

# QAnon

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## Guest Bio: Dr. Mia Bloom

According to a [Georgia State University profile](#):

Dr. Bloom is a Professor of Communication, Middle East Studies Center. Her expertise include terrorism, extremism, and child soldiers.

**Bio:** Mia Bloom is a Professor of Communication and Middle East Studies. She conducts ethnographic field research in Europe, the Middle East and South Asia and speaks eight languages. Author of *Dying to Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terror* (2005), *Living Together After Ethnic Killing* [with Roy Licklider] (2007), *Bombshell: Women and Terror* (2011), and *Small Arms: Children and Terror* [with John Horgan] (2019), Bloom is a former term member of the Council on Foreign Relations and has held research or teaching appointments at Princeton, Cornell, Harvard and McGill Universities. Bloom is the editor for Stanford University Press' new series on terrorism and political violence. She is regularly featured as an expert contributor on CNN, CNN International, MSNBC

and Fox News for terrorism and national security issues. Bloom is a member of the UN terrorism research network (UNCTED) and a member of the radicalization expert advisory board for the Anti-Defamation League (ADL). Bloom holds a Ph.D. in political science from Columbia University, an M.A. in Arab Studies from the Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University and a B.A. from McGill University in Russian, Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies.

## Selection of Additional Profiles and Mentions of Dr. Bloom

- [Mia Bloom](#) - on Foreign Policy Research Institute
- [Mia Bloom](#) - on Google Scholar
- [Extremism: QAnon & The Proud Boys w/ Dr. Mia Bloom](#)

## The Origin and Evolution of QAnon

### Highlights

- QAnon supports the fictional right-wing conspiracy theory that alleges Trump is fighting a "deep state" cabal of human traffickers.
- QAnon believers, along with white supremacists, diehard Trump fans, and militant gangs, stormed the Capitol to protest the election results on January 6.
- The conspiracy-theory movement has been linked to several alleged and convicted violent crimes, including killings and attempted kidnappings. The first known QAnon-linked crime took place in the summer of 2018, and the movement also helped fuel the January 6 insurrection on the US Capitol.

QAnon folklore is based on these 12th century Anti-Semitic tropes claiming that Jews kidnapped Christian children and drank their blood for religious reasons. In QAnon's version, the blood collecting also includes "adrenochrome," a chemical compound that conspiracy theorists claim is harvested from children and consumed by members of the fictitious cabal.

In the world of QAnon, rather than Jews writ large being accused of pedophilia and child murder, it's Democrats, "elites," and anyone else who appears to be an enemy of the movement.

QAnon emerged in the wake of "Pizzagate," a 2016 far-right conspiracy theory that baselessly alleged Hillary Clinton and aides ran a child-trafficking ring out of a pizzeria in Washington, DC. Murmurs of "Pizzagate," which circulated online during the 2016 election, started that October when a Twitter troll shared a screenshot of a Facebook post that falsely claimed the New York Police Department found evidence on disgraced politician Anthony Weiner's laptop that Clinton was involved in an "international child enslavement ring," as Craig Silverman of BuzzFeed News reported at the time. At the same time, conspiracy theorists on far-right message boards were discussing baseless claims that Clinton was allegedly involved in a child-trafficking scheme.

Then, a right-wing fake news article on YourNewsWire.com cited a post on 4chan, an anonymous message board that has frequently been the home of violent and racist rhetoric, claiming that emails from Clinton campaign manager John Podesta, published by WikiLeaks, used code words to discuss child trafficking. Soon, several other

right-wing websites began posting similar fake news articles. As Silverman noted, that entire series of events took place in three days.

Less than two months later, Edgar Maddison Welch, who was 28 at the time, drove from North Carolina to the DC restaurant, Comet Ping Pong, where he said he believed children were being held as sex slaves. His belief was disproven after he entered the restaurant. Welch fired an assault rifle into the restaurant and was later sentenced to four years in prison on weapons charges.

QAnon truly began on October 28, 2017, when an anonymous poster called "Q Clearance Patriot" first posted on 4chan, a message board that's frequently home to violent rhetoric. "Q," as the figure came to be known, claimed to have high-level government security clearance and referenced a cryptic impending "storm" in a thread called "Calm Before the Storm."

