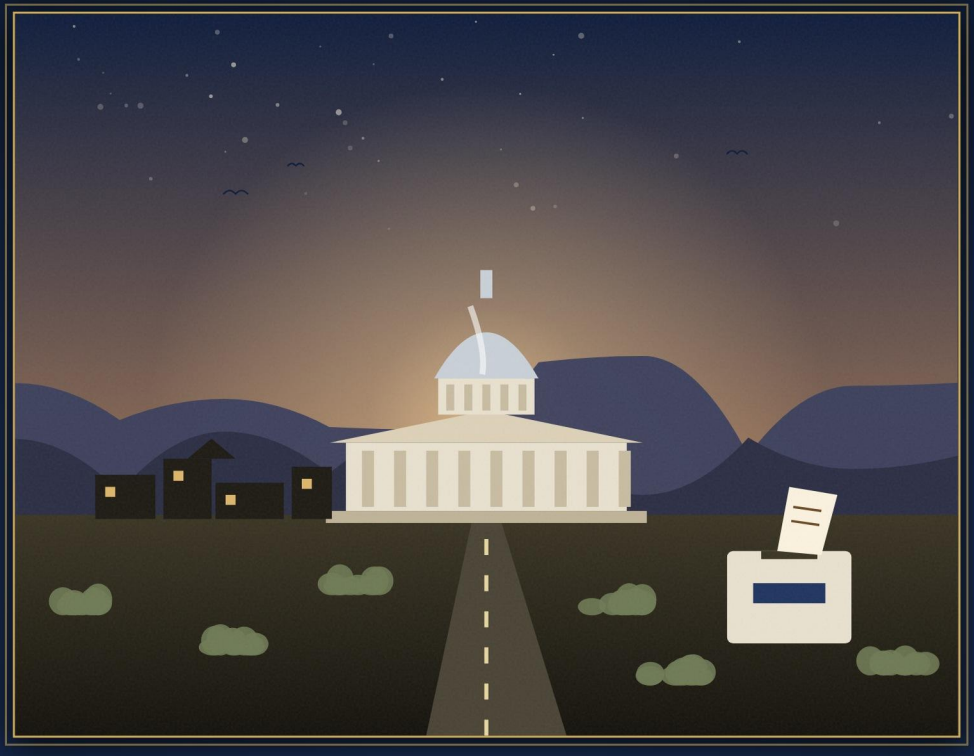
A PLAIN-ENGLISH CIVICS GUIDE

How Nevada Government Works

State, County and City



State, County and City, in Plain English

Andrew Dominguez

Trinfinity Enterprises

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Independently published. First edition, 2026.

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Before You Begin

I live in Dayton, in Lyon County. Lyon County's own fact sheet calls Dayton the earliest permanent settlement in Nevada, and it was the county's first county seat. It is also a community with no city government of its own. When I first tried to figure out who fixes the road in front of my house, who runs the water system, who decides what gets built down the street and who I should call when something goes wrong, I found out that the answer was not as simple as "the city." For a lot of us in Nevada, there is no city at all. There is the county, a handful of districts and boards, the state, and the federal government, each with its own job.

This book is the guide I wish I had back then. It explains, in plain words, how government in Nevada works at three levels: the state, the county and the city or town. It covers who does what, who you elect, how a bill becomes law in Carson City, how the courts are set up, how voters can write their own laws, and how to reach the people who represent you.

How to Use This Book

Each chapter covers one part of Nevada government. Most chapters end with a short "Try This" box that gives you one thing to look up or do in about ten minutes. At the back you will find a worksheet where you can write down the names of your own officials and how to reach them, a glossary of terms, and a list of the official sources used in this book.

You can read straight through, or jump to the chapter you need. If you just want to know how to contact your legislator or county commissioner, start with Chapter 14.

Lyon County as the Example

Nevada has 17 counties, and they are not all alike. Clark County, home to Las Vegas, had about 2.45 million of the state's 3.35 million people in 2025, nearly three out of every four Nevadans. Esmeralda County had 1,217. Lyon County had 66,154. To keep things concrete, this book uses Lyon County as its main example, because it is where I live. Most of what you read about Lyon County works the same way in the other rural and mid-size counties. Where Clark and Washoe counties work differently, the book says so.

The Date This Book Stops At

Government changes. People are elected and leave office, laws change every two years, and agencies reorganize. The facts in this book were checked against official sources as of November 18, 2026. Names of current officeholders are kept to a minimum on purpose, because they change. The chapters tell you where to look up who holds each office today.

A Word About Sources Every number and rule in this book comes from an official source, such as the Nevada Legislature, the Nevada courts, the Secretary of State or a county website, or from a major news report where no official page was available. The sources are listed at the back of the book. Where I could not confirm something, I left it out.

This Book Takes No Side

This is not a book about which party is right. It is a book about how the machinery works, so that whatever you believe, you can use it. Government works better when more people understand it, and Nevada's government is closer to you than you may think.

Chapter 1: Three Levels, One Address

Every Nevadan lives under at least three governments at the same time: the federal government in Washington, D.C., the State of Nevada, and a county. Many also live inside a city, and almost everyone lives inside one or more special districts, such as a school district, a water district or a fire district. This book is about the Nevada part: the state, the counties, the cities and towns, and the districts.

Who Does What

A simple way to keep the levels straight is to ask what each one is for.

Level	What it mostly handles	Where its rules come from
Federal	National defense, foreign affairs, immigration, Social Security, Medicare, federal taxes, federal lands	The U.S. Constitution and acts of Congress
State of Nevada	State laws and crimes, state highways, prisons, the state budget, licensing, public universities, Medicaid, the courts	The Nevada Constitution and the Nevada Revised Statutes
County	Sheriff and jail, roads outside cities, property tax collection, elections, recording deeds, county parks, planning and zoning outside cities, local courts	State law, plus county ordinances
City	Police in some cities, city streets, city parks, zoning inside the city, city water and sewer in many places	A city charter or state law, plus city ordinances
Special districts	One job each: schools, water, sewer, fire, hospitals, libraries, general improvements	State law and the district's own board

The lines are not perfectly neat. In some places a county runs the water system. In others a general improvement district does. Two

neighbors on opposite sides of a road can get their water, their fire protection and even their sheriff's deputy or police officer from different places. That is not a mistake. It is how Nevada has chosen to organize itself.

