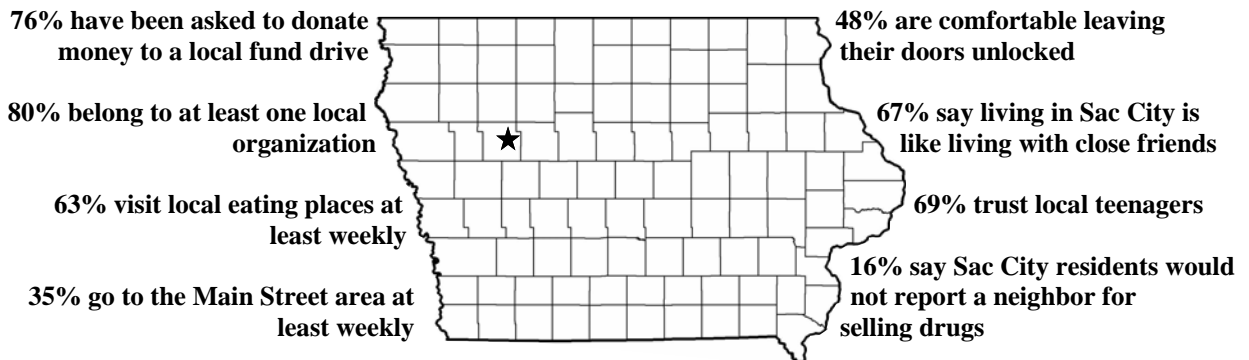


A DECADE OF CHANGE IN SAC CITY

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 Sac City. 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, 110 Sac City residents responded to the survey, and 104 responded in 2004. This report is a summary of the results, including how the opinions of Sac City residents have changed over the past decade.

LIFE IN SAC CITY IN 2004



LOCAL PATRONAGE PATTERNS

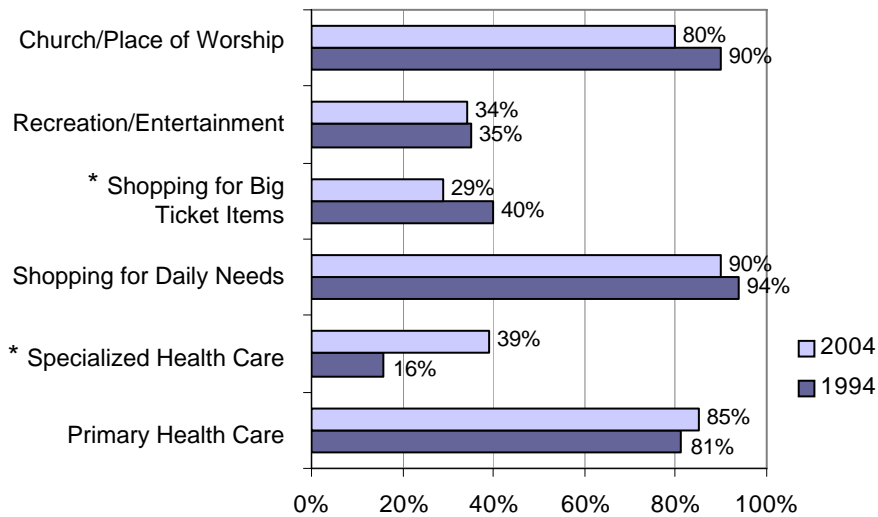


Figure 1: Percent Selecting "Local"

For a variety of reasons, many residents of Iowa's smaller towns rely on neighboring cities for services. Results from this survey suggest that Sac City residents stay in town for some services, but travel for others. Figure 1 shows the percentage of residents who reported patronizing various services in Sac City. Nearly all residents reported shopping for their daily needs in Sac City, but only about one-third stayed to shop for

"big ticket" items, a significant decrease from 1994. A large majority of residents indicated that they remain in Sac City for primary health care, but only 39 percent reported staying for specialized health care. Still, the percentage of residents receiving specialized health care locally increased over the past decade. Finally, most residents remained in Sac City for their church or place of worship.

