# **Local government in the United States:**

**Historical development of US local government**

The United States Constitution established the Federal Government of the United States. At the time of the writing of that document, the separate colonies, that became states, had their own governments, which had grown out of smaller units. The many strata of government were preserved by the Constitution even as it allocated supreme power, such as the power to declare war, to Congress. In fact, it gave practically all powers to the states except those that could, conceivably, work against the good of the whole.  
  
 In the early nineteenth century, the relative youth and ineffectiveness of many of the state governments, together with the urgency of precisely the sort of problems that we have come to think of local government as best positioned to address, resulted in the waxing of the latter’s importance in the United States. The county government became the focal point of administration and for the dissemination of information. Indeed, the county is still the basic political category, although it has more power today, as a rule, in rural than in urban areas, where most local power is held by incorporated municipalities. Even so, the relationship between the state and local government, whatever the nature and style of the latter, is far from simple, with local governments in taut suspense between the need for a degree of independence in order to fulfil their function and their need for the wherewithal from the higher and broader levels of government to be able to do just that.  
  
 The development of the sense of locality, in the form of the county, as the entity with which citizens practically and emotionally identified, to some extent accompanied a growth in the feeling of the role of the state, rather than the nation, as the larger emblem of identity. An interesting point is that it was only after the Civil War that Americans began to use the term ‘the United States’ as a proper name that takes a singular verb.  
  
In general, American local governments are modelled on the British system (going back to ‘shires’) of elected councils. The difference is that in the American system there is also a strong executive level. Local governments in the United States are either territorial or corporate. Examples of the territorial unit are some county governments and local school districts. A corporate government is one based on a charter, such as the state may grant to a city, town or village; these city charters are similar to constitutions, only (of course) on a smaller scale. Such charters are approved and authorized by the state, and they must not contradict state law.  
  
A kind of exception to their necessary complete harmony with state realities is, perhaps, to be found in those cases where corporate governments have acquired some form of ‘home rule’, whereby they can change their own composition and laws, and the state government has no say in the matter. In such instances, however, state law is again the more puissant, and no conflict is possible. In other words, cities may adapt state laws to suit them, but not to the point of anything resembling opposition. The relationship, in terms of delegation of authority, is thus much more hierarchical between state and locality than it is between the federal government and the state.  
  
The increased involvement of the national government in the affairs of levels of government below it that resulted from Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal programs in the 1930s was not confined to the states. The new ‘cooperative’ federalism led to such developments as the 1972 General Revenue Sharing Act, whereby a proportion of federal income tax money found its way back to local, as well as state, governments. Numerous local governments, such as Buffalo, New York and Oklahoma City, now actually depend on federal funding. One bump on this road is turning out to be that the local targets specified by the federal government for particular grants may not be the ones that local officials consider correct or necessary. Such divergences in point of view often result in not an agreement to disagree, but an agreement on the need to cooperate. The aspect of the Constitution alluded to earlier – the one where any powers the federal government does not claim fall to the states – has meant, in recent times, in some ways, the growth of the independence of states and localities; local police may not, for example, be required by the federal government to perform minor administrative tasks.  
  
What were at one time the relatively clear lines of demarcation between local and higher levels of government in the United States, then, have become much less sharply defined.  
  
Currently, there are about 3,100 counties, most of them suburban or rural. There is no part of a state that is not also part of a county, except in states like Virginia, where a city may be independent – that is, not part of a county. There are cities like New York, that consist of more than one county: each of its five boroughs is one. French influence is in evidence in Louisiana, which has parishes instead of counties. Nevertheless, they are, to all intents and purposes, the same thing. There are no counties, only boroughs, in the far northern state of Alaska. A further refinement of complexity is in the doing-away-with of virtually all county functions in such states as Connecticut.  
  
**Forms of US local government**

About eighty per cent of American citizens now live in large cities, suburbs of cities, or towns. People’s needs – from police to sanitation, education to fire protection, housing and public transportation – are seen to, most directly, by city governments. There are, broadly speaking, three forms of it: the mayor-council form; the commission form; and the city or council-manager form.  
  
 In the mayor-council form, which is the oldest of the three, there is (not surprisingly) a mayor and a council consisting of a number of members, sometimes called aldermen. The structure is patterned on that of the state and federal governments. While the mayor is elected at large, the aldermen are sometimes elected, in other cases selected from wards or districts. The mayor is head of the executive branch, presiding over council meetings, appointing chiefs of departments, perhaps with the council’s approval, and is often the budgetary officer of the city. He can veto ordinances passed by the legislative branch, the council.  
  
