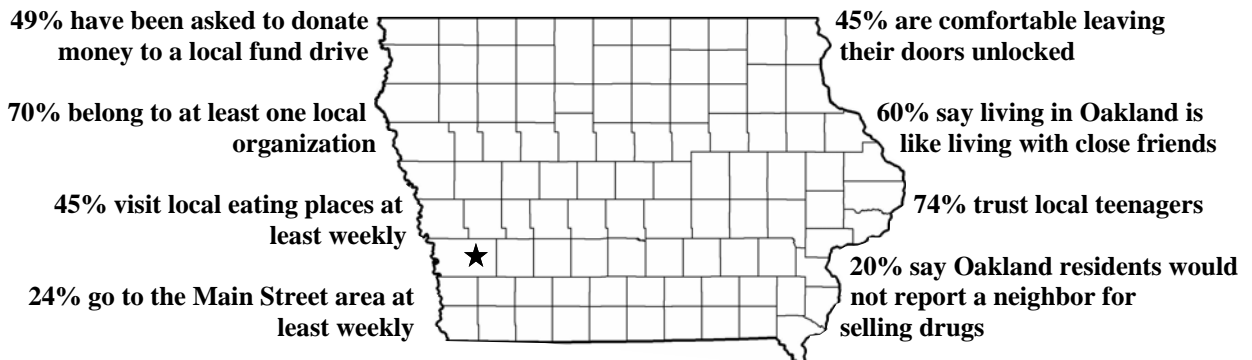


# A DECADE OF CHANGE IN OAKLAND

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 Oakland. 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 Oakland residents responded to the survey, and 85 responded in 2004. This report is a summary of the results, including how the opinions of Oakland residents have changed over the past decade.

## LIFE IN OAKLAND IN 2004



## LOCAL PATRONAGE PATTERNS

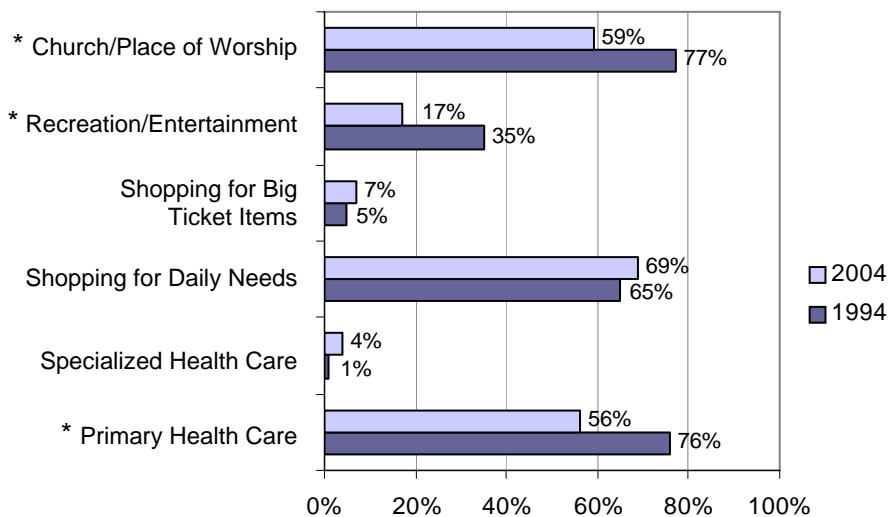


Figure 1: Percent Selecting "Local"

For a variety of reasons, many residents of Iowa's smaller towns rely on neighboring cities for services. The results of this study reveal that Oakland residents stay in town for some services, but travel of others. Figure 1 shows the percentage of residents who reported staying in town for a variety of services in 1994 and 2004. In 2004, 59 percent of residents said that they stay in town to attend church or a place of worship, down significantly from 77

percent in 1994. The percentage of residents who reported staying in Oakland for recreation decreased significantly from 35 percent in 1994 to 17 percent in 2004. About two-thirds stayed in town to shop for daily needs in both years, while fewer than one in ten shopped for "big ticket" items in Oakland. Fifty-six percent of residents said they obtain primary health care in Oakland, down significantly from 76 percent in 1994, while very few said they stay in town for specialized health care.

