

The Lesser Discussed Politics of the United States' Trafficking Victims Protection Act (2000)

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Abstract

Although slavery was banned in the United States through the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution during the 1800s, another form of slavery is still prevalent in the United States today. This form of modern-day slavery is also known as human trafficking and is an extremely widespread global issue. While there have been various efforts to prevent the prevalence of human trafficking, none such actions have successfully helped to see a significant decline in its presence. Even action taken by the United States, the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (TVPA), has failed to yield positive results. Thus, the question remains as to why all moves working against human trafficking have been unsuccessful, specifically the TVPA. This study investigates how certain politics that are not commonly discussed and can be deemed secondary motives were involved with the passing of the United States' TVPA of 2000. In order to do so, governmental documents, research by experts, and speeches written by experts on the topic to investigate the political atmosphere in the United States prior to and during the passing of the TVPA were examined. As a result of this analysis, it was found that secondary political motives behind the passing of the TVPA included the agendas of politicians, the government's need to respond to public outcry, and the political desires of the United States in regards to Russia after the fall of the Soviet Union. In essence, this implies that the United States has yet to solely try to combat human trafficking; rather, so far, it has combated human trafficking while simultaneously seeking self-benefit in terms of politics. The United States should use this knowledge to pass legislation in the future that, rather than simultaneously moving the United States ahead in politics, will wholly make attempts to minimize the prevalence of human trafficking in the world. It is understood that this is extremely difficult in politics; however, it is possible for legislation preventing trafficking to be successfully put into place and yield results. This legislation, while it cannot be imposed upon other nations, can set a standard of what to do in terms of combating human trafficking; this standard can then be passed on to other nations, either through other nations adopting similar legislature or the United Nations developing a similar universal act for member-nations to ratify.

Keywords: Human trafficking, TVPA, Human Rights

1. Introduction

Every day on the news, there are stories about more and more women being kidnapped and forced into the world of human trafficking. Even movies recognize the prevalence of this illegally occurring violation of human rights, as seen in the movie *Taken*. Recently, CNN did a study on how the cost of a human slave has changed over time. Through this study, it was shown that the price of "buying" a human slave has decreased considerably over time; in 1908 a slave could be purchased for about \$40,000 whereas today a slave can be purchased for about \$90.¹ Essentially, for those who wish to purchase another person for labor or exploitation, now is when the expense is at

its lowest. Why in a time when we have the TVPA has it become cheaper to buy a person? A price increase would mean that the prevalence of trafficking would have decreased, which was the intention of the TVPA.

The fact that the prevention of trafficking has been less than successful in the United States brings into question whether or not the United States wrote the TVPA with the full intention of preventing human trafficking. If that was the truth, then the progress of human trafficking may have been halted more than it is currently or more information regarding governmental setbacks in preventing it would be better known; therefore, what are secondary political motives behind the United States passing the TVPA? Generally, in the United States, when there is a standstill in the government in terms of accomplishing goals, it is due to political party issues; for example, the recent U.S. fiscal crisis. So, how were politics involved with the passing of the United States' TVPA of 2000? Although the United States is continually lauded heavily for its attempts to curb human trafficking with the TVPA of 2000, solely preventing human trafficking was not the United States' intention because there were secondary political motives behind the passing of the TVPA through the agendas of politicians, the government's need to respond to public outcry, and the political desires of the United States in regards to Russia after the fall of the Soviet Union. These secondary motives will be investigated and explained in regards to how they have impacted the success of the TVPA.

2. Political Motives

Prior to the passing of the TVPA in the United States, the Mann Act (also known as the White-Slave Traffic Act) was passed in 1910. It is self-described as, "An Act to further regulate interstate commerce and foreign commerce by prohibiting the transportation therein for immoral purposes of women and girls, and for other purposes".² According to United States Homeland Security Office:

The Mann Act and its subsequent amendment resolutions makes it a felony to knowingly persuade, induce, entice, or coerce an individual to travel across state lines to engage in prostitution or attempts to do so. It is an effective tool used to prosecute human traffickers.³ What is significant about the definition of the Mann Act is that it focuses on state lines; there is not specific mention of the international transport of individuals. There was a lack legislation regarding said international transport for another 90 years, until the passing of the TVPA in 2000.⁴

