

WI Supreme Court Retrospective

April 11, 2025

Key Findings - Part 1

- Democrats had a strong showing in the April Wisconsin Supreme Court Election. Initial data points to favorable turnout as the bigger driver of Democratic overperformance, although some vote switching likely occurred as well.
 - 2.4m votes were cast in Wisconsin – 70% of 2024 levels and 130% of 2023 levels. Turnout was closer to 2024 levels in counties where Harris won more of the vote in November.
- Crawford performed similarly statewide to Protasiewicz (winning 55% in the twoway), but did outperform her slightly in more urban and suburban areas, while underperforming in more rural parts of the state.
- In a survey of 2,111 Wisconsin voters from April 3-7, 2025, we find that local issues like abortion, public safety, and partisan control of the courts were more important than national issues in determining voters' *own support* in the race.
 - Voters are split on how they felt about outreach from the Crawford campaign, but most felt negatively about outreach from the Schimel campaign.
 - Susan Crawford is perceived as more focused on local issues while Brad Schimel was seen as more focused on national issues and more closely associated with the Republican party – in an election where voters cared most about local issues.
- Despite the distaste for the national slant of the race – particularly for Schimel – a majority of voters saw the outcome as a rebuke against Trump and his administration.
 - This suggests some potential for positioning Democrats as the more locally-focused candidates in an era when Republicans are implicitly more closely tied to Trump.

Key Findings - Part 2

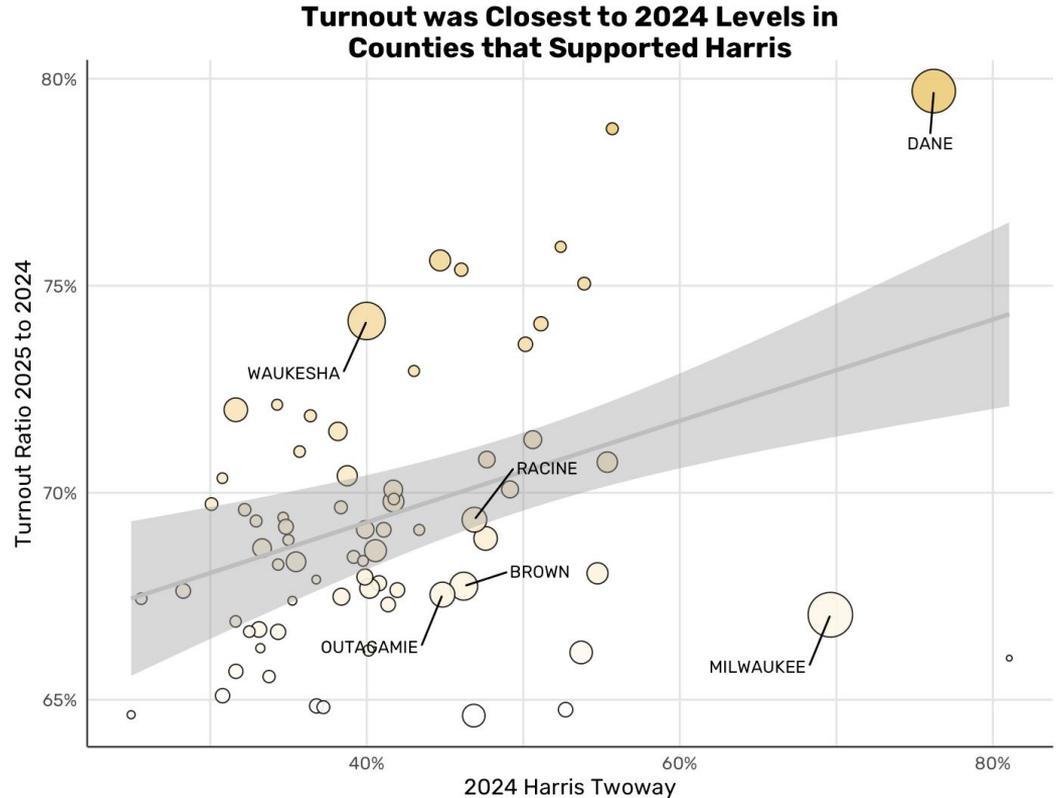
- When asked about Elon Musk's involvement in the race, a slim majority of voters said it did not affect them personally, but a majority of voters thought his involvement influenced the outcome of the election.
 - Crawford voters are more likely to say that Musk's involvement increased their support for Crawford, while Schimel voters were are likely to say they were unaffected.
- While there is some division along partisan lines, a 62% majority of voters – including 1-in-4 Trump '24 voters – see Musk's involvement and his paid petitions as unacceptable.
 - Democrats emulating this tactic is also viewed unfavorably, with 62% of voters overall and 86% of Harris '24 voters saying Democrats should not engage in this type of behavior.
- Musk's tactics aren't necessarily seen as a turning point in politics and more of a continuation of existing trends, but a 63% majority of voters would like to see something done to restrict outside spending in the wake of Musk's involvement.