The Nevada Constitution

The State of Nevada runs under its own constitution, which sets up the three branches of state government: the Legislature makes the laws, the Governor and the executive branch carry them out, and the courts interpret them and settle disputes. Each branch has ways to check the others. The Governor can veto a bill. The Legislature can override a veto. The courts can strike down a law that violates the constitution.

The constitution can be changed in two ways. The Legislature can pass a proposed amendment in two sessions in a row and send it to the voters, or citizens can collect signatures to put an amendment on the ballot, where it must pass at two general elections in a row. Chapter 13 explains both.

Counties Are Arms of the State

Here is one idea that surprises many people: in Nevada, counties are not independent governments that answer only to their own voters. They are created by the state, and they can only do what state law allows them to do. When the Legislature changes a law about property taxes, elections or county powers, every county has to follow it.

Cities have a little more room. Many Nevada cities were set up by a charter, a kind of local constitution approved by the Legislature, and the state has given cities and counties some power to handle purely local matters on their own. But the state still has the last word.

Why This Matters to You

The level of government that touches your daily life the most is often the one you know the least about. Most people can name the President. Fewer can name their state senator. Very few can name their county commissioner or the board members of their water district. Yet those local officials decide things like how fast your property taxes go up, whether a new subdivision goes in next door, how long it takes a deputy to reach you, and what you pay for water.

> **Try This** Write down your home address. Then, as you read this book, fill in the worksheet at the back: who represents that address at each level, from the Legislature to the county commission to the school board.

Chapter 2: The Legislature

The Nevada Legislature makes the state's laws and passes its budget. It meets in the Legislative Building in Carson City, which opened in 1971 at the south end of the Capitol Complex.

Two Houses

Like Congress, the Nevada Legislature has two houses: the Senate and the Assembly. Since 1983 the Legislature has had 21 members in the Senate and 42 members in the Assembly, for 63 lawmakers in all. The Nevada Constitution does not fix those numbers; state law sets them, within a constitutional limit of 75 legislators.

	Senate	Assembly
Members	21	42
Term	4 years	2 years
Limit	12 years in the Senate (three terms)	12 years in the Assembly (six terms)

The 12-year limit applies to each house separately. It came from a constitutional amendment approved by voters in 1996. A legislator who has served 12 years in the Assembly can still run for the Senate.

To serve, a person must be at least 21 years old, must have been a Nevada citizen for at least one year before the election, and must be a qualified voter in the county and district they represent. Legislative elections are held on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November of even-numbered years, the same day as other general elections.

Every Other Year, for 120 Days

Nevada's Legislature meets in regular session only every other year. Sessions are held in odd-numbered years and begin on the first Monday of February. A regular session is limited to 120 days.

That schedule shapes everything. In about four months, lawmakers consider more than 1,000 bills and resolutions and pass a budget meant to last two years. Bills move fast, deadlines come quickly, and a bill that misses a deadline is usually dead until the next session two years later.

The 84th Session, the next one, begins on February 1, 2027.

A Citizen Legislature

Nevada prides itself on having a citizen Legislature. Most members have other jobs and careers outside the session. They are ranchers, teachers, lawyers, business owners, nurses and retirees. That means your legislator is likely to be a neighbor rather than a full-time politician, and it also means that public input can make a real difference in a short session where lawmakers depend on the people who show up.

Special Sessions

Between regular sessions, the Legislature can meet in a special session. The Governor can call one "for a specific purpose." The Legislature can also call itself into special session if two-thirds of the members elected to each house sign a petition. Special sessions have been used for budget shortfalls, emergencies and unfinished business.

Between Sessions

Because the Legislature meets only part of the time, much of its work goes on between sessions through interim committees. The

Legislative Commission and the Interim Finance Committee act for the Legislature on certain matters while it is not in session, and interim study committees take testimony and prepare bills for the next session. The Legislative Counsel Bureau is the nonpartisan staff agency that drafts bills, does research, and keeps the Legislature's records.

Leaders and Parties

Each house elects its own leaders. In the Assembly, the top leader is the Speaker. In the Senate, the Lieutenant Governor is the President of the Senate and can break a tie, but the day-to-day leader is the Majority Leader. Each party chooses floor leaders, and committee chairs come from the majority party.

> **Try This** Look up which Senate district and which Assembly district you live in, and write down the names of your senator and your Assembly member on the worksheet at the back of this book. Chapter 14 explains how.

Chapter 3: How a Bill Becomes Law in Nevada

The basic path of a bill in Nevada looks like the one you may remember from school: a bill is introduced, goes to a committee, passes one house, passes the other house, and goes to the Governor. What makes Nevada different is the speed. Everything happens inside a 120-day session that meets only every other year.

Step 1: The Idea and the Bill Draft Request

Every bill starts as an idea. It might come from a constituent, a business, a local government, a state agency, an advocacy group or the legislator's own experience. Before a bill can be introduced, someone with the authority to do so must file a bill draft request, often called a BDR, with the Legislative Counsel Bureau. Legislators can request bills, and so can certain state agencies and local governments. A staff attorney drafts the request into written form and checks it against the Nevada Constitution.

Turning the idea into legal language matters. A good idea written badly can do the opposite of what its sponsor wanted.

Step 2: Introduction and Committee

Once the bill is drafted, a legislator or a committee chair introduces it in either the Senate or the Assembly. It is given a number, such as SB 123 for a Senate Bill or AB 456 for an Assembly Bill, read aloud for the first time, and sent to a standing committee. Committees are where most of the real work happens. The committee holds a hearing where the sponsor explains the bill and members of the public, agencies and interest groups can speak for it, against it, or as neutral.

