



QANON: A CONSPIRACY MYTH

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The World Jewish Congress is the internationally recognized representative body of Jewish communities in more than 100 countries across six continents, working on their behalf with foreign governments, international organizations, law enforcement agencies, and at the grassroots level to: combat antisemitism, bigotry, xenophobia, and extremism; support Israel and advance Middle East peace; safeguard Jewish security; advocate on issues of international human rights; preserve and perpetuate the memory of the Holocaust; promote and enhance Jewish unity and interfaith relations; and nurture future generations of Jewish leadership.

Executive Summary

QAnon is a conspiracy myth that began to gain influence among users of online platforms starting in 2017, predominately among those based in the United States. The core of the myth asserts that an anonymous individual, 'Q', with a high-level U.S. intelligence security clearance, is leaking information about Trump's secret war with a cabal run by criminal politicians and the Hollywood elite¹ funded by George Soros and the Rothschild family². Over the past three years, the QAnon myth has quickly gained support internationally and has moved into the offline sphere. This support has continued to grow at a more rapid rate amid the coronavirus pandemic.

QAnon supporters drive hashtags and coordinate abuse of perceived enemies. Several QAnon supporters have been arrested after making threats or acting offline.

This report aims to provide an overview of the QAnon phenomenon, its origins, core beliefs, rise in Europe, and connection to antisemitism.



A flag used by QAnon supporters displaying their motto (see page 5).

The Myth

QAnon is a conspiracy myth alleging that a secret-cabal of Satan-worshipping pedophiles comprising political leaders and financial and Hollywood elites— referred to collectively as the ‘Deep State’— are secretly running a global child sex-trafficking and torture ring, with the ultimate goal of controlling the masses.³ Donald Trump is viewed as a saviour figure battling the enemy from within.⁴ According to the myth, this battle will result in a day of reckoning, ‘the Storm’, involving the mass arrest of journalists and politicians.⁵

The myth started in October 2017 when an anonymous figure claiming to be a high-level US official posted cryptic messages on the internet message-board 4chan, asserting that Hillary Clinton’s extradition was already in motion, and her arrest imminent, before spreading further online.⁶

Q’s posts are enigmatic and elliptical. They often consist of a long string of leading questions designed to guide readers toward discovering the ‘truth’ for themselves through ‘research’. As with Clinton’s supposed ‘extradition’, Q has consistently made predictions that failed to materialize, but true believers tend to simply adapt their narratives to account for inconsistencies.⁷

Pizzagate

A similar viral conspiracy, Pizzagate, is a conspiracy myth that went viral during the 2016 presidential campaign and promoted the baseless idea that references to food and a popular Washington DC pizza restaurant in the stolen emails of Clinton campaign manager John Podesta were actually a secret code for a child trafficking ring.⁸

The myth culminated in a shooting within the Washington DC pizza restaurant, in which a man motivated by the Pizzagate myth entered the restaurant to investigate. Although he discharged his weapon there were no injuries.⁹

Subplots

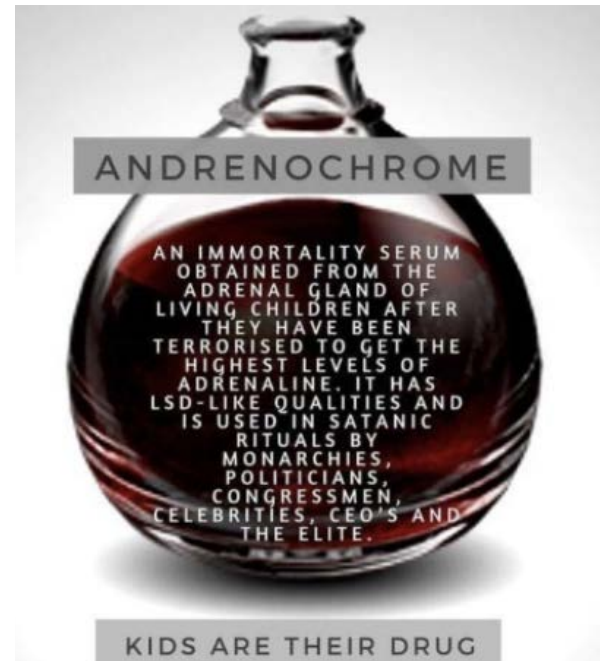
The QAnon myth combines several subplots and prior existing conspiracy myths, including (but not limited to) antivaccine; 5G conspiracies; the beliefs that John F. Kennedy is alive, that the Rothschild family controls the banks, and that children are being sold through the website of the furniture retailer Wayfair¹⁰; as well as antisemitic and anti-immigrant tropes.¹¹

