Civics Independent Project

Hello Students,

This resource packet includes a project that you can work on independently at home. You should also have project packets for some of the other courses you are enrolled in. These projects are standards-aligned and designed to meet the Remote Learning instructional minutes guidelines by grade band.

High School Civics Project: Voter Turnout During a Pandemic

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Estimated Time</th>
<th>~225 min</th>
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**Grade Level Standard(s)**

- SS.IS.1.9-12: Address essential questions that reflect an enduring issue in the field.
- SS.IS.4.9-12: Gather and evaluate information from multiple sources while considering the origin, credibility, point of view, authority, structure, context, and corroborative value of the sources.
- SS.IS.5.9-12: Identify evidence that draws information from multiple sources to revise or strengthen claims.
- SS.IS.6.9-12: Construct and evaluate explanations and arguments using multiple sources and relevant, verified information.
- SS.IS.7.9-12: Articulate explanations and arguments to a targeted audience in diverse settings.

**Caregiver Support Option**

- Assist with reading comprehension and information analysis.
- Assist with primary source interviews.

**Materials Needed**

- Packet, journal (written or digital)

**Question to Explore**

How can we increase voter turnout in the 2020 election?

**Student Directions**

Please complete each Phase thoroughly and in order so that you complete a comprehensive assessment of the situation and answer the call to action.

This project has three phases of research and reflection before you take a final action. The project phases are:

- Phase 1: Ground our inquiry and connect to the Call to Action question.
- Phase 2: Investigate and analyze how we can respond to the call to action question.
- Phase 3: Plan and take action.

**Phase 1: Ground our inquiry and connect to the Call to Action question:**

Note - if you already completed the previous elections independent project packet, please have that work readily available. While that project focused on taking action to change the behavior of
voters to encourage them to turnout, this project will reflect on the systems Illinois should put in place to facilitate voter turnout during the COVID pandemic.

A. **Build your foundation for your inquiry** by tapping into what you already know and what you’d like to explore further. Reflect on the following in your journal:
   - What do you already know about elections, voter turnout, barriers to voting, election day processes? Document 4-5 ideas.
   - Read the following Participate Civics enduring understanding: “The right to vote and ways in which individuals and groups participate in elections have changed over time and continue to evolve.” Document 2-3 sentences to explain what this sentence means to you.
   - What do you already know about how the current pandemic is impacting electoral engagement / voter turnout in the 2020 election? If you have not previously explored this question, what do you imagine the impact of the pandemic has been on voter turnout in the 2020 election?
   - What questions do you think will be important to understand in order to answer our call to action question (how can we increase voter turnout in the 2020 election?)? If you don’t have any questions, ask someone in your household what questions they think would be important. Document them in your journal.

B. **Connect with and collect information from others:**

   If you completed the previous independent civics project on elections, revisit the interview responses you gathered in your prior project. You will build on that interview here. If you did not complete the previous independent civics project on elections, no problem! You can complete the interview below and be all set.

   Interview two or more family or community members by phone, email, or social media. Focus on different ages if possible, 18 and older. If you can, try calling individuals who live in Illinois and in other states. Use the questions below, and other questions you want to ask. Write down the responses to each question. (Consider making a google form to document responses, or expand your research by sending a survey to many people. Sample questions for interviews:

   - **Did you vote in the primary election in March?** Why or why not?
     - If yes, please tell me about your experience (did you vote in person? By mail? etc. What informed your decision about how to vote?).
   - **How did the threat of COVID-19 impact your decision, if at all, to vote or not vote in March?**
   - **Did you vote in any previous election?** Why or why not?
   - **Do you plan to vote in the upcoming election in November?** Why or why not?

   a. **After you finish your interviews - complete the reflection below:**
      i. Explain: Did the responses from any of the people you interviewed surprise you? Why or why not?
      ii. Analyze: How did the COVID-19 pandemic impact their voting habits, if at all?
iii. Hypothesize/Predict: Do you think other people in your community have had similar or different experiences from those you interviewed with voting, in general and/or in this election?

