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# Trump's Indictment and the Weaponization of Conspiracy Theories by the Far-Right

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## Abstract

This paper aims to raise awareness among policymakers and security forces regarding the exploitation of social media platforms by far-right actors to denounce the indictment of former President Donald Trump. The study was conducted over a one-month monitoring period from 18 MARCH to 18 APRIL, and found that these actors focused on two main themes: Conspiracy Theories and Content Advocating for Violence. Conspiracy theories alleged that a secret organization was manipulating decision-makers to indict Trump, with these theories falling under the themes of antisemitism, QAnon, and the New World Order. In addition, the study found that far-right actors used violent language, including calls for the death of individuals connected to the legal proceedings and those perceived as potential threats. The paper highlights the alarming trend of online dissemination of conspiracy theories that can lead to violent actions.

Keywords: Social Media, Far-Right, Conspiracy Theory, QAnon

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## **Introduction**

Former President Trump could face legal charges in 4 investigations: his role in the January 6th insurrection; harboring classified documents at his personal residence; interfering with election results in Georgia; and the payment to a porn star to cover up an affair. On March 30th, it was announced that a Manhattan grand jury indicted Donald Trump in covering up potential sex scandals during the 2016 presidential election.<sup>1</sup> This marks the first indictment of a former president in United States history.<sup>2</sup> Two weeks prior, former President Trump took to Truth Social and posted a series of claims on his account regarding the possibility of his arrest. Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg is prosecuting Trump, and the former president is not

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1 Wehner, P. (2023, April 28). Maga is ripping itself apart. The Atlantic. Retrieved May 1, 2023, from <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2023/04/trump-e-jean-carroll-rape-case-tucker-carlson-fox/673857/>

2 Ibid

shy in his attacks on DA Bragg and the case.<sup>3</sup> Trump has called the investigation a “witch hunt” and called those participating as “Trump-hating.”<sup>4</sup> Following the announcement, calls for protests outside of the Manhattan courthouse, including calls for armed protesters, flooded online sites forcing security personnel in New York City to make special preparations.<sup>5</sup> On the day of Trump’s arraignment, hundreds of supporters gathered in New York City as Trump pleaded not guilty to 34 felony counts.<sup>6</sup> The indictment spurred extensive discourse and dialogues across social media platforms, with notable engagement from both politicians and members of the general public.

During a one-month monitoring period conducted from March 18th to April 18th, social media platforms such as Twitter, Telegram, and far-right boards, observed two primary themes among far-right actors. (1) They generated and amplified content involving conspiracy theories related to the arrest of former President Trump. These conspiracies referenced the following themes: (i) Antisemitism, (ii) QAnon, and (iii) the New World Order. (2) Far-right actors disseminated content calling for violent action against those involved in the prosecution of Trump or believed to be involved in it.

## **Conspiracy Theories**

Many extremist movements rely on or cultivate conspiracy theories to some extent. In the United States, extreme right-wing movements have an especially strong connection to conspiracy theories. Some of these movements consider conspiracy theories to be the foundation of their extreme ideologies.<sup>7</sup> Many of these theories are based in paranoia and promote narratives about the fight between their perception of good and evil.<sup>8</sup>

It seems there is a concerted effort by far-right actors online to link Trump’s indictment with existing conspiracy theories. Monitoring various platforms has demonstrated this is done under 3 themes: Antisemitism, QAnon, and the New World Order.

## **Antisemitic Conspiracy Theories**

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3 Protes, B., Feuer, A., & Hakim, D. (2022, February 24). Donald Trump faces several investigations. here’s where they stand. The New York Times. Retrieved May 2, 2023, from <https://www.nytimes.com/article/trump-investigations-civil-criminal.html>

4 Ibid

5 Sisak, M. R. (2023, March 19). Da leading Trump case says rhetoric won’t intimidate office. AP NEWS. Retrieved May 2, 2023, from <https://apnews.com/article/trump-bragg-hush-mon-ey-investigation-stormy-daniels-4d15a073b0500d4cd47e7371f45d27d7>

6 Person, & Tyler Clifford, J. H. (2023, April 4). Trump backers, detractors face off outside New York courthouse. Reuters. Retrieved May 2, 2023, from <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/trump-supporters-detractors-crowd-around-manhattan-courthouse-ahead-arraignment-2023-04-04/>

