



MPPS Policy Brief

Most Michigan local officials report positive or neutral impacts from recent election reforms, but many express concerns around costs of early voting

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Over the past few election cycles, voters in Michigan have passed several state constitutional amendments to significantly change a range of election administration policies. In 2018, they approved [Proposal 3](#), which established automatic voter registration, same-day voter registration, and no-excuse absentee voting, among other reforms. Then in 2022, they approved [Proposal 2](#), which required nine days of early in-person voting, expanded availability of ballot drop boxes, prepaid postage for mail ballots, and more.

The Michigan Public Policy Survey (MPPS) asked local officials from the state's cities and townships—the local governments responsible for conducting elections—about the impacts of these reforms on their government's administration of elections.

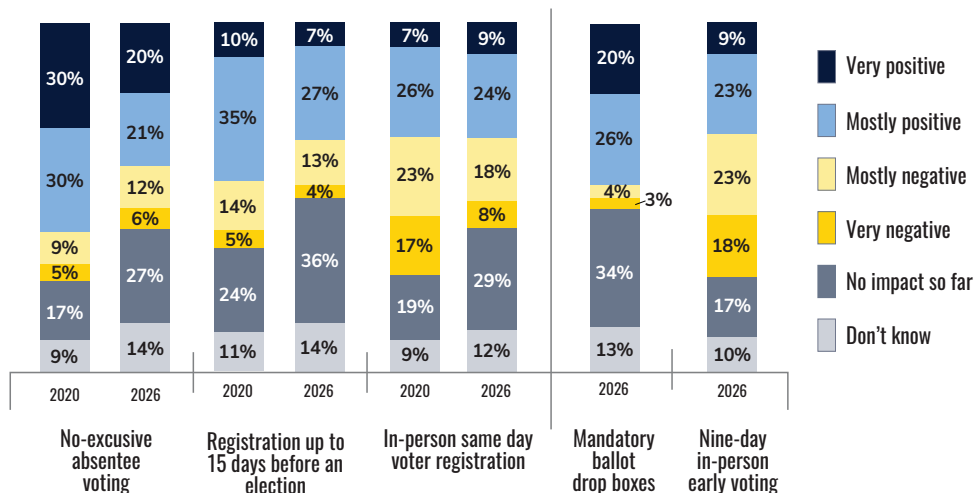
Back in 2020, the MPPS asked about the impact of some of the initial 2018 reforms. Michigan local officials reported more positive than negative impacts from no-excuse absentee voting and voter registration up to 15 days before an election via mail-in, online, and at a Secretary of State's office (see [Figure 1](#)). However, assessments of in-person same-day voter registration were more negative than positive.

Interestingly, this year, more local officials report that each of these reforms has had “no impact” on election administration. In addition, the negative reactions to same-day registration have also been somewhat tempered. Although 26% of cities and townships say same-day registration has had a mostly or very negative impact, 33% say the impact has been positive.

This year was the first time the MPPS asked about the impact of the 2022 reforms. Few (7%) have concerns about expanded drop box access, but a significant group (41%) say the introduction of nine days of in-person early voting has had a mostly (23%) or very (18%) negative impact on their jurisdiction's election administration.

Figure 1

Local officials' assessments of the impacts of various Michigan election reforms on their township's or city's election administration, 2020 vs. 2026

