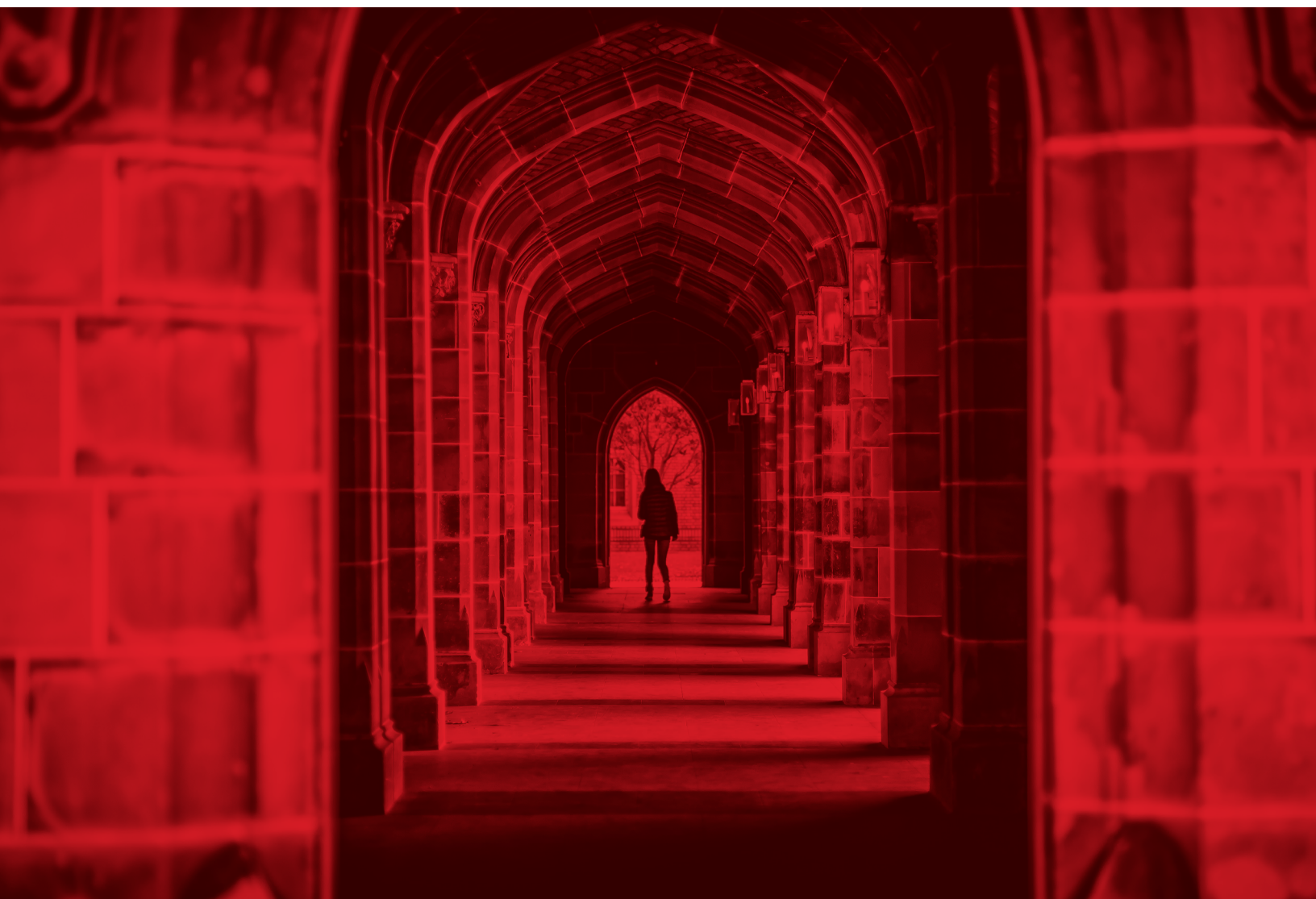


After the Earthquake



**HOW THE ASSASSINATION OF CHARLIE KIRK IS
RESHAPING CAMPUS SPEECH NATIONWIDE**



Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 1

OVERVIEW 2

THE EPICENTER: UTAH VALLEY UNIVERSITY 4

NATIONWIDE AFTERSHOCKS AND REVERBERATIONS 8

CONCLUSIONS 17

METHODOLOGY 18

SURVEY QUESTIONS AND TOPLINE RESULTS 19

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS 28

CITATION 28

ABOUT US 28

Executive Summary

The aftershocks of Charlie Kirk's assassination, in front of thousands of students at Utah Valley University, have reverberated across the country and acutely impacted campuses nationwide. To understand how the assassination is shaping student attitudes and behavior, FIRE commissioned College Pulse to conduct a nationwide survey of 2,028 undergraduates, including an oversample of 204 students at UVU.

The survey was fielded between Oct. 3 and Oct. 31, 2025, and has a margin of error of +/- 2.2%.

Key findings include:

1. Half of students surveyed say that they are less comfortable attending or hosting controversial public events on their campus.
2. A notable portion of students is also less comfortable expressing their views on controversial topics in class (45%), in common campus spaces (43%), and on social media (48%), after what happened to Charlie Kirk.
3. And roughly one in five students say they are now less comfortable attending class.
4. These feelings were most pronounced among students at Utah Valley University, and among moderate and conservative students nationwide.
5. Compared to this past spring, moderate and conservative students are less accepting of other students using aggressive or violent protest tactics. Liberal students, in contrast, did not shift their views in the same way.
6. A majority of students opposed allowing all six controversial speakers on campus they were asked about.
7. In contrast, a majority of students opposed firing all four professors from their campus for hypothetical social media comments made following Kirk's assassination.
8. A majority of students (53%) say that political violence is a problem among all groups, considerably more than the 35% of Americans who recently said this in [FIRE's October National Speech Index](#).

Overview

The assassination of Charlie Kirk at Utah Valley University marked a jarring escalation in America's already volatile political climate. This wasn't just an attack on a high-profile public figure — it tore at the very fabric of our sense of community as a people. A staunch free-speech advocate but also a polarizing presence on college campuses, Kirk was assassinated while doing what he often did: engaging in open political debate.¹

His killing sent shockwaves through higher education and the broader national discourse, prompting urgent conversations about free speech, political violence, and personal safety in public life.² And it has fueled concerns that political violence is no longer a fringe threat, but a force capable of reshaping the culture of speech and dissent. The effects of this assassination have already reverberated across the country.

In the weeks following Kirk's assassination on Sept. 10:

- Matthew Dowd, a political commentator, was fired from MSNBC for comments he made to Katy Tur about the assassination.³ He was also disinvited from speaking at the Hefner-Martin Endowed Lecture Series at Cumberland University.⁴
- A vigil honoring Kirk at Kennesaw State University was repeatedly disrupted by protesters who attempted to drown out the speakers by chanting and banging drums outside the venue. Protestors also damaged fencing around the venue and directly confronted attendees.⁵
- FIRE documented 80 campaigns to sanction scholars — 40 of which resulted in penalties, including 18 terminations. Many of these cancellation campaigns were led by prominent conservative influencers on social media and/or by elected officials at the state and federal levels.⁶
- FIRE has also recorded 25 campaigns targeting individual students or student groups for speech regarding Kirk and/or his assassination, and an additional five against campus chapters of Turning Point USA, the organization Kirk founded.⁷

1 Associated Press (Sept. 10, 2025). Conservative activist Charlie Kirk assassinated at Utah university. Available online: <https://apnews.com/article/charlie-kirk-conservative-activist-shot-546165a8151104e0938a5e085be1e8bd>.

2 Lukianoff, G. (Nov. 7, 2025). Speaking at the site of a murder: My speech at Utah Valley University — and why America must not become like everybody else. Available online: <https://eternallradicalidea.com/p/speaking-at-the-site-of-a-murder>.

3 Bauder, D. & Swenson, A. (Sept. 15, 2025). Matthew Dowd's firing begins flood of people facing consequences for comments on Charlie Kirk's death. Available online: <https://firstamendment.mtsu.edu/post/matthew-dowds-firing-begins-flood-of-people-facing-consequences-for-comments-on-charlie-kirks-death/>.

