

Warrensville Heights Tiger Tects make ACE history

The Warrensville Heights Tiger Tects made history at the ACE Mentor Program Championship.

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Vol. 7, Issue 7, July 2026

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Growing community at Vel’s Purple Oasis



S. A. Lewis



SCAN TO LISTEN

As a lifelong Cleveland resident, it pains me to admit that I was unaware of Vel’s Purple Oasis, a community garden in the University Circle neighborhood located at 10835 Frank Ave.

This nonprofit community garden serves 700 to 800 families annually. Recently, I met with Vel Scott, founder and director.

Lewis: How long has Vel’s Purple Oasis been in operation, and what prompted you to start it?

Scott: We started the garden in 2008. You may remember Vel’s on the Circle, a nightclub owned by my husband (Don Scott) and me.

When we had catering projects, we would drive out to the country to buy fresh fruits and vegetables. Don, being the visionary that he was, suggested we grow our own fruits and vegetables.

He bought the land and convinced me to start the community garden. We started

with one lot and expanded as more lots became available, creating the oasis that you see today. This garden is important to me because health and wellness are now my passion.

After Don was diagnosed with high blood pressure in 2008 and his health began to decline, I realized that I did not know a lot about his condition or proper diet.

Over time, his condition worsened, and he passed away in 2010. I realized then the importance of diet and health in our community. I want to help others and feel it is now my purpose.

Lewis: This garden currently takes up just under 3 acres. What did you have to do to get started?

Scott: Don and I took the Market Gardening Course from the Ohio State University Extension. It was a 12-week intensive course. Afterward, we secured our first grant from the City of Cleveland. But that was not the hard part.

The land was covered with rocks. Initially, I asked some neighbors if they would help me clear the land. When they arrived, they were overwhelmed by the size of the proposed garden and backed out. Eventually, volunteers helped



Vel Scott (right), founder and director of Vel’s Purple Oasis, a community garden in the University Circle neighborhood.

clear the land, and we planted our first garden.

Lewis: What fruits and vegetables do you usually plant?

Scott: We always plant collard, mustard, and turnip greens. These are staples. We usually have tomatoes, cabbage, beets, onions, and rutabaga. Other crops depend on available seeds and donations.

We also have apple, peach, pear, and plum trees. There is an herb garden. I was introduced to herbs as a girl and have always enjoyed the flavor they add to food. In addition, we also plant flowers.

You will find marigolds, roses, and dahlias among others.

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Can Cleveland build safer surveillance without losing public trust?



Ron Calhoun

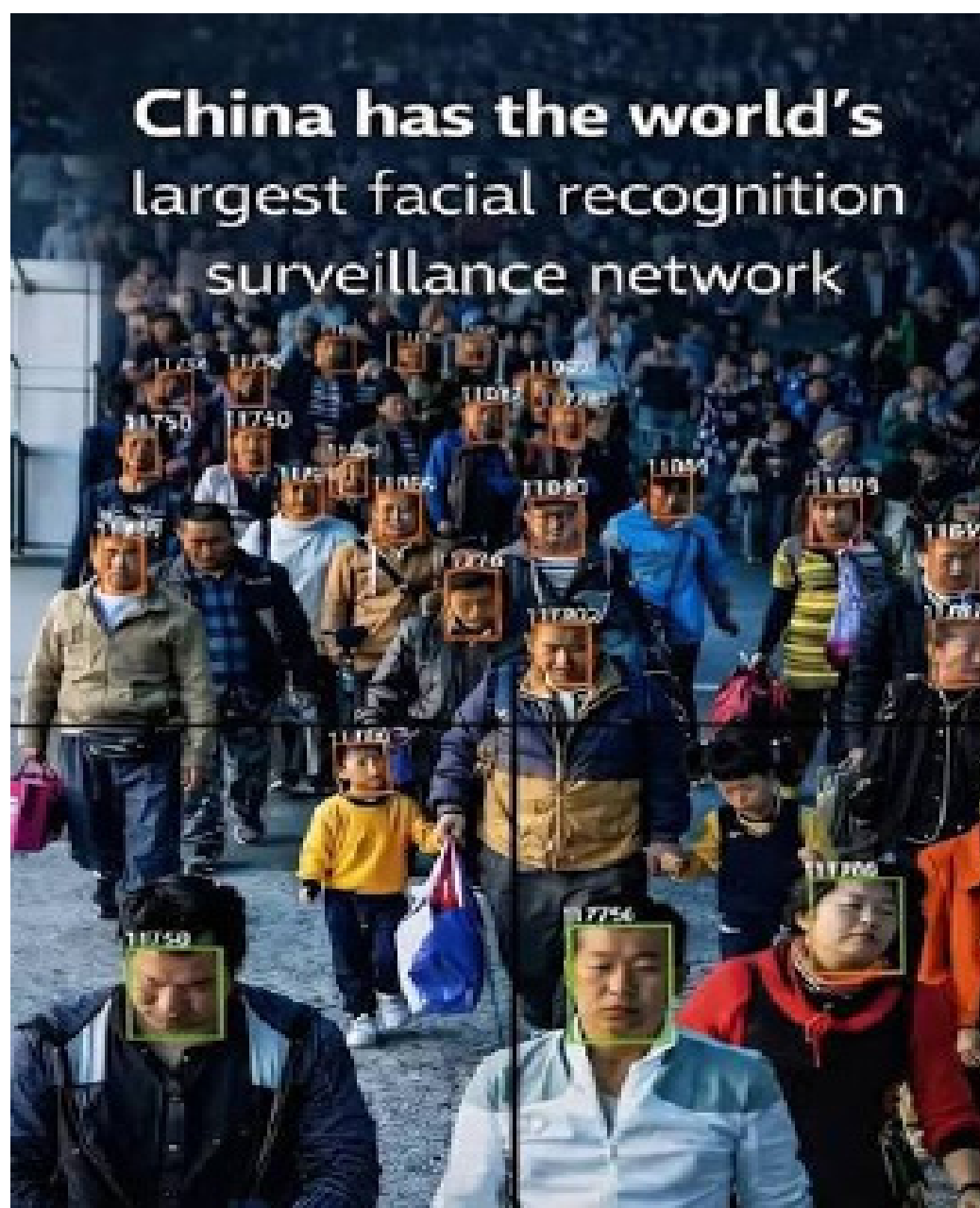


SCAN TO LISTEN

As Cleveland weighs whether to expand or renew public safety surveillance technology, the debate has moved beyond whether cameras can help solve crimes. Residents, advocates, and security researchers are asking a harder question: What safeguards should exist before the city builds a larger public safety network?

