The Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy

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Michigan Public Policy Survey

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Michigan local leaders report significant increases in police surveillance technology use, uncertainty about the introduction of AI

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This report presents the assessments of Michigan's local government leaders, local chiefs of police, and county sheriffs on the use and value of a range of law enforcement equipment and technology such as body and dashboard cameras, drones, automated license plate readers, and facial recognition. In addition, these local leaders, plus county prosecutors, were asked about their views on the use of automated tools such as AI and machine learning in criminal justice work. These findings are based on statewide surveys of local government leaders in the Spring 2024 wave of the Michigan Public Policy Survey (MPPS), with some comparisons to data collected in the Fall 2015 MPPS wave.

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). Respondents for the Spring 2024 wave of the MPPS 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 local jurisdictions across the state, as well as responses from 54 county sheriffs, 234 chiefs of police or directors of public safety, and 55 county prosecutors.

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Key Findings

- Among Michigan communities that fund their own police departments or sheriffs' offices, local officials report significant increases in the use of cameras and surveillance technology between 2015 and 2024.
  - Body cameras were reportedly used in 23% of jurisdictions in 2015 and in 77% of jurisdictions in 2024.
  - Reports of dashboard camera use increased from 55% to 74% of jurisdictions.
  - Reports of public surveillance camera use increased from 28% to 50% of jurisdictions.
  - Reports of drone use increased from 3% to 31% of jurisdictions.

  » While the proportion using body cameras, dashboards, and public surveillance cameras increased among jurisdictions of all sizes, reports of drone use increased primarily among the state's larger jurisdictions (those with over 10,000 residents).

- When it comes to newer technologies, 26% of sheriffs and police chiefs statewide indicate their agency currently uses automated license plate readers, 10% report use of facial recognition technology, and 3% report use of AI or other predictive tools for policing.

  » Looking ahead, 40% of law enforcement leaders say their agencies are *likely* to adopt automated license plate readers in the near future, while just over a quarter (28%) say they are *unlikely* to adopt them. Meanwhile, around half say their agencies are *unlikely* to adopt facial recognition (51%) or predictive policing tools like AI (46%).

- Among jurisdictions that currently use these policing technologies, almost all local leaders agree that each is a worthwhile investment for their communities. However, local government officials are generally less likely to "strongly agree" compared with law enforcement leaders.

- When it comes to confidence in predictive policing tools such as AI and machine learning, over half (55%) of local government officials say they are unsure if assessments made by automated tools are more or less accurate than those made by humans. Uncertainty is even higher among sheriffs and police chiefs (59%) and county prosecutors (66%).

- When elected county prosecutors were asked about specific uses of AI tools in their offices' work, 50% said they at least somewhat trust AI applications designed to identify high-risk neighborhoods, while 45% at least somewhat trust AI tools for processing and analyzing forensic evidence. Just 20% report any trust AI's capacity to conduct risk assessments for sentencing or offers of parole, probation, and release.

Background

The use of law enforcement technologies has expanded significantly across the state of Michigan and nationwide over the past decade. Police departments are increasingly utilizing tools such as body-worn cameras, automated license plate readers, and facial recognition software to enhance surveillance capabilities and monitor public spaces. For example, at the state level, Michigan State Police troopers are now required to operate body-worn cameras if they could have law enforcement contact with the public,[1] and new legislation signed into effect in December 2024 allows automated speed cameras on Michigan highways for the first time.[2] At the local level, many communities are adopting advanced technologies for policing like Detroit's Project Green Light, a real-time camera network installed at private businesses that provide a constant feed to police.[3] Another example is the Grand Rapids Police Department's nearly $100,000 investment in 2023 to expand its small unmanned aircraft systems (drones).[4] Even further along the technological cutting edge, Michigan State University is investing millions of dollars in surveillance video cameras combined with artificial intelligence (AI) software for campus security, in response to the mass shooting on campus in 2023.[5]

While proponents argue that these technologies improve efficiency and public safety, their growing use has prompted ongoing discussions about privacy, accuracy, and regulatory oversight.[6] In 2017, the State of Michigan adopted legislation ensuring victim privacies around use of video and audio recordings obtained by law enforcement officers' body cameras and mandating agencies have written policies regarding the use of bodycams.[7] Meanwhile, some local governments across the state are instituting their own regulations around the use of newer policing technologies. For example, in 2024, Ann Arbor's City Council passed a resolution instructing the city government and its police department to develop a comprehensive policy regulating use of facial recognition technology.[8] The Detroit Police Department also recently changed its rules regarding officers' use of facial recognition technology as part of a settlement in a lawsuit brought by a victim of wrongful arrest.[9]

In spring 2024, the MPPS revisited a series of questions on police equipment and technology use that were originally carried on the survey in 2015.

