



Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy

 | Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy

Democracy at the Local Level: Resident Engagement

Findings from the Michigan Public Policy Survey (MPPS)

May 18, 2021

Presentation Outline

- Brief introduction to the Michigan Public Policy Survey
- Overview of Michigan local leaders' views regarding the functioning of democracy in their jurisdictions
- A statewide look at resident engagement and public participation in Michigan local government decision-making
- Discussion of one Michigan city's new comprehensive approach to engaging its residents



The Michigan Public Policy Survey (MPPS)

- **A census survey** – all 1,856 Michigan counties, cities, villages, & townships
- **Two types of respondents** – top elected & appointed officials
- **Wide Range of Topics** – examples include fiscal health, government operations and budget policies, elections, energy, roads, poverty, public safety, economic development, water infrastructure, intergovernmental cooperation, employee policies, labor unions, housing, environmental sustainability, Great Lakes, and much more.



What makes the MPPS unique?

- 70%+ response rates
- Transparency
 - All questionnaires online
 - Pre-run data tables online
 - Sharing of (anonymized) datasets with other researchers
- Research partnership with MI local government associations
 - MAC, MML, & MTA
- Consulting expert advisors from across Michigan and matching content to national-level sources such as NLC and ICMA

What does the MPPS aim to do?

- **Improve understanding** of local government to help improve policymaking and quality of life
- **Inform local leaders** about peers across the state: challenges and responses
- **Inform state policymakers** and other stakeholders with data about local level issues and views not available from any other source
- **Build a longitudinal data archive** to allow tracking of fundamental changes (such as economic and technological transitions, rural/urban dynamics, etc.)
- **Foster academic research and teaching** on local government issues

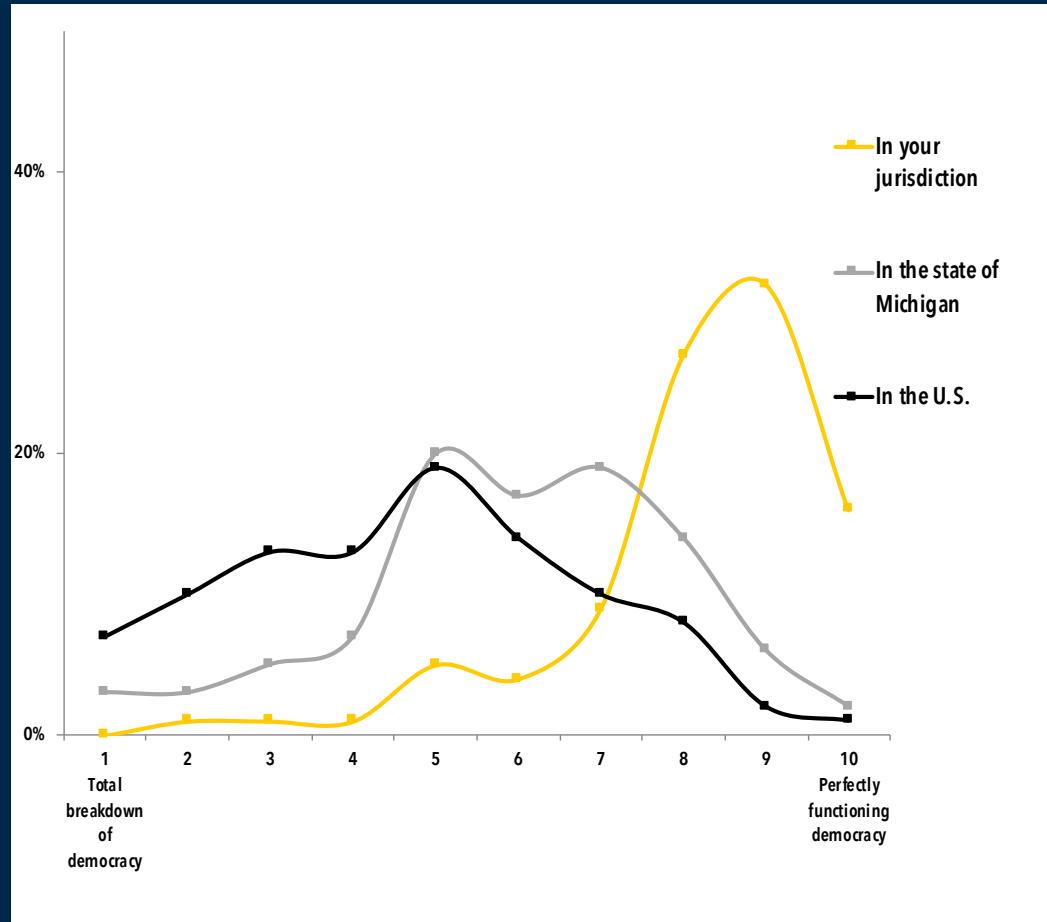


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Local leaders are much more optimistic about functioning of democracy locally than at either state or national levels.

