AmeriSpeak

Better Surveys, Better Data

A Practical Guide for Researchers

4/22/2026

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NORC at the University of Chicago

Responsible for some of the nation's largest and most relied-upon studies, informing countless policies and programs.

The General Social Survey GSS

THE NATIONAL SOCIAL LIFE HEALTH & AGING PROJECT

National Survey of Early Care & Education

MCBS Medicare Current Beneficiary Survey

SCF Survey of Consumer Finances

All of Us RESEARCH PROGRAM

AmeriSpeak

AmeriSpeak is the only U.S. multi-client household panel to utilize in-person recruiting, the gold standard survey modality for response rates and representativeness of the U.S. population. Our mission *and practice* is deep transparency and institutionalization of best practices for valid and reliable survey science.

Get Your Research Right

Objectives

01 Surveys from a process perspective

02 Surveys from a quality perspective

03 Key Survey Design Decisions

04 AmeriSpeak in Action

Surveys from a Process Perspective

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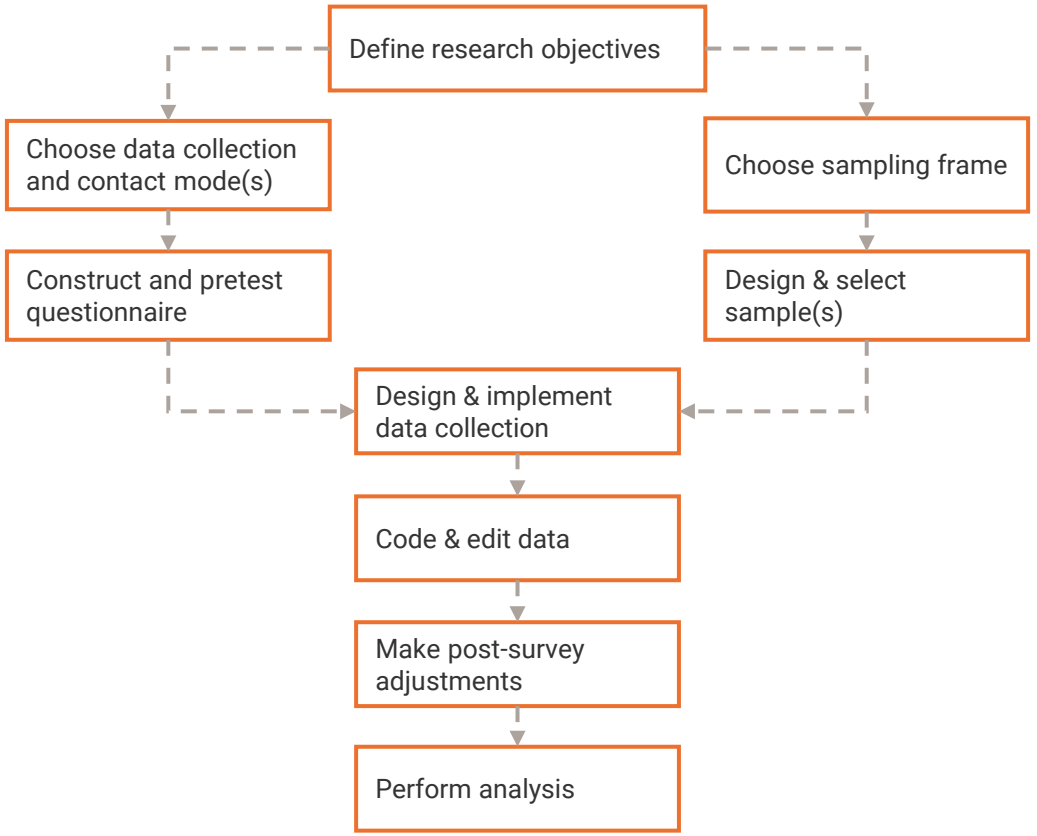
Survey Process from start to finish



Adapted from Groves et al. 2009. *Survey methodology*. Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley.(Figure 5.1)

Surveys from a Quality Perspective

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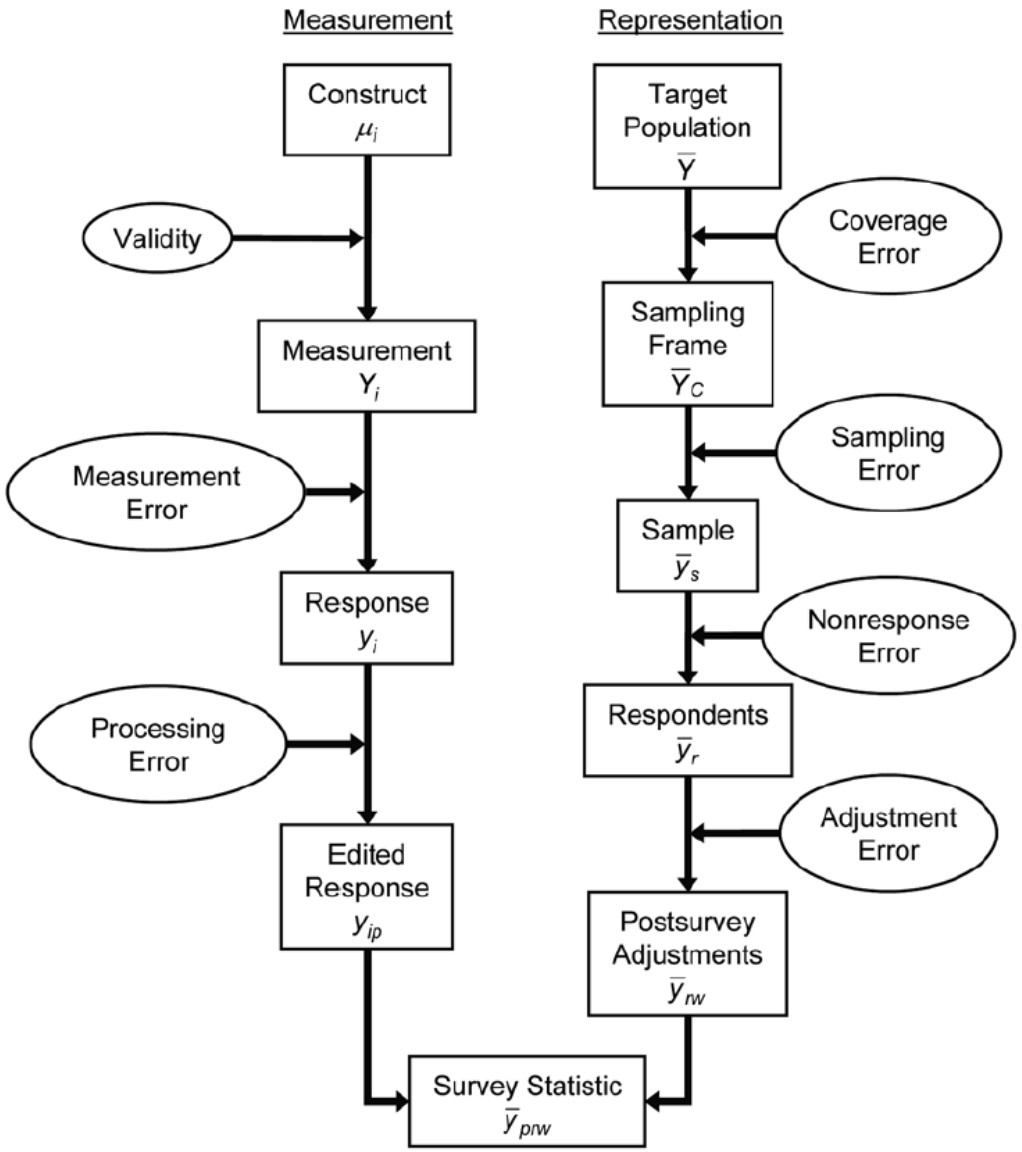
Total Survey Error (TSE) Framework

- Survey error=deviation of what is desired from what is attained
  - Error of non-observation
  - Error of observation
- Goal is to reduce total survey error given cost constraints, or reduce costs for a given level of quality/error



Groves et al. 2009. *Survey methodology*. Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley.(Figure 2.5)

