



**ONLINE HATE
PREVENTION
INSTITUTE**

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Empowering communities,
organisations, and agencies
in the fight against hate.

ONLINE RESPONSES TO SAN DIEGO MOSQUE ATTACK

Analysis of the immediate online responses to the deadly shooting at the Islamic Center of San Diego on May 18 2026.

20 MAY 2026

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Rachel Kaye, and Jonah Kaufman.**

Dedication

This work is dedicated to the memory of the three people who lost their lives in the attack on the Islamic Center of San Diego.

Amin Abdullah

A member of the community and the lead security guard at the Islamic Center. His actions prevented this tragedy having a far higher death toll.

Mohamed Nader

A teacher at the school. He lived nearby and ran from his home towards the gun fire out of concern for his wife who was working inside.

Name withheld

The third victim, who is yet to be identified, was also an employee of the Islamic Center and worked in its food store.



Executive Summary

We send our heartfelt condolences to the Muslim community after the deadly shooting at the Islamic Center of San Diego, California. News sources are reporting that two teenage gunmen opened fire on civilians at the Mosque in what appears to be an act of anti-Muslim hate. Three people at the mosque were killed, including a security guard. The two suspected gunmen were later found dead from self-inflicted gunshot wounds.

The Online Hate Prevention Institute has been monitoring online responses to the attack. While there is significant empathy and support for the Muslim community who have been targeted by this attack, there was also glorification of the attack, false flag claims, and general Islamophobia. We also found hate directed against other communities. Some of the responses blamed Jews or Israel for the attack, others claimed the shooters were transgender.

This report examines the various narratives of hate found online in the immediate wake of the attack and provides examples of this content. The data has been gathered across 12 social media platforms, both mainstream platforms and more fringe platforms focused on minimal moderation.

As with previous attacks which we have written about, conspiracy theories once again sprung up almost immediately. Some comments also linked the attack to a climate of intolerance towards Muslims, promoted by statements made by a number of politicians and commentators.

Social media platforms were also criticised for insufficient action on anti-Muslim hate. Some suggested this was a double standard compared to antisemitism. Our work demonstrates this is not the case and antisemitism fares no better. While levels of online hate have continued to rise, some companies have wound back efforts used to address it. This affects everyone, but communities subjected to racism, religious vilification, xenophobia, and bigotry in particular.

We need to see greater care in the words used by political leaders and other public figures. We need to see greater efforts against hate by social media platforms. Most importantly, we need unity against all forms of hate and a recognition of the harm it does to the fabric of our societies.

Let's stand together, united against hate.

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The San Diego Mosque Shooting

The attack took place at the Islamic Center of San Diego, the largest mosque in San Diego County, on Monday, May 18, 2026. Police said two teenage gunmen opened fire shortly before midday prayers, at around 11:40am local time, killing three adult men outside the mosque.¹ Officers reportedly arrived within minutes of the first emergency calls and secured the area, evacuating worshippers and students from the mosque's Islamic school.

Authorities identified two male suspects in the attack, Cain Clarke (aged 17) and Caleb Velasquez (aged 18).² They were later found dead from apparent self-inflicted gunshot wounds inside a nearby vehicle.³

San Diego Police Chief Scott Wahl told a media conference that a note left behind by one of the attackers included "generalised hate rhetoric and hate speech".⁴ Other law enforcement investigators stated that possible anti-Islamic writings were discovered in the car.⁵ Hate speech was inscribed on one of the weapons used in the attack, and a suicide note discussing "racial pride" was left where the guns had been stored.⁶ The mother of one suspect contacted police earlier that morning to report her son missing along with her firearms and a vehicle, and that her son had last been seen with a companion, both of them wearing camouflage clothing.⁷ According to the San Diego Police Chief, this report prompted an active search and triggered a "larger threat assessment picture" prior to the shooting.⁸

San Diego police and federal investigators are treating the shooting as a suspected hate crime and the San Diego Police Chief described the incident as "every community's worst nightmare".⁹ He also confirmed that the FBI had joined the investigation and established a public tip line.

¹ Josh DuBose, "Suspect, victim details emerge in deadly San Diego Islamic Center shooting", *KTLA5*, 18 May 2026.

<https://ktla.com/news/california/suspect-victim-details-emerge-in-deadly-san-diego-islamic-center-shooting/>

² Tim Stelloh, "What we know about the San Diego shooting victims, suspects, possible motive and more", *NBC News*, 19 May 2026.

<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/san-diego-mosque-shooting-victims-islam-center-suspects-what-know-rcna345805>

³ Ibid.

⁴ Sareen Habeshian and Max Matza, "Teen suspects fatally shoot three in suspected hate crime at San Diego mosque", *BBC News*, 19 May 2026.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c5y7q66gg56o>

⁵ Tim Stelloh, "What we know about the San Diego shooting victims, suspects, possible motive and more", *NBC News*, 19 May 2026.

<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/san-diego-mosque-shooting-victims-islam-center-suspects-what-know-rcna345805>

⁶ Helen Regan, Blake Ellis, John Miller, Mark Morales, "A suicide note with writings about racial pride, hate speech on a weapon. What we know about the San Diego shooting suspects", *CNN*, 19 May 2026 <https://edition.cnn.com/2026/05/19/us/san-diego-shooting-suspects-hnk>

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Annabel Bowles with wires, "Shooters kill three people at San Diego mosque in suspected hate crime", *ABC News*, 19 May 2026.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2026-05-19/police-respond-to-mosque-shooting-in-san-diego/106695196>

Methodology in this report

We began monitoring social media at around 9:30am AEST, approximately five hours after the attack took place. We searched for terms related to the attack, including “San Diego mosque”, “California mosque shooting” and “Islamic Center of San Diego”, and for content from each of the platforms we examined.

