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"QAnon at Virginia 2nd Amendment Rally (2020 Jan)" by Anthony Crider is licensed under CC BY 2.0.

What is QAnon? 11/12

QAnon is the name often given to the loose affiliation of users who belong to connected but discrete social media communities that host content supportive of the anonymous figure known as 'Q'. These communities generally share the belief that the individual or team of individuals known as 'Q' is the conduit between the public and a military-aligned group of patriots who are fighting against a corrupt establishment. There have been no verified Q posts since their 4953rd communication in December 2020, and it is unclear what the long-term consequences of the disappearance of Q will be for the movement. However, QAnon-affiliated users can still be found online posting memes and comments in online communities.

Where did the movement come from?

There has been a growth of interest in conspiracy theories in internet-based discussion communities over the last few decades. QAnon first emerged on the anonymous image board 4chan, a hub for fringe and often extreme internet subcultures that eschewed any sitewide rules. On 4chan's /pol/ forum, users had been claiming to be whistle-blowers for years before 2017, with individuals like 'FBI Anon' and 'High Level Insider Anon' gaining popularity by posting what they claimed were government secrets. The distinct ideological community now understood as QAnon emerged in this environment of rejected knowledge and conspiracies involving global elites. Q drew together many threads that already existed within the discussions on /pol/, attracting a range of supporters who focused on different aspects of Q's message. Like it was in its earliest days, QAnon has continued to be a diverse, loosely defined community.

Between their first post in October 2017 and their last post in December 2020, a series of cryptic posts attributed to 'Q' were released on internet message boards. These posts allegedly release classified information from US military or intelligence agencies. There is an assumption that Q, or some number of the Q team, has held a high level of security clearance. Q's posts are often presented as revealing secret messages hidden in coded public addresses and tweets of Donald

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Trump. Q has regularly encouraged others to collaboratively engage in their own interpretations of these communications.

Starting in 2020, mainstream social media sites like Facebook began to implement an increasingly broad series of negative measures against QAnon.¹ By early 2021 for example, Facebook had characterised QAnon as a ‘violence-inducing conspiracy network’, and suspended all pages, groups, events, and profiles representing the movement. Facebook stated that their goal was to ‘keep people safe’ from the real-world harm that QAnon causes by preventing the group from organising and recruiting on their platform. As QAnon has largely been deplatformed from mainstream social media, it is therefore difficult to estimate the size of the movement.

Who is affiliated with QAnon today?

Though there are no exact numbers for the size of QAnon due to the informal nature of group membership, a number of polls, surveys, and investigations hint at millions of interested followers. An Emerson poll in 2019² found that 5% of US voters believed in QAnon, and a more recent PRRI survey conducted in September 2021³ found that 17% of Americans are QAnon believers. It might be that some definitions of what it means to be a ‘QAnon believer’ would exclude some of those identified as such in these polls. An internal investigation by Facebook in 2020⁴ found that the number of members and followers of QAnon groups on the platform may have exceeded three million.

After suspensions from mainstream sites like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, alternative social media QAnon groups have continued to attract a large audience. Q movement content creators have migrated onto alternative social media platforms like Telegram, Rumble, Gab, and Odysee. In these groups, users share news stories, links to other QAnon groups, memes related to QAnon in-jokes and worldview elements, or simply express support for the content being shared by others. Telegram groups often have over one hundred thousand subscribers, like “Praying Medic” with 182,000 subscribers, and “Great Awakening Channel” with 123,000 subscribers. Gab groups also have large user bases, like “g/greatawakening” with 208,000 members.

QAnon communities are generally right leaning politically, with Democrat politicians often being the target of accusations of corruption or serious crimes on QAnon pages. However, Conservative politicians and media figures that break ranks with Trump or say negative things about the movement have also been demonised, like Infowars host Alex Jones or elected Republicans Mitt Romney and Kevin McCarthy. Statistics from a March 2021⁵ survey show that there is a minority left-wing presence in the Q movement, with 7% of Democrats being QAnon believers. However, the same survey showed that 23% of US Republicans believed in core QAnon tenets.

Terms like ‘patriot’ are very common in QAnon spaces, regardless of the nationality of commenters; US-based followers consider their support of Q to be in the interest of the USA and Italian followers self-identify as Italian patriots. A Q supporter of any nationality can be patriotic as the villains of the QAnon mythology are global, seeking to oppress and control people in every country. However, not everyone who considers themselves a patriot is necessarily a QAnon supporter; supporting your country doesn’t mean that you must believe in Q’s worldview.

