

The Rise of Violent Populism: January 6 to the Buffalo Shooting and Beyond

Testimony to the Senate Judiciary Committee

Capitol Hill, June 7, 2022


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Dr. Robert Pape is professor of political science and director of the Chicago project on security and threats at the University of Chicago. He is considered one of the world's foremost experts on strategic air power and terrorism. His publications include, *Bombing to Win: Air Power and Coercion in War* (Cornell University Press), *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (Random House), *Cutting the Fuse: Rise of Global Suicide Terrorism and How to Stop it* (University of Chicago Press), *American Face of ISIS* (2017), "Capitol Rioters Aren't Like Other Extremists (with Keven Ruby), *Atlantic* (February 2021), and *Face of American Insurrection* (2022). His research on the impact of online propaganda narratives and mobilization to terrorism has been published in *Scientific Reports* (2020). Most recently he has constructed a comprehensive database of those charged for breaking into the US Capitol on January 6th, 2021 (with Keven Ruby) and released a report on findings from survey research on attitudes toward political violence after the January 6th riot conducted in conjunction with NORC at the University of Chicago and available at: <http://cpost.uchicago.edu>. His commentary appears in New York Times, Washington Post, the Atlantic, Slate, Face the Nation, News Hour, CNN, BBC and many other national and international media.

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THE RISE OF VIOLENT POPULISM:

JANUARY 6 TO THE BUFFALO SHOOTING AND BEYOND

Testimony to the Senate Judiciary Committee Hearing on Examining the 'Metastasizing' Domestic Terrorism Threat After the Buffalo Attack, June 7, 2022

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Violent populism is rising in America. Events like the Buffalo shooting that target minority populations and January 6th that threaten our democracy are not simply a continuation of long-standing trends, but reflect the consequences of extremist ideas moving from the fringe to the mainstream.

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THE RISE OF VIOLENT POPULISM



- 1. Violent Populism = violent ideas are moving from fringe to mainstream**
 1. A key driver is fear of the “Great Replacement” – the fear that rights of minorities will overtake rights of Whites
 2. Fear of “Great Replacement” has moved into the mainstream of US politics and media
- 2. January 6, 2021 Assault on US Capitol shows these ideas threaten democracy**
- 3. May 14, 2022 Buffalo shooting shows these violent ideas are expanding beyond electoral context**
- 4. April 15-17, 2022 survey shows these violent ideas are continuing to be part of the mainstream**
- 5. We need to prepare for potential political violence through the 2022 and 2024 electoral seasons**

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A key extremist idea is the “great replacement” – at bottom, the fear that minorities will have more rights than Whites. As these extremist ideas become mainstream, domestic terrorism is evolving in more dangerous ways.

On January 6, 2021, we witnessed, to quote Senator Mitch McConnell, “a violent insurrection for the purpose of trying to prevent the peaceful transfer of power after a legitimately certified election.” (Feb 8, 2022).

