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POLITICS | ELECTIONS

Trump Rally Shooting Marks Dark Day in American Politics: 'It Was Mayhem'

Incident is being investigated as an assassination attempt; one spectator was killed, as well as the suspected shooter

By *Ken Thomas*, *Kris Maher*, *Alex Leary*,
John McCormick, *Vivian Salama* and *Sadie Gurman*

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BUTLER, Pa.—Donald Trump was less than 10 minutes into his campaign rally Saturday, going over his typical points about curbing illegal immigration, when he came close to losing his life in what authorities are investigating as an assassination attempt.

“Look what happened to our country,” the former Republican president said from his lectern, gazing at a giant video screen displaying a chart he wanted to talk about. “If you wanna really see something that’s sad, take a look at what happened—”

Then, in midsentence, the sound of gunfire—*pop, pop*—pierced the hot air at 6:15 p.m. Eastern time. Trump put his hand to his right ear and dove to the floor of the elevated stage he was speaking from.

Pop. Pop.

“Get down, get down, get down,” a U.S. Secret Service agent shouted, as his colleagues rushed to Trump to blanket his body with their own. Shrieks and screams filled the rally site, a fairground some 35 miles north of Pittsburgh.

Pop. Pop. Pop.



Former President Trump reacts as gunshots rang out minutes into his speech. He later said a bullet had pierced the upper part of his right ear. PHOTO: BRENDAN MCDERMID/REUTERS



Members of the crowd take cover after shots were fired during former President Trump's campaign rally on Saturday. PHOTO: EVAN VUCCI/ASSOCIATED PRESS

A shooter was firing from an elevated position outside the rally venue. Witnesses and law enforcement said he was on a roof. A Secret Service sniper, on another roof, was seen over Trump's shoulder as he spoke. The sniper peered into the scope of his rifle and fired back.

Surrounded by agents, Trump was led away. "Wait, wait, wait," he said from the stage, then raised his fist and pumped it several times, blood dripping from his ear and face. The crowd behind him stood up, cheering. Others remained crouched, terrified in the unfolding chaos. Law enforcement officers wearing helmets and carrying rifles walked across the stage.

"Let me get my shoes," Trump said several times after standing back up. As he was about to leave the stage the crowd started chanting "USA! USA!"

The shooting marked a stunning, dark day in American politics, certain to further alter the contours of an already heated and drama-filled presidential race. One rally goer was killed and two others were critically injured.

“This evening we had what we’re calling an assassination attempt against our former president Donald Trump,” said Kevin Rojek, FBI special agent in charge in Pittsburgh.

After he was taken offstage, Trump was rushed to a nearby medical facility, and his campaign said he was fine.

Authorities later identified Thomas Matthew Crooks, 20, as the suspect killed by the Secret Service. He had lived in Bethel Park, Pa., about an hour’s drive south of Butler.

Investigators struggled to identify him in part because he wasn’t carrying any ID. They used DNA, photographs and other information to confirm who he was.

Authorities at the scene recovered an AR-style rifle that law-enforcement officials believe the gunman fired from a rooftop outside the rally.

The suspected gunman fired from an elevated position outside of the rally



Sources: Secret Service, staff reports; Maxar (photo)

At 8:42 p.m. ET, Trump posted on his Truth Social platform, thanking the Secret Service and other law enforcement for the rapid response. He offered condolences to the family of the spectator who was killed and those injured, writing: “It is incredible that such an act can take place in our Country.”

“Nothing is known at this time about the shooter, who is now dead,” Trump continued. “I was shot with a bullet that pierced the upper part of my right ear. I knew immediately that something was wrong in that I heard a whizzing sound, shots, and immediately felt the

bullet ripping through the skin. Much bleeding took place, so I realized then what was happening. GOD BLESS AMERICA!”



Secret Service agents shielding an injured former President Trump behind the lectern. PHOTO: ANNA MONEYMAKER/GETTY IMAGES



Police snipers after gunshots rang out at former President Trump's campaign rally on Saturday. PHOTO: GENE J. PUSKAR/ASSOCIATED PRESS

The shooting took place just ahead of the Republican National Convention in Milwaukee, Wis., set to start Monday and where Trump is scheduled to accept the GOP presidential nomination for the third consecutive time.

“President Trump looks forward to joining you all in Milwaukee as we proceed with our convention to nominate him,” his top campaign advisers, Susie Wiles and Chris LaCivita, said in a statement. Trump has been planning to unveil his choice for running mate and had signaled he wanted to do it during the convention for maximum attention.

“There is no place in America for this kind of violence,” President Biden, Trump's rival, said during a hastily arranged appearance from Delaware. “It's sick.”

Biden spoke with Trump on Saturday night, the White House said. Biden is also expected to receive an updated briefing from Homeland Security and law-enforcement officials Sunday morning.

