



## The Functioning of Democracy at the Local Level:

A compendium of findings from  
the Michigan Public Policy Survey  
of local leaders

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This review presents a summary of various survey questions touching upon issues of democracy and democratic governance asked of Michigan's local government leaders' over 11 years of Michigan Public Policy Survey (MPPS) waves. Topic areas include citizen engagement and public participation in local government decision-making, officials' opinions of their residents' input, civic discourse in local communities, working relationships among local and state leaders, trust in government, government ethics, election administration, the U.S. Census, and the functioning of democracy overall.



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## Introduction

The health of democracy in the United States and around the world has been a topic of significant concern in recent years. Headlines across the U.S. have been filled with stories on challenges to core democratic institutions, from protests,<sup>1</sup> to the media,<sup>2</sup> the courts, the ballot box,<sup>3</sup> and more. Political observers are increasingly focused on the current health of democracy in the United States, and many have concluded that America's system of governance is in decline.<sup>4</sup>

Concerns about the functioning of American democracy are not new,<sup>5</sup> but in recent years, and especially throughout President Donald Trump's tenure, they have spread to a wide variety of facets and measures. In 2016 the Economist's annual "Democracy Index" downgraded the U.S. from "full democracy" to "flawed democracy" as the result of a decade of declining ratings on a number of the 60 different indicators they track.<sup>6</sup>

Surveys of political scientists<sup>7</sup> and scholars who specifically study democratic decline<sup>8</sup> sound similar alarms about the decline in a variety of American democratic institutions and norms. These concerns are not limited to national politics, but among the states as well. The March 2019 Bright Line Watch survey of experts found just 15 American states rated at higher than 75 on a 100 point scale assessing the quality of state-level democracy.<sup>9</sup> And although Michigan's nickname as "The Arsenal of Democracy" dates to World War II, it has experienced its own recent successes and challenges. For example, on one hand, the state's voters have recently amended the state constitution to expand voting access and also to end partisan gerrymandering by handing the redistricting process to a new independent citizens redistricting commission.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, as recently as 2015, Michigan scored worst in the nation on measures of state government accountability, ethics enforcement, and transparency.<sup>11</sup>

With much of this discussion of democratic decline centered on the national and state levels, much less attention has been given to governance at the local level. How well is democracy functioning at the grass roots?

The Michigan Public Policy Survey (MPPS) is one source of information to help investigate this question. Over the past twelve years, the MPPS has gathered the opinions of elected and appointed leaders from all 1,856 of Michigan's general purpose local governments. During that time, various MPPS survey waves have explored a wide-ranging collection of

topics related to the functioning of democracy and political participation in local governments statewide. This compendium of MPPS findings summarizes this research, and while the surveys have uncovered numerous areas of concern, the overarching picture it paints is one where local government leaders in Michigan are—generally—positive about institutions, relationships, and attitudes associated with local democratic governance. Furthermore, in many cases, this contrasts with a greater level of skepticism about the related elements of democracy at the state and federal levels.

Although there are many ways to conceptualize American democracy, one way the MPPS survey has engaged with the concept is through local officials' assessments of local democratic institutions and processes like elections as well as formal rules that regulate and allow citizen participation in governance. And when it comes to institutions, Michigan's local officials tend to believe they are strong at the local level. For example, when asked about the core issue of local election administration, local leaders' confidence in their ability to conduct elections—including accuracy of counts, election security, and successful recounts—is exceptionally high.

In terms of citizen participation in governance, a majority of local leaders statewide also say their jurisdictions offer a great deal of opportunities for citizens to engage in local policymaking and/or operations, while only a handful say they offer few or no opportunities. Many also express interest in seeing more engagement from their local residents, despite concerns that a good number of citizens don't take the time to become well informed, and mostly show up to complain rather than find solutions. And while local leaders increasingly thought between 2012 and 2016 that they themselves (as opposed to their residents) should be in charge of making controversial decisions in their communities, nonetheless they also expressed increasing levels of trust between 2012 and 2020 in their citizens to be responsible participants in local governance.

Ethics in government are another aspect of the functioning of democracy explored on the MPPS. Belief in local rules around ethics is robust as well, with the vast majority of local leaders expressing satisfaction with the policies and practices governing ethics in their jurisdictions as well as the ethical behavior of their own officials, while having significantly higher concerns about ethical issues among state-level actors.

When it comes to relationships between democratic actors, the MPPS has found Michigan local officials to be relatively optimistic about relationships at the local level, while, again, being more skeptical about the state-local relationship. The vast majority of Michigan local officials report that elected officials have good working relationships in their jurisdiction, including nearly one in four who say those relationships are excellent. By contrast, many feel that state government officials do not value input from local governments, that the State holds local governments to a higher standard than it holds itself to, and that the State unfairly treats some jurisdictions better than others.

Meanwhile, again at the local level, officials have very positive views on the tone of public discourse between local officials themselves and with their residents, by wide margins reporting it is constructive rather than divisive. In addition, they generally report that political discourse on local issues has actually trended toward greater civility in recent years. And while local leaders, particularly from larger jurisdictions, are more likely to say that partisan division at the state and nation level can be harmful, the majority of Michigan's local leaders do not believe national politics affect relationships among officials on their local governing councils or boards.

On the foundational democratic issue of trust in government, local government officials also report high levels of trust in other Michigan local governments that have persisted and even increased across the decade of MPPS surveys, while expressing significantly lower trust in the state government, and little trust at all in the federal government.

And finally, in an attempt to capture summary evaluations, in 2020 the MPPS debuted a new question to local officials about their assessments of the essential functioning of democracy at the federal, state, and local levels, while thinking about a wide range of factors that comprise democracy. In keeping with their views as found on many individual aspects of democracy, Michigan's local leaders responded with high ratings for democracy in their own local jurisdictions, but substantially lower marks for the health of democracy in the state of Michigan and the U.S. as a whole.

Of course there are nuances to all of these issues, with variations among officials from different kinds of jurisdictions and different individual perspectives. More detail on each of these topics can be found in reports and data tables linked at the end of each section of the compendium that follows.



# Citizen Engagement and Public Participation in Local Government Decision Making

## What's at Issue:

Democracy, at its core, means having citizens involved in the processes of governance, to at least some extent. The idea that elected officials and public administrators have both an obligation and self-interest to engage the citizens in their communities is routinely promoted by good governance efforts nationwide.

