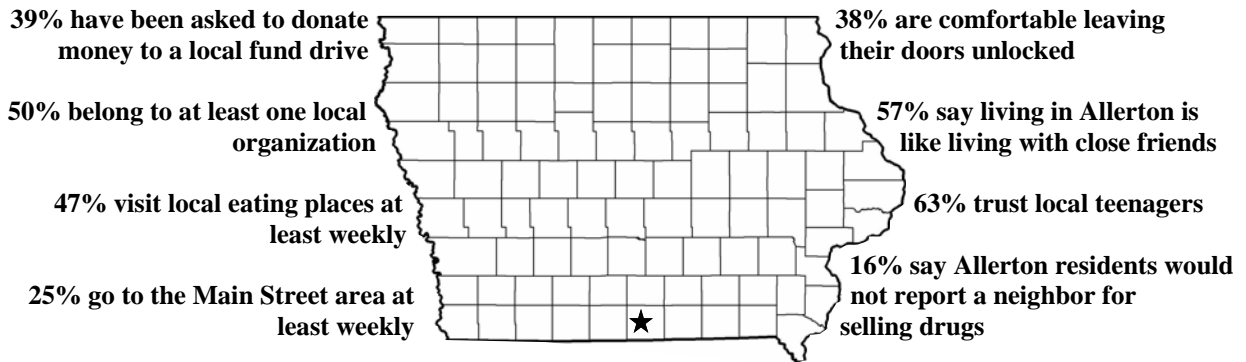


# A DECADE OF CHANGE IN ALLERTON

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 Allerton. 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, 99 Allerton residents responded to the survey, and 97 responded in 2004. This report is a summary of the results, including how the opinions of Allerton residents have changed over the past decade.

## LIFE IN ALLERTON IN 2004



## LOCAL PATRONAGE PATTERNS

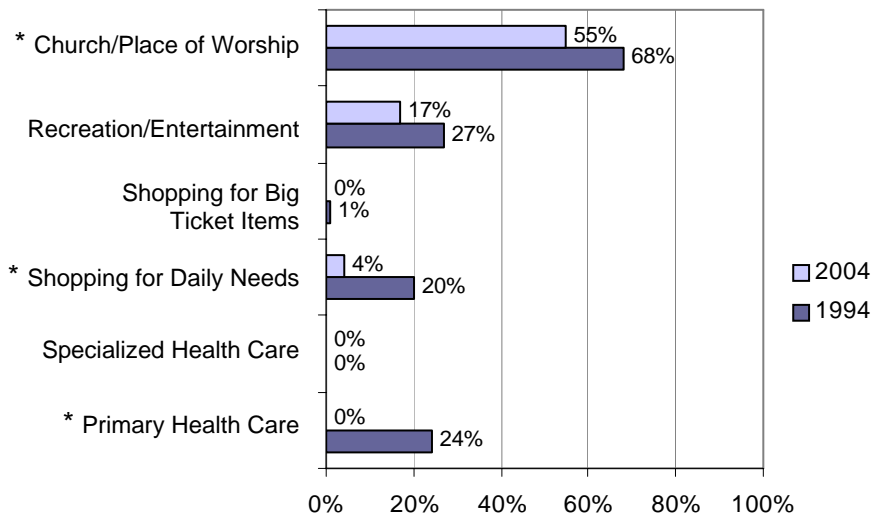


Figure 1: Percent Selecting "Local"

For a variety of reasons, many residents of Iowa's smaller towns rely on neighboring cities for services. Results from this survey suggest that Allerton 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 Allerton in 1994 and 2004. Almost everyone went out of town for all services except attending church or place of worship. About two thirds remained in Allerton for

church or place of worship related services in 1994. This declined to slightly more than half of residents in 2004. Significant decreases in patronage were also reported for shopping for daily needs and primary health care from 1994 to 2004.

\*A Note on Interpretation: For Allerton, 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

