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A Case Study of Layered Border Security and Traffic Problems at Laredo, Texas Port of Entry

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This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

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2024

Abstract

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MA, American Military University, 2013

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Securing the border is the United States Government's top priority to keep terrorists, illegal weapons, nuclear weapons, human smuggling, and drug smuggling from entering the United States during the continuous crossing of legitimate international trades and legitimate travelers. The primary purpose of this qualitative research study was to examine layered U.S. border security and analyze the vehicle and pedestrian flow of traffic problems in Laredo, Texas, Port of Entry. Qualitative methodology was used in this study using seven interviews and open-ended questionnaires. This study's theories were the environment criminology theory, which explored and analyzed the criminal act's environment; and the rational choice theory, where the belief that people can make their own decisions or choose their behavior and are motivated by the avoidance of pain and the pursuit of pleasure. The analysis found that being short-staffed, extended overtime work, lack of border policy, and overwhelming traffic volume caused officers to be stressed, compromising the security of the US – Mexico borders and causing traffic problems. The findings of this study allowed the researcher and readers to identify the numerous issues affecting the delays of international trade and commerce and travelers waiting for an extended time, as well as affecting the people of Laredo's lives, health, and business leading to positive social change.

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Dedication

I want to dedicate my mother, Eufemia, who is the amazing mother in this world. Who raised me and taught me to be grateful for what I have led me to be humble, value life, be helpful and respectful to the elderly, and be a law-abiding citizen. Even though she is not here to witness my achievements and graduation ceremonies, I know she is watching from above. I would also like to dedicate my family, close friends, co-workers, supervisors, and mentors who encouraged and helped me during my doctorate journey. I want to thank my wife for the countless support, especially financial support, and my children for their support and patience as I spent most of my time concentrating on finishing my dissertation project. I am thankful to people who believed and who doubted me; they inspired and challenged me to better myself and move forward to follow my goals and my dreams.

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Eufemia, and my family.

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Finally, I would like to thank my past and present professors and many friends for their advice, encouragement, and continuous support throughout my doctorate program.

My professors and friends are helpful throughout the dissertation and program. They have helped me get this far, and I am forever grateful to them.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

In this qualitative study, I decided to study the effect of securing the United States border to deter and prevent illegal drug smuggling and human smuggling that causes a traffic problem in the Mexico – U.S. southern border, specifically in Laredo, Texas. I collected data on U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officers and civilian employees in Laredo, Texas, Port of Entry (POE). CBP employees such as watch commanders, chief supervisors, supervisors, officers (veterans, field training officers, and new officers), civilian mission support, US – Mexico border articles, and the City of Laredo public data in solving the traffic problem without compromising the border security and the safety of the Laredo community and American people.

Layers of border security such as using Targeting and Analytical Unit (TAU), Canine dogs, Non-Intrusive Inspection (NII) X-ray, biometric and face recognition, Trusted Traveler Programs such as SENTRI Card, Global Card, FAST Card, and officer's skill are effective ways to deter and prevent the crossing of illicit drugs, human smuggling, terrorists, and impostors coming from Mexico to the United States. These security layers can also cause traffic problems. There is a need to find a solution to the congested lengths of time it can take for traffic to follow through the current crossings. These traffic flow problems affect the U.S. economy, air quality, and health of all the people crossing the borders, especially children, the elderly, and people of Laredo's daily lives. Aldrete (2018) argued that:

Traffic delays at the border affect air quality that affects the health of travelers and the community, economic development, and employment opportunities in that community and statewide. Especially those companies' dependent on just-in-time delivery, like automobile or high-end electronics manufacturing companies, who choose to open facilities. (p. 2)

This study aims to add to a gap in the literature on increasing the efficacy of inspections using layered border security and improving the flow of pedestrian traffic and vehicle traffic at the Laredo, Texas, Port of Entry without compromising the security and the safety of the various stakeholders in the United States. This study will contribute to positive social change by addressing the efficacy of the U.S. Customs and Border Protection to improve border security, and at the same time, to decrease the traffic problem in the Laredo Port of Entry (POE) and perhaps use this study to address all U.S. southern border (POE). In Chapter 1, I will provide the problem statement, the purpose of the study, the significance of the study, the background of the study, the theoretical framework foundation, the research question, the nature of the study, the definition, strengths, and limitations, and the summary.

Background

Illegal drugs and human smuggling are a significant problem not only in Laredo, Texas, and the United States, but it is a global problem that leaders in every country need to address. According to Hedegaard et al. (2020), illegal drugs caused 702,000 drug overdose deaths in the United States from 1999-2017 and a total of 6,440,421 of human smuggling on the southern border from 2017 – 2022 (CBP.gov/CBP enforcement, 2022).

Drug Trafficking Organizations (DTOs) and Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCOs) are currently using legitimate shipments and legitimate travelers to assist in the trafficking of illicit narcotics. In addition, these organizations are also assisting or using illegal aliens from Mexico and U.S. citizens/ U.S. nationals to traffic illicit drugs into the United States through the Laredo border.

Laredo, Texas, is one of the superports on the southern border of the United States. This port is the crossing for millions of commercial and noncommercial vehicles and pedestrians, making this a prime location for drug traffickers and criminal organizations to conduct business (City of Laredo, 2020). The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is responsible for managing the nation's border and port of entry security, preventing the crossing of illegal drugs and illegal goods entering the United States, and providing a strong defense against illicit smuggling and immigration is overwhelmed in Laredo, Texas, and the southern border regions (DHS.gov, 2016). The DHS Multi-Layered Defense, which needs to replace outdated technology with more equipment and implement new strategies, training, and policy, causes a traffic problem in the port of entry in Laredo, Texas, and the southern border (DHS.gov, 2016). This study will further explore the issue of DHS's multi-layered defense and the cause of traffic problems in the port of entry in Laredo, Texas. Moreover, this study's findings intend to improve the multilayered defense of U.S. border security and decrease the traffic problem in the Laredo, Texas, Port of Entry.

Problem Statement

Laredo, Texas Port of Entry (POE) is the biggest port on the southern border and the center of international trade and commerce, with the international crossing data of 2,087,808 commercial vehicles, 3,429,367 noncommercial vehicles, and 2,020,930 pedestrian crossings from the Mexico-U.S. border for the 2020 fiscal year (City of Laredo, 2020). Laredo, Texas POE is a vast opportunity for drug cartels and human smugglers and traffickers to traffic illegal drugs and commit additional crimes using legitimate trades and transportation and legitimate travelers from Mexico to the United States. The United States need to improve a lot, specifically the layers of border security and the traffic congestion in the U.S. – Mexico Laredo, Texas border. Outdated systems and equipment, new officers' skills and training, a new plan and strategy, and a new policy and laws in entering the United States are necessary for securing U.S. borders. Layers of U.S. border security improvement, especially in the vehicle and pedestrian crossing in the Gateways to the America Bridges 1 and Lincoln – Juarez Bridge 2 Laredo, Texas Port of Entry (POE) and commercial shipment inspection in international trade and commerce World Trade Bridge and Columbia Solidarity Bridge where drug traffickers' organization use trade and commerce to transport their tons of tons of illegal drugs and human smuggling operations. According to Mayer-Bruestle (2017), the "U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) inspect only four percent of commercial shipments, leaving a huge opportunity for smuggling drugs, weapons, and illegal aliens in the U.S." (p. 4). Mayer-Bruestle's (2017) statement is alarming and demonstrates the need for improvement to secure our borders and make the American people safe. CBP uses state-

of-the-art equipment and billions of dollars to detect, apprehend, and protect the American people. However, Drug Trafficking Organizations (DTOs) are winning the war against drugs because we are leaving them 96% of opportunities to cross their illegal drugs to America. These low inspection rates cause thousands of people to die of a drug overdose, contribute to a high crime rate, and destroy Americans' way of life.

Purpose of the Study

This qualitative study aimed to examine the problem of layered U.S. border security and to understand the vehicle and pedestrian traffic problems in the Mexico - U.S. border in Laredo, Texas, POE. The approach I will used for this research to address this problem will be qualitative research because "qualitative research creates a high-quality report by combining the opinions of participants, showing a multiform analysis of all of the factors involved in studying a topic or central phenomenon, making sure that the closing report is a correct reflection of participant views (validity), and integrating ample evidence for the codes or themes presented as results in the study" (Creswell, 2014. Chapter 3, p. 31). I will use qualitative methodology as the primary method, using interviews and open-ended questionnaires. The participants in this study will be employees of the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) assigned to the Laredo, Texas POE, such as the watch commander, chief, supervisors, field training officers, primary officers, and staff. From the analysis of the data recommendations, new strategies, plans, and policies will be made to improve the U.S. border security layers, improve the traffic flow of legitimate trades and commerce, and decrease the 1-2 hour wait time for travelers crossing from Mexico to the U.S. border.

In addition, policies should also help to deter and apprehend smugglers of illegal drugs and to stop human trafficking operations, the crossing of illegal aliens, and detect possible smuggling of terrorists to the U.S.

Research Question

This qualitative study's research question asks: RQ1 – How can U.S. Customs improve border security effectiveness and efficiency?

Theoretical Framework

The theories that may apply to this study are environmental criminology and rational choice theories. According to mSafedesigncouncil.org (2020), the environmental criminology theory explores, analyzes, and studies crime, criminality, and victimization as they relate to environments. Studying environmental criminology is important to understand how environments influence individual behavior within a geospatial context (Safedesigncouncil.org, 2020). This theory analyzes the relationships between space (geography), time, law, offender, and targets or victims – showing these elements as essential to constructing a criminal incident (Safedesigncouncil.org, 2020). However, the rational choice theory was based on the fundamental tenets of classical criminology – the belief that people can make their own decisions or choose their behavior and are motivated by the avoidance of pain and the pursuit of pleasure (Ontario Ministry of Children, Community, and Social Services, 2016). This means that if criminals observe the costs as too high, the act too dangerous, or the payment too small, they will choose not to be involved in the crime (Ontario Ministry of Children, Community, and Social Services, 2016). This theory relates to my dissertation topic and problem statement

because of my intent to study the criminal patterns and strategies of drug trafficking organizations that are smuggling illegal drugs, human trafficking operations, and sorting out criminal activities from legitimate pedestrians and travelers.

The environmental criminology and rational choice theories are the most appropriate for framing my proposed research. Studying criminal patterns, strategies, and operations will help law enforcement identify the targets, help the officers look for indications while inspecting travelers and international shipments, and discourage criminals from committing crimes. By targeting criminals, using new technology, and equipping officers with the skills to look for indications and signs of criminal activities, the traffic flow of travelers' and vehicles' inspection and processing will be improved, and traffic will move faster.

University of Southern California (USC) (n.d.) noted that the theoretical framework consists of concepts, together with their definitions and references to relevant scholarly literature, and the existing theory used for a particular study. The theoretical framework must demonstrate an understanding of theories and concepts applicable to the research topic and relate to the broader areas of knowledge being considered (USC, n.d.).

Nature of the Study

The nature of this study will be qualitative research with a case study approach (Creswell, 2014). According to Creswell (2014), "a qualitative research design came from fields such as sociology, psychology, and the humanities. They are not called experiments or surveys" (Creswell, 2014. p. 30).

Moreover, Creswell (2014) added that in "a case study qualitative research, we explore single or multiple cases to learn how people address a specific issue" (p. 30). In studying "A Case Study of Layered Border Security and Traffic Problem at Laredo, Texas Port of Entry (POE)," I will use qualitative methodology using interviews and open-ended questionnaires. In this study, my participants will be U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) employees such as watch commanders, chiefs, supervisors, federal officers, and civilian staff (mission support specialists). They have experience and knowledge in daily operations traffic problems on the U.S.-Mexico Laredo border.

Definitions

U.S. Border Security: CBP's border security mission is led at ports of entry by CBP officers from the Office of Field Operations along U.S. Borders by agents from the U.S. Border Patrol and from the air and sea by agents from Air and Marine Operations (CBP.gov, 2020).

Biometric technologies: A biometric is a measurable biological (anatomical and physiological) and behavioral characteristic that can be used for automated recognition (DHS.gov, 2020).

Canine police dog: Also known as K-9, is a dog specifically trained to assist law enforcement in tracking, trailing, and detecting narcotics, firearms or weapons, money, and illegal contrabands (nationalpolicedogfoundtion.org, 2020).

Customs and border protection (CBP) officers: CBP's primary mission is preventing terrorism. CBP Officers' job is to secure the border and avoid drug smuggling

while enforcing immigration laws, protecting agriculture, and ensuring trade compliance (CBP.gov, 2020).

Criminal justice system: is the combination of courts and legal processes that deal with crime (Collins Dictionary, 2021).

Drug smuggling: Involves moving drugs from one state to another or even one country to another. This must be an illegal substance, or if it is a legal drug, then the smugglers must actively avoid paying customs duties and taxes to face charges for drug smuggling (Cohen & Associates, 2021).

Drug trafficking organizations (DTOs): The DTOs can be described as a global business with forward and backward linkages for managing the supply and distribution of illegal drugs in many countries (Beittel, 2015).

Human Smuggling: is defined as the importation of people into the United States involving deliberate evasion of immigration laws. This offense includes bringing illegal aliens into the United States as well as the unlawful transportation and harboring of aliens already in the U.S. (Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE).gov "Blue Campaign," 2017).

Illegal weapons: These are weapons that fall into illegal possession, including firearms to all civilians: machine guns, sawed-off shotguns, explosives, and bombs (Jacoby & Meyers.com, 2021).

Mobile x-ray: The Vehicle and Cargo Inspection System, known as VACIS and the Z-Backscatter Van, is a large X-ray machine technology that scans semitrailers, personal vehicles, delivery vans, and recreational vehicles. Both X-ray machines can

detect anything from big, hidden compartments down to small packages, or even something as small as a handgun, and pick up people being smuggled in a trailer or vehicle (CBP.gov "CBP Screens Vehicles at Super Bowl," 2021).

Multilayered defense: The Multilayered defense strategy includes programs and initiatives such as C-TPAT (Customs-Trade Partnership Against Terrorism), a public-private and international partnership with nearly 5,800 businesses to improve baseline security standards for supply chain and container security, Screening, and Inspection: CBP

Screen 100% of all cargo before it arrives in the United States using intelligence and cutting-edge technologies, including all high-risk cargo. CSI (Container Security Initiative) CBP enables working with host government Customs Services to examine high-risk maritime containerized cargo at foreign seaports and before they are loaded on board vessels destined for the U.S., 24-Hour Rule: a CBP requirement that a manifest must be provided to CBP 24 hours before the sea container being loaded onto the vessel in the foreign port. Lastly, use of Cutting-Edge Technology: CBP utilizes large-scale X-ray and gamma ray machines and radiation detection devices to screen cargo. In addition, CBP uses biometrics to help verify the identities of most non-U.S. citizens arriving at U.S. ports of entry, as well as to identify non-U.S. citizens who may be encountered attempting to enter the country illegally (CBP.gov "Multi-Layered Defense," 2021).

