



AUGUST 2024

PUBLIC OPINION ON FRACKING IN PENNSYLVANIA

With the 2024 Presidential Election approaching and Pennsylvania once again positioned as a premier swing state, much attention has been given to the issue of fracking and the role it may play for voters. Over the past 15 years the Muhlenberg College Institute of Public Opinion (MCIPO) has periodically polled Pennsylvanians on this topic, with the results of these polls indicating a complex array of views among Keystone State residents. In this primer, we explore a number of the facets of Pennsylvania public opinion on natural gas extraction in the Commonwealth.

1. PENNSYLVANIANS ARE HIGHLY DIVIDED ON THE IMPACT OF NATURAL GAS EXTRACTION IN THE STATE

Residents of the Keystone State have consistently expressed varied views in support of or against the extraction of natural gas from the state’s shale deposits, with fairly even segments of the state’s adult population supporting and opposing natural gas drilling. According to a spring 2022 MCIPO survey ([2022 Pennsylvania Climate and Energy Survey](#)), 48% of Pennsylvanians supported extraction, with 44% opposing this process. Compared to a decade earlier this reflects a 9-point increase in support for natural gas extraction (39% to 48%) and a 5-point drop in opposition (49% to 44%).

PENNSYLVANIA SUPPORT OF/OPPOSITION TO NATURAL GAS EXTRACTION in THE STATE (2012 - 2022)

| | 2012 | 2014 | 2022 |
|------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Strongly Support | 20% | 25% | 19% |
| Somewhat Support | 19% | 29% | 29% |
| Somewhat Oppose | 26% | 16% | 19% |
| Strongly Oppose | 23% | 16% | 25% |
| Not Sure | 12% | 15% | 7% |

Question Wording: In general, would you say you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose the extraction of natural gas from shale deposits in Pennsylvania?

When thinking about the future impacts of drilling for natural gas in Pennsylvania, opinions among residents are also quite divided. The same 2022 survey found that 44% of

Commonwealth residents believed that drilling would bring more benefits to the state in the future, with 40% believing that Pennsylvania would experience more problems in the future as a result of this activity. Compared to a decade earlier, the 2022 results show a narrowing of the gap between optimistic and pessimistic views on the future impacts of natural gas extraction in the Commonwealth, with the 24-point divide in 2012 (54% “more benefits” to 30% “more problems”) closing to a 4-point divide in 2022 (44% “more benefits” to 40% “more problems”).

PENNSYLVANIA VIEWS ON THE FUTURE IMPACTS of NATURAL GAS EXTRACTION (2011-2022)

| | 2011 | 2012 | 2022 |
|----------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| More Benefits | 50% | 54% | 44% |
| More Problems | 32% | 30% | 40% |
| About Equal/Not Sure | 17% | 16% | 16% |

Question Wording: In general, do you feel that drilling for natural gas in Pennsylvania will provide more benefits or more problems in the FUTURE for the citizens of Pennsylvania?

2. KEYSTONE STATE RESIDENTS OVERWHELMINGLY SEE NATURAL GAS EXTRACTION AS PROVIDING A BOOST TO PENNSYLVANIA’S ECONOMY

According to the 2022 survey, a large majority of Pennsylvanians (86%) see drilling for natural gas as important to the state’s economy (35% of state residents indicate “very important”, and 51% indicate “somewhat important”). These findings were largely unchanged since 2014, when 82% of Commonwealth residents indicated that natural gas extraction was important (38% “very important” and 44% “somewhat important”) to the overall condition of Pennsylvania’s economy.

PENNSYLVANIA VIEWS ON THE OVERALL IMPORTANCE OF NATURAL GAS DRILLING TO THE STATE’S ECONOMY (2011-2022)

| | 2014 | 2022 |
|----------------------|-------------|-------------|
| Very Important | 38% | 35% |
| Somewhat Important | 44% | 51% |
| Not Very Important | 8% | 10% |
| Not Important at All | 4% | 5% |
| Not Sure | 6% | <1% |

Question Wording: How important would you say that natural gas drilling is to the overall condition of the Pennsylvania economy? Would you say that natural gas drilling is very important, somewhat important, not too important, or not at all important to the Pennsylvania economy?

