

Chapter 25: Local Government and Finance

Section 1

Lecture Notes

The title 'AMERICAN GOVERNMENT' is centered on the page. 'AMERICAN' is written in a white, serif font with a thin black outline. 'GOVERNMENT' is written in a large, bold, yellow, sans-serif font with a thick black outline. The text is set against a background of a stylized American flag with blue stars and red and white stripes.

AMERICAN GOVERNMENT

PEARSON

► Objectives

1. Describe the typical county, its governmental structure, and functions.
2. Analyze the need for reform in county government.
3. Identify the responsibilities of tribal governments.
4. Examine the governments of towns, townships, and special districts.

▶ Key Terms

- **county:** a major unit of local government in most States
- **township:** a subdivision of a county found in many mid-Atlantic and Midwestern States
- **municipality:** a separate urban political unit within a township
- **special district:** an independent unit created to perform one or more government functions at a local level

▶ Introduction

- What are the similarities and differences of local governments, special districts, and tribal governments?
 - These governments are similar in that they have elected officials and provide basic services to their populations.
 - Special districts focus on providing a single type of service to residents.
 - Tribal governments are not created by the States and are independent of the States.

▶ Local Governments

- In 2007 the U.S. Census counted 89,247 local governments.
- Local governments include counties, cities, towns, townships, school districts, and other special districts.
- The U.S. Constitution says nothing about local governments.
- The States have the sole right to create and abolish local governments within their borders.
- Local governments have only the authority granted to them by the State government.

▶ Counties

- There are 3,033 counties in the United States.
- Counties vary greatly in physical size and population,
- The number of counties per State varies.
- In Alaska, counties are called boroughs.
- In Louisiana they are parishes.
- Connecticut, Rhode Island, and some other areas have no counties.

▶ County Structure

- Each county has a governing body.
 - Names for this body vary, though **county board** is common.
 - Board members are elected from county districts, usually for four year terms.
 - **Boards of commissioners** have 3 to 5 members, while less common *boards of supervisors* average about 15 members.

▶ County Structure, cont.

- All county boards levy taxes, borrow money, and pass local laws.
- They also hire county employees, supervise road programs, and manage county property.

▶ County Structure, cont.

- Counties have other elected officials.
- Nationwide, counties employ some 3 million people.
- There are also many county agencies and commissions that oversee specific services, such as fairs and libraries.



County Government Structure

Which local government officials have the greatest impact on your daily life?



An elected county board (above) holds broad powers over budgets and programs. Specialized officials like the county assessor (left) may be elected or appointed.

County Official Duties

County Board	Levies taxes and sets spending Administers roads, county buildings, and programs Appoints boards and officials
Sheriff	Runs county jail Provides rural police protection Carries out court orders May collect taxes
Clerk	Registers and records documents for property, birth, and death Runs county elections
Assessor	Sets the value of taxable property Collects property taxes
Treasurer	Keeps county funds
Auditor	Keeps financial records
District Attorney	Conducts criminal investigations Prosecutes criminal cases
School Superintendent	Administers public schools
Coroner	Investigates violent deaths Certifies causes of death

▶ County Functions

- Counties carry out State and county laws.
- Most counties serve rural areas.
- Common county duties include **law enforcement, tax assessment, tax collection, building and repairing roads, and maintaining schools**
- More heavily populated counties provide many of the same services offered by city governments.

► Problems

- Checkpoint: Why do most county governments need reform?
 - **Poor organization**: Authority is divided among many independent, popularly elected boards and officials.
 - **Inexperienced officials**: Popularly elected officers may have little governing experience.
 - **Geographic problems**: Most counties are geographically ill-suited to the realities of the modern world.

▶ Reforms

- County government reforms include:
 - Allowing county home rule, so individual counties can organize their own governments in a way that more efficiently meets their needs.
 - Hiring professional county managers to act as chief administrators for counties.
 - Combining large cities and the counties that surround them into single units of government to consolidate resources.

▶ Tribal Governments

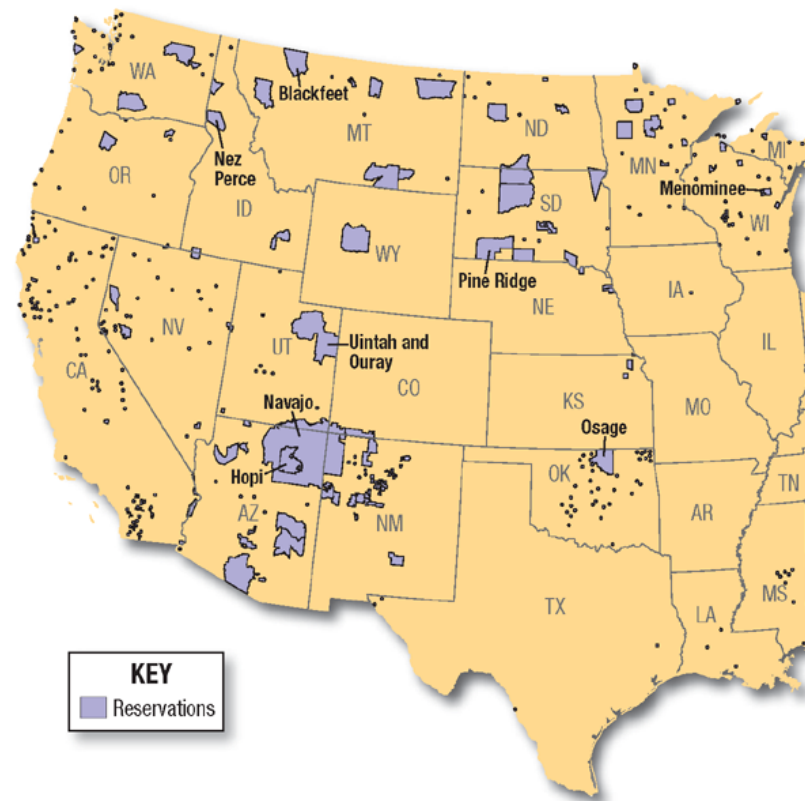
- Native American tribes are considered independent nations.
 - Federally recognized tribes are not subject to State laws and regulations.
 - They can also receive federal funding.
- There are some 560 recognized tribal governments with 1.7 million citizens.
 - Tribes usually have an elected chairman and a council.
 - Other details regarding structure and services vary from tribe to tribe.

