Beyond message framing

Participant characteristics predict social acceptability of increased deer culling in Scotland

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1. Background
2. Relevance
3. Methods
4. Key findings
5. Conclusions

Deer are iconic animals in Scotland

Increasing numbers are causing problems

New legislation to increase annual cull

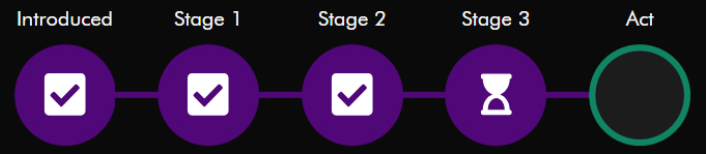
Home > Bills and Laws > Bills (proposed laws) > Natural Environment (Scotland) Bill

Natural Environment (Scotland) Bill

The Bill introduces measures to protect the natural environment.

This is a Government bill

The Bill was introduced on 19 February 2025 and is at Stage 3



This Bill is at Stage 3 of the process to decide if it should become an Act.

Ethically contentious…

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New legislation to increase the deer cull is ethically contentious

Deer management is frequently in the news

Gamekeepers signal opposition to DMNRO proposals

24th March

DEER STALKING ENVIRONMENT SCOTLAND

By Jody Harrison
Reporter
@jodeharrisonHT
Share

5 Comments

Scotland's deer cull. Is it really about 'class envy'?

14th November 2023

ENVIRONMENT NATURE

Allan
ures writer
e

4 Comments

Landowners could be told to cull more deer for nature protection

ns to manage populations that are threatening

Cull of 150,000 deer aims to save Scottish forests

Deer that are shot to preserve the landscape will be used for food

ALAMY

More than 150,000 deer are to be culled across Scotland over the next five years as part of a multimillion-pound scheme to protect the country's trees.

Scotland's red deer population is estimated to have exceeded one million (E

There is, according to a Spectator column published last month by being waged by the SNP and Greens. It is one "motivated by class er up as a high-minded attempt to save the planet".

Nature group and Highland community clash over deer cull

The John Muir Trust has angered neighbours in Assynt with an out-of-season cull at Quinag.

Katharine Hay • Wednesday 11 January 2023 17:00 GMT

Deer culling by the John Muir Trust has been met with resistance by a crofting community in the Highlands (Scottish Gamekeepers Association/PA)

Framing

Assigning greater weight to certain elements of an issue over others. (Entman, 1993)

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[PDF] News framing: Theory and typology

CH De Vreese - Information design journal+ document design, 2005 - academia.edu

… here appear to be interesting differences between European journalistic traditions, at least concerning the **framing** of **news** in terms of economic consequences. **Framing news** in terms …

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News framing theory and research

D Tewksbury, DA Scheufele - Media effects, 2019 - taylorfrancis.com

… , **framing** research argues that **news frames** function to suggest how audiences can interpret an issue or event. In fact, **news frames** … consequential processes in **news** consumption and …

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Framing

Assigning greater weight to certain elements of an issue over others. (Entman, 1993)

Five lessons to guide more effective biodiversity **conservation message framing**

AM Kusmanoff, F Fidler, A Gordon... - **Conservation** ..., 2020 - Wiley Online Library

... basis is likely to be helpful for **framing conservation messages** because many of the behavior changes advocated in **conservation** are about sacrifice. **Messages** that motivate people to ...

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It's the mind-set that matters: The role of construal level and **message framing** in influencing consumer efficacy and **conservation** behaviors

K White, R MacDonnell... - Journal of Marketing ..., 2011 - journals.sagepub.com

... In the case of **conservation** behaviors such as recycling, we ... We propose the effect of **message framing** on **conservation** intentions ... We anticipate that that a loss-framed **message** will be ...

