



Food, Farming
& Countryside
Commission

Shifting the food system: Frames to speed policy change

1 September 2021

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What is Framing?

“Frames are mental structures that shape the way we see the world. As a result, they shape the way we seek, the plans we make, the way we act and what counts as a good or bad outcome of our actions.”

- *Don't Think of an Elephant*, George Lakoff (2014)





Why reframe?

“When we successfully reframe public discourse, we change the way the public sees the world. We change what counts as common sense. Because language activates frames, new language is required for new frames.”

- *Don't Think of an Elephant*, George Lakoff (2014)

Ideas, not slogans

Need to access what people “already believe unconsciously, make it conscious, and [repeat] it until it enters normal discourse” - *Don't Think of an Elephant*, George Lakoff (2014)

Tap into deeply held beliefs and values

Define the problem in such a way that the solution is also defined



Issues for framing food

Personal responsibility vs. systemic responsibility – including 'choice' discourse

Inequalities/disparities

Prevention and long-term approach vs. immediate need

Citizen needs vs. producer livelihoods – 'cheap food'

Foods vs. nutrients

Local vs. global



Example: Framing Childhood Obesity

Caregivers and parents need to start making healthy choices for their children.



Families are up against a flood of unhealthy food; pouring out from high streets, supermarket shelves, and our school canteens. We need to close the floodgates.



<https://www.gsttcharity.org.uk/cotoolkit/>



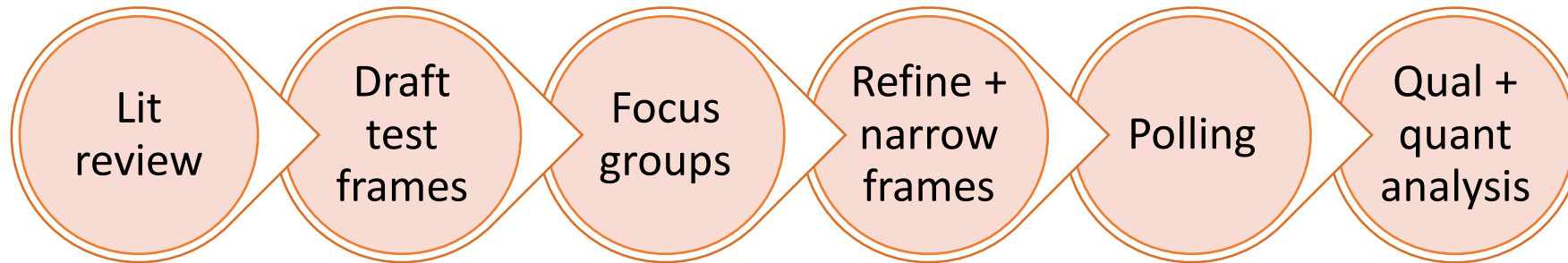
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Our Key Question

Do our re-frames help shift people away from individual level solutions to food and towards policy/system level solutions to food?

Methods



Poll Groups

Frame Topic	Poll Group
n/a	Null control
Case for Change	Power, no responsibility ascribed
	Power, govt responsibility
	Legacy, govt responsibility
Affordability	System realignment, power, govt responsibility
	System realignment, local food, govt responsibility
Meat	Culture, no responsibility ascribed
	Culture, govt responsibility

Key Findings

- Helpful frames/language
 - System realignment
 - Affordability as a systems issue + as intro to other topics
 - Power in the system
 - Responsibility
- Unhelpful frames/language
 - Explanation/problem without solution/responsibility
 - Meat-culture?

“...it scares me, but it doesn't scare me up into action because it just sounds really discouraging.” **Case for Change group – reacting to urgency frame**

“And it should be the responsibility of government to be able to enforce these companies to use to think about what they put in food. And I think that's a very good sentiment.”

