

AN INTRODUCTORY PRIMER ON

# Local Government in Iran





Local government is often the place where citizens are best able to interact with officials and where decision making often has more direct impact on people's everyday lives.

Public transportation, garbage collection, street conditions, green space; these are the quality of life issues that municipal residents feel every day. Having an empowered citizenry that can hold government to account requires having an informed citizenry that knows the "rules of the game." With such information, citizens can test how well their government is meeting the minimum standards and requirements for operating and representing constituent interests.

This document is meant to catalogue and explain some of the prerogatives and regulations affecting local government in Iran based on an analysis of the legal framework. It does not consider how these

are put into practice, which will vary based on individual localities, community size, leaders' personalities and local political dynamics. Nor does it clarify all of the gray areas between municipalities, the central government, and external service providers that leave many citizens frustrated and uncertain about who has responsibility.

With this information, however, Iranian citizens can better know that governments are, for example, required by law to publish expenditures or make meetings open to the public.

Similarly, they can clarify that it is the central government and not the municipality that addresses school issues. Armed with the knowledge of details like this, they can then demand that governments fulfill those basic responsibilities that uphold the law and open avenues to more responsive governance.

Help us keep this information up to date and track how governments are performing. If you note errors in this guide, please let us know—be sure to reference the source of your understanding. Submit information to [info@nabz-iran.com](mailto:info@nabz-iran.com). You can also inform us about whether your local government is fulfilling the obligations outlined here—

send us the name of the community and which items they are or are not fulfilling.

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[theglobaldialogue.ca](http://theglobaldialogue.ca)

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# Municipalities

Cities across the country are governed by municipal governments headed by a mayor. The mayor is appointed by the city council for four-year terms.

## MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT RESPONSIBILITIES

(from Article 55 of the Law of Municipalities)

- Build, develop, maintain and clean the public sphere and water and sewage systems
- Lead urban planning and oversee licensing for all constructions
- Provide licensing for all businesses
- Provide public health to prevent epidemic diseases
- Create cultural, health, and cooperative organizations
- Oversee legislation related to businesses. Close non-registered, unhealthy, and intruding businesses
- Protect the city from flood, fire, and other disasters
- Build inexpensive housing for low income citizens
- Create public spaces for food markets and ensure high quality and good quality
- Control city taxes and fees with approval of the city council
- Control the market and pricing
- Prevent beggary and enforce employment for beggars
- Protect the city's belongings
- Build cemeteries and slaughterhouses
- Collect taxes and fees and control the municipality's budget
- Collect statistical data on city population, births, and deaths
- Protect cultural sites and historic landmarks
- Control sanitary conditions in factories and public bathhouses

## MUNICIPAL BUDGETS

Municipalities are self-sustained public organizations independent from the central government. Although they might receive help from the national government, municipalities need to secure most of their budget through taxes and fees from citizens, businesses, factories, and other local initiatives. Every municipality has its own budget, which must be approved by the city council (Law of Municipalities, Article 65).

## FUNDING SOURCES

There are six categories of municipal income (Organizational Structure, Article 29):

1. Public taxes
2. Special taxes
3. Service fees and income from for-profit organizations
4. Financial investments
5. Government assistance
6. Philanthropy from citizens and private organizations

## BUDGETING PROCESS

Municipal budget proposals must consider the following elements:

- Needs for priority developments and service units of the city
- Policies and five-year development goals of the central government
- Policies and strategies within the five-year plan of municipalities
- Yearly municipality budget announced by the Interior Ministry

## Public Information and the Budget

Notably, every six months the municipality must publish a complete list of all income and spending as well as a comprehensive account of all of the municipality's work. These must be published to provide information to the public, with a copy also being sent to the Ministry of Interior. (*Municipality Law, Article 71*)

The mayor must submit a budget proposal to the municipal council by the end of 10<sup>th</sup> month of the year (*Dey*). After submitting the municipality budget proposal to the council, the mayor may request a minimum of 3 council meetings every week to attend and offer explanation of the various elements of the budget proposal. The council must review and finalize the budget by the end of each year.

By the 15<sup>th</sup> day of every month, the mayor must submit the income and spending accounts from the previous month to the municipal council.

## FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

The mayor has the authority to increase or decrease the budget by 10 percent for each activity in a category, as long as it does not go over the entire allocated budget for that category.

The mayor and the city's financial director or accountant (depending on the size of the municipality) are responsible for planning, proposing, allocating, and monitoring the spending of the budget. The entire income of a municipality must be spent in the respective city as allocated to different neighborhoods and cannot be transferred to be spent in other cities (*Municipality Law, Article 72*).

## Budget Responsibility

Even if the mayor delegates financial responsibilities to another employee of the municipality, the overall responsibility and accountability still lies with the mayor.