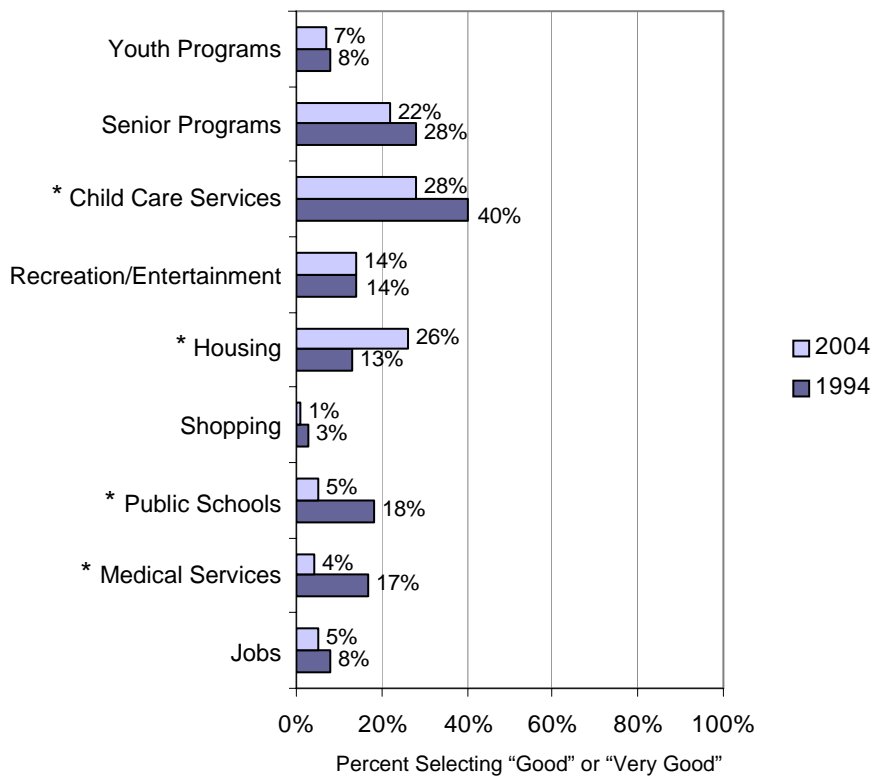


Figure 2: Ratings of Local Services and Facilities

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 services received a favorable evaluation from more than half of residents in either period. Ratings for child care services, public schools, and medical services declined over the decade. In 1994, four in ten rated Allerton’s child care services favorably, compared to 28 percent in 2004. Ratings for the quality of housing increased from 13 percent approval in 1994 to 26 percent in 2004. Changes in the evaluations of other services were within the margin of error for the study.

## 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. Generally, Allerton residents reported being satisfied with local government services. Almost nine of ten residents rated emergency response and fire protection favorably in both periods. About two thirds or more rated garbage collection, water, and the condition of the parks favorably both times. Police protection and condition of the streets received the lowest ratings, but condition of the streets was rated significantly higher in 2004 than in 1994. Garbage collection also had better ratings in 2004.

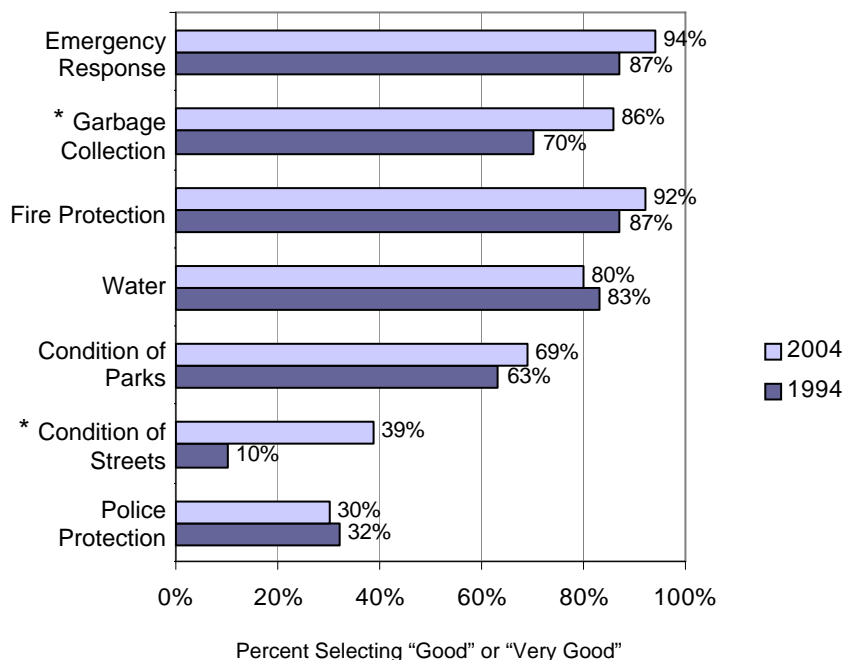
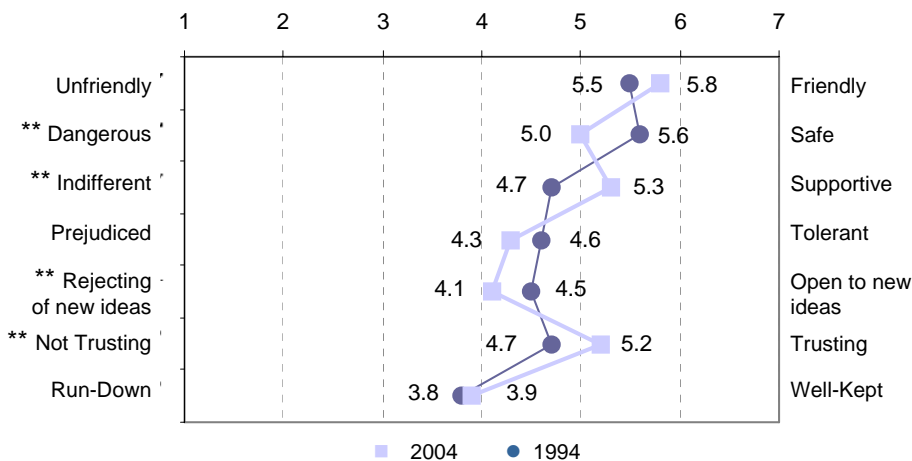


Figure 3: Ratings of Local Government Services

## ALLERTON'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**

\*\* 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.

