



Michigan local government and law enforcement leaders' nuanced views on police accountability issues

By Debra Horner and Margaret Walthall

This report presents the views of Michigan's local government leaders, local chiefs of police, county sheriffs, and county prosecutors regarding accountability in law enforcement, including opinions on a nationwide officer misconduct database, who should have authority to investigate allegations or prosecute evidence of officer misconduct, civilian oversight boards, and assessments of local residents' confidence in how misconduct is handled. These findings are based on statewide surveys of local government leaders in the spring 2024 wave of the Michigan Public Policy Survey (MPPS).

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.

Key Findings

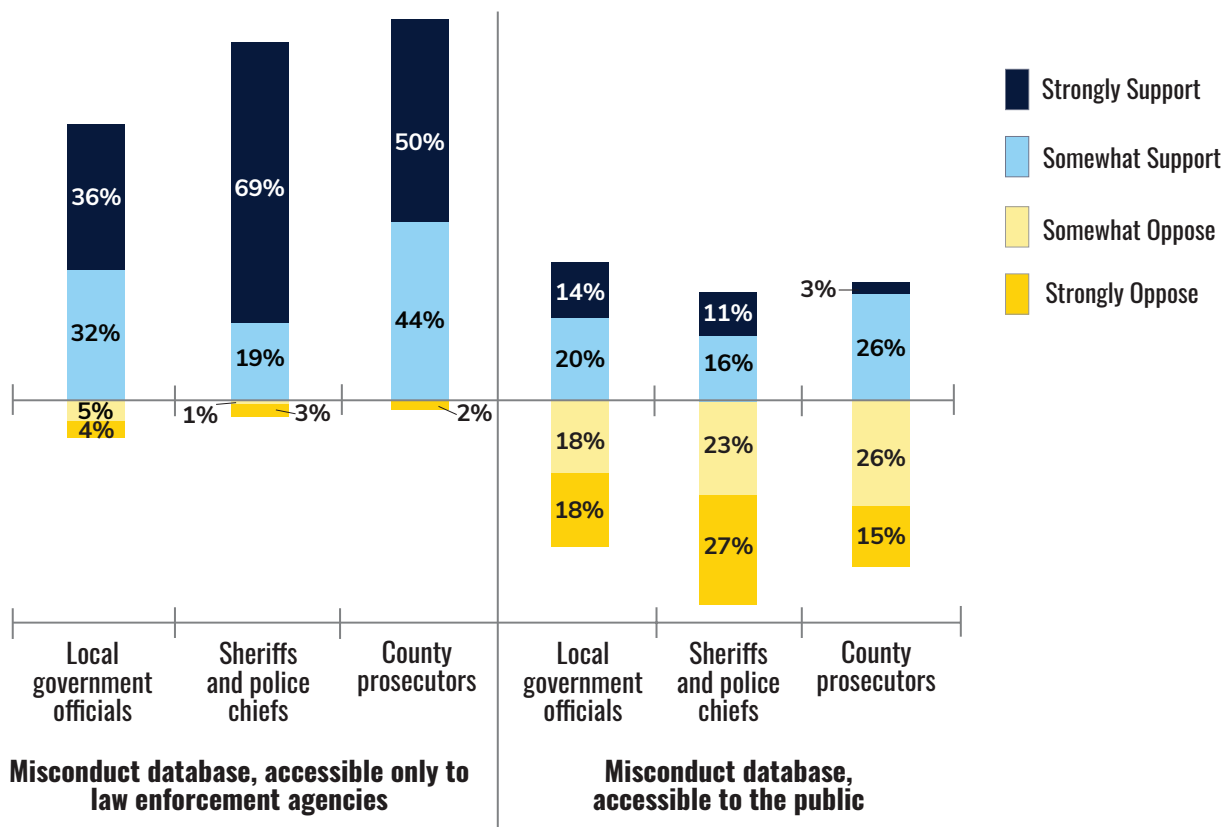
- There is widespread support statewide among local government and law enforcement leaders for a nationwide or statewide database identifying law enforcement officers with misconduct charges or job terminations, as long as it is accessible only to law enforcement agencies.
 - » More than two-thirds (68%) of local government officials, almost all sheriffs and police chiefs (88%), and elected county prosecutors (94%) support an access-restricted misconduct database.
 - » However, support declines substantially for a publicly-accessible misconduct database: local government officials (24%), sheriffs (32%), police chiefs (26%), and elected county prosecutors (29%).
- Law enforcement leaders (71%), local government officials (66%), and county prosecutors (59%) also express support for policies that would formally penalize law enforcement agencies that fail to review a potential hire's history of misconduct with previous departments.
- When it comes to investigations of deputy or officer misconduct, most sheriffs and chiefs support internal investigations and believe in a role for the State Police or other law enforcement agencies, but opinions were mixed on the role of independent outside investigators. There is more opposition than support for either the Michigan Attorney General's office or civilian oversight boards having a role in investigating officer misconduct.
- Statewide, 62% of sheriffs and 60% of police chiefs say residents in their jurisdiction are "very confident" that instances of misconduct by local law enforcement officers will be dealt with effectively, but only 21% of local government officials agree.

Mixed support for public police misconduct database

There is widespread support among Michigan’s local government and law enforcement leaders for a nationwide and/or statewide database identifying law enforcement officers with misconduct charges or job terminations, with the stipulation that it is accessible only to law enforcement agencies. More than two-thirds (68%) of local government officials, and almost all sheriffs and police chiefs (88%) and elected county prosecutors (94%) support an access-restricted misconduct database (see *Figure 1a*). There is very little outright opposition.

However, attitudes toward making such a database accessible to the public are much more mixed. While around a third of local government leaders (34%) would support it, another 36% oppose a publicly-accessible database. Among sheriffs and local police chiefs, 27% would support it, while half say they oppose, and prosecutors are similarly split (29% support versus 41% oppose).

