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Public Perception of Charlie Kirk's Murder: A Sentiment-Based Study of Users' Comments on YouTube

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Abstract

The study examines public reactions to the murder of Charlie Kirk, a right-wing activist and founder of *Turning Point USA*, who was shot on September 10, 2025, during his "American Comeback Tour" in Utah. Analyzing 1,004 comments from CBS News' YouTube channel, researchers conducted sentiment analysis through *Orange* software, revealing emotions of surprise (83.66%), fear (6.77%), and sadness (3.18%), with minimal anger (0.09%). Key themes included media bias and political violence. Tyler Robinson, the accused, faces serious charges, with prosecutors seeking the death penalty, although his motive remains unclear. This research calls for further exploration into radicalization and the influence of media in political contexts. Kirk, known for his controversial views and debates on issues like gun rights and climate change, significantly impacted conservative youth politics and was closely associated with Donald Trump. His assassination has sparked a renewed discussion on political extremism in America.

Keywords: Charlie Kirk, Sentiment Analysis, *Orange* Software, America, YouTube, Politics

Introduction

Charlie Kirk was the son of an architect and grew up in the affluent Chicago suburb of Prospect Heights. He attended the University of Illinois but later



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dropped out to focus on political activism. He once applied to the prestigious U.S. military academy at West Point but was not accepted. While debating complex topics such as postmodernism, he often sarcastically referenced his lack of higher education. Kirk hosted open forums on college campuses across the U.S. in a "change-my-mind" style, engaging with students and community members on various issues. He became one of the highest-profile activists, presenting at Republican events while touring the country. He was particularly connected to members of the ultra-conservative Tea Party movement and had millions of followers on his daily talk show. At the age of 18, he founded Turning Point USA, an organisation aimed at promoting conservative values on liberal-leaning college campuses. Today, it has branches at more than 850 colleges (Sheerin & Faguy, 2025).

Furthermore, according to Sheerin and Faguy (2025), Kirk's main ideologies included conservatism, free markets, fiscal responsibility, gun rights, climate scepticism, and Republican politics. He frequently shared clips on social media and hosted a self-titled podcast, where he debated students on topics such as climate change, family values, and religion. He often criticised liberals and made controversial comments about issues related to gender, race, and politics. The turning point for conservatism in the U.S. began in 2012, following Barack Obama's re-election. Kirk's goal was to educate young people about free markets and conservative ideals, playing a significant role in encouraging young voters to support Donald Trump and other Republicans. He was praised for helping register new voters and assisting Trump in Arizona. After Trump's victory, Kirk became close to him, attending his 2017 inauguration and visiting the White House, where they played golf before Trump's 2025 inauguration. Earlier this year, he also spoke at the Oxford Union in the United Kingdom. In 2020, he published a bestselling book titled "The MAGA Doctrine," based on Trump's "Make America Great Again" slogan.

One of the issues Kirk passionately discussed was his opposition to gun control. A few months ago, he stated, it is worth it to have a cost of, unfortunately, some gun deaths every single year so that we can have the Second Amendment" (Sheerin & Faguy, 2025). Tragically, Charlie Kirk was shot and killed while addressing an audience at Utah Valley University in Orem, Utah, on September 10, 2025 (Amatulli et al., 2025). The event, organized by Turning Point USA, was the first stop of his "American Comeback Tour," where he was speaking about mass shootings in America. A gunman, positioned on the roof of a building 142 yards (130 meters) away, shot him in the neck. He was rushed to the hospital and underwent emergency surgery (SA News, 2025).

According to Stepansky (2025), Tyler Robinson faced court for the first time after being officially charged with the murder of Charlie Kirk. Prosecutors are seeking the death penalty, arguing that Robinson killed Kirk because of his political views and that the incident occurred in front of children. The head of the FBI, Kash Patel, was questioned by the Senate due to accusations that he is politicizing the FBI. Additionally, a judge instructed the suspect not to attempt any contact with Erika Kirk, Charlie's widow. Erika made her first public statement after the incident, expressing her intention to continue her husband's mission, stating that this tragedy has given her new strength.

