anit-human trafficking legislation.

As such, I focus on the creation of these human trafficking task forces as an important measure of the growth of insitutionalized response to human trafficking in the United States. Some states, municipalities and local cultures have been quick to embrace the concept of human trafficking as a social problem and began forming non-profits and law enforcement/government task forces to address the problem quickly with the first recorded task force being formed in California in 1999. Others appear to have taken their time such as the state of Georgia which finally announced the creation of it's first state task force in 2019. What accounts for this varied growth in embracing and responding to human trafficking as a social problem? And, what does this tell us about how social change in response to socially-defined problems actually happens?

Possible Causal Mechanisms

Literature about how social problems are defined, formed and institutionalized describe a number of potential factors to explain the advent and growth of institutional human trafficking responses in the United States. I group these generally into three categories: environment and population, political contest, and media and public attention. Each of these three types of factors sets up a hypothesis about how we expect human trafficking task forces to have formed which I examine in the proceeding hazard and growth models.

First, while much of the literature on social problems argues that we should pay attention to the cultural factors which govern responses to those problems, few would argue that they are the *only* factors that matter. In fact, in order for a cultural-social definition of a problem to develop there has to be some prior thing or event out in the social world around which meaning can coalesce. In Gusfeild's case of drunk driving it was the fact that some people did drink, and drive and got into accidents. In the case of human trafficking task forces, this pior event is that some people commercially exploit others. The most straight-forward explanation of the variation in task force formation is that it follows occurrence. In other words, *we expect that task forces will form sooner and more often in places where more trafficking occurs*. States with environmental factors that facilitate trafficking should therefore develop task forces first and develop more of them.

I can't directly measure the amount of trafficking that has occured in states over time because the official counts we do have rely on a circular system. Once a state begins to address human trafficking through laws and task forces those task forces spur greater prevention and counting efforts. Thus increased counting of human trafficking cases is itself a product of social attention. However, human trafficking or exploitation is not completely mysterious. We know that trafficking appears to be associated with poverty and inequality (Agustin 2007; Wheaton, Schauer and Galli 2010; Blanton and Blanton 2020). Additionally, sheer population size is associated with the size of various industries which create demand for both labor and sex (Schauer and Galli 2010, Blanton and Blanton 2020). Lastly, we would expect geographic locations which make it easier for vulnerable people to move and be moved into trafficking situations such as trade hubs, coasts and borders to create more trafficking opportunities and in turn spur more task force creation.

Second, cultural-political factors may affect how task forces get formed. The way influential political claims-makers take on or define social problems can have a big impact on how the public sees them and how governments respond to those problems (Gusfield 1981). In the United States' two-party system the claims key political figures make about social problems often fall along party lines with each political party widely known as champions of signature causes for which they have to answer to their support base such as Republicans and gun rights or Democrats and environmental protection. If human trafficking fits the political narratives of one party better than another, then we expect that states with Democratic or Republican governors, should see increased action around forming task forces. Scholars who have paid attention to movements and organizations forming around human trafficking as a social problem note that conservative religious groups (often associated with Republican voters) have been extremely vocal and influential in shaping the movement (Wetizer 2007; Shih 2016). Additionally, human trafficking is illegal and thus we might expect members of the Republican party which most often claims to be the party of "law and order" to get the most political capital out of institutionalizing human trafficking task forces. Finally, political variation happens not only at the state and national level but also regionally- with states being influenced by each other's politics and often (though not always) voting in regional blocks (Tarrance 2018). Thus, *we expect that states with Republican governors and in regions more likely to be conservtive politically (such as the South and Midwest) will be more likely to form task forces*.

Third*, we expect institutional responses to social problems to be more likely when public and media attention on them increases*. Most explanations of how social problems grow and become institutionalized view public fears and demands for action as important factors which inspire institutional response. Moral panic litterature sees waves of media and public attention as the beginning of a cycle in which public fears become institutionalized (Cohen 1972, Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994). Other social problems literature emphasize a more reciprocal frame noting that media and public attention both influence and are influenced by institutional responses (Gusfeild 1981; Best 2008). Nonetheless, media amplification and its corresponding public response are understood as essential causal factors in inducing governments and other social entities to act on social problems.

Methods

Building the Dataset

In order to measure human trafficking task forces and the hypothesized factors that affect them, I relied on data from a number of different sources. To measure my predictors, I used U.S. Census data from 2000, 2010, and data from the American Community Survey from 1999-2019 to count population, income and racial make-up for each state from the years 1999-2019. I consulted state websites and the national governor's association records to determine the governor of each state for each year. I also added variables for region and coast (see Appendix ?).

