

# Vote Missouri!

## CHOOSING MISSOURI'S JUDGES



Judges are often called the umpires of the law because they make sure their courtrooms are fair for everyone who comes there seeking justice.

When Missouri became a state in 1821, our constitution created a judicial branch. From then until 1948, all of Missouri's judges were elected.

The popular election of judges in Missouri caused some problems —many judges were afraid to make decisions that would lose them an election and they favored the people who gave them money to run their campaigns. This was especially true in the large cities.

In 1948, Missouri got a new constitution, and state leaders knew they had to make changes to make our courts fairer.

They came up with this plan:

1 Trial judges in rural areas, where the people were more likely to know their judges were still to be elected.

2 All other judges, trial and appellate, are chosen in a three-part process:

a. A panel of citizens and lawyers serve on nominating commissions to select the best three candidates to fill an open judgeship;

b. Then the governor appoints one of these three and;

c. Every few years the people of Missouri vote if they want the judge to remain on the bench. This is called a retention election.

This system is called Missouri's Non-Partisan Court Plan. It was the first of its kind and it has been called a "Model for the Nation" because it has been adopted by many states.

### HELP WANTED

- 1 Judges for the circuit courts, appellate courts and the Supreme Court must be at least 30 years old and be licensed to practice law in Missouri.
- 2 Circuit court judges must have been a resident of Missouri for three years, appellate and Supreme Court judges for 9 years.
- 3 Judges for the circuit court and appellate judges must have lived in the area they serve for at least one year.
- 4 Circuit court judges must have been citizens of the U.S. for 10 years, appellate and Supreme Court judges for 15 years.

### Facts about Judges

1. Missouri has three levels of courts: trial, or circuit courts, in every county; appellate courts — Eastern District (St. Louis), Southern District (Springfield) and Western District (Kansas City); and the Supreme Court of Missouri.
2. There are more than 400 judges who serve in these courts.
3. Supreme Court and appellate judges serve 12-year terms, circuit judges serve six-year terms and associate circuit judges serve four-year terms.
4. Voters in the City of St. Louis and Clay, Greene, Jackson, Platte and St. Louis counties have opted to have their circuit judges selected using the Non-Partisan Court Plan.
5. Unlike federal judges who serve for life, Missouri judges must retire at age 70.

LEARN MORE ABOUT ELECTIONS AND VOTING IN MISSOURI, INCLUDING CURRENT CANDIDATES FOR OFFICE — [sos.mo.gov/elections/goVoteMissouri](http://sos.mo.gov/elections/goVoteMissouri) and [YourMissouriJudges.org](http://YourMissouriJudges.org).

### LEARNING EXTENSIONS

- 1 ACTIVITY #1. Think of some reasons why it might not be the best situation for judges to have to raise campaign money for an election. Remember a judge is the umpire in our court system—would you want an umpire in a baseball game to be paid by someone who is playing for your favorite team? Why or why not?
- 2 ACTIVITY #2. Compare and contrast the federal method of selecting judges with Missouri's Non-Partisan Court Plan. How is a retention election different from other kinds of elections?



MISSOURI STANDARDS ALIGNMENT:  
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