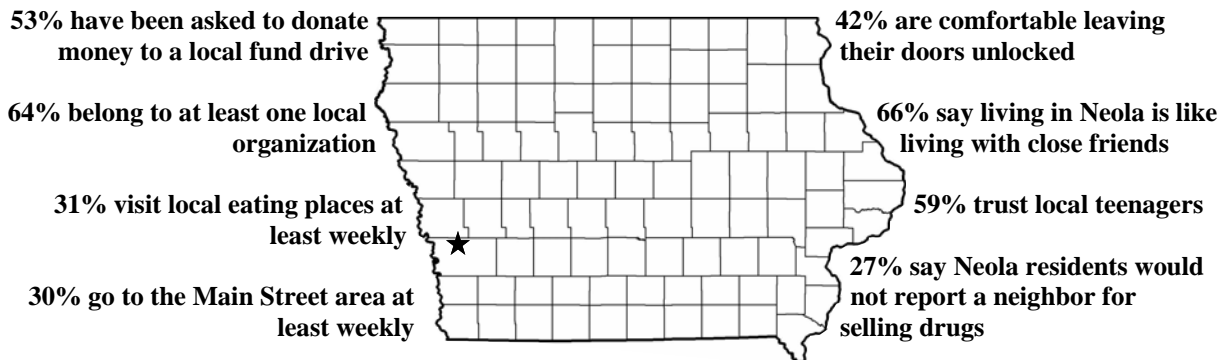


A DECADE OF CHANGE IN NEOLA

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 Neola. 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, 104 Neola residents responded to the survey, and 94 responded in 2004. This report is a summary of the results, including how the opinions of Neola residents have changed over the past decade.

LIFE IN NEOLA IN 2004



LOCAL PATRONAGE PATTERNS

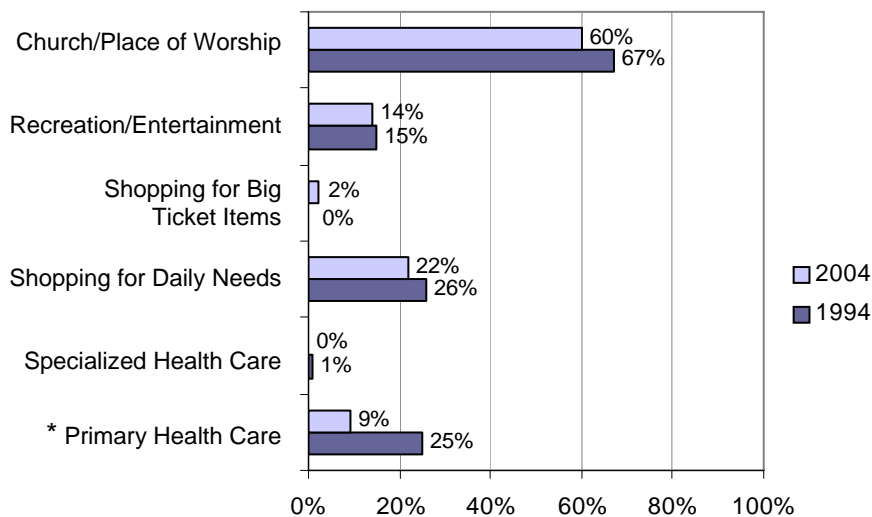


Figure 1: Percent Selecting "Local"

For a variety of reasons, many residents of Iowa's smaller towns rely on neighboring cities for services. Results from this survey reveal that Neola's residents follow this pattern for many services. Figure 1 shows the percentage of residents who reported patronizing various services in Neola in 1994 and 2004. While a majority of residents reported staying in Neola to attend church in both years, only 14 percent remained for recreation and entertainment.

Almost one-fourth said they shop for their daily needs in Neola, while only 2 percent reported staying in town to shop for big ticket items. The percentage of those who reported staying in town for primary health care declined over the past decade, from 25 percent in 1994 to nine percent in 2004. Almost no residents said they remain in Neola for specialized health care.