7 How Conspiracy Theories Can Kill, November 14, 2018, ADL, [https://www.adl.org/resources/blog/how-conspiracy-theories-can-kill?gclid=EAlaQob-ChMImpO898DU\\_gIV5SyzAB39\\_gdQEAAyAAEgIUL\\_D\\_BwE](https://www.adl.org/resources/blog/how-conspiracy-theories-can-kill?gclid=EAlaQob-ChMImpO898DU_gIV5SyzAB39_gdQEAAyAAEgIUL_D_BwE)

8 Conspiracy propagandists. Southern Poverty Law Center. (n.d.). Retrieved May 1, 2023, from <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/ideology/conspiracy-propagandists>

Antisemitism is prejudice, discrimination, and/or hatred against Jews, solely based on their Jewish identity. It has been referred to as the oldest hatred and is often grounded in stereotypes and falsehoods about Jewish people. While initially stemming from religious beliefs, antisemitism took on a new dimension in the 19th century when Wilhem Marr, a German man, coined the term to describe hatred against Jews based on their racial identity. In modern times, antisemitism manifests in many ways, but damaging stereotypes about Jewish power and control still persist. An example of this and what became the most widely spread antisemitic publication of modern times was drafted in the early 1900s.<sup>9</sup> The Protocols of the Elders of Zion were published in Russia and attempted to falsely portray Jews as conspiring to take over the world. The fabricated protocols read as meeting minutes of Jewish leaders and draw upon notions of Jewish global domination and control. These beliefs play an important role in far-right movements, which tend to embrace these conspiracy theories.<sup>10</sup> Often, conspiracy theories enforce an “us vs them” narrative and create room for a group or individual to be identified as culpable for the perceived problem.<sup>11</sup> Traditionally, right-wing extremism is antisemitic and far-right actors identify Jews to be this scapegoat.

When Donald Trump was indicted, his supporters, politicians, and far-right actors came out against the charges and reinforced the idea that the unfolding events were part of a grander scheme orchestrated by the Jewish people in general. They believe these efforts are spearheaded by Jewish businessman and philanthropist George Soros<sup>12</sup>, perpetuating the common, age-old antisemitic trope of Jewish control. George Soros has long been used by the far-right as a boogymen. Their language purports that Soros funds far-left movements and has unchecked powers among liberal leaders. He is viewed as a wire puller and is attributed massive power and influence. Conspiracy theoreticians see him and the Rothschild banking family as the people who fund the “bad guys” - such as Democrats, Hollywood elite, business tycoons, wealthy liberals, the medical establishment, celebrities and the mass media.<sup>13 14</sup>

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9 United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. (n.d.). The Protocols of the Elders of Zion. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/protocols-of-the-elders-of-zion>

10 A brief history of ANTI-SEMITISM (n.d.). Retrieved May 1, 2023, from <https://www.adl.org/sites/default/files/documents/assets/pdf/education-outreach/Brief-History-on-Anti-Semitism-A.pdf>; Beirich, H. (2021, January 21). Antisemitism Rising Among American Right-Wing Extremists. Inss.org.il. Retrieved May 1, 2023.

11 Conspiracy theories and right-wing extremism insights and ... (n.d.-b). [https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2021-04/ran\\_conspiracy\\_theories\\_and\\_right-wing\\_2021\\_en.pdf](https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2021-04/ran_conspiracy_theories_and_right-wing_2021_en.pdf)

12 George Soros is a Holocaust survivor. He fled communism and became one of the single largest funders of democracy promotion, anti-Communism and liberal education around the globe (in Weisman, J., & Higgins, A. (2023, April 4). Behind trump indictment, the right wing finds a familiar villain in Soros. The New York Times. Retrieved April 29, 2023, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/04/04/us/politics/george-soros-bragg-trump.html>

13 Rothschild, M. (2022). The storm is upon us: How Qanon became a movement, cult, and conspiracy theory of everything. Melville House.

14 Weisman, J., & Higgins, A. (2023, April 4). Behind trump indictment, the right wing finds a familiar villain in Soros. The New York Times. Retrieved April 29, 2023, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/04/04/us/politics/george-soros-bragg-trump.html>

On March 18th, Donald Trump posted on his Truth Social account that the indictment against him is funded by George Soros, as seen below.



Trump calls for his supporters to protest and “take our nation back!” (March 18, 2023; Truth Social)

Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene, who has come under fire in the past for antisemitic comments, echoes Trump’s rhetoric.<sup>15</sup> In response to Trump’s indictment, Representative Greene followed suit.



