

County Taxes & Revenues

The County Landscape Project

Maryland Task Force to Modernize County and Municipal Revenue Structures

October 2026 | Research@NACo.org

The County Landscape Project



County Government
Structure and Authority



County Government
Administration

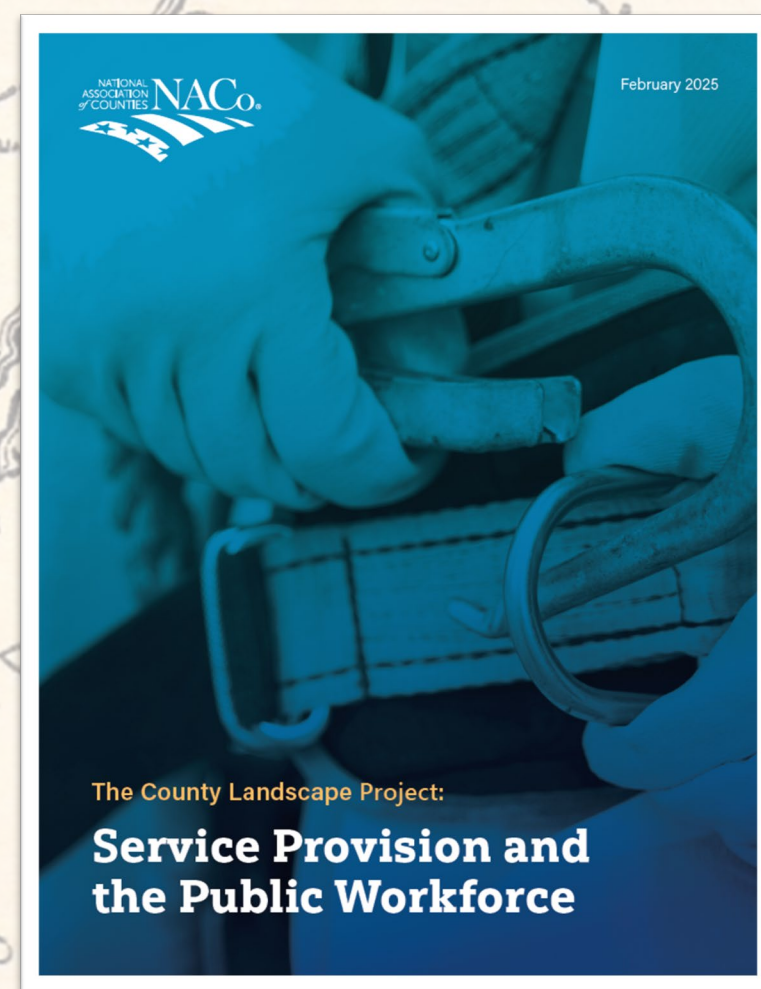
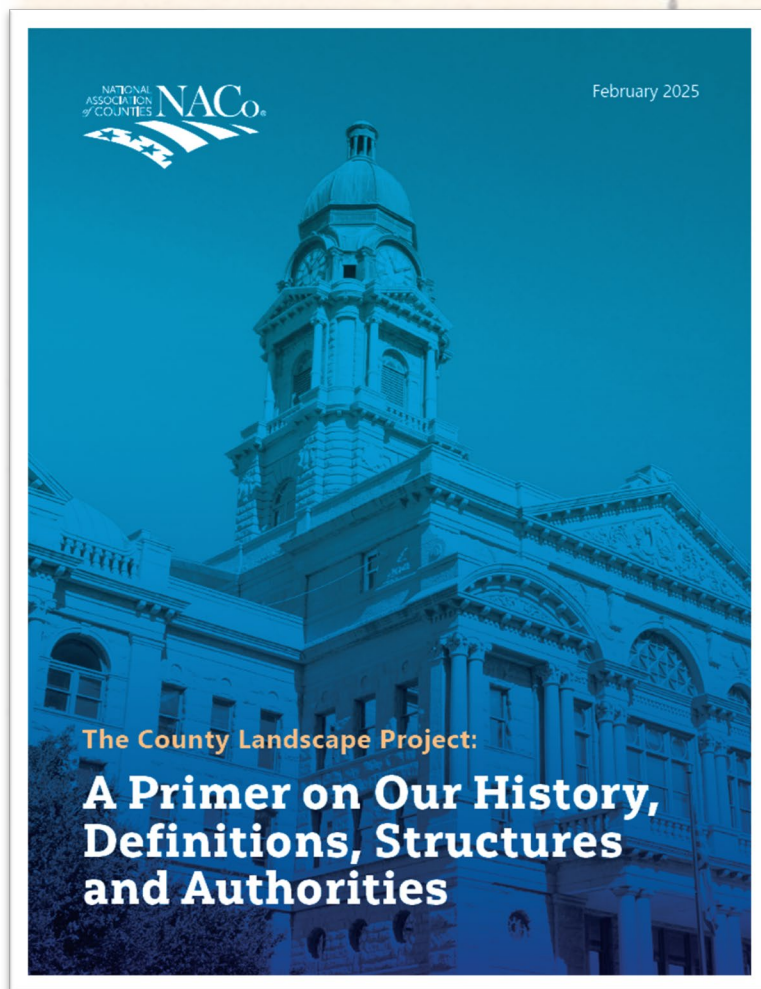


County Government
Services

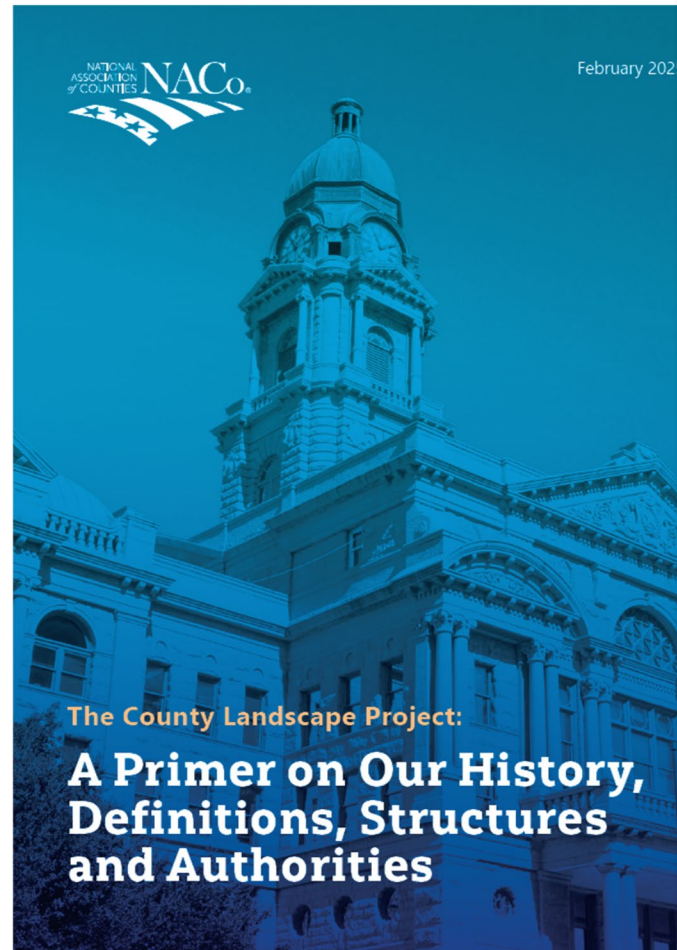


County Government
Workforce

The County Landscape Project



The County L



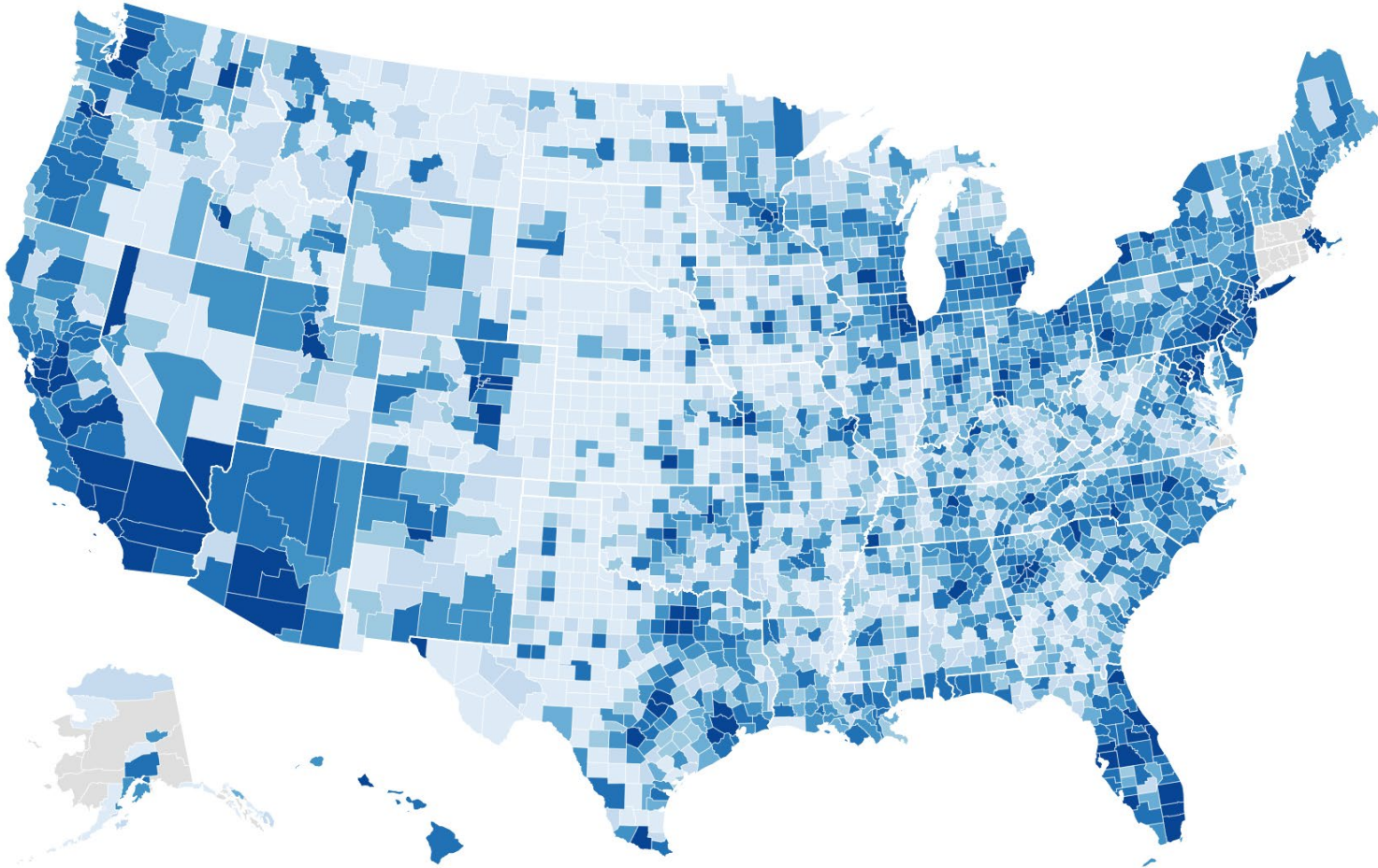


3,069 County Governments in 48 States

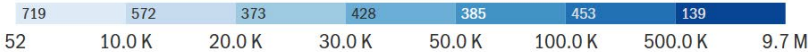
(3,143 county geographies)



Total Population (2025)



Source: NACo Analysis of U.S. Census Bureau - Population Estimates Program (PEP) - 2025

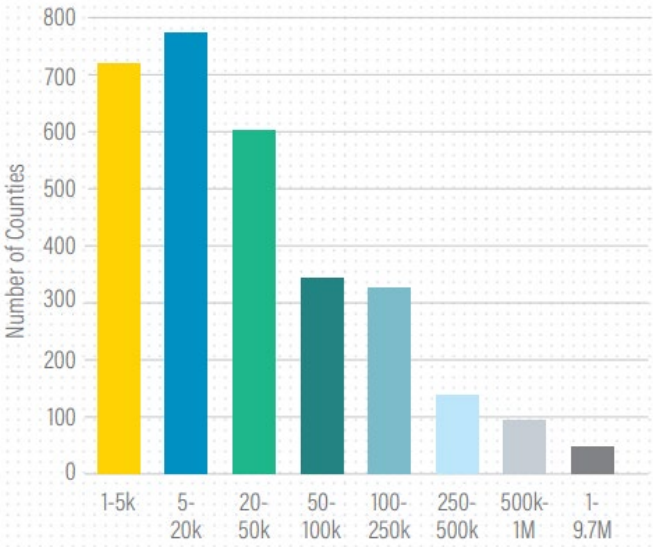


Numbers within each color box represent the distribution of counties.



