

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-20-393](#), a report to the Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere, Transnational Crime, Civilian Security, Democracy, Human Rights, and Global Women's Issues, Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

Rule of law strengthens protection of fundamental rights, ensures a robust civil society, and serves as a foundation for democratic governance and economic growth. According to State, countries with a strong rule of law provide a more level playing field for American businesses to engage and compete, and countries with a weak rule of law can potentially export transnational threats and economic insecurity, undermining the interests of the United States.

GAO was asked to review U.S. rule of law assistance around the world. This report examines (1) how State and USAID allocated funds for this assistance in fiscal years 2014 through 2018, (2) how agencies strategically plan and allocate this assistance globally, and (3) what processes agencies have to design, implement, and coordinate this assistance in selected countries.

GAO reviewed State, USAID, and DOJ documents and data for fiscal years 2014 through 2018 and interviewed officials in Colombia, Kosovo, Liberia, the Philippines, and Washington, D.C. GAO chose these countries on the basis of funding amounts and other factors.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that State require overseas missions where rule of law assistance funds have been allocated to assess whether this assistance is coordinated with all relevant interagency partners. State concurred with our recommendation.

View [GAO-20-393](#). For more information, contact Chelsa Gurkin at (202) 512-2964 or gurkinc@gao.gov.

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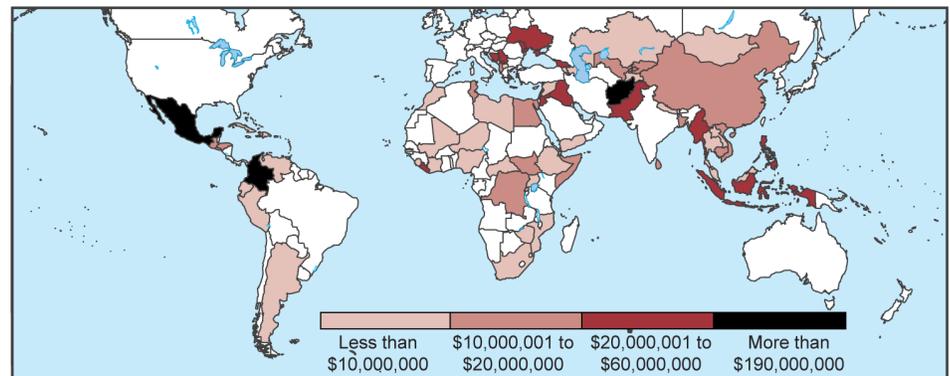
RULE OF LAW ASSISTANCE

Agency Efforts Are Guided by Various Strategies, and Overseas Missions Should Ensure that Programming Is Fully Coordinated

What GAO Found

The Department of State (State) and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) allocated more than \$2.7 billion for rule of law assistance from fiscal years 2014 through 2018—the latest available data as of GAO's review. Of that, State allocated over \$2 billion and USAID allocated over \$700 million. State and USAID funded some of these programs through the Department of Justice (DOJ). Rule of law assistance funded a variety of activities including improving justice institutions, legal reform, and promoting a culture of lawfulness. The agencies implemented these programs globally but allocated most funds to the Western Hemisphere and Afghanistan.

Global Distribution of Bilateral Rule of Law Assistance Allocations, Fiscal Years 2014–2018



Source: GAO analysis of Department of State data. | GAO-20-393

After Congress appropriates funding, agencies determine rule of law allocations through the foreign assistance budget process. State and USAID identify rule of law as a goal in agency-wide strategic documents and hold an annual interagency roundtable regarding rule of law assistance to determine those allocations. Rule of law assistance is guided by national and agency-, bureau-, and mission-specific strategies that are linked to the national security goals of the United States. These strategies discuss the agencies' roles and responsibilities in improving the rule of law.

State and USAID guidance highlights the importance of coordination between agencies as they design and implement rule of law assistance, but not all agencies are included in some of the key coordination mechanisms used in four countries GAO selected for review. Agency officials in the selected countries cited the use of some informal and formal coordination practices, such as the use of law enforcement working groups, but State policy does not require all entities that may be involved in rule of law assistance to participate in these working groups. For example, in three of the four selected countries, officials described coordinating rule of law assistance, in part, through these working groups, which may not include critical agencies such as USAID. According to State policy, these working groups are designed to achieve other goals using agencies and offices that are not involved in providing rule of law assistance. Without verifying that interagency coordination includes all relevant entities, missions may not know whether they are fully leveraging interagency resources or ensuring that they do not duplicate or overlap rule of law assistance.