Representative Greene tweets that Soros undermines United States democracy. She questions why Soros is allowed to maintain his United States citizenship. (March 19, 2023; Twitter)

Similar statements were shared widely by political leaders and then shared on platforms riddled with far-right users. On 4chan and in various telegram channels, commenters positively respond to these posts, further reinforcing their narrative that Donald Trump is under attack from a Jewish conspirator and grand puppet master.

<sup>15</sup> Beauchamp, Z. (2021, January 30). Marjorie Taylor Greene’s Space Laser and the age-old problem of blaming the jews. Vox. Retrieved April 29, 2023, from <https://www.vox.com/22256258/marjorie-taylor-greene-jewish-space-laser-anti-semitism-conspiracy-theories>



In a Telegram channel, users question why Soros has unchecked powers. A poster states that he is Jewish, and therefore “part of the same tribe that is running our country into the ground.” (April 4, 2023; Telegram)

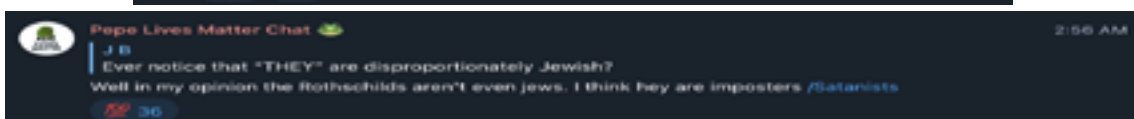
Antisemitic rhetoric is also posted implicitly. Triple parentheses or the (((echo))) is coded language applied to Jewish names and the like in order to harass and mock Jews online while being undetected by search engines, as displayed below.



An article headline is posted on a 4chan board that states Soros is caught hiding evidence from the New York Grand Jury. In response, a user asks for thoughts on the United States “(((j\*stice system)))”, signaling the user’s belief that Jews control and influence the justice system. (March 22, 2023; 4chan)



A post asks 4chan members what “(((they)))” will “blame on MAGA”<sup>16</sup>. A commenter on the thread states that the Zionsts/Jews are in a secret society and are the masterminds. (March 21, 2023; 4chan)



A tweet stating “Trump wins. [They] lose,” is posted in a telegram channel and is followed by a call for calm during the “stormy waters” of Trump’s indictment. In response, a user wrote, “ever notice that “THEY” are disproportionately <sup>17</sup>Jewish?” Another person states that the Rothschilds<sup>18</sup> are imposters and satanists. (March 23,

16 Make America Great Again (MAGA) refers to the slogan Donald Trump used in his presidential campaigns.

17 Azani, Eitan et al. “The Far Right – Ideology, Modus Operandi and Development Trends”. September 2020. The International Institute for Counter-Terrorism. <https://www.ict.org.il/images/The%20Far%20Right%20%E2%80%93%20Ideology.pdf>

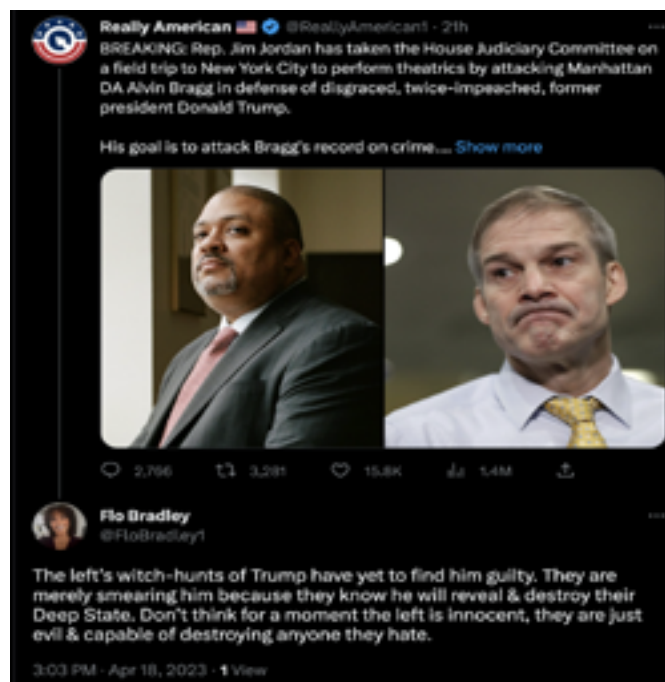
18 The Rothschild family is a Jewish banking family who has been accused of secretly controlling the economy, manipulating the weather, and profiting from wars.