4 Humbles, A. (Sept. 11, 2025). Cumberland University cancels Matthew Dowd lecture after Charlie Kirk comments. Available online: <https://www.tennessean.com/story/news/local/wilson/2025/09/11/charlie-kirk-matthew-dowd-cumberland-university-event/86099537007/>.

5 Lindner, J. (Oct. 15, 2025). KSU student arrested after protesting Charlie Kirk memorial. Available online: https://www.mdjonline.com/news/education/ksu-student-arrested-after-protesting-charlie-kirk-memorial/article_5cca7153-6210-4f1c-afd7-5b5b6bc0c87a.html.

6 Stevens, S. & Lenthall-Cleary, C. (Sept. 30, 2025). The government is now the leading threat to faculty expression: 77% of all sanction efforts involve government actors. Available online: <https://expression.fire.org/p/the-government-is-now-the-leading>.

7 The number of attempts to sanction individual students and student groups was calculated on Nov. 19, 2025. See: <https://www.thefire.org/research-learn/students-under-fire?orderdir=desc&orderby=year>.

To understand how the assassination is shaping student attitudes and behavior, FIRE commissioned College Pulse to conduct a nationwide survey of 2,028 undergraduates, including an oversample of 204 students at UVU. The survey was fielded between Oct. 3 and Oct. 31, 2025.

The goal was simple: to assess whether the assassination and reactions to it are having a chilling effect on campus. We asked students whether recent events had affected how comfortable they were to speak freely, to organize events or attend campus events, and to attend class. We also asked them if professors should be fired for hypothetical comments they made on social media about Kirk after his assassination, and included measures of political tolerance for controversial speakers and student views on the acceptability of disruptive protest from our College Free Speech Rankings survey.

What we found is troubling.

A notable portion of students nationwide report being less comfortable expressing political views in the classroom, in a common campus space like the quad or lounge, or on social media; they say the same thing about attending public events on campus; and even about attending class. Concern is significantly more pronounced among students at UVU, and among politically conservative students nationwide. But students who do not identify with Kirk's politics also report pulling back from public expression, suggesting that the effects of this political violence cross ideological lines.

This report first presents the findings from Utah Valley University, since it was the site of Kirk's assassination. These analyses reveal that while the assassination has negatively impacted UVU students' comfort expressing their views, engaging politically on campus, and attending class, it also finds encouraging signs. For instance, UVU students, compared to students on other campuses nationwide, show increased tolerance and report more relative trust in institutional protections for free speech. The report then delves into how Kirk's assassination impacted students on those other campuses across the country.

The Epicenter: Utah Valley University

Just a few months ago, Utah Valley University was widely regarded as one of the safest campuses in the country, and its president said, “This is not a highly politicized place.”⁸ In this year’s College Free Speech Rankings, UVU was ranked first overall on “Disruptive Conduct,” meaning the students there are least likely to say that students shouting down a speaker, blocking entry to an event, or using violence to stop a speech are ever acceptable, and 41 on “Administrative Support.”⁹

Then came Sept. 10, 2025. Thousands of students attended Kirk’s campus event and witnessed his assassination. Those not in attendance sheltered in place as law enforcement secured the scene.¹⁰

To its credit, UVU responded quickly. Classes were canceled for the remainder of the week and counseling services were expanded. New student organizations promoting tolerance have popped up, and the university plans to launch a civic dialogue program.¹¹

Anecdotally, the atmosphere appears calm. But the survey data tell a more complicated story.

Compared to their peers nationwide, UVU students report a deeper sense of pessimism about the state of free expression in the United States — 86% say it is heading in the wrong direction. This is significantly higher than the 74% of non-UVU students surveyed, and the 74% of Americans who also say this in FIRE’s October National Speech Index.¹² On their own campus, 55% of UVU students say things are heading in the wrong direction, compared to 46% of students elsewhere.

UVU students also report being more affected by the assassination in their day-to-day expression — they are more likely than students at other institutions to say they feel “a great deal” or “slightly” less comfortable:

- Expressing controversial views in class, on social media, or in public campus spaces;
- Attending or hosting controversial events;
- Participating in any public event;
- And even attending class on campus.

8 Wen, Leana S. (Oct. 21, 2025). Utah Valley University faced a choice after Charlie Kirk’s killing: The school’s president sought to care for her community after the shocking assassination. Available online: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2025/10/21/charlie-kirk-utah-valley-university-uvu-healing-tuminez/>.

9 Stevens, S.T. (2025). 2026 College Free Speech Rankings: What Is the State of Free Speech on America’s College Campuses? The Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression. Available online: <https://www.thefire.org/research-learn/2026-college-free-speech-rankings>.

10 Wen (Oct. 21, 2025).

11 Wen (Oct. 21, 2025).

12 FIRE (Nov. 13, 2025). NEW HIGH: 3/4 of Americans say free speech is headed in the wrong direction. Available online: <https://www.thefire.org/news/new-high-34-americans-say-free-speech-headed-wrong-direction>.

Percentage of UVU vs. non-UVU students who are a "great deal" or "slightly" less comfortable doing each

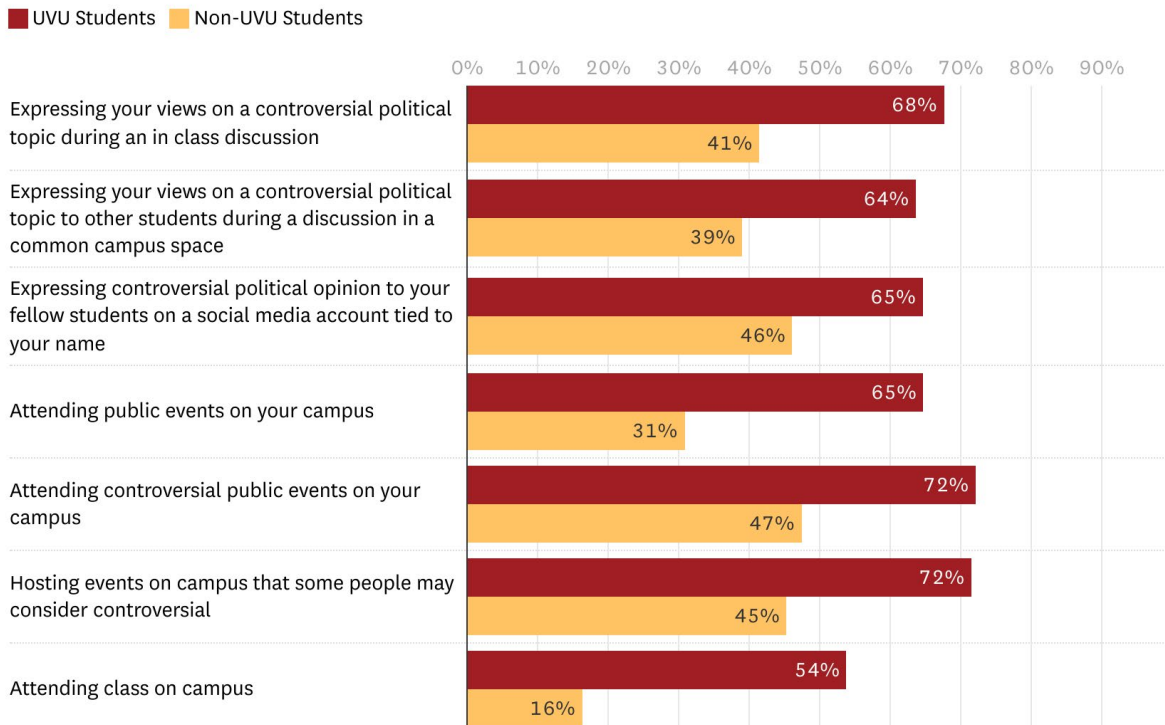


Chart: Emily Nayyer · Source: FIRE's 2025 Charlie Kirk Survey/ FIRE's National Speech Index, Oct. 2025

Self-censorship during classroom discussions has also increased. Before the Kirk assassination, roughly one in four students at UVU (24%) surveyed for FIRE's annual College Free Speech Rankings say they self-censored in this context at least a couple of times a week. Now, one-third of UVU students say this.