The issue began with Ordinance 1367-2025, which would authorize Cleveland’s public safety director to contract with Flock Group Inc., doing business as Flock Safety, to install and support an integrated safety technology system for up to three years. But in March, Cleveland City Council tabled the proposed expansion amid local and national concerns about privacy, immigration enforcement and data access.

Then in April, the city’s



Board of Control approved a one-year, \$853,340 renewal with SoundThinking, the company behind ShotSpotter, without sending it back through City Council. The city argued it did not need council approval because the deal involved software licenses and maintenance.

Together, those developments raise broader questions about how public safety technology should be approved, tested, secured, audited and explained to the public.

The trust gap

Supporters describe surveillance technology as a force multiplier for an understaffed police department. City officials have pointed to reported drops in some crime categories, including a 25% decline in serious downtown crime and a 20% to 22% decline in grand theft motor vehicle incidents. The data can be reviewed on the city of Cleveland’s Open Data portal.

But critics say those numbers do not answer the central question: whether the technology caused the decline, helped document crimes after they occurred, or simply

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Vel's Purple Oasis From front page

We briefly had chickens, but they were too much work. We had to send them back to the farm they came from. I could not chase them up and down the street with the rooster following behind.

Lewis: Do you sell or donate the food?

Scott: We give the food away. For example, we will deliver 50 pounds of apples to schools and local community centers. Nearby churches and mosques often receive food or have members who volunteer. When we harvest, anyone can come and get food.

Lewis: Do you have a headquarters or an office? What about staff, or do you function primarily with volunteers?

Scott: In 2009, we opened the Don Scott House around the corner from Vel's Purple Oasis. That is our headquarters. It hosts our community kitchen for healthy cooking lessons, canning classes, chair yoga, exercise and meal preparation. It is also the place where we prepare the fruits and vegetables for donation.

Right now, I do the work of two and a half people, which is about as much as I can stretch myself. My daughter also works

with me. She led the redesign of the Don Scott House. I also have a small staff and some volunteers, but we always need more for planting, harvesting and additional wellness programs.

Many nearby colleges and schools have fraternities, sororities or environmental clubs whose members volunteer. There are so many people in the community with talents and skills that could benefit the community. Our door is open to them. There is always room for more programming.

Lewis: How does a person go from being a business owner (court reporting and nightclubs) to owning and operating a community garden and community kitchen?

Scott: I've been blessed with a long life and good health, and I feel our community needs health and wellness resources. Through my southern upbringing around food preparation, Don's illness, personal research, and the programs we host at the Don Scott House, I know that this education is vital.

My mission is to help while I can. I believe I have more work to do. This is my purpose, and it is fulfilling.

S.A. Lewis is an educator, certified functional nutrition counselor and licensed minister who founded Christian Quest Ministries in Cleveland.



Vel Scott, founder and director of Vel's Purple Oasis, a community garden in the University Circle neighborhood.

Can Cleveland build a safer surveillance system without losing public trust? From front page

became one factor among many. That distinction matters.

Critics say faster response times do not necessarily show that the technology prevents crime.

Cleveland State University's review of ShotSpotter helped police respond more quickly to gunfire but did not reduce crime, according to Ideastream Public Media's coverage of the renewal debate.

Critics say the finding does not mean the system has no value, but it raises questions about what value the city is paying for.

The community divide

A review of public comments on a March 2026 News 5 Cleveland Facebook post found residents split between those who see Flock as a practical law enforcement tool and those who see it as mass surveillance. Commenters supporting the technology cited stolen vehicle recovery. Critics raised questions about tracking, data storage, hacking, cost, and whether residents have any meaningful say once a camera network is installed.

Those are governance questions, not just policing questions: Who owns the data? Who can search it? How long is it kept? What happens if the technology is used for purposes residents never approved?

Technical integrity is a public safety issue

The surveillance debate is also a cybersecurity debate. The

National Vulnerability Database list several Flock-related records, including describing concerns involving administrative access and physical device protections.

Those records do not prove that Cleveland's deployed equipment is currently vulnerable, but they do create due diligence questions that should be answered before any expansion.

The records should be reviewed by city technology officials or an independent security expert before being used to assess local risk.

A stronger Cleveland policy could require independent security audits, patch deadlines, device inventories, access logs, and contract penalties if a vendor fails to protect the system.

Data limits can be written into law

Cleveland Heights has already shown one path forward. In April, the City Council passed emergency legislation limiting most collected camera data to 30 days and prohibiting the use of license plate reader data for civil immigration enforcement without a court order.

Cleveland could adopt similar rules: a default 30-day retention limit, written search justifications, public audit logs and council approval for data-sharing agreements.

Oversight must cover renewals, not just new purchases

The ShotSpotter renewal showed how surveillance systems

can grow quietly through software agreements and maintenance contracts if public scrutiny applies only to the original purchase.

A Cleveland solution could require council review for major renewals, integrations, and data-sharing agreements above a clear dollar threshold.

Cameras alone are not a safety plan

Cleveland could look to Denver's Support Team Assisted Response program, known as STAR, which sends mental health specialists and paramedics to low-risk 911 calls. The program produced a 34% drop in reported less-serious crimes during its pilot, according to Stanford researchers.

Cameras may help identify a vehicle after a shooting. They cannot stabilize housing, treat a mental health crisis, or repair trust between residents and government.

Cleveland's surveillance debate is ultimately about whether public safety technology can meet three tests: evidence, technical integrity, and democratic accountability. The debate is likely to remain focused as much on public trust as on cameras.

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CLEVELAND OBSERVER

The Cleveland Observer is a community-based nonprofit monthly newspaper dedicated to providing information and resources that will uplift and enhance the community.
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Ohio property tax fight continues as abolition effort shifts to 2027



Brooke Adams

Ohio's debate over property taxes remains one of the state's most closely watched political issues, with competing proposals advancing as an effort to eliminate property taxes shifts to 2027.

The Committee to Abolish Ohio Property Taxes announced on June 5 that it will no longer seek a spot on the November ballot.

Organizers said they were unable to gather enough signatures before the state's July 1 deadline and will continue collecting signatures in hopes of placing the measure before voters in 2027.

The proposed constitutional amendment would prohibit taxes on real property, including homes, land and permanently attached structures, according to Ballotpedia.

Supporters say the measure would provide relief to homeowners whose tax bills have risen as property values increased across Ohio.

The issue has gained attention in Northeast Ohio, where periodic property reappraisals have led to higher valuations and larger tax bills for many homeowners.