 Two forms of mayor-council rule – the strong-mayor and the weak-mayor – have evolved, although they have the points already enumerated in common. The ‘strong mayor’ can appoint and remove heads of city departments; few officials, in that scenario, are elected. He is the preparer of the budget, and has power of veto. Throughout the 1990s, the strong mayor-council form of city government was most popular in cities where the form of government has been decided by the state, and declined in popularity in home rule cities (already mentioned), where the citizens of the city have and exercise the right under state law to decide their form of municipal government.  
  
Where the mayor is a significant policy maker, an administrator may be given responsibility for daily operations. The legislature, in general, adopts the budget and general policy positions, passes resolutions with legislation, and audits the government’s performance.  
  
 The mayor in the other kind of mayor-council city government, the ‘weak’ mayor, has more limited powers of appointment, removal and veto, and the elected officials and boards are more numerous. The council’s more extensive legal powers preclude his being a chief executive in any truly meaningful sense.  
  
 The commission form of city government in the United States combines, in one group of usually at least three, and often five or seven, officials, the executive and legislative dimensions. It is also, sometimes, called the Galveston Plan, after the town in Texas where it originated in 1901 (and which has since abandoned it). All members are elected, and each commissioner is responsible for at least one city department. One of them is the chairperson and may be called the mayor, but he or she has no extra powers. Historically the commission form is regarded as an important manifestation of the impulse in the direction of efficiency through employment of experts, but others have seen that tendency in a negative light – as a movement depriving those without any particular ‘expertise’ – the working class, in other words – of their influence.  
  
 It has also been seen as a stage in the development of the city manager or council-manager form of municipal government. Commissions whose members all have different interests but equal powers have a predictable predisposition to unresolved disagreement. Bringing in a business manager was, and has increasingly been (the commission plan has rarely been initiated since the First World War), seen as the solution. The city manager has most executive powers, including those pertaining to law enforcement and service provision. He carries out the decisions of the elected council, who decide on ordinances and policy, and he, again, produces the city budget. He is thus not elected, but hired, and has no term of office, continuing in his or her role while it meets with the requirements of the council.  
  
 Yet other forms of local government in the United States include the town meeting, the representative town meeting, the township, the borough and the village.  
Town meetings are largely a phenomenon of New England states. As often as necessary, but at least once a year, a town’s registered voters meet, in open session, to elect officers, debate issues and pass laws. Practical issues such as taxes, budget and building and road construction and repair are decided. The board officers are called ‘selectmen’, board of supervisors, town council, or something similar.  
  
The representative town meeting is very like the town meeting system, except that, while all citizens may attend meetings and take part in the debates, the right to vote belongs only to the (large) number chosen to be representatives.  
  
In a township, there is usually a mayor and three, four or five committee members, who are elected, and who hold all legislative powers not held by the mayor. An administrator may be appointed to discharge executive functions.  
  
A borough’s mayor and six members of council are elected, and the mayor only votes to break ties. The council is the legislature, and the mayor appoints officers. In a village, there is, usually, a board of trustees with five elected members, one of whom has mayoral powers.  
  
**Involvement of the private sector**

Two significant problems of municipal government in the United States are where urban areas are divided among a number of different city governments (such as New York), and the diminishing of the tax base and finances of cities through the movement of the middle class to the suburbs. The inability of property taxes to maintain inner cities has led to greater reliance on other kinds of taxation, including sales and commuting taxes. In the past ten years, federal and state programs that stimulate investment in infrastructure by the private sector have resulted in major investment in American cities. Arrangements with strengthening collaborations between the private and the public sectors as their goal have been: credits for or exemptions from local sales and income tax; tax abatements; tax-exempt municipal bonds; and state funding for clean water.  
  
The Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) of 1999 is the biggest infrastructure program in the United States, and it is about finding new ways for the private sector to access federal resources through innovative legislation, such as state infrastructure banks and revolving funds. The grant programs of prior decades have given way to private funding and greater local government control; more than 250 funding programs have been made available for urban redevelopment and construction of affordable housing. Over $100 billion has been marked for urban transportation by the TEA-21, while New York, receiving only $200 million from the federal government for water infrastructure, has obtained $460 million in loans. In the context of these developments, some think that the home rule system of city government in the United States is increasingly worth a closer look for the greater legal authority it confers on localities.

**American local government structure.  
  
Introduction:**  
The United States of America is a federal republic. It is divided into 50 independent federating units generally called states. States have their own constitution and they are free to make any law according to their needs and traditions. However federal laws have priority over state laws in areas where they disagree.  
The United States government has three layers, federal government at the national level, state government and local governments. The federal government is given some specific powers in constitution, such as national defense, creating money, foreign relations. All other powers and duties such as sanitation, education, transportation, medical services, business, regulating property are reserved to the state and local governments.  
In each state there is an elected head of the executive branch, called the governor, an independent judiciary and a popularly elected legislative branch. Local governments include cities, counties, towns, school districts and municipal government; they govern such matters as local natural resources or transportation networks.

