



Local Government in Texas: Cities Part II

It is a source of much astonishment and of considerable severe comment upon the religious character of our city, that while we have a theater, a courthouse, a jail and even a capital in Houston, we have not a single church.

The Morning Star, a Houston newspaper, June 18, 1839

Election Methods in Texas Cities



- The terms, salaries and method of election are determined by city charter in home rule cities and by the state in general law cities.
- generally 2 to 4 year terms of office
- term limits allowed (not required) in home rule cities
- **non-partisan elections**: candidates' names appear on the ballot without party designation and parties may not nominate a candidate for office
- permit organized groups interested in some private or single-issue cause to run their own slates of candidates under the guise of civic organizations interested solely in efficient and responsive government



Election Methods in Texas Cities



- The type of electoral method used in cities indicates how rewards and deprivations are distributed.
- **plurality** (winner is candidate with most votes) or **majority** (winner receives 50%+ of votes) vote to win
- **uniform election dates for offices** (Most can only be held on a date designated in the Texas Election Code.) ... **special elections for referendums and bonds**

One-party complacency, and an uncommon tendency to attack Washington for all ills, have engendered a lingering suspicion of government of any kind.

journalist Willie Morris

Election Methods in Texas Cities: At-Large Elections



- ...a method for choosing public officials in which all voters select all of the members of the council and vote for as many candidates as there are seats
- With at-large elections, all voters can vote for all seats up for election.
- All at-large members are elected to **serve the same constituency**, which is the population of the city as a whole.
- Defenders argue that council members chosen at-large **consider policy issues from a broader perspective** than council members chosen from districts.

Election Methods in Texas Cities: At-Large Elections



- Defenders believe that city-wide campaigns produce **better quality officials** than do district elections because the candidate pool is larger.

- However, at-large elections can **weaken the representation of particular groups**, especially if the group does not have a city-wide base of operations, such as an ethnic or racial group concentrated in a specific area.
- At-large elections tend to be **more popular in small cities and more affluent areas**.

Four Year Term (Vote for Two)	
Brian E. Arnold	<input type="radio"/>
Dave Gruber	<input type="radio"/>
Reid Hettich	<input type="radio"/>
Allison Hiltz	<input type="radio"/>
Tim Huffman	<input type="radio"/>
Abel Læke	<input type="radio"/>
Tom Tobiassen	<input type="radio"/>
Russ Wagner	<input type="radio"/>

Election Methods in Texas Cities: By-Place Elections



- ...a method for choosing public officials in which every citizen of a city votes to select public officials running for numbered places or seats
- In the place system, candidates run only against other candidates who have filed for a particular seat, but voting is still city-wide.
- In at-large councils, the candidates all run against one another, and those receiving the most votes are elected. In councils with numbered places, **candidates choose which place to run for, effectively choosing who they wish to run against.**

Election Methods in Texas Cities: Cumulative-Voting Elections



- ...an election method that allows individual voters to cast more than one ballot in the simultaneous election of several officials
- Voters cast as many votes as there are seats but are not limited to giving only one vote to a candidate. Instead, they can put multiple votes on one or more candidates.
- For example, in an election for a five-seat council, a voter could choose to give one vote each to five candidates, two votes to one candidate and three to another, or all five votes to a single candidate.

You may offer up to 3 votes.			
1	2	3	
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Joe Smith
<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Henry Ford
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Jane Doe
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Fred Rubble
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	Mary Hill

