

Why bowl together when you can scroll on screens alone?

BY ALLISON SCHRAGER
Bloomberg Opinion

Bowling has seen better days. Lucky Strike Entertainment Corp., the dominant player in the business, has lost nearly half of its market value in the past year and had the rating on its debt cut further into junk territory. Higher borrowing costs and iffy consumer sentiment are factors, but Americans also just don't seem to want to bowl that much anymore. And it's not just bowling. Demand for other social forms of leisure is on the decline, too. Dave & Buster's Entertainment Inc.'s disappointing earnings and country clubs' declining membership are cases in

point. There may be a boom in exclusive members' clubs in big cities. But for most Americans, the places that provide outlets for in-person connection, such as recreation and senior centers or the grocery store, are closing. It reflects a long-running trend in how we socialize, or don't socialize at all. Americans are spending much more time alone and on their screens. A less social nation not only portends big economic shifts, so-called "third spaces" closing and businesses running into trouble, but also impacts our mental health and well-being, while robbing us of the connections that in the past led to fresh interests and professional opportunities. This isn't a new lament.

As far back as 2000, Harvard University political scientist Robert D. Putnam wrote in his famous book "Bowling Alone" that the decline of bowling leagues represented a degradation of community and social capital. After years of further decline, leisure activities that involve neighbors, families and colleagues interacting now seem at existential risk. Bowling was once popular among all income groups because it offered a relatively low-cost and family-friendly way to socialize. People formed bowling leagues with friends or co-workers or just made the odd outing with other families. League membership reached some 10 million in its heyday in the 1970s. It's

now down to about a million, with Lucky Strike noting that consumers prefer watching televised sporting events. Millions of Americans still bowl each year, more than play tennis or pickle ball. But the share of the population that bowls in a day has been trending down since even before the pandemic. America has lost one third of its bowling alleys since 2001. Leisure trends come and go, of course, as our culture evolves and technology creates new interests and hobbies. Going to a Vaudeville show was a popular way to spend leisure time and budget in the 1880s. Movies and eventually television changed that. It could be that bowling has run its

course and will soon be about as relevant as a croquet tournament. Consumers these days have limited budgets that are being squeezed by high energy prices and inflation, so they are more price sensitive to the marginal elements of their spending, and bowling is marginal. Companies such as Lucky Strike and Dave & Buster's are also land-intensive and carry lots of debt. The higher rate environment is forcing them to refinance at higher costs, cutting into their margins and hammering their ratings. But the underlying worry is Americans growing less willing to gather like they used to - bowling is, after all, a social activity. Not all forms of entertainment are losing ground. Americans across income groups still spend lots on discretionary services. We spend a fortune, for example, on concert tickets and travel. No doubt budgets are tighter, but consumers are making choices that

cut out community engagement. What has replaced bowling isn't just concert going or watching a football game, we spend more time on video games and scrolling videos of other people with a more active social life. Even when we go to concerts or the theater, we may be solo. Perhaps an isolated Gen Alpha, hungry for more connection than Gen Z had, will shake things up and seek out social leisure again. We might find new third places, such as waiting in line for frozen yogurt (though I observe these lines and most people are on their phones). Or perhaps bowling will be discovered by influencers (Lucky Strike should invest in more flattering lighting), and our new third place will be waiting in line for bowling shoes. Allison Schrager, a Bloomberg Opinion columnist covering economics, is a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute.

Democrats can become the party of business

BY KURT BARDELLA
Los Angeles Times

For half a century, Republicans have worn the "party of business" label like a permanent badge - tax cuts, deregulation, tough trade talk - while Democrats have too often ceded the ground, treating economic strength as someone else's brand to react to rather than a story to tell. A new survey commissioned by the nonpartisan U.S.-Asia Fair Market Alliance hands Democrats a rare gift: hard data showing there is a genuine, winnable opening on economic fairness, and it maps precisely onto the values Democrats already claim. The numbers are hard to argue with. A poll of 1,000 nationally representative voters and 318 D.C.-area policy influencers found that 88% of the public and 86% of policy influencers believe American companies deserve fair, reciprocal treatment when doing business abroad. Seventy percent of the small- and medium-size-business owners surveyed said unfair treatment overseas could meaningfully damage their bottom line. Most tellingly for anyone thinking about the 2026 midterms and the 2028 presidential primaries: 78% of voters said they would be more likely to support a policymaker who works to ensure U.S. companies are treated fairly in foreign markets - and 76% said Washington should push back just as hard even when the offending country is a close American ally. That last finding matters enormously. This isn't nationalist grievance politics. It's a demand for consistency and due process - the idea that a small manufacturer in Ohio or a software company in North Carolina shouldn't face arbitrary data-localization mandates, selective enforcement or shifting rules simply because they're American. That is a fairness argument. And fairness is Democratic home turf.