These results show that witnessing political violence firsthand has had measurable effects.

Yet despite heightened fear and uncertainty following the assassination, the data from UVU also reveals signs of increased tolerance, and even relative trust in institutional protections for free speech.

When asked how often people who express offensive opinions should face consequences, 21% of UVU students say "never," nearly three times the rate of students at other schools (8%).

UVU students are also significantly more likely to say that students shouting down a speaker, blocking other students from entering an event, or using violence to stop a campus speech are never acceptable, compared to their peers on other campuses.

Percentage of UVU vs. non-UVU students who say each protest action is "never" acceptable

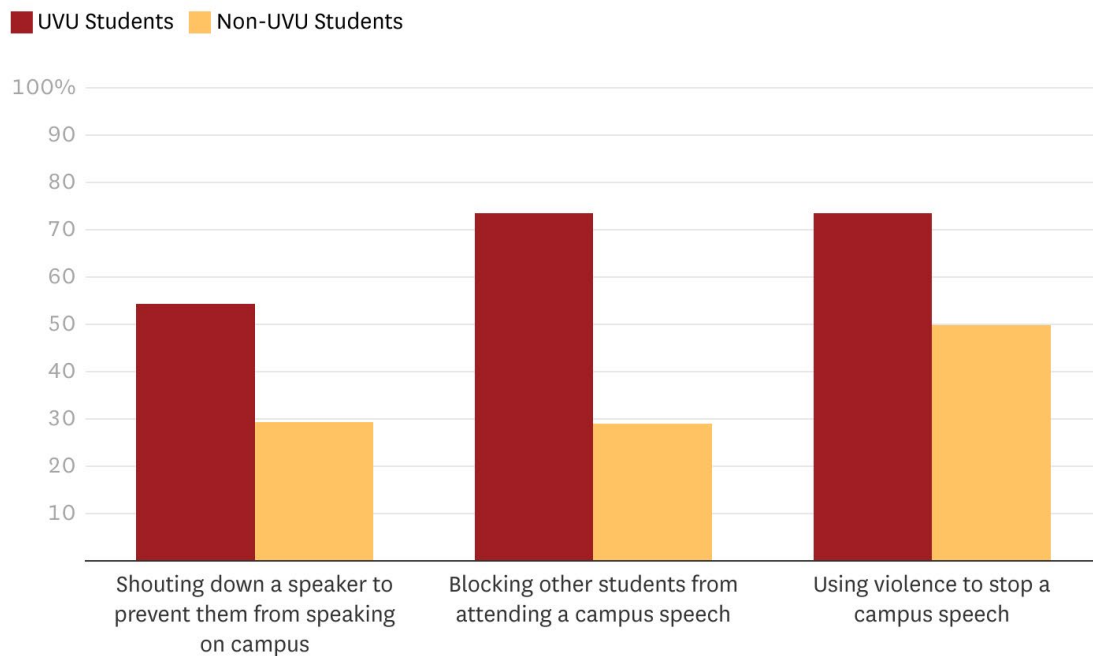


Chart: Emily Nayyer · Source: FIRE's 2025 Charlie Kirk Survey/ FIRE's National Speech Index, Oct. 2025

These same questions were posed to UVU students this past spring for the 2026 College Free Speech Rankings.¹³ Prior to Kirk's assassination on campus:

- 47% said shouting down a speaker was "never" acceptable, 54% now say this.
- 67% said blocking other students from attending a campus speech was "never" acceptable, 74% now say this.
- And 81% said using violence to stop a campus speech was "never" acceptable, 94% now say this.

This pattern of increased tolerance is echoed in students' confidence in university leadership to protect freedom of speech. UVU students are also more likely than their peers on other campuses to say that their college would never punish students for a range of provocative or controversial statements, including:

¹³ Stevens, S.T. (2025).

- “Bigots who say hateful things deserve to be shot.”
- “Gun nuts worship their AR-15s more than they value human lives.”
- “Illegal immigrants should be arrested and deported.”
- “Debate me, prove me wrong.”
- “If a trans-identified male is in a female-only space, he is committing a violent abusive act.”

Percentage of UVU vs. non-UVU responses on belief that college would “never” punish students for each statement

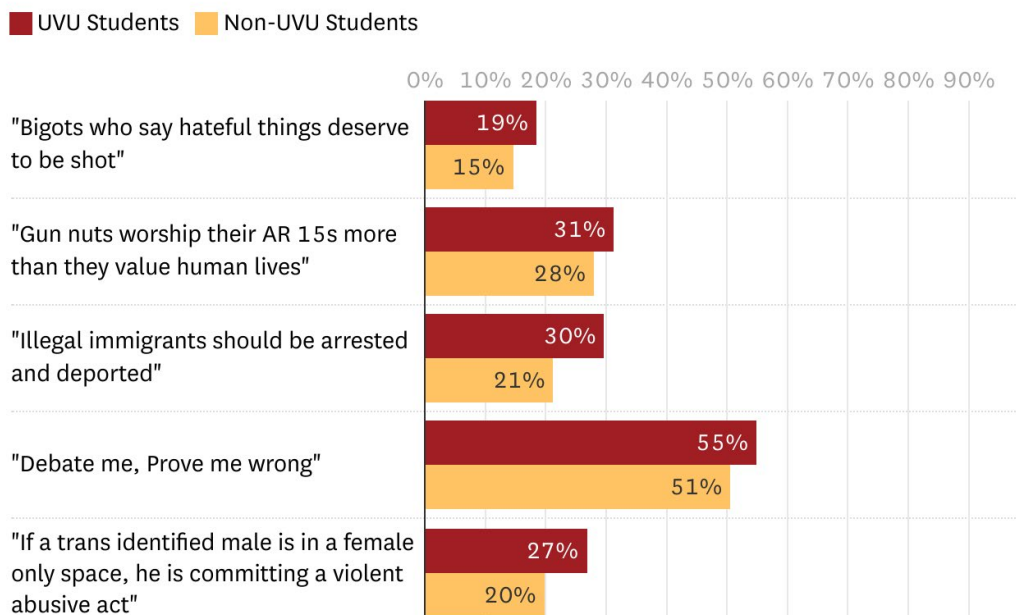


Chart: Emily Nayer - Source: FIRE's 2025 Charlie Kirk Survey/ FIRE's National Speech Index, Oct. 2025

Furthermore, 33% of UVU students say they have either “quite a lot” or “full” confidence that their administration will protect their First Amendment rights, compared to just 26% of students on other campuses. And only 14% of UVU students report having “no” or “very little” confidence in their administration’s support for free speech, half the rate seen elsewhere (28%).

These results show that, even in the wake of a traumatic event, UVU students have more trust and confidence in their school’s administration to protect their expression than their peers on other campuses.

Nationwide Aftershocks and Reverberations

While Utah Valley University presents a unique case, as the site of Kirk's assassination and a campus with relatively high trust in its administration to protect First Amendment rights,¹⁴ the survey responses from students at other institutions reveal widespread discomfort with political expression in the wake of the Kirk assassination. Students nationwide now report feeling less comfortable expressing controversial views, hosting or attending public events, and engaging in open discussion, both online and in person, than before the assassination.

This section explores how students across the country are reacting to the assassination, how they understand the relationship between speech and violence, and how their views on protest, punishment, and political violence have changed since this spring's College Free Speech Rankings survey.¹⁵ It also connects these findings with broader data from FIRE's National Speech Index, comparing college undergraduates to members of the general public.¹⁶

Although UVU students were more likely to report feeling less comfortable expressing themselves, attending or hosting campus events, or even going to class, students at other institutions also reported significant discomfort. This chilling effect is especially pronounced among conservative students, who consistently report higher levels of unease than their moderate and liberal peers.

¹⁴ FIRE's 2026 College Free Speech Rankings: Utah Valley University. Available online: <https://rankings.thefire.org/campus/230737-utah-valley-university?demo=all&year=2025>.

¹⁵ Stevens, S.T. (2025).

¹⁶ FIRE (Nov. 13, 2025).

