

1 ✦ Introduction to Michigan Government, Politics, and Policy

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The state of Michigan is known for many characteristics and qualities—automobile manufacturing; the Great Lakes and miles of shoreline; extensive forests and inland rivers for hunting, fishing, and recreation; its two peninsulas and abundant natural resources; Mackinac Island; and popular music from Motown to Madonna, from Glenn Frey to Eminem, and from Kid Rock to Jack White. Early on, the natural beauty and resources of the state first brought many people from the U.S. northeast for the fur and timber trade. Later, immigrants primarily from southern and eastern Europe, and newcomers from the U.S. south came to work in Michigan’s factories. In particular, the city of Detroit grew substantially as it became the automobile capital of the world in the first half of the 20th century, increasing from 465,766 residents in 1910 to its peak of 1,849,568 in 1950.¹ News stories at the beginning of this growth period reported on the thousands of people who flocked to Michigan for high-paying jobs in the auto industry.² According to census figures for both 1950 and 1960, the city of Detroit was the wealthiest (per capita) large city in the United States.

The second half of the 20th century was more a story of decline, especially for industrialized Michigan cities such as Detroit, Flint, and Pontiac. The history of this decline and the governmental attempts to deal with this decline comprise the heuristic themes of this book. In order to better understand Michigan government, politics, and policy, each chapter will present the state through the following analytical framework:

- historical context
- decline

- responses to challenges
- state-local government relations

While more detail about the book's themes are provided later in this chapter, two major stories involving Michigan reveal the importance of these themes—and how connected the themes are to each other. As readers will see throughout all of the chapters of this book, these four themes are a useful way of analyzing and understanding the fortunes of Michigan, and they help explain why certain government actions were taken.

These themes are illustrated in two recent and historic events in Michigan—the Flint water crisis and the City of Detroit's bankruptcy. These two events captured the attention of the national and international media, and caused state and local policymakers to respond to the challenges that each crisis brought to the state. Each of these stories involves a history of decline in a major Michigan city, attempts to respond to the challenges posed by this decline, and investigates state-local government relations. In many instances, we note how new government policies intending to fix a problem ultimately created a new set of problems. There also is a more specific connection between these two events because at the time they occurred both Detroit and Flint were operating under a controversial emergency manager (EM) law, which gave state-appointed individuals extensive powers to run financially troubled cities in Michigan.

Flint Water Crisis

In its March 2016 Final Report, the Flint Water Advisory Task Force transmitted its findings to Governor Rick Snyder. The Task Force began its report by noting that “[t]he Flint water crisis is a story of government failure, intransigence, unpreparedness, delay, inaction, and environmental injustice.”³ This story is particularly important to students of Michigan government and politics, because it touches directly on numerous political and policy decisions made by state elected officials and civil servants. The Flint water crisis also reveals the challenges facing a declining city with an aging infrastructure, tensions between state and local officials, and the relationship between state government and its citizens.

Since 1967, the City of Flint had been a customer of the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department (on January 1, 2016, a regional body called the Great Lakes Water Authority began to operate the water system as part of the city's reorganization of assets and responsibilities after bankruptcy). In 2013, in an effort to save money (under the advice of a consultant and urg-

ing by Flint’s emergency manager), the Flint City Council decided to join a separate water system called the Karegnondi Water Authority, which was composed of mid-Michigan communities located in Michigan’s Thumb area. Construction of a new pipeline would take over two years, so Flint intended to remain with the Detroit water system until 2016, when it could connect to the new system. However, in 2013, shortly after receiving notice of Flint’s intent to leave its system, the Detroit water system informed Flint that it would terminate water services in 2014. This meant that Flint would need a water source for about two years, until the Karegnondi water system was operational.

In a separate decision, Flint’s emergency manager decided to use water from the Flint River (the city’s water source in its early years) prior to connecting to the new water system. However, shortly after switching, residents began complaining of discolored and murky water, water with a bad odor and taste, and rashes on children as well as other health problems. Federal, state, and local officials initially dismissed these complaints and claimed that such problems were temporary due to seasonal differences or other temporary causes. However, within a few months, city officials issued “boil water” advisories after *E coli* bacteria were found in samples of city tap water. The Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) continued to publicly dismiss the complaints and blamed weather, old pipes, and the city’s declining population for problems with the water.

After months of complaints, Detroit offered to reconnect Flint to its system in January 2015 (and to waive the reconnection fee). However, the Flint EM at the time declined the offer. Advisors to the governor continued to downplay problems and claim no imminent public health risks existed. However, in early 2015, unsafe levels of lead were found in Flint’s drinking water. A federal Environmental Protection Agency official voiced some concern, but his concerns were ignored by the MDEQ. In subsequent months, more samples of Flint River water found high levels of lead, and medical professionals in the city began finding high levels of lead in the blood samples of the city’s children. By late September 2015, Governor Snyder, in a joint phone call with federal and state regulators, was officially briefed on the lead problems in Flint’s water.

Shortly after that, the governor ordered the distribution of water filters to residents, testing of drinking water in Flint schools, and an increase in blood testing of residents. By October 16, 2015—about 18 months after Flint began using the Flint River as its water source—the city was reconnected to Detroit’s water system. Residents were warned to continue the ban on using unfiltered tap water for drinking, cooking, or bathing (as the

water system still needed to flush completely). About this same time, the director of the MDEQ, Dan Wyant, reported that his department had misapplied federal protocols for corrosion control. The caustic nature of the Flint River, without sufficient corrosion controls, caused the water pipes to leach lead into Flint's water. Moreover, between 2014 and 2015, almost 100 cases of Legionnaires' disease occurred in the Flint area, which ultimately led to 12 deaths.⁴ The connection between Legionnaires and Flint's switch to the Flint River as a water source had not been fully established, but several investigations were mounted.

