



April 2025

# DOMESTIC TERRORISM

## Additional Actions Needed to Implement an Effective National Strategy

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-25-107030](#), a report to congressional requesters

## Why GAO Did This Study

In June 2021, the White House NSC released a Strategy that aims to provide a framework to address domestic terrorism, which it identified as an urgent priority. The FBI Director testified in December 2023 that domestic terrorism investigations had more than doubled since 2020.

GAO was asked to review the Strategy. This report examines, among other things, (1) steps agencies have taken to implement the Strategy, (2) the extent to which the Strategy includes desirable characteristics for an effective national strategy, and (3) challenges identified by federal and nonfederal partners in implementing the Strategy.

GAO reviewed the Strategy and related documents, analyzed NSC information, and interviewed officials from eight federal agencies. GAO also interviewed nonfederal partners and Joint Terrorism Task Force personnel in seven geographically dispersed states that had experience with domestic terrorism incidents, as well as 12 domestic terrorism experts.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the NSC ensure any domestic terrorism strategy reflects all desirable characteristics and that DHS and DOJ inform nonfederal partners about roles to combat domestic terrorism. In response to comments, GAO modified the recommendations to apply them to any national domestic terrorism strategy as well as DOJ and DHS's broader missions. NSC did not provide comment and DOJ concurred. DHS did not concur but will work with nonfederal partners to counter domestic terrorism.

View [GAO-25-107030](#). For more information, contact Triana McNeil at [mcneilt@gao.gov](mailto:mcneilt@gao.gov).

April 2025

## DOMESTIC TERRORISM










### Additional Actions Needed to Implement an Effective National Strategy

## What GAO Found

The 2021 National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism (Strategy) tasked the Departments of Homeland Security (DHS) and Justice (DOJ), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and other federal agencies to implement activities to counter domestic terrorism. Agencies have taken steps to implement most of these activities (49 of 58 activities identified by GAO) through both new and preexisting efforts. For example, agencies shared online resources for terrorism prevention with nonfederal partners and the public and updated screening procedures for federal and military personnel. The Strategy also states that nonfederal partners, such as state and local entities, play a role in countering domestic terrorism.

The Strategy, however, does not fully address most of the six desirable characteristics that GAO has previously reported comprise an effective national strategy. For example, the Strategy does not include a risk assessment or clarify which federal entity is responsible for oversight. Further, it does not consistently include milestones, performance measures, or resource information. By including such information in the Strategy, or any national strategy, in effect, to combat domestic terrorism, the National Security Council (NSC) could improve how it oversees activities. In turn, this could enable the NSC and relevant agencies to measure progress in meeting goals to successfully address domestic terrorism and enhance public safety.

#### Extent to Which the 2021 National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism Addresses GAO's Desirable Characteristics of an Effective National Strategy

 Purpose, scope, and methodology	 Problem definition and risk assessment
 Organizational roles, responsibilities, and coordination	 Goals, subordinate objectives, activities, and performance measures
 Integration and implementation	 Resources, investments, and risk management
Assessment  Yes - addressed	 Partial - partially addressed
	 No - not addressed

Source: GAO analysis of the 2021 National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism; GAO (icons). | GAO-25-107030

Federal and nonfederal partners identified challenges related to the Strategy, such as not knowing which agencies were responsible for specific activities. DHS and DOJ, two agencies with statutory missions to combat domestic terrorism and tasked with the most Strategy activities, have shared some details about Strategy implementation, such as providing domestic terrorism-related information on publicly accessible websites. However, they could further clarify their roles and efforts to counter domestic terrorism and communicate such to nonfederal partners to ensure their contributions effectively assist federal efforts. In doing so, DHS and DOJ would be better equipped to address their missions related to countering domestic terrorism. Also, nonfederal partners could better align their resources to support federal efforts.

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## Abbreviations

CP3	Center for Prevention Programs and Partnerships
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
DOD	Department of Defense
DOJ	Department of Justice
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
I&A	Office of Intelligence and Analysis
JTTF	Joint Terrorism Task Force
NCTC	National Counterterrorism Center
NSC	National Security Council
ODNI	Office of the Director of National Intelligence
S&T	Science and Technology Directorate
2021 Strategy	2021 National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism

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April 9, 2025

The Honorable Bennie G. Thompson  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Homeland Security  
House of Representatives

The Honorable Seth Magaziner  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Counterterrorism, Law Enforcement, and Intelligence  
Committee on Homeland Security  
House of Representatives

The Honorable Daniel Goldman  
House of Representatives

In June 2021, the White House National Security Council (NSC) released the nation's first National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism (2021 Strategy) and identified domestic terrorism as the most urgent terrorism threat facing the United States.<sup>1</sup> In addition, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) testified in December 2023 that the number of domestic terrorism investigations had more than doubled since 2020.<sup>2</sup> The threat posed by domestic violent extremism has risen in recent years, as evidenced by attacks in a number of U.S. cities.<sup>3</sup> For example, in May

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<sup>1</sup>White House, *National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism* (Washington, D.C.: June 15, 2021); and *Fact Sheet: National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism* (Washington, D.C.: June 15, 2021). In the 2021 Strategy, the definition of domestic terrorism is an activity that occurs primarily within the territorial jurisdiction of the United States, involves acts dangerous to human life that are a violation of the criminal laws of the United States or of any state, and appears (1) to be intended to intimidate or coerce a civilian population; (2) to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion; or (3) to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination, or kidnapping. This definition is consistent with the statutory definition found at 18 U.S.C. § 2331(5).

<sup>2</sup>*Oversight of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Before the Senate Committee on the Judiciary*, 117<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> Sess. (Dec. 5, 2023) (statement of Christopher A. Wray, Director, FBI).

<sup>3</sup>According to the FBI and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) documentation, a domestic violent extremist is an individual based and operating primarily within the United States or its territories without direction or inspiration from a foreign terrorist group or other foreign power, who seeks to further political or social goals wholly or in part through unlawful acts of force or violence. In FBI and DHS documentation, the terms domestic terrorism and domestic violent extremism are used interchangeably.

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2022, a racially motivated individual shot and killed 10 individuals in Buffalo, New York.<sup>4</sup> In October 2024, DHS reported that the likelihood of violence from domestic violent extremists due to ongoing current events, such as the Israel-Hamas conflict, was of particular concern.<sup>5</sup>

The 2021 Strategy aims to provide a national framework for the U.S. government and its nonfederal partners to specifically address domestic terrorism. The FBI, within the Department of Justice (DOJ), and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) are the main federal entities charged with preventing terrorist attacks in the United States, including attacks conducted by domestic violent extremists.<sup>6</sup> The 2021 Strategy provides that multiple agencies, including DOJ; DHS; the Departments of Defense (DOD), Health and Human Services, State, Treasury, Veterans Affairs, and the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), as well as nonfederal partners such as states and local entities, play a role in countering domestic terrorism.

We have previously reported on federal strategies and initiatives aimed at preventing domestic violent extremist attacks and promoting actions that could reduce the likelihood that attacks are planned in the first place. For example, we recommended in April 2017 that DOJ and DHS develop a cohesive strategy to assess overall efforts for countering violent extremism.<sup>7</sup> In July 2021, we evaluated a 2019 DHS strategy to address targeted violence and terrorist prevention and found that it did not fully

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<sup>4</sup>Federal Bureau of Investigation and Department of Homeland Security, *Strategic Intelligence Assessment and Data on Domestic Terrorism* (Washington, D.C.: June 2023).

<sup>5</sup>Department of Homeland Security, Office of Intelligence and Analysis, *2025 Homeland Threat Assessment* (October 2024).

<sup>6</sup>See 18 U.S.C. § 2332b(f) ("The Attorney General shall have primary investigative responsibility for all Federal crimes of terrorism"); 28 C.F.R. § 0.85(l) ([The FBI] shall... "[e]xercise Lead Agency responsibility in investigating all crimes for which it has primary or concurrent jurisdiction and which involve terrorist activities or acts in preparation of terrorist activities within the statutory jurisdiction of the United States"); 6 U.S.C. § 111(b)(1)(A) (providing that one of the primary missions of DHS is to "prevent terrorist attacks within the United States"). See also Federal Bureau of Investigation and Department of Homeland Security, *Strategic Intelligence Assessment and Data on Domestic Terrorism* (Washington, D.C.: June 2023).

<sup>7</sup>GAO, *Countering Violent Extremism: Actions Needed to Define Strategy and Assess Progress of Federal Efforts*, [GAO-17-300](#) (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 6, 2017). DHS and DOJ concurred with our recommendations. In April 2021, DHS and the FBI stated that the NSC was conducting a review of the federal government's domestic terrorism and domestic violent extremism programs and activities. In June 2021, the NSC subsequently released the National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism.

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include all elements of a comprehensive strategy.<sup>8</sup> Further, we previously reported on federal agency efforts to collaborate and share domestic terrorism information with relevant partners. In February 2023, we found that while DHS and the FBI collaborate to identify and counter domestic terrorism threats, they do not consistently assess the overall effectiveness of these collaborative efforts. We recommended that they implement a process to do so.<sup>9</sup> We also found that DHS and the FBI had not assessed the extent to which formal agreements fully reflect their charge to jointly prevent domestic terrorism attacks. We recommended that DHS and the FBI assess existing agreements and that they update and revise these agreements accordingly. These are priority recommendations that have not been fully implemented as of February 2025.<sup>10</sup>

In September 2023, we found that the Financial Crimes Enforcement Network, an office within the Department of the Treasury, was not included in the development of a booklet designed to help law enforcement and the general public identify behavioral indicators associated with domestic violent extremists.<sup>11</sup> We recommended that the NCTC, in consultation with the FBI and DHS, ensure that its process for updating the booklet clarifies that Treasury can and should seek input

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<sup>8</sup>GAO, *Countering Violent Extremism: DHS Can Further Enhance its Strategic Planning and Data Governance Efforts*, [GAO-21-507](#) (Washington, D.C.: July 20, 2021). In our July 2021 report, we recommended that the Secretary of Homeland Security ensure that the strategy include all elements of a comprehensive strategy. DHS concurred with our recommendation and completed a comprehensive assessment of all relevant strategies. Through this assessment, DHS incorporated additional key elements of a comprehensive strategy and updated its counterterrorism approach. We closed this recommendation as implemented.

<sup>9</sup>GAO, *Domestic Terrorism: Further Actions Needed to Strengthen FBI and DHS Collaboration to Counter Threats*, [GAO-23-104720](#) (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 22, 2023). DHS and the FBI concurred with this recommendation, and we closed it as implemented in March 2024.

<sup>10</sup>Priority recommendations are the GAO recommendations that have not been implemented and warrant attention from heads of key departments or agencies because their implementation could save large amounts of money; improve congressional or executive branch decision-making on major issues; eliminate mismanagement, fraud, and abuse; or ensure that programs comply with laws and funds are legally spent, among other benefits.

<sup>11</sup>See U.S.C. § 310 (providing for the establishment of the Financial Crimes Enforcement Network with the responsibility, among others, to furnish research, analytical, and informational services to appropriate law enforcement authorities in the interest of detection, prevention, and prosecution of terrorism and other crimes).



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from the Financial Crimes Enforcement Network when developing future updates.<sup>12</sup>

You asked us to review the development and implementation of the 2021 Strategy. This report examines (1) how the 2021 Strategy aligns with recent domestic terrorism threat assessments, (2) the steps federal agencies have taken to implement the 2021 Strategy, (3) how federal agencies are engaging with federal and nonfederal partners to implement the 2021 Strategy and identify U.S. and international lessons learned, (4) the extent to which the 2021 Strategy includes desirable characteristics for an effective national strategy, and (5) challenges in implementing the 2021 Strategy identified by federal and nonfederal partners.

To determine how the 2021 Strategy aligns with recent domestic terrorism threat assessments, we compared domestic terrorism threats identified in the 2021 Strategy against the threats identified in seven threat assessments publicly issued by DHS, the FBI, the NCTC, and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) since 2021.<sup>13</sup>

To describe the steps that federal agencies have taken to implement the 2021 Strategy, we reviewed the 2021 Strategy and related documents and identified 58 statements that direct either a federal agency by name, or the federal government in general, to implement a specific activity.<sup>14</sup> We then requested that DHS; DOJ; DOD; the Departments of Health and Human Services, State, Treasury, Veterans Affairs, and the NCTC identify what steps, if any, they have taken to support implementation of 2021 Strategy activities and whether these steps represent new or preexisting efforts that predate the 2021 Strategy.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>GAO, *Violent Extremism: Agencies' and Financial Institutions' Efforts to Link Financing to Domestic Threats*, [GAO-23-105928](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 13, 2023). This recommendation remains open and, as of May 2024, the NCTC stated that it would consult with Treasury, the FBI, and DHS to develop an action plan to address the recommendation.

<sup>13</sup>See Appendix I for a list of the assessments we reviewed.

<sup>14</sup>The related documents include the 2021 and 2023 White House Fact Sheets. We did not find any statements in these Fact Sheets that direct federal agencies to take steps beyond those included in the 2021 Strategy.

<sup>15</sup>We selected these agencies because the 2021 Strategy identifies them as federal partners that play a role in countering domestic terrorism. We did not evaluate individual agency activities to determine whether they completed implementation of the activities we identified in the 2021 Strategy.

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To describe how federal agencies are engaging with federal and nonfederal partners to implement the 2021 Strategy and identify U.S. and international lessons learned, we interviewed officials from each of the agencies in our review, selected subject matter experts, state and local officials, and foreign government officials. Specifically, we selected 12 subject matter experts familiar with domestic terrorism prevention and other efforts. We conducted semistructured interviews with state and local officials from seven state-run primary fusion centers.<sup>16</sup> These centers serve as a focal point for intelligence gathering, analysis, and sharing of threat information among federal, state, and local partners, including information related to domestic terrorism threats. We also met with federal officials from the DHS Office of Intelligence and Analysis (I&A) assigned to support the fusion centers and officials from the FBI Joint Terrorism Task Forces (JTTF) in each of the seven selected locations.<sup>17</sup> We further interviewed government officials from Germany and the United Kingdom who are responsible for leading government efforts to counter domestic terrorism.<sup>18</sup>

To evaluate the extent to which the 2021 Strategy includes desirable characteristics for an effective national strategy, we evaluated public documents related to the 2021 Strategy against characteristics described in our prior work.<sup>19</sup> We assessed each of the desirable characteristics as fully addressed, partially addressed, or not addressed.<sup>20</sup> As discussed above, we also interviewed federal officials at relevant departments and

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<sup>16</sup>See generally 6 U.S.C. § 124h (establishing the fusion center initiative, along with roles and responsibilities for fusion center officers and intelligence analysts). We met with fusion center officials from Colorado, Florida, Michigan, New York, Oregon; Texas, and Washington, D.C. We selected these locations based on geographic dispersion and number of domestic terrorism incidents, among other factors.

<sup>17</sup>DHS I&A is the primary component within DHS responsible for accessing, receiving, analyzing, integrating, and disseminating intelligence and other information related to domestic terrorism.

<sup>18</sup>We selected these countries because they have experience developing national strategies to counter domestic terrorism and because U.S. federal officials we interviewed said they consult with these countries regarding domestic terrorism.

<sup>19</sup>GAO, *Combating Terrorism: Evaluation of Selected Characteristics in National Strategies Related to Terrorism*, [GAO-04-408T](#) (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 3, 2004).

<sup>20</sup>We determined that a characteristic was fully addressed if all of its underlying subcategories were met, partially addressed if only some subcategories were met, and not addressed if none of the subcategories were met.

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subject matter experts on federal efforts to develop, implement, and oversee the 2021 Strategy.

To describe what challenges federal and nonfederal partners identified in implementing the 2021 Strategy, we reviewed documents and interviewed federal and nonfederal partners, as discussed above. We compared DOJ's and DHS's efforts to engage with nonfederal partners to implement the 2021 Strategy with the 2021 Strategy and *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*.<sup>21</sup> Appendix I provides additional details on our scope and methodology.

We conducted this performance audit from August 2023 to April 2025 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

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## Background

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### Definition of Domestic Terrorism and Threat Categories

In the 2021 Strategy, the definition of domestic terrorism is an activity that occurs primarily within the territorial jurisdiction of the United States, involves acts dangerous to human life that are a violation of the criminal laws of the United States or of any state, and appears to be intended to

- intimidate or coerce a civilian population;
- influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion; or
- affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination, or kidnapping.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>GAO, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, [GAO-14-704G](#) (Washington, D.C.: September 2014).

<sup>22</sup>This definition is consistent with the statutory definition found at 18 U.S.C. § 2331(5). The FBI and DHS use similar, but not identical, definitions of domestic terrorism. The FBI uses the statutory definition found at 18 U.S.C. § 2331(5) and the definition of "federal crimes of terrorism" to guide its investigations of domestic terrorism threat actors or domestic violent extremists. DHS uses a definition of terrorism consistent with the Homeland Security Act of 2002, rather than the statutory definition above. See Pub. L. No. 107-296, § 2(15), 116 Stat. 2135, 2141 (2002) (codified at 6 U.S.C. § 101(18)).

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The 2021 Strategy uses the terms domestic terrorism and domestic violent extremism interchangeably, as do the FBI and DHS.<sup>23</sup> These entities use the term domestic violent extremism to refer to a variety of domestic terrorism threats. According to the FBI and DHS, the word “violent” is important because mere advocacy or activism for political or social positions or use of strong rhetoric does not constitute violent extremism and may be constitutionally protected.<sup>24</sup>

Following an initial report in 2021, the FBI and DHS are required to annually update and report domestic terrorism threat-related information to Congress.<sup>25</sup> In their first report in response to this requirement, the FBI and DHS jointly identified five domestic terrorism threat group categories the U.S. government uses, as shown in figure 1.<sup>26</sup> These categories are also reflected in the 2021 Strategy and include violent extremism motivated by (1) race or ethnicity, (2) antigovernment or antiauthority sentiment, (3) animal rights or environmental sentiment, (4) abortion-related issues, and (5) other domestic terrorism threats not otherwise defined or primarily motivated by the other categories. The report noted that domestic violent extremists can fit within one or multiple categories of ideological motivation and can span a broad range of groups or movements. According to the report, these categories help the agencies better understand threats associated with domestic violent extremism.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>For example, the 2021 Strategy includes an assessment of the Domestic Violent Extremism Threat as of March 2021.

<sup>24</sup>The Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Department of Homeland Security, *Strategic Intelligence Assessment and Data on Domestic Terrorism* (June 2023).

<sup>25</sup>Specifically, the FBI and DHS, in consultation with the Director of National Intelligence, as appropriate, shall jointly submit annual updates on domestic terrorism threat-related information to appropriate congressional committees over the course of 5 years following the initial submission of a report containing a strategic intelligence assessment and data on domestic terrorism. Pub. L. No. 116-92, § 5602(d), 133 Stat. 1198, 2155 (2019).

<sup>26</sup>Federal Bureau of Investigation and Department of Homeland Security, *Strategic Intelligence Assessment and Data on Domestic Terrorism* (May 2021).

<sup>27</sup>In the report, the FBI and DHS said domestic terrorism-related criminal actors’ motivations vary, are nuanced, and sometimes are derived from a blend of socio-political goals or personal grievances. Federal Bureau of Investigation and Department of Homeland Security, *Strategic Intelligence Assessment and Data on Domestic Terrorism* (May 2021).

**Figure 1: Summary of Federal Bureau of Investigation and Department of Homeland Security Domestic Terrorism Threat Categories**



#### **Racially or ethnically motivated violent extremism**

Domestic violent extremists whose ideological agendas stem from biases, often related to race or ethnicity, held against specific population groups.



#### **Antigovernment or antiauthority violent extremism**

Domestic violent extremists driven by anti-government or anti-authority sentiments, including opposition to perceived economic, social, or racial hierarchies, or perceived government overreach, negligence, or illegitimacy.

- **Militia violent extremists:** Domestic violent extremists who actively resist or seek to overthrow the U.S. government, believing it exceeds its constitutional authority and is establishing a totalitarian regime. They oppose many federal and state laws, particularly those related to firearm ownership.
- **Anarchist violent extremists:** Domestic violent extremists who oppose all forms of capitalism, corporate globalization, and governing institutions. They view them as harmful to society.
- **Sovereign citizen violent extremists:** Domestic violent extremists who believe they are immune from government authority and laws.
- **Antigovernment or antiauthority-other:** Domestic violent extremists who do not fit within the other subcategories and correspond with potential flashpoints, such as high-profile elections and campaigns or contentious current events.



#### **Animal rights or environmental violent extremism**

Domestic violent extremists aiming to end or reduce perceived cruelty, harm, or exploitation of animals, or the perceived exploitation or destruction of natural resources and the environment.



#### **Abortion-related violent extremism**

Domestic violent extremists with ideological agendas supporting either pro-life or pro-choice beliefs.



#### **All other domestic terrorism threats**

Domestic violent extremists with ideological agendas not defined under other domestic terrorism threat categories, including a mix of personal grievances and beliefs, potentially involving biases related to religion, gender, or sexual orientation.