Attorney General Merrick Garland promised to bring the full force of the Justice Department to the investigation, calling the shooting “an attack on our democracy.”

The drama in western Pennsylvania transpired in a setting not uncommon for Trump rallies: small-town America.

Butler has a population of about 13,500. Thousands of people showed up and waited for hours in 90-degree temperatures for Trump to arrive. The former president walked on stage, as he always does, to the song “God Bless The USA” and launched into his speech.

“This is a big crowd, this is a big, big beautiful crowd,” he said to raucous cheers. People behind him held signs that read, “Joe Biden You’re Fired.” He promised to take back the White House and railed against illegal immigrants. “We have criminals, we have drug dealers, we have people that should not be here.”

Trump had been speaking for approximately 6 minutes and 20 seconds when the shooting began.

“It was mayhem. It was quite violent,” said Rep. Dan Meuser (R., Pa.) who was sitting in the front row with other politicians. “People started panicking, they were crying, they were worried about the president, they were worried about their kids.”

Meuser said that people stayed low on the ground for roughly 10 minutes, helpless, emotions running high. “Some of us were very angry; we wanted to get out of there and help,” he said.

“I saw Trump go down but then I saw him get up and he raised his hand that he was OK,” said Mark McEvoy, 50, of Weirton, W.Va, who was in attendance. McEvoy said he thought he heard between 8 and 10 shots.

Blake Marnell, a California delegate from San Diego set to attend the coming Republican convention, said he was attending roughly his 40th Trump rally and thought at first it might be a prank. He ducked down with others in the crowd when he realized it was gunfire.

Marnell, 59, said he was “tremendously relieved” that the former president appeared to be OK. “He left the stage defiantly,” Marnell said. “He raised his fist. He wanted us to know he’s still there.”

Benjamin Maser, a 41-year-old welder who was listening to the rally from just outside the venue, said he saw a man standing on the roof of a building and then cross from one side to the other. He said he didn't see a gun but told a police officer anyway because he thought it looked suspicious.



Benjamin Maser said he told police he saw a man standing on the roof of a building and then cross from one side to the other. He took a photo with his phone of officers standing over the man.

KRIS MAHER/WSJ

A few minutes later, Maser said he heard gunfire, and then saw police on the roof. He took a photo with his phone of officers standing over the man.

"I witnessed the dead body," Maser said, still shaken by the event as he stood in the parking lot of a nearby store where multiple police cars had blocked off the roads.

As people flooded out of the venue, Maser said he only learned that Trump had been shot when he went back to his home 2 miles away. "It's a shame that this is where we're at in the country right now," he said.

Texas Agriculture Commissioner Sid Miller, who attended the rally as part of an RV tour to campaign for Trump, was standing in the front row when the shots rang out. The blasts weren't very loud, so Miller initially thought they could be balloons or firecrackers, before he saw Trump get hit.

"He went down like a rock, which he was probably trained to do," Miller said.

The commissioner said he stayed standing, searching for the shooter, but never saw him. But he did see someone in the crowd behind him who had been shot, he said, learning later that the individual had been killed.

“I hope it’s the only assassination attempt I get to witness,” Miller said. “I don’t know what the fallout of this will be, I’m just glad he’s OK. Pray for the country.”



Trump supporters embrace after the former president was rushed away from the campaign rally. PHOTO: GENE J. PUSKAR/ASSOCIATED PRESS



Law enforcement officers gather at the campaign rally site in Butler, Pa. PHOTO: EVAN VUCCI/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Though law enforcement gave no motive late Saturday, some of Trump’s former rivals for the Republican nomination quickly suggested the shooting was the culmination of the left’s hostility toward Trump.

“Today is not just some isolated incident,” wrote Sen. J.D. Vance (R., Ohio), who is on Trump’s vice president shortlist. “The central premise of the Biden campaign is that President Donald Trump is an authoritarian fascist who must be stopped at all costs. That rhetoric led directly to President Trump’s attempted assassination.”

The image of the defiant Trump, bloodied, fist raised and standing below a giant American flag, instantly became a rallying cry for his supporters. “This is the fighter America needs!” wrote his son, Eric, on X.

Many called for calm. “There is absolutely no place for political violence in our democracy,” former President Barack Obama said. “Although we don’t yet know exactly what happened, we should all be relieved that former President Trump wasn’t seriously hurt, and use this moment to recommit ourselves to civility and respect in our politics. Michelle and I are wishing him a quick recovery.”

—*Natalie Andrews, Elizabeth Findell, Catherine Lucey and Tarini Parti contributed to this article.*

Write to Ken Thomas at ken.thomas@wsj.com, Alex Leary at alex.leary@wsj.com, Vivian Salama at vivian.salama@wsj.com and Sadie Gurman at sadie.gurman@wsj.com