

# Technologies of the Right: Disinformation, Mobilization, and Surveillance

*Panelists: Brian Friedberg, Dr. Carolyn Gallaher, Talia Lavin  
Moderated by Dr. Koki Mendis*

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**Koki Mendis:** Thank you for joining Political Research Associates today for a roundtable discussion on Technologies of the Right: Mobilization, Disinformation and Surveillance. Political Research Associates is a national nonprofit entering its 40th year. We research, monitor, and publicize the agenda, and strategies of the U.S. Right, revealing the powerful intersections of Christian nationalism, White nationalism, and patriarchy. PRA produces investigative reports, articles, and tools; publishes a peer reviewed quarterly magazine, *The Public Eye*; advises social justice movement organizers; and offers expert commentary for local and national media outlets. Our core issue areas span reproductive justice, LGBTQ justice, racial and immigrant justice, and economic justice.

Today's conversation revolves around social media as a tool: an organizing hub, and a staging ground for far-right movements as they grow, coalesce, plan, and mobilize. We will explore the role of disinformation and conspiracy in driving false and anti-democratic national narratives. We will discuss surveillance as an oft proposed solution to identifying violent actors before they act, and grassroots movements organizing against right-wing online mobilization.

For today's discussion we are honored to be joined by three friends of PRA. Brian Friedberg, Senior Researcher of the Technology and Social Change Research Project at the [Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy](#) at the Harvard Kennedy Center; Dr. Carolyn Gallaher, Political Geographer and Senior Associate Dean of the [School of International Service](#) at [American University](#) in Washington, D.C.; and Talia Lavin, freelance writer who has had bylines in *The New Yorker*, *The New Republic*, *The New York Times Review of Books*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Village Voice*, among others. And author of [\*Culture Warlords: My Journey into the Dark Web of White Supremacy\*](#).

Thank you to our esteemed panelists and to you, our wonderful audience, for joining us today. Please note this webinar will be recorded and our recording will be distributed by email and on our website in the next few days. Our audience today also has access to live close-captioning, which you can toggle on at the bottom of your screen. Audience members, please feel free to introduce yourselves in the chat so we can see who all is with us today. We will also be taking time for audience questions, which can be dropped into the chat at any point in the discussion, and we will go ahead and get started.

Forty percent of people in this country believe that the result of the 2020 Presidential election are fraudulent, despite a dearth of credible evidence. Thousands of people were spurred to action by this belief, culminating in the violent January 6th insurrection in the U.S. Capitol building and at state capitols across the country. I'd like to start our discussion today with an overview of some of the most pervasive ways that disinformation and conspiracy, amplified by powerful and omnipresent social media platforms, have defined our contemporary political moment.

Carolyn, I'd like to start with you. In your recently published piece for PRA, ["Conspiracy for the Masses: Mapping a QAnon Lockdown Network."](#) you and coauthor Jaclyn Fox write: "QAnon's dominance is due in part to its structure as a participatory, crowdsourced initiative. Although Q periodically drops hints (so called breadcrumbs or 'Q-drops,') adherents are encouraged to 'do their own research.' This allows ordinary users to shape conspiracies as they see fit. Q's suspicion of the federal government also allows its conspiracy theories to resonate with militias, sovereign citizens, and Trump supporters. Likewise, its underlying antisemitism, homophobia, and racism allow it to connect to neonazis and White nationalists. But the often-coded language also means many people who interface with QAnon conspiracy theories have little idea of the ideologies of hate and extremism that underlie them; many don't even know they're reading QAnon material." Can you tell us a little about your work centering the wildly popular QAnon conspiracy theory as a unifying belief system for a fractious Right, about QAnon's relationship to the "Stop the Steal" mobilizations that fueled the widespread mistrust of the election results?

**Carolyn Gallaher:** Sure. So I guess I would start by saying that when I first started doing my research—now twenty years ago—on militia movements, one of the things I learned in the process of doing that is that there are lots of divides within the Far Right. Of course, if you don't study the Far Right, you just sort of think is this big blob of angry, incoherent thing. And it's not. It's obviously these different groups. And so when Jaclyn and I were working on this paper, one of the things that we saw when we were looking at the Qanon

rhetoric and the discourse is that it offers something that's attractive to almost all sectors of the Far Right. So it brings in anti-government groups, it brings in White supremacists, White nationalists, Western chauvinists, misogynists, antisemites of all various stripes, many of which are in those categories I just mentioned. People that don't like immigrants, don't like Muslims, don't like Asian people, Black people, annexed people. So there's something in there for all of them.

The other thing that it does, which is, really, I think the thing that's most important, that was most important, relevant to us, was that it took these existing groups and it puts them on the same terrain as members of the GOP. In particular people in the Freedom Caucus, but also extremist people in the GOP, or people that ended up running for office like Marjorie Taylor Green. And then it brings in this third group, which are people that have no real background in being political. And you have all these people in the same space. So that's who it brings together. And that's a pretty new collection of people that are all coming together, I think, in the contemporary period. And then what it does is it brings them together because in some ways it's so general that it's hard to say it belongs to any one of these groups, right? So there's nefarious actors. Basically, they are bad guys. And we watch bad guy cop movies and in movies when there's a bad guy and a good guy. So this is just a way to sort of indicate there's a bad guy. And so whoever your bad guy is, and they can be very different, you kind of come together.

The other thing it does is it brings all of us under this anti-government rhetoric. So militias, dislike the government for different reasons than White nationalists dislike the government, but they all don't like the government. So this provides this kind of big umbrella for these groups. And then again, it's also general enough if you are an apolitical person, you can just jump in there and find your particular issue and connect it. Because the conspiracy is so general that it's hard to sort of say, "no, you don't fit." In fact, this is designed that way. And also it's incentivized because you're supposed to do your own research. It's like you're part of the uncovering of it.

I'll also just say that when we, Jaclyn and I, did our Facebook analysis, we started with a network analysis of groups that formed in April around the shutdown mandates in various states. And then we mapped that and we found out the key groups. And then we looked at groups that were using "Stop the Steal" hashtag, right before and right after the election. And we found there was 14 percent overlap in the groups. But most importantly, the top four groups in the "Stop the Steal" groups were also very important groups in the network that we mapped. So what that said to us, too, is that Trump is really like the center of gravity here in a lot of ways that brings all of these people together onto the same terrain.

**Koki Mendis:** Thank you, Carolyn, you covered a large movement, I really appreciate it. I mean, we'll have lots of time to talk about QAnon. But it really is...it's a mass and absorbant movement. It pulls all sorts of ideologies in really interesting ways.

