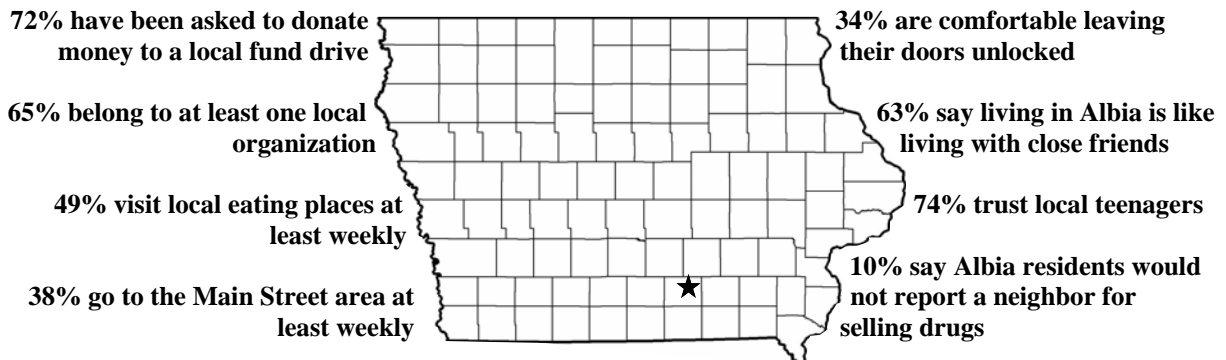


# A DECADE OF CHANGE IN ALBIA

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 Albia. 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, 106 Albia residents responded to the survey, and 88 responded in 2004. This report is a summary of the results, including how the opinions of Albia residents have changed over the past decade.

## LIFE IN ALBIA IN 2004



## LOCAL PATRONAGE PATTERNS

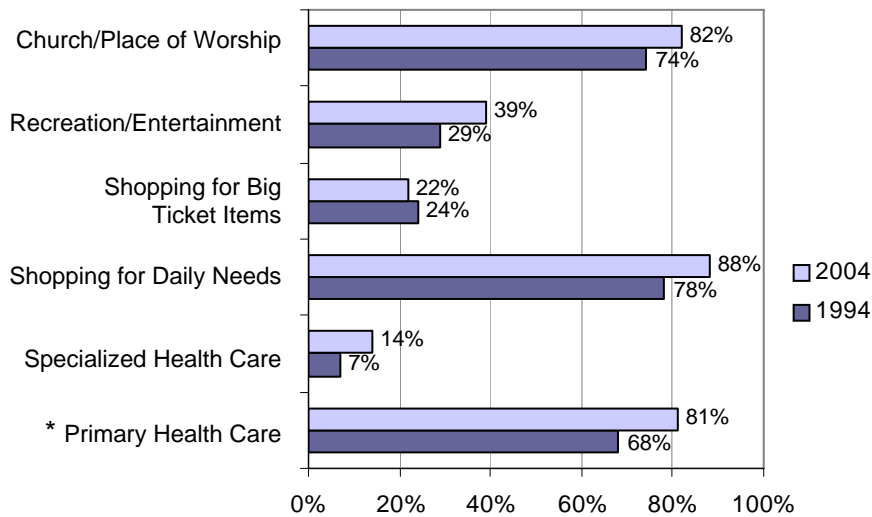


Figure 1: Percent Selecting "Local"

For a variety of reasons, many residents of Iowa's smaller towns rely on neighboring cities for services. Results from this survey suggest that Albia residents defied the trend for some services. Figure 1 shows the percentage of residents who reported patronizing various services in Albia for both 1994 and 2004. In 2004, more than 80 percent of residents remained in Albia for church/place of worship, to shop for

daily needs, and primary health care. Less than half stayed in Albia for recreation and less than a fourth shopped in Albia for big ticket items or utilized local specialized health care. While the percent of residents who utilized local primary health care in 2004 was significantly greater than in 1994, changes in the patronage of other services over the past decade are within the margin of error.

\*A Note on Interpretation: For Albia, differences in percentages between 2004 and 1994 of less than 12 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 12 percent are statistically significant and are indicated with an asterisk (\*).

