Language, Labels, and the DHS Lexicon

Analysis to Support a More-Inclusive Lexicon for Securing the Homeland

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About This Report

Since its creation in 2003, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and its various operational components and support offices, have used terminology to refer to people in certain racial, ethnic, national, and religious groups. Many of these terms were acceptable during an earlier era but have since been viewed by many in government, the public, and the communities with which DHS interacts as disrespectful, noninclusive, and not reflective of important equity considerations. The DHS Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties (CRCL) requested the Homeland Security Operational Analysis Center’s (HSOAC’s) assistance to examine the department’s use of such terminology in its documents and procedures, identify ways to improve it, and to create an organizational culture that supports the lasting implementation of updated terminology.

Specifically, CRCL seeks research and analysis to inform its participation in these and future efforts. CRCL will apply the results of this research and analysis to develop potential recommendations for the Secretary and DHS component and office leaders in accordance with its statutory mission to provide policy advice to DHS leadership on civil rights and civil liberties issues. The objective of this report is to provide CRCL with a comprehensive analytic document containing guidance to enable DHS to update terminology that aligns with the proposed 2021 U.S. Citizenship Act, and to identify ways for DHS to foster an organizational culture that supports the ongoing use of the updated terminology in three principal categories: immigration, law enforcement/public-order policing, and terrorism/counterterrorism. The report will inform DHS efforts to develop a departmental lexicon consistent with current Executive Orders, the objectives of the U.S. Citizenship Act, and recently issued departmental policies regarding the use of certain terminology.

This research was sponsored by CRCL and conducted in the Infrastructure, Immigration, and Security Program of RAND’s Homeland Security Research Division (HSRD), which operates the Homeland Security Operational Analysis Center (HSOAC).

About the Homeland Security Operational Analysis Center

The Homeland Security Act of 2002 (Public Law 107-296, § 305, as codified at 6 U.S.C. § 185), authorizes the Secretary of Homeland Security, acting through the Under Secretary for Science and Technology, to establish one or more federally funded research and development centers (FFRDCs) to provide independent analysis of homeland security issues. The RAND Corporation operates HSOAC as an FFRDC for DHS under contract HSHQDC-16-D-00007.

The HSOAC FFRDC provides the government with independent and objective analyses and advice in core areas important to the department in support of policy development, decisionmaking, alternative approaches, and new ideas on issues of significance. The HSOAC FFRDC also works with and supports other federal, state, local, tribal, and public- and
private-sector organizations that make up the homeland security enterprise. The HSOAC FFRDC’s research is undertaken by mutual consent with DHS and is organized as a set of discrete tasks. This report presents the results of research and analysis conducted under 70RDAD20FR0000131, Subject Matter Expertise Support to CRCL.

The results presented in this report do not necessarily reflect official DHS opinion or policy.

For more information on HSRD, see www.rand.org/hsrd.

For more information on this publication, see www.rand.org/t/RRA1159-1.

Acknowledgments

We are grateful to staff within CRCL who supplied information, data, and insights necessary to conduct this research, particularly Brian Sterling and Thomas Sharp. We also sincerely thank interviewees from the community-based organizations who shared their experiences and perspectives with us. Finally, we are grateful for the impressively insightful comments provided by the reviewers of this study, Bob Harrison, Adjunct Senior Policy Researcher, RAND Corporation, and Rhianna Rogers, Policy Researcher, RAND Corporation.
Summary

Issue

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties (CRCL) requested that the Homeland Security Operational Analysis Center (HSOAC) examine the agency’s use of terminology in its documents and practices, and to recommend how DHS as an organization can update and improve its lexicon,¹ not only now but over time, which requires ongoing implementation. CRCL provided three areas of terminology for us to focus on, each aligned with major DHS activities:

- immigration (enforcement and the administration of benefits)
- law enforcement/public-order policing
- terrorism/counterterrorism.

DHS is a large and complex organization. Because of its missions and statutory authorities, DHS has expansive jurisdiction resulting in interactions with individuals of a variety of races, nationalities, ethnicities, immigration statuses, religions, and social groups. Thus, how DHS personnel refer to and communicate with individuals across these spectra is essential to ensuring safe, secure, respectful, and effective activities and operations. For DHS, the process to select which terms to update and what should replace them will necessarily be complex and nuanced. Moreover, the processes and procedures to implement new terms and phrases and institutionalize their use across a multiagency and multioffice bureaucratic organization will be challenging and will take time. All of this takes place within the larger system of human language that evolves naturally with human culture, reflecting changes in the environment, technology, and contact among societies.

The topic of amending terminology, references, phrasing, and other forms of communication is one piece of this much larger picture. When the terminology pertains to underrepresented, marginalized, or minority groups, or individuals who are different from some other group, it can become both polarized and politicized. Efforts to use unbiased terms and change the way people speak to each other, and the way in which institutions of government refer to people, have been criticized as unnecessary, unduly progressive, or “woke.” However,

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¹ Lexicon refers to the vernacular of DHS as an institution: its terms, phrases, and vocabulary used generally by DHS personnel as they conduct departmental activities and operations, and as they interact with each other and individuals and groups outside the department. This definition is distinct from the 2017 DHS Instruction Manual 262-12-001-01, which is a list of commonly used terms for DHS operations, activities, and administrative functions (DHS, Management Directorate, “DHS Lexicon Terms and Definitions,” DHS Instruction Manual 262-12-001-01, October 16, 2017).
these criticisms are not supported by the research. Similarly, fears of the “language police,” or repercussions from the inadvertent or unintentional use of noninclusive terminology, can provoke responses of resentment, resistance, or apathy. Such responses can undermine the effort and might cause it to stall or backfire. However, these fears and responses can be allayed or mitigated against by implementing an update with care and appropriate techniques.

To support the updating of DHS’s lexicon, this report summarizes the findings to explain why terminology—composed of specific words—is so powerful in DHS contexts; why it must be continuously reexamined and revised; and how other large, public-serving institutions have addressed these issues so far. Our approach for conducting this study involved three lines of effort: (1) a review of the prevailing research literature regarding these issues, (2) an analysis of current DHS lexicon policies, guidelines, and documentation, and (3) interviews with nonprofit and community-based organizations that serve or represent some of the individuals and groups who interact with DHS on a daily basis. We examine how the adoption of person-centric, inclusive terminology is supported by existing research in the law enforcement domain. Studies suggest that the use of respectful language by law enforcement officers affects an individual’s judgment of procedural fairness, which can—in turn—affect their willingness, and the willingness of a community of individuals with the same characteristics, to cooperate with law enforcement. Therefore, the use of respectful language can enhance DHS’s ability to garner individual and community trust, which serves both the individual’s dignity and DHS’s mission set.

There is also clear evidence that the use of racialized, insulting, offensive, disrespectful, or otherwise noninclusive terms can cause harm to the individuals to whom they are directed. The effects of these terms can cause individuals to withdraw or otherwise fail to comply with DHS processes and procedures. This can result in situations that are unsafe for both the DHS official and the individual. These situations can also lead to circumstances where the individual disengages from the processes and procedures out of a sense of fear, isolation, humiliation, or similar emotion—a disengagement that could be a detriment to their ability to be active participants in their case or claim.

We also make recommendations about how DHS can address the continual updating of its lexicon as a priority within its own complex enterprise. Organizational culture can be difficult to change, and language is an element of that culture. This is compounded by the difficulty that language itself—particularly terms that relate to the identity of an individual, a group, or a community—is inherently dynamic. To effectively communicate with individuals and groups under its jurisdiction, DHS’s lexicon should be a living, dynamic document to allow the department to continue to adjust to the changing landscape of language and terms.

**Key Findings and Recommendations**

DHS should update its lexicon, both formal and informal, to reflect more-inclusive and person-centric terms and language. As of this writing in 2023, the lexicon contains terms and phrases that individuals with whom DHS interacts find insulting, demeaning, dehumaniz-
Summary

ing, disrespectful, and otherwise have negative effects. These effects harm these individuals and damage DHS’s abilities to accomplish its mission goals and objectives, particularly as they apply to immigration, law enforcement/public-order policing, and terrorism/counter-terrorism. Notwithstanding this, DHS is in a position to change its processes and procedures and develop new mechanisms to create a dynamic lexicon that preserves respect and dignity of all individuals under its authority and enables DHS to secure the homeland effectively. We summarize our findings and recommendations in Table S.1.

**TABLE S.1**
**Summary of Finding and Recommendations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Findings</th>
<th>Recommendations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The current DHS lexicon is insufficiently inclusive and person-centric.</td>
<td>Update the DHS lexicon and DHS processes and procedures:</td>
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<td>• Update the current DHS lexicon to remove negative terms and phrases and consider replacing these terms, and adding additional terms, with preferred terminology from this report.</td>
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<td>• Institute process and procedure changes to update, revise, amend, or issue new department directives, instructions, manuals, and policy memoranda to stress inclusive and person-centric language; the principles that underlie such language; and principles consistent with exiting DHS diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts.</td>
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<td>The current DHS lexicon includes terms recognized as harmful and is not consistent with best practices for law enforcement.</td>
<td>Create mechanisms to support the incorporation of inclusive and person-centric language:</td>
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<td>• Partner with community-based organizations on issues related to terms and language.</td>
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<td>• Form independent committees and/or working groups to focus on appropriate terms and language to develop subject-matter expertise in this area.</td>
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<td>• Address common pitfalls unique to DHS: acronyms, shorthand, speaker’s intentions regarding connotative vs. denotative meaning, less-conscious use of othering terms, etc.</td>
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<td>• Designate a regularized review and amendment process of the lexicon, to be performed by the appropriate committee or working group.</td>
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<td>• Take advantage of community engagement opportunities (e.g., town halls, regular field meetings, and other interactions) to discuss and collect feedback on lexicon issues.</td>
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<td>• Collect, review, and align publicly available style manuals from community-based organizations and other organizations (described in Chapter 5) for current appropriate terms for lexicon updates.</td>
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<td>• Educate DHS leaders and personnel on the pitfalls of acronyms and shorthand and encourage weighing convenience against the potential harms.</td>
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<td>• Improve the CRCL complaint system to better address lexicon issues and provide feedback to complainants when issues are mitigated and/or resolved.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The DHS lexicon shortcomings are most likely due to organizational culture, processes, and procedures.</td>
<td>Address inclusive language in DHS training:</td>
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<td>• Incorporate DHS lexicon issues into current DHS leadership and employee training programs.</td>
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<td>• Focus training on research-based findings that</td>
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<td>– fair and respectful treatment of individuals is likely to lead to better outcomes for both DHS employees and those individuals over whom DHS has jurisdiction and authority</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– respectful treatment includes the use of inclusive, person-centric language, particularly for minority and historically marginalized groups, and groups for whom DHS focuses its immigration, law enforcement/public-order policing, and terrorism/counterterrorism mission goals and objectives.</td>
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CHAPTER 1

The Imperative for Bias-Free Language

On January 20, 2021, President Joseph R. Biden, Jr. signed Executive Order (EO) 13985, “Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government.” It states, in part, the following:

Our country faces converging economic, health, and climate crises that have exposed and exacerbated inequities, while a historic movement for justice has highlighted the unbearable human costs of systemic racism. Our Nation deserves an ambitious whole-of-government equity agenda that matches the scale of the opportunities and challenges that we face.

It is therefore the policy of my Administration that the Federal Government should pursue a comprehensive approach to advancing equity for all, including people of color and others who have been historically underserved, marginalized, and adversely affected by persistent poverty and inequality. Affirmatively advancing equity, civil rights, racial justice, and equal opportunity is the responsibility of the whole of our Government. Because advancing equity requires a systematic approach to embedding fairness in decision-making processes, executive departments and agencies (agencies) must recognize and work to redress inequities in their policies and programs that serve as barriers to equal opportunity.1

and

The head of each agency, or designee, shall conduct such review . . . whether new policies, regulations, or guidance documents may be necessary to advance equity in agency actions and programs.2

The President followed this EO with EO 14012, “Restoring Faith in Our Legal Immigration Systems and Strengthening Integration and Inclusion Efforts for New Americans.”3 This

2 EO 13985, Section 5.
EO directed the Secretary of State, the Attorney General, and the Secretary of Homeland Security to “review existing regulations, orders, guidance documents, policies, and any other similar agency actions (collectively, agency actions) that may be inconsistent with the policy set forth in section 1 of this order.” The policy set forth in Section 1 requires that the federal government “eliminate sources of fear and other barriers that prevent immigrants from accessing government services available to them.”

Also on January 20, 2021, President Biden sent a bill to Congress: the U.S. Citizenship Act of 2021. In this proposed legislation, and in official White House communications regarding the legislation, the Biden administration emphasized that the United States is a nation of immigrants and called for changing the word “alien” to “noncitizen” in U.S. immigration and related laws. This bill was introduced into Congress on February 18, 2021, but no further legislative action was taken.

EO 13985, the proposed U.S. Citizenship Act, and other orders and memoranda issued by the White House acknowledge and attempt to address the systemic racism and discrimination that have harmed the rights of many people through the country’s history. They also articulate the administration’s priority that the federal government should work to advance equity for all people—including people who have historically been underserved and/marginalized based on race, ethnicity, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, limited English proficiency, immigration status, poverty, or cultural background. These orders and directives pertain to all the executive departments and agencies in the federal government, including the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS).
DHS: Its Missions, Interactions, and Terminology

Created in the wake of the September 11, 2001, attacks, DHS is now the third largest cabinet agency in the federal government. It comprises 23 federal offices and agencies and has a combined workforce of more than 240,000 personnel. As it carries out its missions to safeguard the U.S. homeland—including countering terrorism; securing borders, cyberspace, and critical infrastructure; preserving economic security; strengthening preparedness; and championing its own workforce—DHS is said to have more daily interactions with members of the public than any other federal agency.

Although the contexts vary widely, the agency’s purpose means that any DHS interaction is likely to involve matters of safety and security. In such situations, some of those involved might be applying for immigration benefits or other types of travel permissions. In other situations, individuals might be suspected of committing unlawful acts, immigration violations, or other acts involving national security. In many of these interactions, individuals could feel threatened or vulnerable, regardless of guilt. This heightened sense of threat or vulnerability makes the tone and content of DHS interactions with the public even more pivotal. Thus, the communications from DHS, as an agency, through its components and each member of the DHS workforce, play a critical role in how it executes its mission and how it affects the people with whom it interacts—who include both U.S. citizens and noncitizens.