Brian, I want to continue with you and expand outwards from conspiracism. Your work focuses more broadly on myths and disinformation and media manipulation. In the introduction to your 2019 piece, co-authored by Joan Donovan, [On the Internet Nobody Knows You're a Bot: Pseudoanonymous Influence Operations and Networked Social Movements](#), you write: "When facts become hard to establish, distortion takes over. Social media has given rise to countless operators who assume false identities, infiltrating political networks and using them to influence public opinion. And while social media platforms say they are working to stop this malfeasance, they remain open to all manner of abuse by bad actors. The outcomes are varied, but in almost every instance, a con game is operating—one that manipulates other social media users and online social movements with reams of posts, a firehose of unprovable 'facts' that in measurable ways influences public debate on key social issues." And Carolyn, you mentioned this. You said Q is designed this way. Which really indicates that there are actors at play here.

Brian, can you talk about the effective strategies deployed by actors who create and drive disinformation campaigns from the individuals planning the campaigns, to the websites publishing them, to the influencers disseminating them. And whether we can know who precisely these actors are? Can we identify the individuals and organizations who planned and fueled these campaigns?

**Brian Friedberg:** Absolutely! I think to start establishing sort of three historical traditions of disinfo operators in an American context, you have sort of the institutional Right and the variety of disinfo campaigns: think of someone like Roger Stone, Roy Cohn in the long history, going back to McCarthyism, and before that as well. There's a lineage there. There are people who trained, people who trained people who take us to Milo Yiannaopolous. So there is a lineage of people who—this is their full time job. You have the insurgent aspects of the Right: White supremacists, militias, groups that are both trying to manipulate conservative and mainstream media to their advantages. Who, as Carolyn aptly pointed out, have lots of factional differences and conflicts within these groups. And then you have sort of the newer style of trolling and hoaxing, that comes from less political tradition, but was politicized very heavily in the 2010s via the red-pilling of 4chan, the normalization of White nationalism in insurgent spaces leading up to Gamergate, and then sort of normalized the Gamergate. You have a long history of manipulation tactics that are also shared

by a lot of these groups. There's a documentary called *The Billionaire's Tea Party* back from 2009, I believe. Great—still to this day, is a great watch. And the filmmaker uncovered a young operator for Tea Party strategist encouraging Rotten Tomatoes and Amazon Review bombing in 2009. These are tactics that are still employed to, you know, as we speak are happening. So this sort of normalization of changing what people see when they look up a topic has been something that the Right has been doing for a very long time.

There's sub-tactics within that. Someone like Steve Bannon has been very good at sort of flooding the zone and seeding conspiracism and strategic disinfo through a coordinated network that's much more professionalized. You have someone like Jack Posobiec who's very adept at trending manipulation, has a long history of sort of instigating trending topics. You have, very specifically, the targeted harassment of journalists and activists as a tactic of disinformation, spreading not just as an act of harassment. Finding, isolating individuals who are fighting for social justice, who are being misrepresented by the Right. And using them, and building a straw man that endures through generations of disinfo operators. You still look at figures. Feminists who were targeted by the Gamergate are still used as avatars and shorthand for expressing disinfo around women's issues, and feminism in general. You have the butterfly attack, which is a technique that was sort of tested out on 4chan, and used by 4chan at the same time, to mimic social justice movements on Twitter, to sow division campaigns like Father's Day. Many, many sub campaigns during Gamergate, where they will actively or possibly surveil justice communities to mimic their language styles, avatars in order to sow division in the communities by spreading false info. Quite often the work done by these communities to sort of place-keep and take care of themselves is often underreported as well. So these sorts of campaigns, just as many of them, if not more, fail than succeed.

Pseudoanonymity is used...you look at the Groyper movement. The fact that they're Catholic Groyper, Gamer Groyper, however they want to say it. They're pseudonyms that are used to sort of protect themselves from doxxing and from activists intervention. And there's the distributed amplification of QAnon where, you know, a theory will have multiple heads like a hydra, very difficult to sort of suppress by an influencer in that way. And then meme wars are still a very enduring tactic, as we saw in leading up to the 2016 election. Sort of the the one right-wing subjective position against the big tent of the intersectional Left. So that's some of the tactics.

**Koki Mendis:** Thank you, Brian, I really appreciate your work. I think it really gets at the intentionality behind disinformation movements that are often presented as sort of organic. And it's just really...it's really fascinating work that you're doing over at the Shorenstein Center.

I want to shift our level analysis a little from a political actors, movements, and social structures that you just talked about, Brian. Talia, you begin your book, *Culture Warlords: My Journey into the Dark Web of White Supremacy*, with a really compelling analysis of the individuals who comprise the general body of the far-right digital ecosphere. You write, “they are just people, people with an entire alternate curriculum of history who operate within an insular world of propaganda, built to stoke rage and incite killings and for no other purpose at all. There are rich men and poor men, tradesmen and office workers, teenagers and men crusting middle age. They eat and sleep and sometimes drink too much and sometimes are sober. They’re lonely, some of them horny, some of them sometimes depressed and sometimes confused and sometimes joyful. They’re people just like you and me. They could work in the next cubicle over and you might not know it. Sit one seat over in class from you and you might not know it. Live in your neighborhood, play on your sports teams, and you would never know that deep in the night they trade photos of lynchings like baseball cards and laugh. But I know them now. These men and women, I’ve seen what they write and how they talk and what they read and even how they sing: poorly. It is precisely their humanity that angers me so much. The hate they promulgate and the violence they desire are the culmination of dozens, or hundreds, of small human choices.”

From reveling in violent fantasies in private forums to joining conspiratorial Facebook groups to reposting disinformation memes or infographics, the spread of disinformation and far-right ideology online requires active participation from the millions of people most susceptible to these ideas. Returning to the specific and horrific corner of the internet that you immersed yourself in for a full year, I’d love for you to talk a little bit about what you saw and experienced. Can you give our audience a sense of the pervasive narrative and the level of commitment to violent ideologies, and conspiracies you witnessed? And can you talk a little more about the people who populate these far-right movements and how they fail to conform to the imagined purveyors of neonazi vitriol?

**Talia Lavin:** Sure and I just want to say thanks to PRA for having me, and also it’s really awesome to be alongside these panelists. And I’m hearing people talk about, “oh, you know, there are different factions within the Far Right.” “Look at all the tactics they use.” I’m like, “oh, I’m home”...I.

And to anyone in the audience who might have questions about specific terminology we’re using, feel free to post them and we’ll try to answer in real-time. To Peggy, a doxxer is someone who will expose someone’s private information: where they live, their family’s name, in an effort to intimidate

critics or people of color out of speech. And it's certainly been employed against—that tactic, has been employed against me several times.

