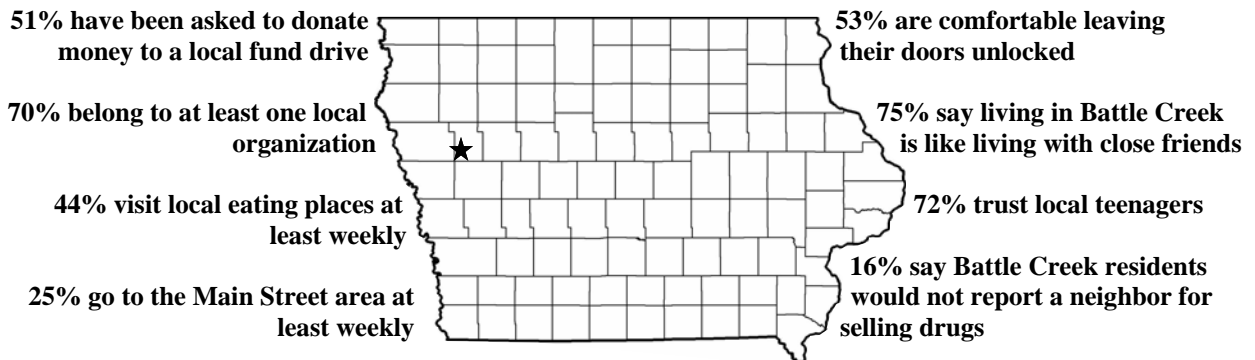


A DECADE OF CHANGE IN BATTLE CREEK

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 Battle Creek. 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, 109 Battle Creek residents responded to the survey, and 107 responded in 2004. This report is a summary of the results, including how the opinions of Battle Creek residents have changed over the past decade.

LIFE IN BATTLE CREEK IN 2004



LOCAL PATRONAGE PATTERNS

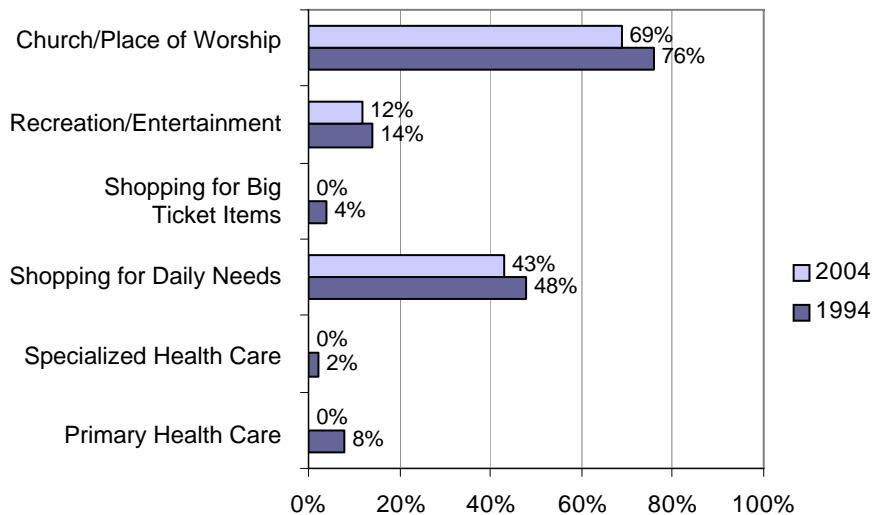


Figure 1: Percent Selecting "Local"

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

and shopping for daily needs. Between three quarters (in 1994) and 69 percent (in 2004) of residents remained in Battle Creek for church or place of worship. Slightly less than half of residents shopped locally for their daily needs in both 1994 and 2004. There were no significant changes in patronage patterns over the past decade.

A Note on Interpretation: For Battle Creek, 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

