

STEVEN P. DINKIN A Path Forward

UNCERTAINTY AHEAD AS HALF OF ADULTS VOTE WORLDWIDE

Somehow, traveling across the globe to Japan — as I recently did — has a way of reminding a person of our interconnectedness. While it may be thousands of miles between points A and B, the world is very small indeed. What happens in one location can have significant effects on people and places far away.

This year, we are cinched even tighter. More than half the world's adults — roughly 6 billion people — will share the opportunity to participate in nationwide elections, according to The Economist. It's a historic number, with 64 of the biggest and most populated countries set to hold a vote, including the U.S., India, Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Russia and Mexico, plus the European Union.

Beyond the act of voting, global citizens share a stake in the outcome: the future of democracy, no less. Freedom House, a nonprofit organization that works to expand and defend freedom across the world, says democracy in its ideal form is based on “the will and consent of the governed, institu-

tions that are accountable to all citizens, adherence to the rule of law, and respect for human rights.”

A democratic society, according to Freedom House, has “mutually reinforcing structures” that provide checks on a person's power. It requires rival candidates or parties to compete fairly and to govern for the good of the public as a whole, not just themselves or their supporters. It levels the playing field “so that every person, no matter the circumstances of their birth or background, can enjoy the universal human rights to which they are entitled and participate in politics and governance.”

To Freedom House, democracy is more than just an ideal — it has a “unique and inherent capacity for self-correction.” In a democracy, there are tools that can be used when decisions or actions fall short of democratic principles. When properly used, democracy grows stronger, enabling a country to deliver stability and prosperity.

Today, almost 60 percent of the world's countries are democratic.

Their citizens enjoy more political and civil rights, certainly, than those who live in non-democracies, but as Barbara F. Walter noted in her 2022 book, “How Civil Wars Start,” they are also happier, wealthier, better educated and, generally, have a higher life expectancy. It's why refugees continue to flee repressive countries around the globe, in search of this better life.

Walter was the 2022 recipient of the National Peacemaker Award from the National Conflict Resolution Center. I remember our conversation over coffee, a mix of pleasantries and pointed words. Walter's extensive research led her to a sobering conclusion: One of the best predictors of whether a country will experience a civil war is whether it is moving toward or away from democracy.

As Walter said, decline often occurs at the hands of “would-be despots” who whittle away rights and freedoms and concentrate power. Often, these countries continue to hold elections, even as their leaders threaten (or outright

abolish) many democratic foundations.

Yet voting is the primary language of democracy — a way for citizens to choose their leaders and give voice to the issues they care about. It's an awesome responsibility, as I saw in Niger, a West African country where I coordinated the international election observation team. Throughout its history, Niger has alternately implemented and dismantled democratic reforms, starting with elections.

Doug Saunders, in a recent article that appeared in *The Globe and Mail*, said that informed observers are anticipating 2024's torrent of ballots “with deep anxiety and ominous foreboding.” He wrote, “Many of those elections will be crucial tests of the very basis of liberal democracy — and some countries will fail.” Some have described 2024 as a global make-or-break year for democracy.

There is no shortage of angst stirring about the Nov. 5 presidential election here in the U.S.

With Donald Trump as the front-runner for the Republican nomination, some worry that his election would propel our country toward authoritarianism. Trump has expressed admiration for autocratic leaders around the world.

Still, there are reasons to be hopeful, Saunders noted. An election in Poland last October put a decisive end to eight years of rule by an extreme, right-wing party that had severely curtailed the rights of Polish citizens. A year earlier, a Brazilian election drove strongman Jair Bolsonaro out of office. As Saunders said, “Even an entrenched authoritarian can be ousted by a determined people.”

It speaks to a shared desire that draws us closer together: to live in a free and just society, with opportunity for all.

Dinkin is president of the National Conflict Resolution Center, a San Diego-based group working to create solutions to challenging issues, including intolerance and incivility. To learn about NCR's programming, visit ncrconline.com.

HORSES

FROM B1
corrals, red tack sheds sprinkled across the property, a dressage arena and a working round pen.

If not for some Mira Mesa tract homes visible on the ridge above, it could be mistaken for a scene from the 1850s.

“People come out and say, ‘I never knew this was here,’” Young said. “We had to put up that big red sign telling hikers they couldn't use our parking lot.”

A year ago, some were concerned it might all go away.

