

# Political violence is a problem of the left

## Democrats can take affirmative steps to stop it

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Another week, another shooting. This time, apparent assassination attempts on U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers in Dallas that missed their intended targets. Violent anti-ICE protests spread in Oregon and elsewhere. Another Sunday church shooting in Michigan. An ideological genealogy that spreads like wildfire online, which tragically snuffed out the life of Charlie Kirk.

Although violent extremism is bipartisan, it is disproportionately on the left. Twenty-five percent of young liberals think political violence can be justified, and another 14% are on the fence about it, according to a recent YouGov poll. That's nearly half of young liberals.

Thirty-four percent of college students think violence to shut down campus speech is acceptable in certain circumstances, according to Greg Lukianoff, a leading free speech researcher. Seventy-two percent believe that shouting down speakers with whom they disagree — the heckler's veto — is acceptable. A liberal think tank reports a surge in leftist violence. Eight in 10 voters now say we are in a political crisis.

Democratic politicians regularly sought to contextualize the Kirk shooting rather than unconditionally condemn it. Professors, public school teachers and students on the left celebrated it. A post on Bluesky seemed to identify a list of conservative influencers who are the next targets.

Jews have been assailed and even killed amid leftist, anti-Western and pro-Hamas chants to "globalize the intifada." Two assassination attempts were made on President Trump, one on U.S. Supreme Court Justice Brett M. Kavanaugh, and large parts of the online left have lionized Luigi Mangione, the alleged UnitedHealthcare assassin, and his incoherent ideological rants. Leftist organizers violently attacked federal law enforcement in Los Angeles months ago with nary a protest from Democratic officials. The list goes on.

Facing the violent extremism of the Weather Underground, the Symbionese Liberation Army in the 1970s and elements of the Black Panther movement, Democratic leaders, together with the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., worked to actively promote nonviolence as a core tenet of their liberalism, as writer Coleman Hughes details. Today, besides the pabulum platitudes about "violence having no place," Democrats seem to be actively ratcheting up the radicalized environment in three ways.

First is the indiscriminate and illiterate use of radicalized vocabulary — "Nazi" and "fascist," in particular — to describe their political opponents. This is an insult to anyone

whose family lived through the horrors of Nazism. More important, it's an invitation to the radicalized fringe to commit violence. After all, if you really believe that Nazis have taken over, might you also think that taking up arms is a dutiful response? Democrats seem to completely lack self-awareness on this. Second, the left is, perhaps unwittingly, encouraging violence with its "safetyism" theology in public schools, universities and elsewhere. Safetyism is the anti-intellectual idea that some words or ideas that challenge liberal orthodoxy on, for example, gender categories or DEI preferences, are so offensive that those words themselves can be considered a form of "violence."

If students can be convinced that these words and ideas are themselves "violence," it may not be too far afield for those students to then believe that actual physical violence may be an appropriate response to such "offensive" words. Mr. Lukianoff warned of this a decade ago, and it seems to be the warped belief system that drove Kirk's assassin.

Third is the anti-Western nihilism embedded in much of liberal and socialist orthodoxy. Liberals today are deeply skeptical of borders, law enforcement, gender categories, colorblind civil rights enforcement, faith, democratic free markets and other pillars of Western civilization. Many liberals believe parents should have no say when a child seeks to transition their gender. Some Democratic lawmakers have aligned with pro-Palestinian student groups who say they are fighting "for the total eradication of Western civilization." When institutions that built the West are broken down — or "deconstructed," in the parlance of the liberal academic — we begin to see more despair, loneliness and alienation, as leading academics Arthur Brooks and Jonathan Haidt have long suggested. It's well documented that alienation is a precursor of violence. If Democrats want to stop political violence, they can take a few affirmative steps. First, the party leaders should renounce the indiscriminate use of the words "fascism" and "Nazi," which are radicalizing some leftist online cohorts. Democrats could recommit support for the Western ideas that have generated so much of our civilizational success: open debate and intellectual inquiry over raw partisanship, nonsectarian nationalism, secure borders, law and order, colorblind civil rights, faith, and excellence, to name just a few. Democrats should also join with the president to pass a national terrorism statute and, until such is enacted, use the full weight of the Justice Department and the criminal anti-racketeering laws to investigate and prosecute anyone who in any way aids and abets political violence. The FBI should be greenlit to increase online monitoring of extreme groups, as shooters often have extensive digital footprints before they act. And for their part, Republicans should agree to investigate and prosecute violent extremism wherever it occurs.

Democrats cannot claim to protect democracy if they don't take affirmative acts to end political violence on their flanks. Nor can they expect to repair their dismal approval ratings if they fail on this defining issue of the day. The party now has the chance to step up to the plate in the most meaningful ways if it will only seize the opportunity.

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