

# Township Officials' Views on State-Local Government Relations

Presented at the  
2017 Michigan Townships Association  
Annual Educational Conference  
April 11, 2017

# Presentation Outline

- Overview of MPPS survey program
- Findings on township officials' views on state and local government relations (from Fall 2016 Wave of the MPPS), including
  - ✓ particular factors that township officials say affect state-local relations
  - ✓ preferred areas of shared and separate authority
  - ✓ how often township officials contact and are contacted by state officials
  - ✓ the importance of communication to improved relations

# The Michigan Public Policy Survey

- **Census survey** – all 1,856 counties, cities, villages, and townships
- **Respondents** – chief elected and appointed officials
- **Administered** – online and via hardcopy
- **Timing** – Spring and Fall each year
- **Topics** – wide range, such as fiscal health, budget priorities, roads, public safety, economic development, intergovernmental cooperation, service privatization, employee policies, labor unions, environmental sustainability, Great Lakes, citizen engagement, much more.

# MPPS is not a typical opinion poll

- **70+% response rates**
- **Transparency**
  - Questionnaires online
  - Pre-run data tables online
  - Sharing of (anonymized) datasets with other researchers
- **Expert advisors on questionnaire content**
- **Research partnership with Michigan local government associations**
  - MAC, MML, & MTA
- **Borrowing from other proven sources such as NLC and ICMA**

# What does the MPPS aim to do?

- **Improve understanding** of local government to help improve policymaking and quality of life
- **Inform local leaders** about peers across the state: challenges and responses
- **Inform state policymakers** and other stakeholders with data about local level challenges and responses not available from any other source
- **Build a longitudinal data archive** to allow tracking of fundamental changes (such as the economic transition, aging population, etc.)
- Foster **academic research and teaching** on local government issues

# How many townships responded to the Fall 2016 MPPS?

**852 townships total (69% of all statewide)**

## **By Population Size**

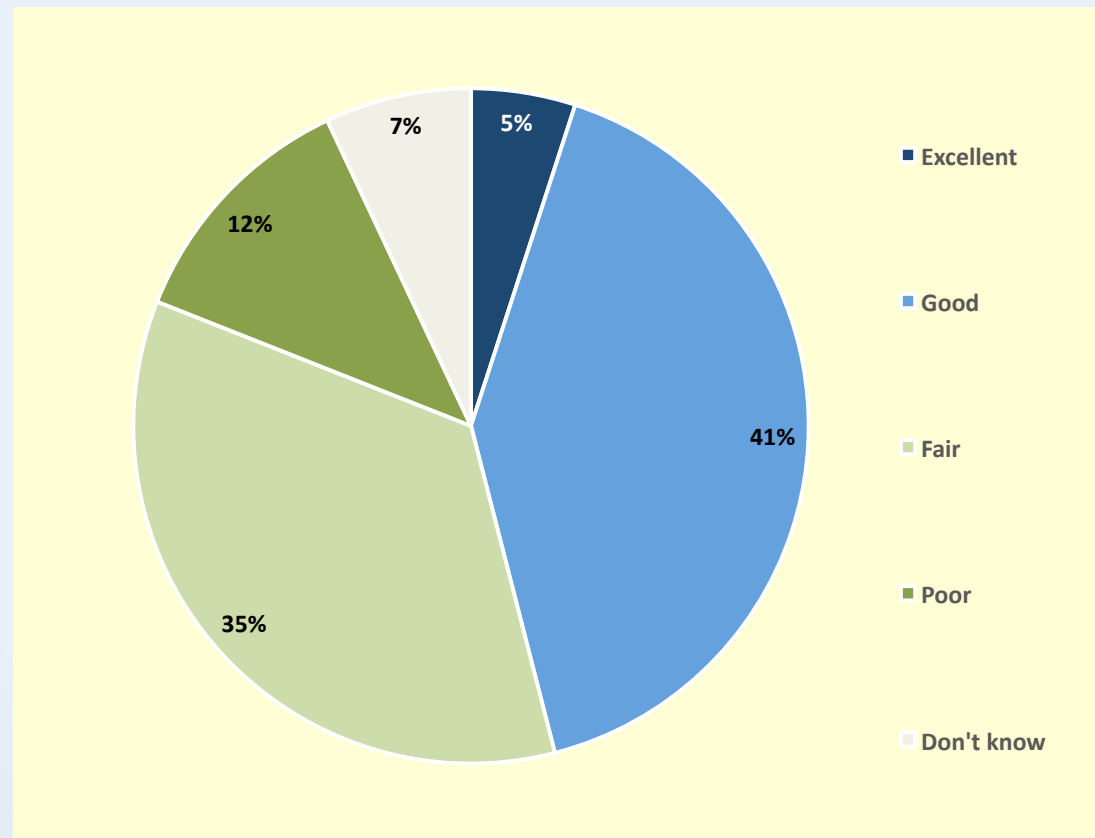
305 townships <1500  
380 townships 1500-5000  
86 townships 5001-10,000  
59 townships 10,001-30,000  
22 townships >30,000

## **By Region**

98 in the Upper Peninsula  
168 in the Northern LP  
163 in the Central West  
158 in the Central East  
130 in the Southwest  
135 in the Southeast

# Townships' mixed relationships with the State

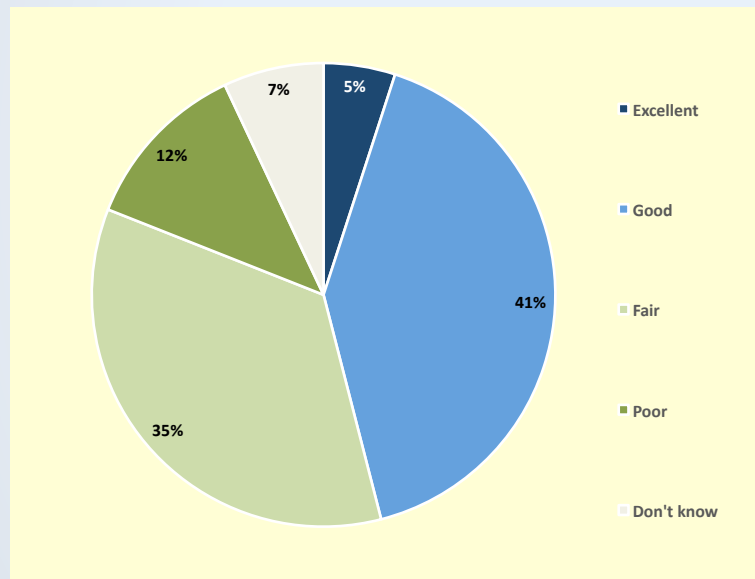
How would you describe the **overall relationship** between the State government and **your township**?



