

# Trends in Local Government Ethics

Presented at the  
2015 Michigan Townships Association  
Annual Educational Conference  
January 29, 2015

# Presentation Outline

- Overview of MPPS survey program
- Findings on township officials' views on state and local government ethics issues (from Fall 2014 Wave of the MPPS), including
  - ✓ Financial Disclosure and “Revolving Door” policies
  - ✓ Gifts and honoraria
  - ✓ Conflicts of Interest
  - ✓ FOIA and the Open Meetings Act
  - ✓ Local ethical pressures
  - ✓ Overall satisfaction with townships' current ethics policies

# The Michigan Public Policy Survey

- **Census survey** – all 1,856 counties, cities, villages, and townships
- **Respondents** – chief elected and appointed officials
- **Administered** – online and via hardcopy
- **Timing** – Spring and Fall each year
- **Topics** – wide range, such as fiscal health, budget priorities, economic development, intergovernmental cooperation, privatization, employee policies, labor unions, state relations, energy, environmental sustainability, Great Lakes, citizen engagement, bankruptcy, 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
- **Borrow from other proven sources such as NLC and ICMA**
- **Quality control such as double blind coding of open-end responses, internal technical memos on data quality, etc.**

# 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 challenges and responses not available from any other source
- **Build a longitudinal data archive** to allow tracking of fundamental changes (such as the economic transition, aging population, etc.)
- Foster **academic research and teaching** on local government issues

# How many townships responded to the Fall 2014 MPPS?

**905 townships total (73% of all statewide)**

## **By Population Size**

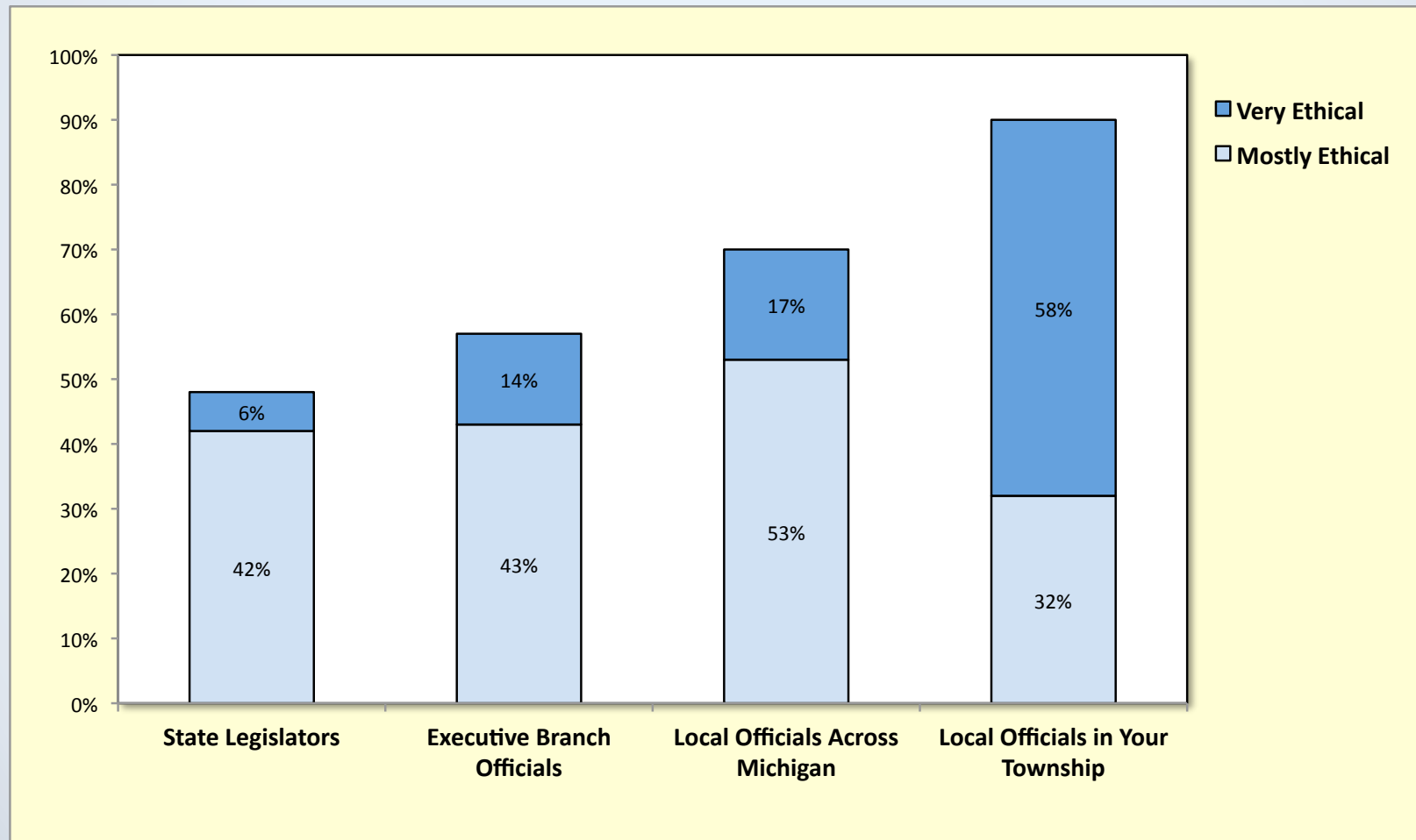
351 townships <1500  
389 townships 1500-5000  
82 townships 5001-10,000  
61 townships 10,001-30,000  
22 townships >30,000

## **By Region**

113 in the Upper Peninsula  
187 in the Northern LP  
165 in the Central West  
169 in the Central East  
140 in the Southwest  
131 in the Southeast

