



BELIZE

SUMMARY

Belize is a unitary constitutional monarchy and bicameral parliamentary democracy with two levels of government: a state government and a single-tier local government. There is currently no constitutional provision for local government and the main governing Acts are the Belize and Belmopan City Council Acts 1999, the Village Councils Act 1999, the Town Councils Act 2000, and the Inferior Courts Act 2003. The Ministry of Labour, Local Government and Rural Development is charged with overseeing the administration of three systems of local government in Belize. There are seven town and two city municipalities, 181 village councils, and 12 community councils. There are also 84 alcaldes (a legally constituted form of traditional governance predominantly practised among the indigenous Maya communities of the Toledo district). As well as receiving subsidies from national government, both village and municipal councils can raise revenue from licence fees and fines for failing to comply with by-laws. Municipal councils also raise approximately one-third of their total revenue from property tax. Municipal and village councils' responsibilities include: maintaining streets and drains, sanitation and waste disposal, parks, markets and cemeteries. Rural councils ensure that sound environmental practices are adhered to by all persons within the village or community and have several other areas of responsibility.

1. NATIONAL GOVERNMENT

Belize is a constitutional monarchy and parliamentary democracy.^{6.1a} The head of state is HM Queen Elizabeth II who is represented by a governor-general of Belizean nationality. Belize's parliament comprises a house of representatives and a senate. The 31 members of the house of representatives are directly elected by the first-past-the-post system. The governor-general appoints the leader of the majority party as prime minister following national elections and s/he heads a cabinet whose members are also appointed by the governor-general on the advice of the prime minister. Additionally the governor-general appoints the 12 members of the senate: six on the advice of the prime minister, three on the advice of the leader of the opposition and three as suggested by non-governmental organisations. Elections to the house of representatives are held at least every five years and the president of the senate is elected by the senate members. Following the 2015 national elections, 9.4% of the elected representatives and 15.4% of senators were women.^{6.1b}

2. LEGAL BASIS FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

2.1 Constitutional provisions

There is no constitutional provision for local government. However, a national policy on local governance was approved in 2009 that recommends the inclusion of local government in the constitution.^{6.2a}

2.2 Main legislative texts

The main Acts governing local government are:

- Belize City Council Act 1999^{6.2b}
- Belmopan City Council Act 1999
- Town Councils Act 2000^{6.2c}
- Village Councils Act 1999
- Inferior Courts Act (Part VIII) 2000-03

2.3 National Policy on Local Governance

A national policy on local governance in Belize was approved by national government in August 2009, and provides guidance and direction for the systems and practices of local governance. The aim is to ensure greater equity, efficiency, effectiveness and transparency in the delivery of local government services to people in rural and urban communities. Initiatives under the policy, in partnership with the UNDP and IBRD (World Bank), include enshrining local government in the constitution of Belize and the revision of all local government legislation with the aim of providing greater clarity on the roles, responsibilities, powers and rights of local government. A formal demarcation of boundary lines for all municipalities and villages across the country is also being implemented under this policy, as are capacity-building programmes for municipalities and village leaders.

2.4 Proposed legislative changes

The Toledo Alcaldes Association has endorsed the draft of an Alcaldes Bill presented to the MLLGRD in 2011.^{6.2d}

2.5 National urban policy

Belize has no national urban policy.

3. STRUCTURE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

3.1 Local government within the state

Belize has two levels of government: national government (including the districts) and a single-tier local government.

3.2 Ministerial oversight

The Ministry of Labour, Local Government and Rural Development^{6.3c} (MLLGRD) has responsibility for overseeing the administration of the three systems of local government in Belize, namely the municipal, village and alcalde systems.



KEY FACTS

POPULATION (2017 census):
387,879

AREA (UN 2006): 22,966 sq km

CAPITAL: Belmopan

CURRENCY: Belize dollar dollar (BZD)

HEAD OF STATE:
HM Queen Elizabeth II

GOVERNOR-GENERAL:
Sir Colville Young

HEAD OF GOVERNMENT:
Prime Minister Dean Barrow

FORM OF GOVERNMENT:
constitutional monarchy

PARLIAMENTARY SYSTEM: bicameral

STATE STRUCTURE: unitary

LANGUAGES: English (official), Garifuna, Kriol, Maya, Spanish (recognised)