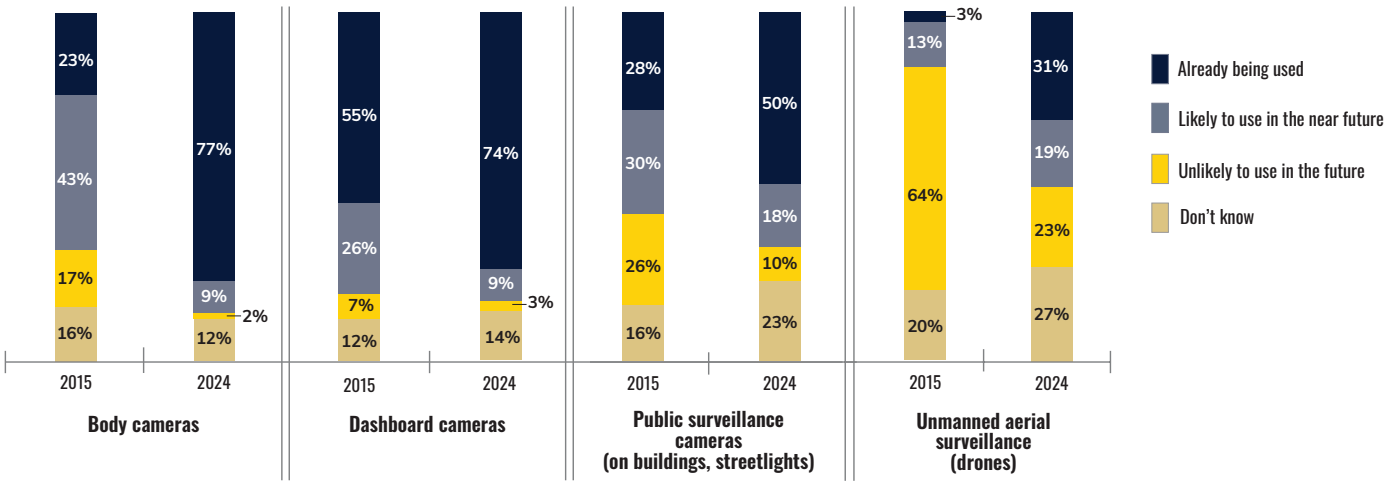
These questions were directed specifically to local government officials in jurisdictions that fund local law enforcement services. This includes all 83 Michigan counties (which have their own sheriff's offices), the 27% of cities, villages, and townships that are directly involved in running their own police departments and/or participating in a joint police department with another jurisdiction, and the 22% of local governments that say they have an indirect role, contracting for law enforcement services provided by a special authority or district, by another municipality, or through a contract with their county sheriff.

Use of law enforcement surveillance technologies has increased significantly over last decade

Among local governments that directly or indirectly fund local law enforcement, reports of the use of surveillance technologies by their primary law enforcement agencies have increased substantially over the past nine years (see *Figure 1a*). In 2015, statewide, fewer than a quarter (23%) of those local governments reported that local law enforcement used body cameras; by 2024, that percentage shot up to over three-quarters (77%). And while in 2015, 17% of local leaders predicted that their primary law enforcement agency would be unlikely to use body cameras, only 2% said the same in 2024.

Similarly, reports of dashboard camera use have significantly increased from 55% of jurisdictions in 2015 to 74% in 2024, as have the use of public surveillance cameras from 28% to 50% of jurisdictions. While only 3% of jurisdictions reported using drones in 2015, almost a third (31%) use drones in 2024.

Figure 1a
Percentage of local government officials who report use of various camera and surveillance equipment by their primary law enforcement agency (among local governments that provide law enforcement services directly or indirectly), 2015 vs. 2024



Reports of body camera use since 2015 more than double in communities of every size, while drone use expands primarily in larger jurisdictions

While technology use has increased in law enforcement agencies statewide, there are some variations in adoption among jurisdictions of different sizes. Taking a look first at body cameras, as shown in *Figure 1b*, reports of local law enforcement use of body cameras have surged in jurisdictions large and small. Only 25% of the state's smallest jurisdictions (those with fewer than 1,500 residents) reported using body cameras in 2015, but by 2024, that percentage rose to 63%. Similar increases are found among larger jurisdictions as well, with officials from almost all (94%) of Michigan's largest jurisdictions reporting their primary law enforcement agency now uses body cameras.

Back in 2015, dashboard cameras were already used more commonly than body cameras, but adoption has reportedly continued to increase in communities of all sizes (see *Figure 1c*).

Figure 1b
Percentage of local government officials who report use of body cameras by their primary law enforcement agency (among local governments that provide law enforcement services directly or indirectly), 2015 vs. 2024, by population size

