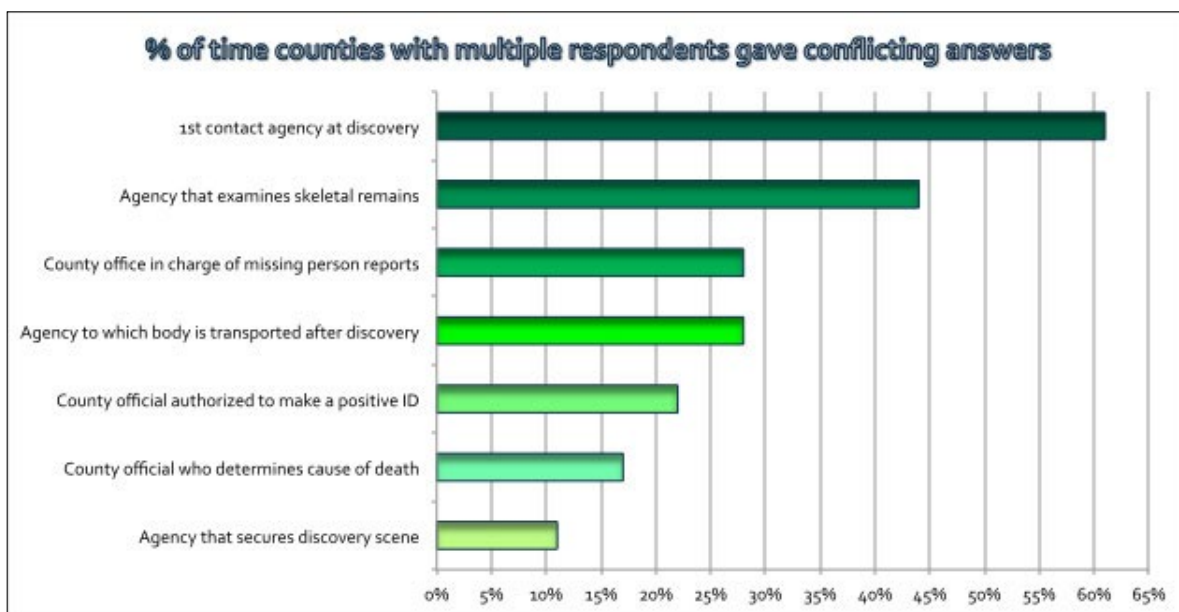


## Appendix A: Methods

This manual emerges from a series of questions from a community that has been affected by the rising toll of UBC deaths. It is a response to the very particular context of the thousands of UBCs who have died since the mid-1990s, which also represents a disaster-like situation for local officials and smaller jurisdictions constituting the majority of this region. This is disaster-like due to the fact that local authorities have not been accustomed or equipped (in terms of infrastructure, finances or training) to deal with this dramatic rise in unknown and decayed human remains in their jurisdictions [52]. Pima County in Arizona has been one of the few jurisdictions to begin to count the UBC dead and unidentified, and alone, they have tallied over 2,000 individuals since the year 2000 [4][9]. The circumstances surrounding UBC deaths are complicated by the fact that many UBCs travel anonymously or under pseudonyms, cannot be identified by common death investigation techniques such as questioning friends and family – often because these people are foreign and/or unknown – or by standard post-mortem treatment accorded to most deaths. This is because UBC remains are often found highly decayed from prolonged exposure to the elements in the remote wilderness settings through which migrants travel.



*Figure 18:* Of the 18 counties in which multiple interviews were conducted, officials occasionally gave conflicting reports of the protocols involved in given stages of a body's itinerary. This chart represents a selection of scenarios for which this conflicted reporting occurred. Values represent percent of 18 counties for which this was the case.