What Happened

Turnout was incredibly high for an April election – votes cast neared 70% of 2024 votes, and turnout was particularly high in more Harris-leaning counties

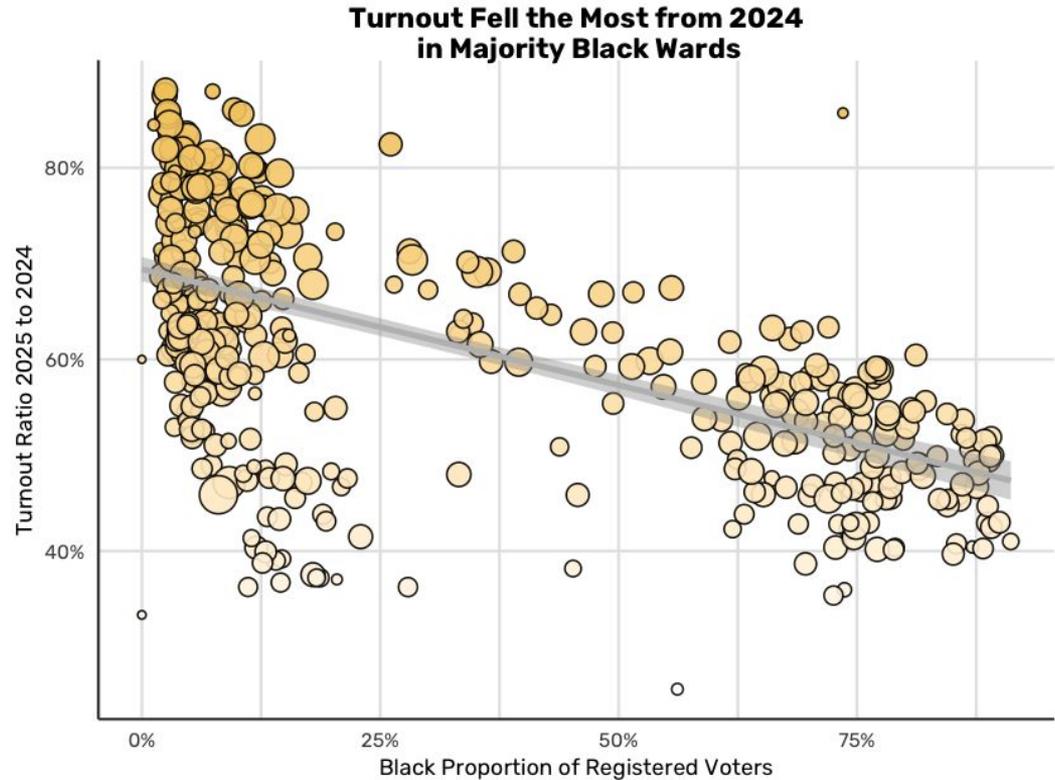
The Wisconsin Supreme Court special had an incredibly high April turnout – 2.4m votes cast, compared to 1.8m in April 2023 (130%) and 3.4m in November 2024 (70%).