Weeks earlier, on October 5, President Trump told reporters, "Maybe it's the calm before the storm." A reporter asked Trump "what storm" he was talking about, and the president replied, "You'll find out." The vague comment didn't seem to reference anything at all, but on 4chan, messages from "Q" sent Trump supporters into a frenzy of theorizing.

With "Q drops," the name given to messages from the anonymous "Q" figure, the idea of this upcoming "storm" solidified into the theory of imminent public executions and arrests for child-traffickers and pedophiles. "Q's" main topics in those early days were

related to Clinton's impending arrest (Clinton was never arrested), and were an offshoot of "Pizzagate." "Q drops" in the fall of 2017 also focused on George Soros, a Jewish Democratic donor who's frequently the subject of conspiracy theories, and Clinton aide Huma Abedin, as a Bellingcat investigation found.

Many popular QAnon theories were never referenced by "Q," but were spread by popular influencers in the community, including Frazzledrip, the conspiracy theory falsely alleging the existence of a video depicting Clinton and Abedin sexually abusing a child before filleting his face and wearing it as a mask. Additionally, the claim that John F. Kennedy Jr. is still alive, as well as the concept of "adrenochrome," were "brought to Q by its believers," as Mike Rothschild, a conspiracy-theory researcher who is writing a book about QAnon, said in a tweet.

In the summer of 2018, as QAnon became more popular, clothing and flags related to the conspiracy theory began popping up at Trump rallies around the country, as NPR reported. Travis View, the pseudonymous host of the QAnon Anonymous podcast, pointed out in a tweet at the time that several people wore "We Are Q" shirts at a July 31, 2018, rally in Tampa, Florida.

While QAnon began as a fringe movement, it seeped into mainstream online spaces from 2018 to 2020.

In the beginning of 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic began, the QAnon community played a huge role in spreading medical misinformation, which in turn helped bring more mainstream believers into the fold.

Much of the medical misinformation related to the pandemic, including false claims about the safety of wearing face masks, was popularized by the QAnon community, as a September 2020 BBC investigation found.

In the summer of 2020, the movement pivoted its pro-Trump narrative to focus on "Save the Children," a movement that purports to seek an end to human trafficking. Actual anti-human-trafficking advocacy groups have begged QAnon believers to stop clogging their hotlines with false tips.

But with both anti-mask and anti-human-trafficking rhetoric, QAnon gained steam among "normies," in what University of Amsterdam researchers have called the "normiefication" of QAnon.

A conspiracy theory alleging the Wayfair furniture company was selling human children on its website went viral in mainstream social-media spaces like Instagram in July. The Wayfair theory was created by a QAnon influencer, Insider found.

Lifestyle influencers, mommy bloggers, and yogis began to espouse QAnon rhetoric online. This group's QAnon beliefs are more tied to the idea of a secretive, shadowy

cabal than to Trump being our savior. It's this version of QAnon that's also spread to other countries, including Germany.

In the summer of 2020, tech companies began to crack down on QAnon, which had reached millions of users in Facebook groups, an NBC News report found.

Twitter banned 7,000 QAnon-linked accounts in July 2020, beginning a wave of moderation. TikTok banned QAnon-related hashtags that month, followed by a Facebook ban in August.

In October, Twitter and Facebook increased their moderation and YouTube began cracking down on the theory.

When Joe Biden won the 2020 presidential election, QAnon believers, like other communities of Trump supporters, didn't believe the results. QAnon mythology depended on Trump remaining in office for another four years, and the news that his tenure was over came as a shock.

