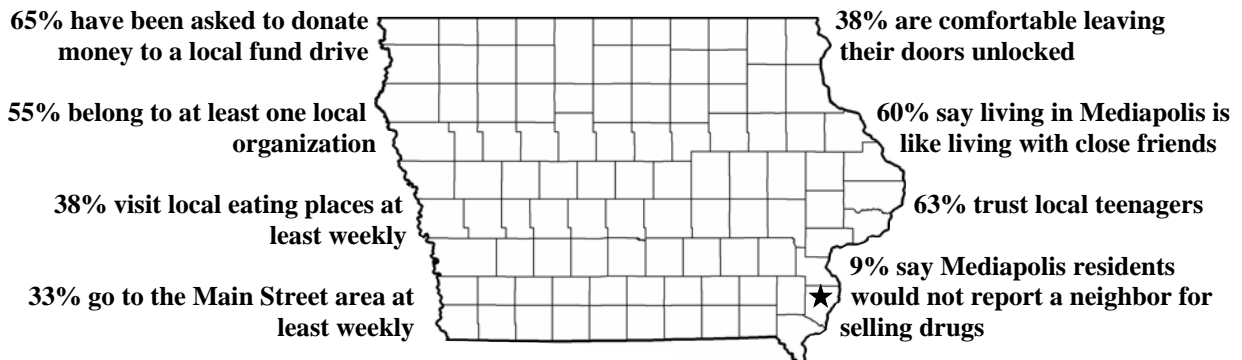


A DECADE OF CHANGE IN MEDIAPOLIS

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 Mediapolis. 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, 111 Mediapolis residents responded to the survey, and 93 responded in 2004. This report is a summary of the results, including how the opinions of Mediapolis residents have changed over the past decade.

LIFE IN MEDIAPOLIS IN 2004



LOCAL PATRONAGE PATTERNS

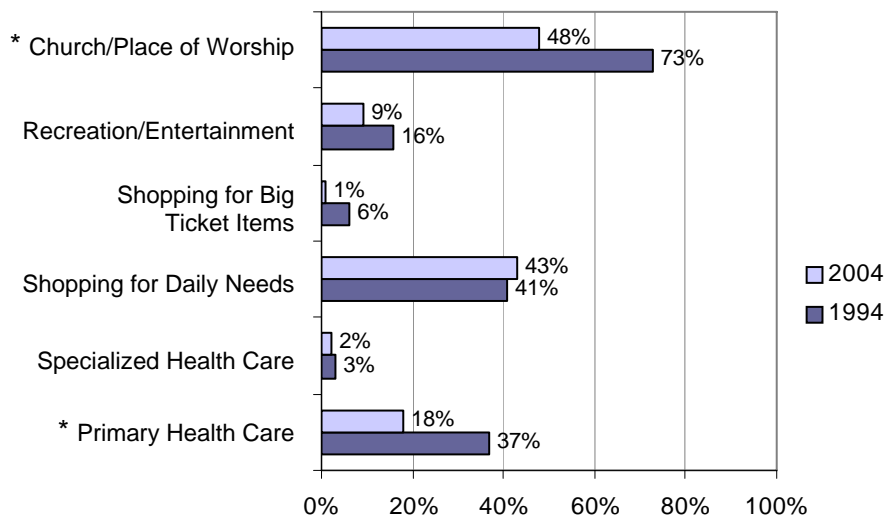


Figure 1: Percent Selecting "Local"

For a variety of reasons, many residents of Iowa's smaller towns rely on neighboring cities for services. Results from this survey show that Mediapolis residents stay in town for some services and travel for others. Figure 1 shows the percentage of residents who reported patronizing various services in Mediapolis. Forty-eight percent reported that they stay in town to attend church or a place of worship, down from 73 percent ten years ago. Only 9 percent stayed for recreation.