Source: GAO summary of Federal Bureau of Investigation and U.S. Department of Homeland Security documentation; Icons-Studio/stock.adobe.com (illustrations). | GAO-25-107030

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of violence, arrests, and disruptions.<sup>28</sup> In addition, in October 2024, DHS I&A reported that from September 2023 through July 2024, domestic violent extremists who were specifically driven by antigovernment, racial, or gender-related motivations conducted at least four attacks in the United States, and law enforcement disrupted at least seven additional plots.<sup>29</sup> Beyond domestic terrorism incidents, we reported in February 2023 that the number of open FBI domestic terrorism cases grew 357 percent (1,981 to 9,049) from fiscal years 2013 through 2021.<sup>30</sup>

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## Federal Strategies Related to Domestic Terrorism Since 2011

Since 2011, the White House and DHS have developed national and departmental strategies designed to counter violent extremism and domestic terrorism in the United States. The White House developed a national strategy for countering violent extremism in 2011, and also developed additional national security-related strategies in 2011 and 2018 that included references to countering violent extremism. At the department level, DHS developed a strategy for countering violent extremism in 2016 and replaced it in 2019 with a strategy for preventing targeted violence and terrorism. According to DHS, it broadened the terrorism prevention concept to include targeted violence in 2019 to recognize and address a broader range of current and emerging threats among communities. Figure 2 provides an overview of the White House and DHS strategies related to domestic terrorism since 2011.

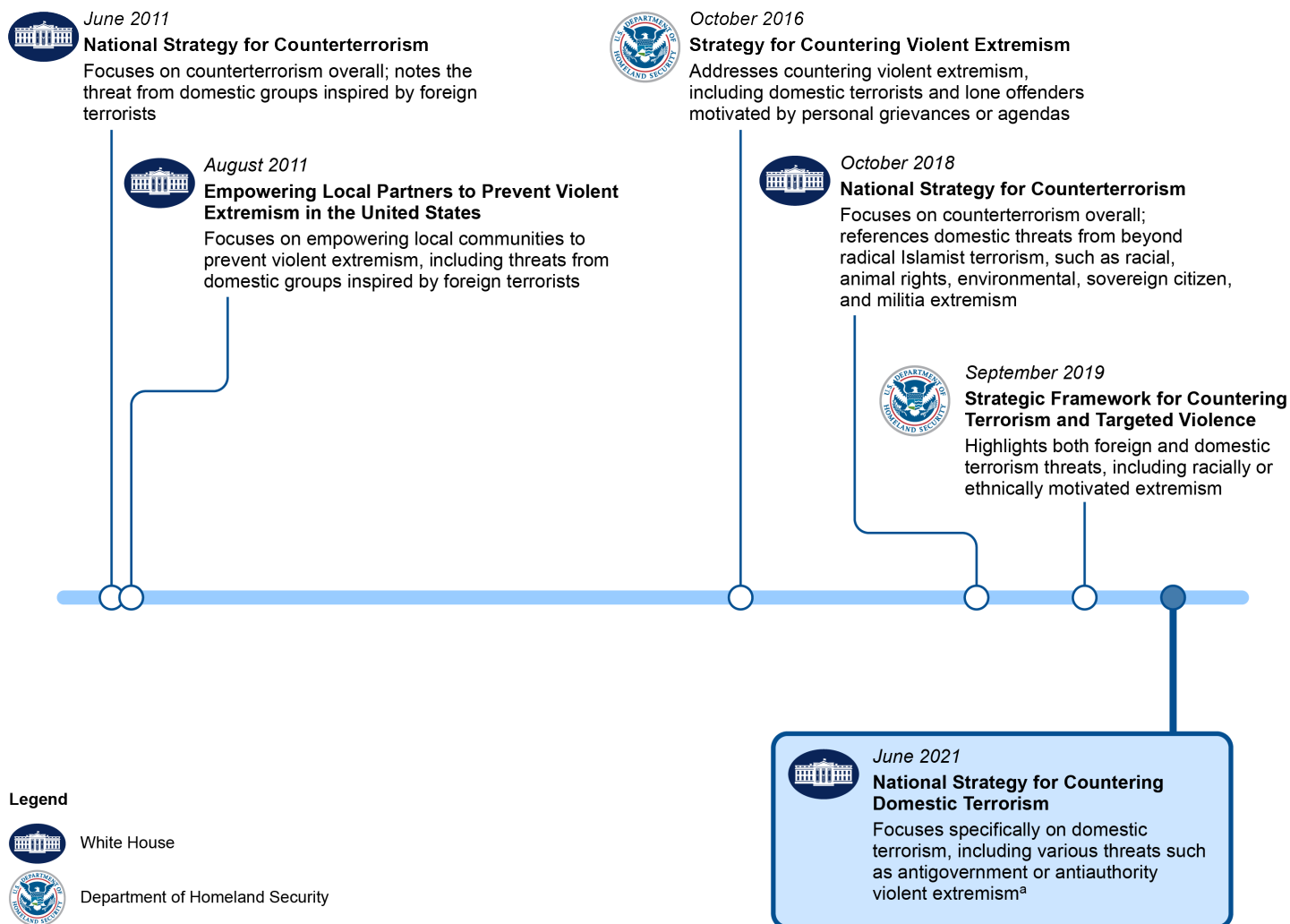
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<sup>28</sup>According to the FBI and DHS, to be considered a domestic terrorism incident, the incident must involve the use or threat of force or violence, have the potential for a federal violation, and appear intended to further social or political goals. In January 2025, DHS officials told us that while the data in the June 2023 report provide a general picture of domestic terrorism threats, a forthcoming fiscal year 2023 report will contain a more comprehensive assessment of domestic terrorism incident data. DHS stated that it partnered with the FBI to develop the fiscal year 2023 data and improve its overall completeness and accuracy. FBI officials noted that some domestic terrorism incidents that are rooted in state and local criminal activity may be unreported. As of January 2025, DHS and the FBI had not released the fiscal year 2023 report. See Federal Bureau of Investigation and Department of Homeland Security, *Strategic Intelligence Assessment and Data on Domestic Terrorism (June 2023)*.

<sup>29</sup>Department of Homeland Security, Office of Intelligence and Analysis, *2025 Homeland Threat Assessment* (October 2024).

<sup>30</sup>GAO, *Domestic Terrorism: Further Actions Needed to Strengthen FBI and DHS Collaboration to Counter Threats*, [GAO-23-104720](#) (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 22, 2023.) The methodology we used in this report differs from how the FBI reports domestic terrorism data in that we captured any investigation or assessment that was opened at any point in the fiscal year. The U.S. Capitol attack took place on January 6, 2021; however, the data did not allow us to analyze the extent to which the number of cases in 2021 reflects cases opened after the attack.

**Figure 2: White House and Department of Homeland Security Strategies Related to Domestic Terrorism Since 2011**



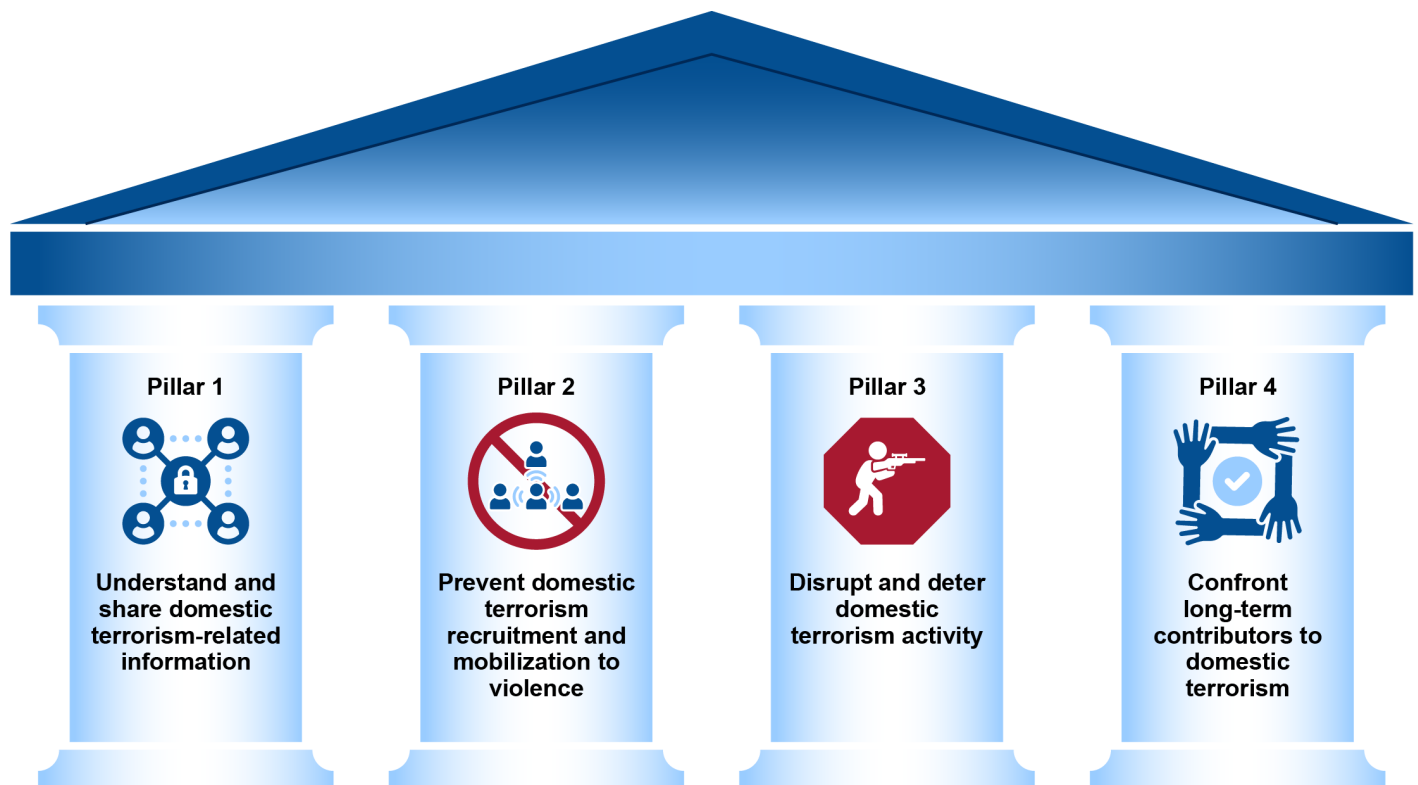
Source: GAO analysis of agency documents; agency seals courtesy of respective agencies. | GAO-25-107030

<sup>a</sup>The five categories of domestic terrorism threats, as defined by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Department of Homeland Security are (1) race or ethnicity, (2) antigovernment or antiauthority sentiment, (3) animal rights or environmental sentiment, (4) abortion-related issues, and (5) other domestic terrorism threats not otherwise defined or primarily motivated by the other categories. The Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Department of Homeland Security, *Strategic Intelligence Assessment and Data on Domestic Terrorism* (June 2023).

The White House issued the 2021 Strategy in June 2021. The 2021 Strategy aims to provide an overarching approach for the U.S. government and its nonfederal partners to specifically address domestic terrorism through the implementation of four main goals, or pillars, as

shown in figure 3. Additionally, the 2021 Strategy identifies subordinate goals that further define the types of efforts that support achieving each of the main goals or pillars. For example, Pillar 1 seeks to understand and share domestic terrorism-related information and has a subordinate goal of enhancing domestic terrorism-related research and analysis.

**Figure 3: Strategic Pillars of the 2021 National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism**



Source: GAO summary of 2021 National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism; Icons-Studio/stock.adobe.com (icons). | GAO-25-107030

Since the issuance of the 2021 Strategy, the White House released two Fact Sheets, in June 2021 and June 2023. These Fact Sheets list examples of some activities that agencies have taken to implement the 2021 Strategy by strategic pillar and serve as updates for the 2021 Strategy.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>31</sup>According to agency officials we interviewed, the NSC also released an accompanying classified strategic implementation plan.



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## Key Roles and Responsibilities

The NSC authored the 2021 Strategy and coordinates its implementation through the NSC's interagency process. The FBI—within DOJ—and DHS are the main federal entities charged with preventing terrorist attacks in the United States, including attacks conducted by domestic violent extremists.<sup>32</sup> The 2021 Strategy further states that multiple federal agencies play a role in countering domestic terrorism.

**NSC.** The White House leverages the NSC as its principal forum for national security and foreign policy decision-making with senior national security advisors and cabinet officials, according to the NSC.<sup>33</sup> In addition, as noted above, the NSC led the development of the 2021 Strategy and coordinates implementation of the 2021 Strategy. It also coordinates other national security policies across federal agencies through the interagency process.

**DOJ.** The FBI is responsible for leading law enforcement and domestic intelligence efforts to prevent and disrupt terrorist attacks.<sup>34</sup> Within FBI headquarters, the Counterterrorism Division manages the FBI's Domestic Terrorism Program. The FBI-led JTTFs are specialized investigative units within the FBI field offices composed of task force officers from federal, state, and local law enforcement that collect and share information and intelligence.

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<sup>32</sup>18 U.S.C. § 2332b(f); 28 C.F.R. § 0.85(l); 6 U.S.C. § 111(b)(1)(A). See also Federal Bureau of Investigation and Department of Homeland Security, *Strategic Intelligence Assessment and Data on Domestic Terrorism* (June 2023).

<sup>33</sup>See generally 50 U.S.C. § 3021(b). The National Security Council consists of the President, the Vice President, the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of Energy, the Secretary of the Treasury, and the Director of the Office of Pandemic Preparedness and Response Policy. The President may designate such other officers of the U.S. government, as appropriate, including the Director of National Intelligence, the Director of National Drug Control Policy, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the National Cyber Director, to attend and participate in meetings of the council. 50 U.S.C. § 3021(c).

<sup>34</sup>Attorney General Guidelines for Domestic FBI Operations authorize the FBI to detect, obtain information about, and prevent or protect against federal crimes or threats to national security. The Attorney General's Guidelines define a threat to national security as international terrorism; espionage and other intelligence activities; sabotage; and assassinations conducted by, for, or on behalf of foreign powers, organizations, or persons; foreign computer intrusion; and other matters determined by the Attorney General consistent with Executive Order 12333 or any successor order. Department of Justice, *Attorney General Guidelines for Domestic FBI Operations* (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 29, 2008).

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Other DOJ components contribute to DOJ's efforts to counter domestic terrorism threats through prosecutions, intelligence information sharing, and research, among others. For example, the National Security Division operates the Domestic Terrorism Unit within the Counterterrorism Section by coordinating domestic terrorism cases and supporting DOJ's work to implement the 2021 Strategy. Additionally, the Executive Office for U.S. Attorneys supports 93 U.S. Attorneys who are responsible for prosecuting federal crimes, including those related to domestic terrorism.<sup>35</sup>

**DHS.** DHS I&A is the primary component within DHS responsible for accessing, receiving, analyzing, integrating, and disseminating intelligence and other information related to domestic terrorism.<sup>36</sup> Other entities within DHS support domestic terrorism-related activities by providing policy guidance, training, and oversight, among other items. For example, the DHS Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism leads the effort to coordinate counterterrorism activities across the department and with federal and external partners. The DHS Office of Strategy, Policy, and Plans develops relevant policy guidance, strategies, and operational plans. In addition, the DHS Center for Prevention Programs and Partnerships (CP3) provides grant funding and training for local governments, the private sector, and local communities to support activities aimed at preventing violent extremism and domestic terrorism, including the development of related state strategies. DHS I&A also assigns personnel to partner with state-led fusion centers across the country. Further, DHS Science and Technology Directorate supports research and development activities, including those related to domestic terrorism, with domestic and international partners.

The 2021 Strategy identifies other federal entities, such as DOD, the Departments of Health and Human Services, State, Treasury, and Veterans Affairs that also implement activities to counter domestic terrorism. For example, the State Department and Treasury work with foreign allies and federal government partners to assess if additional

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<sup>35</sup>While there are 94 federal districts, there are 93 U.S. Attorneys, as one U.S. Attorney represents the federal districts in both Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands. There is no federal crime of domestic terrorism. However, prosecutors can charge domestic terrorists with other crimes corresponding to their conduct, such as those related to unlawful possession of firearms, federal tax evasion, assault, and fraud, among others.

<sup>36</sup>See 6 U.S.C. § 121(d)(14).

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foreign entities linked to domestic terrorism can be designated as Foreign Terrorist Organizations or Specially Designated Global Terrorists.<sup>37</sup>

Within the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, the NCTC leads and integrates the national counterterrorism effort across the intelligence community. The NCTC is the primary organization responsible for analyzing and integrating all U.S. government intelligence related to terrorism and counterterrorism, except for intelligence that pertains exclusively to domestic terrorism.<sup>38</sup> Although the NCTC's activities are focused primarily on international counterterrorism, the NCTC is authorized to receive domestic counterterrorism intelligence from other sources, such as DHS I&A, that have a statutory duty to support the NCTC's mission.<sup>39</sup>

Given the nature of the domestic terrorist threat, the 2021 Strategy states that the federal government should extend its partnerships across the federal government and to nonfederal partners, such as state, local, tribal, and territorial governments, as well as foreign allies and partners, civil society, the private sector, academia, and more. Figure 4 provides an overview of federal and nonfederal partners involved in implementing the 2021 Strategy.

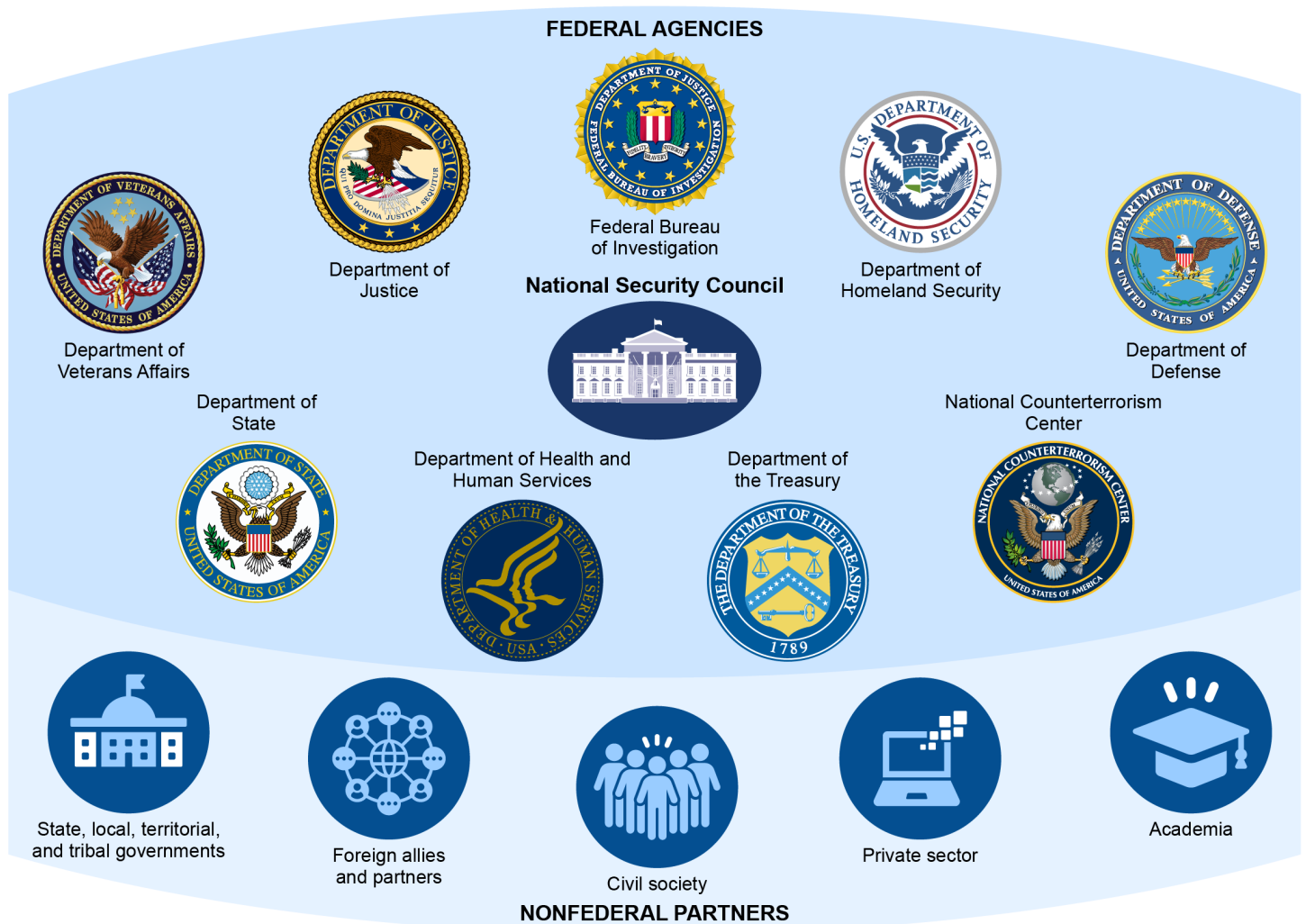
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<sup>37</sup>According to the 2021 Strategy, the Department of Health and Human Services assists in advancing domestic terrorism prevention efforts by developing—in coordination with other federal agencies—an easily accessible website to increase the transparency and accessibility of resources to stakeholders, such as community-based programs and research. The Department of the Treasury coordinates with law enforcement and other stakeholders to explore ways to enhance the identification and analysis of the financial activity of domestic violent extremist actors, including collaborating across federal partners to assess whether foreign organizations and individuals linked to domestic violent extremists can be designated as Foreign Terrorist Organizations.

<sup>38</sup>50 USC § 3056(d)(1).

