

# Allahu Akbar

- Allahu Akbar is a frequently used **Arabic expression**, also known by Muslims as the takbir. It literally means **“God is greater” or “God is the greatest.”** It is used in a multitude of social, cultural, and ritual contexts, however, as a general exclamation. Muslims utter it in ritual prayer, during the call to prayer, in times of personal distress, and as an expression of joy. For some more conservative Muslims, it is also “considered a form of applause and is spoken in union as a way of showing approval of a speaker” in place of clapping hands.
- The **phrase is “recited by Muslims and Arabic speaking Orthodox Christians as an expression of their faith,”** and the “religious term serves as a reminder to Muslims, that no matter the situation or emotion, God is always greater than any real or imaginary entity.” The phrase also appears on the flags of a number of Muslim-majority countries including Afghanistan, Iraq, and Iran.
- The **phrase is frequently heard among rescue workers in war zones and areas that have experienced devastation.** Videos of individuals freeing children and babies from beneath fallen rubble following airstrikes show **individuals exclaiming “Allahu Akbar” to express overwhelming emotion.**
- Militants who identify as Muslims have adopted the phrase and use it as a vocal declaration before carrying out an attack. It has been **co-opted by anti-Muslim activists and organizations and “falsely entwined in acts of terrorism.”** Anti-Muslim speaker Asra Nomani identifies the term as a “battle cry for terrorists.” In May 2016, an actor shouted the phrase during a simulated “anti-terror exercise” at Manchester’s Trafford Centre in the United Kingdom. Following criticism, Manchester Police apologized, saying it was “unacceptable” to use the phrase.
- “Misinformation expert” **Robert Spencer claims the phrase is an “aggressive declaration that Allah and Islam are dominant over every other form of government, religion, law or ethic.”** An article published on FrontPage Magazine, identified by the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) as “the premier financier of radical anti-Muslim extremism,” claimed that “Allah Akbar is a proclamation of Islamic superiority in line with its Koranic mission of making Islam superior over all religions.” In an interview with new-atheist Sam Harris, **“anti-Muslim extremist” Ayaan Hirsi Ali compared the phrase to a white supremacist shouting “heil hitler.”**
- In 2013, Fox & Friends host **Brian Kilmeade stated that he had a “problem helping those people if they’re screaming that [Allahu Akbar] after a hit,”** after seeing footage of Senator John McCain meeting with Syrian rebel forces. **Senator McCain criticized the host, stating, “You have a problem with that? Would you have a problem with an American, a Christian, saying ‘Thank God?’** For someone to say ‘Allahu Akbar’ is about as offensive as someone saying ‘thank God.’”

**IMPACT:** Allahu Akbar is an Arabic phrase used in various religious and social contexts to express devotion or as a general exclamation in emotional situations. It has been co-opted by both militants and anti-Muslim activists and is often mistakenly conflated with violence and terrorism.