

The Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy

Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy >> University of Michigan

Michigan Public
Policy Survey August 2020

Confidence in the accuracy of Michigan's 2020 Census count among local leaders was not very high, slips further

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This report presents the opinions of Michigan's local government leaders regarding the 2020 U.S. Census, including their confidence in the potential accuracy of the count both locally and at the state level, as well as information about local actions to boost census participation among residents. These findings are based on statewide surveys of local government leaders in the Spring 2020 wave of the Michigan Public Policy Survey (MPPS), with a comparison to the Spring 2019 and Spring 2010 waves of the MPPS.

>> The Michigan Public Policy Survey (MPPS) is a census survey of all 1,856 general purpose local governments in Michigan conducted by the Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy (CLOSUP) at the University of Michigan in partnership with the Michigan Municipal League, Michigan Townships Association, and Michigan Association of Counties. The MPPS investigates local officials' opinions and perspectives on a variety of important public policy issues. Respondents for the Spring 2020 wave of the MPPS include county administrators, board chairs, and clerks; city mayors, managers, and clerks; village presidents, managers, and clerks; and township supervisors, managers, and clerks from 1,342 jurisdictions across the state.

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Key Findings

- Ideally, confidence in the accuracy of the 2020 U.S. Census count should be very high. However, as of spring 2020, only 5% of Michigan's local government leaders are very confident that the 2020 Census statewide count will be accurate, unchanged from when they were asked in 2019, while the percentage who are somewhat confident has declined from 56% to 51%. Meanwhile, the percentage who are not very confident or not at all confident has increased from 30% last year to 34% today.
- Local leaders' confidence in the accuracy of their own local community count is somewhat higher, but also down compared to expectations when asked in 2019. Overall, 15% are very confident (unchanged from last year) while 58% are somewhat confident, down from 64% when asked a year ago. Meanwhile, one in five (20%) are either not very confident (15%) or not confident at all (5%) in the accuracy of 2020 Census counts in their own jurisdictions, up from 14% last year.
 - » In 2020, officials from rural jurisdictions are less likely to be very confident in the Census count in their jurisdictions (only 13%) compared to more suburban (22%) or urban (20%) officials. However, confidence has declined the most among urban local leaders compared with last year (a net change of 34 percentage-points). Confidence also continues to be lower and shows greater declines in jurisdictions with larger minority populations compared with less racially-diverse communities.
- In April and May 2020, more than two-thirds (68%) of Michigan local governments reported taking actions to encourage their residents to complete their Census forms. This is up from 53% who responded similarly during the 2010 Census, and up sharply from 35% who reported planning such actions for this year, when asked in 2019.
 - » By far the most common action (59% of jurisdictions statewide) reported is a new option available for the 2020 Census and one particularly suited to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic: encouraging residents to complete the Census online. The next most common actions include direct communications to residents (25%) and collaboration with other organizations (17%) to boost residents' participation.

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Background

Leading up to the 2020 U.S. Census, many analysts expressed early concerns about potential challenges for the enumeration, including the possible inclusion of a question on citizenship¹ and a reduction in the planned hiring of enumerators to canvass in communities, door-to-door.² Then, this spring, just as 2020 Census counting began, the COVID-19 pandemic presented the most severe disruption in recent memory. Less than a week into its formal kickoff in March 2020, the Census Bureau was forced to suspend field operations in an attempt to help slow the spread of the coronavirus across the country.³ It was not until May and June that fieldwork started to resume in select locations.⁴ In addition, there were other changes forced upon Census operations and deadlines throughout the spring and summer that further complicated the nationwide counting.⁵ And although planned extensions to the Bureau's non-response follow-up period were initially set through the end of October, the Census Bureau announced in August it would end door-knocking efforts to visit unresponsive homes by September 30, in order to speed up data collection and the release of apportionment counts.⁶

