

FRACKING AND POLARIZATION OF PUBLIC OPINION

Louisiana State University – Public Policy Research Lab

Michael Climek, Lina Brou, Maxwell Means, & Dr. Kirby Goidel

July 24th 2013

Overall:

The Louisiana State University Public Policy Research Lab (LSU-PPRL) has for the past two years conducted public opinion surveys by phone in regard to in how the public perceives the word “Fracking” and how that relates to the perceptions of the safety and potential economic benefits of the process.

The 2012 & 2013 Louisiana Surveys conducted by LSU-PPRL contained a series of randomized questions about public awareness and support for Hydraulic Fracturing or “Fracking.” However, that data was only representative of Louisiana public opinion.

In order to obtain nationwide representative data LSU-PPRL contracted an outside agency (Opinion Research Corporation) in June 2013 to include the same sets of questions about “Fracking” in two national phone surveys.

The Hypothesis:

The natural gas extraction process known as Hydraulic Fracturing or “Fracking” is currently a contentious issue across the country.

It was hypothesized by LSU-PPRL that the actual word “Fracking” might have a negative connotation that was separate from the environmental concerns that often accompany discussions of the process. Due to the harsh consonant sounds in the word itself, and an undeniable similarity to a certain other four-letter word starting with the letter ‘F’, it seemed plausible that some of the negative public sentiment about “Fracking” may result from how unpleasant the word itself sounds.

In order to test this hypothesis the Public Policy Research Lab placed two randomly assigned blocks of questions into the 2012 & the 2013 Louisiana Survey. One block contained questions about “Fracking” and used the word “Fracking” while the other block, of near identical questions, used a description of the “Fracking” process without actually using the words “Fracking” or “Fracturing.” *(Brief results from the Louisiana Survey are in the appendix and detailed results are on our website www.survey.lsu.edu)*

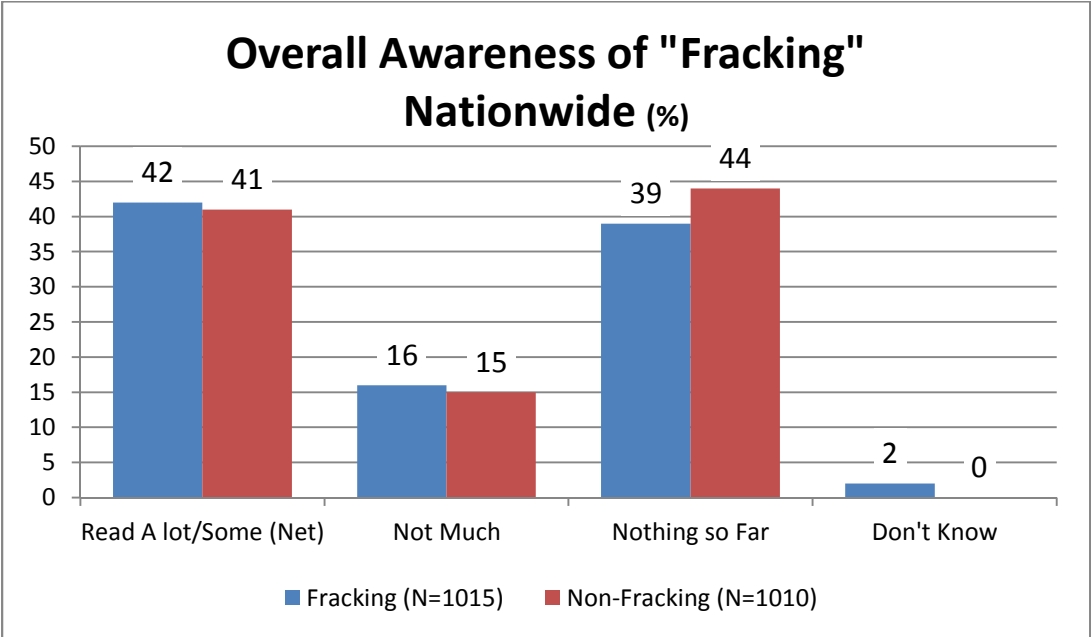
For the national survey, conducted by Opinion Research Corporation, we ran two separate surveys. The first national survey of 1,015 adult US residents contained the “Fracking” questions, and the second national survey of 1,010 adult US residents contained the nearly identical “Non-Fracking” questions.

