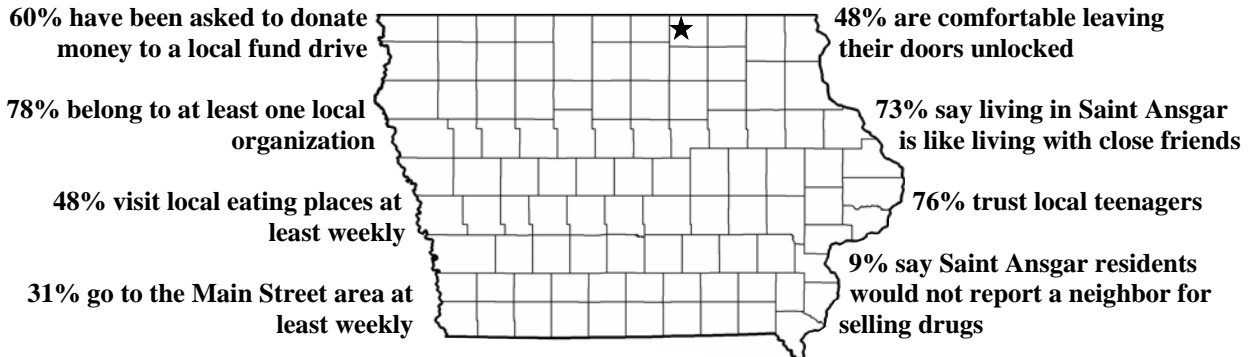


A DECADE OF CHANGE IN SAINT ANSGAR

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 Saint Ansgar. 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 Saint Ansgar residents responded to the survey, and 113 responded in 2004. This report is a summary of the results, including how the opinions of Saint Ansgar residents have changed over the past decade.

LIFE IN SAINT ANSGAR IN 2004



LOCAL PATRONAGE PATTERNS

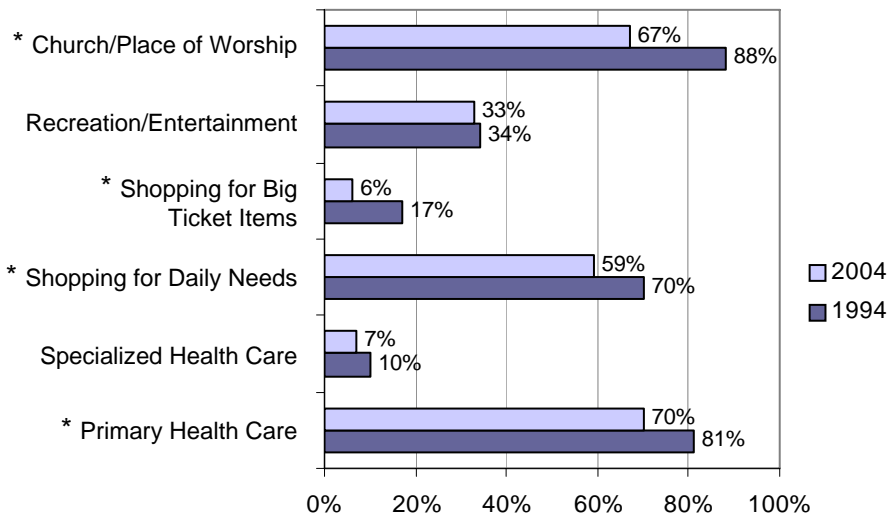


Figure 1: Percent Selecting "Local"

For a variety of reasons, many residents of Iowa's smaller towns rely on neighboring cities for services. Results from this survey shown in Figure 1 suggest that Saint Ansgar residents stay in town for some services, but travel for others. Six percent of residents said they shopped for big ticket items in town in 2004, down significantly from 17 percent in 1994. The percentage of residents shopping for daily needs in town also decreased significantly from 70 percent to 59 percent in 2004. Similarly, less than one in ten reported staying local for specialized health care, compared to 70 percent who reported staying local for their primary health care needs, which decreased from 81 percent in 1994. About one-third of residents in both periods stayed in Saint Ansgar for recreation. Finally, significantly fewer residents are staying local for their church/place of worship in 2004.