Phase 2: Investigate barriers to voting and electoral engagement in our current climate

A. Image Analysis: Reflect on the image included to the right on the next page. Please document your reflections to the following questions:
   a. What do you see? (document literal observations - do not make meaning of them in this question. Simply write what you see).
   b. What do you infer from what you see? (here you can make meaning, assumptions or conclusions about your observations).
   c. Summarize what you think is happening in this image in 1-2 sentences.
   d. How might this image connect to our call to action question?

B. Research Community Impact: Use the maps provided in Source 1 and 2 below to answer the questions below.
   a. Source 1:
      i. What do the colors/shades on the map mean? What patterns do you notice?
      ii. Looking at the overall map, why do you think some areas of Chicago had more or less voter turnout in the 2016 election?
      iii. Was voter turnout for your school/neighborhood/part of the city higher or lower than what you would have expected? Why do you think that is?
   b. Source 2:
      i. How did COVID-19 impact voter turnout in the 2020 primary? Why do you think voter turnout numbers were impacted in the way they were in March?
      ii. Was the percentage change in voter turnout with our most recent election for your school/neighborhood/part of the city higher or lower than what you would have expected? Why do you think that is?
   c. Both Sources 1+2:
      i. What trends or patterns do you notice across both sets of maps?

C. Secondary research: Here you will work to better understand elections and the unique barriers to voting Americans face during the COVID-19 pandemic. Read Sources C-F and document your answers in your journal for each sources’ reflection question. Make a note of any NEW questions that arise for you as you investigate.

1 Retrieved from Twitter @donmoy on April 7, 2020 - Don Moynihan, Professor at Georgetown University
### SOURCE | QUESTION(S) FOR REFLECTION
---|---
3 | ● According to this source, how are different states responding to the impact COVID-19 may have on voter turnout?  
   ○ Which strategy do you think seems to be most effective? Why?
4 | ● According to this source, what options does Illinois have to increase voter turnout in November?  
   ● What are the pros and cons of expanding vote-by-mail options?
5 | ● According to this source, why might someone be against expanding access to voting?  
   ○ Who might be against expanding access to voting? Who might be for expanding access to voting?
6 | ● Summarize in 2-3 sentences what this source is communicating.  
   ○ How are different populations being affected by COVID? Who seems to be impacted the most?  
   ○ If there are no interventions put in place to increase access for our elections, who would be put at greatest risk?

**D. Reflection:** Take a moment to synthesize the information you just explored.

a. Did anything you learned surprise you?

b. How is the pandemic impacting how our country operates its elections?

c. Return to the enduring understanding you reflected on at the beginning of our inquiry.  
   *The right to vote and ways in which individuals and groups participate in elections have changed over time and continue to evolve.* How has your thinking evolved or changed in how you understand this concept? Document 3-5 ideas citing the sources you explored above.

d. What additional information do you need to effectively answer our call to action question? If you’d like to explore the ideas you named in the question above, please ask a caring adult for support with assistance to pursue the investigation.

**Extension:** If you completed the previous independent civics project on elections, reflect on the barriers to voting that you uncovered. How are those barriers still present, minimized or amplified during the COVID pandemic?

**Phase 3: Informed action:** What measures should Illinois take in order to effectively respond to our call to action question: how can we increase voter turnout? Here you will take action to ensure our electoral system is set up to maximize voter turnout in the November general election based on your investigation and exploration.

**Step 1:** Decide on the information that is most important in order to summarize what you have learned about:

- The 2020 election
Step 2: What strategy or strategies you think would be most effective for Illinois to implement for our November general election?

Step 3: Identify WHO needs to know the strategies you identified in Step 1.5 and WHY they need to know it. (Think about who operates our elections, who influences how our elections operate, etc).

Step 4: Identify WHAT you want to say and HOW you want to say it. What could you say to this audience to make them take action around your ideas for expanding voter access in the November election?

Step 5: Next, choose the best way to reach people to make sure they turnout and vote. A letter or email? A tweet? An Op-Ed? A social media campaign? Phone calls?

