



The Functioning of Democracy Across the Urban-Rural Spectrum: Student Paper Series

Internet Access and Connectivity across the Urban-Rural Spectrum

By Julie Rubin

Broadband internet is a faster and more efficient way to access online services and information than traditional dial-up or satellite services. While broadband is becoming increasingly ubiquitous across the United States, there remains a “digital divide” where some people have access to internet and others remain untethered based on a variety of factors including location. Recent research has highlighted disparities between urban and rural areas based on broadband access, which can lead to a “rural penalty,” a term to describe the increased economic and social burden that rural communities face as a result of their distance from seats of power and centers of commerce. This report explores the digital divide between urban and rural municipalities in Michigan by examining the provision of online government services and the challenges that jurisdictions face in implementing technology expansions. Findings indicate that the prevalence of government websites as well as jurisdiction information and services are correlated with whether a jurisdiction is in an urban or rural area.

Key Findings

- Urban areas are more likely than their rural counterparts to engage their citizens through technology and to have an official government website.
- For jurisdictions that do have websites, urban districts are more likely to offer online services (such as taxes and fines) and to post information related to government business (video streams, meeting agendas and minutes).
- Districts across the urban-rural spectrum feel similarly that the information and services they provide to residents are sufficient but recognize needs for improvements.
- Rural areas cite the lack of high-speed internet and infrastructure as a barrier to using more technology, while urban areas cite barriers related to compliance and privacy.



Background

Broadband internet is a faster and more efficient way to access online services and information than traditional dial-up or satellite services. While broadband is becoming increasingly ubiquitous across the United States, there remains a “digital divide” where some people have access to internet and others remain untethered based on a variety of factors including location. Recent research has highlighted disparities between urban and rural areas based on broadband access, which can lead to a “rural penalty,” a term to describe the increased economic and social burden that rural communities face as a result of their distance from seats of power and centers of commerce. This report will explore the digital divide between urban and rural municipalities in Michigan by examining the provision of online government services and the challenges that jurisdictions face in implementing technology expansions.

While addressing the “digital divide” has been a top policy priority for many jurisdictions, researchers increasingly refer to the importance of the more encompassing concept of “digital inclusion.”¹ Digital inclusion strategies ensure that communities not only have access to the technologies but also have the ability to make proper use of those technologies. Both strategies attempt to address disparities in access and ability across age, race, class, and location. Digital inclusion strategies often address disparities in broadband access between and within urban and rural areas. Studies have found that broadband access differs based on median income, educational attainment level, and race.^{2,3}

Across the United States, broadband access is more available in urban areas than in rural areas, with more internet service providers and better access to high-speed internet.⁴ Urban areas also have more public access points for community members to utilize wi-fi and have higher rates of phone data access. These differing rates are often masked when using state-level data. For example, one study of Montana’s statewide connectivity found rates consistent with national averages. However, when connectivity data was broken up by county, researchers found wide disparities between primarily rural and more metropolitan areas.⁵ County-level data can also mask divides that occur within urban areas. Although residents of urban areas are more likely to have access to broadband than are their rural counterparts, many may not have the resources to utilize it.⁶ For example, even with access to many potential broadband providers, if a city resident cannot afford to pay monthly internet bills or invest in a modem or computer, they will remain unconnected.

Implications of the “Digital Divide”

In the wake of COVID-19, fast and reliable internet access has become a necessity for people to work, attend school, and socialize in a safely distanced manner. Even before COVID-19, disparate rates of broadband access often led to different levels of access to goods and services. Access to broadband also correlates with increased civic engagement. This includes interactions with elected officials, voting in local elections, and joining civic organizations.⁷ In addition to all the other benefits that society derives from quick broadband connections, access to connections correlates with increased access to government services and goods.⁸ Therefore, the most effective strategy to reduce the “rural penalty” would be to increase broadband access in rural areas.

While national studies have examined urban and rural broadband divides, few have explored differences in government provisions via jurisdictions based on this division. However, the existing research suggests that, even in rural communities with broadband access, local government websites in these communities tend to be less robust than in urban areas. For example, a survey of Montana local government offices examined differences in government website and online service delivery and found wide disparities between rural areas and metropolitan areas.⁹ Therefore, another strategy to reduce the rural penalty would be to expand services and information offerings on government websites in rural localities. Local government websites can provide information required for civic engagement such as meeting announcements, recordings, and minutes. They can also serve as service hubs for posting permitting information, licensure forms, and job application postings. Expanding online service offerings could be a valuable investment for rural communities to reduce travel burdens.¹⁰ While most research has focused on e-government’s impact on rural communities, increasing online service delivery could also benefit anyone, regardless of their geographical location, who does not have flexible scheduling to travel to offices in-person.