Opinions on the positive economic impacts of fracking on Pennsylvania’s economy in 2022 reflect perceptions of the primary benefits of this activity, with factors such as the stimulation of investments and job creation (22%), along with the reduction of energy costs for consumers and industries (12%) commonly cited as among the biggest positive outcomes of fracking.

PENNSYLVANIA VIEWS ON THE PRIMARY BENEFITS OF FRACKING (2022)

| | |
|---|-----|
| Fracking reduces carbon emissions by increasing the supply of cleaner-burning natural gas | 11% |
| Fracking promotes energy independence by increasing the supply of fossil fuels extracted in the United States | 28% |
| Fracking provides an economic benefit by stimulating investments and creating jobs | 22% |
| Fracking increases the amount of tax revenue collected by governments thereby helping to reduce government debt | 5% |
| Fracking reduces energy costs for consumers and industries | 12% |
| There are no potential benefits from fracking (Volunteered) | 18% |
| Not sure (Volunteered) | 5% |

Question Wording: And in your opinion, which of the following would you say is the primary potential benefit of fracking in the United States? Is it:

3. PENNSYLVANIANS HAVE CONCERNS ABOUT THE IMPACTS OF FRACKING ON PUBLIC HEALTH

While a majority of Pennsylvanians see fracking as positively impacting the state’s economy, they maintain significant concerns about the impact of natural gas extraction on public health and the state’s environment. In MCIPO’s annual Pennsylvania Public Health Poll ([Public Health and Policy Surveys](#)) a number of fracking related questions have been asked over the years. A majority of Pennsylvanians have indicated that fracking poses either a major or minor risk to public health outcomes in the state, with over two out of three Commonwealth residents (67%) holding this view in 2022. The 2022 results also indicate a decline in the number of Pennsylvanians that think fracking poses a *major* risk to public health, with 27% holding this view in 2022, compared with 38% in 2019.

PENNSYLVANIA PERCEPTIONS OF THE PUBLIC HEALTH RISKS OF FRACKING (2019-2022)

| | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 |
|------------|------|------|------|------|
| Major Risk | 38% | 36% | 27% | 27% |
| Minor Risk | 39% | 31% | 32% | 40% |
| No Risk | 14% | 9% | 16% | 21% |
| Not Sure | 9% | 24% | 25% | 13% |

Question Wording: Next I’m going to read you a list of factors that may or may not affect the health of the public in Pennsylvania. For each factor that I note please indicate if you think that factor poses a major risk, minor risk or no risk to public health in Pennsylvania: (ISSUE READ) Fracking for natural gas and oil.

Along with broadly held views that fracking poses some degree of public health risk in the state, a large majority of Pennsylvanians agree that natural gas drilling poses a major risk to the Commonwealth’s water resources. The results of the 2022 MCIPO survey found that 67% of Keystone State residents agreed (36% “strongly” and 31% “somewhat”) that drilling for natural gas in the state entails a major risk for water resources in Pennsylvania. The 2022 results were highly consistent with previous findings gathered over the previous decade.

LEVELS OF AGREEMENT REGARDING FRACKING AS A MAJOR RISK TO PENNSYLVANIA’S WATER RESOURCES (2011-2022)

| | 2011 | 2012 | 2014 | 2022 |
|-------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Strongly Agree | 33% | 35% | 35% | 36% |
| Somewhat Agree | 27% | 24% | 27% | 31% |
| Somewhat Disagree | 13% | 17% | 14% | 15% |
| Strongly Disagree | 15% | 17% | 13% | 16% |
| Not Sure | 12% | 8% | 11% | 2% |

Question Wording: For each statement that I read please indicate if you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree with these statements: Natural gas drilling in Pennsylvania poses a major risk to its the state’s water resources.