Advocates for eliminating property taxes say residents, particularly retirees and people on fixed incomes, are struggling to keep pace with rising housing costs.

The Statehouse News Bureau reported that opponents warn eliminating property taxes could have

significant consequences for local governments and public services. Schools, police and fire departments, libraries and other local agencies rely heavily on property tax revenue.

Critics say eliminating the tax would require lawmakers to identify alternative funding sources or make substantial budget cuts.

State lawmakers continue to pursue other forms of property tax relief. State Rep. Mark Hiner, a Knox County Republican, introduced House Joint Resolution 7, which would exempt owner-occupied homes from property taxation if approved by the General Assembly and voters.

In addition to longer-term proposals, Ohio lawmakers recently approved a \$350 million property tax relief fund for senior homeowners through House Bill 479.

The one-time program is expected to provide credits to eligible older homeowners facing higher tax bills as property values rise. Supporters describe the measure as immediate assistance for older Ohioans on fixed incomes, while critics say it does not address broader concerns about the state's property tax system.

The proposals are among several measures under consideration at the Statehouse as legislators respond to homeowners' concerns.

Activists are continuing their signature campaign, and lawmakers are debating alternative reforms, leaving the future of Ohio's property tax system unsettled.

Brooke Adams is a freelance journalist.

Magnolia Clubhouse offers mental health support



Members of Magnolia Clubhouse in Cleveland celebrate. Credit: Magnolia Clubhouse.



Brittany Ervin



Clubhouse model and impact

Magnolia Clubhouse in Cleveland offers adults living with mental illness a place to find community, daily structure and support beyond traditional clinical care, according to its executive director, Dr. Lori D'Angelo.

Located at 11101 Magnolia Drive, the clubhouse serves adults 18 and older regardless of diagnosis and has no direct cost for membership. Members can visit as often as they want and take part in daily clubhouse operations, including hospitality, employment and education, media, finance and administrative work.

Clubhouse tours are available for guests and potential members.

"The work is so powerful, the environment is so positive," D'Angelo said. The clubhouse thrives on its holistic approach and welcoming environment for members and visitors alike. The clubhouse's main priorities include reducing isolation, supporting wellness and helping members find employment. The clubhouse provides opportunities for members to gain confidence and optimism about their future. "People need more than medication. They need a way to rebuild their lives," D'Angelo said.

Clinical services and expansion

Magnolia Clubhouse has an on-site clinic that is available to members to address primary healthcare and psychiatric needs. Staff members can connect members with specialized care as needed. Services at the clinic include medication management, therapy and primary care.

The clubhouse will undergo an expansion to increase its capacity and impact in the community. D'Angelo thinks the clubhouse model is a vital missing piece to build community for people living with mental illness.

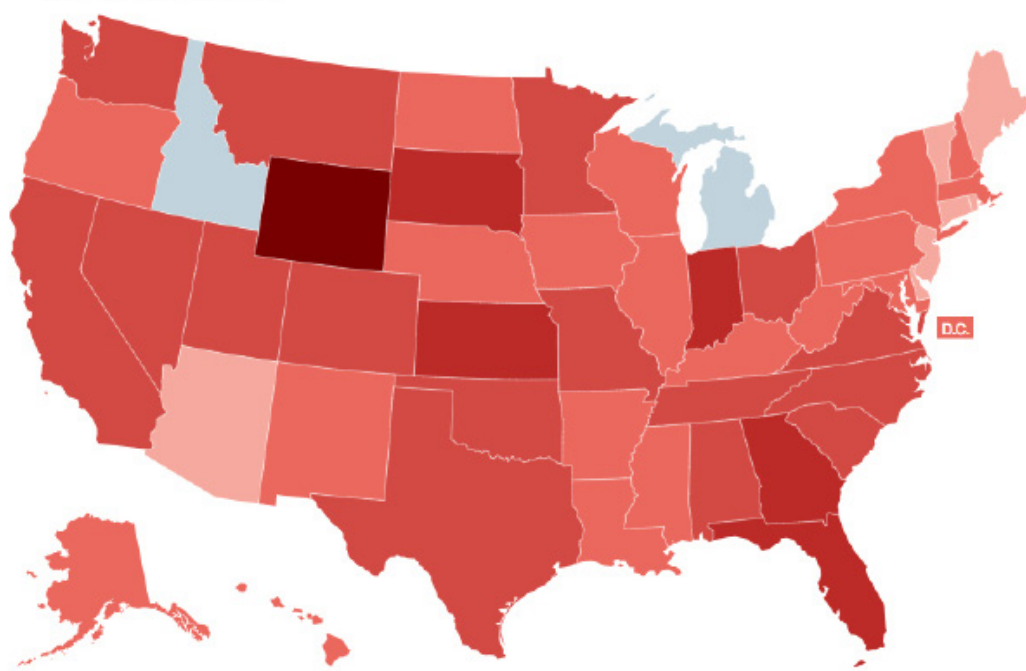
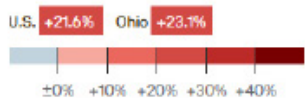
Thoughts from members

Some of the members shared some of their personal experiences and how Magnolia Clubhouse is a supportive outlet for them. Another member spoke of the strong sense of community at the clubhouse. "When a person walks through the doors of the clubhouse, you're no longer a stranger, you are family," one member said.

Magnolia Clubhouse
11101 Magnolia Dr., Cleveland, OH 44106
Phone: (216) 721-3030

Open Monday-Friday 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
Call to schedule a tour or become a Member

Brittany "Miss Brit" Ervin is an author, speaker, creative and a freelance journalist.



Data: CoreLogic analysis; Map: Axios Visuals

Ohio ranked eighth for highest property taxes. Credit: CoreLogic analysis.

Warrensville Heights Tiger Tects make ACE history



Marissa Valentine



The Warrensville Heights Tiger Tects made history on May 12 at the ACE Mentor Program Championship. In the ACE Mentorship Program's 33-year history, no school had won the championship two years in a row.

Founded in 1994, the ACE Mentor Program of America, through its award-winning afterschool program, introduces students to science, technology, engineering, and math learning initiatives, with a specific focus on architecture, construction, and engineering.

Through hands-on instruction and mentorship from industry professionals, students in ACE are introduced to career

opportunities via project-based learning.

The Tiger Tects' award-winning project focuses on the revitalization of E.F. Boyd & Son Funeral Home, one of the oldest Black-owned funeral homes in Cleveland and the United States.

The students' design honors the institution's history while creating spaces intended to offer comfort, dignity, and peace to families navigating loss. Their model expanded and modernized office spaces while introducing new gathering areas where families could come together, reflect, and support one another through life's most difficult moments.

