

# Shorter Isn't Always Better

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# How long should my survey be?

Keep it short!

Less than five minutes

7-8 minutes

8 to 10 minutes

15-30 questions

No more than 20 minutes, or else...

...low completion rate, low satisfaction ratings,  
and poor data quality

# The Dilemma

What to do with the 45 minute survey that captures everything the client wants to know?

Do we cut that down to 10 minutes? 20 minutes?

Does the gain from panelist engagement outweigh the loss of information?

# Research Questions

## 1. Is length really that important?

- Length has many confounds (e.g. number of tasks, number of questions, difficulty of tasks)
- “Perceived length” v. “actual length”

## 2. Do some panelists not mind a longer survey?

- “Professional Respondents” seem to have a high capacity for various surveys
- Perhaps there’s a clustered solution for those with capacity for longer surveys and those without...

# Experimental Design

Five Conditions: Number of Questions \* Difficulty

Number of Questions	Easier	Difficult
12	Condition 1	
24	Condition 2	Condition 3
36	Condition 4	Condition 5

- First 12 questions capture personality and fraud propensity
- Next 12 or 24 questions were about the economy
  - Existing survey was tweaked to make each question easier or more difficult
- End with feedback questions about the survey

# Defining Difficulty:

Easier	Difficult
One month recall	Three month recall
Unipolar scales	Bipolar scales
Shorter instructions	Longer instructions
Check all that apply	Yes/No grid
Rating	Ranking
Short list	Long list
Agree or Disagree	Pick one statement
Asking about now	Asking about the future

Keep the topic constant, but change the amount of cognitive work required

# Question Example

## EASY

If you had \$1,000 of extra money to spend, on which one of the following would you **most likely** spend it?

Charitable giving  
Education  
Hobbies/Sports  
Home  
Personal care  
Retirement  
Social activities  
Travel  
Paying off bills  
Other

## DIFFICULT

If you had \$1,000 of extra money, how would you most likely spend it? Please RANK each of the following from 1 to 10, where 1=Most Likely to Spend On and 10=Least Likely to Spend On.

Charitable giving  
Education  
Hobbies/Sports  
Home  
Personal care  
Retirement  
Social activities  
Travel  
Paying off bills  
Other