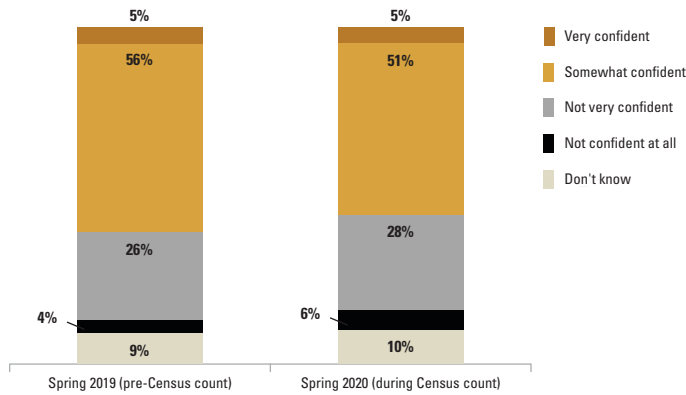
When the Spring 2020 Michigan Public Policy Survey (MPPS) launched at the end of March, the extent and impact of these widespread modifications to the 2020 Census administration were still unclear. At the same time, only 30% of Michigan's local leaders predicted that COVID-19's impacts on their own government operations would last longer than 2-3 months,⁷ and so may not have anticipated some of the major changes that have now impacted the Census operations. And yet, despite these challenges, Michigan's 2020 response rate had already surpassed its final 2010 response rate (67.7%) by June 18.⁸ As of the end of the self-response phase (March 12-August 11), Michigan's response rate was 69%, well above the 63.3% national response rate at that time, and tied for 4th in the national ranking.⁹

In tracking questions carried over from the Spring 2010 and Spring 2019 survey waves, the Spring 2020 MPPS asked local government leaders about their jurisdiction's preparations, if any, for the 2020 Census, and about their confidence in the accuracy of the Census count both locally for their own community, and statewide for Michigan overall. This report presents their responses.



Just 5% of local officials are very confident in an accurate statewide Census count, as pessimism increases

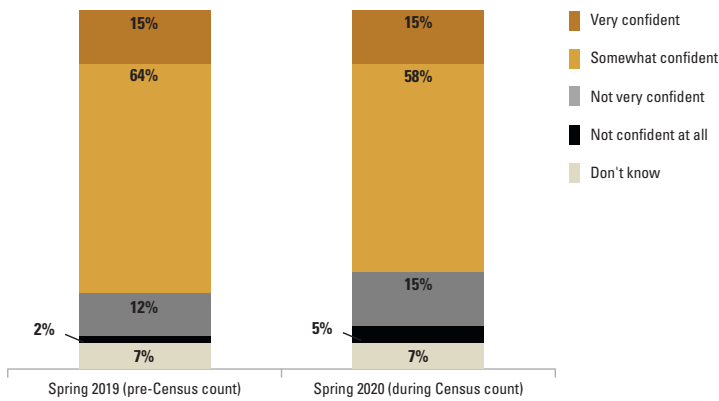
Figure 1
Local officials' confidence there will be an accurate 2020 Census count statewide in Michigan, 2019 vs. 2020



The Spring 2020 MPPS repeated a question from the 2019 MPPS, asking local officials how confident they are that the 2020 U.S. Census count will be accurate in Michigan, statewide. Given the importance of the Census for political representation, redistricting, and allocation of federal resources across and within states, ideally confidence should be very high. However, only 5% of local officials are very confident that there will be an accurate count this year in Michigan statewide, unchanged from responses in 2019 (see *Figure 1*). Meanwhile, 51% are somewhat confident today, down from 56% last year, and 34% are either not very confident (28%) or not confident at all (6%), up from 30% last year.

Local officials somewhat more confident that Census count will be accurate in their own jurisdiction, but also down from 2019

Figure 2
Local officials' confidence there will be an accurate 2020 Census count in their jurisdiction, 2019 vs. 2020



When it comes to the U.S. Census count in their own jurisdiction, local officials' confidence in accuracy is somewhat higher compared to their confidence in the statewide count, but is also down compared to expectations in 2019. Statewide, just 15% of local officials are very confident there will be an accurate count in their own jurisdiction, unchanged from last year (see *Figure 2*). Meanwhile, another 58% are somewhat confident, down from 64% last year, and 20% are either not very confident (15%) or not confident at all (5%), up from 14% in 2019.

These changes can also be considered in terms of “net” confidence in accuracy: the percentage of local officials who are very or somewhat confident minus the percentage who are not very or not at all confident. Back in 2019, the “net” calculation for confidence overall was 79% - 14% = 65%. But this year, the calculation is 73% - 20% = 53%, a 12 percentage-point decline in net confidence compared with last year.

