

QAnon: From Fringe Conspiracy to Mainstream Politics



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Where did QAnon begin?


Pizzagate

On December 4, 2016, 28 year-old Edgar Welch entered Comet Ping Pong pizza restaurant in Washington DC, armed with an AR-15 rifle and revolver. Welch came to investigate reports that there was a child sex trafficking ring operating secretly from hidden rooms. He fired several shots, and after finding no evidence of child sex trafficking, he exited the restaurant and surrendered to law enforcement officers.¹ It transpired that Welch was influenced by the "Pizzagate" conspiracy, supposedly after watching *YouTube* videos and reading online content. The conspiracy alleges Hillary Clinton and other Democrats used the restaurant as a front for a child sex trafficking ring. It gained traction after the owner, James Alefantis, was mentioned in a hacked Clinton campaign email released by Wikileaks earlier in 2016. The conspiracy spread across *4chan* and other social media platforms, resulting in Alefantis receiving death threats.² Welch was arrested and subsequently sentenced to 4 years in prison.

What is QAnon?

QAnon seemingly evolved on *4chan*, and later *8chan* (now known as *8kun*), building on some of the themes evoked by Pizzagate and the intense online discussion that followed. *4chan* and *8kun* are anonymous online forums (imageboards) where users can post messages and images without having to register for an account.

Few, if any rules, regulate what can be shared. An entity, now known as “Q”, began posting messages on *4chan*, and later, *8chan* and *8kun*. The first appeared on 28 October, 2017, and subsequent posts (known as “Q drops”) began using the moniker “Q” as an identifier. “Q”, an abbreviation for “Q Clearance Patriot”, is purportedly an individual (or a small group) allegedly with top secret “Q-level” intelligence clearance (granted by the Department of Energy), and strong ties to President Trump. The “QAnon” conspiracy evolved from these posts. The term “anon” usually references anonymous users who post in spaces like *4chan*. The posts are cryptic, so QAnon supporters work together to find out what each post means, allowing for the movement to be shrouded in a veil of personal interpretation and secrecy.

Anonymous ID:pGukiFmX Wed 01 Nov 2017 19:56:16 No.147567888  [Report](#)
Quoted By: >>147568425 >>147568435 >>147568805 >>147569014 >>147570656 >>147570675 >>147571107 >>147571326
>>147571376 >>147571498 >>147571670 >>147572666 >>147574895 >>147577421 >>147579282 >>147580693 >>147587349
>>147588590 >>147590776 >>147592009 >>147594052 >>147594248,6
Q Clearance Patriot

My fellow Americans, over the course of the next several days you will undoubtedly realize that we are taking back our great country (the land of the free) from the evil tyrants that wish to do us harm and destroy the last remaining refuge of shining light. On POTUS' order, we have initiated certain fail-safes that shall safeguard the public from the primary fallout which is slated to occur 11.3 upon the arrest announcement of Mr. Podesta (actionable 11.4). Confirmation (to the public) of what is occurring will then be revealed and will not be openly accepted. Public riots are being organized in serious numbers in an effort to prevent the arrest and capture of more senior public officials. On POTUS' order, a state of temporary military control will be actioned and special ops carried out. False leaks have been made to retain several within the confines of the United States to prevent extradition and special operator necessity. Rest assured, the safety and well-being of every man, woman, and child of this country is being exhausted in full. However, the atmosphere within the country will unfortunately be divided as so many have fallen for the corrupt and evil narrative that has long been broadcast. We will be initiating the Emergency Broadcast System (EMS) during this time in an effort to provide a direct message (avoiding the fake news) to all citizens. Organizations and/or people that wish to do us harm during this time will be met with swift fury – certain laws have been pre-lifted to provide our great military the necessary authority to handle and conduct these operations (at home and abroad).

Early posting from *4chan* using the identifier “Q Clearance Patriot”.