## RATINGS OF LOCAL SERVICES AND FACILITIES

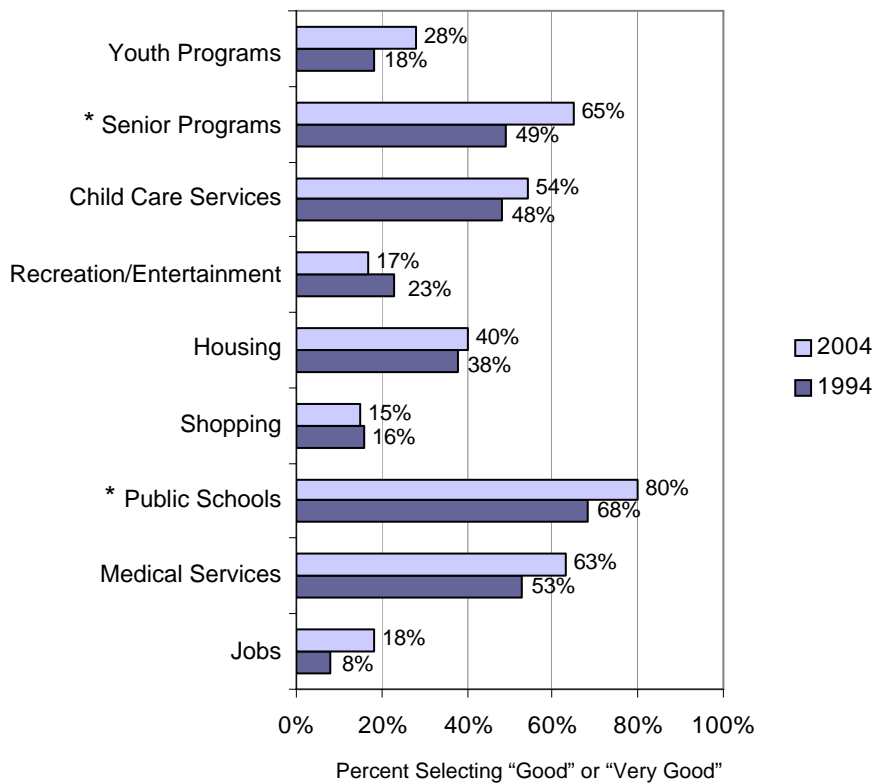


Figure 2: Ratings of Local Services and Facilities

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 percent of residents who rated each service as “good” or “very good” in 1994 and 2004. Eight of ten residents rated the public schools positively and more than half rated senior programs, child care services, and medical service favorably in 2004. The evaluation of senior programs and public schools improved in 2004 compared to 1994. Housing received approval from fewer than half the residents in both 1994 and 2004. Jobs, shopping, and recreation received the lowest ratings in both periods, with fewer than one in four residents indicating that those services were good or very good.

## 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. Generally, Albia residents reported being satisfied with local government services. More than seven in ten rated emergency response, garbage collection, fire protection, and water favorably in both years. Additionally, more than half indicated that the condition of the parks and police protection were good or very good in 1994 and 2004. Even though the condition of the streets received the lowest approval from residents in both periods, it was the one service that received significantly better ratings in 2004 compared to 1994.