A Note on Interpretation: For Neola, 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

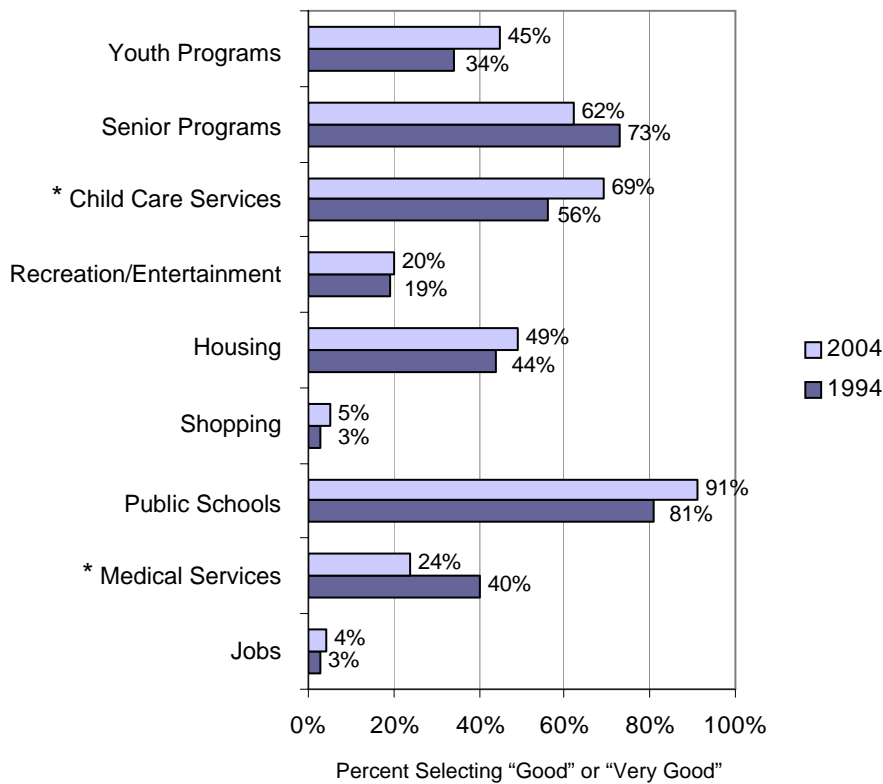


Figure 2: Ratings of Local Services and Facilities

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 the public schools as good or very good, and over half assigned positive ratings to senior programs and child care services in both years. Youth programs received favorable ratings from 45 percent of residents, and recreation/entertainment from about one-fifth. Very few gave favorable ratings to local shopping and jobs. Ratings for most services and facilities did not change significantly over the past ten years. However, the percentage of positive ratings declined for medical services and increased for child care services.

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, residents were satisfied with most of the government services in Neola. In 2004, a majority of residents rated emergency response, garbage collection, fire protection, and the condition of the parks and streets as good or very good. Water services and police protection received positive ratings from fewer than half of residents. Compared to ten years ago, the percentage of favorable ratings decreased for water, the condition of the parks, and the condition of the streets.