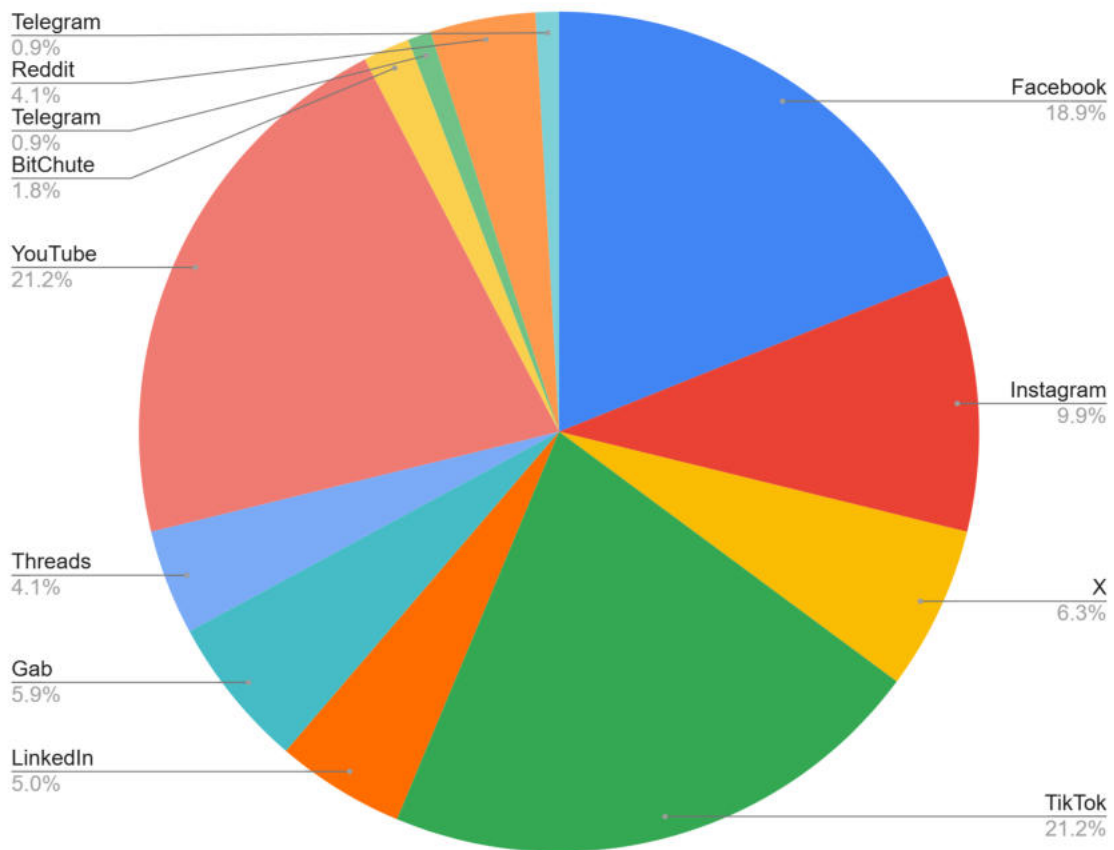
Our searches took us to content discussing the event. Some of the content took the form of an individual item, other content had an item followed by a thread of comments on the item. Where content assessed by our analysts involved hate speech or promoted extremism we captured an image of the content, its url, and other details, then logged the information in our system. As part of this process we also categorised the data noting if content was Islamophobic, promoted false flags, promoted violence, engaged in antisemitism, engaged in transphobic hate, etc. An item could be coded with multiple categories. Items were reported to the platform once the data had been collected.

We collected data across 12 online platforms, both mainstream platforms and more fringe and minimally moderated platforms. The platforms were: Facebook, Instagram, X, Tiktok, Linked, Youtube, Threads, Reddit, Gab, Bitchute, and Telegram. The final platform was 4chan’s /pol/ forum, but this data is not reflected in our numerical count as we archived entire threads rather than recording individual items within those threads. We spent roughly 30 minutes to about 2 hours on each platform, though some popular platforms received additional time.

Empirical Results

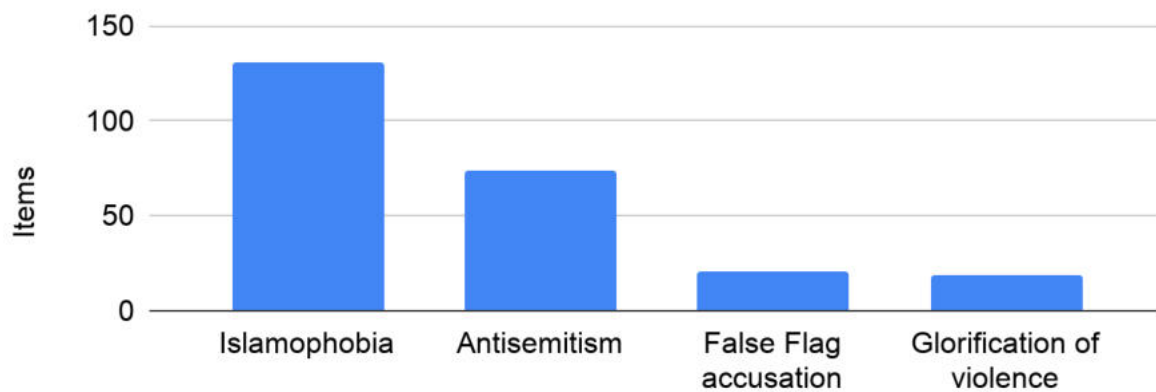
We collected 216 hateful items, excluding those captured from 4chan. A breakdown of this data by platform is shown below. As can be seen, the majority of our data came from Youtube, Facebook, Tiktok and Instagram. This is not an indication of a higher level of hate on these platforms, but rather a result of more time spent capturing data from these platforms.

Data by Platform



The data can also be broken down by the nature of the narrative or type of hate it promotes. The most common forms are shown in the graph below. In this breakdown an item can appear in multiple categories.

Most common categories



56% of the items (131 items) were Islamophobic

Common narratives included:

- Glorifying and justifying the attack, e.g. by claiming it was deserved due to the actions of Islamist extremists
- Claiming that all Muslims were terrorists
- Asserting that Muslims are not welcome in America or Western countries in general and should “go home”

32% of the items (74 items) were antisemitic.

Many of the antisemitic posts involved the claim that Jews, Israel, or the Mossad were responsible for the attack either directly or indirectly. Some people suggested the attack wasn't getting sufficient media attention (despite widespread international coverage) and blamed Jewish control of the media for this.

