

USC Price

Sol Price School of Public Policy



Will the pandemic change the 2020 election?

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1. A threat to our democratic institutions

2. Have a rare opportunity to improve the function of our democracy

Across the Country...

State and local legislative bodies are postponing/modifying meetings to eliminate in-person public access

In CA, emergency executive order that suspends application of certain provisions of the state's laws involving open meetings

Local government agencies may hold meetings by phone and online without public access to the physical meeting site

Democracy at Risk

While we must prevent the spread of COVID-19...

Public officials must do everything in their power to maximize the ability of the public to continue observing and participating in governmental decision-making

Track mitigations

Local Legislative Bodies

Decision-making limited to decisions on only items that are essential services, such as budgets and public health measures

Decisions made outside of the public view, and without meaningful public comment = ill-informed policy or even malfeasance

Transparency

Transparency and inclusion protect everyone: the public, as well as public servants

We must protect ourselves against those who might use this emergency for their own political and economic ends

Elections

Impact of COVID-19 on Elections

States have postponed their primary election

Election officials scrambling to plan for how the virus will impact their ability to hold in-person voting in November

Will the General Election itself will happen?

Delaying the General Election: Congress

- Only an act of Congress can delay the General Election
- 20th Amendment dictates that the current president and vice president cannot stay in office past their four-year terms
- Rules of succession

All Vote-by-Mail

Need to protect public health has fueled the call for states to ensure all U.S. voters have the option to vote by mail

However... research by USC's California Civic Engagement Project has shown that also maintaining an accessible in-person voting option in some form will be critical to ensuring voters are not disenfranchised

Representation at Stake

Decisions state election officials make around access to voting during this crisis may impact General Election turnout

Meaning fewer Americans could have a voice in selecting who leads state and national crisis-response efforts past November

Representation at Stake

Seize this moment

Those who vote are not demographically representative of our population, and they don't often hold the same policy preferences of non-voters

Too few people participate and those who do typically don't represent the greater community

Democratic Institutions

Sociologists tell us that any type of institutional change in a society, including improvements in our democratic institutions, typically occurs slowly

It is moments of great social disruption that often bring about significant change in our institutions – positive or negative

Rebuilding Post-Crisis

Crisis will undoubtedly bring shifts in how our democracy functions

Must seek ways to purposely build better versions of our democratic institutions

See my op-ed in CalMatters on this topic:

<https://calmatters.org/commentary/battle-against-coronavirus-poses-threat-to-our-democratic-institutions/>

Thank you!

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View my Tedx Talk on the Power of the Youth Vote!