Turnout was closer to November 2024 levels in areas where Harris won more of the vote.



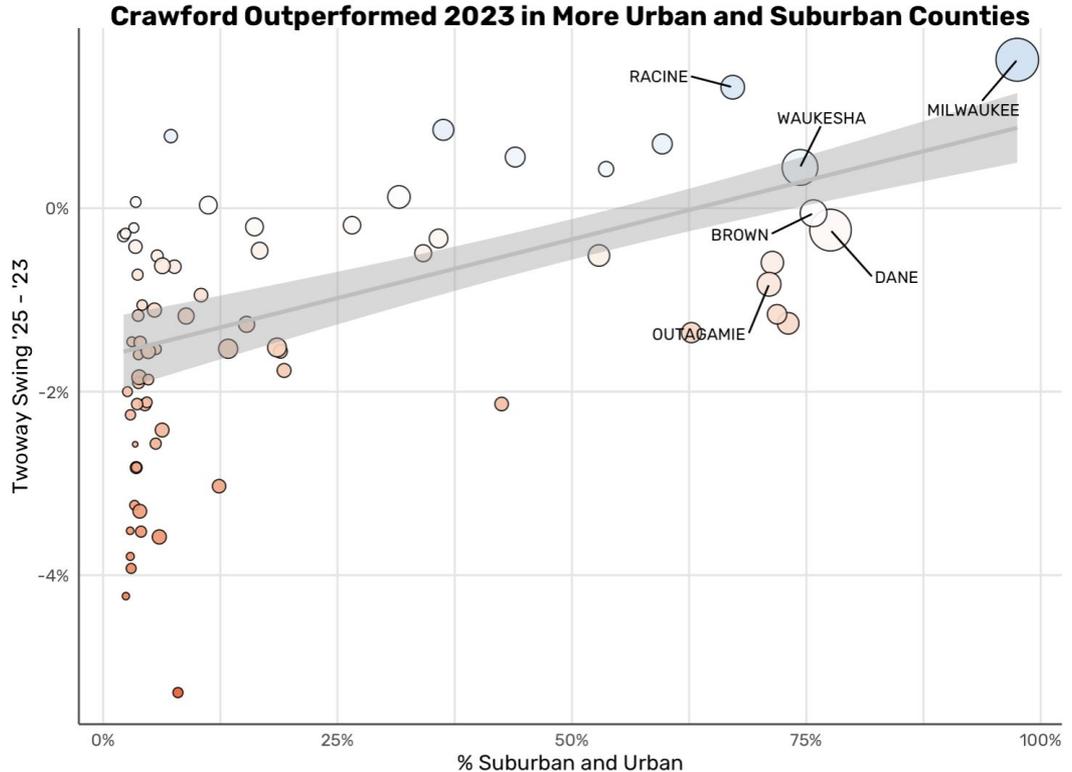
In Milwaukee County, where turnout was noticeably lower than in 2024, predominantly Black wards had more turnout drop-off relative to 2024 levels

Black-majority wards systematically had lower turnout relative to November 2024 in the April 1 Supreme Court election.



Crawford's performance is highly correlated with the April 2023 election (98%), with overperformance in more urban and suburban areas and slight underperformance in rural counties

Relative to 2023, Crawford did better in more Urban and Suburban counties and slightly worse in more rural areas. This aligns with increasing urban-rural polarization.



Views on the Candidates and Election Results

Aligning with county result trends, Harris '24 voters self-report voting at higher levels than Trump voters in a post-election survey

Did you vote in the April 1 election for the Wisconsin Supreme Court?

Response	Overall	2024 Vote: Harris	2020 x 2024 Vote: Swing	2024 Vote: Trump	2024 Vote: Did Not Vote
Yes	63%	81%	73%	67%	36%
No	34%	18%	26%	32%	57%
Not sure	3%	1%	1%	1%	7%

81% of Harris '24 voters report voting in the April election, compared with only 67% of Trump '24 voters.