As described by the U.S. Department of State, the TVPA is meant to, "provide the tools to combat trafficking in persons both worldwide and domestically".⁵ It is widely believed that the TVPA has been quite effective in carrying out its intentions, as expressed with a statement made by the United States Department of Justice on the 10th anniversary of its signing, "The enactment of the TVPA sparked a decade of progress toward eradicating modern-day slavery, a national endeavor that traces back to the Thirteenth Amendment's command, in 1865, that "neither slavery nor involuntary servitude ... shall exist within the United States".⁶ Though this conviction that the TVPA has met its purpose thus far exists, in actuality, the success of the TVPA in making a significant difference in the occurrence of human trafficking has been extremely limited. Evidence of this incomplete carrying out of intentions is visible through another statement made by the United States Department of Justice on the 10th anniversary of the TVPA's signing:

Among all the advances since passage of the TVPA, perhaps the most notable is the evolution of the strong partnerships between federal, state, local, and international law enforcement, government agencies, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) who assist victims of human trafficking and advocate to bring an end to modern-day slavery.⁷

As described in the statement, the greatest accomplishment of the TVPA is that strong partnerships, including political partnerships with governmental agencies, have been made; while creating partnerships is important on the part of the United States government, the preventative measures regarding human trafficking are of more significance in order to combat the issue. Even in the words of the United States government, partnerships saw the greatest success; therefore, this suggests that through the passing of the TVPA, politics have ended up being emphasized more than prevention.

In general, many politicians have used methods to combat human trafficking, like the TVPA, to fulfill their own political agendas. Amy Farrel and Stephanie Fahy, an Assistant Professor at the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice in the College of Social Sciences and Humanities at Northeastern University and a Senior Research Associate in the Center for Applied Social Research at Northeastern University, claim that since the TVPA was passed in the United States, there have been fewer than expected reported incidents of human trafficking than

originally predicted due to the public framing of human trafficking altering over time. To support this claim, they state frames of mind are created by the government/media and affect people's views on human trafficking, stating that in disregarding the actual causes of human trafficking- poverty, gendered inequality, global economic policies, ethnic conflicts, and economies in transition- and by altering how victimization in human trafficking occurs, responses may actually weaken action taken by the government against human trafficking (618).⁸ Essentially, since the frame of human trafficking appears to not include the aforementioned root causes, they are not dealt with; rather, "...human trafficking programs in the U.S. have increasingly focused on identifying and assisting victims with the goal of prosecuting criminals, disrupting criminal networks, and safeguarding U.S. borders" (618).⁹ As described by the research done by Fahy and Farrell, prosecuting criminals, disrupting criminal networks, and safeguarding U.S. borders has come to the forefront of human trafficking prevention. The roots of the human trafficking issue- poverty, gendered inequality, global economic policies, ethnic conflicts, and economies in transition – have been neglected, leaving the breeding ground of trafficking still present. Yes, other factors of human trafficking are seeing attention; however, though some criminals are getting the justice they deserve, not all criminals will be found and sentenced. That being said, with the criminals still out to find victims and with the root causes of human trafficking not being addressed, human trafficking can still occur. It is not until the factors that create an environment for human trafficking have been silenced that the issue itself can work towards being silenced. Prosecuting criminals, breaking up criminal networks, and protecting networks are generalized political policy issues that the government would like to see solved rather than solely being related to human trafficking; therefore, by passing the TVPA, an act in the form of an international standard, some of the government's political agenda can be accomplished while simultaneously working towards human trafficking prevention.

Another significant part of governmental action is what law enforcement does to carry out legislation. Anthony DeStefano, a reporter for Newsday for 20+ years who covers New York City legal affairs and criminal justice, argues that the government has not actual made it a focus to eliminate human trafficking. DeStefano explains that in many human trafficking cases in the United States towards the late 1990s, when the United States law enforcement intervened, there was immediate success in that criminals were prosecuted and victims were rescued (10).¹⁰ DeStefano states, "Clearly, when American law enforcement focused attention and resources on trafficking issues, criminals could be successfully prosecuted" (11).¹¹ This idea of success in trafficking elimination through law enforcement was carried to the TVPA, in that the TVPA, "...dealt primarily with law enforcement issues. It amplified and redefined statues already on the books, added new immigration enforcement measures, and set up a system for evaluating the trafficking actions of other nations" (45).¹² Essentially, the United States is again described as pushing the issue of criminal prosecution to resolve human trafficking, rather than moving on to dealing human trafficking at its root causes.

