

Mitigating Harms From Crisis Events: Mass Violence

Manipulation and Harmful Narratives in the Aftermath of the 2026 Tumbler Ridge Shooting

Crisis Background

On February 10, 2026, an 18-year-old **shot and killed her mother and half-brother at home before killing six others and injuring 27** in a mass shooting at Tumbler Ridge Secondary School in British Columbia, Canada.

In the aftermath of this act of mass violence, online discussions in **both fringe and mainstream spaces focused on the gender identity of the perpetrator**, a trans woman. Narratives scapegoating the LGBTQI+ community for the attack proliferated in its aftermath. Data on more than 5,300 mass shootings in the United States finds that only four – less than one-tenth of 1 percent – were committed by a trans or nonbinary individual. Nevertheless, transphobia and speculation became central themes of discussion following the attack, rather than verified facts about the incident.

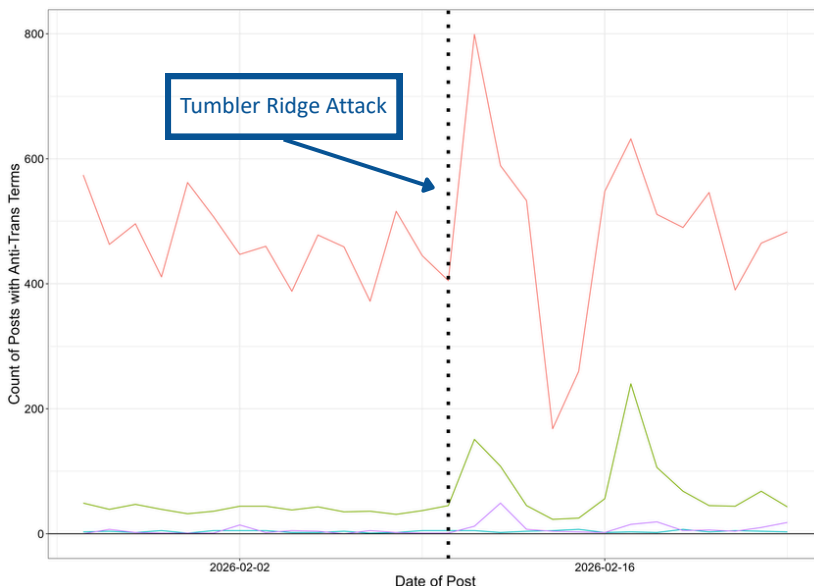
Bad actors often exploit crises like these to advance **harmful narratives that deepen division and scapegoat communities**, in this case, normalizing hostility against transgender communities.

Themes: Harmful Narratives

When discussing the attack, **fringe and mainstream posters alike invoked transphobic narratives**, including unsupported claims that medical transition or hormone therapy contributed to the perpetrator's violent behavior – assertions made without reliable evidentiary backing to **scapegoat the trans community**. This devolved into even broader disinformation that trans people commit mass shootings at disproportionate rates.

Alongside transphobic sentiments, rumors and conspiracies – such as **false flag conspiracies** that the event was staged – circulated in the aftermath of the attack. These narratives suggested without credible evidence that the shooting was staged by the government to **increase gun control measures**.

Following crises, particularly incidents of mass violence, tensions often run high amid understandable and valid feelings of fear, anger, grief, and confusion. Often during moments of vulnerability like these, bad actors will exploit heightened tensions with **emotional language** to manipulate public discourse toward harmful ends. This can include leveraging fear, confusion, and moral outrage to **reinforce the scapegoating of identity groups and spread of harmful conspiracies**.



Posts with One or More Explicit Anti-Trans Term, Before and After Tumbler Ridge Shooting

Following the Tumbler Ridge attack, anti-trans rhetoric temporarily spiked on 4chan, Gab, and X/Twitter. For example, use of anti-trans terms on 4chan nearly doubled, going from just over 400 daily anti-trans mentions to almost 800 mentions.

● = 4Chan ● = Gab ● = Reddit ● = X

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:

Conspiracy theories can be reduced by fostering critical thinking, engaging in empathetic communication, and providing education on digital literacy.

Emotional manipulation can be mitigated by calling out tactics like moral outrage, scapegoating, or false dichotomies, checking reliable sources and evidence, and prioritizing critical thinking.

Scapegoating can be addressed by speaking out against the unjust targeting of groups, building alliances with other communities to enhance solidarity, and checking reliable sources and evidence. Responses should also recognize and support those communities being targeted by scapegoating, in this case the trans community, by refusing scapegoating and choosing care.

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.