The committee can pass the bill, amend it, or simply never vote on it. Most bills that die in Nevada die quietly in committee when a deadline passes without a vote.

Step 3: The Floor Vote

If the committee recommends the bill, it gets a second reading on the floor, where any amendments are adopted or rejected. Then it goes on the General File for its third reading, where the full house debates it and votes. The Nevada Constitution requires every bill to be read three times, on three different days. That rule can be set aside only by a two-thirds vote, 14 votes in the Senate or 28 in the Assembly.

The Nevada Constitution requires "a majority of all the members elected to each house" to pass a bill, which means 11 votes in the Senate and 22 in the Assembly, no matter how many members are present. Some bills need more. A bill that creates or increases taxes, fees or other public revenue needs two-thirds of the members elected to each house, the same 14 and 28.

Step 4: The Second House

A bill that passes one house goes to the other house, where it repeats the whole process: committee hearing, committee vote and floor vote. If the second house changes the bill, the first house must agree to the changes. If the two houses pass different versions and neither will accept the other's, a conference committee of members from both houses tries to work out a compromise. If both houses approve the compromise, the bill moves on. If not, it dies.

Once both houses agree, the bill is enrolled, meaning printed in its final form and signed by the presiding officers of both houses.

Step 5: The Governor

When both houses pass the same version of a bill, it goes to the Governor, who can sign it, veto it, or let it become law without a signature.

The Nevada Constitution sets tight clocks. During the session, the Governor has five days, not counting Sundays, to act. If the Governor does nothing, the bill becomes law without a signature. For bills that reach the Governor at the end of the session, the Governor has ten days after the Legislature adjourns, not counting Sundays, to veto the bill by filing it with the Secretary of State along with the objections. Otherwise it becomes law.

A veto is not always the end. During the session, the Legislature can override a veto by a two-thirds vote of the members elected to each house. A bill vetoed after the session ends is laid before the next session, two years later, where the Legislature can override it by the same two-thirds vote.

When a New Law Takes Effect

Many bills say exactly when they take effect. If a bill does not give a date, it takes effect on October 1 of the year it passed. That is why you often see news stories in late September about new Nevada laws starting October 1.

Deadlines

Because the session is short, the Legislature sets deadlines for each stage: a date by which bills must be introduced, a date by which committees in the first house must act, a date by which the first house must pass a bill, and so on through the second house. A bill that misses a deadline is usually dead for the session unless it has been granted an exemption, which is common for budget bills. The deadlines for each session are posted on the Legislature's website.

Resolutions

Not everything the Legislature passes is a bill. A joint resolution can propose an amendment to the Nevada Constitution or send a message to Congress. A concurrent or simple resolution can set legislative rules or honor a person or group. Resolutions that propose constitutional amendments do not go to the Governor; they go to the voters after passing two sessions in a row, as Chapter 13 explains.

Try This During a session, open the Nevada Electronic Legislative Information System, called NELIS, on the Legislature's website. Search for a topic you care about and read the history of one bill: when it was introduced, which committee heard it, and how each member voted.

Chapter 4: The Governor

The Governor is Nevada's chief executive. The Governor's job is to carry out the laws the Legislature passes, run the state agencies, propose a budget, and lead the state in an emergency.

Term and Limits

The Governor is elected statewide to a four-year term in the same years as the midterm elections for Congress, such as 2022 and 2026. Under the Nevada Constitution, no person can be elected Governor more than twice. To run, a person must be at least 25 years old, a qualified voter, and a resident of Nevada for the two years before the election.

What the Governor Does

- **Signs or vetoes bills.** As Chapter 3 explains, the Governor has five days during a session and ten days after it ends to act on a bill.
- **Proposes the budget.** State agencies send their requests to the Governor's budget office, and the Governor presents a proposed two-year budget to the Legislature at the start of each session. The Legislature decides what actually gets funded.
- **Runs the executive branch.** The Governor appoints the directors of most state departments, such as Health and Human Services, Corrections, Transportation, and Public Safety, and appoints members of many state boards and commissions.
- **Fills vacancies.** When a seat on the Nevada Supreme Court, the Court of Appeals or a district court comes open in the middle of a term, the Governor appoints the replacement.
- **Calls special sessions.** The Governor can call the Legislature back into a special session for a specific purpose.

- **Leads in emergencies.** The Governor can declare a state of emergency and commands the Nevada National Guard when it is not in federal service.
- **Grants pardons, with others.** In Nevada, the Governor does not pardon alone. Pardons and commutations are decided by the State Board of Pardons Commissioners, which includes the Governor, the justices of the Supreme Court and the Attorney General.

The Executive Branch

Under the Governor are dozens of state departments, divisions, boards and commissions. Some you may deal with directly: the Department of Motor Vehicles, the Department of Taxation, the Department of Employment, Training and Rehabilitation (which handles unemployment), the Division of Welfare and Supportive Services, and the Department of Wildlife. Others work in the background, licensing professionals, inspecting businesses, and running state prisons and parks.

Many professions in Nevada, from contractors to cosmetologists, are licensed by boards that are part of state government but are made up mostly of members of that profession and the public, appointed by the Governor.

Try This Pick one state agency you have dealt with in the last year, such as the DMV. Look up who runs it and whether it reports directly to the Governor or to a board.

Chapter 5: The Other Statewide Officers

Nevada voters do not elect just a Governor. They elect five other statewide executive officers, each with a job set by the Nevada Constitution and state law. Because they are elected separately, they can come from a different party than the Governor and do not answer to the Governor.

Office	Main job
Lieutenant Governor	Presides over the Senate and breaks tie votes; becomes Governor if the office comes open
Secretary of State	Runs statewide elections; registers businesses; keeps official records; files notary and other commissions
Attorney General	The state's chief lawyer; represents the state in court; runs consumer protection and other enforcement programs
State Treasurer	Manages and invests state money; runs the unclaimed property program and college savings plans
State Controller	The state's chief accountant; pays the state's bills; collects debts owed to the state

These officers are elected statewide in the same years as the Governor, most recently in 2026. Nevada voters approved term limits for state officers in 1994 and again in 1996.

