QAnon Deconstructed: Faith and Lies

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Abstract

No prior research has delved into the depths of madness as this study has in trying to understand the conspiracy system known as QAnon. This paper first examines the previous literature laying down a basis for understanding the nature of conspiracies, QAnon in particular, and alternative social media platforms, then isolates aspects of the QAnon canon to delineate variables directly related to the belief system. Using open-source intelligence (OSINT) methods, the author codes and analyzes over seven hundred messages from nine QAnon Telegram channels, each of which ranges from 3,000 to over 200,000 active users, taken during an eight-day observation period starting when Q posted on June 24th, 2022 for the first time since before the January 6th Insurrection. Cases were synthesized and analyzed in order to identify content trends across the belief system, the modes of communication utilized to amplify the messages of Q, and better understand the conspiracy as a whole. By understanding the range of content found across these channels and their modes of communication, the author finds a construction of "good vs. evil," where predominantly Christian followers of QAnon and Trump are pitted against a Deep State cabal of high-ranking elites using their power and status to abuse and traffick children sexually. Reinforcing this binary is

the use of fear as a tool to galvanize QAnon followers and cement belief, in some cases, leading to radical and violent acts such as Pizzagate or the January 6th Insurrection.

Introduction

On December 4th, 2016, a North Carolina man named Edgar Maddison Welch, having been indoctrinated by alt-right conspiracy theories online, walked into the Washington D.C. restaurant Comet Ping Pong Pizza, armed with an assault rifle. Welch was a believer in the "Pizzagate" conspiracy theory, a predecessor of QAnon that was subsequently enveloped in the QAnon belief system. The theory goes that the owner of Comet Ping Pong, a notable democratic donor, had been running the pizza restaurant as a front to cover up a child sex trafficking ring. The theory sprang from the anonymous internet messaging board 4chan, where users theorized that leaked emails from Hilary Clinton's campaign chairman John Podesta's personal email, contained coded language pointing to the pizza establishment as a satanic meeting place and front.[1] Welch traveled across state lines with the intention of freeing the children he truly believed were being harmed. He went as far as to record a goodbye video for his two daughters where he said, "I can't let you grow up in a world that's so corrupted by evil. I have to at least stand up for you and for other children just like you."[2] Luckily, there was no child pedophilia ring being run in the pizza establishment, and despite firing three shots inside the restaurant, no one was harmed. Welch was sentenced to four years in prison,

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[1] Kate Samuelson, "Pizzagate: What to Know about the Conspiracy Theory," Time (Time, December 5, 2016), https://time.com/4590255/pizzagate-fake-news-what-to-know/.

[2] Geneva Sands, "'Pizzagate' Gunman Recorded 'Goodbye' Video Message to His Family," ABC News (ABC News Network, June 23, 2017), https://abcnews.go.com/US/pizzagate-gunman-recorded-goodbye-video-message-family/story?id=48235100.

but that did not stop the conspiracy at the heart of Pizzagate from growing and being amalgamated into what is known as QAnon.

Literature Review

Conspiracy Theories

In his research on the nature of conspiracy belief, Michael Barkun describes the essence of belief in conspiracy theories as an attempt to delineate and explain evil aspects of the world and society. "The result is a worldview characterized by a sharp division between the realms of good and evil."[3] The author also characterizes conspiracy belief as the belief that an organization made up of groups or individuals is acting covertly to achieve some evil goal. In his article, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics,* Richard Hofstadter examines American political movements motivated by what he labels as "paranoia;" his work has become the foundation for much literature on the nature of conspiracy belief. In it, Hofstadter examines contemporary political movements such as that of Barry Goldwater and Joseph Mccarthy, ultimately making the conjecture that a mentality disposed to view the world through the lens of conspiracy is a type of psychic phenomenon.[4]

Belief in conspiracy theories is usually categorized as monological, meaning that each of the premises in the belief system serves as evidence for each of the other beliefs.[5] This allows easy explanations for any new phenomenon which could threaten the belief system. The QAnon belief system provides for divergent byways in order to stay

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[3] Michael Barkun, "The Nature of Conspiracy Belief," in *Culture of Conspiracy Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), pp. 1-14, 2.
[4] Ramsay Cook and Richard Hofstadter, "The Paranoid Style in American Politics. and Other Essays," *International Journal* 21, no. 2 (1966): p. 249, https://doi.org/10.2307/40200358.
[5] Ted Goertzel, "Belief in Conspiracy Theories," *Political Psychology* 15, no. 4 (1994): pp. 731-742, https://doi.org/10.2307/3791630.

relevant; it is a very welcoming belief system and tolerates contradictions inside of itself.[6]

Barkun's article also categorizes three types of conspiracy theories: *Event conspiracies*, *Systemic conspiracies*, and *Super Conspiracies,* which are constructs in which multiple conspiracies are linked together hierarchically.[7] QAnon is an amalgamation of different conspiracy theories, including "Pizzagate,"[8] meaning it is a "super conspiracy," employing monological belief as well as utilizing other conspiracy theories.

In *The Paranoid Style in American Politics Revisited: An Ideological Asymmetry in Conspiratorial Thinking*, the researchers found that conspiratorial thinking is often associated with "paranoia, narcissism, interpersonal distrust, feelings of powerlessness, lack of agency and control, uncertainty, low levels of education and intelligence, as well as 'magical thinking,'" defined as the superstitious tendency to draw false inferences about causal relationships.[9]

In Hofstadter's 1966 article, he outlines some key factors that he believed could be conducive to the "paranoid mindset" of conspiratorial thinking in American politics. He posits that "certain religious traditions, certain social structures, and national inheritances, certain historical catastrophes or frustrations may be conducive to the release of such psychic energies, and to situations in which they can more readily be

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[6] Adrienne LaFrance, "The Prophecies of Q," The Atlantic (Atlantic Media Company, February 15, 2022), https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2020/06/qanon-nothing-can-stop-what-is-coming/610567/.
[7] Michael Barkun, "The Nature of Conspiracy Belief," in *Culture of Conspiracy Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), pp. 1-14, 6.
[8] Adrienne LaFrance, "The Prophecies of Q," The Atlantic (Atlantic Media Company, February 15, 2022), https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2020/06/qanon-nothing-can-stop-what-is-coming/610567/.
[9] Sander Linden et al., "The Paranoid Style in American Politics Revisited: An Ideological Asymmetry in Conspiratorial Thinking," *Political Psychology* 42, no. 1 (2020): pp. 23-51, https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12681, 24.

built into mass movements or political parties."[10] He also notes that specific key

ideological differences that people hold to be irreconcilable play a role as well, and those

holdings are not privy to the normal political process such as bargaining and

compromise.[11]

QAnon

The QAnon belief system is centered around Q, whose followers believe him to be

an intelligence or military insider who has proof that corrupt world leaders are secretly

torturing children all over the world. These corrupt officials and child torturers are all

part of the "Deep State" and are a cabal of highly powerful democrats and Jewish

businessmen, sometimes also referred to as the "New World Order," and President

Trump and his army of loyal patriots are the good guys[12] which fits the system into the

typical "good vs. evil" conspiracy trope described by Barkun. Additionally, QAnon also

employs various aspects of the Christian religion in its messaging. Q constantly alludes

to "the Lord" and "the devil" in his postings, as well as other religious figures, harkening

again back to the foundation of "good vs. evil" but now putting the "Deep State" in a

satanic context.[13] The allusion to biblical evil is also a pretext for belief in conspiracy

theories in general, as it is indicative of binary thinking.[14] Additionally, in *The Gospel*

According to Q: Understanding the QAnon Conspiracy from the Perspective of

Canonical Information, a visualization word map of Q's most used vocabulary revealed

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[10] Ramsay Cook and Richard Hofstadter, "The Paranoid Style in American Politics. and Other Essays," *International Journal* 21, no. 2 (1966): p. 249, https://doi.org/10.2307/40200358.
[11] Ramsay Cook and Richard Hofstadter, "The Paranoid Style in American Politics. and Other Essays," *International Journal* 21, no. 2 (1966): p. 249, https://doi.org/10.2307/40200358.
[12] Adrienne LaFrance, "The Prophecies of Q," The Atlantic (Atlantic Media Company, February 15, 2022), https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2020/06/qanon-nothing-can-stop-what-is-coming/610567/.
[13] Adrienne LaFrance, "The Prophecies of Q," The Atlantic (Atlantic Media Company, February 15, 2022), https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2020/06/qanon-nothing-can-stop-what-is-coming/610567/.
[14] Christopher D. Bader et al., "Chapter 2," in *Fear Itself the Causes and Consequences of Fear in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2020).

that most of Q's postings could be grouped into five categories that often intersect: *governmental despotism, governmental insurgency, religion & satanism, deep-state rulers, and Epstein/pedophilia*.[15] These findings enforce the critical aspects of QAnon belief as being all interconnected to each other and further endorse the "super conspiracy" status. Also signaling several factors of general conspiratorial thinking, such as religion and distrust of government.

