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**Bridging the Divide:  
Leadership Perceptions of Law Enforcement—  
Community Trust**

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# Bridging the Divide: Leadership Perceptions of Law Enforcement–Community Trust

By Micaja Verna and Debra Horner

This report presents the assessments of Michigan’s local government leaders, local chiefs of police, and county sheriffs on the interactions and relationship between law enforcement and Michigan communities. In addition, these local leaders, plus county prosecutors, were asked about their views on policies and practices associated with police-community relations. 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.

## Key Findings

- **Minimal change in local officials’ assessments of police-community relations between 2015 and 2024**, despite national attention to law enforcement practices over the past decade.
- **Slight declines in trust and perceived responsiveness:**
  - The percentage of local officials who “strongly agree” that most residents trust law enforcement declined from 49% in 2015 to 46% in 2024. Confidence in timely response fell from 72% to 69%.
- **Sharp perception gaps between local government and law enforcement leaders:**
  - In 2024, 92% of law enforcement “strongly agree” that officers treat all residents professionally, compared to just 67% of local government officials.
- **Communities with higher Black populations report more critical views:**
  - Only 55% of local officials in jurisdictions with more than 25% Black residents “strongly agree” that officers treat people professionally.
  - Just 44% of local officials in jurisdictions with more than 25% Black residents “strongly disagree” that inappropriate use of force is a problem, compared to 85% in communities with fewer than 5% Black residents.
  - Significant gaps in perceptions between local officials and law enforcement leaders in communities with higher Black populations.
  - Just 7% of local officials in communities with more than 25% Black residents report being “very satisfied” with their County Sheriff’s office in 2024, a significant drop from 27% in 2015.
- **Policy reforms show uneven awareness and implementation:**
  - Law enforcement leaders consistently report higher rates of reform adoption (e.g., bias training, civilian oversight) than local government officials — suggesting a communication or implementation gap.

# Background

Between 2015 and 2024, the United States experienced multiple flashpoints that shaped public discourse on policing and trust in government. The fatal shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson (2014) and the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement brought national attention to racial disparities in law enforcement. In Michigan, the Flint Water Crisis (2014–2016) further deepened distrust, particularly among Black and low-income communities. By 2020, the murder of George Floyd triggered global protests, prompting renewed calls for policing reform and institutional accountability.

In Michigan, police-community relations have long been a site of tension and activism. From the Department of Justice’s oversight of the Detroit Police Department (2003–2016), to the controversial 2014 police killing of Aura Rosser in Ann Arbor, the state has experienced its own flashpoints of public outrage and institutional scrutiny.<sup>1</sup> More recently, the 2022 police shooting of Patrick Lyoya in Grand Rapids reignited protests statewide and drew national attention.<sup>2</sup>

Meanwhile, public opinion data underscore deep racial divides in perceptions of policing. For example, a 2020 DMACS survey found that only 27% of Black Detroiters trusted police to do what is right “all or most of the time,” in stark contrast to higher levels of trust reported in suburban white communities.<sup>3</sup>

In response to the national reckoning around police brutality, several Michigan municipalities, including Lansing, Dearborn, and Detroit, launched reform initiatives between 2020 and 2024 — such as oversight commissions, expanded body camera use, and alternative response models.<sup>4</sup> However, these efforts remain localized, inconsistently implemented, and, according to local officials, often unrecognized or underreported.<sup>5</sup>

Against this backdrop, the Michigan Public Policy Survey (MPPS) offers a rare opportunity to assess whether perceptions among local government officials and law enforcement leaders have shifted since 2015 — a baseline year just before these events catalyzed national reckoning. As this report shows, change has been marginal at best.

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<sup>1</sup> *Fatal Police Shooting in Ann Arbor | ACLU of Michigan*. 22 Dec. 2015, <https://www.aclumich.org/en/cases/fatal-police-shooting-ann-arbor>.

<sup>2</sup> White, Ed and Associated Press. “Michigan Police Officer Charged with Murder in Patrick Lyoya’s Death Is Fired.” *PBS News*, 15 Jun. 2022, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/michigan-police-officer-charged-with-murder-in-patrick-lyoyas-death-is-fired>.

<sup>3</sup> Chojnacki, Lauren. *Personal Experience with Police and the Policing Views of Detroit Residents (2020)*. Issue Brief, University of Michigan, Feb. 2024, <https://detroitssurvey.umich.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Personal-Experiences-with-Police-and-the-Policing-Views-of-Detroit-Residents-2020.pdf>.

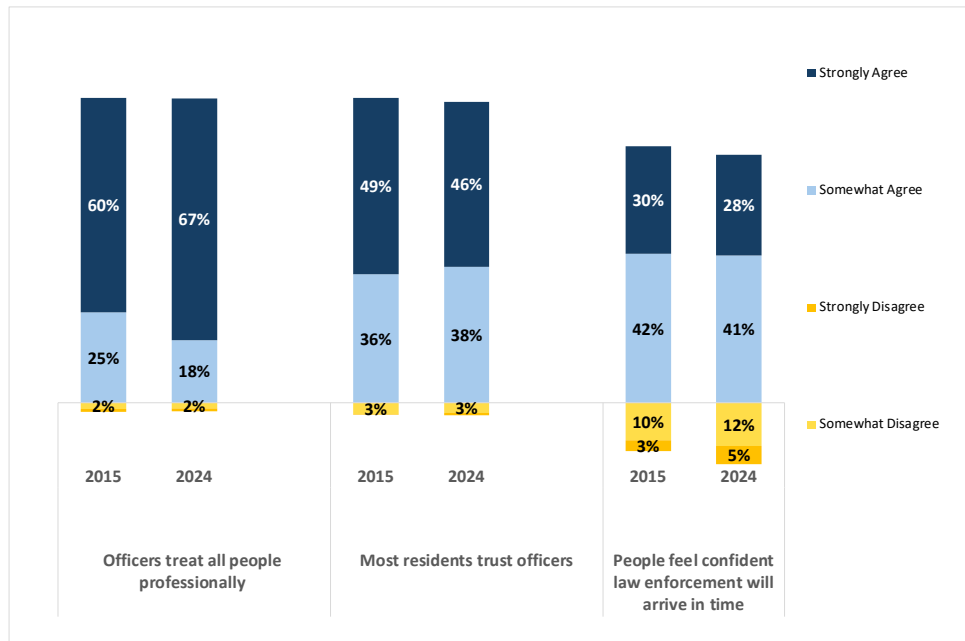
<sup>4</sup> Horner, Debra. *Michigan Local Leaders’ Views on Policing Co-Response and Alternative Response Teams*. Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy | University of Michigan, Feb. 2025, <https://closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/130/mpps-michigan-local-leaders-views-policing-co-response-and-alternative-response-teams>. <https://web.archive.org/web/20200604194828/https://www.detroitnews.com/story/news/local/michigan/2020/06/04/mich-senate-panel-votes-require-implicit-bias-training-police/3142904001/>

<sup>5</sup> Horner, Debra, et al. *Michigan Local Government Leaders Report Significant Increases in Police Surveillance Technology, Uncertainty about AI Introduction*. University of Michigan, Apr. 2025, <https://closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/131/mpps-michigan-local-leaders-report-increases-police-surveillance-technology-AI-uncertainty>.

