

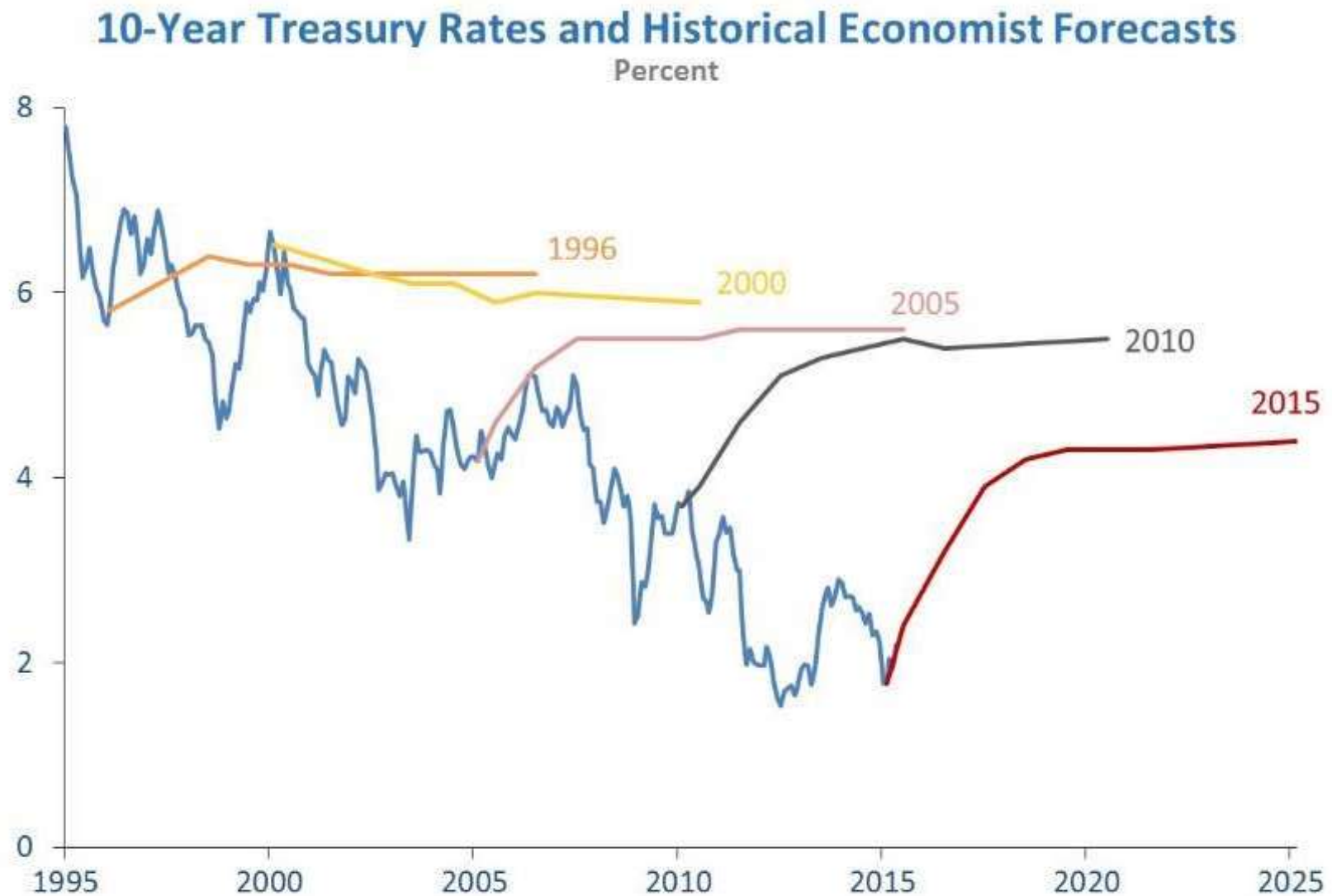
# What's the future of face-to-face surveys?

