

Whether you *vote* for that office depends on where you live

One mechanism of local government — why the sheriff, assessor, clerk, or judge is elected in one place and appointed in another, and why that changes accountability.

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.

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Elected vs. Appointed Offices

Electus An Nominatus?

Governing precedent / case State and local charters (varies) **Status** Varies by state and locality

OBSERVED SPECIMEN

SHERIFFS, ASSESSORS, CLERKS, JUDGES

*In many counties the **sheriff** is independently elected and answers to voters, not the mayor or council; in others, policing runs through an appointed chief. Assessors, clerks, treasurers, coroners, and even judges are elected in some states and appointed in others. Whether an office is **elected or appointed** decides who can hire, fire, or direct it — and whether the remedy for a bad officeholder is a vote or a personnel decision. Demanding that a mayor “fire the sheriff” can be asking for something no one but the electorate can do.*

THE HOOK

People assume the chain of command runs top-down from the mayor, when many local offices are independently elected.

THE MECHANISM

State constitutions and local charters set which offices are elected and which appointed; an elected officeholder answers to voters and cannot simply be removed by another official.

Field mark: when you want an official removed or redirected, check whether the office is elected or appointed — an elected sheriff or assessor answers to voters, not to the mayor, and your charter says which it is.

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 AUTHORITY · NACO

National Association of Counties, county elected officials (sheriff, assessor, clerk) overview.

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

Documents which county offices are commonly elected, noting variation by state.

CROSS-JURISDICTION REFERENCE

National Center for State Courts, “Methods of Judicial Selection” (elected vs. appointed judges).

<https://www.ncsc.org/>

Nonpartisan compendium showing states select judges by election, appointment, or merit selection.

Reading an Accountability Demand: A Gut Check

four questions before ‘fire that official’ can even happen

- 1 Ask elected or appointed**
It decides who controls the office and how it is removed.
 - 2 Trace the chain**
An elected officer does not report to the mayor or council.
 - 3 Match the remedy**
For elected offices, the remedy is a vote (or recall), not a firing.
 - 4 Check your state**
The same office is elected here and appointed there.
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INCOGNATI CIVICS

The Series Continues

This is Specimen No. 4 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.