2023; Telegram Channel)

## QAnon Conspiracy Theory

In 2017, the QAnon movement emerged, which encompasses various conspiracy theories. Its followers assert that there is a group of powerful Satan-worshipping pedophiles who form a global cabal and manipulate governments, banks, media, and entertainment industries to sustain their murderous cult. This group, commonly known as the “Deep State,” includes anti-Trump intelligence officials, bank executives, Hollywood celebrities, and sports icons. QAnon supporters perceive them as foes of democracy who own major media outlets and aim to keep people enslaved mentally and physically. They believe that by stopping this group, they can break free from the chains of oppression.<sup>19</sup> This language is seen in previous denunciations of government actions, including in response to the 2022 FBI raid of Trump’s Mar-a-Lago estate conducted as part of an investigation into Trump’s handling of classified documents.<sup>20</sup> Posts reveal that far-right actors believe Trump is being targeted because he is trying to destroy the deep state.



On Twitter, a user claimed that the left is engaged in a witch hunt against Donald Trump because he is striving to

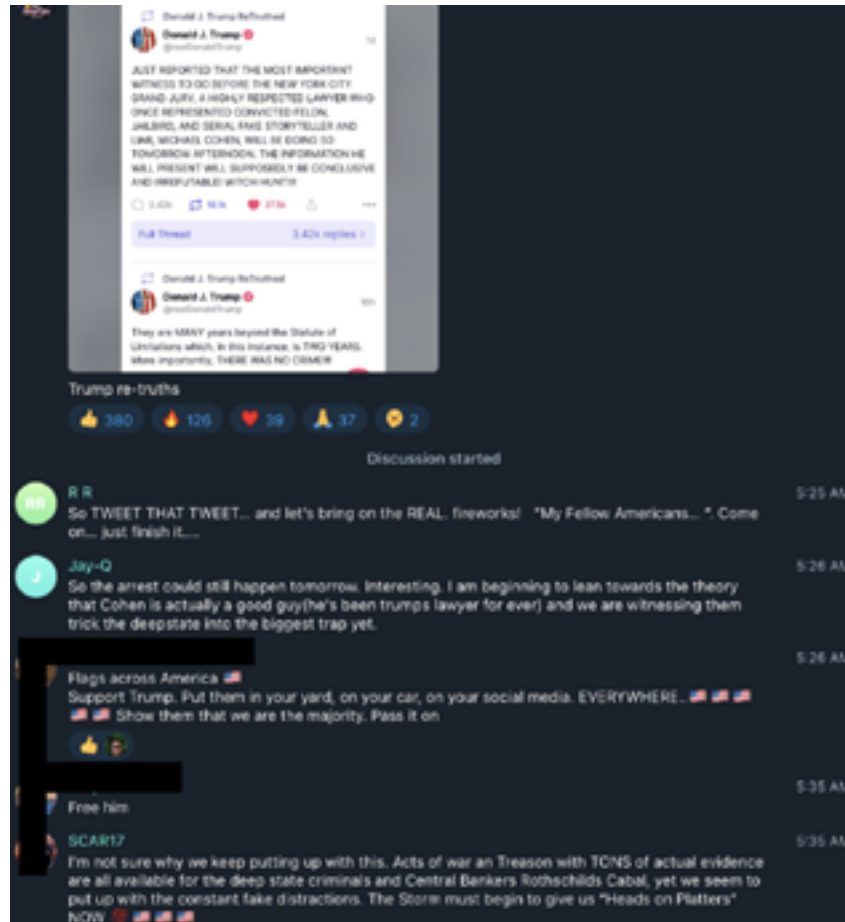
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“Rothschild” has become a generic term for greedy and manipulative Jewish billionaires. (in Rothschild, AJC, <https://www.ajc.org/translatehate/Rothschild>)

- 19 Rothschild Mike, *The Storm Is Upon Us*, Brooklyn, London: Melville House, 2021, p. 11-12; Azani, Eitan et al. “The Far Right – Ideology, Modus Operandi and Development Trends”. September 2020. The International Institute for Counter-Terrorism. <https://www.ict.org.il/images/The%20Far%20Right%20%E2%80%93%20Ideology.pdf>
- 20 Morris, S. (2022, August 9). Deep State in the US: What is the conspiracy theory and what has Donald Trump said? Evening Standard. Retrieved April 30, 2023, from <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/us-politics/deep-state-us-conspiracy-theory-donald-trump-b1017543.html>

dismantle the “Deep State.” (April 18, 2023; Twitter)

Far-right actors spread messages that claim Trump’s indictment is a fraud orchestrated by the deep state, who they believe should be the ones prosecuted.