Election Methods in Texas Cities: Cumulative-Voting Elections

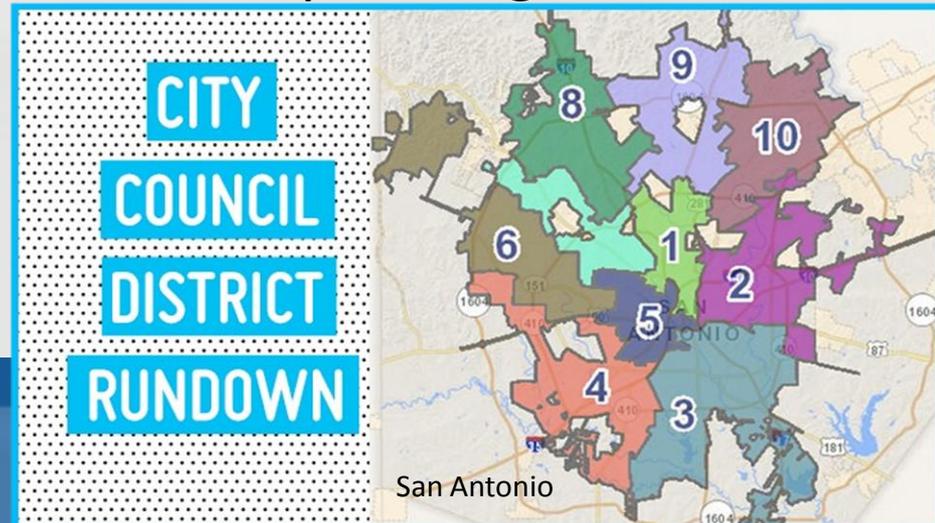


- The difference between at-large and cumulative voting is that the cumulative method allows voters to cast all their votes for a single candidate.
- If members of a minority group work together and get behind a single candidate, **plumping** (concentrating voting power on candidates a voter supports) all of their votes on him/her, they can hope to get someone elected, even if they only make up a small share of the population.

Election Methods in Texas Cities: District Elections



- ...a method for choosing public officials in which a city is divided into districts, with each district electing one official
- These elections select a single council member from a corresponding geographic section of the city.
- In a district method, which is increasingly used by Texas cities over 50,000 population, candidates must live in the district they wish to represent and voters choose only among candidates within their district.



Election Methods in Texas Cities: District Elections



- Supporters argue that district elections make government **more responsive to citizens and increase participation**, giving groups with a geographic base a better chance of being represented, especially minority groups.
- Supporters believe district elections **reduce the role of money** in city politics and **officials are more sensitive to the small but important problems** of their constituents, like waste disposal.
- However, councils elected by district elections **may experience more infighting** and be **less likely to prioritize the good of the city** over the good of their district.

Election Methods in Texas Cities: Mixed Elections



Some municipalities **combine methods**, for example by electing some officials at-large and some from districts. An individual runs for and, if elected, occupies either a district seat or an at-large seat.



Election Methods in Texas Cities



Method of Election	Number of Cities Using System
At-large election by place	131
At-large election	36
District election	74
Combination of district and at-large seats	48
Cumulative voting	1

Election Methods in Texas Cities: At-Large vs. District Elections



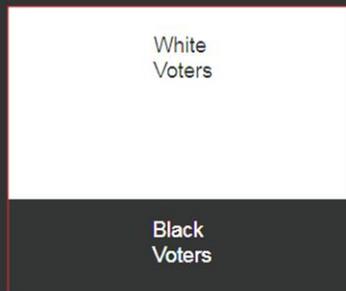
- The adoption of at-large council elections in Texas limited the political influence of ethnic and racial minorities, primarily African Americans and Latinos.
- Very few minorities were able to win council seats in Texas cities under the at-large method.
- The Voting Rights Act provided a means for minority rights groups to attack election methods they considered discriminatory.
- **Voting Rights Act (VRA)**: federal law designed to protect the voting rights of racial and ethnic minorities

Election Methods in Texas Cities: At-Large vs. District Elections



- In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the VRA allowed voters to file lawsuits in federal court challenging local election laws and procedures that were discriminatory against minority voters.
- The outcome of VRA cases forced many cities to abandon at-large elections and adopt district elections.
- The introduction of district elections led to the selection of city councils in most big cities that were more ethnically and racially diverse than ever before.