Other content included:

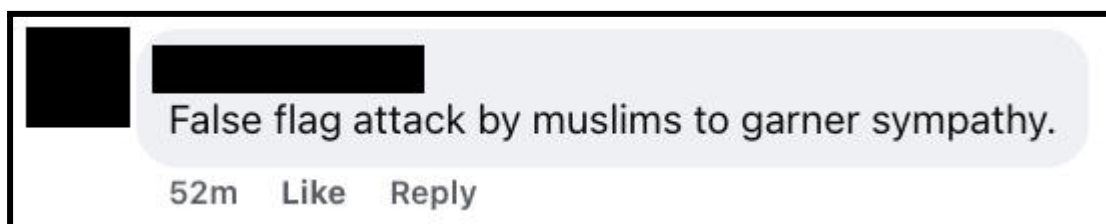
- 9% of the items (21 items) promoted conspiracies claiming the attack was a false flag.
- 8% of the items (19 items) promoted glorification of violence, celebrating the attack
- 3% of the items (8 items) promoted xenophobia or anti-immigration rhetoric
- 3% of the items (6 items) involved incitement to further violence, expressing a hope for further such attacks
- 2% of items (5 items) promoted anti-LGBTIQ+ hate (mostly transphobia)
- 2% of items (4 items) promoted White Nationalism or White Supremacy
- 2% of the items (4 items) were dismissive of the attack

Other content which appeared less than 4 times included: Promotion of Christian Nationalism, racism, denial of the attack, minimization of the attack, anti-Christian hate, and anti-religious hate (in a general sense).

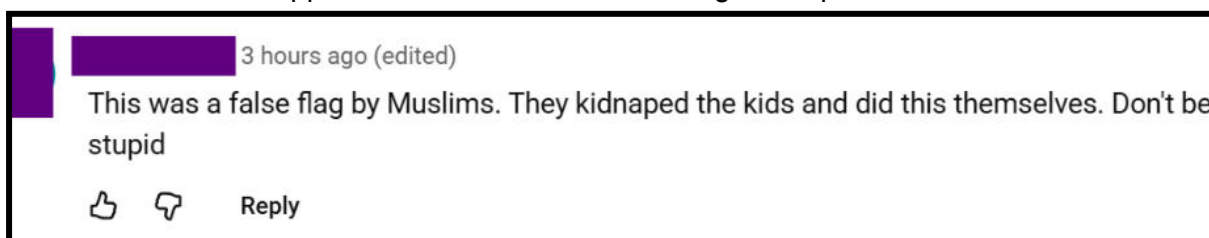
Examples of online content

False Flag Claims

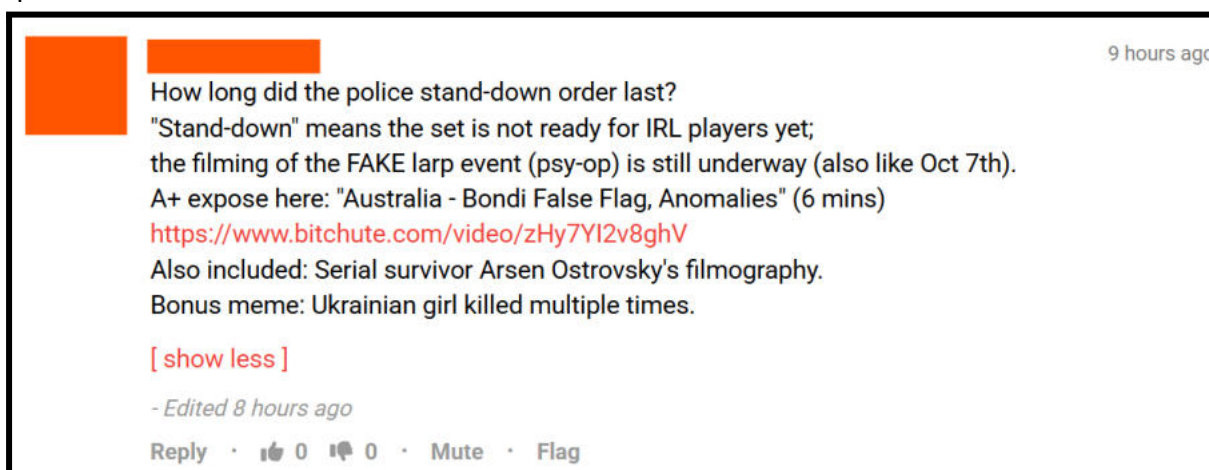
A false flag is an attack on a community orchestrated in order to garner sympathy or cast aspersions on another group. In this context, commenters suggest that the Muslim community are themselves responsible for the attack, and did so to garner sympathy with the victims. This has the effect of denying the reality of anti-Muslim hate in our society, and positions the victims of this attack as being actually responsible.



The comment below appeared on a video of a news segment uploaded to YouTube.



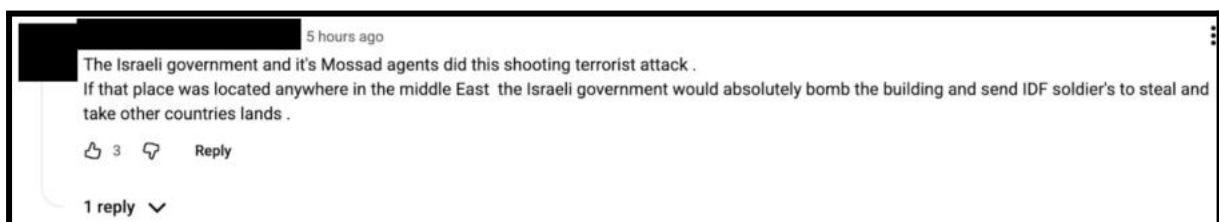
The BitChute comment below appears in response to video in which the creator, a free speech advocate, informs viewers of the attack in a news like format.



