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Illinois Voters Wary of Fracking

Almost half of Illinois voters – 48.6 percent - tend to oppose hydraulic fracturing, or “fracking,” because of concerns about the environment, according to a new poll conducted by the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

By contrast, 31.8 percent believe that fracking should be encouraged for its economic benefits, and 20 percent are not sure about the issue.

Fracking is a process that utilizes high-pressure injection of water, sand, and chemicals to extract oil and natural gas from underground shale formations.

The poll, taken Feb. 28 thru Mar. 10, has a margin of error of 3 percentage points.

Opposition is stronger in the Chicago area than it is downstate. There are 53.5 percent of Chicago and 51 percent of Chicago suburban voters who believe the practice should not be encouraged, while only 29 percent believe it should be encouraged for economic purposes. Downstate, 41.3 percent say fracking should be discouraged and 38.3 percent say it should be encouraged.

John Jackson, visiting professor at the Institute said “It is interesting to note that the highest level of support for fracking is Downstate, where it is likely to take place and have whatever economic benefit and environmental damage it may hold. “Those in Chicago and the suburbs, where it is not likely to have a direct impact are the most opposed,” he said.

Jackson added: “for all the national debate and publicity, a large percentage claim to not know much about fracking, and this is particularly surprising Downstate where it has been much debated.”

Voters’ opinions on fracking are split along party lines. Among Democrats, 19.7 percent believe that fracking should be encouraged, while 54.8 percent of Republicans want to encourage the practice. Similarly, a majority of Democrats (61.9 percent) and a minority of Republican (28.8 percent) voters believe that fracking should be discouraged due to environmental impacts.

Opinions on fracking are strongly influenced by whether or not a person believes the practice is safe. The majority (89.7 percent) of those that believe fracking is safe also believe that it should

be encouraged. Similarly, the majority (92.8 percent) of those that believe fracking is not safe say it should not be encouraged.

Young people are much less likely than other groups to encourage fracking.

- Almost three-fourths (73.8 percent) of respondents aged 18 to 25 believe fracking should not be encouraged due to environmental impacts. Only 11.9 percent of young adults believe the practice should be encouraged for economic reasons.

Location and political party affiliation appear to influence how much a person has heard about fracking.

- People in the city of Chicago have heard more about fracking than those downstate. Forty-two percent of those in Chicago have heard a lot about fracking compared to 29 percent of voters downstate.
- Republicans and independents have heard more about fracking than Democrats. Roughly 70 percent of both Republicans (69.5 percent) and independents (70.1 percent) have heard a lot or some about fracking. Only 55.8 percent of Democrats have heard the same.

Young people and Democrats are less likely than other groups to see fracking as a safe way to extract oil and natural gas.

- Young adults (aged 18-25) are nearly twice as likely as people of other ages to believe that fracking is either not very safe or not at all safe. Fifty-nine point five percent of young adults believe the practice is not very safe or not at all safe compared to 34 percent of voters of any other age.
- The percentage of Republicans who believe fracking is either safe or somewhat safe (61 percent) is over double the percentage of Democrats who believe the same (28.3 percent). A third (35.4 percent) of independents see the practice as safe.

These opinions are set within a larger national debate over hydraulic fracturing. Fracking regulations released by the Obama administration on March 20th have received push back from both parties, with those who support fracking claiming that regulations unnecessarily slow production, and environmentalists claiming the regulations are not strict enough.

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The Simon Institute Poll interviewed 1,000 registered voters across Illinois. It has a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level. This means that if we were to conduct the survey 100 times, in 95 of those instances the results would vary by no more than plus or minus 3 points from the results obtained here.

Live telephone interviews were conducted by Customer Research International of San Marcos, Texas. Cell phone interviews accounted for 30 percent of the sample. A Spanish language version of the questionnaire and a Spanish-speaking interviewer were made available. Fieldwork was conducted from February 28 – March 10. No auto-dial or “robo polling” is included. Customer Research International reports no Illinois political clients. The survey was

paid for with non-tax dollars from the Institute's endowment fund. Crosstabs for the referenced questions will be on the Institute's poll web page at www.simonpoll.org.

