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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
October 29, 2013

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### **Southern Illinois Voters Divide Over Fracking**

A new poll by the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute at Southern Illinois University finds voters are evenly divided over whether hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, should be encouraged for its economic benefits or discouraged because of its environmental impact.

There were 40.7 percent who said it should be encouraged and 39.7 percent who said it should be discouraged. About 20 percent had no opinion on the question.

“We can still see the newness of the issue when there are one in five people without an opinion. It’s hard to understand the consequences, good and bad, of fracking when many of us haven’t seen it first hand,” said Kent Dolezal, a Simon Institute research fellow who worked on the poll.

“Opinions on this issue will certainly evolve as the industry develops in the area. In these types of issues the extreme opinions, both for and against, garner most of the press. It may be hard for people to see their entry point in the discussion when it seems like there is no middle ground,” he said.

The survey of 403 registered voters in the 18 southernmost Illinois counties – excluding the Metro East suburbs - was taken Sept. 20 – October 2. It has a margin of error of 4.9 percent. It is the fourth Southern Illinois Poll© the Simon Institute has conducted since 2010.

The survey also found a plurality of respondents feel hydraulic fracturing is a somewhat safe natural gas and oil extraction technique. Nearly one third of respondents saw hydraulic fracturing as not very safe or not at all safe, while one in 10 felt the technique is very safe.

“Much of the conversation around hydraulic fracturing has been about its safety to this point, and the numbers reflect that. Less than 10 percent of respondents didn’t know enough about the issue to comment on safety.” Dolezal said.

Hydraulic fracturing utilizes the high-pressure injection of water, sand, and chemicals into rock formations deep underground.

Voters are divided on the fracking issue along gender and ideological lines.

- There is a gender divide when it comes to whether hydraulic fracturing should be promoted for its perceived economic benefits or discouraged because of the possibility of environmental damage. Men favor its promotion at a rate of 54.3 percent, while only 31.5 percent of women feel likewise. Four in 10 women feel the technique possess too great of a risk environmentally with one third of men taking a similar view. A full quarter of women surveyed felt they didn't know enough about hydraulic fracturing to form an opinion on its promotion; the rate was one in 10 for men.
- A plurality of native southern Illinoisans (44.6 percent) favored promotion of hydraulic fracturing, while 35.2 percent were more worried about environmental concerns. Those born outside of the region saw the issue with almost the opposite numbers, with 47.3 percent opposing the practice and 33.8 percent in favor.
- On the ideological spectrum, little more than half of conservatives favored the promotion of hydraulic fracturing, while an almost identical number of liberals took the opposite view. Not quite half of moderates expressed environmental concerns with a bit more than one quarter favoring it.
- A partisan divide is also evident. Three in five Republicans favored the promotion of hydraulic fracturing, while less than a third of Democrats did. When asked about environmental concerns, more than half of the Democrats and nearly a quarter of Republicans took this view. Independents had the highest level of environmental worries; 55.6 percent of those surveyed said they had environmental concerns with the technique. Only a quarter of independents favored its promotion.

### **Exposure to the issue of fracking.**

The survey found most people in region had heard or read of the technique of hydraulic fracturing, with 32.3 percent saying they had read or heard "a lot" on the issue while 37.5 percent stated they had heard or read "some." Only one in 10 stated they had heard or read "nothing so far." Men were slightly more likely to have read or heard of the hydraulic fracturing issue than women.

Educational attainment was a significant factor in the issue. Nearly half of respondents who had completed college stating they had read or heard "a lot" on the issue, while only a quarter of those completing just high school said the same thing the same.

### **Perceptions of safety**

Men are more than twice as likely to see hydraulic fracturing as very safe compared to women, at 13.6 percent and 6.6 percent, respectively. A bit more than half of men see the technique as being "somewhat safe," while only three in 10 women feel likewise. Women are almost twice as likely to see hydraulic fracturing as "not at all safe" compared to men, at 14.9 and 8.0 percent respectively.

Ideology and political party affiliation do seem to affect one's view towards hydraulic fracturing with those describing themselves as conservative or claiming to be Republicans seeing the technique as safer than those describe as liberal or identifying as part of the Democratic Party. Two thirds of Republicans and three out of five conservatives view the extraction method as at least "somewhat safe." Conversely, two out of five liberals or Democratic voters find the technique to be not very or not at all safe.

Independents tend to be more skeptical than those claiming party affiliation. A quarter of the independents view hydraulic fracturing as not at all safe. Another quarter of independents feel they don't know enough about the technique to have an opinion on its safety, the highest of any group.

Safety perceptions of the technique are not significantly different between native southern Illinoisans and migrants to the area. There was no significant difference when it came to education level as well.