The Flint water crisis became a national and international news story by 2016, and came to involve hearings in the U.S. Congress, a variety of lawsuits, recall petitions being circulated against Governor Snyder, and a presentation to the United Nations by a group of activists. The Flint water crisis brings together each of this book's four themes in a powerful way. Understanding the current water crisis requires an appreciation of the city's history. Flint's history is about early growth but also a long economic decline—intimately tied to the fortunes of the General Motors Corporation, which had established a major presence in the city beginning in the 1930s. The city grew in the 1940s and 1950s, but beginning in the 1970s, General Motors began to leave the city (leading to Michael Moore's 1989 film, *Roger and Me*, which chronicled the downsizing of GM facilities in the Flint area and its effects on the city). In 1987, *Money* magazine had placed Flint last out of 300 metropolitan areas to live in America. In more recent years, Flint has often made the list of the "worst places to live" in the United States, largely due to high crime rates, a poor school system, high levels of unemployment, high poverty rates, and deteriorating housing values.⁵ The city's population was 193,317 in 1970, but that declined to 98,310 in 2015, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.⁶

As part of Flint's decline, the city government faced an all-too-common story in older industrial cities in the United States. The city government's many financial challenges ultimately led to appointment of an EM by Governor Jennifer Granholm (a Democrat) in 2002, and several others by Governor Snyder (a Republican) between 2011 and 2015. The issue of a state-appointed EM with extensive decision-making powers has been a controversial one. In effect, an EM renders local elected officials essentially powerless; critics claim that this destroys the democratically elected governments in the areas where EMs are placed.

Partisans on both sides tried to blame the other side for the problems surrounding Flint's water crisis. Republicans blamed the federal Environmental Protection Agency and local Flint officials, while Democrats blamed

Governor Snyder for his appointments to the Michigan Departments of Environmental Quality and Health and Human Services. Democrats also blamed the governor for the decisions made by appointed emergency managers (in both Flint and Detroit, which was partly to blame for Flint's split from Detroit's water system in the first place), and for failing to act quickly enough and in a more transparent way. In the meantime, a number of class action lawsuits were being considered and filed throughout 2016, and petitions to recall Governor Snyder were circulated.

But Flint's story is useful also because it underscores a common occurrence related to one theme of this book. Several discussions related to the *responses to challenges* theme involved a story in which the policy response to a challenge itself became a problem. The history of Michigan's public policies includes many examples of attempts to fix a problem, only to have that policy fix become a problem later on. For example, the appointment of an emergency manager for Flint was a response to the budget challenges Flint faced. In attempting to respond to the city's many budget challenges, the emergency manager and city officials sought a cheaper alternative to increasing costs of participating in the Detroit water system. The Flint Water Advisory Task Force was commissioned by Governor Snyder to investigate the causes of Flint's water problems. In the end, the task force placed most of the blame on the MDEQ. However, it also noted that all levels of government failed, and summarized its findings in a March 2016 report: "The conclusion we made in December 2015 that primary responsibility for causing the Flint water crisis rests with the MDEQ has only been substantiated by our subsequent interviews and research. This final report, however, documents the failings, shortcomings and problems in other agencies and entities as well, such as MDHHS [Michigan Department of Health and Human Services], GCHD [Genesee County Health Department], the local water treatment plant, the Emergency Manager structure, the Governor's office, and the U.S. EPA [Environmental Protection Agency]."⁷

Detroit's Bankruptcy

As with the Flint water crisis, the story of Detroit's bankruptcy is first about history—Detroit saw massive economic and population growth in the first half of the 20th century—but also about economic decline in the second half of the 20th century. As with Flint, again, much of Detroit's decline came once automobile manufacturers began to leave the city. Both cities lost population and local tax revenue, while being forced to deal with higher rates of crime, unemployment, and poverty.

The city of Detroit declared Chapter 9 bankruptcy in July 2013, with over \$18 billion in debt. The city's government was faced with high legacy costs owed to retirees, a declining population and tax base, poor city services, a major problem with nonfunctioning streetlights, and other problems. Under bankruptcy, about \$7 billion of the \$18 billion of debt was forgiven, but the city still needed cooperation from a variety of actors—including the governor and Legislature, nonprofit foundations, the city's retirees, financial creditors, and a federal bankruptcy court—to create a path for the city out of bankruptcy but also with a plan that would keep the city from becoming bankrupt again.

A delicate negotiation among the major players occurred in the early months of the city's bankruptcy. Two major items were at stake that became the centerpiece of what became known as the "grand bargain." Those items were needed to provide some level of protection from substantial benefit cuts to the city's retirees, and protection from creditors of the valuable art collection held by the city's Detroit Institute of Arts. The bargain that was struck required that foundations, the State of Michigan, and the Detroit Institute of Arts raise \$816 million in order to save the art collection and to minimize cuts to the city's over 30,000 retirees.⁸ The negotiations were particularly tricky because the nonprofit foundations had never dispersed so much money (the Ford Foundation had pledged \$125 million; the Knight Foundation pledged \$30 million; and the Kresge Foundation pledged \$100 million). In addition, the leaders of the Detroit Institute of Arts pledged to raise \$100 million from its donors. With these pledges, the Michigan Legislature (which originally was not inclined to support the bankrupt city) provided \$350 million over a 20-year period, along with a provision for state financial oversight of the city once it had exited from bankruptcy.⁹

While Detroit's financial troubles culminated in the largest municipal bankruptcy ever at the time, the city was able to successfully emerge from bankruptcy on December 10, 2014, less than two years after first declaring it. On that day, Michigan's governor, Rick Snyder, and Detroit's mayor, Mike Duggan, met with the press to discuss Detroit's exit from bankruptcy. Detroit was able to leave bankruptcy much more quickly than many had predicted, and it allowed the city to shed almost half of its debt, restructure nearly \$3 billion more, and invest about \$1.7 billion into badly needed city services such as police and fire, as well as public transportation.¹⁰

The story of Detroit's bankruptcy fits well within the framework of this book's four themes. The historical context of the city's growth and decline helps us understand the city's reliance on the automobile industry.

For example, the high legacy costs (in the general retirement fund, but especially for police officers and firefighters) grew in part because city leaders assumed they would be able to pay these obligations well into the future because the high-paying automobile industry jobs would be around forever and the City would continue to enjoy a large tax base. That turned out to be a poor assumption.

Decline for Detroit (and for Michigan generally) came as the automobile industry left the city and the state. Detroit's population grew as the auto industry grew, but the city suffered first as people began to move to the suburbs in the 1950s, then later as the auto companies began to build smaller factories in the South or in other countries. Automation and improved production technologies also reduced the labor force in the auto industry during the second half of the 20th century.