Through most of the 20 years of its existence, DHS and its operational components and support offices have used terminology to refer to people in certain racial, ethnic, national, social, and religious groups. Referencing individuals based on these characteristics is a requirement of DHS’s mission set and jurisdictions. For example, in determining whether an individual might be granted asylum, these characteristics must be assessed as they relate to eligibility for the benefit sought. Many of the terms associated with these characteristics were accepted during an earlier era but are now viewed by many in government, the public, and the communities over which DHS has jurisdiction as disrespectful, noninclusive, and not reflective of important equity considerations.

For example, DHS and other federal agencies have long used the term “alien” to refer to individuals who are not U.S. citizens, but this term is now widely considered to be pejora-
tive in nature. In 2020, the U.S. Supreme Court began to use the term “noncitizen” in place of “alien” in many of its opinions.14 Other federal courts have adopted the same approach, explicitly finding that the term “noncitizen” is more appropriate than “alien” when referring to a person of other-than-U.S. nationality, notwithstanding the fact that the term “alien” is the primary term applied in the Immigration and Nationality Act.15 Moreover, the U.S. Library of Congress stopped using the term “alien” in its headings in 2016, stating that, “the phrase ‘illegal aliens’ has become pejorative.”16

**Updating DHS Terminology to Inclusive, Bias-Free Language**

In compliance with the EOs, and in recognition of the proposed/pending legislation and the shift away from noninclusive terms by the courts and other entities, the three primary DHS components responsible for immigration—Customs and Border Protection (CBP), Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS)—issued policy guidance in 2021 to update and align their terminology with the administration’s guidance.17 A summary of these changes are described in Table 1.1. Additionally, DHS issued 12 organizational and mission specific priorities in 2022. These include the following:

- **Advance Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA)** in our workforce and protect the privacy, civil rights, civil liberties, and human rights of the communities we serve: Ensure our Department reflects the diversity of the communities we serve and ensure that our programs, policies, and operations improve equity and protect privacy, civil rights, and civil liberties.

- **Build a fair, orderly, and humane immigration system**: Develop and implement regional migration solutions, lawful pathways as alternatives to irregular migration, and

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14 See, for example, United States v. Palomar-Santiago, 141 S. Ct. 1615, 1619, 2021; Barton v. Barr, 140 U.S. 1442, 1446, note 2, 2020, “This opinion uses the term ‘noncitizen’ as equivalent to the statutory term ‘alien,’” citing 8 U.S.C. § 1101(a)(3) where the term alien is defined as “any person not a citizen or national of the United States.”

15 See Hernandez Avilez v. Garland, 48 F. 4th 915, (9th Cir. 2022), California, September 8, 2022, note 1 (“The word alien can suggest ‘strange,’ ‘different,’ ‘repugnant,’ ‘hostile,’ and ‘opposed,’ Alien, Webster’s Third New International Dictionary 53 [2002], while the word noncitizen, which is synonymous, see Alien and Noncitizen, American Heritage Dictionary of English Language 44, 1198 [5th ed. 2011], avoids such connotations. Thus, noncitizen seems the better choice”). See also 8 U.S.C. § 1101(a)(3) (definition of the term alien).


enhanced policies and processes to expeditiously and fairly administer our nation’s laws and uphold our values as a nation of immigrants.18

These priorities further align DHS’s approach to amend and improve its policies, of which the DHS lexicon is one, consistent with the 2021 EOs, proposed legislation, and general movement of the courts and other federal agencies to a more person-centric, inclusive use of terms to refer to individuals and groups.

Approach

To accomplish our research and analysis for this report, we reviewed the relevant body of DHS policy documents (see in detail in Chapter 2), research literature, and existing guidance on inclusive language from other organizations. We then conducted a series of interviews with representatives of populations under DHS jurisdiction and authority to gain direct insights, experiences, data, and information.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Previous Term</th>
<th>New Term</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alien</td>
<td>Noncitizen or migrant</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alienage</td>
<td>Noncitizenship</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unaccompanied alien children</td>
<td>Noncitizen unaccompanied children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undocumented alien</td>
<td>Undocumented noncitizen, undocumented individual, migrant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illegal alien</td>
<td>Undocumented noncitizen, undocumented individual, migrant</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assimilation</td>
<td>Integration or civic integration</td>
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<tr>
<td>Immigrant assimilation</td>
<td>Immigrant integration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refugee assimilation</td>
<td>Refugee integration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applicant services</td>
<td>Applicant services, customer services, customer (might be used to refer to individuals or entities seeking benefits or services)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocacy groups, associations</td>
<td>Advocacy groups, associations, stakeholders (might be used to refer generally to outside groups interacting with DHS)</td>
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18 DHS, “About DHS—2022 Priorities,” webpage, March 17, 2022a, priorities 4 and 10. Bolded text appeared that way in the source. Italicized text is our emphasis.
Literature Review

Based on the scope of the request from DHS CRCL, we conducted a summary review of the empirical, peer-reviewed literature related to the application of terms and lexicons to minority and marginalized populations in the law enforcement context. We focused our literature review on four principal areas: (1) the use of language by law enforcement and its effects, (2) the effects of racialized, insulting, offensive, disrespectful, or otherwise noninclusive terms, and what alternate terminology would constitute inclusive, people-centered language, (3) how language and word usage change over time, and (4) examples of how other organizations have begun to address issues of exclusion and harm from the use of certain words and terms.

To conduct the search, we first identified an initial set of specific keywords by first reviewing the applicable DHS policy memoranda (see Chapter 2) and the DHS Lexicon itself (DHS Instruction Manual 262-12-001-01) and identifying keyword search terms. These included specific terms and phrases, such as “use of terms,” “alien,” “illegal,” “assimilation,” etc. We combined these terms with terms from the EOs and proposed legislation described above (e.g., “law enforcement” or “government official,” “use of,” and “inclusive language” or “person-centric language”). Additionally, we applied various terms related to the effects of language on individuals (e.g., “racialized,” “insulting,” “demeaning,” “dehumanizing,” “embarrassing,” “disrespectful,” “humiliating,” and “othering”) to further focus the search. We ran queries of Google Scholar using these terms. From these initial results, we developed a broader list of keyword search terms for each principal area of interest of the report (i.e., immigration, public policing, and terrorism/counterterrorism) (see Appendix B).

Next, using the broader list of keyword search terms, we performed a more-extensive search for relevant materials that initially resulted in 5,165 references. We then ran queries for each of the four principal literature review areas, drawing on the following scholarly databases: Google Scholar, Congressional Research Service (CRS) reports, Criminal Justice Abstracts, HeinOnline, Knowledge Services Discovery, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) iLibrary, Policy File Index, Sociological Abstracts, Scopus, Web of Science, and World Bank eLibrary. We focused on sources published since January 2000, and they included peer-review journal articles, legal literature, and grey literature reports (e.g., publications from policy organizations). We reviewed the abstracts of all 5,165 references, removed duplicates, and excluded publications that either had no direct relevance to the research (e.g., immigrant youth education outcomes) or were based on a non-U.S. context; this narrowed down the list of literature to 120 sources. We supplemented these sources with manual searches and scanning of reference lists.


Inclusive Language Guidance

To collect examples of publicly available inclusive language guidance from other organizations, we conducted automated searches, supplemented by manual searches and scanning of reference lists. For the automated searches, we used the widely available Google Search engine so that any resources found could be easily accessible to a wide range of DHS stakeholders. The initial search terms included combinations of “inclusive,” “bias free,” “unbiased,” or “respectful,” with “language,” “terms,” “terminology,” “words,” “vocabulary,” or “lexicon,” and “glossary,” “guide,” “guidelines,” “guidance,” “principles,” “style.” For guidance related to particular communities or topics of interest, we added terms such as, “African American,” “Asian,” “Asian American,” “AAPI,” “Black,” “border,” “city,” “change,” “culture,” “development,” “disability(ies),” “disabled,” “gender,” “Hispanic,” “immigrant,” “immigration,” “Latino(a)(e),” “law enforcement,” “LGBTQ,” “Native American,” “organization,” “police(ing),” “police department,” “religion,” “sex,” “sexual orientation,” or “state.” Finally, to search for local-level guidance, we added the names of each of the 10 largest U.S. cities by population, respectively, to the initial search terms above. Those were “New York City (NY),” “Los Angeles (CA),” “Chicago (IL),” “Houston (TX),” “Phoenix (AZ),” “Philadelphia (PA),” “San Antonio (TX),” “San Diego (CA),” “Dallas (TX),” or “San Jose (CA).”

Such searches on Google often returned results in the millions. Among the results, we scanned at least the first 200 but not more than 300 from each search for relevance and narrowed them further by focusing on those with .org, .gov, or .edu domains. We occasionally spot-checked results with .com domains for relevance, but they were not central to the effort.

Participant Interviews

Next, we conducted interviews with nonprofit and community-based organizations (CBOs) that serve or represent some of the individuals and groups who could be negatively affected during DHS interactions. Based on the scope and remit for this report, we conducted a convenience sampling of organizations determined to have daily interaction with DHS based on publicly available information (i.e., CBO websites, lists of immigrant support organizations).21 Our initial search terms to identify these websites and organizations were provided to us by CRCL leadership and staff, who interact with these groups and representatives on a daily basis to resolve CRCL complaints and relate issues.

Our approach to recruiting organizations for this report is based on what researchers consider the notion of trusted messengers.22 The sociopolitical and unequal dynamics between

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21 With respect to convenience sampling, see generally Allison Galloway, “Non-Probability Sampling,” Encyclopedia of Social Measurement, 2005, pp. 859–864. With respect to public information on CBOs, we refrain from listing that information here to ensure we protect the anonymity of the interviewees.

federal agencies, such as DHS, and nongovernmental organizations necessitate the importance of the Homeland Security Operational Analysis Center (HSOAC) to operate as a hub that connects with the latter to relay their insights to the former. As a trusted messenger, we were clear in our intentions and with the purpose of the project, including how and when participant insights would be used. We gave potential participants multiple opportunities to ask clarifying questions and express any concerns they might have about this work before beginning the interviews. Our independence from DHS allowed us to cultivate conditions that made participants feel safe to express their perspectives openly and candidly.

We interviewed 15 individuals representing nine different organizations that represented individuals across the racial, national, religious, and social group spectrum.23 The interviews explored the participants’ experiences with DHS and its personnel, practices, and terminology. We coded the data and information we received from these interviews based on the protocol questions (see Appendix A). As part of the interview, we provided participants with a list of terms and phrases for which they could assign a “positive,” “negative,” or “neutral,” rating, or provide a preferable term or terms to substitute for the terms/phrases on the list (Table 5.1).

Recognizing the sensitivity of these interviews, and our responsibilities as researchers to this important topic, we applied guiding principles for equity research, such as the following, from the research organization Child Trends:

- Examine our own backgrounds and biases.
- Commit to digging deeper into the data.
- Recognize that the research process itself impacts people and communities; researchers play a role in ensuring that their research benefits communities.
- Engage communities as partners in research and credit them for their contribution.
- Guard against the implied or explicit assumption that White is the normative, standard, or default position.24

23 We refrain from naming these organizations as the majority of representatives requested that they not be listed in the report for fear that it could negatively affect their ongoing relationships with DHS and DHS personnel.

Report Limitations

Given the scope of this report, it was not possible to do a full, systematic review of all empirical and peer-reviewed literature covering this topic area. We recognize the vast bodies of research on language changes, semantics, language policy, and linguistic equity, among many other highly relevant topics, but practical constraints prevented their inclusion in this report.

Further research for DHS could be performed that looks more closely at the use of language in interactions between government organizations and individuals under their jurisdiction. Also, as noted above, resources limited us to a convenience sampling in terms of the interviewee population. This resulted in a focus on representatives of groups as participant interviewees rather than effected individuals such as immigrants, asylees, refugees, or people who are in (or have been in) DHS custody and detention. We also acknowledge that findings from the small, nonprobability sample represent the data from those interviewed, but are not generalizable to all similar organizations. A more fulsome research effort would include additional interviews and surveys of these individuals. Notwithstanding these limitations, the research literature and the interview findings were consistent, leading to reasonable confidence in the findings and recommendations of this report.

Additionally, we note that language, in its broader sense, encompasses much more than just the (English) words and terms that DHS personnel use to refer to the individuals with whom they might interact. There are many other contexts in which the use of language and languages (in the broader sense) affects and reflects biases about inclusion/exclusion and power dynamics among people involved. For example, situations in which individuals do not share a common language (e.g., Arabic, English, Korean, Spanish, Somali) can easily raise questions about linguistic equity or inequity. Thus, when DHS provides (or does not provide) interpreting or translation services for a language, such decisions might incorporate unspoken biases about value or status. Those implicit judgments can easily lead to inequitable outcomes. Pursuing these issues was beyond the scope of this project, but it might be useful to consider matters of language equity in the DHS context in further research.25

Organization of This Report

Chapter 1 of this report provided background information regarding the proposed legislation and executive branch actions that promulgated CRCL’s objective to study the DHS lexicon and the issue of inclusive and person-centric language. We also provided a brief background on DHS and its current efforts to update its lexicon and terminology. We also articulated our methodology for approaching this important area of study. In Chapter 2, we examine the use of language by DHS, its lexicon, and the policies that underpin the department’s use of language. We also examine the research applicable to the use of language with respect to

law enforcement operations given its importance for DHS’s law enforcement and homeland security components. Chapter 3 describes the research related to how language changes over time with examples that relate to DHS operations and activities.

In Chapter 4, we focus on the interview data and information that we collected in an effort to describe how DHS should approach updating its lexicon based on the experiences of those under DHS jurisdiction and authority. We then extend this analysis in Chapter 5 with an in-depth discussion on changing language within the three key domains: immigration, law enforcement/public-order policing, and terrorism/counterterrorism. Chapter 6 explores the use of inclusive and person-centric language in other organizations that might be analogous for the department. Finally, in Chapter 7, we present our findings and recommendations for DHS to consider as it moves forward in its efforts to update the department’s lexicon for the future.
CHAPTER 2

Use of Language and the DHS Mission

In this chapter, we examine the use of language, terminology, and labels in the context of DHS’s mission to secure the homeland, particularly with respect to immigration enforcement, law enforcement/public-order policing, and terrorism/counterterrorism operations and activities. We researched how the use of language in the general law enforcement context affects outcomes—both for the individual subject of the law enforcement action, and the law enforcement agency (LEA) itself. Next, we examined DHS’s current documentation: the current lexicon, DHS directives, policies, and guidance documents related to the use of language as it applies to the interaction with, and treatment of, individuals subject to DHS jurisdiction and authorities. Finally, we researched how the meaning and use of words, terms, and phrases changes over time and changes within organizations and institutions.