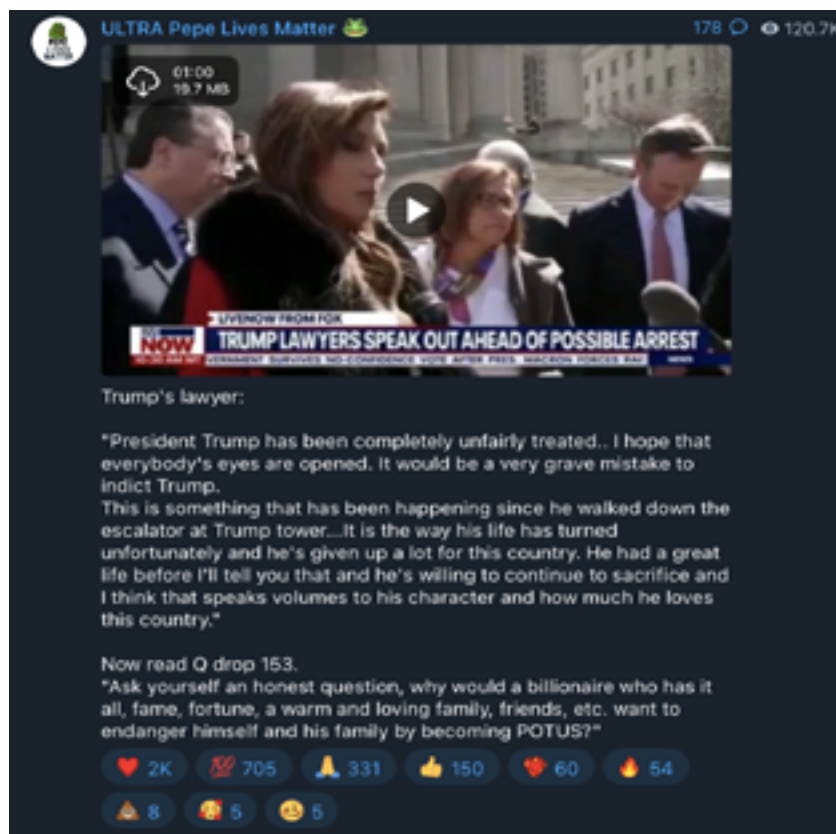


Trump insinuates that a witness in the grand jury investigation is going to demonstrate the investigation is a witch hunt. Responses to his statement include calls for supporting Trump, as well as a message that says, “acts of war an [sic] treason with TONS of actual evidence are all available for the deep state criminals and Central Bankers Rothschilds Cabal....” (March 21, 2023; Telegram Channel)



A photo of a CNN interview with Jewish Representative Adam Schiff is posted in a telegram channel. The post talks about the “deep state” increasing their attacks against Trump. The poster states that “we are in World War 3,” which is being fought between Trump and the patriots versus the globalists. (March 21, 2023; Telegram Channel)

Far-right actors also use their denunciation of Trump’s indictment to promote QAnon to others.



A user on Telegram quotes Trump's lawyer, who speaks about Donald Trump's unfair treatment. In response, the user tells readers to "read Q drop 153"<sup>21</sup>, which refers to a QAnon post on 4chan. (March 22, 2023; Telegram Channel)

## New World Order Conspiracy Theory

The new world order conspiracy theory relies on the claim that there is a secret group attempting to gain control by creating a global, totalitarian government.<sup>22</sup> This belief has deep roots in American conspiracy theory culture.<sup>23</sup> This conspiracy theory is found in both fringe online spaces, as well as on traditional media sites.<sup>24</sup> This conspiracy theory poses a real-world danger as it promotes a worldview that identifies an enemy entity and could potentially lead to violence against those seen as supporting the new world order (communities, infrastructure,

21 QAnon is a "participatory ideological movement" - followers are encouraged to do their own 'research' after given what they believe to be a military intelligence information (intel drops) shared in real time over the internet by the anonymous movement's leader "Q", who claims to be a military intelligence officer. (in Rothschild Mike, *The Storm Is Upon Us*, Brooklyn, London: Melville House, 2021, p. 7)

22 New World Order. ADL. (2017, June 26). Retrieved May 1, 2023, from <https://www.adl.org/resources/glossary-term/new-world-order>