Affordability group – reacting to realign/health frame

Key Findings - Affordability

Put affordability front and centre

- Affordability frame increases support on other policies (meat, environment)
- Came up as a barrier in every focus group
- Affordability-power frame most successful in polling (+12 pts on government responsibility) – with strong cross-over effects to other topics (environment, meat)
- Frame affordability as a *system* issue that goes beyond just cost

“I think, while we can all be idealistic about what we want to do, I think it has to be realistic. It's what people can afford...it's tough time for a lot of people at the moment. So can't just say, Oh, you've got to buy organic, this, that and the other.”

Case for change group

‘Affordability-Realignment-Power’

Frame

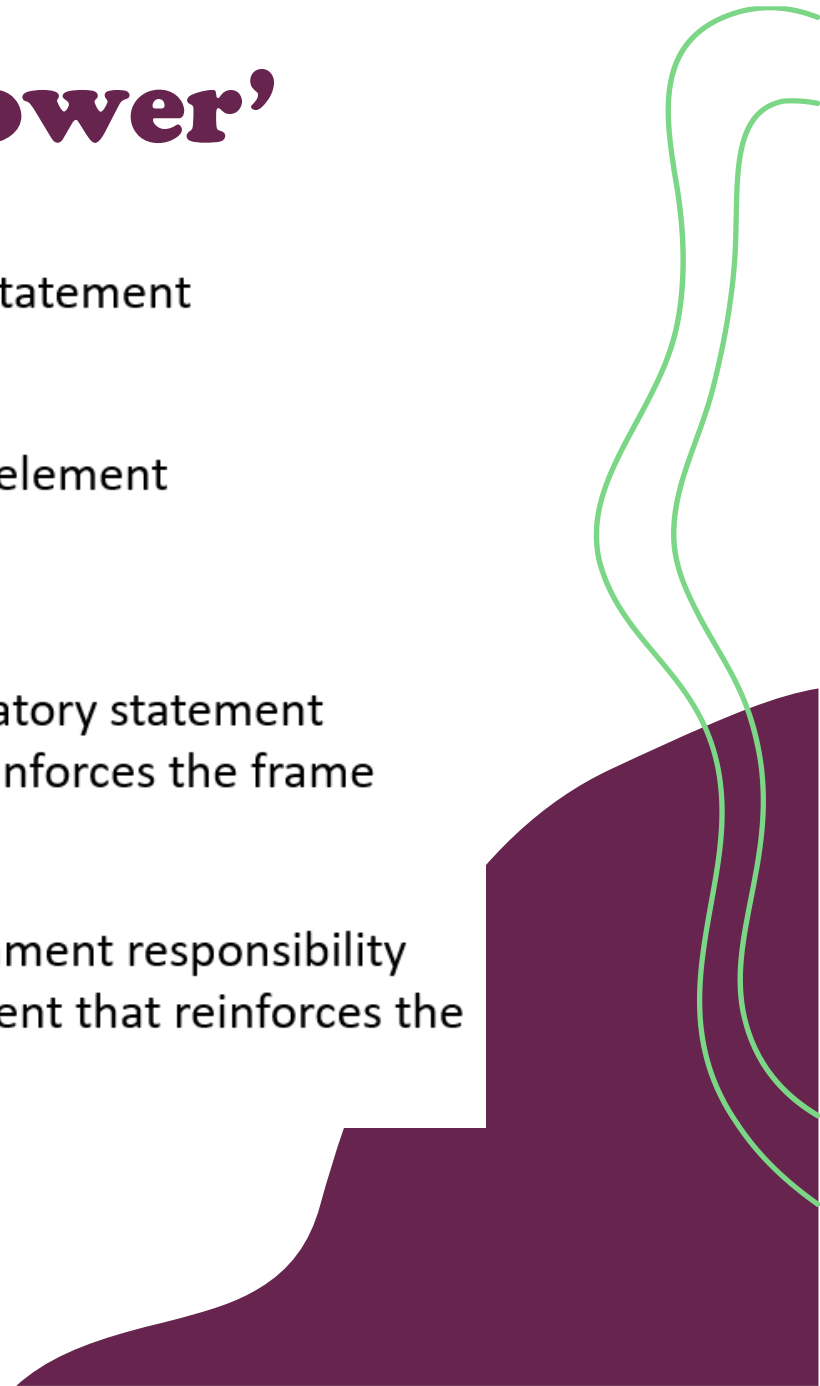
It is not right that only people who have a lot of money can afford good food. Powerful food companies determine what food is available for us to buy and at what price. We know that it doesn't have to be this way--companies can provide high quality food at affordable prices. To make that happen we need 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.