Survey Errors

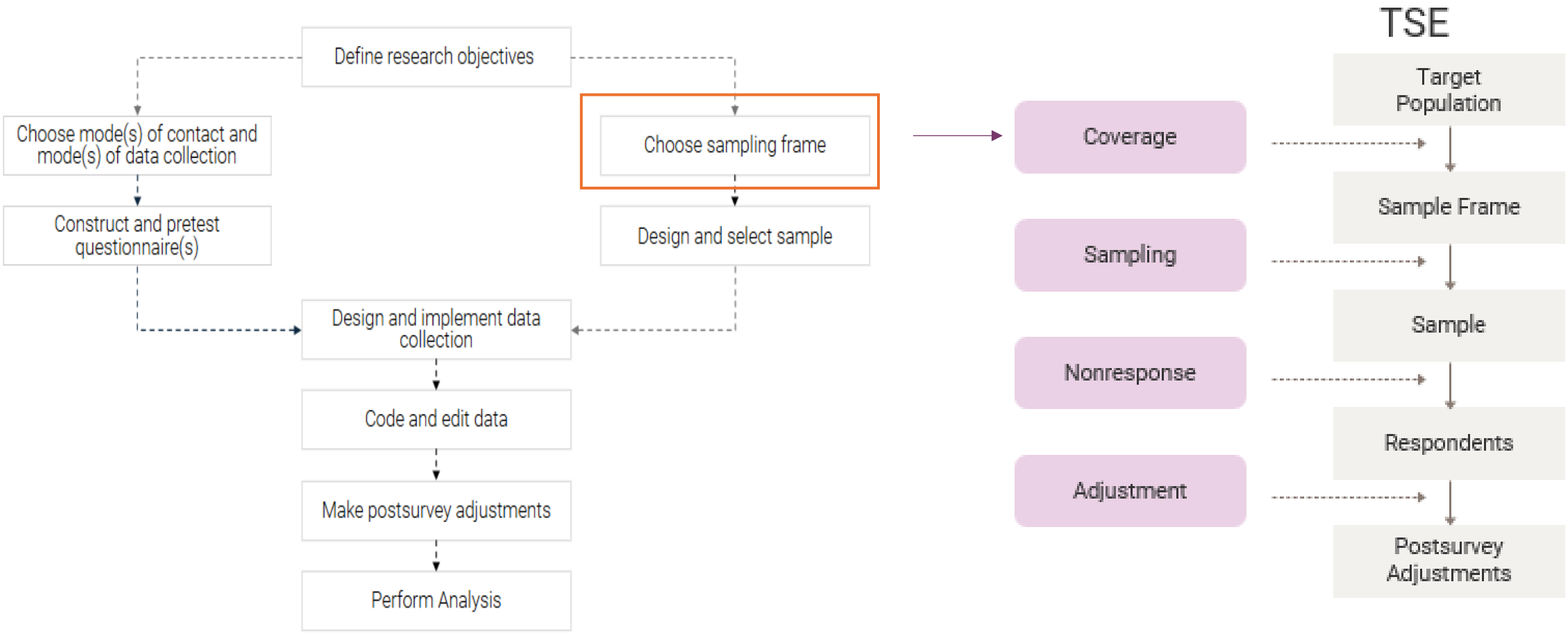
Coverage Error

Sampling Error

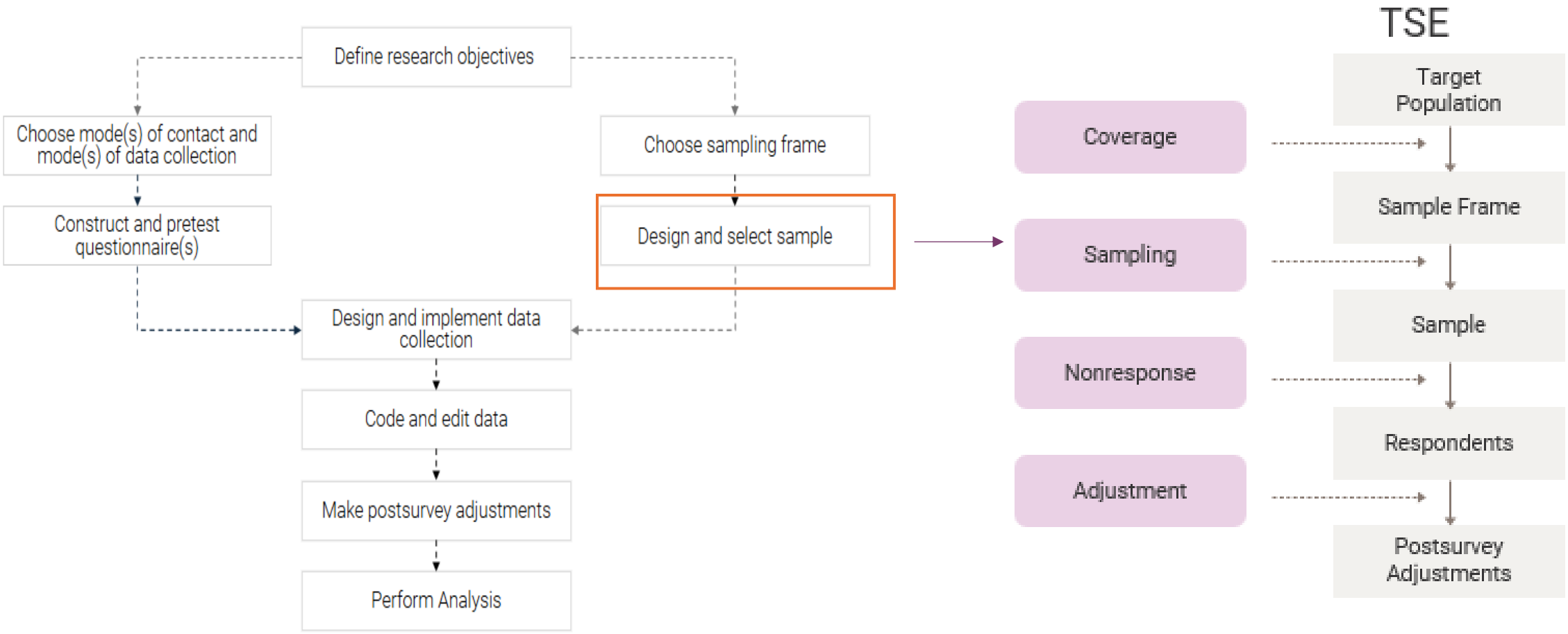
Non-response Error

Adjustment Error

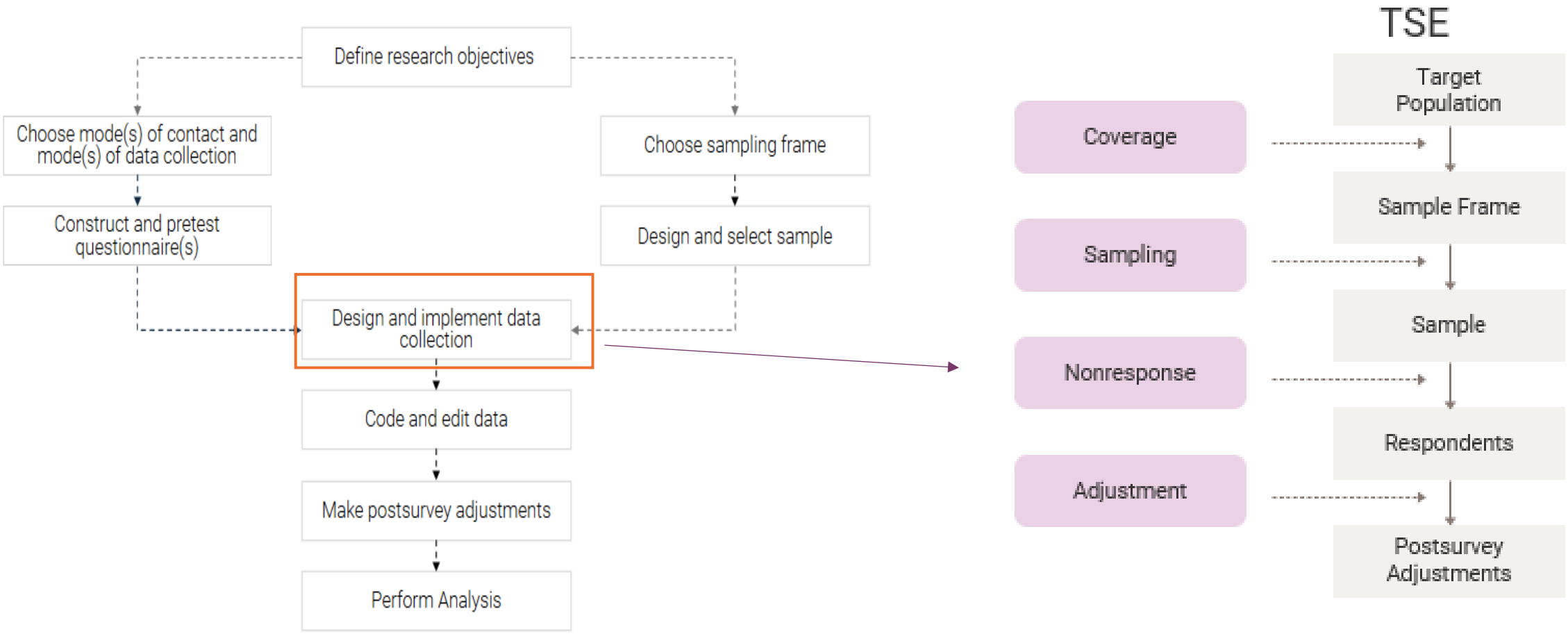
Be explicit about who is expected to be studied and who is expected to be included in data



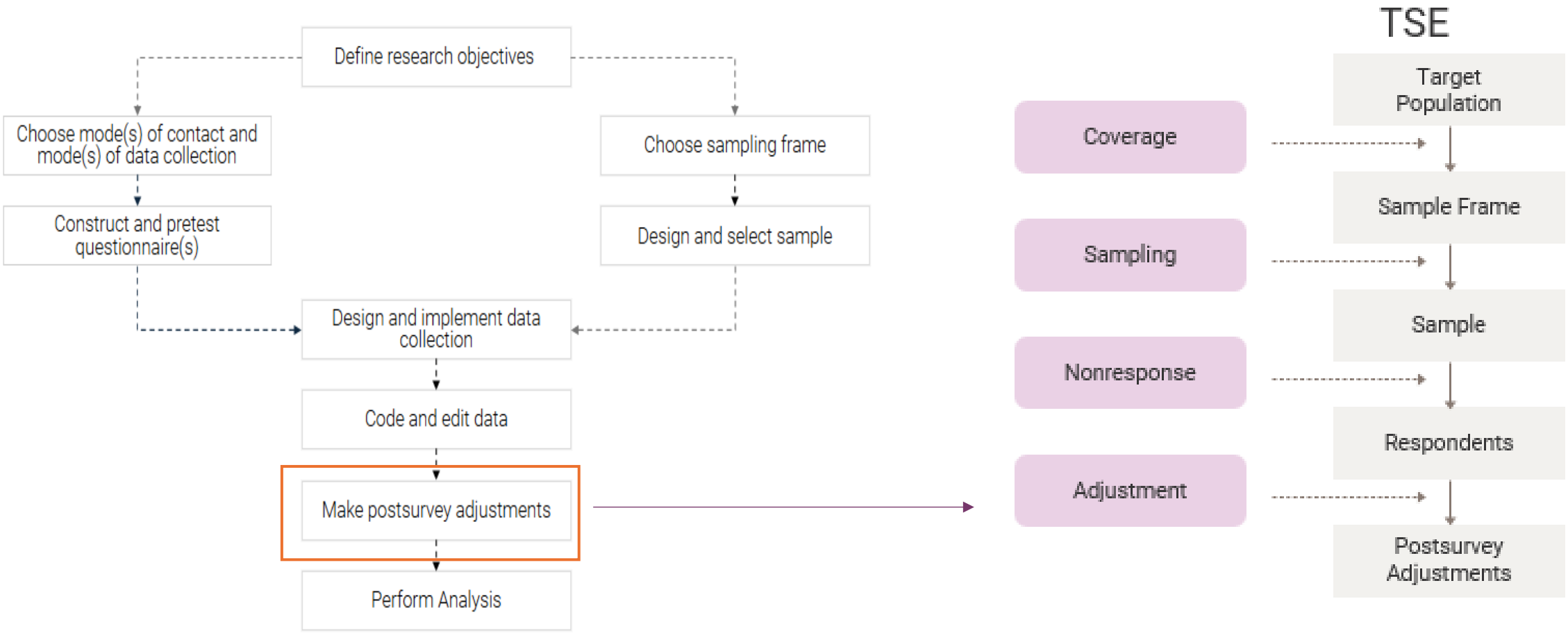
Be explicit about whether probability or nonprobability samples are used and provide details on sampling procedures



Be explicit about who is included in data and provide detailed information on how data are collected/generated



Provide detailed information on adjustment procedures



Design decisions to reduce non-observation errors

Coverage Error

Solution:

Improved sampling frame

Sampling Error

Solution:

Improved sampling efficiency

Non-response Error

Solution:

Multimode designs to reduce non-response error

Adjustment Error

Solution:

Tested weighting adjustment methods

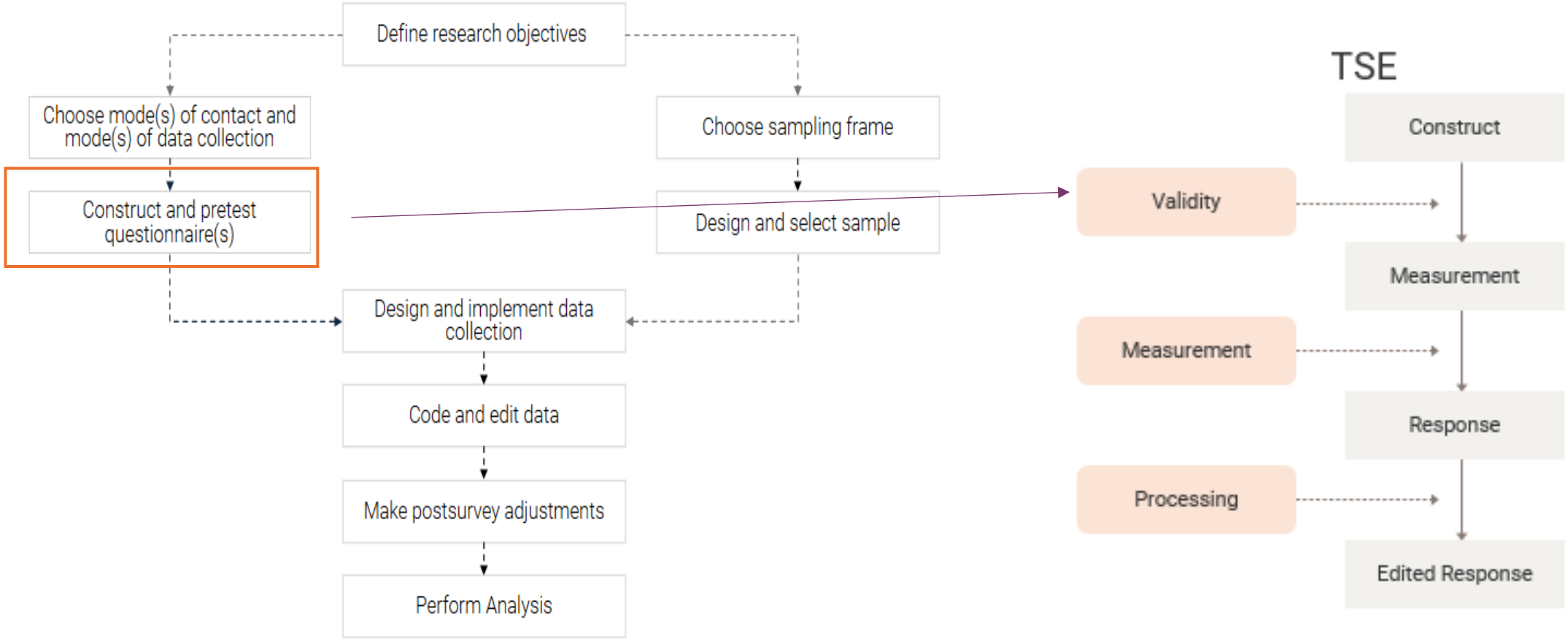
Survey Errors

Validity

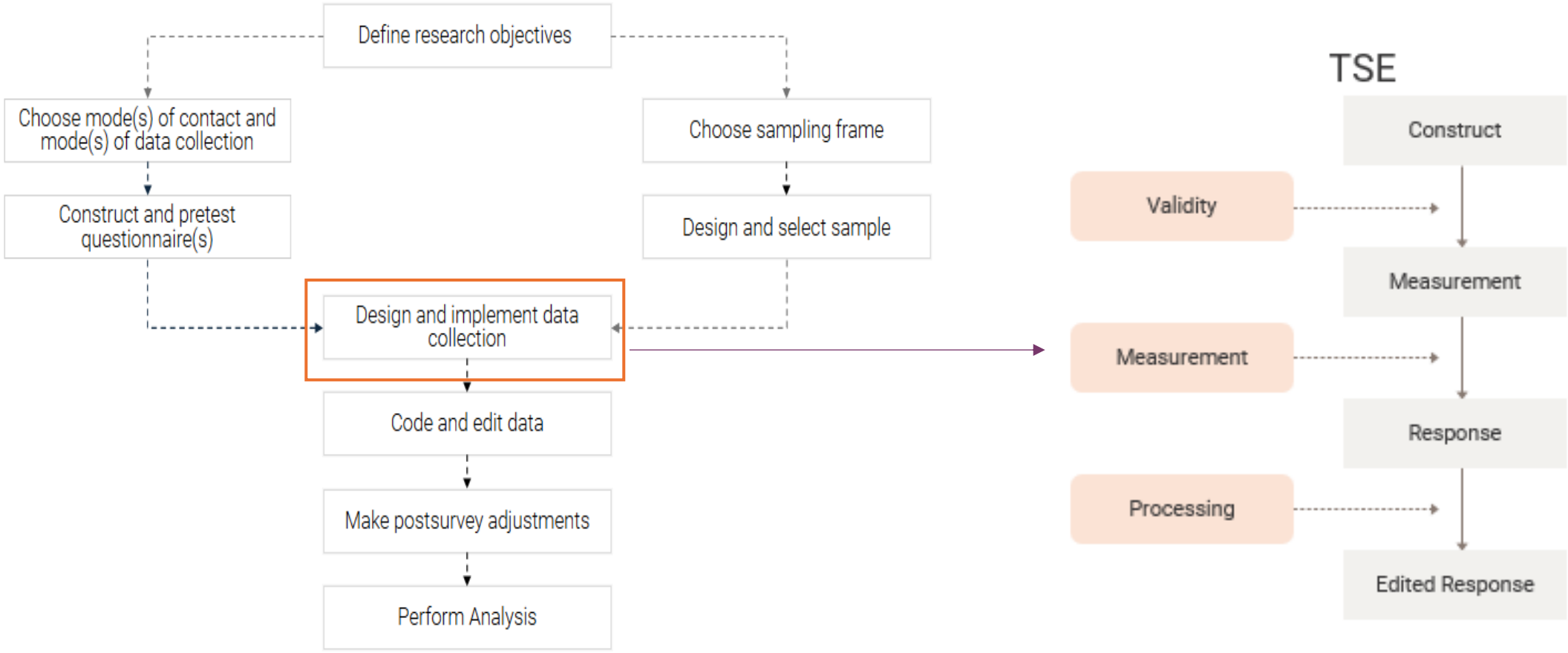
Measurement Error

Processing Error

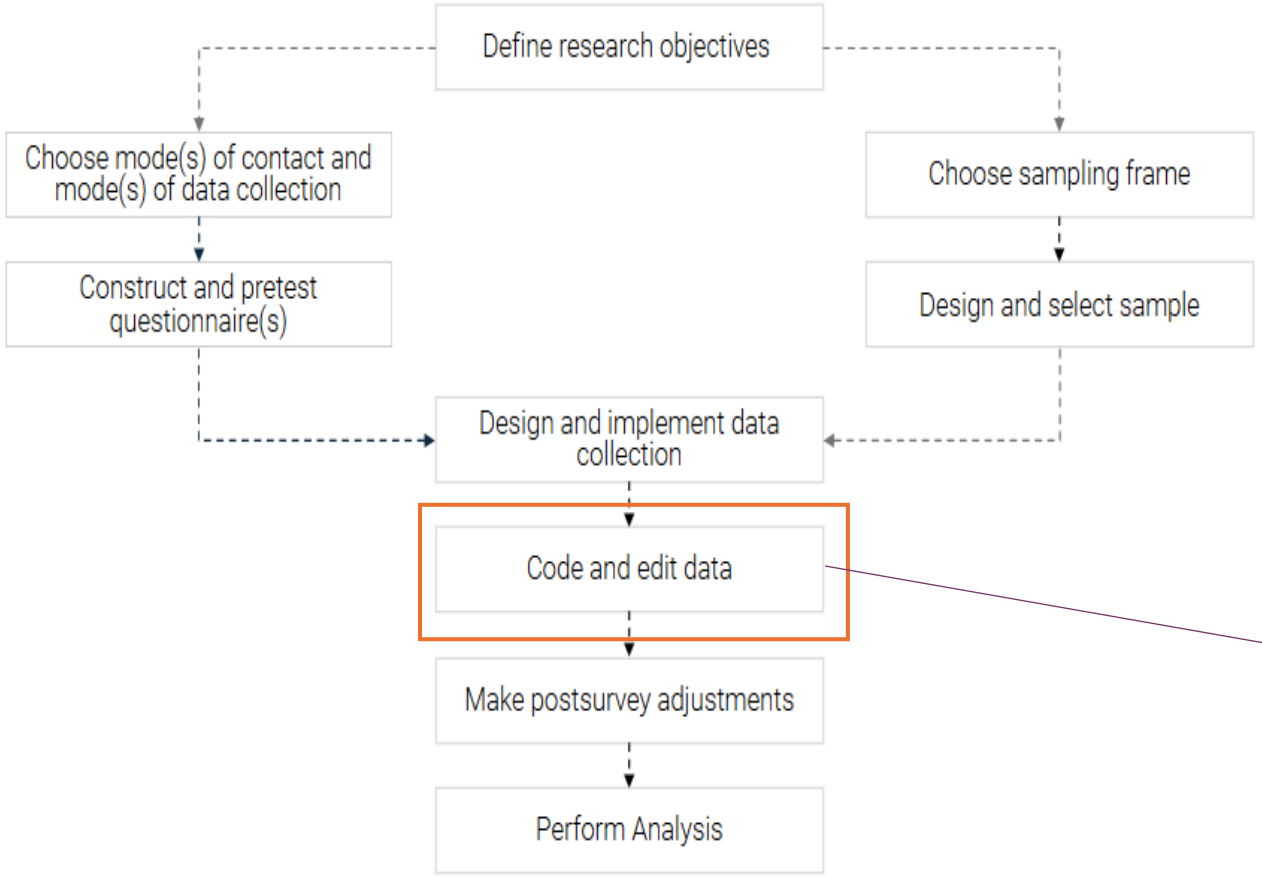
Provide detailed information on measurement (e.g., questionnaires, model/make of equipment/sensors etc) and assessment of measurement

