



Gerald R. Ford
School of Public Policy



Democracy on the Front Lines: Lessons from Michigan Local Governments

Findings from the Spring 2025
Michigan Public Policy Survey (MPPS)
February 10, 2026

The Michigan Public Policy Survey

- **A census survey** –
all 1,856 Michigan counties, cities, villages, and townships
- **Local government respondents** –
top elected and appointed officials
- **Administered** –
online and via hardcopy
- **Topics** –
examples include fiscal health, government operations and budget policies, elections, energy, roads, poverty, civic engagement, water infrastructure, employee policies and labor unions, housing, environmental sustainability, and much more.

MPPS is not a typical opinion poll



- **70%+** response rates
- **Transparency**
 - ~ Questionnaires online
 - ~ Pre-run data tables online
 - ~ Sharing of (anonymized) datasets with other researchers
- **Research partnership with local government organizations (MAC, MML, MTA) and others**

- In 2025, statewide assessments of the general functioning of local democracy held strong

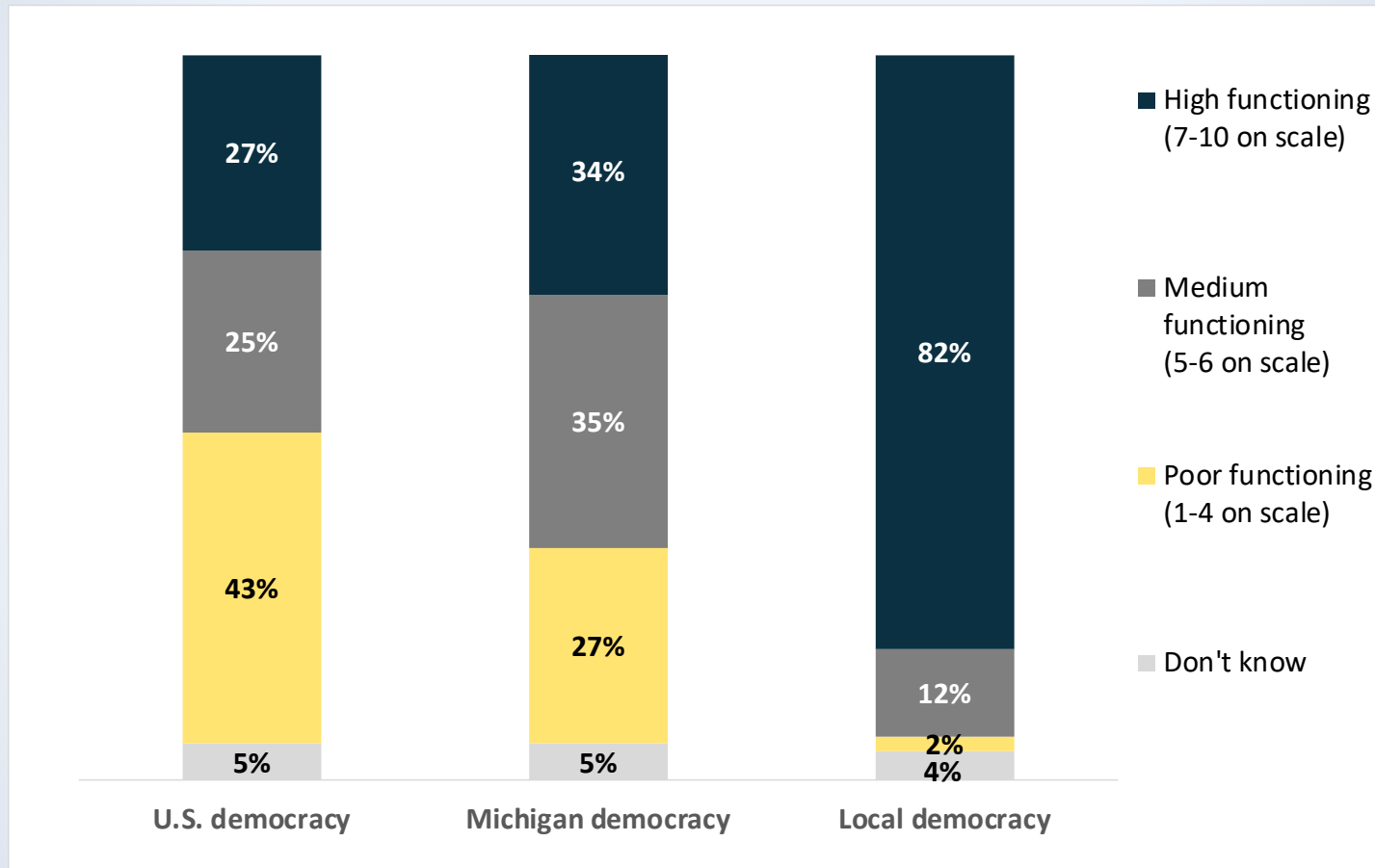


But...

- Assessments of resident engagement, trust in residents, and tone of discourse involving residents are trending worse

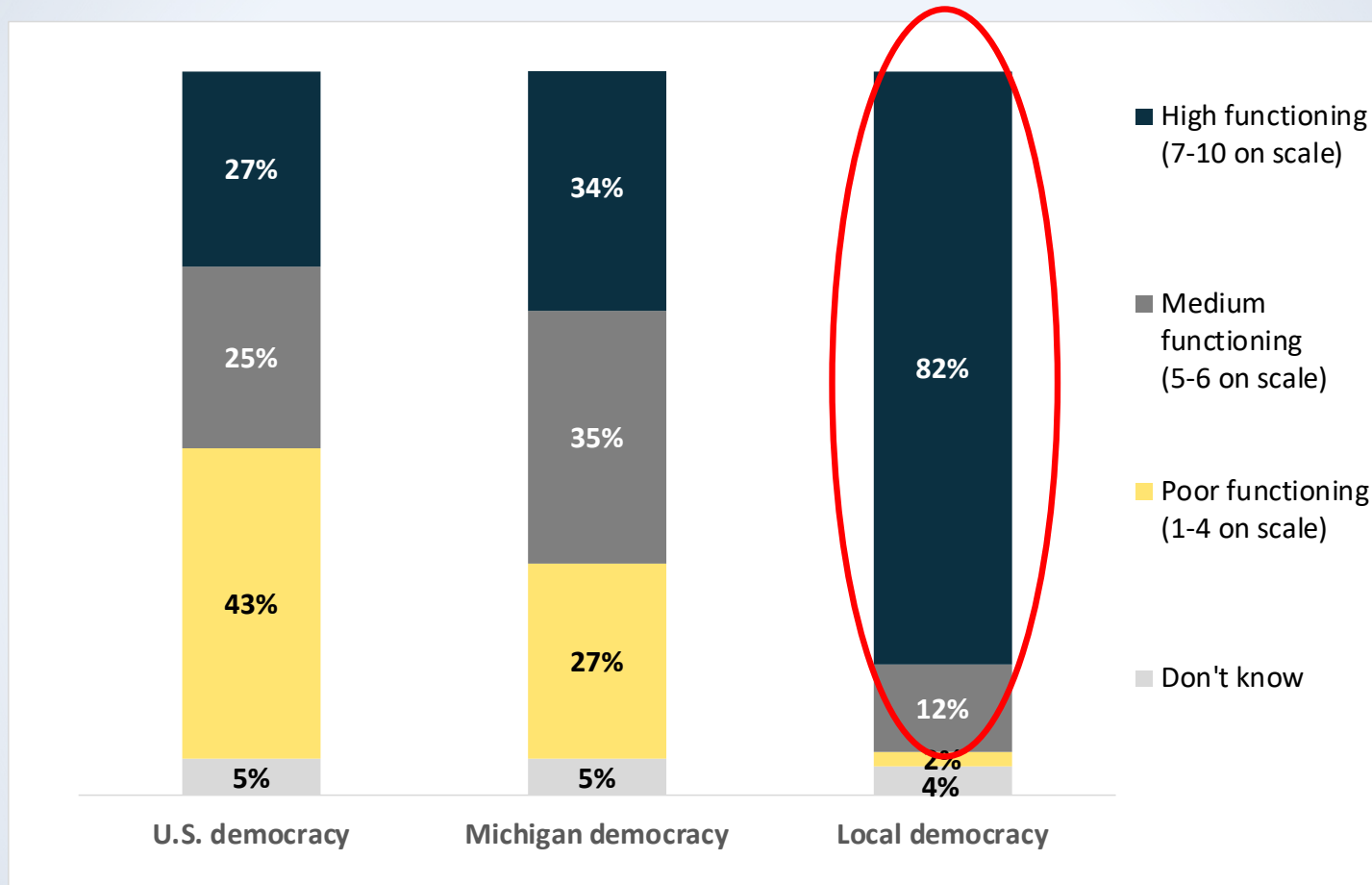
**How are local leaders
feeling about
the overall functioning of
democracy in their
communities?**

Much more **optimism** about the health of local democracy compared with state or nation



“Now we’re asking more broadly about your opinion of the state of our democracy as a system of government. ...On a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is a total breakdown of democracy and 10 is perfectly functioning democracy, how would you rate the functioning of democracy today in...”

