

Township Officials' Views on State-Local Government Relations

Presented at the
2017 Michigan Townships Association
Annual Educational Conference
April 11, 2017

Presentation Outline

- Overview of MPPS survey program
- Findings on township officials' views on state and local government relations (from Fall 2016 Wave of the MPPS), including
 - ✓ particular factors that township officials say affect state-local relations
 - ✓ preferred areas of shared and separate authority
 - ✓ how often township officials contact and are contacted by state officials
 - ✓ the importance of communication to improved relations

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, roads, public safety, economic development, intergovernmental cooperation, service privatization, employee policies, labor unions, environmental sustainability, Great Lakes, citizen engagement, 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
- **Expert advisors on questionnaire content**
- **Research partnership with Michigan local government associations**
 - MAC, MML, & MTA
- **Borrowing from other proven 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 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 2016 MPPS?

852 townships total (69% of all statewide)

By Population Size

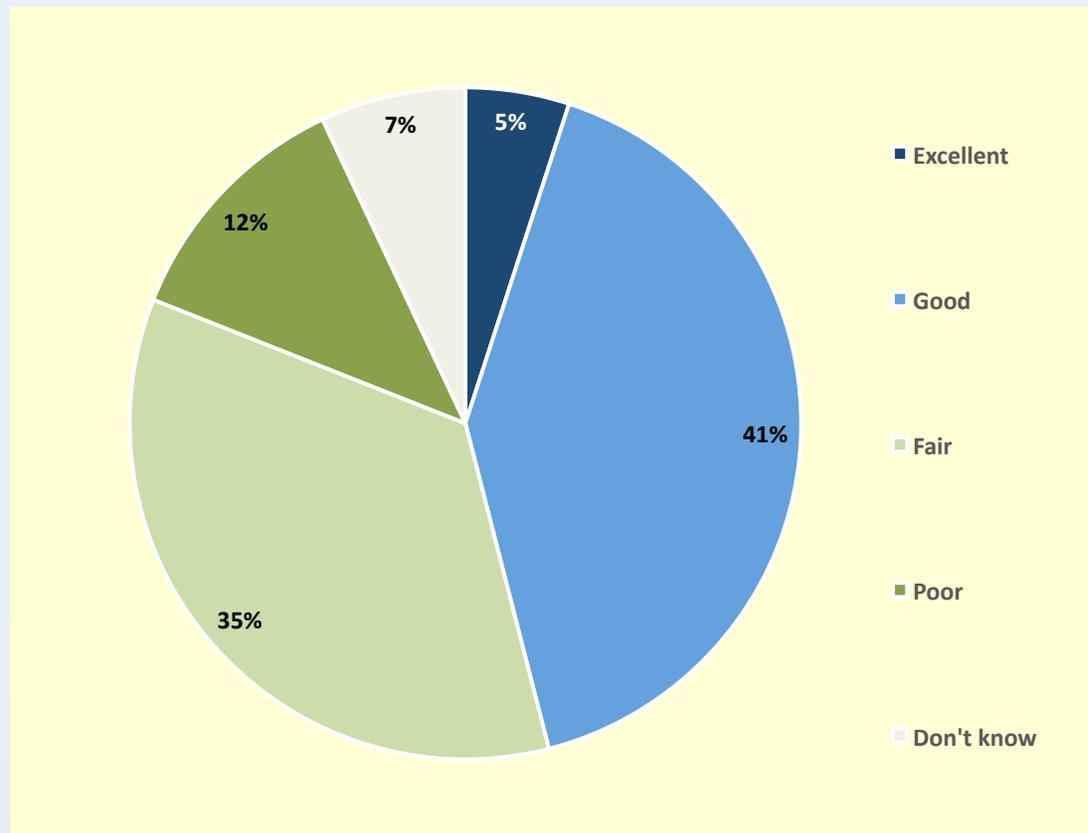
305 townships <1500
380 townships 1500-5000
86 townships 5001-10,000
59 townships 10,001-30,000
22 townships >30,000

By Region

98 in the Upper Peninsula
168 in the Northern LP
163 in the Central West
158 in the Central East
130 in the Southwest
135 in the Southeast

Townships' mixed relationships with the State

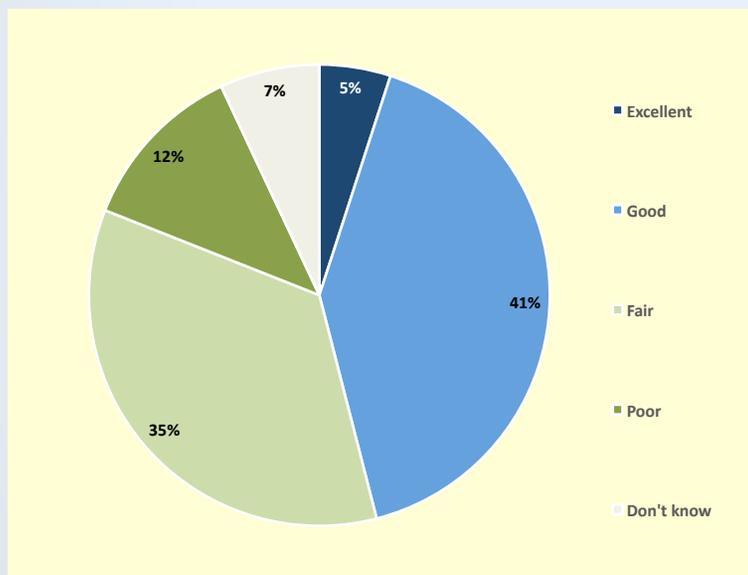
How would you describe the **overall relationship** between the State government and **your township**?



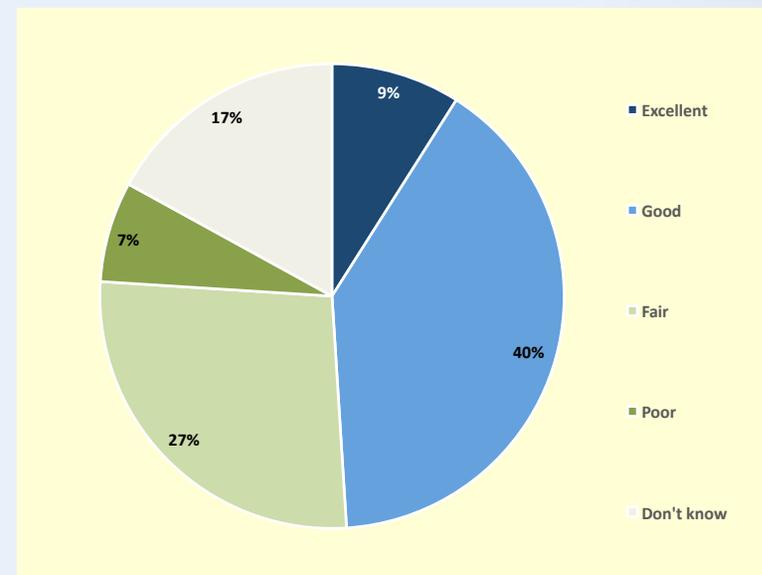
Townships' mixed relationships with the State

How would you describe the **overall relationship** between the State government and **other local jurisdictions**?

