

**PUBLIC OPINION ON EXPLORATION AND PRODUCTION OF OIL AND NATURAL GAS  
IN ENVIRONMENTALLY SENSITIVE AREAS**

**Gene L. Theodori\***

Sam Houston State University  
Department of Sociology  
Box 2446  
Huntsville, TX 77341-2446  
Voice: 936-294-4143  
Fax: 936-294-3573  
[gtheodori@shsu.edu](mailto:gtheodori@shsu.edu)

An energy crisis is looming in many parts of the United States rich with petroleum and natural gas reserves. One issue at the core of this crisis is the fact that many oil and natural gas reserves are located in or near environmentally sensitive areas, both offshore and on land. Such environmentally sensitive areas in the United States containing oil and natural gas reserves can be found offshore on the continental shelf and onshore in coastal wetlands, desert ecosystems, and hardwood forests; they can be found on both privately-owned and publicly-owned lands. Publicly-owned lands include, but are not limited to, lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management, the Forest Service, and the National Park Service. For the most part, these resource-rich environmentally sensitive areas are either completely off-limits to the energy industry for exploration and production or are subject to certain restrictions. Opening up environmentally sensitive areas to exploration and production of oil and natural gas is a timely issue that continues to be increasingly debated. Using data collected in a general population survey from a random sample of individuals in twelve Texas counties, I empirically examine perceptual issues associated with the exploration and production of oil and natural gas in environmentally sensitive areas. The findings reveal that roughly seven out of ten individuals are opposed to eliminating the current governmental regulations limiting the exploration and production of oil and natural gas in each of the selected environmentally sensitive areas. Instead, the majority of respondents unequivocally favor relaxing the current governmental regulations by various degrees. The results also reveal that certain sociodemographic variables are relatively strong and consistent predictors of favorable attitudes towards increasing exploration and production of oil and natural gas in environmentally sensitive areas. Possible implications of these findings are proposed, as are suggestions for future research.

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