Language and Law Enforcement Operations and Activities

There is a robust body of research that shows a strong link between how law enforcement entities deliver procedural justice and the interpersonal treatment of the individuals subject to those procedures.\(^1\) Generally speaking, *procedural justice* is the “fair and respectful treatment by the police” (or any law enforcement entity, such as DHS).\(^2\) Key aspects of procedural justice require law enforcement officials to treat people “they are dealing with, regardless of who they are, with dignity and respect, and allow them to have a voice in decision-making.”\(^3\) An essential aspect of respectful treatment is how a law enforcement official refers to or addresses

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\(^2\) Antrobus et al., 2015, p. 151.

Language, Labels, and the DHS Lexicon

an individual over whom an officer is exercising authority.\(^4\) Perhaps equally as important, respectful treatment by law enforcement results in an increased recognition of the legitimacy of the law enforcement authority and actions, which results in an increased willingness to comply with directives.\(^5\)

This research is particularly important for DHS given the diverse communities and individuals with whom it must interact, engage, and enforce the law. There is some evidence that law enforcement officers exercise disparate levels of respect and treatment, including the use of negative terminology, based on race.\(^6\) Much of this work has not focused on terminology specific to the current DHS lexicon, so it is not possible to draw direct conclusions between the DHS lexicon or other terms used by DHS officials, and the effects of these terms on levels of cooperation or compliance by individuals with whom the officials interact.

However, data collected during our interviews show that the terms that were found to be negative in nature (see Table 5.1) were consistently deemed “disrespectful,” “demeaning,” “offensive,” “antiquated,” and “dehumanizing.”\(^7\) Therefore, these individuals are very likely to believe they are not being treated with fairness or procedural justice. As a result, they are much less likely to trust DHS officials, DHS processes and procedures, and DHS as an institution. As the research shows, in addition to making individuals feel disrespected, marginalized, or less-than-human, the use of these negative terms can erode the trust between DHS officials and individuals, which can then trigger less-cooperative or less-compliant behaviors. This dynamic can jeopardize the efficacy of DHS operations and activities, and the ability of individuals to assert rights or benefits to which they might be entitled (particularly in the immigration context). It could also make interactions between DHS and individuals less safe both physically and psychologically.\(^8\)

The Existing DHS Lexicon

In light of the objectives of this report, we reviewed a number of primary DHS documents related to the department’s publicly available lexicon and the policies, processes and procedures DHS implements to build and amend its lexicon. The documents we examined were

- “ Updating Terminology for CBP Communications and Materials,” CBP, April 19, 2021\(^9\)


5 Mazerolle et al., 2013, pp. 36–39, 44–45; Voigt et al., 2017, p. 6524.

6 Voigt et al., 2017, pp. 6523–6524.

7 Interviews were conducted on June 13, 2022; June 16, 2022; August 25, 2022; and October 21, 2022.

8 Mazerolle et al., 2013, p. 36; Tyler and Blader, 2003, p. 352.

9 Miller, 2021.
• “Updated Terminology for Communications and Materials,” Immigration and Customs Enforcement, April 19, 2021

• “DHS Guidebook 102-01-003-01, DHS Acquisition Management Lexicon Guidebook,” DHS Office of Program Accountability and Risk Management, September 24, 2013

• “Lexicon Program and Standardization of Department Terminology,” DHS, June 8, 2017


Throughout these documents, we searched for terms and concepts—related to public policing, terrorism/counterterrorism, and immigration—and assessed the extent to which they were used in a manner that violated the aims of the executive order. Moreover, we also reviewed the department policy documents that delineate specific procedures for adding, modifying, or eliminating a term or concept, and guidance for how a term or concept can be used.

In our review of all of this information, there was no indication that the current Lexicon itself (Instruction Manual 262-12-001-01), and the terms and definitions contained therein, conveyed any degree of bias or intended offense against any group or community. Thus, many of the terms and phrases that we focused on, and that we queried our interviewees about (See Table 5.1), are not part of the formal lexicon at DHS. However, there are legal lexicons—such as the Immigration and Nationality Act itself (which contains the term “alien,” for example)—that can prompt perceptions of bias and impart offense or insult if they are not properly contextualized. These terms, and their iterations, include “alien,” “extremists,” and “terrorism.” Other terms in Table 5.1 (“illegal,” “assimilation,” “detainee,” etc.) have no formal definitions that we could determine and appear to be products of other DHS documentation (Standard Operating Procedures, policy memoranda, etc.) or simply developed as part of the informal vernacular at DHS.

10 Montoya-Galvez, 2021 (citing and reproducing both the CBP and ICE memoranda).


12 DHS Directive Number 262-12, Revision 00, Lexicon Program and Standardization of Department Terminology, June 8, 2017.

13 DHS, 2017. We note that this document was updated with revision number 4 on April 23, 2018, and that this document was provided to us by DHS. However, this version is not yet public. Therefore, we rely on the 2017 version for the purposes of analysis and note that—for the purposes of this study—there were no substantive differences between the two documents.

14 8 U.S.C. § 1101(a)(3) where the term alien is defined as “any person not a citizen or national of the United States.”). The statute also contains definitions for a number of other terms such as “refugee,” at 8 U.S.C. § 1101(a)(42), “immigrant,” at 8 U.S.C. § 1101(a)(15), etc.
While the guidebooks noted above provide additional fields (e.g., extended definition, annotation) to ensure clear understanding of a term’s definition, there lacks space to include an explanation of the social implications of these terms, making it easier for staff to use the lexicon in ways that might, intentionally or not, promote bias, offense, or insult against a group or community. However, while the corpus of documents and informal vernacular that represents the greater DHS lexicon does not list (to the extent they are documented) terms and their definitions in ways that violate the presidential EOs, it does stand in stark contrast against our findings from interviews. These findings suggest that the concern with the DHS lexicon might not lie solely in written communication, but also in how DHS staff and field agents interact and verbally communicate with involved parties. We discuss these concerns in greater detail in the subsequent chapters.

Definitions for the DHS lexicon are required to meet three criteria to maximize understanding across components, government agencies, and the general public. Terms must

- be in plain language and clearly defined
- express only a single meaning
- not require additional interpretation.15

Additionally, the DHS Directive specific to the lexicon and the standardization of DHS terminology states that terminology should, “facilitate consistent and unambiguous communications and information sharing across the national homeland security community,” and that DHS components should seek to standardize their use of terminology.16

These criteria are helpful in centering the importance of accessibility, but they do not provide clear direction on utilizing unbiased, inoffensive, respectful, and nondiscriminatory language. This is not to suggest that DHS staff would intentionally and willfully express themselves in a biased, offensive, insulting, or discriminatory manner; but without explicit attention to the social implications of language, it is possible that the terms might take on these pejorative aspects unconsciously during interactions with groups subject to DHS authority and jurisdiction.

15 DHS, 2017, p. i.
CHAPTER 3

Language Evolves With Its Users

As a backdrop to today’s efforts by policymakers, government officials, and members of the public to update the terminology used in practical daily matters, such as government, homeland security, and law enforcement, the following quotes offer a rationale:

... if thought corrupts language, language can also corrupt thought.¹
—George Orwell

Language imparts identity, meaning, and perspective to our human community.²
—Mary Pipher

Language shapes the way we think and determines what we can think about.³
—Benjamin Lee Whorf

The notion that human language shapes thought is central to the idea of updating terminology to make it more inclusive. For any such plan, it is essential to recognize that while people can directly create, request, sanction, or require new terms, language also morphs over time, naturally. Inevitably, any language in use will see new words emerge, meanings change, usage vary, and many other phenomena. A classic example of evolution in a word’s meaning is that of the word *nice* in English. It was once used to mean *ignorant*, but it has evolved through many meanings, including *foolish, wanton, extravagant, elegant, precise, refined, respectable, pleasant, attractive, agreeable, kind*, and *well-executed*.

There is a vast body of linguistics research on the ways in which words come into use, gain meaning, and change in meaning and usage over time. In this chapter, we condense complex, nuanced phenomena into broad strokes to describe how language can evolve on its own or be changed by direct action, such as the terminology updates in which many governments, groups, communities, and individuals are engaged. We then discuss some of the terms involved in the ongoing social discourse regarding equity and inclusion and explain how

¹ George Orwell, “Politics and the English Language,” *Horizon*, 1946.
the realities of language changes mean that certain words, such as alien, which might have seemed neutral or bias-free at one time, can become associated with negative connotations later. These changes often reflect shifts in how speakers perceive, experience, and interact with their world—and most relevant for this report, especially the social and political environments. Ultimately, understanding that language changes are inevitable and sometimes swift means that the efforts to achieve a bias-free lexicon in the U.S. federal government, DHS, and other agencies will require continuous attention, social awareness, and nimble updates.

Words, Meaning, and Usage Can Change Naturally or By Intervention

The vocabulary of a language evolves due in part to changes in the context of the people using it. There might be events, such as the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, that call for new words, such as long hauler for a person living with long-term effects of COVID-19. The 2020 murder of George Floyd by a police officer brought the name George Floyd into use to refer to the ensuing flashpoint regarding injustice, systemic racism, social crisis, racial reckoning, collective outrage, and grief. The term doomscrolling was coined before COVID-19, but it became widely used in 2020 at the height of the pandemic when more people found themselves doing it. As new words come into use, existing words become less used—such as the word dungarees being overtaken by jeans between the 1950s and 1970s. Some words become less used because they are openly disavowed, such as the words crippled and then handicapped which have been intentionally updated with the more-inclusive term person with a disability.

Not only do words move into and out of usage, meanings also change, as in the example of nice, described above. A word can be said to have a denotative meaning, i.e., the dictionary definition, and a connotative meaning, which refers to the associations and emotions associated with the word. Meanings might become broader or narrower, more positive or more negative. Although both denotative and connotative meanings can change, the changes in connotative meaning—especially toward negative associations—are those that most strongly affect people’s perceptions of bias, inclusion or exclusion, respect or disrespect, and safety or harm. For those stewarding the present and continuous updating of the DHS lexicon, the emergence of new terms and the changes in connotative meaning of existing terms will be among the most important to monitor. Below, we describe how the evolving connotations of the terms “alien” and “illegal alien,” which have been targets of reform for more than a decade, provide a rationale for a more-inclusive update to this term and others.
Evolution of the Terms “Alien” and “Illegal Alien” and Their Connotations

The words used to refer to people who come to the United States from other countries have varied over time, as have the terms used to refer to people who did so without the permissions required by U.S. immigration laws. Regarding the latter, Figure 3.1 displays graphically how certain terms used to refer to these people waxed and waned from 1924 through 1960, based on the frequencies of terms appearing in three prominent media outlets (Los Angeles Times, New York Times, and Chicago Tribune). The terms “undesirable,” “illegal immigrant,” “illegal alien,” and “wetback” were used across this period, with “undesirable” most common in the earlier years and “wetback” in the later years of this period.

From the same analysis, Figure 3.2 shows the terms used from 1945 through 2011. Note that the scale in Figure 3.2 is larger by a factor of 20. This figure reflects not only the frequency of the terms’ use in relation to one another; it also reflects the overall increase of references to people who entered the United States without the required legal documents from the 1970s through 2011, corresponding to the heightened attention and controversy surrounding this topic in the U.S. social context of those times. Although we do not have the corresponding data for the years from 2012 onward, those familiar with the national discourse and sociopolitical climate in the years since 2011 might surmise that the frequency of such references remained high and was even higher in the years when immigration was hotly debated in the social and political discourse.

FIGURE 3.1
Counts of Media Mentions of Terms Referring to People Who Entered the United States Without the Required Legal Documents, 1924–1960

By 2013, the term “illegal immigrant,” which had surged in usage beginning in the mid-1990s, was no longer sanctioned by the *AP Style Guide*, an authoritative reference in journalism and publishing.\(^4\) The Associated Press (AP) changed its style guidance to say that the term “illegal” could refer only to an action, but not to a person.\(^5\) It stated, “Do not describe people as violating immigration laws without attribution,” and to avoid the use of labels. “Except in direct quotations, do not use the terms *illegal alien*, *an illegal*, *illegals* or *undocumented*.”

In addition to the changes in frequency of uses of terms to refer to people who came to the United States from other countries, still referred to in some legal documents as “aliens,” it is worth noticing how the connotative meaning of the term “alien” has also evolved. From the *Oxford English Dictionary*, its definition as a noun is:\(^6\)

1a) A person who does not belong to a particular family, community, country, etc.; a foreigner, a stranger, an outsider; 1b) A foreigner who is not a naturalized citizen of the country where he or she is living; a foreign national; 2a) A person who is separated or excluded from a particular community, country, custom, etc.; 2b) A person who or thing which is opposed, repugnant, or unaccustomed to a specified person or thing; a stranger to; 3) an

\[^5\] Colford, 2013.
alien plant or animal; 4) Linguistics. A word from one language used but not naturalized in another; a loanword; 5) Originally Science Fiction. An (intelligent) being from another planet; an extraterrestrial.

While those familiar with prior government documents and the law might be accustomed to meanings 1a and 1b above, other meanings are also possible, notably 2a, which conveys being separated or excluded, and 2b, which carries the strongly negative connotations of being opposed and/or repugnant. Furthermore, meaning 5 evokes a sense of extreme foreignness, as in coming from another planet. Each of the definitions from 1a through 5 communicate a sense of being different or “other” in comparison to some other salient group. These interpretations are clear examples of the “othering” discussed further in Chapter 5, which is by nature exclusive rather than inclusive or even neutral. The negative aspects of the word’s meaning point to the rationale for replacing the use of alien with a term that places less emphasis on the sense of not belonging and/or being excluded, opposed, or “other.” Retaining the word “alien” would retain the negative associations in its definition.

Going beyond terms focused only on illegal immigration as shown above, further research provides insight into word-choice trends on the general topic of immigration (not specifically legal or illegal) across the period spanning 1880 through 2020. By analyzing the language used in political speeches during that time, researchers found notable differences in the words used in relation to immigration by those for and against it. These differences, displayed in Table 3.3, reveal the contrasting associations (or connotations) held and communicated by speakers who were anti-immigration compared to those who were pro-immigration.

