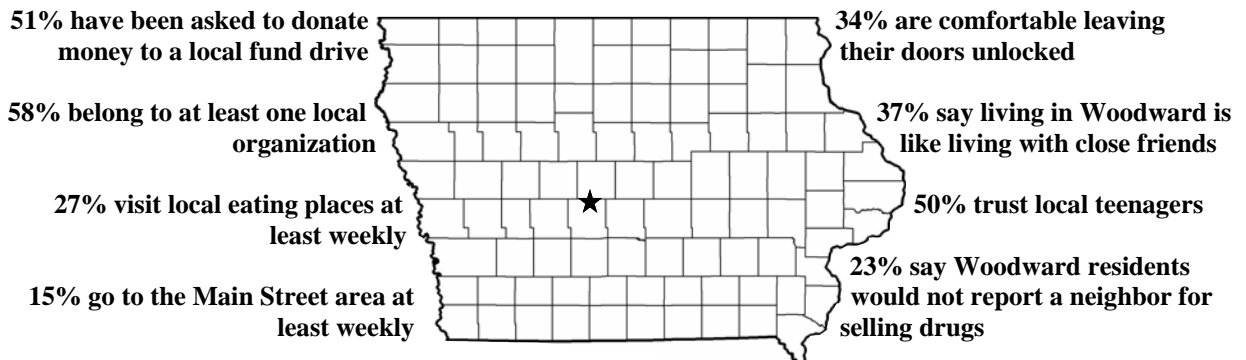


# A DECADE OF CHANGE IN WOODWARD

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 Woodward. 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, 97 Woodward residents responded to the survey, and 96 responded in 2004. This report is a summary of the results, including how the opinions of Woodward residents have changed over the past decade.

## LIFE IN WOODWARD IN 2004



## LOCAL PATRONAGE PATTERNS

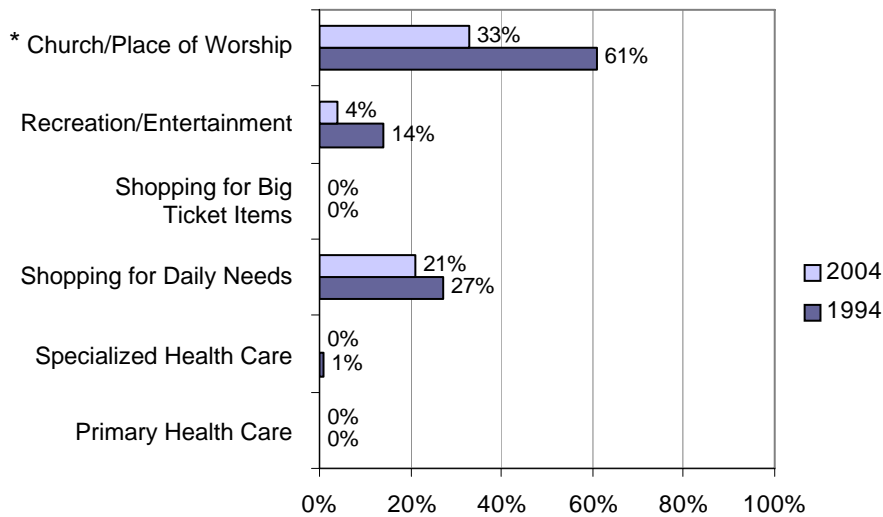


Figure 1: Percent Selecting "Local"

For a variety of reasons, many residents of Iowa's smaller towns rely on neighboring cities for services. Results from this survey suggest that Woodward residents leave town for most services. Figure 1 shows the percentage of residents who reported patronizing various services in Woodward. While over half of residents in 1994 stayed in town to attend a local church or place of worship, in 2004 just one-third, a significant decrease, remained in Woodward.

About one-quarter of residents reported staying in town to shop for daily needs in both years, but there were no reports in either year of residents shopping locally for big ticket items. Similarly, most residents reported traveling out of town for all health care services. Finally, in 2004 only four percent stayed in Woodward for recreation and entertainment.