<sup>39</sup>50 U.S.C. § 3056(e)(1) (providing that the NCTC “may... receive intelligence pertaining exclusively to domestic counterterrorism from any Federal, State, or local government or other source necessary to fulfill its responsibilities and retain and disseminate such intelligence.”); see, e.g., 6 U.S.C. § 121(d)(1) (providing DHS I&A the responsibility to “access, receive, and analyze law enforcement information, intelligence information and other information from agencies in the Federal Government [and others]...in support of the ... functions of NCTC.”). NCTC officials stated that, consistent with congressional direction, as of December 2022, the NCTC has limited its work to focus on the transnational and international dimensions of the terrorist threats against the United States.

**Figure 4: Federal Entities and Nonfederal Partners Identified in the 2021 National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism**



Source: 2021 National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism; agency seals courtesy of respective agencies; Icons-Studio/stock.adobe.com (icons). | GAO-25-107030

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## Domestic Terrorism Threats in the 2021 Strategy Are Consistent with Recent Threat Assessments

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### Categories of Domestic Terrorism Threats in Federal Threat Assessments Are Generally Consistent with the 2021 Strategy

We reviewed seven DHS, FBI, NCTC, and ODNI public threat assessments issued since the 2021 Strategy was released and found that the focus of the 2021 Strategy continues to be generally consistent with the threat categories identified in these assessments.<sup>40</sup> Specifically, the threat assessments we reviewed highlight aspects of the five primary domestic terrorism threat categories reflected in the 2021 Strategy.<sup>41</sup> Further, both the 2021 Strategy and most of the threat assessments issued since 2021 reported that the domestic terrorism threat will continue to persist or rise in the future.

Most of the assessments identify racially or ethnically motivated violent extremism as one of the most lethal domestic terrorism threats to the United States. For example, a June 2022 DHS, FBI, and NCTC joint threat assessment noted that since 2010, racially or ethnically motivated individuals have been responsible for the majority of domestic violent extremism-related deaths and pose a significant threat of lethal violence against civilians, particularly of racial, ethnic, and religious minorities.<sup>42</sup> Further, we found that all of these threat assessments, as well as the 2021 Strategy, mention antigovernment or antiauthority threats, such as those from militia violent extremists. For example, a 2023 DHS and FBI joint threat assessment stated that grievances of militia violent extremists

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<sup>40</sup>Each threat assessment relates to domestic terrorism or violent extremism by either (1) addressing domestic terrorism or domestic violent extremism threats in the document or (2) including a section specifically related to the domestic terrorism threat. We reviewed assessments issued from 2021 through 2024.

<sup>41</sup>The five categories of domestic terrorism threats, as defined by the FBI and DHS are (1) race or ethnicity, (2) antigovernment or antiauthority sentiment, (3) animal rights or environmental sentiment, (4) abortion-related issues, and (5) other domestic terrorism threats not otherwise defined or primarily motivated by the other categories.

<sup>42</sup>Department of Homeland Security, Federal Bureau of Investigation, and National Counterterrorism Center, *Wide-Ranging Domestic Violent Extremist Threat to Persist* (Washington, D.C.: June 2022).

are more disjointed than in previous years and that these actors will most likely continue to target specific groups, including government officials, government facilities, and law enforcement personnel.<sup>43</sup> Table 1 provides an overview of the threat categories included in each document.

**Table 1: Domestic Terrorism Threat Categories Identified in Selected Threat Assessments Issued from 2021 through 2024**

Threat assessment	Source	Domestic terrorism threat categories <sup>a</sup>				
		Racially and ethnically motivated violent extremism	Antigovernment or antiauthority violent extremism	Abortion-related violent extremism	Animal rights and environmental violent extremism	Other domestic terrorism threats
2021 National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism	NSC	√*	√*	√	√	√
March 2021 Assessment of the Domestic Violent Extremism Threat	ODNI, DHS, FBI and NCTC	√*	√*	√	√	√
May 2021 Strategic Intelligence Assessment and Data on Domestic Terrorism	FBI and DHS	√*	√*	√	√	√
June 2022 Wide-Ranging Domestic Violent Extremist Threat to Persist	DHS, FBI, and NCTC <sup>b</sup>	√*	√*	√	√	√
October 2022 Strategic Intelligence Assessment and Data on Domestic Terrorism	FBI and DHS	√*	√*	√	√	√
June 2023 Strategic Intelligence Assessment and Data on Domestic Terrorism	FBI and DHS	√*	√*	√	√	√
September 2023: 2024 Homeland Threat Assessment	DHS	√	√	—	—	√
October 2024: 2025 Homeland Threat Assessment	DHS	√	√	√	—	√

Legend:

√ = Document includes threat category

<sup>43</sup>Federal Bureau of Investigation and Department of Homeland Security, *Strategic Intelligence Assessment and Data on Domestic Terrorism*.

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✓\* = Specific threat category is identified to either be the most lethal of the categories listed or that the specific threat remains elevated during the reporting period.

— = Specific threat category is not identified in the assessment.

Source: GAO analysis of documentation from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), the National Security Council (NSC), and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI). | GAO-25-107030

Note: GAO selected and reviewed a total of seven publicly available threat assessments issued from 2021 through 2024 by the following federal entities: DHS, the FBI, the NCTC, and ODNI. The table shows the different categories—as defined by the FBI and DHS—included in each assessment. While the DHS assessments do not refer to the threat categories by name, we reviewed those reports to identify whether they included any reference to the overall threat type. We found that the assessments highlight some categories as the more lethal threats.

<sup>a</sup>The five categories of domestic terrorism threats identified in the chart are defined by the FBI and DHS in the May 2021 *Strategic Intelligence Assessment and Data on Domestic Terrorism*.

<sup>b</sup>NCTC officials stated that, consistent with congressional direction, as of December 2022, the NCTC has limited its work to focus on the transnational and international dimensions of the terrorist threats against the United States and did not produce any domestic terrorism-related assessments thereafter.

One assessment includes an additional subcategory within the antigovernment or antiauthority violent extremism threat category. This category is known as the antigovernment or antiauthority-other category. This category reflects threats from individuals who threatened government or law enforcement officials to whom they were ideologically opposed but who do not fit into the existing antigovernment or antiauthority violent extremism threat subcategories of militia, anarchist, and sovereign citizen extremists.<sup>44</sup> According to a 2023 DHS and FBI joint threat assessment, the threat originating from the antigovernment or antiauthority-other subcategory has increased in the last few years, and a rise in the future will likely be in response to high-profile events, such as elections or campaigns.<sup>45</sup>

In addition, we reviewed annual threat assessments that ODNI issued from 2021 through 2024.<sup>46</sup> Most of these assessments focus on worldwide threats to the United States, such as those coming from global terrorism, organized crime, or foreign governments, among others, and do not specifically focus on domestic terrorism. However, ODNI's 2021 and 2022 assessments point to the rise of transnational influences on

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<sup>44</sup>Federal Bureau of Investigation and Department of Homeland Security, *Strategic Intelligence Assessment and Data on Domestic Terrorism* (June 2023).

<sup>45</sup>Federal Bureau of Investigation and Department of Homeland Security, *Strategic Intelligence Assessment and Data on Domestic Terrorism* (June 2023).

<sup>46</sup>Office of the Director of National Intelligence, *Annual Threat Assessment of the Intelligence Community* (Feb. 5, 2024); *Annual Threat Assessment of the Intelligence Community*, (Feb. 6, 2023); *Annual Threat Assessment of the Intelligence Community* (Feb. 7, 2022); and *Domestic Violent Extremism Poses Heightened Threat in 2021* (March 2021).

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domestic violent extremists based in the United States. For example, the 2021 assessment states that domestic violent extremists are also inspired by like-minded individuals and groups abroad. The 2022 assessment states that individuals and small groups inspired by a variety of ideologies or personal motivations, such as racially or ethnically motivated violent extremism and militia violent extremism, probably present the greatest terrorist threat to the United States.<sup>47</sup>

In addition to reviewing recent assessments, we interviewed officials from seven selected JTTFs and fusion centers.<sup>48</sup> JTTF officials we interviewed noted that the domestic terrorism threat has generally increased since 2021. Most of these officials (five of seven) said that they noticed a specific increase among racially and ethnically motivated violent extremists. For example, JTTF officials from Michigan said they have seen an increase in racially or ethnically motivated violent extremism threats within the United States from individuals responding to the Israel-Hamas conflict and expect that this increased threat will continue. Officials from all seven of the fusion centers told us that they observed changes in the domestic terrorism threat landscape since 2021, including an increase in domestic terrorism threats in general. In particular, they reported an increase in racially and ethnically motivated and antigovernment threats.

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**Characteristics of Domestic Terrorists in Federal Threat Assessments Are Generally Consistent with the 2021 Strategy**

We found that the characteristics of domestic terrorists outlined in the 2021 Strategy are similar to those that DHS, the FBI, the NCTC, and ODNI identified in subsequent public threat assessments from 2021 through 2024. Both the 2021 Strategy and recent assessments note that domestic terrorists are more likely to use technology to advance their beliefs; operate alone or within small groups; and be influenced by a range of factors, such as blended ideologies.<sup>49</sup>

**Use of technology.** Most of the threat assessments we reviewed, as well as the 2021 Strategy, indicate that domestic terrorists increasingly rely on online platforms, such as gaming and social media platforms, to radicalize

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<sup>47</sup>The 2023 and 2024 reports do not refer to domestic terrorists or domestic violent extremists specifically, but they note that U.S. persons and interests abroad face threats most likely coming from individuals or small groups inspired by foreign terrorist organizations and violent extremist ideologies.

<sup>48</sup>We met with JTTF and fusion center officials from Colorado, Florida, Michigan, New York, Oregon, Texas, and Washington, D.C.

<sup>49</sup>Domestic terrorists may also be motivated to violence by single-issue ideologies, or a combination of ideological influences, according to the 2021 Strategy.



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and mobilize their views.<sup>50</sup> For instance, a 2023 ODNI assessment notes that racially or ethnically motivated violent extremists use a social media platform (Telegram) to share propaganda and exchange operational guidance.<sup>51</sup> Similarly, the 2021 Strategy notes that domestic terrorists use internet-based communications, such as social media, file-upload sites, and end-to-end encrypted platforms, which can amplify threats to public safety.

**Lone offenders.** Most of the threat assessments we reviewed, as well as the 2021 Strategy, point to the increase in the number of domestic terrorism-related lone offender attackers, as opposed to structured or organized groups. Specifically, the 2021 Strategy indicates that lone offenders or small groups adhering to a variety of ideologies are more likely to carry out attacks than organizations that advocate one ideology in particular. The 2021 Strategy states that lone offender efforts pose significant challenges for law enforcement to detect or disrupt.

**Blended ideologies.** The threat assessments we reviewed state that domestic violent extremists are often motivated by a mix of ideologies that can range from conspiracy theories to a blend of varying political ideologies. The 2021 Strategy notes that domestic terrorists are often fueled by ideologies that are fluid, evolving, and overlapping and can intersect with conspiracy theories or other forms of disinformation or misinformation. Specifically, all the seven threat assessments that we reviewed similarly state that domestic violent extremists adhere to a variety of motivations. For example, one assessment states that these individuals tend to develop personalized belief systems based on a mix of political concerns and a range of ideologies.<sup>52</sup> Figure 5 provides an overview on factors that influence domestic terrorists.

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<sup>50</sup>In our prior work, we found that domestic violent extremists use social media and gaming platforms for several purposes. For more information, see GAO, *Countering Violent Extremism: FBI and DHS Need Strategies and Goals for Sharing Threat Information with Social Media and Gaming Companies*, [GAO-24-106262](#) (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 31, 2024).

<sup>51</sup>Office of the Director of National Intelligence, *Annual Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community* (Feb. 6, 2023).

<sup>52</sup>Federal Bureau of Investigation and Department of Homeland Security, *Strategic Intelligence Assessment and Data on Domestic Terrorism* (June 2023).

**Figure 5: Factors Influencing Domestic Terrorists**



Source: GAO analysis of Office of the Director of National Intelligence, Federal Bureau of Investigation, and Department of Homeland Security documentation; twinsterphoto/stock.adobe.com (photo); Icons-Studio/stock.adobe.com (icons). | GAO-25-107030

## Agencies Have Taken Steps to Implement the 2021 Strategy, but Work Remains

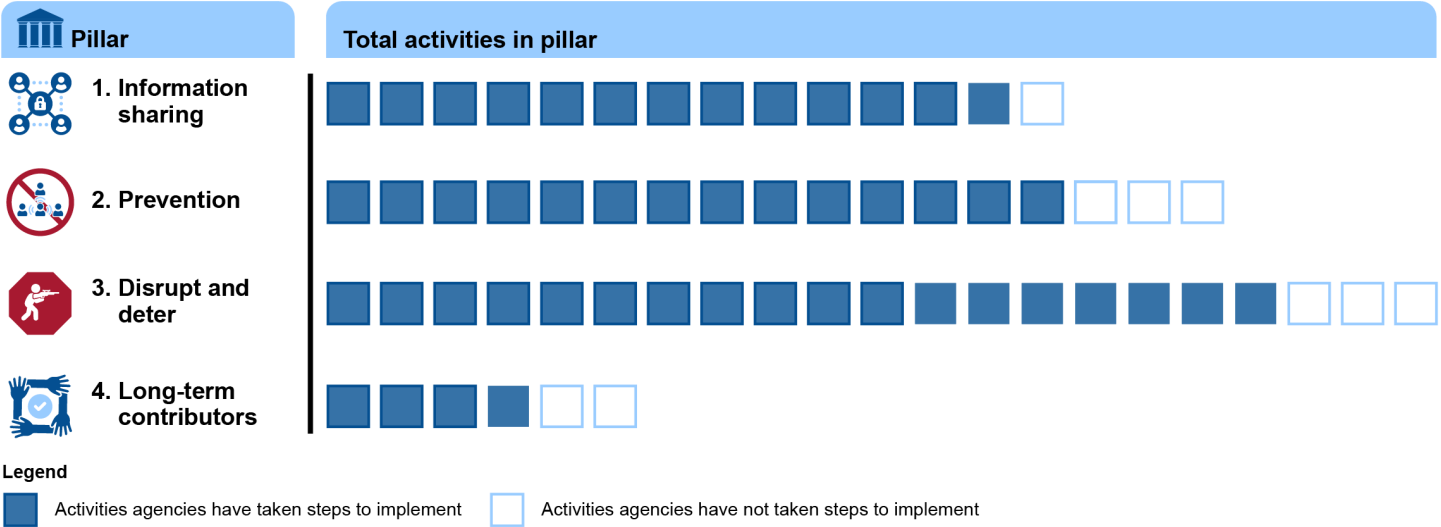
Agencies in our review have taken steps to implement most of the activities we identified in the 2021 Strategy, but some work remains under each pillar.<sup>53</sup> These steps include a mix of new and preexisting efforts. They include sharing information (Pillar 1), preventing domestic terrorism (Pillar 2), disrupting and deterring domestic terrorism (Pillar 3), and confronting long-term contributors (Pillar 4). We found that agencies have taken some steps to implement most activities under each pillar.

The 2021 Strategy tasks some federal agencies by name to take action to implement the 2021 Strategy and, in other cases, tasks the federal government in general to take certain actions. We reviewed the 2021 Strategy and associated Fact Sheets and identified a total of 58 statements (or activities) that task a responsible entity to take steps to counter domestic terrorism. Of these 58 activities, the 2021 Strategy tasks 31 activities to the federal government in general, 22 activities to

<sup>53</sup>In addition to the agencies in our review, the White House has also taken some steps to implement activities under Pillar 4, confronting long-term contributors to domestic terrorism.

specific agencies, seven activities to law enforcement, and two activities to the intelligence community.<sup>54</sup> Figure 6 below provides an overview of the number of activities in which agencies reported taking steps to implement the 2021 Strategy. Appendix II provides a detailed list of 2021 Strategy activities we identified and corresponding examples of steps that federal agencies reported taking to implement the 2021 Strategy.<sup>55</sup>

**Figure 6: Number of Activities, by Pillar, in Which Federal Entities Have Taken Steps to Support Implementation of the 2021 National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism, as of March 2025**



Source: GAO analysis of 2021 National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism and agency information provided by the Departments of Defense, Health and Human Services, Homeland Security, Justice/Federal Bureau of Investigation, State, Treasury, Veterans Affairs; the National Counterterrorism Center; and the White House; Icons-Studio/stock.adobe.com (illustrations). | GAO-25-107030

Note: We reviewed the 2021 Strategy, and the June 2021 and June 2023 White House Fact Sheets related to the 2021 Strategy and identified implementation activities under each pillar that task a specific agency or the federal government in general to take steps to counter domestic terrorism and identified 58 such activities. The 2021 Strategy has four pillars: (1) understand and share domestic terrorism-related information, (2) prevent domestic terrorism recruitment and mobilization to violence,

<sup>54</sup>In some cases, the 2021 Strategy tasks an activity to multiple entities, such as more than one agency or a specific agency and law enforcement. Of the 22 activities tasked to specific agencies, the 2021 Strategy tasked 14 activities to DOJ or the FBI, 11 activities to DHS, and 13 activities to various other agencies.

<sup>55</sup>In addition to the 58 activities that we identified in the 2021 Strategy that task either a specific federal agency or the federal government in general to take steps to counter domestic terrorism, some agencies in our review reported taking additional steps that contribute to efforts to counter domestic terrorism. For example, DHS reported that it has taken several steps to address in-prison radicalization. While the 2021 Strategy does not specifically mention in-prison radicalization or what steps agencies should take to address radicalization in prisons, DHS officials told us that their efforts to respond to in-prison radicalization and recidivism support efforts to implement the goals and objectives in the 2021 Strategy.

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(3) disrupt and deter domestic terrorism activity, and (4) confront long-term contributors to domestic terrorism. The purpose of our review was to identify what steps, if any, agencies took to implement the 2021 Strategy, including both new activities that agencies have implemented since the Strategy was issued in 2021 and preexisting activities that agencies have maintained. Of the nine activities for which we did not find steps that agencies have taken to implement, the 2021 Strategy tasked eight activities to the federal government in general and one activity to law enforcement. We did not evaluate individual agency steps to determine whether the agencies completed implementation of certain activities we identified in the 2021 Strategy.

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## Agency Steps to Implement the 2021 Strategy Include a Mix of New and Preexisting Efforts

Federal agencies' efforts to implement the 2021 Strategy's pillars and goals include a mix of new and preexisting steps. The 2021 Strategy acknowledges that the federal government had preexisting efforts to respond to domestic terrorism. Some 2021 Strategy activities explicitly direct agencies to implement new steps, while other activities do not specify whether agency steps should be new.

**New efforts.** Agencies undertook some new activities to implement the 2021 Strategy since June 2021. These efforts include the following, for example:

- DOJ and State jointly established the Counterterrorism Law Enforcement Forum in Europe, held annually since May 2022. The forum aims to bring together international governments, law enforcement entities, and other relevant partners to address domestic terrorism and violent extremism, as well as share lessons learned.
- DHS CP3 funded Invent2Prevent, which launched in spring 2021 to help high school and university students develop programs, such as online games and digital content, that prevent targeted violence and terrorism.
- Within DHS, the Science and Technology Directorate funded a research grant with the Institute of Strategic Dialogue to produce a bimonthly report on online trends in U.S. domestic violent extremism.<sup>56</sup> The Institute of Strategic Dialogue published its first report in October 2024.
- Further, some federal agencies dedicated new funding and resources to existing programs to counter domestic terrorism. For example, in fiscal year 2021, funding for DHS CP3's Targeted Violence and

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<sup>56</sup>The Institute for Strategic Dialogue is a group of independent, nongovernmental organizations that conducts research and analysis related to extremism and disinformation.

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Terrorism Prevention grants program increased from \$10 million to approximately \$20 million annually.<sup>57</sup>

**Preexisting efforts.** Agency officials also identified some efforts to counter domestic terrorism that were established before the 2021 Strategy was issued that support the 2021 Strategy's implementation. These efforts include the following, for example:

- DHS I&A first assigned personnel to fusion centers to share and receive domestic terrorism information in 2006. DHS officials told us that these positions help fusion centers build capacity and share information between federal, state, and local entities and that they continue to do so.<sup>58</sup>
- DHS I&A's National Threat Evaluation and Reporting Office established a Master Trainers Program in 2020 to certify federal and nonfederal entities in behavioral threat assessment and management techniques to prevent targeted violence, including domestic terrorism.<sup>59</sup>
- FBI officials assigned to JTTF offices told us that, in general, their roles and responsibilities with respect to domestic terrorism were preexisting and already aligned with the 2021 Strategy's goals.<sup>60</sup>
- NCTC officials stated that while their work is not in direct response to the 2021 Strategy, they reprioritized some existing activities relevant to the 2021 Strategy after it was issued. For example, NCTC officials said some of their unclassified products address general terrorism prevention techniques that may apply to domestic terrorism. These officials also noted that the NCTC supports other agencies that are compiling information and data related to terrorism prevention efforts.

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<sup>57</sup>These efforts support Pillars 1 and 2 (sharing information and preventing domestic terrorism).