Q's messages often end with a promise that the "Great Awakening" is coming.[16] The concept of being woken up to the "true reality" is also prevalent in conspiracy theories; it relates directly to the *nothing is as it seems* premise found in most, if not all, conspiracies[17] and "the acceptance of the premise that things are not what they seem provides an avenue to seeing the world anew."[18] To believe Q requires "rejecting mainstream institutions, ignoring government officials, battling apostates, and despising the press."[19]

In relation to this, "Right-wing news outlets such as Fox News and Breitbart were much more likely than mainstream news outlets to spread misinformation, including conspiracy theories about the [corona]virus, and citizens who consumed more right-wing news held more false beliefs about the pandemic."[20] These alternative

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[15] Antonis Papasavva et al., "The Gospel According to Q: Understanding the Qanon Conspiracy from the Perspective of Canonical Information," *Proceedings of the International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media* 16 (2022): pp. 735-746, https://doi.org/10.1609/icwsm.v16i1.19330.

[16] Adrienne LaFrance, "The Prophecies of Q," The Atlantic (Atlantic Media Company, February 15, 2022), https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2020/06/qanon-nothing-can-stop-what-is-coming/610567/.

[17] Michael Barkun, "The Nature of Conspiracy Belief," in *Culture of Conspiracy Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), pp. 1-14, 6.

[18] Christopher D. Bader et al., "Chapter 2," in *Fear Itself the Causes and Consequences of Fear in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2020).

[19] Adrienne LaFrance, "The Prophecies of Q," The Atlantic (Atlantic Media Company, February 15, 2022), https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2020/06/qanon-nothing-can-stop-what-is-coming/610567/.

[20] Sander Linden et al., "The Paranoid Style in American Politics Revisited: An Ideological Asymmetry in Conspiratorial Thinking," *Political Psychology* 42, no. 1 (2020): pp. 23-51, https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12681, 27.

sources of information can come from social media as well. Q and Trump both rail frequently against the "fake news" mainstream media which push a majority of QAnon adherents to get most of their news from either Q or social media.[21] There is a strong connection between the increase in the use of social media and belief in conspiracy theories, as it has been proven that "social media use and multitasking also increase anxiety, and anxiety is strongly and positively connected to perceiving and believing conspiracies."[22]

On October 5th, 2017, before the first post by QAnon on 4chan, then President Trump was taking pictures in the White House. He addressed the reporters taking pictures, traced an incomplete circle in the air with his right pointer finger, and asked, "You guys know what this represents?" When the reporters asked what it meant, Trump responded, "Maybe it's the calm before the storm."[23] The "calm before the storm" is a repeated phrase used by QAnon and, to many believers of QAnon, the thing Trump was tracing with his finger was a "Q."[24] Since the interaction occurred before Q's first post, it is possible that Q could have simply been copying Trump; however, the correlation is unclear.

Trump has also retweeted accounts spreading QAnon posts and memes on at least 145 occasions.[25] These undeniable connections between former President Donald

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[21] Adrienne LaFrance, "The Prophecies of Q," The Atlantic (Atlantic Media Company, February 15, 2022), https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2020/06/qanon-nothing-can-stop-what-is-coming/610567/.
[22] Christopher D. Bader et al., "Chapter 2," in *Fear Itself the Causes and Consequences of Fear in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2020).
[23] Adrienne LaFrance, "The Prophecies of Q," The Atlantic (Atlantic Media Company, February 15, 2022), https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2020/06/qanon-nothing-can-stop-what-is-coming/610567/.
[24] Adrienne LaFrance, "The Prophecies of Q," The Atlantic (Atlantic Media Company, February 15, 2022), https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2020/06/qanon-nothing-can-stop-what-is-coming/610567/.
[25] Adrienne LaFrance, "The Prophecies of Q," The Atlantic (Atlantic Media Company, February 15, 2022), https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2020/06/qanon-nothing-can-stop-what-is-coming/610567/.

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Trump and the QAnon belief system make it very obvious that, in some capacity, Trump is at the center of QAnon.

This finding aligns with conservatives being more likely than liberals to fall victim to conspiratorial thinking. In *The Paranoid Style in American Politics Revisited: An Ideological Asymmetry in Conspiratorial Thinking*, the authors found that "...conservatives in the United States and other Western countries score higher on measures of dogmatism, cognitive rigidity, intolerance of ambiguity and uncertainty, self-deception, and threat sensitivity - and lower on measures of need for cognition, integrative complexity, cognitive reflection, intelligence, and analytical reasoning."[26] QAnon also harnesses paranoia as one of its key foundations, paranoia being one of the most common factors in conspiratorial thinking.[27] Ultimately, the research showed "...that political conservatives were significantly more likely than liberals to exhibit paranoid ideation, to be more distrustful of officialdom, and to espouse conspiratorial thinking in general."[28] Conservatives were exceedingly distrustful of scientists, government, and mainstream media, which presumably makes them more susceptible to conspiratorial thinking; likewise, conspiratorial thinking likely increases distrust of those conventional epistemic authorities. Distrust of officialdom is a common theme in the QAnon belief system; one of the tenets of QAnon is to *Do your own research. Don't take anything for granted.*[29] This ties back to one of the core elements of all conspiracy

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[26] Sander Linden et al., "The Paranoid Style in American Politics Revisited: An Ideological Asymmetry in Conspiratorial Thinking," *Political Psychology* 42, no. 1 (2020): pp. 23-51, https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12681, 27.

[27] Sander Linden et al., "The Paranoid Style in American Politics Revisited: An Ideological Asymmetry in Conspiratorial Thinking," *Political Psychology* 42, no. 1 (2020): pp. 23-51, https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12681, 26.

[28] Sander Linden et al., "The Paranoid Style in American Politics Revisited: An Ideological Asymmetry in Conspiratorial Thinking," *Political Psychology* 42, no. 1 (2020): pp. 23-51, https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12681, 24.

[29] Adrienne LaFrance, "The Prophecies of Q," The Atlantic (Atlantic Media Company, February 15, 2022), https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2020/06/qanon-nothing-can-stop-what-is-coming/610567/.

theories. These belief systems become all-encompassing and act as lenses that refract both society and the individual.[30] Through this lens, the conspiracists can only see the consequences of power with no chance to observe its actual inner workings; conspiracists, in fact, tend to resist heightened awareness of observing how the world actually operates.[31]

Alternative Media Platforms

In their study of *US Extremism on Telegram*, Samantha Walther and Andrew McCoy examine the relationship between the promulgation of QAnon conspiracy theories and alternative media, specifically looking at the app Telegram. They find alternative media platforms, which they define as "those sources and platforms that challenge traditional media due to perceptions that the traditional media has become biased, or concealed and distorting the reality of information being disseminated,"[32] are increasingly being used by conservative users more than liberals. Further, they point out that "alternative social media platforms enable the building of strong and nearly impenetrable virtual communities that can produce echo chambers of hate speech and violent extremist dialogue that would otherwise be removed by mainstream platforms."[33] In selecting Telegram for specific study, over other alternative conservative platforms such as Parler or TruthSocial, they add that its influence has previously been used for recruitment and planning by the Islamist extremist group ISIS.

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[30] Christopher D. Bader et al., "Chapter 2," in *Fear Itself the Causes and Consequences of Fear in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2020).

[31] Ramsay Cook and Richard Hofstadter, "The Paranoid Style in American Politics. and Other Essays," *International Journal* 21, no. 2 (1966): p. 249, https://doi.org/10.2307/40200358.

[32] Samantha Walther and Andrew McCoy, "US Extremism on Telegram: Fueling Disinformation, Conspiracy Theories, and Accelerationism," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 15, no. 2 (2021): pp. 100-124, https://www.jstor.org/stable/27007298, 100.

[33] Samantha Walther and Andrew McCoy, "US Extremism on Telegram: Fueling Disinformation, Conspiracy Theories, and Accelerationism," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 15, no. 2 (2021): pp. 100-124, https://www.jstor.org/stable/27007298, 101.

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Telegram was initially developed in 2013 and is a cloud-based messaging application accessible on a computer, tablet, or mobile device. Telegram has various modes of communication which include private one-on-one conversations, group chats, and both public and private channels controlled and moderated by specific admins or owners. Compared to Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter, Telegram does not have extensive takedown policies and tends only to remove content that is pornographic or contains some violent rhetoric on its public channels.[34] In addition to its laissez-faire style of oversight, Telegram also boasts several security measures taken to protect user data and conversations. These include encryption software and automatically self-destructing secret chats. Since the 2018 terms of service update, Telegram will only release its users' IP addresses and phone numbers if it is served with a court order stating the user is a terrorist suspect.

Walther and McCoy cite a study from Valerio Mazzoni that determined three main categories of Telegram channels: image, news, and discussion. Image channels feature propaganda in the form of videos, memes, and infographics with the purpose of inspiring viewers.[35] News channels often are not open to public discussion and allow only admins to provide constant updates on current events via links to news sites and captions reflecting their narrative. Discussion channels are open groups where anyone can participate in the conversation.[36] Similarly, Mazzoni finds that the two most active types of Telegram users, those who go beyond the pale of simply seeking information or

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[34] Samantha Walther and Andrew McCoy, "US Extremism on Telegram: Fueling Disinformation, Conspiracy Theories, and Accelerationism," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 15, no. 2 (2021): pp. 100-124, https://www.jstor.org/stable/27007298, 102.

[35] Valerio Mazzoni, "Far Right Extremism on Telegram: A Brief Overview," European Eye on Radicalization, July 19, 2021, https://eeradicalization.com/far-right-extremism-on-telegram-a-brief-overview/.

