

The Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy

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Michigan Public
Policy Survey December 2015

Responding to budget surplus vs. deficit: the preferences of Michigan's local leaders and citizens

By Debra Horner and Thomas Ivacko

This report presents the opinions of Michigan's local government leaders and Michigan citizens on the question of policy preferences when local governments face either budget deficits or budget surpluses. These findings are based on statewide surveys of local government leaders in the Spring 2015 wave of the Michigan Public Policy Survey (MPPS) as well as data from Cobalt Community Research's 2015 National Citizen Engagement and Priority Assessment.

>> The Michigan Public Policy Survey (MPPS) is a census survey of all 1,856 general purpose local governments in Michigan conducted by the Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy (CLOSUP) at the University of Michigan in partnership with the Michigan Municipal League, Michigan Townships Association, and Michigan Association of Counties. The MPPS takes place twice each year and investigates local officials' opinions and perspectives on a variety of important public policy issues. Respondents for the Spring 2015 wave of the MPPS include county administrators, board chairs, and clerks; city mayors, managers, and clerks; village presidents, managers, and clerks; and township supervisors, managers, and clerks from 1,328 jurisdictions across the state.

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Key Findings

- When facing decisions about how to allocate a budget surplus, nearly half (49%) of Michigan local officials say their highest priority would be to spend the extra money on today's public services or infrastructure. Another third (32%) would put aside surplus monies for future uses, while 12% would pay down government debt, and just 3% would prefer to return the money to taxpayers through reduced or rebated taxes.
 - » However, local leaders believe their citizens would prefer less spending or savings and more tax relief. Overall, 40% think their citizens would choose to invest in today's services or infrastructure, while 26% think they would prefer to have taxes reduced, 13% think they would want the extra money saved for future uses, and just 4% think their citizens would want the funds used to pay down government debt.
 - » According to a simultaneous citizen survey, local leaders' perceptions of their citizens' preferences are fairly accurate, at least in some cases. Citizens themselves say they would prioritize surplus funds to be used for spending on today's services or infrastructure (42%), reducing taxes (20%), paying down government debt (14%), and finally, saving the funds for future uses (10%).
- When faced instead with a potential budget deficit, nearly half (49%) of local leaders prefer protecting services from being cut, doing so by using rainy day savings the jurisdiction may have set aside (38%), raising taxes (10%), or increasing governmental debt (1%). By contrast, 41% of local leaders would first choose to cut services (and therefore costs too), in order to eliminate a budget deficit.
 - » When asked what they think are their citizens' preferences for closing a budget deficit, local leaders are less sure compared to the case of dealing with a budget surplus. Overall, 28% of local leaders say they don't know what their citizens would prefer. Meanwhile, 39% of local leaders think their citizens would first use up any rainy day funds the jurisdiction may have in order to protect services from cuts, while 31% think their citizens would instead prefer to see services cut. Just 1% think their citizens would prefer to have taxes increased to avoid service cuts, and another 1% think their citizens would prefer to see the jurisdiction take on more debt.
 - » Once again, local leaders' perceptions are fairly accurate (at least in some cases), compared to citizens' own stated preferences. According to the simultaneous citizen survey, 30% of citizens would indeed prefer to use rainy day funds to avoid service cuts, while 30% would prefer to see services cut. Another 11% would choose to have taxes increased and 2% would prefer to have the jurisdiction take on more debt in order to avoid service cuts. Twenty-five percent of citizens don't know what they would prefer, which matches closely with local officials' own uncertainty about citizens' preferences.

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Background

Since the early 2000s, Michigan local governments have been navigating a period of significant challenges. Even before the Great Recession hit in 2008, local governments in the Great Lakes State had been dealing with Michigan's decade-long "one-state recession."¹ Throughout this period local governments absorbed repeated cuts in revenue sharing from the state, a crucial source of local government funding. Then, after the Great Recession hit in 2008, property values plummeted and local governments faced sharp declines in property tax revenues, the most important source of their funding. As revenues dried up, local governments took a wide range of actions to deal with their budget shortfalls, including relying on their rainy day funds and general fund balances to plug budget gaps; cutting services; increasing intergovernmental cooperation and service sharing; cutting staff levels, pay rates and fringe benefit levels, and delaying infrastructure investments.²

