



MPPS Policy Brief

Challenges continue for state-local relations, according to Michigan local government leaders

By Natalie Fitzpatrick, Debra Horner, and Thomas Ivacko

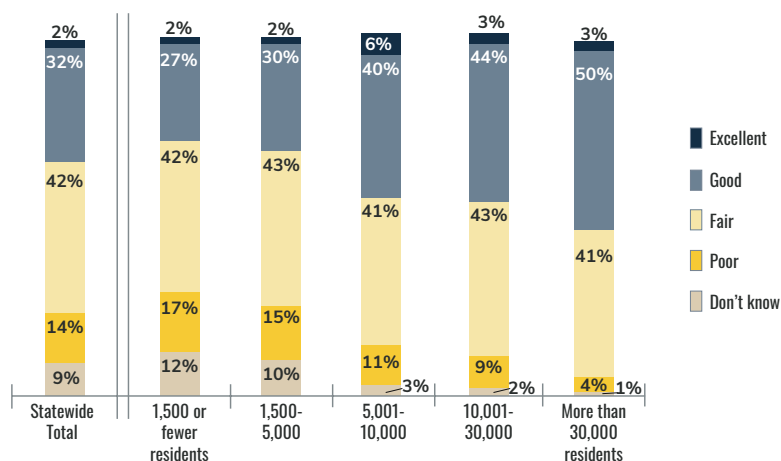
Many aspects of governance and public service delivery depend on the state and local levels of government coordinating and cooperating with each other. The Spring 2023 Michigan Public Policy Survey (MPPS) of Michigan's local government leaders asked about the relationship between their jurisdiction and Michigan's state government and compared the responses with answers to similar questions asked in fall 2016.

As shown in *Figure 1*, over half (56%) of Michigan local officials currently rate their jurisdiction's overall relationship with the state government as just fair (42%) or even poor (14%), while 34% of local officials say it is either good (32%) or excellent (2%). Local leaders from the state's smaller jurisdictions—those with fewer than 5,000 residents—are less likely to say their government's relationship with the State is good or excellent (32% or less) compared with those from mid-sized and larger jurisdictions (46% or more).

These views have become somewhat more pessimistic since the last time the question was asked in 2016, when 49% statewide said their government's overall relations with the State were only fair or poor compared with 46% who said they were good or excellent. However, one factor in that decline may be the shift from Republican to Democratic control of the Governor's office and state legislature, with local leaders' partisan assessments essentially flipping. Among MPPS respondents who self-identify as Republicans, good or excellent ratings of their government's relationship with the state government declined from 55% in 2016 to 32% in 2023. Over that same period, Democrats' assessments increased from 37% to 57% positive. Meanwhile, Independents' positive ratings of their government's relationship with the State declined over the past few years from 36% to 31%.

Figure 1

Local officials' assessments of their local government's overall relationship with the State government, 2023, by jurisdiction size



Local leaders are still overwhelmingly concerned about State preemption of local authority, and increasingly think the State does not value local input

In both 2016 and 2023, the MPPS asked about detailed aspects of state-local relations in Michigan and found concerns remain high in several areas while increasing in others.

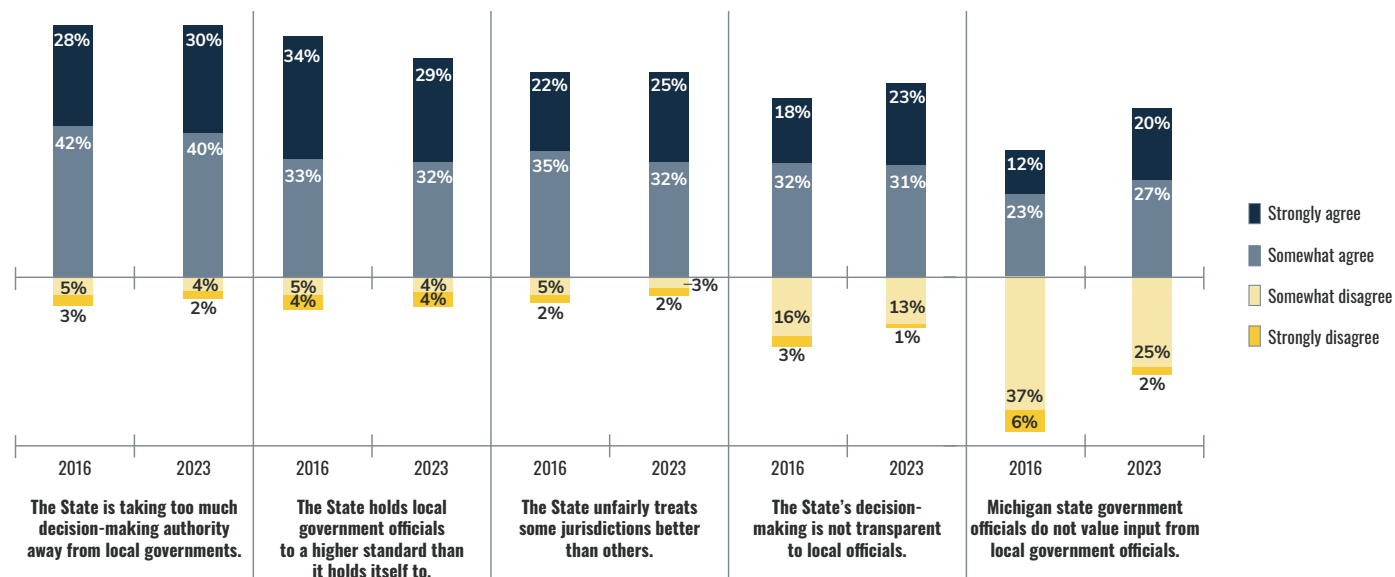
In 2023, 70% of local officials say that the State is taking too much decision-making authority away from local governments, essentially unchanged since 2016 (see *Figure 2*).

Additionally, this year 61% believe that the State holds local governments to a higher standard than it holds for itself, down from 67% who said the same six years ago. Meanwhile, a majority of local leaders (57%) believe the State does not treat jurisdictions fairly across the board, similar to assessments in 2016. And today, local leaders are slightly more likely to say State decision-making is not transparent (54% in 2023 vs. 50% in 2016).

The largest shift in opinion over the last seven years comes among local officials who say the State does not value local input. In 2016, local leaders were more likely to believe the state government valued input from local governments (43%) than thought it did not (35%). Today, just 27% statewide say the state government values local opinion, while nearly half (47%) say it does not.

Whereas local officials' partisan identification is significantly correlated with their ratings of state-local relationships, partisanship appears to play a much less important role in these five specific assessments. According to statistical regression analysis, party identification is only significant for assessments of whether the State values local government input, which may help explain the particularly large shift in those ratings compared with the other four issues.

Figure 2
Local leaders' perceptions of Michigan's state government, 2016 vs. 2023



Note: the scale for two questionnaire items (on State decision-making transparency and valuing input from local government officials) has been flipped here, to display the assessment in the same direction as the other three items; responses for "neither agree nor disagree" and "don't know" not shown



Survey Background and Methodology

The data presented in this policy brief come from the Spring 2023 Michigan Public Policy Survey (MPPS). The 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 2023 wave was conducted February 6 – April 17, 2023. 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 1,307 jurisdictions across the state, resulting in a 70% response rate by unit. More information is available at <https://closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/mpps-2023-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 jurisdiction characteristics such as community population size, region, and jurisdiction type, are available at <http://mpps.umich.edu>.

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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