

CLOSUP Student Working Paper Series
Number 77

April 2022

**Changes in gender demographics in
Michigan local governments**
Michigan Public Policy Survey 2009-2021

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This paper is available online at <http://closup.umich.edu>

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Changes in gender demographics in Michigan local governments

Michigan Public Policy Survey 2009-2021

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1. Introduction

The Michigan Public Policy Survey (MPPS) is an ongoing research program that surveys the top elected and appointed officials in every local government jurisdiction in Michigan. This report aims at understanding how the gender demographics of these officials have changed since the survey first started in 2009. This project would analyze patterns and trends for gender, tenure, education, etc. among MPPS respondents.

In this report, information is based on the responses to a series of surveys sent to all counties, cities, townships and villages in Michigan from 2009 to 2021. In the US, women are underrepresented in the majority of elected and appointed posts in municipal government. This paper summarizes what we know about women's representation in cities and counties, as well as the attributes of women's higher or lower representation.

About Michigan Public Policy Survey

Launched in the wake of the Great Recession in 2009, the Michigan Public Policy Survey (MPPS) is the nation's first ongoing survey of local leaders from all general purpose jurisdictions across an entire state. In Michigan, this comprises the leaders of 1,856 counties, cities, townships, and villages. Each wave, surveys are sent by the University of Michigan's 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) and, on average, the MPPS waves receive a 70%+ response rate by unit.

The program fills an important information gap in the policymaking process. While we knew the policy priorities and views of the state's businesses and citizens from other surveys, before the MPPS we knew very little about the views of the local officials statewide who are so important to the economies and community life throughout Michigan.

Covering a wide variety of today's most important issues, the biannual surveys provide long-term tracking of core fiscal, budgetary, and operational policy over time—as well as covering new issues on each survey wave, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, infrastructure, trust in government, police-community relations, economic development strategies, local government union issues, workforce development, intergovernmental collaboration, energy and environment, and more. The MPPS is conducted in

partnership with the Michigan Association of Counties, Michigan Municipal League, and Michigan Townships Association.

2. Literature review

"The under-representation of women at every level of governance and decision-making leads in a democratic deficit," according to a report published by the International Knowledge Network of Women in Politics (iKNOW Politics). This is especially true when it comes to a difficult duty like representing citizens' interests at the municipal level.¹

Women are still underrepresented as public-sector organizational leaders, despite comprising half of the United States public-sector workforce. The chief administrative officers who run cities and counties remain overwhelmingly male, despite the many affinity groups, leadership trainings, and opinion pieces seeking to diversify local government management.²

According to the last report from Civic Pulse, between 2013 and 2022, the ratio of women in leadership positions has consistently increased, rising from 22% to 29%. "At that rate of development, we will not achieve gender parity among local government officials until 2048," the researchers note.³ Data shows that only 29 percent — or fewer than one in three — of the 9,505 local governments with 1,000 or more citizens and a top appointed official in the United States are women as of this year.

In 2016, women made up 20 percent of mayors of cities with a population over 30,000 and 19 percent of the 100 largest cities in the United States. Figure 1 provides the available data on the share of women as mayors of the larger cities in the United States over time.

¹ The International Knowledge Network of Women in Politics (iKNOW Politics), "Women's Participation in Local Government", 2018, <https://www.idea.int/news-media/news/local-governments-and-gender-quotas-can-improve-womens-political-participation>

² Data on ICMA Women in the Profession, <https://icma.org/data-icma-women-members-profession>

³ Civic Pulse, "2022 Local Government Leadership Gender Gap Report", <https://www.civicpulse.org/gender-gap-localgov-leadership>

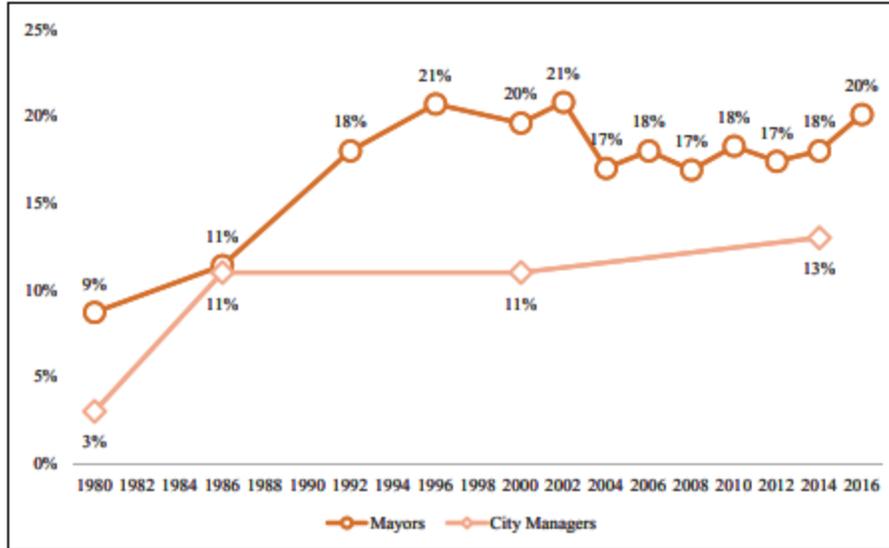


Figure 1. Percentage of cities with a woman mayor and city manager, by year. Note: *Mayors*: Percentage of women mayors of cities with 30,000+ population. Source: Center for American Women in Politics (various years), U.S. Conference of Mayors, Marschall (2014), and Flammang (1985). *City managers*: percentage of women city managers. Source: Szymborski (1996), Fox and Schuhmann (2001), and ICMA (2014).

As shown in the graph, the number of women mayors increased in the early 1990s before plateauing over the last quarter-century. Women's representation at the state and national levels is consistent with both growth and stagnation patterns.

According to data from the Rutgers Center for American Women and Politics and the United States Census, 21.3 percent, or 76 of the 356 mayors of U.S. cities with populations of 100,000 or more were women as of June 2020. 23.3 percent, or 378 of the 1,621 mayors of cities with populations of 30,000 or more in the United States were women. Women are underrepresented in municipal political office, contradicting commonly held notions that women are more likely to occupy office locally than at the state or federal levels.⁴