Nuclear weapon: A nuclear weapon is a device designed to release energy explosively due to nuclear fission, nuclear fusion, or a combination of the two processes (Cochran, n.d.).

Stakeholder: A person entrusted with the stakes of bettors; one with a stake in an enterprise; one who is involved in or affected by a course of action (Meriam-Webster, n.d.).

Terrorist: relating to, or characteristic of terrorists or terrorism: practicing or involving violent acts of terror (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

Trusted Traveler Programs: The Department of Homeland Security official U.S. Government Trusted Traveler Programs for travelers customized to fit various travel needs. The Trusted Travelers Programs allow members to use expedited lanes when crossing international borders and at the airport (DHS.gov "Trusted Traveler Programs," 2020).

Assumption

A lot of assumptions were identified as part of this qualitative research case study. First, I assume that the data collected from the participants will be truthful. I will use field notes, interviews, peer-reviewed scholarly journals, dependent variables, and independent variables. The second assumption is that the research should follow the ethical standards outlined by Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB), which is responsible for ensuring that all Walden University research complies with the university's ethical standards and U.S. federal regulations.

Scope and Delimitations

This research study will compare the effect of securing the border on traffic problems in the Laredo U.S. border. The research will focus on layered border security, procedures in processing and inspection of travelers, and fast lane or express lane

programs for travelers crossing Mexico and U.S. borders. This research study will also seek to determine if securing the border causes the traffic problem in the Laredo U.S. - Mexican border and find a solution to this traffic flow problem.

A theoretical perspective, such as environmental criminology theory, was considered for this study. Safedesigncouncil.org (2020) stated that the environmental criminology theory explores, analyzes, and studies crime, criminality, and victimization as they relate to environments. The environmental criminology theory is important to understand how environments influence individual behavior within a geospatial context (Safedesigncouncil.org, 2020). Laredo is one of the biggest trades and commerce of U.S. – Mexico trade relations and a gateway to the most significant highway in the U.S. Therefore, drug trafficking organizations and drug smugglers take advantage of using trades and commerce and the city of Laredo to conduct their illegal activities and crossing their illicit drugs to the U.S.

This study was limited to CBP federal officers and civilian staff who saw the daily CBP operations and strategy at the Laredo border. Future research can also be conducted on other southern borders to resolve and decrease the traffic problem at the U.S.–Mexico border.

Limitations of Study

This study will examine the problem of layered U.S. border security and analyze the vehicle and pedestrian flow of traffic problems in Laredo, Texas, POE crossing from Mexico to the U.S. border. Using a qualitative case study research design shows the strengths and limitations of using qualitative methods. "Qualitative data collection is

usually by interviews, open-ended questionnaires, surveys, or focus groups, but gathering qualitative data may also be managed through case studies or from a written document" (the University of Southern Denmark, n.d.).

According to the University of Southern Denmark (n.d.), the strength of qualitative methods is that data collection is usually cost-efficient, provides more detailed information to explain complex issues, provides multiple methods for gathering data on sensitive subjects, and complements. If the qualitative approach has strengths, there are also limitations to a qualitative method. Data collection is usually time-consuming, and the qualitative method is more difficult to analyze; it does not fit neatly into standard categories and cannot be generalized to the study population or community (the University of Southern Denmark, n.d.).

Significance of the Study

The significance of my study was to examined the critical problems of the border security layers, the cause of the problem of the flow of traffic on the border, and the officer's processing and inspection of travelers in Laredo, Texas. This study will be able to draw some conclusions and recommendations to improve the layers of border security, the flow of traffic, and the processing and inspection of travelers. The information afforded by this case study research will allow intensive analysis and in-depth examination of the problems and solutions in the layer of border security, border traffic, and processing and inspection of travelers from Mexico to the U.S. This study will improve the border security layer, increase the assessment to deter illicit drugs and human smuggling to America, give a solution to the flow of traffic in the border, and

better the processing and inspection of travelers without compromising the security and the safety of our children and people of Laredo, Texas and the American people.

Summary

The objective of Chapter 1 was to introduce the research problem and the multiple-layered U.S. border security. The first chapter contained the problem statement, the purpose of the study, the significance of the study, the theoretical framework, the research question, the nature of the study, definitions, assumptions, strengths, and limitations, and the summary. Chapter 2 will introduce a literature review and existing research on problems in the U.S. border security and the cause of traffic problems in the U.S. – Mexico border, specifically in Laredo, Texas.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The U.S. border security issue in containing illicit drugs, human smuggling, and other criminal activities causes a traffic problem in Laredo, Texas, even more so in the U.S. southern borders – gaining a national and government concern. Reviewing the criminal justice system's historical point is essential to understanding the problem and finding a solution to the traffic problem and the layers of border security in Laredo, Texas, and all the U.S. southern borders Port of Entry (POE). For the past several decades, the issue of securing the U.S. border, the smuggling of illegal drugs, and human smuggling operations in the south of the border, specifically in Laredo, Texas, has been nationwide and political in the U.S. and has had a significant impact on America's criminal justice system, the community of Laredo, and American people. As a result of these problems, the traffic flow on the southern border, specifically in Laredo, Texas, created a huge problem and a vast effect on our community, economy, trade and commerce, health and air quality, and people of Laredo's way of life.

The city of Laredo is on the Texas, U.S. – Mexico border, with a population of 265,761 in the year 2020. According to World Population Review (n.d.), Laredo is the 10th largest city in Texas and the 81st largest city in the U.S., with a growing rate of 0.62 annually. The population has increased by 12.57% since the last recorded census in 2010, with 236,091. In 2021, Laredo reached its highest population of 265,761, with an average income of $64,705 and a poverty rate of 26.69% (World Population Review, n.d.).

The City of Laredo is one of the busiest land border ports for trade and commerce between the U.S. and Mexico and has one of the highest poverty rates in the United States (World Population Review, n.d.). Laredo is one of the busiest land border ports in the country for trade and commerce. With the highest poverty rates in the U.S., Drug Trafficking Organizations (DTOs) use this opportunity to use less fortunate Laredo people and young people and take advantage of the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) that former President Bill Clinton signed. This NAFTA trade agreement came into effect in 1994, and DTOs take this opportunity to smuggle their illicit drugs to the U.S. and operate their criminal activities, such as human smuggling, gun smuggling, money laundering, and other illegal activities in Laredo, Texas. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) / Customs and Border Protection (CBP) explained that drug seizures in FY2020 compared to the year FY2019 increased, such as Methamphetamine seizures (crystal and liquid) increased by 25%, Fentanyl seizures increased by 71%. Marijuana seizures increased by 5% (CBP.GOV (Enforcement Statistics), 2021). This means that the men and women of the DHS/CBP are doing a good job conducting enforcement and intercepting these illegal drugs. DTOs are also beefing up their operation to smuggle drugs to the U.S. because of the supply and demand in the U.S. In this study, I wanted to include literature on layered border security, deterrence, and enforcement to solve and decrease the traffic problem in Laredo, Texas. In Chapter 2, I address layered border security, deterrence, and enforcement, the literature gap, and why research on the Laredo border traffic is important.

Literature Search Strategy

I searched for relevant literature from the Walden University Library EBSCOhost database, Criminal Justice Database, Sage Journals, ProQuest, and Google Scholar. I limited the search to peer-reviewed scholarly journals. The research must be from 2014 to the present using Border Security, U.S. Homeland Security, U.S. – Mexico border, Constructing Security on the U.S. – Mexico border, Layered Border Security, and Biometric and Face recognition in Automated Border Control as the keywords. Furthermore, I utilized archival data from the Department of Homeland Security, CBP Office of the Field Office (CBP OFO) Laredo, Texas, the City of Laredo, Crime Statistics, and different article journal studies related to U.S. border security after examining and reviewing some articles, dissertations, and references during my searches.

I used the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), CBP Office of the Field Office (CBP OFO), and City of Laredo report to examine and analyze the operational system and the cause of the traffic problem in Laredo, Texas U.S. – Mexico border and most of the southern border Port of Entry (POE). Sufficient articles I found in reviewing the literature support my study, my research topic, and my research question.

Theoretical Foundation

I used environmental criminology and rational choice theories to analyze layered border security and the traffic problem at the Laredo, Texas, U.S. – Mexico border. Scholars have previously applied these theories similarly to this study, and I will discuss the theoretical proposals for the theory.

Overview of Environmental Criminology Theory

The environmental criminology Theory explores, analyzes, and studies crime, criminality, and victimization related to environments (Safe design council.org, 2020). Studying environmental criminology theory in this research is very important to understand how environments influence individual behavior within a geospatial context (Safe design council.org, 2020). Safe design council.org (2020) explained that this theory analyzes the relationships between space (geography), time, law, offender, and targets or victims – showing these elements as essential to constructing a criminal incident.

Overview of Rational Choice Theory

The rational choice theory was based on the fundamental tenets of classical criminology. The belief is that people can make their own decisions or choose their behavior and are motivated by avoiding pain and pursuing pleasure (Ontario Ministry of Children, Community, and Social Services, 2016). This means that if criminals observe the costs as too high, the act too dangerous, or the payment too small, they will choose not to be involved in the crime (Ontario Ministry of Children, Community, and Social Services, 2016).

Explanation for Use of Environmental Criminology Theory and Rational Choice Theory

This theory's relevance to my dissertation topic and problem statement is to study criminal patterns, causes, and why people commit crimes. Through these theories, I intend to learn criminal organizations' strategies and patterns of drug trafficking organizations that are smuggling illegal drugs, human trafficking operations, and

operating criminal activities in the southern borders of Laredo, Texas. Lastly, these theories will help reveal how to sort out criminal activities from legitimate pedestrians and travelers.

One example of environmental criminology theory is criminal organizations operating drugs and gun smugglers in Laredo, Texas. These criminal organizations and offenders take advantage of geography. They are not scared to do illegal activities or commit crimes on the Laredo border because they can easily make money for smuggling drugs, guns, and illicit activities because they know the area. Criminals and offenders can immediately and efficiently run and hide in Mexico so they cannot be arrested and walk away from their crimes.

Another contributing factor is poverty. Laredo, Texas, has one of the highest poverty rates in the nation, with 26.69% (World Population Review, n.d.). People of Laredo, especially young and poor people, are vulnerable to criminal organizations that offer them money to commit a crime.

Moreover, Bond (2015) explained, "Rational Choice Theory implies that criminals are rational in their decision-making, and despite the consequences, that the benefits of committing the crime outweigh the punishment." An excellent example of this theory is young people or offenders who decide to smuggle illicit drugs, illegal weapons, undocumented immigrants, and other criminal activities by weighing the means of benefits of making a significant and easy amount of money offers from criminal organizations and deciding to commit a crime and violate the law despite the punishment of getting caught and arrested.

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and/or Concepts.

This literature review will help us understand, provide a foundation, and provide a rationale for this case study research. I conducted a literature review from previous and current literature to determine a gap in the literature. In this study, I found a gap in the literature on layered border security and traffic problems in processing pedestrians and vehicles crossing from the Mexico – U.S. Laredo border. Little research has studied whether layered border security affects traffic flow in the U.S. – Mexico Laredo border and whether people living along the borders experience daily traffic problems. Researchers who conducted studies on the U.S. border traffic congestion in the U.S. – Mexico borders port of entry have the same opinion.

> Penelope et al. (2015) stated that the "delays and community traffic problem associated with U.S. and Mexico border ports of entry have been criticized for causing economic losses and increasing social stressors." In addition, Aldrete (2018) argued that people who live in those cities know that the traffic along an increasingly active international border affects their lives daily and traffic delays at the border affect air quality that affects the health of travelers and the community, economic development, and employment opportunities in that community and statewide.

Department of Homeland Security (DHS) / CBP Multi-Layered Defense

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) created a program and initiatives that combine a multi-layered defense strategy for securing U.S. borders, ports, and the American people (DHS, 2020 "Multi-layered defense"). The DHS strategy is responsible

for preventing the passage of individuals or goods from entering the U.S. unlawfully, working overseas to strengthen U.S. defenses against illegal smuggling and immigration, and managing the nation's borders and ports of entry (DHS, 2020 "Multi-layered defense").

The following DHS program and initiatives of multi-layered defense strategy include:

Customs-Trade Partnership Against Terrorism (C-TPAT): This program is a public-private and international partnership created by the CBP with nearly 5,800 businesses to improve baseline security standards for container security and supply chain (DHS, 2020 "Multi-layered defense").

Container Security Initiative (CSI): In working with the host government Customs Services, CBP enables the examine high-risk maritime containerized cargo at foreign seaports before they are loaded on board vessels destined for the U.S. (DHS, 2020 "Multi-layered defense").

24-Hour Rule: This CBP initiative requires manifest information to be presented to CBP 24 hours before the sea container is loaded onto the vessels in the foreign port (DHS, 2020 "Multi-layered defense").

Screening and Inspection: CBP and Officers inspect and screen vehicles, pedestrians, and 100 percent of all cargo before it arrives in the U.S. using intelligence and cutting-edge technologies. CBP screens and inspects all high-risk cargo (DHS, 2020 "Multi-layered defense"). Officers' skills and experience are fundamental to intercepting

and apprehending drug trafficking organization's trends and patterns of illegal smuggling and operations.

Use of Cutting-Edge Technology: CBP is using large-scale X-ray, gamma ray machines, and radiation detection devices to screen cargo for any nuclear weapons or weapons of mass destruction (WMD) that are a threat to the U.S. and other countries. In addition, CBP also uses biometric and face recognition technology to help verify the identities of most non-U.S. citizens arriving at U.S. ports of entry, as well as to identify non-U.S. citizens they encounter attempting to enter the country illegally (DHS, 2020 "Multi-layered defense").

DHS / CBP Trusted Traveler Program

The Trusted Traveler Program (Global Entry, TSA Pre, SENTRI, NEXUS, and FAST) is a Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Transportation Security Administration (TSA), and Customs and Border Protection (CBP) initiative program that is a risk-based program used to facilitate the entry of pre-approved travelers (DHS, 2020 "Trusted Travelers Program"). These programs offer travelers a faster security screening process for pre-vetted domestic and international travelers, easing long lines and freeing both CBP officers and TSA security to focus on unknown travelers or passengers (U.S. Travel Association, 2021).

Global Entry: is a CBP program that allows expedited clearance for pre-approved, low-risk travelers upon arrival in the U.S. (CBP.gov, 2020 "Global Entry").

NEXUS: this program allows pre-screened travelers to expedite the process when entering the U.S. and Canada (CBP.GOV, 2019 "NEXUS"). Members of this program

use specific processing lanes at designated northern border ports of entry. The NEXUS kiosks are utilized when entering Canada by air, and Global Entry kiosks are utilized when entering the U.S. via Canadian Preclearance airports. In addition, NEXUS members also receive expedited processing at marine reporting locations (CBO.GOV, 2019 "NEXUS").

Secure Electronic Network for Travelers Rapid Inspection (SENTRI): the SENTRI program is an initiative by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) that permits expedited clearance for pre-approved, low-risk travelers upon arrival in the U.S. (CBP.gov, 2019 "SENTRI"). Members of this program may enter the U.S. by using assigned primary lanes at southern land border ports. In addition, applicants in this program must be pre-approved and undergo a rigorous background check and in-person interview (CBP.gov, 2019 "SENTRI").