There are differences in predictions about the 2020 Census's accuracy among officials from more rural versus more urban places, as shown in *Table 1a*. As in 2019, high confidence this year is again more common among officials who describe their jurisdiction as fully urban (20%) compared to those from fully rural places (13%). However, net confidence declined over the last year twice as much in fully urban places (by 34 percentage-points) compared to fully rural ones (17 points).

Table 1a
Local officials' confidence there will be an accurate 2020 Census count in their jurisdiction, 2019 vs. 2020, by urban-rural self-assessment

	Rural		Mostly rural		Mostly urban		Urban	
	2019	2020	2019	2020	2019	2020	2019	2020
Very confident	13%	13%	15%	16%	21%	22%	31%	20%
Somewhat confident	65%	56%	67%	65%	63%	54%	53%	45%
Not very confident	12%	16%	11%	14%	10%	15%	13%	21%
Not confident at all	1%	5%	1%	3%	4%	4%	1%	8%
<i>Net confidence</i>	65%	48%	70%	64%	70%	57%	70%	36%
<i>Change in net confidence</i>	-17%		-6%		-13%		-34%	

**Table 1b**

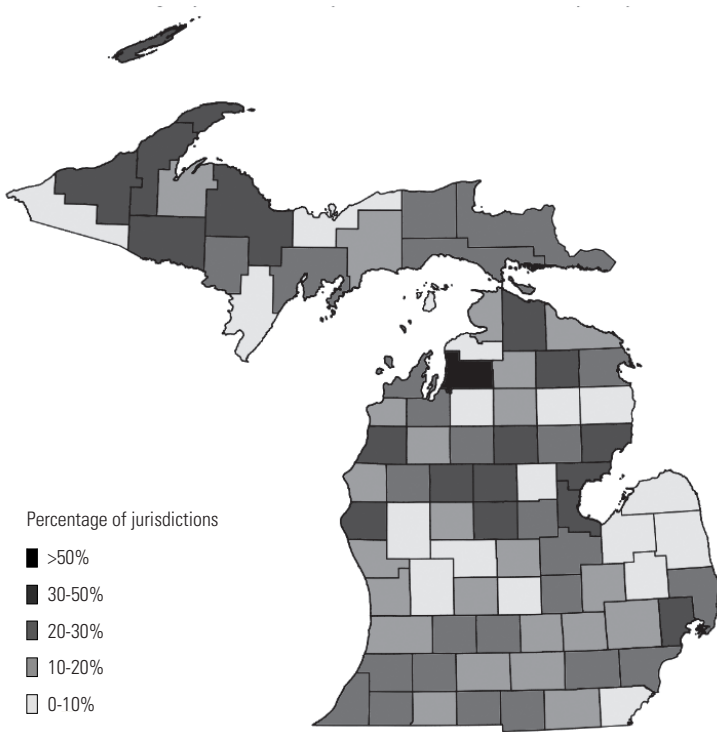
Local officials' confidence there will be an accurate 2020 Census count in their jurisdiction, 2019 vs. 2020, by percent of jurisdiction's residents that identify as a race other than White

	0-10% non-White population		10%-30% non-White population		30%-100% non-White population	
	2019	2020	2019	2020	2019	2020
Very confident	15%	15%	20%	15%	12%	11%
Somewhat confident	65%	59%	59%	53%	64%	52%
Not very confident	11%	14%	13%	20%	17%	30%
Not confident at all	1%	4%	3%	8%	4%	7%
<i>Net confidence</i>	68%	56%	63%	40%	55%	26%
<i>Change in net confidence</i>	-12%		-23%		-29%	

Note: Because the U.S. Census allows residents to select multiple races, for the purposes of this analysis, only residents who did not select "White" are categorized as non-White.

In addition, local leaders from jurisdictions with larger minority populations continue to be less confident there will be an accurate 2020 Census count in their jurisdictions, compared with officials from less racially-diverse jurisdictions. As shown in *Table 1b*, local officials from jurisdictions with less than 10% of residents who identified as a race other than White on the 2010 US Census are significantly less likely to say they are not very confident (14%) or not confident at all (4%), compared to jurisdictions with a higher percent of residents who identify as another race. By contrast, in jurisdictions where more than 30% of residents identify as a race other than White, 37% are not very confident (30%) or not confident at all (7%). Again, net confidence among local leaders from each of these groups declined from 2019, but those from jurisdictions with larger minority populations dropped the most, with a 29 percentage-point decrease in net confidence.

