

An aerial night photograph of a city, likely New York City, showing a dense urban landscape with numerous skyscrapers and residential buildings. A prominent multi-lane highway runs through the center of the frame, with long-exposure light trails from vehicles creating bright, curved streaks of white and yellow. Overlaid on the city scene are several thin, white, curved lines that connect various points across the image, resembling a network or data flow diagram. The overall color palette is dark, with the city lights providing a high-contrast, blue-toned background.

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UNITED STATES ATTORNEYS' COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT EFFORTS TO **COUNTER VIOLENT EXTREMISM:** *Results from a Nationwide Survey*

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INTRODUCTION

In August, 2011, President Obama issued a national strategy for preventing violent extremism in the United States emphasizing the role of community-based problem solving and calling on the federal government to support and partner with local entities.¹ Federal engagement efforts are “essential,” the strategy asserted, “to allow government and communities to share information, concerns, and potential solutions.”² The strategy also envisioned that the federal government would use its “convening power” to “help build a network ... to support community-based efforts to counter violent extremism.”³

Four months later, the Administration issued a “Strategic Implementation” plan assigning agencies and sub-agencies specific roles for executing the overall strategy for preventing violent extremism. It noted that the federal government would engage communities “on the threat of violent extremism to raise awareness, build partnerships, and promote empowerment.”⁴ Engagement activities would be designed to “reinforce our shared sense of belonging” and emphasize “that we are all part of the social fabric of America.” The plan highlighted the role of U.S. Attorneys, in “1) discuss[ing] issues such as civil rights, counterterrorism security measures, international events, foreign policy, and other community concerns, 2) rais[ing] awareness about the threat of violent extremism; and 3) facilitating partnerships to prevent radicalization to violence.”⁵ The plan also noted that 32 U.S. Attorneys’ Offices had begun expanding engagement efforts with communities in 2010, called

for expansion of this effort, and assigned U.S. Attorneys the role of “engagement leads in the field.”⁶

In 2014, our research team was awarded a grant to identify the activities being conducted by federal agencies to implement the president’s directive to conduct outreach and engagement with communities targeted for recruitment to violent extremism. This project included a nationwide survey of U.S. Attorneys, interviews with key stakeholders in four federal agencies (Department of Justice (DOJ), Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and National Counter Terrorism Center (NCTC)), field interviews with U.S. Attorneys and FBI field offices, and focus groups of community members in three cities to gauge their reaction to federal efforts. This report provides results from the survey of U.S. Attorneys. A comprehensive report on the entire project will be published later in 2016.



METHODOLOGY

We conducted a literature review on community outreach and interviews with both U.S. Attorneys and community groups to develop questions for the survey. We interviewed the U.S. Attorney in three jurisdictions, as well as other members of their staffs involved with outreach and engagement activities. In the same three communities, we also conducted focus group of Muslim Americans regarding their experience with and feelings about outreach and engagement activities of the U.S. Attorneys' Offices (USAOs), other federal agencies, and a wide range of other community concerns.

The survey was fielded in December, 2015 to February, 2016, using an on-line survey platform. USAOs were sent an email by a representative of the Executive Office of United States Attorneys and encouraged to participate. The email included a link to the survey and a description of the study. Respondents were provided confidentiality assurances that data from the survey would be reported in the aggregate. Non-respondents were sent reminder emails. Responses were received from 79 of the 93 USAOs (an 85 percent response rate).

Many of the questions referred to efforts of U.S. Attorneys or USAOs to conduct outreach and engagement with communities targeted for recruitment by violent extremist groups and individuals. For the purpose of this survey, the phrase "outreach and engagement" was defined as "a range of activities to foster relationships with communities targeted for recruitment by violent extremists and

assist them in building resilience against violent extremism." Respondents were instructed to report on outreach and engagement efforts directed against foreign or domestic terrorism, and efforts led by USAOs or in which USAOs participated.