## Overview and Key MPPS Findings:

- When it comes to local leaders' views on the role their citizens should play in the local policymaking process—from just staying informed on the low end, to helping make decisions on the high end—interest in a more active role for citizens increased between 2012 and 2016. While 17% of Michigan's local leaders believed the proper role of citizen engagement efforts was only to keep citizens informed about issues facing their jurisdictions as of 2012, this dropped to just 4% by 2016. Meanwhile, the percentage who believed citizens should recommend specific decisions for their jurisdictions doubled, from 12% in 2012 to 25% in 2016.
- On the Fall 2016 MPPS, when asked about opportunities for citizens to engage with their local government, a majority (54%) of Michigan local government leaders reported that their jurisdictions offer a great deal of opportunities, but only 10% said their citizens are very involved.
- There was a drop of approximately 10 percentage points between 2012 and 2016 in reported citizen involvement in local issues, and a similar drop in officials' satisfaction with citizen involvement.
- There was no noticeable difference between 2012 and 2016 in reported opportunities for citizens to participate in government decision-making.

## Deeper Dive:

One way to think about the role of citizen engagement is along a spectrum from low engagement to high engagement. At the low end, a jurisdiction's citizen engagement efforts might focus just on keeping citizens informed about issues facing the local government. At the high end, citizens would actually make decisions for the jurisdiction. The 2012 and 2016 MPPS surveys asked local leaders where they believe the proper role for citizen engagement in local governance is, on that spectrum. As shown in **Table 1**, 17% of local officials in 2012 thought that citizens should simply be kept informed, and only 10% thought they should recommend (9%) or make decisions (1%). However, on the 2016 survey, only 4% of local leaders said citizens should merely be kept informed, while 28% wanted to give them a say in recommending (25%) and even making decisions (3%) for the jurisdiction.

In both 2012 and 2016, the MPPS also asked local government officials how they would describe citizen engagement in their jurisdictions. Compared to responses in 2012, local officials in 2016 were 9 percentage points less likely to say citizens were somewhat engaged, as shown in **Table 2**. A similar decline was found regarding local officials' satisfaction with their citizens' participation in the policymaking process (**Table 3**).

Interestingly, however, very little change was found between 2012 and 2016 in officials reporting that their jurisdiction provides opportunities for citizens to be engaged, with nearly 95% of respondents reporting that their jurisdiction provides opportunities either "a great deal" or "somewhat" (**Table 4**). Along this trend, 78% of respondents in both 2012 and 2016 either strongly or somewhat agreed that their jurisdiction makes opportunities for citizens to get involved, but the citizens do not take advantage of these opportunities (**Table 5**).

**Table 1: While it might differ depending on the topic, in general, what do you personally believe is the proper role for citizen engagement in local governance?**

	2012	2016
Keep citizens informed	17%	4%
Have citizens provide input/identify specific policy options	71%	64%
Have citizens recommend decisions	9%	25%
Have citizens make decisions	1%	3%
Don't Know	2%	2%

**Table 2: We want to start by getting a very broad sense of citizen engagement with your local government. How would you describe citizen engagement — whatever that means to you — with your jurisdiction? Overall, citizens in your jurisdiction are...**

	2012	2016
Very Engaged	10%	10%
Somewhat Engaged	55%	46%
Not Very Engaged	31%	36%
Not At All Engaged	3%	7%
Don't Know	0%	2%

**Table 3: Overall, how satisfied are you regarding citizen engagement in your jurisdiction's policymaking and/or operations today?**

	2012	2016
Very Satisfied	16%	11%
Somewhat Satisfied	42%	40%
Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	22%	25%
Somewhat Dissatisfied	14%	16%
Very Dissatisfied	4%	7%
Don't Know	1%	2%

**Table 4: To what extent do you feel your jurisdiction offers opportunities to citizens for engagement with your jurisdiction in its policymaking and/or operations?**

	2012	2016
A Great Deal	53%	54%
Somewhat	44%	39%
Little, if Any (2012) or Very Little/Not at all (2016)	3%	5%
Don't Know	0%	2%

**Table 5: To what extent do you agree or disagree that you make opportunities for engagement available, but your citizens rarely take advantage of them?**

	2012	2016
Strongly Agree	37%	32%
Somewhat Agree	41%	46%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	12%	11%
Somewhat Disagree	7%	6%
Strongly Disagree	4%	3%
Don't Know	0%	2%





## Resources and links:

### Data tables

- Table 1 2016: <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/fall-2016-data/q24b.php>
- Table 1 2012: <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/fall-2012-data/q20d.php>
- Table 2 2016: <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/fall-2016-data/q20.php>
- Table 2 2012: <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/fall-2012-data/q2.php>
- Table 3 2016: <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/fall-2016-data/q26.php>
- Table 3 2012: <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/fall-2012-data/q23.php>
- Table 4 2016: <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/fall-2016-data/q21.php>
- Table 4 2012: <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/fall-2012-data/q3.php>
- Table 5 2016: <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/fall-2016-data/q22a.php>
- Table 5 2012: <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/fall-2012-data/q14b.php>

### Reports

- [Michigan local leaders want their citizens to play a larger role in policymaking, but report declining engagement \(2017\)](#)
- [Citizen engagement in the view of Michigan's local government leaders \(2013\)](#)

## Officials' Opinions of Their Jurisdiction's Residents' Input

### What's at Issue:

Who should decide key policy issues? The MPPS asked local officials in both 2012 and 2016 to give assessments on who should have a say in significant decisions and whether citizens are responsible participants in policymaking.

### Overview and Key MPPS Findings:

- Between 2012 and 2016, belief that public officials, rather than citizens, should be in charge of making controversial decisions increased among Michigan local leaders.
- Officials from jurisdictions with smaller populations were more likely to say that citizens should be in charge of making controversial decisions.
- Michigan's local leaders reported increasingly negative views about a number of specific attitudes and behaviors they perceive among their citizens. In 2016, over three-quarters (77%) of local leaders said that most of their citizens were not willing to take the time to become well informed on issues facing the jurisdiction, up from 67% in 2012.
- Compared with their views in 2012, local officials were significantly more likely to believe in 2016 that citizens were more interested in just complaining than in finding solutions.
- Despite these concerns, there was a significant increase from 2012 to 2020 regarding officials' trust in citizens to be responsible participants in policymaking, with 16% of local leaders in 2020 saying they trust their residents nearly always (up from 11% in 2012) and another 49% trusting them most of the time (compared with 42% in 2012).

### Deeper Dive:

As shown in **Table 1**, the MPPS carried a similarly worded question in both 2012 and 2016 regarding officials' opinions on who should have the final say in controversial decisions: citizens or public officials. In those four years, belief by elected officials around Michigan that public officials should be in charge of controversial decisions increased (from 61% to 72%), while beliefs that citizens should be in charge of these decisions decreased (from 24% to 20%). In both years, leaders from jurisdictions with smaller populations were much more likely to believe citizens should make controversial decisions compared with those from larger jurisdictions.

In addition, local leaders were asked in both 2012 and 2016 to what extent they agree or disagree that most of their citizens are more interested in complaining than finding solutions (as displayed in **Table 2**). By 2016, officials were far more likely to say that they either somewhat or strongly agree (69%) that their citizens are more interested in complaining than finding solutions, compared with their views in 2012, when 50% felt this way.

