

Government 101: Local, State, and Federal Government

Why Should You Vote?

With very few exceptions, voting is the right, privilege and responsibility of every U.S. citizen, age 18 years and older. Your vote helps determine who represents you in local, state and federal government. The most fundamental way to influence the policies that shape our lives is to *vote* for leaders that represent your interests.

How Do You Register to Vote?

Register to vote by picking up a voter registration card at any public library, U.S.P.S., or government office. You can also download the form at <http://www.sos.state.tx.us/elections/voter/reqvr.shtml> and mail it to the address provided, at least 30 days prior to any election in which you intend to vote. You can register just prior to your 18th birthday if you will be turning 18 within the 30 day pre-election day period.

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**Bookmark this website for info in English and Spanish on
HOW and WHERE to vote, PLUS local election information!**

<http://www.votexas.org>

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Local Government:

Local government in Texas refers to the general-purpose governments at the county or city level and special-purpose governments, which include special districts and school districts.

School District

- Most Texas public schools are run by independent *school districts* which are special-purpose governments, independent from state and local government control
- School districts are governed by an elected or appointed *school board, board of trustees, or board of education* that appoints a *superintendent* to function as the district's chief executive for carrying out daily decisions and policy implementations.
- **Individuals can influence school policies by attending and speaking publicly at local hearings and meetings of the School Board, by phone, email and visits with local school officials, and by VOTING**

City

- Cities vary widely in their local administration, typically managed by some combination of elected or appointed authority: *mayor, city council, and/or a city manager*
- Councils include members elected to represent individual voting districts and/or at-large members representing the diverse interests of voters across a city
- Depending on the city, policies are enacted by a *mayor* and *council*, and implemented by a *city manager*; in smaller cities and townships a *city manager* functions as a *mayor*
- **Individuals can influence city policies by attending and speaking publicly at local hearings and meetings of City Council, by phone, email and visits with local authorities, and by VOTING**

County

- Texas has 254 counties, by far the largest of any state.
- Each county is run by a five-member Commissioners' Court consisting of four commissioners elected from single-member districts (called commissioner precincts) and a county judge elected at-large.
- In Texas, areas within a county are either incorporated or unincorporated. Unincorporated areas are not part of a city; in these areas the county has authority for law enforcement and road maintenance.

State Government (Austin, Texas):

Texas House of Representatives

- The Texas House is led by a Speaker of the House: **Speaker Joe Straus**
- Each Texan has one State Representative in Austin
- Your State Representative may be reached using the following email format:
firstname.lastname@house.state.tx.us

Texas Senate

- The Texas Senate is led by the Lieutenant Governor: **Lt Gov David Dewhurst**
- Each Texan has one State Senator in Austin
- Your State Senators may be reached using the following email format:
firstname.lastname@senate.state.tx.us

Texas Governor

- The Governor of the State of Texas is: **Governor Rick Perry**
 - You can contact Governor Perry by visiting: governor.state.tx.us or by calling: (512) 463-2000
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Federal Government (Washington, D.C.):

United States House of Representatives (aka Congress)

- Each Texan has one Congressman/woman from their home district
- Your Member of Congress may be reached through their official website or: www.congress.org
- The U.S. House of Representatives is led by the Speaker of the House: **Speaker John Boehner**

United States Senate

- All Texans have the same two U.S. Senators that represent the entire state
- Our U.S. Senators from Texas are: **Senators John Cornyn and Kay Bailey Hutchison**
- The U.S. Senators from Texas may be reached through their official websites or: www.congress.org
- The U.S. Senate is led by the Vice President of the United States: **Vice President Joe Biden**

President

- The President of the United States is: **President Barack Obama**
- You can contact the White House by email (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/contact/submit-questions-and-comments>) or by calling (202) 456-1111

**To find your lawmakers, and tell them what you think,
visit the website below and enter your zip code:**

<http://www.congress.org>

With just a click you can contact all of your officials at once on issues that matter to you!

And, did you know?

You can also contact your elected officials on Facebook and Twitter!

Be sure to “like”, “friend” and “follow” their official pages to stay connected, comment on their wall, and “tag” them in your own posts whenever necessary.