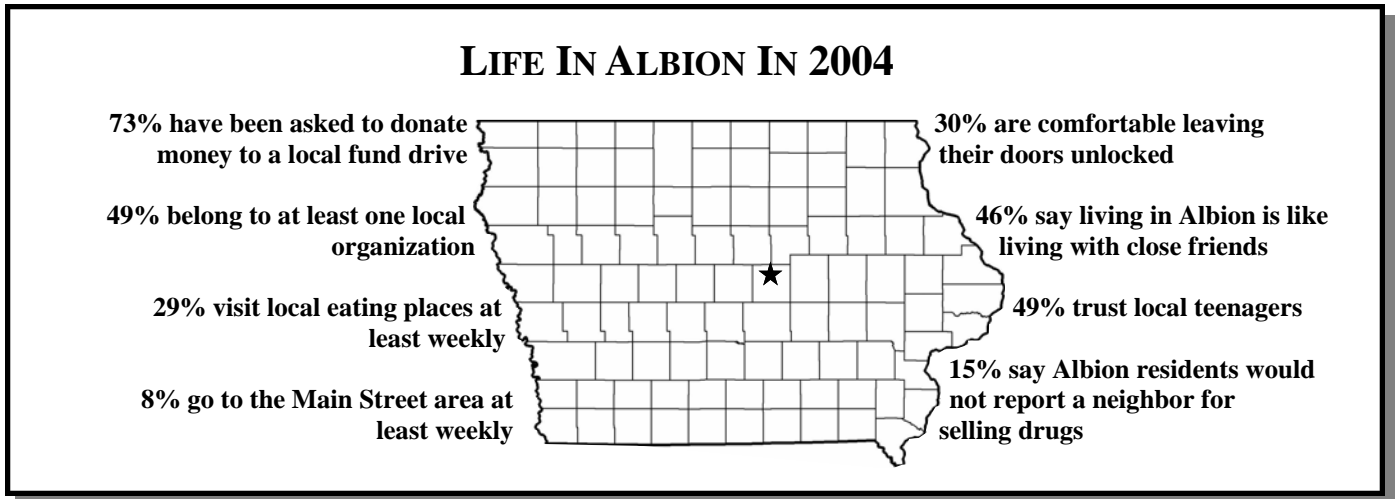


A DECADE OF CHANGE IN ALBION

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 Albion. 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, 108 Albion residents responded to the survey, and 80 responded in 2004. This report is a summary of the results, including how the opinions of Albion residents have changed over the past decade.



LOCAL PATRONAGE PATTERNS

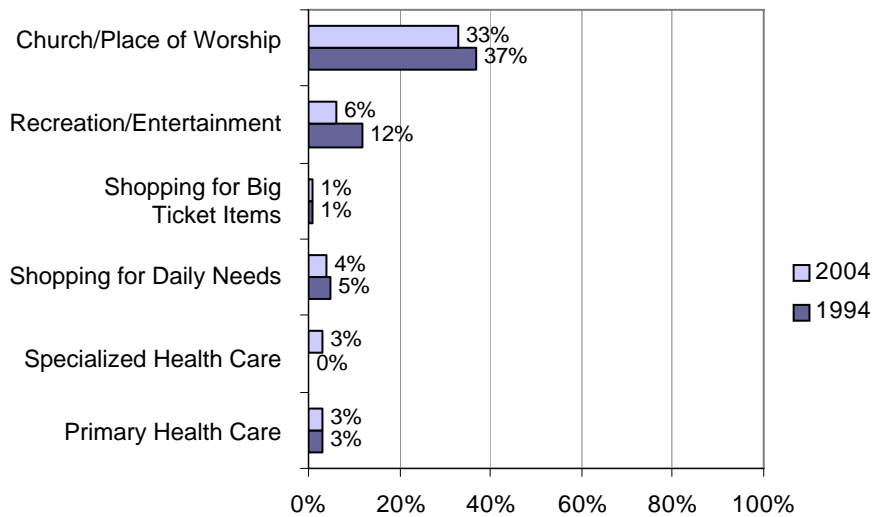


Figure 1: Percent Selecting "Local"

For a variety of reasons, many residents of Iowa's smaller towns rely on neighboring cities for services. Results from this survey suggest that Albion residents followed this pattern in 1994 and 2004. Figure 1 shows the percent of residents who reported patronizing services of various types in Albion. Almost everyone went out of town for all services except church or place of worship. About one-third of residents remained in Albion for church related activities in 1994 and 2004.

