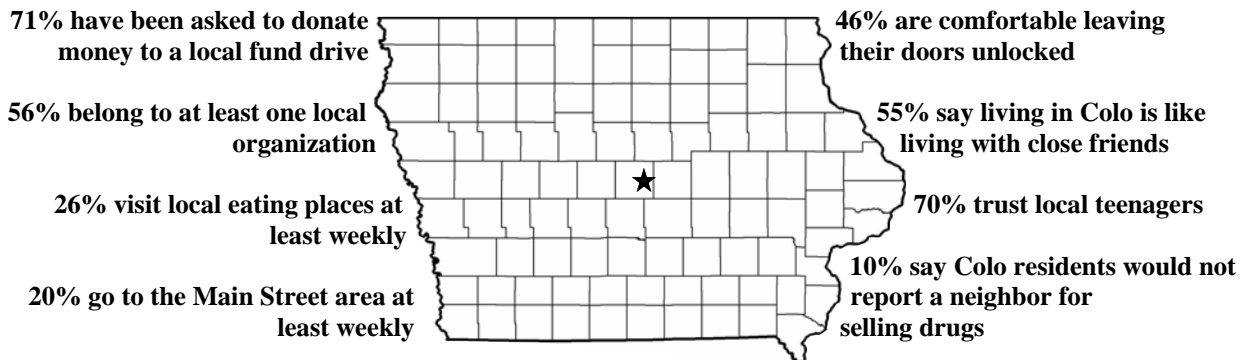


A DECADE OF CHANGE IN COLO

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 Colo. 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 Colo residents responded to the survey, and 101 responded in 2004. This report is a summary of the results, including how the opinions of Colo residents have changed over the past decade.

LIFE IN COLO IN 2004



LOCAL PATRONAGE PATTERNS

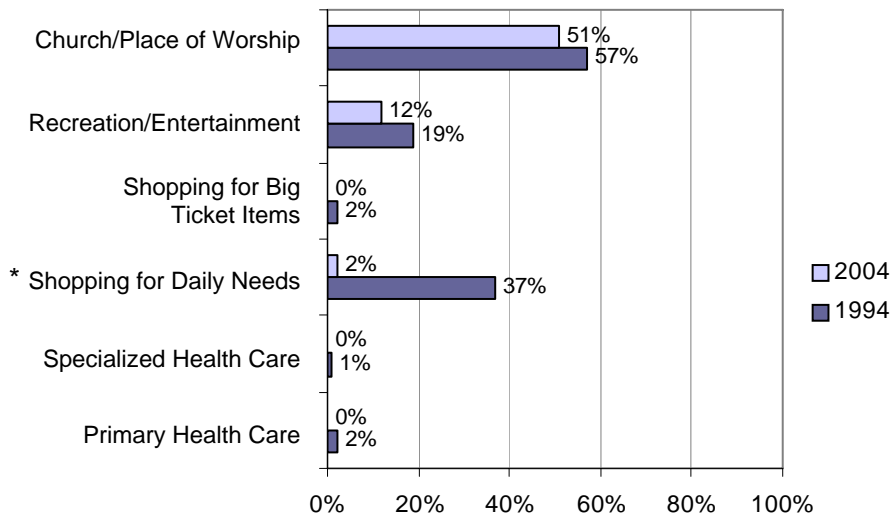


Figure 1: Percent Selecting "Local"

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

About half remained in Colo for church/place of worship in 2004 which was about the same as in 1994. A significantly lower proportion of residents shopped in Colo for their daily needs in 2004 compared to 1994. Patronage levels for other areas were essentially unchanged over the decade.

A Note on Interpretation: For Colo, 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