RESULTS

COMMITMENT TO OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT

The survey results show that U.S. Attorneys consider outreach and engagement with communities to prevent violent extremism as a core part of their offices' responsibilities. In 99 percent of the offices, the U.S. Attorney reported personal involvement on outreach and engagement to prevent extremism. On average, they spent 15 hours per month on such activities. Six U.S. Attorneys reported spending 40 hours or more per month on outreach and engagement.

We also found that Assistant U. S. Attorneys have been assigned responsibility for outreach in 95 percent of the offices. Most offices have one or two Assistant U.S. Attorneys involved in CVE, although 40 percent of the offices have 3 or more participating in outreach and engagement.

The communications or public relations specialist in almost all (93 percent) of USAOs are also involved in community outreach and engagement. In 24 percent of the offices, two or more of these specialists are participating in these activities. Most USAOs (87 percent) have assigned one or more other staff person to outreach and engagement besides the attorneys and communications/public relations specialist.

TYPES OF OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

The survey gave respondents the opportunity to report if their offices engaged in any of 10 different types of outreach and engagement activities to foster relations with communities that may be targeted for recruitment to violent extremism. They were also provided an option to identify non-listed activities.

Almost all the offices (76/79, 96 percent) reported engaging in at least one activity. Over half the offices (56 percent) engaged in 7 or more of the listed activities.

The most common outreach activities by USAOs were providing information on substantive areas interest to communities such as anti-discrimination, hate crime, and fraud (82 percent) and explaining the functions of USAOs and federal law enforcement policy (81 percent).

A large number of USAOs also held meetings with community leaders (78 percent) or both community leaders and members (71 percent). A large majority of offices also had members that attended community

99%

OF U.S. ATTORNEYS CONDUCT
COMMUNITY OUTREACH

& U.S. ATTORNEYS SPEND, ON AVERAGE,
15 HOURS PER WEEK ON OUTREACH

events such as civic celebrations, open houses, or religious or ethnic festivals (72 percent).

Well over half of the USAOs had assigned a staff member to serve as a community liaison (75 percent) or participate on an intergovernmental body to coordinate “countering violent extremism” activities (57 percent).

Only about a third of the offices have provided training relating to outreach to communities to prevent extremism. Specifically, 34 percent of the USAOs had arranged for cultural awareness training or outreach and engagement training for law enforcement and other government officials. In addition, 33 percent of the USAOs offered training to community members on ways to prevent recruitment of individuals by domestic or foreign terrorist groups.

