

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-25-107712](#), a report to the Ranking Member, Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs, Committee on Appropriations, House of Representatives

## Why GAO Did This Study

Cuba remains a one-party authoritarian state that restricts basic rights. Beginning in fiscal year 1996, Congress has regularly made appropriations available for programs seeking to promote democratic values and human rights in Cuba. The U.S. provides Cuba democracy assistance through USAID, State, and grant funding to NED, which in turn make awards to implementing partners. However, the Cuban government has opposed U.S. democracy assistance, resulting in security risks for awardees.

GAO was asked to review USAID, State, and NED security and risk mitigation measures for Cuba democracy assistance. This report is a public version of a sensitive report GAO issued in July 2024, which included four objectives. However, State and USAID deemed information related to one objective to be sensitive and protected from public disclosure. Consequently, this report addresses (1) information USAID, State, and NED provide to awardees regarding security risks; (2) protections they provide to awardees; and (3) how their risk information, award processes, and provisions for Cuba compare with those in other restricted environments. GAO reviewed USAID, State, and NED procedures and award documentation, and interviewed officials and a nongeneralizable sample of awardees.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that USAID develop a process to gather and document known security risks based on USAID's and implementers' experience in order to review and inform the actions of implementers. USAID concurred with the recommendation.

View [GAO-25-107712](#). For more information, contact Nagla'a El-Hodiri (202) 512-7279 or [ElHodiriN@gao.gov](mailto:ElHodiriN@gao.gov).

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## CUBA DEMOCRACY ASSISTANCE

### USAID Should Improve Collection of Security Risk Information to Help Awardee Mitigation Efforts

## What GAO Found

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the Department of State, and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) provide general information on risks to Cuba democracy assistance awardees and take steps to help awardees mitigate risks at various points in the award process (see figure). For example, USAID and State award solicitations required applicants to analyze their risks and propose mitigation measures. USAID does not prepare security risk assessments for each award and does not have a documented process for collecting security risk information before implementation, limiting its ability to inform awardees' risk response.

### General Cuba Democracy Assistance Award Processes



Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Agency for International Development, Department of State, and National Endowment for Democracy documents; GAO (icons). | [GAO-25-107712](#)

USAID, State, and NED address travel to Cuba and take steps to protect Cuba democracy assistance awardees or beneficiaries. USAID and State have worldwide protection programs that Cuba democracy assistance awardees can use to address security issues. In addition, USAID, State, and NED all refer awardees to protection programs available from the U.S. or other countries.

USAID, State's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL), and NED provide similar information about risks to Cuba democracy assistance awardees as they do to awardees in the two other restricted environments, but their award travel and liability provisions and procurement approaches differ. According to USAID and DRL officials, differences in the recent histories of the three countries have led them to take different approaches.

Throughout this publicly-released report, GAO has omitted specific details of USAID, State, and NED risk information, protection measures, and procedures that USAID and State considered sensitive.