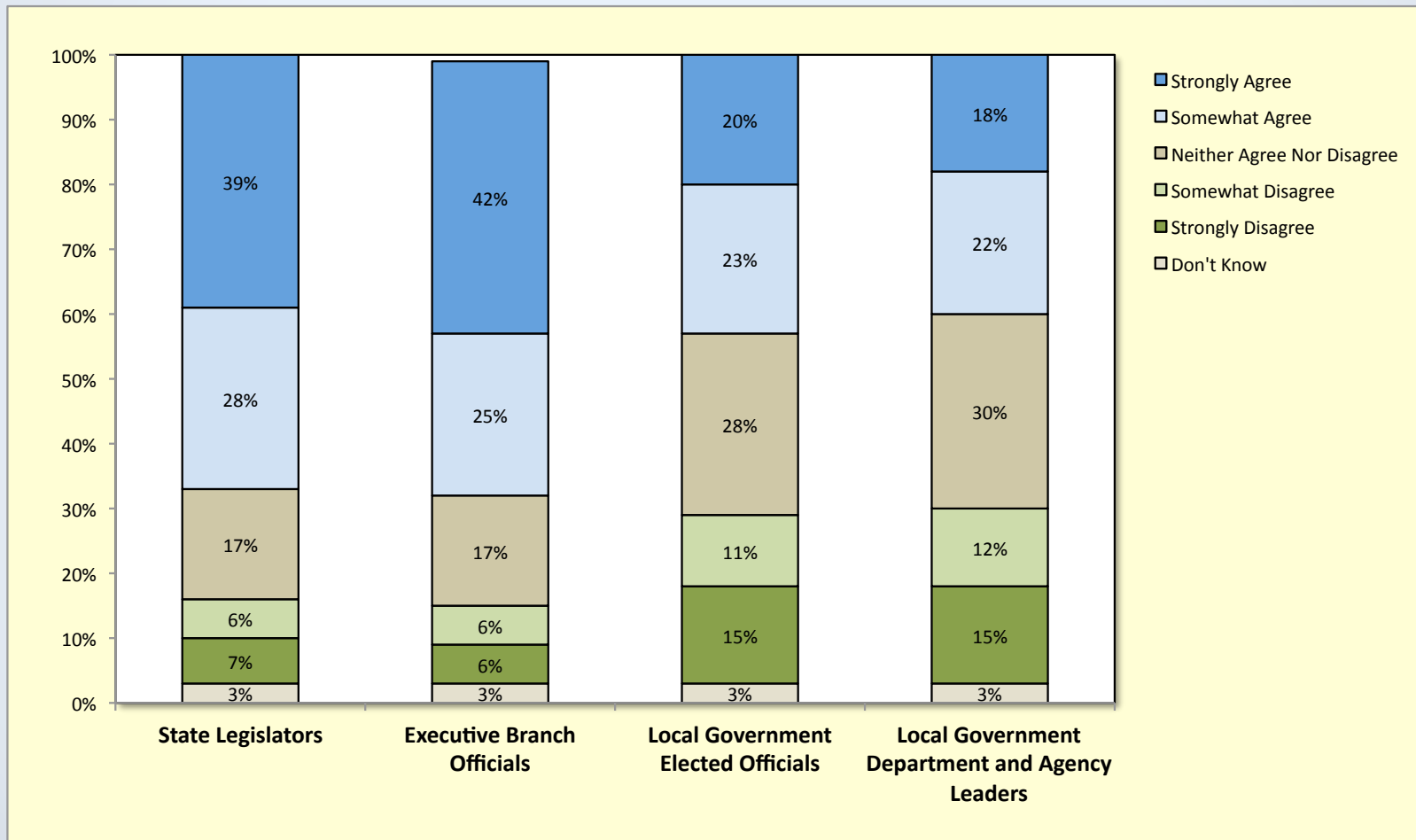
# Officials Closest to Home Get Highest Ratings

Rate the following groups of people **overall** in terms of **ethical behavior in their official positions...**



# Support for Financial Disclosure

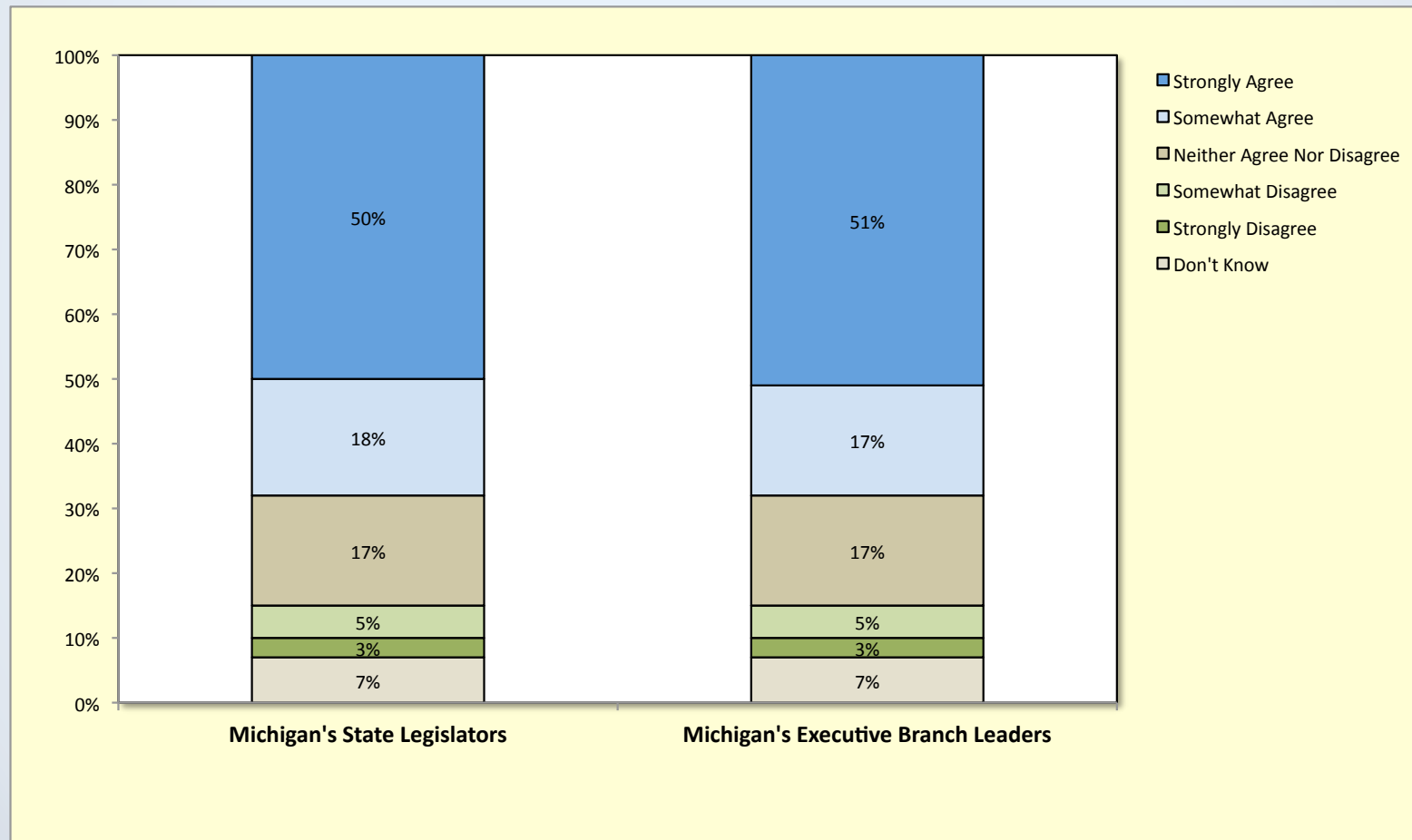
The following types of Michigan government officials should be **required** to disclose their financial interests...