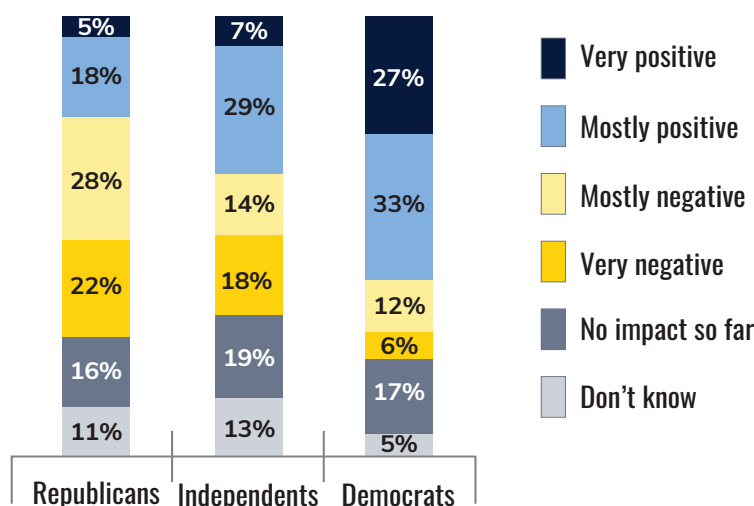


Assessments about early voting reform strongly linked with partisanship

Assessments of the local impact of the nine-day in-person early voting reform largely reflect the partisan dynamics surrounding the original passage of the 2022 Proposal 2 ballot measure. After using statistical analysis to control for other factors like population size and jurisdiction type, data from the MPPS show that local leaders who identify as Republicans (50%) or Independents (32%) are more likely to report a negative impact on election administration from early voting compared to just 18% of Democrats (see Figure 2a).

Figure 2a

Local officials' assessments of the nine-day window for early in-person voting on their township's or city's election administration, by self-reported partisan identification

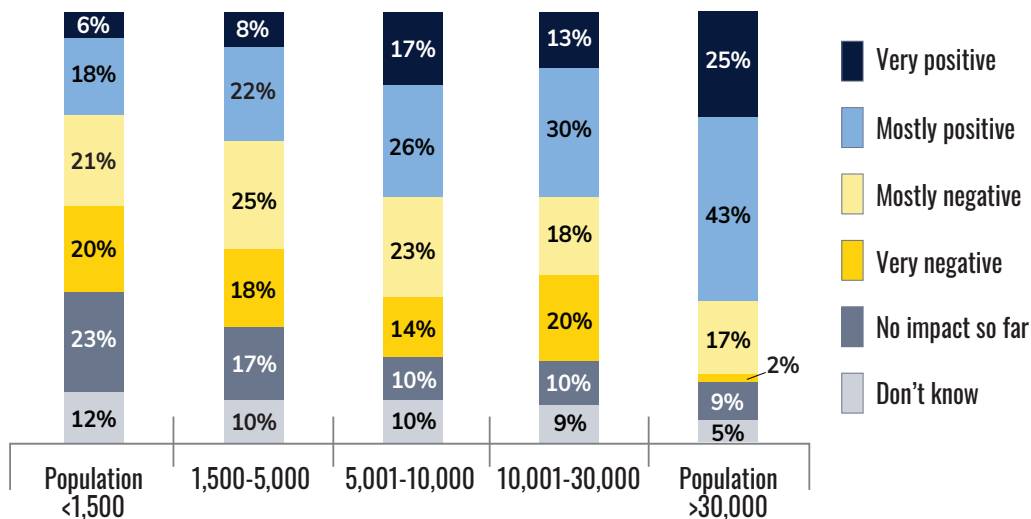


Apart from partisan perspectives, reports of impacts of early voting on local governments vary by size and fiscal stability

Local leaders from the state's smaller townships and cities are most likely to say early voting has had a predominantly negative impact. For example, for jurisdictions with between 1,500 and 5,000 residents, 43% of respondents say nine days of early in-person voting has had a mostly or very negative impact, while 30% say it has been positive and 17% report no impact so far (see *Figure 2b*). By contrast, in Michigan's largest jurisdictions, over two-thirds (68%) say early voting has had a positive impact, while 19% say it has been negative and 9% report no impact.

