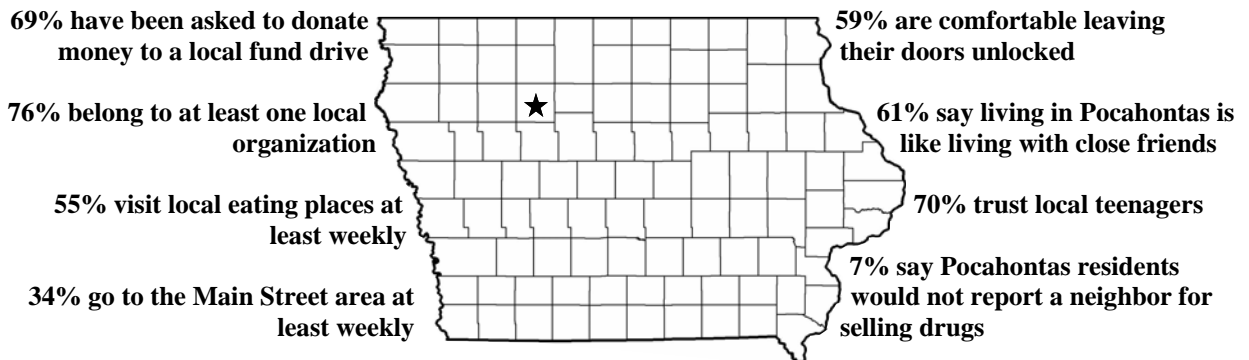


A DECADE OF CHANGE IN POCAHONTAS

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 Pocahontas. 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 Pocahontas residents responded to the survey, and 103 responded in 2004. This report is a summary of the results, including how the opinions of Pocahontas residents have changed over the past decade.

LIFE IN POCAHONTAS IN 2004



LOCAL PATRONAGE PATTERNS

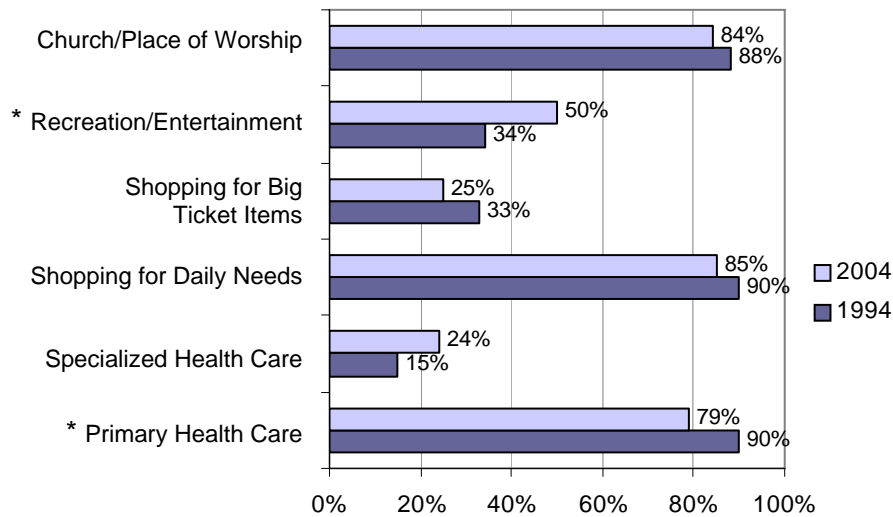


Figure 1: Percent Selecting "Local"

For a variety of reasons, many residents of Iowa's smaller towns rely on neighboring cities for services. Results from this survey reveal that Pocahontas residents stay in town for some services and travel for others. Figure 1 shows the percentage of residents who reported patronizing various services in Pocahontas. Most residents reported staying in Pocahontas to attend church or a place of worship. Half said they stay for recreation

and entertainment—up significantly from about one-third in 1994. A majority indicated that they stay in town to shop for their daily needs, while about one-fourth stayed to shop for "big ticket" items. Similarly, most residents said they remain in Pocahontas to obtain primary health care, while only 24 percent stay for specialized health care. However, the percentage of those using primary health care services in Pocahontas declined since 1994.