Even after the Great Recession ended in 2009 and the economy began to improve, local leaders expressed significant concerns about the system of funding local governments in Michigan. Michigan's local government funding regime is one of the most restrictive in the nation, with tax caps imposed by both the Headlee Amendment, enacted in 1978, and Proposal A, enacted in 1994, two constitutional amendments that cap growth in local revenues.³ In 2012, fewer than half (43%) of local leaders said that the state's system of funding would allow them to maintain the package of services they offered, even with the assumption of continuing improvement in the underlying economy.⁴

Michigan local government fiscal health overall has only improved slowly since 2009. The Michigan Public Policy Survey (MPPS) has tracked fiscal trends since then and found gradual improvement starting in 2011 and continuing each subsequent year. By 2015, the MPPS finds 38% of local governments report being better able to meet their fiscal needs compared to a year earlier, while 20% say they are less able to do so.⁵

After years of cutting budgets and reducing the size and scope of local government, in the Spring 2015 survey, the MPPS asked local leaders how they would prioritize options for dealing with increasing revenues. If their jurisdictions were to experience a budget surplus, would local leaders be more likely to spend that additional revenue on public services and infrastructure improvements to begin reversing the trends of local government retrenchment? Would they instead prefer to save that money for future uses and refill their rainy day funds, or perhaps to pay down debt they have accumulated? Or would they prefer to reduce taxes and leave that money in the private sector?

By contrast, if their jurisdictions found themselves in fiscal decline, how would local leaders prioritize options for dealing with ongoing budget deficits? Would they choose to cut services further in order to cut costs? Or, would they prefer to increase taxes? Alternatively, would local leaders choose to use up any further rainy day funds they may still have available, or even to take on more debt to avoid further budget cuts?

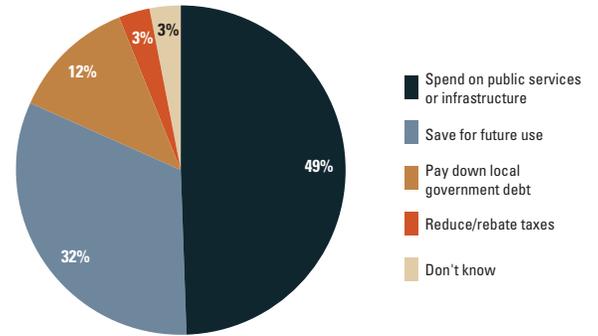
This report examines how local leaders would respond to both situations: dealing with a budget surplus as well as a budget deficit. It also reveals what local leaders think their citizens would prefer, and compares these views to the actual opinions Michigan citizens expressed in a simultaneous survey conducted by CLOSUP's colleagues at Cobalt Community Research.⁶



Nearly half of local leaders would spend budget surplus on public services and infrastructure, while a third would save money for future uses

The MPPS first asked local leaders, regardless of their local government’s current fiscal status, what they would prefer to do with any extra money they would have available should their jurisdiction have a budget surplus. Overall, nearly half (49%) say their highest priority would be additional spending on today’s public services or infrastructure (see *Figure 1*). Approximately another third (32%) would put aside surplus monies in their rainy day funds to be used in the future. Meanwhile, 12% say their highest priority for a potential budget surplus would be paying down government debt, and just 3% would choose to reduce or rebate taxes.

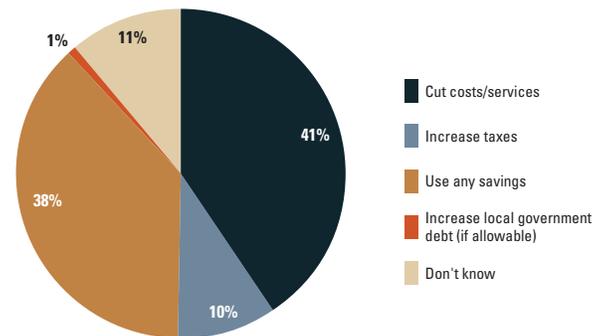
Figure 1
Local officials’ highest priority for using a potential budget surplus



Local leaders more likely to protect services than to cut them when dealing with a deficit

As shown in *Figure 2*, when it comes to addressing a budget deficit, Michigan’s local officials are more likely to choose protecting services from cuts than they are to choose immediate cuts to public services. While 41% would cut services (and therefore costs) in order to close a budget gap, 49% would choose to avoid service cuts, either by using up any available savings the jurisdiction may have (38%), or by increasing either taxes (10%) or governmental debt (1%). This preference for avoiding additional service cuts may be particularly tied to the lengthy period of fiscal challenges Michigan local governments have faced, dating back to the early 2000s, and the fact that so many jurisdictions have already reduced services, staffing, and compensation for their employees during this period.

