



MPPS Policy Brief

Local government officials give mixed reviews to Michigan's new approach to redistricting

By Debra Horner and Thomas Ivacko

Every ten years after the U.S. census, each state redraws the boundaries of its Congressional and state legislative electoral districts. In Michigan, state lawmakers (subject to the Governor's veto) were in charge of this process following the census counts in 2000 and 2010. However, in 2018 Michigan voters approved a Constitutional amendment that placed the redistricting process instead in the hands of the new Michigan Independent Citizens Redistricting Commission (MICRC). This brief outlines the assessments of Michigan's local government leaders regarding the state's new approach and the inaugural MICRC's performance.

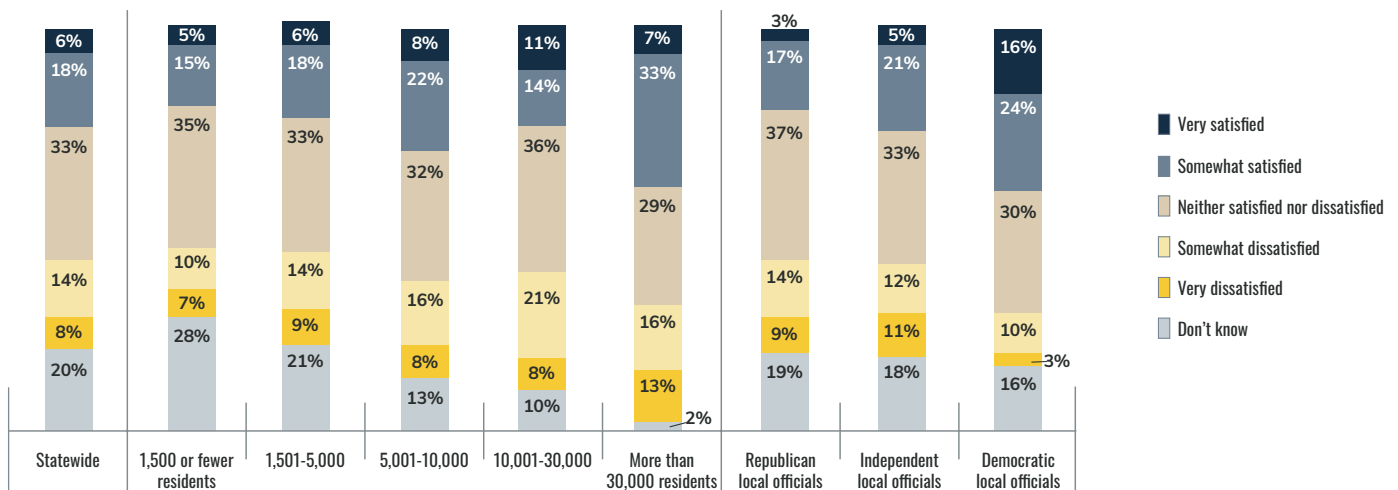
Overall assessments of new redistricting process are split: positive, negative, and neutral

Statewide, 81% of local government leaders paid at least some attention to the MICRC's work in redrawing the state's electoral maps, while 13% paid no attention at all (or were completely unfamiliar with the MICRC), and another 6% were unsure what they knew about the MICRC. Among those who paid at least some attention, 24% are satisfied with the MICRC's process overall and 22% are dissatisfied. Meanwhile, a third (33%) are neutral—neither satisfied nor dissatisfied—and another 20% don't know (see *Figure 1*).

Local leaders from Michigan's largest jurisdictions are more likely to be satisfied with the MICRC's overall process (40%) compared with officials from smaller jurisdictions. Similarly, self-identified Democrats (40%) are more likely to be satisfied with the process than Independents (26%) or Republicans (20%).