Figure 1a
Support for or opposition to nationwide and/or statewide database identifying law enforcement officers with misconduct charges or job terminations, by public office

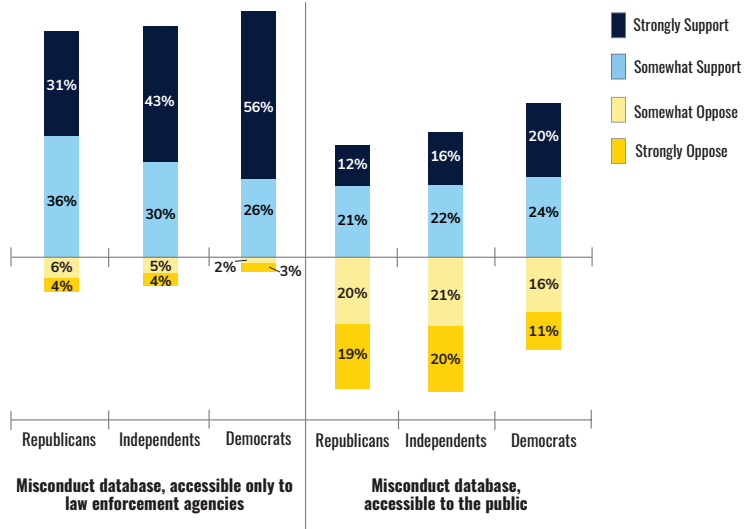


Note: Responses for “neither support nor oppose” or “don’t know” not shown.

Some differences in opinions about publicly-accessible police misconduct databases fall along partisan lines. Among local government leaders, support for a police misconduct database restricted to law enforcement is relatively consistent, with the highest support among those who self-identify as Democrats (82%), but with most Republican (77%) and Independent (73%) local officials also supporting one (see *Figure 1b*). More Democrats support (44%) than oppose publicly-accessible police misconduct databases (27%), while Republicans are more evenly divided (33% support vs. 39% oppose), as are Independents (38% support vs. 41% oppose).

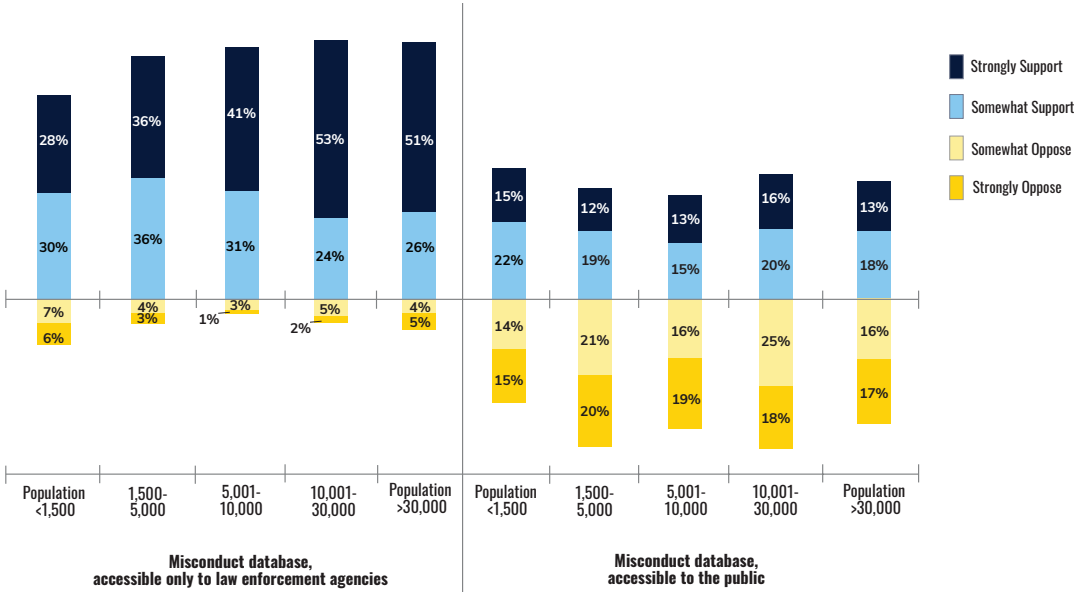
Local officials from larger jurisdictions are most likely to express support for a misconduct database accessible only to law enforcement, with over half from the state’s largest communities expressing strong support (see *Figure 1c*). However, when it comes to support for a publicly-accessible database, there are fewer differences by population size.

Figure 1b
Support for or opposition to nationwide and/or statewide police misconduct database, among local government officials, by partisan self-identification



Note: Responses for “neither support nor oppose” or “don’t know” not shown.

Figure 1c
Support for or opposition to nationwide and/or statewide police misconduct database, among local government officials, by jurisdiction size

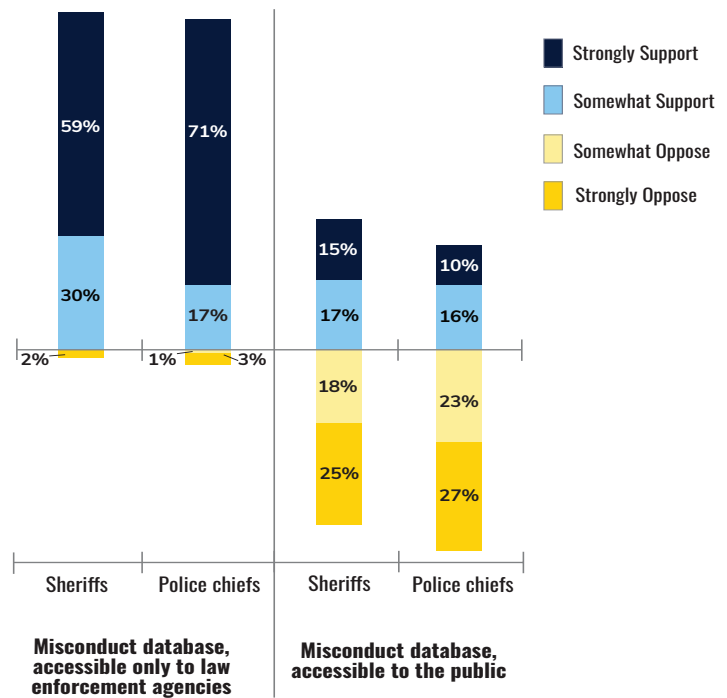


Note: Responses for “neither support nor oppose” or “don’t know” not shown.