The Lieutenant Governor

The Lieutenant Governor is elected separately from the Governor, so the two can be from different parties. The Lieutenant Governor presides over the Senate and votes only to break a tie. If the Governor dies, resigns or is removed, the Lieutenant Governor becomes Governor.

The Secretary of State

For most Nevadans, the Secretary of State is the office behind elections. The Secretary of State oversees elections across the state, publishes ballot questions and results, and keeps the voter registration system. County clerks and registrars actually run the polling places and count the ballots, as Chapter 12 explains.

The Secretary of State also runs the business portal where corporations and limited liability companies register, and keeps official state records.

The Attorney General

The Attorney General is the state's chief law enforcement officer and lawyer. The office gives legal opinions to state agencies, defends the state when it is sued, and handles certain criminal cases. It also runs consumer protection programs, including complaints about scams and fraud. Most criminal cases in Nevada, though, are prosecuted by the elected district attorney in each county, not by the Attorney General.

The Treasurer and the Controller

These two offices handle the state's money from different sides. The Treasurer manages the state's cash and investments and runs programs such as unclaimed property, where you can search for money owed to you from old accounts, deposits and refunds. The Controller keeps the state's books, pays its bills and collects money owed to the state.

Try This Search the State Treasurer's unclaimed property website for your name and for the names of family members. Many people find money they did not know they had.

Chapter 6: Where the Money Comes From

Nevada pays for its government differently from most states. The biggest difference is one most Nevadans already know: there is no state income tax on wages. The Nevada Constitution says so directly: “No income tax shall be levied upon the wages or personal income of natural persons.” The same section allows taxes on the income or revenue of businesses, and it says no inheritance tax shall ever be levied.

The Two-Year Budget

Because the Legislature meets every other year, Nevada passes a budget for two years at a time, called a biennium. The Governor proposes the budget at the start of the session, the Legislature’s money committees go through it agency by agency, and the Legislature passes the final budget bills before the session ends. Between sessions, the Interim Finance Committee can approve certain changes when money comes in or goes out differently than expected.

Where State Money Comes From

Without an income tax on wages, Nevada leans on other sources, such as sales taxes, taxes on gaming, taxes on businesses, and money from the federal government.

Raising state revenue takes more than a simple majority. The Nevada Constitution requires a two-thirds vote of the members elected to each house to pass a bill that “creates, generates, or increases any public revenue in any form, including but not limited to taxes, fees, assessments and rates.” There is one way around it: a simple majority can refer a revenue measure to the voters at the

next general election, and it takes effect only if the voters approve it. That is why the size of each party's majority in the Legislature matters so much in Nevada.

Property Taxes

Property taxes pay mostly for local government: counties, cities, school districts and special districts. The state sets the rules, and the county assessor values each property. The total property tax rate in any one place is capped by state law at $3.64 for every $100 of assessed value, with limited exceptions.

Sales Tax

The sales tax you pay at the register is a combination of a statewide rate and local rates that vary by county. The money is shared among the state, counties, cities and schools by formulas set in state law.

Why This Matters

Nevada's tax system relies heavily on tourism, gaming and sales, which means state revenue can rise and fall quickly with the economy. In a recession, when people travel and spend less, state revenue drops just when more people need help. That is one reason budget fights in Carson City can be intense, and one reason the state keeps a rainy day fund.

Try This Find your most recent property tax bill. Look at the list of taxing entities on it, such as the county, the school district and any fire or general improvement district, and how much of your bill goes to each one.

Chapter 7: The Courts

Nevada's courts settle disputes, decide criminal cases, and interpret the state's laws and constitution. The Nevada court system has four main types of courts, plus a Court of Appeals that sits between the trial courts and the Supreme Court.

Court	Level	What it handles
Municipal courts	City	Traffic tickets, misdemeanors and violations of city ordinances inside a city
Justice courts	County township	Misdemeanors, civil cases up to $15,000, small claims up to $10,000, evictions, and preliminary hearings in felony cases
District courts	Judicial district	Felonies, family law, and civil cases over $15,000; appeals from justice and municipal courts
Court of Appeals	Statewide	Cases assigned to it by the Supreme Court
Supreme Court	Statewide	Final appeals, the hardest cases, and the final word on what Nevada law means

Municipal Courts

Nevada has 17 municipal courts, served by 30 judges. These are city courts. They handle traffic citations, misdemeanors and violations of city ordinances that happen inside city limits. If you live outside a city, as many Lyon County residents do, you will deal with the justice court instead.

Justice Courts

Justice courts are county courts that serve a township. They are often the first and only court most people ever see. They handle misdemeanors, traffic cases outside cities, evictions, protection orders and small claims. Justice courts hear most civil cases worth

$15,000 or less. Small claims, where you can sue for money without a lawyer, are limited by state law (NRS 73.010) to $10,000.

In a felony case, the justice court holds the preliminary hearing, where a judge decides whether there is enough evidence to send the case to district court for trial.

District Courts

District courts are Nevada's general trial courts. The state is divided into 11 judicial districts, which together serve all 17 counties. District courts hear felony trials, family law matters such as divorce and custody, and civil lawsuits worth more than $15,000. They also hear appeals from justice and municipal courts.

The Supreme Court

The Nevada Supreme Court is the state's highest court. It has seven justices. The court began with three justices when Nevada became a state in 1864, grew to five in 1967, and grew to seven in 1997. Each justice is elected to a six-year term. When a seat comes open in the middle of a term, the Governor appoints a replacement. The most senior justice serves as chief justice for two years.

The Court of Appeals

For most of its history Nevada had no middle appeals court, and every appeal went straight to the Supreme Court. In 2014 voters approved a constitutional amendment creating the Nevada Court of Appeals, which began hearing cases in January 2015. It is a three-judge court.