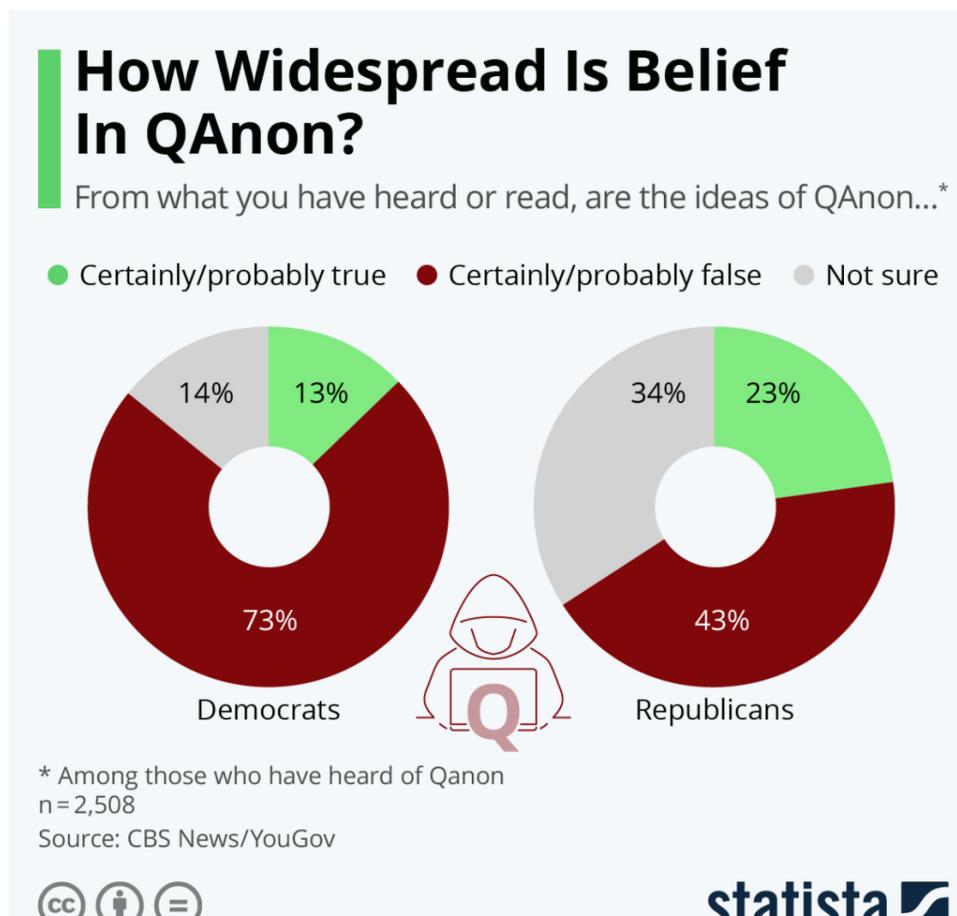
While "Q drops" became less frequent over the course of 2020, they stopped altogether on December 8, after "Q" posted a since-deleted pro-Trump YouTube video.

On January 6, pro-Trump insurrectionists stormed the US Capitol in protest of Biden's win. The coup attempt, which occurred while Congress met to certify the Electoral

College results, featured many QAnon believers, including the "Q Shaman," a popular fixture at QAnon rallies.

Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, a freshman Republican from Georgia, began her first term in Congress in January. But Greene's support for the QAnon conspiracy theory, as well as other offensive claims, drew criticism in the wake of the Capitol riot. Greene claimed to disavow QAnon, but members of the House voted to remove her from her committee assignments on February 5.

As of February 2021, this [graph](#) indicates the widespread belief in QAnon.



# QAnon: Those Who Believe and Their Families

They are artists. They are young and old and middle-aged. They are brothers, sisters, husbands, wives, fathers, and mothers; they are grandparents; they are sons and daughters. They are highly educated and barely educated. They are tech-savvy and they are digitally illiterate. They are pastors preaching from the pulpit. They are from all corners of the United States—and, increasingly, outside it. They are Republicans and Democrats. They were Bernie supporters and Obama supporters. They are business owners and elementary school teachers; they are professors and construction workers; they are IT directors and former FBI agents; and they work for the White House.

And yet despite all this diversity, there are some common threads, based on conversations with dozens of family members of QAnon followers who spoke to VICE News about the damage the conspiracy is doing to their loved ones.

Christian evangelicalism appears to be a major gateway to QAnon belief, with many of those VICE News spoke to reporting that their family member's belief in the conspiracy theory was tightly integrated with their faith.

The majority of the QAnon believers we spoke about were in their 50s, 60s, or 70s. The vast majority were white, and over half did not identify as QAnon supporters—even as they spouted, verbatim, the conspiracy theories boosted by QAnon.

The pandemic has clearly played an important role in radicalizing many people, especially older people who've found themselves isolated and without any real human contact as a result of lockdowns.

While the majority have come to QAnon from a right-wing political viewpoint, a significant number have been radicalized through wellness and spirituality communities online.

All of those spoken to [by Vice] said their family members were informed about the conspiracy through mainstream social media sites like Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter. Some have now moved on to more fringe sites like Gab and Telegram, but most still use the mainstream sites as a way of communicating with fellow QAnon believers.