Voters are largely split on the most important issue to their vote – a plurality said partisan control of the courts

26% of voters identify partisan control of the courts as the most important factor determining their vote.

22% of voters say abortion was most important, and 20% say public safety was most important. National politics was at 16%.

Abortion is a bigger issue for Harris voters (28%), while crime is a bigger issue for Trump voters (29%).

Of the following options, what was the most important factor in your vote for Wisconsin Supreme Court justice?

Response	Overall	2024 Vote: Harris	2020 x 2024 Vote: Swing	2024 Vote: Trump	2024 Vote: Did Not Vote
The candidates' judicial experience	8%	7%	8%	8%	11%
The candidates' stances on abortion	22%	28%	21%	16%	19%
The candidates' stances on crime and public safety	20%	12%	21%	29%	17%
Partisan control of the Wisconsin courts	26%	27%	25%	25%	17%
Sending a signal about national politics	16%	22%	17%	11%	10%
Not sure	8%	4%	7%	11%	26%

A majority of voters also say local issues were more likely to drive their vote than national ones

Regardless of your vote, what types of issues had more impact on who you voted for in the Wisconsin Supreme Court race?

Response	Overall	2024 Vote: Harris	2020 x 2024 Vote: Swing	2024 Vote: Trump	2024 Vote: Did Not Vote
Local issues in Wisconsin like abortion and public safety	54%	57%	54%	53%	44%
National issues like President Trump's agenda and endorsements from national figures	31%	36%	31%	27%	27%
Not sure	15%	8%	15%	20%	29%

Across the board, voters report local issues as more important to their vote than national ones.

The Crawford campaign was seen as focused on local Wisconsin issues by more than a 2-to-1 margin, while the Schimel campaign was viewed as more focused on national issues

While there was a partisan divide in how the campaigns were viewed, a 55 to 24 majority of voters viewed Crawford’s campaign as more focused on local issues while Schimel was viewed as more focused on national issues by nearly the same margin (51 to 29).

Regardless of your vote, which of the following sets of issues do you think **Susan Crawford and her campaign**** were more focused on?**

Response	Overall	2024 Vote: Harris	2020 x 2024 Vote: Swing	2024 Vote: Trump	2024 Vote: Did Not Vote
Local issues in Wisconsin like abortion and public safety	55%	74%	53%	34%	51%
National issues like President Trump's agenda and endorsements from national figures	24%	17%	25%	32%	16%
Not sure	22%	9%	22%	34%	33%

Regardless of your vote, which of the following sets of issues do you think **Brad Schimel and his campaign**** were more focused on?**

Response	Overall	2024 Vote: Harris	2020 x 2024 Vote: Swing	2024 Vote: Trump	2024 Vote: Did Not Vote
Local issues in Wisconsin like abortion and public safety	29%	18%	30%	42%	23%
National issues like President Trump's agenda and endorsements from national figures	51%	70%	49%	32%	41%
Not sure	20%	13%	21%	26%	36%

Similarly, Schimel was seen as more closely associated with the GOP than Crawford was viewed as associated with Democrats

73% of voters view Crawford as at least somewhat associated with the Democratic party, compared to 82% who say the same about Schimel and Republicans.

How closely associated with the Democratic Party do you think Susan Crawford was as a candidate for the Wisconsin Supreme Court?

Response	Overall	2024 Vote: Harris	2020 x 2024 Vote: Swing	2024 Vote: Trump	2024 Vote: Did Not Vote
Very closely associated with Democrats	45%	37%	47%	58%	26%
Somewhat closely associated with Democrats	28%	42%	28%	13%	22%
Not very closely associated with Democrats	4%	4%	4%	4%	6%
Not at all associated with Democrats	3%	1%	3%	5%	4%
Not sure	19%	16%	18%	20%	42%

How closely associated with the Republican Party do you think Brad Schimel was as a candidate for the Wisconsin Supreme Court?

