



Michigan local government leaders remain confident about their election security and administration, though concerns about disinformation increase

By Debra Horner, Thomas Ivacko, and Hank Peters-Wood

This report presents the opinions of Michigan's township and city leaders on issues related to election administration in their jurisdictions, including confidence in election security and expected problems their jurisdictions might encounter. These findings are based on statewide surveys of local government leaders in the spring 2022 wave of the Michigan Public Policy Survey (MPPS), conducted between April 4 and June 6, 2022—prior to the August 2022 primary. It also contains comparisons to opinions expressed in the 2020 MPPS wave.

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). Respondents for the Spring 2022 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 1,327 jurisdictions across the state.



Key Findings

- When asked in spring 2022 to look ahead to the November election, Michigan township and city officials are now more confident in their jurisdiction's election security and ability to administer an accurate election than they were when asked a similar question in 2020.
 - » Regarding election security, 85% are "very" confident that their jurisdiction's final vote results, voting machines, and voter rolls will not be compromised, up significantly from the 63% who were very confident in all three aspects of election security in 2020. Meanwhile, 11% are "somewhat" confident, and just 2% are outright "not very" confident or "not at all" confident.
 - » Local officials are also more confident today that they would know if their election was compromised. This year, 78% are very confident they would know whether their voting machines, voter rolls, or vote tallies were compromised, up sharply from 58% in 2020.
 - » Overall, 92% are very confident in their jurisdiction's ability to administer an accurate election in November, up from 87% in 2020.
- The percentage of local officials who anticipate problems in 2022 regarding poll worker errors, equipment malfunctions, and voter registration list inaccuracies have all decreased substantially compared to 2020. Concerns about poll worker recruitment have also declined, though still nearly a third (32%) of city and township officials say it is a problem.
 - » Officials from the state's larger jurisdictions are more likely to anticipate problems in these areas, compared with those from smaller communities.
- Meanwhile, concerns over potential disturbances at polling places have risen slightly, with 9% statewide now expecting disturbances to be a problem, including over a quarter (27%) of local leaders from the state's largest jurisdictions (those with more than 30,000 residents). Also, nearly one in five (19%) statewide now say intentional disinformation about voting targeted at their jurisdiction's citizens is a problem, including 29% from the largest jurisdictions.
- Despite overwhelming certainty that their own elections will be accurate, just over half of local officials statewide (52%) believe their own residents are very confident in the accuracy of their community's elections. However, few (5%) say their residents are outright not very confident or not confident at all.

Background

Election security and administration are high-priority topics in the state of Michigan, intensified by the experience of the 2020 presidential election and the persistent and false claims of election fraud.¹ In response, several official investigations were undertaken that confirmed the 2020 Michigan election was accurate and correctly decided. In 2021, a 55-page report produced by a Michigan State Senate Oversight Committee of three Republicans and one Democrat “exhausted every resource available to it to thoroughly and faithfully examine our elections process in Michigan and drill down on claims and testimony specific to the 2020 election” and thoroughly debunked a wide range of false claims about election fraud in the state.² A separate review by the Michigan Auditor General’s Office recommended a number of improvements the Board of Elections should undertake to various aspects of election security, auditing, and training, but concluded that over 99% of ballots were legally cast and properly counted in 2020.³

Even as the 2022 election cycle plays out, the security of voting machines has remained in the spotlight. For example, on Aug. 5, 2022, Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel’s office formally sought the appointment of a special prosecutor to consider potential criminal charges against nine individuals over allegations of tampering with vote tabulation machines after the 2020 election.⁴ Fortunately, there have been no substantive claims of fraud or tampering occurring in the August 2 primary election earlier this year.⁵

Beyond the security of voting equipment, city and township clerks—the local government officials charged with administering local elections—have faced numerous recent changes to and challenges for election administration, from 2018’s constitutional expansion of voter registration and absentee ballot access⁶ to safety concerns for in-person voters and poll workers during the COVID-19 pandemic.⁷