Percentage of non-UVU students overall who are a “great deal” or “slightly” less comfortable doing X overall and by ideology

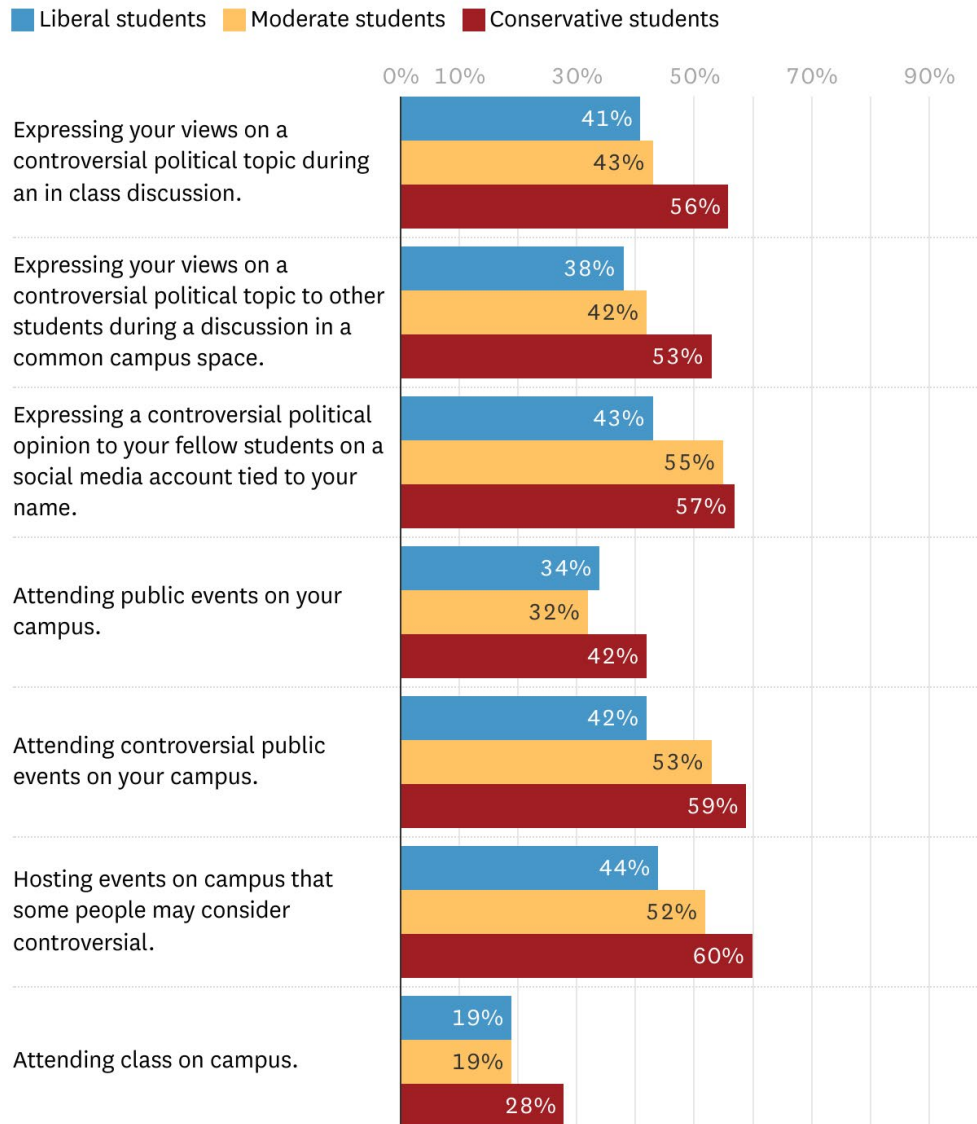


Chart: Emily Nayyer • Source: FIRE's 2025 Charlie Kirk Survey/ FIRE's National Speech Index, Oct. 2025

Yet the assassination appears to have had little effect on student views about shouting down or using violence to stop campus speakers. This past spring, 72% of non-UVU students said that shoutdowns were acceptable to some degree; today, that figure stands at 71%. The numbers are similarly stable regarding violence: 34% previously said it was acceptable to use violence to stop a campus speech, compared to 32% now.¹⁷

¹⁷ Stevens, S.T. (2025).

However, there was a modest shift on one front: support for blocking other students from entering an event declined from 54% to 50%.¹⁸

This contrasts starkly with how UVU students seemed to respond to the assassination, and may have occurred because UVU was one of the more conservative student bodies among the schools included in this year's College Free Speech Rankings.¹⁹

In the current survey, 31% of the UVU students sampled identify as conservative, compared to 17% of students on other campuses. And among the non-UVU students, there is a clear ideological divide in how they responded to the assassination of Kirk when it comes to the acceptability of disruptive or violent protest tactics on campus.

Moderate and conservative students became significantly less likely to say that shouting down a speaker, blocking entry to an event, or using violence to stop a campus speech are acceptable actions. In contrast, liberal students' support for these tactics held steady, or even increased slightly.

Percentage of non-UVU students who find each tactic acceptable in spring 2025 and fall 2025

■ Spring 2025 ■ Fall 2025

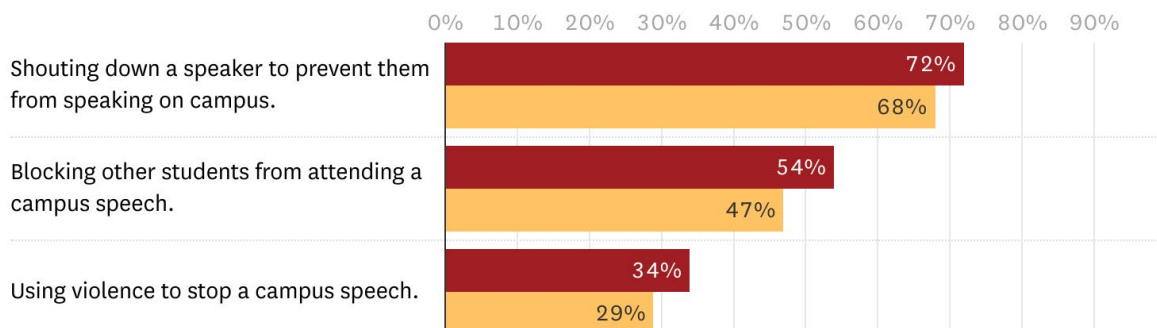


Chart: Emily Nayyer · Source: FIRE's 2025 Charlie Kirk Survey/ FIRE's National Speech Index, Oct. 2025

These divergent patterns show that the assassination may have caused moderate and conservative students to grow more wary of aggressive or violent protest tactics, perhaps reflecting increased concern about the real-world consequences of political violence. Liberal students, in contrast, showed no similar pullback, indicating that the event did not shift their views in the same way.

The findings are similar when it comes to whether controversial speakers should be allowed on campus or not.

¹⁸ Stevens, S.T. (2025).

¹⁹ FIRE's 2026 College Free Speech Rankings: Utah Valley University. Available online: <https://rankings.thefire.org/campus/230737-utah-valley-university?demo=all&year=2025>.

Attitudes toward controversial speakers among non-UVU students remained largely stable in the wake of the Kirk assassination. Across five of the six speaker scenarios included in both the spring 2025 College Free Speech Rankings survey and the fall post-assassination survey, there was no significant change in overall tolerance.

The only exception was the speaker who previously said, “Children should be able to transition without parental consent.” Opposition to this speaker increased slightly, from 51% in the spring to 55% in the fall.