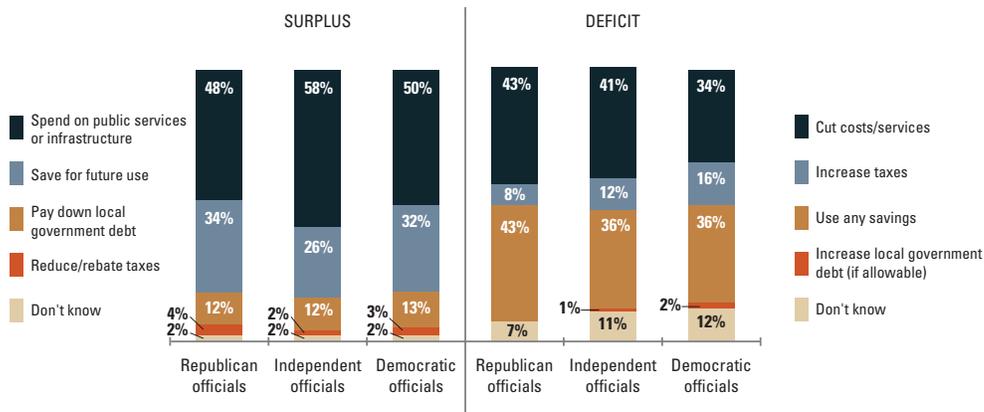
Figure 2
Local officials’ preferred method to eliminate a potential budget deficit



The MPPS program often finds significant differences in local leaders' views, based on characteristics such as the size of their communities, their jurisdiction types, and the regions of the state in which they are located. Interestingly, there are relatively few significant differences in officials' preferences for dealing with surpluses and deficits among those from jurisdictions of different sizes, regions, or even budgetary health. *Appendices A and B* provide breakdowns along these characteristics.

The MPPS also sometimes finds significant differences based on local leaders' party identification. In this case, there are some differences of opinion based on partisanship for how to respond to budget surpluses and deficits, but even these are relatively small (particularly in the case of surpluses). For example, *Figure 3* shows there are few significant differences among local Democratic and Republican leaders in terms of prioritizing how to deal with a budget surplus, although local Independent officials are somewhat more likely to say they would prioritize greater service spending (58%) compared with either Republicans (48%) or Democrats (50%). When confronted with a potential deficit, Democrats are somewhat less likely to prefer cutting services (34%) than are Independents (41%) or Republicans (43%), while Republicans are more likely to say they would use up any savings (43% vs. 36% of Independents and Democrats). Democrats (16%) are also twice as likely as Republicans (8%) to say they would raise taxes.

Figure 3
Local officials' preferences of what to do with a budget surplus or deficit, by partisan identification

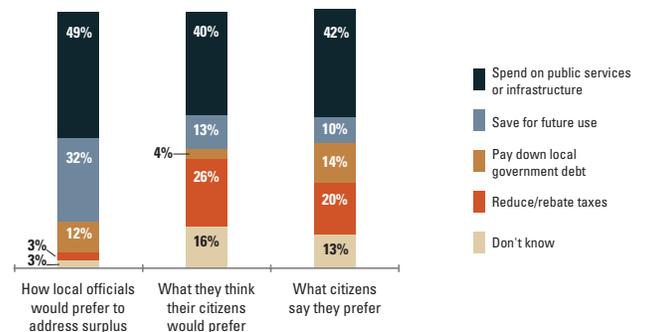




Handling a surplus: priorities of local leaders compared to their citizens

The MPPS also asked local leaders what they think the majority of their jurisdiction's citizens would prefer as the highest priority for handling a potential budget surplus, and found local leaders perceive there to be some sharp differences from their own priorities. Statewide, while 49% of local leaders would choose to spend surplus funds on today's public services or infrastructure, just 40% of them think this would be the top choice among their citizens (see the first two columns in *Figure 4*). Meanwhile, 32% of local leaders would choose to save surplus funds for future uses, but just 13% of them think their citizens would choose this action. At the same time, 12% of local leaders would use the extra money to pay down debt, while just 4% think this would be the top priority among their citizens. And finally, the biggest perceived difference relates to reducing taxes: although just 3% of local leaders would use the budget surplus to reduce taxes, 26% of them think this would be the top choice among their citizens.