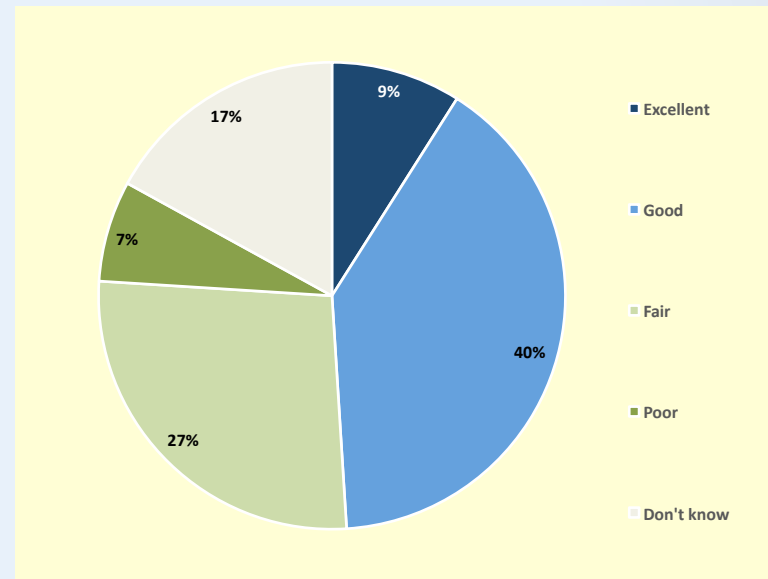
# Townships' mixed relationships with the State

How would you describe the **overall relationship** between the State government and **other local jurisdictions**?

With your township:



With other local jurisdictions:

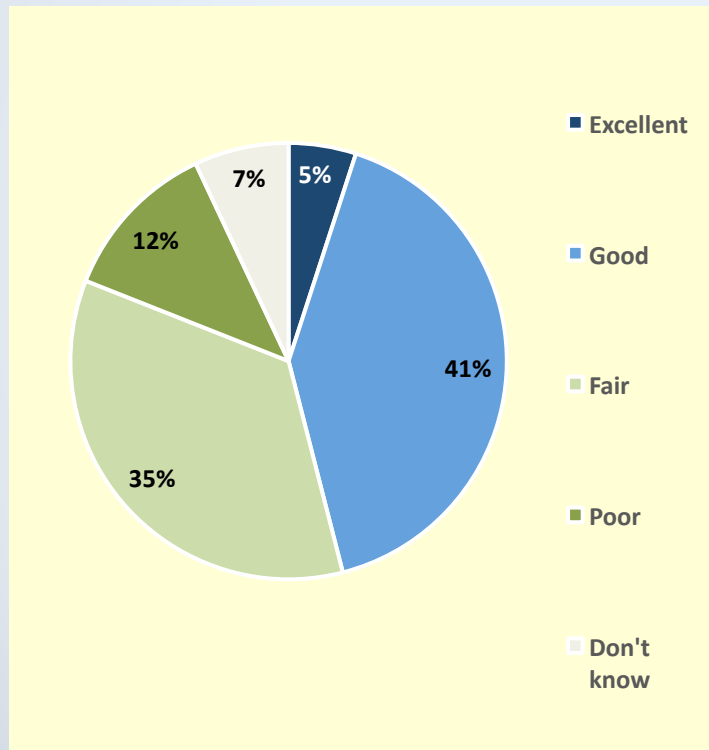




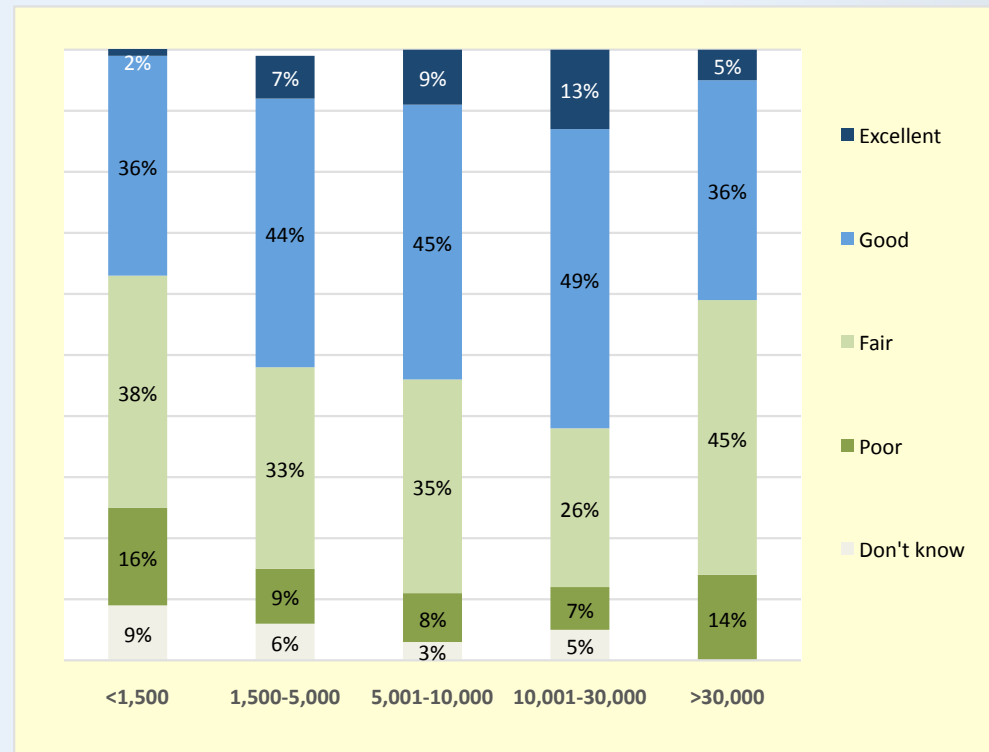
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Overall:



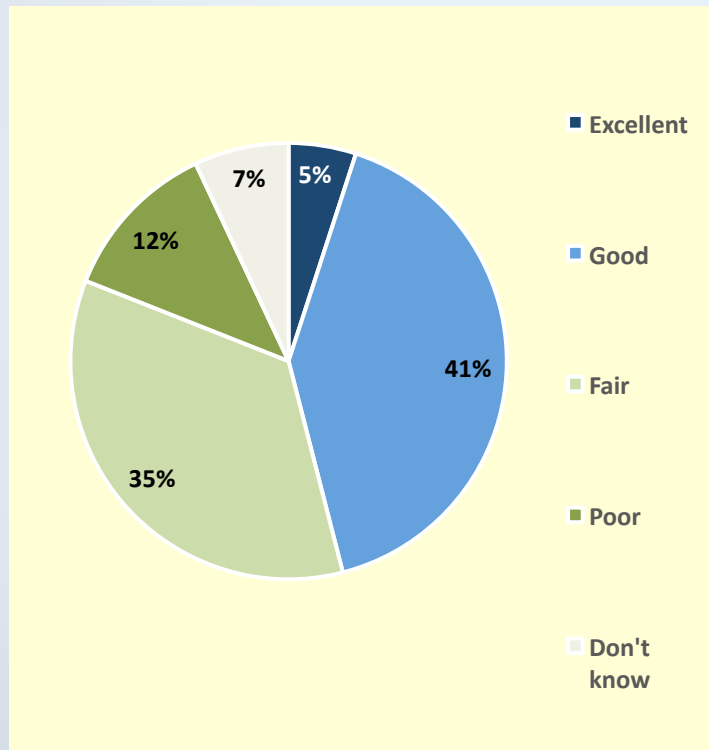
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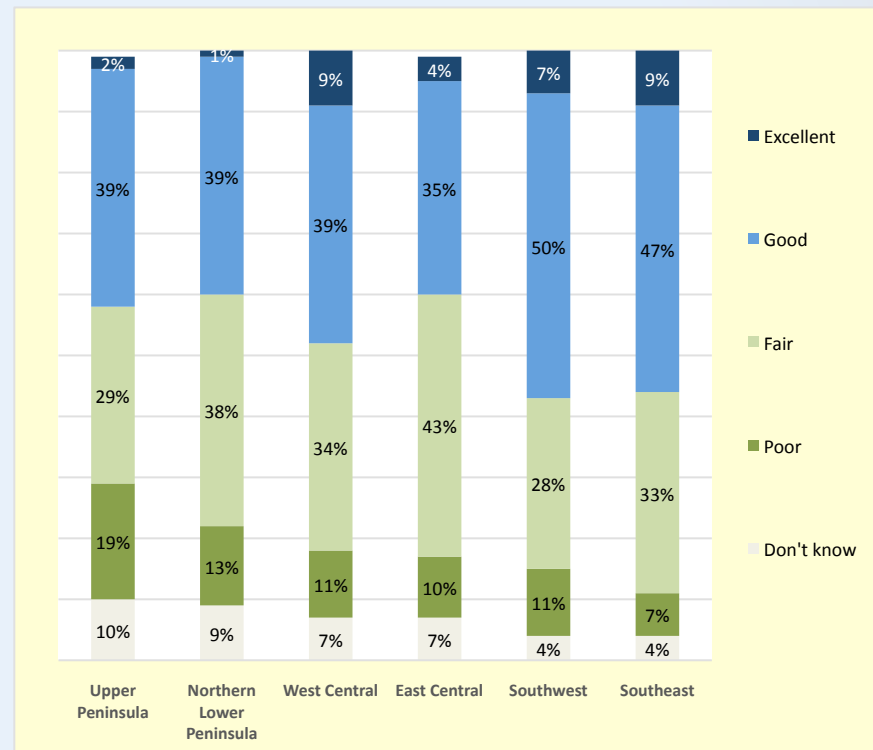
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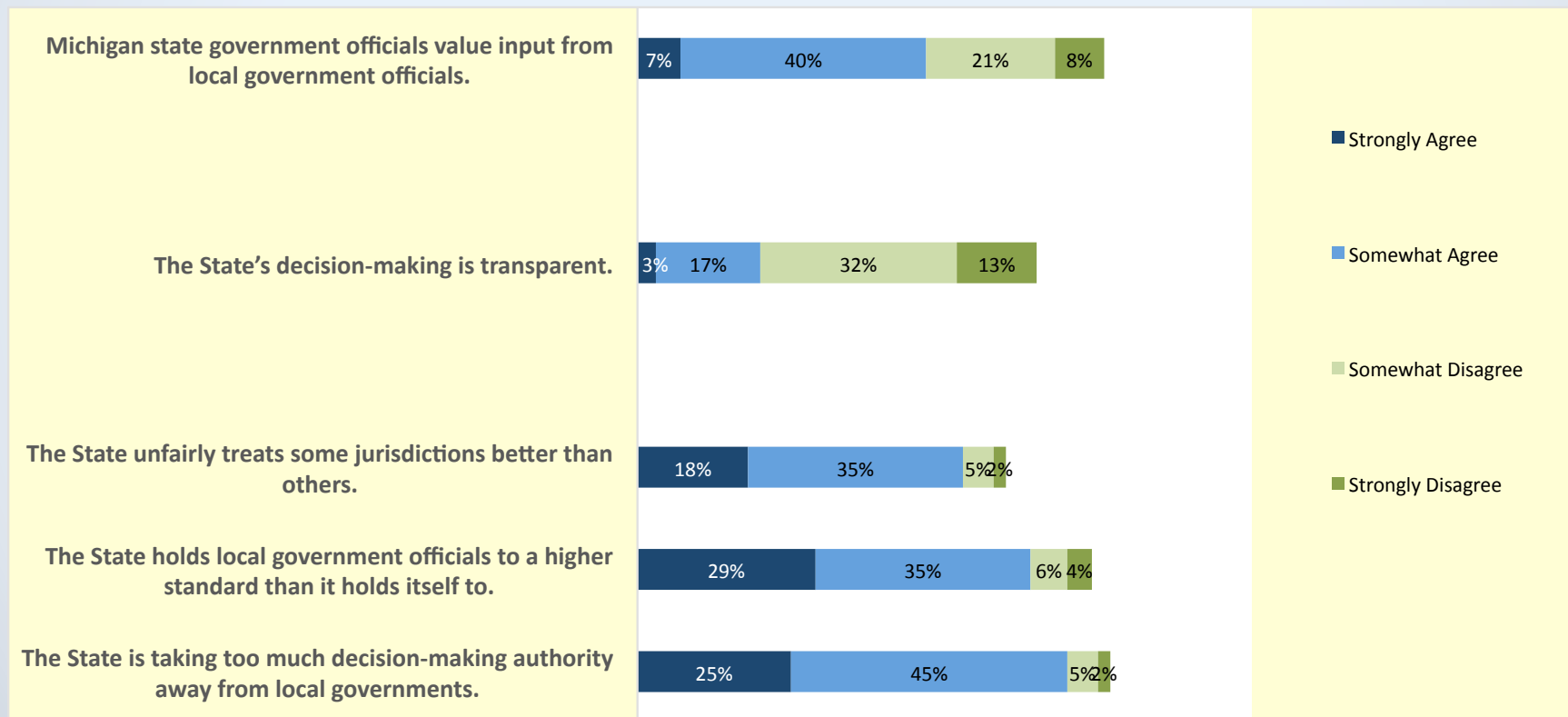


By Region:



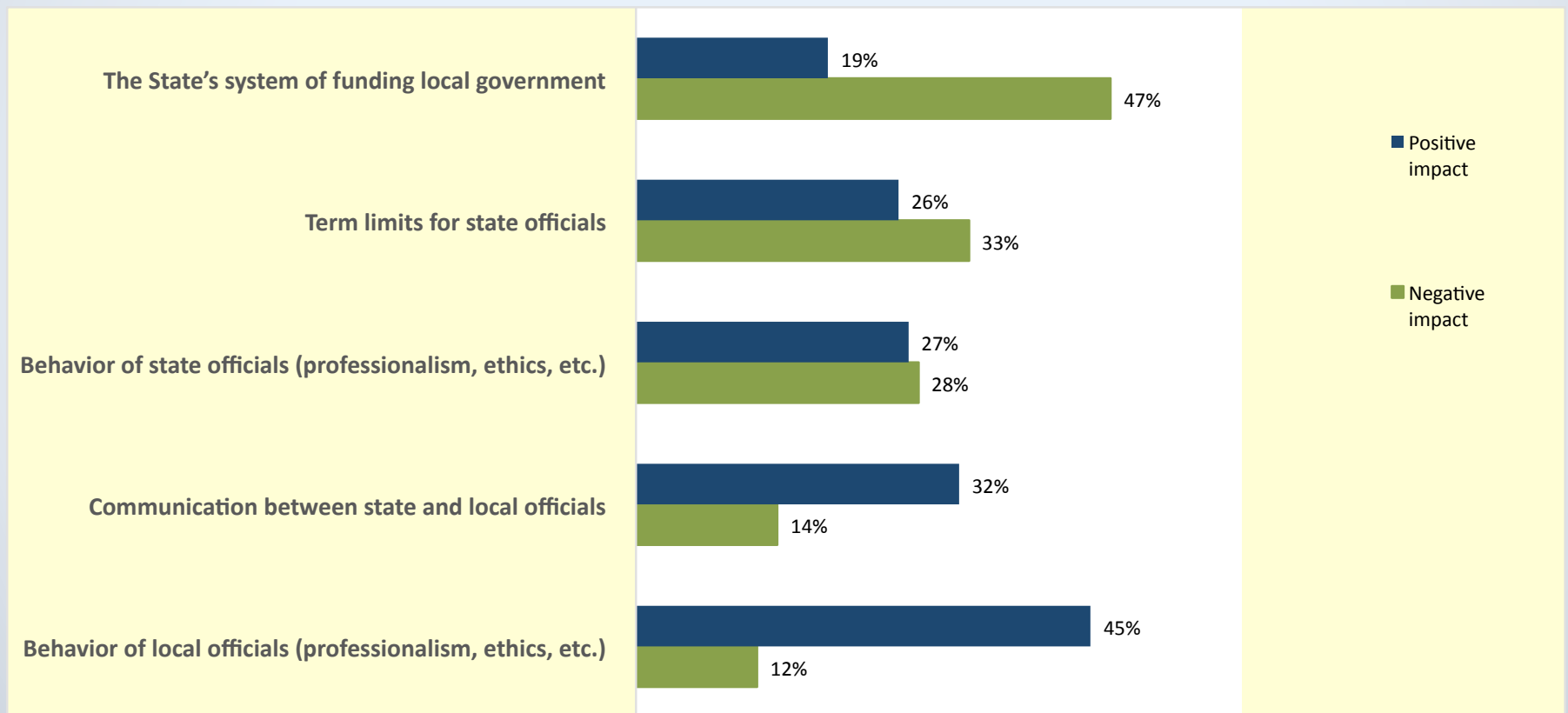
# Factors that affect township-state relations

Thinking about the **relationship** between the State government and local jurisdictions, overall, to what extent do you **agree or disagree** with each of the following statements?



# Factors that affect township-state relations

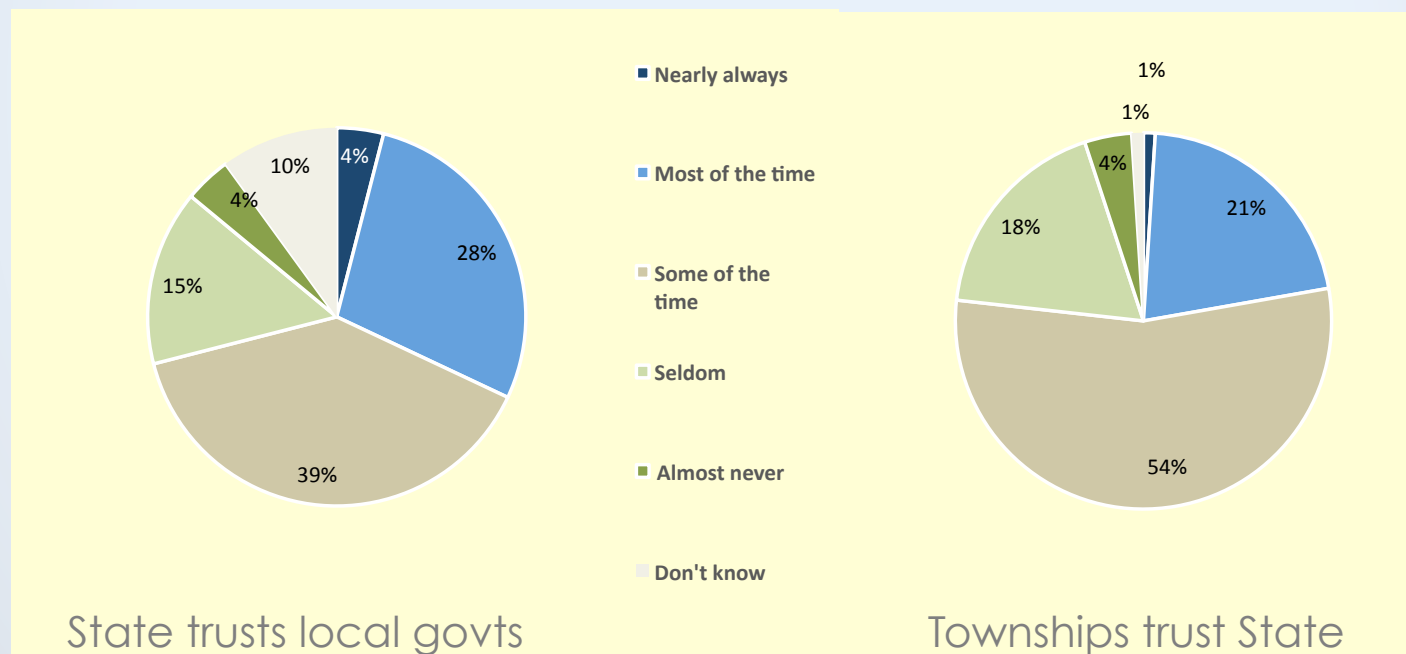
To what extent, if any, would you say the following factors have had a **positive or negative impact** on the **relationship** between the State and local governments in Michigan?