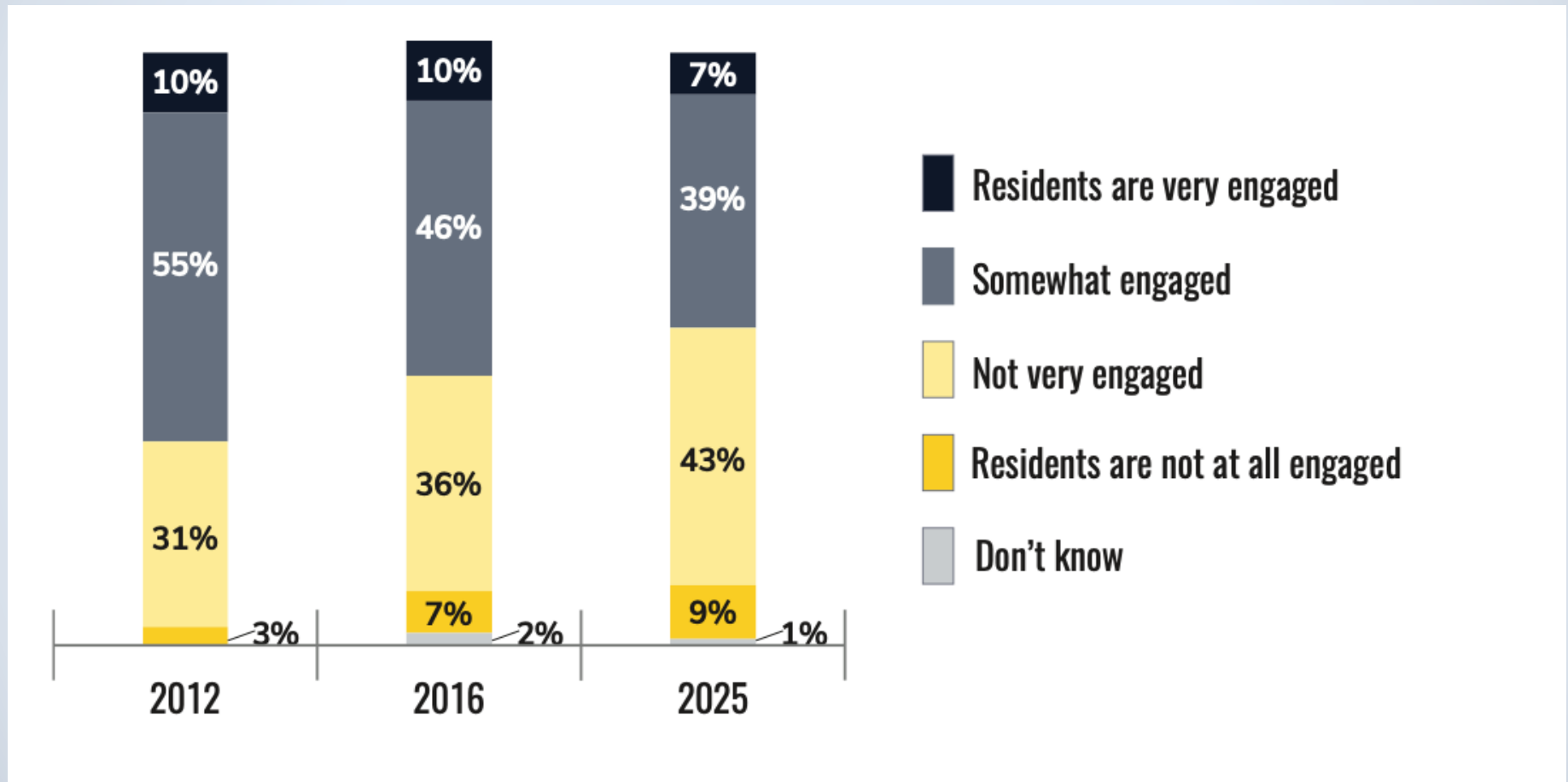
Much more **optimism** about the health of local democracy compared with state or nation



“Now we’re asking more broadly about your opinion of the state of our democracy as a system of government. ...On a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is a total breakdown of democracy and 10 is perfectly functioning democracy, how would you rate the functioning of democracy today in...”

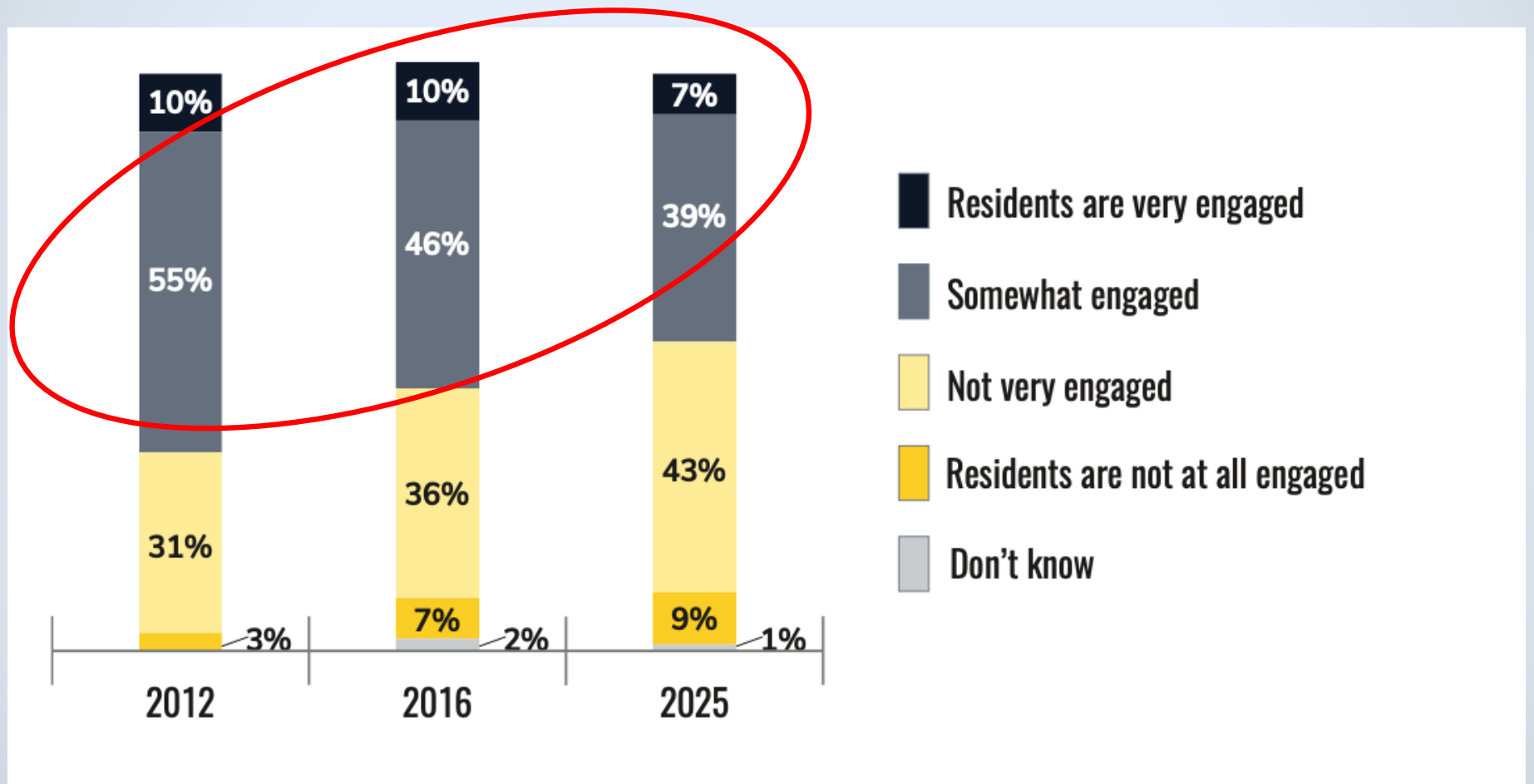
***But what about assessments
of resident engagement in
their own communities?***

