



# Local government officials give low marks to the performance of state officials and report low trust in Lansing

This report presents findings on trust in state government and evaluations of job performance for Governor Jennifer Granholm and the Michigan Legislature by local government officials across Michigan from the Fall 2009 Michigan Public Policy Survey. Respondents for the Fall 2009 MPPS include county administrators and board chairs, city mayors and managers, village presidents and managers, and township supervisors, clerks, and managers from 1,303 jurisdictions across the state.

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*“These findings illustrate a deeply strained state-local relationship in Michigan, and may raise concerns about the ability of state-level officials to produce policy solutions that depend on local implementation.”*

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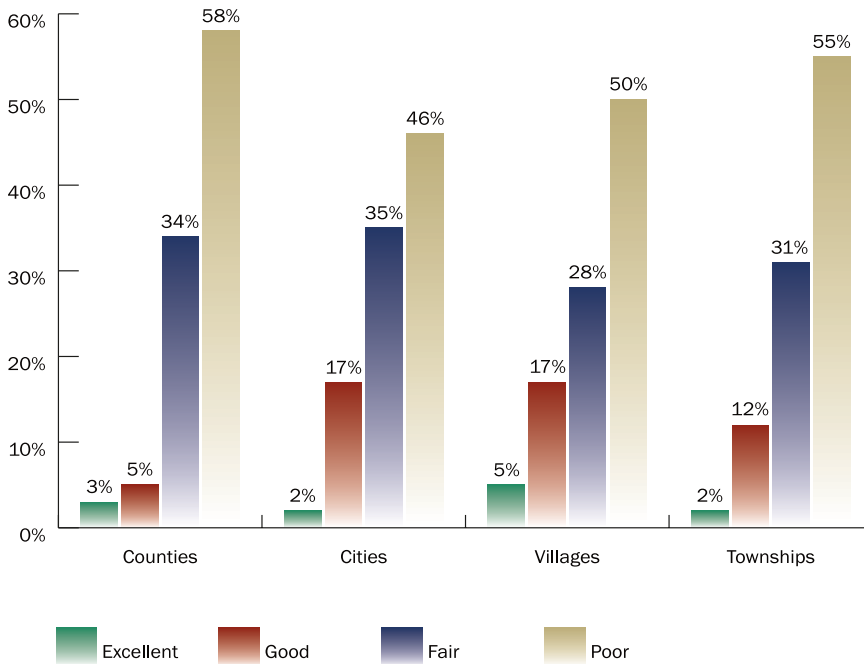
The Michigan Public Policy Survey (MPPS) is conducted by the Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy (CLOSUP) at the University of Michigan in partnership with the Michigan Association of Counties, Michigan Municipal League, and Michigan Townships Association. The MPPS takes place twice each year and investigates local officials' opinions and perspectives on a variety of important public policy issues.

For more information, please contact:  
[closup-mpps@umich.edu](mailto:closup-mpps@umich.edu) / (734) 647-4091

## Key Findings

- Michigan's local government leaders express significant dissatisfaction with Governor Jennifer Granholm's job performance. More than half (53%) of local officials give the Governor a job performance rating of “poor.”
  - » Local officials' ratings of the Governor's job performance are strongly associated with political party identification. Seventy percent of local government officials who identify themselves as Republicans rate the Governor's job performance as poor, compared to 48% of Independent officials and only 22% of Democratic officials.
  - » Local government leaders are significantly less satisfied than state citizens are with Governor Granholm. While 29% of Michigan citizens rate the Governor's job performance as excellent or good, only 16% of Michigan's local government leaders feel that way.
- Michigan local officials give even lower marks to the Michigan Legislature. About 61% of local officials rate the legislature's performance as “poor” and less than 5% rate it as “excellent” or “good.” Majorities of Republican, Independent and Democratic local officials all rate the Legislature's performance as “poor.”
- Nearly half of Michigan's local officials (49%) say they “seldom” or “almost never” trust the state government to do what is right. Levels of trust in the state government vary by local officials' political party identification, as well as between male and female officials, elected and appointed officials, and officials from different regions of the state.
  - » Michigan local officials report significantly less trust in the state government in Lansing than do citizens in general. Twenty-seven percent of Michigan citizens report that they “seldom” or “almost never” trust the state government, while nearly half (49%) of local government leaders report these levels of distrust.

