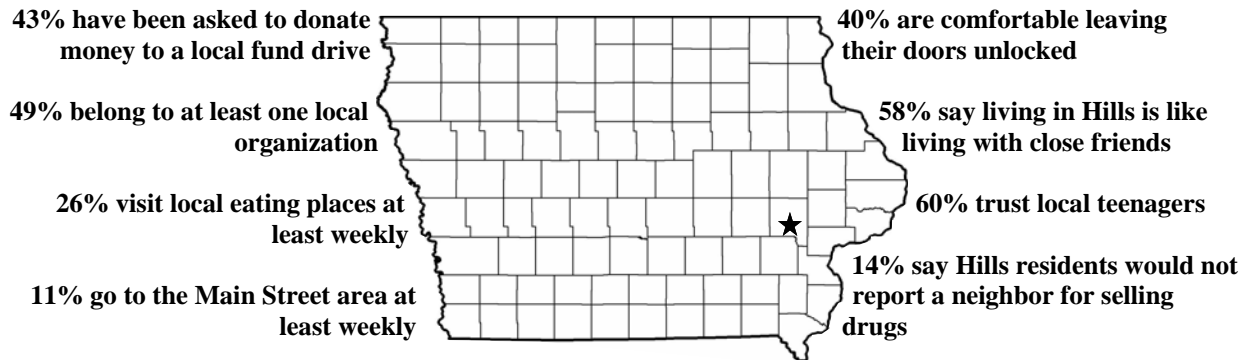


A DECADE OF CHANGE IN HILLS

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 Hills. 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 Hills residents responded to the survey, and 110 responded in 2004. This report is a summary of the results, including how the opinions of Hills residents have changed over the past decade.

LIFE IN HILLS IN 2004



LOCAL PATRONAGE PATTERNS

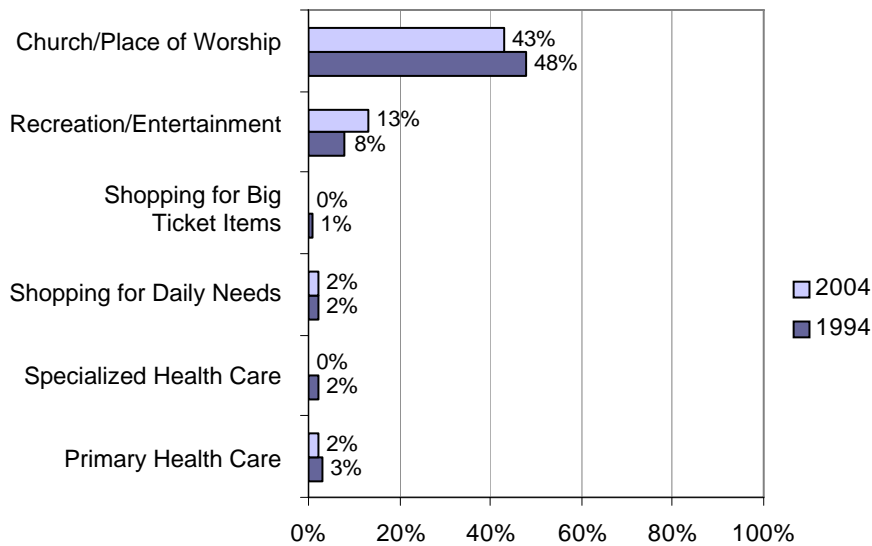


Figure 1: Percent Selecting "Local"

For a variety of reasons, many residents of Iowa's smaller towns rely on neighboring cities for services. Results from this survey suggest that Hills residents follow this pattern. Figure 1 shows the percentage of residents who reported patronizing services of various types in Hills. While almost half of respondents remained in Hills to attend church or a place of worship, only 13 percent stayed for recreation or entertainment. Two percent

reported that they shopped for their daily needs in Hills, while no one stayed to shop for "big ticket" items. Similarly, two percent of residents remained in town to obtain primary health care, but no one stayed for specialized health care. No significant changes in these patterns have occurred since 1994.