The declaration of bankruptcy and the subsequent negotiations that sought to bring Detroit out of bankruptcy were responses to one of the most dire challenges that can face a city or a state. While the grand bargain has been received positively by many, some observers remained concerned about the long-term sustainability of the city's finances.¹¹

This story also reveals a number of important state and local government interactions necessary for the successful emergence of the city from bankruptcy. Governor Snyder helped broker a number of agreements among the major actors involved, and the Michigan Legislature approved over \$300 million in aid to Detroit. The governor also had appointed Kevyn Orr as EM to the city, who helped shepherd the local government through the bankruptcy process.

Of course, the appointment of an EM was controversial in Detroit as it was in Flint and other cities where EMs were in place. The appointment of Orr was vigorously questioned early on after the state law that allowed for emergency managers (Public Act 4) was repealed by voters in a statewide proposal on the 2012 ballot. A mere 13 days later, the Michigan Legislature passed and the governor signed a new emergency manager law (Public Act 436, the Local Fiscal Stability and Choice Act) that replaced the previous law and paved the way for Governor Snyder to appoint an EM in Detroit. The purpose of the original EM law was to put fiscally distressed cities on the path to recovery and prevent municipal bankruptcies. While other states also allow for EMs, Michigan's laws have been considered more extreme, in that the EM had greater powers compared to other states.¹² Many criticized the new law as a strike against local democracy as it meant that duly elected local officials were stripped of their financial decision-making authority. Such powers were

then placed into the hands of individuals who were not elected and who did not answer to the public. Many also saw partisan and racial components to this move, noting that the Republican governor and Republican-controlled Legislature imposed the EM on a city with a population over 80 percent African American.¹³ The controversy continued through the bankruptcy negotiations as many individuals and groups needed to make concessions that many considered too deep. For instance, in the final agreement, roughly 32,000 city retirees saw their pensions and health care coverage cut, some by up to 4.5 percent, with additional cuts to previously agreed upon yearly cost-of-living adjustments.¹⁴

The driving force behind Detroit's bankruptcy was the city's declining fiscal health. At the time Detroit declared bankruptcy, unemployment in the city was 18.6 percent.¹⁵ The national unemployment rate at the time was 7.3 percent,¹⁶ while Michigan's unemployment at the time was the highest in the nation at 10.6 percent.¹⁷ We have already noted the city's declining population, but its remaining residents tended to be much poorer than in previous decades. For example, the per capita income in the city at the time was only roughly \$15,000.¹⁸

While the focus of this book centers on the state of Michigan, a brief set of comparisons to the nation as a whole and to other states can provide a useful context. The section below provides comparisons between Michigan and other states, especially regarding economic indicators. By doing so, the themes of historical context and decline are reinforced and offer a framework for understanding Michigan government, politics, and policy.

Michigan in Comparison

When considering the 50 U.S. states, one great lesson learned quite early is that states vary. This variation can be seen in some obvious ways, including climate, topography, and population. But states vary considerably within the context of government and politics as well. The U.S. system of federalism allows states to determine their own policy paths on many issues, subject to protections granted by the U.S. Constitution and the establishment of federal minimum standards (see chapter 3). Therefore, it should not be surprising that Michigan has both similarities and differences with other states in its range of policies and approaches to its residents, its economy, and what the state considers the proper role of government in society. Moreover, Michigan can be placed in context relative to the rest of the nation; this also highlights important factors that have to be accounted for in Michigan government, politics, and policy.

Michigan vs. the Nation

We begin by comparing some of Michigan's economic indicators with U.S. averages. This comparison allows us to identify measures where Michigan may fall below the overall national average, but also any areas where Michigan can be considered above average. Not surprisingly, many of the economic struggles faced by Detroit over the past 25 years also occurred across the entire state. Whether it is high unemployment, low per capita income, population loss, or negative gross domestic product growth, Michigan has tended to suffer in both social and economic terms compared to the rest of the United States.

Certainly the entire nation felt the dramatic economic difficulties during the Great Recession of the late 2000s. Across the nation, unemployment was up while incomes and gross domestic product were down. However, on nearly every measure these indicators were worse in Michigan. As seen in figure 1.1, at the height of the recession—2008—when the entire U.S. economy was slowing down and getting smaller, Michigan's was contracting even more severely. As illustrated in figure 1.1, the state saw negative growth in gross domestic product (GDP) of nearly 5.5 percent while the U.S. economy shrank at a rate of just over 2 percent. In addition, throughout the late 1990s and into the 2010s, Michigan's GDP performed worse than the nation's, with only a few exceptions.

On multiple conventional measures between the late 1990s and 2010s, Michigan experienced a decline that was, in many instances, more extreme than one felt by the nation as a whole. Much of Michigan's decline can be attributed to the disappearance of manufacturing jobs or the movement of those jobs elsewhere. As is well known, Michigan has historically been a center of automobile manufacturing. As shown in figure 1.2, the number of manufacturing jobs in the state dropped after reaching a high of nearly 900,000 jobs in 1999 to almost half that number in 2009. This exodus of jobs has had an impact on a number of state and local government dynamics including the tax base—fewer jobs means fewer tax dollars for the state and local governments.

Prior to the 2000s, Republican governor John Engler had sought to address the state's decline by promoting a personal income tax reduction and a reform of the state's business tax. During his tenure, the state government also invested in infrastructure projects and promoted a "Life Sciences Corridor" to encourage research in biotechnology that could lead to economic development benefits for the state. A more recent effort began in the early 2000s under Democratic governor Jennifer Granholm to further diversify

