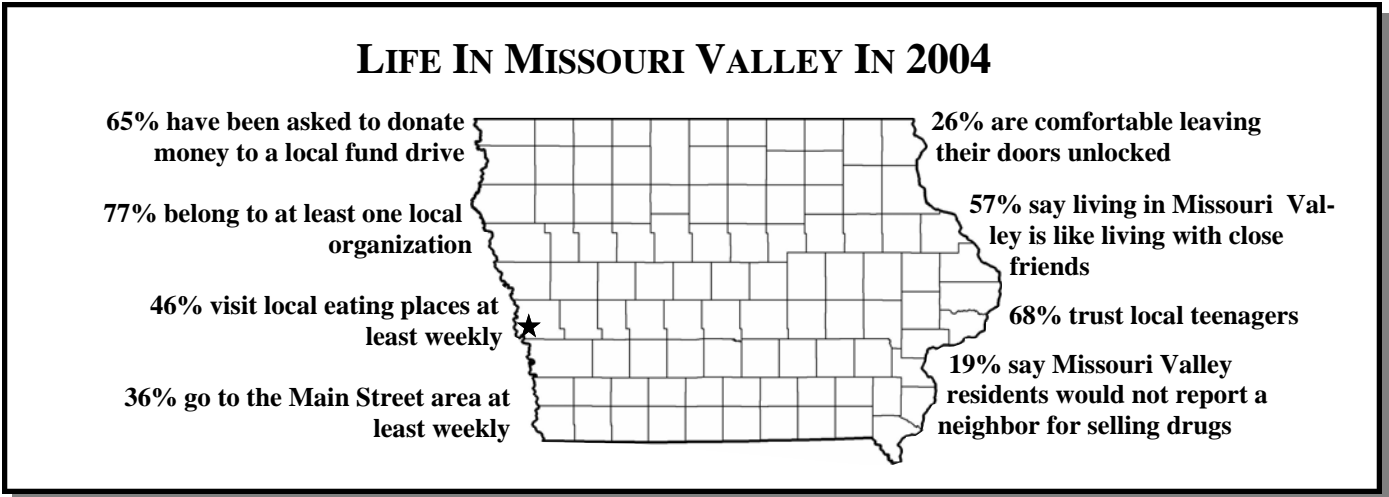


A DECADE OF CHANGE IN MISSOURI VALLEY

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 Missouri Valley. 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, 112 Missouri Valley residents responded to the survey, and 88 responded in 2004. This report is a summary of the results, including how the opinions of Missouri Valley residents have changed over the past decade.



LOCAL PATRONAGE PATTERNS

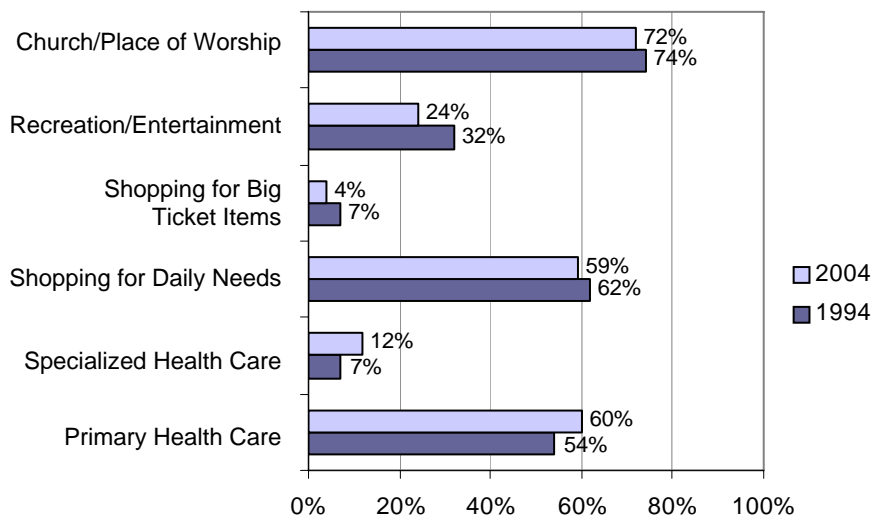


Figure 1: Percent Selecting "Local"

