

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY  
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

# TOWN SIZE AND CHANGES IN IOWA'S SMALL TOWNS

KERRY AGNITSCH • TERRY BESSER  
JEAN FRIESTAD • MONICA WHITHAM

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# TOWN SIZE AND CHANGES IN IOWA'S SMALL TOWNS

Traditionally, small towns have served as the cultural and socioeconomic hub for Iowa's residents. In recent years, due to a variety of circumstances, the survival of many of Iowa's rural communities is in question. Declines in the number of farms and businesses have contributed to a steady out-migration of residents, leaving fewer individuals and decreasing public revenue to address an increasing number of problems. Recognizing the significance of rural towns to Iowa's heritage, a major research effort was initiated in 1994 to assess the social conditions in Iowa's small towns. The purpose of this project, called the Rural Development Initiative, was to provide data that would improve the basis for policy decisions to stimulate rural development and economic growth. This research focused on three main areas: community quality of life, the local social environment, and community involvement.

To examine these issues, 99 communities between 500 and 10,000 in population that are not contiguous to a metropolitan area (cities with at least 50,000 population) were selected to represent Iowa's small towns. Questionnaires were completed by more than 10,000 residents in those selected communities, and the resulting information was provided to community residents and local leaders through a series of reports. Ten years later, in 2004, residents in the same communities were asked to participate in a similar study with the goal of learning how the social conditions have changed. Another component was added in the 2004 study to examine the impact of relatively sudden events, called "economic shocks", on the local economies of Iowa's small towns.

A recently released report presented the statewide results from this study.<sup>1</sup> However, we know that towns face different opportunities and challenges based on their location in the state and on their population size. Accordingly, in this report, we are focusing on the impact of town size on changes in quality of life, the local social environment, and community involvement. Additionally, we will look at patterns surrounding economic shocks and how they differ by town size.

To do this, the 99 towns have been divided into four town-size categories: 500 to 700 in population, 701 to 1,000 in population, 1,001 to 2,000 in population, and 2,001 to 10,000 in population. The characteristics of each town-size category are the average of the characteristics for the towns in each group.

<sup>1</sup> See *A Decade of Change in Iowa's Small Towns* at our website: [www.soc.iastate.edu/rdiweb/](http://www.soc.iastate.edu/rdiweb/).

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Last, but not least, we acknowledge the cooperation of the nearly 22,000 Iowa citizens who contributed to this research in both 1994 and 2004 by completing questionnaires or participating in telephone interviews. There is no better indication of the importance of small towns to Iowans than the fact that so many individuals voluntarily participated in a study of this type.

## STUDY DESIGN

This study was designed to examine changes in Iowa's rural communities over the ten-year period from 1994 to 2004. As such, the communities selected for the study remained the same in both years. However, the residents who participated by completing the questionnaires differed. The following section discusses the methods utilized to select towns and participants.

Probability sampling procedures were used to select participants in two stages: the selection of communities (in 1994) and the selection of residents (in both 1994 and 2004). First, one community was randomly selected from those between 500 and 10,000 in size and not adjacent to a metropolitan area (50,000 persons or larger) from each of Iowa's 99 counties. (See the Appendix for a list of communities divided by town size group, their corresponding counties, population, and percentage population gain or loss over the decade.) Communities with fewer than 500 residents were excluded from the study because basic services are typically unavailable, and therefore cannot be evaluated. Second, telephone directories were used to select households located in and around the 99 communities. One hundred and fifty households were randomly chosen from the directories in each town. Within households, adult heads and co-heads of the household were randomly chosen by gender, with instructions that if the designated gender was not present, another adult member of the household should complete the questionnaire.

Questionnaires were mailed to selected participants. Two additional mailings were sent thanking respondents for their participation and asking non-respondents to participate. Households for which the questionnaire was returned by mail and deemed undeliverable were replaced with another household. Table 1 shows response rate information for both years in the town size groups.

Table 1: Response Rates for Town Size Groups

	1994	2004
500 to 700 (n = 25)	73%	68%
701 to 1,000 (n = 22)	74%	70%
1,001 to 2,000 (n = 27)	74%	67%
2,001 to 10,000 (n = 25)	73%	66%

## A NOTE ON INTERPRETATION

Throughout this report, two types of statistically significant differences will be reported. Significant changes within a town size group between 1994 and 2004 will be noted with an asterisk (\*). Significant differences between town size groups within each year will be noted with a section sign (§). When looking at the results for various items, **it is important to note that differences or changes of the same magnitude may not always be statistically significant across all graphs.** (See *A Decade of Change in Iowa's Small Towns* for more details). Moreover, a statistically significant change or difference is not necessarily an important one. Statistical significance means that we are fairly certain that the difference or change is real. It is up to the reader to decide if the difference is important.

# TOWN SIZE AND QUALITY OF LIFE

Quality of life is a broad term that refers to the extent to which the features of a community are able to meet the needs and wants of its population. The availability and quality of local services and amenities such as parks, grocery stores, medical facilities, public safety services, schools, and others determines, in part, the quality of life for local citizens. Because these services and amenities are dependent on local public or private revenue, it is likely that town size will impact both availability and quality of services. Residents in this study were asked to evaluate the services and facilities available in their communities and to tell us whether they stayed in town to meet their needs. The following pages show the results for towns of different sizes.

## GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Residents count on local governments to provide infrastructure, such as streets and water, as well as public safety services, such as police, fire, and emergency response. Eight different government services were listed in the survey with instructions for residents to rate each as “very good”, “good”, “fair”, or “poor”. A ninth question asked them to rate the overall quality of government services in their towns. Figures 1 through 9 show the percentage of residents who rated each service as “good” or “very good” by town size.

Figure 1: Overall Quality of Government Services

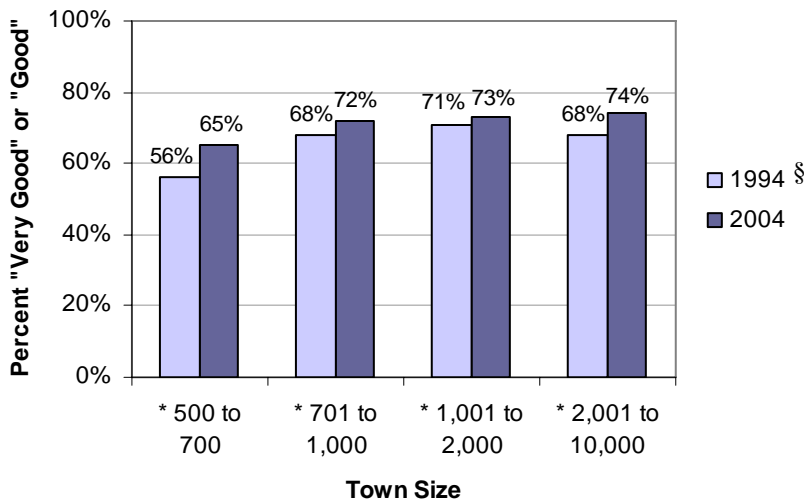
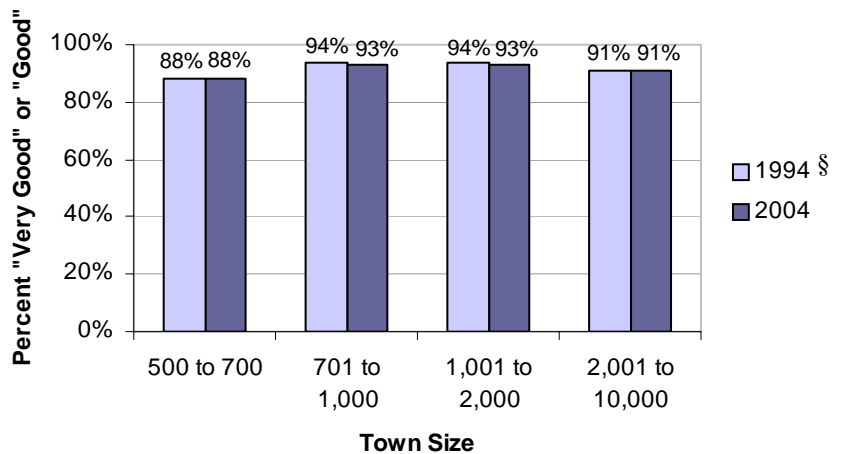


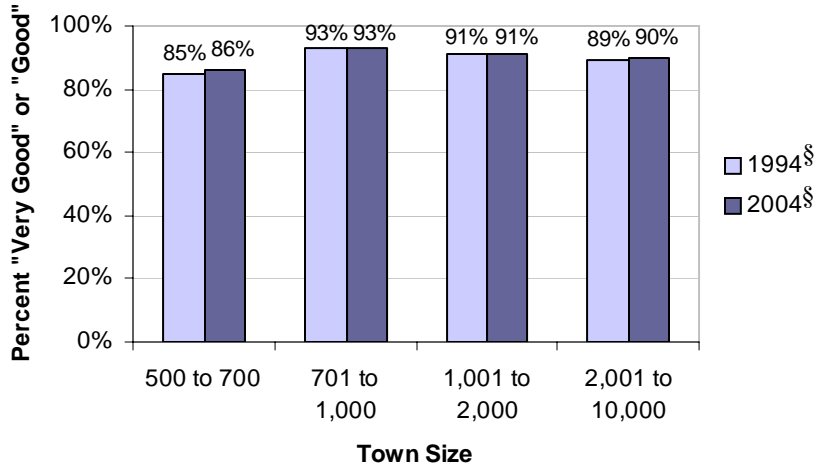
Figure 1 shows residents’ ratings of the overall quality of government services in 1994 and 2004. In all town size groups, ratings increased over the decade. The most improvement was in the smallest communities where the percentage of positive ratings increased from 56 percent in 1994 to 65 percent in 2004—an increase of 9 percent. Additionally, ratings for overall quality of government services were significantly lower in the smallest towns than in the other town size groups in 1994. In 2004, there were no significant differences between town size groups.

Residents’ ratings for fire protection are shown in Figure 2. The vast majority of residents assigned ratings of “good” or “very good” to the fire protection services in their towns, regardless of town size. No significant changes occurred in ratings between 1994 or 2004 for any town size group. There was a significant difference across town size groups in 1994, however. Ratings for fire protection were significantly lower in the smallest towns, when compared to the middle two town size groups.

Figure 2: Fire Protection



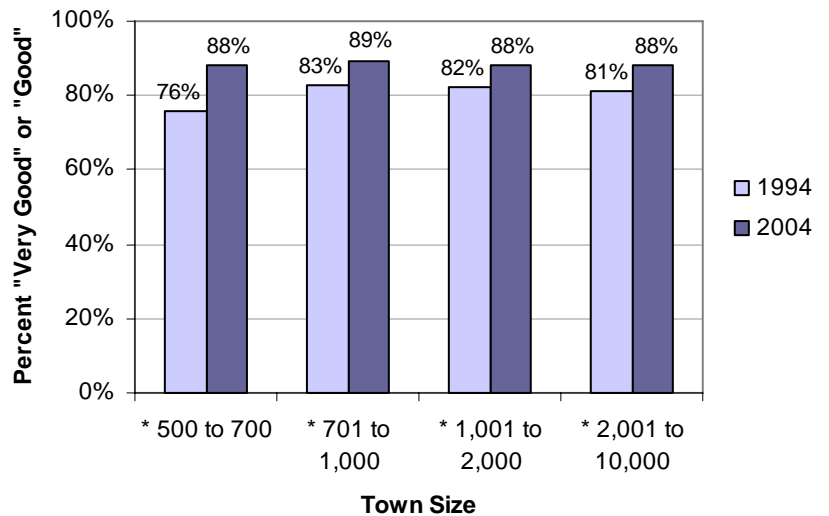
**Figure 3: Emergency Response**



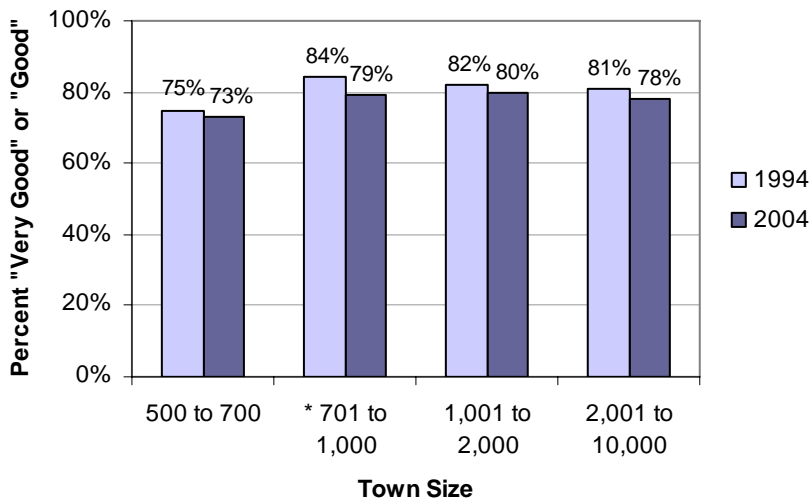
Ratings for emergency response services in 1994 and 2004 are shown in Figure 3. As with fire protection, residents' ratings remained high and stable. More than eight in ten residents assigned positive ratings to emergency response in all town size groups. No changes in ratings occurred within any town size group between 1994 and 2004. The percentage of favorable ratings was higher for towns between 701 and 2,000 in population when compared to the group of smallest towns in 1994. In 2004, ratings for the smallest towns were significantly lower than ratings for the 701 to 1,000 town size group.

Figure 4 displays the percentage of "good" or "very good" ratings for garbage collection for 1994 and 2004 by town size. Across all town size groups, the percentage of favorable ratings increased between 1994 and 2004. The largest increase occurred for the smallest towns, from 76 percent in 1994 to 88 percent in 2004—an increase of 12 percent. Ratings of the quality of garbage collection increased by 6 percent in the middle two groups of towns, while those in the largest communities went up by 7 percent, from 81 percent in 1994 to 88 percent in 2004. There were no significant differences between town size groups in either 1994 or 2004.

**Figure 4: Garbage Collection**



**Figure 5: Condition of Parks**



Ratings of the quality of local public parks in towns of different sizes are shown in Figure 5. As with most government services, ratings are high—more than seven in ten residents in both years assigned positive ratings to the quality of their city parks in both years. However, the percentage of favorable ratings decreased over the decade for those towns 701 to 1,000 in population size, from 84 percent in 1994 to 79 percent in 2004. Ratings for parks in other town size groups did not change significantly, nor were there any significant differences between town size groups.

**Figure 6: Public Schools**

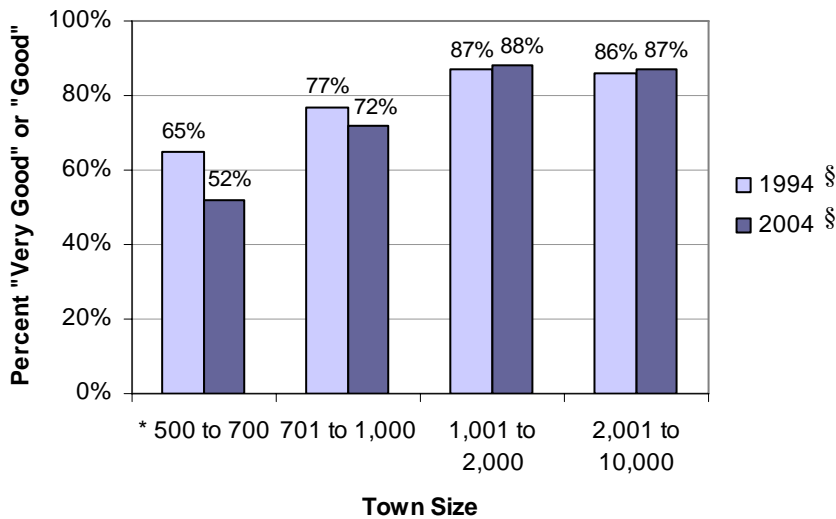
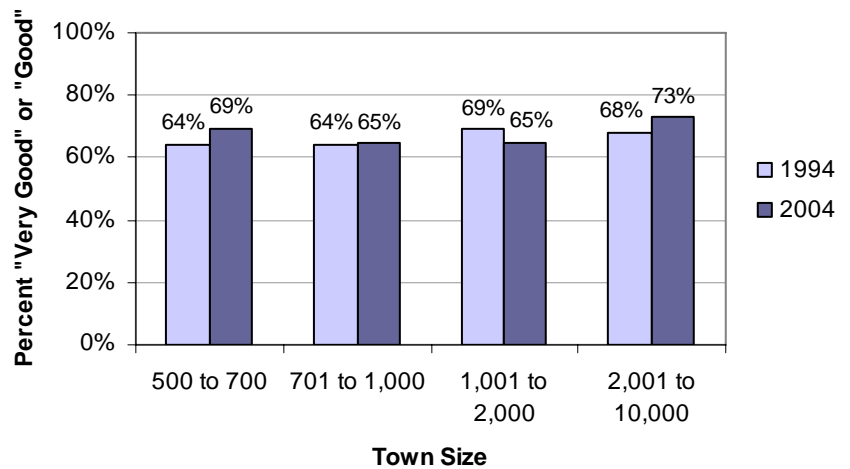


Figure 6 shows the percentage of “good” and “very good” ratings assigned to public schools by residents in 1994 and 2004. Positive ratings were high and stable for the towns over 1,001 in population. However, a significant decrease occurred for the smallest towns. When comparing across town size groups, the percentage of positive ratings for public schools was significantly lower for the smallest communities in both years than for the two groups of larger towns.

