

The Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy

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

Michigan Public
Policy Survey August 2011

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

This report presents the opinions of Michigan's local government leaders regarding the direction in which the state and their individual local jurisdictions are headed, as well as their evaluations of the job performance of Governor Rick Snyder and the Michigan Legislature. These findings are based on statewide surveys of local government leaders in the Spring 2011 wave of the Michigan Public Policy Survey (MPPS).

>> 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. Respondents for the MPPS include county administrators and board chairs, city mayors and managers, village presidents and managers, and township supervisors, clerks, and managers from 1,272 jurisdictions across the state.

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Key Findings

- Michigan's local government leaders are concerned about the direction in which the state is headed. Overall, half (50%) of local officials say they feel the state is generally on the wrong track, while 32% say the state is going in the right direction.
 - » These views are strongly associated with partisan identification, with officials who identify themselves as Democrats more likely to say that Michigan is on the wrong track compared with Independent and Republican officials. However, even among Republican local officials, fewer than half (46%) say that Michigan is going in the right direction.
 - » These views are even more strongly correlated with local officials' evaluations of job performance by the Governor and the Michigan Legislature.
- Michigan local officials are divided in their evaluations of Governor Rick Snyder's job performance so far, with 37% rating his performance as good or excellent, and 22% rating his performance as poor.
 - » Unsurprisingly, evaluations of the Governor are also linked to partisan identification, with Republican officials significantly more likely to evaluate his performance positively and Democratic officials significantly more likely to rate him poorly. Even so, only a bare majority (52%) of Republican officials rate the Governor's performance on the job so far as either good or excellent.
- Local officials are even more critical of the Michigan Legislature, with only 21% of officials statewide rating the Legislature's performance as either good or excellent, and 36% rating it as poor.
- Although these evaluations reveal divisions in opinion among local officials about state-level policymakers, they do represent a positive shift in opinions compared to those toward the end of Governor Jennifer Granholm's tenure. In the fall of 2009, 52% of local officials rated then-Governor Granholm's performance as poor, compared with only 22% rating Governor Snyder's job performance as poor today. Similarly, while 60% of local officials rated the Michigan Legislature's performance as poor in 2009, only 36% do so in 2011.
- In terms of conditions in their own jurisdictions, local officials are much more optimistic about the directions in which their local governments are headed, and express high levels of approval for the job performance of their local legislative bodies. Eighty-six percent of local officials overall say their own local jurisdictions are going in the right direction, and 82% rate their local councils' or boards' job performance as either good or excellent.

Local officials are concerned about the direction in which Michigan is headed

The first six months of 2011 have seen significant changes in the relationship between Michigan’s state and local governments and in the state’s wider public policy environment. Compared to the gridlock from divided government that dominated Lansing toward the end of Governor Jennifer Granholm’s tenure, today’s one-party control of both the executive and legislative branches of Michigan’s state government has resulted in numerous large-scale policy changes. Significant developments that are reshaping the state-local relationship have included adoption of the new Emergency Manager law affecting local governments and school districts and changes in the revenue sharing program to incentivize local government reform. Other high-profile, high-impact changes include elimination of the Michigan Business Tax and development of a new state tax system, and adoption of the state’s next fiscal year budget months earlier than was achieved in the past, in addition to other developments such as decreased support for the film industry. To get a general sense of local officials’ feelings about the direction in which the state is heading, the Spring 2011 MPPS asked whether they felt the state was generally going in the right direction, or if they felt things have gotten off on the wrong track. Overall, government leaders from half (50%) of Michigan’s local jurisdictions say the state is on the wrong track (see *Figure 1a*).

However, these opinions are strongly correlated with the party identification of Michigan’s local leaders: 74% of Democratic officials and 51% of Independent officials say the state is on the wrong track, compared to 39% of local Republican officials (see *Figure 1b*). Still, despite the Republican Party control of state policy levers in Lansing, it is notable that less than half (46%) of local Republican leaders believe the state is heading in the right direction.

There is an even stronger correlation between these views on the state’s direction and local officials’ views of both Governor Snyder’s job performance and the Legislature’s performance, as described below.

