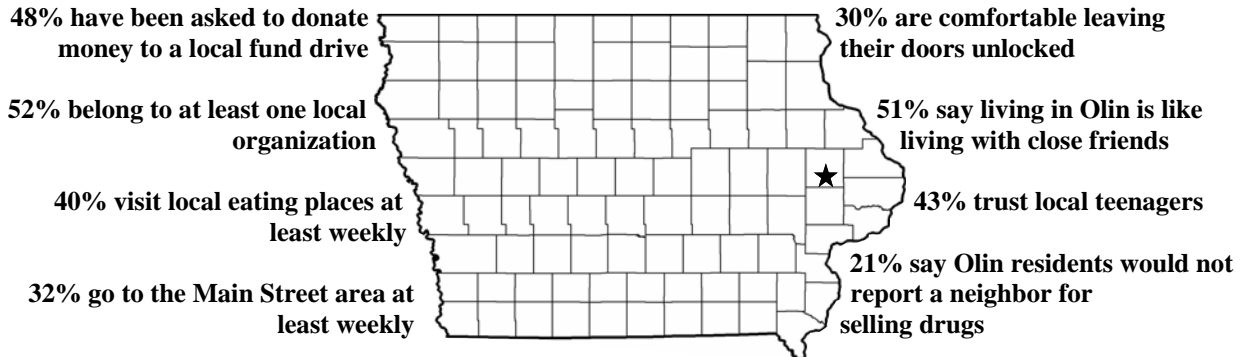


# A DECADE OF CHANGE IN OLIN

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 Olin. 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, 115 Olin residents responded to the survey, and 110 responded in 2004. This report is a summary of the results, including how the opinions of Olin residents have changed over the past decade.

## LIFE IN OLIN IN 2004



## LOCAL PATRONAGE PATTERNS

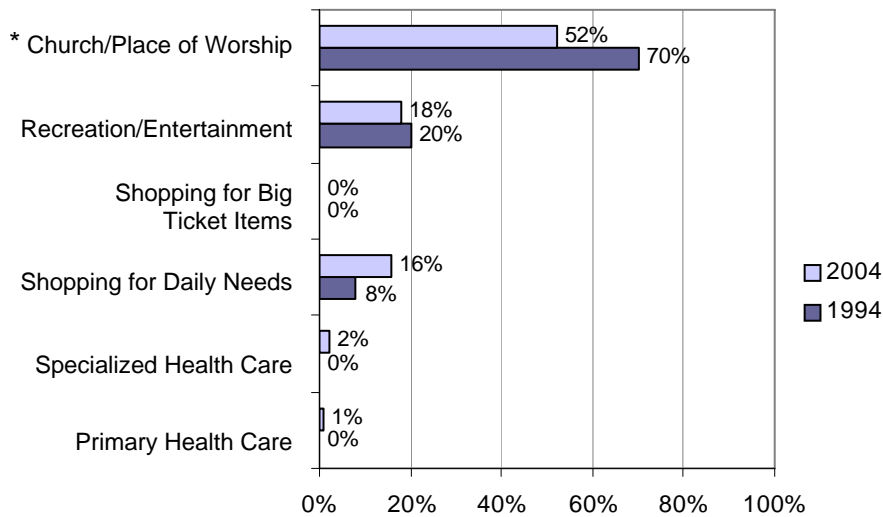


Figure 1: Percent Selecting "Local"

For a variety of reasons, many residents of Iowa's smaller towns rely on neighboring cities for services. Results from this survey reveal that Olin residents leave Olin for most services. Figure 1 shows the percentage of residents who reported patronizing various services in Olin. While 52 percent said they stay in town to attend church or a place of worship, this is a significant decrease from the 70 percent who did so ten

years ago. Approximately one in five said they stay in town for recreation or entertainment in both years. Sixteen percent of residents in 2004 indicated that they shop for their daily needs in Olin, while no residents stayed to shop for "big ticket" items. Very few residents reported staying in town to obtain primary health care (1%) or specialized health care (2%).