\*A Note on Interpretation: For Woodward, 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

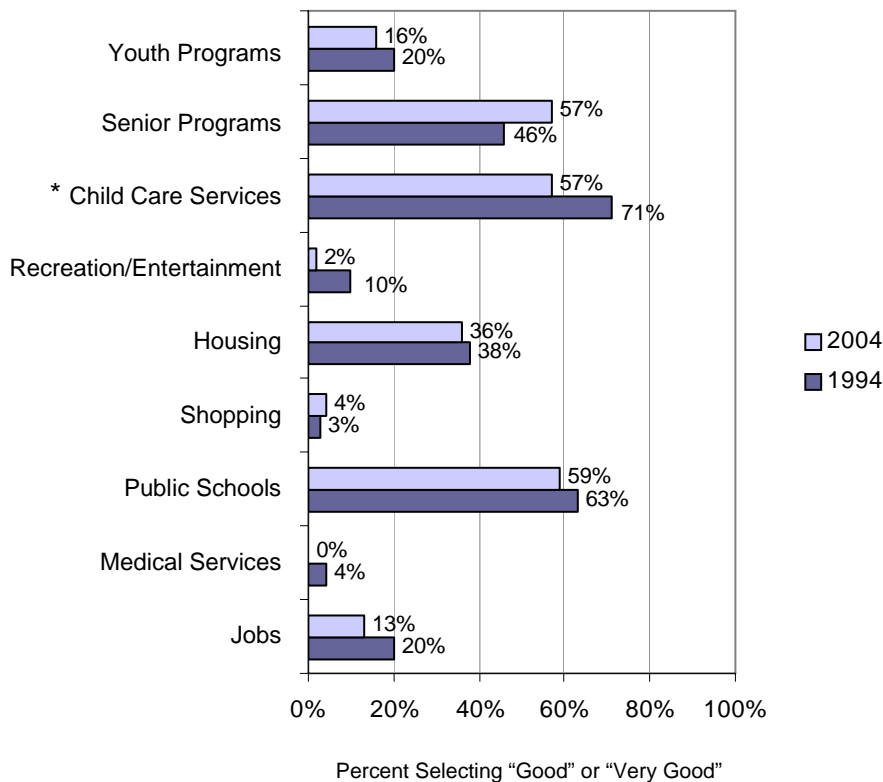


Figure 2: Ratings of Local Services and Facilities

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. Over half rated public schools, senior programs, and child care services favorably in 2004, and housing received positive ratings from about one-third of residents. Youth programs and jobs in Woodward were given favorable ratings from less than one in five residents in 2004. In both years, few or no residents rated recreation and entertainment, shopping, and medical services positively. The percentage of residents assigning positive ratings to child care services decreased significantly from 71 percent in 1994 to 57 percent in 2004.

## 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, Woodward residents reported being satisfied with many of their local government services. Most residents rated emergency response, garbage collection, and fire protection favorably in both years, and a over half also gave positive ratings to water and the condition of the parks. In 2004, less than half rated condition of streets and police protection positively. Compared to 1994, the percentage of favorable ratings for the condition of parks decreased significantly from 70 percent in 1994 to 56 percent in 2004.

