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U.S. Federal: Documenting Origins of Apprehended Undocumented Persons

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Introduction

The United States of America contains more international migrants than any other country in the world [1]

Discerning numbers of unauthorized or undocumented aliens residing within the borders of the United States is difficult. Census data can indicate the numbers of immigrants who were born elsewhere or those who allowed themselves to be enumerated by census takers. However, census numbers only count legal migrants and those voluntarily admitting to being in country without authorization. Determining actual numbers of illegal aliens necessitates going outside of the census numbers and finding other means of estimating populations. For example, studies conducted by The Pew Foundation provide an estimated number of 11,100,000 unauthorized immigrants present in the U.S. in 2014 [2].

Accessing apprehensions by Customs and Border Protection and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (CBP/ICE) tells an alternative story regarding unauthorized immigrants. Much as the Uniform Crime Reports and NBRS (an expanded version) tell us the FBI's story of crime in the United States and the National Crime Victims Survey (NCVS) explains victims' experiences of crimes in United States and additionally, provides measures of numbers of unreported crimes. These two different measures of crime and the census and apprehension lists offer two different measures of unauthorized immigration. Together, these measures provide supplemental and expanded estimates of different facets of a phenomenon.

Since 9/11, public fears of cross-border entries by potential terrorists heightened immigration concerns. Although the 9/11 hijackers had all entered the U.S. legally, media portrayal, whether fictional entertainment or news related, of the possibility of illegal border crossings and hidden terrorist cells and jihadist recruiters do give pause for thought in this country. Newly inaugurated President Donald Trump further sensitizes the media and the public to the possibility of an expensive new border wall construction project, estimated by Stratfor to cost approximately $7 to $10 billion [3]. Further, by creating and implementing, by Executive Order, an incoming travel ban related to specific countries of concern to the Trump Administration, the administration amplifies public awareness of potential terrorist threats to the homeland.

Methodology and Apprehension Data Source

A Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request to U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) resulted in the return of all unauthorized immigrant apprehension data for Fiscal Years 2010 through 2014 in .pdf (Adobe Acrobat Professional Software) file format [4]. All data were read into an Optical Character Recognition (OCR) software program (Read IRIS) [5] that rapidly reduced the .pdf into an easily accessible spreadsheet format of 916,340 unauthorized immigrant apprehension cases (Microsoft Excel) [6]. All personally identifiable data, such as any names and dates of birth, were stripped from the spreadsheet, except for a constructed proximate indicator of age at time of apprehension, which is based on date of birth. Ultimately, remaining data fields include: CBP fiscal year, CBP sector, apprehension date, citizenship country, gender and estimated age at time of apprehension.

Eventually the spreadsheet, read into the statistical database program Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS by IBM),[7] allowed descriptive statistics to be efficiently processed for the entirety of all unauthorized immigrant persons apprehended in the 20 U.S. Border Patrol Sectors for the five years from 2010 through 2014. The resulting file includes 916,340 individual cases of apprehended unauthorized immigrants.

After stripping dross data from the five-year public record apprehension file received, a new file was created and the earlier working files were destroyed. A colleague retains the only original file received from CBP. The original data is considered a public record by CBP (as arrest data is considered by other law enforcement agencies)

1   Phillip Connor, International migration: Key findings from the U.S., Europe and the world, Pew Foundation, last modified December15, 2016, accessed March 10, 2017, http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/12/15/international-migration-key-findings-from-the-u-s-europe-and-the-world/

2   U.S. unauthorized immigration population estimates, last modified November 3 2016, Pew Foundation Research Center, accessed March 20, 2017, based on augmented American Community Survey data from Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS). http://www.pewhispanic.org/interactives/unauthorized-immigrants/

3   Scott Stewart, It Will Take More Than a Wall to Solve Border Crime, Stratfor, last modified December 1, 2016, accessed December 2, 2016, https://www.stratfor.com/weekly/it-will-take-more-wall-solve-border-crime