[36] Samantha Walther and Andrew McCoy, "US Extremism on Telegram: Fueling Disinformation, Conspiracy Theories, and Accelerationism," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 15, no. 2 (2021): pp. 100-124, https://www.jstor.org/stable/27007298, 102.

passively engaging with content, can be classified as "1) those who want to engage more fully with militant and violent groups and the other users on the channel and 2) propagandists who are both seeking information and engaging with other users on channels."[37]

Walther and McCoy also find that after the 2019 Christchurch domestic terror attack in New Zealand, far-right movements have expanded across Telegram channels. They cite research from the SITE Intelligence Group, which found that following the shooting, "far-right channels experienced a 117% increase in membership."[38] Unlike the channels utilized by ISIS for recruitment purposes, these far-right channels are largely public-facing and grant access to any users seeking the hate-based and violent conversations they host. Also, unlike ISIS networks, Walther and McCoy describe these far-right networks as being often much more loosely connected and highly decentralized. Citing a study by Jakob Guhl and Jacob Davey, which analyzed 208 white supremacist Telegram channels,[39] Walther and McCoy conclude that the platform was largely "being used to glorify terrorist and past lone-actors, call for violence, spread white supremacist material, and degrade minority groups."[40]

Another aspect of Telegram's appeal to QAnon conspiracists that Walther and McCoy address is its heightened need for constant engagement. Telegram chats appeal

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[37] Samantha Walther and Andrew McCoy, "US Extremism on Telegram: Fueling Disinformation, Conspiracy Theories, and Accelerationism," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 15, no. 2 (2021): pp. 100-124, https://www.jstor.org/stable/27007298, 102.

[38] Samantha Walther and Andrew McCoy, "US Extremism on Telegram: Fueling Disinformation, Conspiracy Theories, and Accelerationism," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 15, no. 2 (2021): pp. 100-124, https://www.jstor.org/stable/27007298, 103.

[39] Jakob Guhl and Jacob Davey, "A Safe Space to Hate: White Supremacist Mobilisation on Telegram," ISD Global, November 29, 2021, https://www.isdglobal.org/isd-publications/a-safe-space-to-hate-white-supremacist-mobilisation-on-telegram/.

[40] Samantha Walther and Andrew McCoy, "US Extremism on Telegram: Fueling Disinformation, Conspiracy Theories, and Accelerationism," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 15, no. 2 (2021): pp. 100-124, https://www.jstor.org/stable/27007298, 103.

to individuals who wish to connect with other like-minded individuals, with recruiters and propagandists functioning similarly to a salesperson, with the product being a photo, video, link, or another type of propaganda. Many of the links sent expire quickly, and the channels are often flooded with messages to the point where users have to be present and logged in constantly so as not to miss content or the opportunity to connect and engage with others. As Walther and McCoy point out, constant engagement with content and other members can lead vulnerable individuals to feel fulfilled and a part of a community, which influences their likelihood to keep coming back to the channel.[41] Walther and McCoy cite another study by Donald Holbrook, which analyzed the different types of material and their differences in the severity of extremism in terms of media being disseminated. Holbrook concluded that the majority of content being disseminated in groups connected to plans or acts of terrorism in the UK between 2004 and 2017 was ideological in nature, such as religious materials, not facilitative (instructions on how to build an Improvised Explosive Device (IED)).[42] Walther and McCoy speculate that most online users in these channels may be only passively engaging with this type of content and will never take action off-line; however, the increased exposure to this type of propaganda and the regular calls for violence made to such large audiences increase the risk that one or more of the viewers may eventually act off-line.[43]

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[41] Samantha Walther and Andrew McCoy, "US Extremism on Telegram: Fueling Disinformation, Conspiracy Theories, and Accelerationism," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 15, no. 2 (2021): pp. 100-124, https://www.jstor.org/stable/27007298, 103.
[42] Donald Holbrook, "The Terrorism Information Environment: Analysing Terrorists' Selection of Ideological and Facilitative Media," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 33, no. 4 (2019): pp. 697-719, https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2019.1583216.
[43] Samantha Walther and Andrew McCoy, "US Extremism on Telegram: Fueling Disinformation, Conspiracy Theories, and Accelerationism," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 15, no. 2 (2021): pp. 100-124, https://www.jstor.org/stable/27007298, 103.

Walther and McCoy's theoretical framework regarding alternative media suggests that it "aims to serve a specific community while at the same time forming an antagonist relationship with traditional media sources."[44] These communities form a collective identity, usually strengthened by intergroup conflict typically targeted at different social groups. A study by Aleksandra Urman and Stefan Katz found that Telegram activity began to increase with mass bans of far-right actors on mainstream social media platforms; this trend isolates the far-right dialogue from the rest of political discourse and aids the antagonism felt in these communities, ultimately creating an asymmetric polarization online.[45]

Research by Deen Freelon, Alice Marwick, and Daniel Kreiss found that far-right actors have become adept at exploiting vulnerable young men who are inclined towards rebellion and a dislike of political correctness in order to spread their violent ideologies, create distrust of legitimate media and news sources, and further help to radicalize others.[46] In giving platforms to these far-right actors, Telegram channels can be used to quickly spread false information to thousands of vulnerable followers, increasing the influence that such disinformation and conspiracies, like QAnon, can have online. Walther and McCoy also conclude that conspiracies are more likely to circulate in reaction to government mistrust, weakened institutions, and the perceived exclusion of groups from the democratic process; in this sense, QAnon's proliferation on Telegram

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[44] Samantha Walther and Andrew McCoy, "US Extremism on Telegram: Fueling Disinformation, Conspiracy Theories, and Accelerationism," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 15, no. 2 (2021): pp. 100-124, https://www.jstor.org/stable/27007298, 104.

[45] Urman, Aleksandra, and Stefan Katz. "What They Do in the Shadows: Examining the Far-Right Networks on Telegram." *Information, Communication & Society* 25, no. 7 (2020): 904–23. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118x.2020.1803946.

[46] Deen Freelon, Alice Marwick, and Daniel Kreiss, "False Equivalencies: Online Activism from Left to Right," *Science* 369, no. 6508 (April 2020): pp. 1197-1201, https://doi.org/10.1126/science.abb2428.

presents one of the most simultaneously perfect and dangerous executions of modern conspiratorial outreach in history.

Walther and McCoy use the term "accelerationism" to describe how actors on the far-right and in certain Telegram channels believe they must increase civil disorder, or accelerate violence and aggression, in order to further polarization and bring about societal collapse fitting for their agenda.[47] In their view, accelerationists see violence as the spark that can ignite a chain reaction to create chaos, collapse, and revolutionary change promoting white power or other far-right goals. In 2020, during the Black Lives Matter protests that erupted throughout the United States following the murder of George Floyd, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) warned intelligence officials of a white supremacist Telegram channel encouraging its followers to infiltrate and start "boogaloos" at the protests in order to accelerate a civil war, which many far-right actors believe is inevitable and for which they have begun to train and arm themselves.

Walther and McCoy conclude their study by stating that Telegram is an actively growing platform for US-based hate speech and extremism that comprises a range of ideologies. They also find that Telegram and other alternative media platforms are exponentially furthering the pressing disinformation crisis in the United States. Walther and McCoy believe QAnon is the best conspiracy to exemplify how disinformation is delegitimizing democratic institutions and gaining influence in politics. At the time of their study in April 2021, "more than a dozen US House and Senate candidates [had] openly endorsed the conspiracy running for office."[48] They end by positing that the

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[47] Samantha Walther and Andrew McCoy, "US Extremism on Telegram: Fueling Disinformation, Conspiracy Theories, and Accelerationism," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 15, no. 2 (2021): pp. 100-124, https://www.jstor.org/stable/27007298, 105.
[48] Samantha Walther and Andrew McCoy, "US Extremism on Telegram: Fueling Disinformation, Conspiracy Theories, and Accelerationism," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 15, no. 2 (2021): pp. 100-124, https://www.jstor.org/stable/27007298, 114.

momentum that conspiracy theories are gaining in the United States is one of the most dangerous threats to its democracy and national security.

Methodology

For this study, the author utilized open source intelligence (OSINT) data gathering and content analysis to synthesize over 700 messages from nine Telegram channels related to the QAnon conspiracy theory.

Finding Channels

As Walther and McCoy mentioned in their study, Telegram channels can fall into three categories: image, news, and discussion channels. Additionally, channels can either be admin-controlled, with only certain users being allowed to post, or open-discussion channels where anyone can post messages and other media. Typically, most news channels are admin-controlled, most discussion channels are open to discussion, and image channels can go either way. When examining channels for inclusion in this study, the author tried to weigh several different factors. First, the author wanted variety in the type of channel being assessed; second, variety in the number of followers; and third, relevance to the QAnon conspiracy theory. In the end, the following nine channels were operationalized for this study.

"ULTRA Pepe Lives Matter" (UPLM):

UPLM is a news channel with 214,530 subscribers as of December 12th, 2022 (hereafter referred to as the date of observation). The channel image and many of the posts shared include the famous "Pepe" frog meme which has been adopted by the alt-right and followers of QAnon. The admin of this channel posts a daily morning news update accompanied by an image of a poorly drawn Pepe frog in a press outfit with the letters

"QNN" in the corner, an obvious parody of CNN. The posts include videos from a variety

of sources, excessive amounts of links to other alternative media such as TruthSocial,

and captions revealing the admin's personal opinions about the topic at hand.