As seen in **Table 3**, public officials' trust in citizens to be responsible participants while engaging with the jurisdictions' policymaking and operations remained steady between 2012 and 2016, but then saw a sharp uptick in 2020. In both 2012 and 2016, just 13% of respondents said that they felt they could "seldom" or "almost never" trust their citizens, compared to a combined total of 53% in 2012 and 54% in 2016 that felt they could trust their citizens "nearly always" or "most of the time." By 2020, only 11% expressed distrust, while the percentage saying they could trust their citizens "nearly always" or "most of the time" rose to 65%.



**Table 1: Thinking about controversial issues in your community, in general, who do you think should have the final say on your jurisdiction's most controversial decisions — citizens or public officials?**

	2012	2016
Citizens	24%	20%
Public Officials	61%	72%
Not Applicable	6%	--
Don't Know	9%	8%

**Table 2: To what extent do you agree or disagree that most citizens you hear from are more interested in complaining than in finding solutions?**

	2012	2016
Strongly Agree	14%	29%
Somewhat Agree	36%	40%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	25%	17%
Somewhat Disagree	16%	10%
Strongly Disagree	8%	2%
Don't Know	0%	1%

**Table 3: In terms of their engagement in your jurisdiction's policymaking and/or operations, how much of the time do you think you can trust the citizens in your community to be responsible participants?**

	2012	2016	2020
Nearly Always	11%	11%	16%
Most of the Time	42%	43%	49%
Some of the Time	32%	31%	23%
Seldom	10%	10%	8%
Almost Never	3%	3%	3%
Don't Know	1%	2%	2%

## Resources and Links

### Data tables

- Table 1 2016: <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/fall-2016-data/q25.php>
- Table 1 2012: <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/fall-2012-data/q17.php>
- Table 2 2016: <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/fall-2016-data/q22c.php>
- Table 2 2012: <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/fall-2012-data/q14j.php>
- Table 3 2020: <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/spring-2020-data/q50.php>
- Table 3 2016: <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/fall-2016-data/q23.php>
- Table 3 2012: <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/fall-2012-data/q15.php>

### Reports

- [Michigan local leaders say local democracy is strong, as their trust in government and citizens rises \(2020\)](#)
- [Michigan local leaders want their citizens to play a larger role in policymaking, but report declining engagement \(2017\)](#)
- [Citizen engagement in the view of Michigan's local government leaders \(2013\)](#)
- [Beyond trust in government: government trust in citizens? \(2013\)](#)



## Civic Discourse in Local Communities

### What's at Issue:

Conventional wisdom in recent years has highlighted a decrease in civility in public discourse around a wide range of national issues, but is that the case at the local level as well? The MPPS asked local government leaders in 2012, and again in 2018, to evaluate the tone of discourse in their community.

### Overview and Key MPPS Findings:

- Michigan's local officials see their communities' public discourse to be primarily constructive.
- Officials viewed discourse as equally constructive in 2018 as they did in 2012.
- Local leaders believe public discourse to have become more civil in 2018 compared to 2012.
- The majority of local leaders do not believe national politics affect relationships among elected officials on their jurisdiction councils and boards.
- While most local officials believe local discourse remains positive, leaders in jurisdictions with larger populations are more likely than others to feel that national politics negatively impact relationships among their elected officials.

### Deeper Dive:

In 2012 and again in 2018, the MPPS asked government leaders throughout Michigan to rate the state of public discourse regarding local policy issues in their jurisdictions on a scale from "very constructive" to "very divisive." This question was asked regarding three different groups: public discourse between officials themselves, between officials and residents in their jurisdictions, and between residents themselves. As seen in **Table 1**, officials ranked the state of discourse to be primarily constructive for all three groups, with little to no change from 2012 to 2018. The largest change seen between 2012 and 2018 was in discourse between residents themselves, where there was a small uptick in constructive ratings, with an associated decline in percentages ranking discourse as "mixed." There was no change in rates between 2012 and 2018 on the "divisive" end of the scale. And, there is little variation among officials from jurisdictions of various population sizes rating discourse to be constructive.

In 2012, the MPPS asked a question regarding the change in civility of public discourse over the ten previous years for the jurisdiction overall. In 2018, a similarly worded question was asked. As shown in **Table 2**, the 2018 question asked separately about the civility of discussion between elected officials, between officials and residents, and between residents themselves. This survey found a slight increase in elected officials' beliefs that discussions have become more civil compared to their assessments in 2012, with the exception being for discourse between residents, which was approximately the same in 2018 as it was in 2012. These results should be taken with caution, however, as the 2012 survey did not break down the question to ask about civility between different groups of people. Finally, there is a slight trend towards jurisdictions with smaller populations to be rated with more civility.

**Table 3** shows a breakdown of overall responses on the 2018 MPPS relating to the impact of national politics on the relationships among the jurisdiction's board or council. The majority of jurisdictions report that national politics to have little impact on the relationships among those on their own board or council. However, officials from larger jurisdictions are more likely than others to say that national politics does hurt board/council relationships in their communities. Statewide, 23% of Michigan jurisdictions with populations between 5,000-10,000, 28% of jurisdictions with populations between 10,001-30,000, and 37% of jurisdictions with populations higher than 30,000 say that national politics has either "significantly hurt" or "somewhat hurt" their relationships with their board or council. Among jurisdictions with fewer than 5,000 residents, only 11% said the same.

**Table 1: Overall, thinking about relationships between people in your community and the tone of discussions that take place around local policy issues, how would you describe the general state of public discourse between the following groups within your jurisdiction:**

**Table 1a: Between public officials themselves**

	2012	2018
Very Constructive	42%	41%
Somewhat Constructive	32%	30%
Mixed	19%	20%
Somewhat Divisive	4%	5%
Very Divisive	2%	3%
Don't Know	1%	2%

**Table 1b: Between elected officials and residents**

	2012	2018
Very Constructive	22%	27%
Somewhat Constructive	48%	40%
Mixed	25%	26%
Somewhat Divisive	2%	4%
Very Divisive	1%	1%
Don't Know	2%	3%

**Table 1c: Among residents themselves**

	2012	2018
Very Constructive	7%	10%
Somewhat Constructive	23%	28%
Mixed	50%	39%
Somewhat Divisive	9%	9%
Very Divisive	2%	2%
Don't Know	9%	12%

**Table 2a: Thinking in general about how things have changed in your jurisdiction over the last ten years or so - if at all - how are citizens' interactions with your local government different now than they were before: Is political discourse about local issues more or less civil? (2018)**

	2018
More	25%
Neither More or Less	55%
Less	13%
Don't Know	7%



**Table 2b: Would you say the tone of discussion and communication among these groups is more or less civil than it was five years ago? (2018)**

	Among elected officials themselves	Between elected officials and residents	Among residents themselves
Significantly More Civil	16%	13%	7%
Somewhat More Civil	20%	21%	17%
Neither More nor Less Civil	45%	50%	46%
Somewhat Less Civil	9%	8%	14%
Significantly Less Civil	4%	2%	4%
Don't Know	5%	6%	13%