But just to get to the...it's a big question. But so just to answer a part of it, or what I think, kind of, comes to the heart of some of my...where the book is: I think that one of the big things that sometimes gets missed in these very technical explanations, and these analyses that really focus on different factions (and, of course, there are many and it's worrying that I find this totally fascinating in a nerdy/horrified way.) But I think...I thought a lot about the human motivations at play here. And in many cases, these are people who are... people who get involved with the Far Right are people who feel disaffected or people who feel lonely, not necessarily socioeconomically marginalized. I think there's a really pervasive narrative of what I call the "Toothless Cletus" archetype of sort of everyone involved in the Far Right is a redneck, is you know, deeply poor, is undereducated, lives in their mother's basement, so therefore socioeconomically marginalized and socially stunted. And I have not found that to be the case when speaking and observing undercover and not with members of far right movements. That's just a completely inadequate analysis. The people who hew very closely and intensely—intently to that analysis, to my mind, are engaging in some measure of self absolution of, "oh, it couldn't be anyone I know, it can't be anyone in my town." It's essentially a measure of Whiteness defending itself. Of saying, you know, not only could it be no one I know, there's almost a way of like excusing people's conduct, excusing people's engagement in these violent movements by saying, "oh, they're at the margins of society, whether socially or economically." And so I just want to emphatically sort of counter that.

And then my second point that I'd want to make is that, you know, a lot of what these far-right movements have to sell is narrative, is story. You know, it's, you know, very few people...and trolls, and people who purvey hate, know they're causing pain. But that doesn't mean they wake up in the morning and want to say, like, "I am going to be evil today." And what the Far Right offers, I think, particularly when it comes to these White nationalist narratives: wanting to save the White race, wanting to counter the White genocide theory (which is the idea that White people are, via a nefarious, elite conspiracy, being systematically out-bred.) You know, the idea of being able to...like...the idea that the White nationalist movement sells is like you can be a warrior for the White race, you can be a protagonist in the story. QAnon certainly has similar tactics, as Carolyn spoke about, that you can be the person putting the puzzle together again to abort this nefarious global elite. The more antisemitic segments of the Far Right say you can be the one to fight against this: this all pervasive, incredibly moneyed, incredibly powerful specter of Jewish control. And so

they offer people a sense of importance. They offer people the sense that they're protagonists, they offer people a sense of empowerment, and community, brotherhood (because it's so often cast in these very masculine terms.) Of course, there are women who also participate in the movement, you know, and they have their own narratives about "feminism has failed us, we still feel itemized and alienated, and we can be cherished within a you know, within a White nationalist environment that prizes White wombs and White children."

So I think that the biggest point that I want to just give over is that White nationalism and similar elements of far-right extremism offers the power of story, offers the power of, sort of, community, and offers this this power of turning people's loneliness and disaffection into a strong sense of being the protagonist, being on the side of justice, fighting for good and for the people. Even though when you look at what they wind up doing, (which is a spectrum of activities from harassment to murder,) it seems plain to us that this is morally wrong and fundamentally dangerous behavior. But I would argue that the biggest disinformation campaign being wielded perhaps is the one that blankets people who are on the Far Right, or curious about the Far Right, in a sense of love, in a sense of community, in a sense of shared struggle against a world that wants to eliminate the White man and end his way of life. So I guess that's my answer to the question.

**Koki Mendis:** Thank you, Talia. I think it's really important to have both sides of the story, right? The institutions, the major political actors who are creating disinformation, and then the individual people who are allowing it to perpetuate and participating actively. You talk a little bit about, sort of, feeling like people on the Far Right, and in these online spaces feeling like they are part of a larger mission and that they are struggling for their own version of good. And there's a really strong through line, right, across the Far Right with this narrative that is centered in antisemitism. And two of my colleagues, actually, Ben Lorber and Heron Greensmith, just [published a piece in The Progressive](#) on the intersection between antisemitism and the anti-trans movement through this narrative that we see so profoundly. And I was wondering if you all could talk a little bit about the role that antisemitism plays across many iterations of disinformation and groups coalescing on the Right. So if somebody would like to take the first stab at talking through this with our audience? Please, Talia.

**Talia Lavin:** I'm so sorry, I just...I kind of worried about in retrospect, I wish I had addressed it at greater length, but I wrote about the intersection between antisemitism and transphobia in my book. And I also wrote about...I think, again, just returning to the story, I talk a lot about what role does antisemitism



play, what rhetorical function does it serve? And across different Far Right groups. And for me, that rhetorical function is two-fold.

So one, *prima facie*, it's a little bit difficult for people to maybe make the argument that White men are...White men and White people in general are the single most oppressed kind of segment of society. And so there's a classic quote from Jean-Paul Sartre in 1948: "if the Jew did not exist, the antisemite would have to invent him." And the Jew, as posited or created by these Far Right movements, in many ways, is an invention. It's the invention of the all knowing, infinitely moneyed, infinitely powerful, and cunning folk. And so there's an element of sort of rhetorical jujitsu. When you invent the Jew, you position yourself as an oppressed person, fighting against someone, a foe, hell bent on your destruction. And so that's kind of... underlines the obsessive focus on Jews and Jewry from a lot of the Far Right.

And when it comes to transphobia in specific and general anti-LGBTQ sentiment, what I've seen most commonly, (and I'm sure there are many other observations that people smarter than me have made,) but one one thing that I noticed was like throughout 2018 and 2019, there was an obsession in far-right spaces in chat rooms with a program called Drag Queen Story Hour. It was an extremely harmless, like, very sweet program, which just like brought drag queens into libraries to read books to kids. It's about as sweet and entertaining as you might imagine. And there was an obsessive focus on it in the Far Right. This idea of people are, you know, "corrupting our White youth." "This is a Jewish plot." There were protests organized by the Far Right. You know, there were Drag Queen Story Hour events that had to be canceled due to far-right threats. And I think this is emblematic.

And that began before this sort of mainstream Republican, absolutely hideous, transphobia that's being codified in the halls of legislature. But what I saw sort of persistently was this idea that like...I mean, it's almost a joke, or a cliché, that you see like everything's a Jewish plot to reduce White fertility: everything. So gay rights, the trans rights in particular, are posited as this idea of making White men feminine, you know. Destroying White fertility so that Jews can have a more malleable populace of people of color, because people of color are inherently more stupid and more malleable to Jewish control and more fertile. It's very like...it draws on like Malthusian principles, it draws on xenophobia, and it draws on, of course, the classic racism. That racism and antisemitism play really well together. You know, the central thesis is that people of color are not smart enough to advocate for their own rights. And so that not only is any queer advocacy or self advocacy a Jewish plot to reduce White fertility, but also any civil rights movement is all orchestrated by Jewish puppeteers pulling the strings. Which is a lot of words to say, in essence, that

this hyper fixation on transphobia, first of all, takes advantage of ambient social prejudice. Transphobia is very common. It's often posited as natural. It's, of course, as we're seeing now, highlighted front and center in right-wing media and in right-wing legislation. It's often used as sort of a recruiting tactic into the Far Right by saying, like, you know, "OK, like these trans people are trying to corrupt our kids, and by the way, did you know who's behind radical trans ideology? it's in order to reduce White fertility." So that's my long, rambling answer to that.