### Table 3.3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Era</th>
<th>Anti-Immigration</th>
<th>Pro-Immigration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early (1880 to 1934)</td>
<td><strong>Chinese, undesirable</strong>, exclusion, violation, restriction, permit, <strong>dangerous</strong>, restrict, smuggled, <strong>cheap, excluded</strong>, deport, laborers</td>
<td>war, country, <strong>great</strong>, lands, gave, immigrants, <strong>entitled</strong>, property, relief, agriculture, served, give, rights, protection, <strong>glad</strong>, <strong>industrious</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitional (1935 to 1972)</td>
<td><strong>aliens</strong>, country, <strong>illegal, alien</strong>, deportation, <strong>united</strong>, criminals, <strong>subversive</strong>, fact, <strong>deported</strong>, America, system, deport, <strong>undesirable</strong></td>
<td>life, <strong>humanitarian</strong>, families, migrant, opportunity, contributions, anniversary, citizens, hope, <strong>discriminatory, great</strong>, children, migrants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modern (1973 to 2020)</td>
<td><strong>illegally</strong>, control, <strong>foreign</strong>, policy, enforce, entry, people, <strong>national</strong>, terrorism, <strong>illegal</strong>, terrorists, stop, smuggling, <strong>INS, dangerous</strong></td>
<td>community, <strong>young</strong>, immigrant, life, contributions, <strong>Hispanic</strong>, heritage, dream, victims, <strong>Irish, proud, important</strong>, <strong>Italian</strong>, work, treatment, urge</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: Card et al., 2022.
NOTE: Descriptive terms are bolded to call attention to the tone of the words used to deliver the various political messages. INS = Immigration and Naturalization Service.

7 Dallas Card, Serina Chang, Chris Becker, Julia Mendelsohn, Rob Voigt, Leah Boustan, Ran Abramitzky, and Dan Jurafsky, "Computational Analysis of 140 Years of US Political Speeches Reveals More Positive but
We bolded the descriptive terms (adjectives and adverbs) to call attention to the tone of the words used to deliver the various political messages.

Not surprisingly, the words used to frame the topic by those against immigration have negative connotations, including “undesirable,” “excluded,” “alien,” “illegal,” “subversive,” and “dangerous.” In contrast, the words used by those for immigration lean more toward positive connotations, such as “great,” “glad,” “industrious,” “proud,” and “important.” Amidst those somewhat predictable findings, it is noteworthy that the word “alien” was among those associated with anti-immigration sentiments. It is possible that the word “alien” was originally used in the government and legal lexicons with a dispassionate, clinical, or neutral sense. However, its connotation has become increasingly negative over time, strengthening the case for it to be replaced by a term free of bias.

**A Sampling of Terms Created or Rejected in the Interest of Inclusion**

In the previous section, we described how certain terms and their meanings evolved over time through the public discourse and how they reflect the sentiments of inclusion or exclusion of their times. In this section, we present a sampling of terms that were created intentionally to shape or drive the public discourse toward inclusion and equality and how the associations with those terms have evolved over time.

**Hispanic, Latino, Latina, Latinx, and Latine**

Each of the terms Hispanic, Latino, Latinx, and, the most recent, Latine were intentionally created by those who identify with the community to address or ameliorate sociopolitical issues.

The term *Hispanic* was created from activism in the 1970s to establish a census category to respond to the needs of Spanish-speaking U.S. residents. Once created, the term was used to refer collectively to individuals originating from Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, South America, Central America, and other Spanish-speaking countries—who had previously been counted on the census as White. It first appeared on the 1980 U.S. census.
Latino emerged later, in the 1990s, as a backlash to the idea of centering the group identity around connections to Spain, given its history of colonialism and genocide. Latino was meant to be less centered on Spanish influence and more focused on the struggle for independence. Latinx first surfaced online in the early 2000s. It was created as a gender-neutral alternative to the terms Latino and Latina, which code gender. Latinx could be used by people who identify as nonbinary and/or those who do not wish to use a gendered term for any reason. By 2019, it was not widely known or embraced by individuals identifying as either Hispanic or Latino. Some who identify as Hispanic, Latino, or Latina dislike Latinx because a word ending in -x would never occur in Spanish; they associate the word with English.

Latine was created more recently by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual (LGBTQIA+), gender nonbinary, and feminist communities in Spanish-speaking countries as another gender-neutral alternative to Latino and Latina, this one with the ending -e, which is more consistent with Spanish and similar in form to other gender-neutral Spanish words, such as “estudiante.”

At the time of this report, preferences among members of the community vary. In a 2019 survey, more than half of the U.S. residents born in Latin American countries said that they prefer to use the name of their country of origin rather than the terms Hispanic, Latino, or American. However, they preferred Hispanic or Latino to Latinx. The term Latine was not on the survey.

Asian American, AAPI, APIDA, and AANHPI

The term Asian American was created in 1968 by University of California, Berkeley graduate students to unite people from Asian countries—including those with Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Vietnamese, and other origins—into one group to unify their political voices and power.

In the 1990s, the term Asian American and Pacific Islander and its acronym AAPI gained usage after being included as a category on the 1990 U.S. census. Around 2010, the term Asian Pacific Islander Desi American (APIDA) was coined to explicitly include people with Indian, Nepali, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, and other South Asian origins. At the time of writing,

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10 Merriam-Webster, “Latinx’ and Gender Inclusivity,” Words at Play, undated.


13 Call Me Latine, webpage, undated.

it has not yet entered widespread usage. However, recently the phrase *Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander* (AANHPI) has also been used by the federal government.\(^{15}\)

**Negro and Oriental**

In 2016, the terms *Negro* and *Oriental* were explicitly removed from federal laws. Public Law 114-157,\(^{16}\) replaced the term *Negroes* with *African Americans*, and the term *Orientals* with *Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islanders*. Each of the replaced terms has a complex history that defies brief summary. What follows is a vast simplification for the sake of brevity, recognizing that a great deal of meaningful substance will be left out.

The use of the term *Negro* was one stage in the evolution of terms from “Colored” to “Negro” to “Black” to “African American” to “Black.”\(^{17}\) Each term gained usage because its meaning was considered more favorable than the one before it. The term “Negro” was seen as “stronger” than “Colored,” and by the 1930s, Negro was preferred and widely accepted. It remained so until the early 1960s, when it became viewed as White-imposed and associated with subservience. Then it was replaced by *Black*, which at that time was associated with being radical or at least progressive.\(^{18}\) In the late 1980s, the term *African American* came into use and gained favor partly because it established a connection between Black people and their ancestral homeland. More recently, the term *Black* is used broadly to refer to people with African ancestral origins. Concurrently, the term *African American* is used as a more-specific term to refer to people who are descendants of those taken from sub-Saharan Africa to the Americas and enslaved.\(^{19}\)

Until the late 1960s, the term *Oriental* was commonly used to refer to people with origins in East Asian countries or perceived to be of East Asian origin by people unattuned to the heterogeneity among populations from East Asian countries.\(^{20}\) An imprecise and derogatory term that conveys tones of colonialism and exoticism, it has been stricken from federal laws. It has been replaced by such terms as Asian American, AAPI, APIDA, and AANHPI, as mentioned above.

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\(^{18}\) Smith, 1992.


Conclusion

In this chapter, we explained some of the ways in which language, specifically words, terms, and their meanings can evolve, and how usage of those terms can increase or decrease to reflect the sentiments and trends in the larger social and political context. Conversely, the sociopolitical context can lead language users to intentionally modify the terms in use. The examples illustrate only a few of the ways in which words and their meanings evolve with their users. Understanding the general tendency for words, meanings, and usage to shift naturally or by design is crucial to the DHS effort to achieve and sustain a more-inclusive lexicon over time.
CHAPTER 4

Issues Associated with Outdated Language

In this chapter we review the literature that addresses how negative (i.e., perceived as disrespectful, abusive, offensive, demeaning, or racialized) terms and phrases can create a climate of fear, intimidation, discrimination, and insecurity. The use of this language can result in a number of negative consequences and outcomes for both DHS and the individuals subject to DHS’s authority. We also describe the data and information we collected from interviews. We examine the prominent themes and highlight important and consistent points made by interviewees. We also examine themes and important points that specifically address each of the three DHS activities that were of particular focus: immigration, law enforcement/public-order policing, and terrorism/counterterrorism. Finally, we discuss what terms DHS should consider updating and how best this might be accomplished.

Outcomes Associated with Negative Language and Terms

We reviewed literature on the negative outcomes associated with the lexicon relevant to immigration, public policing, and terrorism. Across this literature, it is clear that language matters and has implications for the daily realities of individuals and communities that engage with DHS. When certain terms are used, even those that are codified in our legal system, without proper guidance, their use can cause harm to individuals and communities. The negative outcomes, captured by the literature, can be organized into three interrelated categories (1) reinforcing dominant and harmful narratives, (2) reducing an individual or community to a stereotype or action, and (3) promoting division and oppression.

The primary topics of immigration, public policing, and terrorism/counterterrorism allude to a series of issues that target those individuals and communities commonly perceived as threats to our national security. The use of such terms as “the illegals” or “alien” reinforces dominant and harmful narratives (e.g., individuals from Mexico crossing the U.S. border without proper documentation can be perceived as “violating” our borders) that make it challenging to consider an individual’s unique context. As an example, an individual can be perceived as a threat to national security rather than an individual escaping deleterious polit-
ical conditions in their home country.\textsuperscript{1} This perception also occurs with “terrorist,” especially when that term is not properly applied or qualified in the national security context, the effect of which can often support narratives that target individuals and communities of the Islamic faith.\textsuperscript{2}

Negative terminology also reduces individuals and communities to a stereotype or action. In effect, this reduction limits how, for example, a DHS staff member might perceive the motives and intentions of the individual with whom they are engaging. In other words, the use of some terms erases the humanity of the individual in question, which can justify egregious acts against them and their community. Take, for instance, “criminal immigrant,” which allows the individual to be solely defined by a crime (i.e., a negative act), rather than an “immigrant who committed a crime,” which allows us to understand that the crime is just one aspect of the whole individual and prevents faulty assumptions from being promulgated.\textsuperscript{3}

Related terms can also have a divisionary and oppressive effect on individuals and communities engaging with DHS. Several researchers have noted that words like “alien” or “exotic” denote difference and inferiority.\textsuperscript{4} Utilizing such terms is, according to others,\textsuperscript{5} akin to dehumanization, or perceiving individuals or communities as less than human. Dehumanization can also occur when terms are imposed on individuals who feel that the term does not reflect who they are, such as an individual whose gender identity does not align with the traditional gender binary.\textsuperscript{6}

\section*{What Kinds of Terms Should DHS Update and How?}

Both our literature review and our interview data and analysis enabled us to identify not only specific negative terms and phrases but also general DHS vernacular. Our research and

\begin{flushleft}


\textsuperscript{5} Nick Haslam and Steve Loughnan, ”Dehumanization and Infrahumanization,” \textit{Annual Review of Psychology}, Vol. 65, No. 1, January 2014.

\end{flushleft}
analysis also provided insights into how DHS should go about updating its processes and procedures to achieve a more-inclusive and person-centric lexicon.

**Interviews: General Themes, Insights, and Points**

We conducted interviews with 15 individuals from nine different nonprofit and CBOs. These individuals represented a wide racial, national, religious, and social group spectrum. In several instances, the interviewees had experienced DHS processes and interactions firsthand as immigrants themselves or while assisting family members who were immigrants. The categories of individuals represented by the interviewees and their organizations included: immigrants; nonimmigrant visitors; those arrested or detained by DHS; those with criminal justice records; those applying for benefits; and children. The interviewees were asked to articulate their personal experiences with DHS and its personnel, practices, and terminology while they performed their jobs. They were also asked to articulate their observations and insight with respect to how the language DHS uses has affected their clients. Several major themes, insights, and points were consistent among the interviewees.

**Context in Which a Term Is Used Is Significant**

The issue of how terms are used in context arose in every interview in one form or another. Often, DHS personnel apply a term or phrase to an individual without regard to the current circumstances or interaction with that individual. For example, individuals might be referred to by their race (e.g., “Black,” “Asian,” “Latino”), nationality (e.g., “Guatemalan,” “Guinean,” “Chinese”), or status (e.g., “alien,” “criminal alien,” “detainee,” “EWI” [entered without inspection], “refugee”) when being interviewed as a witness or transported from one location to another. Additionally, legal determinations and the resulting status an individual might have—particularly in the immigration and criminal context—changes frequently. For example, an individual who has a pending claim for asylum is not in the country unlawfully because they almost always have been granted a parole status to pursue that claim.

In these circumstances, the description or categorization is not relevant or material to the process at hand and can have a dehumanizing, demeaning, or humiliating effect on the individual. In many circumstances, simpler, more nondescript or person-centric terminology (e.g., “person[s],” “individual[s],” or the person’s name[s]) is preferable and does not impede or detract from the DHS process, procedure, activity, or operation at hand.

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7 Interviews were conducted on June 13, 2022; June 16, 2022; July 22, 2022; July 29, 2022; August 17, 2022; August 22, 2022; August 25, 2022; September 6, 2022; October 7, 2022; and October 21, 2022.

Individuals Are Not Their Histories or Their Conduct, or Their Past Conduct

Interviewees were consistent that DHS personnel regularly referred to individuals based solely on a past act or past status without regard to whether either was accurate and without regard as to the demeaning effect. This point was made by interviewees universally with respect to particular terms such as “illegal,” “criminal,” and “detainee.” Interviewees stressed that human beings cannot be “illegal” even if an action they have committed violates a statutory requirement. Turning descriptors or adjectives into nouns for the purposes of referring to a person or a group of persons was viewed by interviewees as extremely reductive and—in the vast majority of cases—precluded the opportunity for DHS personnel to render respectful treatment.

Additionally, once assigned, these labels tended to persist even after a person changed their status or the descriptor otherwise no longer applied to them. Some interviewees noted that these terms extended beyond DHS to local communities, the media, and state and local governments, and that this often has a discriminatory effect. For example, once branded as an “illegal,” an individual might face employment discrimination notwithstanding the approval of a legal status, because employers make false assumptions about how the immigration process works. This can occur when a person is given permission (i.e., employment authorization) to work by DHS but, because the person does not have permanent status in the United States, is still denied employment out of a false belief that the individual is still (or might become again) “illegal.”