"As a district, we maintain our ethos, which is to elevate, innovate, and inspire our scholars to the point where excellence is more than an expectation; it is the norm," said Aaron Eatman, Warrensville Heights High School ACE student adviser.

Eatman led the team with Audrey Davis of the AKA Team and



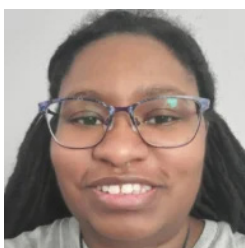
The repeat 2026 championship Warrensville Heights Tiger Tects. Credit: Warrensville Heights High School Facebook page.

student adviser Victoria Irving.

Mentors from Robert P. Madison International, Whiting-Turner, Warrensville Heights Community & Economic Development, and other organizations challenged students to review structural constraints and reimagine how a community business could thrive with support.

Marissa Valentine is a Navy veteran and journalist with 14 years of experience. She has a bachelor's degree in communications.

Faith in the age of social media



Amaya Gentry



content that promotes religious literacy while being aware of the challenges these platforms present."

Church attendance in the U.S.

A 2024 University of Chicago study by Professor Devin Pope, which used cellphone geolocation data rather than self-report surveys to measure church attendance, found 73% of Americans attend church at least once per year. However, only 5% of Americans attend services weekly, compared to 22% who report weekly attendance in surveys.

The study also found that weather, service hours, and religious holidays can affect how often people go to services. While the exact reason attendance rates appear inflated in self-reported surveys remains unclear, the study concluded that religion remains important to millions of Americans.

Accessing religious content online

Smartphones have made religious content easier to access. However, despite the abundance of religious content online, Pew Research Center researchers found that many do not use digital tools for religious practice.

The 2023 study found that 70% of Americans never go online to search for information on religion, and only 21% use apps or websites to remind them to read scripture.

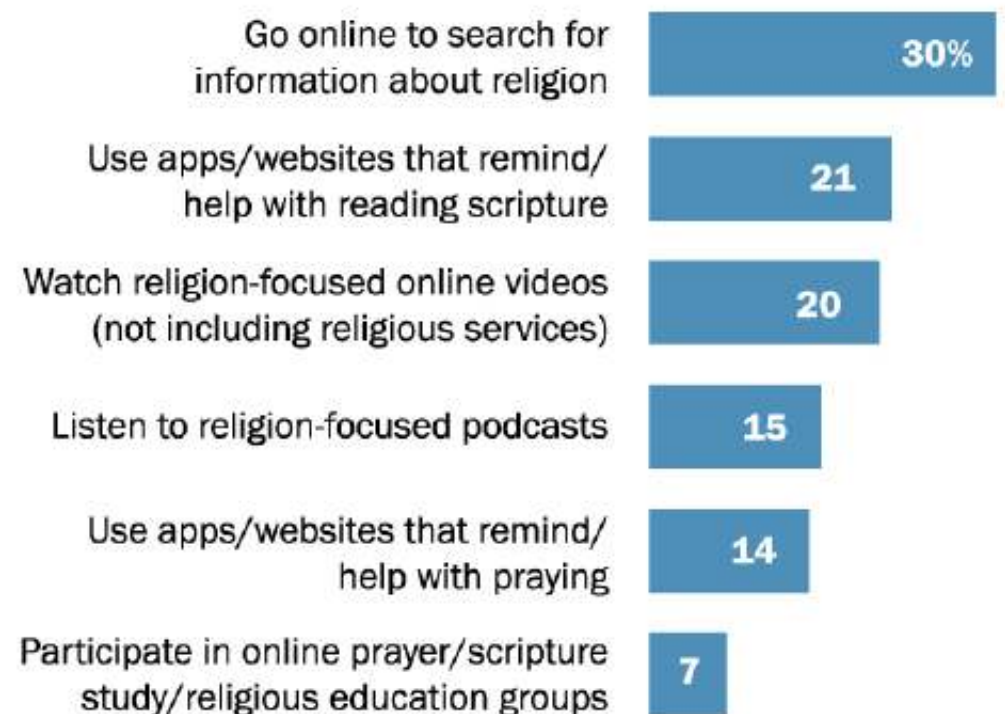
A church responds to social media

A 2025 Statista survey estimates that 310 million people in the United States use social media. That reach has prompted some churches to integrate social media into their marketing and outreach efforts, religious leaders say.



One-in-five U.S. adults use apps or websites for scripture reading

% of U.S. adults who say they do each of the following ...



Source: Survey conducted Nov. 16-27, 2022, among U.S. adults. "Online Religious Services Appeal to Many Americans, but Going in Person Remains More Popular"

The Rev. Brent Bramer, a California pastor, said, "The church needs to better understand how social media can shape opinions, perceptions, and politics."

Takeaways

Although digital tools have made it easier to reach religious institutions, many American churches face declining attendance. Churches across the country have tried to keep up with technology by maintaining active social media profiles and broader digital presences. Some religious leaders worry social media can

weaken congregants' religious literacy. Still, many religious leaders are using social media to reach congregants who do not regularly attend services.

Amaya Gentry has a bachelor's degree in biology and has worked as a quality control chemist.

The digital town square: Searching for civility in the age of social media



Staff Writer

Editors note: This story is based on a Nextdoor neighborhood discussion prompted by a post from Satin Smith. Commenters in the discussion were identified by their first names. Smith approved the use of her post for this story.

The post, shared on Nextdoor by Noble Road resident Satin Smith, drew dozens of reactions and comments from residents in Cleveland and several suburbs. The exchange shows how neighborhood social media networks can function as modern town squares, especially when national divisions enter local feeds.

The thread also shows how local identity can moderate online conflict while bringing national tensions into neighborhood spaces.

An appeal for civility

Smith's post focused on racial hostility online and the common human experiences that cut across race and politics. In the post, Smith urged neighbors to reject racist comments and focus on more constructive conversations.

"Racism doesn't make anyone look smarter, stronger, or more credible," Smith wrote. "It weakens online communities, fuels division, and distracts from real conversations that could move this country forward."

The post had 52 reactions

at the time it was reviewed and drew responses from Willoughby, Chesterland, Euclid, University Heights and Chagrin Falls. Most of the immediate replies expressed agreement, with residents writing "well said" and "words to live by."

Divergent perspectives and politics

Although the thread was largely supportive, comments soon widened into political and social critiques.

The Observer is using commenters' first names because the discussion appeared on a neighborhood-based platform. The conversation briefly shifted to national politics when some commenters framed racism as a systemic and historical issue.