Percentage of non-UVU students who oppose each speaker in spring 2025 and fall 2025

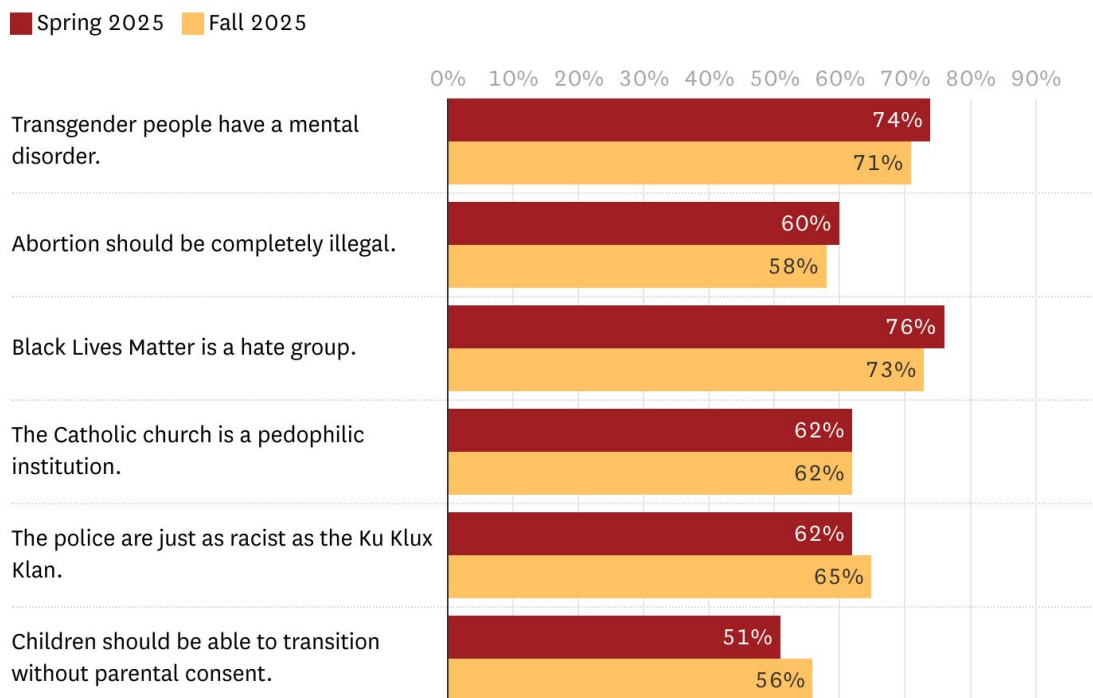


Chart: Emily Nayyer • Source: FIRE's 2025 Charlie Kirk Survey/ FIRE's National Speech Index, Oct. 2025

Among moderate and conservative students, opposition to controversial speakers generally declined, signaling increased tolerance, with a notable exception: among moderates, opposition to the speaker who said “Black Lives Matter is a hate group” rose from 68% to 73%. Among conservatives, opposition to the same speaker increased from 51% to 60%.

Opposition among liberal students, on the other hand, either held steady or increased for all of the controversial speakers compared to the spring. In particular, opposition to allowing someone who previously said that “The police are just as racist as the Ku Klux Klan” and “Children should be allowed to transition without parental consent” increased considerably.

Percentage of non-UVU students who oppose each speaker in spring 2025 and fall 2025 by political ideology

Liberal Spring 2025
 Liberal Fall 2025
 Moderate Spring 2025
 Moderate Fall 2025
 Conservative Spring 2025
 Conservative Fall 2025

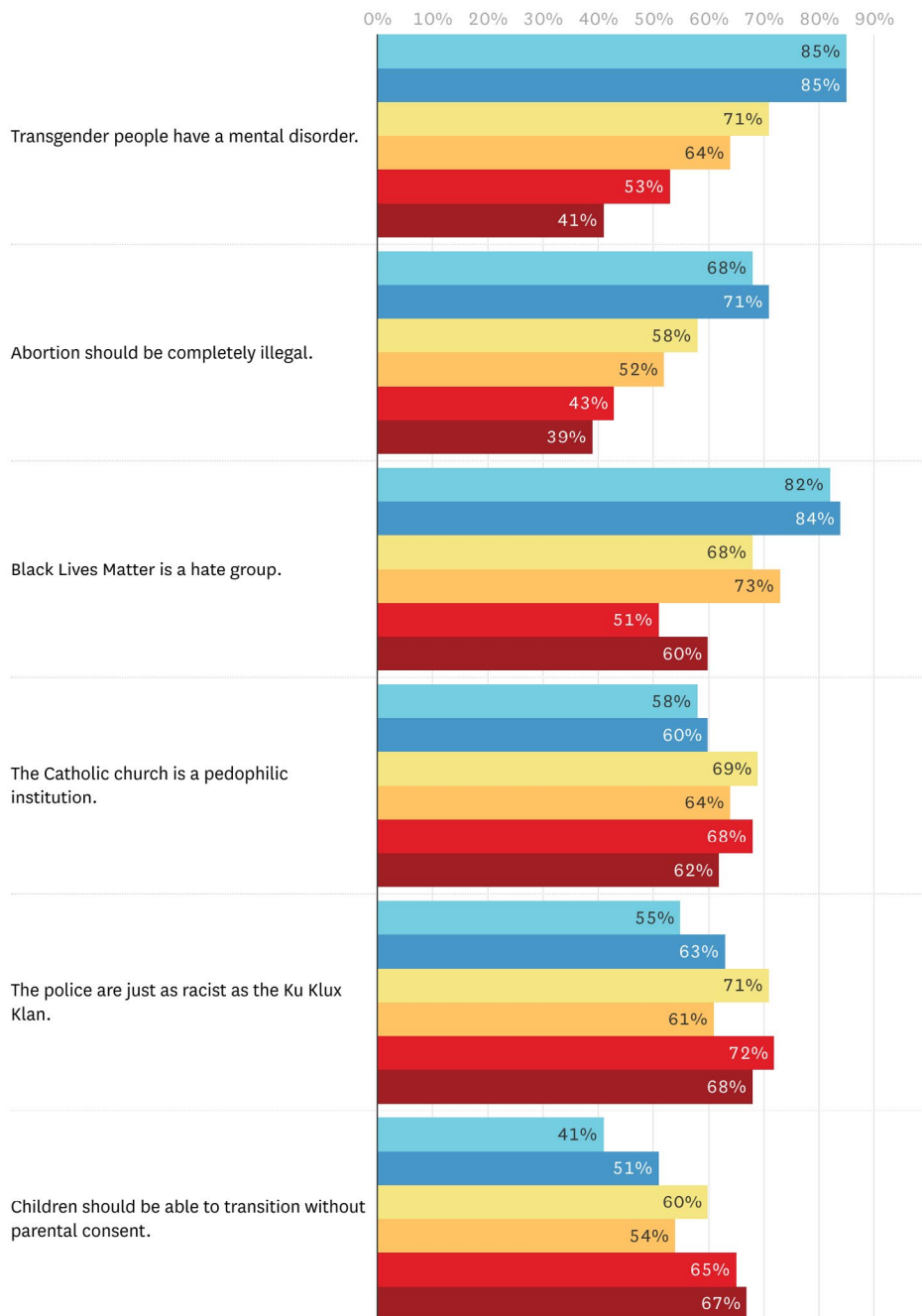


Chart: Emily Nayyer • Source: FIRE's 2025 Charlie Kirk Survey/ FIRE's National Speech Index, Oct. 2025

This suggests that moderate and conservative students may be pulling back from speaker bans, while liberal students are becoming more inclined to exclude speakers whose views they find harmful or offensive. The ideological gap in speaker tolerance appears to be widening, not narrowing, after a high-profile political killing.

One encouraging finding is that students nationwide, and at Utah Valley University, showed greater tolerance for controversial statements made by professors after the Kirk assassination than for allowing controversial speakers on campus. When presented with a series of provocative hypothetical posts made by professors on social media, most students said the professors should not be fired, regardless of the political slant of the comment. This held true for statements such as “It’s okay to punch a Nazi” and “We are going to make America great again.” Although tolerance dropped somewhat for more inflammatory or ideologically loaded statements, like calling religious conservatives “fascist Bible-thumpers” or referring to universities as “progressive indoctrination centers,” majorities still opposed termination.

This heightened tolerance among students for professors who made controversial statements about Kirk’s assassination is encouraging. At the same time, it mostly pales in comparison to the tolerance levels among the general public. FIRE’s October National Speech Index posed these same questions to a sample of 1,000 Americans from Oct. 20 to 28.²⁰ A clear majority opposed firing all four professors, with the percentages opposing firing ranging from 55% (“It’s O.K. to punch a Nazi.”) to 86% (“We’re going to make America great again.”).