# Only small shifts in assessments of police-community relations statewide since 2015

In both 2015 and again in 2024, the MPPS asked local government officials a series of questions about relationships between community members, local government, and law enforcement in their jurisdictions. Local officials' perceptions of police-community relations have remained relatively stable across the nine-year comparison period. The most striking increase among local government leaders appears in assessments of whether law enforcement officers in their community treat all people professionally regardless of demographic characteristics. In 2015, 60% of local officials “strongly” agreed with the statement that officers treat all community members professionally. By 2024, that percentage increased to 67% (see Figure 1a). Meanwhile, in both 2015 and 2024, only 3% of local government leaders statewide disagreed. By contrast, there has been a slight decline from 2015 (49%) to 2024 (46%) in the percentage of local officials statewide who “strongly” agreed that most people in their jurisdiction trust local law enforcement officers. But, again, just 3-4% disagreed. Finally, there has been a marginal decrease in assessments of whether residents are confident law enforcement will arrive on time, from 72% of local officials agreeing. However, within this category, the percentage who disagree has increased from 13% in 2015 to 17% in 2024.

**Figure 1a**  
**Local officials’ agreement or disagreement with statements about the relationship between community members and the law enforcement officers who serve their jurisdiction, 2015 vs. 2024**

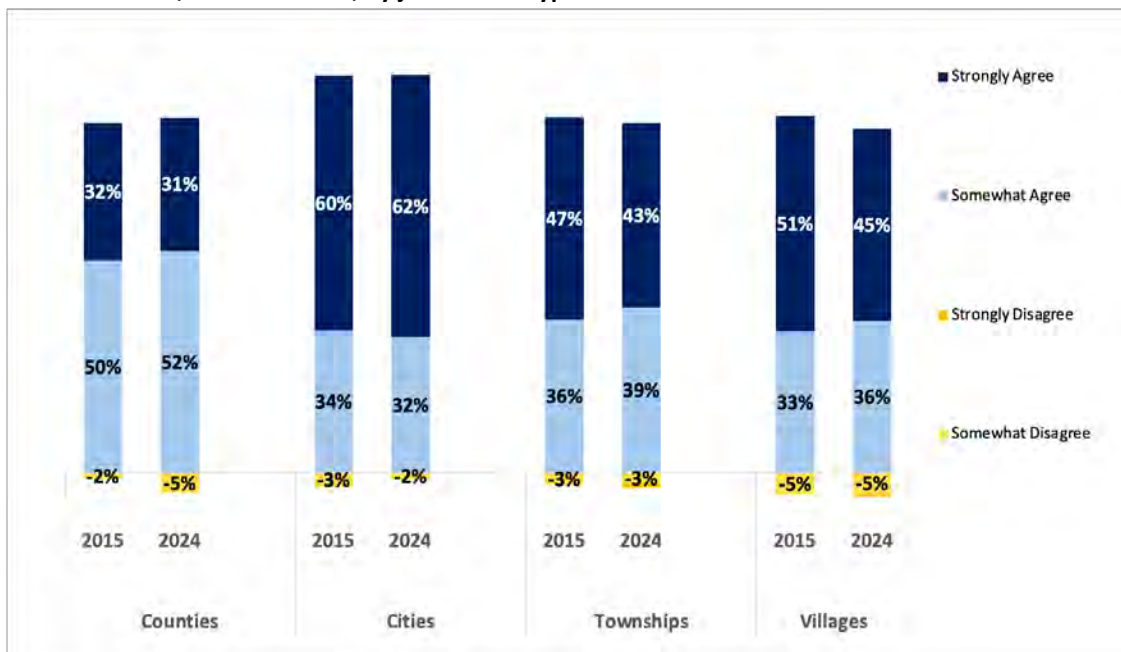


Note: Responses for “neither agree nor disagree” and “don’t know” are not shown.

Looking specifically at assessments of trust between community members and law enforcement officers across different jurisdiction types, the MPPS findings reveal generally consistent patterns between 2015 and 2024 with some prominent variations (see Figure 1b). Counties show a modest shift in their assessment patterns, with county officials reporting "somewhat agree" increasing slightly to 52% in 2024 while those "strongly agreeing" decreased

by one percentage point to 31%. Concurrently, counties reporting "strongly disagree" increased by three percentage points. Townships, which their levels of strong agreement in 2015 at 47%, show a four-percentage point decline to 43% in 2024, though this appears partially offset by increases in the "somewhat agree" category. Cities, display the highest levels of agreement across jurisdiction types, with only 2 percent shifts in both 2015 and 2024.

**Figure 1b**  
**Local officials' agreement or disagreement with the statement "Most people in my jurisdiction trust our law enforcement officers," 2015 vs. 2024, by jurisdiction type**



Note: Responses for "neither agree nor disagree" and "don't know" are not shown.

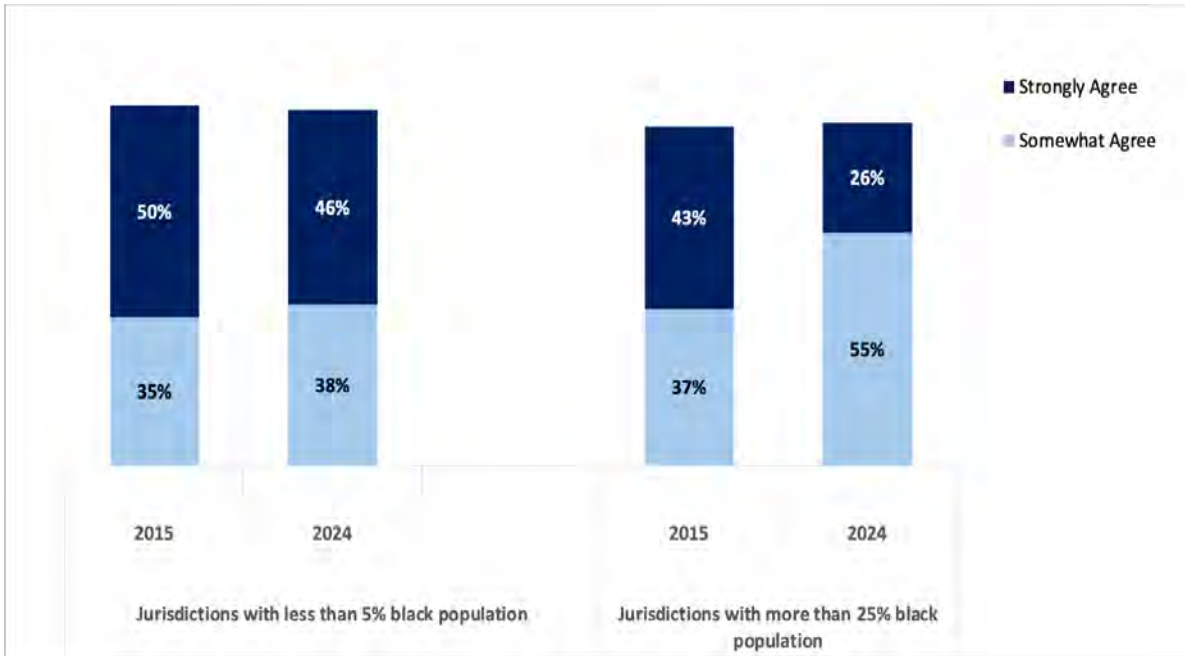
Analyzing the MPPS findings by demographic makeup reveals the greatest variation in perceptions of trust over the nine-year period. Among communities with fewer than 5% Black residents, the percentage of local officials who "strongly agree" that residents trust law enforcement declined slightly from 50% in 2015 to 46% in 2024 (see Figure 1c). However, in jurisdictions where 25% or more of the population is Black, the drop is more pronounced, from 43% strongly agreeing in 2015 to 26% in 2024. This decrease is offset by an 18-point increase in those who "somewhat agree," suggesting a shift toward more cautious views. Altogether, these changes suggest that local officials in jurisdictions with more Black residents are seeing signs of eroded trust between residents and police.

