



### MPPS Policy Brief

# Local officials report declining outlook for state, plummeting approval of the Legislature

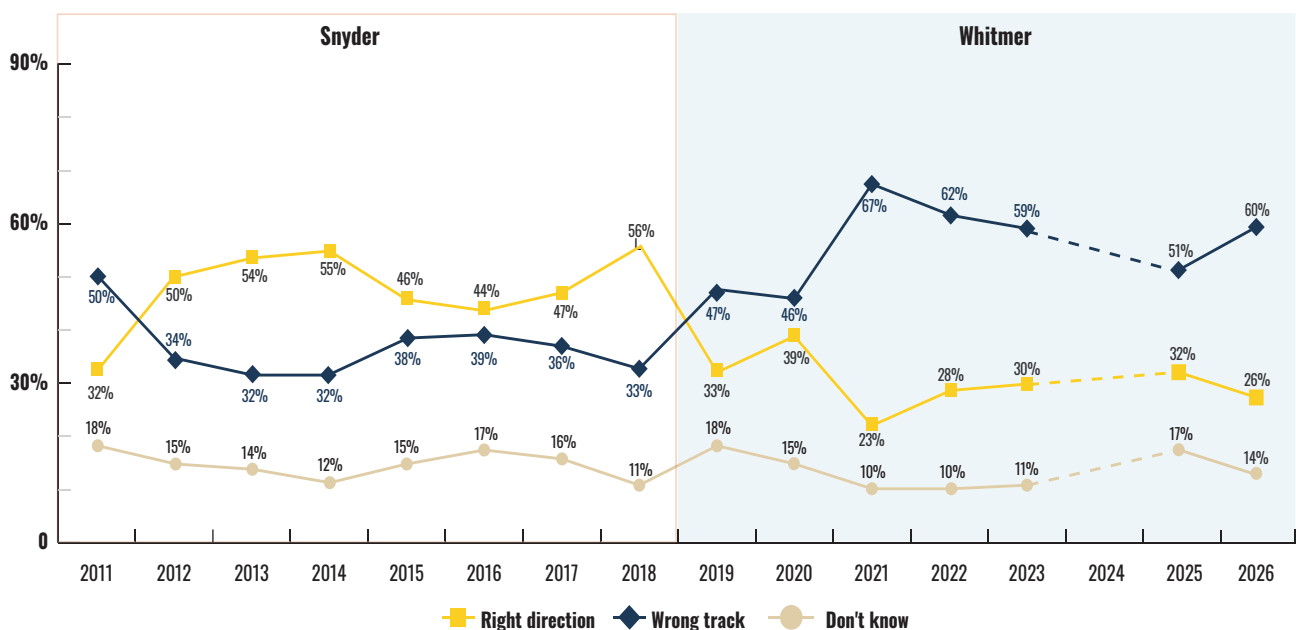
By Debra Horner and Stephanie Leiser

Statewide, 60% of Michigan's local government officials say the state is currently off on the wrong track (see *Figure 1*). This represents a nine percentage-point increase in pessimistic ratings, reversing a three-year trend in improvement.

Meanwhile, only around a quarter (26%) of local officials believe the state is going in the right direction, a six-point drop from 2025. Overall, 14% are unsure about the direction the state is headed, consistent with past survey waves.

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, 65% of this year's MPPS respondents self-identify as Republicans, while 14% 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," 2011-2026



