



CAN CHANGING THE NARRATIVE ABOUT FELLOW ANIMALS HELP US WIN THEIR FREEDOM?

Which are the best narratives
for influencing support for
Animal Freedom?

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Rhetorical.

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INTRODUCTION



In this study, we set out to test different messages that framed the issue of Animal Freedom in different ways.

What is message framing?

Framing is the way we talk about and interpret an issue, which focuses on certain aspects of information, while leaving out others.



We set out to answer the question:

Which message frames are most influential for getting public support for Animal Freedom?

1

Working with Rhetorical, we recruited 4,026 UK participants to take part in an online survey.

2

Each person saw one of 10 messages about why we should give other animals freedom or rights.

3

They were then asked to rate their attitudes about animals on different issues.

- Agreement with the article
- Considering animals needs
- Giving animals rights
- Animals having freedom
- Animals having equality
- Passing laws to protect the needs of animals

4

They were finally asked how much they would support different potential laws to help win Animal Freedom.

- Meat tax
- Subsidies
- Factory farming ban
- Protecting rights of all animals

Here are some examples of the messages people saw:

"Almost everyone cares about animals, whether it's a beloved family companion or the wild animals that share our neighbourhoods. Morally, there's no reason to differentiate the way we treat the animals we share our homes with and those who are farmed for food. They are all individuals, with the same capacity to feel love and joy, and so should be respected by society and protected in law. Animal rights helps us to look beyond species and to respect all animals equally."

"All animals are individuals who feel love, joy, pain, fear, and loneliness, just like humans do. For example, animals who are confined can become depressed, and cows will mourn the loss of their baby if the calf is taken away from them. Studies have shown that many animals even express laughter, including rats when playing. Because other animals have a rich internal experience just like humans, their rights should be recognised and protected."





We found that the way we framed these messages improved people's attitudes more than a baseline message which didn't include any framing

Messages that focused on animal intelligence, social progress, and morality increased agreement with pro-animal attitudes by up to 11%.

Intelligence:
76%
agreement.

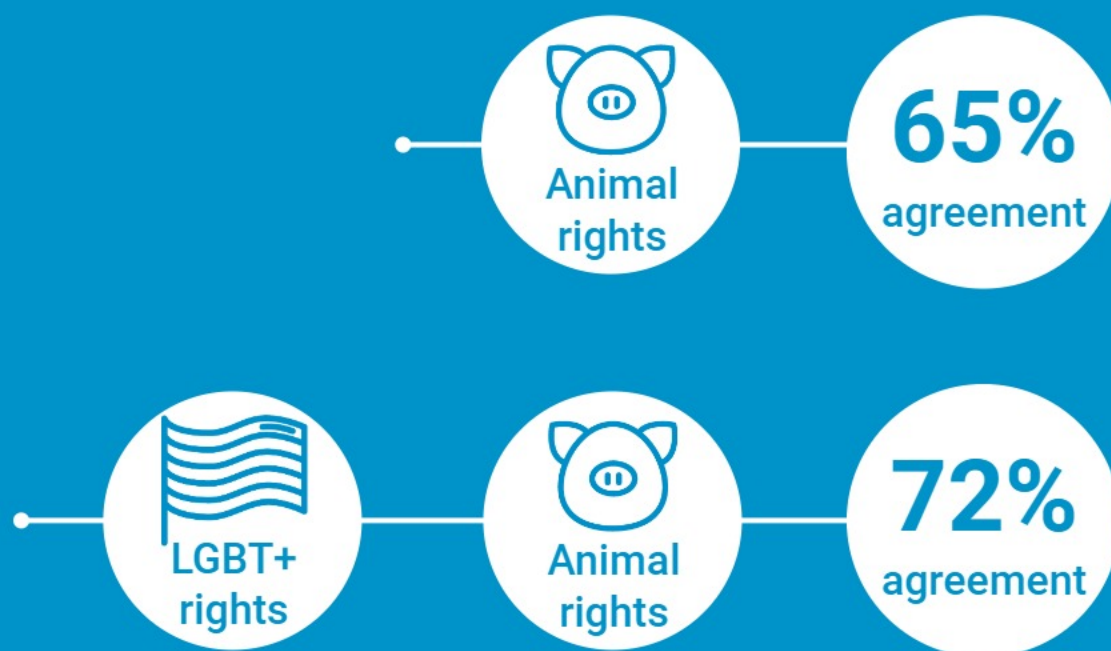
Morality:
74%
agreement.

Social progress:
71%
agreement.

Baseline
(without framing):
65%
agreement.

We also found a spill-over effect across social movements:

A message that talked about LGBT+ rights, framed in terms of social progress, was just as effective at increasing attitudes towards animals (72% agreement, compared to 65% baseline). This represents a spill-over effect, whereby priming values in one context (e.g. LGBT+ rights) activates the same values in another context (animal rights). This spill-over effect may be useful in campaigns that make reference to other social justice issues, and suggests greater collaboration between movements could be an effective strategy.



We found that some narratives can be counterproductive:

We found two message frames in particular were counterproductive, in which support for pro-animal attitudes was lower than that of the neutral baseline condition. Specifically, messages that were framed in terms of speciesism and oppression led to lower attitudes towards animals than the baseline. This could be because these are niche terms that are not widely understood by the public. It shows that we need to use everyday language which resonates with people, and that more work needs to be done to make speciesism a more widely understood concept.

None of our message framing manipulations influenced support for changing specific laws to protect animals, despite up to 64% agreeing that the government should impose laws to protect animals.

'The government should pass laws to protect animals.'

