



Gerald R. Ford
School of Public Policy



Perspectives from local government leaders in Michigan's rural communities

Presented to the
Michigan Municipal League Foundation
February 29, 2024

The Michigan Public Policy Survey

- **Census survey** – all 1,856 counties, cities, villages, and townships
- **Respondents** – chief elected and appointed officials
(County Board Chairs & Administrators, Mayors & City Managers, Village Presidents & Managers, Township Supervisors and Clerks)
- **Administered** – online and via hardcopy
- **Topics** – a wide range over more than a decade including: fiscal health, budget priorities, impacts of COVID-19 on Michigan communities, roads, public safety, water infrastructure, intergovernmental cooperation, employee policies, labor unions, local energy policies, Great Lakes, citizen engagement, much more.



MPPS is not a typical opinion poll

- **70%+** response rates
- **Transparency**
 - ~ Questionnaires online
 - ~ Pre-run data tables online
 - ~ Sharing of (anonymized) datasets with other researchers
- **Research partnership with Michigan local government associations and others**
 - ~ MAC, MML, & MTA
 - ~ The Fall 2019, 2021, and 2023 waves were funded in part by EGLE, the upcoming Spring 2024 wave is funded by the Joyce Foundation

MPPS response rates statewide (Fall 2023)

71% of all statewide – **1,315** governments total

By Population Size

67% of <1500 residents – 492
70% 1500-5000 – 474
74% of 5001-10,000 – 132
79% of 10,001-30,000 – 127
81% of >30,000 residents – 90

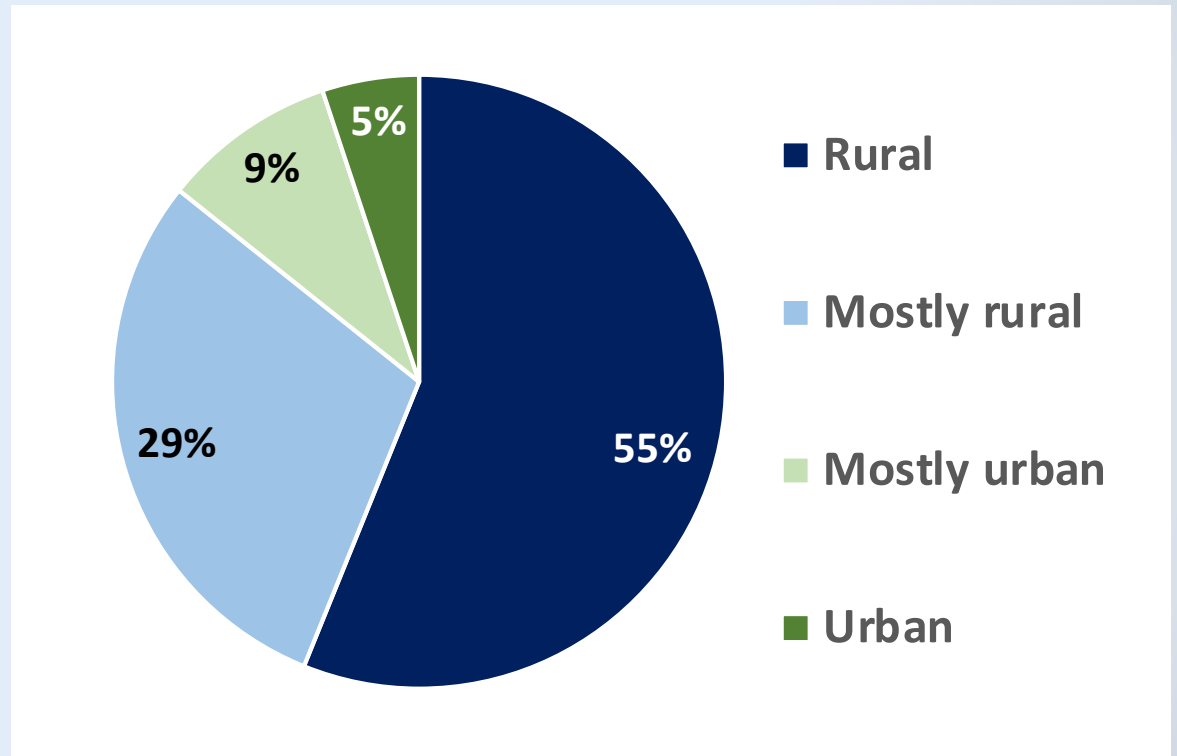
By Region

66% in the Upper Peninsula – 135
74% in the Northern LP – 235
72% in the Central West – 257
66% in the Central East – 227
73% in the Southwest – 217
73% in the Southeast – 244



Local officials' rural/urban self-identification

Survey question: “We are interested in learning more about policy issues according to whether communities are rural, urban, or somewhere in between. How would you characterize your jurisdiction?” (2023)