Free and Secure Trade (FAST): this program is for known low-risk commercial clearance shipments entering the U.S. from Canada and Mexico. This program was initiated after the 9/11 World Trade Center attack. This innovative, trusted traveler and shipper program allows fast processing for commercial carriers and truck drivers from the U.S., Canada, and Mexico who have completed background checks and comply with their eligibility requirements. (CBP.gov, 2020 "FAST").

Positive Impact of DHS Multi-Layered Defense

Keeping America safe is the primary goal of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) (DHS.gov, 2021 "About DHS"). The DHS created programs and initiatives to meet these goals, which serve as a multi-layered defense. Multi-layered

defense refers to a defense system that uses several elements to shield and protect the U.S. and American people from the threats of smuggling of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) (Nuclear or Biological), illegal smuggling of firearms, illegal smuggling of illicit drugs, immigration, and preventing the crossing of illegal goods and species to the U.S. that threaten the U.S. economy (DHS, 2020 "Multi-layered defense"). The Multi-layered defense programs and initiatives help keep America safe, prevent and mitigate any threat, and give prosperity to the American people, economic growth, and stability to the nation (DHS, 2020 "Multi-layered defense").

Positive outcome of Trusted Traveler Programs for the travelers

The Trusted Traveler Program can positively impact travelers and DHS Officers (TSA and CBP). It permits the fast processing of pre-approved and low-risk travelers at some ports of entry (Kolker, 2021). According to Kolker (2021), these programs help the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) and Customs and Border Protection (CBP) accomplish their objectives of helping the lawful flow of people and goods. At the same time, these programs prevent the entry of criminals, terrorists, contraband, and unauthorized individuals from entering the U.S. (Kolker, 2021). Furthermore, these programs are beneficial to CBP Officers by reducing inspection for trusted travelers and focusing on looking for contraband, terrorists, criminals, and individuals using illegal and counterfeit documents from entering the U.S. These programs and initiatives are also beneficial to the trusted travelers for waiting in the lines for shorter times than usual travelers staying a long time.

Alternative ways to avoid border traffic.

In previous years, researchers studied traffic borders to understand better and measure traffic delays. According to Aldrete (2018), the "El Paso Center for International Intelligent Transportation Research at the Texas A&M Transportation Institute has developed and installed a system to accurately measure commercial truck wait times at the border crossings in El Paso and Laredo." This system was very successful and led to it being implemented in Arizona and New Mexico (Aldrete, 2018). This system was adopted and expanded by Customs and Border Protection (CBP) as CBP Border Wait Times (BWT) (CBP.gov "BWT," n.d.). The CBP Border Wait Times (BWT) expanded to the Canadian Border Port of Entry and Mexican Border Port of Entry for commercial vehicles, passenger vehicles, and pedestrians (CBP.gov "BWT," n.d.).

Another alternative way to avoid border traffic congestion in the Laredo border bridge is using the U.S. – Mexico bridge camera. The City of Laredo provides bridge cameras to the community of Laredo, trade, and commerce, and to travelers to monitor and watch the traffic in real-time to avoid traffic, long lines, and wait time (City of Laredo, 2021). Some cities like El Paso, Texas; San Ysidro, California; Nogales, Arizona; and other cities close to the U.S. – Mexico borders also provide bridge cameras for the same concept to avoid traffic congestion, save time, money, and gas, and avoid aggravation (Border Traffic.com, n.d.).

Crime Prevention

Crime Prevention is the recognition, anticipation, and assessment of a crime risk and the inception of some action to reduce or eliminate it (Houston Police Dept. (HPD),

2021). Imprisonment is also believed to deter criminals and smugglers from committing crimes. However, working as a detention deputy at the Sheriff's Department in Houston, Texas (decades ago), a prison in America is like a hotel or vacation spot for criminals and violators. Inmates were given three meals a day (meal plan by nutritionist), controlled temperature, free clinic checkups, free medicines and personal hygiene like soap and toothpaste, LCD television with cable of HBO or ESPN, and free vocational schools for recidivism program. These are paid for and provided with Taxpayer money (Parker, 2016).

According to Wagner and Rabuy (2017), the U.S. government's expenses on public jails and prisons total $80.7 billion. Ash (2019) argues that U.S. taxpayer money goes more into the U.S. prison system than it does into U.S. education, with 15 U.S. States spending $27,000 more per prisoner than they do per student. This is the reason why recidivism is still high in this country. Instead of taxpayers' money and the U.S. government budget going into the prisons, this budget should go to U.S. education to improve our children's learning, update school buildings and technology, and provide free education for colleges for those students who cannot afford college so they can have a better future and will not end up in the street or as a gang member.

Neighborhood Scout (2021) reported that crime analytics in Laredo, Texas, is considerably higher than the national average across all communities in America, from the largest to the smallest. In addition, based on the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) crime data, Laredo, Texas, is not one of the safest communities in America. Laredo has a higher crime rate than 72% of the state's cities and towns of all sizes (Neighborhood

Scout, 2021). For effective crime prevention, we need to study and understand drug traffickers' organizations' (DTOs) operations, trends, and patterns. We need to educate the community about the effect and severity of punishment for drug smuggling, human trafficking, illegal aliens, and other criminal activities in the borders of the U.S.

Lastly, DHS local and state law enforcement agencies must partner with the community (stakeholders like families, business owners, and companies) to organize a crime watch organization. Crime watch organizations are nonprofit organizations organized by the community to help law enforcement prevent crimes and offer a cash reward for anonymous information or tips on criminal activities and operations.

Several studies suggest that crime does not happen equally in city areas. Instead, many crimes occur in significant areas, or "hot spots," producing most criminal activities (Braga et al. 2019). According to Braga et al. (2019), applying hot spot policing is supported by two main theoretical crime prevention mechanisms: crime opportunity reduction and deterrence. Hot spot policing has become a famous way for law enforcement agencies and departments to prevent criminal activities. Police from different departments report that having the ability to handle and analyze crime data in sophisticated ways and, through management advanced technology such as CompStat, put officers responsible for executing problem-solving techniques to control hot spot areas (Braga et al. 2019).

The Principle of Criminal Law

Criminal law is a system of laws that punishes persons who commit crimes (Cornell Law School, n.d.). Therefore, according to Cornell Law School (n.d.), "in the

civil case where two individuals question their rights, a criminal prosecution involves the government deciding whether to punish an individual for either an act or omission." Cornell Law School (n.d.) added that "a "crime" is any act or omission in violation of a law prohibiting the action or omission."

Elements of a Crime. According to Cornell Law School (n.d.), "a person commits a crime if he or she acts in a way that fulfills every element of an offense." In general, there are three elements involved in every crime: First, the act or conduct ("actus reus"); second, the person's mental state at the time of the act ("men's rea"); and the third is the causation between the act and the effect (typically either "proximate causation" or "but-for causation") (Cornell Law School, n.d.). In a criminal trial, the government has the burden of proof to prove every element of the crime beyond a reasonable doubt (Cornell Law School, n.d.).

Types of Crimes. There are four categories of crimes: Felonies, Misdemeanors, Inchoate offenses, and Strict liability offenses (Cornell Law School, n.d.). The federal government and every state determine what sort of conduct to criminalize. Still, in common law, there are nine major felonies: murder, robbery, manslaughter, rape, sodomy, larceny, arson, mayhem, and burglary (Cornell Law School, n.d.) in addition to various misdemeanors (like assault, false imprisonment, battery, perjury, and intimidation of jurors) (Cornell Law School, n.d.).

Summary and Conclusions

The literature review (Chapter 2) analyzed the following themes: DHS/CBP Multi-layered defense, DHS/CBP Trusted Travelers Program, Positive impact of Multi-

layered defense, Positive outcome of Trusted Travelers Program, Alternative ways to avoid border traffic, Crime Prevention, and the principle of Criminal Law and the U.S. Policy. The literature review provided a foundation for this research on DHS/CBP Multi-layered defense and the Positive impact of DHS/CBP Multi-layered defense, DHS/CBP Trusted Travelers Program, and the Positive outcome of DHS/CBP Trusted Travelers Program, Alternative ways to avoid border traffic, and Crime Prevention (Imprisonment, Crime analysis, and Hot spots policing). The literature review revealed a gap in layered border security and traffic problems in processing pedestrians and vehicles crossing the Mexico – U.S. Laredo border. Chapter 3 will discuss methodology, data collection, and data analysis.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

This qualitative research aims to examine the problem of layered U.S. border security and review the vehicle and pedestrian traffic problems in the Mexico – U.S. border of Laredo, Texas POE. In this study, I used the theoretical approach of environmental criminology theory and rational choice theory to assess layered border security and the traffic problem at the Laredo, Texas, POE U.S. – Mexico border. To explore the relationship between securing the border and the traffic problem in the U.S border in Laredo, Texas, and to solve the traffic problem on the border of Laredo, Texas, this study's research question asks:

RQ1. – How can U.S. Customs improve border security effectiveness and efficiency?

This chapter will explain how to accomplish the research goals through data collection and analysis, and I will present the study findings and results.

Research Design and Rationale

In this qualitative study, I used a qualitative research method. Qualitative research is a type of educational research where the researcher relies on participants' views (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative research is defined as "the study of the nature of phenomena," including "their quality, different manifestations, the context in which they appear or the perspectives from which they can be perceived," but excluding "their range, frequency, and place in an objectively determined chain of cause and effect" (Busetto et al., 2020, p.1).

Research problems that can be approached particularly well using qualitative methods include assessing complex multi-component interventions or systems (of change) and addressing questions beyond "what works" towards "what works for whom, when, how, and why." Using qualitative methods can also help shed light on the "softer" side of border crossing. For example, while quantitative evaluations can measure the costs and benefits of border-crossing methods, qualitative research can help better understand officers' stress and their perceptions of its efficacy. In collecting qualitative data, I will need to recruit CBP officers, supervisors, executive officials, and civilian staff of U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP). I will attempt to recruit 15-20 participants for individual interviews. Data collection methods will consist of interviews. The researcher will collect data mostly from text or words, audio recordings, field notes, as well as asking general and comprehensive questions using open-ended questionnaires. (Creswell, 2014). After collecting qualitative data, the researcher conducts a document analysis and presents the findings in narrative form or story (Creswell, 2014).

A nonprobability sampling method with judgment (purposive) sampling will be used in this study. Judgment (purposive) sampling is also known as selective or subjective sampling, where techniques rely on the researchers' judgment when choosing who to ask to participate in (Trochim, 2020).

These methods allowed me to analyze and address the problem and the purpose of the study, answer the stated research question, and find a solution to the layers of border security and flow of traffic issues in the border of Laredo, Texas.

In using Judgement (purposive) sampling, I will select eight participants who have been working in the inspection division for 1 year to 5 years (rookies) and seven participants who have been working in the inspection division for 5 years to 10 years (veterans).

Role of the Researcher

I will interview key personnel in the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), as well as the Civilian Staff. I will conduct interviews (open-ended) to answer the researcher's questions (see Appendix B). I seek to establish a good relationship with the participants that reflects my interest in securing the American border and solving the traffic problem in the U.S-Mexico Port of Entry, especially at the Laredo, Texas border.

The contributors have knowledge of multi-layered defense and confidential information in securing the U.S. border. In this study, ethical issues are possible in revealing officers' names and sharing sensitive government information with the researcher. The federal officers used alias names or addresses, such as "Officer 1" and "Officer 2," to conceal and protect their name and family. In addition, federal officers were only to share data and information that does not compromise the safety and security of the borders and the American community. There was no conflict of interest in this research, and I did not use any incentives to encourage participants to participate or answer researcher questions.

Methodology

Participants Selection Logic

Study Population

The study and target population for this qualitative study were U.S. Federal Officers who work for U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and the Civilian staff of CBP. They experience daily traffic congestion and can share ideas to solve the traffic problem. The sample consisted of officers and civilian staff of CBP. In this research, I will use archival data to determine the impact of securing the border and traffic problems in the community of Laredo, Texas. In addition, data and reports were collected from CBP and the City of Laredo.

Sampling Technique

The targeted population included CBP officers, and civilian staff of CBP. This research included interviews and document analysis. Ten CBP federal officers' participants were assigned and actively and directly engaged in inspection division and border security, as well as ten civilian staff. I will use a judgment Purposive sampling strategy to select federal officers of CBP with one to ten years of experience working at the inspection division and civilian staff who work for daily CBP operations for daily statistics in Laredo border operations. Judgment purposive sampling, also known as a selective or subjective sampling strategy, where an approach relies on the scholar's or researcher's judgment when selecting who to ask to participate (Trochim, 2020).

Data Instrumentation

Using qualitative research, Plano Clark and Ivankova (2016) pointed out that "the researchers focus on exploring individuals' experiences with a phenomenon of interest by collecting and analyzing narrative or text data expressed in words and images using the broad, open-ended question" (Plano Clark & Ivankova, 2016, p. 4). I will utilize qualitative data in my Dissertation/Capstone Project. Data will be collected using questionnaires, in-depth face-to-face interviews, and document analysis (Creswell, 2014). Furthermore, participants from federal officers and leadership of CBP, such as watch commander, chief, supervisor, and civilian staff (mission support specialist), who experience the daily operations in processing and inspection of travelers from Mexico, which I need an average of 10-15 persons. Interviews will occur in a conference room or public library facilities. I will utilize audio recordings to interview participants individually. Note-taking will also be used during each interview, and participants will be asked open-ended questionnaires (see Appendix B). I will follow up with the participants with any descriptive questions if necessary. I will design an interview guide to assist me in interviewing participants (see Appendix B). The interviews will be based on the main goals of this study.

The foundation for placing the instrument is that the data needed for this study was distinct, and I must set the question that the responses from the participants address the research question in this research. Using open-ended questions and an interview guide gave me more chances to examine the participants' experience with the border security and traffic problem in the Laredo U.S. – Mexico border.

Interview Process

In the interview process, I will first consult the Institutional Review Board to approve interviewing co-workers and Officers from my workplace, ensuring that I comply with the IRB policy and do not violate research ethics. In collecting qualitative data, I will need to recruit co-workers/co-officers, supervisors, executive officials, and civilian staff of U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) of about 15-20 participants for individual interviews. I will collect data consisting primarily of words or text and audio or video recordings, and I will ask comprehensive and general questions using interviews and open-ended questionnaires. (Creswell, 2014). After collecting qualitative data, the researcher analyzes and presents the narrative form or story (Creswell, 2014).

Survey and Assessment

A nonprobability sampling method with the Judgment (Purposive) sampling will be used in this study. Judgment (Purposive) sampling is also known as selective or subjective sampling, where techniques rely on the researchers' judgment when selecting who to ask to participate (Trochim, 2020). In addition, the results of the interviews will also assess the problem and cause of the lack of border security and traffic flow at the Laredo, Texas, border.