# Factors that affect township-state relations

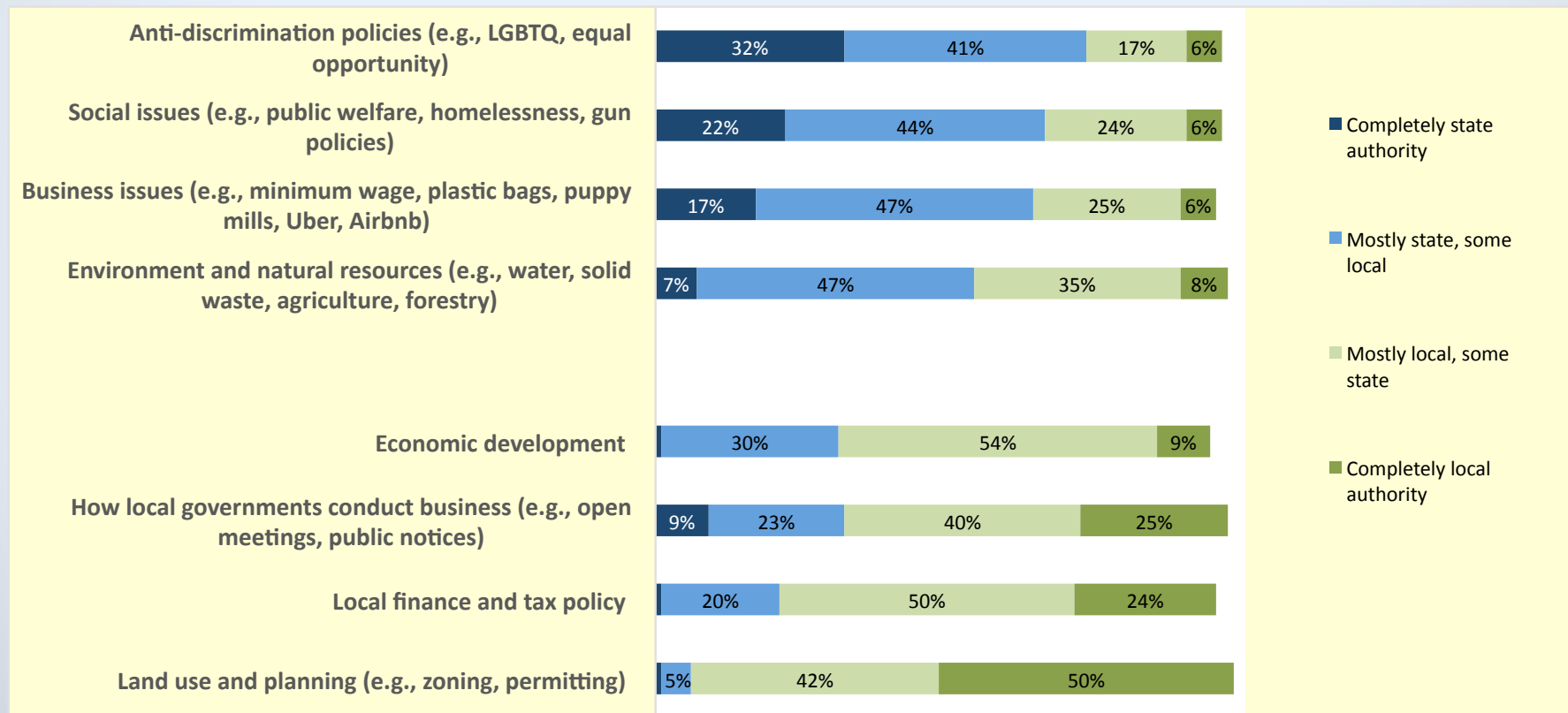
How much of the time do you think Michigan's **state officials trust local governments** to do what is **right**?

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



# How should authority over policy be divided?

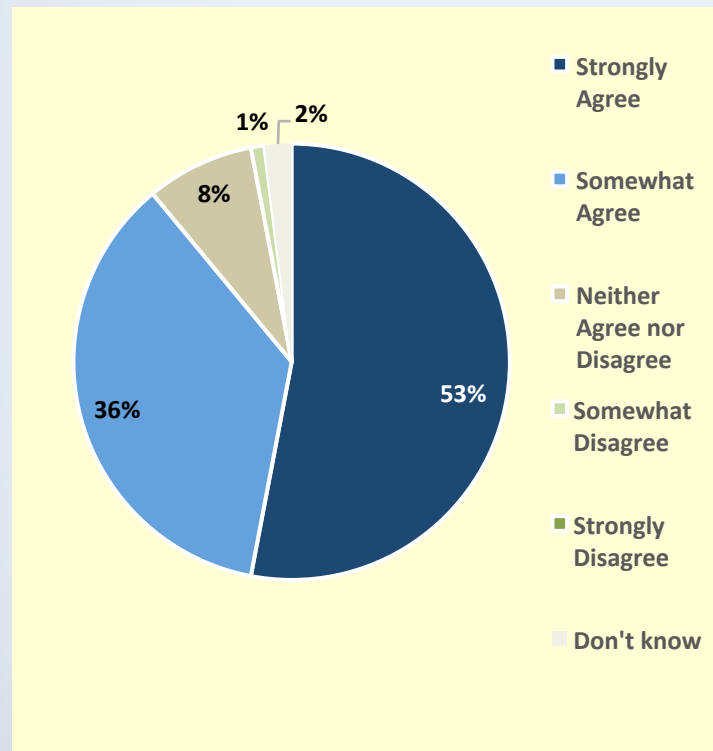
Some people think that certain policy issues should be managed at the state level rather than the local level for a variety of reasons (for example, efficiency or consistency across jurisdictions). Others think local home rule is more important. In each of the following broad policy areas, how do you **generally think authority should be divided** between the state and local levels of government?



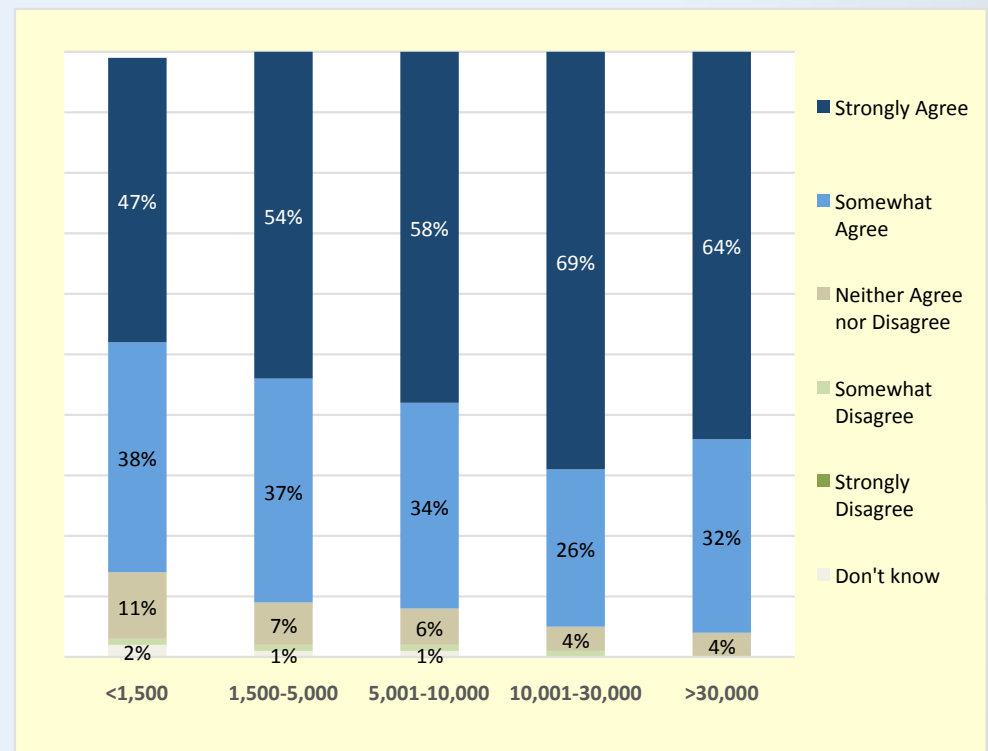
# Township officials think outreach is important

To what extent do you **agree or disagree** that **local officials** should **try to influence** state policy issues affecting local governments?