Nevada uses what is called a "push-down" or deflective model. Appeals are filed with the Supreme Court, which keeps some cases and assigns others, roughly one-third of all cases submitted, to the

Court of Appeals. A party who loses in the Court of Appeals can ask the Supreme Court to review the case.

Judges Are Elected

In Nevada, judges at every level from justice court to the Supreme Court are chosen by voters in nonpartisan elections. Judicial races appear on your ballot without a party label. Many judges run unopposed, which is one reason these races are easy to skip. They are worth a few minutes of research, because the judges you elect decide real cases in your community.

Try This Find out which justice court serves your home and which judicial district your county is in. The Nevada courts website has a "Find a Court" page that lists every court in the state.

Chapter 8: Counties

Nevada has 16 counties plus Carson City, which is a consolidated city and county, for 17 county-level governments in all. For many Nevadans, especially outside Las Vegas and Reno, the county is the government that matters most day to day.

How Big They Are

Nevada's counties range from huge to tiny. The state's own certified population estimates for July 1, 2025 show how uneven they are.

County	Population, July 1, 2025
Clark	2,448,576
Washoe	519,471
Lyon	66,154
Carson City	61,888
Elko	58,031
Douglas	57,149
Nye	52,306
Churchill	27,364
Humboldt	17,918
White Pine	10,236
Pershing	7,332
Lander	5,998
Mineral	4,702
Lincoln	4,667
Storey	4,462
Eureka	1,832
Esmeralda	1,217
State of Nevada	3,349,303

Clark County alone holds about 73 percent of the state's people. Lyon County is the third largest, just ahead of Carson City.

The County Commission

Each county is governed by a board of county commissioners. The commission passes county ordinances, adopts the county budget, sets certain local tax rates within state limits, decides planning and zoning matters in the parts of the county outside cities, and appoints a county manager to run day-to-day operations.

Elected County Officers

Besides the commissioners, Nevada voters elect a set of county officers. The exact list varies a little by county, but most counties elect:

Officer	What the office does
Sheriff	Law enforcement outside city police areas; runs the county jail
District Attorney	Prosecutes crimes; gives legal advice to the county
Assessor	Values property for property taxes
Treasurer	Collects property taxes and manages county funds
Clerk	Keeps county records and the commission's minutes; in many counties also runs elections
Recorder	Records deeds, mortgages and other documents
Public Administrator	Handles estates of people who die without anyone to manage them

In some counties, including Lyon, one person serves as both clerk and treasurer. Each county also elects justices of the peace for its justice courts. Lyon County's fact sheet counted 13 elected county officials in all, including the commissioners.

Term limits apply to some of these offices and not others. Nevada voters approved term limits for state and local officials in 1996.

According to a Legislative Counsel Bureau research brief, an Attorney General's opinion found that the limits apply to members of local governing bodies, such as county commissioners, city council members and town board members, but not to the county clerk, recorder, sheriff, treasurer, assessor, district attorney or public administrator.

Lyon County

Lyon County became a county of the Nevada Territory on November 24, 1861, three years before Nevada became a state. It covers about 2,013 square miles, stretching 91 miles north to south. Dayton was its first county seat, named by the first Territorial Legislature in 1861. After the Dayton courthouse burned, the county seat moved to Yerington in 1911, where it remains. Lyon County is governed by a five-member board of county commissioners and a county manager. The county lists eight communities: Dayton, Fernley, Mason Valley, Mound House, Silver City, Silver Springs, Smith Valley and Stagecoach.

Lyon County has two incorporated cities, Fernley with 26,006 people and Yerington with 3,549 in 2025. That leaves about 36,600 people, more than half of the county, living outside any city, in places such as Dayton, Silver Springs, Stagecoach, Mound House, Silver City and Smith Valley. For all of those residents, the county commission is the closest thing to a city council, and the sheriff is the local police.

Try This Find your county commission district and the name of your commissioner. Then look up when the commission meets next and how to make a public comment.

Chapter 9: Cities, Towns and Districts

Below the county level, Nevada has three kinds of local government that people often mix up: incorporated cities, unincorporated towns, and special districts. Knowing which ones serve your address tells you who to call and who to vote for.

Incorporated Cities

An incorporated city has its own elected mayor and city council, its own budget, and the power to pass city ordinances. Many cities have their own police departments, municipal courts, parks and public works departments. Nevada's cities include large ones such as Las Vegas, Henderson, Reno, North Las Vegas and Sparks, and small ones such as Yerington and Caliente.

In Lyon County, Fernley and Yerington are incorporated cities. Fernley had 26,006 people in 2025 and Yerington had 3,549, according to the state's certified estimates.

Unincorporated Towns and Communities

Many Nevada communities that look like towns on a map are not cities at all. They are unincorporated, which means they are governed directly by the county. Dayton, Silver Springs and Stagecoach in Lyon County are examples. So are large places such as Paradise and Spring Valley in Clark County, where the Las Vegas Strip actually sits outside the City of Las Vegas.

In an unincorporated community, the county commission makes the decisions a city council would make elsewhere. Roads are county roads, zoning is county zoning, and law enforcement comes from the sheriff.

Citizen Advisory Boards

To give unincorporated communities a voice, counties often set up advisory boards made up of local residents. Clark County calls them town advisory boards and citizens advisory councils. Lyon County calls them Citizen Advisory Boards.

Lyon County's handbook for its advisory boards, revised in May 2025, says they "help to identify issues of importance to their communities and facilitate the flow of information between the Board of County Commissioners and the public." It lists the kinds of issues they take up: neighborhood cleanup, animal control, land development, garbage pickup, park development, rezoning, street lighting, annexation and road maintenance. The county commission appoints the members, who must live in the area, for staggered two-year terms. The boards meet monthly in public under the Open Meeting Law, with public comment at the start and end of each meeting, usually limited to three minutes per person.

An advisory board cannot pass laws or spend money. As the Lyon County handbook puts it, "The Commissioners retain all decision-making authority." What it can do is hold public meetings close to home, hear from neighbors about proposed developments and other issues, and send recommendations to the county commission. For a resident of a place like Dayton, the advisory board meeting is often the easiest place to be heard on a project down the street.