With your township:



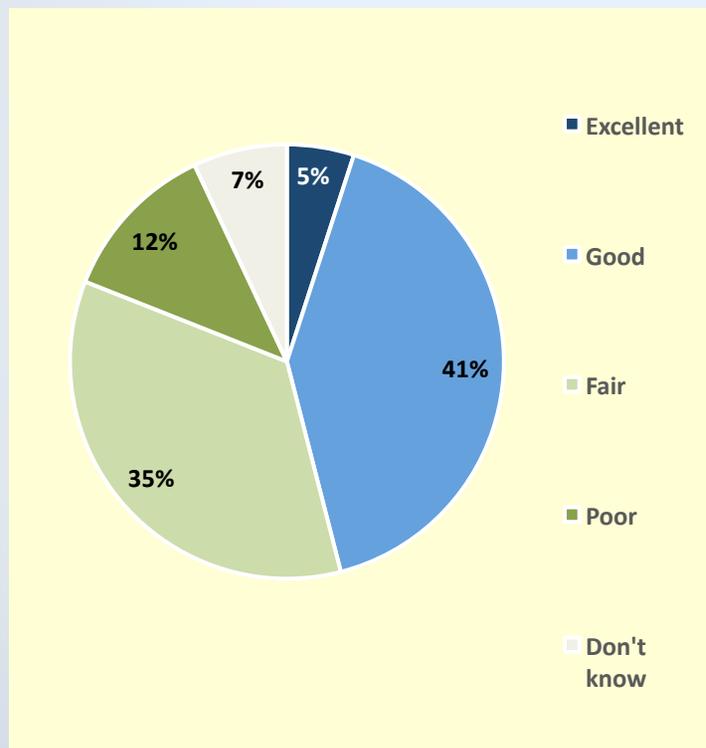
With other local jurisdictions:



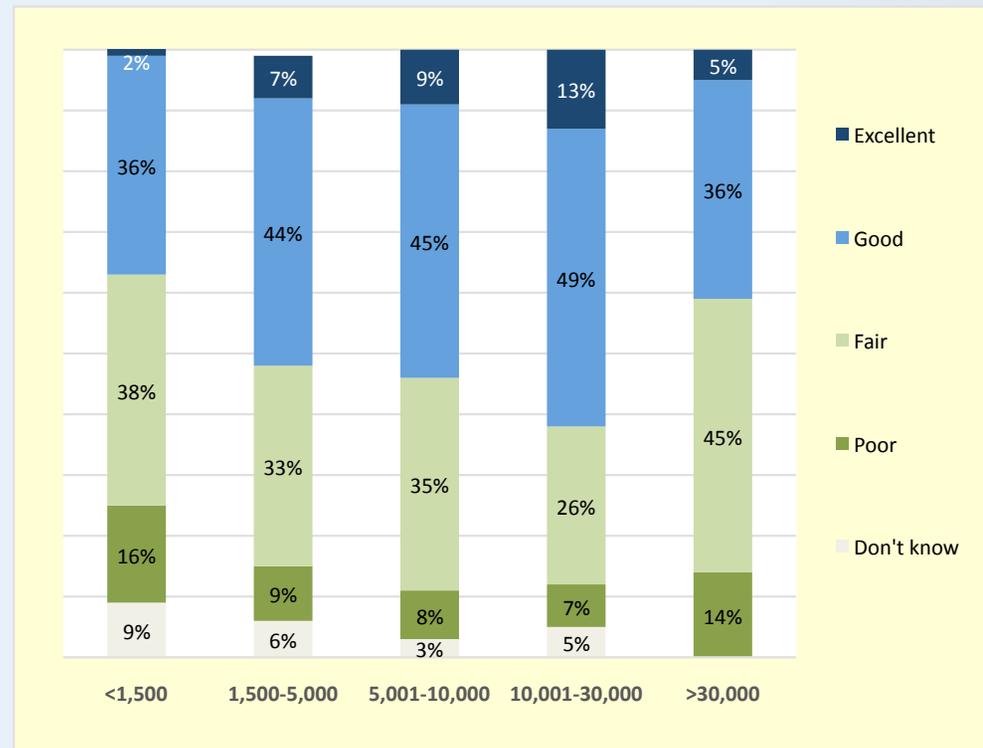
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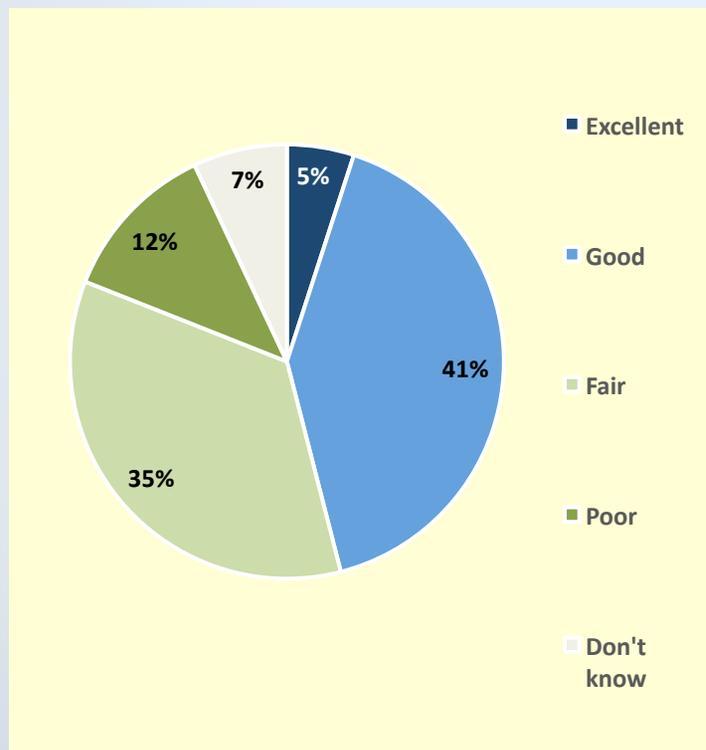
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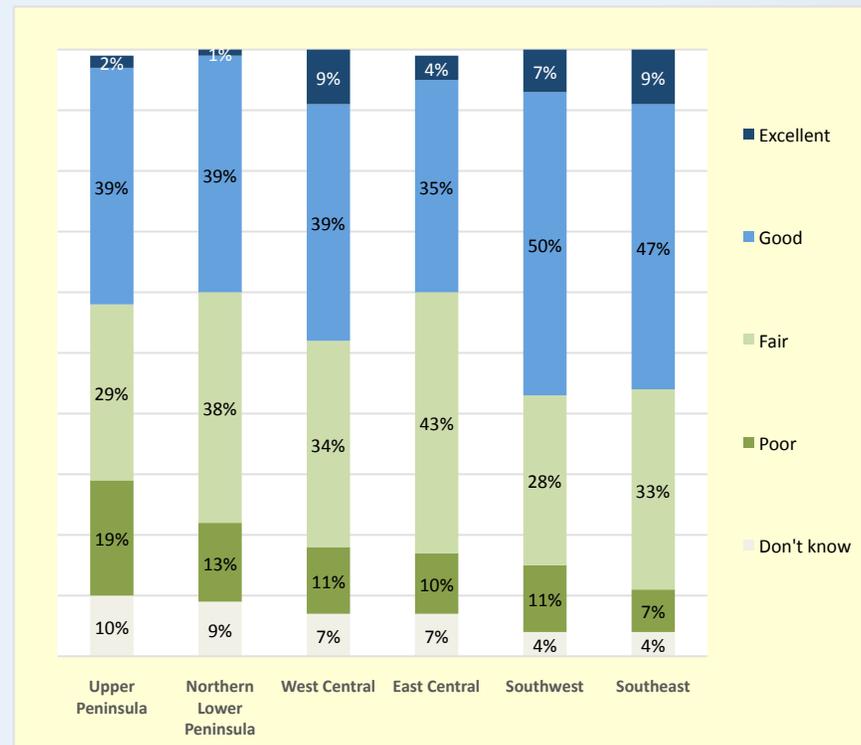
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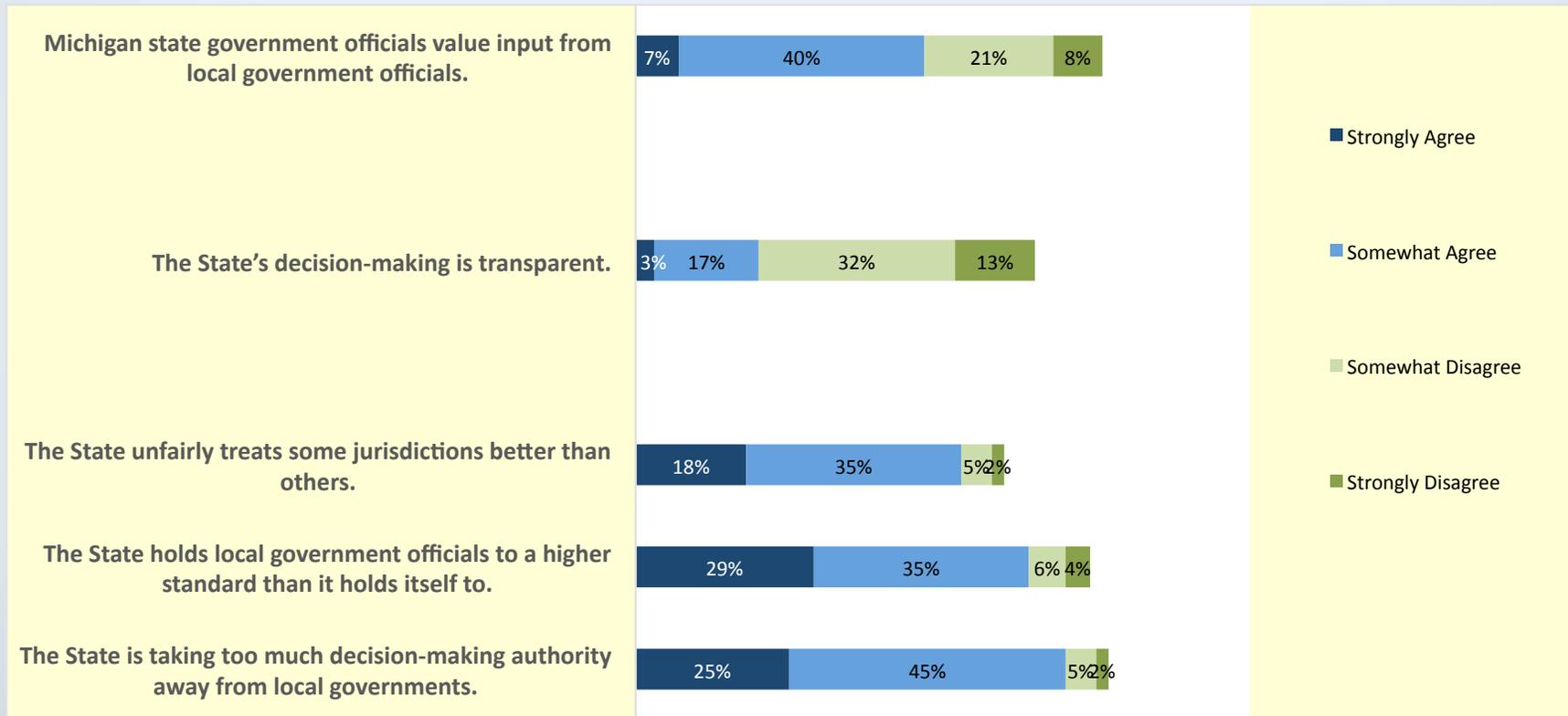


