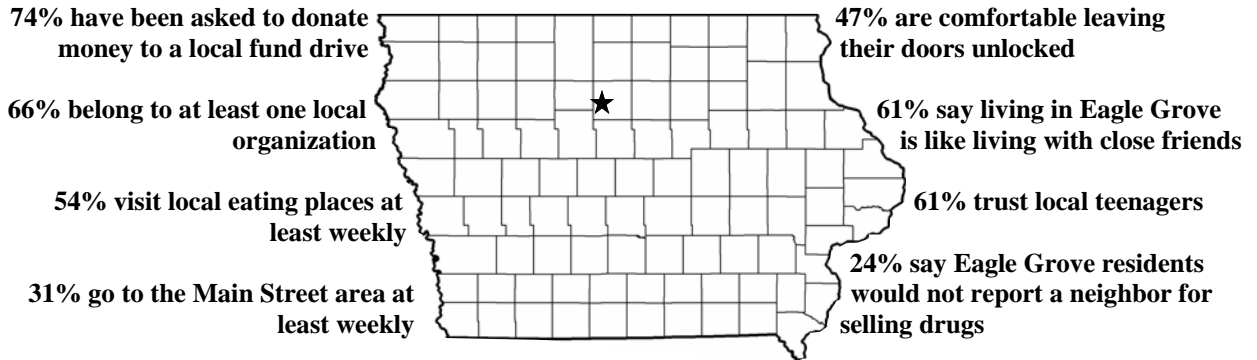


A DECADE OF CHANGE IN EAGLE GROVE

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 Eagle Grove. 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, 111 Eagle Grove residents responded to the survey, and 99 responded in 2004. This report is a summary of the results, including how the opinions of Eagle Grove residents have changed over the past decade.

LIFE IN EAGLE GROVE IN 2004



LOCAL PATRONAGE PATTERNS

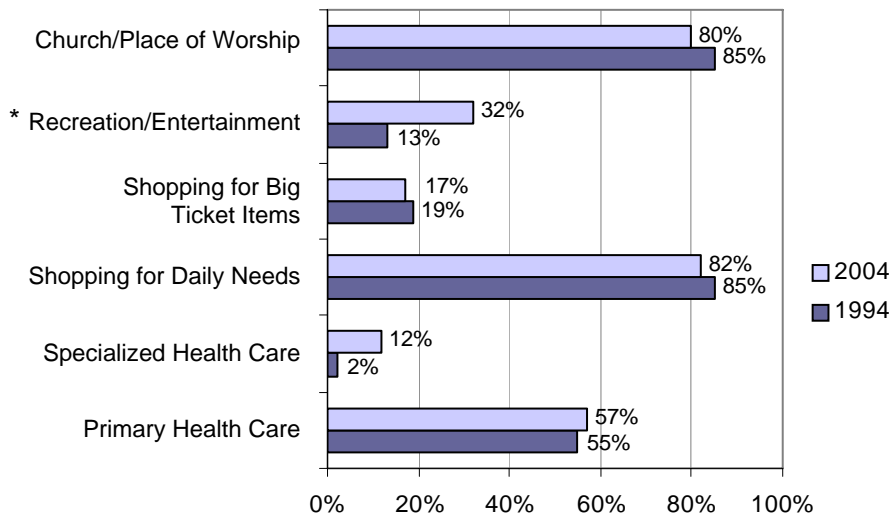


Figure 1: Percent Selecting "Local"

For a variety of reasons, many residents of Iowa's smaller towns rely on neighboring cities for services. The Eagle Grove survey results, which are displayed in Figure 1, show that residents stay in town for some services, but travel for others. Over 80 percent of the residents reported staying in Eagle Grove for their daily shopping needs and for church or place of worship in both years. Over half reported receiving their

primary health care in town. However, less than 20 percent stay in town to shop for big ticket items, to obtain specialized health care, or for recreation and entertainment. The largest change from 1994 to 2004 is that the percentage of residents who stay in Eagle Grove for recreation and entertainment has fallen from 32 percent to 13 percent.