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A Note on Interpretation: For Saint Ansgar, 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

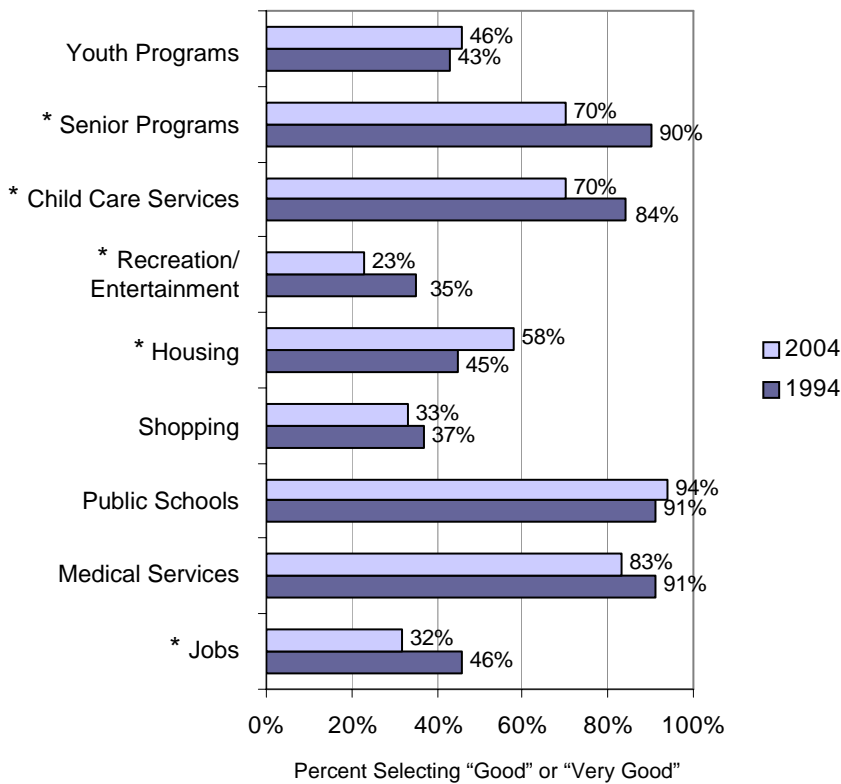


Figure 2: Ratings of Local Services and Facilities

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. Ratings for youth programs and shopping in Saint Ansgar did not change significantly since 1994. Nearly all of Saint Ansgar’s residents were satisfied with public schools and medical services. While 90 percent of residents gave positive ratings to senior programs in 1994, 70 percent did the same in 2004, illustrating a significant decrease. Favorable ratings from residents for jobs, recreation and entertainment, and child care services also decreased in 2004 compared to 1994. However, the percentage of positive ratings for housing increased significantly.

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, Saint Ansgar residents were satisfied with their local government services. Almost all residents gave favorable ratings to emergency response and fire protection services, and a great majority also rated the condition of parks positively in both years. Over half rated garbage collection, the condition of streets, and police protection services in Saint Ansgar favorably. Water received positive ratings from 74 percent of residents in 2004, a significant decrease from 87 percent in 1994.