Procedures for Pilot Study

I will conduct a pilot study to establish if my questionnaires are appropriate for my research study. The pilot study will be conducted in a public library reserve room for privacy via email, phone, or person. I will conduct three sample interviews to decide if my questions will provide excellent and detailed data for my research. If the outcomes of

my pilot study were good, no adjustment or revision was necessary, but if participants

commented that the questions were lengthy and redundant, the questions would be edited

and adjusted.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Criteria followed the recruitment techniques for the participants in this study. The

researcher recruited CBP Federal officers and civilian staff for the pilot and main study

through social media group chat. The selected participants for federal officers were based

on their working experience in the primary (inspection division). All participants in this

study were willing to participate in the research and complete and sign the consent form.

Authorization should be approved by the committee chair, Walden University, and the

Institution Review Board (IRB) with Walden University's approval number 04-17-23-

0754913 and expires on April 16, 2024, before data collection occurs. The data collection

was processed for two weeks for analysis and will follow my interpretation of the data

and findings. Data was collected from interviews, discussions, and archival data from the

U.S. Customs and Border Protection and the City of Laredo.

Data Collection. I will use a sampling method, a nonprobability sampling method

with the Judgement (Purposive) sampling will be used in this study. Judgment

(Purposive) sampling is also known as selective or subjective sampling, where techniques

rely on the researchers' judgment when choosing who to ask to participate or select

participants (Trochim, 2020). I will conduct face-to-face interviews with five questions to

be completed. Data was collected from interviews and document analysis. The

discussions and questionnaires took place through telephone/cellphone or zoom meetings

due to participants' busy schedules and venue accessibility. I will reserve this room for privacy purposes. I can also utilize libraries for interviews, and I will reserve this room for participants' availability and privacy purposes. Data was recorded through field notes with an IRB-approved voice recorder, but not a video recorder due to participant's privacy purposes and if the researcher needs to replay some of the discussion for clarification. After data was collected from these interviews, transcripts were verified, and participants were debriefed, followed by data analysis.

Data Analysis Plan

The analytical strategy I will use to analyze the data is data coding. In this dissertation study, I will be using qualitative data coding. According to Saldana (2015), "a code is a word or short phrase that symbolizes an attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data." Saldana (2015) also explained that qualitative research researchers should follow multiple data analysis steps. In this study, step one is the precoding. As Walden University (2020) noted, "precoding provides a systematic way for a researcher to align the theoretical framework with data collection and analysis." These codes develop as the researcher gathers data from data sources such as transcripts, documents, and notes (Saldana, 2015). The next step is coding all data collected by creating a code category and discovering the relationship between codes. The following steps are to note emerging patterns and meanings and analyze the data using a matrix or table to display the differences and similarities (Miles et al. 2014). I will also utilize NVivo and MAXQDA to identify common themes and characteristics. In addition, I will be utilizing data preparation in this qualitative study.

According to Trochim (2020), "data preparation involves checking or logging the data in, checking the data for accuracy, entering this data into the computer, transforming the data, and developing and documenting a database structure that integrates the various measures."

Threats to Validity

In every dissertation, the essential elements of the research were constructing the validity of the study. Qualitative data was taken from U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and the City of Laredo Database. This data may vary from this year to past years. Therefore, analysis, testing, and comparison are necessary for effective and efficient border security and to decrease the traffic problem in the Laredo Port of Entry (POE).

Implementing layered border security is a strategy to make the American people safe and secure from threats such as terrorist threats, nuclear weapons, weapons threats, and smuggling of illegal drugs crossing through our U.S. – Mexico borders, which kill thousands of our children and affect American families. This strategy analyzes the effectiveness of securing the U.S. borders, especially in Laredo, Texas, and to ensure if this strategy did or did not impact the traffic flows of vehicles, pedestrians, and trade and commerce in Laredo, Texas borders. Comparison of Officers with interview skills, knowledge of criminal activity indicators, what to look for versus Officers without interview skills, knowledge of signs of illegal activities, and what to look for. This strategy is to see if Officers' performance and data have a positive or nonexistent impact

and learn how the strategy affected traffic flow in the Laredo, Texas, U.S. border. This involved external validity.

Internal threats of validity in this research may be issues such as the increase or decrease of several travelers that may cause an increase or decrease in drug apprehension rate and traffic problems. Therefore, the history of the growth of people traveling to the Laredo U.S. border and the rise in drug smuggling operations and seizures may pose a threat to internal validity. Since this qualitative research is compared to secondary data analysis, it is vital to understand the trends of drug smuggling and criminal activities at the Laredo U.S. border. To address this problem, travelers' increase or decrease rate was compared and analyzed with the month, days, and time of an hour and the amount of drug smuggling and criminal activities related to the arrest.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Credibility

In every research, credibility was a vital part of the study. According to Plano-Clark and Ivankova (2016), "credibility is one of the criteria of trustworthiness and refers to the extent to which the qualitative findings are perceived as accurately conveying the study participants' experiences." In performing interviews with the participants, the researcher ensured that credibility questions were honest, organized, straightforward, and aligned with the studies. Questions should be asked plainly, and specific wording should be used to help participants comprehend and answer the questions truthfully. In processing triangulation, questions queried to participants were validated with existing information. Utilizing follow-up questions was also used to make clear answers.

Strategies such as member checking or peer debriefing were also used in this study to interpret data collected during interviews with the participants and ask peers or participants to review these data to ensure the quality of the qualitative findings (Plano Clark & Ivankova, 2016).

Transferability

Transferability refers to the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be generalized or transferred to another context or setting (Trochim, 2020). Researchers recruit participants who can provide information to address the problem and find a solution to the research problem. Participants in this study have at least one to ten years of experience in the CBP primary inspection division, which could share vital data and issues in the Laredo Port of Entry (POE) primary inspection. This research could be transferred or reproduced to other U.S. Southern borders or borders of other countries.

Dependability

Dependability refers to the consistency and reliability of the research findings and the degree to which research procedures were documented, allowing someone outside the research to follow, audit, and critique the research process (Moon et al., 2016). After collecting data from participants, the researcher will ask them to review the data or their statements to ensure the data is accurate and that the researcher did not miss any questionnaires in the research study. The researcher would meet the dependability if the participants agreed to the researcher's interpretation of data.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the degree to which others can confirm or corroborate the results (Trochim, 2020). To achieve confirmability, this study will document the procedures for checking and rechecking the data throughout the study (Trochim, 2020). Another technique to achieve confirmability is the use of reflexivity. The researcher will use and maintain a reflexive journal, field notes, memos, and transcripts in this study.

Ethical Procedures

Ethical procedures included consulting and approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) before participant recruitment, data collection, or dataset access (Walden University Center for Research Quality, 2020). Ethical procedures also need detailed planning and advice from the IRB regarding ethical issues during and after the research. In addition, as a researcher, I will review the research ethics guides, research ethics approval checklist, and red flag issues that would trigger an IRB consultation (Walden University Center for Research Quality, 2020). These guides will help researchers manage and predict any possible ethical issues in planning and executing research (Walden University Center for Research Quality, 2020).

In this study, I will complete Forms A and C before the recruitment of participants or data collection and submit all IRB-requested documents (list of questionnaires, list of participants, consent form, how the data will be stored securely, etc.). I will work out all ethical issues with the IRB and my chair member, ensure that the IRB approves all research data collection, and obtain permission to recruit participants and conduct interviews. During data collection and interviews, I will ensure all consent

forms are signed and explained to all my participants. If I use a recording, I can only use audio recording and no video recording to protect my participant's identity and privacy. I will always maintain honesty, protect my participants' identities and information, and ensure they are not published. I will only use participants' titles and first initials, such as Officer K or Ms. T, to protect their identity and privacy. Each participant interview and data collection will be secured in an alphabetical folder and placed in a secured location such as a password-protected vault where a researcher can only access this vault.

In this study, no confidential information was collected. The researcher protects and respects all participants' private information. The researcher will allow the participants to withdraw their statements and information from the study. Participants who wish to withdraw from the study will delete their information on the same day. I will call or recruit the next participant for an interview.

Statistical data on the day and month of drug seizure and arrest, the busiest day and time of traffic, waiting time in the lane, and other CBP programs were taken from the official database of U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP). The researcher should ensure the data collected is first approved by the Chair member, IRB, and CBP Port Director of Laredo, Texas.

Data collected from the interview was based on officers' experience from one to ten years' experience and civilian staff involved in daily operations and statistics. After all the data is analyzed, finalized into a paper, and approved by the Chair member, Program Director, IRB, and Chief Academic Officer (CAO), all the data collected is not confidential and will be kept in the researcher's safe vault with password protection that

only the researcher can access. As per Walden University policy, all collected data should be stored in a safe and secure place, and after five years, the data will be shredded, burned, and destroyed.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative research case study is to analyze the problem of layered U.S. border security and examine the vehicle and pedestrian flow of traffic problems in Laredo, Texas, POE travelers crossing from Mexico to the U.S. border. This research also explores the relationship between securing the border and the traffic problem in the U.S border in Laredo, Texas, the behavior, trends, and patterns of drug trafficking organizations (DTOs), and find a solution to the traffic problem on the border of Laredo, Texas. The researcher will conduct face-to-face interviews and archival data as data collection methods. The researcher will also utilize NVivo to identify common themes and characteristics. The researcher will use purposive sampling to select 10-15 participants for face-to-face interviews. All data will be kept in the researcher's safe vault with password protection only the researcher can access. This study was conducted per Walden University policy, IRB guidelines, and ethical standards. As per Walden University policy, all collected data and transcripts should be kept in a secure and safe place and be shredded, destroyed, and burned after five years.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

This qualitative research aimed to understand the layered US border security problems and reduce the vehicle and pedestrian traffic problem in the US – Mexico border of Laredo, Texas POE. This chapter includes details of the pilot study, the settings of the study, the participant's demographics, the data collection approach, the data analysis methods used, and a demonstration of the results. This study's research question asks:

RQ1. – How can U.S. Customs improve border security effectiveness and efficiency?

Pilot Study

The pilot study was conducted to establish if the questionnaire was appropriate for this research study. The pilot study was conducted via WhatsApp, audio-visual, and phone interviews due to the busy schedule of participants. Three interviews were conducted to verify if the responses to the questions would offer valuable information and complete data. The outcomes of the pilot study are aligned with my research study. Participants revealed that I had a good question and that it was suitable and perfect for my research study.

Setting

The setting and samples of the study was the Southern Texas U.S – Mexico border Laredo, Texas POE border crossing and CBP organization. The Laredo border crossing accounts for 40 percent of U.S.-Mexico over-land merchandise trade by volume

and 50 percent by value ($80.3billion, $43.3 billion north-bound and $37 billion south-bound) (Fox et al., 2003). Most travelers from Mexico (Nuevo Laredo, San Luis Potosi, Guadalajara, Michoacan, or Mexico City) travel to the North, West, and East Coast of the U.S. by crossing through the Laredo border. The people that cross the border can fit into a variety of categories, including those working in Laredo but living in Mexico because of cheap housing or they have residences in both Mexico and the United States. According to the City of Laredo (2020), the 2020 international crossing data recorded 2,087,808 commercial vehicles, 3,429,367 noncommercial vehicles, and 2,020,930 pedestrian crossings. For fiscal year 2021, the crossing data identified 2,038,672 commercial vehicles, 2,411,938 noncommercial vehicles, and 1,143,504 pedestrian crossings at the U.S.–Mexico border. The target population for this study was CBP federal officers and civilian staff working daily CBP operations and experiencing daily border traffic congestion. I need to find a solution to decrease the travelers' waiting time by one to two hours in the inspection lane to improve their health, work, business, and the U.S. economy. The second target for this research is the Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Officers (new and veteran officers) involved in daily operations who experience an overwhelming number of daily border crossings of travelers, trades, and commerce and everyday border traffic problems.

Flyers will be posted and distributed through social media group chat (See Appendix A) with the approval of the social media group chat administrator to the off-duty CBP Officers and CBP civilian employees to be informed about voluntary participation in research who are directly involved in daily operations for a social change,

and to find a solution to the traffic congestion in the U.S – Mexico Laredo Border. All information was obtained from a data analysis from the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) public website statistics archived and the City of Laredo public statistics archived. Face-to-face, phone, or audio-visual interviews were conducted with CBP officers and CBP civilian staff with experience and knowledge of daily operations and traffic congestion at the U.S.-Mexico Laredo border.

Demographics

From the Inspection division of the US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Federal Officer of the U.S. – Mexico Border of Laredo, Texas POE, both men and women were interviewed via phone and audio–visual interviews. All participants play an important role in protecting Americans, safeguarding our borders, and enhancing the nation's economic prosperity.

The participant's demographics are summarized in Table 1 below. All participants had to be federal officers or civilian staff working in the primary inspection division and operations who have at least one year of experience, have some knowledge, and experience on a day-to-day basis in CBP operations.

Table 1

Participants Demographics

Participants	Gender	Years of Experience	Education
P1	Female	4	Bachelor
P2	Male	15	Bachelor
P3	Male	4	Bachelor

P4	Male	5	Bachelor
P5	Male	5	4th yr. College
P6	Male	4	Bachelor
P7	Male	4	Bachelor

Note: P = Participant.

Data Collection

To get quality data and be more effective in my research study, I selected 15 participants and used purposive sampling. Only 10 participants qualified, and seven participated in my research and interview. Three participants backed out due to the participants' busy working schedules and time for the family. I conducted seven interviews and completed five questionnaires for each participant. The researcher collected all data from document analysis and questionnaires. All interviews were conducted through phone interviews and using an audio recorder because I worked and was assigned in Toronto, Canada. The participants are from the Laredo, Texas, US – Mexico border. After collecting data from the participants' interviews, I conducted all the data analyses. The researcher also collected data from the City of Laredo public records, the Texas online website, and the Department of Public Safety (DPS) website to gain information regarding pedestrian and vehicle crossing statistics at the US – Mexico border and the safety and integrity of the US – Mexico border bridges.

Data Analysis

The data analysis is the point where the researcher acquired to find the answer based on participants' shared experiences and knowledge about border security and traffic

problems in the US – Mexico border. In this data analysis, I will be using qualitative data coding. According to Saldana (2015), "a code is a word or short phrase that symbolizes an attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data." Saldana (2015) also pointed out that qualitative research researchers should follow multiple data analysis steps. In this research, step one is the precoding. According to Walden University (2020), "precoding provides a systematic way for a researcher to align the theoretical framework with data collection and analysis." Saldana noted that these codes develop as the researcher gathers data from data sources such as transcripts, documents, and notes. The next step is coding all data collected by creating a code category and discovering the relationship between codes. Miles et al. (2014) noted that the following steps are to note emerging patterns and meaning and analyze the data using a matrix, table, and NVivo to visualize the differences and similarities. Axial coding uncovered numerous codes, such as Infrastructure problems, Lack of proper documents, Lack of officer training, US border policy, and insufficient bridge.

According to Trochim (2020), "data preparation involves checking or logging the data in, checking the data for accuracy, entering this data into the computer, transforming the data, and developing and documenting a database structure that integrates the various measures."