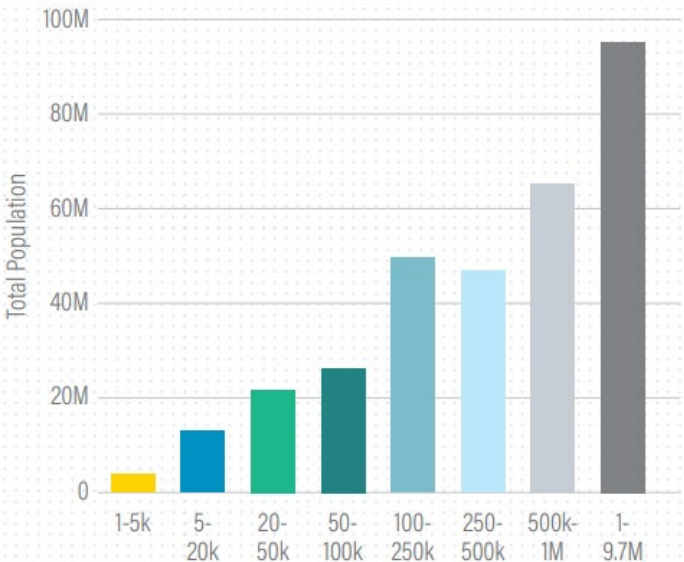
MOST COUNTIES ARE SMALL

Distribution of Counties by Population Size



MOST RESIDENTS LIVE IN LARGE COUNTIES

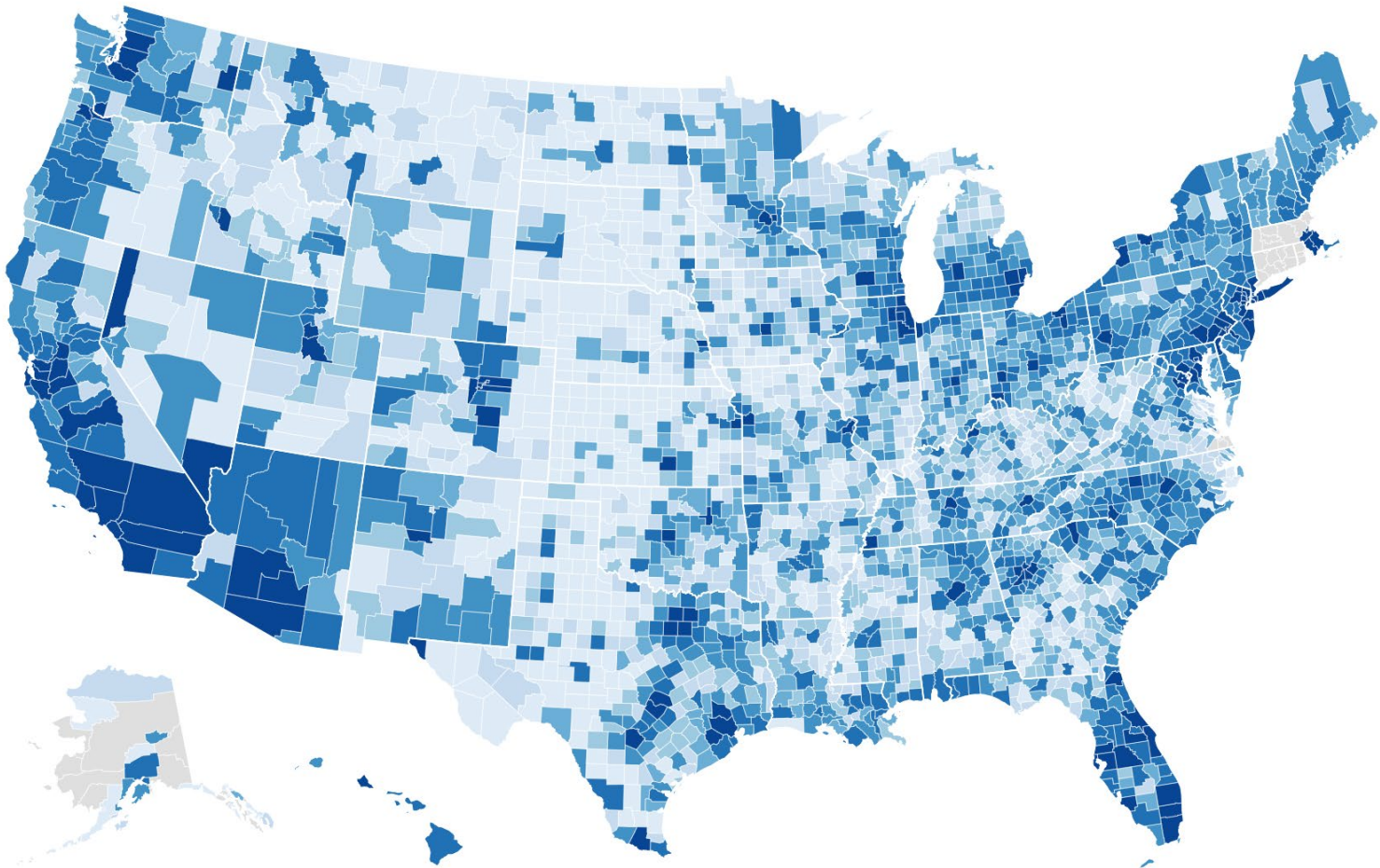
Distribution of County Residents by Population Size



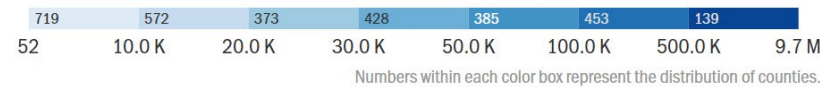
County Size is Diverse



Total Population (2025)



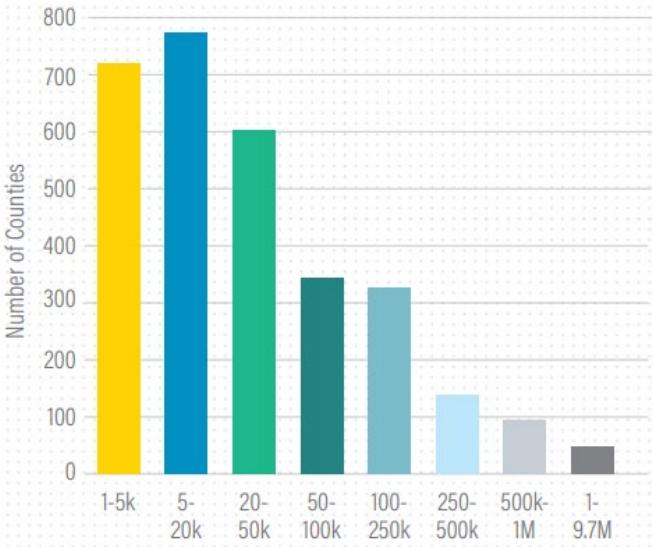
Source: NACo Analysis of U.S. Census Bureau - Population Estimates Program (PEP) - 2025





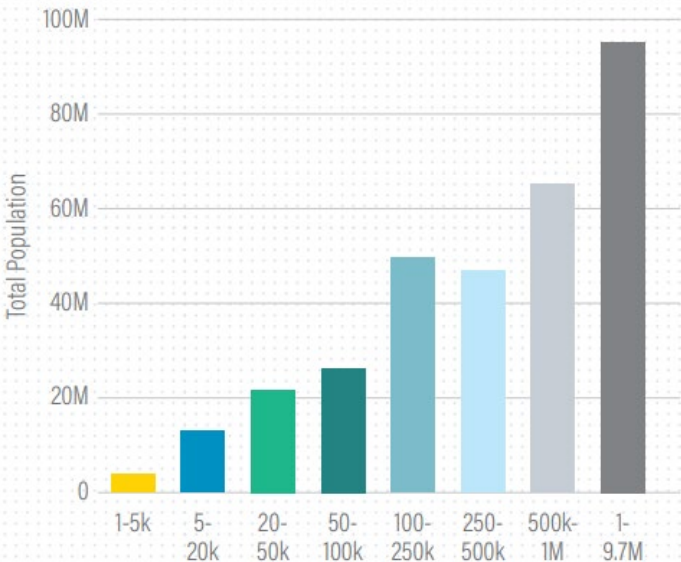
MOST COUNTIES ARE SMALL

Distribution of Counties by Population Size



MOST RESIDENTS LIVE IN LARGE COUNTIES

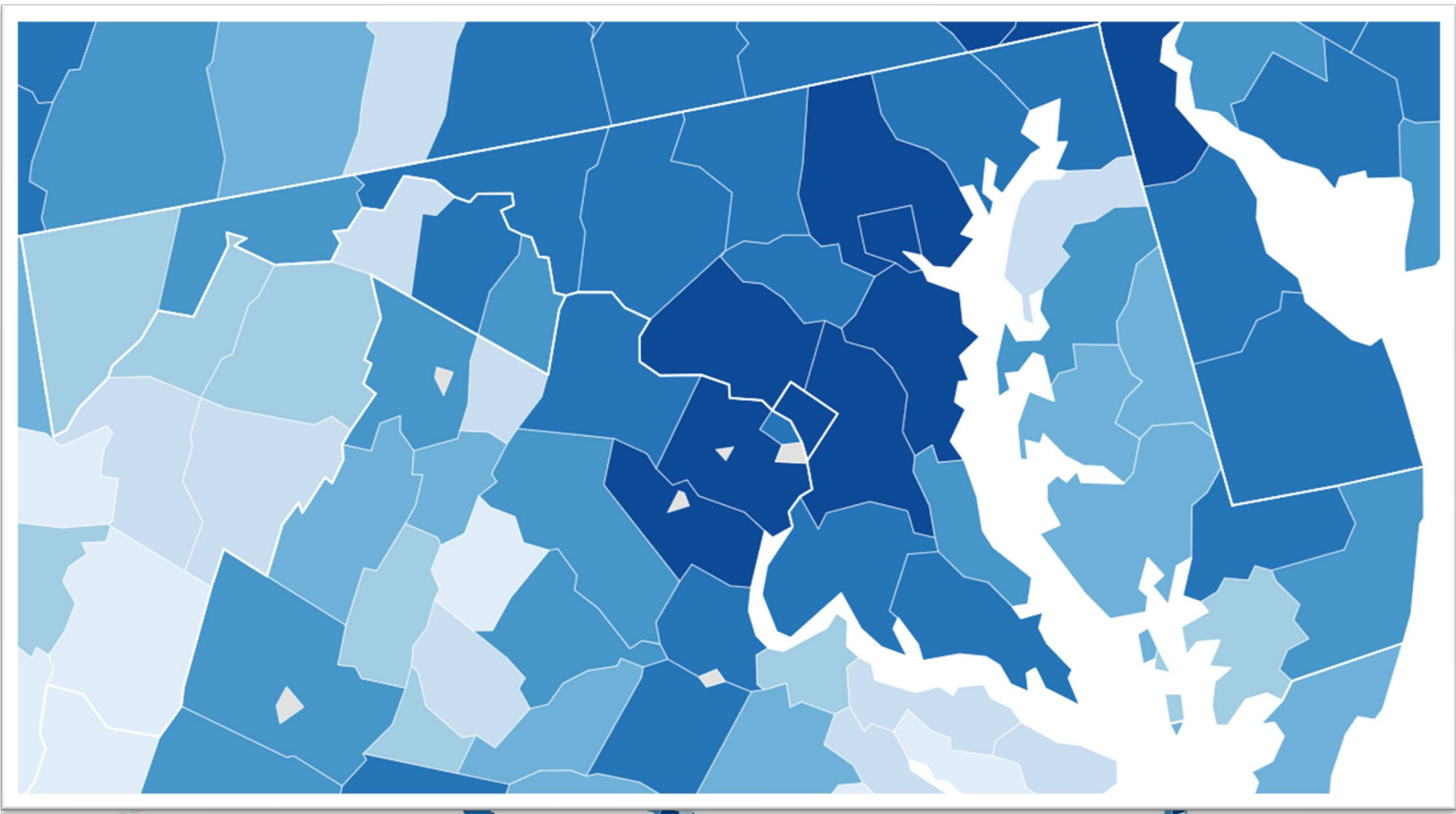
Distribution of County Residents by Population Size



County Size is Diverse



Total Population (2025)



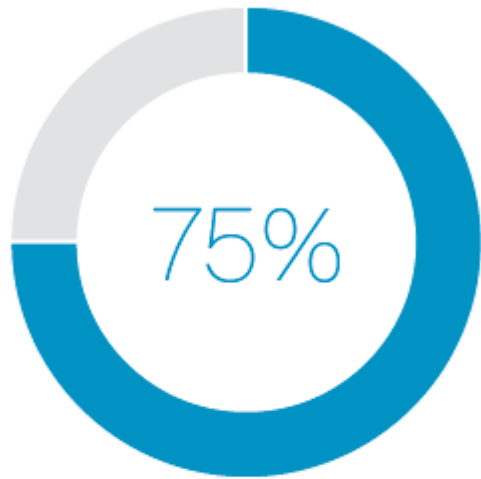
Source: NACo Analysis of U.S. Census Bureau - Population Estimates Program (PEP) - 2025



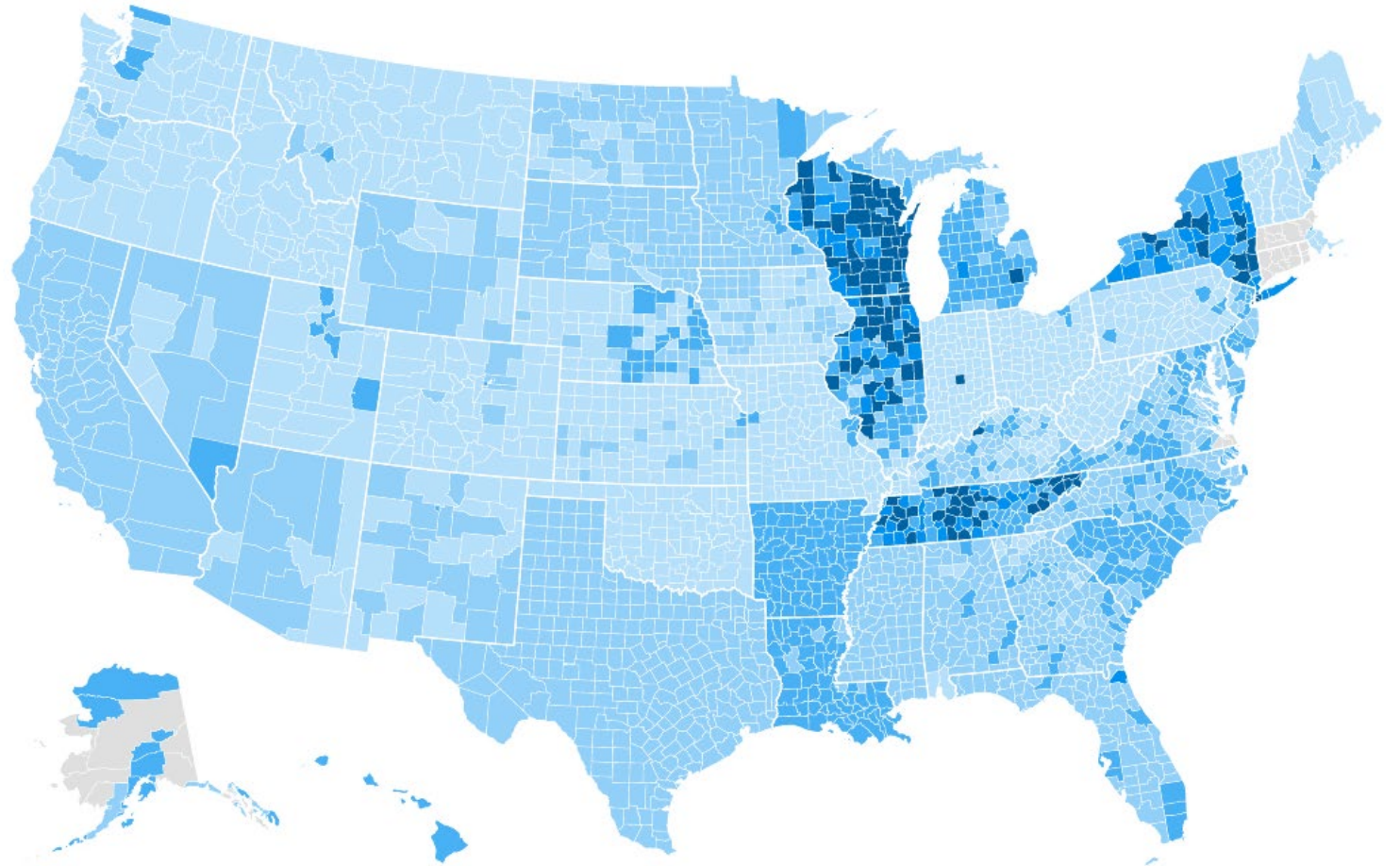


Governing Body **Size** (Legislative)

SIZE OF LEGISLATIVE BODY



Three-quarters (75 percent) of counties have either three or five commissioners.