Value statement

Frame element

Explanatory statement that reinforces the frame

Government responsibility statement that reinforces the frame



Affordability Frame Effect

Unframed discussion:

“And healthy eating, even when I go to the supermarket, I try to eat a lot more healthier than I maybe did, even two, three years ago.”

Affordability group

Reaction to frame:

“It's back to what we were talking about chasing profit. Healthy, buying the healthy stuff cheaper, is clearly the way to go to reduce the obesity in this country. And it takes the government to do that. It says the government could subsidise farmers to grow fruit and vegetables, as a very I don't know, if we do already. Maybe we do...But it seems a very sensible idea to me.” **Affordability group**



Key Findings – Government responsibility

High support for government involvement

- High support for HFSS tax/levy
- High support for 'govt responsibility' especially with affordability frame
- Support increased with power frames and ascription of responsibility

“They're at the point where their system works...the quick, easy food with foods with high fructose corn syrup in it, high sugar food, high, high, extremely high fat content foods. It's ingrained for them to produce it, and people buy it, how do you break that trend? Are they willing to do it off their own backs? No, they're probably not. So would they need someone like an authority to step in and say, listen, we need to make this change now?”

Case for change group

Key Findings – Meat

- Meat frames in focus groups didn't shift towards policy except when govt responsibility added
- Sometimes sparked a 'British exceptionalism' reaction – e.g. I know that's a problem elsewhere, but doesn't happen here
- 'Meat culture' frames sometimes worked and sometimes didn't
- Low support for meat substitution policy but affordability-power frame increased support
- Frames spoke about meat production, not consumption – perhaps helpful in avoiding vegan/non-vegan siloes

“A lot of people aren't in that fortunate position they are buying on a budget and that comes into their one of their food groups I wanna get chicken and get it cheap, because I can't afford in my in my budget to pay more. And that's what supermarkets prey on. It's all price driven.”

Meat Session

Jill 28:37 There's no way that cheap meat can be good meat, if you can buy a whole chicken, three pounds in a supermarket, that chicken has had the most miserable life, it's been very badly treated, the way it's slaughtered will not be a pretty sight. It will, you know, it will not be good meat. It might taste nice. Once you put your salt and pepper on, it will be bad meat. I mean, even before I went vegetarian, I would only buy meat that had been reared properly free range. And it was expensive. But I only bought a bit of it. I just bought less. And I know it was better meat and it didn't trouble my conscience.

Kayleigh 29:15 Um, sometimes people don't have the luxury of doing that, do they? If that's all they can afford, and they have a large family to buy for that's gonna be the option they choose.

Jill 29:24 If you buy less, you could buy better for the same money. [Kayleigh interjects: But again, many people don't have the choices]. You don't have to have a giant piece of meat. You don't have to have meat every day. Some people think you really do. But you know, I accept that everyone's different. But if you want to eat a lot of meat and you're not wealthy, you're going to generally be eating bad meat.

Kayleigh 29:43 Yeah, I'm not, I'm not disputing that. I'm just saying that people don't always have as many options as wealth provides. And if that's what's available to them, they'll take that option.