¹ <https://about.fb.com/news/2020/08/addressing-movements-and-organizations-tied-to-violence/>

² <https://emersonpolling.reportablenews.com/pr/august-national-poll-sanders-closing-gap-with-biden-mayor-pete-fades>

³ <https://www.prri.org/research/competing-visions-of-america-an-evolving-identity-or-a-culture-under-attack/#page-section-3>

⁴ <https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/tech-news/qanon-groups-have-millions-members-facebook-documents-show-n1236317>

⁵ <https://www.prri.org/research/qanon-conspiracy-american-politics-report/>

QAnon in Britain

There have been QAnon-linked rallies in the UK, though the movement doesn't seem to have such a visible presence outside of the US. One London 'save the children' event in August 2020 attracted nearly 500 people⁶, and another in the autumn drew 500-600 people. A survey from the Hope not Hate advocacy group⁷ found that about 25% of the British population believed in theories linked to QAnon, but this is likely an overestimate; Hope not Hate found that only 6% of those surveyed self-identified as QAnon supporters.

The presence of QAnon slogans and links to QAnon pages in large groups dedicated to UK anti-vaccine protests on platforms like Telegram shows that there is an overlap between the movement and anti-vaccine ideology in the UK. Links and comments supportive of QAnon are common in "London Protests Official", a Telegram group with 17,000 subscribers that helped coordinate a September 2021 antivax rally in Clapham Common. The movement's connection to anti-vaccine sentiment in the UK reflects its shift away from Trump and towards New Age or wellness perspectives.

What do they believe?

The QAnon worldview centres on a hidden war between the forces of good, referred to as the 'white hats' or simply 'the patriots', and the forces of evil, usually called the 'Deep State' or 'cabal'. According to Q, the corrupt politicians, corporations, and powerful individuals which comprise the Deep State have been manipulating world governments and popular culture for decades. This organisation allegedly controls institutions such as the Catholic Church, the mainstream media, and the global financial system, and is responsible for the poverty, division, and crime that we experience today.

Though not ubiquitous in QAnon circles, some more extreme views on the Deep State are also often shared in online communities devoted to Q. For example, reluctance to the covid vaccine in QAnon spaces is occasionally justified by a belief that mRNA vaccines are in fact bioweapons designed to further the Deep State's plans in some way by killing those who take them. Other views in this vein include the beliefs that the Deep State ritually murders children, that Queen Elizabeth is an ancient demon in human form, that the US invented time travel in the 60s, or that a chemical called adrenochrome, which grants Deep State members long lives, is harvested from children. There are many more beliefs like these which aren't considered credible by the more mainstream followers of Q, but these beliefs can coexist with the rest of the Q movement. Most of these ideas are all variations on the theme that there exists a secret group at the heart of the establishment which is keeping sinister actions hidden from the public.

For followers of Q, Joe Biden's 2020 election victory was interpreted as the result of fraud, a far-reaching conspiracy to overturn what would otherwise have been a victory for Donald Trump.

The 'White Hats'

According to the QAnon worldview, there now exists a righteous alliance of patriotic and anti-establishment political figures, business owners, and high-ranking members of the US military. This recent coalition is sometimes referred to as the 'white hats', and it is believed that they have launched actions which will ultimately thwart the plans of the Deep State and save the world from tyranny.

⁶ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/blogs-trending-54065470>

⁷ <https://hopenothate.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/qanon-report-2020-10-FINAL.pdf>

This plan is ultimately unknowable to the public, but followers of Q often agree on at least two of its aspects. First, the white hats wanted to support the election of an anti-deep state, patriotic politician to the US presidency who could begin the work of undermining Deep State control of the government. This work would include arranging for the arrests of Deep State-affiliated celebrities, politicians, and business leaders. Followers of Q believe that Donald Trump was chosen by the white hats for this purpose, and that he was waging a hidden war against the Deep State throughout his time in office. Some in the movement believe that he remains the current US president and continues to clash with the Deep State.

Secondly, the white hats wanted Q to release information on the Deep State in coded messages on websites that were free from the Deep State's control, before moving onto mainstream social media. It is believed that as Q continues to strategically reveal the shocking truth about the sinister cabal, the general public will increasingly turn against the Deep State.