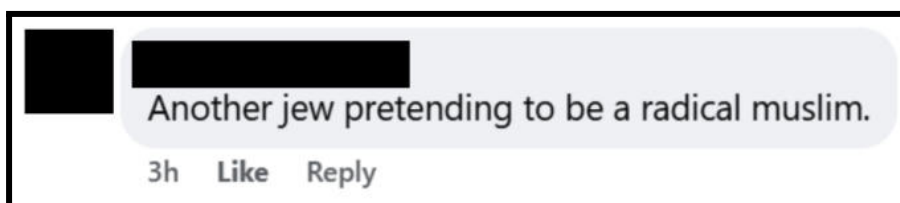
The following user describes the attack as “false flag bullsh*t”, but does not say who was responsible for the attack.



The following two comments claim it was a false flag attack by Mossad, the Israeli foreign intelligence agency. The second one says “The Israeli government and it’s [sic] Mossad agents did this shooting terrorist attack. If that place was located anywhere in the Middle East the Israeli government would absolutely bomb the building and send IDF soldiers to steal and take other countries lands.”



This next user claims that the attack was carried out by a “jew pretending to be a radical muslim”. Presumably, they were under the mistaken belief that the media were claiming a muslim was responsible for the attacks.



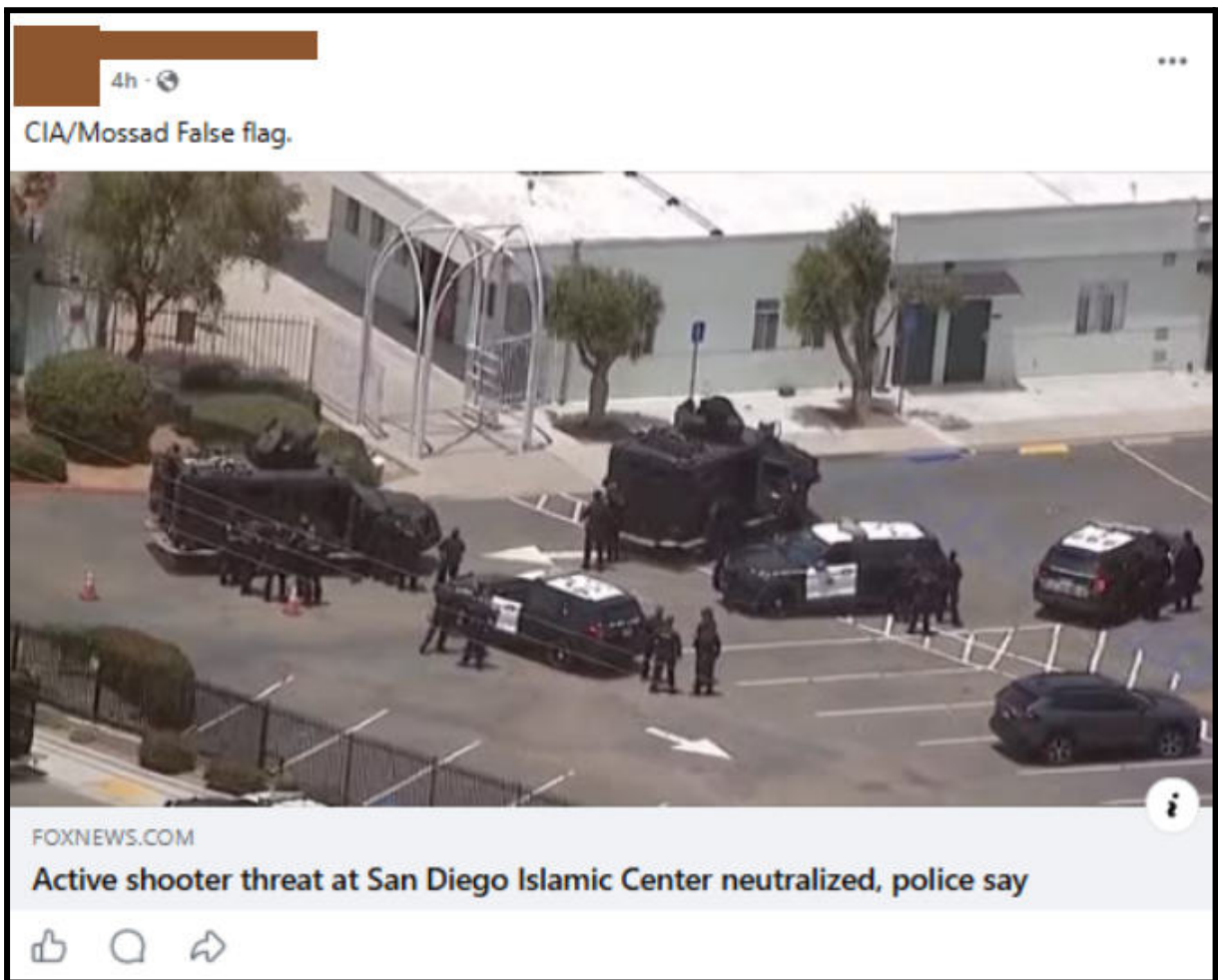
The next comment is an example of someone directly blaming Jews.



This next comment also blames the Jews but does so using an image of a juice box as code for Jews.

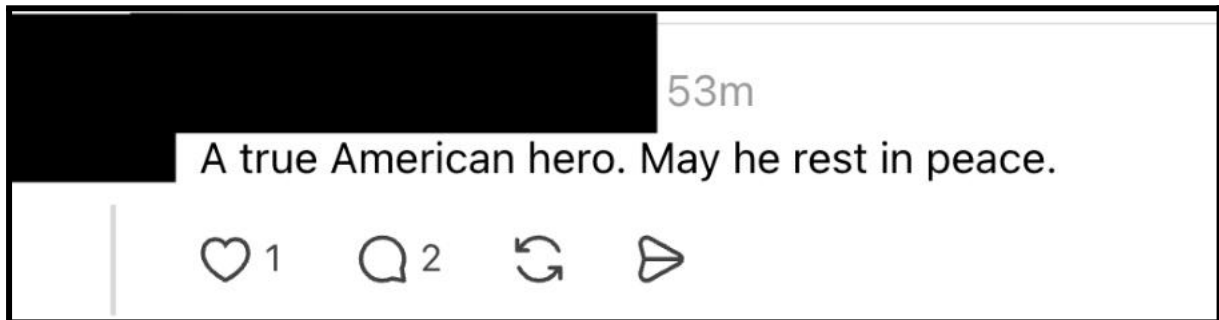


The following post alleged it is a joint CIA / Mossad false flag operation.

