

How Much Government Do We Have in Indiana? By Mark D. Brown

In Indiana, local government exists only at the behest of the State Constitution and Statute. The Constitution creates the following County Officers, who shall be elected: Clerk of the Circuit Court, Auditor, Recorder, Treasurer, Sheriff, Coroner, and Surveyor.¹ The Constitution also provides for the General Assembly to prescribe by law “such other county and township officers as may be necessary.”²

The other offices include the County Councils, Commissioners, and Assessors and Township Trustees, Assessors, and Boards. Municipalities are also created by the State and elected offices in cities and towns include mayors, city councils, and clerks. In addition, the General Assembly over the years has created a groaning (no, that is not a typo) number of “special” governmental districts that provide services to municipalities, counties, or multi-county regions.

The impact, since 1851, of the Constitution and the nearly 1,500 pages of statute in Title 36: Local Government – not to mention the statutes applicable to local governments in other Titles – is a very large number of locally elected officials, local governmental units, boards, authorities, districts, and other structures, the vast majority of which are able to levy property taxes.

Table 1 compares selected local government units in Indiana with those in states of similar population. The 11 states in Table 1 are those with populations between 4.5 million and 7.4 million, with Indiana’s population in 2002 being 6.2 million.

Indiana Among States of Similar Size Ranked by Number of Local Governments							
State	Total	State	Sub-county	State	Townships	State	Municipalities
Minnesota	3,137	Minnesota	2,647	Minnesota	1,793	Missouri	946
Missouri	2,886	Wisconsin	1,850	Wisconsin	1,265	Minnesota	854
Indiana	2,792	Indiana	1,575	Indiana	1,008	Wisconsin	585
Wisconsin	2,606	Missouri	1,258	Missouri	312	Indiana	567
Colorado	1,746	Massachusetts	351	Massachusetts	306	Tennessee	349
Washington	1,491	Tennessee	349	Tennessee	0	Washington	279
Tennessee	916	Washington	279	Colorado	0	Colorado	270
Massachusetts	759	Colorado	270	Virginia	0	Virginia	229
Virginia	520	Virginia	229	Washington	0	Maryland	157
Arizona	407	Maryland	157	Maryland	0	Arizona	87
Maryland	265	Arizona	87	Arizona	0	Massachusetts	45

Source: U.S. Census Bureau³

Excluding public schools, locally elected judges and prosecutors, Hoosiers elect over 10,300 local officials.⁴ These 10,000 elected offices lead and manage – sometimes through appointed administrators – 2,792 general purpose and special district governments. Of these, 2,076 exercised property taxing authority in recent years.⁵

Indiana has the third most local governments of the 11 states. It also has the third most sub-county governments (townships and municipalities combined) and the third most townships. Indiana has the fourth most municipalities. Only five of the 11 states utilize the township form of government. Similarly sized states in all regions of the country - the east, west, north, south, and Midwest - all have fewer governments than Indiana.

**Number of Governmental Units in Indiana
and Number per 1,000 Population
Rank among 50 States**

Local Government Type	Number	Rank	per 1,000 Population	Rank
Total - All Types	2,792	9	0.5	16
Sub-County	1,575	9	0.25	10
Municipalities	567	12	0.09	21
Townships	1,008	9	0.16	10
Special District	1,125	11	0.18	19

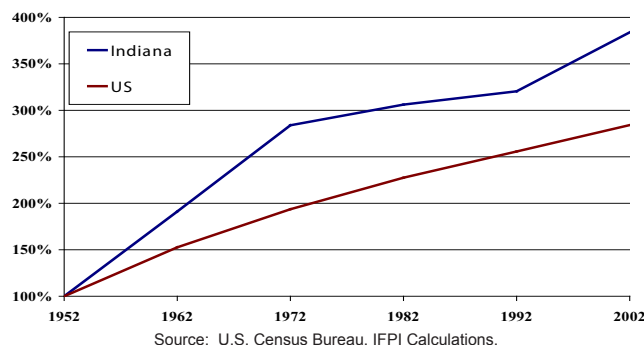
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, IFPI Calculations.

Of course, there are 50 states of all sizes. When comparing Indiana to all 50, one finds that Indiana ranks consistently between about 10th and 20th both in terms of the number of governments and the number of governments relative to population. Indiana has the ninth most townships among the 50 states and the 10th most townships relative to population.

A special note on Special Districts: The Census Bureau defines special district governments as “independent, special purpose governmental units that exist as separate entities with substantial administrative and fiscal independence from general purpose local governments.” They provide specific services that are not being supplied by existing general-purpose governments.⁶

Special districts increased in Indiana from 293 in 1952 to 1,125 in 2002, about a four-fold increase. During the same period for the 50 states combined, the number of special districts increased from 12,340 in 1952 to 35,052 in 2002, or about a three-fold increase. In Indiana, the large number of general purpose governments has not obviated the need to create special districts at a rate 30 percent faster than the rest of the states.

**Increase in Special Government Districts
Indiana and U.S. - 1952 to 2002**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, IFPI Calculations.

Perhaps it is time for State Government to revisit the need for over 10,000 separately elected officials operating and managing nearly 2,800 separate governments, of which 2,076 levy property taxes. Surely, as a State, we would not design local government this way if we started with a clean slate today, in 2007.

1. Constitution of Indiana, Article 6, Section 2.
2. Ibid, Article 6, Section 3.
3. Most of this data is well known and easily obtainable. However, the numbers of elected officials serving on town boards is not kept on a statewide basis. IFPI staff obtained this information via a telephone conversation with the Indiana Association of Cities and Towns.
4. U.S. Census Bureau, 2002 Census of Governments, Volume 1, Number 1, Government Organization, GC02(1)-1, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, 2002. Population numbers obtained from Table 1: Annual Estimates of the Population for the United States, Regions, and States and for Puerto Rico: April 1, 2000 to July 1, 2006 (NST-EST2006-01) Source: Population Division, U.S. Census Bureau Release Date: December 22, 2006.
5. Of course, the property tax issue is even more complex than stated here. The judicial system and state government (through the Family and Childrens' Fund) impose property taxes indirectly. But that is for another analysis.
6. U.S. Census Bureau, 2002 Census of Governments, Volume 1, Number 1, Government Organization, GC02(1)-1, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, 2002. page vii.

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