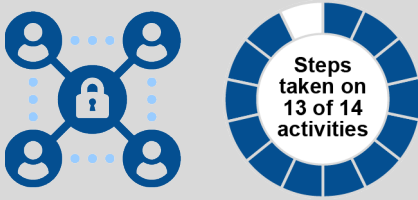
<sup>58</sup>We interviewed DHS I&A personnel assigned to fusion centers in seven states. These officials told us that their primary role is to share information between federal and nonfederal entities, including information related to domestic terrorism, among other threats. This effort supports Pillar 1 (sharing information).

<sup>59</sup>This effort supports Pillar 2 (preventing domestic terrorism).

<sup>60</sup>The FBI's efforts support Pillars 1, 2, and 3 (sharing information, preventing domestic terrorism, and disrupting and deterring domestic terrorism).

## Agencies Have Taken Steps to Implement Most 2021 Strategy Activities Under Each Strategic Pillar

### Pillar 1: Understand and Share Domestic Terrorism-Related Information



The federal government will

- enhance domestic terrorism-related research and analysis,
- improve information sharing across all levels within, as well as outside, the federal government, and
- illuminate transnational aspects of domestic terrorism.

Source: GAO analysis of agency information and 2021 National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism; Icons-Studio/stock.adobe.com (icons). | GAO-25-107030

**Information sharing (Pillar 1).** Federal agencies have taken steps to implement most of the activities we identified in the 2021 Strategy to understand and share domestic terrorism information with nonfederal partners, including state, local, tribal, territorial, and private sector entities. Specifically, as of March 2025, we found that agencies have taken steps to implement 13 of 14 activities under this pillar. The 2021 Strategy tasked five activities to specific agencies (including DHS, the FBI, the NCTC, State, and Treasury).<sup>61</sup> Examples of steps agencies have taken include the following:

- DHS officials reported taking steps to share domestic terrorism-related information by, among other things, assigning DHS I&A personnel to fusion centers to increase local fusion center capacity since 2006. We spoke with officials from JTTFs, fusion centers, and DHS I&A personnel assigned to fusion centers in seven states about their activities that respond to, or align with, the 2021 Strategy. DHS I&A personnel stated that information sharing—their primary role—aligns with Pillar 1 of the 2021 Strategy by sharing intelligence reports, written products, and briefings between federal and nonfederal partners. Some officials reported sharing key practices and lessons learned on domestic terrorism and other threats via regular and informal meetings with fusion centers, JTTFs, and other state and local partners.
- FBI officials in JTTFs stated that they routinely share information with federal and nonfederal partners nationwide on a variety of threats, including domestic terrorism. In particular, FBI, DHS, and the NCTC engaged to update the Mobilization Indicators booklet in 2021 to include information specific to domestic terrorism.<sup>62</sup> Agencies provide this resource to federal, state, and local partners to help determine whether individuals are preparing to engage in violent extremist activities.
- State and Treasury officials reported that they shared information with international partners to designate foreign entities with connections to domestic terrorist activity as Foreign Terrorist Organizations or

<sup>61</sup>The 2021 Strategy tasked the remaining activities to the intelligence community, law enforcement, or the federal government in general. Some activities are tasked to multiple entities.

<sup>62</sup>The Mobilization Indicators booklet was first developed in 2015 and updated in December 2021. According to NCTC officials, supplemental booklets were published for the technology sector in February 2023, the critical infrastructure sector in June 2024, the defense sector in September 2024 and the education sector in February 2025.

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Specially Designated Global Terrorists.<sup>63</sup> According to State, these designations are part of federal efforts to counter domestic terrorism and bar U.S. individuals from supporting these groups or receiving training from them. For example, in April 2020, State designated the Russian Imperial Movement and, in 2024, designated the Nordic Resistance Movement as terrorist organizations.

None of the federal agencies in our review provided information on steps that they have taken to implement one activity under this pillar: ensuring that they apply the full range of intelligence collection tools to domestic terrorism threats that become international through connectivity to foreign actors.<sup>64</sup> The 2021 Strategy tasked this activity to the federal government in general, rather than to a specific agency.

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<sup>63</sup>See 8 U.S.C. § 1189 (providing that the Secretary of State, in consultation with the Secretary of the Treasury and the Attorney General, is authorized to designate an organization as a foreign terrorist organization if specific criteria are met); Exec. Order No. 13224, 66 Fed. Reg. 49,079 (Sept. 23, 2001) (authorizing the U.S. government to designate and block the assets of foreign individuals and entities that commit, or pose a significant risk of committing, acts of terrorism as well as individuals and entities that provide support, services, or assistance to, or otherwise associate with, terrorists and terrorist organizations designated under the Order or consistent with provided designation criteria); 31 C.F.R. § 594.201 (implementing the designation authority under Executive Order 13224); 31 C.F.R. § 594.310 (“The term specially designated global terrorist or SDGT means any person whose property and interests in property are blocked pursuant to § 594.201(a)”).

<sup>64</sup>While agencies identified some discrete steps they have taken in this area, agencies did not report taking steps to include the full range of intelligence tools, as specified in the 2021 Strategy. See Appendix II for more information on activities under Pillar 1 that the federal government has not yet taken steps to implement.

**Pillar 2: Prevent Domestic Terrorism  
Recruitment and Mobilization to Violence**



The federal government will:

- strengthen domestic terrorism prevention resources and services and
- address online terrorist recruitment and mobilization to violence by domestic terrorists.

Source: GAO analysis of the 2021 National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism and information provided by federal agencies in our review; Icons-Studio/stock.adobe.com (icons). | GAO-25-107030

**Prevention (Pillar 2).** Federal agencies have taken steps to implement most of the activities related to preventing domestic terrorism that we identified in the 2021 Strategy.<sup>65</sup> Specifically, as of March 2025, we found that agencies have taken steps to implement 14 of 17 activities under this pillar. The 2021 Strategy tasked DHS to take the greatest number of activities (six of 17).<sup>66</sup> Examples of steps agencies have taken include the following:

- DHS has provided increased resources and funding to federal and nonfederal partners to prevent domestic terrorist activity. For example, DHS CP3's Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention grants fund state and local efforts to prevent domestic terrorism. Since 2021, DHS has provided approximately \$18 million to \$20 million to grantees through this grant program annually, such as state emergency management departments, schools and universities, and community programs.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>65</sup>The 2021 Strategy states that such prevention efforts must be pursued while safeguarding civil rights and civil liberties, including privacy protections, and while avoiding discrimination, bias, and stereotyping.

<sup>66</sup>The 2021 Strategy tasked the remaining activities to various other entities and the federal government in general. Some activities are tasked to multiple entities.

<sup>67</sup>The Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention grant program was established prior to the issuance of the 2021 Strategy, but funding for the program increased from \$10 million annually to approximately \$20 million annually in 2021. DHS CP3 officials reported that they receive significantly more grant applications than they can fund. For example, in 2023, DHS CP3 received grant application requests totaling \$54 million – nearly three times the grant program's \$20 million budget – and, in 2024, received grant application requests from applicants such as nonprofit organizations, institutes of higher education, and local governments, totaling nearly \$100 million.



### Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management (BTAM) Teams

Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management teams include law enforcement, mental health and education professionals, and other civil society partners to prevent potential acts of terrorism. Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management teams proactively respond to individuals exhibiting concerning behavior by providing various supportive services.

The Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention grants help to fund Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management teams in local communities. For example, in fiscal years 2023 and 2024, DHS awarded Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention grant funding to the Colorado fusion center to develop local Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management teams and related initiatives.

Colorado fusion center officials told us they can use this funding to establish four "regional coordinators" who create local Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management teams, share public awareness campaigns, and develop resources for Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management teams.

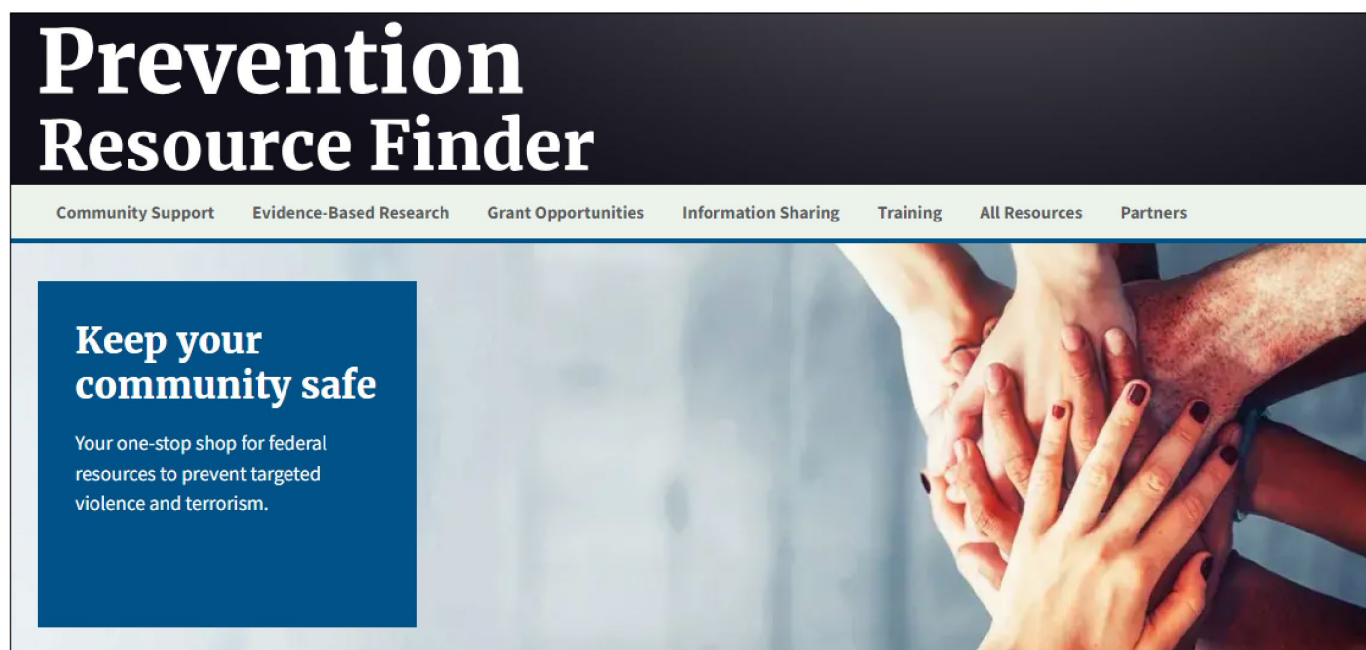


Source: DHS and Colorado Information Analysis Center; Agency logos courtesy of respective agencies. | GAO-25-107030

- In 2023, DHS partnered with several agencies to launch the Prevention Resource Finder website, which provides nonfederal partners with community support, grant information, and evidence-based research, as shown in figure 7.<sup>68</sup> According to the publicly accessible website, it is intended to provide resources to those who may be involved in preventing targeted violence and terrorism, such as law enforcement, mental health professionals, and educators.

<sup>68</sup>DHS.gov/prevention. The website identifies the following agencies that partnered to establish the website: DHS, DOJ, Education, Health and Human Services, the NCTC, State, Treasury, and the U.S. Agency for International Development. The 2021 Strategy also identifies these agencies as responsible for 2021 Strategy-related activities. The website additionally identifies the Department of Labor as a partner in the Prevention Resource Finder.

Figure 7: Department of Homeland Security Prevention Resource Finder Website Homepage



Source: dhs.gov/prevention. | GAO-25-107030

- In April 2021, DOD directed the secretaries of the military services to develop training for service members separating or retiring from the military on potential targeting by violent extremist actors.<sup>69</sup> DOJ officials also reported providing training to military personnel and the general public on terrorist recruitment and mobilization.

Agencies have not yet taken steps to implement the remaining three of 17 activities in the 2021 Strategy to prevent domestic terrorism. The 2021 Strategy tasks all three of these activities to the federal government in general. Specifically, the agencies in our review did not identify any activities to

<sup>69</sup>Department of Defense, Secretary of Defense, *Immediate Actions to Counter Extremism in the Department and the Establishment of the Countering Extremism Working Group* (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 9, 2021).

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- reduce the supply and demand of online terrorism recruitment materials,<sup>70</sup>
  - reduce access to assault weapons and high-capacity magazines,<sup>71</sup> or
  - implement a mechanism by which veterans can report recruitment attempts by violent extremist actors.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup>While none of the agencies in our review described steps they have taken to reduce the volume of terrorism recruitment materials online, in February 2024 we reported that the FBI and DHS have mechanisms to share and receive domestic violent extremism threat-related information with social media and gaming companies. For more information, see [GAO-24-106262](#). DOJ officials told us that agencies do not limit the availability of recruitment materials through unilateral actions, unless the material itself is illegal.

<sup>71</sup>While DOJ officials told us that DOJ works to appropriately enforce all prohibitions and regulations prescribed by law, they also stated that there is no established federal definition of “assault weapons” or “high-capacity magazines.”

<sup>72</sup>DOD, DOJ, and Department of Veterans Affairs officials stated that existing mechanisms for reporting concerning behavior, such as 911 and the FBI Tip Line, are available for veterans to report recruitment attempts by violent extremist actors. Further, in October 2024, DOD published a guide for individuals separating from the service that describes these existing mechanisms available to report recruitment attempts by violent extremist actors and other concerning behavior. However, agencies have not taken steps to create a mechanism specifically for veterans to report such attempts, in response to the 2021 Strategy. See app. II for a full description of activities under Pillar 2 that the federal government has not yet taken steps to implement.

### Pillar 3: Disrupt and Deter Domestic Terrorism Activity



The federal government will

- enable appropriate enhanced investigation and prosecution of domestic terrorism crimes,
- assess potential legislative reforms, and
- ensure that screening and vetting processes consider the full range of terrorism threats.

Source: GAO analysis of agency information and 2021 National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism; Icons-Studio/stock.adobe.com (icons). | GAO-25-107030

**Disrupt and deter (Pillar 3).** Agencies have taken steps to implement 18 of 21 of the activities we identified under Pillar 3 that task agencies to take steps to disrupt and deter domestic terrorism, but agencies did not report taking steps to implement the remaining three activities.<sup>73</sup> While the 2021 Strategy does not identify lead agencies for each of the four strategic pillars, the 2021 Strategy specifically identifies the FBI as the lead federal law enforcement and intelligence agency for investigating all forms of terrorism, including domestic terrorism. Therefore, the 2021 Strategy tasked the greatest number of activities (nine of 21) to implement Pillar 3 to DOJ or the FBI.<sup>74</sup> Examples of steps agencies have taken include the following:

- FBI officials reported that JTTFs coordinate with fusion centers to share information about domestic terrorism threats and investigations, as discussed above. Officials from four of seven fusion centers who we spoke with stated that they have observed an increase in the volume of FBI intelligence products since 2021.
- DOJ officials reported providing training to prosecutors. DOJ officials also told us in November 2023 that they plan to hire and train 180 new positions related to domestic violent extremism and violent crime. As of September 2024, DOJ officials reported that they had filled 127 of these positions.
- In December 2021, DOD updated its definition of prohibited extremist activity among military personnel in response to an April 2021 memo from the Secretary of Defense and in alignment with a statement in the 2021 Strategy indicating that DOD is doing so.
- DOD officials reported that they are in the process of responding to recommendations made by its Countering Extremist Activity Working Group, which aligns with the goals of the 2021 Strategy.<sup>75</sup> As of October 2024, DOD officials reported that DOD had implemented 13 out of 27 recommendations made by the working group.

<sup>73</sup>DHS and DOJ officials told us that they conduct additional activities to respond to the 2021 Strategy that are classified. This review does not include classified activities.

<sup>74</sup>The 2021 Strategy tasks the remaining activities to various other entities. Some activities may be tasked to multiple entities.

<sup>75</sup>According to a December 2021 report by the Countering Extremist Activity Working Group, the group aims to disrupt, deter, and mitigate the threat posed by prohibited extremist activities in the military. Since its establishment, the working group has developed reports and recommendations to address prohibited extremist activities. In November 2023, DOD officials told us that they were in the process of implementing these recommendations.

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We found that agencies in our review have not yet taken steps to implement some activities under Pillar 3, including one activity tasked to law enforcement, and two activities tasked to the federal government in general. For example, none of the agencies in our review reported taking steps to describe what interim measures federal law enforcement has taken to ensure flexibility in human resources to address domestic terrorism threats.<sup>76</sup>

**Pillar 4: Confront Long-Term Contributors to Domestic Terrorism**



Source: GAO analysis of agency information and 2021 National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism; Icons-Studio/stock.adobe.com (icons). | GAO-25-107030

**Long-term contributors (Pillar 4).** The White House and DOJ have taken steps to implement four of six activities we identified to confront long-term contributors to domestic terrorism (Pillar 4). The 2021 Strategy tasks the White House Domestic Policy Council with coordinating the federal government's response to long-term contributors to domestic terrorism, with leadership from relevant agencies. However, it also acknowledges that the federal government cannot solely address these contributors and states that agencies should partner with civil society to implement these activities.

The 2021 Strategy identifies several contributors, including racism and bigotry, gun violence, and the influence of conspiracy theories. However, the 2021 Strategy does not specify which agencies beyond the White House are responsible for implementing particular activities and tasks all six activities to the federal government in general.

The White House has taken some steps to address long-term contributors to domestic terrorism as identified in the 2021 Strategy. For example:

- The White House established an interagency policy committee in December 2022 focused on addressing bias and discrimination. This policy committee subsequently issued the National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism in May 2023 and the National Strategy to Counter Islamophobia and Anti-Arab Hate in December 2024.
- The White House has further hosted the United We Stand summit to address racism and violence since the 2021 Strategy was issued.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup>See Appendix II for a full description of activities under Pillar 3 that the federal government has not yet taken steps to implement.

<sup>77</sup>In September 2022, the White House hosted the *United We Stand* summit. The White House reported that the summit is a whole-of-society approach to preventing and responding to hate-motivated violence, including mass shootings, and included both federal and nonfederal representatives.

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In addition, DOJ has taken some steps to address bias in law enforcement, which the 2021 Strategy identifies as a long-term contributor to domestic terrorism. Specifically, DOJ officials reported providing training to law enforcement personnel on mitigating bias in law enforcement operations.

We found that the federal government has not yet taken steps to implement two of six statements related to confronting long-term contributors to domestic terrorism. In general, the agencies in our review did not identify steps they have taken to implement most of the activities related to Pillar 4. For example, agencies did not report taking steps to ensure that domestic terrorism threats are properly identified, categorized, and addressed or to counter the influence and impact of conspiracy theories.<sup>78</sup>

As discussed above, the majority of activities under each pillar for which agencies did not identify taking steps to implement were assigned to the federal government in general, as opposed to a specific agency. Specifically, of the nine activities for which we did not find steps that agencies have taken to implement, the 2021 Strategy tasked eight activities to the federal government in general and one activity to law enforcement. We further discuss our assessment of the 2021 Strategy, including the extent to which it addresses roles, responsibilities, and milestones, later in this report.

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<sup>78</sup>As previously discussed, the FBI and DHS are required to submit annual reports to Congress on domestic terrorism threat-related information. In coordination with the FBI, DHS I&A tracks domestic terrorism attacks and disrupted plots in the United States to inform these annual reports. However, these reports do not specify how the agencies ensure that these attacks and plots are properly or accurately identified and categorized. See Appendix II for a full description of activities under Pillar 4 that the federal government has not yet taken steps to implement.

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## Agencies Conducted Joint Activities and Identified Lessons Learned with Federal and Nonfederal Partners

We identified 10 activities in the 2021 Strategy that explicitly task multiple agencies to take steps to counter domestic terrorism.<sup>79</sup> In addition, the 2021 Strategy directs agencies or the federal government to coordinate with other entities, including civil society partners, to implement certain actions.

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### Federal Agencies Engage to Conduct Joint Activities

The 2021 Strategy directs federal agencies to conduct some joint activities to counter domestic terrorism. For example, the 2021 Strategy states that the FBI and DHS will enhance the public's understanding of assistance available to the public related to violent extremism, including mental health resources. Further, the 2021 Strategy tasks agencies to develop a website on domestic terrorism prevention resources. To implement these and other activities, agencies took the following steps:

- DHS engaged with several federal agencies to launch the Prevention Resource Finder website in 2023.
- DOJ officials stated that they provided training to DOD personnel on domestic violent extremism.
- State and DOJ cohosted the annual Counterterrorism Law Enforcement Forum in 2022, 2023, and 2024.
- Treasury officials stated that the agency contributed to domestic terrorism investigations by providing financial analysis on suspected terrorist financing.

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### Federal Agencies Engage with Domestic and International Partners to Identify Lessons Learned

We found that federal agencies engage with domestic and international nonfederal partners to identify domestic terrorism-related lessons learned by participating in conferences, working groups, and other information-sharing venues, such as fusion centers. The 2021 Strategy includes that agencies can and should continue to learn from domestic and international partners to prevent, disrupt, and respond to domestic terrorism. DHS, DOJ, and State officials told us that they continue to

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<sup>79</sup>We found that agencies have taken at least some steps to implement all 10 activities that the 2021 Strategy explicitly directs to multiple agencies.