Table 2 describes the participants' comments that emerged from the data analysis, the axial codes, and the themes.

Table 2

*Codes, Themes, and Participants Comments. Semi structured Interview question 1
(SSIQ1) Causes of Traffic Congestion in the Laredo U.S. – Mexico Border.*

Open coding	Axial coding	Themes
PI (P1) – "In the passenger processing, which Is PAX Bridge 2 (Juarez – Lincoln Bridge) right now. I do know that most of the traffic congestion comes from construction. The layout of the construction coming from Mexico to the United States is horrible, and that's makes traffic congestion".	Infrastructure Problem	Not enough bridge
PI (P2) – "Well, what causes traffic congestion In Laredo, Texas is that U.S. citizens that applies for admission into the U.S. don't have the proper documentation."	No proper documentation U.S. Border Policy	Lack U.S. border policy
PI (P3) – "So I feel like it's just an issue that we can add as many lanes as we want, but if we don't open up separate bridges for more traffic is going to be an issue."	Not enough bridge	Not enough bridge
PI (P4) – "Well, the reason we have like a traffic Problem is that we have two big cities and you know, the bridges aren't big enough for the cities."	Bridges are not big enough	Not enough bridge
PI (P5) – "I would say the lack of proper entry Documents and lack of Officers trainings	Lack of proper documents Lacks officers Training. U.S. Border Policy	Lack U.S. border policy Upper management deficiency

Open coding	Axial coding	Themes
PI (P6) – "Compliant documents like, for example, Visa, lawful permanent card, or a passport. It It makes it easier to identify them by asking certain	No compliance documents	Lack U.S. border policy

Question during the interview and that actually helps out with the processing time because without those main factors like the compliant documents it adds more time and work for the officers to conduct their primary inspection and their interviews.	U.S. Border Policy	
PI (P7) – "When you go back to the pedestrian or The vehicles, regular traffic, you have a lot of commuters and have a lot of living in Mexico and US citizens who go to school and live in the United States."	Having a lot of commuters	Not enough bridge
- "So, you have people coming from all over the world also and now the influx of immigrants trying to claim asylum. Uh, you're just overwhelmed with that also. Yeah, and being short-staffed as well. Not having enough Officers to keep up with the flow of traffic."	Short of Officers	Upper management deficiency

Note. PI = Phone Interviews, P = Participant

Tables 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 show the correlation between the semi-structured questions, codes, and themes. The semi-structured questions were as follows: What are the possible solutions to improve the traffic flow in Laredo, Texas, without compromising border security? Presuming you are a high-ranking official of the CBP, what will you do to decrease the traffic problem in Laredo, Texas, and the US – Mexico border, as well as the vehicle and pedestrian travelers' issues? What is your insight about the CBP Multi-layered border security? And, based on your experience, what are the everyday challenges travelers encounter regarding the traffic problem at the Laredo U.S. – Mexico border?

Table 3

(SSIQ2) The possible solutions to improve the traffic flow in Laredo, Texas, without compromising border security?

Open coding	Axial coding	Themes
PI (P1) – "So, I recently learned that CBP was trying to implement new systems that would help primary officers, in general, be able to do like impostor checks faster, or actually, this the system is going to be designed to do that for us. And that way, it could speed up the traffic a a little bit and bring down the wait time for the travelers.	Implementing better system or technology	More budget and support from the government
PI (P2) – "One of the solutions I think is to improve traffic congestion is that we need to have designated lanes for travelers that possess compliant documents."	Having a designated lanes for travelers posses compliant documents	Need new bridge
PI (P3) – "I'm going to go with go ahead and More bridges,	Having more bridges	Need a new bridge
- "And more manpower."	Having more Manpower and Officers	More budget and support from the Government
- "Obviously also incorporating more ready lane, which is allowing individuals who have the passport have the proper documentation."	Having proper documentation	Need a new U.S. border Policy
PI (P4) – "So, you know, in order to improve traffic flow, I mean, we could go into having people mandatory documents. We've already laid documents of just birth certificates and stuff like that. That's a whole another issue of where we could process people a lot faster."	Implementing policy for mandatory documents	Need a new U.S. border policy
- "Down in the valley, they have those, uh, The machines, the deepwater machines scanning Every car before they even get checked. A lot of People say that it also helps with traffic.	Implementing better system or technology	More budget and support from the Government

Open coding	Axial coding	Themes
PI (P5) – "Make an actual requirement that Everybody has to need to have a valid entry Document, just like they do at the airport."	Implement policy for mandatory Documents	Need a new U.S. border policy
PI (P6) – "Well, in that matter, of course, Proper documents help because having Proper documents are kind of like a pre-screening, um, pre-evaluation or pre-inspection of any traveler that tries to come in or tries to apply for admission at the border or in the U.S.	Implement policy for mandatory documents	Need a new U.S. border policy
PI (P7) – "More officers, of course, would be Beneficial."	Having more Manpower and Officers	More budget and support from the government
- "So, if we have more support from our Government, I mean, it would be more beneficial For us."	Support from the government	More budget and support From the Government
- "The amount of traffic coming in without adding another port of entry, which is in the talks. They're talking about opening up one more bridge, or talking about opening up six more cargo lanes for trailers."	Having more bridges	Need a new bridge

Note. PI = Phone Interview, P = Participant

Table 4

(SSIQ3) Presuming you are a high-ranking official of the CBP, what will you do to decrease the traffic problem in Laredo, Texas, and the US – Mexico border, as well as the vehicle and pedestrian travelers' issues?

Open coding	Axial coding	Themes
PI (P1) – "And this traffic jam, the traffic congestion would be to enforce travelers to get passports and WHTI-compliant documents that can speed up the process of traveling from Mexico into the U.S. So that for me would be a huge, huge, huge benefit."	Enforce to get passport and documents	New U.S. border policy
PI (P2) – "One of the things that I will implement Is that every US citizen who is applying for entry into the country, they must possess a document For them to come into that country. And that's one of the biggest problems right now."	Enforce to get passport and documents.	New U.S. border policy
- "The other ones are that you know, for Example, we have high seasons like holy week, Spring break, you know, to have a designated area for those people that they don't live in Laredo, Texas, or on the Mexican side."	Having a designated lanes, or area	Need new bridge
PI (P3) – "And as if I were a higher ranking Individual, I was trying to see if we could propose some type of budget to be allocated specifically to opening up a bridge."	Opening a new bridge for traveler's	Need new bridge
PI (P4) – " If I had that type of power. Yeah, I mean, you know, based on what I just told you for answering number two, you know, maybe instead of talking about it. Yeah, try to implement those types of pilot programs to see. Yeah, gather data. You know, maybe the scanning Every vehicle before could speed up traffic."	Having a new policy	New U.S. border policy
- "Some type of technology like that. Yeah, So we can verify that things are authentic. That may be a technology could be implemented. Like if people are going to use their birth certificate."	Having new technology	Needs more government budget

Open coding	Axial coding	Themes
like in the system, attach a picture to it. That way we can verify it."		
PI (P5) – "I will say bring some of the Experienced Officers back to the like bridge to Bridge one. Yeah, I would call it. Yeah, because now we just have new officers that they're afraid to move position, so we need those experienced officers to teach the new ones so we can expedite more traffic."	Need more experienced officers'	Need more government budget
- "Also, a good solution is like they're doing On the Columbia Bridge. Yeah, for the x-ray Machines are pre-primary, so that way, the traffic will flush much faster because we are getting that vehicle before they get to primary. So, it's easier to decide whether or not anything goes."	Having a new policy	New U.S. border policy
PI (P6) – "Yes, so already specified the fact or the Problem cause for the traffic congestion is that non-compliant documents when the driver doesn't have that, it prolongs the process of the primary officer to conduct its inspection of the vehicle, for the pedestrian travelers at the same time."	Enforce to get passport and document	New U.S border policy
PI (P7) – "If I was a higher-ranking officer, I would try to see if I can give the officers the best equipment possible to counter the amount of narcotics that are entering the United States.	New equipment to counter drug smuggling	Need more government budget
"Tried to regulate the United States Citizens without the proper documentation to get The you know a regular passport of a border crossing card so that it's easier to increase the flow of traffic at a faster speed because we're not typing in birth certificates or trying to figure out if the people presenting the documents are who they say they are."	Enforce to get passport and documents	New U.S. border policy

Table 5

(SSIQ4) Insight about the CBP Multi-layered border security?

Open coding	Axial coding	Themes
PI (P1) – "I do feel we have a really good security system both with technology and ourselves as being officers out there. Yeah, I feel, I feel safe and I feel that we'll be able to manage any situation."	Effective security system	More budget for new technology and equipment
PI (P2) – "I think it's great because you know this By having multilayer security, this helps, this Prevent you know that like for example weapons, Of mass destruction, drugs or illegal entry into the United States."	Effective security system	More budget for new technology and equipment
PI (P3) – "Pre-primary is also another thing that I Feel we don't really need to do. Um, if we, if anything we can just have more manpower on the lanes to view, make sure anything's being done correctly.	More officers	Management problem
- "I feel there could be some room to remove A little bit of the border security just to help kind Of help out, push the traffic through and get you Know less wait time.	Need new strategy	New U.S. border policy
PI (P4) – "You know, I think for vehicles, Yeah, It's really not. I mean, it could be, but like, what Was happening was that. You know and we Diverting traffic to just one lane. Yeah, it was Slowing down traffic in Mexico. We're bad Bogging down Mexico."	Need new strategy	New U.S border policy
PI (P5) – "I think it is effective, but we should have more officers working on enforcement, not just doing their inspections sometime. There's 4 or 5 officers overwhelmed during the second inspection."	More officers	Management problem

Open coding	Axial coding	Themes
PI (P6) – "A traveler must have any documents To present. It still gives a continuous flow of people coming in, So, and when they arrived to the bridge to the inspection line. Uh, the another layer is, uh, helping out with in terms of border security, whatever, um, items or either commercial, personal, or it could be an illegal, an item that tries to come into the United States, um, helps out with the job and the mission, and the vision for the border or, especially in Laredo, Texas."	Enforcement	New U.S. border policy
PI (P7) – "If the officers were cross-trained and You know, using those tools, using certain instruments to conduct better inspections that would help us a lot. Yeah, I know a lot of ports of entry, they di cross training and they do train their officers as well. But, you know, Laredo is just so busy that the upper management is their concern is, you know, processing the flow of traffic."	More officers trainings	Management problem
- "So, right now at the Columbia bridge, we Have a low-energy portal which is every vehicle that's trying to make entry through the regular vehicle traffic. Yeah, will be scanned using our non-intrusive instrument. Which is that X-Ray. Yeah, so with that, it's easier to counter the Narco – terrorism."	New technology and equipment.	More budget For new technology and equipment

Table 6

(SSIQ5) The everyday challenges travelers encounter regarding the traffic problem at the Laredo U.S. – Mexico border?

Open coding	Axial coding	Themes
PI (P1) – "In regard to management and how everything is administered as per officers. We're always short-staffed. Short staff is always a big one as well. Okay, we don't have	Short staffed	Short Staffed

enough officers to manage secondary. We don't have enough officers to manage primary and all the other positions that are available there for us. So, that's a big one too."

Open coding	Axial coding	Themes
PI (P2) – "The travelers, it just what they Challenge they face every day is just, I mean the waiting, you know. The waiting period. the bridge. Why? Because like I say, officers are tasked with different checks. They are tasked to check every traveler, so this is most of what they face every day."	Waiting in the lane for a more extended of time	Long wait for inspections
PI (P3) – "Issues and it's mainly due to the Season we're in which is summer, high temperature subject the travelers waiting in line for one to two hours. Definitely the elements are playing a huge factor in the issues that they have. No waiting is one thing, but to wait in on the seat as very challenging and very upsetting thing for the travelers."	Waiting in the lane for 1 more extended of time	Long wait for inspections
PI (P4) – "Right now, they're going through Huge construction in Mexico. Okay, so instead of them having, I think it's four lanes for them to be able to enter the U.S. Yeah, and they only have two and sometimes only one because they're constructing this whole thing. Right, so it's kind of bottleneck in Mexico, creating extremely long wait times, and by the time they get to us, car are overheating."	Waiting in the lane for a more extended of time	Long wait for inspections

Open coding	Axial coding	Themes
PI (P5) – "I would say everything comes back to The proper entry documents. Yeah, that will reduce the wait times for the travelers. That will reduce the amount of time the officer is doing interview. Yeah, so expedite everything.'	Proper entry document	New U.S. border policy
PI (P6) – "The way I see it, for those travelers' who are compliant to the requirements and coming in into the United States will always be mixed with the people who are not compliant to	Proper entry documents	New U.S. border policy

the requirements. And basically, that would still
the problem will still persist, and that's how I see it."

PI (P7) – "I wouldn't say it's a challenge, but it's You know, like going back to people having their Proper documentation. Yeah, um, here in Laredo, we're, you know, we're processing people with a piece of paper without a photo ID or something that we can distinguish quickly and efficiently if they are who they say they are."	Proper entry documents	New U.S. border policy

Note: Table Key: Phone Interview (PI), Participant (P)

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Connelly (2016) noted that in qualitative research, Trustworthiness is characterized by credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. In qualitative research, evidence of four criteria must be articulated to ensure the trustworthiness of the study's findings: Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (National University.edu, 2023). Credibility corresponds to the notion of validity in qualitative research but is more about internal validity. Transferability is like generalizability in quantitative terms; however, it is not generalizability. Transferability addresses the applicability of the findings to similar contexts or individuals, not to broader contexts. Dependability is like reliability in qualitative research. It can be ensured through rigorous data collection techniques, procedures, and well-documented analyses. Confirmability is like objectivity in quantitative studies; however, objectivity is not necessarily critical for qualitative research as long as personal biases are unpacked in the write-up. Unpacking personal bias can be accomplished by a bracketing interview or reflexivity. (National University.edu, 2023).

Credibility

The research was conducted in line with Walden University IRB approval and ethical standards. The researcher used purposive sampling to recruit and select a qualified participant for the research study. The inclusion criteria in my research study included CBP Officers or civilian staff with at least one year and above of experience in primary inspection, border security operations, or strategic planning, 18 years old or older, and who want to make a difference in the society or community. I utilize multiple sources to increase understanding of the traffic problem in the U.S. – Mexico border, reducing the traffic problem and improving border security effectiveness and efficiency.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be generalized or transferred to another context or setting (Trochim, 2020). This qualitative study aimed to examine layered U.S. border security and understand the vehicle and pedestrian traffic problems in the U.S. – Mexico Laredo, Texas border Port of Entry (POE). Similar research could be conducted in other U.S. Southern border locations. Data from Penelope et al. (2015) state that the "delays and community traffic problem associated with U.S. and Mexico border ports of entry have been criticized for causing economic losses and increasing social stressors." In addition, Aldrete (2018) argued that "people who live in those cities know that the traffic along an increasingly active international border affects their lives daily and traffic delays at the border affect air quality that affects the health of travelers and the community, economic development,

and employment opportunities in that community and statewide." This research could be

transferred or reproduced to other US southern borders or other countries' borders.

