

# QAnon is spreading outside the US. A conspiracy theory expert explains what that could mean

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Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

The name crops up all over the place, but many people have no real understanding of what QAnon is, or why an estimated [22% of Americans](#) accept one of its core beliefs: that some kind of political "storm" is coming and that violence could be necessary to achieve it.

In the U.S., Georgia politician [Marjorie Taylor Greene](#) (MTG), previously a fan of QAnon, has just been appointed to the influential House of Representatives' [homeland security committee](#).

Yet although the far-right conspiracy theory movement started gaining supporters in the U.S. in 2017, it has now spread internationally with increasing [uptake in Russia](#) and Germany. The [German QAnon](#) is firmly pro-Putin and anti-Kyiv in its support for the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Conversely, Russian QAnon followers are [less supportive of Putin](#).

This cult-like movement, most famous for its part in the storming of [the U.S. Capitol](#) in January 2021, originated on an online message board called [8kun](#) before being popularized on [4Chan](#). The first QAnon content was posted by an anonymous self-proclaimed senior intelligence officer with access to supposedly classified material, calling themselves Q and later QAnon ([their identity](#) is still not known).

This material focused on baseless [predictions](#) around the fortunes of the Trump administration, and [conspiracy theories](#) about individuals and groups seeking to undermine Trump. These included the presence of a powerful pedophile ring operating at the top of global politics, celebrity, finance and royalty.

Other self-styled insiders and experts joined in posting "insider information" alongside and in support of QAnon, with sympathizers enthusiastically posting this content across mainstream social media platforms.

The movement started to come to prominence offline in 2018 when its followers appeared at Trump rallies and other political events wearing identifying items or carrying placards with Q on them. At the same time more QAnon-related content started appearing on social media

platforms.

As of now, QAnon has spread to multiple online platforms, and its followers are present in various countries. But QAnon does not have a formalized leadership structure.

This has meant QAnon has expanded the number of subjects it talks about, including [COVID-19](#) and its subsequent vaccines, most of which have been thoroughly refuted by fact checkers and experts. The decentralized nature of the movement means that QAnon followers largely communicate via the internet and messaging services such as [Telegram](#), [Signal](#) and [Parler](#).

QAnon's core theories center on its belief that there is a global cabal of Satan-worshipping, child sex trafficking elites who control governments, financial institutions, and the media. QAnon believes that the aim of the elite cabal was to undermine Donald Trump when he was president, steal the 2020 election from him, and erode his Make America Great Again (MAGA) agenda. QAnon followers also claim that Donald Trump and his close circle are working to expose this pedophile cabal and bring its members to justice.

### **Why it matters**

To those—the majority—who are skeptical or opposed to QAnon theories, the claims made by QAnon followers seem evidence free and [ridiculous](#). Most mainstream media organizations describe QAnon theories as having been based upon mis- or disinformation, a reinterpretation of history, a misunderstanding of contemporary events and fringe conspiracy theory. Followers of QAnon invest large amounts of time hunting down shards of evidence that help—in their eyes—to prove the claims.

In Russia, QAnon followers have embraced vaccine [conspiracy theories](#), and rejected mask mandates. QAnon forums predicted there would be no conflict and then were surprised and divided in support for the [Ukraine](#) war. Some suggested the invasion was to clean up COVID bio-labs, while others saw it as a betrayal of [Russo-Ukrainian](#) kinship.

Some followers of QAnon have been linked to and convicted of acts of political [violence](#). Intelligence and [law enforcement agencies](#) have provided consistent [warnings](#) that QAnon and its messaging have the potential to incite some to violence. On that basis there is surveillance of QAnon by government agencies in the U.S., Germany and the U.K.

Germany is a particularly interesting case, due to alleged connections between QAnon followers and the [Reichsbürger](#) coup attempt in December 2022. This attempted to reinstall a monarchy in Germany, and was closely [associated](#) with elements of the German far right.

QAnon has been [active in Germany](#) since 2018, and has seen its popularity grow. Academics have recorded instances of [QAnon-related content appearing](#) on German social media and internet platforms (breaching legal restrictions on conspiracy and hate speech). QAnon followers in Germany have [organized events in major cities](#), leading some to consider them a potential threat to public order.

The concern for some is that QAnon followers will find their way into elected posts. This has already happened in America, where [President Trump](#) refused to distance himself from the QAnon theories, and where the increasingly prominent Republican [Taylor Greene](#) now sits in an influential post. Some believe this may generate a conflict of interest for the homeland security committee, even with Taylor Greene [backing away from QAnon views](#) recently.

Few elected politicians have openly [associated](#) themselves with QAnon.

Some support some of its ideas, while distancing themselves from particular elements of QAnon's now broad platform.

Attribution, a little like a conspiracy theory itself, arises from [shards](#) of evidence such as statements made by individuals. There are prominent politicians in the U.S., Canada, Italy and Germany who are widely assumed to be QAnon followers, but without more substantial evidence, they will remain nameless.

The most likely path for QAnon is it [continues](#) to grow with dedicated sections on particular issues. The route to influence for QAnon is through individual politicians acquiring important posts. But the route to marginalizing QAnon rests with legislators not appointing "post-truth" politicians to influential jobs.

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