

Republicans exploit Austin shooting to stoke anti-Muslim hysteria and demand restored funding for DHS

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Early Sunday morning, March 1, three people were killed and 14 others wounded in a shooting at Buford's Backyard Beer Garden, a bar in Austin, Texas's Sixth Street entertainment district. Austin police said officers were called around 1:40 a.m. after reports of a gunman firing at the bar.

The shooter, identified as 53-year-old Ndiaga Diagne, first carried out a drive-by attack with a handgun before driving a short distance west along Sixth Street to Wood Street, where he exited his vehicle and began firing on pedestrians with an AR-15-style rifle. Officers already stationed on Sixth Street confronted the gunman, who fired at them before police returned fire and killed him.

Police spokesperson Lisa Davis identified the victims as Savitha Shan, 21; Ryder Harrington, 19; and Jorge Pederson, 30, who later died in a hospital from his injuries. Harrington was a member of the Beta Theta Pi fraternity at Texas Tech University, according to a statement posted on the fraternity's Instagram page. The two other victims remain hospitalized in critical condition. Authorities said both weapons used in the attack had been legally purchased. Images circulated widely in the corporate media showed Diagne wearing a sweater reading "Property of Allah," while photographs released to CBS News also showed him wearing a T-shirt bearing an Iranian flag and the word "Iran."

Diagne was a naturalized citizen born in the West African country of Senegal. At the time of his death he was a resident of Pflugerville, a rapidly growing suburb of Austin around 15 minutes from downtown Austin with a population of 65,000. A little under 1 in 5 (18.6 percent) of the residents of the suburb are first-generation immigrants. Naturalized citizens constitute 12 percent of residents, while almost 6 percent do not hold citizenship.

Republicans are using the shooting to demand funding be restored to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and stoke anti-Muslim attitudes in the population. In a hearing Wednesday featuring at the time DHS Secretary Kristi

Noem, Chuck Grassley, chairman of the Judiciary Committee and a senator from Iowa, brought up "Iranian sleeper cells" in his opening statement saying, "Given the Iran conflict, what steps has Homeland Security taken to protect against potential Iranian sleeper cells and related terrorism?"

After praising Noem for stopping the "invasion" of the United States by "criminals, rapists ... and normal people," Republican South Carolina Senator Lindsey Graham, arch-warmonger and Trump's golfing buddy, said the US was engaged in "military action against the mothership of terrorism Iran."

Graham asked Noem if she thought the "threat level against the United States" from "radical Islamic terrorism" was "up or down?" Noem dutifully replied, "It's up."

Raising his voice, Graham added, "Can we not understand that America is under siege now? Likely to be attacked because radical Islam is under siege and they are likely to hit back."

The US-Israeli war against Iran is already massively unpopular. A sample of recent surveys found only 38 percent of Americans approve of the war so far, while 49 percent disapprove of the illegal and aggressive war.

It could be added that Senegal is an overwhelmingly Sunni Muslim country. The religion of the ruling clerical regime of Iran is Shia. Notable sectarian hostilities exist between the two religious sects, and it is doubtful that a man, likely from a Sunni background, would partake in a holy war on behalf of Shia Iran.

Senator Marsha Blackburn and Texas Senator Ted Cruz reacted in a similar fashion to Grassley. Cruz attempted to pin the blame for the shooting on "lax oversight" on naturalization, which was insufficiently discriminatory against Muslim people, blaming the Democrats for naturalizing Daigne in 2013 under the Obama administration.

Texas's fascist Governor Greg Abbott has also jumped on

the “terrorism” bandwagon, saying any threat to “Texas or our critical infrastructure,” a national security term, would be met with “decisive and overwhelming force.” U.S. Representative Chip Roy (Republican-Austin) used the shooting to rail against legal immigration, saying “IT’S KILLING US. LITERALLY.”

The rhetoric deployed by Republican officials closely echoes the language used by the US government in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks. At that time, warnings of terrorist “ sleeper cells” and hidden enemies inside the country were used to justify sweeping expansions of domestic surveillance and policing powers, including the Patriot Act and the rapid growth of agencies such as the Department of Homeland Security.

The same campaign was used to launch the global “war on terror,” a series of US-led military interventions that cost trillions of dollars, devastated large parts of the Middle East and Central Asia, displaced millions of people and killed vast numbers. None of these measures improved the lives or security of working people in the United States or anywhere else. Instead, they enriched military contractors and corporations tied to the military-industrial complex while expanding the apparatus of state surveillance and repression in the US and internationally.

Even federal investigators have not supported these claims. While the FBI said materials recovered from Diagne’s vehicle suggested a “potential nexus to terrorism,” officials also stated that it was too early to determine a motive and that the shooting may have been an isolated incident. Nearly a week after the attack, no evidence has emerged that Diagne was connected to the Iranian government or to any terrorist organization.

Diagne had lived in the United States for more than two decades. He arrived in 2000 and became a citizen after marrying a US citizen in 2006. Public records show several minor arrests in New York between 2008 and 2016, all of which are sealed, and a misdemeanor charge related to a vehicle collision in Texas in 2022. According to an interview with an ABC affiliate in San Antonio, his ex-wife described him as “religious” but expressed shock at the shooting.

During the roughly 26-year span of his time in the US, Daigne would have heard of hundreds of mass shootings throughout the country. There have been mass shootings at schools, at shopping malls, at bars and restaurants and at factories and warehouses. Police themselves kill roughly 1,000 people per year, while agents from the Department of Homeland Security have recently murdered protesters like Alex Pretti and Renée Good in Minnesota.

Contrary to the narrative promoted by Republicans, far-right extremism accounts for the majority of domestic

terrorist attacks in the United States. Texas itself has been the site of several such atrocities. In 2023 a white supremacist gunman killed eight people at the Allen Mall. In 2019 Patrick Crusius, motivated by the racist “Great Replacement” conspiracy theory promoted by Fox News and adopted by virtually the entire Republican Party, murdered 23 people at a Walmart in El Paso targeting Hispanic shoppers.

The most reliable estimates attribute the vast majority of all deaths from domestic terrorist attacks to the far right after the September 11, 2001 attacks. These were almost all “native-born” citizens. No one, not a single person, has to be brought into the US for a shooting to happen. More anti-immigrant politics will result in more shootings from far-right terrorists and more deaths, not less.

What are the real causes of the recurring mass shootings that plague the United States? The answer lies not in immigration or religion but in the deep social crisis of American capitalism. The United States is an extraordinarily unequal society marked by economic insecurity, political corruption and unending war. For more than three decades the American ruling class, against the popular will, has waged continuous military interventions across the Middle East, Central Asia, Caribbean and parts of Africa, killing millions and devastating entire regions.

These wars abroad inevitably reverberate at home. Mass murder is normalized by a political establishment that spends more than \$1 trillion annually on the military, while social services, education and mental health care are systematically gutted. In a society saturated with weapons, militarism and social despair, individuals—often isolated and psychologically unstable—can come to see violence as a means of expressing rage or resolving personal crises.

Religious extremism itself has frequently been cultivated within the political establishment and military. The Military Religious Freedom Foundation has reported complaints from service members who say Christian nationalist officers described the war against Iran as a religious conflict meant to usher in “Armageddon,” the biblical end times.



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