Beliefs in conspiracy myths rise in volatile and uncertain times, especially during times of financial instability. QAnon is an opportunistic ideology that offers wish-fulfilment. The fact that QAnon conspiracies encompass other new and pre-existing ones indicates that the lines between the various conspiracy myths are blurred, with even participants not necessarily drawing distinctions.¹²

Adrenochrome

Q also incorporates claims that a supposedly life-extending chemical, Adrenochrome, is harvested from the blood of abused children and used as a drug by the 'global elite'. One myth suggests that the coronavirus was manufactured in a laboratory which also manufactured this 'Adrenochrome' drug.

An internet meme related to the Adrenochrome conspiracy - the meme includes a typo, referring to Andrenochrome (sic) rather than Adrenochrome.



Save Our Children

The heavy focus of QAnon conspiracies on child trafficking, pedophilia, and abduction results in the spread of such myths among parents and other well-intentioned audiences.¹³ Child abuse is seen by many as “the epitome of sexual and moral depravity and something that is indisputably evil”.¹⁴ This obsession with children and their safety also links the QAnon conspiracies with the pandemic conspiracies, with both targeting legitimate fears and worries with conspiratorial thinking and dangerous myths.

Coronavirus Conspiracies

With the rise in conspiracies related to the COVID-19 pandemic, belief in QAnon has also risen. A high level of overlap can be found between the audiences of QAnon and pandemic conspiracists, with influencers sharing content related to both myths.¹⁵ People with time on their hands, looking for answers, are led down a radical path by niche interests and the internet's tendency to feed their darkest curiosities.¹⁶ In a QAnon world, where those enforcing mask mandates are perceived as part of a movement that includes Satanic child sacrifices, that good-versus-evil narrative can provide a strange source of comfort.¹⁷

QAnon Antisemitism

TSCHISI

Armin Fradler

Ich verfolge Q seit den ersten Posts Ende 2017. Wissen kann ma...

RICHTIG! Aber diese Meinungsverschiedenheiten um Streits auszulösen gehören genauso zu dem Plan! Wir sollen uns in die Haare kommen! Die wahren Verursacher werden halt nie beim Namen genannt! Aber wenn man recherchiert wird man rausbekommen das eigentlich der Staat Israel überall seine Hände im Spiel hat! Hollywood Schauspieler sind fast alle Juden oder deren Abstammung! Bill Gates ist Jude, Mark Zuckerberg - Jude, Rothschilds - Juden und und und! Die Geschichte die sie uns eintrichtern über den Holocaust stimmt nicht! Das wird man aber nicht über You Tube und anderen bekannten Plattformen herausfinden können! Man muss hinter die Kulissen schauen! Warum sind jüdische Kinder in privaten Schulen mit Polizeischutz untergebracht! Wieso vermischen sie sich nicht mit dem "normalen Volk" ? Wieso zahlen wir noch immer an angebliche Opfer, obwohl wir da gar nicht beteiligt waren??? Nochmals: Wenn du wissen willst wer dich beherrscht, dann brauchst du nur wissen wen du nicht kritisieren darfst!

15:10

A central question surrounding the myth is whether QAnon is inherently antisemitic or merely has some supporters who hold antisemitic beliefs. The theory is expansive and elastic, stretching to include many different tropes in the service of its sweeping scope. That can make its core antisemitism hard to detect or track.¹⁸

“A secret cabal is taking over the world. They kidnap children, slaughter, and eat them to gain power from their blood. They control high positions in government, banks, international finance, the news media, and the church. They want to disarm the police. They promote homosexuality and pedophilia. They plan to mongrelize the white race so it will lose its essential power.”¹⁹ The QAnon core beliefs include antisemitic tropes related to the Protocols of the Elders of Zion and blood libel repackaged and rebranded for a modern audience.