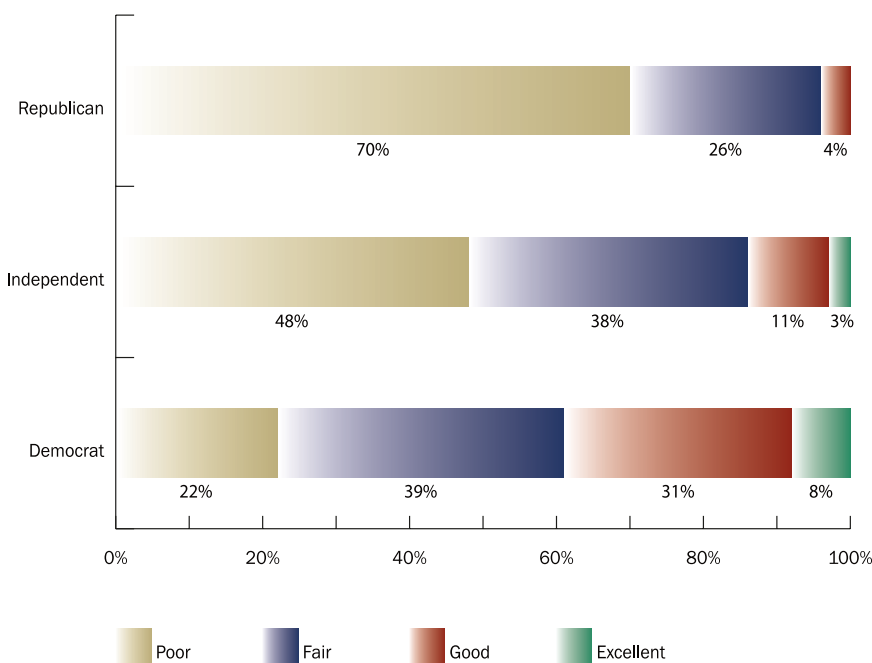
**Figure 1**  
Local officials rate Governor Granholm's performance



## How do local officials rate Governor Granholm's Performance?

When asked to assess Jennifer Granholm's job performance as governor, over half of all local officials surveyed statewide (53%) rate her performance as "poor." Ratings of the Governor's job performance are relatively consistent across the types of local government jurisdictions surveyed (counties, cities, villages, and townships). *See Figure 1.*

**Figure 2**  
Evaluation of Governor Granholm's performance, by party identification



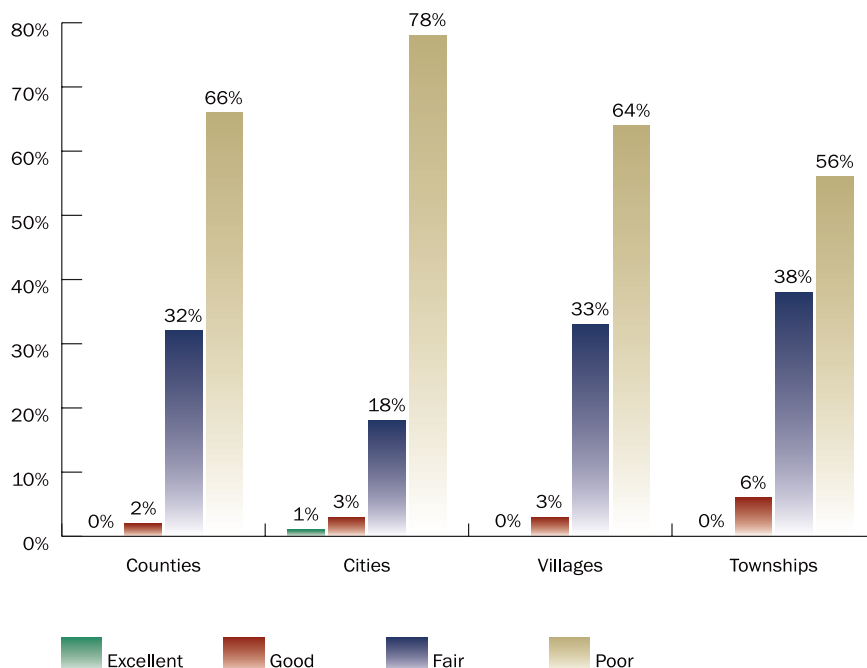
Evaluations of the Governor's performance differ widely by political party identification. Seven in ten Republican local officials (70%) give Granholm a "poor" rating. This compares with nearly half of the self-identified Independents (48%) and less than a quarter of the Democrats (22%) who responded to the survey. *See Figure 2.*