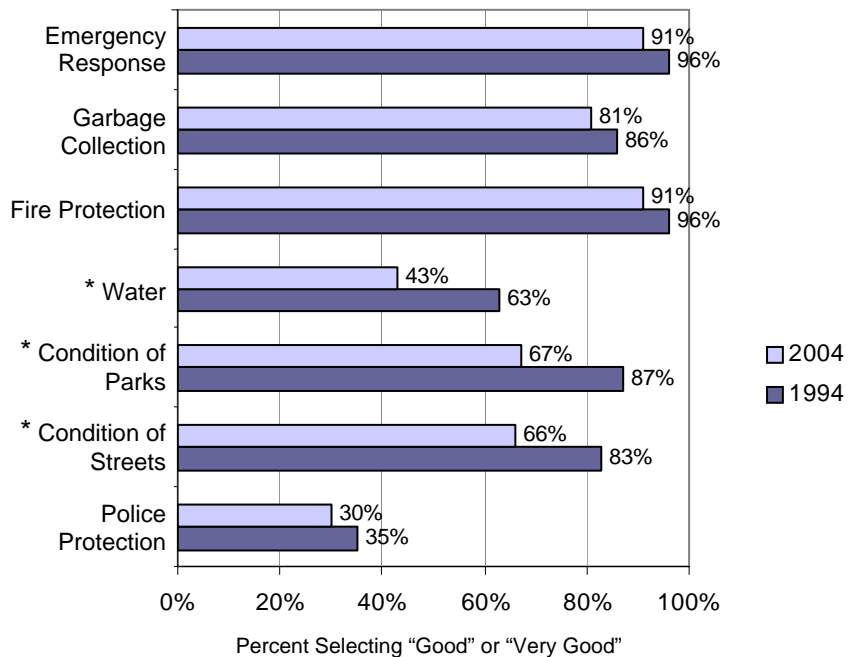


Figure 3: Ratings of Local Government Services

NEOLA'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.

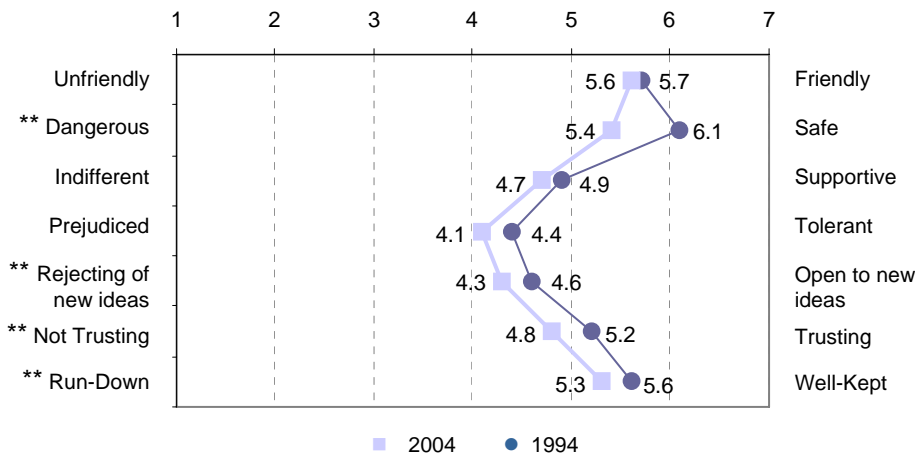


Figure 4: Average Rating of Social Qualities on a 1 to 7 Scale

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 rating to the friendliness and safety of Neola. The lowest ratings in both years were given to the extent to which Neola is tolerant and open to new ideas. Significant changes over the past decade are that residents now view Neola as less safe, less open to new ideas, less trusting, and less well-kept. Ratings for the friendliness, supportiveness, and tolerance of Neola 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. In 2004, 48 percent of residents reported knowing the names of half or more of the people in Neola, compared to 50 percent in 1994. Similarly, 53 percent indicated that half or more of their friends live in town, compared to 48 percent in 1994. As for relatives, 23 percent of residents in 2004 and 20 percent in 1994 said that half or more of their adult relatives live in Neola. (Note: These differences are not greater than the margin of error.)

COMMUNITY ATTACHMENT

Do Neola residents feel at home in their community? When asked this question in 2004, most said that they did (see Figure 5). Furthermore, 76 percent of residents said that they would be sorry to leave if they had to move away from Neola.

These responses are similar to those reported in 1994, indicating that most Neola residents still feel attached to their community.

