Twitter Thread by Andy Carvin



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THREAD: Been thinking a lot about images of the Jan 6 Capitol Hill attack, Inauguration Day, and cognitive dissonance. It got me wondering how, if ever, we could bring conspiracy-minded loved ones back into the fold. (1/N)

My initial reaction to conspiracists freaking out over Biden's inauguration was schadenfreude. But then I started questioning why I was reacting this way, and if there might be a teachable moment for many of us. (2/N)

I've been pretty quiet on Twitter for a while now; most of my work is more behind-the-scenes nowadays, and my time away from Twitter has been recuperative for me. (3/N)

So I haven't talked about the enormous amount of time I've spent over the last year monitoring domestic extremist and conspiracy-based online communities. The well of hate I see in these spaces seems bottomless. (4/N)

And yet when I spent Inauguration Day monitoring Gab, MeWe, MyMilitia and other places where white nationalists, Q believers, etc gather, alongside the usual hateful rhetoric, I saw confusion. People truly struggling to process what had just happened. (5/N)

As emotionally satisfying as it may be to gloat or mock, the exact opposite approach is needed if we wish to bring the conspiracy-curious back into the fold. Now is the time for us to summon our compassion and reach out to them. (6/N)

In one viral video, a Trump supporter sobbed that she couldn't understand why he hadn't come to the rescue, praying for him to "save us." Some versions of the video had laughing emojis embossed on it, mocking her for a fool. (7/N)

Their entire worldview had been shattered. So now came the opportunity for the rest of us to mock their foolishness, gloat at their weakness, share popcorn emojis to express how much we were enjoying their psychological implosions. (8/N)

So as tempting as it is for us revel in this schadenfreude or to say "I told you so" to friends, family or complete strangers who embraced this collective delusion, I would like to suggest a different response: reaching out to them and asking, "Are you okay?" (9/N)

Of course, it would be extremely naïve to believe that many of the people who assaulted the U.S. Capitol and the law enforcement protecting it are suddenly going to see the light of day and reject their previous beliefs. (10/N)

White nationalism, racism, antisemitism and other hateful beliefs aren't embraced overnight, nor are they shed easily. (11/N)

And people who committed crimes to interfere with our democratic process should have their day in court and if convicted, be punished accordingly. (12/N)

But for the countless others swept up in online conspiracies whether due to perceived grievances, rage, moral injury, or loneliness... (13/N)

...a loneliness powerful enough to drive people into the arms of extremist communities because they feel no other community would have them, we must respond differently. We must seize the moment to reach out. (14/N)

Asking "Are you okay" to friends and family who have embraced conspiracy theories is an important step, because it shows you're willing to listen and are concerned about their emotional wellbeing. (15/N)

Listening may not be easy, but it is essential, even if you're not able to understand. Even if you're struggling not to judge. Even if you're not ready to forgive. (16/N)

Not everyone will respond positively – the plague of hatred that exists in this country won't simply vanish, and will continue to be an intergenerational struggle. Other people, perhaps even many, will double-down on their beliefs, compounding existing rifts. (17/N)

But some who have embraced extremism and conspiracy theories – some of them – can still be brought back from the brink. Even if only a fraction of them ultimately come back into the fold of civility and reason, it will have been worth the effort. (18/N)

Right-wing extremism is a cancer in our society, and all the empathy and compassion in the world won't will it away; we must use all the legal tools at our disposal to hold those who have threatened our democracy to account. (19/N)

But an opportunity will be lost if we revel in the current moment and laugh at the collective cognitive dissonance of nonviolent conspiracy theorists. That laughter won't easily be forgotten. (20/N)

The simple act of reaching out and asking, "Are you okay" - for some people at least - might make all the difference in the world. *END OF THREAD* (21/21) https://t.co/G4Hcxe9ffZ