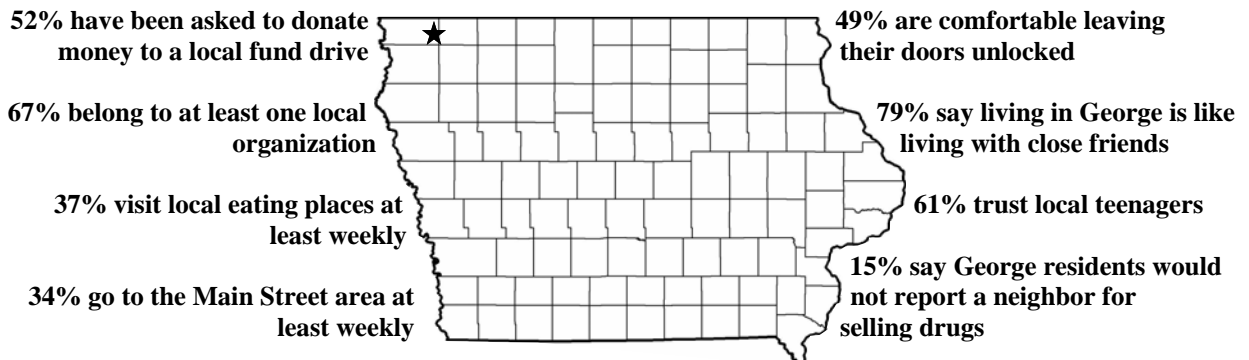


A DECADE OF CHANGE IN GEORGE

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 George. 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, 100 George residents responded to the survey, and 72 responded in 2004. This report is a summary of the results, including how the opinions of George residents have changed over the past decade.

LIFE IN GEORGE IN 2004



LOCAL PATRONAGE PATTERNS

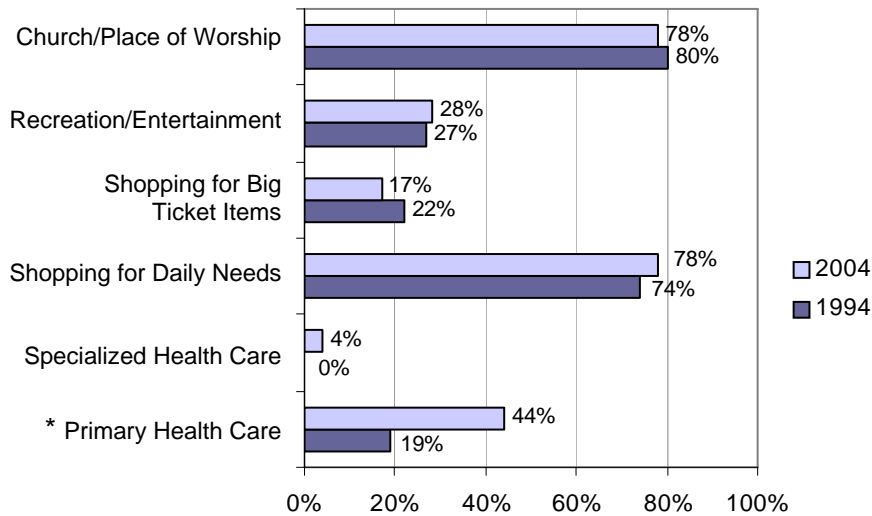


Figure 1: Percent Selecting "Local"

For a variety of reasons, many residents of Iowa's smaller towns rely on neighboring cities for services. The George survey results, which are displayed in Figure 1, show that residents tend to follow this pattern for some services, but remain in town for others. In both 1994 and 2004, approximately three out of four residents stayed in town to attend church or place of worship and for their daily shopping needs. For all of

the other services, however, most residents left town. Less than 25 percent shopped for big ticket items locally, and almost no one received their specialized health care in town. The percentage who stayed in town for their primary health care increased from 19 percent in 1994 to 44 percent in 2004. There were no significant changes over the decade in any of the other patronage patterns.