## How do local officials rate the Michigan legislature?

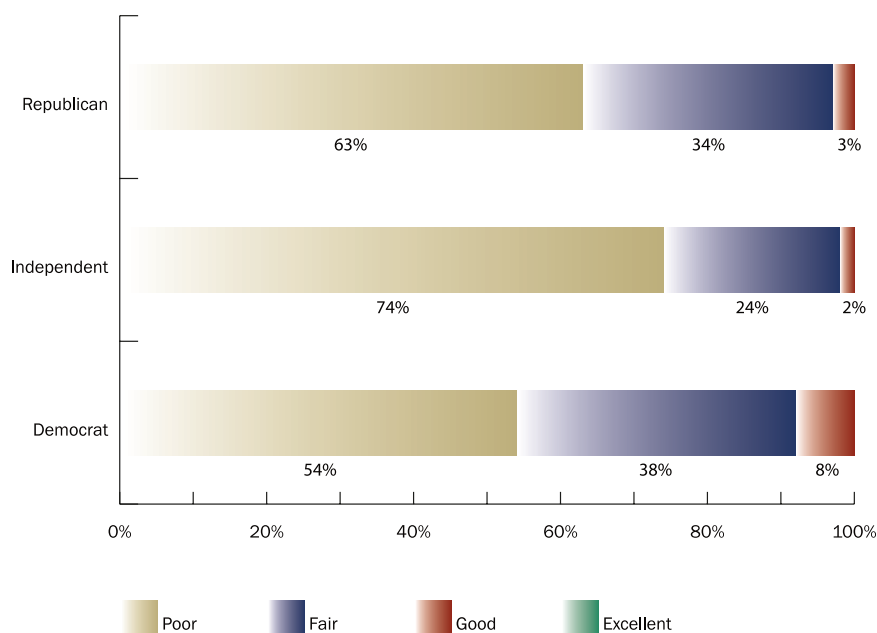
The Michigan Legislature fares even worse than Governor Granholm in the estimation of the local officials surveyed. Six in ten local officials (61%) statewide rate the Legislature’s performance as “poor” and just 1% give the Legislature a rating of “excellent.” Officials from cities are significantly less satisfied with the Legislature’s performance than are officials from villages or townships. (Although they may appear large, differences between the responses from city and county officials are not statistically significant.) See Figure 3.

**Figure 3**  
Local officials rate the Michigan Legislature

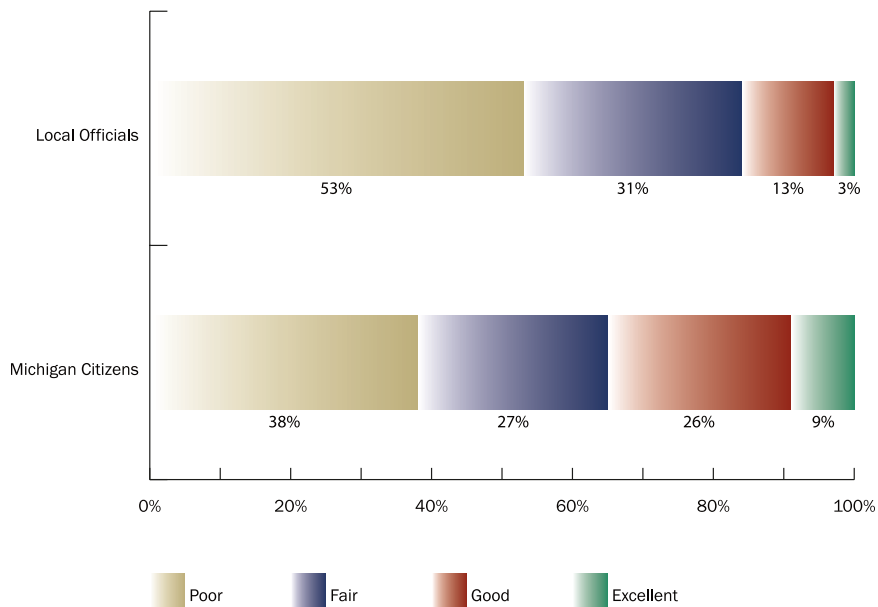


Here again, assessments vary according to the respondent’s party identification. Local officials who identify themselves as Independents are the harshest critics: three in four (74%) say that the Legislature is doing a “poor” job. Large percentages of partisan identifiers—63% of Republicans and 54% of Democrats—also rate the Legislature’s performance as “poor.” See Figure 4.

**Figure 4**  
Evaluation of Legislature’s performance, by party identification



**Figure 5**  
Citizens, local officials rate Governor Granholm's performance



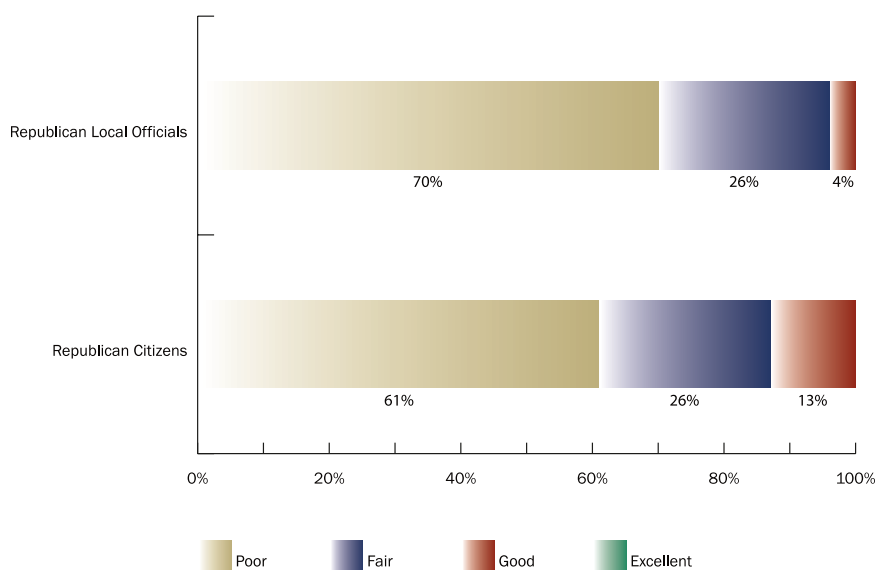
## Local officials are more critical than citizens of Governor Granholm's performance