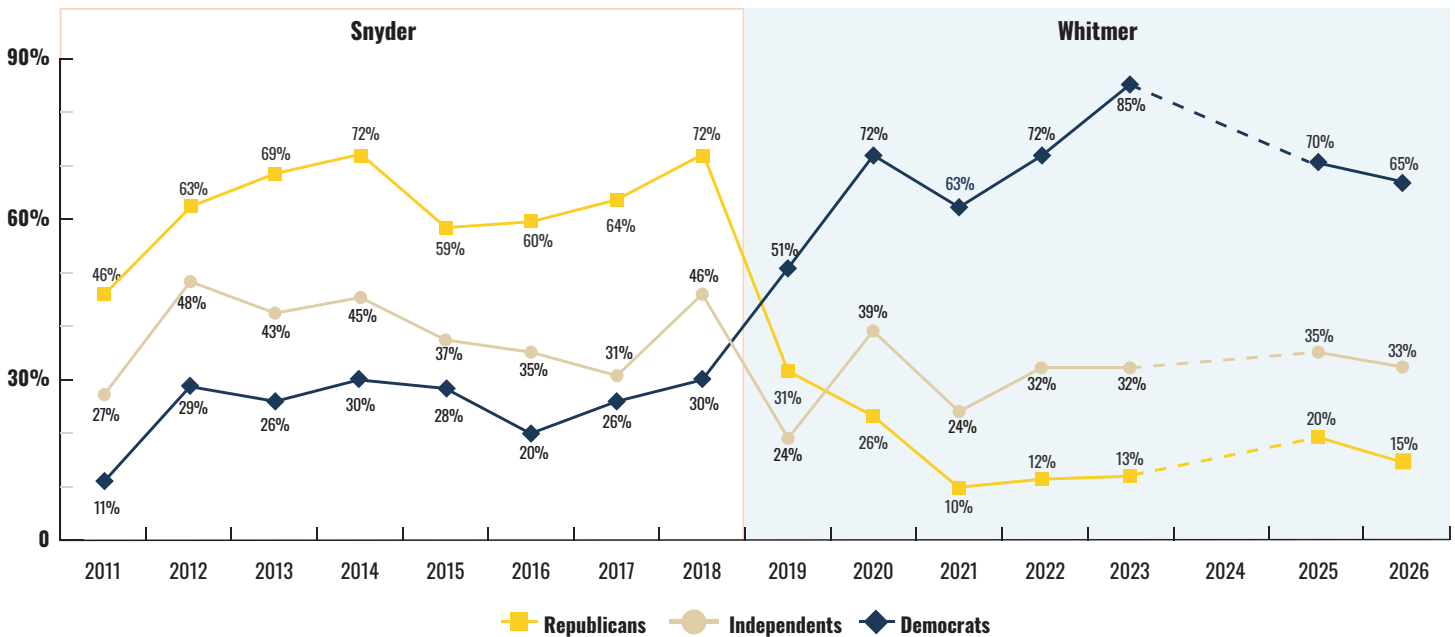
Note: Question not asked in Spring 2024.

## Declines in optimism about the direction of the state are found among officials of all partisan stripes

Consistent with prior years, this year’s 2026 survey shows a large gap in how local leaders from different parties feel about the state’s direction. However, optimism has declined among all partisan groups. Currently, during Democrat Gretchen Whitmer’s final year in office, around two-thirds of self-identified Democrats (65%) think Michigan is headed in the right direction, down significantly from the peak of 85% who said the same in 2023 (see Figure 2). Meanwhile, around a third (33%) of local officials who self-identify as Independents say the state is headed in the right direction, down slightly from last year. Finally, only 15% of Republican local officials say the state is going in the right direction, also down from the 20% who said the same in 2025.

This trend is consistent with wider sentiments among Michigan residents, with local leaders’ opinions largely aligning with voters who identify as “strong” partisans. In a recent public opinion survey conducted by Glengariff Group on behalf of the Detroit Regional Chamber at the end of April 2026,<sup>1</sup> 70% of respondents who identified at “strong” Democrats felt that Michigan was on the right track, similar to the 65% of Democratic local leaders. Similarly, just 17% of “strong” Republican voters think the state is on the right track, and 15% of Republican local officials feel the same.

