

Report: Capitol Police Were Severely Unprepared To Handle Events Of Jan. 6, 2021

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U.S. Capitol Police lacked guidance and training to handle the rioters at the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, a new [report](#) says.

The report from the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) found that most of the 315 officers interviewed felt severely unprepared to handle any unauthorized breach of Capitol property. The report reaffirms what multiple other watchdog organizations labeled as a massive security failure by the Capitol Police and [House of Representatives leaders](#), who failed to give the officers clear direction and autonomy to make security decisions.

At least 211 of the officers testified to GAO that they had little to no guidance from leaders in the force before the events despite [intelligence indicating](#) there would be a major demonstration and

possibly rowdy crowd. Even during the height of the Capitol riot, at least 209 officers admitted that instructions were "slightly clear, not at all clear, or not provided."

At least 80 respondents also claimed they were hesitant to use force against violators due to "fear of disciplinary actions" from the department and a lack of understanding about what kind of force would be appropriate to use against rioters. As a result, more than half of the officers questioned by the GAO, 180, said they desired more training that is "realistic" and gives practical steps to control a crowd.

After the 2020 summer of destructive riots, when polls showed a [lack of confidence in law enforcement](#), it's no surprise that [understaffed](#) police departments would urge their officers to cut back on potentially controversial actions to avoid becoming a target for racial justice rioters. At the time of the Capitol riot, the department's force policy stated that "officers are only authorized to use the level of force that appears reasonably necessary to bring a subject under control while protecting the lives of officers and others."

One officer even testified in the GAO report that the Capitol Police department "is always worried about optics and never really want[s] us to go hands on with the public."

"Several respondents stated that the concern with optics was related to leadership's perception of the desires of Members of Congress," the report clarified.

The last time we heard about bad "optics" related to Capitol law enforcement was when former Capitol Police Chief Steven Sund, who resigned from his leadership post shortly after Jan. 6, [told](#) The

Washington Post that Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, [who is ultimately responsible for the security of the Capitol](#), denied his request for the National Guard to assist his officers. Sund specifically [noted](#) that Pelosi's House Sergeant at Arms Paul Irving claimed that deploying the Guard would be bad "optics," especially for House leaders who previously shunned using the military against civilian rioters.

As a result, at least 151 respondents claimed there was a "lack of leadership and communication" surrounding the events on Jan. 6. Approximately 55 officers agreed that the leadership in the Capitol Police department needs to be "changed or improved."

Capitol Police officials and even [D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser](#) have [admitted](#) that Jan. 6 exposed key failures of the law

enforcement department, but so far, the department has [largely failed](#) to implement the recommendations made by the Capitol Police Inspector General and others.

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