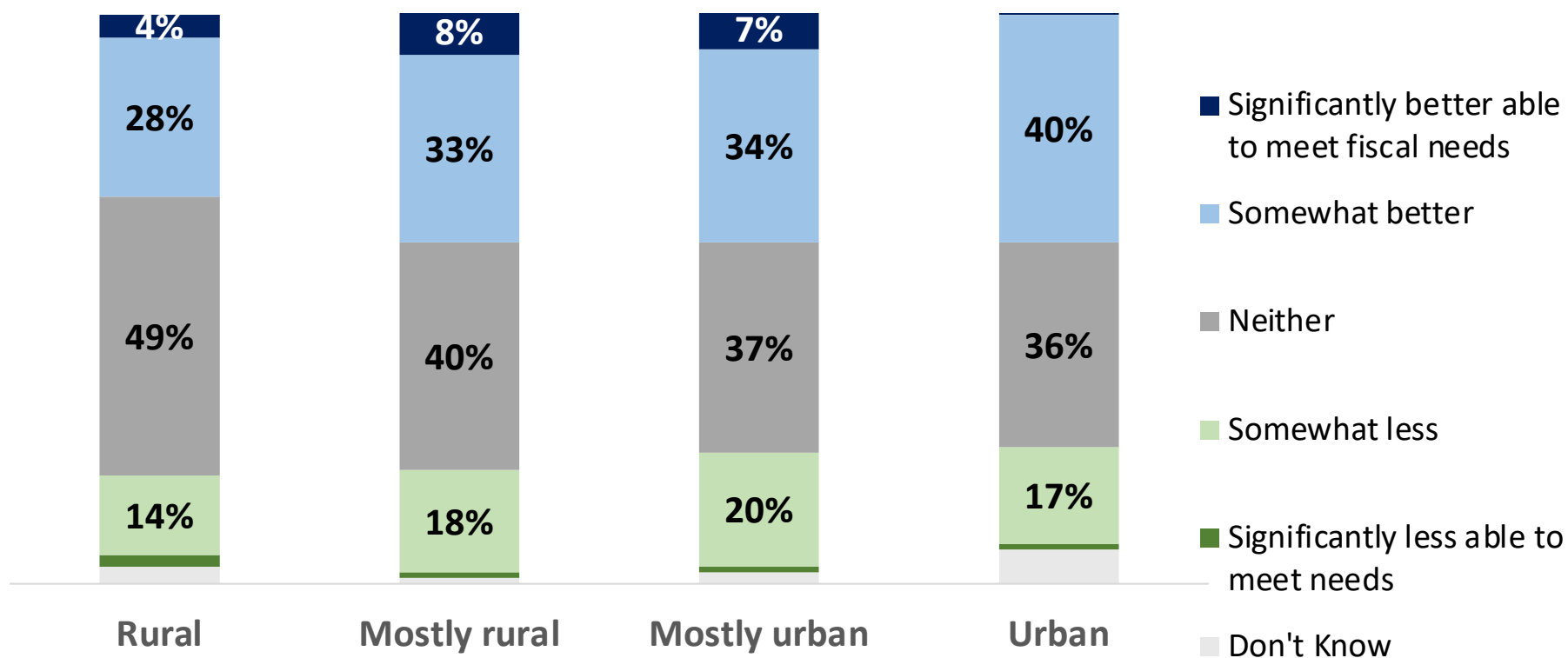




>> Michigan local officials' views along the urban-rural spectrum

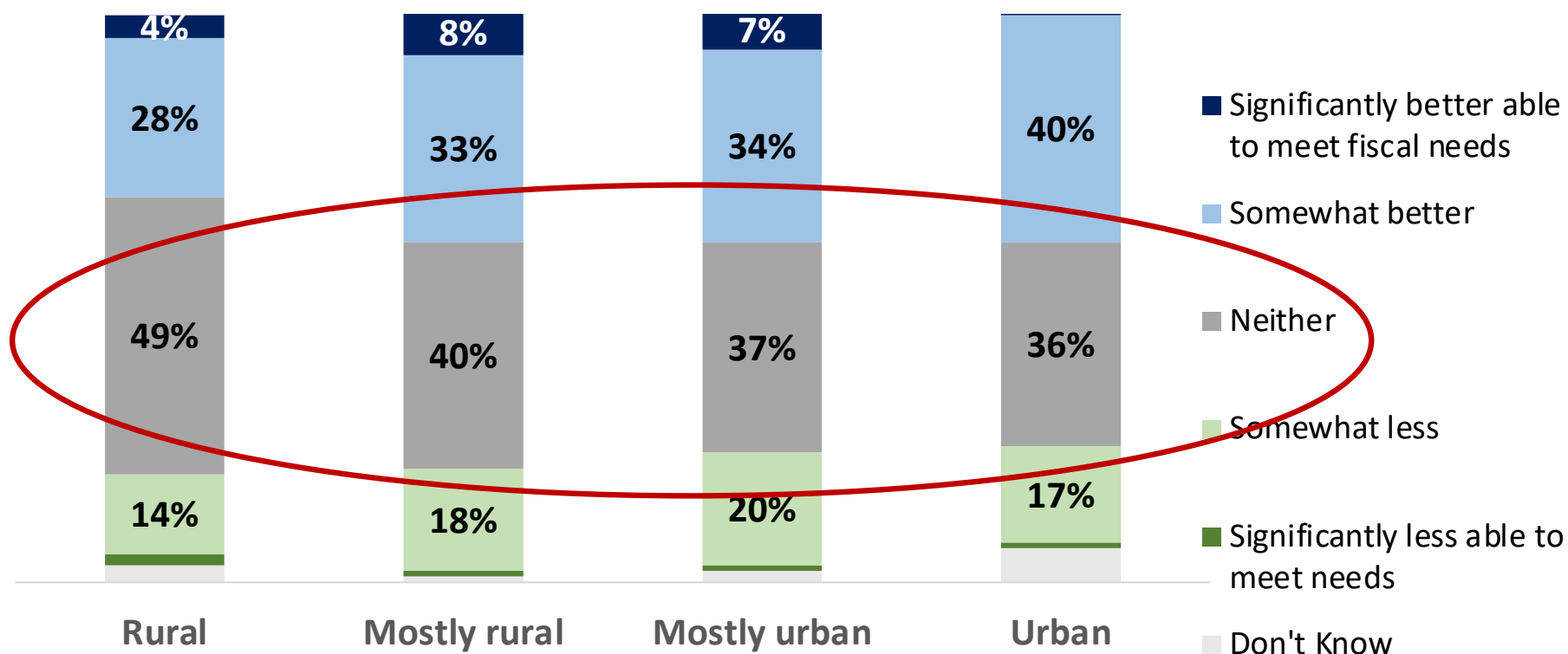
Rural governments' fiscal health less volatile

“Thinking about the financial needs of your jurisdiction, would you say that your unit of government is less able or better able to meet its financial needs in this fiscal year compared to the last fiscal year?” (2023)



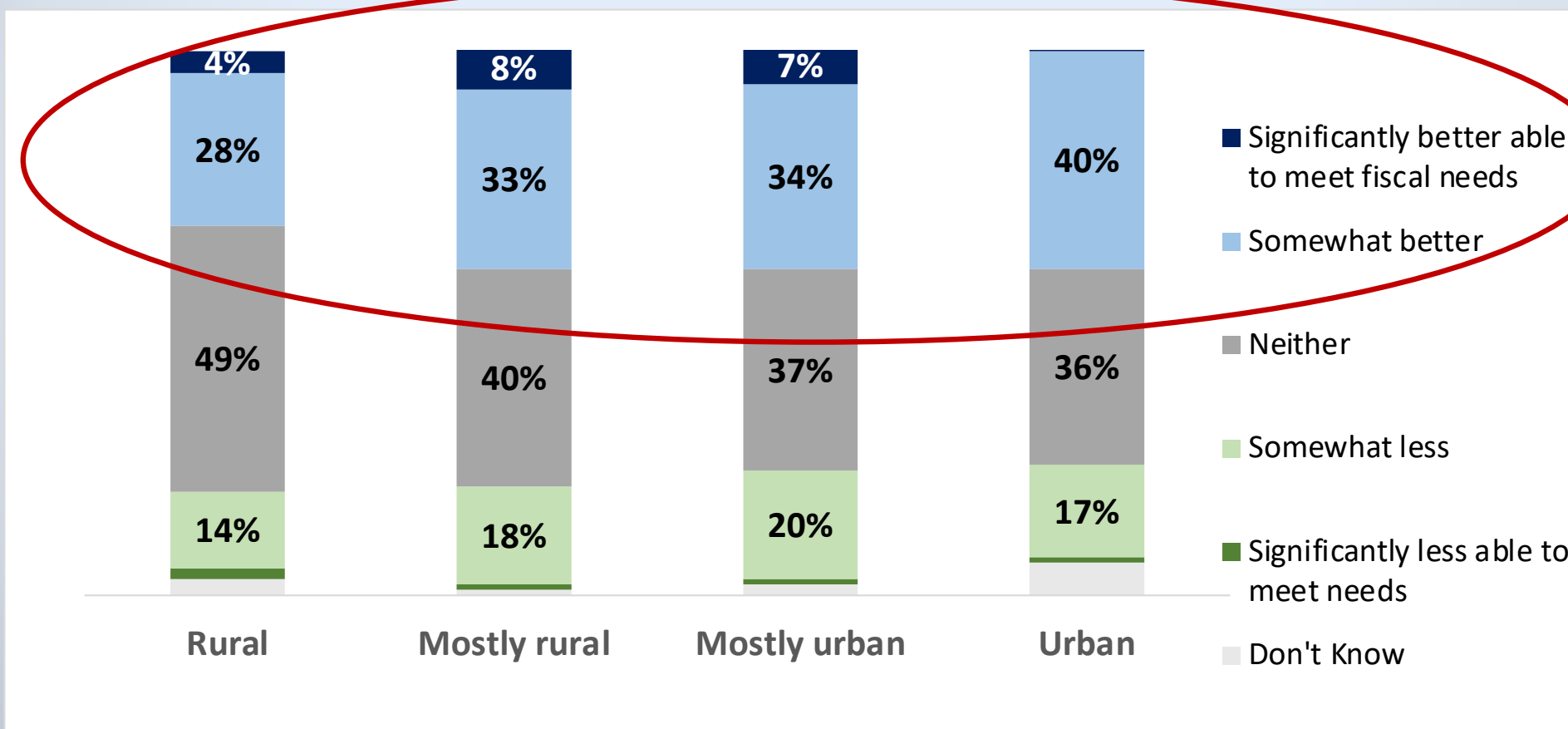
Rural governments' fiscal health less volatile

“Thinking about the financial needs of your jurisdiction, would you say that your unit of government is less able or better able to meet its financial needs in this fiscal year compared to the last fiscal year?” (2023)