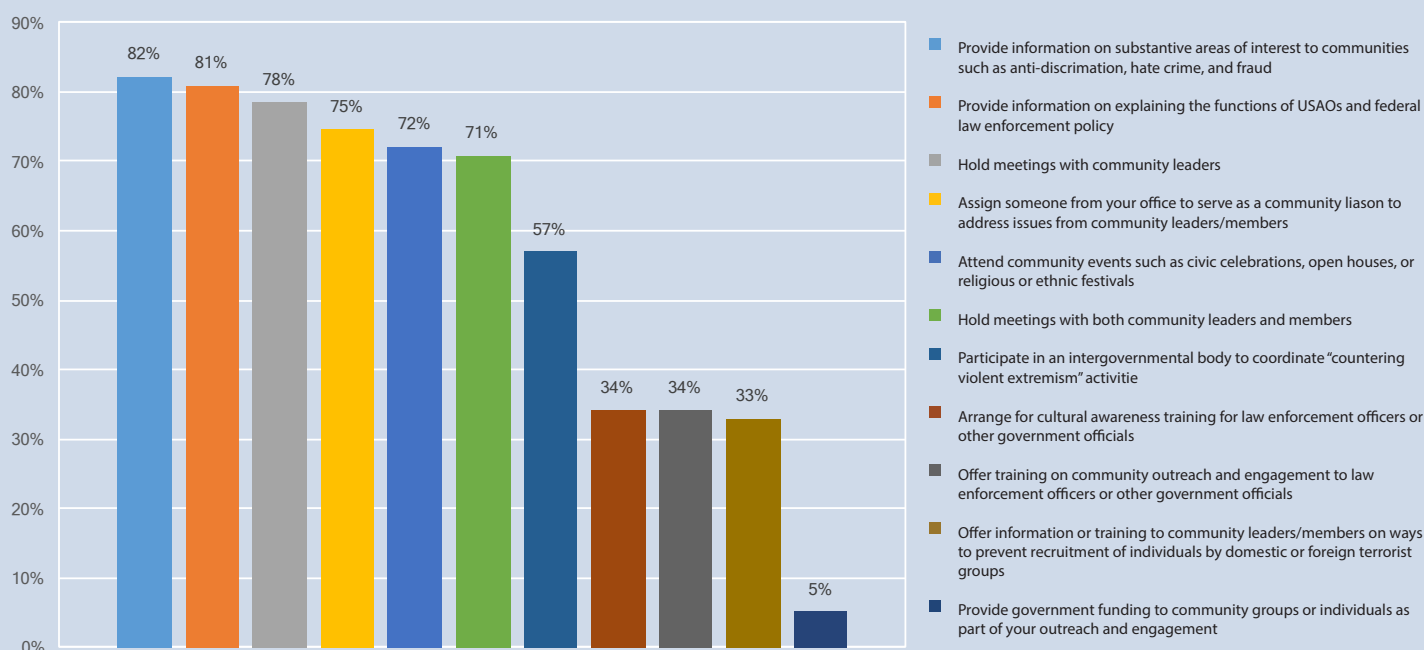
Only 4 offices (5 percent) provided government funding to community groups to support programming to counter violent extremism.

CATEGORY OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM TARGETED

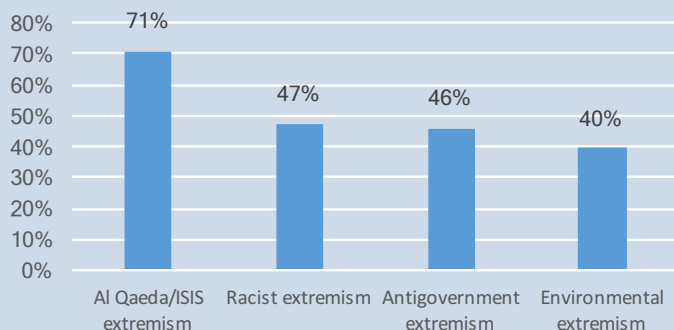
USAOs were asked to identify the types of extremist groups (or individuals inspired by these groups) their outreach attempts to counteract. The possible responses were groups or individuals focused on 1) “radical Islamist extremism, such as al Qaeda or ISIS,” (hereinafter “al Qaeda/ISIS extremism,” 2) “racist extremism such as the Ku Klux Klan,” (hereinafter “racist extremism” 3) “antigovernment extremism such as ‘sovereign citizens organizations’” (hereinafter “antigovernment extremism”) 4) “environmental extremism” such as the Animal Liberation Front or the Earth Liberation Front (hereinafter “environmental extremism”), and “other issues.”

A large majority of USAOs (71 percent) conducted outreach and engagement directed at counteracting al Qaeda/ISIS extremism. But less than half of the USAOs had outreach and engagement programs to prevent other forms of extremism: racist violent extremism (47 percent), anti-government extremism (46 percent), and environmental extremism (4 percent).