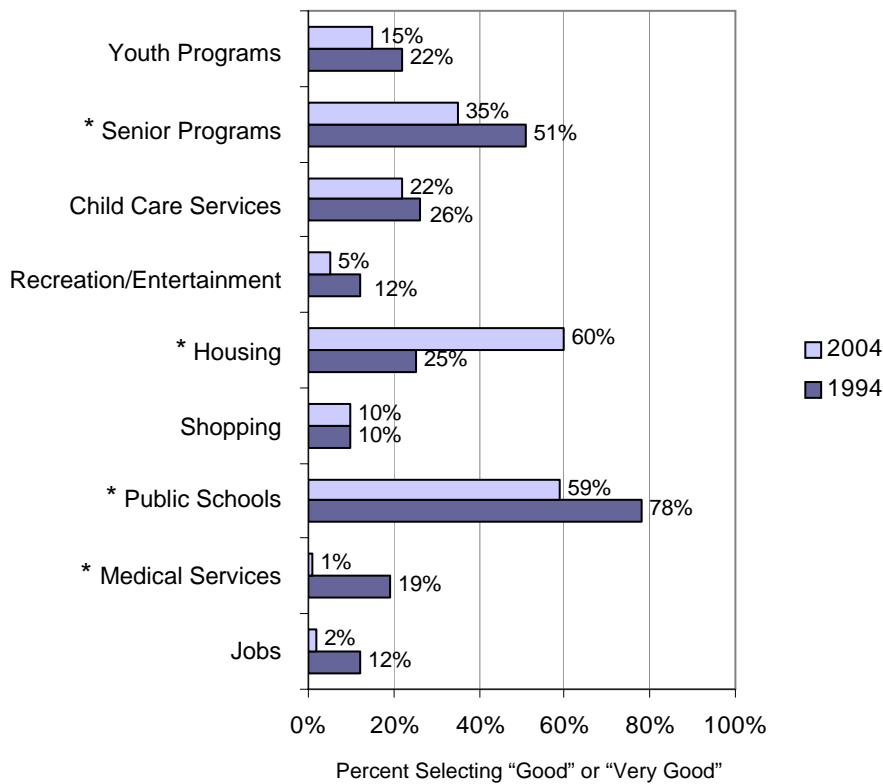


Figure 2: Ratings of Local Services and Facilities

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. Almost 80 percent of residents rated the public schools positively in 1994 which declined to 59 percent in 2004. Senior programs and medical services also received significantly lower ratings during the past 10 years. The quality of housing was rated higher in 2004 by Battle Creek residents going from 25 percent approval in 1994 to 60 percent in 2004. Jobs, shopping, and recreation/entertainment received the lowest ratings in both periods. Ratings for these services, youth programs, and child care services were unchanged over the past decade.

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, Battle Creek residents reported being satisfied with local government services. Emergency response, garbage collection, fire protection, and the condition of the parks received positive evaluations from the vast majority of residents. Ratings for the quality of the water services showed significant improvement over the last ten years. About half of residents evaluated the water, the condition of the streets, and police protection positively in both periods.

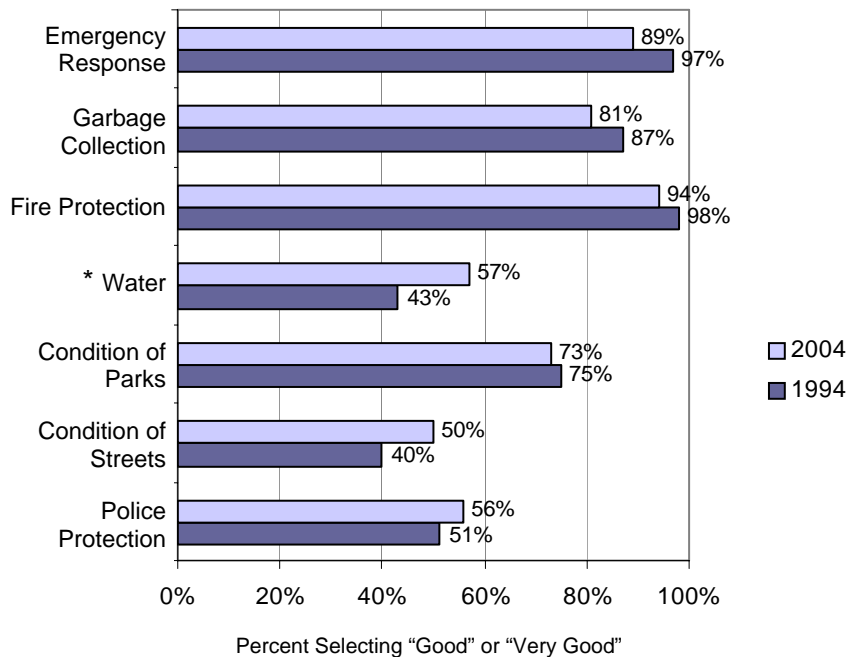


Figure 3: Ratings of Local Government Services

BATTLE CREEK'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.