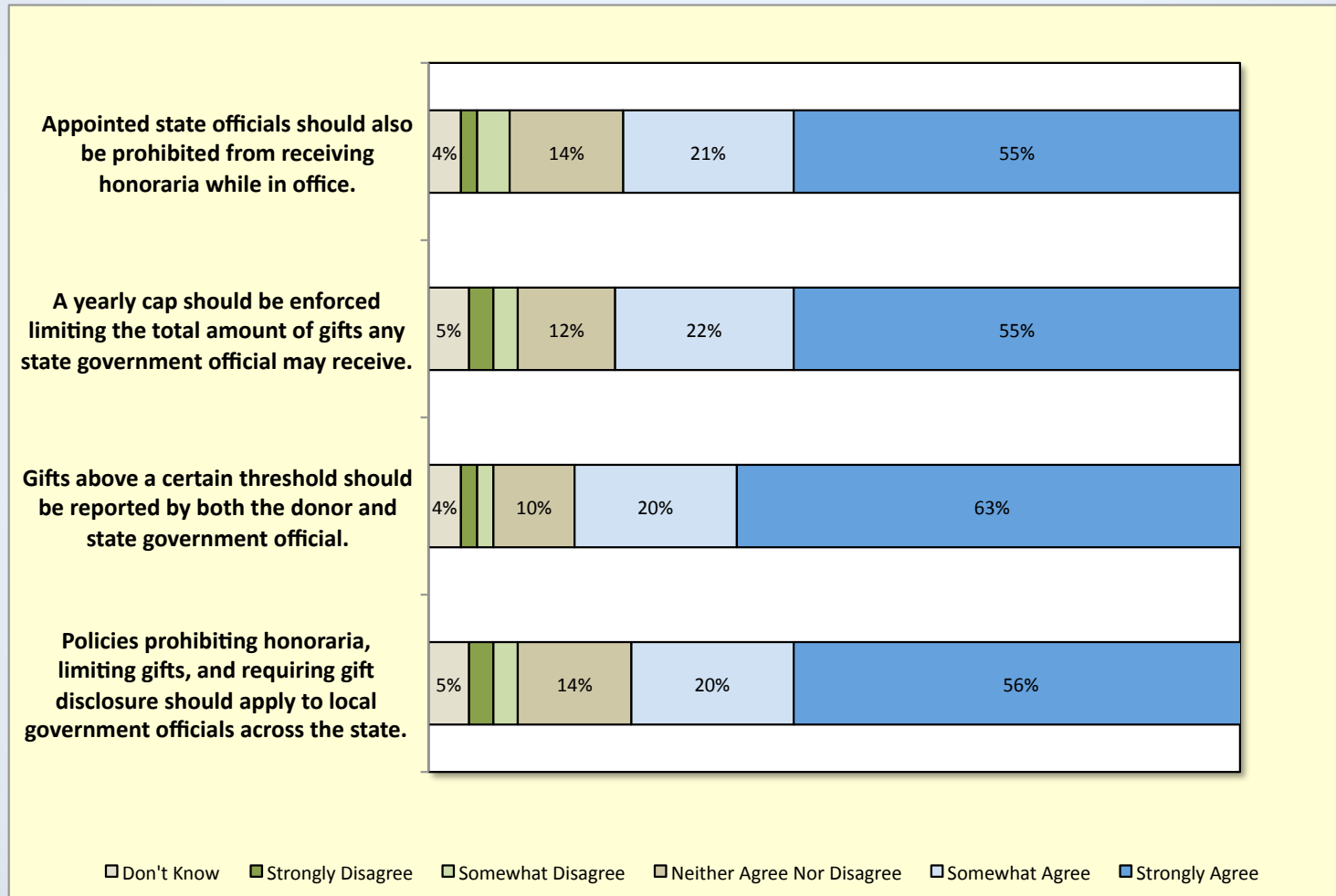
# Support for State “Revolving Door” Policy

Michigan state officials should be **required** to wait a certain period of time after leaving office before becoming a lobbyist or consultant that works for state government...



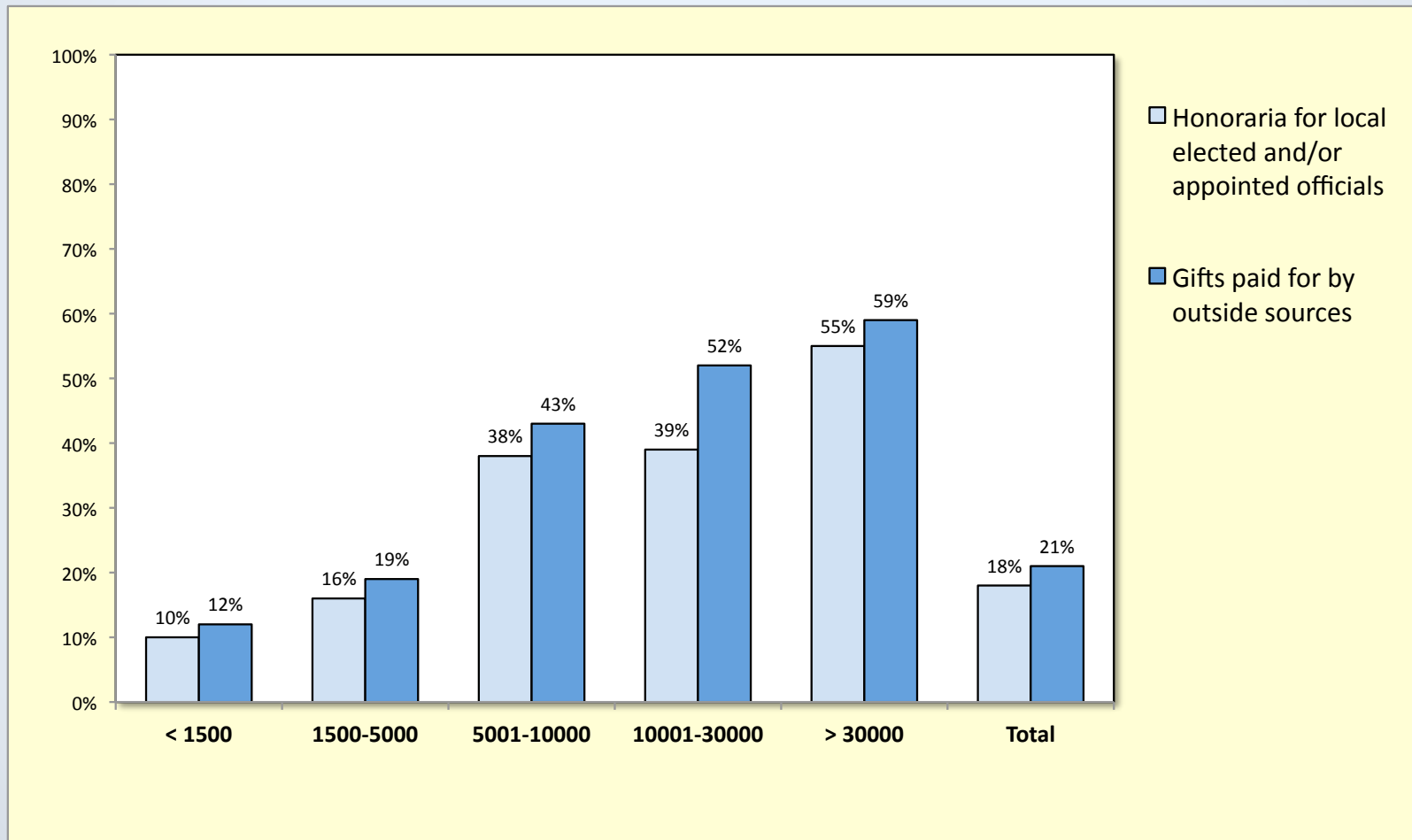
# Support for Policies on Gifts and Honoraria

