



# County Form of Government 2014 Survey Results

## SURVEY METHODOLOGY

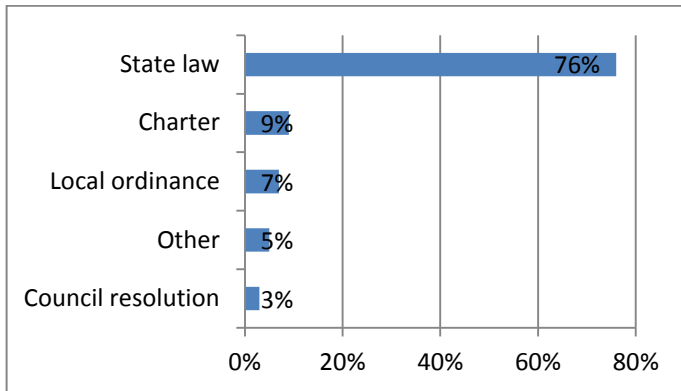
The survey was mailed in October 2014 to 3,031 county governments. A follow-up survey was sent to those who had not responded to the first mailing. An online survey was available as well, with the URL included on the paper survey. The response rate was 25% with 750 counties responding. Not all counties answered every question. The number answering each question is identified beside the question.

- The term **commission** refers to an elected body whose members may be called commissioners, council members, supervisors, board members, or a similar title.
- The **chief appointed official** of the local government is often referred to as county manager, county administrator, chief administrative officer, county coordinator, or a similar title.
- The **presiding officer** of the local government may have the title of presiding officer, judge, board chair, or the like.

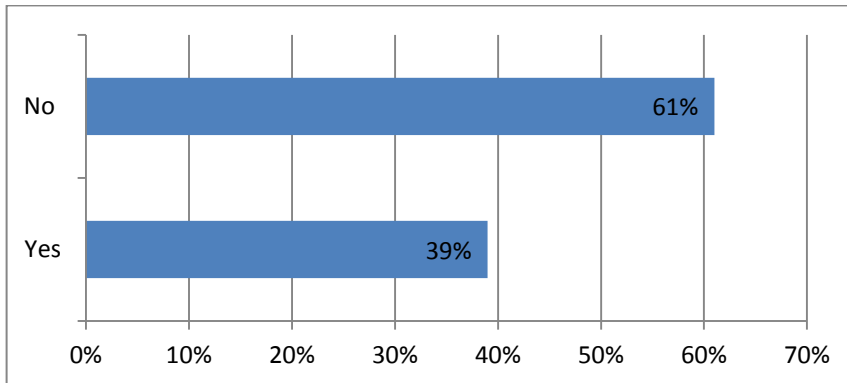
1. Please indicate which of the following best describes your current legal form of government as defined by your charter, ordinance, or state law. (Please read all definitions first and check only one.) N = 685

Form of government	% reporting	No. reporting
Each elected commissioner or board member may serve as director of one or more functional departments (e.g. Public Works Director or Director of Health and Human Services) in addition to his/her policymaking role. The presiding officer may be chosen from the board or elected directly (e.g., county judge). This is popularly known as the <b>commission</b> form of government.	26%	177
An elected board sets policy, adopts legislation, and approves the budget. The commission appoints an administrator to conduct the day-to-day county business, to prepare the budget, to oversee department heads, and to recommend policy to the board. This is popularly known as the <b>council-administrator</b> form.	37%	252
An elected board sets policy, adopts legislation, and approves the budget. The commission appoints a manager or administrator with broad executive authority to oversee and manage county departments, hire and fire most department directors, hire and fire county staff, prepare the budget, and recommend policy to the board. This is popularly known as the <b>council-manager</b> form.	27%	185
The elected board is responsible for making policy. The executive, elected at -large, implements county board policies, prepares the budget, and acts as county spokesperson. The executive often has veto power, which can be overridden. This form fully separates the legislative and executive powers and is popularly known as the <b>council-elected executive</b> form.	10%	71