We used results from Michigan State University's State of the State Survey (SOSS) to explore whether opinions about Governor Granholm's performance differ between local officials and the citizens they represent.<sup>1</sup> Michigan citizens who responded to the MSU survey have a significantly more positive opinion of Granholm's performance than do the local officials who responded to the CLOSUP survey.

Thirty eight percent of Michigan citizens rate Granholm's performance as "poor," compared with 53% of local officials. Just over a quarter (26%) of the citizens rate the Governor's performance as "good," compared with just 13% of the local officials. And finally, 9% of the citizens rate the governor's performance as "excellent" compared with just 3% of local officials. *See Figure 5.*

Local officials who self-identify as Republicans are more critical of Governor Granholm than are Republicans in the population at large. For instance, fewer Republican officials evaluate her performance as "good" (4% vs. 13% of Republican citizens) and more evaluate her performance as "poor" (70% vs. 61%). *See Figure 6.*

**Figure 6**  
Republican local officials and citizens rate Governor Granholm's performance





Local government officials who identify themselves as Independent or Democratic also give the Governor somewhat worse ratings than do Independents and Democrats among the general public. For example, 22% of local Democratic officials rate the Governor's job performance as "poor," compared to only 15% of self-identified Michigan Democrats from the MSU survey of public opinion. Additionally, 26% of Independent citizens give the Governor a "good" rating, compared with only 11% of Independents among the local officials. See Figures 7 and 8.

Figure 7

Democratic local officials and citizens rate Governor Granholm's performance

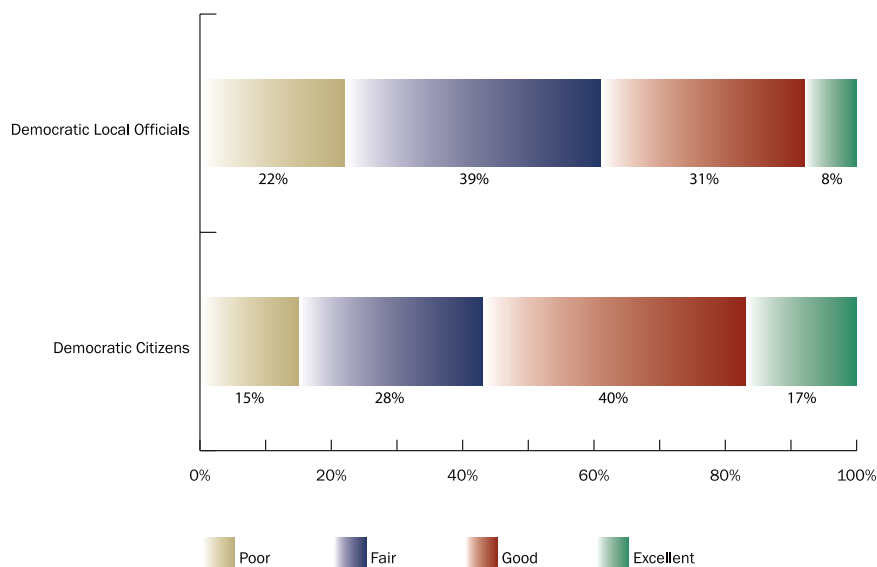
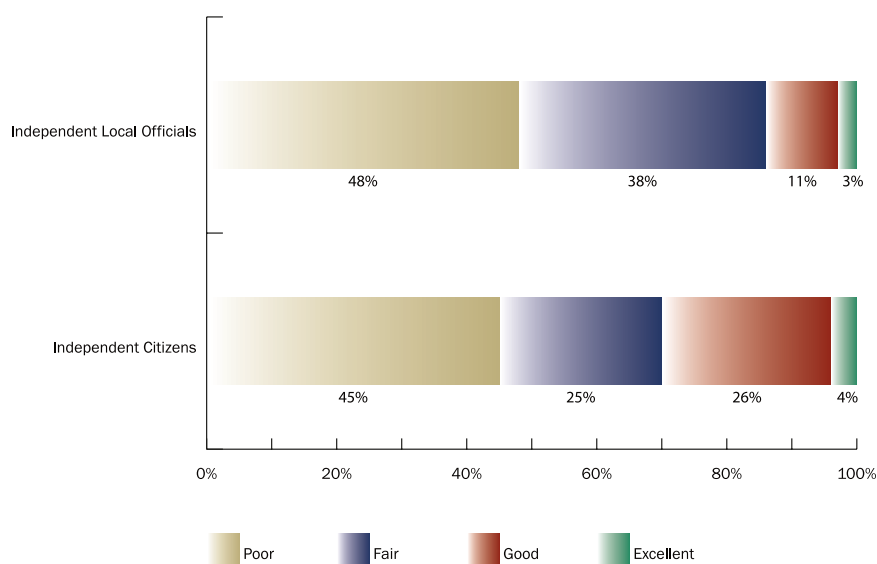
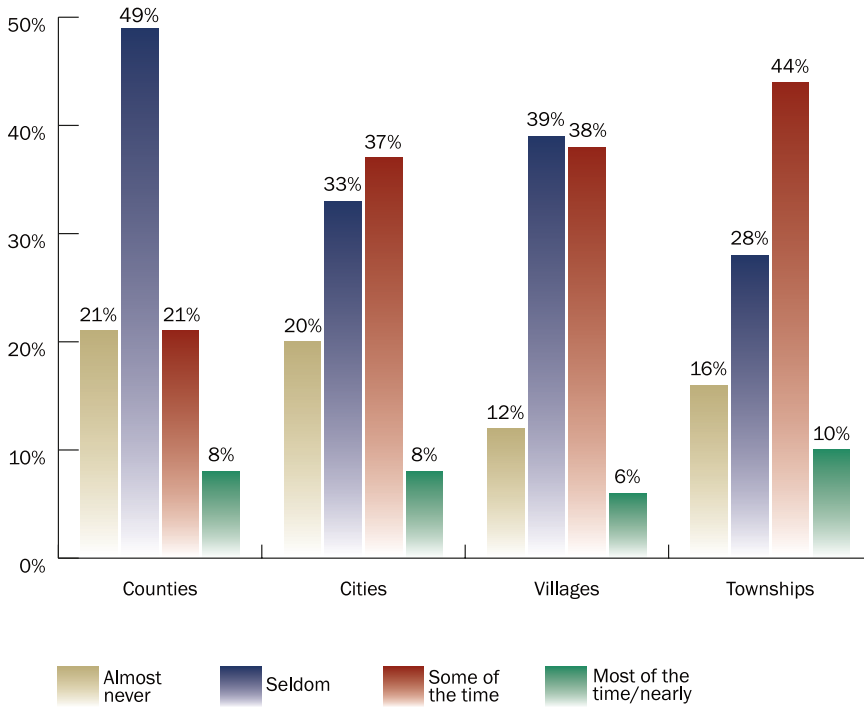