This current study is of utmost importance as it aims to analyze public perception regarding the murder of Charlie Kirk, a high-profile figure and



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symbol of conservative youth politics. It is uncommon to have political assassinations of this type in the U.S. and Kirk was an unforeseen victim, and this led to a moral shock. This occurrence poses a threat to freedom of speech and democracy, and it can be questioned how the country has been fragmented (Hassan et al., 2025). To investigate this question, scholars have gathered the opinions of the population and examined the tendencies and patterns provided by The Guardian. This paper shows how the murder of Charlie Kirk has been perceived among the users on the YouTube platform as well as exploring the impact of news outlets in how they have framed the narrative of the tragic incident.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods research approach, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative model involved statistical analysis of data using software tools to identify and visualise the dominant sentiments and emotions. The qualitative part of this study involved analysing statistical data and comments to obtain in-depth meanings and themes.

Corpus Design

The researcher collected data using Python Jupyter Notebook from YouTube, employing Python coding. The API key of the researcher's YouTube account was used along with the identification number of each video. A total of 1004 comments were retrieved from the CBS News official YouTube channel.¹ The data was retrieved in CSV format and was then uploaded to the *Orange* software.

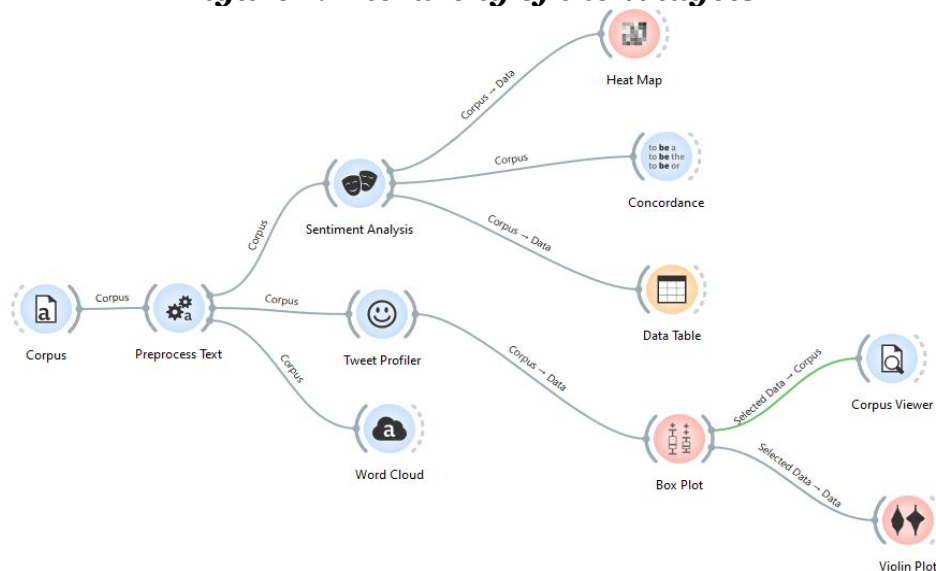
Corpus Analysis

After uploading the data to the *Orange* software, the Sentiment Analysis feature was used to categorize the data into positive and negative sentiment using the VADER filter. The Tweet Profiler feature was then utilized to classify the data into different sub-emotions (Breeze & Hassan, 2024; Hassan et al., 2025). For this classification, the researchers used the Ekman emotional analyzer feature. The following figure shows the hierarchy of widgets used by the researchers for the analysis of the data:

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eRgSyTidepc>



Figure 1: Hierarchy of the Widgets



Theoretical Framework

The researchers in this study applied Paul Ekman’s (1999) Theory of Basic Emotions, which identifies six universally recognized emotions: happiness, sadness, fear, disgust, anger, and surprise. This model proves valuable for analyzing YouTube comments, as emotions are commonly conveyed through both verbal expressions and facial cues. By employing this framework, the analysis transcends simple categorization of sentiments as merely positive or negative, thereby uncovering the emotional complexity of audience reactions to online discourse. In addition to these quantitative methods, a thematic analysis was conducted following Braun and Clarke’s approach, further supported by the use of *Orange* software.

