

Kelly Brownell:

Hello and welcome to Policy 360. I'm Kelly Brownell, Dean of the Sanford School of Public Policy at Duke University. Human trafficking is a worldwide problem. Across the globe, more than 20 million people are victimized by this modern form of slavery. My guest today is Judith Kelley, Judith's research delves into the US State Department's Trafficking in Persons or T-I-P, TIP Annual Report. Since 2001. The TIP Report has ranked country's enforcements of law against human trafficking. The report is the world's most comprehensive record of government anti-human trafficking efforts. Each country is ranked according to its level of effectiveness in combating human trafficking on a scale from one to three, one being the best, three being the worst. The system is intended to incite countries to act. The US is essentially using an overt public shaming, grading and monitoring of progress to countries to get officials to respond to the pressure and stop human trafficking. Judith Kelley is Senior Associate Dean and Professor at the Sanford School of Public Policy. Welcome to Policy 360.

Judith Kelley:

Thank you, I'm pleased to be here.

Kelly Brownell:

First, would you mind describing the TIP Report and what's in it?

Judith Kelley:

What it really is about as combining a narrative of what countries are doing in this space of trying to combat human trafficking with this very visible, highly publicized grade, you might call it, that allows countries to compare themselves with other countries and how they are performing. And that grade is important to understand is not based on the severity of scope of trafficking in the the country. It's based on the efforts the country is making. So every country is in the report, it's not like some countries just don't even get in because they have a lighter issue around this.

Kelly Brownell:

So is there any evidence that countries care about these numbers and then take action accordingly?

Judith Kelley:

There's a lot of evidence that countries care about these. And even though it's not always something that's in the news, for example, the level of concern is really reveal when you dive into the interactions between the embassy in the country and the domestic officials in the country, it's something that countries prefer to keep off the radar. So the effect is really more in anticipation of trying to not fall to a low grade and get a bad grade.

However, we also see in many countries that when countries do get a bad grade, we have examples of prime ministers going on television and explaining why this bad grade is one, either wrong, or what they're going to try to do about it, depending on how they choose to react to it. But more importantly, we have seen in research that we've done to try to understand that the responses in a more systematic way, we have seen countries taking concrete steps in trying to up their R&D in what they're to fight human trafficking. And that's what really, at the end of the day, is what matters.

Kelly Brownell:

So in addition to the final grade, I'm assuming there's a lot of more granular information that gets provided in the report. What sort of information does a report make public?

Judith Kelley:

So that's right. So the whole idea is that you have this grading system in order to increase the interest in collaborating and accomplishing things. And so to do that, you have to also help provide solutions and you have to help provide coalition building and even practical assistance sometimes. So the report itself becomes what one might think of as a dissemination device for ideas. Countries can look and see what are other countries doing in terms of victim shelters? How are they handling their hotlines? What are they doing to deal with bonded labor in certain agriculture, et cetera? So the report starts by describing the nature of the problem in each country and it's important to understand that the nature of human trafficking is so varied. And the problem in Burma is entirely different than the one in Ghana, which is entirely different than the one in the United States, and the one in Durham is different than the one in New York.

So it starts out by describing the nature of the problem then it continues to say what the government has been doing. And then it provides a set of examination in three areas, the prevention, protection, and prosecution, in and what's called the three Ps. And in these of these areas, it suggests what government can do in the future to get better. But in the area about what governments have done, that becomes a library for other countries to read those and understand some of the approaches that they can take.

Kelly Brownell:

So a compendium of best practices if you would.

Judith Kelley:

Hopefully yes. That's part of the intent.

Kelly Brownell:

So in addition to the three Ps you mentioned, I can imagine an overriding fourth P which is policy. So I'm assuming that this report delves into the policies that might get established in different countries that could help with human trafficking.