"TheStormHasArrived17" (S17):

S17 is a news/image channel with 148,359 subscribers as of the date of observation. The

info section of this channel reads: "fighting for POTUS45," meaning former President

Donald Trump. The image for this channel is a "Punisher" skull in camouflage colors

with flames in both eyes. The majority of posts by the admin of this channel are videos

or images attached with links and captions. Occasionally the admin will post memes.

"BandOfBrothersQ" (BOBQ):

BOBQ is a discussion channel with 12,972 members at the date of observation. The

information bio reads: "Donald Trump | Disclosure | Intel | Defense| Opsec | Breaking

News | Prepper Resources | Intelligence | Uncensored News | Presiden Trump| Drops

The Truth Starts Here #osint #awakening #agenda21 #nwo #news #opsec #prepper

#prepping #trump". (Typos left in by the author). In this context, "#nwo" is understood

by the author to stand for "new world order," a common component of the QAnon

conspiracy system. BandOfBrothers is most likely a reference to the HBO program

"Band of Brothers," which followed a group of soldiers during World War II. The author

understands the purpose of this reference to illicit themes of patriotism. Posting in this

channel is open to all and hence cannot be summarized adequately in this section.

"Q+Anons" (Q+A):

Q+A is a discussion channel with 28,828 members at the date of observation. There is

no information bio. Like BOBQ, posting in this channel is open to all, and the generality

of messages can not be summarized adequately in this section. The image for this

channel is the Guy Fawkes mask synonymous with the Anonymous internet group with a green outlined letter Q superimposed over it.

"WeTheUltraMedia" (WTUM):

Since initial observation, this channel has been renamed "We The Media," however, for the purposes of discussion, the author shall refer to it by its originally observed name. This is a news channel with 223,930 subscribers at the date of observation. The image for this channel is a logo with "WTM" in red on a blue background. The information bio of this channel reads: "Real News: For The People By The People. NOTE: WE DO NOT ADVOCATE VIOLENCE. ANY MEMBERS THAT VIOLATE THIS CHANNEL'S POLICY WILL BE PERMANENTLY BANNED. PERIOD." Aside from linking to other alternative news sites, this channel also hosts a substantial amount of memes, videos, and captions that the admin editorializes.

"QAnon Warriors" (QW):

QW is an image/video-based channel that has 63,933 subscribers at the date of observation. The information bio for this channel reads: "🔥🔥🔥Where We Go One We Go All🔥🔥🔥If AMERICA Falls, The World Falls." The image of this channel is an American flag with a white letter Q superimposed on top; encircling the flag are the words "Where We Go One We Go All," a uniting slogan of the QAnon conspiracy, sometimes abbreviated as "WWG1WGA". This channel hosts a range of images and videos, including memes and a substantial amount of clips from Fox News.

"Midnight Rider Channel" (MRC):

MRC is a hybrid image/news channel controlled by an admin. MRC has 199,908 subscribers on the date of observation. The information bio simply reads: "Karli Channel," identifying musician Karli Bonne as the admin for the channel. Her likeness

and username are also featured in the channel's image, which shows Karli wearing a Revolutionary war soldier's uniform and holding a "Punisher" skull mask while a frog sits on her shoulder. Karli posts frequent links and videos, usually from Fox News, Steve Bannon's "the War Room," or Daily Mail.

"Where We Go 1 We Go All" (WWG):

WWG is a discussion channel with 3,372 members at the date of observation. It has no information bio, and the image is an infinity symbol with the words "quantum connected" on top and encircled by the titular slogan. As with other discussion channels, the messages cannot be readily summarized in this section.

"Q World Order" (QWO):

QWO is a news channel with 34,946 subscribers at the date of observation. The information bio for this channel reads: "Your Central Hub For Comms. -Decodes -Connecting Dots -All things Q -Today's News -Preparedness Tips -Skywatch." Decodes refer to members of the QAnon conspiracy decoding QAnon's posts (referred to often as "drops"), and Skywatch is what QAnon followers call tracking military and civilian aircraft. QWO's channel name is a reference to the new world order previously mentioned, and its image is the Pepe frog tipping a hat that reads "QWO." While also posting typical links and videos, the QWO admin also sends messages personally written, which contain elements of news through an editorial lens.

In total, six out of the nine channels examined in this study were closed channels and three were open (see Table 3 on page 31).

QAnon Deconstructed: Faith and Lies

Gathering Messages

The first step in gathering messages to code for this study's content analysis was to set a perimeter on the dates of the messages examined. For this component of sampling, historical context is relevant. On June 24th, 2022, the day the Supreme Court of the United States issued its opinion in the *Dobbs* case overturning the Constitutional right to abortion decided in *Roe v. Wade*, Q posted on the anonymous image chat site "8Kun," the post is included below (see Figure 1):

Figure 1: June 24th Q Drop
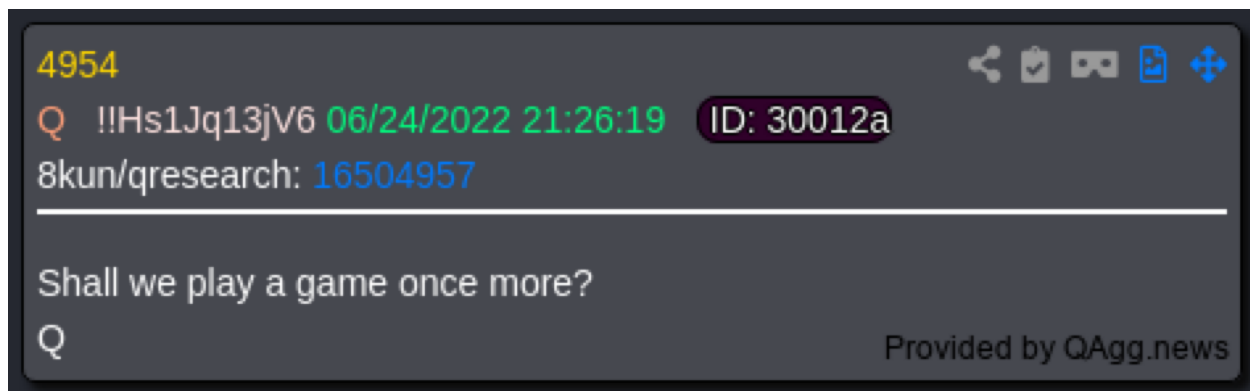
The trip code (the jumble of symbols following the Q) identified the post to be authentic to followers of QAnon. This was the first post made by Q since December of 2020, before the January 6th attack on the nation's capital. This post, coupled with several other significant events in the week that followed, spurred massive engagement of QAnon believers across Telegram. The other significant events include the death of Michael Stenger (the Senate's Sergeant at Arms on January 6th, 2021) on June 27th, the sentencing of Ghislaine Maxwell (a prominent character in the QAnon conspiracy) to 20 years in prison for conspiring with Jeffery Epstein to sexually abuse minors on June 28th, the testimony of Cassidy Hutchinson (former aide to Trump's chief of staff) before the House January 6th select committee on June 28th, and the death of Dr. Vladimir

Zelenko (who promoted the Trump-endorsed hydroxychloroquine treatment of COVID-19) on June 30th. All these events impacted the author's decision to examine messages from June 24th to July 1st, 2022. In this sense, the study can be understood as following the reaction of the QAnon community across Telegram following the resurgence of Q.

The next component of the sampling to consider is the amount of messages to be coded and how said messages would be selected. At the advice of the author's faculty advisor, Dr. Ann Gordon, a randomized selection process was administered. For each channel, starting on June 24th and ending on July 1st, the author counted and coded every seventh message posted, reversing the count after each channel had been synthesized to affirm the precision of randomization. A randomized selection process was chosen due to the sheer volume of messages posted on each channel during the eight-day time period examined; this was also the reason that comments on individual posts were not included. The number seven was chosen to count the messages for no other purposes than the author's affinity for it.

Coding Messages

In total, the author harvested 723 messages from the nine channels. Each message was entered into a spreadsheet and coded by date, channel, media type (i.e., image, video, text, meme, or link), and a unique combination of content codes. The content codebook was created by the author for use in this study and comprises 25 unique variables related to the QAnon conspiracy theory. The full codebook is included below (see Figure 2):

Figure 2: QAnon Codebook

Content	Code
Anti-Biden, Hunter Biden, or Kamala Harris	AB
Antisemitism	AS
Anti-Vaccine or COVID related conspiracy theory	AV
Christianity or Christianity related	CH
Child pedophilia, sacrifice, torture, or sex trafficking	CP
Deep state	DS
Election fraud or advocating to overturn the 2020 election	EF
Fear mongering or accelerationism	FM
Fox News posts, messaging, or links	FX
Government corruption	GC
Homophobia	HO
January 6th hearings	J6H
January 6th insurrection	J6I
Anti-Main stream media or "fake news"	MSM
Nazi related	NR
Other conspiracy theory outside of QAnon	OC
Other types of message	OT
Patriotism	PT
QAnon related or direct Q "drops"	QR
Racism or Xenophobia	RA
Russia, Ukraine, or the Russia-Ukraine war	RU
Satanism	ST
Sexism	SX
Trump messaging: his posts or speeches	TM
Advocating violence or overthrow of the government	VI

Content variables were included based on how often they were mentioned in the literature surrounding QAnon and in the channels themselves. Often, messages were coded with a combination of one or more variables.

