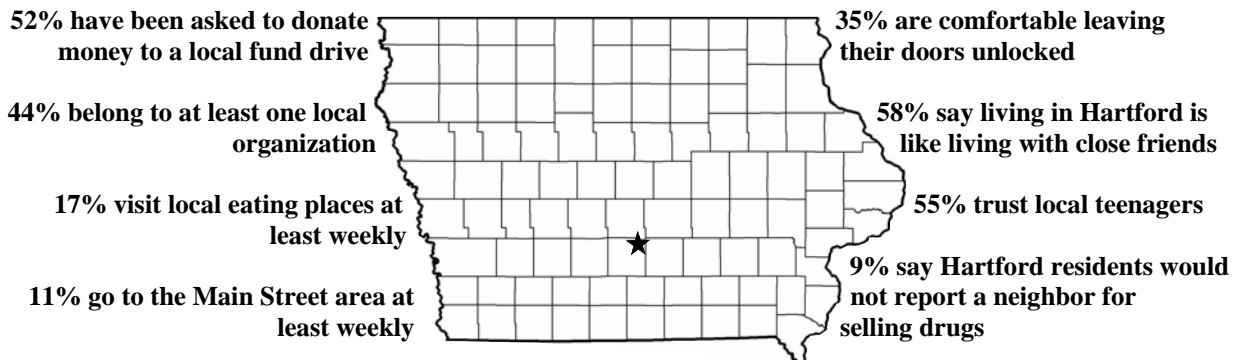


A DECADE OF CHANGE IN HARTFORD

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 Hartford. 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, 103 Hartford residents responded to the survey, and 84 responded in 2004. This report is a summary of the results, including how the opinions of Hartford residents have changed over the past decade.

LIFE IN HARTFORD IN 2004



LOCAL PATRONAGE PATTERNS

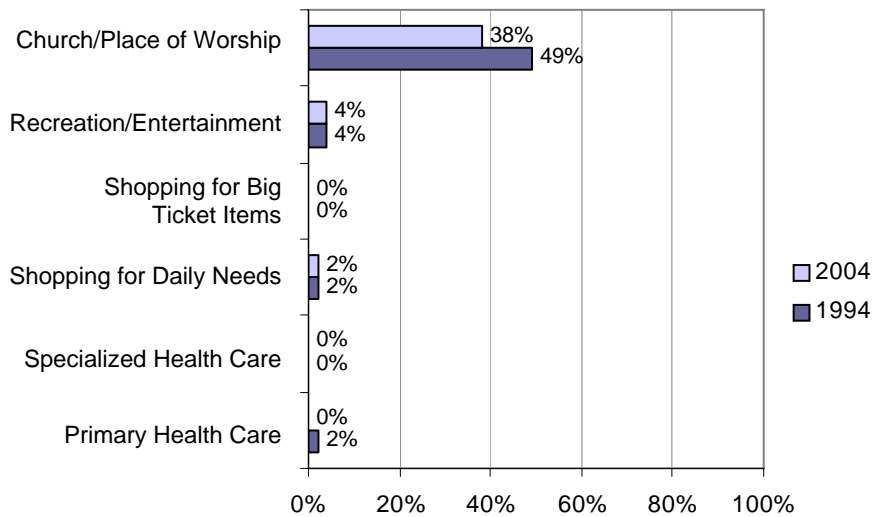


Figure 1: Percent Selecting "Local"

For a variety of reasons, many residents of Iowa's smaller towns rely on neighboring cities for services. Hartford residents in the survey follow this pattern. Figure 1 shows that fewer than half of the residents stay in town to attend church or their place of worship, and almost none stay in town for any of the other services. In both years, four percent of residents said that they stayed in town for recreation and entertainment, and two percent said that they stayed in town for daily shopping needs.

There were no reports from residents in either year of staying in town to shop for big ticket items or to obtain specialized health care. From 1994 to 2004, there were no significant changes in the patronage patterns of Hartford residents.