Rural governments' fiscal health less volatile

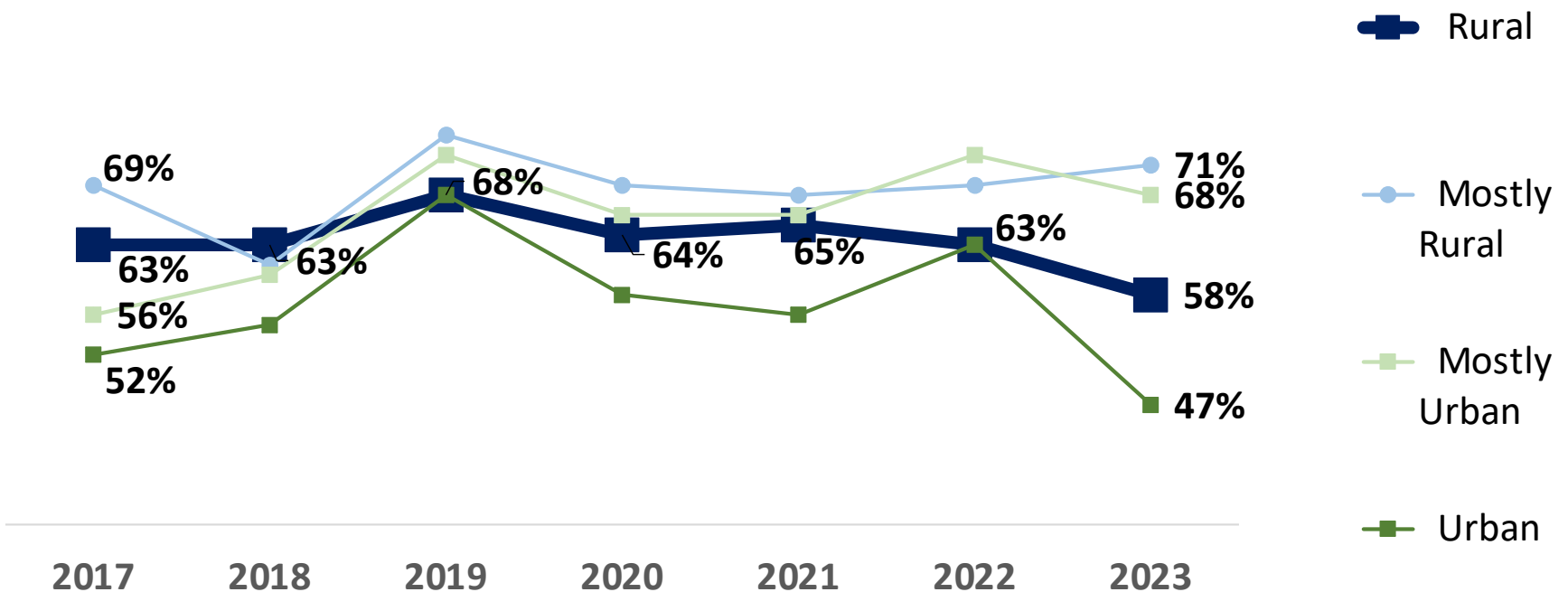
“Thinking about the financial needs of your jurisdiction, would you say that your unit of government is less able or better able to meet its financial needs in this fiscal year compared to the last fiscal year?” (2023)



Rural assessments of fiscal health lowest since 2017

“Thinking about the overall fiscal stress of your jurisdiction today and what you expect it to be down the road, including any future financial obligations it may have ...how would you rate your jurisdiction's overall fiscal stress today?” (2023)

Percentage of jurisdictions in 2023 reporting low fiscal stress (1-4 on 10-point scale)