Among law enforcement agency leaders, county sheriffs (59%) are less likely than local chiefs of police (71%) to “strongly” support a misconduct database accessible only to law enforcement (see *Figure 1d*). However, sheriffs are more likely to support (32%) and less likely to oppose (43%) a misconduct database that is open to the public compared with police chiefs (26% support and 50% oppose).

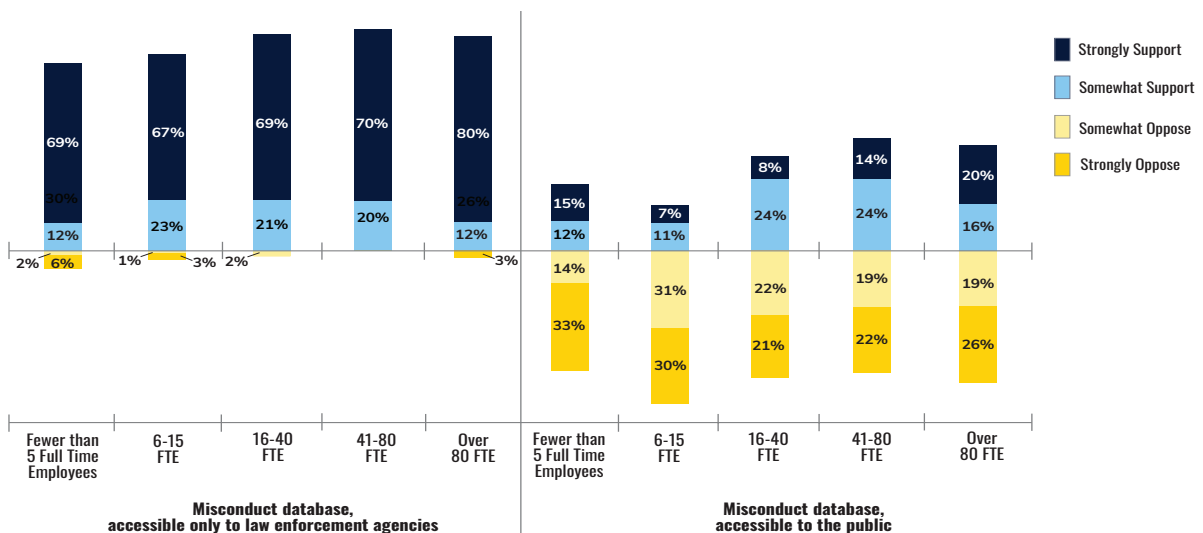
Similarly, when sheriffs’ and chiefs’ opinions are broken out by size of their agencies, they mirror local officials’ opinions in smaller vs. larger jurisdictions. Sheriffs and chiefs from larger agencies are more likely to express “strong” support for both limited and publicly-accessible versions of a nationwide or statewide misconduct database. Among law enforcement leaders from the largest agencies (with more than 80 full-time employees), 80% strongly support a private database and 20% strongly support a public one (see *Figure 1e*).

Figure 1d
Support for or opposition to nationwide and/or statewide police misconduct database, among law enforcement leaders, by agency type



Note: Responses for “neither support nor oppose” or “don’t know” not shown.

Figure 1e
Support for or opposition to nationwide and/or statewide police misconduct database, among law enforcement leaders, by agency size

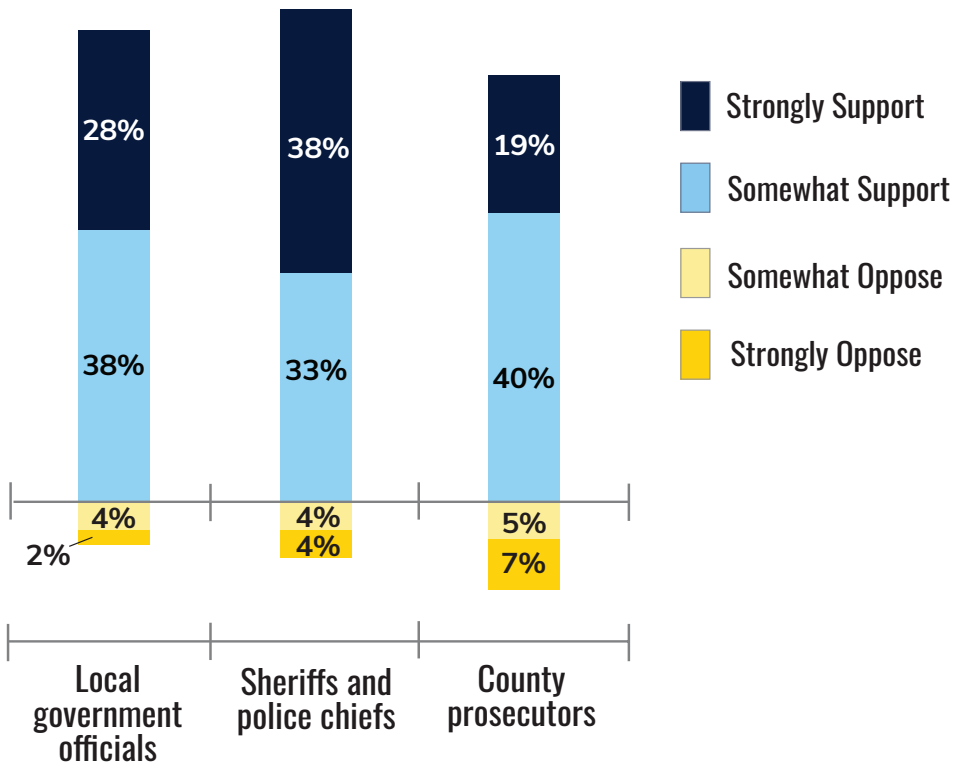


Note: Responses for “neither support nor oppose” or “don’t know” not shown.

