

# The Rise (and Fall?) of QAnon

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# QAnon in the news

- Support for Trump
- Attack on the Capitol
- Banned from Social Media
- Labeled a domestic terrorist group



# Intel?



# Attack on the Capitol



The FBI says Douglas A. Jensen, center, in a shirt promoting the QAnon conspiracy theory, was among the first to breach the Capitol last week. (Manuel Balce Ceneta / Associated Press)



# Attack on the Capitol



© Amy Harris/REX

The 'QAnon Shaman' Jacob Chansley (pictured at the Capitol riot) is a failed actor who lives with his mom, believes spiral signs are an 'FBI pedophile code' and drives a battered Hyundai car plastered with conspiracy slogans, [DailyMail.com](#) can disclose

# Attack on the Capitol - QAnon follower Ashley Babbitt shot and killed



<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/07/us/who-was-ashli-babbitt.html>



# The Retweets

WHITE HOUSE

## Trump isn't secretly winking at QAnon. He's retweeting its followers.

There were 14 retweets on July 4th. And those around Trump are even more explicit. It's giving a boost to the sprawling, Trump-centric conspiracy movement.



<https://www.politico.com/news/2020/07/12/trump-tweeting-qanon-followers-357238>

# Fallout from attack on the Capitol

## Twitter blocks 70,000 QAnon accounts after US Capitol riot

yesterday





# Origins of QAnon

- Part of the conspiracy theory is that there is a cabal of Democratic Party leaders who are Satan-worshipping cannibals and pedophiles who run a global child sex-trafficking ring and have been secretly plotting against President Trump.

# Recognized threat by FBI in 2019

- "The FBI assesses anti-government, identity based, and fringe political conspiracy theories very likely motivate some domestic extremists, wholly or in part, to commit criminal and sometimes violent activity," the document said. "The FBI further assesses in some cases these conspiracy theories very likely encourage the targeting of specific people, places, and organizations, thereby increasing the likelihood of violence against these targets."



# Origins of QAnon

- QAnon started as a far-right fringe conspiracy theory on the anonymous internet forum 4chan
- “QAnon” refers to an American government informant in the U.S. Department of Energy who first posted content as “Q” in 2017

# The mysterious Q

- The Independent has reported that the theories started after one anonymous user signed off as 'Q' on the imageboard website 4chan. The person used the name 'Q Clearance Patriot'.
- Q Clearance or Q access authorization is the level of security clearance required to access top secret restricted data within the American State Department of Energy. The 4chan user was probably using this to give his messages an air of importance and authority.



# Origins of QAnon

- The QAnon followers have identified former national security adviser Michael Flynn and White House aide Dan Scavino as possibilities for Q. Others believe it's Mr. Trump himself. Another theory is that John F. Kennedy Jr. faked his death and now posts on 8chan as QAnon. Or was it Jim Watkins who ran 4chan and 8chan and 8kun?

# The Storm

- The storm takes its name from President Trump's enigmatic comment from October 2018 about "the calm before the storm." Q began posting soon after and said that the storm Mr. Trump referenced is a coming series of mass arrests that would end the deep state forever.



# The Storm

- In QAnon lore, President Trump was secretly working with special counsel Robert Mueller to bring the deep state down, and the storm is a kind of Judgment Day in which the evildoers are punished and the faithful are redeemed. Q has repeatedly suggested that the storm would hit in the very near future and has even said certain people would be arrested at certain dates.

# The Storm

- When those dates come and go without any arrests, Q says that they needed to be delayed for one reason or another, but that President Trump still has the situation well in hand.



# Trust the Plan

On election day

- The QAnon conspiracy theory has a lot on the line today, as followers wait and see whether their trust in “the plan” was well placed.

<https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/11/03/qanon-presidential-election-plan-polls-trump/>

# Trust the Plan

- For years, the supposedly anonymous Q has promised that even the most chaotic happenings around U.S. President Donald Trump were a part of some master plan that would soon be revealed. Just this weekend, an official Q missive asked QAnon's followers: "Are you ready to take back control of this Country?"



# Qanon as alternate-reality game

- QAnon was behaving precisely like an alternate-reality game, or ARG.
- ARGs are designed to be clue-cracking, multiplatform scavenger hunts. They're often used as a promotion, like for a movie. A studio plants a cryptic clue in the world around us.

<https://www.wired.com/story/qanon-most-dangerous-multiplatform-game/>

# Alternate-reality game

- If you notice it and Google it, it leads to hundreds more clues that the gamemaker has craftily embedded in various websites, online videos, maps, and even voice message boxes.
- The first big ARG—called The Beast—was created in 2001 to promote the Steven Spielberg movie A.I

<https://www.wired.com/story/qanon-most-dangerous-multiplatform-game/>



# Overview documentary



# Expansion of QAnon activities

- Save the Children movement
- Covid-19 conspiracy theories
- Anti-vaccines movement
- Anything “Deep State”

# Expansion of QAnon activities

AP

QAnon's 'Save the Children' morphs into popular slogan

## QAnon's 'Save the Children' morphs into popular slogan

By AMANDA SEITZ October 28, 2020



<https://apnews.com/article/election-2020-donald-trump-child-trafficking-illinois-morris-aab978bb7e9b89cd2cea151ca13421a0>



# Expansion of QAnon activities

MORRIS, III. (AP) — At a busy intersection in this small Illinois town, Lynn Vermillion smiles at passing drivers who honk their support for the colorful posters she and friends wave: “Save Our Children. Save their Children. Save ALL the Children.”

