

# **Pennsylvania Residents' Perceptions of Natural Gas Development in the Marcellus Shale**

**Survey Respondents' Characteristics, Community Perceptions,  
and Involvement**

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# Survey Respondents' Characteristics, Community Perceptions, and Involvement

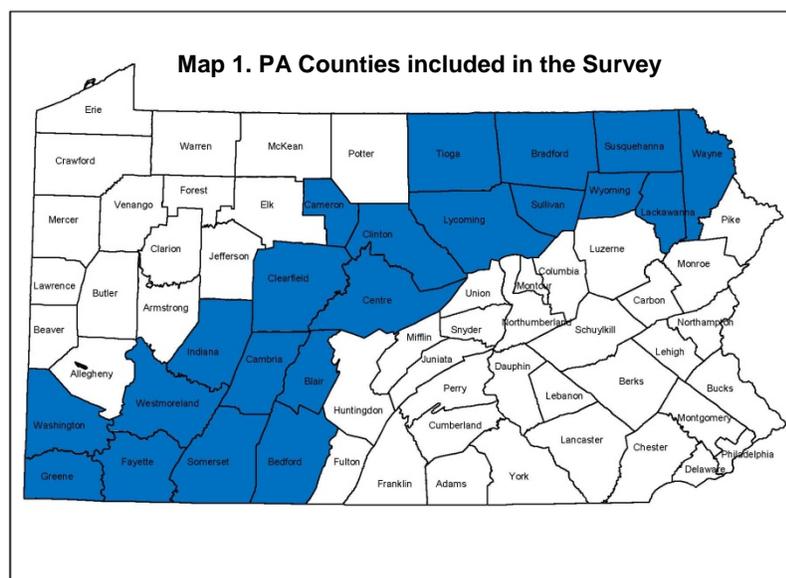
## Introduction

In 2009-2010, a survey of residents in the Marcellus Shale area of Pennsylvania was carried out to assess their knowledge and attitudes concerning the developing natural gas industry. That research, funded partially by the Appalachian Regional Commission, was conducted through the collaborative efforts of researchers from The Pennsylvania State University, Cornell University, and The Institute for Public Policy & Economic Development at Wilkes University. Descriptive findings from the study can be found at [www.institutepa.org](http://www.institutepa.org).

The current report focuses on the characteristics of the respondents, including their perceptions of and involvements in their communities, as a way to provide information on the personal and social context of their expressed views.

## The Survey

In October 2009, 4,496 households drawn at random from 21 counties located in the Marcellus Shale region of Pennsylvania were mailed questionnaires (Map 1). They were asked for information on their views of the developing natural gas industry, their perceptions of their local communities, and their current life situations. The post office returned 421 of the



envelopes as “undeliverable.” Replies from 1,461 of the remaining 4,075 questionnaires were returned with usable data – a 36% response rate.

***Personal Characteristics of the Sample Members***

When the distributions of key characteristics (gender, education, and age) were compared with the 2000 US Census data for the sampled counties, females, younger subjects, and those who terminated their formal schooling with no post high school education were underrepresented in the sample, while males, older persons, and those with at least some college were overrepresented (Table 1). Responses to mail surveys are often selective for these characteristics. For the current analysis, this means that descriptions of the sample members’ responses should not be assumed to be representative of the views of the population of residents in the Marcellus region. To the extent that gender, age, education, or other selective factors are related to responses to other items in the survey, generalizations to the total population should be made with caution.

**Table 1. Distributions of gender, age, and education in the sample and in the sampled population. N = 1461**

Variables	Population -----%-----	Sample
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	48.4	55.1
Female	51.6	44.9
Total	100.0	100.0
<b>Age</b>		
Less than 45	41.7	20.4
45 - 64	36.0	48.3
65 and older	22.3	31.3
Total	100.0	100.0
<b>Education</b>		
Less than H.S. grad	12.8	6.0
High school grad	43.9	29.3
Some college	22.9	33.7
Bachelor’s degree/Graduate work	20.4	31.0
Total	100.0	100.0

### ***Community Attachment***

Reflecting the rural nature of the counties in the Marcellus region, three fourths of the survey respondents described the area in which they lived as either “country” (36%) or “small town” (39%), while only 9% reported they lived “in a city” and 16% described their residence as being in a “suburban” area. Most (81%) reported they had lived in their current county either all of their lives (53%) or for at least 20 years or more (28%). Moreover, they tended to express high levels of attachment to their communities.