Results and Discussion

Figure 2: Sentiment Scores of Comments

Author	Comment	PublishedAt	Likes	positive	negative	neutral	compound
@tamacosta-wi...	People die from guns. Long as we keep our right to own guns. What's...	2025-09-14T02:...	1	0	0.14	0.86	-0.5994
@feenarvaez65	I thought CK was in his forties?. They/he missed DT	2025-09-14T01:...	0	0	0.196	0.804	-0.296
@feenarvaez65	The narrator's voice reminds me of watching the animal kingdom doc.	2025-09-14T01:...	0	0	0	1	0
@shadowbann...	Hallelujah ❤️	2025-09-13T21:...	0	0.8	0	0.2	0.6124
@starmoon4510	This is devastating ❤️ such a loss thoughts and prayers for Charlie Kir...	2025-09-13T13:...	0	0	0.355	0.645	-0.765
@matsobanke...	those are good news to us "Africans"	2025-09-13T13:...	0	0.293	0	0.707	0.4404
@Madmen604	I feel like he should have become a preacher.	2025-09-13T10:...	0	0.263	0	0.737	0.3612
@dejmo.n	Don't worry. He is in heaven. And see us. The future president of the ...	2025-09-13T07:...	0	0.328	0	0.672	0.7786
@kimcarsons70...	Kirk ran atrocity propaganda for some of the most evil people on the ...	2025-09-13T06:...	1	0	0.38	0.62	-0.8687
@jonathonmit...	He was killed by the British forces	2025-09-13T06:...	1	0	0.391	0.609	-0.6705
@GeoMikka-i9o	Trump talks about violence and murder in the JeWSA while violence a...	2025-09-13T05:...	0	0	0.37	0.63	-0.9618
@Dinomess11	Shooting him while answering a question about gun violence is crazy...	2025-09-13T04:...	0	0	0.497	0.503	-0.836
@TheUnknown...	The left couldn't handle the truth	2025-09-13T02:...	1	0	0.246	0.754	-0.2411
@yashitiwan117	Carrying guns in Universities is such an alien concept for everyone I k...	2025-09-13T01:...	1	0.09	0.072	0.839	0.1585
@Badgeraid	Hahahahahahaha Hahahahahahaha	2025-09-13T01:...	0	0	0	1	0
@9thworldtv	Funny how sympathy and empathy is expected for this kind of huma...	2025-09-13T01:...	0	0.296	0	0.704	0.7906
@riehable614	The most stupidest president.. is the current president in USA... He do...	2025-09-12T21:...	0	0	0.178	0.822	-0.5709
@SKBULL-crv	Battle with wind...	2025-09-12T20:...	0	0	0.464	0.536	-0.3818
@tomasintexas	The irony ☹️ Counting or not counting gang violence ☹️ Those were his...	2025-09-12T20:...	0	0	0.085	0.915	-0.0516
@happysocks953	May he rest in peace wish his family strength	2025-09-12T18:...	0	0.573	0	0.427	0.8555
@FelmarRoelRa...	The Philippines and we Filipinos join the World in mourning the mur...	2025-09-12T18:...	0	0.151	0.265	0.584	-0.765
@Dimbeswarku...	In Assam, the way people are committing suicide, why are they doing...	2025-09-12T18:...	0	0.072	0.145	0.783	-0.7463
@beeba52	Did your female news anchor say he 'wound people up?'	2025-09-12T18:...	0	0	0	1	0
@saraibanezas...	He was killed because his life of faith, we need more Charlie in this w...	2025-09-12T17:...	0	0.131	0.211	0.657	-0.4019
@ezramogire87...	Sorry	2025-09-12T17:...	0	0	0.565	0.435	-0.0772
@salah777	Great job whoever did it ❤️	2025-09-12T16:...	0	0.451	0	0.549	0.6249
@jurajkostur	no protests? nothing? white lives matter? wake up people.	2025-09-12T16:...	0	0	0.449	0.551	-0.5739
@Jauv_	This is crazy	2025-09-12T15:...	0	0	0.444	0.556	-0.34

