

National Report

Search continues for gunman who killed 5 people

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Associated Press

CLEVELAND, TEXAS >> A Texas man went next door with a rifle and fatally shot five of his neighbors, including an 8-year-old boy, after they asked him to stop firing rounds in his yard because they were trying to sleep, authorities said Saturday.

The suspect, identified as 38-year-old Francisco Oropeza, remained at large more than 18 hours after the shooting and authorities warned that he might still be armed. The attack happened just before midnight Friday near the town of Cleveland, north of Houston, on a street where some residents say it is not uncommon to hear neighbors unwind by firing off guns.

San Jacinto County Sheriff Greg Capers said Oropeza used an AR-style rifle, and as the search for him dragged into Saturday evening, authorities had widened their efforts to as far as "10 to 20 miles" from the murder scene. He said Oropeza might still have a weapon but that he believes authorities have the rifle used in the shooting.

Capers said they found clothes and a phone while combing a rural area that includes dense layers of forest but that tracking dogs had lost the scent.

"He could be anywhere now," Capers said.

Capers said the victims were between the ages of 8 and 31 years old and that all were believed to be from Honduras. All were shot "from the neck up," he said.

The attack was the latest act of gun violence in what has been a record pace of mass shootings in the U.S. so far this year, some of which have also involved semi-automatic rifles.

The mass killings have played out in a variety of places — a Nashville school, a Kentucky bank, a Southern California dance hall, and now a rural Texas neighborhood inside a single-story home.

Capers said there were 10 people in the house — some of whom had just moved there earlier in the week — but that no one else was injured. He said two of the victims were found in a bedroom laying over two children in an apparent attempt to shield them.

A total of three children found covered in blood in the home were taken to a hospital but found to be uninjured, Capers said.

FBI spokesperson Christina Garza said investigators do not believe everyone at the home were members of a single family. The victims were identified as Sonia Argentina Guzman, 25; Diana Velazquez Alvarado, 21; Julisa Molina Rivera, 31; Jose Jonathan Casarez, 18; and Daniel Enrique Laso, 8.

The confrontation began after the neighbors walked up to the fence and asked the suspect to stop shooting rounds, Capers said. The suspect responded by telling them that it was his property, Capers said, and one person in the house got a video of the suspect walking up to the front door with the rifle.

Rene Arevalo Sr., who lives a few houses down, said he heard gunshots around midnight but didn't think anything of it.

"It's a normal thing people do around here, especially on Fridays after work," Arevalo said. "They get home and start drinking in their backyards and shooting out there."

Capers said his deputies



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Rene Arevalo Sr.
He and his family live near the site of Friday night's mass shooting

had been to Oropeza's home at least once before and spoken with him about "shooting his gun in the yard." It was not clear whether any action was taken at the time. At a news conference Saturday evening, the sheriff said firing a gun on your own property can be illegal, but he did not say whether Oropeza had previously broken the law.

Capers said the new arrivals in the home had moved from Houston earlier in the week, but he said he did not know whether they were planning to stay there.

Ramiro Guzman, whose sister, Sonia Guzman, was killed, said in a phone interview with The New York Times that after his brother-in-law, Wilson Garcia, asked Oropeza to stop shooting near their house, he sensed danger and asked his sister to flee.

Sonia Guzman told him that she did not think Oropeza would hurt them and stayed put. But seconds later, the gunman shot her and quickly moved to the living room where he fatally shot Guzman's nephew.

Guzman said he quickly grabbed his wife and 6-month-old son and hid in a closet as he heard the gunman continue to shoot family members. He tried calling police, but service was bad, so he called his aunt and asked her to call law enforcement.

"I could not get a hold of the police," Guzman said in tears. "And he was killing my family."

Across the U.S. since Jan. 1, there have been at least 18 shootings that left four or more people dead, according to a database maintained by The Associated Press and USA Today, in partnership with Northeastern University. The violence is sparked by a range of motives: murder-suicides and domestic violence; gang retaliation; school shootings; and workplace vendettas.