For a variety of reasons, many residents of Iowa's smaller towns rely on neighboring cities for services. Results from this survey show that Missouri Valley residents stay in town for some services and travel for others. Figure 1 shows the percentage of residents who reported patronizing various services in Missouri Valley. In 2004, seventy-two percent reported that they stay in town to attend church, while 24 percent stayed for recreation. Fifty-nine percent of residents said they remain in Missouri Valley to shop for their daily needs, while only four percent reported staying to shop for "big ticket" items. For health care, 60 percent remained in town to obtain primary health care, whereas only 12 percent reported staying in town to obtain specialized health care. There were no significant changes in patronage patterns over the past decade.

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A Note on Interpretation: For Missouri Valley, 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

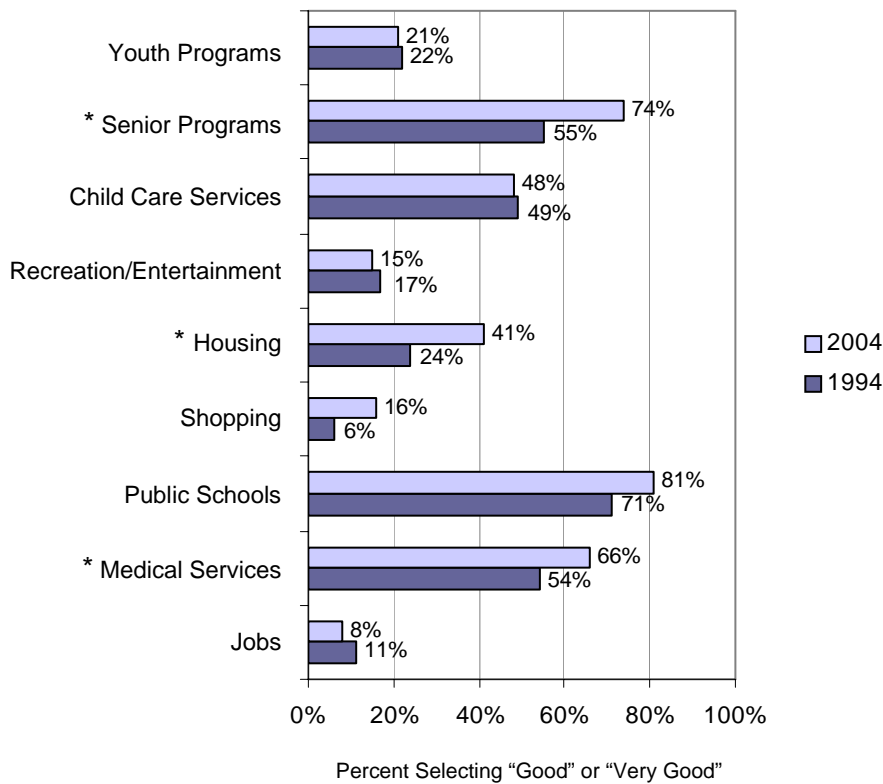


Figure 2: Ratings of Local Services and Facilities

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 rated programs for senior citizens, the public schools and local medical services as good or very good, while relatively few assigned positive ratings to youth programs, recreation, shopping, and jobs. Ratings for youth programs, child care, recreation, shopping, schools, and jobs did not change significantly compared to ten years ago. However, the percentage of positive ratings increased for senior programs, medical services, and housing.

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, Missouri Valley residents were satisfied with their government services. Over three-fourths of residents rated emergency response, garbage collection and fire protection as good or very good. Water, the condition of the parks, and police protection received positive ratings from over half of residents. The lowest percentage of favorable ratings was given to the condition of the streets. Compared to 1994, the percentage of positive ratings decreased significantly for the condition of the streets.