NATIONAL ELECTIONS:
last: March 2013, turnout: 74.5%; next: 2018

WOMEN IN PARLIAMENT (2013):
representatives 9.4%; senators 15.4%

LOCAL ELECTIONS:
municipal: last: 2018, turnout: na; next: 2021
village: last: 2016, turnout: na; next: 2019
alcaldes: last: 2017, turnout: na; next: 2019

WOMEN COUNCILLORS:
24.1% (2017)

LOCAL GOVERNMENT EXPENDITURE as a percentage of total government expenditure 2013/14:
6.8%

Table 6.1a Distribution of councils and population

District	Town and city councils	Village and community councils	Alcaldes	Population 2010 Census	Population mid-2017 estimates	% rural 2010 Census
Orange Walk	1	24	None	45,946	50,969	65.9
Belize	(inc. 1 city) 2	32	None	95,291	117,197	21.7
Cayo	(inc. 1 city) 3	36	None	75,046	93,351	55.8
Corozal	1	27	None	41,061	47,437	76.4
Stann Creek	1	25	2	34,324	42,230	65.5
Toledo	1	49	76	30,785	36,695	81.5
TOTAL	9	193	78	322,453	387,879	54.1

Source: MLLGRD communication with CLGF, with 2010 Census^{6.3a} and mid-2017 estimates^{6.3b}

The Department of Local Government has direct responsibility for municipalities, while the Department of Rural Development has responsibility for villages and communities. Specific responsibilities of the ministry include:

- provision of legislative and regulatory oversight to the local government sector
- administrative and legal advice
- promotion and coordination of interaction between the public, private and NGO sectors
- support to programming and budgeting through financial and technical assistance
- monitoring and evaluation of progress on activities within the sector.

3.3 Council types

There are four types of council in Belize: city councils, town councils, village councils and community councils. The two city councils – Belize and Belmopan – plus the seven town councils cover the urban population in the six administrative districts of the country. The 181 village and 12 community councils represent the rural population across the districts. In the district of Toledo and other parts of south Belize, there is an alcalde system which operates alongside village councils.

3.3.1 City and town councils are responsible for the management of urban municipalities in accordance with their respective Acts. The councils are required to meet on a monthly basis under the leadership of an elected mayor. Mayors (other than in Belize City) have an executive role and are designated as the chief executive officer of the council. All councils must elect a deputy mayor from amongst the councillors. The mayor, after consultation with the councillors and the city (or town) administrator, allocates portfolios of responsibility to other councillors.

Working committees can be set up to assist with some portfolios. Portfolios cover a broad range of issues including environmental protection, town zoning, tourism and recreational planning.

3.3.2 Village councils began in the 1950s and were formalised by the Village Councils Act 1999 which legalised their role and authority to administer village affairs. Villages are declared by ministerial order and one qualification for village status is a minimum of 200 voters. The council is required to meet at least once every quarter and has discretionary powers to appoint committees. Decisions of village committees are subject to the approval of their council.

3.3.3 Community councils may be formed in any areas not included in a city, town or village. They must have a voter population (18 years and older) of 200, and must be declared a community and recognised by ministerial order. The community must then set up a community council that works in the same way as a village council.

3.3.4 The alcalde system refers to the alcalde, or local magistrate, operating at the village level, and is practised in the southernmost parts of the country by the indigenous Maya peoples of Belize. This system is administered through the Inferior Courts in accordance with Chapter 77 of the laws of Belize and implemented by the serving alcalde and the deputy alcalde with the assistance of five voluntary village police officers. An alcalde differs significantly from a village chairperson in that the alcalde has a judicial role. As a village or community leader, s/he has the authority to decide who lives in the village, and can also call for a communal cleaning (fajina) of the village. While it is mainly Mayan communities, including the Mopan and Ketchi groups in southern Belize, who practise this form of local governance, the alcalde jurisdiction is not limited to Mayas.

Any rural community can adopt the alcalde system as long as the citizens request the relevant authority to implement it. The Inferior Court, headed by the alcalde, is charged mainly with maintaining law and order and is authorised to hear and pass judgment on petty crimes.