There were no significant changes in Albion between 1994 and 2004 in patterns of local patronage.

A Note on Interpretation: For Albion, 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

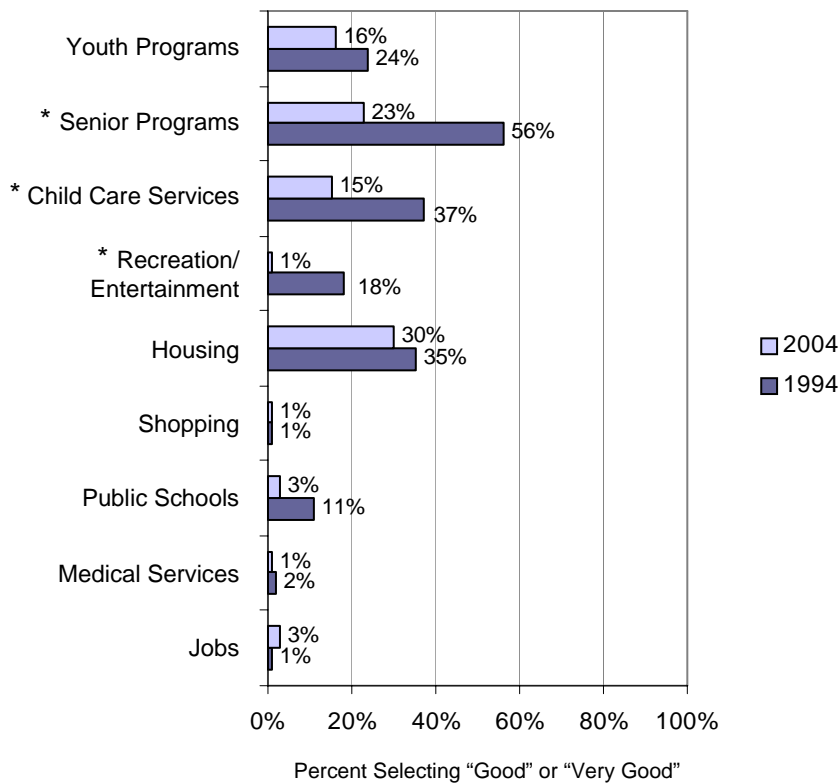


Figure 2: Ratings of Local Services and Facilities

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 percentage of residents who rated each service as “good” or “very good” in 1994 and 2004. None of the local services received positive ratings from more than a third of residents in 2004. This includes the assessment of senior programs which declined from 56 percent approval in 1994 to 23 percent in 2004. Child care services and recreation/entertainment also experienced a significant decrease in evaluations from 1994 to 2004. Shopping, public schools, medical services, and jobs received positive ratings from one in ten or fewer residents in both 1994 and 2004.

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 2004 and 1994. In general, Albion residents reported being satisfied with local government services. More than 90 percent approved of fire protection services in both periods. Positive ratings for emergency response, garbage collection, water, and condition of the parks were expressed by more than 70 percent of Albion residents in 1994 and 2004. Police protection received the lowest evaluations in 1994 and 2004. The percentage of residents rating the condition of the parks positively declined significantly in 2004.