\*A Note on Interpretation: For Olin, 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

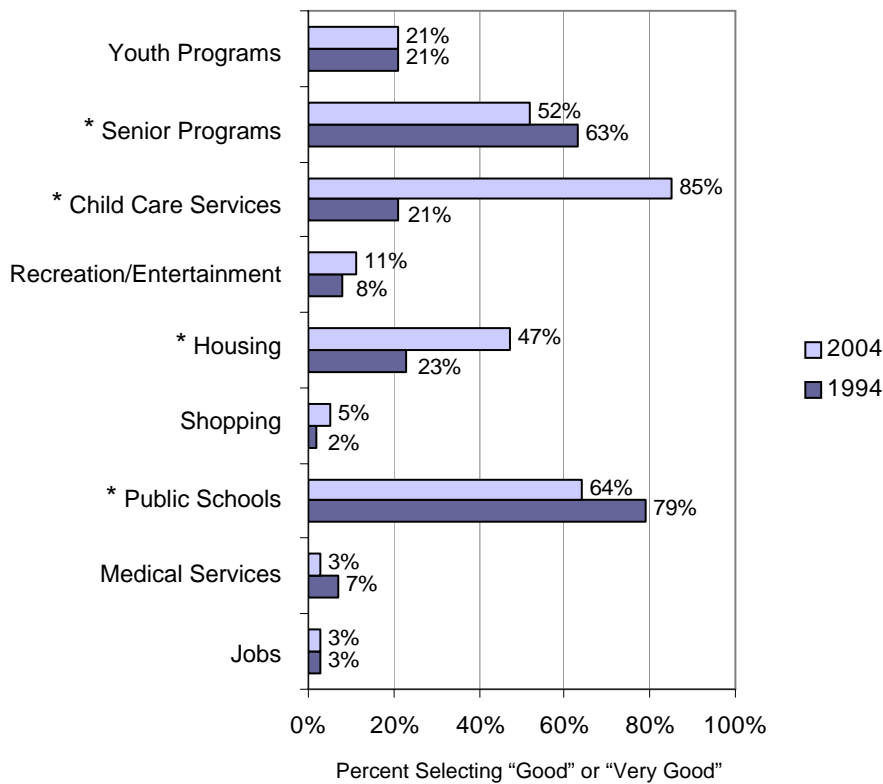


Figure 2: Ratings of Local Services and Facilities

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. In 2004, over half of residents rated senior programs, child care services and public schools as good or very good, while very few gave favorable ratings for recreation/entertainment, shopping, medical services, or jobs. Compared to ten years ago, the percentage of positive ratings increased significantly for child care services and housing. Senior programs and public schools had a significant decrease in the percentage of favorable ratings. Ratings did not change for youth programs, recreation/entertainment, shopping, medical services, or jobs.

## 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 residents reported being satisfied with Olin’s government services. Over three-fourths rated emergency response, garbage collection, fire protection, and the condition of the parks as good or very good in both years. Water, the condition of the streets, and police protection received favorable ratings from less than half of Olin residents in 2004. Most of these ratings did not change over the past decade, however, the percentage of positive ratings for water increased significantly from 32 percent in 1994 to 43 percent in 2004.