A Note on Interpretation: For Pocahontas, 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

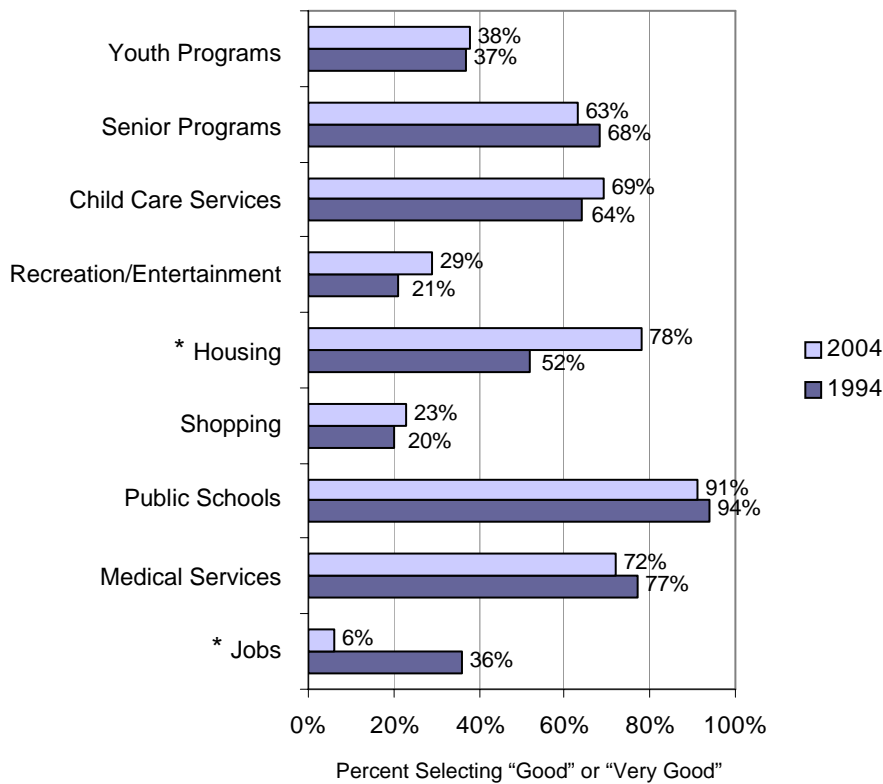


Figure 2: Ratings of Local Services and Facilities

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 senior programs, child care services, housing, public schools and medical services as good or very good in both years, while only about one-fourth gave favorable ratings to shopping and recreation/entertainment. The percentage of positive ratings declined significantly over the past decade for senior programs jobs, from 36 percent in 1994 to 6 percent in 2004. However, favorable ratings increased for housing from 52 percent in 1994 to 78 percent in 2004.

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, Pocahontas residents were satisfied with their government services. Almost all residents rated emergency response, fire protection, and the condition of the parks as good or very good, and over three-fourths gave favorable ratings to garbage collection, the condition of the streets, and police protection. Water services received the lowest ratings. Compared to 1994, the percentage of positive ratings increased for the condition of the streets.