Among those accused of being orchestrators of the ‘Deep Space’ are prominent Jewish figures such as the Rothschilds and George Soros²⁰; however even those who are not Jewish, such as Bill Gates, are often re-imagined as Jewish by supporters of QAnon.




In QAnon circles the Protocols of the Elders of Zion are regularly cited as proof of their beliefs. Holocaust denial, distortion, and trivialisation make regular appearances as well.

Supporters

Several QAnon supporters are known far-right extremists, but many are people who “in the early days of the pandemic had nothing in common with the far-right; those who started in April with worries about the lockdown became more and more radicalized”²¹

ATTILA HILDMANN OFFICIAL



DER WAHLKAMPF VON TRUMP MUSS UNSER WAHLKAMPF SEIN!
JOE BIDEN IST EIN EHRENLOSER DEEP STATE CLON-DÄMON!
GENAU WIE CLINTON, OBAMA ODER BUSH! TRUMP MUSS AM 3.
NOVEMBER 2020 GEWINNEN, WIR WERDEN ALLES IN UNSERER
MACHT STEHENDE TUN, UM TRUMP ZU UNTERSTÜTZEN!   
DIE Q-ANON BEWEGUNG MUSS SICH MIT DER DEUTSCHEN
FREIHEITSBEWEGUNG VERBÜNDEN!

 18.2K 11:19

‘Where We Go One, We Go All’ is the motto of QAnon supporters. The conspiracy world can provide community and fame. Individuals active in the community receive praise and confirmation from one another. A significant online presence can often lead to financial benefit²² as QAnon merchandise is sold and websites profit from increased traffic.²³

ATTILA HILDMANN OFFICIAL



Q ist ne vom CIA gelenkte falseflag Opposition! Seit Februar erzählen die Q Leute Deutschland würde befreit werden! Nichts ist passiert stattdessen ist NEW York jetzt ein KZ unter finalem Lockdown und überall in USA wurden FEMA Konzentrationslager errichtet! Alles unter Trump... Querdenken gehört da auch wieder nur dazu... Überall Q!

19.8K 08:59

While conspiracy myths were found mainly in fringe areas of society, they are increasingly being posted on mainstream social media by individual accounts and influencers.²⁴ The content is often shared by influencers with hundreds of thousands of followers related to topics such as parenting, wellness, fashion, and travel.²⁵ The support of influencers has also affected the large following of QAnon.

Apart from social media influencers, several celebrities, including Robbie Williams (UK), Xavier Naidoo (GER), Sido (GER), Attila Hildmann (GER), Curt Shilling (US), Eddie Bravo (US), Roseanne Barr (US), and James Woods (US) have also shown support for QAnon conspiracies, even though Q often targets ‘Hollywood’ elites in the myth.²⁶

Interestingly, Atilla Hildmann has recently (August 2020) stopped supporting QAnon. Instead, he has denounced Q as a ‘false flag’ operation and admitting that he has lost faith in Trump as a saviour. It should be noted that he continues to spread the conspiracies related to the myth and other antisemitic posts.

According to several experts, the failed belief in Q could bring an added risk: “Q always says: ‘Trust the plan. You have to wait. Trump’s people will take care of it’. If Trump does not invade Germany, then some might say, ‘Let’s take the plan in our own hands.’”²⁷

Political

In the 2020 US elections there were at least 24 congressional candidates²⁸ on the ballot who endorsed or expressed support for the theory,²⁹ with QAnon supporters Lauren Boebert³⁰ and Marjorie Taylor Greene³¹ winning seats in Colorado and Georgia. In the past, Greene has pushed the antisemitic conspiracy that George Soros is a Nazi collaborator.³²

