

DOJ Should Improve Training and Misconduct Guidelines for Nonfederal Task Force Officers

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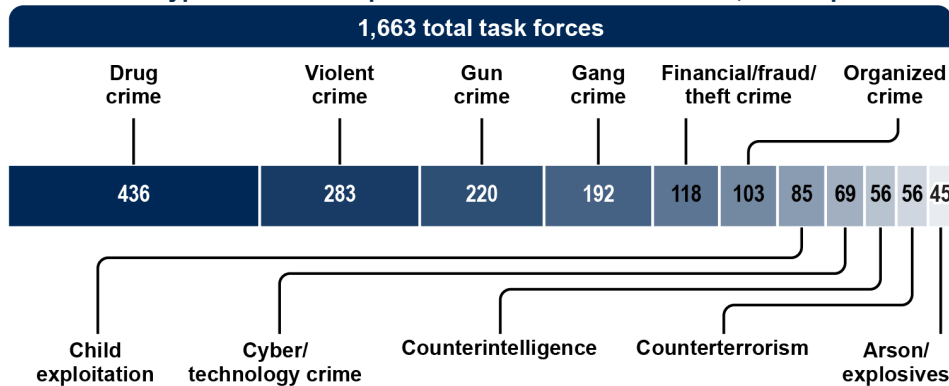
A report to congressional requesters

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What GAO Found

The Department of Justice (DOJ) routinely forms task forces to investigate national security issues and criminal activity, including various forms of trafficking, terrorist threats, and violent gang activity. Through these task forces, DOJ law enforcement agencies partner with thousands of nonfederal officers from state, local, tribal, and territorial law enforcement agencies.

Number and Types of Active Department of Justice Task Forces, as of April 2026



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Justice component-provided information. | GAO-26-108468

All four of the DOJ components GAO reviewed—the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF); Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA); Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and the U.S. Marshals Service—use training to communicate task force officer roles and responsibilities. This training includes the DOJ components’ legal authorities and policies, including how to conduct federal investigations or exercise federal law enforcement authorities. However, ATF, DEA, and FBI allow nonfederal officers to engage in task force operations (e.g., serve warrants) before they have completed their initial task force officer training. Requiring nonfederal task force officers to complete training on relevant legal authorities and policies before engaging in task force operations would ensure components achieve the intent of their training and reduce the risk that officers will participate in task force operations without fully understanding the federal authorities they were deputized to exercise.

ATF, DEA, FBI, and the U.S. Marshals Service policies require federal supervision of nonfederal task force officers, such as reviewing investigative reports and monitoring performance. These policies also require employees to report allegations of misconduct by nonfederal task force officers to their management. However, GAO found the four DOJ components do not have guidelines and criteria for field managers (such as the special agent in charge of a field office) to apply in adjudicating such allegations. By establishing guidelines field managers can use to adjudicate misconduct allegations, such as the conditions under which nonfederal officers should be removed from a task force, DOJ components can ensure they are applying the same criteria across their task forces. In the absence of such guidelines, there is increased risk of inconsistent adjudications, which could jeopardize the integrity of task force operations and erode public trust in task force effectiveness.

Why GAO Did This Study

DOJ deputizes nonfederal officers to serve on federal task forces to obtain valuable insights into regional or local criminal activity and assist the investigative work of DOJ’s federal law enforcement officers.

GAO was asked to review DOJ task force policies for nonfederal officers. This report addresses, among other things, the extent to which DOJ components have policies and procedures to (1) communicate task force roles and responsibilities and (2) supervise nonfederal task force officers.

To address these objectives, GAO analyzed component-level policies, task force agreements, and laws; and interviewed officials from the four components DOJ identified as leading task forces. To identify policies and procedures implemented at the field- and task force-levels, GAO reviewed documents and interviewed members of a nongeneralizable sample of eight task forces, based on task force type and location.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making seven recommendations, including that (1) ATF, FBI, and DEA update policies to require nonfederal task force officers to receive training on legal authorities and policies before using their new federal deputation authority, and (2) that they along with the U.S. Marshals Service develop guidelines for field management to use when adjudicating misconduct allegations against nonfederal task force officers. DOJ agreed with all seven recommendations.