Types of Outreach and Engagement Activities

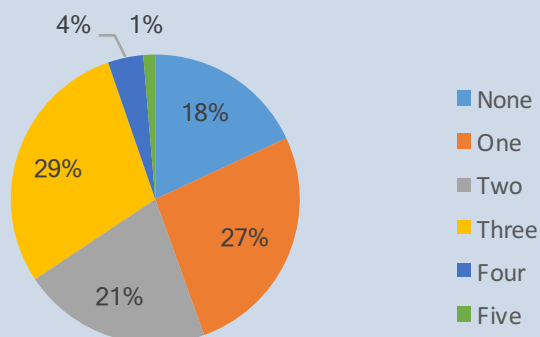


Category of Violent Extremism Targeted



About a quarter of the respondents answered that they only targeted one type of extremism with their outreach (26 percent), while half attempted to counter two or three forms of extremism, (21 percent, 29 percent), and 5 percent attempted to counter four or five types of extremism. A significant number of USAOs (18 percent) stated that their outreach did not focus on any specific group or individual.

Types of Extremism Targeted



TYPES OF COMMUNITY GROUPS ENGAGED

USAOs reached out to faith groups in their efforts to build resilience against violent extremism more than any other type of community organization. Outreach efforts were extended to faith groups in 84 percent of the offices, but only 48 percent of USAOs reported

engagement with advocacy groups, 47 percent with neighborhood groups and 34 percent with business groups.

EFFECTIVENESS OF OUTREACH EFFORTS

USAOs reported that they thought their outreach and engagement efforts were equally effective no matter which form of extremism they were trying to counteract. 92 percent of USAOs working to prevent extremism by al Qaeda and ISIS reported that their efforts were somewhat or very effective, 91 percent reported effectiveness addressing racist extremism and 88 percent reporting effectiveness against anti-government extremism.

ISSUES DISCUSSED IN OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT

USAOs were given the opportunity to identify the issues (from a list of 10 topics) that arose in the course of their outreach and engagement activities and to describe issue other than those listed in the survey.

Interestingly, although the express purpose of the outreach and engagement was to address violent extremism, only about half (54 percent) of the USAOs reported that “violent extremist recruitment” arose in the context of their engagement activities. Of those 41 USAOs that discussed violent extremist recruitment in their outreach activities, 98 percent of them conducted outreach to address extremism by al Qaeda and ISIS. However, only about half the offices that discussed violent extremist recruitment conducted outreach to address racist extremism (58 percent) or anti-government extremism (also 58 percent).

USAO outreach most frequently addressed the activities and operations of USAOs and other law enforcement agencies. The issues that arose during

outreach activities in the most offices were substantive issues like crime prevention (88 percent) and hate crime victimization (83 percent), and the operations of the USAO (84 percent), the FBI (71 percent), and state and local law enforcement (70 percent).

Some issues that were frequently identified as sources of community concerns during our focus group interviews were not discussed in most USAOs: immigration policy (36 percent of USAOs), U.S. foreign policy (20 percent), U.S. counterterrorism policy (36 percent), and airport security (39 percent).

A few USAOs reported that issues such as Islamophobia and anti-Muslim rhetoric in politics and the media arose during their interactions with communities, as well as bullying, offender reintegration, youth drug abuse, and internet safety.

STAFFING RESOURCES FOR OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT

The results show that USAOs are not receiving funding or funded staff positions to execute their outreach and engagement responsibilities.