Mentioning the passing of the TVPA, DeStefano notes that, "Countries that do not comply with minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking or do not make efforts to comply with those standards may be denied non-humanitarian, non-trade related foreign assistance from the United States".¹³ This appears to be an inherently political move on the part of the United States because while the United States may want to investigate a country's actions regarding human trafficking, the statement also opens doors for the United States to exert control over and inhibit what other nations receive from the United States in terms of foreign assistance. Especially for nations that rely on the United States for aid, the United States will more likely than not have the TVPA guidelines fulfilled in said nations. Yes, this is good as it ensures that human trafficking will be fought in those nations; however, imposing sanctions creates more of a political atmosphere on the part of the United States, rather than a purely humanitarian climate. Rather than having sanctions imposed after nations fail to comply with the standards of the TVPA, an example of a less politically involved solution would be for NGOs the United States formed partnerships with to then have the ability to work with nations not complying. If, after NGO involvement, the nation in question still failed to improve its TVPA compliance, the United States could move onto imposing sanctions; however, this should remain a last resort effort in order to preserve the necessity of the TVPA as being a humanitarian effort.

Furthering evidence that not everyone in Washington solely had the issue of human trafficking on his/her mind, DeStefano notes, "But in one of the diplomatic oddities of this period, the United States did not ratify the U.N. measure until 2005. Practically speaking, lack of ratification had no legal effect; but it embarrassed American diplomats".¹⁴ The U.N. measure being referred to dealt specifically with human trafficking and was signed around the time of the TVPA; however, the United States chose to wait until 2005 to ratify it. This reveals that the United States, while it was supportive of its own actions taken to deal with human trafficking, did not feel the need to comply with others. The fact that the measure was by the United Nations can explain why it was voted against, as many Republicans are suspicious of the United Nations; a recent example of said suspicion can be seen through the Senate failing to ratify the Convention on the Rights of Persons With Disabilities. Through this, it can be observed that many politicians were more concerned about their policies towards U.N. action, rather than simply preventing

human trafficking. Though it had no major legal ramifications as a result of the U.S. not ratifying, this still shows that many politicians in the United States were less concerned about human trafficking itself and more concerned about their own political agendas.

3. Public Outcry

Around the same time the TVPA was being discussed, there was a significant increase in human trafficking in Eastern Europe due to the fall of the Soviet Union. Dina Haynes, a professor on Constitutional Law, Immigration Law, the Law and Ethics of Lawyering, International Women's Issues, and Refugee and Asylum Law at New England Law and a former protection officer with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Croatia, claims that there has been a recent increase of human trafficking in Southeastern Europe due to the fall of the Soviet Union. In addition, Haynes claims that nations have not acted in ways that will legitimately prevent the spread of human trafficking due to underlying political motives. Haynes states that, "Because of the visceral reaction trafficking elicits with the public, it has recently been used by politicians and governments to bolster other political agendas, such as curtailing illegal migration, fighting prostitution, and even combating terrorism".¹⁵ As noted earlier, the core problems that lead to human trafficking had little focus; rather, the government chose to act on prosecution significantly more than prevention. With the passing of the TVPA, the political agendas in terms of dealing with illegal immigration in the United States, elimination of prostitution, and fighting terrorism were dealt with more. These political agendas were focused on because they satisfied the public in terms of showing effort towards curtailing trafficking while simultaneously resolving other governmental issues.

The main issue with politicians and the TVPA is that there is no middle ground between the prevention of human trafficking and the prosecution of the criminals who are trafficking the victims. Don Hummer, M.A. DuPont-Morales, and Alese Wooditch, an Associate Professor of Criminal Justice at Penn State and a doctoral student in the Criminology, Law and Society Program at George Mason University, claim that though the TVPA had the intention to prevent and prosecute in terms of human trafficking, said intention has not been carried out. The authors claim that, "In spite of the TVPA's intent to focus on the protection of victims, the needs of trafficking victims are clearly secondary to furtherance of criminal prosecution".¹⁶ Because victims, especially those who have been trafficked internationally, have difficulty being considered legitimate trafficking victims due to the heavy qualifications needed to ascertain a T-visa (visas in the United States meant for victims of trafficking).¹⁷ Without this T-visa, victims do not receive the benefits that are described in the TVPA- eligibility for permanent residency, federally funded benefits, and the possibility of bringing family members to the United States.¹⁸ Basically, in the creation of the TVPA, politicians have created a bill more centered on the criminals instead of being centered on the victims. While the TVPA was enacted to protect victims and prosecute criminals, inherent political motives prior to its passing are now the focus, preventing the origins of human trafficking from being resolved. Instead, what concerns politicians have higher on their lists succeed.