4   Adobe Acrobat Professional, Adobe Systems, www.adobe.com

5   Read IRIS Pro, OCR Software, IRIS Professional Solutions, http://www.irislink.com/EN-US/c1078/About-I-R-I-S-.aspx

6   Microsoft Excel Spreadsheet Software, Microsoft Corporation, www.microsoft.com

7   SPSS, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, IBM Analytics, https://www.ibm.com/analytics/us/en/technology/spss/

and is consistently utilized by them for yearly reporting purposes and occasional press releases on its website in an aggregate form. Protection of human subjects is always an issue but for this project a simple need only for aggregate data in macro form precludes utilization of any individually identifiable personal data. No potential harms should exist to human subjects from data that is already a part of public records compiled by a Federal Agency of the United States, especially when fields containing identifiable information are stripped from the open-source data. Only aggregate data, open-source, is used in this study. No consent forms could possibly be deployed, as no addresses were included in the open-source data received. This study uses only secondary data from a publicly available source.

Four lists of countries, described in the next section, provide a basis for analysis of potentially dangerous unauthorized immigrants. Frequencies and cross tabulations, initiated in SPSS, provide visual information regarding the data on cases of individuals from the four lists of countries of concern.

If an individual is apprehended more than once, each apprehension counts as a data point. Other errors can often creep in to studies. Any errors in the database, calculation of fiscal year dates or analysis are solely those of the author. Perfection does not exist in data, human operators, software or analysis. Best efforts are applied in good faith. No funding was received for this open-source project and none was sought. No individually identifiable data can be traced to any unauthorized immigrants apprehended in the U.S.

Four lists of countries in question

Important to the process of analysis of the apprehension data is determining the select countries that will be analyzed. While the possibility exists to analyze all countries of origin, these results in outputs with limited usability as countries such as Mexico overwhelm all other data when it comes to apprehensions of illegals. For the purposes of this study the focus is on the Middle Eastern and North African Countries (MENA) list as delineated in Figure 1 and Table 1 as well as the current "travel ban" and Special Designated Countries

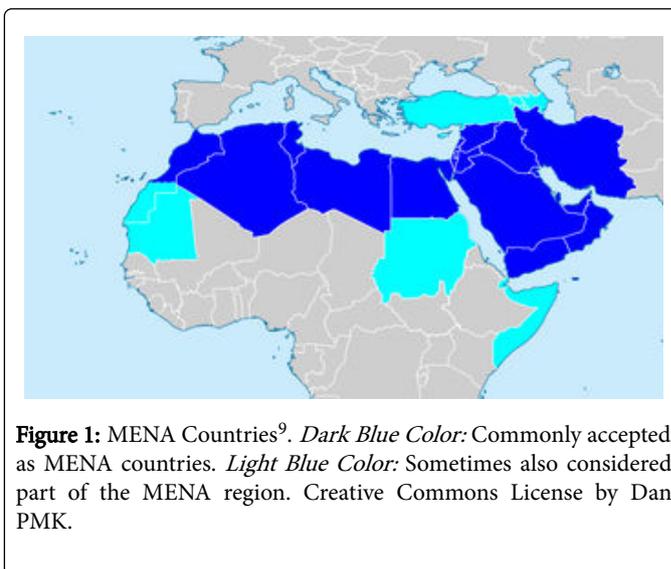(SDC) established by Executive Order and the Department of Homeland Security[8] [1].

Figure 1: MENA Countries[9]. *Dark Blue Color:* Commonly accepted as MENA countries. *Light Blue Color:* Sometimes also considered part of the MENA region. Creative Commons License by Dan PMK.

Table 1 is comprised of 4 lists of countries as identified by government organizations, including MENA, MENA Broader, the ICE/CBP SDC List and the Incoming Travel Ban Countries[10].

The SDC list is partially analogous to MENA Broader in its designations. SDCs are enumerated by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and consist of 36 countries, including Israel.

The nascent, 6-Incoming Travel Ban Countries list is as outlined by Executive Order[11]. The original seven-country travel ban schedule, designated by the Trump administration as an Executive Order, consists of failed states: Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen. Most recently Iraq was removed from the list, making the ban a 6-incoming country travel ban [2].

