

ARIZONA

COUNTY GOVERNMENT OVERVIEW

Counties

15

Government Form

Traditional¹

Governing Body Size

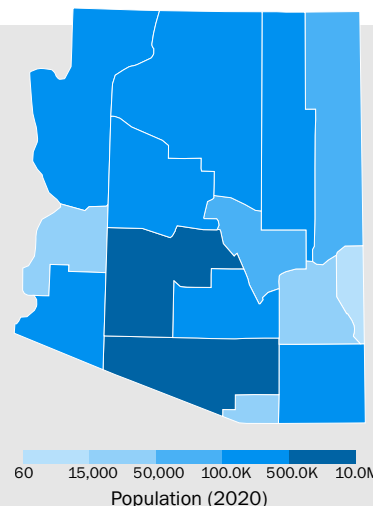
3-5

Population (2020)

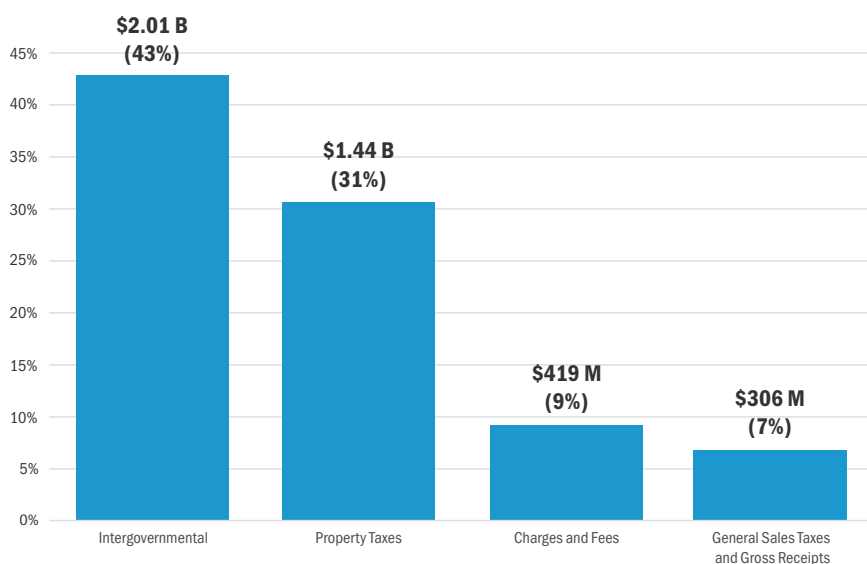
7.2 million²

County Authority

Mixed/Restrictive (Mostly Dillon's Rule): All Arizona counties are governed under Dillon's Rule, and are limited to the authorities the state legislature explicitly grants. Counties with a population over 500,000 have the option to adopt a charter, but this option currently only applies to Maricopa and Pima counties, neither of which have adopted a charter.



TOP REVENUE SOURCES FOR ARIZONA COUNTIES



Source: NACo Analysis of U.S. Census Bureau - Census of Individual Governments: Finance, 2017

¹"Government Form" refers to the distribution of executive decision making authority in a county.

"Traditional" county states mandate that counties exercise executive decision making power solely through the board of elected officials (commissioners, supervisors, etc.). "Reformed" county states mandate that counties employ an elected or appointed county executive, manager or similar position to take on at least some of the county's executive decision making authority. "Mixed" county states means that some counties in that state are "traditional" and some are "reformed."

²NACo Analysis of U.S. Census Bureau - 2020 Decennial Census

Summary of County Services

Services counties MUST provide:

- Establish a county department of health.
- Provide emergency management, including preparedness, response, recovery and mitigation activities.
- Plan and provide for future county growth and improvement.
- Provide opportunities to engage in recycling and waste reduction.

Services counties MAY provide:

- Build dikes, levees or other structures to control flood waters or lessen their destructive effects.
- Maintain a county library.

Services counties CANNOT provide:

- Own a commercial cable television system or pay television system.