A Note on Interpretation: For George, differences in percentages between 2004 and 1994 of less than 13 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 13 percent are statistically significant and are indicated with an asterisk ().

RATINGS OF LOCAL SERVICES AND FACILITIES

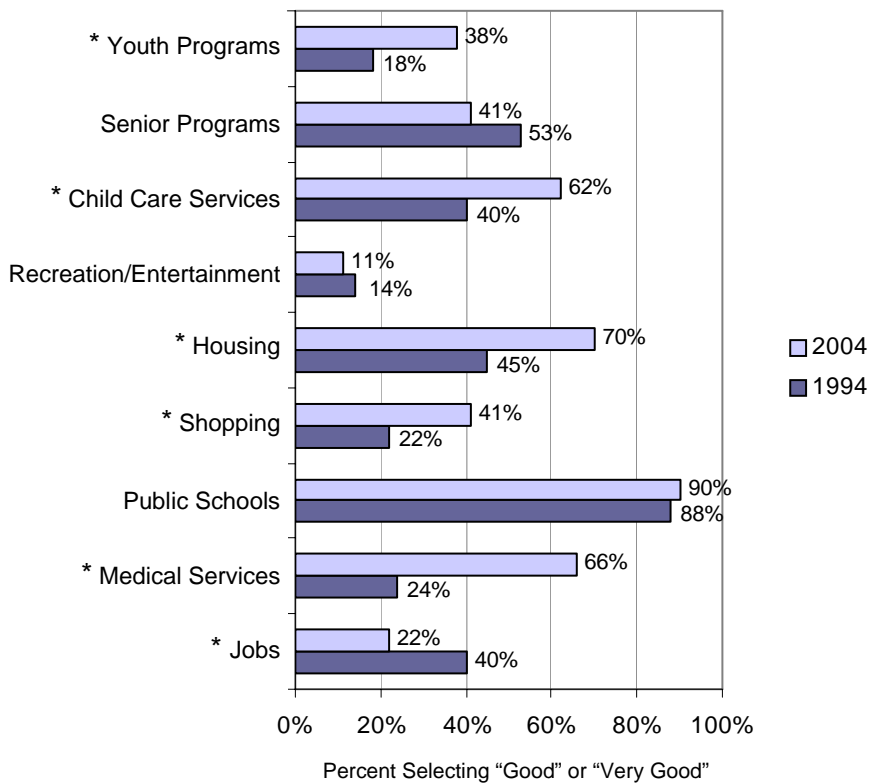


Figure 2: Ratings of Local Services and Facilities

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, with about 90 percent of George residents rating their schools positively. In both years, recreation and entertainment received the lowest ratings of all of the services and facilities. The ratings for youth programs, child care services, housing, shopping, and medical services in George improved significantly from 1994 to 2004. However, the percentage of residents assigning positive ratings to jobs decreased significantly over the ten year period.

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. George residents were pleased with the quality of many of their government services. Over 80 percent were satisfied with emergency response, garbage collection, fire protection and parks. Approximately three-quarters were pleased with the water and about two-thirds were satisfied with the streets. Police protection received the lowest ratings, with about 45 percent of residents rating the service positively. Ratings for the government services did not change significantly over the period.