Results:

On the national level, the results are twofold.

- 1) The results indicate that the unpleasant sound of the word “Fracking” might be partially responsible for view of the safety of the process. Respondents who did not hear the word “Fracking” are more likely to say they think the process is safe.
- 2) When the word “Fracking” is used, respondents are much more likely to answer that they “Don’t Know” if the process is safe or if the state should encourage drilling. This suggests that the word “Fracking” is the subject of polarized and conflicting information/media coverage as respondents are far more likely to have a definitive opinion on “Fracking” if the word “Fracking” is NOT used.

Awareness:



Interestingly nearly identical levels of respondents report that they have heard or read “a lot” or “some” about the “Fracking” process, regardless of whether or not the word “Fracking” is used. As the levels are roughly equal in terms of awareness, this would suggest that the differences in opinion in the ‘safety’ and ‘support for the process’ questions result from using the word “Fracking” not due to any difference in awareness of the process and what it entails.

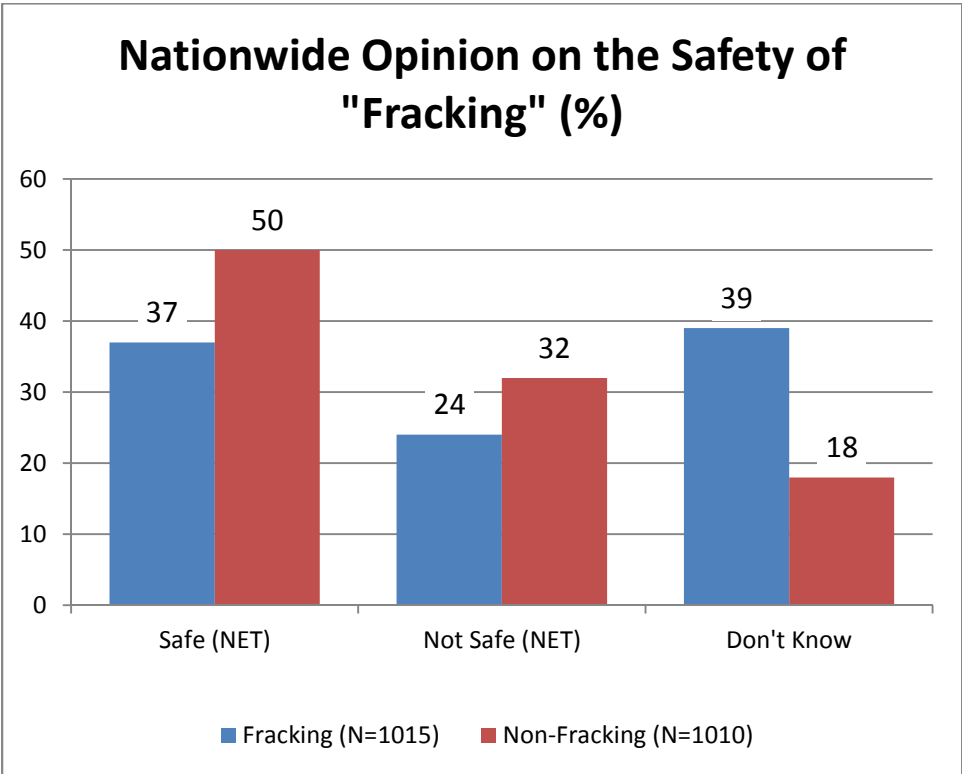
Demographic Differences:

Before delving into the single demographic differences in the “Fracking” vs. “Non-Fracking” sets of questions, two overall differences should be noted; college graduates (compared to non-college grads) and men (compared to women) are more likely to report they have read/heard “a lot” or “some” about the process in both the “Fracking” and “Non-Fracking” versions of the question.

- Politics
 - Democrats are slightly more likely to say they have heard/read “Nothing so far” when the word “Fracking” is NOT used.
 - 38% when the word “Fracking” is used, compared to 47% when the word is NOT used (9-point difference).