By Region:



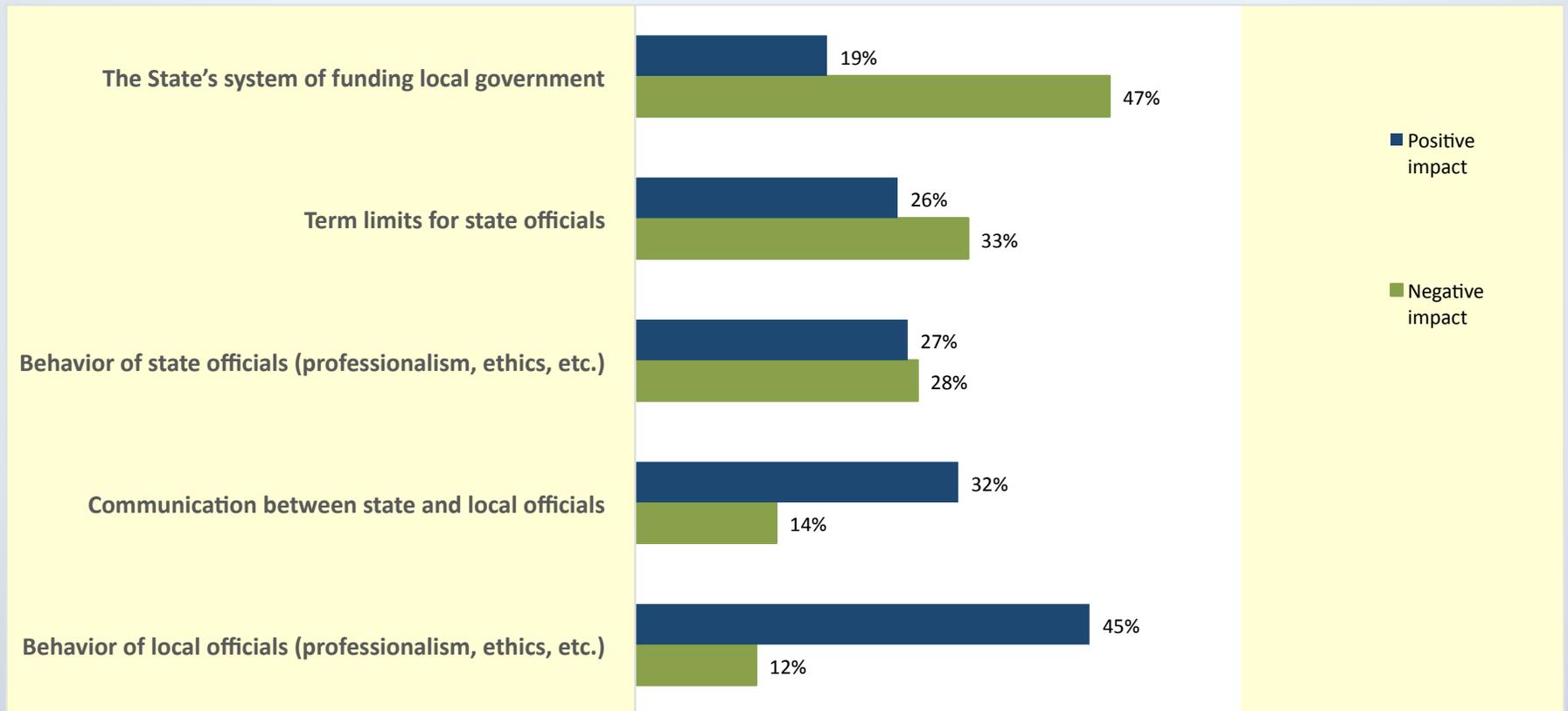
Factors that affect township-state relations