**SRA Scotland Lunchtime Seminar**

Chris Martin

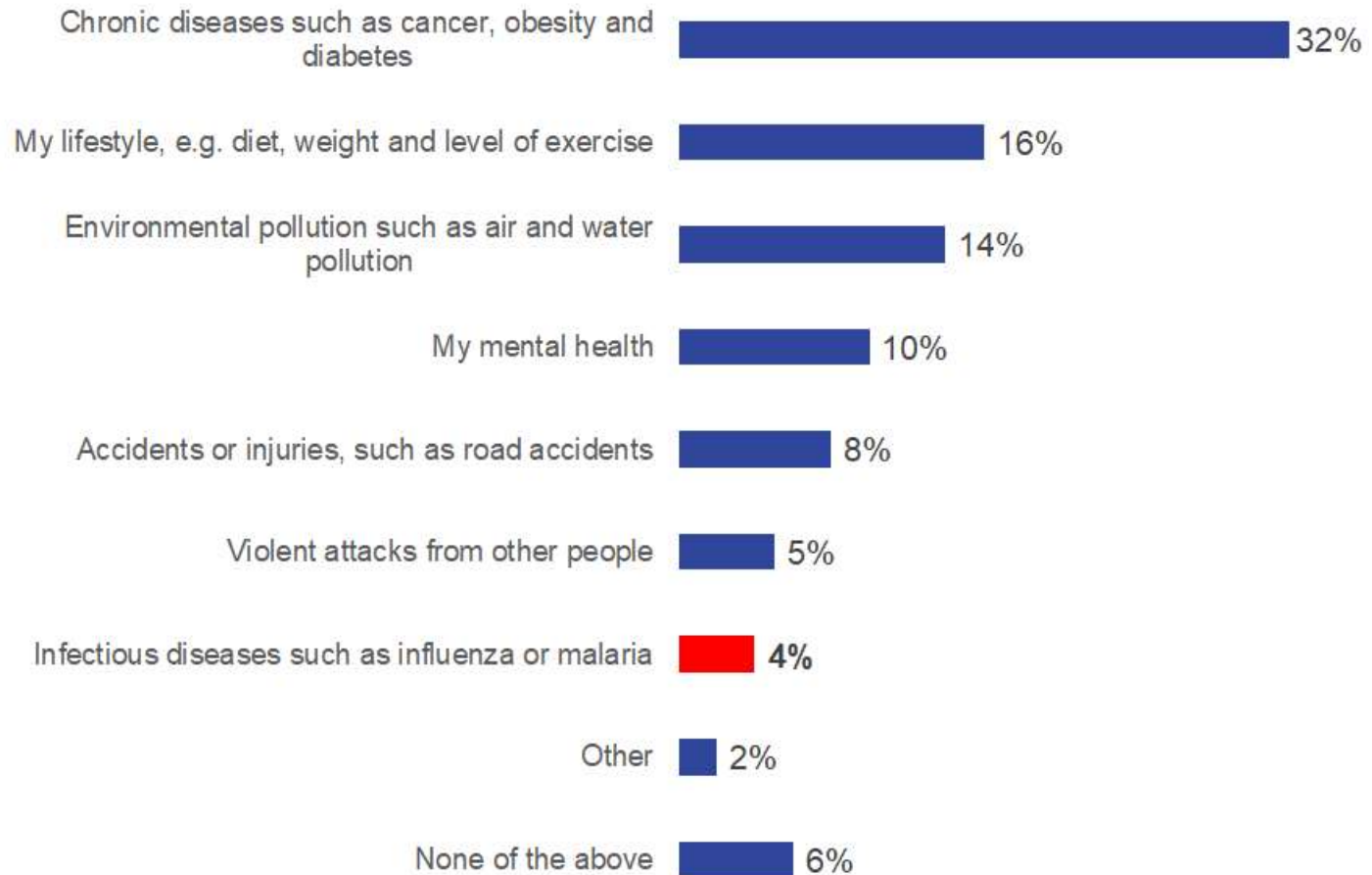
11<sup>th</sup> November 2020

# Most predictions are wrong...



Note: Forecasts are those reported by Blue Chip Economic Indicators released in March of the given calendar year, the median of over 50 private-sector economists. Source: Blue Chip Economic Indicators, Aspen Publishers.