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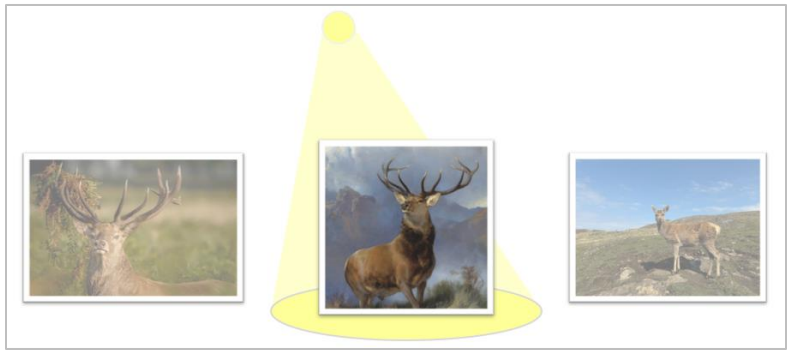
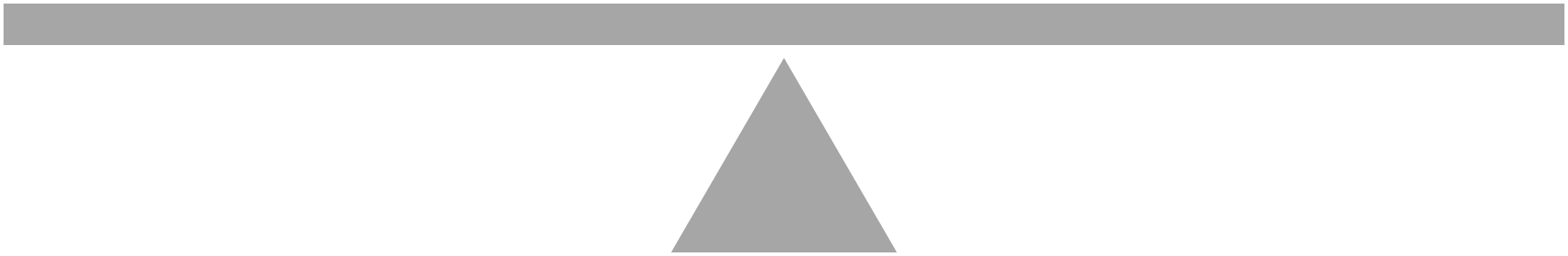
What did we want to know?

Are perceptions of increasing the deer cull in Scotland affected by...

Message framing



Participant characteristics



What did we want to know?

Are perceptions of increasing the deer cull in Scotland affected by…

1. Different message framings in online news?
2. Differences in social identities?
3. General experiences and perceptions of deer?
4. Demographic characteristics?

What did we do?

qualtrics XM

Online experiment: 1,300 members of Scottish public (stratified)

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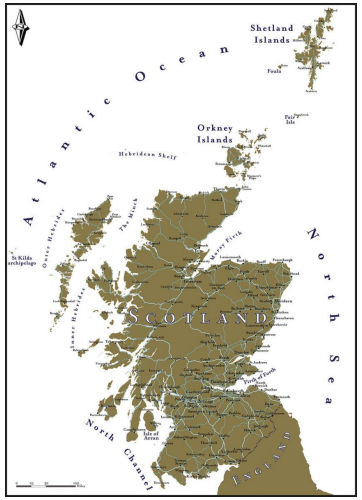

Scottish Government propose new plans for deer management

Biodiversity concerns are relevant to deer management. *(Image: EarthPics)*

The Scottish Government recently unveiled controversial new plans for Scotland's deer, proposing a Deer Management Nature Restoration Order (DMNRO).

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Deer are iconic Scottish animals but are causing damage due to their high numbers. In July 2023, the Scottish Government estimated that it spends almost £9 million per year on deer management.

A Scottish Government spokesperson said: "culling more deer would increase biodiversity by protecting habitats such as woodlands and peatlands in Scotland".

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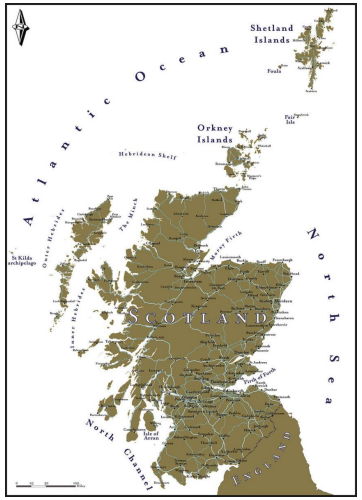

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A Scottish Government spokesperson said: "culling more deer would increase biodiversity by protecting habitats such as woodlands and peatlands in Scotland".

How acceptable or unacceptable would it be to increase the deer cull in Scotland?