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incorporate key practices and lessons learned as they engage in activities to implement the 2021 Strategy.<sup>80</sup>

**Domestic efforts.** To incorporate U.S. lessons learned into federal efforts to counter domestic terrorism, federal agencies engage with domestic nonfederal partners, including through conferences, working groups, and state-run fusion centers. For example:

- Treasury officials stated that they coordinated with private sector companies to share information on the financing of domestic violent extremist activity by conducting a roundtable with nonfederal partners in April 2023. Treasury also developed a webpage of resources on terrorist financing.
- Federal agencies engage with domestic nonfederal partners in several forums, such as JTTF Executive Boards and an annual conference hosted by the National Fusion Center Association, to share ideas and enhance fusion center capabilities.<sup>81</sup> Officials from one fusion center told us that this conference is their primary venue for sharing key practices and lessons learned on domestic terrorism and related threats.
- State and local officials from six of the seven fusion centers we spoke with stated that they have seen improvements in the volume or usefulness of domestic terrorism-related information that the federal government shares with nonfederal partners since 2021.

**International efforts.** To engage with international partners to counter domestic terrorism and share lessons learned, agencies leverage conferences and working groups.<sup>82</sup> For example:

- DOJ and State co-host the Counterterrorism Law Enforcement Forum, discussed above, to convene international partners to counter the

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<sup>80</sup>The 2021 Strategy tasks DOJ and DHS with implementing the most activities to counter domestic terrorism (14 and 11 activities, respectively). We found that the 2021 Strategy tasks three activities specifically to State.

<sup>81</sup>JTTF Executive Boards consist of federal, state, and local representatives within the JTTF's area of responsibility. FBI officials, as well as personnel from state and local law enforcement agencies, provide Executive Board members with threat briefings.

<sup>82</sup>Subject matter experts we interviewed who were involved in the development of the 2021 Strategy also told us that the NSC consulted with some international partners during the development of the 2021 Strategy.



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threat of racially and ethnically motivated violent extremism.<sup>83</sup> This annual forum includes representatives from around 40 countries from both governmental and nongovernmental entities.

- Since 2015, DHS Science and Technology Directorate has co-chaired a research working group with the Five Eyes countries to prevent terrorism.<sup>84</sup> DHS officials told us that the working group developed joint priorities in 2022 to address threats related to violent extremism and also convened in October 2024 to identify common policy objectives and shared research priorities. Further, in March 2024, DHS Science and Technology Directorate led the development of the International Academic Partnerships for Science and Security. This project is intended to connect international governmental, academic, and private sector partners to share information about targeted violence and terrorism.
- State Department officials stated that they engage bilaterally with allies to discuss lessons learned and share information about domestic terrorism threats. For example, State and German government partners shared information on domestic terrorism threats, including racially and ethnically motivated violent extremism.
- Representatives we interviewed from the governments of Germany and the United Kingdom confirmed that they partner with the U.S. government to share information and lessons learned related to domestic terrorism and violent extremism. Specifically, German representatives from the Ministry of the Interior's Division on Countering Right- and Left-Wing Terrorism, Extremism, and Politically Motivated Crime stated that the United States has provided useful intelligence and lessons learned regarding extremist groups operating in Germany.<sup>85</sup> For example, U.S. officials have engaged with Germany to discuss threats, disinformation, and conspiracy theories from racially and ethnically motivated violent extremists. United Kingdom government representatives told us that, in March 2024, officials from the Home Office traveled to the United States to learn

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<sup>83</sup>In July 2024, officials from DHS, DOJ, FBI, the NCTC, State, and Treasury participated in the forum.

<sup>84</sup>The Five Eyes countries comprise an intelligence alliance that includes Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

<sup>85</sup>According to German officials, the Ministry of the Interior is the lead department responsible for ensuring public security. The department includes several divisions, such as Counterterrorism, Extremism, and Organized Crime.

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more about how DHS, DOJ, the NSC, State, Treasury, and other U.S. entities approach domestic terrorism.<sup>86</sup>

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## The 2021 Strategy Is Missing Most of the Desirable Characteristics of an Effective National Strategy

Although we were able to identify a number of steps that agencies have taken to implement 2021 Strategy activities, the 2021 Strategy is missing most of the desirable characteristics of a national strategy. These characteristics would help guide the whole-of-government effort to counter domestic terrorism. Specifically, we found that the 2021 Strategy and its supporting documents fully address one of our six desirable characteristics for effective national strategies, lacked some elements of four characteristics, and did not address any element of one characteristic.<sup>87</sup>

We previously identified a set of six generally desirable characteristics to aid responsible parties in developing and implementing national strategies, to enhance such strategies' usefulness in resource and policy decisions, and to better assure accountability.<sup>88</sup> In our prior work, we noted that a national strategy should ideally contain all these characteristics. Figure 8 provides a summary of our evaluation of the 2021 Strategy against these characteristics.

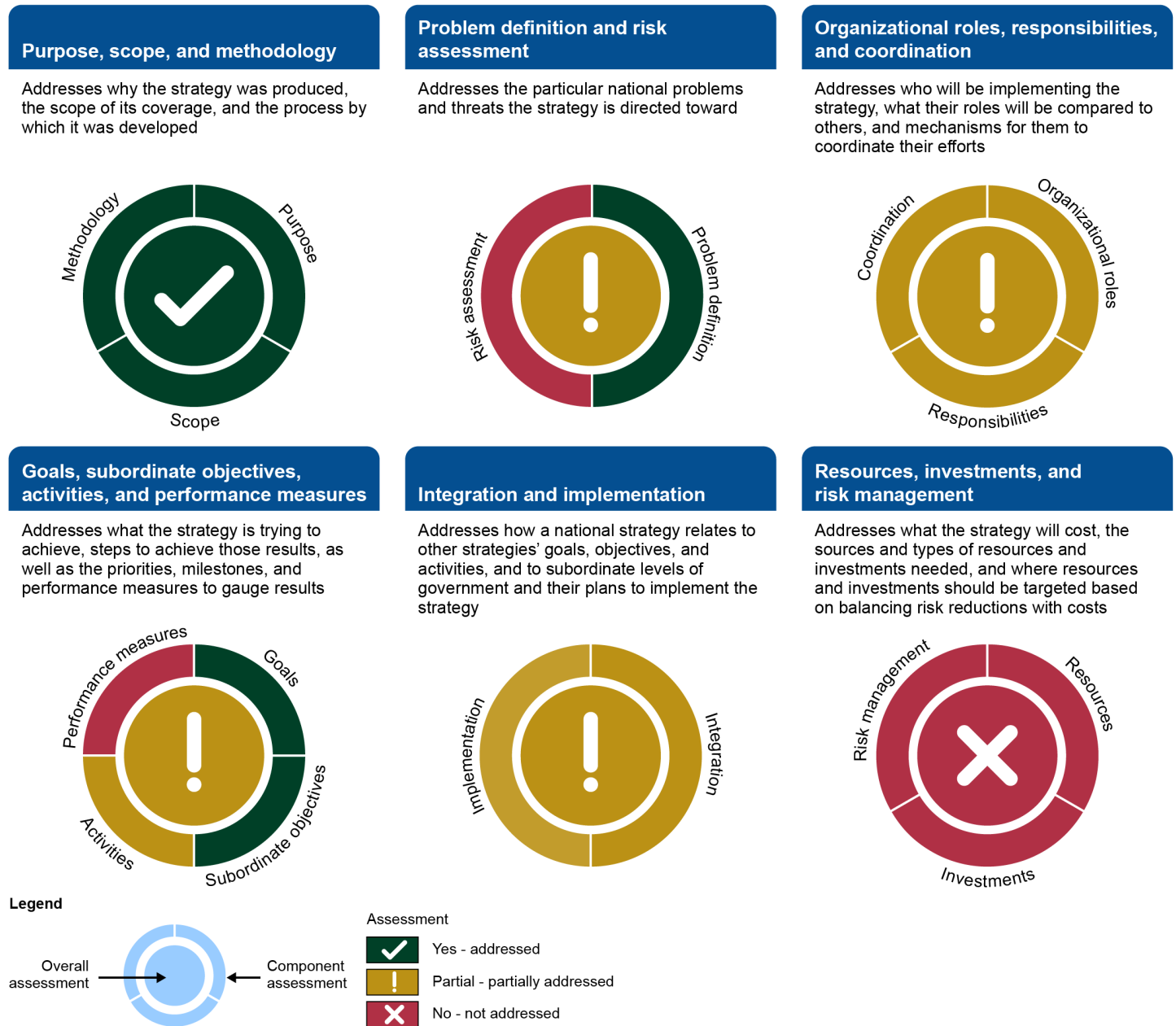
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<sup>86</sup>The Home Office is the United Kingdom's lead government department for immigration and passports, drug policy, crime, fire, counterterrorism, and police.

<sup>87</sup>The federal government's approach to managing domestic terrorism as of March 2025 is articulated through the 2021 Strategy and associated supporting documents, such as an implementation plan and White House Fact Sheets. DHS, DOJ, the FBI, and State officials informed us that the implementation plan is classified and not available to the public. We reviewed White House public Fact Sheets (published in June 2021 and June 2023) and interviewed agency officials to obtain additional information related to the 2021 Strategy and its implementation. We also obtained written responses to some questions the NSC staff provided in September 2024. We did not review the implementation plan, but agencies provided certain information related to the plan and its contents via written responses and interviews.

<sup>88</sup>[GAO-04-408T](#)

**Figure 8: Extent to Which the 2021 National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism Addresses GAO's Desirable Characteristics of an Effective National Strategy**



Source: GAO analysis of the 2021 National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism. | GAO-25-107030

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## The 2021 Strategy Fully Addresses One Desirable Characteristic

The 2021 Strategy fully addresses the purpose, scope, and methodology characteristic.

**Purpose, scope, and methodology.** This characteristic addresses why the 2021 Strategy was produced, the scope of its coverage, and the process by which it was developed. Regarding the purpose, or why the 2021 Strategy was produced, the 2021 Strategy articulates the need for a comprehensive, government-wide approach to address domestic terrorism while protecting the rule of law and safeguarding individuals' civil rights and civil liberties. It also states that the 2021 Strategy's approach will help reduce the factors contributing to inciting domestic terrorism online that exacerbate the spread of calls to violence. Additionally, the 2021 Strategy outlined its scope by organizing how the federal government will address the domestic terrorist threat around four pillars, or main goals and subordinate goals.<sup>89</sup> It also acknowledges that the federal government needs to work with critical partners in state, local, territorial, and tribal governments in civil society; the private sector; academia and local communities; and foreign partners.

Although the 2021 Strategy itself does not include a section on the methodology used for its development, the June 2021 White House Fact Sheet indicates that the White House consulted with stakeholders to develop the Strategy. A subject matter expert familiar with the 2021 Strategy's development stated that such consultations sought to understand what support and resources were needed to address domestic terrorism, among other things. NSC officials stated that they have met with nonfederal stakeholders repeatedly to understand their views on the domestic terrorism threat.

In addition, subject matter experts and agency officials we interviewed stated that White House officials sought their input and those of other relevant stakeholders, both domestic and foreign, in 2021 during the 2021 Strategy's development. For example, DHS and DOJ officials stated that they attended meetings hosted by the NSC to discuss details related to the 2021 Strategy during the Biden Administration's comprehensive

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<sup>89</sup>As we describe earlier in this report, the four pillars are (1) understand and share domestic terrorism-related information; (2) prevent domestic terrorism recruitment and mobilization to violence; (3) disrupt and deter domestic terrorism activity; and (4) confront long-term contributors to domestic terrorism.

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review of domestic terrorism in early 2021.<sup>90</sup> In addition, some subject matter experts noted that the administration's efforts to obtain their perspectives on the 2021 Strategy improved in comparison with previous efforts to elicit similar input to support the development of the national strategy for countering violent extremism in 2011.

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## The 2021 Strategy Partially Addresses Four Desirable Characteristics

The 2021 Strategy partially addresses the following four characteristics: (1) problem definition and risk assessment; (2) organizational roles, responsibilities, and coordination; (3) goals, subordinate objectives, activities, and performance measures; and (4) integration and implementation.

**Problem definition and risk assessment.** Our desirable characteristics state that strategies should include a detailed discussion or definition of the problems the strategy intends to address, their causes, and the operating environment. In addition, this characteristic entails a risk assessment, including an analysis of the threats to, and vulnerabilities of, critical assets and operations.

The 2021 Strategy defines the problem of domestic terrorism by acknowledging that domestic terrorism poses a serious and evolving threat. The 2021 Strategy incorporates a federal law definition of domestic terrorism.<sup>91</sup> In addition, the 2021 Strategy offers an assessment of threats identified by the intelligence community as of March 2021.<sup>92</sup> For example, it states that racially or ethnically motivated violent extremists and militia violent extremists present the most lethal domestic violent extremism threats, with racially motivated violent extremists most likely to conduct mass casualty attacks against civilians and militia violent extremists typically targeting law enforcement and government personnel and facilities.

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<sup>90</sup>According to the 2021 White House Fact Sheet, former President Biden directed his national security team to lead a 100-day comprehensive review of U.S. government efforts to address domestic terrorism on his first full day in office.

<sup>91</sup>Federal law states that domestic terrorism activities involve acts dangerous to human life that are a violation of the criminal laws of the United States or of any state; appear to be intended to intimidate or coerce a civilian population, to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion, or to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination, or kidnapping; and occur primarily within the territorial jurisdiction of the United States. See 18 U.S.C. § 2331(5).

<sup>92</sup>Intelligence Community, *Assessment of the Domestic Violent Extremist Threat* (March 2021).

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However, while the 2021 Strategy incorporates threat assessment information, the NSC did not include a risk assessment in either the 2021 Strategy or in the supporting documents that we reviewed that examines how the threats relate to the potential consequences to, and vulnerabilities of, critical assets and operations.<sup>93</sup> Our prior work states that conducting risk assessments is important because they can help policy leaders identify a broader range of considerations than those identified by threat assessments alone.<sup>94</sup>

A risk assessment could help agencies make more informed management decisions about the resource allocations required to minimize risks and maximize returns on resources expended to support the 2021 Strategy.

**Organizational roles, responsibilities, and coordination.** Our desirable characteristics state that a national strategy should identify which organizations will implement the strategy, their roles and responsibilities, and mechanisms for coordinating their efforts.

The 2021 Strategy addresses organizational roles by acknowledging that the federal government and other members of civil society need to play a role in addressing domestic terrorism, such as by partnering with foreign allies and professionals from the technology, education, and public health sectors, among others. Further, the 2021 Strategy includes that these partners provide critical analysis and expertise needed to help address the multifaceted nature of the domestic terrorism threat. The 2021 Strategy also reinforces the FBI as the lead federal law enforcement and intelligence agency for investigating all forms of terrorism, including domestic terrorism.

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<sup>93</sup>As noted in DHS's Risk Management Fundamentals Doctrine, risk is generally recognized as a function of threats, vulnerabilities, and consequences—elements that may explicitly be considered for many homeland security risks, such as those related to infrastructure protection. Three elements of homeland security risks related to infrastructure protection include (1) threats that are defined as a natural or manmade occurrence, individual or entity or action, including a terrorist that has or indicates the potential to harm; (2) vulnerability is defined as physical features or operational attributes that render an asset open to exploitation; and (3) consequence is the effect of an incident or occurrence. Risk assessment includes a threat assessment, a vulnerability assessment, and a criticality assessment. Department of Homeland Security, *Risk Management Fundamentals, Homeland Security Risk Management Doctrine* (Washington, D.C.: April 2011).

<sup>94</sup>GAO, *Homeland Security: Key Elements of Risk Assessment*, [GAO-02-150T](#) (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 12, 2001).

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The 2021 Strategy states that it will ensure rigorous oversight and accountability but does not specify which entity is responsible for doing so. DHS and DOJ agency officials stated that they believed the NSC was responsible for overseeing the effort and ensuring accountability. However, officials from most other agencies that we interviewed did not know how the NSC ensures accountability and oversight of agencies' 2021 Strategy-related activities as a whole.<sup>95</sup> The 2021 Strategy and its supporting documents do not clearly identify which organizational entity, if any, is responsible for leading or overseeing the implementation of the whole effort.

Further, several subject matter experts whom we interviewed indicated that they were not aware of which federal entity was leading the effort. For example, one academic expert said that they thought DOJ might be the lead entity in theory but did not know if a federal entity was in charge in practice. NSC officials stated that they established an interagency policy committee in 2022 to address antisemitism, Islamophobia, and related forms of bias and discrimination and that they also worked with the Domestic Policy Council within the NSC to examine ways to reduce hate-fueled violence.<sup>96</sup> While these efforts support some pillars within the 2021 Strategy, the NSC did not clarify whether these entities or any other entities within the NSC are responsible for leading the 2021 Strategy as a whole.

With regard to responsibilities, the 2021 Strategy names eight federal agencies and, as discussed earlier, provides some details on specific activities that they are conducting. It also identifies some agency roles and responsibilities. For example, the FBI's general responsibilities include leading law enforcement and domestic intelligence efforts to disrupt and deter terrorism, as well as collecting, analyzing and sharing intelligence related to domestic terrorism (as reflected in Pillars 3 and 1), and DHS produces and shares domestic terrorism-related analysis and

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<sup>95</sup>DHS officials stated that the NSC conducted annual data calls on 2021 Strategy-related activities and held periodic meetings with federal partners regarding progress toward implementing the 2021 Strategy. However, other agency officials reported that they were not aware of annual data calls and could not describe how the NSC interacted with federal partners to implement the 2021 Strategy.

<sup>96</sup>According to the NSC, interagency policy committees coordinate national security policy among multiple federal entities and provide policy analysis for consideration by the more senior committees within the NSC.

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content with its federal and nonfederal government partners (as reflected in Pillar 1).

However, while the 2021 Strategy mentions other federal entities, such as the Department of Veterans Affairs, it does not include any explicit statements about what other activities the agency may be responsible for leading or implementing. As discussed above, the 2021 Strategy tasks more than half (31 of 58) of the activities we identified to the federal government in general and does not include clear agency roles and responsibilities for these activities. According to DHS and DOJ officials, the implementation plan does assign additional roles and responsibilities to federal agencies, but officials from other agencies, such as DOD, Veterans Affairs, and Health and Human Services told us they were unaware of an implementation plan.

With regard to coordination, the 2021 Strategy specifies that the federal government should coordinate and collaborate their program activities at the policy level, and the NSC reported that it coordinates 2021 Strategy-related activities through the interagency process. The 2021 Strategy states that the Domestic Policy Council within the NSC shall coordinate activities related to addressing long-term contributors to domestic terrorism under Pillar 4. DHS, DOJ, and FBI officials stated that the NSC initially hosted regular meetings focused on coordinating domestic terrorism activities in the months following the 2021 Strategy's release.<sup>97</sup> DHS officials stated that these efforts are now held on an annual basis. However, when we spoke with other agencies, such as Health and Human Services and Veterans Affairs, officials could not describe how the NSC coordinated with them to implement the 2021 Strategy.

The NSC's level of coordination with all relevant agencies to implement the 2021 Strategy varies. For example, DHS, DOJ, FBI, and NCTC officials indicated that they respond to an annual request by the NSC to submit a list of their 2021 Strategy-related activities to coordinate departmental efforts to implement the 2021 Strategy with the NSC. However, other federal partners, such as DOD, Veterans Affairs, Treasury, and Health and Human Services, said they were not aware of a similar request. NSC officials stated that they meet with relevant federal entities to discuss domestic terrorism threats and how it relates to the four

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<sup>97</sup>Department of Health and Human Services officials reported that they participated in an interagency policy meeting on targeted violence and terrorism prevention in June 2024. However, they did not specify how this particular activity related to the NSC and their participation in the 2021 Strategy.



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pillars of the 2021 Strategy. However, NSC officials did not specify details, such as which agencies are responsible for how these activities are coordinated among all relevant agencies, nor did they explain why the 2021 Strategy does not include this information.

In addition to being one of our desirable characteristics of a national strategy, clearly defining and communicating roles and responsibilities—particularly in cases where more than one federal agency (or more than one organization within an agency) must coordinate—is an important step in reducing the potential for fragmentation. Fragmentation can occur when multiple federal agencies are seeking to achieve the same goal. Without clarifying which entity is responsible for overseeing the effort as a whole and consistently identifying lead entities responsible for each activity, it is difficult to hold agencies accountable for meeting the goals and objectives of the 2021 Strategy, or any national strategy, in effect, to counter domestic terrorism, that they are responsible for implementing.

**Goals, subordinate objectives, activities, and performance measures.** Our desirable characteristics state that a national strategy should include what the strategy is trying to achieve (goals and objectives); steps to achieve those results (activities); and priorities, milestones, and performance measures to gauge results. The 2021 Strategy identifies and organizes its goals under four pillars, includes subordinate objectives, and identifies some 2021 Strategy-related activities. For example, the main goal of Pillar 2 is to prevent domestic terrorism recruitment and mobilization to violence and the 2021 Strategy identifies strengthening domestic terrorism prevention and resources as a subordinate goal. Within this subordinate goal, we identified 14 activities that agencies should take steps to implement. However, we found that the 2021 Strategy does not include other elements of this characteristic, such as consistently specifying milestones for when these activities are to be achieved, or performance measures to measure the overall progress of the 2021 Strategy.

The 2021 Strategy itself does not include milestones for implementation activities. The NSC stated that it established some milestones (or timeframes) for the implementation of 2021 Strategy-related activities in 2021. DHS and NCTC officials also told us that the NSC provided milestones for some activities in its implementation plan. However, neither the NSC nor any of the other agencies in our review provided details on any specific milestones related to 2021 Strategy activities.

