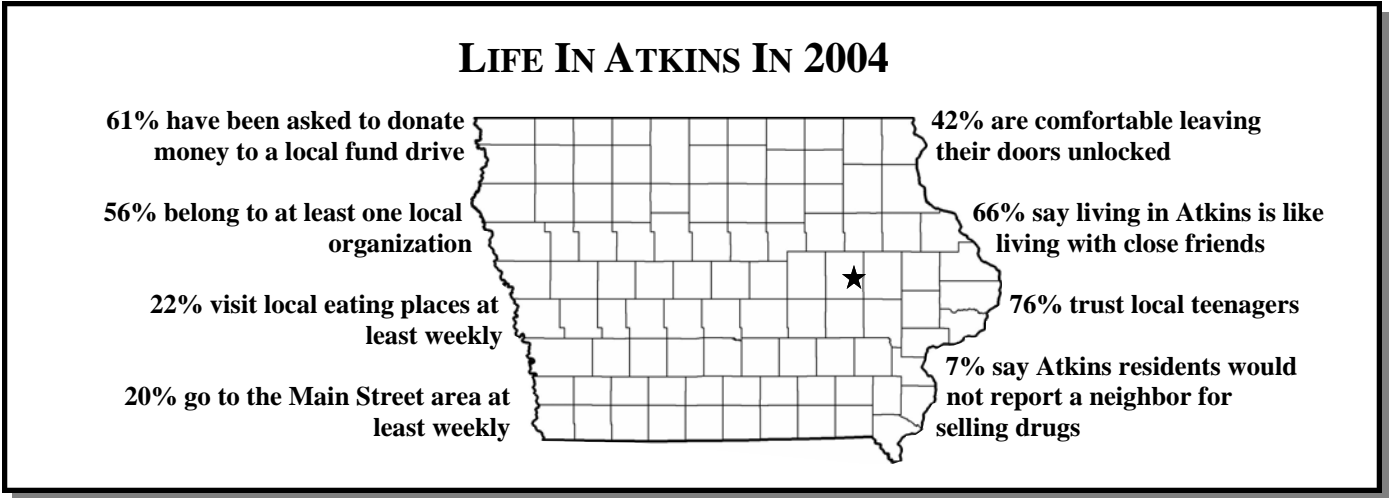


A DECADE OF CHANGE IN ATKINS

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 Atkins. 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, 114 Atkins residents responded to the survey, and 112 responded in 2004. This report is a summary of the results, including how the opinions of Atkins residents have changed over the past decade.



LOCAL PATRONAGE PATTERNS

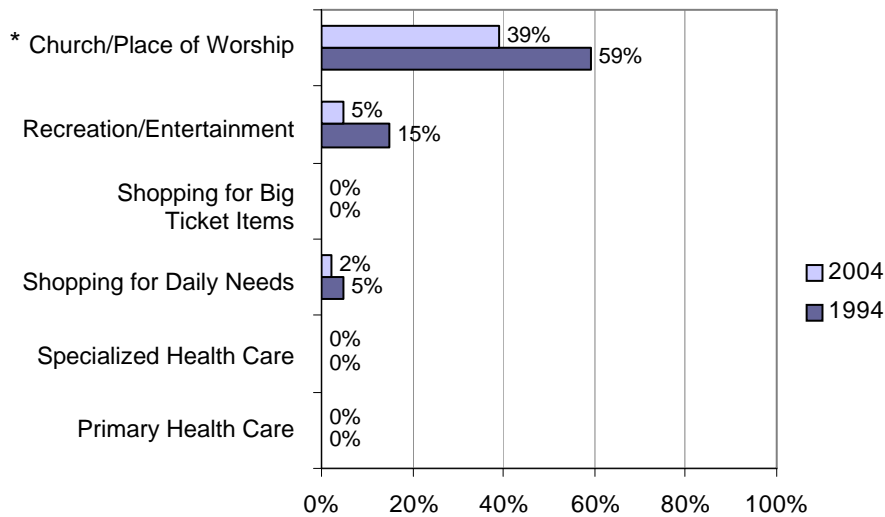


Figure 1: Percent Selecting "Local"

For a variety of reasons, many residents of Iowa's smaller towns rely on neighboring cities for services. Results from this survey suggest that Atkins residents followed this pattern in 1994 and even more so in 2004. Figure 1 shows the percentage of residents who reported patronizing services of various types in Atkins. Almost everyone went out of town for all services except attending church or place of worship. In 1994,

about six of ten Atkins residents frequented a local church or place of worship. In 2004, that figure had dropped to 39 percent. Patronage for other services in Atkins remained essentially unchanged over the decade.