Figure 4
Comparison of local officials' and citizens' preferences for using a potential budget surplus



How closely do local leaders' perceptions of citizens' preferences match reality? The MPPS teamed up with researchers from Cobalt Community Research who were conducting a citizen opinion survey at the same time MPPS was conducting its survey of local leaders in the spring of 2015. This was a rare opportunity to compare the opinions of local leaders and citizens. Cobalt's 2015 National Citizen Engagement and Priority Assessment surveyed citizens nationwide—including an oversample of Michigan residents—regarding a wide variety of community assessments. The questionnaire included two questions on how best to address budget surpluses and deficits with identical wording to the questions carried on the MPPS.

It should be noted that, although the questions on the two surveys contain similar language, comparisons should be made with some caution because of differences in survey methodology and reference points across the two surveys. Local officials in the MPPS represent their own local government and were also asked to think of the citizens specifically in their own jurisdiction, whereas the Cobalt survey is based on a statewide sample, with those responses being representative at the state level, not at the community level. Nonetheless, it is interesting to compare the preferences that Michigan local officials believe citizens have and the ones citizens themselves express.

As shown in the second two columns in *Figure 4*, when it comes to allocating funds from a budget surplus, local leaders appear to have a pretty good read on citizen preferences, at least in some cases. For example, while 40% of local leaders think their citizens would prefer a budget surplus to be spent on today's services and infrastructure, 42% of citizens themselves say this is indeed their top priority. Whereas 13% of local leaders think their citizens would choose to save surplus funds for future uses, 10% of citizens themselves would choose this option. However, there are somewhat larger differences when it comes to paying down government debt, and reducing taxes. Just 4% of local leaders think their citizens would choose to apply surplus funds to pay down local government debt, but 14% of citizens themselves would take this action. And while 26% of local leaders think their citizens would prefer to use surplus funds to reduce taxes, only 20% of citizens themselves would prioritize tax relief.

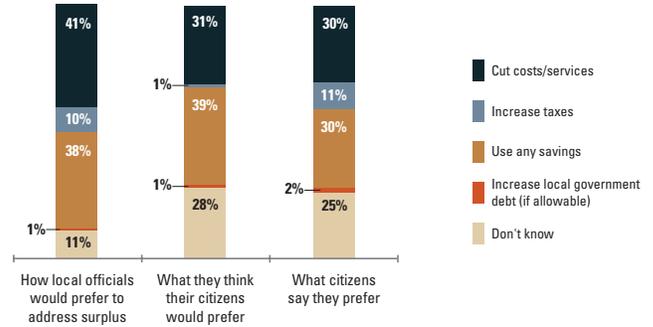
Handling a deficit: priorities of local leaders compared to their citizens

When it comes to dealing with a budget deficit, 41% of local leaders would choose to first cut services (and therefore costs), but only 31% of them think that would also be the top choice among their citizens (see the first two columns in *Figure 5*). And, while 10% of local leaders would choose to increase taxes in order to avoid service cuts, only 1% think this would be the top choice of their citizens. Meanwhile, 38% of local leaders would choose to use any savings their jurisdictions may have to plug the budget gap, and 39% of them think their citizens would choose to do the same. Finally, just 1% of local leaders would choose to increase their levels of debt in order to avoid service cuts, and just 1% of them think their citizens would also take this action.

It is also worth noting that 28% of local officials don't know what their citizens' highest priority would be for dealing with a budget deficit. These "don't know" answers may stem from a variety of factors, including officials' beliefs about lack of citizen knowledge of budgets, concern that citizens may have shifting or conflicting policy preferences, or a sense that citizen preferences may depend on the size of the deficit, or other factors to be determined.