Special Districts

A special district is a local government created to do one job in one area. Each has its own governing board, its own budget, and often its own tax or fees. Common kinds in Nevada include:

- **School districts**, covered in the next chapter.

- **General improvement districts**, often called GIDs, which can provide water, sewer, streets, parks, trash service or other services to a neighborhood or community.
- **Fire protection districts**, which provide fire and emergency medical services outside city fire departments.
- **Water and sewer districts**, and water conservancy or conservation districts.
- **Hospital districts and library districts** in some counties.

Special district boards are among the least-watched elected offices in Nevada, yet they can set the rates you pay for water and sewer. Their meetings are public, and their agendas must be posted in advance under Nevada's Open Meeting Law.

How a Town Becomes a City

A community can incorporate and become a city, but it is not simple. It requires approval under state law, usually including a vote of the residents, and the new city has to show it can pay for the services it would take over from the county. Yerington, for example, became a city in 1907, and four years later it became the Lyon County seat.

Try This Look at a map of your area and find out whether you live inside a city, in an unincorporated town, or in the open county. Then check your property tax bill to see which special districts serve your home.

Chapter 10: School Districts

Public schools in Nevada are run by school districts, and Nevada organizes them in an unusual way: there is one school district for each county. That means the Lyon County School District serves every public school student in the county, from Fernley to Smith Valley, and the Clark County School District serves the whole Las Vegas valley and beyond.

Who Runs the Schools

Each school district is governed by an elected board of trustees. The trustees hire the superintendent, adopt the district budget, set district policies, and approve things like school calendars and attendance boundaries. Trustees are elected in nonpartisan races and usually represent areas within the county.

At the state level, the Nevada Department of Education and the State Board of Education set statewide standards, testing and teacher licensing, and the Legislature decides how much state money goes to schools through the state's school funding formula.

How Schools Are Paid For

Nevada schools are paid for by a mix of state money, local property and sales taxes, and federal money. A 2019 law, Senate Bill 543, replaced the old school funding formula, called the Nevada Plan, with the Pupil-Centered Funding Plan beginning with the 2021-2023 budget. According to the Nevada Department of Education, the plan "for the first time combines specific local and state revenues to provide a guaranteed basic level of financial support for each pupil." It starts with a statewide base amount per student, adjusts it for each district, and adds weighted funding for English learners, at-risk students, and gifted and talented students, plus

separate money for special education and for services such as transportation and school meals.

Charter Schools

Nevada also has public charter schools. They are free and open to the public, but they are run by their own boards instead of the school district. Some are sponsored by the local district, and many are sponsored by the State Public Charter School Authority.

How to Be Heard

School board meetings are public, and they include time for public comment. Many districts stream their meetings. If you have a concern about your child's school, the usual path is the teacher first, then the principal, then the district office, and finally the board of trustees.

Try This Find out who represents your area on the school board. Look up the date of the next board meeting and read the agenda, even if you do not plan to go.

Chapter 11: Tribal Nations and Federal Land

Two kinds of government in Nevada are not part of the state at all, and both matter a great deal here: tribal governments and the federal agencies that manage most of Nevada's land.

Tribal Nations

Tribal nations are self-governing. A tribe's own government, usually an elected tribal council, makes laws and runs services for its members on its lands, and works with the state and federal governments as one government to another. A county commission or the Legislature does not run a reservation or colony.

According to the Nevada Department of Native American Affairs, "Nevada's Tribal Nations include the five major groups, 28 federally recognized Tribes, and urban Native communities." The five major groups it names are the Washoe, the Northern Paiute, the Western Shoshone, the Southern Paiute and the Fort Mojave. The department lists 32 reservations and colonies across the state, from Duck Valley on the Idaho line to the Moapa River Reservation and the Las Vegas Indian Colony in the south. Close to Lyon County, the list includes the Walker River Reservation and Pyramid Lake.

The department also counts more than 62,000 Native people living in Nevada's cities, outside reservations and colonies.

Good to Know The Nevada Department of Native American Affairs, based in Carson City, is the state agency that works with tribal governments and keeps a directory of tribes.

Federal Land

Drive across almost any part of rural Nevada and much of what you see is federal land. Most of the state's land is managed by federal agencies, mainly the Bureau of Land Management, along with the U.S. Forest Service, the military, and the Department of Energy. Neither the state nor the counties control how most of that land is used. Decisions about grazing, mining, wild horses, energy projects and recreation on those lands are made by federal agencies under federal law, usually after public comment periods.

That has real effects on local government. Counties cannot collect ordinary property taxes on federal land, which is one reason the federal government makes payments to counties to make up part of the difference. A county that wants land for a new park, landfill or neighborhood often has to ask Congress or a federal agency to sell or transfer it.

Try This Look at a land ownership map of your county. Notice how much of it is federal land, tribal land or private land, and think about which government you would go to for a decision about each.

Chapter 12: Elections and Voting

Elections in Nevada are run by two levels of government working together. The Secretary of State oversees elections statewide, keeps the statewide voter registration system and certifies results. Each county's clerk or registrar of voters runs the actual election: mailing ballots, setting up voting sites, hiring poll workers, and counting the votes. In Clark County and Washoe County the job belongs to a registrar of voters; in most other counties, including Lyon, the county clerk runs elections.

When Nevada Votes

Nevada holds its primary election in June of even-numbered years and its general election on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November of even-numbered years. Most state and county offices are on the ballot in the same even-numbered years as federal races. Some cities hold their own elections on a different schedule.

Registering and Voting

According to the federal Election Assistance Commission's January 2026 profile of Nevada election rules:

- Nevada allows same-day registration, so an eligible person can register and vote at the same time.
- Ballots are mailed to all active registered voters statewide. You can mark your ballot at home and mail it or drop it off, or you can vote in person.
- Early in-person voting begins on the third Saturday before Election Day.
- A mailed ballot must be postmarked by Election Day and received by 5 p.m. on the fourth day after the election.