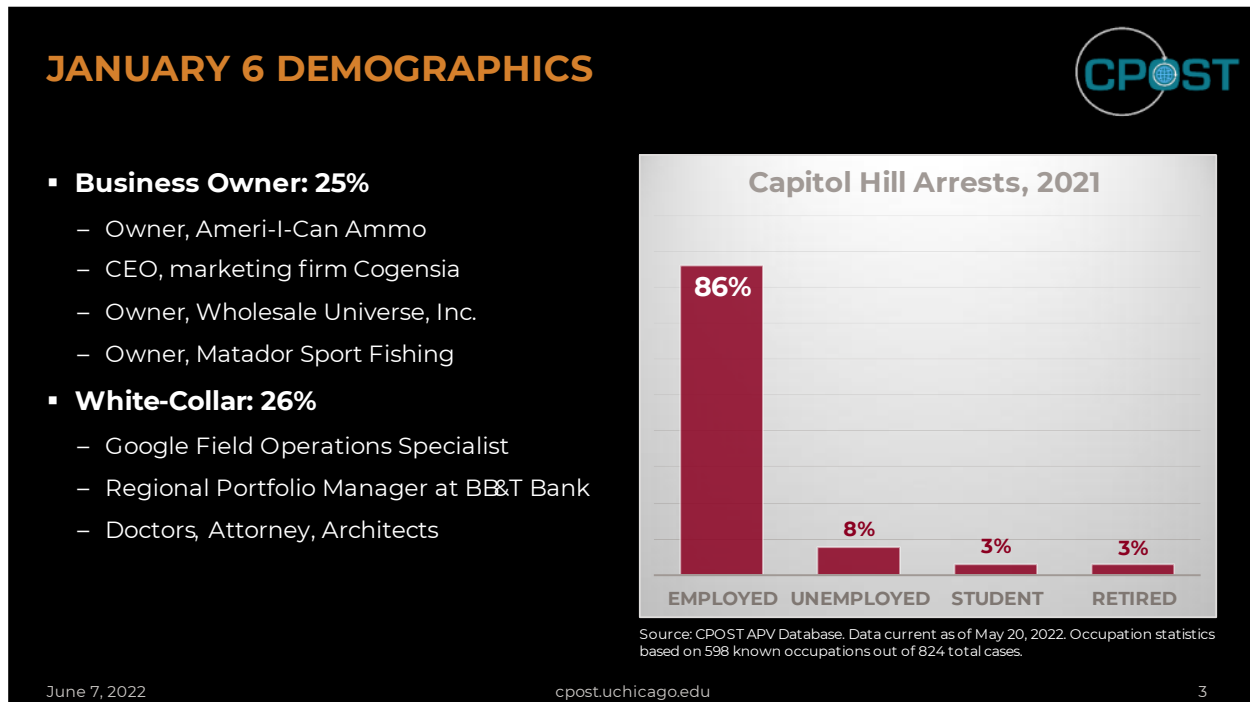
The key characteristic of the over 800 individuals charged in connection with the attack on the Capitol is that they are middle class Whites residing in counties with the most loss of White population share – exactly who would mostly likely fear the great replacement as described by prominent political and media leaders.

On May 14 – just three weeks ago – a mass shooting occurred in Buffalo, New York where the shooter – a self-described “populist” -- methodically selected his target in order to kill large numbers of a minority group related to his fear of the great replacement.

These violent ideas are widespread in the US population and we need to prepare for potential political violence in the future.

