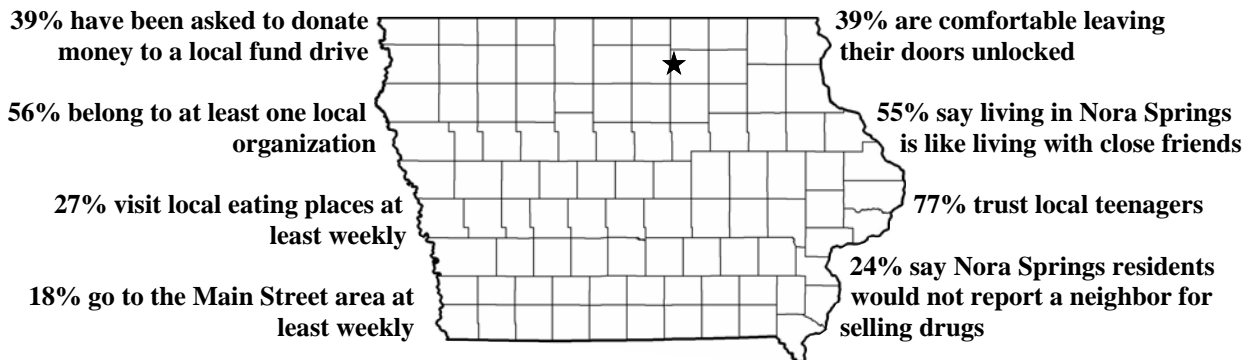


A DECADE OF CHANGE IN NORA SPRINGS

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 Nora Springs. 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, 116 Nora Springs residents responded to the survey, and 98 responded in 2004. This report is a summary of the results, including how the opinions of Nora Springs residents have changed over the past decade.

LIFE IN NORA SPRINGS IN 2004



LOCAL PATRONAGE PATTERNS

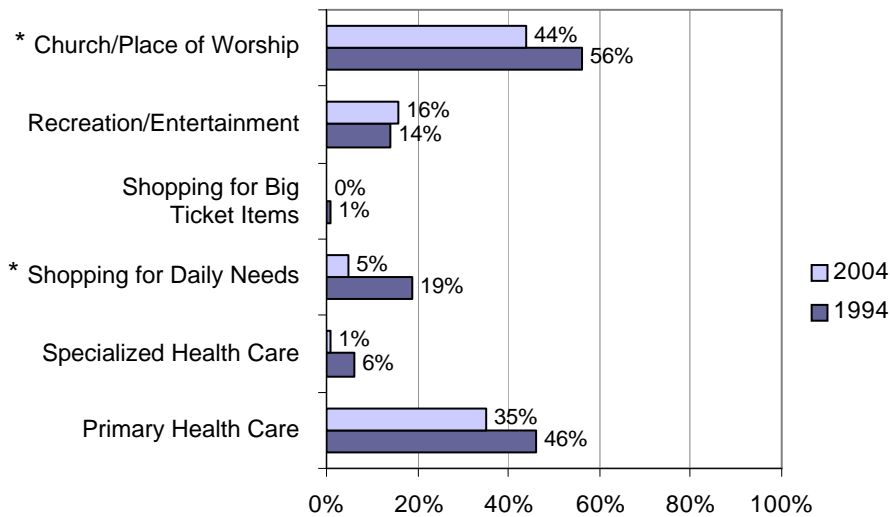


Figure 1: Percent Selecting "Local"

For a variety of reasons, many residents of Iowa's smaller towns rely on neighboring cities for services. Results from this survey reveal that residents stay in town for some services and travel for others. Figure 1 shows the percentage of residents who reported patronizing various services in Nora Springs. The percentage of residents who reported staying in Nora Springs to attend church or a place of worship decreased significantly from 56 percent in 1994 to 44 percent in 2004.

