

PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF DEER MANAGEMENT IN SCOTLAND

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2 April 2025



The Menace of the Glen?

Damage to peatlands and forests

- habitat loss, biodiversity decline
- carbon sequestration

Lyme disease transmission

Road accidents

- economic costs
- public health and safety

Animal welfare



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Publication - Independent report

The management of wild deer in Scotland: Deer Working Group report

Published: **5 February 2020**

Directorate: [Environment and Forestry](#)

[Directorate](#)

Topic: [Environment and climate change,](#)

[Farming and rural](#)

ISBN: **9781839605253**

The final report of the Deer Working Group.

Part of

[Deer Working Group](#)

Ecological and **economic** evidence
of negative impacts of large deer
populations

But no evidence about whether
shooting more deer would be
socially acceptable or unacceptable



How acceptable or unacceptable it would be to shoot more deer if doing so would help achieve various objectives?



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- allow **forests** to recover
- allow **peatlands** to recover
- address **climate** change
- reduce the number of **deer that starve** in winter
- allow **other animals** to survive and thrive
- reduce **Lyme disease** transmission
- reduce the number of **road accidents** involving deer

- create more **stalking opportunities**
- provide low-cost **venison**

On average, do rural people and urban people answer these questions differently?



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Online Questionnaire

1002 adults living in
Scotland

726 urban, 276 rural

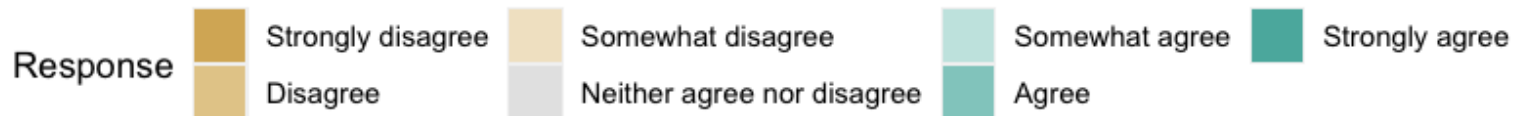
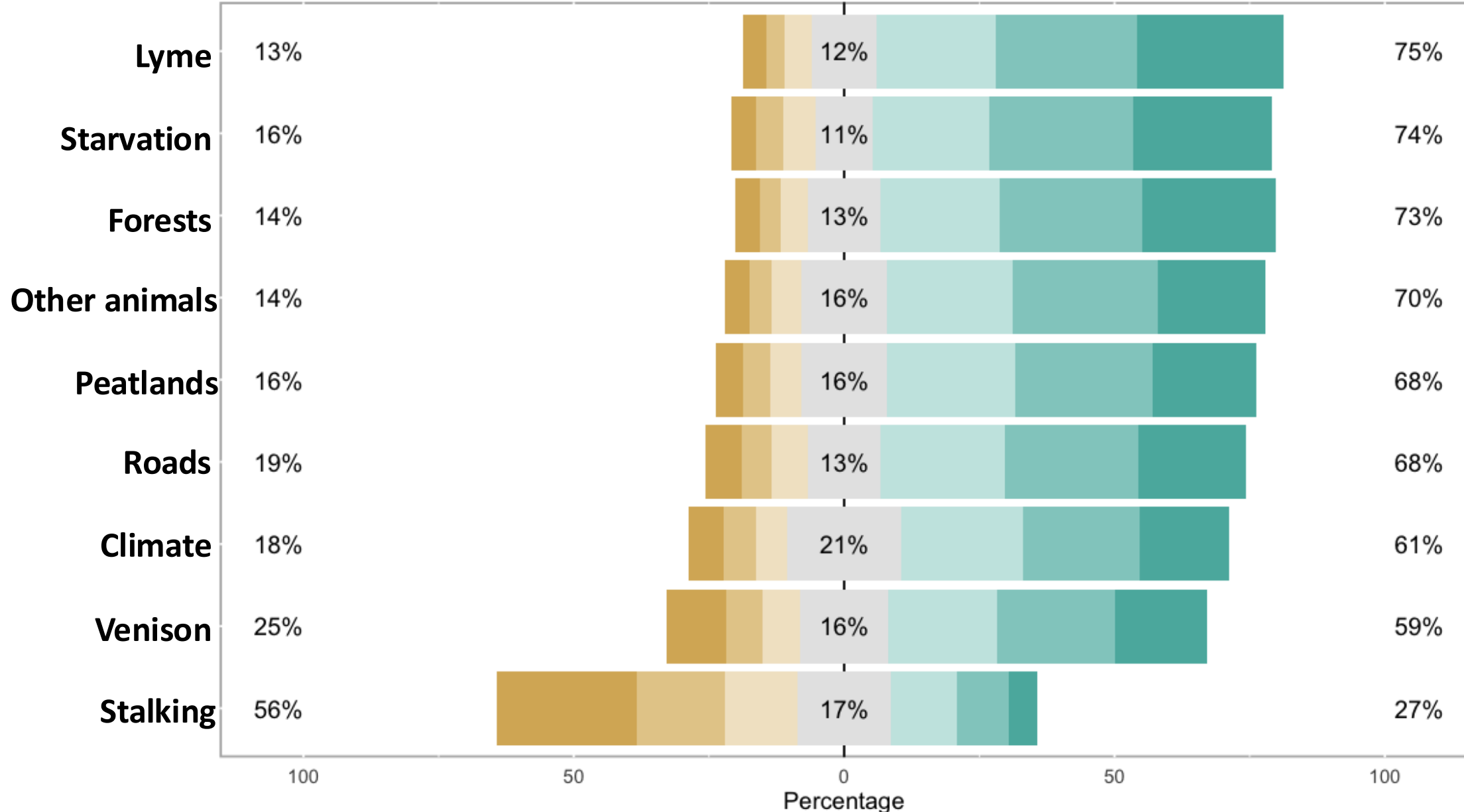
~ Scottish population:
gender, ethnicity, age