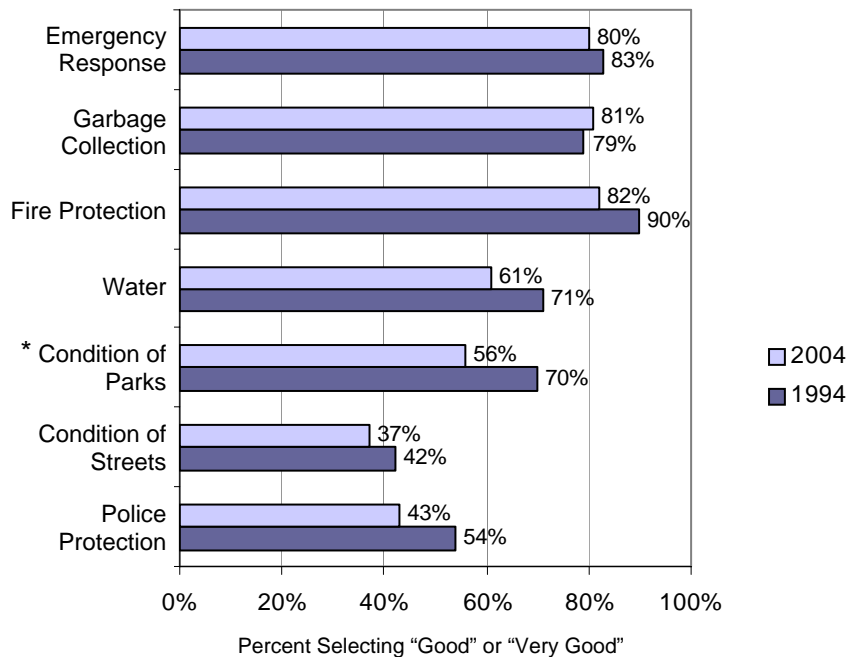
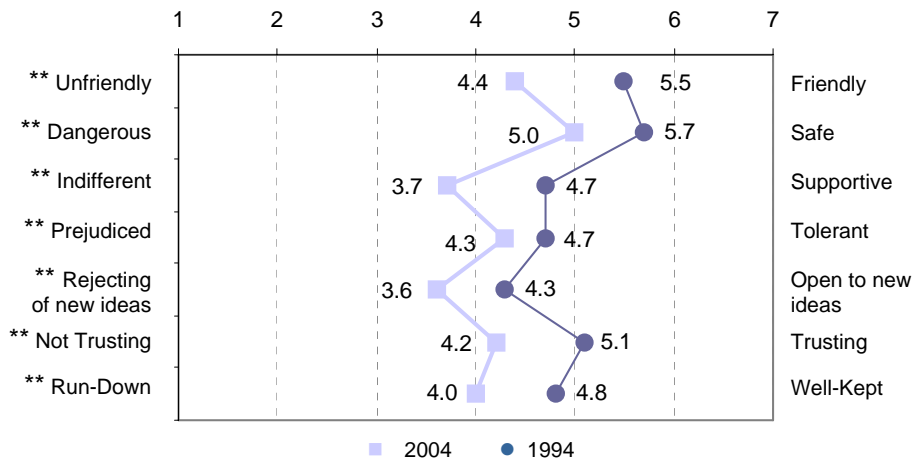


Figure 3: Ratings of Local Government Services

## WOODWARD'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**

\*\* 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.

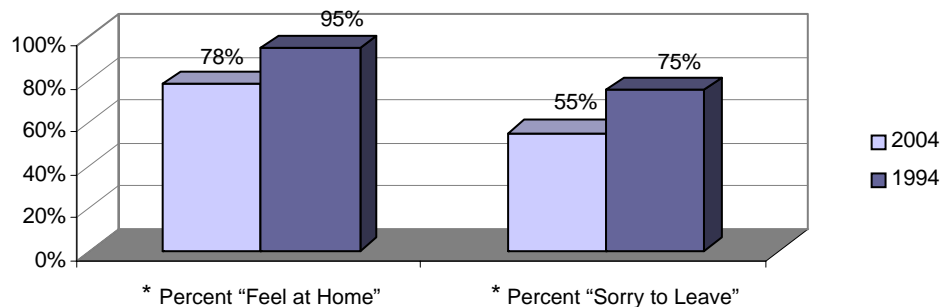
Residents were presented with a list of qualities and asked to evaluate their town on each quality using a 7-point scale. The average ratings shown in Figure 4 reveal that in 1994 and 2004, residents assigned the highest rating to the safety of Woodward, while the lowest rating was given to the extent to which the town is open to new ideas. Significant changes occurred in each of the social qualities listed. Therefore, residents now view Woodward as less friendly, less safe, less supportive, less tolerant, less open to new ideas, less trusting, and less well-kept compared to 1994 ratings.

