



A BUSY WEEK

THE MICHIGAN STATE BASKETBALL TEAM FACED A PAIR OF CHALLENGING GAMES THIS WEEK. MSU TOOK ON IOWA IN ITS BIG TEN OPENER TUESDAY, AND HOST NO. 4 DUKE ON SATURDAY. **B1**



Bullet holes are shown where a shooting took place Saturday at a banquet hall in Stockton, Calif. Four people were killed. Mass killings in the U.S. are down about 24% this year compared with 2024. Jeff Chiu, Associated Press

But experts say it’s likely just a return to more typical levels.

Rebecca Boone Associated Press

A shooting last weekend at a children’s birthday party in California that left four dead was the 17th mass killing this year — the lowest number recorded since 2006, according to a database maintained by the Associated Press and USA Today in partnership with Northeastern University. Experts warn the drop doesn’t necessarily mean safer days are here to stay and that it could simply represent a return to average levels. “Sir Isaac Newton never studied crime, but he says ‘What goes up must come down,’” said James Alan Fox, a criminologist at Northeastern University. The current drop in numbers is more likely what statisticians call a “regression to the mean,” he said, representing a return to more average crime levels after an unusual spike in mass killings in 2018 and 2019. “Will 2026 see a decline?” Fox said. “I wouldn’t bet on it. What goes down must also go back up.” The mass killings — defined as incidents in which four or more people are killed in a 24-hour period, not including the killer — are tracked in the database maintained by the Associated Press and USA Today in partnership with Northeastern University. Fox, who manages the database, says mass killings were down about 24% this year compared to 2024, which was also about a 20% drop compared to 2023. Mass killings are rare, and that means the numbers are volatile, said James Densley, a professor at Metropolitan State University in Minnesota. “Because there’s only a few dozen mass

killings in a year, a small change could look like a wave or a collapse,” when really it’s just a return to more typical levels, Densley said. “2025 looks really good in historical context, but we can’t pretend like that means the problem is gone for good.”

VIOLENT CRIME RATES

But there are some things that might be contributing to the drop, Densley said, including an overall decline in homicide and violent crime rates, which peaked during the COVID-19 pandemic. Improvements in the immediate response to mass shootings and other mass casualty incidents could also be playing a part, he said. “We had the horrible Annunciation School shooting here in Minnesota back in August, and that case wouldn’t even fit the mass killing definition because there were only two people killed but over 20 injured,” Densley said. “But I happen to know from the response on the ground here, that the reason only two people were killed is because of the bleeding control and trauma response by the first responders. And it happened on the doorsteps of some of the best children’s hospitals in the country.” Crime is complex, and academics are not great at assessing the reasons behind crime rate changes, said Eric Madfis, a professor of criminal justice at University of Washington-Tacoma. “It’s multicausal. It’s never going to be just one thing. People are still debating why homicide rates went down in the 1990s,” Madfis said. “It is true that gun violence and gun violence deaths are down, but we still have exceedingly high rates and numbers of mass shootings compared to anywhere else in the world.” More states are dedicating funding to school threat assessments, with 22 states mandating the practice in recent years, Madfis said, and that could be preventing some school shootings, though it wouldn’t

have an impact on mass killings elsewhere. None of the mass killings recorded in the database so far in 2025 took place in schools, and only one mass killing at a school was recorded in 2024.

MOST WHO DIE ARE SHOT

About 82% of this year’s mass killings involved a firearm. Since 2006, 3,234 people have died in mass killings — and 81% of them were shooting victims. Christopher Carita, a former detective with the Fort Lauderdale Police Department and a senior training specialist with gun safety organization 97Percent, said the Safer Communities Act passed in 2022 included millions of dollars of funding for gun violence protection programs. Some states used the money to create social supports for people at risk of committing violence, and others used it for things like law enforcement and threat assessment programs. That flexibility has been key to reducing gun violence rates, he said. “It’s always been framed as either a ‘gun problem’ or a ‘people problem’ and that’s been very contentious,” Carita said. “I feel like for the first time, we’re looking at gun violence as a ‘both/and’ problem nationally.” Focusing on extreme events like mass killings runs the risk of “missing the forest for the trees,” said Emma Fridel, an assistant professor of criminology at Florida State University. “If you look at the deaths from firearms, both in homicides and suicides, the numbers are staggering. We lose the same number of people every year to gun violence as the number of casualties we experienced in the Korean War. The number one cause of death for children is guns. “Mass killings should be viewed as one part of the issue, rather than the outcome of interest,” she said.

