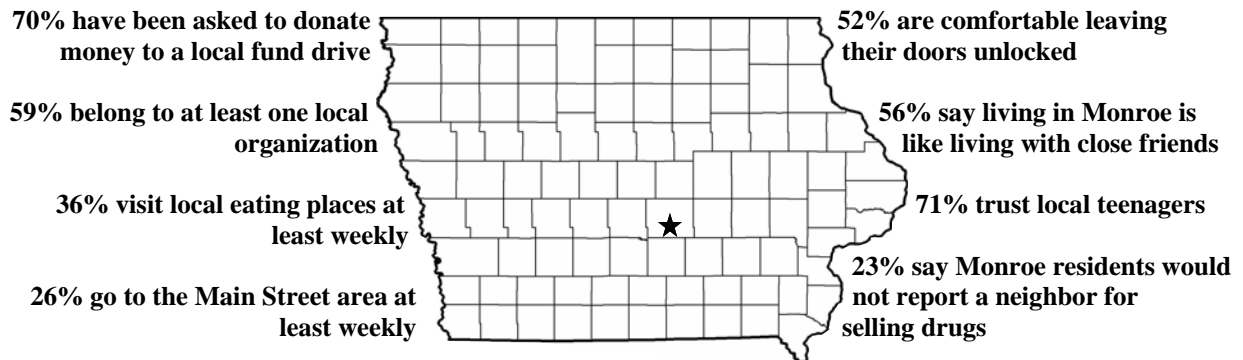


A DECADE OF CHANGE IN MONROE

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 Monroe. 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, 109 Monroe residents responded to the survey, and 99 responded in 2004. This report is a summary of the results, including how the opinions of Monroe residents have changed over the past decade.

LIFE IN MONROE IN 2004



LOCAL PATRONAGE PATTERNS

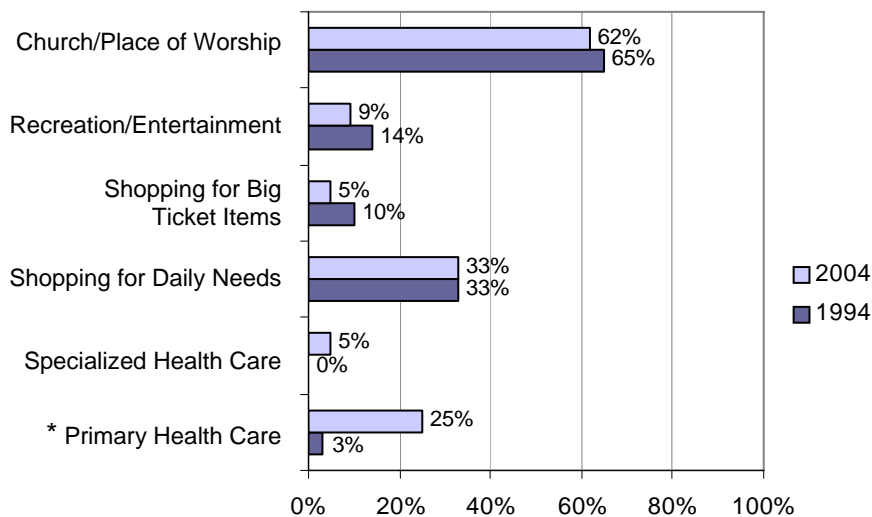


Figure 1: Percent Selecting "Local"

For a variety of reasons, many residents of Iowa's smaller towns rely on neighboring cities for services. Results from this survey show that Monroe residents stay in town for some services and travel for others. Figure 1 shows the percentage of residents who reported patronizing various services in Monroe. In both 1994 and 2004, about 60 percent of residents reported that they stay in Monroe for church/place of worship.

Also in both years, one-third reported shopping for their daily needs in town, while less than one in ten shopped for big ticket items locally. Few residents utilized local recreation/entertainment, specialized health care, and primary health care in either year. The percentage of residents who reported utilizing local primary health care increased significantly over the decade.

