

Fact Sheet – Judicial Elections
(November, 2006)

There are fifty-eight countywide Superior Courts in California, one in every county. The California legislature authorizes the total number of judges statewide, and appropriates the needed funding to support each judgeship. Superior Court judges serve six-year terms and are elected by county voters on a non-partisan ballot. Vacancies that occur between elections are filled through appointment by the Governor. An appointee serves until the next general election when he or she must stand for election in order to retain the seat.

The qualifications to become a judge are to be a United States citizen, a resident of the State of California, and a California licensed attorney for ten years.

If a candidate for judicial office receives a majority (more than 50%) of the votes in a primary election, that candidate is elected outright. If there are multiple candidates for the same judicial office and no candidate receives a majority of votes in the primary election, the two candidates receiving the largest number of votes will face one another in a runoff during the following general election. Although judicial candidates are identified in election materials as running for a specific “office number” or “seat number”, voters should be aware that this number designates the judicial seat for election purposes only, but has no relation to courtroom location or the type(s) of cases that will be heard by the judge when he/she assumes office.

The Superior Court of California, County of Santa Clara bench is comprised of seventy-nine (79) judges and other court-appointed subordinate judicial officers. Superior Court judges hear cases based upon their specific assignments as determined by the Presiding Judge. Judicial assignments are subject to periodic changes, so that judges may hear a variety of case types during their time with the court. This rotation of assignments gives judges a broad range of experience, and allows the Presiding Judge the flexibility to make short-term changes in judicial assignments based upon court needs.