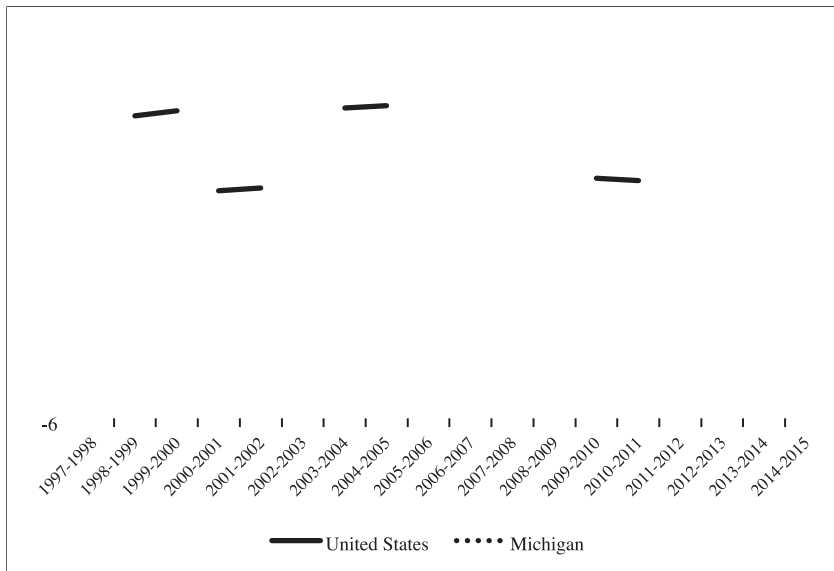


Fig. 1.1. Percent Change from Preceding Period in Gross Domestic Product for Michigan and the United States, 1997–2015

Source: “Regional Data: GDP in Current Dollars,” U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, accessed October 28, 2016, <http://www.bea.gov/itable/iTable.cfm?ReqID=70&step=1#reqid=70&step=10&isuri=1&7003=200&7035=-1&7004=naics&7005=-1&7006=00000,26000&7036=-1&7001=1200&7002=1&7090=70&7007=-1&7093=levels>

the state’s economy. Some of these policies—which included tax incentives and subsidies to encourage business investment by alternative energy companies, and those in the life sciences, tourism, and the film industry—were more successful than others.

Michigan’s experience with economic indicators lagging behind the nation’s is also found on two other key measures—unemployment and per capita income—that can both be tied, at least in part, to the disappearance of manufacturing jobs. Figure 1.3 shows the unemployment rate in Michigan and the United States from the mid-1970s through 2014. At least two important facts can be drawn from this figure. First, around the height of the recession, Michigan’s unemployment spiked to nearly 14 percent; we noted above that the unemployment rate in Detroit at the time was over 18 percent, but other localities found themselves in a similar situation. According to the State of Michigan’s Department of Technology, Management and Budget, 15 Michigan cities had an unemployment rate in 2008 of over 10 percent with Detroit, Flint, Pontiac, and Highland Park all hav-

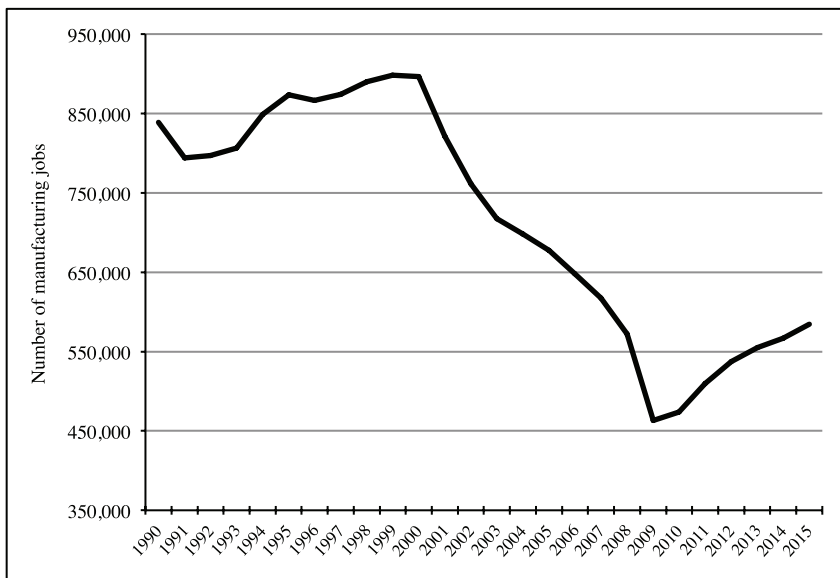


Fig. 1.2. Number of Manufacturing Jobs in Michigan, 1990–2015
Source: Michigan Department of Technology, Management and Budget; accessed March 30, 2015, <http://milmi.org/cgi/dataanalysis/AreaSelection.asp?tableName=Ces>

ing rates above 15 percent. Responding to this challenge, the state made a number of cuts in the fiscal year 2011, including reducing funding for the state police, reducing aid to state universities, and cutting \$42 million from prisons. These were critical times across the state and many were looking to government for solutions to the economic and budgetary distress.

With the exception of a short time period between the mid-1990s and early 2000s, the unemployment rate in Michigan was higher than across the United States. In addition, when a spike in unemployment occurred nationally (i.e., 1982, 1991, 2003, and 2008), a larger spike was seen in Michigan. This trend mirrors that of state versus national GDP found in figure 1.1. In addition to high unemployment rates, Michigan suffered from reduced income levels. Income in Michigan saw a similar dramatic decline around the time of the Great Recession and was worse than the national trends. Figure 1.4 shows that prior to 2003, median household income in Michigan was actually higher than the national average, dating back to the mid-1980s.

These figures that paint a partial picture of Michigan’s economic health clearly show the economic stress found in the state for quite a number of

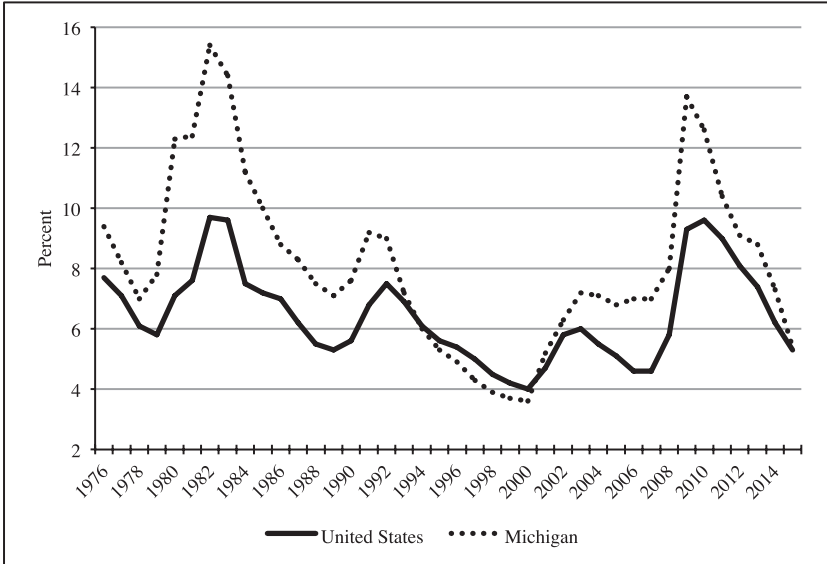


Fig. 1.3. Percent Unemployed in Michigan and the United States, 1976–2015
Source: “Unemployment Rate in Michigan [MIURN],” U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, retrieved from FRED, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, accessed October 30, 2016, <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/MIURN>