Here is the opening: Republicans have held the "pro-business" mantle for decades without much to show for it on this specific problem. Their instinct has been either blanket deregulation that does nothing to protect American exporters from discriminatory treatment overseas, or blunt, across-the-board tariffs that raise costs for the same small businesses they claim to champion. Neither approach distinguishes between a fair playing field and a rigged one. Neither offers the targeted, accountable response the data show voters want. Democrats already have the muscle memory for this fight. It's the same instinct that drives support for antitrust enforcement against dominant corporations, protections for workers against exploitative employers and consumer safeguards against predatory practices. The through-line in all of it is the same: Don't let the powerful write the rules to their own advantage while everyone else absorbs the cost. Turning that instinct outward - toward foreign regulators who selectively target American firms - isn't a departure from Democratic values. It's a natural extension of them. Because the survey shows this issue doesn't split cleanly along party lines in the electorate - both Democrats and Republicans want their government to act - the party that claims it first, credibly and with specifics, is the party that owns it. Now, that mantle is unclaimed in the middle of the field. Democrats have spent years being told they're weaker on economic issues while Republicans get the credit without the results. Fair treatment for American companies abroad is a rare case where the values, the data and the political incentives all point the same direction. The only question is which party picks it up first.

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DOUGLAS SHINEIDR/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES TNS

A supporter of Brazil's right-wing Presidential candidate Flávio Bolsonaro reacts following the partial results of the presidential election in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, on Oct. 4.

Brazil's elections appear to be another win for Donald Trump

BY DANIEL DEPETRIS
Chicago Tribune

If there's anything President Donald Trump likes more than campaigning for Republicans, it's watching his preferred candidates win their elections. In Latin America, he's having remarkable political success. Over the last year and a half, right-wing candidates have won seven presidential elections in a part of the world Washington euphemistically refers to as its backyard. Some of those elections, such as in Honduras, involved a heavy hand from Trump, who all but threatened to cut off U.S. aid to the Central American nation if his preferred politician didn't win last year. In others, such as in Argentina, Trump dangled the promise of a \$20 billion currency swap as a reward for voters giving Argentine President Javier Milei more allies in the legislature. Trump is clearly happy, marveling last month that "everybody I've endorsed has won ... a lot of wins; we're winning a lot." After this weekend, he's a step closer to another win in the region. In Brazil, Latin America's largest country and wealthiest

economy, tens of millions went to the polls to cast their ballots for president. Flávio Bolsonaro, the elder son of former Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, won 47.03% of the votes to Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's 45.16%. Since none of the 12 candidates in the running reached 50% (plus one), a second round will be held Oct. 25 between these two men. Bolsonaro is the clear favorite; many of the other candidates were right or right of center, and their supporters will likely throw their hats behind the scion of Brazil's most influential conservative family. Unless Lula, who's running for a fourth term, attracts some of the moderates and disenchanted voters who stayed home, Trump will have another ally in a high place. It's difficult to put into words how rocky the U.S.-Brazil relationship has been in recent years. Joe Biden's administration didn't exactly get along with Jair Bolsonaro. The Biden White House was petrified over Bolsonaro's destruction of the Amazon, was aghast at his divisive rhetoric against traditionally marginalized groups in the country, and grew concerned when the far-right populist increased Brazil's trade ties with

China. Biden at one point sent his CIA director to Brazil to warn Bolsonaro about stealing his reelection. (Bolsonaro was sentenced to 27 years in prison for a coup attempt.) Trump's interactions with Lula, the region's most famous left-winger and a man who played a role in the downfall of Brazil's military dictatorship in the mid-1980s, hasn't been any better. The country-to-country relationship isn't broken, but it's not healthy either. Much of this can be chalked up to competing national priorities as well as a clash in personalities. For starters, the Trump administration makes a point of saying that the Western Hemisphere is America's region to lead. However for Lula, this kind of sentiment smacks of arrogance and imperialism. Brazil, he has long stated, is for the Brazilians and nobody else. Whereas the United States is operating through the prism of great-power competition, Lula's foreign policy focuses on promoting multi-alignment and strengthening relations with all of the world's major states in order to lessen Brazil's dependence on any single country, increase its geopolitical flexibility and bolster the collective

weight of the so-called Global South. It didn't take long before those two interpretations smacked into each other. Trump wasted little time leveraging America's economic tool kit in an attempt to free his old friend, Jair Bolsonaro, from investigation. In July 2025, he slapped 40% tariffs on some Brazilian products, justifying the move as punishment for what he called the Brazilian justice system's "persecution" of Bolsonaro. Lula used the tariffs to his political advantage, calling them an intrusion into Brazilian affairs and an attempt by Trump to coerce the country into meeting Washington's demands. In the end, the tariffs had the counterproductive effect of pushing the Brazilian government toward more trade deals with China to compensate for the added expense of accessing the U.S. market. Months later, Trump eventually dropped some of those tariffs on Brazilian food products to get a hold on Americans' high grocery costs. Ultimately, Trump wants in Brazil what he currently has in Venezuela: a puppet willing to happily take his orders. Trump might end up being disappointed regardless of who wins the second round later this month. Daniel DePetris is a fellow at Defense Priorities.

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