Heading remains identical in all articles

Image frame

Text that remains identical in all articles

Gain/loss frame

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Text frame

16 different mock online news articles

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New legislation to increase the deer cull is ethically contentious

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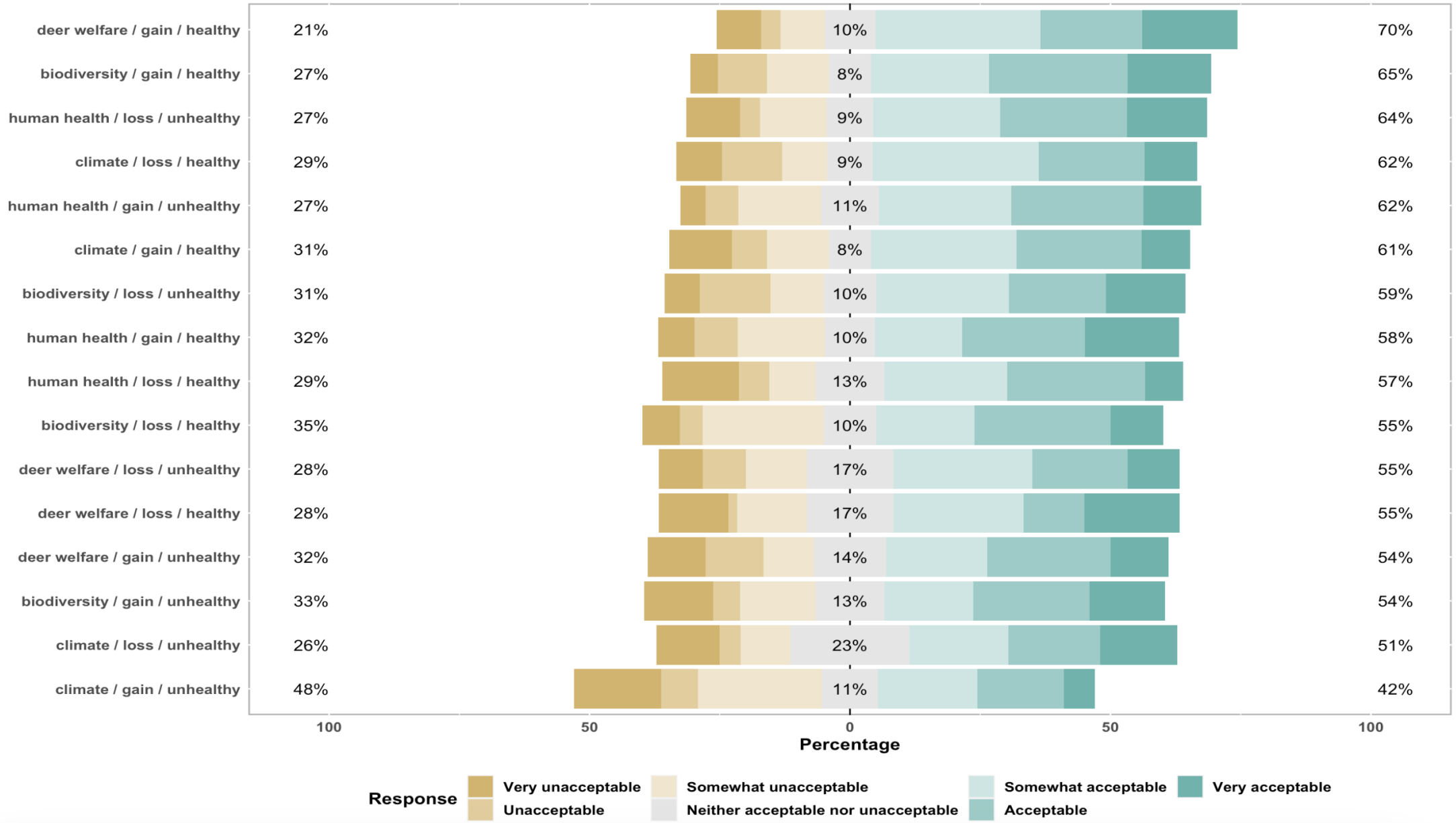
3 **Methods**

Mock online news articles with slightly different framings

4 **Key findings**

5 **Conclusions**

What did we find?