23 What is the "new world order" conspiracy? VICE. (2022, March 23). <https://www.vice.com/en/article/v7dqem/putin-new-world-order-ukraine-conspiracy>

24 The New World Order: The Historical Origins of a dangerous modern conspiracy theory. (2022, May 31). Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Montrely. <https://www.middlebury.edu/institute/academics/centers-initiatives/ctec/ctec-publications/new-world-order-historical-origins-dangerous>

and individuals).<sup>25</sup> Many conspiracy theorists point to the illuminati as the entity in control of developing a new world order. These conspiracy theorists use the term “globalist” to identify their enemies. Originally used to describe Hitler’s ambitions to conquer the world, the term is an antisemitic dog whistle<sup>26</sup> used to describe Jews as loyal to a global world order that enhances their own Jewish control.<sup>27</sup> This language is found in response to Trump’s indictment, as seen below.



On Telegram, a poster says; “The only thing Trump is guilty of is resisting the New World Order globalist agenda.” (March 31, 2023; Telegram Channel)

<sup>25</sup> Ibid

<sup>26</sup> A dog whistle is the use of coded or suggestive language to appeal to an audience or signal a certain message to a group of people.

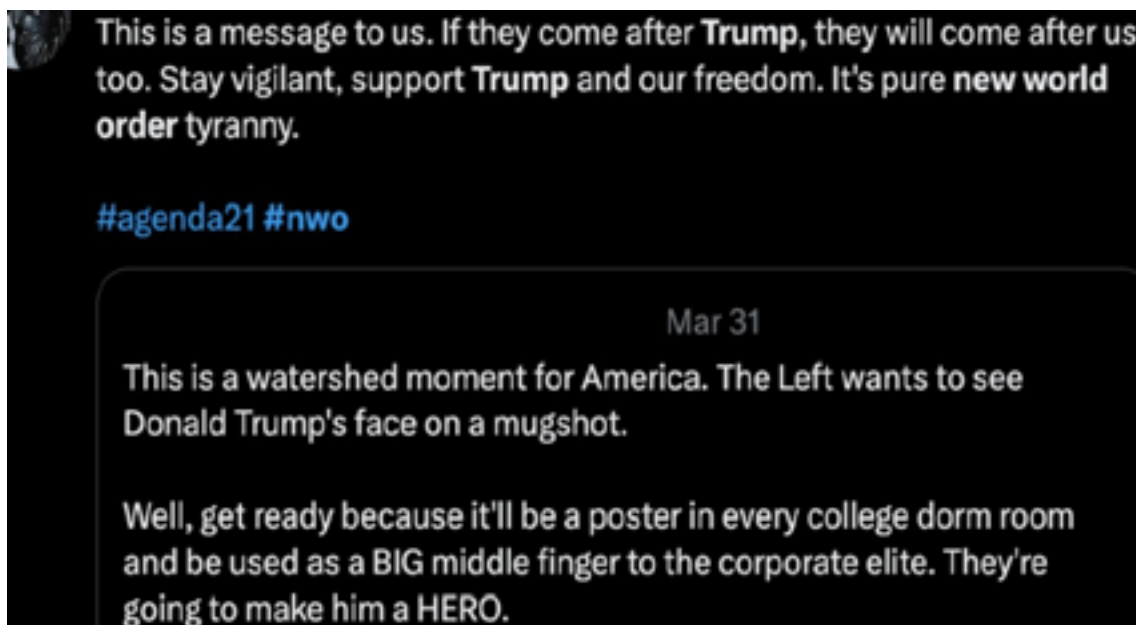
<sup>27</sup> Zimmer, B. (14 March 2018). The Origins of the ‘Globalist’ Slur. The Atlantic. <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2018/03/the-origins-of-the-globalist-slur/555479/>



In response to the announcement of Trump’s possible indictment, a verified twitter user tweets that President Biden is solely interested in “pursuing a woke, globalist agenda.” (March 20, 2023; Twitter)



A message is shared in a Telegram channel questioning whether the “globalists” are truly winning. (March 31, 2023; Telegram Channel)



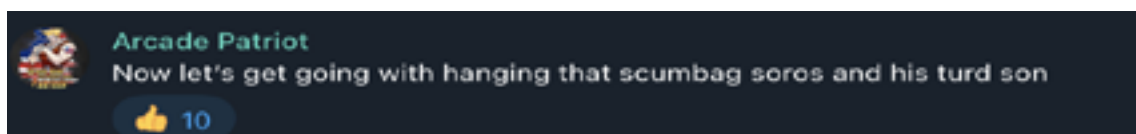
A verified Twitter user tweets that “the Left wants to see Donald Trump’s face on a mugshot.” In response, a user says that coming after Trump is “pure new world order tyranny.” (April 4, 2023; Twitter)

