

Oregonians perceive greater risk than benefit from natural gas export in state, study finds

April 7 2022, by Molly Rosbach



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When presented with proposed natural gas export operations in the state, Oregonians are more likely to perceive the environmental and public health risks than the potential financial gains, a recent study from

Oregon State University found.

To date, six [natural gas](#) export projects have been proposed along the Oregon coast but none have been built, most recently the Jordan Cove LNG project slated for Coos Bay, which was first proposed in 2004 and ultimately defeated last year.

"Oregon is seen as a key location to export natural gas to large markets in Asia, so because of that, future proposals may be coming," said study author Rachel Mooney, who graduated from OSU with a master's degree in [public policy](#) last year. "But having public opposition definitely will make siting any future projects in Oregon a challenge."

The study, published in the journal *Local Environment*, is one of few to directly examine risk-benefit perceptions of natural gas export.

Researchers surveyed 500 Oregon adults in August 2019, with a survey pool that was matched to Oregon's overall population in terms of race, gender, age and education.

Consistent with the researchers' hypotheses, results showed that people with a higher level of education, younger adults, women, people of color and people who identify as liberal or moderate were more likely to perceive environmental or public health risks and less likely to perceive [economic benefits](#) associated with natural gas export.

Political ideology was the strongest predictor of risk-benefit perceptions, with conservatives reporting lower environmental risk and higher economic benefit perceptions.

"Our findings in terms of who is most opposed to or supportive of natural gas export are not surprising given existing research," said study author Hilary Boudet, an associate professor in OSU's School of Public

Policy. "Gender, age, race and [political ideology](#) are often related to views on [energy development](#) in the ways we found, particularly development involving fossil fuels."

Of the survey pool, 53% felt that natural gas export posed a great deal of risk to the global climate and regional environment, and 44-56% perceived little to no benefit to energy prices, energy security, jobs in the region or the regional economy. On the flip side, only 21-27% perceived a great deal of economic benefit in those categories.

The effect of proximity to potential export sites was less clear. Despite typically skewing more liberal and moderate, respondents in metropolitan areas perceived more economic benefit and less risk than people in rural areas where projects are more likely to be located. Researchers hope to further study these relationships.

Researchers noted these results lend credence to social science theories about how people use mental shortcuts to determine their attitudes about new, unfamiliar technologies. At the same time, industry narratives and counter-narratives work to fill in that gap. For instance, Mooney said, the fossil fuel industry has pushed the idea that natural gas can be a "bridge" fuel, helping transition Americans from oil and coal to [renewable energy sources](#), while [environmental activists](#) have called it a "bridge to nowhere" that will result in continued reliance on [fossil fuels](#).

The current war in Ukraine and its impact on the international oil and gas markets has prompted more calls for the U.S. provide additional natural gas supplies to limit Russian influence, Boudet said, particularly in Europe, which is heavily reliant on Russian gas.

"It will be interesting to see how the industry responds and what, if any, additional natural gas export proposals we see in the future because natural gas exports to Europe are more likely to flow from the Gulf of

Mexico and East Coast," Boudet said. "We are in a time of unprecedented change in energy markets."

More information: Rachel Mooney et al, Risk-benefit perceptions of natural gas export in Oregon, *Local Environment* (2022). [DOI: 10.1080/13549839.2022.2040470](https://doi.org/10.1080/13549839.2022.2040470)

Provided by Oregon State University

Citation: Oregonians perceive greater risk than benefit from natural gas export in state, study finds (2022, April 7) retrieved 21 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2022-04-oregonians-greater-benefit-natural-gas.html>

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