Finally, to determine media interest in the topic of human trafficking by state I relied on the Access World News Database (AWND) curated by NewsBank, Inc. The database includes both national and local news sources for my geographic area of interest (the United States). I created a list of search terms that would indicate wether an article was about human trafficking based on my field work and interviews with people involved in anti-human trafficking efforts (Appendix?). I then searched the database by state and year getting a raw count of the number of articles that matched any of my search terms. To accurately measure increasing or decreasing attention on human trafficking, however, I also had to take into account the fact that the AWND cannot guarantee equal coverage over time. It may have added sources since the start of my time period of interest and/or only report certain sources for a subset of my years of interest. I accounted for this by comparing how often news sources reported about human trafficking to how often they reported about crime in general. For each state and year I divided the number of times my list of human trafficking terms was refferenced by the number of times my list of crime terms was mentioned. I also considered using the Lexus Nexus news database. However, I found that AWND offered better coverage for sparse locations and years.

Lastly, to measure my outcome variables: the year each state got its first task force and the overall number of task forces across each year from 1999 to 2019, I added to my data set relying on government documents, internet research, and key informant interviews. First, I began with the United State's Office of Children and Families. In 2018, they published state-by-state documents listing task forces and other in-state collaborations organized to combat human trafficking. I further used internet searches, key informant interviews with stake-holders, and DOJ funding records to add additional task forces that had been either missed in the DCFS documentation or formed since it's publication. I went through this list and verified that each task force fit my inclusion criteria and the year it was started. I did so by studying official websites and social media pages, government documents, press releases, and news reports. If I could not verify the year a task force was formed based on these, I contacted each task force either by email or phone. If no contact information was listed I asked representatives from listed partner agencies. If I could not find any current web presence or evidence of activity from a task force I cut them from my list (this happened fewer than five times) resulting in a final list of 272 task forces. About 27% of these task forces I confirmed existed as of 2019 but was not able to determine the date they were started. Almost all of these were county-based or sub-task forces under a larger state task force. Therefore I remain confident that I accurately measured the

dates of each state's first task force. Missing dates did not appear to be concentrated in a particular geographic area so I treat these dates as missing at random. For my growth curve models, I used only task forces with confirmed dates.

Models

I ran two sets of models using Cox Hazard regression and Growth curve modeling with Stata statistical software. I used the hazard models to predict each state's risk of developing it's first task force while I used the growth curve modeling to predict the growth in number of task forces over time. In both types of models, I treat states as cases. While Stata can produce estimation statistics for these parameters that help give information about how sample parameters relate to a population such as standard errors and confidence intervals, in my findings I *only* report the parameters themselves. In this case I am not working with a sample but the entire population of U.S. states.

??????????models go here

Predictor Variables

Each model contains seven covariates predicting the outcome of interest: population, median income, percent of white residents, region, border status, party of governor, and media score. Population is a measure of each state's population as of 2000 measured in units of 10,000. Median income similarly measures each state's median income in units of $10,000. Percent white measures the percent of each state's residents that were white as of 2000. While population, median income and race could be measured over time, measuring them as such did not greatly change model parameters. Since the effects of these variables was relatively minimal in predicting both first task force and task force growth across states, I deemed that time-varying these covariates added little to the model's explanatory power. Time-varying them introduces uncertainty about estimates into the model since doing so necessarily required that I extrapolate missing dates based on known census years, or use American Life Survey estimates. Therefore I simply used measures of each from the year 2000.

Region and border status are two categorical variables measuring geographic characteristics. I measure region using six categories: Southwest, West, Midwest, Northeast, Southeast, and "Other" (see Appendix ???). Border has four categories measuring whether a state lies on an international border, on a coast, both or neither ("inland").

Governor party is also a categorical variable. For every year, a state received a 0 if it had a Republican governor, a 1 if it had a Democratic governor and a 2 if it's governor belonged to some other party. Very few states had governors belonging to another party for any of the years during my time period of interest. Since I had no theoretical reason to think these governors would particularly support or not support task force growth I counted them as missing since I could not measure the effect of having a Republican or Democratic governor for that particular year. I measure governor party based on the party of the governor who was in office at the time of task force formation. Governors are responsible for signing legislation into law which creates some task forces. In other cases, governors themselves create task forces based out of their own offices and/or oversee state funds being allocated to county and municipal task forces. Most importantly, they can also cut off, decrease, or discourage funding on such efforts.

