

OUR BETTER SELVES FOR A BETTER AMERICA

QUICK FACTS

The killing of Charlie Kirk on September 10, 2025, was a grievous tragedy that reverberated through the Utah Valley University (UVU) community and nation. It challenged civility, respectful disagreement, and freedom of speech — core freedoms written in the United States Constitution. In the wake of this tragedy, UVU President Astrid S. Tuminez, Ph.D., asked, “What is this moment asking of us? Of UVU? Of the nation?”

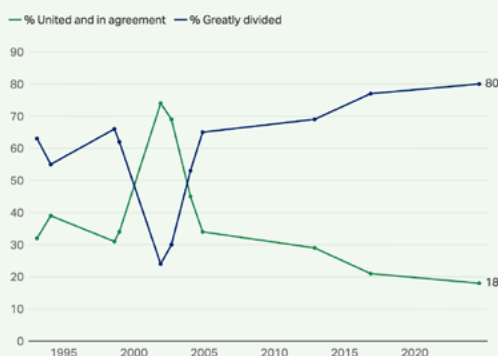
That question became the foundation of a new presidential initiative: Our Better Selves for a Better America. This initiative equips individuals with essential skills — civil dialogue, conflict navigation, principled negotiation, and peacemaking — to ensure disagreement does not devolve into dehumanization.

A NATIONAL NECESSITY

- National research shows that affective polarization — seeing those with different political views as moral or existential threats — has nearly doubled since the late 1970s, reshaping how Americans relate to one another in everyday life (Iyengar et al., 2019; Pew Research Center, 2025).
- 87% say political polarization is a serious threat to the nation, and 86% report feeling exhausted by political division (Listen First Project, 2024; Gallup, 2024).
- More than 85% of Americans believe politically motivated violence is increasing (Pew Research Center, 2025).
- Nearly 1 in 5 young adults say political violence can sometimes be justified (YouGov, 2025).
- 63% of U.S. adults feel that this moment in American politics is a significant turning point in history (Harvard Youth Poll, 2025).

Record-High Percentage of U.S. Adults Say Americans Are Greatly Divided on Most Important Values

Which statement comes closer to your view -- [ROTATED: Americans are united and in agreement about the most important values (or) Americans are greatly divided when it comes to the most important values]?



August 1998 results are from a Kaiser Family Foundation/Washington Post/Harvard University poll.
December 1998 results are from a Washington Post poll.
1993 and 1994 results are from the General Social Survey.

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GALLUP



ABOUT OUR BETTER SELVES FOR A BETTER AMERICA

Our Better Selves for a Better America will transform a moment of tragedy into a movement of unity, understanding, and learning. The goal is to foster a vibrant, non-violent community of students and citizens equipped to engage in civil discourse and collaborative problem-solving through better listening, better dialogue, and better connection.

THE INITIATIVE IS BUILT ON THREE KEY PILLARS:

BETTER LISTENING

Academic credentials

- Students can earn a certificate in areas of negotiation, mediation, conflict management, and conflict resolution.
- The university offers a minor in peace and justice.

BETTER DIALOGUE

Engage in events

- Conferences and lectures that gather expert scholars, thought leaders, and practitioners with students.
- Debates designed to model disagreements while honoring the dignity and respect of others.
- Book clubs that foster conversation and reflection.

BETTER CONNECTION

Expanding skills prepare UVU graduates and citizens

- Faculty and staff are invited to participate in campus-wide development trainings.
- Students can attend trainings conducted by Utah State University's Heravi Peace Institute.

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Better Listening. Better Dialogue. Better Connections.

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