Michigan currently **prohibits** state legislators from receiving honoraria, but **allows** certain levels of gifts, food, and travel or lodging expenses.



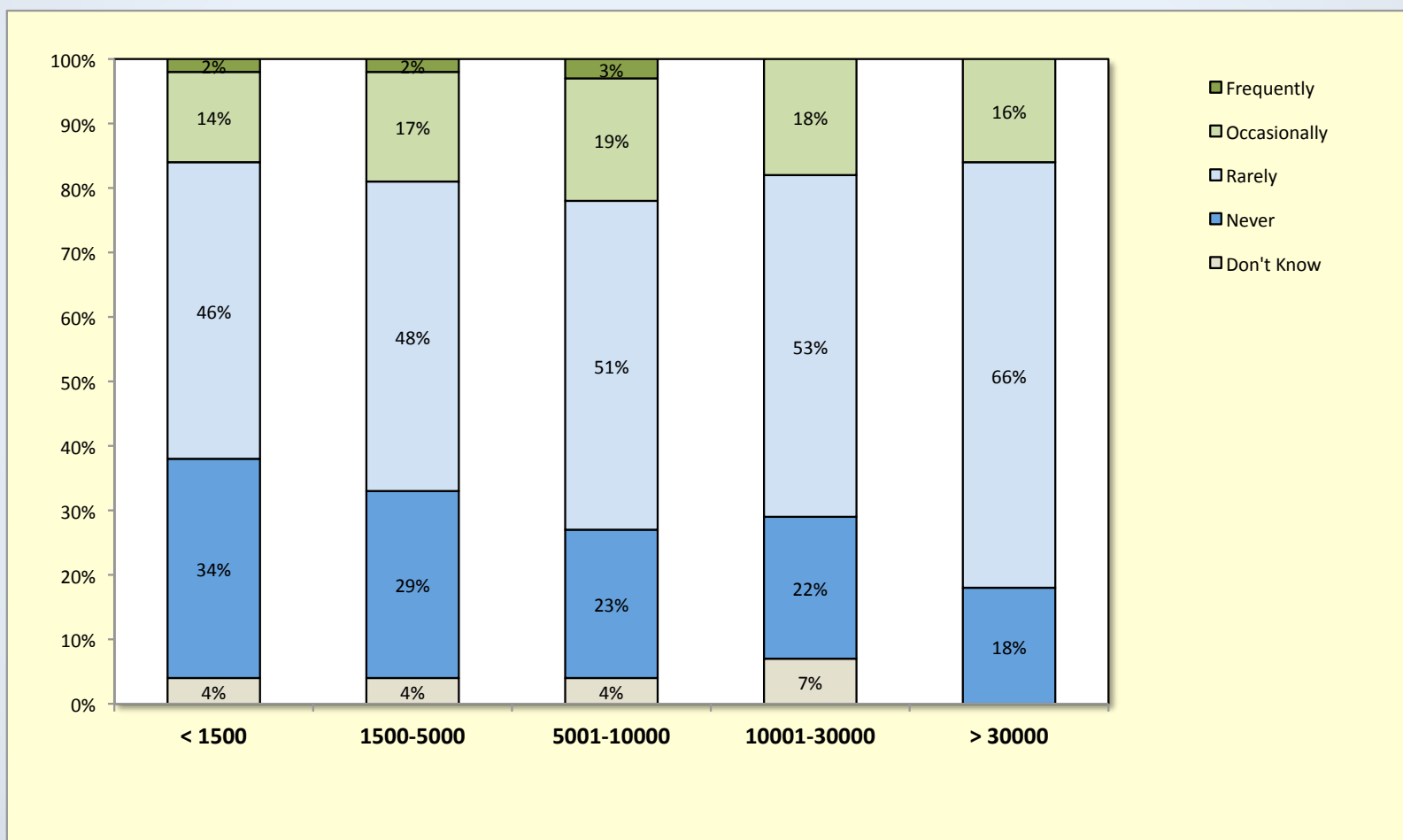
# Current Township Policies on Gifts and Honoraria

Does your township currently have **any policies** that prohibit, limit, or require disclosure for...



