

Luigi Mangione's Anger Wasn't Neatly Ideological

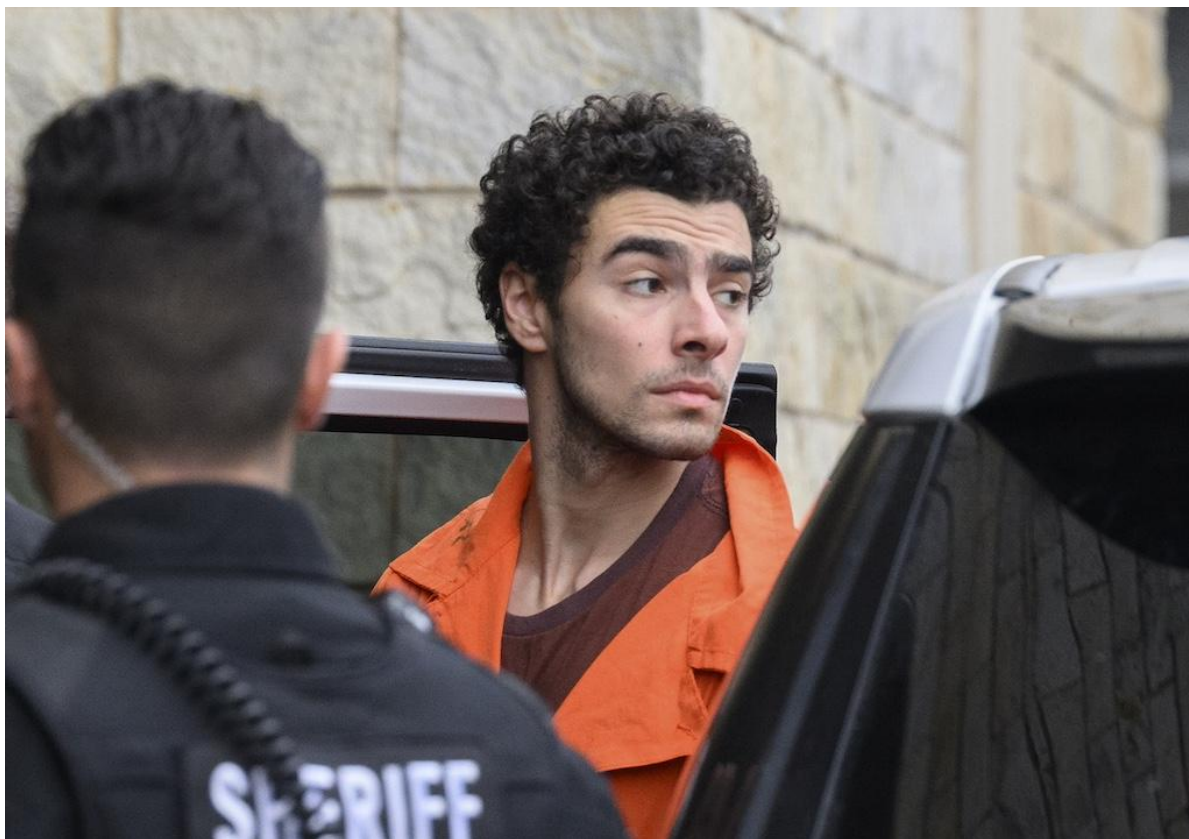
Far from an ideologue, Luigi Mangione seems more akin to an average swing voter: holding a hodgepodge of political views yet resolutely enraged by the barbarities of a for-profit health care system.

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Suspected shooter Luigi Mangione is led into the Blair County Courthouse for an extradition hearing December 10, 2024, in Hollidaysburg, Pennsylvania. (Jeff Swensen / Getty Images)

The profile and background of Luigi Mangione, the man accused of killing UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson last week, is coming into sharper and sharper focus. For one, after days of speculation, we can now more confidently say the motive was health care-related, beyond the words “deny,” “defend,” and “depose” written on the bullet shell casings found at the scene. Mangione had a two-page statement on his person when he was arrested, which complained that “the US has the #1 most expensive healthcare system in the world, yet we rank roughly #42 in life expectancy,” and that companies like UnitedHealthcare “have simply gotten too powerful, and they continue to abuse our country for immense profit.”