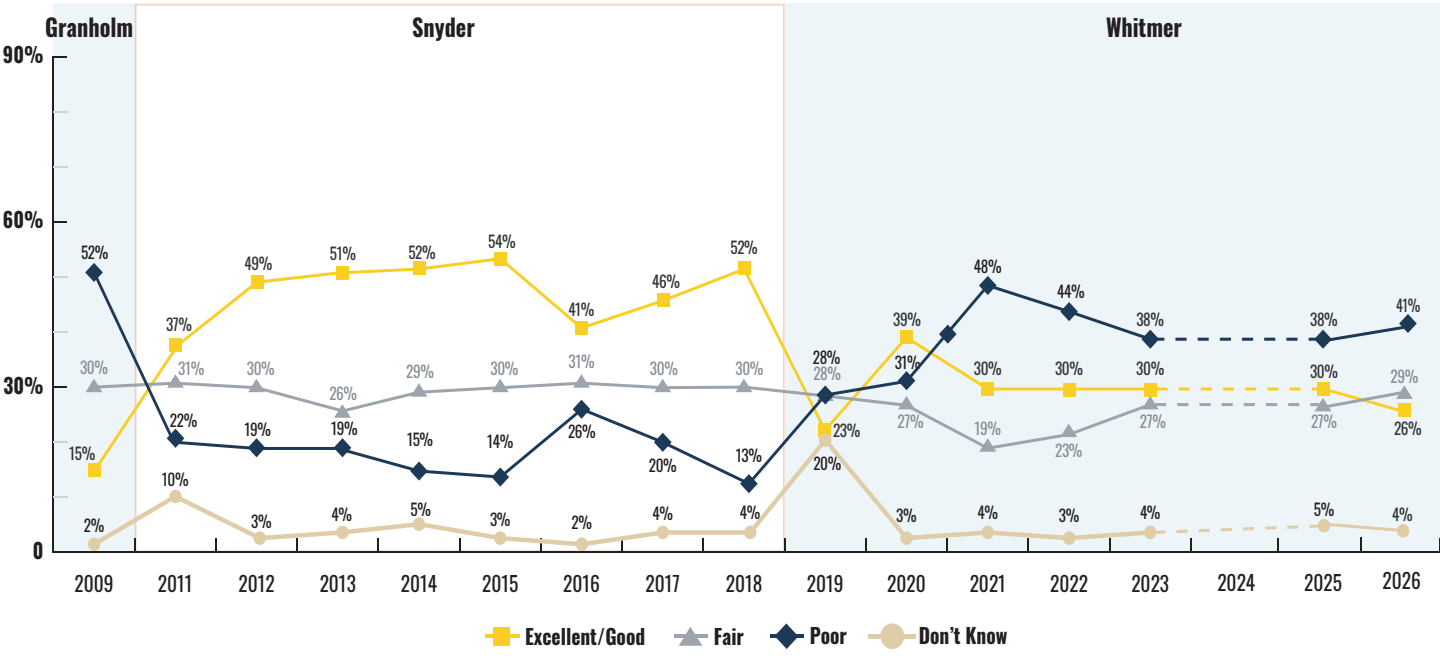
**Figure 2**  
Percentage of local officials who say Michigan is headed in the “right direction,” 2011-2026, by partisan identification



Note: Question not asked in Spring 2024.

# Assessments of Governor Whitmer’s performance generally stable, with slight drop among Republican leaders

**Figure 3**  
Local officials’ evaluations of Governor Whitmer’s performance compared with previous governors’ performances, 2009-2026



Note: Question not asked in Spring 2024.

Each year, the MPPS also asks local officials to evaluate the job performance of the governor, starting in 2009 with Gov. Jennifer Granholm, through Gov. Rick Snyder’s two terms, and through Gov. Gretchen Whitmer’s final year of her second term.

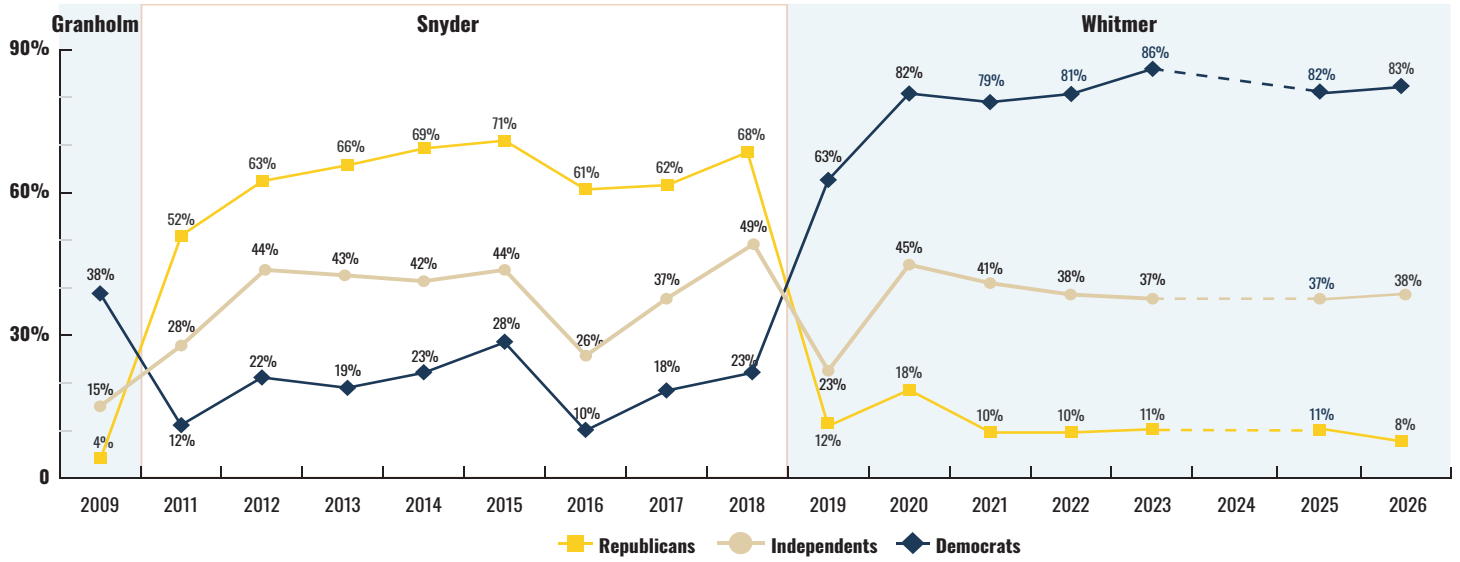
In 2026, 26% of local leaders statewide rate Gov. Whitmer’s performance as “excellent” or “good,” down three points from the consistent ratings she’s received since 2021 (see Figure 3). Meanwhile, 41% rate her performance today as “poor,” up slightly from 38% who said so in both 2023 and 2025.