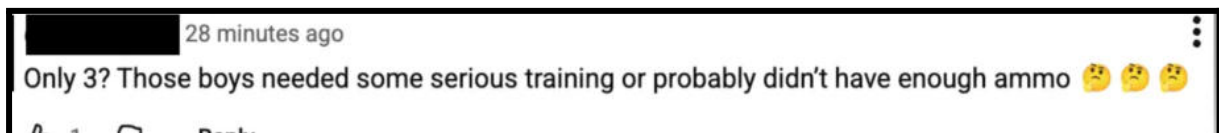


Glorification of violence

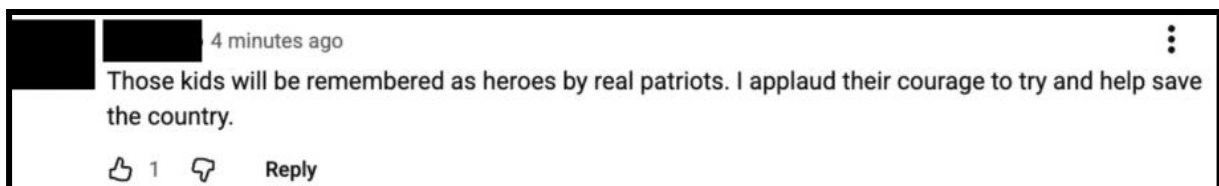
The following posts describe the shooter as a “hero” for his attack on Muslims.



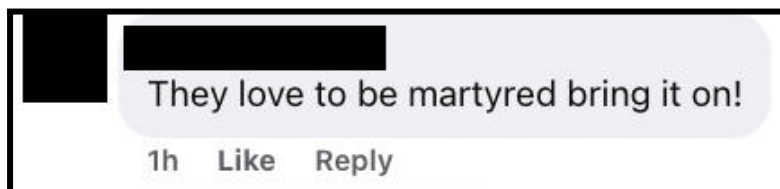
The following posts questions why the shooters only shot and killed three people, implying that more people should have been killed and the attack did not go far enough.



The following posts frame the shooters as ‘real patriots’ and applaud their ‘courage’, understanding the event as an attempt to ‘help save the country’. The facility that was attacked had children in attendance; students of the Bright Horizon Academy. Thankfully, none were harmed.



This Facebook comment suggests that Muslims “love to be martyred bring it on!”. The final “bring it on” is an encouragement to engage in further violence against Muslims.



On 4chan’s politically incorrect forum (/pol/) a number of posts made references back to the Christchurch attack and celebrated this new attack. Tarrant was himself radicalised on /pol/ which makes this content particularly important when it comes to preventing future extremism.¹⁰

¹⁰ Andre Oboler, *New Zealand Terrorist Attack* (Online Hate Prevention Institute, 2019) <https://ohpi.org.au/new-zealand-terrorist-attack/>

>> **Anonymous** (ID: 2GIP8cUe) 05/19/26(Tue)05:44:10 No.535336475 ▶ >>535337636
 File: [Brenton tarrant.webm](#) (1.81 MB, 640x360)



[>>535336364](#)
 Based

>> **Anonymous** (ID: 2GIP8cUe) 05/19/26(Tue)05:44:35 No.535336502 ▶ >>535337734
 File: [NAFO Brenton Tarrant.jpg](#) (115 KB, 1024x877)



NAFO supports TOTAL MUSLIM DEATH

Another poster asks for a live stream to view people being killed


>> **Anonymous** (ID: ndKiE7cZ) 05/19/26(Tue)05:48:20 No.535336733 ▶

someone pls post the epic livestream

Another post writes “hopefully he got a high score”. This gaming reference, treating shooting real people as if it was just scoring points in a game. It was something we saw on /pol/ after the attack on a Synagogue in Poway, near San Diego, back in 2019.¹¹ The attack in 2019 posted that they were about to go in and someone replied “Based. Get the high score.” The image shown is of Baruch Goldstein, a Jewish extremist who killed 29 people in a mosque in the West Bank in 1994. His organisation is a banned terrorist organisation in Israel and was also previously a listed terrorist organisation in the US (it was removed due to inactivity).

>> **Anonymous** (ID: LAGrAfD2) 05/19/26(Tue)05:53:21 No.535337023 ▶ >>535337302
 File: [1756750638637938.png](#) (258 KB, 512x512)

