

GAO@100 Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-21-507](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

Data collected through the Extremist Crime Database show that there were 81 fatal violent extremist attacks in the United States from 2010 through 2020, resulting in 240 deaths. Since 2010, DHS has developed strategic initiatives that address targeted violence and terrorism prevention, which include efforts to counter violent extremism, among other things. GAO was asked to review DHS's longer-term efforts to prevent terrorism and targeted violence.

This report examines the extent to which (1) DHS's 2019 strategy to address targeted violence and terrorism prevention includes key elements of a comprehensive strategy, and (2) DHS has developed a data governance framework to help implement its strategy. GAO reviewed DHS documentation and compared DHS's strategy to identified elements of a comprehensive strategy, and compared DHS's efforts to develop a data governance framework to federal requirements for implementing data governance.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making three recommendations, including that DHS revise its strategy to include all key elements of a comprehensive strategy, and incorporate its targeted violence and terrorism prevention mission into its departmental governance of data.

View [GAO-21-507](#). For more information, contact Triana McNeil at (202) 512-8777 or McNeilT@gao.gov.

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COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM

DHS Can Further Enhance Its Strategic Planning and Data Governance Efforts

What GAO Found

DHS's 2019 Strategic Framework for Countering Terrorism and Targeted Violence and the related plans—collectively referred to as the strategy—outline the department's vision for all DHS counterterrorism activities. In prior work, GAO has identified seven elements of a comprehensive strategy. GAO found that DHS's strategy contains some but not all of the key elements (see figure). For example, GAO found that DHS's strategy included a mission statement, and a set of goals that were in turn linked to objectives and priority actions. However, the strategy did not include a discussion of external factors such as how the economy, demographics, or emerging technologies may affect the department in meeting its goals. By identifying and assessing such external factors, DHS would be better positioned to proactively mitigate such factors or plan for contingencies, if needed.

Extent to Which DHS's Strategy for Countering Terrorism and Targeted Violence Included the Seven Elements of a Comprehensive Strategy

Elements of a comprehensive strategy	GAO assessment
Mission statement	●
Problem definition, scope, and methodology	◐
Goals and objectives	●
Activities, milestones, and performance measures	◐
Organizational roles, responsibilities, and coordination	◐
Resources and investments	○
Key external factors that could affect goals	○

Legend

● Fully included ◐ Partially included ○ Not included

Source: GAO analysis of DHS Strategic Framework for Countering Terrorism and Targeted Violence and the Framework's Public Action Plan and the Implementation Plan. | GAO-21-507

DHS has taken some steps to establish a data governance framework, which helps ensure that an agency's data assets are transparent, accessible, and of sufficient quality to support its mission. For example, DHS established a data governance council to manage various data priority areas, however it has not yet completed actions to include targeted violence and terrorism prevention data into its department-wide framework. DHS has already identified some data challenges, such as the lack of comprehensive, national-level statistics on terrorism and targeted violence that underscore the need for a data governance framework. By incorporating targeted violence and terrorism prevention data into its broader data governance framework, DHS would be better able to leverage data to support and inform its prevention efforts, including building effective policy to address the threats and trends it identifies in the data.