Overall:



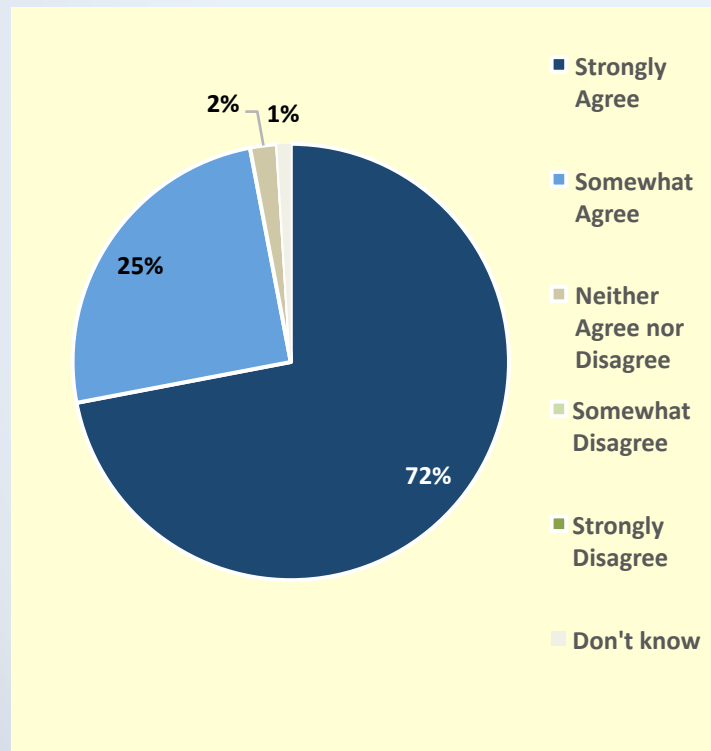
By Population Size:



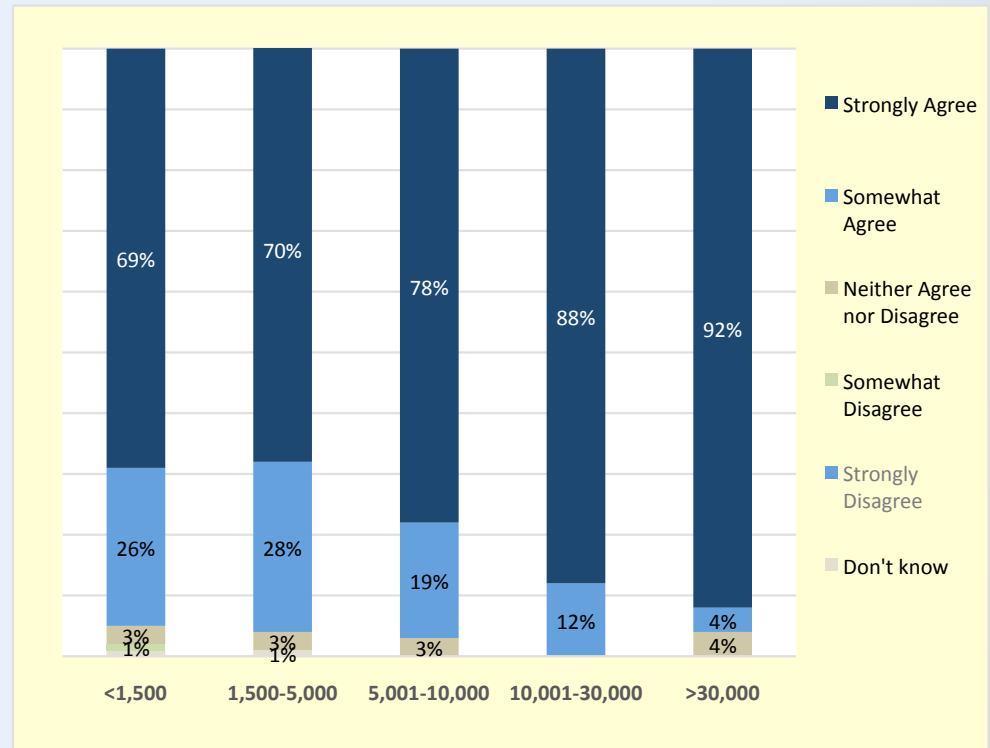
# Township officials think outreach is important

To what extent do you **agree or disagree** that **state officials** should frequently **reach out** to local officials to get feedback on pending policy changes ?

Overall:



By Population Size:

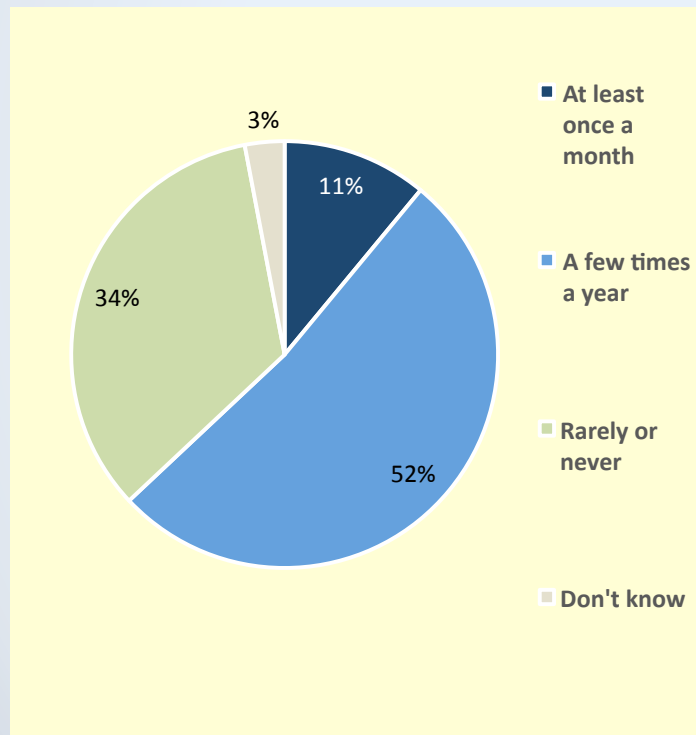




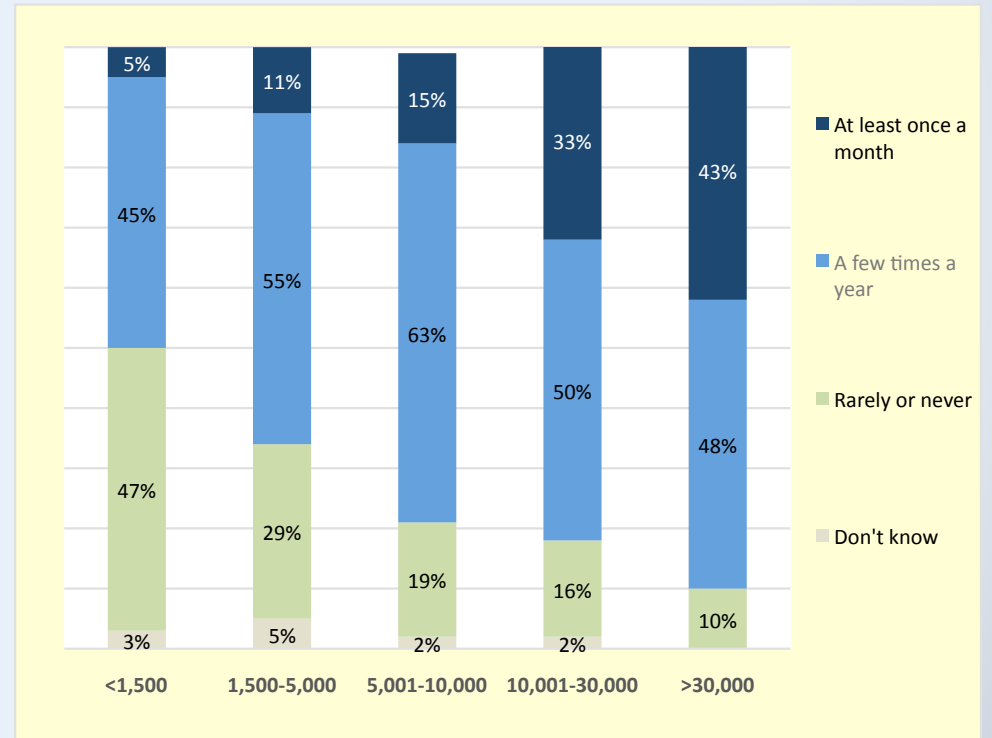
# Most townships reach out at least once a year

Thinking about communication between state and local officials **specifically regarding State actions affecting your township**, in a typical 12-month period, how often do **you** or a representative of your township **contact state officials**?