Statewide, dramatic declines in reports of resident engagement with local governments



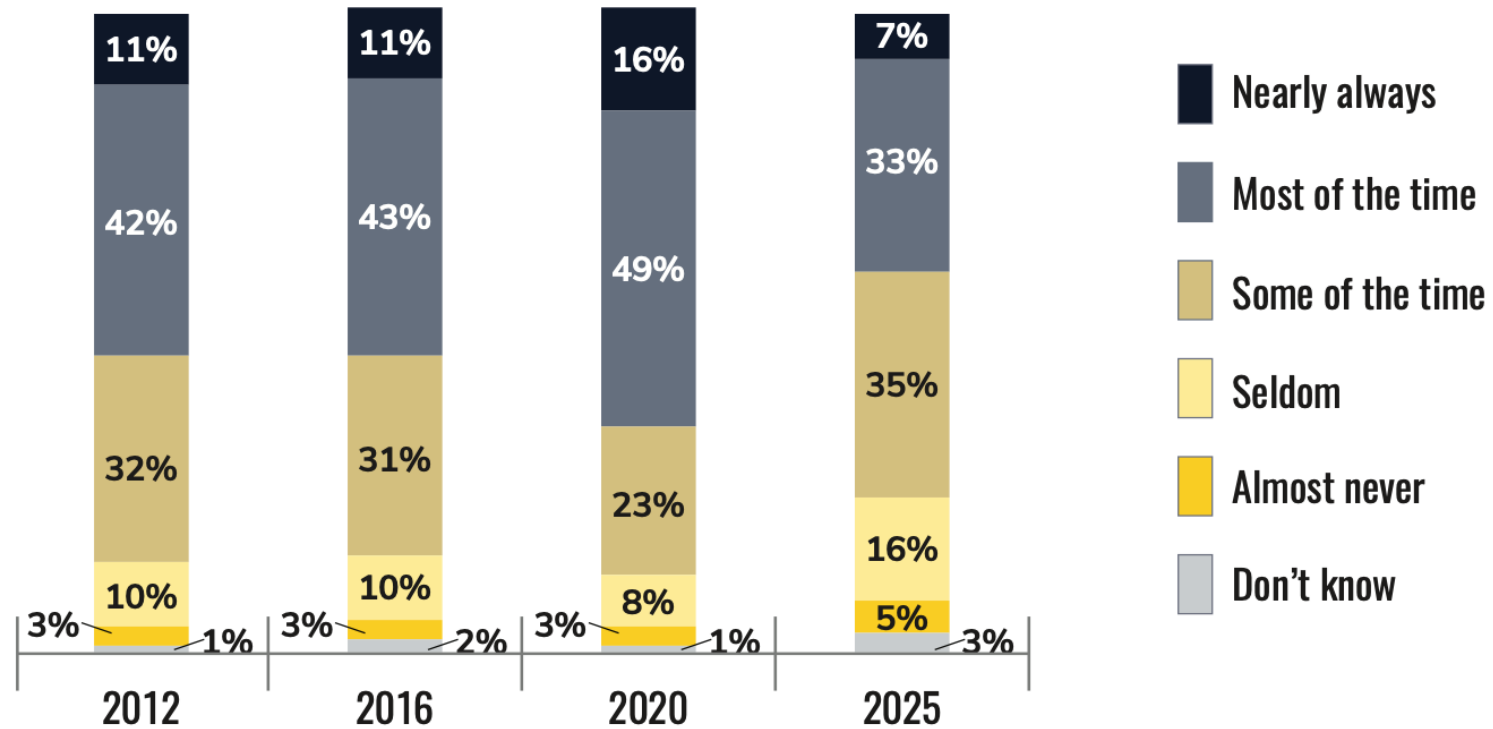
“We want to start by getting a very broad sense of resident engagement with your local government. How would you describe current levels of resident engagement with your jurisdiction?”

Statewide, dramatic declines in reports of resident engagement with local governments



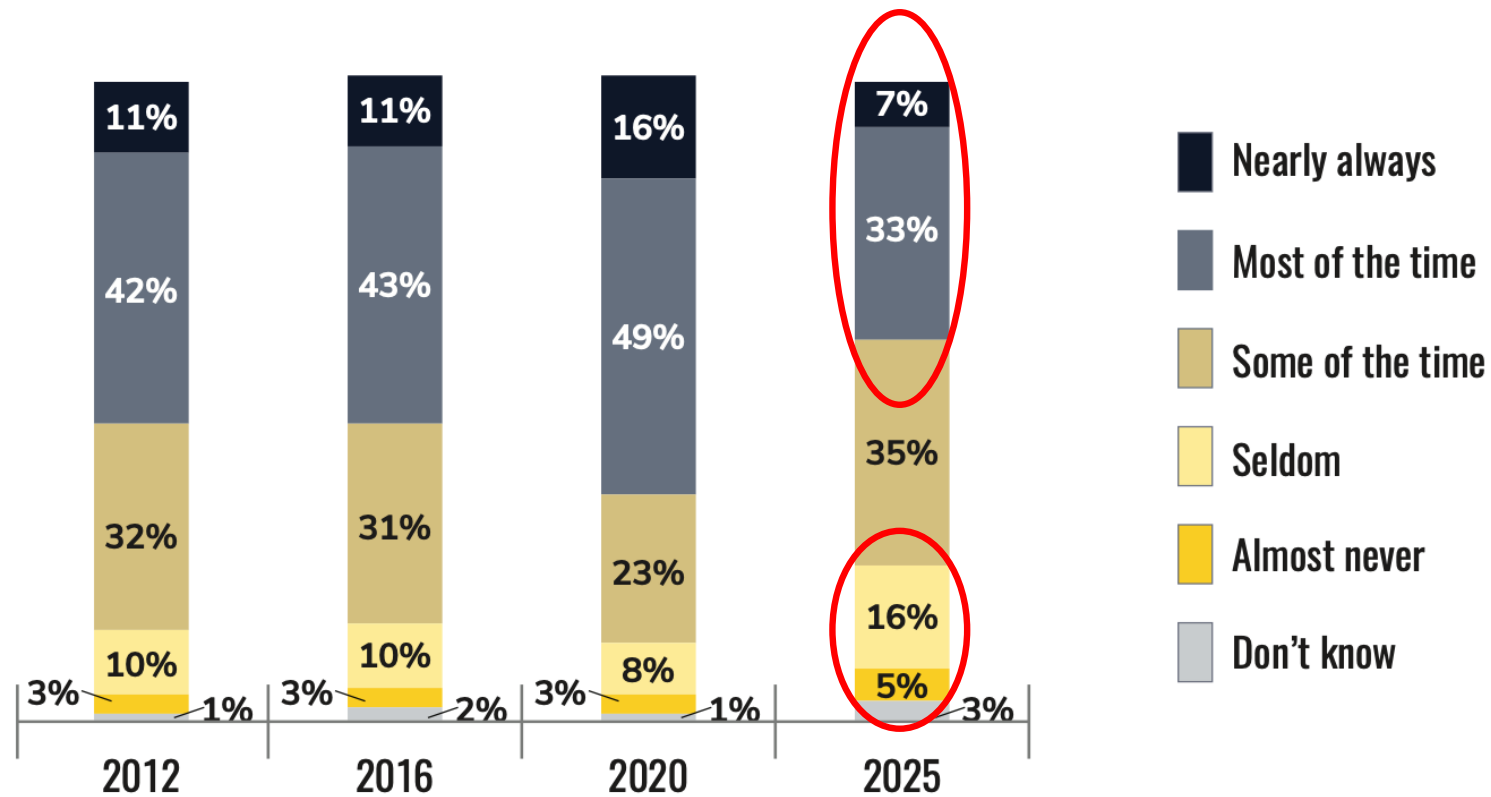
“We want to start by getting a very broad sense of resident engagement with your local government. How would you describe current levels of resident engagement with your jurisdiction?”