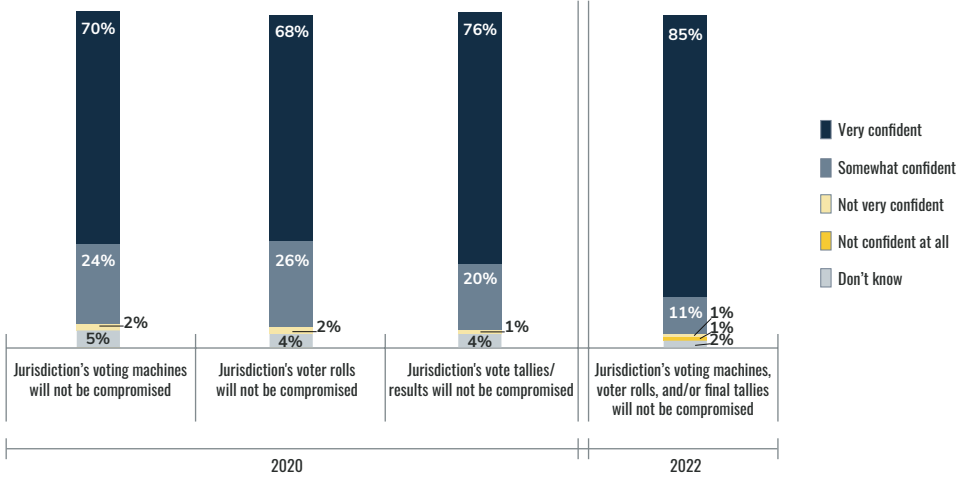
Meanwhile, the 2022 MPPS survey found more than a quarter of Michigan counties, cities, and townships (29%) report that clerks and other election staff have been subject to harassment, threats, or even violence over the past few years.⁸ And within the past few months, many clerks nationwide⁹—including here in Michigan¹⁰—have been swamped by a coordinated campaign of requests for 2020 voting records, possibly intended to hinder election offices’ work and confound the smooth running of the upcoming general election in November 2022. Finally, in an open letter to state legislators, the Michigan Association of Municipal Clerks and Michigan Association of County Clerks expressed concerns that there has been “zero increase in state funding, no pre-processing of absentee ballots to ensure more timely and accurate tabulation and no substantive changes to address voter concerns” and called upon them to implement “improvements that lead to better run elections [which would] have the power to lessen the tensions of mistrust and unite us in a common goal of accessible and secure elections.”¹¹

In order to understand whether these and other ongoing challenges threaten the accuracy and timely administration of the upcoming November 2022 elections in Michigan, the Spring 2022 MPPS asked officials at the local level across the state a series of questions regarding election administration in their jurisdictions, mirroring ones asked two years ago.¹²

Local officials have increased confidence in local election security

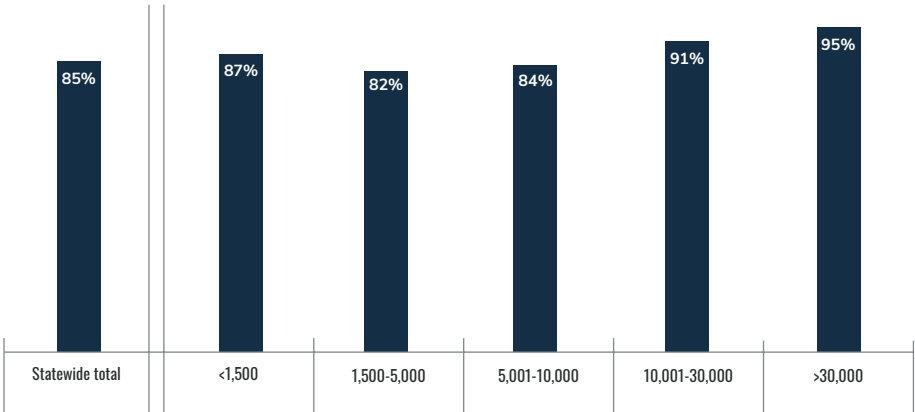
In spring 2022, the MPPS asked city and township officials about their confidence that their jurisdiction’s voting machines, voter rolls, and/or final tallies will not be compromised (i.e., tampered with or hacked) in the November 2022 general election. The vast majority (85%) statewide are very confident that final vote tallies or results, voting machines, and voter rolls will not be compromised (see *Figure 1*). Although over one in ten local leaders (11%) are only somewhat confident in their election security, very few are not very confident (1%) or not confident at all (1%). This represents a significant improvement over views in 2020, when local officials were asked about their confidence in each element of security separately and were significantly less confident in each case.¹³ Looking at views on all three of elements together—the security of voting machines, voter rolls, and final tallies— only 63% of officials were very confident prior to the election in 2020 compared with 85% today.

Figure 1
Local officials’ confidence in elements of local election security for the November election, 2020 vs. 2022



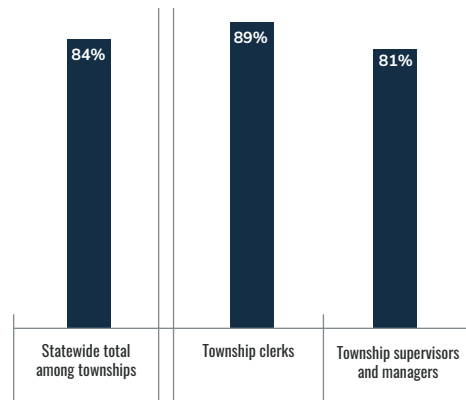
Officials from Michigan’s larger cities and townships—those with over 10,000 residents—are the most likely to express confidence in their jurisdiction’s election security, with more than 90% saying they are very confident the 2022 general election in their city or township will not be compromised (see *Figure 2a*). Still, confidence is high, regardless of community size.