Statewide support for formal penalties on agencies that fail to review new hires' misconduct records

There is widespread support and little opposition to introducing policies in Michigan that would formally penalize law enforcement agencies that fail to review a potential hire's history of misconduct with previous departments. Law enforcement leaders themselves (71%) are most likely to express support for such formal penalties, but a strong majority of local government leaders (66%) and county prosecutors (59%) agree (see *Figure 2a*).

Figure 2a
Support for or opposition to formal penalties for law enforcement agencies that fail to review a potential hire's history of misconduct, by public office

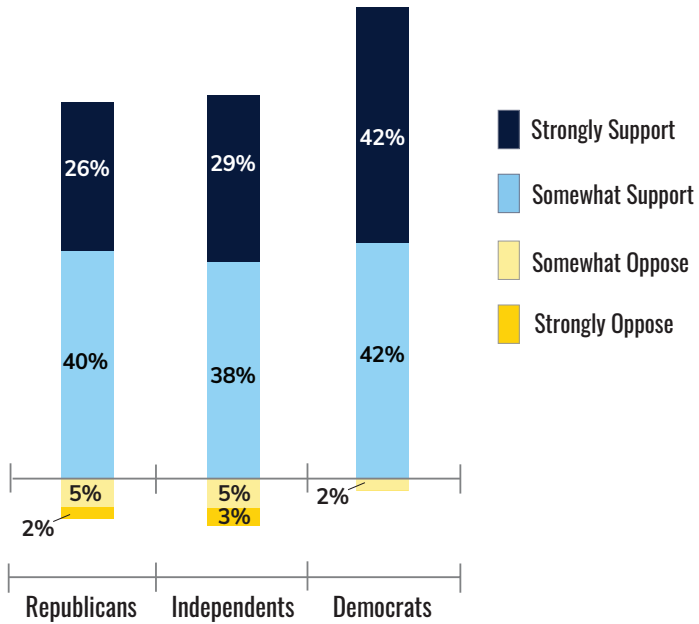


Note: Responses for "neither support nor oppose" or "don't know" not shown.

Among local government leaders, Democrats (84%) are the most likely to support formal penalties for agencies that do not review new hires' previous misconduct, but most Republicans (66%) and Independents (67%) are in favor as well (see *Figure 2b*).

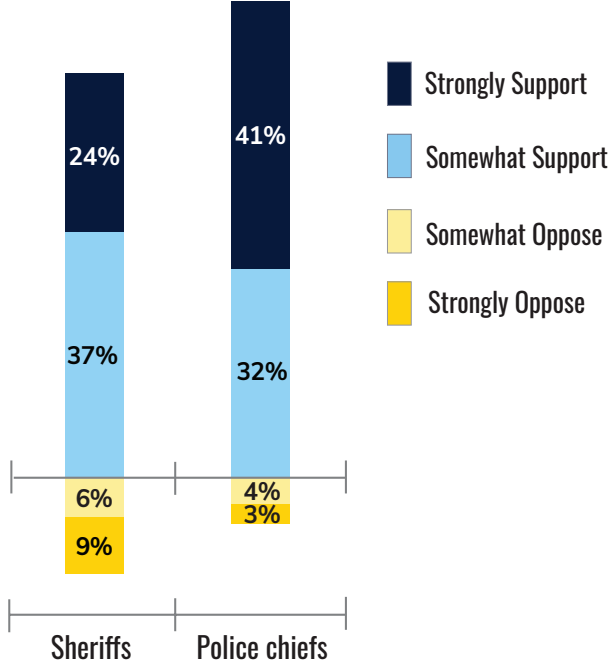
As shown in *Figure 2c*, police chiefs (73%) are more likely to express support for these formal penalties, compared with 61% of county sheriffs (see *Figure 2c*). Just 7% of chiefs oppose such formal penalties, while 15% of sheriffs oppose them.

Figure 2b
Support for or opposition to formal penalties for law enforcement agencies that fail to review a potential hire's history of misconduct, among local government officials, by partisan identification



Note: Responses for “neither support nor oppose” or “don’t know” not shown.

Figure 2c
Support for or opposition to formal penalties for law enforcement agencies that fail to review a potential hire's history of misconduct, among law enforcement leaders, by agency type



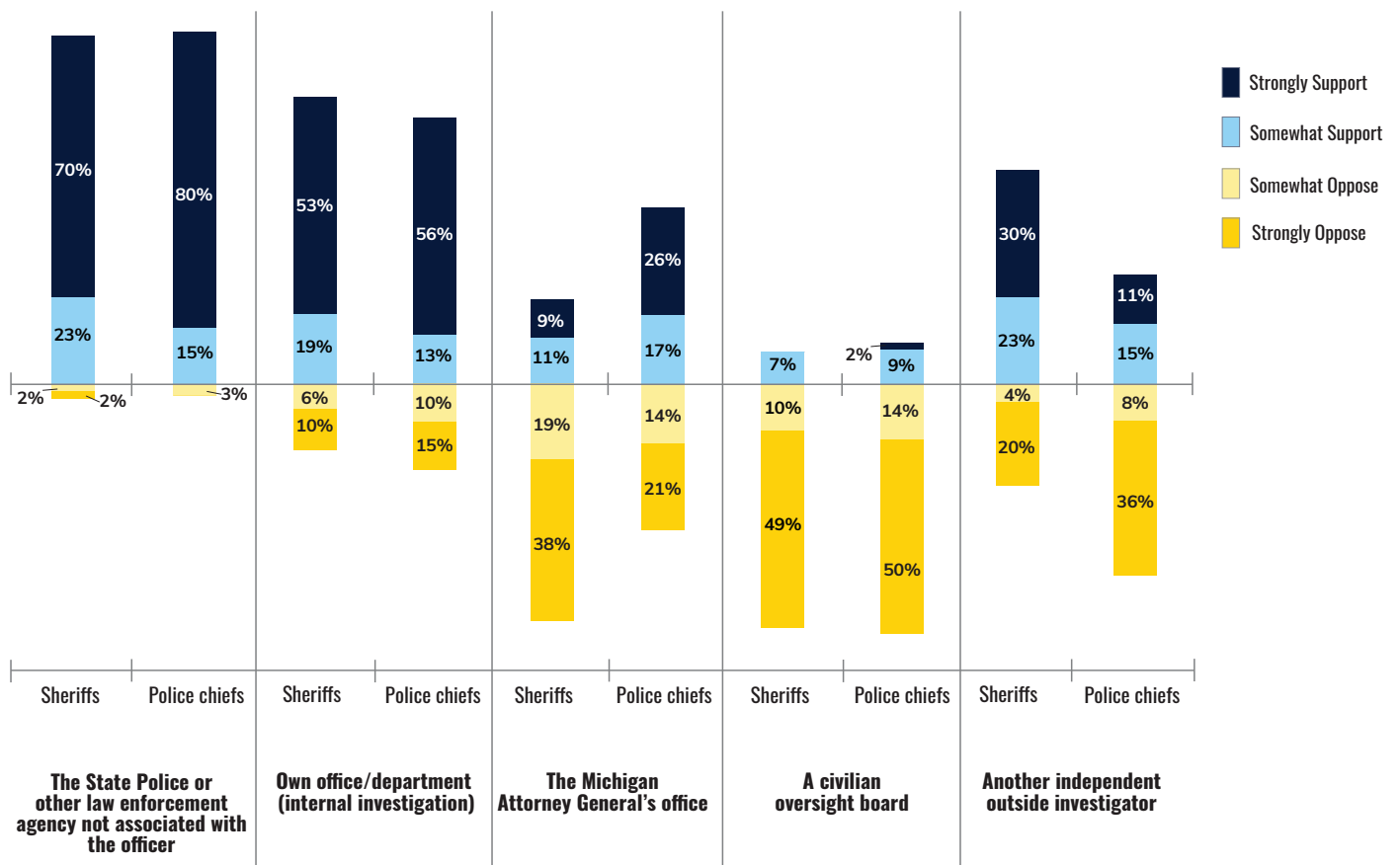
Note: Responses for “neither support nor oppose” or “don’t know” not shown.