Response	Overall	2024 Vote: Harris	2020 x 2024 Vote: Swing	2024 Vote: Trump	2024 Vote: Did Not Vote
Very closely associated with Republicans	64%	78%	62%	48%	52%
Somewhat closely associated with Republicans	18%	7%	18%	32%	10%
Not very closely associated with Republicans	3%	3%	3%	3%	7%
Not at all associated with Republicans	1%	3%	1%	0%	2%
Not sure	14%	9%	15%	17%	28%

Voters are split on how they felt about outreach from the Crawford campaign, but a majority felt negatively toward outreach from Schimel

Would you say that you felt positively or negatively in general toward the communications you received from the ****Crawford campaign****?

Response	Overall	2024 Vote: Harris	2020 x 2024 Vote: Swing	2024 Vote: Trump	2024 Vote: Did Not Vote
Positively	40%	73%	32%	4%	37%
Negatively	41%	10%	45%	78%	29%
Not sure	19%	17%	23%	18%	33%

40% of voters said they felt positively about outreach from Crawford, while 41% felt negatively.

Would you say that you felt positively or negatively in general toward the communications you received from the ****Schimel campaign****?

Response	Overall	2024 Vote: Harris	2020 x 2024 Vote: Swing	2024 Vote: Trump	2024 Vote: Did Not Vote
Positively	23%	3%	21%	46%	15%
Negatively	56%	85%	56%	23%	55%
Not sure	21%	11%	23%	30%	30%

56% of voters felt negatively about Schimel outreach, including almost 1-in-4 Trump voters.

A majority of voters – including almost a third of Trump ‘24 voters – see the Wisconsin results as a rebuke of Trump and the GOP

Which of the following statements do you agree with more about Susan Crawford's win in the April 1 Wisconsin Supreme Court race?

53% of voters overall see Crawford's win as a sign that voters are pushing back against Republicans.

A strong partisan divide emerged: 76% of Harris voters see the result as a rebuke, while only 28% of Trump voters say the same.

A plurality (42%) of Trump voters say the result was a reflection of typical turnout in special elections.

Response	Overall	2024 Vote: Harris	2020 x 2024 Vote: Swing	2024 Vote: Trump	2024 Vote: Did Not Vote
Crawford's win was mostly a rebuke of Trump and the Republican Party , showing that voters are pushing back against Republicans	53%	76%	52%	28%	38%
Crawford's win was mostly a reflection of typical turnout patterns in special elections , rather than a broader statement about Trump or the Republican Party	28%	15%	28%	42%	26%
Not sure	20%	9%	19%	30%	36%

Views on Elon Musk's Involvement

A large majority of voters (79%) were aware of Elon Musk's involvement in the race

Were you aware of Elon Musk's financial involvement in the Wisconsin Supreme Court race before the election?

Harris voters were more likely to say they were aware of Musk's involvement (87%) than were Trump voters (71%).

Response	Overall	2024 Vote: Harris	2020 x 2024 Vote: Swing	2024 Vote: Trump	2024 Vote: Did Not Vote
Yes	79%	87%	79%	71%	65%
No	16%	10%	15%	21%	23%
Not sure	6%	3%	5%	8%	12%

Harris '24 voters are more likely to identify Musk as having had an impact on the race and their vote choice; Trump voters are less likely to say Musk had an impact

Would you say Elon Musk's involvement in the Wisconsin Supreme Court race had any *impact on your vote*, regardless of the candidate you voted for?

Response	Overall	2024 Vote: Harris	2020 x 2024 Vote: Swing	2024 Vote: Trump	2024 Vote: Did Not Vote
It had a significant impact	25%	38%	22%	10%	21%
It had a minor impact	13%	17%	13%	9%	16%
It had no impact	54%	41%	57%	69%	48%
Not sure	8%	4%	8%	12%	15%

38% of voters say Musk's involvement impacted their vote, including 55% of Harris '24 voters. Only 19% of Trump '24 voters say Musk impacted their vote.

To what extent do you believe Elon Musk's involvement affected the *outcome of the race*?