Step 6: Finally, construct your MESSAGE. Consider what you have already decided, and how to bring that all together.

Step 7: Implement your plan and make sure to document your action along the way! Track your outcomes if you can.

Reflection: Document your reflections in your journal:

- What did you learn throughout the process?
- What did you learn about yourself and your community?
- Who has the power to influence and participate in elections?

*As a final action - connect with other CPS students working to get out the vote by sharing your experience, ideas and thoughts either on social media @CPSCivicLife #EngageCPS or email us at SSCE@cps.edu
The following images show the rate of people in CHICAGO that voted in the 2018 election. The rates represent the number of people who voted. So darker shade (of red) indicates more people in that neighborhood who voted in 2018.
Source 2: 2020 Illinois Primary Election Maps, March 24, 2020, City Bureau, By Pat Sier and Darryl Holliday https://www.citybureau.org/newswire/2020-election

Turnout was down (almost) across the board. Explore these interactive maps, including votes for President, Congress, State’s Attorney and the courts.

Excerpt: However, low voter turnout concerns proved correct as polling locations changed by the day and scores of election judges stayed home to practice social distancing guidelines recommended by public health officials. Voter turnout took a hit citywide with up to 30 percent fewer votes cast in numerous districts compared to the 2016 state primary (see turnout detail map below).

Note: in the map below, nearly all of it is in purple (the left side of the key included in the map).
Coronavirus could cripple voting in November. But it depends where you live. A comprehensive examination of the potential problems with mail-in voting and the wide disparities between the states. NBC News, April 17, 2020 By David Wasserman

America's decentralized system of voting means states enjoy broad leeway on setting election rules. Many voters may not realize that state procedures vary widely on everything from registration deadlines, ID requirements and types of voting machinery to who is permitted to vote absentee and when mail-in ballots must be postmarked in order to be counted.

But in the coronavirus pandemic, a lack of federal election funding, partisan disunity and legal disputes could produce last-minute logistical confusion and drastic disparities across state lines in voters' ability to safely access a ballot.

Last week's election in Wisconsin ignited outrage from voting rights advocates, who claimed courts' refusal to grant Democratic Gov. Tony Evers' last-minute request to suspend in-person voting and extend the absentee ballot return deadline forced voters to choose between democracy and their health. The April 7 balloting turned into an administrative fiasco of mass polling-place closures, backlogs that caused 11,000 absentee ballot requests to go unfulfilled, and at least 35,000 voters receiving absentee ballots with incorrect return instructions. Polls show strong support for expanded voting in November.

It was a wake-up call, and all states will have months rather than days to plan for worst-case November scenarios. But there's no guarantee politicians, election officials or judges will arrive at agreement on how best to adapt in time for an anticipated crush of voters if social distancing measures persist or must resume.

President Donald Trump savaged the most obvious work-around when he tweeted on April 8 that mail-in voting carries "tremendous potential for voter fraud, and for whatever reason, doesn't work out well for Republicans."

The president's assertion seemed to ignore that all states already employ some form of mail-in voting, instances of fraud are exceedingly rare and he himself cast a Florida mail-in ballot last month. Numerous GOP state-level chief election officials have disputed Trump's claim, vouching for the effectiveness and security of mail-in voting.

Nonetheless, if Republican policymakers were to follow Trump's lead in opposing expansion of mail, experts warn it could lead to bitter partisan stalemates and overwhelmed election offices in some of the highest-stakes 2020 states, such as Florida, North Carolina, Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin.

In the 2018 midterms, 25 percent of America's 120 million voters cast ballots by mail, a historic high, according to the U.S. Election Assistance Commission's official Voting Survey. But 56 percent of the electorate still voted the traditional way — in-person at polling places — and 58 percent of America's more than 600,000 poll workers were age 61 or older, a high-risk group for COVID-19.
Of course, the states best equipped to weather a public health emergency are those that already have robust remote voting systems.