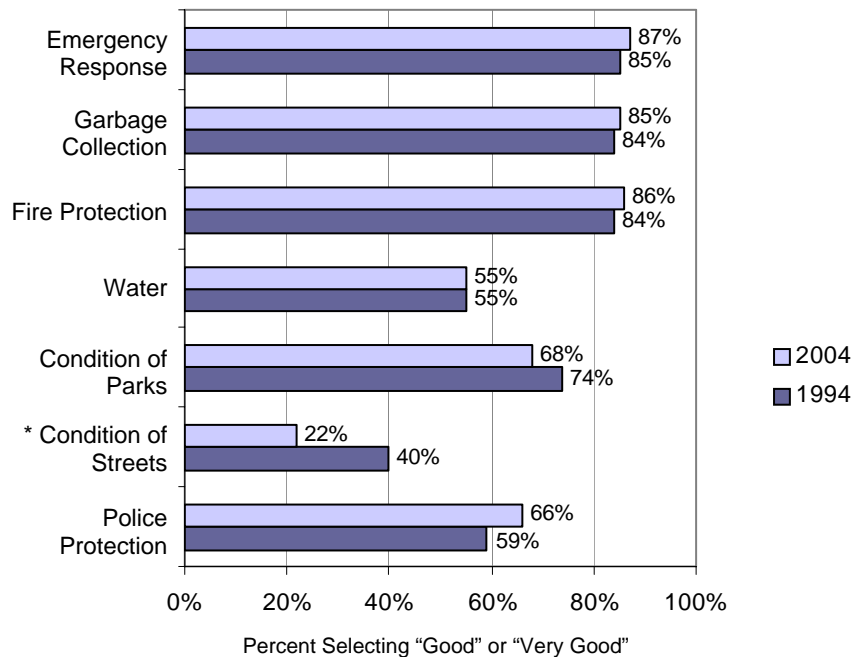


Figure 3: Ratings of Local Government Services

MISSOURI VALLEY'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.

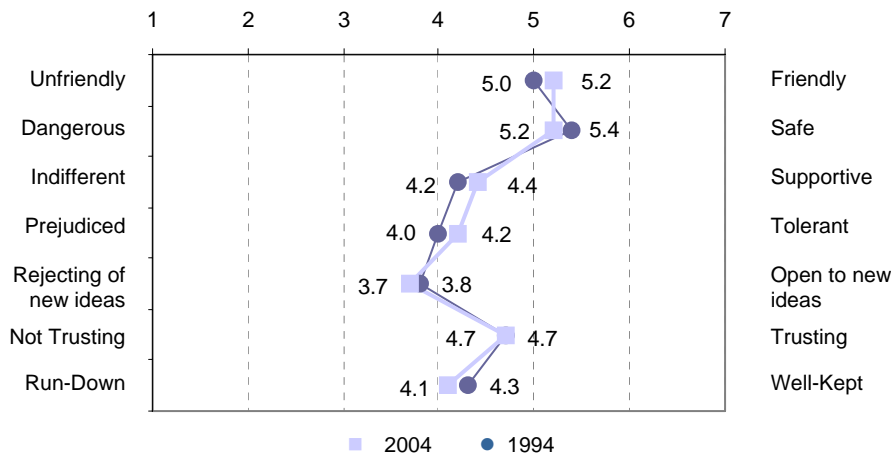


Figure 4: Average Rating of Social Qualities on a 1 to 7 Scale

** 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. The average ratings shown in Figure 4 reveal that in both years, residents assigned the highest ratings to the safety and friendliness of Missouri Valley. The lowest ratings in 1994 were given to the extent to which Missouri Valley is tolerant and open to new ideas. In 2004, the town's appearance and openness to new ideas received the lowest ratings. No significant changes in the ratings for these social 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, 42 percent of residents reported knowing the names of half or more of the people in Missouri Valley, compared to 34 percent in 1994. Fifty-five percent indicated that half or more of their friends live in town, compared to 49 percent in 1994. As for relatives, 25 percent of residents in 2004 and 28 percent in 1994 said that half or more of their adult relatives and in-laws live in Missouri Valley. (Note: These differences are not larger than the margin of error.)

COMMUNITY ATTACHMENT

Do Missouri Valley residents feel at home in their community? When asked this question in 2004, most residents said that they did (see Figure 5). Furthermore, 75 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 Missouri Valley residents still feel attached to their community.