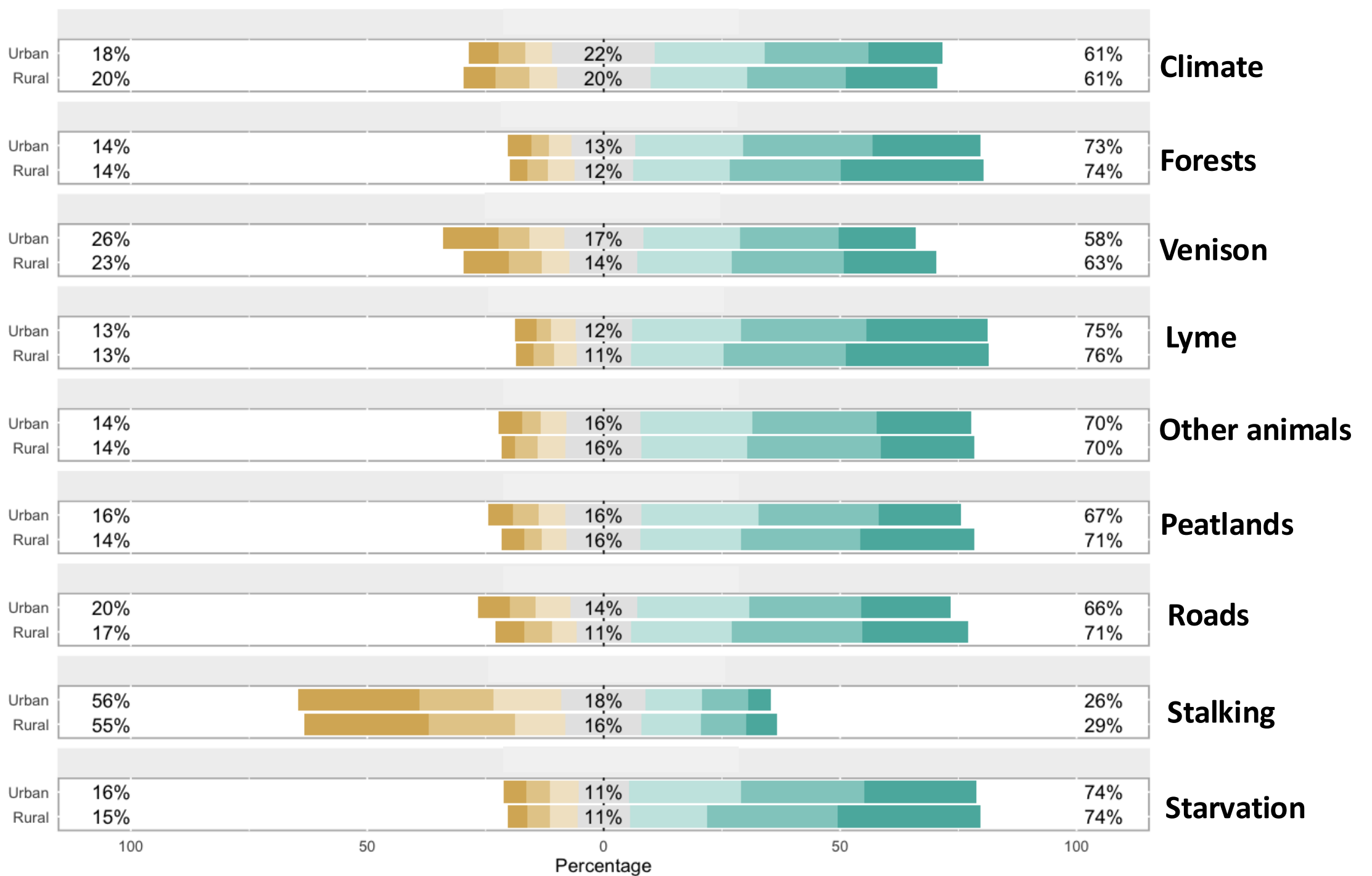
16 March – 21 April 2021

Hare, Daniels & Blossey (2021)



Getty Images





Study aim:

Understand whether message framing in online news articles influences public perceptions of deer culling in Scotland.