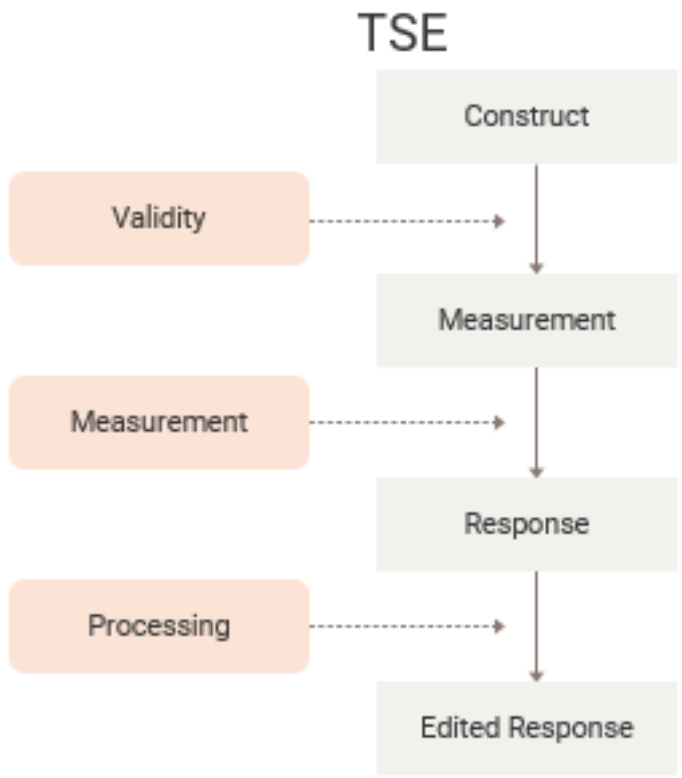


Provide detailed information on data generation process



Provide detailed information on data coding and editing process including tools/algorithms used





Design decisions to reduce observation errors

Validity

Solution:

Extensive question evaluation and testing

Measurement Error

Solution:

Rigorous data collection procedures

Processing Error

Solution:

Extensive

quality control procedures

Methodology ensures accuracy, reliability, and validity by providing a clear plan for data collection and analysis.

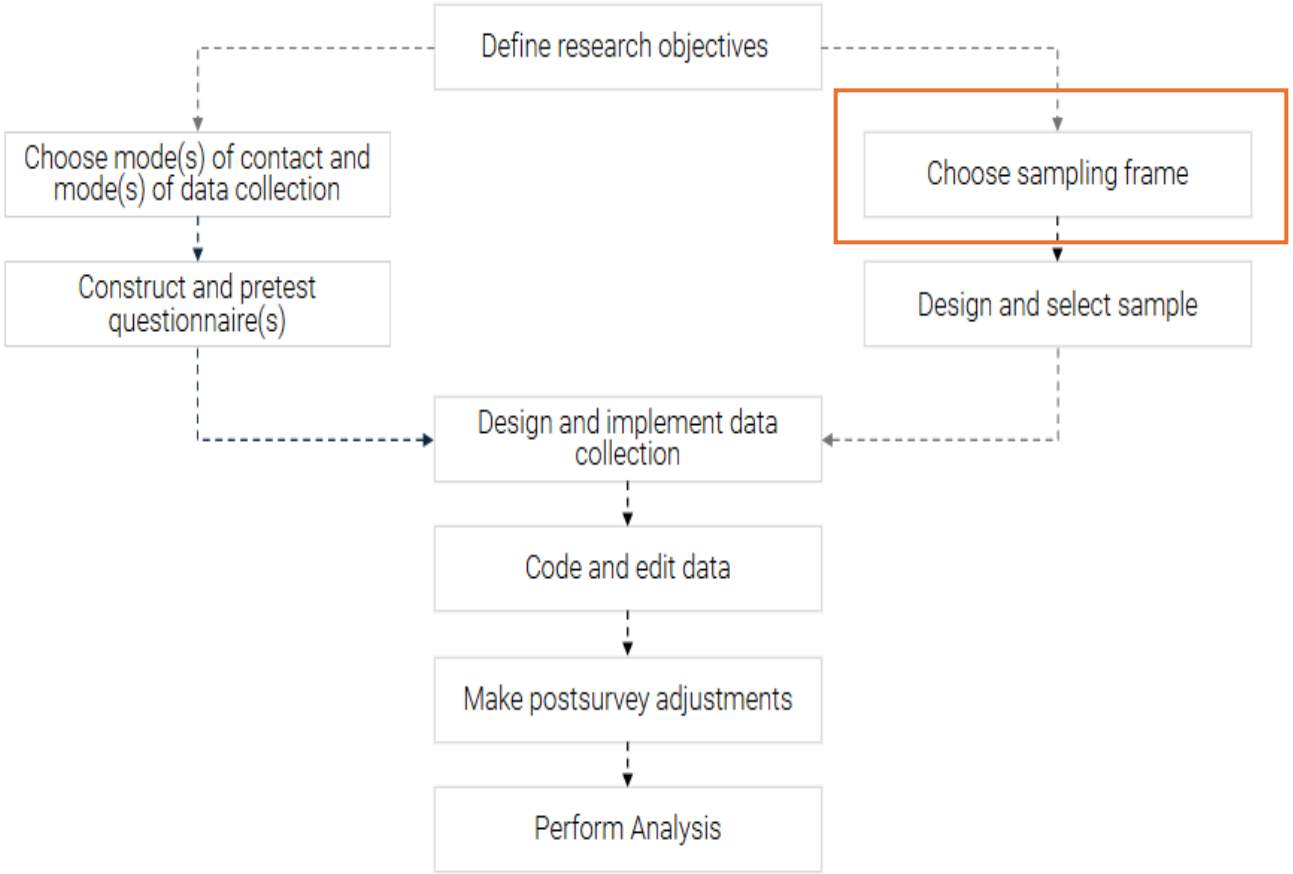
A sound methodology:

- Prevents errors like sampling bias
- Keeps research aligned with its original objectives
- Builds trust in findings by making the process transparent
- Leads to actionable insights that support decision-making

Key Survey Decisions

AmeriSpeak

1. Choose a sampling frame to maximize coverage of your target population



Sampling Frames

Delivery Sequence File (DSF)/Common Data Set (CDS)
USPS Computerized Delivery Sequence File covers about ~91% of addresses, notably missing drop points, simplified addresses and others.

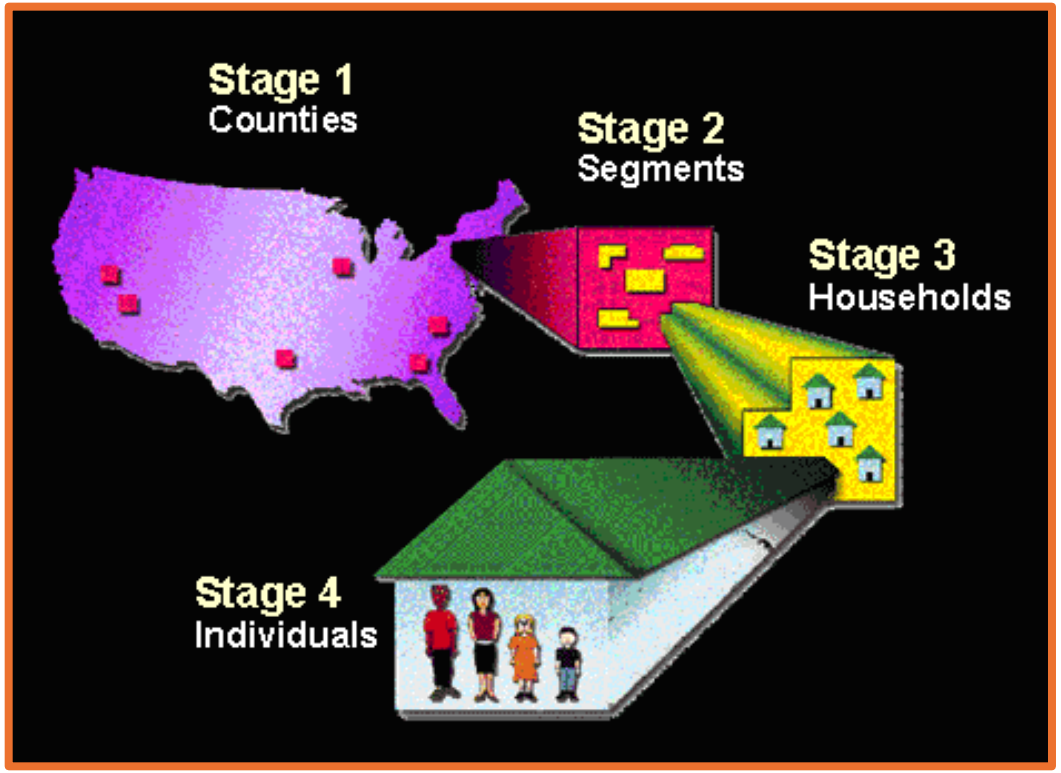
Cellphone
Coverage is 98%, but with call screening and spam filtering there are unknown systematic errors, low response rate and very high costs.

Prepaid Cellphones
Coverage ~11%, highly systematic. But good for boosting some hard to reach populations

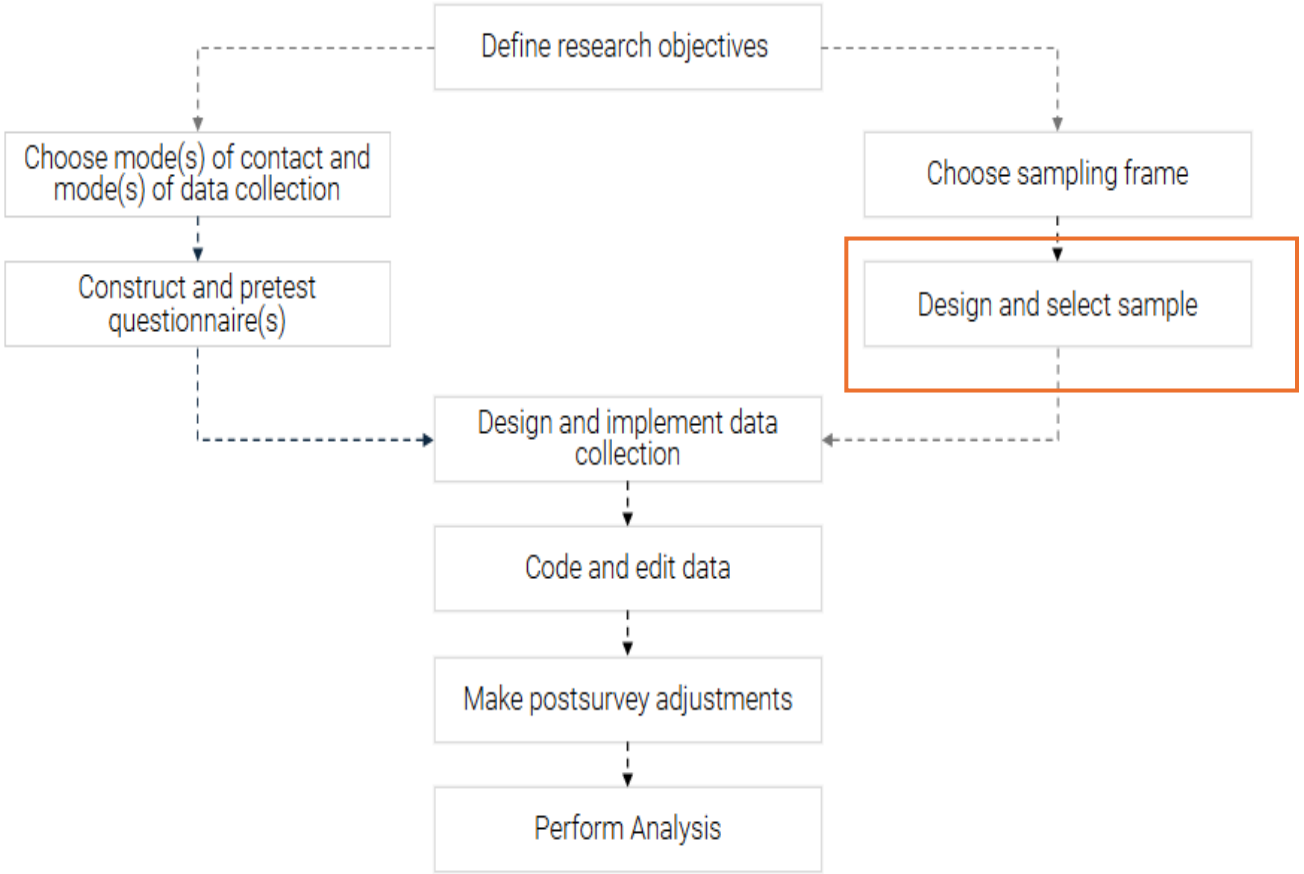
Area Probability, Enhanced (NORC National Frame)
Based on the DSF, but with additional computerized and in-person enumeration to boost coverage to near 100% (~98%).

