



Written by [Billy J. Stephen](#) on February 6, 2026

Wisconsin Supreme Court Race Could Cement Liberal Control Through 2030

Wisconsin's next Supreme Court election, [scheduled](#) for April 7, 2026, will determine whether the state's highest court remains narrowly divided at 4-3 or shifts into an entrenched leftist majority at 5-2 — with potential far-reaching implications for redistricting, election administration, and major policy disputes routinely pushed into the courts.

The race is for an open seat created by the retirement of Justice Rebecca Bradley, who [announced](#) in August 2025 that she would not seek another 10-year term. Only two candidates filed by the deadline, eliminating the need for a primary and setting up a direct general-election contest. Some observers have suggested Bradley's decision reflected broader Republican weaknesses in statewide fundraising and election performance, noting that early [finance reports](#) signaled her intentions well before her public announcement.



Royalbroil/Wikimedia Commons
Wisconsin Supreme Court chamber at the state capitol

A Court Already Transformed

The ideological stakes of the April 7 race cannot be separated from the court's recent trajectory. In 2023, Wisconsin's Supreme Court [flipped](#) from conservative to leftist control in what was then the [most expensive](#) judicial election in U.S. history. The leftist majority was retained in 2025 in another [costly](#) contest.

Even when conservatives held nominal control, the majority was fragile. Justice Brian Hagedorn, often described as a [swing vote](#), has frequently sided with the court's left bloc in high-profile cases — a dynamic that has shaped outcomes and heightened uncertainty.

Since gaining control, the leftist majority has ordered [new legislative maps](#), reshaping Wisconsin's political landscape, and [struck down](#) enforcement of the state's 1849 abortion ban. With additional high-stakes cases still pending — including litigation involving [congressional districts](#) and election-related questions, including how the state should handle [absentee ballots](#) — the court has increasingly functioned as one of the most consequential political actors in the state.

A leftist win in April would widen its majority, and could effectively lock in [control](#) through at least 2030. A conservative victory would preserve the current narrow split and keep future elections and rulings more competitive.



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The Candidates and the Stakes

The contest features two Wisconsin Court of Appeals judges: conservative [Judge Maria Lazar](#) and leftist [Judge Chris Taylor](#), a former Democratic state legislator. Taylor has vastly out-fundraised Lazar, [reporting more](#) than \$2.6 million raised by the end of 2025, compared to about \$200,000 for Lazar.

Although Supreme Court elections in Wisconsin are officially nonpartisan, the ideological divide is plain — and so are the consequences. A strengthened leftist majority could further entrench judicial involvement in redistricting disputes, election administration, labor policy (including renewed pressure to [overturn Act 10](#), which prohibits collective bargaining by public employees), and other matters traditionally left to the Legislature.

[Recent coverage](#) has scrutinized Taylor's record in the state Assembly, particularly her [sponsorship](#) of a 2015 judicial-recusal bill ([AB 588](#)) that would have required judges to step aside from cases involving significant campaign donors. Conservative critics argue her current campaign stance undercuts that earlier position, citing it as evidence of political opportunism and the inherent hypocrisy bred by donor-driven judicial elections.

Some Good News

There is at least one bright spot for conservatives. After the Wisconsin Elections Commission [removed](#) a leftist Court of Appeals candidate from the ballot for violating election law, conservatives are now positioned to retain all four seats on the [District II Court of Appeals](#), assuming Judge Maria Lazar does not win the Supreme Court race. The District II outcome is especially significant because the election is for the seat being vacated by retiring Judge Lisa Neubauer, who was originally appointed by Governor Jim Doyle in 2008 and [narrowly lost](#) the 2019 Wisconsin Supreme Court race to now-Justice Hagedorn. If Lazar loses the Supreme Court contest, she will remain on the Court of Appeals, preserving its conservative composition. If she wins, however, her appellate seat would be filled by appointment from the next governor, who will take office in January 2027 following Governor Tony Evers' departure.

Redistricting Looms Large

Concerns about the election's consequences are not hypothetical. In late 2025, the Supreme Court ordered the formation of two [three-judge panels](#), consisting of [only leftists](#), to hear new challenges to Wisconsin's congressional maps, [invoking](#) a little-used statute enacted in 2011. The process has never before been used in state court, and has drawn sharp criticism from conservative justices, who warned it risks allowing judicial panels to undermine prior court decisions and legislative authority.

Critics argue the move effectively invites judicially managed redistricting — a shift that could alter Wisconsin's congressional delegation ahead of the next election cycle.

Perils of an Elected Judiciary

The 2026 contest will mark the [third consecutive](#) open-seat election and the [sixth straight](#) election in which a new justice joins the court rather than an incumbent winning reelection. That pattern underscores how volatile — and increasingly politicized — Wisconsin's judiciary has become.

The practice of [electing judges](#) exposes a fundamental flaw in modern governance: It politicizes an institution meant to be insulated from popular passion and partisan pressure. Courts were designed to interpret and apply the law — not function as miniature legislatures responsive to donors, activists, or fleeting majorities. Although technocratic selection methods such as “merit selection” must also be



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avoided, [judicial elections](#) incentivize candidates to campaign, fundraise, and signal ideological loyalties, blurring the separation of powers and eroding public confidence in impartial justice. When judges must appeal to voters and special interests to retain their seats, the rule of law is weakened and replaced with rule by politics, inviting the very “[tyranny of the majority](#)” the Framers warned against. In a constitutional republic, liberty is best preserved when courts are constrained by law, not swayed by ballots, money, or leftist pressure campaigns.

A Defining Election

Even if turnout and spending fall short of the record-breaking contests of recent years, the April 7 election could prove just as consequential. The result will determine whether Wisconsin’s Supreme Court remains narrowly divided — or becomes a durable instrument for advancing a leftist agenda through judicial decree.

For voters concerned with constitutional limits, separation of powers, and the proper role of courts in a republican system of government, April 7, 2026 will be a date to watch closely.



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