Figure 1

Local officials' satisfaction with the overall process the MICRC followed throughout redistricting (among those who paid at least some attention to the process), by population category and partisan self-identification

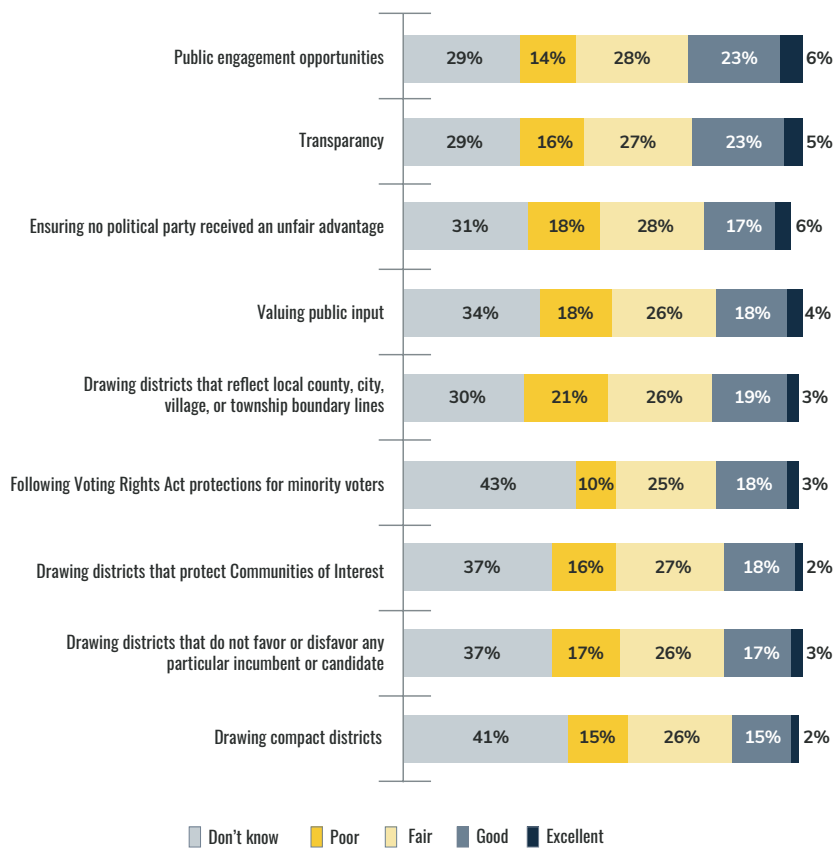


Evaluations of the MICRC’s performance lukewarm, while many are unsure

Local government leaders who have paid attention to the MICRC are more likely to be critical than complementary of the Commission’s performance on a variety of elements. For instance, 28% rate the transparency of the MICRC’s work as “good” or “excellent,” compared with 43% who say it is just “fair” or “poor” (see *Figure 2*). The percentages change somewhat on other elements of the MICRC’s work, but they each fall in this pattern, including ratings for public engagement opportunities, valuing public input, ensuring no unfair advantage for political parties or particular candidates, and drawing districts that protect “communities of interest,” reflect local government boundaries, are compact, and follow the Voting Rights Act protections for minority voters. The highest percentage of excellent/good ratings goes to the MICRC’s public engagement opportunities (29%), while the most fair/poor ratings go to drawing districts that reflect local county, city, village, or township boundary lines (47%).

Meanwhile, even among those local leaders who have paid attention to the MICRC, approximately a third (from 29% to 43%, depending on the issue) don’t know how to rate its performance across most of these measures, which is quite high for questions carried on the MPPS surveys.

Figure 2
Local officials’ assessments of the MICRC’s performance on a variety of measures (among those who paid at least some attention to the process)



Satisfaction among local leaders with the final maps adopted by the MICRC is also mixed for the Congressional maps (22% satisfied vs. 21% dissatisfied), Michigan’s state Senate maps (21% satisfied vs. 23% dissatisfied), and state House maps (22% satisfied vs. 25% dissatisfied). Again, though, approximately a third of respondents are neutral regarding the final maps and another fifth responded “don’t know.”

Support among local leaders for concept of Independent Commission has declined over time

The MPPS first addressed redistricting on the Spring 2010 survey, when it asked local leaders whether they would favor or oppose having electoral districts drawn by an independent commission rather than by the Michigan Legislature. At that time, 60% favored an independent commission and only 11% opposed it (see *Figure 3a*).

After the passage of the 2018 constitutional amendment that created the MICRC, the MPPS asked whether local leaders believed this specific new approach was better or worse than having lines drawn by the Legislature. In 2021, as the MICRC was preparing to gather public input and before the new maps were drawn, less than half (42%) said the MICRC was a better approach (including 18% who said it was significantly better). This year, in spring 2022, after the redistricting process was complete and new maps had been adopted, those saying the MICRC is a better approach to redistricting declined to 39%, with just 12% saying it is significantly better. However, negative assessments have stayed relatively unchanged in the past year, with 18% of local officials in 2021 saying the MICRC is a worse approach, and 19% in 2022 saying the same.