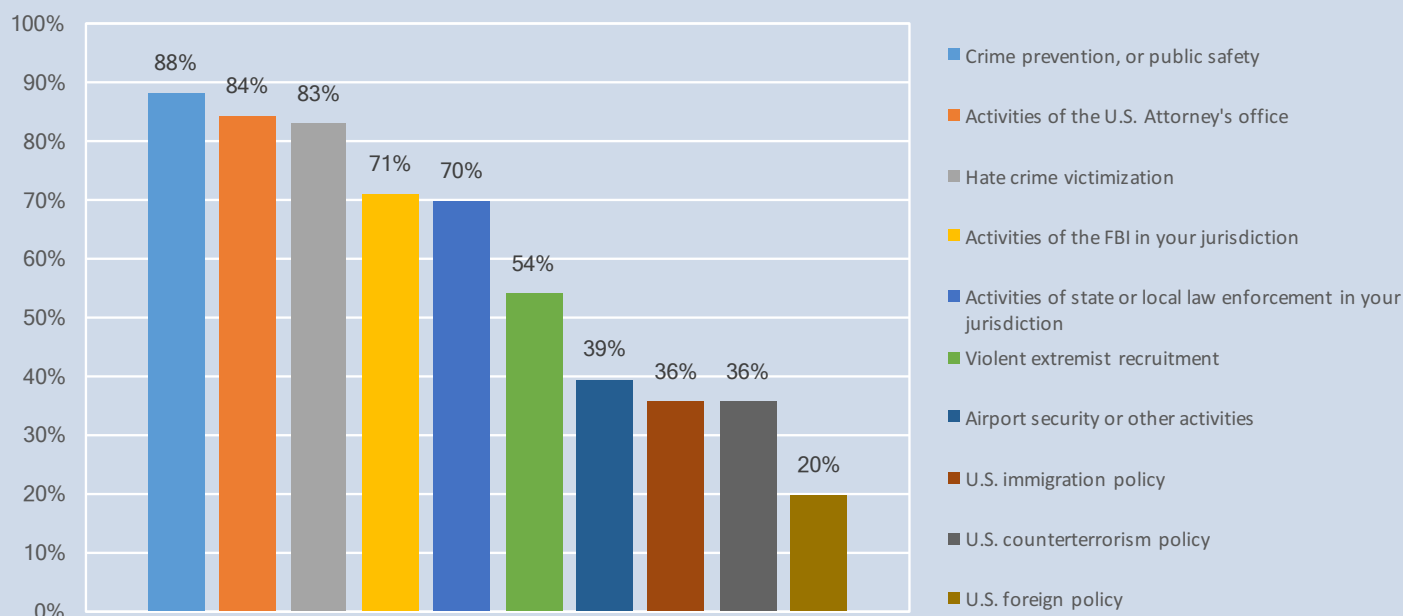
A strong majority of USAOs (73 percent) do not have a single employee assigned full time responsibility for outreach and engagement. Twenty USAOs, however, are employing a total of 29 full time employees for outreach and engagement.

Over half the offices (55 percent) have three or more employees whose responsibilities are focused at least partly on outreach and engagement. But for the vast majority of these offices (88 percent), the employees'

73% OF U.S. ATTORNEYS' OFFICES HAVE NO FULL TIME STAFF FOR OUTREACH

88% OF U.S. ATTORNEYS' OFFICES ASSIGN OUTREACH RESPONSIBILITIES TO STAFF, BUT DO NOT REDUCE OTHER DUTIES

Issues Discussed in Outreach and Engagement



other job responsibilities were not reduced at all to take into account the time being spent on outreach and engagement. In just a few offices (7 percent) was the workload of these employees reduced so that their overall workload remained the same.