4. ELECTIONS

4.1 Recent local elections

The last municipal elections were held on 7 March 2018, and the turnout is not yet known, however in 2015 it was 57.3%, down from 67.5% in 2012.^{6.4a} Village council elections are held every three years and the last village council elections were held in 2016 with the next due in 2019. Turnout cannot be determined as there are no village voter lists. The most recent alcalde elections were held in January 2017.^{6.4b}

4.2 Voting system

Local government elections are conducted using the first-past-the-post system. Municipal elections are held every three years with councillors elected by majority vote and mayors elected directly in a separate mayoral election, whilst deputy mayors are indirectly elected annually in March by the councillors from among their number. Village council elections are also held every three years, with the chairperson elected in a separate vote alongside six other councillors. Eligible residents (18 years and older) may vote in the elections, which are scrutinised by other village residents. Recommendations for appointment as an alcalde are usually, though not necessarily, the result of elections at local meetings, and the appointment by the government is for two years.

4.3 Elected representatives

Belize City Council comprises a mayor and ten councillors, while the City of Belmopan and the towns have a mayor and six councillors.

4.4 Women's representation

There is no information available on women's councillors following the 2018 local elections, however none (0/9) of the town and city mayors were female, down from 11.1% (1/9) following the 2015 elections. Following the 2013-15 elections, 24.1% (292/1,213) of elected councillors were women, up from 20.5% in 2010, as well as 11.1% of town mayors (1/8) and 11.9% (23/194) of village chairpersons (see Table 6.1b). In the alcalde system, women are traditionally excluded from voting in elections and in meetings. The Political Reform Commission, while not condoning this, has recommended that any change to this practice should be made by villagers themselves. At present there are no female alcaldes.



Table 6.1b Number of women councillors and mayors following the last three local elections

Election	2010-12		2013-15		2016-18	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
All councillors						
All female councillors	na	20.5	292	24.1	na	na
All male councillors	na	na	921	75.9	na	na
Total councillors	na	100.0	1,213	100.0	na	100.0
Village Councillors						
Female village councillors	na	na	274	23.5	na	na
Male village councillors	na	na	890	76.5	na	na
Total village councillors	na	100.0	1,164	100.0	na	100.0
Town councillors						
Female town councillors	na	na	18	36.7	na	na
Male town councillors	na	na	31	63.3	na	na
Total town councillors	na	100.0	49	100.0	na	100.0
All mayors and chairpersons						
All female mayors and chairpersons	1	11.1	24	11.8	na	na
All male mayors and chairpersons	na	na	179	88.2	na	na
Total mayors and chairpersons	na	100.0	203	100.0	na	100.0
Mayor (town councils)						
Female mayors	na	na	1	11.1	0	0
Male mayors	na	na	8	88.9	9	100.0
Total mayors	na	100.0	9	100.0	9	100.0
Chairpersons (village councils)						
Female chairpersons	na	na	23	11.9	na	na
Male chairpersons	na	na	171	88.1	na	na
Total chairpersons	na	100.0	na	100.0	na	100.0
Total chairpersons	na	100.0	194	100.0	na	100.0

Source: MLLGRD communication with CLGF

5. SYSTEMS FOR COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

5.1 Legal requirement

All city and town councils are mandated to conduct public meetings at least once a month. All meetings are open to the public unless directed otherwise by the mayor. The quarterly meetings of the village councils are also open to the public, unless declared otherwise by the chairperson. The National Association of Village Councils (NAVCO), along with its district-level counterparts, is legally empowered to consult with village councils and villagers on matters concerning their welfare.

5.2 Implementation

The national policy on local governance (see Section 2.2) mandates the MLLGRD to hold regular consultations with all local government entities, civil society organisations and interest groups.

This is conducted through the Local Government Monitoring Council, which includes members drawn from public, private and civil society organisations.

5.3 ICT use in citizen engagement

No information is available.

6. ORGANISED LOCAL GOVERNMENT

6.1 The Belize Mayors' Association

The Belize Mayors' Association^{6.6a} (BMA) represents the mayors of all the city and town councils. Membership is automatic and is funded by contributions made from council funds by the ministry. The association is a forum to discuss issues of common interest and to promote dialogue with national government.

6.2 Village council associations

Under the Village Councils Act 1999, village councils are required to have a district association of village councils (DAVCO) in each of Belize's six districts. Together they form the National Association of Village Councils^{6.6b} (NAVCO). The composition and conduct of the association is governed by ministerial order. The association is funded by contributions from each district association's funds and subsidies from the government.

6.3 Toledo Alcalde Association

The Toledo Alcalde Association (TAA) was established in 1992 with the objective of promoting the alcalde system and addressing issues of concern to members. The national policy on local governance in Belize has adopted a resolution that the government should legitimise the alcalde system.