Figure 2a
Percentage of local officials who are “very confident” in all three elements of local election security looking ahead to November 2022, by jurisdiction size



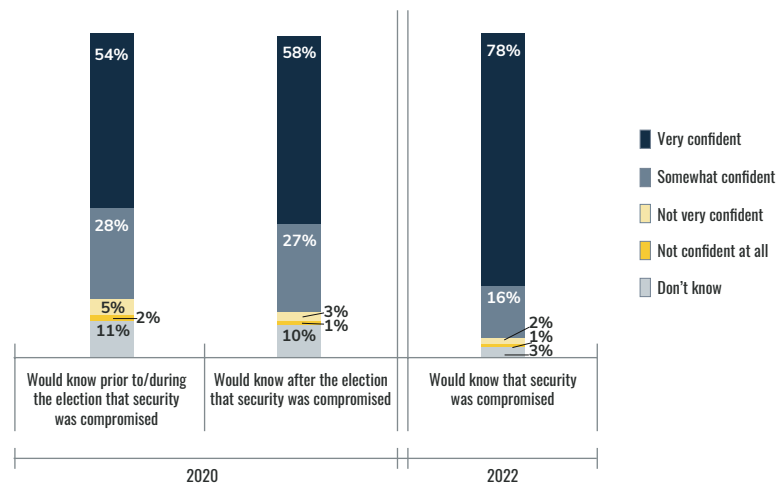
Because city and township clerks are the officials that administer elections in their jurisdictions, the MPPS has previously compared their views with those of other elected and appointed officials and found that clerks have in the past been more confident than other officials in their election administration.¹⁴ Although the 2022 MPPS wave did not gather data from a representative sample of city clerks to make a comparison with other city officials, among township leaders, once again township clerks are even more likely to say they are very confident in their township’s election security (89%) compared with township supervisors and managers (81%).

Figure 2b
Percentage of township officials who are “very confident” in all three elements of local election security looking ahead to November 2022, by township position



Local leaders are also more confident in 2022 than they were two years ago in their jurisdiction’s ability to detect compromised election security. As shown in *Figure 3*, 78% are very confident they would know whether their election systems (including voting machines and technology, rolls, or tallies) had been compromised in November 2022, while 16% are somewhat confident. Very few are not very confident (2%) or not at all confident (1%), although this does equate to approximately 46 cities and townships across the state. By comparison, in 2020, 54% were very confident they would know if their systems had been compromised before or during the election, and 58% were very confident they’d know after the election was completed. Notably, only 3% of local leaders in 2022 say they don’t know whether their jurisdiction would be able to detect compromised election security, down substantially from the 10–11% who said so in 2020.

Figure 3
Local officials’ confidence in their jurisdiction’s ability to detect compromised election security, 2020 vs. 2022



When comparing by jurisdiction size, officials from the state’s largest communities (83%) express high confidence that they would know whether their jurisdiction’s election security had been compromised, but 81% from Michigan’s smallest communities—those with fewer than 1,500 residents—are very confident as well (see *Figure 4a*). In fact, confidence is high across communities of all sizes.

And, as shown in *Figure 4b*, township clerks (82%) are again even more likely to say they are very confident their township will detect any problems with local election security compared with other township officials (74%).

Figure 4a
Percentage of local officials who are “very confident” in their jurisdiction’s ability to detect compromised election security in November 2022, by jurisdiction size

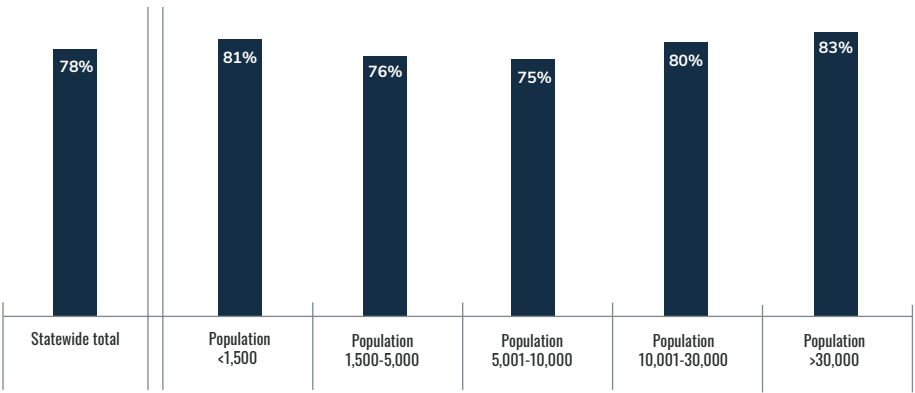
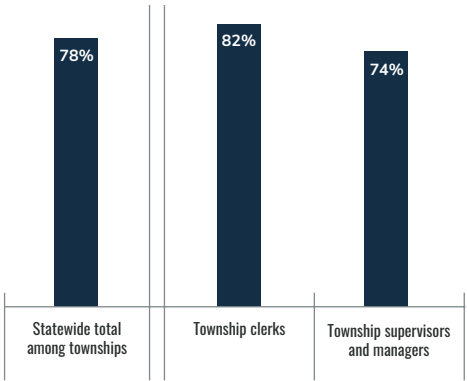


Figure 4b
Percentage of township officials who are “very confident” in their township’s ability to detect compromised election security in November 2022, by township position



