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Population of San Diego declines as immigration decreases

Census data results could have serious ramifications for the county's economy

By Lori Weisberg & Alexandra Mendoza
UNION-TRIBUNE

For much of the last decade, a steady, often robust flow of immigrants into the county has been critical to bolstering San Diego's sometimes sluggish population growth as more and more locals packed their bags and moved to other parts of the country.

Not so anymore. Newly released population estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau reveal the dramatic demographic impacts of the current administration's crackdown on immigration and deportations, which are now contributing to overall population declines and slowdowns across California and throughout the country.

Where a year earlier, San Diego County's population grew by nearly 8,000 from July 1, 2023, to July 1, 2024 — thanks to a healthy influx of immigrants — it fell by nearly 5,300, to 3.28 million in 2025, reversing a post-pandemic rebound. The change is due almost entirely to the monumental shift in immigration policies last year that contributed to a stunning 65% drop in San Diego's foreign arrivals — the single largest decline in 15 years.

San Diego's net international migration from across the globe totaled 6,135 last year. A year earlier, immigration was nearly three times that, with 17,655 more people arriving in San Diego from outside the U.S. than leaving for other countries. It's also notable that these new population estimates reflect

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Bill intends to expand access for evaluating mental health

Measure targets people advocates contend are slipping through cracks

By Kelly Davis & Paul Sisson
UNION-TRIBUNE

Every Saturday morning, Phil Cenedella sets up at the corner of Newport Avenue and Abbott Street, just steps from the sand in Ocean Beach, with a small group of volunteers to serve food and connect people living on the streets to services.

Cenedella, who chairs the OB Task Force on Homelessness, tries to bring in providers so people struggling with mental illness or addiction can get help right there, instead of having to navigate the system on their own. But there are a handful of people who seem unreachable.

He and other residents know them by name — or at least the names they use: Butterfly, Sharae, Kristen. Cenedella is who gets the phone calls when they act up.

Recently, Kristen chased a terrified family with young children up a nearby stairway. Butterfly, Cenedella says, is often yelling at people on the street, defecating on the sidewalk.

It's Sharae he's most concerned about. She's been the repeated subject of police calls and recently threatened to kill an elderly woman who called Cenedella, sobbing.

In October, Cenedella reached out to Dr. Aaron Meyer, a UC San Diego psychiatrist and the city of San Diego's Behavioral Health Officer. Meyer, speaking independently and not for the university, suggested he call the county and ask about 5200, a provision in California's Welfare and Institutions Code that allows "any individual" to request a comprehensive mental health evaluation of a person who is believed to

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"No Kings" demonstrators, part of countywide protests against President Donald Trump's policies, gather at Waterfront Park on Harbor Drive in front of the San Diego County Administration Building on Saturday. **NELVIN C. CEPEDA / U-T**

'NO KINGS' PROTESTS DRAW TENS OF THOUSANDS IN S.D.

RALLIES COME AMID AN ESCALATION OF THE WAR WITH IRAN, HIGH GAS PRICES AND INCREASED THREATS TO VOTING RIGHTS

By Kelly Davis, Alex Riggins, Walker Armstrong & Lucas Robinson
UNION-TRIBUNE

They carried protest signs, waved flags and drew honks of support from passing cars.

Tens of thousands of San Diegans took to the streets Saturday for a third round of "No Kings" demonstrations, this time rallying against an escalating war with Iran, ongoing scrutiny of the Epstein files and mounting economic instability under President Donald Trump's administration.

The protests — part of a coordinated global movement whose flagship rally was held at the Minnesota state Capitol — unfolded amid a partial federal government shutdown, a sliding stock market and mounting concerns over conditions inside immigration detention facilities.

More than 3,100 events were planned nationwide for Saturday, with additional demonstrations in countries including Italy, France and Germany.

Locally, at least 20 rallies were scheduled from Oceanside to Otay Mesa, with events spread throughout the day. A main rally in downtown San Diego kicked off at 10 a.m. at Waterfront Park, where police estimated roughly 40,000 people gathered to hear speakers, including elected officials, union leaders and podcaster Allison Gill.