Texas has confronted multiple mass shootings in recent years, including last year's attack at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde; a racist attack at an El Paso Walmart in 2019; and a gunman opening fire at a church in the tiny town of Sutherland Springs in 2017.

A few months ago, Arevalo said Oropeza threatened to kill his dog after it got loose in the neighborhood and chased the pit bull in his truck.

"I tell my wife all the time, 'Stay away from the neighbors. Don't argue with them. You never know how they're going to react,'" Arevalo said. "I tell her that because Texas is a state where you don't know who has a gun and who is going to react that way."

The New York Times contributed to this report.



(DAVENPORT, IOWA) QUAD CITY TIMES / ASSOCIATED PRESS

Cities face swelling river

The surging Mississippi River was cresting in Iowa on Saturday as melting snow from Minnesota and Wisconsin continues to push up river levels, the National Weather Service said. Officials in towns along the river have said they are optimistic they will escape severe flooding thanks to improved prevention measures. Kayakers paddled along River Drive as sand barriers protected downtown Davenport, Iowa, from the rising river.

BRIEFLY

Journalists' plight adds a somber tone to dinner

WASHINGTON >> The White House Correspondents' Association dinner — known for its fun albeit ferocious jabs at Washington — took a more solemn tone this year as what many see as the brazen attack on press freedom across the globe was on painful display.

Upon arriving at the Washington Hilton on Saturday, President Joe Biden and first lady Jill Biden met privately with the parents of Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich, who has been imprisoned in Russia since March. He was charged with spying, despite strong denials from his employer and the U.S. government. Some guests wore buttons with "Free Evan" printed on them.

Also among the 2,600 people attending the gala was Debra Tice, the mother of Austin Tice, who has not been heard from since disappearing at a checkpoint in Syria in 2012. U.S. officials say they operate under the assumption that he is alive and are working to try to bring him home.

The Bidens also made a beeline for Brittney Griner, the WNBA star and Olympic gold medalist who was detained in Russia for nearly 10 months last year before her release in a prisoner swap.

Actor and former California

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger opened the dinner with a pre-taped video about the importance of a free and independent press. Comedian Roy Wood Jr., a correspondent for "The Daily Show," was the featured entertainer.

Texas city overwhelmed by sudden migrant surge

BROWNSVILLE, TEXAS >> Shelters in a Texas city struggled to find space Saturday for migrants who authorities say have abruptly begun crossing by the thousands from Mexico, testing a stretch of the U.S. border that is typically equipped to handle large groups of people fleeing poverty and violence.

The pace of arrivals in Brownsville appeared to catch the city on the southernmost tip of Texas off guard, stretching social services and putting an overnight shelter in an uncommon position of turning people away. Officials say more than 15,000 migrants, mostly from Venezuela, have illegally crossed the river near Brownsville recently.

The reason for the increase was not immediately clear. Gloria Chavez, chief of the U.S. Border Patrol Rio Grande Valley Sector, said migrants have been frustrated by relying on a glitch-plagued government app that can allow them to seek asylum at a

port of entry. Some migrants who crossed last week cited other motivators, including cartel threats that immediately preceded the sudden increment.

New York officials order closure of 4 parking sites

NEW YORK >> After the deadly collapse of a parking structure in lower Manhattan, New York City building officials swept through dozens of parking garages and ordered four of them to immediately shutter because of structural defects that "deteriorated to the point where they were now posing an immediate threat to public safety."

Two of the parking garages have apartments above them — a 25-story high-rise in downtown Manhattan and an eight-story building in Chinatown — but officials said the residential areas appear to be in no danger.

City officials directed the owners of the parking facilities to make immediate repairs to corroded concrete and other damage.

Inspections were launched soon after a three-story stand-alone parking structure, about a century old, imploded into shards of concrete and twisted metal on April 18, crushing its manager to death.

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