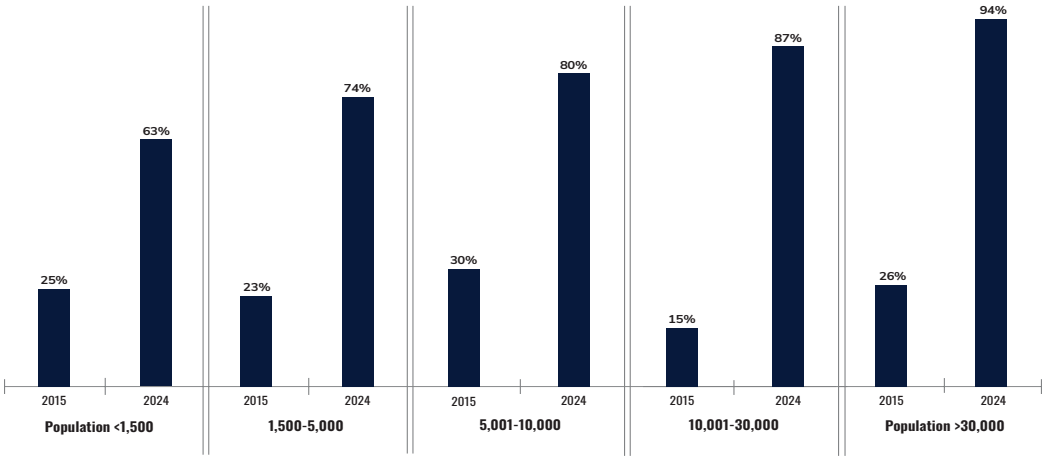
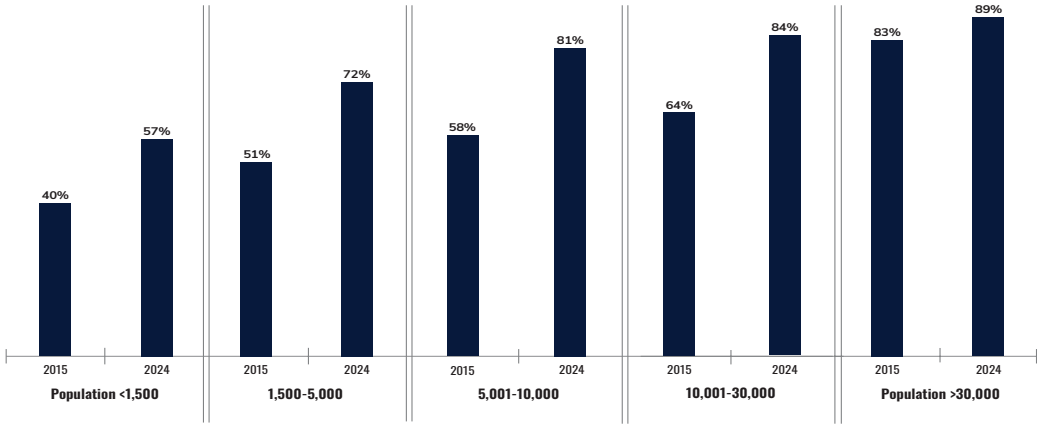
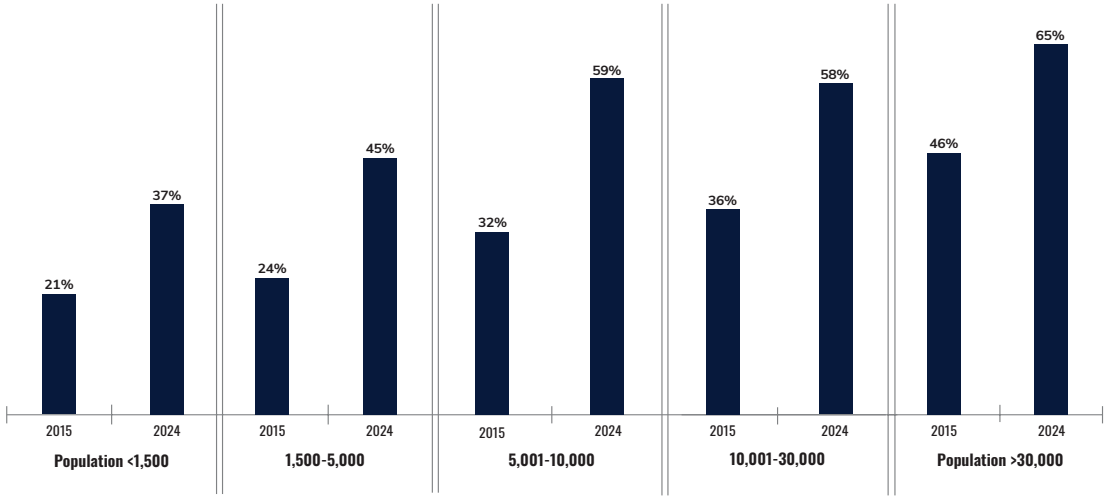


Figure 1c
Percentage of local government officials who report use of dashboard cameras by their primary law enforcement agency (among local governments that provide law enforcement services directly or indirectly), 2015 vs. 2024, by population size