Percentage of UVU students, non-UVU students, and the general public who oppose firing each hypothetical professor

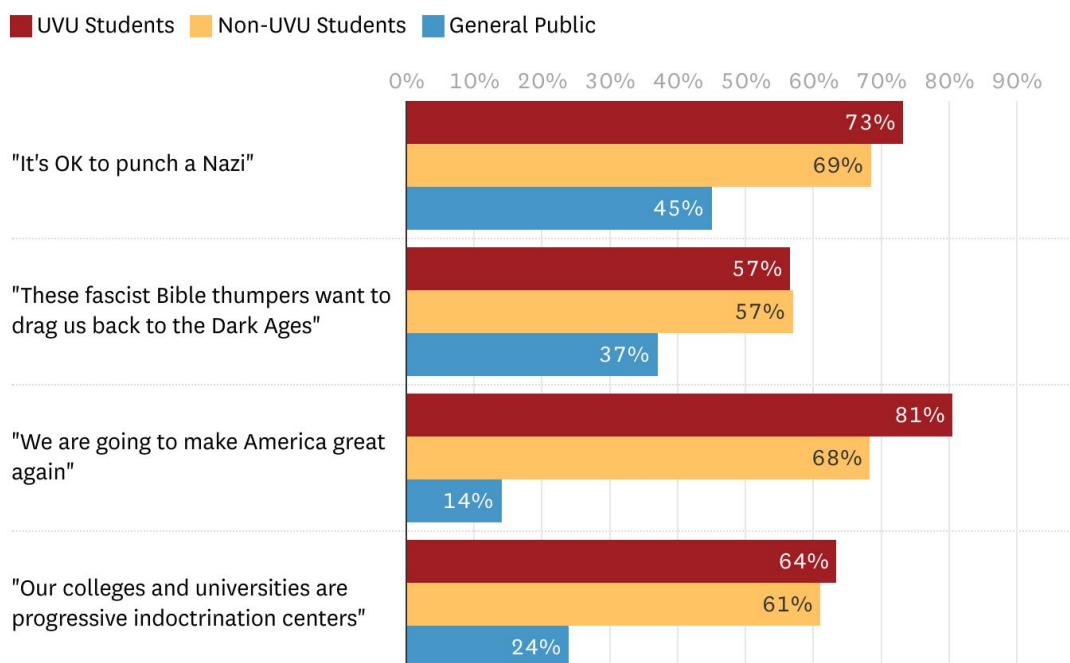


Chart: Emily Nayyer · Source: FIRE's 2025 Charlie Kirk Survey/ FIRE's National Speech Index, Oct. 2025

20 FIRE (Nov. 13, 2025).

Clear ideological differences are also evident in how students responded to these hypothetical professor statements. Nationwide, liberal students were generally the most opposed to firing, especially when the comment aligned with left-leaning views. For example, 76% of liberals said a professor who posted “It’s O.K. to punch a Nazi” should not be fired, compared to 61% of moderates and 54% of conservatives. Conversely, conservative students were most likely to oppose firing when the controversial comment aligned with their views. For instance, 82% of conservatives said a professor should not be fired for posting “We are going to make America great again,” compared to 73% of moderates and 61% of liberals.

Liberal students, however, opposed firing all four professors they were asked about. A majority of conservative students (61%), in contrast, say a professor who posted “These fascist Bible-thumpers want to drag us back to the Dark Ages” following Kirk’s death should be fired.

Percentage of non-UVU students who oppose firing each hypothetical professor by ideology

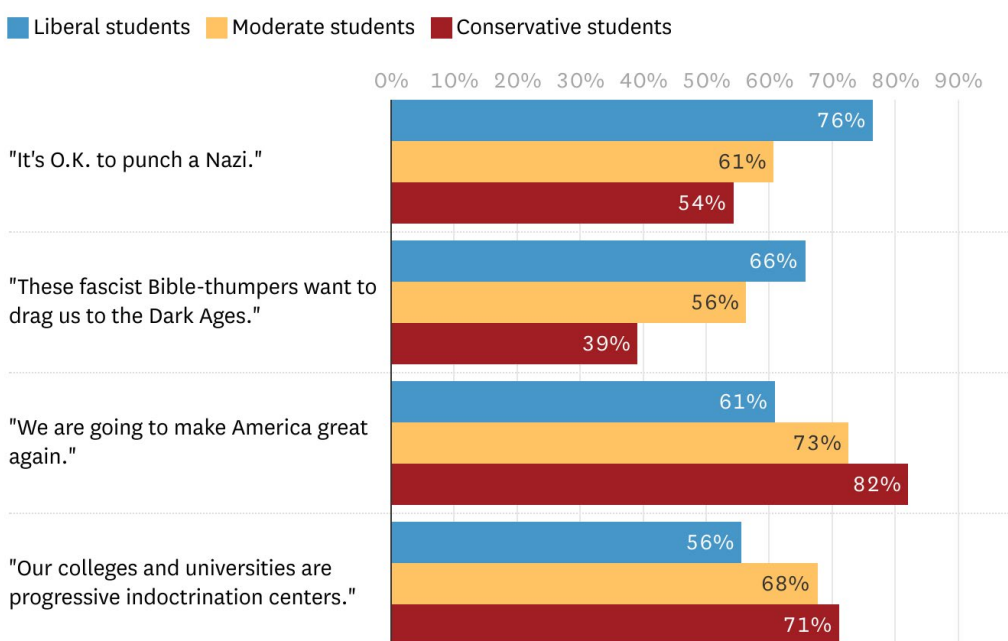


Chart: Emily Nayyer · Source: FIRE's 2025 Charlie Kirk Survey/ FIRE's National Speech Index, Oct. 2025

Finally, to better understand how students interpret the relationship between speech, silence, and violence, the survey included a series of attitudinal questions asking how well certain statements described their thinking. These included phrases like “Words can be violence” and “Silence is violence,” as well as assessments of whether political violence is a problem among progressives, conservatives, or all political groups.

Among students nationwide nearly half of students (48%) say that the phrase “Words can be violence” either “completely” or “mostly” describes their thoughts. This is also the case among students at UVU (46% say this). Fewer students nationwide and at UVU (29% and 26%, respectively) endorsed the idea that “Silence is violence,” though this belief still has support among at least a quarter of students.

Percentage of UVU students, non-UVU students, and the general public who say each statement "completely" or "mostly" describes their thoughts

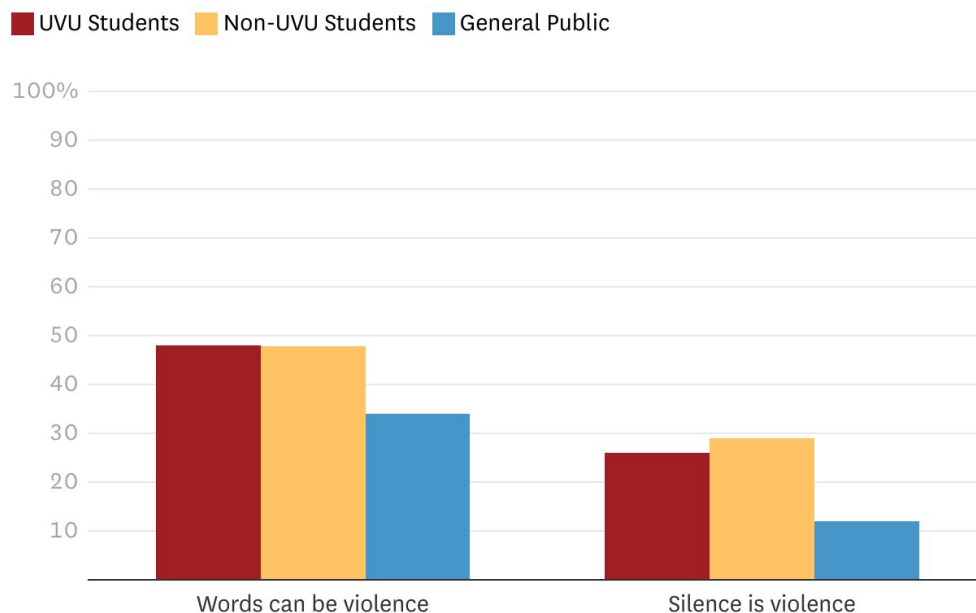


Chart: Emily Nayyer • Source: FIRE's 2025 Charlie Kirk Survey/ FIRE's National Speech Index, Oct. 2025

When asked about political violence, most students saw it as a problem across the ideological spectrum. But differences did emerge between UVU students and those on other campuses. UVU students were more likely than their peers elsewhere to say political violence is a problem among progressives (34% at UVU, 28% nationwide), while students across all campuses were equally likely to say it's a problem among conservatives (42% nationwide and at UVU). A majority of students in both samples agreed that political violence is a problem across all political groups (53% nationwide, 52% at UVU).

