

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-23-104720](#), a report to the Ranking Member, Committee on Homeland Security, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Domestic terrorism investigations have more than doubled since 2020, according to the FBI. FBI and DHS are the main federal entities charged with preventing terrorist attacks in the U.S. FBI has lead responsibility for federal domestic terrorism investigations and domestic intelligence efforts. DHS is responsible for producing terrorist threat information in coordination with federal, state and local government agencies, and private entities.

GAO was asked to review domestic terrorism threats, incidents, and related federal cases and charges. This report addresses, among other objectives, the extent to which the FBI and DHS I&A (1) track domestic terrorism investigations and incidents, and (2) followed leading collaboration practices in their efforts to counter domestic terrorism threats.

GAO reviewed FBI and DHS policies and guidance related to domestic terrorism, and analyzed FBI investigation data from fiscal year 2013-2021 and DHS incident data from 2010 to 2021, the most recent available. GAO also interviewed with FBI and DHS headquarters officials and field personnel from five Joint Terrorism Task Forces and fusion centers. GAO selected these five based on the number of domestic terrorism incidents in their locations, among other factors.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making six recommendations, three each to the FBI and DHS, including to assess agreements in place and evaluate collaborative efforts.

View [GAO-23-104720](#). For more information, contact Triana McNeil at (202) 512-8777 or mcneilt@gao.gov.

February 2023

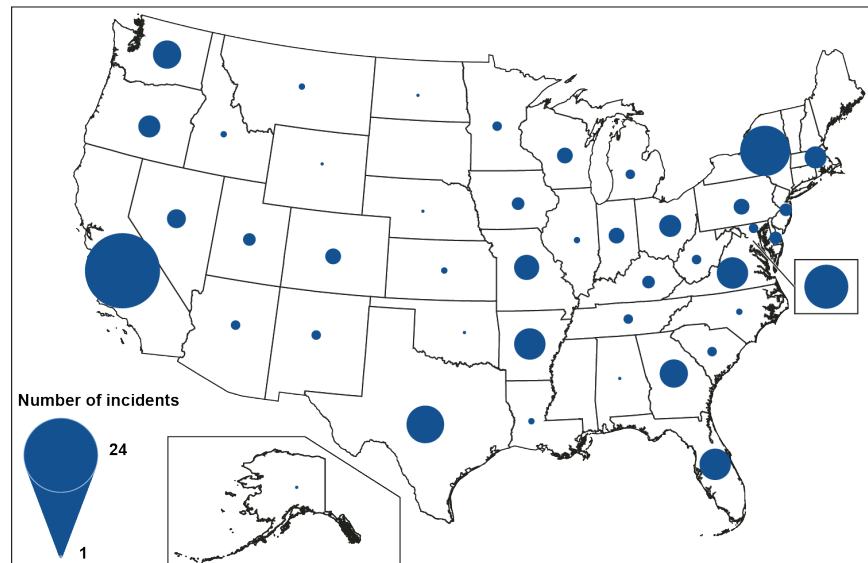
DOMESTIC TERRORISM

Further Actions Needed to Strengthen FBI and DHS Collaboration to Counter Threats

What GAO Found

According to U.S. law, domestic terrorism is generally defined as involving criminal acts dangerous to human life occurring in the U.S. that appear intended to coerce a civilian population or influence or affect the conduct of government. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) tracks cases (which it defines as investigations and disruptions) consistent with its investigative mission. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Office of Intelligence and Analysis (I&A) tracks incidents which it defines attacks or plots, consistent with its definition of domestic terrorism. From fiscal years 2013 through 2021, the FBI's number of open domestic terrorism-related cases grew by 357 percent from 1,981 to 9,049. From calendar year 2010 to 2021, I&A tracked a total of 231 domestic terrorism incidents, with racially- or ethnically-motivated violent extremists committing the most violent incidents during the time period.

Domestic Terrorism Incidents by State, Calendar Years 2010 through 2021



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Homeland Security Counterterrorism Mission Center data. | GAO-23-104720

The FBI and DHS I&A collaborate via headquarters staff, fusion centers, and through serving on task forces, to identify and counter domestic terrorism threats. GAO found that they generally followed leading collaboration practices, but challenges remain. For example, FBI and DHS have agreements in place, but they have not assessed if these agreements fully reflect how their personnel should collaborate on their shared charge of preventing domestic terrorism. Due to the rapidly evolving threat landscape, having up-to-date, comprehensive formal agreements would enhance the two entities' collaboration. Further, FBI and DHS I&A have evaluated individual activities but have not consistently assessed the overall effectiveness of their collaborative efforts. Doing so can ensure both agencies are capitalizing on efforts that may lead to improved information to counter domestic terrorism threats.