Law enforcement leaders prefer misconduct investigations to be conducted by State Police or other law enforcement

The MPPS asked sheriffs and local police chiefs about cases where there is suspicion of criminal misconduct by a deputy or officer in their agency, and whether they would support or oppose various actors having a role in investigating the charge. Most sheriffs (70%) and chiefs (80%) strongly support the State Police or other law enforcement agency (one not associated with the officer under investigation) having a role in investigating officer misconduct, while just over half strongly support their own agency conducting an internal investigation (see *Figure 3*).

Meanwhile, sheriffs (47%) are more likely than chiefs (35%) to oppose a role for the Michigan Attorney General’s office in misconduct investigations; sheriffs (33%) are also more likely than chiefs (26%) to support having other independent outside investigators involved. Both sheriffs and chiefs generally oppose the participation of a civilian oversight board in officer misconduct investigations.

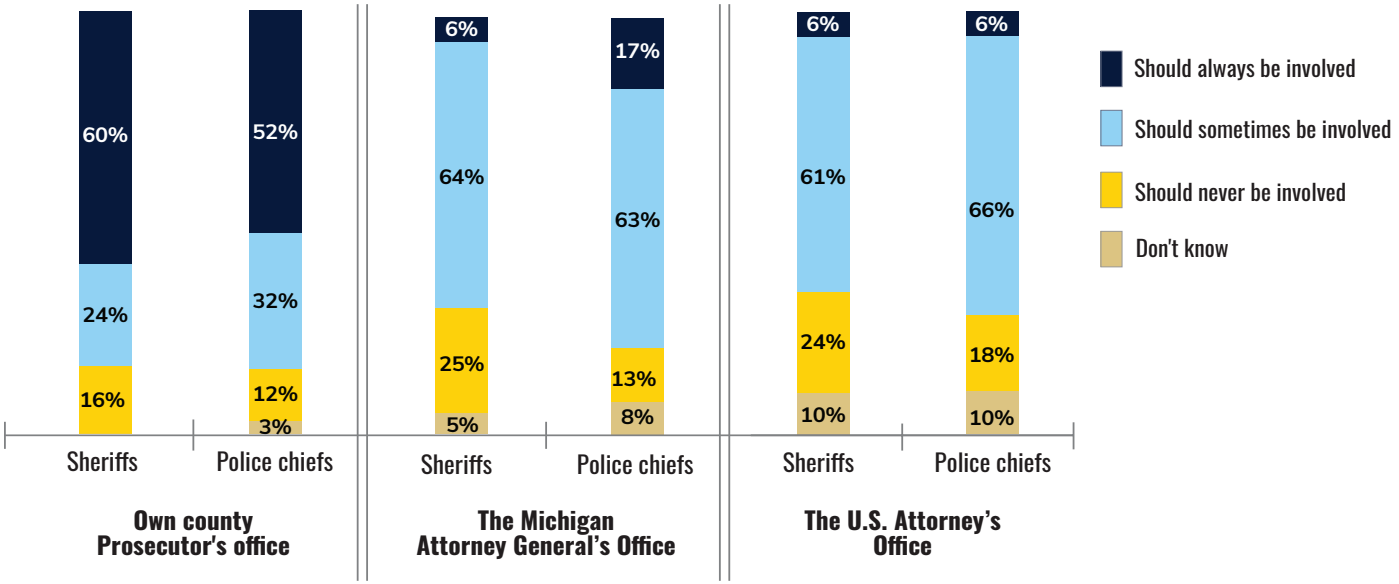
Figure 3
Law enforcement leaders’ support for or opposition to various authorities having a role in investigating suspicion of criminal misconduct by local law enforcement officers, by agency type



Note: Responses for “neither support nor oppose” or “don’t know” not shown.

There is also ambiguity around exactly who law enforcement leaders believe should prosecute cases where there is evidence of criminal misconduct by local deputies or officers. A majority of sheriffs (60%) and chiefs (52%) believe their county prosecutor should always be involved (see *Figure 4*). By contrast, majorities of sheriffs and chiefs believe both the Michigan Attorney General’s Office and a U.S. Attorney’s Office should only sometimes be involved, with a quarter of sheriffs saying neither should be involved in officer misconduct prosecutions.