### **The coal industry and coal miners**

When it comes to the established resource extraction industry, southern Illinoisans have a favorable attitude toward the coal industry and the people who work in the mines. Over 90 percent of those surveyed had at least a favorable view of the industry and those who work in it. Native southern Illinoisans are nearly twice as likely to have a very favorable attitude toward the industry compared to those who have moved to the area. The gap closes somewhat between the groups when it comes to the actual miners with nearly a third of southern Illinois natives having a very favorable view of miners while one in five migrants to the area have a similar view.

Regardless of gender, ideological bent, party affiliation, education level, or whether one is native to the area, survey respondents showed that a strong majority sees the coal industry in a favorable light. Even where one may believe strong opposition could be found, only 20.9 percent of liberals surveyed viewed the coal industry as unfavorable. When it came to the miners themselves, liberals had similar favorability ratings to moderates and conservatives.

The poll of 403 registered voters covered the 18 southernmost counties in Illinois: Alexander, Franklin, Gallatin, Hamilton, Hardin, Jackson, Jefferson, Johnson, Massac, Perry, Pope, Pulaski, Randolph, Saline, Union, Washington, White, and Williamson.

Live phone interviews were conducted September 20 through October 2. The sample has a margin for error of 4.9 percent at the 95 percent confidence level. This means that if we conducted the survey 100 times, in 95 of those instances, the result would be within plus or minus 4.9 percentage points from the results obtained here. The sample included 30 percent cell phone interviews.

Telephone interviews were conducted by Customer Research International of San Marcos, Texas. It reports no Illinois political figures as clients. The poll was paid for with non-state dollars using proceeds from the Institute's endowment fund.

*Note: The “Simon Poll” and “Southern Illinois Poll” are copyrighted trademarks of the Board of Trustees of Southern Illinois University. Use of publication of these polls is encouraged, but only with credit to the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute at SIUC.*

## Appendix

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?

Figure 1 - Total

Response	Percentage
A lot	32.3%
Some	37.5%
Not much	18.4%
Nothing so far	9.9%
Other/Don’t know	2.0%

Figure 2 – Gender

Response	Male Percentage	Female Percentage
A lot	35.8%	29.9%
Some	42.0%	34.4%
Not much	16.0%	19.9%
Nothing so far	4.3%	13.7%
Other/Don’t know	1.9%	2.1%

Figure 3 – Education

Response	High School or Less	Some College	College+
A lot	27.5%	25.5%	48.5%
Some	35.3%	42.1%	34.0%
Not much	22.2%	18.6%	12.6%
Nothing so far	11.1%	12.4%	4.9%
Other/Don’t know	3.9%	1.4%	0.0%

Figure 4 – Native

Response	Born in SI	Born Elsewhere
A lot	33.2%	30.4%
Some	36.0%	39.9%
Not much	17.4%	20.3%
Nothing so far	10.7%	8.8%
Other/Don't know	2.8%	0.7%

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?

Figure 1 – Total

Response	Percentage
Very safe	9.4%
Somewhat safe	39.7%
Not very safe	16.4%
Not at all safe	12.2%
Other/don't know	22.3%

Figure 2 – Gender

Response	Male Percentage	Female Percentage
Very safe	13.9%	6.6%
Somewhat safe	52.5%	31.1%
Not very safe	14.2%	17.8%
Not at all safe	8.0%	14.9%
Other/don't know	11.7%	29.5%

Figure 3 – Education

Response	High School or Less	Some College	College+
Very safe	9.2%	9.0%	10.7%
Somewhat safe	38.6%	37.2%	44.7%
Not very safe	17.0%	16.6%	15.5%
Not at all safe	10.5%	10.5%	15.5%
Other/don't know	24.8%	25.5%	13.6%

Figure 4 – Ideology

Response	Liberal	Moderate	Conservative
Very safe	5.5%	2.1%	14.9%
Somewhat safe	35.2%	37.1%	46.2%
Not very safe	23.1%	19.6%	11.8%
Not at all safe	22.0%	14.4%	6.7%
Other/don't know	14.3%	26.8%	20.5%

Figure 5 – Party Affiliation

Response	Dem	Ind	Rep
Very safe	2.7%	8.3%	17.3%
Somewhat safe	39.6%	27.8%	50.0%
Not very safe	22.2%	13.9%	12.0%
Not at all safe	18.8%	25.0%	3.3%
Other/don't know	16.8%	25.0%	17.3%

Figure 6 – Native

Response	Born in SI	Born Elsewhere
Very safe	11.1%	6.8%
Somewhat safe	40.7%	37.8%
Not very safe	13.8%	21.0%
Not at all safe	11.1%	13.5%
Other/don't know	23.32%	21.0%

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?

