

Eleven killed in deadliest attack on Jewish community in US history

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Eleven people were killed and six injured after a gunman opened fire Saturday during the morning service at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Two of those injured are in critical condition, and one was undergoing his second surgery Saturday afternoon as doctors attempted to save his life. The names of the victims have not yet been released; authorities have said that they are all adults.

The horrific attack is the deadliest against the Jewish community in US history. It is an expression of the profound political crisis in the United States and a consequence of the Trump administration's promotion of extreme-right-wing and fascistic sentiments. It follows the mailing of more than a dozen pipe bombs to prominent Trump administration critics last week.

The Pittsburgh shooter, who has been identified as Robert Bowers, a 48-year-old white male, walked into Tree of Life Synagogue with an AR-15 semi-automatic and three handguns shortly before 10 a.m., yelling, "All Jews must die" as he began shooting.

Pittsburgh police arrived shortly afterwards. Two of the first officers on the scene were shot as they attempted to arrest the shooter, who was exiting the building at the time. Two other police officers were shot after Bowers retreated back into the synagogue, where he was finally shot and arrested.

Three services were taking place at the synagogue at the time of the shooting, including a naming service for newborn baby girl. About 100 people were in the building. The Tree of Life Synagogue is located in the predominantly Jewish neighborhood of Squirrel Hill.

Federal prosecutors charged Bowers with 29 counts of violence and firearms offenses later on Saturday. US Attorney General Jeff Sessions issued a statement declaring that the Department of Justice would "file

hate crimes and other criminal charges against the defendant, including charges that could lead to the death penalty."

President Trump called the attack an expression of "evil," while repeating the remarks he made after the Parkland, Florida school shooting earlier this year, calling for armed police in the schools. He said that if the synagogue had an armed guard the consequences would not have been as deadly.

Bowers was a regular user of Gab, a social network used by white supremacists and anti-Semites. A look at his social media pages show that he espoused a more extreme version of the anti-immigrant, racist and nationalist views put forward by Trump, and regarded Trump as not a real nationalist because he had appointed Jews to his White House staff. He also claimed not to have voted for Trump—he was registered to vote without party affiliation.

But Bowers was fully in support of Trump's persecution of immigrants. In one social media posting, he claimed that Jews were helping transport members of the migrant caravans. He applauded the change in language in which opponents of the caravan referred to the migrants as "invaders" rather than "illegals." After noting this new language—for which Trump is mainly responsible—he wrote, "I like this."

Trump has ordered US troops to the Mexico border, while demonizing immigrants as would-be murderers and rapists of Americans, not as victims fleeing poverty and oppression—for which US imperialism is mainly responsible—in their home countries. Last week, Trump claimed that billionaire George Soros, who is Jewish, was funding the caravan, parroting a standard anti-Semitic trope.

A posting by Bowers just five minutes before the shooting said, "HIAS [Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society]

likes to bring invaders in that kill out people. I can't sit by and watch my people get slaughtered. Screw your optics, I'm going in."

The Tree of Life Synagogue had partnered with HIAS, which has helped to resettle refugees from Latin America and Syria in the Pittsburgh area.

On Friday, Bowers made reference to a list of congregations across America that held Shabbat services for refugees, posted on the HIAS website. Bowers wrote: "Why hello there HIAS! You like to bring in hostile invaders to dwell among us? We appreciate the list of friends you have provided." The Tree of Life Synagogue was one of the synagogues listed on the HIAS site.

In the past month, Bowers has posted dozens of comments attacking Jews, Blacks and immigrants. Many of his posts suggested that Jews were undermining the Trump administration. He criticized Trump's "Make American Great Again" slogan as phony, writing, "There is no #MAGA as long as there is a k--e infestation."

This is the second time this week that a fascist has taken action in synch with Trump's ultra-right rhetoric. A Florida man, Cesar Sayoc, has been arrested for sending over a dozen pipe bombs through the mail to prominent Democrats and critics of the Trump administration. Unlike Bowers, Sayoc was an overt Trump supporter who attended Trump rallies and posted photographs of himself wearing a MAGA hat.

The Pittsburgh massacre is part of a rising number of anti-Semitic attacks in the United States and internationally. In the US, the Anti-Defamation League reported 1,986 cases of harassment, vandalism or physical assault against Jews and Jewish institutions last year, an increase of nearly 60 percent. They also found that hate speech on the internet is way up this year.

In Europe, far-right, fascistic and anti-Semitic parties are gaining political influence, particularly in countries like Hungary, Poland, Italy and Germany, where the Alternative for Germany became the first fascistic party to enter the Bundestag since the defeat of the Nazis in World War II.

The Democratic Party is downplaying the connections of Bowers and the man arrested as the mail bomber, Cesar Sayoc, to the specifically racist and anti-

immigrant policy of the Trump administration. Instead they have simply said that disagreements have to be handled in a civil manner, as if the cruelty of imprisoning children in sweltering concentration camps in Texas is a subject for debate.

Pennsylvania Democratic Governor Tom Wolf made no mention of Bowers' support for the Trump administration at a Saturday afternoon press conference, describing the attack as a "senseless act of violence" rather than one motivated by far-right or fascist political views. Pittsburgh Democratic Congressman Mike Doyle, speaking at a vigil held Saturday evening, also made no mention of Trump and instead cited the shooting as another example of why there needs to be gun control.



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