Of the several judicial selection plans, the merit selection plan, or Missouri Bar Plan, would seem to achieve the optimal balance of independence and accountability for the judiciary. Merit selection utilizes a judicial nominating commission made up of lawyers and non-lawyers who screen applicants based on professional competence, judicial experience, and ethical reputation instead of party affiliation or fundraising potential. This process reduces pressures from partisan and nonpartisan elections, in which judges might feel obligated to respond to short-term popular sentiment or the needs of donors, and sidesteps the blatant political jockeying that may attend executive or legislative appointment. By pairing a disciplined, qualifications-only appointment process with retention elections, merit selection fosters an independent and qualified judiciary while also offering some measure of democratic accountability. Despite the strengths in each method of selection, merit selection prioritizes competency over political agendas, and therefore judges are less accountable to electoral pressures and more to impartial adjudication. Overall, merit selection not only maintains high professional standards but also establishes a judiciary that invariably elicits lasting respect from society.

**Replies**

Hi Andrew,   
I appreciated your take on judicial selection. I agree with you that impartiality is desirable, and it's interesting how both elections and appointments have the potential to be sources of bias. Merit selection does seem to be a compromise by focusing on qualifications and having a probationary period before a retention election, which reduces the short-term political pressure. It's certainly the case that even in retention elections, judges are not completely insulated from manipulation, but generally, this method appears less susceptible to blatant political manipulation. I'm also wondering if there might be any disadvantages to merit selection, like hidden bias in the commission that makes the nominations. But your essay presents a compelling argument for merit-based methods of an independent judiciary. It's an interesting argument that certainly deserves serious consideration.

Hi Daniela,  
I wholeheartedly concur with your analysis of the judiciary selection processes. It is intriguing to consider that all of these systems have their advantages and disadvantages, depending on what is held as most important. The appointment process, in guaranteeing judicial independence, also opens itself up to political involvement, and elections both partisan and nonpartisan carry with them their own intrinsic weaknesses of accountability vs. political interference. Merit selection does appear to be a reasonable compromise, trading off independence for some degree of public accountability in the form of retention elections. Your overview presents the intricacy of the problem very effectively. I am curious, do you think it is possible to further refine these approaches to eliminate biases even further? I think the balance is required and both approaches have their trade-offs.