Water services received positive ratings from roughly two-thirds of residents across towns of all sizes as shown in Figure 7. No significant changes in ratings occurred over the decade for any town size group, nor were there any significant differences between town size groups.

**Figure 7: Water**



**Figure 8: Police Protection**

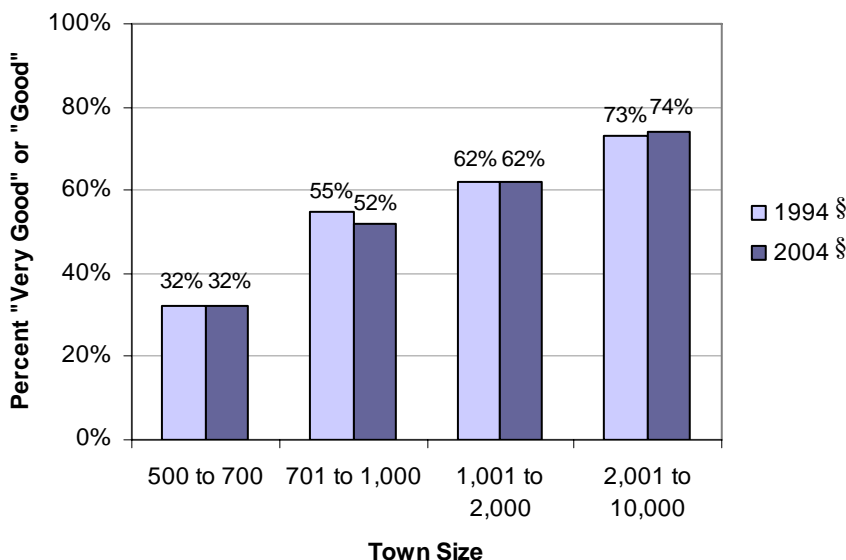
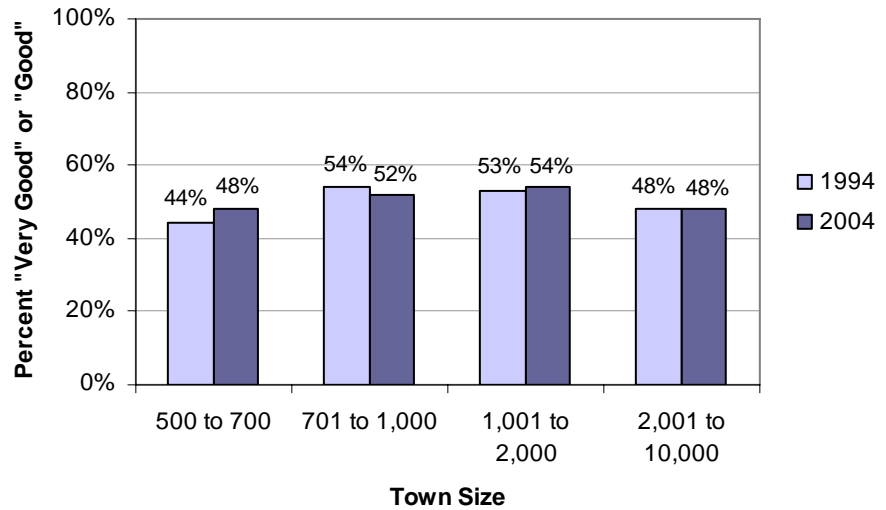


Figure 8 shows the ratings for police protection by town size. Ratings did not change significantly over the decade, but they varied substantially across town size groups in both years. Nearly three-fourths of residents were pleased with police protection in the largest towns in both years, while only one-third assigned positive ratings to police protection in the smallest towns. In both 1994 and 2004, just over one-half of residents rated police protection as “good” or “very good” in towns 701 to 1,000 in size, while 62 percent did so in towns with between 1,001 and 2,000 residents.



**Figure 9: Condition of Streets**

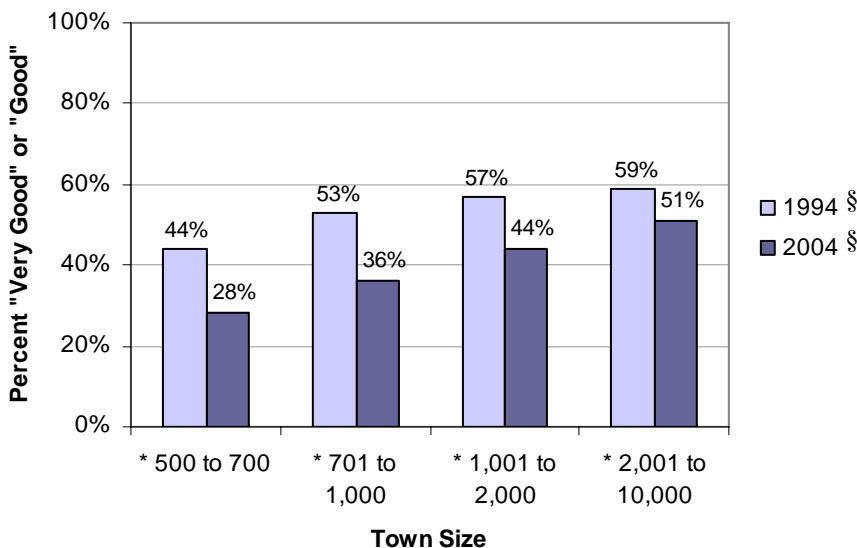
Figure 9 shows the percentage of “good” and “very good” ratings residents assigned to the condition of the streets in their communities in 1994 and 2004. Ratings remained stable between the two years, with roughly half of residents viewing their streets favorably in all groups of towns. Additionally, there were no significant differences in ratings between town size groups for either 1994 or 2004.



## NON-GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Non-government services, such as the availability of jobs, housing, medical services, shopping, and others also contribute to the quality of life in small towns. In this study, residents were asked to assign ratings of “very good”, “good”, “fair”, “poor”, or “not available” to the overall quality of non-government services in their towns and to a list of eight types of services. The percentage of residents who assigned ratings of “good” or “very good” to non-government services in each town size group are shown in Figures 10 through 18. (Note: The percentages shown for ratings of non-government services are calculated including “not available” responses. As a result, very low numbers, such as those for shopping facilities or recreation/entertainment, may reflect the lack of services available for towns in a town size group.)

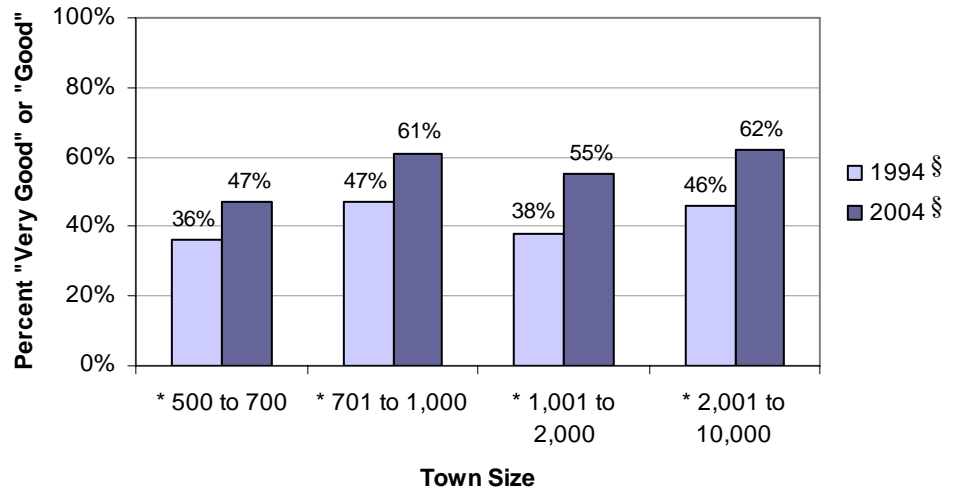
**Figure 10: Overall Quality of Non-Government Services**



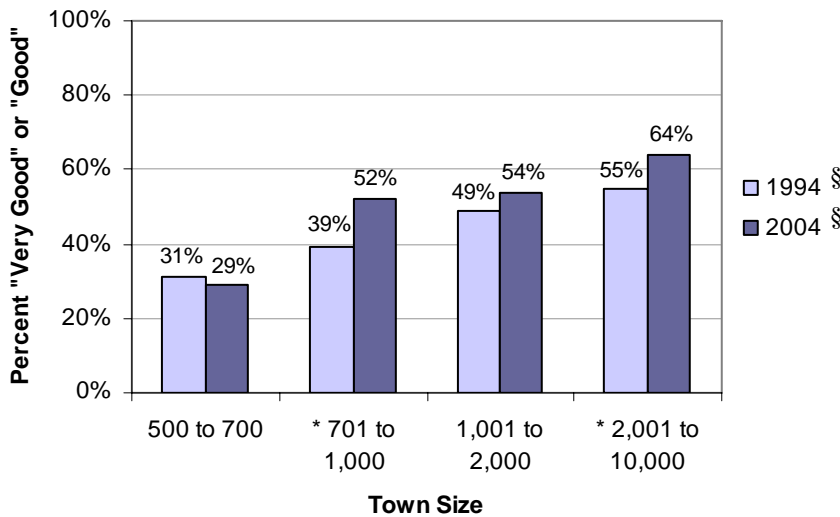
Residents’ ratings of the changes in overall quality of non-government services from 1994 to 2004 by town size are shown in Figure 10. In both years, ratings were significantly lower in the group of smallest towns when compared to the two groups of largest communities. Additionally, the percentage of positive ratings declined significantly over the decade for all town sizes. However, the steepest decline in overall quality of non-government services occurred in the two groups of smaller towns.

While ratings for the overall quality of non-government services dropped between 1994 and 2004, positive ratings for housing increased significantly across all town sizes (see Figure 11). In 1994, ratings for housing were lower for the smallest towns when compared to the 701 to 1,000 town size group. Similarly, the percentage of favorable ratings assigned to housing was lower in the smallest towns when compared to all other groups in 2004.

**Figure 11: Housing**



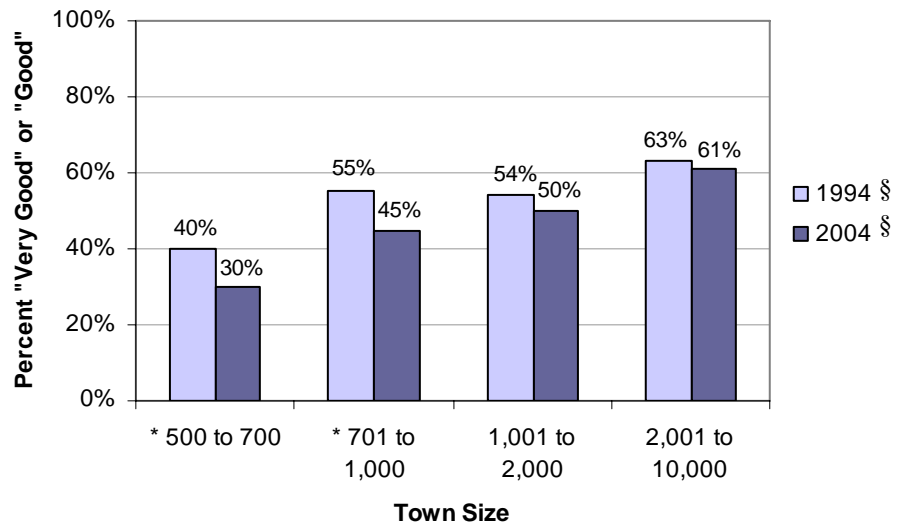
**Figure 12: Child Care**



Ratings of the quality of local child care services by town size for 1994 and 2004 are shown in Figure 12. The impact of town size on the ratings for child care services is evident. In both years, fewer than one-third of residents assigned favorable ratings for child care in the smallest towns, while over half did so in the larger towns. A significant increase in the percentage of “good” or “very good” ratings occurred from 1994 to 2004 in towns with between 701 and 1,000 residents and for those with 2,001 to 10,000 residents. Ratings for the other groups of towns were stable.

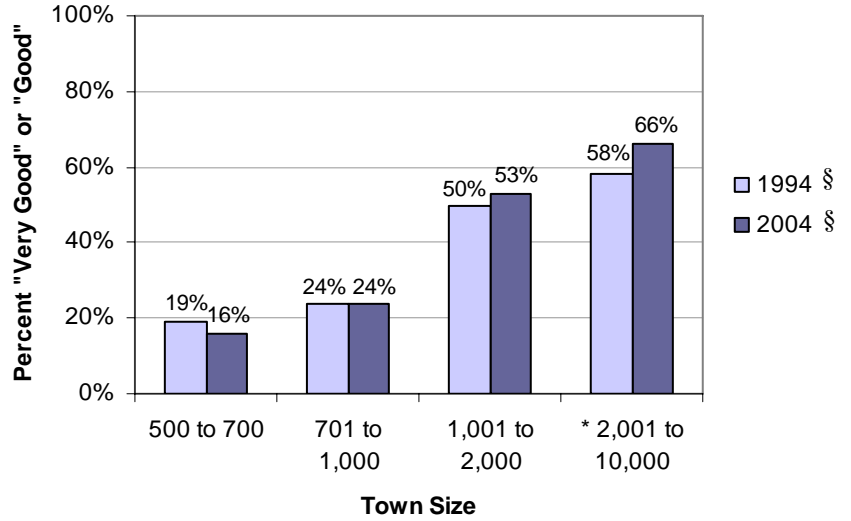
Ratings for senior programs are similarly impacted by town size—ratings are higher in the largest towns, and generally decrease as town size declines (see Figure 13). In 2004, ratings were significantly higher for the largest two groups of towns than for the 500 to 700 town size group. In 1994, however, ratings for senior programs in the smallest towns were lower than those in all other towns. Additionally, compared to 1994, ratings for senior programs declined by 10 percent in the two groups of towns under 1,000 in population.

**Figure 13: Senior Programs**



Assessments of the quality of local medical services in 1994 and 2004 for the town size groups are shown in Figure 14. Ratings are stable for groups of towns under 2,000 in population—no significant changes occurred between 1994 and 2004. However, ratings for medical services improved for the largest communities. Additionally, the impact of town size on residents' evaluations of quality is evident. Half or more of the residents in the two groups of larger towns assigned positive ratings to local medical services, while fewer than one-fourth did so in the two groups of smaller communities.

**Figure 14: Medical Services**



**Figure 15: Programs for Youth**

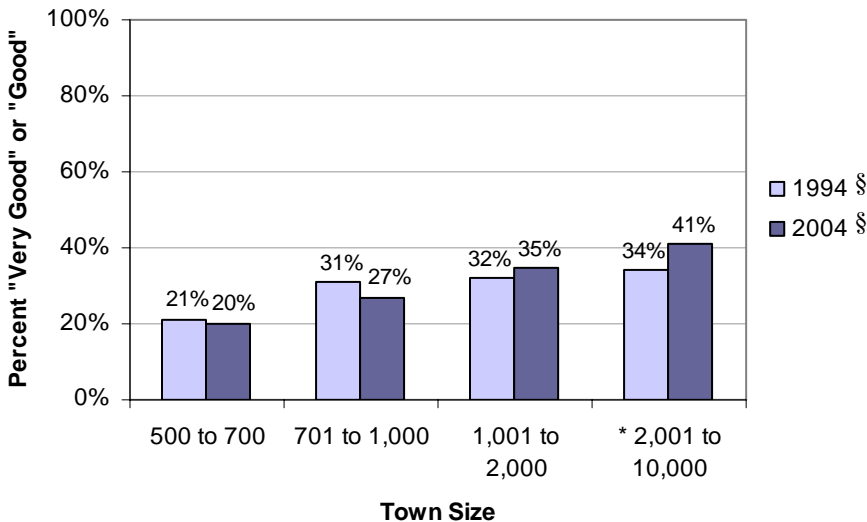
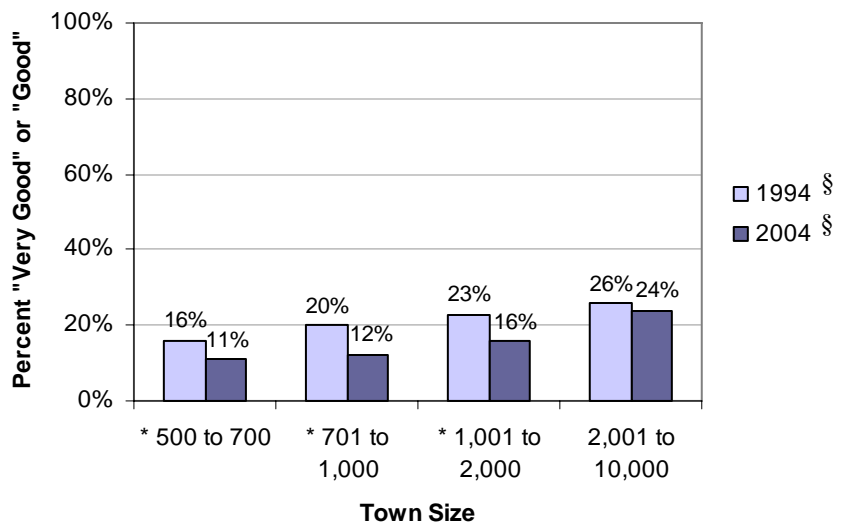


Figure 15 shows the percentage of residents who assigned “good” or “very good” ratings to youth programs in 1994 and 2004 by town size. For the largest towns, ratings for youth programs of “good” or “very good” increased from 34 percent in 1994 to 41 percent in 2004. Additionally, ratings for youth programs were significantly higher in the largest towns compared to the smallest towns in 1994. In 2004, ratings were higher for the largest towns compared to both groups of smaller towns.

