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Democracy Dies in Darkness

TUESDAY, MAY 28, 2024 • \$3

Ads are ‘vaccine’ for online deception

Debunking false stories didn’t work. Welcome to ‘prebunking.’

BY CAT ZAKRZEWSKI, JOSEPH MENN, NAOMI NIX AND WILL OREMUS

Election officials and researchers from Arizona to Taiwan are adopting a radical playbook to stop falsehoods about voting before they spread online, amid fears that traditional strategies to battle misinformation are insufficient in a perilous year for democracies around the world.

Modeled after vaccines, these campaigns — dubbed “prebunking” — expose people to weakened doses of misinformation paired with explanations and are aimed at helping the public develop “mental antibodies” to recognize and fend off hoaxes in a heated election year.

In the run-up to next month’s European Union election, for example, Google and partner organizations are blanketing millions of voters with colorful cartoon ads on YouTube, Facebook and Instagram that teach common tactics used to propagate lies and rumors on social media or in email.

One 50-second animation features a fake news campaign in which “visiting tourists” are blamed for a “litter crisis.” The example is meant to educate voters about “scapegoating,” a disinformation technique that places unwarranted blame for a problem on a single person or group.

Google has no plans to launch such a campaign in the United States, where former president Donald Trump and his allies are spreading falsehoods about widespread voter fraud in the 2020 election, laying the groundwork to cast doubt on the results of Trump’s rematch with President Biden in November.

Instead, humbler campaigns are springing up in locations across the nation, including Arizona’s Maricopa County, where election officials are enlisting local volunteers to help with voter education.

SEE ELECTIONS ON A6



JEHAD ALSHRAFI/AP

Far right ramps up attacks on aid trucks

BY LOVEDAY MORRIS

TARQUMIYAH, WEST BANK — Radical Israeli settlers have expanded their attacks on aid trucks passing through the West Bank this month, blocking food from reaching Gaza as humanitarian groups warn that the enclave is sinking deeper into famine.

Groups of settler youths are tailing relief convoys, setting up checkpoints and interrogating drivers. In some cases, far-right attackers have ransacked and burned trucks and beaten Palestinian drivers, leaving at least two hospitalized.

The assailants use a web of publicly accessible WhatsApp groups to track the trucks and coordinate attacks, providing a window into their activities. Working off what they say are tips from local informants, the groups have targeted trucks carrying aid to Gaza.

SEE AID TRUCKS ON A11



MOHAMMED SALEH/REUTERS

TOP: Palestinians on Monday look at some of the destruction after an Israeli airstrike on a tent camp in Rafah, in southern Gaza. Sunday night’s strike drew widespread international condemnation, and Israel’s military promised an investigation. **ABOVE:** A displaced Palestinian family prepares to flee Rafah following the strike, which the Gaza Health Ministry said killed at least 45 people. The Israel Defense Forces said two militants were killed in the attack.

‘Shooting incident’: Egypt said it will investigate death of security forces member at Rafah border. **A12**

Grisly scenes follow strike

GAZANS DESCRIBE AFTERMATH IN CAMP

Netanyahu calls Rafah attack a ‘tragic accident’

BY MIRIAM BERGER AND HAJAR HARB

JERUSALEM — A deadly Israeli airstrike on a tent camp in Rafah late Sunday drew widespread international condemnation Monday — focusing further scrutiny on Israel’s controversial offensive against Hamas in the south and the desperate plight of Gaza’s civilians.

Witnesses described a horrific scene late Sunday as fires tore through the makeshift encampment in the Tal al-Sultan neighborhood, killing at least 45 people, according to the Gaza Health Ministry. Parents were burned alive in their tents while children screamed for help. Doctors recounted struggling to treat gruesome shrapnel wounds with dwindling medical supplies.

In an address to parliament Monday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called the Rafah strike a “tragic accident.” It was a departure from public statements by the Israeli military, which had previously referred to a targeted strike on a Hamas compound using “precise munitions” and “precise intelligence.”

The Israel Defense Forces said two militants were killed in the attack, including the commander of Hamas operations in the West Bank. “There were many measures taken before the attack to minimize harm to non-involved people,” the IDF said Monday, adding that the incident was under investigation.

A spokesperson for the White House National Security Council, speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss a sensitive matter, said the U.S. was “deeply concerned” by the attack.

SEE RAFAH ON A11

Can’t afford a house? Mom and Dad can help.

More first-time home buyers are relying on parents to co-sign loans and contribute to down payments

BY ABHA BHATTARAI AND FEDERICA COCCO

Home buyers are increasingly turning to family members, most often parents, for help buying a house in overpriced and under-supplied markets, reflecting a shift in the way many families finance homeownership.