Figure 4
Law enforcement leaders’ views on which authorities should prosecute evidence of criminal misconduct by local law enforcement officers, by agency type



Relatively little support for civilian oversight boards

As of spring 2024, civilian oversight boards were rare in Michigan communities. Only 5% of local governments statewide report that the primary law enforcement agency working in their community—either their own local police department or the county sheriff—currently has a civilian oversight board that advises the agency.¹ Both local government officials and law enforcement agency leaders were asked whether they support or oppose having a formal civilian oversight commission or board that can review issues or complaints regarding operations, regardless of whether they already have one.

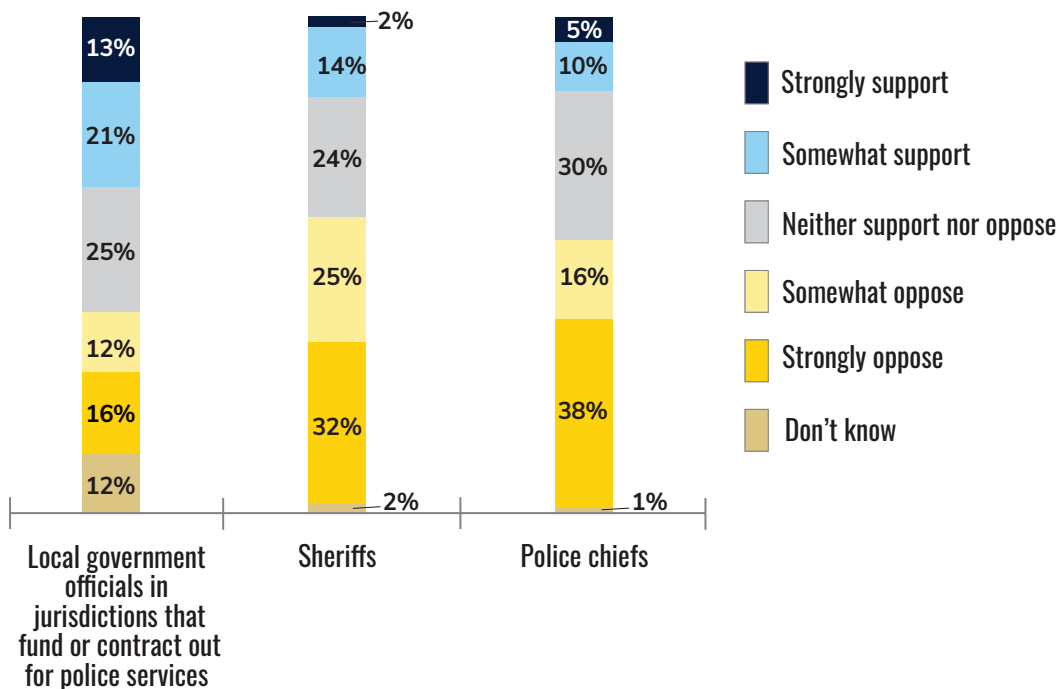
Views among local government leaders are mixed. Around a third of local government leaders (34%) support having a civilian oversight commission for their law enforcement agency, while over a quarter (28%) oppose one (see *Figure 5*). As seen on other issues in this report, but not displayed here, Democrats are significantly more likely to say they support (52%) than oppose (34%) civilian oversight, but Republicans are split evenly (31% support vs. 31% oppose), as are Independents (33% support vs. 33% oppose).

Meanwhile, mirroring the opposition to civilian boards playing a role in misconduct investigations noted above, a majority of sheriffs and police chiefs oppose having a local civilian oversight commission at all, while only 15–16% support them. Leaders from larger law enforcement agencies are more likely to express opposition. While 42–52% of police chiefs in the smallest departments (those with fewer than 15 full-time employees) oppose having a local civilian oversight commission, 62% of those with more than 80 FTE are opposed (not shown).

In addition, when asked whether they would support or oppose providing a civilian oversight commission full access to police body-worn camera or dash camera footage (if used in the jurisdiction), 42% of sheriffs and 35% of police chiefs express “strong” opposition (not shown).

Figure 5

Support for or opposition to formal civilian oversight commission that can review issues or complaints regarding local law enforcement operations, by public office



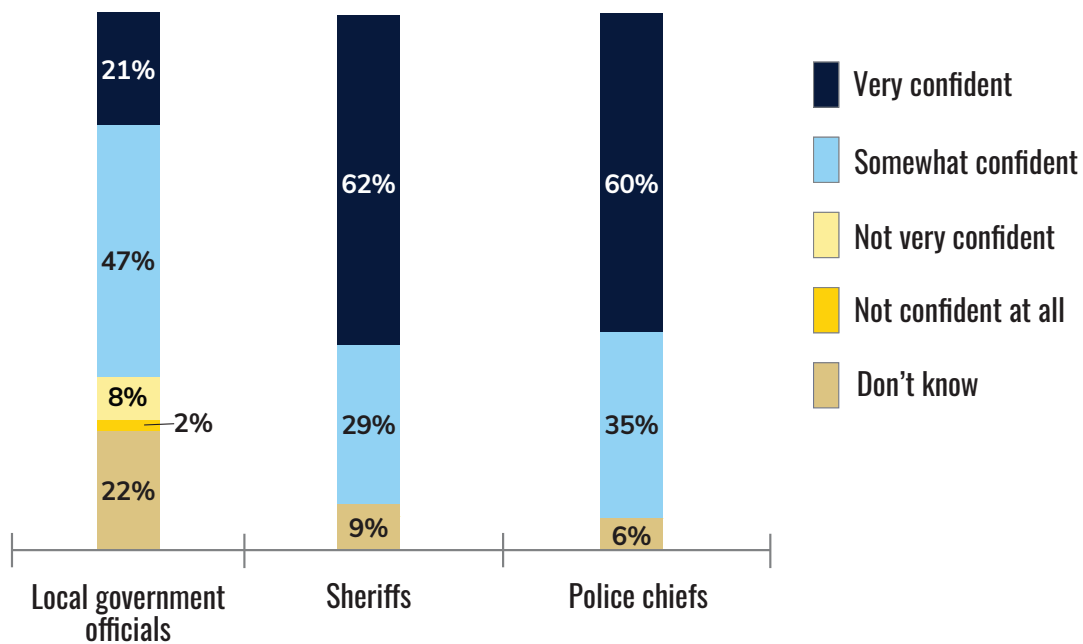
Law enforcement leaders perceive high levels of community confidence that officer misconduct will be addressed effectively; local officials more skeptical

The MPPS survey also asked local government and law enforcement leaders their opinion about their community residents' level of confidence that any instances of misconduct by local law enforcement officers will be dealt with effectively.

