

Framing Research Methods

Focus Groups

We conducted 10 focus groups over a two-week period in February 2021. They were conducted online by Zoom. Each group had 5-6 participants for a total of 59 participants. We aimed for the participants to be demographically and politically representative, and that there was a mix of participants from rural, urban and suburban areas. Each focus group contained a mix of demographics.

Each group discussed one of three topics/problems (Case for Change, Meat, Affordability) and saw a set of three to four frames on topic, as outlined below. We held four groups on Case for Change, three on Meat and three on Affordability.

The groups were structured to enable us to assess participant's existing understanding and framing on the topic, and if our experimental frames shifted them towards policy or system level solutions to that problem. Each group followed the same structure:

1. Descriptive session: 'unframed' group discussion
2. Prescriptive session: each frame was read aloud followed by a set of discussion questions after each one
3. Application session: participants were asked to prepare a presentation to a "community meeting" about the problems with the topic being discussed (food, meat or affordability). This was done in three parts:
 - a. Individual thinking and notes shared privately to the meeting facilitator
 - b. Prepare group presentation: the facilitator left the room for 10 minutes to allow the participants to prepare their presentation as a group
 - c. Give group presentation and answer questions from an "audience" member (the facilitator acting "in character")
4. Summary thoughts and takeaways

As there can be cross-frame effects with this method, we varied the order in which each group saw the frames. Following the failure of the first two focus groups on meat to shift participants' away from individual responsibility, in the third focus group on meat, we added a statement about government responsibility.

We analysed the focus groups in three stages:

1. Group level analysis: assessed the group's shift in discussion (if at all) by looking at:
 - a. Pre/post: Opening discussion (unframed) versus the presentation (after they'd heard the frames) to see which frames they picked up and used in their presentations (if any)
 - b. Frame specific debate: The discussion after each frame to see which ones provoked a shift in thinking (if any)
 - c. Float time: How long a frame stayed "alive" in a group discussion
 - d. Backfire effects: If any of the frames had unintended consequences
2. Individual level analysis: coding the transcript from each group down to the individual level, to see which frames they picked up and how they used them (if at all)
3. Post-polling: reviewing the focus group findings to help us understand and interpret the polling results

Summary of experimental frames tested in focus groups		
Case for change	Runaway food system	Experts are increasingly concerned about our runaway food system. The way we produce food today has radically changed and now has the power to shift our way of life as we know it without us even being aware of it. The food system today is clearing forests and using farming chemicals like pesticides and weed killer, permanently altering our soil, water and climate and destroying wildlife. The food system is the main threat to most of the species that are at risk of extinction. Without change, this damage will continue to accelerate and will threaten our ability to sustain ourselves. We can control this runaway food system and need to do this before it gains more momentum and does irreparable damage to us and our planet.
	Legacy	We expect our food system to produce what we need now and for generations to come, but it is becoming clear that decisions are being made today that will affect the food system and our way of life far into the future. Pesticides and hormones that are used in growing food, and the distance that food travels, have long-term consequences on the food system's future. Relying on food that is produced in other countries makes farming in the UK less profitable, pushing more and more UK farmers to quit farming, which threatens our ability to produce food in years to come. Pesticides and chemical fertilizers have long-term consequences for human health and the environment. Short-term decisions about our food system have long-term repercussions. We need to make changes to ensure we have a stable, healthy food system for our children and grandchildren.
	Urgency and efficacy	The food system today is damaging our health and is a leading contributor to climate change and species extinction. The clearing of forests, destruction of habitats, and use of chemicals is harming our wildlife and nature, including the very insects we rely on to pollinate our food. The way we currently produce food, transport it, and store food waste in landfills all produce greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to climate change. Without change, the damage will continue to accelerate and will threaten our ability to sustain ourselves. This is not some dystopian future; this is happening here and now, on our watch. But there are changes we can make right now, like reducing pesticides and shifting our diets toward more fruits, vegetables and pulses, that will stop the destruction the food system is causing, so it can provide healthy food for all of us.
	Power	Powerful food companies and retailers determine what food is available for us to buy and have the power to shape how that food is produced – and therefore they have a huge influence on our health and the health of the environment. We all want to feel we are doing our part to protect our health and environment, but right now powerful companies are making irresponsible decisions, like using harmful chemicals, that have long-term consequences for all of us. We are already feeling the effects of the damage that big food businesses are doing to the planet and our health. Government needs to hold the food and farming businesses accountable, with legislation and regulations, to make sure they act responsibly.