Thinking about the **relationship** between the State government and local jurisdictions, overall, to what extent do you **agree or disagree** with each of the following statements?



Factors that affect township-state relations

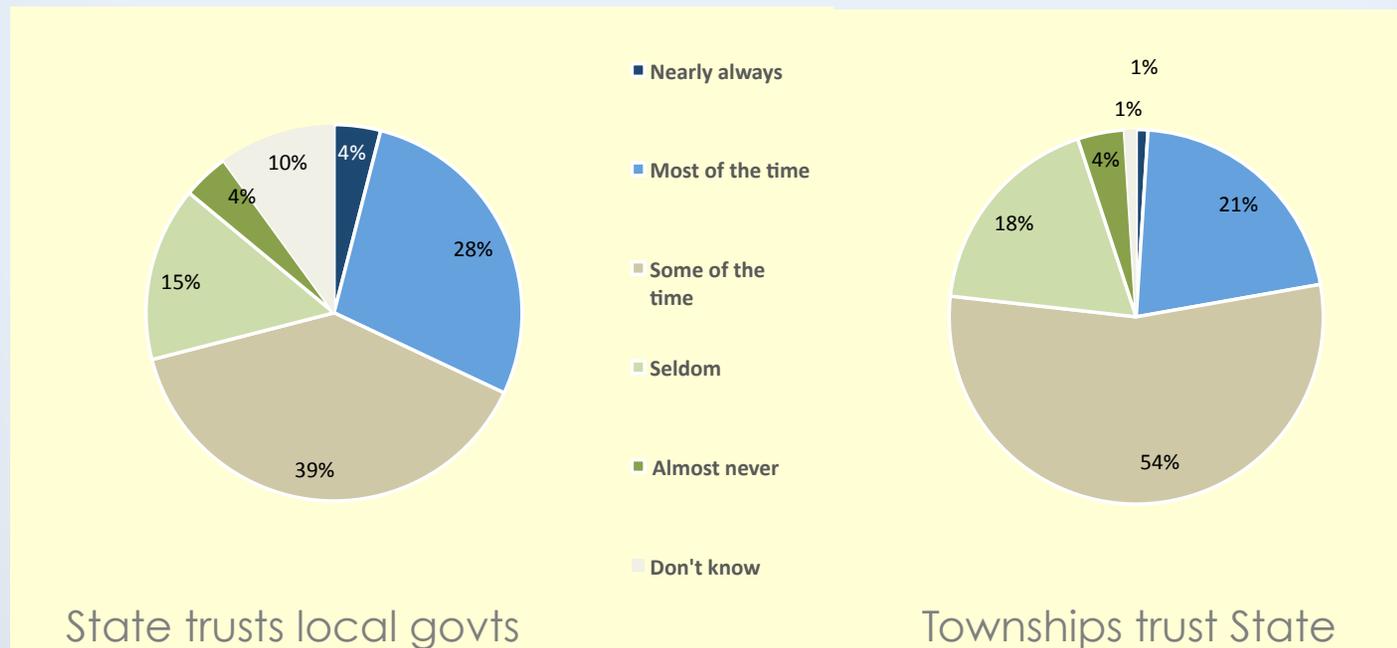
To what extent, if any, would you say the following factors have had a **positive or negative impact** on the **relationship** between the State and local governments in Michigan?



Factors that affect township-state relations

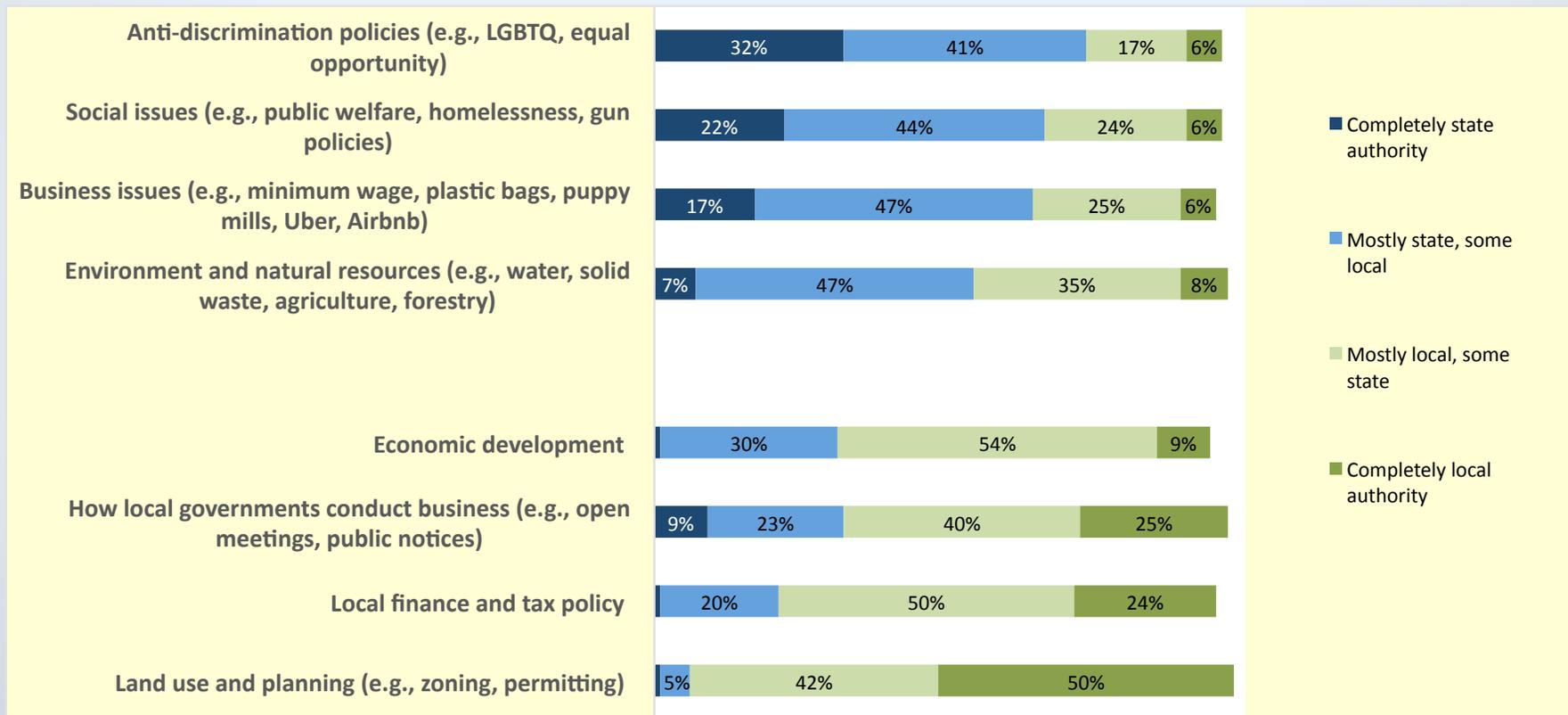
How much of the time do you think Michigan's **state officials trust local governments** to do what is **right**?

