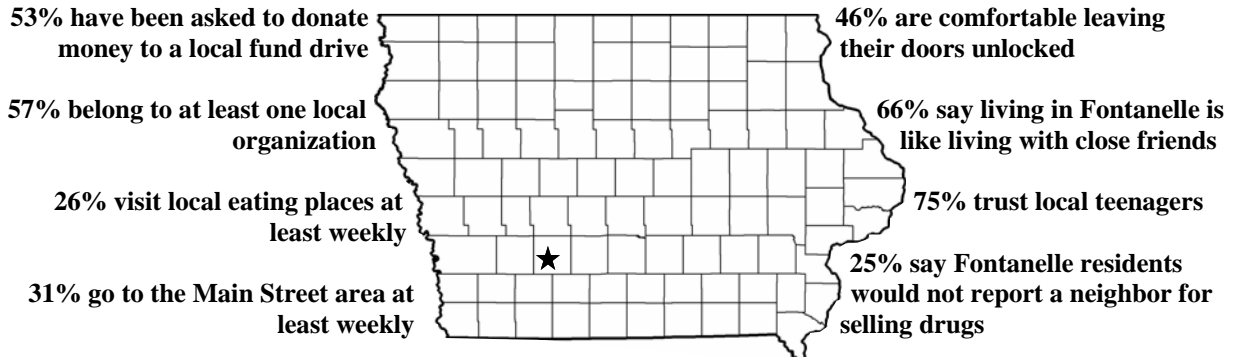


A DECADE OF CHANGE IN FONTANELLE

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

LIFE IN FONTANELLE IN 2004



LOCAL PATRONAGE PATTERNS

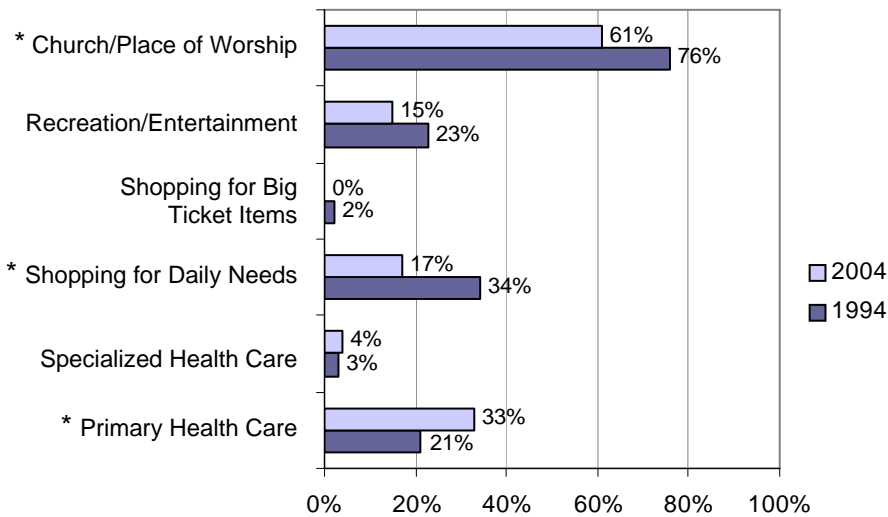


Figure 1: Percent Selecting "Local"

For a variety of reasons, many residents of Iowa's smaller towns rely on neighboring cities for services. Results from this survey suggest that Fontanelle residents followed this pattern. Figure 1 shows that most residents stayed in town to attend church/place of worship, but that they tended to leave for all of the other services. In 1994, 34 percent shopped for daily needs in town, but this fell to 17 percent in 2004. The percentage

who stayed in town for primary medical care increased from 21 percent to 33 percent over the past decade. The percentage who attended church or place of worship in Fontanelle decreased from 76 percent to 61 percent. Few residents stayed in town for recreation/entertainment, specialized health care, and shopping for big ticket items in 1994 and 2004.

A Note on Interpretation: For Fontanelle, 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