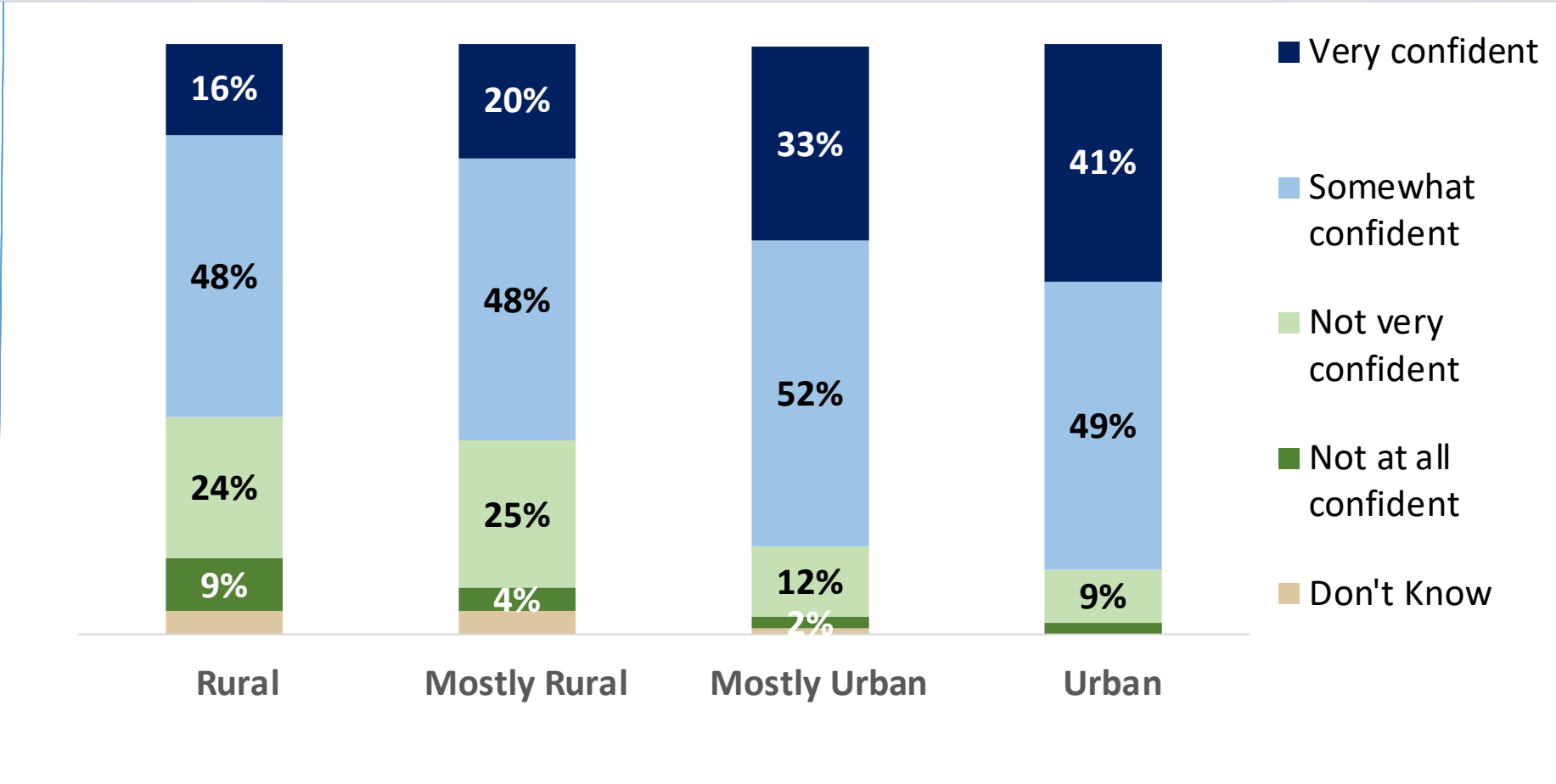




>> rural leaders more likely to have concerns with capacity

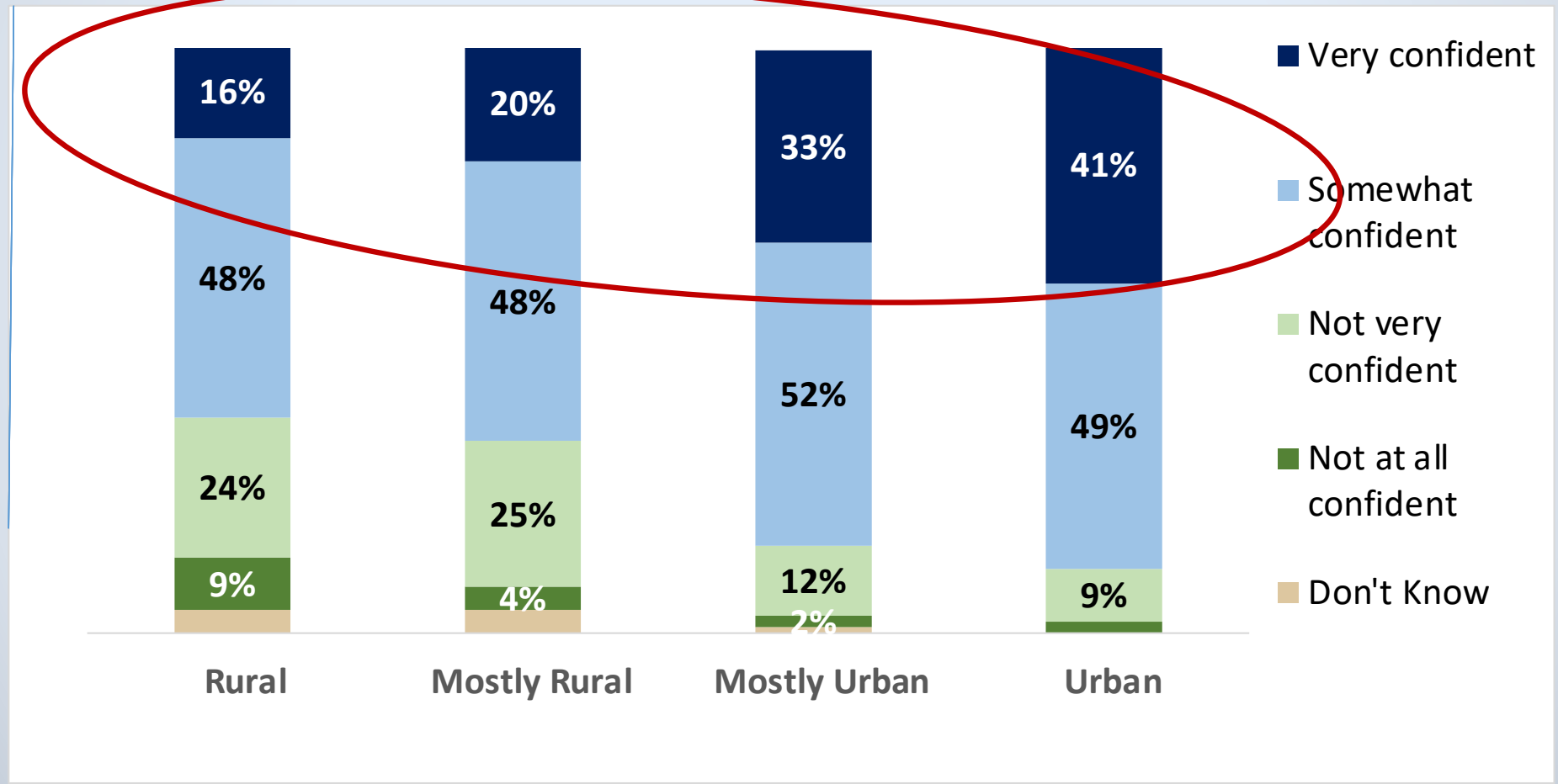
Rural officials struggle to pursue grant funding

“How confident are you that your jurisdiction can monitor opportunities for future state and/or federal funds or grants that may become available?” (2023)



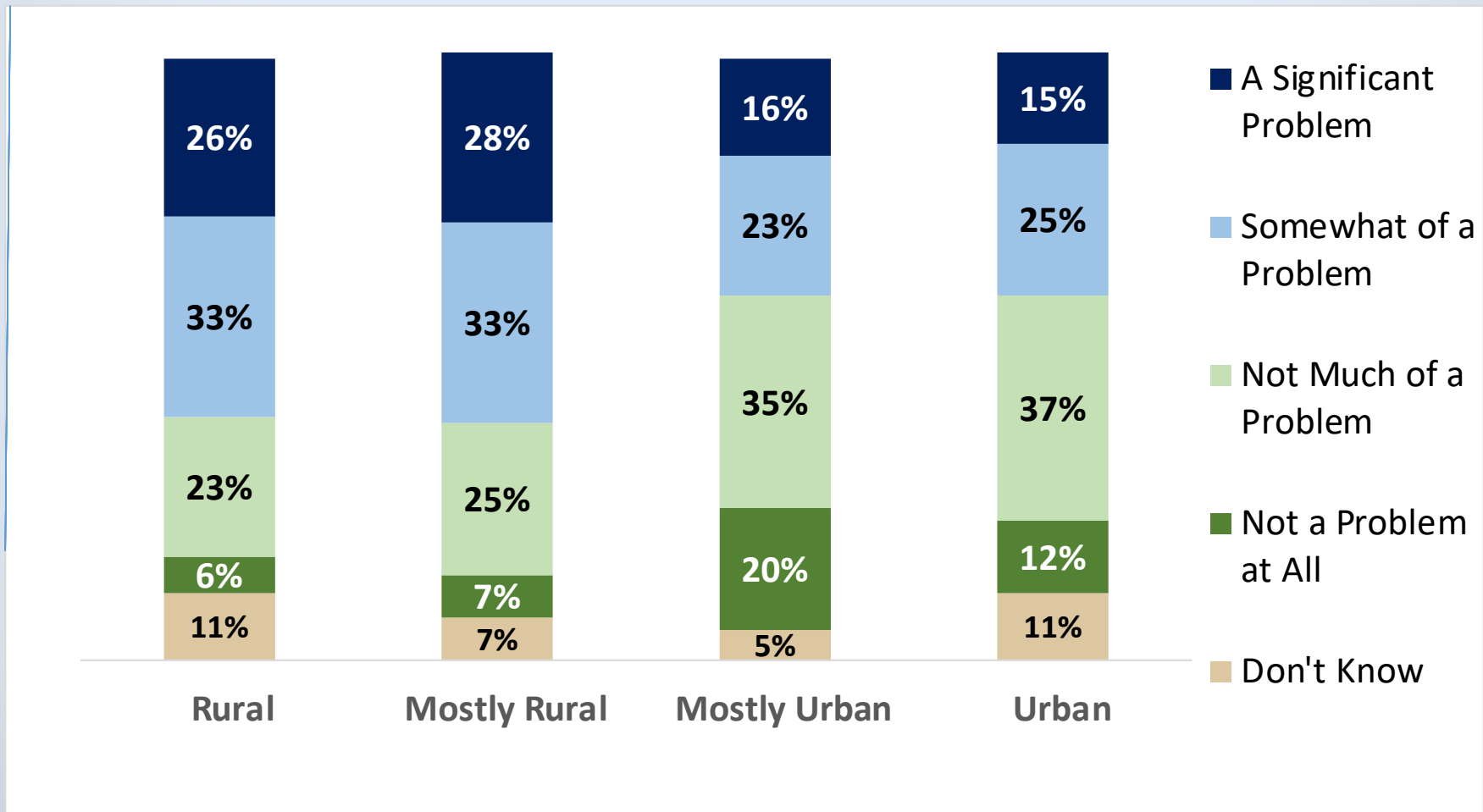
Rural officials struggle to pursue grant funding

“How confident are you that your jurisdiction can monitor opportunities for future state and/or federal funds or grants that may become available?” (2023)