A Note on Interpretation: For Atkins, 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

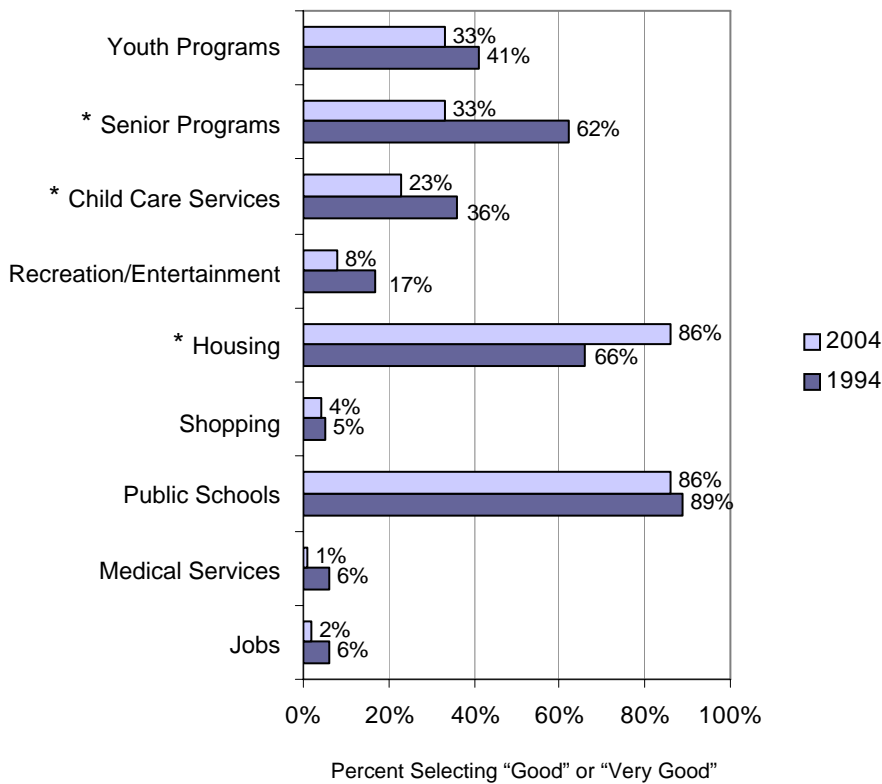


Figure 2: Ratings of Local Services and Facilities

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 highest rated services were housing and public schools. Eighty six percent of Atkins residents rated housing positively which was a significant increase from the 66 percent with positive assessments in 1994. Approval of public schools remained stable over the past decade. However, significant declines in ratings occurred in senior programs and child care services. Jobs, medical services, shopping, and recreation/entertainment received the lowest ratings in both periods.

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, Atkins residents reported being satisfied with local government services. More than seven in ten rated emergency response, garbage collection, fire protection, and parks favorably in both times. More than half indicated that the quality of water services and the condition of the streets were good or very good in 1994 and 2004. Police protection was the only service with approval from less than half of residents. Ratings for water, parks, and streets declined appreciably over the decade.