STRUCTURE/AUTHORITY

SUMMARY

All Arizona counties are governed by a board of three to five supervisors which have authority over both the legislative and executive government powers. Whether a county has three supervisors or five is based on the county's population. Every county also appoints a chief administrative officer. Boards of supervisors have several powers and duties, including the supervision of all row officers. Despite being governed under general law, counties maintain broad jurisdiction and autonomy over many essential functions, including the ability to declare a local emergency. Unlike some other Dillon's Rule states, Arizona counties may determine exactly how they divide up election districts.



COUNTY STRUCTURE

Legislative Branch: A board of three to five county supervisors acts as the sole legislative decision-making body.

Executive Branch: The board of county supervisors also acts as the sole executive decision-making body.

Judicial Branch: The superior court is a single entity that has locations in each of the 15 counties and is the general jurisdiction court. In the superior court system, each court is entitled to one superior court judge and one additional judge for every 30,000 county residents. State law contains a provision for election and/or merit selection of judges. Superior courts act as appellate courts for judgments issued by justice courts and municipal courts. The superior court has jurisdiction over tort, contract, real property rights regarding amounts over \$5,000, exclusive estate, mental health, miscellaneous civil, misdemeanor, miscellaneous criminal, exclusive felony, criminal appeals and juvenile cases.

Optional Forms of Government: All counties are governed by a board of three to five supervisors that performs legislative and executive duties and have an appointed administrator who oversees internal government management. There are no alternative forms of county government.

Row Officers	Elected/ Appointed	Mandatory/ Optional
Assessor	Elected	Mandatory
Clerk of the Board	Appointed	Mandatory
Clerk of the Court	Elected	Mandatory
Constable	Elected	Mandatory
County Attorney	Elected	Mandatory
Engineer	Appointed	Optional
Justice of the Peace	Elected	Mandatory
Medical Examiner	Appointed	Optional
Public Defender	Appointed	Optional
Recorder	Elected	Mandatory
School Superintendent	Elected	Mandatory
Sheriff	Elected	Mandatory
Treasurer	Elected	Mandatory



COUNTY AUTHORITY

Executive Power: All Arizona counties have executive powers that include the supervision of official conduct of all county officers, managing election precincts, selling public property and erecting public buildings. A county may also purchase land, make contracts to purchase and hold personal property and levy and collect taxes.

Ability to Form Partnerships: Counties may contract with a municipality to provide emergency fire or medical services. Counties with an animal control county enforcement agent may also enter agreements with foundations or charitable organizations to solicit donations, property or services to perform non-mandated services and to fund capital improvements for animal control. Counties may also contract with federal, state or local governments to provide welfare services.

Call a State of Emergency: The chairman of a board of supervisors may declare an emergency for the unincorporated portions of a county in response to any natural or human-made disaster or threat of disaster which endangers life or property within the county.

Special Districts: Arizona has approximately 300 special districts consisting of around 40 different types including fire and irrigation districts. Counties may organize many types of special district, usually in response to a citizen petition.

SERVICES

OVERVIEW OF COUNTY SERVICES

As a Dillon's Rule state, most services that Arizona counties may provide must be explicitly authorized by the state legislature. Counties may provide most public buildings that are necessary for the health, safety and benefit of residents within unincorporated areas, including hospitals, jails and courthouses. There is also a large focus on environmental conservation through laws that permit or require counties to provide services such as recycling and waste reduction opportunities, as well as renewable energy incentive districts. Boards of supervisors have a great deal of authority over land use and programs for developing affordable housing. Unlike many other states, school superintendents are employed by county governments instead of the state to support the administration of local education.



PUBLIC AMENITIES

Parks and Recreation: Counties **may** establish a parks and recreation department. The board of supervisors may establish a county parks commission or may supervise and control all county parks and recreation programs. The board may also levy a tax for the acquisition and maintenance of public parks.

Libraries: A board of county supervisors **may** establish and maintain a free library district for the county and for all incorporated municipalities within the county that choose to participate in the district.

County Fair: The board of supervisors **may** establish a county fair fund supplied by the general fund. The board may use the fund for a county fair, a district fair with two or more counties or an exhibit of the county's resources at the state fair.