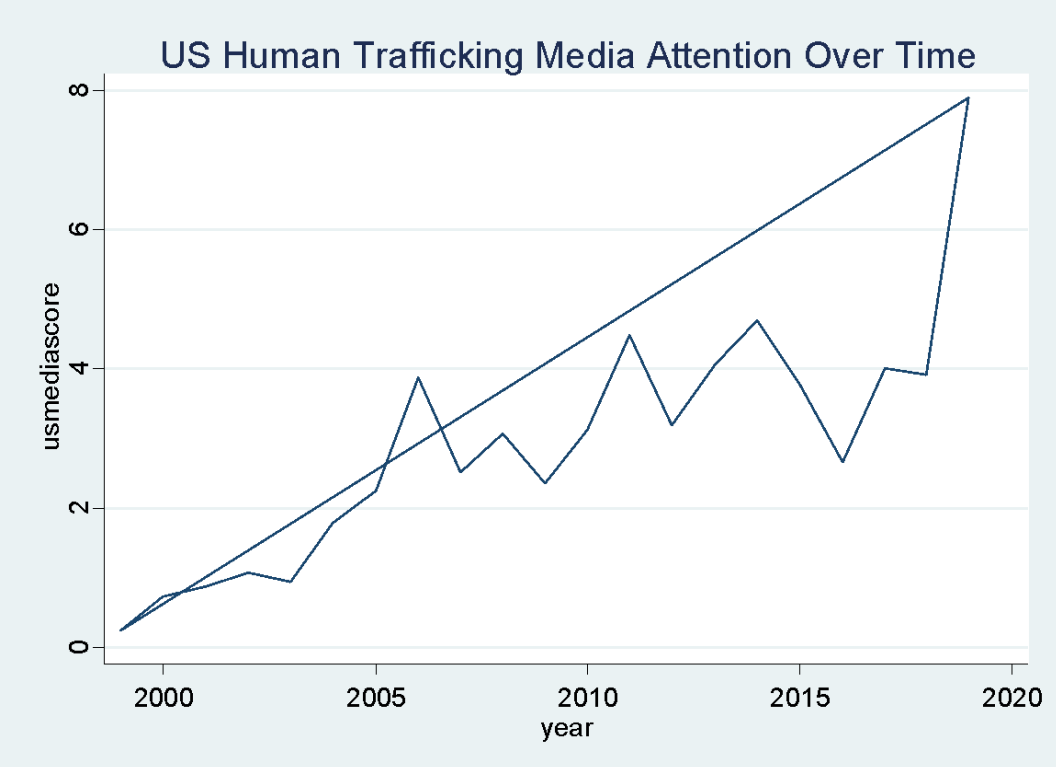
Based on my media observations, and interviews with key informants, I believe that the governors in office at the time of task force creation are most likely to be responsible for encouraging it.

Finally, media score is a continuous variable measuring the amount of media coverage related to human trafficking. As described above I created this variable by dividing human trafficking coverage by general crime coverage each year. I created this measure both for State's local coverage and overall national coverage. State media score ranged from 0 to 6.12. All states experienced a general increase in media score over time. However, the rate of increase varied both between and within states. U.S. meda score ranged from .24 in 1999 to 7.89 in 2019. It has generally trended up but increase in national attention has not been constant with spikes in task force creation occurring in 2006, 2011, and 2019 (see figure 1). Unlike with political party, I do not have reason to assume that media which is published the same year a task force is created has the biggest impact on whether that task force is formed. An increase in media attention the year a task force is formed may be a *response* to that task force forming particularly when it is from local or state-based sources. In order to ensure that I am capturing the causal relationship between media attention and task force formation, I look not only at media attention at the time of task force formation but also in years previous. Thus, while I run models considering the impact of contemporary local and national coverage (models 1-2, and 5-6) I also present models where local and U.S. media score are lagged by three years (models 3-4 and 7-8).

Outcome Variables

For my first set of hazard models, I measure whether/if each state got its first task force and what year it occured. As of 2019 all 50 states had at least one task force. For the growth curve model the outcome variable is simply the number of task forces in each state for every year.