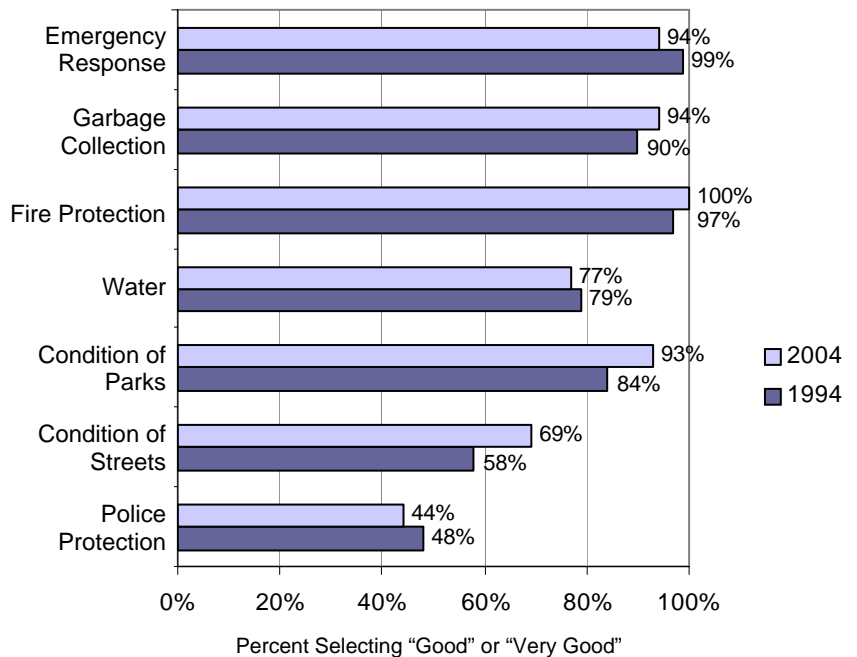


Figure 3: Ratings of Local Government Services

GEORGE'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.

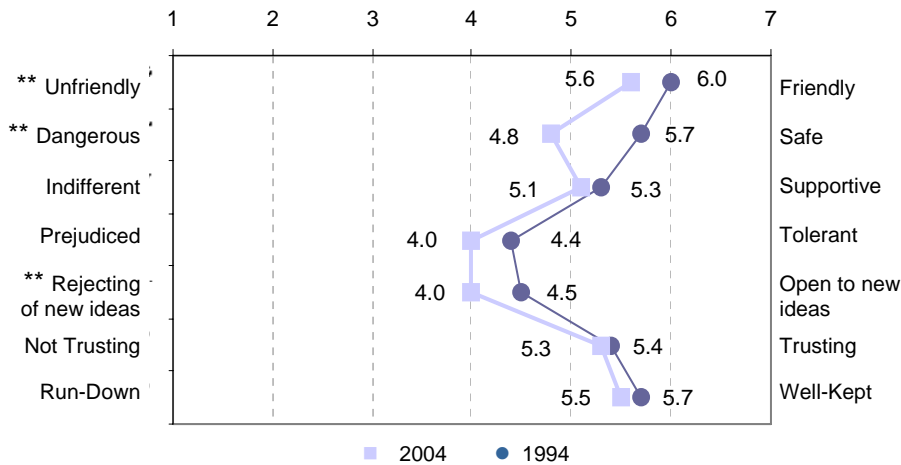


Figure 4: Average Rating of Social Qualities on a 1 to 7 Scale

** 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 George residents evaluated their town on these qualities in 1994 and 2004. In both years, residents assigned the highest ratings to friendliness. The lowest ratings for both years were for tolerance and openness to new ideas. Between 1994 and 2004, the ratings for friendliness, safety, and openness to new ideas declined substantially. Ratings for safety fell the most significantly, from 5.7 to 4.8. George residents rated all of the other areas essentially the same in both 1994 and 2004.

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, 58 percent of the residents reported knowing the names of half or more of the people in George, compared to 66 percent in 1994. However, 51 percent indicated that half or more of their friends live in town which is a significant decrease compared to 65 percent in 1994. Twenty-six percent of the residents in 2004 and 29 percent in 1994 said that half or more of their adult relatives and in-laws live in town.

COMMUNITY ATTACHMENT

Do George 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 George. However, the percentage of residents who said that they would be sorry to leave town fell significantly, from 87 percent in 1994 to 72 percent in 2004. The change in the percentage who feel at home was not significant.