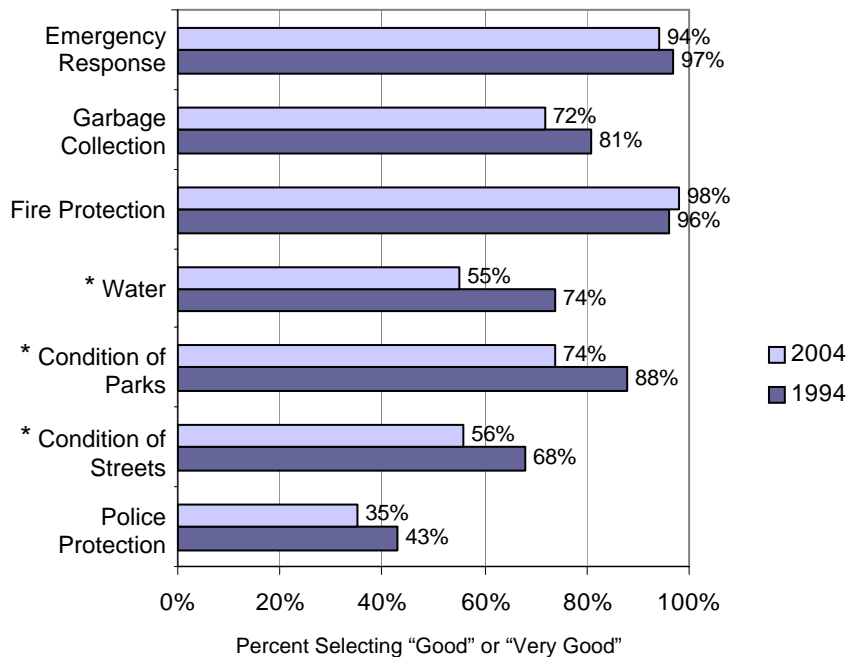


Figure 3: Ratings of Local Government Services

ATKINS' 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.

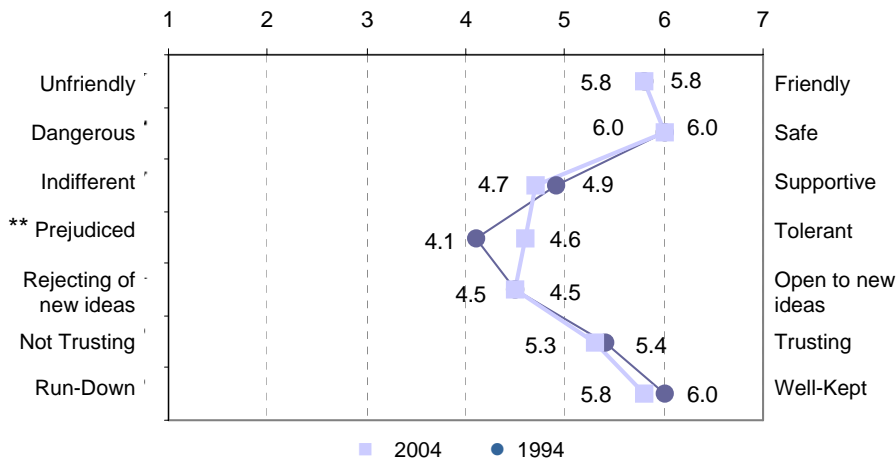


Figure 4: Average Rating of Social Qualities on a 1 to 7 Scale

** 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, appearance, and friendliness had the highest evaluations. Safety, appearance, and friendliness were also given the highest ratings in 2004. Tolerance and openness to new ideas received the lowest ratings from Atkins residents in both 1994 and 2004. The only area of significant change was the higher rating for tolerance in 2004 compared to 1994. The evaluations of other qualities remained essentially the same.

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, 13 percent of residents and 15 percent in 1994 said that half or more of adult relatives and in-laws live in Atkins. Similarly, 36 percent indicated that half or more of their friends live in Atkins in 2004, compared to 40 percent in 1994. However, the percentage of residents who reported knowing the names of half or more of the people in Atkins declined significantly from 46 percent in 1994 to 27 percent in 2004.

COMMUNITY ATTACHMENT

How attached are Atkins residents to their community? Almost everyone reported that they feel at home in Atkins 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 Atkins. Feelings of attachment to Atkins have not changed significantly in the last decade.