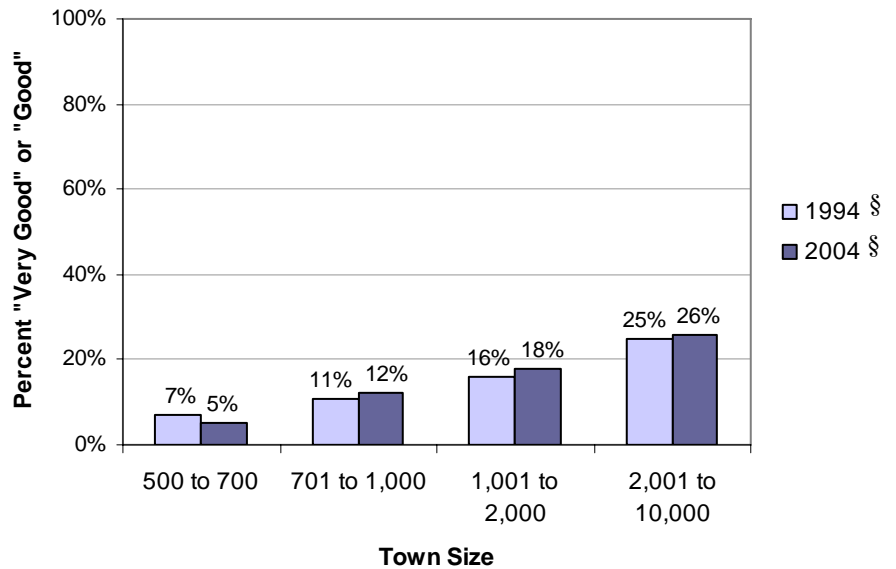
Evaluations of local recreation and entertainment in 1994 and 2004 by town size are shown in Figure 16. Across all town sizes, and for both years, relatively few residents assigned positive ratings to recreation and entertainment in their towns. In 1994, however, ratings were significantly higher in the largest towns compared to the smallest towns, while in 2004, the percentage of positive ratings for recreation was greater in the largest towns when compared to all other town size groups. Additionally, favorable ratings declined over the decade for towns under 2,000 in population.

**Figure 16: Recreation/Entertainment**

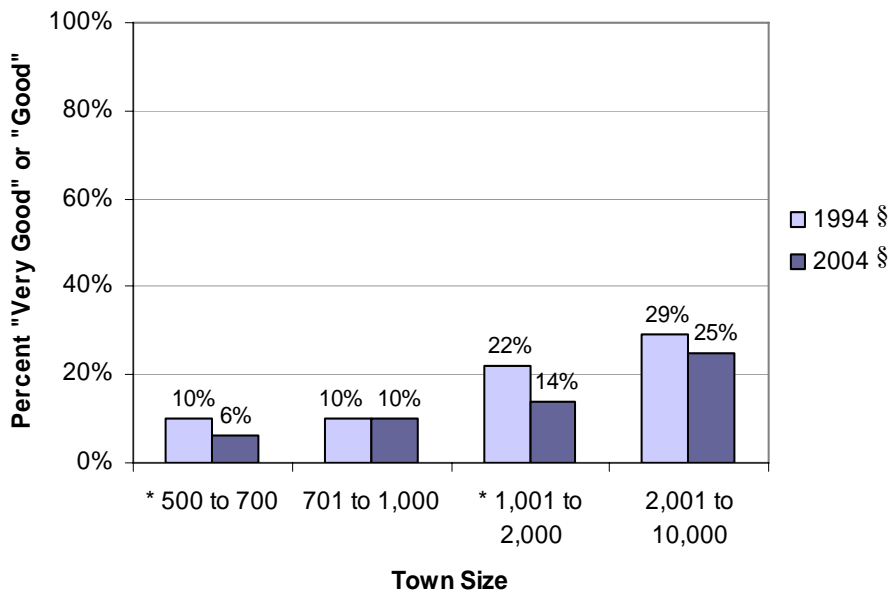


The percentage of “good” or “very good” ratings assigned by residents to local shopping facilities are displayed in Figure 17. Residents’ evaluations of shopping are stable over the decade for all town size groups. As with recreation and entertainment, the percentage of positive ratings is relatively low for all town sizes. Very few residents in the smallest towns were pleased with the shopping facilities in their towns in either 1994 or 2004. Ratings for shopping were significantly higher for the largest towns when compared to the two groups of smaller towns in both years.

**Figure 17: Shopping Facilities**



**Figure 18: Jobs**



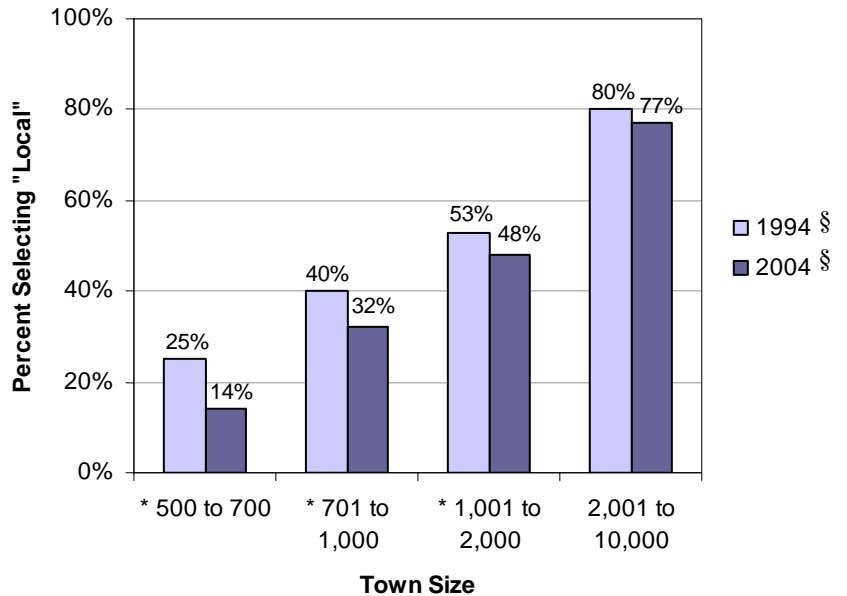
Residents’ evaluations of the quality of local jobs for 1994 and 2004 by town size are shown in Figure 18. Not surprisingly, town size affects evaluations of local jobs. In the largest towns, 29 percent in 1994 and 25 percent in 2004 rated local jobs favorably. However, in the 700 to 1,000 town size group, only 10 percent were pleased with local jobs for both years, and only 6 percent rated jobs favorably in 2004 in the smallest towns. Additionally, the percentage of positive ratings for local jobs declined in the smallest towns and those with 1,001 to 2,000 residents.

## LOCAL PATRONAGE PATTERNS

For a variety of reasons, many residents of Iowa’s small towns rely on neighboring cities for services. However, the ability to meet one’s needs locally is an important component of the quality of life for a town’s residents. Therefore, residents were asked whether they obtained a variety of services mostly locally or mostly outside of the community. Figures 19 through 24 show the percentage of residents who reported using six different services and amenities mostly in their home communities for each town size group.

The impact of town size on the percentage of residents who reported shopping for daily needs in their home communities is shown in Figure 19. Not surprisingly, the highest percentage of residents in both years who said that they shop for daily needs in their communities lived in the largest towns, followed by those in the 1,001 to 2,000 town size group. In the smallest towns, only 14 percent of residents shopped locally for their daily needs in 2004, down substantially from 25 percent in 1994. Similarly, the percentage of residents who reported shopping for daily needs locally dropped in towns between 701 and 2,000 in population.

**Figure 19: Shopping for Daily Needs**



**Figure 20: Shopping for Big Ticket Items**

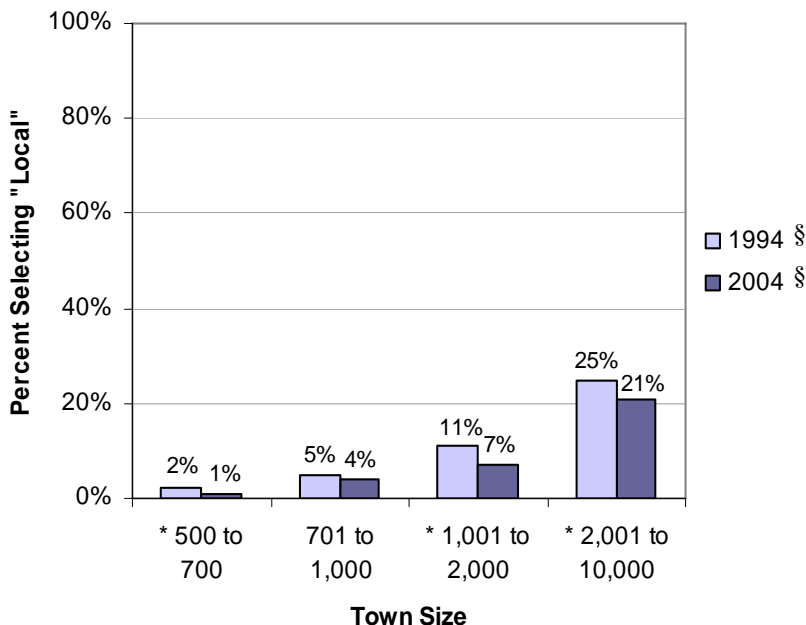
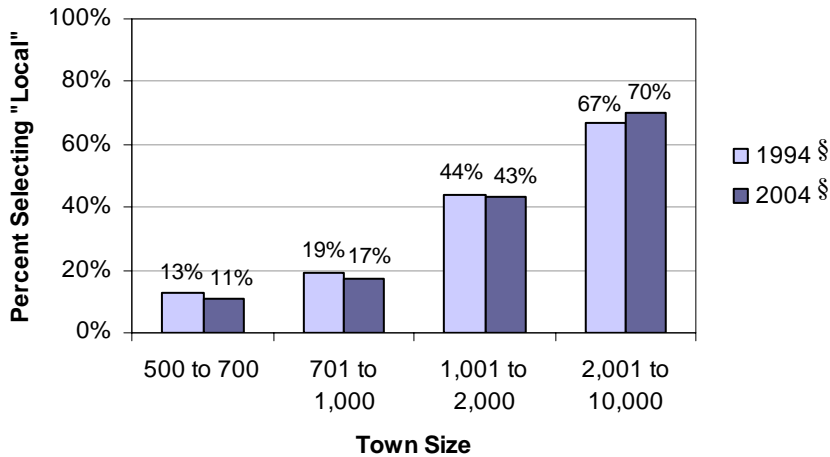


Figure 20 shows the percentage of residents in 1994 and 2004 who said they shop for “big ticket” items in their home communities. For both years, hardly any residents in the smallest towns shopped for “big ticket” items locally, and very few did so in the towns between 701 and 1,000 residents. Twice as many residents in the largest communities reported shopping locally for big ticket items than did so in the towns between 1,001 and 2,000. However, the smallest communities and both groups of larger towns experienced a significant decline in the percentage of residents who shopped locally for “big ticket” items between 1994 and 2004.

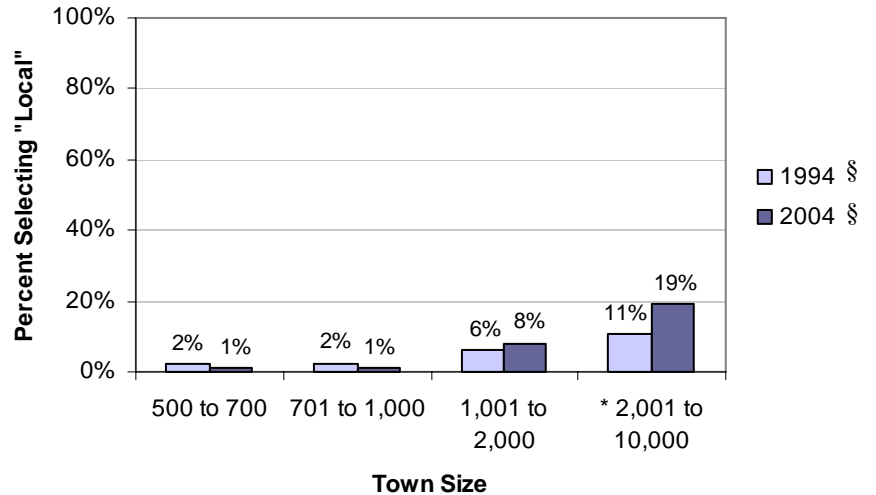
**Figure 21: Primary Health Care**



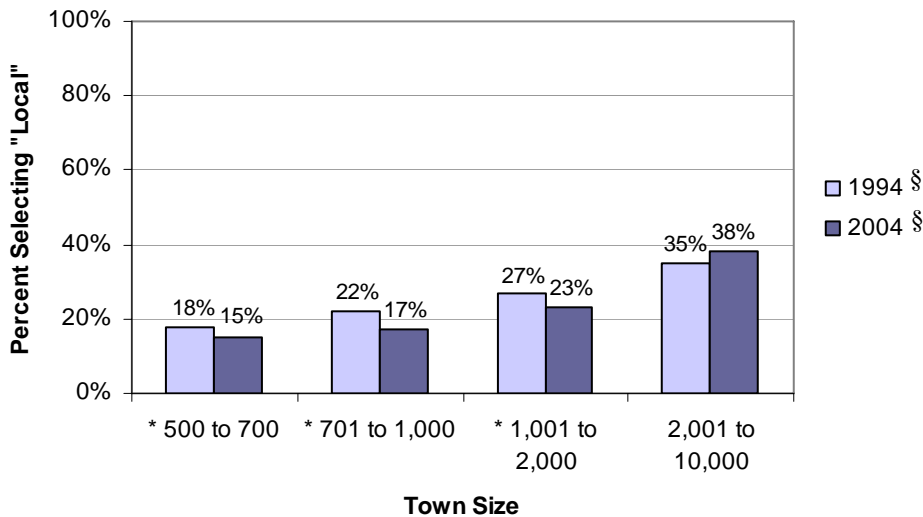
As with shopping, size of town impacts residents' local use of primary health care services. Although there were no significant changes between 1994 and 2004, the percentage of residents indicating local use of primary health care varied from about two-thirds for the largest towns to roughly one in ten for the smallest towns (see Figure 21). Approximately one-fifth of residents in towns with 701 to 1,000 residents sought primary health care locally, while just over 40 percent did so in towns between 1,001 and 2,000 in population.

Patterns of local use of specialized health care services were similar to those for shopping for big ticket items. Hardly any residents in towns under 1,000 used specialized health care services in their home communities in either 1994 or 2004 (see Figure 22). Slightly more residents obtained specialized health care locally in towns from 1,001 to 2,000 residents. In the largest towns, local use of specialized health care actually increased, from 11 percent in 1994 to 19 percent in 2004.

**Figure 22: Specialized Health Care**



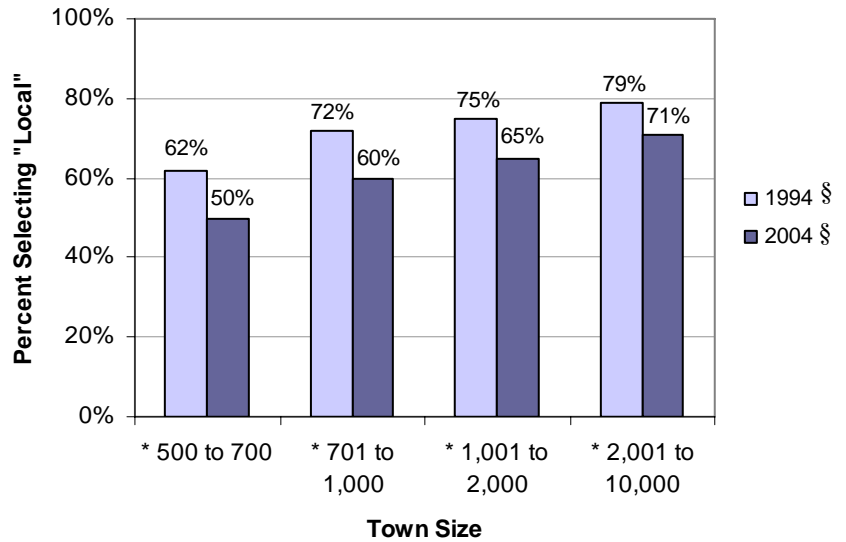
**Figure 23: Recreation/Entertainment**



The percentage of residents who reported staying in their communities for recreation and entertainment in 1994 and 2004 is shown in Figure 23. As with shopping and primary health care, the percentage of residents who remained in town for recreation and entertainment is greatest in the largest communities. This pattern occurred in both 1994 and 2004. Additionally, local use of recreation and entertainment declined for towns under 2,000.