Judith Kelley:

That's right. The fourth P is the foundation of each of the three PS. What are you doing in terms of protecting victims? That is a policy issue. You have to have policies in place that, if a victim is identified, that they are treated as a victim and not as a criminal. That they are given shelter, that they're given health care rather than being deported back to a dangerous situation. So you have to have policies in place for protection. You have to have policies in place for prosecution because you have to have the laws in place that allow you to actually prosecute these crimes. And when this problem really started becoming much more, it was coming to the surface more in the late '80s and in the '90s, you would have thought that it would be easy to prosecute somebody who kept somebody hold up in a hotel and they couldn't get out and they was selling them for sex, you'd think, "Oh, obviously there's a crime going on here."

But it actually turns out that in many countries, it wasn't really clear under what legal rules you would actually be accusing people of. Was it keeping somebody hostage? And so a lot of laws have been

put into place in countries over the last 15 years. And then a lot of practices also in terms of prevention, which is not necessarily that there's a policy that we must prevent, but the government has to make investments in prevention programs and spend money on awareness raising and things like.

Kelly Brownell:

So I believe most people are probably aware of human trafficking in the context of sexual exploitation, but there are other forms of human trafficking. And I'm wondering if you could tell us a little bit about that.

Judith Kelley:

Absolutely. So people tend to think of human trafficking as being women, primarily in sexual slavery. And indeed the whole issue came to the fore in the United States with a focus on sex trafficking in Eastern Europe. And this whole notion that there was these white women who were being forced into sexual labor really captured the imagination of the conservative right in the United States, and at the same time of the feminist coalition. And you had this very unusual coalition of conservative Christians and feminists all wanting to do the same thing. It's a very bizarre coalition but that was how it really got started and that's why I think a lot of people think of human trafficking in terms of sexual trafficking. A lot of it also, however, is labor, a lot of it is children, a lot of it is also men.

It's difficult to put numbers on it exactly, but there are lots of practices in agriculture, even in the United States where people may have their working documents, their legal documents taken from them or they'd be coming here without documents, and then they're kept in such a situation that they really can't function outside of the work area. There is children making bricks as young as three or four years old or sorting through minerals and even things like forced marriage is considered a form of human trafficking. In Ghana, there are people who sell their children more or less into the fishing industry to go out on the boats to fish. And speaking of that, in Thailand, we have a big problem with the fishing industry where it's very easy to keep somebody captured on a boat.

Kelly Brownell:

Are there countries you could point to that are making especially good progress?

Judith Kelley:

In the whole middle east. There was a very curious example of small children being used, for example, in the camel racing industry, because children have to be very light to actually run these camels fast. And this issue came to light through the trafficking import from the State Department. And the reason they were able to make progress is because the technological solution was found, that is a robot was invented that could do the same job. So sometimes it was very, very difficult to make progress unless you can actually find a way of disrupting that supply and demand that's feeding the problem in the first place.

Kelly Brownell:

Absolutely fascinating. I had no idea that camel racing was part of this picture. So as part of your exploration of this topic, you've analyzed a large amount of data from diplomatic cables from around the world and even looked into WikiLeaks material. What are you looking for when you're exploring these things?

Judith Kelley:

So what I'm interested in as a political scientist is try to understand what really motivates states to try to make reforms in areas where they don't really have an incentive to focus their resources or their time for various reasons. And you might say, "Oh, why wouldn't countries want to improve this problem?" But it turns out that after sort of the outright mafia, government officials are themselves in something like 57 countries in the last human trafficking report that government officials themselves were listed as complicit in human trafficking. So there a lot of countries in which people are taking cuts and it's not so easy to promote these kinds of reform. So the whole notion here is to try to find out how can we motivate reforms of kinds that countries not going to undertake by themselves. And as a political scientist, I'm interested in finding out what pushes those buttons.

Is it sanctioning countries or threatening to sanction them? Is it giving them assistance? Is it trying to, as you say, shame them, or is this a different type of approach? And I would actually say that this approach it's different from shaming because where shaming ad hoc singles out somebody and says, "You've done that," this approach praises the ones who are doing well, incentivize the ones who are doing well to keep on doing well, and allows you to compare yourself with others, which has a different type of stigmatizing effect than just being singled out. And then it has the engagement and the assistance and everything along with it.