Five states have now fully adopted all-mail elections: Oregon, Washington, Colorado, Utah and Hawaii. And according to the EAC's 2018 data, mail accounted for a majority of votes in four other states, all in the West: Arizona (78 percent), Montana (73 percent), New Mexico (65 percent) and California (60 percent). The next highest state was Florida (32 percent), which relies heavily on both mail and in-person early voting.

But in the 40 other states and the District of Columbia, mail-in ballots accounted for just nine percent of all votes cast in 2018, while 70 percent of the vote was cast on Election Day. And some of the states with the lowest mail-in shares are some of the highest-stakes in the Electoral College: North Carolina (3 percent), Pennsylvania (4 percent), Wisconsin (6 percent), Georgia (6 percent) and Texas (7 percent).

Of the nation's largest states, Texas has the most stringent absentee laws: it limits mail ballots to those who are either over age 65, plan to be absent from their county on Election Day, are disabled by a "sickness or physical condition," or are jailed. State District Judge Tim Sulak has issued an injunction adding fear of contracting COVID-19 as a qualifying reason to vote by mail, but the state's GOP attorney general is expected to oppose that in an appeal and all nine of the state's Supreme Court justices are Republicans.

Several other states with low mail shares have taken steps to expand access to mail voting, even before the outbreak. In a 2018 referendum, Michigan scrapped a requirement for voters to list an excuse to vote absentee. In 2019, Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Wolf signed "no excuse" absentee voting into law. And Gov. Ralph Northam has signed a law making Virginia the 34th "no excuse" absentee state in the nation and Election Day a state holiday.

"We've got more diversity in state election rules now than we had a few decades ago. Those differences may be even more consequential now, when a pandemic is a deterrent to face to face voting," said Prof. Barry Burden, director of the Elections Research Center at the University of Wisconsin. "There's still a lot of variability in what a voter needs to do to return an absentee ballot. And these little administrative details become really important (to turnout)."

According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, 16 states still require some type of excuse to vote absentee, three states (including Wisconsin) require voters to submit a copy of photo ID along with their absentee application or ballot and 11 states (including Wisconsin and North Carolina) require a notary or witness to sign an absentee ballot envelope before it's returned. Furthermore, only 16 states have statutes requiring local election officials to provide return postage for mailed ballots. In a crisis, it's easy to imagine state legislatures and parties revisiting and litigating all of these potential barriers to participation.

But experts warn that even with relaxed absentee rules and months to prepare, scaling up to satisfy a deluge of absentee ballot requests will be a herculean task for states and counties — and that local
governments will need far more than the $400 million in emergency assistance Congress allocated in the CARES Act.

"If you've only got 6 percent vote-by-mail and you go to 50 percent, there are enormous challenges," warned Rice University Prof. Robert Stein, who has advised local governments on election administration and emergency contingencies. "From securing a vendor to print the ballots to getting the ballots mailed, opening ballots with gloves, checking signatures, counting them — and then doing it all on Election Night by 9 p.m. You have to bring in far more people. It's a daunting resource problem, in terms of both people and money."

The biggest clue as to how states might adapt their voting methods amid a public health emergency might be what states facing spring elections are already doing. Although it would require a highly unlikely act of Congress to delay the November election — as 16 states have done with their spring primaries — states have taken critically different approaches toward enabling voters to skip the polling place.

In California, officials converted a hotly contested May 12 special election for a vacant congressional seat into an all-mail election and all voters will be sent a ballot automatically, minimizing obstacles and confusion. It helps that two thirds of the district's voters are already on a permanent list to vote by mail.

In Nebraska, where GOP Gov. Pete Ricketts has pledged to proceed with the scheduled in-person primary vote on May 12, voters must take the extra step of filling out an absentee ballot application to bypass the polls, but voters in all 93 counties are being mailed applications automatically.

However, in Ohio, where GOP Gov. Mike DeWine signed legislation to convert the canceled March 17 primary to an all vote-by-mail election on April 28, would-be voters must jump through more hoops: the state is mailing all voters postcards with instructions for requesting and mailing in an absentee ballot application, placing the burden on voters to obtain one.