Art Organizations: The board of supervisors **may** establish an arts support fund supplied by the general fund to support arts organizations within the county, including within incorporated cities and towns.

Sports Development: The board of supervisors of a county with a population of more than 1.5 million **may** fund stadium development planning and sports-related economic development activities.



INFRASTRUCTURE

Roads: A board of supervisors **may** lay out, maintain, control and manage public roads and bridges within the county and may levy taxes for those purposes. A highway in the county may be altered by the county engineer's recommendation, by a petition of county residents or by the request of the governing body of an incorporated city or town.

Renewable Energy Incentive Districts: The board of supervisors **may** designate a renewable energy incentive district in unincorporated areas of the county. Renewable energy incentive districts must adopt a renewable energy incentive plan to encourage the construction and operation of renewable energy equipment in the district.

Flood Water Control Works: Counties **may** build dikes, levees or other structures to control flood waters.

Recycling and Trash: A county **must** provide its residents with an opportunity to engage in recycling and waste reduction.

Utilities:

- **Sewage:** Any county with a population between 1 and 2 million **may** purchase, construct and operate a sewage system and may charge fees and levy taxes to cover the expenses.
- **Onsite Wastewater:** Counties **must** review and approve onsite wastewater systems.
- **Well Permit Review:** Counties **must** review well permits for referral to the Arizona Department of Water Resources on parcels of five acres and smaller.

Commercial Cable Television: A county **cannot** own a commercial cable or pay television system, except for in a license transfer or sale.

SERVICES, CONTINUED



HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

County Health Department: Counties **must** establish a county department of health or a public health services district. Counties must also appoint a board for the department of health, which may adopt fees for issuing permits and other services.

Environmental Health: Counties **must** provide for general public health and safety within the county and must appoint and oversee a public health director. Counties must also ensure health and safety in food establishments, public accommodations and recreational health.

Indigent Burials: Counties **must** provide aid for persons who died within the county if they or their next of kin do not have the resources for the cost.

Accessibility: Counties **must** ensure effective communication for people with disabilities.

Mental Health: Counties with a population under 600,000 **must** provide behavioral health care for people with severe mental illness. Other counties must maintain intergovernmental agreements with the state department of health services to provide these services.

Welfare: Counties **may** implement programs to provide services to senior citizens or persons with disabilities and may contract for the provision of related services, including nursing care, transportation and nutrition.

Hospitals: Counties **may** establish hospitals, but generally do not. Instead, counties pay into the state's health care programs.

Health Care: Counties **must** pay part of the state matching funds to access federal resources, but have no administrative responsibility over the state's Medicaid and long-term care programs.



ZONING AND DEVELOPMENT

Zoning Power: The board of supervisors **must** plan and provide for future growth and improvement, and coordinate public improvements. The board may also adopt a zoning ordinance to conserve and promote the public health, safety, convenience and general welfare of the county.

Zoning Supervision: A board of county supervisors **may** form a planning and zoning commission to provide advice regarding matters of planning, zoning and subdivision platting and adopt and enforce those rules, regulations, ordinances and plans.

Zoning Restriction: Zoning ordinances **cannot** affect existing uses of property, nor the right to its continued use, repair or alteration. If the tract concerned is five or more contiguous commercial acres, zoning ordinances cannot prevent, restrict or regulate the use of the land for railroad, mining, metallurgical, grazing, general agricultural purposes or agricultural composting.

Building Codes: The board of supervisors **may** adopt and enforce building codes. They may also may establish and charge reasonable fees for permits and inspections.

Rural Planning Areas: The board of supervisors a county with a population of less than 400,000 **may** form a rural planning area in any unincorporated area if they receive signed petitions by the owners of the property within that area.

Housing Authority: Counties **may** create a housing authority and may delegate to that authority the board's power to acquire, own, maintain and dispose of real estate and to construct, maintain, operate and manage housing projects. Housing authorities may also be empowered by the board to borrow money, issue bonds and acquire real property through eminent domain.

