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**CAN THE AFTER-EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS BE  
MITIGATED?**

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## 1. ABSTRACT

Conspiracy theories often become cloudy and dangerous; they cause governments to topple and even wars in the past. QAnon's influence on American minds and lives is not straightforward to determine. The American Christian Evangelicals embraced the QAnon conspiracy, which allowed Donald Trump to become president of the United States of America. QAnon spread the new disinformation to unite people against mandatory vaccinations, the government, and the elite. The January the 6th insurrection on the capital of the United States of America and Hillary Clinton losing her election bid clarifies how volatile social movements can be.

## 2. INTRODUCTION

Ancient Greece is known to be the birthplace of democracy. However, the transition to democracy was not a straightforward process. In fact, ancient Greek society encountered similar difficulties to contemporary civilised societies. For instance, ancient Greece experienced civil war, differing group ideologies, and protest action. Therefore, the brilliant minds of ancient Greece were the first to theorise explanations for instability in a society.

A significant influence socially is persuasion (Baumeister et al., 2018). Indeed, the brain of humans has the purpose of influencing other people and making a persuasion attempt in arguments with others (Baumeister et al., 2018). According to Aristotle's *Rhetoric* writing, he maintained that the process of persuasion contains three parts: the listener, the speech's subject, and the speaker (Baumeister et al., 2018). Furthermore, Aristotle found three elements needed for audience persuasion: "(a) emotional appeal (pathos); (b) intellectual appeal (logos); and (c) charisma (ethos)" (Baumeister et al., 2018). Indeed, Aristotle made invaluable contributions to understanding how individuals influence human behaviour in a society.

Much later, Comte viewed sociology as a biological extension that researches the "organism's" internal "organs" (Turner et al., 2011). Henceforth, the social organisation will be sociology's study (Turner et al., 2011). In fact, this gives no option but to recognise the "organic whole" of society and the relation between the "organs" (components) (Turner et al., 2011). According to the emphasis of Comte, "there can be no scientific study of society, either in its conditions or movement, if it is separated into portions, and its divisions are studied apart" (Turner et al., 2011).

Indeed, writing from the perspective of a scholar after the French Revolution's thunderous consequences, he naturally became concerned about stability and order (Turner et al., 2011).

In concurrence with Comte, the biological analogy of the human body equated to the organic society is indeed profound. For example, drinking coffee might be a positive stimulant for the brain organ, and conversely, smoking a cigarette can cause serious health problems to other organs in the human body. Similarly, societal changes can either be good or bad for the organic societal structure. However, I will argue that society is far too complex for governments worldwide to mitigate the aftermath of social movements effectively.

### **3. The Social Movement of QAnon**

According to Conner and MacMurray (2021), QAnon's influence on American minds and lives is not straightforward to determine. In fact, followers in one of QAnon's primary channels on telegram is 337,915, and more channels approximately the same size are on a spectrum of platforms across social media (Conner and MacMurray 2021). Indeed, the QAnon support from one sociological perspective is with people who encountered failure in traditional institutions, moved away from the authority in the conventional sense and selected alternatives (Conner and MacMurray 2021). In this case, the distrust has continued from the historical policies of neo-liberalism and production changes affecting people's perspective, whereby individuals of lower class and working class in the South and Midwest of America do not earn enough money (Frank 2004, 2017, 2020; Conner and MacMurray 2021).

Further exploiting the structural conditions, their portrayal was of people living in rural communities that were geographical victims of misfortune, uneducated, racist, or "backwards" that divided urban and rural residents (Conner and MacMurray 2021). In fact, QAnon's core beliefs reflect these issues by continually expressing contempt towards the Clinton family, mainly due to Hillary Clinton referring to the impoverished middle of America as "deplorables," which continued after the elections in 2016 (Conner and MacMurray 2021). Evidently, the inequality in society and Hillary Clinton's political discourse created the opportunity for a social movement to enter the fray. For instance, supporters of QAnon believe in the notion that Democrats and people in the elite category of society belong to the pedophilic cabal and worship

Satan (Conner and MacMurray 2021). In another example, Donald Trump has ample support from the QAnon believers, especially since they believe God ordained him to defeat the cabal by bringing forth “The Storm” event (Conner and MacMurray 2021).

Clearly, this is more than just a fringe movement. In fact, American Christian Evangelicals embraced the QAnon conspiracy, which allowed Donald Trump to become president of the United States of America. Furthermore, in 2021, on the 6<sup>th</sup> of January, people worldwide witnessed in dismay how the QAnon rioters attacked the United States of America’s capital (Conner and MacMurray 2021). Lastly, QAnon has become an international influence and is tearing families apart.