The 'Great Awakening'

For followers of Q, the two parts of the white hats' plan will ultimately result in an event referred to as 'The Great Awakening'. The term 'Great Awakening' echoes the series of revivals in Evangelical Christianity which are referred to by the same name. These revivals represented moments of growth and development for many Protestant churches in the USA, forever changing the landscape of American Christianity.

Through both the cumulative effect of numerous famous and powerful people being arrested for depraved crimes, and the growing acceptance of the information drops released by Q online, the public will be awakened to the true state of the world and come to know about and resist the Deep State. This event is predicted to radically alter the current system, destroying the Deep State, and introducing a new age of global peace and prosperity.

Q predicted that the recognition of their covert information drops would be rejected by the mainstream media. According to the revelations of Q, the mainstream media will be widely understood as propaganda or 'Fake News' in service of the Deep State, and through this understanding growing, the cabal will lose their ability to control the public. Q often told their followers that "you are the news now", assuring them that this aspect of the Great Awakening is already underway and that the communities which discuss and decode Q's messages have begun to displace the mainstream media.

Q claimed that some members of the Deep State have already been secretly arrested and tried for crimes. Their posts predict that these arrests will ultimately be made public, signalling the end of the secret war, the culmination of the white hats' plan, and total victory against the forces of evil. For some followers of Q, the open prosecution of Deep State members would be a demonstration that the cabal is weak enough to be challenged openly, and that the white hats have taken control of law enforcement and intelligence agencies. If anyone is still unconvinced by Q's information drops, the reality of the public trials and convictions of Deep State members would complete the Great Awakening.

Following this momentous event, the movement's followers look ahead to their much-maligned worldview being vindicated, and their enemies in politics and the media being cast down. For Q's followers, this is essentially a foregone conclusion; the white hats' plan is so expertly constructed that the Deep State's defeat is inevitable, and nothing the evil organisation can do can stop what is coming.

As Trump being the president is an element of the white hats' plan to defeat the Deep State, the alleged fraud committed during the 2020 presidential election was supposedly an example of a beleaguered Deep State striking back against the forces of good.

QAnon and Christianity

There is an overlap between Christianity and QAnon, though this connection isn't quite as clear as is sometimes presented in the media. Q's posts frequently included Bible verses, especially Ephesians 6:10-18 which uses martial imagery to symbolise a spiritual battle that Christians must fight against the forces of evil. PRRI's March 2021 survey found that around 22% of white evangelical protestants in the USA were QAnon believers, and January 6 rioters including the 'QAnon Shaman' lead Christian prayers during the riot at the Capitol building⁸.

Vice and other media organisations have recently claimed⁹ that evangelical Christian pastors have started spreading the QAnon worldview, asserting that Pastor Greg Locke from the Global Vision Bible Church levies many of the same accusations against liberal politicians and Hollywood celebrities that you can find in QAnon circles. Additionally, a Vice investigation found that at least 1800 Christian evangelical channels on YouTube had posted videos in which they used signature QAnon phrases like 'great awakening'. These videos have collectively received 208 million views.

Locke vocally distances himself from the movement however, calling QAnon "nonsense" and not using Q as the source for many of his beliefs about criminal activity coming from the establishment. While evangelical Christians like Locke might share many aspects of their worldview with followers of Q, and it may be that a significant portion of Locke's congregation believes Q's claims, it isn't clear that evangelicals are "spreading the gospel of QAnon" as Vice claims.

Current QAnon Interests

Current QAnon memes and comments into two broad categories: One group of posts accuse the wealthy and powerful of being involved in pervasive crimes like child trafficking, the staging of mass shootings, and the fabrication of data on the covid 19 pandemic. These posts and users act as evangelists for the movement through the sharing of information which they believe reveals the true state of the world.

The second common theme of QAnon posts is prophetic, looking ahead to a time when government officials and Hollywood celebrities will be arrested for their crimes, the general public will accept Q's worldview, and the forces of good will take control of the USA. More recently, followers of Q have begun to see themselves as the means through which society will be transformed, becoming more active in local politics. Supporters of Q, often identifiable by their QAnon merchandise, can also sometimes be seen in person at the political rallies of Donald Trump, antivax events, or their own conferences.

Other sorts of posts are less common, like elaborate proofs of Q's legitimacy where complex and often vague evidence is presented to substantiate their claims. In this vein, QAnon supporters often self-identify as investigative journalists or conspiracy researchers. Q's followers distrust the mainstream media and establishment narratives, calling on others to "do your own research", which invariably means to trust QAnon 'proofs' instead of mainstream news articles.