Statewide, around one in five (21%) local government leaders say residents in their community are very confident in the effective handling of local law enforcement misconduct (see *Figure 6a*). Another 47% believe their residents are somewhat confident, while just 10% say residents are either not very confident or not confident at all. A substantial percentage of local government leaders (22%) are unsure about their residents' confidence.

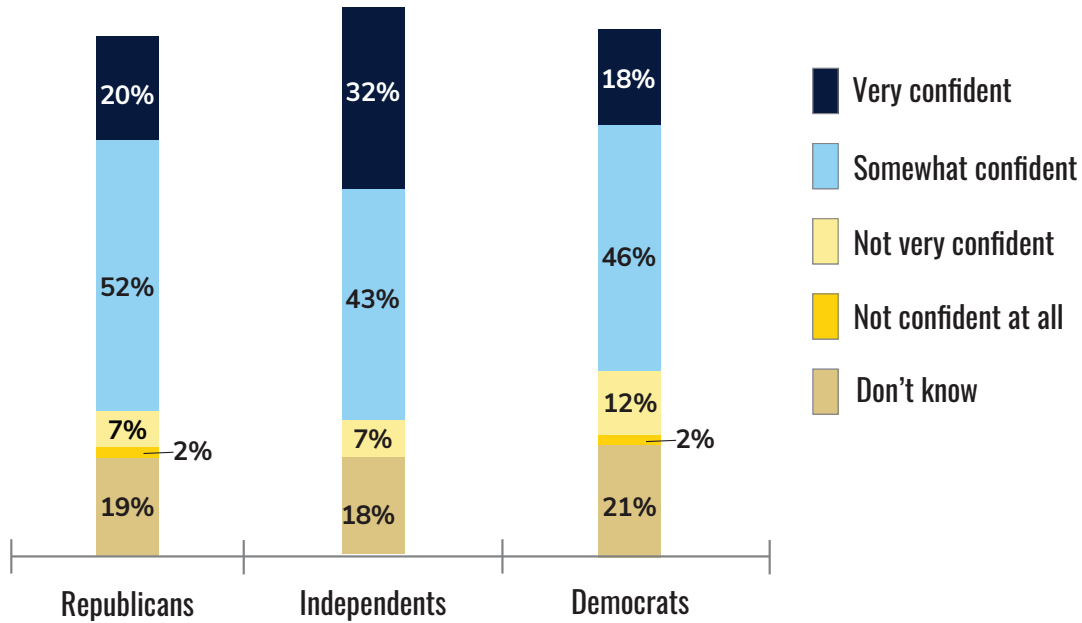
Assessments among law enforcement leaders are considerably more positive, with 62% of sheriffs and 60% of police chiefs saying their community is very confident that misconduct will be dealt with effectively, and none believing there is a lack of confidence.

Figure 6a
Assessments of resident confidence that local law enforcement officers' misconduct will be dealt with effectively, by public office



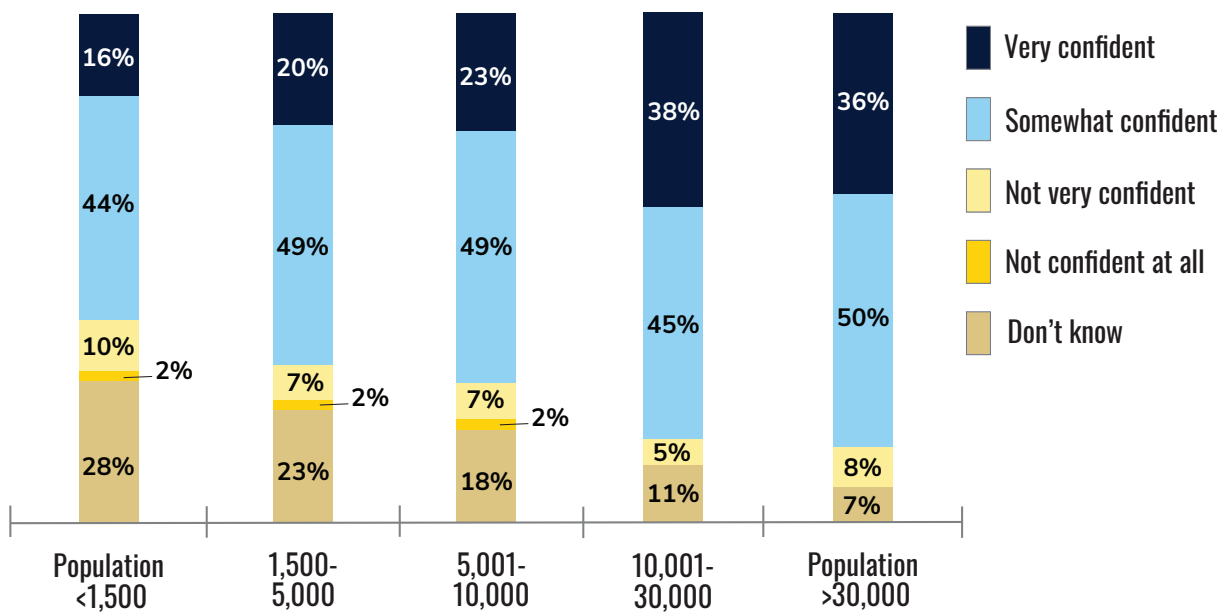
Among local government leaders, when looking at differences by partisan identification, Republicans (72%) and Independents (75%) are more likely than Democrats (64%) to report confidence among their residents in the handling of incidents of police misconduct (see *Figure 6b*).

