

The Challenge of Political Change

A Rapid Forecast on Authority and Governance in America

America is dealing with significant social unrest during this turbulent Trans-COVID period as communities across the country protest racial injustice. The pressure on American politics has been building for years, including a loss of trust and belief in traditional institutions, the fracturing and crystallization of new communities, identities, and movements, and the steady growth of deep dissatisfaction with social reality and a lack of a shared, coherent preferred future to fill the void. This rapid forecast looks out 3-5 years to very quickly explore some of the possibilities and implications for political change in the United States.

Focal issue: how might political life in the US change in response to recent and emerging societal changes?

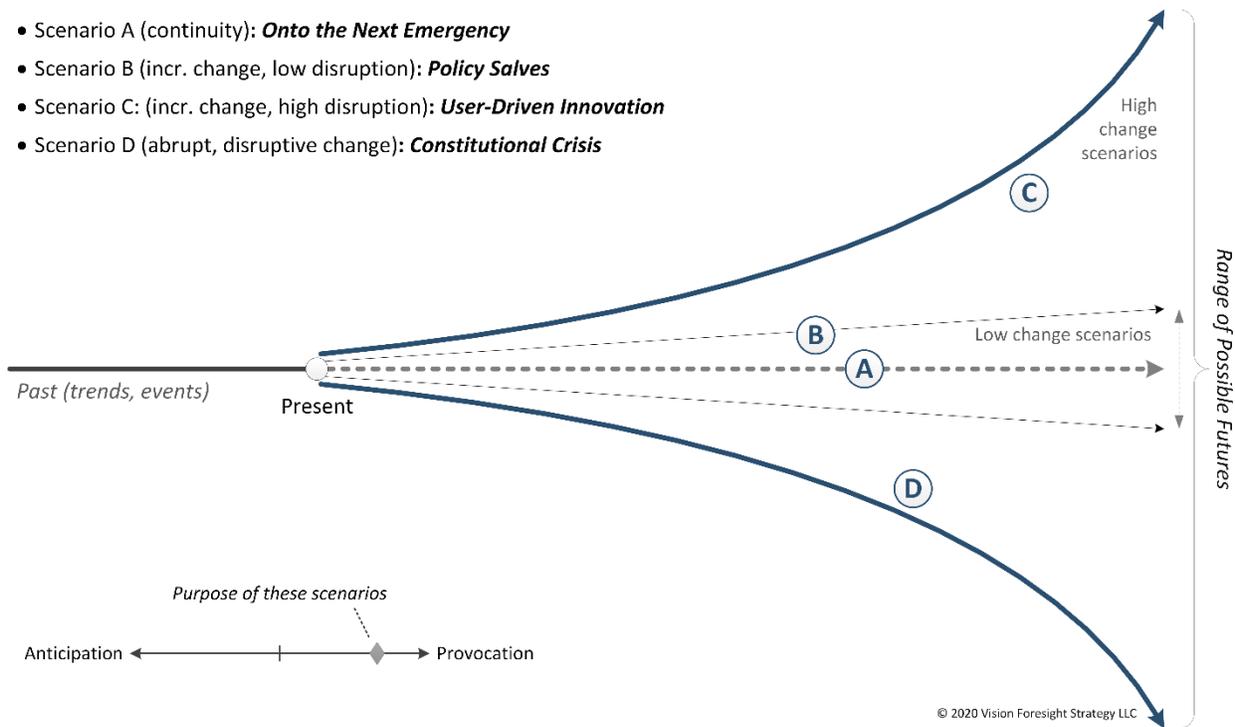
Key Foresight

Social unrest over racial injustice frames much our current historical moment in American political life. While systemic change is not guaranteed, if it does occur, the push for racial justice will be just one among several strong, competing forces shaping societal change.

Scenarios

- **Onto the Next Emergency** (continuity): a series of national crises prevent the nation from focusing on any one thing. A devastating hurricane in 2020 is followed immediately by a second wave of COVID-19 outbreaks that flow into 2021. Deepening economic recession, additional climate change-related crises, and an unraveling European Union sweep the news into 2022.
- **Policy Salves** (incremental change, low disruption): COVID-19 and racial justice protests in 2020 drive important policy changes. Later, new programs and positions are created in many places to deepen discussion and change. A deep and prolonged recession eventually saps attention and resources and many efforts fade away. Ultimately, there are modest improvements in some issue areas, and little deep, structural change in American politics or society.
- **User-Driven Innovation** (incremental change, high disruption): a sequence of changes build upon one another to open up dramatic new spaces. Issues of community safety and racism drive law enforcement reform in 2020. By 2022, a new constitutional amendment lays the foundation for new transparency, privacy, and data ownership in society. Wielding new laws and tech, a new generation begins remaking political life in very active and digital ways.
- **Constitutional Crisis** (abrupt, disruptive change): reported “irregularities” at a polling place in the 2020 elections prompts a small protest, which draws armed “militia.” Things escalate out of control quickly, resulting in electoral violence and protests across the country. Elections are suspended and a constitutional crisis is triggered, with numerous national and state fault lines fractured. Three years of multifaceted political reformation follow to reset the nation.