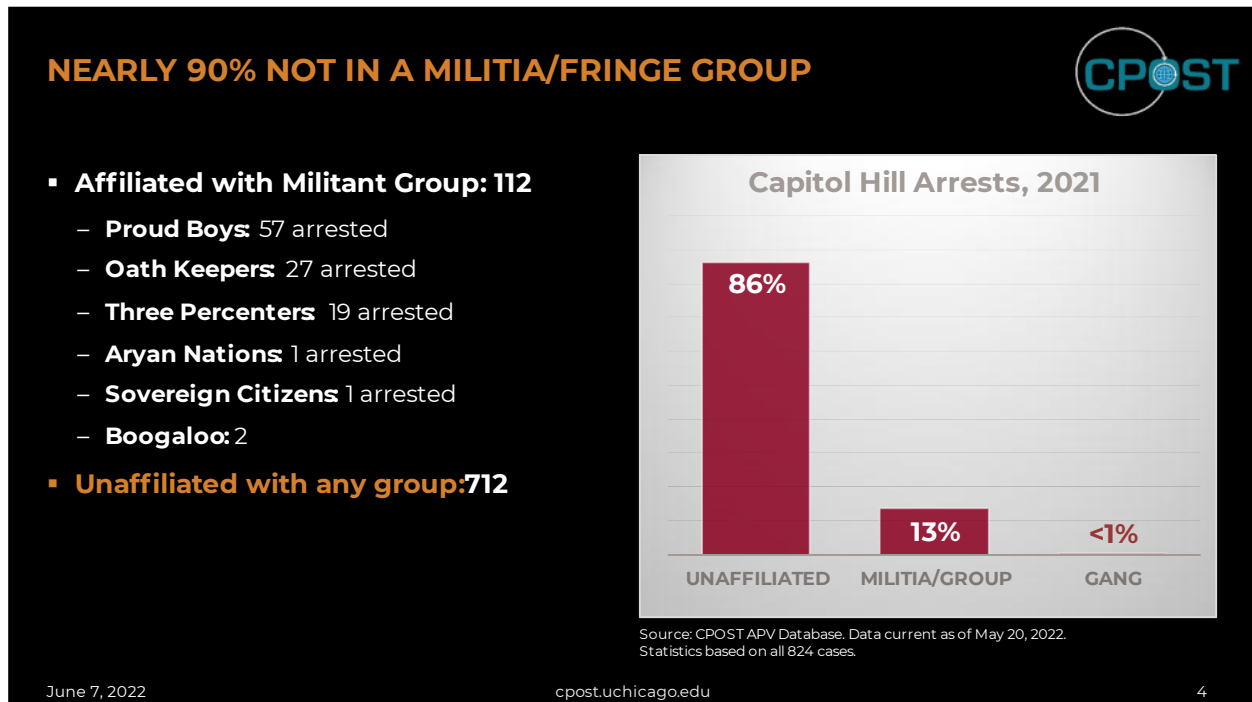
Let's look at the facts.

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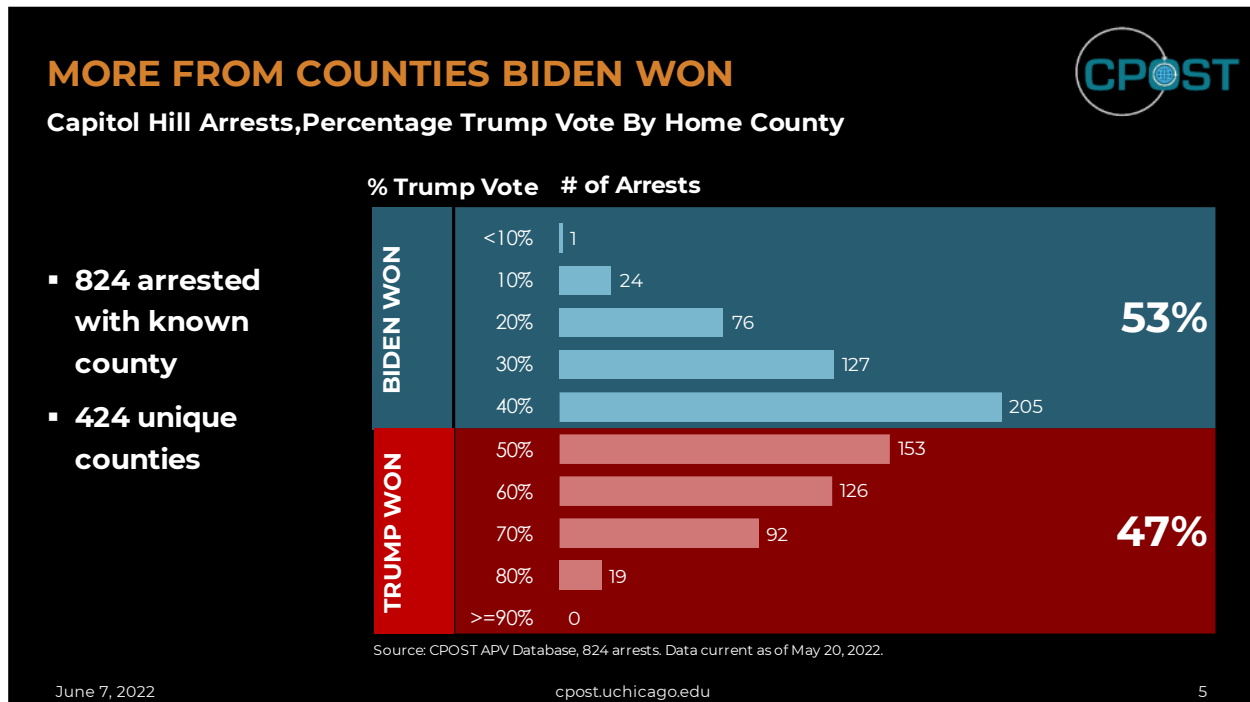
The January 6th demographics are striking. Over half of those charged with committing crimes on January 6 were either business owners and CEOs or from white collar occupations. The last time America saw middle class Whites involved in collective political violence was the expansion of the 2nd KKK in the 1920s.