MENA Traditional	5 Year Total	5 Year % of Total Caught	MENA Broad	5 Year Total	5 Year % of Total Caught	ICE/CBP SDC	5 Year Total	5 Year % of Total Caught
Algeria	12	0	Afganisthan	29	0	Afganisthan	29	0
Bahrain	1	0	Algeria	12	0	Algeria	12	0
Egypt	75	0	Armenia	16	0	Bahrain	1	0
Iran	58	0	Azerbaijan	7	0	Bangladesh	771	0.1
Iraq	38	0	Bahrain	1	0	Djibouti	2	0
Israel	145	0	Chad	5	0	Egypt	75	0
Jordan	67	0	Cyprus	0	0	Eritrea	177	0

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8   Middle East and North African Countries (MENA), The World Bank, accessed March 11, 2017, http://www.worldbank.org/en/region/mena

9   "Broader definitions of MENA," Middle East and North Africa Magazine, accessed December 1, 2014, http://menamagazine.com

10   ICE List of Specially Designated Countries (SDCs) that Promote or Protect Terrorism, last modified July 2, 2011, accessed March 27, 2017, https://publicintelligence.net/specially-designated-countries/

11   Executive Order 13769, Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States, The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, last modified January 27, 2017, accessed March 6, 2017, https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/03/06/executive-order-protecting-nation-foreign-terrorist-entry-united-states .

Kuwait	5	0	Djibouti	2	0	Gaza west bank Ter.	0	0
Lebanon	43	0	Egypt	75	0	Indonesia	44	0
Lybia	10	0	Eritrea	177	0	Iran	58	0
Morocco	25	0	Georgia	61	0	Iraq	38	0
Oman	0	0	Iran	58	0	Israel	145	0
Palestine	0	0	Iraq	38	0	Jordan	67	0
Qatar	4	0	Israel	145	0	Kazakhstan	21	0
Saudi Arabia	34	0	Jordan	67	0	Kuwait	5	0
Sudan	15	0	Kuwait	5	0	Lebanon	43	0
Syria	38	0	Lebanon	43	0	Lybia	10	0
Tunisia	12	0	Lybia	10	0	Malaysia	29	0
UAE	3	0	Mali	14	0	Mauritania	5	0
Yemen	32	0	Mauritania	5	0	Morocco	25	0
			Moracco	25	0	Oman	0	0
Incoming Travel Ban	**5 Year Total**	**5 Year % of Total Caught**	Niger	6	0	Pakisthan	203	0
Iran	58	0	Oman	0	0	Philippines	277	0
Iraq	38	0	Pakisthan	203	0	Qatar	4	0
Lybia	10	0	Palastine	0	0	Saudi Arabia	34	0
Somalia	38	0	Qatar	4	0	Somalia	38	0
Sudan	15	0	Sahrawi Arab Dem Rep	0	0	Sudan	15	0
Syria	38	0	Saudi Arabia	34	0	Syria	38	0
Yemen	32	0	Somalia	38	0	Tajikisthan	21	0
			South Sudan	N/A	0	Thailand	77	0
			Sudan	15	0	Tunisia	12	0
			Syria	38	0	Turkey	165	0
			Tunisia	12	0	Turkmenistan	2	0
			Turkey	165	0	UAE	3	0
			UAE	3	0	Uzbekisthan	69	0
			Yemen	32	0	Yemen	32	0

Table 1: List of MENA, MENA Broader, SDC, and Incoming Travel Ban Apprehensions as percentage of total apprehensions FY 2010-2014.

Analysis

General results from the database

All numbers reported are for total apprehensions of unauthorized immigrants in the 5-year timeframe of 2010 through 2014, across the 20 CBP sectors in the U.S. Overall; the unauthorized immigrants represented 183 countries in the database. Thirty-two individuals could not be assigned to a country and two persons were declared stateless in the database.