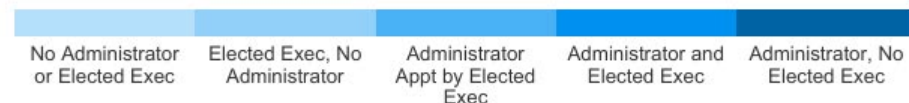
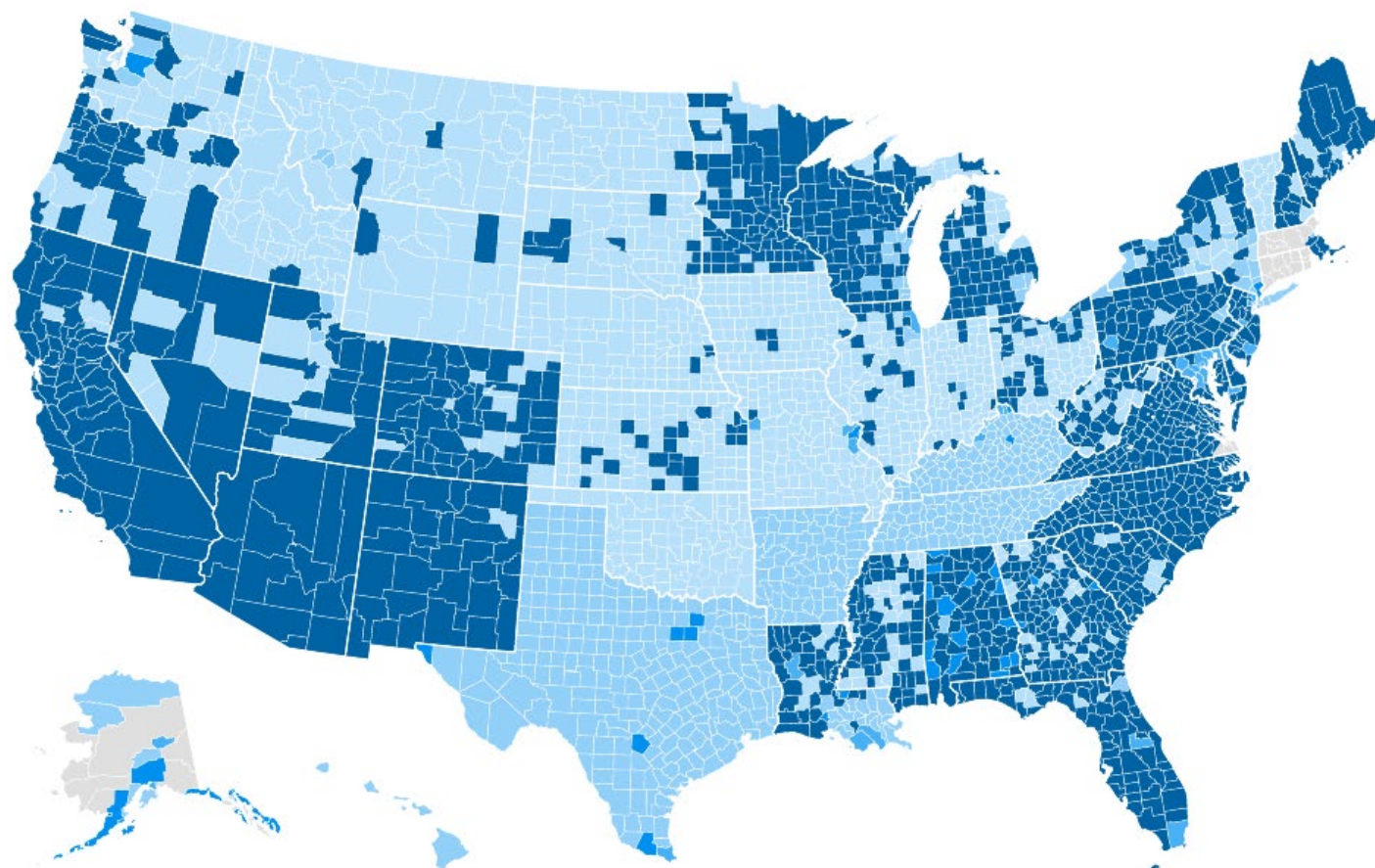
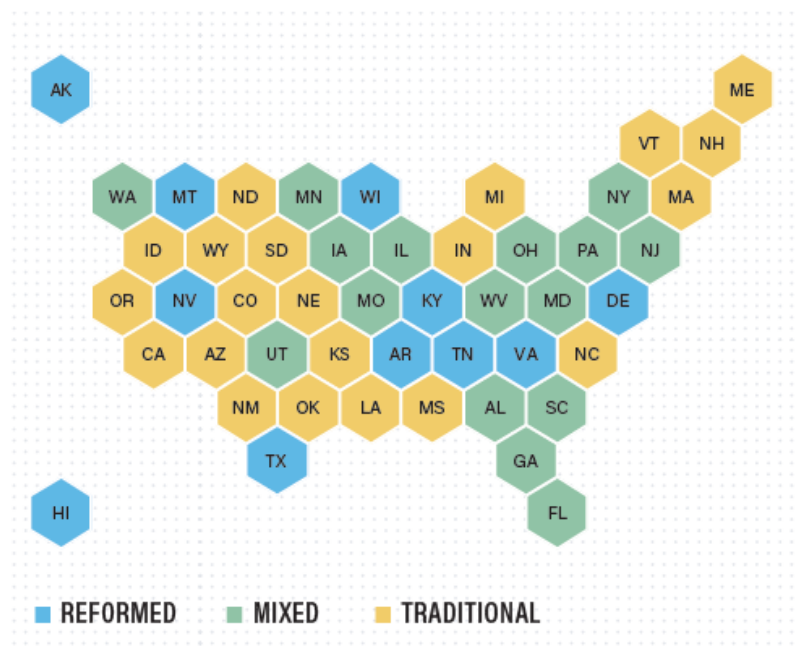


County Government **Form** (Executive)

APPOINTED COUNTY ADMINISTRATORS

21 STATES ONLY PERMIT THE TRADITIONAL,
COMMISSION FORM

County Government Form, according to State Statute





County Government Authority



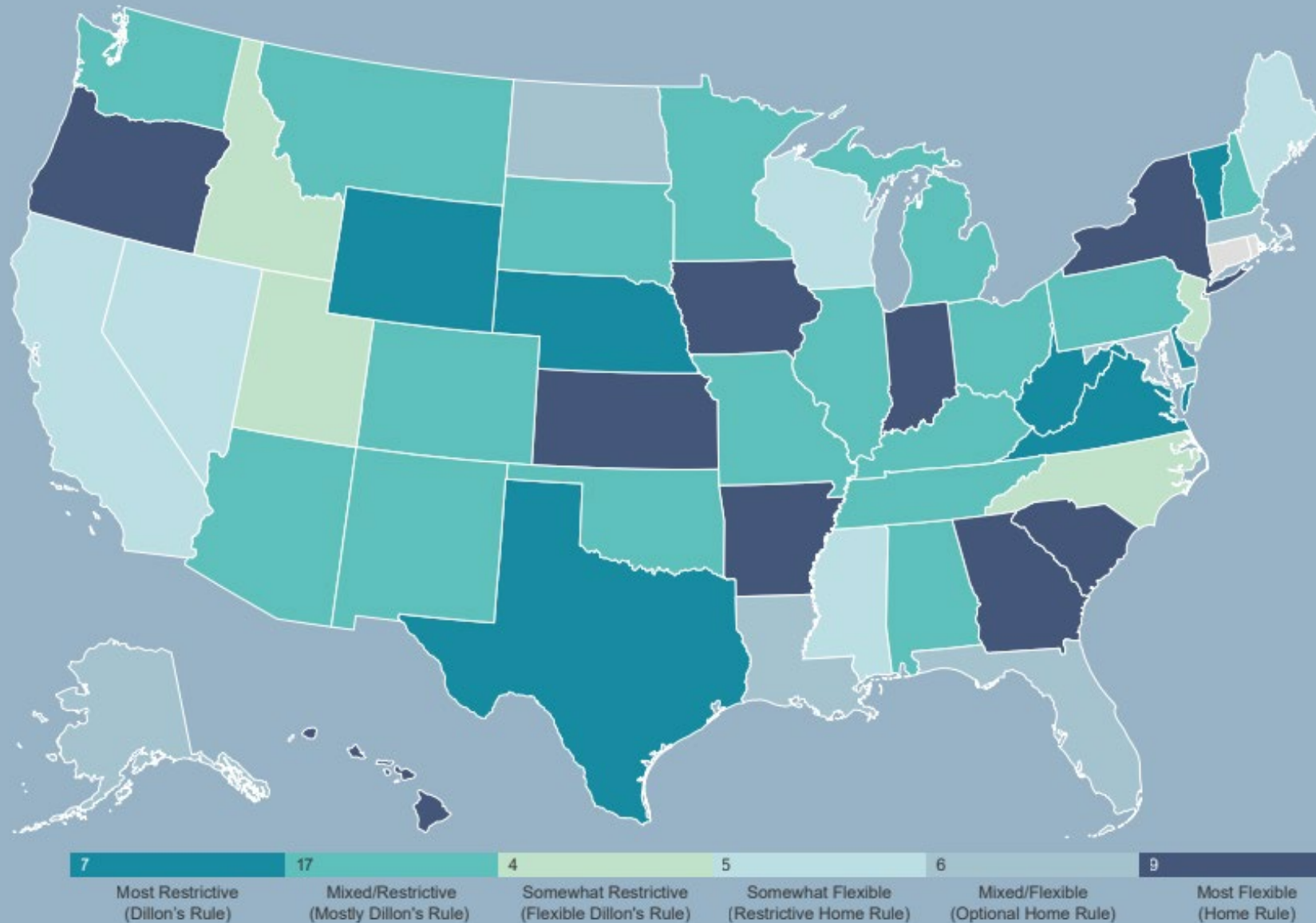
- 1 - Most Restrictive (**Dillon's Rule**)
- 2 - Mixed/Restrictive (**Mostly Dillon's Rule**)
- 3 - Somewhat Restrictive (**Flexible Dillon's Rule**)
- 4 - Somewhat Flexible (**Restrictive Home Rule**)
- 5 - Mixed/Flexible (**Optional Home Rule**)
- 6 - Most Flexible (**Home Rule**)

Three Areas of Autonomy

- ***Structural***
- ***Functional***
- ***Fiscal***



County Government Authority

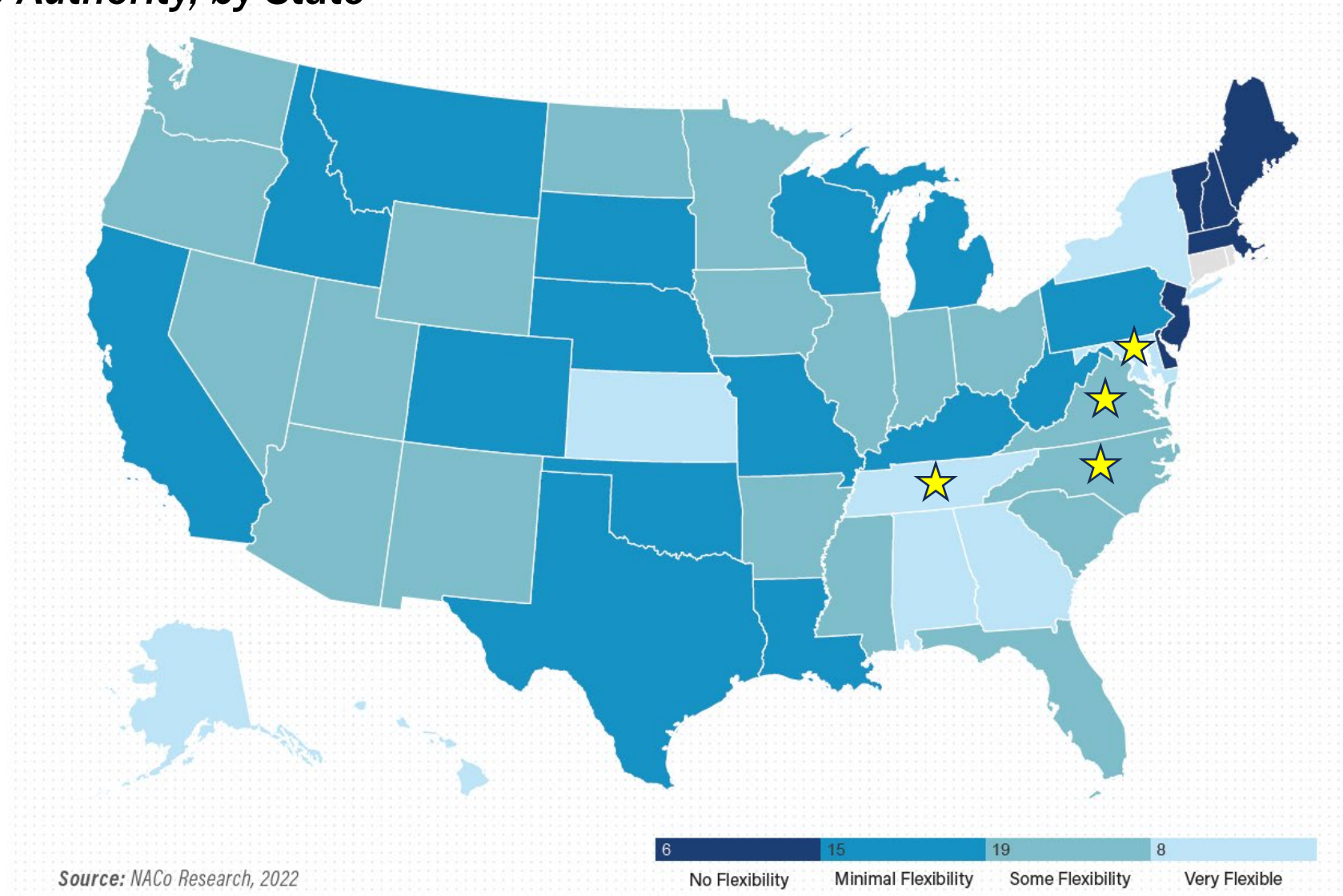




21 States Impose Substantial Restrictions on County Finance Authority



County Finance Authority, by State





County Government **Finances**



- **Property Tax** (real and personal)
- Sales Tax, Income Tax
- Other taxes: Hotel/Motel Tax, Mineral Tax, Gas/Fuel Tax, Real Estate Transfer Tax, Vehicle Tax
- Fees for services
- Shared revenue from states (e.g., sales or gas tax)
- Bonds / financing options (with debt limits)