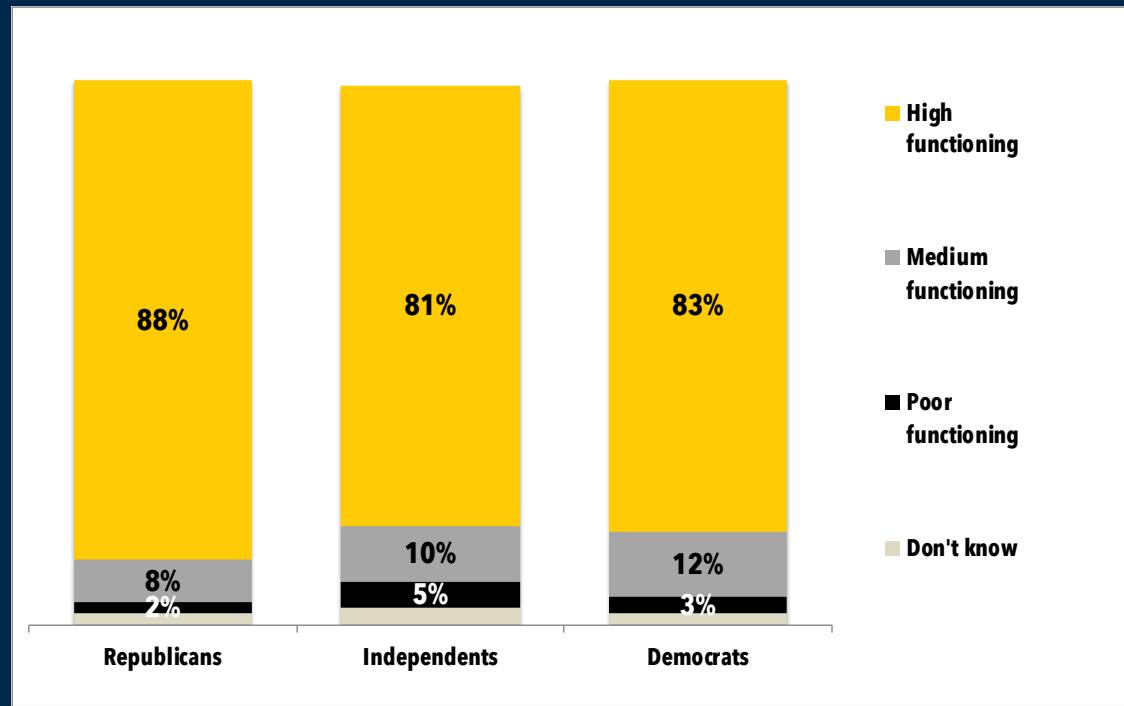


Spring 2020



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There are few differences among partisans regarding strength of local democracy...