**Koki Mendis:** Thank you, Talia. That's a great answer. Carolyn, did you want to add?

**Carolyn Gallaher:** Yeah, I just wanted to back up something that you said with the quote from Satre about there wasn't a Jew, we'd have to create one. And I wanted to say sort of two things. One is personal. One is about the piece of Jaclyn and I wrote.

I grew up in the south, in the Bible Belt. I actually went to a Baptist school through 9th grade and I didn't know any Jewish people until I went to college. Because it was, you know..the big divides where I grew up were between like Pentecostals versus Baptists versus Methodists and and all the rest of it. And, you know, the rhetoric that I heard was "well Jews killed Jesus." And I remember hearing that and not really getting what that meant. Because there wasn't like I could connect that to any real world thing in my environment. I did not know what that meant, but it didn't matter. It was like they created this "bad guy." And they created this nefarious actor. And so it can be uber-abstract. And in places where they're pretty segregated in terms of religious lines, you can just..it doesn't matter in the sense. It's like...it's just very long enduring trope.

The other quick thing I would say, when Jaclyn and I were working on this paper, and trying to sort of unpack what really came before QAnon, which was the the the Comet Pizza restaurant in D.C., which I used to drive by every day when we were actually going into work, and the idea that there was a secret pedophile ring in the basement. (I do want to let you guys know there is no basement to Comet Ping-Pong. I've actually been there.) But there was this secret pedophile ring. And then we were looking at the QAnon and thinking about how this connects to blood libel and the blood libel has been around and it's been in various iterations. But the idea that there's children being sacrificed, and that Jews were behind it. And what QAnon basically did is took blood libel and just sort of threw some code words in there. But the story is the same. And at the end of the day, and I think Spencer Sunshine said this someplace, it may have been on Twitter, you know, at the end of the day, the bad guys are always Jews, even if they don't initially tell you that. And so it's this...it's underlying.... it's underlying the way QAnon has put it together. And again, I think this goes

back to what Brian was saying about there's intentionality here. So the people that believe in that and or want to scapegoat or target Jews are looking out to the audience and finding ways to introduce that in subtle ways. But it's there.

**Brian Friedberg:** Yeah, specifically with the blood libel, I [wrote a piece](#) right before the "Save the Children" rallies last summer about sort of the process tracing how adrenochrome got mixed up into all of this. And you have instances where adrenochrome was very specifically tied to blood libel in like 2015. Yet at the same time, you look...the QAnon movement has had a very dynamic relationship with terms of service as it's grown. And how if you look for overt antisemitism on a QAnon Twitter network, you'll find dogwhistles. If you look for overt antisemitism in the Q research boards, you will find it. And it's been said that the QAnon process of isolating Q posts, sort of sanitizing them on your website so they're easily distributed, it keeps a lot of folks from having to see the darkness of the actual boards and how explicit the antisemitism is there.

You also look at the way that QAnon deals with anti-Blackness and providing you know..."we're not talking about Black people, we're talking about BLM," you know. And how three letters can be sort of reversed from a social movement into a shortened code for Black folk. And how that sort of anti-Blackness is so normal in the noise of American social life, that it doesn't strike as dramatic as sort of some of the more conspiratorial or sensational aspects of the movement.

**Koki Mendis:** Thank you, Brian. Thank you.

**Talia Lavin:** Someone brought up blood libel, I'm a Jew, I have to add my piece. I also [wrote a piece about QAnon and the blood libel](#) that i'll link to. But my sort of take was that, not only did it read to me as a continuation of the Satanic Panic of the 80s and 90s, (which perhaps never really went away,) but also I spoke to a bunch of medievalists about the concept of nocturnal ritual fantasy. Which is this concept that is basically any societal outgroup is more easily demonized by portraying them as engaging in secret nocturnal rituals, specifically victimizing children. And it's a very old tactic that dates back to the to the Roman era. But was particularly employed throughout the Middle Ages and for about a thousand years since, against Jews. And this notion that Jews are meeting up at night sacrificing Christian children, and that the sort of center QAnon mythosphere, is on nocturnal ritual fantasy. And so it shares the same DNA of blood libel. And so it's not a surprise that it winds up, in many cases, fixating on Rothschild and Soros, on specifically Jewish figures as the nexus.

And I also wanted to just back up Brian and say that so many of far-right

movements use like the ambient prejudice in American culture (whether that's anti-Blackness, xenophobia, transphobia, queerphobia) as their recruitment tools. And as they're animating forces, animating stories, you know, maybe they court people with these ambient prejudices and then hyperfixate on them. And so, you know, you can see this now that the coverage of the Derek Chauvin trial by far-right outlets—the way it's fixated on the false narratives about George Floyd as the sort of avatar of evil—that have proliferated throughout the far-right and center-right and right-wing media agenda. That's what right-wing disinformation does is cling onto extant prejudice and simply seek to deepen it and radicalize it.

**Koki Mendis:** Thank you, Talia. Thank you for adding the historical perspective too. You know, we've shared some links in the chat. There's a lot to say certainly about the role that antisemitism plays on the Far Right in these narratives, really pervasive narratives.

I want to pivot us a little bit to talking about the health repercussions of online organizing on the Right. We are, as we are all experiencing and feeling very deeply right now, entering year 2 of a global pandemic in which the profound structural deficiencies and inequities of the U.S. welfare state, and public health infrastructure have been thrown into high relief. We are also in the midst of a nationwide vaccination campaign that will likely reveal the growth of antivaxxer sentiment, which may have significant implications for the ability to reduce Covid-19 infections to safe levels. I'd like us to discuss some of the ways in which these technologies of the Right, from disinformation campaigns to online anti-state mobilization, have heightened the public health crisis. What are some of the most striking examples of this relationship? Who would like to start us off on disinformation of health crisis? I know you've written a lot about this, Brian.

**Brian Friedberg:** I'll start off brief and then I think we can all jump in, but it's...so there's the...the noise of social media and then what's being covered by mainstream press and who's covering it. There's been a lot of sort of overprescription of vaccine hesitancy to marginalized groups, while a lot of data shows that it's young White men who share that sort of hesitancy, that is being ascribed elsewhere.

The inequities that drive health crises are not the result of a Donald Trump disinformation campaign. They've been with us. I think that there is a lot of overscription of "once Trump is gone, this is all going to get better." I know that there's lots of communities, particularly rural communities, that have been true targets for all of this, that are struggling just as much, after Trump left office, with the campaigns that people were concerned about impacting the election.