Overall:



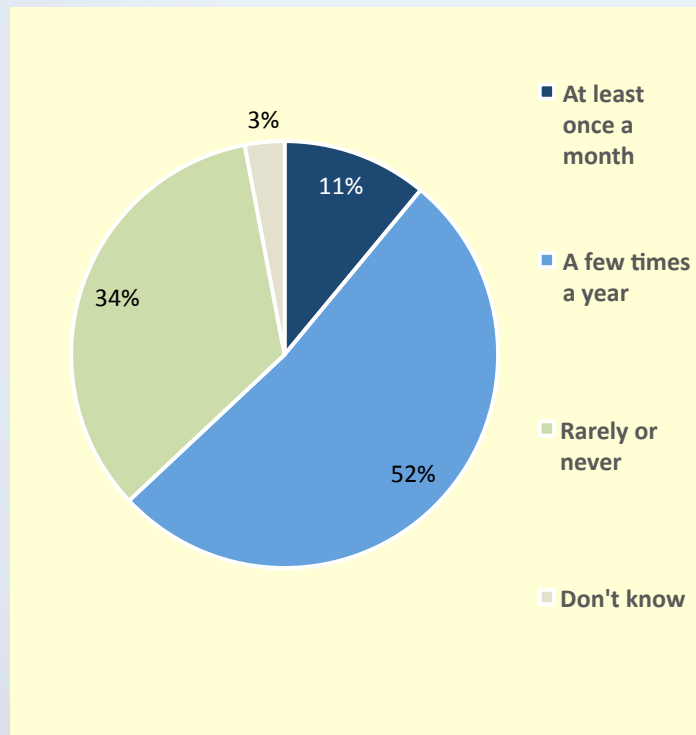
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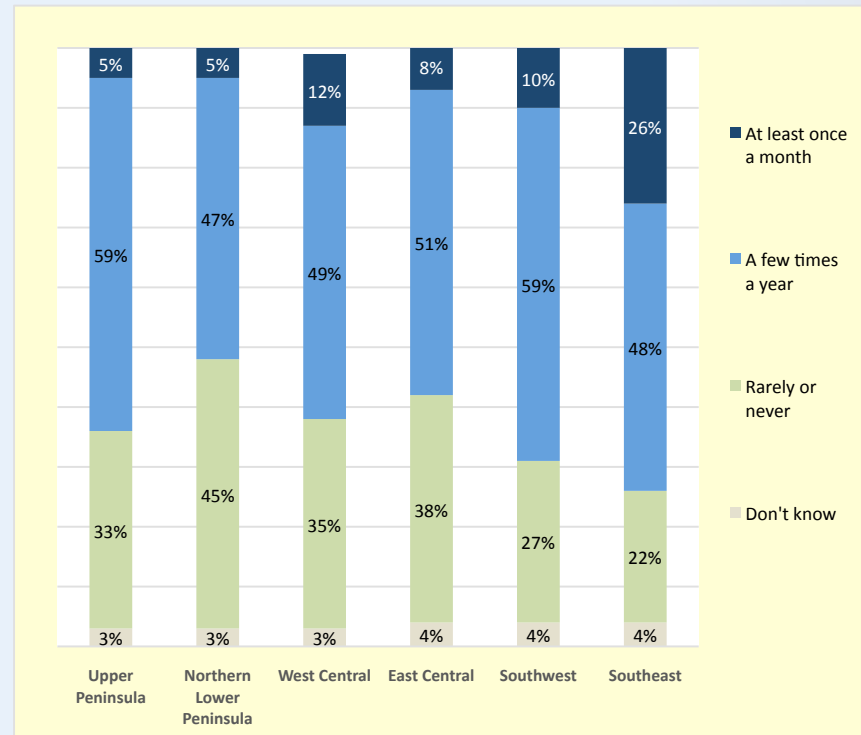
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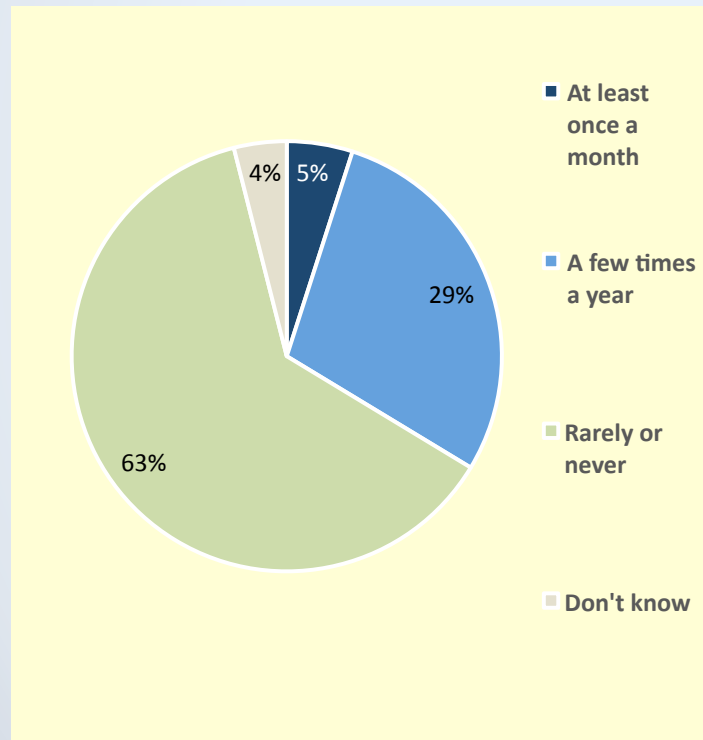
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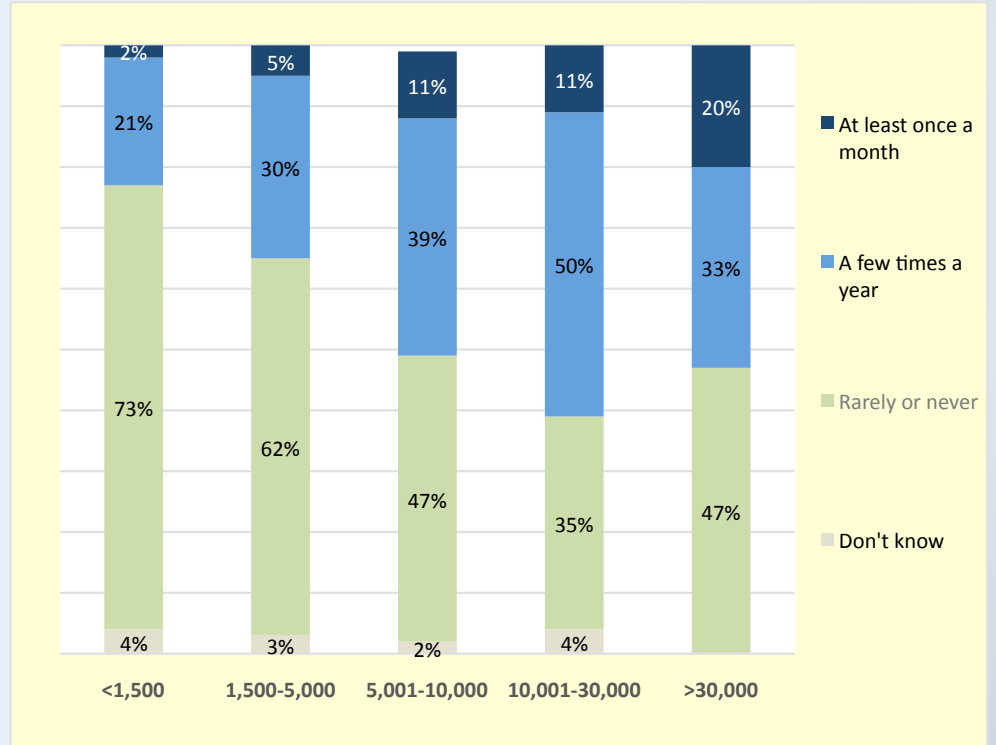
# But is the State doing enough?