Compared to the general public, students were significantly more likely to endorse the idea that “Words can be violence” and that political violence is widespread. Among the broader population, just over a third said, “Words can be violence” describes their thinking, far below the nearly half of college students who agreed. Students were also more likely than the general public to say political violence is a bipartisan problem, suggesting a broader sense of threat but perhaps also a more universal framing of the issue.²¹

²¹ FIRE (Nov. 13, 2025).

Percentage of UVU students, non-UVU students, and the general public who say each statement on political violence "completely" or "mostly" describes their thoughts

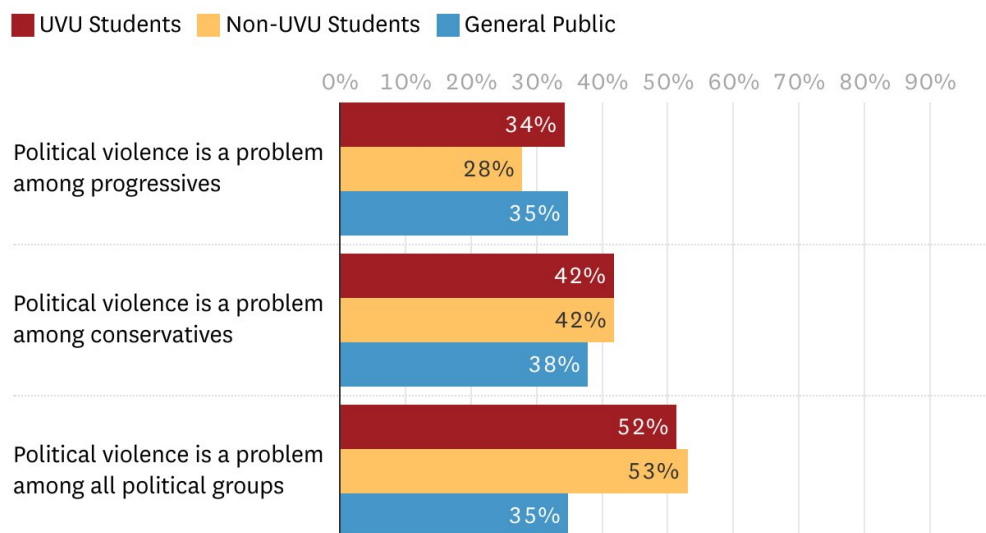


Chart: Emily Nayyer · Source: FIRE's 2025 Charlie Kirk Survey/ FIRE's National Speech Index, Oct. 2025

Conclusions

The assassination of Charlie Kirk was not just a flashpoint, it was a test: a test of campus norms, institutional resilience, and the boundaries of expression in a time of deep national division. This survey offers a first look at how students across the country, and particularly at Utah Valley University, are responding to that test.

The results paint a complex picture. In many ways, the assassination appears to have deepened existing fractures. Students report feeling less comfortable expressing themselves, especially those who are politically conservative or attend UVU. Support for aggressive protest tactics has declined among moderates and conservatives, while liberal students largely maintained or even increased their tolerance for such actions. Attitudes toward controversial speakers have become more polarized, with ideological differences widening. And while most students opposed firing professors on their campus for making provocative social media posts following Kirk's death, their judgments were often shaped by their own political views.

At the same time, there are signs of resilience. Faculty on campus are given more leeway than guest speakers. And despite the trauma of the event, UVU students report more trust in their university to protect speech rights than students at other institutions.

Still, the broader takeaway is clear: The assassination has had a chilling effect — not just at UVU, but across the country. Students say they are pulling back, are speaking less, and are less comfortable attending events. This is not being done in response to policy, but because of fear. If campus leaders, faculty, and policymakers want to protect academic freedom and open inquiry, they must reckon with that fear, and work to rebuild a culture of expression that can withstand not just controversy, but crisis.

Methodology

FIRE commissioned College Pulse to conduct a nationwide survey of college undergraduates, including an oversample of students at Utah Valley University. The sample included 2,028 undergraduates, including 204 from UVU. The survey was fielded between Oct. 3 and Oct. 31, 2025. The survey's margin of error is +/- 2.2%.

The National Speech Index is a quarterly poll designed by FIRE and conducted by the Dartmouth Polarization Research Lab and YouGov to capture Americans' views on freedom of speech and the First Amendment, and to track how Americans' views change over time. The October 2025 National Speech Index includes a sample of 1,000 Americans and was conducted from Oct. 20 to 28. The survey's margin of error is +/- 3.0%.

Poststratification weights were applied to all data reported.

Survey questions and topline results

Total number of students surveyed = 2,020.

Margin of error = +/- 2.2%.

When it comes to whether people are able to freely express their views do you think things in America are heading in the RIGHT or WRONG direction?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Heading in the RIGHT direction	522	26
Heading in the WRONG direction	1502	74

In general, when it comes to whether people are able to freely express their views do you think things on your college campus are heading in the RIGHT or WRONG direction?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Heading in the RIGHT direction	1077	53
Heading in the WRONG direction	947	47

These next three questions ask you about self-censorship in different settings. For the purpose of these questions, self-censorship is defined as follows:

Refraining from sharing certain views because you fear social (e.g., exclusion from social events), professional (e.g., losing job or promotion), legal (e.g., prosecution or fine), or violent (e.g., assault) consequences, whether in person or remotely (e.g., by phone or online), and whether the consequences come from state or non-state sources.

How often do you self-censor during conversations with other students on campus?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	206	10
Rarely	551	27
Occasionally, once or twice a month	704	35
Fairly often, a couple of times a week	406	20
Very often, nearly every day	157	8

How often do you self-censor during conversations with your professors?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	261	13
Rarely	609	30
Occasionally, once or twice a month	628	31
Fairly often, a couple of times a week	355	18
Very often, nearly every day	170	8

How often do you self-censor during classroom discussions?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	207	10
Rarely	547	27
Occasionally, once or twice a month	694	34
Fairly often, a couple of times a week	394	19
Very often, nearly every day	183	9

How much confidence, if any, do you have that your college's administration will protect your First Amendment rights?

Response	Frequency	Percent
No confidence at all	114	6
Very little confidence	409	20
Some confidence	950	47
Quite a lot of confidence	446	22
My full confidence	106	5

How often, if at all, should people who express offensive opinions face consequences for their views?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	186	9
Rarely	440	22
Sometimes	939	46
Often	343	17
Always	116	6

How much, if at all, do the following statements describe your thoughts?

Words can be violence.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Describes my thoughts completely	450	22
Mostly describes my thoughts	512	25
Somewhat describes my thoughts	575	28
Slightly describes my thoughts	298	15
Does not describe my thoughts at all	188	9

Silence is violence.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Describes my thoughts completely	226	11
Mostly describes my thoughts	352	17
Somewhat describes my thoughts	631	31
Slightly describes my thoughts	398	20
Does not describe my thoughts at all	418	21

Political violence is a problem among progressives.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Describes my thoughts completely	215	11
Mostly describes my thoughts	367	18
Somewhat describes my thoughts	679	34
Slightly describes my thoughts	383	19
Does not describe my thoughts at all	381	19

Political violence is a problem among conservatives.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Describes my thoughts completely	416	21
Mostly describes my thoughts	427	21
Somewhat describes my thoughts	621	31
Slightly describes my thoughts	271	13
Does not describe my thoughts at all	289	14

Political violence is a problem among all political groups.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Describes my thoughts completely	533	26
Mostly describes my thoughts	538	27
Somewhat describes my thoughts	586	29
Slightly describes my thoughts	250	12
Does not describe my thoughts at all	118	6

How acceptable would you say it is for students to engage in the following actions to protest a campus speaker?