# What people most saw as a threat to health months before Covid 19.





it call  
it a  
wind farm.  
Call it a  
vind folly.

Sorry windpower  
We just can't afford you

HANDS  
OFF THE WIND  
ACTION

LADYMOOR WIND  
ACTION

# What is the future of face-to-face surveys?

# A year ago....

[www.scottishhouseholdsurvey.com](http://www.scottishhouseholdsurvey.com)



# Trends before Covid19

- Greater consideration of mixed mode approaches
  - ONS Digital by default
- Push-to-web
  - 2022 census moving to a push-to web approach
- Methodological innovation
  - Recent analysis on the Scottish Household Survey/ SCJS exploring whether high response rates necessarily mean better quality data

# Since March...

- The three major Scottish Surveys suspended on 17<sup>th</sup> March
- Period of uncertainty about what would be allowed and when.
- The short-term future is now clearer.
  - *All three surveys paused in their previous forms.*
  - *Suspension of in-home face-to-face interviewing.*
  - *No interviewer travel whatsoever.*
  - *Return unlikely until after a vaccination is in widespread use.*
  - *Scottish Census pushed back until 2022.*



# Two ironies

1. The need for high quality data is more important than ever.
  - Poverty and inequality, informal caring, mental health, loneliness, composition of households etc.
2. While Covid-19 has led to suspension of fieldwork on existing face-to-face surveys, one of the main source of data on the infection rate is...
  - a large scale random pre-selected face-to-face survey – the Covid Infection Study

# Since March...

- The three Scottish surveys have trialled new approaches...
  - SHS – push to telephone/video interviewing with attempt to link telephone numbers to PAF sample.
  - SCJS – follow-up telephone survey and respondents in previous waves
  - SHeS – push to telephone
- Similar pattern in England but with limited socially distanced face-to-face OR knock-to-nudge
  - English Housing Survey - External+ physical survey
  - Use of knock-to-nudge on BARB
  - Face-to-face on COVID related studies.

# In the short-term...

**Fleetness of foot/adaptability is paramount.**

- The situation is very fluid
- Recognise the uncertainty and develop/test a range of adaptations
- Experimentation and variability in methods is good

# SHS push to telephone/video pilot

## All interviews undertaken remotely, no interviewer travel

- 1,000 addresses from unworked 2020 sample
- Telephone matching was attempted all addresses (23% success).
  - Cases with a matched number were sent one advance letter, followed by telephone recruitment
  - Cases without a telephone number were sent initial advance letter, followed by two reminders
- Advance materials directed respondents to a portal where they could request an appointment
- Interview by telephone or by online via MS Teams (one-way)