Meat	Explanatory frame: Anti-microbial resistance (public health)	Our meat production system is damaging our health. To produce the amount of meat we currently eat, we have to keep lots of animals very close together and fatten them quickly on diets they would not naturally eat (like corn and soya). To keep animals raised like this from getting sick, they have to be routinely treated with antibiotics. This allows bacteria to adapt and become resistant to the antibiotics we have. This directly affects our health, because these resistant bacteria can jump from animals to humans, meaning antibiotics might not work for us when we're ill. If we produce less meat, we can raise them in better conditions to avoid widespread antibiotics use and reduce the threat of antibiotic resistance, helping us all to stay healthy. [Government needs to set standards on how meat is produced, to protect the public's health. (NB: Final sentence only seen by one of three groups)]
	Explanatory frame: environment	Our system of meat production is causing damage to our environment . To produce the amount of meat we currently eat, we are deforesting much of the Amazon rainforest for cows and sheep to graze on, and to grow crops like soya to feed them. When we cut down the forest, we lose the unique plants and animals that live there. Even in the UK, to meet our demand for meat we are producing meat in ways that take away habitat for our bees and birds. Producing less meat means we can stop the destruction we are causing to our most precious natural resources. [Government needs to set standards on how meat is produced to protect the environment. (NB: Final sentence only seen by one of three groups)]
	Culture	Eating meat is an important part of British food cultures. Think of our beloved Sunday roast. But there is nothing to be celebrated about eating highly processed, low quality meat that has often travelled long distances. This is damaging our health and producing this much meat in this way is damaging our planet. Imagine instead a country where we take the time to savour high-quality meat reared on British land. Where eating good meat in sensible quantities is an important part of what it means to be British. Where we can be proud and confident that by eating less meat, but valuing and appreciating where it has come from, we are doing the right thing for our bodies, for our land, and for the environment. [It is government's responsibility to regulate producers, food processors and retailers to ensure that this is what our food system delivers.] That's something we can all get behind. (NB: sentence in brackets only seen by one of three groups).
Affordability	System realignment – healthy food	It is not right that only people who have a lot of money can afford healthy food. The most budget friendly products in the supermarket can also be the least healthy. Imagine you are buying a loaf of bread. That bread might be cheaper because the government subsidised the farmer to grow a certain kind of wheat that produces more but is less healthy, or the manufacturer used additives to make it last longer. But we could realign the food system so that healthy foods are the affordable option. The government could subsidise farmers to grow fruits and vegetables, provide tax breaks to companies producing healthy food or penalise companies for using unhealthy ingredients. We know that this works to make people

		healthier – when you reduce the price of healthy food, people buy more of it. The government needs to realign the system and support action like those above which make it easier for affordable, healthy food to end up on our plates.
	System realignment – local food	It is not right that only people who have a lot of money can afford good food. We know that it doesn't have to be this way--the food system <i>can</i> provide high quality food at prices people can afford. To make that happen we need to realign the system so that it works for everyone. Right now, things like subsidies, tax breaks, and free trade agreements, provide a huge advantage to large international food producers and processors. This is one reason why industrially produced food, even when it has been shipped from the other side of the world, is often less expensive than food from the farm next door. ¹ The answer is to support local businesses that produce fresh, fair, and healthy food. For example, the government could support communities to set up local farmers markets, or to produce fruits and vegetables on vacant lots in cities that could go into meals at our local schools.
	Power	Powerful international food companies and retailers determine what food is available for us to buy and at what price. Right now, they are using that power to create cheap, unhealthy food, and choosing to sell healthy food at a premium. They also have the power to change this if they were willing to value our health and budgets alongside their own profits. We need government to be responsible and work on our behalf to set legislation and regulations that require food companies to act in our best interests, not just in terms of their bottom line.

Polling

All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 5,299 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 11th - 16th March 2021. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+).

We ran 7 experimental groups, plus a control group. The groups were randomly allocated. All groups, apart from the null control group, were shown a different paragraph of written material (a 'frame') ahead of the survey questions. The null control group were not shown anything before answering the survey questions.

1. **Attitudes to the problem and efficacy of solutions:** To what extent, if at all, do you agree or disagree with each of the following? (Strongly agree – Agree - Neither agree nor disagree- Disagree- Strongly disagree- Don't know)
 - a. The food system is damaging our health
 - b. The food system is damaging the planet
 - c. Good food is unaffordable in the UK

¹ These two sentences are adapted from *Local is our Future* by Helena Norberg-Hodge (p.76), which originally read: "These policies provide a huge competitive advantage to large monocultural producers and corporate processors and marketers – which is one reason why industrially produced food that has been shipped from the other side of the world is often less expensive than food from the farm next door."