The main focus of the QAnon conspiracy is the belief that President Trump is waging a secret war against a global satanic cabal of pedophiles, often referred to as the “deep state”. This cabal and their puppets are held responsible for engineering many of the world’s greatest problems, such as war, crime, poverty and disease. The cabal indoctrinates the world’s population through their control of mass media, including entertainment, music and news. There are several key elements that form the basis of the QAnon conspiracy:

The Storm: The QAnon community believes mass arrests of many of the figureheads in the cabal are imminent, resulting in their imprisonment or execution. Their tyrannical grip over the world will be broken, allowing for a utopian world to be realized. Support for QAnon online is often indicated by the use of the hashtag #TheStormIsComing.

The Great Awakening: The result of “The Storm” will be “The Great Awakening”, where those who do not believe in QAnon’s messaging will be proven wrong – they will be awoken to face the reality of the world that “Q” was trying to expose.

WWG1WGA: Where We Go One, We Go All” (often abbreviated to WWG1WGA) is a rallying slogan often used by QAnon supporters in public and online. It is taken from a Jeff Bridges movie, “White Squall”, but sometimes misattributed to President John F. Kennedy.

Redpilled: This term is not exclusive to QAnon, but is used within the movement to identify those who have been “awakened” and believe in the conspiracy. It was popularized after the movie “The Matrix” was released in 1999 as a trope to discern those who choose to see reality, and those who remain blind (“blue pill”).

There are several major targets within the QAnon conspiracy. There are three main pillars forming the top of the QAnon conspiracy hierarchy – the **Rothschild** family, the **Saudi Royal Family** and **George Soros**.³ These three so-called “puppet masters” purportedly control the deep state with a vast combined wealth which they use to manipulate political bodies and financial institutions around the world. They are aided by collaborators and puppets. These include prominent liberal, primarily Democratic, political figures such as Bill and Hillary Clinton, Barack and Michelle Obama; Hollywood icons including Oprah, Ellen DeGeneres, Tom Hanks and Rita Wilson, and religious figures, including the Pope. They face accusations including operating child sex trafficking rings, and practicing satanic rituals. Some proponents go as far as accusing these individuals of harvesting blood from children, to acquire the chemical adrenochrome, which they claim is a psychedelic with benefits including anti-aging properties.⁴

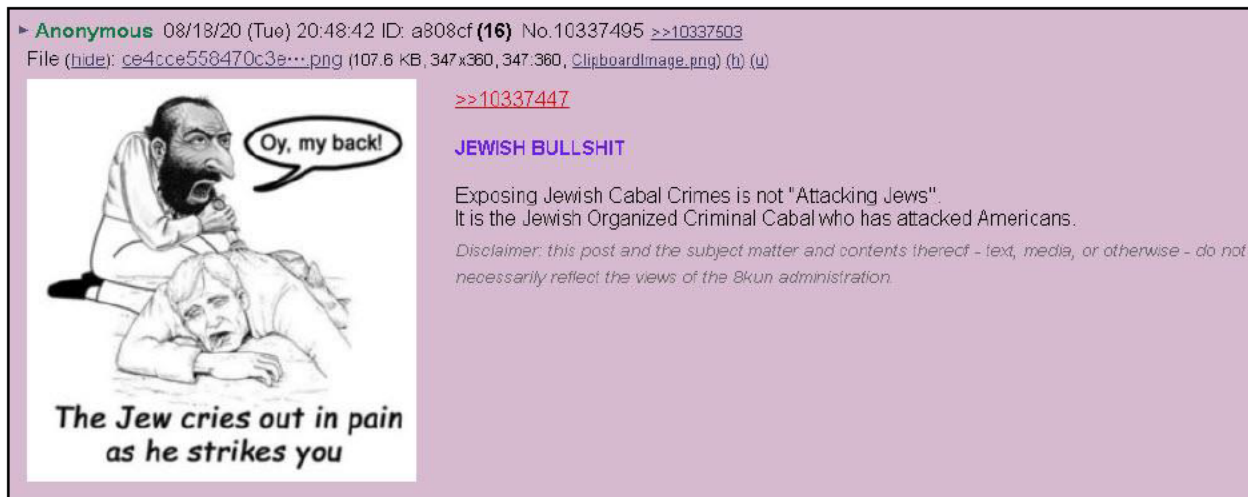
A report from *NBC News* claimed to identify three individuals as being responsible for the creation and spread of QAnon across the internet.⁵ Another investigation by *Logically* (UK-based tech company) purported to expose the identity of the administrator of one of QAnon’s most popular webpages.⁶ Given the anonymous nature of places like *4chan* and *8kun*, the “true” identity of “Q” is not known, but it is unlikely that this operation is led by one person.