Preference for the MICRC over the Legislature for drawing electoral districts has become more strongly associated with partisan identification over time. For example, 64% of self-identified Democratic local leaders in 2022 say the MICRC is a better approach, compared with 41% of Independents and 32% of Republicans (see *Figure 3b*). Officials who self-identify as Republican make up the majority of Michigan’s local leaders, as most of the state’s local governments are smaller, rural townships. According to responses on the 2022 MPPS, 57% of Michigan local government leaders self-identify as Republicans, while 18% say they are Independents, and 25% identify as Democrats.

Figure 3a
Local officials’ assessments of Independent Commission vs. Legislature for drawing electoral lines, 2010-2022

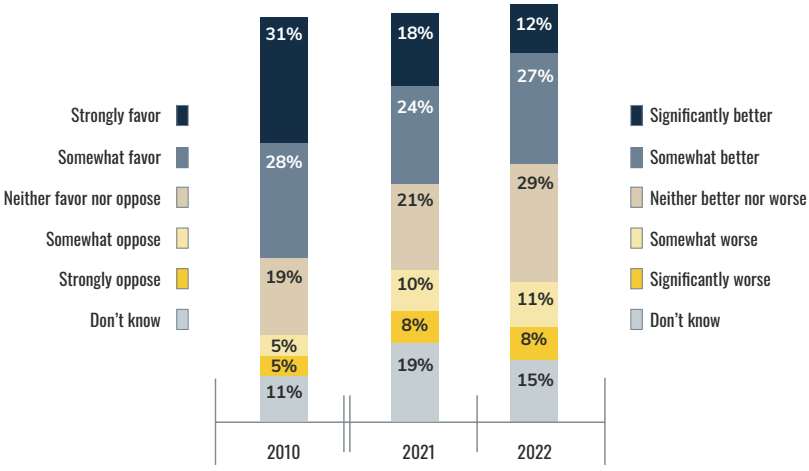
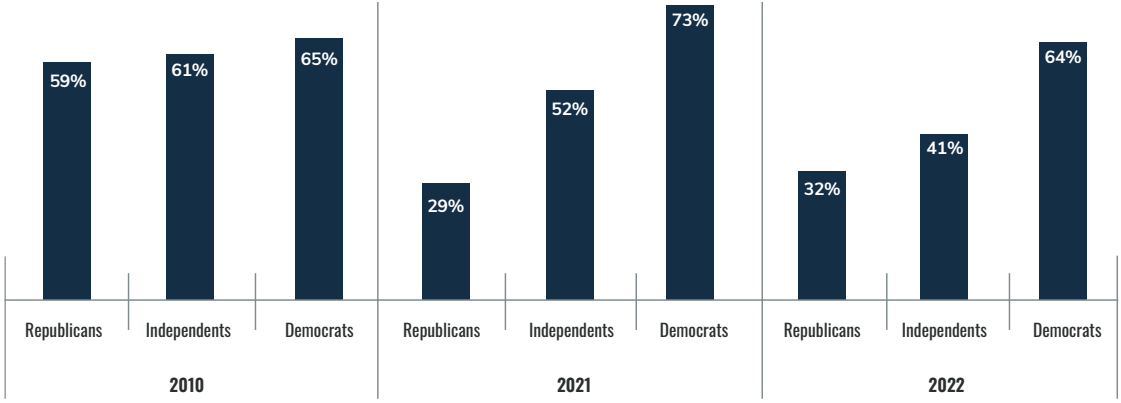