FIGUE 1



Findings

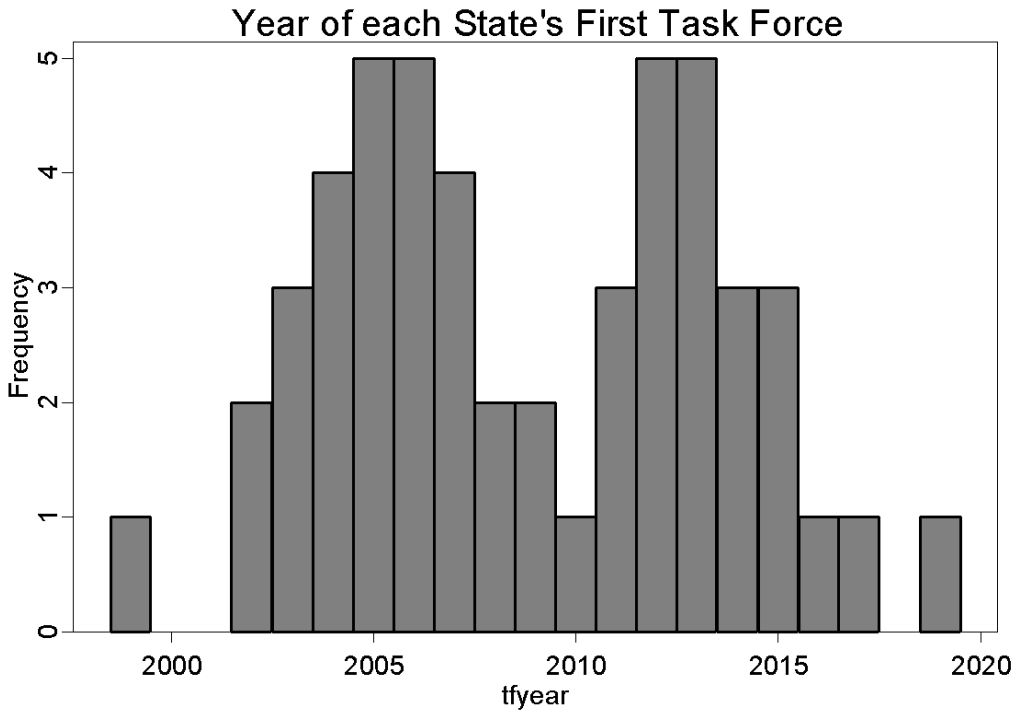
Based on the proceeding theoretical insights there are three potential hypothesis that explain the formation of anti-human trafficking task forces across the U.S.. These are: one, that these task forces form in response to environmental factors such as population size and income or geographic location which contribute to the amount of trafficking that may occur: two, that cultural and specifically *political*-cultural factors affect the likelihood of forming a task force: and three, that public and media attention drive these institutional responses. In order to assess these three hypotheses I look at two different sets of models. The first predicts when each state got its first task force. This models what factors "began" the growth of this particular institutional response in each state. The second is a set of linear growth models that models the rate of growth in number of task forces across each state. Based on how institutional responses to human trafficking across states began and grew, I find some evidence to support all three hypotheses. However, in all three cases my findings demonstrate that particular modifications and specifications are essential to how we theorize regarding each factor (population/region, politics, and media) and its effect on institutional responses to moral problems such as human trafficking. We know that these factors matter but my findings demonstrate that *how* they matter does not necessarily follow the patterns we expect.

Hazard Models: Risks of Getting the first task force

There has been a range in how quickly HT task forces began across the U.S. The first confirmed state-based task force started in a large city in California, while most recently the State of Georgia announced a state-wide task force in 2019. There have been two spikes in first

task force development in 2005-2006 and 2012-2013 (see Figure 2). These roughly correspond to funding activity from the Bureau of Justice Assistance. This agency first started offering grants for the development of HT task forces in 2004. In 2010 they revamped the program offering increased funding (?) and further directions for developing HT task forces based on what they call an "Enhanced Collaborative Model." Not all the first state HT task forces necessarily received this federal funding but it does signal an increased economic and symbolic investment from the federal government which could help account for the second spike in first HT task forces after the first tapered off.

FIGURE 2



What explains the variation in how long it took different states to begin to develop HT task forces? I ran a Cox regression model to examine each state's "risk" of developing a HT task force. In my model, each state was coded "0" on the outcome variable for each year from 1999 until 2019 until it's first HT was formed at which point it was coded as a "1" which in the vernacular of hazard models constitutes a failure. Another way to think about it is that the model measures how long each state survived *without* a task force. The coefficients I report are hazard ratios where a ratio above 1 indicates an increased risk of developing a task force while a ratio below 1 indicates an increased risk of survival (not developing a task force). I ran four different models (see Table 1) using the four different measures of media score (state and U.S. score the year each HT task force was formed, and state and U.S. score lagged three years prior).