A Note on Interpretation: For Hartford, differences in percentages between 2004 and 1994 of less than 12 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 12 percent are statistically significant and are indicated with an asterisk ().

RATINGS OF LOCAL SERVICES AND FACILITIES

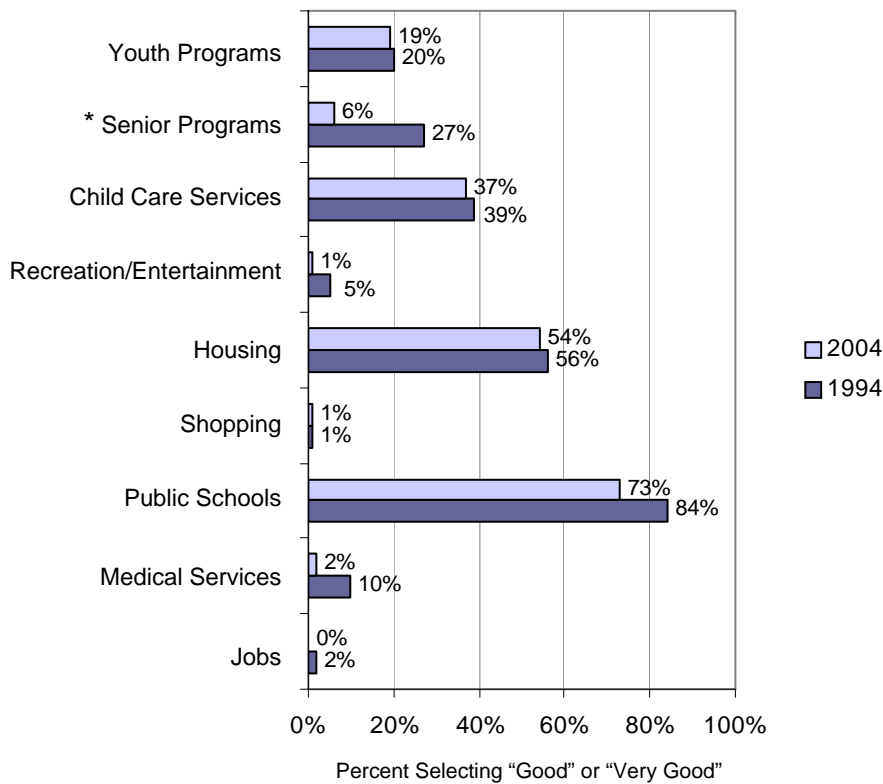


Figure 2: Ratings of Local Services and Facilities

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. Most residents in both years rated the public schools as good or very good, while just over half assigned positive ratings to local housing. Child care services received positive ratings from about one-third of residents, while youth programs were rated positively by one-fifth. Very few residents gave favorable ratings to recreation, shopping, medical services, or jobs. The only significant change over the past decade was that the percentage of positive ratings declined for senior programs, from 27 percent in 1994 to 6 percent in 2004.

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. Overall, Hartford residents reported being satisfied with their government services. Most residents rated emergency response, garbage collection, fire protection, water, and the condition of the parks as good or very good. Fewer than half assigned positive ratings to the condition of the streets or police protection. From 1994 to 2004, the positive ratings for garbage collection, condition of the streets, and condition of the parks increased significantly. There were no significant changes in the assessments for other government services.

