

## **Texas Legislature Overview**

The Texas Legislature is the lawmaking body of the state of Texas.

### **Key Characteristics**

- **Part-time Legislature:** Texas has a part-time legislature, meaning lawmakers typically hold other jobs outside their legislative duties.
- **Limited Government Philosophy:** Reflecting a tradition of limited government, the Texas Legislature meets less frequently and has relatively short sessions compared to other states.
- **Influence of the Lieutenant Governor:** The Lieutenant Governor of Texas is one of the most powerful positions in the state government, wielding considerable control over the legislative process in the Senate.
- **It is a bicameral institution composed of two chambers:** the Texas House of Representatives and the Texas Senate.

### **Texas House of Representatives**

- **Composition:** The House has 150 members.
- **Terms:** Members serve two-year terms with no term limits.
- **Leadership:** The Speaker of the House, elected by the members, presides over the House. The Speaker's duties include appointing committee members and chairs, referring bills to committees, and maintaining order during debates.

### **Texas Senate**

- **Composition:** The Senate has 31 members.
- **Terms:** Senators serve four-year terms, with half the seats up for election every two years. There are no term limits.
- **Leadership:** The Lieutenant Governor of Texas presides over the Senate. Elected statewide, the Lieutenant Governor has significant influence, including appointing committee members and chairs, controlling the flow of legislation, and casting tie-breaking votes.

## **How Senators and Reps can influence policy**

### Drafting and Sponsoring Bills:

Legislators can draft new bills and sponsor them, initiating the legislative process. They work with legal advisors to ensure the bills are properly formatted and comply with existing laws (The Texas Politics Project).

### Committee Membership:

Serving on committees allows legislators to review, amend, and debate proposed bills before they reach the floor. Committees play a crucial role in shaping legislation and can effectively advance or stall bills (The Texas Tribune).

### Debating and Voting:

Legislators participate in debates on the floor of their respective chambers, advocating for or against bills. Their arguments and votes directly impact the passage of legislation (The Texas Politics Project).

### Amendments:

They can propose amendments to existing bills during committee meetings or floor debates. These amendments can significantly alter the content and direction of the legislation (The Texas Tribune).

### Lobbying and Advocacy:

Legislators often lobby their colleagues to gain support for their bills. They use persuasion, negotiation, and coalition-building strategies to influence the legislative process (The Texas Politics Project).

### Constituent Services and Feedback:

Engaging with constituents and understanding their concerns helps legislators prioritize issues and shape their legislative agenda. They can introduce bills and advocate for policies that reflect the needs and preferences of their constituents (The Texas Tribune).

### Public Hearings and Testimonies:

Holding or participating in public hearings allows legislators to gather input from experts, stakeholders, and the public. This information can inform their decisions and help build a case for or against specific legislation (The Texas Politics Project).

### Collaborating with Interest Groups:

Working with interest groups, advocacy organizations, and lobbyists can provide legislators with additional resources, research, and support for their legislative initiatives (The Texas Tribune).

### Media Engagement:

Using media platforms to communicate their positions and rally public support is another influential tool. Press releases, interviews, and social media help legislators shape public opinion and apply pressure to other lawmakers (The Texas Politics Project).

### Building Coalitions:

Forming alliances with other legislators who share similar interests or goals can strengthen a legislator's ability to influence legislation. These coalitions can be formal (caucuses) or informal groups that work together on specific issues (The Texas Tribune).

## **Legislative Sessions**

- **Regular Sessions:** The Texas Legislature meets in regular session biennially (every two years) in odd-numbered years. The session begins on the second Tuesday in January and lasts for 140 days.
- **Special Sessions:** The Governor can call special sessions to address specific issues. These sessions last up to 30 days, and the Governor sets the agenda.