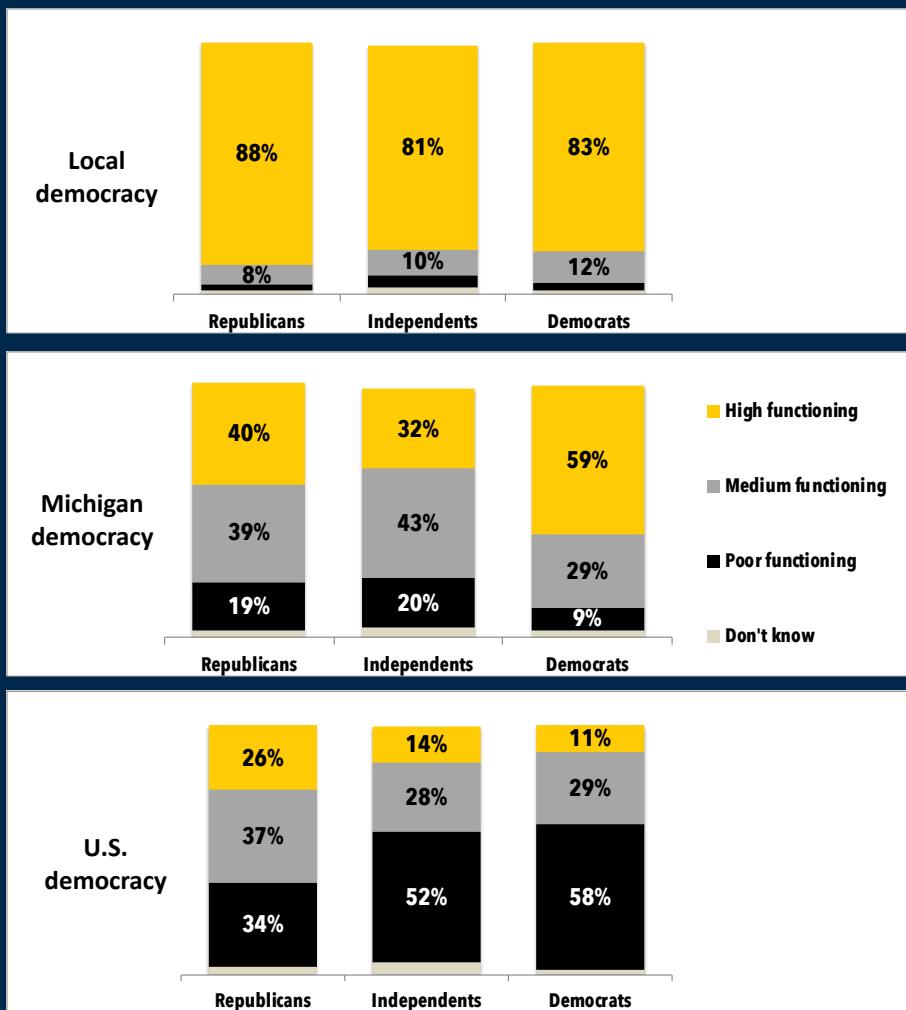
Spring 2020



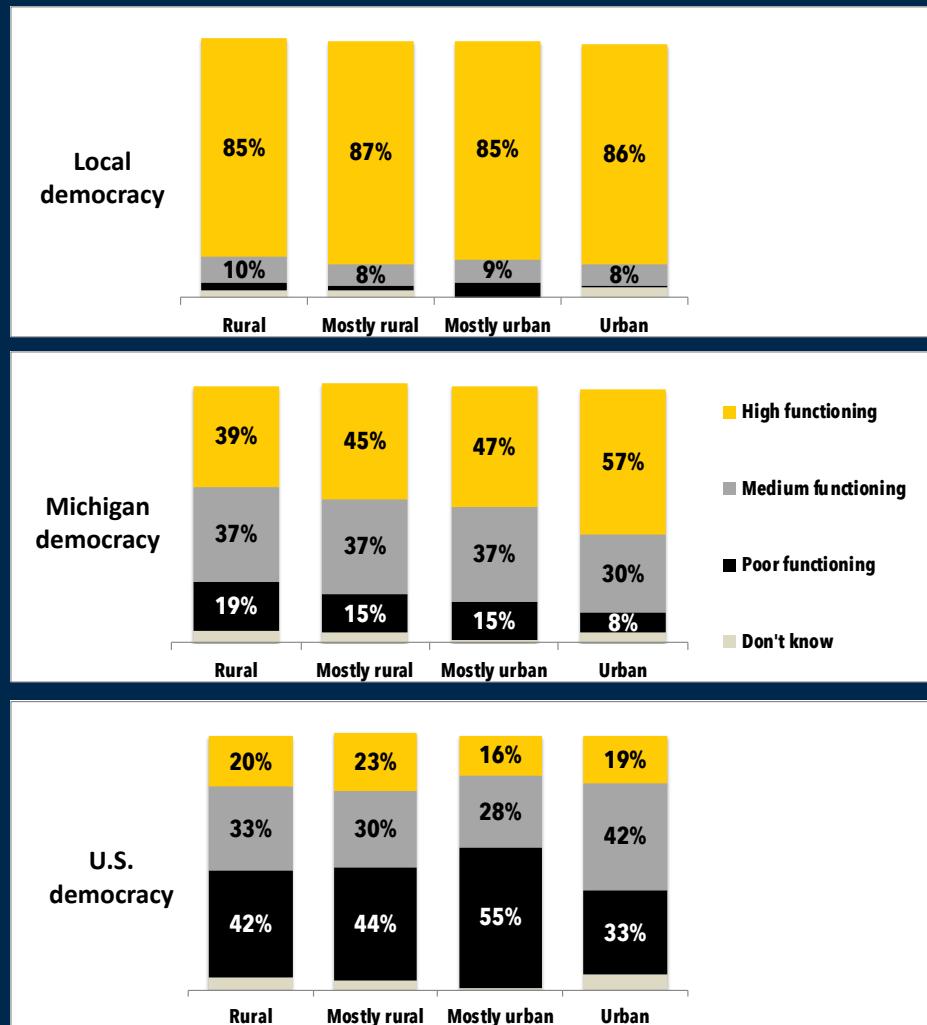
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There are few differences among partisans regarding strength of local democracy...

especially compared with views about state or national levels.