Some Terms (Even Those with Legal Definitions) Have Become Antiquated, Racialized, or Racially Charged

Among the numerous terms that we presented to the interviewees for their input, many were identified as having taken on a racialized or racially charged aspect beyond what their legal or common definition might be. When applied to individuals, therefore, these terms can inflict emotional and psychological discomfort or harm notwithstanding an anodyne intent by the official. For example (and as discussed further in the “Public-Order Policing” section in Chapter 5) the terms “looter,” “trespasser,” “rioter,” and “jihadist,” have become racially charged as they are mostly applied to individuals of a particular race and not to White individuals who might engage in the same conduct or violate the same laws. In these cases, it is the disparate application of the term, rather than the definition, that has caused it to become disrespectful or damaging.

Many of the terms we presented to the interviewees are terms in the DHS lexicon that have longstanding statutory or regulatory definitions. For example, the legal definition of “alien” in the Immigration and Nationality Act is as follows: “any person not a citizen or national of the United States.”

“alien” has become pejorative, dehumanizing term. Interviewees acknowledged that, unless the statute is amended, it is necessary in certain limited circumstances to use this term in legal proceedings, legal briefs and documentation, and on government forms where reference to the statute is required. Interviewees stressed that where the law did not require use of the term, which is in most operational contexts, DHS can avoid the disrespect or harm associated with the term by applying its definitional corollary: noncitizen or nonnational. These terms are both legally accurate and inoffensive.

### Internal DHS Shorthand Terms Affect Official Behavior

Interviewees who took part in the study all had experience dealing with DHS officials in an operational context. Many of their experiences and interactions took place in detention facilities, immigration courtrooms, benefits adjudications offices, or at locations of active DHS field operations and investigations (e.g., the United States southern border, employment facilities where raids or investigations were occurring). In these situations, interviewees acknowledged that DHS officials, particularly law enforcement officials, often use many of the terms listed in Table 5.1 as a form of shorthand to communicate quickly and efficiently—

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10 As described in Chapter 1, we note here that DHS has issued guidance to use the term “noncitizen” in addition to the other changes (see Table 1.1). However, we also note that most interviewees emphasized that, in their experience, the vernacular of most line personnel at DHS had not changed notwithstanding these issuances from leadership.
ostensibly in furtherance of maintaining order, safety, and security. Such terms as “detainees,” “inmates,” “aliens,” “illegals,” “rioters,” “OTMs,” “bodies,” etc., were noted in the context of shorthand usage.

However, interviewees stated that, in their experiences, any gain in efficiency (perceived or real) was lost or overcome by the damage resulting from the use of the offending term. Interviewees observed that the use of these terms as a shorthand often caused officials to exhibit negative behaviors toward individuals: apathy, dismissiveness, disrespect, othering, or a demeaning disposition. The perception is also that the use of these terms might lead to more punitive or unconsciously biased outcomes during interactions with DHS. Interviewees stressed that, even if negative outcomes did not result, this dynamic did damage to the individual on whom the term is applied, and damage to the trust between DHS officials and those over whom they exercise authority.

Many Terms Are Subjective, Leading to Inaccurate Descriptions or Characterizations

Another common theme in the interview data is the subjectivity associated with many of the terms in the DHS lexicon. For example, the term “criminal” might relate to specific crimes the individual committed, but when generalized, it fails to indicate the degree or severity of the crime, whether the individual has been convicted or merely charged, whether the individual has been rehabilitated, or whether it relates to an immigration violation that might have been cured or subsumed when the individual gained legal status in the United States. In these circumstances, the continued use of the term can be demeaning and cause individuals to become fearful or withdrawn.

In addition to words that might have a definition, some terms, such as “extremist,” have no definition within the lexicon or in the law but are commonly used by officials. Without a baseline definition or standard behavioral norm to reference, it is not possible to compare and assess an individual’s behavior objectively to deem it “extreme.” To some, crossing a national border without permission might be an extreme behavior. To others, it might be an infraction that is justified and in accordance with the law if the individual is fleeing persecution and seeks to cross the border in order to pursue asylum. Thus, the use of these terms, particularly with minority or historically marginalized populations, can be harmful not only

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11 We did not find research literature to support the contention that the use of shorthand terms or phrases, particularly ones that might be viewed as offensive, increase efficiency, safety, or security in operations. However, additional research is likely necessary on this topic to make a determination either way.

12 We caution that the relationship between the use of negative terms and more-severe outcomes for individuals subject to DHS authority is anecdotal only based on convenience interview sampling conducted for this study. To establish any level of causality between the two, additional research would be required.

13 See 8 U.S.C. § 1158(a)(1)

Any alien [sic] who is physically present in the United States or who arrives in the United States (whether or not at a designated port of arrival and including an alien who is brought to the United States after
psychologically or emotionally, but also to the individual’s reputation within their community. The reputational harm of many of these terms can damage the individual’s employment opportunities and ability to integrate into the community.

**Negative Effects of Negative Language**

In addition to the use of negative terms affecting the behavior of the officials employing them, interviewees stressed that any terminology that is disrespectful, demeaning, offensive, embarrassing, dehumanizing, or otherwise offensive can have significantly negative effects on individuals on whom they are used. Interviewees noted that they witnessed individuals react in ways that made interactions with DHS more difficult for both sides. Negative terms caused individuals to become withdrawn or shut down, mentally and physically exhausted, angry, embarrassed, noncompliant, apathetic, and despondent. In some instances, individuals who might have been eligible for benefits from DHS would give up and abandon their cases on the assumption that, because DHS did not consider them to be human beings, the struggle to obtain the benefit would be too great or even pointless. Conversely, the use of person-centric, inclusive, and respectful terms and language had the opposite effect, resulting in better engagement with DHS and better outcomes for individuals and officials.

**Leadership Matters**

Interviewees noted that leadership, management, and supervision were often key factors with regard to whether individuals were treated with dignity and respect in an interaction with DHS officials. In offices where leaders stressed respectful treatment, the use of negative terminology was diminished. Correspondingly, in offices where the use of inclusive language was not a focus or a priority, DHS staff more often used terms that had a negative impact. Additionally, interviewees noted a disparity between DHS Headquarters personnel and personnel in the field, with respectful and inclusive language more prevalent in DHS Headquarters offices. Even in instances where the offensive terms were used in the statutory and regulatory language, such as “alien,” the term was used less when leaders were actively promoting a more-respectful dynamic between officials and individuals under DHS authority.

From situations they observed, interviewees reported perceiving that in some offices, the disposition of DHS officials toward the individuals was a significant determinant as to whether the official would use respectful or negative terms. They inferred that if the official viewed immigrants, particularly those without legal status, as a threat to public or national security, dehumanizing language was more frequently used. In contrast, if they perceived that the official viewed the same individual as an applicant for a benefit—asylum status, for

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having been interdicted in international or United States waters, irrespective of such alien’s [sic] status, may apply for asylum in accordance with this section . . .

example—the interaction tended to be much more respectful. Leadership can play a key role with respect to the disposition of DHS staff toward individuals. However, in some instances, interviewees noted that leadership made little difference and speculated that positive change could only occur if certain officials retired or otherwise left government service. In other words, interviewees were unsure whether other interventions (training, counseling, reprimands, etc.) with certain employees could be effective. Several interviewees noted that they observed situations in which certain offices, units, or categories of DHS officials were socialized—by colleagues, managers, and supervisors—in a manner that promoted the use of negative (and, in some cases, outrightly offensive) terminology. In these cases, even new entrant officials who would use respectful language would eventually be socialized and pressured into using the more-pejorative and more-derogatory terms. As noted in the research literature on organizational management, these are instances where organizational culture can overwhelm attempts at change management by DHS leadership.14

Suggestions for Improvement

Universally, interviewees agree that a positive change in the DHS lexicon would result in better, safer, more-productive interactions with DHS officials. We summarize several suggestions that the interviewees offered, some of which are incorporated into our recommendations in Chapter 6. They are as follows:

- Ask individuals how they would like to be addressed or referred to, or how they identify, and use those terms to the extent possible.
  - When possible, use the individual’s name.
- Avoid labeling or referring to individuals using a type of action or behavior (criminal, illegal entrant, rioter, looter, etc.).
  - Replace these terms with person-centric phrasing: “person who . . . (action or behavior),” (e.g., person who entered without inspection, person who was convicted of disorderly conduct).
- Do not use negative terminology with any interactions with children.
- Consider inclusive terms when developing operational shorthand terminology.
- Increase education and training on issues concerning language.
- Partner with CBOs on maintaining a dynamic and up-to-date lexicon. Mechanisms could include:
  - outreach focus and/or working groups
  - town hall or similar engagement meetings
  - advisory committees.

• Collect, review, and incorporate publicly available style manuals from groups and organizations that make them available (for examples, see Appendix B).
• Develop a complaint process that is easier and provides feedback once remediation steps have been taken.

Even within communities, there is often disagreement on the appropriate terms because terminology can change rapidly. This is to be expected and increases the value of engagement over defaulting to terms that most or all in the community agree are negative.
CHAPTER 5

Current DHS Lexicon: Immigration, Law Enforcement/Public-Order Policing, and Terrorism/Counterterrorism

Across our review of literature and conversations with interviewees, several outdated and problematic terms were discussed. In this chapter, we organize these terms by the three major areas of interest: immigration, law enforcement/public-order policing, and terrorism. Within each area, we list the outdated terms that elicited the most negative responses from our interview subject-matter experts (SMEs) (see Table 5.1), explain their problematic nature, and describe the consequences of these terms when applied. We also identified additional trends that warranted clarification.

Immigration

Within the context of DHS, lexicon used within the domain of immigration often emphasizes the perceived threat an individual poses to the U.S. due to the alleged illegality of their actions related to entering the country. There are a range of terms, according to the literature and our SME interviews, that have been used to describe and categorize individuals that unlawfully enter the United States. These terms, which interviewees responded most-negatively to and described as antiquated and problematic, are present in their interactions and exchanges with DHS, from the upper echelons of the organization and extend to the field officers stationed across the United States. These terms include “illegal,” “alien,” “anchor baby,” “exotics,” and iterations of some of the aforementioned terms (e.g., “illegal immigrant,” “unaccompanied alien child” [UAC], “criminal alien”).

The problematic and shared nature of these terms is rooted in, according to one interviewee, “a complete and fundamental lack of understanding . . . of the circumstances that drive (non-U.S. individuals) to the border . . . . People are talked about like they are fraudsters who are trying to game the system.”1 The dominant assumptions about individuals crossing

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1 We do not imply that immigration fraud is not a serious problem affecting the integrity of the U.S. immigration system. See generally, Ruth Ellen Wasem, Immigration Fraud: Policies, Investigations, and Issues,
the border, such as the myth of individuals giving birth in the United States to gain citizenship, are what give these terms (e.g., “anchor baby”) divisive and oppressive influence. The application of these terms in policy then has implications for those individuals whose acts trigger engagement with DHS.

In their work in immigration advocacy and policy, interviewees have observed the prevalent use of “illegal” and “alien” in describing and categorizing their clients and families. While the term “illegal” is used to describe the unlawful entry into the United States, it has also been used as a noun, such as “an illegal.” This application of “illegal” is deemed problematic because it reduces the individual to the act of unlawful entry, that, in itself, is already layered with geopolitical and racialized meanings. When an individual enters the United States unlawfully, the person can be inaccurately perceived as a threat to national and economic security or a criminal because the individual did not go through the legal channels that could assess eligibility.

Moreover, while individuals from across the globe enter the United States unlawfully, interviewees also noted that when “illegal” (e.g., illegal immigration) is used, “[people] are not thinking about white European immigrants.” In other words, “an illegal” often alludes to the migratory patterns of nationals from non-White regions of the world, such as Latin America, which only reinforces racist tropes about and acts against people of color. The use of the term “exotic” also elicited a similar, negative response from interviewees, who described the term as “racist” and “offensive,” in part because it harkens back to histories of colonialism and commodification of human beings.

The term “alien,” and its iterations, conveys similar sentiments as “illegal,” but it can prompt more explicit division between U.S. nationals and non-U.S. nationals within the context of unlawful entry. Legal scholar Emily Ngara noted that “‘alien’ is an example of the rhetoric of self/other; it is a term designed to emphasize the difference between citizens and noncitizens and devalue the noncitizen, thereby justifying the privileges of citizenship.” Across our interviews, it was clear that “alien” prompted a feeling of otherness, which not only differentiates individuals or groups, but cultivates unequal power dynamics that breed a narrative that people unlawfully entering the United States are inferior and undeserving of humane treatment. In fact, interviewees who work on the ground with their clients have noticed such maltreatment by DHS staff, “What I’ve seen . . . down in the border is mistreatment [by] the agents. Their attitude [is] very condescending, [and they are not] treating people with humanity.” SMEs described the effect of “alien” on their clients as “dehumaniza-

CRS, RL34007, May 17, 2007. Notwithstanding the prevalence of immigration fraud, interviewees noted that many individual cases for immigration benefits fail for lack of bona fides, not because the individual engaged in fraud. Thus, any conduct by DHS officials to broadly categorize claimants as “fraudsters” because they do not meet eligibility requirements is inappropriate and damaging to the individual.

2 Frelick, 2014; Cunningham-Parmenter, 2011; Ngara, 2016.


4 Ngara, 2016.
Dehumanization, broadly, occurs when people perceive outsiders as less human, and it occurs and manifests in both subtle and overt ways.\(^5\)

When DHS officials and staff exhibit behavior that dehumanizes individuals, such as using the term “alien,” according to interviewees, individuals can “sense being treated in an undignified way or being dismissed when they are trying to express a concern.” These feelings are amplified when families, without explanation, are separated and transferred throughout the immigration system, “like packages.”\(^6\) Interviewees believe that the use of “alien” represents a complete disregard for what their clients have endured, including children who, in many cases in which the claim by the family is for asylum, have experienced “violence from their government, mistreatment, and trauma.” Iterations of alien and illegal, such as “criminal alien” or “criminal immigrant,” also have significant implications for non-U.S. citizens. While individuals unlawfully entering the United States might have criminal convictions, the use of the aforementioned terms “deems a person rather than an action” as the crime, encouraging their dehumanization at the hands of those tasked to process their immigration status.\(^7\)

There are several alternatives to the aforementioned terms that do not elicit offense and impose harm on individuals immigrating to the United States. First, the use of the terms, “alien” and “illegal,” including any their iterations, should be discouraged when possible. Instead, interviewees and researchers suggest the following replacements: undocumented immigrant, migrant, immigrant, person without authorization or documentation, and entry without inspection.\(^8\) These terms are more amenable because they do not reduce the individual to an act nor do they reinforce faulty assumptions and racist tropes, while still functioning to accurately categorize a foreign individual entering the United States.