Dependability

Dependability refers to the consistency and reliability of the research findings and

the degree to which research procedures were documented, allowing someone outside the

research to follow, audit, and critique the research process (Moon et al., 2016). The

researcher asked the participants to review the researcher's interpretation of data to

ensure the data was correct; if the participants agreed that the interpretation was accurate,

then the researcher achieved dependability. If the participants disagree with the

interpretation of the data, then the researcher needs to revise the data.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the degree to which others can confirm or corroborate the

results (Trochim, 2020). Trochim (2020) suggested that to achieve confirmability, the

researcher will document the procedures for checking and rechecking the data throughout

the study. Researchers used reflexivity as another technique to achieve confirmability.

The researchers will use and maintain a reflexive journal, field notes, memos, and

transcripts in this research.

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Results

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This study answered several significant research questions. The semi-structured

interview questions were: What causes traffic congestion at the Laredo U.S. – Mexico

border? What are the possible solutions to improve the traffic flow in Laredo, Texas,

without compromising border security? Presuming you are a high-ranking official of the

CBP, what will you do to decrease the traffic problems in Laredo, Texas, and the US –

Mexico border, as well as the vehicle and pedestrian travelers' issues? What is your

insight about the CBP Multi-layered border security? Based on your experience, what are

the everyday challenges travelers encounter regarding the traffic problem at the Laredo

U.S. – Mexico border? During the data analysis, several themes emerged. I will present

this theme with supporting data, which answers the research question: How can US

Customs improve border security effectiveness and efficiency? In this data analysis, the

themes are lack of U.S. border policy, not enough bridge, Upper management deficiency,

more budget and support from the government, need a new bridge, need a new U.S.

border policy, Management problem, more budget for new technology and equipment,

long wait for inspections, Short staffed.

Theme 1: Lacks U.S. border policy – According to U.S. Customs and Border Protection

(CBP) (2023), U.S. citizens (including infants and children) entering the United States by

land or sea are required to present a valid Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI)

– compliant travel document. These include U.S. Passport or U.S. Passport Card,

Enhanced Driver's License, Enhanced Tribal Card, Trusted Traveler Program (TTP) Card

like (Global Entry, Nexus, or SENTRI), U.S. military orders (PCS) with valid military ID

with accompanying immediate family members can use any WHTI – compliant travel

document, and Merchant Mariner Credential with official travel letter. In addition, U.S.

children ages fifteen and under arriving by land and sea from Canada or Mexico can

present an original or copy of their U.S. birth certificate issued by the Vital Records

Department of Birth State, official replacement Consular Report of Birth Abroad (FS-

240), or original Naturalization Certificate (USCBP, 2023). However, those travelers who only have birth certificates, official replacement consular reports of birth abroad, or original naturalization certificates would take time to enter their information into the computer system, especially a group of family members, which would hold the lane for inspections for long periods.

Participants had the same opinion regarding the causes of the traffic congestion in the Laredo U.S. – Mexico border. Most participants agreed that having no proper documents or lack of proper entry documents is one of the causes of traffic congestion at the U.S.–Mexico border. Participant 2 stated, "They don't have a US passport, US passport card, or even a birth certificate. What this causes is that officers are primary. They have to put their travelers that US citizens information manually into our system."

Not enough bridge – Laredo, Texas U.S. – Mexico has five bridges. The Juarez-Lincoln bridge (Bridge2) is open 24 hours a day and is only for vehicles and bus crossings. It has a fifteen-lane bridge and was built on November 26, 1976. The Gateway to the Americas bridge (B1) is open 24 hours a day and only to vehicles and pedestrians. It has a four-lane bridge and was reconstructed in 1956. The World Trade Bridge is open from eight in the morning to twelve at midnight and only for commercial traffic. It has an eight–lane bridge and was built in 1998. The Colombia Solidarity Bridge is open from eight to midnight and is open for vehicles, busses, commercial, and pedestrians. It has eight lanes for commercials, four lanes for vehicles and buses, and two sidewalks for pedestrians. It was completed on July 31, 1991. Lastly, the railroad is only for commercial/railroads (Texas Department of Transportation, 2015).

Most participants agreed that another cause of traffic problems is that the Laredo, Texas, US – Mexico border does not have enough bridges. Participant 4 stated, "The bridges aren't big enough for the cities." Participant 4 said, "So, plus the fact that many US citizens live in Nuevo Laredo, Mexico, and come into work, yeah, daily like that, that creates a lot of congestion."

Upper management deficiency – Another factor contributing to traffic problems at the Laredo US – Mexico border is upper management deficiency. Participant 7 stated, "You have people coming from all over the world, and now the influx of migrants trying to claim asylum. You're just overwhelmed with that and being short-staffed. Yeah, not having enough officers to keep up with the traffic flow." According to National Treasury Employees Union (NTEU) National President Tony Reardon, "Long-term staffing shortages continue to pose major challenges for the Customs and Border Protection employees who work at the nation's ports of entry." NTEU (2021) added that "the agency's own workload staffing models show a shortage of 1,700 CBP Officers, 400 CBP Agriculture Specialist, and 200 CBP non-uniformed trade specialist at the nation's 328 air, sea, and land ports of entry. Lack of adequate staffing leads to longer wait times for legitimate trade and travel, involuntary overtime shifts, and the need for personnel to leave their home ports to take temporary duty assignments at the southwest border ports (NTEU, 2021). Another need, according to Participant 5, is the lack of officer training and interviews. These skills are critical to the officers to determine and catch drug smugglers and human trafficking in the primary inspection. Interviews are crucial in the

primary inspections to save time, process travelers, and speed up the flow of traffic at the US – Mexico border.

Theme 2: More budget and support from the government – Participant 7 stated, "More officers would be beneficial. So, if we have more support from our government, I mean, it would be beneficial for us". According to Homeland Preparedness News (HPN) (2017), "A bill that addresses many of the staffing shortfalls seen at U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) stations was approved by the Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee. The Boots on the Border Act was cosponsored by U.S. Sens. Ron Johnson (R-WI), Jeff Flake (R-AZ), and John McCain (R-AZ) and will serve as companion legislation for a House bill introduced last month by U.S. Rep. Matha McSally (R-AZ) (HPN, 2017). This bill permits CBP to waive the polygraph examination for state, local, and federal officers if they have served for at least three consecutive years, have statutory power to arrest a person in violation of law, are not currently under investigation themselves, or have taken a polygraph examination as a condition for employment with their current job (HPN, 2017). In addition, these bills also waive the polygraph for members of the Armed Forces or veterans who have served for at least four years, have held security clearances within the past five years, received an honorable discharge, and have not engaged in criminal activity under the Uniform Code of Military Justice (HPN, 2017). These bills will help expedite hiring officers and cover the shortage of officers in the southern borders to boost the morale of officers, prevent fatigue among officers, have a better quality of life and family time, and secure the US borders.

Need a new bridge – As I mentioned earlier, Laredo, Texas has five US –
Mexico bridges, which are Juarez–Lincoln Bridge (B2) (vehicles and busses only),
Gateway to the Americas (B1) (cars and pedestrians only), World Trade Bridge
(commercial only), Colombia Solidarity Bridge (vehicles, pedestrian, busses, and
commercial), and Railroad bridge (for commercial train only) which economic lifelines
and passageway to Interstate 35 and Interstate 10 going to Northern border, West Coast
and East Coast. Participant 7 stated, "I don't think that Laredo can handle the amount of
traffic coming in without adding another port of entry, which is in the talks. They're
talking about opening up one more bridge or talking about opening up six more cargo
lanes for trailers".

The City of Laredo (2024) reported that Laredo International Bridge Crossing
Data went higher this year, 2024, compared to 2023 (City of Laredo, 2024). According to
the City of Laredo (2024), the daily crossings for commercial on January 10, 2023, is
9,402 compared to January 10, 2024, 10,085, which increased by 7.3%, for non –
commercial on January 10, 2023, 12,100 compared to January 10, 2024, is 13,539 a
raised of 11.9%. Pedestrian crossing on January 10, 2023, is 5,863 compared to January
10, 2024, an increase of 4.8%.

Table 7 explains the Laredo International Bridge Crossing Data for Daily,
Monthly, and Yearly for Non-commercial vehicles, commercial vehicles, and pedestrian
crossings.

Table 7

Laredo International Bridge Crossing Data

Daily	Monthly	Yearly
Commercial		
January 30, 2023, 8,720 compared to January 30, 2024, 10,327 Increase of 18.4%	January 2023, 218,015 compared to January 2024, 228,665 increase of 4.9%	FY 2023, 916,475 compared to FY 2024, 963,840 increase of 5.2%
Non – Commercial		
January 30, 2023, 11,899 compared to January 30, 2024, 13,437 Increase of 12.9%	January 2023, 362,378 compared to January 2024, 382,270 increase of 12.9%	FY 2023, 1,565,463 compared to FY 2024, 1,686,325 increase of 7.7%
Pedestrian		
January 30, 2023, 4.644 compared to January 30, 2024, 6,002 Increase of 29.2%	January 2023, 178,546 compared to January 2024, 171,060 decrease of –4.2%	FY 2023, 763,659 compared to FY 2024, 792,231 increase of 3.7%

Source: City of Laredo, (2024)

According to KSAT.com (2024), U.S. Sen. Ted Cruz and U.S. Rep. Henry Cuellar celebrated the passage of their proposal to reform the presidential process for new and expanded border bridges at Laredo, Eagle Pass, and Brownsville. This proposal would add 10 lanes to the bridges, enabling more trade with Mexico (KSAT.com, 2024). KSAT.com (2024) added that Sen. Cruz stated, "Every year, Texas and Mexico have roughly $800 billion in trade and commerce that comes across this border. That job in Texas and Mexico is the lifeblood of South Texas. And unfortunately, for the past three years, expansion of these bridges has been delayed by bureaucratic roadblocks".

Need a new U.S. border policy – Participants have the same opinion regarding the United States' need for a new border policy. Participant 4 stated, "You know, to

improve traffic flow, I mean, we could go into having people mandatory documents. We've already laid out documents, just birth certificates and stuff like that. That's a whole other issue of where we could process people a lot faster". Participant 5 said, "Make an actual requirement that everybody has to need to have a valid entry document, just like they do at the airport."

According to United States Customs and Border Protection (CBP) (2023), Air travel: U.S. citizens (including infants and children) departing from or entering the United States by air are required to present a valid U.S. passport to board international flights. U.S. citizens departing from a designated Canadian airport can use their NEXUS Card for entry when utilizing a NEXUS kiosk. U.S. citizens traveling on official government business can use their official – issued U.S. passport, or official U.S. military orders (PCS) presented with a valid military ID card, or U.S. Merchant Mariner Credential presented with an official travel letter. Immediate family accompanying military personnel traveling under official orders must present a valid U.S. passport or a valid I-551 (Green Card) or a foreign passport with an appropriate visa. However, Land or Sea Travel: U.S. citizens (including infants and children) entering the United States by land or sea are required to present a valid WHTI-complaint travel document. These include a U.S. Passport or U.S. Passport Card, Enhanced Driver's License, Enhanced Tribal Card, Trusted Traveler Program (TTP) cards (Global Entry, Nexus, or SENTRI), U.S. military orders (PCS) with valid military ID. Accompanying immediate family members can use any WHTI-complaint travel document and U.S. Merchant Mariner Credential with an official travel letter (CBP, 2023). In addition, U.S. citizen children

aged 15 and under arriving by land or sea from Canada or Mexico can present an original or copy of their U.S. birth certificate (issued by the Vital Records Department of the birth State), an original or official replacement Consular Report of Birth Abroad (FS-240), or original of official Naturalization Certificate. Newborns whose official U.S. birth certificate has not yet been received can travel by land or sea using hospital–issued birth certification (CBP, 2023).

The big difference between Air travel and Land or Sea travel is that air travel requires and is mandatory to have a travel document like a US passport to board international flights, a Nexus Card entering and exiting Canada, and a US government official passport or official US military orders (PCS) presented with military ID card or U.S. Merchant Mariner Credential presented with official travel letter using a CBP card reader that can read all this travel documents. However, in the airport environment, CBP/officers cannot use birth or naturalization certificates as travel documents. Moreover, Land or Sea travel policy allows any form of Identification card besides a US passport, US passport card, TTP NEXUS, Global Entry, SENTRI, US military orders (PCS) with valid military ID, U.S. Merchant Mariner Credential like enhanced driver's license, Enhance tribal card, Birth Certificate, Naturalization Certificate, and original or official replacement Consular Report of Birth Abroad (FS-240) in which CBP/officers cannot use the card reader for Enhance driver's certificate, Enhanced tribal card or any Birth and Naturalization certificate. Because of this identification and certificates, officers can only manually enter travelers' information into the computer system, and this is the cause of traffic congestion.

Theme 3: Need more government budget – Participants have different opinions on decreasing the traffic problem at the Laredo U.S. – Mexico border. Participant 5 stated, "I will say bring some of the experienced officers back to the like bridge to bridge one. Yeah, because now we just have new officers who are afraid to move positions. So, we need experienced officers to teach the new ones so we can expedite more traffic".

Experienced officers are crucial in daily operations on the southern border. They have experience and skills in catching drug smugglers, human trafficking, members of cartels, and all criminals crossing the borders. Experienced officers also know what they are looking for in catching drug smugglers, human trafficking, and criminal activities to expedite the flow of traffic. Experienced officers can also help to teach new officers to share and transfer their skills on how to catch smugglers and human trafficking to expedite the flow of traffic and not take a lot of time in the primary inspection. Participant 7 stated, "If I were a higher-ranking officer, I would try to see if I can give the officers the best equipment possible to counter the number of narcotics entering the United States."

CBP has a lot of tools and equipment to intercept and apprehend drug smugglers, human trafficking, terrorism, and all criminal activities like K9 dogs (drug, weapon, and money sniffing dogs), X-ray (non-intrusive inspection), Buster (density meter/detector), camera scope (for gas tank and vehicle side walls), face recognition, biometric, radiation detection, and many more (CBP.gov "Multi-Layered Defense," 2021). But drug cartels and smugglers already know how to elude K9 drug-sniffing dogs and other CBP tools and equipment. According to CBP.gov (2021), U.S. Customs and Border Protection

officers at Arizona's Port of Nogales apprehended a Tucson woman involved in a failed

attempt to smuggle nearly $691,000 worth of cocaine into the United States. A CBP

canine narcotics detection alerted to an odor of drugs, leading officers to the fuel tank,

which had a total weight of 61 pounds (CBP.gov, 2021). In my own experience in

catching drug smugglers, Drug smugglers vacuum-sealed these drugs and soaked them

into the gas tanks to avoid detection by canine sniffing dogs. Some drug smugglers put

chemicals, grease, species, and menthol to prevent detection by canine dogs. In securing

the borders and apprehending drug smugglers, human trafficking, terrorism, and

criminals, we need experienced and skilled officers to teach new officers and have better

tools and equipment to intercept and deter illicit drugs from Mexico.