In addition to initiatives aimed at improving broadband access, many local governments are already attempting to offer more services online. A study done in 2015 found that 61% of Americans used the internet to search for government information or to



complete a government transaction.¹¹ However, government entities that wish to expand their e-government services may encounter obstacles to implementation. According to a national survey of jurisdictions' technology initiatives, barriers include a lack of funding to support infrastructure or to hire dedicated IT staff, resistance to change, and concerns about cyber security.¹²

This report will examine the differences along the urban-rural spectrum in the extent to which Michigan local governments use a website to provide online services and civic information. In addition to looking at how jurisdictions are engaged with technology, this report will also describe the barriers that officials face when expanding technology. As broadband access increases and local governments expand their online offerings, differing expansion rates across the urban-rural spectrum could contribute to widening the “digital divide” and furthering a “rural penalty.”

Methods

The report findings are based on survey data from the Fall 2012 wave of the Michigan Public Policy Survey (MPPS). Data was collected from questions related to jurisdictions' use of technology to engage its citizens, as well as the services provided through a jurisdiction website if one exists. The survey also collected information on the barriers that jurisdictions face when providing technology services for citizens including whether citizens' have access to and the ability to utilize broadband.

Because technology adoption has progressed rapidly since 2012, additional context is necessary to examine differences between the urban and rural spectrum. While there is no directly analogous data to the Fall 2012 survey, statewide broadband availability can demonstrate continued urban-rural disparities. In a report from 2018, rural Michigan households had lower rates of access to fixed broadband technologies.¹³ Additionally, the percentage of rural households who had access to faster download and upload speeds was 6 percentage points lower than the statewide average (see *Appendix A*). While this report is focused on online government service availability, the disparities between urban and rural areas in terms of broadband access and speed indicate that jurisdictions still experience some of the disparities described in the Fall 2012 data.

To analyze differences across urban and rural areas, I aggregate answers across these questions based on a 4-way scale of urbanity – completely urban, mostly urban, mostly rural, completely rural – based on the 2010 Census classification of census tracts within the jurisdiction. First, I find the statewide percentage of jurisdictions that have websites and then I summarize the percentage across the urbanity scale. For jurisdictions that do have websites, I then analyze the number of services they provide via their website and disaggregate the number of services by the 4-way measure of urbanity.

Median income, educational attainment, and race have been cited as impactful on the level of broadband access. To examine this question, I regress the scale of urbanity and these factors on first the number of jurisdiction websites and then the number of services provided.

Additionally, there are questions included in the survey on concerns and obstacles that jurisdictions have about implementing technology initiatives and government officials' perceptions of their technological offerings. I summarize these concerns across urban and rural areas.

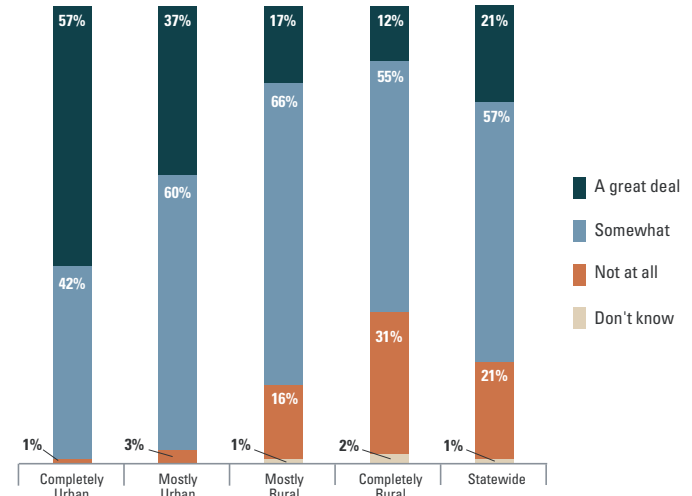
Engaging Citizens Through Technology

Statewide, there is a clear push for jurisdictions to engage their citizens through technology – whether that is through email blasts, social media announcements, or posted information on websites. More of than 70% of jurisdictions surveyed reported that they have tried to engage citizens either somewhat or a great deal through the technology. This number has likely risen since jurisdictions were surveyed, given that broadband access has increased since Fall 2012. Using technology to engage citizens has numerous benefits including more accessible access to government officials, more information about government activity, and more possibilities for jurisdictions to communicate with citizenry to make decisions.