A Note on Interpretation: For Eagle Grove, 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

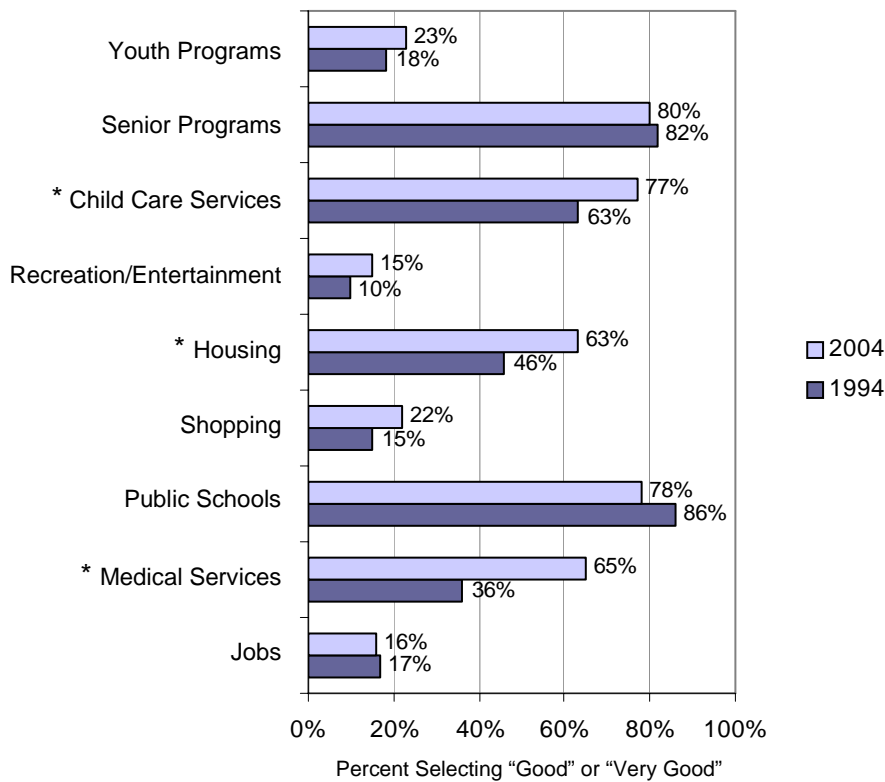


Figure 2: Ratings of Local Services and Facilities

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 Eagle Grove residents who rated each service as “good” or “very good” in 1994 and 2004. Public schools, senior programs, and child care services received the highest ratings in both 1994 and 2004. Jobs, youth programs, recreation, and shopping received the lowest ratings in both years. Positive evaluations of the quality of child care services increased from 63 percent in 1994 to 77 percent in 2004. Medical services and housing also were rated positively by more residents in 2004 compared to 1994. Assessments for other services were essentially unchanged over the decade.

RATINGS OF GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Residents 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. In both years, Eagle Grove residents were generally pleased with the quality of their government services. More than 80 percent of residents rated emergency response, garbage collection, fire protection, and water as “good” or “very good” in 1994 and 2004. However, the positive evaluations of local parks dropped from 79 percent approval in 1994 to 65 percent in 2004. Also, ratings for garbage collection declined from 92 percent to 81 percent. Assessments for other services were unchanged.