Local officials generally expect fewer problems this year compared to their predictions before the November 2020 election, but recruiting poll workers is still a challenge for many

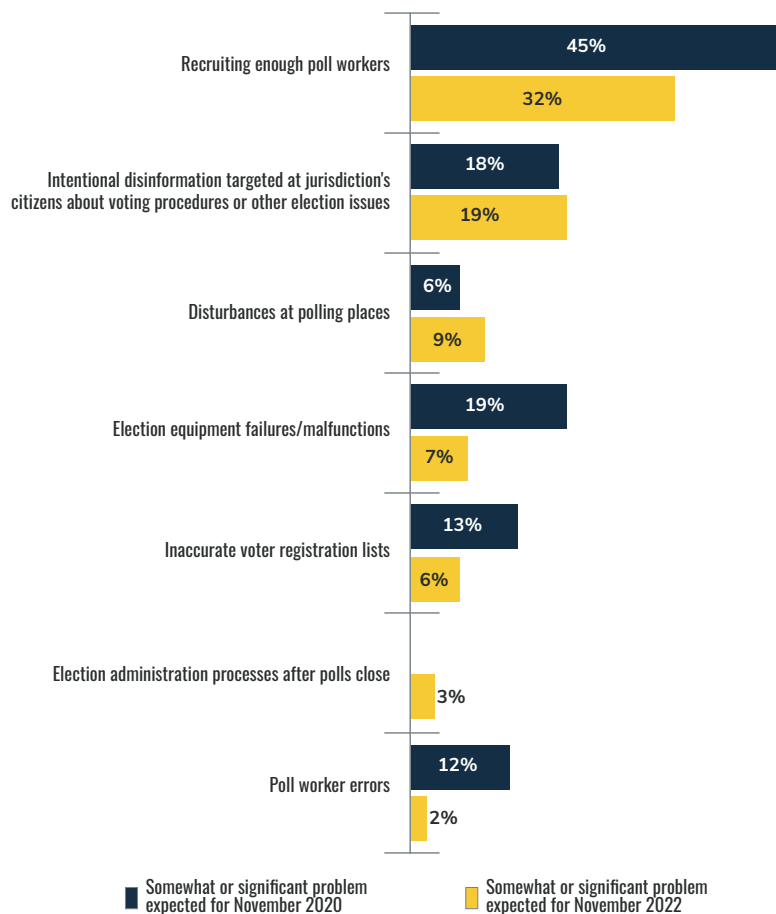
The MPPS asked local leaders in both 2020 and 2022 about expectations regarding a number of potential election administration problems in their jurisdictions during the upcoming November election. Michigan local officials statewide tend to be less concerned about potential administration problems in 2022 compared to the lead up to November 2020. In particular, as shown in *Figure 5*, the percentage who report somewhat or significant potential problems declined by more than half for three categories: equipment malfunctions or failures (19% to 7%); poll worker errors (12% to 2%); and inaccurate voter registration lists (13% to 6%). Additionally, concerns over poll worker recruitment decreased substantially, although still nearly a third of cities and townships (32%) say finding poll workers for the November 2022 general election is a problem.

Two areas of concern have increased slightly this year. When it comes to potential problems with intentional disinformation targeted at citizens about voting procedures or other election issues, 19% of Michigan city and township leaders view this as a potential problem in November 2022, compared with 18% who said the same in 2020. In addition, 9% expect disturbances at polling places, including inappropriate campaigning or voter intimidation, will be somewhat of a problem or a significant problem, up from 6% in 2020.

One additional item asked in 2022 that was not included in 2020 addresses potential concerns about election administration processes after polls close (for example, counting absentee ballots, precinct reconciliation, certifying the final tally, etc.). As of spring 2022, just 3% of local leaders expect administrative problems with these activities after polls close this coming November, equating to approximately 46 cities and townships statewide.

Figure 5

Local officials' assessments of expected problems with election administration in their township or city, 2020 vs. 2022

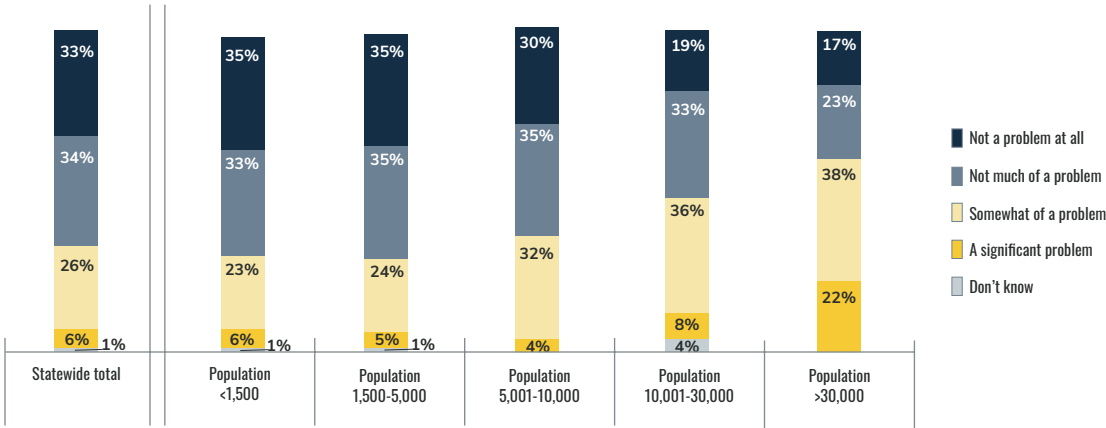


Note: item on election administration processes was not asked in 2020

Larger jurisdictions are the most likely to express concerns about poll worker recruitment, disinformation, and disturbances at polls

