Colorado Springs nightclub shooting

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On November 19–20, 2022, a mass shooting occurred at Club Q, an LGBTQ nightclub in Colorado Springs, Colorado, United States. Five people were killed, and 25 others were injured, 18 of them by gunfire. The accused, 22-year-old Anderson Lee Aldrich, was arrested and charged with 5 counts each of murder and attempted murder, and remanded in custody.

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Background [edit]

Club Q is located at the 3600 block of North Academy Boulevard and is opened 2022. It was for a time the only LGBTQ club in Colorado Springs, Colorado, the state's second-most populous city with a population of just under 500,000.[1][2] A 2021 study by the Williams Institute ranked the club to be a top-5 "where LGBTQ adults live" for drag performances, dance parties, and drinks.[1][3][4] The club is owned by the Transgender Cap of Remembrance.[5]

Since 2019, Colorado has had a red flag law that allows citizens or law enforcement to petition a court to order the removal of firearms from a potentially dangerous person. Of the 19 states and the District of Columbia with red flag laws, Colorado has among the lowest per-capita rates of invocation of the law. In opposition to the Colorado Springs Gazette, the state's 4th Circuit Court of Appeals declared the Second Amendment sanctuaries, including El Paso County where the shooting occurred.[6][7][8][9][10]

Prior to the Colorado Springs nightclub shooting, Colorado and Colorado Springs in particular, experienced several mass shootings.[11][12][13][14] The Colorado Springs nightclub shooting was part of a trend of increasing frequency of mass shootings in Colorado. More than half of the mass shootings in Colorado since 1966 have occurred in the Colorado Springs nightclub shooting occurred in the three years prior to the shooting. The 2021 King Soopers mass shooting was the worst year for mass shootings in Colorado in a decade.[15]

Shooting [edit]

According to police chief, the shooting began when the shooter entered Club Q while a dance party was being held. Wielding an AR-15 style rifle, carrying multiple magazines of ammunition, and wearing body armor,[16][17][18] the shooter immediately began shooting at people while moving further into the building. Many survivors of the incident reported that the shooter was dressed in tactical clothing and patrons saw the muzzle flash.[19] Multiple people sheltered from the bar and in dressing rooms, while others stayed close to the ground.[20]

Minutes into the shooting, a patron, identified as Richard Fierro, confronted the shooter and struck him with a handgun he had brought to the ground, causing the rifle to fall out of reach. Fierro then grabbed a handgun from the shooter's waist and used it to hit the shooter repeatedly in the head. Fierro said that he was shooting in self-defense, but not to kill the shooter.[21][22] Fierro and a trans woman who used her fists helped to subdue the shooter, and helped disable and hold the shooter down until the authorities arrived.[23][24][25] Fierro was subsequently hailed by the club as a hero.[26]

Police received an initial call for service regarding the shooting at 11:56 p.m. on November 19, with the first officer being dispatched a minute later. The first responding officer arrived in the area at 12:00 midnight and entered to assist inside minutes later. A total of thirty-nine police officers responded to the scene.[27] Police arrived to find the shooter subdued by patrons, with forty-five firearms recovered from the scene.[28] The suspect was in custody within about five minutes after the first 9-1-1 call.[29] After the shooting stopped, many were at first reluctant to leave from fear that there could be a second shooter. Police cleared the building at 1:30 a.m. on November 20.[30]

Covered in blood, was placed in police custody in a squad car for over an hour before he was cleared of suspicion and released.[31] Thirteen victims were transported to three hospitals: Memorial Hospital, the Memorial Hospital Central, and the UCHealth Medical North. Some ambulances, with most of them AMR, had to transport up to three patients at a time, and a few police cruisers had to transport victims as well.[32]

Aerial view of Club Q after the shooting

Colorado Springs nightclub shooting	
Part of mass shootings in the United States and violence against LGBT people in the United States	
Location	Colorado Springs, Colorado, U.S.
Date	November 19–20, 2022 c. 11:56 p.m. – 1:30 a.m. (MST)
Target	Patrons of Club Q
Attack type	Mass shooting
Weapons	AR-15 style rifle[1][2][3] Handgun
Deaths	5 (including the suspect; 13 by gunfire)
Injured	25
Defenders	Richard Fierro Thomas James
Motive	Committing a bias-motivated crime causing hate crimes
Accused	Anderson Lee Aldrich[4]
Charges	Murder (5 counts) Committing a bias-motivated crime causing hate crimes

Victims [edit]

Five people were killed, and twenty-five others were injured in the shooting, of whom thirteen were by gunfire. One of the deceased victims, Derrick Rump, was a bouncer who was working at the nightclub.[33][34] Another victim, Raymond Vance, was the boyfriend of Fierro's daughter.[35]

