MPPS Policy Brief

More Michigan communities using policies to improve police-community relations

By Debra Horner, Natalie Fitzpatrick, and Micaja Verna

On both the Fall 2015 and Spring 2024 waves of the Michigan Public Policy Survey (MPPS), local government leaders from around the state were asked about policies and practices associated with police-community relations.

The MPPS findings reveal considerable increases in the adoption of several key policies over the nine-year period. Statewide, the reported use of law enforcement training in de-escalation techniques, cultural understanding, and/or bias awareness has more than doubled from approximately a quarter of jurisdictions (26%) in 2015 to over half (57%) in 2024 (see *Figure 1*). Similarly, the reported use of policies that mandate independent investigations into officer-involved injuries or deaths has more than doubled, from 23% to 49% of jurisdictions. Reported use of community policing (i.e., assigning officers to particular areas to build partnerships with residents) and policies for recruiting or retaining a law enforcement workforce that reflects the demographics of the community have also increased substantially since 2015.

Many jurisdictions that predicted their law enforcement agency was likely to adopt these four types of policies and practices in 2015 appear to indeed have implemented them as of 2024. For most policies, the percentage of jurisdictions who are "likely to adopt" has decreased significantly since 2015.

However, there has been substantially less movement by law enforcement agencies to proactively make policing policies available for public review (e.g., on department or local government website) or to create civilian oversight boards that advise law enforcement agencies. In fact, the proportion of jurisdictions reporting they either already have or are likely to adopt public review or civilian oversight board policies has declined since 2015.

Figure 1
Reports on the status of law enforcement policies and practices in Michigan's communities, 2015 vs. 2024
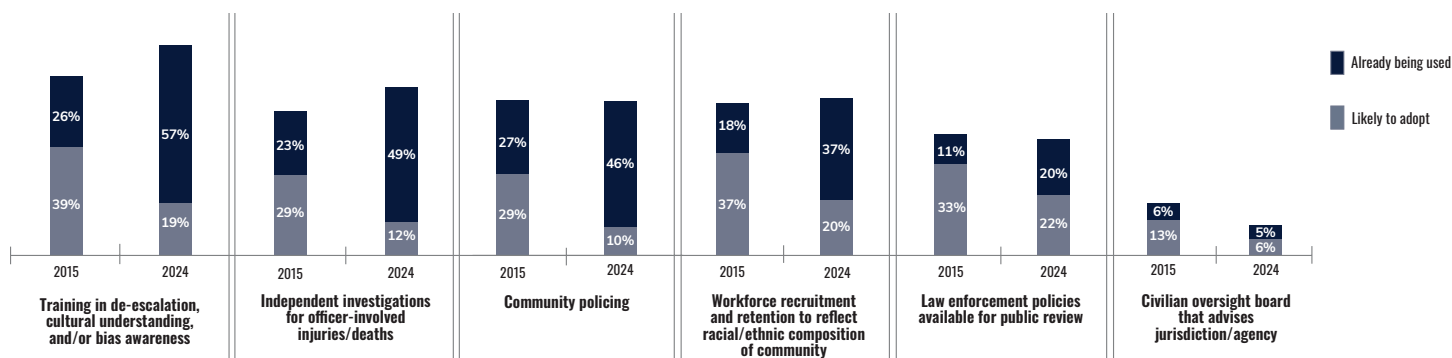
Note: Percentages are based upon a denominator that excludes local officials who answered "don't know"; responses for "unlikely to adopt" not shown.

Across all of the police–community relations policies and practices included in this report, urban communities and those with larger population sizes are more likely to report implementation by their local law enforcement agencies in 2024 (see *Appendix A*).

Looking to the future, many jurisdictions report that although they have not done so yet, they still have plans to adopt certain policies. About one in five jurisdictions say their local police department is likely to make law enforcement policies available for public review (22%), adopt efforts to make the workforce reflect the racial/ethnic composition of the community (20%), and adopt policies for training in de-escalation, cultural understanding, and/or bias awareness (19%).

See *Appendix A* for responses by local government officials broken out by jurisdiction size, urban-rural self-identification, and jurisdiction racial composition.

# Training policies and community policing are associated with higher trust in law enforcement officers

Two police-community relations policies in particular may be associated with increased trust in law enforcement officers. Statewide, 46% of local officials strongly agree that most of their residents trust their law enforcement officers, and 38% somewhat agree. However, in jurisdictions that have already adopted de-escalation and bias awareness training policies, trust is even higher: 63% of local officials strongly agree and 32% somewhat agree (see *Figure 2a*). While we cannot say for certain that de-escalation and bias awareness training cause higher public trust, the relationship holds even when controlling for a variety of jurisdiction characteristics such as population size, demographic composition, and region.