years. The figures, however, also collectively demonstrate another important dynamic in Michigan—resurgence. Indeed, after the difficult times of the Great Recession, Michigan made a comeback with lower unemployment, a growing economy (i.e., GDP), and slightly higher incomes; even the number of manufacturing jobs has rebounded. Whether economic turnarounds like those in figures 1.1–1.4 are driven by the natural flow of the economy or the specific actions of government is debatable in many circles, especially political ones. But what cannot be denied is that government usually tries to have an impact on the economy in tough economic times. Elected officials typically want to see their constituents’ lives improve and citizens often demand action toward that goal. There is usually widespread disagreement about how exactly to do this. These types of debates are outside of the scope of this book. For our purposes, the focus is that the rebound in Michigan did occur. There was at least somewhat of a resurgence in the state as Michigan tried to respond to the challenging times nearly every citizen experienced.

The comparisons provide a framework for understanding the extent of economic decline in Michigan. For a government, politics, and policy

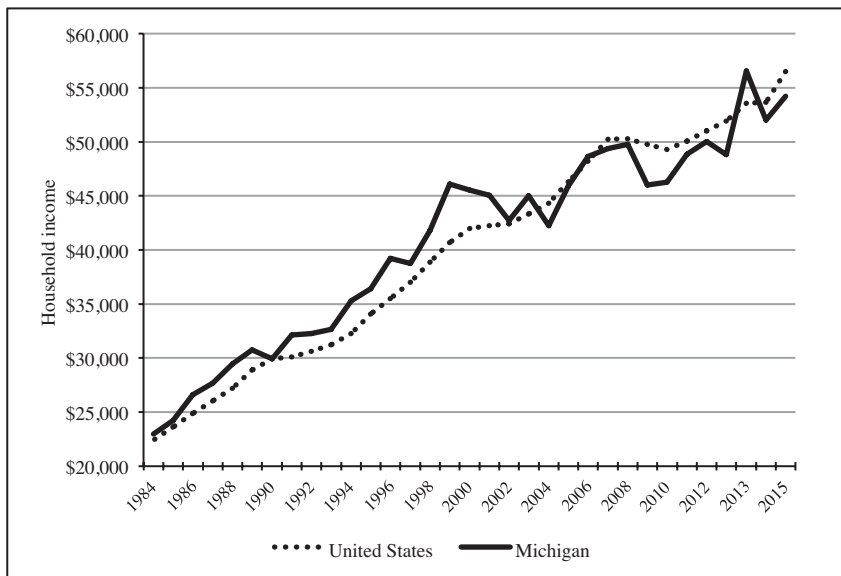


Fig. 1.4. Median Household Income in Michigan and the United States, 1984–2015
Source: “Median Household Income by State,” U.S. Census Bureau, accessed October 30, 2016, <http://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/historical-income-households.html>
Note: Income in current and 2015 CPI-U-RS adjusted dollars.

book, it also would be helpful to provide some state-level comparisons on government and policy dimensions. In terms of politics, Michigan has term limits for its state legislators, along with 18 other states, but also is only one of nine states that has a full-time legislature (see chapter 7). A large number of states have enacted election reforms such as voting by mail, no-excuse absentee voting, early in-person voting, or Election Day registration. Michigan has enacted none of those, but the state was a pioneer in the 1970s in registering voters at the Secretary of State’s driver’s license offices—20 years before Congress passed the National Voter Registration Act (also called “motor voter”) for all states (see chapter 10). Michigan is one of 24 states that allow citizens to place issues on a statewide ballot, and only one of nine states to allow all three forms of direct democracy—initiatives, referendums, and recalls (see chapter 11).

Michigan has also followed a general trend in electoral politics since 2010. Republican elected officials have come to form majorities in both chambers of state legislatures, often along with a Republican governor. In-

deed, by 2017, 25 states had elected enough Republicans for the party to control both the state Legislature and governor's office. Michigan was one of those states, but had gone ever further in that Republicans were elected to majorities in both houses of the Legislature, all of the major positions in state government (governor, lieutenant governor, secretary of state, and attorney general) as well the state Supreme Court.

Another way to compare states is to use various social, economic, and political indicators to determine a state's overall quality of life. This approach can be useful because it uses a wide variety of measures to rank states against each other. One comparison examines states from the period between 1992 and 2012.¹⁹ This study uses 19 indicators (e.g., personal income per capita, unemployment rate, poverty rate, environment for business), assigns weights to each, calculates totals for each state, and places each state in a ranking from best to worst. In the period covering 1992–2012, Michigan ranked 32nd (with New Hampshire ranked 1st and Mississippi ranked 50th). However, most telling about these results is that Michigan also suffered the biggest decline when comparing state rankings in the 1992–2001 period to the 2002–2012 period. The state lost almost 16 spots in the second half of the study's time frame. Other states with large drops included Illinois, Indiana, and Connecticut.²⁰ This significant drop in quality of life rankings underscores the challenges that Michigan faced in the first decade of the 2000s, which, as we noted above, has been referred to as the "lost decade" in Michigan.

It also can be useful to compare Michigan with other states by identifying ways in which the state is unique. In at least two ways, Michigan is clearly unique among the states. A quick glance at a map of the United States reveals Michigan's two prominent peninsulas with extensive shorelines. The Great Lakes always has been an important part of Michigan's economy—in shipping raw materials and manufactured goods as well as for recreational boating and fishing. As sources of freshwater dwindle around the world, and as other states face water shortages, Michigan has the potential to exploit its position in the "blue economy," which we discuss below.