Tom wrote that there is a "long, long history of people using hatred and bigotry to get others to follow them." The comment received eight likes.

Michele of Bentleyville blamed the division on the "current administration," a comment that received 20 likes and prompted replies.

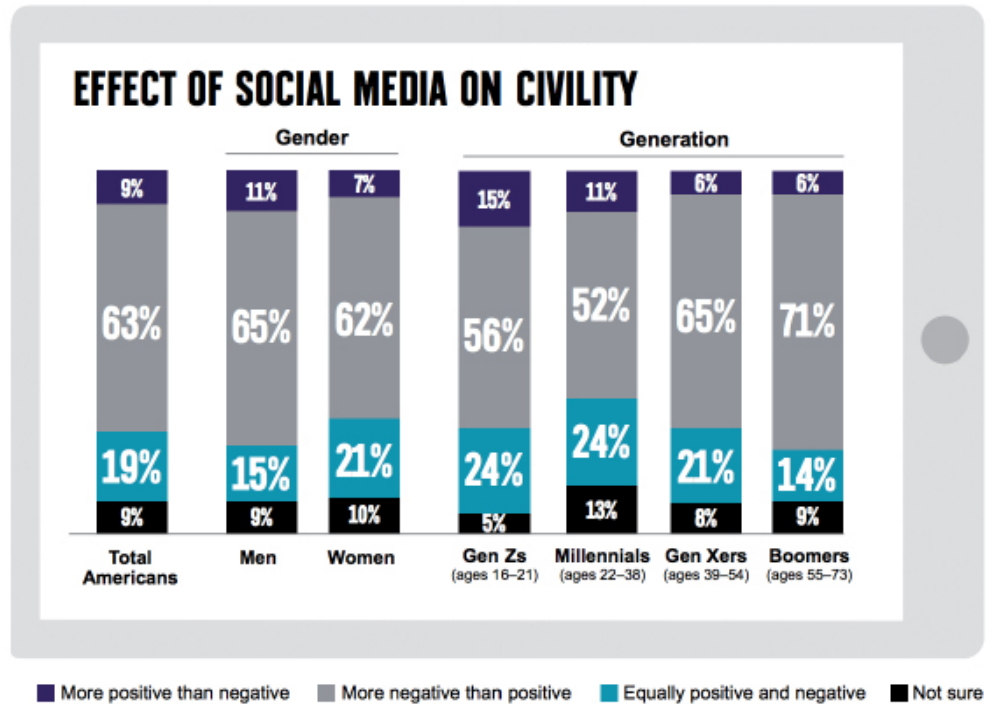
Thomas of North Collinwood argued in a lengthy comment that racism can stem from economic and social anxiety. The comment received eight likes.

Platform culture

The thread also included the informal texture common to online forums, including typos and jokes from residents who appeared to treat the discussion as a message board.

The significance of the digital town square

The exchange illustrates how platforms built for neighborhood updates, lost pets and contractor recommendations can become venues for debates



Credit: Pew Research Center

over race, politics, community and standards conversations about social and cultural issues.

Because Nextdoor identifies users by name and neighborhood, those discussions can feel more immediate than exchanges on broader social media platforms.

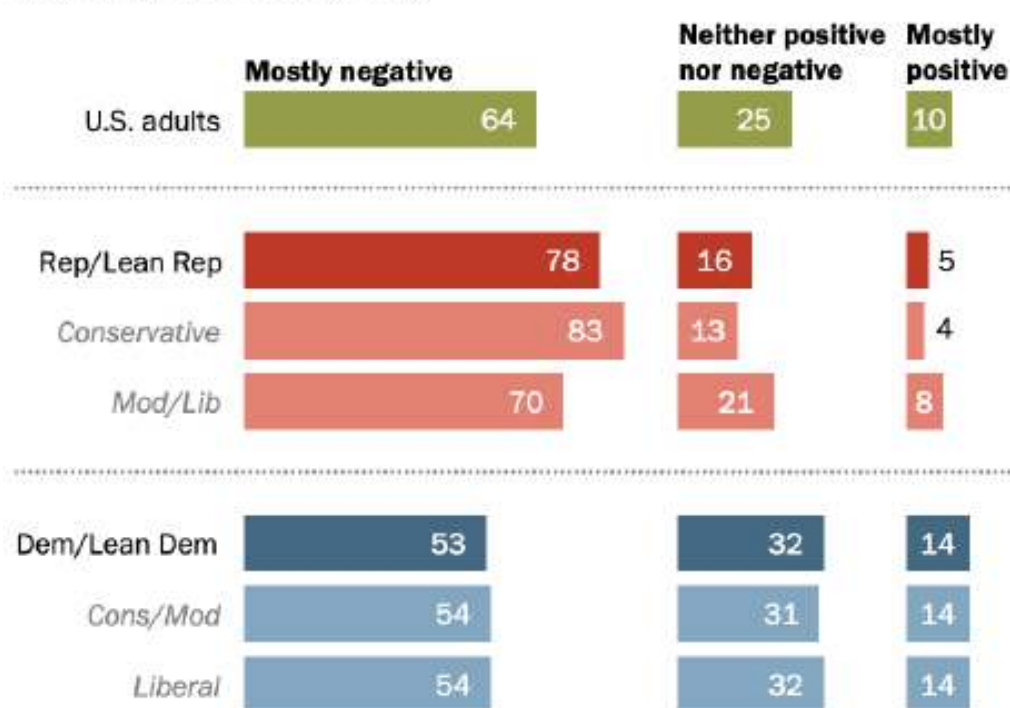
The accompanying Pew Research Center and civility survey charts give broader context to that local exchange, showing

many Americans view social media as a negative force in public life while still using digital platforms as places where community norms are debated, tested and reinforced.

The stakes of these discussions remain close to home, reflecting the immediate environment of the participating communities.

Majority of Americans say social media negatively affect the way things are going in the country today

% of U.S. adults who say social media have a ___ effect on the way things are going in this country today



Note: Those who did not give an answer are not shown. Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted July 13-19, 2020.

Credit: Pew Research Center

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Higher travel costs change summer plans



Marissa Valentine



As summer begins, Clevelanders make travel plans, whether by road or by air. Travel across the United States is increasing across various modes of transportation.

According to AAA's fuel price site, gas prices for regular unleaded in the greater Cleveland area range from \$3.82 to \$4.85 per gallon, fluctuating almost daily as of June 6th. AAA listed the average price at \$4.72 a month earlier and a year ago in June, unleaded gas was as low as \$3.05 per gallon.