The public health sector is already very strained, and the old strategy of “put more doctors on social media to fight medical misinformation” has just led to doctors being subjected to hate and harassment campaigns. You look at the way that the Tiktok nurses became such a polarizing wedge for the far... well, for conservatives in general, as sort of evidence that they weren’t working. So visibility for health workers seems to not be the solution to that problem, let’s put it that way.

**Koki Mendis:** Thank you, Brian. Would anyone else like to talk a little bit about public health? Carolyn?

**Carolyn Gallaher:** I want to say something really quickly. I feel like social media has sort of democratized misinformation because it allowed lots of people to get in the mix, whereas before you needed the state really for propaganda. And the other thing that really strikes me about this, is it makes it so much more intimate. So if one of your friends on Facebook, your Instagram or YouTube or whatever, you know, post about their fears about getting the vaccine or that they were sick after they got the vaccine and they’re now worried that they have Covid or whatever the various things are, you know...you’re like, “oh, well, that’s my friend, I went to high school with them, or college with them, or they live down the street from me.” And so it kind of it democratizes it. But the intimacy is really what makes it scary. And so I think you see that intimacy around the vaccine issue because all of this stuff got politicized, right? I mean, masks got politicized and now vaccines are politicized. And it’s not that vaccines weren’t politicized before, (I mean, we have the whole thing with Jenny McCarthy and all the rest of it with linking autism to childhood vaccines,) but I just think that intimate part of it is, this enabled that. And, of course, that intimacy is happening in a context of deep polarization, and deep politicized—politicization of public health.

**Brian Friedberg:** And right on top of that, how, you know, corporate crimes become the fodder for conspiracy theories later. You look at the opioid crisis, it’s like such a perfect example of corporate disinformation that was deemed socially fine for quite some time, creating a public health crisis that has been seized on by the Far Right. Yet again to indicate that the opioid crisis is just...just the opioid crisis...is just yet another attempt to suppress the White population. “Look to see who’s in the pharmaceutical industry.” So you get a critique of the pharmaceutical industry suddenly becoming animated by antisemitism and far-right discourse.

**Talia Lavin:** Yeah, I wanted to add to this in two ways: So one, Brian, I agree

with you. I think I've seen a lot of times this tactic of kind of taking disaffection with capitalism among youth in different far-right movements and sort of turning it into...there are people who say antisemitism is the socialism of fools. And in essence saying, "oh, you feel disaffected. You see how unfair our society is," And not saying, "oh, the problem is inequity, the problem is capitalism," But rather "oh the problem is the Jews." And that's just like a classic thing.

I would also say that throughout the pandemic, it's been a little bit of a perfect storm for conspiracy. You have people with a lot more time on their hands. You have people with a lot more time on the internet. And you also have a variety of far-right movements and disinformation movements that have taken advantage of this time of disruption, of pain, grief, loss and, you know, sort of the upheaval in society, to press their agendas. So obviously, the anti-vaccine movement has been incredibly active since day one. The lockdown protests were attended by militias, the sort of anti-Covid restriction... militias were...protests were heavily attended by government groups, were attended by White nationalist groups as well. And of course, these protests and these movements are against Covid restrictions, enabled a real cross pollination among these movements, enabled networking, and enabled a sense of cohesion. And I think it's very, very possibly true that that cross pollination, that sense of shared purpose was one of the factors that led to the Capitol uprising on January 6th. And led to the robustness and ubiquity of the disinformation campaign around the 2020 election.

**Koki Mendis:** Yeah, thank you. I think that's an important closing the loop, too, and the connections between the election and the ongoing response to public health decisions made by by the state and states.

Carolyn, you touched on this a little bit in your response to our last question that I want to continue with our next. But talking about how social media creates this unique relationship between disinformation and personal networks. And, you know, something that really strikes me and in doing the research and thinking through the impact that social media has on our world is it's such a new component to how we...how we communicate, how we spend our...the hours of our days. And I'm wondering, as people who think a lot about social media and the internet, and the impact that has on society and politics, what are some historical parallels that you use to make sense of what we're seeing that provide some insight as to where we're heading, that are able—that allow us to to disconnect from the the feeling that this is too novel to address or to understand.

**Carolyn Gallaher:** I think for me to think that and again, this is somewhat personal, but I think the thing that is like a precursor of this with different

technology is I think about the televangelists of the 80s and 90s. And so, you know, there was a rule—the FCC had a rule about...I forget how the rule was structured—but they opened up broadcasting on Sunday mornings and it was not a popular time for most people to want to buy up air space. And they opened it up. And so you have all of these churches buy up space. Now, there is a long history in sort of independent churches that are Protestant, but not a tie to...not necessarily tied to any particular denomination, of having big revivals and tent revivals and and doing itinerant preaching. And what the televangelist buying of that space (the Jerry Falwell, the Pat Robertson, the Bakers,) what they did is they used Sunday morning TV to reach a much bigger audience.

And it was kind of interesting to me when I...because I grew up in Lynchburg, where Jerry Falwell Sr. was one of the early televangelists. And realizing that people knew my hometown, (which was 60,000 people and not in the least bit interesting to the average person outside of it,) all of a sudden they knew who Jerry Falwell was. And especially the people in California. When I went...when I left Virginia and moved to other places. And it was this mechanism for getting...getting...to not just the the marketing purposes for Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson, which were trying to get money for their their own kind of issues. But it really helped the...it really helped bring evangelicals into politics in very negative...very, very negative ways. If you grew up in an evangelical environment and you saw what the politics were like on the ground locally, you would not want those to go national. But they did. And that was one way that they went national. Because each televangelist would preach and they would preach about something particular to the Bible, but they would then link it to political issues that were big at the time: equal rights amendment, abortion. (They didn't tend to talk about segregation—desegregation of schools, but that was obviously a big part of why you had these Christian schools popping up in the first place.) But so they would talk about prayer in schools, things like this. And so I look at that kind of—the Sunday morning televangelism is really like kind of a rough precursor and a rough example of how you reach this audience well beyond your physical reach.

**Koki Mendis:** That's a great...that's a great parallel and interestingly, still a major tool of the evangelical political movement in the U.S. It's now streaming television, but still very much that television... televangelist..ah, I cannot say that word...televised evangelicalism. Brian, did you have do you have a historical parallel that you think about when you're doing your work?