Figure 24 shows the percentage of residents in 1994 and 2004 who reported attending church or a place of worship in their community by town size. Local church attendance declined across all town size groups, with the largest declines occurring in the towns under 1,000. Additionally, there were differences across town size groups. In both 1994 and 2004, local church attendance was lower in the smallest towns than it was in the towns with over 1,000 residents. There was no significant difference in local church attendance between the three groups of larger towns.

**Figure 24: Attending Church or Other Place of Worship**



### **SUMMARY: TOWN SIZE QUALITY OF LIFE**

For the most part, residents in all sizes of towns were pleased with the quality of local government services in both 1994 and 2004—indeed, ratings for overall quality even increased for all town size groups. There were a few exceptions, however. Ratings for public schools decreased over the decade in the smallest towns, and received fewer positive ratings in both years when compared to the larger towns. Similarly, about one third of residents in the smallest towns were pleased with local police protection in both 1994 and 2004, compared to over half in the other three town size groups.

Ratings for non-government services were much lower than those for government services across all town size groups. Residents ratings of the overall quality of non-government services declined substantially over the decade for all town sizes, with the steepest declines occurring in the groups of towns with fewer than 1,000 residents. Again, there were exceptions. Ratings for the quality of local housing increased over the decade for all groups of towns. Residents’ assessments of local child care increased for the three groups of towns between 701 and 10,000 in population size. For most of the non-government services, positive assessments of quality increased with town size in that more favorable ratings were given by residents in larger communities than in smaller towns.

There are also differences in the local use of services and amenities due to town size. In both 1994 and 2004, residents in the larger towns were more likely than those in smaller towns to attend church, shop, recreate, and obtain health care in their communities. However, local church attendance declined over the decade in all town size groups. Additionally, fewer residents in 2004 reported shopping for daily needs or recreating locally than did so in 1994 in the groups of towns under 2,000 in population. The percentage of residents who shopped for “big ticket” items locally declined over the decade for the smallest towns and those with more than 1,001 residents. Interestingly, local use of specialized health care increased in the largest towns.

# THE SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT AND TOWN SIZE

In spite of the frequently publicized economic challenges faced by many of Iowa's small towns, they are often praised for having favorable social climates. Accordingly, a goal of this project has been to determine the extent to which Iowa's small communities possess favorable social environments. Does the size of a town impact the local social environment? The next several pages show residents' assessments of different aspects of the social climate in Iowa's small towns and how those assessments vary by town size.

Residents were presented with a list of social qualities and asked to evaluate their towns on each quality using a 1 to 7 scale. Figures 25 through 31 show the average ratings given to each quality in 1994 and 2004 by town size.

Average ratings for friendliness are displayed in Figure 25. Ratings in 1994 are lower in the largest towns compared to all three groups of smaller towns; in 2004, the largest towns differed only from the smallest towns. In the town size groups between 701 and 2,000 in population, ratings for friendliness declined during the period from 1994 to 2004.

Figure 25: Friendliness

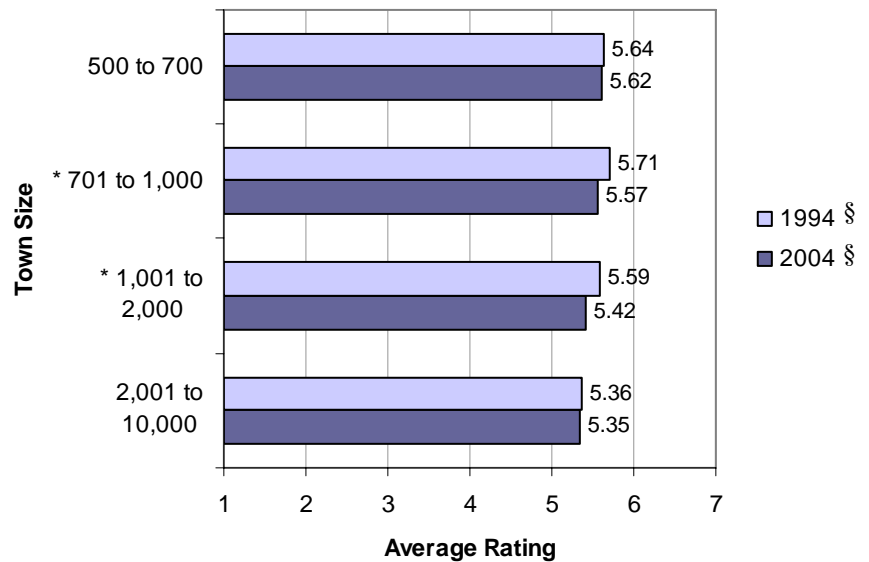


Figure 26: Safety

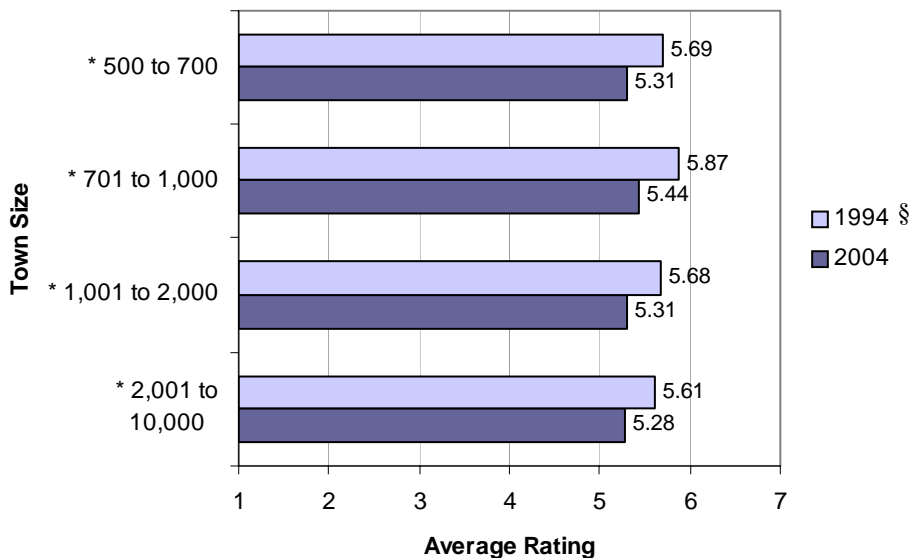
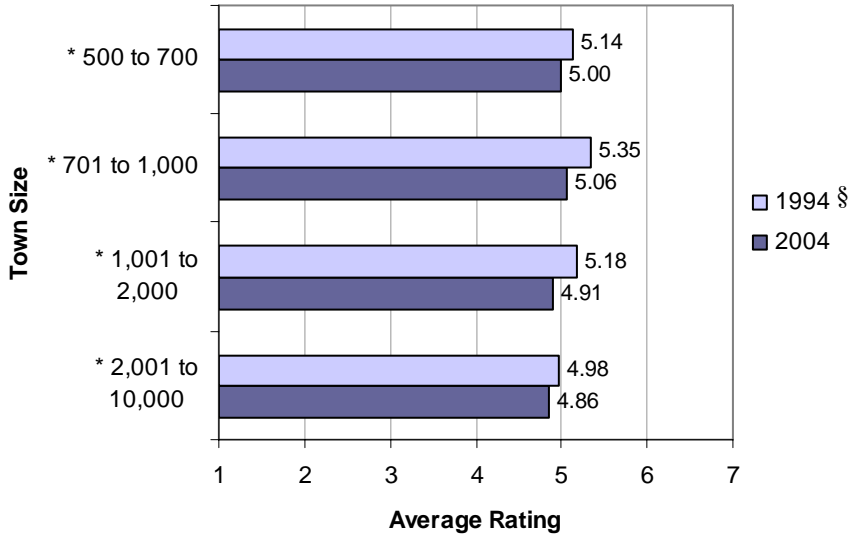


Figure 26 shows the average ratings for safety. In 1994, ratings were higher for towns with 701 to 1,000 residents than for the largest towns, but no differences in safety ratings existed in 2004. In all groups, however, the average ratings for safety declined over the decade.



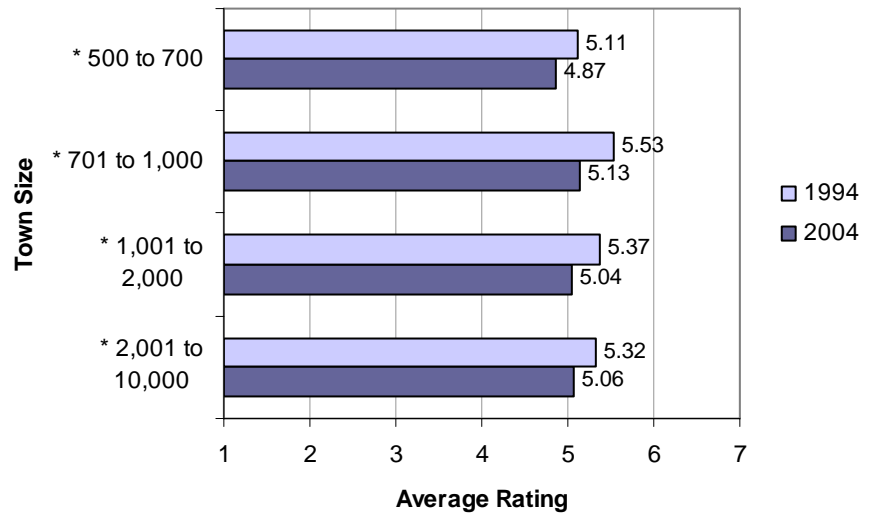
**Figure 27: Trust**



Average ratings for the extent to which residents felt their community was trusting are shown in Figure 27. As with safety, 2004 ratings for trust declined for all town size groups when compared to 1994. There were no differences between town size groups in residents assessments of the trusting nature of their communities in 2004, but in 1994, average ratings for trust were higher in the 701 to 1,000 group when compared to the largest communities.

Residents' evaluations of the extent to which their communities were "well-kept" in 1994 and 2004 are shown in Figure 28. Although there were no significant differences in average ratings due to town size, residents in all town size groups felt their towns were less well-kept in 2004 when compared to 1994.

**Figure 28: Appearance**



**Figure 29: Supportiveness**

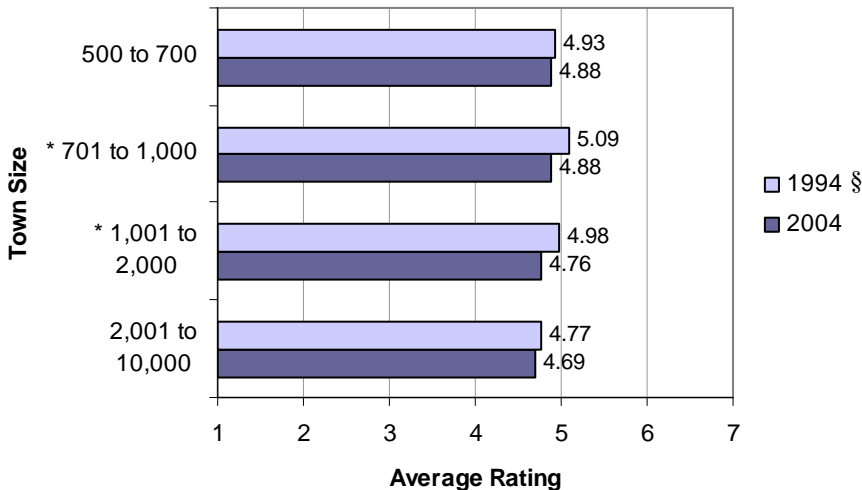


Figure 29 shows the average ratings for residents' assessments of the extent to which their towns were "supportive". Ratings are significantly lower for the largest towns when compared to the 701 to 1,000 town size group in 1994; in 2004, there was no difference in ratings for supportiveness between the town size groups. Compared to 1994, there has been a decline in ratings for supportiveness in the groups of towns with 701 to 2,000 residents.

Residents' assessments of the extent to which their towns are "tolerant" are shown in Figure 30. In 2004, residents in the smallest towns assigned higher ratings to tolerance than did those in the largest towns. There were no differences between the other town size groups in 2004 or between any of the town size groups in 1994. Interestingly, there was an increase in residents' assessments of tolerance in the smallest communities from 1994 to 2004—ratings in the other town size groups did not change significantly.

Figure 30: Tolerance

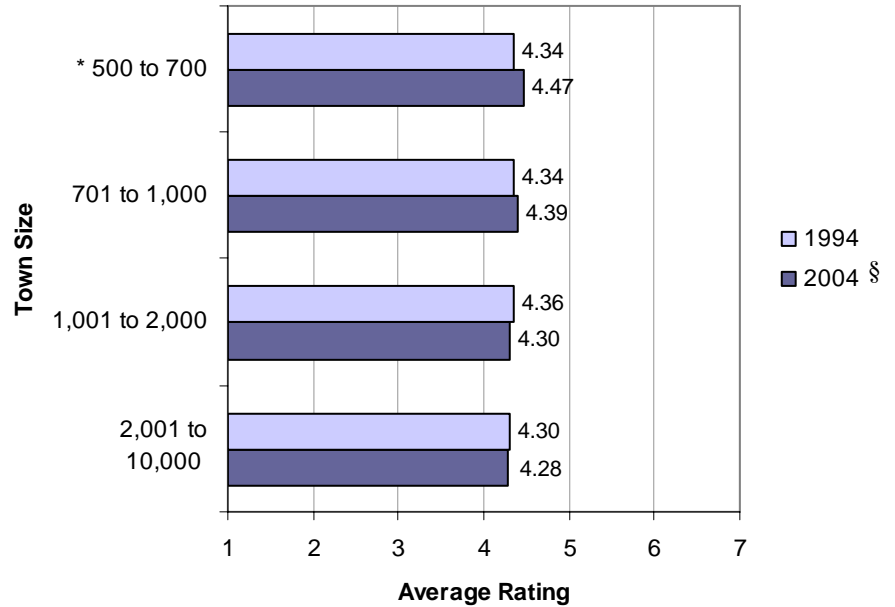


Figure 31: Openness to New Ideas

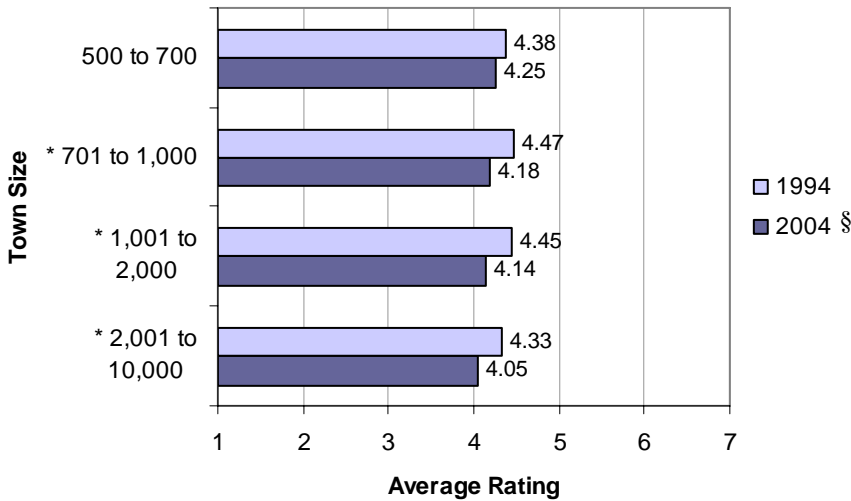
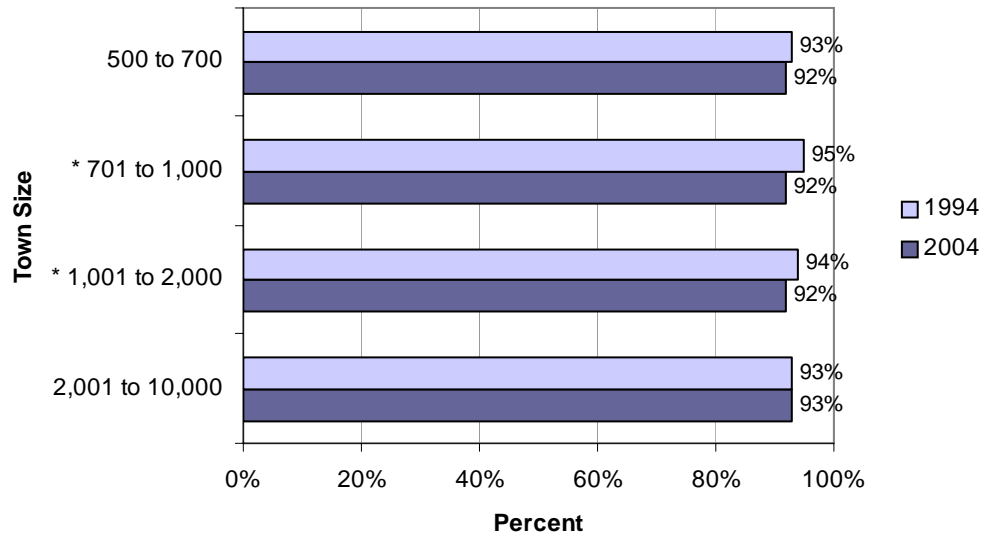


Figure 31 shows the average ratings residents gave to their community's "openness to new ideas" in 1994 and 2004. As with tolerance, residents in the smallest towns gave higher ratings to their town's openness to new ideas than did residents of the largest towns in 2004. Ratings did not differ significantly between town size groups in 1994. Further, ratings for openness to new ideas declined over the decade for all but the smallest towns.