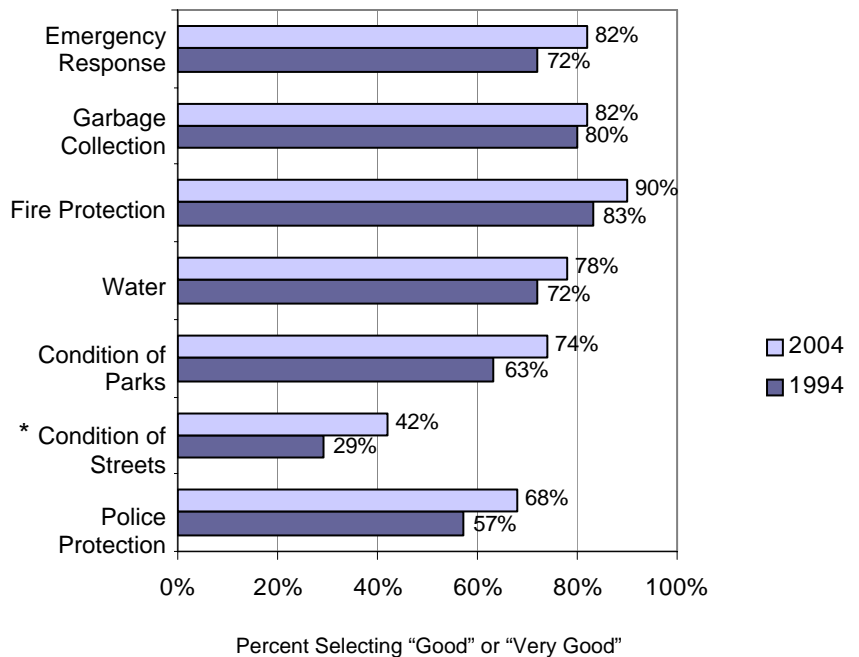


Figure 3: Ratings of Local Government Services

## ALBIA'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.

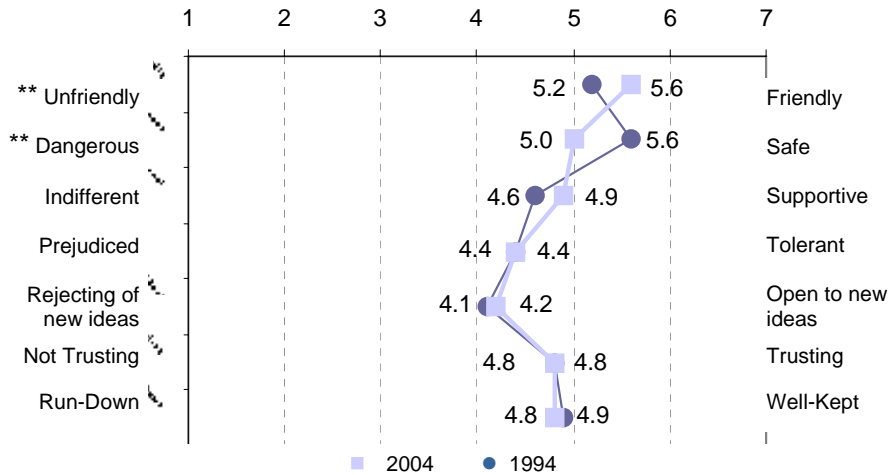


Figure 4: Average Rating of Social Qualities on a 1 to 7 Scale

Residents were presented with a list of qualities and asked to evaluate Albia on each quality using a 7-point scale. The average ratings shown in Figure 4 reveal that in 1994, safe and friendly had the highest evaluations. In 2004, there was a significant decline in residents' assessment of safety and a significant increase in their assessment of the friendliness of Albia compared to 1994. Even so, these two qualities still received the highest ratings. Tolerance and openness to new ideas received the lowest ratings in both 1994 and 2004. The evaluations of other qualities remained the same.

\*\* 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 about local social ties. In 2004, 44 percent of residents reported knowing the names of half or more of the people in Albia, compared to 40 percent in 1994. Similarly, 72 percent indicated that half or more of their friends live in Albia, compared to 67 percent in 1994. Thirty six percent of residents in both 2004 and 1994 said that half or more of adult relatives and in-laws live in Albia. (Note: These differences are not greater than the margin of error.)

## COMMUNITY ATTACHMENT

How attached are Albia residents to their community? Almost everyone reported that they feel at home in Albia in both 1994 and 2004 (see Figure 5). Furthermore, about eight of ten in both 1994 and 2004 indicated that they would be sorry to leave if they had to move away from Albia. Feelings of attachment to Albia have not changed significantly in the last decade.