### Content Calling for Violence

Conspiracy theories have an unusual power to motivate people to action. They are particularly able to do so if they can point to specific people, places or institutions as being behind the conspiracies in question. This practice gives extremists who strongly believe such theories—places to explore or victims to target.<sup>28</sup>

The authors of this paper have monitored posts that advocate for violence against individuals who either backed or played a role in Donald Trump’s impeachment. These posts are highly targeted, explicitly calling for the death of individuals viewed as politically motivated, such as DA Alvin Bragg, who worked to indict Trump, or those perceived to be manipulating events, like George Soros, to bring down the former president.

George Soros already experienced a violent attack when he received a bomb package in his mailbox outside of New York City. The package was later identified as one of at least 15 bombs allegedly sent by a fanatical Donald Trump supporter from Florida to various public figures who had expressed their dissent toward the former president.<sup>29</sup>

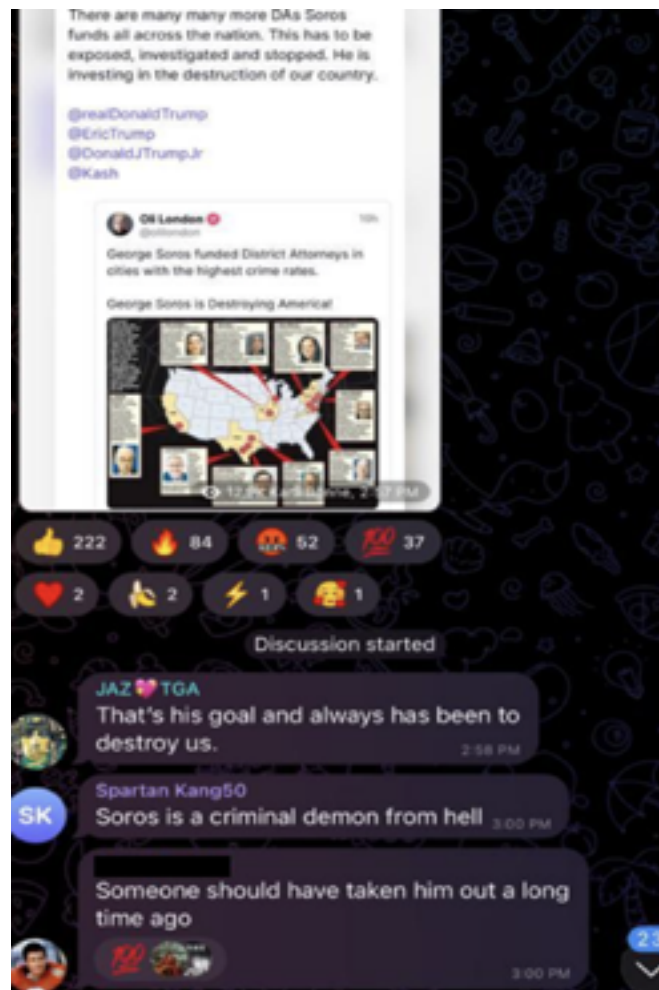


A post on Telegram says, “let’s get going” with the hanging of George Soros and his son. (March, 2023; Telegram Channel)

28 How Conspiracy Theories Can Kill, November 14, 2018, ADL, [https://www.adl.org/resources/blog/how-conspiracy-theories-can-kill?gclid=EAlaIqOb-ChMImpO898DU\\_gIV5SyzAB39\\_gdQEAAyAAEgIUL\\_D\\_BwE](https://www.adl.org/resources/blog/how-conspiracy-theories-can-kill?gclid=EAlaIqOb-ChMImpO898DU_gIV5SyzAB39_gdQEAAyAAEgIUL_D_BwE)

29 Ibid

Doxing, publicly providing private information about individuals, was used to identify others believed to be supported by George Soros, as seen below.