Framing meat policy – Focus groups

Explanatory frame: Antimicrobial resistance (public health)	Focused on meat production public health impacts via AMR. Only worked when we added the line: <i>Government needs to set standards on how meat is produced, to protect the public's health.</i>
Explanatory frame: environment	Focused on meat production damage to the environment. Only worked when we added the line: <i>Government needs to set standards on how meat is produced to protect the environment.</i>
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. <i>[It is government's responsibility to regulate producers, food processors and retailers to ensure that this is what our food system delivers.]</i> That's something we can all get behind.

Framing meat policy- Polling

- Both 'meat-culture' frames failed to shift views on the statement that 'we need to eat less meat', which is arguably their central goal
- Neither frame increased support for meat substitution in ready meals
- However, 'affordability-realignment' and 'case for change-power' frames increase support for policy to reduce meat in ready meals.
- 'Meat-culture-govt resp' did affect a shift in support for policies to reduce food production impact on environment and government responsibility in food

Meat policy – potential reframes

Negative reaction to meat policies, especially if price increases involved, not surprising given how the meat frames tested

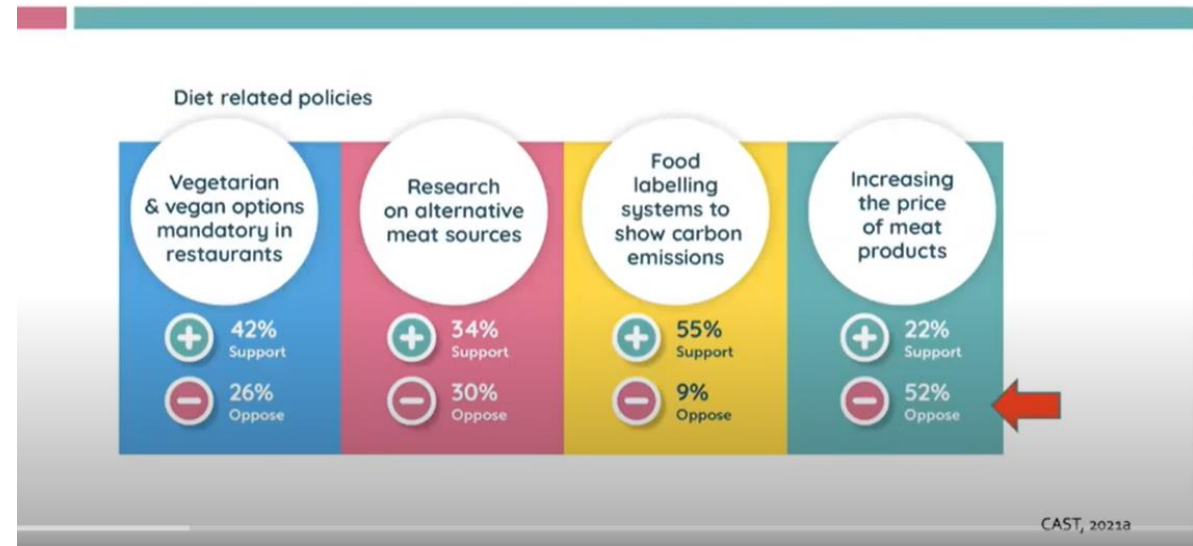
Supported by previous research earlier this year from Centre for Climate Change and Social Transformations

Meat tax debates reek of unfairness

- Fairness value important in framing research
- Also in previous research, perception of fairness more important for citizens than policy effectiveness (Whitmarsh & Sweetman, 2015)

Potential reframes – whole system realignment, relative cost of food so that higher quality meat is more affordable and system is fair for everyone

Support for certain diet policies



IPPR talk with CAST director Lorraine Whitmarsh, June 2021
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GV_aRINZ7po



Overarching Takeaway

People are up for change and they're up for governments and businesses being brave and bold because they think it's the fair and the right thing to do

But need to address affordability in order to get them into that mind space, and not shy away from discussions of power



**Questions?
Reflections?**