Again comparing local leaders' perceptions of citizen preferences (from the MPPS) with actual citizen preferences (from the Cobalt survey), when it comes to dealing with a budget deficit, officials have a relatively good grasp of their citizens' priorities, in most cases. While 31% of local leaders think their citizens would choose to cut services (and costs) to close a budget deficit, 30% of citizens would indeed take this action first (see the second two columns in *Figure 5*). And while 39% of local leaders think their citizens would choose to use any savings the jurisdiction may have in order to avoid service cuts, 30% of citizens say this would be their preferred approach. Meanwhile, just 1% of officials think their citizens would prefer to increase taxes to avoid service cuts, while 11% of citizens would actually prefer to this approach. Just 1% of official think their citizens would choose to increase government debt to avoid service cuts, and in fact just 2% of citizens say they would support this action. Finally, while 28% of officials don't know what their citizens' preferences are for dealing with a budget deficit, 25% of citizens confirm that they don't know either.

Figure 5
Comparison of local officials' and citizens' preferences for eliminating a potential budget deficit





Conclusion

As fiscal health for many jurisdictions across Michigan gradually improves in the wake of the Great Recession, some local leaders are facing the welcome task of deciding how to allocate funds from budget surpluses. Many others continue to struggle with budget deficits. When it comes to handling budget surpluses, both local officials and citizens are most likely to say that their highest priority is increased spending on today's public services and infrastructure, to make up for cuts in both of these areas that so many local governments made over the past few years. Meanwhile, local leaders tend to underestimate the percentage of citizens who would use surplus funds to pay down government debt, and to overestimate the percentage who would prefer that surplus funds are returned to taxpayers in the form of reduced taxes.

And when it comes to handling budget deficits, local leaders are about evenly split between cutting services in order to cut costs, versus using rainy day savings to close the budget gap. Citizens are also roughly evenly divided between those two options (though at somewhat lower percentages in both cases, compared to local leaders). At the same time, local leaders tend to underestimate the percentage of citizens who would choose to increase taxes to avoid service cuts, although this is a small percentage (11%) of citizens overall.

Notes

1. Darga, K. (2011). Is Michigan's economic recovery real? *Re-thinking the one-state recession*. Lansing, MI: Michigan Department of Technology, Management, and Budget. Retrieved from http://www.michigan.gov/documents/cgi/cgi_census_OSР_Pres_11-0804_359979_7.pdf
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3. Sapotichne, J., Rosebrook E. A., Scorsone, E., Kaminski, D., Doidge M., & Taylor, T. (2015). *Beyond state takeovers: Reconsidering the role of state government in local financial distress, with important lessons for Michigan and its embattled cities* [Michigan State University Extension white paper]. East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University. Retrieved from http://msue.anr.msu.edu/uploads/resources/pdfs/beyond_state_takeovers.pdf
4. Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy [CLOSUP]. (2013). *Local leaders support reforming Michigan's system of funding local government*. Ann Arbor, MI: Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy at the Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy, University of Michigan. Retrieved from <http://closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/22/local-leaders-support-reforming-michigans-system-of-funding-local-government/>
5. Mills & Ivacko, 2015.
6. Cobalt Community Research. (2015). National Citizen Engagement and Priority Assessment. Lansing, MI: Cobalt Community Research. Data not yet released to the public.

Acknowledgements

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Survey Background and Methodology

The MPPS is a biannual survey of each of Michigan's 1,856 units of general purpose local government, conducted once each spring and fall. While the spring surveys consist of multiple batteries of the same "core" fiscal, budgetary and operational policy questions and are designed to build-up a multi-year time-series of data, the fall surveys focus on various other topics.

In the Spring 2015 iteration, surveys were sent by the Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy (CLOSUP) via the internet and hardcopy to top elected and appointed officials (including county administrators and board chairs; city mayors and managers; village presidents, clerks, and managers; and township supervisors, clerks, and managers) from all 83 counties, 278 cities, 255 villages, and 1,240 townships in the state of Michigan.

The Spring 2015 wave was conducted from April 6 - June 8, 2015. A total of 1,328 jurisdictions in the Spring 2015 wave returned valid surveys (68 counties, 211 cities, 166 villages, and 883 townships), resulting in a 72% response rate by unit. The margin of error for the survey for the survey as a whole is +/- 1.44%. The key relationships discussed in the above report are statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level or below, unless otherwise specified. Missing responses are not included in the tabulations, unless otherwise specified. Some report figures may not add to 100% due to rounding within response categories. Quantitative data are weighted to account for non-response. "Voices Across Michigan" verbatim responses, when included, may have been edited for clarity and brevity. Contact CLOSUP staff for more information.