A Note on Interpretation: For Monroe, 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

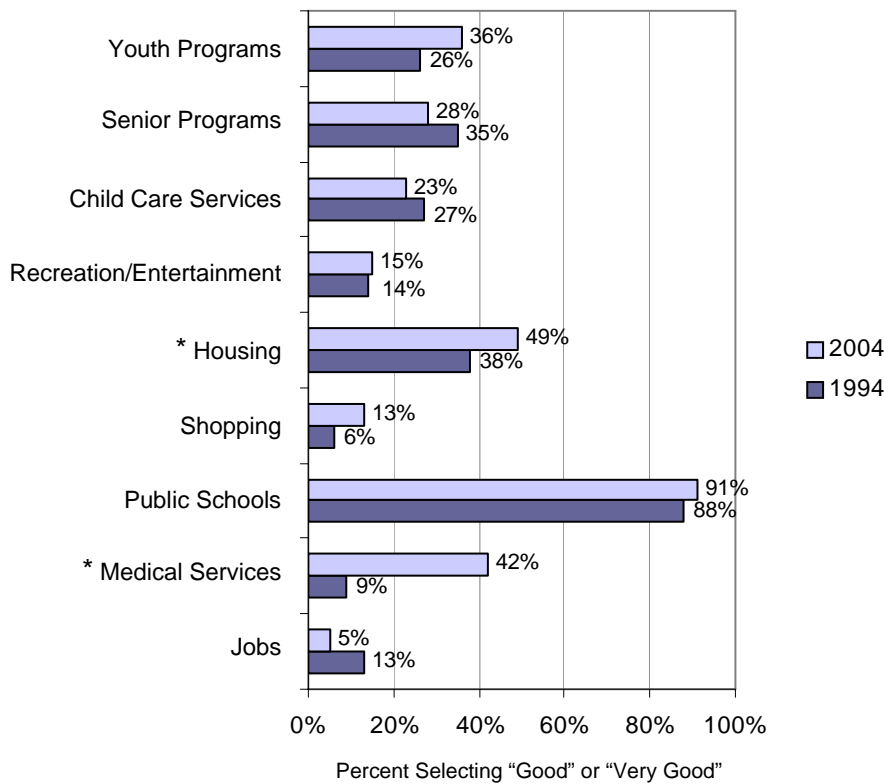


Figure 2: Ratings of Local Services and Facilities

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. Nearly all Monroe residents rated the public schools as good or very good in both years. Housing received positive ratings from about half, youth programs from one-third, with roughly one-fourth of residents giving positive ratings to senior programs and child care in 2004. Far fewer assigned favorable ratings to recreation, shopping, or jobs. The percentage of positive ratings increased significantly for housing and medical services in Monroe in 2004 compared to 1994.

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, Monroe residents were satisfied with their government services. Nearly all residents rated emergency response and fire protection as good or very good, and a large majority assigned favorable ratings to garbage collection, water, and the condition of the parks in both years. Police protection and the condition of the streets received the lowest percentage of positive ratings. Over the past ten years, the percentage of favorable ratings declined for the condition of the parks and streets.