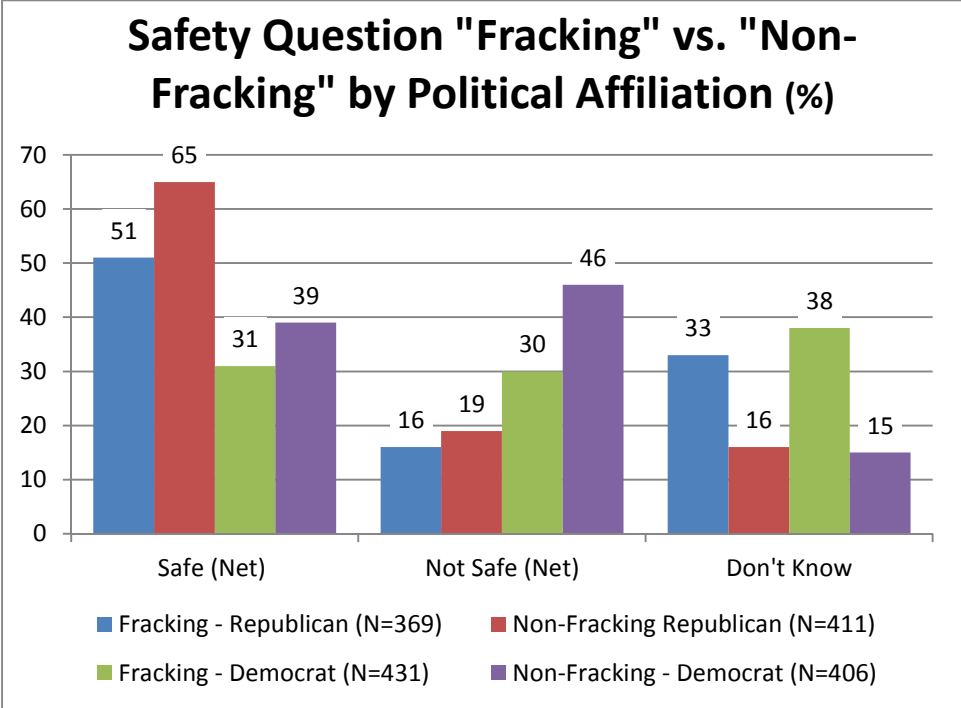
Safety:

In regard to safety, using the more specific and commonly known term “Fracking” leads to greater confusion and lack of knowledge. To put it another way, not hearing the word “Fracking” results in an increase in thinking the process is “Safe” and an increase in thinking the process is “Not Safe”. The difference comes from the fact that respondents are far more likely to answer that they “Don’t Know” if the process is safe if they hear the word “Fracking”. This suggests that the word itself (not the process) is polarized and respondents are not sure how to sort through the conflicting information they may be receiving from the media, environmentalists, and companies in the natural gas industry.



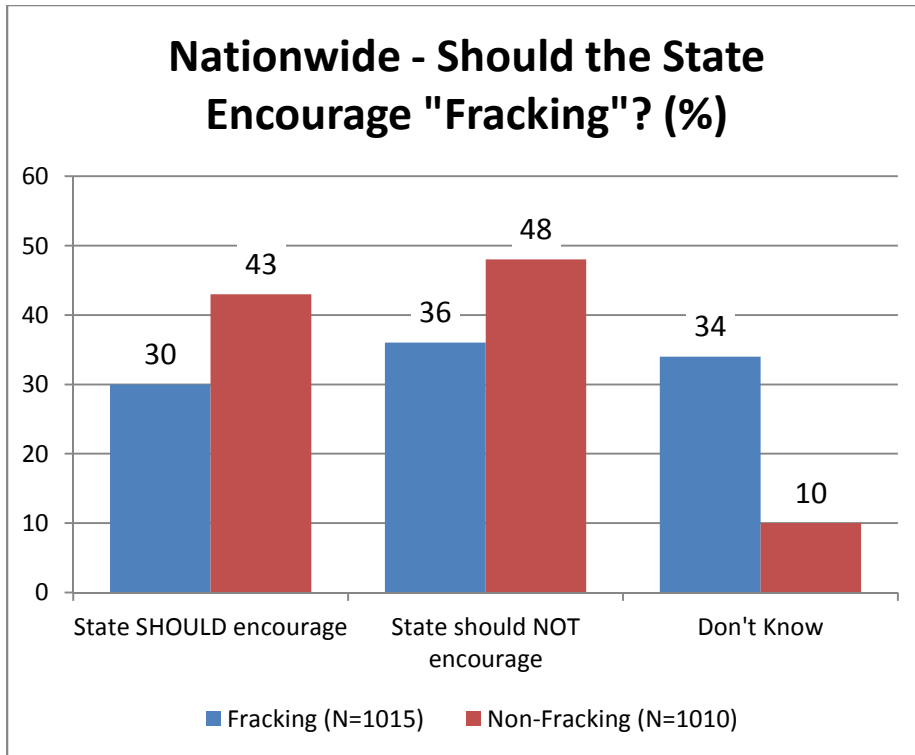
Demographic Differences:

- Gender: Not hearing the word “Fracking” has a much more noticeable effect on female respondents compared to male respondents.
 - Very Safe/Somewhat Safe
 - 48% of men answer “Very Safe” or “Somewhat Safe” when they hear the word “Fracking” compared to 56% when they do not hear the word “Fracking” (8-point difference).
 - 26% of women answer “Very Safe” or “Somewhat Safe” when they hear the word “Fracking” compared to 44% of women who do not hear the word “Fracking” (18-point difference).
 - Don’t Know
 - 27% of men answer “Don’t Know” to the safety question when they hear the word “Fracking” compared to 17% who do not hear the word “Fracking” (10-point difference).
 - 51% of women answer “Don’t Know” to the safety question when they hear the word “Fracking” compared to 18% of women who do not hear the word “Fracking” (33-point difference).
- Politics
 - While answering “Don’t Know” to the safety question increases for both parties when the word “Fracking” is not used, it has an unexpected result on Democrats.
 - Democrats are more likely to definitively say the process is “Not Safe” when the word “Fracking” is not used. 30% compared to 46%.
 - Democrats answering “Very Safe” or “Somewhat Safe” is more uniform (31% compared to 39%) but those who answer “Don’t Know” increase; 38% when “Fracking” is said compared to 15% when it is not.
 - Republicans are more likely to say think the process is “Safe” when the word “Fracking” is not used. 51% compared to 65%. They are also more likely to answer “Don’t Know” when the word is used.



Should the State Encourage “Fracking”?

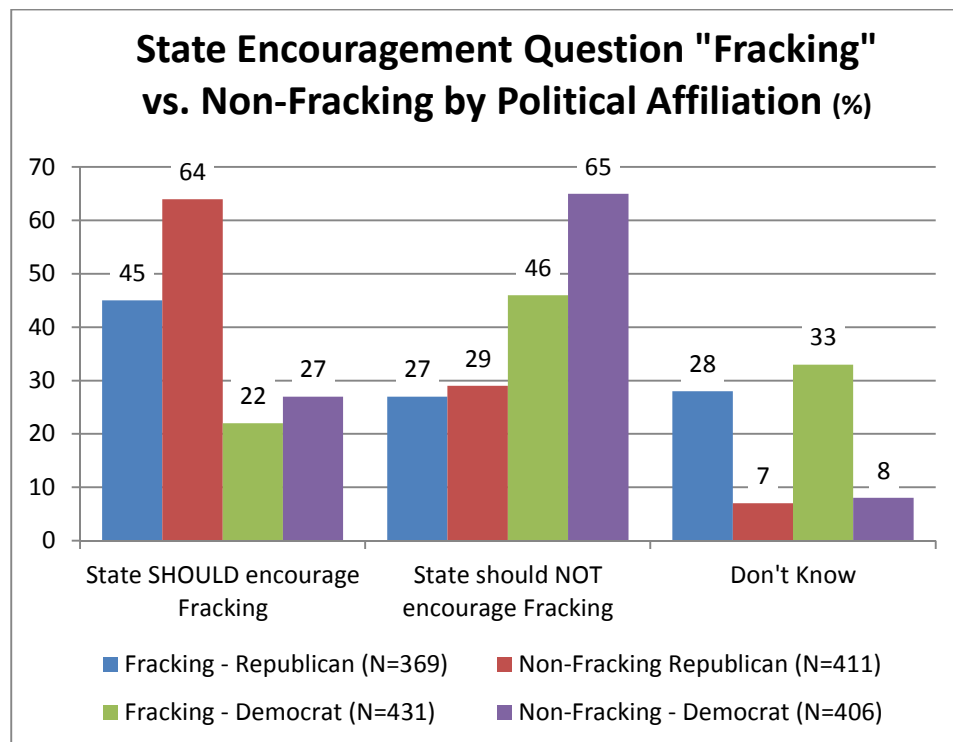
Again, using the word “Fracking” results in a much higher rate of respondents answering “Don’t Know” when asked if they think the state should encourage the process. Or to put it another way when “Fracking” is not said respondents are more likely to say the state should encourage the process (compared to when “Fracking” is said) *and* also more likely to say the state should NOT encourage the process. Again this suggests that the word “Fracking” itself, rather than the process, is polarized and using the word results in more uncertainty in the minds of respondents, compared to when the process is described without using the word “Fracking”.



