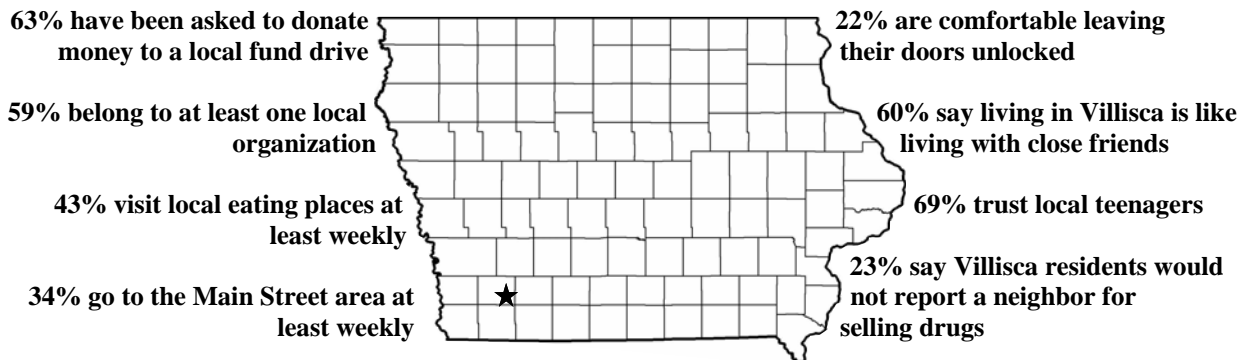


A DECADE OF CHANGE IN VILLISCA

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

LIFE IN VILLISCA IN 2004



LOCAL PATRONAGE PATTERNS

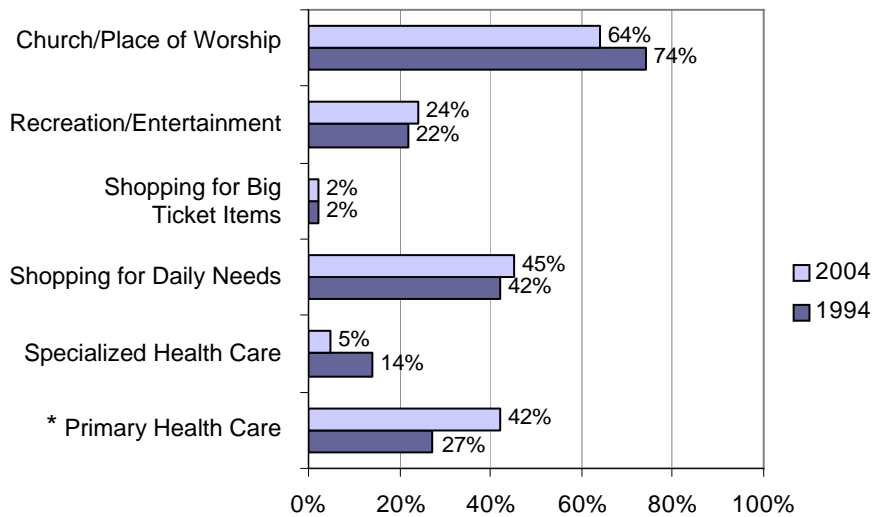


Figure 1: Percent Selecting "Local"

For a variety of reasons, many residents of Iowa's smaller towns rely on neighboring cities for services. Results from this survey suggest that residents of Villisca stay in town for some services, but travel for others. Figure 1 shows the percentage of residents who reported patronizing various services in Villisca. Just under half of residents reported shopping locally for their daily needs, but only 2 percent in both years stayed

in town to shop for big ticket items. About one-quarter of residents remained in Villisca for recreation and entertainment, while 64 percent in 2004 attended a local church or place of worship. Finally, while just 5 percent in 2004 received specialized health care in town, 42 percent received primary health care in Villisca, up significantly from 27 percent in 1994.

A Note on Interpretation: For Villisca, 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

