

Salman Rushdie 'assassin' won't get fair trial because no Muslims in jury, says lawyer

From [The Telegraph](#)

The man accused of attempting to murder Sir Salman Rushdie cannot receive a fair trial because there are no Muslims in the jury pool, his lawyer has claimed.

Hadi Matar is charged with attempted murder and assault after he stabbed Sir Salman, 77, more than a dozen times moments before he was due to begin a talk on author safety in August 2022. The bloody 27-second attack at the picturesque Chautauqua Institution, in upstate New York, left the Booker Prize winner with a paralysed left hand, damaged liver and blinded him in his right eye.

More than two years after the attack, Sir Salman is expected to come face to face with his attacker during the trial which begins in Chautauqua on Monday.

Mr Matar has pleaded not guilty to the charges, which carry a sentence of up to 25 years in prison.



Hadi Matar is led out of Chautauqua County court on Tuesday after the first day of jury selection Credit: Adrian Kraus

Nathaniel Barone, Mr Matar's lawyer, has said he did not believe his client could have a fair trial in Chautauqua, where the county's 124,000 residents

are more than 80 per cent white.

"Do you know, during jury selection, I didn't have, out of over hundreds of jurors, I didn't have any Muslims, any one of the Muslim religion, I had no one of Middle Eastern descent in that jury pool," Mr Barone told The Telegraph.

"So how is that a fair trial? How is that a trial of Mr Matar's peers," Mr Barone said.

The lawyer had previously attempted to move the trial on the grounds that the high publicity of the case and the lack of diversity in the county meant the defendant could not receive a fair trial. His argument was opposed by district attorney Jason Schmidt and the request was denied by the court.

Mr Schmidt has said he does not believe they will need to delve into discussions about Mr Matar's religious beliefs or his background in this case.

Such arguments will likely be reserved for the case against him on separate federal terrorism charges, in which he is accused of providing "material support and resources" to Iran-

backed militia in Lebanon, between September 2020 and the day of the stabbing.

Mr Barone said the court had picked “some good jurors” who “seem open-minded”, but added that it was an “extremely difficult” case, given thousands of people witnessed the mid-morning attack two years ago.

Mr Barone said his defence would focus on trying to prove his client “had no intent to murder” Sir Salman. “If you can’t get him acquitted, then you look to mitigate... perhaps they may not find him guilty on the attempted murder [charge], but a lesser included assault charge.”

Mr Matar’s defence could be undermined by his previous comments to the New York Post, in which he voiced his dislike for Sir Salman, whom he claimed had “attacked Islam” and was “disingenuous”.

Speaking from prison days after the attack, Mr Matar, 27, said he had only read a couple of pages of The Satanic Verses but had watched videos of Sir Salman on YouTube.

“I don’t like him very much,” he said, adding: “He’s someone who attacked Islam, he attacked their beliefs, [the belief systems.](#)”