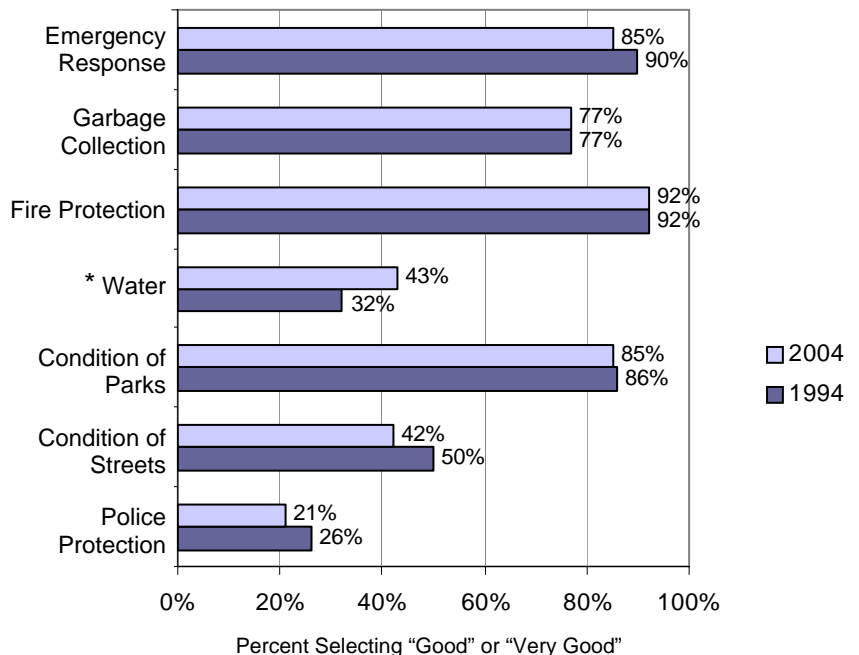
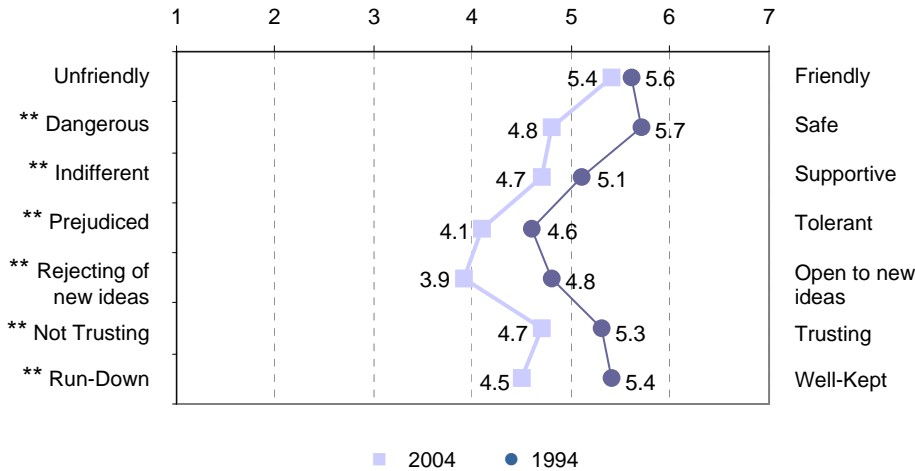


Figure 3: Ratings of Local Government Services

## OLIN'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 Olin. The lowest ratings in both years were assigned to the extent to which Olin is tolerant and open to new ideas. Most of these ratings changed significantly over the past decade—residents in 2004 viewed Olin as less safe, less supportive, less tolerant, less open to new ideas, less trusting, and less well-kept than it was in 1994. The rating for friendliness did not change significantly.

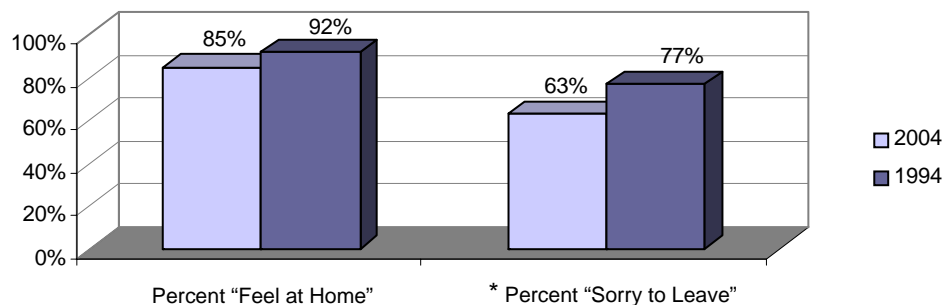
\*\* The margin of error is calculated differently for averages, and will sometimes vary from question to question within the survey depending on how many people answered each question. Thus, changes of the same size may exceed the margin of error for some items in Figure 4, but not for others. Only 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, 60 percent of residents reported that they know the names of half or more of the people in Olin, down significantly from 71 percent in 1994. Similarly, the percentage of residents who said that half or more of their friends live in Olin declined from 59 percent in 1994 to 42 percent in 2004. As for relatives, 23 percent in 2004 and 25 percent in 1994 said that half or more of their adult relatives and in-laws live in Olin.

