

Why GAO Did This Study

On January 6, 2021, thousands of demonstrators surrounded the U.S. Capitol Building to dispute the outcome of the 2020 presidential election. Demonstrators attacked and injured law enforcement officers and breached the building. The Capitol Police is responsible for protecting the Congress, including members, staff, visitors, and facilities.

GAO was asked to review a range of issues related to the events surrounding the January 6 attack. This fourth report addresses (1) how the Capitol Police prepared its officers to use force and maintain crowd control during large-scale demonstrations prior to the attack; (2) reported use of force during the attack; (3) Capitol Police officer perspectives on their preparedness for the attack; and (4) changes made to better prepare officers in the future.

GAO reviewed Capitol Police policies and training for use of force and crowd control. GAO analyzed the use of force reports from January 6, 2021, which describe the types of force used and supervisors' determinations on whether the force was justified. GAO also conducted a survey of Capitol Police officers who were on duty at any point on January 6. GAO received responses from 315 officers, a 20 percent response rate. Although not generalizable to all officers on duty that day, the results provide perspectives on officer preparedness. GAO also interviewed department officials and reviewed documents on actions taken since the attack.

View [GAO-22-104829](#). For more information, contact Gretta L. Goodwin at (202) 512-8777 or GoodwinG@gao.gov.

March 2022

CAPITOL ATTACK

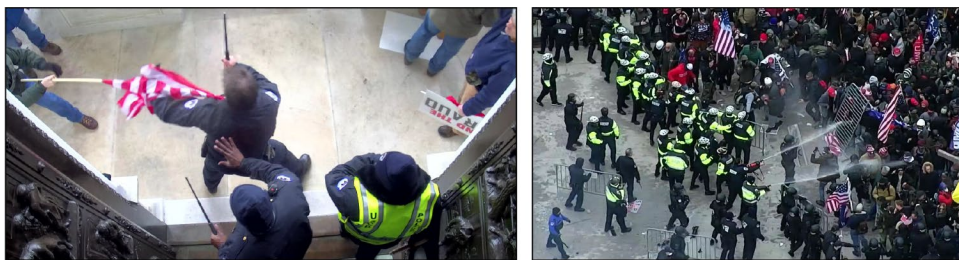
Additional Actions Needed to Better Prepare Capitol Police Officers for Violent Demonstrations

What GAO Found

The U.S. Capitol Police (Capitol Police) used a range of methods to prepare its officers to use force and maintain crowd control prior to the January 6, 2021 attack. At the time of the attack, the department had established department-wide use of force and crowd control policies. The department sends new officers to the Federal Law Enforcement Training Centers and its own Capitol Police Academy for training. The Capitol Police provides all officers with 40 hours of entry-level Civil Disturbance Unit (CDU) training, even if they are not ultimately assigned to the unit. The department equips and trains all officers on the use of a baton, chemical spray, and a firearm, and some officers are trained on other types of force, such as less-lethal munitions (e.g., chemical and kinetic impact).

About 150 Capitol Police officers reported 293 use of force incidents using various types of force against attackers on January 6. After the events, the Capitol Police determined that all use of force incidents were justified. The most prevalent force reported was empty hand control techniques (e.g., pushing) (91 incidents), followed by batons (83) (left image below), withdrawing a firearm from its holster (37), chemical spray (34) (right image below), other physical tactics (22), pointing a firearm at an individual (17), less-lethal munitions (7), a diversionary device (1), and firing a firearm (1).