“We had started to receive a lot of complaints about how the property was being managed and operated,” said Lucy Contreras, the city's deputy director of real estate.

After investigating, city officials determined the operators had not been meeting the requirements in their contract, particularly regarding the health and safety of the animals on site.

“They weren't happy, and they had indicated they

wanted to fight back,” said Contreras, who said the problems had been ongoing for roughly two years. “But at the end of the day, they did leave.”

A lawyer for the former operators did not return a call for comment.

The local housing crisis seems to make every piece of open land in the city a candidate for new development these days, but the equestrian center isn't such an option.

The site is designated permanent open space as part of the 4,000-acre Los Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve, a series of former cattle ranches and farms that the county and city bought from private owners in 1974.

Even if it weren't protected, Young said the area's notorious vulnerability to flooding would make residential development a non-starter.

“They couldn't put affordable housing in unless they supplied each person with a rowboat,” she said.

The equestrian center is not a moneymaker, and it doesn't get the attention of other city-owned recreation



K.C. ALFRED U-T

A horse named Champ rolls in the dust at the Canyonside Equestrian Center.

assets like Mission Bay Park, Balboa Park, the Torrey Pines gliderport, city golf courses, museums and beaches.

But city officials say it's still a priority.

“A lot of the folks have been boarding there for 20-plus years, and they're local to the Black Mountain area,” said Nick Baldwin, program coordinator in the city's Department of Real Estate and Airport Management. “So

it's more geographically convenient and a more affordable option compared to private operators, who see it as more of a revenue-generating opportunity than a community service.”

The city has been collecting only \$2,500 a month in rent, plus a share of overall revenue. City officials haven't disclosed what the rent will be in the new contract.

Young said many users

are relieved that things have stabilized, which has restored the equestrian center's unusual camaraderie.

“More than any ranch I know, this is a family ranch,” she said.

The shift to a new operator comes as city officials have gotten close to raising enough money to begin restoring two historic structures on the property, an adobe house built in 1910 by rancher Charles Mohnike and a hay barn. Both structures are registered on the National Register of Historic Places.

The structures are part of the area's colorful history.

According to city documents, in 1910 Mohnike bought 9,300 acres of the former Rancho Santa Maria de Los Peñasquitos, the first private land grant in San Diego County.

For the next 40 years, through multiple owners, the entire preserve was a key part of Southern California's last era of cattle ranching.

Then developer Irving Kahn bought 14,000 acres of land that included the reserve in 1962. He was planning a golf course sur-

rounded by luxury homes, but was eventually persuaded to sell much of the land to the city and county for a nature preserve in 1974.

Just before that, in 1972, a horse boarding and training facility called Horseman's Park was established on the same site where the equestrian center now operates. The city took control of the land in 1982 and established the equestrian center as a city-owned facility in 1996.

The county opened a similar publicly-owned equestrian center in Lakeside in December.

San Diego Councilmember Marni von Wilpert, whose district includes the equestrian center, said she is grateful to city officials and Young for stabilizing things. Von Wilpert said she's also upbeat about the future.

“It is important that this request for proposals attract a team that is willing to continue the amazing work that has gone on at the equestrian center for years, and I look forward to welcoming and working with the future lessee,” she said.

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SMOLENS

FROM B1
but force a shutdown of the federal government in the coming weeks.

For now, House Republicans say they won't budge from the bill they passed last year. House Resolution 2 would make it harder to qualify for asylum, turn away more migrants at the border, keep many seeking asylum waiting in Mexico and continue construction of former President Donald Trump's border wall. The bill has been a nonstarter for Democrats.

House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., emphasized the GOP House position when he led dozens of Re-

publicans on a visit to the border at Eagle Pass, Texas, on Wednesday.

Bipartisan negotiations have been taking place in the Senate over the spending bill, and Democrats seem ready to give some ground to Republicans. Yet despite comments from both sides that progress is being made, several House Republicans pledged to reject whatever comes out of the talks if the immigration component falls short of HR 2.

Whether that line in the sand shifts as a government shutdown approaches remains to be seen. But House Republicans have made clear they see immigration as a big liability for Biden and Democrats in the November elections.

History does not lend optimism for big immigration deals getting done in Congress. Even bipartisan coalitions could not push ambitious proposals across the finish line. However, the focus now is almost entirely on enforcement, which in the past usually has been paired with other measures such as legalizing undocumented immigrants already in the U.S., including providing a path to citizenship.