Despite the relatively little change in perceived trust, communities with higher Black populations have seen noteworthy increases in the adoption of certain police-community relations policies. In jurisdictions where Black residents make up 25% or more of the population, 46% were already using community policing in 2015, rising to 54% in 2024 (not shown in a figure). However, a more dramatic growth is seen in other areas. For example, policies aimed at recruiting or retaining a law enforcement workforce that reflects the community's demographics rose from 23% in 2015 to 65% in 2024, a 42-point jump. Similarly, the share of jurisdictions making policies publicly available increased from 12% to 39% over the same period.

Interestingly, support for civilian oversight boards has moved in the opposite direction. In 2015, 28% of these communities said they were “very unlikely” to adopt such boards and by 2024 that number has grown to 57%. This signals a growing resistance to this form of public accountability, even in communities that otherwise expanded reforms.

**Figure 1c**

**Local officials' agreement with the statement "Most people in my jurisdiction trust our law enforcement officers," 2015 vs. 2024, by demographic makeup of jurisdiction**

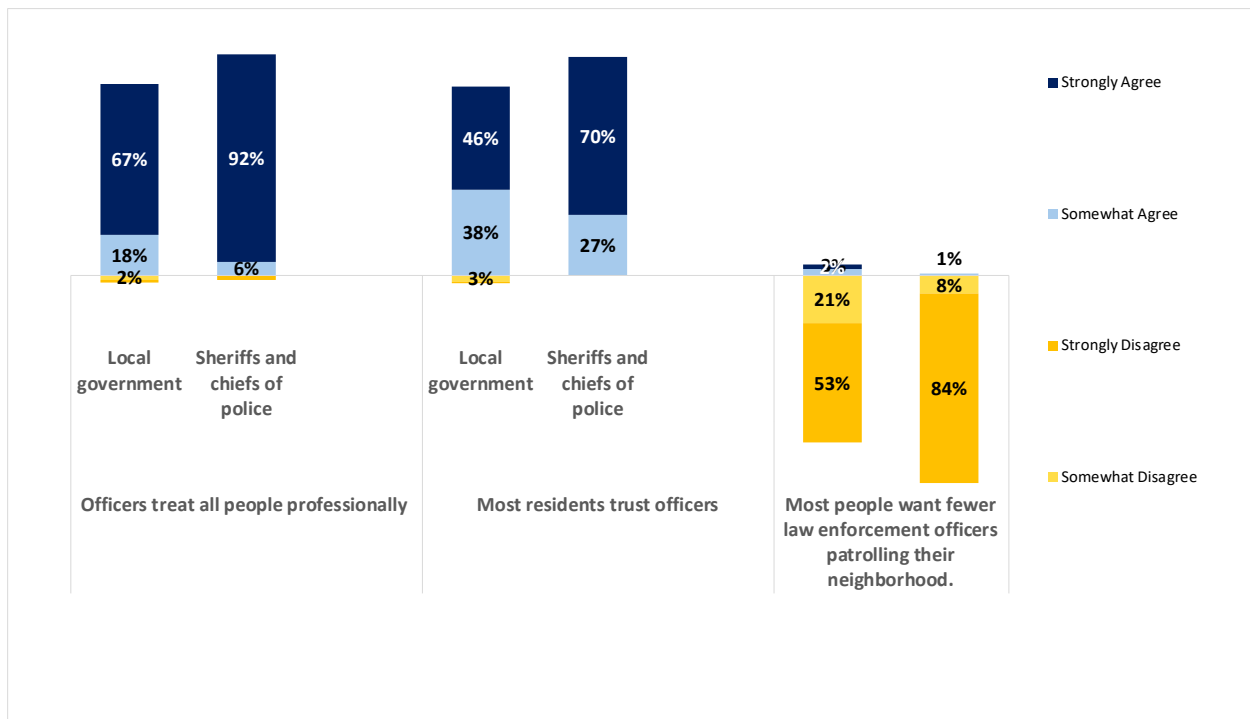


# Significant perception gaps between Law Enforcement Officials and Local Government Leaders

The 2024 MPPS reveals distinguished differences in how law enforcement officials and local government leaders assess police-community relationships (see Figure 2a). The most pronounced disparity appears in perceptions of professional treatment, where 92% of law enforcement officials (sheriffs and chiefs of police) "strongly agree" that officers treat all people professionally regardless of demographic characteristics, compared to only 67% of local government officials who share this level of confidence. Similarly, assessments diverge regarding community trust in law enforcement, with 70% of law enforcement officials saying they "strongly agree" that most people trust officers, while just 46% of local government officials express the same level of certainty.

Conversely, local governments have reported 53% strong disagreement with a desire for less law enforcement in neighborhoods and stark comparison to the 84% of law enforcement who share this sentiment. Across all metrics, law enforcement officials consistently report more positive assessments than their local government counterparts.