**Note: January 14, 2025: Regular Session begins**

**June 2, 2025: SINE DIE, (the 140th day of session) also known as the final day of the Regular Session**

## **How a Bill Becomes a Law in Texas**

- **Introduction of the Bill**
  - **Drafting:** A legislator drafts a bill, which can start in either the House of Representatives or the Senate.
  - **Filing:** The bill is filed with the chief clerk of the originating chamber.
- **First Reading and Referral to Committee**
  - **First Reading:** The bill is read for the first time by its title.
  - **Referral:** The presiding officer refers the bill to an appropriate committee.
- **Committee Action**

- Consideration: The committee reviews the bill, holds hearings, and may make amendments.
  - Vote: The committee votes on whether to pass the bill. If passed, it goes to the full chamber.
- Second Reading and Floor Debate
  - Second Reading: The bill is read a second time in the full chamber.
  - Debate: Members debate the bill, propose amendments, and vote on the amendments.
  - Vote: The chamber votes on the bill. If passed, it moves to the third reading.
- Third Reading and Final Passage
  - Third Reading: The bill is read a third time.
  - Final Vote: The chamber takes a final vote. If passed, the bill moves to the other chamber.
- Repeat in the Other Chamber
  - The bill undergoes the same process (first reading, committee action, second reading, third reading, and final passage) in the other chamber.
- Conference Committee (if needed)
  - Differences: If the second chamber amends the bill, the originating chamber can agree to the amendments or request a conference committee.
  - Resolution: The conference committee, composed of members from both chambers, resolves differences and produces a final version.
  - Approval: Both chambers must approve the conference committee's version.
- Governor's Action
  - Signature: The Governor can sign the bill into law.
  - Veto: The Governor can veto the bill. The Legislature can override the veto with a two-thirds majority in both chambers.
  - No Action: If the Governor takes no action, the bill becomes law after 10 days (excluding Sundays) if the Legislature is in session, or 20 days if the session has ended.
- Becomes Law
  - Once signed by the Governor, overridden, or left unsigned, the bill becomes law and is codified into the Texas Statutes.

## **Ways to follow legislative updates:**

### **TLO** (<https://capitol.texas.gov/>):

Track particular bills as they move through the process, see which legislators are on each committee, watch hearings, etc... lots of good info!

### **X** (fka Twitter):

Follow the #txlege hashtag, and especially during legislative sessions, you'll see lots of information and updates from legislators. Also follow your state Senator or Representative to see what they're up to.

### **TxElects** (<https://txelects.com/>):

Paid subscription if you really like to get into the weeds of elections and candidate information.

## **Local Government Overview**

- County government handles broad administrative, law enforcement, and infrastructure responsibilities across large geographic areas.
- Municipal government focuses on local urban and suburban governance, with different structures depending on city size and charters.
- Special districts address specific needs like education, utilities, and healthcare, filling gaps that general county and city governments do not cover.

## **County Government**

Structure: Texas has 254 counties, each governed by a commissioners court, which consists of four commissioners and a county judge. The county judge presides over the court and has both administrative and judicial responsibilities.

Functions:

- Law Enforcement: Managed by the county sheriff.
- Public Health: Overseen by county health departments.
- Infrastructure: Maintenance of roads, bridges, and county facilities.
- Judicial Administration: Management of county courts, including district, county, and justice courts.

Key Officials:

- County Judge: Presides over the commissioners court and handles administrative duties.
- County Commissioners: Represent precincts within the county and make decisions on budget and policy.
- Sheriff: Oversees law enforcement and county jails.
- County Clerk: Manages records, including property deeds and marriage licenses.
- Tax Assessor-Collector: Collects property taxes and issues vehicle registrations.

## **Municipal Government**

Types:

- General Law Cities: Operate under state laws and have limited self-governance. A general law city has no charter and may only exercise those powers that are specifically granted or implied by statute.
- Home Rule Cities: Larger cities that adopt their own charters and have more autonomy. A home rule city may do anything authorized by its charter that is not specifically prohibited or preempted by the Texas Constitution or state or federal law.

***Note: Carrollton is a home rule city***

Forms of Government:

- Mayor-Council: The mayor has executive authority, and the council handles legislative functions. This can be either strong mayor (mayor has significant control) or weak mayor (mayor has limited control) system.
- Council-Manager: The council appoints a city manager to handle administrative operations, while the mayor and council focus on policy-making.

**Note: Carrollton has a council-manager form of government**

Functions:

- Public Safety: Police and fire departments.
- Utilities: Management of water, sewer, and electricity services.
- Zoning and Planning: Regulation of land use and development.
- Public Works: Maintenance of streets, parks, and public buildings.

### **Special Districts**

Purpose: Created to provide specific services that are not offered by counties or cities.

Common types include:

- School Districts: Manage public education within a specific area.
- Utility Districts: Provide water, sewage, and sometimes electricity.
- Hospital Districts: Manage public healthcare facilities.