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The 2021 Strategy also does not include performance measures. DHS officials stated that they have provided some performance information to the NSC upon request, such as the number of intelligence products related to domestic terrorism and the number of trainings delivered to partners. However, DHS officials stated that some activities do not lend themselves to quantitative measures. The NSC stated that its efforts to establish milestones, as discussed above, allow NSC staff to track and assess the resources that agencies are assigning to 2021 Strategy-related activities and evaluate agencies' progress in implementing these activities. However, in its response to us, the NSC did not identify any specific 2021 Strategy-related milestones or performance measures. In addition, officials from the other federal agencies that we interviewed indicated that they were not aware of, nor do they report, any specific performance measure information to the NSC to help oversee the performance of the 2021 Strategy or to guide their efforts in evaluating any activities.

Some of the subject matter experts we interviewed told us that it is not clear how 2021 Strategy-related activities are evaluated, if at all. While these experts acknowledged that developing performance measures to assess activities designed to address domestic terrorism may be difficult because one cannot prove that an event did not occur, they pointed to a growing body of research exploring the use of proxy indicators to gain insights on the progress of activities and to gauge success. For example, DHS Science and Technology Directorate evaluates local programs designed to prevent domestic terrorist activity to identify ways that may assist in evaluating the effectiveness of these activities.<sup>98</sup> DHS CP3 also indicated that the number of states and territories that are developing their own strategies could be used as a measure to gauge progress in terrorism prevention. Consistently identifying and developing milestones and performance measures for activities related to the 2021 Strategy or any national strategy, in effect, to combat domestic terrorism would help agencies to achieve results within specific timeframes and to assess the extent to which their efforts are addressing domestic terrorism.

**Integration and implementation.** Our desirable characteristics state that national strategies should address how they relate to (1) other strategies'

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<sup>98</sup>The National Counterterrorism Innovation, Technology and Education Center is a DHS center of excellence and administers grants evaluating local domestic terrorism prevention practices. In addition, officials from the United Kingdom indicated that they are funding innovative research that they believe will be a promising practice to help develop performance measures that may evaluate counterterrorism efforts.

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goals, objectives, and activities; and (2) subordinate levels of government and their plans to implement the strategy. The NSC identified the 2023 National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism as a new effort that complements the 2021 Strategy's main goal of confronting long-term contributors to domestic terrorism (Pillar 4). However, neither the 2021 Strategy nor its accompanying documents further define how they may integrate with other national strategies' goals, objectives, and activities or how they relate to other subordinate levels of government and their plans to implement the 2021 Strategy. NSC officials did not explain why the 2021 Strategy does not include this information.

For example, the 2021 Strategy could discuss how its scope complements, expands upon, or overlaps with other national strategies, such as those for cybersecurity or international counterterrorism.<sup>99</sup> The 2021 Strategy could also discuss, as appropriate, various strategies and plans produced by the state, local, private, or international sectors. According to DHS CP3, seven states have developed strategies to address domestic terrorism and violent extremism, and about 36 states and territories have expressed interest in doing so.<sup>100</sup> Yet the 2021 Strategy does not indicate how these efforts may contribute to define the roles, responsibilities, and capabilities of implementing parties more effectively. By identifying and addressing how activities related to the 2021 Strategy or any national strategy, in effect, to combat domestic terrorism may relate or overlap, if at all, to other strategies' goals, objectives, and activities, the NSC could better position itself to integrate and oversee agency efforts.

Regarding implementation, as discussed above, we found that the 2021 Strategy includes 58 activities assigned to either specific federal entities or to the federal government in general. For example, it specifies that DOD is incorporating training for service members who are separating or retiring from the military on recruitment by violent extremist groups. While the 2021 Strategy itself contains limited additional information on specific implementation steps, officials from DHS, DOJ, and State told us that the classified implementation plan includes some additional guidance for classified activities. As discussed later, subject matter experts and

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<sup>99</sup>White House, *National Cybersecurity Strategy* (Washington, D.C.: March 2023); and *National Strategy for Counterterrorism of the United States of America* (Washington, D.C.: October 2018). Both of these strategies address aspects of terrorism.

<sup>100</sup>DHS CP3 administered a Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention grant in fiscal year 2020 designed to help states in developing prevention strategies to address and reduce targeted violence.

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nonfederal partners we interviewed identified challenges related to obtaining information about federal implementation activities.

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## The 2021 Strategy Does Not Address One of the Desirable Characteristics

The 2021 Strategy does not address the resources, investments, and risk management characteristic.

**Resources, investments, and risk management.** Our desirable characteristics state that national strategies should address what the strategy will cost, the sources and types of resources and investments needed, and where resources and investments should be targeted to balance risk reductions with costs. The 2021 Strategy, however, does not provide information on these elements. While the 2021 Strategy itself does not include cost and resource information, the NSC reported that the agencies provide information that allows them to track and evaluate the resources used by the agencies assigned to 2021 Strategy-related activities. However, the NSC did not provide any supporting evidence or documentation, and it is unclear how the NSC uses such information to identify or track resources for the 2021 Strategy as a whole.

In addition, DHS officials stated that the NSC does not specifically request cost or resource information and, therefore, they do not provide it to the NSC in their annual submission. Officials from Treasury, DOD, and Health and Human Services also stated that they do not provide cost and resource information to the NSC regarding 2021 Strategy-related activities.<sup>101</sup> According to our desirable characteristics, a national strategy would ideally elaborate on the risk assessment mentioned earlier and give guidance to implementing agencies to manage their costs, resources, and investments accordingly.

Since the NSC did not include information in the 2021 Strategy on resources, such as costs necessary to implement the 2021 Strategy, agencies and nonfederal partners may be limited in their ability to support and sustain the effort over time. Identifying resources and investments and providing guidance for risk management activities could help agencies and nonfederal partners better determine where they should target those resources and investments. It could also help agencies track costs so they can shift resources and investments to more effectively

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<sup>101</sup>NCTC officials further stated that they are not aware of federal agencies providing trackable cost data on domestic terrorism activities.

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support priorities and activities related to the 2021 Strategy or any national strategy, in effect, to combat domestic terrorism, as appropriate.

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## Federal and Nonfederal Partners Identified Challenges Related to Engaging with Federal Agencies on the 2021 Strategy

Some nonfederal partners whom we interviewed, including fusion center officials and subject matter experts, identified challenges related to obtaining information on how to best engage federal agencies to support 2021 Strategy-related activities. These partners reported that they did not know which federal entities were responsible for implementing 2021 Strategy-related activities or which federal entity was leading or overseeing the effort.

Specifically, officials from four of seven fusion centers we spoke with stated that engagement with federal agencies was a challenge. Officials from three of seven fusion centers stated that the 2021 Strategy did not consistently provide implementation details, such as which federal agencies were responsible for overseeing and taking steps to implement the 2021 Strategy. Further, officials from one fusion center stated that while previous national strategies clearly identified roles and responsibilities for fusion centers, the 2021 Strategy does not describe what fusion centers can do to counter domestic terrorism.

While officials from five of seven fusion centers we spoke with were familiar with the 2021 Strategy, none were aware of how fusion centers should participate in implementation efforts. Further, officials from three fusion centers stated that more public information about implementation plans would be useful to their efforts to counter domestic terrorism. Officials from two fusion centers stated that a public implementation plan would increase transparency by clarifying roles and responsibilities, thereby allowing state and local partners to better align their efforts with federal activities.

Other nonfederal partners and subject matter experts whom we interviewed told us that the White House took steps to elicit and include their input during the development of the 2021 Strategy. However, a few subject matter experts noted that federal outreach to nonfederal stakeholders has been limited since the 2021 Strategy's issuance. In particular, about half of the subject matter experts whom we interviewed stated that, from a nonfederal perspective, it was unclear how the federal government was implementing the 2021 Strategy.

About half of the subject matter experts stated that the lack of public information about implementation posed challenges because they did not know how to best support federal efforts, while others stated that they did

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not know if the 2021 Strategy included an implementation plan.<sup>102</sup> Some subject matter experts we interviewed also indicated that the lack of a public implementation plan impacts the ability of nonfederal entities to understand federal and nonfederal roles and responsibilities. According to three subject matter experts, public information describing specific implementation steps would increase accountability and better enable nonfederal partners to align and allocate their resources in support of the 2021 Strategy as a whole.

In addition, DHS officials acknowledged that a public implementation plan could be useful in coordinating their 2021 Strategy-related activities with nonfederal partners. While agencies engage in a number of 2021 Strategy-related activities that are unclassified, DHS officials noted that the department is limited in its ability to engage with nonfederal and civil society partners on other aspects of the 2021 Strategy because the NSC's implementation plan is classified.<sup>103</sup> DHS and DOJ reported having several mechanisms to share information with nonfederal partners to counter domestic terrorism, as discussed above. However, while these efforts may communicate information on some specific activities, they do not identify and communicate public information on how DHS and DOJ—including the FBI—are implementing the 2021 Strategy overall.

The 2021 Strategy states that preventing and reducing domestic terrorism demands a multifaceted response across the federal government and beyond, including with state and local partners, foreign allies, civil society, and the private sector. The 2021 Strategy acknowledges that these partners are often among the first to identify a potential threat in their communities. The 2021 Strategy also emphasizes that it preserves agencies' existing roles and missions related to domestic terrorism. DOJ and DHS are responsible for the greatest number of activities tasked to specific agencies to implement the 2021 Strategy and as discussed above, some of these activities predate the Strategy. As also discussed above, DOJ and DHS have key statutory responsibilities in leading U.S. efforts to counter domestic terrorism threats.<sup>104</sup> In a 2023 intelligence

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<sup>102</sup>For example, one subject matter expert whom we spoke with stated that some agencies have public, online information about terrorism prevention for private businesses but do not consistently work with private businesses to prevent terrorism. According to the subject matter expert, public information about implementation details would enable both federal and nonfederal partners to strategize how to use resources.

<sup>103</sup>DOD officials similarly agreed that the classification of the implementation plan limits DOD's ability to engage with some nonfederal partners.

<sup>104</sup>See, e.g., 18 U.S.C. § 2332b(f); 28 C.F.R. § 0.85(l); 6 U.S.C. § 111(b)(1)(A).

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assessment, DHS and DOJ further acknowledged that these agencies play a key role in the whole-of-government effort to counter domestic terrorism.<sup>105</sup> In addition, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government* state that agencies should externally communicate the necessary quality information to achieve its objectives. Communicating necessary information enables relevant external parties—such as nonfederal partners—to help agencies achieve these objectives.<sup>106</sup>

While agencies are limited in the types of classified information they can share with nonfederal partners subject to appropriate clearances, key agencies such as DHS and DOJ could communicate more information about what unclassified steps their respective agencies are taking to implement the 2021 Strategy or any national strategy, in effect, to combat domestic terrorism.<sup>107</sup> For example, DHS and DOJ share general information about some 2021 Strategy implementation activities through annual strategic intelligence assessments, discussed above, and share available information and research with the public through DHS's Prevention Resource Finder website.

However, these efforts do not provide information about all unclassified agency efforts to implement the 2021 Strategy overall, describe DHS's and DOJ's roles in 2021 Strategy implementation, or identify areas where nonfederal partners could contribute to the effort.

We have previously reported that strategies are helpful in articulating how agencies will achieve overarching goals and objectives.<sup>108</sup> Further, agencies can take steps within their existing authorities to achieve the goals and activities outlined in such strategies. DHS and DOJ are responsible for implementing the greatest number of 2021 Strategy activities tasked to specific agencies, including some activities that involve nonfederal partners. Therefore, additional external communication with nonfederal partners regarding 2021 Strategy implementation efforts

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<sup>105</sup>Federal Bureau of Investigation and Department of Homeland Security, *Strategic Intelligence Assessment and Data on Domestic Terrorism* (June 2023).

<sup>106</sup>[GAO-14-704G](#).

<sup>107</sup>According to DOJ, there may be instances in which they are precluded from sharing sensitive information related to federal investigations and prosecutions with nonfederal partners.

<sup>108</sup>See, for example, [GAO-24-106262](#).

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could better enable the departments to achieve the 2021 Strategy's goals, as articulated in its strategic pillars.

Specifically, by DHS and DOJ better identifying and communicating unclassified information related to their efforts to implement 2021 Strategy activities—including agency roles in implementing activities and the status of these activities—nonfederal partners would be better positioned to support federal efforts. For example, officials in one fusion center stated that communicating more information about federal domestic terrorism prevention efforts would allow nonfederal partners to more closely align their work with federal efforts and reduce potential duplication of effort.

Further, identifying specific areas where nonfederal partners could contribute to federal efforts could better enable both federal and nonfederal partners to adopt the whole-of-society approach to countering domestic terrorism that the 2021 Strategy dictates to meet its goals and objectives.<sup>109</sup> In doing so, nonfederal partners may be better positioned to identify what information and expertise they could provide to support federal efforts and, therefore, better plan for and align nonfederal resources with federal efforts to counter domestic terrorism.

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## Conclusions

The domestic terrorism threats identified in the 2021 Strategy remain consistent with those identified in selected threat assessments that agencies issued from 2021 through 2024. However, the 2021 Strategy's lack of key information makes it difficult to determine the extent to which agency activities are addressing these threats and meeting overall goals. While agencies are taking steps to implement most activities by strategic pillar, it is not clear how these efforts are tracked, overseen, and evaluated.

The 2021 Strategy does not fully address most of the desirable characteristics of an effective national strategy, including a risk assessment; clarifying which entity is responsible for each activity and for ensuring accountability and oversight of the effort; and consistently developing milestones, performance measures, and information on resource needs. By consistently including such information, the NSC and relevant federal entities would be better positioned to more effectively track, measure, and evaluate progress in meeting the goals of the 2021

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<sup>109</sup>For example, the 2023 National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism similarly dictates a whole-of-society approach to implementation. To communicate its plans to counter antisemitism, the strategy lists specific actions that society must take and identifies government and civil society partners that can take steps to implement each action.



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Strategy or that of any national strategy, in effect, to counter domestic terrorism and enhance public safety in the United States.

Further, the agencies responsible for the greatest number of implementation activities tasked to specific agencies—DHS and DOJ—have not fully identified and communicated details on their roles and efforts to implement the 2021 Strategy with relevant nonfederal partners. These agencies could communicate more unclassified information about what steps they are taking to counter domestic terrorism and implement the 2021 Strategy. Key partners also reported challenges in engaging with federal agencies to implement the 2021 Strategy. As a result, DHS and DOJ are missing opportunities to effectively coordinate with nonfederal partners on 2021 Strategy-related activities. By identifying information about their roles, activities, and areas for nonfederal partner involvement, and externally communicating that information, DHS and DOJ would be better equipped to implement the 2021 Strategy’s whole-of-society approach, or that of any national strategy, in effect, to counter domestic terrorism. Additionally, nonfederal partners would be better equipped to align resources with one another to further support implementation.

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## Recommendations

We are making three recommendations, including one to the NSC, one to DHS, and one to DOJ:

The Chairperson of the NSC or their designee should work with relevant federal entities to ensure any strategy, in effect, and related documents guiding the nation’s efforts to counter domestic terrorism reflect desirable characteristics of an effective national strategy, including

- conducting a risk assessment that includes an analysis of the threats to, and vulnerabilities of, critical assets and operations;
- clarifying which entities are responsible for implementing each activity and ensuring accountability and oversight of federal efforts;
- consistently developing milestones and performance measures for activities related to the 2021 Strategy or any national strategy, in effect, to combat domestic terrorism;
- addressing how the 2021 Strategy or any national strategy, in effect, to combat domestic terrorism, relates to other strategies’ goals, objectives, and activities; and
- identifying the resources and investments needed to implement the 2021 Strategy or any national strategy, in effect, to combat domestic

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terrorism, and providing guidance on risk management activities. (Recommendation 1)

The Secretary of Homeland Security, in coordination with the Attorney General, should help further clarify its roles and efforts to counter domestic terrorism and communicate those roles to nonfederal partners to ensure their contributions effectively assist federal efforts, including those related to any national strategy, in effect, to combat domestic terrorism, as appropriate. (Recommendation 2)

The Attorney General, in coordination with the Director of the FBI and the Secretary of Homeland Security, should help further clarify its roles and efforts to counter domestic terrorism and communicate those roles to nonfederal partners to ensure their contributions effectively assist federal efforts, including those related to any national strategy, in effect, to combat domestic terrorism. (Recommendation 3)

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## Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

We provided a draft of this report to DOD, DHS, DOJ, Health and Human Services, the NCTC, NSC, State, the Treasury, and Veterans Affairs for review and comment. In the draft report, we made one recommendation to the NSC, one recommendation to DHS and one recommendation to DOJ.

Regarding our first recommendation, the NSC did not provide comments. With respect to our second recommendation, DHS did not concur and provided written comments which are reproduced in appendix III. DOJ's audit liaison provided an email stating that DOJ concurred with our third recommendation. We received technical comments from DHS, DOJ, NCTC, and State, which we incorporated, as appropriate.

In response to our draft report, various officials indicated that the 2021 Strategy was under review by the new administration and would likely be changed in the near future, including possibly being rescinded or replaced. As a result, we amended all three recommendations to reflect the possibility of a change to the status of 2021 Strategy, and to indicate that these recommendations would apply to any national strategy in effect to combat domestic terrorism. In addition, we further amended the two recommendations to DHS and DOJ to indicate that these recommendations would apply to their statutory missions to counter

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domestic terrorism, regardless of whether a national strategy was in effect.<sup>110</sup>

In its response to our second recommendation, DHS stated that the new administration is in the process of reviewing actions issued by the prior administration from January 20, 2021 through January 20, 2025, including the 2021 Strategy. DHS stated that because the NSC is likely to rescind the 2021 Strategy and replace it with a new counterterrorism strategy, it would be inappropriate for the department to take further actions to implement the 2021 Strategy. DHS stated that it would continue to work closely with nonfederal partners to counter domestic terrorism, however it requested that we consider the recommendation closed.

We recognize that policy changes are likely in a new administration, including adopting new national strategies. We amended our recommendation to clarify that our intent was for it to apply to any national strategy, in effect, to combat domestic terrorism—not just the 2021 Strategy. Further, regardless of potential changes to the status of the 2021 Strategy, we maintain that it is important that DHS coordinate with the Attorney General to help further clarify its roles and efforts to counter domestic terrorism to nonfederal partners. In doing so, DHS would be in a better position to fulfill its statutory responsibilities to prevent terrorism in the United States, which includes domestic terrorism. As a result, we consider the recommendation open.

We are sending copies of this report to the appropriate congressional committees, the Attorney General, the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of Homeland Security, the Secretary of Health and Human Services, the Secretary of State, the Secretary of the Treasury, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence and other interested parties. In addition, the report is available at no charge, on the GAO website at <https://www.gao.gov>.

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<sup>110</sup>See 18 U.S.C. § 2332b(f); 28 C.F.R. § 0.85(l); 6 U.S.C. § 111(b)(1)(A).

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If you or your staff have any questions on the matters discussed in this report, please contact me at [mcneilt@gao.gov](mailto:mcneilt@gao.gov). Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. GAO staff who made key contributions to this report are listed in appendix IV.

//SIGNED//

Triana McNeil  
Director, Homeland Security and Justice

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# Appendix I: Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

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This report examines (1) how the 2021 National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism (2021 Strategy) aligns with recent domestic terrorism threat assessments, (2) the steps federal agencies have taken to implement the 2021 Strategy, (3) how federal agencies are engaging with federal and nonfederal partners to implement the 2021 Strategy and identify U.S. and international lessons learned, (4) the extent to which the 2021 Strategy includes desirable characteristics for an effective national strategy, and (5) challenges in implementing the 2021 Strategy identified by federal and nonfederal partners.

To determine how the 2021 Strategy aligns with recent domestic terrorism threat assessments, we compared domestic terrorism threats identified in the 2021 Strategy against the threats identified in seven threat assessments publicly issued by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) since 2021.<sup>1</sup> We selected these reports because they address domestic terrorism. Further, we reviewed four annual threat assessments issued by ODNI from 2021 through 2024 to determine what domestic terrorism threat they identified, if any, and how they aligned with those identified in the 2021 Strategy, if at all.<sup>2</sup>

To describe the steps that federal agencies have taken to implement the 2021 Strategy, we reviewed the 2021 Strategy and related documents and identified 58 statements that direct either a federal agency by name,

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<sup>1</sup>We reviewed the following seven threat assessments: (1) Office of the Director of National Intelligence, *Assessment of the Domestic Violent Extremism Threat* (March 2021); (2) the Federal Bureau of Investigation and Department of Homeland Security, *Strategic Intelligence Assessment and Data on Domestic Terrorism* (May 2021); (3) the Department of Homeland Security and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the National Counterterrorism Center, *Wide-Ranging Domestic Violent Extremist Threat to Persist* (June 2022); (4) the Federal Bureau of Investigation and Department of Homeland Security, *Strategic Intelligence Assessment and Data on Domestic Terrorism* (October 2022); (5) the Federal Bureau of Investigation and Department of Homeland Security, *Strategic Intelligence Assessment and Data on Domestic Terrorism* (June 2023); (6) the Department of Homeland Security, *2024 Homeland Threat Assessment* (September 2023); and (7) the Department of Homeland Security, *2025 Homeland Threat Assessment* (October 2024).