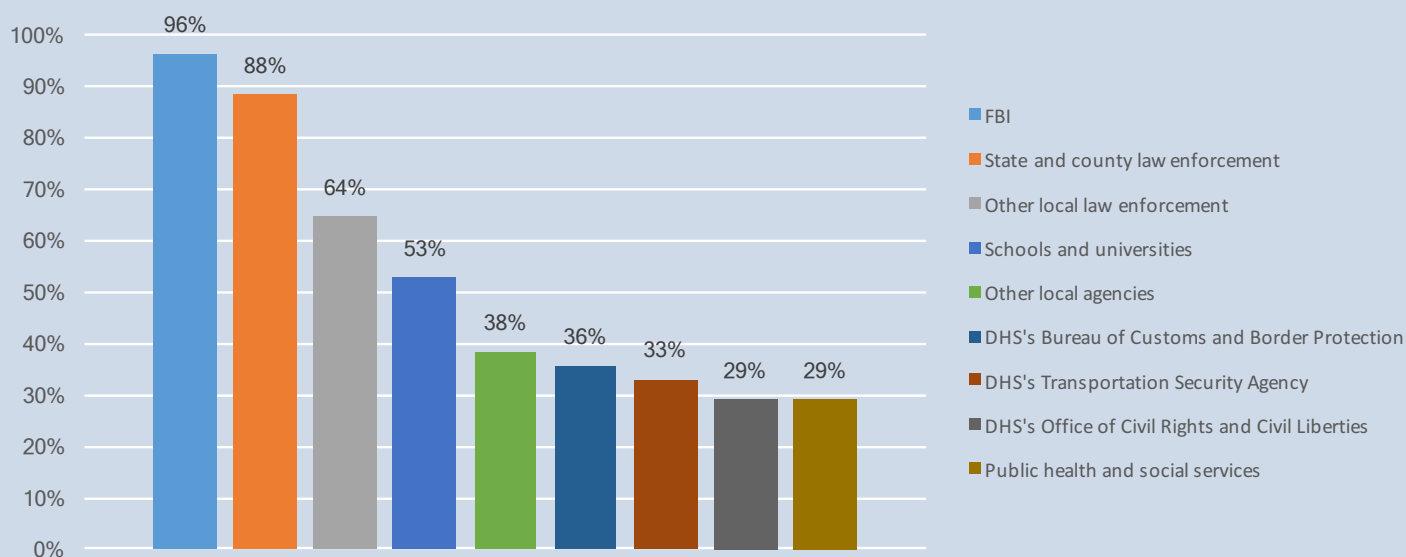
INVOLVEMENT OF OTHER AGENCIES

The FBI was included in outreach and engagement efforts in more jurisdictions than any other federal or local government agency, with 96 percent of the USAOs reporting interaction with the FBI. State and county law enforcement and local law enforcement were also involved in these outreach efforts in high levels (88 percent, and 64 percent, respectively).

Agencies in the Department of Homeland Security were not participating in the USAOs' outreach and engagement efforts at the levels that might be expected. Only 36 percent of the USAOs reported participation by DHS's Bureau of Customs and Border Protection, 33 percent by DHS's Transportation Security Agency, and 29 percent with DHS's Office of Civil Rights and Civil Liberties.

Schools and universities were involved in about half of the outreach initiatives (53 percent), public health and social services were involved in 29 percent of the efforts, and other local agencies participated in 38 percent of the programs.

Involvement of Other Agencies



IMPACT OF COMMUNITY CHARACTERISTICS AND ATTITUDES

The survey asked USAOs to identify the type of extremism their outreach efforts targeted, and then assess if characteristics and attitudes of the communities with which they interacted were helpful or unhelpful with respect to advancing the office's efforts.

Outreach and Engagement Efforts Directed at Communities Targeted for Recruitment by Extremists Inspired by al Qaeda and ISIS

U.S. Attorneys' Offices conducting outreach and engagement to counteract extremism inspired by al Qaeda and ISIS believe community leaders and community members were supportive of these efforts. In a strong majority of offices, community leaders were responsive to the activities (77 percent helpful/4 percent unhelpful), as were community members (76 percent helpful/2 percent unhelpful).⁷ Community feelings about the United States government and the Department of Justice (DOJ) and were also considered to contribute positively to outreach and engagement efforts in a strong majority of offices (U.S. government -- 44 percent helpful/12 percent unhelpful; DOJ -- 40 percent helpful/10 percent unhelpful). Community concerns about discrimination also resulted in support for outreach and engagement in more districts than it resulted in opposition to outreach activities.

Yet, USAOs reported that a number of community attitudes had a negative impact on their outreach and engagement efforts. Feelings about FBI tactics (21/33 percent), immigration policy (9/26 percent), counterterrorism policy (8/21 percent), and U.S. foreign policy (10/21 percent) were perceived to be unhelpful in more USAOs than they were helpful. 21 percent of USAOs reported that community tensions

and disagreement negatively impacted their outreach efforts, while, 15 percent considered these tensions to be helpful.