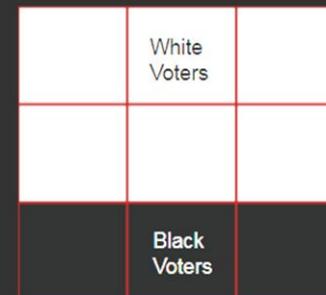
How At-Large Systems Dilute



- City X
 - 9 seats
 - 2/3 White
 - 1/3 Black

Likely result of at-large elections: 9 White council members

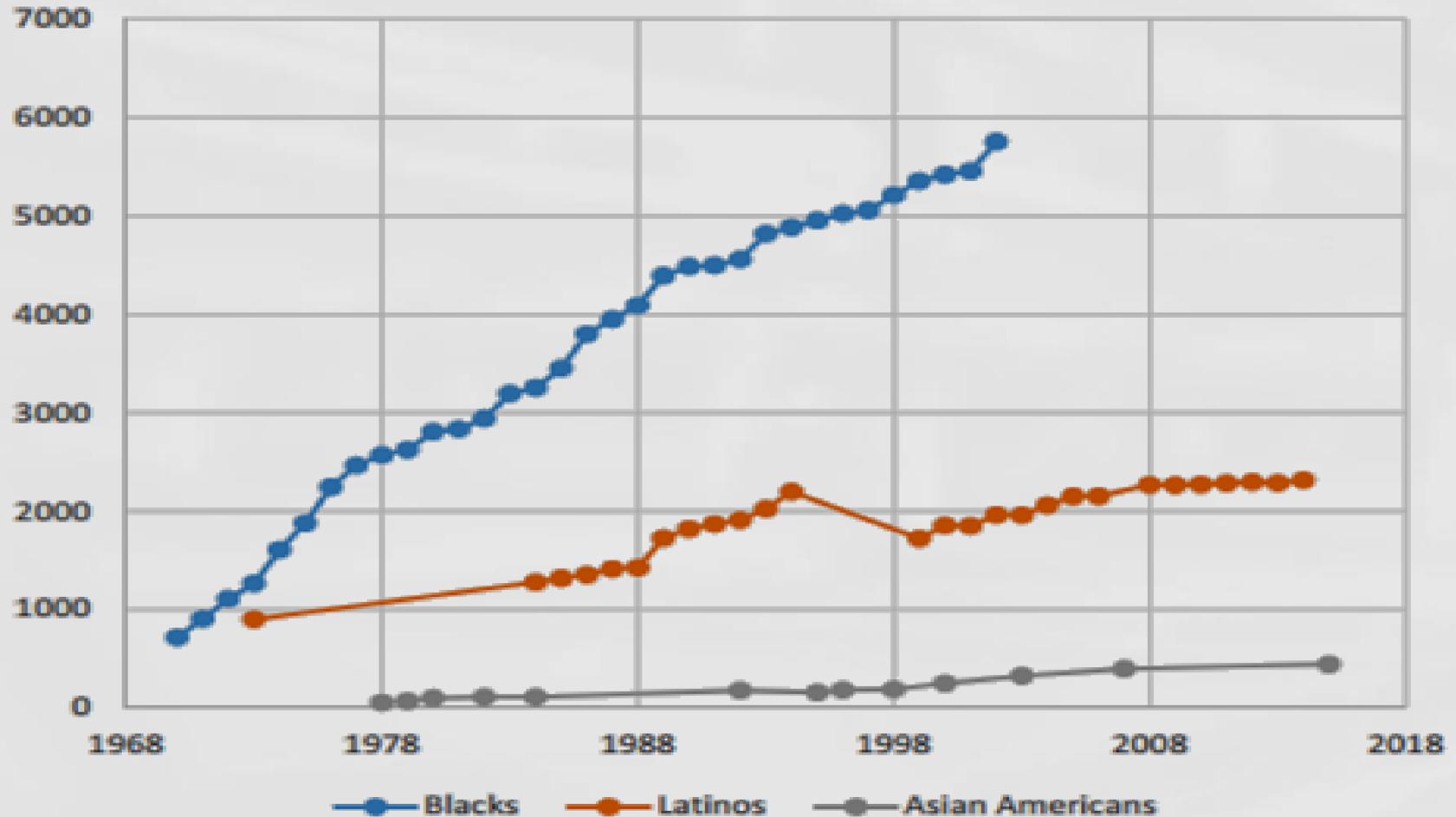
How District Systems Help



- City X
 - 9 seats
 - 2/3 White
 - 1/3 Black

Likely result of district elections: 6 White council members, 3 Black

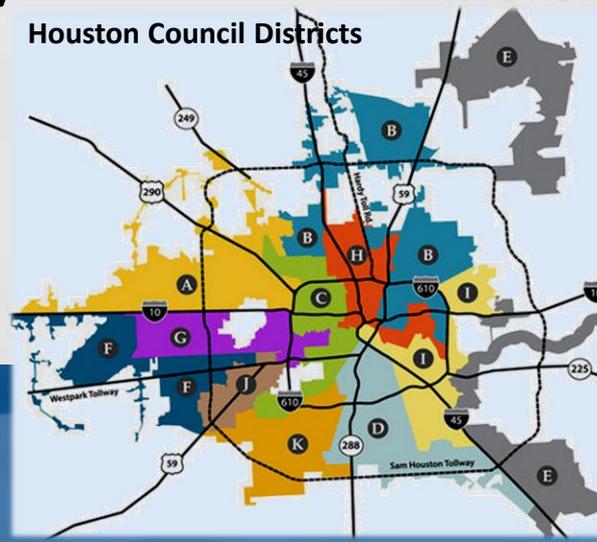
Minorities in Local Offices in Texas



Election Methods in Texas Cities: At-Large vs. District Elections



- Running in districts costs less money and has the advantage of allowing minority candidates to concentrate their campaigns in minority neighborhoods.
- Advocates of at-large and by-place elections suggest that they focus attention on city-wide concerns while **district elections result in a fragmented council**, but proponents of district elections think they make councils **more representative and so more democratic**.