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, 83% of Democratic local leaders currently give Gov. Whitmer positive ratings, generally in line with ratings among Democrats since her term began. Positive ratings among Independents (38%) also remain consistent with previous years, while Republicans (8%) are down slightly from the 11% who gave positive ratings last year.

Again, these trends are remarkably consistent with evaluations among the general public. The Detroit Chamber’s survey finds that, while most governors see a significant decline in job approval among voters in their second term, Gov. Whitmer’s ratings have remained consistently high.<sup>2</sup>

**Figure 4**

Percentage of local officials who rate the governor’s performance as “excellent” or “good,” 2009-2026, by partisan identification

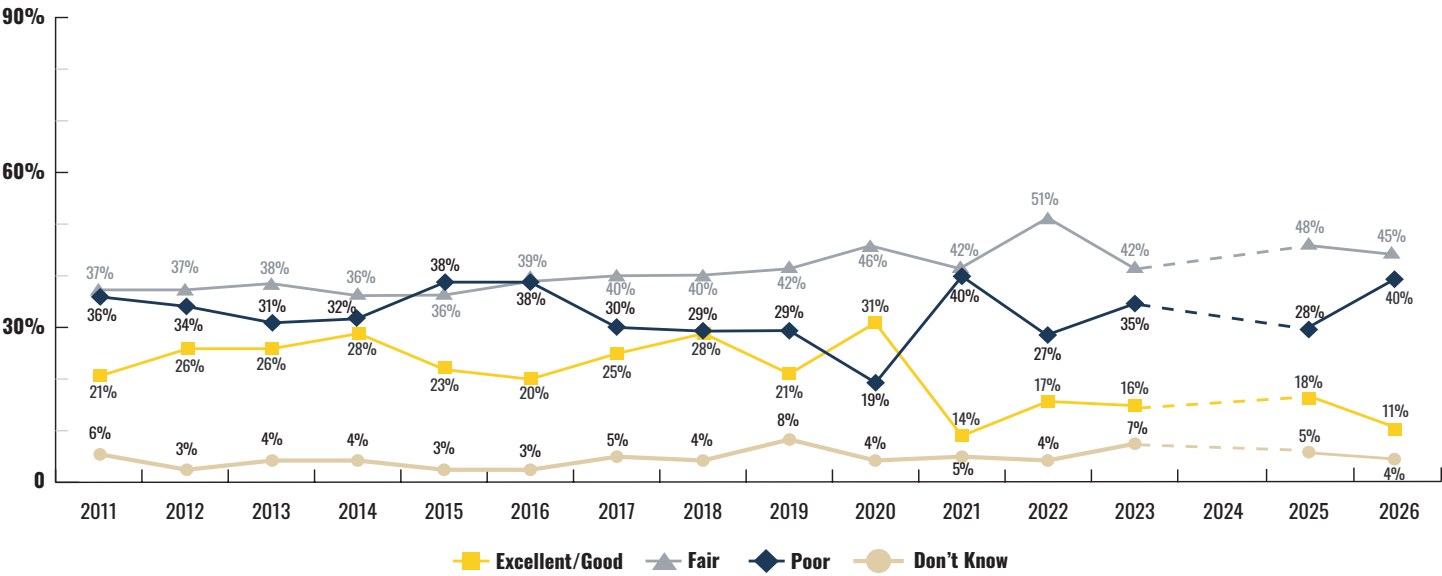


Note: Question not asked in Spring 2024.

