

## Initial Findings on Michigan Communities of Interest from the Spring 2020 Michigan Public Policy Survey (MPPS) August 2020

This brief, quick-release white paper summarizes the views of Michigan’s local government leaders regarding their familiarity with the state’s new Independent Citizens Redistricting Commission as well as their perspectives on potential “Communities of Interest” in the areas surrounding their local jurisdictions. According to the language adopted in 2018 through the Proposal 2 Amendment to the Michigan Constitution, Communities of Interest (COIs) “...may include, but shall not be limited to, populations that share cultural or historical characteristics or economic interests. They do not include relationships with political parties, incumbents, or political candidates.” The findings below are based on statewide surveys of local government leaders in the Spring 2020 wave of the Michigan Public Policy Survey (MPPS).

A full MPPS report regarding these data will be released by the Center for Local, State and Urban Policy (CLOSUP) later this year or in early 2021. For more information, please contact: [closup-mpps@umich.edu](mailto:closup-mpps@umich.edu) or (734) 647-4091.

### Preliminary Key Findings

- **Familiarity with the Independent Citizens Redistricting Commission itself, even among local community leaders, is not high across the state.** Well over a third (41%) of local officials statewide say they are either somewhat unfamiliar (29%), completely unfamiliar (6%), or don’t know (6%) about the Commission, even when prompted with a description of 2018’s Proposal 2. By contrast, just under half (49%) are somewhat familiar—they “have heard of it, and understand it fairly well, but don’t know many details”—while 9% say they are very familiar and know a great deal about the Commission.
- **For many, reaction to the concept of COIs is uncertainty or skepticism.** Over 480 local leaders wrote in answers to the question regarding COIs in their areas. Of those written responses, nearly half (46%) indicated the local official believed either that there were no significant local COIs, that the question was not applicable to their jurisdiction, that they didn’t understand what the question was asking, or that COIs and/or the new redistricting process were not legitimate.
- **For those who did identify local COIs, they often reflect examples from the list provided earlier in this report.** Few identified *specific* groups of citizens or organizations that could be easily contacted by the ICRC and encouraged to participate in public hearings or to otherwise submit testimony to the Commission. Meanwhile, among the most commonly mentioned types of interests, 16% of local leaders described COIs based on economic communities as diverse as manufacturing, lumber, real estate, tourism, agriculture, and downtown development, among others. Many also mention shared public service areas such as fire fighting, policing, or other interlocal agreements. Another 10% specifically describe rural or urban identities that they believe

are shared in their area. In addition, around 6% mention geographic features (particularly linked coastal communities) or shared outdoor recreational areas as local COIs.

- **When asked about COIs, local officials often defend current municipal or jurisdictional boundaries, or identify affinity groups among neighboring jurisdictions.** Among the open end responses on COIs, 14% of local leaders specifically asked to preserve current township, city, or county boundary lines, or to redraw lines that currently split the township or city, so that they can instead be together within a single district. Also, in thinking about COIs, local leaders are clearly thinking about ties among their neighboring units of government.

## Methodological Note

The MPPS 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.

In the Spring 2020 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, 280 cities, 253 villages, and 1,240 townships in the state of Michigan.

The Spring 2020 wave was conducted from March 30 – June 1, 2020. A total of 1,342 jurisdictions in the Spring 2020 wave returned valid surveys (59 counties, 216 cities, 163 villages, and 904 townships), resulting in a 72% response rate by unit. For the open-end question regarding Communities of Interest, a total of 487 local government officials provided responses.

*The survey responses presented here are the opinions 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.*