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Justifying the Murder of Charlie Kirk

**Understanding Public Support
and Sympathy for Political
Violence**



"When people stop talking, that's when you get violence."

"When people stop talking that's when civil war happens, because you start to think the other side is so evil and they lose their humanity."



Charlie Kirk

The Research Question

- In this report, we investigate people's reactions to the murder of Charlie Kirk.
- How many people think his murder was justified? Why?
- How much sympathy was there for Charlie Kirk?
- Why are people unwilling to express sympathy towards him?



Methodology

Engage AI conducted chat-based interviews with 1,583 individuals to explore their beliefs regarding the murder of Charlie Kirk and the factors influencing their opinions.



Sample Size: 1,583

Gender:

53% Female
45% Male
1% Non-binary

Age:

Average age: 43.8

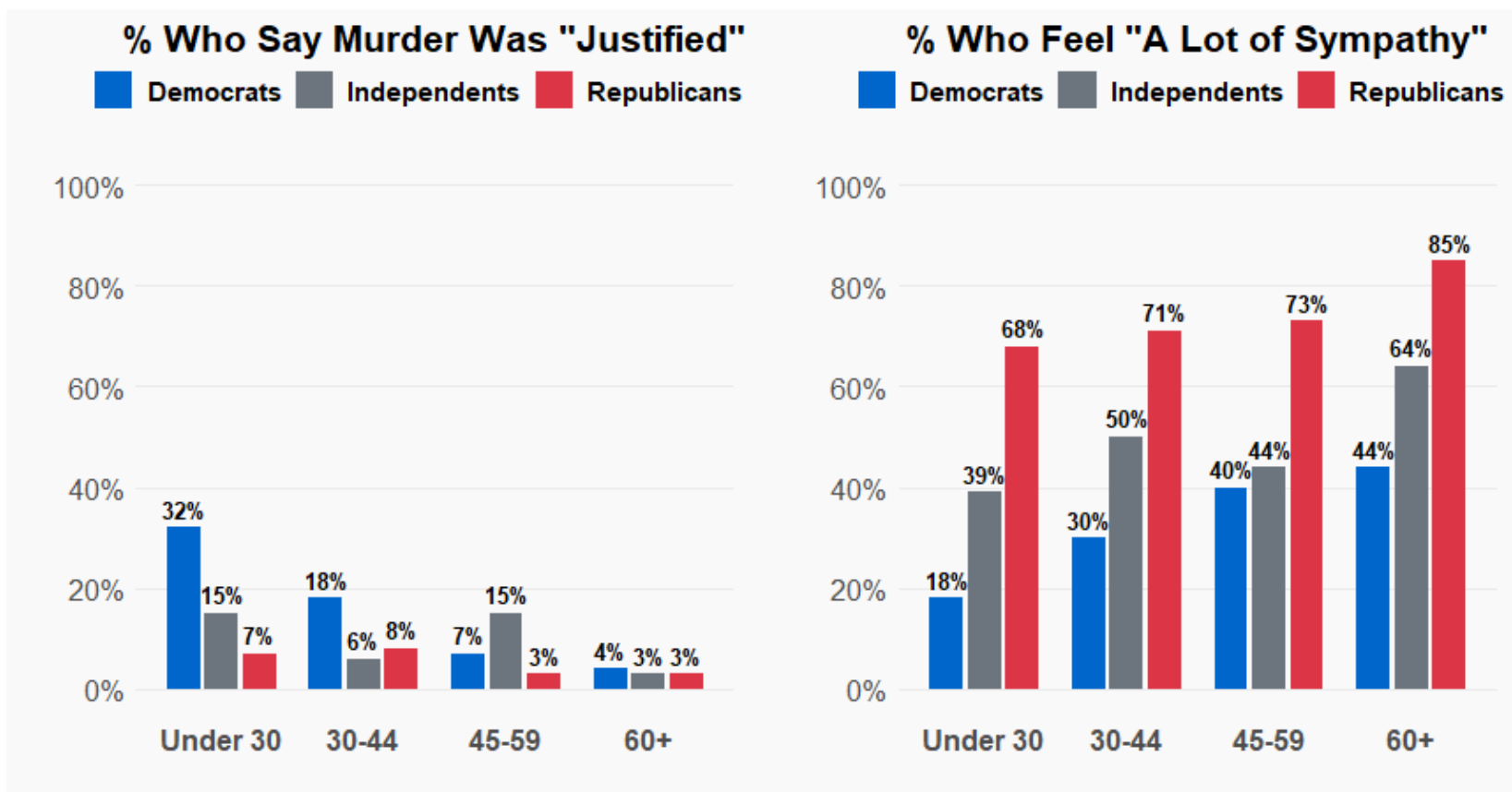
Race/Ethnicity:

61% White
12% Black
13% Latino
6% Asian
8% Other/Mixed



How many people
think the murder of
Charlie Kirk was
justified?

