



# County Government 101

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September 12, 2018

# What Keeps Me Up at Night

- Enough \$ to provide services and affordability?
- Declining population in many rural areas
- Leadership – who will step up?
- Business owners approaching retirement; wealth transfer to other places
- Leadership (youth are busy; seniors have given)
- Right-sizing to reality (we are over-built!)
- Water issues – quantity and quality; decline of the aquifer
- Technology; uneven availability of high speed internet
- Stress on delivery systems (e.g. small hospitals)
- Capacity to adapt? Can we? In time?
- Others ?



# County Establishment



- Striped=Prior to 1861 (Statehood)
- Dark Gray=1861-1869
- Light Gray=1870-1879
- White=1880 or Later

## Q and A.

- ▶ What was the biggest factor in determining how many counties would be created in Kansas?
- ▶ County size: small enough so a person could travel by horseback from home to the county seat, transact business, and arrive back home – all in one day



**KANSAS**  
ASSOCIATION OF  
COUNTIES

# 3,069 County Governments in U.S.



# A Lot of Counties in Kansas!

- **Kansas (105)**  
81,759 sq. mi. **2.90 million pop.**  
Avg. county pop. = 27,688
- **Colorado (64)**  
103,642 sq. mi. **5.54 million pop.**  
Avg. county pop. = 86,571
- **Nebraska (93)**  
76,824 sq. mi. **1.91 million pop.**  
Avg. county pop. = 20,507
- **Missouri (115)**  
68,742 sq. mi. **6.09 million pop.**  
Avg. county pop. = 52,983
- **Oklahoma (77)**  
68,595 sq. mi. **3.92 million pop.**  
Avg. county pop. = 50,955

# Varieties of Counties

- ❑ 47 of 50 states have functioning county governments
- ❑ 3 states without functioning counties: Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Connecticut
- ❑ Counties are also called parishes (Louisiana) or boroughs (Alaska)
- ❑ By population, smallest county is Kalawao County, HI (89); largest is Los Angeles County, CA (10 million+)
- ❑ By area, smallest county is Arlington County, VA (26 sq. miles; largest is North Slope Borough, Alaska (87,860 sq. miles)

# The Extremes in Kansas

- ▶ 151 sq. mi. in Wyandotte County; 1,430 sq. mi. in Butler County
- ▶ Ks. Constitution requires all counties (*after 1861*) to have 432 sq. mi.
- ▶ 1,296 pop. Greeley County; 584,451 in Johnson County





# In KS, we LOVE Local Government!

➤ Counties	105
➤ Cities	625
➤ Townships	1,300 +/-
➤ Unified School Districts	288
➤ Community Colleges	19
➤ Special Districts	1,500 +/-
Total	3,837 +/-

# What Are Special Districts?

- Examples:
  - Cemetery Districts
  - Fire Districts
  - Hospital Districts
  - Drainage Districts
  - Watershed Districts
  - Sewer Districts
  - Library Districts
  - Others: Irrigation, Lighting, Conservation, *et al.*

# Counties have 2 Major Roles

- ▶ Serve as an administrative arm of state government
- ▶ Provide locally-determined services

# As an administrative arm of state government, counties:

- Administer the election process
- Handle many taxation processes, incl. property appraisal, collection, distribution
- Issue licenses and permits
- Maintain land records (RODs, GIS)
- Provide facilities/equip. for the judiciary
- Finance prosecution (county & district attorneys)