Housing Trust Fund: Counties **may**, establish a county housing trust fund to be used to provide affordable housing opportunities for low-income households.

Economic Development: Counties **may** appropriate up to \$1.5 million each year for economic development activity in the county for the benefit of the public.

SERVICES, CONTINUED



PUBLIC SAFETY

Law Enforcement: County sheriffs **must** supervise the common jails and provide juvenile detention. Counties also must provide prosecution of state crimes, public defense and probation services.

Courthouses: Any county **may** erect and furnish a courthouse. There is a superior court in each county and locally established justice courts.

Fire: A county **may** create a fire district if it promotes public health, safety, welfare or convenience. A fire district is run by an appointed board, which may employ personnel and provide services.

Ambulance: A county that wishes to operate an ambulance service **must** apply to the state department of health services. Currently only Greenlee County operates an ambulance service.

Emergency Management Agency: Each county **must** provide emergency management, including disaster preparedness, response, recovery and mitigation. The chairperson or board of a county may appoint a director who is responsible for the organization, administration and operation of local emergency management programs.



SCHOOLS

Education, Generally: Multiple counties **may** form joint common school districts.

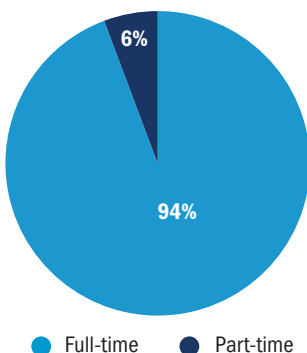
School Superintendent: The office of county school superintendent receives and spends local, state and federal funding to provide programs and services for public education.

School Districts: School districts **must** prescribe and enforce policies and procedures in line with the state board of education.

Community Colleges: Community college districts **may** be organized by one or more counties or existing community college districts. Community colleges are governed by separately elected boards.

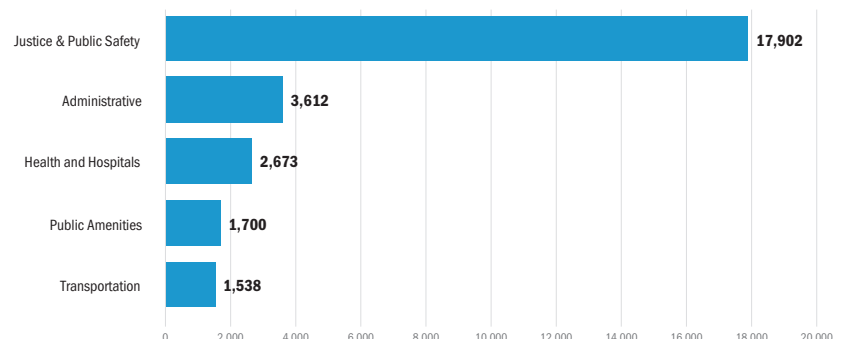
Jail Education Program: Counties that operate a jail **must** provide an education program to serve prisoners under the age of 21. The county school superintendent and the sheriff in each county must plan the method for delivery of the education program.

ARIZONA COUNTIES EMPLOY 30,975 GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES



Source: NACo Analysis of U.S. Census Bureau - Census of Individual Governments: Employment, 2017

ARIZONA COUNTY GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES BY TOP FUNCTIONAL CATEGORIES



Source: NACo Analysis of U.S. Census Bureau - Census of Individual Governments: Employment, 2017

OVERVIEW OF COUNTY FINANCE STRUCTURE

As a Dillon's Rule state, Arizona does not authorize counties to levy and collect taxes for any purposes beyond those otherwise specifically authorized by statute. Arizona counties' property tax levy growth is limited to 2 percent annually plus any new construction. Counties may, however, levy excise taxes in various forms, including a general, transportation, jail and public health excise tax. In addition to the general fund, a board of supervisors must have a special county school reserve fund for school transportation purposes, and may establish an energy and water savings account. Typically, counties in Arizona are limited to a debt of 6 percent of the taxable property within the county; however, they may increase the maximum limit to 15 percent if they have the assent of a majority of qualified voters that pay property taxes.