That kind of approach — if adopted by states for November — could more severely curtail turnout among lower-propensity voters, who skew young and non-white.

Since the WHO declared a global pandemic on March 11, four states have held presidential primaries. In Arizona and Florida, both states where majorities of the electorate routinely vote early in person or by mail, the outbreak posed less of an impediment. Total votes cast in the March 17 Democratic presidential primary were up 26 and two percent over 2016 levels, respectively.

But Illinois (March 17) and Wisconsin (April 7), states with less vote-by-mail experience, were logistical messes. Total votes cast were down 24 percent and 8 percent from 2016, respectively — significantly lagging most other states.

"My number-one fear is that voters will want absentee ballots and will request them on time, but the system will be overloaded and unable to deliver them back," said Prof. Edward Foley, director of the
Foley suggested that federal write-In absentee ballots, currently limited to military and overseas voters who don't receive absentee ballots on time, be made available for domestic emergency use.

He also predicted partisan flashpoints that could merit Supreme Court arguments between now and November. Those could include rules on when ballots can be postmarked to count (according to NCSL, only 15 states allow mail ballots to count if they are postmarked by Election Day but received in the days following) and organized collection of absentee ballots by volunteers or workers (often referred to as "ballot harvesting"), a newly legal practice in California that many Republicans decry.

Other voting advocates fear that Trump's threatened opposition to bailing out the Postal Service could render it "financially illiquid" by Sept. 30 and hamper its ability to deliver mail reliably amid an unprecedented surge of mail-in ballots.

In a sense, the decentralized nature of America's elections is a security feature; it makes elections harder to tamper with on a massive scale. But as the parties' philosophies on how to hold "fair" elections continue to drift further apart, it also makes it more challenging to establish uniform ballot access across state lines in a crisis and preserve voters' faith in the legitimacy of election outcomes.

Stein's advice to states: to the extent possible, maximize the time frame and modes by which voters can cast ballots, including in-person early voting — and start investing in personal protective equipment for fall election workers.

"The idea that the non-majority vote-by-mail states can move to even 50 percent vote-by-mail by November is unrealistic," Stein says, citing both logistical and political pressures. "But think of it like COVID-19 — try to spread out how we vote."

**Source 4: Excerpted:** Amid coronavirus uncertainty, Gov. J.B. Pritzker and other top Democrats back increased mail-in voting in November. But it's not that simple. Chicago Tribune, April 10, 2020 By Rick Pearson

Fears over the coronavirus pandemic and an emphasis on social distancing have fueled calls for restructuring Illinois' Nov. 3 general election, including a push for a large-scale mail-in voting system. But increased voting by mail comes with cautionary notes both political and practical. Even advocates acknowledge the need to allow people — among them those who don't trust the post office — to show up at a polling place to cast their vote. There are also the added costs of printing, mailing, securing and counting mail-in ballots, as well as allowing for drop-off boxes for those who don't believe their vote will be delivered in time.

Illinois, with among the most open voting access laws in the nation, already allows anyone to vote by mail without having to give a reason. Voters can seek an application for a vote-by-mail ballot as
early as Sept. 24, more than five weeks before Election Day. Ballots have to be postmarked by Election Day and they are valid even if election authorities don’t get them until two weeks afterward.

That should be sufficient, leading Republicans in the state say, since anyone who wants to vote by mail can already do so, not to mention their concerns about costs and potential vote fraud.

But the state’s top Democrats and other supporters of large-scale voting by mail say more federal money is needed to secure voting systems in the coronavirus era, and that shortening the time frame for early voting and moving to centralized polling places could end up saving money.

Supporters of increased mail-in voting point to the chaos in Wisconsin, where Democratic Gov. Tony Evers’ eleventh-hour effort to move to at-large mail voting with extended ballot return dates was overturned by the courts as was his bid to delay the April 7 primary. Every other state with an election scheduled for April postponed their contest or shifted to mail-in voting.

Illinois’ March 17 primary went on as scheduled with in-person voting encouraged on Election Day despite orders banning large gatherings and personal distancing recommendations. Nonetheless, turnout in Chicago was about 38% — far from the recent record low of 24.5% in 2012 and well above what many local officials had feared.