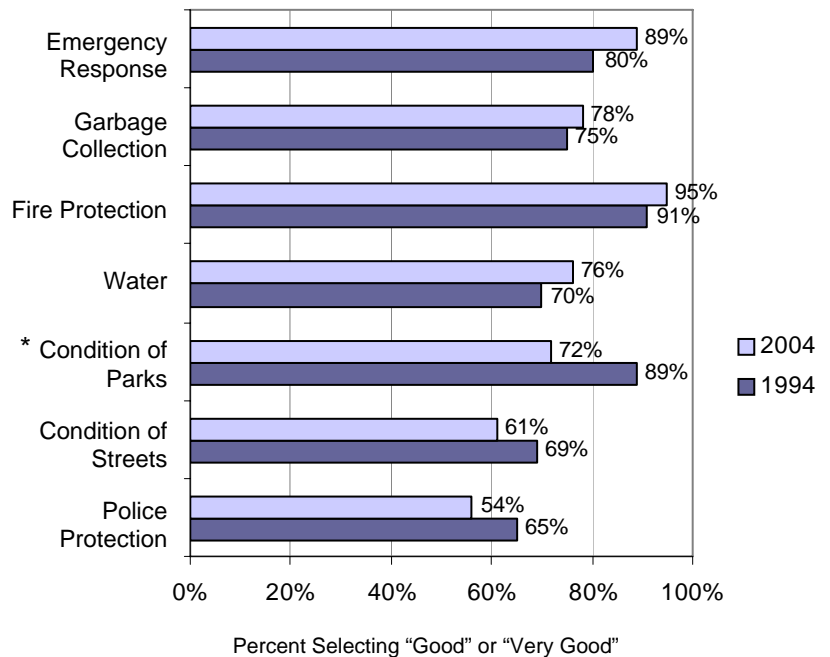


Figure 3: Ratings of Local Government Services

ALBION'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.

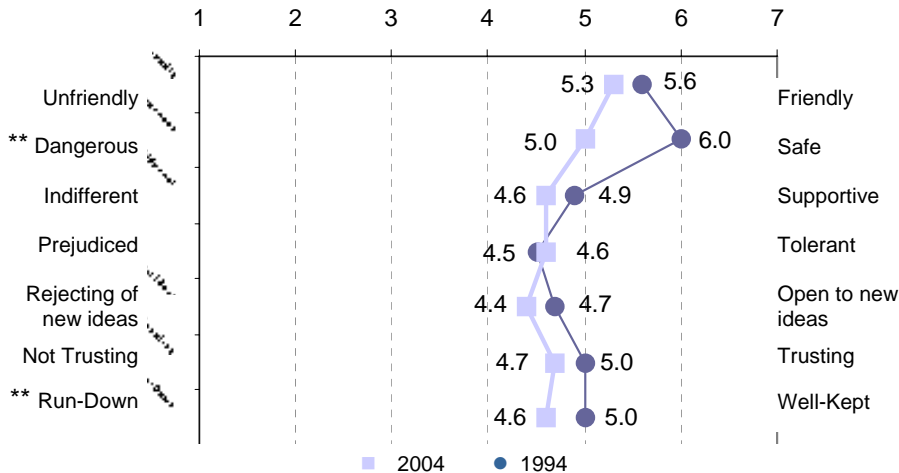


Figure 4: Average Rating of Social Qualities on a 1 to 7 Scale

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, safety and friendliness had the highest evaluations. Tolerance and openness to new ideas received the lowest ratings in both 1994 and 2004. In 2004, friendliness and safety were again rated the highest. However, there was a significant decline in residents' feelings of safety compared to 1994 and a decrease in their assessment of Albion's appearance. The evaluations of other qualities remained essentially 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, 51 percent of residents reported knowing the names of half or more of the people in Albion, compared to 42 percent in 1994. Similarly, 30 percent indicated that half or more of their friends live in Albion, compared to 39 percent in 1994. Six percent of residents in 2004 and 7 percent in 1994 said that half or more of their adult relatives and in-laws live in Albion. (Note: These differences are not greater than the margin of error.)