### Law Enforcement/Public-Order Policing

A LEA’s capacity to enforce public order ranges from policing large protests to the everyday policing of public spaces.\(^9\) This broad range of authorities and operations present different challenges, particularly for DHS LEAs that must incorporate these authorities and opera-

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\(^5\) Haslam and Loughnan, 2014.

\(^6\) The formal zero-tolerance policy of separating families at the U.S. southern border was ended by a federal court order in June 2018. See Laura Jarrett, “Federal Judge Orders Reunification of Parents and Children, End to Most Family Separations at the Border,” CNN, June 27, 2018. Notwithstanding this, interviewees indicated that, in their experience, family members are still separate in some cases during various DHS processes and procedures at the border.


\(^8\) Frelick, 2014; Ngara, 2016.

tions, and the criminal justice system’s approved tactics, laws, and regulations into a variety of environments and situations. DHS LEAs like ICE, CBP, the Secret Service, the Federal Protective Service, and the U.S. Coast Guard are responsible for exercising police powers in the context of immigration enforcement, transnational criminal activity (e.g., smuggling, human trafficking, money laundering), border security, the protection of persons and property, maritime enforcement, and other areas. This places thousands of DHS officials and staff in situations in which they interact with individuals from communities across the spectrum under stressful and sometimes dangerous situations. As discussed in Chapter 1, the use of language and terms can be a critical element of these interactions and can help lead to safer, more-just outcomes if that language is respectful.

Correspondingly, the use of terms that are ambiguous, disrespectful, or offensive to the communities that DHS is policing can harm individuals and make it more difficult for DHS to enforce the laws they are responsible for in a just and safe manner that protects the security and dignity of people on either side of the badge. As part of the law enforcement/public-order policing analysis, such terms as “riot/rioter” and “looting/looter” were discussed among the interviewees. While several interviewees indicated that these are legal terms and that they are “definitely in the law,” the majority of them found them to be negative when used by law enforcement officials. They indicated that those legal terms are racially loaded and typically used to describe a certain demographics (i.e., Black and/or Brown communities).

Study participants also brought up the context in which these terms are used in circumstances where they had direct experience. Many stated that in the majority of these cases people were protesting various DHS actions or policies, and by using these terms the situations were unnecessarily escalated, leading to conflict and enforcement actions that might otherwise have been avoided. The importance of context is supported. Even when minority groups have engaged in nonviolent means of protesting, they are often “perceived as more violent than they are and requiring more repression by the state.”

However, it is important to note that law enforcement operators are not the only ones at fault in these instances. Criminal conduct by individuals and the media can contribute to these escalations. Criminal conduct might require law enforcement operators to use force, which heightens stress and makes it more difficult to maintain a peaceful and respectful event. Portrayals of the events in the news and on social media tend only to show the most-chaotic aspects of an event that might otherwise have been peaceful. Some of the interviewees recommended the use of less escalatory terms such as “protest(s)” and/or “protesting,” and the word “thief” in the cases of any stealing instead of “looter/looting.”

“Protest/protester” was found to be a neutral term for the majority of the interviewees, only one found it to be negative. It was deemed inoffensive and accurate in most instances. Like the terms above, one interviewee mentioned the importance of context and that while accurate, the issue is also “who is the term applied to and when is it applied.” That said, one

other interviewee indicated that protester is “an unpreferred way to categorize people based on favoritism.” It can also be used as an “excuse to engage in violence against the protester” and that based on their experience, when protesting, “people at the border were nervous [about the potential for an unjustified use of force] at least with the last administration and there were [news] articles on that.” Other preferred terms for protest/protestor also included “activist” and/or “demonstration/demonstrator.”

In situations dealing with detention, custody, and/or incarceration, two of the terms that were discussed were “feeding” and “bodies.” The majority of interviewees had a negative reaction to “feeding” and there was a unanimous consensus by all of them that “bodies” was a negative term. Within the law enforcement context, “feeding” is used to refer to the times in which meals are provided to people who are incarcerated. The participants found the term negative for two different reasons, it is an offensive/dehumanizing term, and it is also infantilizing. “Feeding” was deemed dehumanizing because participants associated the term with animals and being on a farm or in a barn. The term suggested that instead of referring to people, they were referring to animals and “feeding” cattle.

Other interviewees found the term infantilizing and immature because it was as if “you are talking to kindergartners” or feeding a baby “because they can’t feed themselves.” Different terms were suggested as preferred for “feeding” such as “meal provisions,” “dinnertime,” “suppertime,” and “meals/mealtime.” One interviewee commented and questioned the use of the word “feeding” when the word “mealtime” could be used instead bringing up the fact that by saying “feeding” you are not using an operational shorthand that saves time and that “once you start dehumanizing [like ‘feeding’], the abuse increases from those officials.”

Much like “feeding,” “bodies” had a negative connotation for the interviewees, all of them agreed that it was a negative term. Interviewees described the use of the term as follows: “dehumanizing,” “it reduces people to a thing rather than a person,” “treating people like packages,” “separates them from their personhood.” Five participants associated the term with death (i.e., a dead body or a corpse). Alternative terms could be “person,” “people,” “individual(s),” or using person-first language and saying a person who is incarcerated or detained.

Using dehumanizing terminology can have a particularly negative impact on those who are incarcerated or detained, given their lack of autonomy. Another participant stated that it “contributes to detention fatigue,” and presented a major challenge with their clients because some of them were “choosing to be deported because they can’t be in detention anymore.” The same participant stated that conditions and treatment like the ones mentioned above contribute to mental health issues because their clients are being dehumanized. Experiences like those only contribute to the increased lack of trust in DHS law enforcement officials, especially among underrepresented and marginalized communities.
Terrorism/Counterterrorism

Combating terrorism and sustaining effective counterterrorism operations is a key mission of DHS and one of the reasons it was created in the wake of the September 11, 2001 (9/11) attacks. Similar to law enforcement/public-order policing, language and terminology can play an essential role in effective operations and activities to combat terrorism. Again, the respectful treatment of individuals can build trust, which can be an essential element in creating the partnerships and gaining the intelligence and information needed to prevent terrorist acts before they occur. Likewise, negative, disrespectful or otherwise offensive terms and language can harm not only the individuals involved, but also damage DHS’s ability to combat terrorism.

Outdated lexicon related to terrorism emerges from narratives that are promulgated by the media. These narratives are often defined by significant events (e.g., 9/11) in U.S. history. While terrorism can come in many forms and be advanced by individuals and groups of various backgrounds and ideologies, it is commonly associated with individuals of the Islamic faith and individuals from countries where Islam is the official or dominant faith. As a result, “The over-simplification of Islam’s principles in American media has contributed to an ethnocentric bias among citizens.” The terms that elicited the most negative responses from our interviewees include “Jihadist,” “extremist,” and “terrorist.” To be clear, our interviewees do believe these terms have their time and place in both the operational and policy contexts, but they are against the unregulated and decontextualized use of these terms that can lead to dire consequences for those belonging to racially minoritized groups and minority religious faiths in the United States. In other words, as noted by an interviewee, these terms have “real meaning, and we are not using [them] for [their] real meaning.”

The aforementioned lexicon related to terrorism is most often used to target individuals with backgrounds from countries in the Middle East and South Asia, regions with a high concentration of Muslims, and to differentiate them from “real” (e.g., White, Christian) Americans. The misapplication of the lexicon casts those who might share similar physical traits with those committing geopolitical atrocities as threats to domestic security. While these terms (“Jihadist,” “extremist,” and “terrorist”) other the individuals and groups tar-

11 DHS, “Preventing Terrorism,” webpage, November 1, 2022c.
geted, as noted by the interviewees, their misuse can further cement racist tropes that might incite violence and trigger dangerous circumstances for these individuals. Additionally, any association with these terms that becomes public in any way can result in serious reputational damage that can negatively affect employment and social well-being. In effect, when Muslims and people from the Middle East and South Asia are considered “terrorists,” for example, they are inherently, and sometimes irrevocably, criminalized.

Among a few interviewees, domestic terrorism has increasingly been used to categorize “White supremacists” or “to highlight the gravity of domestic violence.” The application of “terrorist” in these contexts appeared to be less problematic for interviewees, although legal scholars warn that “due to the serious negative implications of expanding the framework of terrorism into new subject and legal areas, it is critical to carefully analyze the impact of reconceptualizing intimate partner abuse in such a manner.” In other words, shifting the use of these terms to another discrete group can repeat the damaging effects on that new group. This can be said about all the outdated lexicon within the context of terrorism. The interviewees did not suggest modifications or replacements to these terms, just the need to apply them selectively and with the appropriate context and distinctions.

Other Trends Identified in Interviews

During the interviews, we identified additional terms that warranted discussion. While not directly related to immigration, policing, and terrorism, the implications of these terms should be considered.

Other than Mexican

The majority of the interviewees (eight entities), including those who had never heard the term OTM before, meaning other than Mexican, found the term to be negative and offensive. After explaining the context in which it is used, typically by CBP, there was a preference over identifying the individual countries, their ethnicity, or indicating whether they were coming from a contiguous country or not, so as to ensure the proper legal distinction was made if that was appropriate. During the discussions, a couple of issues with using “OTM” were brought up. In terms of data collection, some participants indicated that using “OTM” would lead to inaccurate data collection, because they would not be able to accurately indicate what percentages of the population came from which nation. Another concern was the use of abbreviations and shorthand; during an interview one participant stated that “when you have a long phrase, and we are interacting with long phrases it is natural to want to make


18 See 8 U.S.C. § 1223, Entry Through or from Foreign Territory and Adjacent Islands.
them short.” However, when using shorthand in reference to a marginalized group of people “those terms are going to develop a negative connotation. It’s not the language, but the stigmatization of people.”

Similar sentiments were shared by other interviewees, as some indicated that they found the term to be “super offensive” and using such a broad term will lead to “assumptions of who is coming to the country and the lumping of them together with people from various backgrounds and countries that might be different. It’s important to identify people, and not just as ‘other than Mexican.’ People [are] coming from very different experiences [and countries]. It [i.e., the proper terminology] would need to be something more specific” and using terms like “OTM” “highlights people’s stereotypes of who is undocumented.” A shared recommendation for this term “is moving away from the shorthand and focusing on what is happening to the person.”

Latinx

The increasing commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion has encouraged many U.S. organizations to update and modify their institutional vocabulary. One such term that has been incorporated to reflect a more-inclusive lexicon and culture is “Latinx.” This term is considered, by many, to be a gender-inclusive alternative to “Latino/a,” which denotes an individual’s gender identity along the traditional gender binary (e.g., man/woman) and ties to a culture or country in Latin America. By using “Latinx,” an organization signals its commitment to acknowledge and include those who identify outside those traditional norms of the gender binary spectrum.

When presented to our SMEs, “Latinx” elicited mixed reactions, especially from our participants primarily working with individuals and communities from Latin American countries. While everyone agrees on the inclusive intent of this new term, “Latinx” also can be perceived as “bastardizing someone’s language,” as noted by one interviewee. “Latinx” is considered a U.S. invention and not largely recognized by individuals from Latin American countries, which is why, for some, “Latinx” is an extension of a long history of colonialism. Rather than assuming that “Latinx,” by default, would be the most appropriate in any situation, such organizations as DHS could be more inclusive by offering individuals with a choice (e.g., Latino, Latina, Latinx).

Gender-Inclusive Language

The interviewees noted that some of their clients identify as transgender or nonbinary. These clients experience harm when the system, or one of its representatives, misgenders or limits

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them to traditional gender norms (e.g., woman/man, he/him, she/her). Individuals can experience negative mental health outcomes when a category, that is misaligned with how they identify, is imposed on them.\textsuperscript{20} According to one interviewee, “I have a lot of trans clients and until they legally change their names and gender identity, DHS identifies them with the legal name and gender that they are assigned at birth regardless of what I say to them . . . . It makes it really hard [for them] to trust this government and it’s really hurtful.”

While federal agencies act on the official records that might deviate from how an individual identifies, interviewees were in agreement that, to the extent practicable, agencies should make every effort to recognize and engage with individuals in a manner that reflects how they see themselves. This effort might include asking the individual how they identity and to use the proper gender and pronouns in conversation and adding supplemental notes to their records indicating this preference. Interviewees were consistent in their belief that using the individual’s preferred terms of reference would make for safer, more-productive, and more-beneficial interactions with DHS officials.