Outreach and Engagement Efforts Directed at Communities Targeted for Recruitment by Racist Extremists

USAOs addressing racial extremism through outreach and engagement reported similar levels of community support for these efforts (leaders helpful in 77 percent of offices, members helpful in 76 percent of offices). Community attitudes towards the U.S. government, the Department of Justice, and the FBI were considered to be helpful by far more offices than not. (U.S. government -- 44/15, DOJ -- 47/3, FBI 32/12). Similarly, community feelings about societal discrimination against them contributed to the success of the outreach and engagement in far more offices than it detracted from the outreach program (53 percent helpful/21 percent unhelpful).

Issues such as immigration, foreign policy, counterterrorism policy were considered to have a negligible effect in the communities targeted for recruitment by racist extremists.

COMMUNITY FEELINGS ABOUT FBI TACTICS, IMMIGRATION, AND COUNTERTERRORISM POLICY, **DETRACTED FROM OUTREACH EFFORTS**

COMMUNITY FEELINGS ABOUT THE U.S. GOVERNMENT, THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE, **CONTRIBUTED POSITIVELY TO OUTREACH EFFORTS**

Outreach and Engagement Efforts Directed at Communities Targeted for Recruitment by Anti-Government Extremists

USAOs also reported high levels of community support for outreach and engagement in communities targeted for recruitment by anti-government extremists, but this support was somewhat lower than it was in the other communities studied. (Community leaders helpful in 63 percent, community members helpful in 50 percent). Community feelings about the U.S. government and the DOJ were positive factors in more jurisdictions than they were negative factors, but, again, at lower levels than the other communities (U.S. government -- 34 percent helpful/19 percent unhelpful; DOJ -- 35 percent helpful/6 percent unhelpful). Community feelings about immigration, foreign policy, and counterterrorism were insignificant.

IMPACT OF GOVERNMENTAL SUPPORT FOR OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT

USAOs believe the support they are receiving from federal and local agencies are helpful to their outreach and engagement efforts regardless of the groups with which they are conducting outreach. USAOs approve of the support they receive from Justice Department leadership for their outreach efforts to address extremism by al Qaeda and ISIS (74 percent helpful/0 percent unhelpful), racist extremism (64

US ATTORNEYS BELIEVE THEY RECEIVE **STRONG SUPPORT FOR OUTREACH ACTIVITIES** FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE, THEIR STAFF, AND OTHER AGENCIES.

U.S. ATTORNEYS ARE DISSATISFIED **DISSATISFIED WITH FUNDING LEVELS AND STAFFING PROVIDED FOR OUTREACH ACTIVITIES.**

percent helpful/0 percent unhelpful), and anti-government extremism (53 percent helpful/3 percent unhelpful). They also find that their own staffs support these efforts (70 /74 /63 percent helpful (by group, respectively), 0/3/6 percent unhelpful). Strong levels of support are also provided by other federal, state and local agencies (74 /74 /62 percent helpful (by group, respectively), 2/3 /6 percent unhelpful).

However, USAOs are generally unsatisfied with resources they receive for outreach and engagement activities to counter extremism. They are most dissatisfied with the level of funding for these efforts (8 /12/13 percent helpful (by group, respectively), 59/56/50 percent unhelpful). Most USAO are also unsatisfied with the level of staffing resources for outreach (27/32/22 percent helpful (by group, respectively), 50/38/47 percent unhelpful).

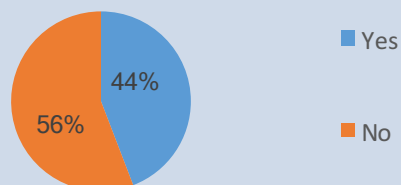
These findings are echoed in reports that in 2015, 94 percent of the USAOs received no additional funding beyond their normal budget to implement outreach and engagement programs, 90 percent of the offices received no additional staff, and 97 percent received no contractor support.

TRAINING FOR OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT

Less than half of the USAOs have received training relating to community outreach and engagement for violent extremism (44 percent yes, 56 percent no). Of the 34 offices that did engage in some form of training, 56 percent received cultural awareness training, 65 percent received training in community engagement strategies, and 76 percent received training in radicalization and extremist recruitment.

