Twitter Thread by Adam Tranter



Adam Tranter
@adamtranter

THREAD: A thread on research and sampling, and how the media use data and polling.

I can safely say from a decade of working with media, it is *highly* unusual for a newspaper to so heavily reference a self-selecting and homemade survey and present it as the views of all people.

We will ditch Boris over bike lanes, say 27pc of Tory voters

By **Michael Powell** and **James Heale**

BORIS JOHNSON is haemorrhaging public support amid anger over the cycle lanes introduced during the pandemic, a poll reveals.

More than one in four people – 27 per cent – who voted Conservative in last year's General Election say they will not do so next time due to the congestion and disruption caused in towns and cities across the country.

The survey of almost 11,000 drivers and cyclists will send shockwaves through Downing Street as it proceeds with a £2billion green agenda to reduce car travel.

Ministers hope that putting in bike lanes and closing roads to cars will encourage more people to cycle to work. But the survey found that only 14 per cent of motorists in favour of the new lanes are willing to leave their car at home and start cycling to work.

The online survey by motoring campaign group FairFuelUK was free to complete and open to all road users. More than 2,000 people who answered the questions said they were cyclists.

The findings, which will make uncomfortable reading for No10, revealed:

● Just three per cent of car drivers said they had taken part in a public consultation on the introduction of cycle lanes and Low Traffic Neighbourhoods, compared to 34 per cent of cyclists;

● Only two per cent of cyclists said they should be made to adhere to the same road user rules that drivers must legally follow, including paying tax;

● Nearly two-thirds (63 per cent) of car drivers said the pandemic had been the wrong time to roll out hundreds of miles of new cycle lanes;

● Seventy-six per cent of cyclists said they had 'no problem' with unelected special advisers in No10 influencing the roll-out of cycle lanes.

'Drivers should not be demonised any more'

Howard Cox, founder of the FairFuelUK Campaign, said: 'Nowhere in the Tory Election manifesto was any mention of our already clogged urban roads being reduced in size for the benefit of so few.

'The majority of road users, who contribute the fifth-largest income to the Treasury, have never been asked if dedicated cycle lanes should be built, eating into our roads.

'Unless Boris Johnson recognises that the UK's 37million drivers should not be demonised any more, this £2billion self-indulgent madness, under the dishonest guise of Covid emergency powers, will decimate his 80-seat majority.'

Conservative councillors across the country fear they will lose their seats in the local elections in May because of the backlash against the bike lanes. Some Tory-run local authorities have ripped out the cycle lanes, including West Sussex County and Wandsworth and Kensington councils in London.

Sources say Tory council leaders have been sharing 'incandescent' messages on a WhatsApp group blaming No10's cycling tsar Andrew Gilligan for the row.

During a virtual meeting of London Conservative councillors in September, members from Hammersmith and Fulham said the policy risked shedding party votes.

One Tory councillor told The Mail on Sunday: 'Covid is destroying the London economy, yet senior No10 staff are spending all their time forcing these unpopular routes on to our already crowded roads. If this continues we're not going to be left with a single Tory-run council in Central London – it is bizarre.'

...as council pays 'gatekeeper' in a van to monitor road barely a single cyclist uses

By **Abul Taher** and **Michael Powell**

COUNCIL chiefs who closed off a shopping street to traffic are now employing a gatekeeper – on what is thought to be £200 per day – to allow lorries and vans in.

In order to create a cycle lane, bollards were placed in the middle of the road last August to stop vehicles entering, even though delivery drivers still needed to get in to access dozens of shops.

Now a gatekeeper has been hired to move the bollards for deliveries to Baker Street, in Weybridge town centre, Surrey. He sits in a van near the shops, sometimes appearing to be dozing off.

When The Mail on Sunday monitored the road last Monday, we did not see the gatekeeper letting in or out any vans or lorries, and observed only two cyclists using the road in more than five hours.

The cost of the bike lane and the wage for the gatekeeper has come from the £250million Emergency Active Travel Fund, set up by the Department for Transport to fund pop-up cycle lanes.

A spokesman for Surrey County Council said: 'We have closed a narrow section of Baker Street for social distancing purposes to protect pedestrians and people on bikes. To support traders, a gatekeeper is in place to open the road when deliveries are made. This is a temporary scheme.'