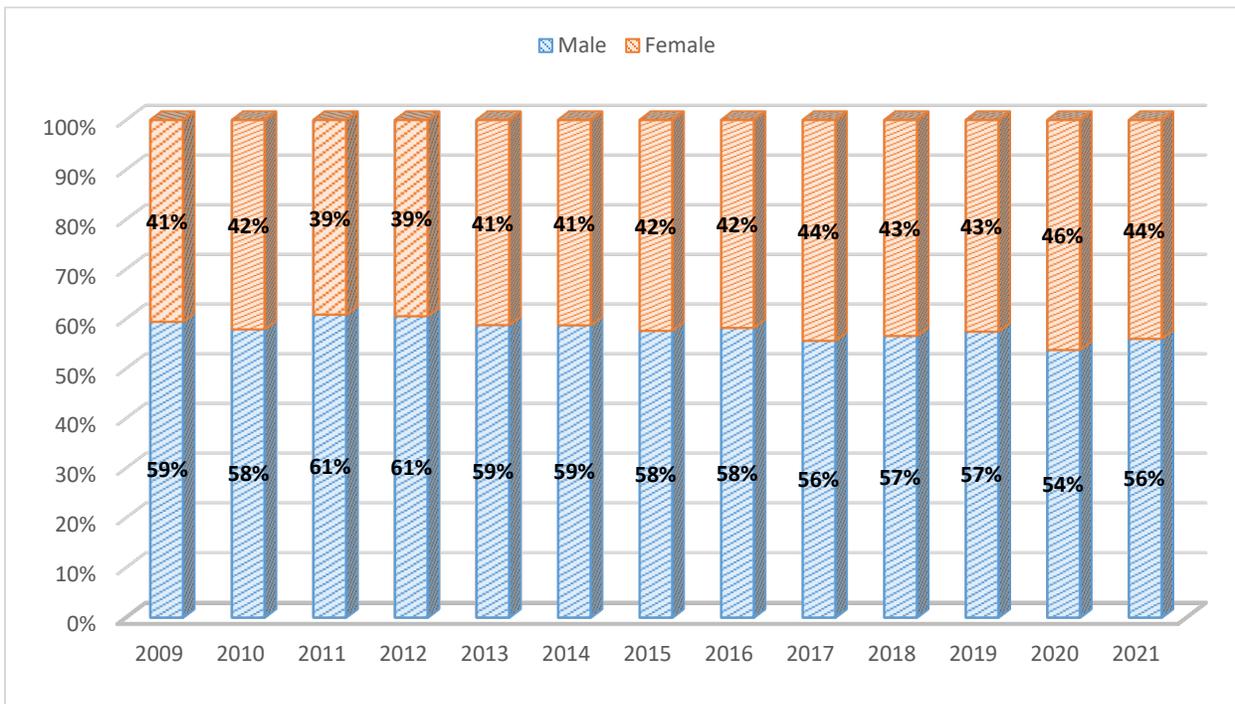
The Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers, the first university-based center to focus on women's participation in American politics on a national scale, found that the percentage of women serving in municipal office nearly matches that of women serving in state government and the House of Representatives, according to census-level data. Women currently hold 30.5 percent of municipal seats, compared to 30.9 percent of state legislature seats.

⁴ Center for Americans Women and Politics, "2021 Women in Municipal Office", <https://cawp.rutgers.edu/facts/levels-office/local/2021-women-municipal-office>

3. Michigan local government gender dynamics over time

Since the first survey in 2009, each wave the MPPS has asked respondents in its demographics battery to indicate whether they consider themselves male or female. As captured by the MPPS survey, gender dynamics in Michigan local government units indicate that women’s representation throughout the last decade has been steady with a moderate representation. Graph 1 shows the changes in the percentages of men and women in leadership positions in local governance. Women represent around 39-46% of all Michigan local government officials surveyed, including counties, townships, cities and villages.

Graph 1. Men and Women in Michigan local government leadership positions



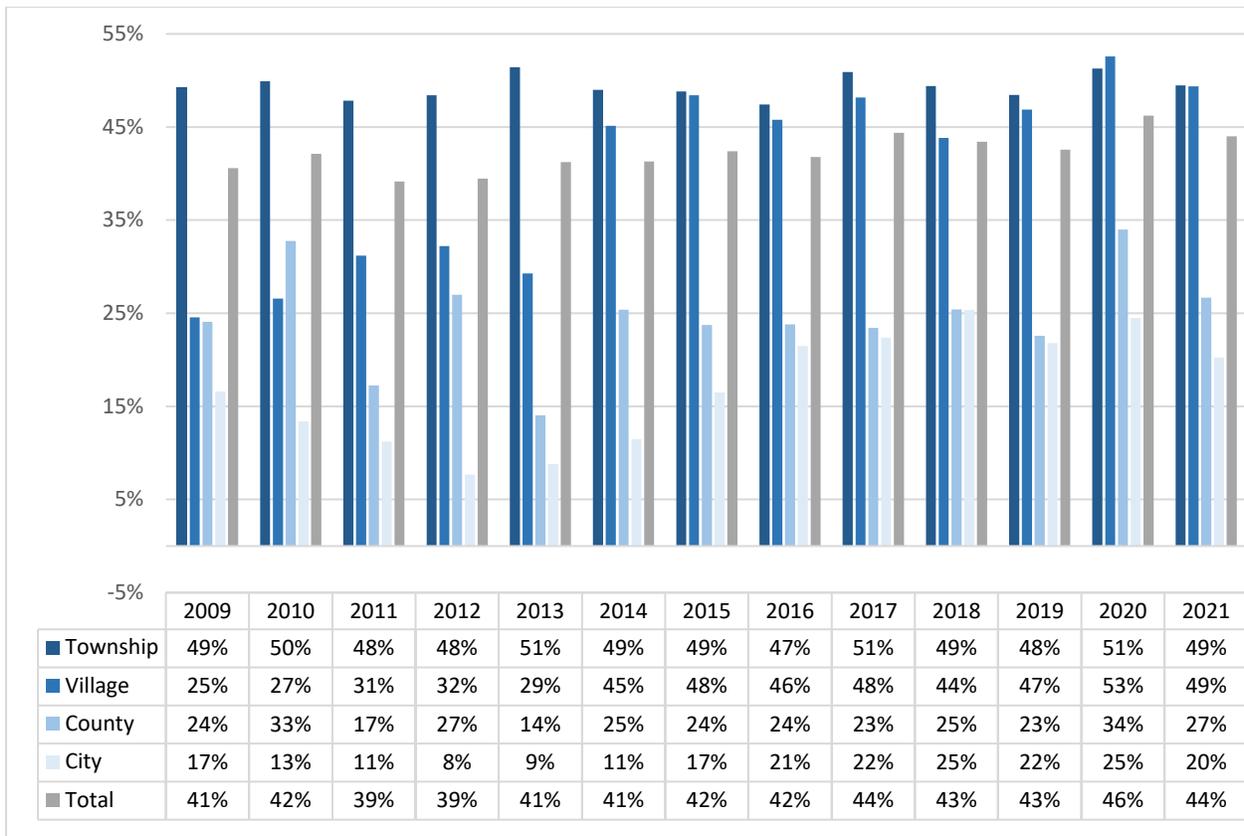
Data shows that men predominate in local government units’ leadership positions over time. Women’s representation has been the lowest in 2010 and 2011 (39%) and since then it has steadily increased by four percentage points, to represent 44% of the all local government leadership positions surveyed by the MPPS in 2021.

4. Women in leadership position

As shown in Graph 3, the major representation of women among Michigan’s local leaders are in townships, where the ratio between women’s and men’s representation is mostly equal. Interestingly, since 2014 there can be observed an increase of women serving as officials in villages, from 25% in 2009 to almost equal level as men, 49%, in 2021.

Meanwhile, in the case of counties and cities, women represent less than 30% of the top elected and appointed positions. Over the decade surveyed, the percentage of women who serve as city managers in Michigan has been below the national average. In 2021, only approximately 20% of Michigan’s city managers were women, a ratio considerably lower than the US national average (31.36%).⁵ Similarly, only approximately 27% of county managers were women in 2021.