## STRUCTURE OF CENTRAL AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACROSS IRAN

DIVISION	ADMINISTRATION	APPOINTMENT	GOVERNMENT
Country	Interior Minister	President	CENTRAL
Province	Governor	Interior Minister	CENTRAL
County	County Governor	Interior Minister	CENTRAL
District	District Governor	Interior Minister	CENTRAL
City	Mayor	City Council	LOCAL
Village Community	Village Community Governor	Interior Minister	CENTRAL
Village	Village Chief	Village Council	LOCAL

# City, Village, Province and District Councils

Articles 6, 7, 12, 100, 101, 102, 103, 105 and 106 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran state that local councils must be an essential part of decision making and local administration in the country. The first council elections were held in 1999 under President Seyed Mohammad Khatami, which opened a new chapter in the decentralization of administration in Iran.

## COUNCIL ELECTIONS

Every four years around 200,000 members are elected to the city, village, province, and district councils across Iran. Council members are elected directly by their local constituents and serve four-year terms.

Candidates must be approved by their county (for city councils) or district (for village councils) "Supervisory Board." According to law, the Parliament (*Majlis*) is responsible for overseeing council elections through these Boards. First, Members

of Parliament choose a five-member central Supervisory Board among themselves. The central board is then responsible for selecting provincial supervisory boards that in turn appoint five-member district councils. These are charged with approving candidates.

### Did you know?

If two or more candidates get the same number of votes, the priority is with war veterans. If there are no veteran candidates, priority is with the candidate with the higher educational degree. If education level is equal, the final candidate will be picked through drawing.

Elections are administered by the Ministry of Interior. Locally, an "Executive Board" is formed to oversee council elections. The board is headed by the county governor (for city councils) or district governor (for village councils) and consists of the head of the Registration Office, head of the Education Office, and eight trusted members of the community. The county or district governor first selects 30 trusted members of the community who will then hold a meeting and vote for

8 (for city) or 7 (for village) candidates among themselves (Organization, Responsibility and Election of the Islamic Councils Law, Articles 32-34).

## EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS FOR COUNCIL MEMBER

### COUNCIL

### EDUCATION REQUIREMENT

TRIBE



Literacy

VILLAGE (Population under 1,500)



Literacy

VILLAGE (Population over 1,500)



High School diploma

CITY (Population under 20,000)



Associate degree

CITY (Population over 20,000)



Bachelor's degree



COUNCIL STRUCTURE

Each council elects a president, board of directors, secretary, and treasurer among its members through an internal election. Councils are also divided into different committees and commissions. All of these positions are valid for two years, at which time mid-term internal elections

are held and positions are reorganized accordingly. In many cases, the areas of concern for commissions and committees overlap with responsibilities managed by the central government, such as education and police services; the local entities then serve in an advisory role.

CITY COUNCIL COMMISSIONS AND COMMITTEES

COMMITTEES

Budget  
Legislation  
Administration and Organization  
Economy and Investment  
Planning

Culture  
Society  
Sports  
Health

City planning  
Safety  
Environment  
Information Technology

COMMISSIONS



Budget and Planning



Culture, Society and Sports



Development and Services

CITY COUNCIL AREAS OF CONCERN

AREAS OF CONCERN

Economy	Audit	Legal
Finance	Organization	Income
Planning	Administration	
Budget	Accounting	

Arts	Health	Cooperatives
Culture	Sports	Welfare and Charity
Religion	Leisure	Crime
Education	Tourism	

Traffic	Architecture	Safety
Transportation	Urban Planning	Trash
Construction	Landscape	Fire
Technology	Pollution	

COMMISSIONS



Budget and Planning



Culture, Society and Sports



Development and Services

## COUNCIL COMMISSION RESPONSIBILITIES

### Budget and Planning

- Allocation of budgets for the municipality and city council
- Regulations related to organizations that belong to the municipality
- Transactions undertaken by the city and municipality
- Legislation and projects related to city taxes
- Legislation and projects related to the municipality
- Monitoring and evaluation of city regulations in order to reform them
- Oversight of appointment of city council representatives in other organizations
- Use of expert opinions

### Culture, Society and Sports Commission

- Arts and culture
- Politics and security
- Sports and tourism
- Civil society organizations

- Education and health
- Crime and violations
- Charity organizations





### Urban Planning and Services Commission

- City areas and boundaries
- City development and expansion of roads and highways
- Infrastructure including water, sewage, gas, electricity and telephone
- Usage of land outside city boundaries
- Transportation and traffic

## COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP

The number of members for each council is based on the population of the administrative division or unit. Nomadic tribes with a minimum of 20 families are considered similar to a village and entitled to have their own council. The largest council is that of Tehran, with 31 main members and 12 standby members (*Articles 4, 7, and 68 of the Organization, Responsibility and Election of Islamic Councils Law*).

## NUMBER OF COUNCIL MEMBERS ACCORDING TO POPULATION

	DIVISION	POPULATION	MEMBERS
	Tribe	20 families	3 main
	Village	Under 1,500	3 main
	Village	Over 1,500	5 main
	City	Under 20,000	5 main, 2 standby
	City	20,000 to 50,000	7 main, 3 standby
	City	50,000 to 100,000	9 main, 4 standby
	City	100,000 to 200,000	11 main, 5 standby
	City	200,000 to 500,000	13 main, 6 standby
	City	500,000 to 1,000,000	15 main, 7 standby
	City	1,000,000 to 2,000,000	21 main, 8 standby
	City	Over 2,000,000	25 main, 10 standby
	Capital	Tehran	31 main, 12 standby

## COUNCIL RESPONSIBILITIES

The key responsibility of councils is the appointment of the first level of local government (the executive branch) in their respective division; village councils appoint village chiefs and city councils appoint mayors. In addition, councils have legislative and oversight powers within their respective local divisions. Decisions are made with the votes of the majority of members present at the meeting. Their chief responsibilities are:

- Appointing mayors and village chiefs
- Overseeing and monitoring management of municipalities
- Approving municipal budgets
- Interacting with citizens in order to identify and solve their problems
- Legislating local regulations
- Monitoring and evaluating the execution of legislation

However, the legal framework creates distinctions in the responsibilities of councils depending on whether they are at the village or city level.

## VILLAGE-SPECIFIC COUNCIL RESPONSIBILITIES

(Law of Councils, Article 68)

- Appoint the Village Chief for four-year terms
- Make suggestions to executive officials, who must respond within two months
- Hold a minimum of two yearly public meetings to report their work to citizens, answer questions, receive suggestions, and encourage citizen engagement and participation
- Explain and justify government policies to village residents and encourage them to follow policies
- Approve budgets
- Monitor and evaluate development projects related to the village
- Collaborate with government officials in the development, administration, and utilization of public facilities required for the village
- Conduct rescue efforts and provide assistance during disasters

- Assist lower-income and single-parent families in local communities
- Resolve conflicts among people and communities
- Follow up on citizen complaints with official entities to ensure resolution
- Collaborate with the police to maintain public order and safety
- Create opportunities for public participation in the work of ministries and other government entities
- Interact with citizens in order to identify and solve their problems

## Public Opinion

If a village council decides that it is necessary to solicit public opinion on a certain topic, it can call for a public meeting with the approval of the district governor. (Village Councils, Article 16)

## CITY-SPECIFIC COUNCIL RESPONSIBILITIES

(Law of Councils, Article 71)

- Appoint the mayor for four-year terms
- Identify needs in social, cultural, educational, health, economic, and welfare areas and provide plans and suggestions to respective officials
- Oversee the execution of council legislation and approved proposals in the municipality and other service organizations
- Collaborate with executive officials and government organizations upon their request in social, cultural, educational, economic, and development areas
- Evaluate and approve legal amendments proposed by the municipality
- Oversee the management and preservation of the financial and material assets of the municipality and monitor municipal income and spending
- Approve the annual budget of the municipality and its affiliated organizations and companies, also approving the city council budget



- Approve the municipality's overall income and expenditure every six months, publish them for public information, and send a copy to the Ministry of Interior
- Approve the annual plans and budgets of government and private entities providing services to the city
- Approve loans proposed by the municipality with careful review of amount, duration and interest
- Approve and monitor transactions of the municipality or the city including sales, purchases, leasing, and rentals. *(In order to expedite transactions, the council may assign the mayor to approve transactions up to a designated amount)*
- Approve the statute of companies and organizations related to the municipality, with the approval of the Interior Ministry
- Approve legislation to collect, cancel or change the amount of city taxes
- Oversee claims and courts related to the municipality
- Oversee public health and hygiene in the city
- Oversee cinemas, theaters, and other centers run by the private sector or the government and set necessary rules to ensure order and cleanliness and prevent fire and such
- Collaborate with the municipality to formalize city borders, with approval of the Interior Ministry and the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning
- Review and approve general urban planning projects and legal city barriers as proposed by the municipality, then send them to relevant legal entities for final approval
- Set rules for non-encapsulated lands in the city to ensure cleanliness, safety, and beauty
- Oversee cemeteries, funeral homes, and body transportation material to ensure hygiene
- Set regulations and oversee drilling for urban construction
- Oversee projects related to the construction of streets, squares, and green spaces
- Approve the naming of public spaces and areas
- Establish and publish regulations regarding any writings, posters, or advertisements on city walls

- Approve rates for services provided by the municipality and its affiliated organizations
- Approve rates for public transportation
- Set regulations for the municipality to create public markets providing life necessities to the public
- Set regulations for the municipality to collaborate with other entities in holding agriculture, arts, and trade expos
- Plan and increase citizen participation in social, economic, development, cultural, educational and welfare services
- Encourage citizens to develop and increase leisure, recreation, sports, tourism, and cultural centers, in coordination with respective organizations
- Assist in the formation of social communities, starting cooperatives, and distributing food stamps
- Collaborate with the county's security council as required by law

### Did You Know?

The city council is required to publish its budget and expenditures for public information at the end of each financial year.

