

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-23-105201](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

TSA screened over 1.5 million airline passengers per day in 2021 as part of its mission to protect the nation's transportation systems. However, TSA has faced allegations that some of its screening practices may negatively affect certain passengers and has received discrimination complaints.

GAO was asked to review the potential for discrimination in TSA's screening practices. This report addresses (1) how TSA helps ensure that its airline passenger screening practices do not result in discrimination and (2) the extent to which TSA has established and informed passengers about its complaint process for allegations of discrimination. GAO analyzed documents and data on TSA's screening practices and complaints process and interviewed TSA officials in headquarters and four airports, selected based on size, complaints filed, and other factors. GAO also interviewed seven stakeholder organizations, including those representing religious groups and persons with disabilities, selected based on their work on airline security screening.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making four recommendations to TSA to (1) collect data on passenger referrals for additional screening, (2) conduct assessments to determine the extent to which its screening practices comply with agency non-discrimination policies, (3) take additional actions to better inform passengers about its discrimination complaint process, and (4) strengthen its ability to analyze discrimination complaints. DHS concurred with these recommendations.

View [GAO-23-105201](#). For more information, contact Tina Won Sherman at (202) 512-8461 or shermant@gao.gov.

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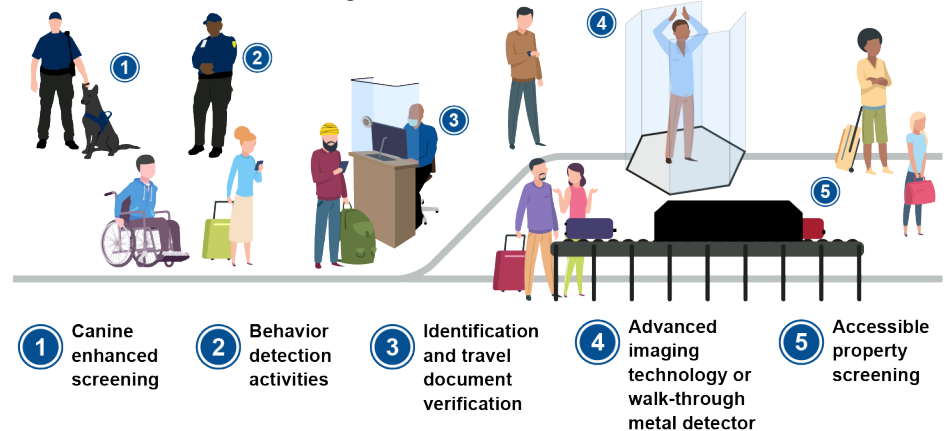
AVIATION SECURITY

TSA Should Assess Potential for Discrimination and Better Inform Passengers of the Complaint Process

What GAO Found

The Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Transportation Security Administration (TSA) has taken actions, such as establishing procedures and training, that can help to prevent the potential for discrimination in its airline passenger screening practices. However, it has not assessed the extent to which these practices may result in certain passengers being referred for additional screening more often than others. For example, TSA officials in all four airports GAO visited and representatives from the seven stakeholder organizations GAO interviewed stated that TSA's advanced imaging technology or other practices could result in certain passengers being referred for additional screening more frequently than others. These include transgender passengers or those who wear religious headwear or have disabilities. TSA has not collected data on referrals for additional screening and conducted assessments to determine the extent to which this occurs. Such data collection and assessments could help TSA identify any actions needed to better comply with agency policies that prohibit discrimination.

Examples of TSA Passenger Screening Practices at Airport Checkpoints That Can Result in Referrals for Additional Screening



Source: GAO analysis of Transportation Security Administration (TSA) information. | [GAO-23-105201](#)

TSA has a process for addressing passenger complaints alleging discrimination, but could improve how it informs passengers about this process. For example, representatives from all seven stakeholder organizations stated that passengers are often unaware of how to file discrimination complaints. While TSA provides signs for airports to place at checkpoints that include contact information for questions about screening, most do not explicitly cite complaints. Taking additional steps to better inform the public about the discrimination complaint process could help ensure any issues are identified and addressed. Further, TSA's data systems and collection practices limit its ability to fully analyze discrimination complaints. For example, TSA is unable to analyze the number of complaints that were found to have merit or resulted in disciplinary actions because the data are stored in different systems that lack specific fields to collect this information. Improving TSA's analyses of discrimination complaint data could better inform training and other initiatives to help prevent discrimination.