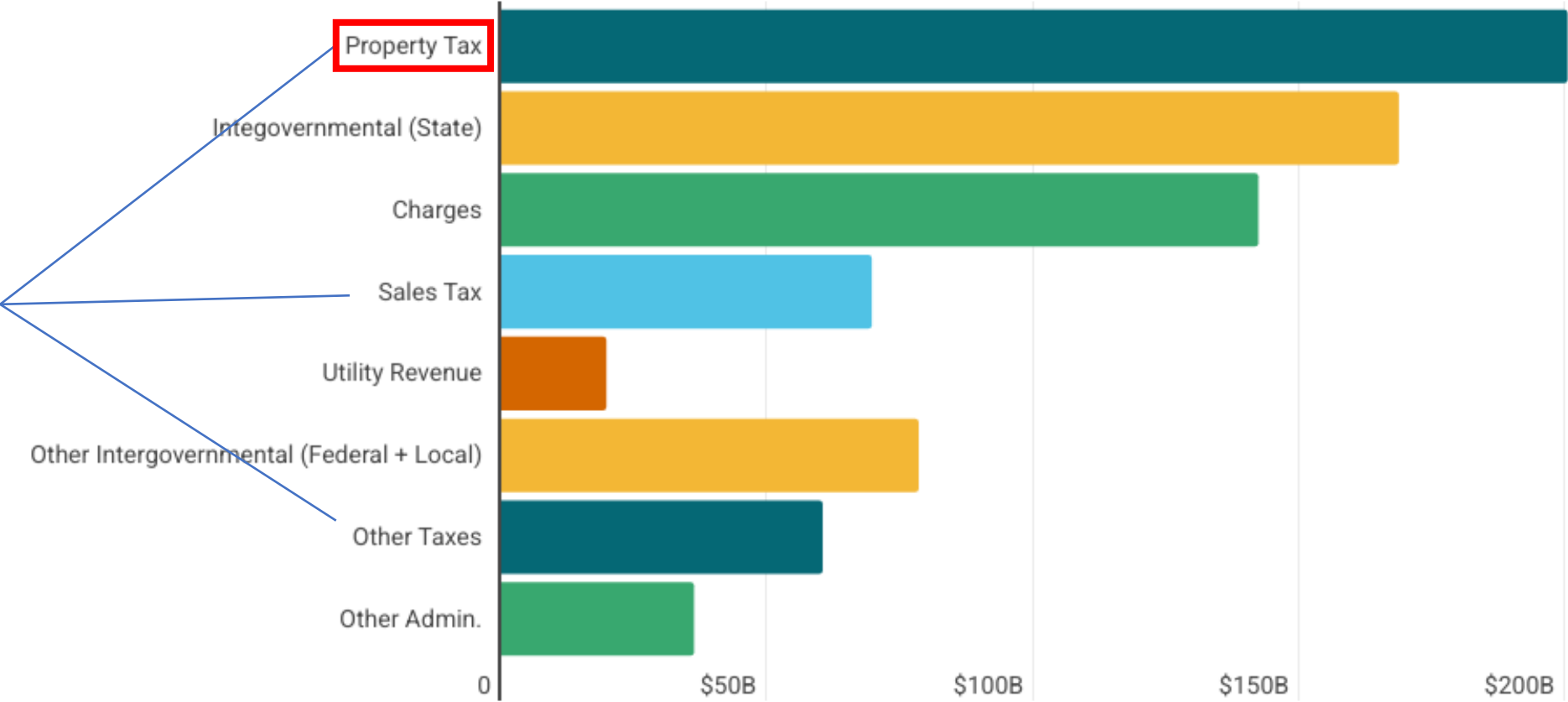


Property Taxes Provide Top Source of County Revenue



Breakdown of Total County Revenue

Taxes =
Foundation of
Government
Finances



Source: NACo Analysis of U.S. Census Bureau, 2022 Census of Individual Governments – Finance

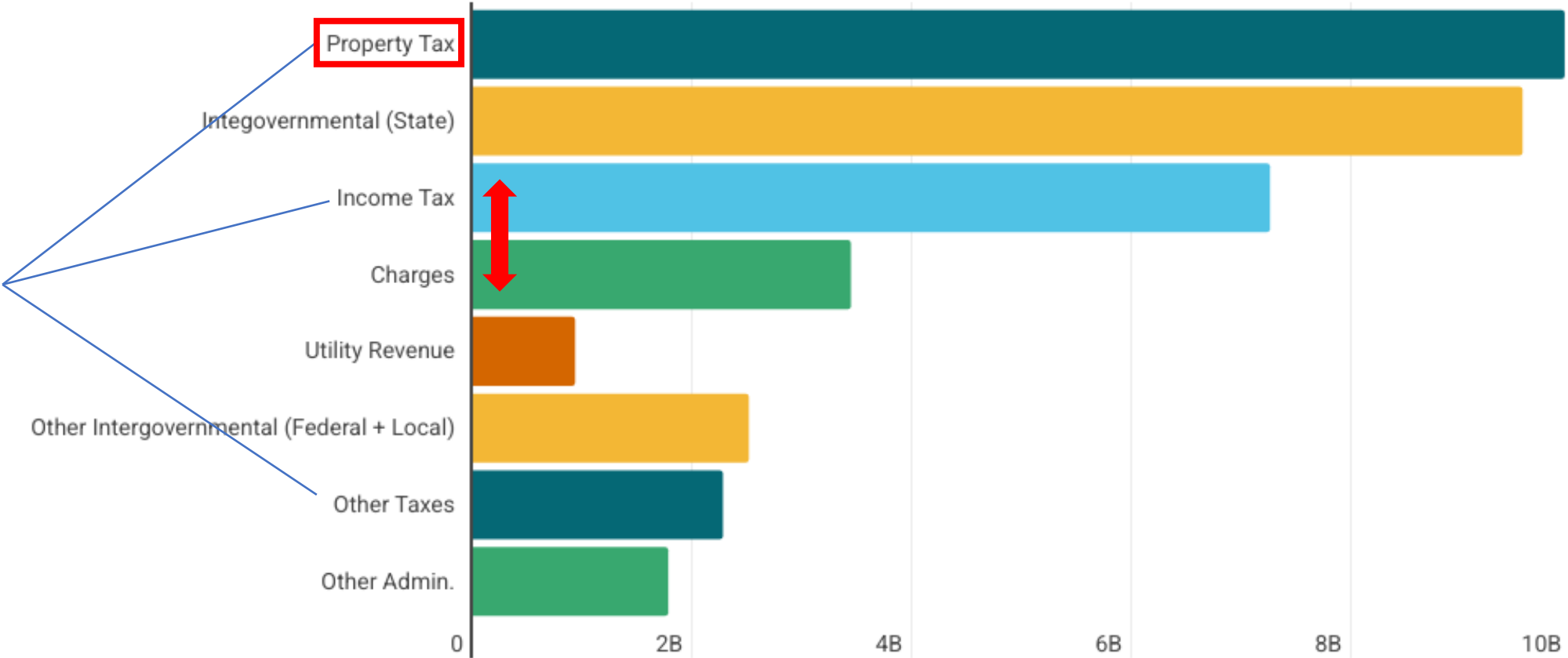


Property Taxes Provide Top Source of Maryland County Revenue



Breakdown of Total **Maryland** County Revenue

Taxes =
Foundation of
Government
Finances

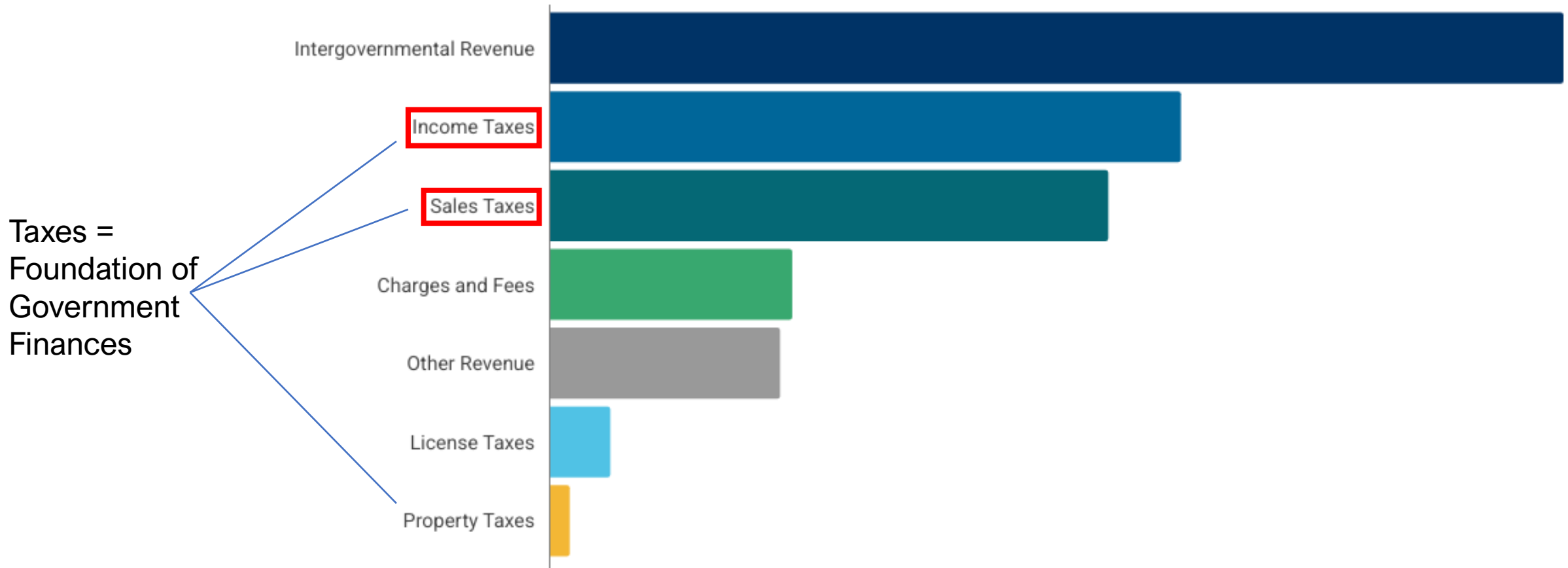


Source: NACo Analysis of U.S. Census Bureau, 2022 Census of Individual Governments – Finance

Income & Sales Taxes Provide Top Source of State Revenue



Breakdown of Total State Revenue

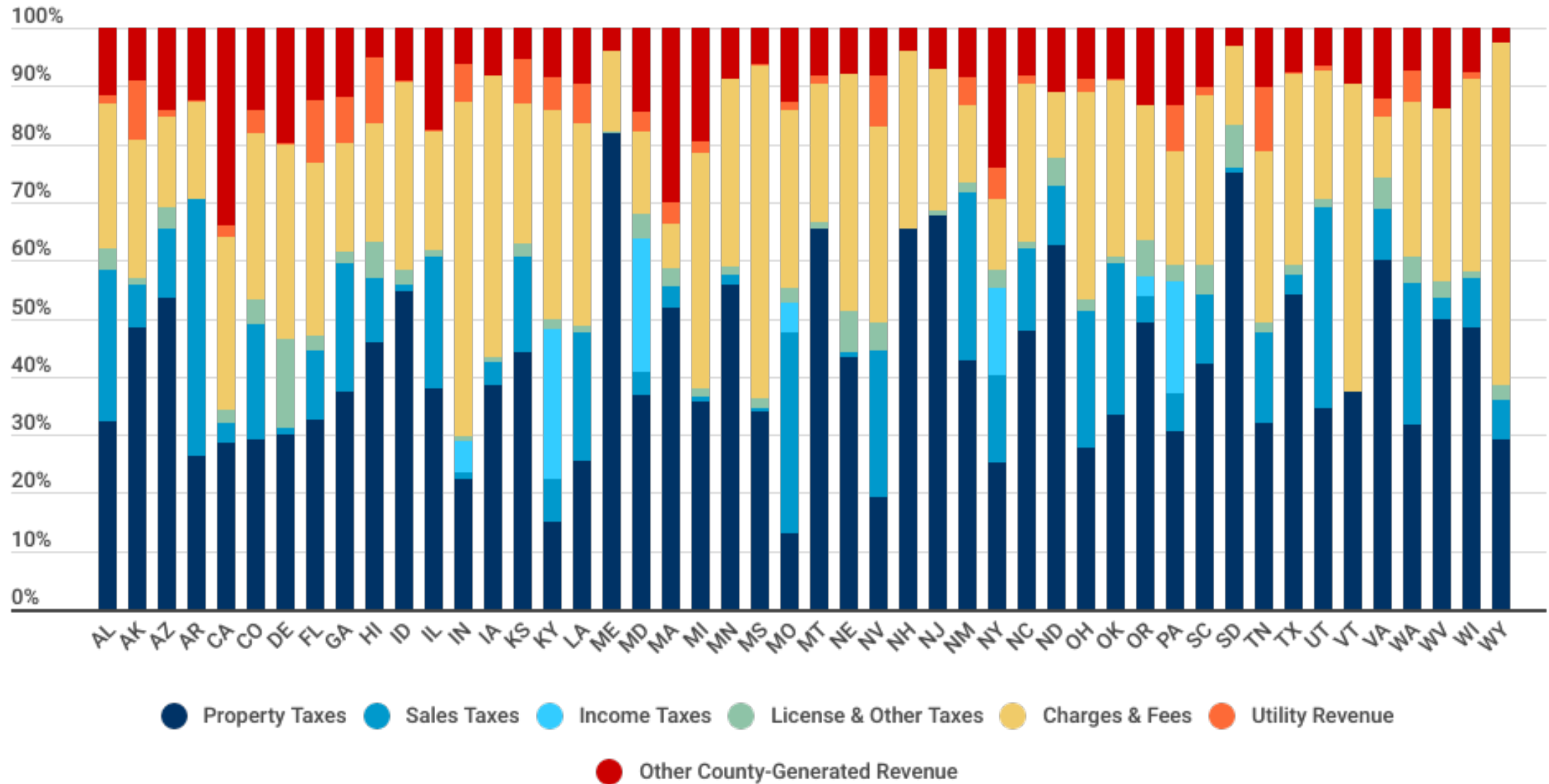


Source: NACo Analysis of U.S. Census Bureau, 2022 Census of Individual Governments – Finance