How much of the time do you think **you can trust the state government** in Lansing to do what is right?



How should authority over policy be divided?

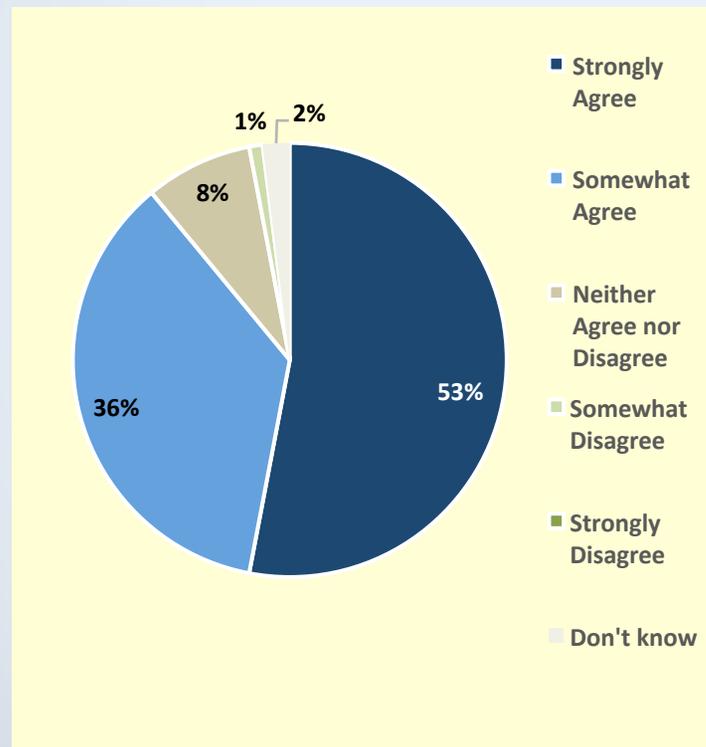
Some people think that certain policy issues should be managed at the state level rather than the local level for a variety of reasons (for example, efficiency or consistency across jurisdictions). Others think local home rule is more important. In each of the following broad policy areas, how do you **generally think authority should be divided** between the state and local levels of government?



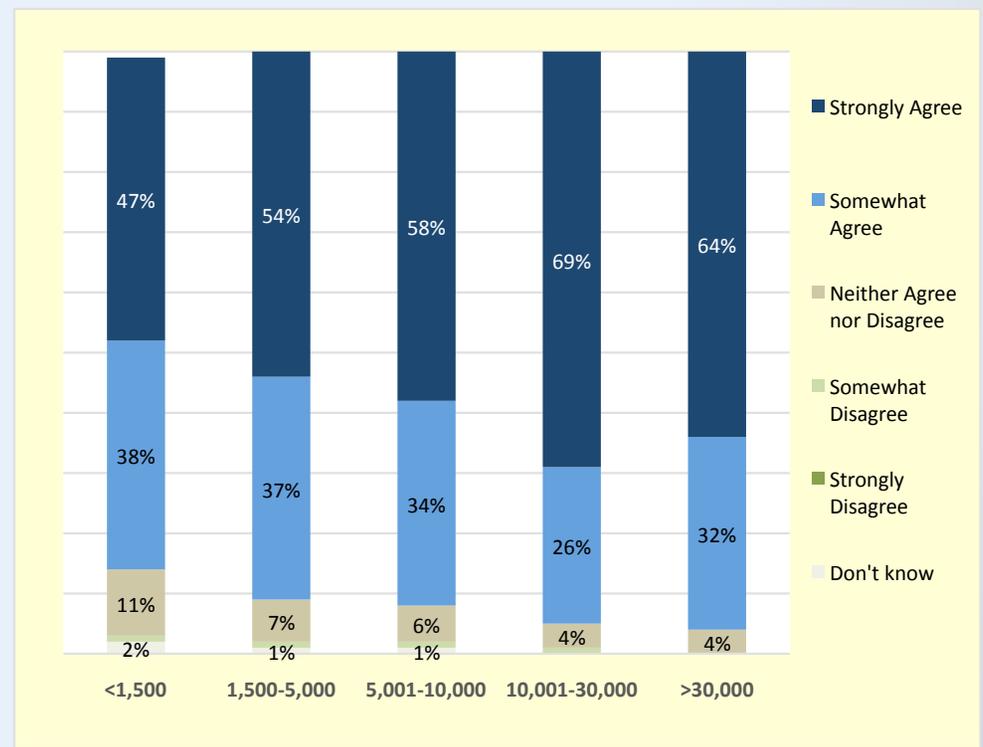
Township officials think outreach is important

To what extent do you **agree or disagree** that **local officials** should **try to influence** state policy issues affecting local governments?