Simon Institute polling data are also archived by three academic institutions for use by scholars and the public. The three open source data repositories are: the University of Michigan's Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (OpenICPSR; <http://openicpsr.org/repoEntity/list>), the University of North Carolina's The Howard W. Odum Institute for Research in Social Science Dataverse Network (<http://arc.irss.unc.edu/dvn/dv/PSPPI>), and the Simon Institute Collection at OpenSIUC (<http://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/ppi/>).

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Views on fracking by geographic area, age, and political party

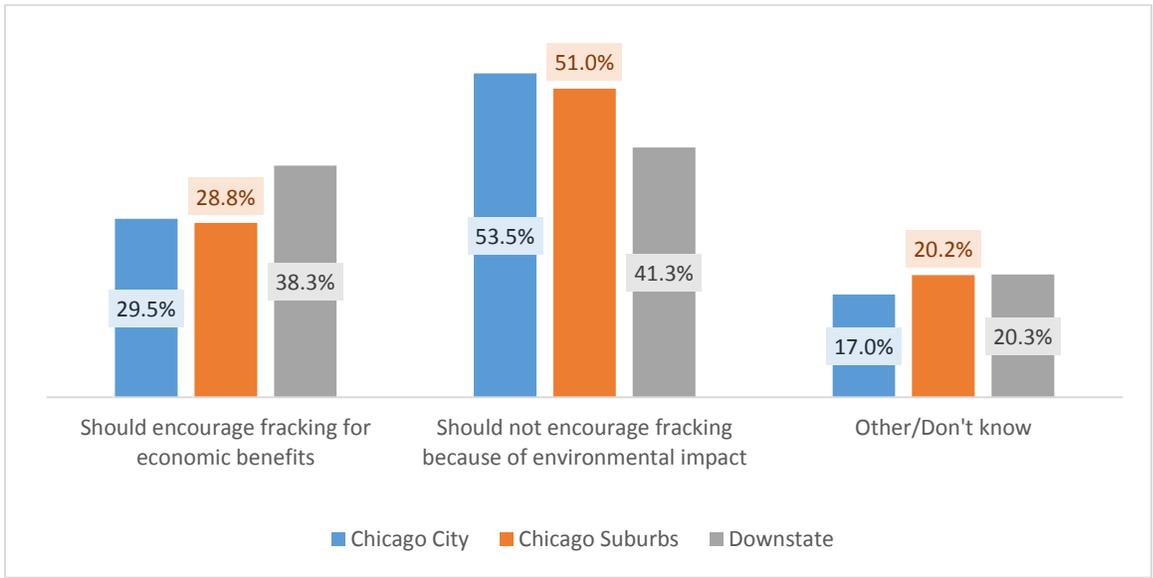


Figure 1. Views on fracking by geographic area.