A number of irresponsible voices have jumped on details like this to declare that he is a “leftist” and even “clearly a fan of” Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. Mangione had gripes with the US health care system and private insurers, the Left criticize both of those things; ergo, he must be of the Left — this seems to be the extent of the sophistication going in this analysis.

But a scouring of Mangione’s digital footprint shows the reality is very different, and much more interesting. Far from a stereotype of a Zoomer leftist radicalized to violence by BreadTube and Sanders that obsesses the conservative imagination, Mangione appears to have been, like many Americans, someone with a hodgepodge of views and political beliefs that don’t neatly map onto any one category on the political spectrum.

All too many atomized Americans have taken up arms and carried out shocking acts of violence over the past decades, usually without anything more than the desire to harm and kill for their own sake. Mangione might be a sign of something new: a political moderate with no movement behind him, no history of activism, and no strong ideology, seemingly radicalized by a failing system — and led to believe murder is the way to fix it.

The Swing Voter as Shooter

If you wanted, you could cherry-pick your way through the digital trail Mangione left behind him to make his politics look like whatever you’d like. Want him to be a left-winger? You could point to the part of his now-inaccessible Goodreads account, where he “liked” a Kurt Vonnegut quote about how “poor Americans are urged to hate themselves,” and where he professed interest in reading Michelle Alexander’s *The New Jim Crow* and *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. You could even underline his distaste for Jordan Peterson, who he said “overcomplicates everything he says aloud, wasting everyone’s mental bandwidth in having to decipher it.”

Want him to be a radical environmentalist? Highlight his five-star rating of Dr Seuss’s environmental fable *The Lorax*, his interest in reading climate crisis books like *Merchants of Doubt* and *How to Avoid Climate Disaster*, or his retweets noting coal’s contribution to climate change and celebrating the acquittal of animal rights activists who stole piglets from a farm.

Prefer him as a libertarian tech bro? Well, there are his many tweets and retweets about artificial intelligence (AI) that reflect both awe and concern about the emerging technology. There is the presence of a fawning biography of Elon Musk on his favorite books list, his retweeting of a Peter Thiel talk, or his interest in books about Steve Jobs, start-ups, as well as *Atlas Shrugged*. You might also look to his retweet of an endorsement of billionaire philanthropy, his passion for cellular agriculture (an “unreal opportunity for retail investors”), or his retweet of a thread charging that Ancient Rome fell because it “became an unsustainable welfare state,” turning much of the population into entertainment-addicted parasites.

If you’d like to pin his actions on the men’s rights movement, you could selectively single out a few different data points. Mangione wanted to read *Of Boys and Men: Why the Modern Male Is Struggling, Why It Matters, and What to Do About It*, and retweeted things that could be read as overlapping with that movement: tweets charging that “toxic masculinity is a harmful myth”; lamenting that “it’s sad that the

question of ‘are men important?’ can’t be answered with a simple ‘yes’”; and affirming that “men are made for impossible situations and daring feats” and “born with a heroes [sic] heart,” which “society is trying so hard to quash.”

You could also pin it on the politics of right-leaning podcasts popular with young men. Mangione was into working out and wellness, seemed passionate about psilocybin and other mind-altering substances, was a fan of controversial scientist and podcaster Andrew Huberman — often accused by liberals of, among other things, spreading pseudoscience and anti-vaccine sentiment — and seemed to generally be against COVID lockdown policies. For instance, he retweeted a story about Chinese people rebelling against their country’s “‘zero-Covid’ terror-state” and “reassert[ing] their human dignity in the face of the most dehumanizing machine of control in the world today.”

For those who would like to paint him as a more traditional right-wing reactionary, there’s material for you too. Mangione frequently tweeted and retweeted things critical of wokeness, and was a fan of New York University professor Jonathan Haidt, author of *The Coddling of the American Mind*, a critique of cancel culture that was among Mangione’s “want to read” list. *Mein Kampf* also pops up on that list, if you’re feeling particularly ungenerous.