Figure 2b

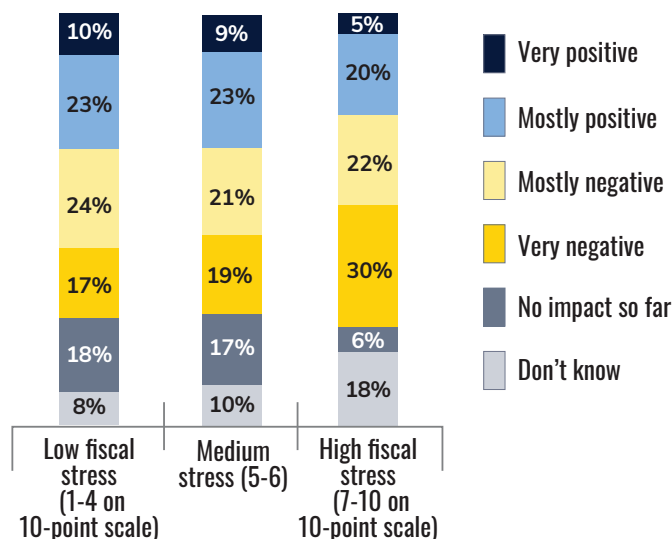
Local officials' assessments of the nine-day window for early in-person voting on their township's or city's election administration, by population size



The added responsibilities of providing early voting also appear to have a more negative impact on communities that are already experiencing higher levels of fiscal stress. As shown in *Figure 2c*, a majority (52%) of township and city officials who report high fiscal stress in their jurisdiction (rating their stress between 7-10 on a 10-point scale) say that early voting has had a negative impact. Jurisdictions with low or medium fiscal stress are less likely to say that early voting has had a negative impact (40-41%).

Figure 2c

Local officials' assessments of the nine-day window for early in-person voting on their township's or city's election administration, by jurisdiction's self-reported fiscal stress

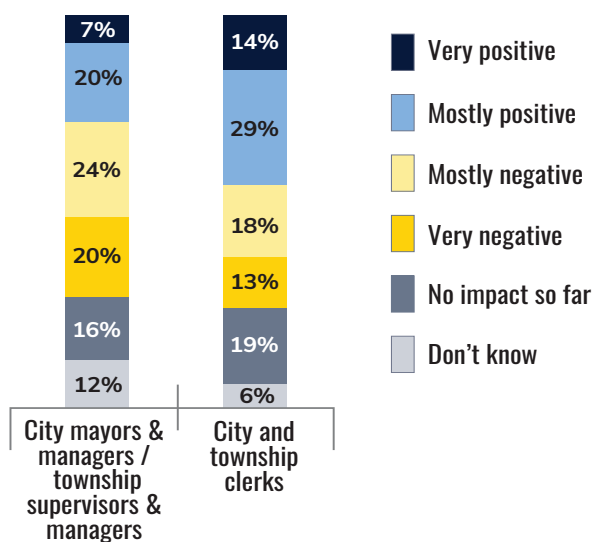


Clerks significantly more likely than other local leaders to see early voting as positive

Although concerns about early voting are widespread, interestingly, city and township clerks are significantly more likely to say early voting has had a positive impact on their election administration than are other local officials such as city managers or township supervisors (see *Figure 2d*). Among clerks, 43% report either a very or mostly positive effect for early voting. By contrast, a plurality of mayors, supervisors, and managers (44%) report a very or mostly negative effect. Responses to a follow-up open-end question suggest that many clerks are focused on boosting turnout among voters, while non-clerk officials are often concerned about the strain on their jurisdiction's budget from running early voting.

Figure 2d

Local officials' assessments of the nine-day window for early in-person voting on their township's or city's election administration, by official's position





Through a follow-up open-ended survey question, the MPPS asked city and township leaders to describe the most significant negative impacts that their jurisdiction's election administration has experienced from recent election changes. In the Spring 2026 wave, local leaders provided over 400 comments regarding challenges that recent reforms have posed for their election administration.