Overall:



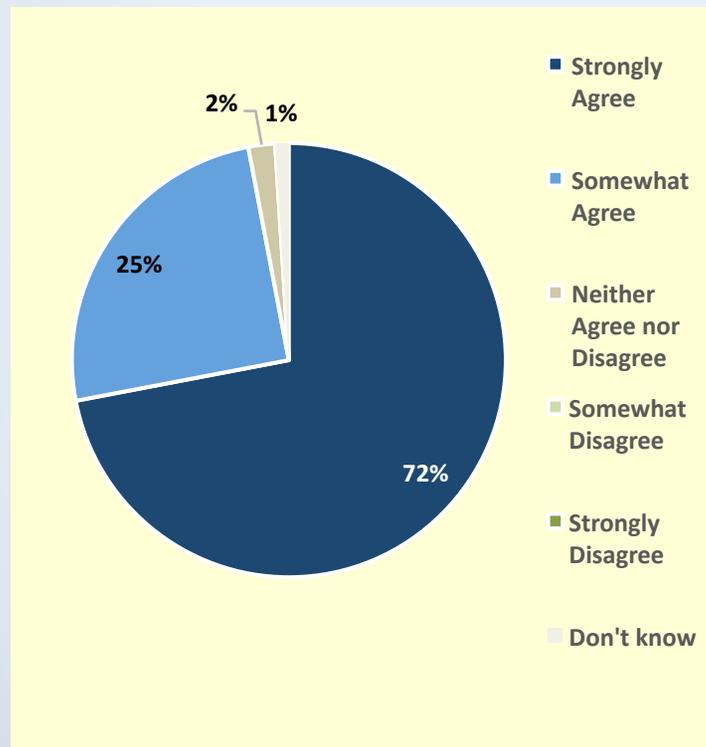
By Population Size:



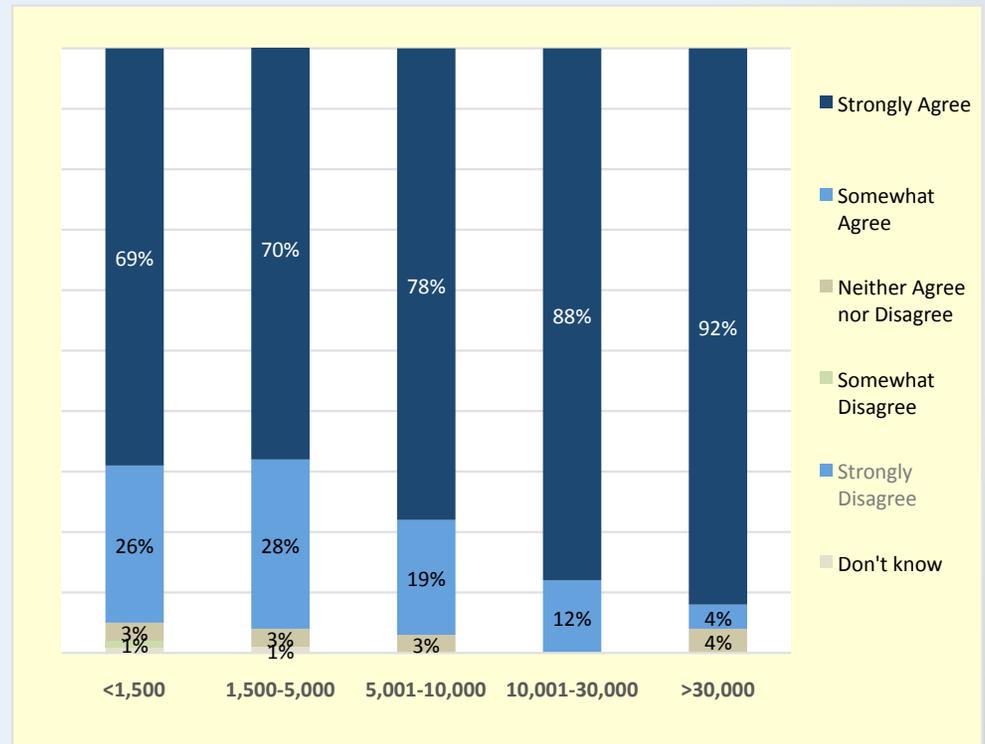
Township officials think outreach is important

To what extent do you **agree or disagree** that **state officials** should frequently **reach out** to local officials to get feedback on pending policy changes ?

Overall:



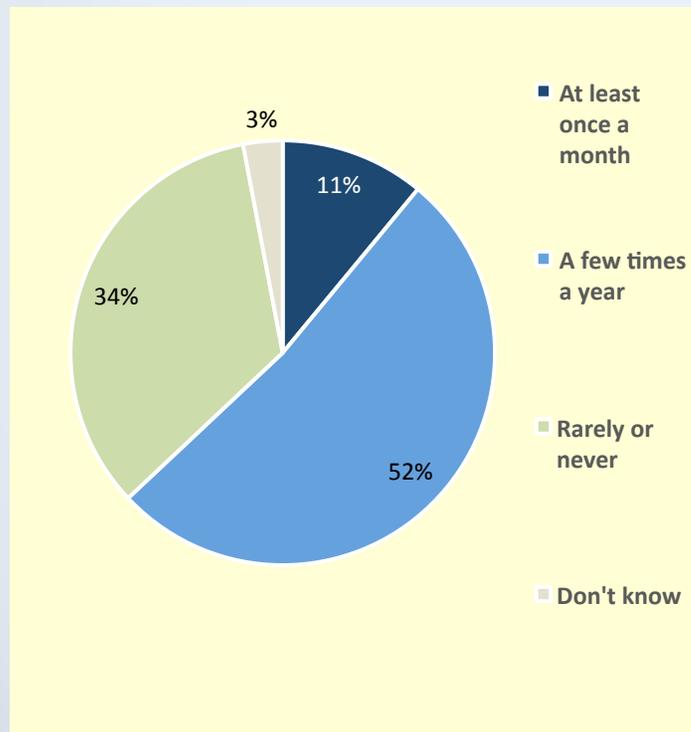
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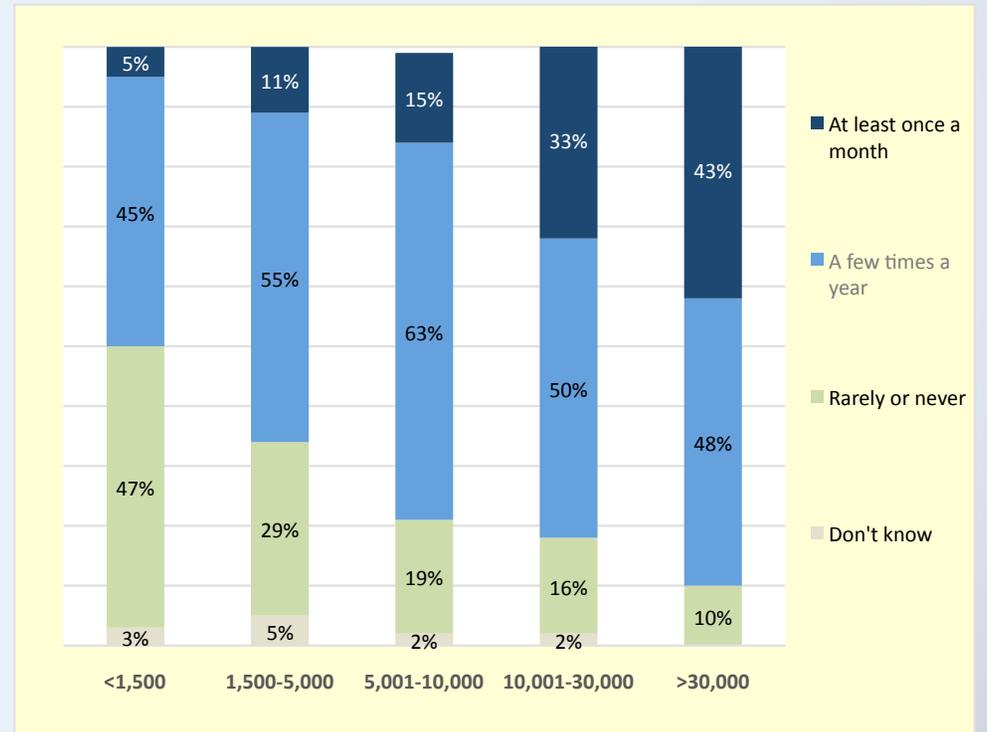
Most townships reach out at least once a year

Thinking about communication between state and local officials **specifically regarding State actions affecting your township**, in a typical 12-month period, how often do **you** or a representative of your township **contact state officials**?

