



Highlights of [GAO-07-1174](#), a report to the Chairman, Committee on Homeland Security, House of Representatives

### Why GAO Did This Study

Diversity visas provide an immigration opportunity to aliens from countries with low rates of immigration to the United States. Diversity visa applicants must apply online, be selected by lottery, be interviewed, and be determined to be eligible before obtaining a diversity visa. GAO was asked to review (1) the extent to which the Diversity Visa Program (DV program) is diversifying the U.S. immigrant pool, (2) areas of the DV program that are vulnerable to fraud, (3) whether there are security implications associated with these vulnerabilities, and (4) what steps the Department of State (State) has taken to address the vulnerabilities. We reviewed laws, regulations, and other documentation, and interviewed numerous State officials both at headquarters and in the field.

### What GAO Recommends

We recommend that State compile better data on known fraud in the DV program and use these data to develop a strategy to address fraud risks, including proposals for legislative changes, if deemed necessary. State did not agree with our recommendations and said that it has a robust fraud screening program for DV applicants. However, our report shows that there are significant fraud risks in the DV program and that State could do more to mitigate the risk, especially at posts that are reporting significant challenges with DV fraud.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-07-1174](#). For more information, contact Jess T. Ford at (202) 512-4128 or [fordj@gao.gov](mailto:fordj@gao.gov).

## BORDER SECURITY Fraud Risks Complicate State's Ability to Manage Diversity Visa Program

### What GAO Found

The DV program is contributing to the diversity of U.S. immigrants; since 1995, more than 500,000 aliens from countries with low rates of immigration to the United States have become legal permanent residents through the program. Little is known about diversity immigrants once they enter the United States, such as whether they contribute to further diversity by petitioning for family members to immigrate.

The DV program is vulnerable to fraud committed by and against DV applicants, but State has not compiled comprehensive data on detected and suspected fraudulent activity. At 5 of the 11 posts we reviewed, consular officers reported that the majority of DV applicants, lacking access to a computer or internet savvy, use "visa agents" to enter the lottery. Some agents take advantage of DV applicants; visa agents in Bangladesh have intercepted applicants' program documents and charged ransoms of up to \$20,000 or coerced applicants into sham DV marriages. Consular officers at 6 posts reported that widespread use of fake documents, such as birth certificates, marriage certificates, and passports, presented challenges when verifying the identities of applicants and dependents.

Difficulty in verifying identities has security implications because State's security checks rely heavily on name-based databases. In 2003, State's Inspector General raised concerns that aliens from countries designated as state sponsors of terrorism can apply for diversity visas. Nearly 9,800 persons from these countries have obtained permanent residency in the United States through the program. We found no documented evidence that DV immigrants from these, or other, countries posed a terrorist or other threat. However, experts familiar with immigration fraud believe that some individuals, including terrorists and criminals, could use fraudulent means to enter or remain in the United States. This places a premium on mitigating fraud risks.

Despite taking steps to strengthen the DV program, State does not have a strategy to address the pervasive fraud reported by some posts. State believes that some legislative changes could mitigate fraud risks, but it has not made formal proposals for change and has not compiled comprehensive data on program outcomes and fraud trends which would help decision makers consider whether legislative changes are needed.

Top 10 Countries of Origin for DV Immigrants, Fiscal Years 1995-2006



Source: Map Resources (map).