Figure 1a
Percentage of officials who say Michigan is going in the ‘right direction’ or is ‘off on the wrong track’

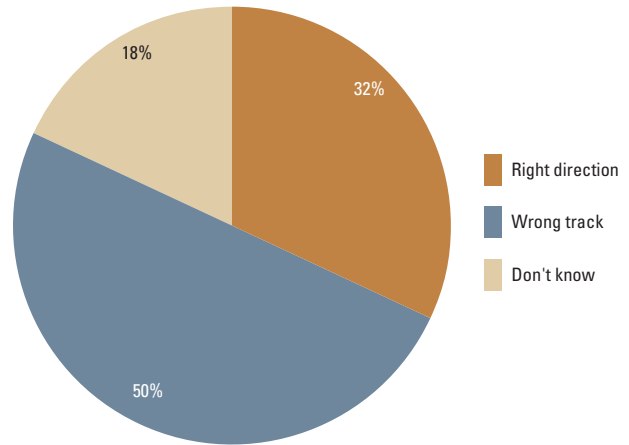
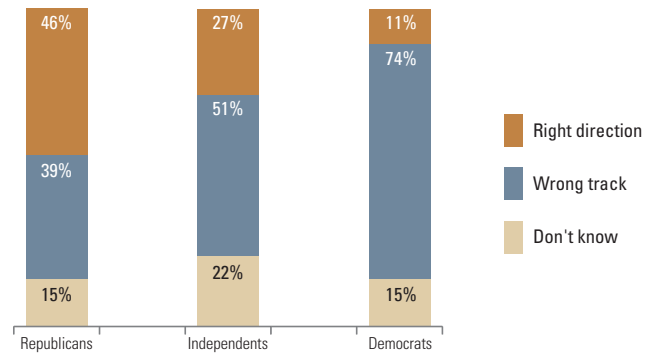


Figure 1b
Percentage of officials who say Michigan is going in the ‘right direction’ or is ‘off on the wrong track,’ by partisan identification





How do local officials rate the performance of Governor Snyder?

When asked to assess Rick Snyder’s job performance as governor so far, 37% of local officials statewide rate his performance as either good or excellent, while 22% rate it as poor (see *Figure 2a*).

As might be expected, evaluations of the Governor’s performance differ widely by political party identification. While just a bare majority (52%) of officials who identify themselves as Republicans think the Governor is doing a good or excellent job, far lower percentages of Independent officials (28%) and Democratic officials (12%) also feel this way (see *Figure 2b*). By comparison, only 10% of Republican officials rate the Governor’s job performance so far as poor, compared with 26% of Independent officials and 47% of Democratic officials.

Figure 2a
Local officials’ evaluations of Governor Snyder’s performance

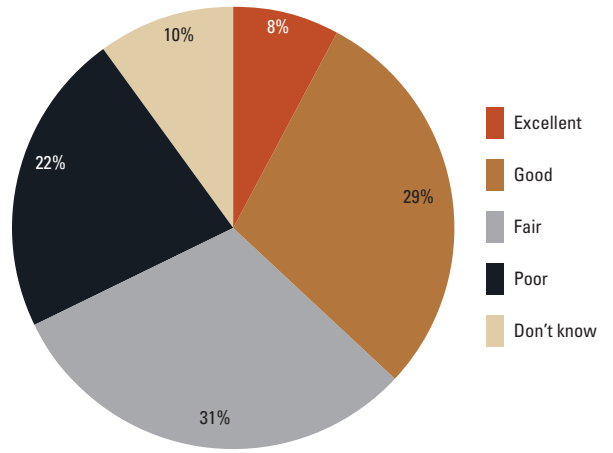
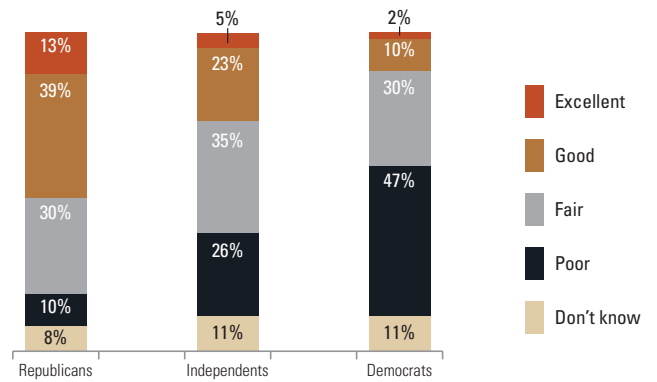


Figure 2b
Local officials’ evaluations of Governor Snyder’s performance, by partisan identification



How do local officials rate the performance of the Michigan Legislature?

Local officials' evaluations of the Michigan Legislature's performance are also divided (see *Figure 3a*), but more negative than their ratings of Governor Snyder. Just over two in ten local officials (21%) statewide rate the state Legislature's performance as either good or excellent, while 36% rate it as poor.

