

Massacre in Pittsburgh's Tree of Life Synagogue

By [Stephen Lendman](#)

Region: [USA](#)

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*On Saturday, alleged shooter 46-year-old **Robert Bowers** killed 11, wounding six others inside Pittsburgh's Tree of Life synagogue before surrendering to police.*

Police said he exchanged gunfire with officers, wounding four, one reportedly in critical condition. He was shot, hospitalized, and remains in stable condition.

Shootings occurred in the city's Squirrel Hill neighborhood, the targeted synagogue located at the corner of Wilkens and Shady Avenues.

A personal note. I know the location well. In the early to mid-1960s, I lived in Pittsburgh, blocks from where the shootings occurred, a neighborhood I remember fondly - where I met my wife and had many friends.

What happened has special meaning for me, close to my former home, a quiet violence free area at the time - any time of day or night, no longer since Saturday.

Bowers was reportedly armed with an AR-15 semi-automatic rifle sold to civilians and law enforcement agencies - along with a Glock semi-automatic pistol, used for recreational and competition shooting, another pistol in his waistband, one more strapped to his ankle.

"It's a very horrific crime scene...one of the worst that I've seen. It's very bad, said Pittsburgh Public Safety Director Wendell Hissrich.

According to FBI Pittsburgh field office special agent Bob Jones, Bowers opened fire on entering the synagogue, firing on police when engaging them outside.

Tree of Life congregants said a mid-morning bris (circumcision) was taking place when the incident occurred.

Hours before the shootings, Roberts reportedly wrote the following: "I can't sit by and watch my people get slaughtered. Screw your optics, I'm going in."

The incident was one of the deadliest ever for Jewish Americans. US attorney for the Western District of Pennsylvania Scott Brady said "justice in this case will be swift and it will be severe."

Bowers had no previous criminal record. He used the Gab social media site, founded in 2016 as an alternative to Facebook and Twitter, to make anti-Semitic remarks.

Andrew Torba said he founded the site to let users say pretty much anything they wished,

free from constraints. Critics call Gab a “hate-filled echo chamber of racism and conspiracy theories... Twitter for racists.”

In the site’s bio section, Bowers wrote “Jews are the children of Satan.” He accused the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) of bringing “invaders” into the US that “kill our people.”

He faces multiple criminal counts, a US attorney’s statement saying the following:

“On Saturday, October 27, 2018, at 8:05 pm, US Magistrate Judge Robert C. Mitchell signed a criminal complaint charging Robert Bowers of Baldwin, PA with 29 counts, setting forth federal crimes of violence and firearms offenses.”

“The crimes of violence are based upon the federal civil rights laws prohibiting hate crimes. The FBI in Pittsburgh is leading the investigation.”

AG Jeff Sessions said Bowers faces possible capital punishment, a barbaric practice no just societies tolerate. It flagrantly violates the Eight Amendment, prohibiting “cruel and unusual punishments.”

It’s banned in 20 US states and the District of Columbia. Most countries either abolished or rarely impose the death penalty.

Gun violence in America is at epidemic levels, ineffective gun laws and easy access key reasons, including to semi-automatic assault weapons like the one Bowers used.

Incidents like Saturday’s shooting occur with disturbing regularity in America. Among developed nations, the US is by far the most violent – domestically and abroad.

In 2017, US civilian-owned firearms numbered over 120 per 100 residents – well over double any other country.

Yemen, notoriously known as a gun society before the ongoing conflict, ranked second last year with around 53 guns owned per 100 residents.

About 100,000 Americans are gun violence victims annually – countless others irreparably harmed. Nothing is done to curb or prevent what’s shocking and intolerable.

Federal as well as most state and local regulations are weak and ineffective. Inner city and other communities nationwide are unsafe.

Gun violence touches every segment of society – occurring on streets, in homes, at work, in schools, at shopping areas, and numerous other locations – including in places of worship.

It’s just a matter of time before another bloody incident like Pittsburgh’s occurs – because nothing is done to prevent them.

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