

Independence Day: Distrust of the federal government grows, survey shows

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(Phys.org) —As the nation prepares to celebrate its independence from British rule, trust in the government formed 237 years ago continues to decline.

Fewer than one in 10 local [government](#) leaders, or 6 percent, in Michigan [trust](#) the [feds](#) to "do what is right" nearly always or most of the time, according to a University of Michigan survey.

U-M's Michigan Public Policy Survey and the State of the State Survey at Michigan State University teamed up to compare the views of Michigan's local leaders and state residents on the fundamental issue of trust that's critical to democratic governance.

More than half of Michigan's local leaders, or 59 percent, say they trust the federal government seldom or almost never, according to the poll by U-M's Ford School of Public Policy.

Trust in Michigan's state government is somewhat higher, but still low overall: 19 percent of local leaders trust Lansing nearly always or most of the time, while 28 percent trust it seldom or almost never.

More encouraging are indications that 67 percent of local leaders place a lot of trust in others at their level, which could facilitate cooperative efforts between municipalities.

"As pressure grows to expand service-sharing among Michigan's [local](#)

[governments](#), these high levels of inter-local trust may provide a strong foundation to build on," said Thomas Ivacko, who oversees the survey at the Ford School's Center for Local, State and Urban Policy.

The report also includes comparisons to Michigan citizens' trust in government, based on Michigan State's survey.

"Our surveys ask about the same questions of different groups of people yet show some interesting—and sharp—differences between local leaders and the state's citizenry," said Charles Ballard, director of the State of the State Survey. "Together, the surveys stand in interesting contrast, especially as we approach the nation's Independence Day celebration."

Key comparisons include:

- While 41 percent of Michigan's citizens say they trust the [federal government](#) seldom or almost never, 59 percent of Michigan's local officials report such distrust for Washington.
- When it comes to the state government, 19 percent of both Michigan's local leaders and its citizens trust the state government nearly always or most of the time. While Republican local leaders (25 percent) and Republican citizens (23 percent) express similar levels of trust in Lansing, Democratic (6 percent) and Independent local leaders (13 percent) are less trusting of the state government than are the state's Democratic and Independent citizens (19 percent and 22 percent, respectively).
- Local leaders overall (67 percent) are much more likely than Michigan's citizens (39 percent) to express high trust in local government. Similarly, while just 4 percent of local leaders say they trust other local governments seldom or almost never, the percentage of citizens who seldom or almost never trust their own local government is much higher (21 percent).

"The low levels of trust in Washington and Lansing raise a big red flag in my eyes since local government leaders are likely to be more informed than most [citizens](#) are about government operations in general," Ivacko said.

The U-M study, conducted April-June 2013, involved surveys sent via hardcopy and the Internet to top elected and appointed officials in all counties, cities, villages and townships in Michigan. A total of 1,350 jurisdictions returned valid surveys, resulting in a 73-percent response rate. The survey had a margin of error of 1.4 percentage points either way.

More information: [closup.umich.edu/michigan-publ... leaders-and-citizens](https://closup.umich.edu/michigan-publ...leaders-and-citizens)

Provided by University of Michigan

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