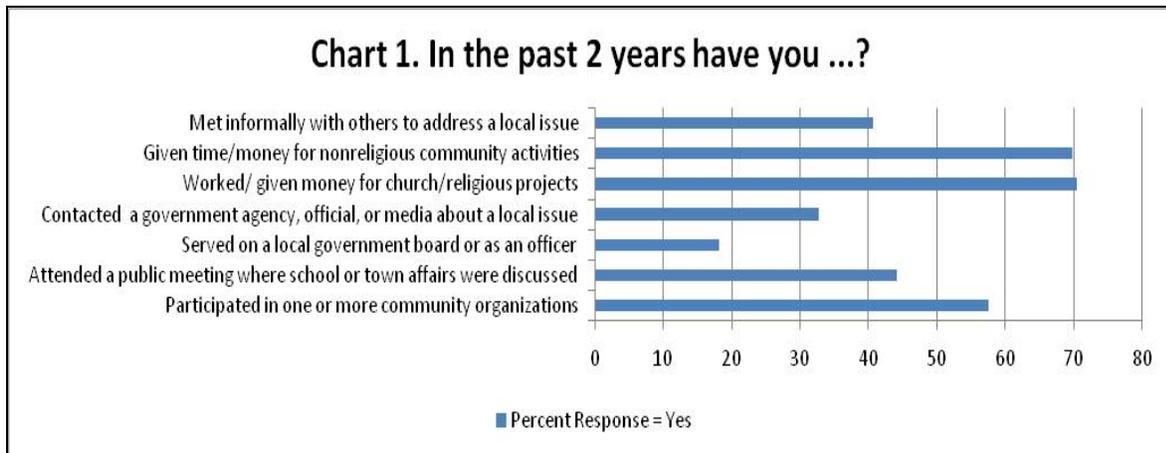
- 51% agreed that the community (or general area) in which they lived was an important part of who they were.
- 54% agreed their community (or general area) was their favorite place to be.
- 75% felt they were accepted there.
- 43% reported it was the best place to do the things they enjoyed most.

### ***Community Involvement***

Respondents not only expressed feelings of attachment to their communities, many were also involved in various community activities (Chart 1). Forty-three percent reported they felt they were “somewhat” or “very” active, and only 18% said they were “not at all active.” More specific items asked the kinds of activities in which they had engaged during the last two years:

- 58% indicated they had participated in one or more community clubs or organizations.
- 44% had attended a public meeting where school or other local issues were discussed.
- 18% had served on a local government board, council, commission, or as an officer in a community organization.
- 33% had contacted a government agency, official, or the media about a local issue.
- 70% worked or gave money or time to special projects at a church or religious organization.

- 70% gave time and/or money to nonreligious community activities.
- 41% had met informally with others to address community issues or problems.



### ***Rating Community Quality***

Asked to rate various community attributes as “very good, “good, “neither poor nor good,” “poor” or “very poor,” (67%) of the subjects rated the overall quality of life in their communities as “good” or “very good;” very few (7%) indicated that it was “poor” or “very poor.” (Table 2).

- Most also rated as good or very good the natural environment (76%), neighborliness/friendliness (74%), the quality of drinking water, (70%), schools (69%), and medical/healthcare (63%).
- Job availability received good or very good ratings from just 10% of the subjects, with 66% rating it as poor or very poor. Job training opportunities were also rated low, with 44% poor/very poor and 19% good/very good ratings.

Despite the generally positive evaluations of their communities, many people were pessimistic about changes in the community where they lived.

- 44% felt that the community was worse off now than it had been five years ago; 45% indicated it was the same; only 11% reported it was better off.
- Looking ahead, 31% believed it would be worse off in five years and 50% felt it would be the same. Just 19% thought it would be better.

**Table 2. Rate your community in regard to: (N = 1461)<sup>a</sup>**

Item	Neither		
	Poor/Very Poor	Poor nor Good	Very Good/Good
	-----%-----		
Natural environment	5.6	18.4	76.0
Neighborliness/friendliness	6.6	19.0	74.4
Drinking water	11.2	18.8	70.0
Public schools	7.8	23.7	68.5
Medical services/Health care	13.6	23.4	63.0
Freedom from crime/violence	15.3	29.0	55.8
Recreation opportunities	18.9	25.9	55.2
Availability of affordable housing	21.5	37.3	41.2
Cultural events and activities	26.8	32.6	40.6
Roads and streets	27.4	34.9	37.7
Job training opportunities	43.8	37.5	18.8
Availability of jobs	65.9	24.4	9.7

<sup>a</sup>Number of cases varies due to missing data

### ***Social Interactions***

The positive evaluation of the neighborliness and friendliness of their communities was expressed in responses given to other questions on the survey form:

- 44% reported they had ten or more close friends in the community, and 72% had at least 5 close friends.
- 60% had five or more relatives outside their household in the area; 40% had ten or more such relatives.
- 45% agreed the community was “close knit;” just 17% disagreed.
- 88% reported that people in the community were “often” (51%) or at least “sometimes” (37%) willing to help their neighbors.
- 71% felt that members of the community could work together “sometimes” or “often” to solve local issues.

Interactions of the respondents with those who differed from themselves in regard to race/ethnicity, wealth, education, and political views were limited.

- 48% had interacted no more than two or three times in the last year with people of a different race/ethnicity.

- 47% had interacted with people much poorer than themselves no more than two or three times in the previous year.
- 42% had interacted two or three times or less with people who had less education than they in the past 12 months.
- 32% reported they had interacted no more than two or three times during the last year with people who differed from them in regard to political views.

