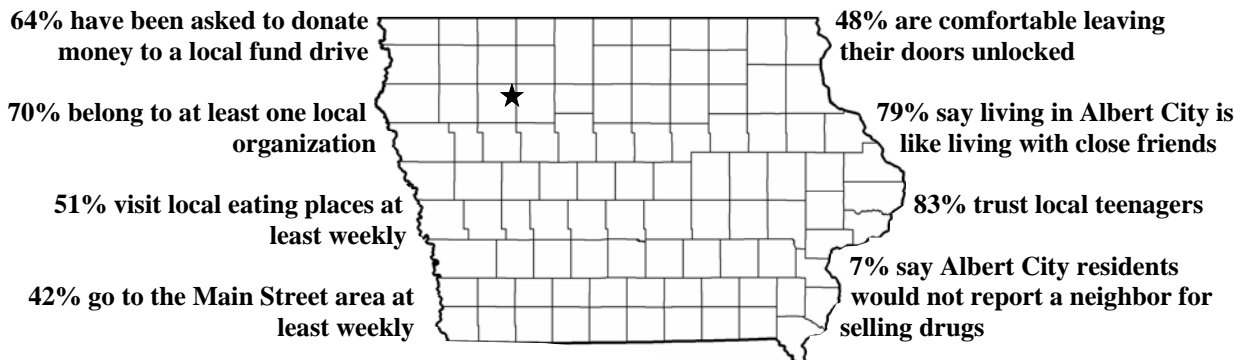


A DECADE OF CHANGE IN ALBERT CITY

In February 2004, the Rural Development Initiative Project at Iowa State University conducted a survey designed to look at changes in the social conditions in Iowa's rural towns. The survey was mailed to nearly 15,000 households in 99 towns, one of which was Albert City. Ten years ago, residents of these same 99 communities were asked to complete a similar survey. The households for both surveys were selected randomly from local telephone directories (150 households per community). In 1994, 121 Albert City residents responded to the survey, and 107 responded in 2004. This report is a summary of the results, including how the opinions of Albert City residents have changed over the past decade.

LIFE IN ALBERT CITY IN 2004



LOCAL PATRONAGE PATTERNS

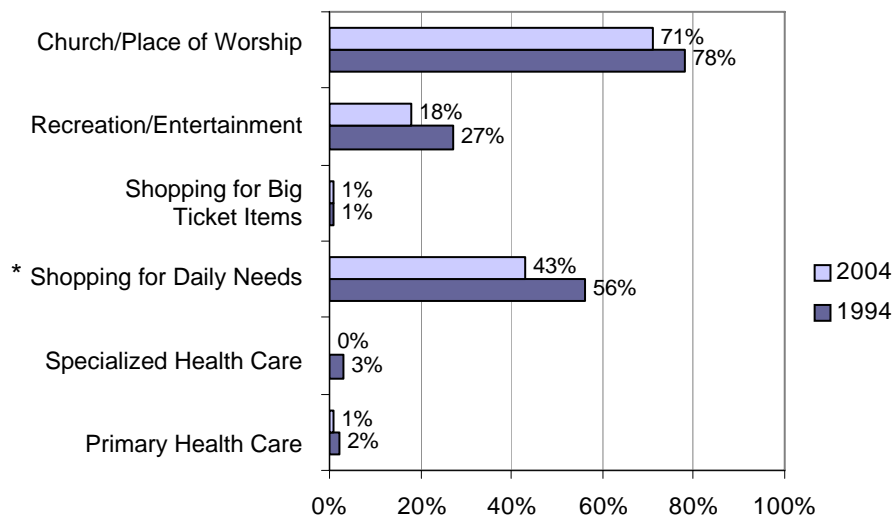


Figure 1: Percent Selecting "Local"

For a variety of reasons, many residents of Iowa's smaller towns rely on neighboring cities for services. Results from this survey suggest that Albert City residents followed this pattern in 1994 and even more so in 2004. Figure 1 shows the percent of residents who reported patronizing services of various types in Albert City. About three-fourths of residents attended church or a place of worship in Albert City in 1994 and 2004. Sig-

nificantly fewer residents shopped for daily needs in Albert City in 2004 (43 percent) compared to 1994 (56 percent). Less than one in four residents stayed in Albert City for recreation/entertainment in 2004, roughly the same as the 27 percent in 1994. Albert City residents reported leaving town for health care and shopping for big ticket items in both 1994 and 2004.

