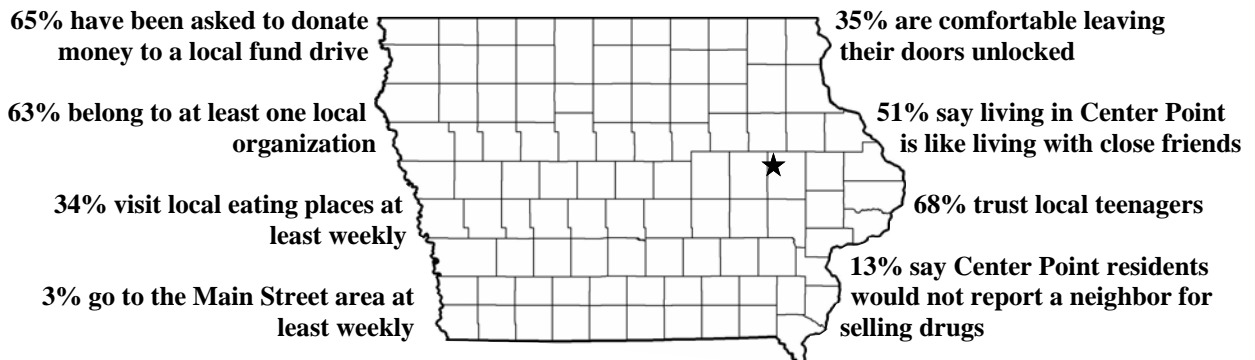


A DECADE OF CHANGE IN CENTER POINT

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 Center Point. 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, 112 Center Point residents responded to the survey, and 103 responded in 2004. This report is a summary of the results, including how the opinions of Center Point residents have changed over the past decade.

LIFE IN CENTER POINT IN 2004



LOCAL PATRONAGE PATTERNS

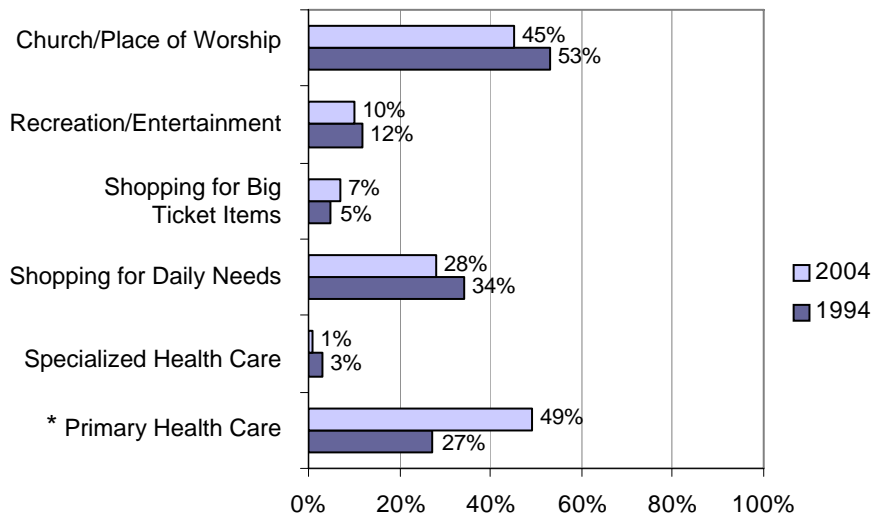


Figure 1: Percent Selecting "Local"

For a variety of reasons, many residents of Iowa's smaller towns rely on neighboring cities for services. Results from this survey suggest that Center Point residents followed this pattern in 1994 and 2004. Figure 1 shows the percentage of residents who reported patronizing services of various types in Center Point. About half remained in Center Point for church/place of worship and for primary health care in 2004.

This represented a significant increase in patronage for primary health care compared to 1994. Almost everyone went out of town for recreation, shopping for big ticket items, and specialized health care in both time periods. Patronage levels for all areas except primary health care were essentially unchanged over the decade.

A Note on Interpretation: For Center Point, 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

