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THE LONG BALLOT IN MICHIGAN

Voters in Michigan are asked to elect a large number of state and local government officials, so many in fact, that some jurisdictions had to use paper ballots to supplement voting machines in the general election of 1984. Popular elections are intended to enable the people to hold public officials accountable for satisfactory performance in office. However, this cannot happen if the choices are so numerous as to frustrate the fixing of responsibility and the judgement of performance of incumbents and qualifications of candidates.

The Statewide Picture. Michigan voters elect a total of 19,417 state and local officials. As shown in Table 1 (page 4), 18,657 (or 96%) of this total are local officials and only 760 (or 4%) are state officials and judges. Individual voters, however, elect more state officials and judges than local officials. A Michigan voter in a typical locality might be asked to choose 82 state and local government officials during a complete election cycle (i.e., counting each office only once and disregarding length of term). Of the 82 elective officials, 54 or about two-thirds are officials of state government and the judiciary, while 28 or about one-third are officials of local governmental units. The actual number of officials to be elected by a particular voter varies depending on the place of residence, but as a general rule, the number is greater for those living in urbanized areas. This urban-rural difference is due almost entirely to the election of a greater number of judges to circuit, district, and probate courts. The election by each voter of 46 state and local education officials and from 16 to 112 judges raises a question: Can the voter assess the qualifications of that many officials?

Elective offices in Selected Localities. A survey of 10 representative municipalities across the state was made to obtain the actual number of elective offices that 1 voter is asked to fill. Four are small cities (Alpena, Charlevoix, Marquette and Muskegon Heights with populations ranging from 3,296 to 23,288), 4 are large cities (Bay City, Detroit, Kalamazoo and Warren with populations ranging from 41,593 to over a million), and the other 2 are Independence Township in Oakland County with a population of 21,537 and its Village of Clarkston with a population of 968. A summary of the survey results is shown on pages 2 and 3.

Voters living in small urban areas generally have the fewest number of elective offices to fill — Charlevoix has 79, Alpena 81, Bay City 81, and Marquette 83. In the more urbanized areas of Kalamazoo and Muskegon Heights, voters elect candidates to fill

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90 and 91 offices respectively. However, voters located in the Detroit metropolitan area have their work cut out for them in filling seats of elective offices. Voters in Independence Township are asked to fill 98 separate offices; voters in the City of Warren, 99; voters in Clarkston Village, 107; and voters in Detroit, 175.

State and Judicial offices. As shown on the chart, voters in all 10 municipalities elect the same total, number of state officials in the executive and legislative branches of state government – 38. They are: a governor and lieutenant governor (elected on a single ticket), attorney general, secretary of state, state senator, state representative, 8 members to the state board of education, and 24 members (8 each) to the governing boards of the University of Michigan, Michigan State University and Wayne State University. Other state higher education institutions have governing bodies appointed by the governor. In the judicial branch of government, each voter in the 10 municipalities elects 7 justices of the supreme court and 6 judges of the court of appeals from appeals court districts. The number of judges elected to serve on the bench of the lower courts varies substantially in accordance with population. At one extreme, Charlevoix voters elect 3 judges, 1 each to serve the circuit, district, and probate courts. At the other, Detroit voters are asked to fill 99 seats in the lower courts — 35 circuit judges, 29 recorder’s court judges, 27 district judges, and 8 probate judges.

ELECTIVE OFFICIALS ACCOUNTABLE TO AN INDIVIDUAL

STATE OFFICES

	<u>EXECUTIVE</u>	<u>LEGISLATIVE</u>	<u>EDUCATION BOARDS</u>	<u>JUDICIAL</u>
	GOVERNOR LT. GOVERNOR ATTY-GENERAL SEC. OF STATE	SENATOR REPRESENTATIVE	STATE BD. OF EDUCATION (8) U. OF MICHIGAN REGENTS (8) MSU TRUSTEES (8) WSU GOVERNORS (8)	SUPREME COURT JUSTICES (7) APPEALS COURT JUDGE (6) CIRCUIT, DISTRICT, PROBATE COURT JUDGES (VARIES)
CHARLEVOIX	4	2	32	16
ALPENA	4	2	32	17
BAY CITY	4	2	32	20
MARQUETTE	4	2	32	18
KALAMAZOO	4	2	32	24
MUSKEGON HTS	4	2	32	24
INDEPENDENCE TWP	4	2	32	32
WARREN	4	2	32	28
CLARKSTON VLLG	4	2	32	32
DETROIT	4	2	32	112

