

# Mitigating Harms From Crisis Events: Mass Violence

## Incel Community Response to the 2026 Islamic Center of San Diego Shooting

### Crisis Background

Looking at responses within extreme communities when mass violence events happen can teach us about secondary radicalization risks. On May 18, 2026, **two teenage gunmen** attacked the Islamic Center of San Diego, which functions both as a mosque and school, killing three before dying of what appeared to be **self-inflicted gunshot wounds**.

The gunmen left behind a manifesto. In the document, they describe themselves with a variety of ideological labels, including **Nazis, ecofascists, accelerationists, and "Third Positionists."** Notably, one of the shooters also described themselves as an active member of the incel community.

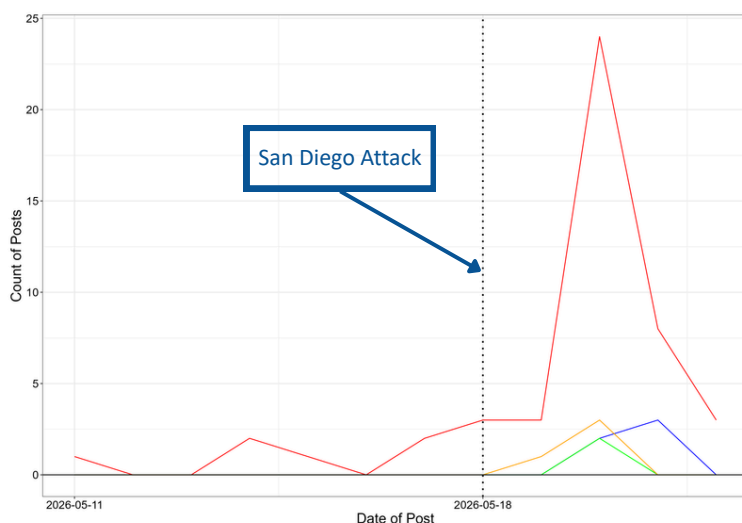
In examining the immediate reaction to this attack and the manifesto by members of a fringe incel forum, **harmful narratives can be seen escalating toward deeper polarization and future violence.** The initial reaction in the forum included a range of harmful narratives, as well as dismissive sentiments regarding the perpetrators – not as a condemnation of violence but as a failure to sufficiently explain their motivations or perpetrate a larger attack.

### Themes: Harmful Narratives

Members of this incel forum engaged in **scapegoating** – blaming entire communities for the attack despite no evidence of collective culpability, including alleging that the perpetrators were Jewish, transgender, and/or nonwhite, despite the perpetrators' manifestos expressing explicit antisemitic, anti-trans, and white supremacist beliefs. Many posts used slurs and **dehumanizing rhetoric targeting Jewish, Hispanic, and transgender communities, as well as victim-blaming Muslim communities.**

**Black and white thinking** – eliminating nuance and reducing complex issues into absolutist narratives – was also prevalent in post-attack posts, such as framing purported "non-whites killing other non-whites" as irrelevant to the incel movement or expressing disappointment that the attack did not align with posters' **idealized image of an incel-linked perpetrator.**

Many posts also reflected an **us vs. them framework** – dividing people into opposing groups – by alleging that the perpetrators harmed the forum's community by inadequately explaining "our" views and **alleging that the perpetrators were "them," or would draw undue attention to the incel community** from outsiders and "normies."



### Antisemitic and Anti-LGBTQ Rhetoric Before/After the Attack on the Islamic Center of San Diego on Incels

The shooting at the Islamic Center of San Diego (indicated by a dotted, vertical line in the plot) was a salient topic of discussion on Incels.is. We find co-occurrence of discussing the attack with rhetoric targeted against vulnerable unrelated communities such as the Jewish community (Blue), the LGBTQ+ community at large (green), and the trans community in particular (orange). Surprisingly, given the target of the attack, there were no co-occurrences of explicit anti-Muslim slurs.

- = Posts mentioning "Mosque"
- = "Mosque" + Antisemitic terms
- = "Mosque" + anti-LGBTQ+ terms
- = "Mosque" + Anti-trans terms

### Preventing Manipulation

PERIL's evidence-based research shows that teaching about manipulative tactics is more effective than counterarguing with facts. A starting point is always to point out manipulation as a tactic of bad actors who are trying to persuade you. In addition, these three tactics can be addressed directly through evidence-informed responses:

Please see the following PERIL resources for more on **incel terminology** and **how incel content goes mainstream**.

**Scapegoating** can be addressed by speaking out against the unjust targeting of groups, building alliances with other communities to enhance solidarity, and calling out discriminatory attitudes.

**Us vs. them narratives** can be mitigated by shifting focus from divisive labels to common goals while promoting empathy and shared interests.

**Black and white thinking** can be reduced with messages that challenge harmful narratives by identifying gray areas or using moderate language (ex. replace "always/never" with "sometimes").

PERIL analyzes harmful, salient, and fast moving narratives to inform violence prevention. In this series, we highlight prevalent manipulation strategies that appear in the aftermath of common crises.

Scan QR for more resources developed from PERIL's research.