County Revenue Structure Is Diverse

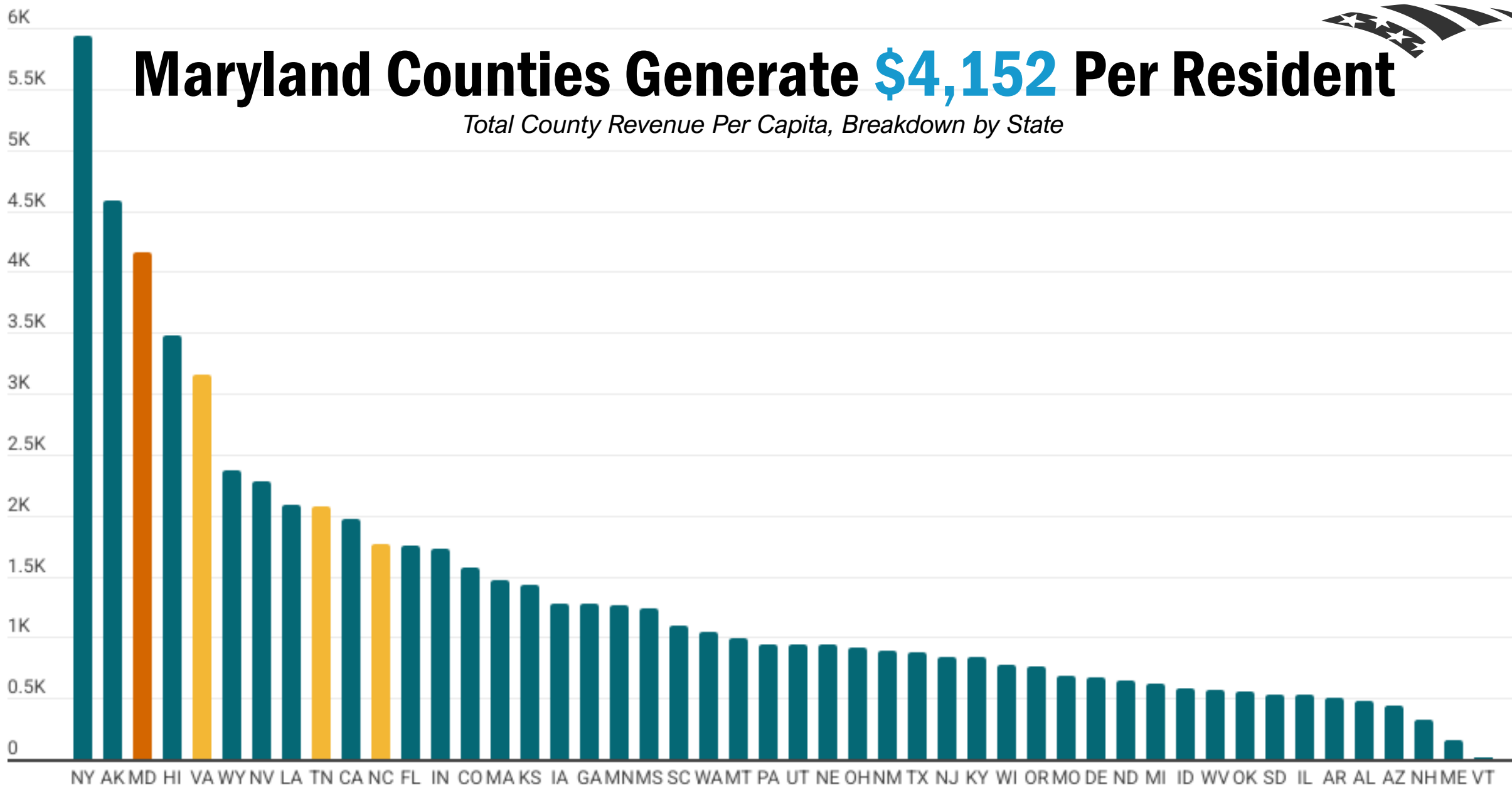
County-Generated Revenue Breakdown by State



Source: NACo Analysis of U.S. Census Bureau, 2022 Census of Individual Governments – Finance

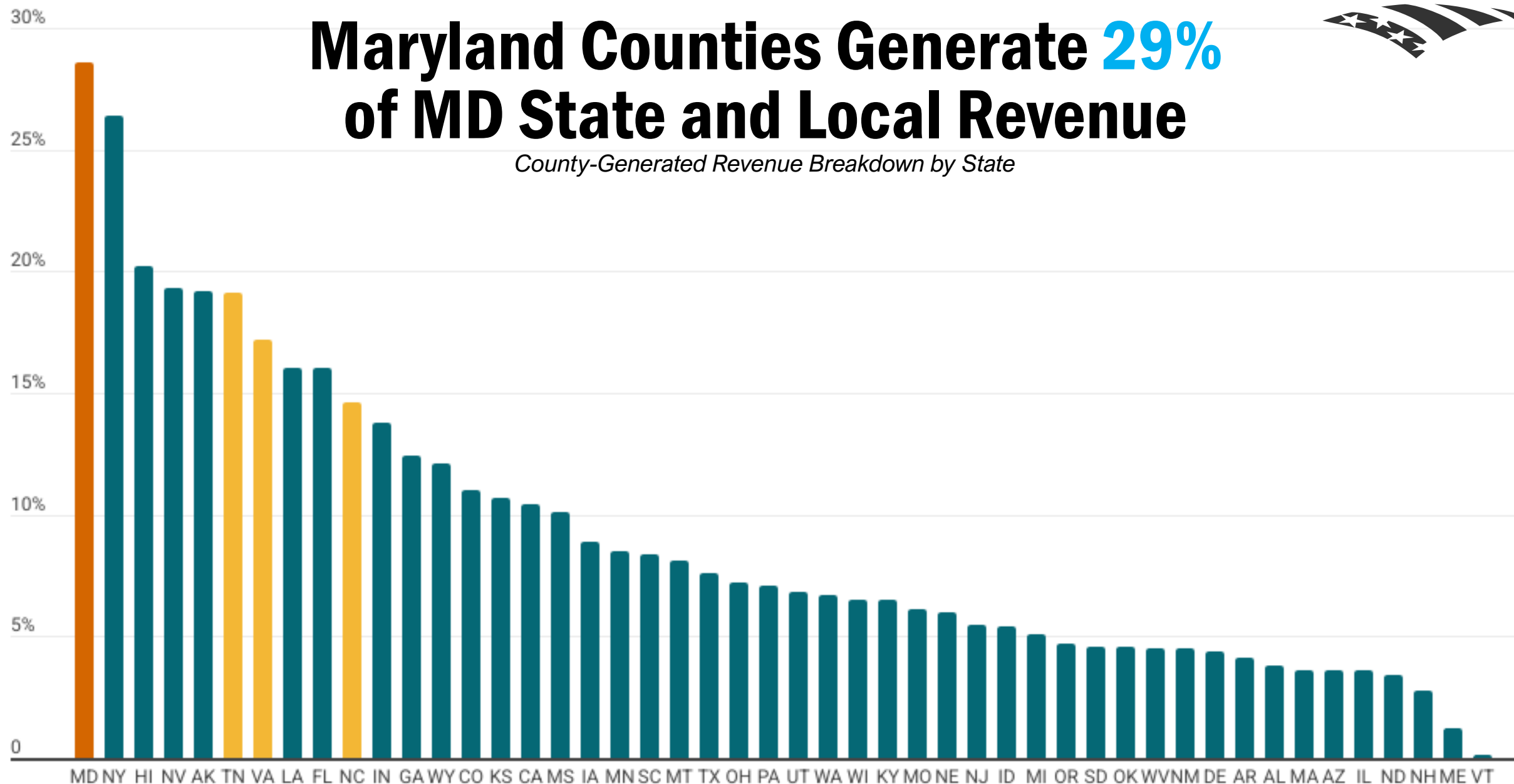
Maryland Counties Generate **\$4,152** Per Resident

Total County Revenue Per Capita, Breakdown by State



Maryland Counties Generate **29%** of MD State and Local Revenue

County-Generated Revenue Breakdown by State

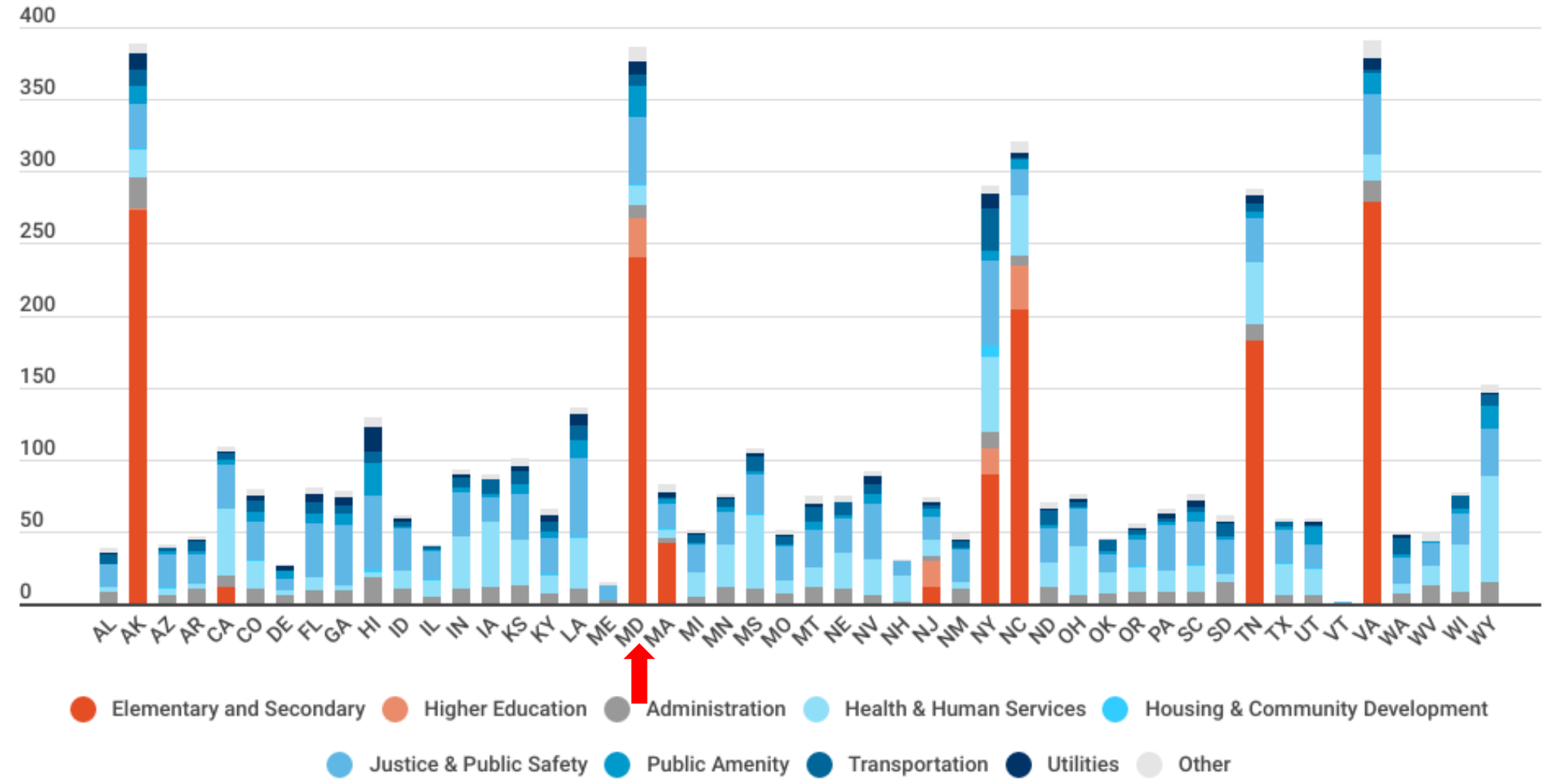




Counties Which Provide **K-12 Education** Play a Large Role in Their Communities



County Employment, per 10k Residents, by State

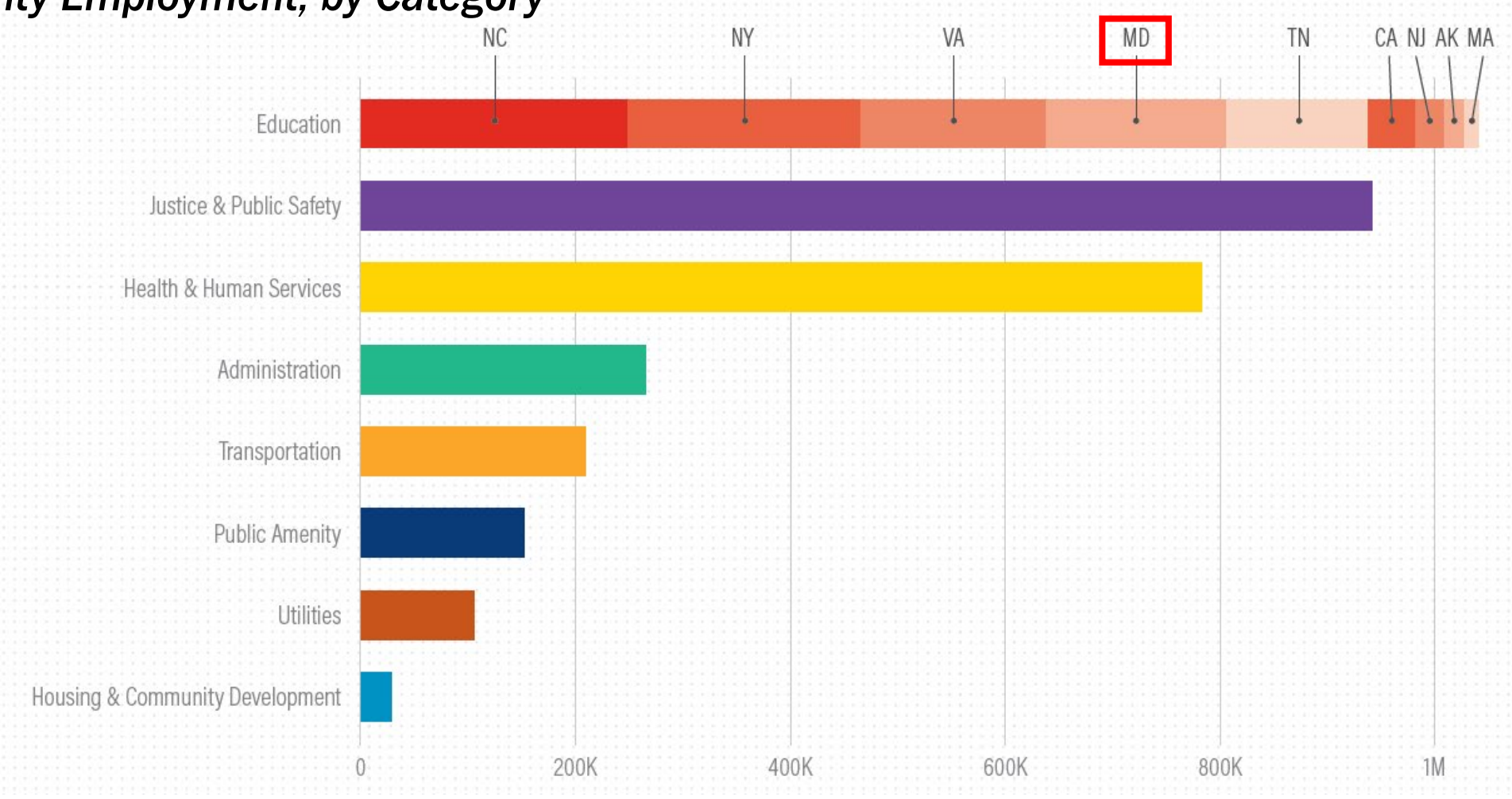




K-12 Education Is Top County Employer (in Nine States)