A Note on Interpretation: For Albert City, differences in percentages between 2004 and 1994 of less than 11 percent should be considered a statistical "dead-heat." That is, they fall within the margin of error range, which occurs whenever samples are used to draw conclusions about a larger group. With the modest sample sizes used in this study, the differences must be relatively large before we can be confident that they are real. Throughout the report, differences that are equal to or exceed 11 percent are statistically significant and are indicated with an asterisk ().

RATINGS OF LOCAL SERVICES AND FACILITIES

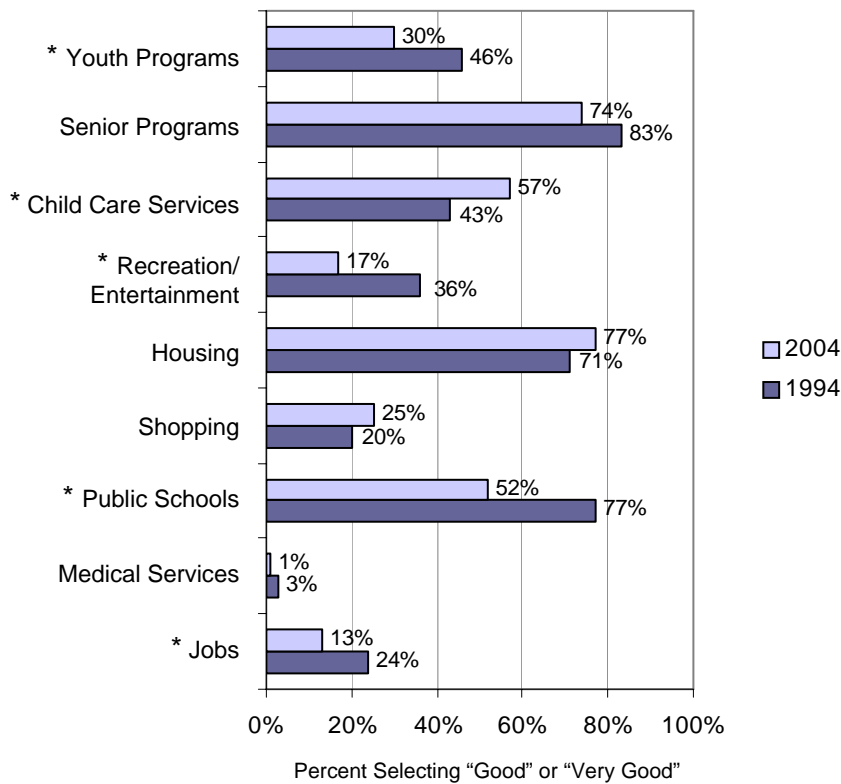


Figure 2: Ratings of Local Services and Facilities

Nine local services were listed on the questionnaire along with instructions to rate each as “very good,” “good,” “fair,” “poor,” or “not available.” Figure 2 shows the percentage of residents who rated each service as “good” or “very good” in 1994 and 2004. The ratings for senior programs, housing, shopping, and medical services changed very little since 1994. In four of the other service areas however, evaluations declined. Public schools experienced the biggest drop in ratings from 77 percent approval in 1994 to 52 percent in 2004. Ratings for youth and recreation programs each decreased by more than 15 percent over the past decade. On the positive side, approval for child care services increased to 57 percent in 2004 from 43 percent in 1994.

RATINGS OF GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Respondents were asked to provide ratings for seven services normally provided by local governments. Figure 3 shows the percentage of residents rating each service as “good” or “very good” for 1994 and 2004. Overall, the vast majority of Albert City residents reported being satisfied with their local government services. All services were rated positively by two thirds or more of residents in both 1994 and 2004. Indeed, almost everyone rated emergency response, fire protection, and condition of parks as “good” or “very good” in 1994 and those figures declined by only a small amount in 2004. There were no significant changes in government service evaluations from 1994 to 2004.