In North County, hundreds marched through Carlsbad, carrying signs and chanting as they moved along Marron Road.

"Every day's a new horror show," said Patti Slack, membership chair of the Democratic Club of Carlsbad and Oceanside.

She said leadership starts from the ground

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Tommy Simmons, 75, and wife Moraima Simmons, 82, participate in a "No Kings" protest at Broadway and H Street in Chula Vista Saturday. **KRISTIAN CARREON / U-T**

Art Madril blows bubbles while on Marron Road during a "No Kings" protest in Carlsbad on Saturday. **HAYNE PALMOUR IV / FOR THE U-T**

NATIONAL PROTESTS
More than 3,100 "No Kings" events across all 50 states were expected to draw millions. **A5**



War widens with attack by Iran-backed Houthis

Group says strikes to continue until Israel, U.S. halt 'aggression'

By Sammy Westfall, Abbie Cheeseman, Victoria Crow & Dan Lamothe
THE WASHINGTON POST

Iran-backed Houthi militants in Yemen launched an attack against Israel on Saturday for the first time since the start of the U.S.-Israeli war on Iran a month ago, an intervention that amounted to a widening of the conflict and that brings the potential for further disruption of global trade and markets.

The Israeli military said it had intercepted a missile coming from Yemen, which the Houthis confirmed to be their first operation of the war.

The group claimed to have launched a barrage of ballistic



A first responder assists an injured boy following a strike that hit a residential building amid the U.S.-Israeli military campaign in Tehran, Iran, on Saturday. **SAJAD SAFARI / AP**

missiles at Israeli military sites. No casualties were reported.

The absence of the Houthis in Iran's retaliatory efforts over the first month — and uncertainty

about the timing and scope of their expected intervention — had particularly unnerved oil markets. In response to Israel's war on Gaza, the group under-

took a lengthy campaign to disrupt shipping through the Red Sea — a route that has further grown in importance since Iran's effective closure of the Strait of Hormuz. The militant group, designated a terrorist organization by the United States, said its "naval blockade" was carried out in solidarity with the Palestinian people and against Israel. It sank four vessels, including at least two cargo ships, killing at least eight sailors.

Last March, President Donald Trump launched a multiweek campaign of military strikes against the Houthis after they targeted maritime traffic and American troops in the Red Sea. The effort saw U.S. warships and jets launch attacks across Yemen in an effort to degrade Houthi military capabilities and doubled as a warning to Tehran. The near-

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DIGITAL ACTIVATION

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STEVEN P. DINKIN A PATH FORWARD

Center to celebrate peacemaking in divided times

What's in a name? If you're a fan of Shakespeare, this question may transport you to the balcony scene in "Romeo and Juliet." In it, Juliet laments that Romeo is a Montague, the rival family to her own, the Capulets. She says, "That which we call a rose / By any other name would smell as sweet."

Juliet is arguing that Romeo's name is merely a label that does not define his essence. And while names and labels shape perceptions, it's substance that matters.

With deference to Shakespeare, I'll say that the National Conflict Resolution Center is perfectly named.

But it wasn't always so. I remember meeting with the president of a local university about a dozen years ago. Early in our conversation, he declared that his campus didn't need conflict resolution services, but strategies to build community. The student body had become increasingly siloed.

Truth be told, when we adopted the NCRC name in 2004, I never imagined our country would be experiencing the

level of conflict we see today — in all corners of society, college campuses included. So, while I can't say I'm prescient, I'm proud: In a time when our divides feel increasingly insurmountable, NCRC is meeting the moment.

As it turns out, "Meeting the Moment" is the theme of NCRC's annual Peacemaker Awards dinner — a night when we celebrate people working with passion and purpose toward a better future. On May 2, we will honor visionaries who have chosen to step into the center of the storm with courage, nonviolence and a bias for action in the name of our shared humanity.