There are also few differences among rural and urban leaders about strength of local democracy compared with views on democracy in the state or nation.



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What is the role of residents in local government?

Who should decide key policy issues?

Can residents be trusted to be good partners in local policymaking?

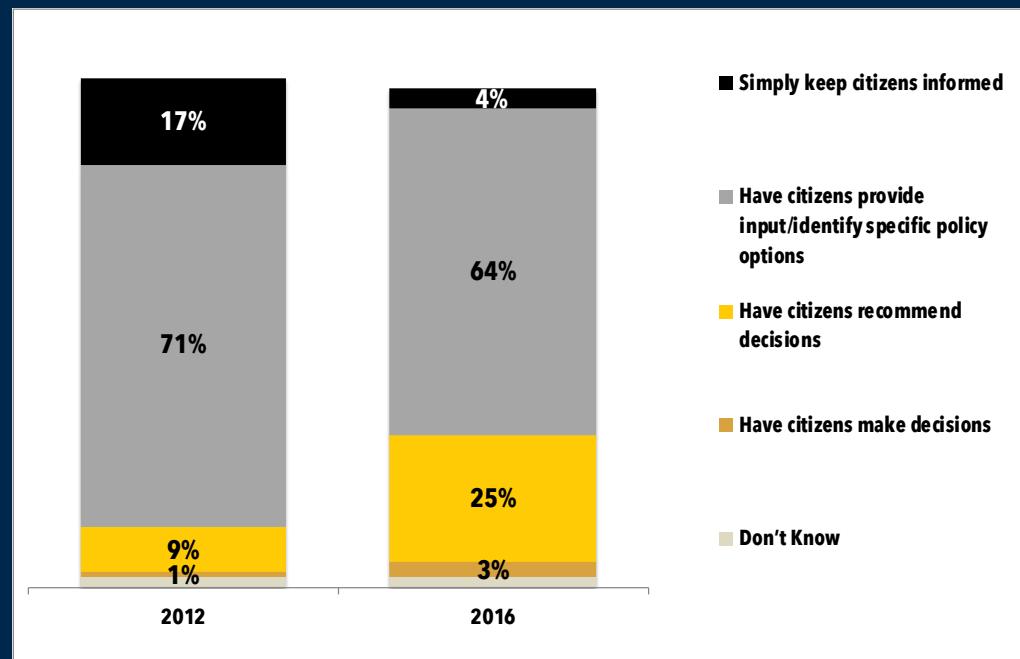
What is the current tone of local political discourse?

Who provides their residents with opportunities to participate?



Generally, Michigan local leaders would like their residents to provide input into local policymaking.

Also, officials' overall interest in residents recommending decisions has increased.



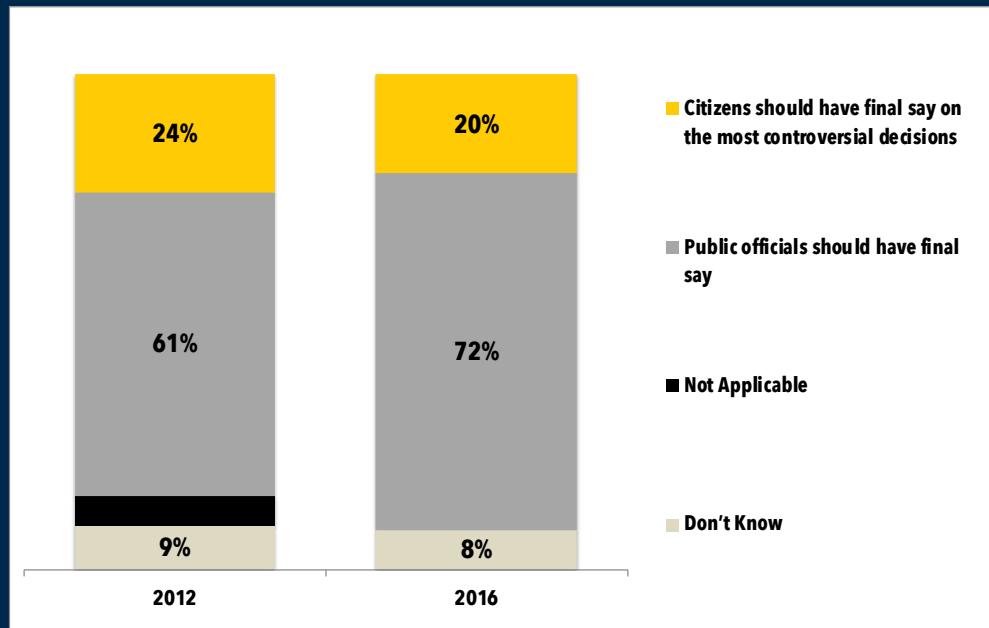
Fall 2012/16



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And when it comes to making decisions about the most controversial issues in the community, one in five local leaders think the final say should belong to citizens...