In these circumstances, a sustained process of random and disorganized response techniques based on locally available (insufficient) money, infrastructure and training has meant that for more than a decade, UBCs have been systematically subject to incomplete or uneven investigation, leaving no comprehensive statement about the number of UBC dead nor the number left unidentified. As evident in Figure 18, of the 18 counties at which multiple interviews were conducted, many county officials gave conflicting answers regarding basic aspects of which county offices were involved in given aspects of a body's itinerary, from discovery to release. Officials involved in death investigations are cognizant of the lack of standardization and oversight. Therefore, our team focused on collecting the local knowledge of procedures and protocols from each county jurisdiction.

## OBJECTIVES

The study aimed to determine what the methods of death investigation were in each of the jurisdictions responsible for UBC remains. Second, was to determine the conditions in which these practices were occurring, and the barriers to best practice.

### Data Collection

The research was divided into four stages: survey research; semi-structured interviews with officials involved in the postmortem process to determine what was being done; and group meetings with experts and practitioners involved in UBC death investigation to determine optimal practices. Finally, legal and medicolegal research helped identify optimal practices and to examine these in light of existing laws.

### Survey Research

Primary data was generated by way of an open-ended survey instrument and semi-structured interviews of medical examiners, coroners and other pertinent officials. Figure 19 proportionally represents the types of officials represented within the survey. The survey instrument was developed in consultation with Pima County Chief Medical Examiner, Bruce Parks, MD, and considered conventions and standards used in the counting and processing of UBCs, the criteria used to establish if someone is a UBC, rationales for counting and not counting UBCs, procedures for identifying persons presumed to be UBCs, and procedures for the processing of unidentified bodies of probable UBCs. The survey instrument was mailed to medical examiners, coroners, and other pertinent officials responsible for the counting, examination, and identification of the bodies of UBCs in United States counties bordering Mexico.

For this project, we limited our study area to the area within 100 miles of the U.S.-Mexico border, although counties above that area were incorporated if they were directly involved in the death investigation process for counties to the south. For example, in New Mexico, the Medical Examiner's office is state-based, such that UBC bodies recovered within 100 miles of the U.S.-Mexico border are examined in the Medical Examiner's Albuquerque facilities, over 270 miles north of the border. This study area was over 200,000 square miles (see Figure 20).

The University of Arizona Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects reviewed and approved the plans for research.

The majority of the interviews were administered in person, although some officials submitted survey answers via mail or telephone. Each county within the study area received a request to complete our survey via certified mail and multiple phone calls, regardless of whether they responded. The interviews involved a series of closed and open-ended questions tested in a pilot project in 2007. Ultimately, 69 completed surveys were collected from 35 counties and four states, with an average of 2.25 interviews per county. Each survey interview took approximately one hour to complete.

### Analysis of the Data

At the end of data gathering, each interview was subject to qualitative content analysis and quantitative evaluation. Statistical analysis was undertaken to pinpoint general trends and particular practices.