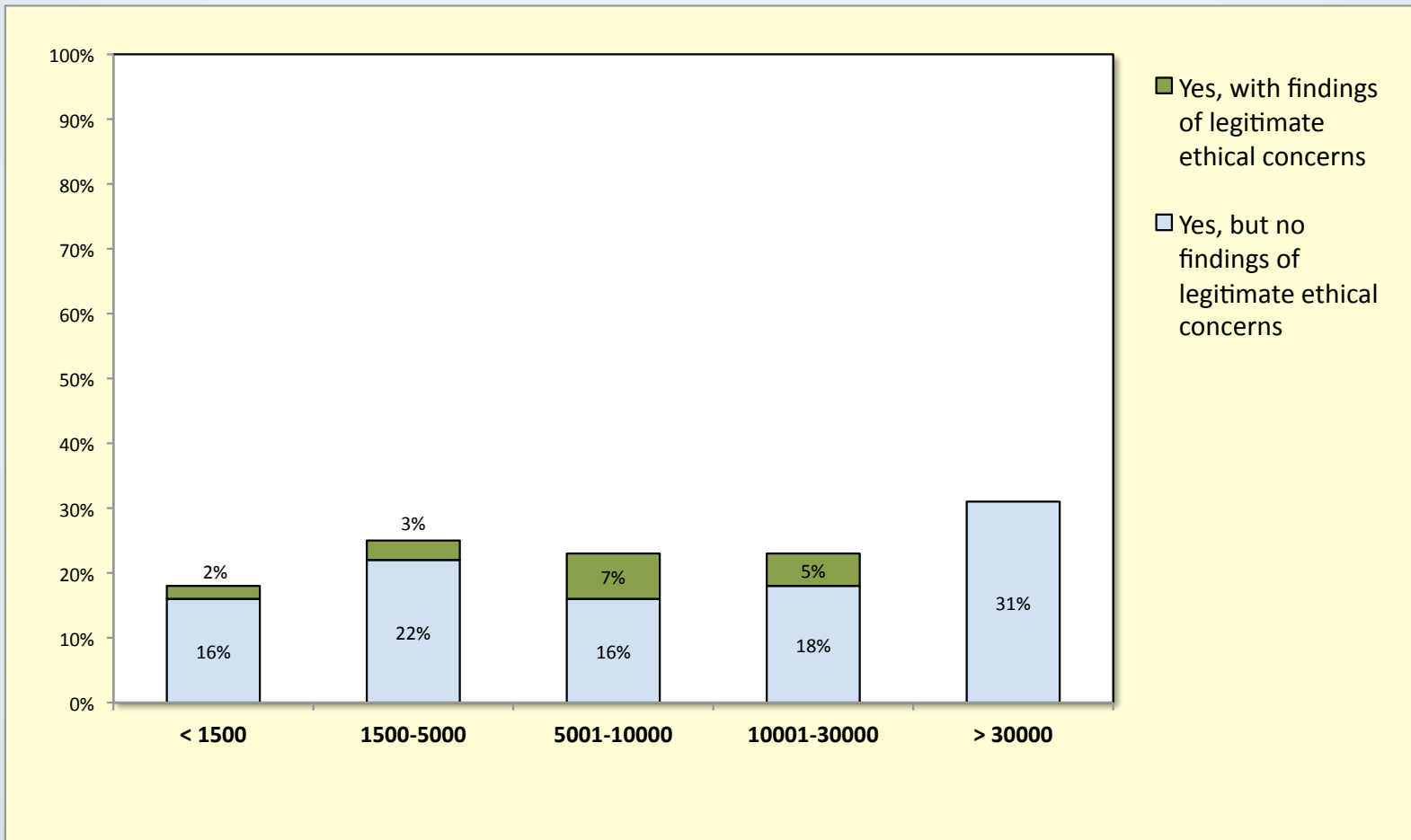
# Townships' Experiences with Conflicts of Interest

How often, if at all, would you say officials in your township's government face issues that present potential **conflicts of interest**?



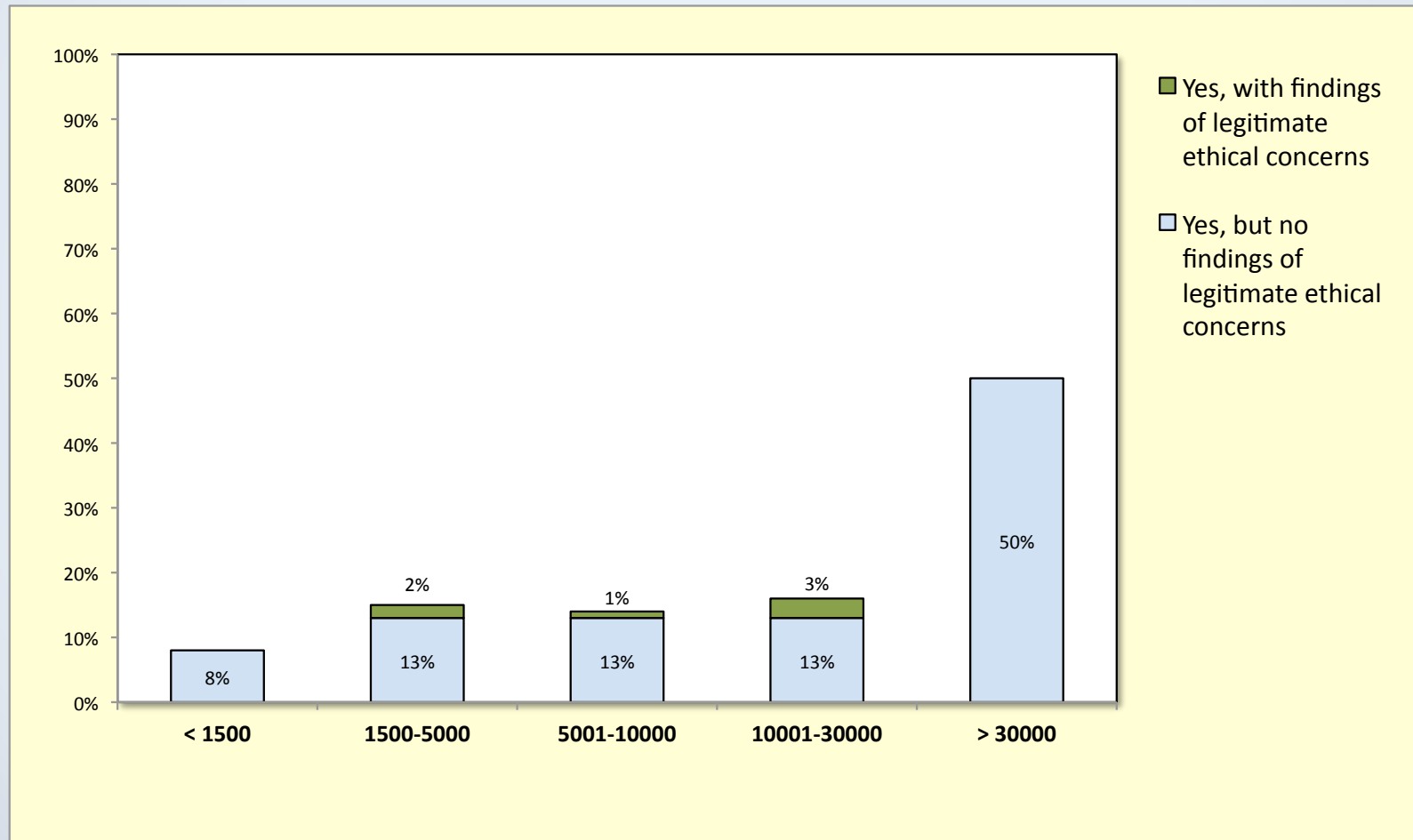
# Townships' Experiences with FOIA requests

Has your township experienced Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests related to **potential ethical concerns** in the last five years?