Is this conspiracy new?

As discussed, QAnon has existed and evolved since 2017. However, many of the themes and allegations within the QAnon conspiracy pre-date QAnon and are well-known - they have simply been repackaged. Conspiracies contending a secret elite cabal controlling the world for political and financial gain have surfaced in many forms, throughout history. Other popular conspiracies, including psychological warfare being used on the general population, Big Pharma, 9/11, and supposed false flag attacks, can all be found within the QAnon pantheon. Conspiracies focused on the Rothschild family, and more recently, George Soros, have long been used to promote anti-Semitism. Gregory Stanton (Genocide Watch) has posited that QAnon is a “Nazi cult, rebranded”. He argues there are parallels between QAnon and the debunked anti-Semitic conspiracy screed, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. *The Protocols* has been translated into multiple languages and has been, and still is, invoked by major anti-Semitic figures over the last 120 years.⁷

While the complexities of the QAnon conspiracy may not have mainstream appeal, the focus on child sex trafficking has become an emotionally charged topic popular with a broad audience. Individuals who may not consider themselves QAnon adherents can perhaps unwittingly contribute to the larger promotion of the conspiracy. Likewise, accusations of harvesting blood from children are likely to lead individuals seeking more information down a path laced with anti-Semitism, as suggested by Magda Teter (Professor, Fordham University).⁸ Googling “killing children for blood” results in content focused on one of the most familiar, deadly, and long-lasting anti-Semitic tropes - “Blood libel”.

Therefore, while QAnon may appear to be a new phenomenon, the foundations that it stands on are long-standing tropes and conspiracies. One factor that does set it apart from many other conspiracies, is the manner in which it has been co-opted into the mainstream via prominent social media platforms far beyond *4chan* and *8kun*, and even seeping into the political discourse and 2020 electoral process. Frequent Q-drops invite the participation of the general public to decode the messages, and continue unabated despite that the projections made by Q rarely manifest in reality.



Post from "Q Research" board on *8kun*.

How much support does QAnon have?

It is always challenging to gauge how many supporters a primarily internet-based movement has. Interest in QAnon has remained high since its inception, with "Q" included on TIME's "25 Most Influential People on the Internet" in 2018.⁹ More recently, there have been several reports which give a sense of the scale of QAnon's support online and in the real world. In August 2020, *The Guardian* released a report documenting more than 170 QAnon groups, pages and accounts across *Facebook* and *Instagram*, purportedly with more than 4.5 million aggregate followers.¹⁰ Similarly, in August 2020, *Facebook* made a statement announcing they had removed 790 groups tied to QAnon, alongside restrictions on over 1,950 more groups and over 10,000 *Instagram* accounts. One *Twitter* account monitored for this report has gained close to 400,000 followers in the past 18 months; it currently has over half a million followers.¹¹ Support for QAnon has also spread to alternative platforms like *Parler*. *Parler* is a platform launched in August 2018 which functions like a hybrid of *Facebook* and *Twitter*. The platform claims to be committed to "free speech" and is popular with conservatives and some far-right extremists in the US. One of the most popular QAnon accounts on *Parler* has over 108,000 followers (the network claims to have 3.8 million users).¹² Popular QAnon hashtags have been utilized in hundreds of thousands of *Parler* posts (parleys) including #WWG1WGA (234,000), #TheGreatAwakening (76,000) and #SaveTheChildren (50,000).