COMMUNITY ATTACHMENT

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

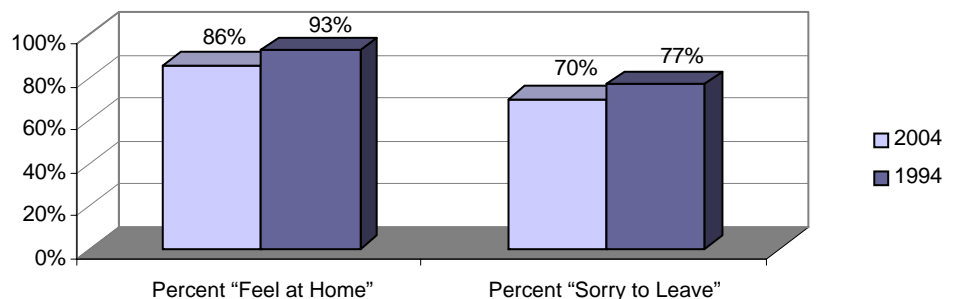


Figure 5: Community Attachment

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Citizens working together to accomplish local goals is an important feature of small towns. For Albion, 61 percent of residents indicated in 2004 that the spirit of community participation is

“good” or “very good.” Likewise, almost two thirds reported participating in a local 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). This represents a significant increase in participation levels since 1994 when 41 percent of residents reported participating in a project. Activeness is essentially unchanged from 1994. When asked to consider a variety of factors that limit their involvement in community projects, the top three factors selected by residents were lack of time (58%), not being asked to volunteer (32%), and not interested in participating (31%).

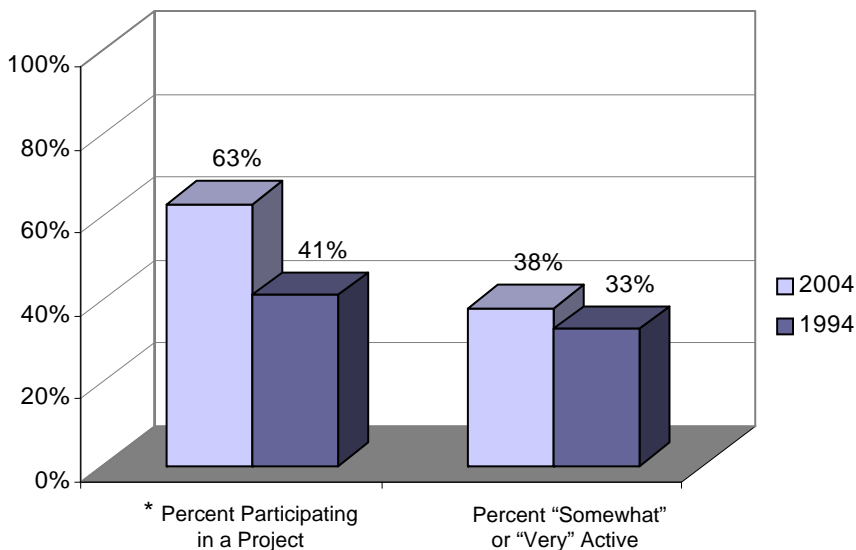


Figure 6: Community Involvement

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 Albion over the past decade? The evaluation of the quality of the senior programs, child care services, recreation/entertainment, police protection, and condition of the parks has declined over the past decade. Residents’ opinions of other services and their patronage patterns have not changed.

The social environment has changed somewhat. Albion residents still describe their town as a safe and friendly community, but viewed it as less safe and less well-kept compared to 1994. Residents remained strongly attached to Albion—that is, a majority feel at home and would be sorry if they had to leave. The level of community involvement increased significantly from 1994 to 2004 and more than 60 percent reported that the spirit of community participation is good or very good overall. It is interesting to note that one of the top three reasons people gave for not being involved in community projects was that no one asked them. This response suggests a potential strategy for increasing 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 Albion’s future. **We wish to thank the Albion residents who participated in the 1994 and 2004 studies for providing the information that made this report possible.**

RDI

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