

# Unigov

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Toward the end of the 1960s, a diminishing tax base and a deteriorating downtown prompted [Indianapolis](#) civic leaders to push for measures that would revive the city. In 1970, the Indiana state legislature provided for the consolidation of the governments of Indianapolis and Marion County. The resulting entity—coined “[Unigov](#)” by tycoon-councilman Beurt SerVaas—instantly turned the city into the nation’s 11th largest. But Unigov was not a comprehensive merger. The mayor of Indianapolis—[Dick Lugar](#), at that time—became the mayor of Marion County as well, with the City-County Council serving as a single legislative body. Nonetheless, a number of services—including law enforcement, fire departments, school systems and tax assessment—were not combined.

Additionally, the communities of Lawrence, Beech Grove, Speedway and Homeroft retained autonomy, although they were represented in the City-County Council. Unigov took as a precedent similar initiatives in Nashville, Tennessee and Jacksonville, Florida; and served as a model for the consolidation of the governments of Louisville and Jefferson County, Kentucky. After Unigov, a number of American cities—from Albuquerque to Kalamazoo—undertook consolidations that were not successful.

The adoption of Unigov is often credited with having resuscitated Indianapolis and secured its national reputation. The move was praised in some quarters as visionary in its transformation of outdated jurisdictional boundaries and bureaucratic structures and its attempt to mend a fractured community. Unigov laid a foundation, it’s been argued, that led to everything from the city’s AAA bond-rating to its acquisition of an [NFL](#) franchise. On the other hand, Unigov’s critics claim that the measure was designed to maintain Republican control of Indianapolis, and that it only enhanced the city’s racial inequities.

Ironically, a subsequent consolidation proposed in 2004 is once again weathering accusations of being a partisan power grab—albeit for the other party. Democratic [Mayor Bart Peterson](#) promotes “Indianapolis Works” as the extension of the work of streamlining government begun by Unigov in 1970. After initially voting it down, the state legislature passed a bill allowing for a combined metropolitan police force as of January 2007. Although consolidations in other departments are gradually being incorporated, the overhaul remains controversial.

For more information on Unigov, go to:

<http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/imh/102.3/hudnut.html>

[http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/imh/102.3/br\\_1.html](http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/imh/102.3/br_1.html)

[http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/ahr/109.4/br\\_86.html](http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/ahr/109.4/br_86.html)

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