Shouting down a speaker to prevent them from speaking on campus.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Always acceptable	104	5
Sometimes acceptable	612	30
Rarely acceptable	653	32
Never acceptable	655	32

Blocking other students from attending a campus speech.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Always acceptable	31	2
Sometimes acceptable	355	18
Rarely acceptable	568	28
Never acceptable	1070	53

Using violence to stop a campus speech.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Always acceptable	40	2
Sometimes acceptable	211	10
Rarely acceptable	327	16
Never acceptable	1445	71

Question only presented to students who said violence was “always,” “sometimes,” or “rarely” acceptable.

What forms of violence do you consider acceptable to stop a campus speech? (please select all that apply)

Form of violence:	Percentage of students who selected option:
Arson	7%
Bomb threats	9%
Detaining or restraining people	8%
Incendiaries or fireworks aimed at the venue	17%
Kidnapping	9%
Murder	7%
Physical assault on people in attendance	17%
Physical assault on the speaker	20%
Smoke or “stink” bombs to force evacuation of the event	14%
Threats of bodily harm to people in attendance	9%
Throwing projectiles (e.g.;pies;eggs;rocks;bottles)	26%
Use of chemical irritants (e.g.;bear spray)	22%
Use of firearms (e.g.;rifle)	9%
Use of sharp objects (e.g.;knife)	8%
Using physical force to prevent people from entering the event	17%
None of the above.	46%

Because of what happened to Charlie Kirk, how much more or less comfortable are you doing each of the following?

Expressing your views on a controversial political topic during an in-class discussion.

Response	Frequency	Percent
A great deal less comfortable	376	19
Slightly less comfortable	526	26
Neither more nor less comfortable	906	45
Slightly more comfortable	156	8
A great deal more comfortable	59	3

Expressing your views on a controversial political topic to other students during a discussion in a common campus space such as a quad, dining hall, or lounge.

Response	Frequency	Percent
A great deal less comfortable	354	18
Slightly less comfortable	505	25
Neither more nor less comfortable	949	47
Slightly more comfortable	156	8
A great deal more comfortable	60	3

Expressing controversial political opinion to your fellow students on a social media account tied to your name.

Response	Frequency	Percent
A great deal less comfortable	463	23
Slightly less comfortable	516	25
Neither more nor less comfortable	829	41
Slightly more comfortable	151	7
A great deal more comfortable	65	3

Attending public events on your campus.

Response	Frequency	Percent
A great deal less comfortable	245	12
Slightly less comfortable	465	23
Neither more nor less comfortable	1083	54
Slightly more comfortable	150	7
A great deal more comfortable	81	4

Attending controversial public events on your campus.

Response	Frequency	Percent
A great deal less comfortable	505	25
Slightly less comfortable	516	25
Neither more nor less comfortable	827	41
Slightly more comfortable	116	6
A great deal more comfortable	60	3

Hosting events on campus that some people may consider controversial.

Response	Frequency	Percent
A great deal less comfortable	505	25
Slightly less comfortable	516	25
Neither more nor less comfortable	827	41
Slightly more comfortable	116	6
A great deal more comfortable	60	3

Attending class on campus.

Response	Frequency	Percent
A great deal less comfortable	109	5
Slightly less comfortable	316	16
Neither more nor less comfortable	1317	65
Slightly more comfortable	151	7
A great deal more comfortable	132	7

How often, if at all, do you think your college would punish you for saying ...

“Bigots who say hateful things deserve to be shot.”

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	306	15
Rarely	334	16
Sometimes	579	29
Fairly often	452	22
Always	353	17

“Gun nuts worship their AR-15s more than they value human lives.”

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	576	28
Rarely	561	28
Sometimes	491	24
Fairly often	251	12
Always	146	7

“Illegal immigrants should be arrested and deported.”

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	452	22
Rarely	474	23
Sometimes	558	28
Fairly often	337	17
Always	204	10

“Debate me. Prove me wrong.”

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	1033	51
Rarely	464	23
Sometimes	343	17
Fairly often	121	6
Always	63	3

“If a trans-identified male is in a female-only space, he is committing a violent, abusive act.”

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	417	21
Rarely	501	25
Sometimes	582	29
Fairly often	342	17
Always	182	9

If a professor on your campus said any of the following statements on social media after Charlie Kirk’s assassination, SHOULD THEY or SHOULD THEY NOT be fired from their job?

“It’s O.K. to punch a Nazi.”

Response	Frequency	Percent
The professor definitely should not be fired from their job	611	30
The professor probably should not be fired from their job	786	39
The professor probably should be fired from their job	441	22
The professor definitely should be fired from their job	186	9

“These fascist Bible-thumpers want to drag us back to the Dark Ages.”

Response	Frequency	Percent
The professor definitely should not be fired from their job	355	18
The professor probably should not be fired from their job	787	39
The professor probably should be fired from their job	592	29
The professor definitely should be fired from their job	290	14

“We are going to make America great again.”

Response	Frequency	Percent
The professor definitely should not be fired from their job	505	25
The professor probably should not be fired from their job	909	45
The professor probably should be fired from their job	431	21
The professor definitely should be fired from their job	179	9

“Our colleges and universities are progressive indoctrination centers.”

Response	Frequency	Percent
The professor definitely should not be fired from their job	357	18
The professor probably should not be fired from their job	885	44
The professor probably should be fired from their job	595	29
The professor definitely should be fired from their job	187	9

Student groups often invite speakers to campus to express their views on a range of topics. Regardless of your own views on the topic, should your school **ALLOW** or **NOT ALLOW** a speaker on campus who promotes the following idea? [Presented in randomized order]

Transgender people have a mental disorder.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	754	37
Probably should not allow this speaker	696	34
Probably should allow this speaker	399	20
Definitely should allow this speaker	175	9

Abortion should be completely illegal.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	526	26
Probably should not allow this speaker	644	32
Probably should allow this speaker	599	30
Definitely should allow this speaker	255	13

Black Lives Matter is a hate group.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	791	39
Probably should not allow this speaker	688	34
Probably should allow this speaker	383	19
Definitely should allow this speaker	162	8

The Catholic church is a pedophilic institution.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	425	21
Probably should not allow this speaker	838	41
Probably should allow this speaker	555	27
Definitely should allow this speaker	207	10

The police are just as racist as the Ku Klux Klan.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	516	26
Probably should not allow this speaker	787	39
Probably should allow this speaker	534	26
Definitely should allow this speaker	186	9

Children should be able to transition without parental consent.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	396	20
Probably should not allow this speaker	736	36
Probably should allow this speaker	679	34
Definitely should allow this speaker	213	11

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Our gratitude goes to Sean Stevens for study and questionnaire design, data collection, data analysis, and authoring this report; and to Nathan Honeycutt for support with study and questionnaire design. We would additionally like to thank Chapin Lenthall-Cleary for data checking and validation; Emily Nayyer for data visualization; Cantelon Design for designing the report; Jordan Howell for designing the online version of the report; and Logan Dougherty, Angela C. Erickson, Ryne Weiss, Alex Griswold, and David Volodzko for editing support.

Greg Lukianoff
President and CEO, FIRE

CITATION

Stevens, S.T. (2025). After the earthquake: How the assassination of Charlie Kirk is reshaping campus speech nationwide. The Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression. Available online: <https://www.thefire.org/research-learn/how-assassination-charlie-kirk-reshaping-campus-speech-nationwide>

ABOUT US

The Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to defending and sustaining the individual rights of all Americans to free speech and free thought. These rights include freedom of speech, freedom of association, due process, legal equality, religious liberty, and sanctity of conscience — the most essential qualities of liberty. FIRE also recognizes that colleges and universities play a vital role in preserving free thought within a free society. To this end, we place a special emphasis on defending these rights of students and faculty members on our nation's campuses.

For more information, visit thefire.org or [@thefireorg](https://twitter.com/thefireorg) on X.



Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE)
P.O. Box 40128
Philadelphia, PA 19106
p: 215-717-3473 | www.thefire.org