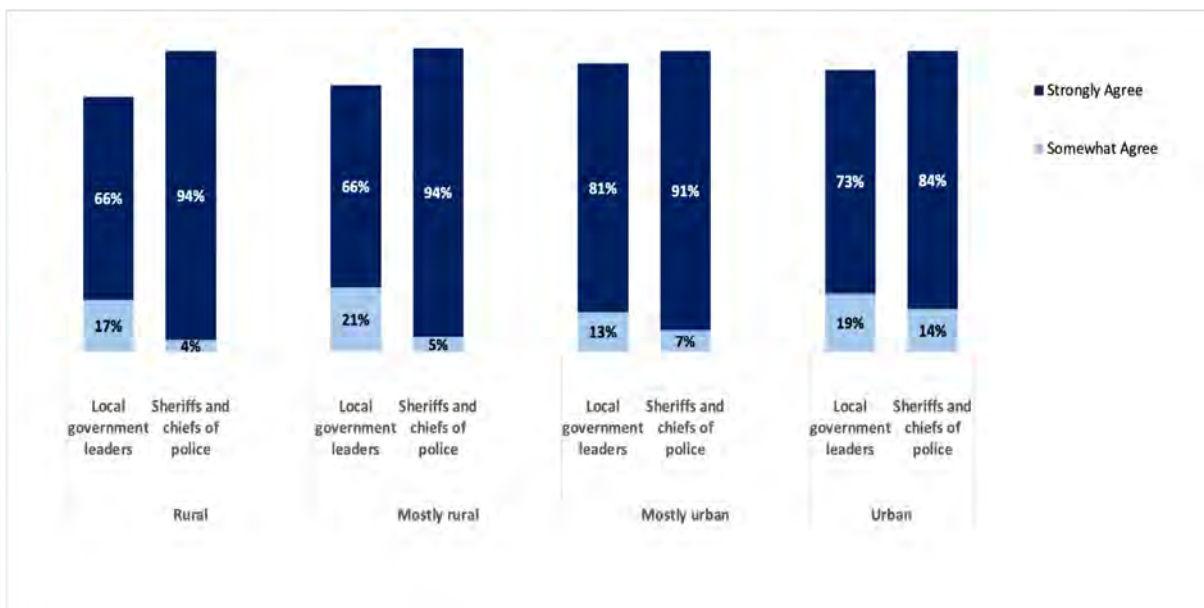
**Figure 2a**  
**Comparison of local officials' and law enforcement leaders' agreement or disagreement with statements about the relationship between community members and the law enforcement officers who serve their jurisdiction, 2024**



Note: Responses for "neither agree nor disagree" and "don't know" are not shown.

Given the previous high reports on professionalism within police-community relations it is not surprising to observe similar patterns across self-identified rural and urban communities. Most notably, among mostly rural local governments, 66% “strongly agree” on community treatment, compared to law enforcement perception at 94% (see Figure 2b). This rural perception gap (28 percentage points) remains consistent with the overall pattern of differences between local officials and law enforcement perceptions. In urban jurisdictions, the difference narrows slightly but remains substantial, with 73% of local leaders strongly agreeing that officers treat all people professionally compared to 84% of law enforcement officials.

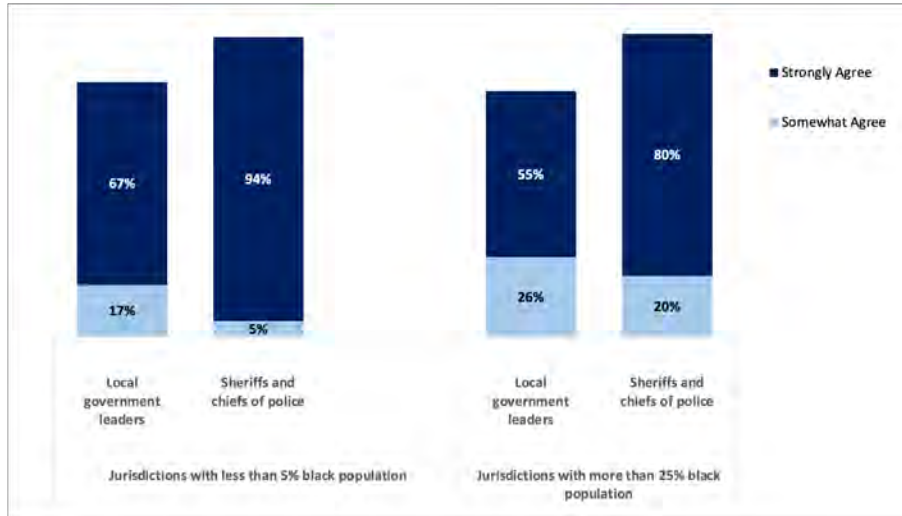
**Figure 2b**  
**Local officials’ and law enforcement leaders’ agreement with the statement “Most law enforcement officers in my jurisdiction treat all people professionally regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender, or other characteristics,” 2024, by rural-urban self-identification**



In communities with greater than 25% Black residents, local government officials report substantially lower rates of strong agreement (55%) that officers treat all people professionally compared to law enforcement officials in those same types of community (80%). By comparison, in jurisdictions with fewer than 5% Black residents, the difference is similar in magnitude but from higher baseline levels, with 67% of local officials strongly agreeing compared to 94% of law enforcement officials.

Figure 2c

Local officials' and law enforcement leaders' agreement 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 demographic makeup of jurisdiction

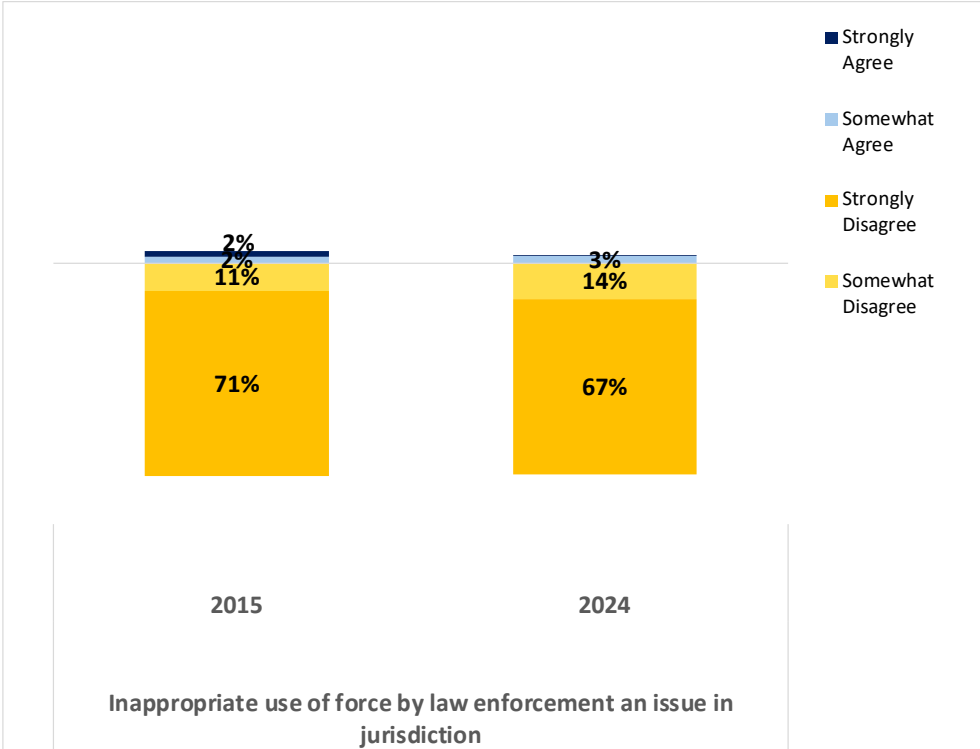


# Little change in views on inappropriate Use of Force and Civil Unrest among Local Officials and Law Enforcement

The MPPS also examined local officials' assessments regarding inappropriate use of force by law enforcement and concerns about civil unrest related to police actions. As shown in *Figure 3a*, local officials' perceptions about inappropriate use of force have remained remarkably stable between 2015 and 2024. In both survey years, approximately 71% of local officials "strongly disagree" that inappropriate use of force has been an issue in their jurisdiction, with only minimal changes in the distribution of responses across the nine-year period.