64%

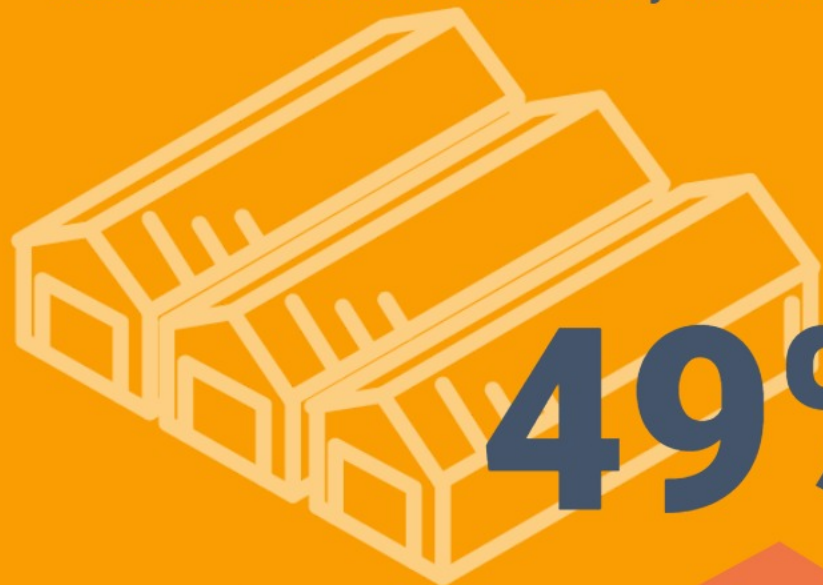
'Which of the following laws would you support?'

36%



'A law which increased subsidies for plant-based agriculture, and reduced or removed subsidies to animal-based agriculture.'

'A law which banned factory farming.'



49%



44%

'A law which protects the rights of all animals in not being harmed, exploited, or killed.'



22%

'A law which put a tax on buying meat.'

The general population cares for other animals but is disconnected from how they are harmed and exploited.

Up to 71% (depending on the message they read) supported the statement "Animals deserve the same rights as humans in not being harmed or exploited", yet only 49% are in support of a ban on factory farms, an industry that is well known to be highly harmful and exploitative of fellow animals.

"Animals deserve the same rights as humans in not being harmed or exploited"



71%

In support of a ban on factory farms



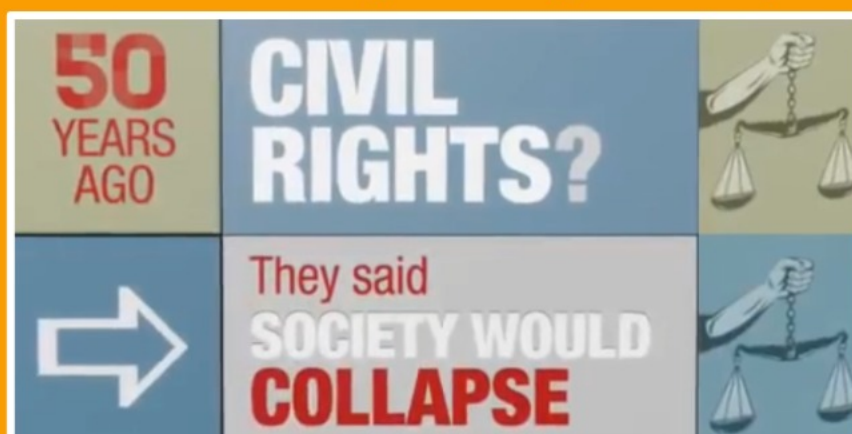
49%

How can we, as animal advocates, use this knowledge to our advantage?

1 Focus on effective narratives. For example, our fellow animals deserve freedom because...

a ...it is the next step in our social progress.

"Society is evolving all the time. Most countries in the world have improved their human rights by outlawing human slavery and child labour. Recognising the rights of animals is the next stage in our progress towards a more progressive world. As a progressive civilised society, all animals should have their rights recognised and protected."



An image from a Vegan Society video encouraging people to take the vegan pledge. The video focused on past social justice movements, how they were once perceived as futile, but now are looked back on with admiration. The video attempts to frame the vegan movement in the same light. Watch the video [here](#).

b

...they are individuals, with an internal life, with their own unique intelligence and capabilities.

"Many people feel that humans are uniquely special in the animal kingdom. However, many other animals are highly intelligent, just like us. Crows can solve complex problems, dolphins work together to hunt, and bees can count. Studies have shown that pigs are just as intelligent as dogs. Many animals even have intellectual capabilities that humans do not possess. For example, bats and dolphins can use sonar, and many animals can sense sights and sounds that humans can't."



C

...it is the morally right thing to do.

"When it comes to morality, the golden rule is to treat others the way we would like to be treated ourselves. However, we often forget this rule when it comes to our treatment of animals, particularly farmed animals. The way we treat other animals is immoral. We have a moral obligation to respect other animals, and to treat them more morally."



2

Be aware of who we are talking to, and tailor our messages accordingly.

Left-leaning people, who are more supportive of social progress in other areas (e.g., LGBT+), are more likely to be supportive of social progress for fellow animals. Even if they do not already have that mindset, it can be activated through how we frame our messages. When people are in a social progress mindset, they are more open to support Animal Freedom. This means we can draw connections between Animal Freedom and other freedom movements, as well as seek collaboration across movements.



3

Avoid "activist" language, or language that may alienate others.

Speak the language of the person you are communicating with. If terms like 'oppression' or 'speciesism' are ones they would not typically use, they should be avoided until more work has been done to make these terms more widely understood.



Animal Think Tank



To read the full analytical report that these findings are based on, please contact robert.udale@animalthinktank.org.uk or natalie.braine@animalthinktank.org.uk