Graph 2. Women in leadership positions in Local Government structures

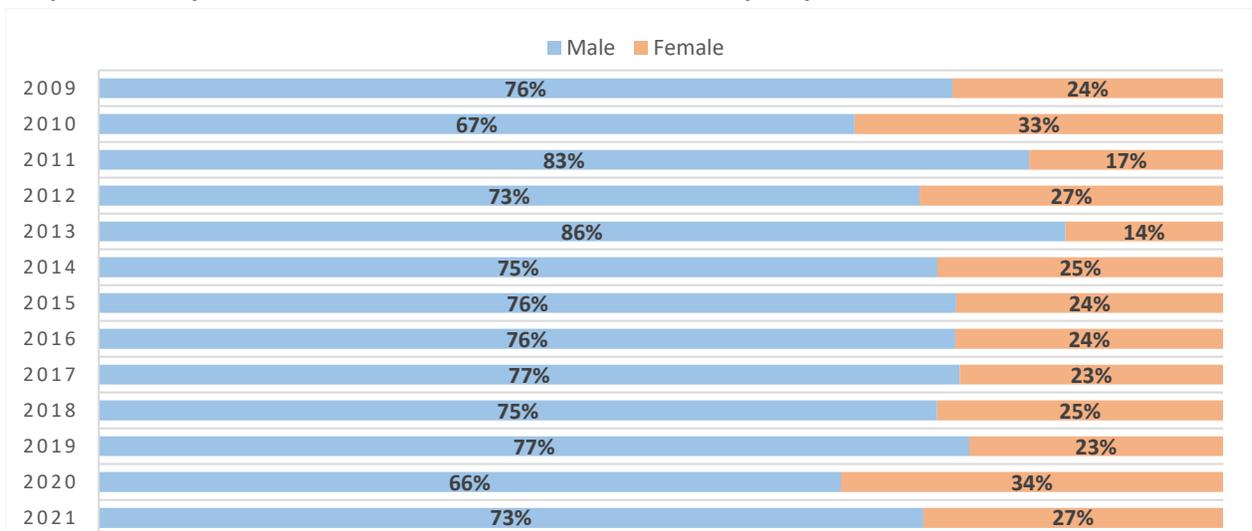


⁵ Zippia, The career expert, City Manager Demographics and Statistics in the US, <https://www.zippia.com/city-manager-jobs/demographics/>

a. County Board Chairs and Administrators

Among all county Board Chairs and Administrators in Michigan, less than one third responding to the MPPS are women. Throughout the years, women’s representation in county leadership positions has changed considerably. The evident gender disparity in the last decade in Michigan local government is amplified on certain years. In 2011 and 2013 women stood at the lowest level of representation, respectively 17% and 13%. Higher levels of female representation are seen in county posts from 2013 onwards. In 2021, women county mayors make up only 27% of all city mayors in Michigan (graph 4).

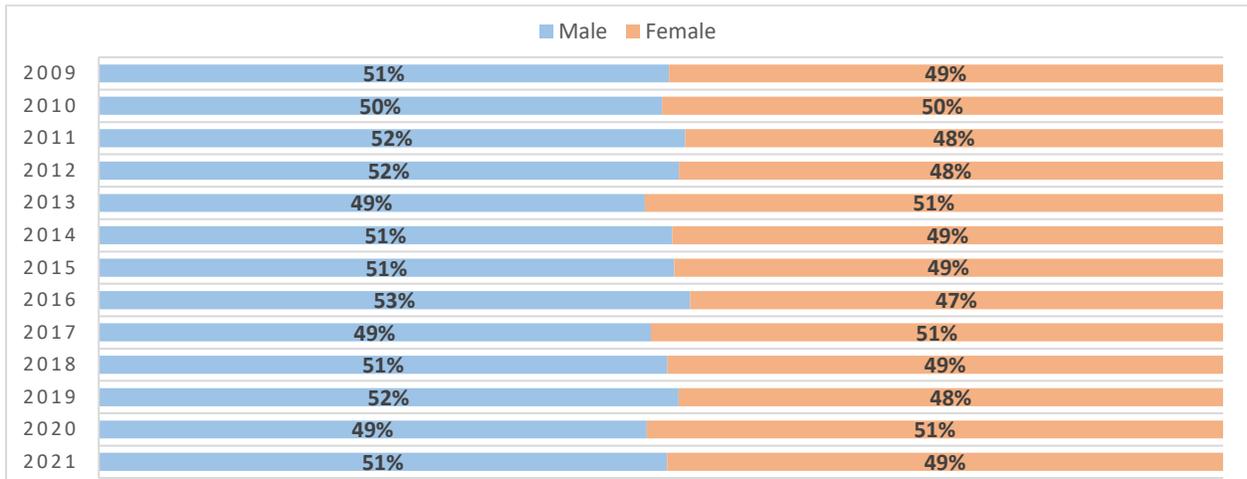
Graph 3. County Board Chairs and Administrators Gender Disparity



b. Township Supervisors and Clerks

When looking at township supervisors and clerks in Michigan (graph 5), it can be observed that nearly half of them are women, representing a gender balance in these leadership positions. In 2021, 49% of township supervisors and clerks responding to the MPPS were women compared to 51% men. This data shows how men’s and women’s representation in township supervisor and clerk positions is quite stable over the last years.

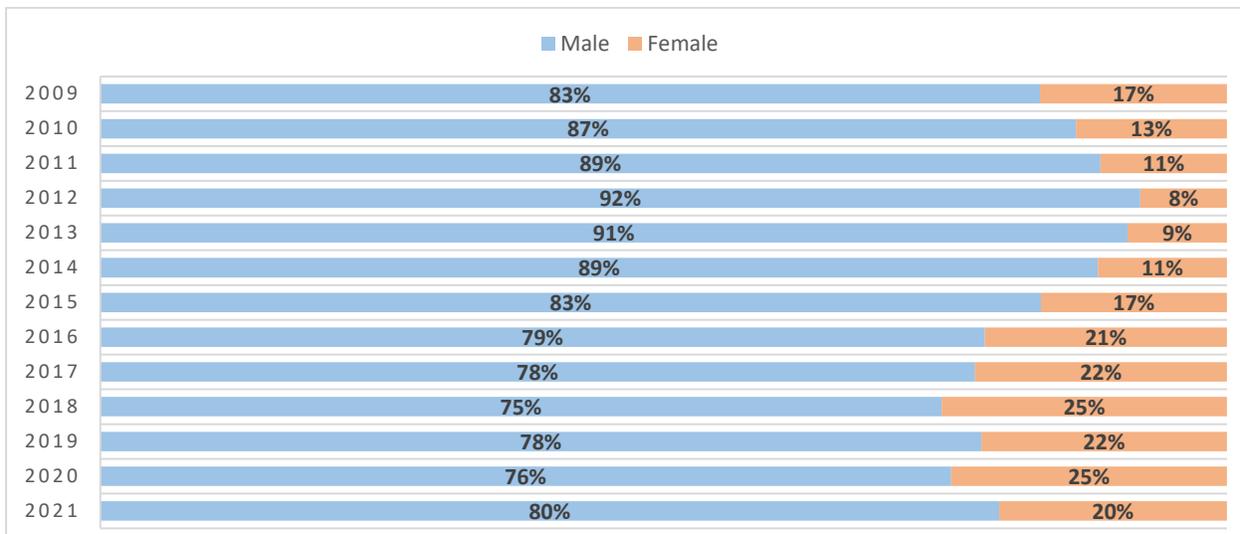
Graph 4. Township supervisors and clerks Gender Disparity



c. Mayors and City Managers

Women are 51% of the population in the U.S., but as of 2021 make up only 31% of the largest cities' mayors and 25% of mayors in cities with populations over 30,000.⁶ In Michigan, the gender disparity is even higher with women representing less than one fourth (25%) of mayors or city managers throughout the years of the survey. Nevertheless, since 2012, women's representation as mayors or city managers has steadily been increasing (graph 6). In 2021, women represented 20% of city leadership positions, a lower ratio compared with 2020 (25%).