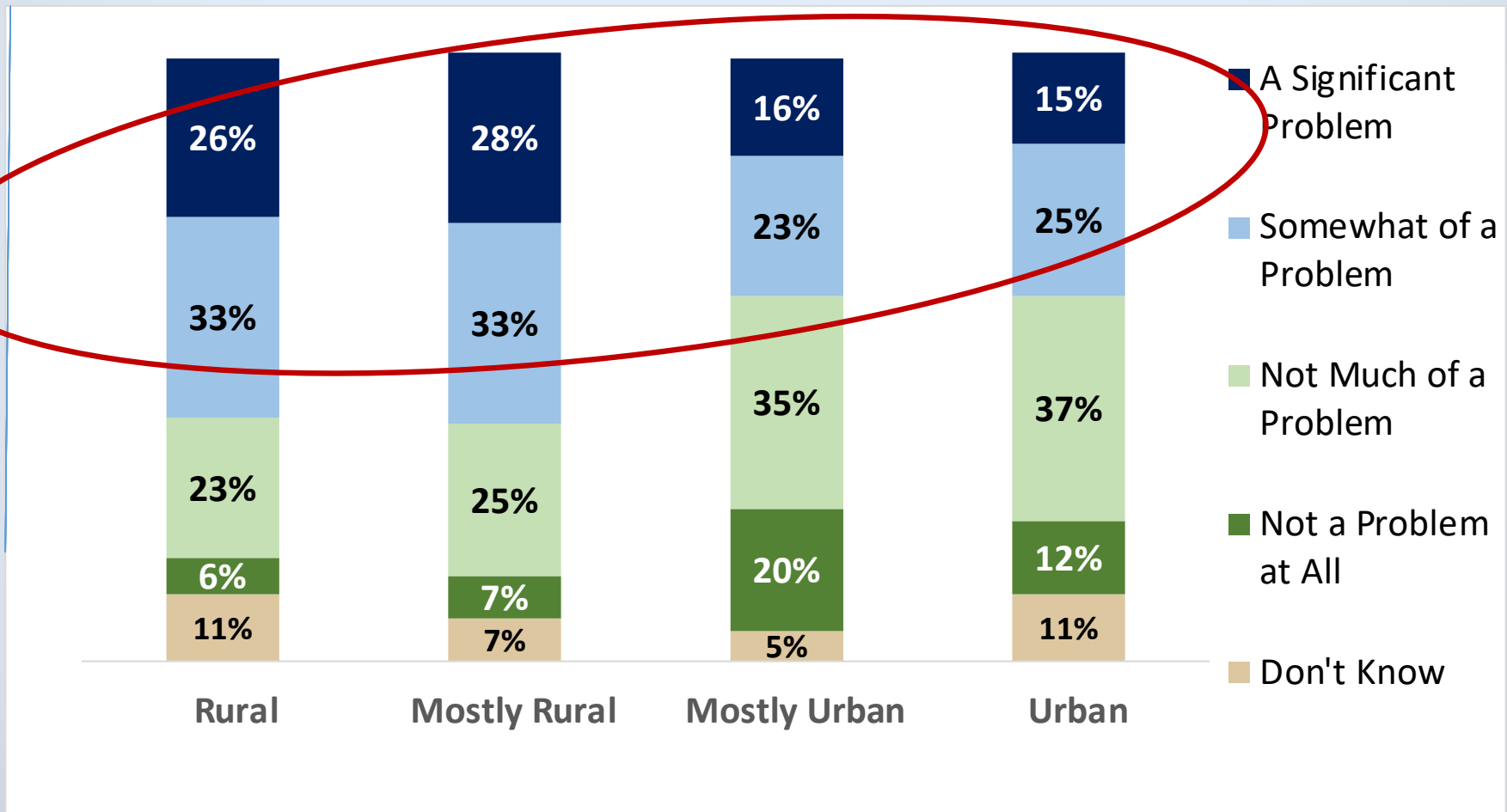
Rural officials struggle to make use of ARPA funds

“Is navigating state and federal bureaucracies a problem your jurisdiction is facing regarding the management and/or allocation of any ARPA funds?” (2023)



Rural officials struggle to make use of ARPA funds

“Is navigating state and federal bureaucracies a problem your jurisdiction is facing regarding the management and/or allocation of any ARPA funds?” (2023)

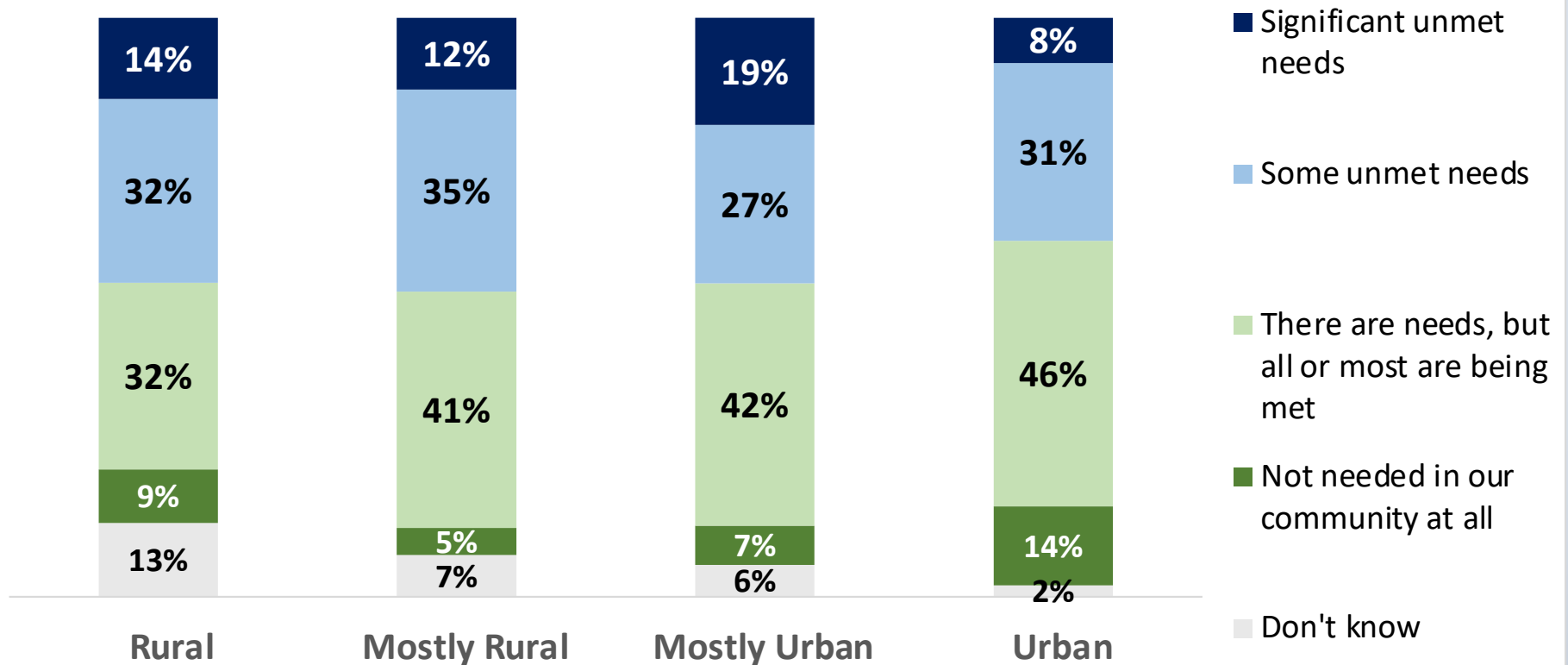




>> other rural community concerns

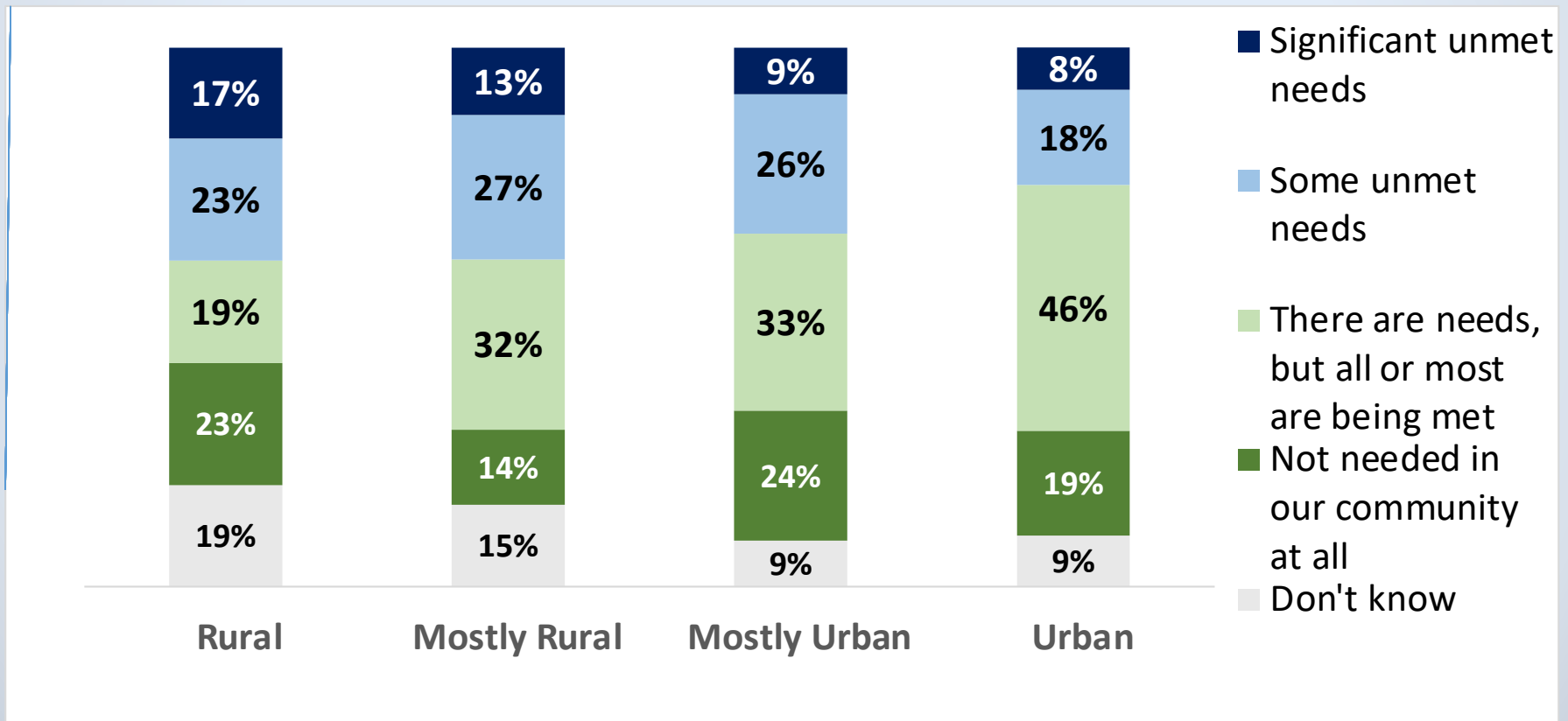
Concerns about rural affordable housing

“To the best of your knowledge, please indicate if affordable housing is needed by residents in your community to help make ends meet and — if so — whether those needs are being met.” (2018)