Forty-three percent of residents said they stay in Mediapolis to shop for their daily needs, while only 1 percent reported staying to shop for "big ticket" items. For health care, 18 percent remained in town to obtain primary health care, a significant decrease from the 37 percent who did so ten years ago. Only 2 percent reported staying in town for specialized health care.

A Note on Interpretation: For Mediapolis, 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

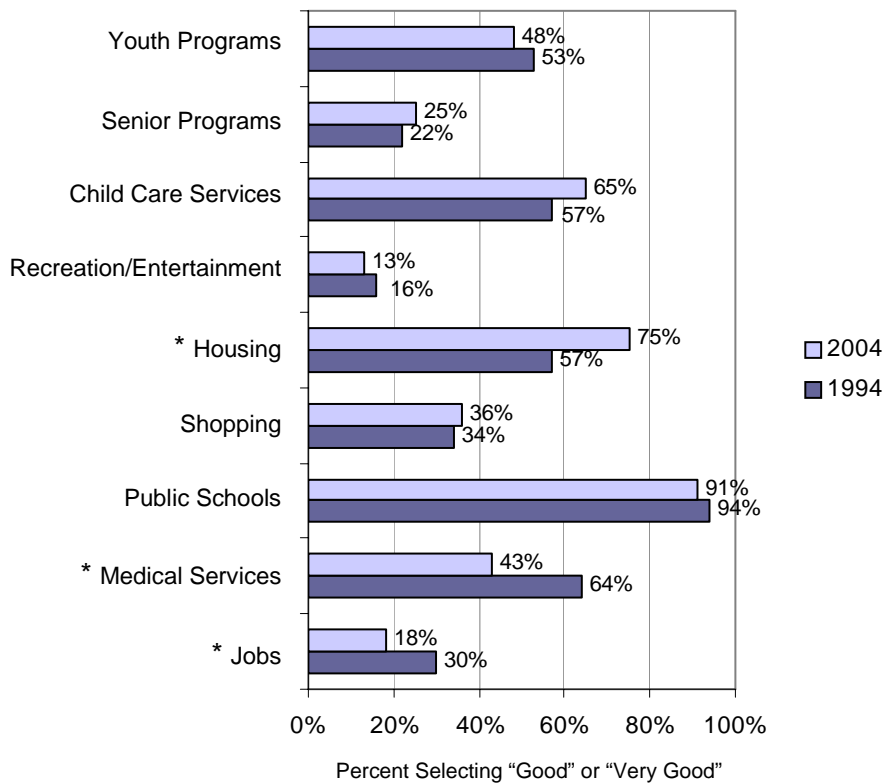


Figure 2: Ratings of Local Services and Facilities

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. Nearly all residents rated the public schools as good or very good in both years, and over half gave favorable ratings to child care and housing. Relatively few assigned positive ratings to senior programs, recreation, or jobs. Ratings for most services did not change significantly over the past decade. However, there was a significant decrease in the percentage of those assigning positive ratings to medical services and jobs, while the percentage of favorable ratings for housing increased.

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, Mediapolis residents were satisfied with their government services. A large majority assigned favorable ratings to emergency response, garbage collection, fire protection, the condition of the parks, and the condition of the streets in both years. Water and police protection received positive ratings from half of Mediapolis residents. Compared to 1994, the percentage of favorable ratings decreased for water services and the condition of the streets in Mediapolis.

