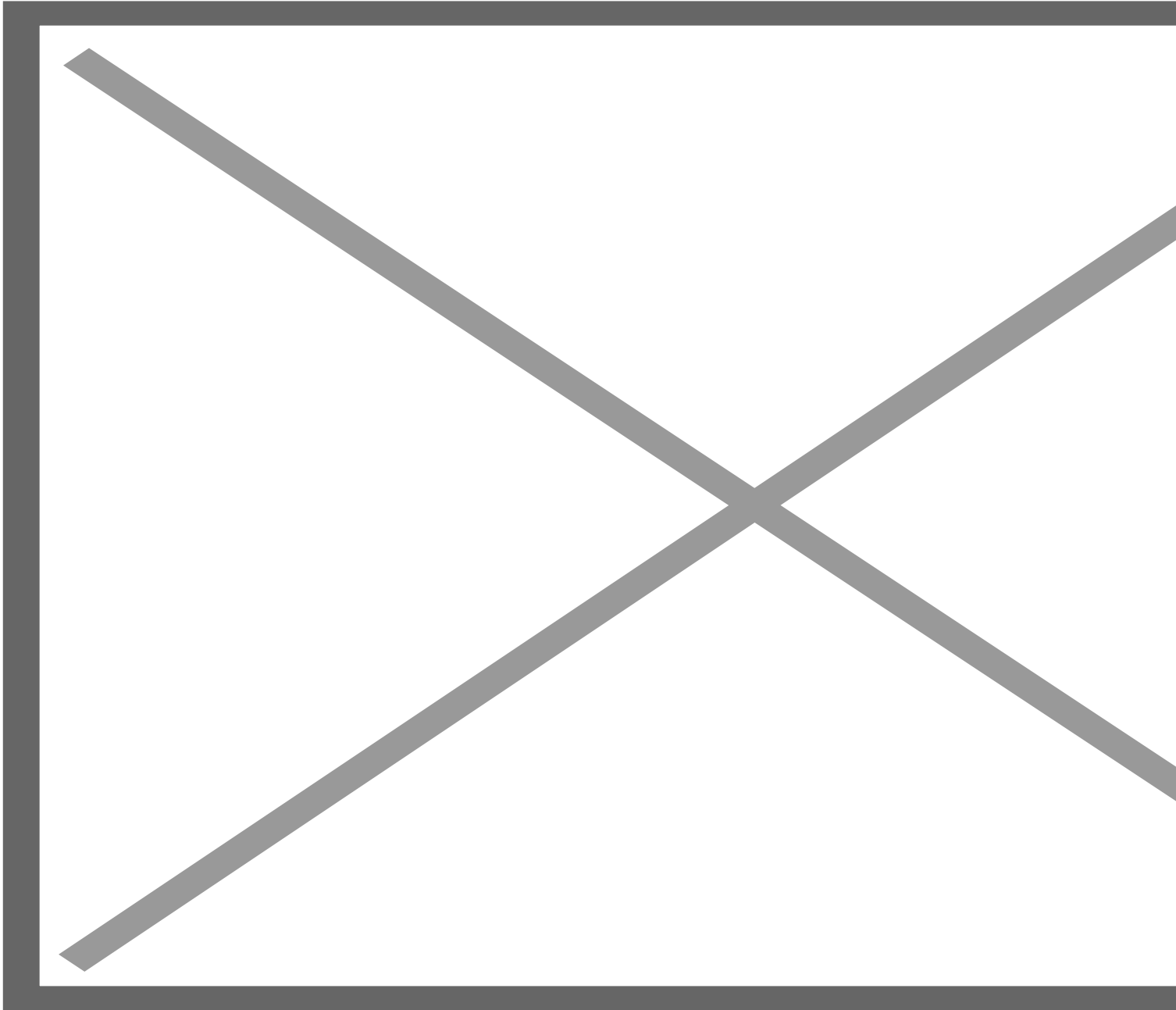


A time for nonviolence

Political violence is morally unacceptable, against Charlie Kirk or anyone else. It's also strategically shortsighted.

From the Editors in the [November 2025](#) issue



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The first thing to say about political violence is that it is categorically wrong. It's antithetical to democracy, contemptuous of human dignity, and incompatible with historic Christian teaching. In these strife-torn times, the temptation toward schadenfreude is always near, and no less than when an activist whose extreme views include pro-gun absolutism—a man who moments earlier echoed a false smear about trans people and mass shootings—is felled by an assassin's bullet. But however offensive his political speech, Charlie Kirk did not deserve to be shot for it. No one does.

We've seen multiple incidents of targeted political violence in recent years, with victims from across the political spectrum. Meanwhile, masked officers are dragging people into unmarked vans, and soldiers are patrolling American cities. Openness to violence feels increasingly normal. We have to stand against it in all forms.

A secondary but crucial point about political violence is that it's not the best way to achieve political goals—the scholarly consensus is that nonviolent action is more effective. Nonviolence has a wider appeal, more capacity to build a large, diverse movement. It is also better at swaying public opinion more broadly, as violent news photos are a quick way to dissolve whatever soft support a movement has.

Any mass movement is going to include varied views on when, if ever, violence is acceptable. Some of the *Century* editors are pacifists, while others stop short of that stance; the same is true of our readers and of their own circles of influence. But we can all practice nonviolence. You don't have to oppose violence in every situation to commit to eschewing it in this one. Yet it is also more demanding than pacifism, because it's more active, riskier.

Nonviolence, in short, takes courage. That's the first of six principles of nonviolence articulated by Martin Luther King Jr. in his first book, *Stride Toward Freedom* (1958). Two years later [he wrote in this magazine](#) about how he came to embrace nonviolence. He had once relegated it to interpersonal conflict, maintaining that at a larger scale “a more realistic approach is necessary.” Then he read Gandhi. “I came to see for the first time,” writes King, “that the Christian doctrine of love operating through the Gandhian method of nonviolence was one of the most potent weapons available to oppressed people” (see “[Pilgrimage to nonviolence](#),” April 13, 1960).

King continued to work with people whose commitment to nonviolence was more circumscribed than his own. In 1964, he assured the *New York Times* that “tactical nonviolence” enjoyed broad support among Black Americans: “They believe in it in a pragmatic sense, not as a way of life as I do.” It's not easy to agitate for social change without contributing to the escalation of social strife. But tactical nonviolence is at the center of any such effort. It publicly refuses to concede, in word or in action, the authoritarian belief that might is right.

There is a growing movement, broad based and tactically nonviolent, to defend American democracy. As people mobilize, they are looking to community organizations for help. Many churches have gotten involved; we need more of this, and fast.

In November we'll mark the anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. In the 1980s, St. Nicholas Church in Leipzig held meetings to pray for peace. These prayer meetings led to pro-democracy actions in the church square, sparking the larger, nonviolent Monday Demonstrations. These in turn spread to other cities, and in 1989 the wall came down.

The US isn't East Germany. But recent months should have extinguished any vestigial exceptionalism, any belief that in America things can only get so bad. Things are bad. The crisis is now, and we all need to stand up to authoritarianism—as a nonviolent movement, which is both the only moral option and the only one that will work.