\textsuperscript{20} McLemore, 2014.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Negative</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Preferred Terms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Immigration</td>
<td>Alien</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Migrant(s), immigrant(s), foreign national, people, person, noncitizen, or person who is undocumented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alienage</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>Nationality, country of origin, heritage, foreign</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Undocumented alien</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td>No preferred terms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Illegal alien</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>Migrant(s), immigrant(s), person from another country, undocumented, people without authorization/documentation, entry without inspection, person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Illegal/illegals</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>Immigrant(s), person, person who is undocumented, noncitizen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assimilation</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>Integration, belonging/sense of belonging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Immigrant assimilation</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>Integration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Refugee assimilation</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>Integration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Immigrant</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Naturalized citizen</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Citizen or person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Undocumented</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Unauthorized, people without documents, people without authorization in the United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anchor baby</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>Citizen or child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unlawful (immigrant, person, or entry)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Undocumented entry, entry without inspection/authority/authorization, nonregularized/unlawful entry, undocumented, person</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Refugee</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Asylum seeker/applicant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Asylee (or asylum seeker)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Person who is seeking asylum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UAC or unaccompanied minor</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>Unaccompanied minor(s), unaccompanied child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Family unit</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Illegal entry</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>Unregulated/unlawful entry, entry without authorization/inspection(s)/permit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exotics</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>People, individual(s), foreign national</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5.1—Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Negative</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Preferred Terms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public-order policing</td>
<td>Feeding</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>Meal provisions, providing food, mealtime, dinnertime, suppertime, meals, this is where meals are served</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Target</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td>Suspect or describe the person who they are seeking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Detainee</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>Person in detainment, person who is detained, adult in detention, detained person, person who has been detained, person who is detained at this facility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inmate</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>Detainee, detained person, incarcerated person, person in prison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Incarcerated</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>Detained person, incarcerated person, person in prison, person in custody or person incarcerated at “x” jail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prisoner</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>Detained person, incarcerated person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bodies</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Individual(s), person(s), people, person who is detained, person who is incarcerated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Subject</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>Person in custody, person who is apprehended by the police, respondent, use the person’s name, person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Protest/protester</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td>Demonstration, activist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disturbance/civil disturbance</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>No preferred term</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Demonstration</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>No preferred term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Civil disobedience</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>No preferred term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Civil disorder</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>Civil disobedience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Riot/rioter</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>Protest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Looting/looter</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>Thief (if there is stealing) or protest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trespassing/trespasser</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td>No preferred term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vandalism/vandal</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td>Person who commits the crime, person who has trespassed, person who has engaged in vandalism, property damage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terrorism</td>
<td>Extremist</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>Name the position of the person (i.e., animal rights activist)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Domestic terrorist</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td>Terrorist or describe the act that someone is suspect of or have committed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Terrorist</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>No preferred term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jihadist</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>Terrorist or describe the person’s beliefs or actions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Radical</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td>Radical left/right</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Preferred Terms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General demographics</td>
<td>Male/female</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td>Add nonbinary, cisgender, transgender, men, women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Minor or youth</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Child, youth, this “x” year-old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>OTM (Other than Mexican)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>Name the specific country or region (i.e., people from “x” country, use “noncontinuous.”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BIPOC</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Person of color (POC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Black (about a person)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>No preferred term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td>No preferred term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brown (about a person)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td>No preferred term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Person of color (POC)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>People of color</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Arab (about a person)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>Middle Eastern, African, specify the country they are from (i.e., someone from “Egypt,” AMESMA [Arab, Middle Eastern, Muslim and South Asian])</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Foreign/foreigner</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>Foreign national, person from abroad, person from “x” country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Asian (about a person)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td>Asian-American, AAPI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hispanic (about a person)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td>Latino, Latina, Latinx</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Latin, Latino/Latina, Latinx</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Latino, Latina, Latine, Latinx</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Indian (referring to Indigenous people or matters related to them)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td>American Indian, Alaskan Indian, Indigenous people/folks, person who speaks “x” language, first people, Native</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: The numbers in this table reflect the number of entities. Thus, each entry indicates the total number of CBOs that provided the response for the “positive,” “negative,” and “neutral” columns. The “preferred terms” column represents a qualitative summary of the combined responses from individuals interviewed from all CBOs. Although there was some occasional disagreement among responses with CBO groups, they were not significant enough so as not to be able to aggregate the responses for each column.
CHAPTER 6

Inclusive Language Guidance from Other Public-Serving Organizations

According to the Linguistic Society of America, “Inclusive language acknowledges diversity, conveys respect to all people, is sensitive to differences, and promotes equal opportunities.”\(^1\) Guidance from the National Institute of Standards and Technology states that inclusive language “maintains neutrality, avoiding unpleasant emotions or connotations brought on by more divisive language.”\(^2\) Many public-serving entities have published guidance for inclusive or bias-free language, including principles for choosing terms, lists of terms to avoid based on those principles with preferred terms, and glossaries.\(^3\) Style guides for journalism and publishing also provide such information. For example, the *AMA Manual of Style* recommends, “Avoid the use of language that imparts bias against persons or groups on the basis of gender or sex, race or ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, or disability or disorder. Avoid generalizations without context (such as minorities) and stereotypes and be specific when choosing words to describe people.”\(^4\) The *AP Style Guide*,\(^5\) a comprehensive guide for writers and editors, offers detailed guidance on inclusive language and is cited as a reference in numerous other inclusive-language resources.

For this analysis, we conducted manual searches for publicly available guides to inclusive language from public-serving institutions and agencies and from private-sector organizations and individual authors. We found little published guidance on bias-free terminology specifically by or for LEAs, but we did find evidence that some city and state governments are developing guidance for inclusive language, which could later apply to all agencies in those governments, including law enforcement. From thousands of results, we reviewed a subset

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3 It is worth noting that we did not find such published guidance for any LEAs.
based on holistic assessments of their relevance to public-serving missions. In this chapter, we highlight key concepts and principles that were repeated across various sources. We also list a small sampling of inclusive language guidance for easy reference.

**Key Principles for Inclusive, Bias-Free Language**

Several principles surfaced repeatedly among the guides we reviewed. Not coincidentally, they generally align with the interview findings in Chapters 4 and 5 and include using person-centered, rather than condition-centered language and avoiding dehumanizing terms that define a person or people by a circumstance; including only the descriptors that are needed in the immediate context; avoiding terms with negative connotations regardless of the person(s) they are used to describe; using bias-free terms to refer to aspects of a person’s identity; and anticipating that the lexicon of appropriate words and terms will change over time, meaning that organizations and individuals must continue their efforts to establish and sustain an inclusive, bias-free lexicon and an organizational culture that continues to incorporate the needed changes. Below, we illustrate the principles with examples pertinent to DHS contexts.

**Use Person-Centered Language**

This principle was conveyed either directly or indirectly in nearly every resource we reviewed. Consistent with the interview data described earlier, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance prioritizes person-centered language and explains why, as in the following excerpt.6

Avoid dehumanizing language. Use person-first language instead.

Describe people as having a condition or circumstance, not being a condition. A case is an instance of disease, not a person. Use patient to refer to someone receiving healthcare. Humanize those you are referring to by using people or persons. (See Table 6.1)

As researchers, we recognize that person-first language requires more words and that those words take more time and energy to say. Many speakers might prefer short terms that feel faster, easier, and more convenient. As a result, people often resort to labels and/or compress longer phrases into acronyms that might seem more efficient. While the brevity of an acronym reduces the time to utter it, it also obscures the original meaning. (For example, the acronym “snafu,” which is now used as a noun, camouflages a coarse term represented by the letter “f.”) Furthermore, because acronyms are not transparent, their meanings change easily—and often toward the negative in an us-versus-them environment. From Table 6.1, the

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6 CDC, “Key Principles,” webpage, August 2, 2022a.
acronym MSM is dehumanizing, as is “OTM,” which was discussed in Chapter 5. It is difficult to conjure even one scenario in which either term would connote respect.

While person-first language is not a perfect solution, its drawbacks should be weighed against the downsides to the shorter, easier terms that might replace them. The shorter terms can be dehumanizing and lead to less-human treatment for some, especially people in situations that reduce or remove their autonomy. At the time of this report, person-first language is widely (although not universally) recommended to avoid the negative effects of dehumanizing labels. However, we can safely predict that the preference for this approach will change with time and use.

**Avoid Labels and Terms with Inherent Negative Connotations**

The following examples of biased terms with less-biased alternatives demonstrate how negative labels and terms can powerfully influence perceptions of a reader or listener. They pertain to criminal justice and/or immigration contexts (See Table 6.2).
CDC guidance further notes:

Use accurate and clearly defined terms when referring to foreign-born persons. For example, do not use “refugee” if you mean “immigrant . . . . “Refugee” and “migrant” are often used interchangeably. Confusion in the use and understanding of these terms can impact the lives and safety of refugees and asylum-seekers. Refugees who leave their homes may be entitled to a range of legal protections and aid to which migrants are not entitled.7

The alternative terms in these examples are not only person-centered; they also avoid using labels that communicate negative associations regardless of the person(s) about whom they are used. They demonstrate how the choice of words clearly affects the connotative meaning conveyed. In law enforcement situations, using terms with negative connotations can introduce bias and/or reinforce existing biases, increasing risk for the people and groups

7 CDC, “Preferred Terms for Select Population Groups & Communities,” webpage, November 3, 2022b.
about whom the terms are used, and heightening the potential for discrimination and systemic inequities. As noted above, the terms “immigrant,” “refugee,” and “migrant” differ in meaning; therefore, using the most accurate and appropriate term can seriously affect a person’s life and safety.

Use Bias-Free Terms to Refer to Aspects of a Person’s Identity

Numerous guides provide inclusive, bias-free options to write or speak about a person’s ability and/or disability, age, gender, nationality, race, ethnicity, religion, and sexual orientation. For example, regarding race and ethnicity, see Table 6.3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 6.3</th>
<th>Examples of Person-Centered Language (personal identity)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instead of This . . .</strong></td>
<td><strong>Try This . . .</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referring to people as their race/ethnicity (e.g., Blacks, Hispanics, Latinos, Whites, American Indians)</td>
<td>Black or African American persons; Black persons; Latino persons, White persons, etc.; people who identify with more than one race; people of more than one race; persons of multiple races</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referring to people as colored people, colored Indian (referring to American Indians)</td>
<td>Black or African American persons; Black persons; Latino persons, White persons, etc.; people who identify with more than one race; people of more than one race; persons of multiple races</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>American Indian, Indigenous American, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander person/community/population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eskimo</td>
<td>Alaska Native person/community/population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oriental</td>
<td>Asian Americans; Asian persons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afro-American</td>
<td>Black or African American persons; Black persons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negro</td>
<td>Black or African American persons; Black persons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>White persons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The [racial/ethnic] community (e.g., “the Black community”)</td>
<td>People who identify as [race, nationality, ethnicity]; [for household] mixed status households; people who identify with more than one race; people of more than one race; persons of multiple races</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-White (used with or without specifying non-Hispanic or Latino)</td>
<td>Hispanic or Latino persons; Latinx has been proposed as a gender-neutral English term, but there is debate around its usage. Its use might be considered on an audience-specific basis; Latino (individual man, group of men, or group of people including men and women); Latina (individual woman or group of women)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: CDC, “Preferred Terms for Select Population Groups & Communities,” webpage, November 3, 2022b.
Choose Accurate and Appropriately Specific Wording Without Extraneous Descriptors

A recurring theme among inclusive language guides is the importance of choosing words that are not only accurate but also specific. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends: “Be as specific as possible when referring to groups or subjects. Specificity provides clarity and avoids multiple interpretations or misinterpretations.”8 For example, avoid using “man” or “men” if one means “all people.” Furthermore, instead of “kid,” be more precise by using “infant,” “adolescent,” or “young adult.”

At the same time, one should avoid introducing specific characteristics that are extraneous and “ensure that all references to a person’s religion, age, ethnicity, gender, or any other identity marker are relevant to the point being made.”9 For example, instead of saying “a female officer answered the call,” simply saying “an officer answered the call” might be sufficient. Similarly, simply saying “immigrant” instead of “gay immigrant” is more respectful when the person’s sexual orientation is unrelated to the context.

Expect Language and Terminology to Change

As discussed in Chapter 3, language inevitably changes. Every guide we viewed contained the important caveat that the principles and terminology will certainly change over time. The guides were presented as *living documents*, acknowledging the frequency and necessity of updates. Just as such terms as “alien,” “foreigner,” “handicapped,” “homosexual,” “Oriental,” and “Colored,” were once accepted as neutral, but are now seen as pejorative, many of the terms considered acceptable or even preferred today might come to be viewed very differently. Furthermore, the durability of any term is unknown; connotations can morph quickly under the pressures of active social discourse and societal change. For all who seek to use inclusive, bias-free language, the attention and effort must be ongoing.

Inclusive Language Guides from Other Organizations

Table 6.4 provides a sampling of inclusive language guidance from other organizations. The marks in the columns on the right indicate the type of guidance each resource offers.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source Agency or Entity</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Provides Principles</th>
<th>Suggests Preferred Terms</th>
<th>Contains Glossary</th>
<th>Gives Further Resources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AAP</td>
<td>Words Matter: AAP Guidance on Inclusive, Anti-Biased Language</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Medical Association (AMA)</td>
<td>AMA Manual of Style</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Medical Association, American Association for Health Equity</td>
<td>Advancing Health Equity: A Guide to Language, Narrative, and Concepts</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Psychological Association (APA)</td>
<td>Inclusive Language Guidelines</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APA</td>
<td>APA Publication Manual, including Guidelines for Reducing Bias</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-Defamation League</td>
<td>Guidelines for Achieving Bias-Free Communication</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AP</td>
<td>AP Style Guide</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California State University</td>
<td>Diversity/Inclusivity Style Guide</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Center for Integration and Improvement of Journalism, San Francisco State University</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Racial Equity Terms and Definitions</td>
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<td>Terminology Guide</td>
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<th>Suggests Preferred Terms</th>
<th>Contains Glossary</th>
<th>Gives Further Resources</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Association of Counties</td>
<td>Diversity Equity and Inclusion: Key Terms and Definitions&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Center on Disability and Journalism (NCDJ)</td>
<td>NCDJ Style Guide</td>
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<td>x</td>
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<tr>
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<td>x</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American Journalists Association</td>
<td>Reporting and Indigenous Terminology</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>New York City Department of Health</td>
<td>Race to Justice Glossary</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Racial Equity Tools</td>
<td>Racial Equity Tools Glossary</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Alabama at Birmingham</td>
<td>Inclusive Language Guide</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: DIB = Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging.


Advancing Inclusive Language in DHS

In this chapter, we describe our findings and present DHS CRCL with recommendations based on the research and analysis conducted. In sum, our research and analysis strongly indicate that updating the DHS lexicon would very likely be beneficial for the numerous individuals of various racial, ethnic, religious, and social groups over whom DHS has authority and jurisdiction. Person-centric and inclusive language can lead to better outcomes in the context of enforcing laws in the immigration, law enforcement/public-order policing, and terrorism/counterterrorism domains. A dedicated focus to using person-centric and inclusive language should not be dismissed as “woke,” or as a political, progressive, or partisan issue. Respect and dignity in human interactions, particularly in high-stress, high-impact interactions, are essential factors in maintaining safety, security, and effective outcomes for individuals on both sides of the law enforcement badge.

In general, the research supports the use of respectful language by LEAs to achieve better procedural justice. We find that the use of inclusive, person-centric terms and language is an essential element to what constitutes respectful language. Alternatively, the used of racialized, demeaning, dehumanizing, offensive, embarrassing, humiliating, othering, or otherwise negative terms and language can harm the individuals psychologically and emotionally in interactions with DHS officials and staff, and therefore, should be avoided to the greatest extent possible. Additionally, research shows that terms and language changes over time. Thus, where the use of terms and language is at issue, DHS should continue to regularly update its lexicon. This dynamic approach will position DHS to ensure the best possible outcomes with respect to future law enforcement and administrative interactions with individuals.

Findings

Based on the foregoing research and analysis in this report, we make three findings with respect to the current DHS lexicon and DHS lexicon processes and procedures, as they are applied to individuals under DHS’s jurisdiction and authority.
The Current DHS Lexicon Is Insufficiently Inclusive and Person-Centric

The DHS lexicon, both formalized (in current laws, regulations, instructions manuals, memoranda, guidebooks, etc.) and informal (immigration, law enforcement/public-order policing, and terrorism/counterterrorism vernacular), contains terms and language that are insulting, demeaning, dehumanizing, offensive, embarrassing, othering, or otherwise make individuals feel uncomfortable, marginalized, disrespected, or unsafe. The lexicon fails to consider and incorporate specific terms that are inclusive and person-centric.