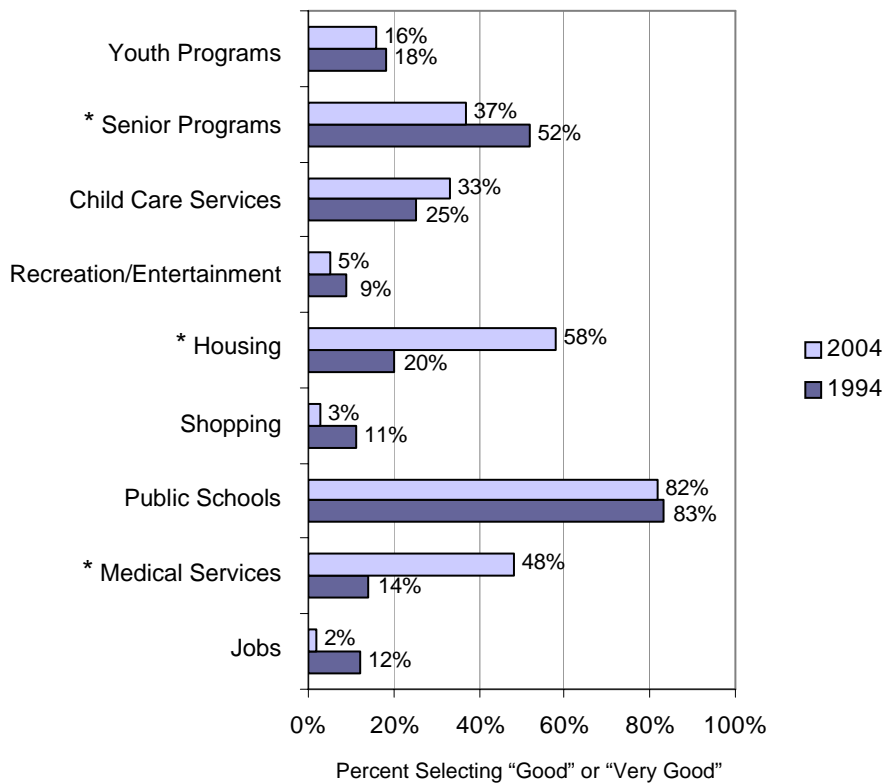


Figure 2: Ratings of Local Services and Facilities

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. Public schools received the highest ratings in both years. Approximately 80 percent of Fontanelle residents rated their schools positively. The percentage of positive ratings for medical services more than tripled over the ten year period, and the positive ratings for housing more than doubled. However, the percentage of residents who rated senior programs as “good” or “very good” dropped significantly. The ratings for the other services and facilities did not change significantly from 1994 to 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. In both years, Fontanelle residents were pleased with the quality of most of their government services. Over 70 percent of the residents were satisfied with emergency response, garbage collection, fire protection, water, and parks. Police protection was rated the lowest, but the percentage of positive ratings for police increased from 35 percent in 1994 to 52 percent in 2004. The percentage of residents assigning favorable ratings to garbage collection also improved significantly over the ten year period.

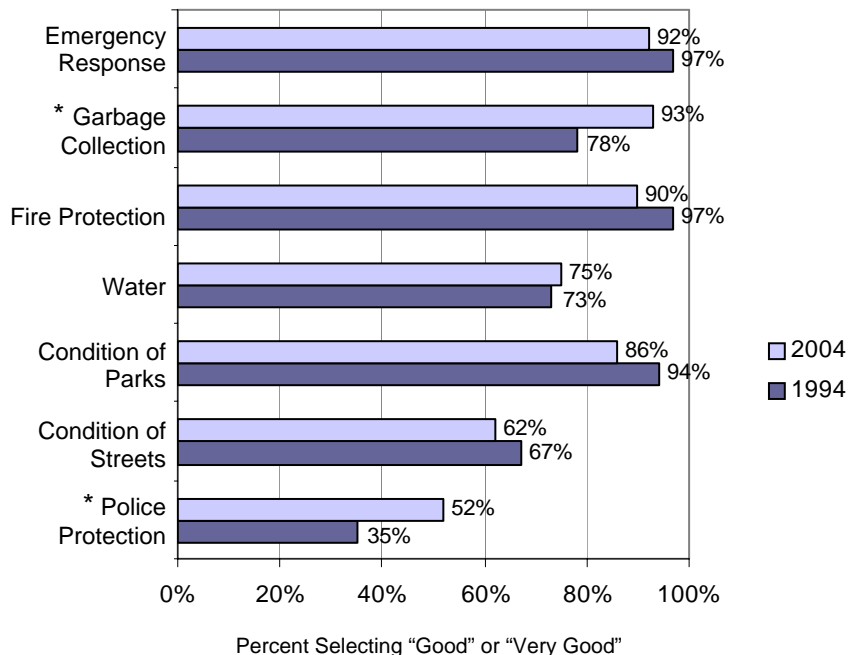


Figure 3: Ratings of Local Government Services

FONTANELLE'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.

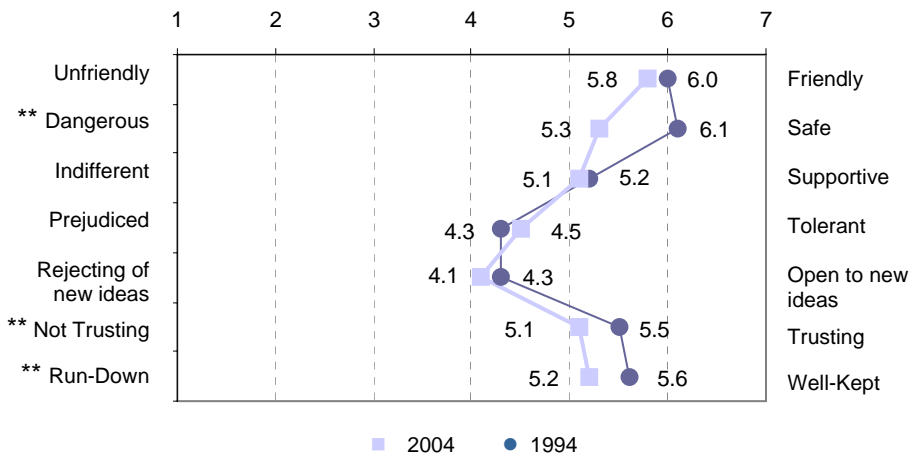


Figure 4: Average Rating of Social Qualities on a 1 to 7 Scale

** 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. Figure 4 shows how Fontanelle residents rated their town on these qualities in 1994 and 2004. In 1994, respondents assigned the highest ratings to friendliness and safety, and these two areas also received the highest ratings in 2004. The lowest rating for both years were for tolerance and for openness to new ideas. Between 1994 and 2004, the ratings for safety, trust, and appearance declined substantially. The ratings for all of the other areas remained unchanged.