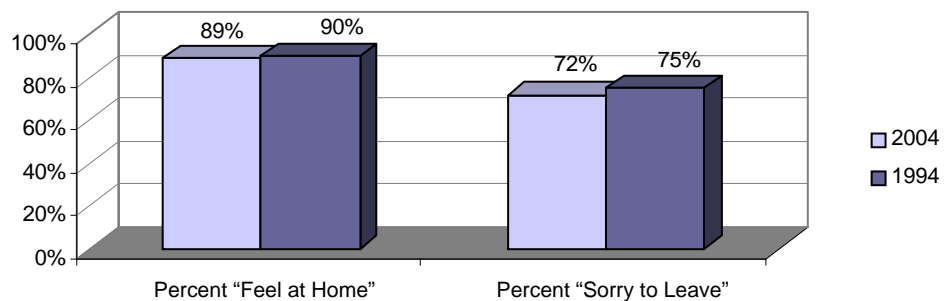
Residents were presented with a list of qualities and asked to evaluate their town on each quality using a 7-point scale. The average ratings shown in Figure 4 reveal that in 1994, safety and friendliness had the highest average evaluations. Appearance, tolerance, and openness to new ideas received the lowest ratings in both 1994 and 2004. In 2004, friendliness and supportiveness were rated the highest. There was a significant decline in residents' feelings of safety compared to 1994 and a decrease in openness to new ideas. Residents rated Allerton as more supportive and trusting in 2004 than in 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, 58 percent of residents reported knowing the names of half or more of the people in Allerton, compared to 62 percent in 1994. Similarly, 47 percent indicated that half or more of their friends live in Allerton, compared to 44 percent in 1994. Fourteen percent of residents in 2004 and 16 percent in 1994 said that half or more of adult relatives and in-laws live in Allerton. (Note: These differences are not greater than the margin of error.)

### COMMUNITY ATTACHMENT

How attached are Allerton residents to their community? The vast majority of residents reported that they feel at home in Allerton 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 Allerton. Feelings of attachment to Allerton have not changed 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 Allerton, 77 percent of residents indicated in 2004 that the spirit of community participation is

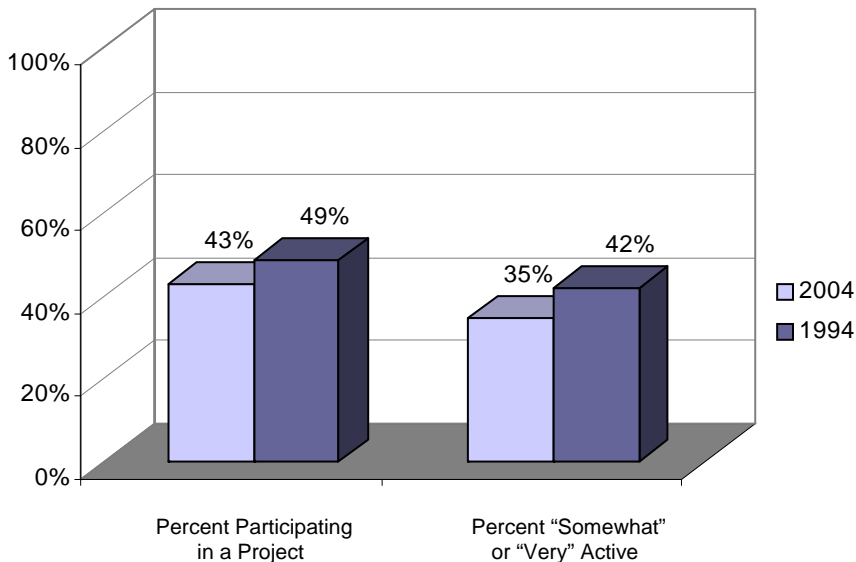


Figure 6: Community Involvement

“good” or “very good.” At the same time, less than half reported participating in a local improvement project in 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 was essentially unchanged from 1994 when 49 percent reported participating in a project and 42 percent rated themselves active in the community. When asked to consider a variety of factors that limit their involvement in community improvement projects, the top three factors mentioned by Allerton residents were lack of time (53%), not being asked to volunteer (37%), and not knowing how to become involved (25%).

## 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 Allerton over the past decade? Findings revealed decreases in local patronage for churches/places of worship, shopping for daily needs, and primary health care. The evaluations of the quality of child care services, public schools, and medical services have also declined over the decade. However, ratings for garbage collection and condition of the streets have improved and residents continued to approve of most local governmental services.

The social environment has changed somewhat. Residents still described Allerton as a friendly community, but viewed it as less safe and less open to new ideas than in 1994. At the same time, Allerton has improved in the areas of trust and supportiveness. Residents remained strongly attached to Allerton and most indicated that community participation is good or very good. Levels of community involvement were unchanged over the decade. It is interesting to note that two of the top three reasons people gave for not being involved in community projects were that no one asked them and they didn’t know how to get involved. These responses suggest potential strategies for increasing community participation.

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

**RDI**

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