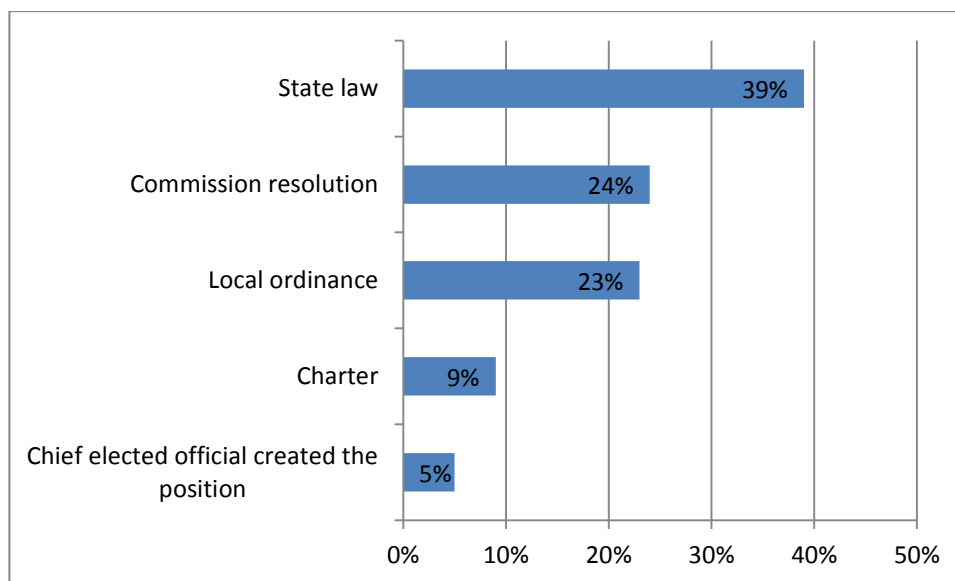
2. How is your county's *structure or form of government* established? (Check only one.) N = 717



3. Does your county have the position of *chief appointed official* (CAO)? N = 692



3A. If your county does have the position of *chief appointed official*, what action established the position? (This question refers only to the establishment of the position, not to the person or group that does the hiring.) N = 274



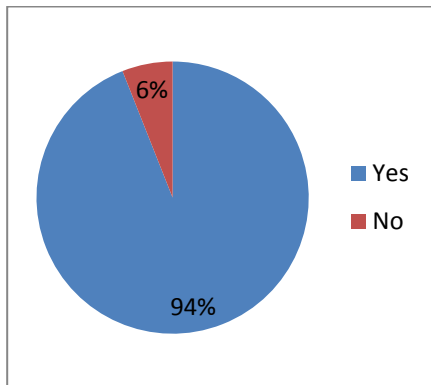
**3B. If your county does have the position of *chief appointed official*, who appoints the chief appointed official? (Check only one.) N = 321**

	% reporting	No. reporting
Presiding officer	1%	4
Commission	82%	262
Combination of presiding officer and commission	5%	16
Other	12%	39

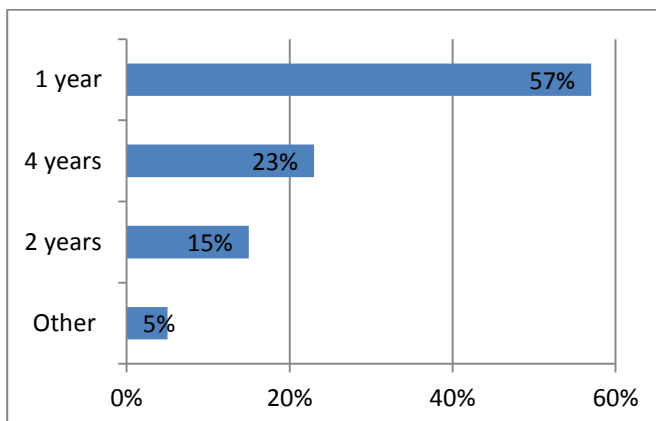
**4. How is your presiding officer selected? (Check only one.) N = 715**

	% reporting	No. reporting
Voters elect directly	21%	149
Commission selects from among its members	68%	484
The commission member receiving the most votes in the general election becomes the presiding officer	1%	4
Commission members rotate into the position of presiding officer	8%	54
Other	3%	24