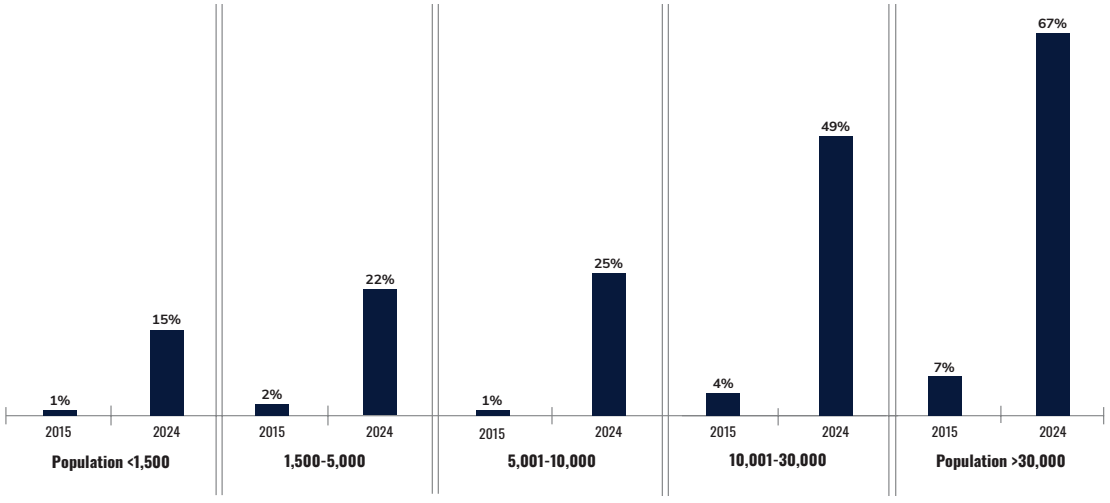
Public surveillance cameras (for example, on buildings, streetlights, etc.) have been less common than dashboard or body cameras but have also seen increased adoption among jurisdictions of all sizes since 2015 (see *Figure 1d*). However, by 2024 still only a minority of smaller communities with fewer than 5,000 residents use public surveillance cameras. In contrast, they are reportedly used by two-thirds (65%) of the largest jurisdictions with more than 30,000 residents.

Figure 1d
Percentage of local government officials who report use of stationary surveillance cameras by their primary law enforcement agency (among local governments that provide law enforcement services directly or indirectly), 2015 vs. 2024, by population size



Turning to the use of drones, in 2015, just 3% of jurisdictions statewide reported that their primary law enforcement agency uses drones (see *Figure 1e*). As of 2024, usage has increased among local governments of all sizes, but especially among the largest. While the rate of adoption has increased to 15% in the smallest communities, two-thirds (67%) of the largest jurisdictions with over 30,000 residents indicate that their police department or sheriff's office uses drones.

Figure 1e
Percentage of local government officials who report use of drones by their primary law enforcement agency (among local governments that provide law enforcement services directly or indirectly), 2015 vs. 2024, by population size



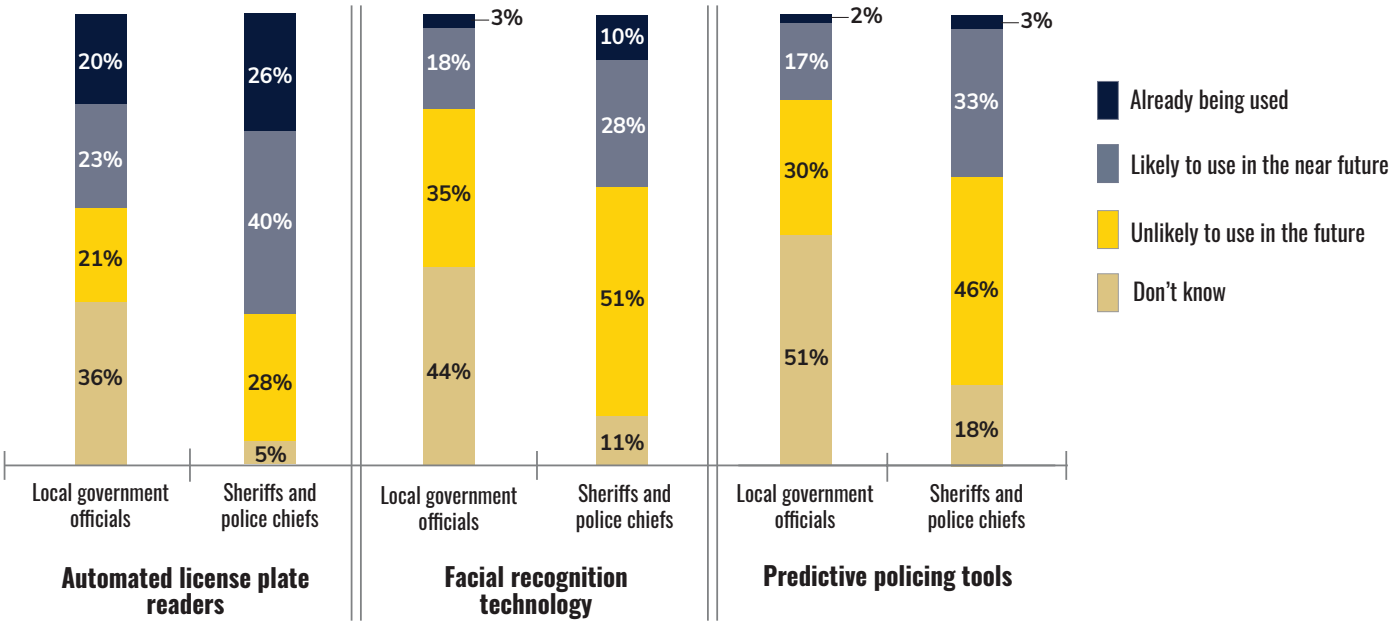
Use of newer technologies characterized by uncertainty, especially among local officials

The spring 2024 MPPS also asked local officials, police and sheriffs about their use of newer technologies like automated license plate readers, facial recognition technology, and predictive policing tools (for example, using AI to help anticipate or assess crime).