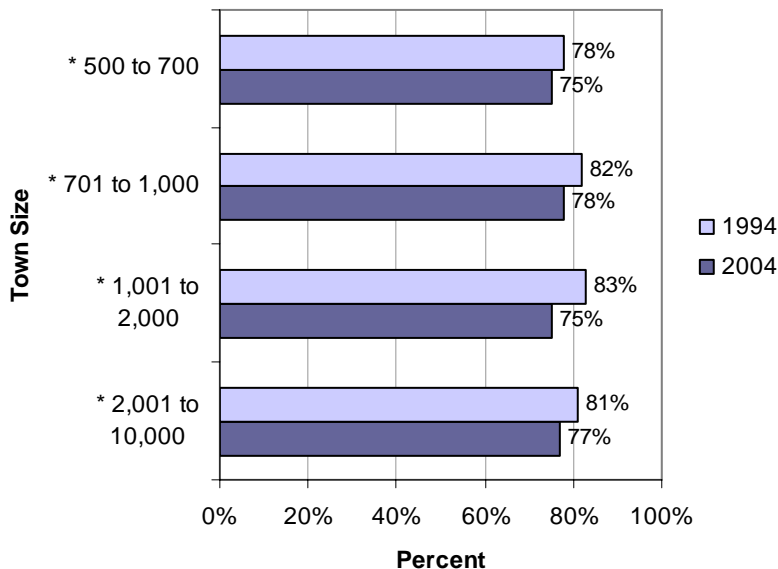
## COMMUNITY ATTACHMENT

Community attachment refers to the extent local residents feel happy in and a part of their community. Residents who are “attached” to their towns are more likely to be interested in what happens locally and are more likely to participate in community events or volunteer for local projects. Does the size of a town influence community attachment? Figure 32 shows that the vast majority of residents in all town sizes felt at home in their communities in both 1994 and 2004. However, in towns with 701 to 2,000 residents, the percentage of residents who said that they feel at home declined over the decade.

**Figure 32: Residents Who “Feel at Home”**



**Figure 33: Residents Who Would Be “Sorry to Leave”**



Further, over three fourths of residents in both years and in all town sizes said that they would be sorry to leave if they had to move away (see Figure 33). However, fewer residents in all groups of towns expressed this sentiment in 2004 when compared to 1994.

Town size does not appear to greatly influence community attachment—residents in all town sizes were about equally attached to their communities. However, there was a decline in community attachment between 1994 and 2004, particularly for communities between 701 and 2,000 in population.

# SOCIAL CAPITAL

An important feature of a local social environment is called “social capital”. Social capital is a term that refers to the relationships among residents—that is, how much local residents know and trust one another. There are two main components of social capital: social ties and trust. Social ties are the connections among residents—acquaintanceships, friendships, and family relations. Trust refers to the extent to which local citizens trust each other, even those they do not know personally. A community rich in social capital will usually have an easier time accomplishing goals and making decisions. For example, recruiting volunteers for a local festival or fundraising for the local fire department is much easier in a town where people know and trust each other than in places where this is not the case. Because of these important implications for communities, we wanted to know more about the extent of social capital in Iowa’s small towns. The following pages show how social capital varies by town size and how it has changed since 1994.

## SOCIAL TIES

**Figure 34: Know Half or More Residents By Name**

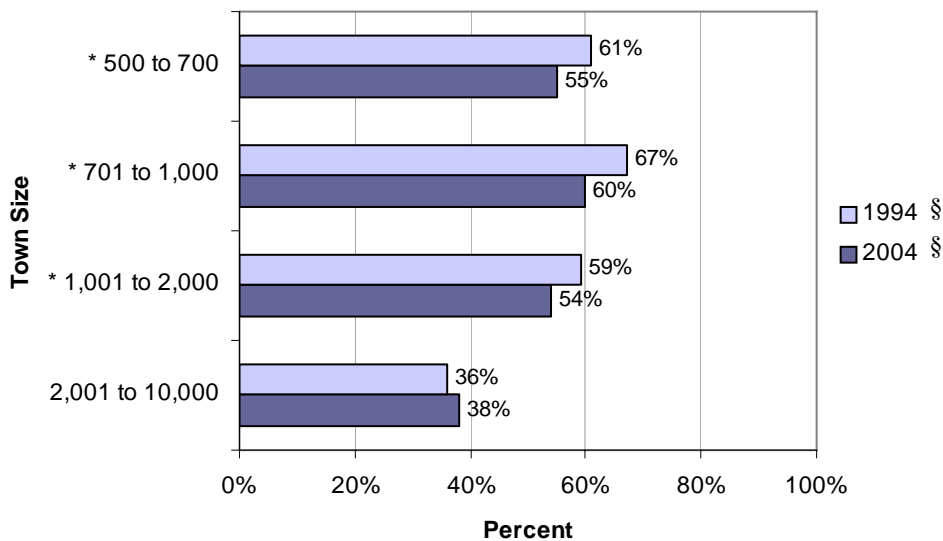


Figure 34 shows the percentage of residents who said they know half or more of the other people in their towns. This percentage was significantly smaller in the largest communities than in the other three town size groups in both 1994 and 2004. Further, the extent to which residents know each others’ names has declined significantly over the ten-year period in those towns with 500 to 2,000 residents, and remained stable in the largest communities.

**Figure 35: Half or More of Friends Live in Community**

The percentage of residents who reported that half or more of their friends live locally is shown in Figure 35. In both 1994 and 2004, residents in the two groups of larger communities reported having more local friends than those in the smallest communities. Additionally, local friendships declined over the decade for residents in the three groups of towns under 2,000 in population.

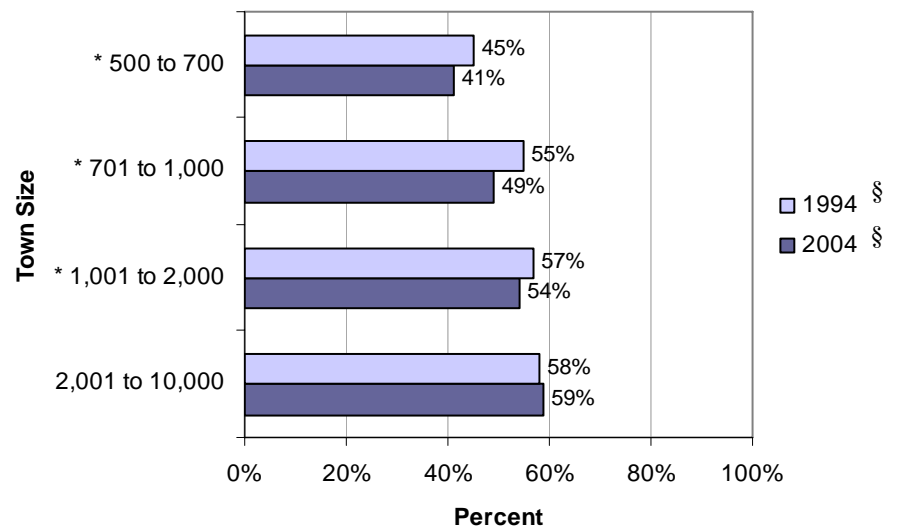
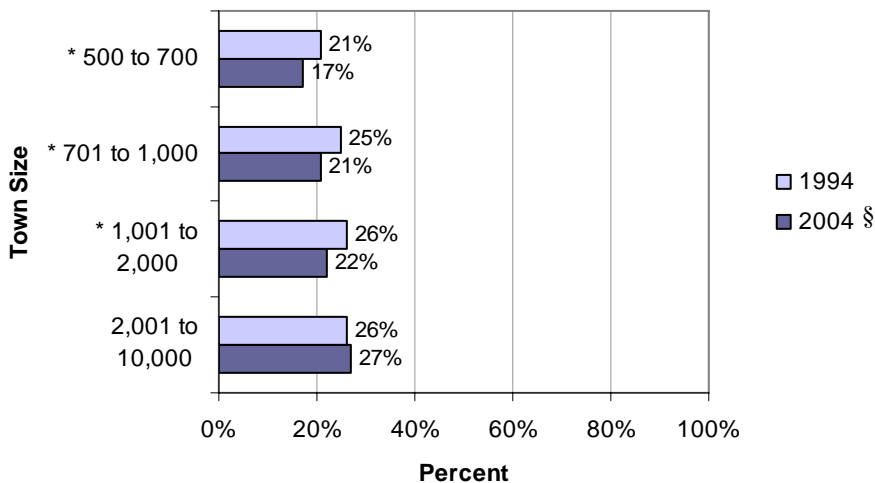


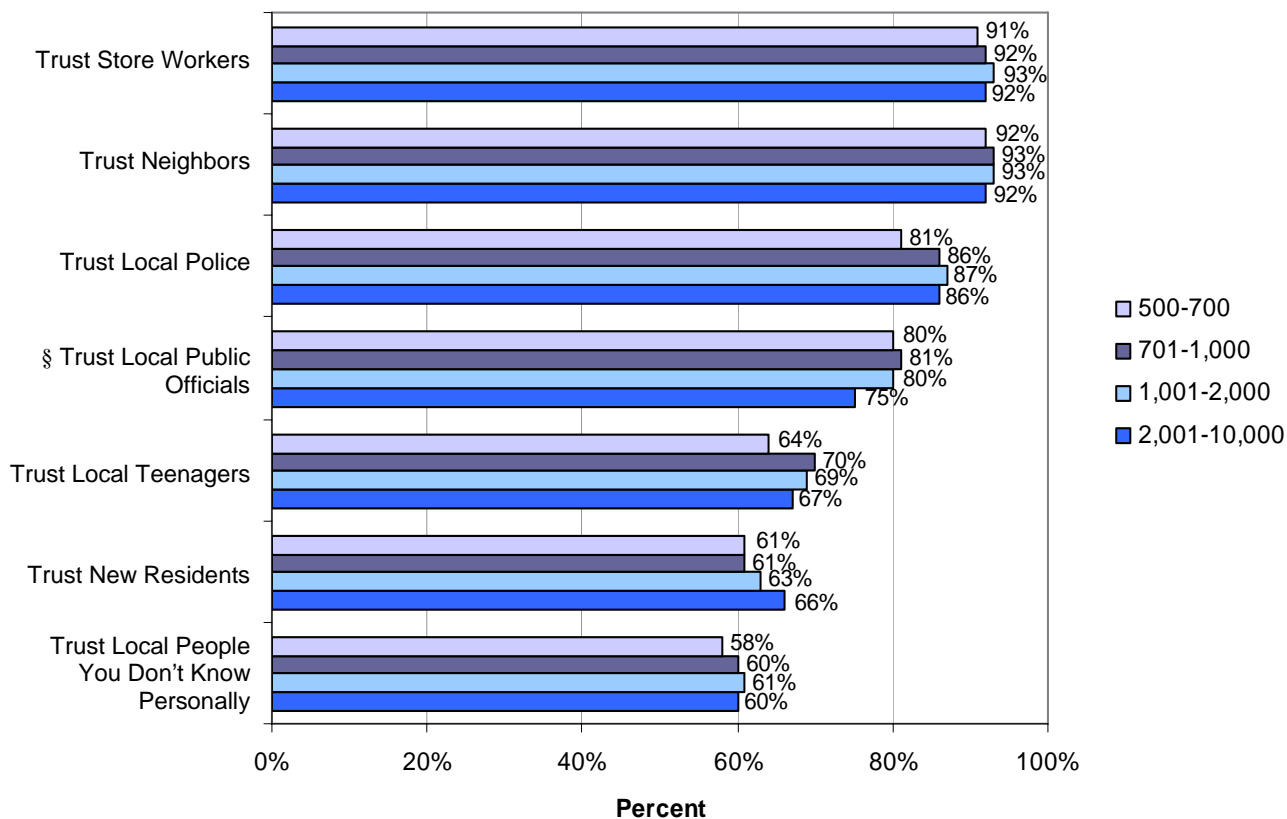
Figure 36 shows the percentage of residents who said that half or more of their adult relatives and in-laws live in town. As with local friends, the extent of local relatives has decreased over the decade for residents in all but the group of largest towns. Further, residents in the largest communities reported having significantly more local relatives than did those in the two groups of smallest towns in 2004. There were no significant differences between town size groups in 1994.

**Figure 36: Half or More Relatives Live in Community**



## TRUST

**Figure 37: Trust in Local Authorities and Institutions**



During the 1990's, research showed a general erosion in the amount of trust Americans have in institutions and each other. For this reason, a series of questions was added in 2004 to measure trust in Iowa's small towns. Figure 37 shows the percentage of residents who said they trust a variety of others "almost always" or "most of the time". For the most part, residents in all town sizes trust local people and authorities—even those they do not know personally. However, residents in the largest towns reported less trust in local public officials than did those in the other town size groups.

## **SUMMARY: SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT AND TOWN SIZE**

Overall, a favorable social environment still exists for Iowa's small towns of all sizes. Although still relatively high in 2004, ratings for safety, trust, and appearance declined for all town size groups when compared to 1994. Ratings for friendliness and supportiveness also decreased in towns with 701 to 2,000 residents, while ratings for openness to new ideas declined in all but the smallest towns. Further, residents in the largest communities rated their towns as less friendly than did those in the smallest towns in both 1994 and 2004, while in 2004 residents in the smallest towns assigned higher ratings to tolerance and openness to new ideas. In 1994, ratings for safety, trust, and supportiveness were higher in the 701 to 1,000 town size group than in the largest towns.

Community attachment did not vary substantially due to town size, although it did decline over the decade, especially in towns with 701 to 2,000 residents. Overall, the extent of social ties declined since 1994 in Iowa's towns with fewer than 2,000 residents. In 2004, residents in these three groups of towns reported knowing fewer other residents by name and having fewer local friends or relatives when compared to 1994. Interestingly, the extent of social ties did not change significantly for the largest communities. However, there were differences across town sizes. Fewer residents in the largest communities said they know half or more other residents by name when compared to the other town size groups. But, more residents in the larger towns reported having local friends and relatives.

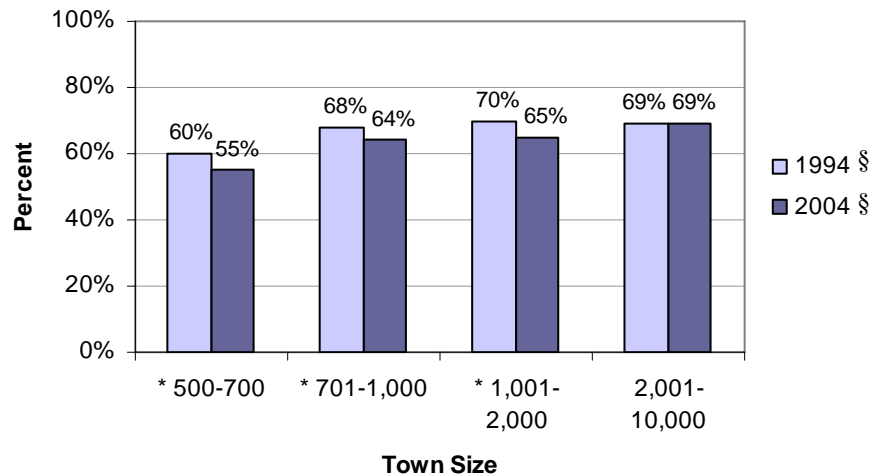
In 2004, the vast majority of residents in all town size groups said they trusted their neighbors and workers in local stores. However, compared to other town size groups, residents in the largest communities reported less trust in local public officials.

# COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT AND TOWN SIZE

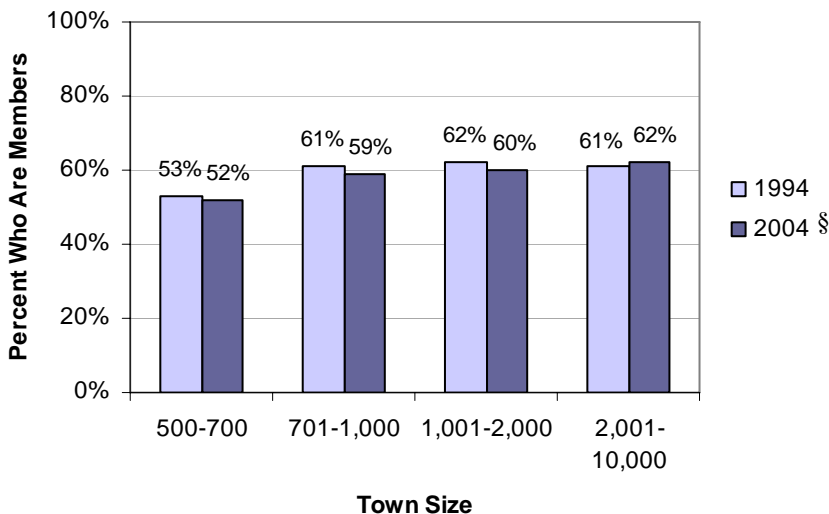
Community involvement is an important feature of small towns. Many local accomplishments depend on local citizen's willingness to volunteer their time on behalf of community goals. Citizens can get involved in their communities in formal ways, through local organizations and planned projects, and in informal ways, such as donating money to a fundraiser or participating in a spring clean-up. The trend in current times is for citizens to be less involved in their communities. This decline in "civiness" makes it more difficult for local communities to accomplish goals. The following six pages present the patterns of community involvement among residents of Iowa's small towns of different sizes.

Local organizations play a key role in bringing people together to facilitate activities of various types. These organizations sponsor fund-drives or lead the planning and implementation of events. The ability of local organizations to facilitate local action depends, to some degree, upon the willingness of the local citizenry to join organizations and actively participate in them. Figure 38 shows the percentage of residents who reported belonging to at least one organization in 1994 and 2004. In both years, fewer residents belonged to organizations in the smallest towns compared to the other groups of towns, where roughly two-thirds of residents reported belonging to a local group. Additionally, the percentage of residents who said they belong to local organizations declined from 1994 to 2004 in all but the largest towns.

**Figure 38: Membership in Local Organizations**



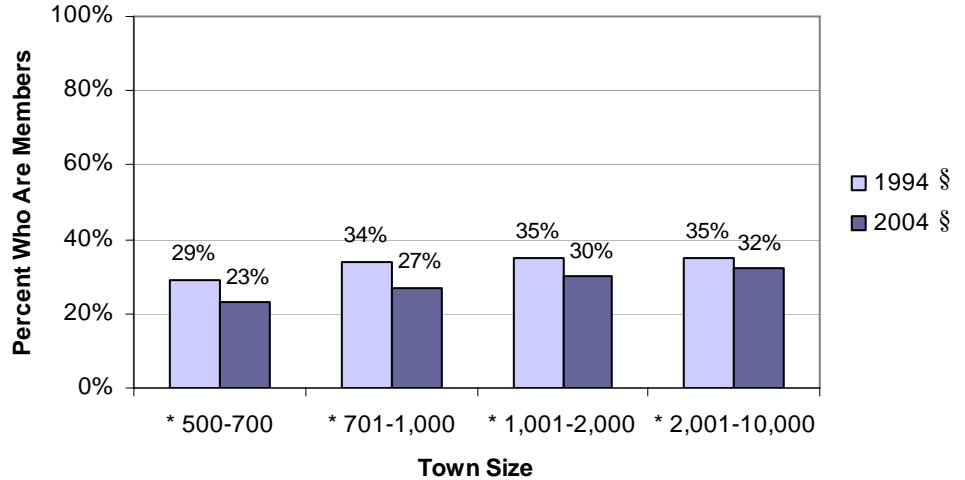
**Figure 39: Membership in Church-Related Organizations**



There are a variety of types of organizations present in many communities, ranging from church-related groups to those with a political or civic focus. Figures 39 through 43 show how membership in these types of groups varied by town size in 1994 and 2004. Membership in church-related organizations remained stable over the decade (see Figure 39). And, there were no significant differences in membership between town size groups in 1994. However, in 2004, membership in church related groups was significantly lower in the smallest towns than in the largest towns.

**Figure 40: Membership in Recreational Groups**

Membership in recreational groups declined over the decade in all town size groups (see Figure 40). Additionally, the percentage of residents who belonged to recreational groups was significantly lower in the smallest towns when compared to the two groups of towns with more than 1,000 residents in both 1994 and 2004.



**Figure 41: Membership in Political and Civic Groups**

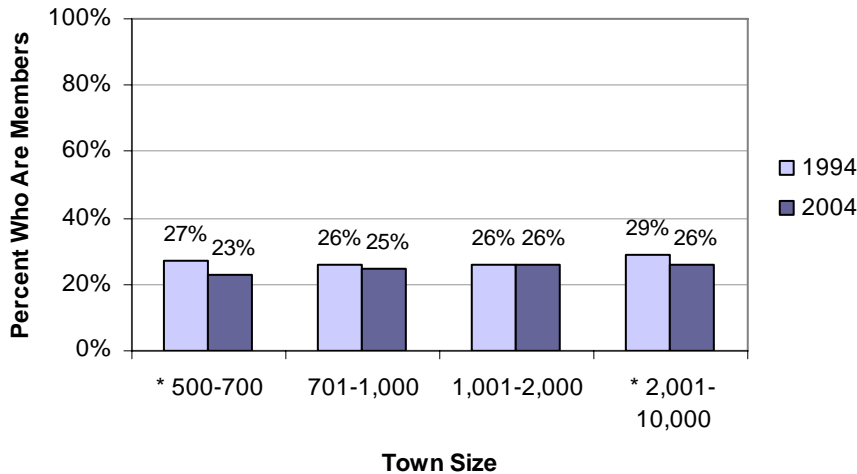
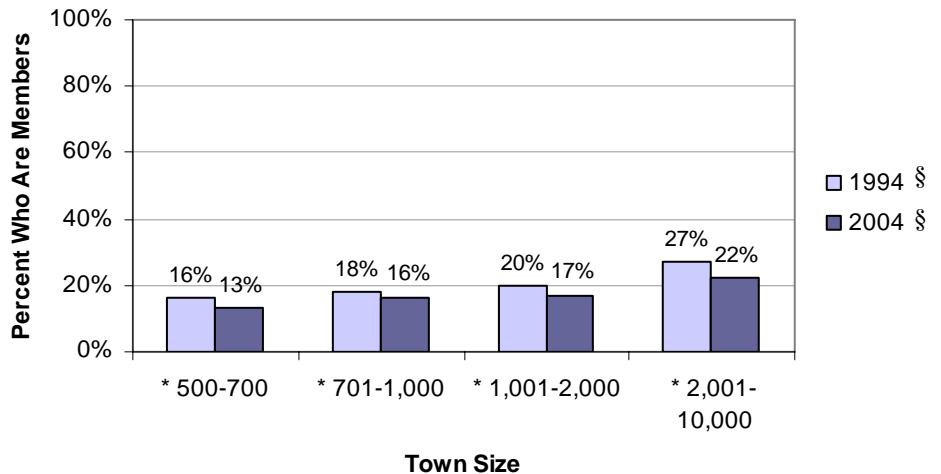


Figure 41 shows the percentage of residents who reported belonging to political and civic groups in 1994 and 2004. There are no significant differences in membership between town size groups—roughly one-fourth of residents reported belonging to political and civic groups in both years across all town sizes. However, there was a decline in membership for the smallest and largest communities over the ten year period.

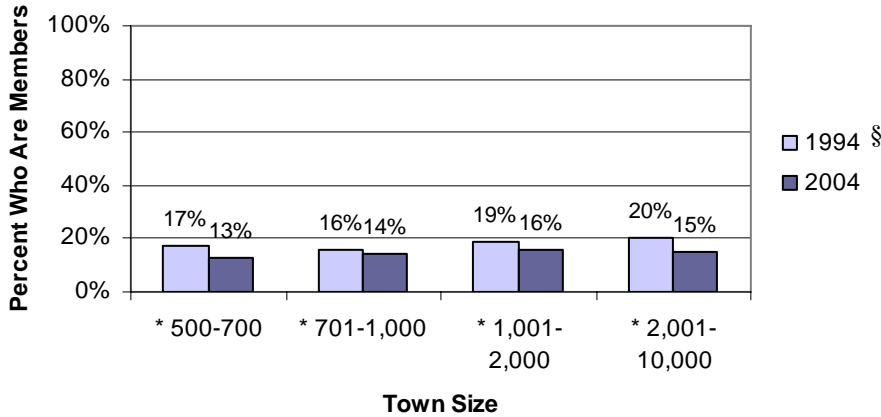
**Figure 42: Membership in Job Related Organizations**

Membership in job-related organizations has declined over the period from 1994 to 2004 for all town size groups (see Figure 42). Additionally, in both years, more residents in the largest communities belonged to job-related organizations than did in the towns under 2,000 in population.





**Figure 43: Membership in Service and Fraternal Organizations**

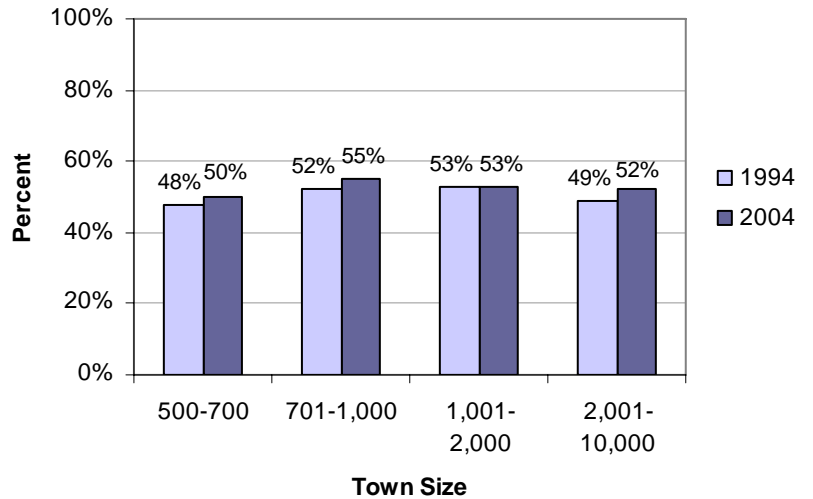


As with job-related organizations and political and civic groups, membership in service and fraternal organizations declined over the decade in all town size groups (see Figure 43). In 2004, there were no significant differences between town size groups, while in 1994, more residents reported belonging to service and fraternal organizations in the largest communities when compared to the 701 to 1,000 town size group.

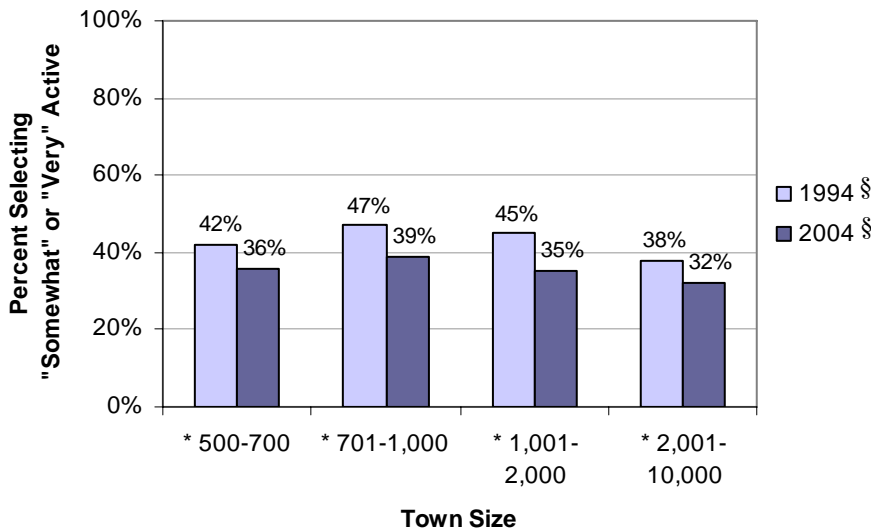
## PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITY PROJECTS

While membership in local organizations is an important feature of small towns, of utmost importance is the extent to which the local citizenry is actively involved in the community, particularly to the extent of being willing to participate in the completion of local projects. Figure 44 shows the percentage of residents in each town size group who reported participating in a community improvement project in 1994 and 2004. No significant changes in participation in a local project occurred over the decade for any town size group, nor were there any differences in participation between town size groups.

**Figure 44: Project Participation**



**Figure 45: Level of "Activeness"**

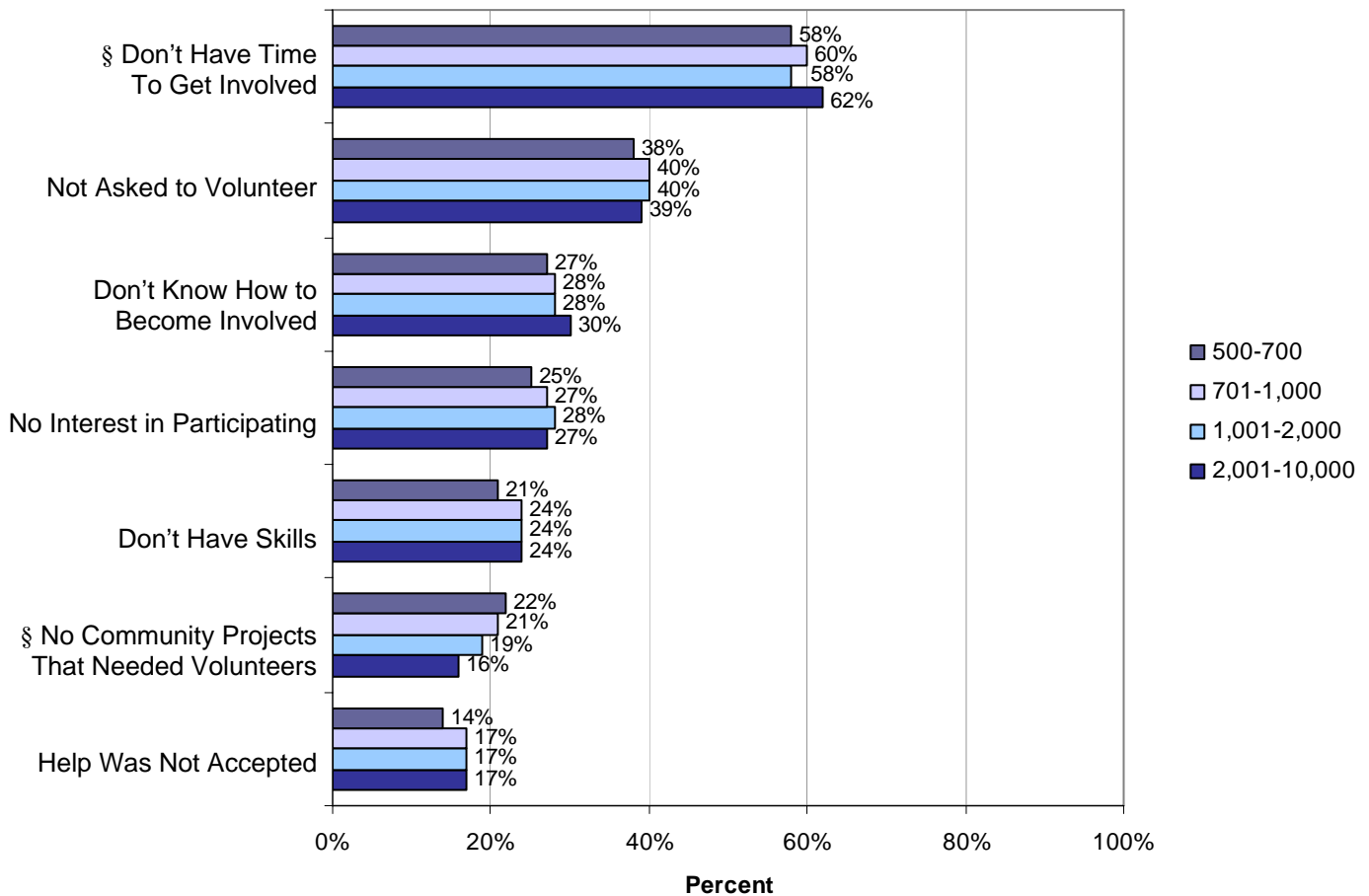


The percentage of residents who described themselves as "somewhat" or "very" active in community activities and events is shown in Figure 45. In 1994, residents in the middle two groups of towns reported more "activeness" than those in the largest towns, while in 2004, only the 701 to 1,000 and the 2,001 to 10,000 town size groups differed significantly. The percentage of residents who describe themselves as active in the community declined over the ten-year period for all town size groups.

## LIMITATIONS TO COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Because community involvement is so important to the success or failure of many local projects, we wanted to know more about the reasons people do not get involved. Therefore, residents in 2004 were asked to tell us whether or not a variety of factors served to limit their involvement in community improvement projects. Figure 46 shows the reasons residents in the different town size groups reported not volunteering in their communities.