**5. Is the presiding officer a member of commission? N = 710**



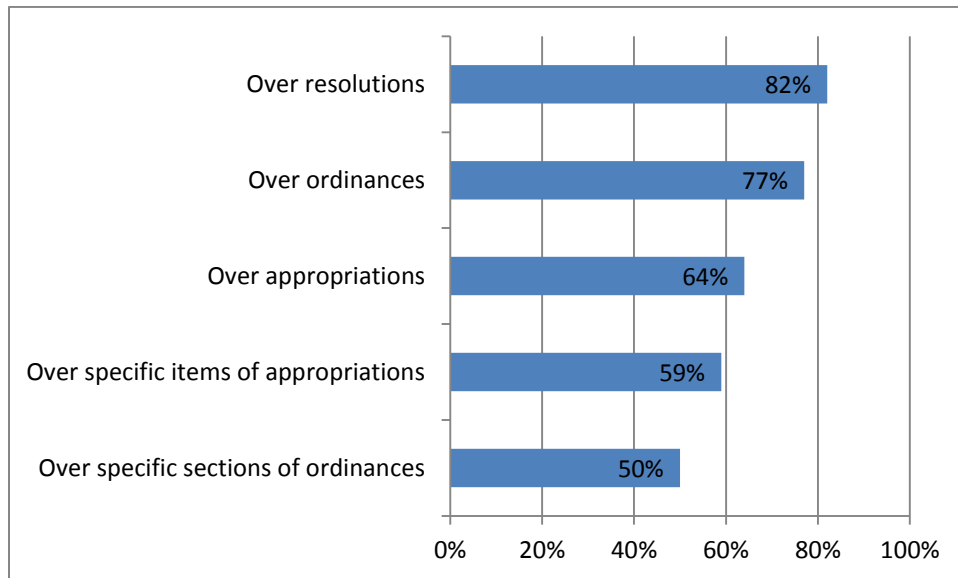
**6. How long is the presiding officer's term of office? (Important: If the presiding officer is a member of the commission, specify the term for the position of presiding officer, not of commission member.) (Check only one.) N = 709**



**7. Does the presiding officer have the authority to veto commission-passed measures? N = 707**

Only 4% checked “yes.”

**A. If yes, in what cases may the presiding officer exercise veto power? (Check all applicable.) N = 22**



**8. Since 2007, have any recall initiatives been filed against the presiding officer? N = 697**

- Only 10 counties reported a recall initiative filed against the presiding officer.

**A. If yes, were any successful?**

- Only 2 were successful.

**9. How many seats, vacant and filled, are on your commission? The average is 6; the median is 5.**

(Include the presiding officer if that position serves on the commission. If the presiding officer is a member of the commission, your answer to question 5 should be “yes.”)

**10. How many current commission members are (Total number of commission members should equal the total in question 9.)**

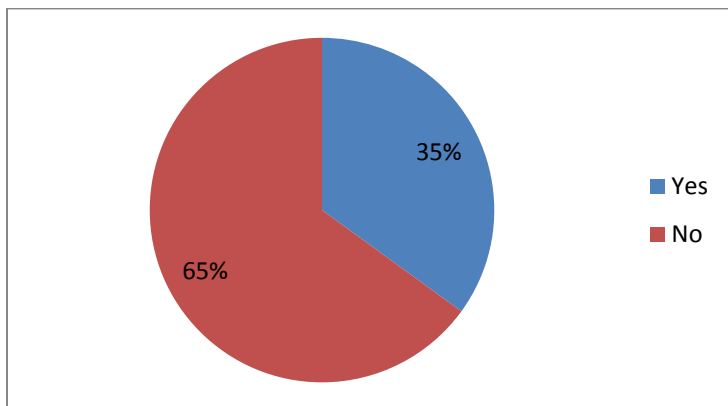
Commission members-male		Commission members-female	
Mean	Median	Mean	Median
5	4	1	1

11. How many current commission members are (*Total number of commission members should equal the total in question 9.*)

Commission members-Native American		Commission members-Hispanic		Commission members-Asian or Pacific Islander		Commission members-White		Commission members-Black	
Mean	Median	Mean	Median	Mean	Median	Mean	Median	Mean	Median
2	1	2	1	5	2	6	5	2	1

