



Voting in a Pandemic: Wisconsin Primary Explained by Experts

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This week, Wisconsin became the first state to hold a major election with in-person voting since stay-at-home orders were widely instituted due to COVID-19. Efforts to ensure voter safety, such as extending absentee ballot voting or postponing the election, were blocked by the state legislature, leaving Wisconsin voters with the choice to protect their health by staying home or waiting in line for hours at one of the state's reduced polling locations.

Below are the scholars who are available to comment on the Wisconsin primary, and what the process means for future elections during this Presidential election year.

You can connect with all researchers available to comment on the COVID-19 pandemic [here](#).

GLADYS L. MITCHELL-WALTHOUR

North Carolina Central University



"The pandemic has highlighted already existing inequalities as Blacks in Milwaukee are dying of Covid-19 at a higher rate than whites. It is in these circumstances, Milwaukee voters went to 5 polling sites, reduced from 185. All people voting had to put their lives at risk, however, Black people in Milwaukee were even more burdened because of existing inequalities in the city. For Milwaukee's Black citizens, today's elections continued the long struggle to exercise the democratic right to vote with the risk of death."

JENNIFER L. MCCOY

Georgia State University



"As an observer of democracy and elections across many nations, I am alarmed by the stories emerging in Wisconsin. Voters and poll workers should never have to risk their health and their lives to participate in an election. The debacle in Wisconsin is a product of the bitter partisan polarization in the state and the country as a whole. Elections during a public health

emergency require urgent bipartisan problem-solving and preparation starting now to ensure that all Americans will be able to vote while protecting their health during spring primary season and the November elections.”

PARU R. SHAH

Rutgers University-New Brunswick



“Yesterday, Wisconsin legislators gave our residents an impossible choice: vote in person and risk your life, or lose your right to participate in the civic process. Thank you to those who voted yesterday, and the poll workers who made it happen as safely as possible.”

PHIL ROCCO

Marquette University



“Yesterday’s elections are part of a pattern of [subnational democratic erosion](#) in Wisconsin that began with a clawback of public employees’ rights, continued with an unprecedented partisan gerrymander in 2012, and manifested as an unconstitutional power-grab in 2018. Throughout the last decade, Republicans have operated to consolidate their control of the state legislative and judicial branches, bidding fair to the state Constitution. Forcing voters to choose between their health and their rights is only the most visible manifestation. Those concerned for the future of democracy in the United States should pay close attention to Wisconsin.”

Charles Stewart

Massachusetts Institute of Technology

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“If there is a silver lining to the chaos that has surrounded voting in Wisconsin, it has shown the nation how critical it is that state political leaders work together to ensure that voting is safe and secure for voters and poll workers. In the midst of uncertainty about the course of the coronavirus crisis, voters need choices. More generous access to mail balloting is the first step. Making sure in-person polling places remain open and safe is the next step.”