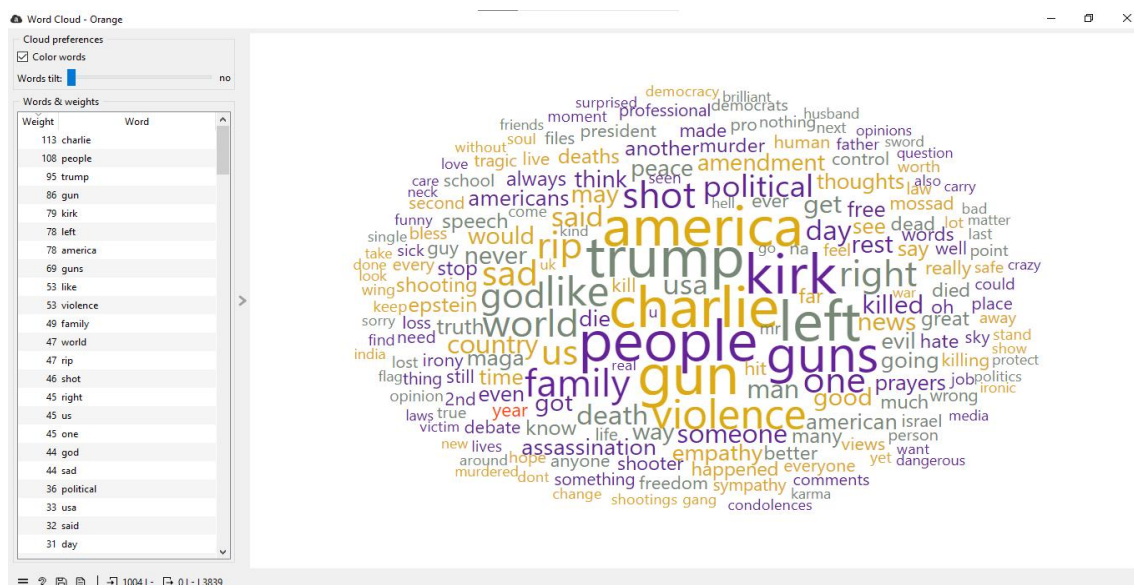
The figure above presents a data table generated using the *Orange* data mining tool. The analysis employed the VADER method to evaluate dominant



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sentiments, encompassing positive, negative, neutral, and compound sentiments. The highest positive sentiment value regarding public responses and concerns about Charlie Kirk's murder is 0.825, while the lowest is 0. This provides insight into how the audience reacted to this incident. On the negative side, the highest sentiment value is 0.819, with the lowest being 0, indicating that viewers expressed negative sentiments through their choice of words. For neutral sentiment, the highest value is 1, and the lowest is 0.104. Additionally, the highest compound sentiment value is 0.974, while the lowest is -0.9874. This dataset comprises 1,004 comments that reflect public reactions to Charlie Kirk's murder, which was presented to the audience at the Utah Valley University campus. It includes details such as author IDs, publication dates, and full comments on the videos.