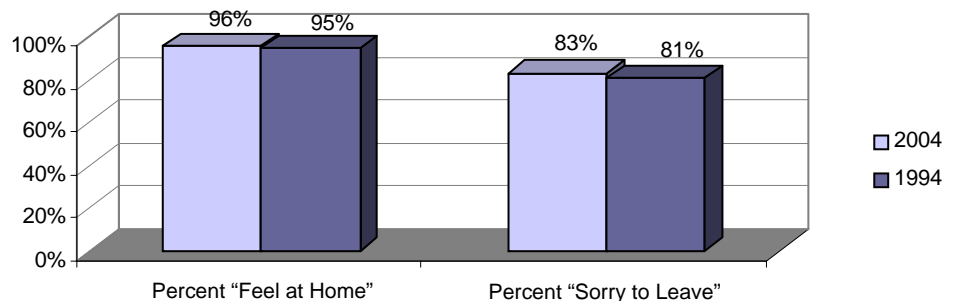


Figure 5: Community Attachment

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Citizens working together to accomplish local goals is an important feature of small towns. For Atkins, 70 percent of residents indicated in 2004 that the spirit of community participation is

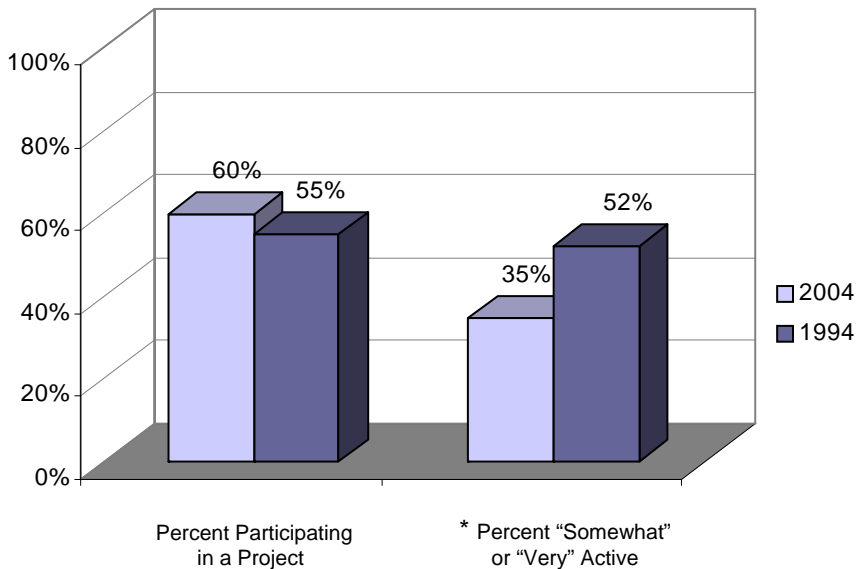


Figure 6: Community Involvement

“good” or “very good.” At the same time, more than half reported participating in a local improvement project during the year prior to the survey and about one of three described themselves as “somewhat” or “very” active in local community activities and events (see Figure 6). The level of participation in community projects is unchanged from 1994, however significantly fewer residents consider themselves active in 2004 compared to 1994. When asked to consider factors that limit their involvement in community improvement projects, the top three factors selected by Atkins residents were lack of time (60%), not being asked to volunteer (40%), and not knowing how to get involved (23%).

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 11 percentage points. Using this standard, what has changed in Atkins over the past decade? Atkins residents were less likely to patronize a local church or place of worship in 2004 than in 1994. More residents rated the quality of housing positively, but fewer evaluated the quality of senior programs, child care services, water, parks, and streets favorably.

The social environment has changed somewhat. Residents still described Atkins as a well-kept, safe, and friendly community that is more tolerant than it was in 1994. Residents remained strongly attached to Atkins—that is, a vast majority feel at home and would be sorry if they had to leave. More than seven in ten reported that the spirit of community participation is good or very good and the majority reported participating in a community project in the last year. However, fewer described themselves as active in the community. 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 did not know how to become involved. This suggests possible strategies 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 Atkins’ future. **We wish to thank the Atkins residents who participated in the 1994 and 2004 studies for providing the information that made this report possible.**

RDI

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