Theme 4: Management Problem – Multi-layered defense strategy includes programs

and initiatives such as C-TPAT (Customs-Trade Partnership Against Terrorism), a

public-private and international partnership with nearly 5,800 businesses to improve

baseline security standards for supply chain and container security, Screening, and

Inspection: CBP Screen 100 percent of all cargos before it arrives in the U.S. using

intelligence and cutting-edge technologies including all high-risk cargo, CSI (Container

Security Initiative) CBP enables to working with host government Customs Services, to

examine high-risk maritime containerized cargo at foreign seaports before they are

loaded on board vessels destined for the U.S., 24-Hour Rule: CBP requirements that a

manifest must be provided to CBP 24 hours prior to the sea container being loaded onto

the vessel in the foreign port. Lastly, use of Cutting-Edge Technology: CBP utilizes

large-scale X-ray and gamma ray machines and radiation detection devices to screen

cargo. In addition, CBP uses canine drug, weapons, and money sniffing dogs to detect drugs, money, and weapons and biometrics and face recognition to help verify the identities of most non-U.S. citizens arriving at U.S. ports of entry, as well as to identify non-U.S. citizens who may be encountered attempting to enter the country illegally (CBP.gov "Multi-Layered Defense," 2021). Participants believe that CBP's multi-layered border security is very efficient but has a management problem and needs to change its strategy. Participant 3 said, "Pre-primary is another thing that I feel we don't need to do. If anything, we can just have more manpower on the lanes to make sure everything's being done correctly. You know, getting other eyes on a subject's vehicle person, whatever the case may be". Also, Participant 5 said, "I think it is effective, but we should have more officers working on enforcement, not just doing their inspections sometimes. There are four or five officers overwhelmed during the second inspection. Pre-primary inspection is the inspection method that will expedite CBP's search of each vehicle, minimize delays, and require cooperation and assistance from the community (CBP.gov, 2021). However, some strategies like pre-primary inspection don't work because of the staff shortage. Instead, we need more officers for the primary to process travelers to expedite traffic flow or more staffing for secondary inspection to speed up the inspections.

Theme 5: Long wait times for inspections – One of the traveler's challenges crossing the US – Mexico bridge is waiting two to three hours in the lane for inspections. Participants have different feedback regarding travelers' challenges in crossing the US–Mexico border. Participant 2 said that "the travelers, it just, what they challenge they face

every day is just. I mean, the waiting, you know. The waiting periods. The bridge. Why? Because, like, say, officers are tasked with different checks. They are tasked to check every traveler. So, this is most of what they face every day". According to the study by Texas A&M Transportation Institute (2024), "Required security inspections and increased truck traffic at U.S. – Mexico border crossing create delays that are disruptive and costly to manufacturers, shippers and, ultimately, consumers. The impacts of these delays are not confined to the immediate area of specific border crossing. Instead, these delays have a broader implication and far–reaching consequences across the United States because border crossing delays in El Paso can affect product prices and quality in the hundreds of cities awaiting delivery of those products". Feedback from Participant 4 said that "But right now, they're going through huge construction in Mexico. Okay, instead of them having four lanes for them to enter the United States, I think it's four lanes. Yeah, they only have two and sometimes only one because they're constructing this whole thing. Right, so it's kind of a bottleneck in Mexico, creating extremely long wait times. And by the time they get to us, cars are overheating". Road construction is another problem at the US – Mexico border; we know we want to improve the US - Mexico border bridge, but this road construction should be done and working at nighttime when there is no traffic and not in the daytime when a lot of travelers and commerce try to cross US – Mexico border bridge.

New U.S. border policy – As I mentioned in themes 2 and 3, the New US border policy is crucial in solving the traffic problem and securing the US–Mexico border. Implementing and enforcing legitimate travel documents, national identification, or CBP

border identification will expedite the process and flow of traffic and focus more on securing the border. Participants have the same opinion on the everyday challenges travelers encounter at the Laredo, US – Mexico border: We need a new US border policy. Participant 5 said, "I would say everything comes back to the proper entry documents. Yeah, that will reduce the wait times for the traveler. That will reduce the amount of time the officer is doing the interview. Yeah, So, expedite everything". In addition, Participant 6 stated, "The way I see it, for those travelers who are compliant to the requirements and coming into the United States, will always be mixed with the people who are not compliant to the requirements. Basically, that would still cause the problem to persist. And that's how I see it". However, Participant 7 said, "I wouldn't say it's a challenge, but it's, you know, like going back to people having their proper documentation. Yeah, here in Laredo, we're, you know. We're processing people with a piece of paper without a photo ID or something that we can distinguish quickly and efficiently if they are who they say they are."

Having a short staff – When participants were asked about everyday challenges encountered at the Laredo US – Mexico border, they agreed on the same problem of having a short staff. Being short-staffed is a big problem in operations and securing the US – Mexico border. Officers are stressed and overwhelmed at work, forced to work overtime and work extended hours to cover short staffing, and officers become rude and careless in securing the border. In addition, a prior study showed that constantly working long hours increases fatigue, can lead to workplace injuries, and the likelihood of being diagnosed with chronic health problems such as Cardiovascular and Cerebrovascular

Disease, Hypertension, Diabetes Mellitus, Depression, and Anxiety, Work Stress, Health

Behaviors, Sleep and Fatigue, and Occupational Injury (Wong et al., 2019). Participant 1

said, "Regarding management and how everything is administered as per officers. We're

always short-staffed. Short staff is a big one as well. Okay, we don't have enough officers

to manage secondary. We don't have enough officers to manage the primary and all the

other positions available there. So, that's a big one too". According to the Committee on

Oversight and Accountability (2023), Joseph Cuffari, an Inspector General at the

Department of Homeland Security – broke down how record-high migrant surges

negatively affected personnel on the border: "We determined that CBP's and ICE's

current method of managing law enforcement staffing is not effective. CBP and ICE

workloads have grown significantly due to increased border encounters and travel

volume beyond DHS control. Despite greater workloads, staffing levels have remained

the same, with CBP and ICE using details and overtime to temporarily surge staffing

along the Southwestern border".

Summary

Chapter 4 aimed to answer the main research questions portrayed at the start of

this dissertation. The primary research question was: How can US Customs improve

border security effectiveness and efficiency? In this research, participants also answered

five semi-structured interview questionnaires. Semi–structured interview question 1:

What causes traffic congestion at the Laredo U.S. – Mexico border? 2: What are the

possible solutions to improve the traffic flow in Laredo, Texas, without compromising

border security? 3: Presuming you are a high–ranking official of the CBP, what will you

do to decrease the traffic problems at the Laredo, Texas, and the US – Mexico border, as well as the vehicle and pedestrian travelers' issues? 4: What is your insight about the CBP Multi–layered border security? 5: Based on your experience, what are the everyday challenges travelers encounter regarding the traffic problem at the Laredo U.S. – Mexico border? All five semi-structured interview questionnaires were answered by phone interview due to the location of the researcher and the participants and their availability.

The analysis found that short-staffed, extended overtime work, lack of border policy, and overwhelming traffic volume caused officers to be stressed, compromising the security of the US – Mexico borders and causing traffic problems. The research showed that the federal and city governments of Laredo, Texas, need to build a new bridge and research initiatives to tackle the overwhelming traffic volume of travelers crossing daily in the Laredo, Texas, US – Mexico border.

Chapter 4 reviewed the pilot study, the setting of the study, the data collection and analysis, trustworthiness, and findings. Themes with accompanying data from participants, such as the TXDOT report, CBP report, KSAT report, City of Laredo, HPN report, and NTEU report, portrayed the outcomes of this study. Chapter 5 will examine the interpretations of findings, limitations, recommendations, implications, and conclusions.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

This research study aimed to examine the problem of layered U.S. border security and to understand the vehicle and pedestrian traffic problems in the U.S. – Mexico border in Laredo, Texas, Port of Entry (POE). I conducted this research study to find a solution, decrease traffic congestion, and improve the layered U.S. border security the U.S. – Mexico border, at this time, according to the City of Laredo (2024), for the fiscal year 2023 to 2024, crossing data increased by 5.2% for commercial crossing, 7.7% for noncommercial Crossing, and 3.7% for pedestrian crossing in which we have an overwhelming traffic volume of travelers crossing every year. We lack bridges, border policy, and a staff shortage of at least 1,800 CBP Officers nationwide (Cong. Brian Higgins, 2023). This problem causes low morale, fatigue, and stress to the officers, causes traffic congestion, and compromises the security of the US – Mexico border and the security and safety of the American people.

Qualitative findings from this study showed that the US–Mexico border needs many factors like requiring more officers, new border policy, additional bridge, more training for the officers, new technology and equipment, and limitations of vehicles to decrease traffic congestion and improve layered border security. Participants believed this problem could be solved with the cooperation and help from local and federal governments, stakeholders, and the community.

Interpretation of Findings

In the literature review, I examined the listed issues: the positive impacts of DHS multilayered defense (the importance of multilayered defense), the positive outcome of the Trusted Traveler Program, the alternative ways to avoid border traffic, crime prevention, and the principle of criminal law. The DHS Multi-layered defense strategy is focused on securing the US borders and ports for smuggling weapons of mass destruction (WMD nuclear or biological), illegal firearms, illegal drugs, immigration, and preventing the illegal crossing of goods and species that threaten the US and its economy (DHS, 2020 "Multi-layered defense"). However, this system is not solving the problem of traffic congestion at the Laredo, Texas, US – Mexico border, and sometimes officers take a long time conducting primary inspections because of a lack of training on what to look for. In addition, this defense system can also fail if the officers are exhausted and stressed working excessively overtime because of a staff shortage, compromising the security and safety of the U.S. – Mexico border. Participants P1, P3, P5, and P7 indicated that being short-staffed of officers is a big problem in CBP operations and the US – Mexico border. CBP does not have enough officers to keep up with the traffic and conduct inspections and enforcement for illegal drugs, human smuggling, terrorism, and criminal activity.

The Trusted Traveler Program initiatives benefit travelers and DHS (TSA and CBP), mainly in the airport environment. This program permits the fast processing of pre-approval and low-risk travelers at some ports of entry (Kolker, 2021). In addition, at the southern border, travelers can use only two trusted traveler programs: the Secure Electronic Network for Travelers Rapid Inspection (SENTRI) program for non-

commercial and the Free and Secure Trade (FAST) for commercial. Both programs have assigned primary lanes entering the U.S.; applicants in this program must be approved and undergo a rigorous background check and in-person interview (CBP.gov, 2019 "SENTRI). This program benefits business owners and frequent travelers of the U.S. and Mexico. This program has little effect on solving traffic congestion in the U.S. – Mexico Laredo, Texas POE because not many people can afford to apply for this program.

Another alternative way to avoid border traffic is measuring border wait time and border cameras. Aldrete (2018) reported that the El Paso-based Center for International Intelligent Transportation Research at the Texas A&M Transportation Institute has developed and installed a system to track truck wait times accurately at the El Paso border crossing. This system was adopted and expanded by US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) as CBP Border Wait Times (BWT) and expanded to the Canadian and Mexican border Ports of Entry (CBP.gov "BWT," n.d.). The City of Laredo also provides bridge cameras to the community of Laredo, trade, and commerce, and to travelers to monitor the traffic in real-time to avoid traffic, long lines, and wait time (City of Laredo, 2021). The border waits time and camera system only focused on monitoring the real-time traffic for travelers, commerce, and DHS. Still, it did not decrease the traffic problem and the cause of the traffic congestion. Participants P3, P4, and P7 indicated that the amount of traffic coming in from Mexico and the lack of control and limitations of vehicles coming from Mexico create a lot of traffic congestion. Opening a new bridge can decrease the problem of traffic congestion.

These study findings were that federal and local governments have failed the commerce, the community, the people of Laredo, Texas, and the American people. Congress should create a new border policy for all travelers, primarily US citizens, to have a mandatory and legitimate entry document or State Identification for faster processing of travelers entering the United States at the southern border. The federal government should address and act immediately on the CBP staffing shortage in the Laredo, Texas, US – Mexico border and other parts of the southern border. Federal and local governments should coordinate and plan for additional bridges to decrease traffic congestion and improve border security. Federal and local governments should create a new policy to limit vehicle crossing from Mexico to the United States. Lastly, Federal and Local governments should make or conduct a research initiative of a train system or commute system that travels from Mexico to the United States and vice versa to eliminate vehicles for travelers who cross every day for work, school, and shopping to decrease traffic problem in the US – Mexico Laredo, Texas border. I will tackle each subject from the literature review in Chapter Two and how this connects to my research results on decreasing traffic congestion and improving border security.

Positive impact of DHS Multi-Layered Defense

The DHS created program and initiatives, which serve as a Multi-layered defense refers to a defense system that uses multiple layers to shield and protect the U.S. and American people from the threat of illegal smuggling of firearms, illegal smuggling of illicit drugs, smuggling of weapons of mass destruction (WMD nuclear or biological), illegal aliens or immigration, and preventing the crossing of illegal goods and species to

the United States that threaten the U.S. economy (DHS, 2020 "Multi-layered defense").

Multi-layered defense can positively impact only to secure the border and preventing

illegal drugs, illegal firearms, smuggling weapons of mass destruction (WMD), illegal

aliens, and crossing of illicit goods and species to the United States that destroying our

family and community, future of our children, and the US economy. But in connection to

solving the problem of traffic congestion in the US – Mexico Laredo border, Multi-

layered defense does not improve the traffic congestion in the southern border due to lack

of officers training in targeting, shortage of officers and staff, lack of new bridges, lack of

additional equipment and latest technology, and lack of border policy for enforcing

legitimate entry documents and limiting of vehicles coming from Mexico. Moreover,

multi-layered defense can be compromised and fail if the federal and local governments

do not address this problem immediately. According to Katz (2022), Sen. Gary Peters,

who chairs the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, said,

"Staffing shortages threaten CBP's ability to facilitate safe and lawful trade and travel

across our borders." "We must ensure these dedicated officers, who have served on the

frontlines throughout the pandemic, have the support they need to perform critical

functions, like detecting and preventing illegal drugs from reaching our communities."

Majority of my participants agreed that US border policy needs a reform that includes

enforcing valid entry documents, especially for US citizens, limiting vehicles coming

from Mexico, more officers and staffing, additional equipment and new technology, and

a new bridge as a possible solution for traffic congestion in the US – Mexico Laredo

border.

Positive outcome of the Trusted Traveler Program for the travelers

The Trusted Traveler Program has a positive outcome for travelers and DHS officers (CBP and TSA), mainly in the airport environment. This program permits fast processing of pre-approved and low-risk travelers at some ports of entry (Kolker, 2021). Kolker (2021) explained that these programs help the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) and United States Customs and Border Protection (CBP) accomplish their objectives of supporting the lawful flow of people and goods and preventing the entry of criminals, terrorists, illicit drugs, illegal weapons, and unauthorized individuals from entering the US. Moreover, these initiatives are beneficial to CBP officers by reducing inspections to travelers and focusing on targeting and looking for illicit drugs, illegal weapons, terrorists, criminals, and individuals entering the US using illegal and counterfeit documents. In addition, these programs benefit trusted travelers in the airport environment, who wait in lines for shorter periods than usual travelers who stay for a long time.