Election Methods in Texas Cities: Partisan vs. Nonpartisan Elections

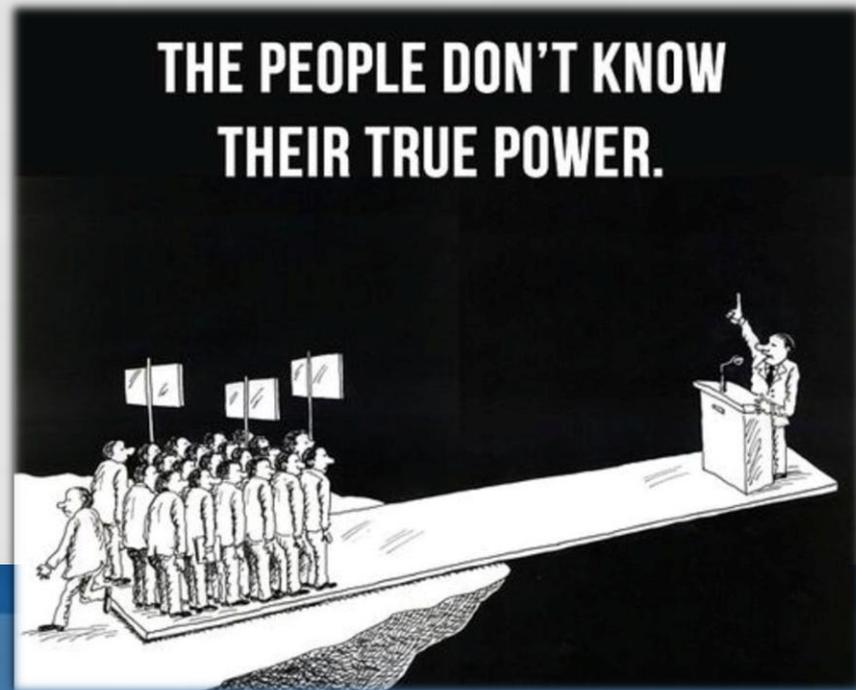


- Critics say nonpartisan elections often hinge on personalities and rob the community of organized opposition to the government in power.
- Proponents say that the absence of party labels permits local elections to focus on local issues, rather than be confused with state and national political issues.
 - Texas city drops Israel boycott ban for individuals but says businesses must still reject BDS to get hurricane aid
 - The Partisans Are Coming for Your Cities and Schools: Democrats and Republicans are turning non-partisan elections partisan

Election Methods in Texas Cities: Low Voter Turnout



At-large elections, nonpartisan voting and holding elections in the spring contribute to low voter turnout and this in turn further helps to perpetuate the dominant position of the white middle-class business community.



Public Policies in Texas Cities: Policy Categories



- Urban public policies can be divided into three categories: development, redistributive and allocational.
- **development policies**
 - enhance the economic position of a community in its competition with other communities
 - strengthen the local economy, expand the tax base and generate additional tax revenues



Public Policies in Texas Cities: Policy Categories



• redistributive policies

- local programs that benefit low-income residents of an area
- include such programs as the provision of low-income housing and food assistance to poor families

• allocational policies

- programs that are more or less neutral in their impact on the local economy
- examples include police and fire protection, garbage pickup and routine street maintenance



Public Policies in Texas Cities: Policy Categories



- Economic factors and political factors play an important role in urban policymaking.
 - For example, cities concentrate on developmental and allocational programs in order to enhance their tax bases and protect the local economy.
 - City governments frequently adopt developmental policies that entail building entertainment centers such as sports stadiums and convention centers designed to attract visitors from out-of-town and from the suburbs.
- Urban public policies deal with budgetary policies (revenues and expenditures), tax incentives, and annexation and suburban development policies.

Public Policies in Texas Cities: Municipal Revenues



- property taxes: a major source of city revenue
 - **property tax / *ad valorem* property tax**: a tax assessed on real property such as houses, land, business inventory and industrial plants
 - The maximum property tax rate of a general-law city is \$1.50 per \$100 of the assessed value of a city's property.
 - Property taxes are based on the value of a property, as estimated by the appraisal district in each county. The appraisal is intended to reflect the market value of a property.