Democratic Gov. J.B. Pritzker’s stay-at-home order went into effect just four days after the primary.

“We totally dodged a bullet on that,” said state Sen. Julie Morrison, D-Lake Forest, who is crafting a measure for lawmakers to consider when they return to Springfield that would send a mail-in ballot to every registered voter for the Nov. 3 election, among other provisions.

“Other states have done it. Other states are doing it. I think Illinois needs to figure out a way to adjust and evolve, and this is as good a time as any. I think there’s a lot of people in both parties who feel it’s time to try it,” she said.

Five states now conduct large-scale mail-in voting: Washington, Oregon, Colorado, Hawaii and Utah. Four other states — Arizona, California, Montana and New Mexico — received a majority of their votes by mail in this year’s truncated primary season.

Lori Augino, president of the National Association of State Election Directors, acknowledged in an email to state election administrators that “it sounds like a no-brainer to keep your voters out of the polling places and keep your poll workers safe.”

But Augino, who is director of elections for the state of Washington, added, “With 25 years of vote-by-mail experience, I offer some advice and caution.”

Among the many issues is cost. Mailing a postage-paid ballot to each of Illinois’ more than 8 million registered voters would require nearly twice the $13.8 million the state received from the recent federal stimulus act for dealing with pandemic election issues. And that figure doesn’t include the
potential of extra staffing and security to store and count a massive number of mailed ballots.

Officials in other states warn that mail-in ballots face high rejection rates due to questions over signatures matching up and urge the use of professionals and software to improve recognition. To prevent fraud, it’s also recommended that mail ballots contain scanner technology that would allow officials to match the voter mailing in the ballot to anyone trying to vote in person.

The Brennan Center for Justice, founded by former law clerks to the late Justice William J. Brennan Jr., has been a longtime advocate of expanding voter rights. In its review of states prepared to deal with an election under pandemic circumstances, Illinois fares fairly well despite lacking the infrastructure for a fully vote-by-mail election.

In addition to no-excuse absentee balloting, the state allows in-person early voting, online voter registration and same-day voter registration.

But the Brennan Center proposes that Illinois institute an online vote-by-mail voter application system and the creation of regional voting centers like those used in Chicago.

On March 17, Chicago’s early voting centers, where people from all parts of the city can vote, were put into use as alternatives to precinct polling places that were forced to move or close due to COVID-19 fears.

While early voting has gained in popularity in Illinois, voting by mail had not seen large-scale acceptance before the March 17 primary.

In Chicago, with concerns over the coronavirus building, more than 117,000 ballots were sent to voters by mail and more than 91,993 returned — a 78.5% return rate. But of the ballots returned, 8,632 ultimately were rejected as having been postmarked after the March 17 election or for other reasons.

Statewide, more than 230,000 mail-in ballots were turned in to election officials, State Board of Elections officials said. That’s up by 100,000 from the 2016 presidential primary, officials said. Total voter turnout in the state, which was in the millions, won’t be certified until April 17.

“Illinois is pretty well set up if we wanted to heavily move to a voting-by-mail system. Our system is pretty open. It’s pretty easy to use,” said Matt Dietrich, spokesman for the state elections board...

But the Illinois Association of County Clerks and Recorders opposes legislation to automatically send a mail-in ballot to all registered voters. The group’s president, Chuck Venvertloh, the county clerk and recorder of Adams County along the Mississippi River in Quincy, cites “the logistical issues surrounding delayed results based on having over 50% of the ballots mailed out not yet returned” by Election Day...He also said the cost would be “prohibitive.”...

In addition to cost and implementation concerns, there’s plenty of politics involved...Democrats who control the General Assembly have generally backed Pritzker on increasing vote-by-mail. The party
Republicans nationally, led by President Donald Trump, have been critical of Democratic attempts to facilitate large-scale voting by mail. "Republicans should fight very hard when it comes to state wide mail-in voting. Democrats are clamoring for it. Tremendous potential for voter fraud, and for whatever reason, doesn’t work out well for Republicans," Trump tweeted Wednesday. Trump voted by mail last month in the Florida primary but said his case was different because he could not travel to the state to cast an in-person ballot.

