

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-15-684](#), a report to congressional requesters

## Why GAO Did This Study

Terrorism and violent extremism continue to pose a global threat, and combating them remains a top priority for the U.S. government. State leads and coordinates U.S. efforts to counter terrorism abroad. State's Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism was elevated to bureau status in 2012 with the aim of enhancing State's ability to counter violent extremism, build partner counterterrorism capacity, and improve coordination. GAO was asked to review the effects of this change and the new bureau's efforts.

This report examines (1) how the bureau's staffing resources have changed since 2011, (2) the extent to which the bureau has assessed its performance since 2011, and (3) the extent to which the bureau's coordination with U.S. government entities on selected programs is in line with key collaboration practices. To address these objectives, GAO reviewed and analyzed State and other U.S. government agency information and interviewed U.S. government officials in Washington, D.C.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Secretary of State take steps to (1) ensure that CVE program efforts abroad are evaluated and (2) establish time frames for addressing recommendations from program evaluations. State concurred with both of GAO's recommendations. State indicated that it was currently assessing which programs would benefit from a third-party evaluation and that it would commit to setting a timetable for reviewing each recommendation by a third-party evaluator.

View [GAO-15-684](#). For more information, contact Charles Michael Johnson, Jr., at (202) 512-7331 or [johnsoncm@gao.gov](mailto:johnsoncm@gao.gov).

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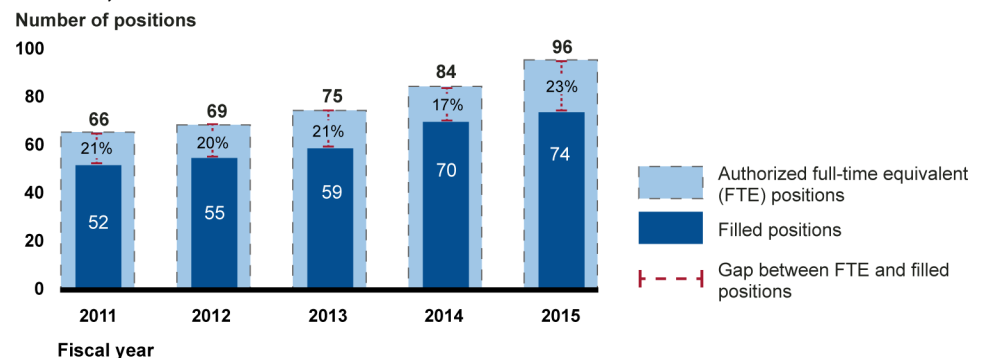
## COMBATING TERRORISM

### State Should Evaluate Its Countering Violent Extremism Program and Set Time Frames for Addressing Evaluation Recommendations

## What GAO Found

The Department of State's (State) Bureau of Counterterrorism has had an annual increase in authorized full-time equivalent (FTE) positions since fiscal year 2011 and has recently undertaken efforts to reduce a persistent staffing gap. The bureau's authorized FTEs increased from 66 in fiscal year 2011 to 96 in fiscal year 2015, and over the same period, FTE vacancies ranged from 17 to 23 percent. The vacancies included both staff and management positions. Bureau officials said they postponed filling some positions until the Coordinator for Counterterrorism had sufficient time to assess the bureau's needs and priorities. A senior Bureau of Counterterrorism official testified before Congress in June 2015 that the bureau was making progress and that it had 11 vacancies. However, we have not been able to verify that 4 of the reportedly filled positions have been filled because State did not provide sufficient documentation.

**Department of State Bureau of Counterterrorism Authorized Full-Time Equivalent and Filled Positions, Fiscal Years 2011 to 2015**



Source: GAO analysis of Department of State data. | GAO-15-684

Note: Data are as of October 31 in each fiscal year. For example, fiscal year 2015 data are as of October 31, 2014.

While the bureau has undertaken efforts to assess its progress, it has not yet evaluated its priority Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) program and has not established time frames for addressing recommendations from program evaluations. Specifically, the bureau established indicators and targets for its foreign assistance-related goals and reported results achieved toward each indicator. The bureau has also completed four evaluations covering three of its six programs that resulted in 60 recommendations. The bureau reported having implemented about half of the recommendations (28 of 60) as of June 2015 but has not established time frames for addressing the remaining recommendations. Without specific time frames, it will be difficult for the bureau to ensure timely implementation of programmatic improvements. In addition, despite identifying its CVE program as a priority and acknowledging the benefit of evaluating it, the bureau has postponed evaluating it each fiscal year since 2012.

The bureau's coordination on two programs GAO reviewed, CVE and Counterterrorism Finance, generally reflects key practices for effective collaboration. For example, GAO identified efforts to define outcomes and accountability, bridge organizational cultures, and establish written guidance and agreements—all key practices of effective collaboration.