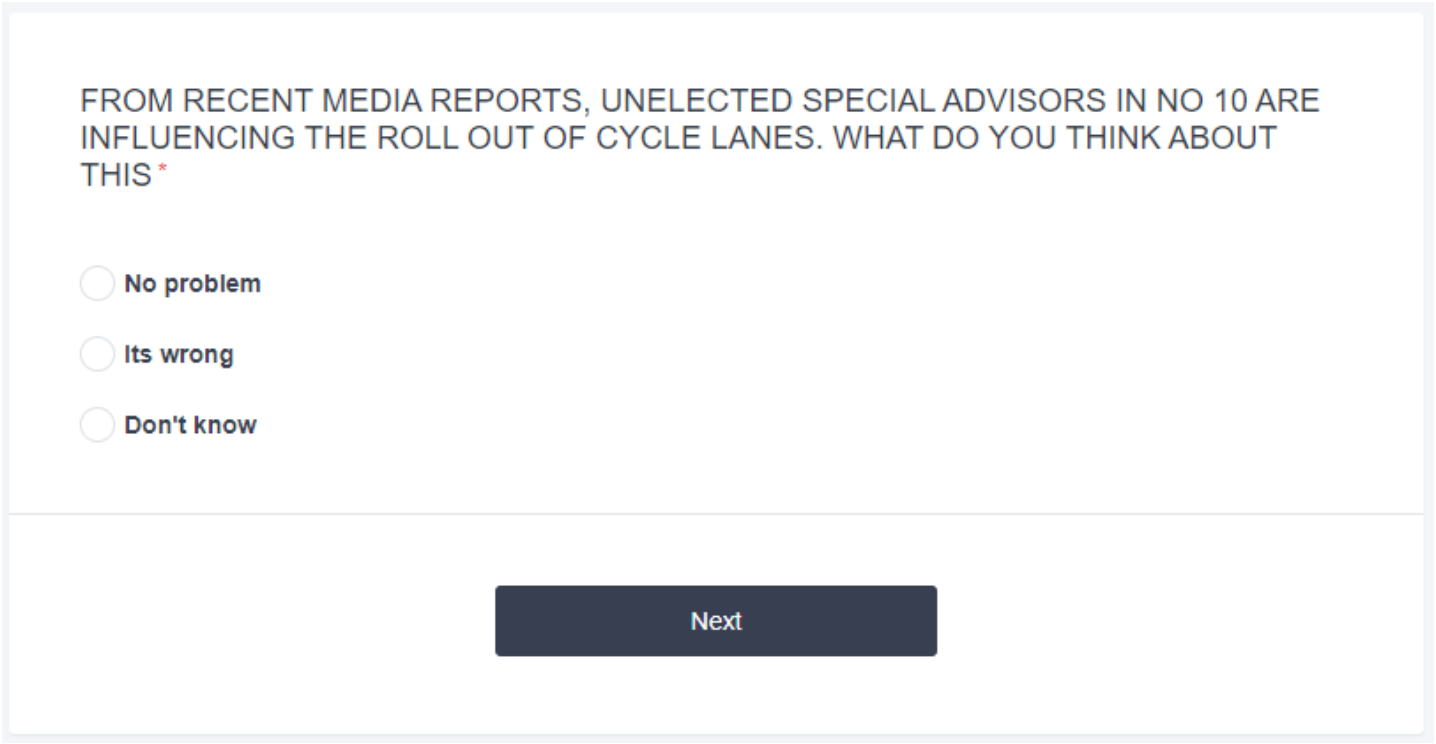
Tory MP Craig Mackinlay said: 'They should not be spending taxpayers' money on this at all.'