Detailed tables of the data analyzed in this report broken down three ways—by jurisdiction type (county, city, township, or village); by population size of the respondent's community, and by the region of the respondent's jurisdiction—are available online at the MPPS homepage: <http://closup.umich.edu/mpps.php>.

Cobalt Community Research's 2015 National Citizen Engagement and Priority Assessment is a nationwide citizen opinion survey that also contains a Michigan oversample. It was conducted from February 23 – April 20, 2015 and had a valid response from 321 adults, equaling a response rate of approximately 10%, and margin of error of +/- 5.5%. This was their 8th year of data collection for Michigan.

The survey responses presented here are those of local Michigan officials, while further analysis represents the views of the authors. Neither necessarily reflects the views of the University of Michigan, or of other partners in the MPPS.



Appendices

Appendix A

Local officials' highest priority for using a potential budget surplus, by jurisdiction's level of fiscal stress, jurisdiction type, size, and region

	Low Fiscal Stress	Medium Fiscal Stress	High Fiscal Stress	Total
Spend on public services or infrastructure	50%	48%	44%	49%
Save for future use	33%	33%	32%	32%
Pay down any debt	11%	14%	18%	12%
Reduce taxes	4%	2%	3%	3%
Don't know	2%	3%	4%	3%

	County	Township	City	Village	Total
Spend on public services or infrastructure	23%	50%	54%	49%	49%
Save for future use	40%	33%	25%	32%	32%
Pay down any debt	33%	9%	17%	15%	12%
Reduce taxes	4%	4%	2%	1%	3%
Don't know	0%	4%	1%	4%	3%

	<1,500	1,500-5,000	5,001-10,000	10,001-30,000	>30,000	Total
Spend on public services or infrastructure	44%	52%	54%	56%	45%	49%
Save for future use	38%	30%	26%	22%	30%	32%
Pay down any debt	10%	10%	16%	16%	24%	12%
Reduce taxes	3%	4%	3%	4%	0%	3%
Don't know	4%	3%	2%	2%	1%	3%

	Upper Peninsula	Northern Lower Peninsula	West Central Lower Peninsula	East Central Lower Peninsula	Southwest Lower Peninsula	Southeast Lower Peninsula	Total
Spend on public services or infrastructure	40%	46%	50%	47%	56%	52%	49%
Save for future use	34%	38%	34%	34%	29%	25%	32%
Pay down any debt	17%	8%	9%	13%	11%	16%	12%
Reduce taxes	6%	6%	4%	2%	2%	2%	3%
Don't know	3%	3%	3%	4%	2%	4%	3%

Appendix B

Local officials' preferred method to eliminate a potential budget deficit, by jurisdiction's level of fiscal stress, jurisdiction type, size, and region

	Low Fiscal Stress	Medium Fiscal Stress	High Fiscal Stress	Total
Cut costs/services	40%	45%	47%	41%
Increase taxes	7%	13%	15%	10%
Use any savings	43%	29%	25%	38%
Increase debt	1%	1%	1%	1%
Don't know	9%	12%	12%	11%

	County	Township	City	Village	Total
Cut costs/services	60%	37%	49%	41%	41%
Increase taxes	6%	5%	19%	22%	10%
Use any savings	26%	44%	24%	25%	38%
Increase debt	1%	1%	3%	0%	1%
Don't know	6%	13%	5%	12%	11%

	<1,500	1,500-5,000	5,001-10,000	10,001-30,000	>30,000	Total
Cut costs/services	36%	42%	44%	44%	53%	41%
Increase taxes	12%	6%	10%	9%	15%	10%
Use any savings	39%	38%	38%	40%	23%	38%
Increase debt	1%	0%	3%	2%	2%	1%
Don't know	12%	13%	6%	6%	7%	11%

	Upper Peninsula	Northern Lower Peninsula	West Central Lower Peninsula	East Central Lower Peninsula	Southwest Lower Peninsula	Southeast Lower Peninsula	Total
Cut costs/services	37%	45%	37%	33%	42%	49%	41%
Increase taxes	10%	7%	9%	8%	13%	12%	10%
Use any savings	40%	39%	41%	42%	31%	31%	38%
Increase debt	1%	0%	0%	1%	2%	1%	1%
Don't know	11%	8%	12%	16%	13%	8%	11%



