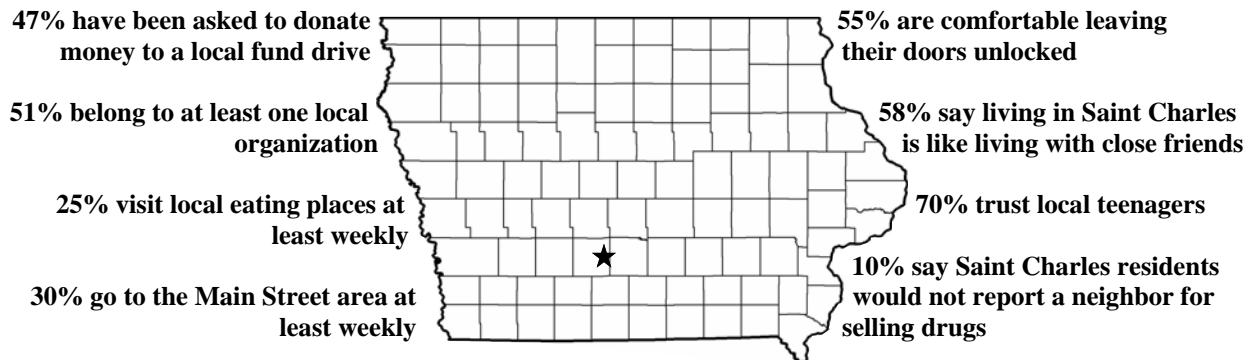


A DECADE OF CHANGE IN SAINT CHARLES

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 Charles. 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, 111 Saint Charles residents responded to the survey, and 96 responded in 2004. This report is a summary of the results, including how the opinions of Saint Charles residents have changed over the past decade.

LIFE IN SAINT CHARLES IN 2004



LOCAL PATRONAGE PATTERNS

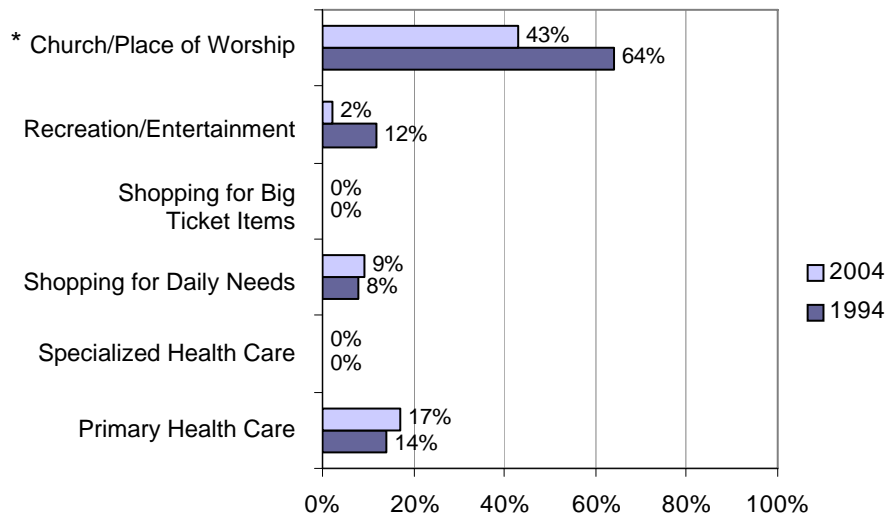


Figure 1: Percent Selecting "Local"

For a variety of reasons, many residents of Iowa's smaller towns rely on neighboring cities for services. Results from this survey suggest that Saint Charles residents followed this pattern in 1994 and 2004. Figure 1 shows the percent of residents who reported patronizing services of various types in Saint Charles. Almost everyone went out of town for all services except attending church or place of worship.

In 2004, 43 percent of residents reported attending church or place of worship related services in Saint Charles, a significant decrease from 64 percent in 1994. Fewer than one-fifth of residents indicated that they remain in town for their primary health care needs and less than one-tenth reported shopping for their daily needs in Saint Charles in both 1994 and 2004.