Gamekeepers signal opposition to DMNRO proposals

24th March

DEER STALKING ENVIRONMENT SCOTLAND



By Jody Harrison
Reporter

X@jodeharrison11T



5 Comments



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

14th November 2023

ENVIRONMENT NATURE



By Vicky Allan
Senior features writer



4 Comments



Scotland's red deer population is estimated to be around 1.5 million.

There is, according to a Spectator columnist, a case for the cull being waged by the SNP and Greens. It is seen up as a high-minded attempt to save the

Landowners could be told to cull more deer for nature protection

Scottish ministers are considering plans to manage populations that are threatening woodland and peatland preservation

Cull of 150,000 Scottish forest



Deer that are shot to preserve the landscape. ALAMY

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

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 cullings 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)



What we did:

Online experiment, **1,300** members of Scottish public.



Each participant **read** one of 16 mock online news articles, which were subtly different and emphasised different message frames.

We asked how **acceptable or unacceptable** it would be to increase the deer cull in Scotland.

Heading remains identical in all articles

Scottish Government propose new plans for deer management

Image frame



Text that remains identical in all articles

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

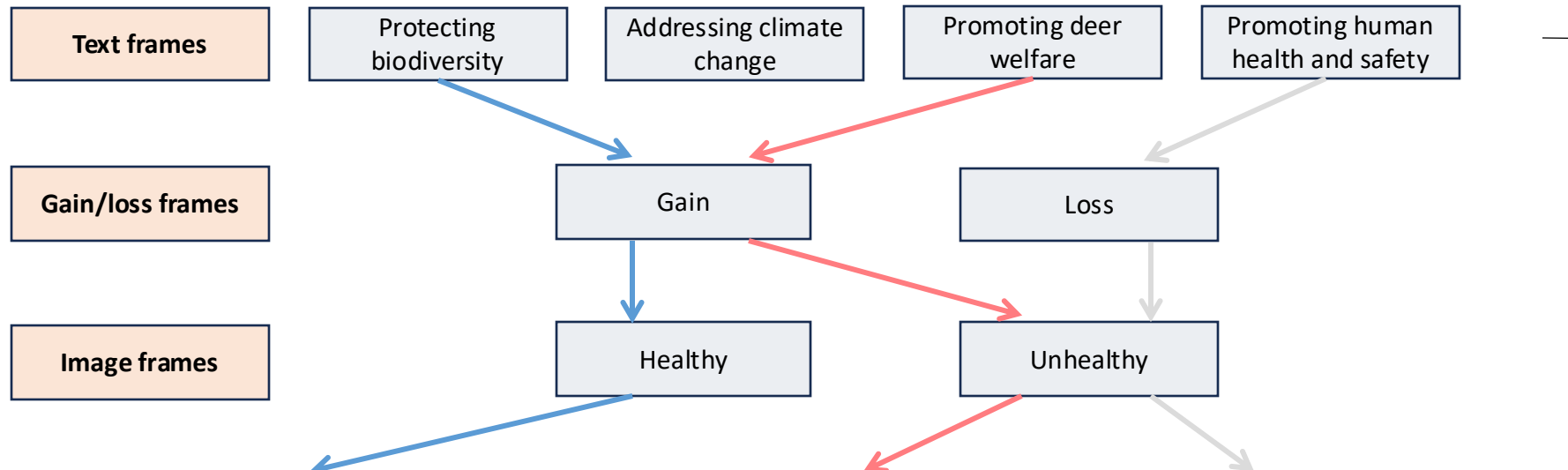
It is estimated that the wild deer population in Scotland has doubled since 1990 to more than one million. Deer are currently managed by shooting on public and private land and voluntary culls by local deer management groups. However, the Scottish Government is considering deer management reform to reduce negative impacts of deer.

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.

Gain/loss frame

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

Text frame



Existing news article review

Scottish Government propose new plans for deer management



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

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Scottish Government propose new plans for deer management



Deer welfare concerns are relevant to deer management. (Image: EarthPix)

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A Scottish Government spokesperson said: "culling more deer would improve deer welfare by making more food available, so more deer avoid starvation during winter in Scotland".

Scottish Government propose new plans for deer management



Human health and safety concerns are relevant to deer management. (Image: EarthPix)

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A Scottish Government spokesperson said: "culling more deer would reduce threats to human health and safety by making roads safer for motorists and reducing the prevalence of Lyme disease in Scotland".