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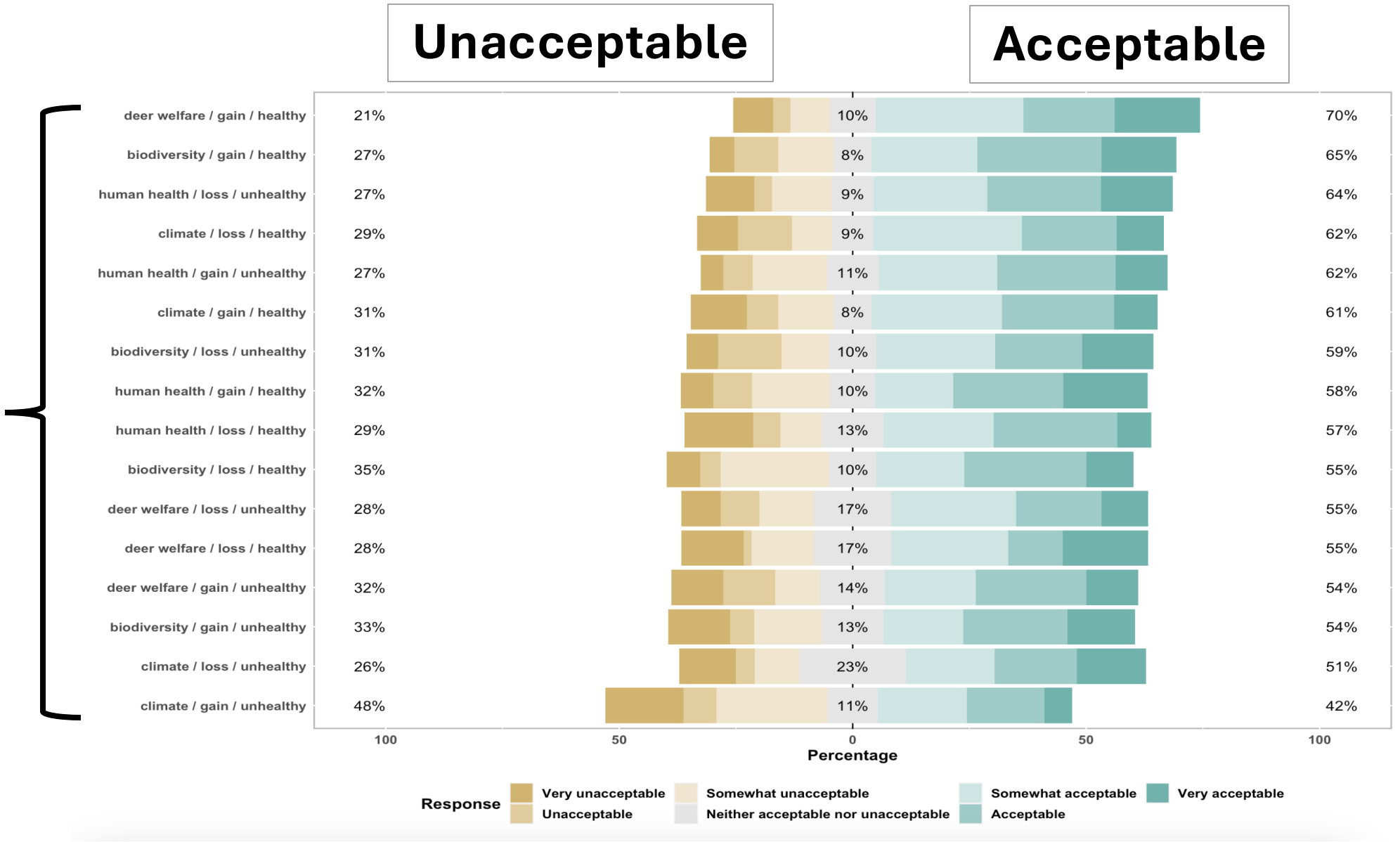