Graph 5. Mayors and City Managers Gender Disparity

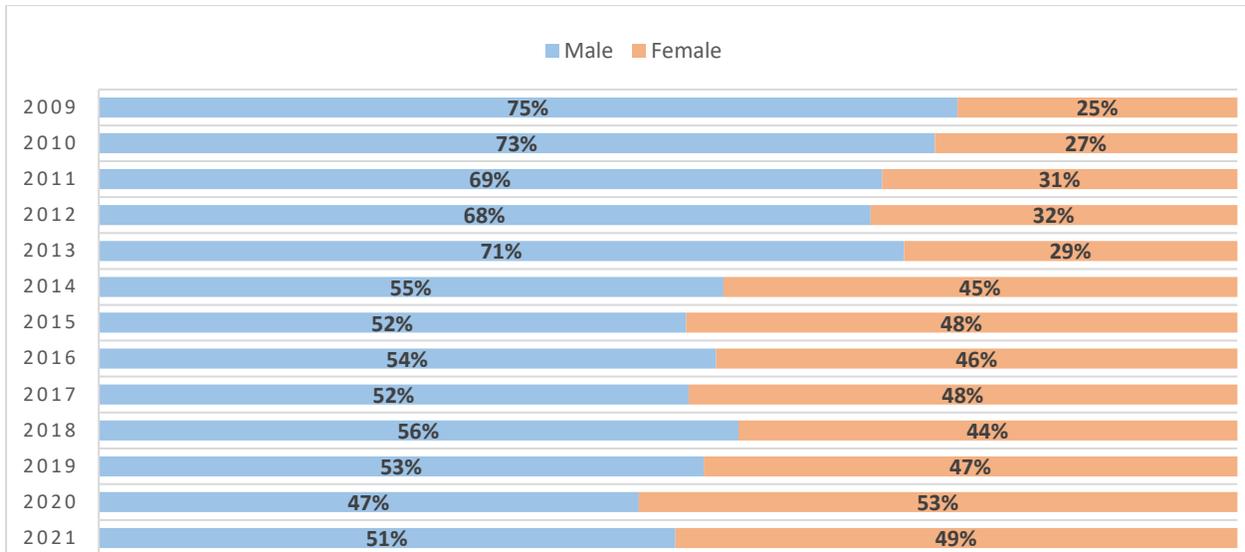


⁶ Center for American Women in Politics at Rutgers University, US Overview, 2021, https://www.representwomen.org/current-women-representation#us_overview

d. Village Officials

In 2009, women represented only 25% of village positions: president, manager, or clerk. Since then, their representation has gradually increased, representing almost half (45-53%) of village positions from 2014 onwards (graph 7).

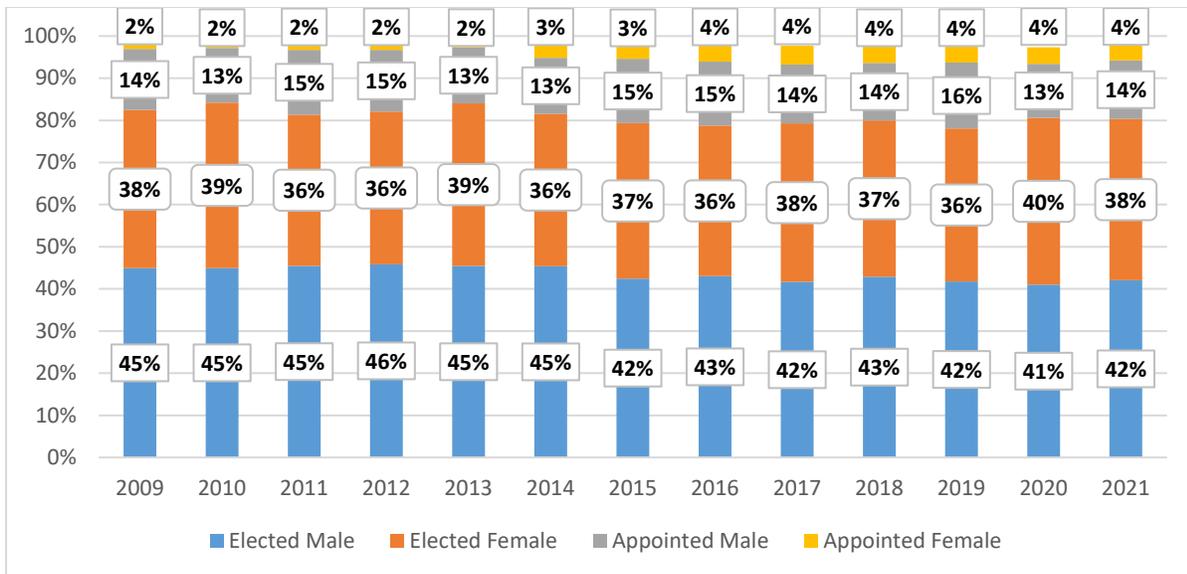
Graph 6. Village Heads Gender Disparity



5. Appointed vs. Elected Officials

The composition of MPPS respondents as of 2021: 18% of them were top appointed officials and 82% were elected officials. By comparison, 14% of all appointed respondents were men and 4% women. Women now hold a higher percentage of senior appointed local government leadership positions in Michigan than they did a few years ago. Whereas, the situation looks more balanced in the case of elected officials, with 42% of all respondent being men and 38% women (graph 8).

Graph 7. Elected vs. appointed officials Gender Disparity



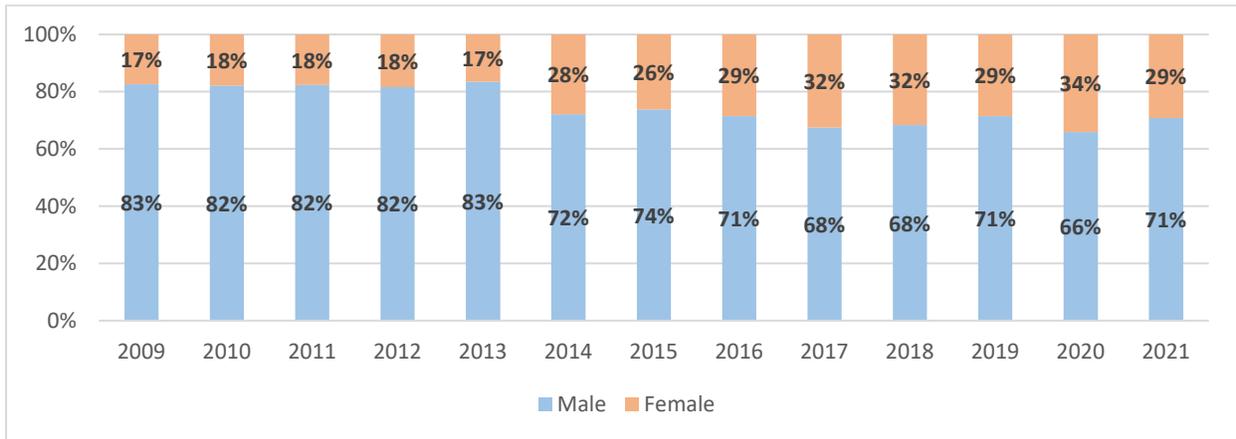
a. Appointed Officials

In local administrations, women are underrepresented in significant appointed positions, with little signs of improvement over the last three decades. In 1981, women composed 3% of municipal administrators; by 1986, they accounted for 11% of city managers. However, in 1999, the percentage was remained 11%, and by 2014, it had only climbed to 13%. CAOs (chief administrative officers) follow a similar pattern: While the percentage of women in this job has climbed considerably from 1.3 percent in 1974 to 14.4 percent in 2012–2013, it is still far from equal.⁷

Fewer than one out of three (29%) local government’s top-appointed officials in the US are women. As per MPPS survey data, women’s representation as appointed officials has slowly increased in the last decade (graph 9). Women composed 17-18% of all appointed leadership positions in Michigan (2009-2013) and after 2014 their involvement as appointed officials increased to 28-34% participation rate.