Response	Overall	2024 Vote: Harris	2020 x 2024 Vote: Swing	2024 Vote: Trump	2024 Vote: Did Not Vote
It had a significant impact	33%	47%	31%	18%	30%
It had a minor impact	29%	26%	30%	33%	22%
It had no impact	18%	13%	19%	23%	16%
Not sure	20%	14%	19%	26%	33%

A much larger share believe Musk had an impact on the outcome – 62% of voters overall, including 73% of Harris '24 voters.

Musk's participation in the election was a more motivating factor to vote for Crawford than for Schimel

79% of Schimel voters say that Musk's support did not make a difference in their likelihood to vote for Schimel.

In contrast, 55% of Crawford voters say Musk's support made them more likely to vote for Crawford, and only 34% say Musk did not make a difference.

Among Schimel Voters: Did Musk's support for Brad Schimel make you more or less likely to vote for **Schimel?**

Response	Overall	2024 Vote: Harris	2020 x 2024 Vote: Swing	2024 Vote: Trump	2024 Vote: Did Not Vote
More likely	14%	26%	12%	14%	22%
Less likely	1%	6%	1%	1%	5%
No difference	79%	63%	82%	80%	66%
I didn't know Musk supported Schimel	4%	3%	4%	4%	2%
Not sure	2%	3%	1%	2%	5%

Among Crawford Voters: Did Musk's support for Brad Schimel make you more or less likely to vote for **Crawford?**

Response	Overall	2024 Vote: Harris	2020 x 2024 Vote: Swing	2024 Vote: Trump	2024 Vote: Did Not Vote
More likely	55%	56%	53%	50%	51%
Less likely	7%	7%	8%	9%	13%
No difference	34%	34%	35%	35%	31%
I didn't know Musk supported Schimel	2%	1%	2%	3%	3%
Not sure	2%	2%	2%	3%	3%

A majority of voters see Musk's involvement as a bad thing; 56% say it was an abuse of power compared to 31% who see it as free speech

While voters are divided along partisan lines, Harris '24 voters are united on Musk's actions being bad and an abuse of power. A plurality of Trump '24 voters saw Musk's involvement as neither good nor bad.

Would you say that Elon Musk's financial involvement in the Wisconsin Supreme Court race was generally a good thing or a bad thing?

Response	Overall	2024 Vote: Harris	2020 x 2024 Vote: Swing	2024 Vote: Trump	2024 Vote: Did Not Vote
Good	8%	1%	8%	17%	5%
Bad	59%	91%	59%	21%	55%
Neither good nor bad	22%	4%	21%	43%	24%
Not sure	11%	4%	11%	18%	15%

Which of the following best describes your view of Elon Musk's involvement in the race?

Response	Overall	2024 Vote: Harris	2020 x 2024 Vote: Swing	2024 Vote: Trump	2024 Vote: Did Not Vote
It was a legitimate exercise of free speech and strategic political support, like any donor's involvement	31%	3%	31%	63%	25%
It was an abuse of power by a billionaire trying to buy influence in politics	56%	94%	54%	14%	49%
Not sure	13%	3%	15%	24%	26%

When asked more explicitly about Musk's tactics, a majority of voters say his paid petition was unacceptable and harmful to democracy

Elon Musk's America PAC offered \$100 to any voter signing a petition "opposing activist judges," with an opportunity for any voter who signed the petition to win \$1,000,000. Which of the following statements do you agree with more?

93% of Harris 2024 voters and 63% of swing voters respond this way.

A plurality of Trump 2024 voters (42%) say they are not sure whether or not paid petitions were acceptable. 1 in 3 Trump voters say this was an acceptable political tactic. 26% of Trump voters say Musk's petition was unacceptable.

Response	Overall	2024 Vote: Harris	2020 x 2024 Vote: Swing	2024 Vote: Trump	2024 Vote: Did Not Vote
Offering compensation for this type of activity is an **acceptable** political tactic and a good way to get people engaged in politics	16%	2%	16%	32%	15%
Offering compensation for this type of activity is an **unacceptable** political tactic and harmful to American democracy	62%	93%	63%	26%	58%
Not sure	22%	5%	21%	42%	27%

62% of voters prefer that Democrats not emulate the America PAC paid petitions

86% of '24 Harris voters and 61% of swing voters say that Democrats should not engage in this type of behavior.