Compared to the more familiar technologies discussed above, local government leaders are generally more hesitant to speculate about current or future use of these newer technologies. Over one-third to half of local officials were unsure whether automated plate readers (36%), facial recognition technology (44%), or predictive policing tools (51%) are currently being used or would be used in the future (see *Figure 2*).

Meanwhile, just over a quarter (26%) of sheriffs and police chiefs statewide indicate that their agency currently uses automated license plate readers, and another 40% predict they will adopt the technology in the near future. Just 10% of law enforcement leaders report current use of facial recognition technology, and only 3% are currently using predictive policing tools.

Figure 2
Percentage of local leaders who report use of other technology by their primary law enforcement agency (among local governments that provide law enforcement services directly or indirectly), 2024, by public office



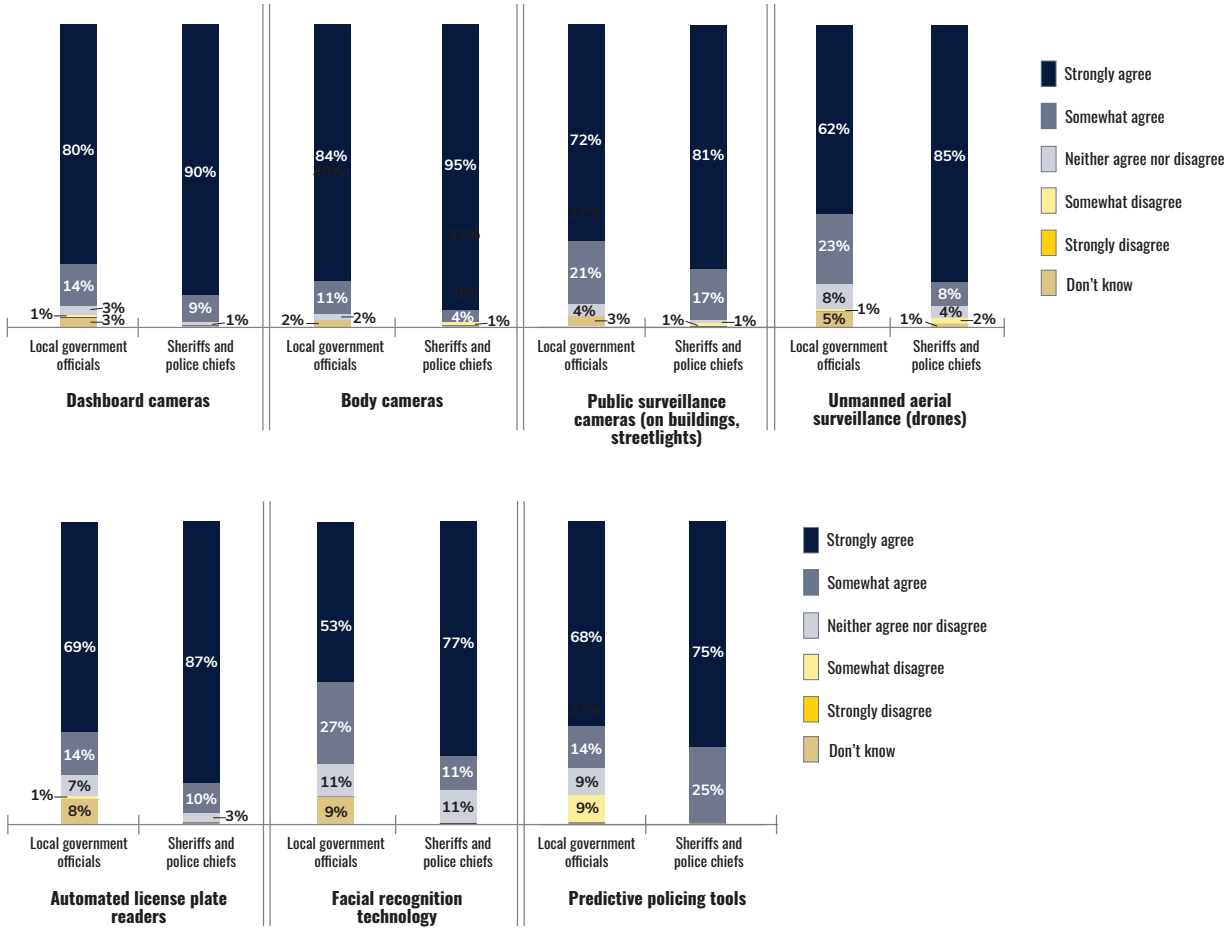
Please see *Appendix A* for breakdowns by jurisdiction type of reported use or plans for adoption of all seven types of equipment or technology (among local governments that provide law enforcement services directly or indirectly). See *Appendix B* for reports of use or plans for adoption by police chiefs and sheriffs.