⁷ Mirya R. Holman, “Women in Local Government”, 2017, https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/48571775.pdf?casa_token=GlzXbuY8zzYAAAAA:6U9PphOyhLTEp9B8ibcWP6awgZodtej0Wts2_cJAAqi3kOq3FoBryc17OeEqdT7anXYOZI49dz7xbVNWpDHRht-3MhLZALgVYFnFyrCaAP9BfEVpZH8

Graph 8. Statewide Appointed officials Gender Disparity

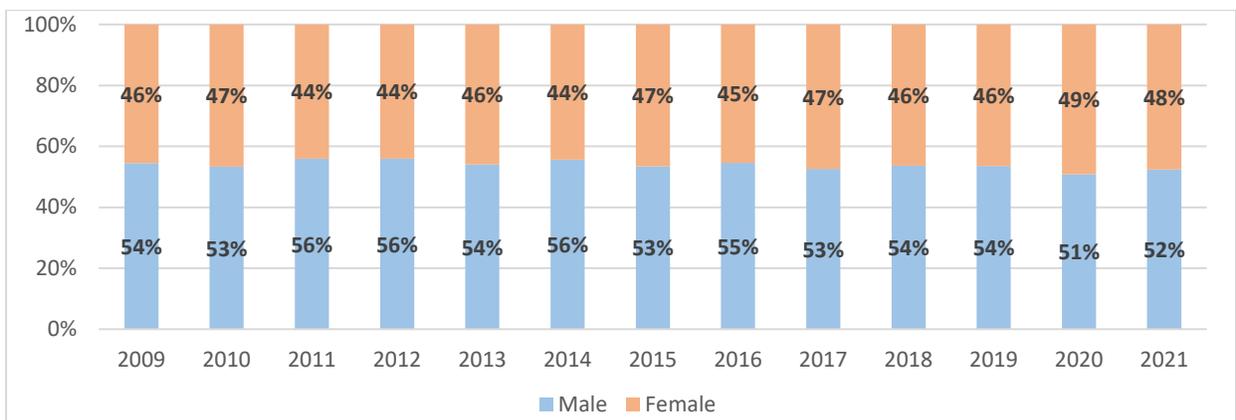


b. Elected Officials

In addition to state and federal elected office, women are underrepresented in municipal elected office. On a national level, women hold 30.5 percent of municipal offices, including mayoral offices, city councils and other similar bodies in 2021.⁸ Women’s representation for elected officials is, at best, only marginally better at the local level than at the state or federal level.⁹

Nevertheless, according to the MPPS respondents, women hold almost half of the local elected leadership positions in Michigan in the last decade (graph 10). In 2021, women elected officials make up 48% of all local elected positions.

Graph 9. Elected Officials Gender Disparity



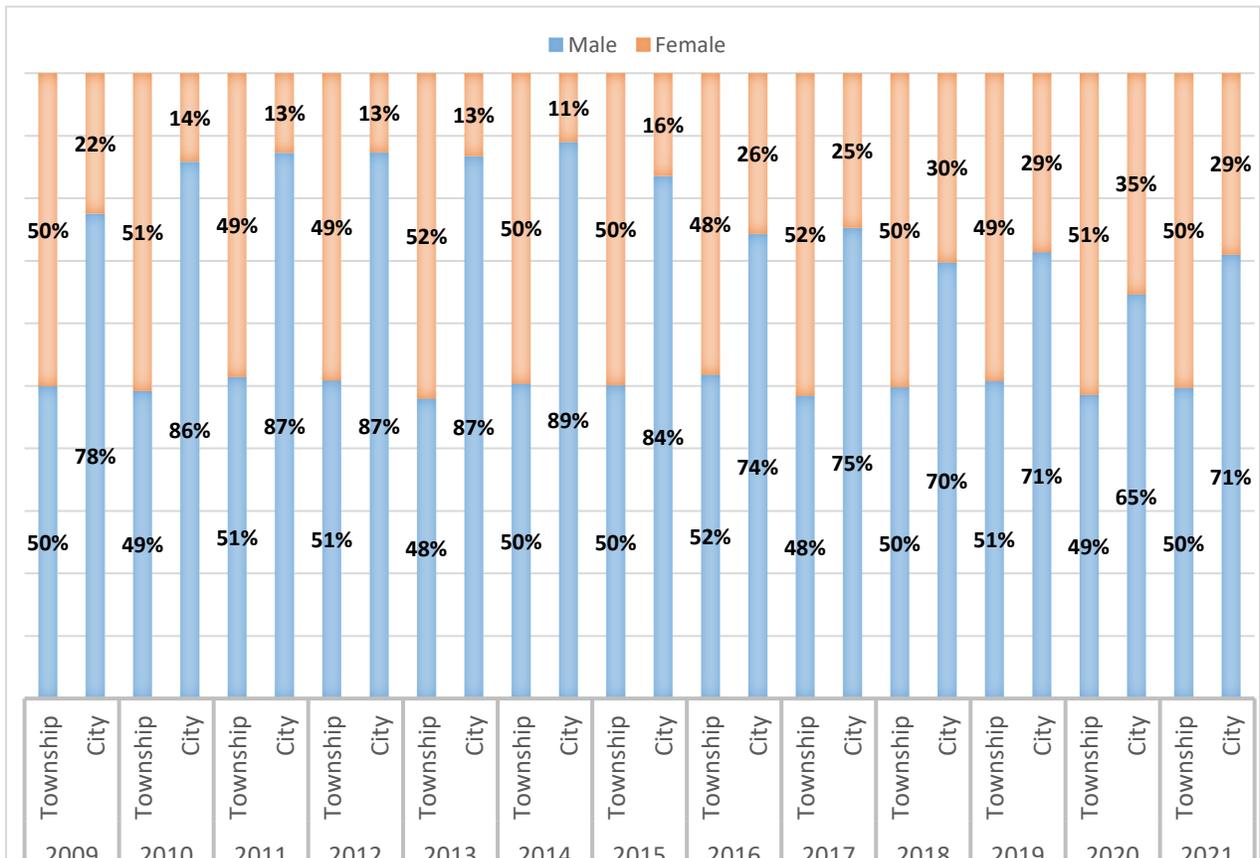
⁸ Center for American Women and Politics, 2021, 2021 Women in Municipal Office

⁹ Alejandra Aldridge and Nathan Lee entitled, “Where Do Women Serve? A Comprehensive Analysis of the Gender Gap in U.S. Government.”, <https://ippsr.msu.edu/public-policy/michigan-wonk-blog/2020-and-fight-womens-representation-politics>

c. Elected Officials in townships vs. cities

When comparing the representation of women and men as elected officials in townships and cities, we can clearly observe that women’s participation is higher at the township level in Michigan. As shown in graph 11, women hold approximately half of township elected positions. In the case of city level women represent less than one third and in some years even less than one fourth of the elected officials (11-13% from 2010 to 2015).