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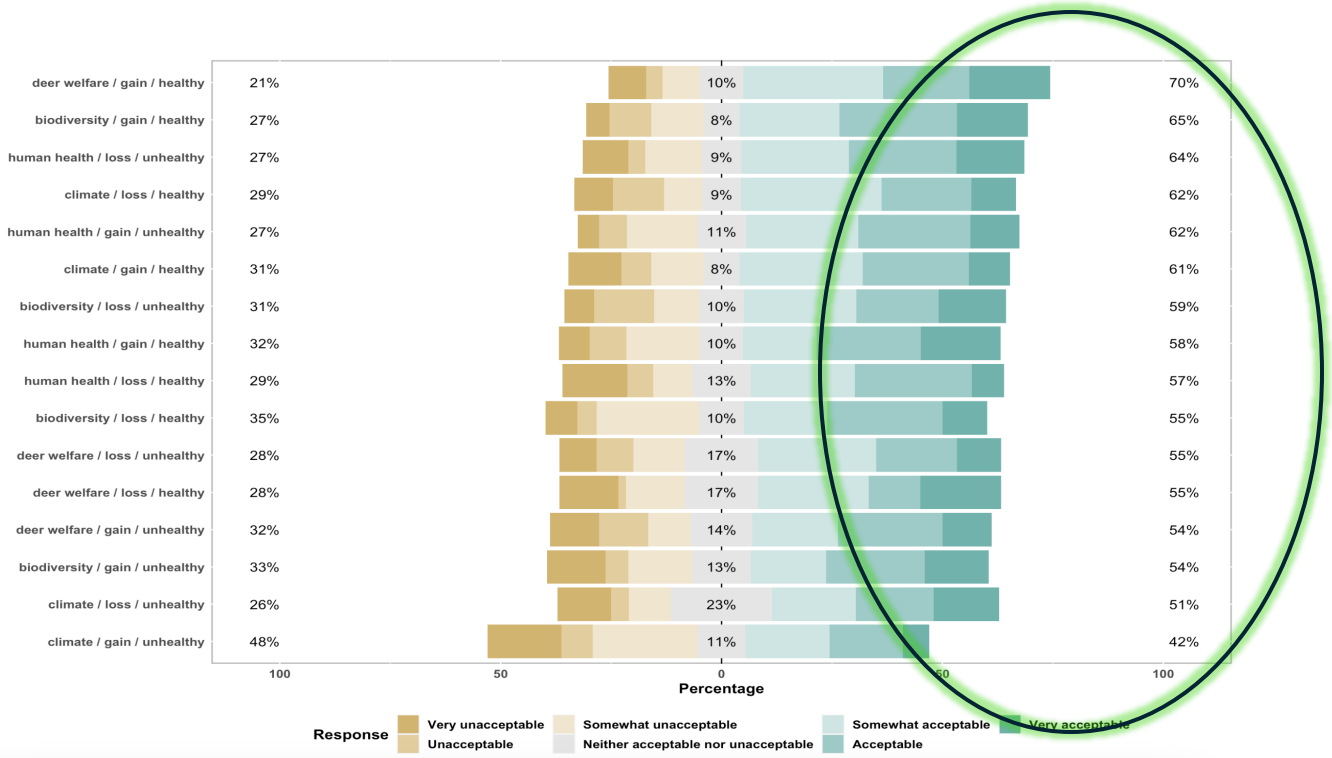
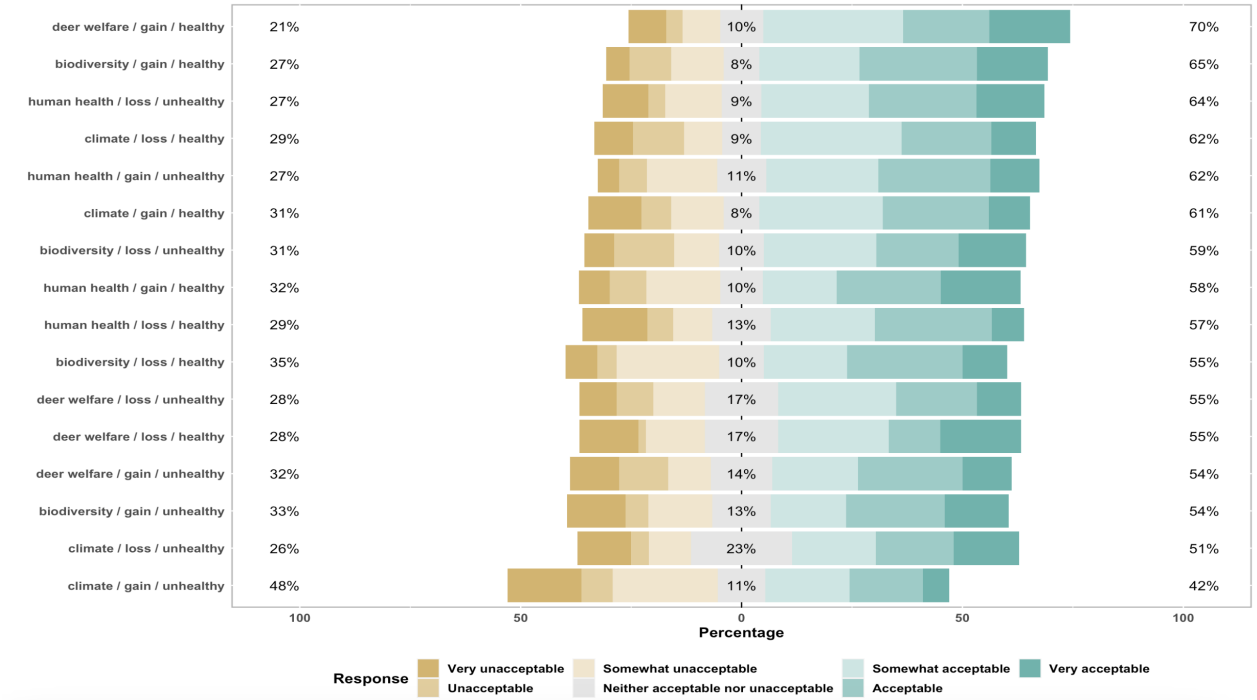


Increasing the cull was more acceptable than unacceptable

What did we find?