Figure 3
Percentage of local officials' who are "not very" or "not at all" confident in an accurate 2020 Census count in their jurisdiction, by county



The map in *Figure 3* displays breakdowns of all Michigan local jurisdictions aggregated at the county level showing variation among counties where local officials are not very or not at all confident that the 2020 Census count in their local jurisdiction will be accurate. The lighter shades show counties where local officials from relatively few jurisdictions have higher levels of concern about accuracy of the Census count, while progressively darker shades indicate increasing levels of concerns. The darkest shade indicates local leaders from a majority of the jurisdictions in Antrim county lack confidence in the Census' accuracy for their own community. Confidence among local leaders about the accuracy of the 2020 count in their jurisdictions is particularly low in the Upper Peninsula (21% region-wide are not very or not at all confident) and Northern Lower Peninsula (22%), compared with regions further south.



Most local jurisdictions report taking action to encourage residents to complete Census forms

Figure 4
Whether jurisdiction is planning to take, or has already taken, any actions to encourage residents to complete their Census forms, 2010 vs. 2019

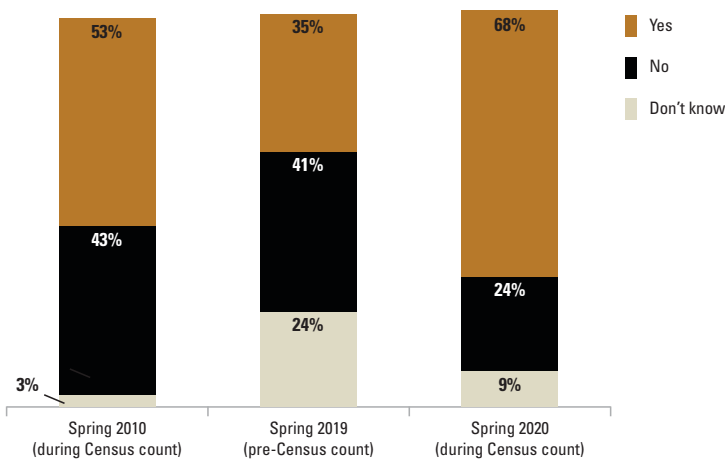
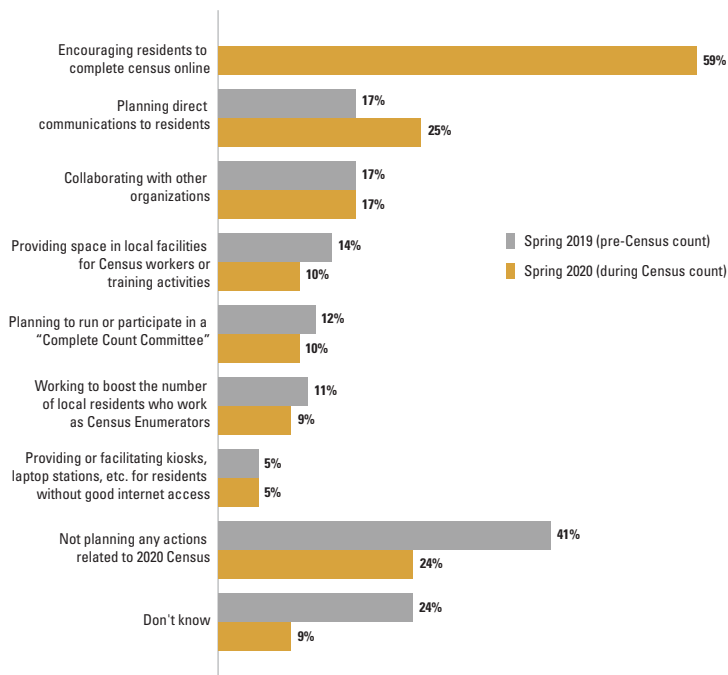


Figure 5
Percent of local governments planning to take, or already taking, specific actions to encourage residents to complete their Census forms, 2019 vs. 2020



In April and May 2020, over two-thirds (68%) of local jurisdictions reported taking actions to encourage their residents to complete their Census forms, while 24% said they were not taking any such actions, and 9% were not sure (see *Figure 4*). This marks a large shift compared to findings from the Spring 2019 MPPS, when 41% said they were not planning to take any actions, and nearly a quarter (24%) were not sure.