TABLE 1

Hazard Ratios: Risk of States Getting First Task Force

	(1) Media b	(2) US Media b	(3) Lagged Media b	(4) Lagged US ~a b
Gov = Dem	1.497978	1.477853	1.408894	1.477853
pop10K	1.002035	1.00199	1.001993	1.00199
Medium Income	1.071027	1.130496	1.284388	1.130496
percentwht2000	.3514327	.3290853	.2385499	.3290853
Mediascore	1.188877			
US Mediascore		.2946155		
Lagged Mediascore			.4930693	
Lagged US Mediascore				28.70765
Southwest	1	1	1	1
West	4.809276	4.996291	5.003406	4.996291
Midwest	3.879054	4.150887	3.709043	4.150887
Northeast	2.948422	2.742271	2.320988	2.742271
Southeast	1.337502	1.447993	1.585078	1.447993
Other Region	6.713465	6.927821	6.13291	6.927821
Coast	1	1	1	1
Border	1.030321	1.129386	1.384147	1.129386
Coast & Border	5.556171	6.271852	6.681453	6.271852
Inland	1.30826	1.337526	1.509669	1.337526
Observations	491	491	397	397

Exponentiated coefficients

First, in terms of population and geographic factors some variables appear to matter more than others. Population and medium income have positive but very small effects; their associated hazard ratios are essential 1. A state's chances of developing a HT trafficking task force were smaller for states with higher percentages of white populations. The hazard ratio is quite a bit below 1 indicating a substantial effect. One possible explanation is that race is acting as a proxy measure for inequality. Since race is historically related to income states with more non-white residents may have higher wealth gaps and thus a good deal of poverty. Thus, states that may experience higher rates of trafficking due to population size or low overall income did not have much of an increased chance of developing a task force but states with high inequality did. It is surprising that population especially had such a small effect. This means that states like Texas were not much more likely to develop a task force before states like Montana based on population size.

However, regional factors did appear to have a big impact. States that lie on an international border had about the same chance of developing a task force each year compared to states on a coast, however states on *both* a coastal region and a border had an increased hazard ratio of almost 6:1 compared to states that only lie along a coast which indicates that while as state such as Texas did not have an increased risk of developing a HT task force because of its population, it *did* have an increased risk due to its location. However, an increased risk of foreign-based trafficking was not the only regional factor that contributed to HT task force development since inland states were slightly more likely to develop one before coastal states. In addition to border status, region also mattered. Southwest states as a whole were the slowest to begin developing task forces while the West and Midwest were much more likely to develop task forces with a hazard ratio of almost 5 and 4 respectively. The "other"

category has the highest hazard ratio compared to the Southwest but since this category only contains the two non-contiguous states (Hawaii and Alaska) which are geographically quite distant from each other and the other states it is difficult to speculate on the substantive significance of this category.

The fact that region seems to play an important role in how quickly states began developing task forces- even while holding constant other factors like border status and population- gives some evidence that cultural and political factors (hypothesis 2) do in fact matter for the creation of task forces. States in similar regions share commerce, and social interactions as well as borders, environmental and social factors. They collaborate through interstate trade and may be influenced by each other's policy and legal interventions. The governor of Wisconsin may be much more likely to hear that Michigan has developed a task force and feel compelled to create one in her own state compared to hearing that Arizona or Washington has one.