# Four trends...

1

**Increasing difficulty of meeting target response rates**

2

**Increasing difficulty of recruiting good interviewers**

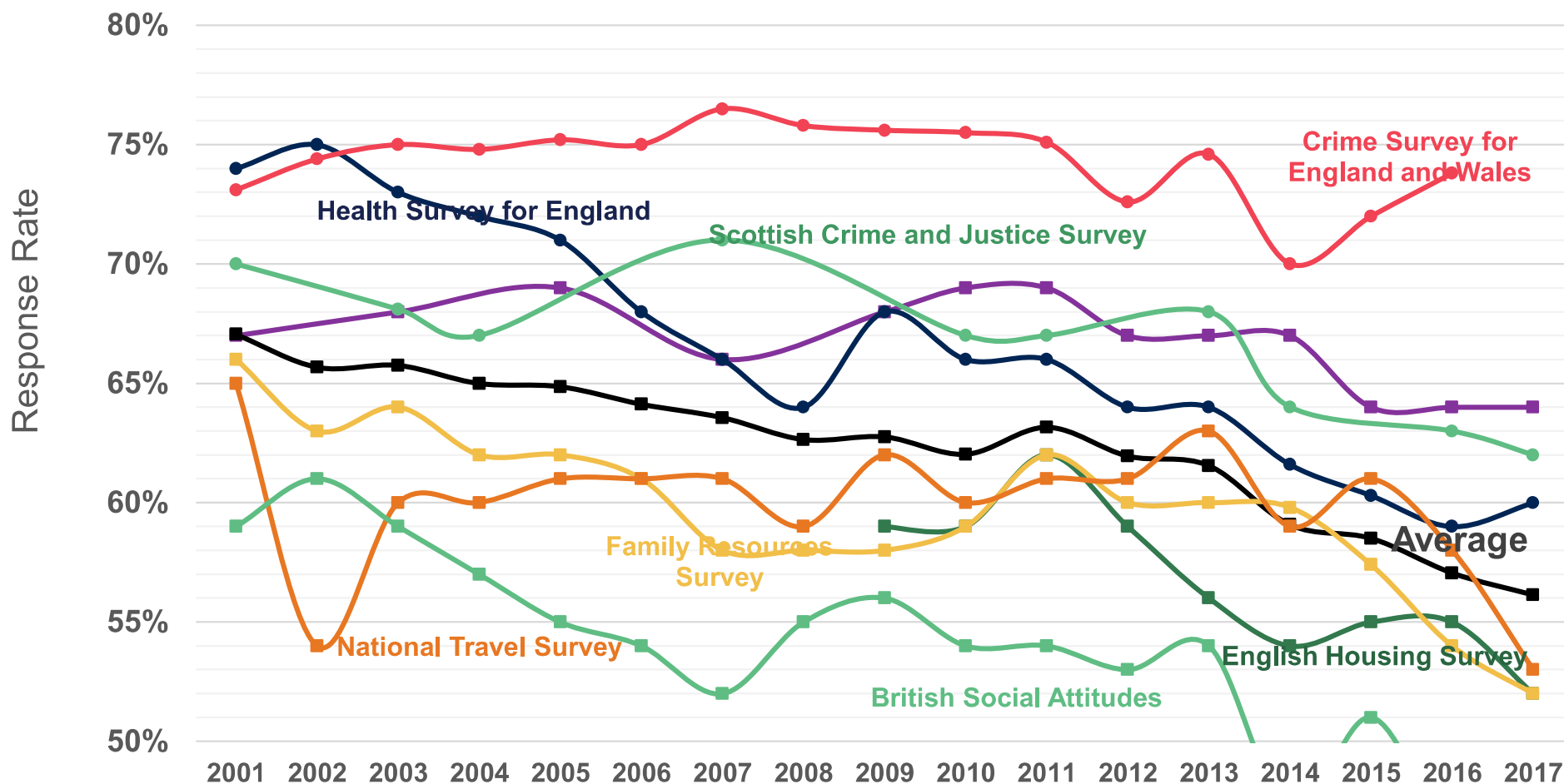
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**Increasing pressure on public sector budgets**