\*A Note on Interpretation: For Oakland, 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

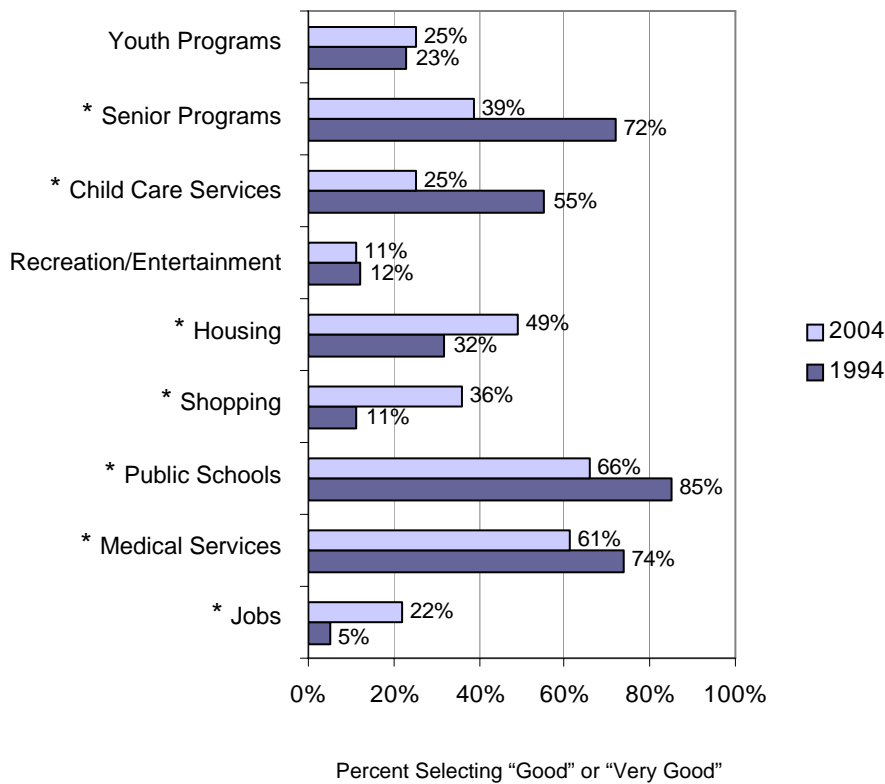


Figure 2: Ratings of Local Services and Facilities

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. Well over half of Oakland residents rated the public schools and medical services as good or very good, however the percentage of those doing so declined significantly since 1994. Similarly, the percentage of positive ratings decreased over the past ten years for senior programs and child care services. However, the percentage of favorable ratings increased significantly for housing, shopping, and jobs. Ratings did not change significantly for youth programs and recreation/entertainment.

## 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, Oakland residents were satisfied with their government services. In both years, a large majority assigned positive ratings to emergency response, garbage collection, fire protection, and water, while over half rated the condition of the parks and streets as good or very good. Police protection received the lowest percentage of favorable ratings. Compared to 1994, the percentage of positive ratings decreased significantly for garbage collection and fire protection, but increased for the condition of the parks and streets.

