

State Should Improve Timeliness and Completeness of Reporting to Congress

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A report to congressional addressees.

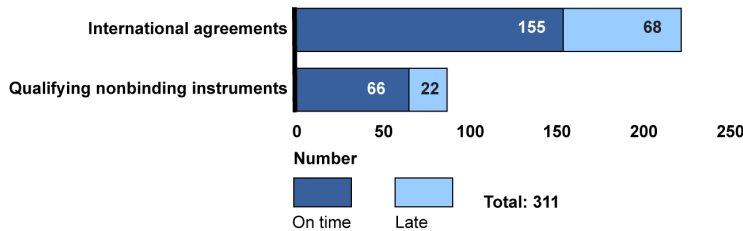
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What GAO Found

The Department of State must report to Congress all international agreements and qualifying nonbinding instruments twice: (1) after being signed, concluded, or otherwise finalized, including their authorizing authority, and (2) after entering into force or becoming operative, including any implementing authority. This twofold reporting enables Congress to provide oversight of U.S. government agencies' agreements and instruments before and after they enter into force or become operative.

State reported 311 agreements and instruments to Congress between October 2023 and March 2025, but nearly one-third were reported late at one or both points. Late-reported agreements and instruments were on average 2.3 reporting cycles late. For example, an agreement concluded on November 4, 2024, was to have been reported by the end of December 2024 but was not reported until the end of March 2025 (three reporting cycles late). This means Congress was notified about the agreement about 5 months after its conclusion. GAO found that State does not track the timeliness of State bureaus or offices or other federal agencies in submitting their agreements or instruments for State to report to Congress. Doing so would better position State to identify and address potential related challenges. State also does not collect, from agencies or State bureaus or offices, the legal authorities for their instruments, although it is required to report this information to Congress. The timing and completeness of State's reporting is critical for Congress to meaningfully oversee the agreements and instruments, including to evaluate whether they align with U.S. national security and foreign policy interests.

Timeliness of State Reporting of International Agreements and Qualifying Nonbinding Instruments to Congress Between October 2023 and March 2025



Source: GAO analysis of Department of State information. | GAO-26-108186

Note: A late-reported agreement or instrument is one that was signed, concluded, or otherwise finalized during the prior month, or that entered into force or became operative during the prior month, but was not reported during the following month.

GAO's analysis of a generalizable sample of agreements and instruments found that State generally published text and legal authority information for agreements and instruments on its website but missed the 120-day statutorily mandated deadline about half of the time. GAO also found State's website for agreements and instruments does not enable Congress or the public to find information efficiently, when compared to best practices. Specifically, State posted fragmented information on agreements, instruments, and their legal authorities across four webpages on its website, without a way to search across the universe of agreements and instruments, such as by country, agency, or subject. By establishing written, standard operating procedures to help ensure information is published within the 120-day deadline, and optimizing its website for efficiency and searchability, State could maximize transparency for Congress and the public, and the usability of its website.

Why GAO Did This Study

Amendments in the James M. Inhofe National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023, which took effect on September 19, 2023, expanded the Case-Zablocki Act's transparency provisions. For the first time, qualifying nonbinding instruments—commitments that do not legally bind the U.S. to their terms—must generally be reported to Congress and made available to the public. Previously, reporting and publishing requirements applied only to international agreements, which are legally binding under international law. The statute mandates that U.S. government agencies report their agreements and instruments to State. State is responsible for reporting them to Congress and publishing them on State's website.

Congress included a provision in statute for GAO to review State's implementation of the amended requirements. This report examines the extent to which State addressed reporting and publishing requirements related to international agreements and qualifying nonbinding instruments and any challenges to meeting those requirements. GAO assessed information State reported to Congress between October 2023 and March 2025 and posted to its website in relation to statutory requirements. GAO interviewed officials from State and six other agencies about late reporting.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making seven recommendations, including that State improve the timeliness and completeness of its reporting on agreements and instruments, and optimize its website for discoverability and searchability. State concurred with five recommendations and did not concur with two. GAO continues to believe all the recommendations are warranted, as discussed in the report.