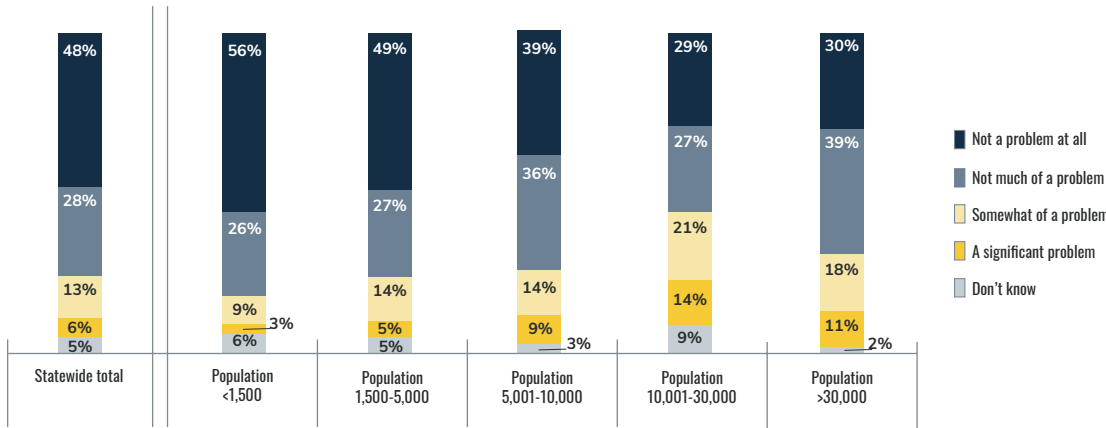
Although expectations about problems with other aspects of election administration are quite low across the state, in three particular areas officials from larger jurisdictions express heightened concern. As shown in *Figure 6*, 60% of local officials from jurisdictions with over 30,000 residents say recruiting enough poll workers for the upcoming election will be a problem, including 22% who call it a “significant” problem. Meanwhile, 44% of jurisdictions with between 10,001–30,000 residents also anticipate problems with recruiting sufficient poll workers.

Figure 6
Local officials' expected problems with recruiting enough poll workers in November 2022, by jurisdiction size



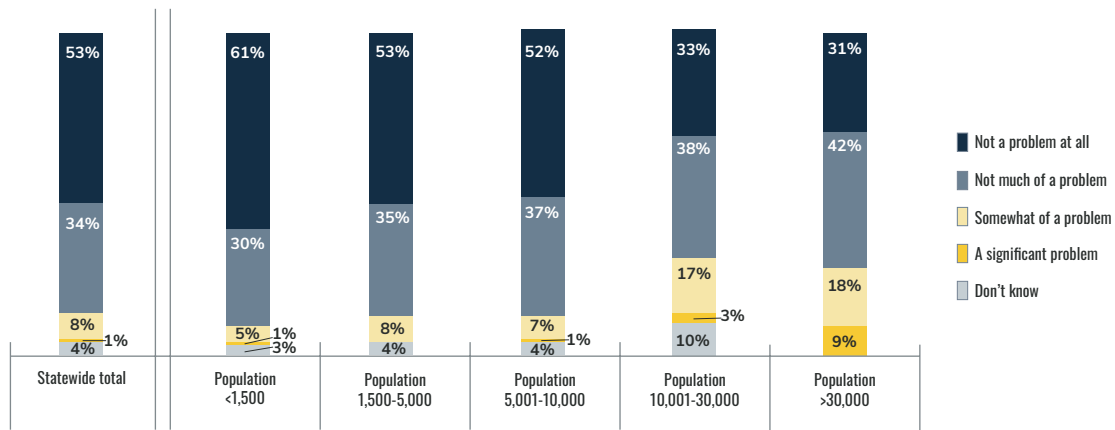
Leaders from larger jurisdictions are also more likely to express concern about problems with disinformation about voting targeted at their residents, with 29% from communities with more than 30,000 residents and 35% from communities with 10,001–30,000 residents anticipating problems with election disinformation (see *Figure 7*).

Figure 7
Local officials' expected problems with intentional disinformation targeted at jurisdiction's citizens in November 2022, by jurisdiction size



Furthermore, as shown in *Figure 8*, over a quarter (27%) of local leaders from the state’s largest jurisdictions expect problems with disturbances at polling places during the November election, significantly higher than the percentage of leaders in the smallest jurisdictions who say the same (6%).

