


Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-03-459](#), a report to Congressional Requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

As one response to the September 11 terrorist attacks, the Department of Justice (DOJ) initiated a project to interview aliens whose characteristics were similar to those responsible for the attacks. The purpose was to determine what knowledge the aliens might have of terrorists and terrorist activities. GAO was asked to determine

- the criteria DOJ used in compiling the list of aliens to be questioned,
- whether law enforcement complied with DOJ guidance for the project,
- the interview project's status, and
- what information resulted from it.

What GAO Recommends

Because there are indications that the government's antiterrorism efforts will continue to rely, in part, on conducting interview projects with aliens who reside in this country, GAO recommends that the Attorney General initiate a formal review of the project and report on lessons learned. In commenting on a draft of this report, DOJ was silent on GAO's findings, conclusions, and recommendation. DOJ provided technical comments, which GAO evaluated and incorporated, as appropriate. DOJ also expressed two specific concerns about the presentation of information that GAO responded to in the report.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-459.

To view the full report, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Richard M. Stana at (202) 512-8777 or stanar@gao.gov.

HOMELAND SECURITY

Justice Department's Project to Interview Aliens after September 11, 2001

What GAO Found

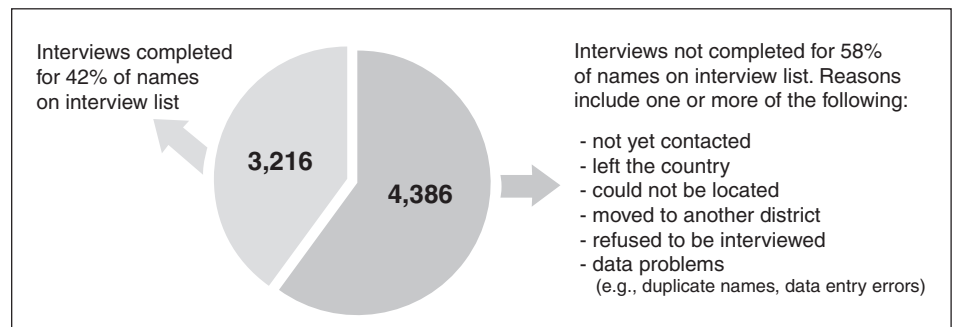
Between September 11 and November 9, 2001, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) compiled a list of aliens whose characteristics were similar to those of the hijackers. DOJ searched its databases for aliens that fit certain characteristics relating to type of visa, gender, age, date of entry into the United States, and country that issued the passport, and identified 7,602 names for interview.

According to law enforcement officials, attorneys for interviewees, and immigration advocates in six U.S. Attorney districts, law enforcement officers who conducted the interviews adhered to DOJ guidelines for the project. The guidelines stressed that the project's objective was information gathering, not criminal investigation, and that participation was to be voluntary. Attorneys for interviewees and immigration advocates agreed that the law enforcement officers adhered to project guidelines, but expressed the view that interviewed aliens did not perceive the interviews to be truly voluntary. They noted that although aliens were not coerced to participate in the interviews, they worried about repercussions, such as future INS denials for visa extensions or permanent residency, if they refused to be interviewed.

Firm and complete information on the project's status is unavailable. As of March 2003, law enforcement officers had interviewed 3,216 aliens—about 42 percent of the names on the list (see figure). However, the list contained problems such as duplicate names and data entry errors, making it difficult to determine how many interviews remained to be completed.

DOJ asserted that the project netted intelligence information and had a disruptive effect on terrorists. But the results are difficult to measure, and DOJ has not fully analyzed all the data obtained from the interviews or how effectively the project was implemented.

Interviews Completed and Not Completed, as of March 2003, from INS's List of 7,602 Names



Source: GAO's analysis of Executive Office for U.S. Attorneys' interview project data.