

## Abstract

Two enduring ideological divisions in biodiversity conservation concern whether conservation should prioritize (i) the interests of people or wild animals and (ii) the interests of individual animals or groups of animals. Public debates suggest that people living in the Global North more strongly prioritize the interests of wild animals over people and the interests of individual animals over groups of animals. To examine this possibility, we measured and compared conservation priorities across 10 international publics living in rural and urban areas of sub-Saharan Africa, the United States of America (USA) and the United Kingdom (UK). Overall, distant respondents (i.e. living in the UK, USA and urban sub-Saharan Africa) more strongly prioritized the interests of wild animals over people and the interests of individual animals over groups of animals. Moreover, variation among local publics (i.e. living in high-biodiversity areas of rural sub-Saharan Africa) was greater than among distant publics. Our findings illuminate how ideological divisions may complicate international biodiversity conservation, especially around controversial topics such as culling, hunting, translocation and protected-areas management. Policies and programmes more acceptable to distant people may be less acceptable to local people, creating difficulties for decision-makers charged with balancing biodiversity conservation alongside the values, needs, interests and concerns of multiple publics.