- d. We need to eat less meat in the UK
 - e. If we continue as we are now, we will not have a healthy and stable food system in the future
 - f. If we act now we can fix the food system and the problems it causes
2. **Support for Policies:** To what extent, if at all, would you support or oppose government taking action to...
(Strongly support - Tend to support - Neither support nor oppose - Tend to oppose- Strongly oppose - Don't know)
- a. ...impose a tax on companies for producing foods which are high in sugar, salt and saturated fat, such as sweets, cakes, crisps and processed meat.
 - b.Lower the amount of meat we eat by replacing it with plant-based meat alternatives in supermarket products such as ready-made lasagnas, burgers, and other manufactured foods.
 - c.reduce the impact of food production on our environment.
3. **Responsibility:** To what extent, if at all, do you agree or disagree with each of the following? (Strongly agree – Agree - Neither agree nor disagree – Disagree - Strongly disagree- Don't know)
- a. It is our responsibility as individuals to eat food that is better for us and the planet
 - b. Food companies are responsible for making food that is better for us and the planet
 - c. It is the government's responsibility to set policies and regulations so it is easier for us to eat food that is better for us and the planet

Split Name	Text
Control	No text
Case for Change - Power - no resp.	The way we produce food today has radically changed. It is becoming clear that powerful food companies determine what food is available for us to buy and have the power to shape how that food is produced. These companies therefore have a huge influence on our health and the health of the environment. We all want to protect our health and environment, but right now powerful companies are making this really hard through their irresponsible decisions, like using harmful chemicals, that permanently alter our soil, water and destroy wildlife. We are already feeling the damage that big food businesses are doing to our health and the planet.
Case for Change - Power - Gov Resp.	The way we produce food today has radically changed. It is becoming clear that powerful food companies determine what food is available for us to buy and have the power to shape how that food is produced. These companies therefore have a huge influence on our health and the health of the environment. We all want to protect our health and environment, but right now powerful companies are making this really hard through their irresponsible decisions, like using harmful chemicals, that permanently alter our soil, water and destroy wildlife. We are already feeling the damage that big food businesses are doing to our health and the planet. Government needs to work on our behalf and use legislation and regulations to ensure food companies act in our best interests, not just in terms of their bottom line.
Case for Change - Legacy - Gov Resp.	The way we produce food today has radically changed. It is becoming clear that decisions are being made today about how our food systems works that will affect our way of life and our future generations far into the future. We all want to protect our health and environment, but right now we are using harmful chemicals to grow food that permanently alter our soil, water and destroy wildlife. This has long-term consequences for our health and the planet. Decisions we are making now about our food system have long-term repercussions for generations of people to come. Government needs to work on our behalf and use legislation and regulations to ensure we have a stable, healthy food system for our children and grandchildren.

Affordability - System realignment, power	It is not right that only people who have a lot of money can afford good food. Powerful food companies determine what food is available for us to buy and at what price. We know that it doesn't have to be this way--companies can provide high quality food at affordable prices. To make that happen we need to realign the system so that it works for everyone. Right now, big companies are using their power to create cheap, unhealthy food, and choosing to sell healthy food at higher prices. This is why unhealthy food, even when it has gone through more processing, is often less expensive than healthy food. Government needs to work on our behalf and use legislation and regulations to ensure food companies act in our best interests, not just in terms of their bottom line.
Affordability - System realignment, local	It is not right that only people who have a lot of money can afford good food. We know that it doesn't have to be this way - the food system can provide high quality food at affordable prices. To make that happen we need to realign the system so that it works for everyone. Right now, things like subsidies, tax breaks, and free trade agreements, advantage large international food producers. This is why industrially produced food, even when it has been shipped from the other side of the world, is often less expensive than food from the farm next door. Government needs to work on our behalf and use legislation and regulations to support local food companies to produce fresh, fairly priced food.
Meat - Culture - no resp.	Eating meat is an important part of British food cultures. Think of our beloved Sunday roast. But there is nothing to be celebrated about eating highly processed, low quality meat that has often travelled long distances. This is damaging our health and producing this much meat in this way is damaging our planet. Imagine instead a country where we take the time to savour high-quality meat reared on British land. Where eating good meat in sensible quantities is an important part of what it means to be British. Where we can be proud and confident that by eating less meat, but valuing and appreciating where it has come from, we are doing the right thing for our bodies, for our land, and for the environment.
Meat - Culture - Gov Resp.	Eating meat is an important part of British food cultures. Think of our beloved Sunday roast. But there is nothing to be celebrated about eating highly processed, low quality meat that has often travelled long distances. This is damaging our health and producing this much meat in this way is damaging our planet. Imagine instead a country where we take the time to savour high-quality meat reared on British land. Where eating good meat in sensible quantities is an important part of what it means to be British. Where we can be proud and confident that by eating less meat, but valuing and appreciating where it has come from, we are doing the right thing for our bodies, for our land, and for the environment. Government needs to work on our behalf and use legislation and regulations to ensure food companies use good meat in sensible quantities.