Patrizia Rametta

@PatriziaRametta

visceralmente siciliana, Ortigia me genuit, #noeuro #minibot @LegaSalvini @LegaSovranita #NoUE 🇮🇹 #WWG1WGA #MAGA

📍 <https://telegram.me/menoeuropa> 📅 Joined January 2012

2,182 Following 37.8K Followers

Patrizia Rametta, regional coordinator of Italy's far-right Lega party in Sicily, has also embraced the QAnon conspiracy, adding #WWG1WGA to her Twitter bio as well as reviving the Protocols of Zion conspiracy.³³



QAnon International

Anti-vaxxers, white supremacists and government sceptics in Europe are starting to buy into the ill-defined but pro-Donald Trump conspiracy that emerged in the US. QAnon has been adapted into EU-centred and even local narratives where they merge with pre-existing conspiracies and groups.³⁴ Dozens of European QAnon offshoots have sprung up online, while protesters have brandished Q-themed messages at demonstrations in Berlin, London and Paris denouncing face masks and other measures to curb the pandemic.³⁵

According to an investigation by *The Guardian*, the largest international QAnon groups are German, Italian, Polish, Dutch, Australian, and British.³⁶ The investigation, carried out prior to Facebook's crackdown on QAnon, found more than 4.5 million aggregate followers of the QAnon myth in over 15 countries.³⁷

Balkans

The QAnon movement in the Balkans is relatively new; however, it has been growing, with 8.8K people subscribed to the QAnon Balkan³⁸ group, another 8K members in the QAnon Hrvatska³⁹ group on Facebook. The groups have since been removed from Facebook.

France

In recent French-language QAnon posts, French President Emmanuel Macron is described as a pawn of the Deep State.⁴⁰ Several QAnon pages, groups, and accounts also share articles and videos critical of Macron and his government.⁴¹

In France two subsets particularly interested in the Q narratives include pro-Yellow Vests groups and groups supporting Didier Raoult, a doctor supporting the use of hydroxychloroquine.⁴²

Damien Viguiet, lawyer of convicted Holocaust Denier Alain Soral, has recently mentioned QAnon aligned theories on his Twitter account and mentioned the @QAnonFrance. A French QAnon account on Twitter, with nearly 2000 Followers, has tweeted calls for a popular uprising.



German-speaking Region

(Germany, Austria, Switzerland)

A report by ISD-Global demonstrates that Germany is among the top five most active QAnon countries.⁴³ QAnon theories in Germany have resonated with followers of Reichsbürgerbewegung, a conspiracy that claims that Germany is not fully sovereign and has secretly been occupied since the end of WWII by the US, frequently lamenting the stationing of US troops in Germany (According to the Office for the Protection of the Constitution, this Reichsbürgerbewegung encompasses about 19,000 people).⁴⁴

German-language QAnon channels have thousands of followers, with the main YouTube Channel showing 108K subscribers (prior to deletion) and the main Telegram channel showing 128.7K subscribers.

In Germany, it has gained popularity among backers of the nationalist theory of a “great replacement” being orchestrated to supplant Europe’s white population with outsiders.⁴⁵



Demonstrations against the measures to combat the coronavirus have seen QAnon supporters joining with other conspirators, as well as members of the extreme right-wing in Germany attempted to storm the Reichstag.

In May, Michael Brück, a leading German neo-Nazi and member of the Neo-Nazi party Die Rechte, wrote an op-ed urging fellow neo-Nazis to support the demonstrations regardless of whether they believe in the conspiracies or not.⁴⁶ Jürgen Elsässer, editor in chief of the far-right magazine *Compact*, has also been active in promoting the conspiracy, although he claims not to believe in the conspiracy directly. He views it as a “novel attempt to structure political opposition in the era of social media” and claims that “the far right will reconstitute itself differently. Q could play a role in this. It’s about elites, not foreigners. That casts the web more widely”.⁴⁷

Demonstrations against the measures to stop the spread of coronavirus across Austria⁴⁸, Germany, and Switzerland have heavily featured QAnon signs.