**Structure of local government:**

Federal constitution of US does not mention local governments. Local governments are the creatures of states, so these are structured in accordance with the laws of the various individual states. Typically each state has at least two separate levels: counties and municipalities. Some states have their counties divided into townships or special districts to meet the need of their population. And municipalities are also further divided into different categories. Although the types and nature of the municipal entities varies from one state to other according to their mass density. In a few states, there is only one level of local government. There are also often local or regional special districts that exist for specific purposes, such as to provide fire protection, sewer service, transit service or to manage water resources.  
In most states, county and municipal governments exists side-by-side. In some states, a city can, either by separating from its county or counties or by merging with one or more counties, become independent of any separately functioning county government and function both as a county and as a city. In many states, counties exist only to designate boundaries for such state level functions. Municipal governments are usually administratively divided into several departments, depending on the size of the city.  
  
**Types of local government:**

The constitutions of various states differ in many respects but to some extent they follow the same pattern as like local government structure. Local governments in the United States are grouped into the following categories.  
 **Municipal government:**

Generally corresponding to an area rather than one of a set of areas into which a county is divided. City governments are chartered by states, and their charters detail the objectives and powers of the municipal government. But in many respects municipal or city government function independently from state.  
Types of municipal governments vary from one state to another. However, almost all have some kind of central council, elected by the voters, and an executive officer, assisted by various department heads, to manage the city's affairs. In few states both counties and municipal governments exist side by side.  
There are three general types of municipal government: the mayor council, the commission, and the council manager. These are the pure forms; many cities have developed a combination of two or three of them

**Mayor Council:**

This is the oldest form of city government in the United States. A mayor council city government consists of an elected mayor and a number of council members. The mayor appoints heads of city departments and other officials. He or she has the power of veto over ordinances, the laws of the city and frequently is responsible for preparing the city's budget. The council passes city ordinances, sets the tax rate on property, and allocates money among the various city departments. In some states the mayor may given a larger policy making role, and responsibility for day-to-day operations is delegated to him.  
**The Commission:**

The commission form of city government, also known as the Galveston Plan. This combines both the legislative and executive functions in one group of officials, usually five or seven number, elected city-wide. Each commissioner supervises the work of one or more city departments. One is named chairperson of the body and is often called the mayor. Commissioners are responsible for taxation, appropriations, ordinances, and other general functions.

**Council/City Manager:**

The council manager is a response to the increasing population and growing number of cities, which require management expertise not often possessed by elected public officials. This form of government was established to entrust most of the executive powers, including law enforcement and provision of services, to a highly trained and experienced professional city manager. Under this system an elected council of usually five to nine members makes the city ordinances and sets policy, but hires a paid administrator, also called a city manager, to carry out the policies. The manager draws up the city budget and supervises most of the departments. Usually, there is no set term; the manager serves as long as the council is satisfied with his or her work. Though, the city manager is recognized as the political head of the municipality, but is a member of the legislative body and does not have the power to veto legislative actions.  
  
**County government:**

The county is a subdivision of the state. County governments are organized local governments, authorized in state constitutions and statutes and established to provide general management in a region. 48 out of 50 states are divided into counties (while Parishes in Louisiana, and boroughs Alaska). In areas lacking a municipal or township government, the county government is generally responsible for providing all services.  
The county is a subdivision of the state, usually but not necessarily containing two or more townships and several villages. New York City is so large that it is divided into five separate counties. While Arlington County & Virginia, are governed by a unitary county administration. In most counties one city or town is designated as county seat, where the government offices are located and where the important meetings held. In small counties, boards are chosen by the county as a whole; in the larger ones, supervisors represent separate districts or townships.

**Sub County general purpose governments:**

In most Midwestern and Northeastern states, counties are further subdivided into townships or towns. Municipal and township governments are distinguished primarily by the historical circumstances surrounding their formation.

**Township governments:**

Township governments are organized local governments, to provide general government for a defined area, generally corresponding to one divided area of a county. Township will consist of Mayor and 3 to 5 elected committee members. The committee members will act as the legislative body. The officials are all local residents of this township, elected by the township citizenry, and always available to talk with their constituency. The Township Committee may delegate, by ordinance, all or a portion of executive responsibilities to an appointed administrator.

**School districts:**

School districts are organized local entities providing public elementary, secondary, and higher education which, under state law, have sufficient administrative and fiscal autonomy to qualify as separate governments. An elected or appointed board of members looks after the district functions.

