World Atlantic Airlines ICE Air Flights via Brownsville International Airport

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1 Introduction

This memo analyzes U.S. Immigration & Customs Enforcement Air Operations (ICE Air) deportation and immigration detention transfer flights operated by World Atlantic Airlines (WAL) via Brownsville/South Padre Island International Airport (KBRO) in Brownsville, TX.

This analysis uses data from ICE Air's Alien Repatriation Tracking System (ARTS) database, released to the University of Washington Center for Human Rights (UWCHR) under the Freedom of Information Act. For more on ICE Air and the ARTS database, see UWCHR's 2019 report, "Hidden in Plain Sight: ICE Air and the Machinery of Mass Deportation".

Analysis for this report was done using Python. Long code sections for charts and maps displayed in this memo have been hidden. The full data and code used to produce this memo can be reviewed on GitHub.

2 ARTS Mission Data

```python
import pandas as pd
import numpy as np
import yaml

with open(f'../input/mission-dtypes.yaml', 'r') as yamlfile:
    mission_dtypes = yaml.load(yamlfile)

with open('../input/airport_dict.yaml', 'r') as yamlfile:
    airport_dict = yaml.load(yamlfile)

read_csv_opts = {'sep': '|',
                 'quotechar': '"',
                 'compression': 'gzip',
                 'encoding': 'utf-8',
                 'parse_dates': ['MissionDate'],
                 'infer_datetime_format': True}

df = pd.read_csv(f'../input/ice-air-missions.csv.gz',
                 **read_csv_opts,
                 dtype=mission_dtypes)
```

The ARTS data includes information on 16967 ICE Air missions from October 1, 2010 to May 4, 2019. Each mission is associated with a unique identifier (`MissionID`), aircraft tail number (`MsnTailNumber`), and date (`MissionDate`), as well as additional information including an itinerary of up to ten airports, number of passengers, cost, etc.

3 Flights operated by World Atlantic

The dataset does not directly encode the airline operating each mission. The `msnVendor` field represents the air charter brokers contracted by ICE Air to arrange flights. Classic Air Charter is the current contractor for ICE Air. However, we can use publicly available flight tracking websites to collect aircraft tail numbers associated with a given airline, such as World Atlantic Airlines (Caribbean Sun). Using data gathered from RadarBox, we generate a list of tail numbers used by World Atlantic Airlines (WAL) during the first months of 2020, as well as additional aircraft known to be associated with WAL:

```python
wal = pd.read_csv(f'../input/RadarBoxWAL20200116-20200417.csv.gz',
                  sep='|',
                  quotechar='"')

wal_tails = wal['Aircraft'].unique()

def extract(string, start='(', stop=')'):
    return string[string.index(start)+1:string.index(stop)]

cleaned = []
for i in wal_tails:
    try:
        j = extract(i)
        cleaned.append(j)
    except ValueError:
        pass
wal_tails = cleaned
del cleaned

# Adding known tail numbers
wal_tails.extend(['N802WA', 'N803WA', 'N807WA'])
```

We can verify that each of these tail numbers is associated with a World Atlantic or Caribbean Sun aircraft using the website FlightAware:

- N801WA
- N805WA
- N806WA
- N807TR
- N808WA
- N804WA
- N802WA
- N803WA
- N807WA

We then limit our analysis to records with `MsnTailNumber` values matching these tail numbers:

```
pre_drop = len(df)
df = df[df['MsnTailNumber'].isin(wal_tails)]
post_drop = len(df)
```

This excludes 13265 records, leaving us with 3702 missions associated with known WAL tail numbers.