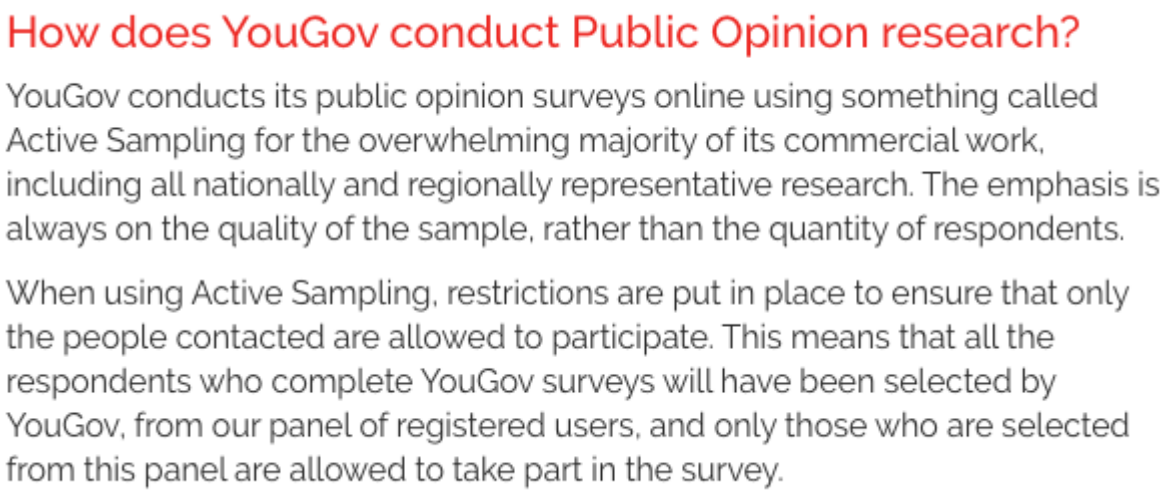
LONELY: A gatekeeper sits in a van in Weybridge town centre, waiting to remove the bollards for any delivery vans

Surveys with self-selecting samples, in this case, both from FairFuelUK + cycling advocates, should not be represented as the views of all of those groups; same goes for claiming data represents "Tory voters".

And that's without even mentioning the survey's leading questions.