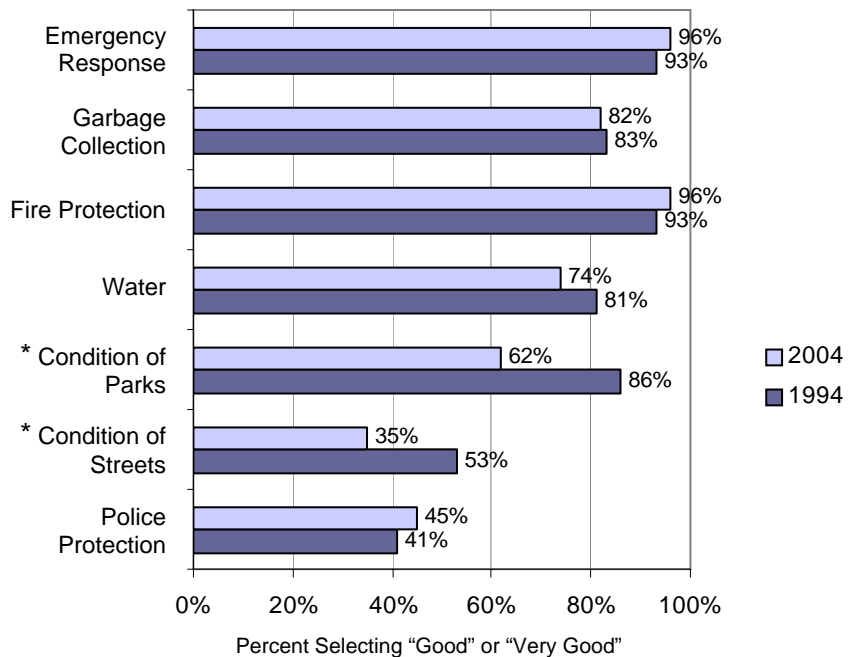


Figure 3: Ratings of Local Government Services

MONROE'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.

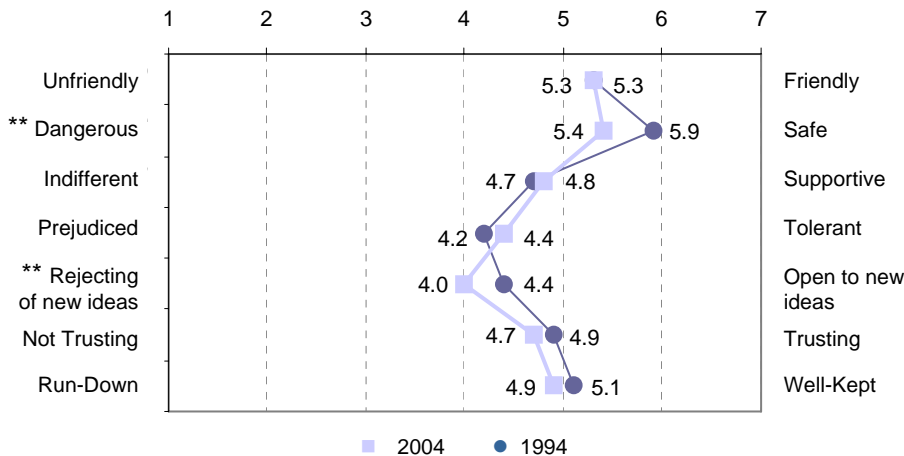


Figure 4: Average Rating of Social Qualities on a 1 to 7 Scale

** 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 Monroe. The extent to which Monroe is tolerant and open to new ideas received the lowest ratings in both years. Ratings for the friendliness, supportiveness, tolerance, openness to new ideas, trusting nature, and appearance did not change over the past decade. However, residents now view Monroe as less safe and less open to new ideas than it was in 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, 55 percent of residents reported knowing the names of half or more of the people in Monroe, compared to 51 percent in 1994. Similarly, 57 percent indicated that half or more of their friends live in town in both years. As for relatives, the percentage of residents who said that half or more of their adult relatives and in-laws live in Monroe declined significantly from 43 percent in 1994 to 26 percent in 2004.

COMMUNITY ATTACHMENT

Do Monroe residents feel at home in their community? When asked this question, most residents said that they did (see Figure 5). Furthermore, 70 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 Monroe residents still feel attached to their community.