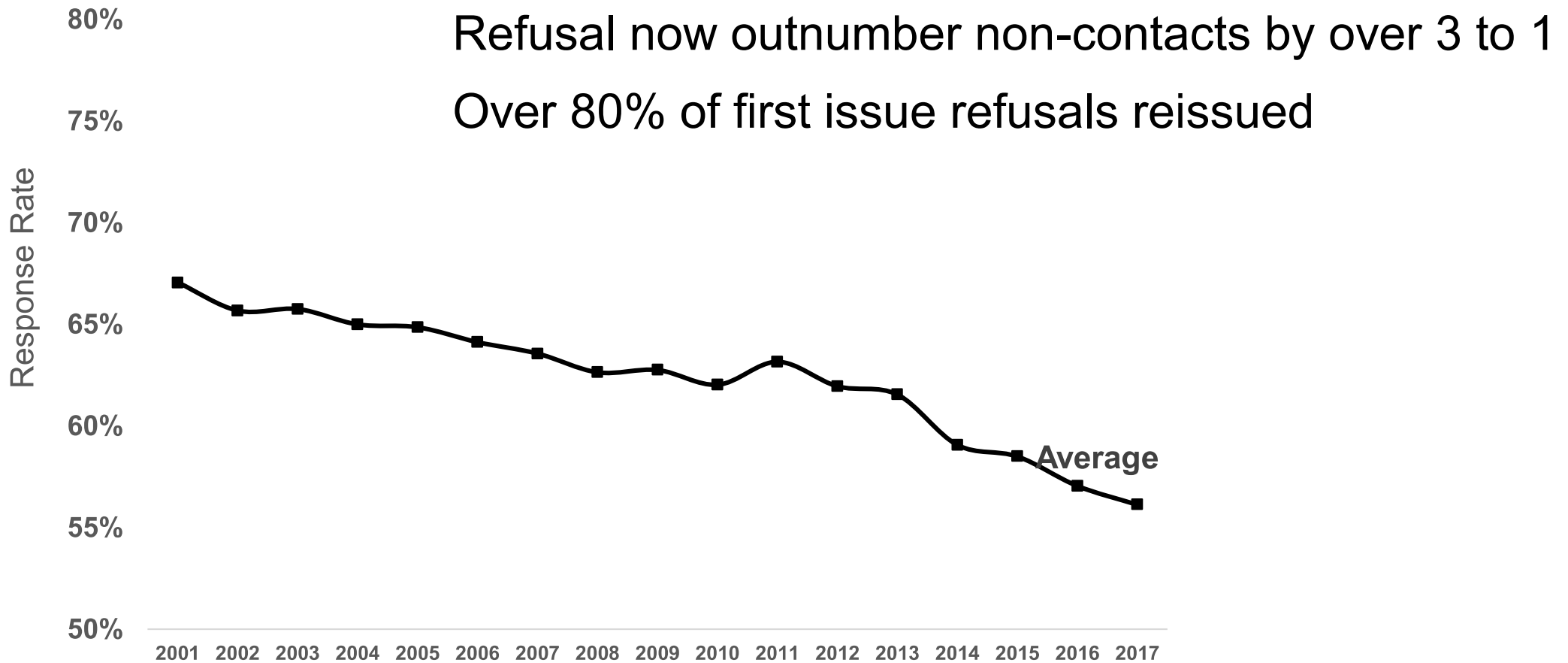
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**Greater potential of other sources of information eg. admin data**