Uses of the NORC National Frame

- Area probability design based on 126 national frame areas (NFAs).
- 2nd stage selects segments within each NFA (1,917 selected)
- DSF used for addresses; supplemented with in-person enumeration in rural areas to increase coverage to 97%.
- NFAs with at least 1.5 million selected with certainty
- Supplementation with general DSF sample in 2019 to increase representativeness in key states
- Segments with a higher % of young adults and minorities (Hispanic, NH-Black) oversampled
- High Hispanic tracts oversampled



2. Design and select a probability-based sample



Types of Panels: Pros & Cons

	Pros	Cons	Examples
Probability Panels	Representative, generalizable	Higher cost	AmeriSpeak SSRS Knowledge Panel
Non-Probability Panels	Fast, inexpensive	Limited accuracy	Dynata YouGov
Hybrid Panels	Balances cost/rigor	Requires careful methods	Verasight (80% nonprob) Offered by many of the above

Non-Probability Panels: Growing Challenges

Key Sources of Error

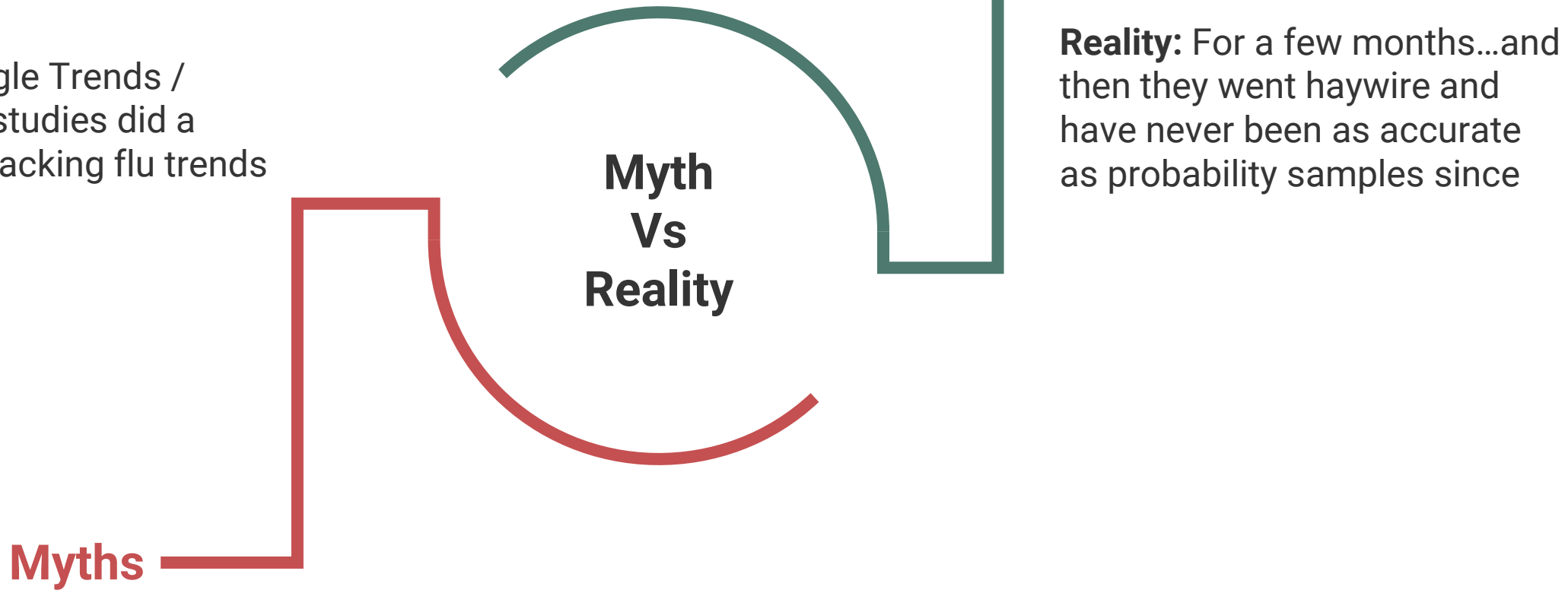
- **Volunteer Bias**: Self-selected respondents over-represent highly active participants
- **Professionalization Bias:** Respondents take many surveys per week and even per day, across 4 or more panels
- **Non-Internet Coverage:** ~8% of U.S. population
- **Weighting & Calibration Issues:** Demographic adjustments often fail or worsen estimates.
- **Fraud & Bots:**
  - 10–50% of responses commonly found fraudulent
  - Explosion of human click farms trained to pass filters and checks
  - Explosion of bots to answer questions, using humans first to pass
  - Spoofing technology greatly advanced (residential proxies, purchasing of “clean” IP addresses, etc)

An “Existential Threat” (Insights Association):

- Errors can shift survey estimates by large amounts: 30-40%.
- Mitigation exists, but effectiveness is uncertain and fraudsters are constantly adapting.

Common “Evidence” Against Probability Panels:
The Cherry Pick

Myth: Google Trends / Facebook studies did a great job tracking flu trends



Reality: For a few months…and then they went haywire and have never been as accurate as probability samples since

Common “Evidence” Against Probability Panels

Myth: Probability panels aren’t accurate.

Myth: Non-probability panels sometimes do better.

Myth: Response rates are so low that it is no different

Myths

Myth Vs Reality

Reality

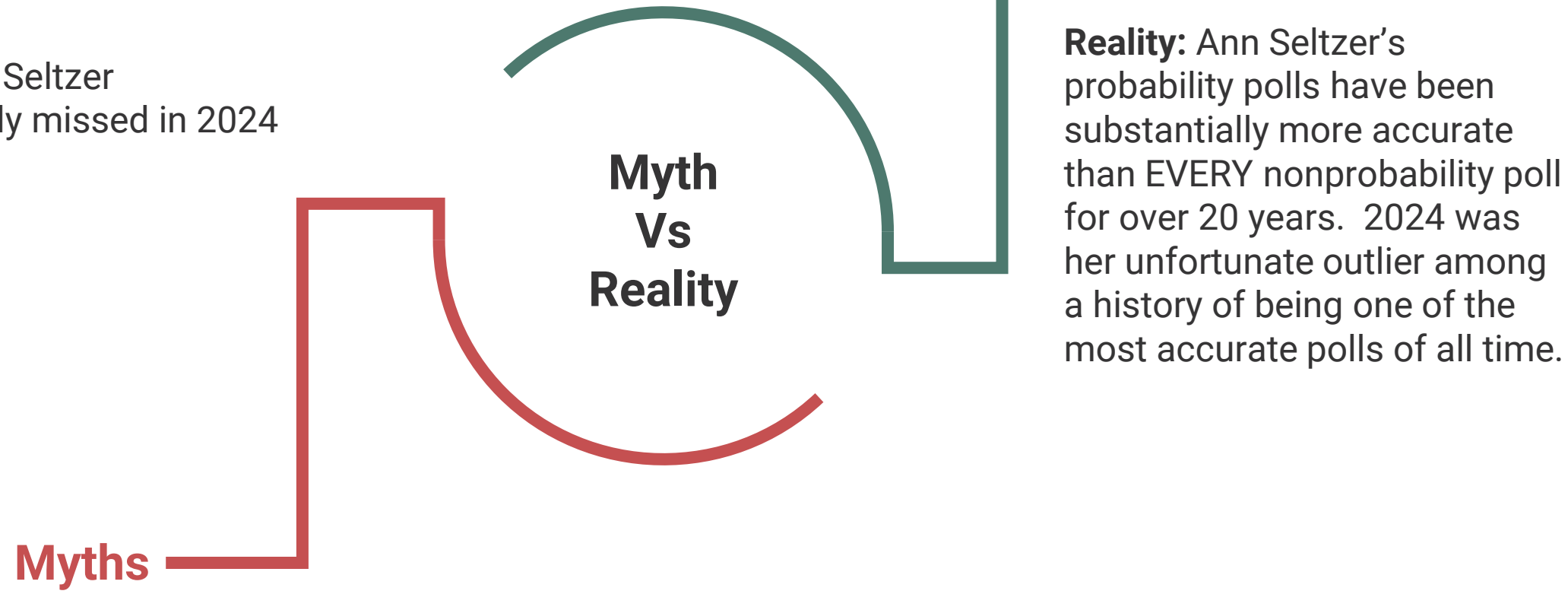
Reality: Probability error is modest compared to opt-in

Reality: Occasional success doesn’t predict consistent accuracy across questions or populations.

Reality: Study after study shows low response rate is still far superior

Common “Evidence” Against Probability Panels:
The Cherry Pick

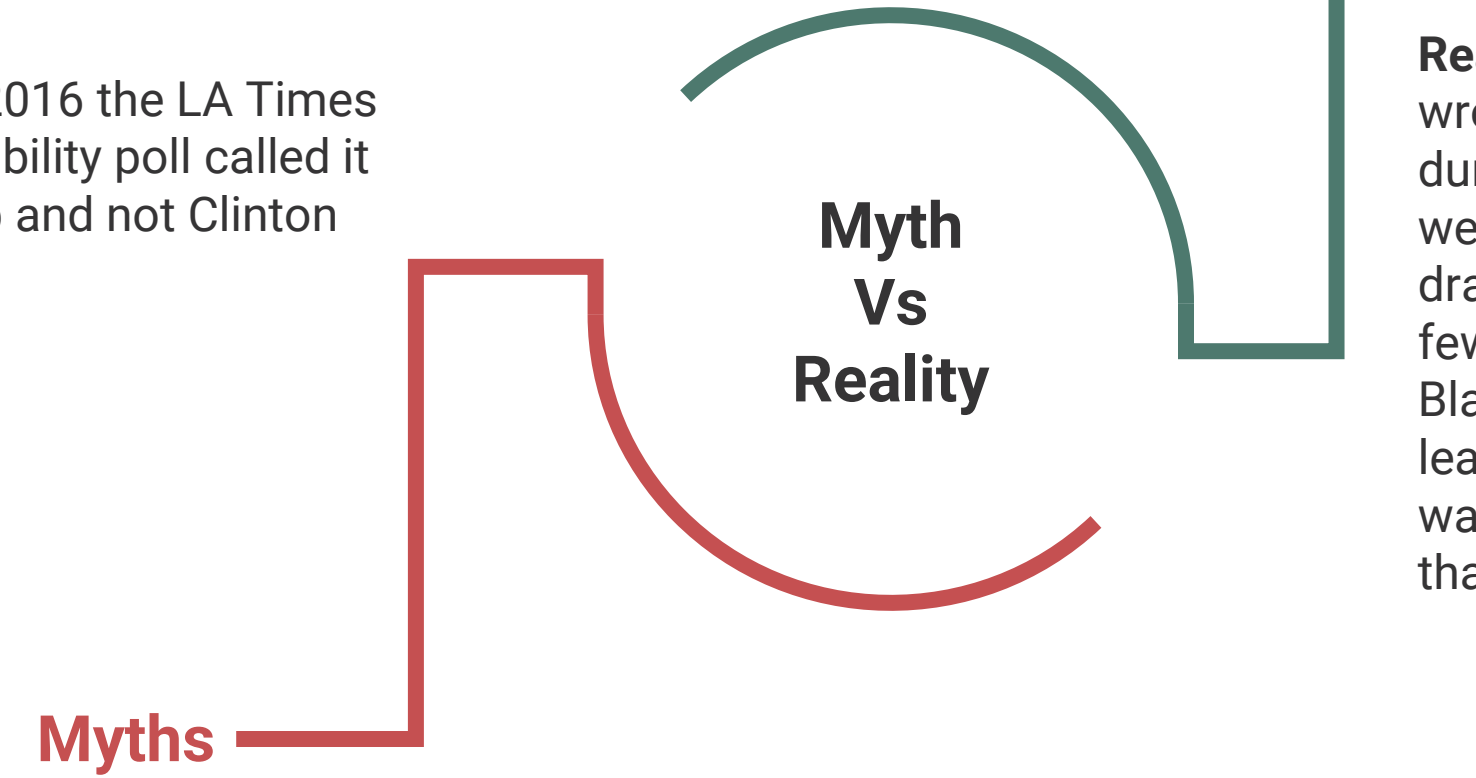
Myth: Ann Seltzer significantly missed in 2024



Reality: Ann Seltzer’s probability polls have been substantially more accurate than EVERY nonprobability poll for over 20 years. 2024 was her unfortunate outlier among a history of being one of the most accurate polls of all time.

Common “Evidence” Against Probability Panels:
The Cherry Pick

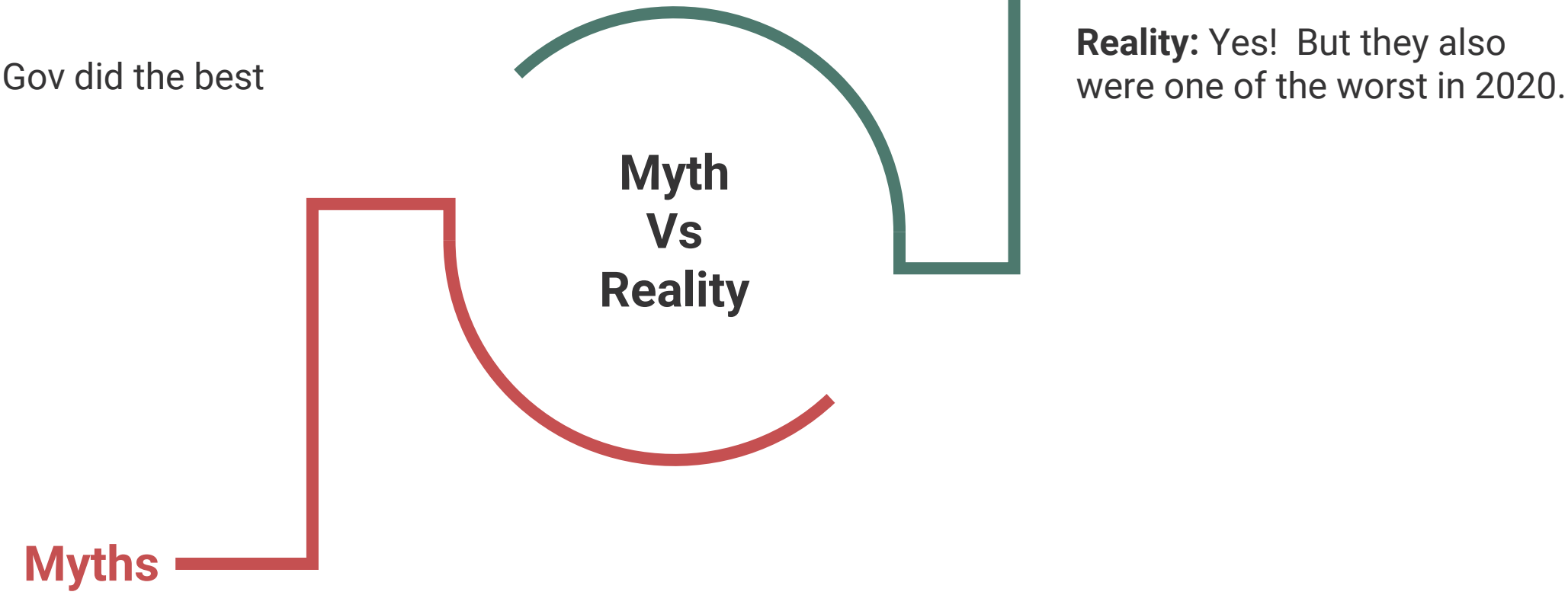
Myth: In 2016 the LA Times Nonprobability poll called it for Trump and not Clinton



Reality: Yes! But for the totally wrong reasons and basically dumb luck: Their extreme weighting resulted in dramatically high weights of a few cases (notably the few Blacks who supported Trump), leading to an estimate that was erroneously ~4% more red than blue.