BODY FOUND

Mom, stepfather charged with murder, causing a still birth

Rebecca Park, a 22-year-old pregnant woman, vanished in Wexford County on Nov. 3 and was discovered dead Nov. 25.

Gus Burns fburns@mlive.com

CADILLAC — The mother and stepfather of a Wexford County woman who vanished after being last seen Nov. 3 have been charged with murder. Bradly Bartholomew, 47, was charged with eight counts, including murder and intentionally assaulting in order to cause a still birth. Cortney Bartholomew, 40, also was charged with murder, among other counts. “This is a case of premeditated torture and murder,” Wexford County Prosecutor Johanna Carey said while arguing for no bond at the arraignment. “These two individuals created a plan, conducted research. Mr. Bartholomew brought Rebecca to their home, forced her into another vehicle and took her into the woods where they stabbed her, forced her to lie on the ground while they cut her baby out, ultimately caused her death and the death of the baby. “This is, frankly, evil personified.”

The investigation into Rebecca Park’s disappearance began in early November. Submitted by the Wexford County Sheriff’s Department

Both are facing the following charges: one count of first-degree murder; one count of felony murder; one count of torture; one count of conspiracy to commit torture; one count of assault on a pregnant individual intentionally causing miscarriage or stillbirth; one count of conspiracy to commit assault on a pregnant individual intentionally causing miscarriage or stillbirth; one count of unlawful imprisonment; and one count of illegally moving a dead body. The judge denied any bond in the cases, and both remain in custody. Preliminary exams were set for 2 p.m. Dec. 16. The charges come nearly a month after the disappearance of Cortney Bartholomew’s biological daughter, 22-year-old Rebecca Park, who was last seen Nov. 3. Park was pregnant at the time of her disappearance, and the baby hasn’t been located. In the recently plowed parking lot of Cadillac District Court, friends and strangers gathered and greeted one another. “Justice 4 Rebecca Park” and “say her name, Rebecca Kay Park,” “Justice for Becca and baby Park,” read messages written on one SUV. **SEE BODY FOUND, A3**

RNC sues over Michigan voter eligibility rules At issue are spouses and children of residents living overseas.

Michael Kransz mkransz@mlive.com

The Republican National Committee is suing Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson, alleging state election law and guidance from her office violate the state Constitution by allowing non-Michigan residents to vote in elections. “Individuals who have never lived in the United States, let alone Michigan, should not have a say in Michigan’s elections,” RNC Chair Joe Gruters said. “Democrat Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson is ignoring the Michigan Constitution by allowing people who don’t live in Michigan to vote in Michigan. That’s why

the RNC is fighting to ensure only lawful votes count.” The lawsuit targets those who haven’t lived in the state but are the spouses of military and overseas Michigan voters and children born to residents of the state. Lawyers for the RNC say provisions around overseas absentee voting in state law, further defined by the state’s elections manual, allow these individuals to vote in Michigan elections despite never having lived in the state. RNC lawyers say that is unconstitutional, as the Michigan Constitution requires a voter to have lived in the state for at least six months, although lawmakers can reduce

the requirement or waive it for former residents. Benson spokesperson Angela Benander called the lawsuit the latest attempt by the RNC to “spread distrust in Michigan’s secure and fair elections.” “Once again, the RNC has decided to target the voting rights of United States citizens and their families living overseas — including the children of active-duty military service members who are making sacrifices for our freedoms,” Benander said. “This is not a legitimate legal concern, just the latest attempt to spread distrust in Michigan’s secure and fair elections.” **SEE LAWSUIT, A3**