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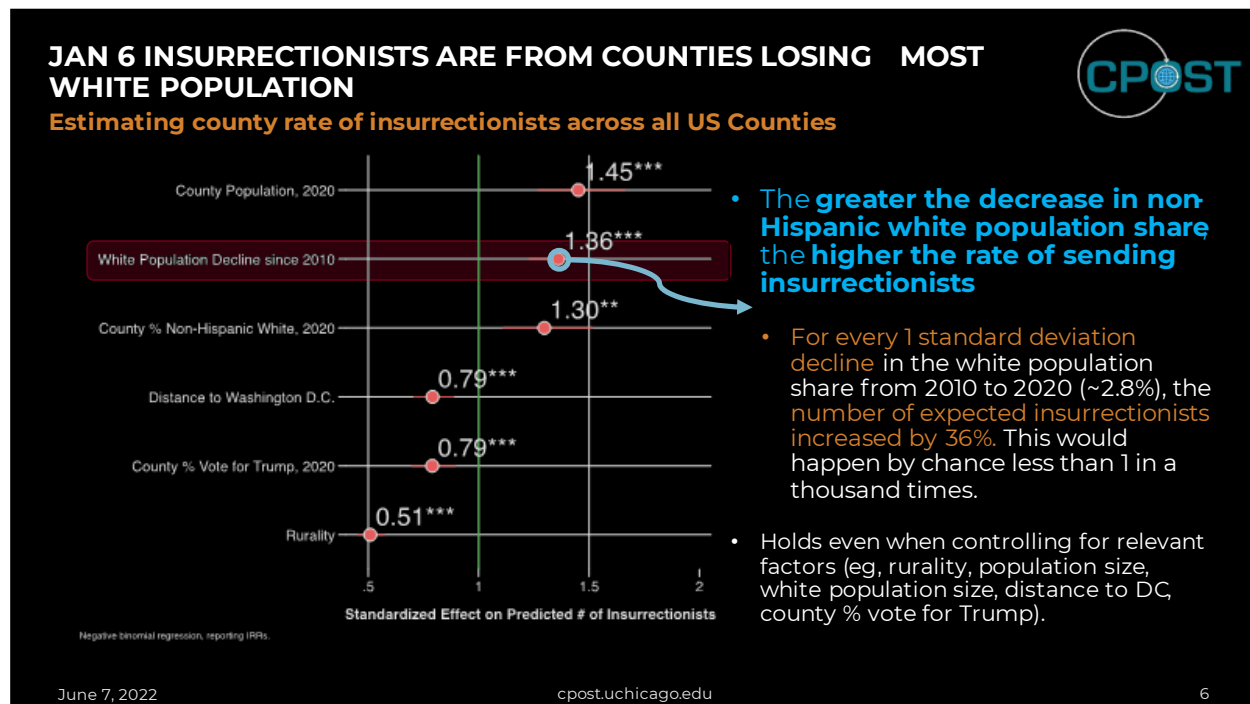
Nearly 90 percent charged were not members of militia and extremist groups like the Oath Keepers or the Proud Boys.