Governance: Usually governed by an elected board of directors specific to the service they provide.

Key Points

### **Passing an ordinance in a home rule city**

In Texas, home rule cities have the authority to govern themselves with more autonomy than general law cities. This autonomy allows them to create and enforce ordinances (local laws) as long as they do not conflict with state or federal laws. Home rule cities have more flexibility in this process compared to general law cities, allowing them to tailor their laws to better meet the needs of their local communities.

Here's how the process typically works in a home rule city in Texas:

- Proposal: An ordinance can be proposed by a city council member, the mayor, a city department, or through a citizen initiative.

- **Drafting:** The city attorney or a legal department drafts the proposed ordinance. This involves writing the specific legal language and ensuring it aligns with state and federal laws.
- **Introduction:** The proposed ordinance is introduced at a city council meeting. This is usually the first reading, where the council members are presented with the draft and can discuss it.
- **Public Notice:** In many cases, the proposed ordinance must be publicly posted or published, allowing residents to review it. This ensures transparency and provides the public with an opportunity to provide feedback.
- **Public Hearing:** A public hearing may be held to gather input from residents. This allows citizens to voice their support, concerns, or opposition to the proposed ordinance.
- **Council Deliberation:** After the public hearing, the city council deliberates on the proposed ordinance. They may make amendments or revisions based on feedback and further discussion.
- **Voting:** The city council votes on the ordinance. In most cases, a simple majority is required for the ordinance to pass. However, certain types of ordinances might require a supermajority vote.
- **Adoption and Publication:** If the ordinance is approved, it is formally adopted and becomes law. The new ordinance is then published or posted publicly, often in a local newspaper or on the city's website.
- **Implementation:** The city administration and relevant departments implement the ordinance. This may involve creating new procedures, training staff, or allocating resources.
- **Enforcement:** The city enforces the new ordinance through its various departments, such as law enforcement or code compliance.



## **Elections**

### Election Administration

- Conducted by county election offices under the guidance of the Texas Secretary of State.
- Poll workers and election judges are appointed to oversee the voting process and ensure laws are followed.

### Election Results

- After polls close, votes are counted, and unofficial results are released.
- Official results are certified by the local canvassing authority and the Texas Secretary of State.

### Types

- **Primary Elections:**
  - Held in even-numbered years in March.
  - Parties select their nominees for the general election.
  - Two types: open primary (voters don't have to be party members) and closed primary (voters must be party members).
- **General Elections:**
  - Held on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November of even-numbered years.
  - Voters select candidates for various federal, state, and local offices.
- **Special Elections:**
  - Called as needed to fill vacancies or for issues like constitutional amendments or bond issues.
  - Can be held on uniform election dates set by the state.
- **Municipal Elections:**
  - Held for city officials and issues.
  - Often occur in May or November.
- **School Board Elections:**
  - Typically held in May.
  - Voters select members of local school boards.

## **Local Government Elections: Types of Issues and Positions Voted On**

In a local election in Texas, voters might encounter a variety of issues and positions to vote on, including:

### Local Government Officials:

- **Mayor:** The chief executive officer of a city or town.
- **City Council Members:** Representatives who make policy and budget decisions for the city.
- **County Commissioners:** Officials who serve on the county's governing body.
- **Sheriff:** The head law enforcement officer for the county.
- **School Board Members:** Individuals who oversee the local school district's policies and budget.

### Local Propositions and Referendums:

- **Bond Measures:** Proposals to raise funds through bonds for public projects like schools, roads, and parks.
- **Tax Changes:** Proposals to increase, decrease, or reallocate local taxes.
- **Local Ordinances:** Changes to local laws and regulations, such as zoning laws or public safety measures.

### Special Districts:

- **Utility Districts:** Board members who manage water, sewage, and other utilities.
- **Hospital Districts:** Governance of local public healthcare facilities.
- **Library Boards:** Oversight of public libraries and their services.

### Judicial Elections:

- **County Judges:** Judges who preside over various local courts, including probate, juvenile, and family courts.
- **District Judges:** Judges who handle more serious criminal and civil cases.

### Public Policy Issues:

- **Education Policies:** Decisions on school funding, curriculum changes, and school safety measures.
- **Public Health Initiatives:** Measures related to public health, such as smoking bans or vaccination mandates.
- **Infrastructure Projects:** Decisions on funding and development of local infrastructure like roads, bridges, and public transit.