As the U.S. presidential campaign heated up in recent months, the 57-year-old mother of two and others like her took to city and suburban streets nationwide to join rallies calling for an end to child trafficking.

The “Save the Children” effort emerged earlier this year as a splinter movement from QAnon, the group of internet conspiracy theorists who believe without evidence that President Donald Trump is secretly fighting a supposed network of celebrities and government officials who are running a child trafficking ring.

<https://apnews.com/article/election-2020-donald-trump-child-trafficking-illinois-morris-aab978bb7e9b89cd2cea151ca13421a0>

# QAnon phrases

The Q posts are known to the faithful as "breadcrumbs." The people who then try to figure out what they mean are called "bakers." According to The Daily Beast's Will Sommer, QAnon believers also spend a lot of time trying to figure out who in the government is a "white hat" Trump supporter and who is a "black hat" in league with the deep state.

Their rallying cry is "where we go one, we go all," a line from the 1996 Jeff Bridges sailing adventure "White Squall" that they misattribute to President Kennedy.



# Origin of WWG1WGA



- “If we don't have order, we have nothing. Where we go one, we go all.”
- Sheldon “Skipper” – Jeff Bridges
- The White Squall



# Qanon phrases

The phrase is frequently abbreviated to "WWG1WGA," which Roseanne Barr — one of several celebrity QAnon supporters — tweeted in June 2018. Former Red Sox pitcher and current right-wing radio host Curt Schilling has also promoted QAnon online.

# Difficulty of coverage

- More a hydra than a structure – message boards, social media, private chats
- Expanding under “Save the Children”
- Simply explaining ever changing and widening beliefs
- Potential online and in-person threats
- Spreading misinformation by reporting on it

# A reporter's viewpoint

TIMES INSIDER

## Following Falsehoods: A Reporter's Approach on QAnon

Kevin Roose, a Times tech columnist, has watched the baseless conspiracy theory grow from fringe internet subculture to mass movement, carefully calibrating his coverage along the way.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/03/insider/qanon-reporter.html>



# A reporter's viewpoint

- My instinct, honestly, was to ignore it. As a tech columnist for The Times, I'd written about a lot of bizarre internet subcultures, and I knew that ridiculous 4Chan conspiracy theories were a dime a dozen. "The Storm" seemed to be just the latest iteration of Pizzagate, a bogus theory about child-trafficking Democrats that had taken hold on fringe sites during the 2016 election, and almost as quickly faded from view.

# A reporter's viewpoint

- But QAnon didn't go away. In June 2018, an armed QAnon believer was arrested after stopping traffic on a bridge near the Hoover Dam. A month later, QAnon supporters started showing up at rallies for the president wearing Q-branded hats and T-shirts. Unlike fringe internet movements that stay purely online, QAnon was seeping into the offline world, and I realized I was going to have to start keeping closer tabs on it.

# A reporter's viewpoint

- The normie tipping point is a joke, but it speaks to one of the thorniest questions in modern journalism, specifically on this beat: When does the benefit of informing people about an emerging piece of misinformation outweigh the possible harms?



# A reporter's viewpoint

- It's a hard balance to strike, and a judgment call every time. Give too much attention to a fringe conspiracy theory before it's gone viral, and you might inadvertently end up amplifying it. Wait too long, and you allow it to spread to millions of people with no factual counterweight.

# Now "normie"

| CONGRESS

## **QAnon goes to Washington: two supporters win seats in Congress**

Believers in Deep State conspiracy enter halls of power



<https://www.rollcall.com/2020/11/05/qanon-goes-to-washington-two-supporters-win-seats-in-congress/>

# Now “normie”

Greene and Boebert were among at least a dozen Republican congressional candidates who had endorsed or given credence to QAnon’s unfounded belief that Trump is the last line of defense against a cabal of child-molesting Democrats who seek to dominate world power.



# Now “normie”

Twitter locks account of congresswoman who live-tweeted about Nancy Pelosi's location during riot

A Republican congresswoman who supports QAnon had her account locked by Twitter this week after she live-tweeted House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's location during last week's deadly Capitol Hill insurrection.

# Now “normie”

Rep. Lauren Boebert (R-CO) revealed on Instagram that Twitter had prevented her from posting until Inauguration Day on Jan. 20.

It was not immediately clear why Twitter had shut down the lawmaker's account. Twitter users called for Boebert to be jailed last week after she used the platform to disclose details of Pelosi's security while a pro-Trump mob stormed the Capitol.

# New meeting places

future  tense

## **Where 8channers Went After 8chan**

The notorious troll board is back online with a new name—but its racist users didn't just find new homes. They found new ways to gather.

<https://slate.com/technology/2019/11/8chan-8kun-white-supremacists-telegram-discord-facebook.html>



# What is needed: even better reporting

- Who runs the communications
- Who finances it
- Which government officials, military and police employees are part of it
- Its future plans of violence

# Inside Qanon

The New York Times

For the past three <sup>I</sup> weeks, a group of Trump supporters and QAnon believers met online, swapped theories and eagerly awaited the conspiracy's violent climax. I was listening in. This is what they sounded like.

 This story features audio. Click to unmute.

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/01/26/opinion/trump-qanon-washington-capitol-hill.html>