This is also a significant increase compared to MPPS responses during the 2010 Census. A decade ago, 53% of local officials said their jurisdictions were taking some kind of action to encourage Census participation, while 43% were not taking any action. (It is important to note, however, that in 2010 the survey questionnaire item was a simply yes or no question, while in 2019 and 2020 the “no action” choice was listed alongside a set of possible specific actions they might be taking.)

When looking at the list of possible actions local governments might be either planning or already taking to encourage Census participation, by far the most commonly reported action as of April and May 2020 was encouraging residents to complete the Census online. As shown in *Figure 5*, 59% of jurisdictions statewide report such efforts. (It is important to note here, too, that the 2019 MPPS survey did not include this option on the questionnaire.)

In 2020, one quarter (25%) of local governments also report direct communications to residents regarding completing the Census, up from 17% who were planning such communications in 2019. There was a small decrease in the percent of jurisdictions providing (or planning to provide) space in local facilities for Census workers or training activities, which is unsurprising given the COVID-19 shutdown during the MPPS survey period. Meanwhile, few jurisdictions reported taking other actions, such as participating in a Complete Count Committee (10%), or working to increase the number of enumerators going door-to-door in their community (9%).

Conclusion

During April and May 2020, few Michigan local government leaders expressed high levels of confidence in the accuracy of the 2020 US Census count. Just 5% of local leaders statewide were very confident that there would be an accurate count in Michigan overall, while just 15% were very confident the count would be accurate in their own community. High levels of confidence are more common in urban than rural places, but confidence overall has also fallen further in urban places over the last year, compared with rural ones. Confidence is also higher and has changed less in places where more residents self-identify as White, compared with communities that have greater racial diversity.

Most local governments (68%) report taking actions to boost their local response rate, though few report taking a wide range of actions. In particular, 59% statewide encouraged residents to take the Census online, a new option available for the 2020 Census and one particularly suited to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Notes

1. Schmidt, A. (2020, March 2). Citizenship question is gone. Michigan immigrants still distrust the Census. *Bridge Magazine*. Retrieved from <https://www.bridgemi.com/michigan-government/citizenship-question-gone-michigan-immigrants-still-distrust-census>
2. Maciag, M. (2019, January). A better count: 6 innovative ways U.S. governments are preparing for the 2020 Census. *Governing Magazine*. Retrieved from <https://www.governing.com/topics/mgmt/gov-2020-census-count.html>
3. Census Bureau Public Information Office. (2020, March 18). U.S. Census Bureau Director Steven Dillingham on Operational Updates. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2020/operational-update.html>
4. Census Bureau Public Information Office. (2020, May 4). Census Bureau to Resume Some 2020 Census Field Operations in Select Locations. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2020/resume-field-operations.html>
5. Census Bureau. 2020 Census Operational Adjustments Due to COVID-19. Retrieved from <https://2020census.gov/en/news-events/operational-adjustments-covid-19.html>
6. Census Bureau Public Information Office. (2020, August 3). Statement from U.S. Census Bureau Director Steven Dillingham: Delivering a Complete and Accurate 2020 Census Count
7. Horner, D., Ivacko, T., & Fitzpatrick, N. (2020, June). The initial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Michigan communities and local governments. Ann Arbor, MI: Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy at the Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy, University of Michigan. Retrieved from <http://closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/80/the-initial-impact-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-on-michigan-communities-and-local-governments>
8. Broda, N. (2020, June 23). Michigan becomes first state to surpass 2010 census response rate. *The Oakland Press*. Retrieved from https://www.theoaklandpress.com/news/local/michigan-becomes-first-state-to-surpass-2010-census-response-rate/article_f3d600c2-b4b3-11ea-bd0e-0f6c4e1688ed.html
9. Census Bureau. (as of 2020, August 11). 2020 U.S. Census Response Rates. Retrieved from <https://2020census.gov/en/response-rates.html>



Survey Background and Methodology

The MPPS is an ongoing survey program, interviewing the leaders of Michigan's 1,856 units of general purpose local government. Surveys are conducted each spring (and prior to 2018, were also conducted each fall). The program has covered a wide range of policy topics, and includes longitudinal tracking data on "core" fiscal, budgetary and operational policy questions and designed to build-up a multi-year time-series.