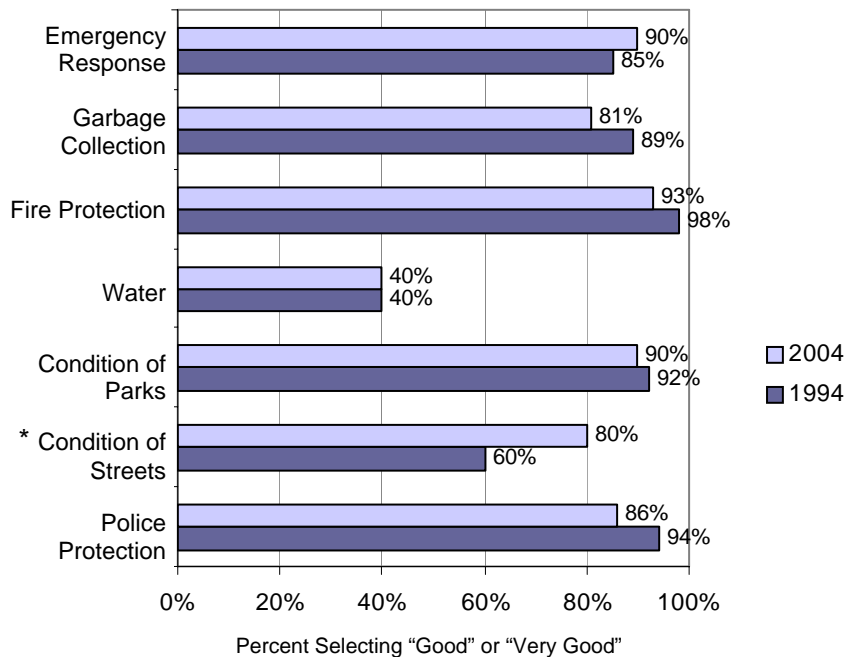


Figure 3: Ratings of Local Government Services

POCAHONTAS' 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.

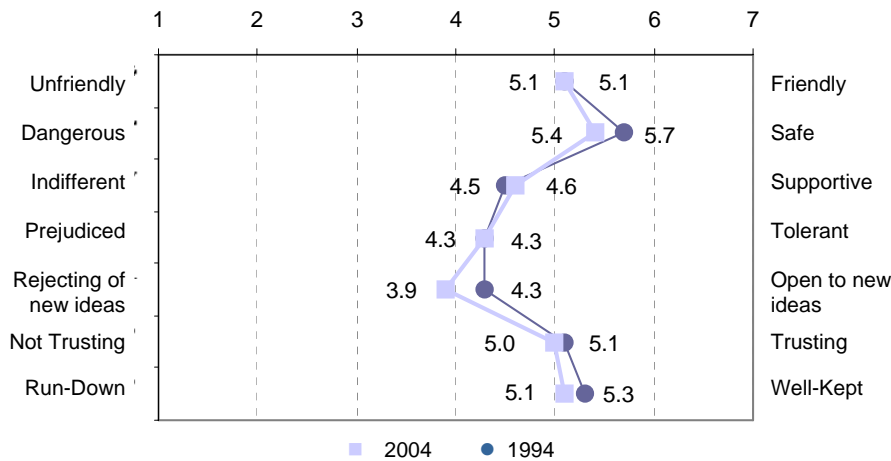


Figure 4: Average Rating of Social Qualities on a 1 to 7 Scale

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 safety of Pocahontas, followed by the friendliness, trusting nature, and appearance of the town. The lowest ratings in both years were given to the extent to which Pocahontas is tolerant and open to new ideas. There were no significant changes in these ratings of social qualities over the past decade.

** 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, 54 percent of residents reported knowing the names of half or more of the people in Pocahontas, compared to 56 percent in 1994. Similarly, 65 percent indicated that half or more of their friends live in town, compared to 58 percent in 1994. As for relatives, 19 percent of residents in 2004 and 28 percent in 1994 said that half or more of their adult relatives and in-laws live in Pocahontas. (Note: These differences are not greater than the margin of error).

COMMUNITY ATTACHMENT

Do Pocahontas residents feel at home in their community? When asked this question in 2004, most said that they did (see Figure 5). Furthermore, 71 percent of residents said that they would be sorry to leave if they had to move away from Pocahontas. These responses are similar to those reported in 1994, indicating that most Pocahontas residents still feel attached to their community.