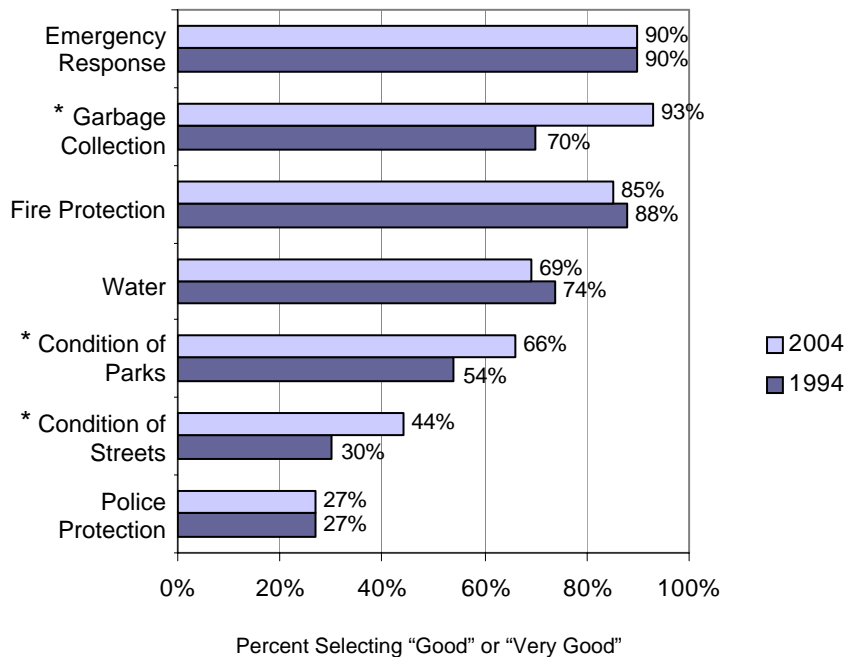


Figure 3: Ratings of Local Government Services

HARTFORD'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.

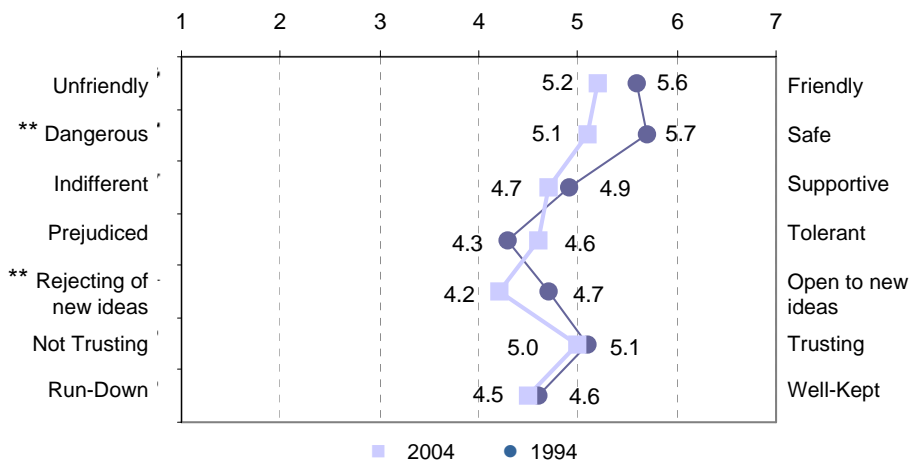


Figure 4: Average Rating of Social Qualities on a 1 to 7 Scale

** 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 Hartford residents evaluated their town on these qualities in 1994 and 2004. In both years, residents assigned the highest ratings to friendliness, safety, and trust. The lowest rating in 1994 was for tolerance and the lowest rating in 2004 was for openness to new ideas. From 1994 to 2004, the assessment of safety and openness to new ideas fell significantly. The average ratings for all other qualities remained unchanged over the ten year period.

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 1994, 36 percent of residents reported knowing the names of half or more of the people in Hartford, compared to 38 percent in 2004. In 1994, 60 percent indicated that half of more of their friends lived in town, which decreased significantly to 30 percent in 2004. In both 1994 and 2004, 11 percent of residents reported that half or more of their adult relatives and in-laws lived in Hartford.

COMMUNITY ATTACHMENT

Do Hartford 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 Hartford. Almost 80 percent of the residents also reported that they would be sorry to leave the community. These levels of community attachment in Hartford have not changed significantly over the last ten years.