# Trend 1: Response rates



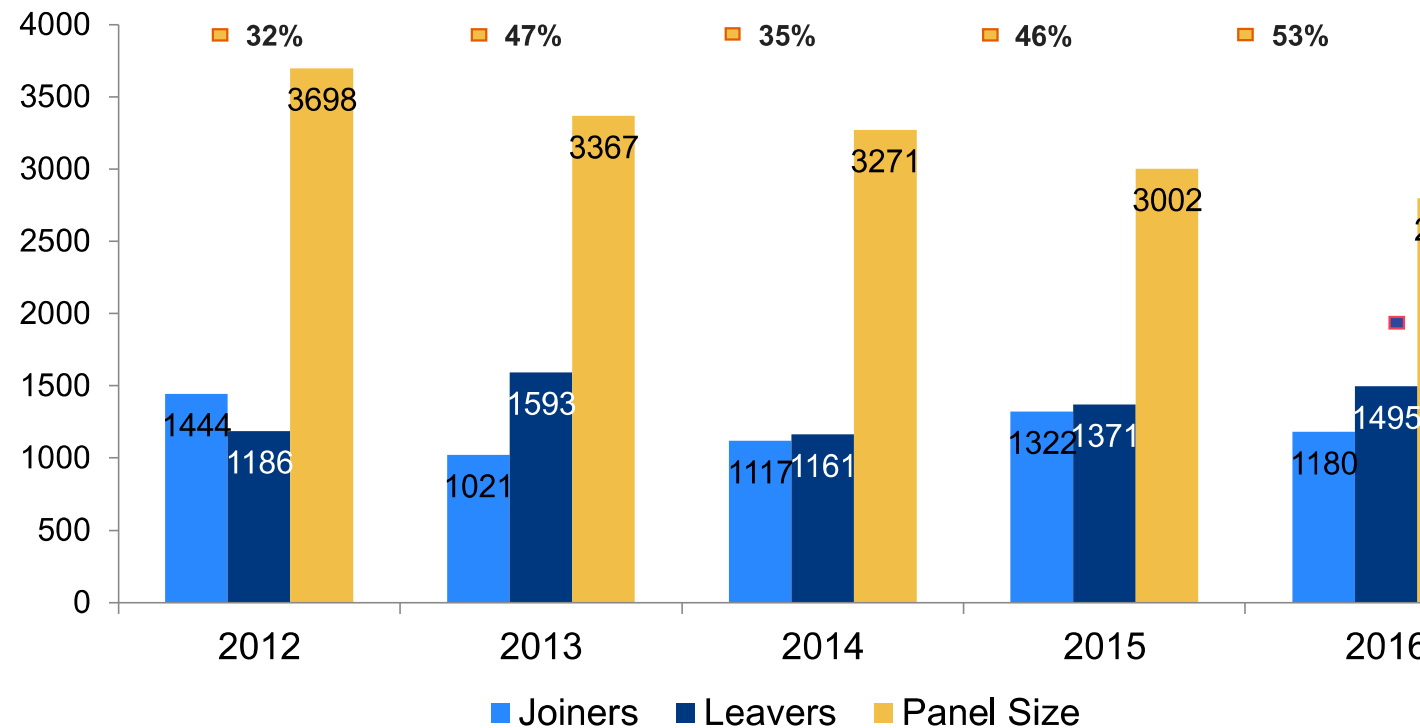
# Response rates have been falling (despite more effort)



# Trend 2: increasing effort to maintain interviewer panels

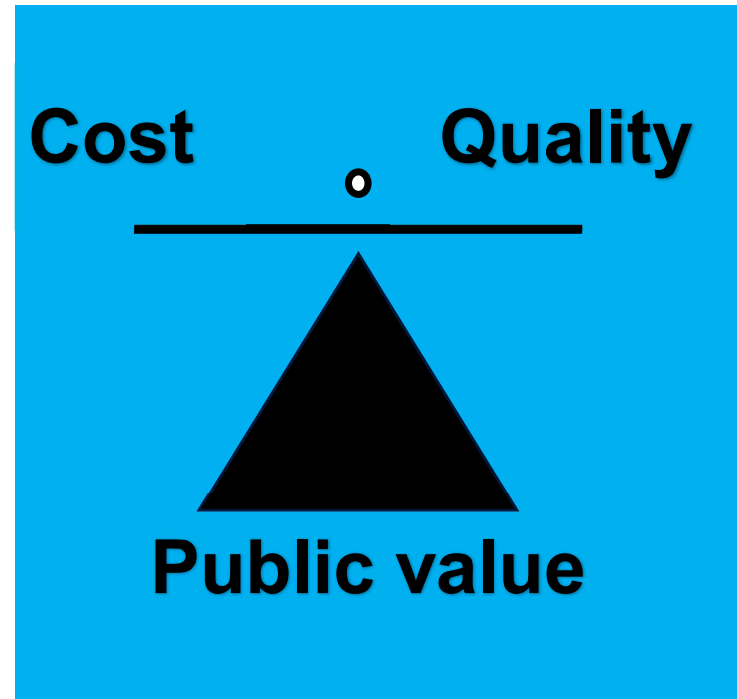
- Challenges include:
  - Recruitment
  - Retention
  - Engagement
  - Response rate targets