(however, this view decreased between 2012 and 2016).

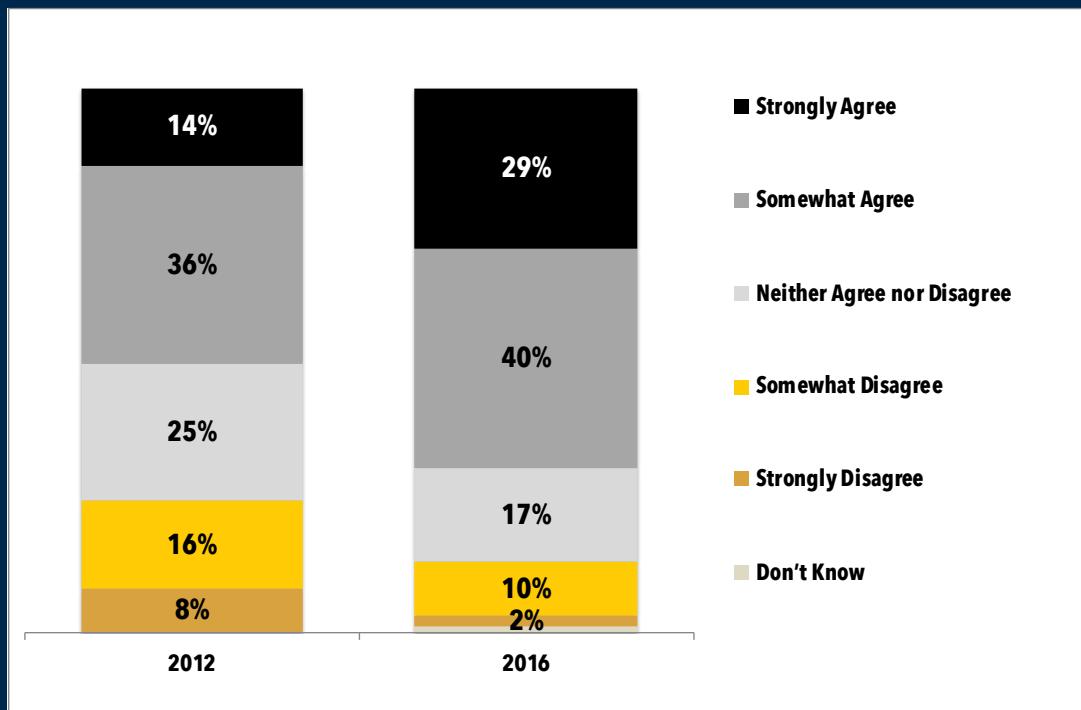


Fall 2012/16



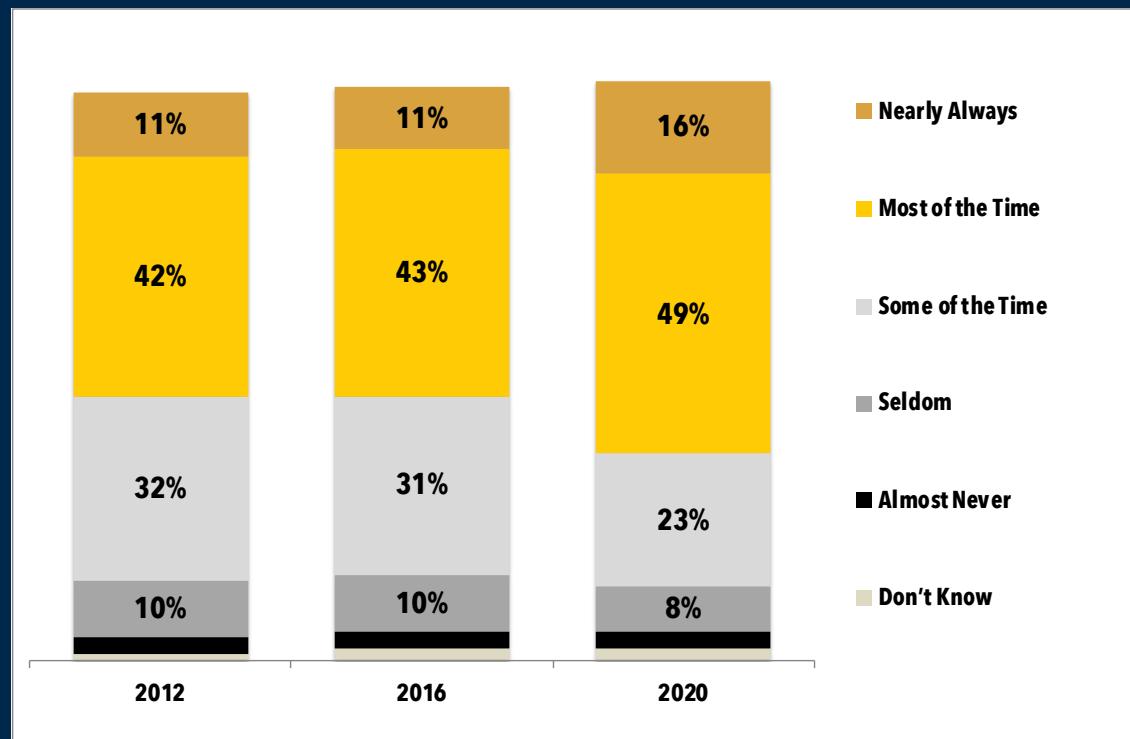
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On one hand, local officials are increasingly likely to agree that the residents they tend to hear from are more interested in complaining than in finding solutions.