Michigan local leaders' trust in their residents also declined significantly this year



“... In terms of engagement in your jurisdiction’s policymaking and/or operations, how much of the time do you think you can trust the residents in your community to be responsible participants?”

Michigan local leaders' trust in their residents also declined significantly this year

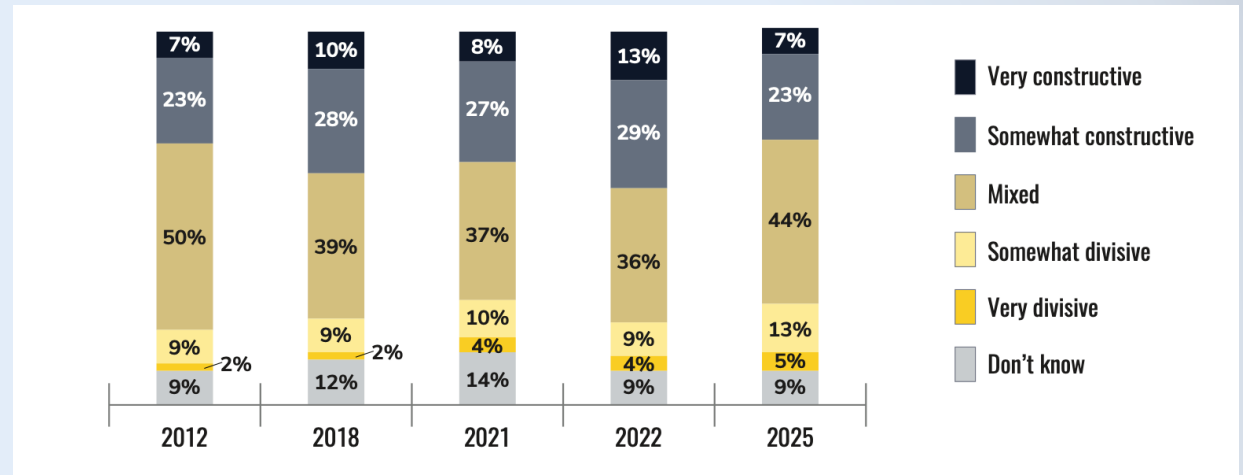


“... In terms of engagement in your jurisdiction’s policymaking and/or operations, how much of the time do you think you can trust the residents in your community to be responsible participants?”

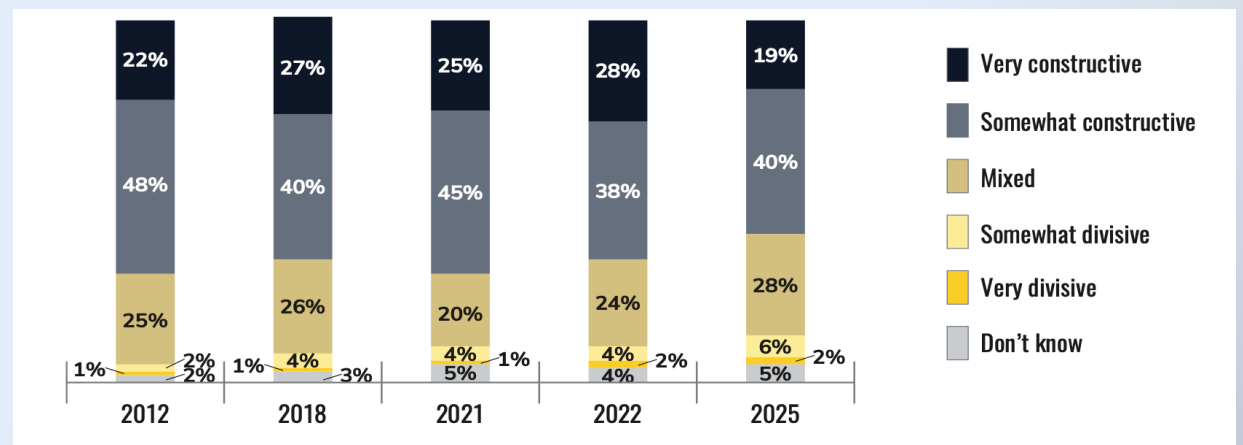
Deterioration in tone of public discourse among residents, and between residents and elected officials

“Thinking generally about the tone of discussion and communication that takes place around local policy issues, how would you describe the general state of public discourse within your jurisdiction between...?”

Among residents:



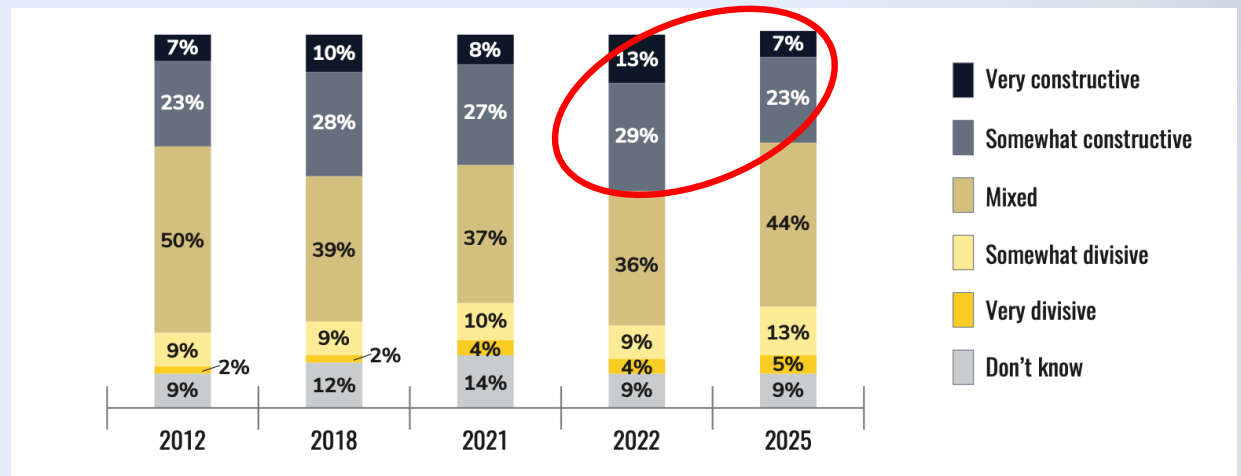
Between residents and elected officials:



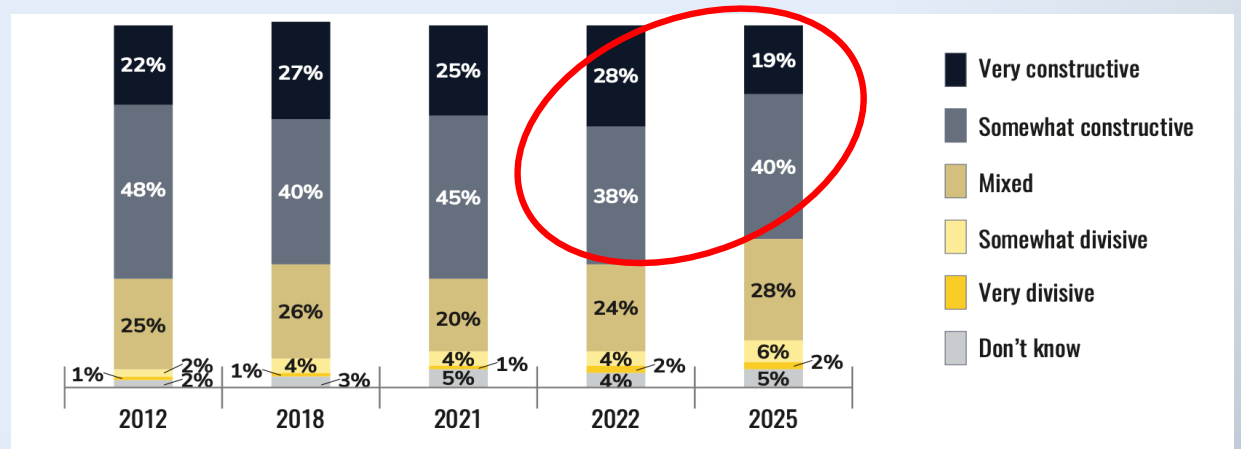
Deterioration in tone of public discourse among residents, and between residents and elected officials

“Thinking generally about the tone of discussion and communication that takes place around local policy issues, how would you describe the general state of public discourse within your jurisdiction between...?”