### 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, 43 percent of residents reported knowing the names of half or more of the people in Woodward, compared to 45 percent in 1994. Thirty-four percent indicated that half or more of their friends live in Woodward, a significant decrease compared to 54 percent in 1994. As for relatives, 18 percent of residents in 2004 and 23 percent in 1994 said that half or more of their adult relatives and in-laws live in Woodward.

### COMMUNITY ATTACHMENT

Do Woodward residents feel at home in their community? In 2004, 78 percent said they do, a significant decrease from the 95 percent who felt the same way in 1994. Furthermore, 55 percent indicated that they would be sorry to leave if they had to move away from Woodward, also a significant decrease from the 75 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 Woodward, 37 percent of residents indicated in 2004 that the spirit of community participation

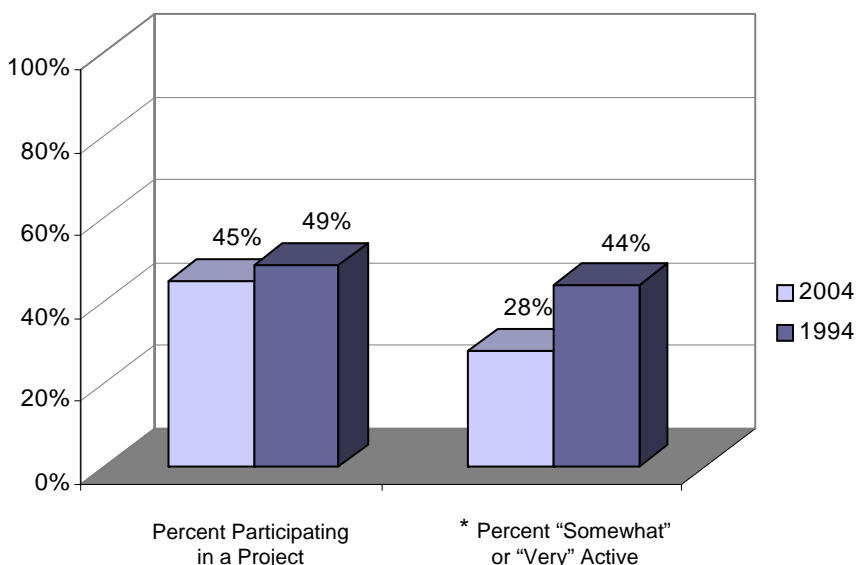


Figure 6: Community Involvement

was “good” or “very good.” For both years, just under half of residents reported participating in a community improvement project in the years prior to the surveys (see Figure 6). Additionally, 28 percent in 2004 considered themselves to be “somewhat” or “very” active in community activities and events, down significantly from 44 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 Woodward residents were lack of time (65%), not being asked by others to volunteer (54%), and lack of projects available that needed volunteers (32%).

## 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 Woodward over the past decade? Residents are attending church or place of worship in Woodward less now than ten years ago. The evaluations of the quality of most local services and facilities did not change significantly. However, there was a significant decrease in positive favorable ratings for child care services. The evaluations of the quality of local government services remained high for most services, although positive ratings declined significantly for the condition of parks.

The social environment seems to have changed substantially. Residents view Woodward as less friendly, less safe, less supportive, less tolerant, less open to new ideas, less trusting, and less well-kept than it was in 1994. Residents remain attached to their community. However, the percentage of those who feel at home in their community and would be sorry to leave both decreased significantly since 1994. Participation rates remain unchanged over the decade, but there was a significant decrease in the percentage of residents describing themselves as active in the community. Finally, it is interesting to note that a top reason people gave for not participating in local projects was that no one had asked.

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

**RDI**

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