Rarely, if ever, has immigration legislation been tied to such far-reaching concerns as aid to allies engaged in wars.

The immigration debate often is infused with scurrilous claims and misinformation.

In Texas, Johnson said, “These are not people who are fleeing and are looking for asylum that are in fear for their lives,” and claimed that “hardened criminals” were taking advantage of lax border enforcement policies

to wreak havoc in the United States, according to *The New York Times*.

In a visit to the Jacumba Hot Springs camp, county Supervisor Jim Desmond said San Diego County taxpayer dollars were being spent on tents, food and other items for migrants there. He later went on social media to admit that was false.

As the political battle rages, impacts of immigration — and the disputes about it — are being felt across the country.

Border enforcement resources have been stretched thin, resulting in reallocation of agents to assist with processing asylum requests. That was the explanation for the temporary closure of the PedWest border crossing in San Ysidro, which partially reopened Thursday.

Also on Thursday, New York City Mayor Eric Adams sued 17 charter bus companies used by Texas to send migrants to New York, seeking reimbursement for more than \$700 million the city has spent providing shelter and other services.

Over the holidays, buses bound for New York instead dropped migrants off in New

Jersey to avoid New York restrictions on such efforts.

On Wednesday, the Department of Justice sued Texas over a law that allows local police to arrest migrants who enter the county illegally.

And on Tuesday, the Biden administration filed an emergency appeal asking the Supreme Court to allow border agents to continue to remove razor wire that Texas has put up along the border. An appellate court judge last month ordered the federal government to stop taking it down.

The administration in both cases says immigration enforcement authority belongs with the federal government, not the states.

Meanwhile, Republicans in the House this week plan to begin formal impeachment proceedings against Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas over his handling of border policies.

The escalation in political and legal fights comes amid what border officials say are a record number of border-crossing apprehensions — topping 10,000 on some days last month.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Mayorkas

recently traveled to Mexico City seeking assistance from President Andrés Manuel López Obrador to stem the tide of people heading toward the U.S.

Since then, Mexico has restarted flights to repatriate Venezuelan migrants back to their home country.

Blinken said the U.S. and Mexico also would seek to bolster a sponsorship initiative for Venezuelan, Cuban, Nicaraguan and Haitian migrants.

Just last week, Mexican authorities began breaking up a large migrant caravan that crossed its southern border, according to National Public Radio.

But many of the estimated 5,000 people in the caravan were still trying to head north.

What they said

Shea Benton (@SheaBenton), government relations director at Family Health Centers of San Diego.

“It's incredibly San Diego of me to be freezing in a normal dress shirt and suit when it's under 60. I'll own that. And I know I'm not the only one.”

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COUNTY

FROM B1
spending, according to the county. All of the money must be spent by the end of 2026.

The most expensive of Lawson-Remer's proposals would spend \$24 million to expand the county's behavioral health workforce amid a shortage. A 2022 report by the San Diego Workforce Partnership found that the region was 8,000 workers short of the 25,000 it needs to address growing rates of substance use and psychological distress.

Other elements of her proposal range from creating county employee workforce housing to creating climate justice grant programs for small businesses.

The board will also consider Tuesday several amendments to its rules and procedures — including an update to its public participation rules.

The motion, also authored by Lawson-Remer, says that a number of public speakers misuse their time, causing delays and disruptions at meetings, and that



ALEJANDRO TAMAYO U-T FILE

Supervisors pose at the Dec. 5 swearing-in ceremony for Monica Montgomery Steppe (second from left).

the proposed changes “would protect the board's ability to conduct business in an orderly manner while ensuring all have an equal opportunity to observe and participate.”

“There have been multiple incidents where members of the public uttered racist comments and personal attacks aimed at county staff,” the motion reads. “While the Board of Supervisors will not curtail the content of the public's comments, the board will act with the proposed changes to protect county employees from a hostile and harassing environment.”

Among other changes,

the proposed update would let the board chair reduce the two-minute time limit per speaker for non-agenda public comment and for public comment on discussion items when they deem it necessary to complete the meeting within a reasonable period of time.

The motion also recommends that county lawyers be directed to explore options for people who “engage in a pattern and practice of disruptive behavior.” It does not say what those options might be.

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