

Trump administration says it will target far left groups for Kirk's assassination. Prosecutors made no such link.

Kirk's alleged assassin said he targeted the conservative activist because he "spreads too much hate" and "I had enough of his hatred," new court documents show.

Bondi says Justice Department will target users of hate speech

01:01



Get more news **LIVE** on  NBC NEWS NOW. >

Sept. 17, 2025, 2:00 AM PDT

By Rich Schapiro, David Rohde and Dan De Luce

In the aftermath of Charlie Kirk's assassination, President Donald Trump and his allies have threatened to [bring the weight of the federal government](#) against what they refer to as the "radical left."

"It is a vast domestic terror movement," Stephen Miller, Trump's top policy adviser, said Monday.

“With God as my witness, we are going to use every resource we have at the Department of Justice, Homeland Security and throughout this government to identify, disrupt, dismantle and destroy these networks and make America safe again for the American people,” he added. “It will happen, and we will do it in Charlie’s name.”



— White House Deputy Chief of Staff Stephen Miller during a television interview outside the West Wing of the White House, Aug. 29. Andrew Cabareлло-Reynolds / AFP - Getty Images file

But the suggestion that a secret network of violent left-wing extremists was behind the killing [stands in contrast](#) to the evidence that law enforcement officials presented on Tuesday in Utah, where Kirk was fatally shot. There was no indication presented Tuesday that the suspect, Tyler Robinson, was a member of a group or that he fell under the sway of a particular leader. The investigation is ongoing.

Utah County Attorney Jeffrey Gray laid out seven counts – including aggravated murder – against Robinson, and detailed the evidence against him in a 10-page court filing. In the hours after the shooting, Robinson was asked twice, by his father and his roommate, why he shot Kirk. He responded that Kirk “spreads too much hate” and “I had enough of his hatred,” the documents show.

Experts told NBC News that the Trump administration appears to be using Kirk's assassination as an excuse to crack down on left-wing individuals and groups. While administration officials have yet to detail their plans, statements by Miller and others raise questions of who exactly would be targeted, how, and what effect this might have in stifling political dissent.

“When I see terms like disrupt, dismantle and destroy these networks, the question is – Is it a criminal network that's plotting crimes?” said Anthony Cangelosi, a former Secret Service and Department of Homeland Security agent. “If they are, then disrupt and dismantle them. We don't just disrupt or dismantle organizations that we disagree with.”

Trump swept into office in January vowing to exact revenge on his perceived enemies. His administration has already taken action against universities, law firms, prominent Democrats and FBI agents who worked on the Jan. 6 investigations, to name a few.



— President-elect Donald Trump walks out on stage after being declared the winner during an election night watch party Palm Beach, Fla., early on Nov. 6, 2024. Jabin Botsford / The Washington Post via Getty Images file

But a new crackdown along the lines of what Miller has proposed is raising fears among some civil liberties groups and political experts that the administration is ramping up its efforts to punish or silence critics.

“The administration’s signaling that it intends to use the assassination of Charlie Kirk as justification for targeting the political left is the least surprising outcome of this tragedy, ” said David Viola, a professor at John Jay College in New York and author of “You Have Unleashed a Storm,” a new book on political violence during the 1960s.

He noted that the move has “scary echoes in our not too distant past,” referencing the actions of the FBI under J. Edgar Hoover to target left-leaning groups and figures like Martin Luther King.

“The truth is, we have a crisis of political violence in the United States today – not a crisis of ‘radical left’ political violence or ‘radical right’ political violence,” Viola added. “Amplifying one aspect of the crisis while pretending the other doesn’t exist will only cause the spiral to worsen.”

Since 2002, right-wing ideologies have fueled more than 70% of all extremist attacks and domestic terror plots in the U.S., according to the Anti-Defamation League.

Ideology and terror

Right-wing ideologies have fueled more than 70% of all extremist attacks and domestic terror plots since 2002 in the U.S., according to the Anti-Defamation League.

Right wing (white supremacist)	385
Right wing (anti-government)	148
Islamist	135
Right wing (other)	64
Left wing	51
Other	5
Unknown	1

Notes: List includes plots that were foiled or thwarted by law enforcement. [Read more on the ADL classifications.](#)
Source: [NBC News analysis of Anti-Defamation League data](#)
Graphic: Nigel Chiwaya / NBC News

The Justice Department itself noted in a 2024 study that the number of far-right attacks in the U.S. continues to outpace all other types of terrorism and domestic violent extremism. The study was removed from the Justice Department website in the past few days, according to [404 Media](#).

