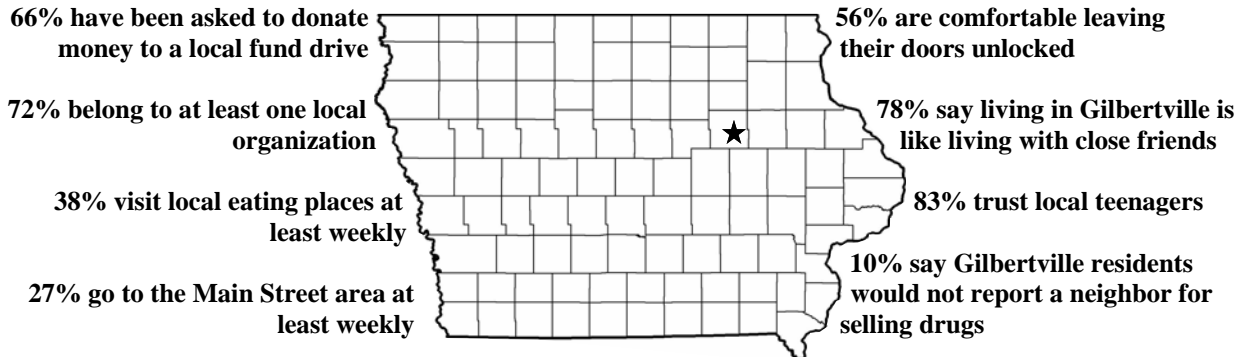


# A DECADE OF CHANGE IN GILBERTVILLE

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 Gilbertville. 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 Gilbertville residents responded to the survey, and 121 responded in 2004. This report is a summary of the results, including how the opinions of Gilbertville residents have changed over the past decade.

## LIFE IN GILBERTVILLE IN 2004



## LOCAL PATRONAGE PATTERNS

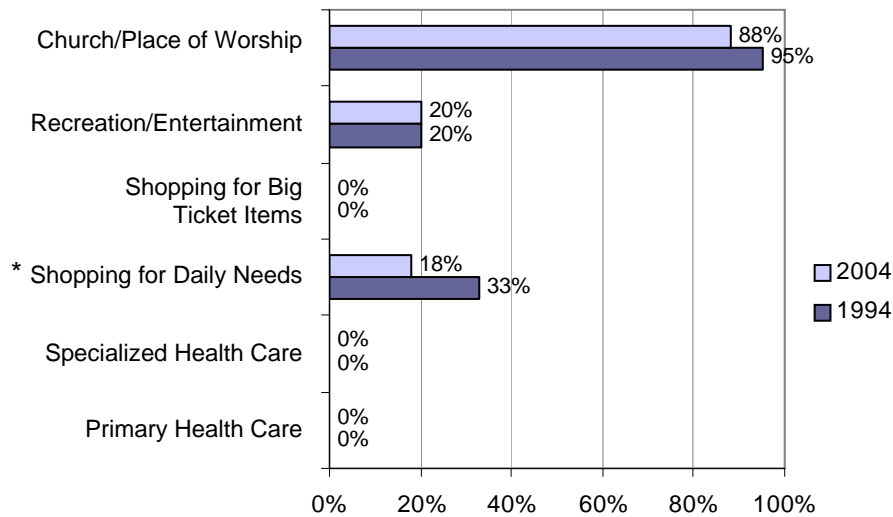


Figure 1: Percent Selecting "Local"

For a variety of reasons, many residents of Iowa's smaller towns rely on neighboring cities for services. Results from the survey suggest that Gilbertville residents follow this pattern. Figure 1 shows that approximately 90 percent of the residents stay in town to attend church or their place of worship, but that they tend to leave for all of the other services. The percentage who shop for their daily needs in Gilbertville declined significantly over the last ten years, falling from 33 percent in 1994 to 18 percent in 2004. The percentage who stay in town for their recreation and entertainment held steady at 20 percent. Nobody in either year reported staying in Gilbertville when shopping for big ticket items or when receiving health care.