**Table 3: To what extent, if at all, would you say overall the following factors help or hurt relationships among the members of your jurisdiction's Board/Council? State and national partisan politics? (2018)**

	2018
No Impact on Relationships	56%
Significantly Help	6%
Somewhat Help	9%
Somewhat Hurt	12%
Significantly Hurt	3%
Don't Know	15%

## Resources and links:

### Data tables

- Table 1a 2018: <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/spring-2018-data/q13a.php>
- Table 1a 2012: <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/fall-2012-data/q18a.php>
- Table 1b 2018: <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/spring-2018-data/q13b.php>
- Table 1b 2012: <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/fall-2012-data/q18b.php>
- Table 1c 2018: <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/spring-2018-data/q13c.php>
- Table 1c 2012: <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/fall-2012-data/q18c.php>
- Table 2a: <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/fall-2012-data/q19c.php>
- Table 2b: <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/spring-2018-data/q14a.php>
- Table 3: <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/spring-2018-data/q12f.php>

### Reports

- [The state of community civic discourse, according to Michigan's local government leaders \(2018\)](#)

## Working Relationships among Local and State Leaders

### What's at Issue:

Bitter partisan infighting in Washington, DC in recent years has been a hallmark of dysfunction and gridlock at the national level. How have working relationships affected local government in Michigan? Beyond issues of civil discourse, as reviewed above, the MPPS also asked local elected officials in 2016 and 2018 a variety of questions regarding their working relationships with each other, with state officials, and with local residents.

### Overview and Key MPPS Findings:

- The vast majority of Michigan local officials report that they have positive discourse and good working relationships with other officials and employees in their jurisdiction.
- There are lukewarm feelings regarding whether state government officials value local leaders' input.
- Local officials feel that state officials hold them to higher standards than they hold themselves, and believe state officials unfairly favor certain jurisdictions over others.

### Deeper Dive:

As shown in **Table 1**, by and large, elected officials believe that discourse—an important part of relationships in governance—among fellow elected officials, as well as that between elected officials and residents in the jurisdiction is constructive.

**Table 2** then offers further positive evidence, with 81% of surveyed officials reporting that relationships among elected officials in their jurisdiction are either “excellent” or “good”.

When asked about their relationships with other jurisdiction employees, the majority of local leaders reported positive relationships between elected officials and other local government employees, as seen in **Table 3**. (It is also worth noting that 12% of respondents reported this question to not be applicable to them, reflecting the fact that among many of the smallest Michigan jurisdictions, the local government has no appointed employees, only elected officials).

Meanwhile, in 2016, the MPPS also asked local leaders whether they believe state government officials value their input as local government officials, as shown in **Table 4**. The results were lukewarm. Only 6% of respondents strongly agreed that state government officials value their input, while 12% strongly disagreed.

Finally, **Tables 5 & 6** illustrate some of the challenges for relationships between state and local elected officials. Approximately two-thirds of respondents believe that state leaders hold local elected officials to higher standards than they hold themselves. Additionally, 57% of those surveyed believe that state leaders unfairly favor certain local jurisdictions over others.





**Table 1: Thinking more generally about the tone of discussion and communication that takes place around local policy issues, how would you describe the general state of public discourse among.... (2018)**

	Among Elected Officials Themselves	Between Elected Officials and Residents
Very Constructive	41%	27%
Somewhat Constructive	30%	40%
Mixed	20%	26%
Somewhat Divisive	5%	4%
Very Divisive	3%	1%
Don't Know	2%	3%

**Table 2: Overall, how would you rate the relationships among elected officials in your jurisdiction?**

	2018
Excellent	38%
Good	43%
Fair	14%
Poor	5%
Don't Know	0%

**Table 3: Overall, how would you rate the relationships among elected officials and other employees in your jurisdiction?**

	2018
Excellent	27%
Good	45%
Fair	12%
Poor	3%
Not Applicable	12%
Don't Know	1%

**Table 4: Thinking about the relationship between the State government and local jurisdictions, overall, to what extent do you agree or disagree that Michigan state government officials value input from local government officials?**

	2016
Strongly Agree	6%
Somewhat Agree	37%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	20%
Somewhat Disagree	23%
Strongly Disagree	12%
Don't Know	2%

**Table 5: Thinking about the relationship between the State government and local jurisdictions, overall, to what extent do you agree or disagree that the State holds local governments to a higher standard than it holds itself to?**

	2016
Strongly Agree	34%
Somewhat Agree	33%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	21%
Somewhat Disagree	5%
Strongly Disagree	4%
Don't Know	3%

**Table 6: Thinking about the relationship between the State government and local jurisdictions, overall, to what extent do you agree or disagree that the State unfairly treats some jurisdictions (or types of jurisdictions) better than others?**

	2016
Strongly Agree	22%
Somewhat Agree	35%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	28%
Somewhat Disagree	5%
Strongly Disagree	2%
Don't Know	9%

## Resources and links:

### Data tables

- Table 1 2018:
  - » <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/spring-2018-data/q13a.php>
  - » <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/spring-2018-data/q13b.php>
- Table 2 2018: <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/spring-2018-data/q16a.php>
- Table 3 2018: <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/spring-2018-data/q16c.php>
- Table 4 2016: <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/fall-2016-data/q2a.php>
- Table 5 2016: <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/fall-2016-data/q2c.php>
- Table 6 2016: <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/fall-2016-data/q2e.php>

### Reports

- [Positive working relationships reported among Michigan's local elected officials \(2019\)](#)



## Trust in Government

### What's At Issue:

Studies of public trust toward the U.S. federal government have revealed significant changes in trust over time, with occasional increases and decreases woven into an overall pattern of steep decline since the 1950s. In addition to understanding citizen trust in government, it can also be valuable to examine local government leaders' trust or distrust in government, because of their "insider knowledge" and because of the central role they play, interacting with citizens as well as with officials and agencies at various levels of government. The MPPS tracks Michigan's local government officials trust in various levels of government, repeating these questions over time to better understand this key aspect of the functioning of democracy.

### Overview and Key MPPS Findings:

- Local government officials tend to trust other Michigan local governments to do what's right, and that trust has remained consistently high over the past decade, with an uptick in 2020.
- Fewer local officials express trust in the state government, but that trust has also seen improvement from 2009-2020.
- Trust in the federal government remains very low, with 41% of local leaders in 2020 saying they seldom or almost never trust the federal government.
- Michigan local officials do not feel that State officials trust local governments to do what's right.