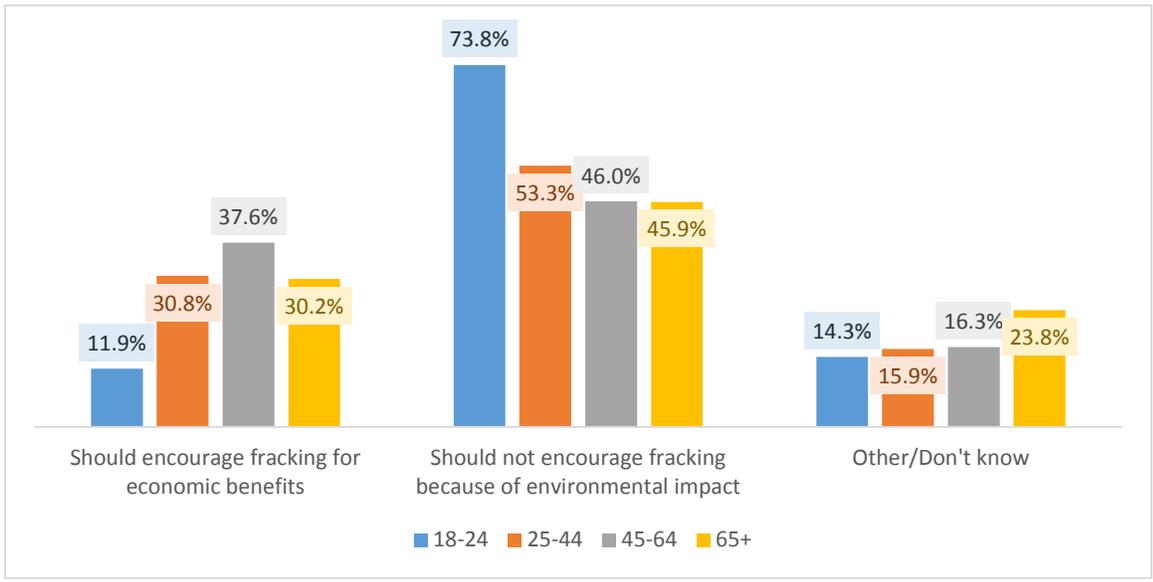


Figure 2. Views on fracking by age.

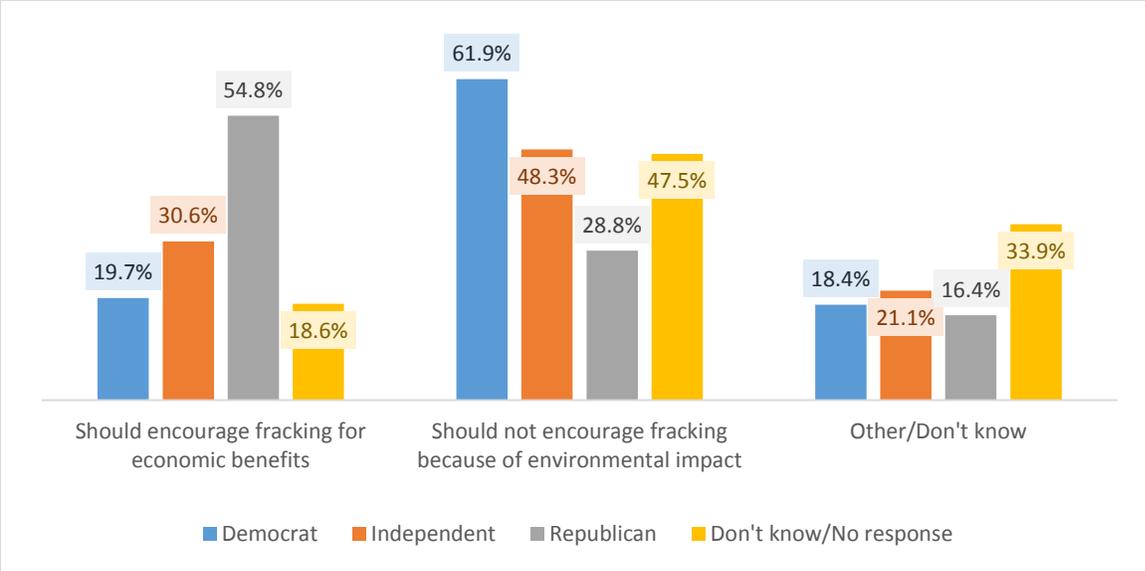


Figure 3. Views on fracking by political party affiliation.

Table 1. Knowledge of fracking

How much have you heard or read about hydraulic fracturing, or “fracking,” a process that uses the high-pressure injection of water, sand, and chemicals to remove natural gas from rocks deep in the earth’s surface?

Response	Percent (n=1000)
A lot	33.2%
Some	27.9%
Not much	14.3%
Nothing so far	21.3%
Other/don’t know	3.3%

Table 2. Perception about the safety of fracking

As far as you know, do you think hydraulic fracturing or “fracking” is a very safe method to extract natural gas from the ground, somewhat safe, not very safe, or not at all safe?

Response	Percent (n=1000)
Very safe	7.8%
Somewhat safe	31.3%
Not very safe	14.8%
Not at all safe	20.9%
Other/don’t know	25.2%

Table 3. Opinion on whether fracking should be encouraged or not

Some people say the state should encourage hydraulic fracturing because of the economic benefits, while others say the state should not encourage hydraulic fracturing because of potential environmental impact. Which comes closer to your view?

Response	Percent (n=1000)
Should encourage for economic benefits	31.8%
Should not encourage because of environmental impact	48.6%
Other/don’t know	19.6%