Table 6.2a Income and expenditure for local government 2013/14

Income	BZ\$	Expenditure	BZ\$
Centre-local transfers	9,915,799	Administration	25,322,264
Locally raised revenue	64,734,581	Services	10,749,910
Property taxes	25,179,866	Other expenditure	31,621,516
Trade licences	13,132,457		
Traffic revenue	16,138,086		
Garbage collection fees	1,181,742		
Other	9,102,430		
TOTAL INCOME	74,650,380	TOTAL EXPENDITURE	67,693,690

Source: MLLGRD communication with CLGF

7. INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

The chief executive officers of each government ministry are responsible for working with local government on areas of mutual concern.

8. MONITORING SYSTEMS

The chief executive officer in the Department for Local Government holds the title of accounting officer with general oversight for the accounting systems of local councils. S/he is accountable to the Public Accounts Committee of the house of representatives. In one city council, a financial controller to provide financial oversight and give advice has been appointed. Through the Office of the Auditor General, auditors scrutinise the financial affairs of both municipal and village/community councils. There is a unit within this office dedicated to the auditing of all the 193 villages and communities. The Office of the Ombudsman was created in 1994 to investigate complaints against government bodies, individuals and elected officials.

9. FINANCE, STAFFING AND RESOURCES

9.1 Local government expenditure

Local government expenditure was 6.8% of total government expenditure in 2013/14 (see table 6.2b).

9.2 Locally raised revenue

Village councils receive revenue from liquor licensing fees and from fines for non-compliance with by-laws. They can also fundraise for specific projects.

Municipal councils receive funds from trade and liquor licences and traffic penalties, as well as a significant proportion from property taxes, which accounted for approximately 1/3 of all municipal revenue in 2013/14 (Table 6.2a).

9.3 Transfers

On average, national government has provided municipalities with around BZ\$33 per annum per municipal resident since the fiscal year 2004/05, but this average is not evenly distributed across municipalities. The subsidy received by each municipality has been relatively stable on a per capita basis, with the exception of Belmopan and San Pedro where it has declined consistently, reflecting the substantial population growth in these municipalities.

9.4 Loans

No information is available.

9.5 Local authority staff

City and town councils must appoint a city or town administrator to assist the mayor in the day-to-day management of the council. In Belize City, this administrator is the chief executive officer. All councils may appoint staff and have the power to discipline and dismiss them and to determine pay and conditions. Village councils can appoint support staff for the efficient administration of village affairs and determine their duties and pay. Salaries of elected representatives and officials of local government are the responsibility of the municipalities.

10. DISTRIBUTION OF SERVICE DELIVERY RESPONSIBILITY

10.1 Overview of local government service delivery responsibility

Councils have a statutory duty to provide 'rules and good governance' and to provide certain basic services. Town and city councils' responsibilities include street maintenance, drains, refuse collection and public parks, markets and cemeteries. All urban councils must set up a utility coordination unit to oversee the activities of the bodies providing electricity, water and sewerage, gas, telephone and other utility services. Village/community councils have responsibility for the maintenance of streets, drains and the sanitation of the village, and the maintenance of public parks, markets and cemeteries. They are tasked with encouraging and assisting cooperation on economic and social development and general welfare. They run community centres, and assist residents in making representations to government if there are problems with certain centrally administered services like school supplies, primary healthcare or the provision of agricultural extension services. They must also ensure that sound environmental practices are adhered to by all persons within the village.

10.2 ICT use in service delivery

No information is available.

10.3 The role of local government in achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The Growth and Sustainable Development Strategy (GSDS) for Belize 2016–2019, while focused principally on the development vision for Belize as articulated in Horizon 2030, is also intended to be in line with the United Nations framework. At the core of the GSDS is a commitment to achieve a single overriding goal: to improve quality of life for all Belizeans, living now and in the future.^{61a} These principles are also reflected in the Horizon 2030 National Development Framework for Belize 2010–2030.^{61b} In late 2013, Belize volunteered to act as a "pilot country" within the UN system, to help demonstrate how national development planning could work in harmony with the emerging "Post-2015 Development Agenda" of the global community of nations.