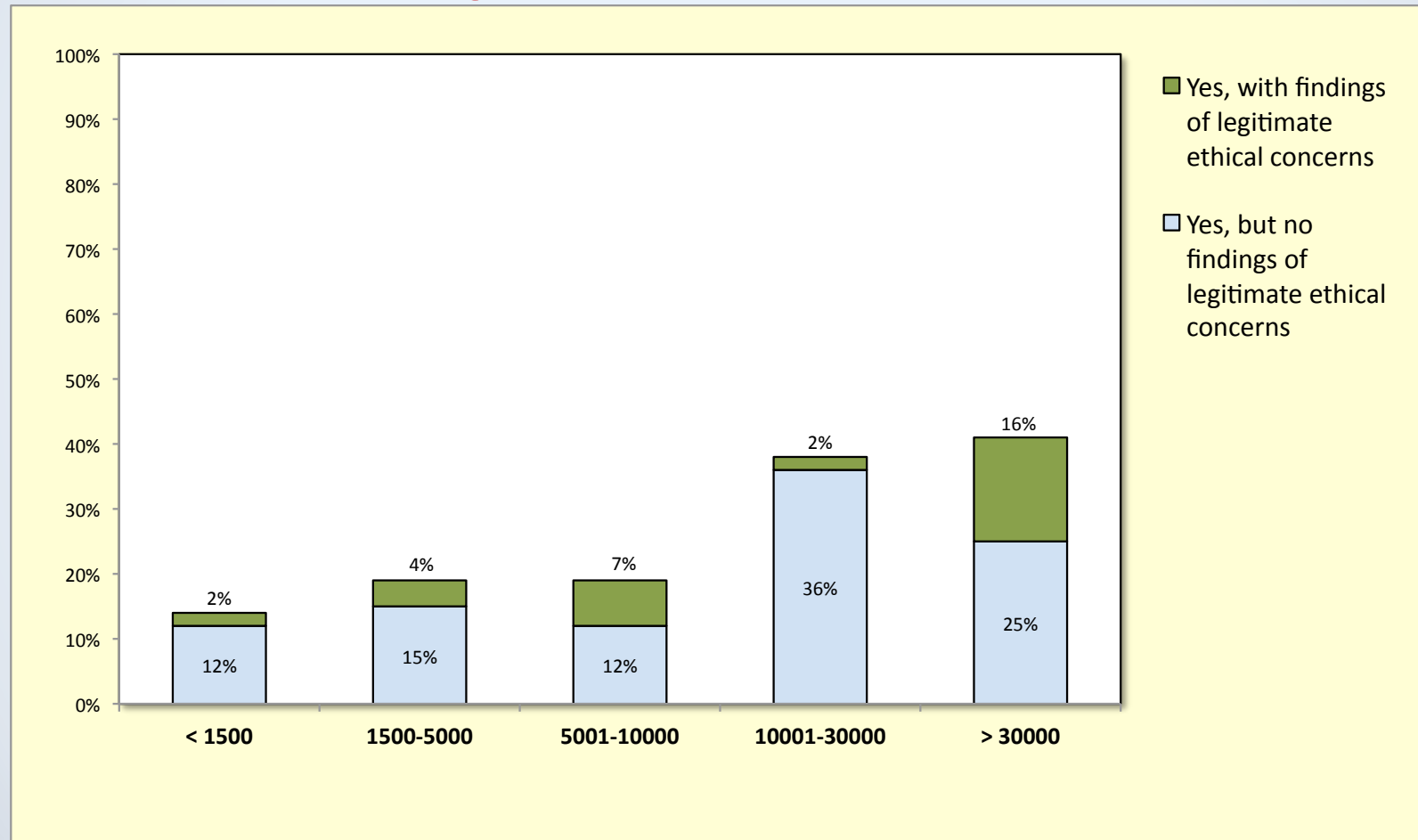
# Townships' Experiences with Open Meeting Violations

Has your township experienced **accusations** of Open Meetings Act violations in the last five years?



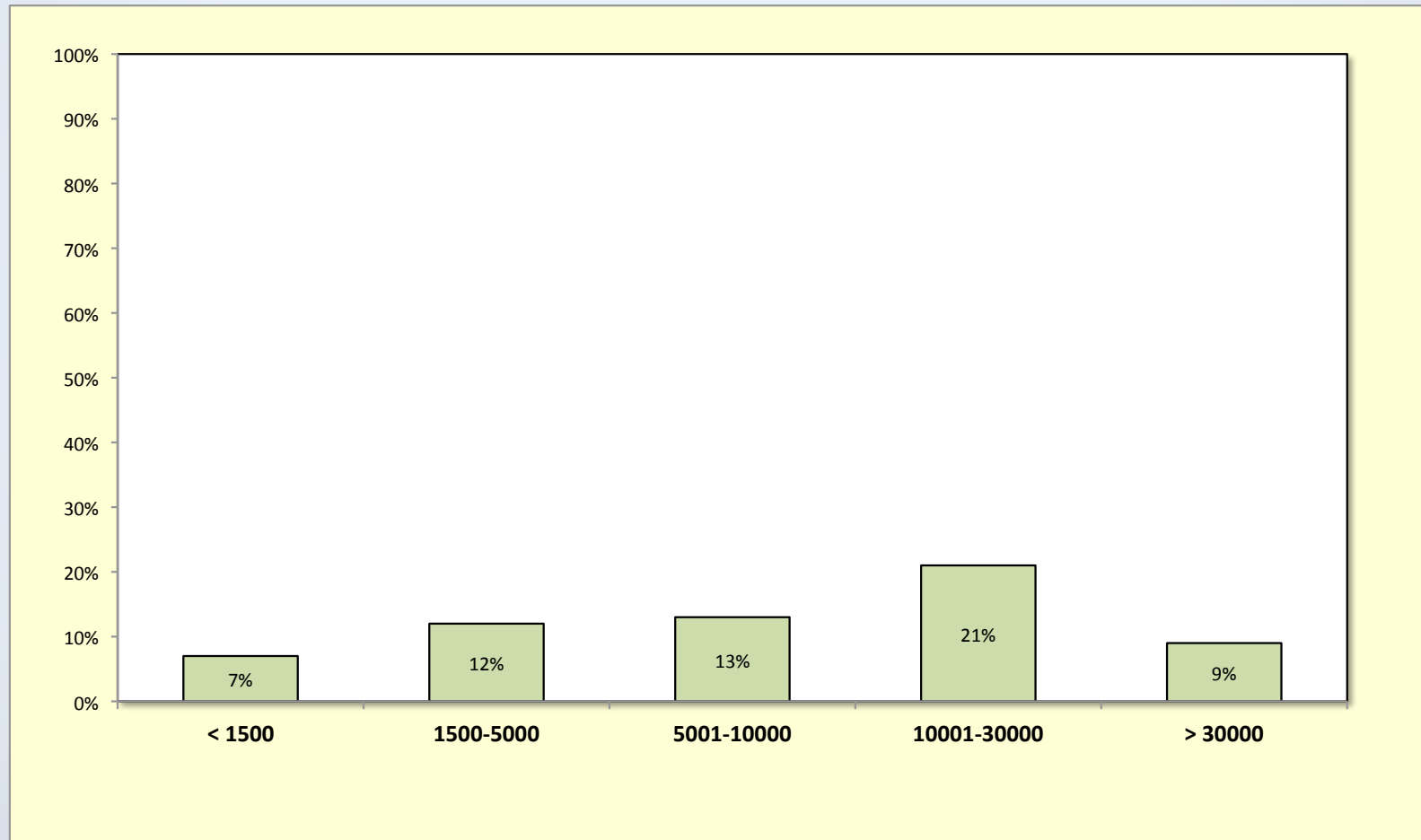
# Townships' Experiences with Official Impropriety

Has your township experienced **accusations** of impropriety against one or more of your government officials in the last five years?