Sixteen percent of residents said that they stay in town for recreation or entertainment. Five percent indicated that they shop for their daily needs in Nora Springs, down from 19 percent in 1994, while no residents reported staying to shop for "big ticket" items. Over one-third reported that they obtain primary health care in Nora Springs, while only 1 percent stay for specialized health care.

A Note on Interpretation: For Nora Springs, 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

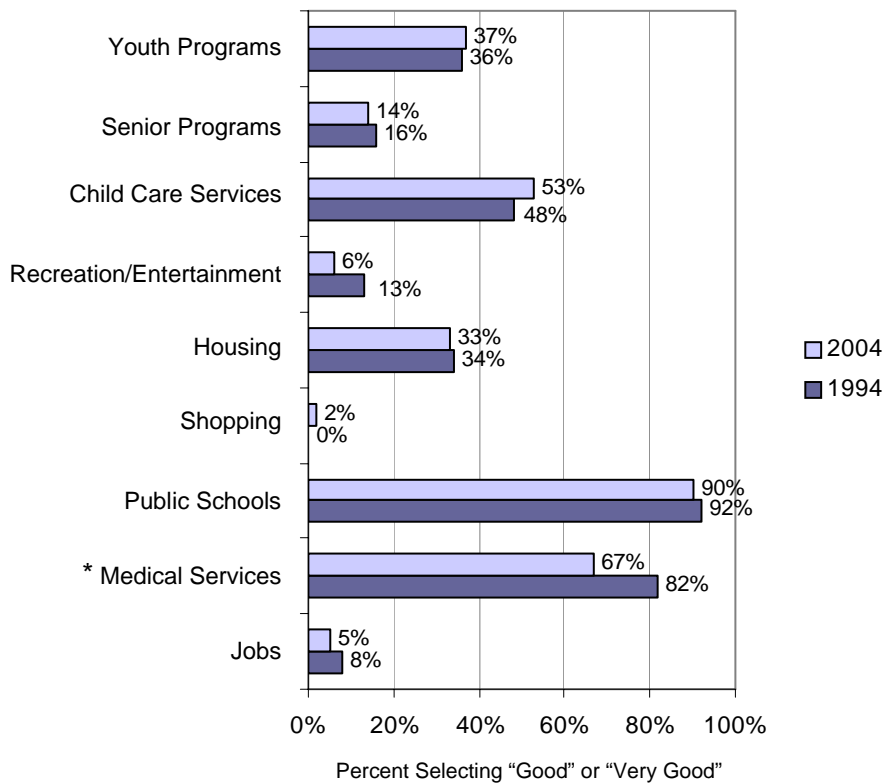


Figure 2: Ratings of Local Services and Facilities

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, while very few gave positive ratings to senior programs, recreation, shopping, and jobs. Roughly half assigned favorable ratings to child care services, and about one-third rated youth programs and housing favorably. The percentage of positive ratings decreased significantly for medical services (from 82 percent to 67 percent). Ratings of the quality of other local services and facilities did not change significantly over the past ten years.

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, Nora Springs residents were satisfied with their government services. Over three-fourths rated garbage collection, fire protection, water, and the condition of the parks as good or very good, while more than half assigned positive ratings to emergency response and police protection. The smallest percentage of positive ratings went to the condition of the streets. The only change over the past decade was a decrease in favorable ratings for emergency response.

