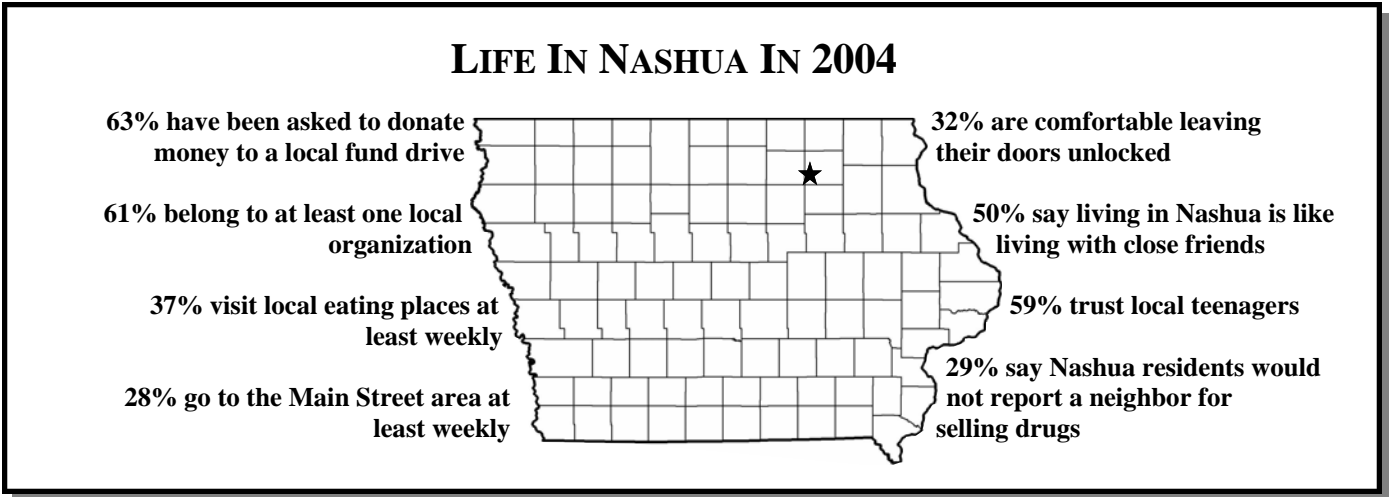


A DECADE OF CHANGE IN NASHUA

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 Nashua. 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, 117 Nashua residents responded to the survey, and 99 responded in 2004. This report is a summary of the results, including how the opinions of Nashua residents have changed over the past decade.



LOCAL PATRONAGE PATTERNS

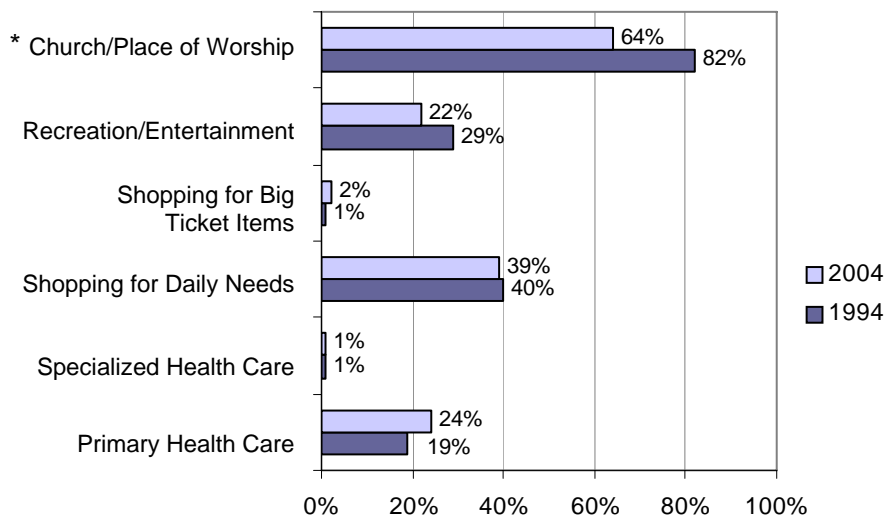


Figure 1: Percent Selecting "Local"

For a variety of reasons, many residents of Iowa's smaller towns rely on neighboring cities for services. Results from this survey suggest that Nashua residents stay in town for some services, but travel for others. Figure 1 shows the percentage of residents who reported patronizing various services in Nashua. In 2004, 64 percent of residents stayed in town to attend church or a place of worship, down significantly

from 82 percent in 1994. Twenty-two percent remained for recreation and entertainment. Thirty-nine percent of residents reported that they stay in Nashua to shop for their daily needs, while only 2 percent stay to shop for "big ticket" items. Similarly, almost one-fourth said they obtain primary health care in Nashua, whereas only 1 percent remain in town for specialized health care.