QAnon Deconstructed: Faith and Lies

Definitions

When coding the 723 messages to fit within 25 unique variables, the criteria inferred by the content label often did not encompass all relevant types of messages coded for each variable. To clarify, the author has included definitions to avoid speculation on the deviations included. Examples of each variable are included in the index section as well (see Index).

- AB, "Anti-Biden": messages were included that contained sentiments critical of the Biden administration, Kamala Harris, or conspiracy theories related to Hunter Biden. Also included were conspiracies that Trump is still President.

- AS, "Antisemitism": messages were included that contained common components of antisemitic thought. This includes conspiracies about George Soros, the Rothschilds, or Israel.

- AV, "Anti-Vaccine": messages were included that contained advocating against vaccines in general and specifically the COVID-19 vaccine. Also included were conspiracies about COVID-19, Dr. Anthony Fauci, Dr. Zelenko, and China's role in manufacturing the virus. Additionally, anything that argued the government shutdowns were a hoax to control the population.

- CH, "Christianity": messages were included that contained components related to Jesus Christ, the Bible, and God. Often, these messages took the form of advocating Trump as the apostle of Christ and sometimes were as benign as users sharing their favorite Bible verses as motivation to others.

- CP, "Child Pedophilia": messages included incorporate the QAnon theories of Jeffery Epstein, the Clintons, and other high-ranking individuals linked to child sex trafficking, torture, and sacrifice, albeit in reality or in fiction. Also included

in this variable is anything relating to Pizzagate or the theory surrounding Adrenochrome and the Blood Libel.

- DS, "Deep State": messages included contain elements of the QAnon conspiracy regarding the global elite, deep state, or new world order who secretly control the government and media. Also included were regurgitations of Trump messaging regarding actors of the deep state who stole the 2020 presidential election. Frequent mentions in this variable are Nancy Pelosi, Hilary Clinton, Barack Obama, and Ruth Bader Ginsberg.

- EF, "Election Fraud": messages included conspiracies regarding widespread voter fraud, advocating recounts or overturning the election, and misinformation reporting untrue facts about the 2020 election.

- FM, "Fear Mongering": this variable relates to Walther and McCoy's definition of accelerationism. It includes messages intended to scare or accelerate fear in the QAnon base. Messages included conspiracies about Antifa, the deep state, or radical leftists somehow threatening the safety and security of conservatives.

- FX, "Fox News": simply any media taken from Fox News; it includes video clips, images, links, and quotes.

- GC, "Government Corruption": messages included similar to the Anti-Biden and Deep State variables. Anything related to corruption of the presidency, Congress, or the Supreme Court. Additionally, alleging corruption on individual government officials such as Nancy Pelosi and Chuck Schumer. This variable relates to distrust of officialdom, as mentioned in the literature review.

- HO, "Homophobia": includes homophobia, transphobia, and any other form of discrimination based on sex or gender preferences.

- J6H, "January 6th Hearings": related to the January 6th hearings, primarily the Cassidy Hutchinson hearing, which occurred during the eight-day observation period. This variable includes direct quotes and clips from the hearings as well as posts about the hearings and clips from discussions regarding them.

- J6I, "January 6th Insurrection": messages included focused on the January 6th insurrection, conspiracies about the origin, reporting of convictions, and the memorialization of insurrectionist Ashli Babbitt.

- MSM, "Anti-Mainstream Media": messages included the sentiments that mainstream media sources, for example, CNN, the New York Times, or the Washington Post, are biased against conservative viewpoints. Also, criticism of mainstream social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter for their censorship policies was included.

- NR, "Nazi Related": messages included anything related to Nazi ideology, Adolf Hitler, or the American neo-Nazi movement.

- OC, "Other Conspiracies": due to the all-encompassing nature of QAnon, many other conspiracy theories were referenced throughout the different channels. Anything related to gematria, transhumanism, Moloch, or Bael was included.

- OT, "Other": this variable includes anything found not already defined in other variables. Often it took the form of one-on-one conversations in open-discussion channels, arguments, or simply people saying good morning.

- PT, "Patriotism": QAnon relies on patriotism as a principal driving factor in belief and connection to Donald Trump. For this variable, messages were coded that referred to QAnon supporters as "patriots" or advocated defending the country from the left.

- QR, "QAnon Related": this variable included any messages containing principal QAnon phrases such as "Where We Go One We Go All," Q or Pepe symbols, and were deciphering or sharing Q posts.

- RA, "Racism": any racist or xenophobic messages were coded into this variable. It also includes anti-immigration sentiments that were especially targeted/hateful.

- RU, "Russia-Ukraine": any messages related to Russia, Ukraine, or the Russia-Ukraine war were coded into this variable. This includes conspiracies about Hunter Biden and Ukraine, Russiagate, Vladimir Putin, and Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

- ST, "Satanism": any mention of Satan, Moloch, Bael, or any other demon was included in this variable. Also included were any conspiracies that members of the deep state are Satanists, news articles or sentiments about the Satanist church, and any criticism of an individual or policy deemed "satanist."

- SX, "Sexism": messages included common sentiments of sexism as well as comments about the appearance of female politicians or political figures such as Cassidy Hutchinson that went beyond the pale of civility.

- TM, "Trump Messaging": messages included references or quotes from Trump's posts on Twitter, TruthSocial, or other platforms, and his speeches. Also, videos or direct statements from Trump.

- VI, "Advocating Violence": messages included directly calling for violence against the state or certain individuals or groups. Additionally, anything advocating for the overthrow of the U.S. Government.
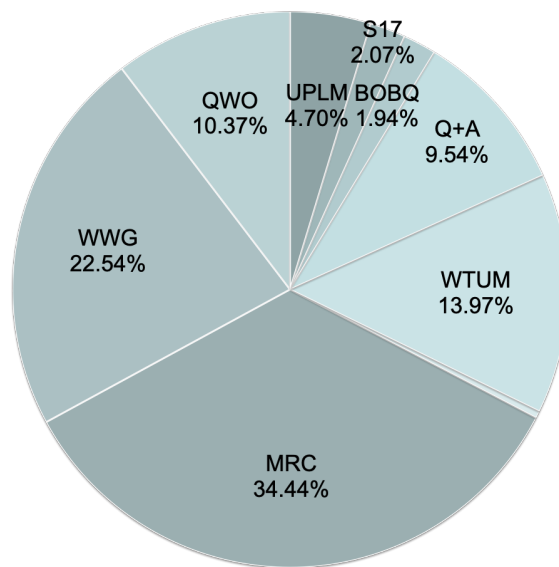
Coding

After coding 723 messages into a Google spreadsheet along the criteria listed previously (date, channel, content type, and content code), the author transferred the data into an IBM SPSS Statistics dataset, checking each message again to confirm the accuracy of the content coding before entering it. In creating the SPSS data set, each content code was created as a binary variable, and each message case would either be assigned a one or a zero, one if the content variable applied and a zero if it did not. To account for the date, a range of one to eight was given for each case, with one being June 24th and eight being July 1st. Similarly, each channel was assigned a number variable from one to nine, each number standing for a specific channel, with one being UPLM and nine being QWO. As well each channel was also assigned either a one or two to denote whether or not the channel was open to discussion or closed/run by an admin; one being open and two being closed. Lastly, each message case was coded on a scale from one to five to account for the type of message sent; one being images, two being videos, three being memes, four being links, and five being texts.

Due to the randomized selection process for message cases and the variety of channel sizes and activity monitored, not every channel was represented proportionally in this study. The most represented channel was MRC, with 249 messages being examined, and the least represented channel was QW, with just three messages. A full breakdown of the channel makeup of this study can be found below (see Figure 3) and in Table 3 (see page 31).

Figure 3: Channel Breakdown

(n= 723)

Content Analysis

After the coding of the 723 message cases was complete, it was time to begin the content analysis. In analyzing this data, the author wanted to answer the following questions:

- What are the biggest trends of discussion across these QAnon channels?

- How are they getting their messages across (i.e., What types of media were most common)?

- How do the differences between different channels translate to differences in content types/variables utilized?

To answer these questions, the following hypotheses were used to guide analysis.

- H1: Out of the total 723 cases, the most common type of content will be QAnon-related (QR) content, followed by content related to sexual abuse of children (CP), fear-mongering or accelerationism (FM), and Christianity (CH).

- H2: The most prominent type of message will be text messages followed by links to other forums, articles, or media.

- H3: The forums with large member/subscriber bases will incorporate more content outside of QAnon-related content and have a different mode content variable.

Testing Hypothesis 1

To test Hypothesis 1, a dummy variable was created, and set all cases to true. The author then ran a cross-tabulation test on this dummy variable against all 25 content variables. From that cross-tabulation, the ten most common variables (hereafter referred to as the T10) were tested against the date variable and the forum variable to determine which date and channel were most prominent for each of the T10 variables. The results of these tests have been condensed into the table below (see Table 1).