Speaking to family members of QAnon victims across the country, it's clear that QAnon is not an easy conspiracy to categorize. Some people spoke of loved ones who openly boasted of their loyalty to Q and their belief in every single conspiracy associated with the movement. Others said they didn't even know if their family members had heard of QAnon, and yet they repeated verbatim the core conspiracies pushed by the group's followers.

What's common to all of those who spoke to VICE News is that they see QAnon as a malign force that has radicalized their loved ones to the point where relationships have broken down, families have been divided, and people are living in fear for their safety.

The unhinged nature of some of the conspiracy theories have led to much derisive coverage in the media, where followers are described as crazy and kooky for believing in such obvious falsehoods, and painted as a uniform group of poorly-educated, right-wing conspiracy nuts.

Cutting off all contact with your mother, or refusing to talk to your sibling, or deciding that you have to end your marriage are not decisions that people make lightly. These decisions are made only when nothing else works, and the family members who've made them nearly-uniformly described the anguish of not knowing if they were making the right decision but having to do so for their own mental wellbeing.

They'd also made the decision to cut off their loved ones knowing they might be the person's last real links to the non-QAnon world.

Detailed individual accounts of radicalized family members can be found in the [Vice article](#), from which the information above originates.

- Here is a subreddit dedicated to those victimized by QAnon, called [r/QAnonCasualties](#).
- [NPR](#) features an interview with multiple people who have lost their family members to QAnon.
- A [video](#) on “The personal toll of QAnon on families and once-close relationships”.

# Women of QAnon

According to a [Global Network](#) article, the 2020 United States election marked QAnon's formal entry in the American political arena, and women were at the forefront of the movement. While prior to this, former president Donald Trump had been frequently accused of indirectly **encouraging** or **endorsing** support for QAnon, as reported by Alex Kaplan, the US general election saw **97 candidates running for office with ties to the conspiracy theory**, of which 37 were female.

Of these female Q-supporting candidates, 16 qualified to be on the ballot in the November general election after competing in primary elections or having fulfilled other requirements to be featured on the ballot. Of these 16, 12 were Republican candidates running for Congress – two others ran for Senate, one as a write-in candidate and one as a candidate for the Independent Party of Delaware.

This meant that of **the record 94 female Republican Congressional candidates** in the 2020 election, just over one in seven espoused some degree of public support for QAnon. Furthermore, the only two Q-supporting candidates to win Congressional seats – Marjorie Taylor Greene of Georgia, and Lauren Boebert of Colorado – were both women.

These statistics are important. Not only are women **historically underrepresented in politics**, but in extremist movements they are also **often relegated to supporting roles**, or their **involvement with the group may be understudied**. Thus, the number of women at the very forefront of the QAnon extremist movement is both unusual and significant.

According to a February 2021 article featured on [Politico](#), the national politicians most associated with the false QAnon conspiracy theory — Georgia Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene and Colorado Representative Lauren Boebert — are women. (Boebert has repeatedly denied that she is a QAnon follower, but she has [voiced support](#) for the theory in the past.) Two of the people who died in the January 6 Capitol riot were women, both QAnon followers.

QAnon started in the “mostly masculine recesses” of the internet, according to extremism expert and author Mia Bloom: the message boards 4chan, 8chan and eventually 8kun. But since then, the dark conspiracy theory has evolved, moving from far-right forums onto almost every kind of social media, from Youtube to Etsy to Peloton, gaining momentum along the way. How? Women. Women, particularly white suburban women, flocked to the QAnon community once it migrated to platforms like Instagram and YouTube, and are a key part of how the theory flourished and went mainstream.

QAnon sort of jumped the shark when it ended up being on Facebook, and Instagram in particular in the spring of 2020. And that was when a lot of women started getting on board, and that was when it kind of went more mainstream. What we found while writing the book is that there were 24 QAnon candidates in the 2020 election—but even worse, there were 97 QAnon candidates in the primaries.

And not all of the women were conservatives. A lot of these women, surprisingly, who came to [QAnon] via Facebook or Instagram, were women who were Bernie Bros; they were into yoga and essential oils.

When QAnon went to Instagram, it became much more about “save the children” [from sex trafficking and other organized abuses against children that are part of the QAnon conspiracy universe], and it’s all about “we need to step up,” and in many ways it activates the inherent protective nature of women.