Public Policies in Texas Cities: Municipal Revenues



- property taxes
 - **Single-family homes** account for 45% of the taxable property value in Texas.
 - **Commercial property**, including apartments, and **industrial property** together account for 37% of statewide taxable value.
 - **Agricultural land** accounts for only 0.8% of the taxable value. The taxable value of farm, ranch and timberland is set by the land's capacity to produce agricultural products, rather than on its full market value. This special treatment (popularly known as the **ag exemption**) reduces the value of qualified acreage by 94%, causing a loss of \$2.7 billion in property tax revenue.

Public Policies in Texas Cities: Municipal Revenues



• property tax exemptions

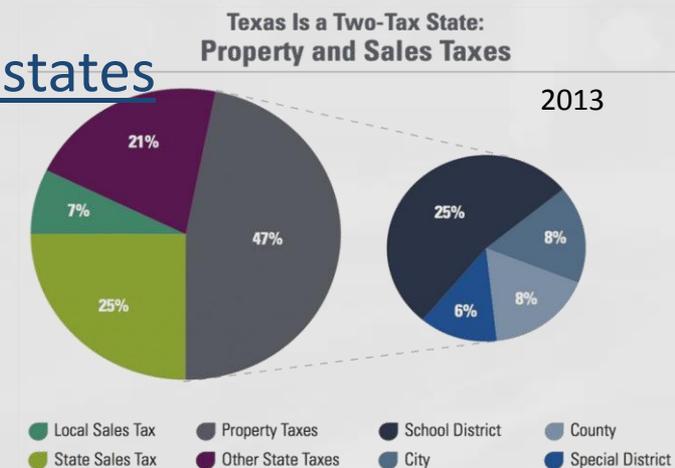
- City governments may grant property tax breaks called exemptions to certain categories of taxpayers such as homeowners, elderly residents or disabled veterans.
- Because of exemptions local governments lose out on billions of dollars in revenue.
- In 2010, property in Texas had a total market value of \$2.1 trillion. Property tax exemptions and special treatments of \$465 billion reduced this amount by 22% to a taxable value of \$1.6 trillion.



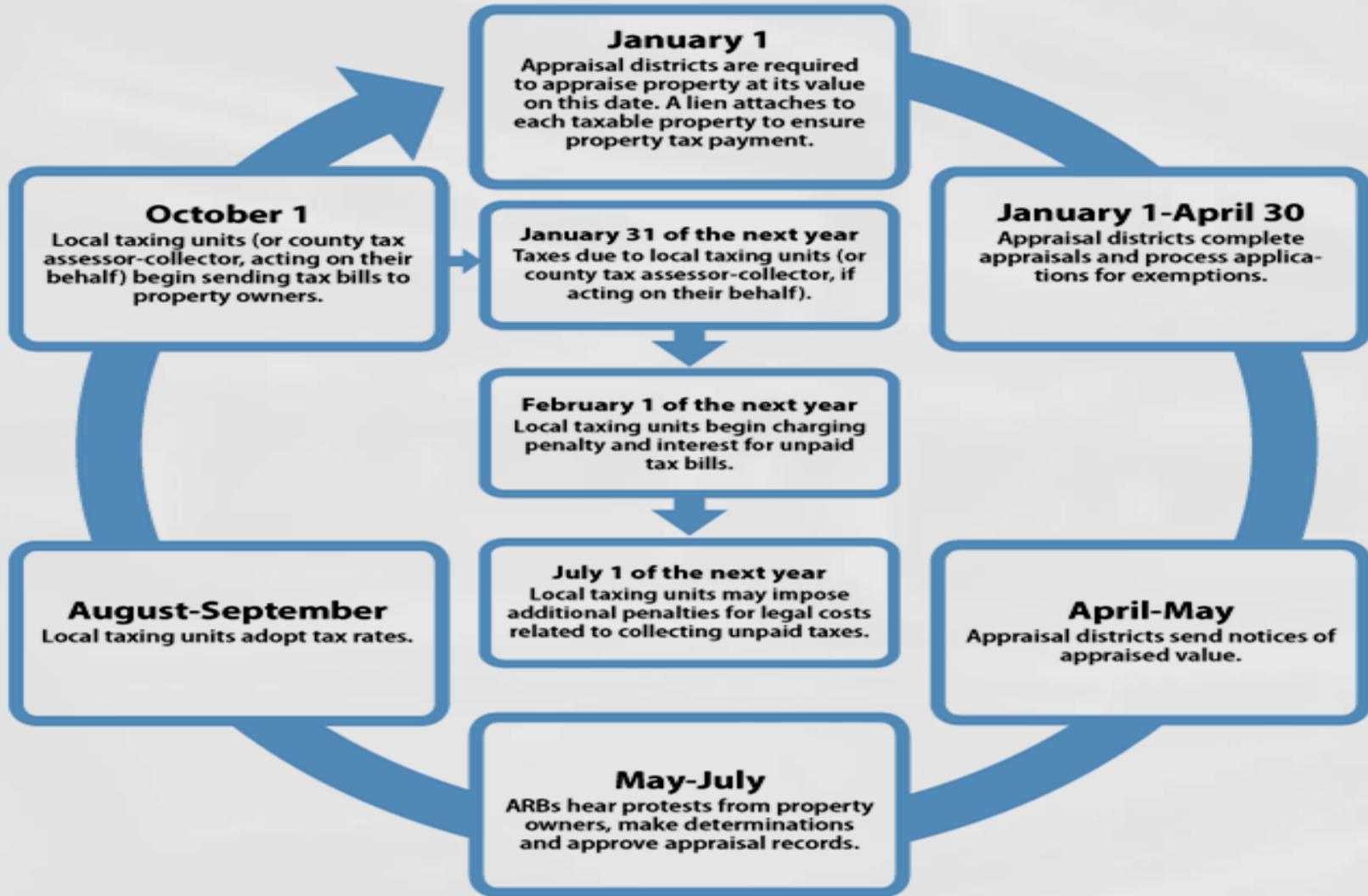
Public Policies in Texas Cities: Municipal Revenues