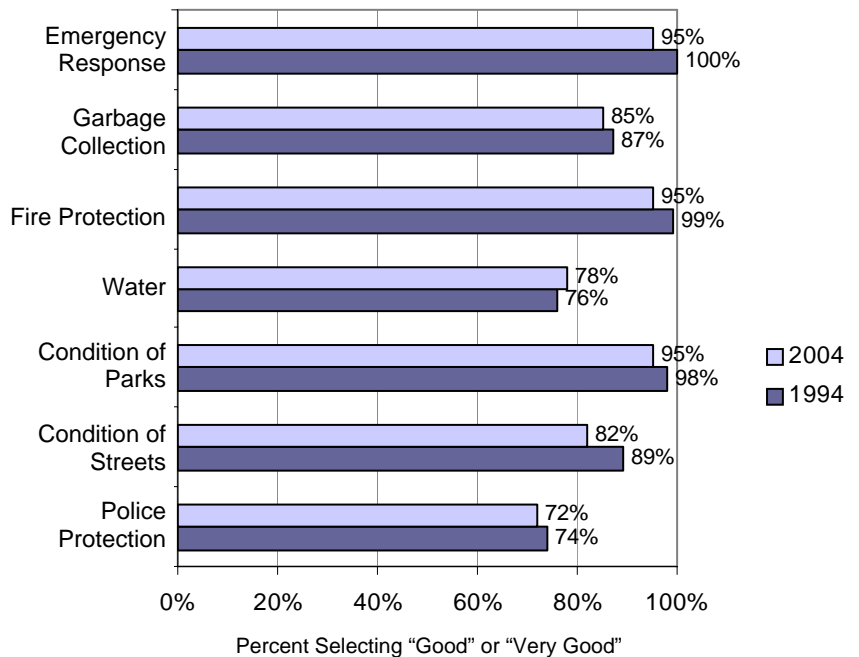


Figure 3: Ratings of Local Government Services

ALBERT CITY'S SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

In spite of the frequently publicized economic challenges faced by many of Iowa's small towns, they are regularly praised for having favorable social climates. A main goal of this project has been to determine the extent to which Iowa's rural towns possess favorable social environments. Accordingly, a variety of questions were included on the survey asking residents to evaluate various social attributes of their communities.

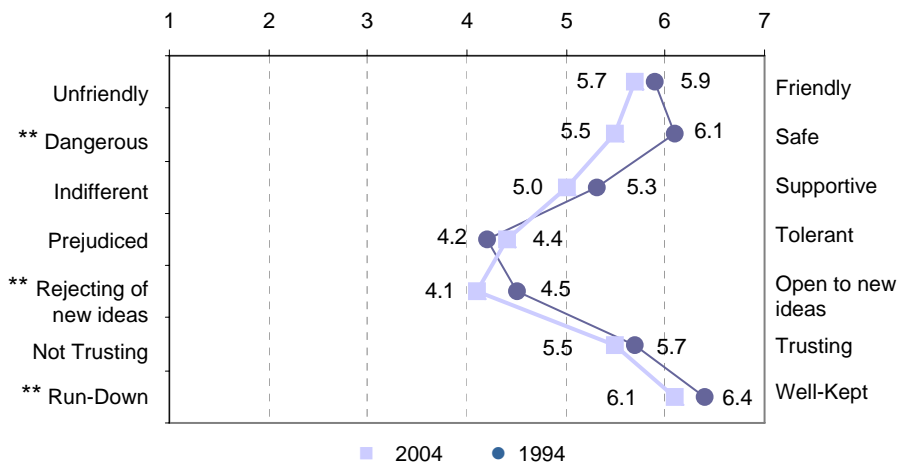


Figure 4: Average Rating of Social Qualities on a 1 to 7 Scale

Residents were presented with a list of qualities and asked to evaluate their town on each quality using a 7-point scale. The average ratings shown in Figure 4 reveal that in 1994, residents assigned the highest ratings to appearance, safety, and friendliness for Albert City. Tolerance and openness to new ideas received the lowest ratings in that year. In 2004, appearance, safety, and friendliness were still highly rated, but appearance and safety had declined significantly. Tolerance and openness to new ideas remained the lowest ratings with openness to new ideas significantly lower than in 1994.

** The margin of error is calculated differently for averages, and will sometimes vary from question to question within the survey depending on how many people answered each question. Thus, changes of the same size may exceed the margin of error for some items in Figure 4, but not for others. Only those items designated by double asterisks (**) have differences large enough to fall outside of the statistical margin of error and can thus be considered to have changed since 1994.

SOCIAL TIES

“Everybody knows everybody” is often cited as a feature of small towns. The extent to which people know and interact with each other influences commitment to the community and interest in its well-being. Therefore, questions were included to assess local social ties. In 2004, 59 percent of residents reported knowing the names of half or more of the people in Albert City, compared to 15 percent in 1994. Similarly, 61 percent indicated that half or more of their friends live in Albert City, compared to 29 percent in 1994. Twenty-three percent of residents in 2004 and 27 percent in 1994 said that half or more of their adult relatives and in-laws live in Albert City.

COMMUNITY ATTACHMENT

Albert City residents appear to be as highly attached to the community in 2004 as they were in 1994. Almost everyone reported that they feel at home in Albert City in 1994 (see Figure 5). This changed only slightly in 2004. Furthermore, about eight of ten people in both 1994 and 2004 indicated that they would be sorry to leave if they had to move away from Albert City.