Common “Evidence” Against Probability Panels:
The Cherry Pick

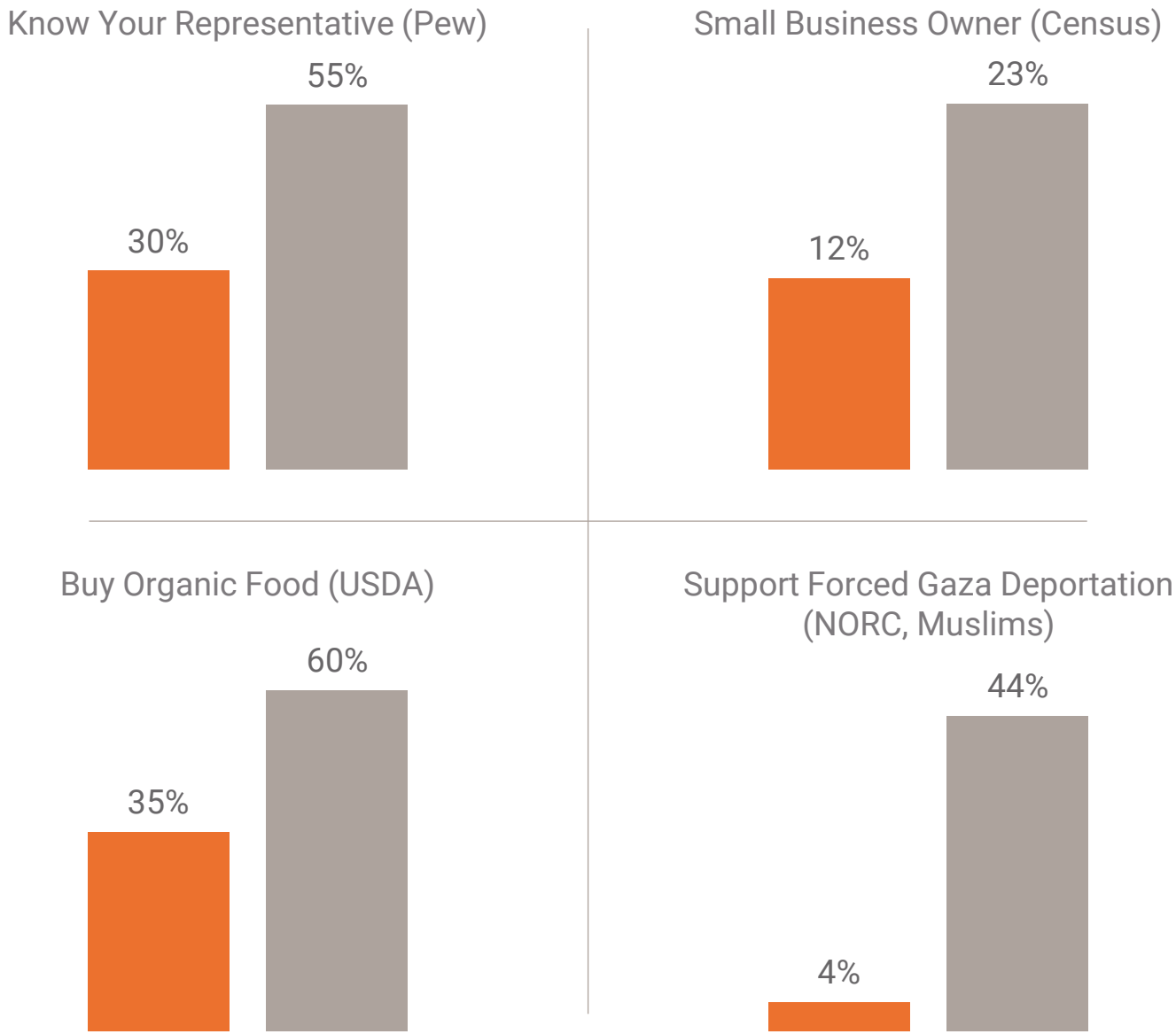
Myth: YouGov did the best in 2016



Reality: Yes! But they also were one of the worst in 2020.

Nonprobability does not just have a higher probability for error, but a substantially higher variance of error

In plain language: when probability is wrong, it is typically by a few points…but nonprobability errors range from a few points to 20 percent or more



Peer-Reviewed/High Quality Research Showing NonProbability is Superior

Wang, W., Rothschild, D., Goel, S., & Gelman, A. (2015). Forecasting elections with non-representative polls using MRP. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 112(38), 10568–10573.
CAVEAT: Xbox poll with hundreds of thousands of cases, utilized extreme weight: In short, not a "real world" application

Rivers, D. (2007/2013). Sampling for Web Surveys (JSM Proceedings and subsequent methods notes).
CAVEAT: Again, the YouGov method has not fared as good a probability in recent elections. Forthcoming research will show serious errors occurring in YouGov samples

Ansolabehere, S., & Schaffner, B. F. (2014). Does Survey Mode Still Matter? Findings from a 2010 Multi-Mode Comparison. Political Analysis, 22(3), 285-303.
CAVEAT: Another YouGov example, and only showed general comparability, not superiority

Note: there are studies that show that treatment effects can be comparable between samples in experiments in Mturk, see Weinberg, J. D., Freese, J., & McElhattan, D. (2014); Mullinix, K. J., Leeper, T. J., Druckman, J. N., & Freese, J. (2015); Coppock, A., Leeper, T. J., & Mullinix, K. J. (2018); Boas, T. C., Christenson, D. P., & Glick, D. M. (2020)

Peer-Reviewed/High Quality Research Showing Probability is Superior

West, B. T., Sakshaug, J. W., & Aurelien, G. A. S. (2021). How Big of a Problem is Analytical Error in Secondary Analyses of Survey Data? PLOS ONE, 16(3), e0158120.

Rao, J. N. K. (2021). On Making Valid Inferences by Integrating Data from Surveys and Other Sources. Survey Methodology, 47(1), 1-32.

Chang, L., & Krosnick, J. A. (2009). National surveys via RDD telephone interviewing versus the internet: Comparing sample representativeness and response quality. *Public Opinion Quarterly, 73*(4), 641-678.

Yeager, D. S., Krosnick, J. A., Chang, L., Javitz, H. S., Levendusky, M. S., Simpser, A., & Wang, R. (2011). Comparing the accuracy of RDD telephone surveys and internet surveys conducted with probability and non-probability samples. *Public Opinion Quarterly, 75*(4), 709-747.

Bradley, V. C., Kuriwaki, S., Isakov, M., Sejdinovic, D., Meng, X. L., & Flaxman, S. (2021). Unrepresentative big surveys significantly overestimated US vaccine uptake. Nature, 600(7890), 695-700.

Tortora, R. D. (2004). Response trends in a national random digit dial survey: The Gallup Poll experience 1997-2003. *Proceedings of the Section on Survey Research Methods, American Statistical Association*.

Kennedy, C., Mercer, A., Keeter, S., Hatley, N., McGeeney, K., & Gimenez, A. (2016). Evaluating online nonprobability surveys. *Pew Research Center*.

Meng, X.-L. (2021). The Big Data Paradox: When More Data Can Lead to Less Accurate Inference. Harvard Data Science Review, 3(1).

Keiding, N., & Louis, T. A. (2016). Perils and Pitfalls of Self-Selected Surveys. International Statistical Review, 84(2), 219–254.

Mercer, A., Deane, C., & McGeeney, K. (2016). Why 2016 election polls missed their mark. *Pew Research Center*.

Kennedy, C., Blumenthal, M., Clement, S., Clinton, J. D., Durand, C., Franklin, C., ... & Witt, G. E. (2018). An evaluation of the 2016 election polls in the United States. *Public Opinion Quarterly, 82*(1), 1-33.

Elliott, M. N., & Valliant, R. (2017). Inference for nonprobability samples. *Statistical Science, 32*(2), 249-264.

Callegaro, Mario, Ana Villar, David Yeager, and Jon Krosnick. 2014. "A Critical Review of Studies Investigating the Quality of Data Obtained with Online Panels Based on Probability and Nonprobability Samples." Online Panel Research: A Data Quality Perspective 23–53. doi:10.1002/9781118763520.ch2

Elliott, M. R., & Haviland, A. M. (2022). Combining Data from Probability and Nonprobability Samples Using Pseudo-Weights. Survey Methodology, 48(1), 1-21.

Dutwin, D., & Buskirk, T. D. (2017). Apples to oranges or gala versus golden delicious? Comparing data quality of nonprobability internet samples to low response rate probability samples. *Public Opinion Quarterly, 81*(S1), 213-239.

Sturgis, P., Kuha, J., Baker, N., et al. (2017). An Experiment in Combining Probability and Nonprobability Samples for Survey Inference. Public Opinion Quarterly, 81(4), 1013–1037.

Schlenger, W. E., & Silver, R. C. (2006). Web-based methods in terrorism and disaster research. *Journal of Traumatic Stress, 19*(2), 185-193.

Pasek, J. (2016). When will nonprobability surveys mirror probability surveys? Considering types of inference and weighting strategies as criteria for correspondence. *Public Opinion Quarterly, 80*(1), 45-75.

Bethlehem, J. (2010). Selection bias in web surveys. *International Statistical Review, 78*(2), 161-188.

Cornesse, C., Blom, A. G., Dutwin, D., Krosnick, J. A., De Leeuw, E. D., Legleye, S., ... & Wenz, A. (2020). A review of conceptual approaches and empirical evidence on probability and nonprobability sample survey research. *Journal of Survey Statistics and Methodology, 8*(1), 4-36.

Malhotra, Neil, and Jon A. Krosnick. 2007. "The Effect of Survey Mode and Sampling on Inferences about Political Attitudes and Behavior: Comparing the 2000 and 2004 ANES to Internet Surveys with Nonprobability Samples." Political Analysis 15:286–323.

Mercer, A., Lau, A., & Kennedy, C. (2018). For weighting online opt-in samples, what matters most? *Survey Practice, 11(1).*.

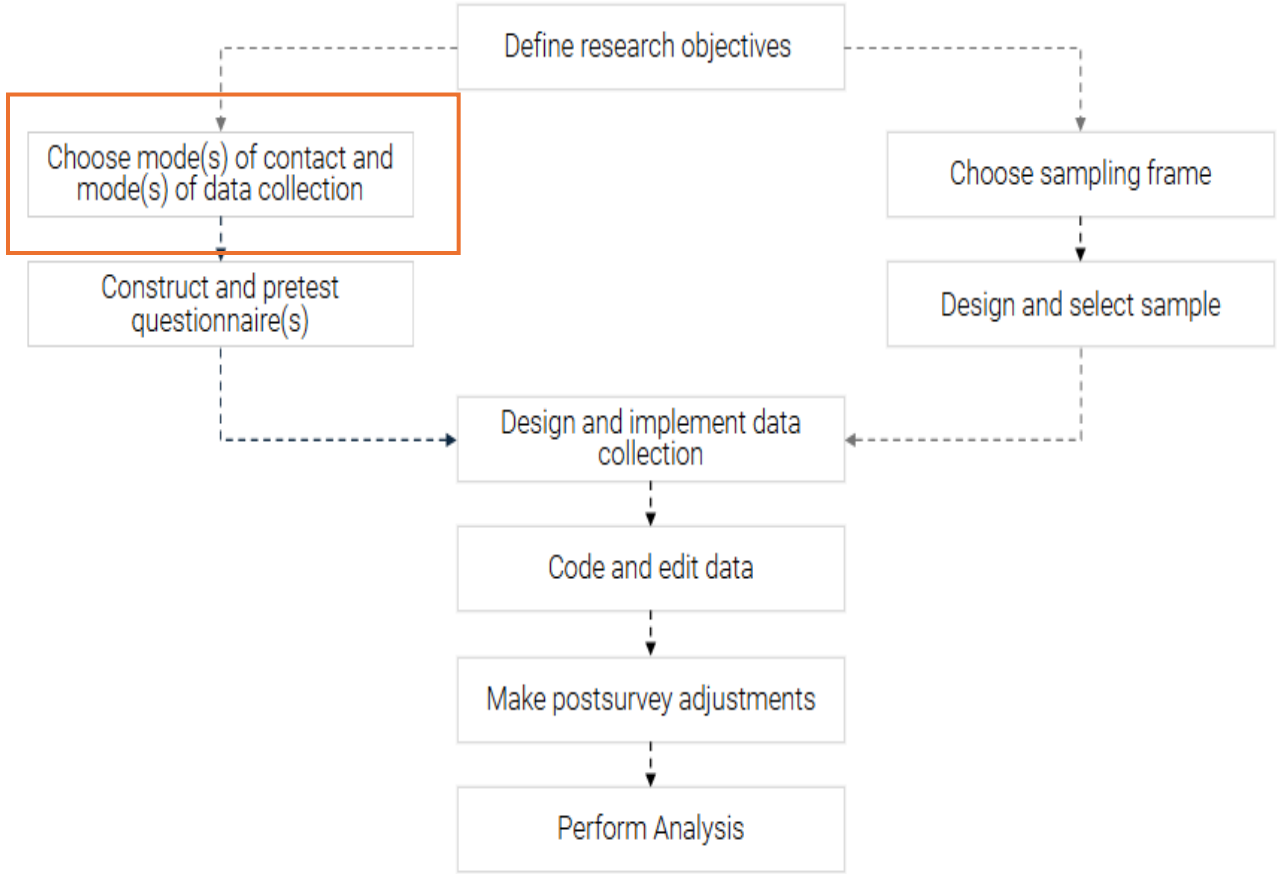
Chen, Y., Li, P., & Wu, C. (2020). Doubly robust inference with nonprobability survey samples. *Journal of the American Statistical Association, 115*(532), 2011-2021.

Scherpenzeel, A. C., & Das, M. (2010). "True" Samples of Individuals Versus Convenience Samples? Differences Between Probability-Based and Volunteer Online Panels. In: Social and Behavioral Research and the Internet (eds. Das, Ester, & Kaczmirek).

Schonlau, M., Van Soest, A., Kapteyn, A., & Couper, M. (2009). Selection Bias in Web Surveys and the Use of Propensity Scores. Journal of the Royal Statistical Society: Series A (Statistics in Society), 172(4), 641–662.