While statewide the percentage of jurisdictions who engage citizens through technology is high, rates diverge significantly along the urban-rural spectrum. Almost all completely urban areas use some form of technology to engage citizens compared to less than 70% of completely rural areas (see *Figure 1*). The relationship between use of technology and urbanity of jurisdictions is strongly related. A regression between the two with technology use as the dependent variable found the relationship to be statistically significant even after controlling for median income, education attainment levels, and percentage of African American residents in the community. While the literature suggests that these additional factors have an impact on broadband presence, they do not have a large impact on the relationship between urbanity and technological citizen engagement.

Beyond the strong relationship between urbanity and technological citizen engagement, the most jarring statistic from this cross tabulation is the number of completely rural districts who use no forms of technology to engage citizens. As *Figure 1* demonstrates, approximately 35% of completely rural local governments use no technology to engage their citizenry. As technology is increasingly seen as a beneficial way to engage with citizens, this wide swath not using it could contribute to the rural penalties that citizens have experienced.

Figure 1
Extent jurisdiction tries to engage citizens through technology





Jurisdiction Official Website

Across Michigan, 73% of jurisdictions had an official website as of Fall 2012 (see *Figure 2*). This number aligns with the number of jurisdictions statewide who utilize technology to engage citizens, implying that websites could be the main vehicle of that engagement. Having one central hub for information on meetings, services, and communication information is a strong resource for jurisdictions to engage citizens.

Similar to the use of technology to engage citizens, the percentage of jurisdictions who have a website aligns directly along the urban-rural spectrum. While 99% of completely urban areas had a website, less than 60% of completely rural areas had a website at the time (see *Figure 2*). Completely rural areas lack access to both technological citizen engagement and the ability to engage directly with government through a website. Jurisdictions are less likely to reach them using technology and citizens have less ability to reach their local governments with technology further compounding a rural penalty. This difference among urban-rural districts is statistically significant and remains so even when controlling for median income, educational attainment levels, and percentage of African American citizens in the community.

Differences in Online Service Provision, But Not Satisfaction of Local Officials

Not only do the type of citizen engagement and the presence of a website affect urban and rural areas disproportionately, even if a rural area has a website, the content of the website and number of services delivered via the website is lower for rural areas. Of the services listed in the questionnaire, urban areas are more likely to offer each of the different types of online services than completely rural counterparts (see *Appendix B*).

While this trend holds across each of the online service categories, the differences are particularly pronounced when looking at two services areas: “taxes, services, and fines” and “posting electronic streams of meetings”. For the first, jurisdictions were asked to select whether they offer “taxes, services, fines, etc” online (see *Figure 3*). 59% of completely urban districts selected that they offer these services online, while only 12% of completely rural jurisdictions who reported that they do have websites checked the same. The distribution in mostly urban and mostly rural jurisdictions demonstrates a clear trend across the urban-rural spectrum. One of the central features of an e-government system is the ability to access these basic

Figure 2
Does jurisdiction have official website?

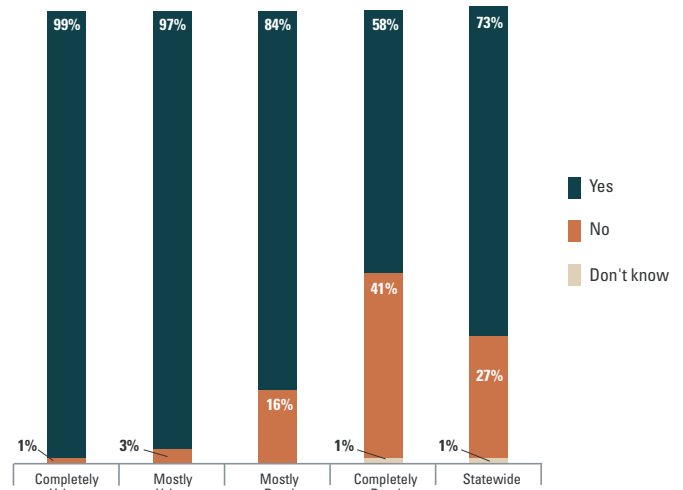
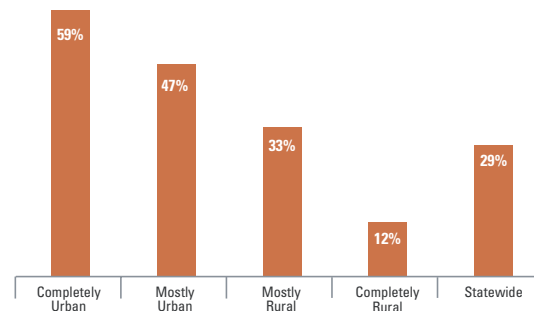