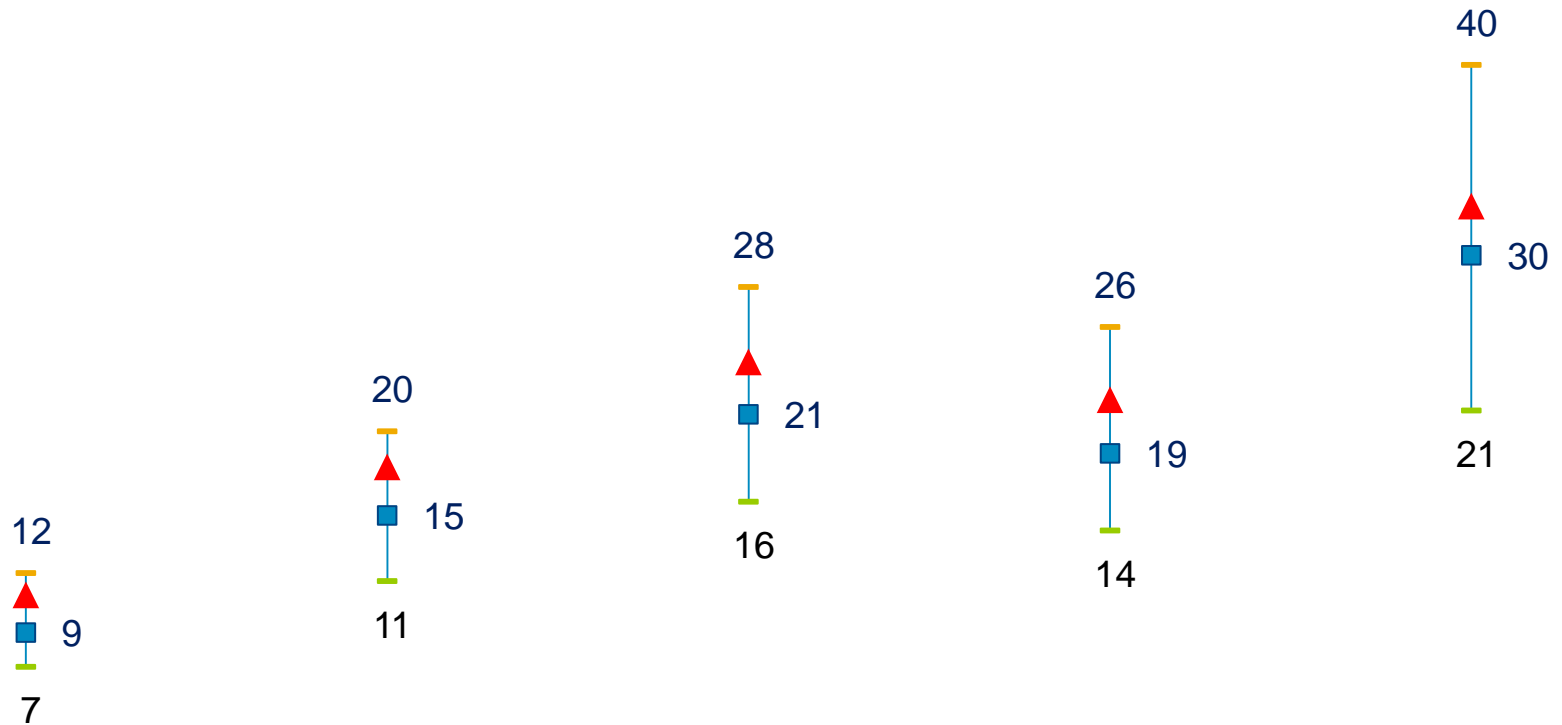
# Sample

Demographically Representative Sample of  
5,182 pulled from NPD's online panel



# The LENGTH of SURVEY

— 25th percentile   ■ Median   ▲ Mean   — 75th percentile



12 questions

24 questions

36 questions

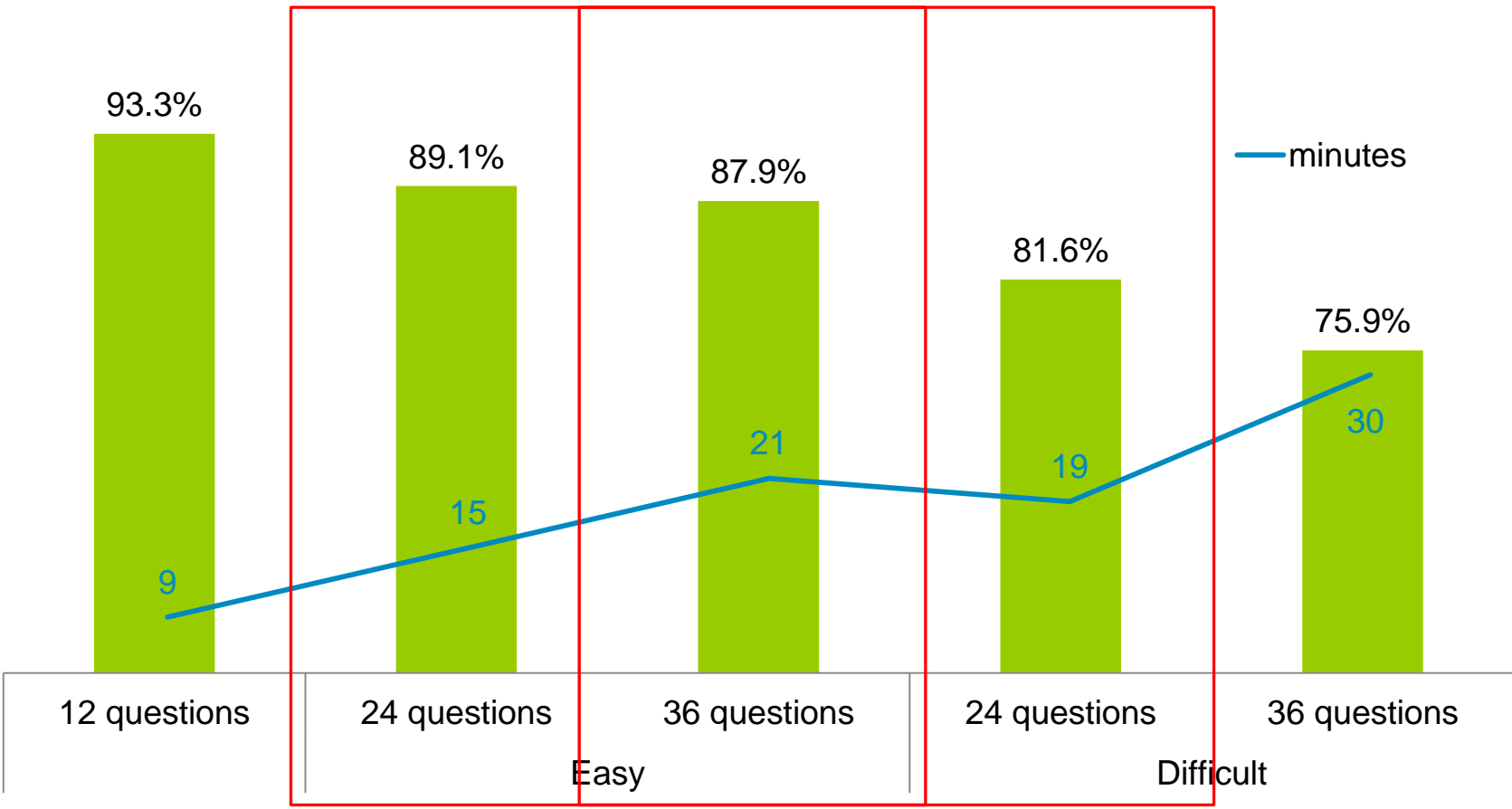
24 questions

36 questions

Easy