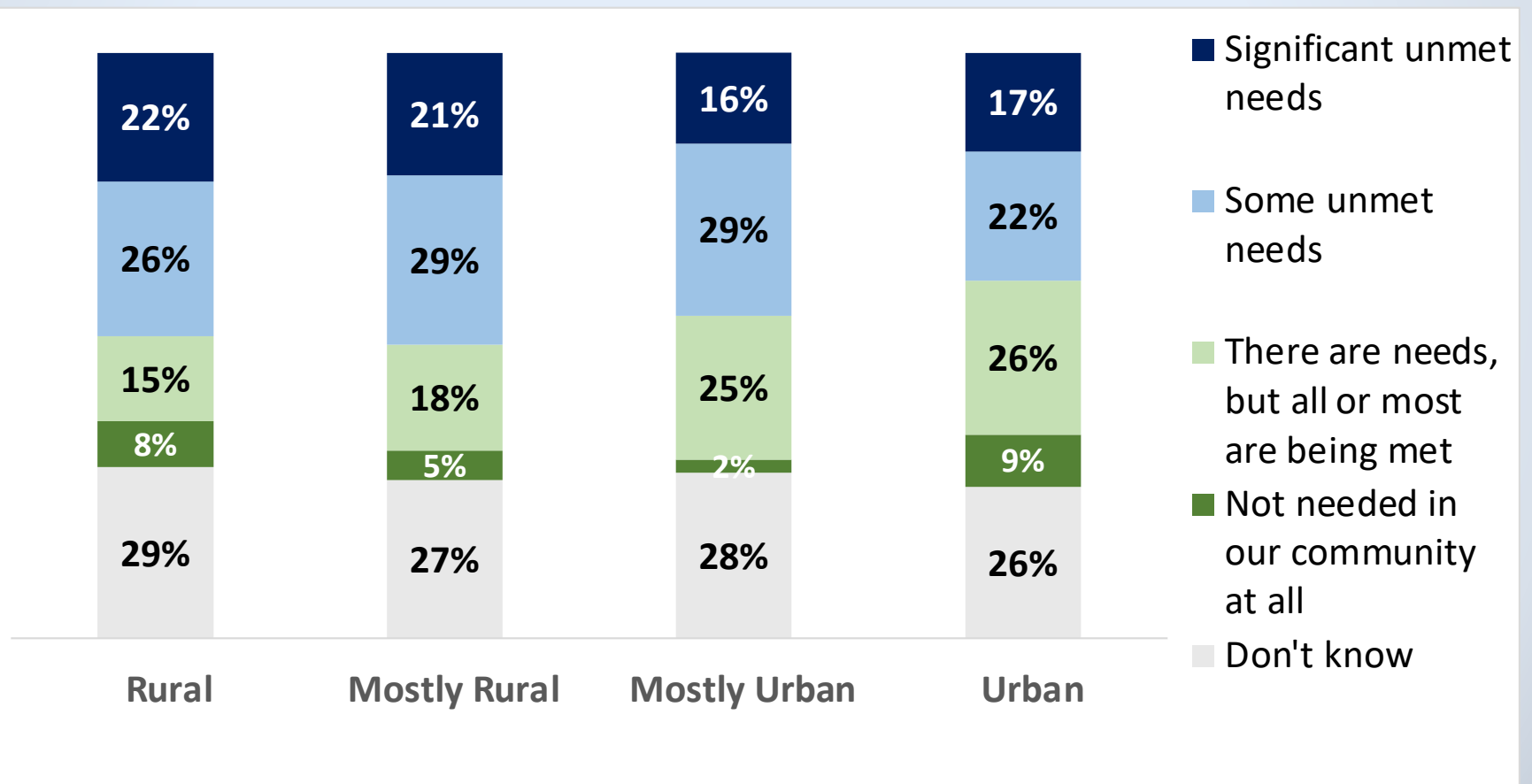
Concerns about rural emergency housing

“To the best of your knowledge, please indicate if emergency housing (homeless shelters, domestic violence shelters, warming centers, etc.) is needed by residents in your community...” (2018)



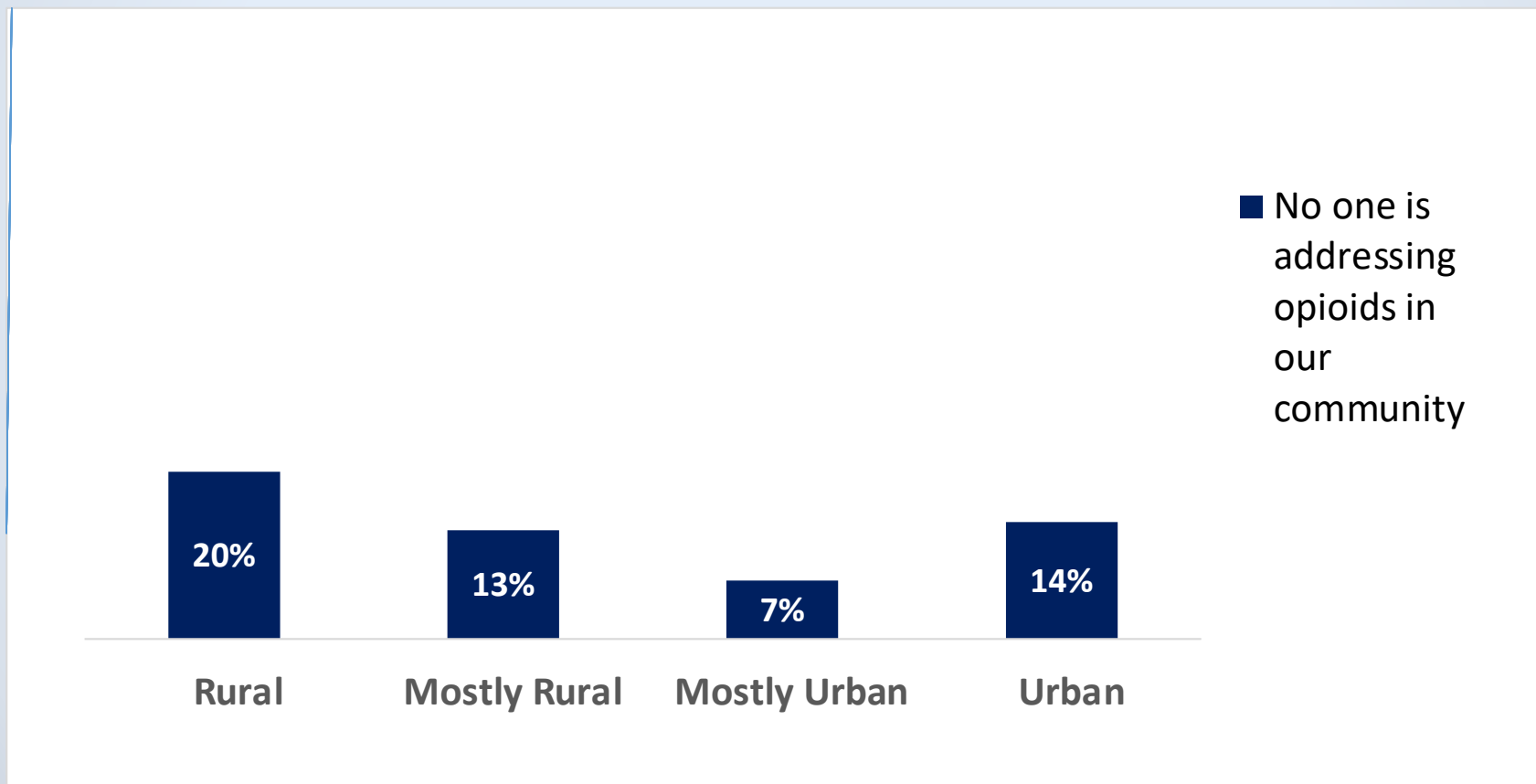
Concerns about rural public health

“To the best of your knowledge, please indicate if drug treatment programs are needed by residents in your community...” (2018)