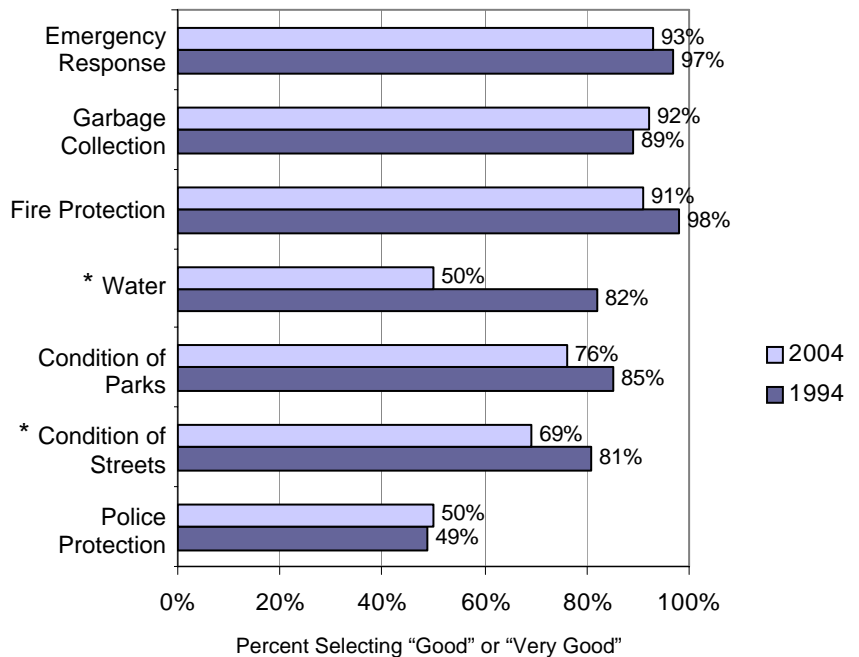


Figure 3: Ratings of Local Government Services

MEDIAPOLIS' 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.

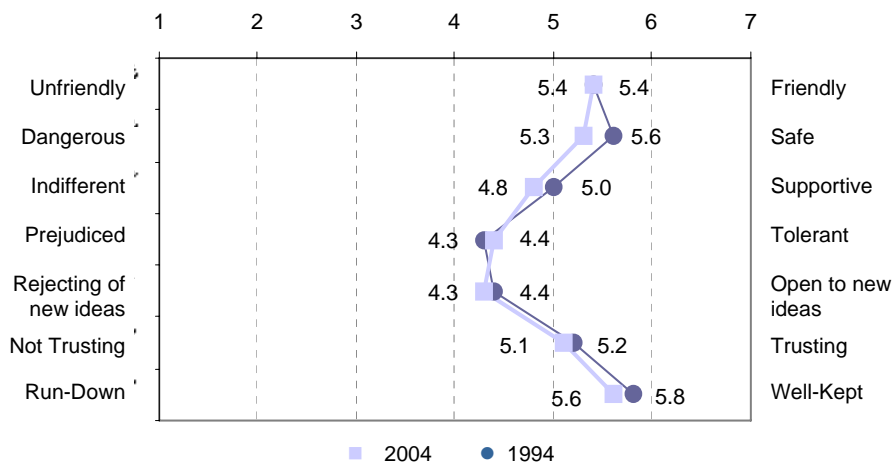


Figure 4: Average Rating of Social Qualities on a 1 to 7 Scale

** 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 ratings to the safety and appearance of Mediapolis. The highest ratings in 2004 were given to the appearance and friendliness of the town. The lowest ratings in both years were assigned to the extent to which Mediapolis is tolerant and open to new ideas. No significant changes in these qualities occurred over the past decade.

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, 52 percent of residents reported knowing the names of half or more of the people in Mediapolis, compared to 48 percent in 1994. Forty-five percent indicated that half or more of their friends live in town, compared to 52 percent in 1994. As for relatives, 25 percent of residents in 2004 and 31 percent in 1994 said that half or more of their adult relatives and in-laws live in Mediapolis. (Note: These differences are not larger than the margin of error.)

COMMUNITY ATTACHMENT

Do Mediapolis residents feel at home in their community? When asked this question in 2004, most residents said that they did (see Figure 5). Furthermore, 74 percent indicated that they would be sorry to leave if they had to move away. These responses are similar to those reported in 1994, indicating that most Mediapolis residents still feel attached to their community.