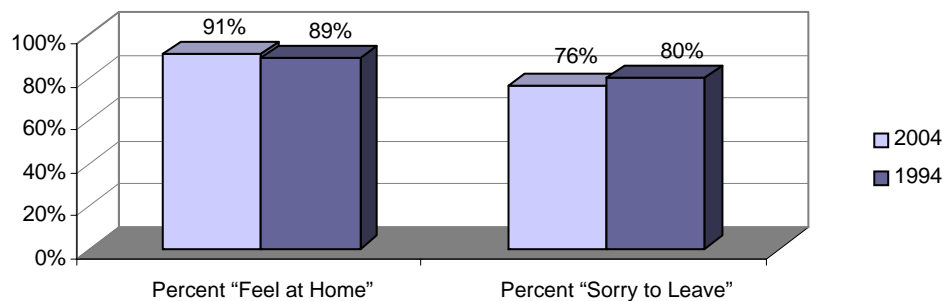


Figure 5: Community Attachment

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Citizens working together to accomplish local goals is an important feature of small towns. For Neola, 71 percent of residents reported in 2004 that the spirit of community participation is

“good” or “very good.” In both 1994 and 2004, over half of Neola residents reported that they participated in a community improvement project during the years prior to the surveys (see Figure 6). In 1994, 45 percent considered themselves to be “somewhat” or “very” active in community activities and events, and 34 percent in 2004 described themselves as active. These patterns of community involvement did not change significantly from 1994. When asked to consider a variety of factors that limit their involvement in community projects and events, the top three selected were lack of time (69%), not being asked by others to volunteer (41%), and not knowing how to become involved (28%).

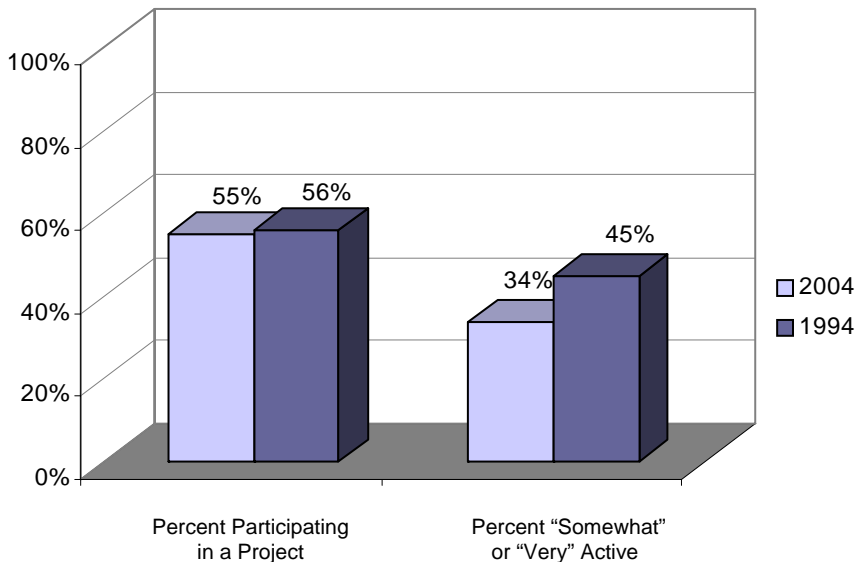


Figure 6: Community Involvement

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 12 percentage points. Using this standard, what has changed in Neola over the past decade? Residents are going outside of the community to obtain primary health care more now than ten years ago. Most still attend church in Neola, but leave for recreation, shopping, and specialized health care. Evaluations of the quality of medical services declined, while ratings increased for child care services. Evaluations of the quality of government services remain high, although ratings decreased for water and the condition of the parks and streets.

The social environment has changed very little. While residents view Neola as less safe, less open to new ideas, less trusting, and less well-kept than it was ten years ago, the extent to which people know each other and have local friends and relatives did not change. Neola residents remain attached to their community—that is, most feel at home in Neola and would be sorry to leave if they had to move away. Finally, patterns of community involvement did not change significantly—about half reported participating in a local improvement project, and in 2004, about one-third considered themselves to be active in the community. It is interesting to note that over one-fourth reported they do not know how to get 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 Neola’s future. **We wish to thank the Neola residents who participated in the 1994 and 2004 studies for providing the information that made this report possible.**

RDI

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