12. Does your county have a provision for initiative? N = 690

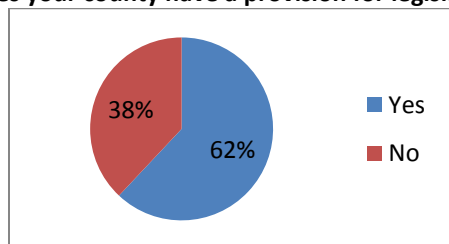
*Initiative allows citizens to place charter, ordinance, or home rule changes on the ballot by collecting a required number of signatures on a petition.*



12A. If yes, which of the following initiative processes does your municipality provide? (*Check all applicable.*) N = 231

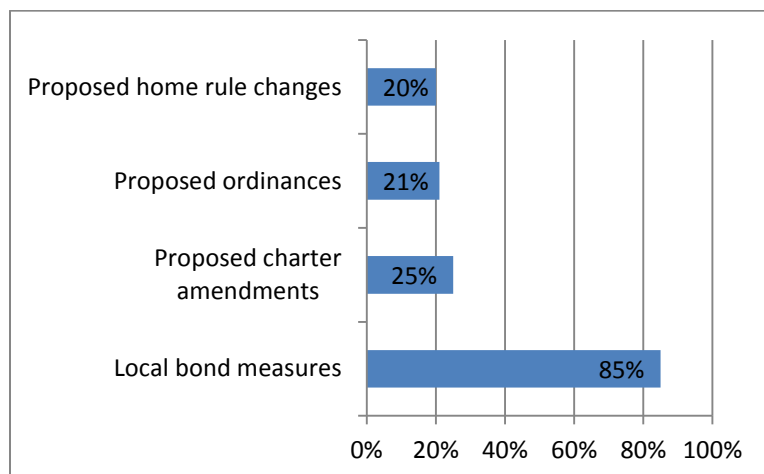
	% reporting	No. reporting
<b>Indirect:</b> Requires that <i>before</i> any charter, ordinance, or home rule change proposed by citizens through a petition process is placed on the ballot for vote, the council must consider it. Vote results are binding on the local government.	8%	60
<b>Direct:</b> Requires that any charter, ordinance, or home rule change proposed by the citizens through a petition process must be placed directly on the ballot for a vote. Vote results are binding on the local government.	18%	138
<b>Non-binding initiative:</b> Allows citizens to place on the ballot a question for voter approval or rejection. The voter response is non-binding on the local government.	4%	33

13. Does your county have a provision for legislative referendum?

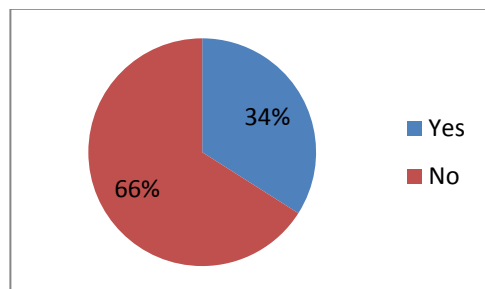


*Legislative referendum allows the council to place any question on the ballot for voter approval or rejection. The results may be binding or non-binding.*

**13A. If yes, which of the following items must be placed on the ballot for voter approval? (Check all applicable.)**  
**N = 346**

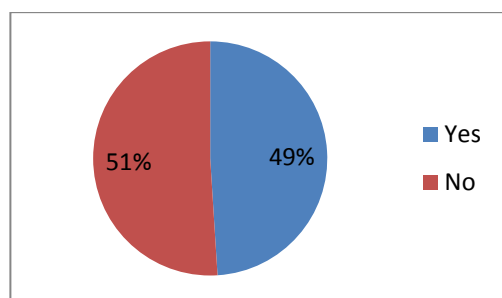


**14. Does your county have a provision for popular referendum? N = 676**



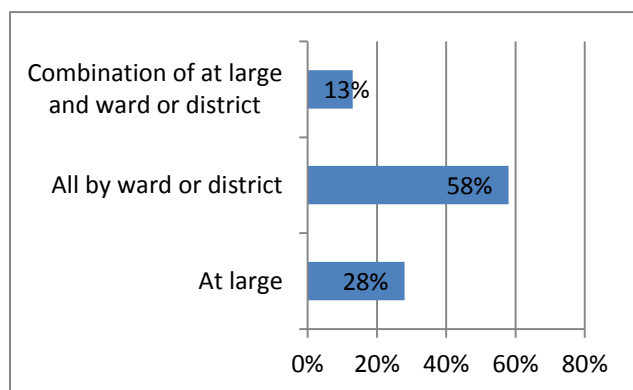
*Popular referendum allows citizens to collect signatures on a petition to place on the ballot any charter, ordinance, or home rule change that has been adopted by the local government before the change can take effect.*