▶ Native American Reservations

- Native American governments enjoy a sovereign status and a special relationship with the federal and State governments.

- Why are reservations organized differently from other forms of local government?

Native American Reservations



▶ Towns

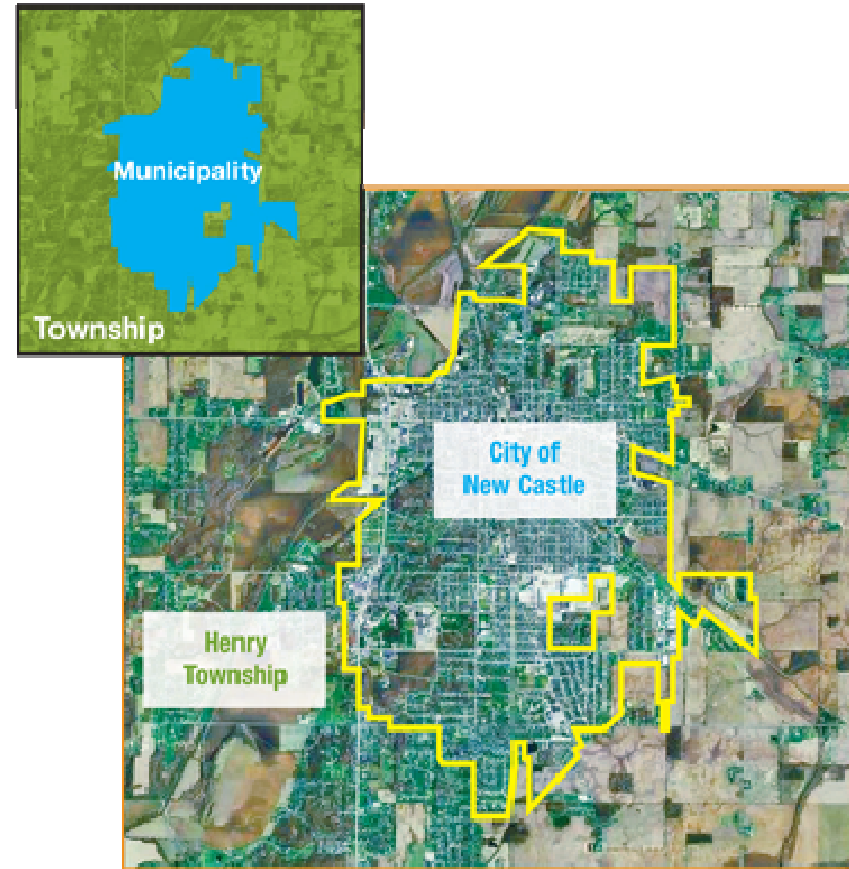
- Towns are a major unit of local government in New England States.
 - Towns deliver many services provided by cities and counties elsewhere.
- Town meetings have been used since colonial times to govern these towns.
 - In small towns, all eligible voters gather in an assembly to levy taxes, make budget decisions, and elect officers.
 - In larger towns, officers have more power and voters do not vote directly on as many issues.

▶ Townships

- Townships are found in the Northeast and Midwest. They tend to be rural.
- Townships either hold annual township meetings—like town meetings—or elect a board of trustees to govern.
- Townships typically provide services involving roads, drainage, and minor law enforcement.
- Many rural townships have been abolished.

► Municipalities and Townships

- **Municipalities** such as **New Castle, Indiana** provide a high level of services to the town center and residential neighborhoods within city boundaries.
- **Townships** such as **Henry Township, Indiana**, often surround municipalities, providing a smaller number of services to a predominantly rural population.



► Special Districts

- There are many thousands of special districts throughout the nation, providing a wide range of services.
 - School districts are the most common form of special district.
 - Other special districts provide services such as fire and police protection.



▶ Special Districts, cont.

- Special districts are formed when:
 - A service must be provided to an area larger or smaller than a county or city
 - Other local governments cannot or will not provide the desired services.
- Special districts are usually governed by an elected board.
 - These boards can raise taxes, charge fees, and spend the money needed to provide services.

▶ Review

- Now that you have learned about the similarities and differences of local governments, special districts, and tribal governments, go back and answer the Chapter Essential Question.
 - How local should government be?