A Note on Interpretation: For Sac City, 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

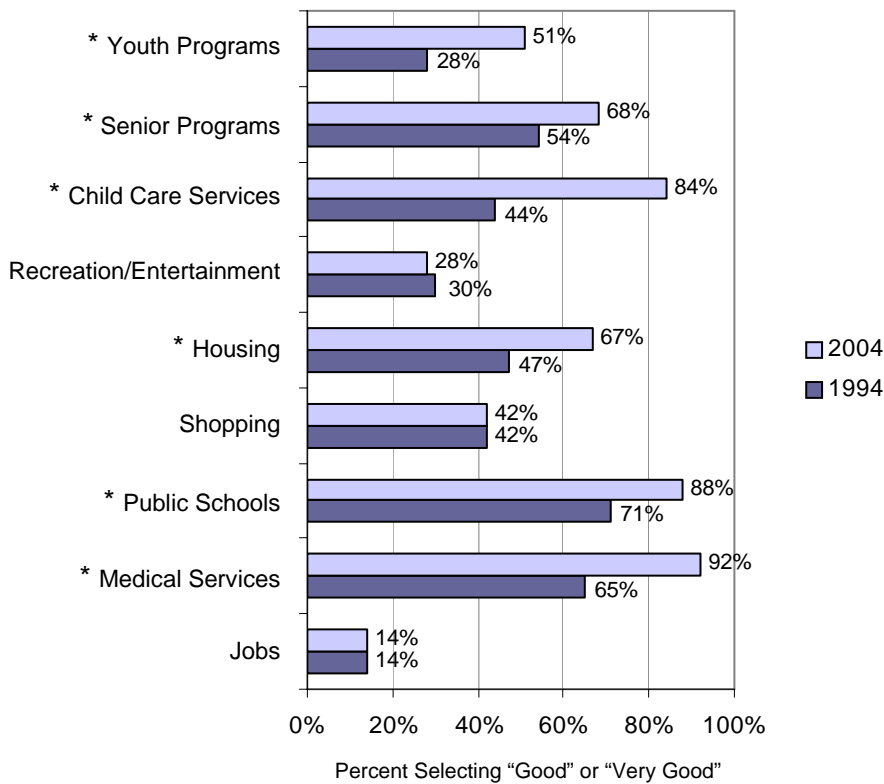


Figure 2: Ratings of Local Services and Facilities

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 both periods, public schools and medical services received the most favorable ratings, while jobs and recreation/entertainment received the fewest. The percentage of positive evaluations for youth programs, senior programs, child care services, housing, public schools, and medical services increased significantly over the past decade. Positive ratings for medical services and housing increased by 20 percent or more from 1994 to 2004. The percentages giving positive assessments to other services remained essentially unchanged.

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, Sac City residents were satisfied with their government services. Almost all residents in both survey years reported being pleased with emergency response, fire protection, and water. Garbage collection and condition of parks in Sac City also received positive ratings from over three-fourths of residents. The percentage of favorable ratings declined significantly for the condition of streets and police protection services compared to ratings given in 1994.