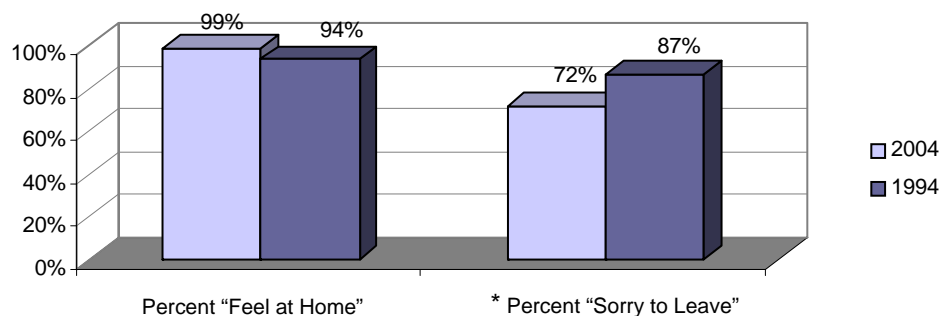


Figure 5: Community Attachment

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Citizens working together to accomplish local goals is an important feature of small towns. For George, 83 percent of the residents indicated in 2004 that the spirit of community participation is “good” or “very good.” In both 1994 and 2004, over 50 percent of the residents 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 local community activities was slightly under 50 percent in both years. When residents were asked to consider the factors that limit their involvement in community improvement projects, the top response given in 2004 was that they lacked the time to get involved (58%). Other common responses were that they had not been asked to volunteer (52%) and that they lacked the necessary skills to be effective volunteers (38%).

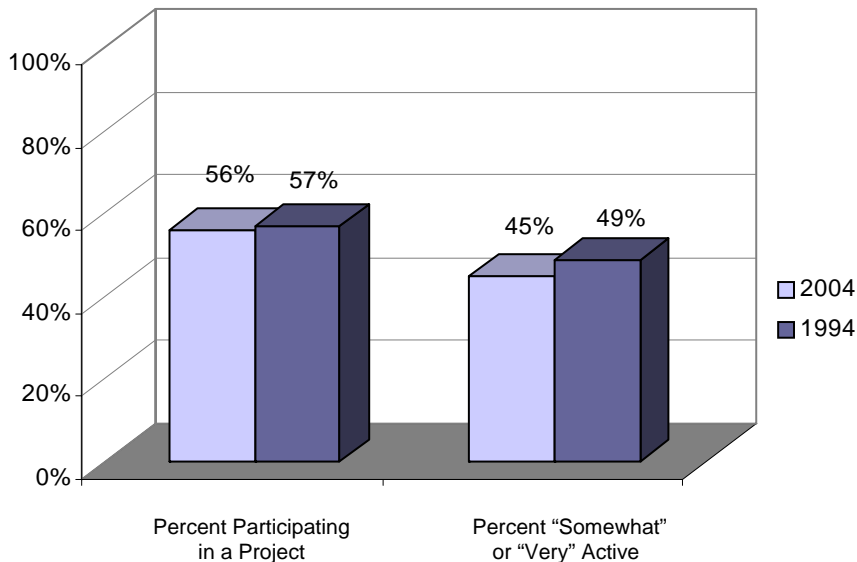


Figure 6: Community Involvement

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 13 percentage points. Using this standard, what has changed in George over the past decade? The percentage of people who stay in George for their primary health care increased significantly from 1994 to 2004. Residents’ evaluations of the quality of youth programs, child care services, housing, shopping, and medical services improved, but their ratings of jobs declined. Evaluations of local government services remain high, and there were no significant changes in how George residents rated these services.

The social environment in George has changed somewhat over the decade. While, the ratings on some qualities remained unchanged, in 2004, residents describe their community as less friendly, less safe, and less open to new ideas than it was in 1994. Also, there was a significant decrease in the percentage of residents reporting that they would be sorry to leave if they had to move away. There were no changes in the levels of community involvement. It is interesting to note that one of the top three reasons people gave for not being involved in community projects was that nobody had asked them. This suggests a 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 George’s future. **We wish to thank the George residents who participated in the 1994 and 2004 studies for providing the information that made this report possible.**

RDI

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