Demographic Differences:

- Gender: Not hearing the word “Fracking” has a more noticeable effect on female respondent compared to male respondents.
 - State SHOULD encourage “Fracking”
 - 39% of men say the state SHOULD encourage the process when they hear the word “Fracking” compared to 52% who do not hear the word “Fracking” (13-point difference).
 - 21% of women say the state SHOULD encourage the process when they hear the word “Fracking” compared to 33% who do not hear the word “Fracking” (12-point difference).
 - State should NOT encourage “Fracking”
 - 38% of men say the state should NOT encourage the process when they hear the word “Fracking” compared to 40% who do not hear the word “Fracking” (2-point difference).
 - 34% of women say the state should NOT encourage the process when they hear the word “Fracking” compared to 55% who do not hear the word “Fracking” (21-point difference).
 - Don’t Know
 - When asked if the state should support the process 22% of men answer “Don’t Know” when they hear the word “Fracking” compared to 8% who do not hear the word “Fracking” (14-point difference).

- When asked if the state should support the process 45% of women answer “Don’t Know” when they hear the word “Fracking” compared to 12% who do not hear the word “Fracking” (33-point difference).
- Politics
 - Republicans are more likely to think the state should encourage “Fracking”. However, they are much more likely to say the state should encourage it when the word “Fracking” is not used. A 19-point difference in fact; 45% to 64%.
 - As it was with the ‘safe’ question, Democrats are more likely to have a definitive opinion when the word “Fracking” is not used.
 - Unexpectedly though, Democrats are more likely to say the state should NOT encourage the process when the word “Fracking” is NOT used. 46% to 65%.
 - Both parties are much more likely to answer “Don’t Know” when the word “Fracking” is used, which further supports the idea that the word itself, rather than the process, is polarized and surrounded by conflicting information.



THE SURVEY INSTRUMENT & APPENDIX

Fracking Questions Methodology:

This report presents the findings of a telephone survey conducted among two national probability samples, which, when combined, consists of 1,015 adults, 510 men and 505 women 18 years of age and older, living in the continental United States. Interviewing for this CARAVAN® Survey was completed on June 20-23, 2013. 665 interviews were from the landline sample and 350 interviews from the cell phone sample. The combined sample is weighted to represent the US population using data from the Current Population Survey (CPS) on age, gender, race, region, and education. The survey has a margin of error of +/- 3.08%.

Fracking Questions – Exact Wording:

On another subject...

- F1 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? Would you say...

(READ ENTIRE LIST BEFORE RECORDING ONE ANSWER)

- 01 A lot
- 02 Some
- 03 Not much
- 04 Or, nothing so far
- 99 DON'T KNOW

- F2 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?

- 01 VERY SAFE
- 02 SOMEWHAT SAFE
- 03 NOT VERY SAFE
- 04 NOT AT ALL SAFE
- 99 DON'T KNOW

- F3 Some people say the state should encourage hydraulic fracturing because of the economic benefits, while others say the state should NOT encourage hydraulic fracturing or fracking because of potential environmental impact. Which comes closer to your view?