<sup>2</sup>(1) Office of the Director of National Intelligence, *Annual Threat Assessment of the Intelligence Community*, (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 5, 2024); (2) *Annual Threat Assessment of the Intelligence Community* (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 6, 2023); (3) *Annual Threat Assessment of the Intelligence Community* (Feb. 7, 2022); and (4) *Domestic Violent Extremism Poses Heightened Threat in 2021* (March 2021).

or the federal government in general, to implement a specific activity.<sup>3</sup> Subsequently, we requested that DHS; DOJ; the Departments of Health and Human Services, Defense (DOD), State, the Treasury, Veterans Affairs; and the NCTC identify what steps, if any, they had taken to support implementation of 2021 activities.<sup>4</sup>

We asked each agency to describe whether these steps represent new efforts since the 2021 Strategy was issued in June 2021, or preexisting efforts that predate the 2021 Strategy. We reviewed a range of supporting documents from agencies, including training materials, summaries of research grants, and conference agendas.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, we interviewed officials from each of the federal agencies in our review to obtain information about their efforts to implement the 2021 Strategy.<sup>6</sup> We further obtained written responses from the National Security Council (NSC) regarding its perspectives on agency implementation and oversight of the 2021 Strategy.

To describe how federal agencies are engaging with federal and nonfederal partners to implement the 2021 Strategy and identify U.S. and international lessons learned, we interviewed officials from each of the agencies in our review, selected subject matter experts, state and local officials, and foreign government officials. Specifically, we selected 12 subject matter experts familiar with domestic terrorism prevention and other efforts. In order to ensure a diversity of views, we included at least one expert from each of the nonfederal partners identified in the 2021 Strategy, including academic institutions, nongovernmental organizations, the private sectors, and foreign governments. We reviewed literature and solicited referrals from relevant agency officials to identify experts in each of the areas and to gain additional understanding of each expert's formal

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<sup>3</sup>The related documents include the 2021 and 2023 White House Fact Sheets. We did not find any statements in these fact sheets that direct federal agencies to take steps beyond those included in the 2021 Strategy.

<sup>4</sup>We selected these agencies because the 2021 Strategy identifies them as federal partners that play a role in countering domestic terrorism.

<sup>5</sup>See Appendix II for examples of steps agencies have taken to implement the 2021 Strategy. We did not evaluate individual agency activities to determine whether they completed implementation of the activities we identified in the 2021 Strategy.

<sup>6</sup>While the 2021 Strategy mentions the Department of Education, its role is limited to supporting one activity, and it is not responsible for leading any activities. Therefore, we did not include this agency in our review.

education, research, and work experience related to domestic terrorism and the 2021 Strategy.

To obtain the perspectives of state and local officials, we conducted semistructured interviews with officials at a nongeneralizable sample of seven state-run primary fusion centers.<sup>7</sup> We selected these locations to reflect a range of characteristics, including diversity in geographic location, numbers of domestic terrorism incidents from 2010 through 2021, and amount of federal funding received since June 2021 to counter domestic terrorism and targeted violence. We also met with federal officials from the DHS Office of Intelligence and Analysis (I&A) assigned to support the fusion centers, and officials from the FBI Joint Terrorism Task Forces (JTTF) in each of the seven selected locations.

Additionally, we interviewed government officials from Germany and the United Kingdom who are responsible for countering domestic terrorism.<sup>8</sup> We selected these countries because they have experience developing national strategies to counter domestic terrorism and because United States federal officials whom we interviewed said they consult with these countries regarding domestic terrorism. In addition, we interviewed officials from each of the federal agencies in our review to understand what steps agencies have taken to obtain and share lessons learned related to countering domestic terrorism both within the United States and with other countries. While the information we obtained from these interviews cannot be generalized to all partners, it provides illustrative context and insights on how relevant partners address domestic terrorism and share lessons learned.

To evaluate the extent to which the 2021 Strategy includes desirable characteristics for an effective national strategy, we evaluated public documents related to the 2021 Strategy against characteristics described

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<sup>7</sup>We met with fusion center officials from Colorado, Florida, Michigan, New York, Oregon, Texas, and Washington, D.C. Fusion centers are state or local-run centers that may be funded in part by DHS grants that serve as a focal point for intelligence gathering, analysis, and sharing of threat information among federal, state, and local partners, including information related to domestic terrorism threats. See generally 6 U.S.C. § 124h (establishing the fusion center initiative, along with roles and responsibilities for fusion center officers and intelligence analysts).

<sup>8</sup>We met with officials from the United Kingdom's Home Office and Germany's Ministry of Interior.

in our prior work.<sup>9</sup> Specifically, we reviewed (1) the 2021 Strategy; (2) White House Fact Sheets on the 2021 Strategy issued in June 2021 and June 2023; and (3) additional documents provided by the agencies in our review, such as written responses from the NSC about the 2021 Strategy and agency documentation related to their efforts to implement the 2021 Strategy. We evaluated 2021 Strategy documents to identify indicators related to the underlying subcategories for each characteristic and assessed each of the desirable characteristics as fully addressed, partially addressed, or not addressed.<sup>10</sup> As discussed above, we also interviewed federal officials at relevant departments and subject matter experts on federal efforts to develop, implement, and oversee the 2021 Strategy.

To describe what challenges federal and nonfederal partners identified in implementing the 2021 Strategy we reviewed documents and interviewed federal and nonfederal partners, as discussed above. We compared DOJ's and DHS's efforts to engage with nonfederal partners to implement the 2021 Strategy with the 2021 Strategy and *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>GAO, *Combating Terrorism: Evaluation of Selected Characteristics in National Strategies Related to Terrorism*, [GAO-04-408T](#) (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 3, 2004).

<sup>10</sup>We determined that a characteristic was fully addressed if all of its underlying subcategories were met; partially addressed if only some subcategories were met; and not addressed if none of the subcategories were met.

<sup>11</sup>GAO, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, [GAO-14-704G](#) (Washington, D.C.: September 2014).



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# Appendix II: Examples of Agency Steps to Implement 2021 National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism Activities

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In June 2021, the White House National Security Council (NSC) released the National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism (2021 Strategy). This 2021 Strategy aims to provide a national framework for the United States government and its nonfederal partners to specifically address domestic terrorism. Consistent with statutory authorities and responsibilities, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), within the Department of Justice (DOJ), and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) are the main federal entities charged with preventing terrorist attacks in the United States, including attacks conducted by domestic violent extremists.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, per our analysis and methodology—as outlined below—the 2021 Strategy directs the greatest number of implementation activities to DOJ and DHS. The 2021 Strategy also identifies other agencies that play a role in countering domestic terrorism.

To determine the extent to which federal agencies have taken action to implement the 2021 Strategy, we reviewed the document and identified statements (or activities) within the 2021 Strategy’s four strategic pillars that direct one or more federal entities, or the federal government in general, to take specific steps to counter domestic terrorism.<sup>2</sup> This appendix provides details on the activities we identified in the 2021 Strategy and examples of steps agencies have taken to implement these activities. Specifically, the tables below show

- 2021 Strategy activities by pillar that identify one or more agencies or the federal government in general to take a specific action to implement the 2021 Strategy;
- the entities responsible for implementing the activity, according to the 2021 Strategy; and

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<sup>1</sup>See 18 U.S.C. § 2332b(f) (“The Attorney General shall have primary investigative responsibility for all Federal crimes of terrorism”); 28 C.F.R. § 0.85(l) ([The FBI] shall... “[e]xercise Lead Agency responsibility in investigating all crimes for which it has primary or concurrent jurisdiction and which involve terrorist activities or acts in preparation of terrorist activities within the statutory jurisdiction of the United States”); 6 U.S.C. § 111(b)(1)(A) (providing that one of the primary missions of DHS is to “prevent terrorist attacks within the United States”). See also Federal Bureau of Investigation and Department of Homeland Security, *Strategic Intelligence Assessment and Data on Domestic Terrorism* (June 2023). According to FBI and DHS documentation, the terms domestic terrorism and domestic violent extremism are used interchangeably.

<sup>2</sup>The 2021 Strategy is organized according to four strategic pillars: (1) understand and share domestic terrorism-related information, (2) prevent domestic terrorism recruitment and mobilization to violence, (3) disrupt and deter domestic terrorism activity, and (4) confront long-term contributors to domestic terrorism.

- examples of steps agencies have taken, if any, to implement the activity.

We identified a total of 58 activities in the 2021 Strategy that task one or more federal agencies or the federal government in general to take implementation steps. If an agency provided information indicating that it developed or maintained an effort or product in alignment with a 2021 Strategy activity, we assessed that the agency had taken steps to implement the activity.<sup>3</sup>

We found that agencies have taken some steps to implement most of the activities we identified under each of the four strategic pillars (49 of 58).<sup>4</sup> Of the nine activities for which we did not find steps that agencies have taken to implement, the 2021 Strategy tasked eight activities to the federal government in general and one activity to law enforcement.

We found that agencies have taken some steps to implement 13 of 14 activities we identified under Pillar 1, as shown in table 2.

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<sup>3</sup>The purpose of our review was to identify what steps, if any, agencies took to implement the 2021 Strategy. We did not evaluate individual agency activities to determine whether they completed implementation of certain activities we identified in the 2021 Strategy, nor did we evaluate the effectiveness of individual activities that agencies reported taking to support the 2021 Strategy.

<sup>4</sup>Tables 2 through 5 provide examples of steps that agencies reported taking to address the activities we identified in the 2021 Strategy. They do not provide a complete list of all federal actions to counter domestic terrorism, and federal agencies may be taking additional steps, including classified activities, to implement the 2021 Strategy.

**Appendix II: Examples of Agency Steps to  
Implement 2021 National Strategy for  
Countering Domestic Terrorism Activities**

**Table 2: Examples of Steps Federal Entities Reported Taking to Implement Pillar 1 of the 2021 National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism: Understand and Share Domestic Terrorism-Related Information**

Activity number	Implementation activity	Responsible entity <sup>a</sup>	Steps taken	Examples of steps taken, if any
1	Generate and share key trends widely across the federal government.	Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Department of Homeland Security (DHS), National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC)	✓	DHS and the FBI developed joint threat assessments, such as an intelligence assessment issued in May 2023 describing domestic terrorism threats and related data. <sup>b</sup>  DHS produced annual Homeland Threat Assessments and, as needed, National Terrorism Advisory System bulletins. <sup>c</sup>
2	Enhance abilities to receive, analyze, and disseminate threat information provided by state, local, tribal, and territorial partners.	Federal government	✓	In June 2023, the FBI reported that it produced approximately 3,000 intelligence products in fiscal year 2022.  Additionally, six out of seven fusion centers we spoke with stated that they have seen improvements in information sharing between federal and nonfederal partners since 2021. <sup>d</sup>
3	Introduce a new systematic approach for using external, nongovernmental analysis and information to provide enhanced situational awareness, including ways gender-motivated violence relates to domestic terrorism threats.	DHS	✓	In May 2023, the White House released the National Plan to End Gender-Based Violence. In October 2023, DHS reported that it took steps to improve how threats are coordinated and assessed by transitioning to annual Homeland Threat Assessments. <sup>e</sup> DHS reserves the National Terrorist Advisory Bulletins and Alerts for situations when there is a change to the terrorism threat environment or a particular threat. <sup>f</sup>
4	Share information across the federal enterprise, including through new efforts focused on threats identified from open-source information.	Federal government	✓	DHS Science and Technology Directorate (S&T) funded a grant for the Institute for Strategic Dialogue to produce bimonthly reports on online trends related to U.S. domestic violent extremism. The Institute for Strategic Dialogue published its first report in October 2024.  The FBI updated four Domestic Terrorism Symbols guides with open source information. The FBI also maintains public, online dashboards that provide information about domestic terrorism-related threats and resources, among others.

**Appendix II: Examples of Agency Steps to  
Implement 2021 National Strategy for  
Countering Domestic Terrorism Activities**

<b>Activity number</b>	<b>Implementation activity</b>	<b>Responsible entity<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>Steps taken</b>	<b>Examples of steps taken, if any</b>
5	Increase focus on information sharing with state, local, tribal, and territorial partners at the unclassified level, including through intelligence products and situational awareness notifications.	Federal government	✓	In June 2023, the FBI reported that it produced approximately 3,000 intelligence products in fiscal year 2022.  Additionally, six out of seven fusion centers we spoke with stated that they have seen improvements in information sharing between federal and nonfederal partners since 2021. Five out of seven DHS I&A personnel we spoke with stated that they have seen an increase in information sharing or product development from DHS or the FBI since 2021.
6	Develop new resources for state, local, tribal, and territorial law enforcement, including resources on iconography, symbology, phraseology, and indicators of mobilization to domestic terrorism.	Federal government	✓	DHS, the FBI, and the NCTC jointly developed the First Responder's Toolbox and, in 2021, issued an update to the Mobilization Indicator's booklet, which discuss violent extremist threats and behaviors. <sup>g</sup>
7	Assess whether foreign entities linked to domestic terrorism can be designated as Foreign Terrorist Organizations or Specially Designated Global Terrorists.	State, Treasury	✓	The Departments of State and the Treasury collaborated to designate some racially and ethnically motivated violent extremist groups as Foreign Terrorist Organizations or Specially Designated Global Terrorists.
8	Enhance the identification and analysis of financial activity of domestic terrorists and their foreign counterparts, and enhance engagement with financial institutions on domestic terrorist financing.	Treasury, law enforcement	✓	Treasury developed a page of resources for financial institutions to learn more about domestic violent extremism financing.  In April 2023, Treasury held a roundtable with private sector partners on violent extremist financing.
9	Implement more robust information exchanges with foreign partners on foreign connections to the U.S. domestic terrorism threat.	Intelligence community, law enforcement	✓	DOJ and State cohosted the Counterterrorism Law Enforcement Forum with international partners annually from 2022 through 2024. <sup>h</sup>  DHS S&T participated in a working group with the Five Eyes countries on terrorism research and response. <sup>i</sup>
10	Obtain information from foreign partners on international support for domestic terrorism in the United States, and share such information across the federal government and with foreign partners.	Federal government	✓	DOJ and State cohosted the Counterterrorism Law Enforcement Forum with international partners annually from 2022 through 2024.  State receives cables on domestic terrorism trends and threats from international partners.
11	Learn from international partners in disrupting plots and responding to attacks, and integrate that expertise into U.S. planning and operations.	Federal government	✓	DOJ and State cohosted the Counterterrorism Law Enforcement Forum with international partners annually from 2022 through 2024.

**Appendix II: Examples of Agency Steps to  
Implement 2021 National Strategy for  
Countering Domestic Terrorism Activities**

Activity number	Implementation activity	Responsible entity <sup>a</sup>	Steps taken	Examples of steps taken, if any
12	Understand how foreign malign influence operations and disinformation relate to the domestic terrorism threat, including by recognizing, understanding, and countering terrorist propaganda and disinformation.	Intelligence community, law enforcement	✓	In December 2023, State reported that building resilience to disinformation was one of the objectives of its U.S. Public Diplomacy Program facilitated by State's Office of Press and Public Diplomacy programming.
13	Leverage public diplomacy programs and messaging as a preventative measure.	State	✓	Since 2015, State has participated in the City Pair Program with several countries, including Germany, to encourage resilience among at-risk youth. <sup>j</sup>
14	Apply the full range of intelligence collection tools in an ideologically neutral, threat-driven manner, when threats become international, through connectivity to foreign actors.	Federal government	X	Agencies in our review did not describe what steps they have taken to apply the full range of tools, nor does the 2021 Strategy identify what constitutes the full range of tools.

Legend:

✓ = Yes

X = No (as of March 2025)

N/A = No reported steps taken to implement the 2021 Strategy statement

Source: GAO analysis of the 2021 National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism and agency documentation. | GAO-25-107030

<sup>a</sup>For each statement listed, the 2021 Strategy identified one or more agencies or the federal government in general to take action to counter domestic terrorism. This column indicates entities named in the 2021 Strategy, including specific federal agencies, or more general entities, such as the federal government, law enforcement, or the intelligence community. It does not include instances in which the 2021 Strategy generally stated that "others" were responsible for implementation of certain activities.

<sup>b</sup>The National Defense Authorization Act for 2020 mandated that DHS and the FBI jointly produce a report containing a strategic threat assessment and data on domestic terrorism. Pub. L. No. 116-92, § 5602(b), 133 Stat. 1198, 2154-2158 (2019). DHS and the FBI subsequently produced updated joint threat assessments, as mandated.

<sup>c</sup>As of October 2024, DHS officials stated that the annual Homeland Threat Assessment is the primary mechanism to communicate threat assessments, while National Terrorist Advisory Bulletins are used to communicate significant, specific updates or changes to the threat landscape.

<sup>d</sup>Fusion centers are state-owned, information-sharing venues composed of federal, state, local, and private sector entities that are responsible for addressing a range of threats. See generally 6 U.S.C. §124h. We spoke with officials from seven fusion centers to hear their perspectives on the 2021 Strategy, the domestic terrorism threat landscape, and federal efforts related to countering domestic terrorism.

<sup>e</sup>The steps DHS took broadly addressed departmental mechanisms for coordinating threat intelligence and responses and did not refer to or discuss gender-motivated violence relating to domestic terrorism.

<sup>f</sup>National Terrorism Advisory Bulletins are used to communicate only significant, specific updates or changes to the threat landscape.

<sup>g</sup>The First Responder's Toolbox is a collaborative effort between federal and nonfederal entities to share unclassified counterterrorism information, according to the Office of the Director for National Intelligence. The Mobilization Indicators booklet is a publicly available resource on indicators that an individual may be mobilizing to violence. The booklet was first developed in 2015 and updated in 2021.

<sup>h</sup>The Counterterrorism Law Enforcement Forum is an annual meeting intended to bring together international governmental, law enforcement, and nongovernmental partners to share information about racially and ethnically motivated violence extremism and related threats, according to the State Department.

**Appendix II: Examples of Agency Steps to Implement 2021 National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism Activities**

<sup>i</sup>The Five Eyes countries include Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

<sup>j</sup>The City Pair Program is designed to “pair” U.S. cities with international partner cities to share information and develop practices and policies to counter violence extremism, according to the State Department. State has operated the City Pair Program with various international partners since 2015.

We found that agencies have taken some steps to implement 14 of 17 activities we identified under Pillar 2, as shown in table 3.

**Table 3: Examples of Steps Federal Entities Reported Taking to Implement Pillar 2 of the 2021 National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism: Prevent Domestic Terrorism Recruitment and Mobilization to Violence**

Activity number	Implementation activity	Responsible entity <sup>a</sup>	Steps taken	Examples of steps taken, if any
1	Reduce supply and demand of terrorism recruitment tools by limiting widespread availability online and bolstering resilience.	Federal government	X	While none of the agencies in our review described steps they have taken to reduce the volume of terrorism recruitment materials online, in February 2024 we reported that the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) have mechanisms to share and receive domestic violent extremism threat-related information with social media and gaming companies.
2	Reduce access to assault weapons and high-capacity magazines, and enforce legal prohibitions that keep firearms out of dangerous hands.	Federal government	X	Agencies in our review did not describe what steps they have taken to reduce access to assault weapons and to enforce firearms-related legal prohibitions.
3	Consult with stakeholders nationwide to understand what support and resources stakeholders are looking for from the federal government and learn from past prevention efforts.	White House, federal Government	✓	The White House hosted the <i>United We Stand</i> summit with federal and civil society partners, which focuses on mitigating hate-fueled violence.  All seven Joint Terrorism Task Forces (JTTF) we spoke with stated that they have mechanisms to communicate with fusion centers and state and local partners, including through meetings, working groups, or outreach programs. <sup>b</sup>
4	Pursue efforts to enhance community- and individual-level resilience to violence.	Federal government	✓	DHS Center for Prevention Programs and Partnerships (CP3) awarded approximately \$18 million to \$20 million annually through its Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention Grants to state and local recipients, including some grants related to raising societal awareness of terrorism and targeted violence and community recovery, among others.  The Department of State reported that building resilience to disinformation was one of the objectives of its U.S. Public Diplomacy Program.

