

Tracking the QAnon ‘Gospel’ in the Post-Trump Era  
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Conspiracy theories have existed in the American political arena so long as there has been an American political arena. Often, we see conspiracy theories revolve around people, (Obama birther claims, JFK assassination theories, ‘the Clinton’s were responsible for the killing of so-and-so’) or events, (‘the moon landing was faked,’ ‘9/11 was an inside job,’ ‘the Sandy Hook school shooting was a false flag with crisis actors’). However, it was arguably not until Donald Trump that we witnessed the rise and popularization of American conspiracy theories directed at their own government. As [David Rohde writes for the New Yorker](#), “the idea of the deep state saturates Trump’s rhetoric and worldview. His Presidency is predicated on the idea that the United States government is itself an enemy of the people.”

The current American culture of conspiracy led me to my research on QAnon. Dubbed a ‘big tent conspiracy,’ by the New York Times, QAnon advocates the existence of a secret global child sex ring run by liberal political and financial elites. While the user known as Q – who began writing conspiracy riddles to their followers – has not posted since December 8<sup>th</sup>, 2020, (and experts say it is unlikely they will again) the effect left on adherents is lasting. QAnon followers, (known as Anons) were actively involved in the January 6<sup>th</sup> insurrection, according to the Washington Post. One of the most startling revelations came in my first month of research: [QAnon is now as popular as some major U.S. religions](#).

The beginning of my research consisted of an extensive literature review and constant surveil of alt-right and extremist social media platforms. The intention behind this method was to ascertain any and all gaps in mainstream news’ QAnon reporting so that I, as a journalist, could step in and bring these issues to light by freelancing my findings. The two most apparently underreported and important issues to emerge from this research was the issue of Canadian domestic security interests with the rise in QAnon here; and transphobia as a tool for radicalizing people into ideologically motivated extremist groups like QAnon.

Researching, synthesizing, and writing these main articles required expert source material and interviews. I relied heavily on a recent report from the International Centre for the Study of Radicalization which details [the extremist threat during the first 100 days of the Biden Administration](#). I conducted phone or Zoom interviews with experts from around Canada, the United States and Europe; from professors, psychiatrists, former CSIS analysts, counter terrorism experts and a former nearly-radicalized individual, people were willing to share their concerns, opinions and expertise. Subjects discussed ranged from international security and the variant standards between countries, gendered discourses in ideologically motivated extremist groups and how these issues are at play while analyzing an evolving movement like QAnon.

My findings affirm the dangers associated with [an all-time low distrust in government](#) and the myriad of circumstances that allow an individual to become radicalized into a movement such as QAnon. There is no one such demographic that is more prone to radicalization than another as conspiracy theories and conspiracy thinking exist on a linear spectrum: everyone has a part of their brain with the capacity to have conspiratorial beliefs, some just listen to it more than others, particularly when there is such a large and divisive gap in public perception. This research afforded me practical and experiential work as a journalist, allowing me to work with editors, pitch to multiple publications, and make connections with academics and reporters in a similar field around the world.