Total County Employment, by Category

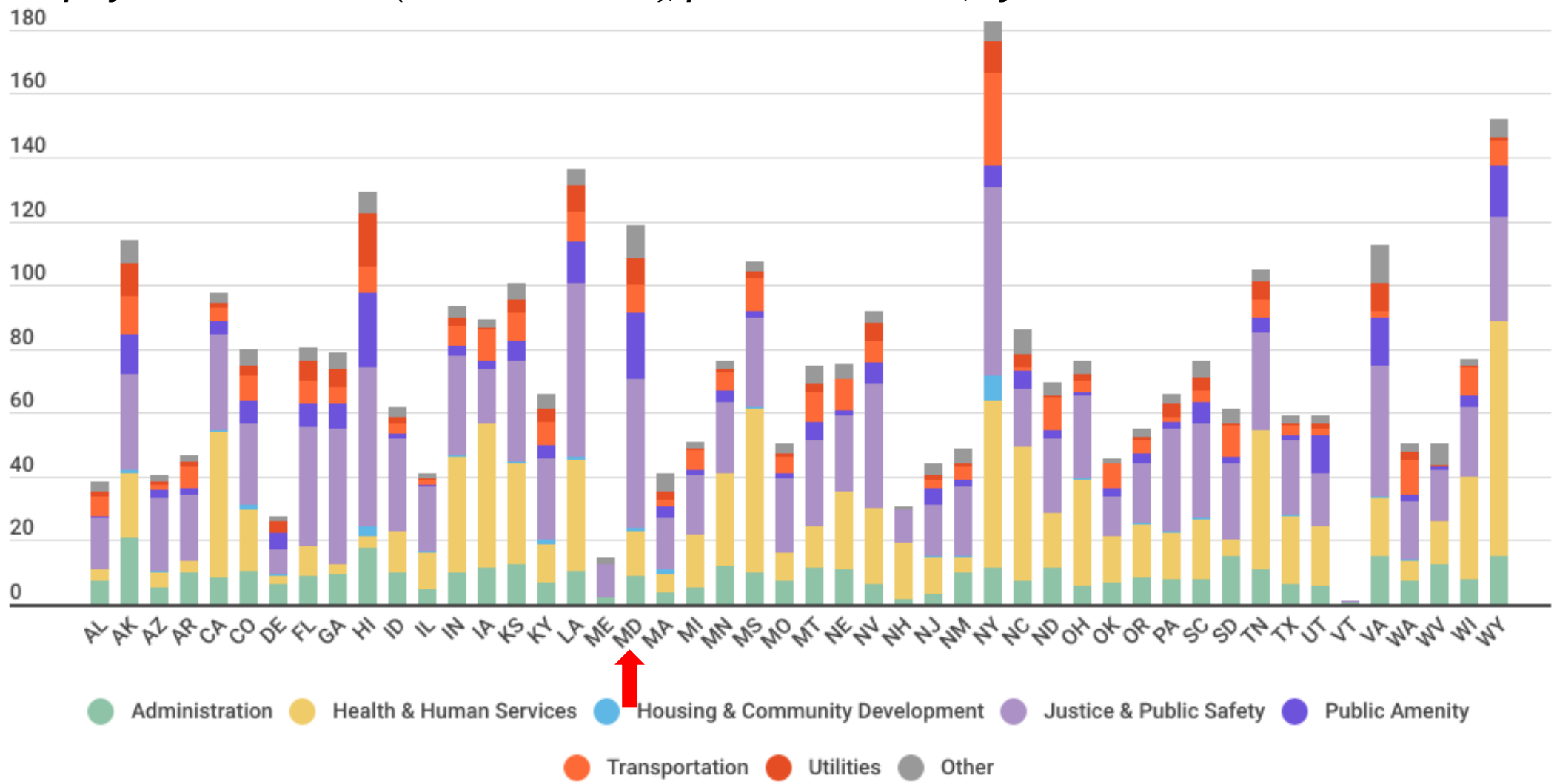


Source: NACo Analysis of U.S. Census Bureau - Census of Individual Governments: Employment, 2022



Counties in **Ten States** Employ >100 Workers per 10k Residents

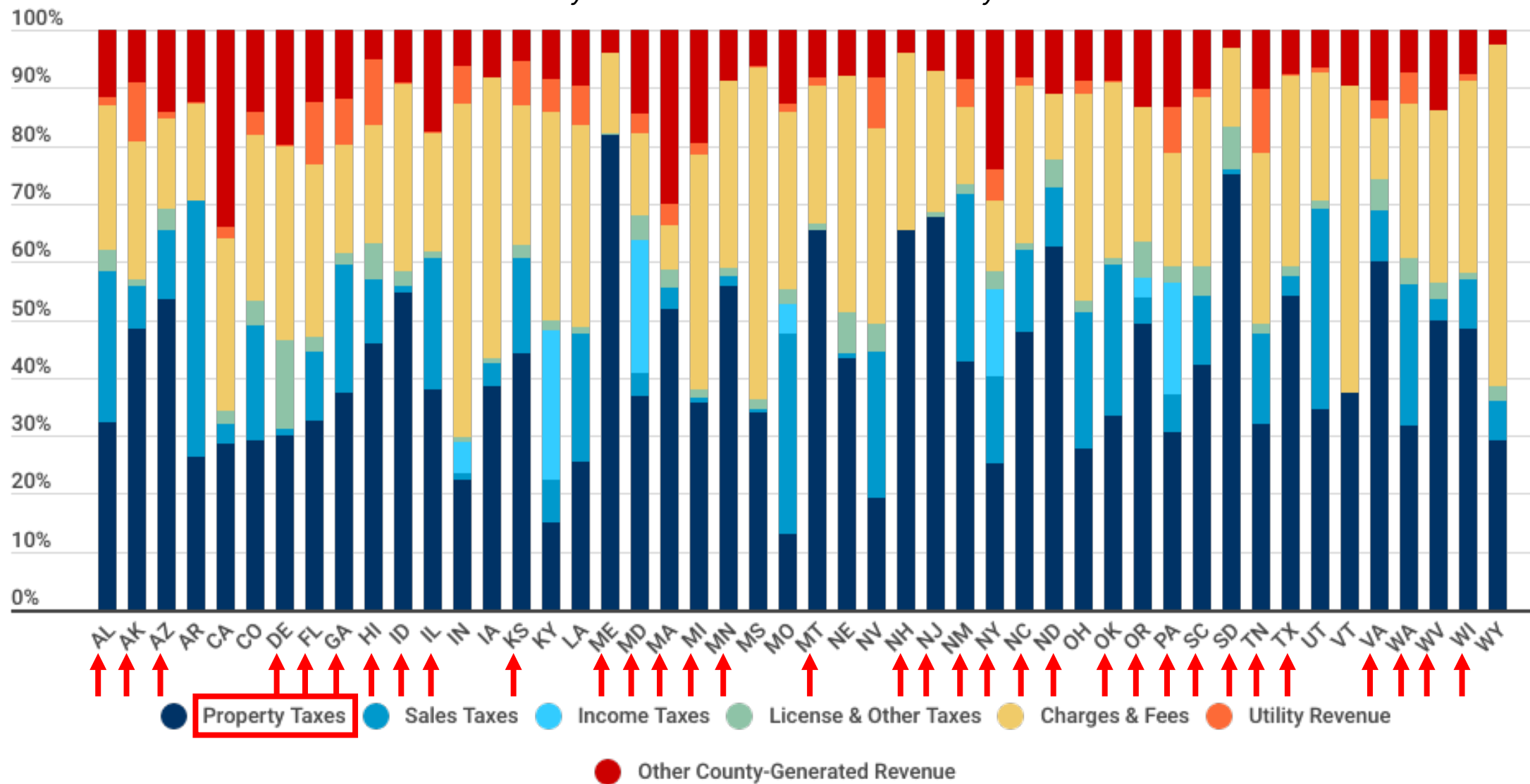
County Employment Breakdown (minus Education), per 10k Residents, by State





Property Tax Is Top Revenue for 33 States

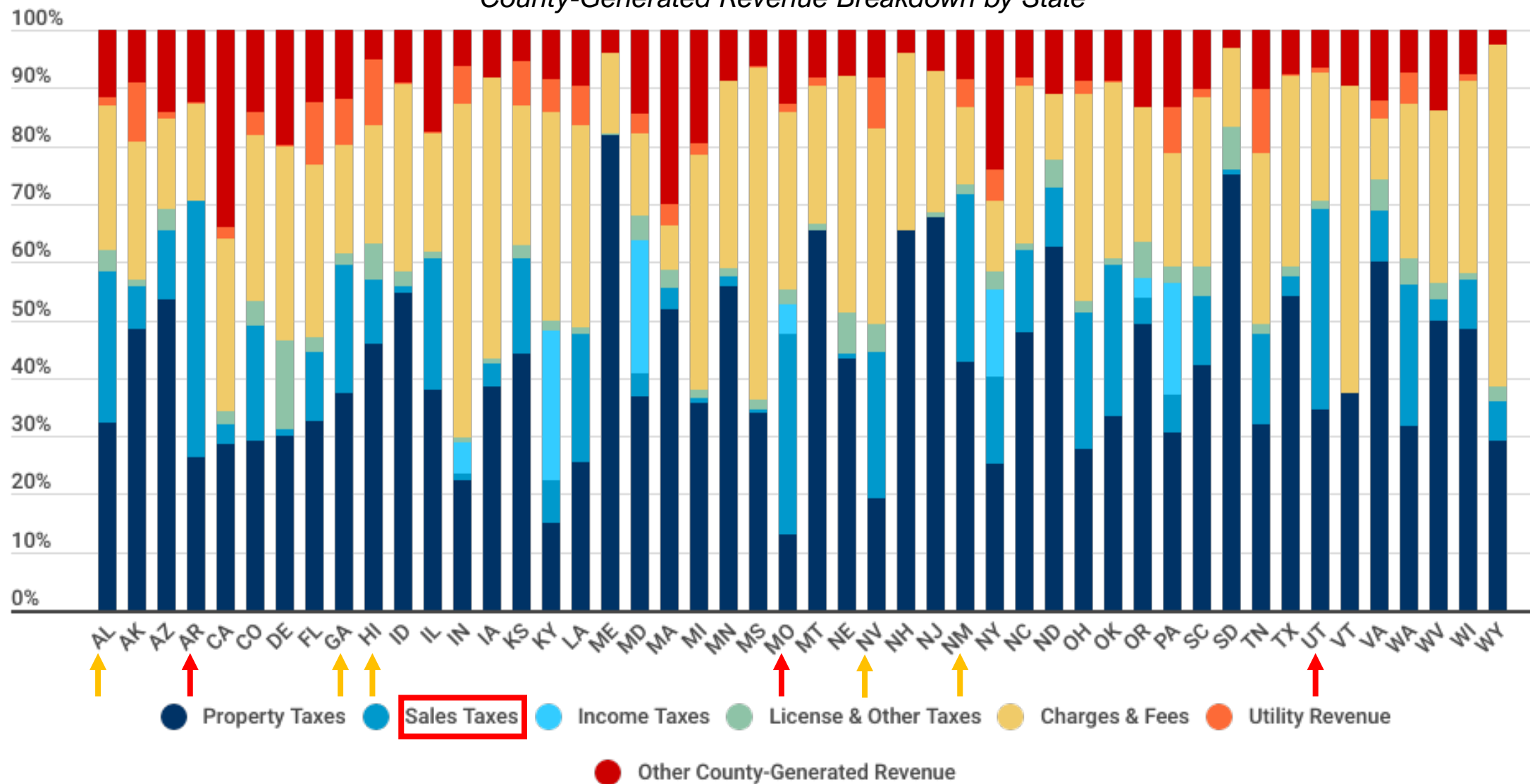
County-Generated Revenue Breakdown by State





Counties in **Eight States** Rely on Sales Taxes

County-Generated Revenue Breakdown by State



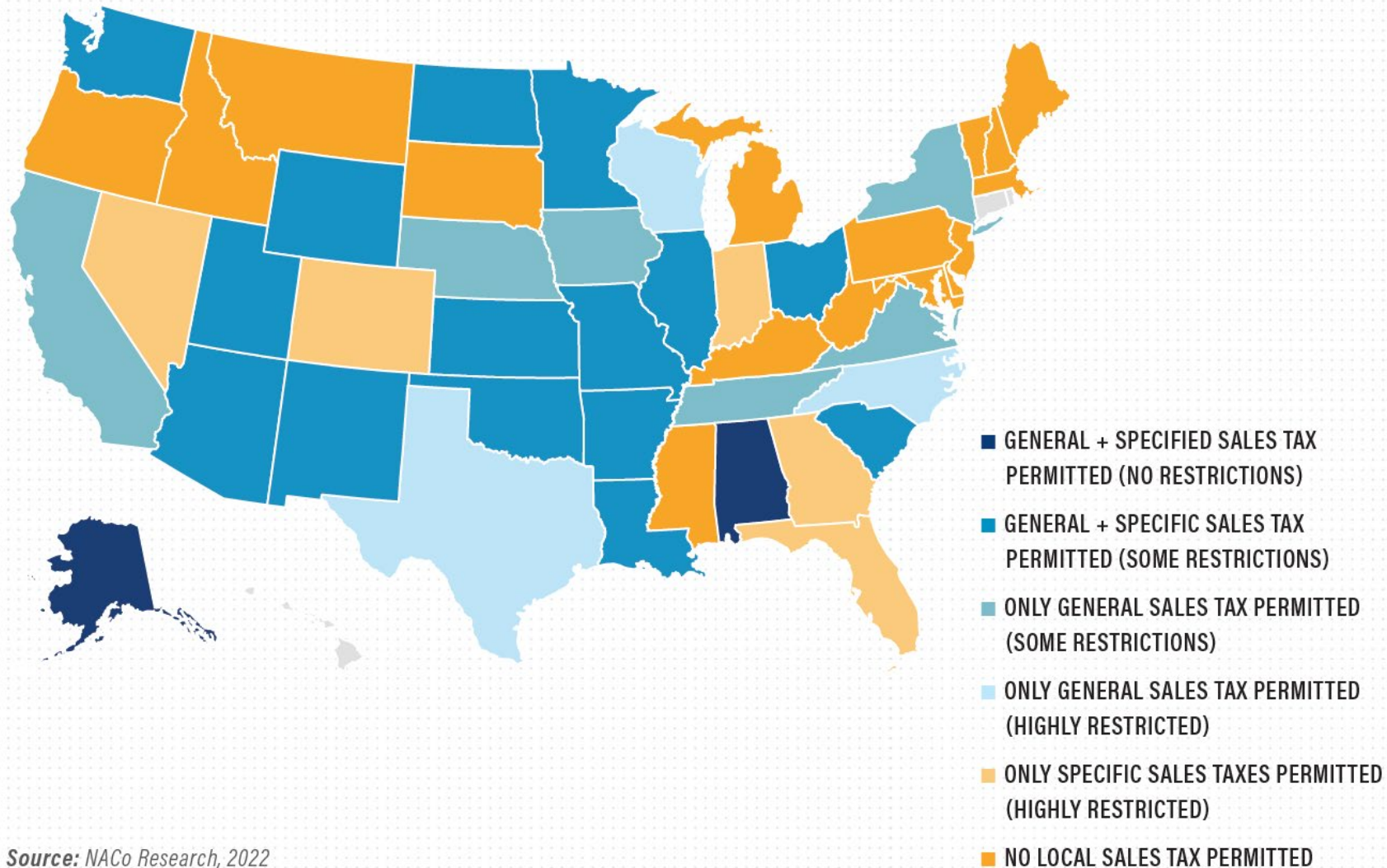
Source: NACo Analysis of U.S. Census Bureau, 2022 Census of Individual Governments – Finance