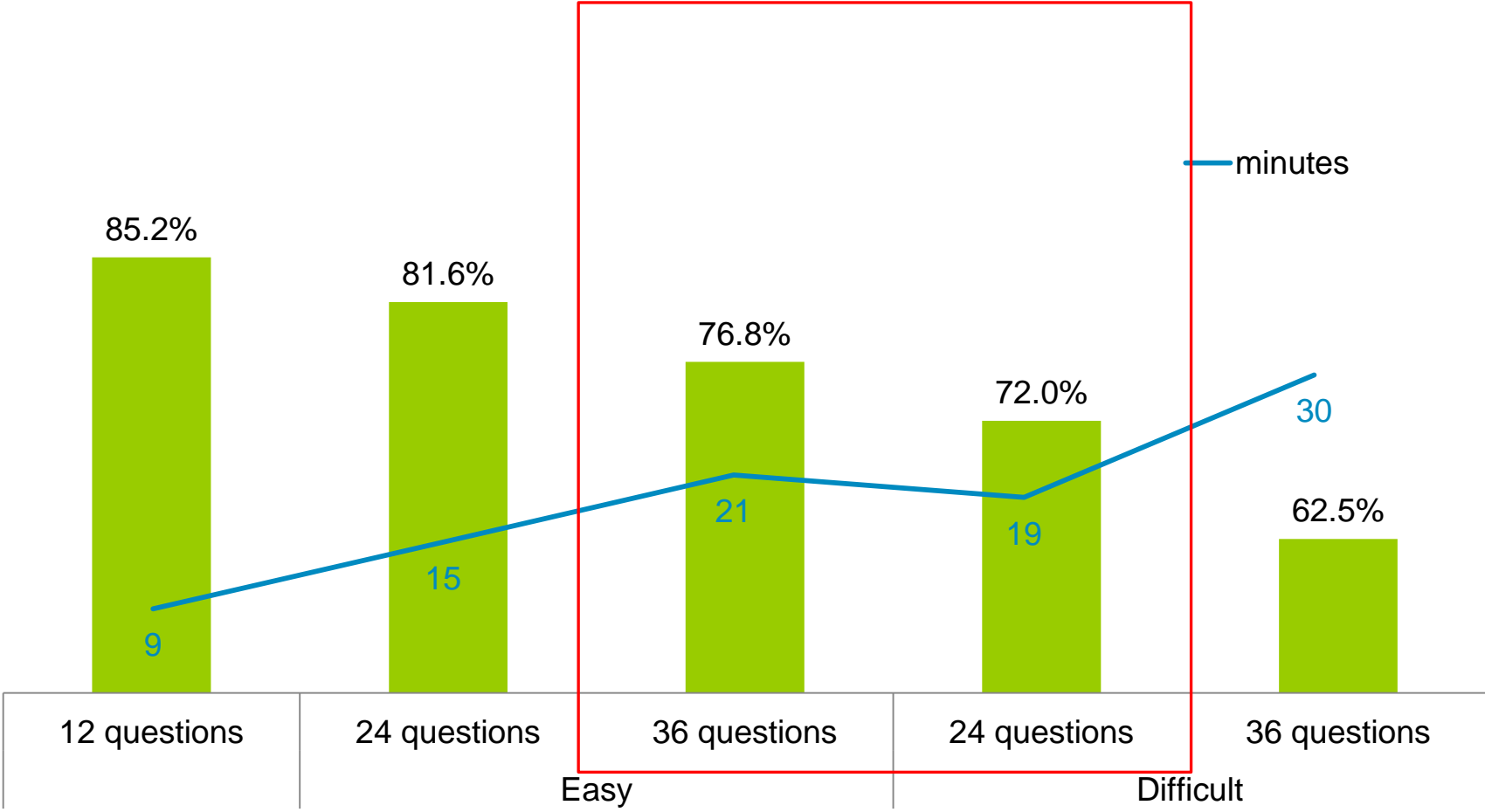
Difficult

# Percent who completed the survey



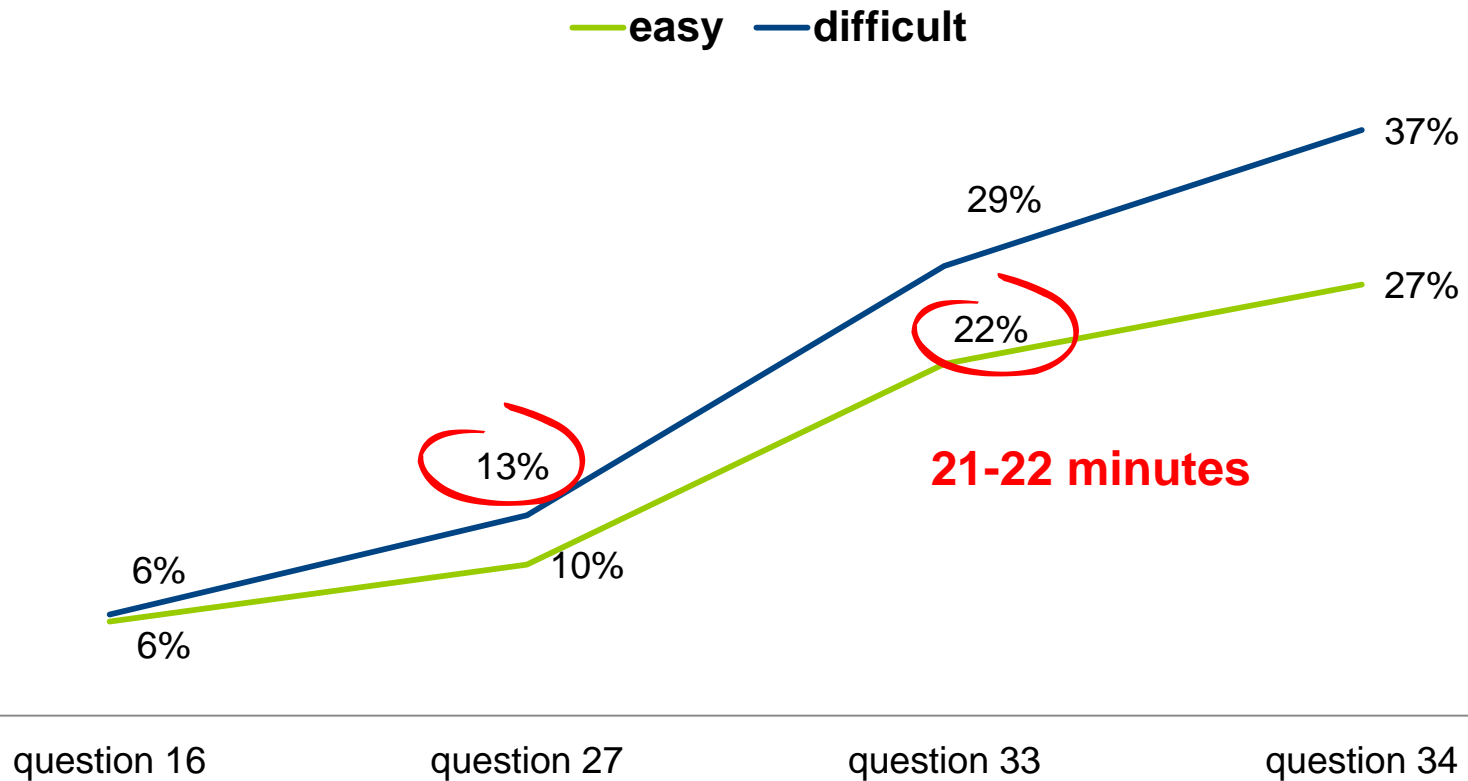
Difficulty causes abandonment more than length