Thinking about communication between state and local officials **specifically regarding State actions affecting your township**, in a typical 12-month period, how often does a **state official contact your township**?

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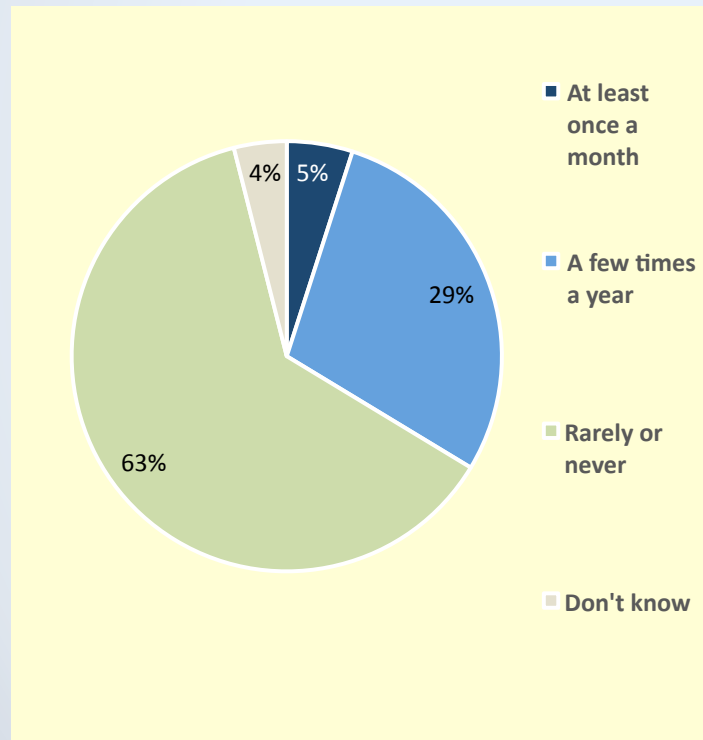
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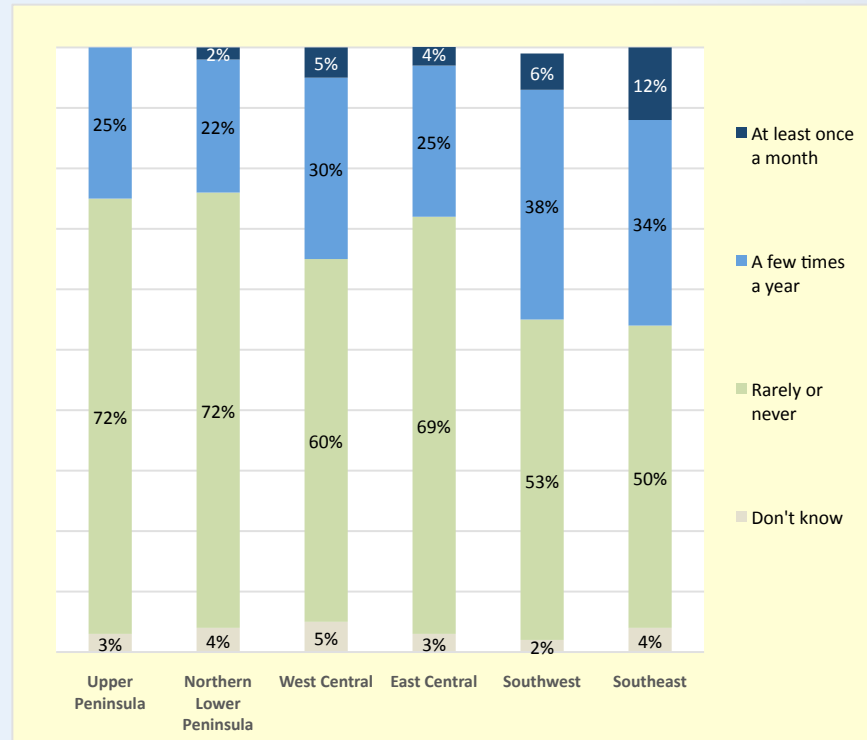
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Overall:



By Region:



# Local officials say communication is the key to improved state-local relations

What do you think **the State** could do to **improve** the relationship between the State and local governments?

*over 1,000 descriptive comments from more than 700 local leaders*

What do you think **local governments** could do to **improve** the relationship between the State and local governments?

*almost 800 comments from 645 local leaders*

# Local officials say communication is the key to improved state-local relations

**Suggestions for actions the State could take to improve state-local relations = 49% focus on communication**

- the State needs to listen to locals' problems and generally improve communication
- the State should get input from local governments before changing laws
- State officials should visit local jurisdictions and be more forthcoming with information

# Local officials say communication is the key to improved state-local relations

**Suggestions for what local governments themselves could do to improve relations = 64% communication**

- educate state officials on local needs
- contact state officials more consistently to open dialogue and engage them with more quality dialogue
- attend or set up meetings with state officials for a greater quantity of dialogue
- stay educated on current policy and state government efforts



# Township Officials' Views on State-Local Relations

## Summary

- Township officials' overall assessments of their governments' relationships with the state government are mixed, with 46% rating their overall relationship with the State government as excellent or good, but 47% saying it is only fair or poor.
- A majority of township leaders believe that:
  - the State is taking too much authority away from locals
  - the State holds locals to a higher standard than it holds itself
  - the State plays favorites, treating some local jurisdictions better than others
- 63% of township officials report that their jurisdictions contact the State on issues that affect their townships a few times each year or more, while only 34% say that the State communicates with their township about salient local issues each year.
- Most say communication is the most important way to improve state-local relations.



# The Michigan Public Policy Survey (MPPS)

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