Table 1: T10 x Date x Forum

Content	Count	Percent of Total	Mode Date	Mode Forum
FM	125	17.3%	6/24 & 6/25	MRC
OT	115	15.9%	6/24	MRC
QR	99	13.7%	6/24	QWO
CH	85	11.8%	6/25	WWG
CP	85	11.8%	6/28	WTUM
OC	73	10.1%	6/28	WWG
AB	60	8.29%	6/30	MRC
FX	57	7.88%	6/27	MRC
DS	54	7.47%	6/28	MRC
J6H	52	7.19%	6/28	MRC

As the results of testing Hypothesis 1 show, the most prominent type of message found across all platforms was FM, "Fear Mongering". Out of the 723 messages, 125

(17.3%) contained elements defined in the definitions section of this study. The most common channel for these types of messages was MRC, the most represented channel, and the most common days for fear-mongering messages were June 24th and June 25th.

Testing Hypothesis 2

In testing Hypothesis 2, a cross-tabulation test was also employed. The dummy variable created for testing Hypothesis 1 was utilized again to test against the message type variable. The results of this test have been included below (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Mode Message Types
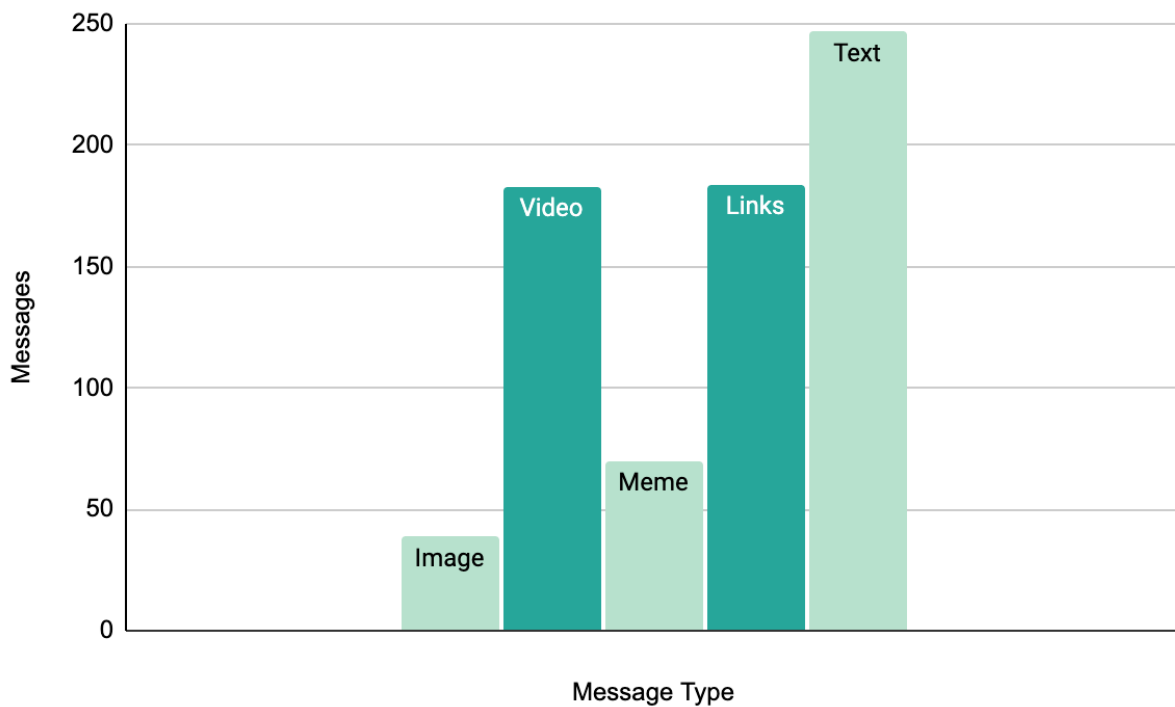
The most common type of message sent was text-based messages, those containing solely text. Text messages accounted for 247 (34.2%) out of 723 messages. Followed by links with 184 (24.4%) cases and videos with 183 (25.3%) cases. Memes

accounted for 70 (9.7%) messages, and images were the least common message type, with only 39 (5.4%) recorded cases.

Next, to further the study, the author ran cross-tabulation tests on each of the T10 content variables against the message type variable to determine which mode of content was utilized the most per each variable in the T10. The results of these tests are included below (see Table 2).

Table 2: T10 x Message Type

T10	Mode Message Type	Percent
AB	Video	53.3%
CH	Text	64.7%
CP	Text	48.2%
DS	Text	51.9%
FM	Links	34.4%
FX	Video	77.2%
J6H	Video	28.8%
OC	Text	52.1%
OT	Video	24.3%
QR	Text	56.6%

Testing Hypothesis 3

To test Hypothesis 3, the findings from Figure 3 were utilized, as well as cross-tabulation tests between the forum variable and each of the 25 content variables. These tests were run in order to determine the mode variable for each channel as Hypothesis 3 assumes that individual channels would have a different makeup of mode content variables than the results of testing Hypothesis 1 indicate. A distinction was made for each channel between open and closed, with a C being assigned to closed

channels and an O to open ones. The results of these tests are included below (see Table 3).

Table 3: Forum Size x T10

Forum	C/O	Members/Subscribers	Message Count	Mode Content
UPLM	C	214,530	34	QR
S17	C	148,359	15	TM
Q+A	O	28,828	69	CH
WTUM	C	223,930	101	CP
MRC	C	199,908	249	FM
QW	C	34,946	3	AV
WWG	O	3,372	163	OT
QWO	C	34,946	75	QR
BOBQ	O	12,972	14	VI

The results displayed in Table 3 show that only MRC, the most represented channel and the third largest in user size, had FM as the most common message content. Two content variables outside of the T10 variables found in testing Hypothesis 1 were found to be the mode content variable for BOBQ and S17, respectively.

Findings and Conclusions

The results from testing Hypothesis 1 revealed the ten most common categories of content found across all 723 message cases. Surprisingly, Hypothesis 1's conjecture that QR would be the most common variable was rejected. Instead, FM was dominant, followed by OT, then QR third. The high placement of OT, although a bit benign

compared to CP, was expected but not as the second most common variable. It follows

that in online chatrooms, even ones designed around a common ideology or conspiracy,

the conversation ought to drift occasionally to other topics. By randomizing the selection

process, personal sentiments, arguments, and other types of messages outside of the 25

coded variables were bound to occur. FM's placement as the most common variable was

not anticipated. In most cases, FM generally did not exist on its own; it was more of an

additive variable, tagging on to messages about the Deep State, Satanism, or other topics

that were especially driving at striking fear into their viewer. In accordance with

Hypothesis 1, both CH and CP appeared in the T10, actually being tied for the fourth

most common variable. These variables were often coded together in many cases, and

their subsequent ranking points to the use of a relationship of "good vs. evil," outlined

by Barkun and reinforced by fear and accelerationism, to control followers of QAnon

and keep them invested in the belief system. Despite Hypothesis 1 being disproved, the

findings of testing it does help to prove Walther and McCoy's theory about the use of

accelerationism by far-right movements online to advance their agendas.

The results of the testing of Hypothesis 2 revealed the breakdown of the 723

message cases according to message type. As Hypothesis 2 predicted, the most common

type of message sent was text-based messages followed by links. In Table 2, these

message types were analyzed against the T10 variables. In testing these two variables,

the author hoped to illuminate how different types of content were being communicated

across the various channels. Messages coded as QR, in addition to CP and DS, are all

messages related to the QAnon belief system, either directly such as QR or comprising

integral components, such as the Deep State or the child pedophilia and sex trafficking

perpetrated by high-ranking elites. All three of these variables showed that text

messages were the most common type of message used to communicate these ideas. On the other hand, FM, the most common variable across the board, was predominately found in messages containing links. This points to the conclusion that the QAnon channels rely on text-based messages, typed out in chat, to reinforce their conspiracy theories inside the channels while outsourcing fear-mongering to a variety of news/alternative sites. Unsurprisingly, the FX message variable was majority videos, the largest majority recorded, with 77.2% of all coded FX messages being videos. This means that of the 7.88% of total message cases that were coded FX, most of them were simply clips from Fox News.

Hypothesis 3 asserted that the largest channels (in user population) examined, which are in order: WTUM (223,930), UPLM (214,530), and MRC (199,908); would incorporate more content outside the realm of being QAnon-related (QR). Additionally, these differing mode content variables would not be the same as the dominant T10 found when testing Hypothesis 1. Ultimately, Hypothesis 3 could not be proven as WTUM and UPLM both had mode content variables directly related to the QAnon conspiracy (CP and QR, respectively), and MRC's mode content variable was FM. WTUM's mode content variable was CP, which means that out of 13.97% of the total cases WTUM makes up, 24.7% involved, in some way, the QAnon conspiracy that elites are sexually and physically abusing and trafficking children for their own gain.

Interestingly, the three open discussion channels examined in this study, Q+A, WWG, and BOBQ, all had mode content variables that were more removed from conventional QAnon belief. For Q+A, the most common content variable was CH; for WWG, it was OT; and for BOBQ, the most common variable was VI. VI, "Advocating Violence," was one of two variables found in this test not in the T10 (the other being TM

for S17). This leads to the conclusion that, without the constraints of closed discussion, when QAnon followers are able to discuss freely with each other, the average QAnon is likely to discuss Christianity, other topics, and advocate violence. This is also reinforced by WTUM's information bio, which prohibits any type of advocating violence. It would seem that, despite the conception that conventional social media platforms are too censored, Telegram channels related to QAnon are increasingly censoring themselves, to a degree. A potential reason for this could be the 2018 terms of service change by Telegram to comply with terrorism investigations and the increased monitoring of the alt-right following the January 6th insurrection.

