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USC Price-Schwarzenegger Institute California Issues Poll Reveals Voters' Attitudes on New Voting Procedures and Political Reform

Nearly 62% are Unaware of Voters' Choice Act Changes Ahead of State Primary Election; Most View New Upcoming Redistricting Procedures as Fair

Los Angeles, Feb. 20, 2020 – With less than two weeks before the March 3 Primary Election, many potential California voters surveyed still aren't clear about new Voters' Choice Act (VCA) voting procedures put into place for the first time in 15 California counties, according to a poll conducted by the [USC Price School of Public Policy](#) and the [USC Schwarzenegger Institute on State and Global Policy](#).

Additionally, as the state this week narrows down its list of potential individuals to serve on the next California Citizens Redistricting Commission, a majority of likely California voters polled rate the process as a fair way of drawing legislators' electoral districts. They also voiced support for a federal proposal to require the citizen-driven approach in every state.

The findings are the latest from the USC Price-Schwarzenegger Institute California Issues Poll fielded from February 1-15, 2020, conducted in consultation with the [California Civic Engagement Project](#) and the [USC Price Center for Social Innovation](#)—both affiliated centers of the USC Price School of Public Policy.

The poll and its key findings are outlined below:

Voters' Choice Act and Voting Rights

Passed in 2016, the Voters' Choice Act allows counties in California to optionally implement new voting processes to encourage stronger civic participation. The poll sought to determine voter awareness and knowledge about these new procedures in the 15 participating counties in the state.

- Only 37.1% of likely California voters living in counties implementing new voting centers reported knowing that their county had changed options for how and where ballots could be cast; the other 62.9% either had no idea that options had changed or couldn't answer the question.
- Among Latino voters surveyed, 58.5% did not know of new voting procedures in their counties.
- Respondents who lived in Los Angeles County showed a similar lack of knowledge about new voting procedures at 62.2%. This was in contrast to 51.0% of respondents from Orange County, who said they were aware of the changes.

- About one in five likely California voters polled were *not* confident that their ballot would be counted as intended in the March 2020 California Primary Election. However, once these respondents were given more details on the VCA, their confidence levels rose, indicating that more information on the new voting processes might help strengthen confidence in the election process among potential voters.

Political Reform and the California Redistricting Process

Passed by ballot proposition in the late 2000s, the California Citizen Redistricting Commission (CCRC) was a priority for then Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger in his effort to promote more bipartisan cooperation on the redrawing of electoral lines each decade following the Census. This CCRC process will be used for the second time in history after the 2020 Census is completed. This week an Applicant Review Panel in Sacramento is expected to name the 120 interview finalists from among 19,000 panel applicants to make up the next CCRC. The new poll determined that:

- Only 24.2% of California voters thought the state's redistricting approach was a fair process.
- However, when the ongoing selection process of choosing five Democrats, five Republicans, and four no-party-preference/other citizens to serve as commissioners was explained, the number of respondents who thought California's system of redrawing electoral lines was fair jumped to 65.1%, more than a 40-point increase.
- Likely voters polled also appeared much more skeptical of approaches in which legislators themselves conduct redistricting, with more than 50% responding that the outcome would likely lead to unfairly favoring one political party.

The findings show that it will be essential for the new California Citizens Redistricting Commission to communicate the benefits of the process to the state's voters in order to build public bipartisan support for the new Commission and to enhance voter confidence.

- Survey respondents were also asked about efforts underway at the federal level (H.R. 1 by Congressman Alan Lowenthal of Long Beach) to require similar bipartisan commissions in every state. More than 60% of those surveyed supported the bill.

Federal Intervention in Homelessness Solutions

Last week, initial results of the USC Price-USC Schwarzenegger Institute California Issues Poll revealed the top issues on the minds of likely voters surveyed. Homelessness or housing topped the list (29%), followed by climate change (14.8%) and immigration (9.2%). While poll results on other specific homelessness questions were also [released last week](#), additional findings on the issue are being released today.

Respondents were asked their thoughts on who should remove homeless tent encampments from public spaces in California.

- When asked whether they supported removing homeless tent encampments from public spaces, 51.5% of those surveyed either strongly or somewhat agreed.
- However, when asked about support regarding federal intervention in removing homeless tent encampments, attitudes markedly changed.
 - If removals were proposed by the U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development, support for this policy went down to 47.2%.
 - Similarly, if proposed by President Donald Trump, the number supporting removing tent encampments decreased to 41.1%.

The findings suggest that while voters are generally supportive of removing homeless tent encampments from public spaces throughout the state, they are less supportive when intervention is proposed by the federal government.

The Issue of Homelessness and California Preferences for President

- Among likely Democratic primary voters who said they are afraid that they or a family member could become homeless, 34.4% support Bernie Sanders, 21.6% support Joe Biden, 16.9% support Elizabeth Warren and 7.3% support Michael Bloomberg.
- In contrast, California Democratic likely voters who are not afraid they or a family member could become homeless still support Bernie Sanders (25.6%), but at lower rates than those who fear they could become homeless. Elizabeth Warren placed a close second among those not fearful of homelessness impacting their family (22.6%) with Joe Biden third among this group (21.4%) and Michael Bloomberg fourth (8.0%).
- More than one-third of California voters of all parties surveyed fear they or a family member could become homeless.

The poll also included several questions regarding sports policies, including attitudes about pay equality in sports, support for removing the Houston Astro's MLB 2019 World Series title, and support for a November 2020 ballot initiative to legalize sports wagering in licensed gambling establishments in California. [See sports specific findings here.](#)

Full detailed results of the USC Price-Schwarzenegger Institute California Issues Poll can be accessed [here.](#)

The USC Price-USC Schwarzenegger Institute California Issues Poll was fielded February 1-15, 2020, in both English and Spanish. Questions were designed by USC Price faculty research experts. The poll was fielded by YouGov, a global public opinion and data company based in London. YouGov interviewed 1,200 likely California voters. Interviews were administered online via a panel recruited by YouGov, which used sampling and post-stratification weights so that the 1,200 person sample was representative of the likely California voter population. There was a Latino voter oversample. Margin of error is +/- 3.1.

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The **California Civic Engagement Project** is part of the USC Sol Price School of Public Policy and is based in Sacramento. The CCEP conducts research to inform policy and on-the-ground efforts for a more engaged and representative democracy, improving the social and economic quality of life in communities. The CCEP is engaged in pioneering research to identify disparities in civic participation across place and population. Its research informs and empowers a wide range of policy and organizing efforts aimed at reducing disparities in state and regional patterns of well-being and opportunity. To learn about the CCEP, visit our website at <https://ccep.usc.edu>.

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