31 States Permit Some Form of County Sales Tax, Most With Restrictions



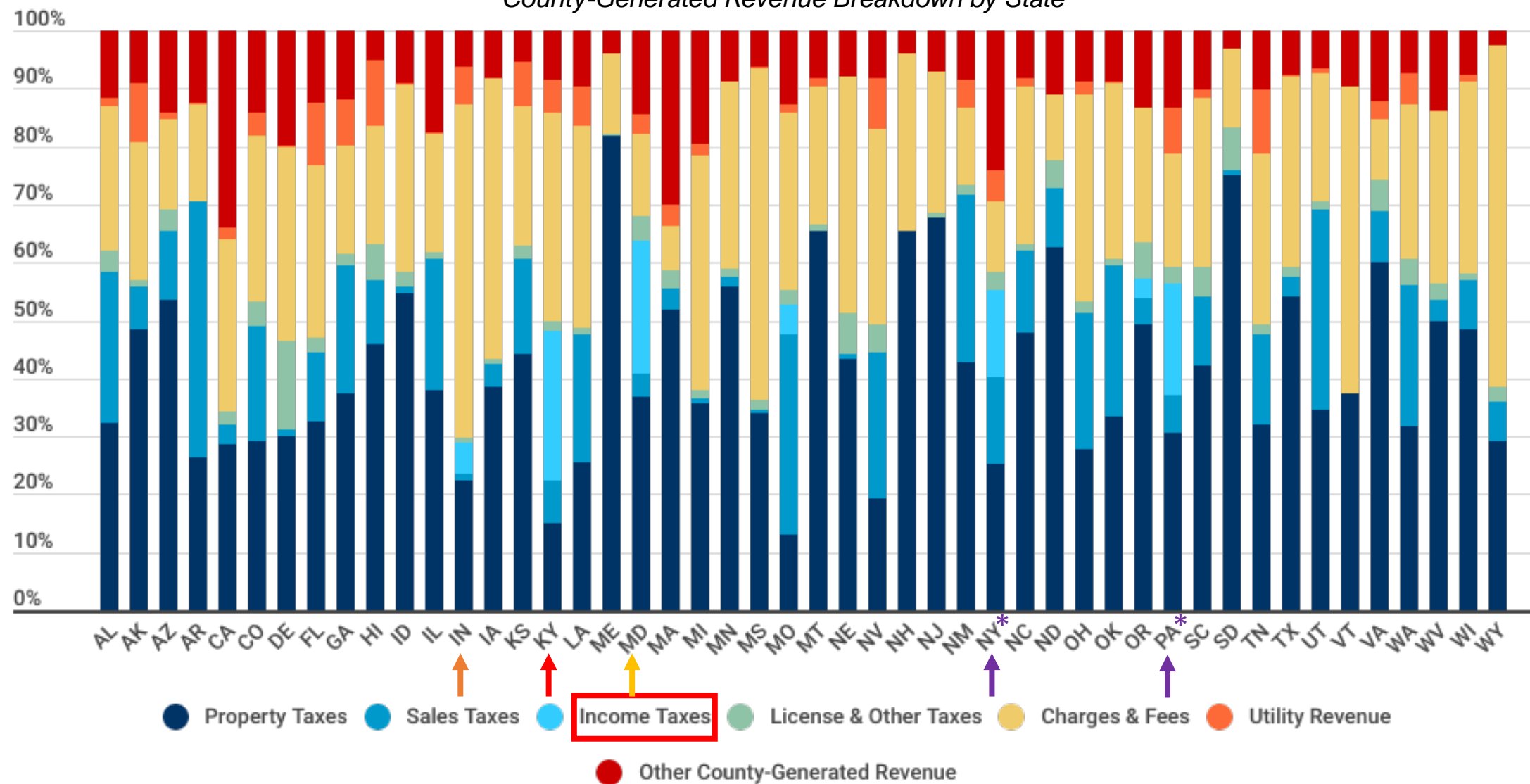
County Sales Tax Authority, by State



Source: NACo Research, 2022

Counties in **Three States** Rely on Income Taxes

County-Generated Revenue Breakdown by State



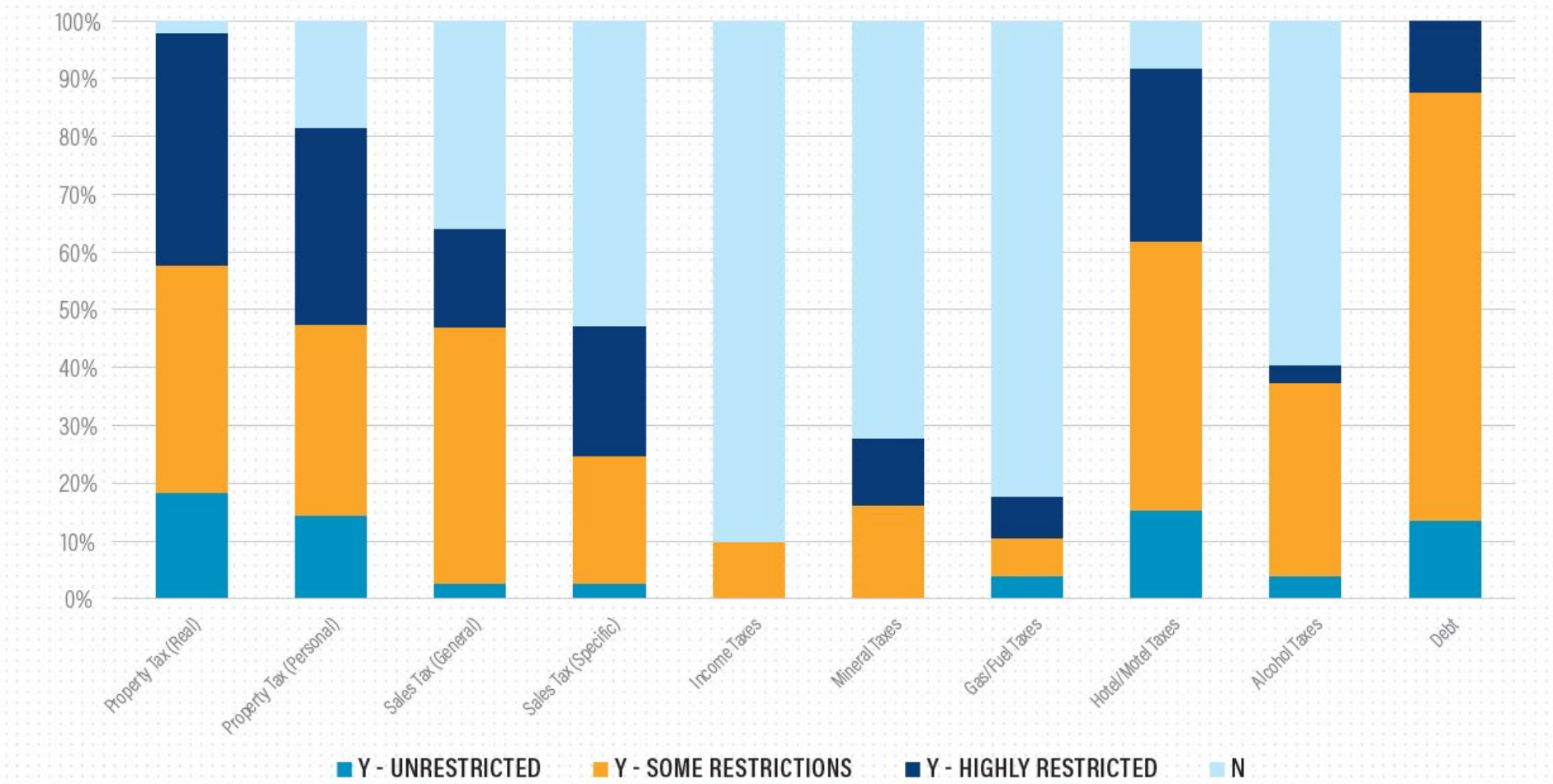
Source: NACo Analysis of U.S. Census Bureau, 2022 Census of Individual Governments – Finance



Counties Use a Wide Variety of Other Revenue Sources to Fill in the Gaps



County Finance Authority (Breakdown by Share of Counties)



Notes: The above chart depicts the total percent of all counties that fall into each subcategory. The total number of counties was calculated based on overall state authority in these areas, with an understanding that there may be some slight discrepancies due to variations within the states themselves.

Source: NACo Research, 2022



Counties Use a Wide Variety of Other Revenue Sources to Fill in the Gaps



Common County Taxes

- Hotel/motel tax: 38 states
- Gas/fuel tax: 12 states
- Vehicle tax: 11 states
- Mineral tax: 8 states (separately or through property tax)
- Real estate transfer tax: 7 states
- Alcohol sales: 15 states (method varies)
- Amusement or public entertainment taxes: 3 states (LA, MD, MO)
- Rental car taxes: 3 states (GA, NC, UT)

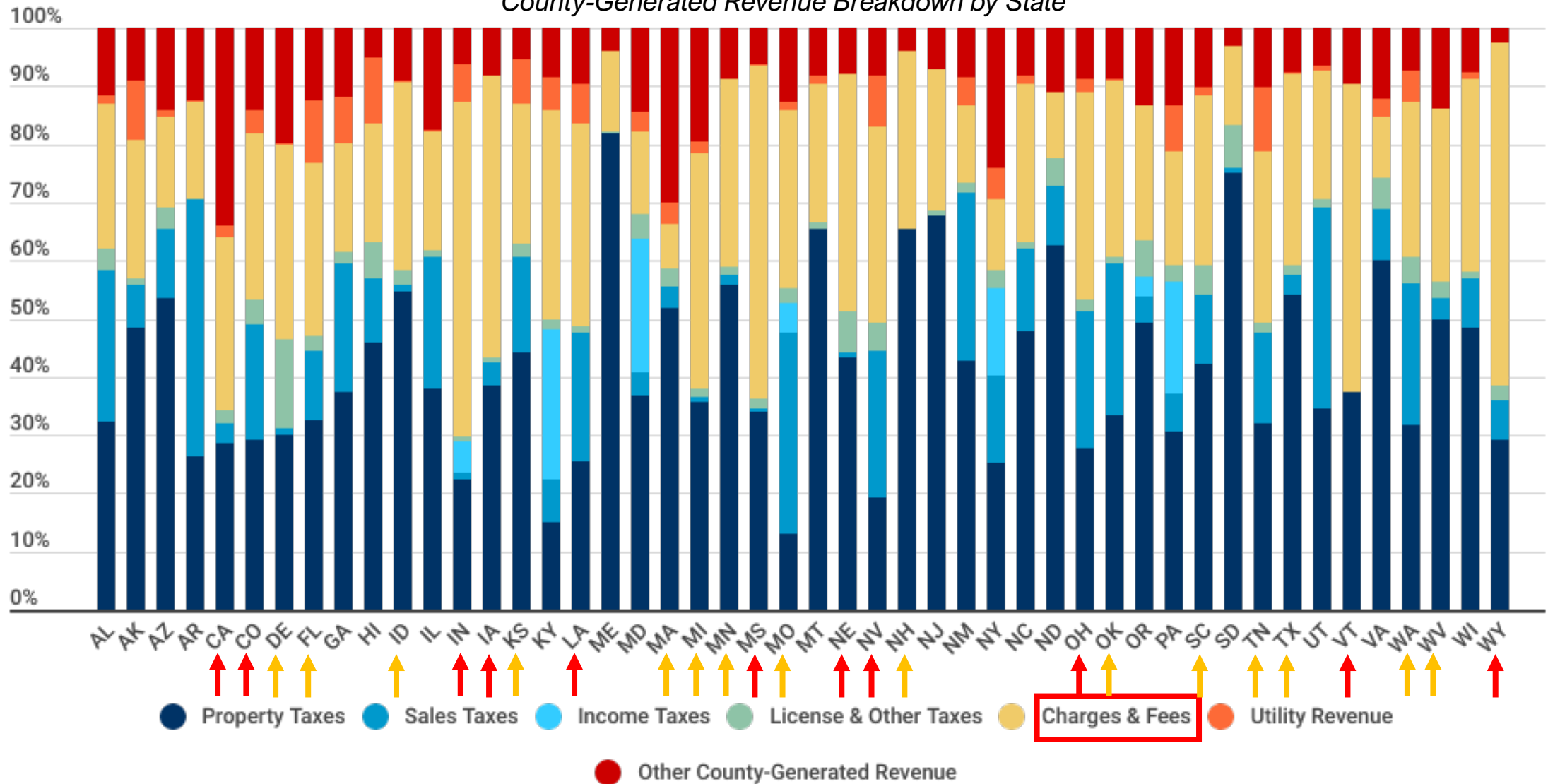
Unique County Taxes

- Poll tax: AL
- Parks tax: AZ
- Head/Capitation tax: DE, PA
- Insurance premium tax: GA, KY
- Tax on replacement cars provided by insurance companies: IL
- Cigarette tax: MO, OH
- Documentary stamp tax: NE
- Animal tax: NC