A Note on Interpretation: For Nashua, 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

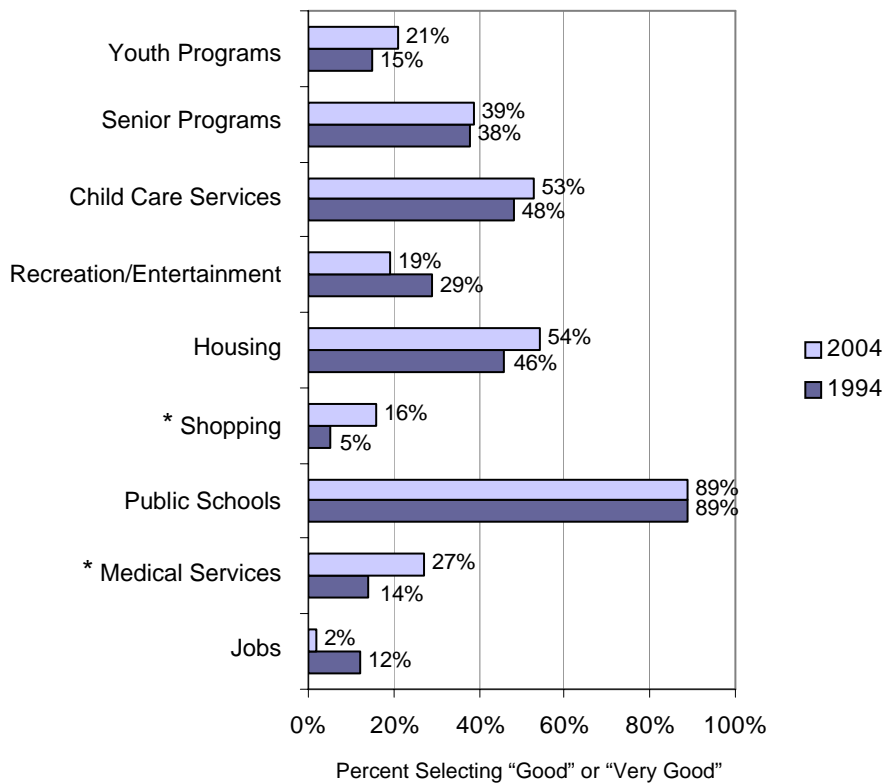


Figure 2: Ratings of Local Services and Facilities

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. Most residents rated the public schools as good or very good in both years, while around half gave positive ratings to child care and housing. Four in ten assigned favorable ratings to senior programs, and about one fifth rated youth programs and recreation/entertainment positively in 2004. Jobs and shopping received the lowest percentage of positive ratings in both years. Favorable ratings for shopping increased significantly from 5 percent in 1994 to 16 percent in 2004. Similarly, positive ratings for medical services increased from 14 percent to 27 percent.

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, most Nashua residents were satisfied with their government services. In 2004, over 90 percent of residents rated fire protection and the condition of the parks as good or very good, while well over half gave positive ratings to garbage collection, water, and police protection in both years. The percentage of positive ratings decreased significantly since 1994 for police protection. However, favorable ratings for the condition of the streets increased significantly over the past decade from 19 percent in 1994 to 58 percent in 2004.