Israel

Israeli QAnon groups on Facebook have about 1.3K members each; on Telegram they are smaller. On YouTube, videos related to QAnon translated into Hebrew have several hundred thousand total views.

The discourse is often focused on the mainstream media’s “disinformation campaign” regarding the pandemic and it again demonstrates a strong connection between QAnon & the coronavirus.

UK

A report by British think-tank Hope Not Hate found that an alarming 25% of Britons support QAnon or believe at least some of the conspiracies propagated by the movement.⁵⁰

In the UK, a leading voice in the anti-Corona lockdown movement and propagator of QAnon myths referred to the National Health Service (NHS) as the ‘New Auschwitz’⁵¹.

Demonstrations held at Trafalgar Square united conspiracists, fascists, QAnon believers, and climate-change deniers.

Some supporters suggest that Boris Johnson was installed by Q to help Trump fight the ‘deep state’.⁵²

Violence

In 2019 an FBI document identified conspiracy myths, including QAnon specifically, as domestic terror threats within the US.⁵³

In 2018 a heavily armed man blocked a bridge over the Hoover Dam and engaged in a standoff with police.⁵⁴

In 2019, following an innocent tweet by former FBI director James Comey, which was interpreted by QAnon supporters as a secret message, a school festival was shut down over concerns of violence.⁵⁵ A man arrested in connection with a devastating California wildfire was also a QAnon supporter⁵⁶. Also in 2019 a man was found with bomb-making materials in his car, who had been planning to bomb the Illinois capitol to “make Americans aware of Pizzagate and the New World Order”⁵⁷.

In March 2019 a man convinced that the Gambino crime family underboss Frank Cali was a member of the deep state shot Cali 10 times.⁵⁸

In August 2020 30-year-old Cecilia Fulbright was arrested and charged with aggravated assault with a deadly weapon and driving while intoxicated after she chased two strangers’ vehicles in an attempt to hit them. After the first driver succeeded in evading her, Fulbright chased and cornered a college student with her car, repeatedly ramming the stranger’s car and claiming that she intended to “save a child from Pedophiles”.⁵⁹

Responses – Social Media

In August 2020 Facebook took initial action against the QAnon conspiracy by:

- Removing accounts, pages, and groups that discuss potential violence “including when they use veiled language and symbols” associated with the movement;
- Restricting their ability to organize by not recommending such content and reducing the ranking of such content; and
- Banning them from placing adverts, fundraising, or selling products.

In October 2020 Facebook announced that they will be taking further action and blocking QAnon content across the platform.⁶⁰ In an updated policy, Facebook stated that they will ban any groups, pages, or Instagram accounts that are dedicated to, or identify with, the QAnon movement. It will not apply to individual content, nor to individual Instagram users who post frequently about QAnon but do not explicitly identify themselves as representing the QAnon movement.⁶¹

On 22 July 2020 Twitter announced that they are taking action against the QAnon conspiracy by:

- Permanently suspending accounts tweeting about these topics and coordinating abuse around individual victims;
- No longer serving content and accounts associated with QAnon in Trends and recommendations;
- Working to ensure that this activity is not highlighted in search and conversations; and
- Blocking URLs associated with QAnon from being shared on Twitter.

TikTok has also banned some hashtags associated with the movement.⁶² In October 2020, TikTok announced a series of policy changes aimed at restricting content related to QAnon on the platform by banning and removing users that promote QAnon theories for violating the disinformation policies.⁶³ The ban includes “coded language and symbols that can normalise hateful speech and behaviour” as well as “misinformation about notable Jewish individuals and families who are used as proxies to spread antisemitism”.⁶⁴

In October 2020 YouTube announced an update to their “efforts to curb hate and harassment by removing more conspiracy theory content [...] that targets an individual or group with conspiracy theories that have been used to justify real-world violence. One example would be content that threatens or harasses someone by suggesting they are complicit in one of these harmful conspiracies, such as QAnon or Pizzagate”⁶⁵.

Following the deletion of their accounts on major platforms like Facebook and YouTube, QAnon support channels have moved their activities to alternative platforms such as BitChute.

Notes

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