Concerns about rural public health

"Whether or not there are currently any problems with opioids in your area, to the best of your knowledge, are any of the following actively addressing opioid issues in your jurisdiction?" (2019)

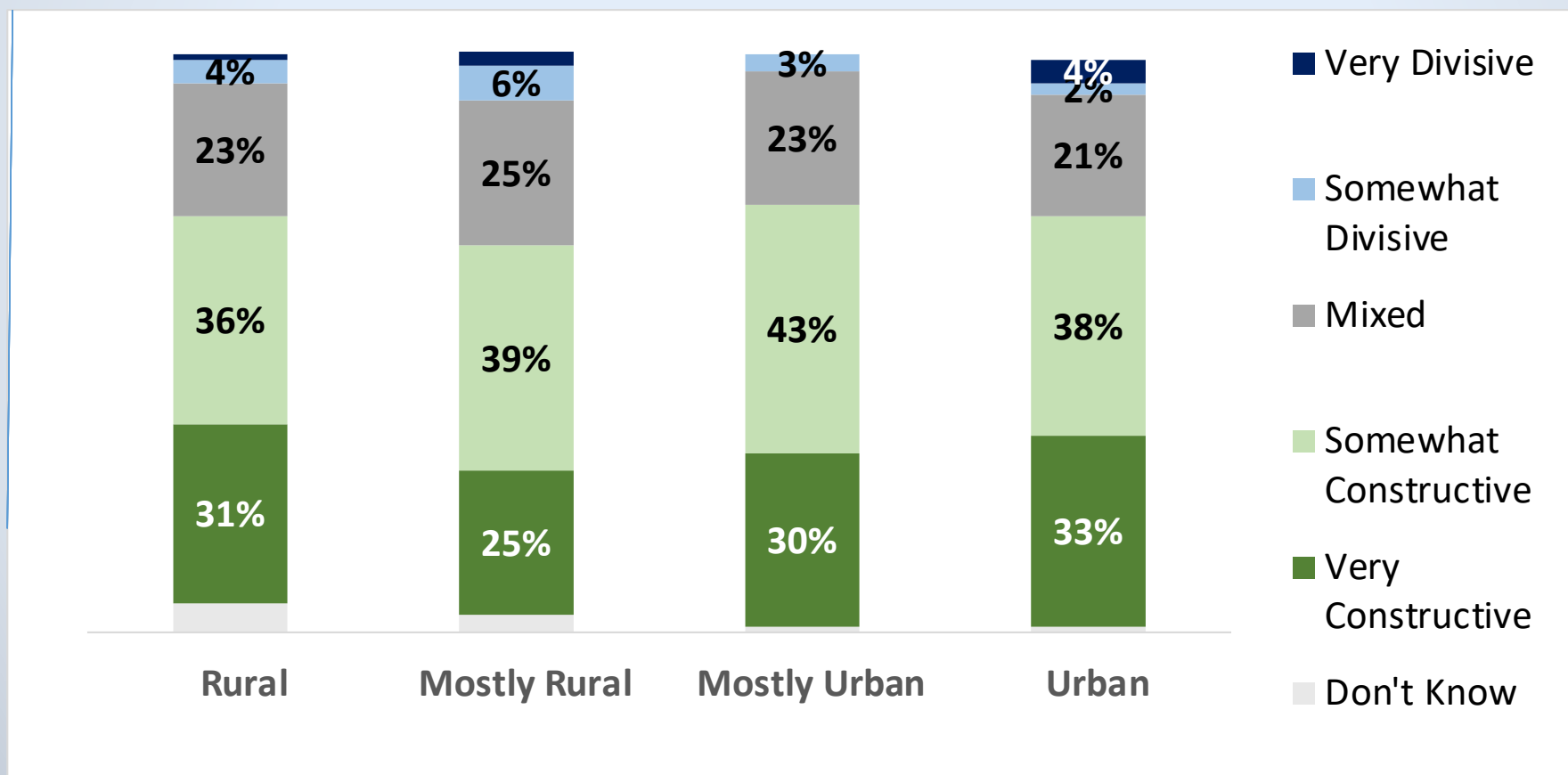




>> civic relationships in rural communities

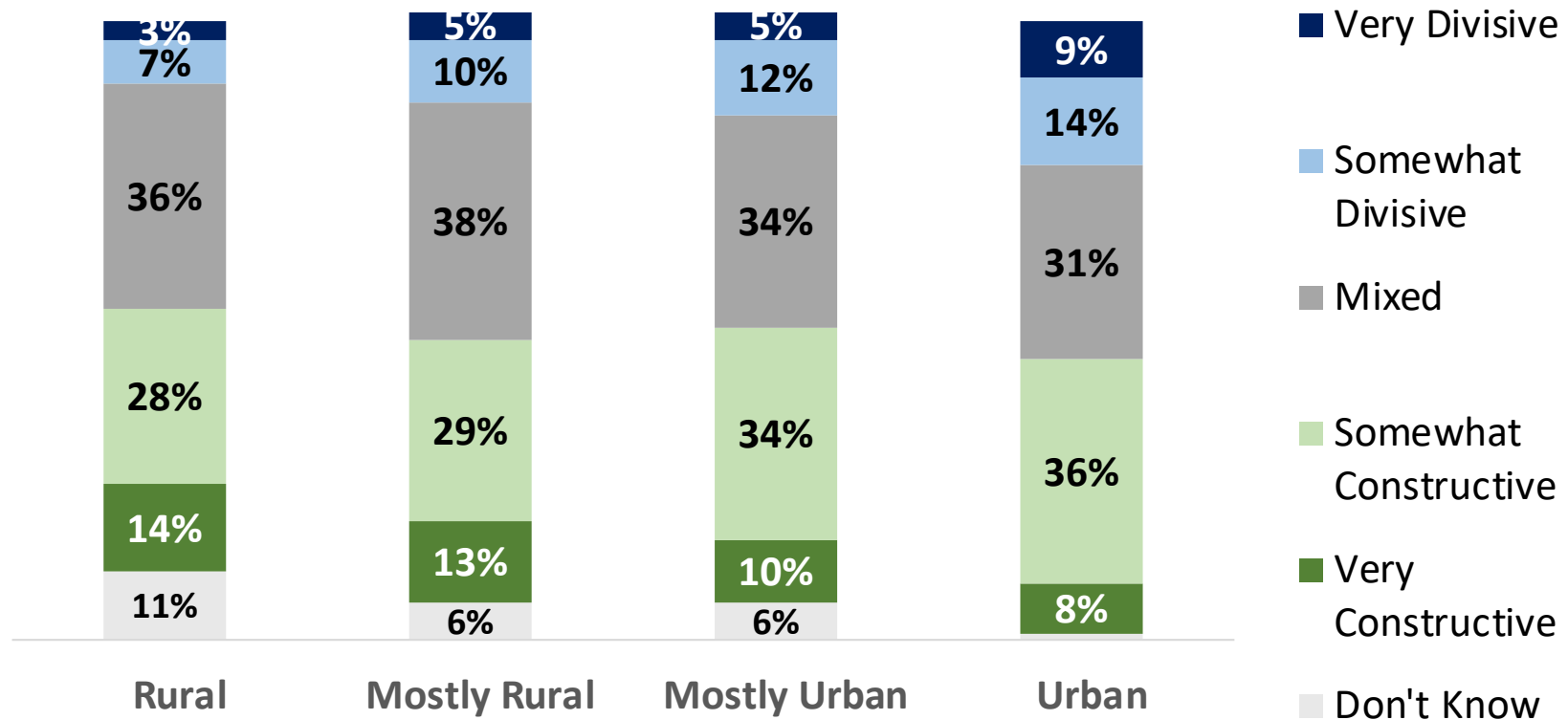
Civic discourse between leaders and residents similar across communities

