



# **The Road Less Traveled: Exploring the Experiences and Successes of Women Leaders in Homeland Security (Defense)**

*Naval Postgraduate School*

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# The Road Less Traveled: Exploring the Experiences and Successes of Women Leaders in Homeland Security (Defense)

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Today, women constitute over 50% of the United States' population. Yet, women are still a minority in many workforce fields, including homeland security. A woman currently leads the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, and women have achieved high levels of leadership within the federal homeland security apparatus. While great strides are being made, women are still clearly the minority and hold an average of 20% of leadership positions in homeland security related professions, such as law enforcement, fire, and emergency management. These numbers do not reflect the success that women who achieve leadership positions in the homeland security profession experience. Qualitative research was conducted through personal interviews with 14 women who currently hold, or have previously held, top leadership positions in federal, state or local agencies with homeland security responsibilities. Data gathered from these interviews shows that women are succeeding in homeland security leadership positions due to various factors including experience, education, the influence of strong mentors and role models, personality traits like tenacity and confidence, having vision, and their ability to overcome obstacles and barriers and take advantage of opportunities available to them.

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