Images of the Attack on the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021



Source: U.S. Capitol Police. | GAO-22-104829

GAO surveyed officers who were deployed during the January 6 attack. Based on the nongeneralizable responses from the 315 officers who completed the survey, GAO found the following:

- **Some officers felt less prepared.** There were mixed views among respondents on whether they felt prepared to use force and apply crowd control tactics during the January 6 attack. Related to use of force, 207 felt well or somewhat prepared and 96 felt slightly or not at all prepared. Related to crowd control tactics, 134 felt well or somewhat prepared and 153 felt slightly or not at all prepared.
- **Lack of sufficient guidance before and during the attack.** Most respondents indicated that preoperational guidance (211) or guidance provided during the attack (209) was slightly clear, not at all clear, or not provided. In comparison, fewer respondents indicated that preoperational guidance (45) or guidance during the attack (29) was somewhat or very clear.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making five recommendations to the Capitol Police to take actions to

- better understand officers' comprehension of the department's expectations and policies related to use of force, including identifying underlying causes for potential officer hesitancy to use force;
- make changes, as appropriate, to policy, guidance, and training to address findings from actions taken to better understand officers' comprehension of the department's expectations and policies related to the use of force;
- provide more refresher crowd control training to prepare all officers, including those who are not part of the CDU, for large-scale and potentially violent demonstrations;
- provide officers with more realistic training; and
- identify underlying factors related to employee concerns with the department following the January 6 attack and develop an action plan to address these issues.

Capitol Police agreed with all five recommendations.

Based on responses to open-ended questions, GAO identified several common themes among respondents:

- **Perceived discouragement from using force.** Many respondents (80) identified concerns related to use of force, including that they felt discouraged or hesitant to use force because of a fear of disciplinary actions (57); and that leadership needed to clarify the appropriate use of force during situations like the January 6 attack (39).
- **More training wanted.** Over half of respondents (180) expressed that more training was needed, including crowd control (128), very large or violent crowd control (84), and more realistic training (46).
- **Concerns with the department.** Many respondents (151) identified concerns or offered suggestions related to leadership, including that there had been a lack of leadership and communication on January 6, 2021 (99); and that leadership needed to be changed or improved (55).

The Capitol Police has taken actions to better prepare officers following the attack but additional opportunities exist to further enhance preparedness.

- **Use of force.** The Capitol Police has taken actions to clarify use of force, such as issuing additional guidance to officers and conducting briefings in which its Office of General Counsel addressed common misconceptions related to use of force. However, in October 2021, officials stated that misconceptions related to use of force have been persistent both before and after the attack. The department's discussions with officers following the attack are a positive step, but based on GAO survey results, such discussions may not have addressed underlying factors related to officer hesitancy to use force. Taking actions to better understand officers' comprehension of the use of force policy will help Capitol Police ensure that management and officer expectations are aligned.
- **Training and equipment.** The Capitol Police has trained additional officers on crowd control tactics and less-lethal force and obtained additional protective and less-lethal force equipment using supplemental appropriations. However, officials stated that their current focus is on improving training for the CDU and that they do not have plans to improve training for non-CDU officers. Yet, non-CDU officers, who represent more than 80 percent of officers, may also be called upon to provide crowd control in emergencies. Further, officials stated that offering more realistic training (e.g., in-person) is challenging because it requires that officers be pulled from their posts, which may lead to paying officers for overtime. While there may be challenges in providing more in-person training, the Capitol Police must balance its need to staff officers to posts to perform their law enforcement duties with the need to train them to effectively accomplish those duties. Enhancing crowd control training for all Capitol Police officers, including non-CDU officers and more realistic training, will help ensure that all officers are better prepared in the future.
- **Concerns with the department and morale.** The department used 2021 supplemental appropriations to fund retention bonuses, hazard pay, and initiatives related to mental health. However, officials stated that the department has faced long-term morale issues. For example, analysis of the Capitol Police's employee viewpoint surveys since 2016 identified similar themes shown by GAO's survey, such as concerns related to morale, promotions, and leadership. Given the severity of the attack and the likely long-standing nature of the concerns, matters may not be resolved quickly. In light of GAO's survey findings and the Capitol Police's forthcoming employee viewpoint survey for 2021, there is an opportunity for the department to identify underlying causes for employee concerns and develop a responsive action plan.