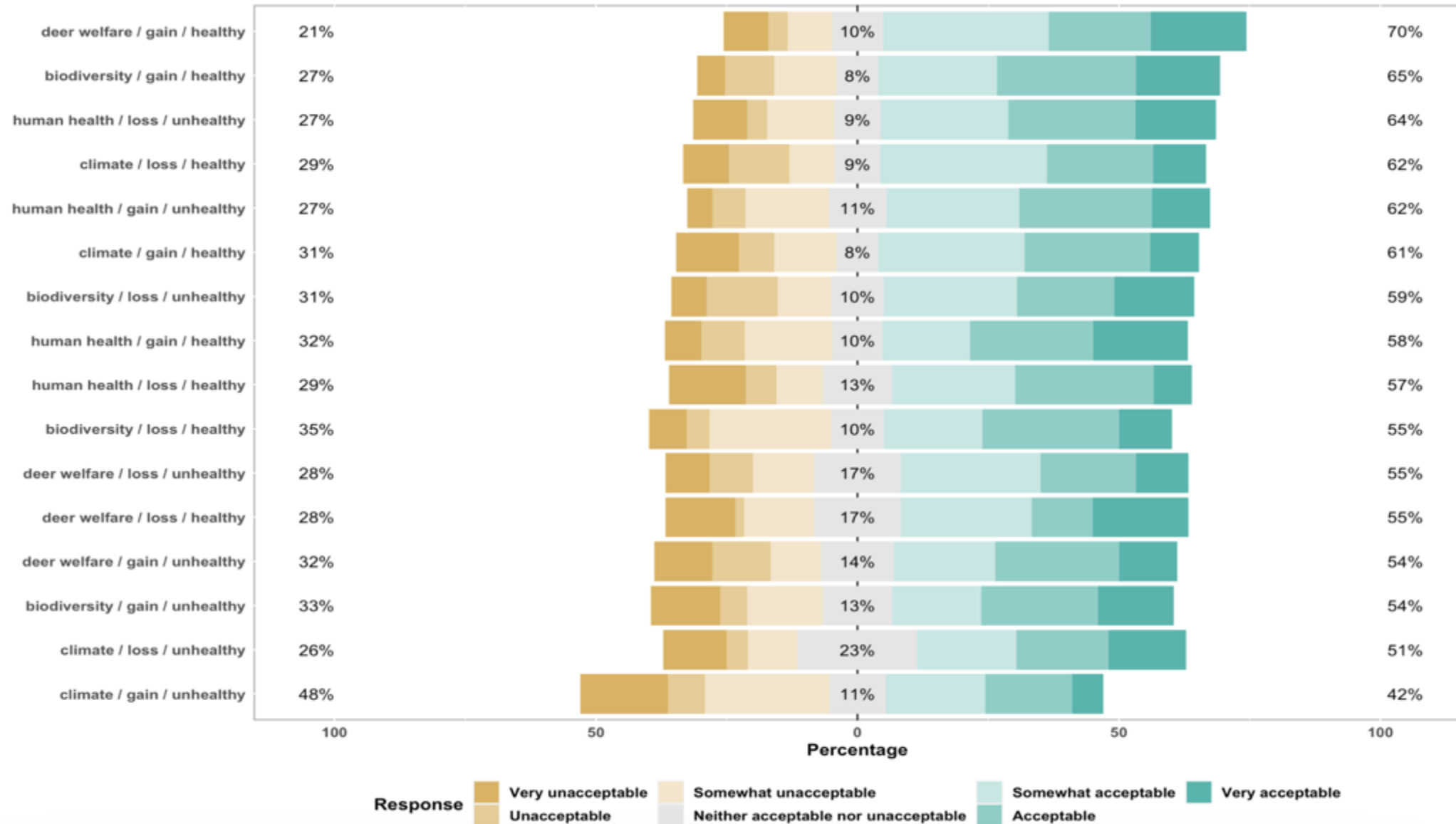
We wanted to know:

Is the acceptability of increasing the deer cull in Scotland affected by...

1. Different message framings? (i.e., words, gain/loss, images)
2. Differences in social identities?
3. General experiences and perceptions of deer?
4. Demographic characteristics?



What did we find?



What did we find?

Participant characteristics mattered more for acceptability.



People were more likely to say increasing the deer cull was acceptable if they:

- identify as **male**
- have greater **trust** in the government
- are already **aware** of the annual deer cull
- think the **number of deer** in Scotland is too high
- **encounter** deer less frequently
- identify more strongly as a **deer stalker**
- identify less strongly as an **animal protectionist**



Summary

Perceptions **not very susceptible** to message frames in the media.

Evidence of **deeply entrenched** positions?

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



What is it that you would like to know,
and we could answer with research?

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