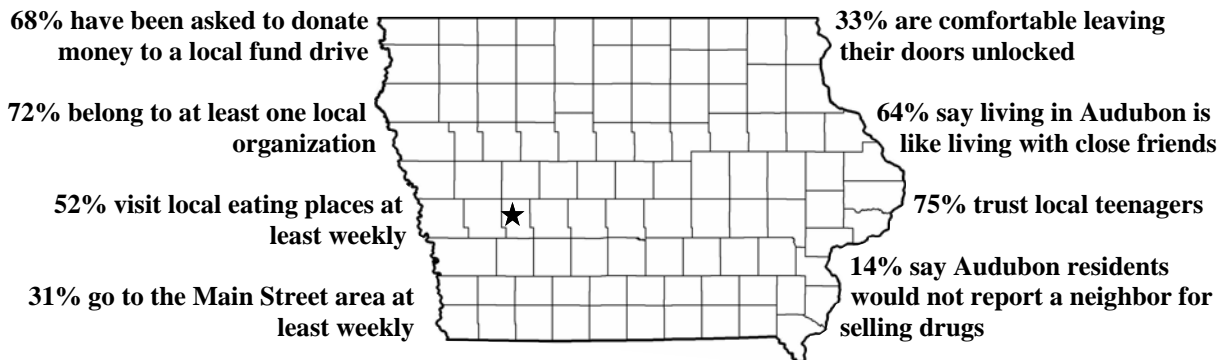


A DECADE OF CHANGE IN AUDUBON

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 Audubon. 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, 117 Audubon residents responded to the survey, and 107 responded in 2004. This report is a summary of the results, including how the opinions of Audubon residents have changed over the past decade.

LIFE IN AUDUBON IN 2004



LOCAL PATRONAGE PATTERNS

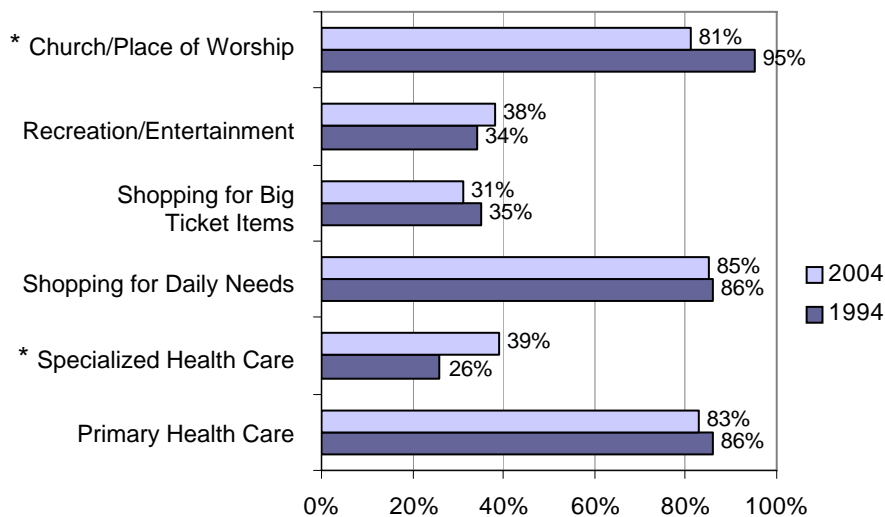


Figure 1: Percent Selecting "Local"

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

Even so, significantly fewer residents attended a local church/place of worship in 2004 than in 1994. About four in ten Audubon residents patronized local specialized health care in 2004 up from 26 percent ten years ago. Changes in other services over the decade are within the margin of error and essentially unchanged.

A Note on Interpretation: For Audubon, 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