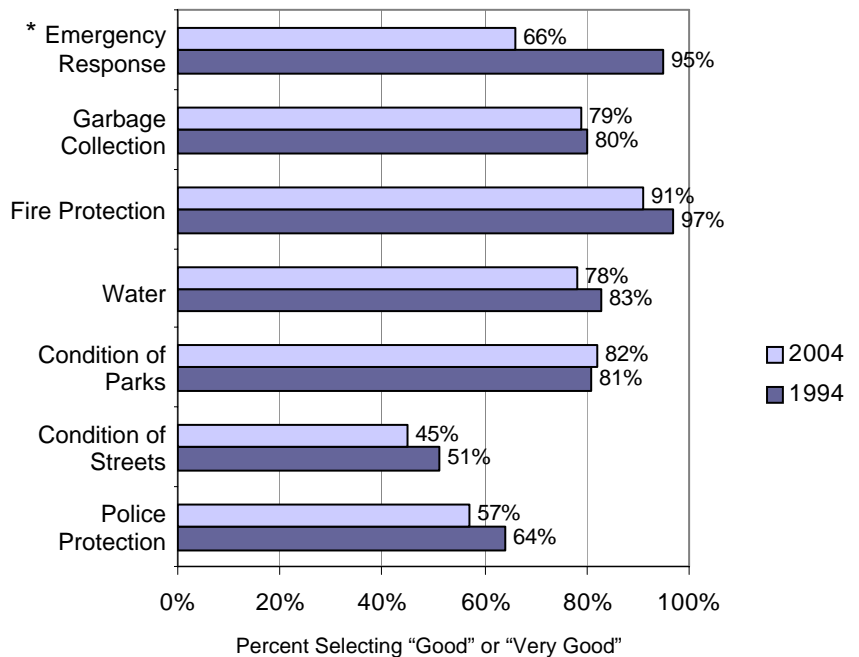


Figure 3: Ratings of Local Government Services

NORA SPRINGS' 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.

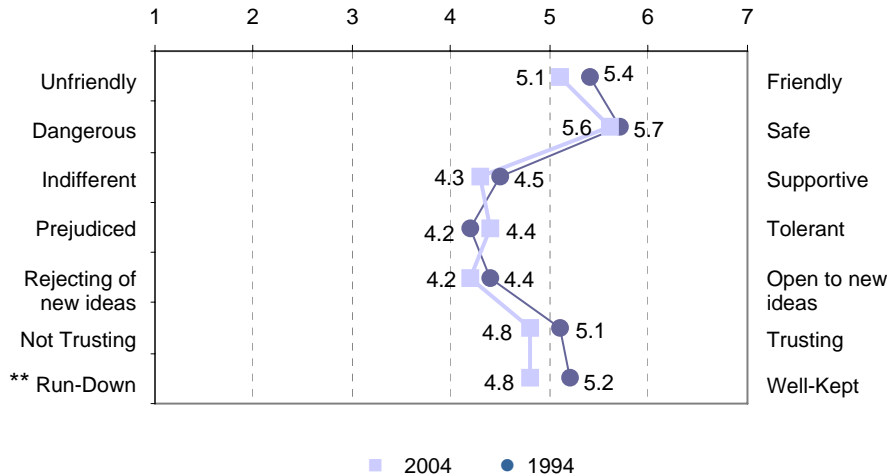


Figure 4: Average Rating of Social Qualities on a 1 to 7 Scale

** 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 Nora Springs. The lowest ratings were given to the extent Nora Springs is tolerant and open to new ideas. Ratings for each of these social qualities did not change significantly over the past decade, except for assessments of the appearance of Nora Springs. Residents in 2004 said that Nora Springs was less well-kept 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, 37 percent of residents reported knowing the names of half or more of the people in Nora Springs, compared to 48 percent in 1994. Similarly, 45 percent indicated that half or more of their friends live in town, compared to 54 percent in 1994. As for relatives, 10 percent of residents in 2004 and 13 percent in 1994 said that half or more of their adult relatives live in Nora Springs. (Note: These differences are not greater than the margin of error).

COMMUNITY ATTACHMENT

Do Nora Springs residents feel at home in their community? When asked this question in 2004, most said that they did (see Figure 5). Furthermore, 75 percent of residents said that they would be sorry to leave if they had to move away from Nora Springs. These responses are similar to those reported in 1994, indicating that most Nora Springs residents still feel attached to their community.