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Their political geography is also striking. Over half of those charged with committing crimes on January 6 came from counties that Biden won – including large, urban, democratic strongholds like Dallas, Houston, New York City, San Francisco, and Los Angeles.

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The crucial feature of the counties with insurrectionists is the loss of non-Hispanic white population. The more the county lost white population and became diverse, the much higher the rate of having an insurrectionist.

Why?

Increasingly some politicians and media figures tell Whites that they are deliberately being “replaced” by minorities and destined to become second-class citizens. White decline in one’s community can reinforce and seemingly confirm these political and media narratives and have impact beyond electoral politics.

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THE BUFFALO SHOOTER

(Name deliberately suppressed)

Manifesto

- "This crisis of mass immigration and sub-replacement fertility is an assault on the European people that, if not combated, **will ultimately result in the complete racial and cultural replacement of the European people.**"
- "We are experiencing an invasion on a level never seen before in history. Millions of people pouring across our borders, legally. **Invited by the state and corporate entities to replace the White people who have failed to reproduce...**"
- "If there's one thing I want you to get from these writings, it's that White birth rates must change. **Everyday the White population becomes fewer in number.**"

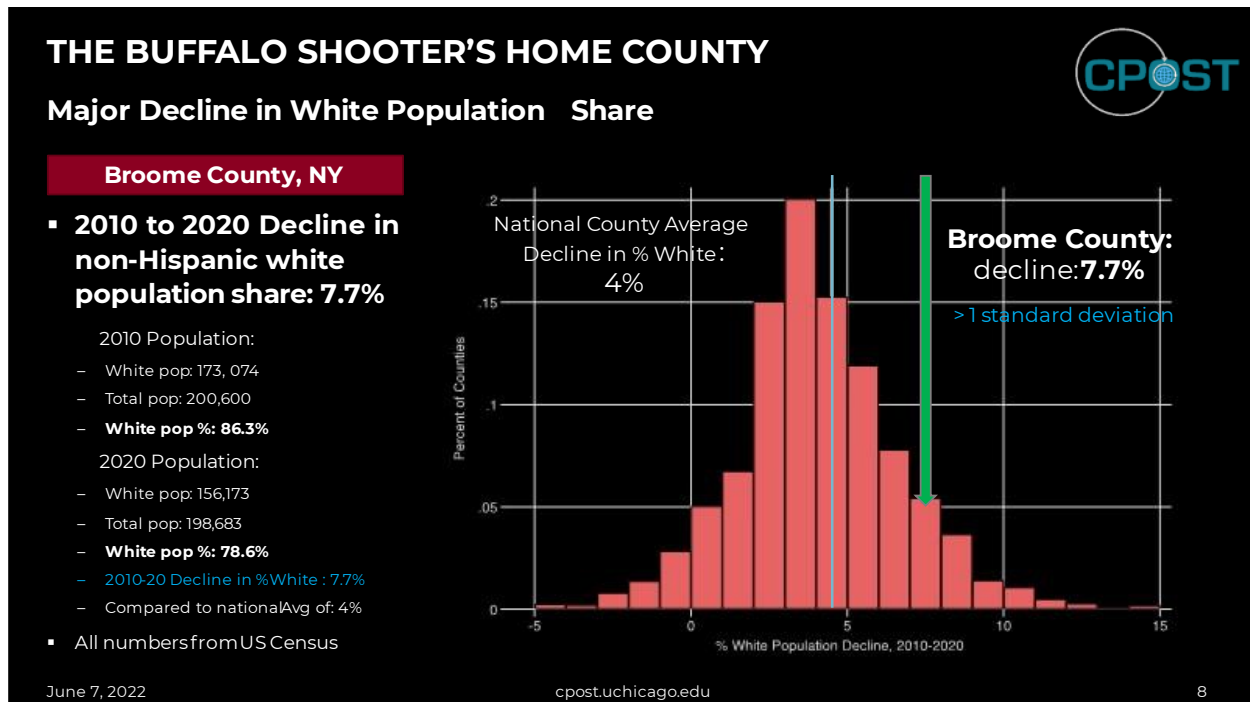
Self-Interview

- **What do you want ?**
 - **"We must ensure the existence of our people and a future for white children."**
- **Why did you choose [Buffalo] for the place of attack?**
 - **"[Buffalo] has the highest black population percentage and isn't that far away.** Plus NY has heavy gun laws so it would ease me if I knew that any legally armed civilian was limited to 10 round magazines or cucked firearms."