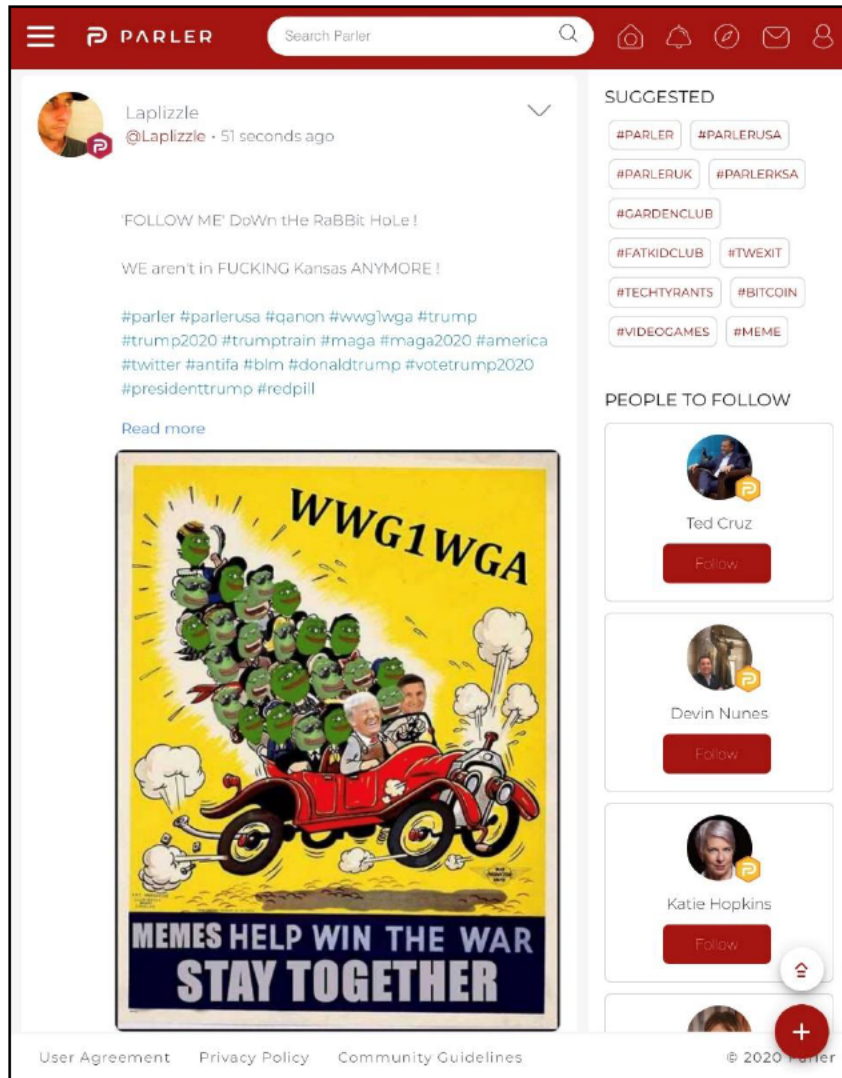
QAnon supporters have been photographed at many events since the conspiracy began swirling in 2018, including at rallies for President Trump, and even at a far-right led, anti-mask protest in Berlin, Germany, in August 2020.¹³ Merchandise including t-shirts and bumper stickers is widely available for purchase online.¹⁴ In 2019, *QAnon: An Invitation to the Great Awakening*, a book supposedly written by 12 anonymous

supporters, was at the top of several best-seller lists on the online retailer, *Amazon*.¹⁵ Documentaries with high quality production value, made by QAnon supporters, are readily available on *YouTube*. Popular QAnon documentary “Out of Shadows” has garnered over 18 million views since April 2020.¹⁶

Therefore, while it is hard to put a specific number on the size of QAnon’s support, it is fair to assume there are hundreds of thousands of people engaging with Q’s content online, in the USA, and the content is increasingly spreading globally.



@Qanon76 Twitter account, with over 555,000 followers.



Post from *Parler* (social network).