“Thinking generally about the tone of discussion and communication that takes place around local policy issues, how would you describe the general state of public discourse between elected officials and residents within your jurisdiction?” (2022)



Discourse among residents in rural communities slightly more constructive

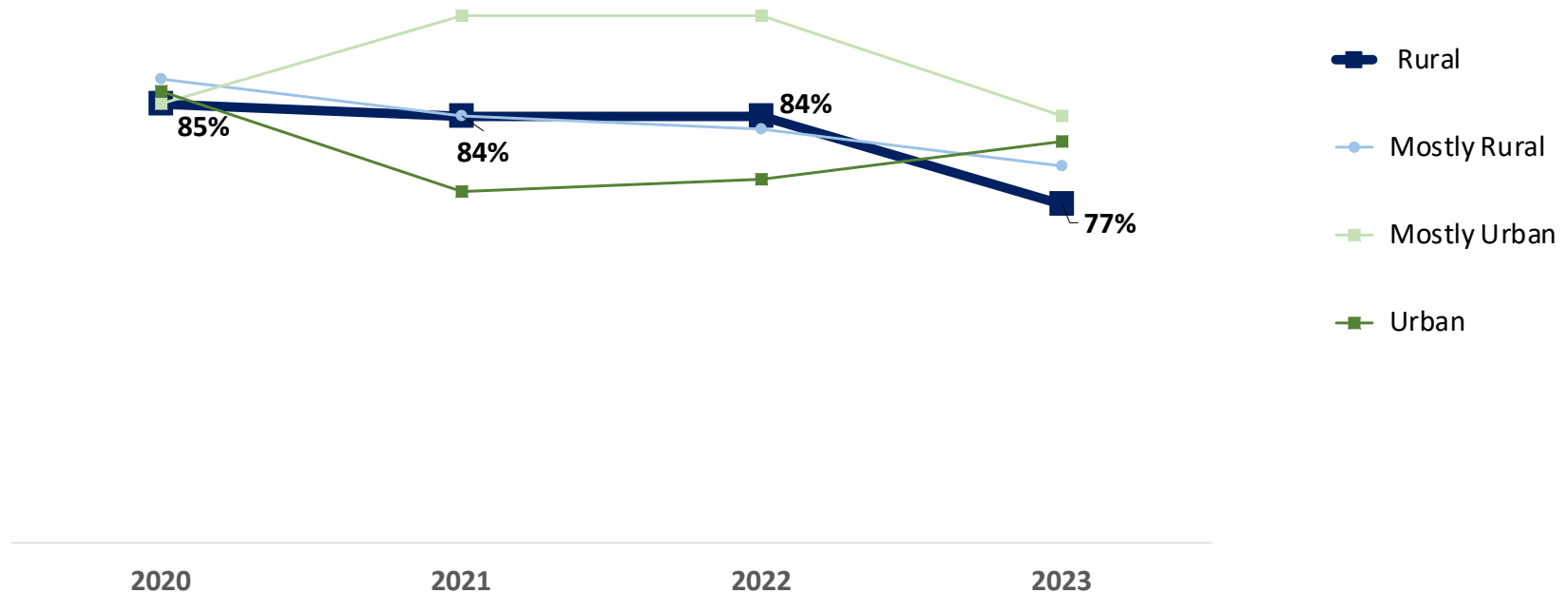
“Thinking generally about the tone of discussion and communication that takes place around local policy issues, how would you describe the general state of public discourse among residents themselves within your jurisdiction?” (2022)



Health of local democracy saw first ratings decline

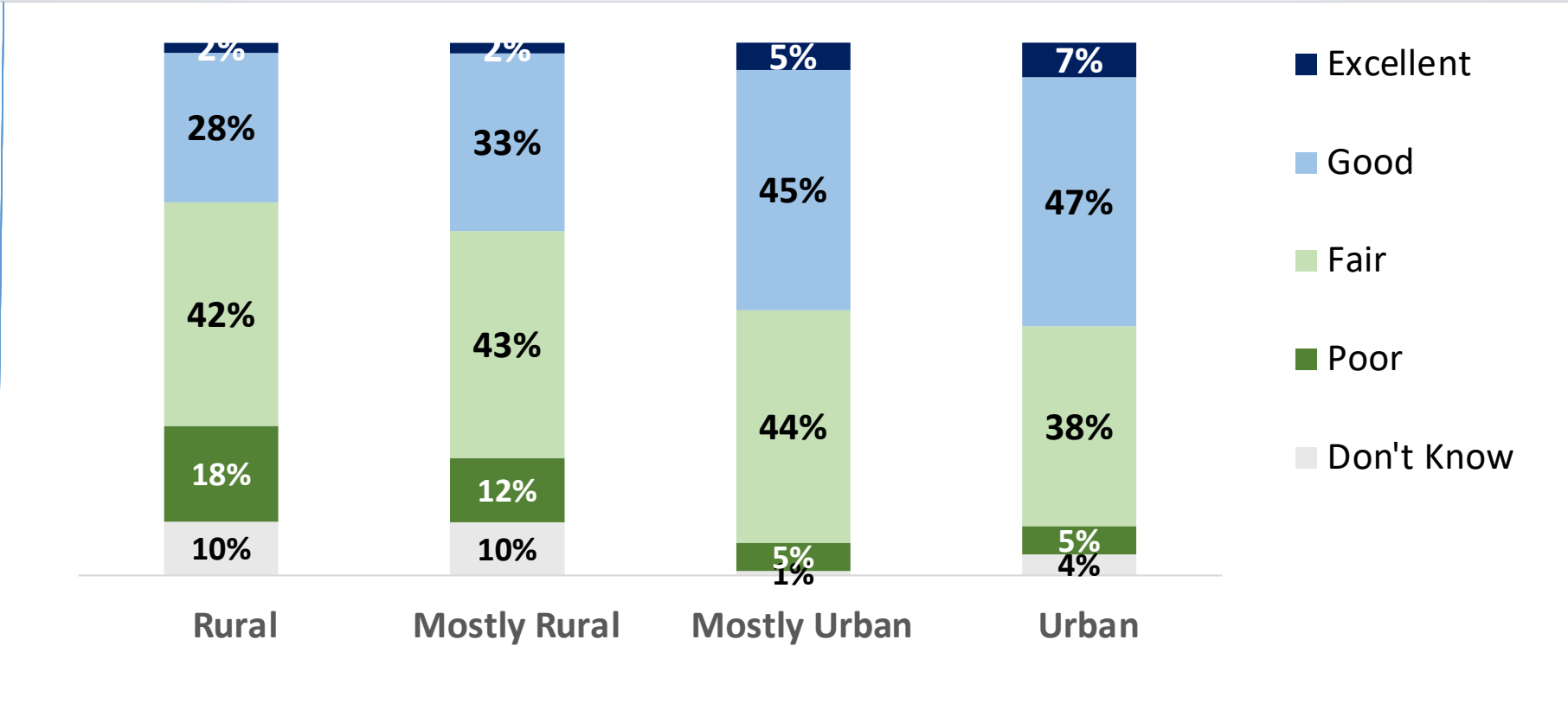
“On a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is a total breakdown of democracy and 10 is perfectly functioning democracy, how would you rate the functioning of democracy today in your jurisdiction?” (2000-2023)

Percentage of jurisdictions reporting high functioning local democracy (7-10 on 10-point scale)



Concerns about local relationships with Lansing

“How would you describe the overall relationship between the state government and your jurisdiction in particular?” (2023)



Takeaways:

- Greater overall stability in rural communities may be masking reasons for concern
- Rural leaders' concerns about local government capacity and resources
- Rural leaders' concerns about a wide variety of metrics of community health
- Recent signs of rural decline: fiscal health assessments, functioning of democracy



Gerald R. Ford
School of Public Policy



And for additional information on MPPS data

Web: www.closup.umich.edu

Email: closup-mpps@umich.edu or dhorne@umich.edu

Phone: 734-647-4091