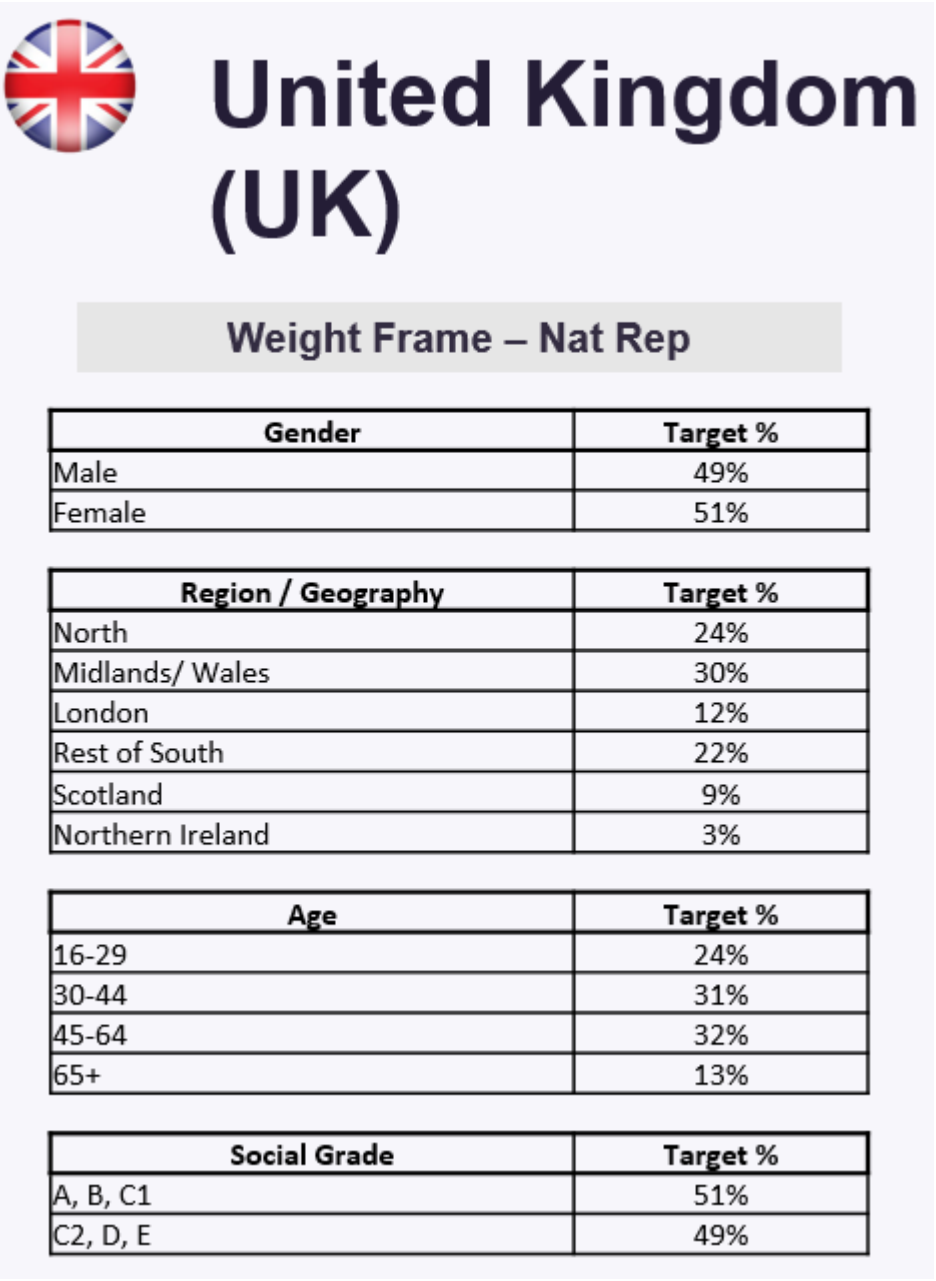


Polls can make for really interesting stories and are commonplace in media. YouGov, a key player, vets the questions and ensures they don't lead, and gets answers from a statistically representative sample to reflect the views of all GB adults.



You've probably seen the stories: X% of Brits think X. The sample size is over 2,000 and the methodology means they'd be confident the output would be the same, even if the number of people surveyed increased.

They ensure each demographic is represented as per the population.



United Kingdom (UK)

Weight Frame – Nat Rep

Gender	Target %
Male	49%
Female	51%

Region / Geography	Target %
North	24%
Midlands/ Wales	30%
London	12%
Rest of South	22%
Scotland	9%
Northern Ireland	3%

Age	Target %
16-29	24%
30-44	31%
45-64	32%
65+	13%

Social Grade	Target %
A, B, C1	51%
C2, D, E	49%

I've worked with YouGov to conduct polls like this, most recently for @BikeIsBestHQ. Our nationally representative survey looked like this.

- 62% used their cars as first choice for errands
- Just 5% cycled
- 78% agreed the environment would be better if more people cycled

HFL_Q1_2a. Leisure (e.g. days out, visiting family and friends, etc.)										
Unweighted base	2010	917	1093	183	308	337	357	825	1207	803
Base: All GB Adults	2010	975	1035	223	316	334	347	789	1146	864
Public transport (e.g. bus, train etc.)	28%	27%	29%	43%	33%	28%	24%	23%	30%	26%
Private car (e.g. where you are the only occupant)	54%	54%	55%	32%	53%	63%	58%	56%	59%	49%
Shared car (e.g. car club or car share)	9%	8%	11%	16%	10%	9%	7%	9%	9%	10%
Cycling (either owned or rented)	9%	11%	7%	15%	9%	10%	12%	5%	10%	7%
Walking	30%	30%	30%	43%	35%	33%	30%	23%	33%	26%
Ride hailing (e.g. taxi, uber etc.)	7%	7%	8%	12%	12%	9%	8%	3%	8%	6%
Micromobility device (e.g. Electronic scooter/ bike etc.)	2%	2%	1%	3%	3%	2%	1%	1%	1%	2%
Other	3%	3%	3%	2%	2%	2%	2%	5%	3%	3%
Don't know	2%	2%	2%	9%	3%	1%	1%	1%	1%	3%
Not applicable - I did not need to travel for this reason before lockdown	10%	10%	10%	7%	7%	7%	9%	14%	7%	15%
HFF_Q1_3. For errands (e.g. food shopping, dropping child(ren) off at school etc.)										
Unweighted base	2010	917	1093	183	308	337	357	825	1207	803
Base: All GB Adults	2010	975	1035	223	316	334	347	789	1146	864
Public transport (e.g. bus, train etc.)	15%	13%	17%	21%	16%	14%	10%	15%	14%	15%
Private car (e.g. where you are the only occupant)	57%	56%	58%	31%	51%	60%	64%	62%	61%	51%
Shared car (e.g. car club or car share)	5%	4%	6%	12%	5%	4%	5%	4%	5%	5%
Cycling (either owned or rented)	5%	7%	3%	8%	5%	5%	6%	3%	6%	4%
Walking	38%	38%	37%	48%	42%	44%	36%	31%	40%	34%
Ride hailing (e.g. taxi, uber etc.)	2%	3%	2%	3%	3%	2%	3%	2%	2%	3%
Micromobility device (e.g. Electronic scooter/ bike etc.)	1%	1%	1%	1%	2%	0%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Other	3%	3%	3%	3%	1%	1%	2%	4%	2%	3%
Don't know	2%	3%	2%	8%	2%	2%	1%	2%	2%	3%
Not applicable - I did not need to travel for this reason before lockdown	9%	9%	9%	12%	9%	6%	7%	11%	6%	13%