Figure 2a
Local officials' agreement or disagreement with the statement "Most people in my jurisdiction trust our law enforcement officers," by adoption of de-escalation and bias awareness policies, 2024
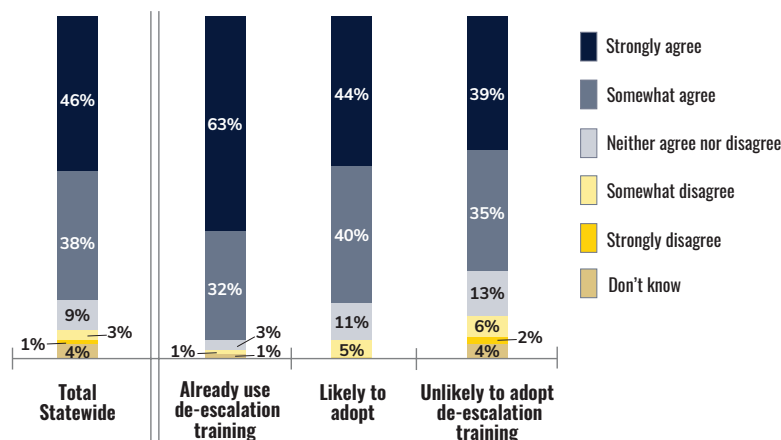
Similarly, as shown in *Figure 2b*, in jurisdictions that report using community policing, 63% of local officials strongly agree that most of their residents trust local law enforcement. That percentage declines in places that are simply looking to adopt (44%) and is lowest (37%) in places that report they are unlikely to adopt community policing.

Figure 2b
Local officials' agreement or disagreement with the statement "Most people in my jurisdiction trust our law enforcement officers," by adoption of community policing policies, 2024
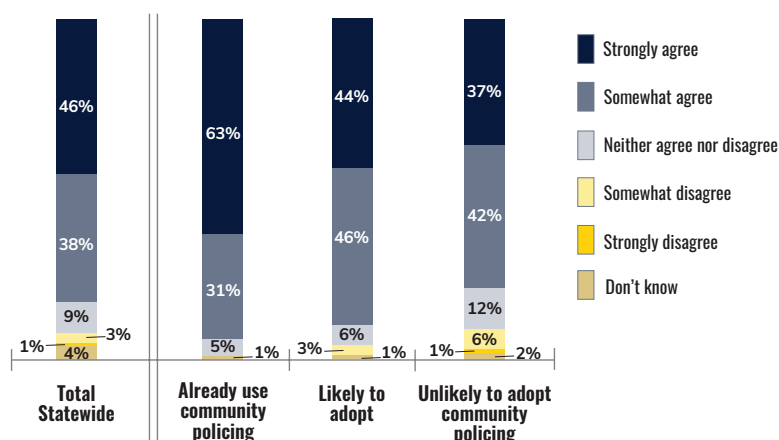
Law enforcement leaders have a more positive view of police-community relations than local officials or prosecutors

The 2024 MPPS also surveyed local law enforcement agency leaders (county sheriffs and local chiefs of police) as well as Michigan's 83 elected county prosecutors and gathered their perspectives on police-community relations. The surveys reveal notable differences in how law enforcement officials and local government leaders assess police-community relationships, with law enforcement agency leaders reporting the most positive assessments and county prosecutors reporting the least positive assessments (see *Figure 3a*).

For example, statewide, 46% of local government officials strongly agree that most of their residents trust local law enforcement officers, compared to 70% of law enforcement leaders but just 26% of county prosecutors. Similarly, 67% of local government officials strongly agree that officers treat all people professionally, compared to 92% of law enforcement agency leaders, but only 57% of county prosecutors.