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The Buffalo Shooter is a prime example. The shooter's manifesto clearly describes his motive as targeting a minority population to prevent what he perceives as quote "the complete racial and cultural replacement" of White Americans.

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Importantly, the shooter lived in Broome County, New York – which had one of the largest declines in non-Hispanic White population share since 2010 – nearly 8%. This underscores that White population decline near their home can influence individuals with violent populist sentiments.

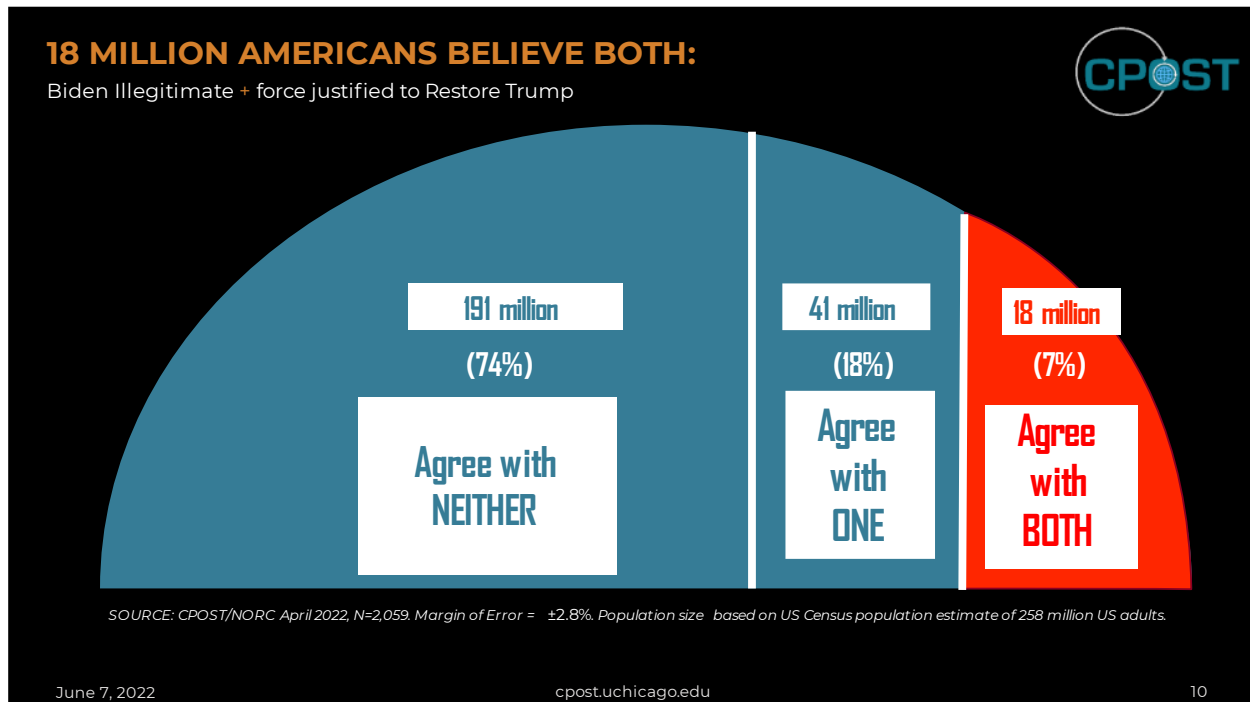
To understand the risks going forward, we conducted a nationally representative survey with the respected polling firm NORC at the University of Chicago, fielded in April -- just weeks ago.

