



MPPS Policy Brief

A majority of Michigan local officials continue to say the state is on the wrong track, reflecting partisan affiliation and growing uncertainty

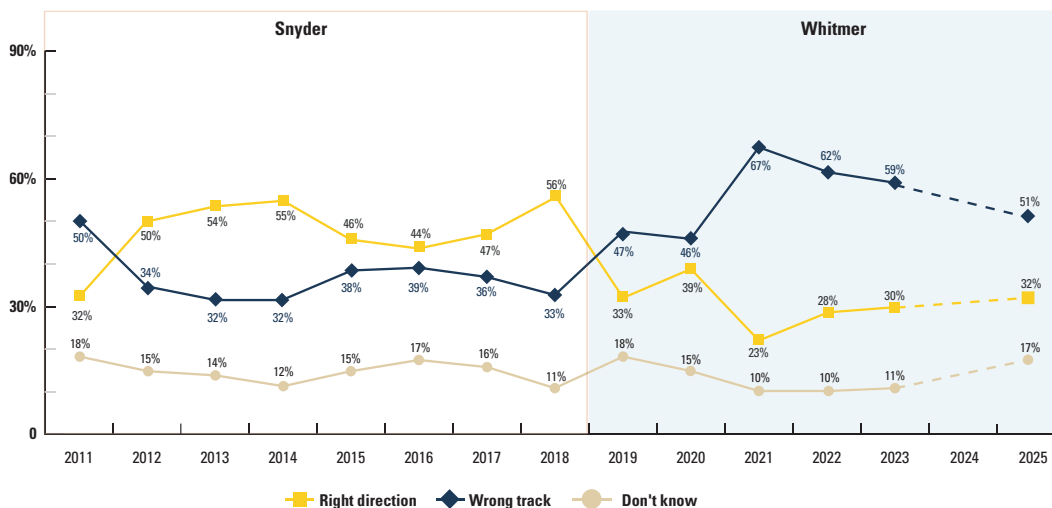
By Debra Horner and Stephanie Leiser

Statewide, 51% of Michigan’s local government officials say the state is currently off on the wrong track (see *Figure 1*). This represents a continued drop from the series high of 67% in 2021 and, more recently 59% in 2023, but pessimism is still higher than pre-COVID levels, when typically around 30–35% of local officials believed the state was on the wrong track.

Meanwhile, just under a third (32%) of local officials believe the state is generally going in the right direction, a slight improvement from 30% in 2023 and from the series low of 23% in 2021. Overall, 17% are unsure about the direction the state is headed, a jump from 11% who expressed uncertainty two years ago.

An important part of interpreting these findings has to do with political partisanship. The MPPS consistently finds these assessments are strongly linked to local leaders’ partisan identification in relation to the party that controls the Governor’s office. In other words, Republican local leaders generally express more optimism about the state’s direction when a Republican is governor and less when a Democrat is in office, while the reverse is true among Democratic local leaders (as shown in *Figure 2*). Because of this partisanship factor, the total statewide percentages in *Figure 1* reflect the fact that about two-thirds of Michigan’s local governments are townships—most of which are rural, small in terms of population, and led by Republicans. Indeed, 62% of this year’s MPPS respondents self-identify as Republicans, while 17% say they are Independents, and 21% identify as Democrats.

Figure 1
Percentage of local officials who say Michigan is headed in the “right direction” or is off on the “wrong track,” 2011–2025



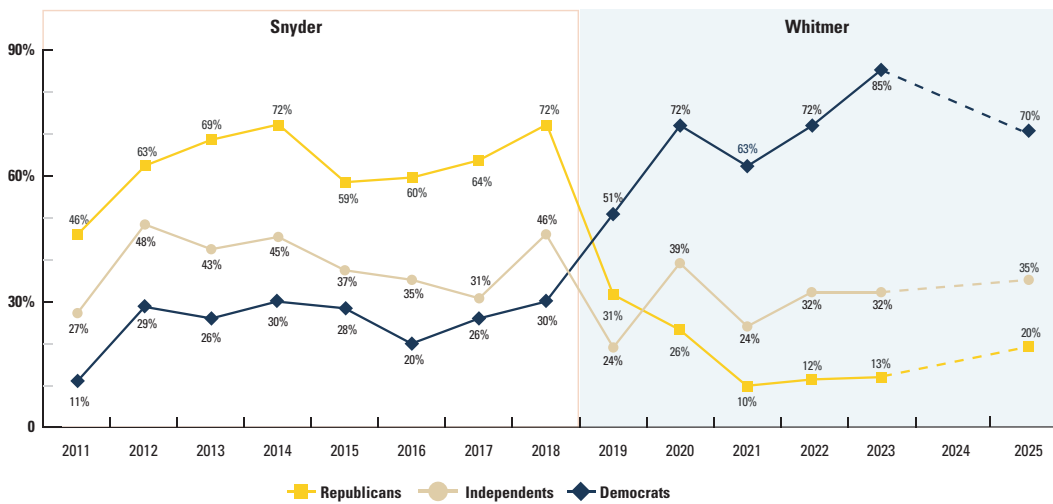
Note: Question not asked in Spring 2024.