my honest reaction



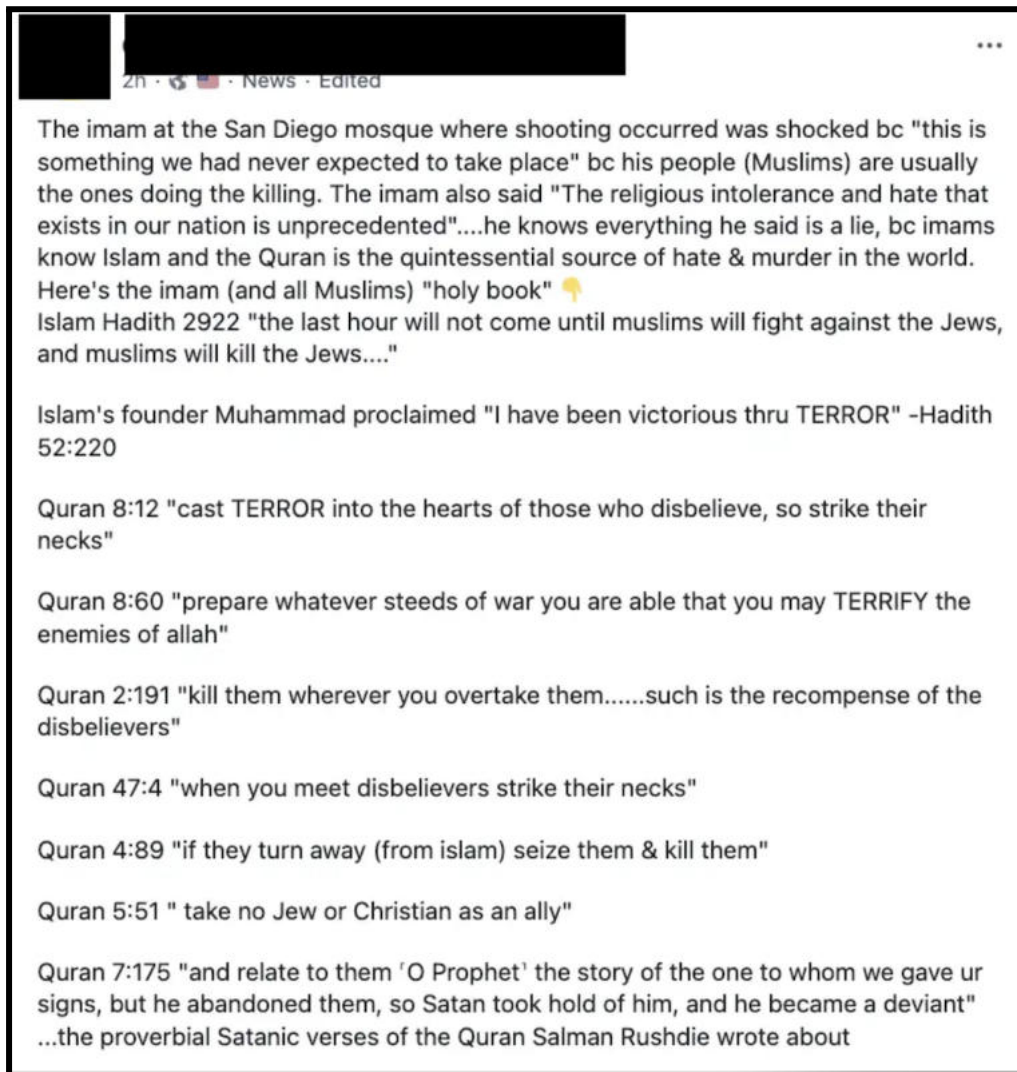
[>>535336824](#)
 hopefully he got a high score

¹¹ Andre Oboler, *Poway Synagogue Attack* (Online Hate Prevention Institute, 2019) <https://ohpi.org.au/poway-synagogue-attack/>

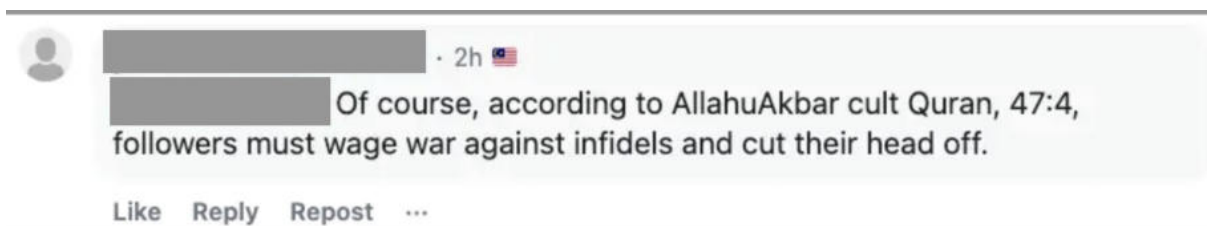
Other Islamophobia

Claims that Muslims are terrorists

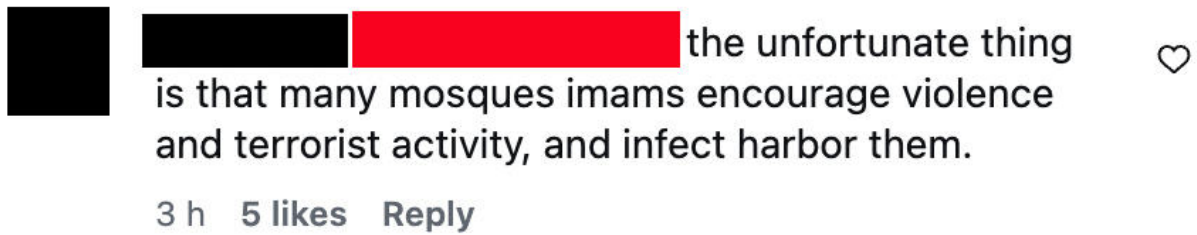
The Gab post below seeks to associate Muslims with violence in general, using passages from the Quran as supposed evidence that Islam and the Quran are the “quintessential source of hate and murder in the world.” The post also states that Muslims “are usually the ones doing the killing.



The following comment labels Islam using offensive language, and uses Quran passages as evidence that Islam and its adherents are inherently violent.

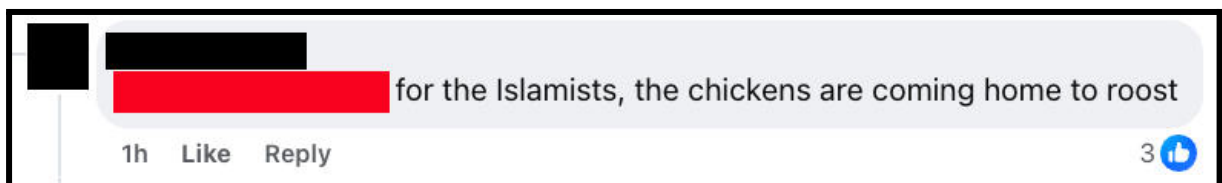


This Instagram comment claims that “many mosques imams encourage violence and terrorist activity, and infect harbor them.”