Figure 8

Independent local officials and citizens rate Governor Granholm's performance



**Figure 9**  
Local officials report how often they trust the state government



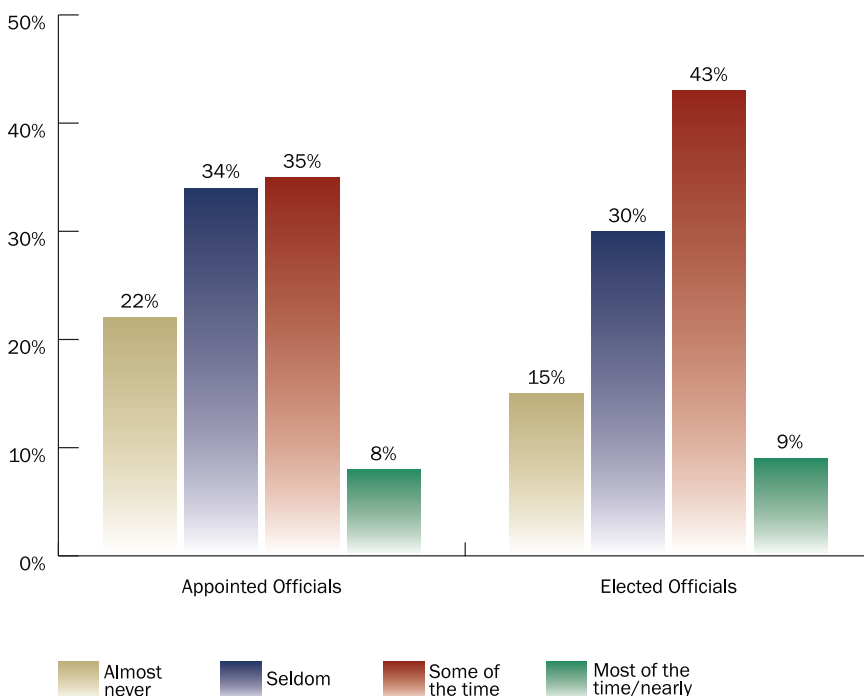
## Do local officials trust the state government?

Michigan local officials also report low levels of trust in the state government. When asked how much of the time they think they can trust the state government in Lansing to “do what is right,” almost half (49%) respond “seldom” or “almost never,” while fewer than one in ten (8%) say “most of the time” or “nearly always.”

