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Opposition to Fracking Grows in Southern Illinois

Opponents of drilling for natural gas using hydraulic fracturing, or “fracking,” appear to be winning the battle for public opinion in southern Illinois, according to the latest findings of the Southern Illinois Poll conducted by the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

Opposition to the practice has grown from 39.7 percent, recorded in a fall 2013 Southern Illinois Poll, to majority opposition, at 52.4 percent in the present survey. Support has fallen in that same period from 40.7 percent to 33.9 percent.

The poll of registered voters in 18 counties south of Interstate 64 was taken September 22-October 2. The survey was based on a random sample of 401 registered voters who responded to telephone interviews. It has a margin of error of plus or minus 4.9 percentage points. Thirty percent of the sample were cell phone users.

While support for fracking has fallen, southern Illinois voters’ level of information has grown somewhat. In 2013, seven in ten voters (69.8 percent) had heard a lot or some about fracking, that number has grown to almost eight in ten (77.8 percent).

Driving the opposition is the growing perception that hydraulic fracturing might not be safe for the environment. While two years ago almost half the southern Illinoisans surveyed (49.1 percent) thought fracking was very or somewhat safe, that level has fallen slightly but significantly (to 41.1 percent).

Democrats in the survey sample were significantly more likely to say the government should not encourage fracking (65.2 percent oppose, 22.6 percent favor), while Republican voters were slightly more likely to favor fracking (45.3 percent) than to oppose it (42.1 percent). Independents are in-between; 35.1 percent say the state should encourage fracking, and 48.2 percent say it should not.

Opposition to hydraulic fracturing is somewhat higher in the current Southern Illinois Poll than it was in the statewide Simon Poll conducted in March of this year. Not quite half (48.6 percent) in

the statewide sample said the state should not encourage fracking because of its environmental impact, compared with the 52.4 percent opposition in the southernmost 18 Illinois counties.

“Attention to hydraulic fracturing is a little higher in southern Illinois than in the rest of the state, because the natural gas extraction would be happening here,” said Charlie Leonard, a Simon Institute visiting professor who was one of the poll’s supervisors. “At first this would seem a little surprising, since southern Illinois is more conservative than the rest of the state, and opposition to fracking is seen as a liberal idea. On the other hand, southern Illinoisans are outdoors people who are attached to our beautiful landscape, and they would take any threat to it seriously.”

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The poll of 401 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.

The sample has a margin of error of plus or minus 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.

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. Field work was conducted from September 22 – October 2. 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 polling web site, 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 Odum Institute Dataverse Network (<http://arc.irss.unc.edu/dvn/dv/PSPPPI>), and the Simon Institute Collection at OpenSIUC (<http://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/ppi/>).

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

Frequency Tables

Opinions on Hydraulic Fracturing

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	Southern IL 10/13	Statewide 3/15	Southern IL 10/15
A lot	32.3%	33.2%	43.1%
Some	37.5%	27.9%	34.7%
Not much	18.4%	14.3%	11.7%
Nothing so far	9.9%	21.3%	6.7%
Other/Don’t know	2.0%	3.3%	3.7%

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?

Response	Southern IL 10/13	Statewide 3/15	Southern IL 10/15
Very safe	9.4%	7.8%	6.7%
Somewhat safe	39.7%	31.3%	34.4%
Not very safe	16.4%	14.8%	21.7%
Not at all safe	12.2%	20.9%	23.7%
Other/Don’t know	22.3%	25.2%	13.5%

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	Southern IL 10/13	Statewide 3/15	Southern IL 10/15
Should encourage for economic benefit	40.7%	31.8%	33.9%
Should not encourage because of environmental impact	39.7%	48.6%	52.4%
Other/Don’t know	19.6%	19.6%	13.7%