**Special districts:**

Special districts are all organized local entities. A special district may serve areas of multiple states as compare to other type of governments who can serve only in some specific area to qualify as a separate government. Special districts are widely popular, to perform special functions like fire protection district, flood control district, transportation district.

Overall it refers to governmental jurisdictions below the level of the [state](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/U.S._state). Most states and territories have at least two tiers of local government: [counties](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/County_(United_States)) and [municipalities](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Municipality). In some states, counties are divided into [townships](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civil_township). There are several different types of jurisdictions at the municipal level, including the [city](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/City), [town](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Town), [borough](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Borough_(United_States)), and [village](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Village_(United_States)). The types and nature of these municipal entities vary from state to state.

Many rural areas and even some sub-urban areas of many states have no municipal government below the county level. In other places [consolidated city-county](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Consolidated_city-county) jurisdictions exist, in which city and county functions are managed by a single municipal government. In places like [New England](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_England), [towns](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_England_town) are the primary unit of local government and counties have no governmental function but exist in a purely perfunctory capacity (e.g. for census data).

In addition to general-purpose local governments, there may be local or regional [special-purpose](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special_district_(United_States)) local governments, such as [school districts](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/School_district) and districts for fire protection, [sanitary sewer](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sanitary_sewer) service, [public transportation](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Public_transport), [public libraries](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Public_library), public parks or forests, or water resource management. Such special purpose districts often encompass areas in multiple municipalities. According to the US Census Bureau's data collected in 2012, there were 89,004 local government units in the United States. This data shows a decline from 89,476 units since the last census of local governments performed in 2007.

Depending on the state, local governments may operate under their own charters or under general law, or a state may have a mix of chartered and general-law local governments. Generally, in a state having both chartered and general-law local governments, the chartered local governments have more local autonomy and home rule.

**Comparison of USA and Pakistan local Government:**

**Pakistan’s local government system:**

The future of local government in Pakistan has always been dependent upon the nature of the regime and the outcome of the power struggle at the centre.

Changes in political control at the centre usually led to a collapse of authority in the localities, but local government structures have always reappeared in modified forms because of the necessity for the ruling regimes to legitimise or strengthen their authority. 'Local government for the central government' is a legacy which Pakistan inherited from British

India, but which has been strengthened by the passage of time. Local government has long been considered a favoured political mechanism by our army rulers because it served their purposes to divide and rule. Quite the opposite view was taken by the bureaucracy, for local government is a rival political and administrative force to whom they are supposed to surrender or share most of their power. Elected political governments have usually taken a view in between these two extremes. There has been a reluctance to revive, or continue, local government systems that were established by previous army rulers. At other times, the elected governments have manipulated local government to gain temporary political objectives with the assistance of the bureaucracy. As a result, local government in Pakistan has always been a rolling stone in the power struggle between the crazy generals, short-sighted politicians, and over-ambitious bureaucrats. In the shadow of national or provincial politics, and in competition with a powerful and integrated all-purpose bureaucracy, local government could never become a self-sustaining, stable and self-governing set of institutions. Rather it has been successively attacked by different political parasites trying to flourish and survive on its life force. The Bhutto government has changed its strategy, although the underlying attitude towards local government is the same as that of previous governments. After a long delay it has been decided to reform the existing system rather than to abolish it totally and introduce a new structure. The Government of the Punjab has issued the Punjab Local Government (Amendment) Ordinance 1995 (PLGAO 1995), which amended the existing Laws.

**USA government:**

Local governments generally include two tiers: counties, also known as boroughs in Alaska and parishes in Louisiana, and municipalities, or cities/towns. In some states, counties are divided into townships. Municipalities can be structured in many ways, as defined by state constitutions, and are called, variously, townships, villages, boroughs, cities, or towns. Various kinds of districts also provide functions in local government outside county or municipal boundaries, such as school districts or fire protection districts.

Municipal governments — those defined as cities, towns, boroughs (except in Alaska), villages, and townships — are generally organized around a population centre and in most cases correspond to the geographical designations used by the United States Census Bureau for reporting of housing and population statistics. Municipalities vary greatly in size, from the millions of residents of New York City and Los Angeles to the 287 people who live in Jenkins, Minnesota.

Municipalities generally take responsibility for parks and recreation services, police and fire departments, housing services, emergency medical services, municipal courts, transportation services (including public transportation), and public works (streets, sewers, snow removal, signage, and so forth).

Whereas the federal government and state governments share power in countless ways, a local government must be granted power by the state. In general, mayors, city councils, and other governing bodies are directly elected by the people.