# State Mandated Services

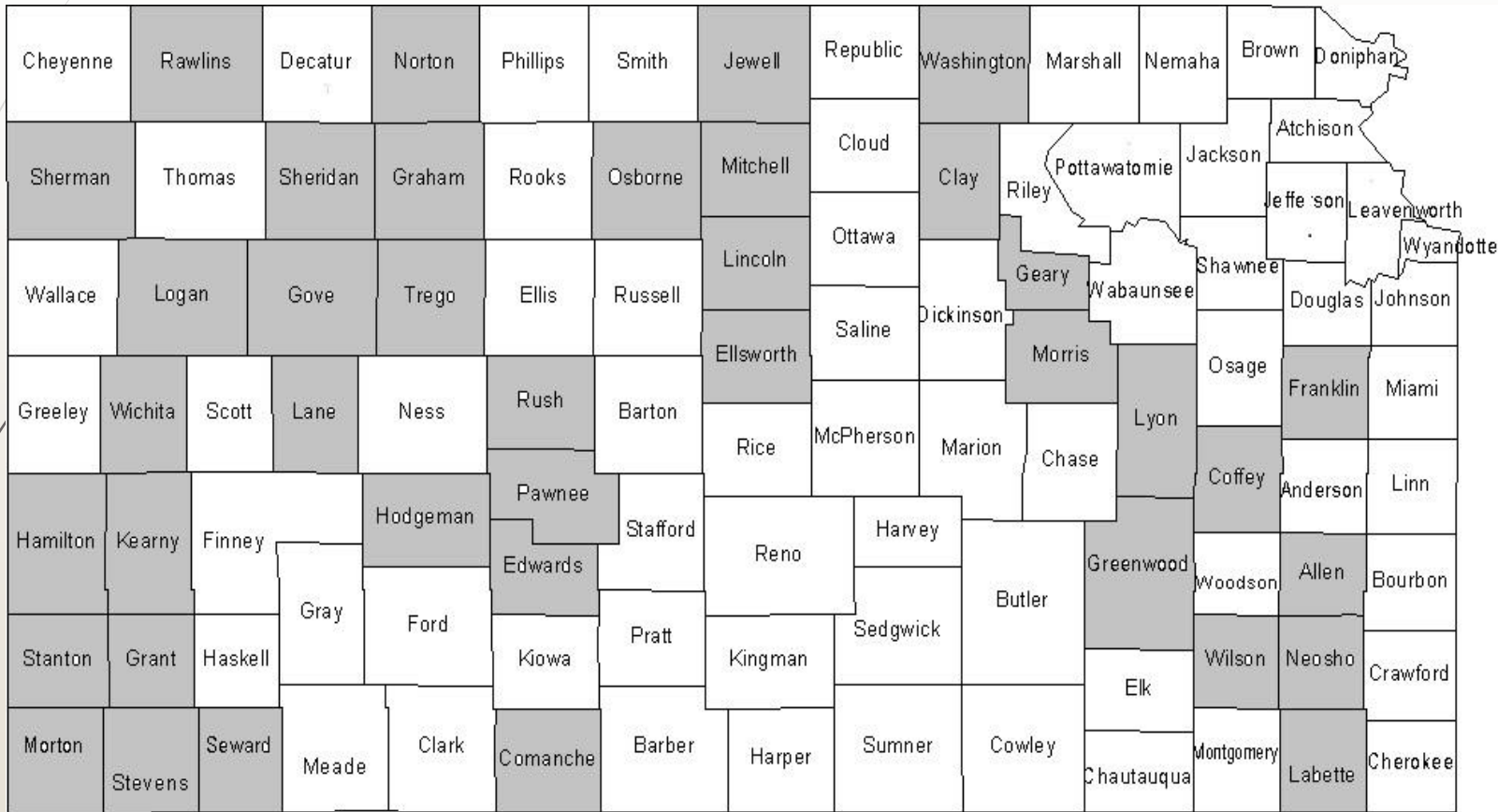
- Public Health Services
- Emergency Management
- Solid Waste Planning
- Law Enforcement and Jails
- Transportation – Roads and Bridges
- Noxious Weed Eradication

# Locally Determined Services

- Hospitals
- Various Medical Services (home health care, assisted care, nursing care)
- Cultural and Leisure Services (parks, zoos, museums, cultural facilities)
- Economic Development
- Planning and Zoning