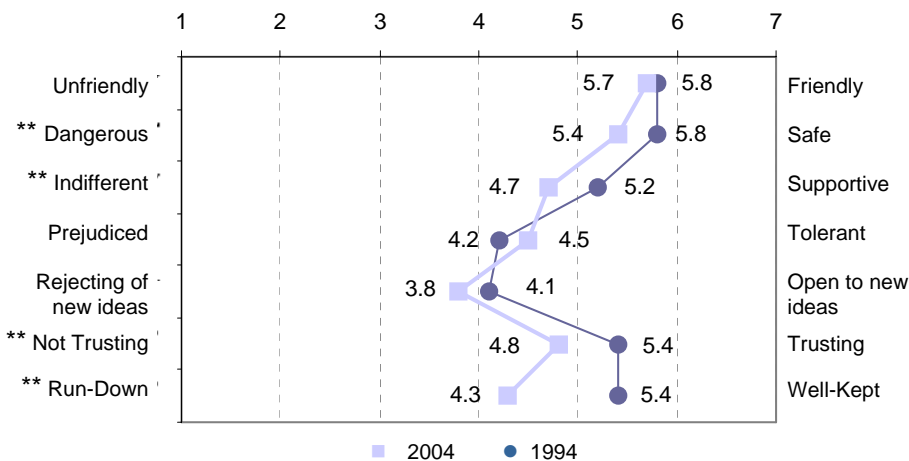


Figure 4: Average Rating of Social Qualities on a 1 to 7 Scale

** 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 evaluations. In 2004, there was a significant decline in residents' assessment of safety, but even so, safety and friendliness still received the highest ratings. Openness to new ideas and tolerance received the lowest ratings in both 1994 and 2004. Battle Creek residents perceived the town as significantly less safe, less supportive, less trusting, and more run down in 2004 compared to 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, 78 percent of residents reported knowing the names of half or more of the people in Battle Creek, compared to 75 percent in 1994. Similarly, 57 percent indicated that half or more of their friends live in Battle Creek, compared to 67 percent in 1994. Twenty six percent of residents in 2004 and in 1994 said that half or more of adult relatives and in-laws live in Battle Creek. (Please note: These changes are within the margin of error.)

COMMUNITY ATTACHMENT

How attached are Battle Creek residents to their community? Almost everyone reported that they feel at home in Battle Creek 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. Residents' feelings of attachment to Battle Creek have not changed significantly.

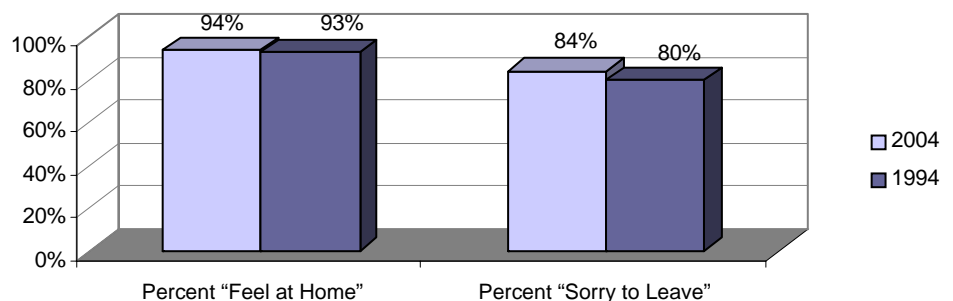


Figure 5: Community Attachment

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Citizens working together to accomplish local goals is an important feature of small towns. For Battle Creek, 62 percent of residents indicated in 2004 that the spirit of community participation is “good” or “very good.” At the same time, 55 percent reported participating in a community improvement project during the year prior to the survey and 38 percent described themselves as “somewhat or “very” active in local community activities and events (see Figure 6). The level of participation and the percentage indicating they were active were statistically the same in 1994 as in 2004. When asked to consider a variety of factors that limit their involvement in community improvement projects, the top three factors selected by Battle Creek residents were lack of time (69%), not being asked to volunteer (43%), and having no interest in participating (36%).

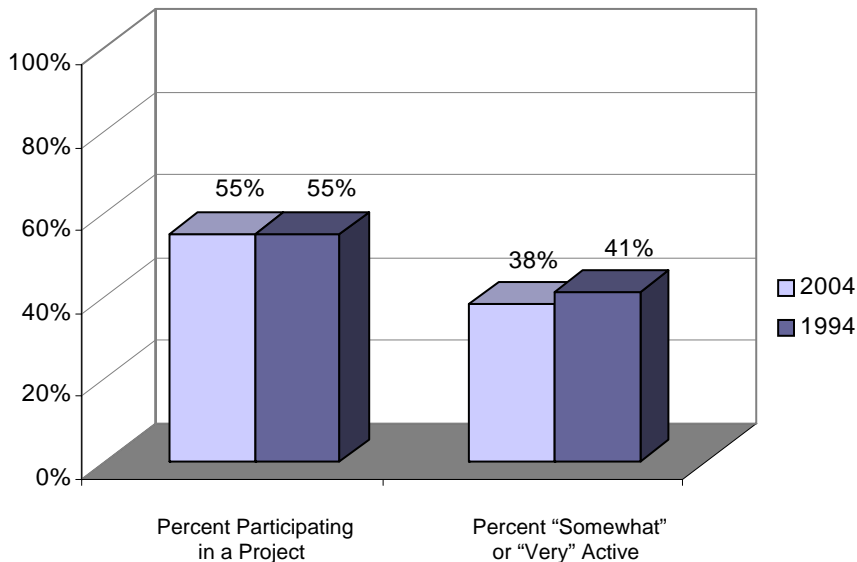


Figure 6: Community Involvement

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 Battle Creek over the past decade? More Battle Creek residents approved of the quality of local housing and water services, but fewer rated the quality of public schools, senior programs, and medical services favorably as in 1994. Evaluations of other services and reported patronage patterns remain unchanged.

The social environment has changed somewhat. Residents still described Battle Creek as safe and friendly, but viewed it as less safe, less supportive, less trusting, and more run-down compared to 1994. They remained strongly attached to Battle Creek—that is, a vast majority feel at home and would be sorry if they had to leave. About two thirds 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 to note that one of the top three reasons people gave for not being involved in community projects were that no one asked them. 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 Battle Creek’s future. **We wish to thank the Battle Creek residents who participated in the 1994 and 2004 studies for providing the information that made this report possible.**

RDI

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