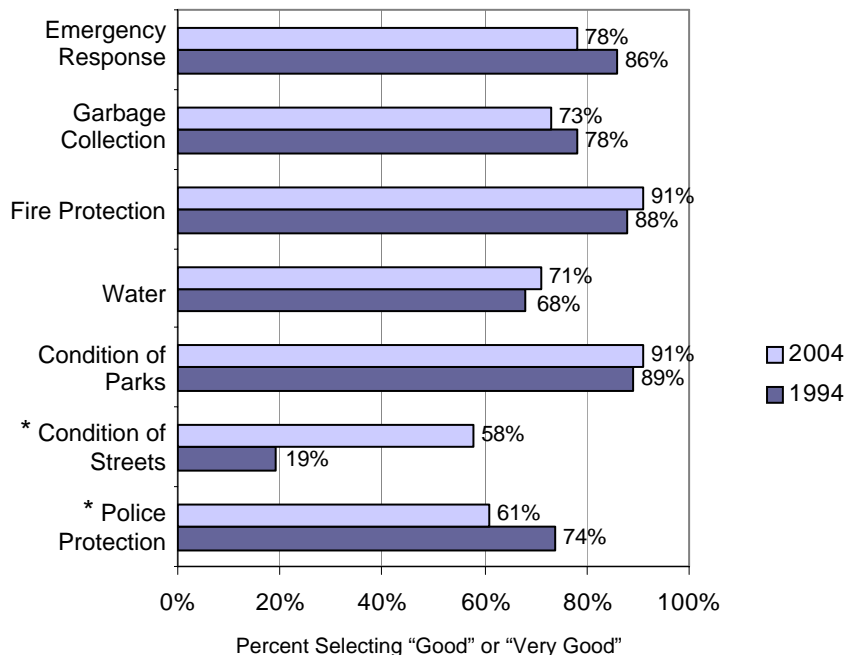


Figure 3: Ratings of Local Government Services

NASHUA'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.

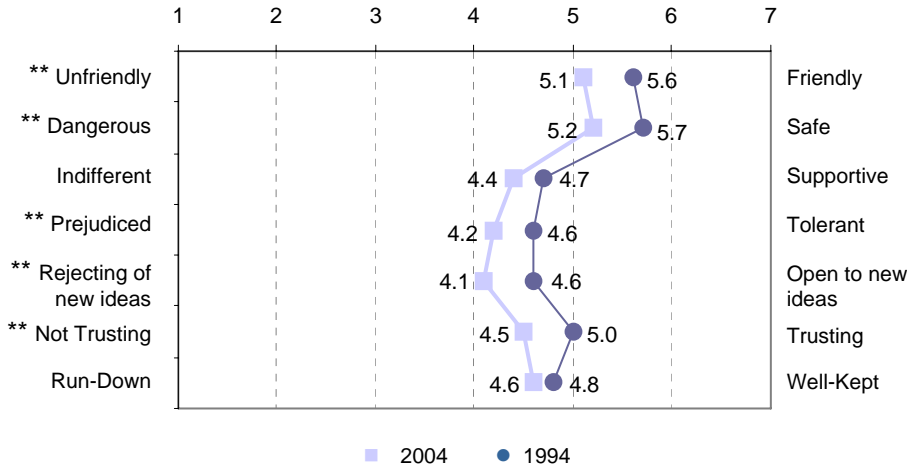


Figure 4: Average Rating of Social Qualities on a 1 to 7 Scale

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 friendliness and safety of Nashua. The lowest ratings in both years were assigned to the extent to which Nashua is viewed as tolerant and open to new ideas. Significant changes over the past decade are that residents now view Nashua as less friendly, less safe, less tolerant, less open to new ideas, and less trusting than it was in 1994. The ratings for supportiveness and appearance did not change significantly.

** 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.

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. Forty-seven percent of Nashua residents said that they know the names of at least half of the other people in town, down from 62 percent in 1994. Fifty-one percent indicated that half or more of their friends live in Nashua, compared to 54 percent in 1994. As for relatives, the percentage of residents who said that half or more of their adult relatives and in-laws live in Nashua decreased significantly from 36 percent in 1994 to 20 percent in 2004.

COMMUNITY ATTACHMENT

Do Nashua residents feel at home in their community? When asked this question, most residents in both years said that they did (see Figure 5). Furthermore, 67 percent of residents reported that they would be sorry to leave if they had to move away from Nashua. This is a significant decrease from the 85 percent who expressed this sentiment in 1994.