3. Choose mode(s) of contact and data collection to maximize contact and response from your target population

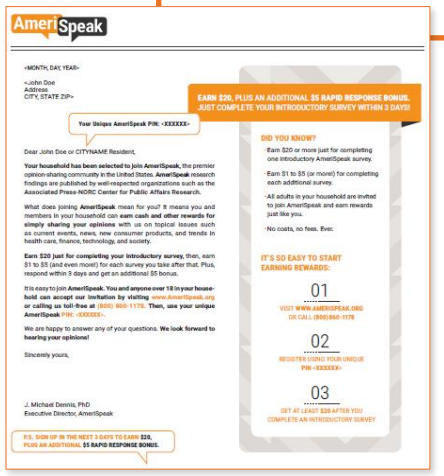
- Implication on measurement and nonresponse error



AmeriSpeak uses multiple modes of contact/data collection to maximize reach to all Americans

2–STAGE RECRUITMENT

Mail & Phone Contacting


AmeriSpeak

<MONTH, DAY, YEAR>

<John Doe
Address
CITY, STATE ZIP>

EARN $20, PLUS AN ADDITIONAL $5 RAPID RESPONSE BONUS.
JUST COMPLETE YOUR INTRODUCTORY SURVEY WITHIN 3 DAYS!

Your Unique AmeriSpeak PIN: <XXXXXX>

Dear John Doe or CITYNAME Resident,

Your household has been selected to join AmeriSpeak, the premier opinion-sharing community in the United States. **AmeriSpeak** research findings are published by well-respected organizations such as the Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

What does joining **AmeriSpeak** mean for you? It means you and members in your household can **earn cash and other rewards for simply sharing your opinions** with us on topical issues such as current events, news, new consumer products, and trends in health care, finance, technology, and society.

Earn $20 just for completing your introductory survey, then, earn $1 to $5 (and even more!) for each survey you take after that. Plus, respond within 3 days and get an additional $5 bonus.

It is easy to join **AmeriSpeak. You and anyone over 18 in your household can accept our invitation by visiting www.AmeriSpeak.org or calling us toll-free at (800) 868-1178. Then, use your unique AmeriSpeak PIN: <XXXXXX>.**

We are happy to answer any of your questions. **We look forward to hearing your opinions!**

Sincerely yours,

J. Michael Dennis, PhD
Executive Director, AmeriSpeak

P.S. SIGN UP IN THE NEXT 3 DAYS TO EARN $20, PLUS AN ADDITIONAL $5 RAPID RESPONSE BONUS.

DID YOU KNOW?

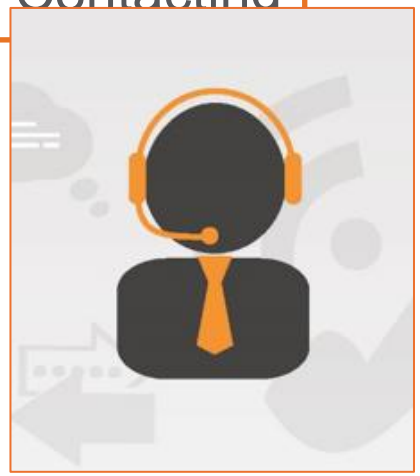
- Earn $20 or more just for completing one introductory AmeriSpeak survey.
- Earn $1 to $5 (or more!) for completing each additional survey.
- All adults in your household are invited to join AmeriSpeak and earn rewards just like you.
- No costs, no fees. Ever.

IT'S SO EASY TO START EARNING REWARDS:

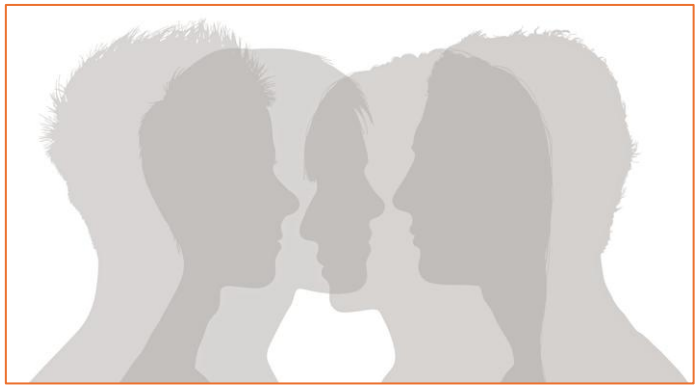
01
VISIT WWW.AMERISPEAK.ORG OR CALL (800) 868-1178

02
REGISTER USING YOUR UNIQUE PIN <XXXXXX>

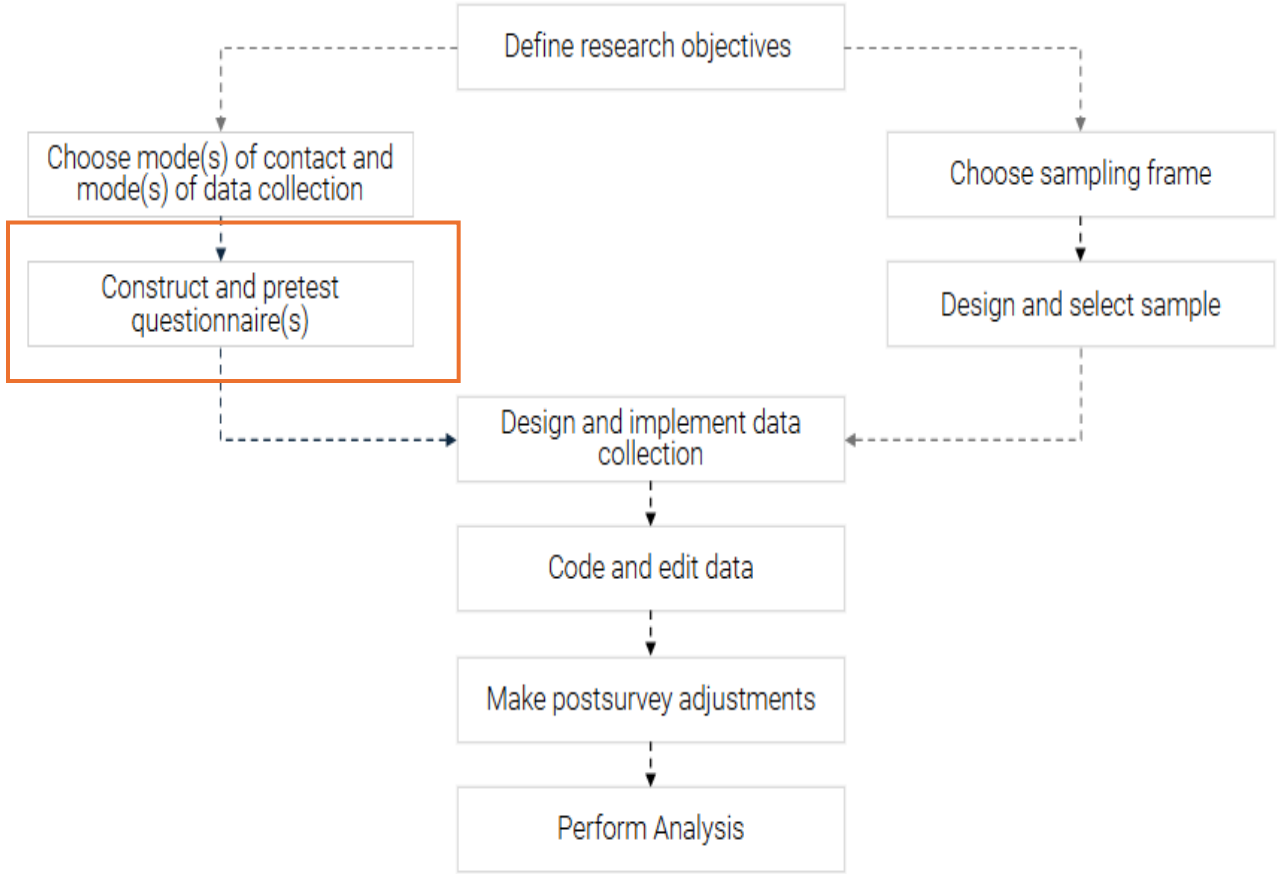
03
GET AT LEAST $20 AFTER YOU COMPLETE AN INTRODUCTORY SURVEY



Face-to-Face (F2F) Contacting



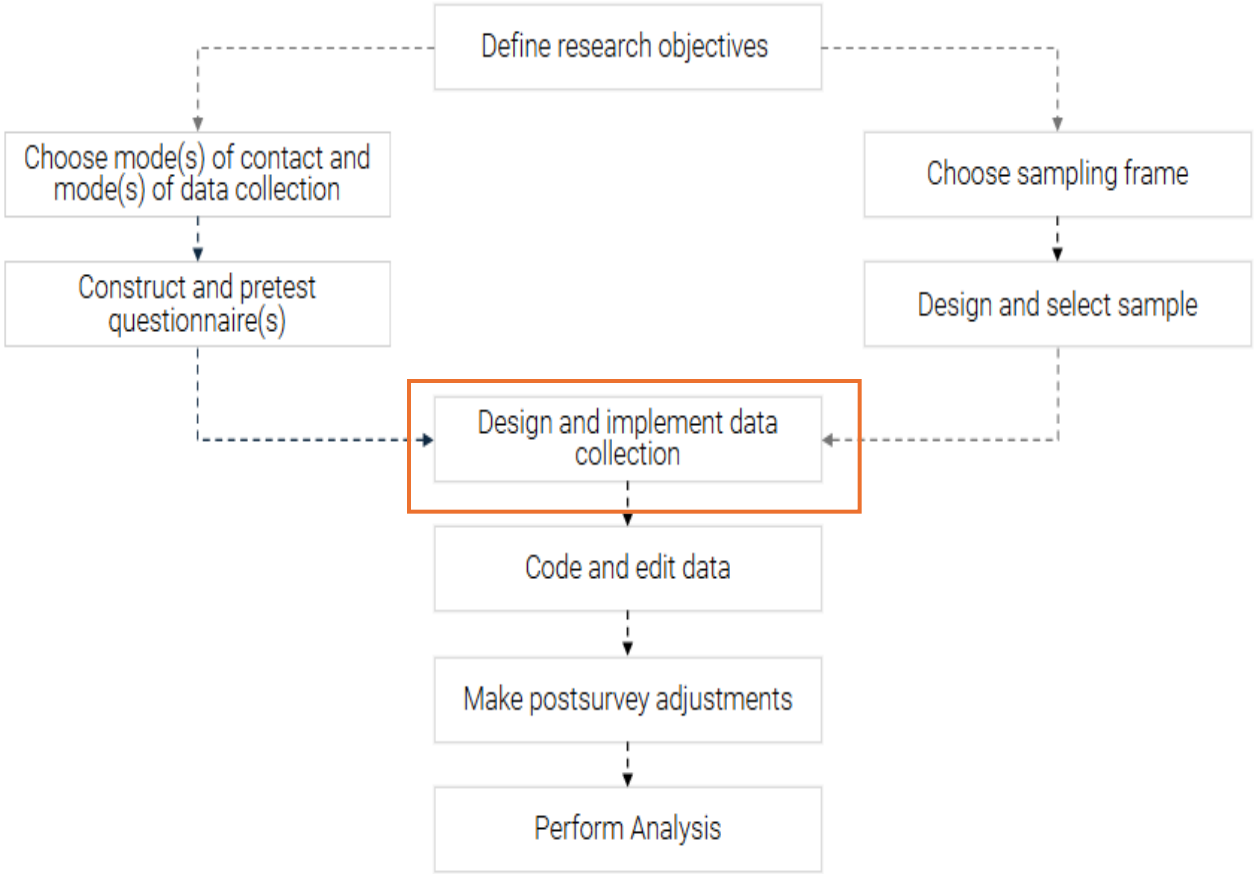
4. Pretest and evaluate your questionnaire



Types of Question Evaluation Methods: Pros & Cons

	Pros	Cons	Examples
Expert methods	Quick turn-around, inexpensive	No involvement of actual respondents	Expert reviews
Lab-based methods	Involving actual respondents	Expensive	Cognitive interviews
Field-based methods	Large data, mimicking actual data collection	Resource heavy	Randomized experiment, pilot testing

5. Design data collection protocol to maximize response rate and reduce survey error

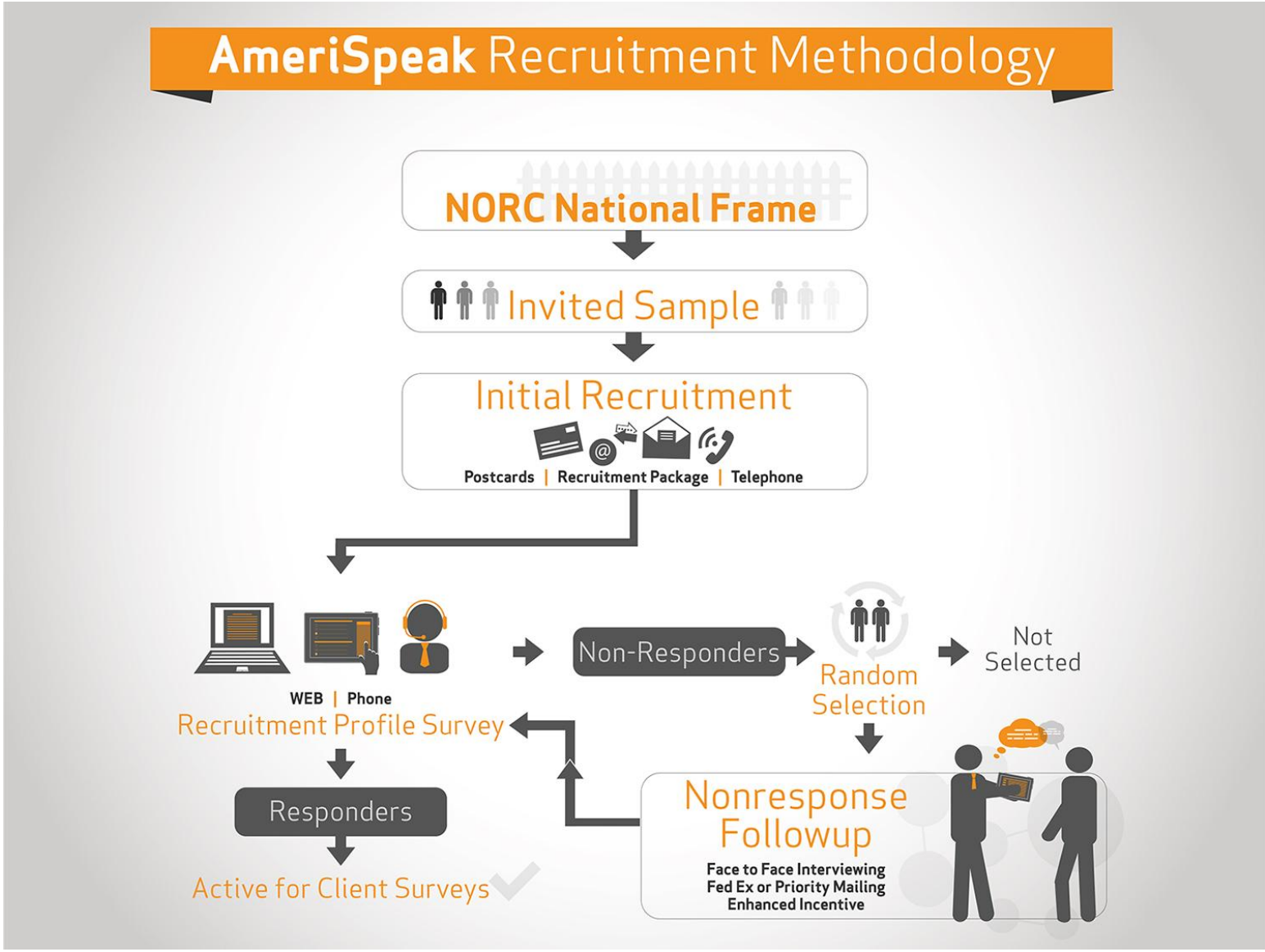


Initial Contact

- **Pre-notification postcard**
- **+5 days, 9 x 12 recruitment packet w/ pre-incentive, study brochure, and privacy policy**
- **+12 days, reminder postcard**
- Call-ins allowed throughout
- +18 days, call-outs to matched telephones