Overall, the findings of this study reveal a lot about the QAnon belief and communication systems. The results of testing Hypothesis 1 point to a Barkunian system of "good vs. evil" where the righteous, Christian, Trump and Q are fighting against the evil Deep State and Joe Biden who use their power to abuse and exploit children. In addition, fear is used as a tool to galvanize and scare QAnon followers, as well as reinforce their beliefs. The findings of testing Hypothesis 3 also support this conclusion, showing evidence that in open discussion, QAnon followers will not only form an echo chamber to strengthen their belief in the "good vs. evil" structure but also advocate for violence and accelerationism to rectify it.

In summation, Telegram channels are being increasingly used by alt-right conspiracists, in this study QAnon, to push their followers to action. As Walther and McCoy note, most domestic terrorism perpetrated by the alt-right takes the form of lone-actor violence, such as Pizzagate, where Edgar Welch truly believed he was going to save innocent children from the fell clutches of evil. However, the massive audiences and activity on these channels conclude a reasonable basis to believe that some of the

people posting on these channels, messages that very well could have been included in this study, will go to extreme and dangerous lengths for their faith in the lies of QAnon.

Limitations

To the knowledge of this study's author, no prior investigation of QAnon has utilized the combination of OSINT methods and statistical content analysis to attempt to delineate trends in content, message types, and examine individual Telegram channels. The research of Walther and McCoy was instrumental in providing a theoretical framework to understand alternative social media platforms, specifically Telegram; however, their research stopped short of coding and analyzing individual messages. That being said, the limitations of this study could provide avenues for future research.

Firstly, the sample size used in this study was only 723 message cases over an eight-day period taken from nine channels. Ideally, the author would have opted to measure more message cases, perhaps abandoning a randomized selection process and examining channels holistically, including comments on individual posts which, without detailing in this study, contained a variety of content and discourse that could have furthered the investigation. Following this vein, more channels could have been used for the study, including more variety in channel type and user bases; in addition, a proportional representation of both open and closed channels could have aided the testing and findings of Hypothesis 3. In addition, although the eight-day examination period was robust with historical and conspiracy significance, it would have been beneficial to contrast the data from June 24th-July 1st with another period of examination, potentially from before or after the dates measured. Frustratingly, as data collection and analysis were being completed for this study in early November 2022, Q began posting on 8kun again in response to the 2022 Midterm elections; the reaction on

Telegram from these posts would have been quite interesting to examine as the author would hypothesize that EF, "Election Fraud," messages would be more prevalent.

Second, in randomly selecting from a variety of channels, some channels were overrepresented (MRC) and others underrepresented (QW). This led to distortion in analysis that included the measurement of the channels. Although the channel breakdown was not an integral aspect of this study, further research should learn from this error and sample proportionally from both open and closed channels; perhaps there is a method to weigh the channels and their contributions to the study accurately. Following the theme of channel measurement, recordings of user populations for each channel were measured thrice during the study. The first measurement was not accurate and rounded to the nearest thousand, the second measurement, taken on November 12th, was accurate, and the final measurement, taken on the date of observation, was also accurate. Due to the lack of accuracy in the initial measurement, taken when each channel was found and decided upon for use in the study, a measurement of individual channel growth was not included. Future research should take accurate measurements to understand the effect Q's postings and content trends have on channel user retention and increase.

Finally, as this study was conducted between September and December 2022, the time constraint was a principal factor in all of the limitations listed above. With a longer time period to study these channels, more could be understood about how this conspiracy is communicated and promulgated. As with any study, the author is human and mentally cannot be immersed fully for too long at a time in this web of conspiracy. For this reason, despite extensive research and review of literature, there may be

elements of the QAnon conspiracy theory present in the coded messages that eluded the author's understanding.

Author's Endnote

For this endnote, I will abandon the formality of the previous sections. I first began paying attention to QAnon in 2020 during the presidential election. I started monitoring Parler, envisioning the research I have now concluded for the first time. In the aftermath of the 2020 election, the posts on Parler became increasingly worrisome. I began having severe panic attacks, truly believing that our democracy was at stake, and I was witness to the formulation of a plot to overthrow the government. I was assured by those close to me that I was reading too much into the calls to execute Mike Pence and violent rhetoric from people within Trump's cabinet of advisors. I have never been less happy to be correct.

On January 6th, 2021, I watched as legions of insurrectionists descended on our nation's capital. I felt fear, anger, and regret. I regretted not paying more attention and not calling the FBI hotline over and over until someone took me seriously. I assumed they must have already been monitoring the same channels I had been, but the insurrection happened all the same. From then on, I set out to try to understand what QAnon is and how it is reaching so many people. It is my hope that this research can be of some use in halting the spread of these dangerous lies.

One final thing, if you have read this paper in its entirety or been exposed to QAnon, either directly or through some misguided friend or family member, you would be forgiven for losing some amount of faith in humanity. In doing this research and surrounding myself with an onslaught of insidious rhetoric and ideas, I've found it is

easy to simply label these people as crazy or evil; it is harder to understand them. To adopt their "good vs. evil" mentality would be a mistake. These people ardently believe, to the point of alienation by their own friends and families, that they are fighting the good fight against those who would do great harm to children and exclude their own votes from the democratic process. Followers of QAnon are not evil; they are confused and have been sold a bad deal. I urge you not to abandon hope in reconciling our nation's politics and reason. After reading so much hate and fear-mongering throughout this study, I still believe rationality can prevail as long as the hope for it is not lost.

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Index

In an effort to further understand how content variables were selected and defined, the author has included an index with specific examples of each content variable taken directly from the study. Content warning: the messages and images contained in this index are uncensored and include offensive language and graphics.

AB

In response to the Biden's directive, the Secretary of Defense ordered the United States military to become an arm of the LGBT agenda throughout the world. The United States army's new mission: to fight for the gay agenda in other nations.

The American army is to now fight against any intolerance for LGBTQI+ conduct. Thus it wasn't a matter of respecting the dignity and rights of all people, it was about fighting any nation, group, or people that did not agree with gay conduct - any nation that did not endorse or celebrate homosexuality.

AS

AV

<u>CH</u>

Today's Mission
Throw off your burdens and worries and give them all to
God. Pray for His eternal peace to be on you unto
everlasting.

Matthew 6:25
25 Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life,
what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your
body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat,
and the body than raiment?
"If you decide for God, living a life of God-worship, it follows
that you don't fuss about what's on the table at mealtimes
or whether the clothes in your closet are in fashion. There
is far more to your life than the food you put in your
stomach, more to your outer appearance than the clothes
you hang on your body. Look at the birds, free and
unfettered, not tied down to a job description, careless in
the care of God. And you count far more to him than birds.

Have a blessed day and week.
May Yeshua Hamashiach bless you,
Love, Debbie

t.me/wwg1wgaPatriots/253208   Jun 28 at 19:06

CP

Matt Couch ✔
@RealMattCouch · 1h
...

The fact that there has never been an investigation into George Soros is proof that the Deep State exists...

Translate post

11:55 AM · Jun 30, 2022

Also the fact that Ghislain Maxwell trafficked underage girls to nobody?

t.me/realKarliBonne/102859   20.2K 👁
Karli Bonne, Jun 30 at 10:10

DS

Angela Thomp… in Where We Go One, We Go All ! 🦅🇺🇸 ✈
Forwarded from SHELLSHQCK

Who's in charge?

We are.
We are the storm.
We are the second coming.

7.8 Billion people are under the hypnotic spell of 100 "elite" families.

Imagine the day even 1% of that 7.8 billion, wake up and say no to the market, the IRS, the government, working in the system, buying gas, etc.

The house of cards would crumble instantly.

This all ends when we set our differences aside and stand together against the system. Until then, we sit back and "trust the plan."

t.me/wwg1wgaPatriots/253567   17.9K 👁 Jun 30 at 17:37

EF

3/11/20 - a day I will never forget.

The day WHO declared a worldwide pandemic.

The day President Trump invited me to meet with him in the Oval Office.

There are no coincidences.

FIX 2020 OR BUST!!!

End rigged elections.

End child sex trafficking and modern day slavery.

Keep fighting!!!

Lin 🙏❤️🇺🇸

t.me/wwg1wgaPatriots/252719   Jun 26 at 17:43

FM

Putin took away the biolabs.
He took away their next plandemic.
They were left with the moronic monkeypox instead of something far worse.
He destroyed nazis.
But what if there's more to that?
At the fall of Roe V Wade we all expected Antifa to begin their riot season yet they've been largely missing in action. Why?
Did the money supply dry up?
Did Antifa become impotent?
Or are they waiting for another false flag to act on?
I can't be the only one who's shocked at how little action we are seeing from them especially in a moment that seemed catered for their outrage.

t.me/WeTheMedia/70116   28.8K 👁

Pepe Lives Matter, Jun 29 at 11:58

FX

GC

BREAKING: Leaked Call With Prison Inmate Reveals SC Democrat State Rep & Senate Candidate Krystal Matthews Calling For "#SecretSleepers" to Infiltrate South Carolina GOP; Advocates For ILLEGALLY Funding Campaign with "Dope Money"

"We can flip some sh*t from the inside out."