Gaps in optimism between Democrats and Republicans are still wide but converging slightly

This year’s 2025 survey continues to reveal stark differences in how partisan leaders feel about the state’s direction. With the governor’s office currently held by Democrat Gretchen Whitmer, most self-identified Democrats (70%) think Michigan is headed in the right direction, but that percentage is down significantly from the 85% who said the same in 2023 (see *Figure 2*). Only 20% of Republican local officials say the state is going in the right direction, although this is up from the 13% who said the same in 2023. Just over a third (35%) of local officials who self-identify as Independents say the state is headed in the right direction, up slightly since 2023.

This year’s drop in optimism among Democrats and increase among Republicans may be linked not only to assessments of the Governor, but also to the shift in control of the state House of Representatives after the 2024 election.

Figure 2
Percentage of local officials who say Michigan is headed in the “right direction,” 2011-2025, by partisan identification



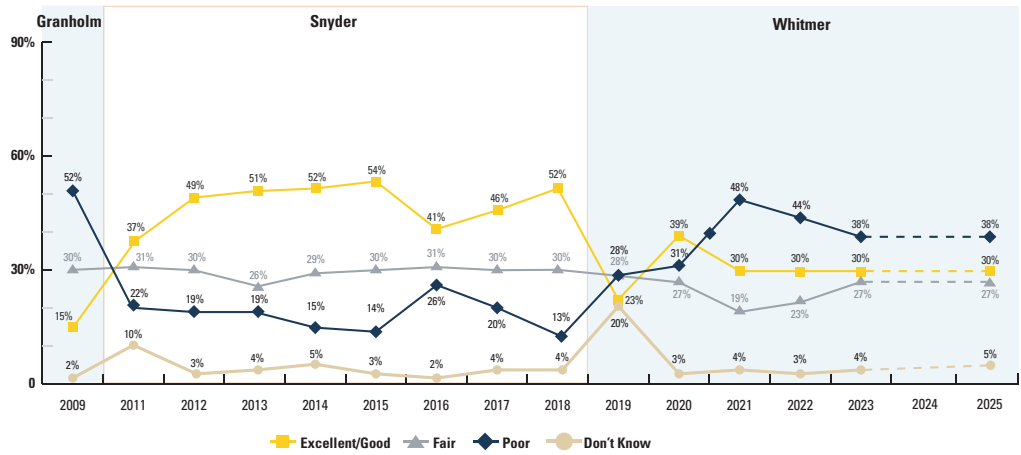
Note: Question not asked in Spring 2024.

Local leaders' assessments of Governor Whitmer's performance remain stable

Each year, the MPPS also asks local officials to evaluate the job performance of the governor, starting in 2009 with Governor Jennifer Granholm, through Governor Rick Snyder's two terms, and now into current Governor Gretchen Whitmer's second term.

In 2025, less than a third (30%) of local leaders statewide rate Governor Whitmer's performance as "excellent" or "good," essentially unchanged since 2021 (see *Figure 3*). Meanwhile, over a third (38%) rate her performance today as "poor," also the same as the 38% who said so in 2023.

Figure 3
Local officials' evaluations of Governor Whitmer's performance compared with previous Governors' performances, 2009-2025

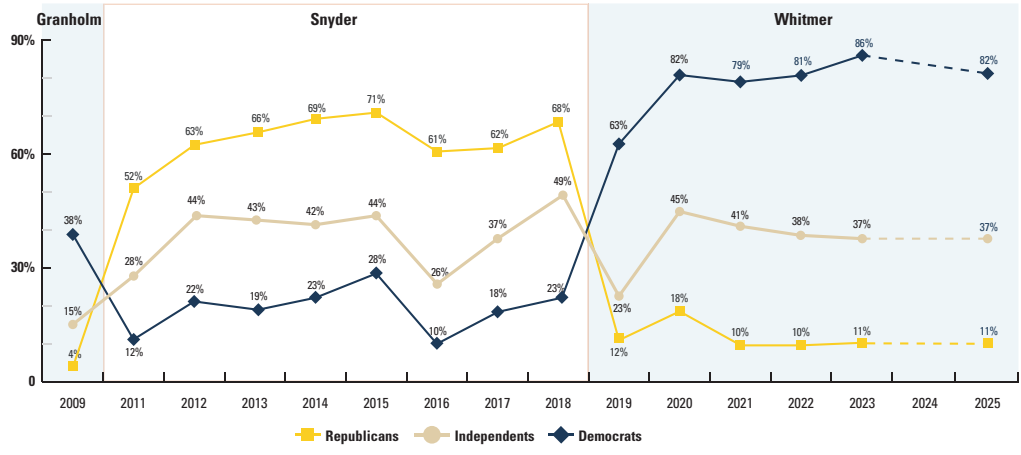


Note: Question not asked in Spring 2024.

As with assessments of the state's overall direction, these ratings on the Governor's job performance are strongly associated with partisanship. As shown in *Figure 4*, 82% of Democratic local leaders currently give Governor Whitmer positive ratings, down slightly from the high of 86% in 2023. Among Independents, positive ratings (37%) are unchanged from last year.