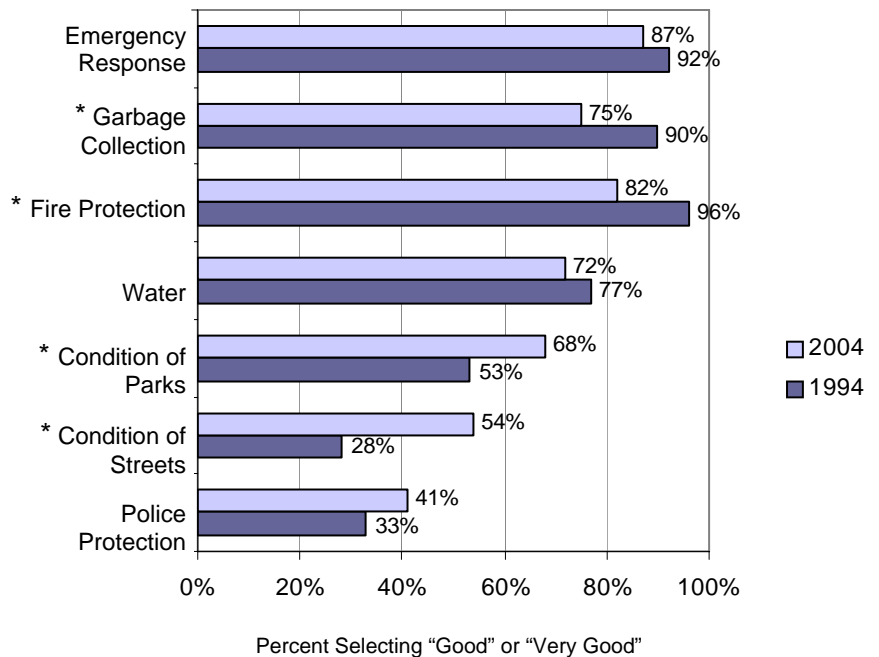
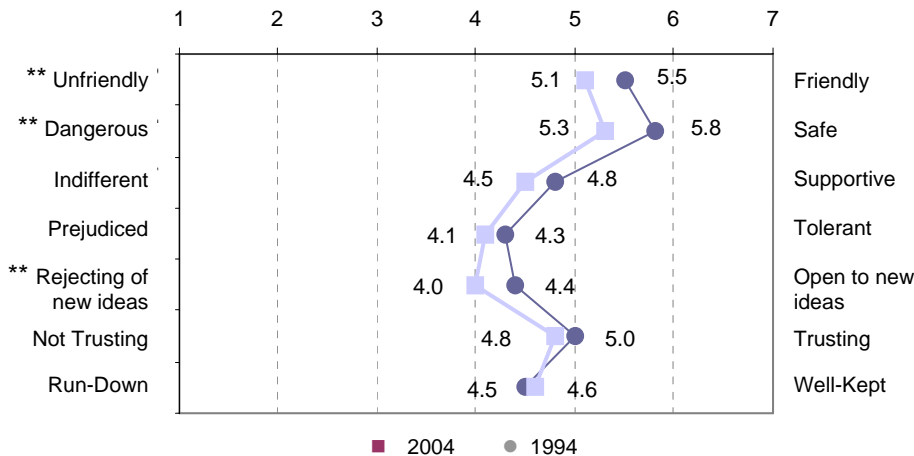


Figure 3: Ratings of Local Government Services

## OAKLAND'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.

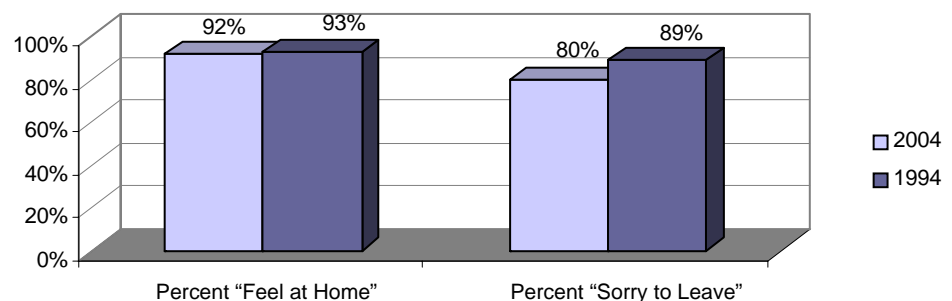
Residents were presented with a list of qualities and asked to evaluate their town on each quality using a 7-point scale. The average ratings shown in Figure 4 reveal that in both years, residents assigned the highest ratings to the safety and friendliness of Oakland. The lowest ratings in both years were given to the extent to which Oakland is tolerant and open to new ideas. Significant changes over the past decade are that residents in 2004 viewed Oakland as less friendly, less safe, and less open to new ideas than it was in 1994. The ratings for supportiveness, tolerance, trust, and appearance did not change significantly.