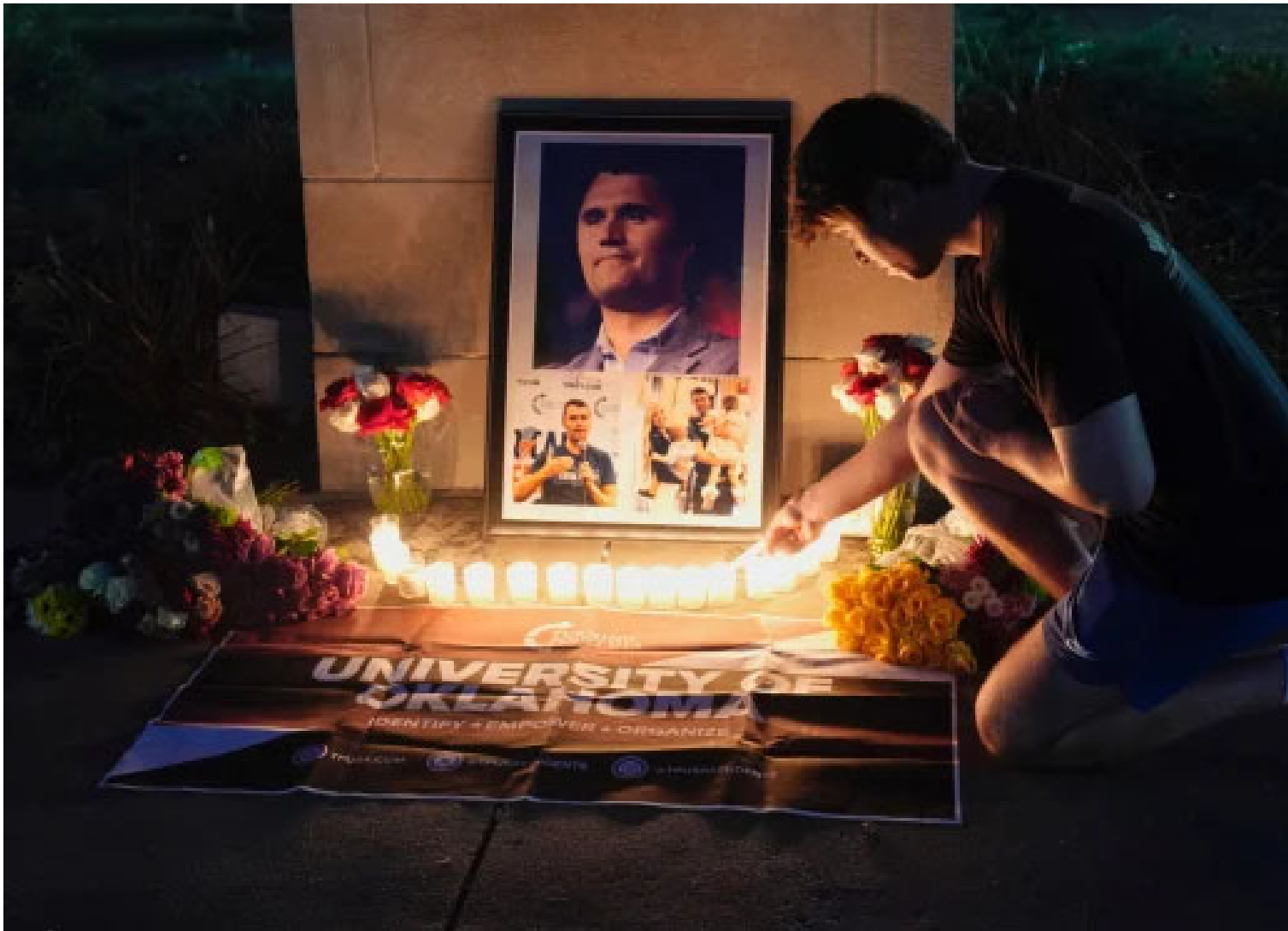
The Justice Department did not respond to a request for comment about the removal of the study or the details of its plan to target left-wing groups.

Abigail Jackson, a White House spokeswoman, said left-wing organizations have “fueled violent riots, organized attacks against law enforcement officers, coordinated illegal doxing campaigns,

arranged drop points for weapons and riot materials, and more.”

“The Trump administration will get to the bottom of this vast network inciting violence in American communities,” Jackson added. “This effort will target those committing criminal acts and hold them accountable.”