Michigan also has had a long history of significant labor union activity, stemming in part from the organization of the United Automobile Workers (UAW) beginning in the 1930s. While other states have experienced influential labor unions, Michigan's experience has been a prominent feature of its political landscape over the years. Labor unions grew and became active politically in the state. Unions endorsed political candidates and were able to elect a number of union-friendly legislators to office in the post–World War II years. However, that political influence has waned, as we describe next.

Loss of Labor Union Influence

As we noted at the beginning of the chapter, decline is a major theme of the book—most notably seen in the decline of population in the state’s larger cities and in the economy generally. But decline can take many forms. For example, as the automobile industry grew in the early part of the 20th century, it gave rise to labor unions by the 1930s and 1940s. As the UAW and labor unions such as the Teamsters negotiated higher wages and benefits for their members, unions also became involved in state politics. By the 1960s, public employee unions in Michigan and around the United States began to grow as well. Organizations of police officers, firefighters, nurses, and public school teachers grew both in membership and in political influence. The Michigan Education Association and later the Service Employees International Union became active in state politics, in addition to their collective bargaining efforts.

However, changes in the economy and decisions by automakers led to a decline in union membership over time. Restructuring of automobile production meant that many production facilities moved to the southern states, where states often had right-to-work laws that made union organizing difficult or impossible. Later, automobile companies also began moving overseas or to countries such as Mexico, due to lower production costs and low import fees thanks in part to free trade agreements such as the North American Free Trade Agreement. There also were differences evident in what the labor union leadership had advocated or endorsed and what the union’s rank-and-file members wanted. These differences became obvious during the 1980s and President Ronald Reagan’s election. Many union members voted for Reagan and his more conservative views on social policy. In fact, with this, Michigan became known as the birthplace of an entirely new political category of voter—the Reagan Democrat. Macomb County, in southeast Michigan, was where the term was coined and where many union workers were persuaded to vote for Reagan over the Democratic candidate, Walter Mondale. Some would argue that this phenomenon was repeated nearly 40 years later as Macomb County was a major center of Donald Trump supporters in 2016 and key to him winning Michigan’s Electoral College votes (see chapter 10).

In the period after the 1990s, a more conservative mood became more popular among voters. In Michigan, voters supported term limits for state elected officials, and increasing numbers of Republicans were elected to office. The newer state legislators were less inclined to support the interests of labor union members, and indeed, in many cases, felt that unions were responsible for the fiscal problems facing state and local governments at

the time. Although the UAW has had some more recent gains in national membership by 2015 compared to 2008, overall UAW membership in the United States was only about 400,000 in 2015. This represented a drop from about 650,000 in 2006, and a steep decline from its peak in 1979 at 1.5 million members.²¹ Union membership generally has also declined nationally from its peak in 1954, when roughly 28.3 percent of wage and salary workers were members of a union, to 2016, when that number shrank to only 10.7 percent.²²

In an attempt to sidestep the state Legislature, union advocates proposed a few ballot proposals in the early 2000s, all of which were defeated by voters (see chapter 11). In 2002, a proposed constitutional amendment (Proposal 3) would have given public and private sector workers a constitutional right to collectively bargain, but this was defeated by voters 54.4 percent to 45.6 percent. In 2012, two proposals sought to give home health care workers limited rights to collectively bargain (Proposal 4) and public and private sector workers the right to collectively bargain (Proposal 2). Proposal 4 was defeated 56.2 percent to 43.8 percent and Proposal 2 was defeated 57.4 percent to 42.6 percent. In the face of a declining economy, enough Michigan voters were convinced that extending or continuing collective bargaining rights would prevent the state from economic recovery. After 2010, the state of Michigan was not as union-friendly as it had been in the 1930s and 1940s.

State policy after 2010 began to limit the power of public employee unions as well. The expansion of charter schools reduced the Michigan Education Association's membership size and its political clout. Once a powerful lobbying group in the state, the Michigan Education Association also was faced with a more hostile Legislature, frustration with the quality and performance of some public school districts—especially the Detroit Public Schools and some other large city school districts in the state. In March 2013, the state Legislature passed a “right-to-work” bill (see chapter 7), which some observers linked directly to a subsequent double-digit drop in statewide MEA membership by 2015.²³ These policy changes and the economic decline in Michigan has resulted in union membership declining from nearly 45 percent of workers in 1964 to only about 14 percent in 2016.²⁴

Michigan, Water, and the “Blue Economy”

Despite its many challenges, Michigan has a coveted natural resource readily available that many states do not—fresh surface water from the sur-

rounding Great Lakes. The state touches four out of the five Great Lakes: Michigan, Superior, Huron, and Erie. As news reports from California and Arizona describe water shortages and conservation efforts, Michigan remains at the center of a valuable resource for the state's and the region's economy—for agriculture, manufacturing, and recreational opportunities, to name just a few industries and activities that rely on freshwater. Some Michigan counties have taken on various blue economy initiatives (such as Macomb and Ottawa Counties), and the University Research Corridor (comprising researchers from the University of Michigan, Michigan State University, and Wayne State University) received about \$300 million in research grants between 2009 and 2013 to explore innovations in water usage and preservation of water quantity and quality into the future.²⁵

Michigan also is a member of the Great Lakes Compact (formally, the Great Lakes—St. Lawrence River Basin Water Resources Council), composed (with approval from the U.S. Congress) of the eight states that border one or more of the Great Lakes: Michigan, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, Wisconsin, and Minnesota. The Compact seeks to manage and protect the Great Lakes through cooperation among its members. Michigan also has recognized the importance of the blue economy in its “Pure Michigan” advertising campaign, which emphasizes the Great Lakes as an area of outstanding natural beauty and a tourist attraction for a variety of recreational activities.

Themes of the Book

We introduced the book's four themes above and offered two compelling stories of government, politics, and policy in Michigan that can better be understood through the lens of those four themes. We now examine each of the book's themes in more detail by providing some broader context for the state of Michigan in each area as well as offering selected examples of how the themes help us understand Michigan politics.

By design, each chapter provides examples of how the book's four themes touch on events and policies relevant to the chapter's topics. Some of the book's chapters will play out certain themes more than the others, but each chapter includes some discussion on the following—*historical context*, *decline*, *responses to challenges*, and *state-local government relations*. The themes cut across a wide variety of experiences in Michigan and involve governmental institutions and nongovernmental actors, and are found in the areas of policy discussed in the chapters that follow.