Not only were political agendas behind the passing of the TVPA, but also there was continual pressure from United States citizens to pass legislation related to prevention of human trafficking. DeStafano claims that the United States, along with various other nations, have had lackluster responses or responses that fail to actually make an impact in regards to the prevalent issue of human trafficking. To actually begin response to the issue of trafficking, DeStefano states that, "As trafficking cases developed and gained publicity, the issue acquired more political traction".¹⁹ With this political traction being gained and human rights groups speaking out, finally on International Women's Day in 1998, human trafficking was brought into focus on the Senate floor. Essentially, the government saw that its people would not stand by and let it do next to nothing about the issue; therefore, their political reasoning of enacting the TVPA was to avoid a substantial public outcry if the issue had continued to be avoided.

Haynes agrees with the idea that there was pressure from United States citizens, but approaches the topic from another perspective. She claims that there has been a recent increase of human trafficking in Southeastern Europe due to the fall of the Soviet Union. Haynes notes that, "Because of the visceral reaction trafficking elicits with the public, it has recently been used by politicians and governments to bolster other political agendas, such as curtailing illegal migration, fighting prostitution, and even combating terrorism".²⁰ From Haynes' point of view, the politicians used the pressure from U.S. citizens to pass legislation; however, said legislation was passed simply to satisfy the citizens. So, it was passed due to the political pressure, but the secondary means behind the legislation was to fulfill political agendas while simultaneously keeping citizens content.

The TVPA has seen success in that on a yearly basis, the U.S. State Department produces the Trafficking in Persons Report. As defined by the U.S. State Department, this is:

The Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report is the U.S. Government's principal diplomatic tool to engage foreign governments on human trafficking. It is also the world's most comprehensive resource of governmental anti-human trafficking efforts and reflects the U.S. Government's commitment to global leadership on this key human rights and law enforcement issue. It represents an updated, global look at the nature and scope of trafficking in persons and the broad range of government actions to confront and eliminate it. The U.S. Government uses the TIP Report to engage foreign governments in dialogues to advance anti-trafficking reforms and to combat trafficking and to target resources on prevention, protection and prosecution programs.²¹

The three P's are specifically noted in this definition: Prevention, protection, and prosecution. As previously noted, the first two P's have been neglected in favor of the final P, prosecution. The TIP Report is a progressive step towards the eradication of human trafficking; however, until all 3 P's see equal focus within nations including the United States, human trafficking will not be fully inhibited.

4. The Soviet Union

With the fall of the Soviet Union increasing the prevalence of human trafficking, there was not only political agendas and public outcry, but also a political reason for the inception and acceptance of the TVPA. Farrel and Fahy detail how in the late 1990s, many women from the former Soviet Union were discovered in brothels in the United States; this scared many U.S. citizens because the women were white in complexion and therefore looked more similar to U.S. citizens.²² Prior to this significant increase in victims from the Soviet Union, most victims came from Asia, Africa, and Latin America; therefore, they did not appear similar to U.S. citizens.²³ Having victims more similar in appearance made the issue more real to people in the United States than it seemed before.²⁴ The authors state that, "The growth of media depictions of young, White victims helped special interest groups frame an emotionally charged trafficking problem that generated public sympathy and attention from government and legislators to support their cause".²⁵ In essence, the fall of the USSR increased human trafficking awareness in the United States, creating a fear-filled environment on the behalf of U.S. citizens that led up to the passing of the TVPA.

With the fall of the Soviet Union, the new Russia was left in a state of turmoil; in other words, the type of climate suited for human trafficking. Kate Transchel, a professor for Russian and East European History at the Department of California State University claims that human trafficking in the former Soviet states is an issue derived from the combination of cultural, social, economic, and political problems in the states. Transchel explains that:

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 ended seventy years of centralized social, political, and economic controls that guaranteed employment and social security for all...A history of labor exploitation and domestic violence, as well as the dramatic social, cultural, and economic changes since 1991, has left many men, women, children vulnerable to trafficking.²⁶

In essence, after the fall of the Soviet Union, the social, political, and economic status of the former Soviet Union and former Soviet Union states were in a disarray; this led to an environment that would allow for human trafficking to take fruit and expand. Because of the environment that was created:

...in the early to mid 1990s in the wake of globalization and with the weakening of the Russian and post-Soviet states, criminal groups assumed the roles that the state used to play, asserting their own form of authoritarianism. These mafia groups infiltrated financial and political institutions, subverting efforts to establish a civil society in the wake of communism".²⁷

The United States would be concerned about this issue because with the fall of the USSR, the United States wished for Russia to become more westernized; however, with criminal groups taking over and social/political structure being affected by these groups in Russia, this hope would be destroyed. As such, by focusing on trafficking and creating the TVPA, a closer eye could be kept on Russia through the guidelines of the TVPA in that if Russia were to not comply with the TVPA, reasons as to why it was not could be investigated by the United States, thus giving way for the U.S. to help modify the structure of the former U.S.S.R. into that of a more Western nation. Going along

with this sentiment, in following the requirements of the TVPA, Russia would naturally improve its social structure to become more westernized.