NRFU Contact

- **Federal Express study brochure and enhanced pre-incentive**
- In-person contact

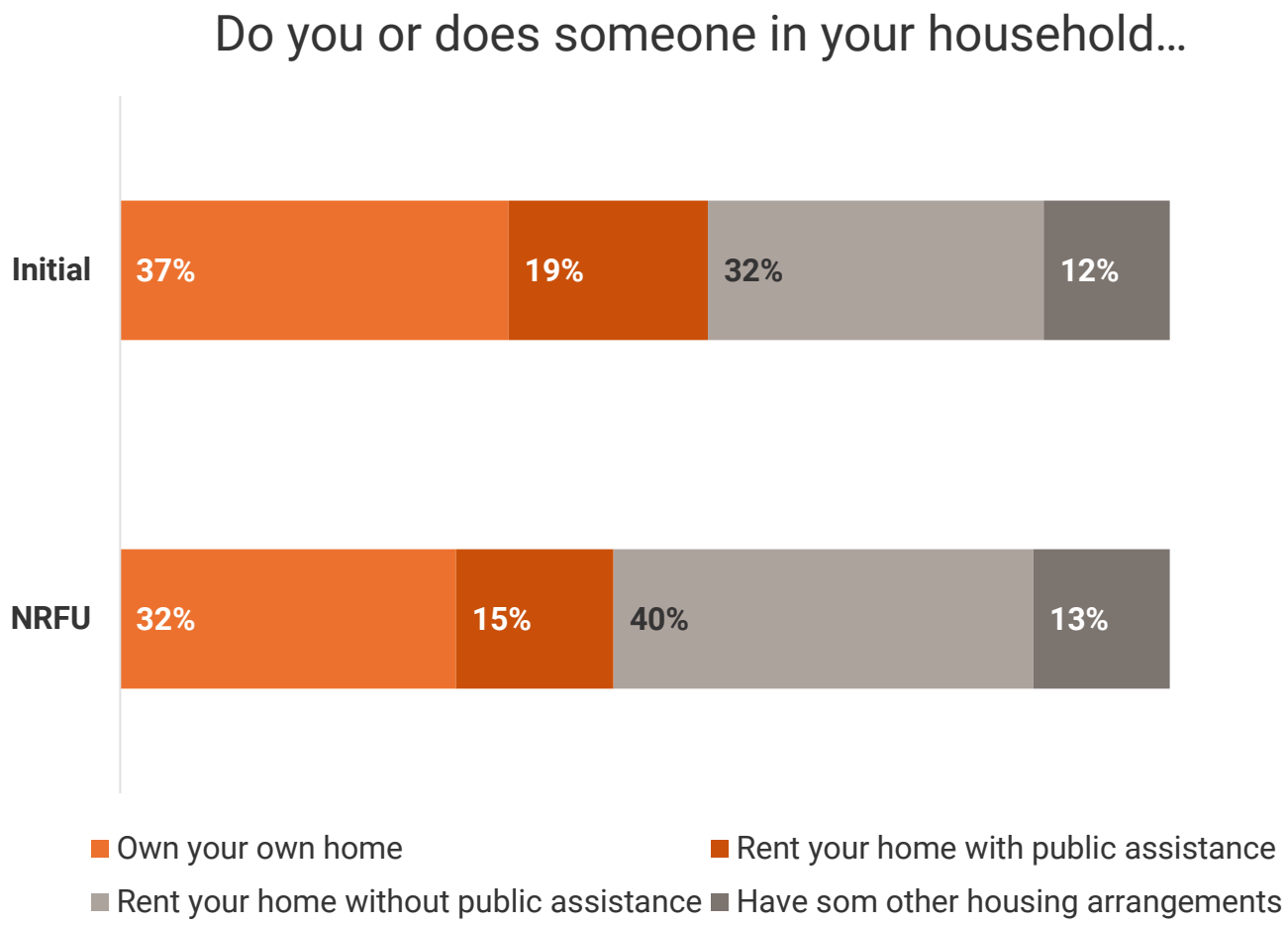


AmeriSpeak has the highest response rate.

Key Panel Features	AmeriSpeak	KnowledgePanel	American Trends Panel	Gallup Panel
Sample Frame	NORC National Frame/ABS	ABS, RDD	ABS	ABS, RDD
Household Sample Coverage Rate	97%	~92%	~92%	~92%
AAPOR Panel Recruitment Response Rate	22%	10%	N.P.A.	8%
AAPOR Cumulative Response Rate4	8-15%	~1%	~1%	N.P.A.
Panel Tenure	2–3 years on average	N.P.A.	N.P.A.	N.P.A.
Mode of Data Collection for Client Surveys	Online + phone	Online only	Online only	Mail, online, phone

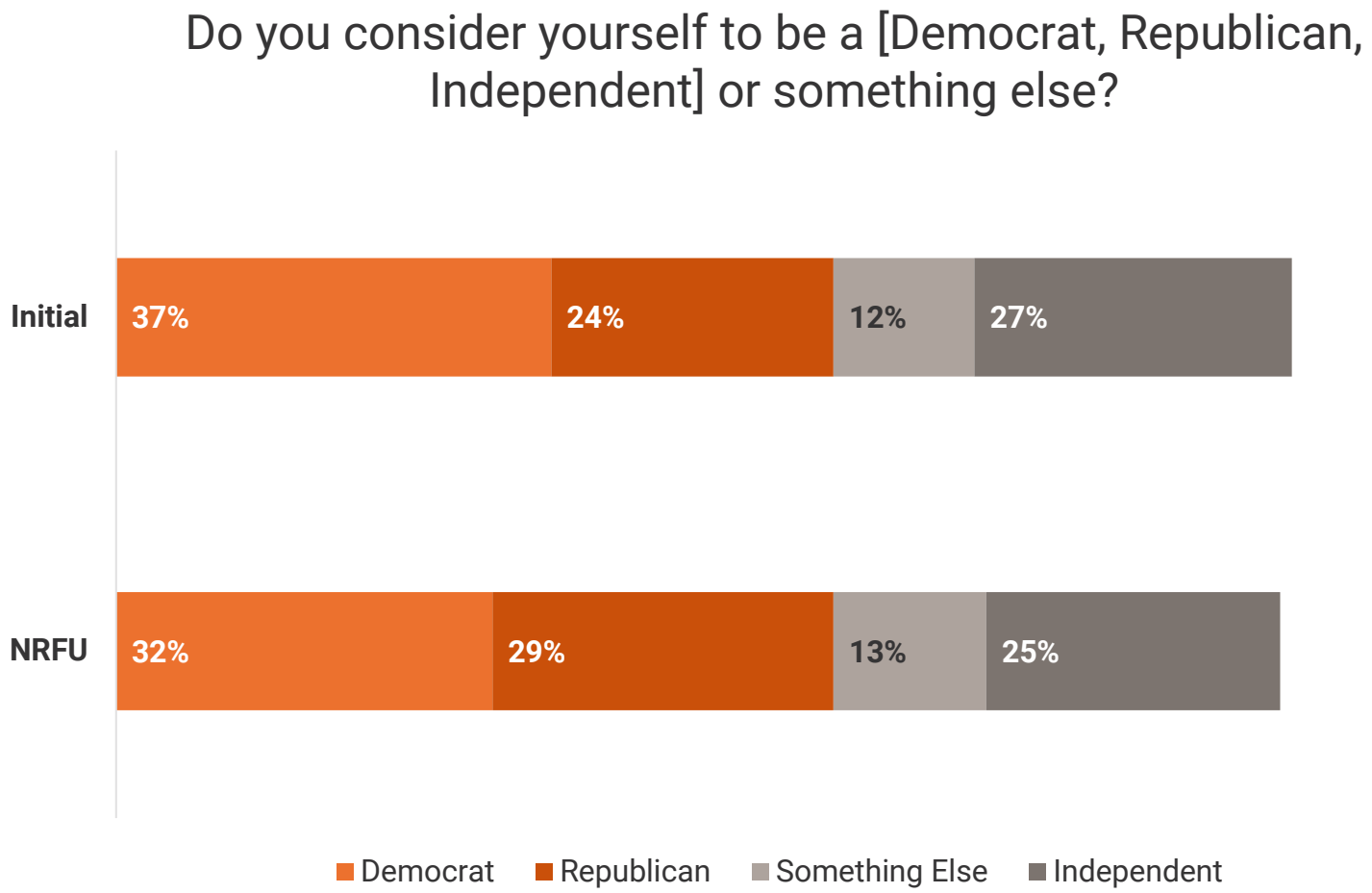
Note: References for the information are available upon request. “N.P.A.” indicates that NORC was unable to locate this information from public sources.

Panels with in-person follow up track reality much better.



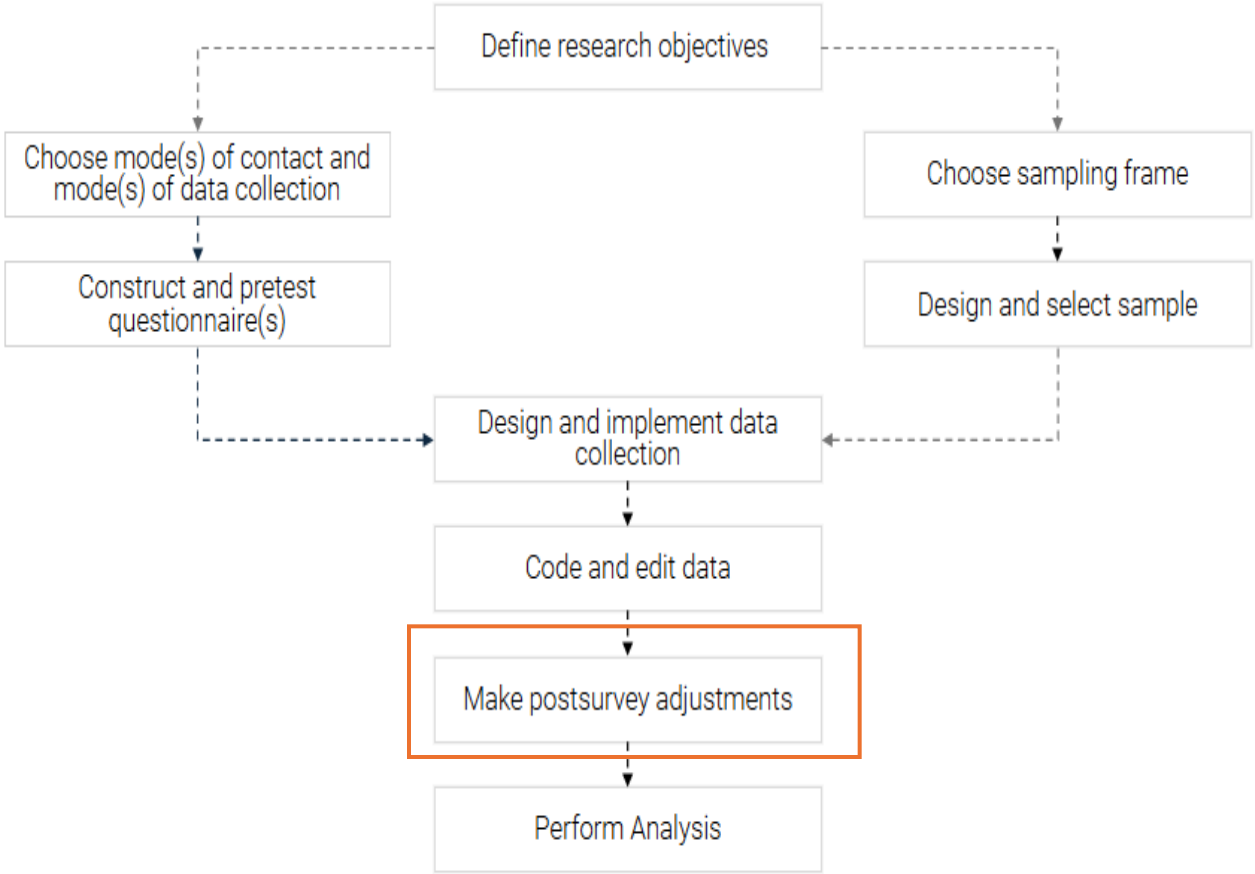
Source: Legal Services Corp. Justice Gap Survey | n=10,480 U.S. adults

Non-response follow-up captures people who would otherwise be missing, making the data more representative.



Source: AARP Retirement Study | n=9,606 working U.S. adults age 18-64 employed in private sector industries

6. Choose correct weighting adjustment procedures



Weighting Considerations

Weighting panels should be complex, as there are multiple steps and often additional metadata to use to better reduce other errors.