Voices Across Michigan

Quotes from local leaders about the most significant negative impacts of recent election administration reforms

"The 9 days of early voting included in Prop 22-2 is a clerk-killer, especially in rural townships. Elections continue to become more and more complex and time consuming, without any additional pay. Part-time rural clerks who signed up for a manageable job have watched it change into something much different. Our county has lost so many experienced clerks in the last few years that it is concerning."

"Adding 9 days of early voting requires a budget of 6x higher than a year without early voting, largely due to increased payroll of election workers. Also, by not being able to close early voting until after 8 PM (for reasons that do make sense), it doubles the amount of time that is needed for the local clerk to close the election, as we have to close both the early voting and the in-person voting. As a small community that skews significantly younger than the state average, we also have difficulty recruiting sufficient election workers. We do partner with neighboring municipalities to ease these burdens, but sometimes that creates additional burdens. For example, when there are 19 ballot styles, it's easier for a mistake to be made in ballot assignment."

"The 9-day early voting does not make sense for townships with small populations. It is very expensive to have poll workers available for 9 days when we get less than 10 people voting early. One day on a weekend would make more sense for small townships."

"Early voting and same day registration have been well received. As a clerk I am disappointed that our voters and potential voters don't make registering to vote and voting more of a priority at election time." "While our community appreciates the additional days of voting, the turnout during the additional days is low. The ability to mail or drop off ballots has been wildly popular."

"Misinformation provided to voters is always a problem, and more so now with public interest groups accessing local social media pages. We've only had a couple of same-day voter registrations and there were concerns with both; I can't imagine how difficult it would be with a much larger precinct."

"They make all these changes, require new machines and expect the township to pay for them. Townships should not have to pay for changes at their expense. At the very least - townships with a net worth under \$1,000,000 with a fund balance under \$500,000 should not have to pay at all."

"We are a small township with [under 100] registered voters. Most of our residents are seasonal. Because we are so small, we have difficulty recruiting election inspectors and have only about 7 people to cover all the election duties, including early voting. At the very least, Michigan law should be amended for early voting to include townships 3000-5000 or greater to reduce the burden on small townships."

Administrative "Chaos": Traditionally, the weeks leading up to an election allowed for the "dust to settle," where clerks could finalize voter rolls and prepare poll books. Same-day registration removes this buffer, requiring staff to perform complex data entry and verification in real-time while simultaneously managing high voter turnout."

"Same day voter registration can't ensure that voter has not already voted elsewhere. Michigan voter registration laws allow for persons to register without having a physical residence in the state; the law allows and BOE requires that persons are registered even if the registration is at a vacant lot."

"Managing nine days of early voting followed immediately by a 15+ hour Election Day leads to extreme staff burnout. Clerks' offices are typically small; when the same three or four people must oversee nearly two weeks of constant public interaction, the risk of clerical error increases due to fatigue."

"Trusting the accuracy of last-minute registrations, early voting, and mail in voting. It is easily corrupted and makes us feel the results are not real."

"Concerned about the cost of new election equipment coming up next year 2027. That would be a huge expense if each municipality has to take that on without help from HAVA or the State of Michigan."

Survey Background and Methodology

The Michigan Public Policy Survey (MPPS) is an ongoing census survey of all 1,856 general purpose local governments in Michigan conducted since 2009 by the Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy (CLOSUP) at the University of Michigan's Gerald R Ford School of Public Policy. The program is a partnership with Michigan's local government associations. The Spring 2026 wave was conducted March 30 – June 5, 2026. Respondents include county administrators, board chairs, and clerks; city mayors, managers, and clerks; village presidents, managers, and clerks; and township supervisors, managers, and clerks from 1,328 jurisdictions across the state, resulting in a 72% response rate by unit. More information is available at <https://closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/mpps-2026-spring>

See CLOSUP's website for the full question text on the survey questionnaire. Detailed tables of the data in this report, including breakdowns by various community characteristics, are available at <http://mpps.umich.edu>.

The survey responses presented here are those of local Michigan officials and residents, 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.