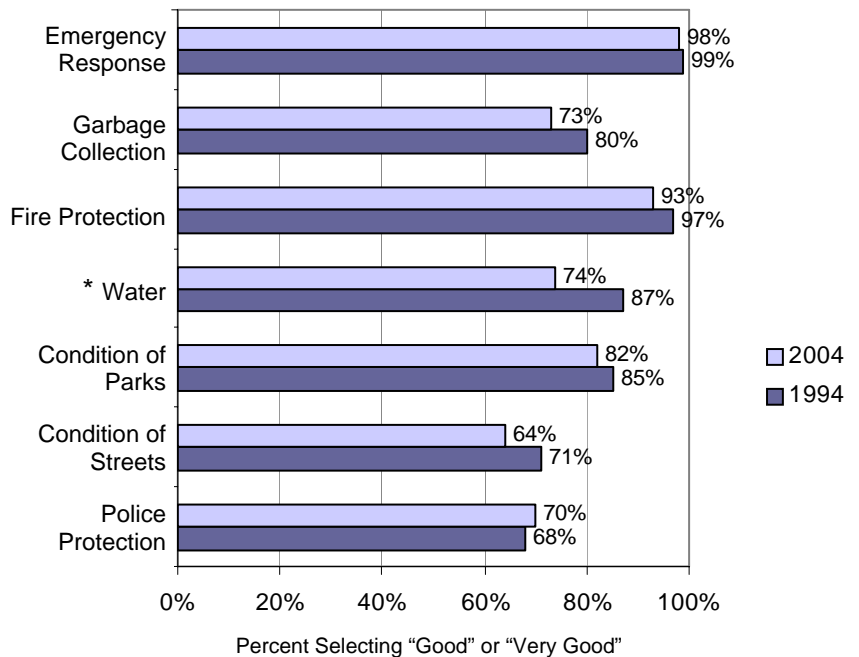


Figure 3: Ratings of Local Government Services

SAINT ANSGAR'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.

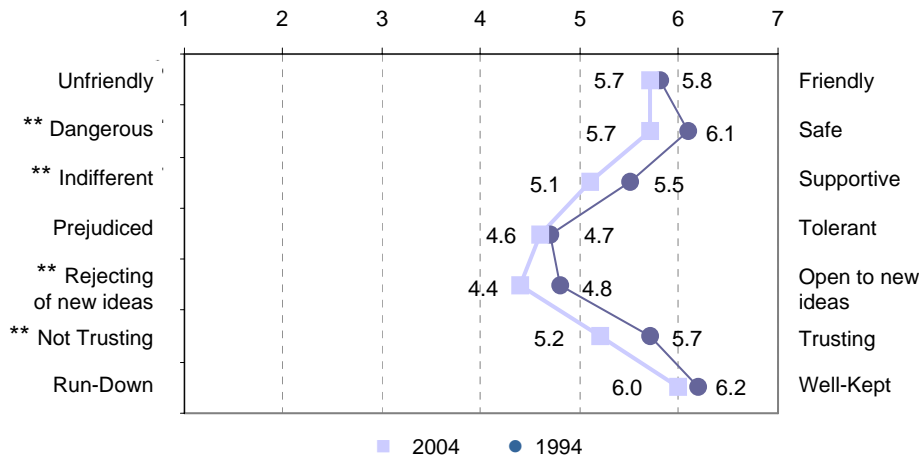


Figure 4: Average Rating of Social Qualities on a 1 to 7 Scale

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, residents assigned the highest ratings to the appearance and safety of Saint Ansgar, and in 2004, appearance, safety, and friendliness received the highest ratings. The lowest ratings in 1994 were given to the tolerance in Saint Ansgar, and in 2004 to the extent to which the town is open to new ideas. Significant changes over the decade are that residents view Saint Ansgar as less safe, less supportive, less open to new ideas, and less trusting.

** 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, 64 percent of residents reported knowing the names of half or more of the people in Saint Ansgar, compared to 66 percent in 1994. Similarly, 64 percent indicated that half or more of their friends live in Saint Ansgar in both years. Eighteen percent of residents in 2004, a significant decrease from 35 percent in 1994, said that half or more of their adult relatives and in-laws live in Saint Ansgar.

COMMUNITY ATTACHMENT

Do Saint Ansgar residents feel at home in their community? When asked this question in 2004, 93 percent said that they do feel at home (see Figure 5). Furthermore, 80 percent said they would be sorry to leave if they had to move away from Saint Ansgar. These responses are similar to those reported in 1994, and indicate that most residents feel attached to their community.