Demographics

Focus Group Demographics		
Gender	Female	34
	Male	25
Age	18-30	18
	31-40	12
	41-50	8
	51-60	11
	61-70	7
	71-80	3
Social Segmentation	A	5
	B	9
	C1	20
	C2	11
	D	7
	E	7
Living Status	Co-habiting	5
	Divorced	6
	Married	18
	Single	26
	Widowed	4
Children	Yes, under 18	18
	Yes, 18+ or not at home	18
	No	23
Employment Status	Employed	33
	Homemaker	3
	Retired	10
	Self Employed	4
	Student	2
	Unemployed	7
Urban/Suburban/Rural	Rural	12
	Suburban	18
	Urban	29
Location	England	45
	Wales	4
	Scotland	6
	Northern Ireland	4
Voting Preference	Brexit Party	1
	Conservative	17
	Democratic Unionist Party	2
	Don't know/Undecided	6

	Green Party	4
	Independent	1
	Labour	18
	Liberal Democrats	3
	Scottish National Party	2
	Sin Fein	2
	I will be eligible, but I wouldn't vote	1
	I would not be eligible to vote	1
	I would spoil my ballot	1

Figure 1: Interaction between Age and responses to questions on responsibility in the polling

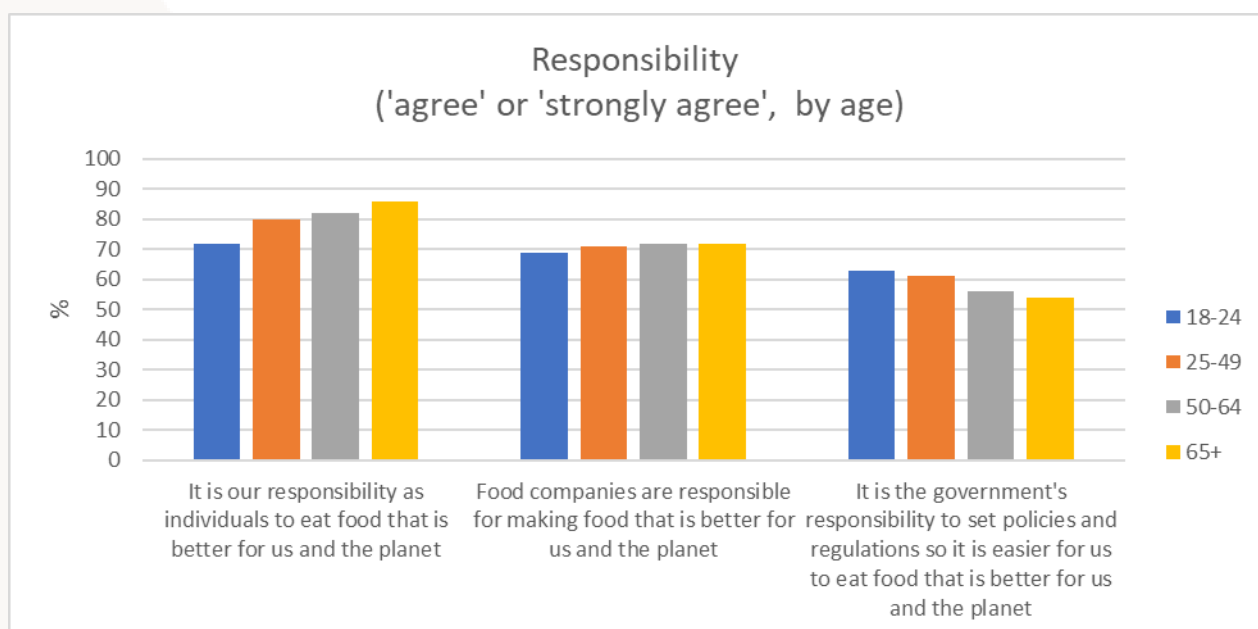


Figure 2: Interaction between political affiliation and responses to questions on responsibility in the polling