# Percent who completed and found it worthwhile



Extra questions and difficulty lowers satisfaction

# Percent Straightlining



This suggests it's about the order of the grid, rather than the time at which it appears

# Summary of main effects

Completion Rate dropped with additional questions

Satisfaction with survey experience dropped with additional questions

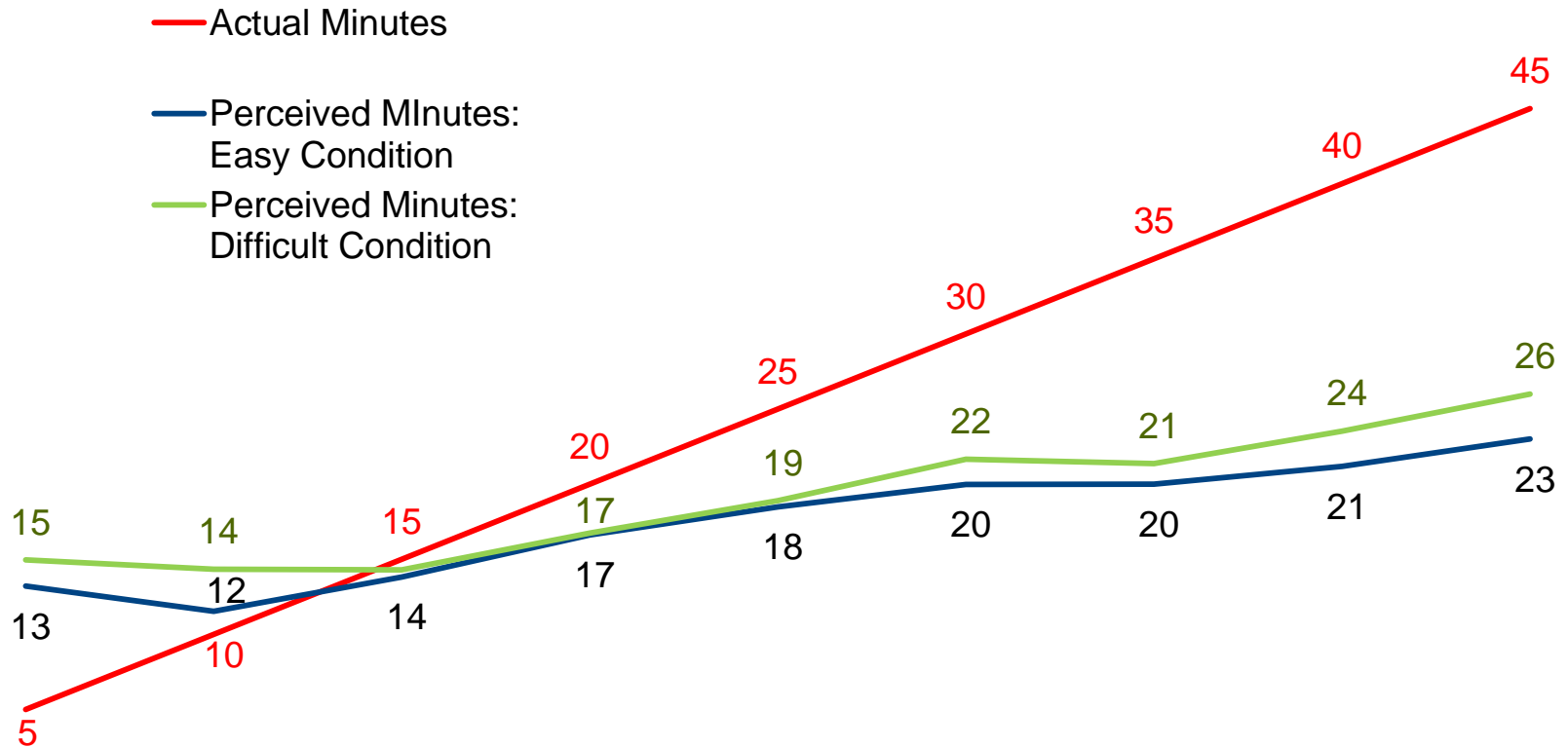
Straightlining increased with additional questions

Difficulty of the additional questions exacerbated these effects, over added length.

