

Topic 6

The Structure of Massachusetts State and Local Government

Topic 6 explores the roles of state and local government in Massachusetts and throughout the United States.



[Map of Massachusetts Counties](#), licensed under [CC BY-SA 3.0](#)

Snapshot of Topic 6

Supporting Question

- What is the role of state and local government in the U. S. political system?

Massachusetts Standards [8.T6.1-6]

1. [Functions of State and National Government](#)
2. [Distribution of Powers in the United States and Massachusetts Constitutions](#)
3. [Enumerated and Implied Powers](#)
4. [The Protection of Individual Rights](#)
5. [The 10th Amendment](#)
6. [Identify additional protections provided by the Massachusetts Constitution](#)
7. [Responsibilities of Government at Federal, State and Local Levels](#)
8. [Leadership Structure of Massachusetts Government](#)
9. [Tax-Supported Facilities and Services](#)
10. [Major Components of Local Government](#)

Topic 6: The Structure of Massachusetts State and Local Government

State Government

State government refers to the institutions that provide government for an entire state - its governor, legislature, and state's court system. There are a total of **7,383 state legislative seats** in the country, and the Republican and Democratic Parties are engaged in an intense competition to control those decision-making bodies.

In 2021, Republicans control the legislature and governorship in 22 states; Democrats 14 states; and 13 states have a divided government, including Alaska which has adopted a multipartisan legislature coalition of members of different political parties ([2021 State & Legislative Partisan Composition](#), National Conference of State Legislatures, February 2022). In Minnesota, each party controls one of the houses of the state legislature, a situation that has not happened since 1914.

In some places, individuals with extreme political views have been elected to state legislatures. Jane Mayer ([State Legislatures Are Torching Democracy](#), August 15, 2022), writing in *The New Yorker*, reported that of the 7,383 representatives serving in 2021-2022, 850 had joined far-right Facebook groups; all but three were Republicans.

Local Government

Local government refers to the people that run cities and towns, including mayors, select boards, city councils and town meetings.

Massachusetts is considered a **commonwealth** because it appeared in the state's constitution in 1780 (the states of Kentucky, Pennsylvania and Virginia are also commonwealths). Being a commonwealth does not define any superior status to other states that are not a commonwealth, but when originally used it simply meant to describe **a state of people**. Commonwealth was coined to describe dependencies of the British Empire, with the monarch seen as the head of the commonwealth. Like the term commonwealth, many counties and towns of Massachusetts are directly referenced from England, the most obvious larger example is "New England."

While Topic 6 has information specific to Massachusetts (such as the Massachusetts Constitution and the leadership structure of the state's government), most of the following standards focus on the functioning of state and local governments throughout the U.S. political system. Our modules explore interactions between federal, state and local government in the context of the challenges brought on by the digital revolution, the Trump Presidency, and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Functions of State and National Government
United States and Massachusetts Constitutions

Enumerated and Implied Powers
Core Documents: The Protection of Individual Rights
10th Amendment to the Constitution
Additional Provisions of the Massachusetts Constitution
Responsibilities of Federal, State and Local Government
Leadership Structure of the Massachusetts Government
Tax-Supported Facilities and Services
Components of Local Government



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