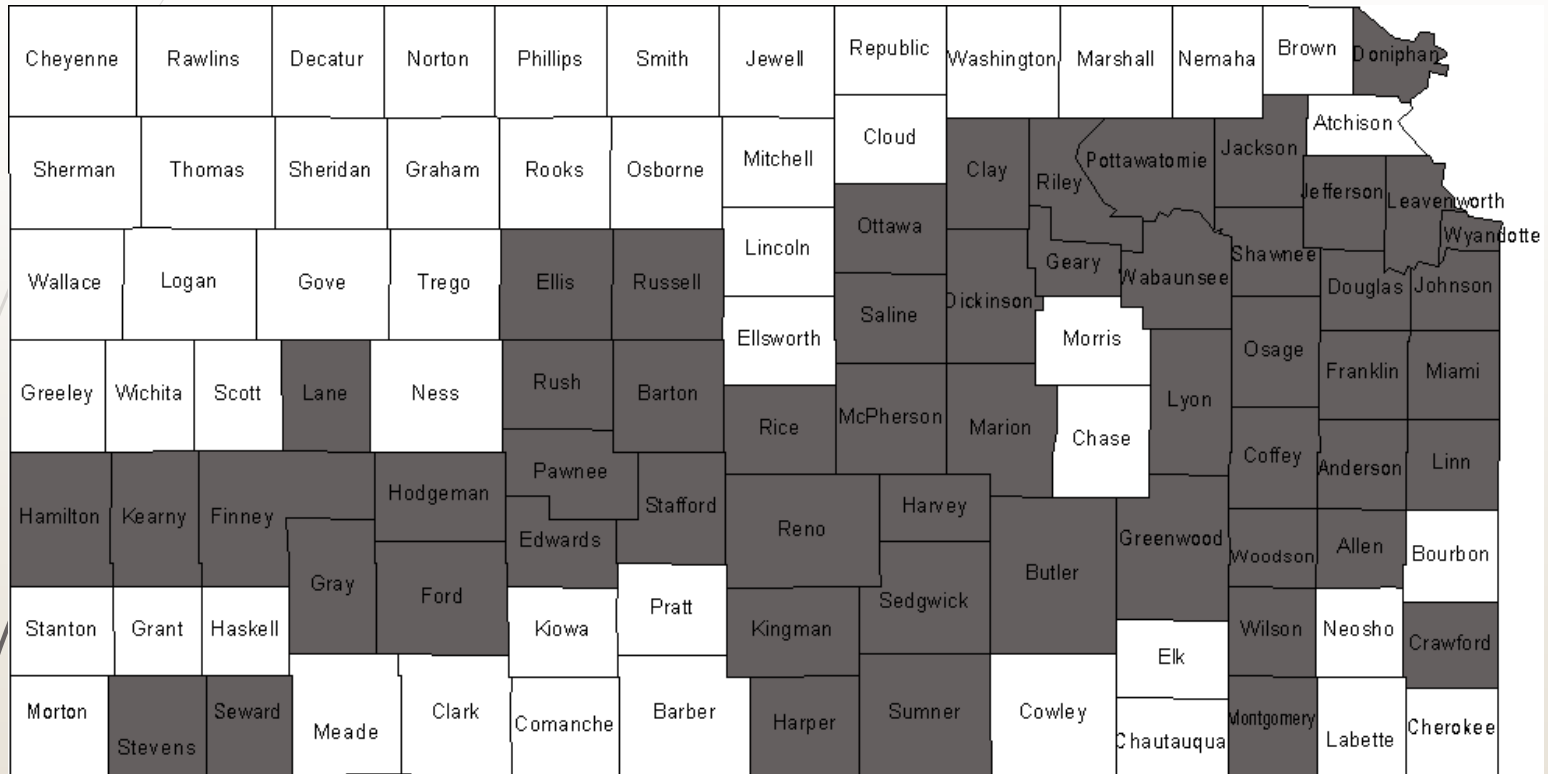


# Counties with Co. Hospitals





# Zoning Practices



- Gray=Zoning
- White=No Zoning

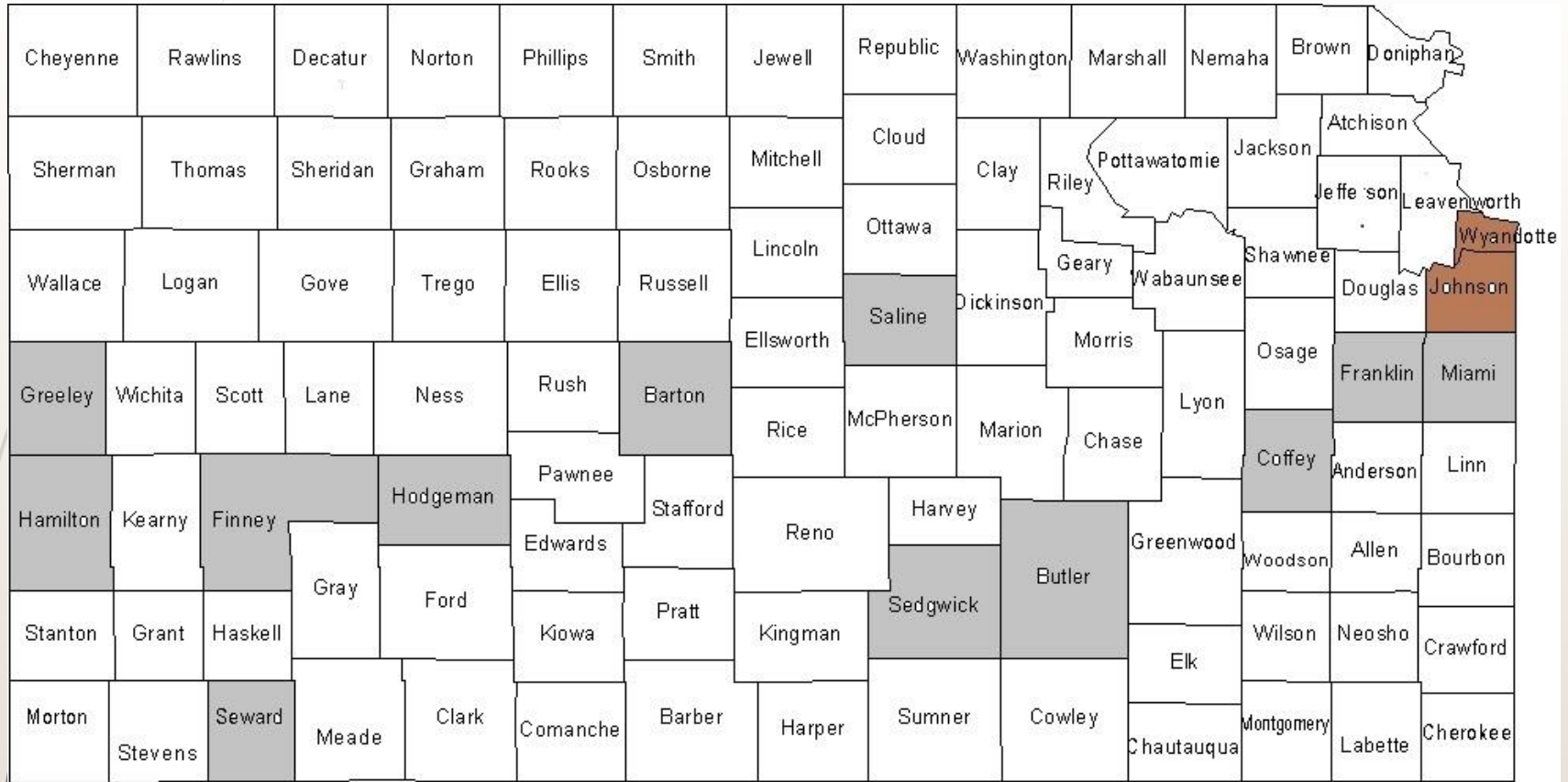


# Options for County Leadership

- ▶ County Boards – 3,5,or 7 members \*
- ▶ Board Size can be changed by referendum
- ▶ Slight trend toward larger board size
- ▶ Special legislation in Johnson, Wyandotte, and Greeley counties
- ▶ Directly-elected board chair in Johnson & Wyandotte counties