Fall 2012/16

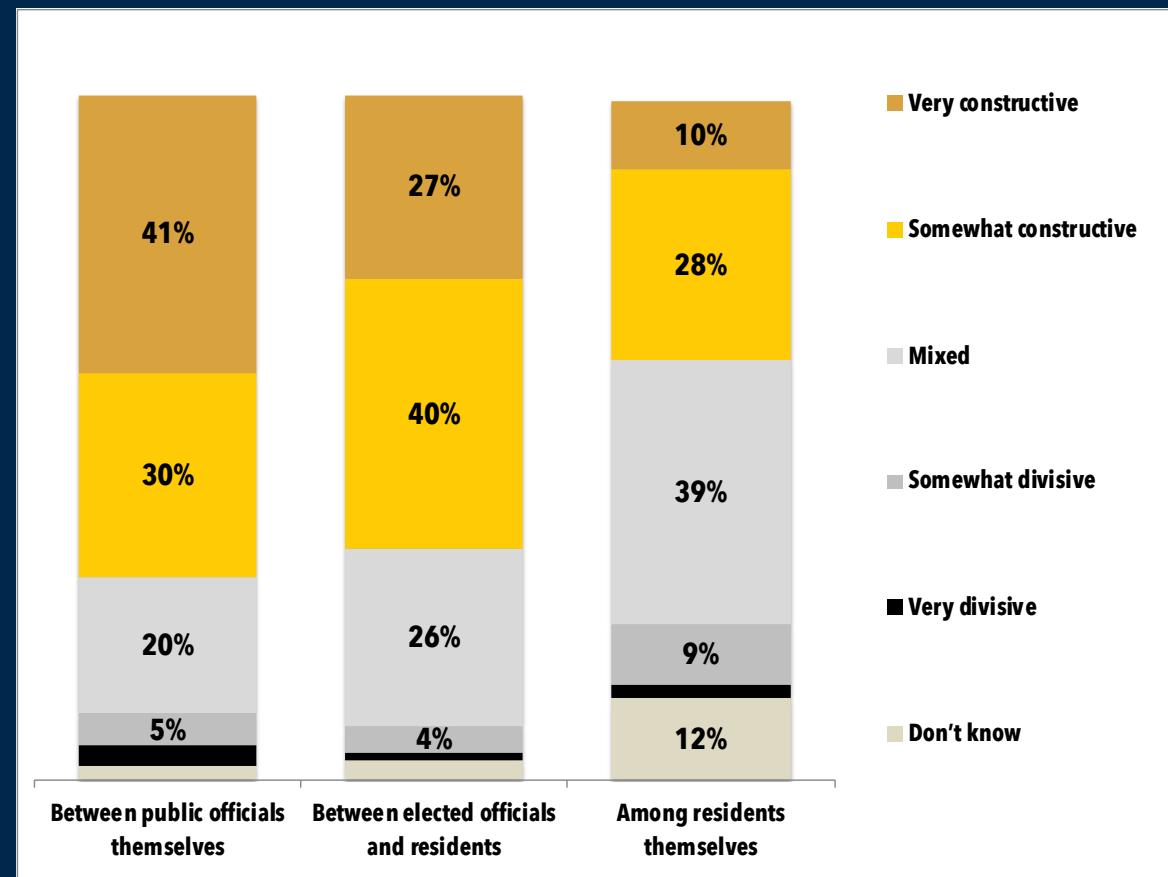
On the other hand, local officials increasingly say they generally trust the citizens in their community to be responsible participants in the jurisdiction's policymaking.