# Township Officials Under Pressure

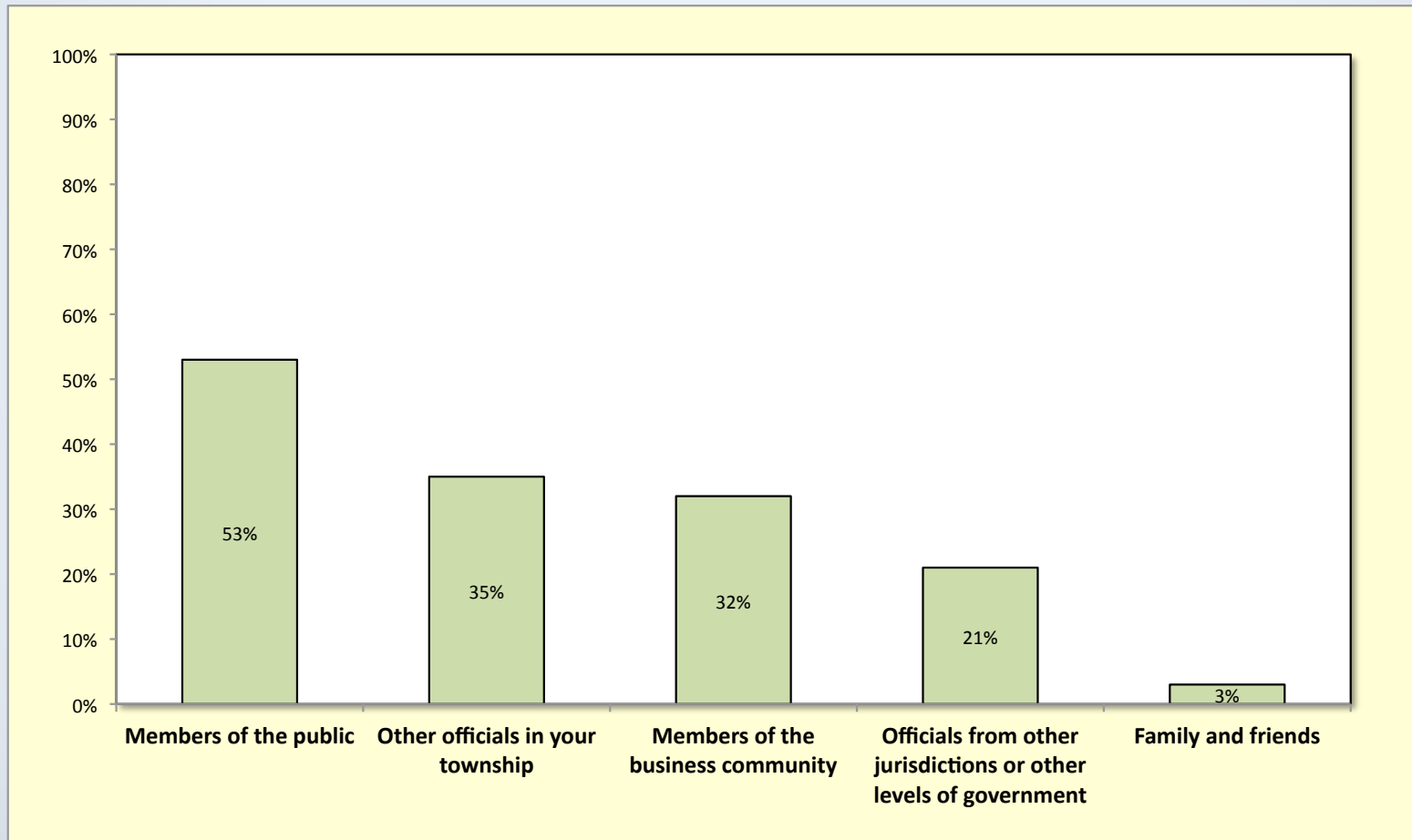
Have **you as a local official** ever come under pressure to do something that **you** felt might be unethical in the last five years?