So what I'm looking for in the cables is trying to understand whether the theory that I have about how this is working is evidenced in the interactions that are revealed in the cables. It's difficult to know when we're studying any kind of policy that's not sort of randomly distributed across countries to know whether a country is really changing their policies because of this report or is it other pressures on them that are leading them to change or not change? So I'm looking for evidence that it's driven by concern for these grades. I'm looking for evidence that the United States Embassy is really involved in providing practical and real input into the policies on the ground so that I could actually trace the footprint of the policy on the outcomes.

Kelly Brownell:

So at what levels of government are these discussions occurring? Are they happening at low levels where the people aren't in a position to do anything or is it otherwise?

Judith Kelley:

So I was able to actually code the level of interactions and some of them are handled at lower levels but actually the majority of the interactions I was surprised to learn are at the ambassador level or the chief of mission and they tend to occur with ministers or attorney generals, and in civil cases, heads of state. So I was surprised to see the attention that this is given that it's not merely some bureaucratic, it takes back and place in the back rooms but it's really on the forefront.

Kelly Brownell:

Can you give us some examples of specific things you found in the WikiLeaks information?

Judith Kelley:

Yeah, so several things were interesting from a policy perspective of analyzing the policy and then other things were just interesting from, I would say, a psychological perspective. From the policy perspective, it was very interesting to see how the interactions revealed that countries were motivated directly by getting a better grade. And this was revealed, for example, in the cables by the fact that they would say

things like, "If we get this done by March 20th, will it make it into the report?" That's smoking gun evidence that they're really doing this because of the report. So those kinds of things were very interesting. The level of interaction that was revealed in the reports was very interesting to me. I think we tend to think of US involvement in other countries as something that is very visible and strong-arming, but in some cables, it was shown that the US embassy was having input into suggesting how a government might organize its internal agency that might deal with this, or even who they might put in charge of that. It kind of level of intrusion that we're not really aware of, but that shows the influence that this kind of policy can have.

From a psychological perspective, there were some comments that just, I found really precious. One in particular, when the ambassador was briefing the top official in Albania, who is dealing with this policy, and told him that Albania was going to be dropping to the watch list, the cable says, "His face went pale when told." And I like that, because you can fake a lot of things, but you can't fake your face going pale, right? And so that really revealed the shock that it was to this guy. But there are also other things that show how countries are really comparing themselves. So like when a official from Venezuela was interacting with the ambassador protesting, "We are not as bad as Cuba on this issue," right? Or Egypt saying, "After all, Egypt is not Thailand." That they really are taking offense to being "lumped together" with countries that they don't want to be lumped together with, and I found that really fascinating.

Kelly Brownell:

Very impressive evidence that people do pay attention to these scores.

Judith Kelley:

Indeed, yeah.

Kelly Brownell:

So I think I know the answer to this question, given the comments that you've made. But it sounds like you would believe that the scorecard approach has been effective with respect to human trafficking.

Judith Kelley:

I think the scorecard diplomacy approach has been good bang for its buck. Meaning that it's not cost us the same as the US military. It's also not rendering us the same kind of impact. But when you think about the subtlety of the method, the relative inexpensive approach, what we're accomplishing is worth it, it's worth the effort. So I would say it's had success proportional to what's been invested that's worthwhile. And I don't think it would work in all issue areas. I don't think it's going to get North Korea to give up nuclear weapons, but I think that it should be thought of as part of our toolkit for how we approach issues.

Kelly Brownell:

Well, thank you very much for talking about this. This whole concept of scorecard diplomacy applies obviously to human trafficking but it's a lot of other areas as well. And one can learn a lot of lessons from your work and from your book on this about how one might go about creating social change by using this approach. So thank you very much for sharing this with us.

Judith Kelley:

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You're very welcome, my pleasure.

Kelly Brownell:

So our guest today, Judith Kelly, is the Kevin D. Gorter Professor of Public Policy at the Sanford School of Public Policy, where she also serves as Professor of Political Science and Senior Associate Dean in the Sanford School. Judith's book, Scorecard Diplomacy will be published in April by Cambridge University Press and I can guarantee you, it will be a good read. Until next time, I'm Kelly Brownell.