Panel Base Weighting
Designed to ensure equal probability of selection of every sample element

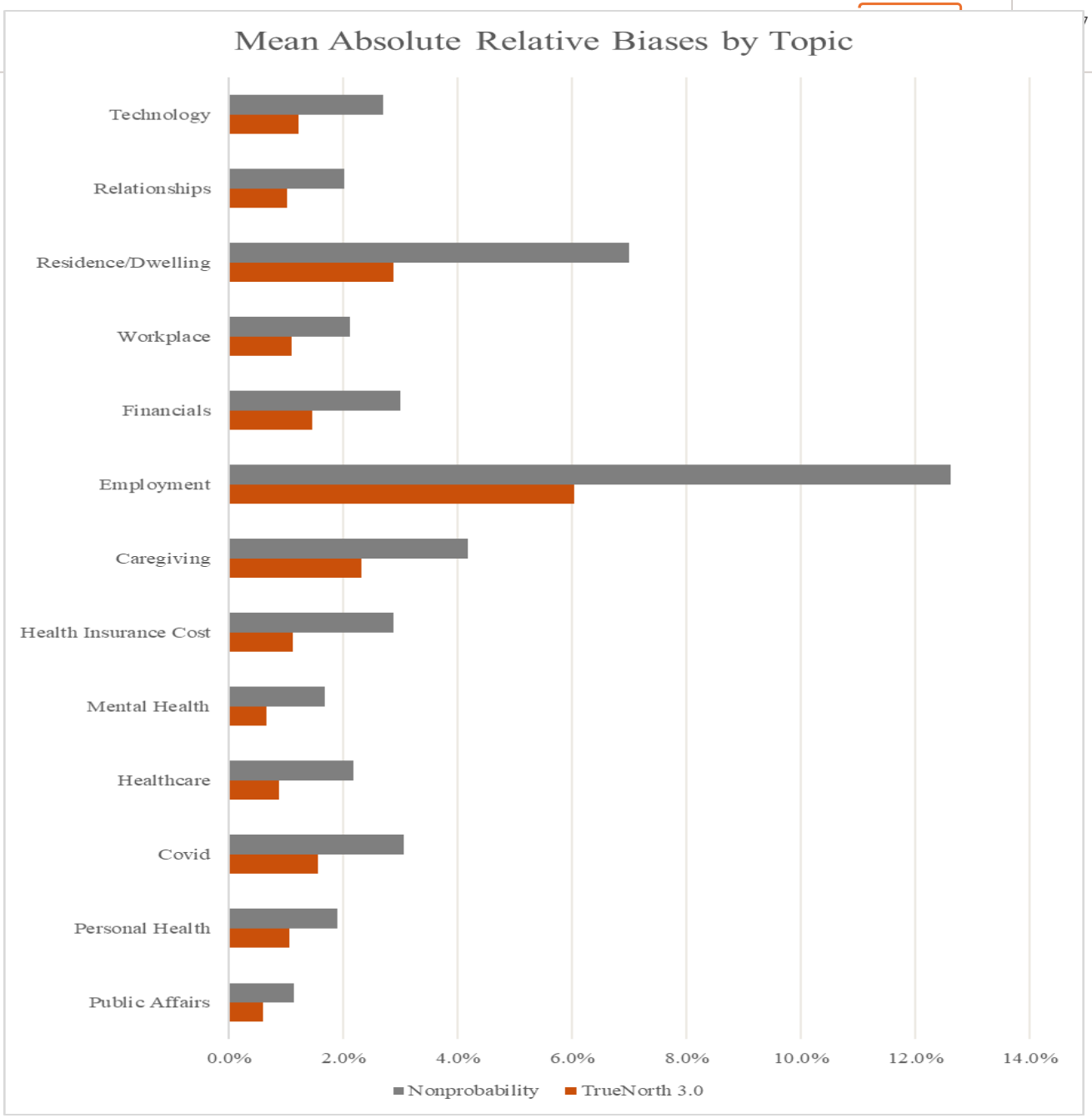
Nonresponse Weighting
Use of frame and other metadata to reduce known systematic errors

Survey Weighting
Study-specific weighting. Current best practice includes a range of interactive demographic benchmarks, and….(for political surveys)…past vote?!

TrueNorth combines probability and nonprobability samples

Hybrid weighting utilizing a modelled approach

- **leveraging the higher quality of the probability to reduce biases in the nonprobability sample.**



AmeriSpeak in Action

AmeriSpeak

AmeriSpeak is a suite of panels serving a range of populations

AmeriSpeak

State and Local Panels

TrueNorth

VETERANS INSIGHT PANEL

AmeriSpeak Teen

Foresight 50+ BY AARP & NORC

Prime Qualitative

AmplifyAAPI

By the Numbers

50K+

Participating Households

(50 States + DC)

2M+

Client Surveys Completed

(Since 2015 thru June 2022)

34%

Panel Recruitment Response

(AAPOR RR3 with Nonresponse Follow-up)

AmeriSpeak conducts surveys for clients who can't afford to be wrong.

We combine the speed and cost-effectiveness of probability-based panels with a unique approach that captures a true picture of America.

Response Rate

AmeriSpeak knocks on the doors of people who don't respond to our initial outreach. This extra effort gives us an industry-leading recruitment response rate of 34 percent.

Sample Representativeness

Our rigorous recruitment makes AmeriSpeak's panel truly reflective of the entire U.S. population. We survey hard-to-reach segments such as low-income households, young adults, and social and political conservatives.

Survey Consistency

AmeriSpeak has low participant turnover and survey fatigue, with an industry-leading retention of about 85 percent. Respondents are limited to one survey a week, so they're more likely to provide thoughtful answers.

How AmeriSpeak is Different

Recruiting

Only panel to use mail, phone, and door-to-door

Other panels rely on mail/phone and only attain 3-6%

Response Rates

True AAPOR RR3 of 12-25 percent

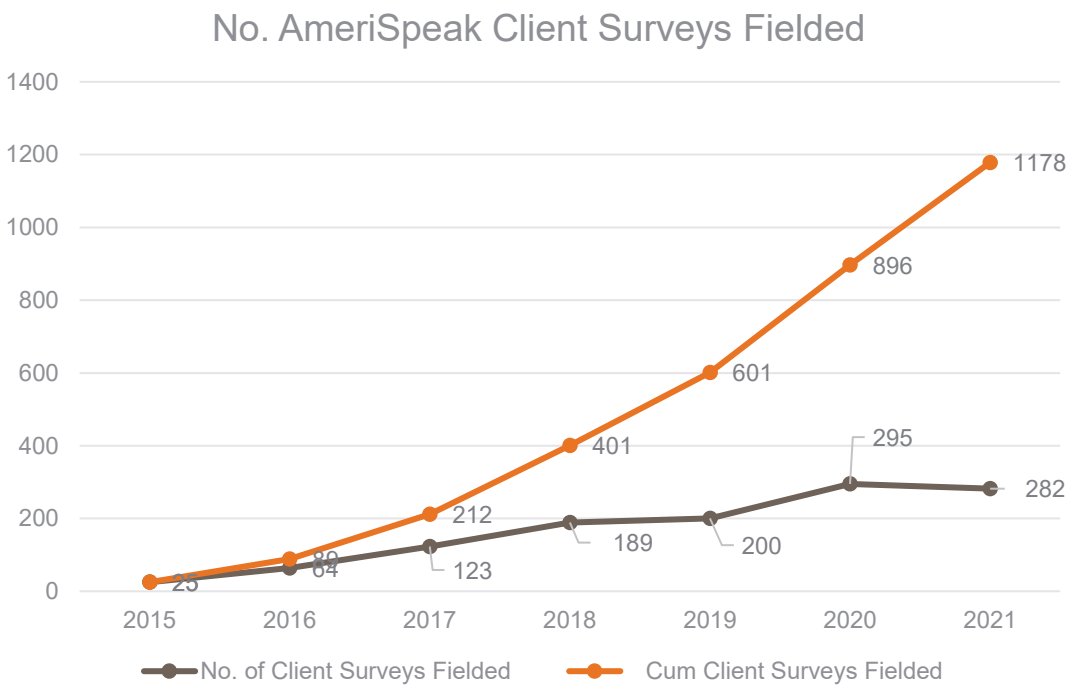
No other panel exceeds 5%

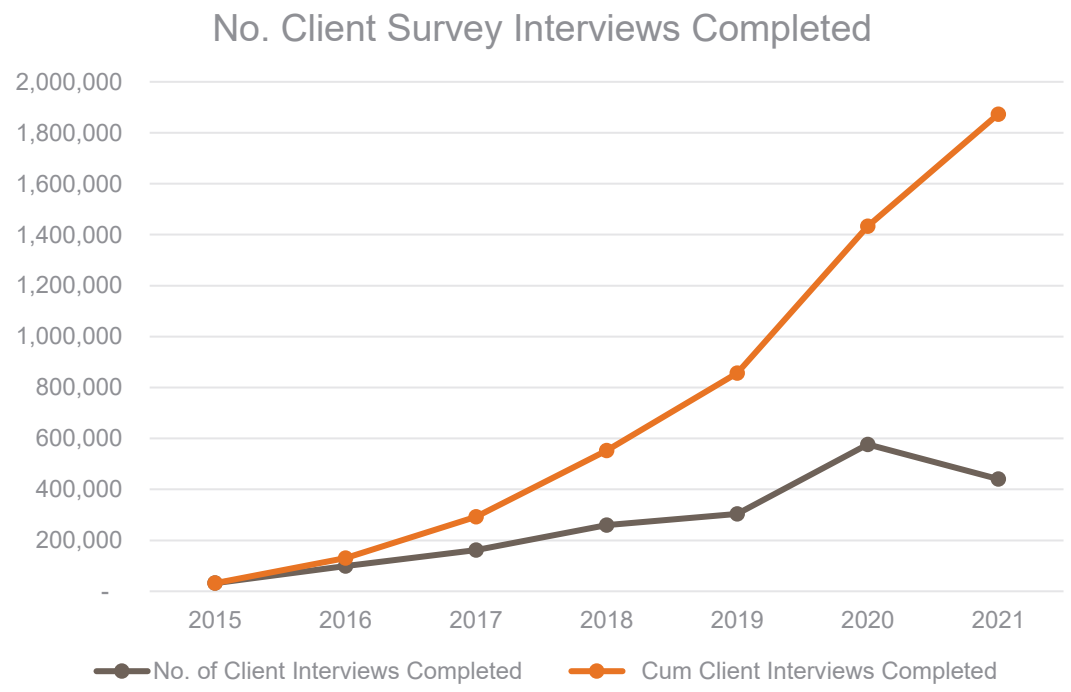
Quality

Structured quality processes

Tools and resources to drive reliability

AmeriSpeak – Now the premier polling infrastructure for probability-based panel surveys in the U.S.





Common Uses of AmeriSpeak

- **Survey representative of US adults**
- **Subgroups of US adults**
- **Longitudinal surveys**
- **Tracking polls**
- **Teen surveys (ages 13-17)**

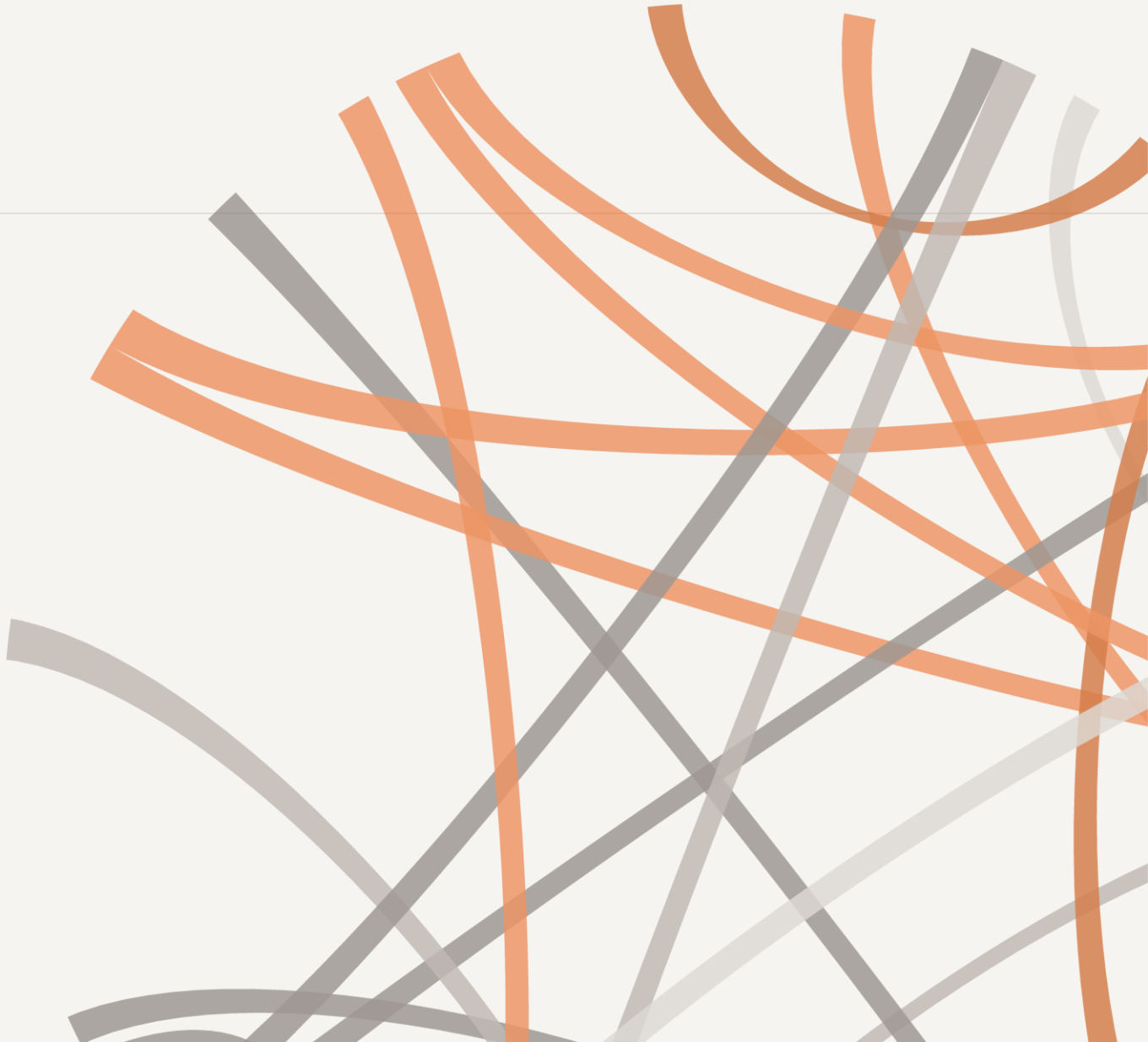
Can I Afford A Probability Sample?

- **TESS Experiments**
- **SESSR Experiments (TESS for religion)**
- **AmeriSpeak Omnibus surveys – pay by the question**

Key Takeaways

- **Methodology matters:** The way we sample and recruit participants shapes the accuracy and reliability of survey findings.
- **Probability-based panels are essential:** They provide the foundation for data that can be generalized to the U.S. population.
- **Recruitment and follow-up improve representation:** Non-response follow-up brings in voices that are often missed, reducing bias.
- **AmeriSpeak demonstrates these principles in action:** A rigorous, probability-based panel powering research that informs policy, academia, and society.

Questions?



Resources & Next Steps

In this presentation

- AmeriSpeak Overview
- Center for Panel Survey Sciences publications
- TESS Proposal Site

Additional Reading

- **ScienceDirect:** We need to talk about nonprobability samples
- **Pew Research Center:** Evaluating online nonprobability surveys
- **Cornell University:** Assessing selection bias in regression coefficients estimated from non-probability samples

Thank you.

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Get Your Research Right

AmeriSpeak