

Las Vegas Politician Sentenced in Murder of Journalist

In October 2024, a former Las Vegas-area elected official was sentenced to 28 years in Nevada state prison for the first-degree murder of investigative journalist Jeff German. Robert Telles was convicted of stabbing *Las Vegas Review-Journal* reporter Jeff German to death in 2022. German had written articles criticizing Telles' conduct at the Clark County (Nev.) Public Administrator's office and had exposed Telles' extramarital relationship with a coworker.

Las Vegas Review-Journal Executive Editor Glenn Cook said in a statement shortly after Telles' guilty verdict: "Today . . . brought a measure of justice for slain journalists all over the world. Our jobs are increasingly risky and sometimes dangerous. In many countries, the killers of journalists go unpunished. Not so in Las Vegas." For additional coverage of Jeff German's murder, see "Nevada Supreme Court Holds Murdered Journalist's Electronic Devices Are Covered by the State Reporter's Privilege" in the Fall 2023 issue of the *Silha Bulletin*; and *Las Vegas Reporter Murdered; Police Arrest Government Official, Seek Review of Reporter's Files* in "Two American Journalists Killed in Connection with Their Work; Western Journalists Covering Protests in China Detained" in the Fall 2022 issue of the *Silha Bulletin*.

German reported on Telles in a May 16, 2022, article for the *Las Vegas Review-Journal*. At the time, Telles was the Clark County Public Administrator. Prior to his election in 2018, Telles had never served in public office. At the Clark County Public Administrator's office, Telles was paid about \$120,000 per year and oversaw fewer than 10 people. The office primarily handled unclaimed estate and probate cases. Before running the office, Telles was an attorney practicing probate and estate law. German's reporting described the Clark County Public Administrator's office as "mired in turmoil and internal dissension . . . with allegations of emotional stress, bullying and favoritism leading to secret videotaping of the boss and a co-worker outside the office." German interviewed at least six employees, current and former, who described a hostile work environment cultivated by Telles. The employees told German that Telles' "inappropriate relationship" with a staffer had harmed the office's ability to carry out its functions. According to these employees, the staffer with whom Telles had a relationship, who German identified by name in the article, in some cases was

allowed to act beyond her assigned duties because of her favored status with Telles. Animosity over the unfair treatment grew among the staff and led one employee to secretly videotape Telles meeting with the staffer in the back seat of her car to show proof of their relationship. Another employee filed a retaliation complaint with the county against Telles.

Telles blamed “a handful of old-timers” in his office for exaggerating his relationship with the female staffer and making false claims that he mistreated them. “They are unhappy with the way the office has been taken out of their control,” German quoted Telles as saying. “All my new employees are super-happy and everyone’s productive and doing well. We’ve almost doubled productivity in the office.” German’s reporting can be found online at: <https://www.reviewjournal.com/investigations/county-office-in-turmoil-with-secret-video-and-claims-of-bullying-hostility-2577147/>.

German’s story was published shortly before the 2022 primary for County Administrator. Telles faced several challengers in his bid for a second term in office, including one of his subordinates at the County Administrator’s office. After German’s stories were published, county officials hired a consultant to help oversee Telles’ office to ensure that employees were not being mistreated. According to a Sept. 9, 2022 report by the *Associated Press (AP)*, Telles angrily denounced German on Twitter, now X, following the article’s publication, calling German a bully who was “obsessed” with him. Telles ended up finishing last in the June 2022 primary.

In the following weeks, German published several more articles covering Telles and the race for Clark County Public Administrator. Then, on Sept. 4, 2022, the *Las Vegas Review-Journal* reported that German had been found outside his home on September 3, dead of multiple stab wounds. As *CBS News* reported in 2024, police quickly identified Telles as a suspect. Surveillance footage had captured the murder, showing a person wearing an orange shirt and a large straw hat ambushing German as he opened his garage door. Police photos of the suspect’s car showed a Maroon Yukon Denali, identical to one owned by Telles’ wife. The police brought Telles in for questioning, took DNA samples, and then released him. Following a positive DNA match, Telles was arrested after a standoff at his home. A grand jury indicted him for murder several weeks later. The *CBS News* report is available online at: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/jeff-german-slaying-robert-telles-arrest-las-vegas-photos-48-hours/>.