**15. Does your county have a provision for recall? N = 679**



*Recall allows citizens to collect signatures on a petition to place on the ballot a question of whether an elected official should be removed from office before the expiration of his/her term.*

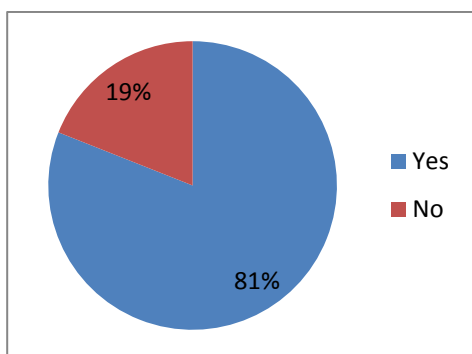
**16. How are the members of your commission elected? (Check only one.) N = 718**



**16A. If you selected a combination, indicate the number of commission members elected by each of the following methods:**

Number of commissioners elected at large		Number of commissioners elected by ward/district	
Mean	Median	Mean	Median
2	1	5	4

**17. Does the political party affiliation of commission candidates appear on the ballot in your local general elections?**



**18. Since 2007, have any recall initiatives been filed against council members? N = 704**

	% reporting	No. reporting
Yes	3%	23
No	97%	681

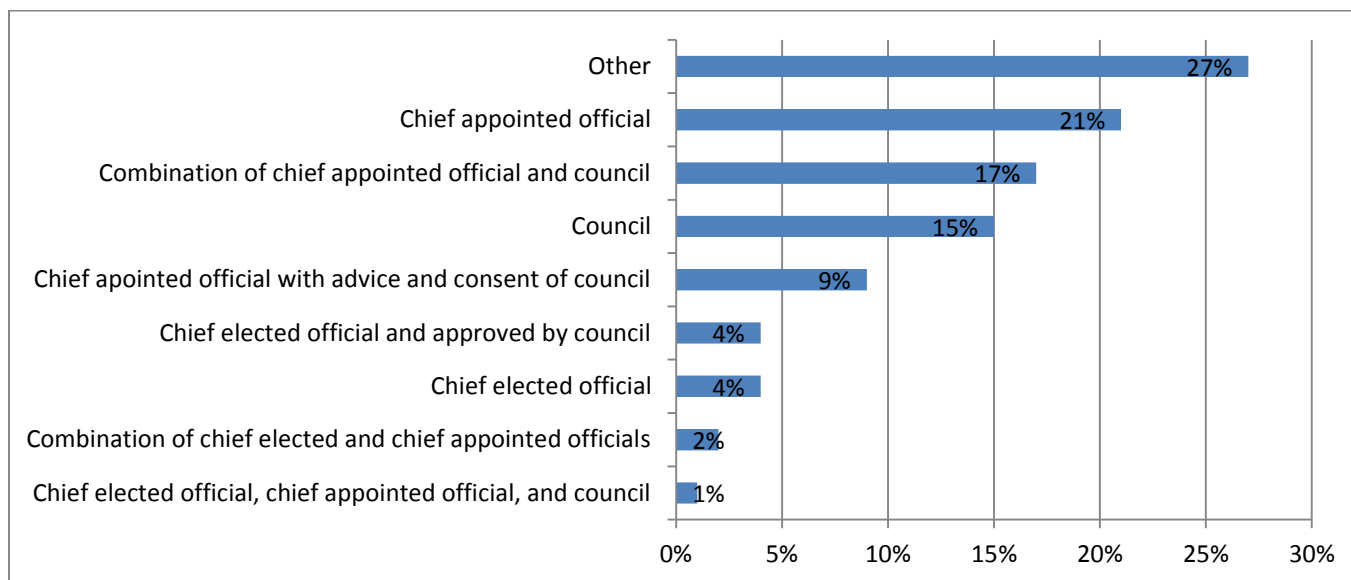
**18A. If yes, were any successful? N = 22**