A Note on Interpretation: For Saint Charles, 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

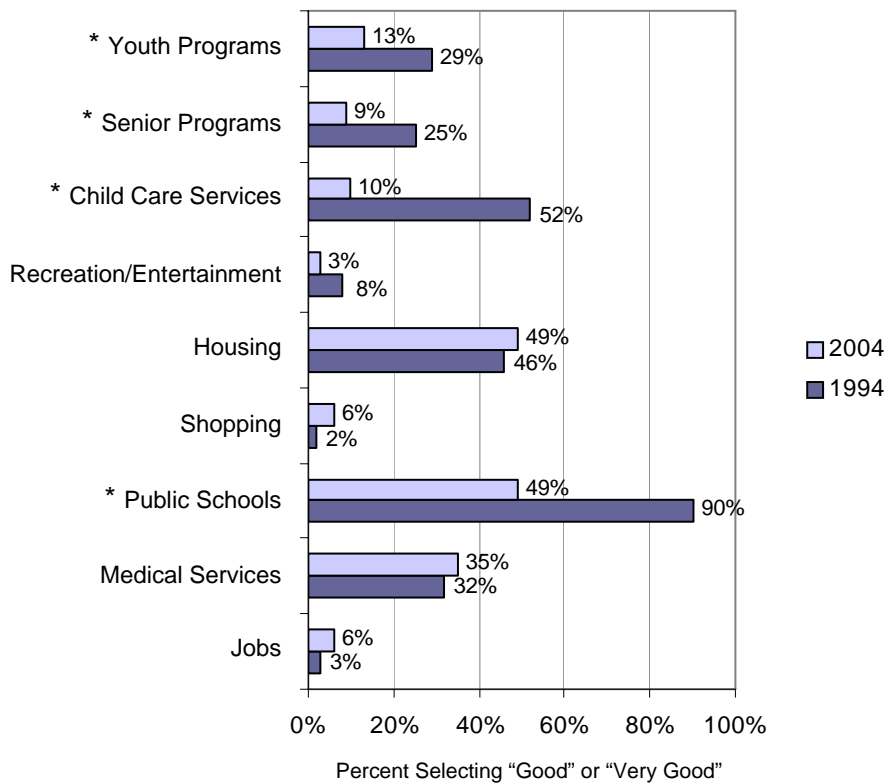


Figure 2: Ratings of Local Services and Facilities

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. While nine of ten residents approved of public schools in Saint Charles in 1994, 49 percent gave them positive ratings in 2004, a significant decrease. Housing was evaluated positively by about half of residents in both times. Jobs, shopping, and recreation/entertainment received the lowest approval ratings in 1994 and 2004. The percentage of positive ratings decreased significantly for youth programs, senior programs, and child care services in 2004 compared to 1994. Ratings for other services were 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, Saint Charles residents reported being satisfied with many of their government services. Over 60 percent of residents rated emergency response, garbage collection, fire protection and water favorably in 2004. The percentage rating water services positively increased to 71 percent in 2004 from 45 percent in 1994. However, the percentage approving of the condition of parks declined 15 percentage points to 42 percent in 2004. Police protection received the fewest positive ratings in both years.

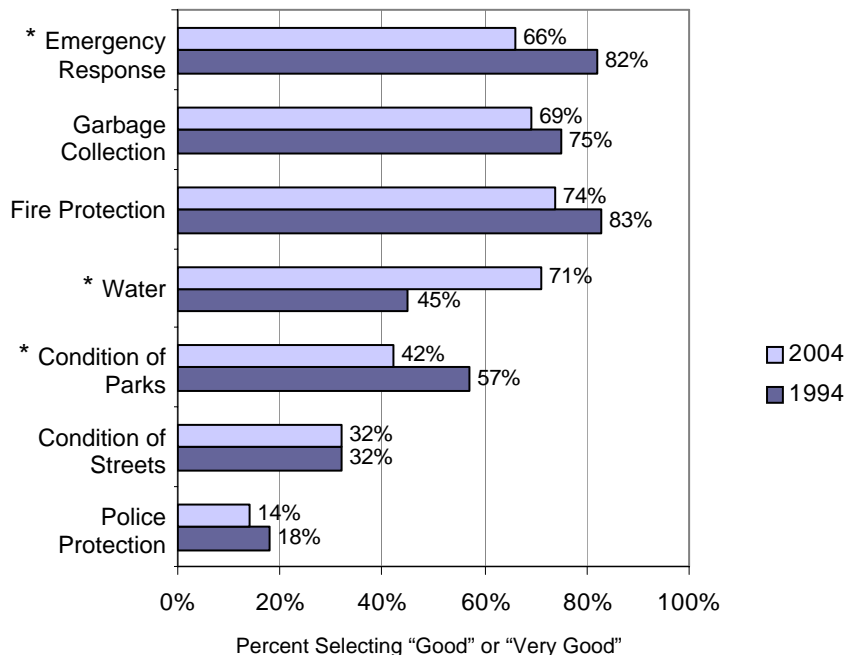


Figure 3: Ratings of Local Government Services

SAINT CHARLES' 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.

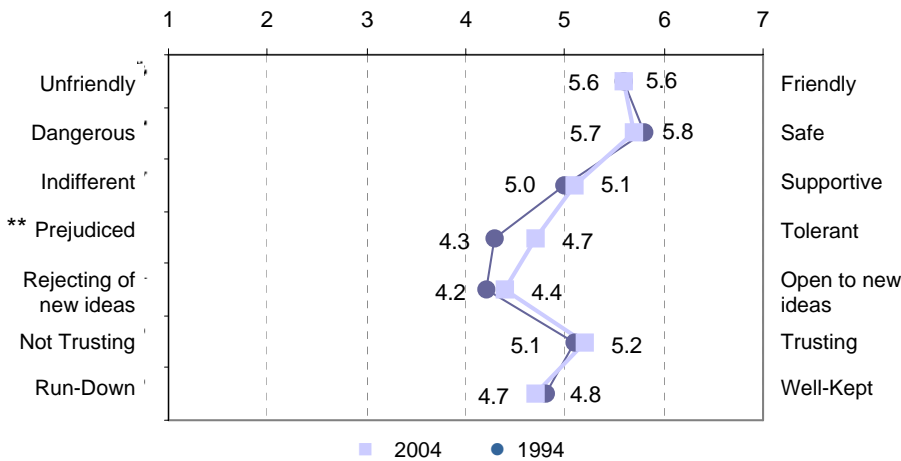


Figure 4: Average Rating of Social Qualities on a 1 to 7 Scale

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 rating to the safety of Saint Charles followed closely by the friendliness of the town. The lowest ratings for both years were assigned to the tolerance in the town and the extent to which Saint Charles is open to new ideas. However, the findings indicate an increase in residents' assessment of the tolerance of Saint Charles compared to 1994 ratings. No other significant changes in these qualities were noted 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, 50 percent of residents reported knowing the names of half or more of the people in Saint Charles, a significant decrease compared to 65 percent in 1994. Similarly, 37 percent indicated that half or more of their friends live in Saint Charles, compared to 52 percent in 1994, illustrating another significant decrease. Twenty-three percent of residents in 2004 and 19 percent in 1994 reported that half or more of their adult relatives and in-laws live in Saint Charles.

