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Do Judges Perceive Value in Voter Guides for Judicial Elections

Abstract:

As judicial elections have become “noisier, nastier, and costlier” (Geyh 2003), some have voiced concern over whether these elections now resemble those for the other branches of government. The fear is that judges and the courts will be viewed as unfavorably as their political counterparts and citizens will vote for judges as they would for legislators. This article centers on voter guides as a possible counterbalance to these “noisy” elections. Through a survey of 1,618 appellate and general jurisdiction judges nationwide, we examine judges’ experiences with and perceptions of voter guides. We find that judges think voters are ill-informed about the courts and that judicial campaign ads offer poor and misleading information. Along these lines, a vast majority supports distributing official voter guides during an election. We also discuss judges’ perceptions of certain types of information found in voter guides, such as candidate bios, vote criteria, and candidates’ issue positions.