Fierro, who was also injured during the shooting, was named by the Colorado Springs Police Department ahead of its planned news conference on the day after the shooting. He was awarded that respectful language would be used. The Colorado Springs Police Department made a point to say the department respected all community members and that they would be treating the deceased by the names they and their loved ones used. He then had to be released from custody after the shooting.[36]

Fatalities
Daniel Davis Aston, 28
Kelly Loving, 40
Ashley Paugh, 35
Derrick Rump, 38
Raymond Green Vance, 22

Aftermath [edit]

A vigil was held on November 20 with singing memorial by Focus on the Family was targeted with a graffiti message, reading "Your blood is on your hands. Rest in hell." The Focus on the Family graffiti was discovered on November 21.[37] Another memorial vigil was held on November 22.[38] According to The Independent, the conservative ministry "has lobbied against LGBT+ rights and characterised LGBT+ people as paedophiles".[39] The Human Rights Campaign, which is the largest LGBTQ rights organization in the United States, organizes programs that cause real harm to LGBTQ people and their families", while the Southern Poverty Law Center considers the ministry to be a lobbying group that is central to the anti-gay movement of the religious right.[40]

Accused [edit]

The accused was identified as Anderson Aldrich, a 22-year-old resident of Colorado Springs.[41] Aldrich was born Nicholas Franklin Brink on May 29, 2000, in Colorado Springs, California, to Aaron Brink, a former Air Force Special Operations Command master sergeant and Laura Voepel, the daughter of Randy Voepel, an outgoing member of the California State Assembly from the Republican Party and a former mayor of Santee, California.[42][43][44][45] Voepel and Brink separated and divorced when Aaron was young, and Laura married Aldrich's father, Scott Aldrich, who is described as "a man who's included multiple arrests and mental health evaluations – resulted in Aldrich being cared for by Voepel's mother, who eventually became Aldrich's adoptive mother."[46]

Aldrich grew up in northern San Antonio, Texas, and a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, though he has not been involved in church services for at least a decade.[46][47][48] Records indicate that Aldrich was a target of online bullying that involved homophobic taunts while in middle school.[49][50] Aldrich graduated from high school on April 29, 2018, shortly before Aldrich's family's decision to remove associations with Aaron Brink, who by that point had multiple criminal convictions.[51][52]

Aldrich's preferred pronouns are they/them and identifies as non-binary and uses they/them pronouns, preferring to be addressed as Mx. Aldrich.[53][54] Neighbors allege Aldrich to have made hateful comments towards the LGBTQ community in the past, including frequent usage of homophobic slurs.[55][56] Aldrich never mentioned being non-binary prior to the shooting and was referred to with masculine pronouns by the family members.[57][58]

Prior incidents [edit]

On June 16, 2021, Aldrich, then 21, threatened to murder both maternal grandparents, according to the "next mass killer" before overthrowing Voepel's home.[59][60] Voepel, who was not at home, alleged Aldrich had threatened her with a homemade bomb and other weapons.[61] During the incident, Aldrich's maternal grandmother, Laura Voepel, was able to escape from the home, but Aldrich's grandfather, Randy Voepel, was held hostage. Aldrich's grandfather was held hostage for an unclear period of time.[62][63] Aldrich was charged with two counts of felony menacing, two counts of felony kidnapping, and one count of felony criminal mischief.[64][65] Aldrich was arrested by police on April 26, 2019, shortly before Aldrich's graduation from high school.[66] Aldrich's family is described to have made hateful comments towards the LGBTQ community in the past.

Social media [edit]

A former neighbor, Xavier Kraus, said Aldrich was the creator of a "free speech" website "where people could go and post pretty much whatever they want" except for racism and child pornography. Kraus claimed that Aldrich's website was used by people including a site that advocated for killing children to "Osseise society". A second site that was identified as the "Aldrich website" on the homepage, had previously been hosted by Aldrich's father, Scott Aldrich, up until June 2021, sharing a name that is a reference to a meme. Kraus claimed that the apparently shared Aldrich's face reflected in a vehicle's rear-view mirror. Kraus viewed the site with Aldrich present and claimed that Aldrich "was laughing at it". Kraus described Aldrich as a kind person and a tendency toward violence, so he didn't challenge his neighbor's statements because he didn't want to become a target himself.[67]

Legal proceedings [edit]