- If there is a problem with the signature on your mail ballot, Nevada has a statewide process to "cure" it, so your vote can still count.
- The profile describes Nevada's primaries as partially open. Ask your county clerk or registrar which primary ballot you can get based on how you are registered.

Rules change, especially after a legislative session, so check the Secretary of State's website before each election.

None of These Candidates

Nevada ballots include a choice most American voters never see: "None of These Candidates." It appears in statewide races and presidential races. Voters can choose it to show they reject every candidate. Even if "None of These Candidates" gets the most votes, the candidate with the most votes among the actual candidates wins. In the 2026 race for Governor, about 1 percent of voters chose it.

Nonpartisan Races

Judges, school board trustees and some local offices appear on the ballot without a party label. These races are easy to skip, and they often decide things closer to home than the races at the top of the ballot.

Photo ID Starting in 2028

With the second approval of Question 7 in 2026, the Nevada Constitution will require voters to show a government-issued photo ID to vote in person, and mail voters to provide the last four digits of their driver's license or Social Security number. It is expected to take effect for the 2028 elections. The Legislature will set the details, such as which IDs count, during the 2027 session.

Try This Check your voter registration on the Secretary of State's website. Make sure your address is current, especially if you have moved, so your ballot goes to the right place.

Chapter 13: Ballot Questions: When Voters Make the Law

Nevada voters do not have to wait for the Legislature. Under the Nevada Constitution, citizens can write a law or a constitutional amendment, collect signatures, and put it on the ballot. They can also ask voters to keep or throw out a law the Legislature already passed. And the Legislature itself sends questions to the voters. That is why Nevada ballots often have several statewide questions on them.

Four Ways a Question Reaches the Ballot

Type	Who starts it	What happens
Initiative to change the constitution	Citizens, by petition	Must be approved by voters at two general elections in a row
Initiative to make a law (statute)	Citizens, by petition	Goes first to the Legislature; if lawmakers do not pass it, it goes to the voters at the next general election
Referendum	Citizens, by petition	Voters decide whether to keep a law already on the books; if voters reject it, the law is repealed
Legislative referral	The Legislature	A constitutional amendment must pass two regular sessions in a row, then the voters once

How Many Signatures

To qualify a petition, sponsors must collect valid signatures from registered voters equal to 10 percent of the total votes cast in the last general election. The signatures must be spread across the state: each of Nevada's four congressional districts must supply its share. For the 2026 ballot, that meant more than 147,000 signatures, including more than 37,000 from each of the four districts.

Petitions have strict deadlines. A constitutional initiative for the November ballot has to be filed with county election officials 15 days after the primary election. An initiative to make a statute has to be filed shortly after the general election so it can go to the Legislature when the next session begins.

Why Amendments Need Two Votes

A citizen initiative that changes the Nevada Constitution has to pass twice, at two general elections in a row. The idea is to give voters a second look before a change becomes part of the state's founding document. A question that passes the first time and fails the second time does not take effect.

Protection for Voter-Passed Laws

When voters approve an initiative that makes a statute, the Legislature cannot amend or repeal it for three years after it takes effect. After that, lawmakers can change it like any other law.

The 2026 Ballot

In 2026 only two statewide questions qualified, the fewest since 2012. Both were second votes on constitutional amendments that first passed in 2024.

- **Question 6** would put the right to an abortion into the Nevada Constitution, up to fetal viability or when needed to protect the life or health of the pregnant patient. It passed in 2024 by nearly 29 percentage points.
- **Question 7** would require voters to show a government-issued photo ID to vote in person, and mail voters to include the last four digits of their driver's license or Social Security number. It passed in 2024 by more than 46 percentage points. If it passed again, it would take effect for the 2028 elections.

On November 3, 2026, voters approved both questions a second time: about 63 percent voted yes on Question 6, and about 61 to 62 percent voted yes on Question 7, depending on which count you read. In 2024 the yes votes had been 64.4 percent and 73.2 percent, so both passed by smaller margins the second time. Because each passed at two general elections in a row, both become part of the Nevada Constitution once the Supreme Court canvasses the vote, which by law happens on the fourth Tuesday in November. The figures here are unofficial counts reported by The Nevada Independent, from the Associated Press and the Secretary of State, and in a November 4, 2026 election summary. Check the Secretary of State's certified results for the final numbers.

Reading a Ballot Question

Every statewide question on your ballot comes with an explanation, a digest of what it would do, arguments for and against, and a note on its fiscal effect. The Secretary of State publishes the full text and explanations before each election, and your sample ballot includes them. Read the "what a yes vote means" and "what a no vote means" lines carefully. On some questions, a yes vote keeps things as they are; on others, it changes them.

Try This Look up the sample ballot for the next election in your county. Read one ballot question all the way through, including the arguments for and against, before you read any news coverage of it.

Chapter 14: How to Reach Your Officials

Government in Nevada is small enough that one person can be heard. A state legislator may represent tens of thousands of people, but in a short session they hear from far fewer than that. A county commissioner may get only a handful of comments on an item. A thoughtful message from a constituent counts.

Step 1: Find Out Who Represents You

Start with your address. The Nevada Legislature's website (leg.state.nv.us) has a "Who's My Legislator" lookup where you enter your address and it shows your state senator and Assembly member. Your county's website shows your county commission district, and your county clerk or registrar can tell you every district you vote in, from Congress down to the school board and any special districts. Your sample ballot lists them too.

Write the names down on the worksheet at the back of this book.

Step 2: Pick the Right Level

Before you call, ask which level of government actually handles your problem. A pothole on a county road goes to the county public works department, not your state senator. A problem with a state agency, such as unemployment benefits or the DMV, is a good one to bring to your legislator, whose office can often help untangle it. A proposed subdivision in an unincorporated town goes to the county planning commission and county commission, and in Lyon County to the local advisory board first.

Step 3: Say It Well

Whether you write, call or speak at a meeting, a few habits make a big difference.

