

Elon Musk Is Trying to Buy the Wisconsin Supreme Court

“His attack on democracy isn’t limited to gutting the federal government. He wants it all.”



• [ARI BERMAN](#)



Thousands of people across the United States protested President Donald Trump's executive orders, actions by his administration, and Elon Musk's

usurping of the Constitution and Congress. [Robyn Stevens Brody/Sipa](#)
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Not content with spending more than a quarter of a billion dollars to elect Donald Trump and Republican candidates in 2024 and then taking a wrecking ball to the federal government, Elon Musk is now trying to flip the balance of power on the top court in one of the country's most important swing states.

Building America's Future, a dark money group backed by Musk, is spending at least \$1.6 million in support of Wisconsin Supreme Court candidate Brad Schimel, a conservative judge in suburban Milwaukee running for an open seat in an April election that will decide whether progressives or conservatives control the court. The group began running ads across the state Thursday.

"Elon Musk is buying off Brad Schimel," his opponent, Dane County Judge Susan Crawford, responded. She is backed by Democrats and progressive groups.

To a remarkable degree for a state Supreme Court justice hopeful, Schimel is running as a MAGA-aligned candidate who wants to export Trump's radical agenda to Wisconsin. He attended Trump's inauguration, welcomed the president's (hypothetical) endorsement, and pledged that "we're going to nationalize" the race.

Clearly, the stakes are high. Conservatives controlled the court for 15 years, helping to entrench an extreme right-wing agenda, but progressives won a majority with Janet Protasiewicz's victory in April 2023. The progressive majority subsequently struck down heavily gerrymandered electoral maps that had ensured lopsided GOP legislative majorities for more than a decade. That allowed Democrats to pick up 14 seats in the state legislature in 2024, giving them a chance to retake both chambers in 2026.

The fates of Wisconsin's 1849 abortion ban—a measure that criminalized abortion as manslaughter unless it was to save the life of a mother—which Schimel supports, and a 2011 law championed by former Republican Gov. Scott Walker that eliminated collective bargaining rights for public-sector unions are pending before the court. The justices could also decide the constitutionality of Wisconsin's congressional map. Republicans have a 6–2 advantage despite the closely divided nature of the state, and the decision could help determine the balance of power in the US House of Representatives.

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Musk's intervention in Wisconsin shows how his oligarchic plans go well beyond Washington. "Elon Musk and Donald Trump want a MAGA Supreme Court to ensure that maps are rigged to lock in power for far-right legislators, to overturn elections when they don't like the results, and to suppress voters that don't kiss their ring," said Wisconsin Democratic Chair Ben Wikler. "Musk's attempt to buy

Wisconsin's Supreme Court is a red alert that his attack on democracy isn't limited to gutting the federal government. He wants it all."

Musk first mentioned the race on X in January, writing that it was "very important to vote Republican for the Wisconsin Supreme Court to prevent voting fraud!" He was referencing a Wisconsin Supreme Court decision in July 2024 reinstating mail-in ballot drop boxes, even though there is no evidence that the use of drop boxes has led to voter fraud.

"Elon Musk highlighted a critical issue in this race: election integrity," Schimel said after Musk's tweet. "Wisconsin's voter ID law is under serious threat—Susan Crawford is the attorney who tried to eliminate the law and called it 'draconian.' If she wins, can we really expect the law to survive?"

Schimel, as Wisconsin's attorney general from 2015 to 2019, defended the state's strict voter ID law in court and claimed it was a key reason why Trump won Wisconsin in 2016. He also sent Department of Justice staff to monitor polls in heavily Democratic areas in that election, which Democrats viewed as voter intimidation.

"We battled to get voter ID on the ballot for the November '16 election," he told conservative radio host Vicki McKenna in April 2018. "How many of your listeners really honestly are sure that Sen. [Ron] Johnson was going to win reelection, or President Trump was going to win Wisconsin if we didn't have voter ID to keep Wisconsin's elections clean and honest and have integrity?"

Although Schimel said the law would "keep Wisconsin's elections clean and honest," the state didn't present a single case of voter impersonation in court that the law would have stopped. But it did prevent tens of thousands of disproportionately Democratic voters from casting a ballot in 2016, as *Mother Jones* reported.

In a University of Wisconsin study published in September 2017, 1 in 10 registered voters in Milwaukee County and Madison's Dane County who did not cast a ballot in 2016 cited the voter ID law as a reason why. That meant that up to 23,000 voters in the two heavily Democratic counties—and as many as 45,000 voters statewide—didn't vote because of the voter ID law. Trump won the state by a little more than 22,000 votes.

Meanwhile, Schimel has openly solicited donations from dark money groups, an approach that is highly unusual—and some might say unethical—for a judicial candidate who may eventually hear cases from those very interests. "I'm hoping that very soon, we're going to start seeing friends like Wisconsin Manufacturers & Commerce, Fair Courts America, other groups like that—that very soon, they're going to get on the airwaves and help take some pressure off," he said recently, referring to the state's top business group and another dark money organization linked to conservative billionaire Richard Uihlein, one of the biggest funders of the election denial movement. Shortly thereafter, the Musk-aligned group started running ads in the race, while the Uihlein-affiliated PAC disclosed it had spent \$1.35 million on TV ads attacking Crawford.

The 2023 race was the most expensive Wisconsin Supreme Court contest ever, topping \$56 million, which quadrupled the previous amount. Protasiewicz outraised her GOP-backed opponent, Dan Kelly, but conservative groups outspent liberal ones. Kelly was supported by prominent election deniers and funders of the insurrection who wanted to see a MAGA takeover of the court.

After that loss, anti-democratic forces on the right are redoubling their efforts to take control of state supreme courts all over the country, including waging an unprecedented effort to overturn a Democratic victory on the North Carolina Supreme Court. More than likely, Musk and Trump are just getting started in Wisconsin.