Our headliner — who will receive the National Peacemaker Award — is Bernice King. As CEO of The Martin Luther King, Jr. Center, King continues to honor her parents' legacy of nonviolent social change, directing policy, advocacy, research, education and training efforts.

She is meeting the moment as champion of Nonviolence365, a framework that transforms conflict into the positive social change that can create a more

peaceful, just and humane world.

At the 2026 MLK Day Commemoration in January, she talked about our conflict-filled times. We are "fractured by polarization, poisoned by fear and paralyzed by divisiveness," she said, warning that "the forces tearing at our shared humanity are not waiting."

In words reminiscent of her father's, King conveyed a sense of urgency: These times demand movement, action and commitment, she said, "rooted in justice and compassion."

Our Local Peacemaker honoree, Jorge Francisco Castillo, is meeting the moment through the transformative power of the arts. A Grammy Award-winning musician and founder of the Fandango Fronterizo festival, Castillo has turned the U.S.-Mexico border — a site often defined by political friction — into a space of profound musical connection.

Through the tradition of son jarocho, the Fandango brings communities together across physical barriers to celebrate unity and love. The musical style comes from Veracruz, a state in

the Gulf Coast region of Mexico, where three cultures — Spanish, Indigenous and African — came together more than 500 years ago. Castillo teaches son jarocho to youths in Barrio Logan, ensuring the rich tradition will continue.

Our Philanthropy in Peacemaking Award honoree, Jack McGrory, is a civic leader whose life's work is a master class in meeting the moment. When our region faces a crossroads, McGrory steps up. He orchestrated public-private partnerships to revitalize downtown San Diego and was a "founding father" of the San Diego State University Mission Valley development that brought Snapdragon Stadium to life. McGrory believes that civic investment is inextricably linked to social harmony.

His philanthropy is similarly directed toward civic good. McGrory invests in the next generation of leaders, including student veterans and first-generation scholars. At SDSU, he is creating a new curriculum around social justice, public service and collaborative governance.

Much like King's message at the MLK Day commemoration, our goal for the Peacemaker Awards dinner is to encourage individual action. Peacemaking can only happen when every one of us is engaged. I can't wait to hear from our honorees — Bernice King, Jorge Francisco Castillo and Jack McGrory — whose vision and stories of moments met are sure to empower us all.

It's why Peacemaker is my favorite night of the year. More than a celebration, it's an evening filled with inspiration and, with a nod to Juliet, substance for all.

The National Conflict Resolution Center's Peacemaker Awards dinner will be held at 5 p.m. May 2. For information or to register, go to ncrconline.com/peacemaker.

Dinkin is president of the center, a San Diego-based organization working to create innovative solutions to challenging issues, including intolerance and incivility. To learn about its programming, go to ncrconline.com.

San Clemente gets updates on sand studies, surveys

By Laylan Connelly
SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA
NEWS GROUP

SAN CLEMENTE — San Clemente will focus its search for sand near the Santa Ana River in Newport Beach and San Onofre State Beach just south of the beach town in its effort to find sources closer to its shore for replenishment projects.

City officials heard several beach-related updates this month from studies and surveys that have been ongoing the past few years as the town grapples with severe erosion and shrinking sand space.

Greg Hearon, principal engineer with Coastal Frontiers, gave a presentation with preliminary results from San Clemente's search for offshore sand, an effort that kicked off in 2024 with an \$800,000 state grant. The hope is to find a source closer to San Clemente, rather than dredge off Surfside/Sunset near Huntington Beach, to cut down on the high costs of transport.

Scientists took core samples from the ocean floor at six locations to determine if a closer, more suitable sand source exists. Surveys took place in water depths about 35 feet to 60 feet in depth as far south as Camp Pendleton and as far north as Surfside/Sunset Beach, the same borrow site used for a big replenishment project the city did with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers two years ago that placed sand around the pier.