### COMMUNITY ATTACHMENT

Do Olin residents feel at home in their community? When asked this question, most residents in both years said that they did (see Figure 5). Furthermore, 63 percent of residents in 2004 said that they would be sorry to leave if they had to move away from Olin, a significant decrease from the 77 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 Olin, 49 percent of residents reported in 2004 that the spirit of community participation was “good” or “very good.”

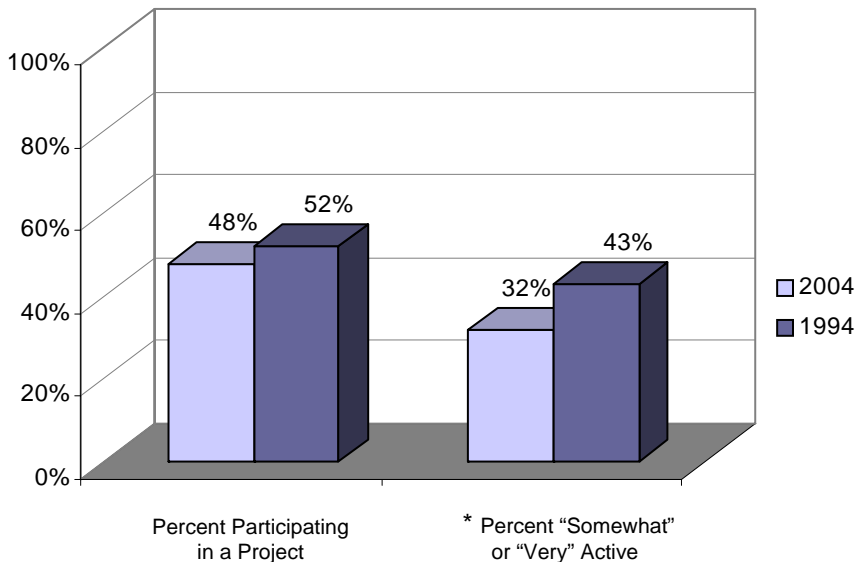


Figure 6: Community Involvement

Approximately half of residents reported participating in a community improvement project in both 1994 and 2004 (see Figure 6). Thirty-two percent in 2004 considered themselves to be “somewhat” or “very” active in community activities and events, down significantly from 43 percent ten years ago. When asked to consider a variety of factors that limit their involvement in the community, the top three factors selected by Olin residents were lack of time (60%), not being asked by others to participate (41%), and lack of skills needed to contribute to community projects (29%).

## 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 Olin over the past decade? Fewer residents are attending church in Olin, although patronage patterns for recreation, shopping, and health care remain the same. Evaluations of the quality of child care services and housing increased significantly, while ratings for the quality of senior programs and public schools declined. Evaluations of the quality of local government services remain high, and the only change is an increase in ratings for water services.

The social environment has changed significantly. Residents view Olin as less safe, less supportive, less tolerant, less open to new ideas, less trusting, and less well-kept than it was ten years ago. Olin residents do not know as many other community members and have fewer friends living in the community. Residents remain attached to their community—that is, most feel at home in the community and would be sorry to leave. However, the percentage of those who would be sorry to leave declined over the past decade. 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 Olin’s future. **We wish to thank the Olin residents who participated in the 1994 and 2004 studies for providing the information that made this report possible.**

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