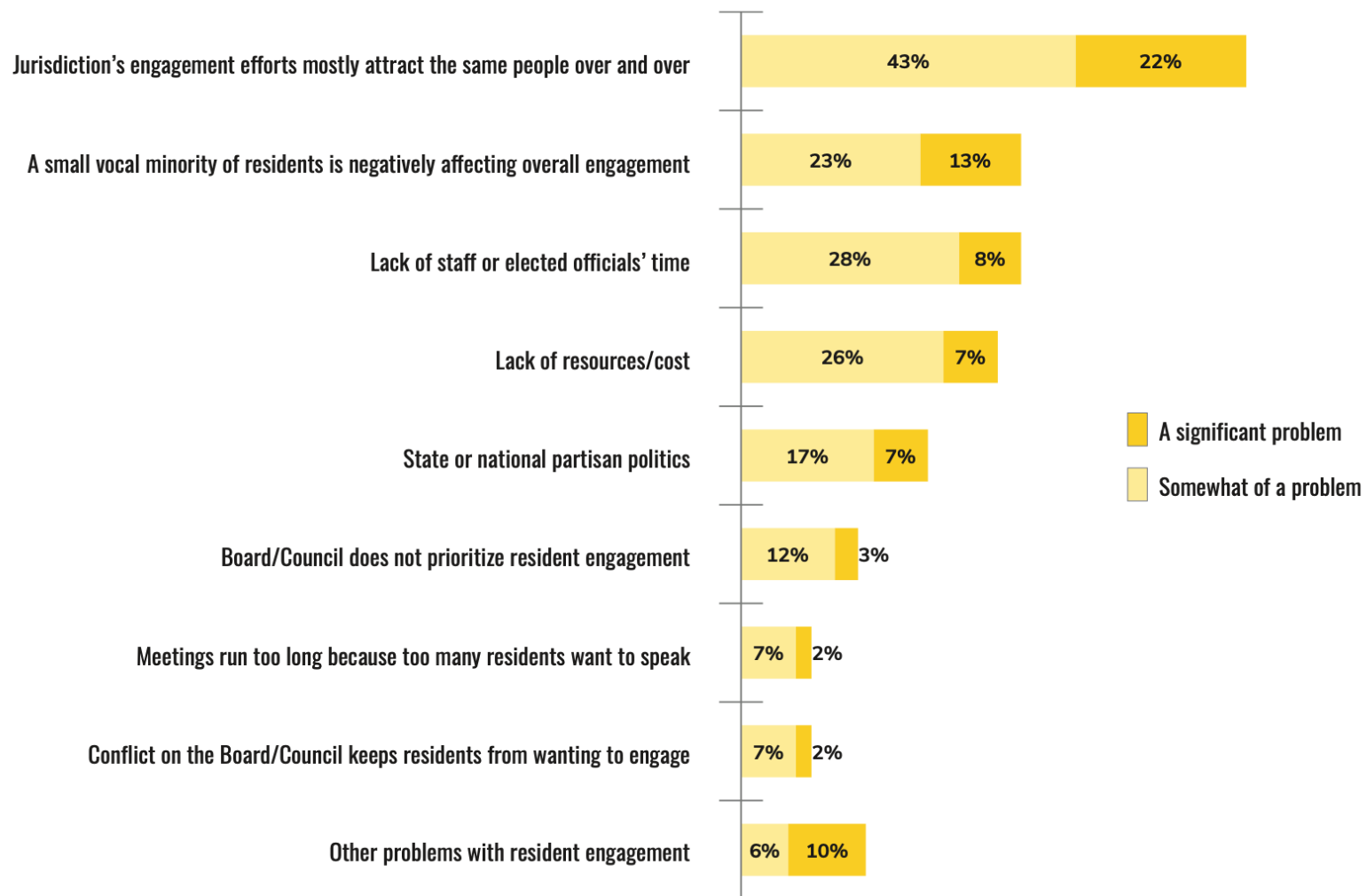
Among residents:



Between residents and elected officials:

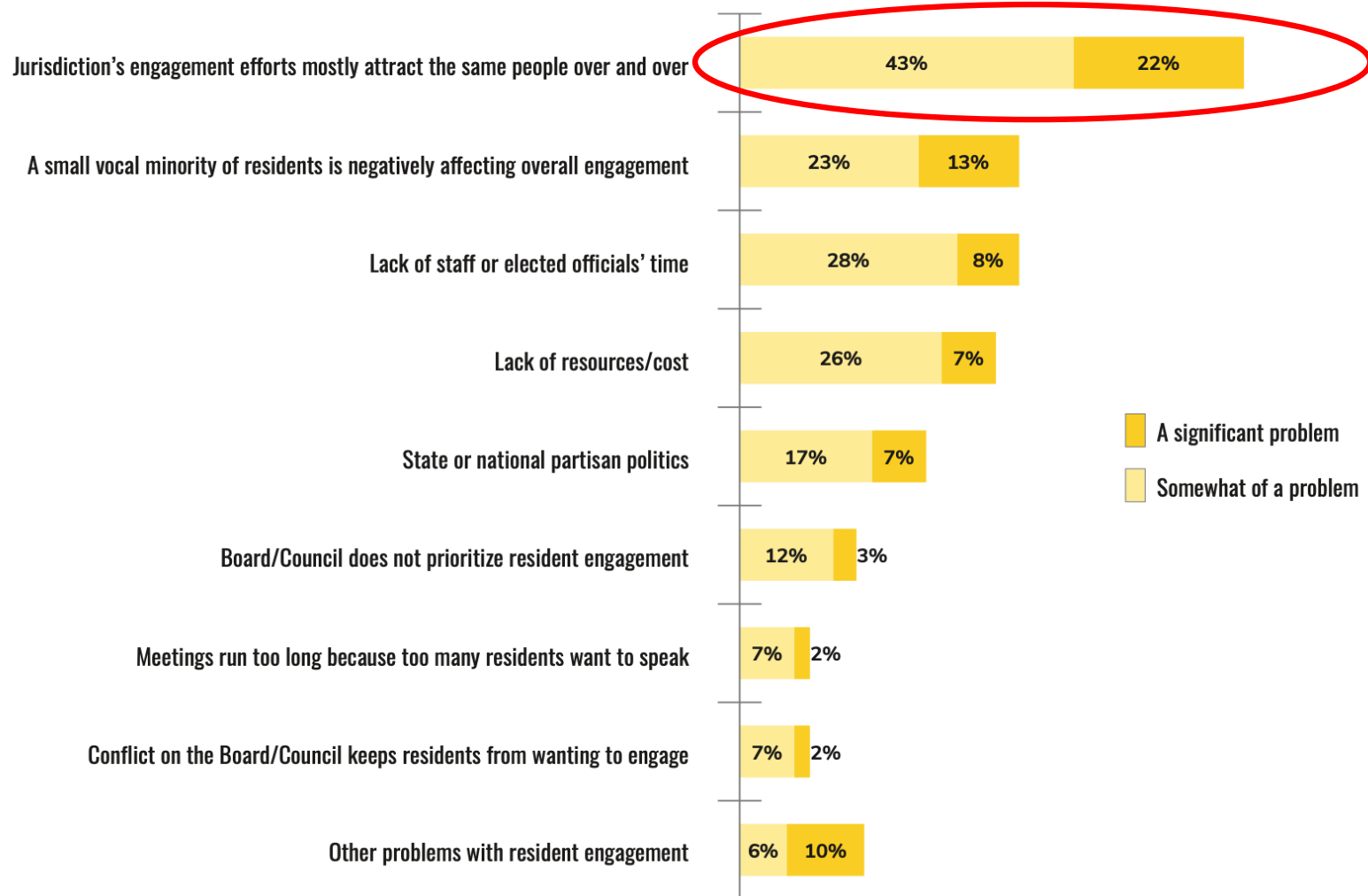


Some of the problems local officials report with resident engagement (2025)