A Note on Interpretation: For Hills, 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

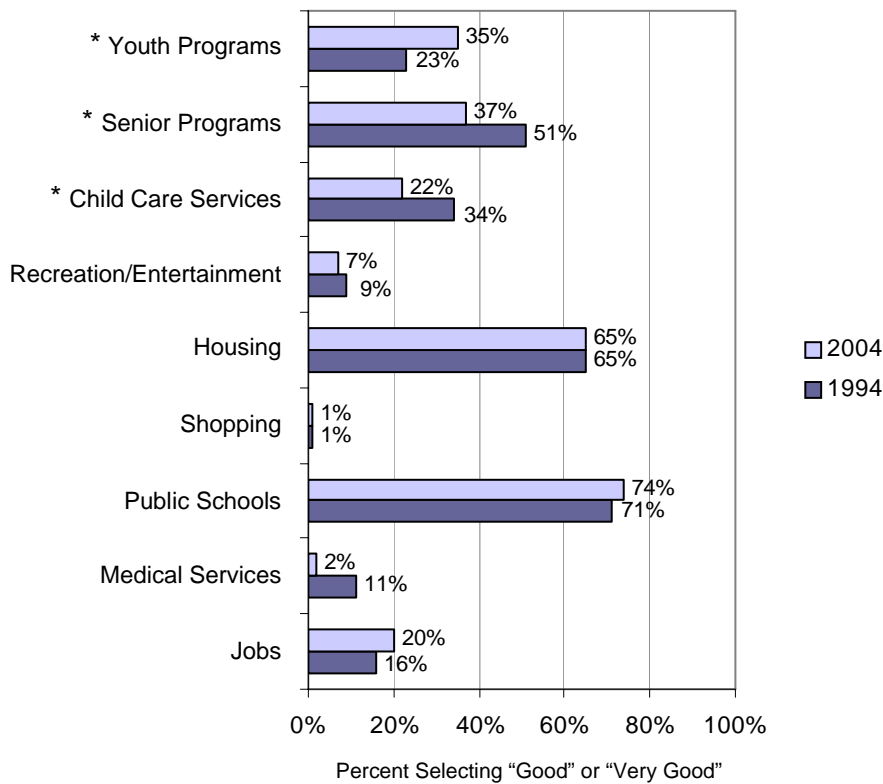


Figure 2: Ratings of Local Services and Facilities

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. In 2004, over half of residents rated housing and public schools as good or very good, while fewer than one in ten gave positive ratings to recreation and entertainment, shopping, or medical services. Just over one-third rated youth programs and senior programs favorably. Compared to 1994, the percentage of positive ratings decreased for senior programs (from 51 percent to 37 percent) and child care services (from 34 percent to 22 percent). However, favorable ratings increased for youth programs from 23 percent in 1994 to 35 percent in 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. Overall, Hills residents reported being satisfied with their government services. A large majority of residents rated emergency response, garbage collection, fire protection, and the condition of the parks as good or very good in both years. Sixty-three percent gave favorable ratings to the condition of the streets in 2004, while fewer than half of residents did so for water services and police protection. Since 1994, a significant decrease in positive ratings occurred for water, while favorable ratings increased for the condition of the streets.