1. Say who you are and where you live. Officials pay the most attention to their own constituents.
2. Name the bill number or agenda item if there is one.
3. Say what you want: support, oppose, or a specific change.
4. Give one or two reasons, from your own experience if you can.
5. Keep it short and polite. A calm, specific message is more persuasive than an angry one.

Testifying on a Bill

During a session, every bill gets a committee hearing, and the public can speak. You can speak in person in Carson City, and the Legislature has also offered ways to testify or comment from a distance; check the hearing agenda for the options available. The Legislature's website also has an online opinion poll where you can register whether you support or oppose a bill. Agendas are posted on the Legislature's website before each hearing, so check the agenda for the bill you care about. When you speak, you will usually be asked to say whether you are for the bill, against it, or neutral.

Speaking at a Local Meeting

County commissions, city councils, school boards and advisory boards all hold public meetings under Nevada's Open Meeting Law. The agenda must be posted ahead of time, and each meeting includes a time for general public comment. Many boards also take comment on each agenda item before they vote. Comments are usually limited to a few minutes, so write down what you want to say.

Writing an Email

Email is the easiest way to reach most officials, and many staff members read every one. Use the subject line for the bill number or issue, put your request in the first sentence, and include your home address so they know you are a constituent.

Try This Write a three-sentence email to one of your officials about one issue that matters to you. You do not have to send it today. Writing it is the first step.

Chapter 15: Where Things Stand: November 2026

This chapter is a snapshot. It records where Nevada government stood on November 18, 2026, two weeks after the general election and about ten weeks before the next session of the Legislature. Much of it will be out of date by the time you read it, which is why the rest of this book focuses on how things work rather than who is in charge.

The 2026 Election

On November 3, 2026, Nevada voters elected a new Governor and filled every statewide office. Unofficial results reported by The Nevada Independent, from the Associated Press and the Secretary of State, showed the following winners.

Office	Winner	Share of the vote
Governor	Aaron D. Ford (Democrat)	about 52 percent
Lieutenant Governor	Sandra Jauregui (Democrat)	about 54 percent
Attorney General	Nicole Cannizzaro (Democrat)	about 56 percent
Secretary of State	Francisco “Cisco” Aguilar (Democrat)	about 57 percent
State Treasurer	Tya Mathis-Coleman (Democrat)	about 55 percent
State Controller	Michael MacDougall (Democrat)	about 54 percent

Aaron Ford, who had served as Attorney General, defeated Governor Joe Lombardo. The Nevada Independent reported that Ford will be Nevada’s first Black governor and that Democrats would hold every statewide office for the first time since John F. Kennedy was president.

The Legislature

Democrats have controlled both houses of the Legislature since the 2016 election and will keep large majorities in 2027. Early reports said Democrats won a two-thirds supermajority in the Assembly and fell one seat short of two-thirds in the Senate, with some races still close as of the morning after the election. Two-thirds matters in Nevada because it takes a two-thirds vote in each house to override a veto and to pass a bill that raises certain taxes.

The 84th Session of the Legislature begins on February 1, 2027.

The Constitution

Voters approved Questions 6 and 7 for the second time. Once the vote is canvassed, the Nevada Constitution will protect abortion up to fetal viability, or later when needed to protect the life or health of the patient, and will require photo identification to vote in person, with the voter ID rule taking effect for the 2028 elections.

What to Watch in 2027

- The new Governor takes office in January 2027 and presents a proposed two-year budget to the Legislature.
- The Legislature will have to put the voter ID amendment into practice with laws on what ID is accepted and how mail voters prove who they are.
- Hundreds of bills will be filed. The deadlines come fast, so if an issue matters to you, follow it from the start of the session.

Try This When the 2027 session begins, pick one bill that affects your town or your work. Follow it from its first committee hearing to its final vote, and send one comment to the committee before it votes.

My Officials Worksheet

Fill in the names and how to reach each official who represents your home address. Keep this page with your voter information and update it after each election.

Office	Name	Phone or email
Governor		
My state senator (district _____)		
My Assembly member (district _____)		
My county commissioner (district _____)		
County sheriff		
County clerk or registrar		
My mayor and city council member, if I live in a city		
My advisory board, if I live in an unincorporated town		
My school board trustee		
My water, sewer or general improvement district		
My fire protection district		
My justice court		

Glossary

Assembly. The larger house of the Nevada Legislature, with 42 members serving two-year terms.

Ballot question. A proposed law or constitutional amendment that voters decide directly.

Biennium. The two-year period covered by the state budget.

Bill draft request (BDR). The request that starts the drafting of a bill.

Board of county commissioners. The elected governing board of a county.

Charter. A document, approved by the Legislature, that sets up a city's government.

Citizen Advisory Board. A board of residents that gives advice to the county commission on matters in an unincorporated community.

Conference committee. Members of both houses who try to settle differences between two versions of a bill.

Enrolled bill. The final version of a bill passed by both houses and sent to the Governor.

General improvement district (GID). A local district that provides services such as water, sewer or streets to one area.

Incorporated city. A community with its own city government.

Initiative. A law or constitutional amendment proposed by citizens through a petition.

Interim. The time between regular sessions of the Legislature.

NELIS. The Nevada Electronic Legislative Information System, the Legislature's online system for bills, hearings and votes.

Nonpartisan. An office that appears on the ballot without a party label.

Referendum. A vote on whether to keep a law the Legislature already passed.

Senate. The smaller house of the Nevada Legislature, with 21 members serving four-year terms.

Special session. A meeting of the Legislature outside the regular session, called by the Governor or by two-thirds of the members.

Supermajority. A two-thirds vote, needed in Nevada for some tax bills and to override a veto.

Unincorporated town. A community governed directly by the county rather than by a city government.

Veto. The Governor's rejection of a bill.

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About This Book

How Nevada Government Works is part of a set of free plain-language guides from Trinfinity Enterprises. Facts were checked against official sources as of November 18, 2026. If you find something that has changed or that needs correcting, please write to andrew@trinfinityenterprises.com.