Democratic and Independent officials are twice as likely to give the Legislature a poor rating (57% and 51%, respectively), compared to Republican officials (24%) (see *Figure 3b*).

Despite these relatively high levels of dissatisfaction, it is worth noting that today's approval levels are higher than those found toward the end of Governor Granholm's tenure. Looking back to the fall of 2009, the Michigan Public Policy Survey asked Michigan local officials to rate then-Governor Jennifer Granholm's job performance.¹ Overall, 52% thought she was doing a poor job at that time, compared with only 22% rating Governor Snyder's job performance as poor today.

Similarly, local officials' ratings for the Michigan Legislature have improved significantly, driven largely by changes in opinion among Republican local officials, and somewhat by changes among Independent officials as well (see *Figure 3c*). Whereas the Fall 2009 MPPS found that 62% of Republican officials and 74% of Independent officials rated the Legislature's performance as poor, the Spring 2011 survey found those negative ratings reduced substantially (24% and 51%, respectively). Democratic local officials' ratings of the Legislature, by contrast, have remained relatively stable (54% rating the Legislature's performance as poor in fall 2009, compared to 57% today).

Figure 3a
Local officials' evaluations of the Michigan Legislature's performance

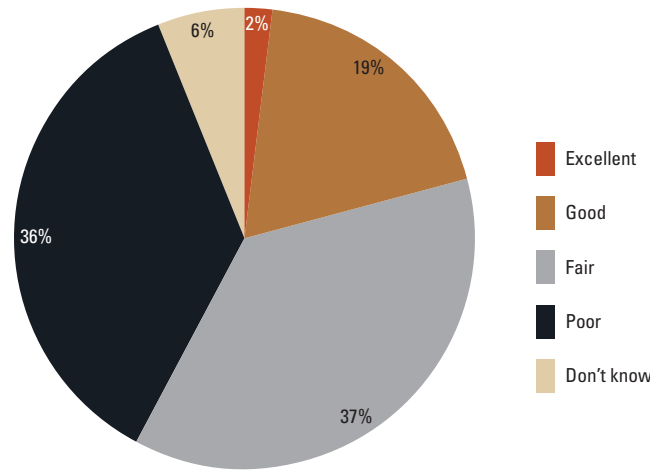


Figure 3b
Local officials' evaluations of the Michigan Legislature's performance, by partisan identification

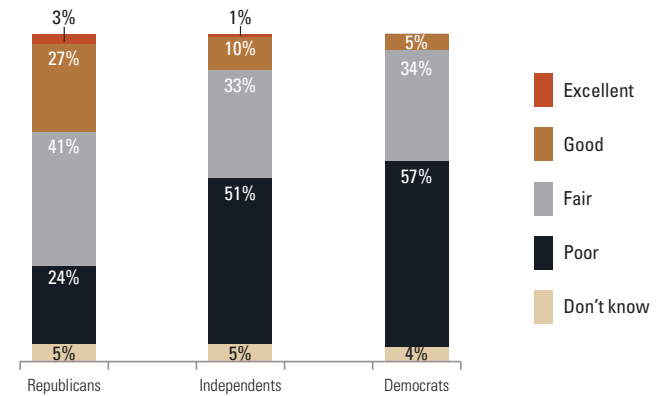
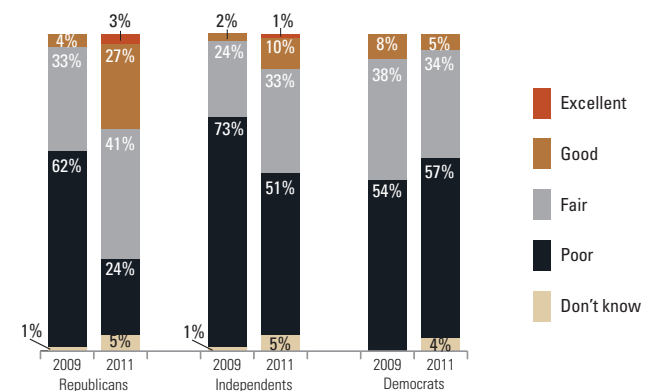


Figure 3c
Changes in local officials' evaluations of the Michigan Legislature's performance, Fall 2009 - Spring 2011





Local officials' views on the state's direction are closely tied to their assessments of state policymakers' job performance

