

## QAnon

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# 'We have a project': QAnon followers eye swing state election official races

As part of a calculated assault on democracy, QAnon steered far-right candidates toward secretary of state contests



The elected candidates would be in prime position to overturn election results as they fit. Photograph: Bloomberg/Getty Images



**Ed Pilkington**

Fri 11 Feb 2022 08.00 GMT

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**Q**Anon, the extremist conspiracy movement whose followers believe Donald Trump is waging war against the “deep state”, appears to have instigated a nationwide effort to take control of

the US election process in critical battleground states ahead of America's 2024 presidential election.

In recent months concern has risen over the coordinated efforts of **at least 15** candidates - committed to Trump's "big lie" that the 2020 election was stolen from him - who are now running to serve as chief election officials in key swing states.

**At least eight** of the candidates standing for secretary of state positions have formed an alliance in which they share tactics and tips for success, details of which the Guardian **revealed** last month.

Should any of the candidates be elected, they would be in prime position to distort or even overturn election results in favor of Trump or another preferred presidential candidate in ways that could have a profound impact on or even determine the national outcome.

All the big lie candidates vying to gain control of election counts at state level present themselves as Republicans. It is now emerging that QAnon played a critical role in steering far-right candidates towards the secretary of state races as part of what appears to be a calculated nationwide assault on American democracy.

"This is the way that QAnon could trigger a constitutional crisis," said Alex Kaplan, senior researcher at the watchdog Media Matters for America who is a close observer of the conspiracy theory. "QAnon is linked to an effort to recruit and elect candidates to positions directly controlling election administrations, and given their ties to harming democracy, that is very concerning."

**QAnon** emerged in 2017 when an unknown figure, "Q", began to post on the 4chan message board that Trump, then in the White House, was secretly preparing to destroy a cabal of Satan-worshipping child traffickers. The conspiracy has become more overtly political in recent months, helping to spread baseless claims that the 2020 election was rigged for Joe Biden.

It was also implicated in the January 6 insurrection at the US Capitol. The FBI has arrested more than 20 QAnon followers for violent acts on that day. Last June the agency released a **threat assessment** that warned that other adherents of the conspiracy could begin "accepting the legitimacy of violent action".



📷 Jim Marchant says QAnon influencer Juan O Savin told him to consider running for the post of Nevada's election administrator. Photograph: John Locher/AP

The links between QAnon and the coordinated push to control election counts was revealed by one of the big lie candidates himself. Jim Marchant, a former Republican lawmaker who is running to become chief election official in Nevada, disclosed the connection at “Patriot Double Down”, a QAnon-linked convention held in Las Vegas in October.

Marchant told the convention that the idea that he should run for secretary of state was not his own. It was given to him by a prominent QAnon-influencer who goes by the alias Juan O Savin.

The name is a phonetic play on the number 1-0-7. Q is the 17th letter of the alphabet.

**Marchant told the audience** of QAnon advocates that he was approached by Savin the day after the presidential election on 3 November. Savin came to him in a suite he had rented in the Las Vegas Venetian hotel accompanied by “other President Trump allies” and told him that instead of running for Congress, which he was considering, Marchant should stand for the post of top election administrator in Nevada.

“I said, ‘Absolutely,’” Marchant said in a recorded video of his speech to the convention.

“I knew right then that they had figured out that we need to take back the secretary of state offices around the country. Not only did they ask me to

run, they asked me to put together a coalition of other like-minded secretary of state candidates. I got to work, Juan O Savin helped, and we formed a coalition.”

In an [interview](#) with the Guardian last month, Marchant confirmed that he had set up an alliance of at least eight far-right secretary of state candidates in states that are likely to determine the outcome of the 2024 presidential election. They include Arizona, Georgia and Michigan - states which were critical in the 2020 presidential election and which all now have big lie candidates running for secretary of state posts who have been endorsed by Trump.

**▲▲ *This is the way that QAnon could trigger a constitutional crisis***  
**Alex Kaplan**

The Guardian contacted Marchant about the QAnon connection, but he did not respond.

Marchant’s disclosure of the formative role played by Juan O Savin in the secretary of state candidates alliance, which was first reported by [the Daily Beast](#) and by Kaplan for [Media Matters](#), has in turn been corroborated by Savin himself. Kaplan has monitored several recent instances where the QAnon-influencer has spoken about having backed the alliance.

In January [he told](#) a QAnon show that “we have a project that we are doing helping candidates across the country that we started here in Nevada that has prospered pretty well, with a number of Trump endorsements”.

In May he said in a [video conversation](#) that he had recently organized a meeting of about 50 people to look at “how we are going to get to a lawful election this time around and get to the right result. How we are going to coordinate between the different states to get to the right outcome.”

In the most recent comment, on Sunday, [he talked](#) about “the secretary of state stuff”, boasting that “across the country we are gaining strength rapidly to get back into this game in an effective way. A lot of those offices that they thought they held and weren’t going to matter, we are going to flip those.”

QAnon watchers say that Savin has been rising rapidly within the conspiracy theory in recent months. “He used to be a fringe figure, but has become a lot more prominent,” said Al Jones, founder of the Q Origins Project, a group of analysts who track the QAnon movement.



📷 Trump supporters hold up their phones with messages referring to the QAnon conspiracy.  
Photograph: Mario Tama/Getty Images

Savin made a rare open public appearance at the Patriot Double Down convention. Normally, though, he hides his identity. He is often interviewed by QAnon followers as he is driving, showing only his hands on the steering wheel or his cowboy boots.

He brags about having high-up contacts in the US intelligence services, though in fact he is believed to be a private insurance investigator living in the Seattle area. He claims to be friends with the actor Roseanne Barr, and in one of the wilder aspects of his influence, is believed by many QAnon followers to be John F Kennedy Jr.

Savin's recent efforts have been focused on spreading falsehoods about mass fraud in the 2020 election. He has also amplified apocalyptic conspiracy theories including that President Biden's public appearances are broadcast with the use of a green screen to disguise his disabilities.

Travis View, a leading QAnon watcher and host of the [QAnon Anonymous podcast](#), told the Guardian that it would be "ruinous for democracy if people involved with QAnon got into positions of power where they have actual influence in determining the results or legitimacy of elections. QAnon is such an anti-reality way of thinking that it is entirely incompatible with the conventions that sustain democracy."

Several people close to Trump are known to have deep ties with the QAnon movement. Michael Flynn, a former national security adviser to Trump,

spoke at a previous QAnon conference in Dallas and is thought to also have pushed a strategy of standing for local election among QAnon followers.

Sidney Powell, who advocated for overturning the 2020 election result and who Trump at one point **verbally agreed** to appoint as special counsel on election fraud, also has ties to QAnon. Before Trump was removed from Twitter, he frequently **disseminated** comments from QAnon followers.

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