AAA has reported that summer demand can contribute to higher gas prices. Yet people continue to travel during peak season, raising the question: Is driving the cheapest mode of transportation for families?

Why road trips?

According to research by Longwoods International, American families spend \$115 million annually for fuel on road trips. Of those surveyed, younger travelers are choosing ground travel as their primary mode of transportation for vacations. One factor is control over the journey.

Whether a vacation is 500 miles away or just a few hours by car, road trips offer flexibility and can be more affordable than flying. They also allow families to visit multiple cities en route.

Many families also choose to drive to offset the cost of flying with multiple children, or if their children have special needs or accommodations that are easier to manage by car.

Additionally, driving allows families to stop at multiple attractions or cities on the way to their final destination.

Another reason families value road trips, even though driving delays their arrival at their destination, is the opportunity for bonding time during their extended time together in the car.

How do road trips save money?

Historically, road trips have been thought to help families save money on extra airport costs, such as food, drinks, and baggage fees.

For example, on a road trip, families can pack as much food as they like or customize their meals if kids have food sensitivities or allergies, plus they can avoid the costs of airport food, which often exceed what you would normally pay at a fast-food restaurant.

The Parking Spot estimates airport food costs 10% to 15% more than comparable food outside airports because of vendor operating costs and rent.

Baggage is an additional cost for families who choose to fly. Southwest Airlines, one of the top choices for people looking to save on baggage, was the last airline to offer a free checked bag with a plane ticket purchase. According to the airline, Southwest implemented checked-bag fees on April 9.

If you are a family of five, the checked bag fees would cost approximately \$175, starting at \$35 per bag. If you check more than one bag with a single ticket, the next bag will cost \$55. Many other airlines have similar or higher rates, increasing the total cost of travel for a family.

highly sought-after vacation spots increases.

"I chose to drive based on distance and who I travel with," said Cleveland native, Martina White. "Flying is only an option for our family if it is cheaper than driving where we choose to go."

The destination, number of travelers, and baggage are factors that increase flight costs, but some factors affect driving costs as well.

With current gas prices in Cuyahoga, Lorain and Summit counties hovering from \$3.82 to \$4.85 per gallon, the type of vehicle and distance driven will determine fuel costs.

you are traveling with children. A round-trip train from Cleveland to Chicago costs approximately \$900 if traveling with children.

A flight from Cleveland to Chicago, according to United Airlines' website, if booked well in advance, is \$117 per person for basic economy in June and \$277 in July. If you are flying solo to a major hub like Chicago, the ticket price is affordable, but adding multiple children can cost \$700 to \$900, making it almost as expensive as an Amtrak ride.

While the train may be cheaper, flights are the faster mode of transportation.

Travel is a pastime that

#	STATE	AVERAGE VACATION EXPENSE (PER PERSON)	TRANSPORTATION	FOOD/ALCOHOL	ENTERTAINMENT	LODGING
1	Minnesota	\$750.57 (\$271.76)	\$296.81 (\$216.81)	\$203.09 (\$95.08)	\$67.01 (\$32.46)	\$191.40 (\$56.16)
2	Iowa	\$654.57 (\$1716.84)	\$262.80 (\$2081.05)	\$179.82 (\$81.01)	\$59.33 (\$34.87)	\$169.47 (\$79.71)
3	Nebraska	\$660.41 (\$2707.58)	\$281.16 (\$2,008.21)	\$178.69 (\$607.9)	\$58.96 (\$34.76)	\$168.41 (\$770.9)
4	Illinois	\$659.74 (\$1703.85)	\$260.89 (\$2,026.15)	\$178.51 (\$696.58)	\$58.90 (\$24.42)	\$168.24 (\$770.0)
5	Missouri	\$646.45 (\$2,629.22)	\$255.64 (\$1,995.13)	\$174.91 (\$94.36)	\$57.71 (\$27.69)	\$164.85 (\$751.82)
6	North Dakota	\$627.00 (\$1,810.04)	\$247.95 (\$1,888.15)	\$169.65 (\$76.46)	\$55.98 (\$17.88)	\$159.89 (\$211.81)
7	Wisconsin	\$605.27 (\$1,799.04)	\$230.35 (\$1,068.04)	\$163.77 (\$66.48)	\$54.04 (\$26.81)	\$154.35 (\$736.65)
8	South Dakota	\$601.34 (\$3,375.87)	\$227.80 (\$1,655.90)	\$162.71 (\$52.88)	\$53.49 (\$34.82)	\$153.35 (\$731.96)
9	Kansas	\$599.16 (\$1,363.70)	\$226.93 (\$1,849.15)	\$162.12 (\$50.87)	\$53.49 (\$33.71)	\$152.79 (\$699.4)
10	Michigan	\$591.93 (\$1,323.52)	\$234.07 (\$1,816.85)	\$160.16 (\$64.21)	\$52.85 (\$30.05)	\$150.94 (\$690.87)
11	Ohio	\$582.08 (\$2,267.82)	\$230.18 (\$1,746.85)	\$157.50 (\$58.17)	\$51.97 (\$26.05)	\$148.43 (\$679.17)
12	Indiana	\$567.68 (\$1,813.01)	\$224.49 (\$1,712.03)	\$153.60 (\$57.94)	\$50.68 (\$27.76)	\$144.76 (\$663.87)

Credit: Longwoods International

What affects flight vs. driving prices?

The average cost of a flight in the U.S. is based on several factors. The time of year, the airport you depart from, and the airport you arrive at are all determining factors that affect your ticket price.

Most importantly, like gas prices for vehicles, the cost of jet fuel and the popularity of the destination heavily influence airline ticket prices. According to the Bureau of Transportation Statistics data show fares vary widely by airport, route and demand.

Since flying in the summer is a high-demand time for consumers and airline corporations, flights are almost always more expensive during what airports consider peak season. If there are any holidays during this peak season, airline tickets will also be pricier as the demand to visit family or

Fuel-efficient vehicles reduce highway fuel costs compared with stop-and-go city driving. Websites like fuel economy.gov can provide you with estimates of your fuel costs.

The Longwoods International chart shows how travel spending varies by state, including Ohio's average vacation costs.

Additionally, the AAA website provides average gas prices for your state and surrounding states, updated daily, so you can also calculate fuel costs on the way back from your destination based on the gas prices where you are staying.

What other travel options exist?

An option for travel that might be considered a road trip in a more unconventional sense is Amtrak. Depending on where you're visiting, it may not be cheaper than driving, but it could be less expensive than a flight if

can build lasting memories for families.

If you are a family with multiple children, a flight may be the quickest mode of transportation, but it is often still the most expensive option.

