

Manhunt for US executive's killer becomes a search for motive

Oliver Barnes, Zehra Munir and Aiden Reiter Dec 10, 2024 – 4.41pm

New York | Luigi Mangione's charge of murdering a top UnitedHealth Group executive ended a five-day manhunt. Now a social media trawl is under way to piece together clues the suspect left – and find his motive.

Late on Monday (Tuesday AEDT), New York prosecutors [charged the 26-year-old from Maryland](#) with last Wednesday's killing of Brian Thompson in New York City.



Arrest photo of Luigi Mangione, a suspect in the fatal shooting of UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson. AP

Mr. Mangione, a software engineering graduate from the University of Pennsylvania, had been detained earlier in the day in Altoona, Pennsylvania. He was carrying a three-page, handwritten manifesto outlining “some ill will towards corporate America”, according to Joseph Kenny, the New York Police Department’s chief of detectives.

“These parasites had it coming” and “I do apologise for any strife and trauma, but it had to be done” were among the lines in the manifesto.

The suspect appeared in a Pennsylvania court late on Monday to be charged on five counts, including forgery and possession of a firearm. NYPD detectives travelled to Pennsylvania to interview him, Mr. Kenny said.

The killing of the executive during a busy rush-hour morning in Midtown, Manhattan last week has gripped America – and jolted US companies into [bolstering the security](#) of their high-ranking executives.

It has also fostered a morbid wave of admiration for the alleged killer among people with anti-capitalist views or aggrieved with the country’s costly and often capricious healthcare system.

“The suspect has become a meme that channels widespread grievances with the healthcare industry and dark humour to legitimise targeted violence,” said Alex Goldenberg, a senior adviser to Rutgers University’s Network Contagion Research Institute, which specialises in researching ideologically motivated threats.



Altoona Police officer Tyler Frye, centre, speaks during a press conference regarding the arrest of suspect Luigi Mangione. AP

People who knew Mr. Mangione described a kind young man who had been struggling personally.

A friend from high school said Mr. Mangione had been “having issues with painkillers”, had lost contact with many close friends, and was rumoured to be “entirely estranged from his family, and was not speaking with them”.

“I had not realised how bad it was,” he said.

Mr. Mangione’s family issued a statement late on Monday sent out by Maryland delegate Nino Mangione, Luigi’s cousin: “Our family is shocked and devastated by Luigi’s arrest,” the family said. “We offer our prayers to the family of Brian Thompson, and we ask people to pray for all involved.”

Mr. Mangione had posted about mental health on X, including a summary of social psychologist Jonathan Haidt’s book *The Anxious Generation*. Earlier this year, he referred to a quote sometimes attributed to Indian philosopher Jiddu Krishnamurti: “It is no measure of good health to be well adjusted to a profoundly sick society.”

Online, the killing has taken on a more political meaning. On X and TikTok, videos surfaced of people dressing like the alleged killer. Others declared his name to be “Robert Paulson”, a reference to the cult anti-consumerist film *Fight Club*.

The killing – and the country’s gruesome fascination with it – marked another example of violence moving to the centre of American discourse, and followed a presidential election campaign marred by two assassination attempts on Donald Trump.

Robert Pape, professor of political science at the University of Chicago, said: “Our country is experiencing a slippery slope where the erosion of norms against political violence on one issue can spill over onto other issues.”

With the murder of Mr. Thompson, “a threshold was broken”, he said, noting violent attacks against the commercial sector had been rare.

Online, the man police connected with the brutal killing of a father of two gained new popularity.

Mr. Mangione’s X account had jumped from just a few hundred followers to more than 200,000 by Monday evening. Beneath photos on what appeared to be his Facebook and Instagram accounts – both no longer accessible – some replies praised his alleged violence. Some commenters called him a “king” and demanded police “free him”.

The support for Mr. Mangione follows other incidences of vigilantism in recent years. They included Kyle Rittenhouse, who won support from Trump and others after he shot dead two anti-racism protesters in 2020, and Daniel Penny, a former US marine who was found not guilty on Monday in the fatal choking of a homeless man on a New York subway car in 2023.

Online commentary under Mr. Mangione's name pointed to a fascination with countercultural violence. On Goodreads, he left a review for a book written by domestic terrorist Theodore Kaczynski, the "Unabomber" who killed three people and injured many others using letter bombs before his arrest in 1996.

"It's easy to quickly and thoughtlessly write this off as the manifesto of a lunatic, in order to avoid facing some of the uncomfortable problems it identifies," said the review. The Unabomber "[had] the balls to recognise that peaceful protest has gotten us absolutely nowhere", Mr. Mangione added, quoting a comment he had seen online.

Social commenters said Mr. Mangione's arrest would prompt wider debate about younger men and violence.

Scott Galloway, a marketing professor at New York University's Stern School of Business, was one of just 76 users followed by Mr. Mangione on X. Professor Galloway said: "We knew this was going to inspire a dialogue around healthcare and claims in the US, but what this will also inspire is a dialogue around the state of young men ... if the alleged suspect appears to have gone from having everything going for him to becoming overcome by a murderous rage."

Isaias Jacinto, who lived in the same dormitory as Mr. Mangione during their first year at the University of Pennsylvania, recalled an "intelligent and well-rounded" classmate. "We never got much into politics, but he was clearly a thoughtful guy," Mr. Jacinto said.

One image on his X account showed an X-ray scan of a spine with four nails inserted in it – part of what two experts told the *Financial Times* was likely a lumbar spine fusion procedure to relieve and restore nerve function after a lower back injury.

Mr. Mangione, who hailed from a wealthy Maryland family, graduated as a valedictorian from a \$US38,000-a-year (\$59,000-a-year) high school in the state.

Ed Davis, former Boston police commissioner who now runs a private security company, said he was alarmed that someone who appeared so normal online had been charged in connection with a brutal murder.

But he was also taken aback by the outpouring of admiration and sympathy for Mr. Mangione online. "We're a short step from chaos if you start to support people who are working outside of the system of justice and the rule of law," he said.

Ed: It is completely delusional to suggest that people accept the way society is run without protest, eventually resulting in violence. Any level of critical investigation shows that the public has no voice at all in the operation of the country and are largely ignored. When they do protest, they are criticized as being uneducated, uniformed, ignorant, garbage, deplorable, that they fail to see what they are told to see, and the massive imbalance of wealth is their fault. You have a completely unaccountable military instigating wars all over the world, idiots suggesting the police be defunded, and wages suppressed by a massive inflow of illegal aliens, and governments that endorse and support suppression of their citizens by arrests, jail, denial of free speech and independent media, and an Orwellian attempt at propaganda.

The only people that are protected by these actions are elected officials, bureaucrats who leech off the public purse and corporations that maximize profit at the expense of employees and the nation.

Not one company that moved to China or other low wage countries was compelled to do so by anything other than greed. Apple, which got everything from America, including the mouse and the WYSIWYG interface (from Xerox) moved its money to avoid taxes to Ireland and a significant amount of manufacturing to China and other low-cost nations. Governments are quickly getting to the point that they are going to have to start killing and jailing their own people to maintain power or recognize their failures.