- property tax exemptions
 - The most common exemption is the **homestead exemption**: a property tax reduction granted to homeowners on their principal residence.
 - average 2017 property taxes paid: \$2,658.53
 - Comparing homestead exemption in the states



The Property Tax Process in Texas



Public Policies in Texas Cities: Municipal Revenues



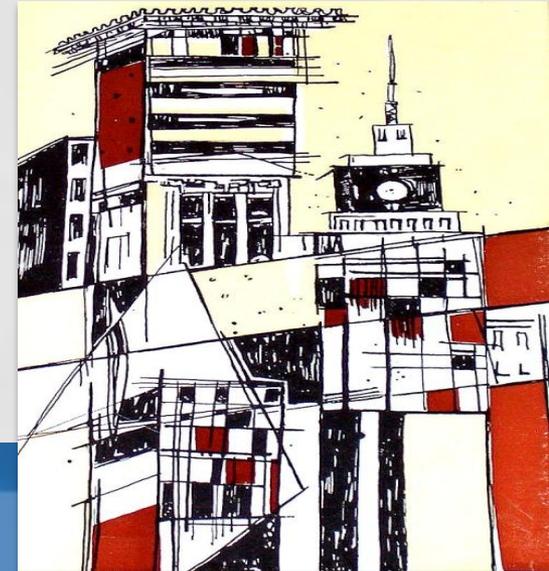
- **sales tax**: another major source of revenue for municipal governments ... a tax on the retail sale of taxable items
- **franchise fees**: the rents that utility companies pay the city to use the right-of-ways (ROW) for their lines, pipes, poles, etc
- permits and licenses
- **service charges**: water and sewer service, etc



Public Policies in Texas Cities: Municipal Revenues



- fines
- interest earnings
- **loans**: City governments borrow money by issuing **bonds** (certificates of indebtedness) to cover the cost of capital improvements such as the construction of buildings, airports, roads and utility plants.
- federal grants
 - [Federal Funding in Texas](#)
- other sources
- [Where Do Texas Cities Get Their Money?](#)