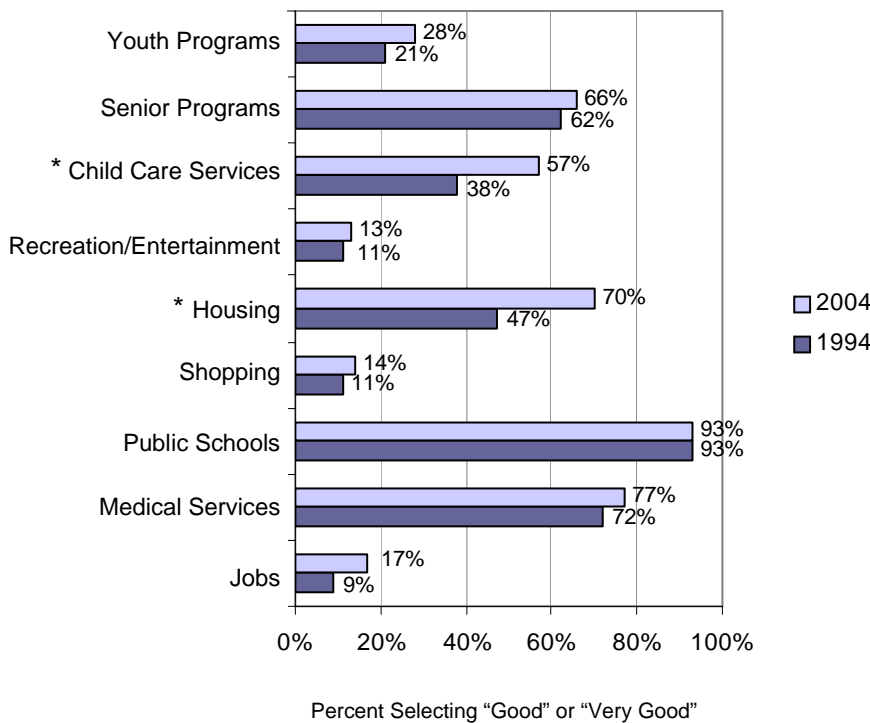


Figure 2: Ratings of Local Services and Facilities

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. About 90 percent of residents rated the public schools positively and roughly three quarters evaluated medical services positively in both time periods. Likewise, senior programs received favorable ratings from more than half of Audubon residents. Ratings for housing and child care services improved significantly from the 1994 level. Jobs, shopping, and recreation received the lowest ratings in both periods. Changes in the ratings for these services and youth programs 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, Audubon residents reported being satisfied with local government services. Emergency response, garbage collection, fire protection, condition of the parks and police protection received positive evaluations from the vast majority of residents. However, water and the condition of the streets were rated as good or very good by less than half of Audubon residents in 1994. The rating for water services improved significantly, while ratings for park conditions declined over the ten year study period.

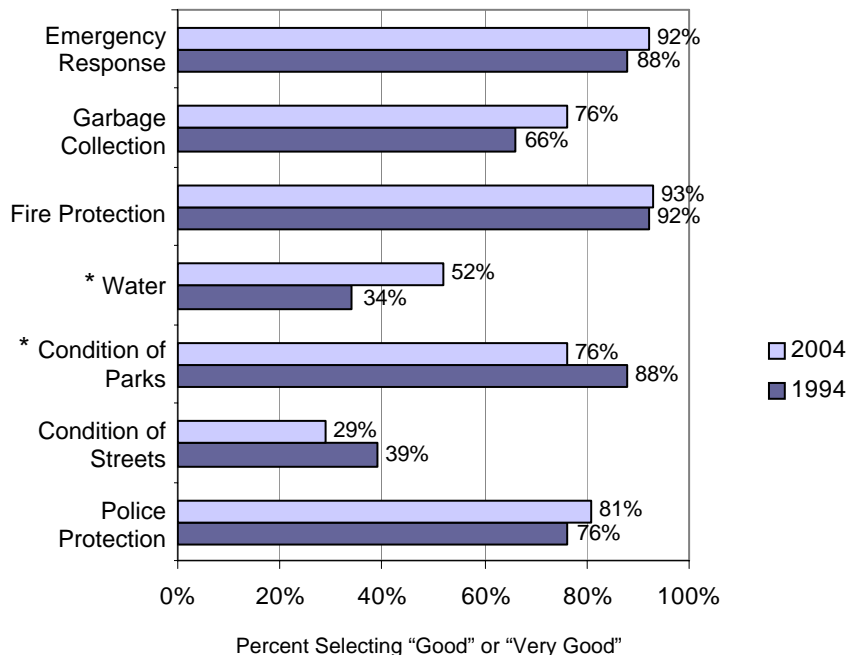


Figure 3: Ratings of Local Government Services

AUDUBON'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.

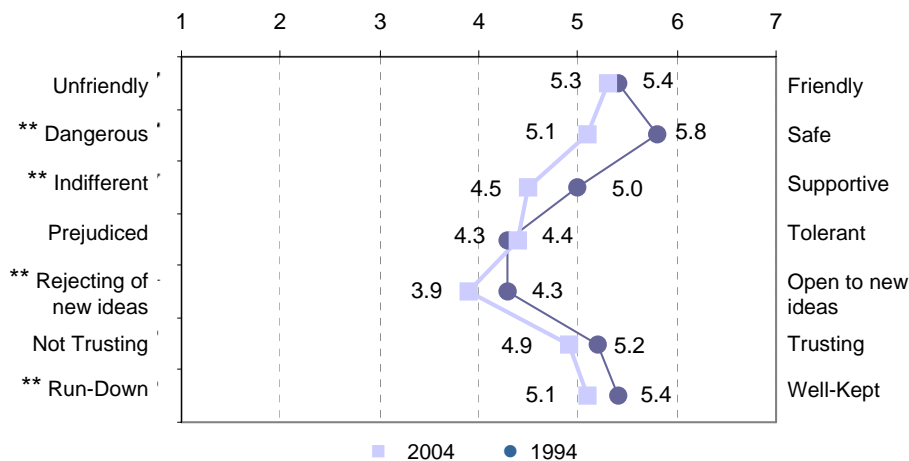


Figure 4: Average Rating of Social Qualities on a 1 to 7 Scale

** 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, friendliness, and appearance had the highest evaluations. In 2004, there was a significant decline in residents' assessment of safety and appearance compared to 1994. Even so, these two and friendliness still received the highest ratings. Openness to new ideas and tolerance received the lowest ratings in both 1994 and 2004. Openness to new ideas and supportiveness decreased significantly over the decade.