Figure 3a
Local officials' and law enforcement leaders' agreement or disagreement with the statements regarding police-community relations, 2024, by public office
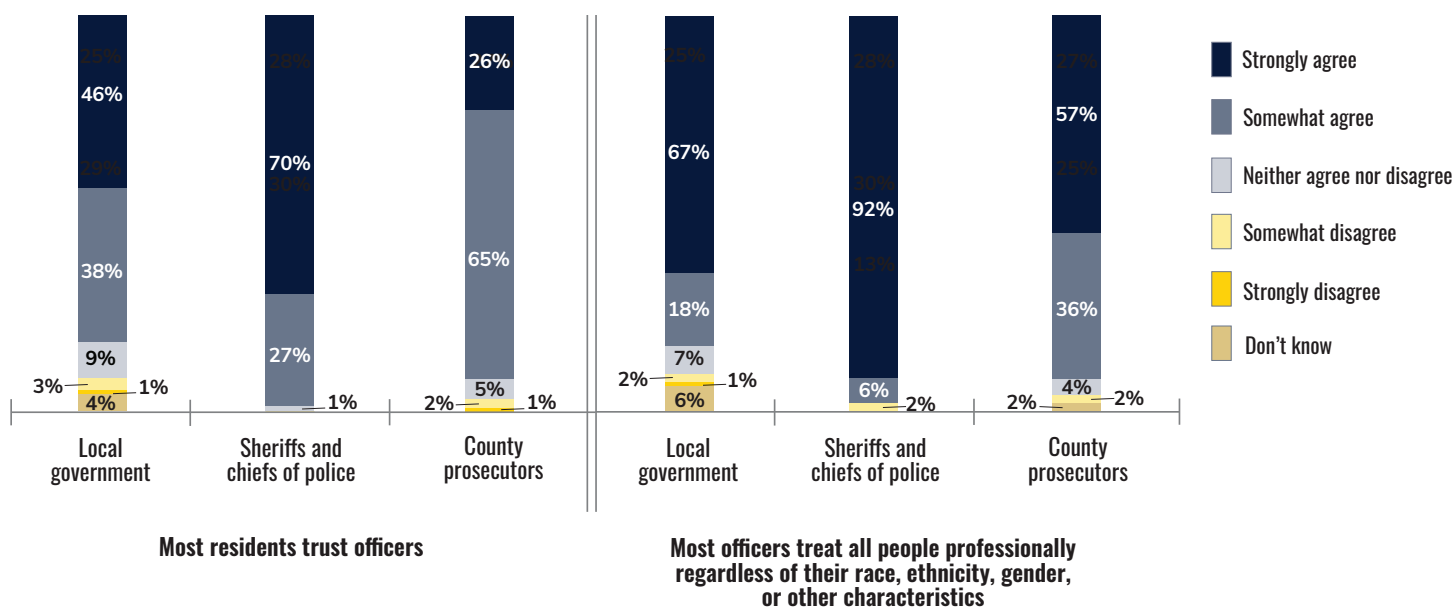
There are larger gaps between local officials' and law enforcement leaders' assessments in rural communities than in urban communities. As shown in *Figure 3b*, within rural and mostly rural communities, only 66% of local government leaders strongly agree that their local law enforcement officers treat all people professionally, compared to 94% of rural or mostly rural sheriffs and police chiefs (94%). In urban jurisdictions, the difference narrows slightly but remains substantial, with 73% of local officials and 84% of law enforcement leaders strongly agreeing that officers treat all people professionally.

Figure 3b
Percent of local officials and law enforcement leaders who agree with the statement "Most law enforcement officers in my jurisdiction treat all people professionally regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender, or other characteristics," 2024, by rural-urban self-identification
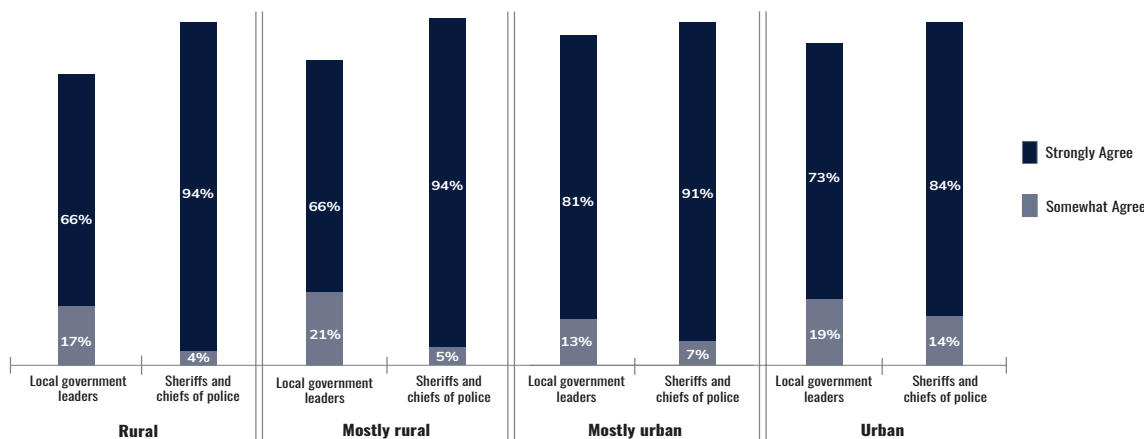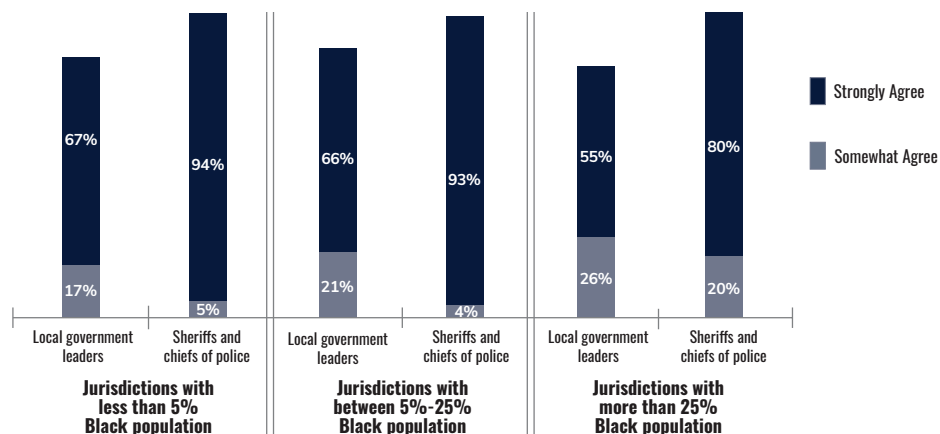