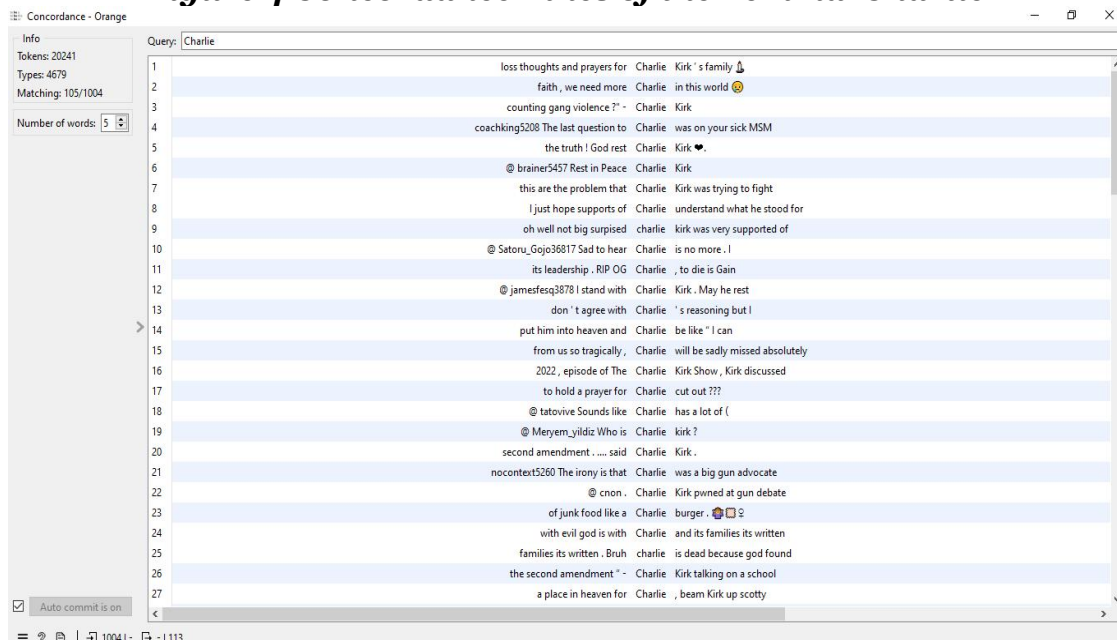
Figure 3: WORD CLOUD of COMMENTS



The "Cloud" feature visually represents the most frequently occurring words in the dataset. The most common keywords include Charlie (113), People (108), Trump (95), gun (86), Kirk (79), America (78), Violence (53), family (49), shot (45), sad (44), and political (36). The keyword "Charlie" is the most frequent, indicating that Charlie Kirk is the central focus of the dataset due to his tragic assassination in the USA. Words like "People" and "family" reflect the community's response, grief, and concerns of those who were close to him. Additionally, the terms "Trump," "gun," "Kirk," "America," "violence," "shot," "sad," and "political" suggest that Charlie Kirk's death is being framed politically, tied to the national debate and societal anger regarding violence in the USA. While some viewers argue that the conversation should focus on gun violence rather than politics, this narrative has generated feelings of sadness and fear among the public. Furthermore, since his murder was committed with a gunshot, the word "shot" appears frequently in the dataset. Overall, these words reflect a blend of national and personal tragedy. On one hand, there is the sorrow of a life lost, and on the other, there is the revelation of political polarization and anger within American society.

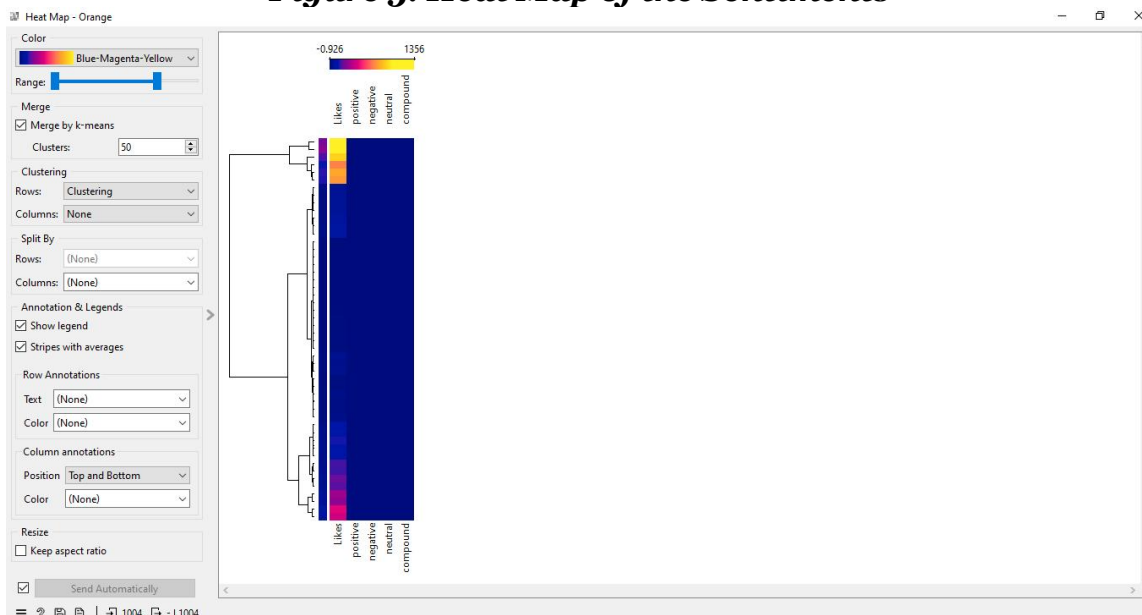


Figure 4 Concordance Lines of the Lemma 'Charlie'