QAnon Incidents

While conspiracy theories are often ignored as harmless, or viewed as posing no threat, there have been multiple incidents involving individuals who have purportedly been tied to the QAnon movement. This resulted in the release of an FBI “Intelligence Bulletin” from their field office in Phoenix, Arizona, in May 2019.¹⁷ The bulletin states that “anti-government, identity based and fringe political conspiracy theories [are] very likely to motivate some domestic extremists to commit criminal, sometimes violent activity”. The bulletin specifically referenced several incidents where QAnon appeared to influence the perpetrator. These included a Nevada man blocking traffic on the Hoover Dam Bypass Bridge, who was found to have weapons and ammunition in his vehicle. They also included the 2016 Pizzagate incident, and categorized QAnon as a “Fringe Political” conspiracy theory.

Other incidents with alleged links to QAnon that have transpired before and since the release of the FBI's bulletin include: a train derailment in San Pedro, CA (March 2020); the arrest of a woman in New York, who threatened to kill Joe Biden for his alleged involvement in a deep state sex trafficking ring (April 2020); as well as two separate murders and at least two separate cases of kidnapping.¹⁸

QAnon Political Candidates

Despite the dangerous worldview that QAnon spreads, there are multiple candidates running for office in the USA in 2020 that have been connected to QAnon, including:

- Lauren Witzke won the Republican US Senate primary for Delaware, and has previously been photographed wearing a QAnon t-shirt and using QAnon hashtags on social media.¹⁹
- Marjorie Taylor Greene is the front-running Republican candidate for Congress in Georgia's 14th Congressional District, referring to "Q" as a "patriot" in a video from 2017.²⁰ Greene is on course to be elected in the heavily Red district.
- Jo Rae Perkins won the Republican nomination for US Senate in Oregon in May 2020, overtly expressing her support for QAnon several times on social media.
- Mark Cargile uses the hashtag #WWG1WGA in his *Twitter* profile and is a Republican challenger for a seat in California's 35th Congressional District.

In August 2020, The Soufan Center published a briefing estimating there are as many as 77 Congressional candidates seeking election in November 2020, that have espoused support for QAnon.²¹ President Trump and other prominent Republicans have indicated their support for some of these candidates, while other members of the Republican Party have called for the public denouncement of the conspiracy.²²

What is the future of QAnon?

QAnon continues to grow in popularity, even as its pages, groups and accounts are removed from mainstream social media, and pushed into alternative spaces like *Parler*. A Pew Research Center Poll released in September 2020 stated that Americans' awareness of a collection of conspiracies known as QAnon has doubled since March, to roughly half of US adults.²³ Increased awareness, coupled with easy accessibility on social media, and the compelling intrigue of a cryptic and evolving (and sometimes salacious) conspiracy, may suggest that QAnon is here to stay for a while longer. Increased legitimacy from political candidates, the FBI's warning that it is likely to inspire domestic extremists, alongside multiple documented violent incidents supposedly inspired by QAnon, also could signal that QAnon poses a dangerous threat to US society. As the phenomenon is being documented in other countries, it could continue to have a growing impact on public perceptions of government globally, and harm public trust in financial and political institutions and certain government officials.

The Simon Wiesenthal Center

The Simon Wiesenthal Center (SWC) is a Jewish global human rights organization dedicated to researching the Holocaust and hate in a historic and contemporary context. The Center confronts anti-Semitism, hate and terrorism, promotes human rights and dignity, stands with Israel, defends the safety of Jews worldwide, and teaches the lessons of the Holocaust for future generations. With a constituency of over 400,000 households in the United States, it is accredited as an NGO at international organizations including the United Nations, UNESCO, OSCE, Organization of American States (OAS), the Latin American Parliament (PARLATINO) and the Council of Europe.

For decades, the SWC has researched the promotion of extremism in digital spaces. The Digital Terrorism and Hate Project has produced an annual interactive report annually since 1997. The report focuses on tens of thousands of websites, detailing how the Internet has become a virtual university for terrorism and has emerged as the nerve center for training, recruitment, and terrorist activities around the world. Digital Terrorism and Hate has been distributed to government agencies, community activists, educators, and members of the media.

Explore the report at www.digitalhate.net

Report to ireport@wiesenthal.com

www.wiesenthal.com



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