Really importantly, though, it showed - like lots of other statistically representative surveys - that:

- 77% of adults support measures in their local area to encourage walking and cycling
- This doesn't differ hugely based on social grade or region

#BikeIsBest
Cycling
GB18 Sample: 16th - 17th July 2020

YouGov

	Total	Gender		Age					Social Grade	
		Male	Female	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55+	ABC1	C2DE
HFF_Q4a. To what extent, if at all, would you support or oppose more measures being taken in your local area to encourage walking and cycling?										
Unweighted base	2010	917	1093	183	308	337	357	825	1207	803
Base: All GB adults	2010	975	1035	223	316	334	347	789	1146	864
Strongly support	33%	32%	33%	40%	42%	35%	32%	26%	35%	30%
Tend to support	44%	44%	44%	40%	37%	44%	48%	46%	44%	44%
Tend to oppose	7%	8%	7%	4%	7%	4%	6%	10%	6%	8%
Strongly oppose	5%	6%	4%	4%	4%	3%	4%	6%	5%	4%
Don't know	12%	10%	13%	12%	10%	15%	10%	11%	10%	13%

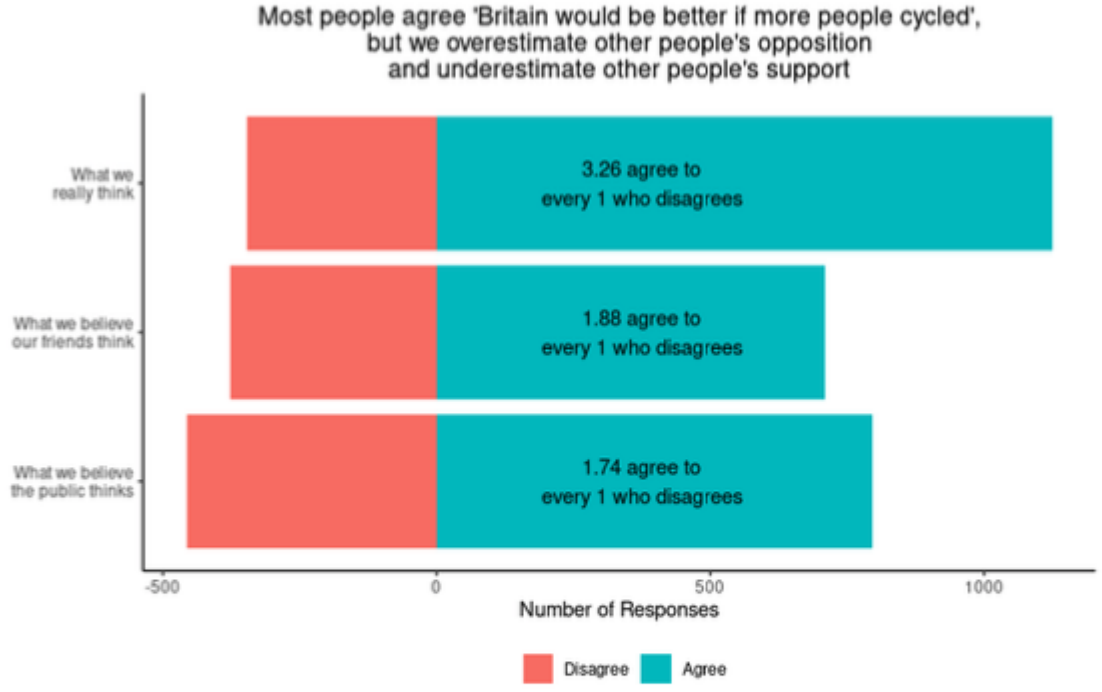
Cell Contents (Column Percentages)

YouGov also asked questions on children playing in the street - a topic we thought was interesting because of a perceived increase in discourse on Low Traffic Neighbourhoods. 65% agreed "Children should be able to play in the street without danger from cars cutting through."