Interviewer turnover across agencies

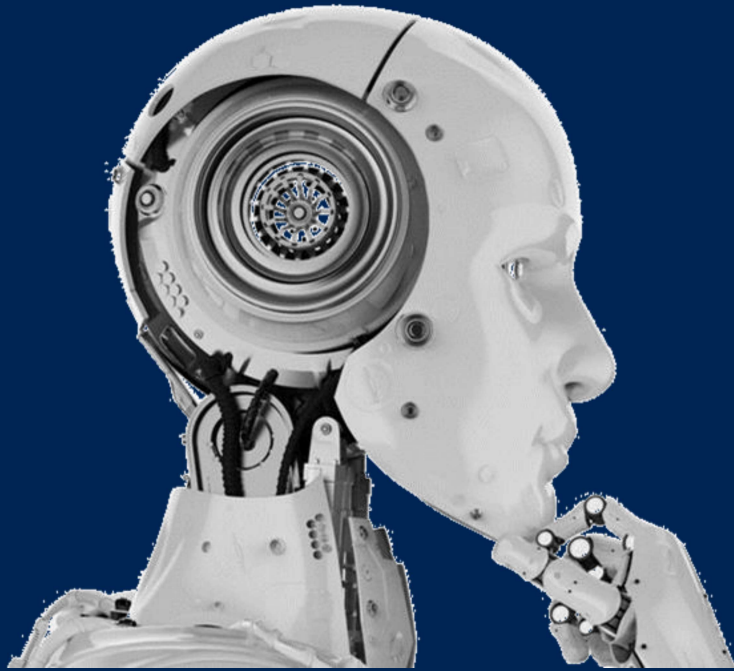




# Trend 3: Pressure on public sector budgets



# Trend 4: Growth of alternative methods



Growth of online

Push-to-web

Big data and social media

Use of administrative data

# Covid19 likely to accelerate all four trends

1

**Increasing difficulty of meeting target response rates**

2

**Increasing difficulty of recruiting good interviewers**

3

**Increasing pressure on public sector budgets**

4

**Greater potential of other sources of information eg. admin data**

# What has remained the same?

## 1. The need for evidence to inform policy

High quality data to measure...

- Characteristics and behaviours
- Changes over time

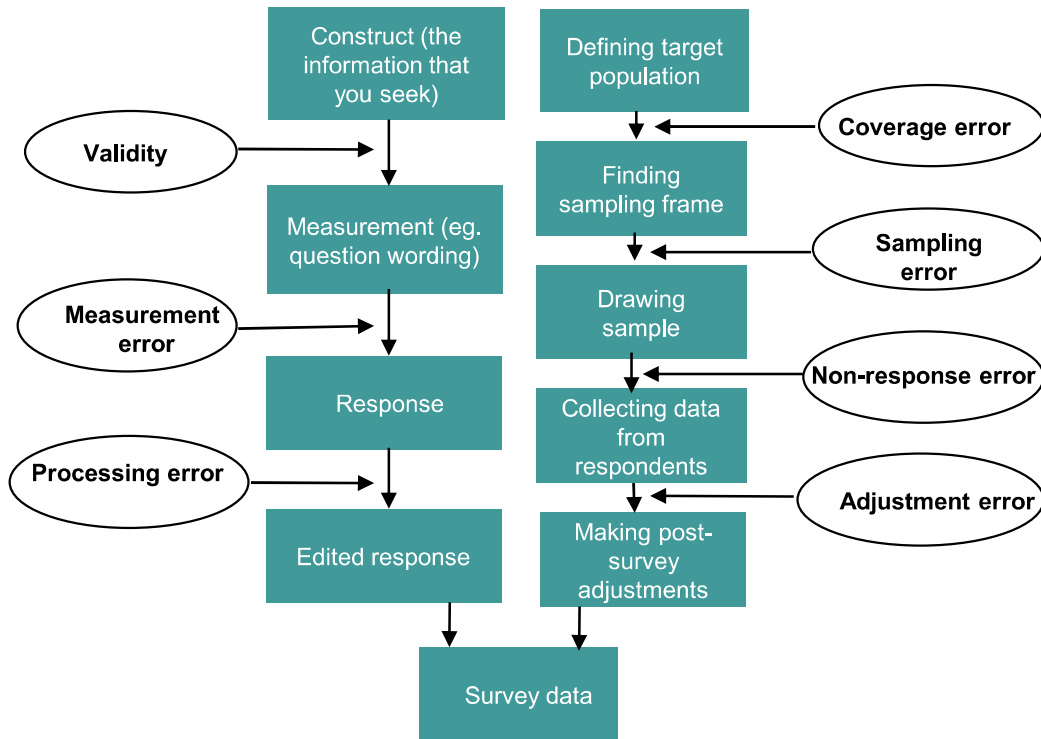
Surveys are not only to measure the world but to change it...