Meanwhile, at the southern border such as Laredo, Texas, trusted travelers can only use two types of trusted traveler programs: the Secure Electronic Network for Travelers Rapid Inspection (SENTRI) program for non-commercial vehicles and the Free and Secure Trade (FAST) for commercial vehicles. Both programs benefit business owners, companies, and frequent travelers of the US, Mexico, or Canada; applicants in this program must be approved, undergo a rigorous background check and in-person interview, have assigned primary lanes, and reduce inspections entering the United States. (CBP.gov, 2019, "SENTRI"). The SENTRI and FAST programs have little effect

in solving the traffic problem in the Laredo, Texas US – Mexico border because not a lot of travelers can apply and afford this program; the volume of travelers and vehicles increased every year as reported by the City of Laredo (2024), no policy of limiting vehicles to cross and entering the United States, no policy of implementing mandatory legitimate entry documents entering the United States like policy in the airport environment, and lastly, no new bridge or alternative bridge to reduce the traffic congestion and waiting times of the travelers and trades.

An alternative way to avoid border traffic.

Private sector federal and local governments have created an initiative to find alternative ways to avoid traffic on the southern border, such as measuring border wait time and installing border cameras. Aldrete (2018) reported that the El Paso-based Center for International Intelligent Transportation Research at the Texas A&M Transportation Institute has developed and installed a system to accurately measure commercial truck wait times at the El Paso border crossing and Laredo, Texas. This border wait times (BWT) system was adopted and expanded by US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) as CBP Border Wait Time or called as (BWT) and expanded to the Canadian and Mexican border Port of Entry (CBP.gov "BWT," n.d.). In addition, The City of Laredo also created an initiative to provide and installed bridge cameras for the community of Laredo, Texas, trades, commerce, and for travelers to monitor the traffic in real-time to avoid traffic, long lines, and wait time (City of Laredo, 2021). Moreover, the initiative of border wait time and border camera system was focused only on monitoring the real-time traffic at the border and port of entry. But it still did not reduce the traffic problem and

what is the cause of the traffic congestion. Nearly all my participants indicated that the volume of traffic from Mexico is overwhelming, and the US needs more control and limitations of vehicles coming from Mexico, creating traffic congestion. Opening and building a new bridge and new border policy can decrease the problem of traffic congestion.

Another alternative way is to create an initiative for a train or commute system to the Mexico border for pedestrians or create a new policy for a vehicle coding system crossing the US–Mexico border. To decrease the traffic problem in the Laredo, Texas, US – Mexico border, federal and local governments need to create an initiative for a train or commute system for pedestrians who travel from Mexico to the United States and vice versa to decrease using of vehicles crossing the US – Mexico Laredo border. Although these initiatives will cost a lot of money to purchase a train and build construction or railing for a train, there is another way to decrease the traffic congestion in the US – Mexico Laredo border by Congress creating a new policy by limiting Mexican vehicles crossing the border called "vehicle coding system." The vehicle coding system is a system that only allows Mexican cars with the odd and even last number of vehicles to cross the border on certain days. Vehicles with even numbers are only allowed on Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and Sunday, and odd numbers can only cross the border on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday. In this way, we can reduce the traffic problem in the US – Mexico Laredo border, mitigate and avoid long wait times, improve trade and commerce, and improve the health of travelers and people of Laredo by spending less

idling of vehicles and producing less pollution and having a good air quality in the City of Laredo.

Intelligent and Efficient Border Crossing

United States Department of Transportation (USDOT) researched improving traffic congestion and efficient border crossings. USDOT Intelligent and Efficient Border Crossing are ITS applications that use variable crossing, advanced traveler information systems, electronic screening, and other technologies to improve safety and mobility, reduce emissions, and improve security at our nation's borders (USDOT, 2023). According to USDOT (2023), the vision for the research on Intelligent and Efficient Border Crossing is to enable the implementation of innovative ITS solutions for a bi-national border system that ultimately improves safety and mobility, reduces emissions, and facilitates trade and travel without compromising the vital missions of securing America's borders.

Crime Prevention

According to the Houston Police Department (HPD) (2021), Crime Prevention is the recognition, anticipation, and assessment of a crime risk and the inception of some action to reduce or eliminate it. Warning signs and notices for illegal drugs and weapons are also crime prevention to deter individuals or criminals from committing a crime. However, the US – Mexico border bridge, especially the northbound lane bridge going to the United States, lacks warning signs for illegal drugs and weapons for travelers or individuals who are traveling to the US. These warning signs deter individuals or criminals from committing crimes and know the severity of punishment for committing

this crime before crossing the US. In Laredo, Texas, crime analytics is considerably higher than the national average across all communities in America, from the largest to the smallest, and has a higher crime rate than 72% of the state's cities and towns of all sizes (Neighborhood Scout, 2021). In addition, according to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) crime data, Laredo, Texas, is not one of the safest communities in America (FBI, 2019).

Laredo, Texas, is one of the drug smuggling, human trafficking, and illegal activities hubs of the Drug Trafficking Organizations (DTOs) and Transnational organized crime (TCOs) because of the major highway (Interstate 35 and Interstate 10) for commercial and non-commercial vehicles that connect the Mexico border to the US border going to North border, East and West Coast. According to the National Drug Intelligence Center (2008), Drug traffickers use the South Texas border area as a key storage center for drug shipments smuggled into the country from Mexico; they often store shipments temporarily in the South Texas border area, particularly in the Lower Rio Grande Valley and Laredo, before transporting them to markets throughout the country. To have effective crime prevention, we need to hire and put more confidential informants on the street and inside criminal organizations to gather more information and intelligence; we need to study and understand drug traffickers' operations, trends, and patterns; we also need to educate communities and schools about the effect and severity of punishment for drug smuggling, human trafficking, weapons smuggling, and other criminal activities in the US borders. Lastly, Federal, State, and Local law enforcement agencies need a partnership with stakeholders (community, schools, business owners, and

companies) for ideas and suggestions on how to protect our families and children against illegal drugs to prevent destroying their future and our community.

The Principle of Criminal Law

Criminal law is a system of laws involved with crimes and punishing individuals who commit crimes (Cornell Law School, n.d.). Imprisonment is one of the punishments or rehabilitations for individuals who get convicted for crimes they committed. Prisons in the United States hold over 1.9 million people in 1,566 state prisons, 98 federal prisons, 3,166 local jails, 1,323 juvenile correctional facilities, 142 immigration detention facilities, and 80 Indian country jails, including military prisons, civil commitment centers, state psychiatric hospitals that cost of at least $182 billion each year (Sawyer, W. & Wagner, P. (2024). Sawyer and Wagner (2024) reported that in federal prisons, there are 68,000 inmates convicted of drug-related cases, and 21,000 are still under trial for drug-related cases. State prisons have 134,000 state prisoners, and Local prisons have 24,000 convicted and 114,000 still pending trials for drug-related cases. Prior research revealed that the US taxpayer money goes more into the US prison system than it does on US education, with 15 US states spending $27,000 more per prisoner than per student (Ash, 2019). As a former detention deputy in a law enforcement agency in Houston, Texas, the prison system in America is like a luxury hotel or a vacation spot for criminals and violators. As Parker (2016) noted, prisoners were given three meals a day (with a meal plan by a nutritionist), controlled temperature, free clinic checkups, free medicines and personal hygiene, LCD television with cable HBO or ESPN, gym for workouts, and free vocational school for recidivism program. All of these are paid for and provided by

taxpayer money. This is one of the reasons why we still have a high rate of recidivism in the US, especially drug cases because criminals and violators play the US criminal justice system. Drug traffickers and pushers are getting arrested and serving their sentences in luxury jails. After serving their sentences, drug traffickers and pushers go back to the street and do the same thing again until they save a lot of money in their drug business and have a luxurious life while our children are dying and destroying their future because of illegal drugs. We need to change our system; the federal government and Congress need to be strict and firm in our laws regarding drug policy. The executive and Congress need to pass a law that makes drug trafficking and selling a heinous crime.

In connection with the traffic problem in the Laredo US – Mexico border bridge, the safety and security of the border and American people are being compromised due to the stress of working overtime because of the shortage of officers, lack of equipment, and latest technology. There is an overwhelming volume of traffic from Mexico in which DTOs and TCOs are taking advantage of traffic to transport ten vehicles with illegal drugs and blend in the traffic, hoping seven vehicles with illicit drugs can pass through the US border and officers will apprehend only three cars in which still win-win situation to DTO's and TCO's.

Limitation of the Study

There are several limitations in this study. The limitations were based on a small sample of participants, research bias, and the nature of the methodology, which is a qualitative approach. A small sample of seven US Customs and Border Protection officers were only interviewed from the original ten to fifteen CBP officers or

participants due to being busy at work and with family, conflict of interest, and no

cooperation from partner organizations (CBP). Conducting more interviews with CBP

officers, Staff, Supervisors, Managers, and other stakeholders such as business owners,

community leaders, and travelers would have provided more data and a greater

understanding of the cause of traffic congestion and how to improve border security. To

reduce researcher bias, I assigned numbers to each participant to replace their names and

identity. Including CBP supervisors, managers, and operation staff could better

understand the cause of traffic problems, border security, and operations in the Laredo

US – Mexico border bridge. CBP managers, supervisors, and operational staff were not

recruited as participants due to conflict of interest and challenges of receiving approval

from CBP counsel and the CBP Laredo Port director. In addition, If the qualitative

method has strength, the qualitative approach also has limitations. Qualitative method

data collection is usually time-consuming and is more difficult to analyze; it needs to fit

neatly into standard categories, and it usually cannot be generalized to the study

population or community (University of Southern Denmark, n.d.).

Recommendations

Further research is necessary in the future to decrease the traffic congestion in the

southern border by reducing the volume of vehicles coming from Mexico (vehicles

coding system) or by creating initiatives such as a train system for US – Mexico border

travelers to reduce emissions, improve safety, facilitate fast trade and travel, and improve

border security without compromising the vital missions of securing America's borders

(USDOT, 2023). In this study, all participants agreed that being short-staffed and

overwhelming volume of vehicles coming from Mexico is a massive problem in employees' and travelers' health, CBP operations, and securing the US – Mexico border. The Federal government and Congress must address the short-staffed problem and control the volume of traffic coming from Mexico to reduce traffic congestion and improve border security. Another recommendation is passing a new border policy for legitimate entry documents entering the US border; Congress needs to pass a new border policy that makes it mandatory to have legitimate entry documents, including US citizens entering US borders. Lastly, Congress, Federal, and Local governments need to partner to build a new bridge to alleviate the traffic congestion in Laredo US – Mexico border bridge and all southern borders to reduce emissions and eliminate air pollution, improve trade and travel, improve health and safety of the travelers, and improve border security and American people.

Implications

This research study desired to understand the cause of traffic congestion in the Laredo, Texas, US – Mexico border Port of Entry (POE) and how to improve the security of the US border. The study uncovered that Policymakers and federal and local governments failed to address the traffic congestion at the US – Mexico border in Laredo, Texas, POE, compromising US border security. This research gave a new understanding of the daily challenges the officers and travelers encounter regarding the traffic problem at the US – Mexico border Laredo POE. Federal and Local governments and Policymakers should work together on how to control the overwhelming number of vehicles coming from Mexico, build a new bridge, and hire and put more officers to

prevent short-staffed so we can achieve our goals and mission to reduce traffic congestion and improve US border security. This study will contribute to positive social change by addressing the problem of the participants (CBP Officers) who experience and work in daily operations in the US- – Mexico Laredo POE to improve border security and to decrease the traffic problem in the Laredo Port of Entry (POE) and perhaps use this study to address all US southern border Port of Entry (POE).

Conclusion

The Department of Homeland Security US Customs and Border Protection (DHS – CBP) was created to protect the American people, safeguard our borders, and enhance the nation's economic property. However, the traffic congestion problem in the US – Mexico Laredo border and other southern borders can cause a lot of issues, such as air pollution that affects the health of the travelers and officers, children, seniors, and the community, affects the fast movement of trade and commerce, affects officers' health and their families, and compromising the vital mission of securing America's borders. Despite the private sector, federal or local government creating an initiative program such as border wait times (BWT), border camera system, or trusted traveler program (SENTRI and FAST) but not controlling the volume of vehicles coming from Mexico, the traffic congestion in the US – Mexico Laredo border and all Southern borders remains a problem and not going to resolve the issue. Finally, Policymakers, Federal and Local government, and stakeholders should work together and create a new policy and research initiative on how to control the volume of vehicles traveling from Mexico, new policy and enforcement for legitimate entry documents entering the United States, building a

new bridge for travelers and fast trades and commerce, and lastly, more officers to cover

and prevent short-staffed to improve mobility, safety, and health, reduce emissions and

air pollution, and enhance security at our nation's borders.

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Appendix A: Flyer

TEAMWORK for a better AMERICA,
      TEAMWORK for a better ECONOMY and SECURITY,
         and TEAMWORK for a better LAREDO!!!

PARTICIPANTS AND VOLUNTEERS WANTED FOR A RESEARCH STUDY

Purpose of Research:
This study aims to identify the strengths and the weaknesses of border security, examine the problem of layered U.S. border security, and analyze the vehicle and pedestrian flow of traffic problems in Laredo, Texas, Port of Entry (POE).

Eligibility and Criteria:
Participants:
- Must be working at CBP and have at least one (1) year and above of experience in primary inspection, border security, operations, strategic plan, or civilian staff.
- 18 years old or older, and
- Who wants to make a difference in society.

If you want to participate and you want to make a difference, you will be asked to:
- Participate in a face-to-face, phone, or audio-visual interview and will not exceed 40 minutes to answer the questions.

Contacts and Questions:
If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant or any negative parts of the study, you can call Walden University's Research Participant Advocate at 612-312-1210 or contact irb@mail.waldenu.edu. This study is under the direction of the College of Behavior Sciences at Walden University and under the supervision of Dr. Gregory Koehle, the dissertation chair of this research. Dr. Gregory Koehle.

Thank you for your support and for making a difference.

Appendix B: Semi structured Interview Questions

Semi-structured interview questions

Participant Information

Name of Interviewee:

Location of Interview

Date of Interview

Participant Work Location

Years of Work Experience

Education:

Age:

Sex:

Participants interview questions:

1. What causes traffic congestion in the Laredo U.S. – Mexico border?

2. What are the possible solutions to improve the traffic flow in Laredo, Texas, without compromising border security?

3. Presuming you are a high-ranking official of the CBP, what will you do to decrease the traffic problems in Laredo, Texas, and the US –Mexico border, as well as the vehicle and pedestrian travelers' issues?

4. What is your insight about the CBP Multi-layered border security?

5. Based on your experience, what are the everyday challenges travelers encounter regarding the traffic problem at the Laredo U.S. – Mexico border?