Figure 3
Does jurisdiction’s website offer online services – taxes, services, fines, etc?



services via an online platform. For both urban and rural residents, being able to access and complete services online would be a benefit in time and expense. Instead of having to drive to a government office, likely during regular working hours, to complete a request, a resident could access the service at their leisure. Not having access to these online services could contribute to a greater rural penalty.

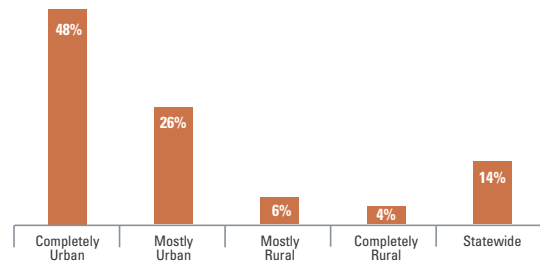
While providing governmental services online is an important component of how people interact with their governments, citizens also utilize jurisdiction websites to be engaged in the civic process. While 48% of completely urban districts posted videos of meetings online, less than 4% of completely rural districts did the same (see *Figure 4*).

Rural districts overall are less likely to have access to a jurisdictional website and if they do have access to that website, they are less likely to access online services or videos of meetings or hearings. These are just two highlights but they represent the variety of ways that living in a rural jurisdiction can affect access to information and services.

Notably, however, while websites may offer services at different levels across the urban-rural spectrum, jurisdictions have a similar grasp on the degree that their website is adequate for their citizens. Across the urban-rural spectrum, jurisdictions reported similar metrics when describing their websites (among those who had websites). Most jurisdictions either strongly agree or somewhat agree that information on jurisdiction websites is kept up to date (see *Appendix C*). Most jurisdictions also report that their website is easily searchable and is simple for citizens to search and find what they are looking for (see *Appendix D*). Most jurisdictions also agree that their website is sufficient for their citizens' needs and that their jurisdiction has adequate resources to maintain the website (see *Appendix E and F*). The distribution is relatively consistent across the urban-rural spectrum on all these metrics. This indicates that urbanity does not affect how a jurisdiction feels about their website offerings.

Thus, though rural communities tend to provide fewer online services, the local officials themselves are no less satisfied with these provisions. Rural jurisdictions may have a stronger hold on what their citizen's need to know or may have limited knowledge of the types of services that they could offer. For rural jurisdictions that recently set up a website, any new piece of technology may feel like an update that suits the needs of residents. Local governments operated before websites and so may feel like a website is auxiliary to the government's function instead of central. Urban jurisdictions may also feel like the services and content they offer online aligns with the needs of their residents. More information is needed on whether this is due to lack of knowledge about future website possibilities or a better grasp of how citizens access information and engage with their governments.

Figure 4
Does jurisdiction's website electronically post video of meetings and hearings?





Barriers to Tech Also Vary

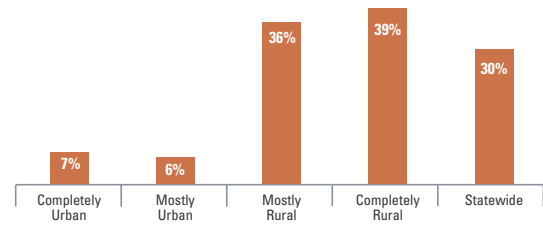
Just as the level of technology use differs across the urban-rural spectrum, the barriers to implementing technology noted by local officials also differed (see *Appendix H*). These differences were not as linearly related as the use of technology or number of services offered but there were a few different metrics on which they skewed either rural or urban. Overall, rural areas tended to point to reasons associated with access to high speed internet and tech expertise. Almost 40% of rural jurisdictions cited a lack of high-speed internet as an obstacle to implementing more technology. This is compared to only 7% of completely urban areas who cited the same reason (see *Figure 5*).