In the AP's Sept. 19, 2022, report, Cook reminisced about German. Though the reporter was aged 69, he never talked about retirement, Cook said. German had joined the *Las Vegas Review-Journal* in 2010 after more than 20 years at the *Las Vegas Sun*. Cook said of German's death: "We'll never forget Jeff. His killing remains an immeasurable loss for his family, friends, colleagues and community, and for journalism itself." Cook also said that there had been talk around the *Review-Journal* office that Telles was "unhinged," but that he had never made any physical threats against German, and German never said he was worried. More about German's work and dedication to exposing corruption in government is available [online](https://apnews.com/article/crime-las-vegas-mass-shooting-organized-government-and-politics-57a029429632d25345236d4ab71ebafb) at: <https://apnews.com/article/crime-las-vegas-mass-shooting-organized-government-and-politics-57a029429632d25345236d4ab71ebafb>.

Telles pleaded not guilty in German's murder. His trial took place in August 2024. At trial, Telles did not invoke his Fifth Amendment right to remain silent. Instead, he testified, denying that he stabbed German to death. "I understand the desire to seek justice and hold somebody accountable for this. But I did not kill Mr. German," Telles said, according to an Aug. 15, 2024, report from the AP. Prosecutors rebutted Telles' testimony with video footage, caught by neighborhood cameras, that showed a maroon SUV leaving Telles' neighborhood and driving near German's home around the time he was killed. The SUV was very similar to the one owned by Telles' wife. The prosecution also brought strong physical evidence against Telles, including his DNA beneath German's fingernails. Authorities also found cut up pieces of a straw hat and athletic shoe at Telles' house, which appeared to be the same garments worn by the figure caught on camera outside German's house. Evidence also showed that Telles' wife sent him a text asking, "Where are you?" at the same time the SUV was spotted outside German's home. Telles told the jury he was out for a walk and at the gym during the time in question.

The state's theory of the case was rooted in revenge — that Telles retaliated because he did not like what German wrote about him. The prosecution asserted that Telles felt German, through his reporting, cost him an elected position. According to an Aug. 28, 2024, report from the AP, the jury deliberated for three days before reaching a guilty verdict. The August 15 AP report is available [online](https://apnews.com/article/vegas-journalist-killed-telles-murder-trial-efd86acb2605829a60bf664a8c7e4ba0) at: <https://apnews.com/article/vegas-journalist-killed-telles-murder-trial-efd86acb2605829a60bf664a8c7e4ba0>. The August 28 AP report is available online at:

<https://apnews.com/article/vegas-journalist-killed-telles-murder-trial-393c5588c1babe5b11ca905363f6a45>.

According to an Oct. 19, 2024 AP report, at Telles' sentencing, Prosecutor Pamela Weckerly told the judge: "This type of violence, this sort of political violence, is unacceptable and dangerous for a community as a whole." The judge sentenced Telles to 28 years, invoking sentencing enhancements for use of a deadly weapon and the victim being older than 60 years of age. These enhancements added eight years to the minimum 20-to-life sentence set by the jury in August. Clark County District Attorney Steve Wolfson told reporters after the sentence was announced: "The judge couldn't sentence him to any more time . . . She gave him the maximum." The AP's account of the sentencing is available online at:

<https://apnews.com/article/vegas-journalist-murder-politician-sentence-485cbc07ec75c22a61abc22bdf8b14>.

Jeff German was the sole journalist killed in the United States in 2022, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ). Killing of journalists in the United States in retaliation for their work is rare; before German's death, eight journalists have been killed in the country since 1992, according to CPJ. The deadliest of these attacks was a shooting at Maryland's *Capital Gazette* in 2018 that left five employees dead. Diana Fuentes, executive director of the organization Investigative Reporters & Editors, said: "Jeff's death is a sobering reminder of the inherent risks of investigative journalism. Journalists do their jobs every day, digging deep to find information the public needs to know and has a right to see." Katherine Jacobsen, CPJ's U.S., Canada, and Caribbean program coordinator told the AP: "Although the jailing of Telles cannot undo Jeff German's murder, it can act as an important deterrent to would-be assailants of journalists." CPJ's tracking of journalist deaths in the U.S. since 1992 is available online at: <https://z.umn.edu/CPJJournalistsDeathsReport>.

For more information on the Maryland *Capital Gazette* shooting, see "Journalists Face Attacks and Threats at Jan. 6, 2021 Insurrection, Prompting Arrests and Investigations; *Capital Gazette* Gunman Receives Maximum Sentence" in the Fall 2021 issue of the *Silha Bulletin*; and Five Newspaper Staff Members Killed, Two Injured in Shooting at Local Maryland Newsroom in "Journalists Face Physical Violence, Other Dangers in the United States and Abroad" in the Summer 2018 issue.

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