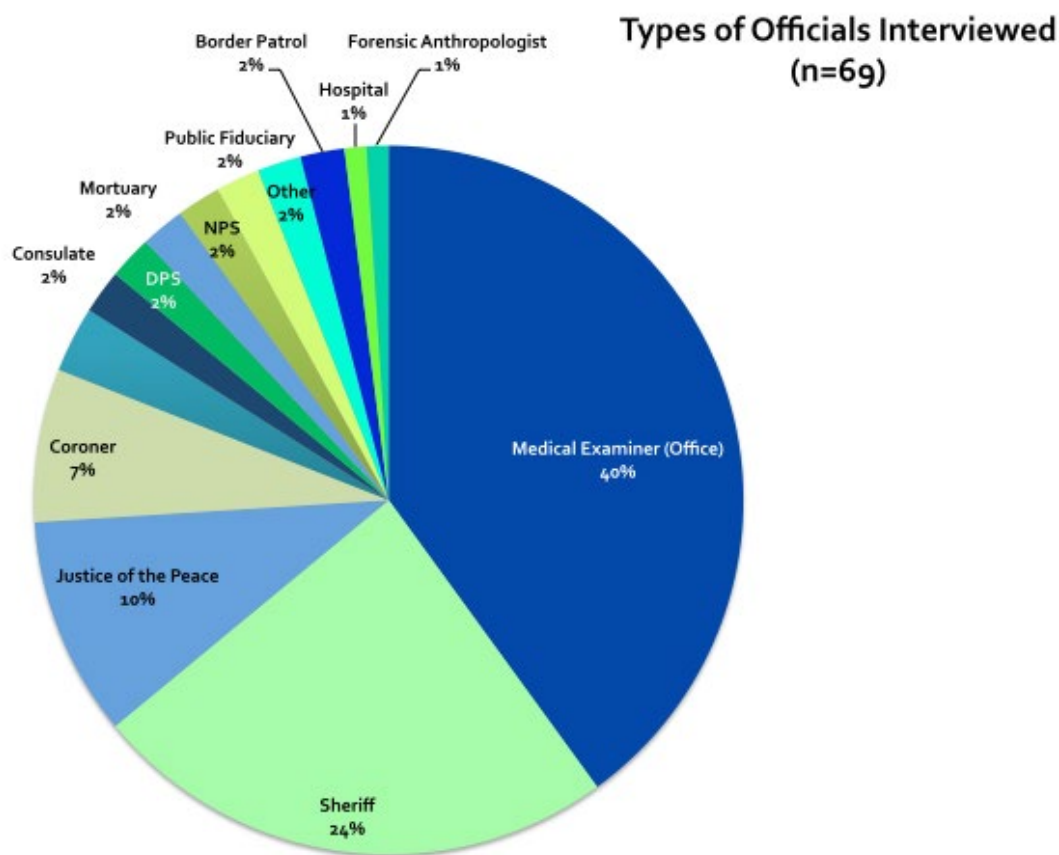


Figure 19: Pie chart represents proportions of each official type represented among the 69 interviews conducted.

**Consultant Meetings: Participatory Research**

After interviews were collected, a first draft of a best practice manual was created and sent to consultants and survey respondents from across the border, which included a range of possible practices developed in response to border-based needs. Additionally, community-based organizations such as Houston Unidos, Coalición de Derechos Humanos and the Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team were sent drafts. These organizations were represented as they are nationally recognized for their work with county and state medical examiners, coroners, law enforcement agencies (including sheriffs, police, and Border Patrol), and thus represented important community-based viewpoints regarding best practices surrounding migrant deaths.

A meeting in Scottsdale, Arizona, was organized to discuss their notes on the draft and related concerns. Eighteen participants representing Arizona, California and Texas attended, as well as the Binational Migration Institute project team.

The meeting produced many key insights for a final manual draft, resulting in the addition and expansion of several chapters, suggestions for points of emphasis, notes for the future distribution of the final manual, and the idea that the manual should be used as a training tool for agency officials along the U.S.-Mexico border region.

### Student Research Training

The BMI's far-reaching, multidisciplinary scholarship offered students opportunities to gain invaluable experience in conducting applied social science research. Most of the fieldwork done with numerous government agencies for the 2006 study on the "funnel effect" [6] mentioned earlier, was completed by students associated with the BMI. For the current project, both graduate and undergraduate engaged in the project design and implementation. The graduate research assistants (GRAs) were able to hone their skills in database computer software (entry and management), engaged with senior personnel (Co-PIs) by attending project related planning meetings, assisted in the organization and publication of the manual, and in writing papers or briefs that emerge from these events (for presentation at professional meetings or part of their masters or doctoral programs). GRAs were trained in ethical practice as outlined by the University of Arizona Institutional Review Board Human Subjects Protection program, after which they engaged in the fieldwork portion of the project.