4   WAL itineraries via KBRO

We search the fields associated with mission itineraries to generate a summary of total number of mission stops per airport for known WAL flights, and to flag all missions with at least one stop at KBRO:

```
stop_cols = ['MsnStart',
             'MsnStpOne',
             'MsnStpTwo',
             'MsnStpThree',
             'MsnStpFour',
             'MsnStpFive',
             'MsnStpSix',
             'MsnStpSeven',
             'MsnStpEight',
             'MsnEnd']

stop_count = df.loc[:, stop_cols].melt()['value'].value_counts()

targets = ['KBRO']
func = [lambda x: x.isin(targets)]
target_found = df[stop_cols].apply(func).sum(axis=1) > 0

df['kbro_stop'] = target_found
```

We find a total of 2765 stops at KBRO (including initial and final stops). KBRO is ranked #2 among all airports for stop frequency:

```
Top 10 stops for WAL missions
-----------------------------
KAEX    3482
KBRO    2765
KMIA    1972
MGGT     858
MHLM     645
KSAT     638
KCSG     607
MSLP     441
KMDT     396
KLRD     392
Name: value, dtype: int64
```

1736 ICE Air missions by WAL aircraft involve at least one stop at KBRO. This represents 46.89% of all known WAL ICE Air missions. WAL flights via KBRO transported 233,125 passengers, at a total reported cost of $94,626,549.96.

The proportion of WAL ICE Air missions involving KBRO has increased in recent years:

ICE Air missions with known World Atlantic tail numbers

Itineraries with at least one stop at KBRO
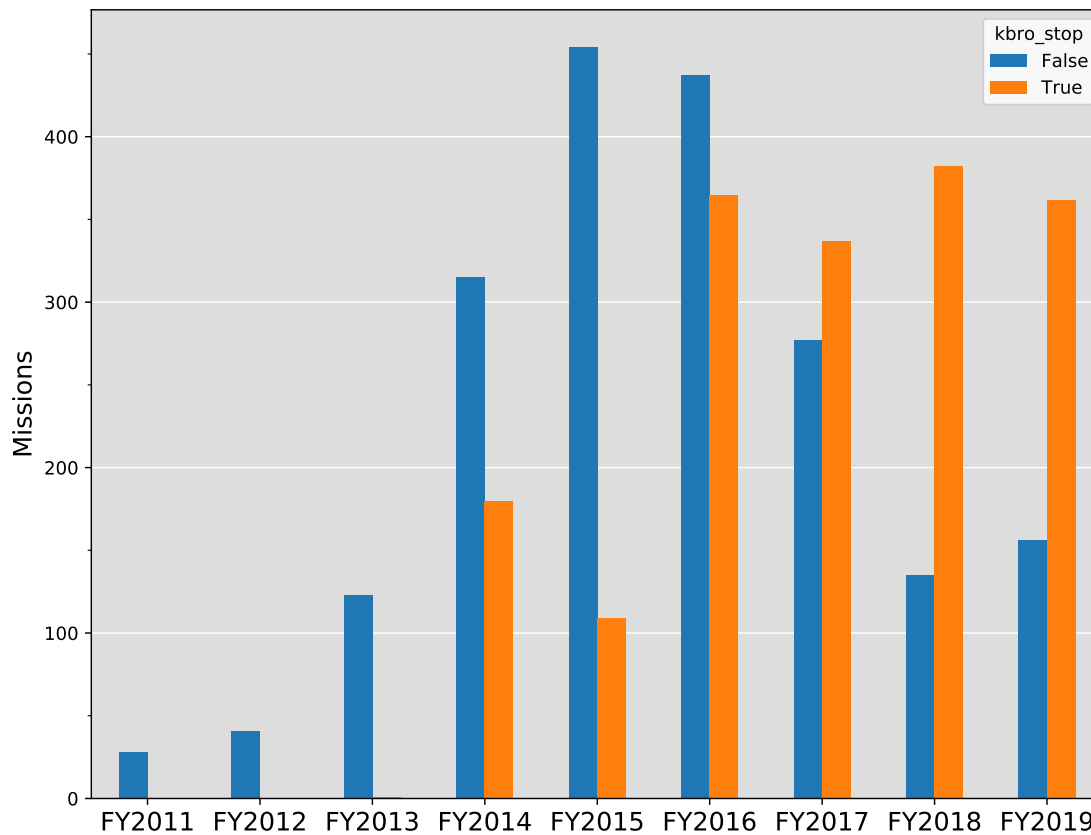
As seen in the above chart, from FY2017-FY2019 a majority of known WAL ICE Air flights involved stops at KBRO. During FY2019, 69.88% of ICE Air missions by known WAL aircraft involved at least one stop at KBRO. 1061 missions originated at KBRO and 1064 ended there. See Appendix A below for maps of all WAL missions involving KBRO per fiscal year, emphasizing most frequent itineraries.