Various studies have shown election fraud to be rare, though there have been instances involving mail-in voting, most notably in a 2018 North Carolina congressional race when a campaign aide who harvested absentee ballots for Republican candidate Mark Harris was charged with election fraud.

In Illinois, House Republican leader Jim Durkin of Western Springs said he is opposed to any effort to expand vote-by-mail, calling it "government overreach" and saying "there is no problem of individuals taking advantage of what is currently in law."

Source 5: Excerpt of The Daily podcast, New York Times, April 7, 2020

Michael Barbaro: You know, Astead, I’m struck by the fact that earlier on, you told us that Democrats and Republicans in the state, they had basically been on the same page about this primary until the virus gets worse and the governor advocates for a different kind of voting system through absentee ballots. And then it all breaks down, and Republicans are attempting at every turn to block him now in court. And how do you explain that? I mean, how do Republicans in the state legislature explain that?

Astead Herndon: Republican county chairs and folks in the state legislature say a couple things. The first is that their position hasn’t changed. They thought the governor didn’t have the power then, and they don’t think he has the power now to change how the election is run. The other point is that they see Wisconsin, again, as a microcosm of the conservative fight that could happen largely, and what could be a new reality of how American elections are run in this pandemic era. And in that view, dramatically expanding the electorate in these ways is not something that Republicans are all that keen on. Because what they’re worried about is an election in which people who may not have participated, or may not have come out, all of a sudden have the opportunity to do so and to cast a ballot. And that kind of changes the center of power within the state.

Michael Barbaro: What do you mean?

Astead Herndon: If people participate in different numbers, in bigger numbers, if it changes the type of people who want to participate in the spring election that’s not necessarily always seen the biggest turnout, that changes who can win.

Michael Barbaro: And who has benefited from those systems in the past, and who might benefit if they were to change along the lines of what Governor Evers is asking for?

Astead Herndon: It’s hard to say exactly, because we’re talking about an unprecedented situation. But we do know that the people who are typically benefited from early voting, from early registration, from online registration, or a vote-by-mail are people who usually don’t participate in the process —
younger voters, minority voters, people that lean Democratic. And just in the ways that Republicans limited early voting in that special session they had after Evers won, it’s the same thought process. That when more people get involved, when people who typically sit out get involved, that helps Democrats.

Michael Barbaro: Mm. Do Democrats acknowledge that an absentee balloting system that is suddenly much more widespread than it has been in the past would be advantageous to them in Wisconsin?

Astead Herndon: They principally try to appeal to voters using small “d” democratic ideals — the general, basic American principle that everyone should be given the easiest access to vote. They try to appeal to people through public health measures, noting how unsafe it is for people to gather at polls. But when you ask folks in Democratic circles, they know that when the electorate expands, particularly in national and statewide elections, that’s usually good news for Democrats.

Michael Barbaro: It’s interesting. This is not just a debate about how to vote in a pandemic, although clearly that’s what’s driving a lot of this. But in the background, from what you’re saying, is this other question, which is whether the systems needed to vote during a pandemic may fundamentally change who votes, how many people vote and which party wins.

Astead Herndon: Exactly. This is not just about public health. This is about access to power and the kind of most basic fundamental principles of democracy. If the system that we have been traditionally used to can’t hold, what replaces it? And we’ve seen real resistance to that in this state, and we may see that resistance all across the country.

Michael Barbaro: Well, why would you say that? Because it’s very tempting to see this story as an anomaly, right, in that the governor of Wisconsin waited a very long time to try to postpone the state’s primary — perhaps too long — and the state legislature is this hyper-partisan, conservative, activist body that is trying to use its power for political advantage. So all those factors would seem to make Wisconsin a bit of an outlier.