Overall:



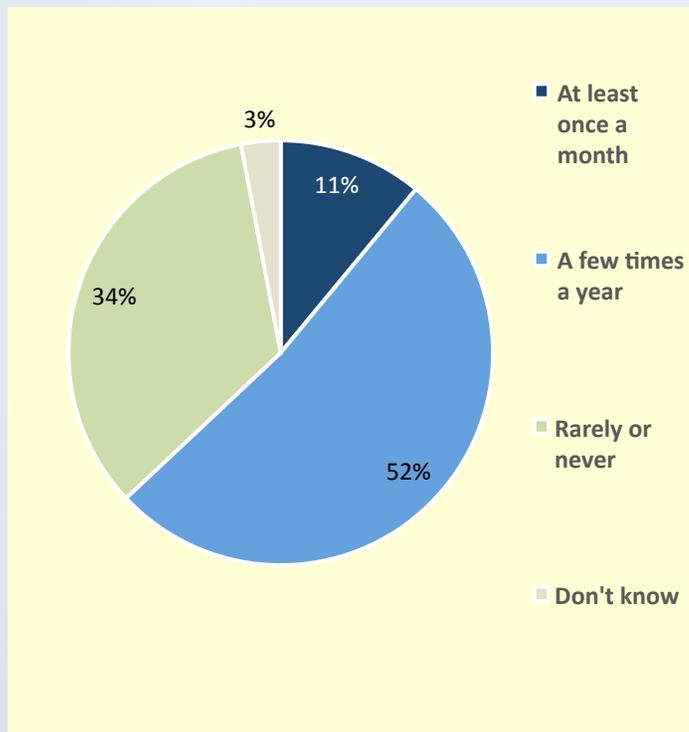
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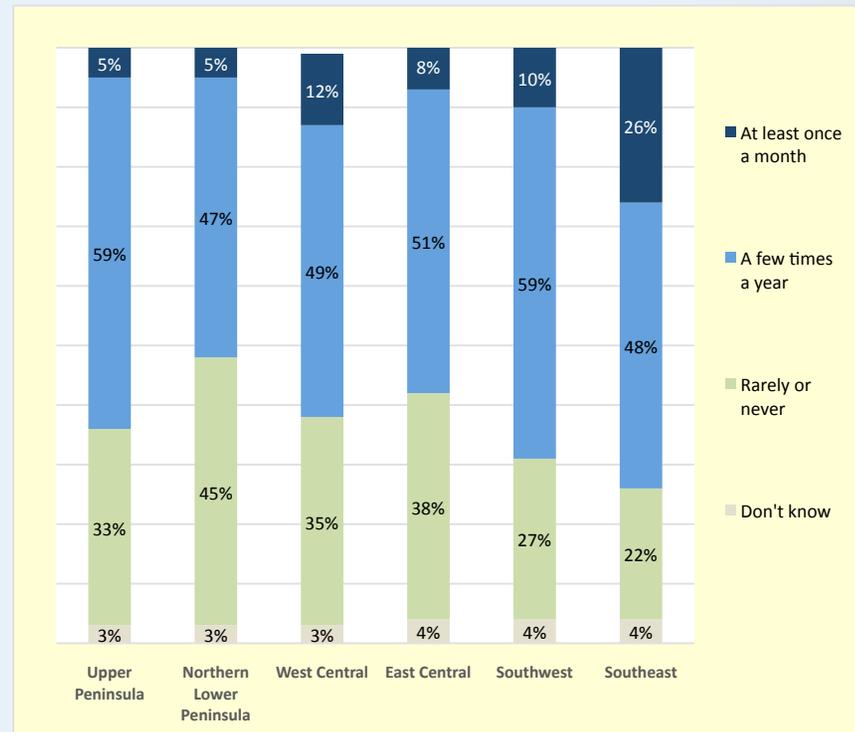
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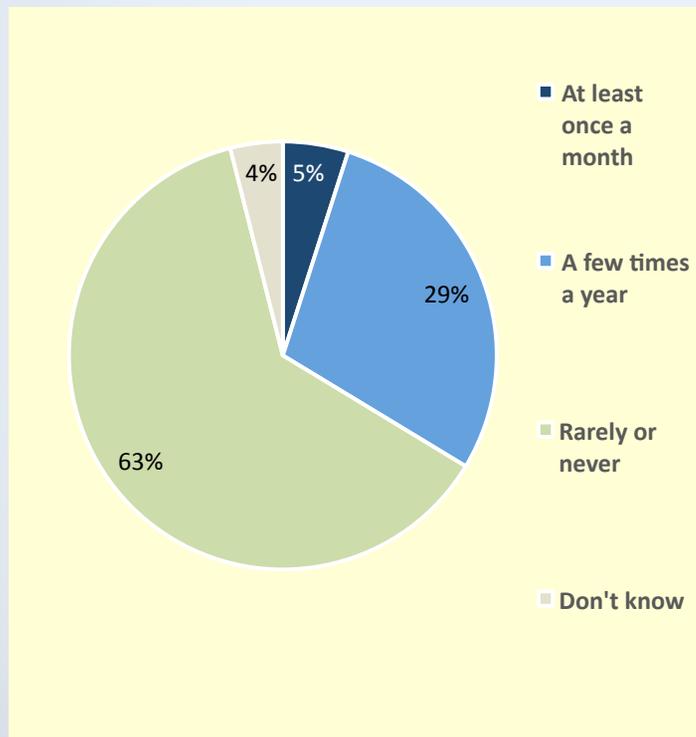
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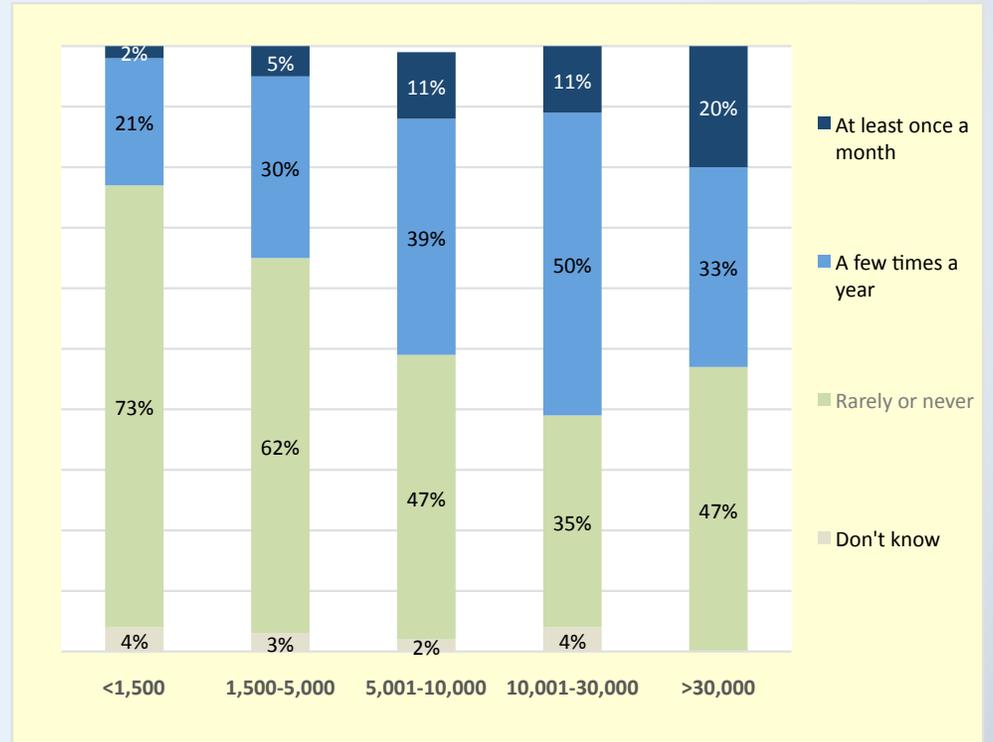
But is the State doing enough?