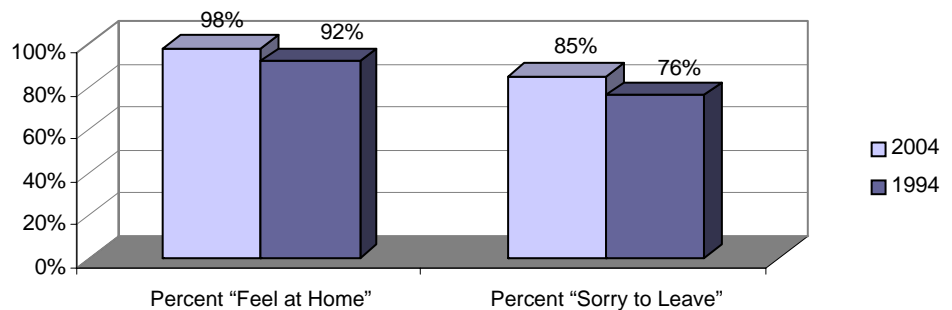


Figure 5: Community Attachment

## COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Citizens working together to accomplish local goals is an important feature of small towns. For Albia, 84 percent of residents indicated in 2004 that the spirit of community participation is “good” or “very good.” About half reported participating in a local community improvement project during the year prior to the survey and about one in three described themselves as “somewhat or “very” active in local community activities and events (see Figure 6). Involvement levels in 1994 when 45 percent reported participating in a project and 35 percent rated themselves as active in the community is not significantly different from 2004. When asked to consider a variety of factors that limit their involvement in community improvement projects, the top three factors mentioned by Albia residents were lack of time (58%), not being asked to volunteer (35%), and not being interested in participating (30%).

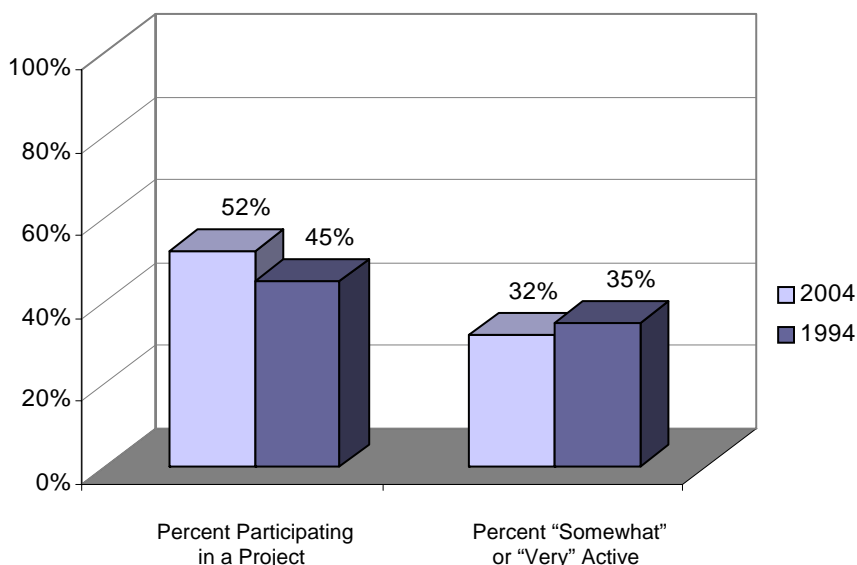


Figure 6: Community Involvement

## 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 2004 and 1994 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 12 percentage points. Using this standard, what has changed in Albia over the past decade? Albia residents were more likely to utilize local primary health care in 2004 than in 1994 and still remained in town for church/worship and to shop for daily needs. More residents approved of the condition of the streets and the quality of senior programs and public schools in 2004. Other government services continued to be rated positively. Residents’ opinions of other services and their patronage patterns have not changed over the past decade.

The social environment has changed somewhat. Residents still described Albia as a safe and friendly community, but viewed it as less safe and more friendly compared to 1994. Residents remained strongly attached to Albia—that is, they feel at home and would be sorry if they had to leave. In addition, more than eight in ten reported that the spirit of community participation is good or very good overall and levels of community involvement remained unchanged from 1994 to 2004. It is interesting that one of the top three reasons people gave for not being involved in community projects was that no one asked them. This suggests a possible strategy to increase community participation in the future.

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

**RDI**

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