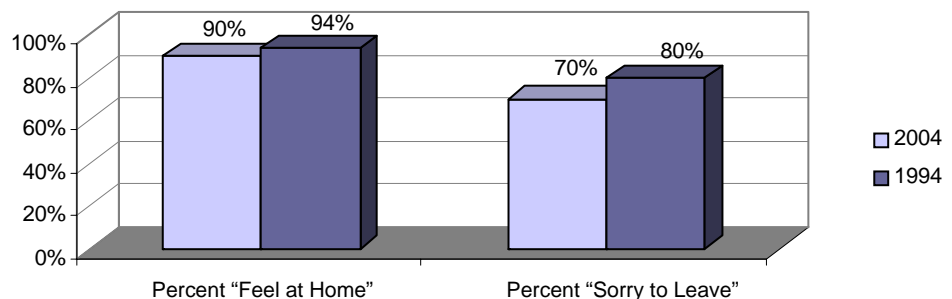


Figure 5: Community Attachment

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Citizens working together to accomplish local goals is an important feature of small towns. For Monroe, 77 percent of residents reported in 2004 that the spirit of community participation is “good” or “very good.” In 2004, half of Monroe residents indicated that they had participated in a community improvement project during the year prior to the survey, and 40 percent considered themselves to be “somewhat” or “very” active in community activities and events (see Figure 6). This compares to 44 percent who had participated in a local project, and 38 percent describing themselves as active in 1994. When asked to consider a variety of factors that limit their involvement in the community, the top three selected by Monroe residents were lack of time (60%), not being asked by others to volunteer (43%), and lack of interest in participating (28%).

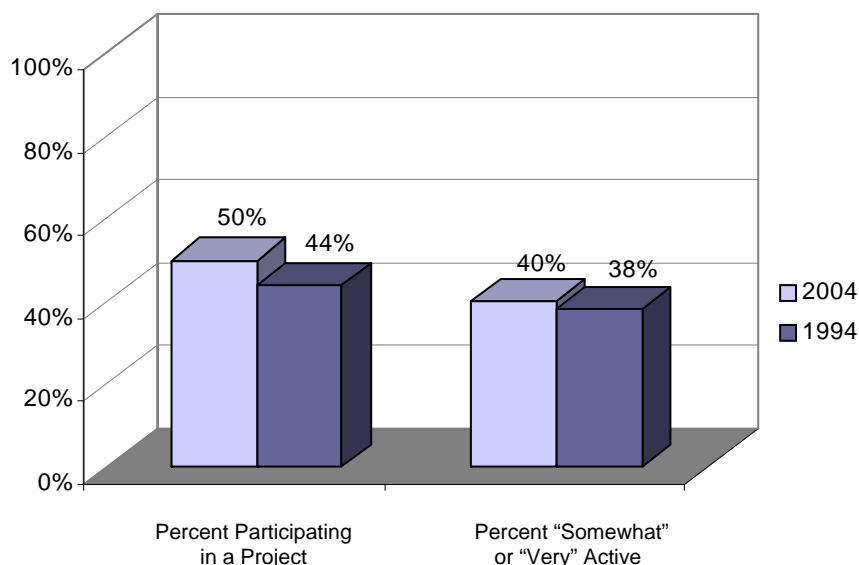


Figure 6: Community Involvement

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 11 percentage points. Using this standard, what has changed in Monroe over the past decade? Residents are obtaining primary health care services in Monroe more now than ten years ago, although they still leave town for specialized health care. Patronage patterns for shopping, recreation, and church did not change significantly. Favorable evaluations increased for housing and medical services, but ratings of other services did not change significantly. The evaluations of the quality of local government services remain high—the only changes are decreases in ratings for the condition of the parks and streets.

The social environment changed somewhat. Residents view Monroe as less safe and less open to new ideas than it was ten years ago. Also, residents report that fewer of their relatives live in the community. Monroe residents remain attached to their community—that is, most feel at home in Monroe and would be sorry if they had to move away. Finally, levels of community involvement are about the same as they were a decade ago—about half have participated in community projects and four in ten consider themselves to be active in the community.

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

RDI

Prepared by: Kerry Agnitsch, Terry Besser, Laura Forster, Jean Friestad, Tom Rice, Vern Ryan, and Nick Recker, Department of Sociology, Iowa State University. For further information, contact Kerry Agnitsch, 515-294-4095, kagnitsc@iastate.edu or Terry Besser, 515-294-6508, tbesser@iastate.edu.

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