Among Trump voters, 34% say Democrats should not engage in this behavior, while 21% say Democrats should find a Democratic donor to mimic Musk.

A plurality (46%) of Trump voters say they are unsure about whether or not Democrats should use the same strategy in the future.

Elon Musk's America PAC offered \$100 to any voter signing a petition "opposing activist judges," with an opportunity for any voter who signed the petition to win \$1,000,000. Which of the following statements do you agree with more?

Response	Overall	2024 Vote: Harris	2020 x 2024 Vote: Swing	2024 Vote: Trump	2024 Vote: Did Not Vote
If Elon Musk does it on behalf of Republicans, Democrats should find a billionaire donor to do it on behalf of Democratic candidates too	12%	5%	14%	21%	12%
Regardless of whether Elon Musk does it on behalf of Republicans, Democrats and Democratic donors should not engage in this type of behavior to impact elections	62%	86%	61%	34%	55%
Not sure	26%	8%	25%	46%	32%

Only 7% of voters say they signed Musk's America PAC petition

Elon Musk's America PAC offered \$100 to any voter signing a petition "opposing activist judges," with an opportunity for any voter who signed the petition to win \$1,000,000. Did you sign this petition?

This includes 13% of Trump voters, 3% of Harris voters, and 7% of swing voters.

Response	Overall	2024 Vote: Harris	2020 x 2024 Vote: Swing	2024 Vote: Trump	2024 Vote: Did Not Vote
Yes	7%	3%	7%	13%	4%
No	88%	95%	88%	81%	85%
Not sure	5%	3%	4%	6%	12%

Voters are split on whether Musk's tactics represent a turning point – a slight plurality of voters see it as a continuation of existing trends

Looking back, do you believe Elon Musk's financial involvement in the Wisconsin Supreme Court election represents a turning point in how billionaires influence elections?

Harris voters are more likely to see this race as a new era of influence (39%) than an extension of existing trends (27%).

In contrast, Trump voters are more likely to see the 2025 election as a continuation of trends (41%) than a new era of influence (14%).

Response	Overall	2024 Vote: Harris	2020 x 2024 Vote: Swing	2024 Vote: Trump	2024 Vote: Did Not Vote
Yes, it's a new era of influence	27%	39%	26%	14%	27%
No, it's a continuation of existing trends	34%	27%	35%	41%	30%
No, this was a one-off case	13%	12%	14%	15%	13%
Not sure	26%	22%	25%	29%	31%

A 63% majority of voters would like to see something done to restrict outside spending in the wake of Musk's involvement

39% of voters, including 48% of Harris 2024 voters and 28% of Trump 2024 voters, say they'd like their representatives to regulate outside spending in elections.

A further 24% of voters would like their representatives to overturn Citizens United and limit spending.

28% of Trump 2024 voters say they did not want legislation to change how outside spending currently works, and 31% are unsure.

In light of Elon Musk's involvement in the recent Wisconsin Supreme Court race, what action would you like to see your representatives take in response?

Response	Overall	2024 Vote: Harris	2020 x 2024 Vote: Swing	2024 Vote: Trump	2024 Vote: Did Not Vote
Support a constitutional amendment to overturn the Citizens United Supreme Court decision and limit outside spending in elections	24%	34%	23%	14%	20%
Support new legislation in Congress to impose stricter regulations on outside spending in elections	39%	48%	40%	28%	31%
Nothing, outside spending in elections should be protected as free speech	15%	4%	14%	28%	12%
Not sure	22%	14%	24%	31%	36%

Media Environment

News coverage was identified as the top source influencing voters' decisions, followed by paid media

Across all the ads and political communications you received, which sources or messages would you say had the greatest influence on your voting decision?

23% of voters overall, including 30% of Harris voters, say that news coverage was most impactful in their vote choice. Only 15% of Trump voters say the same.

Campaign ads were next most impactful, with 16% of voters overall and 17% of Trump 2024 voters selecting this as the most impactful.

Response	Overall	2024 Vote: Harris	2020 x 2024 Vote: Swing	2024 Vote: Trump	2024 Vote: Did Not Vote
News coverage (TV, newspapers, radio, online)	23%	30%	22%	15%	15%
Campaign ads on TV	16%	15%	16%	17%	14%
Endorsements from people or organizations I trust	11%	11%	11%	11%	5%
Conversations in-person or online with friends or family members	9%	10%	10%	9%	8%
Campaign ads online (social media, websites, YouTube)	5%	5%	5%	6%	9%
Campaign materials in the mail	4%	4%	3%	3%	4%
In-person conversation with a volunteer at my door	2%	2%	2%	2%	1%
Phone call or text message exchange with a campaign	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Not sure	30%	23%	30%	36%	44%

76% of voters report receiving at least one kind of communication from the Crawford campaign

The majority of voters saw a campaign ad on broadcast TV (58%).

50% of voters received campaign materials in the mail.

Only 24% of voters report no communication from the Crawford campaign.

Which of the following types of campaign communications did you receive from the **Crawford campaign?
Please select all that apply.**

Response	Overall	2024 Vote: Harris	2020 x 2024 Vote: Swing	2024 Vote: Trump	2024 Vote: Did Not Vote
Campaign Ads Online (Social Media Websites, Youtube)	41%	55%	46%	38%	27%
Campaign Ads on TV	58%	70%	66%	59%	41%
Phone Call Or Text Message Exchange With A Campaign	28%	37%	32%	28%	15%
In Person Conversation With A Volunteer At My Door	11%	15%	11%	7%	11%
Campaign Materials The Mail	50%	66%	61%	52%	29%
None of the Above	24%	12%	15%	23%	40%

75% of voters report receiving some outreach from the Schimel campaign

60% of voters reported seeing campaign ads on TV.

55% reported receiving campaign materials in the mail.

42% of voters reported seeing campaign ads online, while a smaller number reported having a phone (23%) or in-person exchange with a volunteer.

25% of voters did not hear from the Schimel campaign.

Which of the following types of campaign communications did you receive from the ****Schimel campaign****?
Please select all that apply.

Response	Overall	2024 Vote: Harris	2020 x 2024 Vote: Swing	2024 Vote: Trump	2024 Vote: Did Not Vote
Campaign Ads Online Social Media Websites Youtube	42%	50%	48%	44%	29%
Campaign Ads On Tv	60%	70%	67%	63%	45%
Phone Call Or Text Message Exchange With A Campaign	23%	27%	27%	27%	11%
In Person Conversation With A Volunteer At My Door	9%	12%	11%	10%	4%
Campaign Materials The Mail	55%	69%	69%	62%	28%
Noneoftheabove	25%	17%	16%	21%	42%

The majority of voters (64%) heard about Musk's involvement from local or national news media

How did you hear about Elon Musk's financial involvement in the race?

Response	Overall	2024 Vote: Harris	2020 x 2024 Vote: Swing	2024 Vote: Trump	2024 Vote: Did Not Vote
Local news (e.g. local TV, radio, online, newspaper)	24%	25%	24%	23%	18%
National news (e.g. national TV, radio, online, newspaper)	40%	50%	39%	30%	33%
Social media (e.g. Facebook, X/Twitter, Instagram, TikTok)	18%	15%	17%	21%	21%
Campaign outreach (mail, text, call, door-to-door volunteer)	1%	1%	1%	2%	2%
Coworker, friend, or family member	6%	5%	6%	6%	5%
I hadn't heard about it	7%	2%	7%	11%	11%
Not sure	5%	3%	5%	7%	11%

Only 1% of voters say they heard about Musk's involvement in the election from campaign outreach efforts, while 18% of voters heard about it from social media.

More voters cited national (40% overall; 50% of Harris voters) than local (24% overall) news sources.