While rural areas tended to find barriers in access related to installing and implementing infrastructure, urban areas cited barriers more aligned with the policy of technology in government. For example, urban areas tended to cite issues related to privacy and compliance as barriers over rural areas. One possible explanation is that more urban areas have already set up jurisdiction websites and so barriers are mostly focused on making sure those pieces of technology comply with a complicated set of standards and requirements. Rural areas, on the other hand, are less likely to have access to broadband overall and so their main concern would be to overcome that obstacle.

Conclusion

Disparate levels of access to online information and government services can contribute to a “rural penalty”. While local governments have prioritized broadband access and adoption, it remains important to provide support to jurisdictions who may face additional barriers when setting up and updating official websites. While external data showing an urban-rural gap in broadband access persists, repeating the questions reported on here (from Fall 2012) on a future MPPS survey would provide clarity on patterns that rural and urban jurisdictions experience along the technology adoption process. Lastly, this report did not find that race was not a statistically significant factor correlating with jurisdiction-wide technology use. However, much of the literature suggests that communities with large African American population have more difficulties accessing technology adoption. More research is needed to compare within the urban-rural spectrum (instead of between) to examine technology access as an equity issue.

Figure 5
High speed internet is a barrier to implementing technology



Appendix A

| Michigan Broadband Availability Estimates by Speed Tier Among Fixed Technologies: Cable, DSL, Fiber, Fixed Wireless | | |
|--|-------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Speeds | % STATEWIDE Households served | % RURAL Households Served |
| 10 Mbps Download x 1 Mbps Upload | 98.57 | 97.85 |
| 25 Mbps Download x 3 Mbps Upload | 94.51 | 91.07 |
| 100 Mbps Download x 10 Mbps Upload | 91.43 | 85.81 |
| 1 GBPS Download | 30.95 | 19.28 |

Source: Connected Nation Michigan, Sept 2020

Appendix B

| Percentage of jurisdictions' official websites that offer service | | | | | | | | |
|---|--|------------------------------|---|--|-------------------------------|---|-----------------------------|---|
| | Online payment of taxes, services, fines | Online requests for services | Citizens email local officials directly | Citizens participate in a poll or survey | Citizens post comments online | Streams/posts video of jurisdiction hearings or meeting | Post meeting agendas online | Post meeting minutes and decisions online |
| Completely Urban | 59.41 | 51.79 | 87.87 | 36.16 | 31.09 | 48 | 88.25 | 81.24 |
| Mostly Urban | 46.86 | 54.54 | 86.13 | 32.27 | 38.24 | 26.10 | 79.23 | 88.90 |
| Mostly Rural | 33.40 | 51.04 | 84.76 | 22.92 | 24.93 | 5.83 | 66.97 | 84.29 |
| Completely Rural | 12.09 | 24.26 | 70.38 | 16.46 | 18.71 | 3.85 | 36.59 | 57.83 |
| Statewide | 29.29 | 39.20 | 78.59 | 23.49 | 25.73 | 14.29 | 57.74 | 72.43 |

Appendix C

| Agreement/disagreement that information on jurisdiction's website is generally kept up to date | | | | | |
|--|----------------|----------------|------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| | Strongly Agree | Somewhat Agree | Neither Agree/Disagree | Somewhat Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| Completely Urban | 44.31 | 42.87 | 0 | 11.09 | 1.73 |
| Mostly Urban | 49.40 | 40.15 | 3.99 | 5.51 | 0.95 |
| Mostly Rural | 47.40 | 37.48 | 5.18 | 6.72 | 3.22 |
| Completely Rural | 37.97 | 39.91 | 9.28 | 8.42 | 3.72 |
| Statewide | 43.28 | 39.85 | 6.13 | 7.71 | 2.72 |



Appendix D

| Agreement/disagreement that website makes it easy for citizens to find what they are looking for | | | | | |
|--|----------------|----------------|------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| | Strongly Agree | Somewhat Agree | Neither Agree/Disagree | Somewhat Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| Completely Urban | 30.59 | 52.28 | 7.11 | 90.15 | 0.87 |
| Mostly Urban | 42.20 | 42.89 | 6.74 | 6.76 | 0.45 |
| Mostly Rural | 42.21 | 44.47 | 5.25 | 5.95 | 1.55 |
| Completely Rural | 35.34 | 45.18 | 10.44 | 5.20 | 0.89 |
| Statewide | 37.73 | 45.33 | 8.17 | 6.19 | 0.91 |