Astead Herndon: Well, what may seem like an anomaly right now might actually just be a pacesetter. And this could be a preview as to what comes for state after state. If you are in a place like Georgia or Louisiana or Ohio that has functionally delayed its election by three, four weeks, and if this virus persists to that time, there will still be questions about whether it is safe to hold in-person balloting then.

Michael Barbaro: Right.

Astead Herndon: And when those questions come and the remedies are proposed, whether it’s online or vote-by-mail or the like, these same struggles of power will persist. And we will see factions emerge that question whether the new systems are fair and who politically benefits from them.

Michael Barbaro: Astead, thank you very much.

Astead Herndon: Thank you.

DOCUMENT 6: The COVID-19 virus is killing black residents in Cook County at disproportionately high rates, according to early data analyzed. WBEZ, April 5, 2020 By Elliott Ramos, María Inés Zamudio

While black residents make up only 23% of the population in the county, they account for 58% of the COVID-19 deaths. And half of the deceased lived in Chicago, according to data from the Cook County Medical Examiner’s office.
As of Saturday, 107 of Cook County’s 183 deaths from COVID-19 were black. In Chicago, 61 of the 86 recorded deaths – or 70% – were black residents. Blacks make up 29% of Chicago’s population.

The majority of the black COVID-19 patients who died had underlying health conditions including respiratory problems and diabetes. Eighty-one percent of them had hypertension, or high blood pressure, diabetes or both.

As the virus continues to spread, the high mortality rate for black residents is alarming.

“It’s disturbing and upsetting, but not surprising,” said Dr. Linda Rae Murray, health policy professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago. “This is just a reflection of the facts that we already know about these pandemics. People who are vulnerable will die quicker and won’t have as many resources.”

It’s still early in the pandemic and health officials are assessing information on which groups of people are being affected, Dr. Ngozi Ezike, director of the Illinois Department of Public Health, said Saturday. Ezike said she “would not be entirely surprised” if a disproportionate number of deaths were occurring in black communities.

“As we put on our health equity lens, we already know [that] before COVID was ever established that the health outcomes for various communities are already different,” she said. “So if you know those disparities exist in terms of health outcomes, you can imagine that overlaying a new disease is only going to exacerbate whatever inequities already exist.”

Historically, Chicago’s black communities have been disproportionately affected by health-related issues including poverty, environmental pollution, segregation and limited access to medical care.

These conditions contribute to high rates of hypertension and diabetes. In Illinois, the rate of high blood pressure for black residents is around 48%.

Some of these historical factors are raising the risks for black residents in the coronavirus outbreak, said Murray, a former official in the Chicago Department of Health and previous chief medical officer for Cook County Public Health.

That was the case for 61-year-old Patricia Frieson, a black woman who was the first person to die in Illinois from the coronavirus. Frieson, a retired nurse, died on March 16 and a week later her sister Wanda Bailey, 63, died of COVID-19. They both had hypertension or diabetes.

It can be more difficult for black residents to practice social distancing because the population is more likely to use public transit and hold jobs that can’t be done from home. In poorer communities in the city, persons of color are also more likely to live in crowded homes, experts say.

“You just have a lot of people living in a house,” said Antonio Davis Jimenez, director of the University of Illinois at Chicago’s Community Outreach Intervention Projects.
Jimenez said that many “people that we serve in the neighborhoods that we target, they can have multiple people living in a household. And so it’s really difficult to stay inside and do this thing. In fact, there’s an incentive to want to go outside.”

Murray is particularly worried about the black population that’s incarcerated during this pandemic.

The number of black residents with COVID-19 statewide is also disproportionately high. Blacks account for 38 percent of the confirmed cases in Illinois but they are only 14% of the population. The state has not released a racial breakdown for deaths, although Illinois is one of the few states that keeps COVID-19 data with a racial breakdown.

According to ProPublica, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention typically tracks detailed data, including race, during outbreaks. But the federal agency did not respond to ProPublica’s request for data that includes a racial breakdown.

There’s been a push to get a racial breakdown of the cases at the national level, said Murray. It is important to get the data so that resources and culturally competent information can be distributed.