Historical Context

In addition to Michigan's early years as a fur trading and timber center, the area grew in population and importance with completion of the Erie Canal in 1825, and expansion of the canal's capacity that occurred into the 1860s. The canal opened up an important transportation link between the Great Lakes and the Atlantic Ocean.²⁶ This greatly increased the economic importance of cities on the Great Lakes such as Buffalo, Cleveland, Chicago, and Detroit.

The economic decline that would come to Michigan stands in stark contrast to the state's growth up through World War II. In earlier times, Michigan was a center of economic and population growth. When Michigan became a state in 1837, its population had grown somewhat, as the state became a center of the timber industry. Moreover, copper and iron ore mining in the state's Upper Peninsula served the emerging industrial era for the state and the United States. Furniture making in Grand Rapids and breakfast cereal production in Battle Creek also became major economic activities in the state. Michigan has been a center of agricultural and dairy production and it continues to be a leader in the production of apples, corn for grain, sugar beets, and soybeans. In 2011, Michigan was the leading producer among all U.S. states of tart cherries, cucumbers, blueberries, and squash, and was second in navy beans, celery, and carrots.²⁷ Tourism has been and remains important to the state, as there are many recreational opportunities associated with the Great Lakes, as well as the many inland lakes and rivers in the state. The Pure Michigan advertising campaign that began in 2006 has brought in many out-of-state visitors, such that in 2011, those from outside of Michigan spent more in the state for leisure travel than state residents spent.²⁸

The 20th-century economic history of Michigan was dominated by automobile production. The "Big Three" car companies (General Motors, Ford, and Chrysler) all had a major presence in the state—not only in the metropolitan Detroit area, but also in other Michigan cities such as Flint, Pontiac, and Lansing. Detroit grew to the fourth largest U.S. city by 1920—and remained fourth until 1950, when Los Angeles moved past Detroit.²⁹

While a complete history of the state is beyond the scope of this volume, some attention to the historical components to the institutions, actors, and policy areas is needed for a full understanding of government, politics, and policy today. The chapters typically offer a brief *historical context* of a topic or policy that will serve as an important lead-in to a discussion of more recent events. The context could include social, political, economic, or cultural factors—or some combination thereof. A brief exam-

ination of relevant historical considerations in each chapter sets the stage for an analysis of the modern elements of the particular chapter topic. This historical examination includes addressing contextual factors important for the chapter's focus. For instance, the chapter on Michigan's Constitution (chapter 2) examines each of Michigan's four constitutions as well as the evolution of constitutional principles and the organization of governmental structures in the state from the period in which statehood was granted.

Decline in Michigan

Earlier, we presented a broad framework summarizing the economic decline that industrialized cities in Michigan such as Flint and Detroit suffered in the post–World War II period. However, the economy in the state overall did not suffer as much during the decades immediately after 1950. In fact, the entire state of Michigan gained almost 1 million jobs between 1950 and 1970, with over 15 percent of that total in durable goods manufacturing.³⁰ The postwar period was a boom period for the state in some ways. Michigan's population, as a share of the overall U.S. population, increased from 4 percent in 1940, to 4.2 percent in 1950, to 4.3 percent in 1960, and finally to 4.4 percent in 1970 (before declining since then, to 3.3 percent in 2010).³¹

In addition to the decline that began as early as the 1950s, the period after 1970 saw a spike in decline for Michigan industrialized cities. The U.S. economy had been changing from an industrial- to a service-based economy, and the days of plentiful low-skill, high-wage jobs that were the hallmark of the automobile production process were gone. Changes in the automobile manufacturing industry in response to the 1973 energy crisis included a restructuring of the auto industry. This included the dispersion of manufacturing plants around the United States and the world. Some cities in Michigan grew as automobile factories moved out of Detroit and into suburban and formerly rural areas, but the state ultimately lost many automobile manufacturing jobs. Even before the Great Recession, in which both General Motors and Chrysler declared bankruptcy, Michigan lost 211,000 automobile jobs between 2000 and 2007.³²

There have been declines in other areas in the state's economy. For example, as noted above, Detroit saw its population shrink from a high of almost 2 million in the 1950s to only about 700,000 according to the 2010 Census. However, Michigan as a whole also saw important population shifts in the latter part of the 20th century and in the early years of the 21st century. From 2000 to 2010, Michigan was the only state in the nation to actually have a net population loss. Table 1.1 shows the state's population

between 1840 and 2010. In particular, Michigan’s population of 9,883,640 in 2010 was down 0.6 percent from the 2000 population of 9,938,444.³³ In his 2017 State of the State address, Governor Snyder said “Our goal should be to reach 10 million people again. We were there once. We’re at 9,928,000. We need 71 thousand people. Let’s get ’em over the next three years. Let’s put ’em to work in Michigan.”³⁴ To put this goal in context and picking up on the aforementioned comparisons of Michigan and other states, Michigan’s shrinking population and the governor’s goal to add about 71,000 people is striking in contrast to states like Nevada, which saw its population increase by over 35 percent between the 2000 and 2010 censuses, and Texas, Arizona, Utah, and Idaho, all of which saw population growth of more than 20 percent in the same time frame.³⁵

These population figures have a great impact on government in the state. The most dramatic area is arguably the state’s influence in the U.S. House of Representatives, which uses a state’s population total to allocate seats in the chamber. While Michigan has retained a number of senior members of the U.S. House (John Dingell, now retired; John Conyers; Sander Levin), the state’s number of congressional seats has consistently declined. This is illustrated in table 1.1, which shows that since the 1970s, Michigan has lost a total of five congressional seats. This decrease in rep-

TABLE 1.1. Michigan’s Population and Number of U.S. House Seats, 1840–2010

Year	Population	Number of U.S. House Seats
1840	212,267	3
1850	397,654	4
1860	749,113	6
1870	1,184,059	9
1880	1,636,937	11
1890	2,093,890	12
1900	2,420,982	12
1910	2,810,173	13
1920	3,668,412	13
1930	4,842,325	17
1940	5,258,106	17
1950	6,371,766	18
1960	7,823,194	19
1970	8,881,826	19
1980	9,262,044	18
1990	9,295,297	16
2000	9,938,444	15
2010	9,883,640	14