In closing, the extent to which QAnon’s social movement had consequences for the communities and the social elite clarifies how difficult it is to predict and mitigate the aftermath of social movements.

#### **4. Application of Social Movement Theories to the QAnon Social Movement.**

It happened in the past, and conspiracy theories often define the future (Bodner et al., 2021). In fact, conspiracy theories often become cloudy and dangerous; they cause governments to topple and even wars in the past (Bodner et al., 2021). Indeed, when conspiracy theories enter public health and politics, they can have serious repercussions (Bodner et al., 2021).

##### **4.1. INSPIRATIONAL AND MORAL RELATIVE DEPRIVATION**

According to Defronzo and Gill (2020), “relative deprivation theory: The idea that living conditions or political limitations only become intolerable when people come to view them as unacceptable relative to their conception of the way of the way they think things should be.”

Firstly, “aspirational deprivation occurs when people gain new information convincing them that their living conditions are unacceptable and can be changed, causing discontent to rise and support for social movements to increase” (Defronzo and Gill 2020). However, in QAnon’s case, it is new disinformation in the form of conspiracy theories driving the social movement to have devastating effects on relatively deprived people’s health. For instance, the disinformation claiming that the COVID-19 vaccinations are planting government chips inside the human body and other

COVID-19 conspiracies have caused numerous people to die. In fact, the deaths occur from the COVID-19 infection itself or comorbidities with other pre-existing health conditions. In other words, someone that is predisposed to pneumonia or has diabetes is more likely to die from those illnesses due to being unvaccinated. In this case, QAnon spread the new disinformation to unite people against mandatory vaccinations, the government, and the elite.

Secondly, in “moral relative deprivation,” “people may also experience relative deprivation when they witness a condition or a pattern of behaviour that they find unacceptable in terms of deeply held personal moral standards” (Defronzo and Gill 2020). Evidently, the Republican American Christian Evangelicals quickly latched onto conspiracy theories about the Satan-worshipping Democrats. In fact, the Christian Evangelical pastors preached about Trump being the saviour against the Satan-worshipping Democrats. Furthermore, Christian Evangelicals maintained the Democrats stole the elections in 2020.

Indeed, the freedom of speech act and the freedom of information act adopted by many countries worldwide have made the task of controlling conspiracy theories challenging. In conclusion, the ease with which conspiracy theories can inspire and falsely appeal to the morals of relatively deprived people shows that it is complicated to predict, control, and mitigate the effects of social movements.

#### **4.2. RESOURCE MOBILISATION THEORY**

“According to resource mobilisation theory, people motivated to create a social movement must have access to the necessary resources to succeed” (Jenkins 1983; Defronzo and Gill 2020).

The beneficial resources are member recruitment on social networks, influential leaders, and funding (Defronzo and Gill 2020). Indeed, QAnon has accomplished using the three valuable resources. Firstly, QAnon has gained success on the largest social network in existence, the internet. Therefore, QAnon’s conspiracies have become a worldwide phenomenon. As a result, I know people in Bloemfontein, South Africa, that has subscribed to these conspiracy theories. In fact, the internet has been the perfect place for QAnon to remain current and recruit new members. Additionally, the influential leadership has come from the church, in which pastors speak with conviction about the conspiracy theories. In this case, the charismatic

church leaders used emotional and intellectual appeal to persuade their congregation. Definitely, the persuasion has been so successful that the Evangelical Christians overlooked Donald Trump's non-religious behaviour, such as financial fraud, infidelity, and blatant dishonesty. Lastly, QAnons religious strategy was a masterstroke, especially since the American Evangelical Christian churches make large sums of money. Therefore, there has been almost unlimited funds available to spread these conspiracies.

Helpful resources found elsewhere are moral figures that legitimise the movement's goals, use existing social movements for aid, and have persons in power support the cause (Defronzo and Gill 2020). In this case, indeed, QAnon received an endorsement from the most powerful person on earth at the time, the president of the United States of America, Donald Trump.

The January the 6<sup>th</sup> insurrection on the capital of the United States of America and Hillary Clinton losing her election bid clarifies how volatile social movements can be. In closing, with the advancement of technology and dependency on the internet, social movements in the future are bound to capitalise on the available necessary resources and may lead to unpredictable devastating outcomes.

## **5. Conclusion**

In summary, the consequences for the social elite and communities in America clarify the difficulties of mitigating social movement aftermath or predicting the extent of the effects. The ease in which appealing to people's morals takes place and how easily people are inspired indicates how complex it is to mitigate, control and predict the consequences of social movements. With the dependency on the internet and advancement in technology increasing, social movements will find methods to acquire the necessary resources available, which could lead to tragic unpredictable outcomes. To conclude, the complexity of society makes it almost impossible to deal with the consequences of social movements effectively.

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