Fall 2012/16 & Spring 20



Fortunately,
Michigan local
leaders generally
report that the tone
of discussions about
local policy issues is
more constructive
than divisive.



Spring 2018

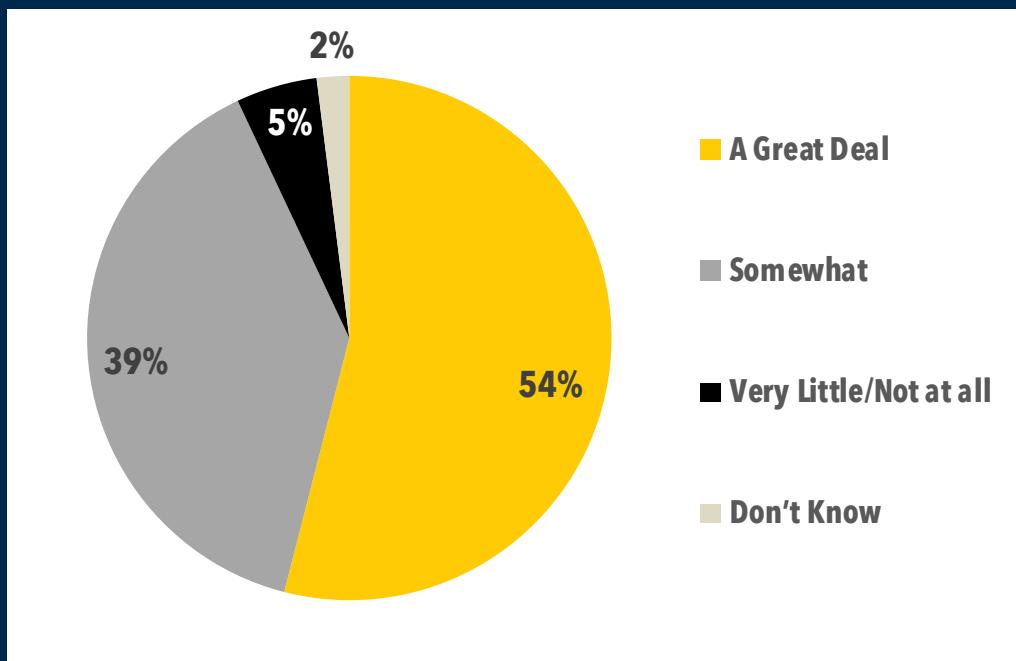


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Let's look more specifically at resident engagement...



A majority of Michigan local government leaders reported that their jurisdictions offer a great deal of opportunities for residents to engage with their local government...



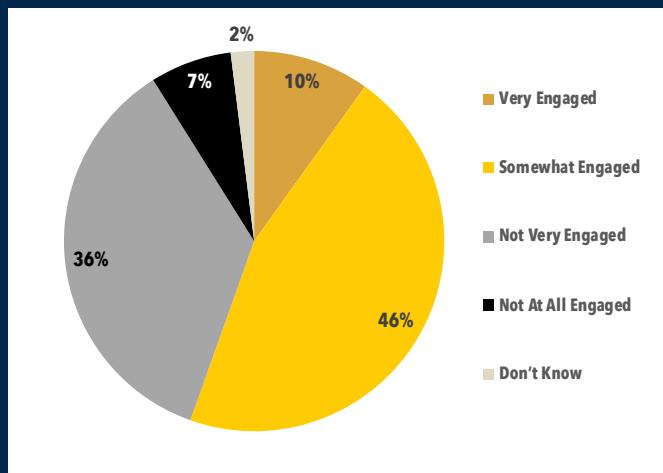
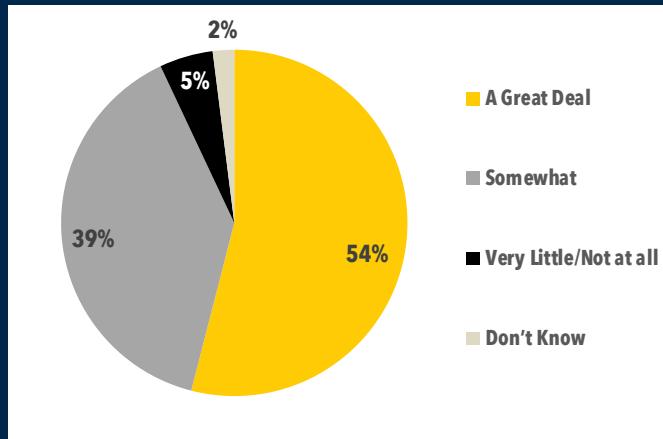
Fall 2016