TWEET THE BOMBSHELL VIDEO NOW:
https://ctt.ec/4FO25

t.me/wwg1wgaPatriots/252702   472.1K 👁   Jun 26 at 16:37

<u>HO</u>

MARY MILLER: "Mr. Health Secretary, what is a woman?!"
LAUREN BOEBERT: "Mr. Health Secretary, can men get pregnant?"

t.me/realKarliBonne/103055   30.2K 👁   Karli Bonne, Jul 1 at 10:25

<u>J6H</u>

Midnight Rider Channel 🇺🇸

His sudden death on Monday came the same day an unexpected additional hearing of the committee investigating the riot was announced.
The surprise meeting will 'present recently obtained evidence and receive witness testimony.'

https://mol.im/a/10959599

Mail Online

Senate Sergeant-at-Arms Michael Stenger - who was in charge of Capitol security on January 6 and who blamed 'professional agitators'...

Stenger, who resigned the day after the January 6 insurrection, amid criticism of his handling of the riot, warned in February 2021 that the role of 'professional agitators' needed to be investigated.

t.me/realKarliBonne/102200   40.7K 👁
Karli Bonne, Jun 28 at 05:16
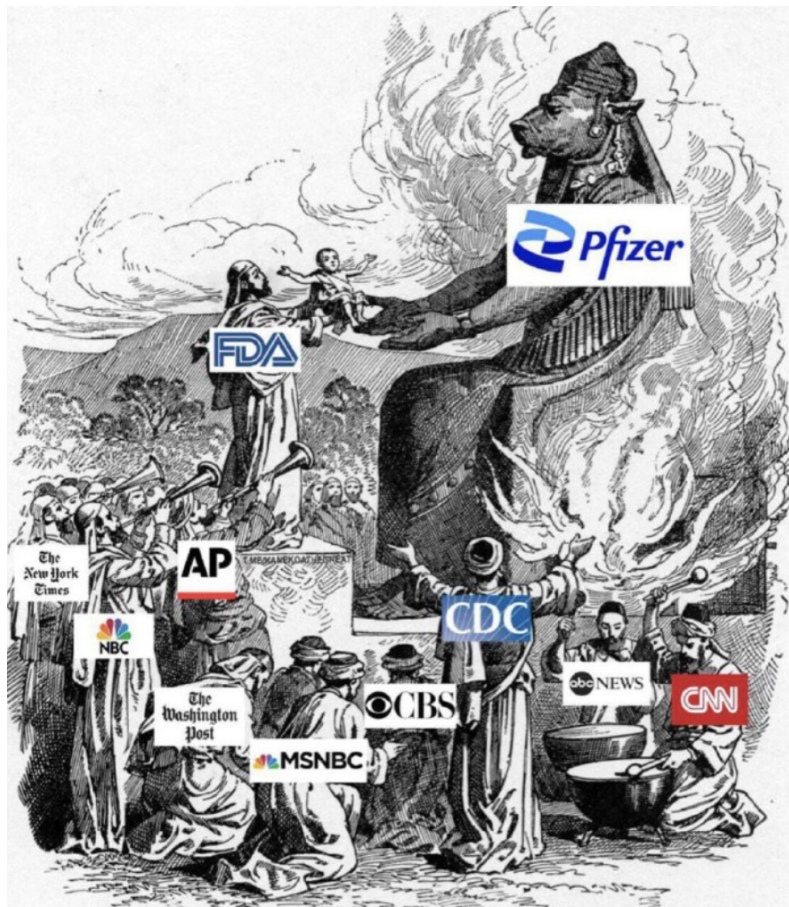
<u>J6I</u>

Midnight Rider Channel 🇺🇸
Forwarded from **Gateway Pundit**

U.S. Releases Gitmo Detainee After 15 Years - Court Rules He Was Detained "Unlawfully" without Trial -- What About Jan. 6ers Who Are Not Terrorists?

https://www.thegatewaypundit.com/2022/06/u-s-releases-afghan-national-held-guantanamo-bay-detention-camp-15-years-court-rules-detained-unlawfully-without-trial/

<u>MSM</u>

NR

12.05.22 ThisDay

On May 12, 1944 the Crimean offensive operation ended.

📑 We publish Hitler's plan called "Tiger" for the total destruction of Crimea's infrastructure.

The evacuation plan makes it clear **what fate the occupiers were preparing for the Black Sea peninsula**. It details, with German precision and practicality, the assets intended for destruction.

"During the evacuation of the Crimea it is important: to destroy or undermine at many points all the most important Crimean roads... to put out of action the Chongar-Dzhankoi-Armyansk railway line, which is important for the enemy... Destroy harbors, all economic facilities, airfields... Ensure that the Crimean peninsula could not be used by the enemy as an operational base for a long time ...".

OC

Debbie C in **Where We Go One, We Go All !** 🦅🇺🇸🌪️   ✈️
Forwarded from Debbie (Debbie C)

JFK-S 1961 Prophecy EXPOSES Obama, Hillary, Pope Francis, and The NWO. Must Watch Video
https://amg-news.com/archives/9429

American Media Group

JFK'S 1961 Prophecy EXPOSES Obama, Hillary, Pope Francis, and The NWO. Must Watch Video - American Media Group
Arguably the most unusual speech ever given by a U.S. president was delivered by number 35 John F. Kennedy in 1961, the year of the birth of number 44 Barack Obama.

t.me/wwg1wgaPatriots/252977   400 👁   Jun 27 at 17:19

OT

RocknCrui… in **Where We Go One, We Go All !** 🦅🇺🇸🌪️…   ✈️
Good morning😍
t.me/wwg1wgaPatriots/252846   Jun 27 at 06:06

<u>PT</u>

Liberals are self castrating themselves, promising to not have children, and going on sex strikes as the Supreme Court demolishes their agendas.
At this rate it's going to a boom of young Patriots in the next generation since Liberals are refusing to have children. Checkmate. 🤣🤣🤣

t.me/WeTheMedia/70209   27.0K 👁

Pepe Lives Matter, Jun 30 at 09:07

<u>QR</u>

Personal thank you to the BO, Bakers, and Autists/Anons who continually dedicate their time and energy to the GREAT AWAKENING.
You are all Patriots.
The hard part is coming to an end.
The next phase will bring JUSTICE.
Q+

Statements today needed to be made.
Operators have died.
They approach the field of battle w/o fear.
They lay down their lives for YOU.
They are SELFLESS.
They are fighting for our FREEDOM.
They fight unconditionally because they hold a core value, a value that we should all live in FREEDOM.
We HONOR them.
We must do better to protect them.
WWG1WGA.
Q+

Patriots.🇺🇸
@QSRDECODES
@QWO17

t.me/wwg1wgaPatriots/253681   23.4K 👁   Jun 30 at 22:44

RA

Midnight Rider Channel 🇺🇸   20 💬 👁 19.6K Karli Bonne 6:32 PM

01:40
30.4MB

Were you with your brother husband at the time? https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10974975/Ilhan-Omar-suggests-Minnesota-worse-Somali-refugee-camp.html

RU

Q World 🍊rder
Forwarded from 8CueBall 🎱 (Lisa B 4 Baadasssss)
☀️ Inside AzovStal - John Mark Dougan
☀️ Get An Inside Track on Ukraine
☀️ The Other Side Of The Story

Known as a police corruption whistle blower, fugitive US cop now living in Moscow, who fled to escape the FBI...claims Seth Rich leaked docs...gives his take on what's really happening in Ukraine..incl. interviews & footage of Azovstal catacombs (Azov Battalion bunker)

Use your own discernment

https://bit.ly/3nrGCx6

ST

Paul G. in Where We Go One, We Go All ! 🦅🇺🇸🦅 ✈️

Adam is a Satanist and does not like us. Horrible human.

t.me/wwg1wgaPatriots/253541   Jun 30 at 17:09

SX

Midnight Rider Channel 🇺🇸 ✈️

t.me/realKarliBonne/102341   18.4K 👁

Karli Bonne, Jun 28 at 11:34

TM

> **Donald J. Trump** ✅
> @realDonaldTrump   2h
>
> Congratulations to Darren Bailey on his very big
> and impressive win in the Republican Primary
> for Governor of Illinois. He will beat Pritzker, one
> of the worst and most obnoxious Governors (Mr.
> Lockdown!) in the USA.
>
> t.me/wwg1wgaPatriots/253245   25.4K 👁 Jun 29 at 01:03

VI

> PEDO REPTO HUNTING
>
> IF YOU ARE ON THE KILLING LIST, YOU WILL FACE A
> BULLET
>
> NO DEALS
>
> ⚔️💀⚔️🔥⚔️💀⚔️🔥⚔️💀⚔️
> ⚔️💀⚔️WWG1WGA ⚔️💀⚔️
>
> MILITARY IS THE ONLY WAY
> Q
>
> @SpecialQForces
> @DUMBSandUNDERGROUND
> supported by
> @ExposeThePEDOSendOfTheCABAL
> t.me/wwg1wgaPatriots/253173   110.6K 👁 Jun 28 at 17:53