



## Administrative Office of the Courts

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Supreme Court upholds a man's convictions for a murder at an Albuquerque motel

SANTA FE – The state Supreme Court today affirmed a Bernalillo County man's convictions for a fatal shooting in 2021 at an Albuquerque motel and conspiring to rob the victim.

In a unanimous opinion written by Justice Michael E. Vigil, the Court rejected arguments by the defendant, Christopher Maldonado, that there was not enough evidence to convict him and that the jury was confused by the instructions it received from the trial court.

“Viewing the evidence in its entirety, a reasonable jury could have found that Defendant was the masked individual who shot Victim. We conclude that the State presented sufficient evidence to allow a rational trier of fact to find Defendant guilty of first-degree felony murder beyond a reasonable doubt,” the Court wrote.

Maldonado was sentenced to life in prison for the murder plus an additional three years for conspiracy to commit armed robbery.

The victim, Rony Carrera-Flores, was staying at the motel with a friend, Rosalva Martinez, after his car broke down while transporting methamphetamine and fentanyl from California to the Midwest. Carrera-Flores partied with a group of people also at the motel and talked with them about the drugs.

Early one morning, a woman knocked on Carrera-Flores' motel door and asked to use his cell phone. She called Maldonado, who entered the room a few minutes later with a gun. His face was covered with a bandana. He pointed the gun at the victim and demanded everything he had. Carrera-Flores reached for the gun and was shot in the face. Maldonado and the woman, Monique Montano, fled.

Martinez ran outside and saw Maldonado talking with one of the people who Carrera-Flores had partied with. Maldonado and Montano got into a car and left.

Police later identified Montano from surveillance camera footage. She entered into a plea agreement with prosecutors and testified about conspiring with Maldonado and his ex-wife to rob Carrera-Flores.

In his appeal, Maldonado contended that Montano’s testimony as an accomplice to the crime was biased and not sufficient evidence to prove his guilt. The Court disagreed, explaining that there was other evidence to corroborate her account of the crime. The justices noted that police had gathered evidence about the planned robbery from several individuals and that Martinez had overheard Maldonado referred to as “Night Owl,” which was his nickname.

The jury initially found Maldonado guilty of second-degree murder and other crimes. The trial court judge asked if the jury had addressed as required an alternative count of felony murder, which is a murder committed during the commission of a felony. The jury foreperson responded that jurors had “carried out their deliberations but should probably take a minute to just make sure everybody is on the same page.” The jury returned a few minutes later with the felony murder guilty verdict.

The Court stated that the jury “was properly instructed on the essential elements of each of the crimes Defendant was charged with committing. There is simply no indication that the jury was confused by the substance of the instructions. Rather, the jury’s confusion appears to have been limited to the verdict forms it needed to sign.”

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To read the decision in *State v. Maldonado*, No. S-1-SC-40588, please visit the New Mexico Compilation Commission's website using the following link:

<https://nmonesource.com/nmos/nmsc/en/item/538157/index.do>