## Marjorie Taylor Greene

Greene was involved in QAnon starting in 2017. Part of it was that she was very onboard with Pizzagate, which was actually earlier than QAnon. And early on she was also promoting this notion of adrenochrome, a naturally occurring compound in the body, that, these QAnon folks say, Hollywood elitists and other people harvest from children. And it’s either used as a recreational drug or for youth and beauty among Hollywood types, according to the theory.

And so she’d been part of these Internet communities even before she was part of QAnon theories. But she was a very early adopter of QAnon, because a lot of these middle-class women only discovered QAnon in late 2019, 2020. There was a 174 percent increase in posts about QAnon starting in March 2020 when the lockdown started.

## QAnon and Mental Health

Sourced from a March 2021 [article](#) by Dr. Bloom’s co-author, Sophia Moskalenko:

As a social psychologist, I normally study terrorists. During research for “Pastels and Pedophiles: Inside the Mind of QAnon,” a forthcoming book I co-authored with security

scholar Mia Bloom, I noticed that QAnon followers are different from the radicals I usually study in one key way: They are far more likely to have serious mental illnesses. I found that many QAnon followers revealed – in their own words on social media or in interviews – a wide range of mental health diagnoses, including bipolar disorder, depression, anxiety and addiction.

In court records of QAnon followers arrested in the wake of the Capitol insurrection, 68% reported they had received mental health diagnoses. The conditions they revealed included post-traumatic stress disorder, bipolar disorder, paranoid schizophrenia and Munchausen syndrome by proxy – a psychological disorder that causes one to invent or inflict health problems on a loved one, usually a child, in order to gain attention for themselves. By contrast, 19% of all Americans have a mental health diagnosis.

Among QAnon insurrectionists with criminal records, 44% experienced a serious psychological trauma that preceded their radicalization, such as physical or sexual abuse of them or of their children.

Research has long revealed connections between psychological problems and beliefs in conspiracy theories. For example, anxiety increases conspiratorial thinking, as do social isolation and loneliness.

Depressed, narcissistic and emotionally detached people are also prone to have a conspiratorial mindset. Likewise, people who exhibit odd, eccentric, suspicious and paranoid behavior – and who are manipulative, irresponsible and low on empathy – are more likely to believe conspiracy theories.

QAnon's rise has coincided with an unfolding mental health crisis in the United States. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of diagnoses of mental illness was growing, with 1.5 million more people diagnosed in 2019 than in 2018.

The isolation of the lockdowns, compounded by the anxiety related to COVID and the economic uncertainty, made a bad situation worse. Self-reported anxiety and depression quadrupled during the quarantine and now affects as much as 40% of the U.S. population.

It's possible that people who embrace QAnon ideas may be inadvertently or indirectly expressing deeper psychological problems. This could be similar to when people exhibit self-harming behavior or psychosomatic complaints that are in fact signals of serious psychological issues.

It could be that QAnon is less a problem of terrorism and extremism than it is one of poor mental health.

## The QAnon Conspiracy Theories

QAnon conspiracy theory alleges that there is a battle between good and evil in which the Republican Mr. Trump is allied with the former. QAnon followers are awaiting two major events: the Storm and the Great Awakening. The Storm is the mass arrest of people in high-power positions who will face a long-awaited reckoning. The Great Awakening involves a single event in which everyone will attain the epiphany that QAnon theory was accurate the whole time. This realization will allow society to enter an age of utopia.

“Q” is a high-ranking government insider, presumably with a military or intelligence background, committed to exposing the hidden truth of what they see as an international bureaucracy scheming against Mr. Trump and his supporters. Some followers believe that “Q” often sends coded signals about his or her existence, using the number 17—the letter Q’s placement in the alphabet.

QAnon additionally claims:

- The democratic primary was rigged to keep Bernie Sanders from winning.
- The government is trying to cover up the link between vaccines and autism.
- There exists a global network that tortures and sexually abuses children in Satanic rituals.
- Vaccinations with tracking chips will later be activated by 5G cellular networks.
- Trump is/was secretly preparing a mass arrest of government officials and celebrities.
- Mueller was actually investigating a child sex-trafficking network.
- The coronavirus is a hoax.
- Celebrities harvest adrenochrome from children’s bodies.

A study concerning these and other claims can be found [here](#).