Widespread agreement that investments in technology are worthwhile, with local government leaders slightly less likely than law enforcement leaders to strongly agree

Within communities that have already adopted different technologies – body cameras, dashboard cameras, surveillance cameras, drones, automated license plate readers, facial recognition, and predictive tools – local government officials and law enforcement leaders were asked to evaluate whether these investments are worthwhile for their communities. They were asked to consider the financial impacts, potential reduction of crime, and possible community opposition to a technology.

For each type of technology, the vast majority of both local officials and law enforcement leaders agreed that the investment was worthwhile (see *Figure 3*). However, for each type of technology, local government officials are less likely than law enforcement leaders to say they "strongly agree." For example, in communities where drones are currently used by law enforcement, 62% of local government officials "strongly agree" that they are worthwhile investment, compared with 85% of law enforcement leaders. (Note that although 9% of local leaders disagreed that predictive policing tools are a worthwhile investment, given the small number of communities where this technology is currently in use, that represents fewer than four jurisdictions statewide.)

Figure 3
Local leaders' assessments of whether technology use is worthwhile investment for their community (among units that report using each type of technology), by public office



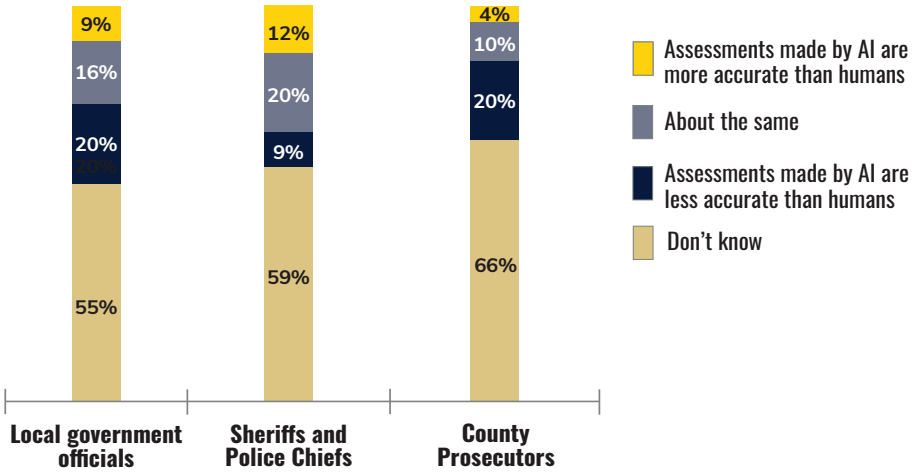
Local government and law enforcement leaders uncertain about the accuracy of AI predictive tools in policing

In recent years, the use of AI and other automated tools in the public sector has sparked significant debate, particularly in law enforcement. Proponents of its use say AI algorithms could make certain tasks like paperwork and data analysis more efficient by allowing machines to quickly calculate and analyze data instead of relying on people to perform the work.[10] However, there are concerns that AI and other predictive tools are inherently unreliable. These tools rely on data sources that often have missing or incomplete data and algorithms that are not easy to subject to the same transparency or accountability standards that humans are held to.[11] In 2024, the Michigan Civil Rights Commission passed a resolution recommending a transparent and responsible, research-based approach to using AI in policing, encouraging Governor Gretchen Whitmer to form a task force on AI in policing and establish guiding principles.[12]

The Spring 2024 Michigan Public Policy Survey (MPPS) asked Michigan local government officials, county prosecutors, county sheriffs, and police chiefs about their perceptions of the relative accuracy of public safety risk assessments made by automated tools versus humans.

As shown in *Figure 4*, most Michigan local government and law enforcement leaders are unsure of the accuracy of public safety risk assessments made by AI and other predictive tools compared to humans. Over half (55%) of local government officials say they do not know if assessments made by automated tools are more or less accurate than assessments made by humans. Uncertainty is even higher among sheriffs and police chiefs (59%) and elected county prosecutors (66%).

