

No staying home for the most important Pennsylvania election of the century on November 3rd

It may come as a surprise to learn just how important this November's Supreme Court races are in Pennsylvania. These elections are critical because they will determine how easy it will be for either party to win the legislature during the next decade. Whichever party controls the court appoints a tie-breaking member to the [redistricting commission](#). In 2012, that system led to Republicans winning the legislature despite losing the popular vote because they had drawn the maps. The new maps were used for the first time during the 2014 red wave, and Republicans won their largest majorities in generations even though Democrats decisively unseated unpopular GOP Gov. Tom Corbett.

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[For Supreme Court elections] turnout is historically pathetic. And the people who do vote are those with a vested interest in the outcome. It's nearly impossible to understate the importance of this year's state Supreme Court election. For starters, the number of open seats is unprecedented.

A partisan swing on the 7-member court will affect how it rules on every issue that comes before it, from abortion and guns to campaign finance and employment law. And no matter your party loyalty, that's a big deal.

John Micek, PennLive April 24, 2015

A Commonwealth Court ruling overturning a challenge to Pennsylvania's method of funding schools will be appealed to the state's Supreme Court. Previous lawsuits to force the legislature to boost funding for schools have failed, with courts reluctant to intervene — saying that maintaining such a system is a political question best left to the executive and legislative branches of government.

Today's plaintiffs argued, however, that in the years since the lawsuit, the General Assembly has created a standard to be judged against: The Keystone Exams, completion of which is a graduation requirement. If students are unable to meet the standards of those legislatively approved exams, they argued, it means the state is failing to fund education adequately to help students pass. That, they say, requires court intervention. The Pennsylvania Supreme Court will now decide if the state's courts have a role to play in enforcing the clause. Court observers expect the case will continue into 2016.

April 21, 2015 – by Joel Mathis, Philadelphia Magazine –

The [Supreme Court] low-key primary became a multimillion-dollar one, campaign finance reports show. Candidates collectively raised nearly \$4.2 million from the start of the year through early May. The open seats will decide the political swing of the court, which leans Republican with five sitting justices. Influential policy decisions loom large in the near future.

Endorsements, name recognition, regional association or ballot position may have affected voters' choices, said Jeff Brauer, a political science professor at Keystone College in Lackawanna County. "In many of these races, no one knows the qualifications, or whether they would be a good justice or not. Yet the race is one of the most influential electoral decisions. The Supreme Court makes really important decisions that impact the lives of all Pennsylvanians and businesses and industry," Brauer said. "They interpret the constitution for us. It's an extremely important position."

The next court potentially could have to rule on the constitutionality of changes to public pension benefits or a challenge to Gov. Tom Wolf's death penalty moratorium, said Bruce Ledewitz, a professor at Duquesne University School of Law.

And the newcomers' 10-year terms extend through 2020 and the next round of legislative redistricting, on which the court must sign off.

Ethics and integrity will remain talking points as the campaigns continue, Ledewitz said. Two of the seats opened when justices stepped down amid scandals — Joan Orié Melvin of Marshall on the heels of corruption charges, and Seamus McCaffery of Philadelphia because of inappropriate emails unearthed on state servers.

Melissa Daniels is a Trib Total Media staff writer May 19, 2015