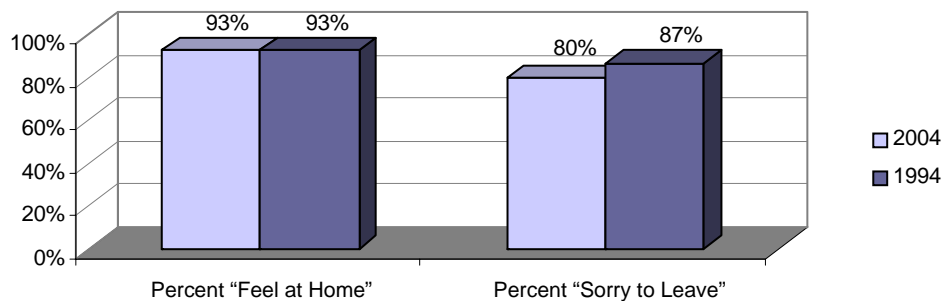


Figure 5: Community Attachment

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Citizens working together to accomplish local goals is an important feature of small towns. For Saint Ansgar, 86 percent of the residents indicated in 2004 that the spirit of participation is “good” or “very good.” In both 1994 and 2004, about six of ten residents reported participating in a community improvement project in Saint Ansgar in the years prior to the surveys (see Figure 6). Also, 45 percent in 2004 said that they would describe themselves as “somewhat” or “very” active, compared to 55 percent of residents describing themselves in this way in 1994.

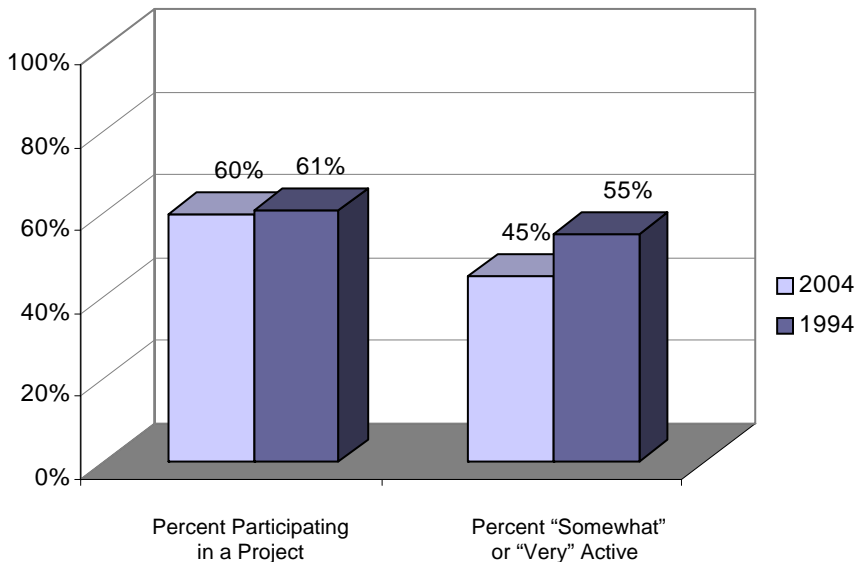


Figure 6: Community Involvement

When asked to consider a variety of factors that limit their involvement in local community activities and events, the top three factors mentioned by residents of Saint Ansgar were lack of time (66%), not being asked by others to volunteer (34%), and not having any interest in being 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 11 percentage points. Using this standard, what has changed in Saint Ansgar over the past decade? Findings revealed decreases in local patronage for churches/places of worship, shopping for daily needs, and primary health care. The evaluations of the quality of senior programs, child care services, recreation and entertainment, and jobs in Saint Ansgar have also declined over the past decade. However, evaluations of housing have increased significantly. While a majority of residents continue to approve of most local government services, positive ratings given by residents for water decreased since 1994.

The social environment has changed somewhat. Residents still describe Saint Ansgar as friendly and well-kept, but view it as less safe, less supportive, less open to new ideas, and less trusting than in 1994. Still, residents remain strongly attached to Saint Ansgar and most indicated that community involvement is good or very good. Levels of community participation were unchanged over the decade. It is interesting to note that one of the top reasons people gave for not being involved in community improvement projects was that no one had asked them to volunteer.

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

RDI

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