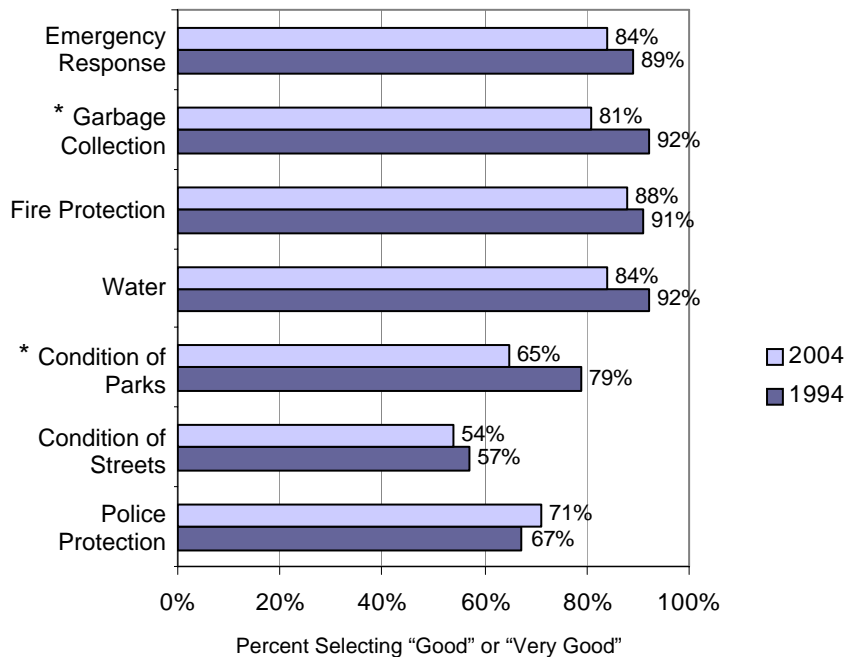


Figure 3: Ratings of Local Government Services

EAGLE GROVE'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.

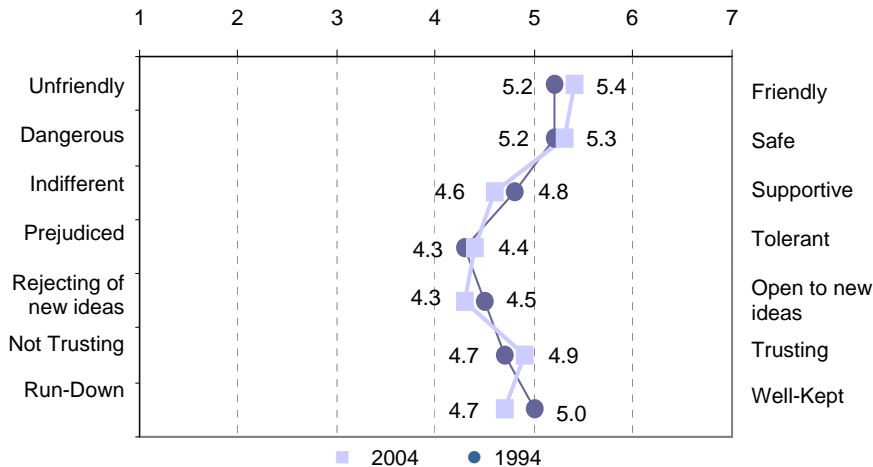


Figure 4: Average Rating of Social Qualities on a 1 to 7 Scale

Residents were presented with a list of qualities and asked to evaluate their town on each quality using a 7-point scale. Figure 4 shows that there was no significant change in how Eagle Grove residents evaluated their town on these qualities from 1994 to 2004. In 1994, residents assigned the highest ratings to friendliness and safety. These two areas also received the highest ratings in 2004. The lowest ratings in 1994 and 2004 were for tolerance and openness to new ideas. The other qualities—supportive, trusting, and well-kept—scored in the middle in both years.

** 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 to assess local social ties. In 2004, 47 percent of the residents reported knowing the names of half or more of the people in Eagle Grove, compared to 41 percent in 1994. Similarly, 64 percent indicated that half or more of their friends live in town, compared to 65 percent in 1994. Twenty-three percent of the residents in 2004 and 31 percent in 1994 said that half or more of their adult relatives and in-laws live in town. (Note: These differences are not greater than the margin of error.)

COMMUNITY ATTACHMENT

Do Eagle Grove residents feel at home in their community? Figure 5 shows that almost all of the residents in both 1994 and 2004 felt at home in Eagle Grove. Seventy percent of residents in 2004 said that they would be sorry to leave the community if they had to move away. These responses indicate that most Eagle Grove residents feel attached to their community.