Americans looking to save money on vacation continue the tradition of road trips, which are often a more economical and flexible way to visit multiple locations in one trip.

Marissa Valentine is a Navy veteran and journalist with 14 years of experience. She has a bachelor's degree in communications.

Beyond the badge: Rethinking mental health crises



Jennifer Bailey



Communities are expanding alternatives for people experiencing mental health crises. Police-based programs such as the Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) initiatives can give people entering the criminal justice system a path to treatment and support.

However, some communities are implementing an approach that does not involve law enforcement. The Sequential Intercept Model is a framework that identifies where individuals with mental health and substance use disorders come into contact with the criminal justice system and where they can be diverted to clinical care.

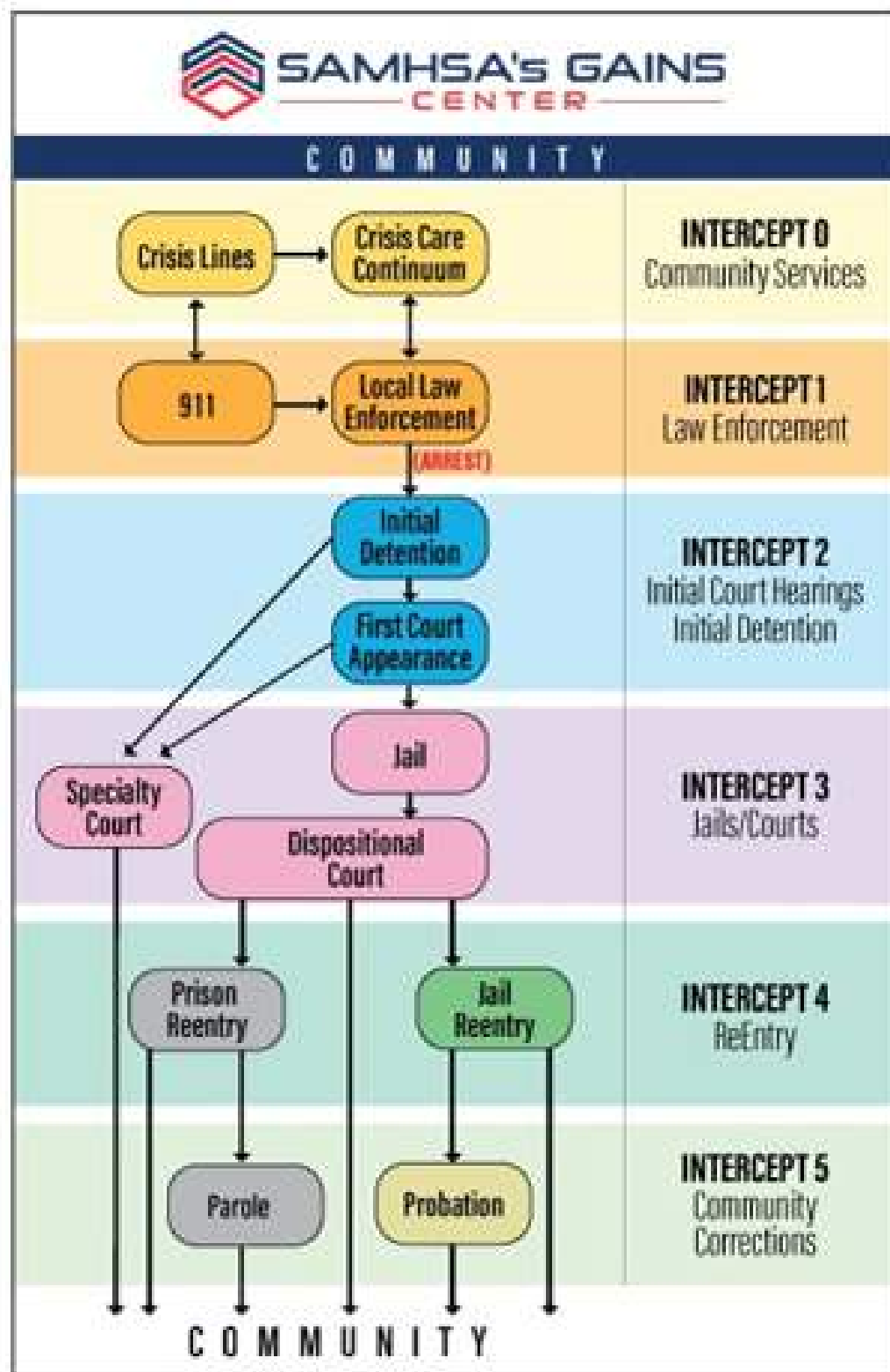
The model identifies six points, or “intercepts,” starting with community services and continuing through law enforcement, courts, jails, reentry, probation, and parole.

The framework is intended to help communities identify service gaps and strengthen behavioral health responses outside traditional policing.

In practice, some cities are using this model’s earlier intercepts to reshape local emergency dispatch. Denver’s Support Team Assisted Response Program, known as STAR, is one example. STAR dispatches mental health practitioners and EMTs or paramedics to nonviolent situations, prioritizing de-escalation and connections to mental health services.

By deploying clinicians and EMS personnel instead of police, this model aims to intervene before an arrest is made, at Intercept 0. Denver established STAR in 2020.

“We are trying to get people connected to the resources and services they need, so they do not call 911 because of a crisis,” said



Source: SAMHSA's GAINS Center, Sequential Intercept Model

Tandis Hashemi, STAR’s operations manager. “We are not under the same time constraints as law enforcement or EMS. So we’re able to spend as much time as we need to support an individual who’s in crisis to really build that rapport, provide the de-escalation, and get them to a place where they’re collaboratively working with us on what it is that needs to happen next.”

The team rides together in

a van dispatched by Denver 911 to calls that do not require traditional law enforcement. “When our responders make contact with someone in need of additional resources that go beyond what would be provided on scene, they submit a referral to our case managers,” Hashemi said.

The emphasis on continuous care has sparked similar initiatives across the country, including Psychiatric Mobile Response

Teams (PMRT) in Los Angeles, B-Heard in New York, and Portland Street Response (PSR) in Portland, Oregon.

Research also points to the potential of continuous care models. A January 2026 report by the Urban Institute examined the STAR program’s performance from 2020 through September 2024 alongside co-responder interventions, which pair a police officer and a mental health clinician.

The report found that while both initiatives reduced criminal justice system involvement, STAR participants were more likely to receive follow-up clinical care.