While the United States wanted to keep an eye on Russia during the crucial time following the fall of the Soviet Union, there were not strong relations between the United States and Russia during the time period. Celeste Wallander, previously the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Russia/Ukraine/Eurasia in the Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy, claims that the United States failed to maintain proper relations with Russia following the fall of the USSR, particularly in regards to politics and security. First of all, Wallander explains that the American policy towards Russia was based on the idea that Russia would uphold a more Westernized international systems with two effects.²⁸ For one, the system that Russia would be adopting would include economic, political, and security policies to aid Russia in moving towards a more market and democratic society.²⁹ Since adopting the policies and would also cause financial benefits to be gained, along with political and security benefits, Russia would be more willing to work towards the Western system in order to gain said benefits.³⁰ Through this, it can be seen that the United States was extremely interested in the economic, political, and security institutions of Russia. Considering that the TVPA was passed not too long after the fall of the USSR, it can be noted that the United States had secondary political motives through the TVPA in being able to indirectly keep a close watch on the formation of Russia. Wallander continues to explain:

The second effect was that through integration, we would influence Russian internal societal and economic interests that would seek to profit from and have a stake in international cooperation in joining with the West. In doing so, Russia's definition of its national and security interests would be shaped in such a way as to develop a large degree of overlapping common interests with Western countries.³¹

With the TVPA passed, there could be cooperation between the United States and Russia in that the United States could aid Russia in deterrence of its trafficking, thus somewhat ensuring similar national security interests, eventually leading to full cooperation between the nations and the full transformation of Russia into a Westernized nation.

5. Conclusion

As time continues to pass since the TVPA was passed in the United States, there have been significantly less stories about successes in preventing human trafficking as compared to horror stories of human trafficking still occurring. Reviewing past research on the history behind the passing of the TVPA and what went into its passing, it can be concluded that in the creation of the TVPA, human trafficking was not the sole focus; rather, significant secondary politics with some relation to human trafficking ended up coming to the forefront of the human trafficking issue. These politics include agendas of politicians, the response of U.S. citizens, and the fall of the Soviet Union.

While politicians had the intention to work with prevention and prosecution of human trafficking through the passing of the TVPA, in the actual carrying out of the legislation, prosecution overwrote prevention in that criminals have been dealt with more than victims have been aided, border control has taken importance, and terrorism prevention has seen a fair share of action. Though all the aforementioned issues are significant and relate to human trafficking in their own ways, they are not the root causes of human trafficking; rather, they are on the agendas of politicians. These root causes include failing economies, lack of strong government presence, and social issues; without addressing the issues at the core of human trafficking, there will continue to be a cycle of people being trafficked and criminals being prosecuted. If the heart of the issue is put to a halt, it can no longer occur; therefore, there will be limited to no occurrences of human trafficking and limited to no necessity of prosecuting criminals related to human trafficking. In addition, once human trafficking became more publicly known in the United States, the government took notice of the response in the U.S. population and took action. This lack of action until the public began speaking out openly about the prevalence of human trafficking speaks volumes about what motivated the United States to pass legislation in that it was important for the United States to take note of what its citizens wanted; though this was important, the fact that this spend up the process shows that the TVPA had significant political motivation in that the government wanted to appease the people to some extent as well as resolve the issue of human trafficking. Finally, the fall of the Soviet Union created an atmosphere that increased the occurrence of human trafficking. Through the TVPA, a dual purpose could be achieved on the part of the United States: ensure that Russia did not resume its socialist ways by becoming Westernized and create a powerful alliance between the two nations by aiding Russia in rebuilding itself.

Though there are always going to be outlying political motives behind any bill that is passed in general, in the future, legislation should be passed related to human trafficking that shows more focus towards preventing human trafficking and protecting the victims. As the TVPA has shown success in prosecuting criminals related to human trafficking, the preventative measures need to be emphasized in the future. This can be through the U.N.- as long as it is ratified by the United States as well- or can be through the United States, which can set an example for many other nations to base legislation off for improved and effective inhibition of human trafficking.

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