



Highlights of [GAO-10-395](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

Thousands of gang members in the United States belong to gangs such as MS-13 and 18th Street that are also active in Central American countries. Federal entities with responsibilities for addressing Central American gangs include the National Security Council (NSC); the Departments of Homeland Security (DHS), Justice (DOJ), and State; and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). GAO was asked to review federal efforts to combat transnational gangs. This report addresses (1) the extent to which the federal government has developed a strategy to combat these gangs, and (2) how federal agencies have implemented the strategy and other programs to combat these gangs, coordinated their actions, and assessed their results. GAO examined federal agencies' antigang plans, resources, and measures; interviewed federal, state, and local officials in seven localities representing varying population sizes and geographic regions; and interviewed U.S. and foreign officials in El Salvador and Guatemala where U.S. agencies have implemented antigang programs. The results of these interviews are not generalizable.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the NSC revise the antigang strategy to include an approach for oversight and performance measures and that DOJ and DHS reach agreement on the composition of an antigang unit in El Salvador. The NSC did not comment. DOJ and DHS agreed with our recommendation to them.

[View GAO-10-395 or key components.](#)
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COMBATING GANGS

Federal Agencies Have Implemented a Central American Gang Strategy, but Could Strengthen Oversight and Measurement of Efforts

What GAO Found

The NSC, in conjunction with State, DOJ, DHS, and USAID, developed a strategy to combat gangs with connections to Central America; however, the strategy lacks an approach or framework to oversee implementation and performance goals and measures to assess progress. GAO previously reported that characteristics such as defining the problem to be addressed as well as the scope and methodology of the strategy; describing agencies' activities, roles, and responsibilities; providing an approach to oversee implementation; and establishing performance measures, among other characteristics, can enhance a strategy's effectiveness. While the antigang strategy contains some of these characteristics, such as identifying the problems and risks associated with the gangs, describing the scope and purpose of the strategy, and defining roles and responsibilities of federal agencies as well as specific implementation activities, it lacks other characteristics such as an approach for overseeing implementation and goals and measures for assessing progress. For example, although agencies coordinate the strategy's implementation through an interagency task force, agency officials reported that this task force does not oversee the strategy's implementation and that no entity exercises oversight responsibility for the strategy's implementation. Similarly, while State and USAID are developing measures to assess the outcomes of their antigang programs, these measures do not encompass all programs under the strategy or track results of the strategy as a whole. Incorporating these characteristics could enhance the accountability of agencies to implement the strategy and provide a means for assessing progress.

To carry out the strategy and combat transnational gangs, federal agencies have implemented programs and taken steps to coordinate their actions and develop performance measures to assess results of individual programs; but, coordination could be strengthened in an antigang unit in El Salvador by reaching agreement on Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) role in the unit, the only such unit currently in Central America. Agencies use various interagency groups to coordinate with each other, such as DOJ's Anti-gang Coordination Committee. However, improved coordination at the FBI-initiated antigang unit in El Salvador could enhance information sharing. While the FBI requests information directly from Salvadoran police, ICE requests go to its country attaché, then to FBI agents at the unit who pass it on to Salvadoran police, as ICE does not have an agent at the unit. Prior GAO work has shown that agencies should facilitate information sharing and look for opportunities to leverage resources. Although FBI and ICE officials agree that the process could be improved by posting an ICE agent at the unit and have been discussing the possibility since 2008, they have not yet reached agreement on ICE's role. By reaching agreement, the FBI and ICE could strengthen coordination and information sharing. While agencies have established measures to assess programs, as some of the programs are just starting, data collection for many measures is in the early stages.