### PUBLIC ACCESS AND TRANSPARENCY

According to the law, all council meetings are public and become official when two-thirds of the main members are present. The general public and the media are free to attend council meetings, though they need to coordinate with the council's public relations unit and be seated in designated seats. They must keep quiet during the meeting, otherwise they could be asked to leave.

Closed-door meetings can be held in special circumstances but need an approval by a vote of two-thirds of the members present in that meeting ([Article 28](#)). The mayor or governor can submit written requests for closed-door meetings, which must be approved by an absolute majority of the members present.

## Closed-door Meetings

The mayor or governor can request closed door meetings with the council, but they must submit a written request that needs to be approved by an absolute majority of the council members present.

All discussions in council meetings are public and available for broadcast and publication. A copy of each meeting's minutes should be archived.

Council members must be available to meet and interact with citizens and hear their problems and issues. In-person

meetings as well as mail, telephone, fax, and email (in larger cities) are different methods of contacting the council.

The Transparency and Freedom of Information Act requires councils to publish all information regarding legislation, budget allocation, projects, and taxes and fees for the public. Councils are also required to ensure the presence of media in all public meetings.

Printed council publications are available for the general public, with detailed information on council legislation, elections, and responsibilities, as well events and other topics. In Tehran, publications can be requested over the phone at +98-21-88891025.

## City Councils and Politics

Sohrab Arabi, 19, was killed in June 2009 in Tehran while participating in popular protests after the contested presidential election. His mother was later invited to a public meeting of Tehran's city council to speak about her son's death. The city council's meeting essentially provided a medium for her as a citizen to share her tragic experience publicly and request justice.

Video of the meeting: <http://youtu.be/9HkiYEH7ato>



## Citizen Participation on Councils

Council Assistants (*Shora-Yari*) are officially sanctioned community organizations with the responsibility to monitor the municipal government and issues within their neighborhoods. They were founded as financially independent citizen assistance bodies to the city councils with the goal of creating citizen participation in local government and serving as a bridge between citizens and the councils, municipalities, and other governmental entities. Council Assistants are essentially non-political, participatory entities which must be financially independent and run on a volunteer basis. Founded as a mechanism to create more citizen participation in local government and serve as a bridge between citizens and governmental

entities, Council Assistant organizations are an opportunity for regular, non-council citizens to be elected as the representative of their neighborhood or district and assist the local council. (*Law of the Council-Assistants*)

Theoretically, each main neighborhood in a city could have one of these *Shora-Yari* councils. However, every municipal council establishes its own laws and regulations for the Council Assistants and the number members. In Tehran, for example, these councils each have 7 main members and 3 standby members. Members are elected by neighborhood residents over the age of 15 for two-year terms and divide into working groups that each focus on specific areas.

To be a council assistant, candidates must fulfill several requirements:

- Citizenship in the Islamic Republic of Iran
- Commitment to the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran
- A minimum age of 25 years on the day of registration
- A minimum of six months as an official resident of the neighborhood
- The ability to read and write
- No criminal record

### **COUNCIL ASSISTANT RESPONSIBILITIES**

Although their role varies from place to place, some of the responsibilities that council assistants have include the following:

- Submit plans and proposals to improve transportation in the city, collaborating with the department of motor vehicles and the police to reduce traffic in the city
- Help control taxi fares in collaboration with the city council
- Submit plans and proposals for creating city landmarks and memorials as well as naming streets, alleys, squares, and other public spaces

- Collaborate to create and increase small parks in the city
- Foster volunteer work to help administer public spaces
- Help provide leisure amenities for youth and increase arts, culture, sports and entertainment centers
- Help to provide safety and comfort and prevent crime, in collaboration with the city council
- Educate and advocate on citizens' rights and responsibilities
- Identify social, cultural, educational, health, economic, welfare and development needs, issues and problems
- Collaborate with the city council to build various volunteer organizations (rescue, social work, religious) and establish cooperatives
- Propose plans to teach non-military defense methods to citizens and collaborate with the city council in disaster relief
- Help administer public entities such as religious, cultural, and sports centers, art galleries, etc., with approval of the city council and municipality
- Participate and collaborate in national elections



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