Little evidence that perceptions of acceptability were sensitive to message framing

Increasing the cull was **more acceptable** than unacceptable

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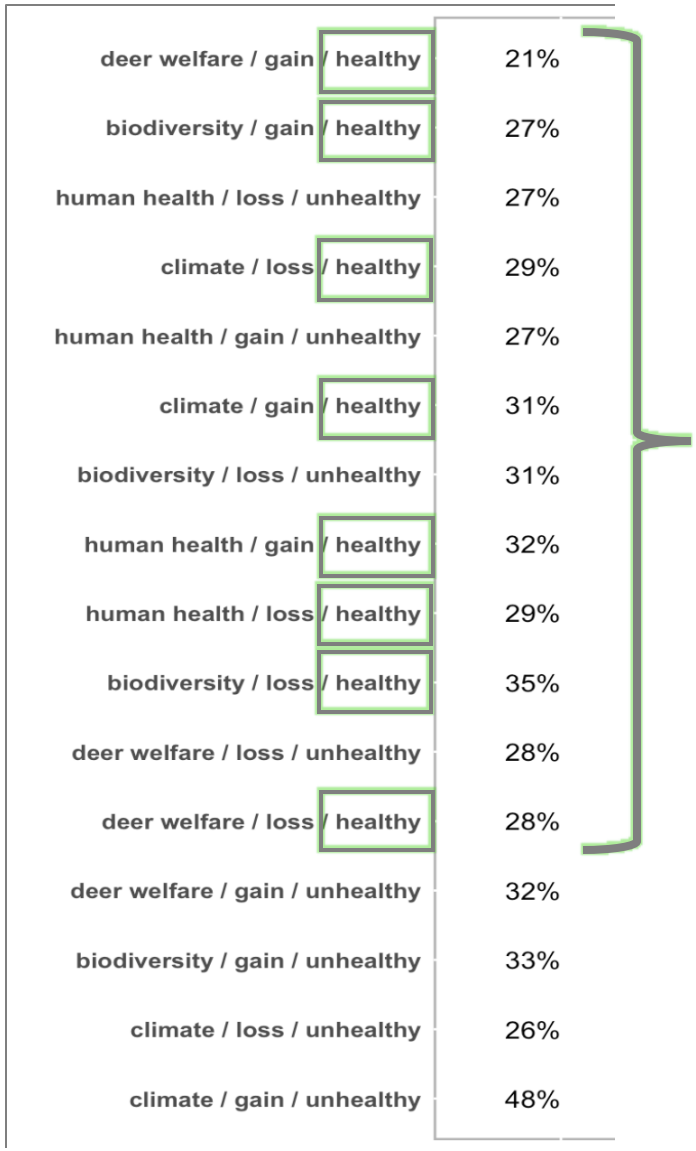

Slightly more influence of the 'healthy' image frame

Little evidence that perceptions of acceptability were sensitive to message framing

Increasing the cull was **more acceptable** than unacceptable

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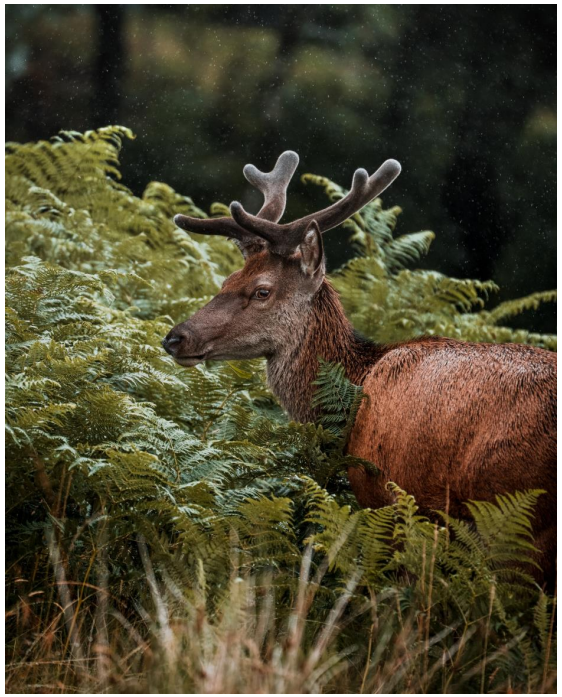
Instead, participant characteristics explained differences in perception