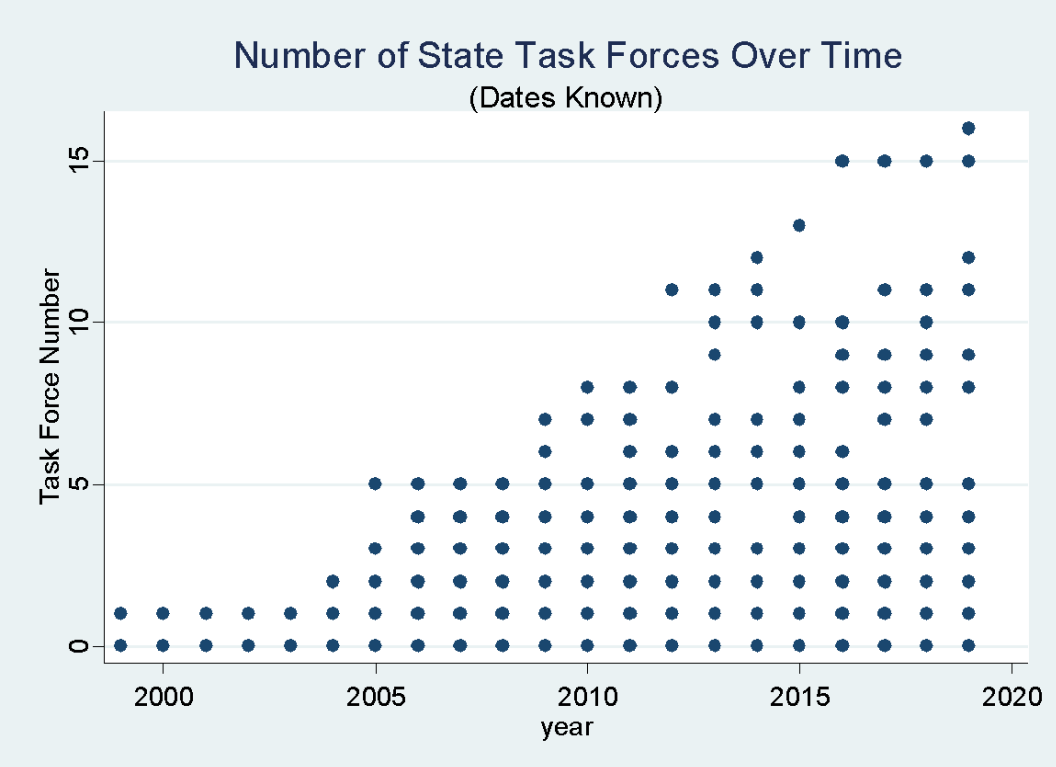
The other measure that points to cultural and political factors is the political party of the governor at the time each task force was formed. The hazard ratio comparing Democratic governors to Republican ones is almost 1.5 which indicates a moderate effect. While Republicans have historically been known as the "law and order" party, states with Democratic governors were more likely to develop a task force sooner. On the one hand, while Republicans often seek to be known as a party committed to law and order, Democratic governors are not exempt from this same bump in political capital. On the other hand, the general Democratic openness to spending on social welfare may account for this difference as well.

Lastly, when it comes to assessing the effect of media and public attention, the effects on HT task force development are mixed. When media score is measured during the year each HT task force was formed, State media score appears to have a positive affect and U.S. media score a negative one on increasing the chances of task force formation (with hazard ratios of 1.2 and .3. However, as I discussed above, to accurately measure causal effect, we have to look at previous years. It makes sense that a state forming a task force would cause media mentions of human trafficking to increase locally while U.S. media mentions are not likely to be affected by a single State's task force but be subject to the rise and fall in number of new task force creations across the nation. Models 3 and 4 therefore use media scores that are measuring the effect of media score three years prior to each task force's formation (measures lagged by 2 years showed similar results and I deemed lagging measures by only 1 year did not give enough time gap to adequately measure a causal effect). Here the effect of media gets very interesting. Local and State media attention in the years prior to a HT task force formation did not increase a state's chances of developing a task force – if anything it is associated with a decrease in the risk of task force development (hazard ratio .5). However, media attention across the U.S. as a whole did have a powerful effect. For years when U.S. media attention increased in the few years before task force development, states were more likely to start developing HT task forces. This suggests an important facet to understanding how and why public attention on a moral problem like human trafficking sparks institutional change. On the local level, state governments and institutions do not appear to be affected by *internal* increases in media and public attention. However, *external* public attention- perhaps spurred by national government's activities and other states developing task forces are associated with an increased risk in task force development.

Growth Models: Explaining the Increase Over Time

To further assess the validity of the three hypotheses about what causes institutional responses to Human Trafficking I looked not only at how the formation of human trafficking task forces began in each state but also how this formation developed over time. Most state and local governments in the U.S. have not been content with merely one task force per state but have continued to develop more over time. I measured 272 confirmed task forces as of 2019 (not counting the federal level, the District of Columbia or U.S. territories) which translates to a rate of more than five per state. Of course, this growth is not spread evenly, a few states like California and Ohio have over 20 (as of 2019) while others have only one or two (See Figure 3 for task force growth over time).

FIGURE 3



The relationship between time and task force growth rate appears fairly linear, however I did assess whether a squared term was appropriate in the model. The term had very low predictive power so I left it out of the model. Over time, population and regional factors do not appear to have identical effects on task force growth across states compared to task force start. Population still seems to have a minimal effect with only a .02 increase in number of task forces for an increased 100,000 residents. States in the lowest medium income bracket (around $30,000) compared to states with the highest income bracket (around $85,000) only have a

predicted difference of about 1 task force (depending on the model). Racial make-up also has a positive but small effect. Region and border have roughly the same relative effects- Southwest states are predicted to have fewer task forces over time compared to Western and Midwestern States, while states with coasts and borders have the highest rates. However, these effects are relatively small with all predicting only one or fewer task forces.