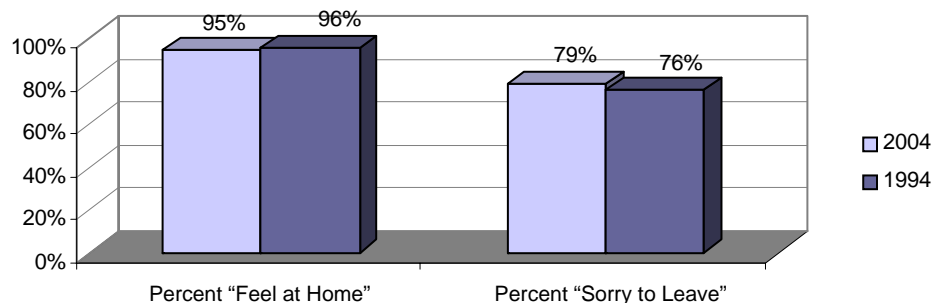


Figure 5: Community Attachment

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Citizens working together to accomplish local goals is an important feature of small towns. For Hartford, 62 percent of the residents in 2004 indicated that the spirit of community participation is “good” or “very good.” In both 1994 and 2004, approximately 40 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 community activities was also approximately 40 percent in both years. When Hartford 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 (59%). Other common responses were that they had not been asked to volunteer (44%) and that there were no projects needing volunteers (35%).

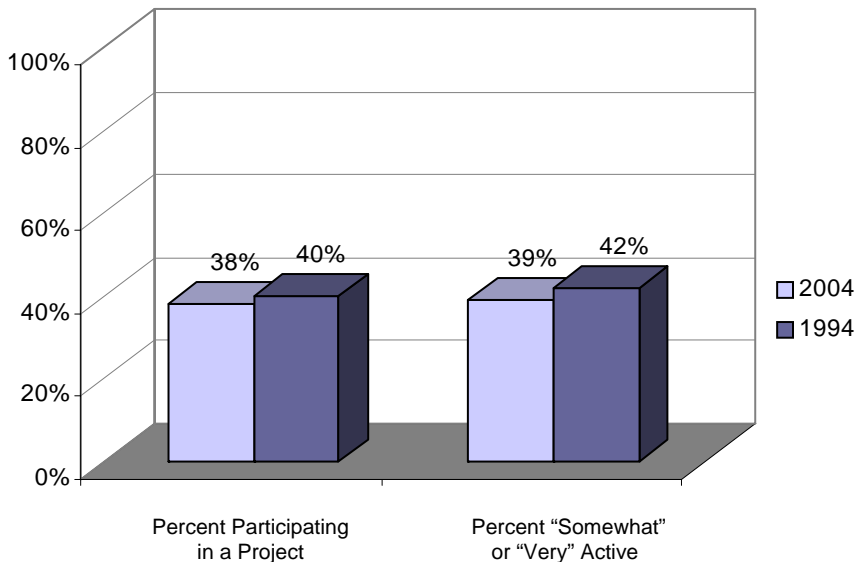


Figure 6: Community Involvement

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 12 percentage points. Using this standard, what has changed in Hartford over the past decade? There were no changes in local patronage patterns—the vast majority of residents left town for most services in both years. Residents’ ratings of senior programs fell significantly over the decade, but evaluations of the quality of garbage collection and the condition of the parks and streets increased in 2004. The ratings of all of the other services remained unchanged.

The social environment in Hartford has changed somewhat. Residents of Hartford rated their community as less safe and less open to new ideas in 2004 compared to 1994 ratings. Local friendships also declined from 1994 levels. Community attachment remained high and unchanged over the decade. Levels of community involvement did not change, with well under half of residents participating in a community project in both survey years. 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 Hartford 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 Hartford’s future. **We wish to thank the Hartford residents who participated in the 1994 and 2004 studies for providing the information that made this report possible.**

RDI

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