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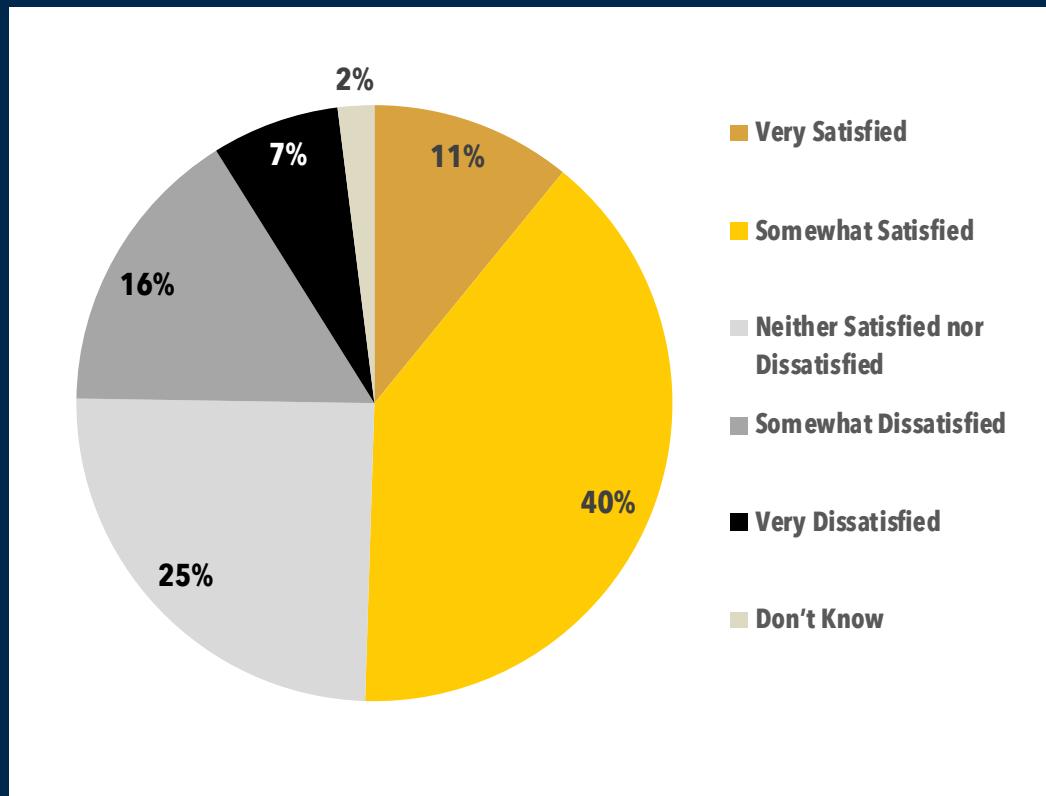
A majority of Michigan local government leaders reported that their jurisdictions offer a great deal of opportunities for residents to engage with their local government...

and 56% said their residents are very or somewhat engaged.



Fall 2016

Ultimately, only about half of Michigan local government leaders say they very or somewhat satisfied with their residents' engagement in their jurisdiction's policymaking and/or operations.



Fall 2016



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“Engage Birmingham”

Melissa Fairbairn
Assistant to the City Manager

The screenshot shows the homepage of the Engage Birmingham website. At the top right, there is a navigation bar with links for Home, City of Birmingham, Search, Sign in, and Register. Below the navigation is a large banner image of a brick building. To the right of the banner, the text "Welcome to Engage Birmingham" is displayed, followed by a brief description: "Engage Birmingham is where you can contribute ideas to actively shape your community and strengthen the place you call home. We know your time is precious, which is why we promise to listen to what you say, and let you know how your input contributes to decisions." A "Register" button is located at the bottom right of this section.

Featured Projects

- Welcome & FAQ

[Learn More](#)
- Engaging with Your Community

[Learn More](#)
- Pickleball Court Locations

[Learn More](#)
- City of Birmingham
A Place to Call Home
Newsletter

Rename & Refresh the Print Newsletter

[Learn More](#)
- 2040 Master Plan

[Learn More](#)

Previous MPPS findings: recap

New MPPS findings for 2021:
uses for technology in resident
engagement in the post-COVID world

(data available this summer!)



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