### Deeper Dive:

In 2009, 2013, 2016, and 2020 the MPPS asked local leaders throughout Michigan about their trust in various levels of government to do the right thing. In contrast with generally declining public trust in government at all levels, the surveys have found local leaders' trust in government has been steady or even slightly increased over that time span. **Table 1** illustrates that local leaders' trust is highest in other local governments. Statewide, 72% of Michigan local leaders today trust other local governments "nearly always" or "most of the time." Meanwhile, 23% trust other local governments some of the time, and just 3% say they seldom or almost never trust other local governments. The 72% with high levels of trust is an increase from the consistent ratings of 65-66% saying the same from 2009 to 2016.

Trust in Michigan's state government, while lower, also increased slightly in 2020. Overall, a quarter of Michigan's local officials said in 2020 that they trust the state government nearly always or most of the time to do what is right, as shown in **Table 2**. Trust in the State has seen a gradual increase since 2009, when just 9% of local leaders had high levels of trust. Meanwhile, distrust in the state has declined precipitously. While nearly half of local leaders seldom or almost never trusted the State in 2009, only 19% said the same in 2020.

Lastly, just 12% of local leaders in 2020 believe nearly always or most of the time that the federal government will do what is right, an increase over the low point (6%) in 2013, but relatively unchanged since 2016.

As a way of gauging feelings of reciprocated trust, in 2016, the survey asked local officials whether they believed that state government officials in Lansing trusted local governments to do what is right. Only 3% of respondents felt state government officials trust local government nearly always, while another quarter of respondents said state officials trust them most of the time. Compared to local government trust in the state, assessments going the other direction are much more spread across various levels of trust, including approximately one in five respondents who said the State trusts them seldom, and 5% who said the State never trusts local governments to do what is right.

**Table 1: How much of the time do you think you can trust other local governments to do what is right?**

	2009	2013	2016	2020
Nearly Always	11%	9%	9%	10%
Most of the Time	55%	56%	57%	62%
Some of the Time	28%	30%	27%	23%
Seldom	4%	3%	2%	2%
Almost Never	1%	1%	1%	1%
Don't Know	2%	2%	4%	3%

**Table 2: How much of the time do you think you can trust the state government in Lansing to do what is right?**

	2009	2013	2016	2020
Nearly Always	0%	1%	1%	1%
Most of the Time	9%	18%	21%	24%
Some of the Time	41%	52%	51%	54%
Seldom	31%	20%	19%	14%
Almost Never	17%	8%	6%	5%
Don't Know	2%	1%	1%	3%

**Table 3: How much of the time do you think you can trust the federal government in Washington to do what is right?**

	2009	2013	2016	2020
Nearly Always	0%	0%	1%	1%
Most of the Time	10%	6%	10%	11%
Some of the Time	42%	35%	42%	44%
Seldom	30%	36%	30%	28%
Almost Never	16%	22%	16%	13%
Don't Know	2%	1%	2%	3%

**Table 4: How much of the time do you think Michigan's state officials trust local governments to do what is right?**

	2016
Nearly Always	3%
Most of the Time	26%
Some of the Time	38%
Seldom	18%
Almost Never	5%
Don't Know	9%



## Resources and links:

### Data tables

- Table 1 2009: <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/spring-2009-data/q17.htm>
- Table 1 2013: <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/spring-2013-data/q57.php>
- Table 1 2016: <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/fall-2016-data/q5a.php>
- Table 1 2020: <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/spring-2020-data/q47.php>
- Table 2 2009: <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/spring-2009-data/q18.htm>
- Table 2 2013: <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/spring-2013-data/q58.php>
- Table 2 2016: <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/fall-2016-data/q5b.php>
- Table 2 2020: <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/spring-2020-data/q48.php>
- Table 3 2009: <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/spring-2009-data/q19.htm>
- Table 3 2013: <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/spring-2013-data/q59.php>
- Table 3 2016: <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/fall-2016-data/q5c.php>
- Table 3 2020: <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/spring-2020-data/q49.php>
- Table 4 2016: <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/fall-2016-data/q4.php>

### Reports

- [Michigan local leaders say local democracy is strong, as their trust in government and citizens rises \(2020\)](#)
- [Improving communication, building trust are seen as keys to fixing relationships between local jurisdictions and the State government \(2017\)](#)
- [Trust in government among Michigan's local leaders and citizens \(2013\)](#)

## Government Ethics

### What's at Issue:

The expectation of ethical behavior among public officials is a cornerstone of democratic governance. No single set of rules can dictate all of the ethical decisions officials should make, given the complex and sometimes competing values—such as fairness, liberty, or common good—that officials face in their role as government leaders. However, laws related to transparency and ethical conduct are important for setting appropriate standards. Michigan's rules regarding public sector ethics lag behind many other states. As recently as 2015, Michigan was scored worst in the nation by the Center for Public Integrity on measures of state government accountability, ethics enforcement, and transparency. The MPPS asked Michigan's local government officials about a variety of issues regarding ethics at the state and local levels, including how ethical they believe Michigan's state and local government leaders are, what types of ethics policies are needed, and what types are already in place in their jurisdictions.

### Overview and Key MPPS Findings:

- When asked about the state of ethics and integrity in Michigan government at various levels, local government officials ranked their own jurisdiction as being most ethical, followed by other local jurisdictions across the state, Michigan's executive branch of state government, and in last place, the Michigan Legislature.
- A slight majority of local officials report that their jurisdiction has a formal code of ethics while a notable number do not know if their jurisdiction has such a code.
- The majority are satisfied with their jurisdiction's policies surrounding ethics.
- Statewide, 13% of local officials said they have felt pressured to do something unethical in their official government capacity.

### Deeper Dive:

The MPPS covered issues of government ethics in a single survey conducted in the Fall of 2014, and will return to the topic in a future wave to investigate changes over time.

**Table 1** displays responses to a series of questions asking local government leaders how ethical or unethical other officials are at various levels of government across the state of Michigan. Unsurprisingly, respondents viewed the elected and appointed officials in their own jurisdictions with the highest ratings, with 88% believing their officials were either very (53%) or mostly (35%) ethical. Michigan's state legislators were seen as the least ethical, with less than half of respondents viewing legislators as very (5%) or mostly (43%) ethical, and approximately a third of respondents (32%) saying they are equally ethical and unethical.

**Table 2** shows that, in 2014, 59% of local government leaders reported their jurisdiction's local government had a formal code of ethics with guidelines for their personnel that can cover a broad range of ethics issues. Meanwhile, 29% said their jurisdiction did not have a code of ethics, and 12% didn't know if they had a code of ethics. As local government representatives, it can be argued that not knowing whether there is a code of ethics they are supposed to be following might raise as much concern as not having a code at all.

**Table 3** displays respondents' satisfaction levels with their jurisdiction's ethics practices and policies, showing that 59% are very satisfied while 24% are mostly satisfied. Only 5% of responding local government officials reported any level of dissatisfaction with their policies and practices, despite 41% of respondents in **Table 2** stating their jurisdiction either doesn't have a code of ethics or they don't know if they have one.