Figure 1 – Total

Response	Percentage
Should encourage for economic benefits	40.7%
Should not encourage because of environmental impact	39.7%
Other/don't know	19.6%

Figure 2 – Gender

Response	Male Percentage	Female Percentage
Should encourage for economic benefits	54.3%	31.5%
Should not encourage because of environmental impact	33.3%	44.0%
Other/don't know	12.4%	24.5%

Figure 3 – Education

Response	High School or Less	Some College	College+
Should encourage for economic benefits	39.2%	43.5%	39.8%
Should not encourage because of environmental impact	37.3%	39.3%	44.7%
Other/don't know	23.5%	17.2%	15.5%

Figure 4 – Ideology

Response	Liberal	Moderate	Conservative
Should encourage for economic benefits	26.4%	33.0%	54.7%
Should not encourage because of environmental impact	52.8%	47.4%	29.2%
Other/don't know	20.9%	19.6%	16.4%

Figure 5 – Party Affiliation

Response	Dem	Ind	Rep
Should encourage for economic benefits	54.4%	28.2%	60.7%
Should not encourage because of environmental impact	29.2%	53.7%	23.3%
Other/don't know	16.4%	18.2%	16.0%

Figure 6 – Native

Response	Born in SI	Born Elsewhere
Should encourage for economic benefits	44.7%	33.8%
Should not encourage because of environmental impact	35.2%	47.3%
Other/don't know	20.2%	18.9%

We would like to know your views of various industries and occupational groups in our area:  
The coal industry.

Figure 1 – Total

Response	Percentage
Very favorable	29.0%
Favorable	51.9%
Unfavorable	7.7%
Very unfavorable	2.7%
No opinion	6.5%
Other/don't know	2.2%

Figure 2 – Gender

Response	Male Percentage	Female Percentage
Very favorable	30.3%	28.2%
Favorable	51.9%	51.9%
Unfavorable	9.3%	6.6%
Very unfavorable	0.6%	4.2%
No opinion	7.4%	5.8%
Other/don't know	0.6%	3.3%

Figure 3 – Education

Response	High School or Less	Some College	College+
Very favorable	28.8%	37.2%	18.5%
Favorable	52.3%	46.9%	58.3%
Unfavorable	5.2%	5.5%	13.6%
Very unfavorable	2.6%	2.8%	2.9%
No opinion	7.2%	6.2%	5.8%
Other/don't know	3.9%	1.4%	1.0%

Figure 4 – Ideology

Response	Liberal	Moderate	Conservative
Very favorable	20.9%	17.5%	37.4%
Favorable	41.8%	62.9%	52.8%
Unfavorable	15.4%	9.3%	4.1%
Very unfavorable	5.5%	2.1%	2.1%
No opinion	14.3%	4.1%	3.1%
Other/don't know	2.2%	4.1%	0.5%

Figure 5 – Party Affiliation

Response	Dem	Ind	Rep
Very favorable	24.2%	22.2%	36.7%
Favorable	49.0%	66.7%	50.0%
Unfavorable	14.1%	2.8%	6.0%
Very unfavorable	3.4%	2.8%	1.3%
No opinion	8.1%	0.0%	4.0%
Other/don't know	1.3%	5.6%	2.0%

Figure 6 – Native

Response	Born in SI	Born Elsewhere
Very favorable	35.6%	18.2%
Favorable	49.8%	55.4%
Unfavorable	7.5%	8.1%
Very unfavorable	2.0%	4.1%
No opinion	3.2%	11.5%
Other/don't know	2.0%	2.7%

We would like to know your views of various industries and occupational groups in our area:  
Coal miners.

Figure 1 – Total

Response	Percentage
Very favorable	31.5%
Favorable	56.3%
Unfavorable	2.7%
Very unfavorable	0.7%
No opinion	7.0%
Other/don't know	1.7%

Figure 2 – Gender

Response	Male Percentage	Female Percentage
Very favorable	28.4%	33.6%
Favorable	60.5%	53.5%
Unfavorable	1.2%	3.7%
Very unfavorable	0.6%	0.8%
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Figure 3 – Education

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No opinion	7.8%	6.2%	6.8%
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Figure 4 – Ideology

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Unfavorable	2.2%	5.2%	1.5%
Very unfavorable	1.1%	1.0%	0.5%
No opinion	9.9%	7.2%	4.6%
Other/don't know	1.1%	3.1%	0.5%

Figure 5 – Party Affiliation

Response	Dem	Ind	Rep
Very favorable	30.9%	38.9%	35.3%

Favorable	57.7%	47.2%	54.0%
Unfavorable	4.0%	2.8%	2.7%
Very unfavorable	0.7%	2.8%	0.0%
No opinion	5.4%	2.8%	7.3%
Other/don't know	1.3%	5.6%	0.7%

Figure 6 – Native

Response	Born in SI	Born Elsewhere
Very favorable	37.6%	21.6%
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No opinion	4.7%	10.8%
Other/don't know	2.0%	1.4%