A 19 minute “difficult” survey is worse than a 21 minute “easy” survey...

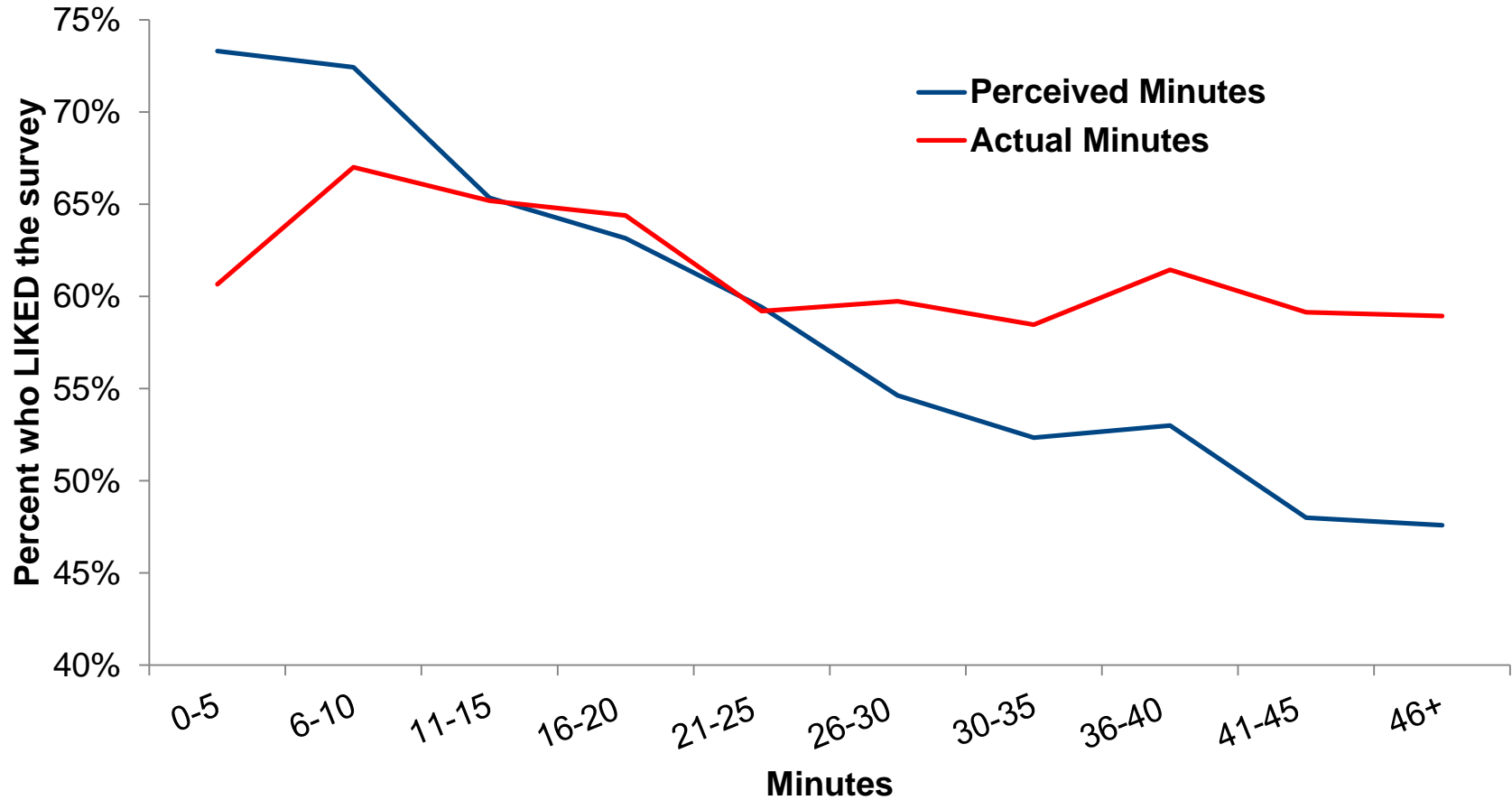
# Perceived Minutes versus Actual Minutes

...how many minutes did you spend on this survey?