The concordance feature is utilized to search for the most frequently occurring keyword, "Charlie." The results provide context for the word, such as in the phrase "tragic loss of Charlie Kirk's family," which reflects people's concerns for his family. Some viewers struggle to believe that Charlie is no longer alive. As a prominent advocate for gun rights, his death by gun violence offers insight into how Charlie is viewed in linguistic terms. Additionally, it shows the heartfelt reactions from individuals for both him and his family, as well as the political implications surrounding his death.

Figure 5: Heat Map of the Sentiments



The Heat Map illustrates the sentiment analysis of online comments related to Charlie Kirk's death, showcasing five variables: likes, negative sentiment, neutral sentiment, and compound score. It reveals that the discourse surrounding Kirk's death had predominantly negative sentiments, with only a few isolated clusters



exhibiting higher positivity. The lowest sentiment score recorded was -0.926, indicating that many comments were strongly negative. The likes metric also aligns with sentiment scores, demonstrating how public engagement correlates with emotional tone. The highest engagement, with 1,356 likes, was concentrated in a few supportive comments. Most of the dataset clustered in the blue range of negative values, confirming that negative sentiment dominated public reactions, while positive responses were scarce but garnered significant likes.

Figure 6: Box Plot of Emotion



Considering the examined social responses, one may notice the variety of emotions that represent complicated and divided attitudes toward the death of Charlie Kirk. People kill people; it is a sad day. RIP CK 🙏🙏🙏,” which conveys disapproval and frustration over the act of violence itself. It means that not all viewers were inclined to the political associations and instead to the tragic deprivation of life, and it seems to have been the main worry of people about senseless murders and the inability to defend human life. The fear is also expressed in remarks like, they had killed their own asset to create more outrage. It's giving a false flag.” It demonstrates fear and mistrust of influential structures that portray that some viewers are not safe to see this gruesome murder because they suspect unknown forces are manipulating them.

The commentary extends beyond the instant action, highlighting the issue of exploitation in the political system and systemic corruption. The emotion of sadness is also very pronounced as people reacted with sympathy towards the dead and his family. As an illustration, remarks such as “Wasn't a fan of Charlie Kirk's views”, but he was a father and a husband, and no one should lose the father/husband will display the sorrow and grief of the loss of human life and the effect it will have on the family it has left behind.

These are reactions that transcend political affiliation, and one can see a genuine feeling of empathy for the human being and the tragedy that accompanies the violence. The irony or criticism of the joy is found in such comments as the irony of the Left is that they are becoming what they say that they fear the most. This implies that there are viewers who find coping mechanisms of the emotionally charged situation with humour or smug



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satisfaction in pointing out hypocrisy. There is also an element of surprise, with remarks that show shock and surprise at the widespread nature of gun violence in the USA. One respondent commented, I must be lacking something here, there are 47 school shootings this year alone, and I am astonished and worried about the rate of gun violence.

Other remarks were similar, like, “In the mean, approximately 120 Americans are being shot dead every day (approximately 48,000 a year), and still, so much ado is being made over this shooting. The combination of these reactions suggests that, although the death of Kirk does not surprise the people, they are worried about the actual case and the current cycle of violence that cannot be stopped. The surprise stems not only from the tragic loss itself but also from the unresolved systemic issues. This reaction suggests that while people have become accustomed to gun violence, the statistics still manage to shock them.

Dominant Themes in the Data

Hypocrisy and Media Bias in the USA

One strong observation from people's voices is that the U.S. media, and sometimes its citizens, are selective in how they respond to tragic events, such as the killing of Charlie Kirk. The outrage surrounding his death was considerable, especially when compared to the silence regarding the persistent violence of ordinary killings. For many, this reflects a hypocrisy in American society: it tolerates endless violence, yet when a political figure is killed, it suddenly becomes a national tragedy. Some voices assert, “This is America; this is democracy at its finest: violence, death, disunity. And it exports the same all over the globe—death and bloodshed.” This highlights the hypocrisy of Americans who call their country a democratic state while simultaneously spreading violence around the world.