While Surfside remained the most optimistic location, others were unsuitable, including off San Clemente and Dana Point where the



Beachgoers flock to the sand near San Clemente pier in July, following a sand replenishment project that added darker-colored grains. JEFF GRITCHEN / SCNG FILE

sand was too fine, more like silt. Tests off San Onofre and from the outflow of the Santa Ana River were "promising."

The next phase of the investigation is now approved, at an estimated cost of nearly \$449,000, with \$300,000 being funded by Metrolink and the Southern California Regional Rail Authority as ordered by the California Coastal Commission as part of a beach sand impact mitigation fee. The city will fund \$100,000, and the remaining cost will be funded using leftover money from the original Coastal Commission grant.

"The objective here is unchanged — locate and verify sand sources as close to the city as possible and in sufficient quantities to support multiple projects," Hearon said.

The next step will be to acquire a State Lands permit

for the second phase and develop a plan to bring the sand to the shore, Hearon said.

He said he is especially interested in exploring more areas off San Onofre State Beach because of its close proximity to San Clemente.

"We want to understand if we can exploit that site for beach nourishment," he said, noting that they would have to coordinate with State Parks to pursue that location for dredging.

The outflow of the Santa Ana River off Newport Beach had two core samples that looked promising, and that location is still about 10 miles closer than Surfside/Sunset, Hearon added.

During the City Council meeting, community member Mike Kay urged leaders to further explore using rail to bring in sand from inland sources such as the Prado

Dam, which has a surplus of available.

"I have not seen a strong economic breakdown of the cost of sand transport. I know, with a background in construction, that sand is transported by rail in Orange County," Kay said. "It's transported by rail all over the United States."

A concrete plant in Irvine, for example, used rail cars for sand, as does an operation in Cabazon near Palm Springs, Kay told council members, noting it is the "cheapest, quickest, easiest way to do it."

"Sand can easily and cheaply be transported by rail," he argued. "I wish we were looking better at the economic realities, the cheapest way to move sand."

"And I'm frustrated that we aren't putting attention into that."

The city also heard results from a shoreline monitor-

ing program that launched in 2023 and concluded in December, with the council deciding to continue services with Coastal Frontiers for another \$190,913 contract over a three-year period.

San Clemente has experienced widespread beach erosion since the early 2000s due to natural sand supplies being cut off and no longer reaching the beach. "The city's shoreline is now in a significant, sediment-deficit condition requiring action and intervention to restore the beach," city staffers said in a report to the council.

Surveys have been taken each spring and fall to document coastal changes for the monitoring program. The next surveys in San Clemente are planned for May.

In addition to documenting the condition of the shoreline, the program results will "offer regional and long-term context for site-specific findings and allow planners and engineers to evaluate beach nourishment as the sand moves offshore and onshore, and upcoast and downcoast to adjacent beaches," city officials said.

There were 12 beach sections measured between Doheny State Beach to the north and Cotton's Point to the south.

"The goal of this program is to build a database of shoreline changes in the region," the city's coastal administrator, Leslea Meyerhoff, said. "This data is important. It's the foundation of all of the projects and plans that we work on, because it helps us understand how the sand is moving and where to build our projects."

The city is losing about 0.3 acres of sand per year, with

some areas more depleted than others, according to the staff's report.

Linda Lane and San Clemente State Beach had gains in sand from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers replenishment project that brought 200,000 cubic yards of sand near the pier, while Doheny State Beach in Dana Point to Mariposa Point in north San Clemente had losses, as did Cotton's Point on the south end of town.

The Army Corps of Engineers' replenishment project has made a "significant difference," Hearon said, showing before-and-after images of the pier and lifeguard headquarters that had more sand surrounding the structures.

The council voted to pursue grant funding for the next stage of that Army Corps of Engineers project, which will require a 50-50 cost share between the federal government and the city when its next cycle returns in about five years.

Officials also approved, with a 3-2 vote, moving forward in pursuing grant funding to explore creating offshore structures that would retain sand.