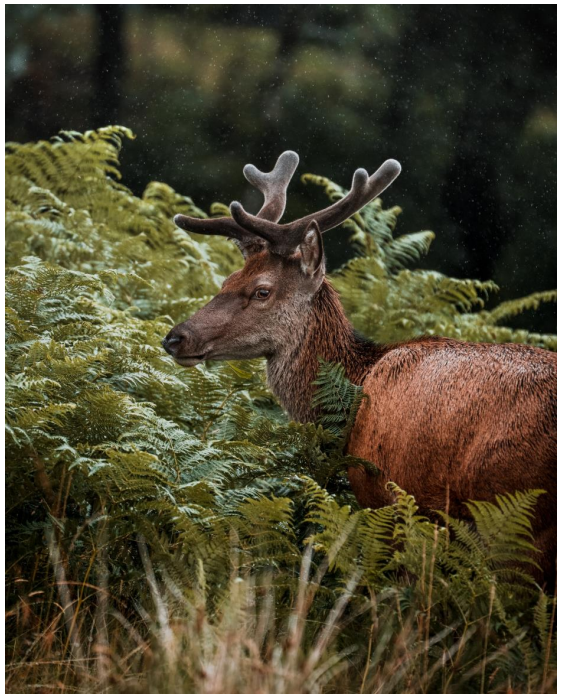


What did we find?

Instead, participant characteristics explained differences in perception

More likely to say increasing the cull was acceptable if they:

1. Identify more strongly as a **deer stalker**
2. Identify less strongly as an **animal protectionist**
3. Identify as **male**
4. Have greater **trust** in the Scottish Government
5. Are already **aware** of the annual deer cull
6. Think the number of deer in Scotland is **too high**
7. Encounter deer **less frequently**



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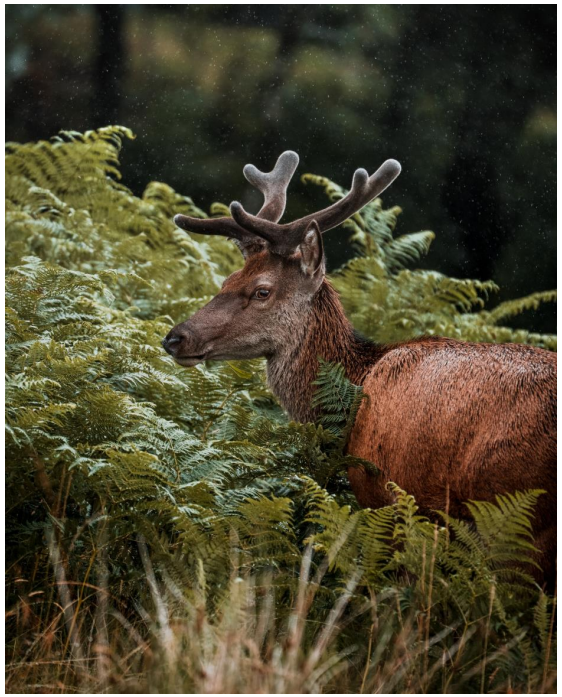

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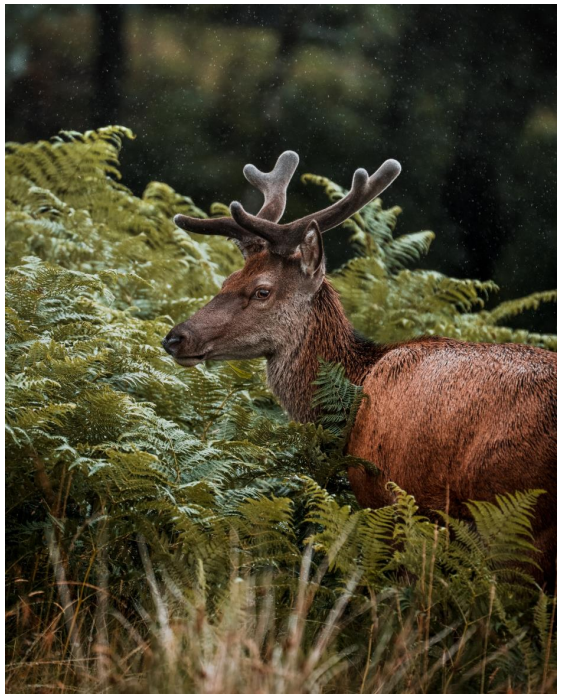

