

The city, the county, and the district are *different* governments

One mechanism of local government — why a single address sits inside several overlapping governments, and how blame lands on the wrong one.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

How This Guide Works

This is part of **Incognati Civics**, applying the field-guide format to local government — city councils, counties, special districts, zoning, and local taxes. Unlike elections or federal law, local structure **varies by state and even by town**: the same title can carry different powers ten miles away. So each specimen names the pattern and the tell, then points you to the one authority that settles it — your own jurisdiction's charter and your state's code — rather than asserting a single national rule. Sources are cross-jurisdiction bodies and representative statutes, listed in full on the references page.

INCOGNATI CIVICS — LOCAL GOVERNMENT

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Overlapping Jurisdictions: Who Is Responsible

Quis Respondet?

Governing precedent / case General- and special-purpose governments (varies) **Status** Varies by place; recurring

OBSERVED SPECIMEN	CITIES, COUNTIES, AND DISTRICTS
<i>One home can sit inside a city, a county, a school district, and several special districts at once — each an independent government with its own elected officials, budget, and taxes. Roads may be county; schools a separate district; water another; policing city or county depending on where the line falls. So a complaint aimed at the city council — about schools, or a road, or the sheriff — is often aimed at a government that has no authority over it. The U.S. has roughly 90,000 local governments, and which one is responsible for what differs from address to address.</i>	

THE HOOK	THE MECHANISM
‘The government’ feels singular, so residents direct every local complaint at the most visible body, usually the city council.	General-purpose (city, county) and special-purpose (school, water, fire) governments overlap on the same ground, each with its own jurisdiction; responsibility is divided and varies by location.

Field mark: before blaming your city council for schools, roads, or the sheriff, check which government actually holds that function — county, district, or city — because several overlap on your address and only one is responsible.

See the full references page for complete citations.

References

every source checkable at the link provided; DOIs given where the source has one

CROSS-JURISDICTION DATA · CENSUS

U.S. Census Bureau, *Census of Governments* — counts of local governments by type.

<https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/cog.html>

The official count (about 90,000 local governments) and taxonomy of general- and special-purpose governments.

CROSS-JURISDICTION AUTHORITY · NACO

National Association of Counties, “What Counties Do” / county vs. municipal functions.

<https://www.naco.org/counties/about-counties>

Nonpartisan explainer on the division of functions between counties and municipalities, which varies by state.

Reading ‘Who Do I Call’: A Gut Check

four questions before you blame one government for another's job

- 1 Map the layers**
City, county, school, and special districts overlap on one address.
 - 2 Match function to body**
Roads, schools, water, and police may each sit elsewhere.
 - 3 Find the elected officials**
Each government has its own board and budget.
 - 4 Aim the complaint right**
Only the responsible government can fix the problem.
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INCOGNATI CIVICS

The Series Continues

This is Specimen No. 3 of the Local Government section within Incognati Civics — the section built around the fact that local structure varies, so every plate ends at your own charter. It joins Elections, Federal Laws, Official Data Reporting, and Institutional Communications within Civics. The Incognati Atlas catalogs the underlying patterns across all of it.