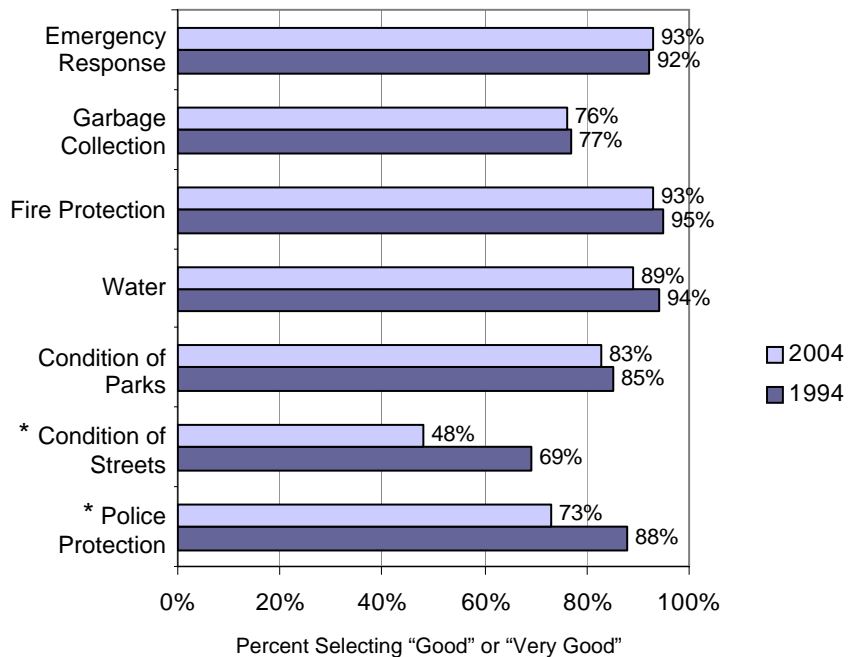


Figure 3: Ratings of Local Government Services

SAC CITY'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.

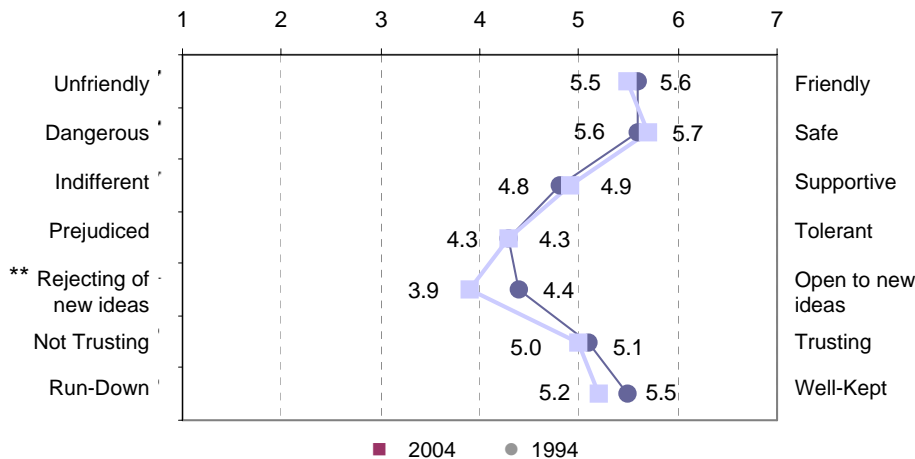


Figure 4: Average Rating of Social Qualities on a 1 to 7 Scale

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 1994 and again in 2004, residents assigned the highest ratings to the friendliness and safety of Sac City. The lowest ratings in both survey years were assigned to the extent to which Sac City is tolerant and open to new ideas. Also, ratings decreased significantly since 1994 for feelings about whether Sac City is open to new ideas. The ratings for all other qualities stayed about the same across 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, 62 percent of residents reported knowing the names of half or more of the people in Sac City, a significant increase compared to 50 percent in 1994. Similarly, 77 percent indicated that half or more of their friends live in Sac City, compared to 71 percent in 1994. Thirty percent of residents in 2004 and 38 percent in 1994 said that half or more of their adult relatives and in-laws live in Sac City.

COMMUNITY ATTACHMENT

Do Sac City residents feel at home in their community? When asked this question, almost all residents in both years reported that they do feel at home (see Figure 5). Furthermore, a large majority indicated that they would be sorry to leave if they had to move away from Sac City. These responses indicate that most Sac City residents feel attached to their community.

