



By: TA | AP Brief

# Assassination of Charlie Kirk adds to America's roll call of public violence



In the tragic roll call of violence in American public life, Charlie Kirk's name joins what has fast become a long list.

The influential 31-year old commentator, who cast his young professional life rousing other young people to embrace or debate his brand of conservatism, was **slain** doing what he does best: holding a provocative question-and-answer **session** on a college campus.

Kirk had been sparring with a questioner at Utah Valley University over who commits gun violence. Then the shot rang out.

President Donald Trump, a survivor of **assassination** attempts including at a 2024 campaign rally, announced on social media: Kirk was dead.

"It has to stop," House Speaker Mike Johnson pleaded from the U.S. Capitol. "This is not who we are."

Condemnation of the violence came quickly, from all corners and across the political divide, and it was universal. But it has never been **enough**.

Within minutes a shouting match erupted during a moment of silence in the House. One Republican lawmaker wanted an actual prayer for Kirk; Democrats called for changes in gun laws. Online, certain far-right figures responded with anger and pointed blame. And so did Trump.

"We're moving in a very dangerous direction, and I think we have been moving in this direction for quite some time," said Kurt Braddock, an assistant professor of public communication at American University.

## Polarization and normalization of violence

Though nothing is publicly known about the shooter or the motive in this case, Braddock said it can't be ignored that **polarization** and normalization of violence have become

threaded through U.S. politics.

"It's incumbent on both sides to take steps to lower the temperature and make it clear that violence should never be considered an acceptable form of political action," he said.

The nation's long history of violence in the public realm carries many data points. It has felled presidents, presidential contenders, activists like Kirk and some of the most consequential figures in American civic life — Abraham Lincoln, the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.

**Among those who have survived the violence, Trump does not stand alone**

Among those who have survived the violence, Trump does not stand alone. Elected officials in the U.S. have been shot at and critically wounded while talking to voters outside a grocery store in Arizona; practicing for a congressional baseball game in Virginia; answering the door to their own home in Minnesota.

The governor's house in Pennsylvania was set **ablaze** as he and his family slept inside. Members of Congress fled the Jan. 6, 2021 attack on the U.S. Capitol.

"It's time for all Americans and the media to confront the fact that violence and murder are the tragic consequence of demonizing those with whom you disagree day after day, year after year," said Trump — who then proceeded to blame what he called the "radical left" for the attacks.

Bruce Hoffman, a senior fellow for counterterrorism and homeland security at the Council on Foreign Relations, said how the country responds to Kirk's killing will be crucial to what happens next.

"In the past, we had elected officials that would seek to bring the country together rather than to cast blame," he said. "We'll have to see what in the coming days our national

leaders have to say about this, and whether they can be effective in lowering the temperature.”

## Kirk often faced protests and controversy

College campuses where Kirk draws robust and curious crowds to discuss not just politics but their questions about growing into adulthood have often been battlegrounds of ideas and centers of American thought, from the Vietnam War protests at Kent State to the Israel-Hamas war demonstrations of the Trump era.

Conservative commentators in particular have complained of being unfairly blocked from universities as students protested their appearances at college campuses. Trump has turned the force of the U.S. government against Harvard, Columbia and the nation's premier universities to end policies his administration views as too “woke.”

Kirk, a charismatic figure who founded his Turning Point USA as an 18-year-old, grew into an influential leader **tapping** into the mood of a younger generation's grievances with society.

A Christian father of two, he demonstrated a combative new approach to conservatism that openly criticized racial justice movements, the news media and LGBTQ rights. Critics said his views perpetuated racist, anti-immigrant and anti-feminist ideas.

**Is this what 250 years has wrought on us? – Spencer Cox**

Kirk often faced protests and controversy when he visited college campuses, including on his recent tour.

Ahead of Wednesday's event, an online petition calling for the university's administrators to reconsider allowing him to speak received nearly 1,000 signatures. A similar petition at Utah State University, where

Kirk was set to appear later in the month, gathered nearly 7,000 signatures.

In Utah, Gov. Spencer Cox, a Republican, pleaded with Americans to look at themselves, and the way they treat one another, as the nation prepares to celebrate the 250th anniversary of its founding.

“We desperately need leaders in our country, but more than the leaders, we just need every single person in this country to think about where we are and where we want to be,” he said. “Is this what 250 years has wrought on us?”

He prayed that “all of us will try to find a way to stop hating our fellow Americans.”