

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-14-222](#), a report to congressional requesters

## Why GAO Did This Study

Fraudulent passports pose a significant risk because they can be used to conceal the true identity of the user and potentially facilitate other crimes, such as international terrorism and drug trafficking. State issued over 13.5 million passports during fiscal year 2013.

GAO was asked to assess potential fraud in State's passport program. This report examines select cases of potentially fraudulent or high-risk issuances among passports issued during fiscal years 2009 and 2010—the most recently available data at the time GAO began its review. GAO matched State's passport data from fiscal years 2009 and 2010 for approximately 28 million issuances to databases with information about individuals who were deceased, incarcerated in state and federal prison facilities, or who had an active warrant at the time of issuance. GAO also analyzed the passport data to identify issuances to applicants who provided a likely invalid SSN, which had not been assigned at the time of the passport application, or had been publically disclosed. From each of these five populations, GAO selected nongeneralizable samples for additional review. GAO also randomly selected a generalizable sample from a population of passport issuances to applicants who used only the SSN of a deceased individual. GAO reviewed State's adjudication policies, and examined passport applications for these populations to further assess whether there were potentially fraudulent or high-risk issuances. State provided technical comments and generally agreed with our findings. This report contains no recommendations.

View [GAO-14-222](#). For more information, contact Stephen M. Lord at (202) 512-6722 or [lords@gao.gov](mailto:lords@gao.gov).

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## STATE DEPARTMENT

# Pervasive Passport Fraud Not Identified, but Cases of Potentially Fraudulent and High-Risk Issuances Are under Review

## What GAO Found

Of the approximately 28 million passports issued in fiscal years 2009 and 2010 that GAO reviewed, it found issuances to applicants who used the identifying information of deceased or incarcerated individuals, had active felony warrants, or used an incorrect Social Security number (SSN); however, GAO did not identify pervasive fraud in these populations. The Department of State (State) has taken steps to improve its detection of passport applicants using identifying information of deceased or incarcerated individuals. In addition, State modified its process for identifying applicants with active warrants, and has expanded measures to verify SSNs in real time. GAO referred, and State is reviewing, matches from this analysis. The following summarizes GAO's findings:

- **Deceased individuals.** As shown in the figure, GAO identified at least 1 case of potential fraud in the sample of 15 cases, as well as likely data errors. State reviewed the cases referred by GAO, and indicated fraud could likely be ruled out in 9 of the 15 cases; State plans to further review 6 cases.
- **State prisoners.** GAO found 7 cases of potential fraud among the sample of 14 state prisoner cases. State noted fraud could likely be ruled out in 10 of the 14 cases, and intends to conduct additional reviews of 4 cases.
- **Federal prisoners.** None of the 15 cases in this sample had fraud indicators, since all individuals were not actually in prison when applying for passports.
- **Individuals with active warrants.** GAO found five cases where State identified the warrant and resolved it prior to issuance. As the figure shows, GAO also identified three cases with warrants that State was not aware of or alerted to, but should have been in State's system for detection during adjudication.

Summary of GAO's Matching Analysis and Nongeneralizable Samples

GAO's population of passport applicants	Matching criteria			Total passport issuances <sup>a</sup>	Sample size	Sample cases with potential fraud or high-risk indicators
	Social Security number (SSN)	Name	Date of birth			
Deceased individuals	✓	✓	✗	181	15	1
State prisoners (from 11 states)	✓	✓	✓	68	14	7
Federal prisoners	✓	✓	✓	206	15	0
Individuals with active warrants	✓	✓	✓	486	15	3
				<b>Total:</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>11</b>

- ✓ Matched the Department of State's passport data
- ✗ Not used or available for matching analysis

Source: GAO analysis of data provided by the Department of State (State), the Social Security Administration (SSA), state departments of correction, the federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP), and the U.S. Marshals Service.

<sup>a</sup>Total passport issuances are solely based on the matching criteria. GAO did not verify that all issuances from its match populations were actual fraud cases or issuances to individuals with active warrants. Rather, it selected samples for further review and referred all matches to State.

In addition, GAO found 13,470 passport issuances to individuals who used the SSN, but not the name, of a deceased person, as well as 24,278 issuances to applicants who used a likely invalid SSN. GAO reviewed a 140-case generalizable sample and a 15-case nongeneralizable sample for these two populations, respectively, and determined the cases were likely data errors. State has taken steps to capture correct SSN information more consistently.