Figure 6b
Assessments of resident confidence that local law enforcement officers' misconduct will be dealt with effectively, among local government officials, by partisan identification



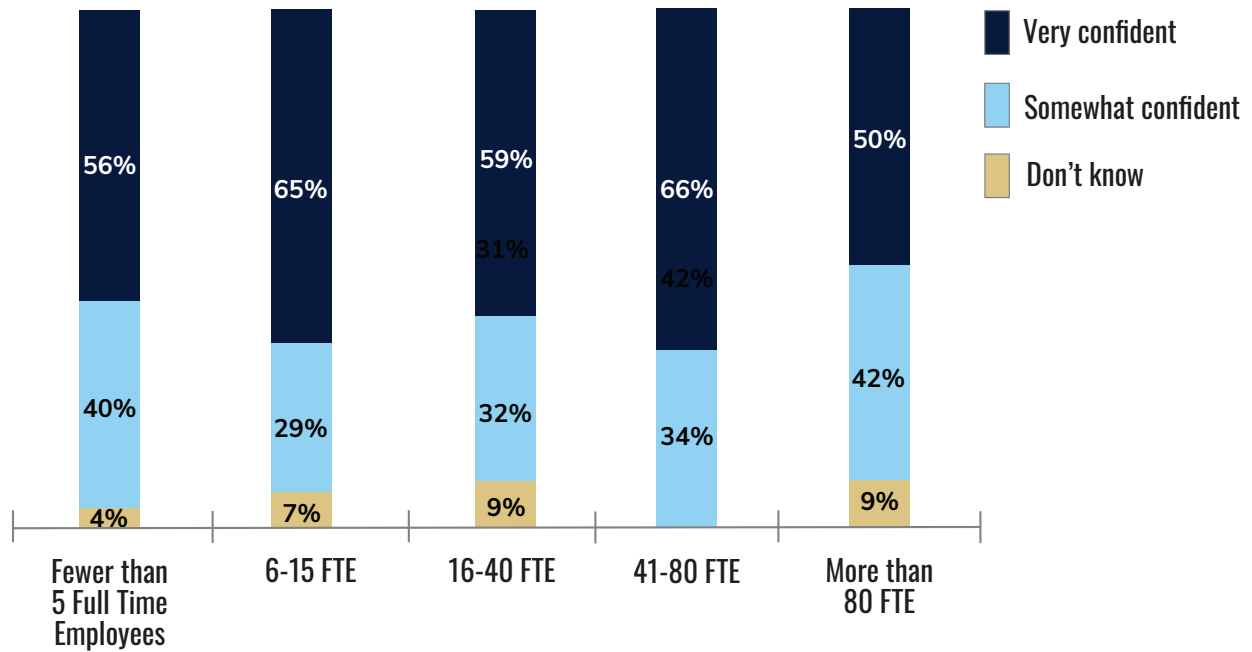
Local government leaders from larger jurisdictions are more likely to believe their residents are confident that police misconduct will be handled effectively, while those from the state's smaller jurisdictions are more likely to be unsure (see *Figure 6c*).

Figure 6c
Assessments of resident confidence that local law enforcement officers' misconduct will be dealt with effectively, among local government officials, by population size



As shown in *Figure 6d*, contrasted with the higher levels of assessments of community confidence among local government officials, sheriffs and police chiefs from the largest agencies—those with more than 80 full-time employees—are *least* likely to say their jurisdiction’s residents are very confident (50%).

Figure 6d
Assessments of resident confidence that local law enforcement officers’ misconduct will be dealt with effectively, among law enforcement leaders, by agency size





Conclusion

Among local government officials and law enforcement leaders, there is a broad consensus in favor of establishing a statewide or nationwide database to track law enforcement officers with histories of misconduct or terminations, provided access is limited to law enforcement agencies. This policy enjoys strong bipartisan support and is seen as a practical tool for improving hiring practices and accountability within the profession. However, enthusiasm drops sharply when the prospect of public access to such a database is raised. In addition, there is significant support for formal penalties against agencies that fail to review an applicant's prior misconduct history, with support cutting across agency type, jurisdiction size, and political affiliation.

When it comes to the investigation and prosecution of officer misconduct, law enforcement leaders prefer internal, State Police, or peer-agency investigations, rather than oversight by external bodies such as the Michigan Attorney General's office or civilian boards. While some law enforcement leaders, particularly sheriffs, express openness to independent outside investigators, both law enforcement and local government leaders remain generally skeptical of expanding civilian oversight, especially in larger law enforcement agencies.

Finally, perceptions of public confidence in the handling of police misconduct diverge notably between law enforcement leaders and local government officials. Law enforcement leaders are much more likely to believe their communities are "very confident" in the system's ability to address misconduct, while local officials express more uncertainty and perceive a lower level of public trust, especially in smaller jurisdictions.

Overall, these findings suggest that Michigan's local government and law enforcement leaders recognize the need for greater accountability and improved hiring practices, and that they are open to reforms that enhance internal transparency and peer oversight. However, there remains considerable resistance to wider public disclosure and external oversight mechanisms.

Notes

1. Horner, D., Fitzpatrick, N., and Verna, M. (2025, May). *More Michigan communities using policies to improve police-community relations*. Ann Arbor, MI: Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy at the Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy, University of Michigan. Retrieved from <https://closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/132/mpps-policy-brief-more-michigan-communities-using-policies-improve-police-community-relations>

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.

University of Michigan

Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy

Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy

Joan and Sanford Weill Hall

735 S. State Street, Suite 5310

Ann Arbor, MI 48109-3091

The Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy (CLOSUP), housed at the University of Michigan's Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy, conducts and supports applied policy research designed to inform state, local, and urban policy issues. Through integrated research, teaching, and outreach involving academic researchers, students, policymakers and practitioners, CLOSUP seeks to foster understanding of today's state and local policy problems, and to find effective solutions to those problems.

web: www.closup.umich.edu

email: closup@umich.edu

phone: 734-647-4091



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