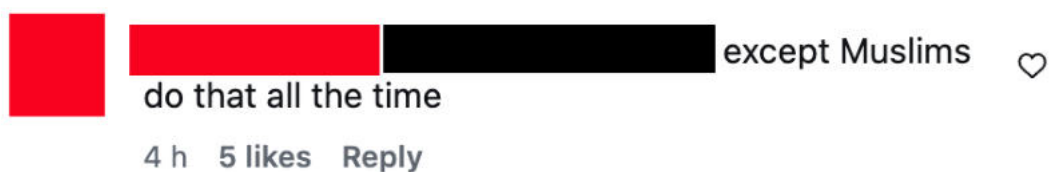
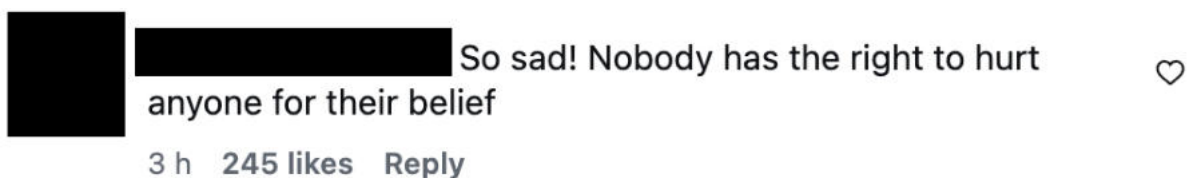


Claims the attack was justified because of Islamist extremism

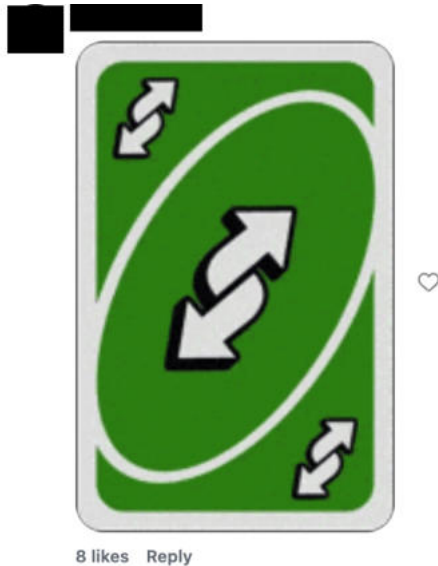
This post says that the “chickens are coming home to roost” for “the Islamists”, implying that violence towards Muslims is justified or deserved because of the actions of Islamist extremists.



In response to another Instagram user saying that nobody should be hurt for their beliefs, another commenter writes “except Muslims do that all the time”. This suggests that the actions of Islamist extremists who are responsible for terrorism justify violence against Muslims.



In response to an Instagram post about the attacks, this user just posts an image of an “uno reverse” card. The implication is that this violence against Muslims is the “reverse” of what usually happens, when (the user implies) Muslims are responsible for violent attacks. This suggests that Muslims are deserving of these attacks as retribution for Islamist extremism.

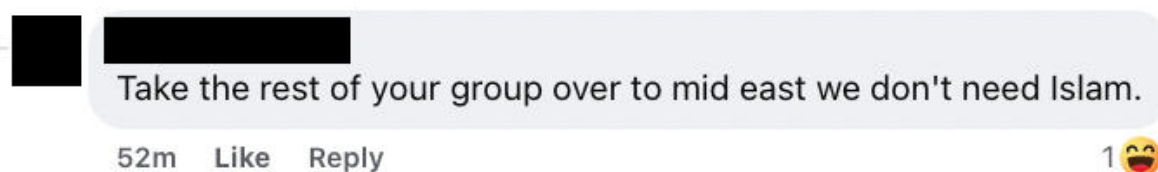


Excluding Muslims from society

This comment asks why Muslims would choose to live in the West when there are “57 Muslim countries”. This implies that Muslims do not belong in western society.



This Facebook comment urges Muslims to move “over to mid east” because “we don’t need Islam”.



Generalised Islamophobia

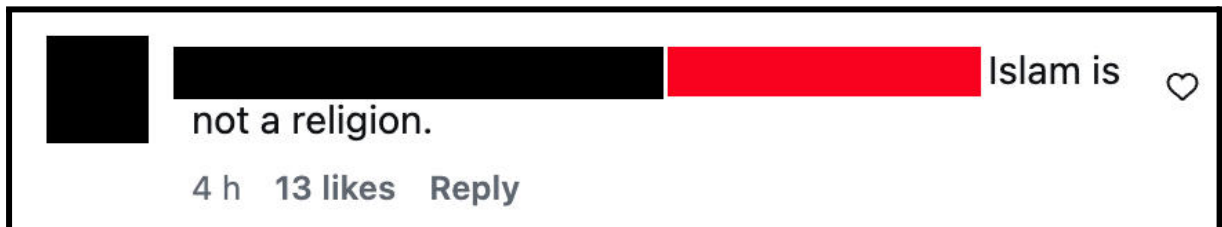
The following posts use the news about the attack on a Mosque to engage in generalised Islamophobia. These are comments that are anti Muslims or Islam, but which do not specify their reasons why or engage in any specific Islamophobic trope.



On Facebook a response to news of the shooting expressed hope this would lead to the Islamic Center being torn down.



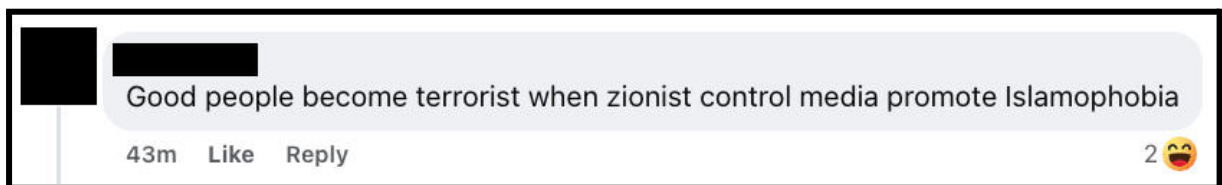
This user claims that "Islam is not a religion", but does not outline their reasons for thinking so.