With respect to cultural awareness training, most offices received the training from the federal government (89 percent of offices). It was provided to fewer offices by other entities. (Community groups --

Received Training for Outreach and Engagement



26 percent of the offices; State and local government – 21 percent; Professional associations – 21 percent; Private contractors – 11 percent).

Similar patterns applied to the provision of community engagement training (95 percent of offices received the training from the federal government) and radicalization and extremist recruitment training (92 percent from the federal government).



FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Consistent with the national strategy, United States Attorneys across the country are spending significant time and resources interacting and engaging with communities for the purpose of preventing violent extremism.

The greatest amount of effort is being directed to addressing extremism inspired by al Qaeda and ISIS, but substantial efforts are being made to conduct outreach to prevent racist and anti-government extremism as well. **More USAOs are interacting with faith groups than are interacting with other civic organizations like neighborhood, advocacy, and business groups. U.S. Attorneys should build their outreach to these civic organizations.**

USAOs appear to be more comfortable using their outreach and engagement opportunities to provide communities with information about their operations and other functions of the federal government and law enforcement communities than addressing substantive issues relating to violent extremism. Only half the offices are directly addressing violent extremist recruitment. On a related note, most offices also report receiving no training relating to outreach and engagement strategies to prevent violent extremism. **U.S. Attorneys are wise not to base their relationships with communities on the issue of extremism. Yet as relationships are developed, they should seek opportunities to include such issues in discussions about address the full range of community needs. The Department of Justice**

should develop a training module for its employee and present strategies for broaching sensitive issues like extremist recruitment in the context of outreach and engagement.

Most offices reported immigration policy and airport security did not arise in the context of their outreach and engagement directed toward preventing extremism. Furthermore, only about one-third of the USAOs reported including Department of Homeland Security (DHS) organizations such as the Transportation Security Agency, Customs and Border Protection (CBP), and Civil Rights/Civil Liberties in their outreach and engagement activities. **U.S. Attorneys may want to take stronger efforts to include DHS units in their outreach activities. DHS leadership should also encourage their sub-agencies like the TSA and CBP to work with the U.S. Attorney in their jurisdiction.**

USAOs are not receiving staffing, budget, or other resources to support their outreach and engagement efforts and expressed that this lack of support is generally “unhelpful.” The survey also indicates that outreach and engagement responsibilities are added to employees’ workloads as an extra duty, without any reduction in their normal responsibilities. This is not sustainable over the long run, as USAOs will either see an erosion in performance on non-outreach related work, or employees may come to resent the extra burdens that are being placed on them by their outreach and engagement responsibilities.

If the Department of Justice believes that outreach and engagement are an important part of the function of USAOs, then this work has to be included in staffing models and USAOs should be provided at least some budget to support the community work. Congress should consider these questions as well in the annual appropriations process.

Most USAOs have not received training in basic cultural awareness, outreach and engagement strategies and radicalization/extremist recruitment. There is no reason to believe that AUSAs or USAO staff have any background in these areas. **Training in all of these areas is essential for the U.S. Attorney and all employees conducting outreach and engagement activities. Some USAOs report receiving such training from the federal government. These federal training programs should be used by all USAOs.**

REFERENCES

- 1 The White House, "Empowering Local Partners To Prevent Violent Extremism in the United States," (2011), pp 1-2.
- 2 Id., p. 5.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 The White House, "Strategic Implementation Plan for Empowering Local Partners To Prevent Violent Extremism in the United States," p. 7.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Id., p. 9.
- 7 The survey asked if the factors were Very Helpful, Helpful, Neither helpful nor unhelpful, Unhelpful, or Very Unhelpful. The percentages reported above combine the categories "Very helpful" and "Helpful" (reported as "helpful") and "Unhelpful" and "Very unhelpful" (reported as "unhelpful").

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