Appendix E

| Agreement/disagreement that citizens make considerable use of website's information and resources | | | | | |
|---|----------------|----------------|------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| | Strongly Agree | Somewhat Agree | Neither Agree/Disagree | Somewhat Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| Completely Urban | 13.40 | 43.46 | 17.85 | 9.84 | 3.41 |
| Mostly Urban | 18.10 | 35.28 | 24.04 | 8.02 | 3.40 |
| Mostly Rural | 15.60 | 29.10 | 23.70 | 10.12 | 4.86 |
| Completely Rural | 7.94 | 29.69 | 29.15 | 11.51 | 3.73 |
| Statewide | 12.50 | 32.55 | 25.53 | 10.21 | 3.83 |

Appendix F

| Agreement/disagree that website is sufficient for citizens' needs | | | | | |
|---|----------------|----------------|------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| | Strongly Agree | Somewhat Agree | Neither Agree/Disagree | Somewhat Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| Completely Urban | 18.56 | 47.28 | 15.03 | 9.82 | 8.42 |
| Mostly Urban | 19.78 | 41.74 | 18.01 | 13.47 | 5.53 |
| Mostly Rural | 22.89 | 41.47 | 15.11 | 12.80 | 4.22 |
| Completely Rural | 21.66 | 39.52 | 15.30 | 14.45 | 5.26 |
| Statewide | 21.07 | 41.35 | 16.08 | 13.35 | 5.50 |

Appendix G

| Agreement/disagreement that jurisdiction does not have the resources to adequately maintain our website | | | | | |
|---|----------------|----------------|------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| | Strongly Agree | Somewhat Agree | Neither Agree/Disagree | Somewhat Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| Completely Urban | 5.65 | 15.12 | 21.64 | 23.69 | 33.89 |
| Mostly Urban | 4.37 | 20.54 | 17.15 | 18.38 | 39.55 |
| Mostly Rural | 4.46 | 14.93 | 23 | 14.29 | 41.68 |
| Completely Rural | 5.84 | 19.27 | 22.51 | 19.12 | 31.35 |
| Statewide | 5.20 | 18.27 | 21.20 | 18.58 | 35.59 |

Appendix H

| Barriers to implementing technology in jurisdictions | | | | | | | |
|--|--|-----------------|---|--|--|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| | Lack of high speed internet in community | Lack of funding | Lack of technical expertise among personnel | Lack of technical expertise among citizens | No particular leaders among juris. personnel | Resistance among juris. personnel | Lack of interest among citizens |
| Completely Urban | 7.10 | 45.43 | 28.98 | 15.25 | 25.38 | 8.55 | 25.58 |
| Mostly Urban | 6.40 | 35.74 | 43.55 | 21.72 | 21.39 | 13.18 | 23.82 |
| Mostly Rural | 36.22 | 28.40 | 40.80 | 19.06 | 25.13 | 13.49 | 21.48 |
| Completely Rural | 38.98 | 37.42 | 46.10 | 28.56 | 24.65 | 9.20 | 30.83 |
| Statewide | 30.42 | 36.36 | 43.47 | 24.84 | 24.22 | 10.50 | 27.75 |

| Barriers to implementing technology in jurisdictions | | | |
|--|----------------------------|--------------------------------------|---|
| | Issues of privacy/security | Issues concerns compliance with Acts | Concerns unrepresentative groups would dominate |
| Completely Urban | 18.53 | 16.98 | 15.10 |
| Mostly Urban | 13.49 | 10.56 | 13.60 |
| Mostly Rural | 7.70 | 9.63 | 6.19 |
| Completely Rural | 9.06 | 5.67 | 4.12 |
| Statewide | 10.37 | 8.03 | 6.95 |



Notes

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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.

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: <https://closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey>.

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' views on state's new approach to electoral redistricting (February 2021)
- COVID-19 pandemic sparks Michigan local leaders' concerns for fiscal health (December 2020)
- The functioning of democracy at the local level: a compendium of findings from the Michigan Public Policy Survey of local leaders (December 2020)
- Energy Issues and Policies in Michigan Local Governments (October 2020)
- Michigan local leaders expect increased challenges for the 2020 election, but are confident about administering accurate elections (October 2020)
- Michigan Local Energy Survey (MiLES): Intergovernmental collaboration on sustainability and energy issues among Michigan local governments (September 2020)
- Confidence in the accuracy of Michigan's 2020 Census count among local leaders was not very high, slips further (August 2020)
- 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)

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