**Brian Friedberg:** Well, as far as broadcast thinking about Charles Coughlin and his program, Social Justice, that reached the largest audience in America

with 23 million at its peak or something like that. And slowly slid, in real time, into fascism. That process you could see happen to dozens and dozens of YouTubers in real time over the last decade. Leading up to something like “Unite the Right.” So that process of being radicalized oneself and having a massive, massive platform to distribute that in progress. So it’s not just, you know, one day waking up and deciding that, “oh, I’ve been crypto fasc for my whole life and now I’m going to be explosive.” But that’s low power, social process of the broadcaster. And then as far as the sort of institutional—the institutional background, (I’d mentioned it earlier) but Roy Cohn, Arthur Finkelstein, Roger Stone, people who have played with all sorts of anti-queer, antisemitic, anti-Black conspiracism, well within the bounds of Republican politics, for quite some time. And how you can look at the way that the George Soros conspiracy spiraled outside of the control of its original operative is and has become endemic in American popular conversation.

**Koki Mendis:** Thank you, Brian. Talia Did you want to chime in or we move to the—

**Talia Lavin:** I was actually also going to use Father Coughlin as my example. I think it’s so striking that, you know, there was also a proliferation of essentially fascist militias around the time. The Silver Shirts...many of them directly inspired by Coughlin. But then thinking of another example on the fly, I have recently been reading Brendan O’Connor’s book, [\*Blood Red Lines: How Nativism Fuels the Right\*](#), and he has some great points to make about the Tanton network of anti-immigrant organizations so that it’s FAIR, CIS, IRLI and their various publications, and their lobbying, and their impact on legislation. And in this case, this was a—this is an anti-immigrant, sort of, organization that’s been directly funded by the cash of sort of an eccentric heiress. And we’re seeing the results now. We’ve certainly seen them throughout the Trump era, but in the way that anti-immigrant ideas have become established sort of political conventional wisdom across party lines. I mean, that’s a direct impact of a very well-funded network that includes White nationalists. They’re the reason V-DARE has a castle. So I do recommend that book, if you want sort of a very granular look at the sort of funding behind anti-immigrant, eliminationist, and eugenic rhetoric.

**Koki Mendis:** Thanks Talia, that’s a great example, sort of...and also, you know, going back to intentionality and creating these networks that tie seemingly disparate institutions very closely together. PRA is actually working on a book review of that book. So stay tuned for that.

Moving on, there’s a...especially after January 6th, there’s been a real



nationwide conversation on what to do about reducing the incidence and harm of social media as a tool on the Far Right. And one of the major responses really has been increased surveillance. I want us to take a little while to talk about that, because that is a major national narrative. Brian, you and the team at the Shorenstein Center have developed the [Media Manipulation Casebook](#), which “presents a methodology for how to understand the origins and impacts of media manipulation campaigns, both domestic and international, and the relation to the wider information ecosystem.” Can you talk us through what the stages of a campaign are and some concrete recommendations you have for disrupting them? Who is the intended audience for this work of disrupting disinformation campaigns?

**Brian Friedberg:** Sure. Well, I’ll start with the intended audience because it’s—we position this as an all of society approach. This does not suggest law enforcement, if that makes sense. That the—there’s a lot of danger right now of Patriot Act level disruption of American civic life, in general, to preserve the platforms that brought us these disasters in the first place. One of the things that we hope to show is how crucial social media is in the propagation of these campaigns and that how it’s currently configured, it will keep happening.

Another part about, sort of, laying bare how these are done is so they’re harder to do next time. The idea that these are just going to happen and that we always will be two steps behind these folks is just not true. It’s who’s watching. Don’t think that we trust the state itself to just watch these groups. And there’s dedicated folks online who do all sorts of civic pressure to deplatform White nationalists, varieties of domestic extremists. There’s journalists who do good work as being the only people on the front lines who can raise those red flags in time and often result in disrupting the public perception of these platforms that they are forced to take action. But playing catch up with these platforms is not going to continue forever, particularly under a Democratic presidency, when a lot of the popular front of concerned liberals about the sanctity of the internet will probably dissipate.

It’s very important that civil society groups and marginalized folks in general within civil society develop tactics to monitor and disrupt these. Because the communities that are often most directly impacted are minor data points in a larger conversations, when their day to day lives are being disrupted by this sort of stuff. And the more that we can do to make it easier, both emotionally and materially, for folks to keep themselves safe when the platforms continue to fail, the better.

**Koki Mendis:** Thank you, Brian. For anybody in our audience who hasn’t

looked at the Shorenstein Center's Media Manipulation Casebook, it's fascinating. It's really interesting to read sort of an analysis of of disinformation campaigns and the ways in which you all have developed specific tools that you see repeated on the Far Right is a really fascinating and clinical examination, again, is something really presented often as organic.

Carolyn pivoting a little bit from sort of the disinformation side of our conversation to the mobilization side. You wrote a piece with Jaclyn Fox for our fall issue of PRA's *The Public Eye* magazine: "[Could Anti-Government Militias Become Pro-State Paramilitaries](#)" on chat and meet evidence that you obtain prior to the 2020 election from militia and far-right social media channels, suggesting that there was a significant risk of anti-state militias mobilizing as pro-state paramilitaries in service of Donald Trump. Members of many of the groups you discussed in the piece participated in and in some instances organized the January 6th insurrection at the U.S. Capitol Building, ostensibly in service of Trump and in the name of democracy. Can you talk about how these far-right conversations can, and in this case did, shed light on where the direction of alignment and mobilization of far-right actors heading?

**Carolyn Gallaher:** Sorry, I should know how to turn my mute button off at this point in the pandemic.

Yeah, so I think a couple of things about that. One, I started studying the militia movement in the 90s, and at the time they hated government and they didn't really care for Republicans or Democrats. And what I have seen over the last 20 or so years is that the militia movement was becoming more partisan and getting more tied to in particular, the Republican party. And so, Jaclyn, I wanted to really look at this and go, what's happening to the paramilitaries? Are they starting to act like...the militias...are they starting to act like a paramilitary? By paramilitary, I mean like groups like the AUC in Colombia, or the loyalist paramilitaries in Northern Ireland, where they were basically like a shadow force for the state. And this was a big question, but it was also a big step for the militia movement. Because a movement to cut its teeth on all government is bad, all of a sudden being willing to work on behalf of of a particular regime, not all governments, but a particular regime, was a pretty big deal. So we theorize that this could happen in one of two ways. And then we kind of tested it.

One was that they would join forces with White nationalists. Or two that they would stay separate, but they would work on behalf of Trump. And we looked at Discord—leaked discord chats and some other chats. And we looked at the chats around the planning for Charlottesville. And so we...based on that, we rejected the idea they would work very closely with White supremacists.

In part because there was just a lot of suspicion between the two groups, and there was a lot of derision, too, especially from the White nationalists and supremacists against the militia and called them “larpy tryhards” and things like that. So we were...so that was our sort of hypothesis.