Local officials' views on whether the state is heading in the right direction or is off on the wrong track could be associated with any number of factors, including their partisan identification, gender, race, age, education, region of the state, jurisdiction's population size, and so on. Other factors could include the officials' perception of general economic conditions, the ability of their own jurisdiction to meet its financial needs, and state support for local governments. After testing these and other factors, the strongest correlation for local officials' views on the state's direction is found with their assessments' of the job being done by the state's policymakers in Lansing. This may not be surprising given the nature of the high-profile policy reforms rolling out of Lansing in the first half of 2011. For instance, among those local officials who rate Governor Snyder's job performance as excellent, 85% also believe the state is heading in the right direction, and only 8% believe the state is on the wrong track. These percentages are flipped among those who believe Governor Snyder is doing a poor job: in this group less than 1% of local officials believe the state is heading in the right direction, while 94% believe it is on the wrong track (see *Table 1*).

This relationship holds true among Republican, Democratic, and Independent local officials (see *Table 2*). For instance, among Republican local officials who believe Governor Snyder's job performance is excellent, 86% believe the state is heading in the right direction. Meanwhile, among those Republican local officials who believe Governor Snyder's job performance is poor, 96% believe Michigan is heading off on the wrong track.

There is also a similar, though slightly weaker, correlation in local officials' views of the Legislature's performance and the state's direction: among those local officials who rate the Legislature's performance as excellent, 87% believe the state is heading in the right direction. Conversely, among those who rate the Legislature's performance as poor, 77% believe the state is off on the wrong track.

Table 1

Local officials' evaluations of the state's direction and evaluations of Governor Snyder's performance

	Governor's job performance is excellent	Governor's job performance is good	Governor's job performance is fair	Governor's job performance is poor
State is going in right direction	85%	66%	17%	1%
State is off on wrong track	8%	19%	60%	94%

Table 2

Local officials' evaluations of the state's direction and evaluations of Governor Snyder's performance, by partisan identification

	Governor's job performance is excellent	Governor's job performance is good	Governor's job performance is fair	Governor's job performance is poor
<i>Among Republican officials:</i>				
State is going in right direction	86%	72%	20%	2%
State is off on wrong track	8%	18%	59%	96%
<i>Among Independent officials:</i>				
State is going in right direction	81%	56%	19%	0%
State is off on wrong track	19%	22%	55%	90%
<i>Among Democratic officials:</i>				
State is going in right direction	100%	54%	13%	1%
State is off on wrong track	0%	31%	65%	96%

Local officials express significant confidence in their own jurisdictions

In comparison to evaluations of the job being done in Lansing, local officials are significantly more confident about their own local jurisdictions. Overall, while only 32% of local officials think the state itself is heading in the right direction, 86% think their own jurisdictions are heading in the right direction (see *Figure 4a*). Fewer than one in ten (9%) think their own jurisdiction is off on the wrong track. Differences among partisans are still apparent, but are much less pronounced than is the case in state-level assessments, with 90% of Republican officials saying their local jurisdictions are headed in the right direction, compared to 81% of Independent officials and 80% of Democratic officials (see *Figure 4b*).

Compared to their views of the state Legislature’s performance, local officials also give significantly higher approval ratings regarding the job performance of their own jurisdictions’ legislative body (i.e., city councils, county commissions, township boards, etc.). One-quarter of local officials (25%) rate the job their own council or board is doing as excellent, and another 57% say their board’s performance is “good.” Only 3% of local officials rate their board or council’s performance as poor. Unlike with evaluations of the state’s overall condition or with state policymakers, these percentages are relatively similar across various partisan identifications (see *Figure 4c*).

Again, there is a correlation between local officials’ views on the direction in which their jurisdiction is heading and their assessment of their local board or council’s job performance, although this correlation is somewhat weaker than in their views regarding the State Legislature. Among those local officials who think their board or council is doing an excellent job, 97% also believe their jurisdiction is heading in the right direction. Meanwhile, among those who believe their board or council is doing a poor job, only 31% still believe their jurisdiction is heading in the right direction, and 52% believe it is off on the wrong track.