Thinking about communication between state and local officials **specifically regarding State actions affecting your township**, in a typical 12-month period, how often does a **state official contact your township**?

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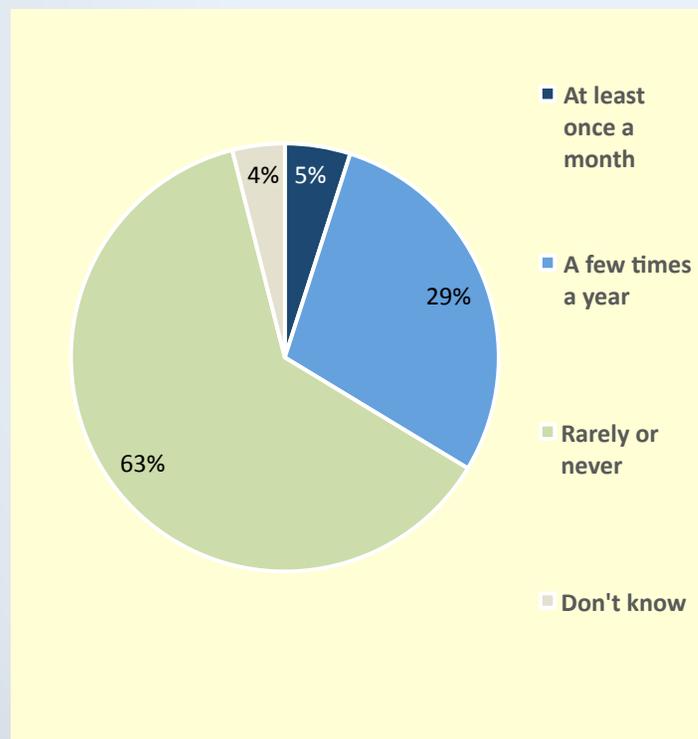
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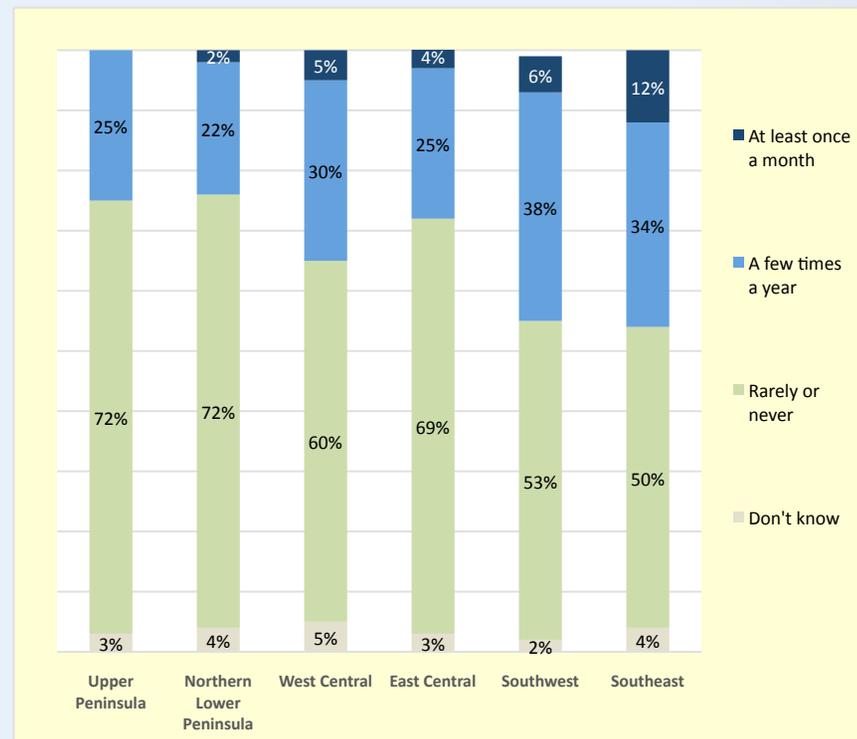
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Overall:



By Region:



Local officials say communication is the key to improved state-local relations

What do you think **the State** could do to **improve** the relationship between the State and local governments?

over 1,000 descriptive comments from more than 700 local leaders

What do you think **local governments** could do to **improve** the relationship between the State and local governments?

almost 800 comments from 645 local leaders

Local officials say communication is the key to improved state-local relations

Suggestions for actions the State could take to improve state-local relations = 49% focus on communication

- the State needs to listen to locals' problems and generally improve communication
- the State should get input from local governments before changing laws
- State officials should visit local jurisdictions and be more forthcoming with information

Local officials say communication is the key to improved state-local relations

Suggestions for what local governments themselves could do to improve relations = 64% communication

- educate state officials on local needs
- contact state officials more consistently to open dialogue and engage them with more quality dialogue
- attend or set up meetings with state officials for a greater quantity of dialogue
- stay educated on current policy and state government efforts

Township Officials' Views on State-Local Relations

Summary

- Township officials' overall assessments of their governments' relationships with the state government are mixed, with 46% rating their overall relationship with the State government as excellent or good, but 47% saying it is only fair or poor.
- A majority of township leaders believe that:
 - the State is taking too much authority away from locals
 - the State holds locals to a higher standard than it holds itself
 - the State plays favorites, treating some local jurisdictions better than others
- 63% of township officials report that their jurisdictions contact the State on issues that affect their townships a few times each year or more, while only 34% say that the State communicates with their township about salient local issues each year.
- Most say communication is the most important way to improve state-local relations.

The Michigan Public Policy Survey (MPPS)

Web: www.closup.umich.edu

Email: closup-mpps@umich.edu

Twitter: [@closup](https://twitter.com/closup)