# Local leaders' ratings of the Michigan Legislature plummet to new lows

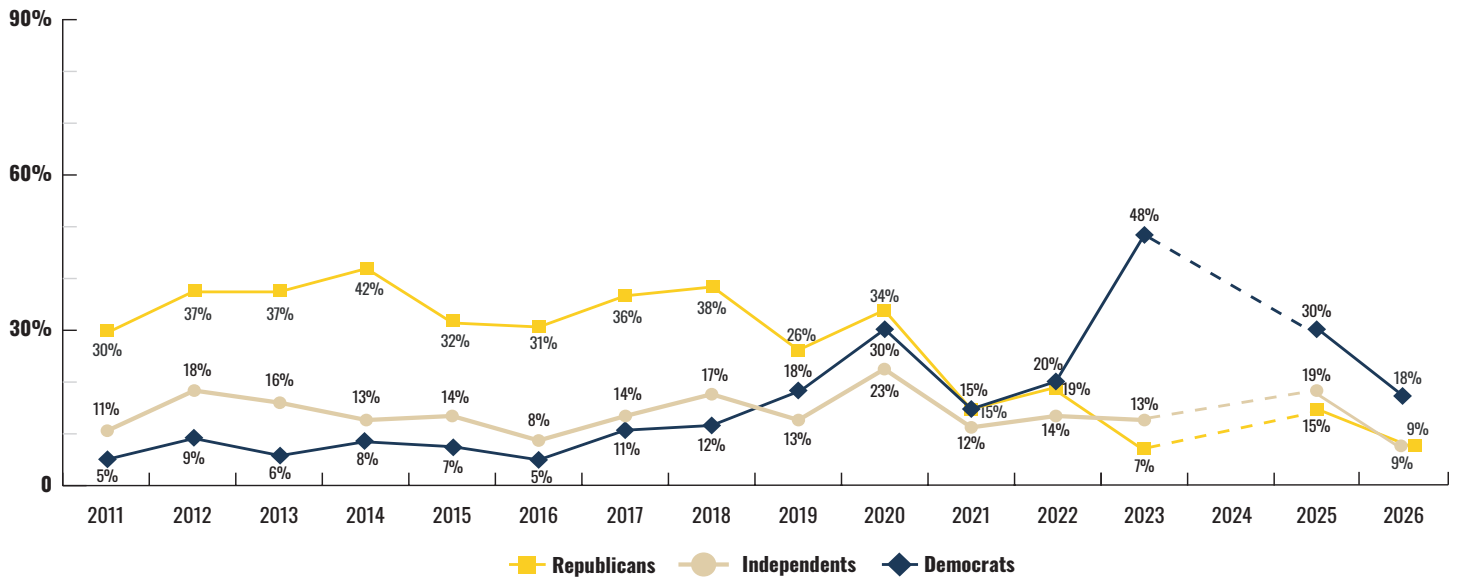
In contrast to the relative stability in ratings of Gov. Whitmer, this year, there has been a significant decline in assessments of the State Legislature's performance in Lansing. As shown in *Figure 5*, ratings of "poor" for the Legislature's performance jumped from 28% in 2025 to 40% in 2026. "Fair" continues to be the most common rating, reflecting the opinions of 45% of local leaders in 2026. The percentage who view its performance as either excellent or good dropped from 18% in 2025 to just 11% today, the lowest level since tracking began in 2011.

**Figure 5**  
Local officials' evaluations of Michigan Legislature's performance, 2011-2026



Note: Question not asked in Spring 2024.

**Figure 6**  
Percentage of local officials who rate the Michigan Legislature’s performance as ‘excellent’ or ‘good’ in 2011-2026, by partisan identification



Note: Question not asked in Spring 2024.

Partisan differences in local leaders’ evaluations of the Legislature’s performance had nearly disappeared between 2019-2022. However, after the November 2022 elections, Democrats controlled both chambers for two years, and the percentage of Democratic local officials rating the Legislature’s performance as excellent or good temporarily rose. The subsequent 2024 election resulted in a divided Legislature — with Republicans controlling the House and Democrats controlling the Senate — and assessments again converged between Republican and Democratic local officials.

In 2026, positive ratings of the state Legislature have substantially dropped among Democrats, Independents, and Republicans alike. Among Independents, just 9% say the Legislature is doing an excellent or good job (down from 19% last year), and Republican leaders’ positive ratings also dropped to 9% this year (see *Figure 6*). Meanwhile, Democrats’ ratings of the Legislature have dropped precipitously from a high of 48% in 2023 to 18% in 2026.



## Notes

1. Glengariff Group. (2026, May 3). Michigan Statewide Voter Survey. Retrieved from [https://www.detroitchamber.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/Detroit-Regional-Chamber\\_Glengariff-Group\\_Michigan-Voter-Poll\\_May-2026.pdf](https://www.detroitchamber.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/Detroit-Regional-Chamber_Glengariff-Group_Michigan-Voter-Poll_May-2026.pdf)
2. Glengariff Group. (2026, May 3).

## 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 2026 wave was conducted March 30 – June 9, 2026. 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-2026-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, nor of other partners in the MPPS.*