Figure 46: Reasons for Lack of Involvement in Community Projects (2004 Only)

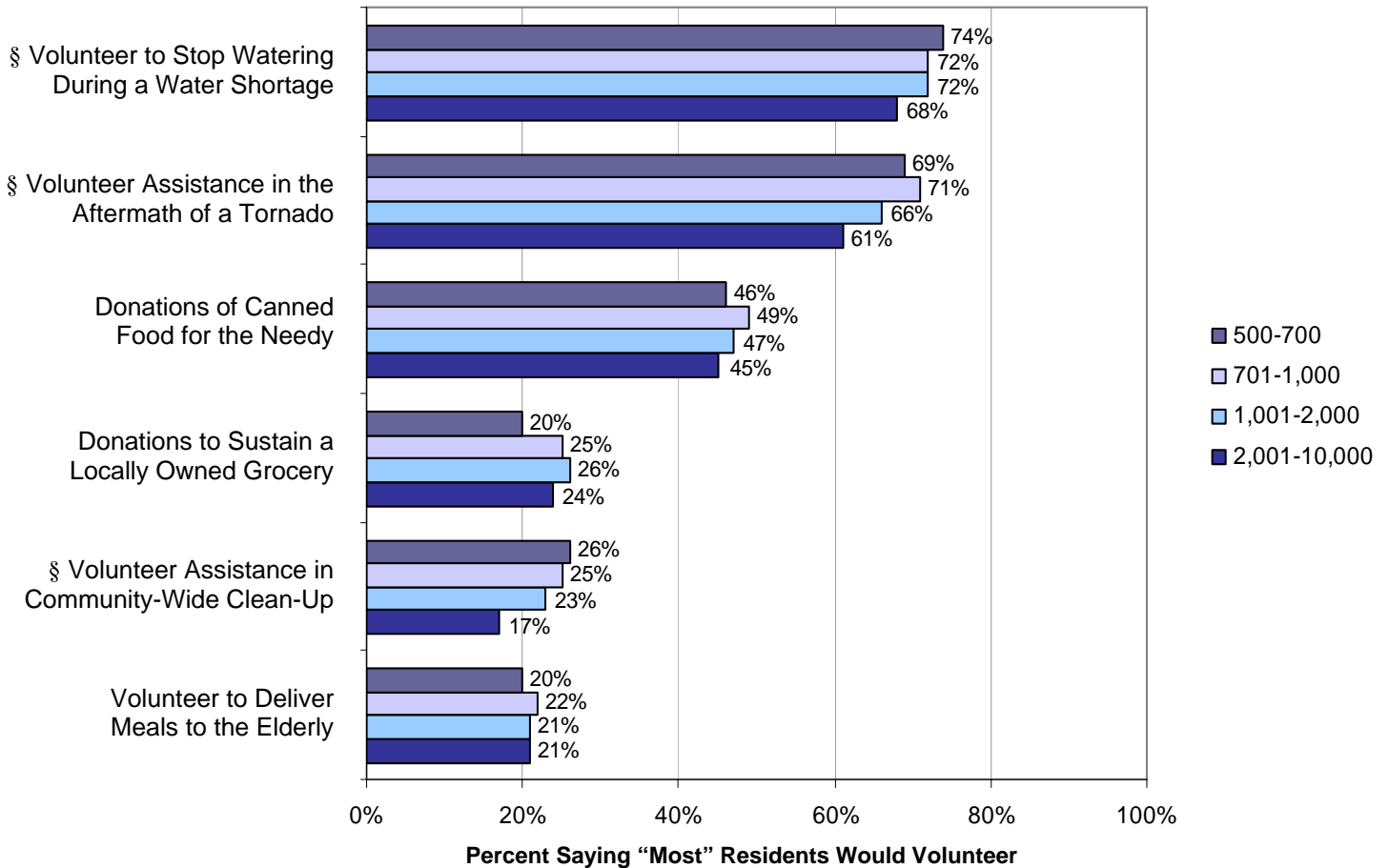


Not surprisingly, a majority of residents in all town size groups reported that a lack of time limits their involvement in community improvement projects, although this percentage is highest in the largest communities. About four in ten residents in all groups said they had not been asked to volunteer. Just over one fourth of residents in the towns under 2,000 in population indicated that they did not know how to become involved, compared with 30 percent in the largest communities. Lack of interest in participating was mentioned by about one quarter of residents in all town size groups as a factor that limits their involvement. Twenty-one percent of residents in the smallest towns and 24 percent in the other town size groups felt that they lacked the skills necessary to participate in local projects. Twenty-two percent of residents in the smallest towns reported that there were no projects that needed volunteers in their communities, which is significantly higher than the 16 percent occurring in the largest communities. Finally, 14 percent of residents in the smallest towns and 17 percent in the other town size groups said that they tried to help out with a local project, but their help was not accepted.

## INFORMAL COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Community involvement is not limited to participation in formal organizations or projects. A citizen can be civic by doing a wide variety of activities that help out the local community. Figure 47 shows the percentage of residents in the different town size groups who believe that “most” other residents in their communities would volunteer their assistance in a variety of situations.

**Figure 47: Helping Behaviors Among Town Residents (2004 Only)**



A majority of residents in all town size groups believed that most other people in town would volunteer to stop watering their lawns during a water shortage or provide assistance during the aftermath of a tornado, although these percentages were lowest in the largest towns. In all town size groups, slightly fewer than half felt that fellow residents would provide donations of canned food for the needy in their towns. Approximately one fourth of residents in the 701 to 10,000 town size groups reported that most other citizens would donate money to sustain a locally owned grocery store, while 20 percent expressed that belief in the smallest towns. Seventeen percent of residents in the largest towns felt that most local citizens would volunteer their assistance in community-wide clean-up efforts, which was significantly less than the one fourth of residents in the towns under 2,000 in population who felt this way. As for volunteering to deliver meals to the elderly, about one in five residents in all town size groups reported that most other local citizens would help out in this way.

## **SUMMARY: COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT**

Overall, community involvement in Iowa's small towns has declined over the period from 1994 to 2004. But there are variations in community involvement across the town size groups. The percentage of residents who reported belonging to at least one local organization was lowest in the smallest towns and declined between 1994 and 2004 for all but the largest towns. Membership in most types of organizations also declined, and was lower in the smallest communities for church-related groups in 2004, for recreational groups and job-related organizations in both years, and for service and fraternal organizations in 1994.

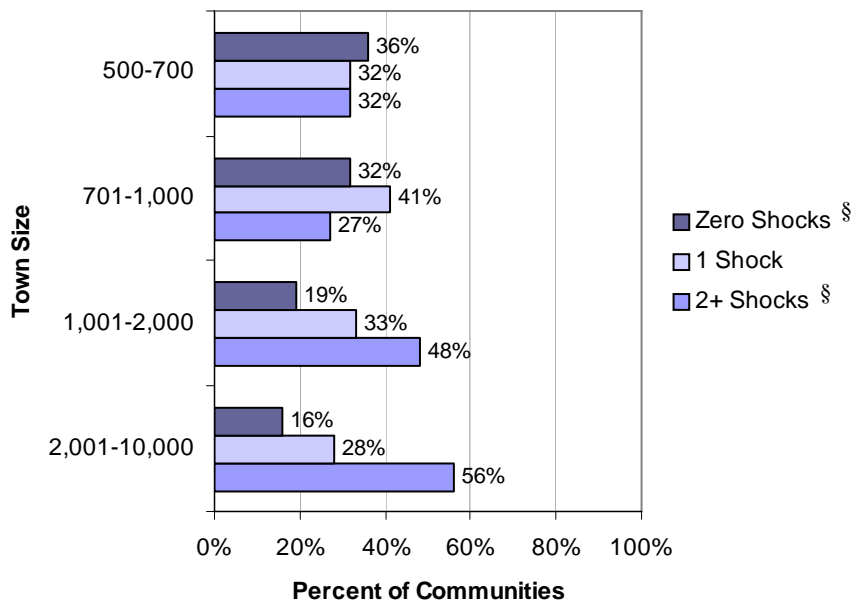
The percentage of residents who reported participating in a local community project did not change significantly for any town size group between 1994 and 2004, nor were there any significant differences between town sizes. Residents in all town size groups described themselves as less active in their communities in 2004 when compared to 1994, but those in the 701 to 1,000 group reported a greater level of "activeness" than those in the largest communities. Factors that limited residents' community involvement in 2004 did not vary a great deal by town size, although residents in the largest towns were more likely to cite lack of time, but less likely to say there were no local projects that required volunteers. Finally, when compared to other towns, fewer residents in the largest communities felt that other local citizens would stop watering during a water shortage, help out in the aftermath of a tornado, or assist in a community-wide clean up.

## TOWN SIZE AND ECONOMIC SHOCKS

The state of the local economy has a significant impact on all aspects of community life. A community with a thriving economic sector will have a greater ability to provide residents with services and amenities than one experiencing economic downturns. But, what happens when a town is faced with a sudden challenge to its economy? We sought to answer this question by studying towns that have experienced “economic shocks,” which are defined as relatively sudden events that have an impact on a community’s economy.

To identify the significant economic events, we contacted five to eight community leaders in each of the 99 towns and asked them to list all the events occurring from 1990 through 2003 that had a significant impact on the local economy. They were also asked to rate the impact of the event on a one-to-five scale, to tell us whether the event was positive or negative for the community, and whether it was locally planned or externally generated. Those events mentioned by at least two persons and having a minimum average rating of 2.0 on the one-to-five scale of significance are designated as economic shocks. In this report, we are showing our results about the differences in types and qualities of economic shocks experienced by Iowa’s towns of different sizes.

**Figure 48: Number of Shocks by Town Size**



Of the 152 economic shocks identified by respondents, 21 percent occurred in the smallest towns, 19 percent in the town with 701 to 1,000 residents, and 30 percent in each of the groups of larger communities.

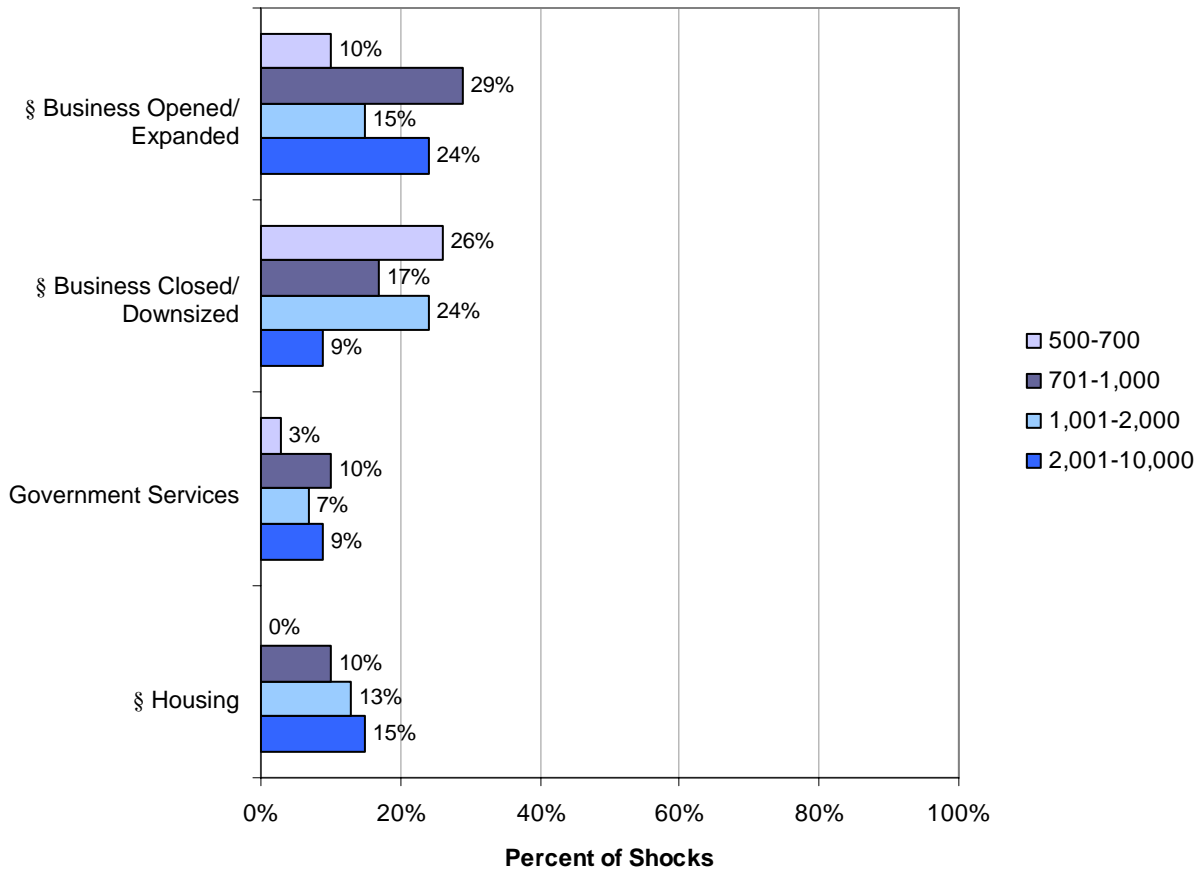
Additionally, some communities experienced multiple shocks while others did not have any. Figure 48 shows the number of shocks occurring in each of the town size groups. Differences

by town size are evident—larger communities are more likely to experience multiple shocks than are smaller communities. Additionally, more of the smaller towns reported no shocks when compared to the larger towns.

## TYPES OF ECONOMIC SHOCKS BY TOWN SIZE

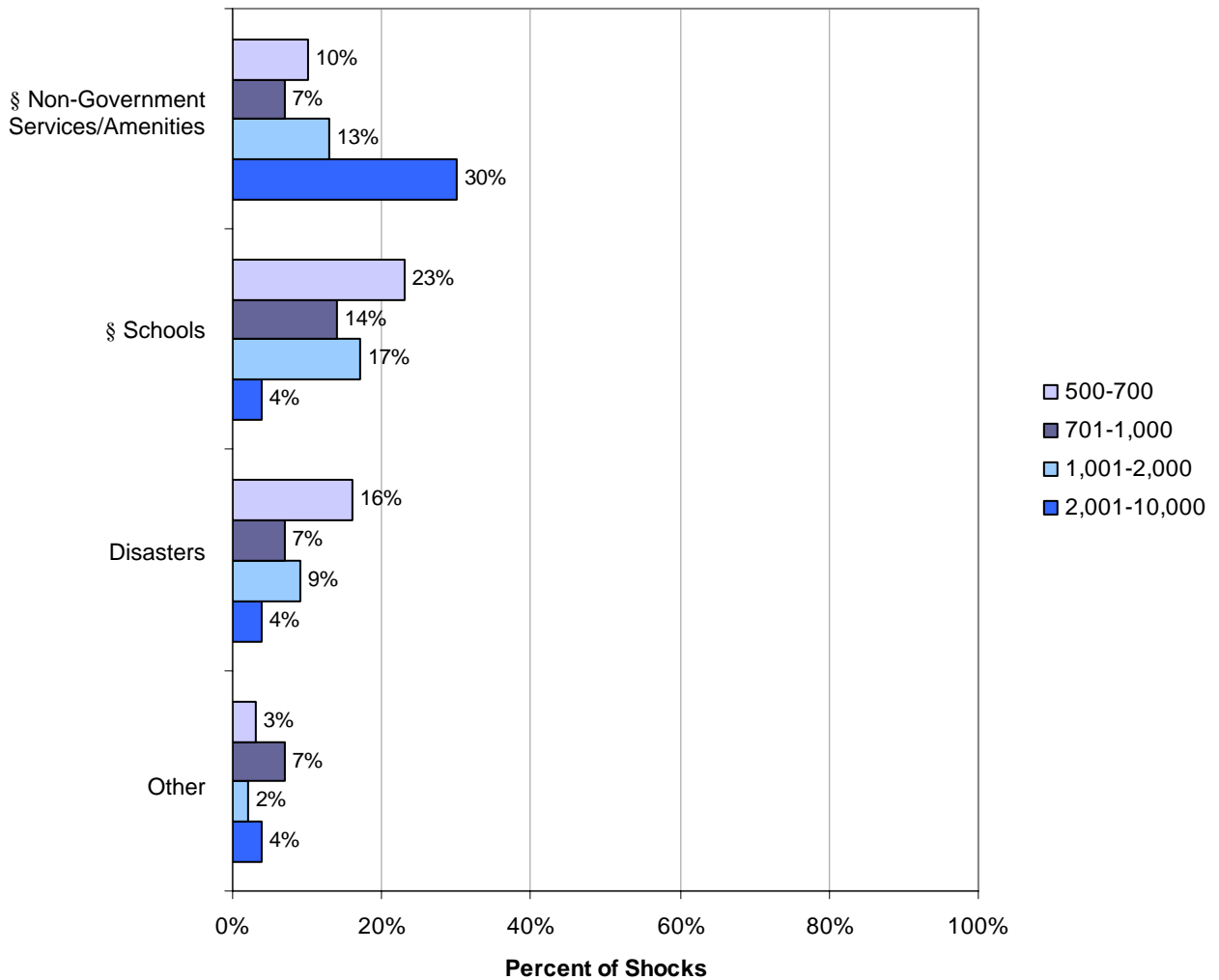
We grouped the shocks into seven categories and examined whether towns of different sizes are more or less likely to experience shocks of particular types. Categories included changes to local businesses (such as business openings/expansions or closures/downsizing), changes to government services (such as improvements to local infrastructure), housing development, changes to non-government services and local amenities, school related changes (openings, closures, or consolidations), and natural disasters.