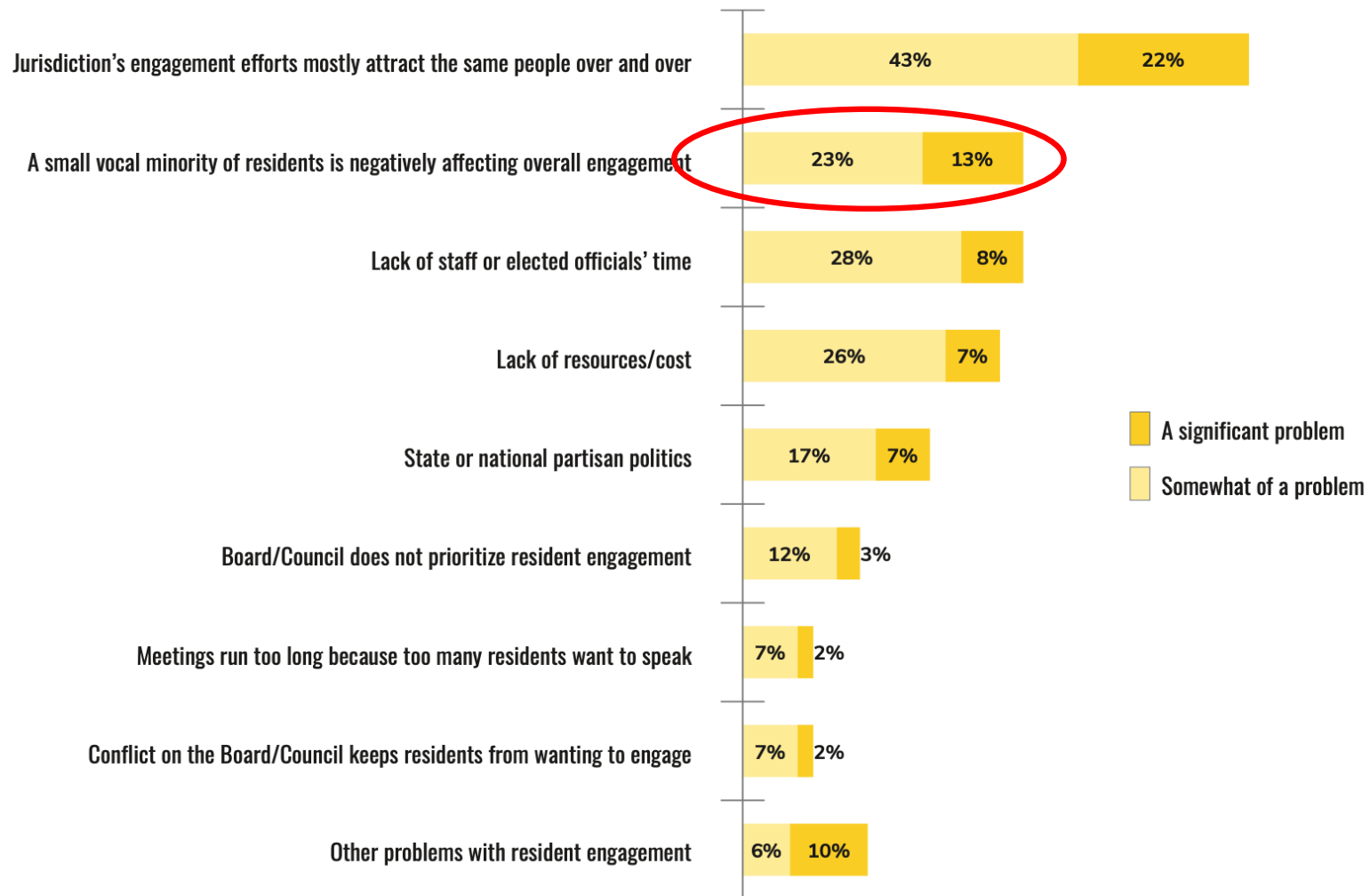
“Which of the following, if any, are problems your jurisdiction currently faces with resident engagement?”

Some of the problems local officials report with resident engagement (2025)



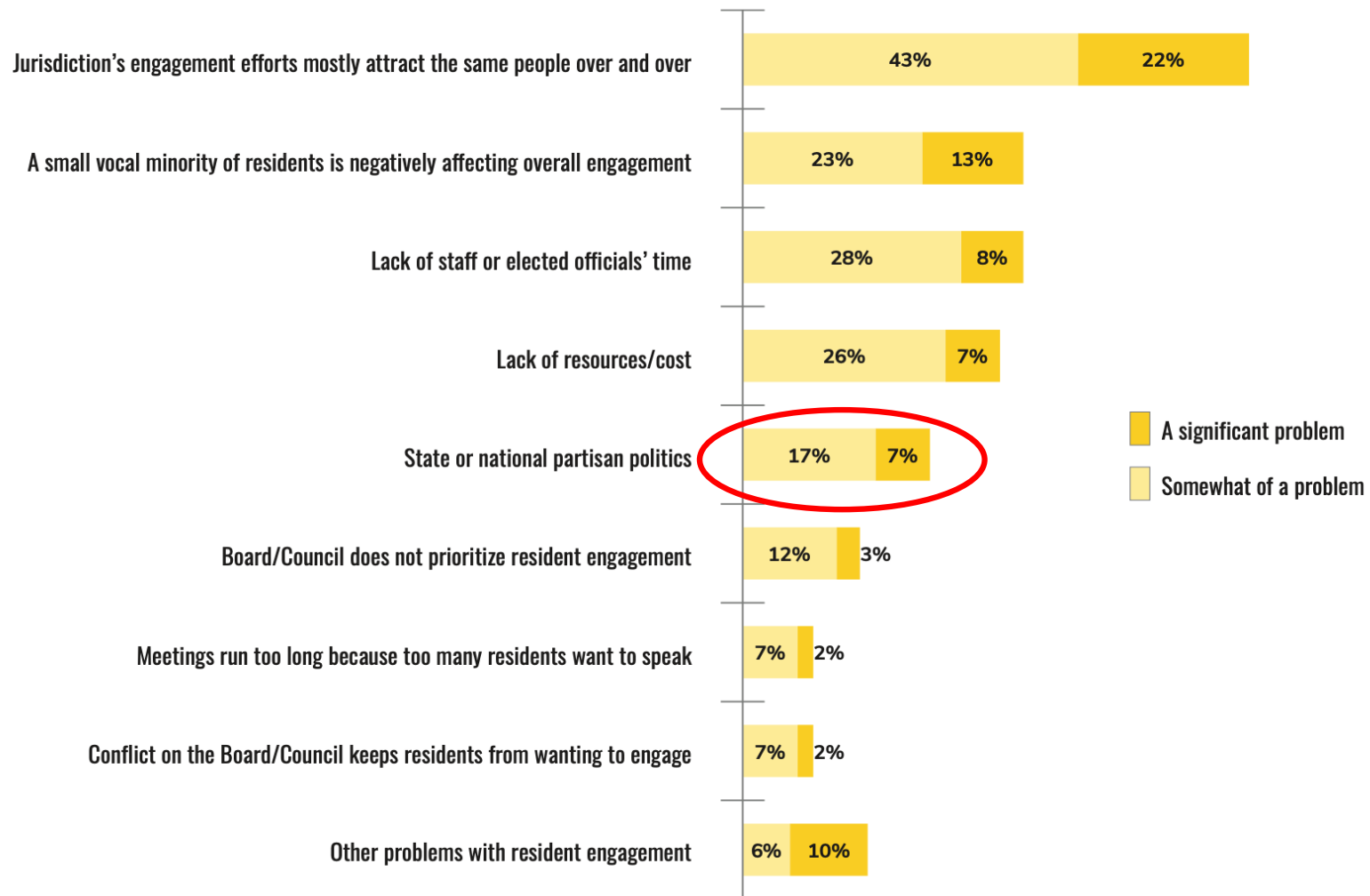
“Which of the following, if any, are problems your jurisdiction currently faces with resident engagement?”