How Americans Responded to Charlie Kirk Murder



Source: CloudResearch National Survey (N=1,583) • 24 hours after incident

22% of respondents under age 30 thought the murder was justified.

Percent who thought Charlie Kirk murder was justified, by age and political party.

Age Group	Democrat	Republican	Independent	Other	Total
Under 30	32%	7%	15%	23%	22%
30-44	18%	8%	6%	6%	10%
45-59	7%	3%	15%	13%	7%
60+	4%	3%	3%	10%	4%
All Ages	20%	5%	10%	16%	12%

Do you feel that the killing of Charlie Kirk was justified?

	Democrat	Republican	Independent	Other	Total
Yes - definitely justified	6%	2%	2%	9%	4%
Yes - somewhat justified	14%	3%	8%	7%	8%
No - somewhat unjustified	23%	7%	18%	16%	16%
No - definitely unjustified	58%	88%	72%	68%	72%

🔗 AI-Generated Analysis

Overview

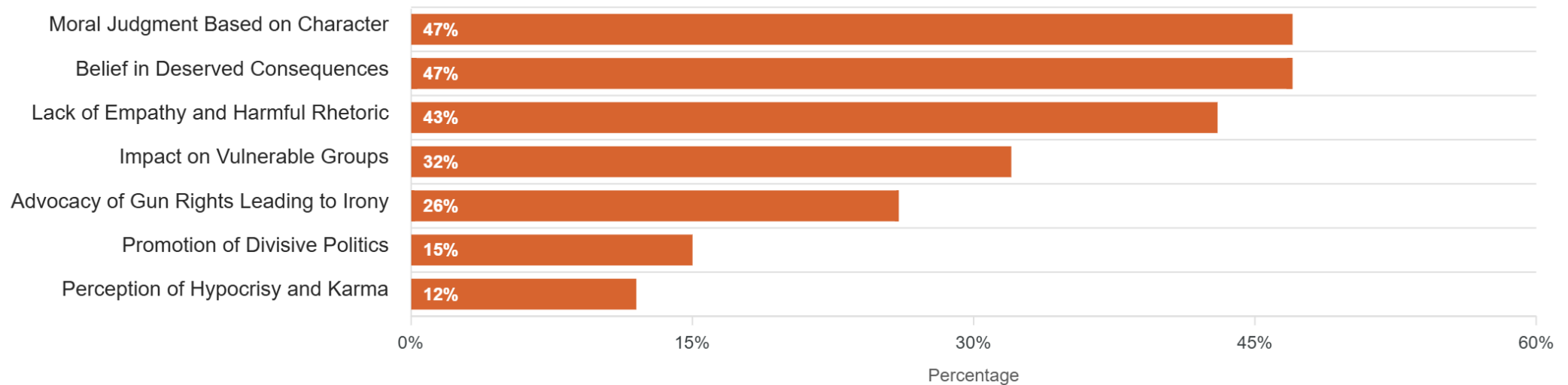
The qualitative data presents a diverse range of perspectives on the perceived justifications for the killing of Charlie Kirk. Participants' responses span moral, ethical, and personal viewpoints, revealing underlying themes related to political ideologies, personal experiences with discrimination, and attitudes towards gun violence.

Key Themes

1. **Perceived Hate Speech and Racism:** Many respondents referenced Charlie Kirk's rhetoric, highlighting his quotes perceived as racist, homophobic, or misogynistic. This was seen as contributing to a culture of hate, with some participants expressing relief or a lack of sympathy with his demise due to these views.
2. **Gun Rights and 'Karma':** A recurring theme involved Kirk's advocacy for gun rights, with multiple participants noting the irony or karmic perspective that his death involved gun violence—a consequence he purportedly deemed acceptable in defense of the Second Amendment.
3. **Empathy and Emotional Responses:** Responses varied concerning empathy towards Kirk's family versus Kirk himself, with participants often conflicted between the impact of his words and the human aspect of his death.
4. **Political Divisiveness:** The incident was frequently linked to broader political strife, reflecting concerns over political rhetoric and its consequences. Respondents mentioned the influence of extreme political beliefs and fear over escalating violence.
5. **Personal Vendettas and Emotional Closure:** Some participants expressed personal satisfaction derived from Kirk's death, citing personal grievances or broader societal issues like oppression, suggesting a 'fighting fire with fire' mentality.