Figure 4
Local government and law enforcement leaders' views on the accuracy of automated tools (such as AI or machine learning) to make assessments about public safety risks

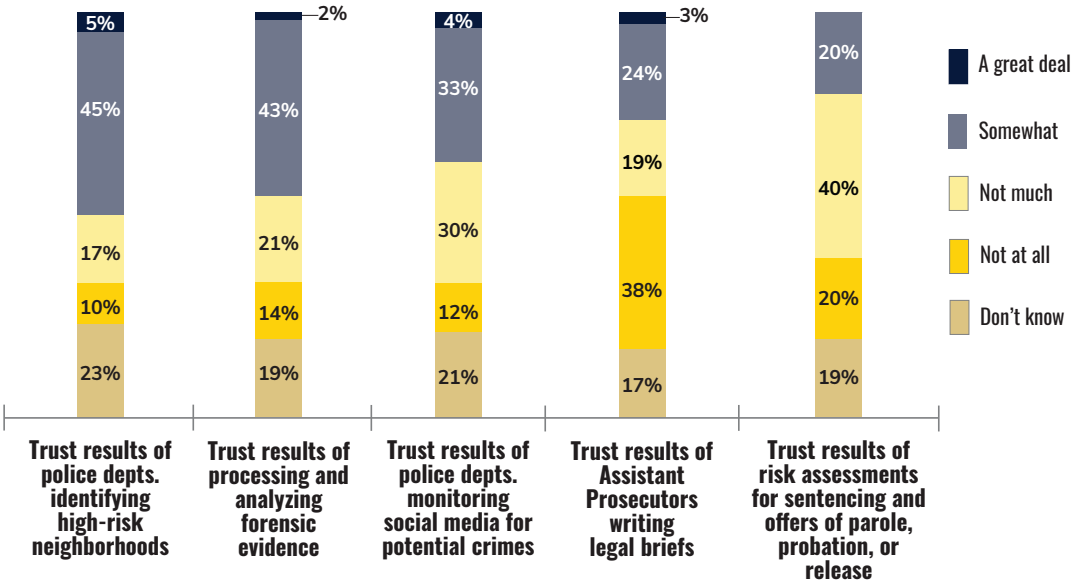


Among those who expressed an opinion, county sheriffs and local police chiefs are more likely to view automated assessments favorably compared to local government officials and county prosecutors. One-third of sheriffs and police chiefs say assessments made by AI or other automated tools are either as accurate (20%) or more accurate (12%) than assessments made by humans, while only 9% say AI assessments are less accurate. In comparison, only 25% of local government officials and 14% of county prosecutors say assessments made by AI are as or more accurate than human assessments, while 20% of both local government officials and county prosecutors say that AI assessments are less accurate.

County prosecutors trust AI for some uses more than others

When asked about specific uses of automated tools such as AI or machine learning in their work, elected county prosecutors express varying levels of trust, reflecting areas of both optimism and caution toward AI's capabilities. Half of Michigan's county prosecutors (50%) at least somewhat trust AI or other automated applications designed to identify high-risk neighborhoods, while 45% at least somewhat trust the use of automated tools for processing and analyzing forensic evidence. Even in these contexts, however, very few (2-5%) say they trust these tools a great deal and a significant minority (10-14%) do not trust the tools at all (see *Figure 5*).

Figure 5
County prosecutors' trust in the use of automated tools (such as AI or machine learning) for various tasks



By contrast, only 37% of prosecutors trust AI and other automated tools for monitoring social media for potential crimes, and only one-quarter (27%) trust it to draft legal briefs, an area where human expertise and accountability remains a priority. Prosecutors have the least trust (20%) in AI's capacity to conduct risk assessments for sentencing and offers of parole, probation, and release, underscoring a preference for human oversight in decisions with substantial legal and ethical implications.

Conclusion

From 2015 to 2024, Michigan local government officials across the state reported a substantial increase in the use of surveillance and camera technology by the primary law enforcement agencies that serve their communities. Body cameras, dashboard cameras, public surveillance cameras, and drones, particularly in larger jurisdictions, have become prevalent tools. While more familiar technologies like body cameras and dashboard cameras have been adopted in around three-quarters of Michigan communities that fund local law enforcement, newer technologies such as facial recognition and AI-powered predictive tools remain less common, with many agencies predicting they are unlikely to adopt them in the future.

There is broad agreement among local government officials and especially law enforcement leaders that the policing technologies they have already adopted have been valuable investments. However, local officials, law enforcement leaders, and elected county prosecutors express high levels of uncertainty about the emerging use of automated/AI-powered predictive policing tools, particularly regarding their accuracy compared to human judgment.

When asked to evaluate specific AI applications, county prosecutors exhibit cautious trust in tools aiding in crime detection and forensic analysis, but remain skeptical about AI's role in legal drafting, social media monitoring, and risk assessment. As advancements continue, careful consideration of technology's role in justice and law enforcement practices will be essential.