Then again, you could easily peg him as something much more middle of the road. “I believe this book will go down in history as the most important philosophical text of the early twenty-first century,” Mangione tweeted about Tim Urban’s *What’s Our Problem*, something of a centrist manifesto arguing that tribalism caused by the takeover of political parties by their extremes is the fundamental problem of our era, extolling former New Democrat Coalition chair Rep. Derek Kilmer, and saying things like, “without the burden of rigid attachment to any one ideology, [people] can combine ideas from across the spectrum to form a nimble political superbrain that can respond in nuanced ways to changing times.” He retweeted things about the dangers of political polarization and wanted to read Ezra Klein’s *Why We’re Polarized*.

A Normal American

Mangione, it turns out, has a whole mess of different political opinions (at least as far as we can piece together right now) that make it hard to place him on the typical political compass. He seems to have felt passionately for health, fitness, and hallucinogens and alarm at the dopamine-addicting effects of modern technology and social media. He expressed a not-untroubled interest in the emerging technology of AI. He expressed a dislike of “wokeness” and concern about climate change and food quality; and, ultimately, a hatred of the rapacious health insurance industry. His all-over-the-map politics are, in other words, those of a fairly normal American.

More to the point, he is a normal American who seems to have had his own personal experience with that widely loathed industry. A number of individuals who knew Mangione have now told news outlets and reporters he suffered from serious back pain,

and his Twitter/X banner is an X-ray of what is, presumably, his spine. Several of the books that he listed as wanting to read — *Healing Back Pain*, *Back in Control*, *Do You Really Need Spine Surgery?*, among others — were on that topic. It was a matter for which he appears to have sought advice on Reddit, as reported by *Forbes*, and other posts dug up by CNN show him talking about the debilitating effects the spinal issues and other medical problems had on his life.

Could that be what led him to the view, as laid out in his two-page statement, that health insurers were “parasites,” and that the murder he committed “had to be done” as a way of facing their “corruption and greed” with “brutal honesty”? Clearly, the opinion that an act of shocking violence was his only option was one that had been bubbling up in his mind in the past year.

Internet users have been circulating his February 2024 review of Unabomber Ted Kaczynski’s manifesto, where he called him “a violent individual” who was “rightfully imprisoned,” but nevertheless was still “an extreme political revolutionary” before sharing a quote he said he found “interesting”: about how peaceful protest had been ineffective, and that only “cowards and predators” said that violence didn’t solve anything. He retweeted a parody version of an exchange between Batman and the Joker, one that suggests the superhero is wrong to hold to his famous refusal to kill his nemesis, because it meant condemning “a bunch of innocent families” to death.

It’s not hard to draw the connection between reasoning like this and Mangione’s actions. Of course, unlike with the Joker in the Batman universe, Mangione’s murder of Thompson hasn’t saved any lives, nor will it; it won’t make UnitedHealthcare any more rapacious or lead to the establishment of Medicare for All in the United States. Its only effect has been the death of Thompson.

Something New?

We tend to think of political violence as being committed by zealots: radicals on the extreme end of one or the other half of the political spectrum, whose ideology leads them to carry out acts most people would never contemplate, shooting or bombing to advance the goals of a movement or group. But we’re starting to see in twenty-first-century America violence carried out not by ideological extremists, but by individuals with the profile of your typical swing voter.

The twenty-year-old who nearly killed Donald Trump was similarly alone and all over the political map, donating to a pro-Democratic PAC on the day of Joe Biden’s inauguration before registering as a Republican eight months later, and whose classmates remembered him either not having strong political opinions or being a staunch conservative. The congressional task force investigating his attempted assassination still has no idea why he did what he did.

It remains to be seen if this ends up being a wider trend, of nonideological Americans becoming radicalized and taking up arms to further some kind of political goal,

detached from any wider movement. If so, you can't help but suspect it's a measure of the frustration and hopelessness that every recent US election result seems to highlight, of an unfair and corrupt system that Americans know and feel is failing them, but that seems stubbornly immune to change no matter how they vote or organize.

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The Ted K Archive

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