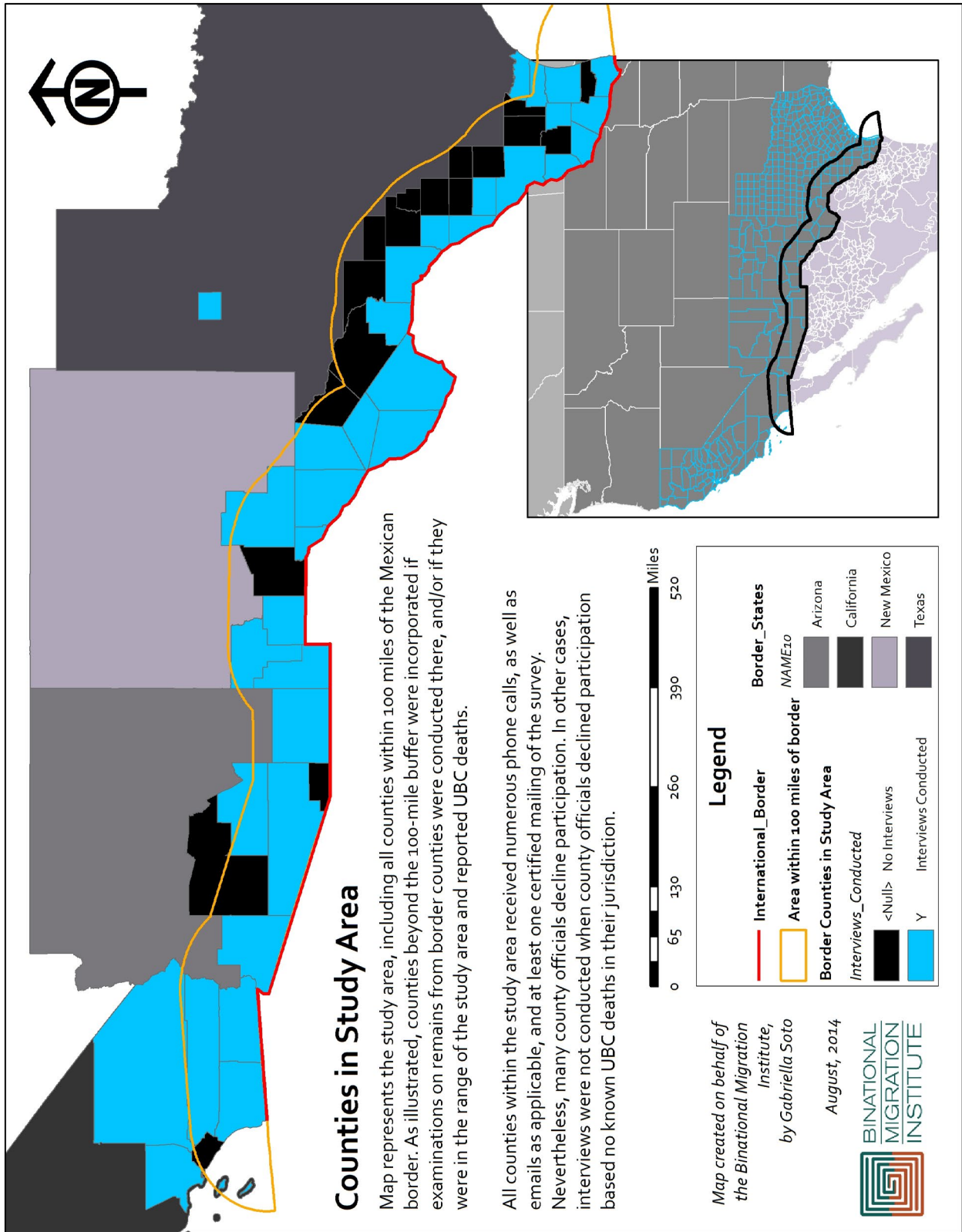


Figure 20: The study area of 100 miles north of the border is buffered in orange, while counties within this buffer are colored blue where interviews were conducted, and black where no interviews were conducted.