The media bias is underscored by the fact that news outlets often spotlight the deaths of elite figures but frequently ignore the countless lives lost in schools, streets, and workplaces. This selective mourning raises questions about whether all lives are valued equally or only those with political and media significance. For example, one commenter noted, “I think there might have been Democrats that got shot too; I'm not sure if there was Fox News coverage on it, but I'm sure they meant to.” This emphasizes the notion that some deaths receive more attention than others. Another commenter expressed frustration over media bias, stating, “I must be missing something here. There have been 47 school shootings in America this year alone, with 19 young victims up to now (as of September 12, 2025). Meanwhile, around 120 Americans are shot dead every day (approximately 48,000 a year). Yet, there is an overwhelming amount of fuss over this particular shooting. It is, of course, sad and unnecessary, leaving a family in ruins, but where is the interest in doing something about the millions of guns available for anyone to pick up and misuse?”

Ideological Intolerance

Kirk's ideological positions play a significant role in the conversation surrounding his death, with many linking it to the causes he passionately defended, particularly gun rights. For example, one comment noted the irony of being pro-gun: “My condolences to the Jewish lobby; better get recruiting.” This



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statement suggests that adhering strongly to a belief in gun rights can potentially lead to one's downfall. Kirk often dismissed calls for restrictions on firearms, even asserting that tragedies like school shootings were sacrifices needed to preserve the Second Amendment. His views highlight the irony of ideological stances.

As a staunch advocate for gun rights, he defended a culture that normalizes access to weapons, leading some to view his death as a natural consequence of his beliefs. Many pointed out his dismissal of empathy, labeling it as "weakness," which is a cruel twist considering that, in the aftermath of his death, many refuse to show him any empathy. One of the remarks made, is that Charlie said school shootings were the price that had to be paid to have the right to bear arms. He also thought empathy was an illness. This demonstrates the way cruel ideologies result in inhumane treatment. The other instance is the feeling that the individuals in this comment section are utterly missing out that he was murdered due to his views and his right to practice his opinions freely. And they tell you that nothing is threatening the freedom of speech in the West. This is proof of that. Others criticise the film, saying the assassination of him highlights the menace of freedom of expression in the West, though many deny that it is a threat.

Assassination as a Tool to Silence Opposing Political Views

The way people reacted on the assassination of Charlie Kirk show that people felt that the assassination was not an accident but was a political tool of silencing differing opinions. It is common knowledge that when one side of the political spectrum loses ground in a debate, it often resorts to violence to silence the voices it cannot out-argue. Others perceive the killing as a manifestation of a general breakdown in the conversation of the people, with open dialogue being substituted by aggression and intimidation. It has been argued that the assassination endorses the conservative fears of a society going out of hand; Kirk was telling of anarchy, and at the end of it all, he was an intended target, which explains that political adversaries can go to the extent of using criminal means to attain their objectives. One critic pointed out that all Kirk was seeking was open debate; however, his opposing sides were losing the argument and turned to violence, which proved that they used assassination to silence him. The man just wanted to argue with people and especially to converse. The left is not winning the debate in America, so extreme elements opted to kill him. Even words of mourning are often political, and this is indicative of the difficulty in distinguishing between the tragedy of humankind and the struggle for survival.

Overall, these two opinions support the fact that assassination is purposefully employed as the means of silencing protests and turning the moment of defeat into a new indication of political anarchy. It was not a gun violence victim, but the radical left assassinated him because they disagreed with what he was saying. That is what has happened here, the left has decided to kill him instead of having a debate with him. This is exemplified by the drastic measures taken against dissenting voices.