Among the various types of general purpose local government in Michigan, those officials closest to state government-- county officials-- stand out as having the lowest levels of trust in state government, while township officials express the most trust. The percentage of local officials who report they seldom or almost never trust the state government includes 44% of those in townships, 51% in villages, 53% in cities, and 71% in counties. Note that, although these differences in trust between townships, municipalities, and counties are statistically significant when examined alone, it’s possible the differences may be accounted for by other factors. *See Figure 9.*

Whether an official is appointed or elected corresponds strongly with his or her level of trust in the government in Lansing. Michigan’s professional appointed local officials are less trusting of the state government than are the local elected officials. Whereas 55% of Michigan’s local appointed officials say they seldom or almost never trust the state government, only 45% of the local elected officials respond this way. *See Figure 10.*

**Figure 10**  
Local officials’ trust in state government, by position





## Among local officials, trust varies by party identification, gender, and region of the state

As with job approval, one of the most significant factors in local officials' trust in state government is their party identification. Local government officials who consider themselves either Republicans or Independents are significantly less trusting of the state government than are those officials who consider themselves Democrats. While 55% of Republicans and 56% of Independents say they seldom or almost never trust the state government, only 34% of Democrats feel this way. See Figure 11.

Another important predictor of trust among local Michigan officials is gender. Male local government officials in Michigan are significantly less trusting of the state government than are their female counterparts. Whereas 55% of male officials say they seldom or almost never trust the state government in Lansing, only 40% of female officials feel the same way. See Figure 12.

The MPPS found that those officials from jurisdictions in Southeast Michigan are the least trusting of state government. Fifty-four percent of local officials in the Southeast region report they seldom or almost never trust the state government, compared to the 46% average in the rest of the state. In addition, only 5% of officials in the Southeast say they trust the state nearly always or most of the time, compared to 10% among their counterparts statewide. See Figure 13.

Figure 11

Local officials' trust in state government, by party identification

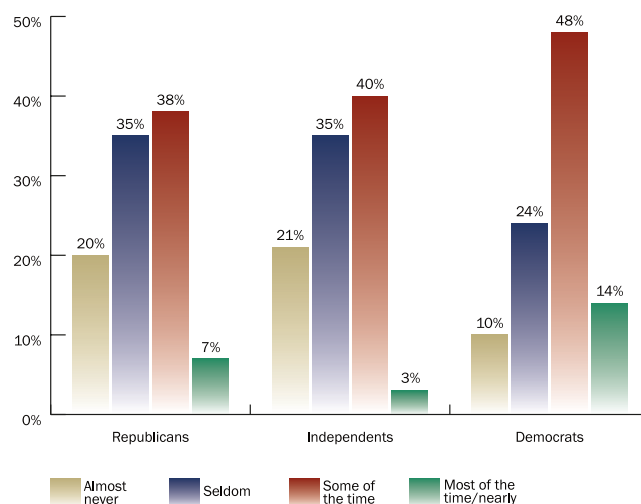


Figure 12

Local officials' trust in state government, by gender

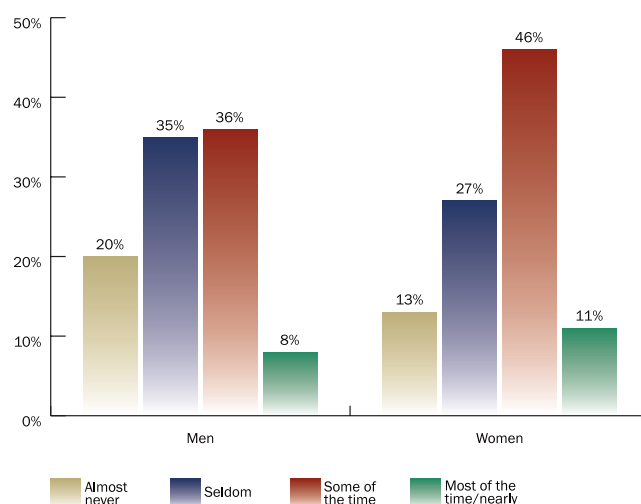
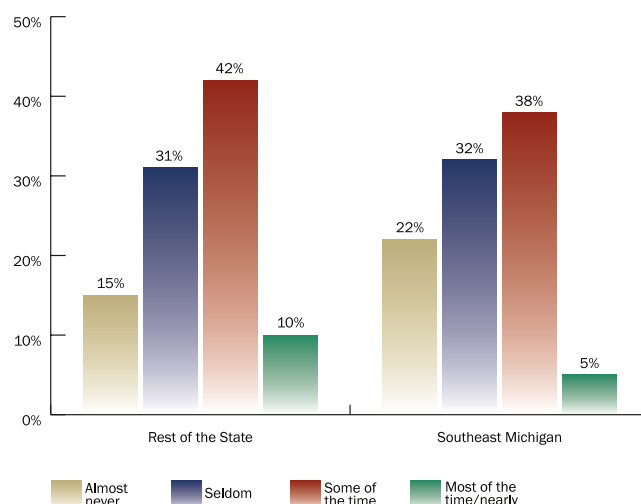


