

## WHO WATCHES JUDGES?

Trial lawyers, prosecutors, jurors, witnesses, public defenders, plaintiffs and defendants all watch judges. Trials and other courtroom procedures are open to the public (except for Juvenile Court). Anyone who has contact with the courts, either as a participant or a spectator, probably forms an opinion of the judges observed. Anyone with a complaint can contact the Commission on Judicial Performance: [www.cjp.ca.gov](http://www.cjp.ca.gov).

Each year, the commission investigates complaints of misconduct by judges. The investigations and actions are announced to the public. If the commission finds the misconduct to be serious it has the power to have the judge censured or removed from office.

Anyone can access information about the California Court System Judicial Branch through [www.courtinfo.ca.gov](http://www.courtinfo.ca.gov).

## INFORMING YOUR VOTE

### **L.A. County Bar Association**

Judicial Candidate Ratings  
[www.lacba.org](http://www.lacba.org)

### **State or local bar associations:**

- evaluate candidates' professional qualifications
- publish voter guides

[www.abanet.org/barserv/map/ca.html](http://www.abanet.org/barserv/map/ca.html)

### **League of Women Voters:**

- sponsor candidate forums
  - publish voter guides
- [www.lwvlosangeles.org](http://www.lwvlosangeles.org); [smartvoter.org](http://smartvoter.org);  
[dnet.org](http://dnet.org)

### **California Courts Judicial Branch:**

[www.courtinfo.ca.gov](http://www.courtinfo.ca.gov)

### **Women Lawyers Association of Los Angeles:**

[www.wlala.org](http://www.wlala.org)

### **Black Women Lawyers Association:**

[www.blackwomenlawyersla.org](http://www.blackwomenlawyersla.org)

### **State Election or local Boards of Election**

### **Newspapers**

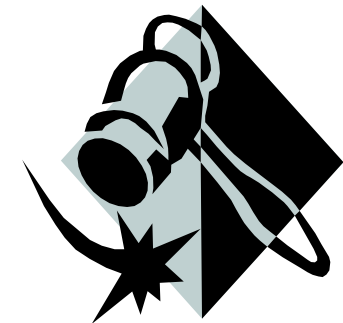
- publish bar association recommendations
- provide coverage of elections
- publish relevant editorials



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# VOTERS GUIDE TO JUDICIAL ELECTIONS



**Judges are different  
from other elected officials;  
their role is to uphold the  
law, not represent voters.  
This difference can make  
it challenging to make  
decisions in a judicial  
election.**



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## WHAT SHOULD YOU EXPECT FROM JUDICIAL CANDIDATES?

- Impartiality
- Commitment to the law, rather than public or personal opinion
- Campaign conduct consistent with judicial rules and ethics

## WHAT SHOULD YOU LOOK FOR IN A JUDGE?

**Experience:** demonstrated exposure to legal issues and substantial and diverse experience with the justice system

**Integrity:** high moral character, honesty, dedication and diligence

**Judicial temperament:** unbiased, courteous, open-minded, understanding, fair attitude and commitment to the rule of the law

**Professional competence:** intellect, knowledge of the law, writing and analytical ability, judgment, and courtroom and trial experience

**Service:** demonstrated commitment to justice for all

## WHAT STANDARDS SHOULD A VOTER CONSIDER WHEN VOTING ON JUDGES?

The right to vote comes without strings attached. Voters are free to use any standards that appeal to them.

Trial court judges deal constantly with people under stress, yet they need to remain calm, patient and fair while trying to resolve disputes quickly. Appellate judges work primarily with records, research, legal briefs, and colleagues. Voters may conclude that "judicial temperament" is important for the lower courts and that legal background plus analytical research and writing skills are more important at the appellate level.

Voters who place a very high value on judicial independence may want to use the type of job performance standards that many bar associations recommend. They will expect judges to decide cases as they think the facts and law require without regard to their personal views on the issue and without bending to public or political pressures. They think that elections should not be referendums on a judge's philosophy.

## STANDARDS—continued

Voters who place a higher value on political accountability will also take into consideration specific decisions made by judges. Voters may look for a candidate whose views on social issues match their own. Voters may believe that there are many instances in which judges, even at the trial court level, have a great deal of discretion in applying the law, and therefore their personal values and philosophy are important. Voters may think this is especially relevant for Supreme Court justices because their decisions are binding on major constitutional issues and in the lower courts.

## WHY VOTE ON JUDGES?

Judges must deal with everything from minor disputes to society's most intractable problems. Their decisions have as great an impact on our lives as decisions made by the governor or legislator. The governor may appoint judges to vacant positions, but at election time, voters determine who is qualified to remain seated. Those who vote are exercising an important opportunity to maintain the balance between judicial independence and accountability.