

SUPREME COURT OF ARKANSAS

Israel Estrada Cannalte v. State of Arkansas

2026 Ark. 102 (2026) · No. CR-25-534 · Decided May 28, 2026

SUMMARY

The Arkansas Supreme Court affirmed Israel Estrada Cannalte’s conviction for first-degree murder and life sentence. The court held that substantial evidence supported the jury’s finding that Cannalte purposely caused Maximo Hernandez’s death, relying on the nature of the wounds, cell-tower evidence, DNA evidence, Cannalte’s injuries, and statements about his whereabouts.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	Supreme Court of Arkansas
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Shawn A. Womack; Cody Kees
JURISDICTION	Supreme Court of Arkansas
DECIDED	May 28, 2026
DOCKET	CR-25-534
DISPOSITION	affirmed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Cannalte appealed his conviction for first-degree murder and life sentence, challenging the sufficiency of the evidence and the circuit court's denial of his directed-verdict motion.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	A directed-verdict motion is a challenge to the sufficiency of the evidence. The Supreme Court reviews whether substantial evidence supports the conviction, viewing the evidence in the light most favorable to the State and leaving witness credibility and conflicting proof to the jury. Circumstantial evidence must be consistent with the defendant's guilt and inconsistent with every other reasonable hypothesis.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Published Arkansas Supreme Court opinion
PARTIES	Israel Estrada Cannalte v. State of Arkansas

TOPICS

- criminal procedure
- evidence
- standard of review
- appellate procedure
- burden of proof

PRACTICE AREAS

criminal law

criminal procedure

appellate practice

evidence

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether substantial evidence supported the jury's finding that Cannalte purposely caused Hernandez's death.
2. Whether the circuit court erred by denying Cannalte's directed-verdict motion.

HOLDINGS

1. The evidence was sufficient for the jury to find beyond speculation or conjecture that Cannalte purposely caused Hernandez's death.
2. Circumstantial evidence need not eliminate every conceivable hypothesis consistent with innocence; it need only exclude every other reasonable hypothesis, and whether it does so is for the jury.
3. The circuit court properly denied Cannalte's directed-verdict motion because substantial evidence supported the conviction.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“Substantial evidence is that which is of sufficient force and character that it will, with reasonable certainty, compel a conclusion one way or the other, without resorting to speculation or conjecture.” (at 3)

“Circumstantial evidence need not eliminate every conceivable hypothesis consistent with innocence; it need only exclude every other reasonable hypothesis, and whether it does so is a question for the jury.” (at 6)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Maximo Hernandez was found stabbed to death in his home in Batesville after sustaining more than twenty-five stab wounds from a knife and a Phillips-head screwdriver. Cellphone-tower data placed Cannalte at Hernandez's residence during the relevant period, and Cannalte falsely told his child that he was no longer in Batesville. Cannalte had cuts on his fingers and additional apparent injuries, while his blood was found on the murder weapon, on exterior and interior doorknobs, throughout the residence, and inside his truck.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Cannalte was tried in the Independence County Circuit Court and convicted by a jury of first-degree murder, receiving a sentence of life imprisonment. After the circuit court denied his directed-verdict motion, he appealed to the Supreme Court of Arkansas, which affirmed.

DISPOSITION

affirmed

CASES CITED

- Tait v. State, 2026 Ark. 28, at 7-8
- Price v. State, 2019 Ark. 323, at 4, 588 S.W.3d 1, 4
- Edmond v. State, 351 Ark. 495, 95 S.W.3d 789 (2003)
- Dortch v. State, 2018 Ark. 135, at 5, 544 S.W.3d 518, 522
- Drennan v. State, 2018 Ark. 328, at 6, 559 S.W.3d 262, 266
- Howard v. State, 2016 Ark. 434, at 12, 506 S.W.3d 843, 850
- Smith v. State, 2024 Ark. 1, at 6, 680 S.W.3d 711, 716
- Harmon v. State, 340 Ark. 18, 27, 8 S.W.3d 472, 477 (2000)
- Mulkey v. State, 330 Ark. 113, 117, 952 S.W.2d 149, 151 (1997)
- Weatherford v. State, 2025 Ark. 150, at 8, 720 S.W.3d 843, 850
- Robinson v. State, 353 Ark. 372, 381, 108 S.W.3d 622, 627 (2003)
- Green v. State, 265 Ark. 179, 577 S.W.2d 586 (1979)

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