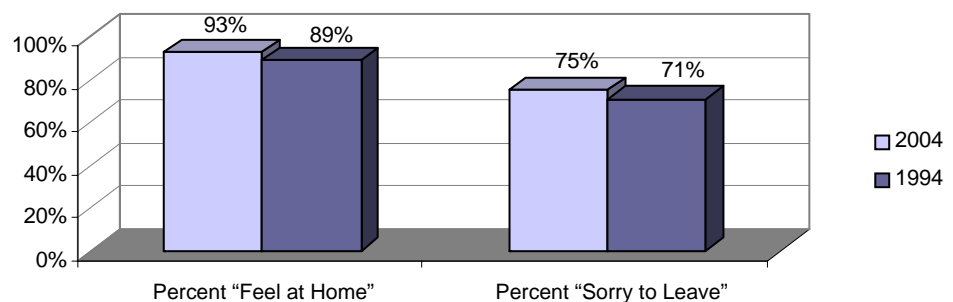


Figure 5: Community Attachment

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Citizens working together to accomplish local goals is an important feature of small towns. For Missouri Valley, 50 percent of residents reported in 2004 that the spirit of community participation is “good” or “very good.” Additionally,

roughly half (51%) of residents indicated that they participated in a community improvement project during the year prior to the survey, a significant increase from the 37 percent who participated ten years ago (see Figure 6). Twenty-eight percent considered themselves to be “somewhat” or “very” active in community activities and events, compared to 32 percent in 1994. When asked to consider a variety of factors that limited their involvement in community activities, the top three factors selected by Missouri Valley residents were lack of time (67%), not being asked by others to volunteer (34%), and not knowing how to become involved in the community (26%).

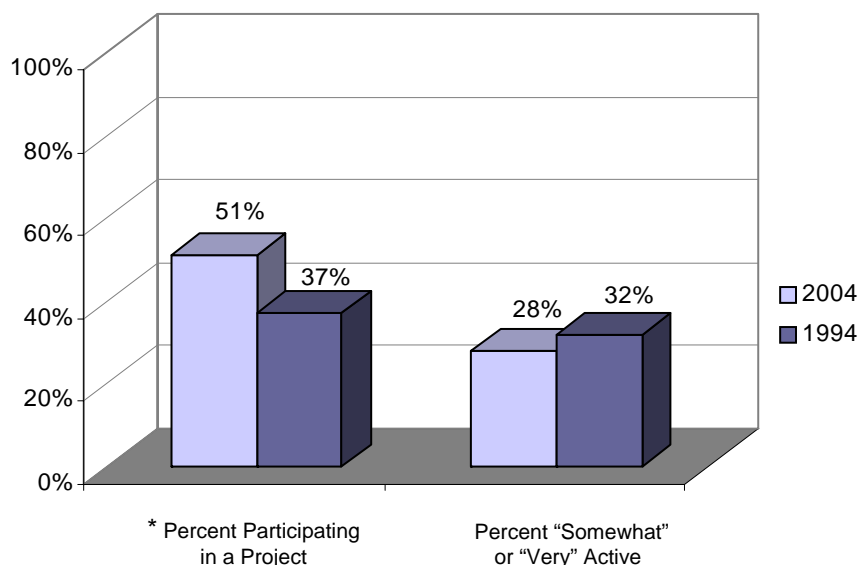


Figure 6: Community Involvement

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 Missouri Valley over the past decade? Patronage patterns have not changed—most residents still attend church, shop for daily needs, and obtain primary health care in Missouri Valley, while they leave for recreation, to shop for “big ticket” items, and for specialized health care. Evaluations of the quality of senior programs, housing, and medical services increased. Satisfaction with local government services remains high—the only change was a decrease in ratings for 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 the same as they were in 1994. The extent to which people know each other in Missouri Valley remains unchanged as well. Missouri Valley residents remain attached to their community—that is, most feel at home in Missouri Valley and would be sorry to leave. Finally, levels of community involvement have changed in that more residents reported participating in local improvement projects. The percentage of those who describe themselves as active in the community did not change significantly. 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 Missouri Valley’s future. **We wish to thank the Missouri Valley residents who participated in the 1994 and 2004 studies for providing the information that made this report possible.**

RDI

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