Overall, the mean age of unauthorized and apprehended immigrants is 29.92 years at time of apprehension and the database indicates that of the 916,340 individuals, 73.8% are male and 26.2% are female.

Mexico contributes the most unauthorized and apprehended immigrants in the U.S., accounting for 57.1% or 528,650 of the 916,340 total. This leaves a remainder of 42.9% or 392,690 of the 916,340 apprehended in the U.S. from countries other than Mexico. CBP breaks down their aggregated totals of apprehensions using the term, Other

Than Mexico (OTM), to designate country of origin outside of those from Mexico.

ICE/CBP SDC List

Individual countries from each of the 4 lists may be accessed in Table 1.

The total number of unauthorized immigrants apprehended within our 5-year timeframe is 916,340 persons. The total for the unauthorized immigrants in the SDC apprehensions list is 2,544 persons. These figures indicate that only 0.3% of unauthorized immigrants apprehended came from SDC countries of interest. The highest number of SDC list, unauthorized immigrants in the 5 years, came from Bangladesh at 771 individuals. Those individuals comprised 0.1% of the overall 916,340 total unauthorized immigrants apprehended over the 5-year period. This list contained the only significant percentage of unauthorized persons in comparison to the comprehensive, 5-year database. See Figure 2 for a depiction by country by year of the apprehensions.
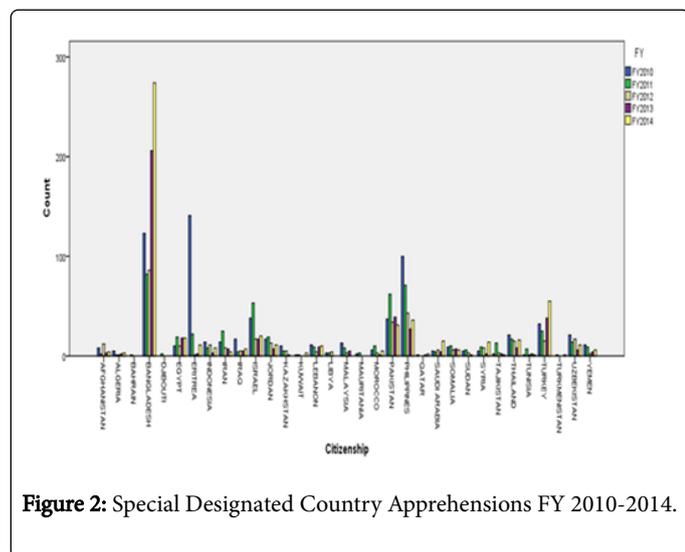

Figure 2: Special Designated Country Apprehensions FY 2010-2014.

Looking at the major contributors to apprehensions of illegals from SDC countries, outside of Bangladesh, the next set of top contributors are from the Philippines (277), a long time U.S. ally in the Pacific, former home to multiple U.S. military bases, and supporter of the U.S. in the ongoing war on terror; Pakistan (203), a U.S. ally in the ongoing war on terror, and the primary source of land access to Afghanistan during the fight against the Taliban and Al Qaeda; Eritrea (177), a tiny African country that borders the Red Sea yet is neither considered a part of MENA or the Broader MENA region; Turkey (145), a member of NATO and supporter of the U.S. in the war in Iraq and counterterrorism in the Middle East; and Israel (145). Israel is not a Visa Waiver country and it is unknown if the 145 apprehensions were illegal entries or people overstaying their legally obtained visas.

Incoming 6 Travel Ban Countries

Again, the individual countries may be accessed in Table 1.

The total for the unauthorized immigrants apprehended from the current 6 incoming travel ban countries of Iran, Syria, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, and Yemen is 191 persons. These figures indicate that only 0.02% of unauthorized immigrants apprehended came from these special countries over the 5-year period of study. It is unknown if these were illegal migrants entering the country illegally or were persons that overstayed valid visas.

MENA Region

See Table 1 for the individual country data.