Between April 2023 and September 2024, STAR made 1,357 referrals and served 1,221 clients. From 2020 through September 2024, STAR received roughly 50,000 calls. The data also showed capacity limits: STAR vans answered 23,114 of those calls, leaving the remainder to traditional police units, according to the report. Despite those capacity challenges, Hashemi said the program remains focused on diversion.

“Our primary focus is diverting people from unnecessary interactions with the criminal justice system and from unnecessary emergency department visits,” Hashemi said, adding that the goal is to connect people to appropriate resources so they no longer rely on emergency services. Programs such as STAR can help some people receive behavioral health support without entering the criminal justice system.

The Urban Institute report said that both law enforcement and nonpolice programs remain parts of community crisis response. As more communities explore clinical crisis-response models, experts say long-term stability will require sustained funding and policy changes.

For Cleveland and Cuyahoga County, the question is whether crisis response can include both public safety and clinical care without routing every call through law enforcement.

Jennifer Bailey is a licensed clinical social worker and registered drama therapist.

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Republican Gov. Mike DeWine wants Ohio to abolish the death penalty, saying it is not a deterrent



SCAN TO LISTEN

Julie Carr and Patrick Aftoora-Orsagos (AP)

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — Gov. Mike DeWine, who has repeatedly postponed executions over the past seven years, said that Ohio should abolish the death penalty, confirming his change of heart on the policy he helped write as a state legislator 45 years ago.

DeWine, 79, said during a news conference that data indicates the death penalty is not serving as a deterrent to violent crime, which he had always believed was its moral imperative.

“I do not believe that argument today can be successfully made, nor do I believe that there’s any chance in the future the facts that I’ve cited to support that belief will change,” he said. “Therefore, I believe Ohio should abolish the death penalty.”

To bolster his case, DeWine brandished charts and graphs detailing the diminishing number of death sentences meted out by courts and showing the exceedingly long wait times that elapse as legal appeals play out for those on death row. He said condemned murderers are increasingly unlikely to ever be executed, sometimes dying by natural causes or by suicide before their execution date arrives.

“In summary, each decade that the death penalty has been in effect, the chances of a murderer getting executed get more and more and more remote,” DeWine said.

He also cited years of pain brought to victims’ loved ones by the delays and the toll taken on the mental health of state employees who serve on execution teams.

DeWine, facing a term limit in December, said he felt compelled to share his observations now,

having had 50 years of experience with the issue from the time he was a young county prosecutor, through being a congressman and U.S. senator, then as Ohio’s attorney general. But he said his outright opposition has only crystallized over the past year.

Divided reaction to DeWine’s position

Headed into the announcement, any chance of a legislative repeal of the death penalty appeared unlikely. Republican House Speaker Matt Huffman has said he would oppose such an effort.

In repeatedly extending Ohio’s unofficial death penalty moratorium by postponing scheduled executions, DeWine has cited pharmaceutical suppliers’ unwillingness to provide the drugs used in lethal injections. In January 2025, President Donald Trump ordered then-U.S. Attorney General Pam Bondi to help states try to resolve that issue.

Interim Ohio Republican Attorney General Andy Wilson expressed relief that DeWine did not choose to use commutations and that his office will continue working to uphold the current law.

DeWine has already said he expects no further executions during his term, but he said the compelling nature of the death penalty data remains the same whether you include the past seven years, when executions have been on hold, or not.

Kevin Werner, executive director of Ohioans to Stop Executions, said the governor’s decision is in line with “an evolution on the death penalty” across the political spectrum in Ohio.

“Nobody supports a system that harms victim families, convicts innocent people and wastes millions of dollars without a shred of improved public safety,” Werner said.

Abraham Bonowitz, executive director of Death Penalty Action, said his group



Larry Greene, public information director of the Southern Ohio Correctional Facility, demonstrates how a curtain is pulled between the death chamber and witness room at the prison in Lucasville, Ohio, in November 2005. (AP Photo/Kiichiro Sato, File)

had been anticipating DeWine’s announcement, which he called “well-reasoned.”

Kent Scheidegger, legal director of the Criminal Justice Legal Foundation, which supports the death penalty and crime victims’ rights, said DeWine may be right that Ohio’s death penalty isn’t currently serving as a deterrent.

However, “what is needed is the political will and effective leadership,” Scheidegger said.

Death penalty’s future being debated nationally

The governor noted that Ohio is far from the only state where such trends exist. Use of and support for the death penalty has been on the decline nationally for two decades.

Currently, 27 states allow the death penalty and 23 do not, according to the Washington, D.C.-based Death Penalty Information Center. Ohio is among four states where executions are paused by executive action. The center reported in 2023 that more Americans now believe the death penalty is administered unfairly than fairly, a first.

Texas has executed 600 people since it resumed the death penalty in 1982. Republican state Rep. Jeff Leach, who has met with death row inmates and advocated for reforms, led a group of state lawmakers last year who successfully halted the first execution in the U.S. tied to a murder conviction for shaken baby syndrome.

Then-Illinois Gov. George Ryan, also a Republican, signed off on the execution of one killer then decided not to carry out any more. In virtually his last act as governor, he emptied death row with pardons and commutations in 2003. Numerous governors have commuted some number of death sentences or granted broad blanket clemency to condemned inmates in the years since to empty portions of their death rows.

But the nation remains

divided.

Since 2019, Colorado, New Hampshire and Virginia have eliminated the death penalty, while five states have approved nitrogen gas executions since 2024 to get around issues with lethal injection protocols. Meanwhile, Trump has pushed to expand federal executions. During his first term, Trump’s administration carried out 13 federal executions, more than under any president in modern history.

DeWine’s position has evolved over time

Pushing back execution dates has left Ohio with 30 scheduled over the next four years, according to the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction. Ohio hasn’t put an inmate to death since July 18, 2018, the year before DeWine took office.

The state reinstated capital punishment in 1981 under a law co-written by DeWine. Ohio resumed death penalties in 1999, and 56 people have since died by lethal injection in the state.

DeWine’s support has slowly shifted since his political career began in 1976. As attorney general, DeWine ordered the Ohio prison system to consider alternative lethal injection drugs. A year later, in 2020, he said lawmakers would have to choose a different method before any more inmates could be executed.

Since then, neither a bipartisan push to ban the practice nor a competing effort to bring nitrogen gas executions to Ohio has gone anywhere. A nitrogen gas execution in Alabama was halted last week, after the U.S. Supreme Court refused to set aside a lower-court ruling that found the method unconstitutionally cruel.

Associated Press writer John Raby in Charleston, West Virginia, contributed to this report.



Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine speaks at a news conference on June 16, in Columbus, Ohio. (AP Photo/Patrick Aftoora-Orsagos)