

How Do the Courts Impact You?

The ideological balance of the court can affect laws surrounding education, voting rights, environmental protections, and reproductive access.

⚡ Education: *Leandro v. State* — In 1994, School Boards in Cumberland, Halifax, Hoke, Robeson and Vance counties sued the State arguing the school funding system violated the NC Constitution. Although the NC Supreme Court has required schools to be funded to meet basic education needs, like well-trained teachers and updated resources, the state continues to underfund public schools. The Court recently decided to rehear this case, for the 5th time, putting the education of North Carolinians at stake.

⚡ Democracy: *Harper v. Hall and NC NAACP v. Moore* — In 2022, the NC Supreme Court ruled that legislators who are elected as a result of unlawful racial gerrymandering do not possess the authority to make certain constitutional amendments. The case was sent back to the lower courts to decide if the implementation of photo ID and state income tax amendments were passed legitimately. Considering the reversal of *Harper v. Hall*, where the Court's new conservative majority ruled that gerrymandering disputes were outside the court's legal authority, NC NAACP may be taken up again by the Court.

⚡ Environmental Protections: *Clayton, et al. v. Person County* — In Person County, residents filed a case in Superior Court raising concerns that rezoning changes allowed for the construction of Dominion Energy's Moriah Center, a liquefied natural

gas storage facility in a rural area. Residents argue the rezoning decision ignores public concerns about the facility's harmful health and environmental impacts, including air pollution, increased noise and traffic, and threats to water sources.

⚡ Reproductive Health — Following the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, state courts have gained more power over reproductive rights. State Supreme Courts have made important decisions affecting reproductive health access. Judges opposing reproductive freedom upholding total abortion bans, even in cases of life-threatening pregnancies. Those in support of reproductive freedom have ruled state constitutions protect the right to an abortion and prevented public funding restrictions on reproductive care. In 2023, North Carolina lawmakers approved a 12-week abortion ban, *currently being litigated in North Carolina federal court, not state court.*

⚡ Criminal Justice Issues: *State v. Hobbs* In Cumberland County, a defendant convicted of murder, argued the Court wrongly dismissed his objections to the State's unconstitutional removal of Black jurors during jury selection. In a 6-1 decision, the NC Supreme Court found that the lower courts did not properly consider racial discrimination evidence and ordered a new hearing. This case highlights the crucial role judges play in ensuring fair trials by examining claims of bias and discrimination in our legal system.



Where can I learn more about the courts? Check out the "Why Courts Matter?" webpage whyjudgesmatternc.com to learn more. To find races on your ballot, visit ncvoter.org/guide.



2024 What's ON THE BALLOT

North Carolina Courts Explainer

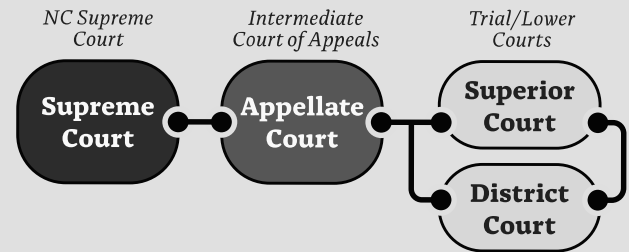
Spotlight

NC Judges are on the ballot in 2024

Judges are powerful. They decide cases that change lives and uphold and overrule laws that affect every aspect of your life. They make decisions in disputes on everything from education access, your right to vote, and traffic violations.

You will find judicial candidates near the middle of your ballot — another reason to vote the whole ballot, top to bottom.

North Carolina Judicial System



NC Supreme Court is the state's highest court. **One** of the seven seats is on the ballot.

NC Court of Appeals judges hear appeals of criminal and civil cases from the District and Superior Courts, North Carolina's trial courts. **Three** of the 15 seats are up for election.

Lower Court judges, often a part of what is referred to as a "trial court," determine sentencing for crimes and resolving civil disputes, like divorce or child custody.

North Carolina Supreme Court

The Appellate Division is made up of the NC Supreme Court and the NC Court of Appeals. Decisions made by the NC Supreme Court are final, and are decided by seven justices serving eight year terms. While trial courts review the facts of a case to make decisions, appellate courts review if the law was followed correctly by the lower courts. Through its administrative responsibilities, the NC Supreme Court sets policies and standards for judges and court administrators to follow.

HIGHLIGHT — In 2017, North Carolina shifted from non-partisan to partisan judicial elections. In 2024, the NC Supreme Court is made up of 5 Republican Justices and 2 Democratic Justices. In the 2022 General Election, the NC Supreme Court's majority flipped—leading to several landmark cases that were previously decided to be overturned. This was an extremely uncommon act for the Court.

North Carolina Court of Appeals

Cases are heard by a rotating panel of three judges assigned by the NC Supreme Court's Chief Justice. The NC Court of Appeals checks if lower courts applied the law correctly in cases. If a party involved disagrees with the appellate court's decision, they can ask the NC Supreme Court to review the case. Currently, four out of the 15 judges on the Court of Appeals are Democrats. Out of the seats up for reelection, 2 are currently held by Republican Judges.

Court of Appeals seats are statewide races and will appear on each voter's ballots.

Court of Appeals Candidates

Thomas Murray (R) and **Carolyn Thompson (D)** will be on your ballot for Seat 12.

Ed Eldred (D) and **Valerie Johnson Zachary (R)** will be on your ballot for Seat 14.

Christopher Freeman (R) and **Martin Moore (D)** will be on your ballot for seat 15.

North Carolina Superior Court

Trial courts decide cases involving felony charges, civil cases involving >\$25,000, and misdemeanor appeals from lower courts. There are 111 judges serving 8-year terms across 48 districts on a rotating schedule.

District Courts

District courts hear cases involving civil, criminal, and juvenile matters. While some civil cases are decided by juries, other issues such as child custody disputes are determined by a judge. District court judges are elected by registered voters residing in their district to four-year terms. There are 282 district court judges in 43 districts located in every county seat.

Not all voters may have Superior Court or District Court races. To see if an election is being held in your district and learn about candidate platforms and background, visit ncvoter.org/guide.

Justice	Party	Next Election
Paul Newby	Republican	2028
Anita Earls	Democrat	2026
Phil Berger Jr.	Republican	2028
Tamara Barringer	Republican	2028
Richard Deitz	Republican	2030
Trey Allen	Republican	2030
Allison Riggs	Democrat	2024

NC Supreme Court Candidates — *Allison Riggs (Democrat) and Jefferson Griffin (Republican) will be on your ballot.*

