

Minnesotans Overwhelmingly Support Judicial Election Reform

Strong Support for Merit Selection With Retention Elections As a Replacement

A survey conducted by Decision Resources, Ltd., a nationwide survey research firm located in Minnesota shows that Minnesotans are ready for judicial election reform; it shows that Minnesotans recognize the need for their courts to be impartial so that the average person has equal access to justice. It also shows that Minnesotans often do not vote in judicial elections under the current system due to lack of knowledge about the judicial candidates and the court system. At the same time, Minnesota voters dislike campaign activities in judicial races. They believe that campaign pledges to special interests made by candidates threaten the fairness of the courts, and they view judicial candidate fundraising as having a corrosive effect on courtroom decisions. As a solution, Minnesota voters overwhelmingly favor merit selection of judges with retention elections.

Minnesotans see a flawed judicial election system.

Voters have little knowledge of the Minnesota court system and a majority of voters say they do not always vote in judicial elections because they lack enough information on candidates, lack interest in races, and have little knowledge of the judicial system. Voters are concerned that the fairness of the judiciary is put at risk by judicial candidates lobbying for the support of political and interest groups by making campaign pledges.

- Only 5% of Minnesotans report they know “a lot” about Minnesota’s court system
- Less than half (46%) of voters state they “almost always” vote in judicial races.
- Only 22% of voters agree that Minnesota courts are free from special interests.
- 78% of voters believe judicial candidates making pledges to political parties or other special interests on political issues threaten the fairness of the courts.

Minnesotans fear the influence of politics and money on the judiciary.

Voters in Minnesota believe that judges and politics do not mix and that by eliminating the impact of money, the average person will have a better chance at getting a fair day in court.

- 75% believe judicial fundraising is a threat to the fairness of the judiciary.
- 59% of voters believe campaign contributions influence judges
- 74% of Minnesotans believe campaign advertising impedes the impartiality of their judges.
- 95% believe judges should remove themselves from cases involving contributors.

American Judicature Society
Amicus
Center of the American Experiment
Citizens League
Common Cause Minnesota
Council on Crime and Justice
Disability Law Center
Growth and Justice
Hennepin County Bar Association
Joint Religious Legislative Coalition
League of Women Voters Minnesota
Mid-Minnesota Legal Assistance
Minnesota AFL-CIO
Minnesota Chamber of Commerce
Minnesota Council of Nonprofits
Minnesota Second Chance Coalition
Minnesota State Bar Association
Minnesotans for Impartial Courts
O’Connor Judicial Selection Initiative
180 Degrees, Inc.
Take Action Minnesota
WATCH

Minnesotans overwhelmingly support merit selection with retention elections, where citizens may vote yes or no on every judge.

Voters feel strongly that this would level the playing field for those seeking justice, reduce judicial campaign fundraising by lawyers or potential litigants, and stop special interests from influencing judicial decisions.

- 74% of Minnesota voters support merit selection with retention elections, with only 16 % opposed.
- 82% of Democrats support merit selection with retention elections and only 13 % opposed.
- 76% of Republicans support merit selection with retention elections and only 18 % opposed

When evaluating specific elements of a retention election proposal:

- 82% support the creation of a performance evaluation commission.
- 88% support the public release of the findings of that commission.
- 93% support the public voting on whether judges should be retained.



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This survey was administered by Decision Resources Ltd. of Minneapolis for Justice at Stake, a national nonpartisan organization supporting fair and impartial courts, to 800 randomly selected adult residents of the State of Minnesota between January 2nd and 15th, 2008. The demographics of this sample match the demographics of the entire population of Minnesota adults, and the results of the study are projectable to all Minnesota adult residents within $\pm 3.5\%$ in 95 out of 100 cases.