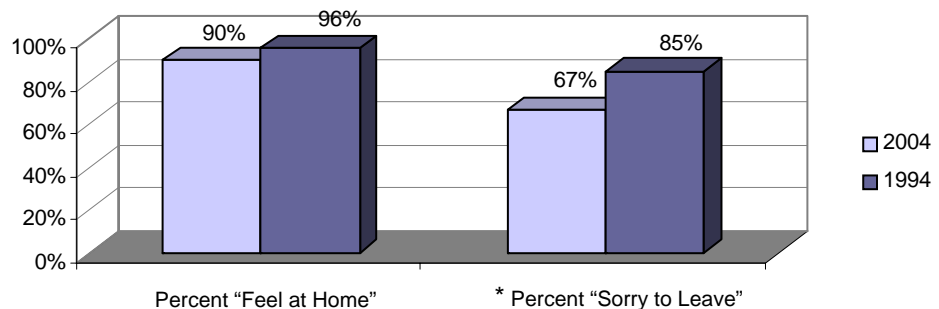


Figure 5: Community Attachment

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Citizens working together to accomplish local goals is an important feature of small towns. For Nashua, 66 percent of residents reported in 2004 that the spirit of community participation is

“good” or “very good.” At the same time, 39 percent in 2004 and 45 percent in 1994 reported that they had participated in a community improvement project during the years prior to each survey. The percentage of those who described themselves as “somewhat” or “very” active in community activities and events decreased from 43 percent in 1994 to less than one-third (27%) in 2004 (see Figure 6). When asked to consider a variety of factors that limit their involvement in Nashua projects and activities, the top three factors were lack of time (63%), not being asked by others to volunteer (43%), and no interest in becoming involved (35%).

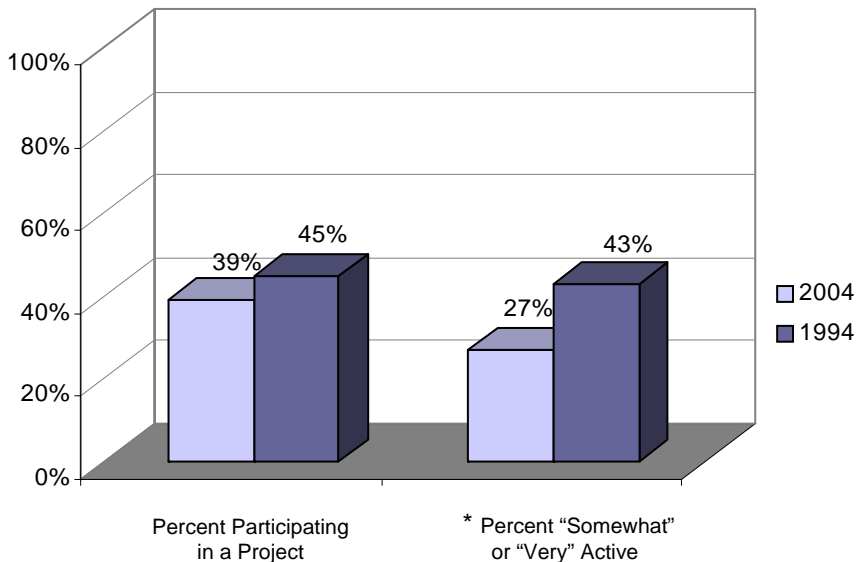


Figure 6: Community Involvement

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 11 percentage points. Using this standard, what has changed in Nashua over the past decade? Residents are attending church or a place of worship in Nashua less now than ten years ago. However, patronage patterns did not change for recreation, shopping, and health care. Evaluations of the quality of local shopping and medical services increased—ratings for other services did not change significantly. Evaluations of quality of government services remain high, and ratings increased for the condition of local streets and decreased for police protection.

The social environment has changed significantly. Residents view Nashua as less friendly, less safe, less tolerant, less open to new ideas, and less trusting than it was in 1994. People don't know as many other Nashua residents, and fewer of their adult relatives and in-laws live locally. Nashua residents remain attached to their community—that is, most feel at home in Nashua and would be sorry to leave. However, the percentage of those sorry to leave decreased over the past decade. Community involvement remains important to many residents, as nearly four in ten had participated in a community project, although the percentage who describe themselves as active in the community declined significantly.

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

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