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, 60 percent of residents reported knowing the names of half or more of the people in Audubon, compared to 59 percent in 1994. Similarly, 71 percent indicated that half or more of their friends live in town, compared to 67 percent in 1994. Thirty two percent of residents in 2004 and 27 percent in 1994 said that half or more of their adult relatives and in-laws live in Audubon. (Please note: These changes are within the margin of error.)

COMMUNITY ATTACHMENT

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

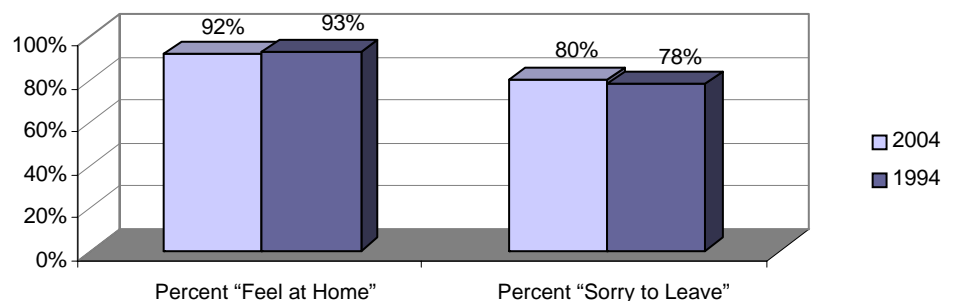


Figure 5: Community Attachment

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Citizens working together to accomplish local goals is an important feature of small towns. For Audubon, 71 percent of residents indicated in 2004 that the spirit of community participation is

“good” or “very good.” At the same time, about two thirds reported participating in a local improvement project during the year prior to the survey and about half described themselves as “somewhat” or “very” active in local community activities (see Figure 6). This level of involvement is statistically the same as in 1994 when 69 percent reported participating in a project and 55 percent rated themselves as 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 residents were lack of time (56%), not being asked to volunteer (49%), and not having the skills to contribute (39%).

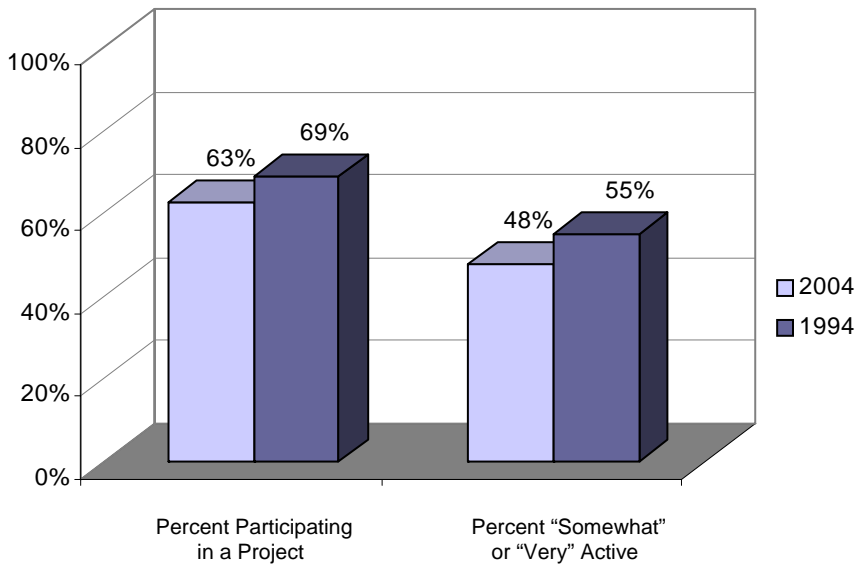


Figure 6: Community Involvement

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 11 percentage points. Using this standard, what has changed in Audubon over the past decade? Audubon residents were more likely to utilize local specialized health care in 2004 and less likely to attend church/place of worship in town. More gave positive evaluations to the quality of local housing, child care services, and water, but the condition of the parks received favorable ratings from fewer residents. Other government services, medical services, senior programs, and the public schools continued to be rated positively.

The social environment has changed somewhat. Audubon residents still described their town as safe, well-kept, and friendly, but viewed it as less safe, less supportive, more run down and more rejecting of new ideas compared to 1994. Residents remain attached to Audubon. More than 70 percent reported that the spirit of community participation is good or very good and levels of community involvement remained unchanged from 1994 to 2004. 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 don't have the skills to contribute. 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 Audubon's future. **We wish to thank the Audubon residents who participated in the 1994 and 2004 studies for providing the information that made this report possible.**

RDI

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