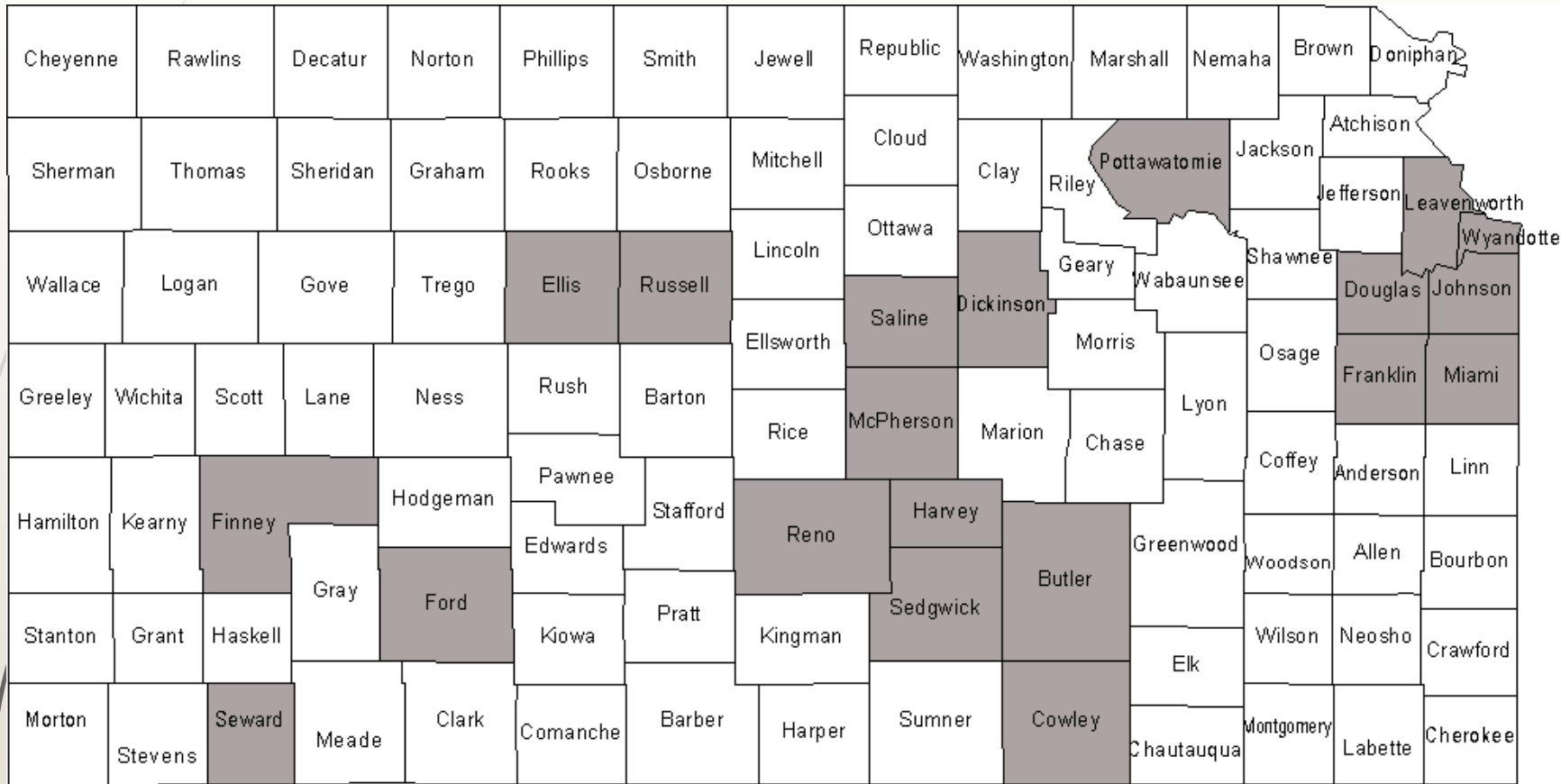
# County Governing Board Size



- White=3 Commissioners
- Light Gray=5 Commissioners/Supervisors
- Brown = 7 (JO); 11 (WY/KCK)



# County Administration



- Light Gray=County Administrator/Manager
- White=None

# Where Does the \$ Come From?

- **Property Taxes**, primarily (\$1.27 billion in 2016)
- Local-option **Sales/Use Taxes** (\$616.5 in 2016 including \$469 million **sales** & \$147.5 million **use** for local govt)
- **Motor Vehicle Taxes** (\$376 million for local govt, 2015)
- **User Fees**
- **State-Shared Revenues** (Special City-County Highway Fund - \$150.4 million for locals – 2016.) Source: motor fuels tax.

# 2017 County Mill Levy Rates

- Highest: Stanton County – 145.427 mills
- Lowest: Johnson Co. – 19.318 mills
- **Average: 68.451 mills**

**Mill = \$1 in taxes for every \$1,000 valuation.**

# Local-Option Sales Taxes

- ▶ Countywide taxes are shared with cities, unless used for “dedicated” or special purposes
- ▶ As of Dec. 2016, 91 counties imposed a countywide sales tax
- ▶ In 2016, local option sales/use taxes generated \$616.5 million. Sales = \$469m. Use = \$147.5m
- ▶ Use Tax (e.g. purchases from out-of-state retailer when sales taxes not collected)
- ▶ Greater potential in future due to Wayfair decision

# County Home Rule

- “That which is governed closest to home is governed best .....
- Kansas counties granted statutory home rule in 1974.
- Cities have constitutional home rule

# Home Rule

- Presumes local officials can and should make good policy decisions
- Cannot be used to overturn uniformly applicable legislative acts, or to legislate in areas determined by Legislature to be “off-limits” to local governments
- “Off-limit” Examples: taxes, elections, CAFO regulations