⁸ <https://religionnews.com/2021/02/25/the-insurrectionists-senate-floor-prayer-highlights-a-curious-trumpian-ecumenism/>

⁹ <https://www.vice.com/en/article/k78jwx/qanon-pastors-spreading-conspiracies-youtube>

QAnon controversies and crimes

There have been several high-profile crimes connected to QAnon, in which the criminal actions of self-identified followers of Q appear to have been motivated by QAnon ideology.

One such incident in 2018 involved Matthew Wright¹⁰, who used an armoured vehicle to block traffic on a bridge near the Hoover Dam, demanding the release of the Inspector General's report on Hillary Clinton's emails. Some QAnon followers expected that the document would contain revelations about the crimes of the Deep State, and Wright appears to have shared this expectation. Upon arrest, law enforcement found in his vehicle two assault-style rifles and two handguns, 900 rounds of ammunition, and a flashbang device. Wright later wrote letters from jail to Donald Trump and other elected officials, expressing continued commitment to Q's message, signing off letters with the popular QAnon motto "where we go one, we go all", capitalising phrases like "Great Awakening", and reiterating parts of the QAnon worldview: "I understand that the evil and corruption is limited to a select few in power and that the greater good is doing its best to combat this."

The 6 January 2021 'insurrection' at the US Capitol also had a QAnon presence, with 20 QAnon adherents arrested for their involvement in the event as of June 2021¹¹. It has been reported that calls for violence were posted in QAnon spaces in the days leading up to the attack¹². Supporters of QAnon and other groups encouraged each other to enter the Capitol in an attempt to interrupt the count of the January the 6th electoral college vote, believing that they were defending an election that was under attack. QAnon adherents saw themselves as taking an active role in the Deep State's downfall by participating in the Capitol riots.

Following these incidents and others, the FBI has published two bulletins on QAnon, stating that the group is likely to motivate some domestic extremists to commit criminal, or even violent activity¹³. The second of the bulletins speculated that because of the failure of Q's predictions to come true, an increasing number of Q's followers will come to believe they can no longer trust the white hats' plan to actualise itself and will begin accepting the legitimacy of violent action.

QAnon and the media

There have been many unflattering pieces written about QAnon in the media, many of which refer to the movement as a conspiracy theory and focus on the most extreme or fringe elements of Q's worldview. In some of these articles, the perspectives of the anticult movement are highlighted, with 'cult experts' like Steven Hassan calling QAnon a 'destructive authoritarian cult'¹⁴ and Rick Alan Ross discussing the 'undue influence' that the movement leverages over its adherents.¹⁵

Further Information

- [Professor Joseph Uscinski](#), on QAnon in the USA

¹⁰ <https://www.reviewjournal.com/crime/courts/suspect-in-hoover-dam-standoff-writes-trump-cites-conspiracy-in-letters/>

¹¹ <https://int.nyt.com/data/documenttools/fbi-bulletin-on-q-anon-and-domestic-violent-extremism-june-4-2021/e587368b36687b6e/full.pdf>

¹² <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/01/08/us/online-extremism-inauguration-capitol-invs/index.html>

¹³ <https://int.nyt.com/data/documenttools/fbi-bulletin-on-q-anon-and-domestic-violent-extremism-june-4-2021/e587368b36687b6e/full.pdf>

¹⁴ www.vanityfair.com/news/2021/01/can-trumps-cult-of-followers-be-deprogrammed

¹⁵ <https://onezero.medium.com/cult-deprogrammer-rick-alan-ross-on-nxivm-qanon-and-what-makes-us-vulnerable-62f6c709562c>

- Annie Kelly, human rights journalist and editor of the Guardian's Rights and Freedom reporting project, on QAnon in Britain: Annie.kelly@theguardian.com
- Dr David [Robertson](#), the Open University
- [Marc-Andre Argentino](#) research fellow at ICSR.

Books (specify perspective – movement or scholarly)

- Much factual background can be found in [The QAnon Deception](#) by James Beverley, written from a conservative American Christian position.
- [The Storm is Upon Us](#)- Mike Rothschild (one of the Telegraph books of the year 2021, critical perspective, not academic)
- [QAnon: An Invitation to the Great Awakening](#) (2019, written by 14 of the movement's most prolific content creators at the time, many of whom are still among the most popular thought leaders)

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