Source: “Resident Population and Apportionment of the US House of Representatives,” U.S. Census Bureau, accessed March 29, 2015, <https://www.census.gov/dmd/www/resapport/states/michigan.pdf>

representational allowance decreased Michigan's power at the federal level. Moreover, since a state's membership in the U.S. House is part of the formula for determining a state's number of electoral votes in the Electoral College for presidential elections, this means that Michigan has also seen a decline in voting power for the nation's chief executive. In the 1976 presidential election Michigan had 21 electoral votes while 40 years later that was down to 16. Projections are for Michigan to lose another seat in Congress and, therefore, another electoral vote after the 2020 census.³⁶

Decline has been felt or has been a major aspect of governmental and political action in nearly all areas of government, politics, and policy in Michigan. The chapters that follow cover many of these areas in greater detail.

Responses to Challenges

As we also noted above, in the wake of the difficult economic time endured by many in Michigan, the state has responded to the challenges. To be sure, not every attempt to respond to challenges in the state has been successful. However, the long-term decline that the state has suffered has required decision makers to face these challenges directly. Much of what policy making centers on are the debates about what program or degree of government involvement will most effectively lead the state on a path to ongoing recovery. The discussions in the chapters on the governor's office (chapter 6) and the Legislature (chapter 7) briefly address some of the ways in which those institutions pursued solutions to the state's economic problems. In addition, the policy chapters trace the varying levels of success that past policies have had on the state's economic recovery. Voters elect political leaders to help solve problems—whether those leaders solve those problems or not can be an important criterion for their reelection. Leaders can be well intentioned, but still not successfully address a state's problems. They also could make matters worse—the economy could get worse, for instance, with no apparent policy fix in sight. In a Michigan gubernatorial debate during the campaign of 2014, Governor Snyder, who was running for reelection, noted the economic decline that occurred under a Democratic governor and said, "Let's not go back to the lost decade. Let's not let professional politicians mess up Michigan again."³⁷ The reference to the "lost decade" referred to the period when the state was headed by Governor Granholm (who served from January 2003 to January 2011).

State-Local Government Relations

While this volume is about state government and politics in Michigan, one cannot forget the importance of local governments in the state's set of

intergovernmental relations. The fourth and final theme of this book acknowledges this important dynamic in Michigan; and indeed, it is one that is present in all states. The nature of state-local relations and the implications of those relations remains a major feature of how states operate, how politics is waged, and how services are delivered to citizens. For example, the legal relationship between the state and local governments can create political tensions between the different levels of government. Even under home rule, cities are often limited in what they can do on their own given the power the state has. As we noted above, the economic decline that plagued Michigan resulted in many struggles, one of which was the loss of revenue sharing from the state to local governments (see chapter 13). Some of the struggles between the state and its localities are debated by candidates for office and elected officials; some may be resolved through ballot proposals; still others are played out in the courts. But state-local relations are crucial elements of public policy as well, as the policy chapters in this volume illustrate.

The ongoing dynamic of state-local relations, therefore, touches on much of what government does and how it operates. Some of the broader questions of policy responsibility have been answered over time, but there continues to be considerable discussion and debate about which level of government has the proper responsibilities in making and executing public policies (as can be seen in the case of the Flint water crisis). Running through those questions is the matter of how programs and services will be funded—and by which government or combination of governments. Funding programs necessarily raises questions about government revenues, taxes, and fees, as well as Michigan-specific policies such as the Headlee Amendment³⁸ (named after anti-tax activist Richard Headlee) and the state government's decisions on issues such as the allocation of revenue sharing dollars to local governments.

Organization of Book

This book is organized into four major sections. The first section (chapters 2–5) on *foundational elements* covers the state Constitution and formal powers of Michigan's state government and its various local governments. This section also summarizes the different types of local governments that operate within the state, as well as the legal relations between the state and local governments. The second section (chapters 6–8) focuses on the state's *political institutions*, including the governor and the executive branch, the state Legislature, and the state's court system. The next section (chapters 9–11) investigates the major *political actors and processes* in Michigan. In particular,

this section includes discussions of political parties and interest groups in the state, as well as elections and political participation. Finally, Michigan's recent experience with citizen-initiated ballot proposals is explored.

The final section (chapters 12–15) includes *public policy case studies* of selected policy areas important to Michigan—and to most states for that matter. In the United States' federated system, state governments traditionally have been responsible for public health and safety, public education, economic development, transportation and infrastructure, and law enforcement and corrections. More recent controversies include the politics and policies surrounding same-sex marriage, immigration, and homeland security. While we could not cover all policies important to state government and politics, we chose three issue areas that are both important and are illustrative of the state experience with policy making. As such, we selected the policy areas of public education, budget and finance, and economic development.

Public education is a top spending area in most states, as it is in Michigan. It is a constitutional responsibility of the state to provide public education. Economic development is an important policy as well, since it is crucial to a state's economy and quality of life. Business investment in a state increases jobs and state and local revenues. Jobs, especially those with higher wages and benefits, help create or maintain a vibrant middle class. State and local governments must coordinate efforts in order to attract businesses. A number of state and local incentives are often provided to qualifying businesses in an effort to reduce the cost of locating or relocating to a particular jurisdiction, which reinforces the theme of state-local relations. We also include a chapter on the state's budget and finance policy. For a state such as Michigan—with all of its funding challenges in the past 30 years—a chapter on how well the state brings in revenues and how well it can fund its programs is key to understanding both the process and the outcome of government and politics in the state. Moreover, a major theme of this book is the economic decline that Michigan has suffered over the years. Indeed, this decline has likely framed many of the policy debates in the past 30 years, as well as proposals for a rebirth in Michigan. Understanding budget and fiscal policy will help readers understand those frames and the policies themselves.

We end the section on policy case studies with a chapter on the city of Flint and the Flint water crisis. No current book on Michigan government, politics, and policy could ignore this tragic and compelling story. Interestingly, we believe the Flint water crisis illustrates the book's themes quite well. Readers will better understand the Flint story through the lens of our four themes—*historical context, decline, responses to challenges, and state-*

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