Notes

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Appendix A

Percentage of local government officials who report use of technologies by their primary law enforcement agency (among local governments that provide law enforcement services directly or indirectly), 2024, by jurisdiction type

Body cameras

	Counties	Townships	Cities	Villages	Statewide total
Already being used	81%	70%	85%	78%	77%
Likely to adopt	15%	7%	11%	8%	9%
Unlikely to adopt	1%	2%	1%	2%	2%
Don't know	3%	21%	3%	12%	12%

Dashboard cameras

	Counties	Townships	Cities	Villages	Statewide total
Already being used	82%	70%	82%	67%	74%
Likely to adopt	12%	7%	9%	10%	9%
Unlikely to adopt	4%	2%	3%	4%	3%
Don't know	1%	21%	6%	18%	14%

Public surveillance cameras (e.g., on buildings, streetlights)

	Counties	Townships	Cities	Villages	Statewide total
Already being used	57%	40%	64%	47%	50%
Likely to adopt	17%	16%	19%	18%	18%
Unlikely to adopt	9%	11%	8%	11%	10%
Don't know	17%	34%	9%	23%	23%

Unmanned aerial surveillance (drones)

	Counties	Townships	Cities	Villages	Statewide total
Already being used	68%	30%	34%	8%	31%
Likely to adopt	18%	16%	23%	22%	19%
Unlikely to adopt	3%	14%	30%	45%	23%
Don't know	10%	40%	13%	26%	27%

Automated license plate readers

	Counties	Townships	Cities	Villages	Statewide total
Already being used	23%	18%	28%	12%	20%
Likely to adopt	24%	18%	28%	22%	23%
Unlikely to adopt	16%	15%	25%	30%	21%
Don't know	37%	49%	19%	36%	36%

Facial recognition technology

	Counties	Townships	Cities	Villages	Statewide total
Already being used	1%	3%	5%	1%	3%
Likely to adopt	30%	14%	22%	18%	18%
Unlikely to adopt	24%	25%	48%	42%	35%
Don't know	44%	58%	26%	39%	44%

Predictive policing tools

	Counties	Townships	Cities	Villages	Statewide total
Already being used	3%	2%	2%	1%	2%
Likely to adopt	23%	11%	23%	19%	17%
Unlikely to adopt	22%	21%	37%	43%	30%
Don't know	52%	66%	38%	38%	51%

Appendix B

Percentage of law enforcement leaders statewide who report use of technologies by their office, 2024, by office or department

Body cameras

	Sheriff's Offices	Police Departments	**Statewide total**
Already being used	72%	89%	86%
Likely to adopt	20%	8%	10%
Unlikely to adopt	6%	3%	4%
Don't know	2%	0%	0%

Dashboard cameras

	Sheriff's Offices	Police Departments	**Statewide total**
Already being used	69%	72%	72%
Likely to adopt	14%	12%	13%
Unlikely to adopt	17%	13%	14%
Don't know	0%	2%	2%

Public surveillance cameras (e.g., on buildings, streetlights)

	Sheriff's Offices	Police Departments	**Statewide total**
Already being used	42%	55%	53%
Likely to adopt	38%	28%	29%
Unlikely to adopt	14%	14%	14%
Don't know	6%	3%	4%

Unmanned aerial surveillance (drones)

	Sheriff's Offices	Police Departments	**Statewide total**
Already being used	56%	23%	28%
Likely to adopt	38%	28%	29%
Unlikely to adopt	6%	43%	37%
Don't know	0%	6%	5%

Automated license plate readers

	Sheriff's Offices	Police Departments	**Statewide total**
Already being used	26%	26%	26%
Likely to adopt	45%	39%	40%
Unlikely to adopt	19%	30%	28%
Don't know	10%	4%	5%

Facial recognition technology

	Sheriff's Offices	Police Departments	**Statewide total**
Already being used	15%	9%	10%
Likely to adopt	42%	25%	28%
Unlikely to adopt	34%	54%	51%
Don't know	9%	11%	11%

Predictive policing tools

	Sheriff's Offices	Police Departments	**Statewide total**
Already being used	3%	3%	3%
Likely to adopt	40%	32%	33%
Unlikely to adopt	42%	46%	46%
Don't know	16%	19%	18%

Survey Background and Methodology

The MPPS is an ongoing survey program, interviewing the leaders of Michigan's 1,856 units of general-purpose local government, conducted by the Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy (CLOSUP) at the University of Michigan in partnership with the Michigan Municipal League, Michigan Townships Association, and Michigan Association of Counties. Surveys are conducted each spring (and before 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. It is designed to build up a multi-year time series.

In the Spring 2024 iteration, surveys were sent by the Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy (CLOSUP) via email 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. In addition, surveys were sent to all 83 county sheriffs and county prosecutors, as well as 430 local police departments and public safety departments. More information is available at https://closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/mpps-2024-spring.

The Spring 2024 wave was conducted from April 1– June 10, 2024. A total of 1,307 local jurisdictions returned valid surveys (67 counties, 216 cities, 171 villages, and 853 townships), resulting in a 70% response rate by unit. A total of 343 law enforcement leaders returned valid surveys (54 sheriffs, 234 police chiefs, and 55 county prosecutors) for a 58% response rate across various agencies. Quantitative data are weighted to account for non-response. Missing responses are not included in the tabulations unless otherwise specified. Some report figures may not add to 100% due to rounding within response categories. "Voices Across Michigan" verbatim responses, when included, may have been edited for grammar and brevity.

See CLOSUP's website for the full question text on the survey questionnaires. 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.

Acknowledgement and Disclaimer

This material is based upon work supported by a grant from The Joyce Foundation. 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 Joyce Foundation, the University of Michigan, or of other partners in the MPPS.

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