COMMUNITY ATTACHMENT

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

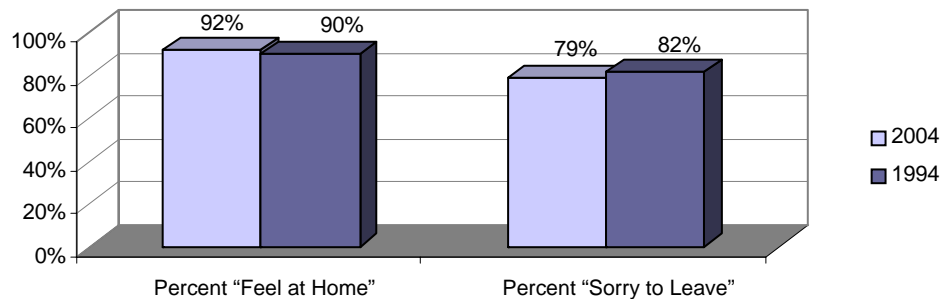


Figure 5: Community Attachment

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Citizens working together to accomplish local goals is an important feature of small towns. For Saint Charles, 68 percent indicated in 2004 that the spirit of community participation is “good” or “very good.” For both years, over half of Saint Charles residents reported participating in a local community improvement project during the past year. About one-third of residents considered themselves to be “somewhat” or “very” active in community activities and events, down significantly from 48 percent who considered themselves to be 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 residents were lack of time (56%), not being asked by others to volunteer (37%), and that there are no projects in the community that need volunteers (27%).

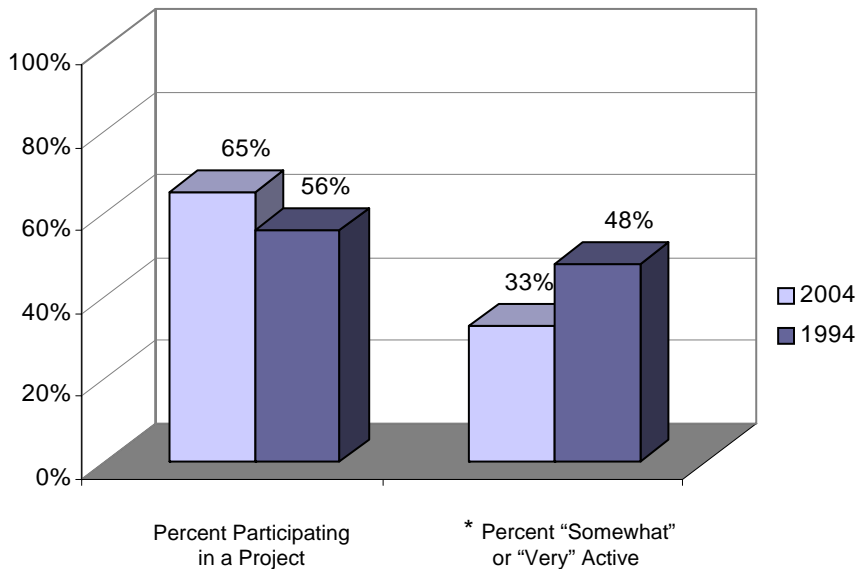


Figure 6: Community Involvement

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 Saint Charles over the past decade? Saint Charles residents are less likely to attend a local church/place of worship, but other patronage patterns are unchanged. The evaluations of the quality of local youth and senior programs, child care services, and public schools decreased significantly. The evaluations of the quality of local government services remain high. There was an increase in the positive ratings for water, while the positive ratings for emergency response services and the condition of parks in Saint Charles decreased.

The social environment has changed very little. There are no significant changes in reports of the friendliness, safety, supportiveness, openness to new ideas, trusting nature, or appearance of Saint Charles over the past decade, but residents view their town as more tolerant than it was ten years ago. Saint Charles 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, but the percentage of residents describing themselves as active in the community has decreased significantly.

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

RDI

Prepared by: Laura Forster, Kerry Agnitsch, Terry Besser, 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.

RDI-210 — This report was prepared through the **Rural Development Initiative** Project, Iowa State University and funded by the National Research Initiative, U.S. Department of Agriculture, under Agreement No. 2003-35401-13828.