

Abstract

Fierce international debates rage over whether trophy hunting is socially acceptable, especially when people from the Global North hunt well-known animals in sub-Saharan Africa. We used an online vignette experiment to investigate public perceptions of the acceptability of trophy hunting in sub-Saharan Africa among people who live in urban areas of the USA, UK and South Africa. Acceptability depended on specific attributes of different hunts as well as participants' characteristics. Zebra hunts were more acceptable than elephant hunts, hunts that would provide meat to local people were more acceptable than hunts in which meat would be left for wildlife, and hunts in which revenues would support wildlife conservation were more acceptable than hunts in which revenues would support either economic development or hunting enterprises. Acceptability was generally lower among participants from the UK and those who more strongly identified as an animal protectionist, but higher among participants with more formal education, who more strongly identified as a hunter, or who would more strongly prioritize people over wild animals. Overall, acceptability was higher when hunts would produce tangible benefits for local people, suggesting that members of three urban publics adopt more pragmatic positions than are typically evident in polarized international debates.