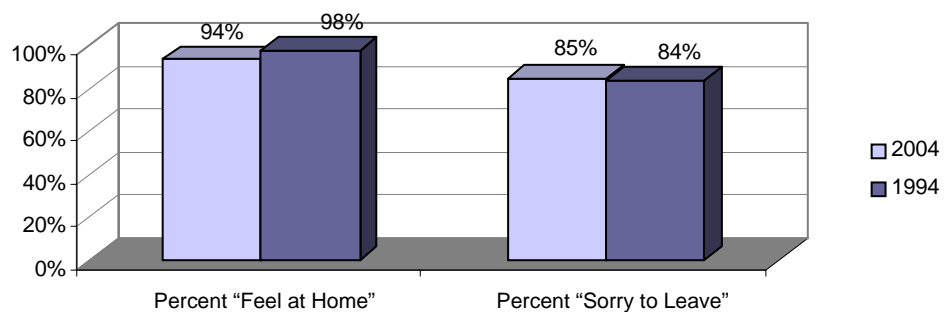


Figure 5: Community Attachment

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Citizens working together to accomplish local goals is an important feature of small towns. For Albert City, 84 percent of residents indicated in 2004 that the spirit of community participation is “good” or “very good.” Likewise,

more than half reported participating in a local improvement project in the year prior to the survey and 43 percent described themselves as “somewhat” or “very” active in local community activities and events (see Figure 6). The level of participation was about the same in Albert City in 1994, but the percentage who described themselves as active was greater in 1994 at 61 percent. When asked to consider a variety of factors that limit their involvement in community improvement projects, the top three factors mentioned by Albert City residents were lack of time (51%), not being asked to volunteer (39%), and not being interested in participating (34%).

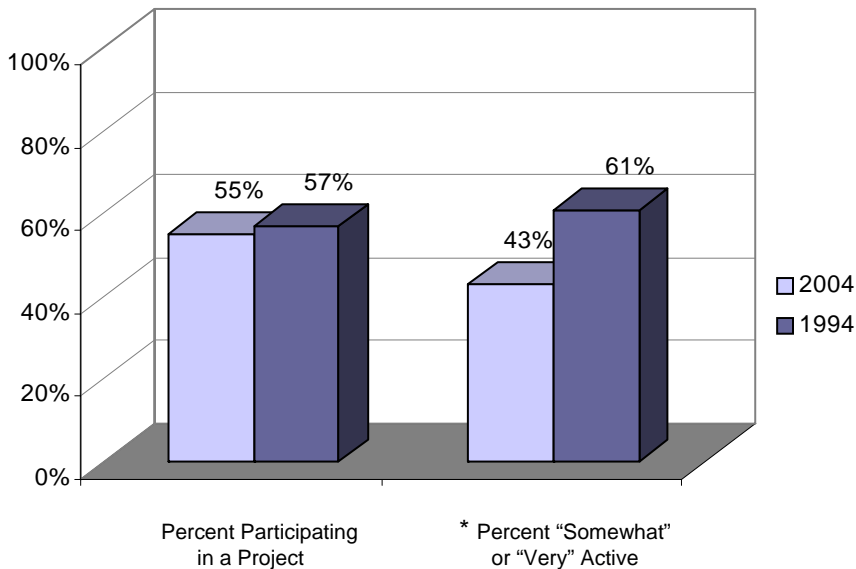


Figure 6: Community Involvement

SUMMARY

A major goal of this project is to examine changes in the social conditions in rural Iowa over the past decade. As previously discussed, the differences between 1994 and 2004 shown in this report must be interpreted to account for the margin of error—that is, we cannot say with confidence that a change has occurred unless the difference is equal to or greater than 11 percentage points. Using this standard, what has changed in Albert City over the past decade? Local churches and places of worship are still patronized by the vast majority of residents, but there has been a decline in shopping for daily needs in town. Ratings for public schools, youth programs, jobs, and recreation decreased over the decade. Government services continue to receive positive ratings and child care services was viewed more favorably in 2004 compared to 1994.

The social environment has changed somewhat with residents reporting that Albert City is very well-kept, safe, and friendly, but less well-kept, safe, and accepting of new ideas than in 1994. Residents remained strongly attached to their community. The majority of residents believe that community participation is generally high. Involvement levels have not changed over the period with slightly more than half reporting participating in a community improvement project in the last year. However, the percent who consider themselves active or very active has declined. It is interesting to note that one of the top three reasons for not participating in community projects is not being asked to get involved.

The past decade has been challenging for Iowa’s small towns. We hope this information will prove useful in planning for Albert City’s future. **We wish to thank the Albert City residents who participated in the 1994 and 2004 studies for providing the information that made this report possible.**

RDI

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