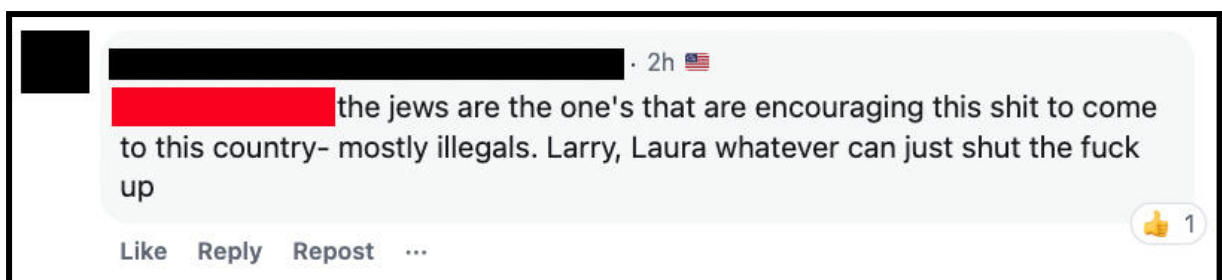
Blaming Jews and feeding anti-Jewish hostility

In addition to the significant amounts of Islamophobia that we documented, we also captured a significant number of antisemitic comments. One theme in these comments was the idea that Jews, or Zionists, or Israel, were responsible for the attacks. Some of this has already appeared in the false flag section. There were other ways this anti-Jewish sentiment was expressed as well. We examine a few examples in this section.

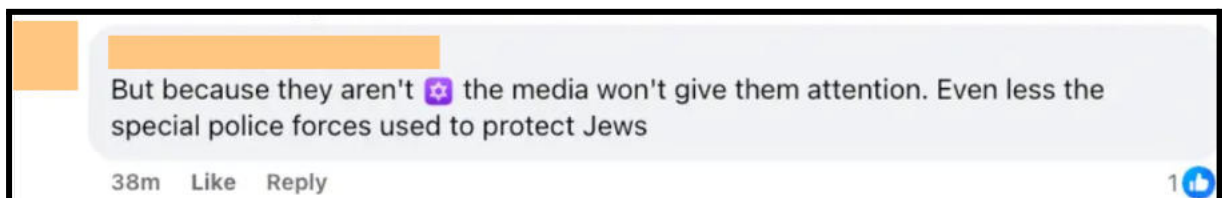
This comment below implies that Jews are indirectly responsible for the attacks, because “zionist control media” promotes Islamophobia.



The next comment, from Gab, employs a common antisemitic conspiracy theory, according to which Jews are encouraging mass migration, to suggest that they are ultimately responsible for the attack.



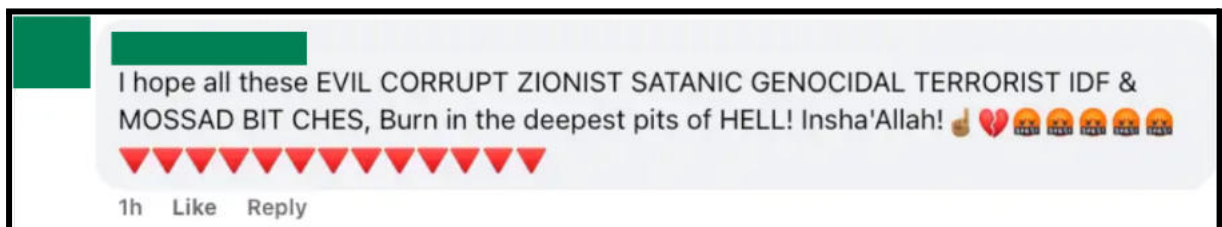
The next comment suggests the attack won't get media attention because the victims aren't Jewish. This might suggest bias in the media, or it might be a nod to claims of Jewish media control. It also claims Jews get special protection that Muslims don't. In the US, off-duty police officers are often hired as security. In the case of the mosque, they had their own armed security. The comment is misleading and designed to create a sense of competition for victimhood and animosity to the Jewish community.



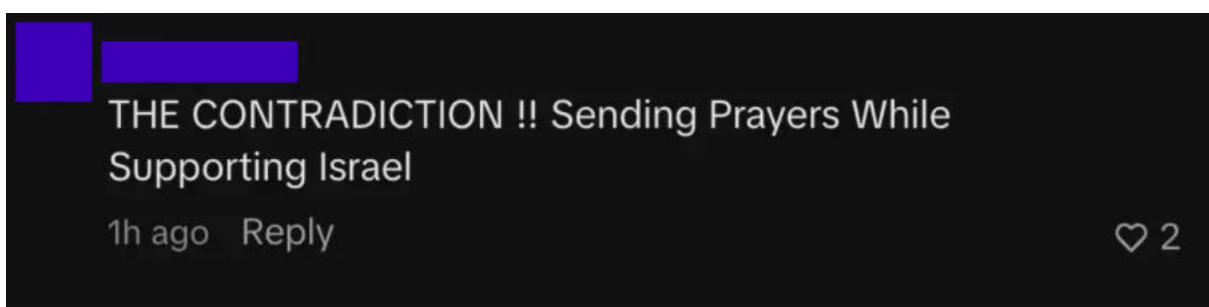
Another comment claimed it wasn't being given sufficient attention by politicians and that if it had been a synagogue it would have a "chorusline of politicians condemning it as 'antisemitic attack on the Jewish community'". The attack WAS said to be a hate crime against the Muslim community and politicians up to and including the President have made statements condemning it. The comment aims to create resentment against the Jewish community and engage in competitive victimhood, all based on a faulty premise.



This next example engages in demonisation against Zionists, the IDF, and Mossad suggesting they should "burn in the deepest pits of HELL!" It then shares a row of red triangles symbolising support for Hamas. The post goes beyond the false flag claims that baselessly accusing Mossad of being behind the attack. This post entirely buys into that world view, or perhaps one that simply holds Jews, Zionists, and Israel responsible as scapegoats for anything that goes wrong. The nature of the post suggests radicalisation.



This next comment attacks a Jewish person for expressing solidarity and sending prayers to the victims. The commenter claims it is a contradiction to be "sending prayer while supporting Israel". This demonstrates the degree to which disagreements over foreign matters (the Israel/Palestinian conflict) is destroying the ability to work together and support each other at home.



Blaming LGBTIQ+ people

We also documented a number of comments suggesting, without evidence, that one or both of the attackers were transgender. This feeds into common transphobic narratives online that villainise trans people by painting them as dangerous threats to society.

The following posts come from a Reddit thread discussing the attackers.