**Appendix II: Examples of Agency Steps to  
Implement 2021 National Strategy for  
Countering Domestic Terrorism Activities**

Activity number	Implementation activity	Responsible entity <sup>a</sup>	Steps taken	Examples of steps taken, if any
5	Provide financial, educational, and technical assistance to those well placed to recognize and address potential domestic terrorism recruitment and mobilization.	DHS	✓	<p>DHS Office of Intelligence and Analysis (I&amp;A) provided resources to state and local partners via its personnel assigned to fusion centers nationwide, by sharing the Mobilization Indicators booklet and by training state and local partners in Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management best practices through its National Threat Evaluation and Reporting program office.</p> <p>DHS Science and Technology Directorate (S&amp;T) funded grants through its Public Safety and Violence Prevention project to prevent targeted violence and terrorism and evaluated grantees that receive funding through DHS Center for Prevention Programs and Partnerships' (CP3) Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention grants.</p>
6	Increase grant funding to support evidence-based programs.	DHS	✓	<p>DHS has requested increased funding and resources from fiscal years 2021 through 2025 to counter domestic terrorism, specifically to fund increases in staffing and specific programs related to terrorism prevention.</p> <p>DHS CP3 nearly doubled the amount of funding for its Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention grants from \$10 million to about \$18 million to \$20 million annually.</p>
7	Incorporate training for service members separating or retiring from the military on potential targeting by violent extremists.	Department of Defense (DOD)	✓	<p>In April 2021, DOD issued a memo directing the secretaries of the military services to develop training for service members separating or retiring on potential targeting by violent extremists.<sup>c</sup></p> <p>Further, DOD's October 2024 guidance for service members separating from the military (the Pre-Separation Counseling Resource Guide) included some information on avoiding and reporting extremism.</p>
8	Develop a mechanism by which veterans can report recruitment attempts by violent extremists.	Federal government	X	<p>DOD and the Department of Veterans Affairs reported that veterans can contact 911 or the FBI Tip Line if they experience recruitment attempts by violent extremists. However, agencies in our review did not report developing any mechanisms specifically for veterans to report such attempts in response to the 2021 Strategy.</p>

**Appendix II: Examples of Agency Steps to  
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<b>Activity number</b>	<b>Implementation activity</b>	<b>Responsible entity<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>Steps taken</b>	<b>Examples of steps taken, if any</b>
9	Make resources and training available on how to respond to behavior threatening an act of domestic terrorism or targeted violence.	Federal government	✓	DHS developed the Prevention Resource Finder website in coordination with other agencies, including the Department of Education, the Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Labor, DOJ, and the U.S. Agency for International Development. <sup>d</sup>
10	Ensure that resources and training on how to respond to behavioral threatening an act of terrorism or targeted violence are included in the federal government's upcoming launch of additional resources.	Federal government	✓	DHS CP3 funded state and local efforts to develop Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management teams. <sup>e</sup> Further, DHS's National Threat Evaluation and Reporting program office has trained over 200 state and local partners in Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management best practices since 2020.
11	Enhance public understanding of assistance that can be provided to those in need, including mental health experts.	FBI, DHS	✓	DHS developed the Prevention Resource Finder website in coordination with other agencies, which includes resources by and for mental health experts.
12	Release a new edition of the Mobilization Indicators booklet with potential indicators of domestic terrorism-related mobilization.	NCTC, FBI, DHS	✓	In 2021, the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), the FBI, and DHS produced an update to the Mobilization Indicators booklet.
13	Develop resources that the public may consult in the event of domestic terrorism recruitment and mobilization.	NCTC, FBI, DHS	✓	DHS developed the Prevention Resource Finder website in coordination with other agencies.
14	Launch a new approach to aggregating, synthesizing, and publicizing information on research, grants, technical assistance, training, and other resources on domestic terrorism prevention through a one-stop website.	DOJ, Health and Human Services, Department of Education, DHS	✓	DHS developed the Prevention Resource Finder website in coordination with other agencies.  DHS funded a grant for the McCain Institute and the Institute for Strategic Dialogue to develop the Prevention Practitioners Network through its Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention grant program, which enables stakeholders involved in violence prevention to connect with each other and share resources. <sup>f</sup>
15	Pursue innovative ways to cultivate digital literacy, including educational materials and interactive online resources.	Federal government	✓	DHS CP3 has funded projects through the Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention grants, including some focused on developing media literacy and critical thinking skills. Other grants were awarded for projects such as raising societal awareness and civic engagement related to violence prevention.
16	Endorse the Christchurch Call to Action to Eliminate Terrorist and Violent Extremist Content Online.	Federal government	✓	The White House affirmed the nation's endorsement of the Christchurch Call to Action in the 2021 Strategy.



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Activity number	Implementation activity	Responsible entity <sup>a</sup>	Steps taken	Examples of steps taken, if any
17	Join key global governmental and nongovernmental partners through international fora to help shape the agenda or continuing transnational conversation on domestic terrorism while advocating for freedom of expression on the Internet.	Federal Government	✓	DOJ and State cohosted the Counterterrorism Law Enforcement Forum annually from 2022 through 2024.  DHS S&T engaged with the Five Eyes countries through its working group on terrorism research and response. DHS S&T also established the International Academic Partnerships for Science and Security, which held its first meeting with international participants in March 2024.

Legend:  
✓ = Yes  
X = No (as of March 2025)  
N/A = No reported steps taken to implement the 2021 Strategy statement  
Source: GAO analysis of the 2021 National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism and agency documentation. | GAO-25-107030

<sup>a</sup>For each statement listed, the 2021 Strategy identified one or more agencies or the federal government in general to take action to counter domestic terrorism. This column indicates entities named in the 2021 Strategy, including specific federal agencies, or more general entities, such as the federal government, law enforcement, or the intelligence community. It does not include instances in which the 2021 Strategy generally stated that “others” were responsible for implementation of certain activities.

<sup>b</sup>JTTFs are FBI-led specialized investigative units composed of task force officers from federal, state, and local law enforcement that collect and share information and intelligence.

<sup>c</sup>DOD established the Countering Extremism Activity Working Group in April 2021 to oversee the implementation of activities related to countering extremist activity, such as updating DOD’s definition of prohibited activities in the military and developing related recommendations.

<sup>d</sup>dhs.gov/prevention.

<sup>e</sup>Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management is a recognized best practice approach to prevent targeted violence, according to DHS’s Prevention Finder website. Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management teams can enable organizations to identify potential threats and mitigate them.

<sup>f</sup>As of 2024, the Prevention Practitioners Network is hosted by the Eradicate Hate Global Summit and is no longer housed in the McCain Institute.

We found that agencies have taken some steps to implement 18 of 21 activities we identified under Pillar 3, as shown in table 4.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup>DHS and DOJ officials reported that they conduct additional activities to address this pillar that may be classified. This review does not include classified activities.

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**Table 4: Examples of Steps Federal Entities Reported Taking to Implement Pillar 3 of the 2021 National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism: Disrupt and Deter Domestic Terrorism Activity**

Activity number	Implementation activity	Responsible entity <sup>a</sup>	Steps taken	Examples of steps taken, if any
1	Enhance federal law enforcement efforts to ensure investigators and prosecutors are positioned to tackle the domestic terrorism threat.	Law enforcement	✓	The Department of Justice (DOJ) requested additional resources for domestic terrorism efforts in fiscal years 2021 through 2025, specifically to fund special agents in the field and research on radicalization.  DOJ reported that it has provided training to prosecutors on domestic violent extremism.
2	Identify interim measures to allow flexibility in federal law enforcement resources to address the domestic terrorism threat.	Law enforcement	X	Agencies in our review did not identify what steps they have taken to allow interim flexibilities in federal law enforcement resources.
3	Augment training and other resources to the U.S. Attorney's Offices to match the heightened priority already being assigned by DOJ to domestic terrorism investigations and prosecutions	DOJ	✓	DOJ reported that it planned to hire 180 positions related to domestic violent extremism. As of September 2024, DOJ reported that it had filled 127 of these positions, which are eligible to receive training from the DOJ National Security Division.  DOJ reported that they have provided training to prosecutors on domestic violence extremism.
4	Sustain robust collaboration between counterterrorism investigators and prosecutors and hate crimes investigators and prosecutors.	DOJ, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)	✓	The White House and DOJ reported that DOJ created a domestic terrorism unit to improve coordination among prosecutors and investigator
5	Strengthen and expand the use of the Domestic Terrorism Executive Committee to ensure interagency collaboration.	DOJ	✓	DOJ reported expanding the Domestic Terrorism Executive Committee to include more federal partners. Additional federal partners include the Department of Defense (DOD) Defense Criminal Investigative Service. According to DOJ, this partner will be responsible for domestic violent extremism issues.
6	Ensure that Anti-Terrorism Advisory Councils focus on the elevated domestic terrorism threat.	DOJ	✓	DOJ reported that it provided training on domestic terrorism investigations and prosecutions to U.S. Attorney's Offices, the FBI, and other members of Anti-Terrorism Advisory Councils, including training on internal reporting requirements related to domestic terrorism investigations.
7	Support law enforcement action through provision of financial intelligence, information, and analysis	Treasury, federal government	✓	Department of the Treasury officials reported that they provide some financial analysis to investigators, as requested.  Treasury published the 2024 National Terrorist Financing Risk Assessment.

**Appendix II: Examples of Agency Steps to  
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<b>Activity number</b>	<b>Implementation activity</b>	<b>Responsible entity<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>Steps taken</b>	<b>Examples of steps taken, if any</b>
8	Augment existing information sharing to ensure that state, local, tribal, and territorial law enforcement receives up-to-date intelligence and analysis.	Law enforcement	✓	In June 2023, the FBI reported that it produced approximately 3,000 intelligence products in fiscal year 2022.  Additionally, six out of seven fusion centers we spoke with stated that they have observed increased information sharing between federal and nonfederal partners since 2021.
9	Incorporate an increased focus on domestic terrorism into current intelligence products and leverage current mechanisms of information sharing with nonfederal partners.	DOJ, FBI, DHS, the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC)	✓	DHS Office of Intelligence and Analysis (I&A) assigned personnel to fusion centers nationwide and communicates with international governmental partners to share information. <sup>b</sup>  Four out of seven fusion centers we spoke with stated that DHS's Mobilization Indicators booklet and its update have been useful.
10	Improve the usability of existing information-sharing platforms, including through the development of mobile applications, and refine that support based on partner feedback.	DOJ, FBI, DHS, NCTC	✓	In 2022, DHS developed the mobile Intel application.  Six out of seven fusion centers we spoke with reported that information from DHS and the FBI has been more useful or detailed since 2021.
11	Offer enhanced domestic terrorism-related resources and training to state, local, tribal, and territorial partners.	Law enforcement	✓	The NCTC, DHS, and the FBI jointly produced an update to the Mobilization Indicators booklet.
12	Develop strategies to provide enhanced training on domestic terrorism iconography, symbology, phraseology, and indicators of mobilization through the existing Joint Counterterrorism Assessment Team First Responder's Toolbox and the forthcoming edition of the Mobilization Indicators booklet.	FBI, NCTC, DHS	✓	The FBI, the NCTC, and DHS collaborated to develop the First Responder's Toolbox, which included information about domestic terrorist threats and behaviors.
13	Update the DOJ State and Local Anti-Terrorism Training and Handbook on Law Enforcement Intelligence.	DOJ	✓	DOJ officials reported that they have updated the State and Local Anti-Terrorism Training since the issuance of the 2021 Strategy.
14	Convene nonfederal partners for exchanges of ideas on collaboration in addressing domestic terrorism, including how to make better use of laws related to "militia" activity.	Federal government	✓	In March 2023, Georgetown Law School convened federal officials, including from DHS, as well as nonfederal partners, for a panel discussion on "hate-fueled violence" and how the U.S. government has responded to related threats, including through the 2021 Strategy.

**Appendix II: Examples of Agency Steps to  
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<b>Activity number</b>	<b>Implementation activity</b>	<b>Responsible entity<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>Steps taken</b>	<b>Examples of steps taken, if any</b>
15	Examine what new authorities might be necessary and appropriate related to domestic terrorism.	DOJ	✓	As of June 2021, DOJ officials were considering legislative reforms related to domestic terrorism that balanced safety with civil liberties protections and, according to officials, this effort is ongoing as of November 2024.
16	Consider whether seeking legislative reforms is appropriate and, if so, which to pursue in consultation with the Congress.	Federal government	✓	As of June 2021, DOJ officials were considering legislative reforms related to domestic terrorism that balanced safety with civil liberties protections and, according to officials, this effort is ongoing as of November 2024.
17	Ensure that existing watchlisting mechanisms and systems are applied in appropriate cases to international terrorists with connections to domestic terrorist threats, including making available the mechanisms for those who believe they have been improperly listed.	Federal government	X	The 2021 Strategy does not specify which specific watchlisting mechanisms and systems agencies should apply to domestic terrorism cases. Further, agencies in our review did not describe how they ensure that existing mechanisms and systems are appropriately applied.
18	Augment the screening process for military personnel, federal law enforcement, and government employees by considering changes to employee and military screening questionnaires.	Federal government	✓	DOD and the Department of Veterans Affairs reported that they have implemented Trusted Workforce 2.0 and Continuous Vetting to improve employee screening and vetting.  In November 2023, the Office of Management and Budget replaced the SF-86 (Questionnaire for National Security Positions) with the Personnel Vetting Questionnaire, which includes specific questions on domestic and international terrorism threats.
19	Improve systems and mechanisms for identifying anyone already granted a sensitive position of trust within the federal workforce who would misuse that position in violation of law, including by reviewing and updating the DOD definition of prohibited extremist activities among uniformed military personnel.	Federal government	✓	In April 2021, the Secretary of Defense issued a memo to DOD to update its definition of prohibited extremist activity and to consider relevant policy recommendations. In response, DOD updated its definition in December 2021.  In December 2023, the Institute for Defense Analyses conducted a study on prohibited extremist activities in the military and made 18 recommendations. As of October 2024, DOD has not yet implemented these recommendations.

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Activity number	Implementation activity	Responsible entity <sup>a</sup>	Steps taken	Examples of steps taken, if any
20	Develop threat assessments; resources; and training for state, local, tribal, and territorial partners to enhance their employee screening programs and to prevent violence, including through consistent use of federal government databases.	Federal	✓	In July 2024, DHS issued a product with information and resources for onboarding and screening employees in critical infrastructure to prevent insider threats and other violence.
21	Enhance existing training programs and resources for those in the private sector to prevent sensitive positions from being exploited by domestic terrorists.	Federal government	X	Agencies in our review did not describe what steps they have taken to enhance training programs for the private sector.

Legend:

✓ = Yes

X = No (as of March 2025)

N/A = No reported steps taken to implement the 2021 Strategy statement

Source: GAO analysis of the 2021 National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism and agency documentation. | GAO-25-107030

<sup>a</sup>For each statement listed, the 2021 Strategy identified one or more agencies or the federal government in general to take action to counter domestic terrorism. This column indicates entities named in the 2021 Strategy, including specific federal agencies, or more general entities such as the federal government, law enforcement, or the intelligence community. It does not include instances in which the 2021 Strategy generally stated that “others” were responsible for implementation of certain activities.

<sup>b</sup>Fusion centers serve as a focal point for intelligence gathering, analysis, and sharing of threat information among federal, state, and local partners, including information related to domestic terrorism threats.

We found that agencies have taken some steps to implement 4 of 6 activities we identified under Pillar 4, as shown in table 5.

**Table 5: Examples of Steps Federal Entities Reported Taking to Implement Pillar 4 of the 2021 National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism: Confront Long-Term Contributors to Domestic Terrorism**

Activity number	Implementation activity	Responsible entity <sup>a</sup>	Steps taken	Examples of steps taken, if any
1	Tackle long-term contributors by addressing the sources of mobilization to violence in close partnership with civil society.	Federal government, White House Domestic Policy Council	✓	In September 2023, the White House reported that it had formed an interagency policy committee in December 2022 focused on countering bias and discrimination.  In May 2023, the White House developed the U.S. National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism.

**Appendix II: Examples of Agency Steps to  
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Countering Domestic Terrorism Activities**

<b>Activity number</b>	<b>Implementation activity</b>	<b>Responsible entity<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>Steps taken</b>	<b>Examples of steps taken, if any</b>
2	Confront the racism that feeds into aspects of the domestic terrorism threat, including by advancing equity for underserved communities.	Federal government	✓	The White House hosted the United We Stand summit, which included civil society partners and communities to counter hate-motivated violence.  In May 2023, the White House developed the U.S. National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism.
3	Ensure domestic terrorism threats are properly identified, categorized, and addressed.	Federal government	X	The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) are required to submit annual reports to Congress on domestic terrorism threat-related information. In coordination with the FBI, DHS Office of Intelligence and Analysis tracks domestic terrorism attacks and disrupted plots in the United States to inform these annual reports. However, these reports do not specify how the agencies ensure that these attacks and plots are properly or accurately identified and categorized.
4	Ensure that law enforcement operates without bias as it responds to domestic terrorism threats.	Federal government	✓	The Department of Justice (DOJ) reported that it provides antibias trainings to law enforcement personnel. For example, DOJ offers annual, online trainings to law enforcement personnel on topics such as implicit bias and its relationship to law enforcement policies.
5	Work with Congress to provide immediate financial relief to Americans to alleviate the sentiments that some domestic terrorists use to recruit and mobilize.	Federal government	✓	Since fiscal year 2021, several agencies have requested increased appropriations to address domestic terrorism specifically and violent extremism in general, including the Department of Defense (DOD), DHS, DOJ, the Department of State, and the Department of the Treasury. Specifically, DHS and DOJ requested additional funding for staff and programming related to countering domestic terrorism. State and Treasury requested additional funding for programming related to countering violent extremism.
6	Counter the influence and impact of dangerous conspiracy theories that provide a gateway to terrorist violence.	Federal government	X	Agencies in our review did not describe what steps they have taken to counter conspiracy theories.

**Legend:**

✓ = Yes

X = No (as of March 2025)

N/A = No reported steps taken to implement the 2021 Strategy statement

Source: GAO analysis of the 2021 National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism and agency documentation. | GAO-25-107030

<sup>a</sup>For each statement listed, the 2021 Strategy identified one or more agencies or the federal government in general to take action to counter domestic terrorism. This column indicates entities named in the 2021 Strategy, including specific federal agencies, or more general entities such as the federal government, law enforcement, or the intelligence community. It does not include instances in

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**Appendix II: Examples of Agency Steps to  
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which the 2021 Strategy generally stated that “others” were responsible for implementation of certain activities.

# Appendix III: Comments from the Department of Homeland Security

U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
Washington, DC 20528



**Homeland  
Security**

BY ELECTRONIC SUBMISSION

March 18, 2025

Triana McNeil  
Director, Homeland Security and Justice  
U.S. Government Accountability Office  
441 G Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20548-0001

Re: Management Response to GAO-25-107030, "DOMESTIC TERRORISM:  
Additional Actions Needed to Implement an Effective National Strategy"

Dear Ms. McNeil:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this draft report. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS, or the Department) appreciates the U.S. Government Accountability Office's (GAO) work in planning and conducting its review and issuing this report.

DHS leadership is pleased to note GAO's recognition that Federal agencies tasked with implementing of the 2021 National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism (2021 Strategy)<sup>1</sup> have implemented 48 of 58 activities reviewed to counter domestic terrorism (DT), such as DHS funding "Invent2Prevent" in spring 2021 to help high school and university students develop programs that prevent targeted violence and terrorism, and DHS funding a research grant with the Institute of Strategic Dialogue to produce a bi-monthly report on online trends in U.S. domestic violent extremism. GAO also acknowledged that DHS took additional steps towards efforts to counter DT, including steps to address and prevent in-prison radicalization and recidivism to support implement the goals and objectives of the 2021 Strategy. DHS remains committed to working with its government and nonfederal partners to prevent terrorist attacks in the United States and safeguard the homeland.

The draft report contained three recommendations, including one for DHS with which the Department non-concurs. Enclosed find our detailed response to this recommendation.

<sup>1</sup> White House, "National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism," (Washington, D.C.: June 15, 2021)



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**Appendix III: Comments from the Department  
of Homeland Security**

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DHS previously submitted technical comments addressing several accuracy, contextual, and other issues under a separate cover for GAO's consideration, as appropriate.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on this draft report. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions. We look forward to working with you again in the future.

Sincerely,

JIM H CRUMPACKER

Digitally signed by JIM H  
CRUMPACKER  
Date: 2025.03.18 18:01:10 -04'00'

JIM H. CRUMPACKER  
Director  
Departmental GAO-OIG Liaison Office

Enclosure

**Enclosure: Management Response to Recommendation  
Contained in GAO-25-107030**

GAO recommended that the Secretary of Homeland Security, in coordination with the Attorney General:

**Recommendation 2:** Help further clarify its roles and efforts to counter domestic terrorism and communicate those roles to non-federal partners to ensure their contributions effectively assist federal efforts, including those related to any national strategy, in effect, to combat domestic terrorism, as appropriate.

**Response:** Non-concur. The DHS Counterterrorism Coordinator with support from the DHS Center for Prevention Programs and Partnerships; DHS Office of Strategy, Policy, and Plans (PLCY); DHS Office of Intelligence and Analysis, and others will continue to work closely with our nonfederal partners on efforts to counter DT, as appropriate. A new administration established by President Donald J. Trump as of January 20, 2025, is in the process of reviewing orders, memoranda, proclamations, and other actions issued by the prior Administration from January 20, 2021, through January 20, 2025. The 2021 Strategy and related strategic implementation plan, both dated June 15, 2021, fall within this period. In addition, while the Department remains committed to coordinating with its nonfederal partners across all threat vectors it is also important to acknowledge that DHS's non-concurrence with this recommendation recognizes that the 2021 Strategy—the implementation of which was the subject of GAO's engagement—was developed under a prior Administration.

PLCY leadership understands that the National Security Council is currently in the process of developing a new counterterrorism strategy, which will address respective DT issues, and that the 2021 Strategy developed in the prior administration will be rescinded. Consequently, it would be inappropriate for DHS to take further actions to implement the 2021 Strategy to include addressing this recommendation until receiving further guidance. Given this situation, we request that GAO consider this recommendation resolved and closed.

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# Appendix IV: GAO Contacts and Staff Acknowledgments

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**GAO Contact:**

Triana McNeil, [mcneilt@gao.gov](mailto:mcneilt@gao.gov)

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**Staff****Acknowledgments:**

In addition to the contact named above, Sarah Turpin (Assistant Director), Nanette Barton (Analyst in Charge), Christy Catanzaro, Holland Freeman Casenhiser, Kirstin Crook, Eric Hauswirth, Amanda Miller, Shannon Murphy, Kevin Reeves, Janet Temko-Blinder, and Mary Turgeon made key contributions to this report.

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