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Missouri Versus Illinois: A Comparison of Judicial Merit Selections to Judicial Partisan Elections

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State supreme courts are entrusted with guarding our most valuable constitutional rights and also have great power in interpreting our state's laws. State supreme courts have a large impact on their constituents' lives. In order for the public to follow the courts' decisions, they must trust them. Trust can be facilitated through a competent, impartial, and independent judiciary. Independence of thought from political influence is essential to our judiciary. So how do we select justices to ensure that they are of the upmost ability and will deliver fair decisions, so that the public can trust them? What qualities do we look for in our judicial bench? How do we make justices accountable to the people, while they remain out of political entrapment? My research aims to determine if either merit selections or partisan elections are better at facilitating factors that increase trust in the judiciary. I focused my study on Missouri and Illinois. My research collected primary biographic and demographic data on all past Missouri and Illinois State Supreme Court Justices. I analyzed this data for any anomalies or trends. I then compared this to secondary data collected from trends of thought or consensuses of opinions in the literature. I also looked at public opinion data, as well as interviewed a past Missouri Supreme Court Judge. I compared these two data sets to determine whether the overarching beliefs in the literature came to fruition in the real world of the Missouri and Illinois Supreme Courts. As my project is still in progress, my results and conclusion will be presented at the forum. Due to my time limitations, my data set was a two-state case study, so I recommend that future studies expand this type of analysis to other states or selection methods.