Figure 4a
Percentage of officials who say their own jurisdiction is going in the ‘right direction or is ‘off on the wrong track’

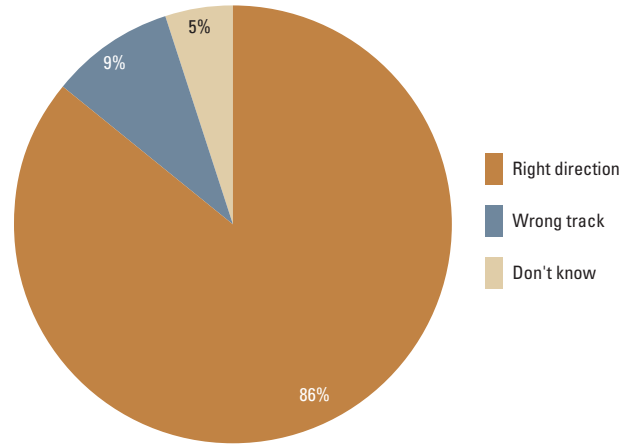


Figure 4b
Percentage of officials who say their own jurisdiction is going in the ‘right direction or is ‘off on the wrong track,’ by partisan identification

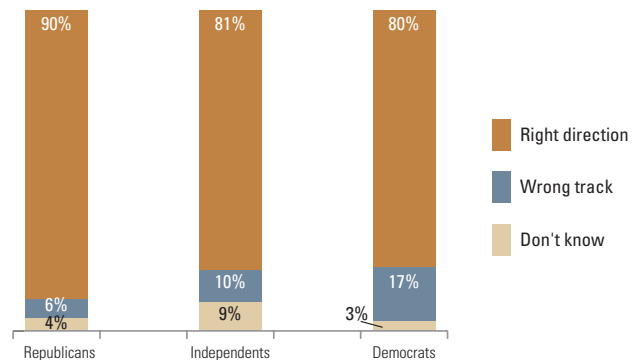
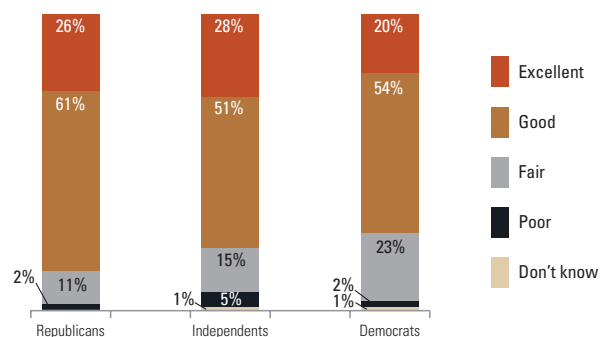


Figure 4c
Local officials’ evaluations of their own jurisdictions’ governing boards’ performance, by partisan identification





Conclusion

The first half of 2011 has been filled with high-profile, high-impact public policy reform in Lansing that is reshaping the policymaking environment across the state of Michigan. In particular, the state-local relationship has undergone significant changes with Lansing's enactment of the new Emergency Manager law and a revised local government revenue sharing program designed to incentivize local government reform.

Earlier reports by both the MPPS2 and the Legislative Commission on Statutory Mandates3 documented the strained state-local relationship in Michigan and warned that resulting problems could impede the state's progress toward a better future. While Michigan's local government leaders express higher levels of approval of the jobs being done today by Governor Snyder and the Michigan Legislature compared to assessments from the period of divided government toward the end of Governor Granholm's tenure in 2009, nonetheless they also voice significant concerns about the direction in which the state is heading. Only 32% of Michigan's local leaders believe the state is heading in the right direction today. The concerns local leaders express are strongly correlated to their assessments of the job being done by the state's policymakers in Lansing.

Notes

¹ Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy (CLOSUP). "The Michigan Public Policy Survey (MPPS) Fall 2009 Data Tables: Governor Granholm's job performance." <http://closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/fall-2009-data/Q31.htm>.

² Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy (CLOSUP). "Local government officials give low marks to the performance of state officials and report low trust in Lansing." March 2010. <http://closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey>.

³ 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>.

Survey background and methodology

The MPPS is a biannual survey of each of Michigan's 1,856 units of general purpose local government. 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 and managers, and township supervisors, clerks, and managers) from all 83 counties, 274 cities, 259 villages, and 1,240 townships in the state of Michigan.

The Spring 2011 wave was conducted from April 18- June 10, 2011. A total of 1,272 jurisdictions in the Spring 2011 wave returned valid surveys, resulting in a 69% response rate by unit. The margin of error for the survey as a whole is +/- 1.5%. The key relationships discussed in the above report are statistically significant at the $p > .05$ level or above, unless otherwise specified. Missing responses are not included in the tabulations, unless otherwise specified. Data are weighted to account for non-response.

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—will be available online at the MPPS homepage: <http://closup.umich.edu/mpps.php>

The views reported herein are those of local Michigan officials and do not necessarily reflect the views of the University of Michigan.

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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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