Finally, the MPPS asked local officials whether they had felt pressured in their official government role to do anything that felt unethical in the preceding five years (2009-2014). **Table 4** shows that 85% stated that they had not ever felt such pressure, while 13% of responding officials stated that they had indeed been pressured in these ways.

**Table 1: First of all, we are interested in your general opinions about the state of ethics and integrity in Michigan government. In general, how would you rate [each group] overall in terms of ethical behavior in their official positions?**

	Michigan State Legislators	Michigan State Executive Branch	Elected and Appointed Officials in Your Jurisdiction	Local Government Elected and Appointed Officials Across the State
Very Ethical	5%	14%	53%	15%
Mostly Ethical	43%	43%	35%	55%
Equally Ethical and Unethical	32%	24%	8%	18%
Mostly Unethical	10%	9%	1%	2%
Very Unethical	3%	3%	1%	0%
Don't Know	7%	7%	3%	9%

**Table 2: Does your jurisdiction's local government have a code of ethics?**

	2014
Yes	59%
No	29%
Don't Know	12%

**Table 3: Overall, how satisfied are you with your jurisdiction's policies and practices governing ethics?**

	2014
Very Satisfied	59%
Somewhat Satisfied	24%
Neither Satisfied or Dissatisfied	9%
Somewhat Dissatisfied	3%
Very Dissatisfied	2%
Don't Know	3%

**Table 4: Thinking back over the past five years, have you in your role as a local official ever come under pressure to do something that you felt might be unethical?**

	2014
Yes	13%
No	85%
Don't Know	2%

## Resources and links:

### Data tables

- Table 1 2014:
  - » <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/fall-2014-data/q36a.php>
  - » <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/fall-2014-data/q36b.php>
  - » <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/fall-2014-data/q36c.php>
  - » <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/fall-2014-data/q36d.php>
- Table 2 2014: <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/fall-2014-data/q41.php>
- Table 3 2014: <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/fall-2014-data/q46.php>
- Table 4 2014: <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/fall-2014-data/q44.php>

### Reports

- [Michigan local leaders see need for state and local ethics reform \(2015\)](#)





## Voting and Election Administration

### What's at Issue:

Whether elections are fair, accurate, and efficient has become a common focus of debate in recent years, with confidence in elections being extraordinarily tested in the wake of the 2020 presidential election. Voting is a core tenant of democracy, and the ability for jurisdictions on local levels to accurately administer elections is critical to maintaining democracy. In the spring of 2020, the MPPS asked local officials about their expectations regarding election administration in their jurisdictions for the November 2020 election. These questionnaire items mirrored questions that were asked retrospectively in spring 2017, looking back at problems local officials may have experienced in the November 2016 election.

### Overview and Key MPPS Findings:

- Confidence among Michigan's local officials in their ability to administer accurate elections, including their election security and their ability to complete an accurate recount if necessary, has been very high in surveys conducted in both 2017 and 2020.
- However, local leaders expected potential election problems to be more common in 2020 than what they reported experiencing in 2016.

### Deeper Dive:

**Table 1** looks at confidence among city and township officials—representing the jurisdictions in Michigan responsible for conducting elections—in their ability to hold accurate elections in both 2017 and 2020. While the vast majority of officials were “very confident” in their ability to administer an accurate election, approximately one in ten officials did not feel that way. While the statistics between 2017 and 2020 are quite similar, there was a four point drop in officials responding “very confident” between 2017 and 2020.

Similarly, **Table 2** looks at local officials' confidence in the ability of their county clerk's office to conduct an accurate recount should it be necessary. While nearly every city and township official was either “somewhat” or “very” confident that their county clerk would be able to accurately recount, it is worth noting the numbers decreased slightly between 2017 and 2020. There was a five point drop between 2017 and 2020 in officials who were “very confident”, with a two point increase in officials who said that they “don't know” if the county could conduct an accurate recount.

**Table 3** addresses a number of possible problems with election administration. The majority of issues showed officials expressing more concern in 2020 compared to what was experienced in 2016. Among the most noticeable increases in predicted problems in 2020 compared to 2016 were the cost of administering elections, potential wait times in line to vote, access to reliable internet in order to contact the Secretary of State's office, and recruitment of enough poll workers.

**Table 1: Overall, to what extent would you say you are confident in the ability of your jurisdiction to administer an accurate election?**

	2017	2020
Very Confident	91%	87%
Somewhat Confident	8%	11%
Not Very Confident	1%	1%
Don't Know	1%	1%

**Table 2: Overall, to what extent would you say you are confident in the ability of the County Clerk's office to administer an accurate recount, if needed?**

	2017	2020
Very Confident	80%	75%
Somewhat Confident	16%	19%
Not Very Confident	2%	2%
Not Confident At All	1%	0%
Don't Know	2%	4%

**Table 3: Still thinking ahead to the November 2020 general election, to what extent, if any, do you expect the following will or will not be problems with election administration in your jurisdiction? (2020 questionnaire language, prospective)**

**To what extent, if any, would you say the following have or have not recently been problems with election administration in your jurisdiction? (2017 questionnaire language, retrospective)**

		Not a problem at all	Not much of a problem	Somewhat of a problem	A significant problem	Don't know
The cost of election administration on your jurisdictions budget	2020	18%	37%	31%	10%	4%
	2016	28%	45%	22%	3%	2%
Long wait times for any voters	2020	29%	43%	17%	7%	5%
	2016	58%	36%	4%	0%	1%
Election equipment failures/malfunctions	2020	22%	50%	15%	4%	9%
	2016	36%	45%	14%	3%	2%
Inaccurate voter registration lists	2020	33%	46%	10%	3%	8%
	2016	58%	35%	3%	0%	3%
Reliable internet connectivity for community with SOS	2020	26%	40%	16%	10%	8%
	2016	46%	31%	10%	5%	8%
Disturbances at polling places (i.e. inappropriate campaigning, voter intimidation, etc)	2020	46%	44%	5%	1%	4%
	2016	73%	24%	2%	0%	1%
Recruiting poll workers and other election staff with necessary skills	2020	21%	31%	32%	13%	2%
	2016	32%	38%	25%	4%	1%
Recruiting enough poll workers and other election staff (regardless of skill)	2020	20%	33%	32%	13%	3%
	2016	33%	38%	24%	3%	1%
Poll worker errors in following election procedures	2020	32%	52%	10%	2%	5%
	2016	48%	44%	5%	1%	3%
Intentional disinformation targeted at your jurisdictions citizens about voting procedures or other election issues	2020	37%	37%	12%	6%	8%
	2016	Not asked	Not asked	Not asked	Not asked	Not asked