So I think we were right that they were able to become paramilitaries working on behalf of Trump. What I will say is that we were also, I think, mostly right about not working with White supremacists, but with a big caveat, which is that they were willing to share the same space in Charlottesville and that was a protest space, technically. Here they were willing to share the same battlefield. I mean, it was an insurrection, attempted and failed insurrection. So they were willing to share the same battlefield, which is coming closer together. They were sharing the same space. But there’s still not a whole lot of evidence, a lot of operational coordination. But still, the steps that they’re making in this direction are really problematic in the sense of potential coming together. And again, I think Trump is this vortex for the Far Right. I mean, he’s like the center of the gravity, the black hole, whatever your physics metaphor is, this is the... he’s... everything is sort of circling around it.

The thing that we didn’t account for, in this article, is all the other people who join. In the George Washington University extremism—they did a report and I think it was the end of February. They looked at the two—at the time, 257 people who’d been arrested and only, I think, like 13 or 14 percent of the people that were arrested were in a militant network. So there’s all these other people that were also radicalized and came onto this battlefield space. And so that I think we didn’t really account for that. And that’s a really scary thing, because you had this larger citizen army. And if you look at what happened in Northern Ireland, for example, or in Colombia or in places in Central America where you had death squads and far-right groups, getting some popular support was crucial for operation because you could just sort of...you had a place to be and operate relatively safely. And so that’s what’s so scary about this. That you think about ordinary communities, (to the extent any of us is ordinary) but ordinary communities that aren’t what we think. It was hotbeds of militia activity generally supporting the idea that we should overthrow the government today. And that’s a space where you can operate with with a lot of impunity.

**Koki Mendis:** Thank you, Carolyn, and I think that’s also where we see the intersection of all three of your work and really like the individuals making those small human decisions, the intentional actors who are putting these... most...these things into motion, and the militias who are organized already and then responding to wider conversations and narrative.

Talia, I want to move on a little bit to talking about your work as a member of

the sort of the Left journalists who are working to disrupt these disinformation campaigns and to disarm using your information and using your networks, the actors that we're seeing organizing on the ground. Can you tell us a little bit about this work and its efficacy and the limited landscape of grassroots strategies for disrupting the technologies of the Right?

**Talia Lavin:** Well, I just wanted to add to something Carolyn said too. I...For a couple of months around the election, as part of a group called [Deplatform Hate](#), I like embedded in like—infiltrated a militia called the Georgia III% Security Force, and some of whom were present on January 6th. Some were part of a parallel state capitol protests. And it was remarkable just how much they were in the bag for Trump. I mean, everything was about how the election was rigged. Everything was about supporting Trump. There was no airs... there was no daylight between Trumpism and sort of militia, and it felt more paramilitary than anti-government for certain.

As to the question: I don't know, it's complicated. I mean, I think the biggest thing that I've tried to do is to say, "look, look, I'm a Leftist. I have a vested interest in crushing the Far Right." That's the perspective I come to, and I come with. And yet I am completely committed to integrity, to truth, to facts. And I think, within the context of this sort of view from nowhere, the idea of kind of...the only kind of journalism that matters has no opinion. I think that view from nowhere, that idea of objective journalism inherently privileges White men, who don't have any vested interests, whose role in in oppression is oppressor. And I think there's a false idea that that's a neutral role. I think it's not. I think that we saw that recently when The Washington Post barred a woman who publicly talked about her experiences as a victim of sexual assault from reporting on sexual assault; where a Black journalist in Pennsylvania was barred from reporting on Black Lives Matter protests. I mean, there's this persistent, incredibly damaging, incredibly marginalizing idea that if you are personally impacted as a writer, as a person by oppression, by cruelty, then you can't write about it and maintain your integrity, and maintain your ability to keep a level head and to write truthfully.

So when I wrote my book, like I did write it from the perspective of Talia Lavin: a Jewish woman that hates the Far Right. (Admittedly, it's a first book, so it has a little bit of, the insatiable autobiographical impulse of first books.) But I felt it was important to reveal my own sort of set of...I'm not going to call them biases...my own set of principles that I was operating from. Something like...I came into this book angry at the Far Right, wanting to crush them. And certainly that, I think, precludes me from participation in a lot of journalistic endeavors. It makes it sort of a challenge to have a more straightforward career.

On the other hand, I think it frees me up to write work that tracks with my principles, tracks with my goals, and to work with antifascists, and to publicize their campaigns to target bad actors. And I have really profited from, and enjoyed, and felt part of a community with antifascist activists, you know. And I feel that my role is almost as an antifascist journalist. Which is a complex, weird role, but it's one that I'm doing my best to lean into, not shy away from and create as I go along.

**Koki Mendis:** Thank you, Talia. I think that's an important point to make, and it brings to mind another friend of PRA's work, Tina Vasquez, [has been writing on movement journalism](#) as a way to sort of counter this idea of objective journalism, right? There is that...there can be a goal to to doing journalism and doing it with good...with good intentions.

As we continue this conversation on surveillance, we would be remiss if we didn't talk about the ways in which surveillance is often being suggested as a as a response to social media organizing and mobilization for the Right, which is state surveillance. And so knowing that monitoring and disrupting disinformation campaigns are very valuable to changing discourse and mobilizations that we're seeing, how do we balance this with the knowledge that increased state surveillance will undoubtedly...more...impact more so, people on the center and center-left who are organizing, and disproportionately will harm communities of color. So wondering if you all could address that question.

**Talia Lavin:** I mean, something that's been a guiding principle of my work and I think this...this is sort of part of coming from the antifascist perspective, is that I consider the vast majority of the law enforcement apparatus in the United States to be part of the Right, part of the oftentimes, the Far Right. That their political goals often align. There's the notion of the three-way fight. Or antifascists or sort of combating both non-state actors who, you know, in some cases seek to overthrow the state, and then combating law enforcement at the same time. And I think that we've seen throughout the Trump era like this persistent overlap between—and for obviously way, way, way back decades back then in ways that have been warned about. Certainly there was that report by Daryl Johnson in 2009. But it's been a very long time that this problem has been glaring with absolutely no...you know, no attempt to address it. There's been no internal policing of the police. But I think it's been ever more obvious, and particularly when you look at the absolutely militant response to protests this past summer, that law enforcement views far-right actors as sympathetic. Law enforcement is often like very explicitly and openly on the side of far-right actors. And far-right movements seek to recruit...current...seeks to both recruit

current and former members of the military, and law enforcement, and also push their members to join the military and law enforcement in order to gain weapons expertise, power, all those benefits. And so I think that it's a mistake to view law enforcement and the Far Right as completely distinct actors. It's very unfortunate. It would be great if law enforcement was an apolitical, justice oriented segment of society. But it's so abundantly obvious that that's not the case.

**Koki Mendis:** Thank you. I think that's a great point. We definitely saw that with a number of law enforcement who were attending the January 6th insurrection. Carolyn, you wanted to add?