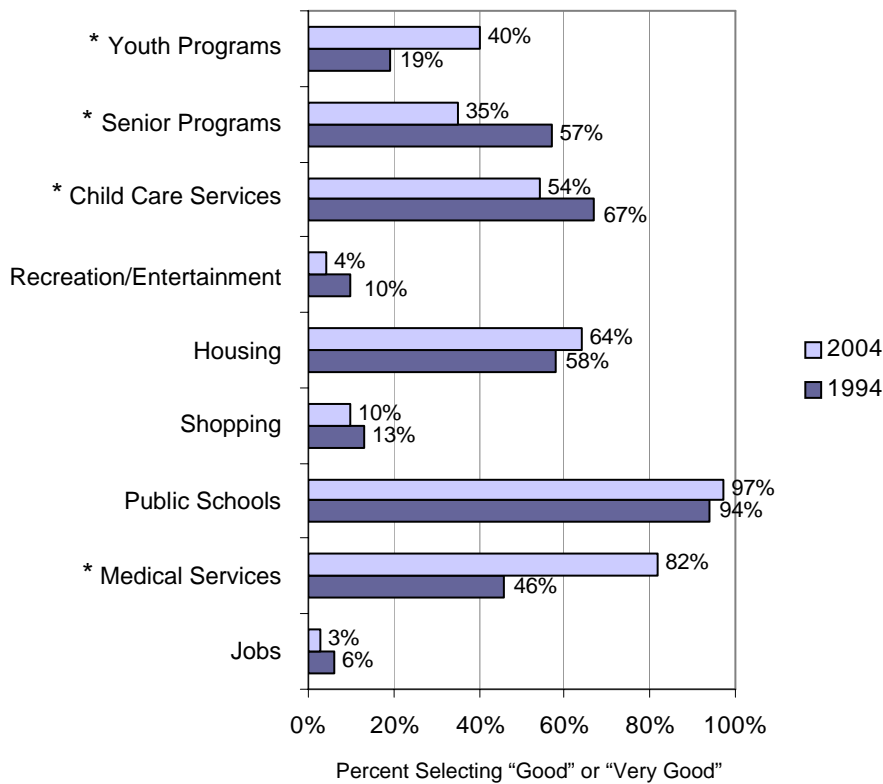


Figure 2: Ratings of Local Services and Facilities

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. Over 90 percent of residents rated the public schools positively and more than two-thirds rated medical services and housing favorably in 2004. Ratings for youth programs and medical services improved from 1994, but senior programs and child care services had lower ratings at the end of the decade. Jobs, shopping, and recreation in received the lowest ratings in both periods with fewer than one in six residents indicating the services were good or very good. With the exceptions noted above, evaluations were unchanged in 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. Generally, residents reported being satisfied with government services in Center Point. More than two thirds rated emergency response, garbage collection, fire protection, and parks favorably in both times. The condition of streets and police protection were lowest in 1994 and again in 2004 with approval from a third or less. Ratings for the quality of water services declined in 2004 compared to 1994. Changes in the assessments of other services are within the margin of error.

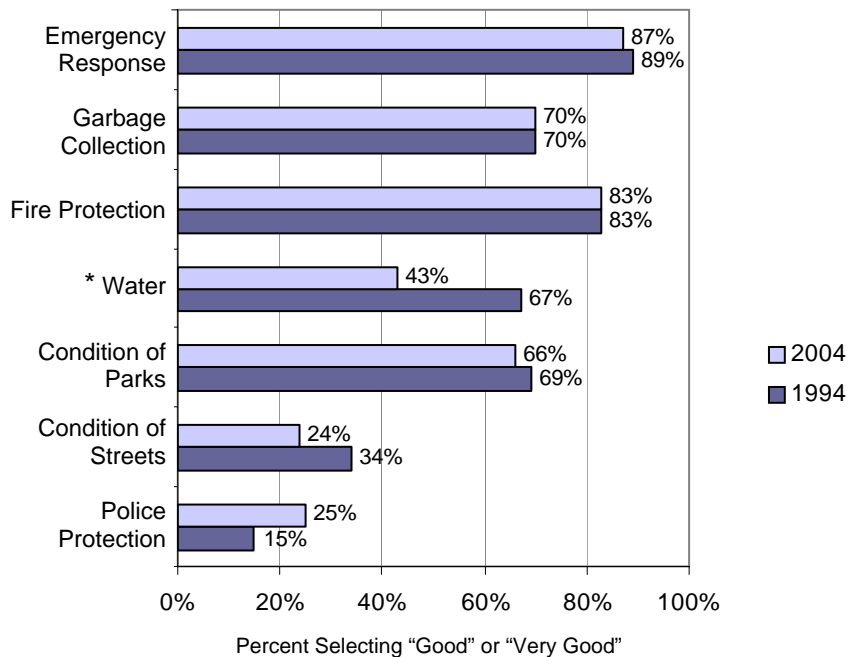


Figure 3: Ratings of Local Government Services

CENTER POINT'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.