The biggest predictor of task force growth is time itself. On average holding all other model factors constant, the four models predict a growth rate in number of task forces ranging from 3.4-5 every five again, having a democratic governor has a positive effect on the number of expected task forces in any given year but that difference is relatively small (.2 in all three models). Because of the spread of cases in later years, I ran interaction effects to see if the effect of any factors changed over time. While regional differences did show some increase over time, these increases were not very large and therefore not substantively significant. All these positive but relatively small effects add further support to the importance of modeling the *first* state task force in modeling institutional responses to moral problems over time. Once a state or region has broken the ice and taken the first step towards forming state task forces, states on average seem to steadily increase those numbers regardless of governor party, or regional factors. At the same time, there is a good deal of variation in number of task forces left unexplained. This strongly suggests that other cultural and state-specific factors explain task force growth.

Perhaps most importantly, media attention had little or no effect on the growth in number of task forces per state. For example, one of the years with the most disparate media scores was 2019. That year Florida had one of the highest scores (around 5) while New Jersey had the lowest (around 1.3). This 3.7 point difference corresponds to a predicted difference in task forces of about 1.4. As I said previously however, state media score for a given year may be more reflective of media response to task force formation (especially in years were a high number were formed). The lagged model demonstrates an even smaller effect. U.S. media score both current and lagged was also very small and even appears negative in Models 2 and 4. Theoretically, I think it very unlikely that increased national media attention actually had a *negative* causal effect on number of task forces. Cultural factors not included in the model likely account for these negative signs. While it does not make sense to interpret the coefficients specifically, it is important for assessing the hypotheses to note that neither current or lagged U.S. media attention seems to have the out-sized positive effect on task force growth as it did on the creation of each state's initial task force.

TABLE 2

Linear Growth Model: Number of Task Forces per State

	(1) Media b	(2) US Media b	(3) Lagged Media b	(4) Lagged US ~a b
tfn				
Gov = Dem	.2275702	.2220193	.2018662	.2145179
pop10K	.0022312	.0022058	.0024597	.0024468
Medium Inc~e	.1583311	.1564151	.1864837	.1959707
prcntwht	.7669518	.6969595	.816403	.7698441
Mediascore	.3897895			
US Mediasc~e		-.1737273		
Lagged Med~e			.1503893	
Lagged US ~e				-.0940442
year	.1693029	.2398064	.2120121	.2474615
Southwest	0	0	0	0
West	.7888961	.8256742	.9023406	.9039318
Midwest	.6823073	.6563215	.7672735	.745956
Northeast	.5465754	.3815334	.4801024	.4122142
Southeast	.2303299	.1308937	.209281	.177202
Other Region	.9251692	.9322916	1.052662	1.021617
Coast	0	0	0	0
Border	.0127059	.0315286	.0398224	.0518495
Coast & Bo~r	.5978443	.618488	.6964904	.7073024
Inland	.2189408	.2433819	.2561311	.27311
_cons	-342.4017	-483.0998	-428.3841	-499.2935
lns1_1_1				
_cons	-.2628076	-.2806354	-.1494874	-.1526233
lnsig_e				
_cons	.3058777	.3107664	.2757083	.2762474
N	940	940	844	844

Discussion

While I find some evidence to support all three hypotheses about what governs institutionalized response to social problems, none was supported in its entirety. Population and income mattered little, government party mattered differently than expected and local media had little or no effect while only national media did. Further, the different efficacy of these various factors in the models predicting the formation of first task force compared to task force growth over time leads me to a number of important additions to our current understanding of the institutionalization of social problems. First, this process is time-sensitive and variant. The factors which affect the institutionalization process at one point in time may not be the ones that sustain it over time. In the case of human trafficking task forces, the things that started each state along a path of institutionalization were not the same that sustained it. Second, it is important to understand the differing role of *internal* vs. *external* sources of influence. In the case of states developing human trafficking task forces, national and regional influences spurred the beginning of task force formation while internal pressures did not matter as much. However, once a state developed its first task force, this seemed to create an internal domino

effect: the explanatory importance of factors such as national media attention and region are greatly reduced and time itself is the most important predictor of number of task forces formed.