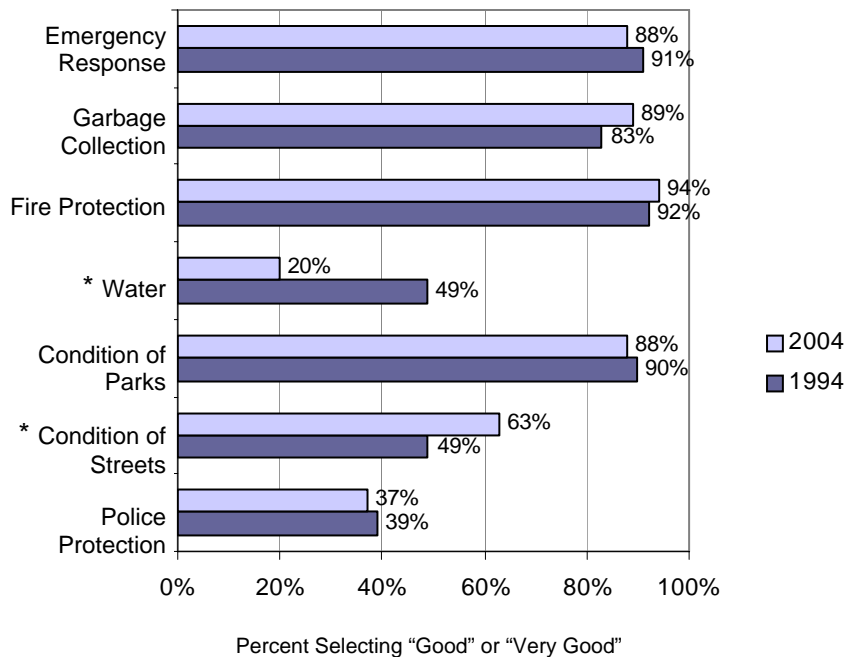


Figure 3: Ratings of Local Government Services

HILLS' 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.

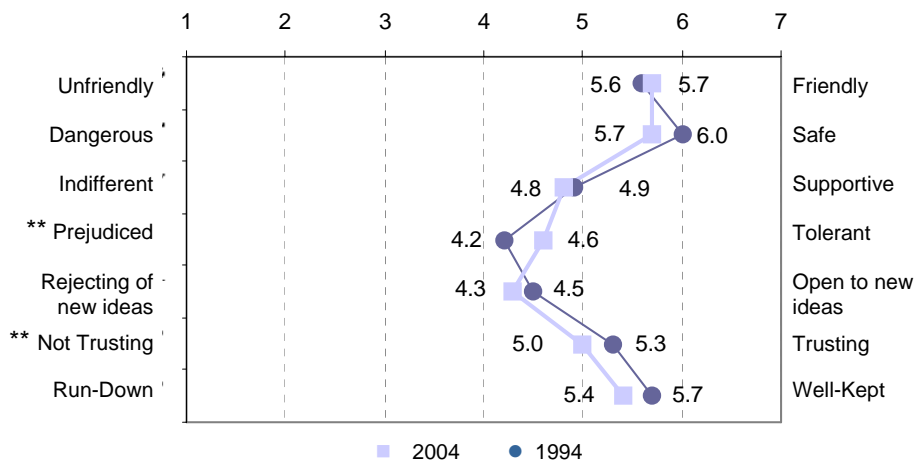


Figure 4: Average Rating of Social Qualities on a 1 to 7 Scale

** 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. The average ratings shown in Figure 4 reveal that in 1994, residents assigned the highest rating to the safety of Hills, followed closely by the friendliness and appearance of the town. In 2004, those three qualities also received the highest ratings. The lowest rating in 1994 was assigned to the tolerant nature of Hills; in 2004 the lowest rating was assigned to the extent to which Hills is open to new ideas. Significant changes over the past decade are that residents view Hills as less tolerant and less trusting when compared to 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, 45 percent of Hills residents reported knowing the names of half or more other community members, compared to 39 percent in 1994. About one-fourth indicated that half or more of their friends live in Hills in both years (27% in 2004 and 25% in 1994). As for adult relatives and in-laws, 13 percent said that half or more live in Hills in 2004, compared to 11 percent in 1994. (Note: These differences are not larger than the margin of error.)

COMMUNITY ATTACHMENT

Do Hills residents feel at home in their community? When asked this question in 2004, 96 percent said that they do (see Figure 5). Furthermore, 71 percent reported that they would be sorry to leave if they had to move away from Hills. These responses are similar to those reported in 1994, indicating that most Hills residents feel attached to their community.