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\*A Note on Interpretation: For Gilbertville, 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

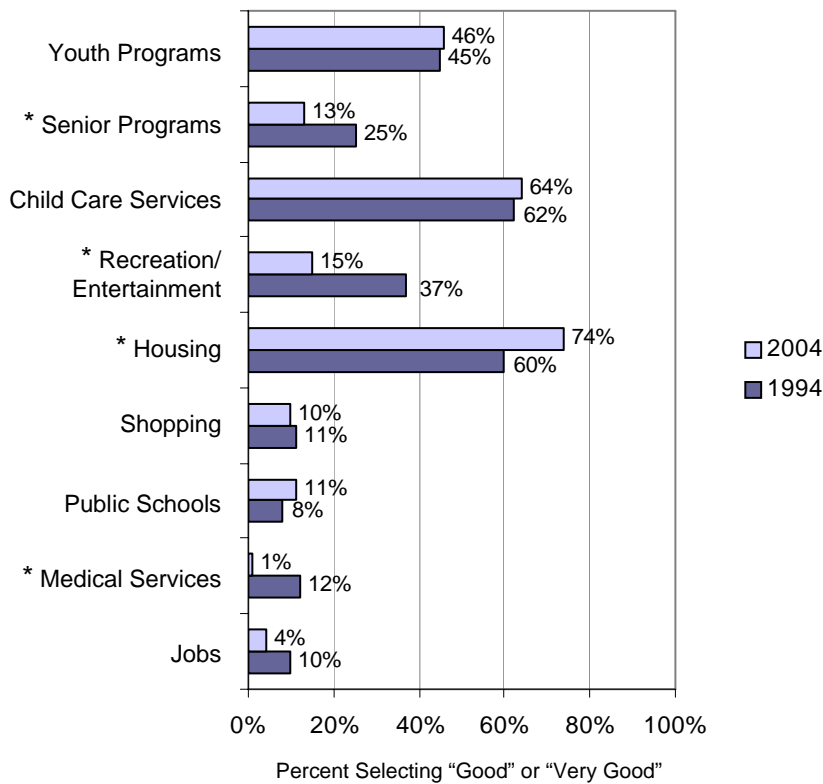


Figure 2: Ratings of Local Services and Facilities

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. Housing and child care services were the only services to receive “good” and “very good” ratings from at least 50 percent of residents. Youth programs were assigned favorable ratings from about 45 percent in both years. All of the other services had positive ratings of 25 percent or less in 2004, and many had positive ratings of 10 percent or less. The percentage of residents giving favorable ratings to housing increased significantly from 1994 to 2004, while the ratings for senior programs, recreation and entertainment, and medical services decreased.

## 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. As the figure shows, Gilbertville residents were pleased with the quality of most of their government services. In both years, over 75 percent of the residents were satisfied with emergency response, garbage collection, fire protection, water, and parks. Police services received favorable ratings from just under 60 percent of residents. Positive ratings for streets fell significantly, from 89 percent in 1994 to 52 percent in 2004. Water ratings also fell significantly, from 91 percent to 78 percent.