Local Government Offices. Voters in the 10 municipalities elect varying numbers of local officials, for two reasons: (1) some local governmental units have latitude to determine which offices are to be elective, and (2) some have latitude to determine whether the governing body is to be elected on an at-large basis or by voting districts. Home rule cities and villages have wide latitude in both areas. Counties and townships are more restricted, while local school districts and community college districts are bound by law and with few exceptions are headed by a 7-member board elected at-large.

City and township voters in the sample elect an average of 28 local government officials — 7 municipal and 7 county officials, 7 local school board members, and 7 members of a community college board. A Bay City voter elects the fewest (23), basically because the city council is elected from wards and the community college board is elected from voting districts, even though Bay County has more elected executive/administrative officials than any of the other counties represented in the sample. Village voters in Clarkston elect the most local officials in the sample (37), principally because village voters choose both township and village officials. The Clarkston total includes 9 village officials, 7 township officials, 7 county officials, 7 local school board members, and 7 community college board members.

VOTER IN SELECTED LOCALITIES

LOCAL OFFICES

<u>CITY, VILLAGE, TOWNSHIP</u>		<u>COUNTY</u>		<u>EDUCATION DISTRICTS</u>			<u>TOTAL OFFICIALS ELECTED BY ONE VOTER</u>		
<u>LEGISLATIVE OFFICIALS</u>	<u>EXECUTIVE, OTHER</u>	<u>COMMISSIONER</u>	<u>EXECUTIVE; OTHER</u>	<u>LOCAL SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS</u>	<u>INTER-MEDIATE SCH. BD. MEMBERS</u>	<u>COMM. COLLEGE BOARD MEMBERS</u>	<u>STATE</u>	<u>LOCAL</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>
3	1	1	6	7	7		54	25	79
5		1	6	7		7	55	26	81
2		1	10	7		3	58	23	81
7	5	1	7	7			56	27	83
7		1	6	7		7	62	28	90
7	1	1	6	7		7	62	29	91
4	3	1	6	7		7	70	28	98
9	3	1	6	7		7	66	33	99
11	5	1	6	7		7	70	37	107
9	2	1	7	5		1	150	25	175

Table 1

	Total No. of Elective Offices in Michigan		No. of Officials Elected by a Hypothetical Michigan Voter	
	<u>Number</u>	<u>% of Total</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>% of Total</u>
<u>State Offices & Judges</u>				
Legislature	148		2	
Executive/Administrative	4		4	
Educational Boards	32		32	
Supreme Court Justices	7		7	
Appeals Court Judges	18		6	
Lower Court Judges	<u>551</u>		<u>3^a</u>	
Subtotal—State	760	4%	54	66%
<u>Local Offices</u>				
County Offices	1,277		7	
City Offices	2,066		7 ^b	
Village	2,596		7	
Township	8,628			
Local School Boards	3,876		7	
Community College Boards	186		7	
Intermediate School Boards	<u>28</u>		<u>c</u>	
Subtotal—Local	18,657	96%	28	34%
GRAND TOTAL	19,417	100%	82	100%

- a All voters are served by a circuit, district, and probate court and elect at least one judge to each type of court. The table includes a minimum number of such judges.
- b An individual voter lives in either a city or a township, and if the latter, may also live in a village. Village electors are authorized to vote in both township and village elections because villages are **legally** a part of the township. The table includes an arbitrary number of 7 such officials.
- c Only 4 of the 57 intermediate school districts have chosen to have the intermediate board elected by popular vote rather than selected **by** the underlying local school boards.

NOTE: A more detailed tabulation of elective offices in the state is available on request.