Figure 8
Local officials’ expected problems with disturbances at polling places in November 2022, by jurisdiction size



Local officials have unwavering confidence in their jurisdiction’s ability to conduct accurate elections overall

Regardless of any expectations about administrative or other problems or concerns over election security, a nearly unanimous majority of local officials statewide (99%) are confident in their jurisdiction’s ability to administer an accurate election, including 92% who are “very confident” (see *Figure 9*). This is up from 2020, when 87% were “very confident.”

Once again, township clerks—the local officials responsible for their jurisdictions’ election preparations—have even higher confidence in the accuracy of local elections than township supervisors. Among township officials in 2022, 94% of clerks are “very confident” in their jurisdiction’s ability to conduct elections accurately, compared with 89% of township supervisors.

In addition to administering elections themselves, local jurisdictions might need to have their ballots reviewed by their county clerk’s office if a recount is ordered. When asked about the ability of their county clerk’s office to administer a recount accurately, 80% of local officials overall are very confident (see *Figure 10*). This is up from 75% who were very confident in their county clerk’s office before the 2020 election. Meanwhile, this year 15% are somewhat confident, 3% are not very confident, and 1% are not confident at all (this represents just 6 jurisdictions statewide, none of which are in the same county). In addition, in reaction to the controversies in certifying election results after the 2020 election, the MPPS asked in 2022 whether local leaders are confident their County Board of Canvassers will certify the election results accurately, to which 80% of local leaders indicated they are very confident.

Figure 9
Local officials’ confidence in their jurisdiction’s ability to administer an accurate election, 2020 vs. 2022

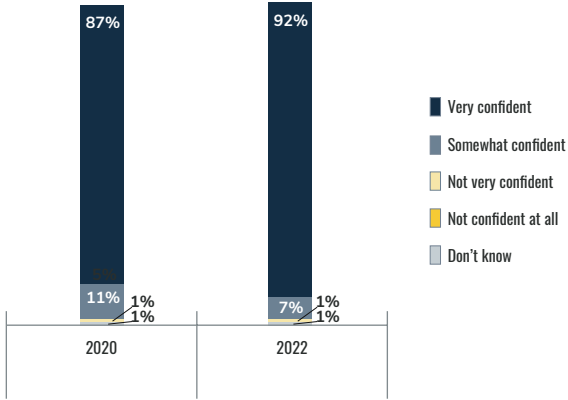
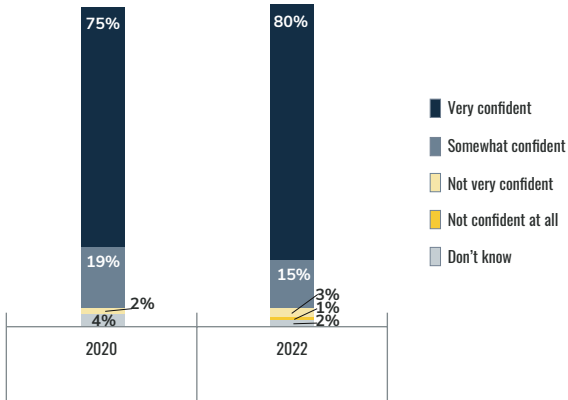


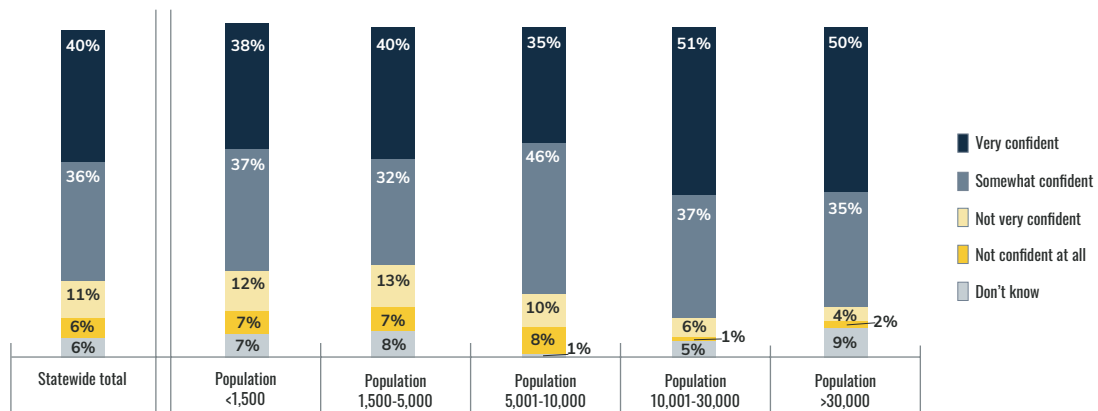
Figure 10
Local officials’ confidence in their county clerk’s ability to administer recounts accurately, 2020 vs. 2022