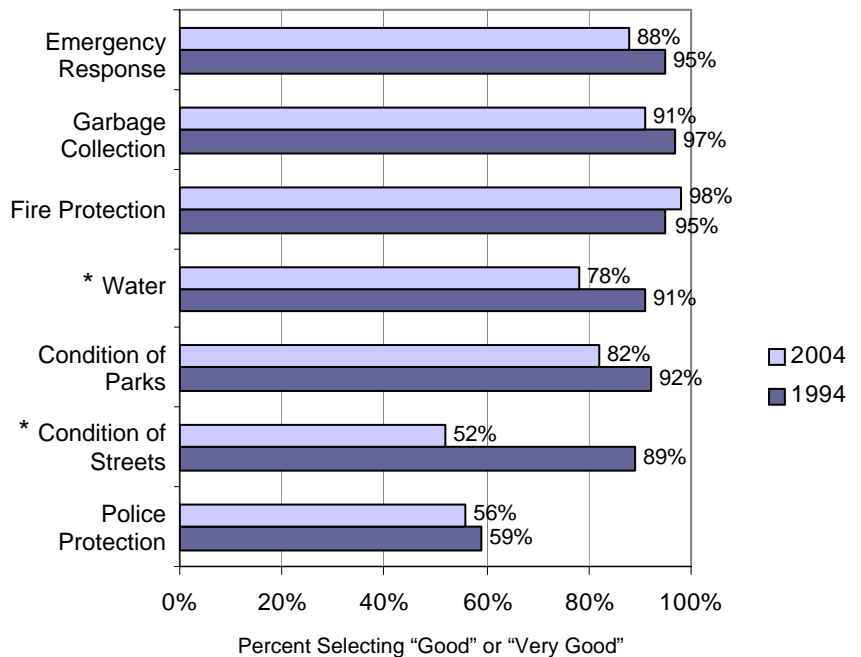
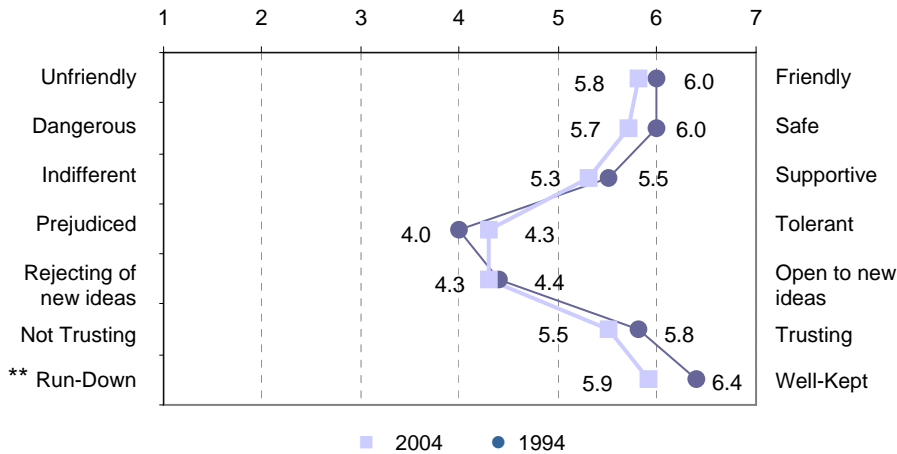


Figure 3: Ratings of Local Government Services

## GILBERTVILLE'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 how Gilbertville residents evaluated their town on these qualities in 1994 and 2004. In 1994, residents assigned the highest ratings to friendliness, safety, and appearance; these areas also received the highest ratings in 2004. The lowest ratings for both years were for tolerance and openness to new ideas. Between 1994 and 2004, the ratings for appearance fell significantly. The ratings for all of the other areas did not change over the last ten years.

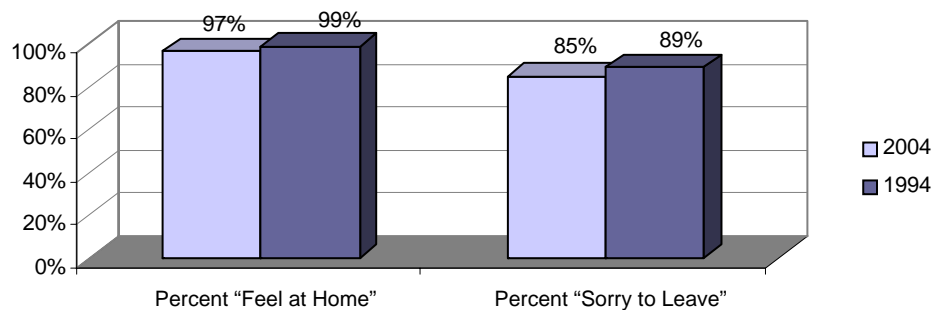
\*\* The margin of error is calculated differently for averages, and will sometimes vary from question to question within the survey depending on how many people answered each question. Thus, changes of the same size may exceed the margin of error for some items in Figure 4, but not for others. Only 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. As such, questions were included to assess local social ties. In 2004, 71 percent of the residents reported knowing the names of half or more of the people in Gilbertville, compared to 76 percent in 1994. Similarly, 55 percent indicated that half or more of their friends live in town, compared to 64 percent in 1994. Thirty-one percent of the residents in 2004, a significant decrease from 45 percent in 1994, said that half or more of their adult relatives and in-laws live in town.