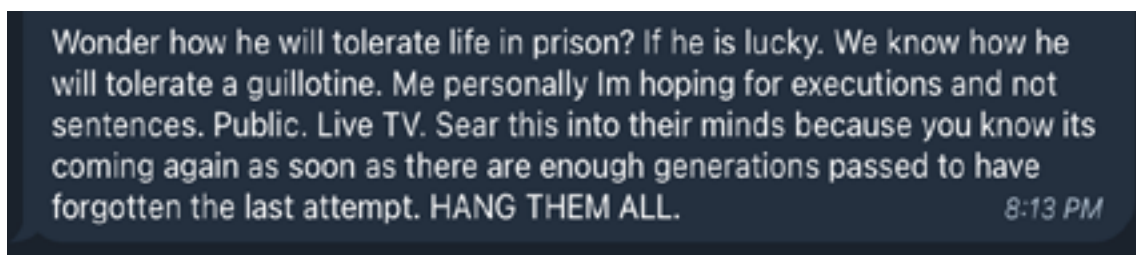
The post claims that numerous district attorneys (DAs) across the United States are being financed by Soros and that he is to be held responsible for the country's downfall. A map of DAs in particular states is also included in the post. Some users respond by suggesting that "someone should have taken him out a long time ago," referring to Soros. (March 20, 2023; Telegram Channel)





In a Telegram channel, a video is posted of Tucker Carlson, formerly with Fox, commenting on Soros’ involvement in Trump’s indictment. Commenters respond by saying; “hang that zionist...” (April 4, 2023; Telegram)

As reported in NBC News, District Attorney Bragg has been sent two envelopes of white powder and two separate death threats since the indictment of Donald Trump. One letter said, “ALVIN: I AM GOING TO KILL YOU!!!!!!!!!!!!!!”<sup>30</sup> This sentiment is also found on social media, as seen below.



A user on Telegram says he hopes “for executions and not sentences” in response to a post about Manhattan DA Bragg. (March 21, 2023; Telegram)

30 Dienst, J., & Stelloh, T. (2023, April 12). Manhattan da Alvin Bragg is sent another threatening letter and White Powder. NBCNews.com. Retrieved April 29, 2023, from <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/politics-news/manhattan-da-alvin-bragg-sent-another-threatening-letter-white-powder-rcna79452>



In response to a tweet about DA Alvin Bragg, a twitter user replies “hang Soros.” (April 5, 2023; Twitter)

## Summary

Donald Trump is the first United States President to be indicted. Shortly after the announcement on March 30th, 2023, Trump used Truth Social to share his viewpoint on the decision which included calls for his supporters to “take our nation back.”<sup>31</sup> This instigated an outpour of fervent support in far-right circles online.

Monitoring social media platforms from March 18th to April 18th has revealed a troubling trend in which far-right actors have exploited Twitter, Telegram, and far-right boards to vehemently denounce the indictment of former President Donald Trump. This campaign primarily focused on two themes: 1. Conspiracy Theories and 2. Content Advocating for Violence. Posts centered around conspiracy theories that alleged a secret organization was manipulating decision-makers to indict Trump, with these theories falling into three themes - antisemitism, QAnon, and the New World Order. Additionally, far-right actors resorted to violent language, including calls for the death of those connected to the legal proceedings and individuals perceived as potential threats.

According to the House Committee on Homeland Security, the United States has witnessed an all-time high of 333 domestic terrorism plots or attacks since 2015, with right-wing extremists

31 Gans, J. (2023, March 18). Trump suggests he will be arrested Tuesday, calls for supporters to ‘protest, take our nation back!’. The Hill. Retrieved May 2, 2023, from <https://thehill.com/regulation/court-battles/3906452-trump-suggests-he-will-be-arrested-tuesday-calls-for-supporters-to-protest-take-our-nation-back/>

perpetrating 80% of them.<sup>32</sup> The online dissemination of extremist beliefs is a red flag, exacerbated by the ease social media platforms facilitate their spread and manipulation of world events. In 2020, former EU counter-terrorism coordinator Gilles de Kerchove expressed concern about the “potential future rise of new forms of terrorism, rooted in conspiracy theories and technophobia,”<sup>33</sup> signaling a warning to security forces and policymakers alike. The far-right’s alarming reaction to Trump’s indictment should serve as a red flag to policymakers and security forces, who must take action to address this dangerous phenomenon.

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32 Thompson, B. G. (2022, November 2). Opinion: Domestic terrorism is a threat we can’t ignore. CNN. <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/11/02/opinions/domestic-terrorism-threat-we-cant-ignore-thompson/index.html>

33 Dearden Lizzie, New forms of terrorism inspired by conspiracy theories may emerge after pandemic, warns EU counter-terror chief, Independent, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/coronavirus-conspiracy-theory-terrorism-5g-gilles-de-kerchove-a9699571.html>