In the Spring 2020 iteration, surveys were sent by the Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy (CLOSUP) via the internet and hardcopy to top elected and appointed officials (including county administrators and board chairs; city mayors and managers; village presidents, clerks, and managers; and township supervisors, clerks, and managers) from all 83 counties, 280 cities, 253 villages, and 1,240 townships in the state of Michigan.

The Spring 2020 wave was conducted from March 30 – June 1, 2020. A total of 1,342 jurisdictions in the Spring 2020 wave returned valid surveys (59 counties, 216 cities, 163 villages, and 904 townships), resulting in a 72% response rate by unit. The margin of error for the survey as a whole is +/- 1.41%. The key relationships discussed in the above report are statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level or below, unless otherwise specified. Missing responses are not included in the tabulations, unless otherwise specified. Some report figures may not add to 100% due to rounding within response categories. Quantitative data are weighted to account for non-response. "Voices Across Michigan" verbatim responses, when included, may have been edited for clarity and brevity. Contact CLOSUP staff for more information.

Detailed tables of the data analyzed in this report broken down three ways—by jurisdiction type (county, city, township, or village), by population size of the respondent's community, and by the region of the respondent's jurisdiction—are available online at the MPPS homepage: <http://closup.umich.edu/mpps.php>.

The survey responses presented here are those of local Michigan officials, while further analysis represents the views of the authors. Neither necessarily reflects the views of the University of Michigan, or of other partners in the MPPS.

Previous MPPS reports

- Michigan local leaders expect mixed impacts from expanded voter registration and absentee voting reforms (July 2020)
- Local leaders' evaluations of Michigan's direction and Governor's performance during the COVID-19 pandemic's arrival (July 2020)
- The initial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Michigan communities and local governments (June 2020)
- Energy policies and environmental leadership among Michigan's local governments (January 2020)
- Mixed signals continue for Michigan local governments' fiscal health, while future outlooks worsen (December 2019)
- Michigan local officials' views on the next recession: timing, concerns, and actions taken (October 2019)
- Michigan local government preparations and concerns regarding the 2020 U.S. Census (September 2019)
- New Governor, new evaluations of the direction Michigan is headed among local leaders (August 2019)
- Positive working relationships reported among Michigan's local elected officials (June 2019)
- Community poverty and the struggle to make ends meet in Michigan, according to local government leaders (March 2019)
- The state of community civic discourse, according to Michigan's local government leaders (December 2018)
- Despite sustained economic growth, Michigan local government fiscal health still lags (November 2018)
- Michigan local government leaders' views on medical and recreational marijuana (September 2018)
- Rising confidence in Michigan's direction among local leaders, but partisan differences remain (July 2018)
- Michigan local government officials weigh in on housing shortages and related issues (June 2018)
- Approaches to land use planning and zoning among Michigan's local governments (May 2018)
- Workforce issues and challenges for Michigan's local governments (January 2018)
- Local leaders' views on elections in Michigan: accuracy, problems, and reform options (November 2017)
- Michigan local government officials report complex mix of improvement and decline in fiscal health, but with overall trend moving slowly upward (October 2017)
- Michigan local leaders want their citizens to play a larger role in policymaking, but report declining engagement (August 2017)
- Michigan local leaders' views on state preemption and how to share policy authority (June 2017)
- Improving communication, building trust are seen as keys to fixing relationships between local jurisdictions and the State government (May 2017)
- Local leaders more likely to support than oppose Michigan's Emergency Manager law, but strongly favor reforms (February 2017)
- Local government leaders' views on drinking water and water supply infrastructure in Michigan communities (November 2016)
- Michigan local leaders say property tax appeals are common, disagree with 'dark stores' assessing (October 2016)
- Local officials say Michigan's system of funding local government is broken, and seek State action to fix it (September 2016)
- Michigan local governments report first declines in fiscal health trend since 2010 (August 2016)
- Michigan local leaders' doubts continue regarding the state's direction (July 2016)
- Hospital access primary emergency medical concern among many Michigan local officials (July 2016)
- Firefighting services in Michigan: challenges and approaches among local governments (June 2016)
- Most local officials are satisfied with law enforcement services, but almost half from largest jurisdictions say their funding is insufficient (April 2016)
- Local leaders say police-community relations are good throughout Michigan, but those in large cities are concerned about potential civil unrest over police use-of-force (February 2016)
- Report: Responding to budget surplus vs. deficit: the preferences of Michigan's local leaders and citizens (December 2015)
- Michigan's local leaders concerned about retiree health care costs and their governments' ability to meet future obligations (October 2015)
- Fiscal health rated relatively good for most jurisdictions, but improvement slows and decline continues for many (September 2015)
- Confidence in Michigan's direction declines among state's local leaders (August 2015)
- Michigan local government leaders' views on private roads (July 2015)