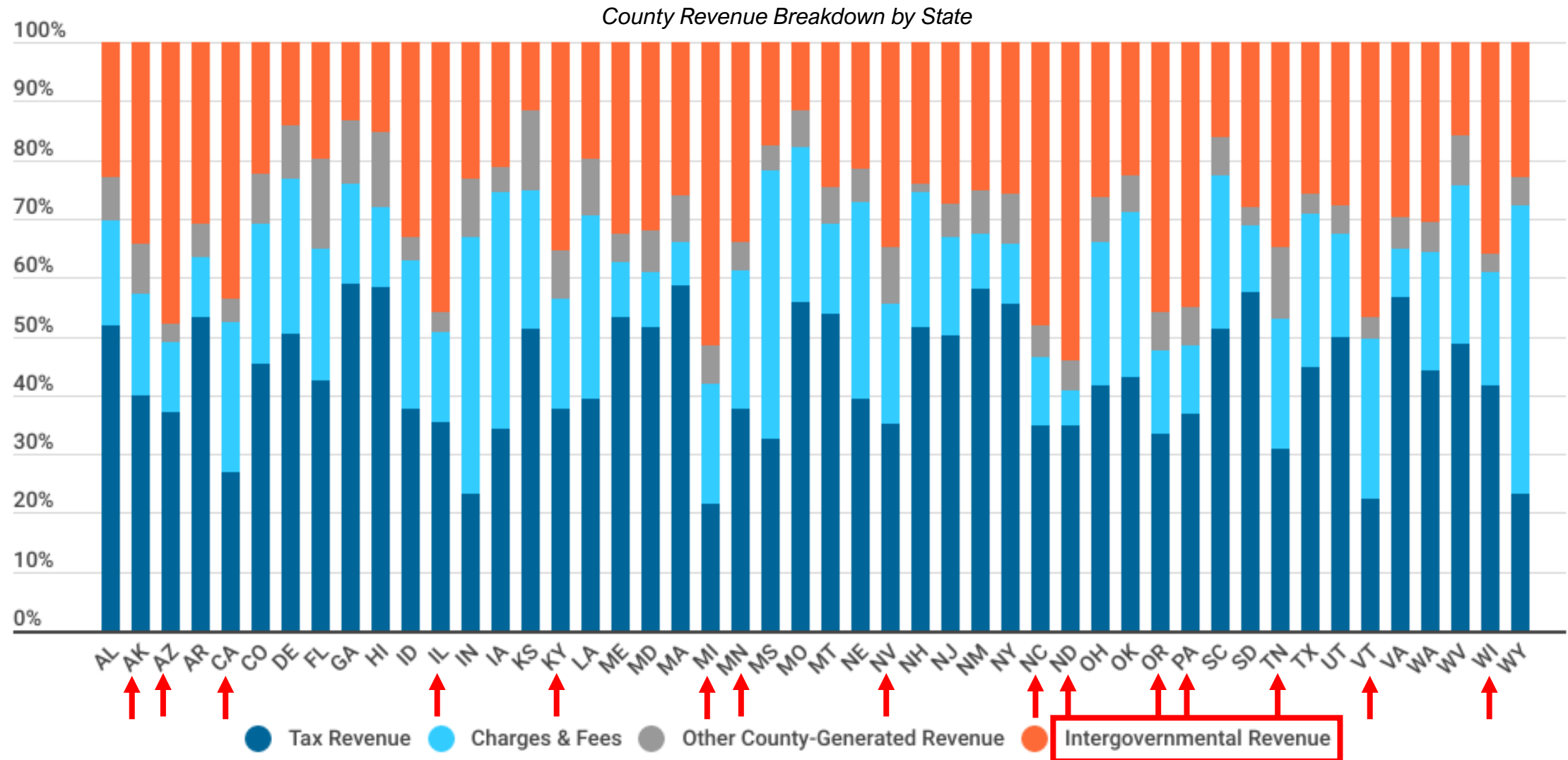
Counties in **Half of States** (25) Heavily Use Charges & Fees

County-Generated Revenue Breakdown by State





Counties in 15 States Rely Greatly on Intergovernmental Revenue



State Comparison

Maryland

- Population: 6,265,347 (19th)
- Total County Revenue: \$37.7M
- Share County-Generated Revenue: 68%

North Carolina

- Population: 11,197,968 (9th)
- Total County Revenue: \$36.5M
- Total County-Generated Revenue: 52%

Tennessee

- Population: 7,315,076 (15th)
- Total County Revenue: \$22.5M
- Share County-Generated Revenue: 65%

Virginia

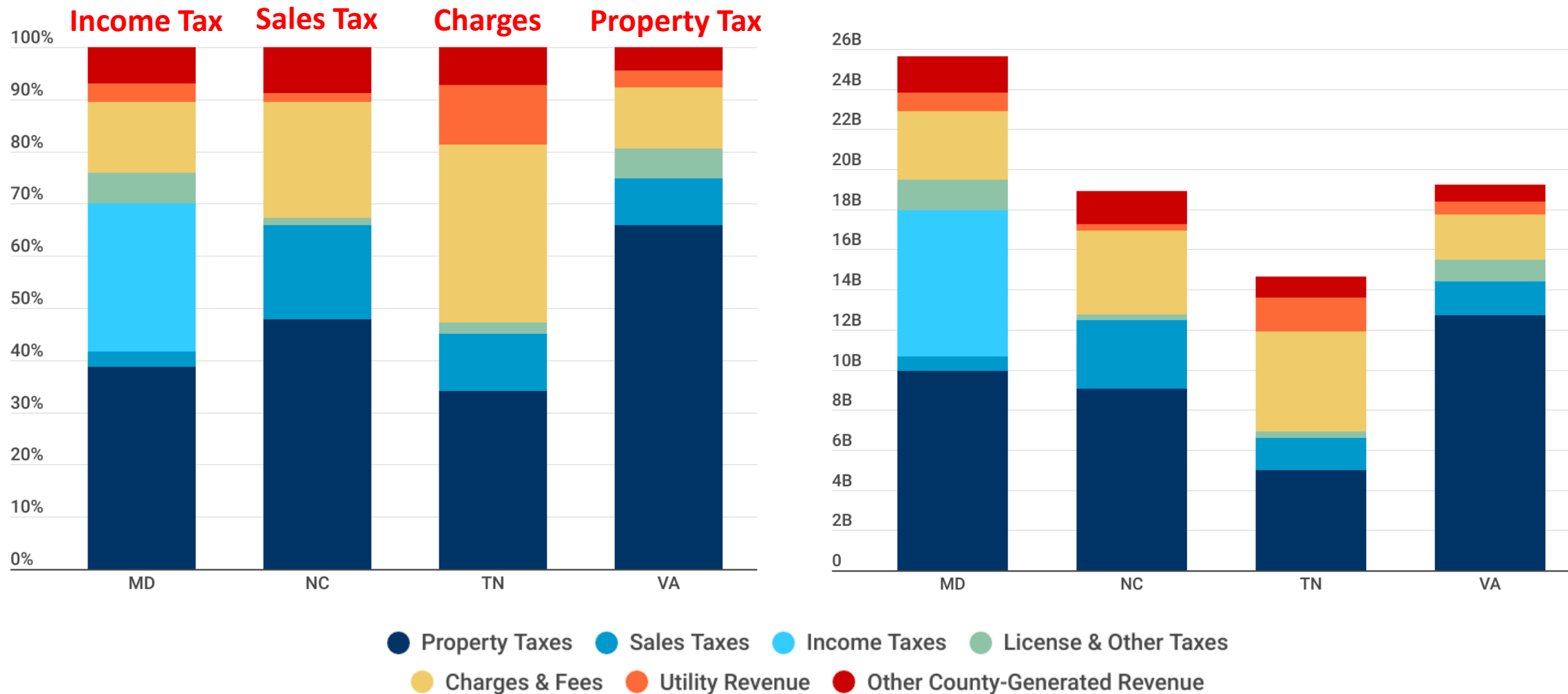
- Population: 8,880,107 (12th)
- Total County Revenue: \$27.4M
- Share County-Generated Revenue: 70%

* Counties in all four states are responsible for K-12 education.



County-Generated Revenue Comparison

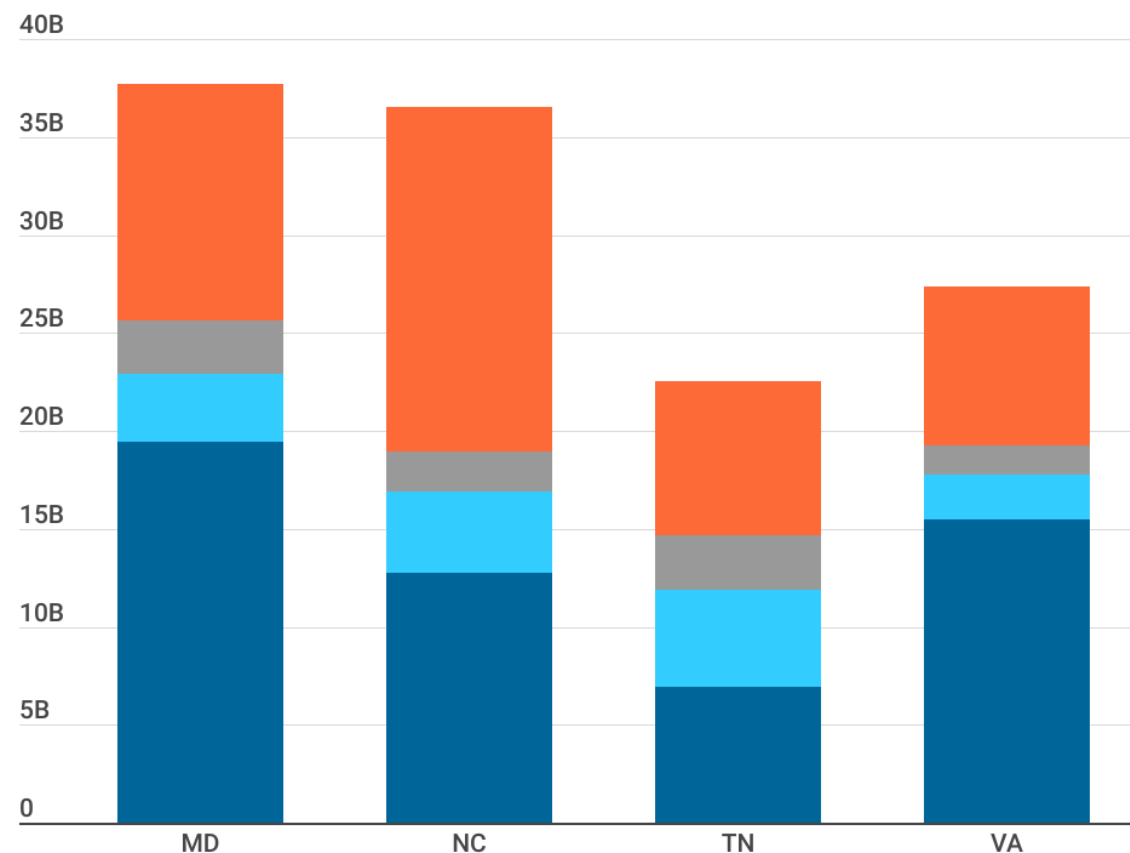
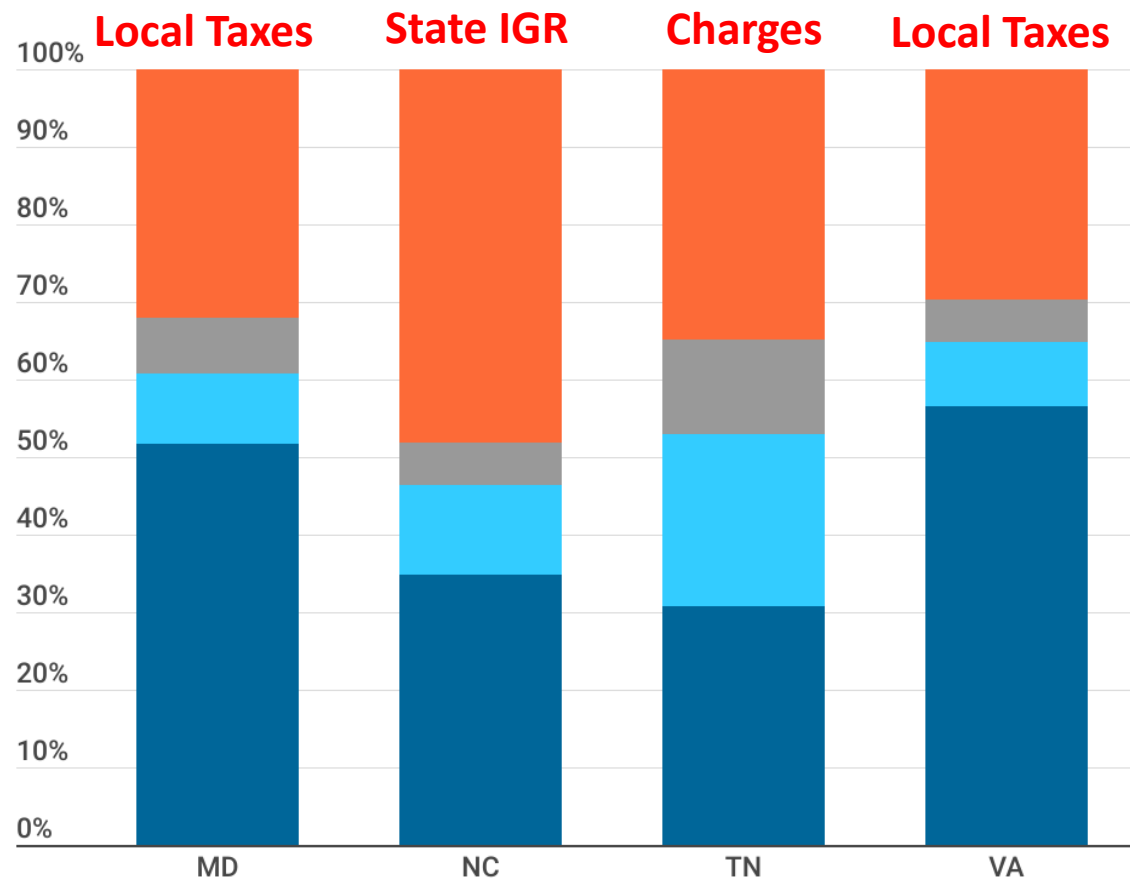
County-Generated Revenue Breakdown by State





County Revenue vs. Intergovernmental Comparison

County Revenue Breakdown by State



● Tax Revenue ● Charges & Fees ● Other County-Generated Revenue
● Intergovernmental Revenue



State Comparison: Other Taxes

Maryland

- Hotel/motel tax
- Fee for selling alcohol
- Food & beverage tax (in resort areas)
- Admissions and amusement tax
- Coal tax
- Energy taxes (certain counties)
- Property transfer tax

Tennessee

- Mineral tax
- Hotel/motel tax
- Fee for selling alcohol
- Motor Vehicle Tax
- Development Tax
- Adequate Facilities Tax

North Carolina

- Hotel/motel tax
- Animal tax
- Motor vehicle rental tax
- Meals tax

Virginia

- Coal/gas severance tax
- Hotel/motel tax
- Meals Tax
- Real Estate Transfer Tax
- Business License Fees
- Consumer Fees for Gas and Electric Utilities

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