## Resources and links:

### Data tables

- Table 1 2017: <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/spring-2017-data/q12a.php>
- Table 1 2020: <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/spring-2020-data/q29a.php>
- Table 2 2017: <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/spring-2017-data/q12b.php>
- Table 2 2020: <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/spring-2020-data/q29c.php>
- Table 3 2017:
  - » <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/spring-2017-data/q10a.php>
  - » <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/spring-2017-data/q10b.php>
  - » <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/spring-2017-data/q10c.php>
  - » <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/spring-2017-data/q10d.php>
  - » <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/spring-2017-data/q10e.php>
  - » <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/spring-2017-data/q10f.php>
  - » <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/spring-2017-data/q10g.php>
  - » <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/spring-2017-data/q10h.php>
  - » <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/spring-2017-data/q10i.php>
- Table 3 2020:
  - » <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/spring-2020-data/q24a.php>
  - » <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/spring-2020-data/q24b.php>
  - » <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/spring-2020-data/q24c.php>
  - » <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/spring-2020-data/q24d.php>
  - » <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/spring-2020-data/q24e.php>
  - » <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/spring-2020-data/q24f.php>
  - » <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/spring-2020-data/q24g.php>
  - » <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/spring-2020-data/q24h.php>
  - » <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/spring-2020-data/q24i.php>
  - » <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/spring-2020-data/q24j.php>

### Reports

- [Michigan local leaders expect mixed impacts from expanded voter registration and absentee voting reforms \(2020\)](#)
- [Local leaders' views on elections in Michigan: accuracy, problems, and reform options \(2017\)](#)

## The U.S. Census

### What's at Issue:

The Constitution mandates that a census be completed every ten years across the country. It is one of the most clearly stated responsibilities of American democracy, but is nevertheless a constant source of controversy, due to its impact on allocation of resources, voting districts, and representation. What do Michigan local leaders think about the Census, and how have local governments supported it?

### Overview and Key MPPS Findings:

- As of spring 2020, few local government leaders were very confident that the 2020 Census statewide count in Michigan would be accurate, and over a third (34%) were not very confident or not at all confident, slightly more pessimistic than 2019 assessments.
- Local leaders' confidence in the accuracy of their own local community count in 2020 was somewhat higher than for the statewide count, but also down compared to expectations when asked in 2019.
- When it comes to undercounts, local officials are most concerned about accurately counting non-homeowners and citizens who split where they live amongst multiple homes.
- In 2020, more than two-thirds of Michigan local governments reported taking actions to encourage their residents to complete their Census forms, up 14 percentage points from the percentage who responded similarly in 2010.
- The most common actions local governments reported taking in 2020 included encouraging residents to complete the Census online, direct communications to residents (25%) and collaboration with other organizations (17%) to boost residents' participation.

### Deeper Dive:

In 2010, 2019, and 2020, the MPPS asked local leaders a series of questions about the Census, including how confident they were that it would be accurate, whether they were concerned about undercounting particular groups of residents, and whether their jurisdictions were taking action to promote participation.

**Table 1** shows local leaders' confidence for the pending Census counts in their own jurisdiction and for the state as a whole. Local leaders grew less confident between the spring of 2019 and the spring of 2020 that the Census would be accurate in their own jurisdiction, or for the state as a whole. In addition, although local leaders were more confident about the count for their own community than for other communities, few expressed high confidence in either count. In particular, just 5% said they were very confident the statewide count would be accurate.

**Table 2** shows which groups of residents local leaders were particularly concerned might be undercounted in their community during the 2020 Census. While the national narrative surrounding the Census often reflected concerns about accurately counting minority populations with limited English proficiency or without citizenship, local leaders in Michigan most commonly cited non-home owners and those who own a second home as groups who might be undercounted in their communities.

**Table 3** shows whether Michigan jurisdictions planned to take any particular actions to encourage residents to participate in the Census, in both 2010 and 2020. In fact, there was a significant 14 percentage point increase in the number of jurisdictions that did plan such actions, between the 2010 and 2020 counts.

Finally, **Table 4** shows the types of actions that Michigan local governments planned to take, to encourage participation in 2020 (note: this question was not asked as a closed-end response on the 2010 MPPS).



**Table 1: At this time, how confident overall are you that there will be an accurate 2020 Census count in....?**

	Your Jurisdiction		Statewide in Michigan	
	2019	2020	2019	2020
Very Confident	15%	15%	5%	5%
Somewhat Confident	66%	58%	56%	51%
Not Very Confident	14%	15%	26%	28%
Not Confident At All	2%	5%	4%	6%
Don't Know	4%	7%	9%	10%

**Table 2: Which of the following groups within your jurisdiction, if any, are you concerned may be hard to count in the 2020 Census?**

	2020
Elderly Residents	29%
Children Under the Age of 5	12%
People With Limited English Proficiency	15%
Non-Home Owners (renters, residents with no fixed place of residence, college students, etc.)	43%
Non-Citizens	17%
Residents Living in Poverty	24%
Residents With Little/No Internet Access	34%
Residents With a Secondary Home Where They Live a Significant Amount of the Year	39%

**Table 3: Now, thinking about issues related to the U.S. Census, has your jurisdiction done anything specifically to encourage its citizens to complete their census forms? (2010)**

As far as you know, is your jurisdiction doing any of the following to encourage its residents to complete their census forms in 2020? (2020)

	2010	2020
Yes (2010) Planning any action (2020)	54%	68%
No (2010) Not taking any action (2020)	43%	24%
Don't Know	3%	9%

**Table 4: As far as you know, is your jurisdiction doing any of the following to encourage its residents to complete their census forms in 2020?**

	2020
Encouraging residents to complete census online	59%
Planning direct communications to residents	25%
Collaborating with other organizations	17%
Providing space in local facilities for Census workers or training activities	10%
Planning to run or participate in a "Complete Count Committee"	10%
Working to boost the number of local residents who work as Census Enumerators	9%
Providing or facilitating kiosks, laptop stations, etc. for residents without good internet access	5%
Not planning any actions related to 2020 Census	24%
Don't know	9%

## Resources and links:

### Data tables

- Table 1 2010: <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/spring-2010-data/q35.htm>
- Table 2 2019:
  - » <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/spring-2019-data/q33a.php>
  - » <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/spring-2019-data/q33h.php>
- Table 2 2020:
  - » <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/spring-2020-data/q39a.php>
  - » <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/spring-2020-data/q39i.php>
- Table 3 2019:
  - » <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/spring-2019-data/q34a.php>
  - » <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/spring-2019-data/q34b.php>
  - » <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/spring-2019-data/q34c.php>
  - » <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/spring-2019-data/q34d.php>
  - » <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/spring-2019-data/q34e.php>
  - » <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/spring-2019-data/q34f.php>
  - » <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/spring-2019-data/q34g.php>
  - » <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/spring-2019-data/q34h.php>
- Table 4 2019:
  - » <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/spring-2019-data/q35a.php>
  - » <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/spring-2019-data/q35b.php>
- Table 4 2020:
  - » <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/spring-2020-data/q40a.php>
  - » <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/spring-2020-data/q40b.php>

### Reports

- [Confidence in the accuracy of Michigan's 2020 Census count among local leaders was not very high, slips further \(2020\)](#)
- [Michigan local government preparations and concerns regarding the 2020 U.S. Census \(2019\)](#)
- [Michigan local governments actively promote U.S. Census participation \(2010\)](#)



## The Functioning of Democracy

### What's at Issue:

In a time when there are growing concerns about the health of American democracy, much of the focus tends to be on national-level institutions and norms. But, of course, American democracy operates in a federal system, with equally important aspects at the national, state, and local levels. How do Michigan's local leaders assess the overall functioning of democracy in their own jurisdictions, compared with at the state and national levels?