Few Michigan jurisdictions have adopted Complete Streets policies, though many see potential benefits (June 2015)

Michigan local leaders have positive views on relationships with county road agencies, despite some concerns (May 2015)

Michigan local government leaders say transit services are important, but lack of funding discourages their development (April 2015)

Michigan local leaders see need for state and local ethics reform (March 2015)

Local leaders say Michigan road funding needs major increase, but lack consensus on options that would raise the most revenue (February 2015)

Michigan local government leaders' views on employee pay and benefits (January 2015)

Despite increasingly formal financial management, relatively few Michigan local governments have adopted recommended policies (December 2014)

Most Michigan local officials are satisfied with their privatized services, but few seek to expand further (November 2014)

Michigan local governments finally pass fiscal health tipping point overall, but one in four still report decline (October 2014)

Beyond the coast, a tenuous relationship between Michigan local governments and the Great Lakes (September 2014)

Confidence in Michigan's direction holds steady among state's local leaders (August 2014)

Wind power as a community issue in Michigan (July 2014)

Fracking as a community issue in Michigan (June 2014)

The impact of tax-exempt properties on Michigan local governments (March 2014)

Michigan's local leaders generally support Detroit bankruptcy filing despite some concerns (February 2014)

Michigan local governments increasingly pursue placemaking for economic development (January 2014)

Views on right-to-work legislation among Michigan's local government leaders (December 2013)

Michigan local governments continue seeking, and receiving, union concessions (October 2013)

Michigan local government fiscal health continues gradual improvement, but smallest jurisdictions lagging (September 2013)

Local leaders evaluate state policymaker performance and whether Michigan is on the right track (August 2013)

Trust in government among Michigan's local leaders and citizens (July 2013)

Citizen engagement in the view of Michigan's local government leaders (May 2013)

Beyond trust in government: government trust in citizens? (March 2013)

Local leaders support reforming Michigan's system of funding local government (January 2013)

Local leaders support eliminating Michigan's Personal Property Tax if funds are replaced, but distrust state follow-through (November 2012)

Michigan's local leaders satisfied with union negotiations (October 2012)

Michigan's local leaders are divided over the state's emergency manager law (September 2012)

Fiscal stress continues for hundreds of Michigan jurisdictions, but conditions trend in positive direction overall (September 2012)

Michigan's local leaders more positive about Governor Snyder's performance, more optimistic about the state's direction (July 2012)

Data-driven decision-making in Michigan local government (June 2012)

State funding incentives increase local collaboration, but also raise concerns (March 2012)

Local officials react to state policy innovation tying revenue sharing to dashboards and incentive funding (January 2012)

MPPS finds fiscal health continues to decline across the state, though some negative trends eased in 2011 (October 2011)

Public sector unions in Michigan: their presence and impact according to local government leaders (August 2011)

Despite increased approval of state government performance, Michigan's local leaders are concerned about the state's direction (August 2011)

Local government and environmental leadership: views of Michigan's local leaders (July 2011)

Local leaders are mostly positive about intergovernmental cooperation and look to expand efforts (March 2011)

Local government leaders say most employees are not overpaid, though some benefits may be too generous (February 2011)

Local government leaders say economic gardening can help grow their economies (November 2010)

The Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy

Local governments struggle to cope with fiscal, service, and staffing pressures (August 2010)

Michigan local governments actively promote U.S. Census participation (August 2010)

Fiscal stimulus package mostly ineffective for local economies (May 2010)

Fall 2009 key findings report: educational, economic, and workforce development issues at the local level (April 2010)

Local government officials give low marks to the performance of state officials and report low trust in Lansing (March 2010)

Local government fiscal and economic development issues (October 2009)

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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.

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