	% reporting	No. reporting
Yes	27%	6
No	73%	16

**19. Which best describes your department head positions? (Check only one.) N = 723**

	% reporting	No. reporting
All are elected	15%	105
All are appointed	20%	142
Combination, some are elected and some appointed	66%	476

**20. If any of your department heads are appointed, who appoints them? (Check only one.) N = 501**



**21. Are the following department heads appointed or elected?**

Position	No. reporting	% Appointed	% Elected
a. Assessor	680	46%	54%
b. Prosecutor	678	8%	92%
c. Civil attorney	495	67%	33%
d. Sheriff	729	1%	99%
e. Recorder	630	20%	80%
f. School superintendent	558	77%	23%
g. Treasurer	685	19%	81%
h. Clerk of governing board	640	49%	51%
i. Clerk of court	671	27%	73%
j. Controller	418	77%	23%

**22. Is there a legal limit on the number of terms a commission member may serve? N = 718**

	% reporting	No. reporting
Yes	6%	41
No	94%	677



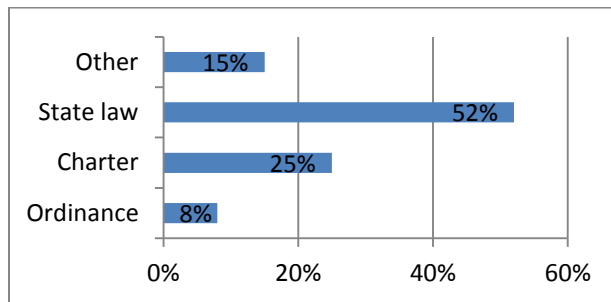
**22A. If yes, what is the maximum number of terms allowed by law?**

Maximum terms a commissioner may serve	
Mean	Median
3	2

**22B. When was the term limitation enacted? (year)**

- 1994, 1996, and 2002 were reported by the highest percent (11%) of respondents.

**22C. By what authority is the number of terms limited? (Check only one.) N = 52**



**23. How many incumbents ran for reelection to commission in the last general election?**

- Mean = 4
- Median = 2

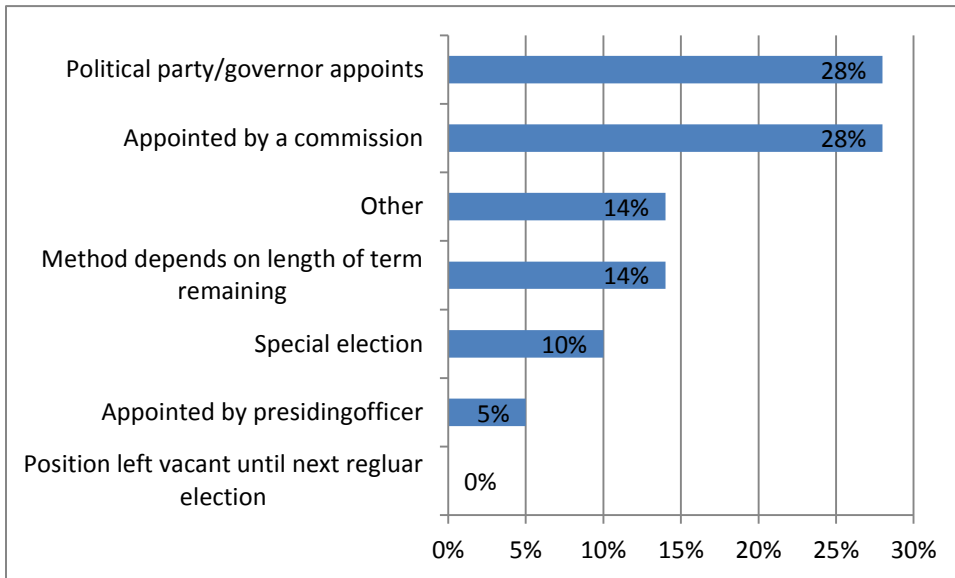
**23A. How many incumbents ran unopposed?**

- Mean = 4
- Median = 2

**23B. How many incumbents were reelected?**

- Mean = 3
- Median = 2

**24. How is a commission member's seat filled if it is vacated before the term has expired? (Check only one.) N = 718**



**25. When does your fiscal year begin? N = 753**

- January and July are reported by the highest percentages at 39% and 41%, respectively.