**Carolyn Gallaher:** I was going to say to sort of back up what Talia was saying and zoom in a little bit on the militia movement. I mean, the militia movement used to be very...in the 90s, built around anti-federal police. It was all about Waco and Ruby Ridge, sort of as these pivotal moments where federal police (they were focused on federal police) were bad. And really what we're seeing now, and I think you see this with the Oath Keepers and the III%ers...and there's target...there's targeting people who have worn the badge, or are wearing the badge, or were in the military. And so, in a sense, you are seeing this shift towards paramilitarism on the Right in general and in terms of it being used for what—for right-wing goals.

And the kind of classic example, I think about this, is the shift that's been happening, at least in the militia movement, is Ammon Bundy. And he's a gadfly. He's always looking for publicity. So we have to take everything Ammon Bundy says, with a grain of salt. But at the same time, this summer—he did two things in the last year that were interesting to me in terms of where the militia movement is going. One of them was he kind of put some arm's length distance between him and Trump when he said he thought that it was...he should leave the immigrants alone. They're just trying to...they were crossing the border... Central Americans crossed the border. They decided they were just doing what anyone would do for their family. And then he also came out in the summer and said, you know, if you think the police are your friends, you're mistaken. And what was interesting about that is he got...you know, after the first event, he got sort of rebooted himself out of the militia movement and kind of came back around the mask stuff. But he really was roundly criticized in the militia movement for really taking a position that would have not been all that controversial a decade prior to that. And so what it said to me was like, because he's been at this for a long time, the movement has changed that he was...that he helped facilitate...is changed around him in ways that have become much more an attempt to align our armed forces at all levels with the Far Right.

**Koki Mendis:** That's a great example, Carolyn. It's really interesting to be able to watch history evolve around Bundy. Brian, do you want to add?

**Brian Friedberg:** Yeah, and I think too, is like, who...you know, we've talked about law enforcement, who else is doing the surveilling here? You know, like there's markets to be identified in all of this. All of the footprint that both the positive movements against fascism and fascism itself has revealed online, and we still don't have legal imperative to do anything about things that are designated as speech. And so sort of the techno-libertarian view of the internet, that has a presumed White male subject who's free to say whatever he may want on the internet, is not serving equity in any way, shape, or form. And we're also getting to a point where terms of service are seeming to be more responsive than the law. That's another thing that should give us pause about who is noticing all of this sort of activity. And there's...the profitability of platforms is obviously their primary prerogative for existing. But you can see with the rise of alt-tech and the very real threats of the decentralized web, as far as its implications for extremist organizing, we don't want to get in a position where it is just corporate actions that are dictating safety online.

**Koki Mendis:** Thank you, Brian. You actually bring me to my next question. First, I will say I would love for our panelists to provide, after we're done, a couple of examples of organizations who you do think are working to improve our information ecosystem so that we can share with our audience. Because I think that that's an important question. Who is doing the surveillance in ways that are just?

But I want to end with a with an audience question from Greeley O'Connor of PRA. It's a really good question and it gets to sort of what you were just saying about decentralized internet Brian. Are there signs that the more transitive types of media, reels, expiring text, etc. transmit misinformation more effectively? Is it easier or harder to fight these conspiracies if documentation becomes sparse? And is this ultimately the same role that pulp media has always served? So if so, what can we learn about efforts in the past to overcome misinformation, disinformation? Would any of you like to take a stab at that question?

**Brian Friedberg:** I'll simply say that I think that enduring artifacts hold a bit more power. You look at to the basis of the two driving antisemitic and racist cartoons of the Happy Merchant and a crude racist rendering of a Black man by A Wyatt Mann: that was in a zine. That wasn't just a scribble that he passed to a friend in passing at a bar on a napkin. When you get objects that can take on

lives and histories of their own, they're more useful for movement building than ephemeral texts. So viral misinformation about a public health crisis, etc. may be spread very freely through, sort of, chat type messaging. It's something like the Plandemic film that was very carefully distributed that really holds the mass recruitment power rather than the sort of community reinforcement of chat.

**Koki Mendis:** Thank you. That's a really interesting way to think about it. And I think it relates too to your work, Carolyn, looking at memes and the way that that those were really key in mobilizing once anti-state militias.

Any last thoughts from our panelists before we close? It's been a really fabulous discussion, really interesting. A lot of readings to take away with us, a lot of thinking to continue to do. And as we try and respond to a very real, and in some ways new, threat from the Right. Carolyn?

**Carolyn Gallaher:** I'll just say one thing? If you have kids, ask your kids' teachers, when they get above a certain age, what they're teaching them about how to get information. You know, because they're online all the time, and they're online even more now because of the pandemic. And, you know, I see this like with my son: it's sort of like, okay, how do you know that it's a good source? How do you figure that out? And I think some schools are doing that. I know we're trying to do it in colleges. And we...let me just tell you, we're hitting all kinds of brick walls. But because, you know, by the time you get to college, you haven't figured this out, it can be really hard to grade papers and things like this. But that's not really anyone's issue, about grading papers. But I think we need to teach people really early how to spot misinformation. And that means talking to kids about it.

**Koki Mendis:** That's a wonderful point. Audience member Emma echoes and says we really need to teach media literacy. And it's so true. Talia?

**Talia Lavin:** Yeah, I mean. Frankly, if I if I were a parent, I would like disable YouTube for the rest of my children's lives. But I am not yet a parent, although hopefully someday.

I just want to add that one of the things...like to take...if you have any interest in engaging in antifascist activism, I would encourage you to start local. And as my dear friend and antifascist, Molly Conger told The Washington Post, if you have the skills to stay up all night on Instagram and figure out who your ex is now dating, you have the skills to unmask your local Nazi. And I would encourage you to get started. And Spencer Sunshine, who Carolyn mentioned, has a great pamphlet called 40 Ways to Fight Fascism. And so I



would encourage you to give it a read and think about getting started. Because we need everybody on board.

**Koki Mendis:** Thank you, Talia, I really appreciate you mobilizing the troops that we have with us on this call today.

Thank you all so much, Carolyn, Brian, Talia. It's been a wonderful conversation, as many of our audience members are echoing right now. And thank you all out there for joining us today, on what is possibly a very sunny afternoon if you're located in New England, like most of us at PRA. This is our second or third...I think I've lost count...I think second webinar of our Spring Series, so we have several more to go. Please stay tuned.

Our next panel will be on transgender justice and the impact that, as we talked about today, transphobic and anti-trans organizing is really impacting children. And so we are really excited to convene that conversation in...next month. So thank you. We will be sending around resources and more reading to think about. And as always, we really appreciate you spending this time with PRA. Thank you again to our panelists. This has been a really fascinating conversation.