The Current DHS Lexicon Includes Terms Recognized as Harmful and Is Not Consistent with Best Practices for Law Enforcement

As applied by department personnel, the current DHS lexicon, with its persistent and ubiquitous terms such as “alien,” “illegal,” “assimilation,” “inmate/prisoner/detainee,” (when used in the wrong context), “OTM,” “bodies,” and others (See Table 5.1) is very likely harming individuals psychologically and emotionally. Additionally, because these terms are harmful and not considered respectful by those individuals about whom they are applied, DHS—as a LEA—is not applying the best practice of treating individuals with fairness and respect, which can reduce the likelihood of effective law enforcement outcomes during interactions.

The DHS Lexicon Shortcomings Are Most Likely Due to Organizational Culture, Processes, and Procedures

The insufficient nature of the current DHS lexicon was not due to any individual-level or institutional-level animus directed toward particular individuals or a group of individuals. Instead, where there are lexicon inadequacies, it appears to be the result of institutional lethargy and the static adherence to, and continued socialization of, archaic or antiquated terms in the immigration, law enforcement/public-order policing, and terrorism/counterterrorism domain. For example, the term “alien” dates back to the 1798 Alien and Sedition Acts.1 We note that the incorporation of these types of terms in law is the responsibility of Congress and not DHS. However, the DHS promulgation of these terms in DHS regulations and policy memoranda might be an area for the department to examine further. Additionally, DHS policies regarding its lexicon and the use and generation of terms do not address the issue of inclusive and person-centric language.

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Recommendations

To address the above findings, we make the following recommendations:

Update the DHS Lexicon and Create Dynamic Processes and Procedures to Ensure Its Continued Appropriateness

Because terms and language are dynamic, DHS should consider instituting process and procedural changes that will keep the department’s lexicon from getting stale, static, or otherwise inclusive of negative terminology. Initially, the results of this report might be useful in updating the current DHS Lexicon (both formal and informal). DHS leadership should also consider updating, revising, amending, or otherwise issuing new departmentwide directives, instructions, manuals, and policy memoranda to stress the use of inclusive, person-centric language by all employees in a manner that aligns with departmental diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts, and incorporates these principles. Leadership is essential for changing institutional culture in a manner that will endure long-term.

Create Mechanisms to Support the Incorporation of Inclusive and Person-Centric Language

To ensure DHS leadership and personnel develop and maintain a continuously updated lexicon, the department should consider creating the following mechanism to partner with CBOs:

- Form independent committees and/or working groups to focus on appropriate terms and language to develop subject-matter expertise in this area.
  - Address common pitfalls unique to DHS, such as acronyms, shorthand, speaker’s intentions regarding connotative versus denotative meaning, less-conscious use of othering terms, etc.
- Designate a regularized review and amendment process of the lexicon, to be performed by the appropriate committee or working group.
- Take advantage of current community engagement opportunities (e.g., town halls, regular field meetings, and other interactions) to discuss and collect feedback on lexicon issues.
- Collect, review, and align publicly available style manuals from CBOs and other organizations (described in Chapter 5) for current appropriate terms for lexicon updates.
- Improve the CRCL complaint system to better address lexicon issues and provide feedback to complainants when issues are mitigated and/or resolved.
Training
Training for all DHS personnel, including those in the highest positions, is essential. It must thoroughly prepare the top leaders in DHS agencies to model and promote the new lexicon and the ethos associated with the new lexicon. Establish a standard by which using a bias-free lexicon is a matter of professional responsibility. Incorporate DHS lexicon issues into current DHS leadership and employee training programs. This training should focus particularly on the research-based findings that (1) fair and respectful treatment of individuals by the department is likely to lead to better outcomes for both DHS employees and those individuals over whom DHS has jurisdiction and authority, and (2) respectful treatment includes the use of inclusive, person-centric language, particularly for minority and historically marginalized groups, and groups for whom DHS focuses its immigration, law enforcement/public-order policing, and terrorism/counterterrorism mission activities. Such training should also be designed to foster empathy, which might help mitigate the tendency to revert to short terms that dehumanize people with whom DHS interacts.2

Conclusion
DHS is a large and complex organization with a diverse mission set that places its employees in daily interaction with individuals across the racial, national, religious, and social group spectrum. These interactions are very often high-stakes, high-stress events focused on the enforcement and administration of some of the nation’s most important laws (e.g., immigration, law enforcement/public-order policing, and terrorism/counterterrorism). Language is a key aspect of these interactions. Currently, the use of certain terms and language by DHS personnel is resulting in less-than-optimal outcomes that are harming individuals under the department’s jurisdiction and making the job of securing the homeland more difficult for its employees. However, DHS is in a position to update the terms and language it uses, and in a position to create a state of continuous institutional improvement with respect to its lexicon. According to our findings and recommendations, DHS—through an improved lexicon—can improve outcomes for the fair and respectful treatment of individuals over whom it has authority and, in doing so, improve outcomes for its employees and the goals and objectives of the department as a whole.

2 DHS might incur additional costs and administrative burdens associated with changes to its training programs. This could be a topic for further study and evaluation should DHS seek to implement these recommendations.
APPENDIX A

Interview Protocol

Below is a copy of the protocol we used to interview the 15 individuals across the nine CBOs representing individuals under the jurisdiction and authority of DHS. These organizations represent a diverse population of individuals from across racial, national, religious, and social group designations.

Background

1. Could you tell us about your background and how it has caused you to come to interact with DHS?
   a. If part of a community-based organization or advocacy group, what is your position and does your position cause you to interact with DHS?

2. Is there a particular group (e.g., racial, ethnic, religious, or social group) for which you advocate for or otherwise represent in your current role?

Interactions With the Department

3. Can you describe your interactions with DHS?
   a. Do you interact with officials or do you represent individuals who interact with DHS?
   b. Do you interact (or represent individuals who interact) with DHS in person or through applications, correspondence, or other documentation, or through more than one of these methods?
   c. How frequent are these interactions and over what period of time have they taken place?
   a. Do you inform DHS of the racial, ethnic, religious, or social group that you identify with during these interactions. If so, how?
DHS Terminology

4. During these interactions with DHS, have DHS officials (either orally or in writing) used terminology that you find insulting, offensive, embarrassing, or that otherwise makes you feel uncomfortable, marginalized, disrespected, or unsafe?
   a. Can you describe these terms?
   b. Have you ever filed a complaint regarding the use of these terms? If so, which terms were the basis of the complaint?
   c. If you filed a complaint, was there an outcome or decision? If so, do you feel comfortable sharing that information with us today?

5. In addition to the terms you describe above, some of DHS’s current terminology includes the following (see chart below). We would like to get your reaction to these terms. For each term, how does it come across to you? For example, does it feel negative, positive, neutral? Please comment openly about terms you find insulting, offensive, uncomfortable, or negative in any way. And, for each one, let us know if there is a term you would prefer instead, and why.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Reaction / Feeling</th>
<th>Preferred Term (if any)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alien</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Alienage</td>
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<tr>
<td>Illegal Alien</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Illegal/Illegals</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Immigrant</td>
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<td>Naturalized (citizen)</td>
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<td>Undocumented</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anchor Baby</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unlawful (immigrant, person, or entry)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refugee</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Asylee (or asylum seeker)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assimilation</td>
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<td>Immigrant Assimilation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Refugee Assimilation</td>
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<td>Unaccompanied Alien Child (UAC) or Unaccompanied Minor</td>
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<td>Reaction / Feeling</td>
<td>Preferred Term (if any)</td>
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<td>Exotics(^1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Target(^2)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Extremist (and/or prefaced with: animal rights, abortion, anti-government, black supremacist, white supremacist, environmental, homegrown, militia, racial skinhead, sovereign citizen, incel)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Domestic Terrorist</td>
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<td>Terrorist</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jihadist</td>
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<td>Radical</td>
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<tr>
<td>Protest/Protester</td>
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<tr>
<td>Disturbance/Civil Disturbance</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Civil Disobedience</td>
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<td>Civil Disorder</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riot/Rioter</td>
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<td>Looting/Looter</td>
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<td>Trespassing/Trespasser</td>
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<td>African American</td>
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<tr>
<td>Person of color, POC</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arab (about a person)</td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

\(^1\) e.g., “Subject is a 32-year-old Mexican national.”

\(^2\) e.g., “A high number of exotics are seeking to enter at the border,” or “the person attempted entry while carrying a number of exotics (as in exotic items).”

\(^3\) e.g., “She is an OTM.” “A group of OTMs were apprehended.”

\(^4\) e.g., “It’s feeding time now.” “This is where feeding occurs.” “6pm is when feeding is.”

\(^5\) e.g., “Target was apprehended outside his home.”
### Preferred Terminology

6. Beyond the terms we just discussed, can you think of other words or phrases that could be used in matters of immigration, homeland security, and/or law enforcement that:
   a. Concern you in any way because they may be disrespectful, disempowering, and/or “othering” to certain individuals or groups? Even if they strike you as “not quite right” or “off” in some way that you might not be able to fully explain?
   b. You wish would become part of the government’s lexicon to be more respectful to the people it interacts with?

7. Are there sources of terminology for you or your group that DHS can reference when attempting to develop terminology that is more acceptable? If yes, please provide details.
   a. Are there any other information sources (such as web sites, books, articles, etc.) that you recommend we look at for more insight to selecting respectful terminology for your group and/or others?

8. Do you believe your interactions with DHS would be improved if your preferred terminology was used by DHS officials? If so, how and why? If not, why not?

9. Do you believe your communications with DHS would be improved if your preferred terminology was used by DHS officials? If so, how and why? If not, why not?

10. Can you describe terminology that you or your group uses to refer to activities that you or your group engage in that trigger interactions with DHS (e.g., protesting, marching, demonstrating, speaking out, advocacy, etc.) that is more acceptable or that would not convey something disrespectful toward the activity or the people participating?

11. Do you have any other suggestions or insights that you would like to offer with regard to DHS’s use of terminology related to you or your group?

12. Based on our discussion today, are there questions you believe we should have asked but did not? And are there other people or organizations that you would recommend we reach out to for their perspectives on this topic?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Reaction / Feeling</th>
<th>Preferred Term (if any)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foreign, Foreigner</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian (about a person)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic (about a person)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Latin, Latino/a, Latinx (about a person)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian (referring to indigenous people or matters related to them)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others?</td>
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</table>
Keyword Search Terms for Literature Review

The following table comprises the keyword search terms that we used to collect the empirical, peer-reviewed, resources that supported our research and analysis. These terms were used to query the following databases: Google Scholar, CRS reports, Criminal Justice Abstracts, HeinOnline, Knowledge Services Discovery, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) iLibrary, Policy File Index, Sociological Abstracts, Scopus, Web of Science, and World Bank eLibrary.

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<td>Immigration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>“civil disobedience” OR “civil disorder” OR “community policing” OR “crowd control” OR “public demonstration” OR “discriminatory policing” OR “disorderly conduct” OR “disturbance” OR “first amendment event” OR “first amendment protected event” OR “incitement to violence” OR “lawful protest” OR “looting” OR “march” OR “mass protest” OR “obstruction” OR “police strategy” OR “police tactic” OR “policing model” OR “policing public order” OR “protest policing” OR “protest” OR “public order policing” OR “public order” OR “public-order policing” OR “rally” OR “riot control” OR “riot police” OR “riot” OR “tampering” OR “targeted violence” OR “trespassing” OR “unlawful assembly” OR “public vandalism”</td>
<td>Public-order policing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>“anarchist extremist” OR “animal rights extremist” OR “anti-abortion extremist” OR “anti-government extremist” OR “anti-terror” OR “antiterror” OR “black supremacist extremist” OR “counter-terrorism” OR “CT” OR “defeat terror” OR “domestic terror” OR “environment rights extremist” OR “extremist” OR “homegrown violent extremist” OR “international terror” OR “lone offender” OR “militia extremist” OR “national security” OR “profiling” OR “racial skinhead extremist” OR “radicalization” OR “sovereign citizen extremist” OR “surveillance” OR “targeted violent” OR “terror facilitator” OR “terror” OR “terrorism” OR “unwitting co-optee” OR “violent extremism” OR “white supremacist extremist”</td>
<td>Terrorism/counter-terrorism</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AANHPI</td>
<td>Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AAP</td>
<td>American Academy of Pediatrics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AAPI</td>
<td>Asian American Pacific Islander</td>
</tr>
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<td>AP</td>
<td>Associated Press</td>
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<td>APIDA</td>
<td>Asian Pacific Islander Desi American</td>
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<tr>
<td>BIPOC</td>
<td>Black, Indigenous, and people of color</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBOs</td>
<td>community-based organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBP</td>
<td>Customs and Border Protection</td>
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<tr>
<td>CDC</td>
<td>Centers for Disease Control and Prevention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COVID-19</td>
<td>coronavirus disease 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRCL</td>
<td>Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRS</td>
<td>Congressional Research Service</td>
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<tr>
<td>DHS</td>
<td>U.S. Department of Homeland Security</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EO</td>
<td>Executive Order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FFRDC</td>
<td>federally funded research and development center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HSOAC</td>
<td>Homeland Security and Operational Analysis Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HSRD</td>
<td>Homeland Security Research Division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICE</td>
<td>Immigration and Customs Enforcement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEA</td>
<td>law enforcement agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OTM</td>
<td>other than Mexican</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SME</td>
<td>subject-matter expert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UAC</td>
<td>unaccompanied alien child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USCIS</td>
<td>U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services</td>
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</table>
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EO—See Executive Order.


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In this report, the authors provide the U.S. Department of Homeland Security’s (DHS’s) Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties with analysis of the department’s use of terminology in referring to people in certain racial, ethnic, national, and religious groups. The authors also identify ways to improve departmental documentation, processes, and procedures and create an organizational culture that supports the lasting implementation of updated terminology.

This comprehensive analytic document (1) contains guidance that would enable DHS to update terminology that aligns with the proposed 2021 U.S. Citizenship Act and (2) identifies ways for DHS to foster an organizational culture that supports the ongoing use of the updated terminology in three principal categories: immigration, public order policing, and terrorism/counterterrorism. This report will inform DHS efforts to develop a departmental lexicon consistent with current Executive Orders, the objectives of the U.S. Citizenship Act, and recently issued departmental policies regarding the use of certain terminology.