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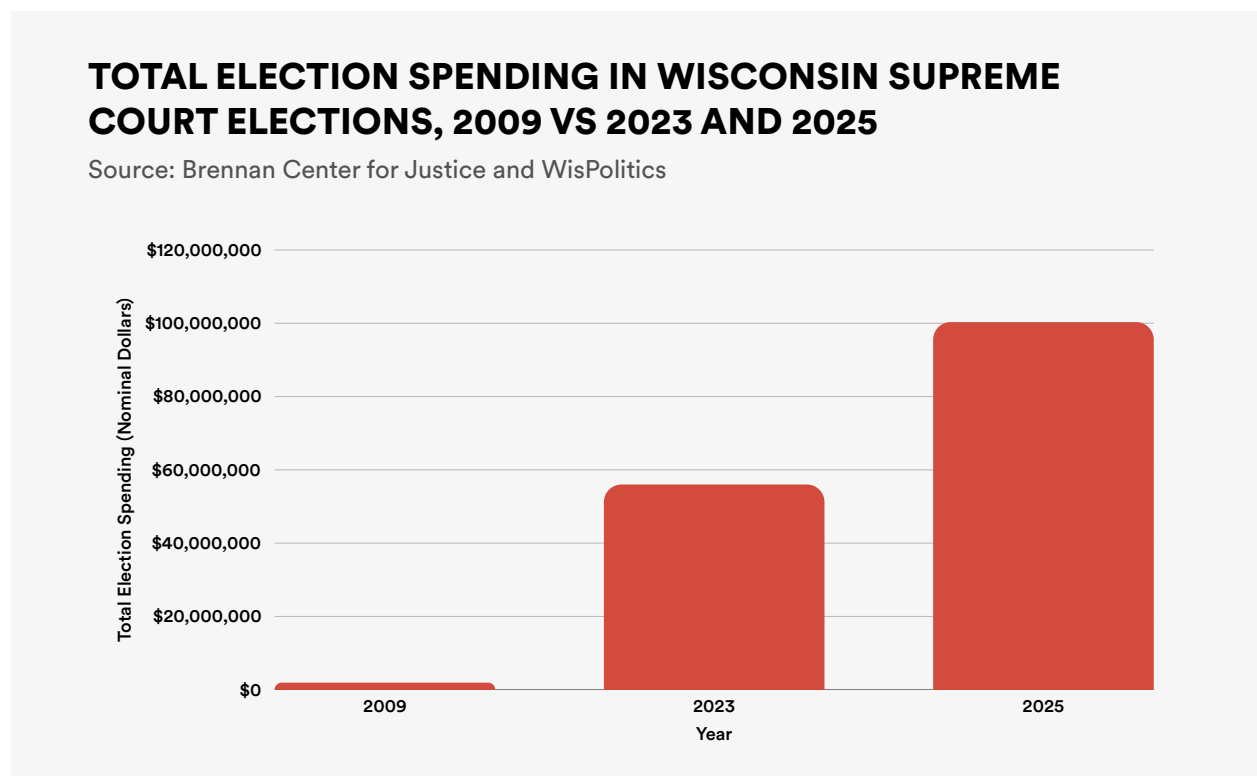
**SPENDING IN WISCONSIN'S RECORD-SMASHING 2025
SUPREME COURT ELECTION**

APRIL 2025 UPDATE



Just two years after Wisconsin saw a State Supreme Court race that was the most expensive state judicial election in American history (as we detailed in [this report](#)), the Badger State has again been subjected to another record-smashing election. Estimates place the total cost of this year's State Supreme Court election at \$100 million,¹ nearly doubling the \$56 million in the 2023 race which was, at the time, the most expensive state supreme court election America had ever seen.²

Spending levels in these two most recent judicial elections both massively exceeded the spending Wisconsin saw in its judicial elections less than 20 years ago. Wisconsin also saw an off-year State Supreme Court election in 2009. Total spending for the 2009 election was less than \$2 million,³ less than 2% of the spending we saw this year.



This trend of exploding election costs is not unique to Wisconsin. Last year, the total cost of the 2024 elections, between federal and state races, exceeded \$20 billion.⁴ The most expensive Senate race in the country, in Ohio, saw more than \$400 million in spending (Wisconsin's own Senate race was the 5th-most expensive, with over \$200 million in spending).⁵ Compare that to less than 20 years ago: in 2008, the total cost of all federal elections was just under \$5.3 billion.⁶

How did we get here? Following a series of United States Supreme Court decisions that opened the floodgates for unlimited fundraising and spending by wealthy donors, corporations, unions, and foreign interests, election spending in America has skyrocketed. (You can find more

background in [this report](#).) Though extreme, the 2025 Wisconsin State Supreme Court election is just one example of a broken campaign finance system that is drowning out the voices of ordinary Americans in favor of hyper-polarized national campaigns.