Among people that
said that Charlie
Kirk's killing was
justified

Based on the interviews Engage identified the main reasons why people thought the murder was justified:



Here is an excerpt from one **21-year-old female college student** who told Engage :



“He was a bigot who constantly spread misinformation along with hateful and discriminatory beliefs. Although I feel sympathy for those who were present at the event, along with his family, I believe that as someone who has previously stated that "some deaths are necessary" in order to protect our Second Amendment rights, him getting shot is karma.”

Engage replied by asking:



“It sounds like your feelings about this incident are influenced by both what you see as Charlie Kirk's past actions and statements, as well as the idea of "karma" you mentioned. When you first heard about the shooting, what emotions or thoughts came up for you in that moment?”



Her response:

“I felt relieved that someone so hateful and bigoted could no longer disseminate his prejudicial and discriminatory beliefs, his rhetoric was harmful to our country as a whole and was actively setting us back in terms of freedom, equality, and inclusivity.”

How much
sympathy was
there for Charlie
Kirk?

Half the respondents said they had “a lot” of sympathy for Charlie Kirk

Percent who reported feeling “a lot of sympathy” toward Charlie Kirk by age and political party.

Age Group	Democrat	Republican	Independent	Other	Total
18-29	18%	68%	39%	34%	34%
30-44	30%	71%	50%	52%	51%
45-59	40%	73%	44%	32%	56%
60+	44%	85%	64%	44%	66%
All Ages	30%	75%	48%	39%	50%

10% said they had “no sympathy at all” for Charlie Kirk

Percent who reported feeling “no sympathy at all” toward Charlie Kirk by age and political party.

Age Group	Democrat	Republican	Independent	Other	Total
18-29	20%	4%	11%	17%	14%
30-44	11%	3%	10%	13%	8%
45-59	15%	1%	8%	21%	7%
60+	10%	4%	4%	25%	7%
All Ages	15%	3%	9%	18%	10%

Do you feel any sympathy towards Charlie Kirk?

	Democrat	Republican	Independent	Other	Total
No sympathy at all	15%	3%	9%	18%	10%
Very little sympathy	15%	2%	8%	2%	8%
Some sympathy	24%	9%	21%	25%	18%
A moderate amount of sympathy	16%	11%	15%	15%	14%
A lot of sympathy	30%	75%	48%	39%	50%

A 55-year-old female Democrat told Engage :



“I support every American's right to freely speak their beliefs. Whether or not I agree with him, I sympathize that Charlie Kirk was shot down while expressing free speech. I have sympathy for him and his family, even though I deeply disagree with his ideology.”



“You mentioned that you have sympathy for Charlie Kirk and his family even though you disagree with his ideology—can you tell me more about how you separate your feelings about his beliefs from your feelings about what happened to him personally?”



“My feelings about his beliefs inspire me to debate about that which I disagree. I wish to educate others about my right to speak views that may conflict with others. It is not for me to determine who lives or dies based on beliefs. I feel compassion when any human life is ended. I feel even more compassion that he was killed while exercising his rights, which all Americans have. I do not want any American to lose their constitutional rights or be murdered because of them.”

 AI-Generated Analysis

Theme: Reasons Against Sympathy

Overview

In exploring the reasons participants reported for their lack of sympathy towards Charlie Kirk, multiple narratives emerged, showcasing the complex interplay between individual beliefs, societal values, and Kirk's own statements and public persona.

Key Sub-Themes

1. Controversial Rhetoric:

- Participants frequently cited Kirk's public statements, particularly those relating to gun rights, abortion, and racial equality, as catalysts for their lack of sympathy.
- Kirk's assertion that gun violence is a necessary consequence of the Second Amendment rights led many to perceive him as dismissive of pain caused by gun violence.
- Specific utterances regarding racial minorities, LGBTQ+ rights, and his stance on abortion were seen as intolerant or hateful.

2. Impact of Ideology:

- His alignment with the MAGA movement and close ties with figures like Trump were discussed as reasons that further polarized participants against offering sympathy.
- Participants who identified with minority groups, particularly racial and gender minorities, felt disenfranchised or targeted by Kirk's ideology, influencing their inability to sympathize.

3. Perceived Hypocrisy:

- Participants noted irony or hypocrisy in Kirk's views on violence and empathy, specifically where he minimized others' suffering yet became a victim himself.
- Some participants highlighted a belief that Kirk's downfall was a direct consequence of his polarizing rhetoric.

4. Broader Social Perception:

- The discussion often included reflections on broader social issues like gun control debates and the political divide in the U.S., seeing Kirk as a symbol of these conflicts.
- Public figures who promote divisive discourse were generally viewed unfavorably, reflecting societal exhaustion with aggressive political rhetoric.

**Four Sub-Themes
explaining why people did
not have sympathy for
Charlie Kirk were
identified by Engage**

Are we able to have
respectful debate
in this country?