The killing of Kirk, a [hugely popular conservative activist](#) who is credited with helping Trump win the 2024 election, has convulsed an already deeply polarized America.



— Kalib Magana, president of the University of Oklahoma's chapter of Turning Point USA, at a vigil for Charlie Kirk at the University of Oklahoma in Norman, Okla., on Sep. 10. Bryan Terry / The Oklahoman via USA Today Network

Kirk built a [massive following](#), particularly among young Republicans, who flocked to his events on college campuses where he engaged in live debates with students. He was a divisive figure who also drew sharp criticism for statements considered racist, misogynistic, Islamophobic, antisemitic and against transgender people.

Robinson grew up in a conservative family in southwestern Utah but had developed political leanings that reflected a “leftist ideology,” Utah governor Spencer Cox said over the weekend, without elaborating.

Court records on Tuesday noted that Robinson and his father had “very different political views.” His mother told investigators “that over the last year or so, Robinson had become more political and had started to lean more to the left – becoming more pro-gay and trans-rights oriented. She stated that Robinson began to date his roommate, a biological male who was transitioning genders.”

The roommate is cooperating with authorities, and text messages detailed in court documents show the person was shocked by Kirk’s killing.

Robinson was charged in part for targeting Kirk’s “political expression,” prosecutors said, without describing any specific ideology. Robinson wrote messages on [bullet casings that references](#) fascism, video gaming and internet meme culture.

Kirk’s assassination at Utah Valley University marked the latest in a string of targeted attacks against prominent figures on both sides of the political divide.

It came nearly three months after a gunman killed former Minnesota House Speaker Melissa Hortman, a Democrat, and her husband, and injured State Sen. John Hoffman, also a Democrat, and his wife. Two months earlier, the residence of Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro’, a Democrat, was [set on fire](#) by a man who suggested he was [upset by the governor’s position](#) on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In the 2024 presidential campaign, Trump narrowly survived an assassination attempt during a rally in Butler, Pennsylvania. Two months later, Secret Service agents apprehended a gunman lying in wait for Trump on his golf course in Florida. He is currently on trial.

The Biden administration [poured resources](#) into combatting the threat of domestic violent extremism.

The Trump administration has [shifted FBI agents](#) and others to focus on immigration and other priorities. Trump also pardoned those who participated in the Capitol riot on Jan. 6, 2021.

“It’s really hard to take this seriously when all the people who attacked the Capitol were pardoned,” said Daniel Richman, professor of law at Columbia University and a former federal prosecutor in the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Southern District of New York.

Richman said it would be difficult for the Trump administration to carry out the type of sweeping crackdown on what it calls left-wing organizations. “It’s very hard to get it right when, on the one hand, you’re recognizing First Amendment rights and, on the other, recognizing that sometimes people act on their threats.”

The cases that get prosecuted and upheld generally involve a specific threat to harm others, Richman said.

"Violent rhetoric has a regrettably long history in the United States, and a lot of it is protected by the First Amendment," he added. "Context, specificity and the intent of the speaker matter a lot."

A former senior Justice Department official said that defense lawyers would likely urge judges to dismiss charges if the DOJ prosecutes people from one side of the political spectrum and not the other. He said they could argue that prosecutors are engaging in "selective prosecution" and not applying the law equally.

"If a left-wing troll makes a death threat online or by phone, it's a federal crime," said the former official who spoke on the condition of anonymity, citing fears of retribution. "That's also true if a right-wing troll does it."

Some foreign affairs experts likened the Trump administration's threats to actions taken by authoritarian leaders abroad.

In Hungary, Prime Minister Viktor Orban has carried out a long-running campaign to tarnish the reputation of civil society groups -- including those supported by George Soros -- and to try to choke off their funding.

If the Trump administration tries to prosecute nonprofit groups as "terrorist" organizations, that would represent a step beyond even what Hungary's government has pursued and resemble more draconian measures adopted by Russia, according to Peter Kreko, an academic and director of the Political Capital Institute, an independent policy research center based in Budapest.

Such a move would mean following "the hardcore authoritarian playbook," Kreko said. "That's a different kind of toolkit, and I would say it's a more dangerous toolkit."



Rich Schapiro

Rich Schapiro is a reporter with the NBC News national security unit.



David Rohde

David Rohde is the Senior Executive Editor for National Security & Law for NBC News.

Dan De Luce

Dan De Luce is a reporter for the NBC News Investigative Unit.

Katherine Doyle and Andrew Blankstein contributed.