Less certainty among local leaders about elections in other communities

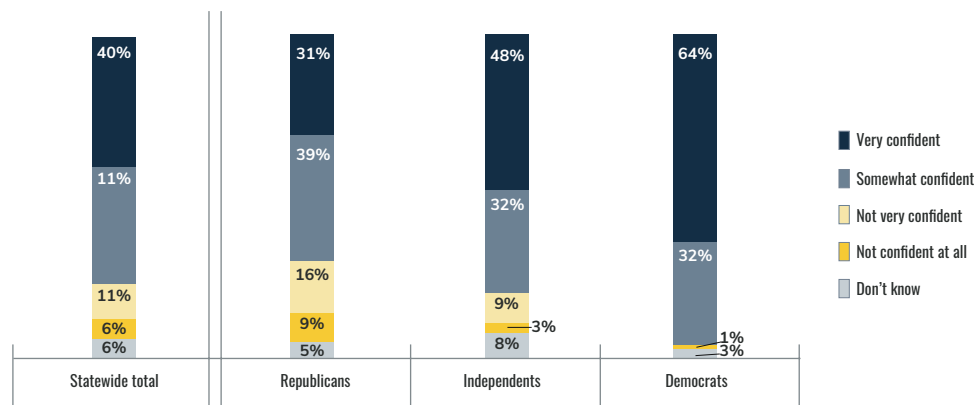
Local leaders are less confident in other Michigan jurisdictions' ability to administer accurate elections, though large majorities still express confidence. As shown in *Figure 11a*, fewer than half (40%) are very confident in other jurisdictions' elections, while another 36% are somewhat confident. Still, statewide only 11% are not very confident, 6% are not confident at all, and 6% don't know if other jurisdictions will be able to conduct accurate elections. Concerns are more prevalent in smaller jurisdictions. In communities with fewer than 1,500 residents, only 38% of local leaders are very confident in other jurisdictions' accurate elections, compared with a majority (50%) in the largest jurisdictions.

Figure 11a
Local officials' confidence in other Michigan jurisdictions' ability to administer accurate elections, 2022, by jurisdiction size



Although local leaders of all partisan stripes have similarly high confidence in the accuracy of their own local elections, partisanship clearly plays a role in local leaders' concerns about other Michigan communities' elections. Only 31% of local officials who self-identify as Republicans are very confident in other jurisdictions' elections, compared with 48% of Independents and 64% of Democrats (see *Figure 11b*). At the other end of the scale, nearly a quarter (25%) of Republican local leaders are not very confident or not confident at all in other jurisdictions' election accuracy, compared with 12% of Independents, and just 1% of Democrats.

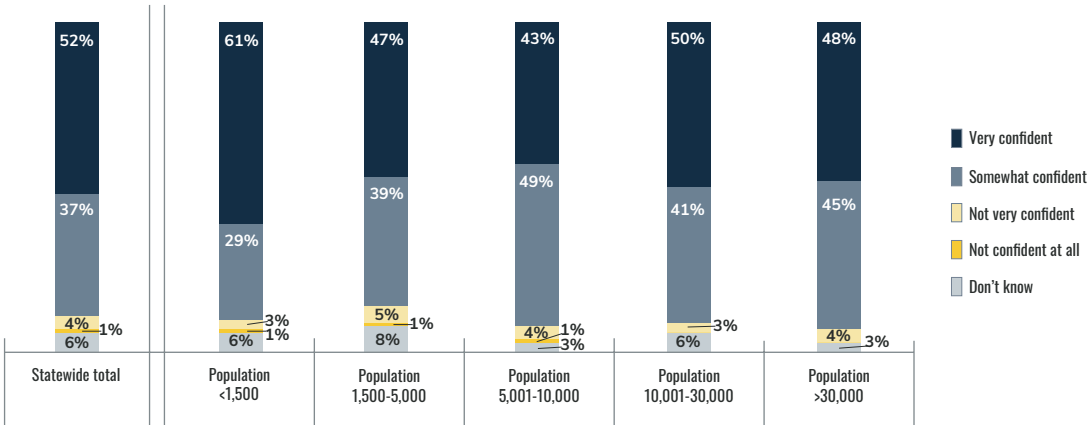
Figure 11b
Local officials' confidence in other Michigan jurisdictions' ability to administer accurate elections, 2022, by partisan identification



Doubts about residents' confidence in local elections

Finally, when asked about their own residents' confidence in local elections, just over half (52%) of local officials statewide believe their residents are very confident in the accuracy of their jurisdiction's elections (see *Figure 12*). Meanwhile, 37% believe their residents are somewhat confident, just 4% believe they are not very confident, and 1% believe they are not confident at all. Statewide, 6% of local leaders are unsure of their residents' confidence in local elections. Officials from the state's smallest cities and townships are the most likely to say their residents are very confident in local election accuracy (61%). By contrast, 43% of those from communities with between 5,000-10,000 residents say their citizens are very confident.