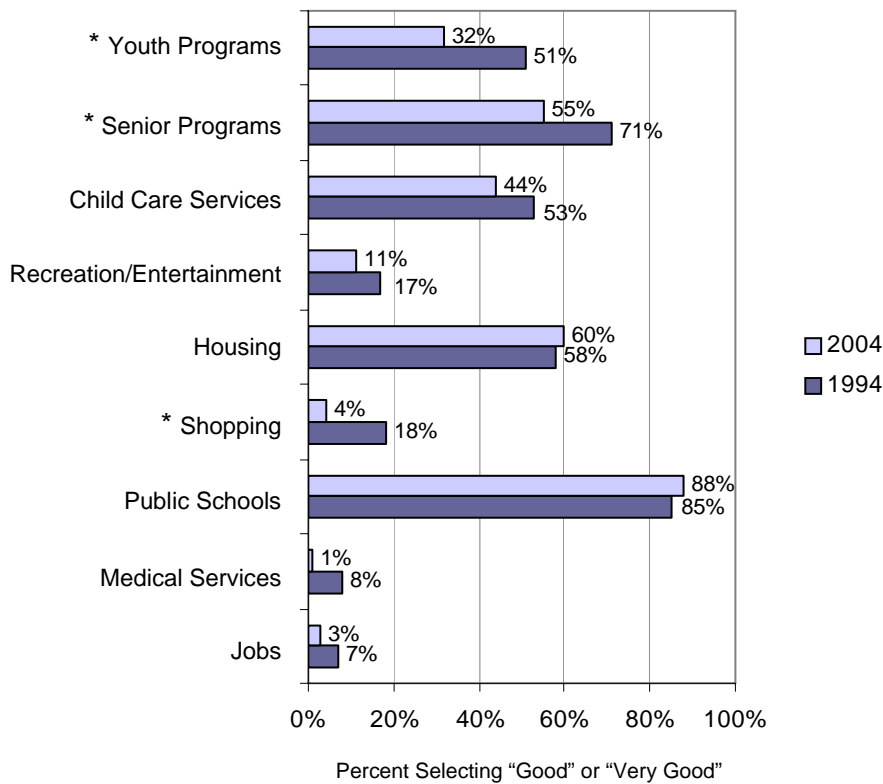


Figure 2: Ratings of Local Services and Facilities

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 percent of residents who rated each service as “good” or “very good” in 1994 and 2004. More than 80 percent of residents rated the public schools positively in both time periods. Jobs, medical services, shopping, and recreation received the lowest ratings with less than 20 percent approval in 1994 and 2004. Ratings for shopping declined substantially over the ten years. Significant declines also occurred in the assessment of youth programs, and senior programs. The change in the proportions of residents who evaluated housing and child care positively from 1994 and 2004 were within the margin or error.

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, Colorado residents reported being satisfied with local government services. More than seven in ten rated emergency response, garbage collection, fire protection, and the condition of the parks favorably in both time periods. Water and police protection received positive ratings from more residents in 2004 compared to 1994, while the percentage approving of emergency response services declined significantly. Other changes in ratings did not exceed the margin of error for this study.

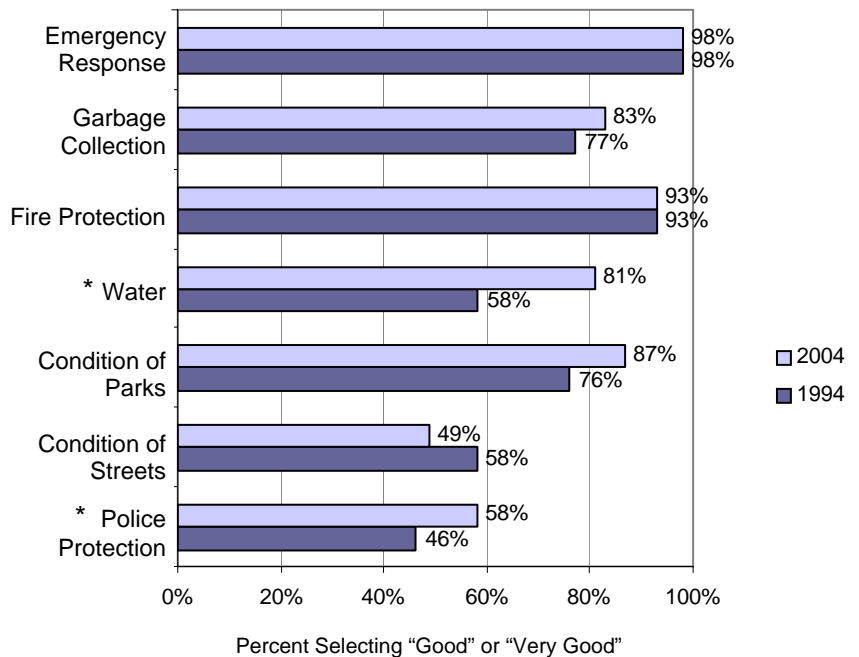


Figure 3: Ratings of Local Government Services

COLO'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.

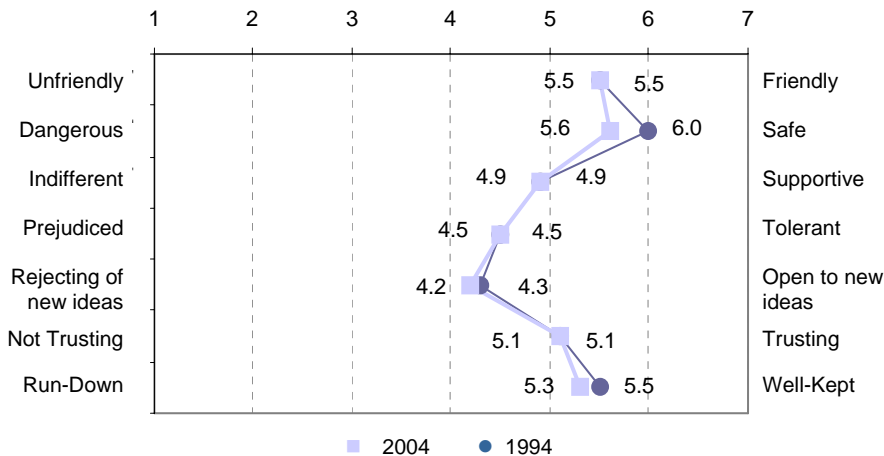


Figure 4: Average Rating of Social Qualities on a 1 to 7 Scale

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. Openness to new ideas and tolerance received the lowest ratings in 1994. Residents' evaluation of Colo's qualities were essentially the same in 2004 as in 1994. In both time periods, residents reported that Colo is a safe, well-kept, and friendly town.

