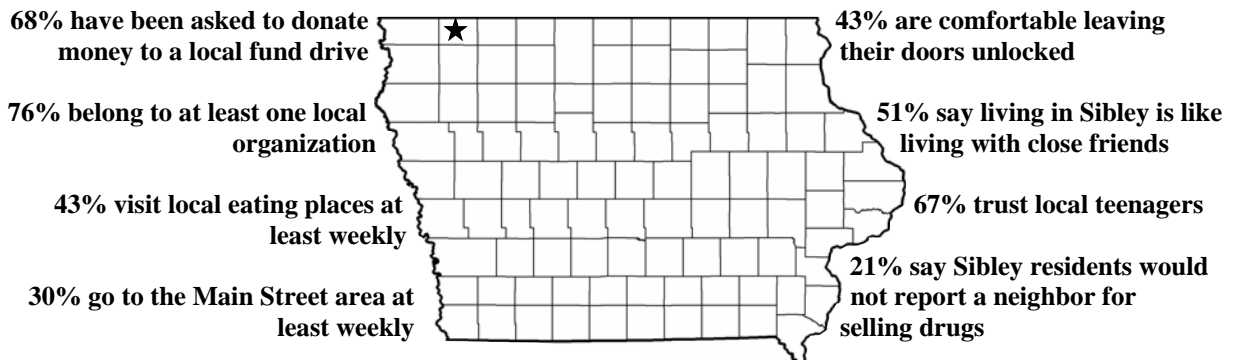


A DECADE OF CHANGE IN SIBLEY

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 Sibley. 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, 109 Sibley residents responded to the survey, and 97 responded in 2004. This report is a summary of the results, including how the opinions of Sibley residents have changed over the past decade.

LIFE IN SIBLEY IN 2004



LOCAL PATRONAGE PATTERNS

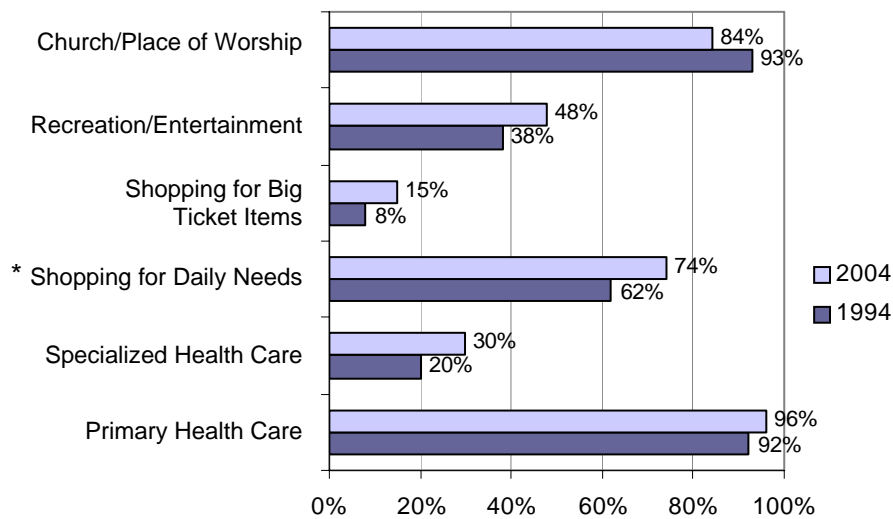


Figure 1: Percent Selecting "Local"

For a variety of reasons, many residents of Iowa's smaller towns rely on neighboring cities for services. Results from this survey suggest that Sibley residents stay in town for some services, but travel for others. Figure 1 shows the percentage of residents who reported patronizing various services in Sibley. Nearly all residents reported receiving primary health care in Sibley, but in 2004 only about one in three residents

stayed to receive specialized health care. Similarly, while only 15 percent in 2004 reported shopping locally for big ticket items, 74 percent, a significant increase since 1994, indicated that they remain in Sibley to shop for their daily needs. Finally, a majority of residents reported staying in Sibley to attend church or place of worship, while 48 percent in 2004 remained for recreation and entertainment.

A Note on Interpretation: For Sibley, 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

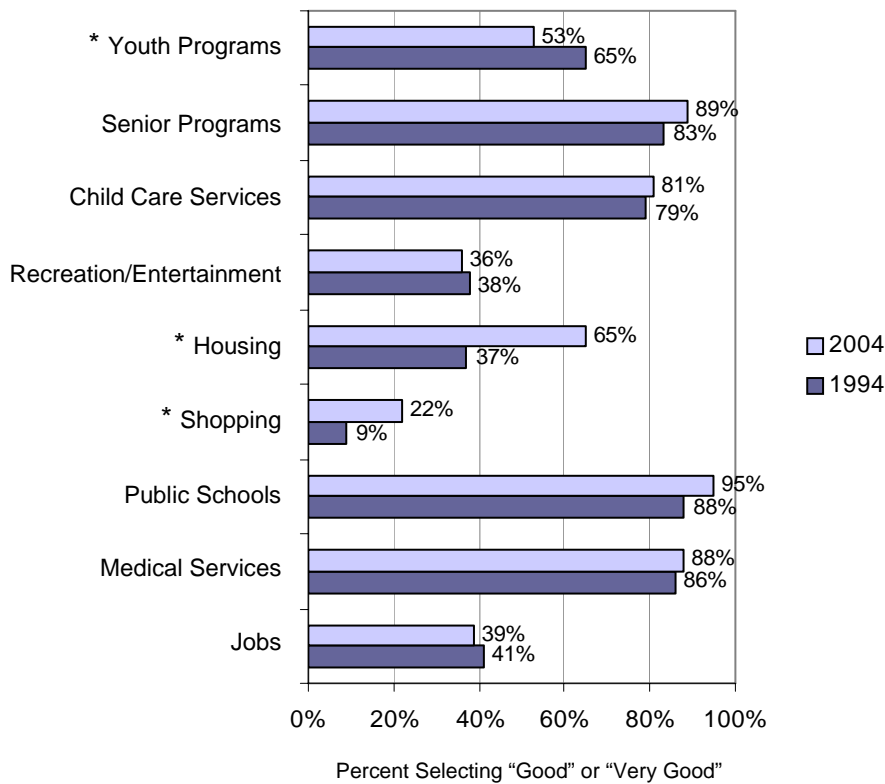


Figure 2: Ratings of Local Services and Facilities

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. A majority of residents rated medical services, public schools, child care services, and senior programs favorably in both years. Jobs and recreation and entertainment received positive ratings from over one-third of residents. The percentage of favorable ratings for youth programs in Sibley decreased over the past decade. Still, the percentage of positive ratings for housing increased greatly from 37 percent in 1994 to 65 percent in 2004. Shopping was also rated significantly more favorably in 2004 compared to 1994.

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. Generally, Sibley residents were satisfied with their government services. About nine out of ten residents in 2004 rated emergency response, fire protection, and the condition of parks favorably. Garbage collection and police protection services were also given positive ratings by a majority of residents, along with the condition of streets in Sibley. The percentage of residents assigning positive ratings to water increased significantly from just 11 percent in 1994 to 83 percent in 2004.

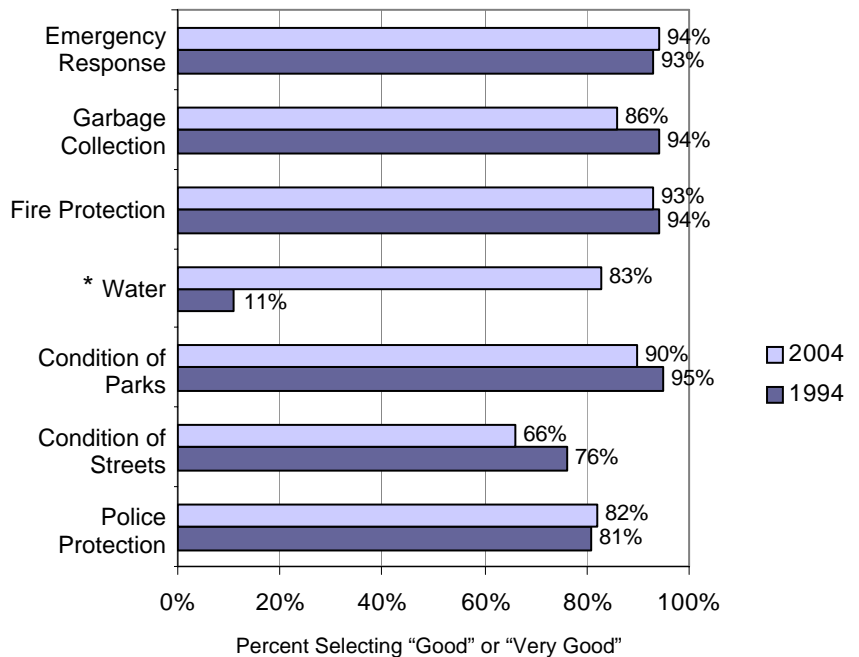


Figure 3: Ratings of Local Government Services

SIBLEY'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.

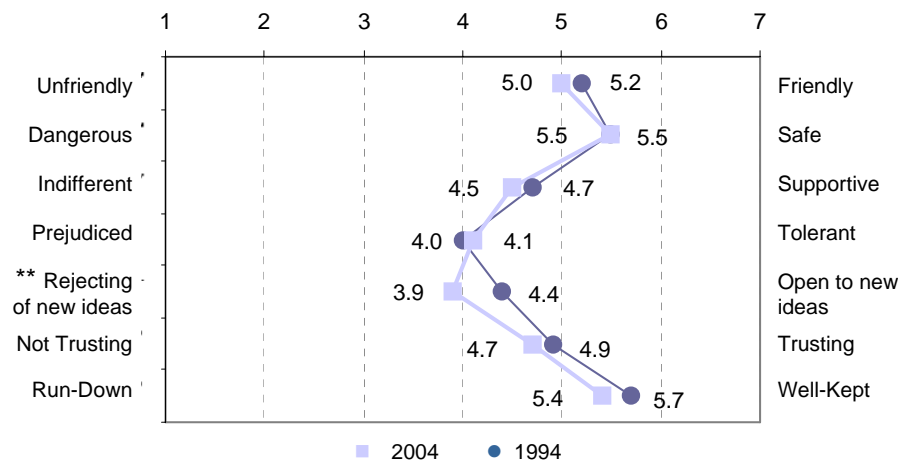


Figure 4: Average Rating of Social Qualities on a 1 to 7 Scale

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 rating to the appearance of Sibley. In 2004, safety received the highest rating, followed closely by the appearance of the town. The lowest ratings were assigned to the tolerance in Sibley in 1994, and in 2004 to the extent that the town is open to new ideas. One significant change over the decade was that residents view Sibley as less open to new ideas when compared to 1994 ratings.

** 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, 42 percent of residents reported knowing the names of half or more of the people in Sibley, compared to 40 percent in 1994. Similarly, 59 percent indicated that half or more of their friends live in Sibley, compared to 56 percent in 1994. Twenty-two percent of residents in 2004 and 20 percent in 1994 said that half or more of their adult relatives and in-laws live in Sibley. (Note: These differences are not greater than the margin of error.)

COMMUNITY ATTACHMENT

Do Sibley residents feel at home in their community? When asked this question, a vast majority in both 1994 and 2004 said that they do feel at home in Sibley (see Figure 5). Furthermore, 72 percent indicated that they would be sorry to leave if they had to move away from Sibley, a significant decrease from the 84 percent who expressed this sentiment in 1994.

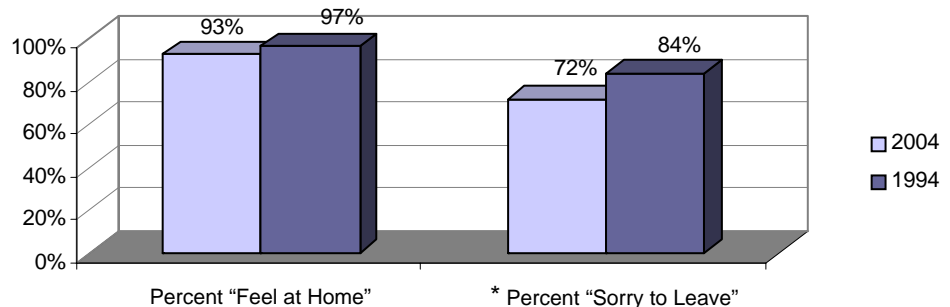


Figure 5: Community Attachment

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Citizens working together to accomplish local goals is an important feature of small towns. For Sibley, 64 percent of the residents indicated in 2004 that the spirit of participation is “good” or “very good.” Additionally, 44 percent of Sibley residents said they had participated in a community improvement project in the year prior to the survey, and 29 percent considered themselves to be “somewhat” or “very” active in community activities and events (see Figure 6). This compares to 51 percent participating in a project in 1994, and 39 percent describing themselves as active in the community. When asked to consider a variety of factors that limit their involvement in the community, the top factors mentioned were lack of time (61%), not being asked by others to volunteer (47%), and not knowing how to become involved in community activities (37%).

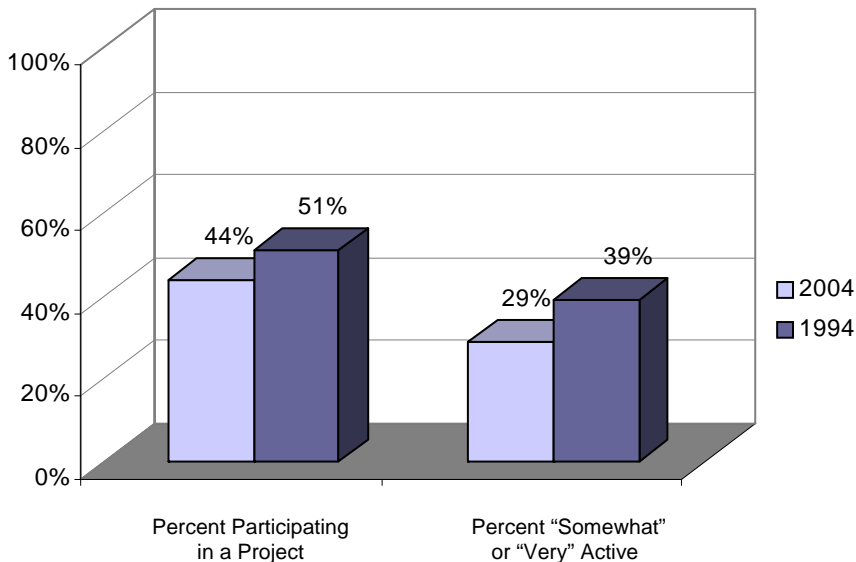


Figure 6: Community Involvement

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 Sibley over the past decade? Findings revealed an increase in shopping for daily needs in town. The evaluations of the quality of youth programs decreased, while the evaluations of housing and shopping in Sibley increased. Ratings for local government services remained high, with water being rated significantly more favorably in 2004 when compared to 1994 ratings.

The social environment has changed very little. Residents still describe Sibley as a well-kept and safe community, but view it as less open to new ideas than in 1994. Sibley residents remain attached to their community—that is most feel at home in the community and would be sorry to leave if they had to move away. However, the percentage of those who would be sorry to leave has decreased since 1994. Finally, levels of community participation were unchanged over the decade. It is interesting to note that two of the top three reasons people gave for not being involved in community projects were that no one had asked them to volunteer and that they didn’t know how to become involved. These responses suggest possible strategies for increasing community involvement.

The past decade has been challenging for Iowa’s small towns. We hope this information will prove useful in planning for Sibley’s future. **We wish to thank the Sibley 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-212 — 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.