The total for the unauthorized immigrants apprehended from the World Bank defined[12] MENA countries is 617 persons with Israel (145) being the only country of MENA with more than 75 unauthorized migrants apprehended over the 5-year period. These figures indicate that only 0.06% of unauthorized immigrants apprehended came from this region over the 5-year period of study. It is unknown if these were illegal migrants entering the country illegally or were persons that overstayed valid visas.

Broader MENA Region

See Table 1 for the individual country data.

The total for the unauthorized immigrants apprehended from the broader MENA region is 1,331. The largest contributor to illegal migration from this expanded area was Pakistan (203). These figures indicate that only 0.15% of unauthorized immigrants apprehended came from this region over the 5-year period of study. It is unknown if these were illegal migrants entering the country illegally or were persons that overstayed valid visas.

Conclusions

The relatively minute number of apprehensions of immigration violators, from the list of countries discussed, especially compared to total overall apprehensions from all countries, might lend itself to a conclusion that very few unauthorized individuals from these countries are inside the United States at any given time. The caveat applicable here is that the data for this tabulation and analysis is based strictly on recorded apprehensions of unauthorized immigrants.

Extant tribal, familial, religious and other in-person social networks may be so close and invulnerable to penetration that the unauthorized and undocumented are highly shielded from scrutiny, once actually ensconced somewhere in the U.S. Bad actors may be documented and may have entered the country legally at some point. All the 9/11 hijackers had legally entered the U.S. prior to their deployment on mission.

Due to heightened concerns about apprehension being hazardous to a successful terrorist mission, virtual (online) indoctrination and radicalization may be the method that terrorist organization have deemed most efficacious. Social networking sites and the Dark Web provide multitudinous opportunities for underground recruitment, as do other forms of legitimate social media[13]. YouTube videos by recruiters for terrorist organizations are ubiquitous and often pop up

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12   MENA, The World Bank.
13   Kristin Finklea, Dark Web, March 10, 2017, Congressional Research Service, 7-5700, R44101, accessed April 24, 2017, https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R44101.pdf

on Facebook and other social media faster, than they can be taken down.

One of the potential means of access to the Dark Web is Tor. Administrators who developed TOR studied traffic on and estimate that only approximately 1.5% of users access covert services and applications on the Dark Web[14]. Tor administrators deliberately designed the application for anonymity and virtually untraceable paths practically guarantee this. Therefore, the 1.5% is suspect.

Exploitation of borders, essentially non-physical borders in the evolving cyber age, necessitates that law enforcement agencies and counter-terrorism experts must evolve to match technological gains as persons exploit new weaknesses they identify[15]. How this impacts the identification and apprehension of illegal migrants is constantly changing. Fundamentally, as political administrations change, apprehension and detention policy change, and the organizations facilitating illegal entry into the U.S. change the information provided to migrants as well as the routes used. While not a component of this research, this process of adaptation has long been in place with drug cartels and they presently control access to the U.S. southern border from Mexico when it comes to illegal migration. Future research will need to focus on the changing aspects of information support for migrants, legal and otherwise.

The significance of this analysis is in its insignificance. Even with the removal of Mexicans from the apprehension database, using only OTMs, there was no identifiable significance in apprehension numbers for this timeframe. There are no fluctuations in the apprehensions from the SDC, MENA and MENA Broader apprehensions or from the select group of countries included in the recent Travel Ban over this 5-year timeframe. Early indicators of the FY 2015 and FY 2016 apprehension numbers indicate a noticeable and measurable increase in apprehensions of Nicaraguans and a decrease in apprehensions of Hondurans, Salvadorans, and Guatemalans, but this data has not yet been the focus of significant analysis. Nor are there any significant increases in apprehensions from other countries and in fact, according to many news reports, apprehensions are down in the months leading up to and following the inauguration of Donald Trump[16].

A number of continuing studies are ongoing as additional apprehension data is collected from CBP through FOIA requests. Primarily, the researchers are looking at potential economic contributors to changing illegal migrant flows. Additionally, changing conditions of violence, either state sponsored or criminal may be contributors to fluctuations in illegal migrant apprehensions. As these additional factors are examined through statistical models, additional research will be published.

References

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