Note: County prosecutors' assessments not shown due to the small number of mostly urban and urban counties in Michigan; responses for "neither agree nor disagree", "somewhat disagree", "strongly disagree", and "don't know" not shown.

Jurisdictions with higher proportions of Black residents generally have lower assessments of police–community relations, and there is a persistent gap between the assessments of local officials and law enforcement leaders. For instance, in communities where the population is greater than 25% Black, 55% of local government officials and 80% of law enforcement officials strongly agree that officers treat all people professionally (see *Figure 3c*). Where Black residents make up less than 5% of the population, agreement is higher, but the magnitude of the gap is similar, with 67% of local officials and 94% of law enforcement officials strongly agreeing that officers treat all people professionally.

Figure 3c
Percent of local officials and law enforcement leaders who agree with the statement "Most law enforcement officers in my jurisdiction treat all people professionally regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender, or other characteristics," 2024, by racial composition of local jurisdiction

Note: County prosecutors' assessments not shown due to the small number of counties in Michigan with over 5% black residents; responses for "neither agree nor disagree", "somewhat disagree", "strongly disagree", and "don't know" not shown.

Appendix A

Local government officials' reports on the status of law enforcement policies and practices in Michigan's communities (excluding local officials who answered "don't know"), 2024

By population size

Community policing (i.e., assigning officers to particular areas to build relationships with residents)

	<1,500	1,500-5,000	5,001-10,000	10,001-30,000	>30,000	Statewide total
Already being used	33%	43%	57%	63%	86%	46%
Likely to adopt	9%	11%	10%	10%	3%	10%
Unlikely to adopt	57%	46%	33%	27%	10%	44%

A civilian oversight board that advises the law enforcement agency in your jurisdiction

	<1,500	1,500-5,000	5,001-10,000	10,001-30,000	>30,000	Statewide total
Already being used	3%	2%	4%	13%	22%	5%
Likely to adopt	5%	7%	6%	9%	8%	6%
Unlikely to adopt	92%	91%	90%	78%	70%	88%

Proactively making policing policies available for public review (e.g., on department or local government website)

	<1,500	1,500-5,000	5,001-10,000	10,001-30,000	>30,000	Statewide total
Already being used	10%	16%	24%	41%	43%	20%
Likely to adopt	19%	21%	24%	25%	28%	22%
Unlikely to adopt	71%	63%	52%	34%	29%	58%

Policies mandating independent investigations into officer-involved injuries or deaths

	<1,500	1,500-5,000	5,001-10,000	10,001-30,000	>30,000	Statewide total
Already being used	34%	45%	55%	75%	80%	49%
Likely to adopt	8%	12%	20%	16%	12%	12%
Unlikely to adopt	58%	43%	25%	9%	8%	39%

Training for law enforcement officers in any of the following: de-escalation tactics, cultural understanding, and/or bias awareness

	<1,500	1,500-5,000	5,001-10,000	10,001-30,000	>30,000	Statewide total
Already being used	41%	52%	69%	82%	88%	57%
Likely to adopt	19%	23%	18%	15%	8%	19%
Unlikely to adopt	40%	25%	13%	3%	3%	24%

Policies for recruiting or retaining a law enforcement workforce that reflects the racial and/or ethnic composition of your community