- 01 STATE SHOULD ENCOURAGE HYDRAULIC FRACTURING
- 02 STATE SHOULD NOT ENCOURAGE HYDRAULIC FRACTURING
- 99 DON'T KNOW

Non-Fracking Methodology:

This report presents the findings of a telephone survey conducted among two national probability samples, which, when combined, consists of 1,010 adults, 505 men and 505 women 18 years of age and older, living in the continental United States. Interviewing for this CARAVAN® Survey was completed on June 27-30, 2013. 660 interviews were from the landline sample and 350 interviews from the cell phone sample. The combined sample is weighted to represent the US population using data from the Current Population Survey (CPS) on age, gender, race, region, and education. The survey has a margin of error of +/- 3.08%.

Non-Fracking Questions – Exact Wording:

On another subject...

- F1 How much have you heard or read about 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?
Would you say...

(READ ENTIRE LIST BEFORE RECORDING ONE ANSWER)

- 05 A lot
- 06 Some
- 07 Not much
- 08 Or, nothing so far
- 99 DON'T KNOW

- F2 As far as you know, do you think this process is a very safe method to extract natural gas from the ground, somewhat safe, not very safe or not at all safe?

- 05 VERY SAFE
- 06 SOMEWHAT SAFE
- 07 NOT VERY SAFE
- 08 NOT AT ALL SAFE
- 99 DON'T KNOW

- F3 Some people say the state should encourage drilling for natural gas by this process because of the economic benefits, while others say the state should NOT encourage drilling by this process because of potential environmental impact. Which comes closer to your view?

- 03 STATE SHOULD ENCOURAGE DRILLING
- 04 STATE SHOULD NOT ENCOURAGE DRILLING
- 99 DON'T KNOW

Overall Comparison Data:

National & Louisiana Specific Data:

National Data - 2013				Louisiana 2013		Louisiana 2012	
		Fracking (N=1015)	Non- Fracking (N=1010)	Fracking (N=492)	Non- Fracking (N=438)	Fracking (N=375)	Non- Fracking (N=356)
		%	%	%	%	%	%
Q1	A Lot/Some (NET)	42	41	40.2	42.1	36.3	37.8
	<i>A lot</i>	16	19	15.2	21.3	17.9	19.6
	<i>Some</i>	26	22	25.0	20.8	18.4	18.2
	Not Much	16	15	21.4	21.3	18	15.3
	Nothing so Far	39	44	38.4	35.4	44.6	46
	Don't Know	2	0	0	1.2	1.1	0.9
Q2	Safe (NET)	37	50	44.8	47.3	34.5	42.5
	<i>Very Safe</i>	8	12	11	15.4	12.3	12.6
	<i>Somewhat Safe</i>	28	38	33.8	31.9	22.2	29.9
	Not Safe (NET)	24	32	25.4	23.7	23.8	23.8
	<i>Not Very Safe</i>	13	17	13.6	13.3	8.7	12.4
	<i>Not at all Safe</i>	11	15	11.8	10.4	15.1	11.4
	Don't Know	39	18	29.7	29	41.7	33.7
Q3	State should NOT encourage	36	48	39.7	35.7	35	35.3
	State SHOULD encourage	30	43	38.4	51.6	38.6	51.6
	Don't Know	34	10	21.9	12.7	26.4	13.1

Louisiana Survey 2013 Methodology:

About the Survey: The 2013 Louisiana Survey includes a traditional landline telephone survey combined with a survey of Louisiana cell phone users. The results presented here have been weighted to reflect current population demographics as reflected in the most recent available Census data. The combined survey includes 930 respondents including 574 respondents selected from landline telephone numbers via random-digit dialing and 356 respondents selected from available cell phone blocks. Interviews were conducted from February 8 to March 17, 2013. The overall survey has a margin of error of +/- 3.6 percentage points.

Louisiana Survey 2012 Methodology:

About the Survey: The 2012 Louisiana Survey includes a traditional landline telephone survey combined with a survey of Louisiana cell phone users. All respondents – cell phone and landline - are randomly selected. The results presented here are from the combined weighted survey. All results here have been weighted to reflect current population demographics as reflected by U.S. Census estimates. The combined survey includes 731 respondents including 517 respondents selected from the landline telephone survey and 214 respondents selected from available cell phone blocks. Interviews were conducted from February 7 to February 29, 2012. The overall survey has a margin of error of +/- 3.6 percentage points.