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We asked whether respondents agree that Joe Biden stole the 2020 election and is an illegitimate president and whether they agree that the use of force to restore Donald Trump to the presidency is justified. As you can see, tens of millions of Americans agree with these radical sentiments.

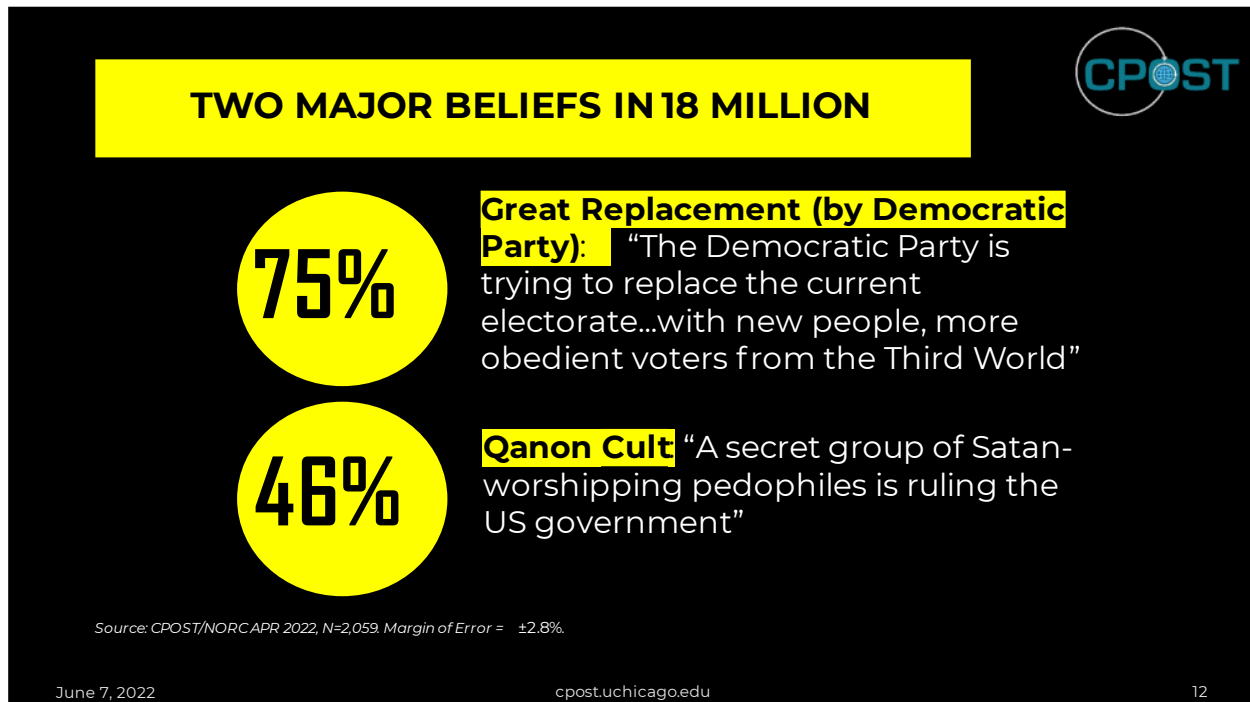
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Most disturbing, we found that 7% of American adults, which equates to 18 million people – agree both that that Biden is illegitimate and that the use of force is justified to restore Trump to the presidency.