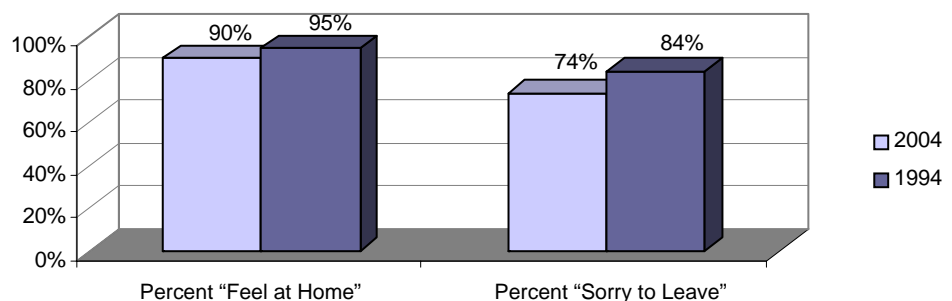


Figure 5: Community Attachment

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Citizens working together to accomplish local goals is an important feature of small towns. For Mediapolis, 81 percent of residents reported that the spirit of community participation is “good” or “very good.” At the same time, only 38 percent said they had participated in a community project during the year prior to the survey, and 28 percent considered themselves to be somewhat or very active in community activities and events. This compares to 43 percent participating in a project in 1994, and 37 percent who described themselves as active in the community. When asked to consider a variety of factors that limit their involvement in community activities, the top three factors selected by Mediapolis residents were lack of time (59%), not being asked by others to volunteer (35%), and not knowing how to get involved (33%).

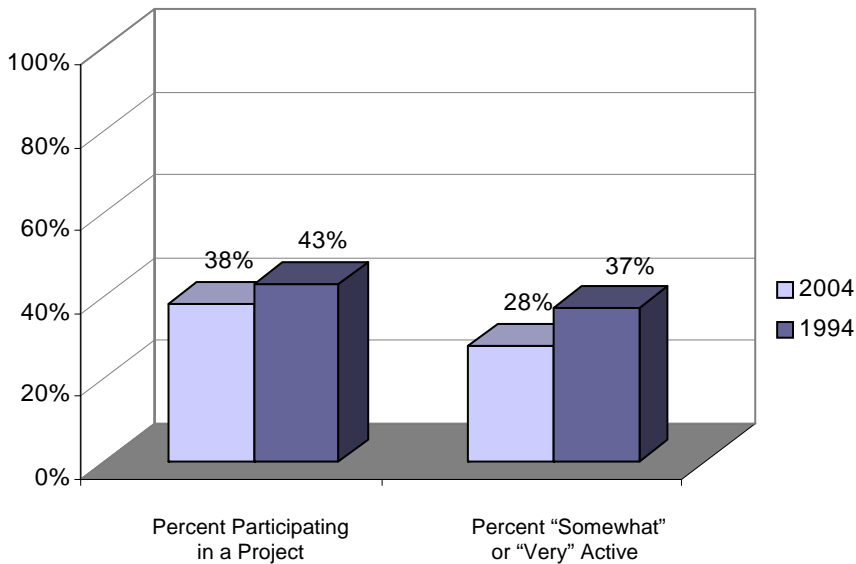


Figure 6: Community Involvement

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 Mediapolis over the past decade? Residents are attending church and obtaining primary health care in Mediapolis less now than ten years ago. Evaluations of the quality of medical services and jobs declined, while positive ratings increased for housing. The evaluations of the quality of local government services remain high—the only changes were decreases in ratings for water services and the condition of the streets.

The social environment has changed very little. Ratings for the friendliness, safety, supportiveness, tolerance, openness to new ideas, trusting nature, and appearance are essentially the same as they were in 1994. The extent to which people know each other in Mediapolis remains unchanged as well. Mediapolis residents remain attached to their community—that is, most feel at home in Mediapolis and would be sorry to leave. Finally, levels of community involvement are about the same as they were ten years ago. It is interesting to note that one-third of residents reported not knowing how to become involved in the community.

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

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