Figure 12
Local officials' assessments of residents' confidence in the accuracy of their township's or city's elections, 2022, by jurisdiction size



The MPPS asked city and township leaders to share additional feedback, experiences, and concerns regarding local election administration through an open-ended survey question. In the Spring 2022 wave, 173 local leaders provided approximately 364 comments regarding their expectations for the upcoming November 2022 election in their jurisdiction. Some of their comments include the following:

Voices Across Michigan

Quotes from local leaders about their jurisdiction's election administration

“Correcting misinformation and disinformation is an ongoing battle. Even after providing accurate information, people continue to share bad information. My counter is to ask them to work as election inspectors so they can see the process and feel confident in the accuracy.”

“Despite the transparency efforts such as public accuracy testing and workshops put on by our Clerk’s office, the public still seems swayed that there are “issues” by the misinformation in the media.”

“I have a great group of election inspectors who are careful to work accurately. Because I am familiar with the safety/accuracy procedures, I am confident that our work is done correctly. I can’t speak for other areas, though!”

“I think that all Election polling places should have a ban on weapons in the Election venue. Open carry or concealed. When weapons are allowed, the risk of something bad happening goes way up. Plus, our Election workers don’t need to be intimidated in any way. It’s hard enough to get poll workers as it is.”

“I would like to see more support for election officials, specifically the Clerk. There is a large mistrust of elections and I fear for the safety of our Clerks in 2024.”

“I’ve always had complete confidence in our election staff and clerk to do their jobs with accuracy and integrity. Little fed up with dealing with the election fraud narrative. It gets frustrating.”

“I’ve been administering elections here for almost 12 years. The past 2 years are the worst it’s ever been as far as mis-, dis-, and mal-information. But I’m completely confident in my ability to run a fair, open, and transparent election for my voters, regardless of how they feel about me and the job I’m doing.”

“We keep everything as transparent as possible. Some mistakes will be made but caught and fixed before turning in results to the county.”

“Looking forward to a return to normal as the pandemic ends.”



Conclusion

According to Michigan’s local government leaders, the November 2022 general election faces a number of challenges, most notably related to securing enough poll workers to run local elections and combating the spread of disinformation.

That being said, local officials are more confident than ever in election security and whether they would know if their election systems (including voting machines and technology, rolls, or tallies) had been compromised. Furthermore, compared to 2020, local officials expect far fewer problems regarding poll worker errors, equipment malfunction or errors, and voter registration list inaccuracies.

Overall, Michigan’s local officials—and particularly township and city clerks—express widespread confidence in the ability of their jurisdictions to conduct accurate elections. Whether Michigan residents will feel the same levels of confidence once the election is over remains to be seen.

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, 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. 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 2022 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 2022 wave was conducted from April 4 – June 6, 2022. A total of 1,327 jurisdictions in the Spring 2022 wave returned valid surveys (62 counties, 202 cities,

167 villages, and 896 townships), resulting in a 71% response rate by unit. The margin of error for the survey for the survey as a whole is +/- 1.44%. 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 several ways—by jurisdiction type (county, city, township, or village); by population size of the respondent's community, by the region of the respondent's jurisdiction; and by self-identified rural, mostly rural, mostly urban, or urban categories—will be available online at the MPPS homepage: 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

- MPPS Policy Brief: Statewide survey finds a majority of Michigan local governments experiencing harassment or other abuse (September 2022)
- MPPS Policy Brief: A survey of Michigan local government leaders on American Rescue Plan Act funding and uses (July 2022)
- Local leaders' pessimism about Michigan's direction continues, but eases slightly from last year (July 2022)
- Internet presence among Michigan local governments: websites, online services, and experience with virtual meetings (May 2022)
- Michigan local leaders' views on recycling: current challenges and opportunities for improvement (April 2022)
- Recycling Issues, Policies, and Practices among Michigan Local Governments (March 2022)
- Michigan local leaders report little change in the tone of civic discourse in their communities, but are concerned about local impacts of increasingly hostile national partisan politics (January 2022)
- Michigan local government officials report improved fiscal health after a year of COVID-19, but not yet back to pre-pandemic levels (December 2021)
- Michigan local officials' assessments of American democracy at the state and federal levels decline sharply (November 2021)
- The lingering impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Michigan communities and local governments (October 2021)
- Michigan local governments report fewer economic challenges one year into the COVID-19 pandemic, and describe efforts to support local businesses (September 2021)
- Local leaders' views on Michigan's initial COVID-19 vaccine rollout in Spring 2021 (August 2021)
- Local leaders' concerns about Michigan's direction spike, while evaluations of state leaders sink over the past year (July 2021)
- 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)



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University of Michigan
Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy
Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy
 Joan and Sanford Weill Hall
 735 S. State Street, Suite 5310
 Ann Arbor, MI 48109-3091

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.

web: www.closup.umich.edu
 email: closup@umich.edu
 twitter: @closup
 phone: 734-647-4091



Regents of the University of Michigan

Jordan B. Acker
 Huntington Woods

Michael J. Behm
 Grand Blanc

Mark J. Bernstein
 Ann Arbor

Paul W. Brown
 Ann Arbor

Sarah Hubbard
 Okemos

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 Bingham Farms

Ron Weiser
 Ann Arbor

Katherine E. White
 Ann Arbor

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 (ex officio)