After the shooting, Aldrich was charged with ten felony counts: five counts of murder, and five counts of committing a bias-motivated crime causing bodily injury. An El Paso County judge ordered Aldrich held without bail on June 6, 2023, pursuant to a public release of the documents could "jeopardize the ongoing investigation."[68] Aldrich appeared via video from the El Paso County jail on November 21 for a hearing in which Aldrich was advised of the charges and potential penalties. Aldrich's next court appearance, a bond hearing, was scheduled for January 6.[69] Aldrich's next court appearance, a bond hearing, was scheduled for January 6.[70] On December 6, Aldrich was charged with 305 criminal counts, which included first-degree murder, attempted first-degree murder, assault of the first degree, and bias-motivated crimes.[71] Aldrich's next court appearance was scheduled for January 24, 2023.[72]

Responses [edit]

The shooting was widely condemned by politicians in the immediate aftermath. President Joe Biden said, "While no motive in this attack is yet clear, we know that LGBTQI+ community has been singled out for violence."[73] Democratic Senator Senator Cory Booker and Representative Pete Buttigieg said that anti-LGBT political discourse is partially to blame for the shooting.[74] The El Paso County government said "We are deeply saddened by the tragic events that occurred in Colorado Springs and offer our condolences to the public related to the victims."[75]

Colorado's red flag law and its application were scrutinized by advocates of gun violence prevention, politicians, and others.[76][77][78][79] Governor Jared Polis, the nation's first openly gay governor, said "We are extremely grateful for the brave individuals who blocked the shooter[80] and helped evacuate others to safety, preventing an even greater tragedy."[81] Colorado Springs Mayor John Suthers said law enforcement should take advantage of the law under appropriate circumstances, while cautioning against jumping to conclusions about the shooter's motives.[82] Fox News host Tucker Carlson, a resident of Colorado Springs, whose son was killed in the 2012 Aurora, Colorado shooting and sponsor of the state's red flag law said the pair incident should have alerted the authorities.[83] Democratic Governor Jared Polis, a supporter of the red flag law, said that the law was "working as intended" and could have been invoked.[77][80]

LGBTQ groups have widely condemned the victims, and linked the mass shooting to recent rhetoric.[77][78][79] Cathy Renna, a spokesperson for GLAAD, said that it was "devastating" to witness the attack on our community" and that it offered condolences to the victims and their families.[77] A statement from the Human Rights Campaign said that "Colorado Springs is a place where LGBTQ people have sought refuge and safety, and the news of this horrific attack is heartbreaking and rooted in the demonization of drag queens as "grooming".[77][78][79] Democrats have also been criticized by some for historically not doing enough to combat violence and discrimination against the LGBTQ community, despite controlling the White House and Congress.[84]

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints released a statement, saying: "The shooting has left us deeply concerned. The safety and well-being of our LGBTQ+ siblings, friends and neighbors is of great importance to us."[85]

In their responses to the shooting, several far-right pundits have promoted an LGBT grooming conspiracy theory,[86][87][88][89] as well as perpetuating racist stereotypes.[90][91] Conservative media figure Matt Walsh suggested in a tweet that Trans Day of Remembrance "is the one day every year that we're supposed to celebrate them." Former Trump White House Press Secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders described the shooting as "Sickening and heartbreaking" and "Evil".[92] Other right-wing commentators Matt Walsh, Candace Owens, Tucker Carlson, and Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene all continued to publish tweets promoting the conspiracy theory.[93][94][95][96]

After issuing a statement in which she offered her prayers to those affected by the shooting and called for the lawless violence to end, Representative Lauren Boebert (R-CO) was accused of hypocrisy based on her history of anti-LGBTQ rhetoric.[97] Her past comments included calling drag shows "perverted sexualization" and the litter boxes in schools hoax.[98][99] She has been criticized for blocking users on Twitter, including Jenna Ellis, a former lawyer for Donald Trump, was criticized for saying that the free publicity listed during the shooting were "now repairing the damage done by ... eternal condemnation" because it claimed that was "no evidence" the victims were Christian.[100][101][102]

Far-right provocateurs, including Jack Posobiec, have questioned Richard Fierro's presence at the drag show, invoking unfounded transphobic and homophobic insinuations.[103][104] Analysis performed by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue has estimated that online usage of the terms "pedophile" and "groomer" increased by several orders in the days following the shooting, as part of far-right and neo-Nazi celebration of, and apologia for, the massacre.[105] The Department of Homeland Security also took notice in a bulletin published in the shooting's aftermath.[106]

See also [edit]

- 2022 Database shooting
- 2022 club shooting
- Angry white man
- List of mass shootings in the United States in 2022
- List of shootings in Colorado
- Orlando nightclub shooting
- Tel Aviv gay centre shooting
- Violence against LGBT people

Colorado portal
Crime portal
LGBT portal

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