More than half of the respondents were concerned that the Charlie Kirk murder will “undermine the ability to have respectful debate in this country”.

Age Group	% Agreed
18-29	55%
30-44	59%
45-59	61%
60+	53%
All Ages	57%

How likely do you think it is that this event undermines the ability to have respectful debate in this country?

	Total
Very unlikely	7%
Unlikely	7%
Neither likely nor unlikely	29%
Likely	31%
Very likely	26%

One 23-year-old Independent male emphasized a growing fear of sharing controversial views due to potential violence :



"I feel that people are going to be more afraid of speaking out their opinion on the matters they care about cause that's what Charlie did he was very passionate about the topics he talked about and freely did so and even invited people to discuss them with him but now that this happened people are gonna be more on edge about speaking in public."



"You mentioned that people might lie more often to protect themselves—how do you think this kind of self-censorship could affect the overall quality and honesty of political conversations in the future?"



"Because people have showed they are not always open to discussion and debate and are mentally unhinged enough to enact political violence on the opposites just cause they don't agree."

Have we reached a
tipping point where
political violence is
now acceptable

33% of respondents thought that political violence is now acceptable

Percent who agreed “we’ve reached a tipping point where political violence is now acceptable in the US”

Age Group	Democrat	Republican	Independent	Other	Total
18-29	41%	29%	33%	29%	35%
30-44	39%	33%	33%	26%	34%
45-59	40%	24%	32%	21%	29%
60+	42%	26%	23%	13%	30%
All Ages	40%	27%	31%	24%	33%

Do you think we've reached a tipping point where political violence is now acceptable in the US?

	Democrat	Republican	Independent	Other	Total
Strongly agree	13%	12%	12%	14%	12%
Agree	28%	16%	19%	10%	20%
Neither agree nor disagree	22%	20%	28%	33%	23%
Disagree	18%	17%	19%	13%	18%
Strongly disagree	20%	35%	22%	29%	26%

Societal attitudes toward political violence have shifted:

Leadership Influence: A recurring theme was the influence of political leaders, notably President Donald Trump, with many attributing an increase in political violence to his rhetoric and actions, such as his reaction to the January 6th Capitol riot and his statements perceived as permissive of violence.

Media and Social Media: Participants frequently described how media sensationalism, social media's rapid dissemination of information, and misinformation contribute to the perceived normalization of violence.

Historical Context and Comparison: Many references were made to historical events such as past assassinations (JFK, MLK) or instances of unrest (Civil Rights Movement, the Capitol riot). These events were often used to contrast current events, suggesting a perceived continuity or escalation in political violence.

Moral and Legal Standards: Many emphasized that, despite increased visibility or frequency of violence, it remains legally and morally unacceptable in the broader American ethos. This underscores a belief in upholding democratic values and the rule of law as bulwarks against normalization.

Polarization and Division: A significant portion of the data highlighted societal division, where opposing political factions perceive violence mediated through a lens of 'us versus them,' leading to justification from one side when perceived injustices or political extremism arise from the other.

Desensitization and Public Reaction: Some respondents expressed concern over societal desensitization to violence, evident through frequent incidents and subsequent normalization. They highlight an increase in violent discourse and actions that fail to shock the public.

The overall analysis suggests that while many were alarmed by recent trends of political violence normalization, there remains a robust constituency advocating for non-violence and adherence to democratic principles, emphasizing the dynamic and highly polarized nature of this issue in contemporary American society.



How many people
were “okay with
political violence”
against those they
disagree with?

Silver Lining: Only 3% said okay with political violence against those I disagree with”

Age Group	Total
18-29	4%
30-44	5%
45-59	3%
60+	0%
All Ages	3%

I am okay with political violence against those I disagree with

	Democrat	Republican	Independent	Other	Total
Strongly agree	1%	1%	1%	0%	1%
Agree	3%	2%	2%	3%	2%
Neither agree nor disagree	13%	5%	9%	23%	10%
Disagree	22%	12%	18%	17%	17%
Strongly disagree	61%	80%	71%	57%	70%



Summary

- CloudResearch National Survey (N=1,583) within 24 hours after incident
- 22% of Americans under 30 said the murder was justified
 - Among Democrats under 30: 32% justified the killing
- Partisan divide:
 - Democrats: 20% justified vs. 30% felt "a lot of sympathy"
 - Republicans: 5% justified vs. 75% felt "a lot of sympathy"
- 57% worry this undermines respectful debate
- 33% believe political violence is now "acceptable" in the U.S.
- **Generational gap:** Younger Americans across all parties showed less sympathy and more acceptance of violence than older generations
- **Silver lining:** Only 3% admitted being "okay with political violence" against those they disagree with

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