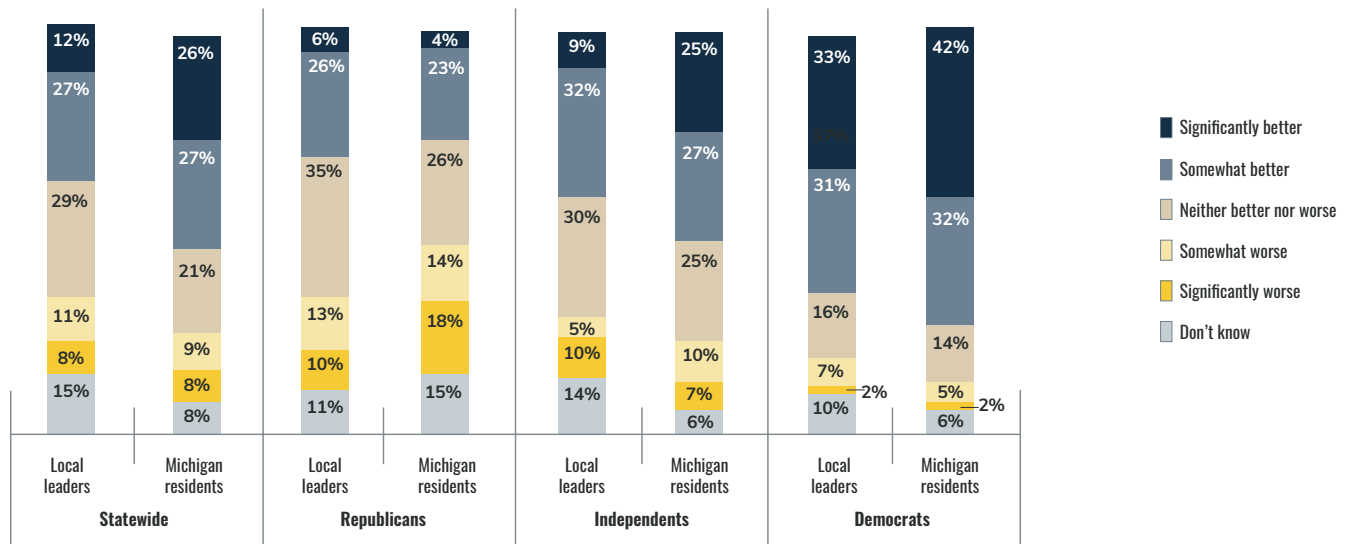
Figure 3b
Percent of local officials who prefer Independent Commission over Legislature for drawing electoral lines, 2010-2022, by partisan identification



Stronger support for the MICRC among Michigan residents overall, but partisan divisions remain

By comparison, the state’s residents are less likely to be Republican compared with the MPPS sample of local leaders. And on Michigan State University’s September 2021 State of the State Survey of public opinion, support for the MICRC was higher statewide (see *Figure 4*). Of those Michigan residents familiar with the MICRC, 53% believe it is a better approach (up 8 percentage points from an earlier survey) than having the legislature draw districts, while 17% think it is worse (up 3 percentage points). However, among partisans, Republican residents are more critical of the MICRC approach than are Republican local leaders, while the opposite is true among Independents and Democrats.

Figure 4
Local officials’ vs. Michigan residents’ assessments of Independent Commission vs. Legislature for drawing electoral lines, 2022, by partisan identification





Survey Background and Methodology

The Michigan Public Policy Survey (MPPS) is an ongoing census survey of all 1,856 general purpose local governments in Michigan conducted since 2009 by the Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy (CLOSUP) at the University of Michigan's Gerald R Ford School of Public Policy. The program is a partnership with Michigan's local government associations. The Spring 2022 wave was conducted April 4 – June 6, 2022. Respondents include county administrators, board chairs, and clerks; city mayors, managers, and clerks; village presidents, managers, and clerks; and township supervisors, managers, and clerks from 1,327 jurisdictions across the state, resulting in a 71% response rate by unit. More information is available at <https://closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/mpps-2022-spring>

See CLOSUP's website for the full question text on the [survey questionnaire](#). Detailed tables of the data in this report, including breakdowns by various community characteristics, are available at <http://mpps.umich.edu>. Findings from the Spring 2022 State of the State Survey (SOSS) are not yet publicly available. Data presented here were provided directly to CLOSUP via email by the Institute for Public Policy and Social Research at Michigan State University. More information is available at <http://www.ippsr.msu.edu/survey-research/state-state-survey-soss>.

The survey responses presented here are those of local Michigan officials and residents, 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.



Regents of the University of Michigan

Jordan B. Acker
Huntington Woods

Michael J. Behm
Grand Blanc

Mark J. Bernstein
Ann Arbor

Paul W. Brown
Ann Arbor

Sarah Hubbard
Okemos

Denise Ilitch
Bingham Farms

Ron Weiser
Ann Arbor

Katherine E. White
Ann Arbor

Santa J. Ono
(ex officio)



Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy

 | Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy