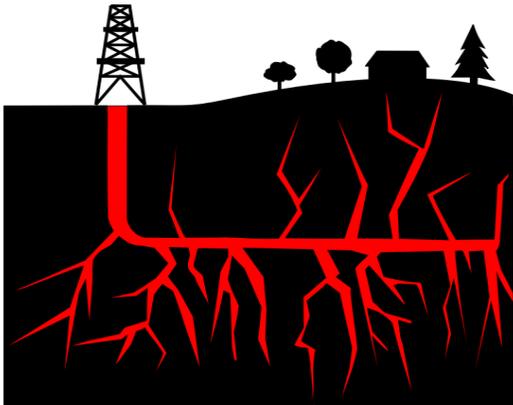


# ISSUE INVESTIGATION

## FRACKING



Lawmakers examine an issue from a variety of perspectives as they consider what laws will be best for Americans. But sometimes problems are more complicated than they seem, and lawmakers need input from their constituents (that's you!) as they make important decisions on issues facing our nation.

This *Issue Investigation* is a guide to investigate an issue and form your own opinion after thinking about a policy area from multiple

perspectives. It is also an invitation to reach out to your own representatives and community to share what you've learned.

## KEY CONCEPTS



### Fossil Fuels

Fossils of decayed plants and animals from millions of years ago are trapped beneath the earth's crust. These trapped fossils have been exposed to huge amounts of heat and pressure, which creates energy in the form of fossil fuels.



### Fracking

A way to get at some of the fossil fuel energy that is trapped beneath the earth. It's a way to get to the really out-of-the-way energy- the stuff we never thought we'd be able to use.



### Conflicts of Interest

Most elected officials have had other jobs before their elections to public office. Some may have had jobs in the energy industry. Others may consider jobs in the energy industry in the future. Many officials may have benefited from political donations made by energy companies. While these factors may not impact their decision-making now, they are things to keep in mind.

## CHART YOUR OPINION

People have different ideas about what lawmakers should do about fracking. Here's a spectrum showing some of the options. Chart where you fall on the spectrum. Does your position change after the issue investigation?



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Think about these big questions related to fracking on your own, or discuss them with a partner.

1. Is it right for companies to make energy in ways that harm the environment, when energy is something that everyone needs to live? Why or why not?
2. Should we rely on other countries to help us make energy, or make more of our own- even though making our own means that our citizens may suffer? Why?
3. Do you think competition between businesses should determine how we get most of our energy? Or do you think the government has a responsibility to help the businesses it believes will be better for people in general?
4. Is it fair to ask some people to give up their income and security for the health and security of everyone? Why or why not? If people have to make this sacrifice, does the government owe them help?

# ISSUE PERSPECTIVES

## ENERGY

### *PRO*

Fracking is a very profitable way to get a lot of energy. It's also an opportunity for the U.S. to make more of its own energy. There are ways of making energy that are better for the planet, but fossil fuels are still the cheapest way to produce energy in amounts that Americans are used to. At least in the short-term.

### *CON*

There are other ways to produce energy besides fracking, and some of them are better for the environment. The better the fracking industry does, the worse other forms of energy, like wind and solar, may perform. Additionally, wind and solar power are less likely to improve as energy sources if people are still investing in fracking.

## CLIMATE CHANGE

### *PRO*

There aren't really any benefits of fracking when it comes to climate change, but fracking does send less heat-trapping gases into the air than coal mining and many traditional forms of oil drilling. Defenders of fracking argue that it's a good way to transition from fossil fuels to cleaner energy sources.

### *CON*

Getting energy out of the ground by fracking requires lots of methane, and that methane gets trapped in the atmosphere to warm the globe. Fracking also makes it easier to use oil and natural gas, which are significant contributors to global warming. Fracking could also slow growth of cleaner energy sources like solar and wind.

## NATIONAL SECURITY

### *PRO*

It helps the United States' security if we are able to produce our own energy. If we are always buying energy from other nations, then that influences how we relate to those other nations. It may mean we have to accept things those nations do, even if we don't like it. But if the United States is producing its own energy, the United States has more options, is more energy-independent, and may even be less likely to have conflicts with other countries.

### *CON*

Scientific and government research have linked fracking to earthquakes. Disasters like earthquakes, which damage property and physically harm and kill Americans, are a threat to our nation's security and well-being. Defenders of fracking argue that most of these earthquakes are too small to cause major damage, but fracking opponents point to

fracking-related earthquakes that were serious. And if fracking contributes to increased risk for poor health and climate change, those could be long-term risks for national security.

## HEALTH & COVID-19

### PRO

In the age of the COVID-19 pandemic, the United States may want to produce more of its own supplies, depending less on a global market and instead relying on a diverse national economy. If the United States is producing more of its own energy, it doesn't have to rely on or bargain with other countries. This energy independence may make it more likely (though not guaranteed) that the United States can also be more independent when it comes to things like medical supplies. Plus, fracking gives people jobs and money, which often means that they have access to healthcare.

### CON

At the same time, fracking causes a lot of serious health problems. Fracking releases toxic chemicals, contaminates groundwater, pollutes the air and contributes to climate change. It has been linked to an increased risk of stroke, heart attack, and cancer. People are more likely to develop asthma and other health conditions if they live near oil and gas sites. All of these health concerns are magnified by the COVID-19 pandemic.

## JOBS & INCOME

### PRO

Fracking creates jobs and provides people with money. Jobs are created as a result of an increase in oil and gas production, and people can rent out their land to companies that want to build fracking sites. Economists argue about just how many good jobs are being created and maintained by the fracking industry, but it's certainly true that if fracking were banned, a number of people would need a new source of income, and quickly. With fracking in place, a number of Americans are staying employed.

### CON

Figuring out just how many jobs have been created by an industry is tricky. Critics argue the number of jobs that exist because of fracking is exaggerated, especially because jobs like truck driving and construction would still exist without fracking. Additionally, because we know that fracking causes health problems for everyone (whether they work in a fracking-related job or not), there's the possibility that a large number of people may lose money, or even their jobs, because they are sick.

### Additional Resources:

Nacamulli, Mia. "How Does Fracking Work?" *Ted-Ed*. July 13, 2017 [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tudal\\_4x4F0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tudal_4x4F0)

Woodford, Chris. "Fracking." *Explain That Stuff!* March 10, 2020, <https://www.explainthatstuff.com/fracking.html>

## ISSUE TO ACTION

What stood out to you as you did this Issue Investigation? What do you want to make sure elected officials are thinking about as they make laws about fracking? Use the space below to make notes on which perspectives you want to share with your elected officials and your community. Do some research on the perspective and write a few additional facts you'd like to share.



## SHARE YOUR PERSPECTIVE

### **Write a letter**

Look up the physical mail or e-mail address of a local elected official, federal representative or your federal senator. Write them to share who you are and what you want them to know about fracking. You may want to ask for their support or opposition on a specific bill, like the proposed bill that would ban fracking nationwide, the Fracking Ban Act.

### **Share on social media**

Many elected officials are on social media. Follow your representatives, senators, mayor, and other officials. Engage your own followers with polls, facts, videos, infographics, and videos that represent your message. Tag the handles of your elected officials in your posts.

### **Join an advocacy group**

Advocacy tends to be more powerful when lots of people work together toward a policy goal. If you're passionate about this policy area or another one, consider joining a coalition or group to amplify your efforts.