### Overview and Key MPPS Findings:

- Michigan's local leaders are significantly more positive about the functioning of democracy in their jurisdictions than they are about democracy at the state or federal levels.
- Statewide, 84% of local leaders rate democracy in their jurisdiction at 7 or higher on a 10-point scale, compared to just 41% for democracy in Michigan overall, and just 21% for democracy across the U.S.
- Partisan identification plays a larger role in assessments of the functioning of democracy at the state and national levels than locally.

### Deeper Dive:

The Spring 2020 MPPS asked local leaders for their opinions about the state of America's democracy as a system of government, prompting them to think about such issues as free and fair elections, rule of law, an unbiased free press, balanced relationships between levels and branches of government, ethical and transparent governance, an informed and engaged electorate, etc. Local officials were asked to evaluate the functioning of democracy on a 1 to 10 scale— with 1 as a total breakdown of democracy and 10 as perfectly functioning democracy—for three specific levels of governance: in their own jurisdiction, in the state of Michigan overall, and in the United States overall.

As shown in **Table 1**, nearly one in six (16%) local leaders rate the state of democracy in their own jurisdictions as a perfect 10 on the 1-10 scale, and the mean assessment statewide is 8.2 out of 10. Only 3% rate the state of democracy in their communities as less than a 5 on the 10-point scale.

By comparison, the mean assessment on the 10-point scale for democracy in the State of Michigan as a whole is 6.1, and only 2% of local leaders give Michigan democracy a perfect 10. At the other end of the scale, 18% rate Michigan's democracy below a 5 on the 10-point scale, including 3% who rate Michigan at 1 on the scale, that is, experiencing a total breakdown of democracy.

Ratings for democracy at the federal level are even more pessimistic. Among local officials statewide, the mean rating of the current state of democracy in the U.S. is below the halfway point of the scale, at 4.8, with nearly half (43%) giving U.S. democracy a rating lower than 5. Fewer than 1% say it is perfectly functioning, and 7% believe U.S. democracy is in a state of total breakdown.

Regardless of their partisan identification, local leaders of all types are highly positive about democracy in their own jurisdictions. **Table 2** displays how significant majorities among Democrats (83%), Independents (81%), and Republicans (88%) consider their jurisdictions to have highly functioning democracy (scores of 7-10). But when it comes to rating the current health of democracy at the state level in Michigan, with a Democratic governor currently at the helm, a majority of Democratic local leaders (59%) say Michigan has high functioning democracy, compared to just 42% of Republicans and 32% of Independents, as seen in **Table 3**. And meanwhile, at the federal level, with the U.S. presidency held by Republican President Donald Trump, the partisan pattern is reversed. As shown in **Table 4**, Republican local officials (26%) tend to give higher ratings than Independents (14%) or Democrats (11%) for democracy in the United States as a whole, although these percentages are all quite low.

**Table 1: Now we’re asking more broadly about your opinion of the state of our democracy as a system of government. This would include basic issues such as free and fair elections, rule of law, an unbiased free press, balanced relationships between levels and branches of government, ethical and transparent governance, an informed and engaged electorate, etc.**

**On a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is a total breakdown of democracy and 10 is perfectly functioning democracy, how would you rate the functioning of democracy today in...**

	Your jurisdiction	The state of Michigan	The U.S.
1: Total breakdown of democracy	0%	3%	7%
2	1%	3%	10%
3	1%	5%	13%
4	1%	7%	13%
5	5%	20%	19%
6	4%	17%	14%
7	9%	19%	10%
8	27%	14%	8%
9	32%	6%	2%
10: Perfectly functioning democracy	16%	2%	1%

**Table 2: On a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is a total breakdown of democracy and 10 is perfectly functioning democracy, how would you rate the functioning of democracy today in your jurisdiction?**

	Republicans	Independents	Democrats
Poor functioning (1-4)	2%	5%	3%
Medium functioning (5-6)	8%	10%	12%
High functioning (7-10)	88%	81%	83%
Don't know	2%	3%	2%

**Table 3: On a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is a total breakdown of democracy and 10 is perfectly functioning democracy, how would you rate the functioning of democracy today in the state of Michigan?**

	Republicans	Independents	Democrats
Poor functioning (1-4)	19%	20%	9%
Medium functioning (5-6)	39%	43%	29%
High functioning (7-10)	40%	32%	59%
Don't know	3%	4%	3%

**Table 4: On a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is a total breakdown of democracy and 10 is perfectly functioning democracy, how would you rate the functioning of democracy today in the U.S.?**

	Republicans	Independents	Democrats
Poor functioning (1-4)	34%	52%	58%
Medium functioning (5-6)	37%	28%	29%
High functioning (7-10)	26%	14%	11%
Don't know	3%	5%	2%





## Resources and links:

### Data tables

- Table 1:
  - » <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/spring-2020-data/q51a.php>
  - » <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/spring-2020-data/q51b.php>
  - » <http://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/spring-2020-data/q51c.php>

### Reports

- [Michigan local leaders say local democracy is strong, as their trust in government and citizens rises \(2020\)](#)

## Notes

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## Survey Background and Methodology

The MPPS was launched in 2009 by the Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy (CLOSUP) at the University of Michigan and is conducted in partnership with the Michigan Association of Counties, Michigan Municipal League, and Michigan Townships Association. It is an ongoing survey program, interviewing the leaders of Michigan's 1,856 units of general purpose local government. Surveys are conducted each spring (and prior to 2018, were also conducted each fall). The program has covered a wide range of policy topics, and includes longitudinal tracking data on "core" fiscal, budgetary and operational policy questions and designed to build-up a multi-year time-series.

The survey is administered via the internet and hardcopy, and is sent 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, 280 cities, 253 villages, and 1,240 townships in the state of Michigan.

Most waves of the MPPS achieve greater than a 70% response rate by unit. Please see individual survey pages for more information on survey response and methodology, as well as hardcopy questionnaires and detailed tables of the data broken down 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: <http://closup.umich.edu/mpps.php>.

*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.*



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The **Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy (CLOSUP)**, housed at the University of Michigan's Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy, conducts and supports applied policy research designed to inform state, local, and urban policy issues. Through integrated research, teaching, and outreach involving academic researchers, students, policymakers and practitioners, CLOSUP seeks to foster understanding of today's state and local policy problems, and to find effective solutions to those problems.

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