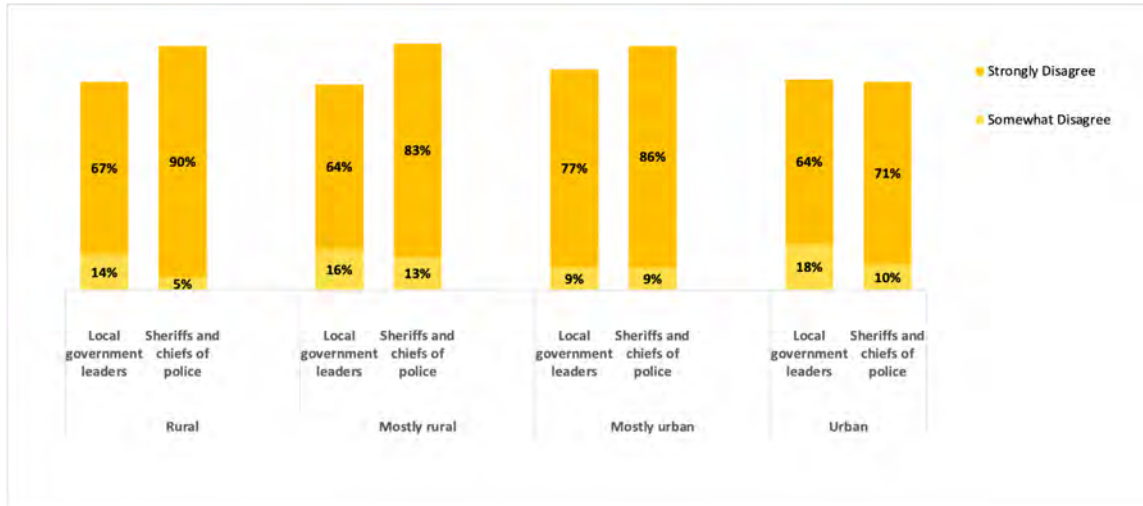
When comparing assessments across different community types in 2024 (*see Figure 3b*), law enforcement officials and local government leaders show similar patterns but with some significant differences. In rural communities, 67% of local officials "strongly disagree" that inappropriate use of force is an issue, compared to 90% of law enforcement officials. The gap narrows in urban settings, where 64% of local officials "strongly disagree" compared to 71% of law enforcement officials.

**Figure 3a**  
**Local officials' agreement or disagreement with the statement "Inappropriate use of force by law enforcement in my jurisdiction is (or has recently been) an issue," 2015 vs. 2024**



**Figure 3b**

**Local officials' and law enforcement leaders' agreement with the statement "Inappropriate use of force by law enforcement in my jurisdiction is (or has recently been) an issue," 2024, by rural-urban self-identification**

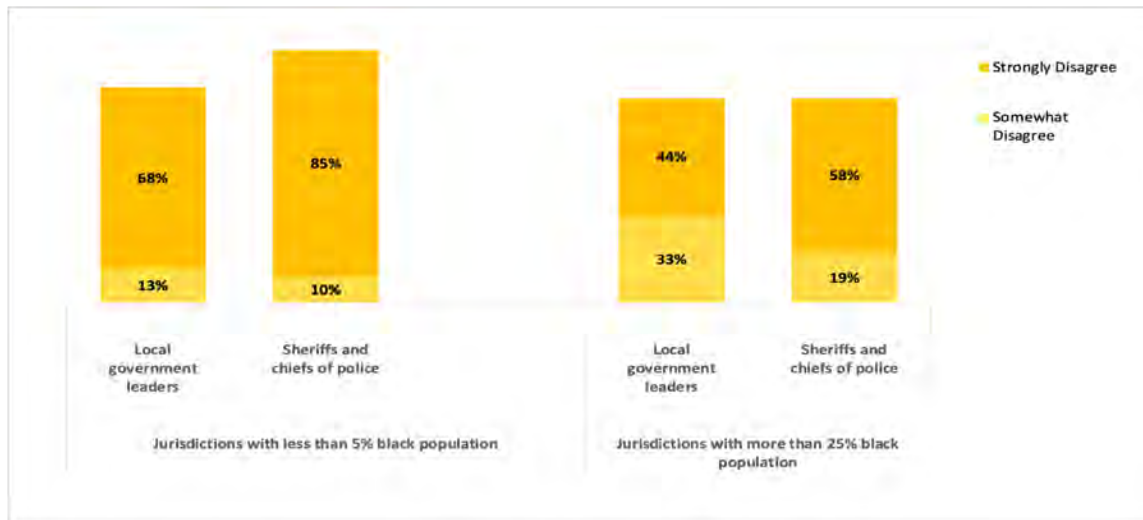


The demographic composition of communities also appears to influence perceptions about use of force (see Figure 3c). In jurisdictions with less than 5% Black residents, 85% of law enforcement officials "strongly disagree" that inappropriate use of force is an issue, while 68% of local officials share this view.

In more diverse communities with more than 25% Black residents, the percentage of local officials who "strongly disagree" drops to 44%, while 58% of law enforcement officials in these communities "strongly disagree." It is interesting to note that while the local officials have less strong disagreement, there is a 20-point increase in the respondents who "somewhat agree" with this sentiment. Both law enforcement and local officials report less confidence in inappropriate uses of force within these communities – suggesting a more risk averse view among local leaders than law enforcement in more homogenous communities.

**Figure 3c**

**Local officials' and law enforcement leaders' agreement with the statement "Inappropriate use of force by law enforcement in my jurisdiction is (or has recently been) an issue," 2024, by demographic makeup of jurisdiction**



Regarding concerns about potential civil unrest, the MPPS found that in 2015, 57% of local officials reported being "not at all concerned" about potential civil unrest connected to police use of force (see *Figure 4a*). The 2024 survey, which used an agreement scale instead, found 71% of local officials "strongly disagreeing" with the statement that they were concerned about potential civil unrest in their jurisdiction.

The 2024 data further reveal differences in concerns about civil unrest across rural and urban communities (see *Figure 4b*). Among rural jurisdictions, 74% of local government officials and 72% of law enforcement officials "strongly disagree" that civil unrest is a concern. In urban areas, the percentages drop to 54% for local officials and 43% for law enforcement officials, indicating somewhat higher levels of concern in urban communities from both groups, though still reflecting generally low concern overall.