Don't know	4%	3%	5%	7%	5%	4%	3%	4%	3%	5%
HFF_Q2_8. If the streets were redesigned to ensure pedestrians and cyclists were safer from motor vehicles, I would drive less frequently										
Unweighted base	1473	669	804	102	210	256	281	624	931	542
Base: All GB adults	1455	692	762	118	216	249	273	597	877	578
Strongly agree	10%	12%	8%	10%	17%	10%	14%	6%	11%	9%
Tend to agree	21%	23%	20%	26%	21%	28%	22%	18%	24%	17%
Neither agree nor disagree	28%	27%	30%	31%	21%	22%	27%	33%	25%	33%
Tend to disagree	19%	19%	19%	11%	20%	20%	19%	19%	19%	18%
Strongly disagree	17%	17%	17%	13%	15%	14%	15%	20%	16%	18%
Don't know	5%	3%	6%	9%	5%	5%	3%	4%	4%	5%
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?										
HFF_Q4_2. Children should be able to play in the street without danger from cars cutting through										
Unweighted base	2010	917	1093	183	308	337	357	825	1207	803
Base: All GB adults	2010	975	1035	223	316	334	347	789	1146	864
Strongly agree	27%	27%	27%	30%	33%	29%	27%	23%	27%	27%
Tend to agree	38%	35%	40%	35%	38%	36%	42%	38%	39%	37%
Neither agree nor disagree	14%	15%	14%	10%	13%	16%	16%	15%	15%	14%
Tend to disagree	12%	14%	11%	12%	9%	10%	9%	16%	12%	13%
Strongly disagree	5%	6%	4%	5%	4%	4%	4%	6%	5%	5%
Don't know	3%	3%	3%	7%	3%	5%	2%	2%	2%	5%

The #BikeIsBest campaign was interested if the developing media narrative (which has accelerated somewhat since) would make people believe they were unusual in supporting cycling. We worked with Dr @ianwalker on this, which produced the following insights.

Something akin to the pluralistic ignorance phenomenon is visible here in the specific context of cycling. Most people agree that Britain would be a better place if more people cycled. Indeed, three-and-a-quarter people actively agree with this idea for each person who actively disagrees (77% agreement). However, it is clear from the plot that respondents underestimated how much other people agreed that more cycling would be good for the country and overestimated how much other people disagreed with this.



This pluralistic ignorance-like effect might possibly help explain the success of opposition to pro-cycling measures. First, this kind of effect might embolden the minority who oppose active-travel measures, as they overestimate the number of other people who feel the same way. In addition, it is possible that there is a second effect: when opposition to active travel measures is voiced, perhaps people who support active travel misjudge the public mood and assume there is more opposition than there really is. This might lead them to accept the opposition, and not counter it, more than should otherwise happen.

Dr Ian Walker
Environmental Psychologist, University of Bath
21 July 2020

This is the pluralistic ignorance phenomenon. It is clear from the plot that respondents underestimated how much other people agreed that more cycling would be good for the country and overestimated how much other people disagreed with this.

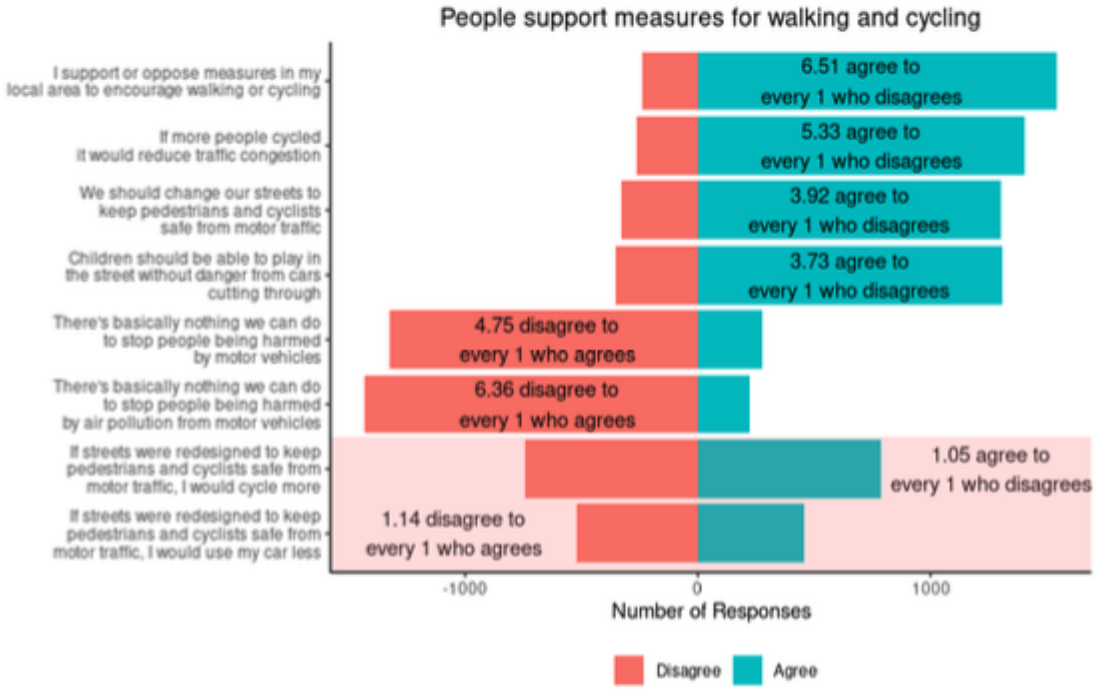
You might have seen our graphic which shows the overall support, which came from the data here. It was shared widely thanks to support from @Chris_Boardman, @London_Cycling, @WeAreCyclingUK, @BritishCycling and all the great people out there who want to make our streets safer.