** 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.

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, 42 percent of residents reported knowing the names of half or more of the people in Colo, compared to a significantly larger 53 percent in 1994. As for friendships, little change has occurred. Thirty nine percent indicated that half or more of their friends live in Colo, compared to 42 percent in 1994. Thirteen percent of residents in 2004 and seventeen percent in 1994 said that half or more of adult relatives and in-laws live in Colo.

COMMUNITY ATTACHMENT

How attached are Colo residents to their community? Almost everyone reported that they feel at home in Colo in both 1994 and 2004 (see Figure 5). More than 70 percent in 2004 indicated that they would be sorry to leave if they had to move away from Colo. This was less than the percentage in 1994. Even so, feelings of resident attachment to Colo in 2004 are still quite high.

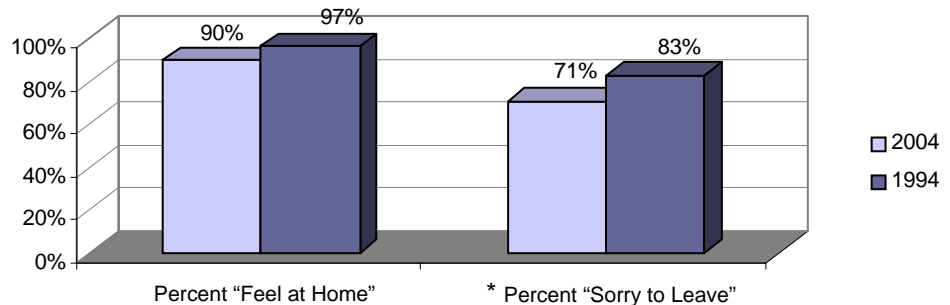


Figure 5: Community Attachment

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Citizens working together to accomplish local goals is an important feature of small towns. For Colo, 76 percent of residents indicated in 2004 that the spirit of community participation is

“good” or “very good.” Fifty-three percent reported participating in a local improvement project during 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 level of involvement is essentially unchanged from 1994 when 58 percent reported participating in a project and 39 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 Colo residents were lack of time (64%), not asked to volunteer (43%), and no interest in participating (31%).

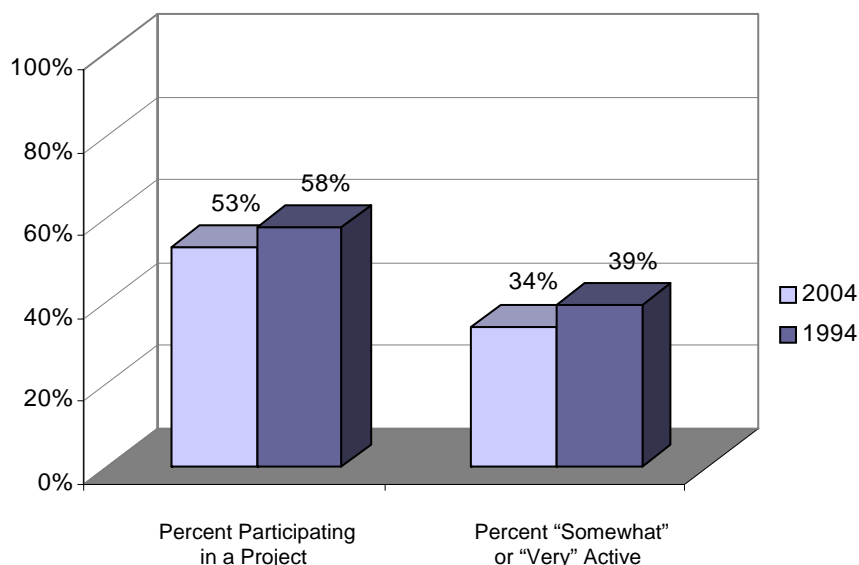


Figure 6: Community Involvement

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 Colo over the past decade? Colo residents were less likely to shop in town for their daily needs in 2004 compared to 1994. A greater percentage approved of the quality of water services, but fewer residents rated youth and senior programs, shopping, and police protection favorably. Overall, government services and the public schools continued to be rated positively.

The social environment has changed somewhat. Residents still described Colo as a safe, well-kept, and friendly community. However, fewer residents reported they would be sorry to leave town in 2004 than in 1994 and they were less likely to know other residents on a first name basis in 2004. More than seven in ten 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 was that no one asked them. This suggests a possible strategy 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 Colo’s future. **We wish to thank the Colo residents who participated in the 1994 and 2004 studies for providing the information that made this report possible.**

RDI

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RDI-150 — 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.