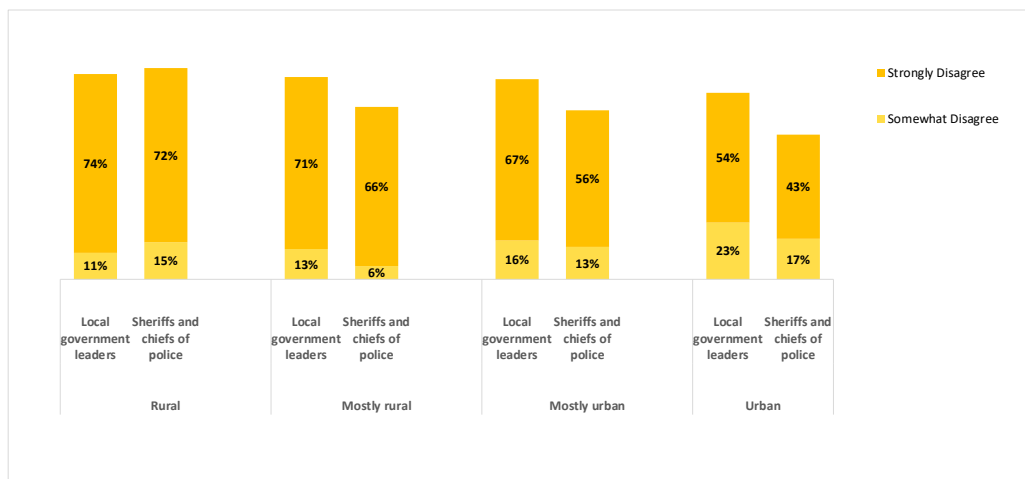
**Figure 4a**

**Local officials' concerns that a major incident of civil unrest connected to police use of force could happen in their jurisdiction, 2015 vs. 2024**



**Figure 4b**

**Local officials' and law enforcement leaders' agreement with the statement "I'm concerned that a major incident of civil unrest connected to police use of force could happen in my jurisdiction in the near future," 2024, by rural-urban self-identification**

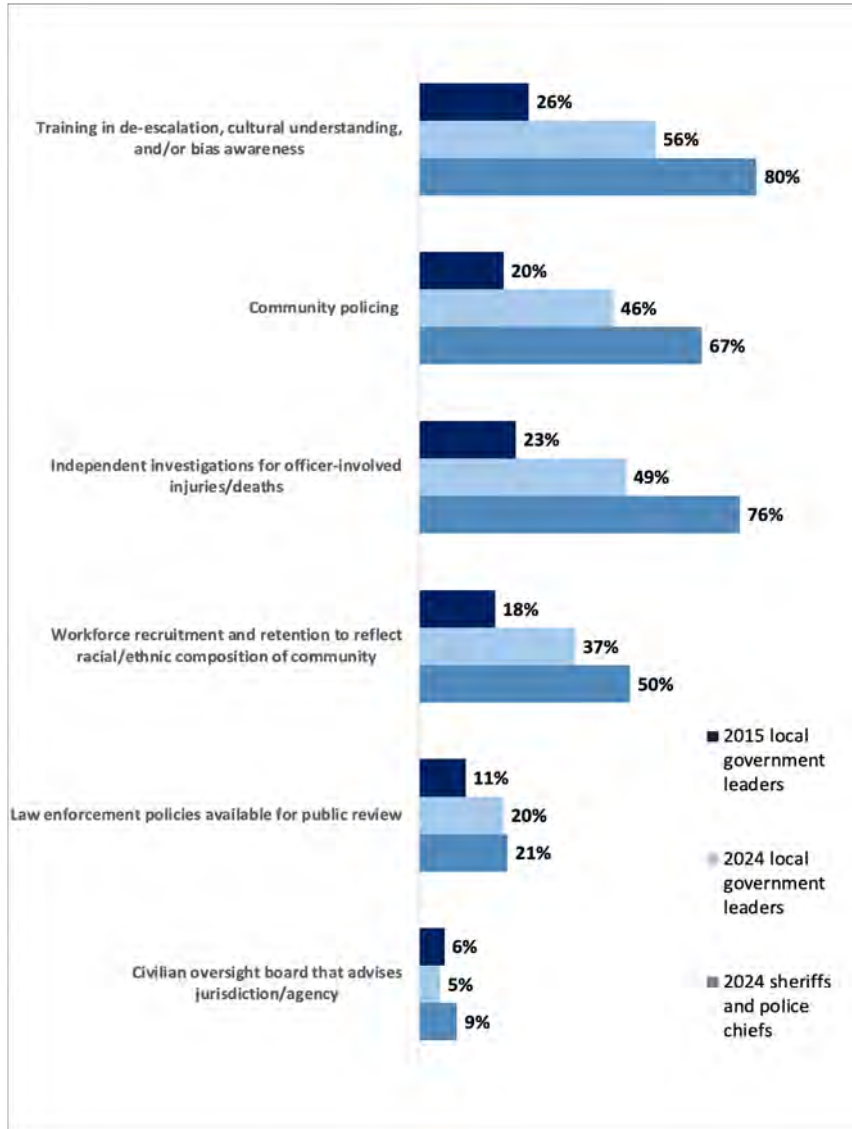


## Local Government and Law Enforcement Responses to Policies to Improve Police-Community relations

Both the 2015 and 2024 MPPS asked local government leaders whether they have certain policies and practices in place to address police-community relations, and the 2024 survey asked the same of local sheriffs and police chiefs. As shown in *Figure 5*, reports regarding the implementation of various policies vary considerably between local government officials and law enforcement leaders. For training in de-escalation techniques, cultural understanding, and bias awareness, 80% of law enforcement officials report these are "already in use" compared to just 56% of local government officials reporting the same. This pattern repeats across several practices, including community policing strategies (67% of law enforcement versus 46% of local officials) and independent investigation policies for officer-involved incidents (76% of law enforcement versus 49% of local officials).

Additionally, the data shows noteworthy differences in the adoption of civilian oversight mechanisms, with 9% of law enforcement officials reporting these are already in use compared to 5% of local government officials. Similarly, there are significant variations in reporting about recruiting efforts to create a workforce reflective of community demographics, where 50% of law enforcement officials report this as "already in use" compared to 37% of local government officials. These differences in perception between local government and law enforcement officials regarding policy implementation may reflect varying levels of awareness about existing policies (particularly in smaller villages and townships without their own police departments), different interpretations of what constitutes implementation, or actual differences in adoption rates across jurisdictions.

**Figure 5**  
**Percentage reporting that specific law enforcement policies and practices are in use in Michigan’s communities, 2015 vs. 2024, by public office**



