

## Voting in Judicial Elections

Judicial elections, and the candidates running in them, continue to be a mystery to Ohio voters. A majority of Ohio voters say that they skip voting in judicial elections because they do not know enough about the candidates. This is alarming, considering that the judiciary is integral to the working of our government as the third co-equal branch. In 2020, Ohio voters in every county will elect judges for county and common pleas courts, all 12 courts of appeals districts, and two seats on the Ohio Supreme Court. These judges affect the lives of Ohioans in many ways, from their main role of interpreting the law, to more routine functions like traffic citations and estate administration.

Judicial races often do not have the same amount of publicity as the other races on the ballot, tied in part to more stringent fundraising limitations. And, unlike candidates for political offices, judicial candidates are bound by a code of ethics enforced by the legal profession.

Before you step into the voting booth, take some time to familiarize yourself with what judicial seats you will be voting on and the candidates running. Then, do some research on those candidates just like you would for any other race.

### Some things to pay attention to:

- Why is this candidate running for judicial office? This can often be found on their campaign website or social media presence, or by interacting with candidates at local candidate forums.
- What is the candidate's background? This includes where they went to law school, what type of

legal experience they have had in the past, and how that contributes to the judicial role they are seeking.

- How is the candidate involved in your community? What organizations have they worked with that align with your values?
- Have they shown good character and temperament? Judges, particularly those at the local level, are often seeing people experiencing stressful and trying situations. It is important that the judiciary can treat them with calm respect to ensure confidence in the judicial system.

One struggle voters often have with judicial candidates is a lack of clear positions on specific issues. Voters may wonder where judges personally stand on specific issues like eminent domain or school funding, and may be frustrated that the candidates are not giving an answer to those types of questions. However, this is an important part of having a fair and impartial judicial system. Judges are prohibited from commenting on cases and controversies that may come before them, because it is their job to apply the law based on the facts at hand, regardless of their personal or political beliefs. Instead of specific issue positions, voters can ask judicial candidates about their judicial philosophy, or how the judge views different aspects of the law and decision-making.

A fair and impartial judiciary is a cornerstone of our government and a hallmark of our free society. As voters, it is our responsibility to look beyond the outcome and consider whether a judge had sound reasoning, based in law and fact, to bring about that decision.