- A commitment to base policy on evidence underpins the demand for all social surveys



# What has remained the same?

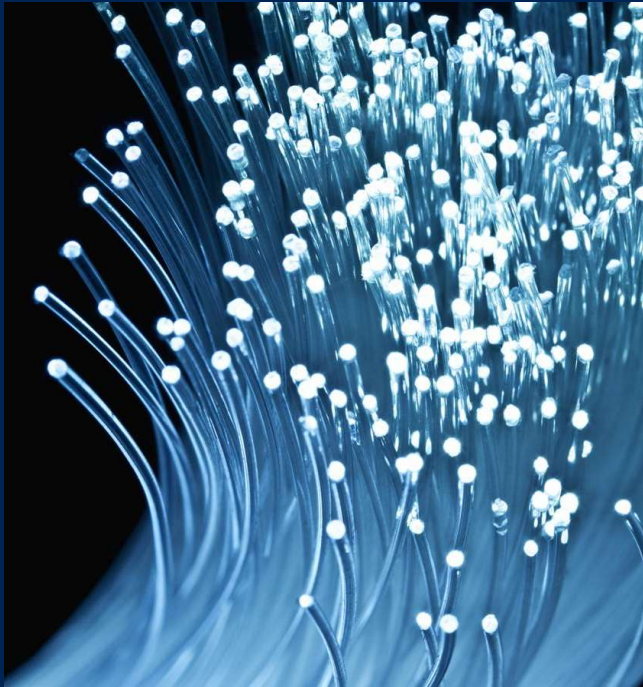
## 2. Face-to-face means higher quality



- Higher response rate = lower level of bias
- Higher engagement = lower measurement error
- Potential for add-ons.

# 12% of people in Scotland do not use the internet

(Scottish Household Survey, 2019)



Remote small towns

16%

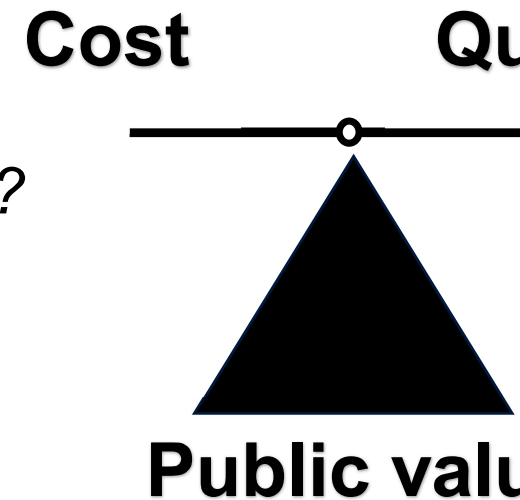
20% most deprived areas

18%

HA/LA tenant

# Likely trends post-covid....

- **Where precise, high quality data is needed, face-to-face will remain.**
- *Mixed-mode approaches likely to become more common.*
  - *Responsive designs?*
  - *Opt-in first, targeted knock-to-nudge?*
- *More nuanced approach to quality and value for money?*
  - *Focus on minimising non-response bias rather than maximising response rates?*
  - *Greater emphasis on other forms of error, especially measurement error.*



# Some challenges...

- Disentangling mode effects
- Shifting existing face-to-face to mixed mode
  - Long-term trends
  - Use of showcards
  - Complexity of questions.
- Length of questionnaires
  - Point estimates versus multivariate analysis?



## But, we have a window for innovation



# So, is there a future for face-to-face?

Yes! So long as we can clearly articulate their benefits and the impact they have in shaping policy.



# Over to you...

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