Ad Spending

Wisconsin's nominally non-partisan State Supreme Court race, between liberal Susan Crawford and conservative Brad Schimel, has attracted a massive amount of attention from outside the state, and with that attention has come a deluge of fundraising and spending. According to [analysis by the Brennan Center for Justice](#), which tracked fundraising reported to the Wisconsin Ethics Commission, as well as ad spending estimates from Vivvix/CMAG, spending in the race reached over \$100 million as of April 4. Together, the two candidates raised over \$43 million: Crawford raised over \$28 million, while Schimel raised \$15 million. More than half the spending in the race, however, came from outside spending groups like PACs dropping tens of millions of dollars into Wisconsin. The largest outside spender was Elon Musk's America PAC, which spent more than \$12.7 million on the race. Musk also funded the nonprofit Building America's Future,⁷ the 3rd-largest outside spending group in the race, which spent nearly \$6 million.



The second-largest outside group in the race was A Better Wisconsin Together, which spent more than \$8 million, primarily on ads attacking Schimel. The group was the top spender in the 2023 state Supreme Court Race, where it spent more than \$6.2 million backing liberal candidate Janet Protasiewicz, who won the election.⁸ According to filings with the Wisconsin Ethics Commission,⁹ one of A Better Wisconsin's major donors is the Sixteen Thirty Fund, a nonprofit [dark money](#) group which receives a significant amount of funding from the Berger Action Fund, another nonprofit funded by Hansjörg Wyss, a Swiss billionaire. Between April 2022 and 2023, the Sixteen Thirty Fund received \$35 million from the Berger Action Fund.¹⁰ (Read more about foreign money in U.S. elections [here](#)).

In addition to Musk and Wyss, many other billionaires became involved in the 2025 Wisconsin

Supreme Court race, including George Soros and J.B. Pritzker (the governor of Illinois) who backed Crawford, and Diane Hendricks and Elizabeth Uihlein backing Schimel.¹¹ Soros gave \$2 million to the Wisconsin Democratic party this cycle, while Pritzker gave \$1.5 million.¹² Uihlein, along with her husband Richard Uihlein, were the 4th-largest donors in the 2024 elections, having given more than \$143 million to conservative candidates and committees. Richard Uihlein was also involved in the 2023 Supreme Court race, and gave \$4 million to the Fair Courts America PAC, which spent over \$5.5 million supporting the conservative candidate, Dan Kelly.¹³

Ultimately, Crawford emerged as the winner, after raising more than \$28 million directly for her campaign and benefitting from nearly \$18 million in independent expenditures.¹⁴

Endnotes

- 1 <https://www.jsonline.com/story/news/politics/elections/2025/03/17/wisconsin-supreme-court-headed-for-record-smashing-spending-levels/82414645007/>.
- 2 <https://www.wispolitics.com/2023/wispolitics-tracks-56-million-in-spending-on-wisconsin-supreme-court-race/>.
- 3 <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/new-politics-judicial-elections-2009-10>.
- 4 <https://www.opensecrets.org/news/2024/11/big-money-big-stakes-5-things-everyone-should-know-about-money-in-2024-election/>.
- 5 <https://www.opensecrets.org/elections-overview/most-expensive-races?cycle=2024&display=curr&sort=total>.
- 6 <https://www.opensecrets.org/elections-overview/cost-of-election?cycle=2020&display=T&infl=N>.
- 7 <https://www.jsonline.com/story/news/politics/elections/2025/03/17/wisconsin-supreme-court-headed-for-record-smashing-spending-levels/82414645007/>.
- 8 <https://www.jsonline.com/story/news/politics/elections/2025/03/24/crawford-campaign-leads-ad-spending-in-wisconsin-supreme-court-race/82570614007/>.
- 9 <https://cfis.wi.gov/ReportsOutputFiles/1100112SpringPre-Election2025e7718324202593749AMCF-2Report.pdf>.
- 10 <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/swiss-billionaire-hansjorg-wyss-recently-poured-over-60m-propping-up-left-wing-groups-causes>.
- 11 <https://www.jsonline.com/story/news/politics/elections/2025/03/17/wisconsin-supreme-court-headed-for-record-smashing-spending-levels/82414645007/>.
- 12 <https://www.wpr.org/news/billionaires-wisconsin-supreme-court-election-crawford-schimmel-musk-soros-pritzker-uihlein>.
- 13 <https://www.jsonline.com/story/news/politics/elections/2025/03/17/wisconsin-supreme-court-headed-for-record-smashing-spending-levels/82414645007/>.
- 14 <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/buying-time-2025-wisconsin>.