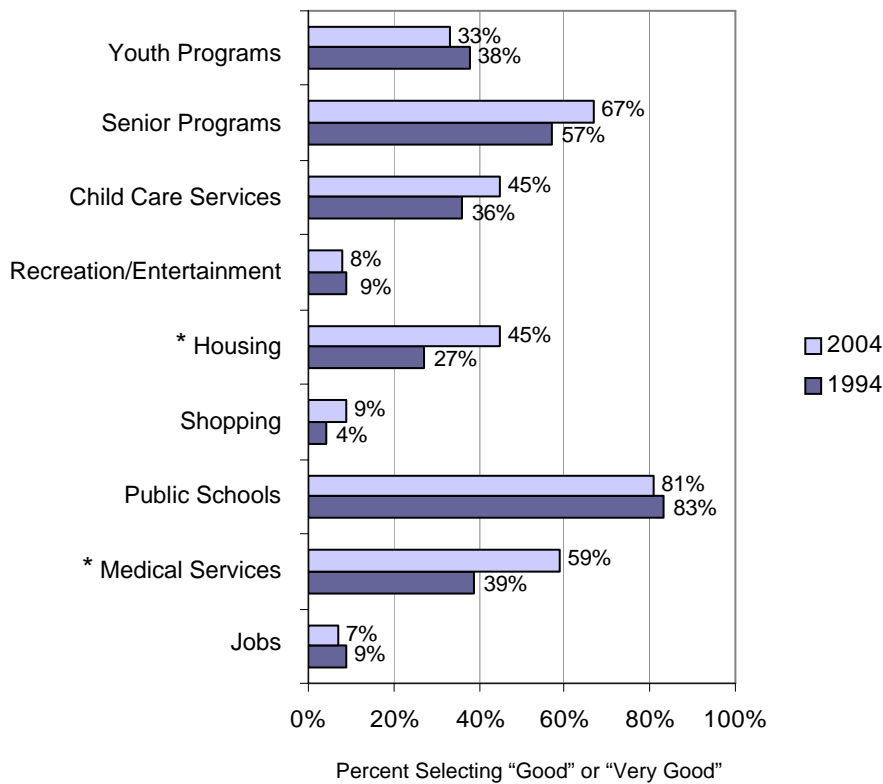


Figure 2: Ratings of Local Services and Facilities

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 years, less than one in ten residents gave positive ratings to recreation and entertainment, shopping, and jobs in Villisca. Youth programs and child care services were rated favorably by less than half of residents. A majority of Villisca’s residents were satisfied with local schools, and over half gave favorable ratings to senior programs. The percentage of residents assigning positive ratings to housing and medical services increased significantly over the past decade.

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, Villisca residents reported being satisfied with many of their government services. Almost nine of ten residents rated fire protection, emergency response, and garbage collection favorably. About three-fourths of residents also gave favorable ratings to the condition of parks in Villisca, and over half rated police protection services positively. Compared to 1994, there was a decrease in the percentage of positive ratings for water and the condition of streets in Villisca, with less than half of residents in 2004 approving of these services.

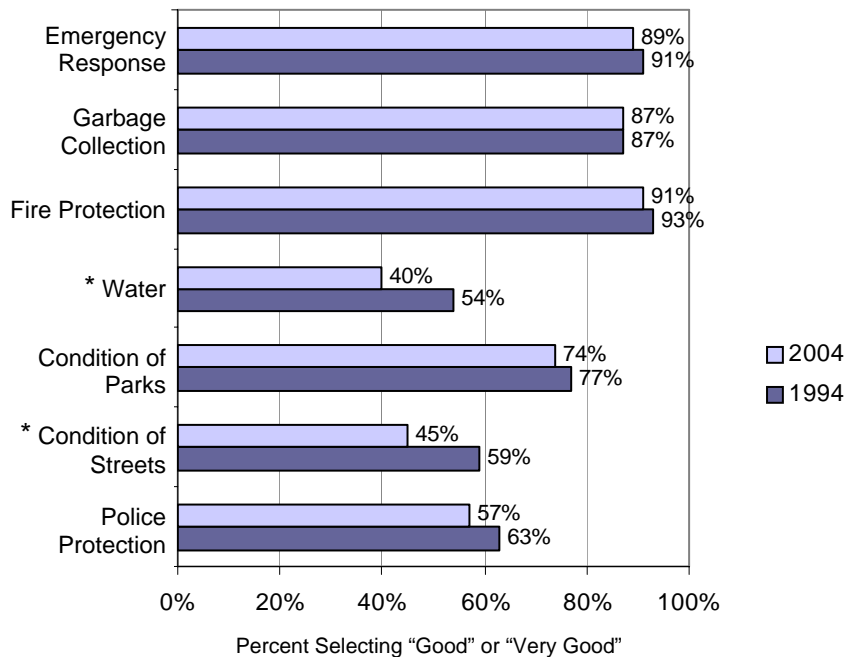


Figure 3: Ratings of Local Government Services

VILLISCA'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.

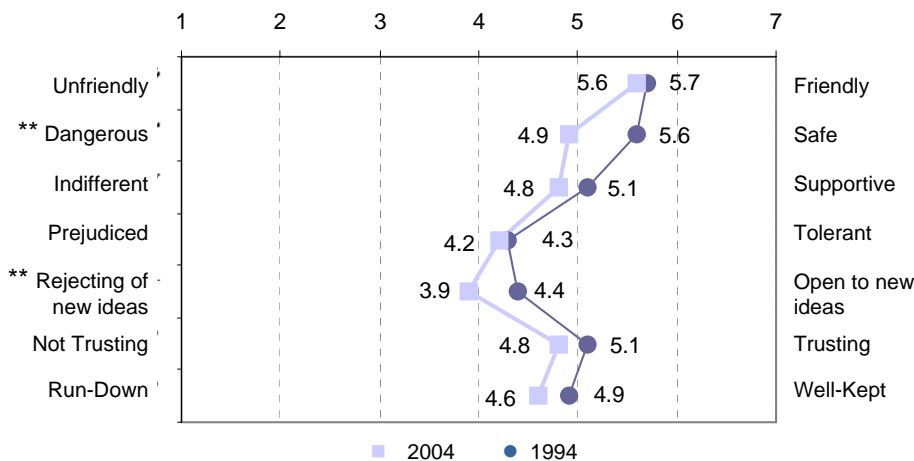


Figure 4: Average Rating of Social Qualities on a 1 to 7 Scale

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 rating to the friendliness of Villisca, followed closely in 1994 by the safety of the town. The lowest ratings in both years were assigned to the extent to which Villisca is tolerant and open to new ideas. Significant changes over the past decade are that residents view Villisca as less safe and less open to new ideas.

** 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, 52 percent of residents reported knowing the names of half or more of the people in Villisca, compared to 54 percent in 1994. Similarly, 53 percent indicated that half or more of their friends live in Villisca, compared to 51 percent in 1994. Eighteen percent of residents in 2004 and 25 percent in 1994 said that half or more of their adult relatives and in-laws live in Villisca. (Note: These differences are not greater than the margin of error.)

COMMUNITY ATTACHMENT

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

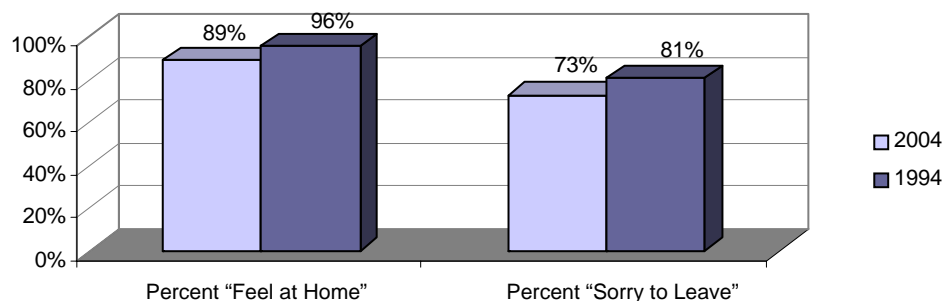


Figure 5: Community Attachment

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Citizens working together to accomplish local goals is an important feature of small towns. For Villisca, 69 percent of the residents indicated in 2004 that the spirit of participation is “good” or “very good.” In 1994 and 2004, almost two-thirds of Villisca residents reported participating in a local community improvement project in the years prior to the surveys (see Figure 6). About one-third of residents considered themselves to be “somewhat” or “very” active in community activities and events, down significantly from 43 percent who described themselves as active 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 (50%), not being asked by others to volunteer (44%), and not having the skills needed to participate in community projects (33%).

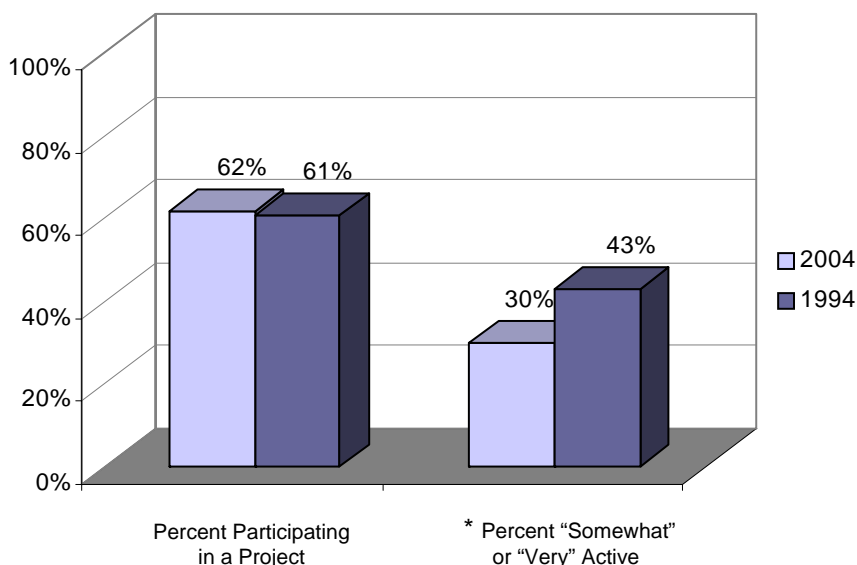


Figure 6: Community Involvement

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 11 percentage points. Using this standard, what has changed in Villisca over the past decade? Residents are obtaining primary health care in Villisca more now than ten years ago. The evaluations of the quality of local housing and medical services also increased significantly. The evaluations of the quality of many local government services remain high, although there was a decrease in positive ratings for water and the condition of streets in Villisca.

The social environment has changed somewhat. Villisca residents still describe their town as friendly, but view their town as less safe and less open to new ideas than it was ten years ago. Residents of Villisca 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. Finally, participation in the community is still important to Villisca residents, as well over half reported participating in a local improvement project and many indicated that community involvement is good or very good. However, the percentage of residents who consider themselves to be active in the community decreased significantly over the past decade.

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

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