	<1,500	1,500-5,000	5,001-10,000	10,001-30,000	>30,000	Statewide total
Already being used	28%	32%	34%	58%	68%	37%
Likely to adopt	15%	21%	27%	26%	18%	20%
Unlikely to adopt	58%	47%	40%	16%	14%	43%

By urban-rural self-identification

Community policing (i.e., assigning officers to particular areas to build relationships with residents)

	Rural	Mostly rural	Mostly urban	Urban	Statewide total
Already being used	39%	48%	63%	77%	46%
Likely to adopt	9%	9%	9%	13%	10%
Unlikely to adopt	52%	44%	28%	10%	44%

A civilian oversight board that advises the law enforcement agency in your jurisdiction

	Rural	Mostly rural	Mostly urban	Urban	Statewide total
Already being used	2%	4%	12%	30%	5%
Likely to adopt	6%	5%	10%	7%	6%
Unlikely to adopt	92%	91%	78%	63%	88%

Proactively making policing policies available for public review (e.g., on department or local government website)

	Rural	Mostly rural	Mostly urban	Urban	Statewide total
Already being used	12%	22%	32%	54%	20%
Likely to adopt	17%	22%	32%	23%	22%
Unlikely to adopt	71%	56%	36%	23%	58%

Policies mandating independent investigations into officer-involved injuries or deaths

	Rural	Mostly rural	Mostly urban	Urban	Statewide total
Already being used	36%	56%	70%	82%	49%
Likely to adopt	12%	12%	15%	12%	12%
Unlikely to adopt	52%	32%	15%	6%	39%

Training for law enforcement officers in any of the following: de-escalation tactics, cultural understanding, and/or bias awareness

	Rural	Mostly rural	Mostly urban	Urban	Statewide total
Already being used	46%	59%	77%	94%	57%
Likely to adopt	20%	23%	13%	4%	19%
Unlikely to adopt	33%	18%	9%	2%	24%

Policies for recruiting or retaining a law enforcement workforce that reflects the racial and/or ethnic composition of your community

	Rural	Mostly rural	Mostly urban	Urban	Statewide total
Already being used	28%	39%	59%	59%	37%
Likely to adopt	19%	24%	17%	22%	20%
Unlikely to adopt	53%	38%	23%	19%	43%

By racial composition of community

Community policing (i.e., assigning officers to particular areas to build relationships with residents)

	Less than 5% Black population	5-25% Black population	Over 25% Black population	Statewide total
Already being used	43%	77%	54%	46%
Likely to adopt	9%	6%	32%	10%
Unlikely to adopt	48%	17%	14%	44%

A civilian oversight board that advises the law enforcement agency in your jurisdiction

	Less than 5% Black population	5-25% Black population	Over 25% Black population	Statewide total
Already being used	3%	21%	28%	5%
Likely to adopt	5%	14%	14%	6%
Unlikely to adopt	92%	65%	57%	88%

Proactively making policing policies available for public review (e.g., on department or local government website)

	Less than 5% Black population	5-25% Black population	Over 25% Black population	Statewide total
Already being used	16%	44%	39%	20%
Likely to adopt	20%	28%	42%	22%
Unlikely to adopt	63%	28%	19%	58%

Policies mandating independent investigations into officer-involved injuries or deaths

	Less than 5% Black population	5-25% Black population	Over 25% Black population	Statewide total
Already being used	45%	69%	83%	49%
Likely to adopt	11%	16%	17%	12%
Unlikely to adopt	43%	16%	0%	39%

Training for law enforcement officers in any of the following: de-escalation tactics, cultural understanding, and/or bias awareness

	Less than 5% Black population	5-25% Black population	Over 25% Black population	Statewide total
Already being used	53%	83%	78%	57%
Likely to adopt	20%	12%	22%	19%
Unlikely to adopt	28%	6%	0%	24%

Policies for recruiting or retaining a law enforcement workforce that reflects the racial and/or ethnic composition of your community

	Less than 5% Black population	5-25% Black population	Over 25% Black population	Statewide total
Already being used	34%	53%	65%	37%
Likely to adopt	18%	27%	27%	20%
Unlikely to adopt	48%	20%	7%	43%

Survey Background and Methodology

The data presented in this policy brief come from the Spring 2024 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 2024 wave was conducted April 1- – June 10, 2024. For the first time, the MPPS not only surveyed leaders of counties, cities, villages, and townships, but surveys were also sent to all 83 county sheriffs and county prosecutors, and 430 local police departments and departments of public safety. 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. Calculations regarding racial composition of the population served by local police departments are made at the county level for *Figure 3c*, however, validation using a less complete, department-level measure confirms these percentages are accurate.

More information is available at https://closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/mpps-2024-spring.

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, will soon be available at http://mpps.umich.edu.

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