Table 6.2b Local government expenditure as a percentage of total government expenditure 2013–2017

	2012/13 actual BZ\$m	2013/14 actual BZ\$m	2014/15 actual BZ\$m	2015/16 actual BZ\$m	2016/17 estimated BZ\$m
Total government expenditure	na	999.7	na	na	na
Total local government expenditure	na	67.7	na	na	na
Local government expenditure as a percentage of total government expenditure	na	6.8%	na	na	na

Source: MLLGRD communication with CLGF



REFERENCES AND USEFUL WEBSITES

- 6.1a Belize National Assembly
www.nationalassembly.gov.bz
- 6.1b Women in national parliaments. Inter-Parliamentary Union
www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm
- 6.2a Constitution of Belize
<http://pdba.georgetown.edu/Constitutions/Belize/belize81.html>
- 6.2b Belize City Council Act 1999
www.belizecitycouncil.org/city-council-acts
- 6.2c Town Council Act 2000
http://elections.gov.bz/modules/article_publish/files/files_4918ec11c635a.pdf
- 6.3a Belize 2010 Census
www.sib.org.bz/Portals/0/docs/publications/census/2010_Census_Report.pdf
- 6.3b 2017 mid-year population estimates
www.sib.org.bz/statistics/population
- 6.3c Ministry of Labour, Local Government and Rural Development
www.belize.gov.bz/ct.asp?xItem=1073&CtNode=600&mp=27
- 6.4a Electoral Commission
http://www.elections.gov.bz/modules/article_publish/?tac=ELECTIONS_RESULTS
- 6.4b New Alcaldes Sworn-In in Toledo Jan 2017
<http://edition.channel5belize.com/archives/141058>
- 6.5 No references for this section
- 6.6a The Belize Mayors' Association
<http://calga.org/bma/index.php/component/content/featured?id=featured>
- 6.6b National Association of Village Councils
www.navco.org.bz
- 6.7 No references for this section
- 6.8 No references for this section
- 6.9 Based on figure of BZ\$67.7m provided in the profile by the Ministry of Labour, Local Government and Rural Development and BZ\$999.7m the executive summary of the national government budget 2013/14
www.centralbank.org.bz/rates-statistics/government-finance
- 6.10a Relationship of the GSDS to the UN SDGs page 2
http://cdn.gov.bz/mof.gov.bz/files/FINAL%20GSDS_March_30_2016.pdf
- 6.10b Horizon 2030 National Development Framework for Belize 2010-2030
www.nationalplanningcycles.org/sites/default/files/country_docs/Belize/ndp_belize.pdf
- 6.11a UN 2012 statistics surface area
<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/dyb/dyb2006/Table03.pdf>
- 6.11b Commonwealth Local Government Knowledge Hub
www.clgf.org.uk/resource-centre/knowledge-hub
- 6.11c UNDP HDR Belize country profile
<http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/BLZ>



Annex 6. A Summary of service provision in different spheres of government in Belize

Services	Delivering authority				Remarks
	National	City/town	Village	Alcalde	
GENERAL ADMINISTRATION					
Police	■				
Fire protection	■				
Civil protection	■				
Criminal justice	■				
Civil status register	■				
Statistical office	■				
Electoral register	■				
EDUCATION					
Pre-school (kindergarten and nursery)	■				
Primary	■				
Secondary	■				
Vocational and technical	■				
Higher education	■				
Adult education	■				
SOCIAL WELFARE					
Family welfare services	■				
Welfare homes	■				
Social security	■				
PUBLIC HEALTH					
Primary care	■				
Hospitals	■				
Health protection	■				
HOUSING AND TOWN PLANNING					
Housing	■				
Town planning	■	■	■		
Regional planning	■	■	■		
TRANSPORT					
Roads	■				
Transport	■				
Urban roads (streets)	■ (■)	■ (■)			
Urban rail	na				
Ports	■				
Airports	■				
ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC SANITATION					
Water and sanitation	■	■	■		
Refuse collection and disposal	■	■	■		
Cemeteries and crematoria	■	■	■		
Slaughterhouses	■	■	■		
Environmental protection	■		■		
Consumer protection	■	■			
CULTURE, LEISURE AND SPORTS					
Theatre and concerts		■			
Museums and libraries	■				
Parks and open spaces	■	■	■		
Sports and leisure	■	■	■		
Religious facilities	na				
UTILITIES					
Gas services	■				
District heating	na				
Water supply	■		■		
Electricity	■				
ECONOMIC					
Agriculture, forests and fisheries	■		■		
Local economic development/promotion	■				
Trade and industry	■				
Tourism	■				

■ sole responsibility service ■ joint responsibility service ■ discretionary service