### COMMUNITY ATTACHMENT

Do Gilbertville 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 Gilbertville. Almost as many residents also said that they would be sorry to leave the community. These high levels of community attachment in Gilbertville 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 Gilbertville, 88 percent of the residents indicated in 2004 that the spirit of community participation is “good” or “very good.” In both

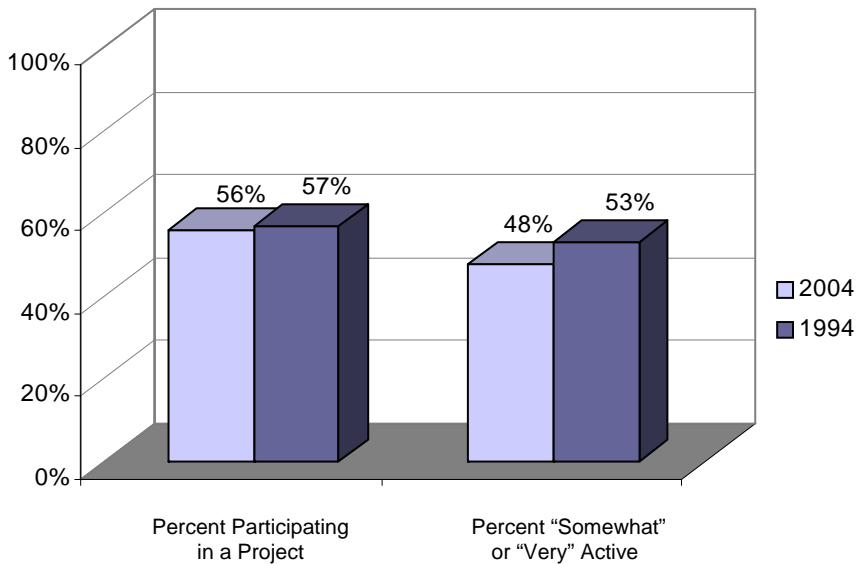


Figure 6: Community Involvement

1994 and 2004, slightly less than 60 percent of the residents reported participating in a community improvement project in the years prior to the surveys (Figure 6). The percentage of residents who said they were “somewhat” or “very” active in community activities was near 50 percent in both years. When Gilbertville 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 (50%). Other common responses were that they had not been asked to volunteer (25%) and that they lacked the necessary skills to contribute (23%).

## 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 Gilbertville over the past decade? The percentage of people who stay in Gilbertville to shop for their daily needs declined. Residents’ evaluation of housing improved, but their evaluations of senior programs and recreation/entertainment declined. As for government services, residents rated the condition of streets and water lower in 2004 than in 1994. Assessments of all of the other facilities and services remained unchanged over the 10 year period.

The social environment in Gilbertville has changed very little over the past decade. The only significant change was that residents perceive the community to be less well-kept in 2004 compared to 1994. Levels of community attachment remained high—that is, residents reported feeling at home in the community and said that they would be sorry to leave. Levels of community engagement also remained similar over the period. It is interesting to note that one of the top reasons people gave for not being involved in community projects was that they had not been asked to volunteer. This suggests that community engagement might increase in Gilbertville if more residents were approached about participating.

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

**RDI**

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