Previous MPPS reports

- Michigan's local leaders concerned about retiree health care costs and their governments' ability to meet future obligations (October 2015)
- Fiscal health rated relatively good for most jurisdictions, but improvement slows and decline continues for many (September 2015)
- Confidence in Michigan's direction declines among state's local leaders (August 2015)
- Michigan local government leaders' views on private roads (July 2015)
- Few Michigan jurisdictions have adopted Complete Streets policies, though many see potential benefits (June 2015)
- Michigan local leaders have positive views on relationships with county road agencies, despite some concerns (May 2015)
- Michigan local government leaders say transit services are important, but lack of funding discourages their development (April 2015)
- Michigan local leaders see need for state and local ethics reform (March 2015)
- Local leaders say Michigan road funding needs major increase, but lack consensus on options that would raise the most revenue (February 2015)
- Michigan local government leaders' views on employee pay and benefits (January 2015)
- Despite increasingly formal financial management, relatively few Michigan local governments have adopted recommended policies (December 2014)
- Most Michigan local officials are satisfied with their privatized services, but few seek to expand further (November 2014)
- Michigan local governments finally pass fiscal health tipping point overall, but one in four still report decline (October 2014)
- Beyond the coast, a tenuous relationship between Michigan local governments and the Great Lakes (September 2014)
- Confidence in Michigan's direction holds steady among state's local leaders (August 2014)
- Wind power as a community issue in Michigan (July 2014)
- Fracking as a community issue in Michigan (June 2014)
- The impact of tax-exempt properties on Michigan local governments (March 2014)
- Michigan's local leaders generally support Detroit bankruptcy filing despite some concerns (February 2014)
- Michigan local governments increasingly pursue placemaking for economic development (January 2014)
- Views on right-to-work legislation among Michigan's local government leaders (December 2013)
- Michigan local governments continue seeking, and receiving, union concessions (October 2013)
- Michigan local government fiscal health continues gradual improvement, but smallest jurisdictions lagging (September 2013)
- Local leaders evaluate state policymaker performance and whether Michigan is on the right track (August 2013)
- Trust in government among Michigan's local leaders and citizens (July 2013)
- Citizen engagement in the view of Michigan's local government leaders (May 2013)
- Beyond trust in government: government trust in citizens? (March 2013)

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Local leaders support reforming Michigan's system of funding local government (January 2013)

Local leaders support eliminating Michigan's Personal Property Tax if funds are replaced, but distrust state follow-through (November 2012)

Michigan's local leaders satisfied with union negotiations (October 2012)

Michigan's local leaders are divided over the state's emergency manager law (September 2012)

Fiscal stress continues for hundreds of Michigan jurisdictions, but conditions trend in positive direction overall (September 2012)

Michigan's local leaders more positive about Governor Snyder's performance, more optimistic about the state's direction (July 2012)

Data-driven decision-making in Michigan local government (June 2012)

State funding incentives increase local collaboration, but also raise concerns (March 2012)

Local officials react to state policy innovation tying revenue sharing to dashboards and incentive funding (January 2012)

MPPS finds fiscal health continues to decline across the state, though some negative trends eased in 2011 (October 2011)

Public sector unions in Michigan: their presence and impact according to local government leaders (August 2011)

Despite increased approval of state government performance, Michigan's local leaders are concerned about the state's direction (August 2011)

Local government and environmental leadership: views of Michigan's local leaders (July 2011)

Local leaders are mostly positive about intergovernmental cooperation and look to expand efforts (March 2011)

Local government leaders say most employees are not overpaid, though some benefits may be too generous (February 2011)

Local government leaders say economic gardening can help grow their economies (November 2010)

Local governments struggle to cope with fiscal, service, and staffing pressures (August 2010)

Michigan local governments actively promote U.S. Census participation (August 2010)

Fiscal stimulus package mostly ineffective for local economies (May 2010)

Fall 2009 key findings report: educational, economic, and workforce development issues at the local level (April 2010)

Local government officials give low marks to the performance of state officials and report low trust in Lansing (March 2010)

Local government fiscal and economic development issues (October 2009)

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