Mary Sloan's Stylized Dallas Skyline

Federal Earmarks for Texas, 2004



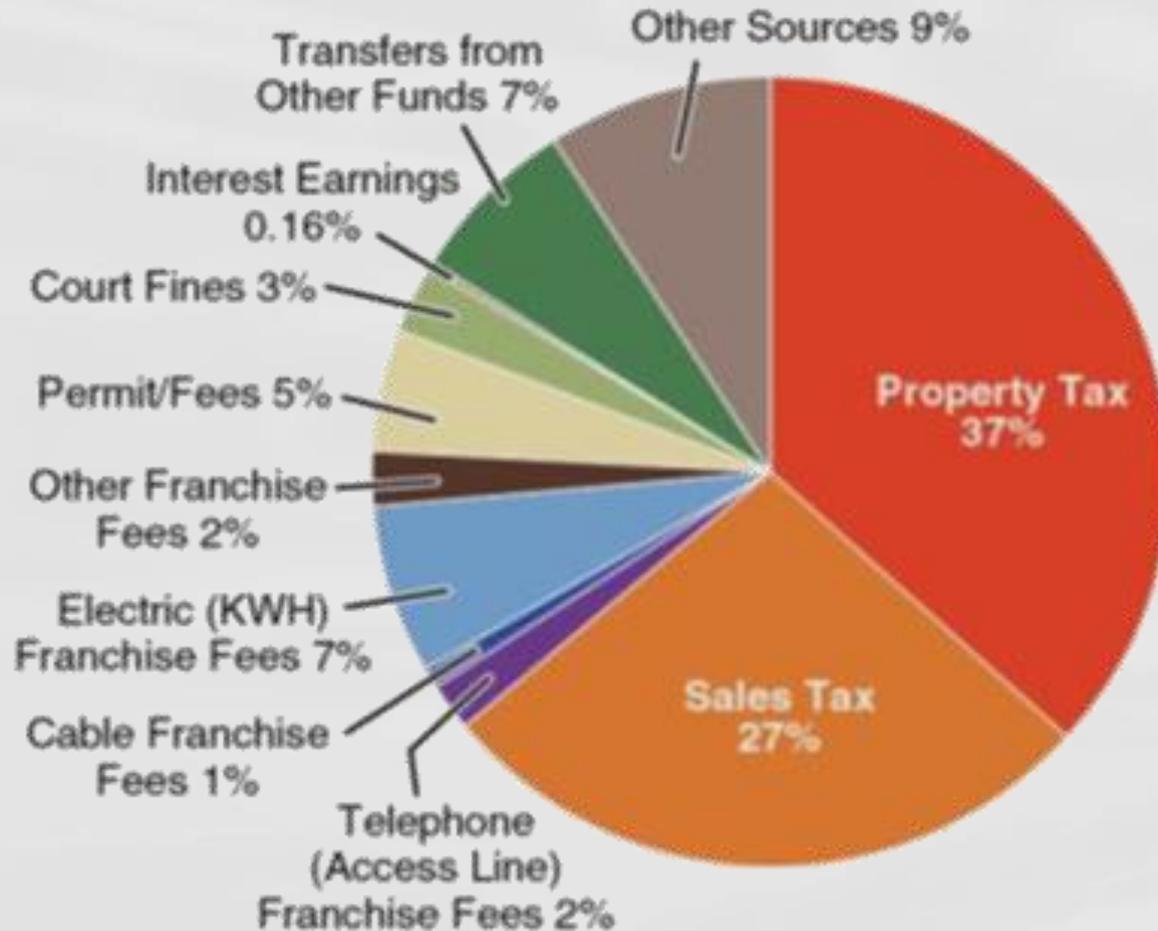
Top Ten and Bottom Ten Earmarks for Texas from the Federal Omnibus Appropriations Act, Fiscal Year 2004

Rank	City/County	Description	Amount
1	Houston	FBI Building	\$58,080,000
2	Eagle Pass	Border Station construction	\$31,980,000
3	Dallas	North Central Light Rail Extension	\$31,161,283
4	Houston	Houston Area Air Traffic System	\$25,000,000
5	Del Rio	Border Station construction	\$23,966,000
6	Houston	Project GRAD-USA, Inc.--Program focusing on school reform	\$20,000,000
7	McAllen	Border Station construction	\$17,938,000
8	West Texas	Efficient Irrigation	\$10,350,000
9	San Antonio	Courthouse Construction	\$8,000,000
10	Houston	Houston Advanced Metro Transit Plan--New starts	\$8,000,000

274	Harris	Harris County--Economic development study of Unincorporated Revitalization Program in Precinct 2	\$100,000
275	Williamson	Williamson County--Community center construction	\$100,000
276	Abilene	CityLink Public Transportation Services--Job Access and Reverse Commute grant	\$100,000
277	Texas	Wool research	\$90,000
278	San Antonio	San Antonio Food Bank--land acquisition and facility build out	\$75,000
279	Texas	Dairy and meat goat research	\$57,000
280	Dallas	Today Foundation--Expansion of Imagination Station literacy program	\$50,000
281	Houston	Houston Independent School District--River Oaks elementary school	\$50,000
282	Houston	Houston Community College System--Accelerated nursing proficiency center	\$50,000
283	Austin	Capitol Area Boy Scouts--Juvenile justice program discretionary grant	\$25,000

Texas received almost \$469 million in earmarked funds in the 2004 federal appropriations process spread across 283 separate earmarks. These range from large multi-million dollar projects to small projects with price tags of just several tens of thousands of dollars. Every project is important to those in the project area. The biggest projects serve broader interests. In Texas these involve border security, transportation, and areas with a high public profile. Smaller projects are targeted to serve narrower constituencies.

