Appendix: Methodology

Rationale for analysis of the hashtag #SaveTheChildren

The hashtag #SaveTheChildren was chosen for investigation as an initial case study in a broader multi-platform research project. We view the hashtag as a key indicator of whether QAnon content, and conspiracy theories more broadly, is co-opting authentic social movements on X. When used conspiratorially rather than for genuine activism, #SaveTheChildren is often associated with QAnon content.

Data collection

We answered our preliminary research question for this research note by using a dataset of posts collected from Twitter (now known as X) containing the hashtag #SaveTheChildren. To collect these posts, we used the Twitter API v2 for Academic Research. This API is no longer freely available as X has transitioned to a paid tier API system since the time of data collection. We collected 121,984 tweets containing the hashtag, including 44,494 unique tweets/posts from January 6, 2022, to March 20, 2023. There is a difference between the total tweets and unique tweets as a significant portion of our dataset comprised of retweets, that is, users sharing the posts and views of another.

Qualitative coding

To determine our qualitative codes, the authors extracted the top 500 most liked original tweets and qualitatively coded them. Coding was completed separately with the authors conferring after the coding had been completed to ensure intercoder reliability. We found five hundred tweets sufficient to code to saturation. The collected posts were temporally analyzed to demonstrate changes in activity during and after Twitter's change in ownership. Qualitative coding was necessary to capture the nuance of the use of #SaveTheChildren and whether posts represented genuine activism or conspiratorial content.

The qualitative code categories were:
- Advocacy
- Anti-Democrat
- Anti-Establishment
- Anti-GOP
- Anti-LGBTQIA+
- Anti-Woke
- Children Experiencing Gun Violence
- Children Experiencing Natural Disasters
- Children in Geopolitical Conflicts
- Climate Change Activism
- Conspiracy Content
- Human Trafficking
- Core QAnon Beliefs
- COVID-19 Measures Harm Children
- Criticism of Pornography Industry

- Criticism of Religious Institutions
- Criticism of Social Media Platforms
- Donald Trump
- Donations to Save The Children Charity
- Doomsday
- Follower Harvesting
- Humor
- Jeffrey Epstein
- Mental Health Awareness
- Pro-Life
- Pro-Russia Sentiment
- Pro-Vaccination
- Sound of Freedom
- Spam

The coding category *core QAnon beliefs* includes the idea that a Satanic, cannibalistic cabal of Democratic and Hollywood elites are trafficking children. Additionally, this theme includes posts containing elements of QAnon lore like Pizzagate and more recent events such as the Balenciaga photoshoot scandal of 2022. Conspiratorial criticism of Democratic politicians was coded under the *core QAnon beliefs* category; for example, if there was an implication the politician was involved in sex trafficking rings or had pedophilic tendencies based purely on their party allegiance. If the user simply disagreed with a politician's policies or public comments, this was not considered conspiratorial and coded differently, for example as "Anti-Democrat".

Some of the other most prominent themes associated with posts containing #SaveTheChildren which are utilized for legitimate, non-conspiratorial purposes are: donations to the Save the Children charity, children in geopolitical conflict, genuine concern for victims of human trafficking, children experiencing gun violence, and general social justice advocacy. Users in these categories were determined by the researchers to be utilizing the hashtag authentically and genuinely seeking donations to a legitimate charity or, for example, raising awareness of the plight of children in Ukraine following the Russian invasion.