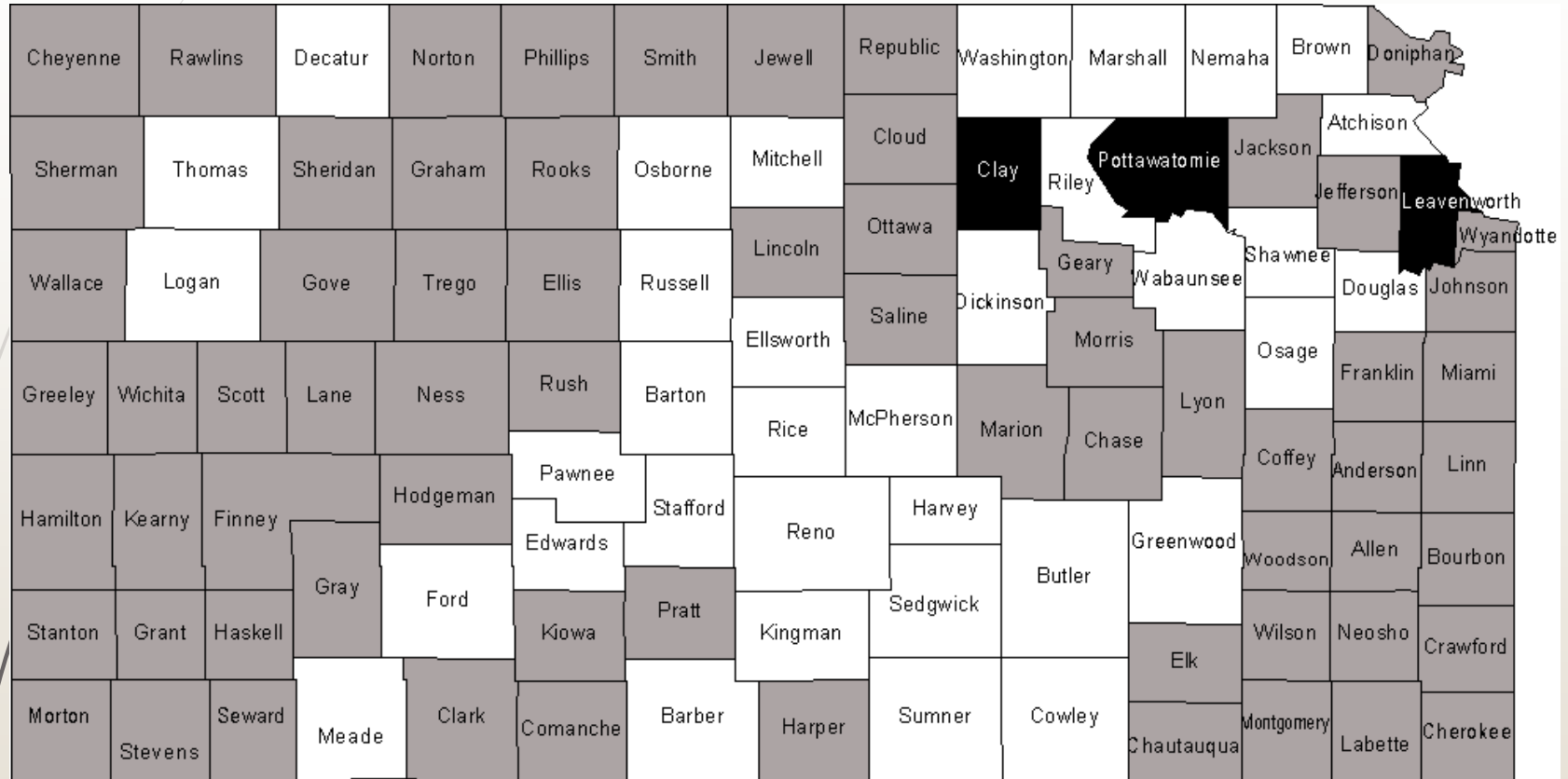


# County Home Rule Used When:

- ▶ a state law is non-uniform (treats counties differently)
- ▶ state statutes are silent, and the local enactment is not otherwise prohibited by the Legislature



# Co. Road Maintenance Systems



- White: County-Township System
- Gray: County Unit System
- Black: County Rural System

# Counties and Cities

- **ALL** Kansans live in counties
- **NOT ALL** Kansans live in cities. 500,000 or 17.2% of 2.9 million Kansans live in unincorporated areas
- County boundaries originally set by state. Counties can be consolidated, subject to approval of voters in both counties
- City boundaries set locally, based on a “community of interest”

# Counties and Cities

- ▶ Counties' organizational structures are more **decentralized** than cities' structures
- ▶ Even with county administrators & managers, certain functions operate more independently in county government. County commissioners are **one among many** elected officials

# Counties and Cities

- ▶ Counties typically have more departments. Organizational charts less hierarchical.
- ▶ County governing boards mostly elected on a partisan basis. Exceptions: Johnson, Wyandotte, and Unified Greeley County. City governing boards typically elected on a non-partisan basis.

# Counties and Cities

- ▶ Counties have **far less** authority or discretion to raise local revenue for services than cities. Example: counties have limited franchise fee authority.
- ▶ Counties more relatively more dependent on local property tax to finance services than cities.

# Trends

- **Devolution** (*shifting down*) of service responsibility continues
- Feds to States; States to Counties
- Devolution of responsibility often not (usually not) accompanied by **\$\$\$\$\$\$**