For each state, environmental factors such as population and median income surprisingly had little effect on task force formation. Thus, the assumption that institutional response will form more quickly in places where more trafficking occurs is not well-supported. Rather, my results indicate that cultural and social factors matter more than actual occurrence. At the same time, the fact that states along both coasts and borders were most likely to develop task forces first net of other factors could be read as an indication that increased international trafficking did affect task force creation while domestic trafficking did not. I find this explanation plausible given the fact that international focus on human trafficking occured before the wide-spread movement in the U.S.. Additionally, governments in border and coastal states are already primed to respond to other types of international trafficking from drugs, to weapons to exotic pets so adding “human trafficking” to the list of potential criminal activities may have quicker and smoother compared to other states. At the same time, it is not as if other states, even inland ones do not have to deal with other criminal international trafficking as well.

When states had democratic governors they were more likely to form human trafficking task forces compared to whent hey had republican govenors. This could be due to a number of factors. For instance, perhaps Democratic governors felt they got increased political capital from focussing on domestic matters in the mid-2000s while Republican president George W. Bush was waging war in the Middle East and then continued to feel encouraged to form these task forces during Barak Obama’s tenure while Republicans were leary of giving him credit. Perhaps Republican governors’ commitment to fiscal conservatism was overall stronger than their commitment to law and order in the case of human trafficking while Democratic govenors saw it as part of their commitment to social welfare spending. Whatever the case my results indicate that political factors do matter, but that the *way* they matter is not always straight-forward.

The results related to the importance of media and how it relates to task force formation show that understanding “media attention” as a monolithic factor is not sufficient for making sense of how media and institutional change relate to one another. Surprisingly, local in-state media attention was not a significant factor either in states forming their first task force or in growth over time. In contrast, national media attention did matter quite a bit when it came to first task force but not growth over time. This indicates that public attention or “moral panic” did not effectively operate at the local level as an incentive for task force formation. States do not appear to have been greatly influenced by internal public attention when it comes to beginning to form task forces. Rather, they were influenced by national attention on the issue of human trafficking. To further nuance this point, I found that states in different regions did form task forces at different times and different rates. This suggests that state governments and law enforcement entities were influenced not only on by the national attention paid to human trafficking but also to what other states around them were doing. Taken together, this describes a pattern in which states began to form task forces not as a result of grass-roots and local calls for action. Rather, the initial task force formation process indicates that states were responding to outside interest in human trafficking as a social problem and attempting to create it as a local

problem in their own state by insitutionalizing it. Thus, rather than being an end result in the cycle of social problems, in-state institutionalization was itself an attempt to begin the creation of human trafficking as a social problem in the local culture and institutional structure of states.

To further this claim, the growth models demonstrate that once states actually began the institutionalization process represented by having one task force formed, the ensuing growth over time was no longer affected much by regional or national media factors. Rather, influence appears to have shifted from external forces to internal and this first task force served as a sort of institutionalization domino which then spurred more task forces throughout each state. With this information, we can add to our understanding of how institutionalization works in social problems cycles. Factors are overlapping and reciprocal but these observed patterns demonstrate that these relationships may matter differently based on the social/governmental level where the institutionalization is occurring and point in time. In the case of human trafficking, national external pressure from media and culture appears to matter more than internal grass-roots pressure to begin the process of institutionaliziation. However, once the first task force was formed in a state, it set off a domino effect in which states continued to form task forces with little outside influence. This top-down model of institutionalized influence suggests that attempts to create an institutional response to a social problem may be most successful by focussing on national rather than local change and attention. In order to influence internal institutionalized responses, in-state entities must first be aware that other outside entities view the social problem as a problem.

UPDATED CYCLE CHART

Conclusion

These findings offer a blueprint to refine how both qualitative and quantitative projects can continue to explore the cycle of social problems and the way they are enshrined through institutional change. For case-based inquiries, these findings caution that observed patterns between population factors, media attention, political interest and institutional change can not be assumed to be *causal* relationships without considering the interplay of internal/external pressures and the possibility of domino-effect patterns in how those factors affect institutional change. For quantitative studies, this methodology and result serve as an example of how institutionalization and it's potential causes can be measured. While I have used particular variables to measure each factor that may affect institutional change, readers will note that the list of possible environmental, political and public attention variables is quite extensive and this project is simply a beginning step towards understanding how these play out in the social problem cycle. Additionally, the domino-effect pattern I observe may not operate the same way across all social problems cycles. In other contexts and places, the complex social actors and forces involved in a social problems cycle might cause different outcomes.

By studying the case of institutional response to human trafficking in the United States, I have detangled one pathway in which the cycle of social problems oppeartes. The domino effect operates in this case in which the national government took a symbolic stance, and social, organizational, and governmental groups in subordinate units (states) responded in a particular pattern over time by institutionalizing the problem through collaborative organizational effort.

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