Long-Term Trends in Public Attitudes Toward Hunting in Sweden: Coupled to Venison

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Abundant media related to trophy hunting, political/activist undertakings, and continued urbanization during the past few decades would suggest support for hunting might be decreasing in the global north. We report data from a replication of Swedish national surveys conducted in 1980, 1997, 2001, 2008-2012, and 2014, to explore if support for hunting – principally deer hunting – has changed in that country. Although down some from 2012 to 2014, when compared to 1980, general support for hunting has been relatively stable to increasing the past 3 decades. Support increased through time for hunting of deer species (4 species in Sweden) when obtaining meat (66% in 2001 and 67 % in 2014) and for recreation/sport (33% in 1997 and 34% in 2014). Our cross-sectional study substantiates findings elsewhere where regulated hunting occurs, which points to broad public support for hunting when utilitarian motives are perceived associated with the particular hunting experience. The most positive attitudes, expressed by the vast majority of Swedish society is toward hunting by indigenous people. Attitudes are less positive, yet >50% of society expressed positive attitudes toward hunting if the purpose was to obtain meat; attitudes toward hunting for sport/recreation were less positive. We speculate that restoration of deer species that resulted in locally abundant populations creating negative societal impacts, a growing social movement favoring locally produced meat, and institutional changes manifested in legislation contribute to the improved attitudes toward hunting. Research that addresses specifically the effect of deer abundance,
and the consequences of that abundance on society, would provide further insights into how wild-harvested venison is a coupler between human and natural systems.