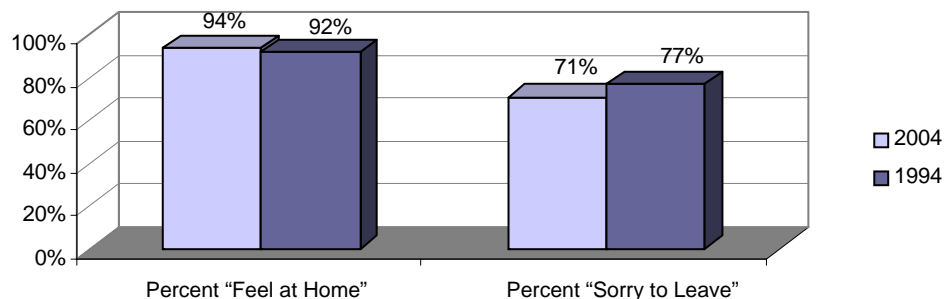


Figure 5: Community Attachment

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Citizens working together to accomplish local goals is an important feature of small towns. For Pocahontas, 70 percent of residents in 2004 reported that the spirit of community participation is “good” or “very good.”

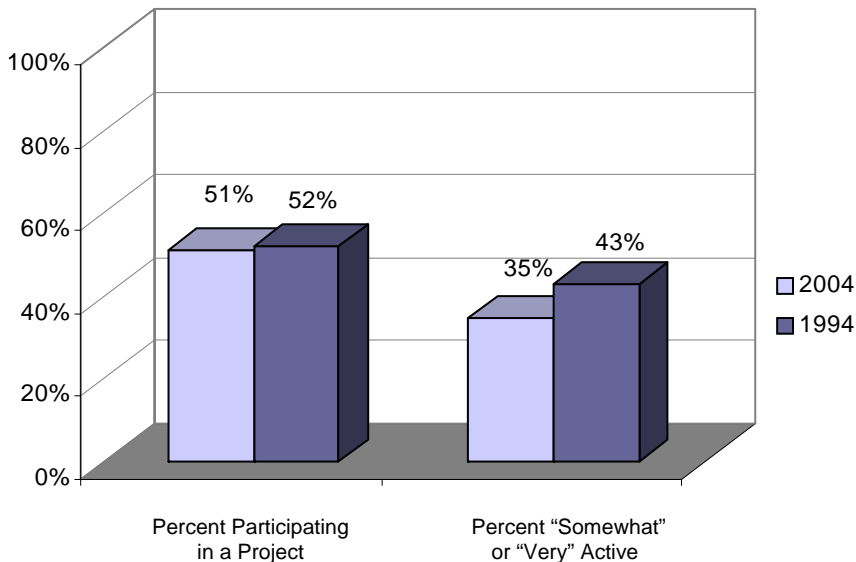


Figure 6: Community Involvement

is “good” or “very good.” Approximately half of residents in both years indicated that they had participated in a community improvement project in the years prior to each survey (see Figure 6). In 2004, 35 percent of residents considered themselves to be “somewhat” or “very” active in community activities and events, compared to 43 percent in 1994. When asked to consider a variety of factors that limit their involvement in the community, the top three factors selected by Pocahontas residents were lack of time (48%), not being asked by others to participate (44%), and lack of interest (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 11 percentage points. Using this standard, what has changed in Pocahontas over the past decade? Residents are staying in Pocahontas for recreation and entertainment, but leaving to obtain primary health care more now than ten years ago. Evaluations of the quality of local housing increased, while ratings decreased for jobs. Evaluations of the quality of local government services remain high. In fact, positive ratings increased for the condition of the streets.

The social environment has changed very little. There were no changes in residents perceptions of the friendliness, safety, supportiveness, tolerance, openness to new ideas, trusting nature, or appearance of Pocahontas. Nor were there changes to the extent to which people in Pocahontas know each other. Pocahontas residents remain attached to their community—that is, most feel at home and would be sorry to leave if they had to move away. Finally, levels of community involvement did not change significantly over the past decade. It is interesting to note that one of the top reasons given for not being involved in community projects was not being asked to volunteer.

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

RDI	Prepared by: Kerry Agnitsch, Terry Besser, Laura Forster, Jean Friestad, Tom Rice, Vern Ryan, and Nick Recker, Department of Sociology, Iowa State University. For further information, contact Kerry Agnitsch, 515-294-4095, kagnitsc@iastate.edu or Terry Besser, 515-294-6508, tbesser@iastate.edu.
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