Graph 10. Gender Disparity among elected officials in townships vs cities

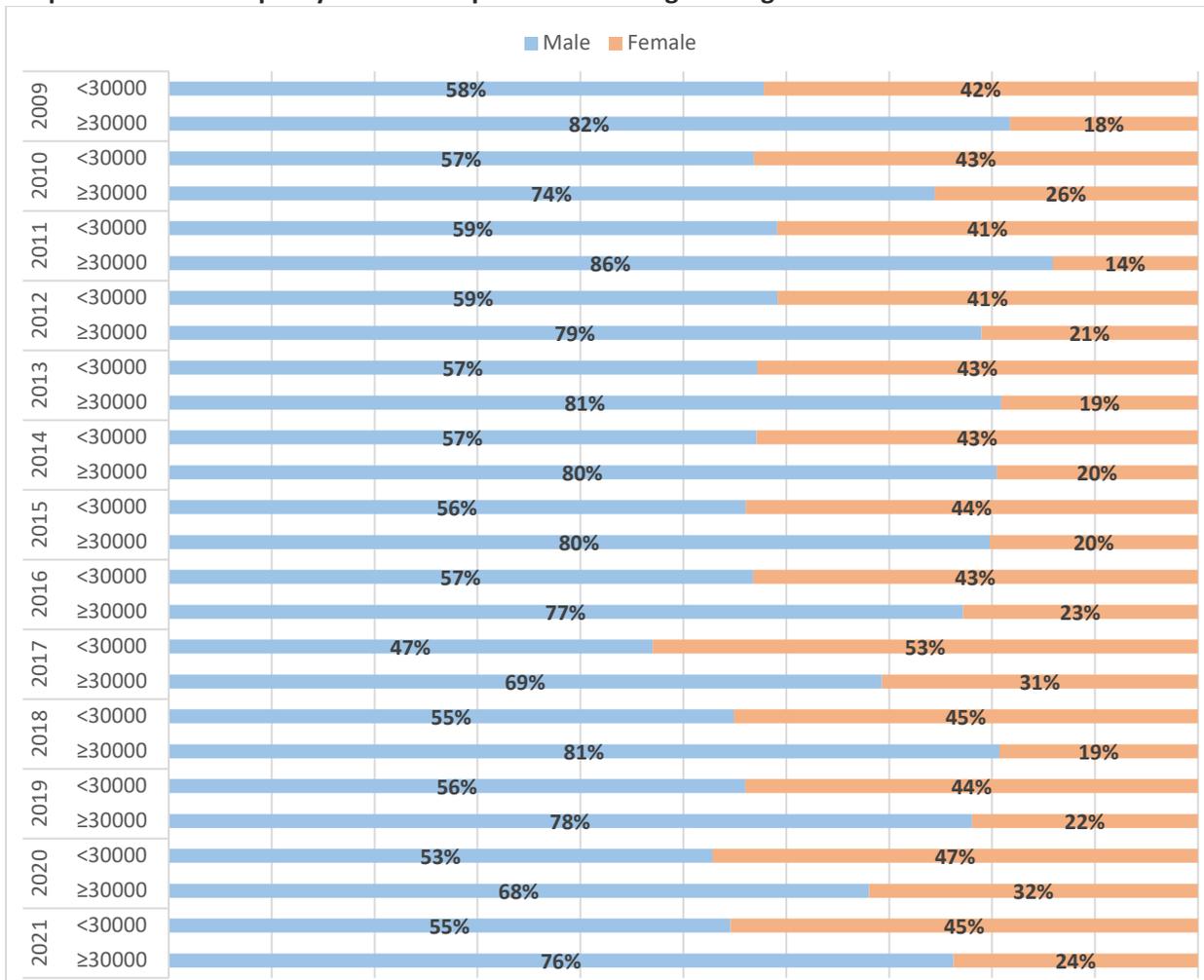


6. Leadership per small vs. large local government units

Women currently make up 20% of mayors in cities with populations of over 30,000 people and 19% of the top 100 cities in the United States.¹⁰ Local governments with smaller populations are more likely to have women leaders.¹¹

According to MPPS respondents, the situation is presented similarly in Michigan. As shown in graph 12, women’s leadership is considerably higher in the case of small local government units (41-53%) compared with large local units with more than 30000 residents (14-31%).¹²

Graph 11. Gender Disparity in leadership for small vs large local government units



¹⁰ The United Conference of Mayors, <https://www.usmayors.org/mayors/meet-the-mayors/>

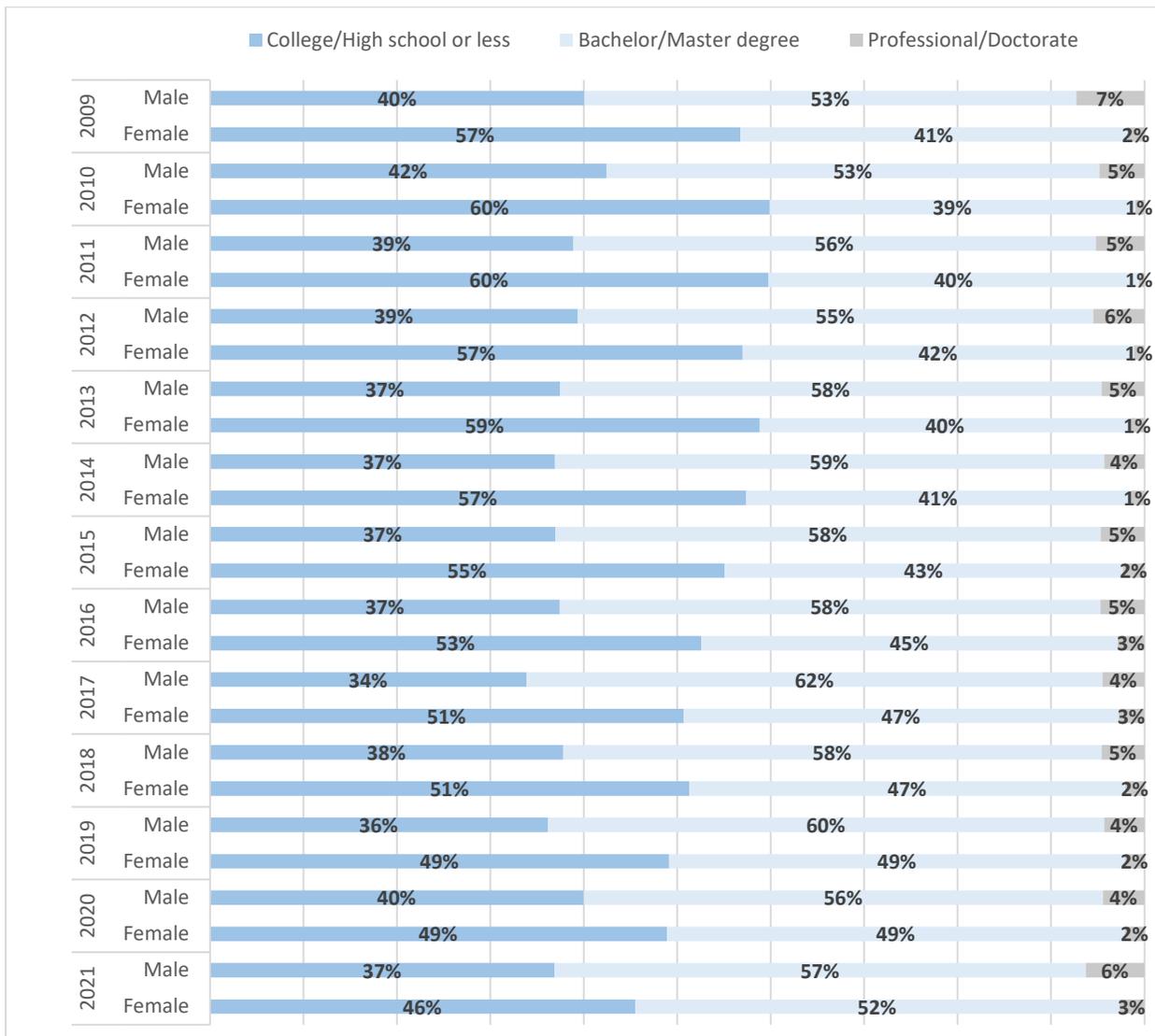
¹¹ Civic Pulse, “2022 Local Government Leadership Gender Gap Report”, <https://www.civicpulse.org/gender-gap-localgov-leadership>

¹² For more detailed information refer to Appendix B

7. Education Background

Based on MPPS survey, men in local government leadership' power position seem to have more education than women, although both genders' education level has gradually increased throughout the years (graph 13). In 2021, 57% of men leaders report to have a bachelor or master degree and 6% obtained a doctorate degree, whereas 53% of women state having a bachelor or master degree and only 3% hold a doctorate degree.¹³