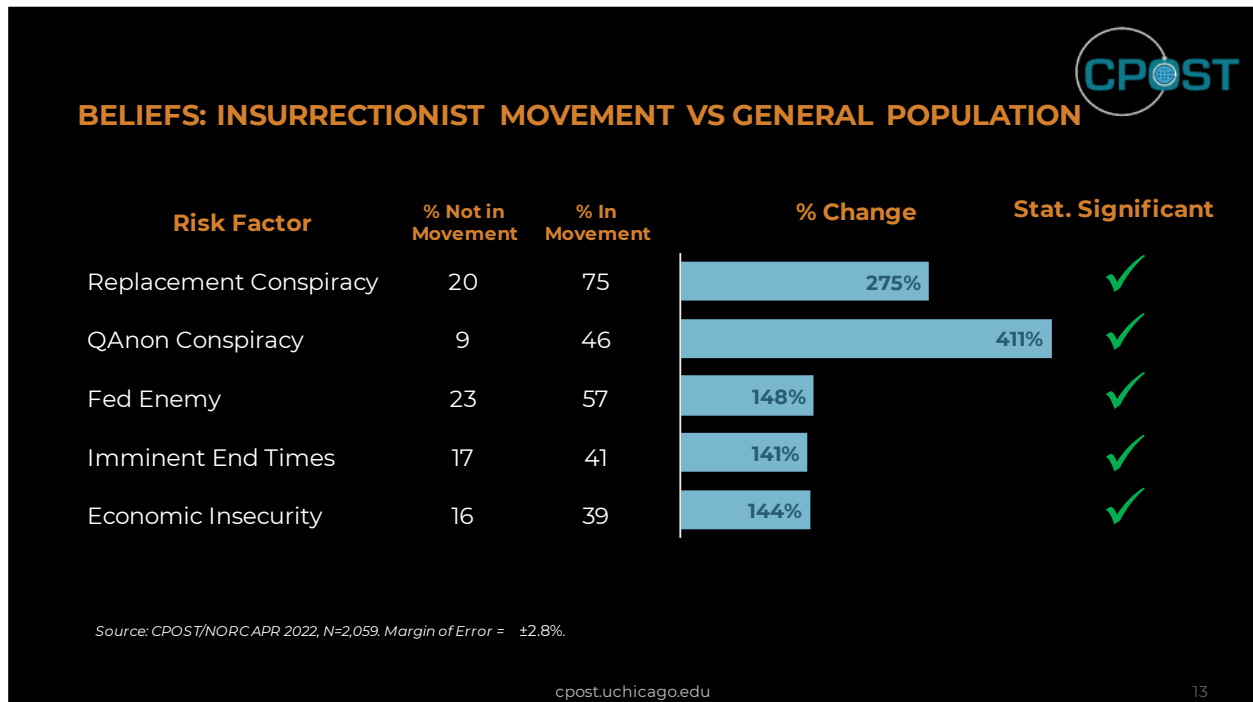
This is important. A key indicator of long-term political violence in a country is the pool of the population that sees political violence as justified, and so this figure is extremely concerning.

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The two main beliefs driving the 18 million are – number one -- the Great Replacement – 75% agree with that. The second is the QAnon cult idea.

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We did look at economic and other factors. But, the Great Replacement and QAnon conspiracies are the far more powerful drivers.

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URGENTLY NEEDED:

Dialogue and Listening – the Pillars of American Democracy

- **National Conversation about Rise of Violent Populism:**
 - In Depth, based on transparent discussion of potential political violence on both right and left
 - Non-partisan academic research/institutions have important role to play
- **Improved government knowledge to prevent mass domestic terrorism:**
 - Annual public reports by DHS, DOJ, and FBI assessing violent threats to democracy and civilian populations
 - Across political spectrum— neo-Nazis to Antifa to violent sentiments in mainstream

2022 and 2024 political seasons are danger zones

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Our country needs annual public reports by law enforcement assessing incidents in which people from across the political spectrum – from neo-Nazis to Antifa—turn to violence, so that we can better understand the extent and source of the greatest threats.

Our country needs a national conversation based on the facts about the consequences of violent ideas moving into the mainstream.

Ultimately, the solutions to violent populism are the pillars that have always guided our great American democracy -- dialogue and listening to each other.