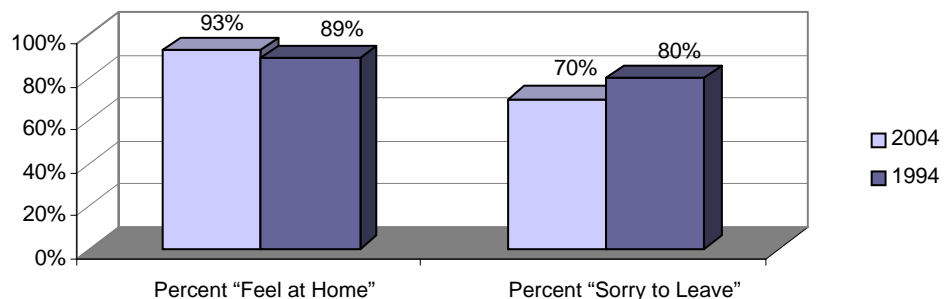


Figure 5: Community Attachment

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Citizens working together to accomplish local goals is an important feature of small towns. For Eagle Grove, 63 percent of the residents indicated in 2004 that the spirit of community participation is “good” or “very good.” In

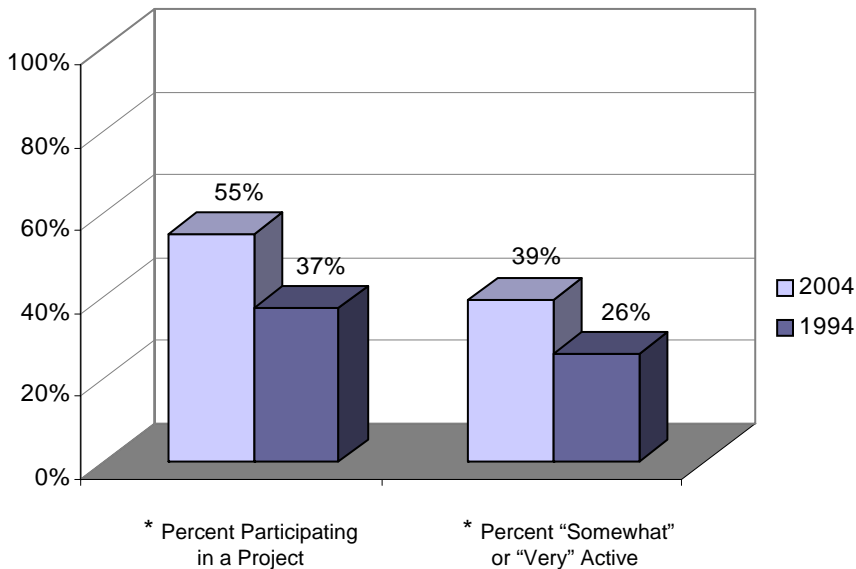


Figure 6: Community Involvement

2004, 55 percent of the respondents reported participating in a community improvement project in the year prior to the survey, up significantly from the 37 percent in 1994 (Figure 6). Likewise, the percentage of respondents who said they were “somewhat” or “very” active in local community activities increased significantly, from 26 percent in 1994 to 39 percent in 2004. When asked to consider the factors that limit their involvement in community improvement projects, the top three answers mentioned by Eagle Grove residents were lack of time (56%), not being asked to volunteer (41%), and having no interest in participating (34%).

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 Eagle Grove over the past decade? The percentage of people who stay in town for recreation and entertainment has declined. Opinions about the quality of local medical services, child care, and housing have improved, but they have declined in regard to the condition of the parks and the quality of garbage collection. Residents continued to evaluate the quality of local government services positively.

The social environment in Eagle Grove has changed very little over the decade. The ratings that residents gave their community on a variety of qualities, such as friendliness and safety, remained the same. Also unchanged is the percentage of residents who feel at home in Eagle Grove and the percentage who would be sorry to leave. There have been major changes, however, in the number of people involved in community activities. The percentage of residents who said that they participated in a community improvement project during the last year increased, as did the percentage of residents who said that they were “somewhat” or “very” active in local community activities.

The past decade has been challenging for Iowa’s small towns. We hope this information will prove useful in planning for Eagle Grove’s future. **We wish to thank the Eagle Grove residents who participated in the 1994 and 2004 studies for providing the information that made this report possible.**

RDI

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