

U.S.

Las Vegas Shooter Who Targeted 2017 Festival Was Angry at Casinos, FBI Documents Show

Report cited ‘no clear single motivating factor’ why Stephen Paddock opened fire on a country music festival, killing 58 people



A memorial site in November 2017 for victims of the shooting, the worst in modern U.S. history.

PHOTO: MARK RALSTON/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE/GETTY IMAGES

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New details about the 64-year-old gambler who killed 58 Las Vegas concertgoers and wounded hundreds more on Oct. 1, 2017, were revealed in a trove of documents released by the Federal Bureau of Investigation last week.

The documents don’t answer the enduring mystery of Stephen Paddock’s motive for carrying out the deadliest mass shooting in modern American history. Paddock killed himself before he could be apprehended. The documents include the most detailed accounting of the gunman’s gambling habits and shed new light on what was going on in his mind prior to the attack.

A fellow gambler told the FBI that Paddock had said he was “very upset at the way casinos were treating him and other high rollers,” noting that casinos had reduced the number of perks they gave to VIP customers in the years leading up to the shooting. The stress could “easily be what caused Paddock to ‘snap,’” the gambler said.



A police photo shows Stephen Paddock’s 32nd-floor room of the Mandalay Bay hotel in Las Vegas after the shooting.

PHOTO: LAS VEGAS METROPOLITAN POLICE DE/ASSOCIATED PRESS

A yearlong investigation by a panel convened by the FBI's Behavioral Analysis Unit found "no clear single motivating factor" for why Paddock opened fire on a country music festival from his 32nd-floor suite at the Mandalay Bay Resort & Casino. In its 2019 report, the panel said there was no indication that he was motivated by a grievance against "any specific casino, hotel, or institution in Las Vegas." The aging Paddock wanted to kill himself and sought infamy by killing as many people as he could, the report said.

The FBI declined to comment on the newly public documents, which were released in response to a public records request filed by The Wall Street Journal.

Paddock gambled hundreds of thousands of dollars at MGM Resorts properties and other Las Vegas casinos in the decade before the shooting, according to records released by Nevada gambling regulators in the newly released FBI files. He was known to play video-poker in hourslong sessions. In 2006, for example, he wagered more than \$945,000 and won slightly more than he lost, profiting by making about \$4,300, according to one casino report.

Paddock was friendly, but only wanted to talk about gambling, a woman who worked at the Tropicana Las Vegas told the FBI. She said that Paddock stayed at the Tropicana for two days less than a month before the attack and lost \$38,000.

The documents include statements from acquaintances of Paddock, an accountant who made much of his money by investing in real estate. One man who worked with Paddock and stayed in touch over the years said he was "mad at the system" and was fascinated by the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing of a federal building that killed 168 people. But the man said he didn't expect Paddock to "go out like that."

The documents aid in understanding Paddock but don't reveal a singular motive, said Russell Palarea, chief executive of the threat-assessment firm Operational Psychology Services. Paddock requested a hotel room overlooking the outdoor Lollapalooza music festival in Chicago that same summer, an indication that his anger wasn't solely focused on casinos or Las Vegas, he said.

A 10-month probe by the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department previously turned up no evidence of Paddock's motives after interviews with his relatives, girlfriend, ex-wife, doctor and casino hosts, as well as searches of his computers, phones and internet history. He left no statement or suicide note, wasn't affiliated with a terrorist group and had no mental-health diagnosis that might explain his actions.

Sheriff Joseph Lombardo, the former head of the Las Vegas police, said upon the release of the department's final report in 2018 that Paddock's gambling losses may have been a factor; his bank accounts dwindled from \$2.1 million to \$530,000 in the two years before the attack. But the sheriff said investigators weren't able to "definitively answer the why."

—Cameron McWhirter contributed to this article.

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