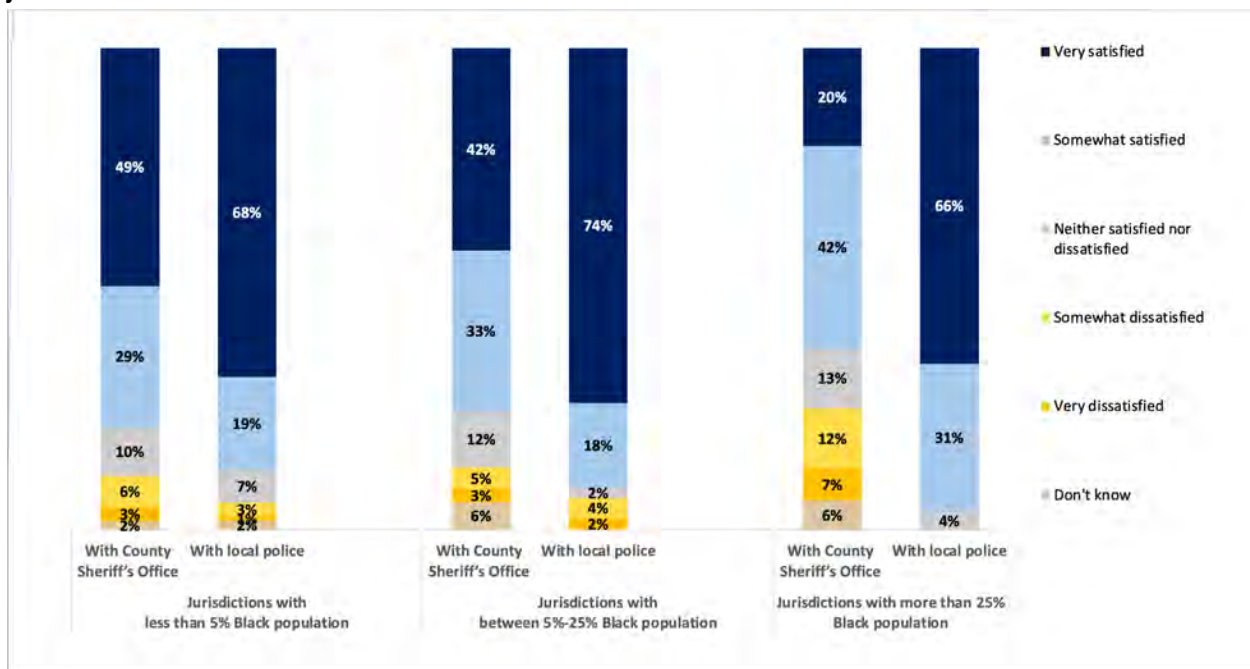
Note: Percentages are based upon a denominator that excludes local officials who answered “don’t know”

# Most local leaders continue to express satisfaction with law enforcement agencies in their jurisdictions

When assessing their own satisfaction with law enforcement services, especially local police departments and the County Sheriff's Office, local government officials report varying levels across jurisdictions with different racial compositions. In communities where fewer than 5% of the population is Black, sixty-eight percent of local officials report being "very satisfied" with local police, and 49% say the same of the County Sheriff's Office (see *Figure 6a*). Satisfaction drops slightly in the communities with 5-25% Black residents, though 74% still report being very satisfied with their local police.

However, the trend sharply shifts in communities with more than 25% Black residents. Only 20% of local officials say they are "very satisfied" with the County Sheriff's Office and 42% are only "somewhat satisfied." Dissatisfaction is notably higher as well, with 19% expressing negative views on their County Sheriffs Office. In contrast, satisfaction with local police remains higher in these communities, with 66% "very satisfied" and only 4% reporting dissatisfaction. Perceptions of law enforcement, specifically sheriffs are more critical in jurisdictions with higher Black populations further highlighting the gaps in trust and accountability that vary across types of law enforcement agencies.

**Figure 6a**  
**Local government officials' satisfaction with law enforcement services, 2024, by demographic makeup or jurisdiction**

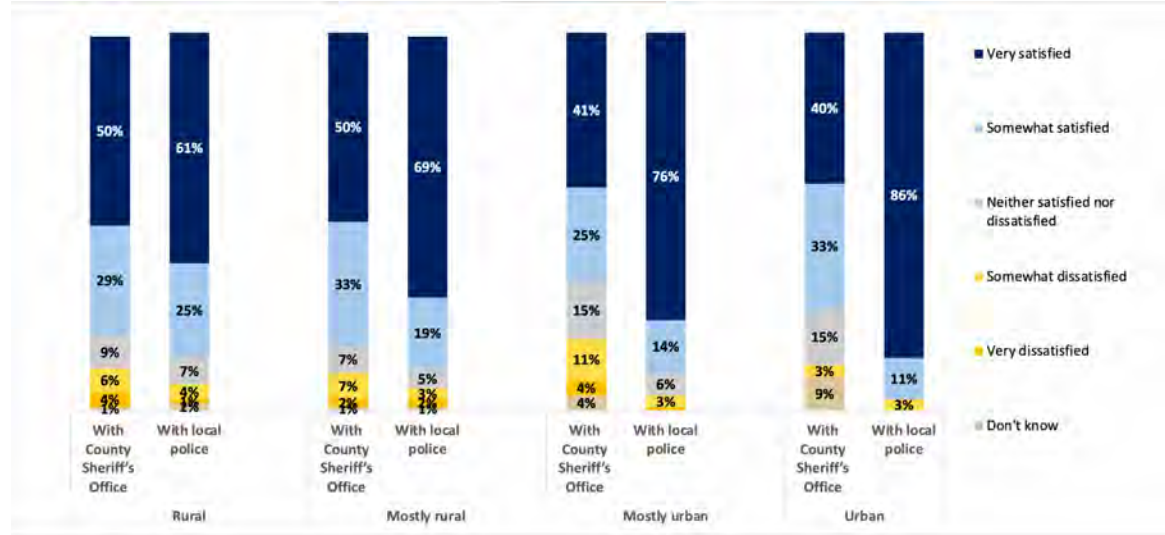


Note: percentages for satisfaction with local police services are calculated excluding respondents who answered, "not applicable."

The MPPS data also reveal distinct patterns between rural and urban jurisdictions (see *Figure 6b*). In 2024, local officials from mostly rural areas reported higher levels of personal satisfaction with law enforcement services, with approximately 50% indicating they are "very satisfied" with the County Sheriff's office compared to 40% of officials from urban communities. Furthermore, mostly rural communities reported a total satisfaction of 88% with the

local police compared to urban areas at 97%, the highest overall satisfaction with local police across all communities. Satisfaction with local police maintains a minimum 10-point lead over the County Sheriff’s Office. This further emphasizes the disconnect in communication and polices between these various law enforcement agencies within Michigan jurisdictions.

**Figure 6b**  
**Local government officials’ satisfaction with law enforcement services, 2024, by rural-urban self-identification**