Public Policies in Texas Cities: Municipal Revenues



Public Policies in Texas Cities: Municipal Expenditures



Core city services like police, fire and EMS account for the majority of city expenditures. In addition, cities spend revenue on streets, municipal courts, libraries, utilities, parks and recreation, environmental compliance (such as solid-waste disposal), general government, health and welfare, interest on municipal debt, etc.



Solid waste collection is a basic local government service, whether it is provided by the city, as this photo of Denton depicts, or by a private agency with which the city or county contracts.

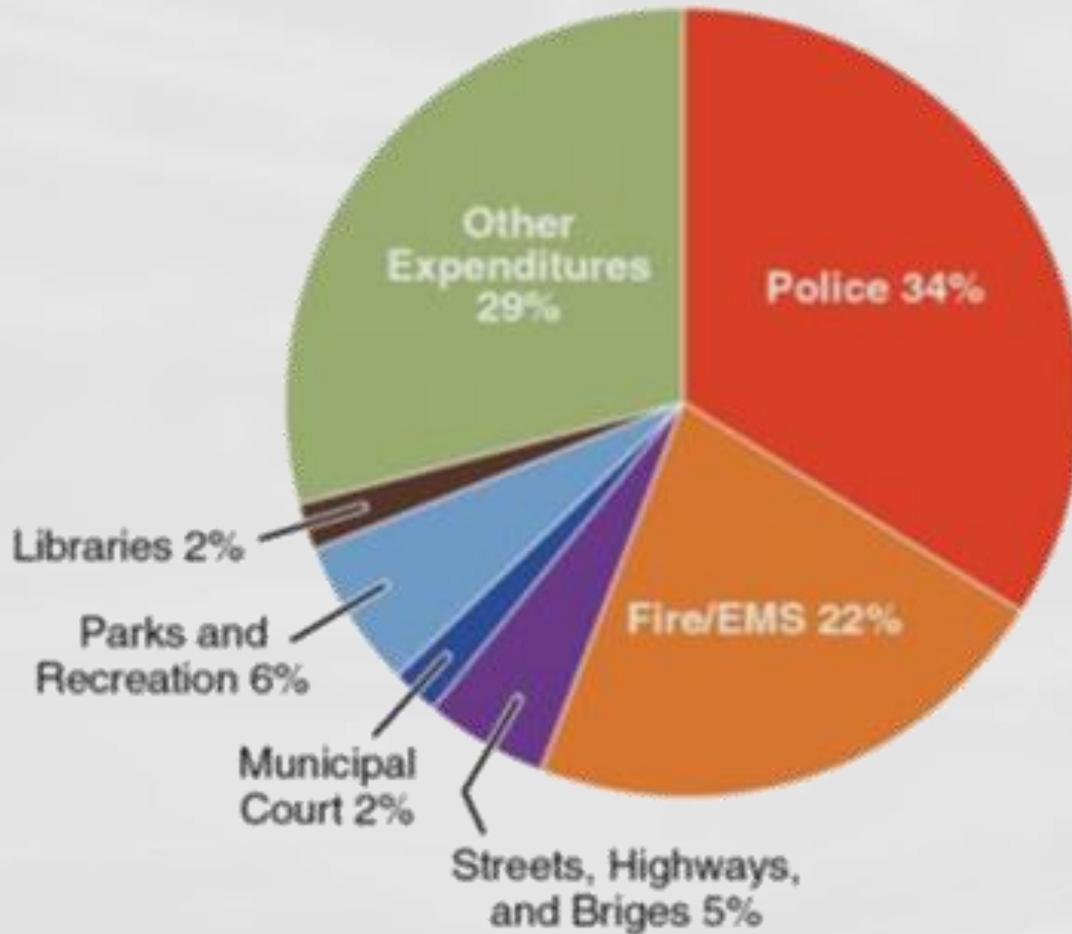
Public Policies in Texas Cities: Municipal Expenditures



- In 2009, Texas' local governments spent an estimated \$120 billion total, or \$4,169 per resident, compared to the national per-capita average of \$4,594.
- Excluding state and federal revenue sources, Texas' local governments provided \$90 billion in public services in 2009, compared to \$59 billion from the Texas state budget.
- Texas local government spending is higher than state spending because **the state has pushed its responsibilities for public services down to local governments.**
- Local governments are also a **major employer**, accounting for one of every nine Texans employed at a non-farm job in 2012.



Public Policies in Texas Cities: Municipal Expenditures



continued in Local Government in Texas: Cities Part III