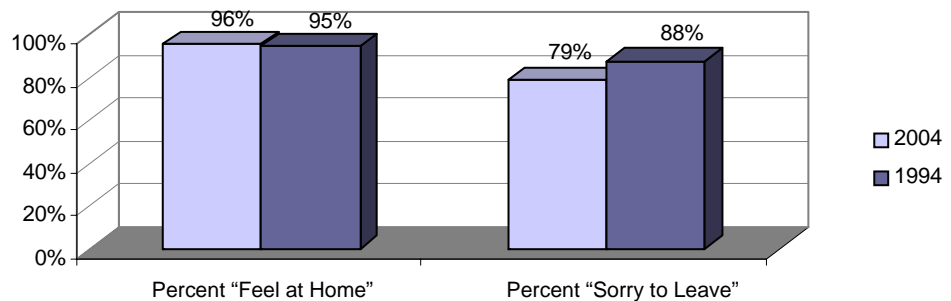


Figure 5: Community Attachment

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Citizens working together to accomplish local goals is an important feature of small towns. For Sac City, 79 percent of residents reported in 2004 that the spirit of community participation in Sac City is “good” or “very good.” In both

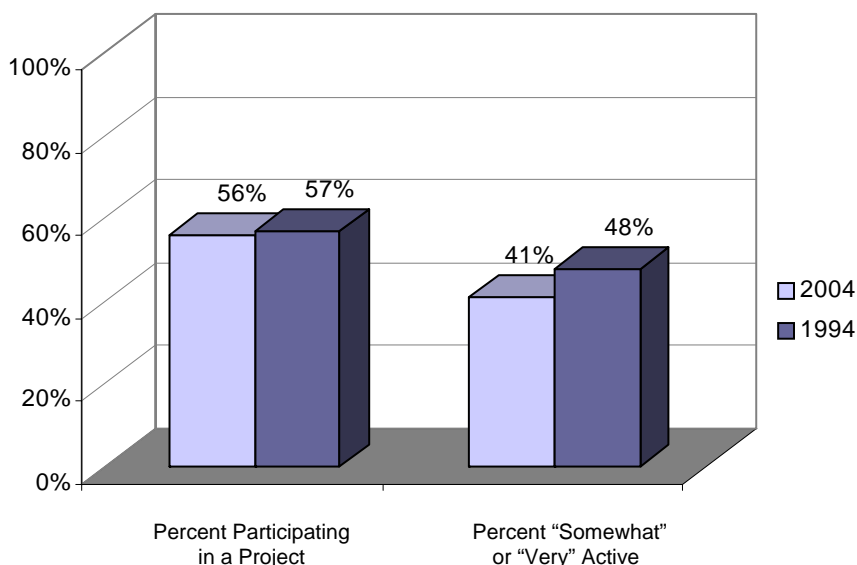


Figure 6: Community Involvement

1994 and 2004, over half of residents reported participating in a community improvement project in the years prior to the surveys (see Figure 6). In 2004, 41 percent described themselves as “somewhat” or “very” active in community activities and events, compared to 48 percent describing themselves as active in the community in 1994. When asked to consider a variety of factors that served to limit their involvement in the community, the top three factors mentioned by Sac City residents were lack of time (61%), not being asked by others to volunteer (36%), and not knowing how to get involved in community activities (20%).

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 Sac City over the past decade? Residents are shopping less for big ticket items in Sac City, but more are utilizing local specialized health care. The evaluations of the quality of youth and senior programs, child care services, housing, public schools, and medical services have all increased significantly since 1994. The evaluations of the quality of local government services remain high, although there were declines in ratings of the condition of streets and police protection.

The social environment has changed very little. Sac City residents continue to view their town as friendly and safe. There were no significant changes in most of the social qualities of Sac City, but residents did consider the town to be less open to new ideas in 2004 compared to 1994. Sac City residents remain attached to their community—that is, a majority feel at home in the community and would be sorry to leave. Participation rates have not changed since 1994. It is interesting to note that two of the top factors given for not participating in community projects are not being asked to volunteer and not knowing how to become involved.

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

RDI

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