Graph 12. Educational Background of Top Local Officials

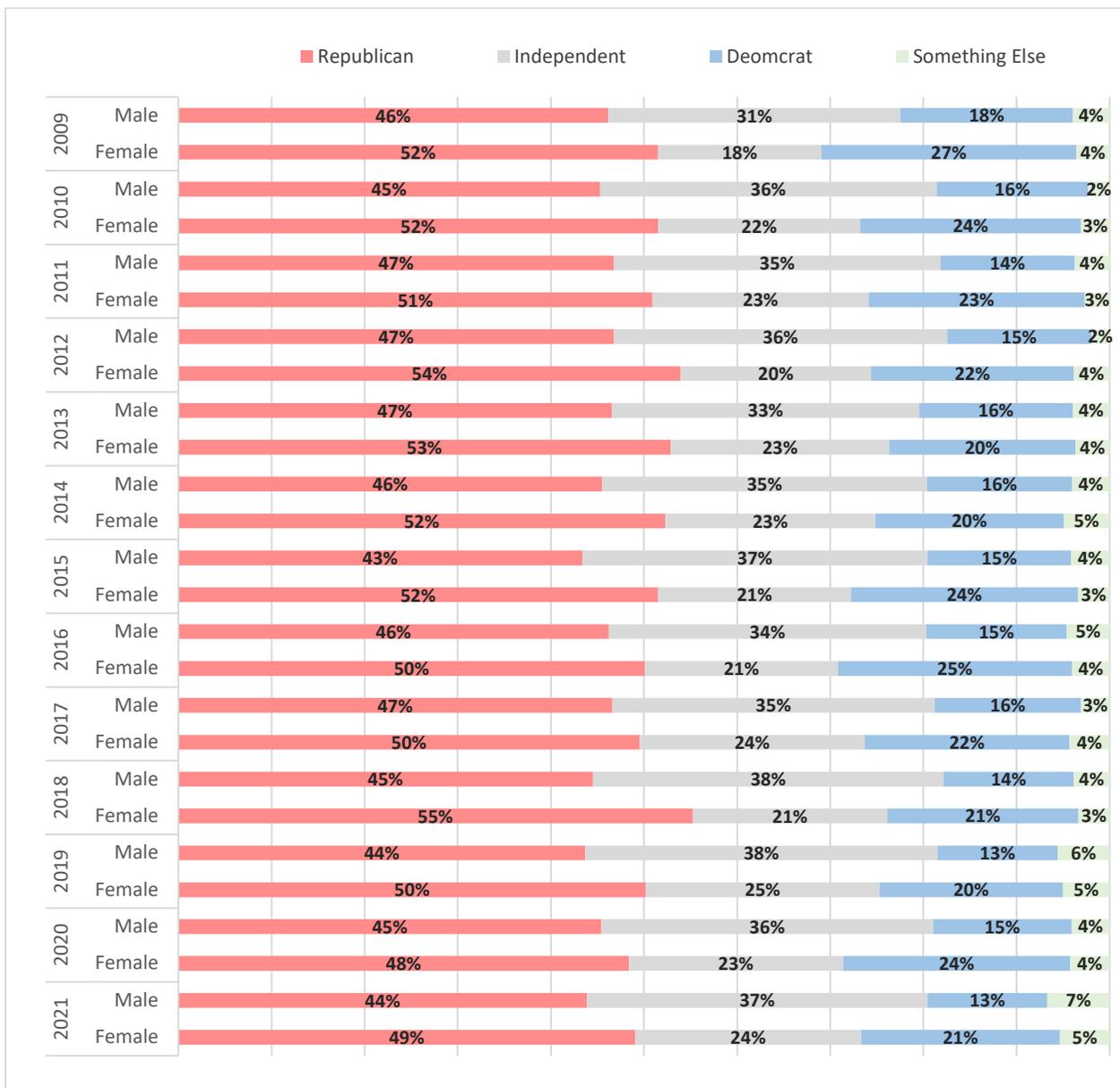


¹³ For more detailed information about the education background, please refer to Appendix C.

8. Political Affiliation

With regards to the political affiliation of MPPS respondents, it is observed that women on top local government position who identify themselves as Republicans or Democrats are higher than men. Differently from their male counterparts, it can be seen that women running independently are considerably fewer.

Graph 13. Political Affiliation of Top Local Officials



9. Conclusions

- Gender trends in Michigan local government units, as documented by the MPPS survey, show that women's representation was at its lowest point in 2010 and 2011 (39%) and has progressively climbed since then, accounting for 44 percent of all local government leadership positions in 2021, which includes counties, townships, cities, and villages.
- The majority of women officials work as supervisors or clerks of the townships, where women and men are almost equal in representation.
- Surprisingly, since 2014, there has been a rise in the number of women serving as village officials, rising from 25% in 2009 to nearly equaling men at 49% in 2021.
- Counties and cities, on the other hand, have a contrasting picture, with women accounting less than one third of all leadership posts. Only 20% of Michigan's mayors or city managers and only 27% of county Board Chairs or administrators were women in 2021.
- Women are also underrepresented in key appointed positions in local government, with considerable change over the years. Women held 17-18% of all appointed leadership roles in Michigan from 2009 to 2013, and their participation as appointed officials climbed to 28-34 percent after 2014.
- Women have held about half of the local elected leadership positions in Michigan in the last decade, 48% in 2021.
- Women have a greater representation rate as elected officials at the township level, hold roughly half of township elected offices, whereas women represent less than a third or even a fourth of elected officials at the city level.
- Women's leadership is significantly higher in small local government units (41-53%) than in large ones (14-31 percent).
- Paradoxically, men in local government power positions appear to have more education than women. In 2021, 63% of men versus 56% of women claim to have a bachelor, master or doctorate degree.
- When it comes to political affiliations, women in top local government positions are more likely than men to identify as Republican or Democrat; there are far fewer women who identify as Independent.

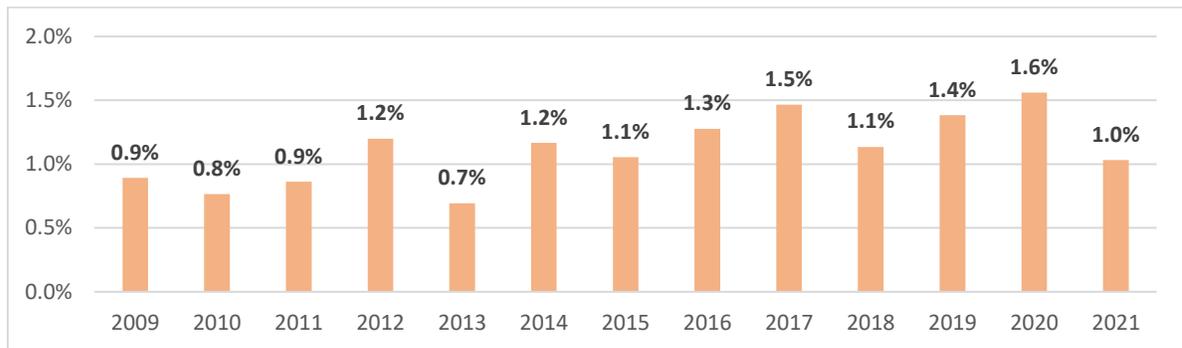
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- ¹ The International Knowledge Network of Women in Politics (iKNOW Politics), "Women's Participation in Local Government", 2018, <https://www.idea.int/news-media/news/local-governments-and-gender-quotas-can-improve-womens-political-participation>
- ² Data on ICMA Women in the Profession , <https://icma.org/data-icma-women-members-profession>
- ³ Civic Pulse, "2022 Local Government Leadership Gender Gap Report", <https://www.civicpulse.org/gender-gap-localgov-leadership>
- ⁴ Ceter for Americans Women and Politics, "2021 Women in Municipal Office", <https://cawp.rutgers.edu/facts/levels-office/local/2021-women-municipal-office>
- ⁵ Zippia, The career expert, City Manager Demographics and Statistics in the US, <https://www.zippia.com/city-manager-jobs/demographics/>
- ⁶ Center for American Women in Politics at Rutgers University, US Overview, 2021, https://www.representwomen.org/current-women-representation#us_overview
- ⁷ Mirya R. Holman, "Women in Local Government", 2017, https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/48571775.pdf?casa_token=GlzXbuY8zzYAAAAA:6U9PphOyhLTEp9B8ibcWP6awqZodtej0WTs2_cJAAqi3kOq3FoBryc17OeEqdT7anXY0ZI49dz7xbVNwPdHRht-3MhLZALqVYFnFyrCaAP9BfEVpZH8
- ⁸ Center for American Women and Politics, 2021, 2021 Women in Municipal Office
- ⁹ Alejandra Aldridge and Nathan Lee entitled, "Where Do Women Serve? A Comprehensive Analysis of the Gender Gap in U.S. Government.", <https://ippsr.msu.edu/public-policy/michigan-wonk-blog/2020-and-fight-womens-representation-politics>
- ¹⁰ The United Conference of Mayors, <https://www.usmayors.org/mayors/meet-the-mayors/>
- ¹¹ Civic Pulse, "2022 Local Government Leadership Gender Gap Report", <https://www.civicpulse.org/gender-gap-localgov-leadership>