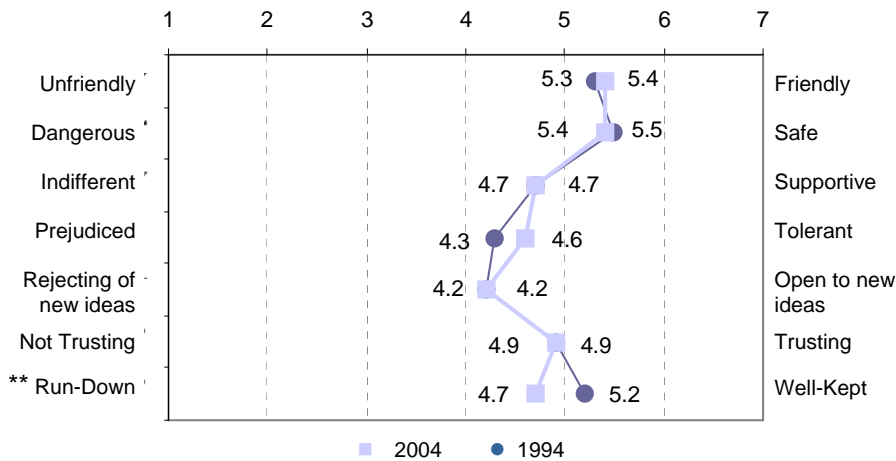


Figure 4: Average Rating of Social Qualities on a 1 to 7 Scale

** 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 and 2004, safety and friendliness had the highest evaluations. Tolerance and openness to new ideas received the lowest ratings in both 1994 and 2004. Residents described Center Point as less well-kept in 2004 compared to 1994. However, there were no significant changes in residents' evaluations of the other qualities 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, 21 percent of residents reported knowing the names of half or more of the people in Center Point, compared to 28 percent in 1994. Similarly, 44 percent indicated that half or more of their friends live in Center Point, compared to 37 percent in 1994. Sixteen percent of residents in 2004 and 15 percent in 1994 said that half or more of adult relatives and in-laws live in Center Point. (Note: These differences are not greater than the margin of error.)

COMMUNITY ATTACHMENT

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

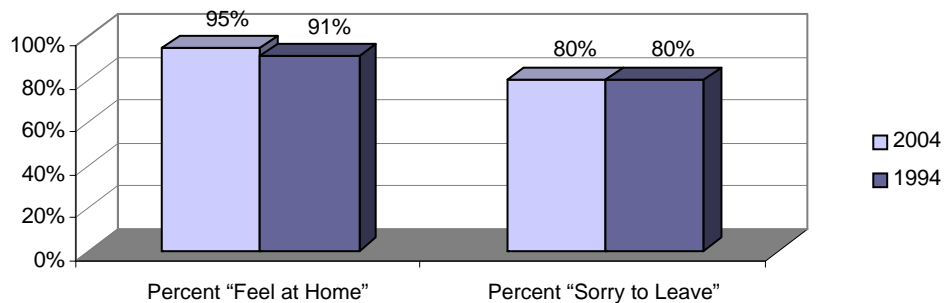


Figure 5: Community Attachment

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Citizens working together to accomplish local goals is an important feature of small towns. For Center Point, 71 percent of residents indicated in 2004 that the spirit of community participation is “good” or “very good.” Fifty percent reported participating in a local improvement project during the year prior to the survey and about one in four described themselves as “somewhat” or “very” active in local community activities (see Figure 6).

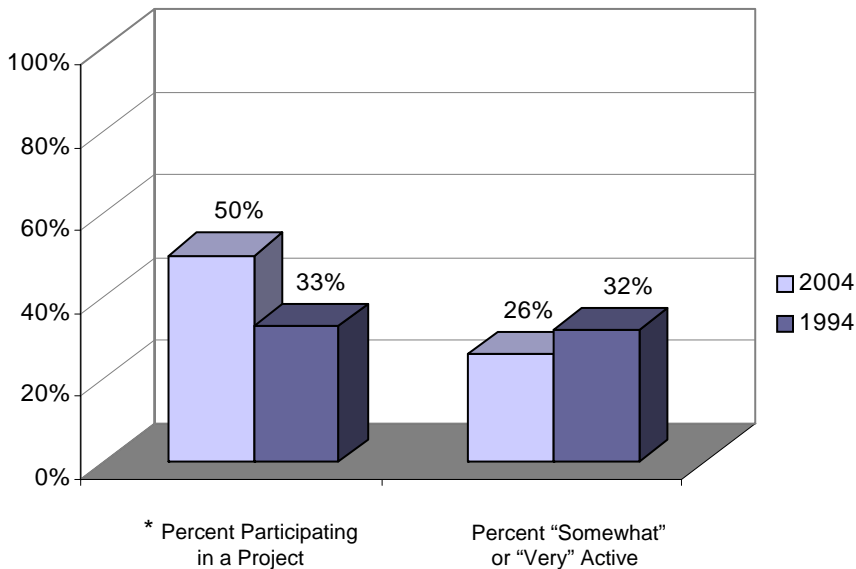


Figure 6: Community Involvement

Fifty percent reported participating in a local improvement project during the year prior to the survey and about one in four described themselves as “somewhat” or “very” active in local community activities (see Figure 6). The level of participation is significantly greater than in 1994 when 33 percent reported participating. There was no significant change in active-ness over the ten years. 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 (63%), not being asked to volunteer (46%), and not knowing how to become involved (32%).

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 Center Point over the past decade? Residents were more likely to utilize local primary health care in 2004 than in 1994. A greater percentage approved of the quality of youth programs and medical services, but fewer rated the quality of senior programs, child care services, and water favorably. Other government services and the public schools continued to be rated positively.

The social environment has changed somewhat. Residents still described Center Point as a safe and friendly community, but viewed it as less well-kept compared to 1994. They remained strongly attached to Center Point—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 overall and reported levels of community involvement improved 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 not being asked and not knowing how to become involved. These reasons suggest 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 Center Point’s future. **We wish to thank the Center Point residents who participated in the 1994 and 2004 studies for providing the information that made this report possible.**

RDI

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RDI-145 — This report was prepared through the **Rural Development Initiative** Project, Iowa State University and funded by the National Research Initiative, U.S. Department of Agriculture, under Agreement No. 2003-35401-13828.