#BIKEISBEST

The findings in more detail

People want to change our streets to support walking and cycling

The online survey shows overwhelming support among the British population for changes in their local area to encourage walking and cycling. For every person opposed to changes in their local area, there are as many as 6.5 people who support those changes (i.e., of the people who expressed a view, 77% were in favour of local measures to support walking or cycling). It is clear, then, that any opposition to active travel schemes does not reflect the views of the majority.



People are not fatalistic about the negatives from motoring

The plot above shows just how much British people do not accept the harms of motor traffic as inevitable. For every person who agreed that motor danger or air pollution are essentially outside our control, there were many more who disagreed.

The nation supports changing our streets for active travel, even when they don't personally benefit

The data show that around 2 in 5 people said they would cycle more, and around a third who use a private or shared car to travel said they would drive less, if streets were redesigned to make them safer for non-motorists. On the one hand, this suggests a large suppressed desire for active travel: if around half of British adults walked more or drove less in response to street changes, this would be enormous change. On the other hand, it is clear that agreement with these statements is lower than for the questions about support for active travel in general. This can be interpreted positively: a lot of people must support changing streets to encourage walking and cycling *even though they personally would not be the ones cycling more, or driving less*.

The point of this thread is that it is essential research is conducted ethically, this includes working with external third parties who can ensure this is the case. The results need to be reputable so that media trust them. Or at least that's *supposed* to be how it works.

Using Surveys and Polling Data in your journalism: QUICK GUIDE

A wide variety of news stories incorporate or are even based on market and social results. If you want to cover such results, here is a quick check list of what you should do to ensure your reporting is accurate...

DO

- **Include** the sample size, dates of data collection and methodology (e.g. internet survey), the company who did the research (are they regulated?) and the commissioning organisation.
- **Refer** to the margin of error; so, for a margin of error +/- 4% for each figure: Conservatives 30 | Labour 30 could also be Conservative 34 | Labour 26 or Labour 34 | Conservative 26
- **Report** the % of "don't know/wouldn't say" responses

DON'T

- Refer to changes which are within the **margin of error** as if they are real changes; e.g. don't use a headline "party lead soars", if they are performing 1% better than in the same polling company's previous poll
- Compare polls if they are not like for like, particularly if you have **not evaluated the differences** between them
- Report on research where the sample size is **too small** to be accurate or are **not representative**