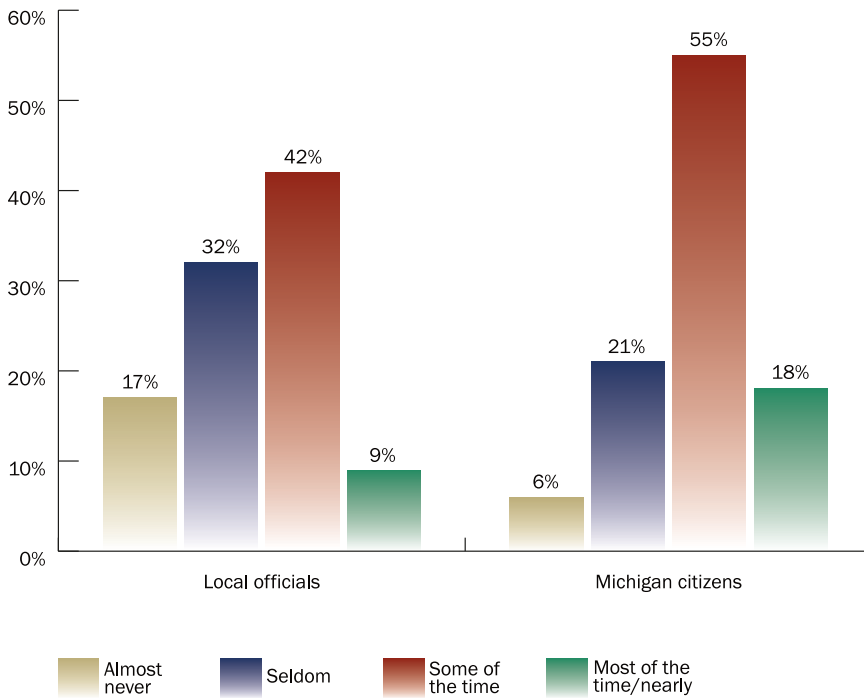
Figure 13

Local officials' trust in state government, by region



**Figure 14**

Citizen's, local officials' trust in state government



## Local officials are less trusting in state government than are citizens

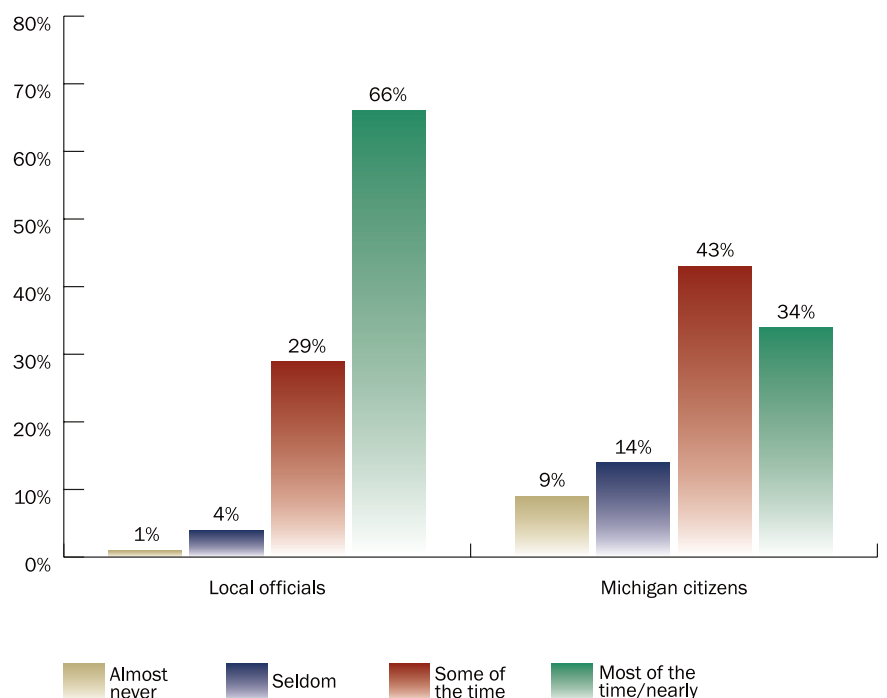
Once again using the Michigan State University State of the State Survey (SOSS),<sup>2</sup> we compared the views of Michigan citizens with those of local officials overall and find Michigan's local leaders are less trusting of the state government than are the state's citizens. While 18% of Michigan's citizens say they trust the state government in Lansing to do what is right "nearly always" or "most of the time," only 9% of Michigan's local government leaders feel the same way. While 27% of the citizens report that they "seldom" or "almost never" trust the state government, fully 49% of the local government leaders report these levels of distrust. See Figure 14.