Appendix. A. Spanish / Hispanic / Latino Ethnicity of Local Government Leaders

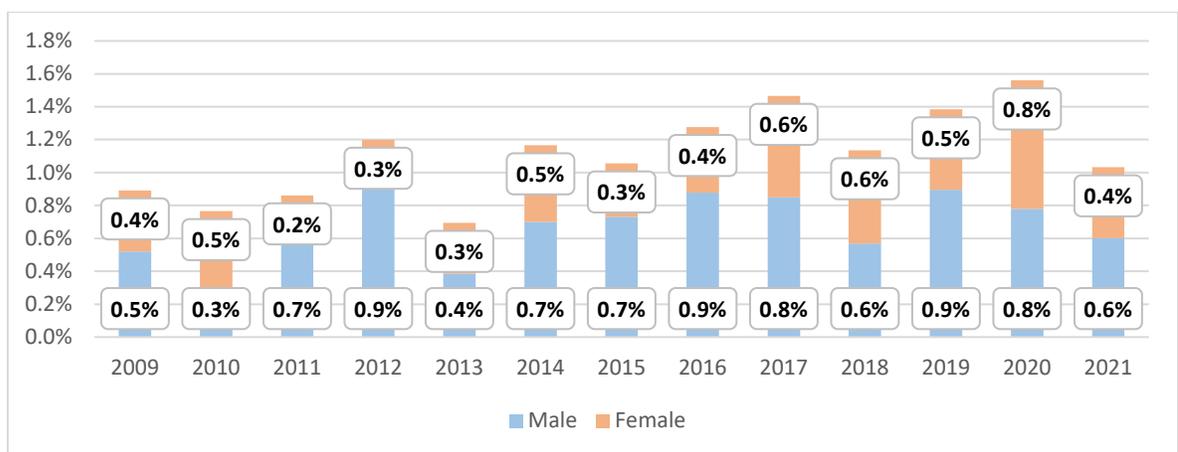
Only less than 1.6% of elected officials are of Spanish, Hispanic or Latino ethnicity. The representation varied throughout the years with a deviation of less than 1%. In 2021, 1% of MPPS survey respondents indicated that they were Spanish, Hispanic or Latino.

Graph 14. Spanish/Hispanic/Latino in power in Local Government structures

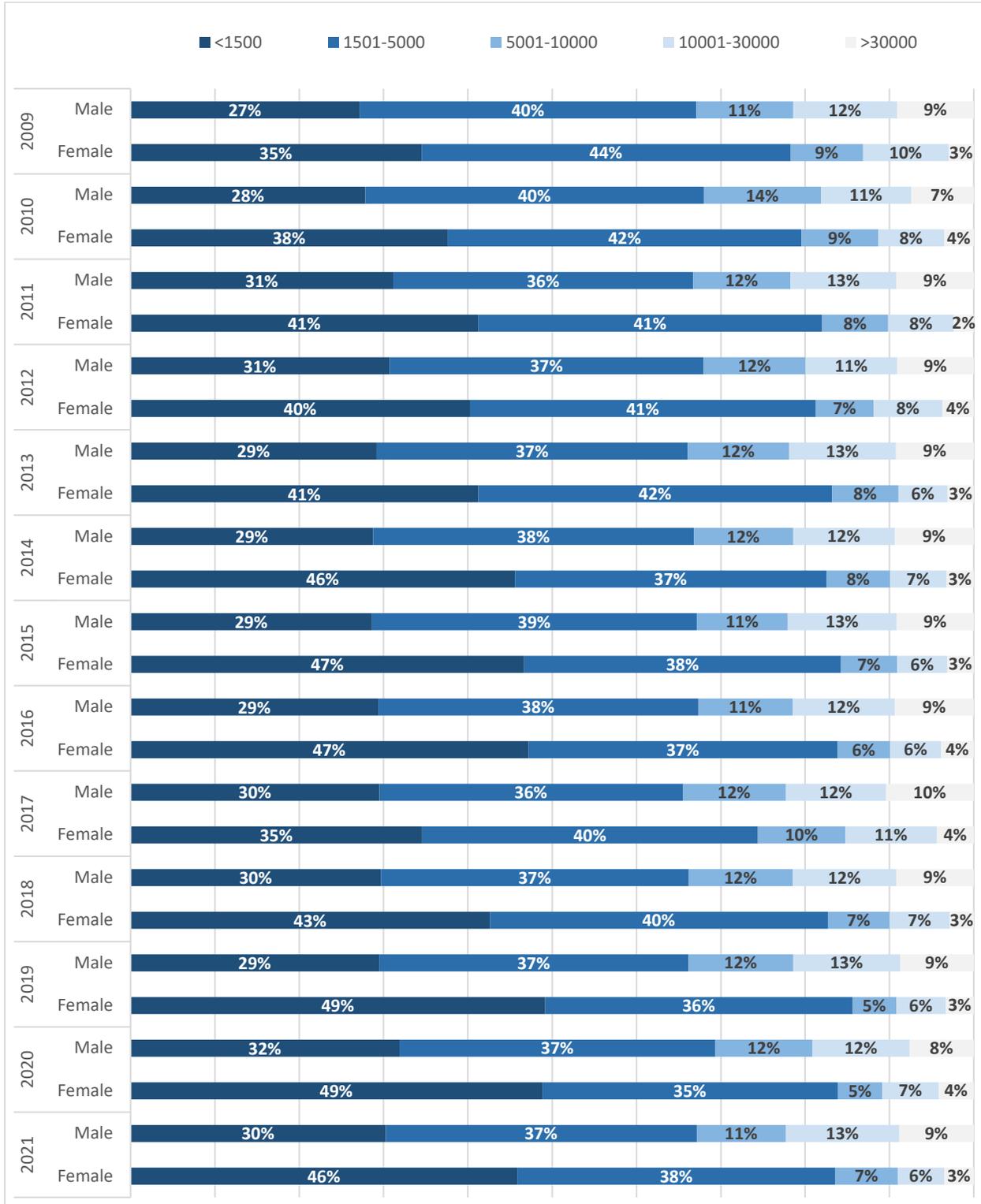


When it comes to the representation of Spanish, Hispanic or Latino community in power in Local government structures, we can observe that there exists a higher representation of men in power positions compared with women. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the numbers are so low that differences are statistically insignificant.

Graph 15. Spanish, Hispanic or Latino ethnicity gender disparity



Appendix B. Leadership per local government size



Appendix C. Education Background of Local Officials