Some of the problems local officials report with resident engagement (2025)



“Which of the following, if any, are problems your jurisdiction currently faces with resident engagement?”

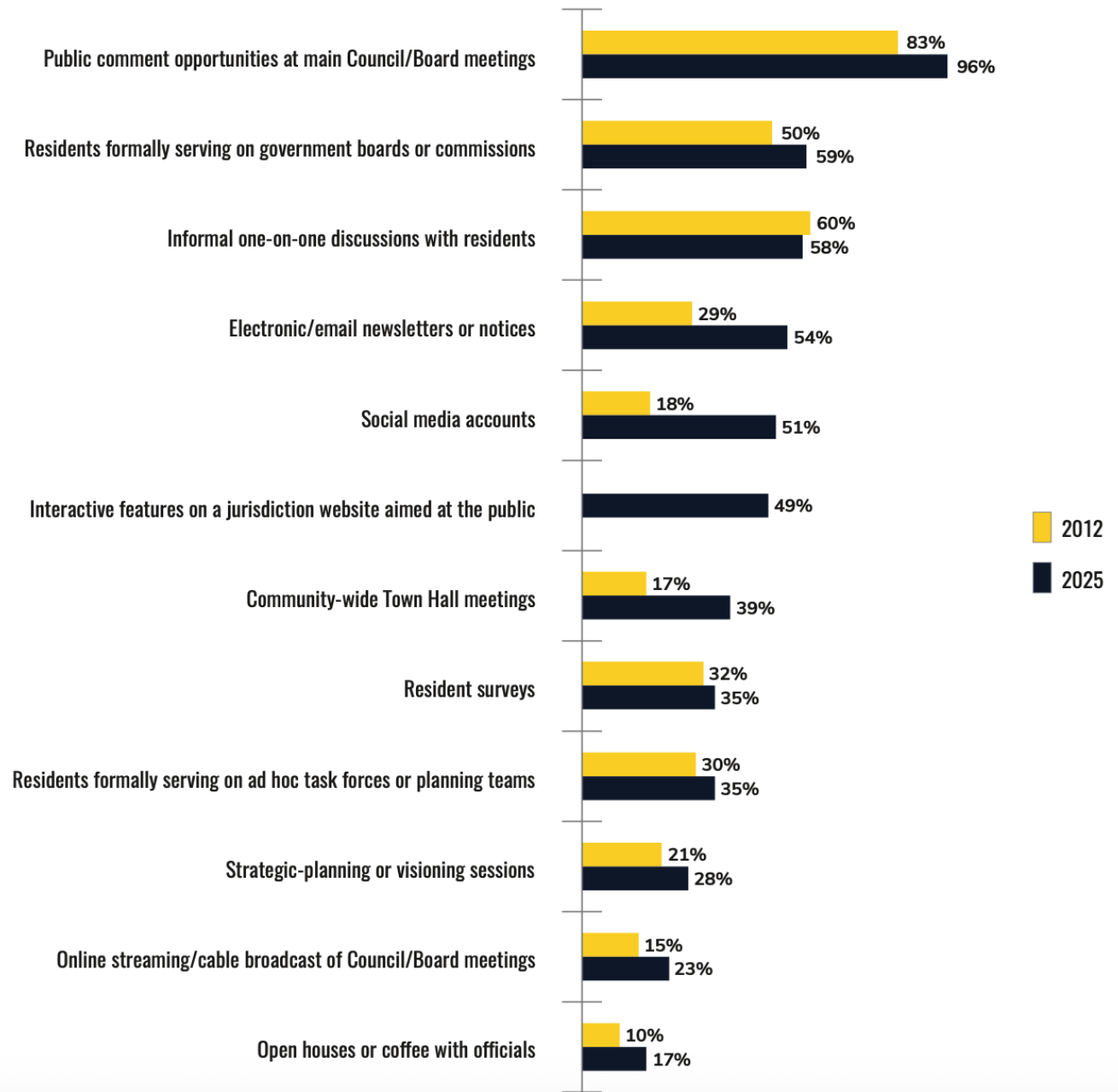
Some of the problems local officials report with resident engagement (2025)



“Which of the following, if any, are problems your jurisdiction currently faces with resident engagement?”

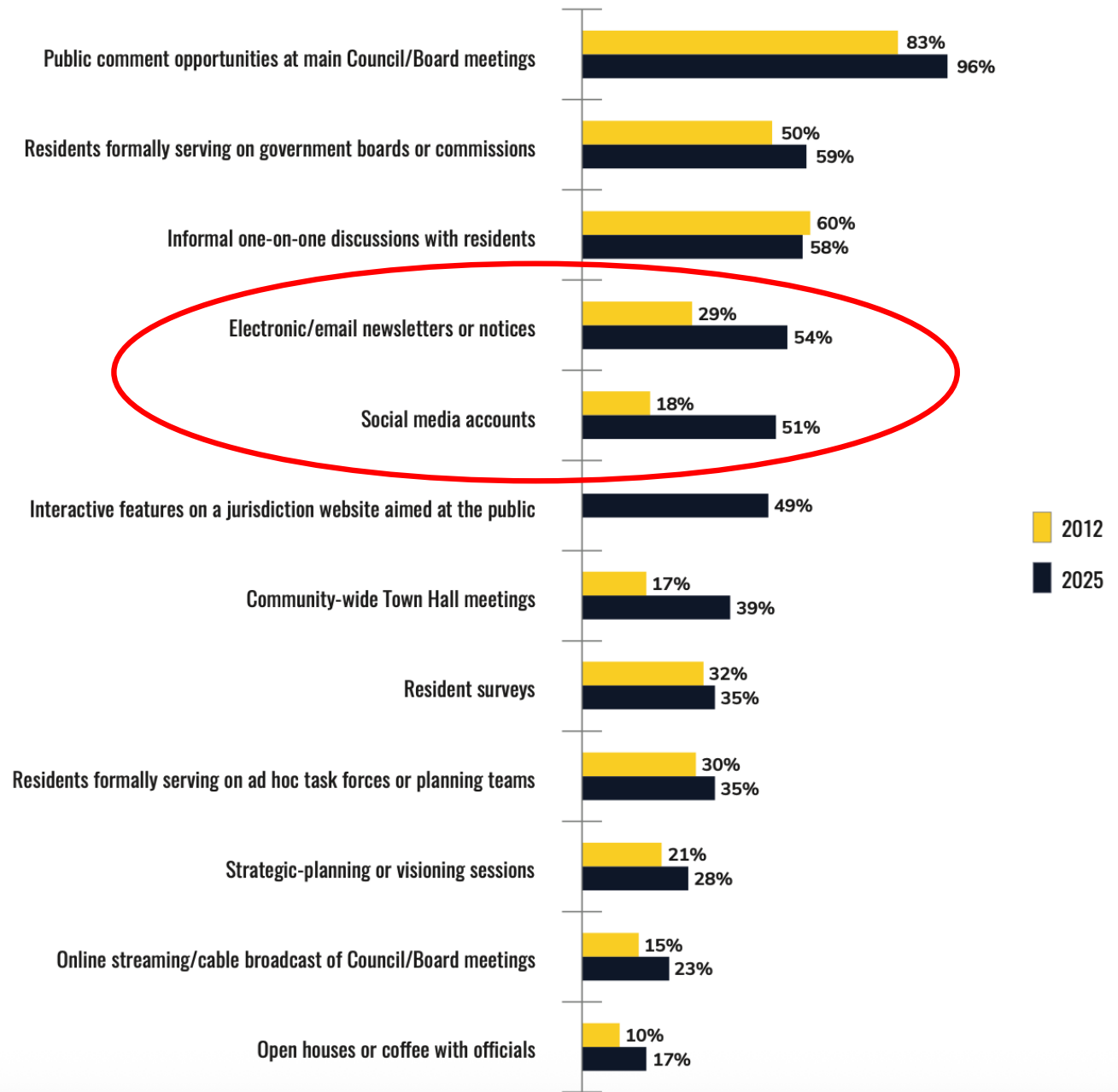
What are some ways local governments try to promote resident engagement?