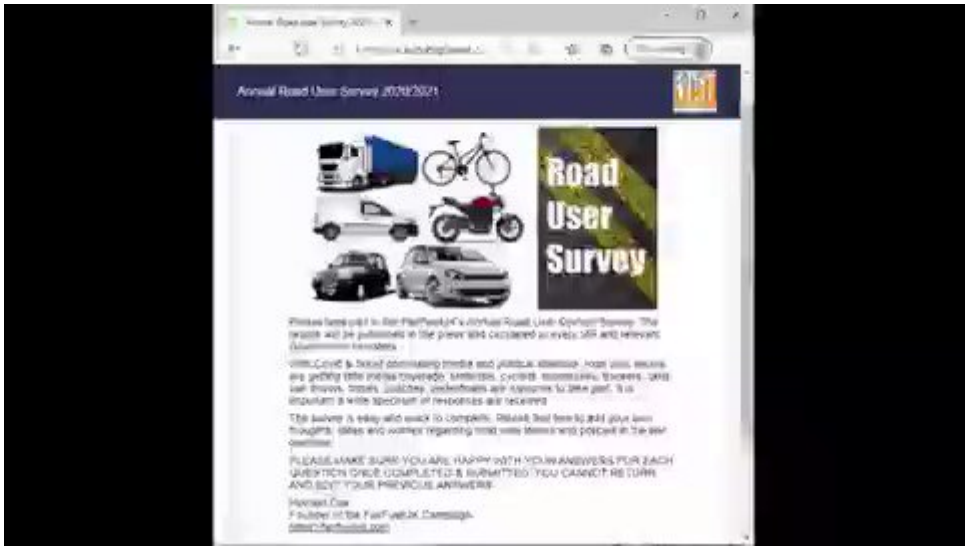
MRS Evidence Matters™

IMPRESS

#HighQualityReporting

The work above took several weeks to assess and analyse by professionals, and we didn't close the survey early so that we could give an exclusive to the Mail on Sunday to suit the timing of their agenda.

Compare what you've read here with what you've seen from FairFuelUK.



Finally, what's happening in media isn't fair. But I hardly think policymakers are shaking in their boots 'cos they also understand how polls work (politics relies on them heavily).

I'm sure they'd trust YouGov, who make successful political predictions, more so than Fair Fuel.

YouGov
What the world thinks

YouGov's Record of Accuracy

Public Polling Results compared to other pollsters and actual outcomes

UK General Elections

UK General Election 2017

	YouGov	Ipsos MORI	Opinium	ComRes	BMG	Survation	ICM	Kantar	Panelbase	Qriously	Result
Con	42	44	43	44	46	41	46	43	44	39	**44**
Lab	35	36	36	34	33	40	34	38	36	41	**41**
Lib Dem	10	7	8	9	8	8	7	7	7	8	**8**
UKIP	5	4	5	5	5	2	5	4	5	4	**2**
SNP	5	5	5	4	4	4	5	4	4	3	**3**
Green	2	2	2	2	3	2	2	2	2	1	**2**
Other	1	2	1	1	2	2	1	2	2	4	**1**
Av. Error	**2.1**	**1.6**	**1.6**	**1.7**	**2.3**	**0.9**	**2.1**	**1.3**	**1.6**	**1.6**	

UK General Election 2015

	YouGov	Ipsos MORI	Opinium	ComRes	BMG	Survation	ICM	TNS	Panelbase	Populus	Result
Con	34	36	35	35	34	31	34	33	31	33	**38**
Lab	34	35	34	34	34	31	35	32	33	34	**31**
Lib Dem	10	8	8	9	10	10	9	8	8	9	**8**
UKIP	12	11	12	12	12	16	11	14	16	13	**13**
Green	4	5	6	4	4	5	4	6	5	5	**4**
Other	6	5	5	6	6	7	7	6	7	6	**6**
Av. Error	**1.4**	**1.4**	**1.4**	**1.1**	**1.4**	**2.0**	**1.7**	**1.3**	**2.0**	**1.4**	

And we always need to remember, the middle ground - normal folk who just want to live their lives, feed their families, do good etc, generally support measures for active travel. The DfT's own credible research supports this too: https://t.co/QxjNGx8xYD

- Respondents overwhelmingly agreed that the government should act in local neighbourhoods to *increase road safety* (88%), *improve air quality* (86%), *reduce traffic congestion* (83%) and *reduce traffic noise* (75%).
    - Support varied by subgroup. However, respondents were consistently more likely to agree than disagree with interventions across subgroups, with pedestrians and cyclists more likely than car/van drivers to agree to government intervention, and 16-24 year olds least likely to agree than other age groups.
- Three quarters of respondents supported the reduction of road traffic in *towns and cities in England* (77%) and their *local area / neighbourhood* (78%), and two thirds of respondents were supportive of reallocating road space to walking and cycling across *towns and cities in England* (66%) and their *local area / neighbourhood* (65%).

Thanks for reading. Thanks to @ianwalker for his help with our analysis, thanks @lastnotlost for the survey vid, thanks to YouGov for doing a great job, thanks to our #BikeIsBest partners. And thanks to all journalists who take use of data and opinion seriously. This is the end.