5   Conclusion

Brownsville/South Padre Island International Airport (KBRO) has been a major hub for World Atlantic Airlines' ICE Air deportation and immigration detention transfer flights since at least FY2014. From FY2014 to FY2019 an increasing proportion of WAL IC Air missions involved stops at KBRO. For many of these missions, KBRO was either the start or end point of the mission.
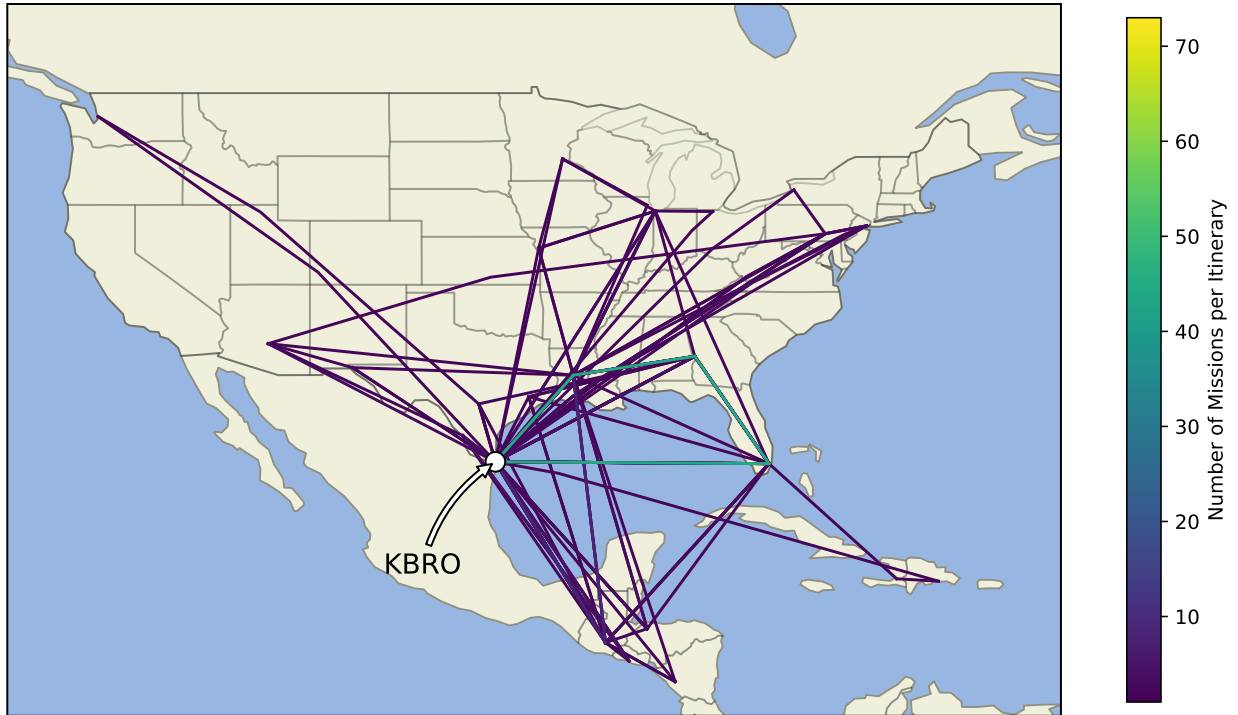
A   Maps of WAL flights via KBRO
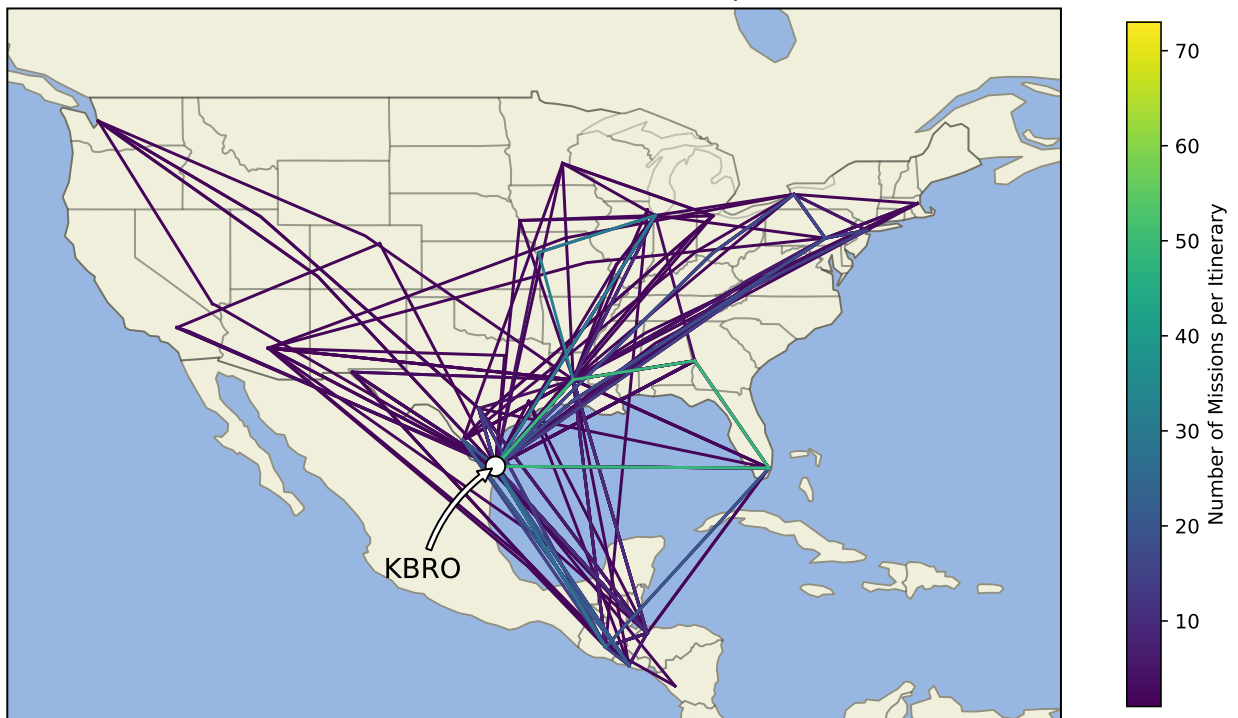
WAL ICE Air missions via KBRO, FY2013