The share of young home buyers relying on older mortgage co-signers is as high as it has been in at least 30 years, according to a Freddie Mac analysis of its home loans. In 1994, 1.6 percent of first-time home buyers under 35 had a co-borrower age 55 or older. By 2022, after a pandemic-era spike, that figure had more than doubled to 3.7 percent, matching a high set in 2015.

A separate analysis of a federal mortgage data set by Redfin suggests that the trend in co-signers above 55 years old on younger home buyers’ purchases picked up even more in 2023.

Meanwhile, the share of home buyers in their 20s, 30s and early 40s receiving financial help for a down payment is also rising, after



SCOTT MCINTYRE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

José Matos, 24, has been house-hunting with his mother, Lizet Rodriguez, 61, who will cover a \$50,000 down payment.

declining for much of the past five years. Overall, 12 percent of home buyers relied on down payment help from friends and family as of April, up from 9 percent last year, according to survey data from the National Association of Realtors. The youngest buyers — ages 25 to 33 — were the most likely to

receive familial help, with nearly 1 in 4 receiving cash gifts or loans toward their purchases.

“The housing market is an incredibly unaffordable place right now,” said Daryl Fairweather, chief economist at Redfin, a national real estate brokerage. “People who are succeeding are com-

ing in with a lot of cash and large down payments — and often, family support.”

The trend of more younger home buyers, who are more often first-timers, seeking parental help to reach a middle-class milestone is just the latest sign of growing disparities between younger generations and older ones who have had more opportunities over the past 20 years to lock in cheaper mortgages. And it’s happening at a time when more young people are living at home and mortgage rates have hit 20-year highs.

As home buying becomes increasingly out of reach to first-timers, Realtors confirm that more parents are stepping in to help, sometimes taking out loans against their existing homes to fund their children’s. More parents are also getting involved in the home-buying process from the beginning, considering joint purchases less of a handout to their children and more of a long-term family investment, brokers said.

Eve Brown, who lives in Cincinnati, said she helped her son with a down payment on his first home. **SEE HOME BUYERS ON A14**

Trump trial does little to sway swing voters

Some in Michigan say plenty of other issues will govern their choices

BY HANNAH KNOWLES

CHESANING, MICH. — Judy Loachridge, a rare undecided voter, keeps up with Donald Trump’s criminal trial by reading the news and hearing about it from her daughter. She said she thinks Trump was dishonest about his finances and was caught in lies.

But as the case nears its conclusion, it has not shifted Loachridge’s thinking about her ballot in November. She already disliked Trump, who she said “doesn’t respect women,” but might still vote for him.

She also has concerns about President Biden, who she thinks has been weak on foreign policy. Regardless of what the jury decides, Loachridge reasoned, she is left to contemplate what she re-

gards as a lousy choice in November.

“I’m still deciding the lesser of two evils,” said Loachridge, 74, who lives in a swing county in a swing state that narrowly backed Trump in 2016 and Biden in 2020.

The first criminal trial of a former president is in its final stages in a Manhattan courthouse, where jurors will deliberate on whether Trump falsified business records to cover up a hush money payment to a actress. While the long-term political effects of the case are not yet known, three dozen interviews with voters in Saginaw County the past few days show many have shrugged off Trump’s case, with still-persuadable residents unmoved by historic legal proceedings that in another election year could dominate public attention.

After norm-shattering campaigns, a tumultuous Trump presidency with two impeachments, voters are looking for a change. **SEE VOTERS ON A4**

N.Y. case: Trump’s trial is not televised, but TV played a role. **A4**

IN THE NEWS

Basketball great Walton dies of cancer

Bill Walton, the Hall of Fame center who won titles at UCLA and in the NBA before becoming a quirky broadcaster, was 71. **B4**

A solemn duty Chris Gekker has played the trumpet — and taps — for decades, but on Memorial Day it took on extra meaning. **B1**

THE NATION

A lawsuit seeks the removal of a statue in North Carolina honoring “faithful slaves.” **A3**
Tornadoes that tore through much of the U.S. over the weekend killed at least 22. **A18**

THE WORLD

A bipartisan delegation of U.S. lawmakers met with Taiwan’s new president in Taipei. **A7**
In China, the cultural appeal once held by the United States has faded in recent years. **A8**

A proposal in Britain

that would require national service for 18-year-olds is being lampooned by Gen Z. **A9**

THE ECONOMY

Following the rules of etiquette on social media can keep you from finding yourself in a messy situation. **A13**

THE REGION

Nearly half of D.C.-area parents say learning loss from the pandemic and teacher shortages are issues for schools, a poll finds. **B1**
Crime has become a key issue in the Democratic primary race for the Ward 4 seat on the D.C. Council. **B1**

STYLE

Evan Kinori, whose menswear designs have a cult following, wants to change the way you think about clothes. **C1**

HEALTH & SCIENCE

Research suggests that our dreams change as we age, and sleep scientists are pondering how and why they do. **E1**

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The Washington Post
Year 147, No. 53865