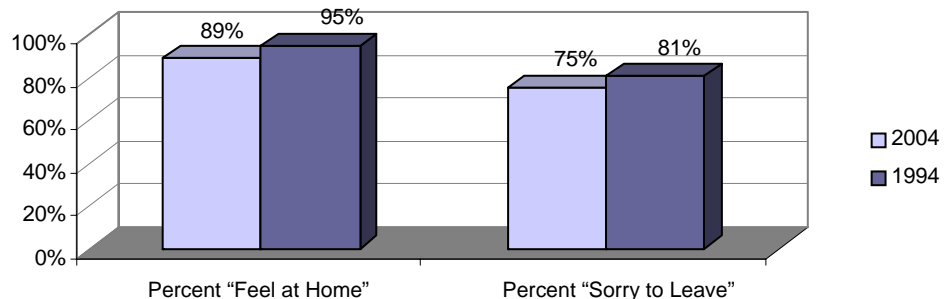


Figure 5: Community Attachment

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Citizens working together to accomplish local goals is an important feature of small towns. For Nora Springs, 66 percent of residents reported in 2004 that the spirit of community participation is “good” or “very good.” At the same time, fewer than half of residents in both years said that they had participated in a community improvement project during the years prior to each survey, and less than one-fourth considered themselves to be “somewhat” or “very” active in community activities and events in 2004, down significantly from 40 percent ten years ago (see Figure 6).

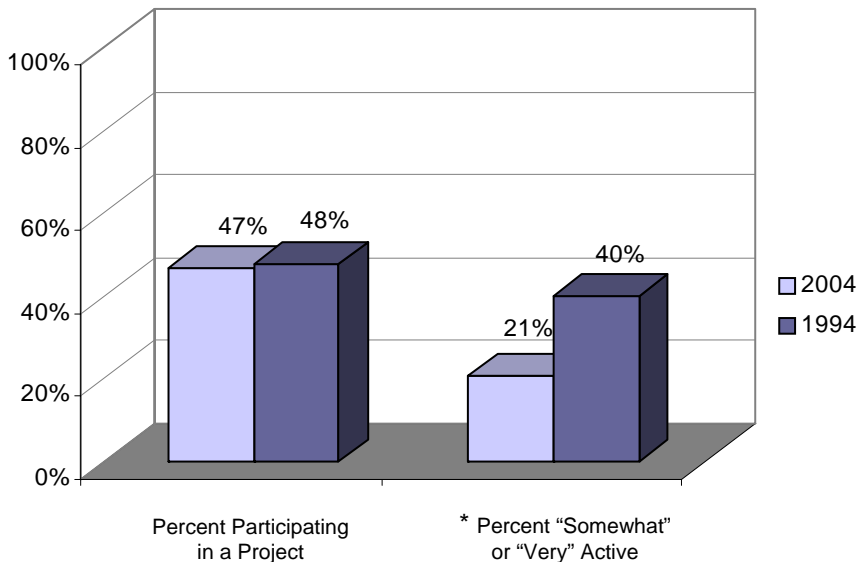


Figure 6: Community Involvement

When asked to consider a variety of factors that limit their participation in community projects or activities, the top three selected by Nora Springs residents were lack of time (63%), not being asked by others to participate (49%), and not knowing how to become involved (30%).

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 Nora Springs over the past decade? Residents are attending church and shopping in Nora Springs less now than they were ten years ago. Evaluations of the quality of medical services decreased, although ratings of other services did not change significantly. Evaluations of the quality of local government services remain high, however, the percentage of positive ratings decreased for emergency response services.

The social environment has changed very little. Residents view Nora Springs as less well-kept than it was a decade ago, but ratings for the friendliness, safety, supportiveness, tolerance, openness to new ideas, and trusting nature of the town did not change significantly. Nor did the extent to which social ties exist among residents. Residents remain attached to Nora Springs—that is most feel at home in the community and would be sorry to leave if they had to move away. Finally, levels of community involvement changed somewhat. While levels of participation in local projects did not change, the percentage of those who describe themselves as active in the community declined.

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

RDI

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