In November, the consultant suggested moving forward with a dog-bone-shaped reef placed offshore to help dissipate waves before they reach the shoreline to protect the beach. The structure could also have the benefit of creating new surfbreaks.

While some council members questioned that plan, which is estimated to cost nearly \$90 million, the majority voted to move forward with pursuing grant funds to take ideas to the next stage in the research and planning process.

MILITARY

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the most versatile, flexible and lethal global response force the United States has to offer," Marine Corps Commandant Gen. Eric Smith said in a speech last year, according to Breaking Defense news.

The San Diego task force now en route to the Middle East is composed of three bulky and brutish vessels. Two of them — the USS Portland and USS Comstock — primarily put Marines and their equipment ashore.

The group's focal point is the flagship, Boxer, an 844-foot amphibious assault ship that has spent most of its roughly 30 years of service operating out of San Diego. The Golden Gator, as it's known, also puts Marines ashore. And it has a major hospital.

But it's chiefly a small aircraft carrier that features many air assets, notably F-35B stealth fighters that can fly 1,200 mph.

The U.S. F-35Bs that already are in the Middle East have been destroying Iranian air defense systems and infrastructure.

Boxer also has heavy-lift and attack helicopters, as well as MV-22B Osprey, fast, long-range tilt-rotor aircraft used to transport troops and equipment, and to evacuate



The Wasp-class amphibious assault ship USS Boxer and Whidbey Island-class dock landing ship USS Comstock in formation Dec 7. CPL. AVERY WAYLAND / U.S. MARINE CORPS

the wounded.

The Trump administration is considering ordering Marines to storm into the Persian Gulf and take over Kharg Island, Iran's principal oil export terminal and a vital cog in its economy. A raid also would aim to help broadly reopen the Strait of Hormuz to shipping.

ARG-MEUs are expressly designed for such missions.

It is not clear whether the Boxer group would lead the way if such a raid is approved. Another U.S. Navy-Marine task force from Japan just arrived in the region. It's possible that both would be used if the U.S. does not reach a peace agreement with Iran.

This involves great risk.

Retired Adm. James Stavridis, the former Supreme Allied Commander of NATO, has repeatedly told the news media that Iran could launch a counterattack, killing a lot of U.S. troops. Such an attack could involve ballistic missiles, which are very difficult to knock down because of their speed and trajectory.

The Boxer has defensive weapons, including Rolling Airframe and Sea Sparrow missiles. But Stavridis, among others, has called such an invasion a "high-risk, little-reward" venture.

Such an event might not be far away.

The Boxer group likely will reach the Middle East about a week into April.



Dredging of the Oceanside harbor is scheduled to begin April 6. ANA RAMIREZ / U-T FILE

OCEANSIDE

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environmental restrictions.

"No additional approvals are needed from our end," Davis said. "The USACE environmental window ... already accommodates the city's requested change to the dredging season."

The Corps of Engineers is responsible for maintaining the harbor entrance, which requires regular dredging to remove the sand carried in by ocean currents, tides and waves. Oceanside shares the entrance channel with a small military marina just north of the city on Camp

Pendleton.

In November, city officials declared a local emergency to obtain help with efforts to clear a rapidly growing accumulation of sand that threatened to block the entrance. Parts of the main channel were as shallow as 10 feet, creating a low-tide navigation hazard and prompting warnings.

However, the city and the Corps of Engineers were unable to get the money needed and a contractor for the work. Favorable ocean conditions slowed the accumulation of sand, although the hazard remained.

This spring's dredging is beginning a few weeks

earlier than usual. Traditionally, the work is finished by the Memorial Day weekend.

Sand for the beaches is a side benefit of the dredging, although there's never enough to go more than about one-third of the way down the city's 3-mile coastline. South of Tyson Street, the shoreline is badly eroded, leaving nothing but rocks at high tide. The city is working on several projects to restore and retain sand there.

The Oceanside harbor was built in the 1960s. The marina at Camp Pendleton was created when the Marine Corps base opened in 1942.