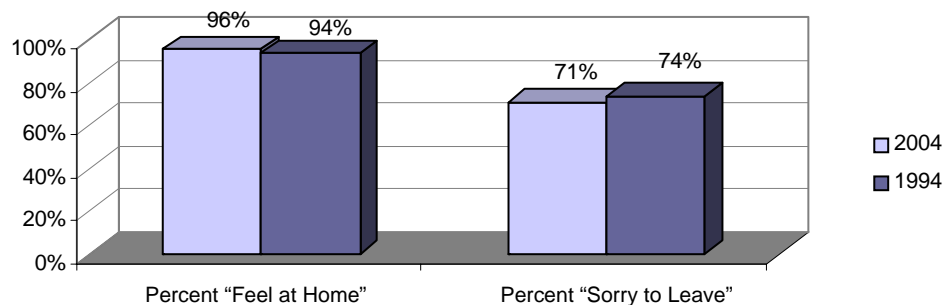


Figure 5: Community Attachment

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Citizens working together to accomplish local goals is an important feature of small towns. For Hills, 75 percent of residents indicated that the spirit of community participation is “good” or “very good.”

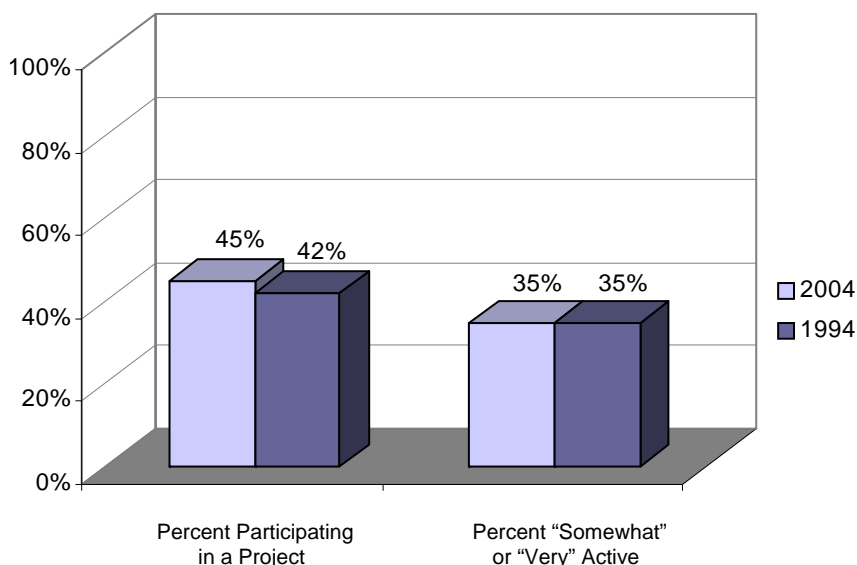


Figure 6: Community Involvement

At the same time, fewer than half of Hills residents (45%) reported participating in a local improvement project during the year prior to the survey, and about one-third (35%) considered themselves to be “somewhat” or “very” active in local community activities and events in 2004 (see Figure 6). This compares to 42 percent participating in a project in 1994, and 35 percent rating themselves as “somewhat” or “very” active in the community. When asked to consider a variety of factors that limit their involvement in community improvement projects, the top three factors were lack of time to participate (61%), not being asked by others to volunteer (43%), and not knowing how to get involved (38%).

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 Hills over the past decade? The patronage patterns for Hills residents remain unchanged—most residents still shop, recreate, and seek health care outside of Hills, although most attend church locally. Evaluations of the quality of senior programs and child care services decreased, while ratings for youth programs increased. The evaluations of the quality of local government services remain high—the only changes were a decrease in positive ratings for water and an increase for the condition of the streets.

The social environment has changed slightly. Hills residents view their town as less tolerant and less trusting than a decade ago. Ratings for friendliness, safety, supportiveness, acceptance of new ideas, and appearance did not change significantly. Hills residents remain “attached” to their community—that is, a large majority feel at home in the community and most would be sorry to leave. Finally, levels of community involvement have not changed significantly. It is interesting to note that one of the top three reasons residents reported for not getting involved in the community is that they have not been asked. This suggests a possible strategy 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 Hills’ future. **We wish to thank the Hills residents who participated in the 1994 and 2004 studies for providing the information that made this report possible.**

RDI

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