Some approaches local jurisdictions are currently using for resident engagement



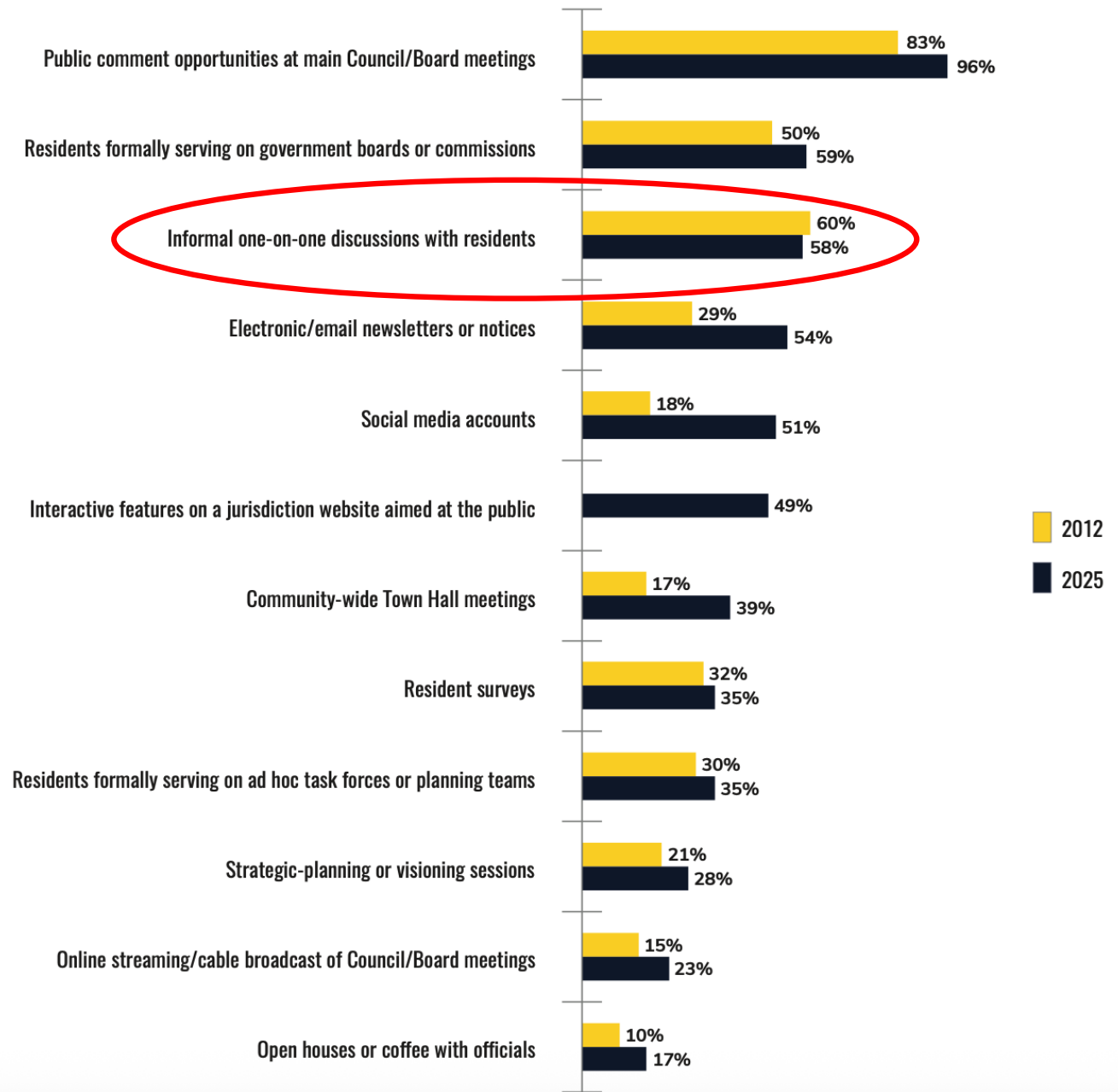
“As far as you know, which of the following approaches – if any – does your jurisdiction use to engage its residents in your government’s policymaking and/or operations?”

Some approaches local jurisdictions are currently using for resident engagement



“As far as you know, which of the following approaches – if any – does your jurisdiction use to engage its residents in your government’s policymaking and/or operations?”

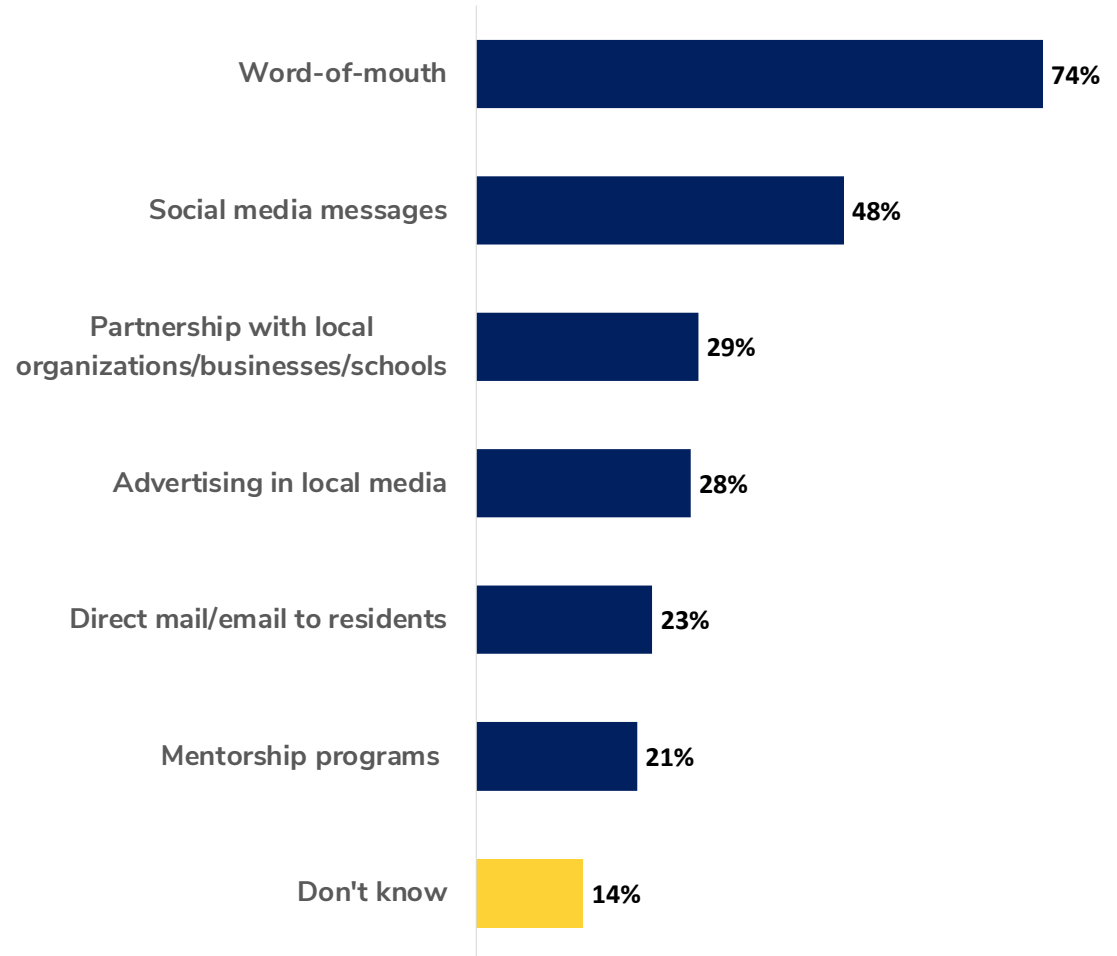
Some approaches local jurisdictions are currently using for resident engagement



“As far as you know, which of the following approaches – if any – does your jurisdiction use to engage its residents in your government’s policymaking and/or operations?”

“What kinds of outreach methods do you think are, or could be, most effective in your jurisdiction for encouraging residents to run for office or serve on appointed boards?”

Some methods local officials think are effective for recruiting residents to participate



Let's find out what our panelists are seeing and doing in their communities

For additional information on the MPPS:
Web: www.closup.umich.edu
Email: closup-mpps@umich.edu