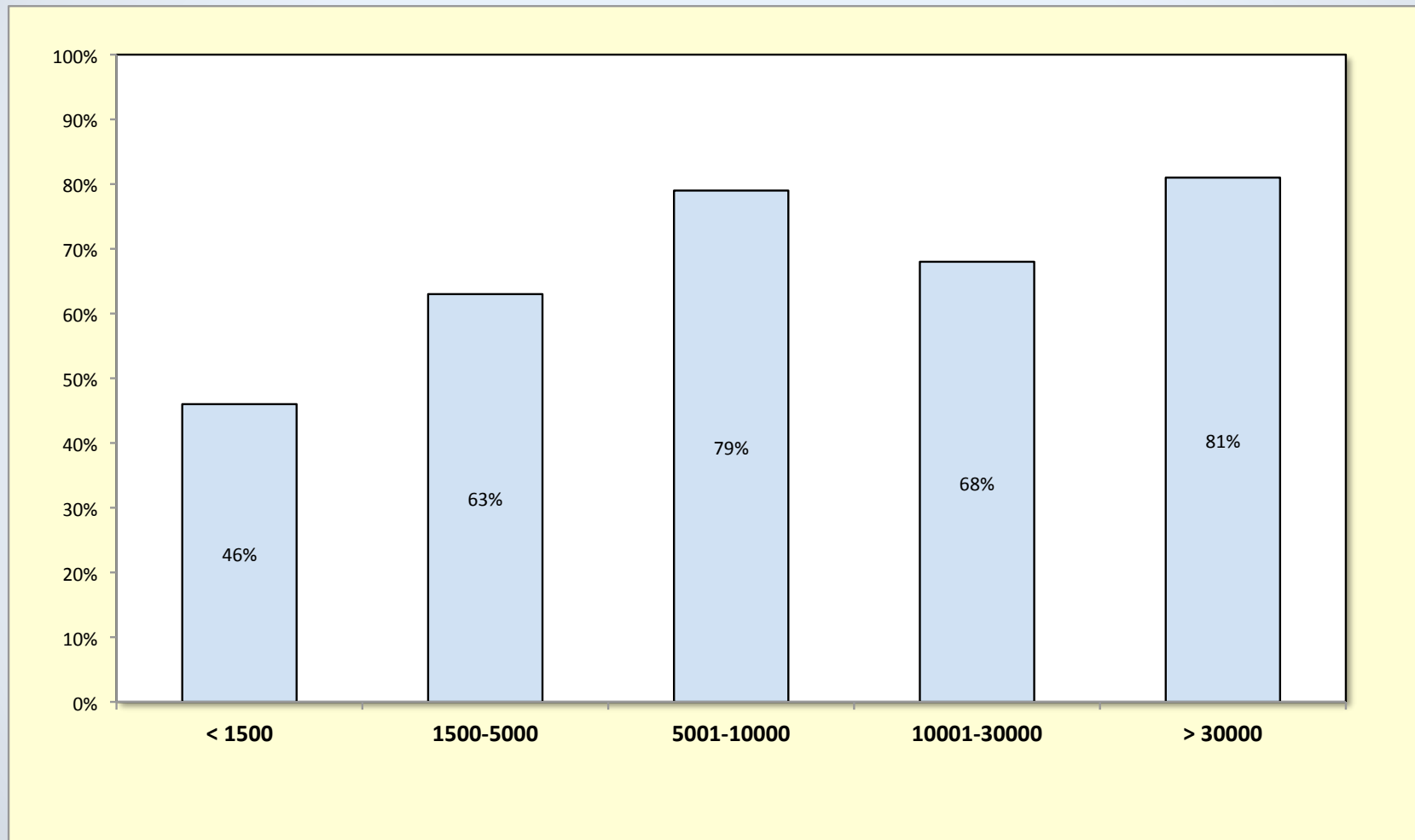
# Township Officials Under Pressure

**Sources** from which you felt pressure to do something that, in your role as a local official, you felt might be unethical...



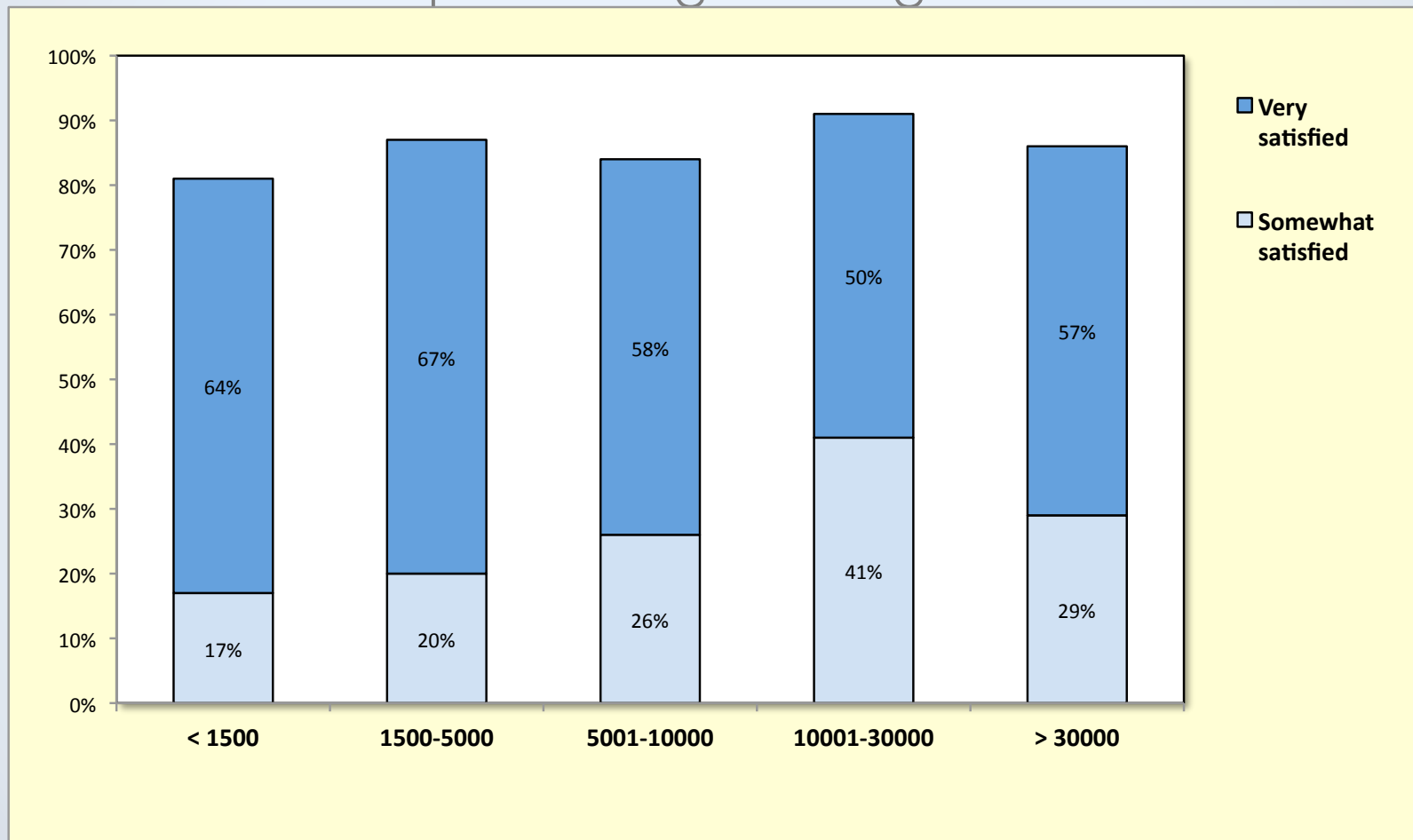
# Townships with a Current Code of Ethics

Does your township's government currently have a code of ethics?



# Satisfaction with Ethics Policies

Overall, how satisfied are you with your township's policies and practices governing ethics?



# Township Officials' Views on Ethics Policies

## Summary

- Most township officials rate their governments as “very ethical.” Fewer than half say the same about state legislators.
- Approximately 40% agree that local officials should have to disclose financial interests, and 76% say they should have restrictions on gifts and honoraria. However, only ~20% currently have policies on gifts and honoraria.
- Few townships statewide report instances of legitimate ethical concerns over conflict of interest, FOIA, violation of Open Meetings, official impropriety, or other ethical pressures.
- 85% of township officials are somewhat or very satisfied with their ethics policies and practices. (~58% have a formal code of ethics in place.)

# The Michigan Public Policy Survey (MPPS)

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