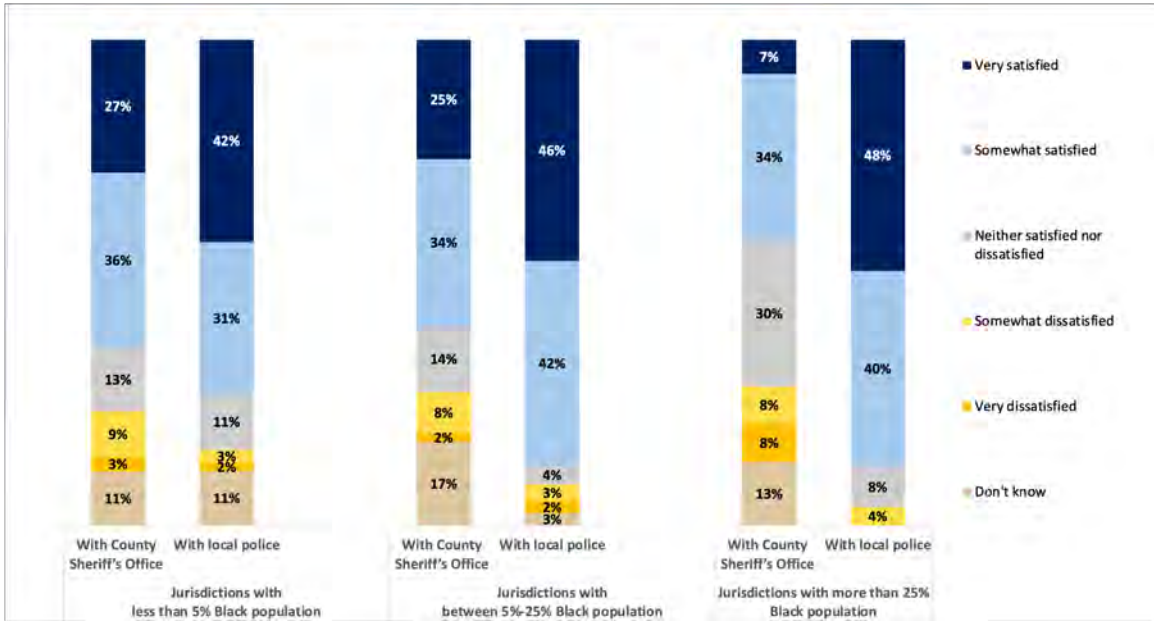
Note: percentages for satisfaction with local police services are calculated excluding respondents who answered “not applicable.”

When local officials were asked to assess their residents' satisfaction with law enforcement services, specifically local police and the County Sheriff’s department, they report varying levels across the different racial composition of the jurisdictions (see *Figure 7a*). In communities with less than 5% Black residents, 42% of officials said residents were “very satisfied” with local police services, compared to just 27% who said the same about the County Sheriff’s Office. As the percentage of Black residents increases, satisfaction with County Sheriff’s Offices declines, while satisfaction with local police remains relatively similar. In jurisdictions with 25% or more Black residents, only 7% of officials report residents are “very satisfied” with their County Sheriff’s Office, while 48% say residents are “very satisfied” with local police. Meanwhile, perceptions of resident satisfaction with local police range from 42%-48%.

At the same time, dissatisfaction is highest in higher-Black-population communities—particularly for the Sheriff’s Office, where 16% of local officials report residents are either “somewhat” or “very” dissatisfied. This suggests a widening perception gap not just across racial demographics, but also between different types of law enforcement agencies serving the same communities.

**Figure 7a**

**Local government officials' assessments of residents' satisfaction with law enforcement services, 2024, by demographic makeup of jurisdiction**

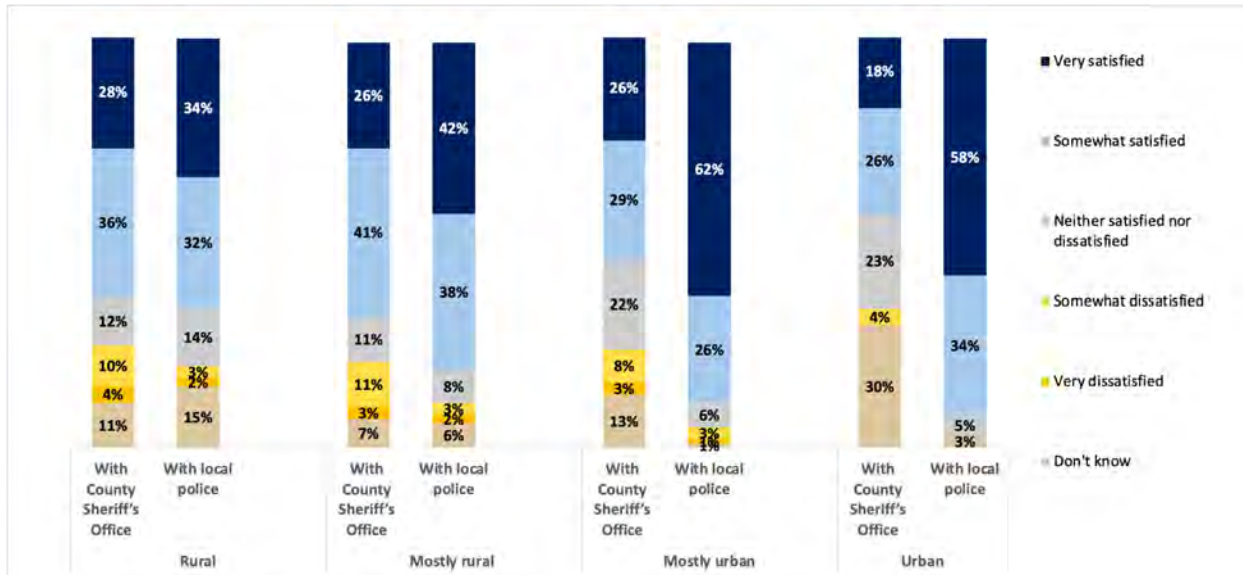


Note: percentages for satisfaction with local police services are calculated excluding respondents who answered "not applicable."

The rural-urban difference is even more pronounced in officials' assessments of resident satisfaction, where rural officials are significantly less likely to believe their residents are "very satisfied" with law enforcement services (43%) compared to urban officials' perceptions of their residents (32%).

**Figure 7b**

**Local government officials' assessments of residents' satisfaction with law enforcement services, 2024, by rural-urban self-identification**



## Takeaways

The results and analysis of the 2024 MPPS reveal insightful descriptions and takeaways on the status of police-community relations with Michigan. Examining the respondents' perceptions on trust, professionalism, satisfaction and policy initiatives divulge a consistent perception from local officials and law enforcement that their efforts are positively impacting the jurisdictions they serve. However, the discrepancies between these facets of leadership suggest that position within the justice system significantly influences perspective. The variation underscores the need for more robust communication channels, shared benchmarks, and a commitment to cross-sector alignment in how public safety is defined and measured.

Perhaps what is most striking is how little perceptions have changed over the past decade. Despite the years of high-profile incidents, public protest, national dialogue, and a wave of reform efforts across the country, many local officials' views remain largely static. The standpoint of these leadership groups has not wavered in either direction. This raises important questions: is this a sign of institutional defensiveness? A lack of feedback loops from community voices? Or perhaps a sign that reforms have yet to translate into felt or visible change on the ground? The stasis in perception, particularly when set against the breadth of public discourse suggest that internal narratives about effectiveness and trust must be deeply entrenched and insulated from broader social currents.

Concurrently, a clear disconnect persists between how local officials and law enforcement view both their own work and the public perception of it. While both serve the same communities, their divergent angles hint at a fractured understanding of community sentiment and accountability. These gaps could be symptomatic of differences in day-to-day interaction with the public, varying exposure to complaints or misconduct, or differing institutional incentives. For example, law enforcement may be more likely to assess their work through operational metrics, while local officials may be attuned to resident concerns and political accountability.

What emerges from this analysis is not just a snapshot or reform implementation, but a portrait of institutional siloing. Moving forward, it will be critical for Michigan municipalities to not only continue adopting evidence-based policies, but also to develop shared narratives of public safety that are responsive to the communities they serve. Without this reform risks becoming symbolic rather than transformative.