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. As such, questions were included to assess local social ties. In 2004, 74 percent of the residents reported knowing the names of half or more of the people in Fontanelle, compared to 84 percent in 1994. Fifty-one percent indicated that half or more of their friends live in town, compared to 59 percent in 1994. Twenty-eight percent of the residents in 2004 and 38 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 Fontanelle 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 town. Over 75 percent also said that they would be sorry to leave the community. These high levels of community attachment in Fontanelle have not changed significantly over the last ten years.

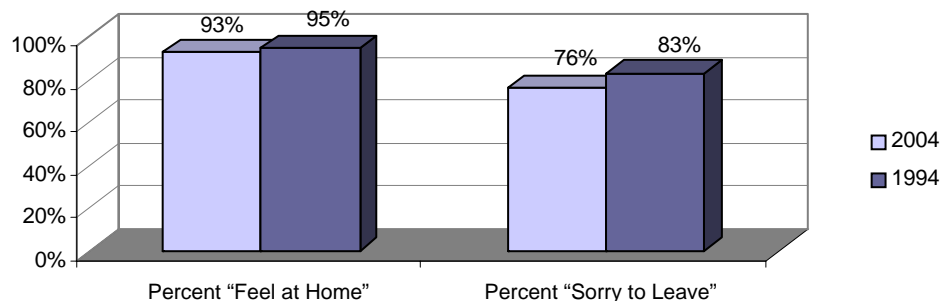


Figure 5: Community Attachment

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Citizens working together to accomplish local goals is an important feature of small towns. For Fontanelle, 78 percent of the residents indicated in 2004 that the spirit of community participation is “good” or “very good.” In both

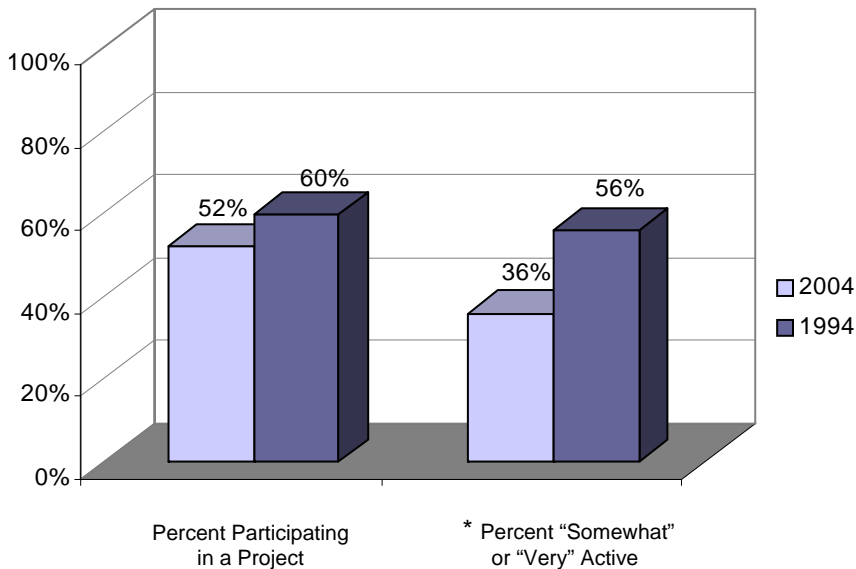


Figure 6: Community Involvement

1994 and 2004, more than 50 percent of the respondents reported participating in a local community improvement project during the year prior to the survey (Figure 6). The percentage of residents who said they were “somewhat” active or “very” active in community activities fell significantly, from 56 percent in 1994 to 36 percent in 2004. When residents were asked to consider the factors that limit their involvement in community improvement projects, the top response in 2004 was that they lacked time to get involved (55%). Other common responses were that they had not been asked to volunteer (40%) and lack of interest in participating (29%).

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 Fontanelle over the past decade? The percentage of people who stay in town to attend church or a place of worship and to shop for their daily needs declined, but the percentage who receive their primary health care in town increased. Residents’ evaluation of medical services and housing improved, but their evaluations of senior programs declined. As for government services, residents rated garbage collection and police protection higher in 2004 than in 1994. Assessments of all of the other facilities and services did not change significantly over the 10 year period.

The social environment in Fontanelle has changed somewhat over the decade. Residents perceive the community to be less safe, less trusting, and less well-kept in 2004 than in 1994. In terms of community engagement, significantly fewer residents reported that they were active in community projects in 2004 than in 1994. It is interesting to note that one of the top reasons people gave for not being involved in community activities was that they had not been asked to volunteer. This suggests one way for increasing community involvement.

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

RDI

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