

# Mitigating Harms From Crisis Events: Violence Against Politicians



POLARIZATION & EXTREMISM  
RESEARCH & INNOVATION LAB  
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## Manipulation and Harmful Narratives in the Aftermath of the Attempted Bombing Outside Mayor Mamdani's Home

### Crisis Background

On March 7, 2026, two teens allegedly attempted to use homemade explosives in an attack outside of Gracie Mansion, the home of New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani, the city's first Muslim mayor, in an act described as carried out in the name of the Islamic State.

At the time of the incident, an anti-Muslim protest and counter-protest were taking place outside Gracie Mansion. While the motives and target of this failed attack remain under investigation, online discussions quickly centered on Mayor Mamdani's identity, politics, and religion, rather than verified facts about the incident itself.

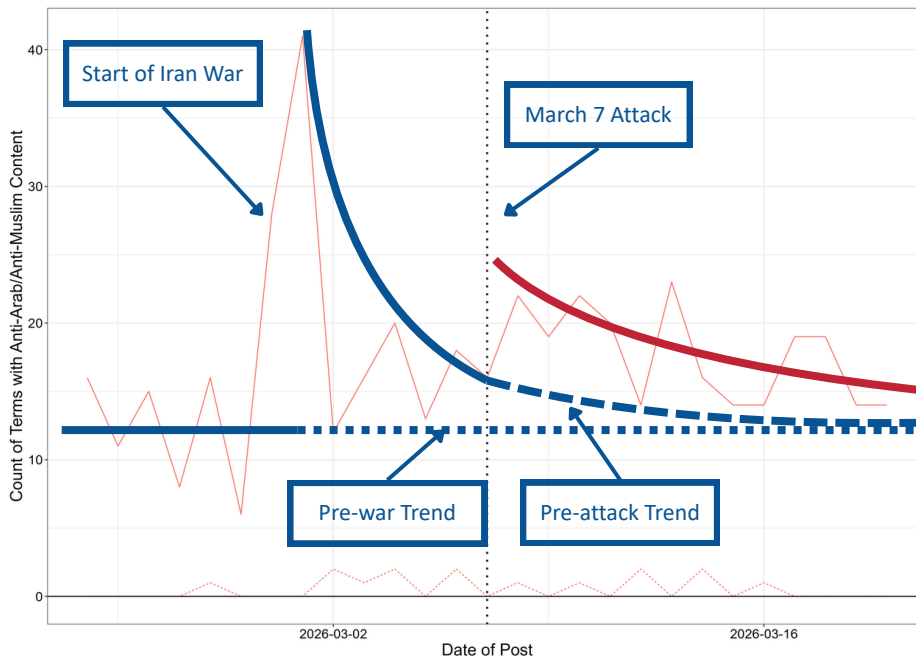
Bad actors frequently use crises like these to advance harmful narratives that **deepen division, scapegoat communities, and normalize hostility or violence** against perceived opponents. Interrupting that escalation is key to mitigating hate-fueled and political violence.

### Themes: Harmful Narratives

When discussing the attack, **fringe forum posters invoked anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim sentiments**.

These sentiments were typically coupled with **black and white stereotyping, treating Muslims as a monolithic group** and claiming they are inherently extremist or supportive of terrorism.

Posters also proliferated **false flag conspiracies**, blaming the attack on the government, mainstream media, and even Mamdani himself, which targeted the political left and right and were present on mainstream and fringe platforms alike. Additionally, some posters avoided nuanced discussions of Mamdani as a potential target, instead **focusing on other potential victims to generate moral outrage, an example of victim switching**.



### Anti-Muslim and Anti-Arab Rhetoric Before/After the Attack on Mayor Mamdani on 4Chan

The attempted bombing outside Mayor Mamdani's house (indicated by the dotted vertical line) coincided with a secondary elevation of anti-Arab and anti-Muslim content across 4Chan. This followed an initial surge accompanying the outbreak of the conflict with Iran on February 28, 2026.

..... = Anti-Arab Terms  
———— = Anti-Muslim 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:

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

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

**Moral outrage and victim switching** can be mitigated by toning down "good vs. evil" rhetoric, promoting checking for sources and evidence, and prioritizing critical thinking over emotional responses.

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.