FINANCES, TAXES AND LIMITATIONS

Property Tax: Counties **may** impose property taxes. Each year, the maximum amount of property taxes levied by any county cannot exceed an amount 2 percent greater than the amount levied in the preceding year.

Personal Property: Counties **may** assess both real and personal property for tax purposes.

Income Tax: Counties **cannot** impose an income tax.

Sales Tax: A county with a population of less than 1.5 million on a unanimous vote of the board of supervisors **may** levy and collect a county general excise tax on transactions made in the county. The rate may not exceed 0.5 cents on the dollar. Other sales tax authorities available to the county require voter approval and may be used for dedicated purposes (e.g. transportation, jails, public health).

Mineral Tax: Counties receive a portion of a **state** levied mining severance tax.

Gas/Fuel Taxes: Counties receive a portion of a **state** levied gas tax.

Debt and Debt Limit:

- **General:** Counties **cannot** incur a debt of more than 6 percent of the taxable property in the county unless they have assent from a majority of property taxpayers that are qualified voters. Even if they have assent, the debt cannot exceed 15 percent.

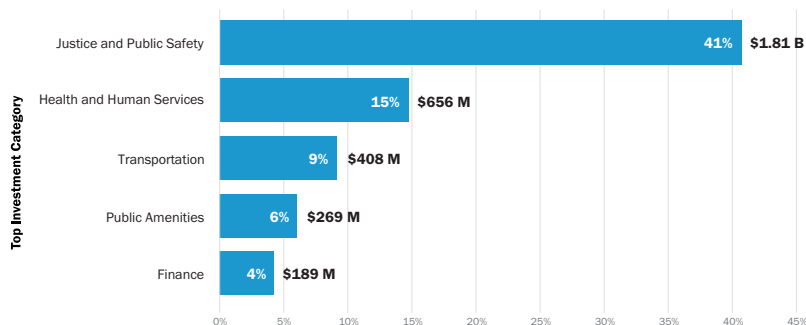
- **Flood Control:** For purposes of flood control, a board of supervisors **may** issue certificates of indebtedness against the general fund at a rate not exceeding 15 percent of all assessed taxable property within the county.

Other Finance Info:

- **County Road Maintenance Tax:** A board of supervisors **may** refer to the voters a dedicated sales tax to support county road maintenance.
- **Regional Transportation Excise:** If approved by voters, a regional transportation authority **may** levy and collect a transportation excise tax.
- **Energy and Water Savings Account:** The board of supervisors **may** establish an energy and water savings account consisting of capital investment money to fund energy or water savings projects in county facilities.
- **Parks Tax:** A board of supervisors **may** levy a tax for the acquisition and maintenance of public parks, or it may appropriate otherwise unappropriated funds for such purpose.
- **Hotel Excise:** In unincorporated areas, counties with a population between 500,000 and 2,500,000 **may** levy and collect a tax on the gross proceeds of sales or gross income from the business for hotel lodging at a rate not to exceed 6 percent.

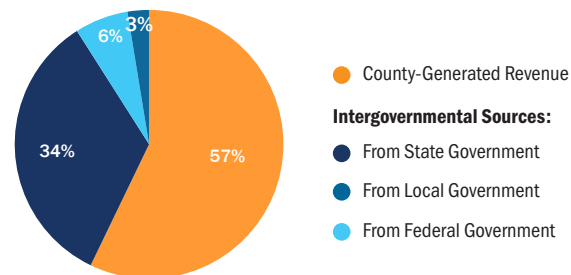
TAXATION/FINANCES, CONTINUED

ARIZONA COUNTIES INVEST \$4.5 BILLION ANNUALLY



Source: NACo Analysis of U.S. Census Bureau - Census of Individual Governments: Finance, 2017

ARIZONA COUNTIES RECEIVE \$2 BILLION FROM INTERGOVERNMENTAL SOURCES



Source: NACo Analysis of U.S. Census Bureau - Census of Individual Governments: Finance, 2017