- Scenario A (continuity): **Onto the Next Emergency**
- Scenario B (incr. change, low disruption): **Policy Salves**
- Scenario C: (incr. change, high disruption): **User-Driven Innovation**
- Scenario D (abrupt, disruptive change): **Constitutional Crisis**



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Quick Analysis

Developing this set of scenarios highlighted several things. While enormous pressure has built up for deep and systemic change, lasting improvements are in no way guaranteed. Regional and national crises have been growing in frequency and impact, and the US has numerous overlapping institutions that can slow change – even if they do not mean to. The current social unrest around racial injustice is, unfortunately, just one of *many* powerful forces pushing for change. If this moment in history does manage to open up space for systemic change, there are a multitude of competing and interacting forces that will flood that opportunity space and shape the outcomes in ways we aren’t anticipating.

Additional Emerging Issues, Implications, and Uncertainties

- Long-term importance of a gradually liberalizing and diversifying US population
- Growing importance of the rising lack of faith in traditional institutions and “experts”
- Possibility of the political parties splintering again
- Big tech companies positioning themselves as new “elites” within the evolving political landscape
- The possibility of “autonomous social movements” created by a new generation that are digital, executed by machines, and never fade away

Not accounted for in the Forecast:
Geopolitical transitions
Climate change impacts
Impact of accelerating automation
COVID-19 driven changes in education

Developing Deeper Insights

There are a lot of scenarios to be forecast in this space and there are many specific issues that should be explored in greater detail. With the upcoming presidential election and given the uncertainties and anxieties in the world today, there are *more* possible futures for governance in the United States than there were at the start of 2020. Beyond the surface level questions of, “will there be more violence?” or, “who will win the election?” what does all of this imply for the choices facing leaders today?

- **Government officials:** what do you need to start doing now to maximize integrity, transparency, and community trust in the decision making and electoral processes under your care?
- **Business leaders:** what role will you choose to play in promoting political engagement among your customers and in encouraging your peers and the politicians you influence to support broad and just political participation?
- **Community leaders:** within the larger context of the multiple pressures on our society today, what specific political changes will you be supporting, and how will you best support community members ensuring transparency and accountability in our political institutions?

For those wishing to explore these political futures further, VFS can assist with forecasting specific scenarios, anticipating political innovations, and mapping the technologies and trends that will play important roles in creating unexpected change. Contact us today to discuss how we can work with you.

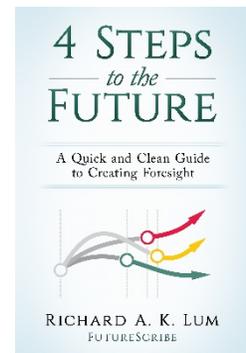
Rapid Forecasts

Rapid Forecasts are a Vision Foresight Strategy technique used to help our clients jump start thinking about the future. The technique briefly analyzes the history, trends, and emerging issues of a topic, and then develops original scenarios about the topic. The technique utilizes a condensed version of *the 4 Steps to the Future* model, designed by Dr. Richard Lum, CEO of Vision Foresight Strategy LLC.

Being rapid forecasts, they are not exhaustive analyses of a topic; rather, they are very quick explorations of the issue under consideration.

4 Steps to the Future

4 Steps a practical, straight-to-the-action guide for creating foresight in your organization. Written for today's attention-stressed and resource-deprived manager, *4 Steps to the Future* provides an easy-to-understand process for creating insight about the future that individuals can immediately begin applying in their organization.



Vision Foresight Strategy LLC

Vision Foresight Strategy is a foresight and strategic analysis firm headquartered in Honolulu. We are a global network of trained foresight professionals that works with organizational leaders to navigate the uncertainty and complexity they face in the world today. Our services include original futures research and analysis, facilitated workshops, and foresight training.

Find out more and contact us today at www.visionforesightstrategy.com