### 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, 52 percent of residents reported knowing the names of half or more of the people in Oakland, compared to 59 percent in 1994. Fifty-nine percent indicated that half or more of their friends live in town, compared to 58 percent in 1994. As for relatives, 24 percent of residents in 2004 and 34 percent in 1994 said that half or more of their adult relatives and in-laws live in Oakland. (Note: These differences are not larger than the margin of error.)

### COMMUNITY ATTACHMENT

Do Oakland residents feel at home in their community? When asked this question in 2004, most residents said that they did (see Figure 5). Furthermore, 80 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 Oakland 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 Oakland, 66 percent of residents indicated in 2004 that the spirit of community participation is “good” or “very good.” Over half of Oakland’s residents indicated that they participated in a community improvement project during the year prior to the survey. However, only about one-third described themselves as “somewhat” or “very” active in Oakland activities and events.

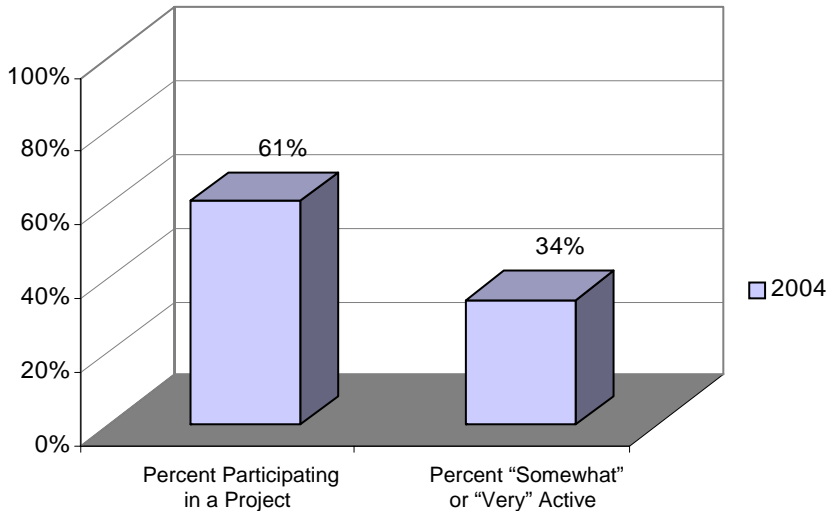


Figure 6: Community Involvement

When asked to consider a variety of factors that serve to limit their involvement in community projects and activities, the top three factors selected by Oakland residents were lack of time (67%), not being asked by others to get involved (44%), and not knowing how to become involved (28%).

## 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 Oakland over the past decade? There was a decline in the number of residents who attend church or place of worship, seek recreation, or obtain primary health care services in Oakland. Evaluations of the quality of senior programs, child care services, public schools, and medical services all decreased significantly. However, positive evaluations increased for local housing and shopping. Evaluations of the quality of local government services remain high, and favorable ratings increased for the condition of the parks and streets. However, ratings decreased for garbage collection and fire protection.

The social environment has changed very little. Oakland is now viewed as less friendly, less safe, and less open to new ideas than it was ten years ago. However, the extent to which people know each other in town did not change significantly. Oakland residents remain attached to their community—that is, most feel at home in Oakland and would be sorry to leave. Finally, levels of community involvement in Oakland are relatively high, with over half of residents reporting that they had participated in a community project, and nearly two-thirds indicated that the spirit of community participation is strong.

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

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