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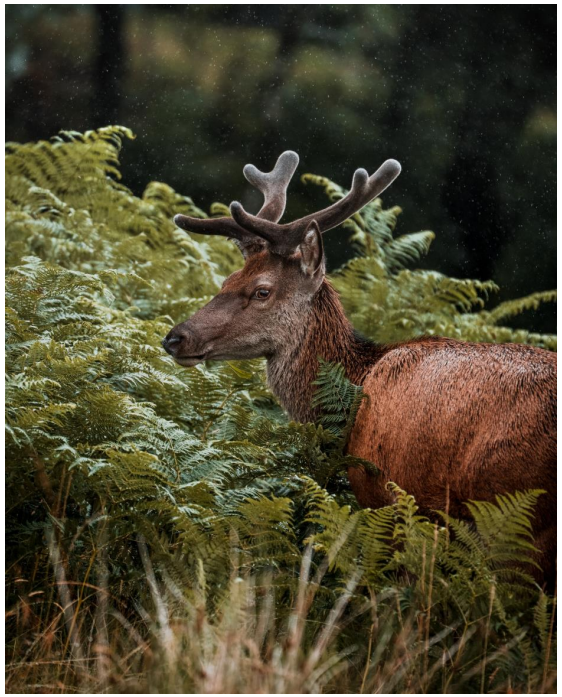

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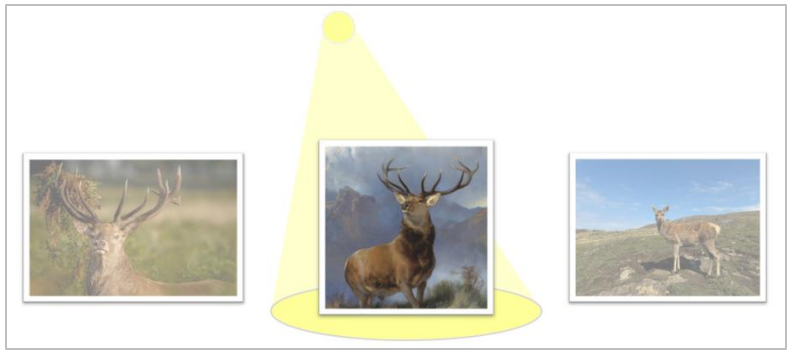

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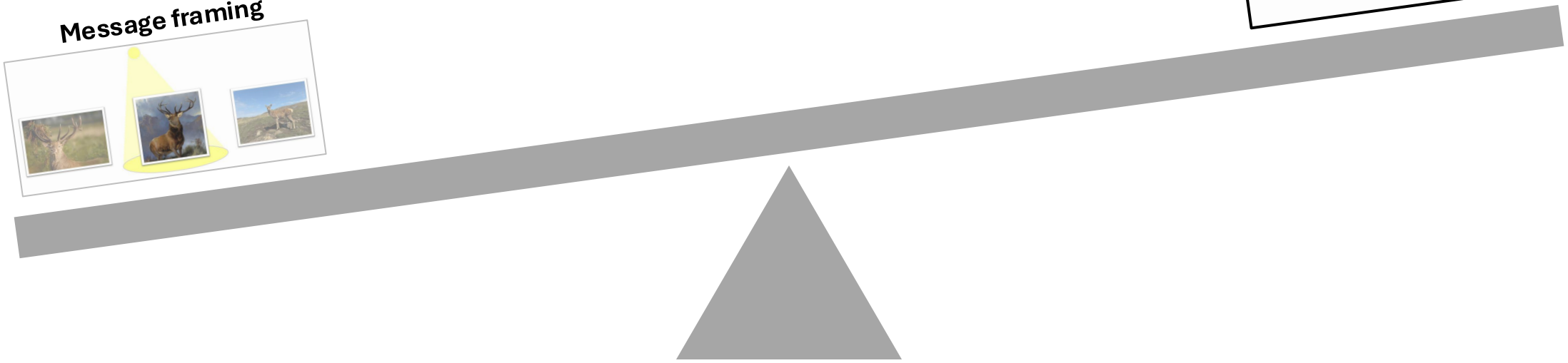

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Acceptability predicted by the **type of person** you are, not the **type of article** you read

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Collaborators: Dr Mike Daniels, Jess Tacey, Dr Paul Johnson, Emily K. Madsen, Dr Darragh Hare

Funders: Scottish Environment LINK, School of Geography and the Environment (University of Oxford)