## Local officials are more trusting in local governments than are citizens

Local government officials express significantly higher levels of trust in other local governments than they do in the state government. In fact, Michigan's local government leaders express even more trust in other local governments than Michigan's citizens express in their own local government. Whereas 34% of Michigan's citizens trust their local government nearly always or most of the time, 66% of Michigan's local officials report that level of trust in other local governments. And while 23% of citizens report that they seldom or almost never trust their local government, only 5% of local officials feel that way about other local governments. See Figure 15.

**Figure 15**

Citizen's, local officials' trust in local government







## Conclusion

The findings in this report illustrate a deeply strained state-local relationship in Michigan. Michigan's local government leaders express an alarming lack of trust in state government leaders in Lansing and significant dissatisfaction with their job performance.

This may not be surprising, as Michigan's state government—like others around the country<sup>3</sup>—has cut revenue sharing and shifted responsibilities to local governments even while those local units face severe fiscal difficulties due to falling tax revenues and rising costs, as documented in the first MPPS survey from the spring of 2009.

Michigan's Legislative Commission on Statutory Mandates released a report in December 2009 that chronicled the failure of the state government to abide by constitutional restrictions against unfunded mandates to localities. That report stated that the imposition of unfunded mandates “has fostered a climate of resentment and revolt [among local units of government] that will impede economic recovery and the cooperation this State so badly needs.”<sup>4</sup> This warning is reinforced by academic studies showing that a lack of trust in government can decrease acceptance of and support for policy innovation.<sup>5</sup> Thus, distrust of state government by local government leaders raises questions about the ability of state-level officials to produce policy solutions that depend on local implementation.

In order to improve the policymaking process at all levels, it is important that all Michigan stakeholders should understand that there are significant tensions in the state-local relationship and that these problems can decrease the efficacy of Michigan's governmental system overall.

Officials at both the state and local levels should pursue trust-building measures such as initiatives to increase transparency and accountability and to fight corruption.<sup>6</sup> Increased levels of trust will enhance state-local governmental effectiveness and increase the state's ability to develop policy innovations to address today's challenges.

## Survey Background and Methodology

The MPPS is a biannual survey of each of Michigan's 1856 units of general purpose local government. Surveys were administered via the internet and hardcopy to top elected and appointed officials in all 83 counties, 274 cities, 259 villages, and 1240 townships. A total of 1,303 jurisdictions returned valid surveys, resulting in a 70% response rate by unit (70% of counties, 71% of cities, 47% of villages, and 75% of townships). The key relationships discussed in the above report are statistically significant at the  $p > .05$  level or above, unless otherwise specified.

Reports on key findings overall, individual jurisdictions and issue areas are forthcoming. Missing and “don't know” responses are not included in the tabulations, unless otherwise specified. Data are weighted to account for non-response.

The MPPS is funded in part by a grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. The views reported herein are those of local Michigan officials and do not necessarily reflect the views of the University of Michigan or the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

<sup>1</sup> Institute for Public Policy and Social Research. 2009. State of the State Survey – 53 (Summer 2009). Michigan State University, East Lansing, Mich. Available at [www.ippsr.msu.edu/SOSS](http://www.ippsr.msu.edu/SOSS).

<sup>2</sup> Institute for Public Policy and Social Research. 2008. State of the State Survey – 47 (Winter 2008). Michigan State University, East Lansing, Mich. Available at [www.ippsr.msu.edu/SOSS](http://www.ippsr.msu.edu/SOSS).

<sup>3</sup> Harrison, David. “States renege on local aid.” The Pew Center on the States. 17 Feb. 2010. [www.stateline.org/live/details/story?contentId=460901](http://www.stateline.org/live/details/story?contentId=460901)

<sup>4</sup> Michigan. Legislative Commission on Statutory Mandates. “Final Report of the Legislative Commission on Statutory Mandates,” 31 Dec. 2009, p.3. <http://council.legislature.mi.gov/lcsm.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Levi, Margaret and Laura Stoker. 2000. “Political Trust and Trustworthiness.” Annual Review of Political Science, Vol. 3: 475-507.

<sup>6</sup> Blind, Peri K. 2006. “Building trust in government in the twenty-first century: review of literature and emerging issues.” 7th Global Forum on Reinventing Government. Vienna, Austria.

University of Michigan  
**Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy**  
 Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy  
 Joan and Sanford Weill Hall  
 735 S. State Street, Suite 5310  
 Ann Arbor, MI 48109-3091

The Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy (CLOSUP), housed at the University of Michigan's Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy, conducts and supports applied policy research designed to inform state, local, and urban policy issues. Through integrated research, teaching, and outreach involving academic researchers, students, policymakers and practitioners, CLOSUP seeks to foster understanding of today's state and local policy problems, and to find effective solutions to those problems.

[www.closup.umich.edu](http://www.closup.umich.edu)  
 734-647-4091



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