

## **Local Government**

### **Extensive Summary**

**Local Government** is the part of government that takes care of community needs at a local level, like in cities, towns, or counties. It handles things like fixing roads, providing water, running schools, and keeping people safe with police and fire services. Local government leaders are often elected by the people who live there.

**Local elections** give *you the power* to directly shape your community's future by voting for leaders who make critical decisions about public safety, education, infrastructure, and more. It is widely considered that the *decisions and actions a local government takes* will likely have the most *direct impact on your daily life*.

Here's a look at various local government positions that *you can vote for* and the impact they can have.

#### **Mayor**

**Purpose:** The mayor acts as the executive leader of a city or town, responsible for implementing policies, managing city departments (like public works, police, and parks), and preparing the budget. They often set the tone for local priorities, such as increasing affordable housing or addressing climate initiatives.

**Typical Size:** One mayor per city.

**Term Length:** Usually 2-4 years.

**Impact Example:** A mayor might prioritize expanding public transportation to reduce traffic congestion, directly affecting commute times and air quality.

#### **City Council Members**

**Purpose:** City council members create and vote on local laws, approve budgets, and represent residents from specific districts or areas of a city. They can influence the development of local businesses, public safety measures, and neighborhood services.

**Typical Size:** Usually 5-7 members for smaller cities, and up to 15 members for larger cities.

**Term Length:** 2-4 years, often staggered for continuity.

**Impact Example:** A city council might vote on whether to allow a new shopping center to be built, which could bring more jobs and shopping options but also increase traffic in the area.

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### *County Commissioners*

**Purpose:** Commissioners oversee county services such as road maintenance, public health initiatives, and emergency management. They decide on how to allocate funds for essential services, which can affect everything from road quality to the availability of health clinics.

**Typical Size:** Usually 3-5 commissioners within a county.

**Term Length:** Almost all county commissioners have 4-year terms, but some smaller counties do have 2-year terms.

**Impact Example:** They might allocate more budget to repair potholes in residential areas, improving road safety and reducing car repair costs for drivers.

### *School Board Members*

**Purpose:** School board members govern public schools, making decisions on policies, curricula, budgets, and school facilities. Their policies shape the educational environment, teacher salaries, and resources available to students.

**Typical Size:** Usually 5-9 members.

**Term Length:** 2-4 years.

**Impact Example:** They may decide whether to invest in new technology for classrooms, which can enhance learning opportunities but may also increase local taxes.

### *Sheriff*

**Purpose:** The sheriff manages law enforcement for the county, including running the county jail and patrolling areas outside city limits. They set policies for handling crime, public safety, and community policing efforts.

**Typical Size:** One sheriff per county.

**Term Length:** 4 years.

**Impact Example:** The sheriff could prioritize drug prevention programs in schools to combat substance abuse, directly impacting youth safety and health.

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### *District Attorney*

**Purpose:** The district attorney prosecutes criminal cases, advises law enforcement on legal matters, and decides which cases go to trial. Their choices affect crime rates, incarceration, and public trust in the justice system.

**Typical Size:** One per county.

**Term Length:** 4 years.

**Impact Example:** They may choose to focus on prosecuting violent crimes more aggressively, which could deter criminal behavior and make the community safer.

### *Judges (Local Courts)*

**Purpose:** Judges preside over legal cases including criminal, civil, and family matters. Their rulings shape legal outcomes and set precedents that influence future cases. They also manage court schedules and interpret laws.

**Typical Size:** Varies widely from county to county. A very small county may only have a few elected judges, an average county may have a dozen or more, and the county with the largest number of elected judges is Los Angeles County, with over 400 elected judges.

**Term Length:** 4-6 years.

**Impact Example:** A judge's decision on a landlord-tenant dispute can influence housing policies and tenant rights, impacting residents' living conditions.

### *Learning More About Local Elections*

To find out about upcoming local elections in your community, learn about the candidates, and view sample ballots, you can:

- Visit the official website of your county's election office (for example, Dallas County Elections: <https://www.dallascountyvotes.org>).
- Use national resources like “[nass.org/can-i-vote](https://nass.org/can-i-vote)” to check registration status, polling locations, and election dates.
- Check local news outlets and community boards for information on candidate forums, debates, and public discussions.