Meanwhile, just 11% of Republican local leaders rate Governor Whitmer's performance as good or excellent in 2025, largely consistent over the last few years.

Figure 4
Percentage of local officials who rate the Governor's performance as "excellent" or "good," 2009-2025, by partisan identification

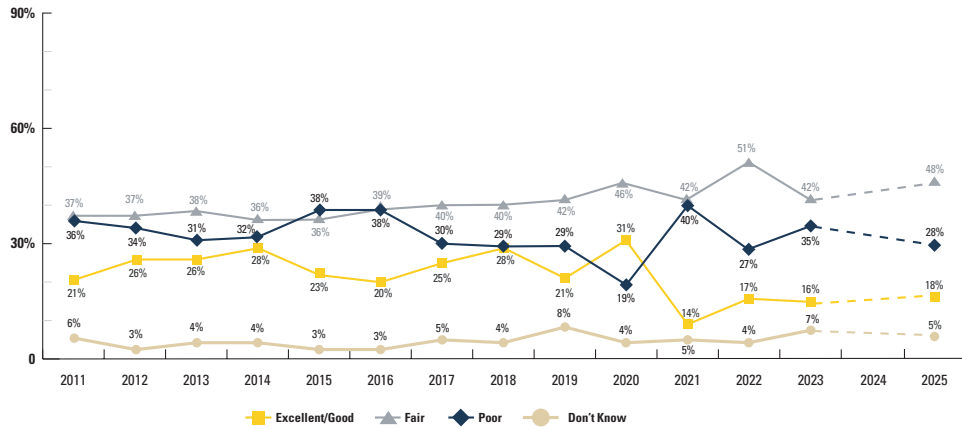


Note: Question not asked in Spring 2024.

Assessments of the Michigan Legislature remain low but slightly improved

This year, there has been a slight increase in positive assessments of the legislature’s performance. However, as shown in *Figure 5*, relatively few local leaders overall believe the Michigan Legislature is doing an outright excellent or good job (18%). Ratings of fair improved to 48% in 2025, and the percentage who view the Legislature’s performance as poor dropped from 35% in 2023 to 28% today.

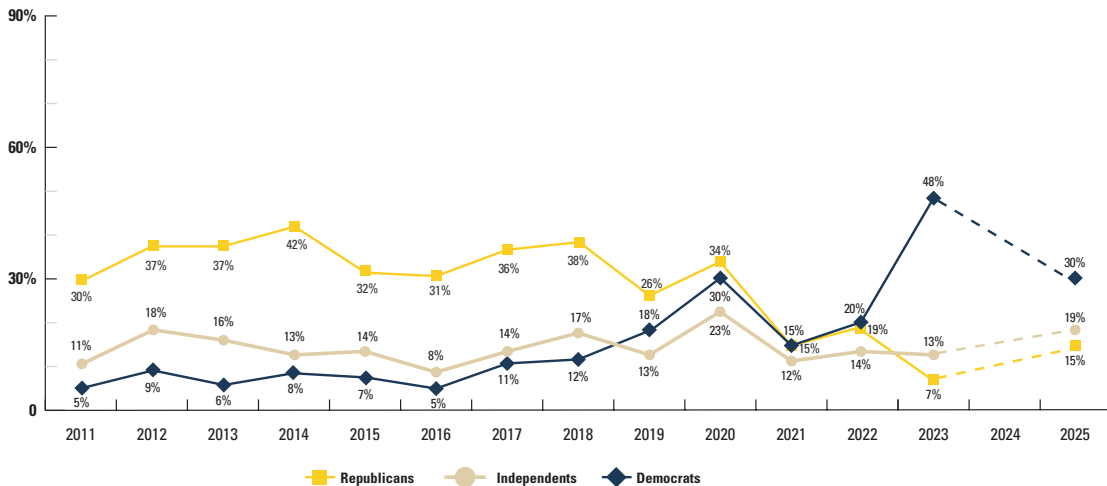
Figure 5
Local officials’ evaluations of Michigan Legislature’s performance, 2011-2025



Note: Question not asked in Spring 2024.

Earlier partisan differences in local leaders’ evaluations of the Legislature’s performance had nearly disappeared between 2019–2022. However, the change of legislative control fully to the Democrats after the November 2022 elections, triggered a huge shift in the views of the Legislature’s work. With the 2024 election creating a divided legislature —with Republicans controlling the House and Democrats controlling the Senate—assessments are again starting to converge. Among Independents, 19% say the Legislature is doing an excellent or good job (up from 13% in 2023), and Republican leaders’ positive ratings rose from 7% in 2023 to 15% this year (see *Figure 6*). Meanwhile, Democrats’ ratings have dropped from a high of 48% in 2023 to 30% in 2025.

Figure 6
Percentage of local officials who rate the Michigan Legislature’s performance as “excellent” or “good,” 2011-2025, by partisan identification



Note: Question not asked in Spring 2024.

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 2025 wave was conducted April 7 – June 12, 2025. 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 1,328 jurisdictions across the state, resulting in a 72% response rate by unit. More information is available at <https://closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/mpps-2025-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, will be available soon at <http://mpps.umich.edu>.

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.



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