Although most felt that they had “a great deal” or “some” trust and confidence in their neighbors and those with whom they worked, they were less likely to feel the same about those who differed from them in regard to culture/ethnicity or religion or those who were new to the community (Table 3).

**Table 3. How much confidence and trust to you have in each of the following? (N= 1461)<sup>a</sup>**

Item	No trust	Very little trust	Some trust	Great deal trust
	-----%-----			
Your Neighbors	2.6	5.0	47.1	45.4
People you work with	3.8	7.5	50.0	38.7
People from other culture/ethnic group	4.8	12.8	69.5	12.8
People of other religious beliefs	2.8	8.0	69.8	19.4
People who are new to the community	3.9	19.1	71.6	5.3

<sup>a</sup>Number of cases varies due to missing data

- 45% had a great deal of trust in their neighbors and an additional 47% expressed some trust.
- 39% expressed a great deal of trust in the people they worked with and an additional 50% trusted them somewhat.
- 13% trusted people from other cultural/ethnic groups a great deal; 69% expressed some trust; 18% trusted them very little or not at all.
- 19% trusted people with different religious beliefs a great deal; 70% trusted them some, while 11% had very little or no confidence and trust in these people.

- Only 5% had a great deal of trust/confidence in newcomers to the community, although 72% trusted them only somewhat. Nearly one in four (23%) had very little or no trust in people who were new to the community.

### ***Trust in Government***

On a 7-point scale from 1=extremely liberal to 7=extremely conservative, a majority (36%) of the respondents described their political beliefs as in the middle. A total of 44% reported they were “conservative,” with 20% describing themselves as liberal (i.e. left of center).

Regardless of their political affiliations, most people reported they had little or no trust and confidence in the state government, although a somewhat greater proportion reported they had some or a great deal of confidence/trust in local government. However, nearly half felt that the concerns of local citizens like themselves were rarely or never heard by local officials.

- 64% had little or no trust/confidence in the governor of Pennsylvania,
- 64% had little or no confidence and trust in the state legislature.
- 45% had little or no trust in local government.

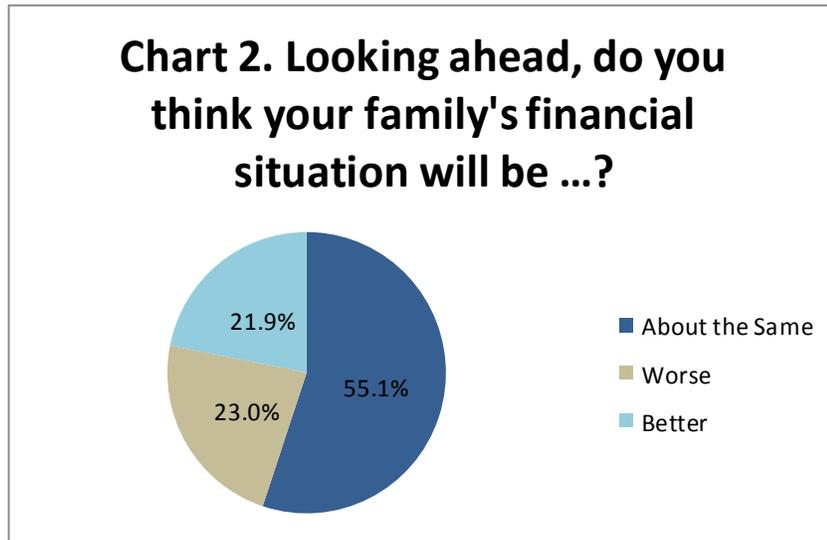
### ***Personal Well-Being***

Respondents evaluated how satisfied they were with their life as a whole using a scale ranging from 0 (completely dissatisfied) to 6 (completely satisfied). Seventeen percent placed themselves in the middle of the scale, but 73% indicated they were satisfied (scores of 4, 5, and 6) while only 10% were dissatisfied (scores of 0, 1, or 2).

The majority (53%) reported that they were more or less satisfied with their family’s current financial situation; 29% reported they were not at all satisfied, while just 18% were very satisfied.

- 37% felt they were worse off financially than a year ago, while just 15% saw themselves as better off. The remainder (48%) saw little change in their family’s financial situation during the year.

- Although 55% expected little or no change in their financial situation in the next year, 22% thought it would get better, while an almost equal number (23%) felt it would get worse (Chart 2).



**Summary**

Residents in the Marcellus Shale area of Pennsylvania as defined for this study lived primarily in small communities and open country locations. Most had lived in their current county more than 20 years; many had family and friends living nearby; and most expressed strong personal attachment to the area. The apparent stability of these communities was reflected in the tendency of residents to have limited interactions with others who differed from them in regard to race/ethnicity, wealth, education, and even political views. They were unlikely to place a great deal of trust in state and local government, and in newcomers to their communities. They rated their communities positively in regard to neighborliness/friendliness and the quality of the natural environment, expressed strong community ties and trust in their neighbors and workmates. However, they were critical of the limited availability of jobs. Likely influenced by the limited job market and the current stagnant economy, many felt that their communities were worse off today than five years ago, and predicted that things would get even worse in the next five years.