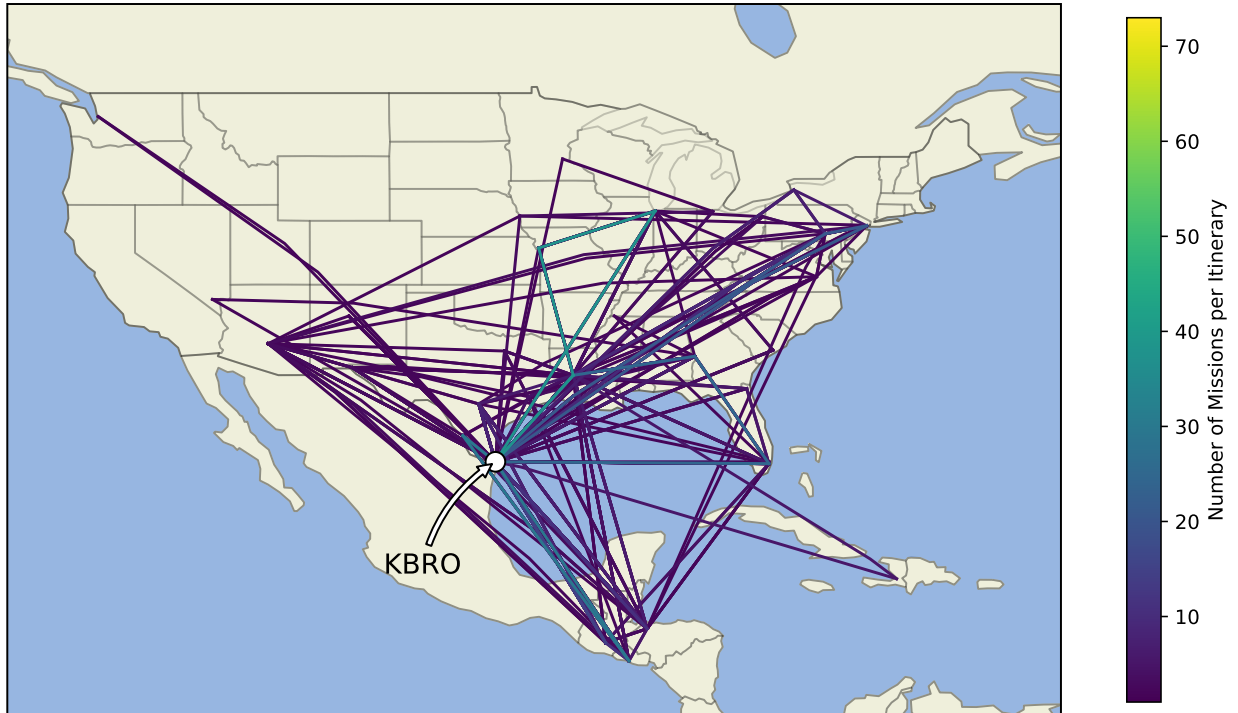## WAL ICE Air missions via KBRO, FY2014
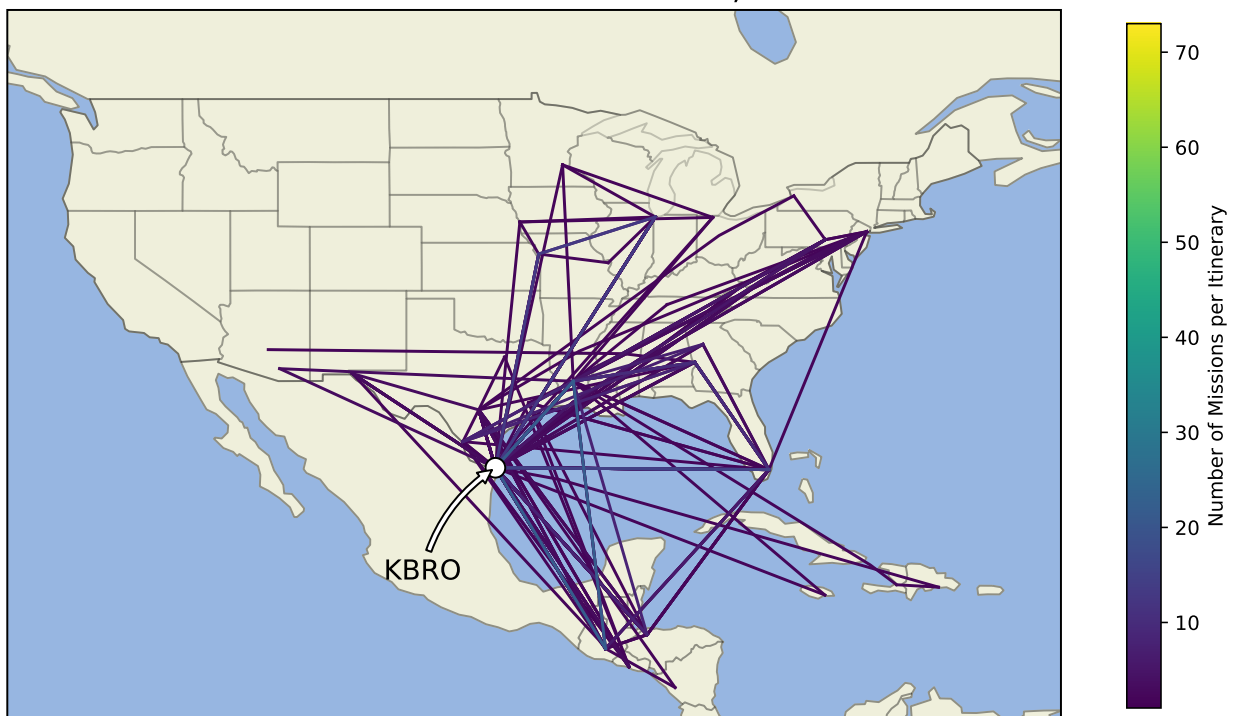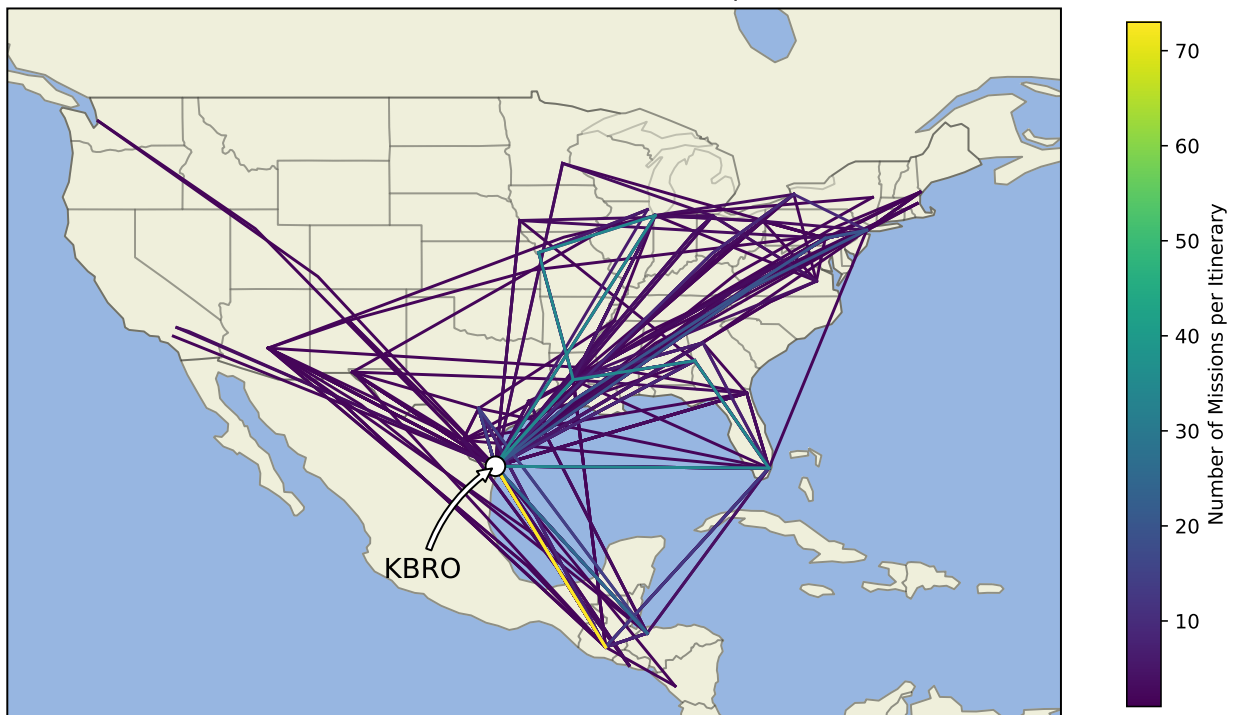
WAL ICE Air missions via KBRO, FY2015

WAL ICE Air missions via KBRO, FY2016

WAL ICE Air missions via KBRO, FY2017

WAL ICE Air missions via KBRO, FY2018

WAL ICE Air missions via KBRO, FY2019