**Figure 49: Types of Shocks**



Figures 49 and 50 show the types of shocks that occurred in each of the four town size groups. Shocks related to businesses opening or expanding happened most often in the largest communities and the 701 to 1,000 town size group, while businesses closing or downsizing occurred more frequently in the smallest towns or those with 1,001 to 2,000 residents. Shocks related to government services happened least often in the smallest towns, which also had no shocks related to housing.

**Figure 50: Types of Shocks (cont.)**



Changes to non-government services and amenities comprised about one-third of the shocks in the largest communities, while roughly one in ten occurred in the other town size groups. Conversely, smaller communities were more likely to experience shocks related to schools than were larger towns. Shocks resulting from natural disasters also occurred more often in the smallest towns.

# ORIGIN AND IMPACT OF ECONOMIC SHOCKS BY TOWN SIZE

Figure 51: Shocks of Internal or External Origin

Economic shocks can originate from within the community, such as efforts to attract businesses or plans for a new park, or from forces outside the community, such as with a natural disaster or unfunded state mandate. Figure 51 shows the percentage of shocks that were internal or external in origin by town size. Over half of the shocks in all town size groups originate from within the community.

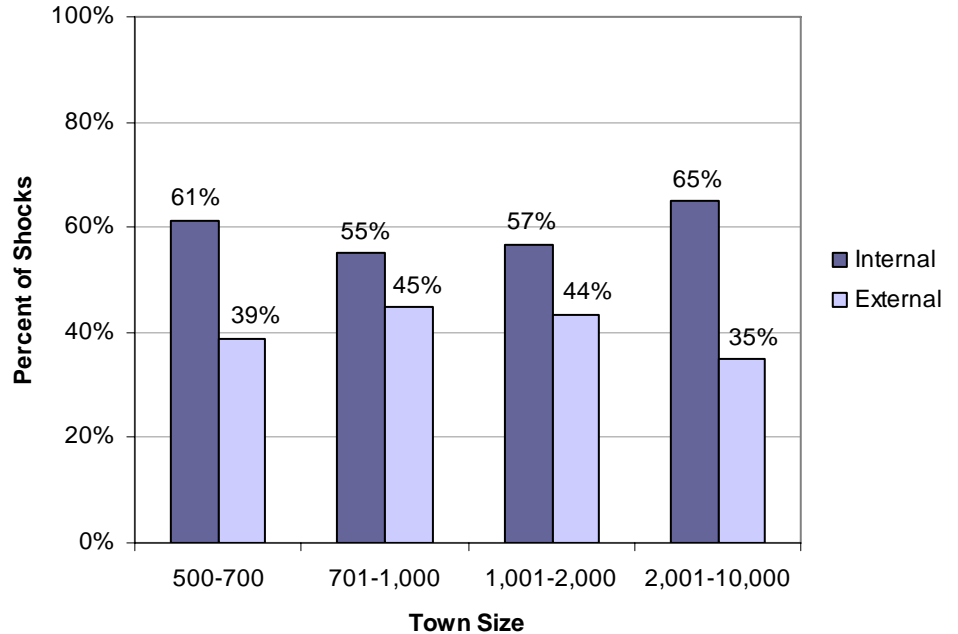
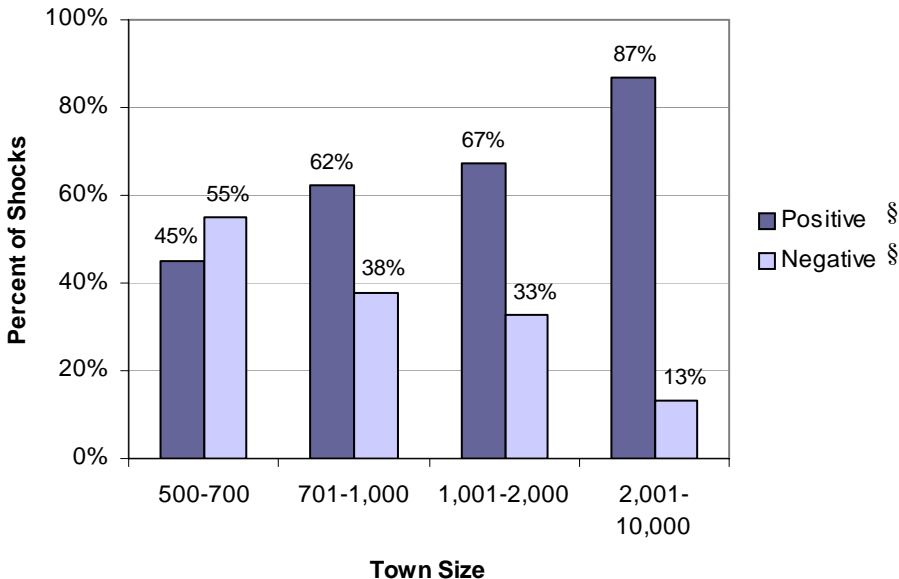


Figure 52: Positive or Negative Shocks



Economic shocks can also have positive or negative impacts on a town's economy. The percentage of shocks deemed positive or negative by respondents as related to town size are shown in Figure 52. There is a dramatic difference between town sizes. The vast majority of shocks in the largest towns had a positive effect on the local economy, while over half of the shocks in the smallest towns had a negative effect.



## NET SHOCK SIGNIFICANCE

How do economic shocks affect small towns, and do they affect smaller towns differently than larger towns? Experiencing several small shocks within a span of 13 years may have as much impact on the local economy and community quality of life as experiencing one major one. Additionally, communities may experience shocks with both positive and negative impacts. To take the “summative” impact of multiple shocks into account, we created an indicator of “shock significance” by adding together the significance scores assigned to all the shocks experienced by each town. Significance scores for negative shocks were given a negative sign so that for towns experiencing both positive or negative shocks, we could roughly estimate the net effect of both positive and negative shocks. The shock significance scores for individual communities ranged from  $-7.2$  to  $16.9$ . Because the significance of individual shocks was scored from 1 to 5, a score of  $-7.2$  indicates a town with at least two negative shocks during the study period. A shock significance score of  $16.9$  indicates that more than three positive shocks occurred in that town from 1990 to 2003.

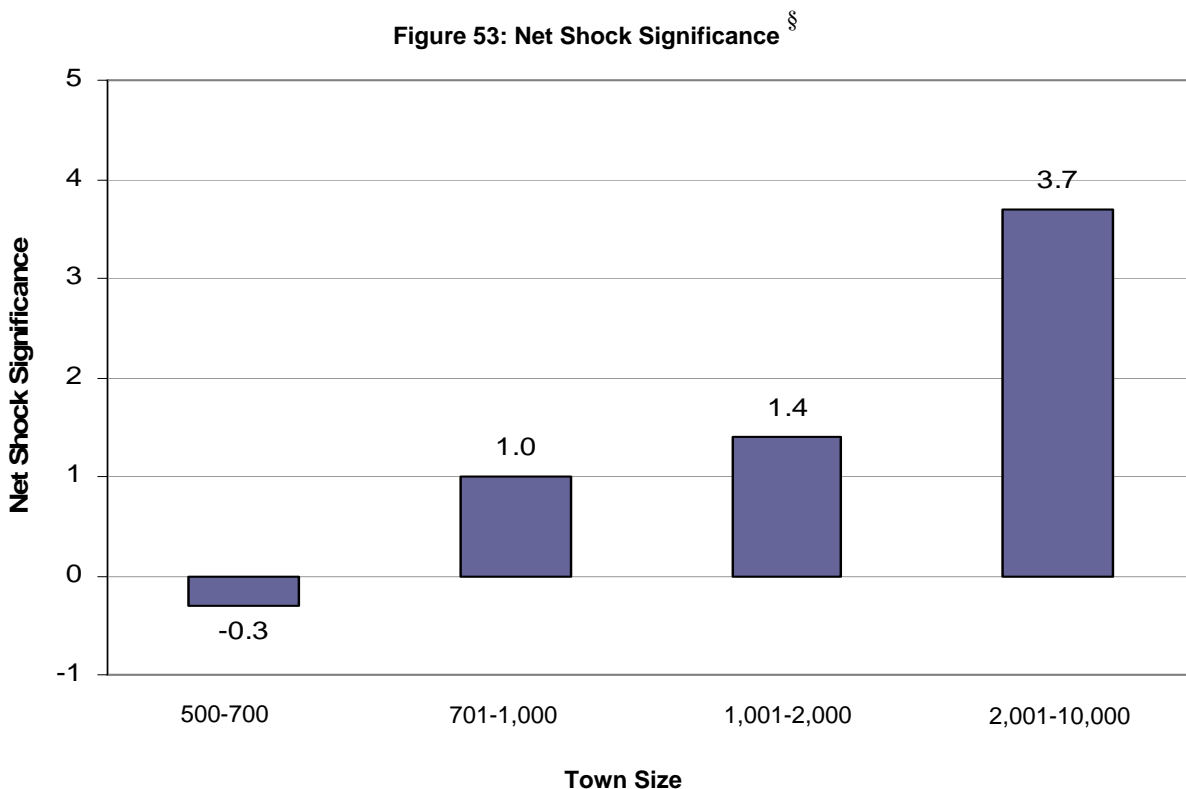


Figure 53 shows the average net shock significance scores for the four town size groups. The largest communities had, on average, a much greater net positive shock significance than the other town size groups. Net shock significance was positive for the two groups of communities between 701 and 2,000 in population. However, for the 500 to 700 town size group, the net shock significance was negative, indicating that the combined effect of all shocks was generally negative for Iowa’s smallest communities.

## **SUMMARY: TOWN SIZE AND ECONOMIC SHOCKS**

While communities of all sizes experienced shocks, a greater number of economic shocks occurred in the larger communities, and larger communities were more likely to experience multiple shocks. The smallest towns were more likely than others not to experience an economic shock. There were also variations by town size in the types of shocks in the towns. Changes to local businesses comprised roughly 40 percent of the shocks in the towns under 2,000 in population, but only one-third of the shocks in the largest communities. More business closures or downsizings were reported in the smallest communities and in the 1,001 to 2,000 town size group, while business openings or expansions occurred more frequently in the other two groups of towns. No shocks related to housing development occurred in the smallest towns, while between ten and fifteen percent of shocks in the other town size groups were related to housing. The largest towns were more likely than the others to have economic shocks related to non-government services and amenities, such as medical centers opening or closing or the development of a golf course. These towns were less likely, however, to experience changes to their local schools.

In all town size groups, most economic shocks originated from within the community. However, a larger percentage of shocks were internal in origin in the largest and smallest communities. There was a dramatic difference in whether a shock was deemed positive or negative between town size groups. Economic shocks in the larger communities were far more likely to have a positive effect on the local economy, while a majority shocks in the smaller towns had a negative effect according to respondents. This pattern held even when communities experienced multiple shocks.

## APPENDIX

500 to 700 Population				
Community	County	1990 Population	2000 Population	% Population Gain/Loss
Agency	Wapello	616	622	0.97%
Ainsworth	Washington	506	524	3.56%
Albion	Marshall	585	592	1.20%
Allerton	Wayne	599	559	-6.68%
Batavia	Jefferson	520	500	-3.85%
Bayard	Guthrie	511	536	4.89%
Dumont	Butler	705	676	-4.11%
Elgin	Fayette	637	676	6.12%
Elk Horn	Shelby	672	649	-3.42%
Elma	Howard	653	598	-8.42%
Everly	Clay	706	647	-8.36%
Fontanelle	Adair	712	692	-2.81%
Grand Mound	Clinton	619	676	9.21%
Hills	Johnson	662	679	2.57%
Hopkinton	Delaware	695	681	-2.01%
Hospers	Sioux	643	672	4.51%
Moulton	Appanoose	613	658	7.34%
Pacific Junction	Mills	548	507	-7.48%
Quasqueton	Buchanan	579	574	-0.86%
Radcliffe	Hardin	574	607	5.75%
Sabula	Jackson	710	670	-5.63%
Saint Charles	Madison	537	619	15.27%
University Park	Mahaska	598	536	-10.37%
Ventura	Cerro Gordo	590	670	13.56%
What Cheer	Keokuk	762	678	-11.02%
<b>Average Population:</b>		622.08	619.92	

**701 to 1,000 Population**

<b>Community</b>	<b>County</b>	<b>1990 Population</b>	<b>2000 Population</b>	<b>% Population Gain/Loss</b>
Afton	Union	953	917	-3.78%
Albert City	Buena Vista	779	709	-8.99%
Atkins	Benton	637	977	53.38%
Bancroft	Kossuth	857	808	-5.72%
Battle Creek	Ida	818	743	-9.17%
Buffalo Center	Winnebago	1081	963	-10.92%
Colo	Story	771	868	12.58%
Correctionville	Woodbury	897	851	-5.13%
Donnellson	Lee	940	963	2.45%
Farmington	Van Buren	655	756	15.42%
Fruitland	Muscatine	511	703	37.57%
Garnavillo	Clayton	727	754	3.71%
Gilbertville	Black Hawk	748	767	2.54%
Graettinger	Palo Alto	813	900	10.70%
Hartford	Warren	768	759	-1.17%
Kanawha	Hancock	763	739	-3.15%
Murray	Clarke	731	766	4.79%
Neola	Pottawattamie	909	845	-7.04%
Olin	Jones	663	716	7.99%
Pomeroy	Calhoun	762	710	-6.82%
Sheffield	Franklin	1174	930	-20.78%
Wellsburg	Grundy	682	716	4.99%
<b>Average Population:</b>		801.77	811.82	

1,001 to 2,000 Population				
Community	County	1990 Population	2000 Population	% Population Gain/Loss
Anita	Cass	1068	1049	-1.78%
Bedford	Taylor	1528	1620	6.02%
Calmar	Winneshiek	1026	1058	3.12%
Clarence	Cedar	936	1008	7.69%
Columbus Junction	Louisa	1616	1900	17.57%
Corning	Adams	1806	1783	-1.27%
Epworth	Dubuque	1303	1428	9.59%
George	Lyon	1066	1051	-1.41%
Glidden	Carroll	1099	1253	14.01%
Gowrie	Webster	1028	1038	0.97%
Hamburg	Fremont	1248	1240	-0.64%
Hartley	O'Brien	1632	1733	6.19%
Lake Park	Dickinson	996	1023	2.71%
Mapleton	Monona	1294	1416	9.43%
Mediapolis	Des Moines	1637	1644	0.43%
Monroe	Jasper	1739	1808	3.97%
Montezuma	Poweshiek	1651	1440	-12.78%
Mount Ayr	Ringgold	1796	1822	1.45%
Nashua	Chicasaw	1476	1618	9.62%
Nora Springs	Floyd	1505	1532	1.79%
Pleasantville	Marion	1536	1539	0.20%
Pocahontas	Pocahontas	2085	1970	-5.52%
Saint Ansgar	Mitchell	1063	1031	-3.01%
Traer	Tama	1552	1594	2.71%
Villisca	Montgomery	1332	1344	0.90%
Winfield	Henry	1051	1131	7.61%
Woodward	Dallas	1197	1200	0.25%
<b>Average Population:</b>		1380.22	1417.52	

<b>2,001 to 10,000 Population</b>				
<b>Community</b>	<b>County</b>	<b>1990 Population</b>	<b>2000 Population</b>	<b>% Population Gain/Loss</b>
Albia	Monroe	3870	3706	-4.24%
Altoona	Polk	7242	10345	42.85%
Audubon	Audubon	2524	2382	-5.63%
Bloomfield	Davis	2580	2601	0.81%
Center Point	Linn	1693	2007	18.55%
Chariton	Lucas	4616	4573	-0.93%
Cherokee	Cherokee	6026	5369	-10.90%
Clarinda	Page	5104	5690	11.48%
Denison	Crawford	6604	7339	11.13%
Eagle Grove	Wright	3671	3712	1.12%
Estherville	Emmet	6720	6656	-0.95%
Humboldt	Humboldt	4438	4452	0.32%
Jefferson	Greene	4292	4626	7.78%
Lamoni	Decatur	2319	2444	5.39%
LeClaire	Scott	2734	2847	4.13%
LeMars	Plymouth	8454	9237	9.26%
Madrid	Boone	2395	2264	-5.47%
Missouri Valley	Harrison	2888	2992	3.60%
Northwood	Worth	1940	2050	5.67%
Sac City	Sac	2516	2368	-5.88%
Sibley	Osceola	2815	2796	-0.67%
Waukon	Allamakee	4019	4131	2.79%
Waverly	Bremer	8539	8968	5.02%
Webster City	Hamilton	7894	8176	3.57%
Williamsburg	Iowa	2174	2622	20.61%
<b>Average Population:</b>		4322.68	4574.12	