Public Showing Fear and Distrust in Modern Democracies

The general feeling is that insecurity is perceived as a significant fear among contemporary democratic societies, as people increasingly distrust political



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authority and its structures. It is a common argument that if some public figures and leaders can be assassinated, ordinary citizens are left even more defenceless, which means that democracy is not protecting its citizens. The frequent incidences of political violence and lawlessness make the citizens doubt whether the ruling people care about their safety or if politics has been turned into a weapon of corruption, division, and violence. The fact that, when said, it is not very safe, such a statement as I feel sorry for the people in the U.S., they have no safety, underlines how unsafe democracy is at a personal level. In the same way, statements like Two presidential assassination attempts, and one presidential candidate shot in the head during broad daylight, point to the fact that the power of the political rank cannot assure order.

All these opinions point in one direction: that societies, which are supposed to be citadels of freedom and safety, are, on the contrary, perceived as unsafe and unreliable, with safety and faith in leadership both on the decline. Such expressions as, it is a sad time in the U.S. right now; with such attacks happening, it is not safe, etc. and, this will not be the last political figure to be targeted, and one whose connections are related to Trump. Heaven forbid that the U.S. now reads a generalised fear on the issue of living in a democratic society. Individuals think that assassinations are no longer single events but a worrying trend, proving that many people no longer have the feeling of being safe in contemporary democratic life. One more comment is, it is not gun violence, it is deep-state murder. And he was noisy as all get out--just like Kennedy. This highlights the lack of trust in political power, as it suggests that even people like Trump would not be there to protect. Referring to JFK helps to demonstrate that the paranoia surrounding political interference has numerous decades-long roots, and people feel like they are being puppets in the background of some orchestrated processes.

Communal Empathy with the Deceased and his Family

Although there is anger, polarization and fear within society, most people showed sincere compassion in the case of a recent tragedy. They expressed sympathy, underlined the fact that a family has lost its loved one, and condemned people who ridiculed the death of a person. Such responses confirm that many people still hold on to the idea that we are all the same even despite our political differences even though so much of the general sentiment has fallen away. They knew that the Kirk family did not need to experience such sorrow, notwithstanding their differing political opinions. It was these sympathetic reactions that served as a contrast to the brutality, allowing individuals to save face in an environment frequently dominated by aggression. One man commented, It is a pity to know that Charlie is dead—my condolences and best wishes to his family at this hard time. One of them also said, "I did not agree with virtually anything he said, but I cannot gloat because this is a human being who has a family, and humanity trumps politics. The only comment made was 'RIP Charlie Kirk,' which was relatively straightforward and very strong. No one has a right to it, and it is a heartfelt reminder of our humanity. The empathetic voices reveal that communal love is not yet lost and indicate the chances of togetherness even amidst cruelty through grief and compassion.



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Conclusion

This study examines the civic reaction to the horrible assassination of Charlie Kirk, a right-wing activist, as he gave a speech at Utah Valley University. Using Orange software to retrieve sentiments and emotions and employing thematic analysis to interpret comments posted on social media, primarily on YouTube, the researchers revealed a deep layer of feelings. Those responses were as sorrowful and indignant as they were discursively political, on the one hand, and, on the other, the picture of their human feelings was detailed and beautiful in its complexity. The perceived media bias was an abomination to users, and alarm was acutely raised on the harmfulness of expressing different views in a highly polarised society today in an open-minded manner.

At the heart of this event was a left-wing activist, Tyler Robinson, whose motives are unclear but are closely connected to radical political frustration. The data obtained, such as family conversations and activity in social media, provides an insight. However, it does not conclusively indicate a single ideological motive, suggesting a more general social uneasiness. This highlights the uncomfortable fact that ideological arguments can escalate to the point of violence, a worrying trend that is jeopardising the very nature of democratic discourse. The scholars of the given research recommend the creation of education programs that would focus on conflict resolution, critical thinking, and the importance of respectful dialogue. These efforts may become essential instruments in preventing future tragedies, as they promote helpful dialogue on the differences in belief. In the future, this research highlights significant gaps that necessitate further investigation. The way people are radicalised by online subcultures, and how individual platforms and communities contribute to the formation of extremist opinion, should be investigated by future researchers. Moreover, comparative analysis of media coverage of political events by different media sources would help to understand the extent to which media biases influence mass opinion and social attitudes towards political leaders. Finally, the Kirk case is a sobering lesson on the importance of empathy, understanding and discourse in creating a safer and more inclusive society.

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