Easier surveys feel shorter

# Relationship between perceived versus actual time with satisfaction



Perceived time, rather than actual, is linked with satisfaction

# How do people perceive the long/difficult version?

Probably the worst survey I've ever taken

Too %#\$@# long!!

Way too many dumb questions, took forever

Survey was excellent, didn't notice the time

Very thought provoking, most interesting survey in years

I really enjoyed it so much I didn't care how long it was



# What impacts perception?

## ■ Experience

- Numbers of surveys taken
- 10+ surveys

## ■ Propensity to Fraud

- Based off prior work presented at the 2010 CASRO conference
- Cluster Analysis on 60+ fraud measures, which resulted in five fraud clusters
- From that a Discriminant Function was created that assigns panelists into the fraud clusters using just five questions

# Fraud Clusters

## 1. A/B Panelists

- Diligent responders, enjoy taking surveys

## 2. C Panelists

- Like surveys, but aren't great survey takers, show struggle

## 3. D Panelists

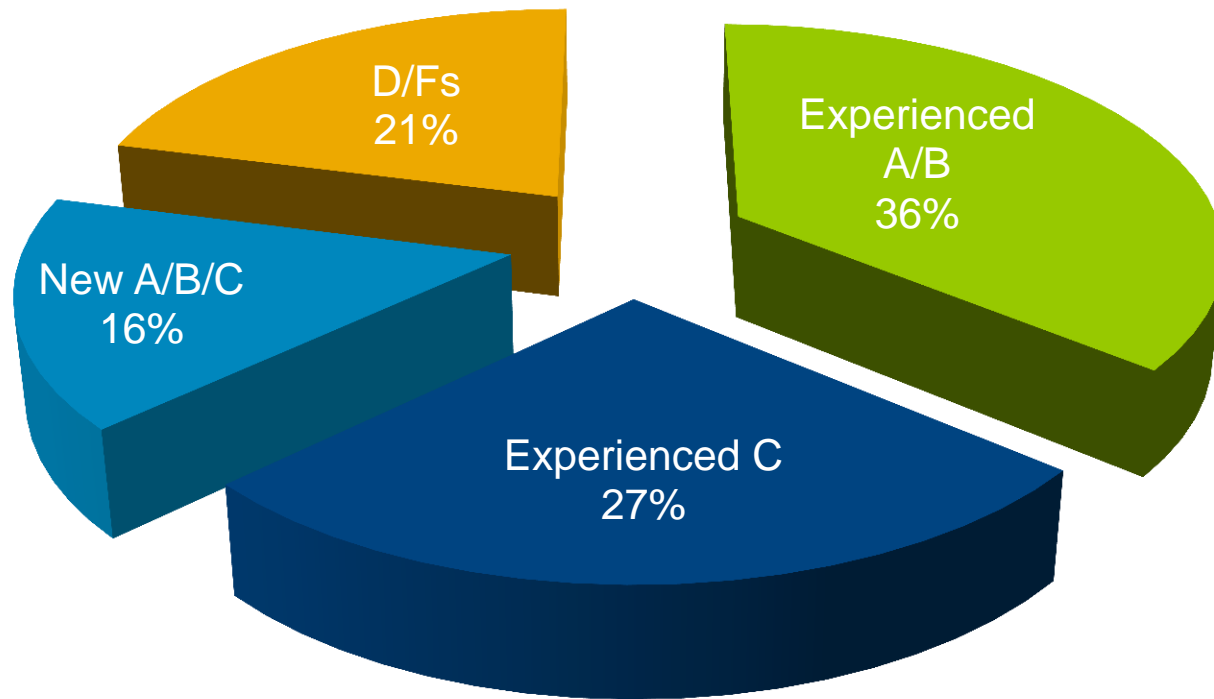
- Unfocused, work avoidant responders; don't enjoy surveys

## 4. F Panelists

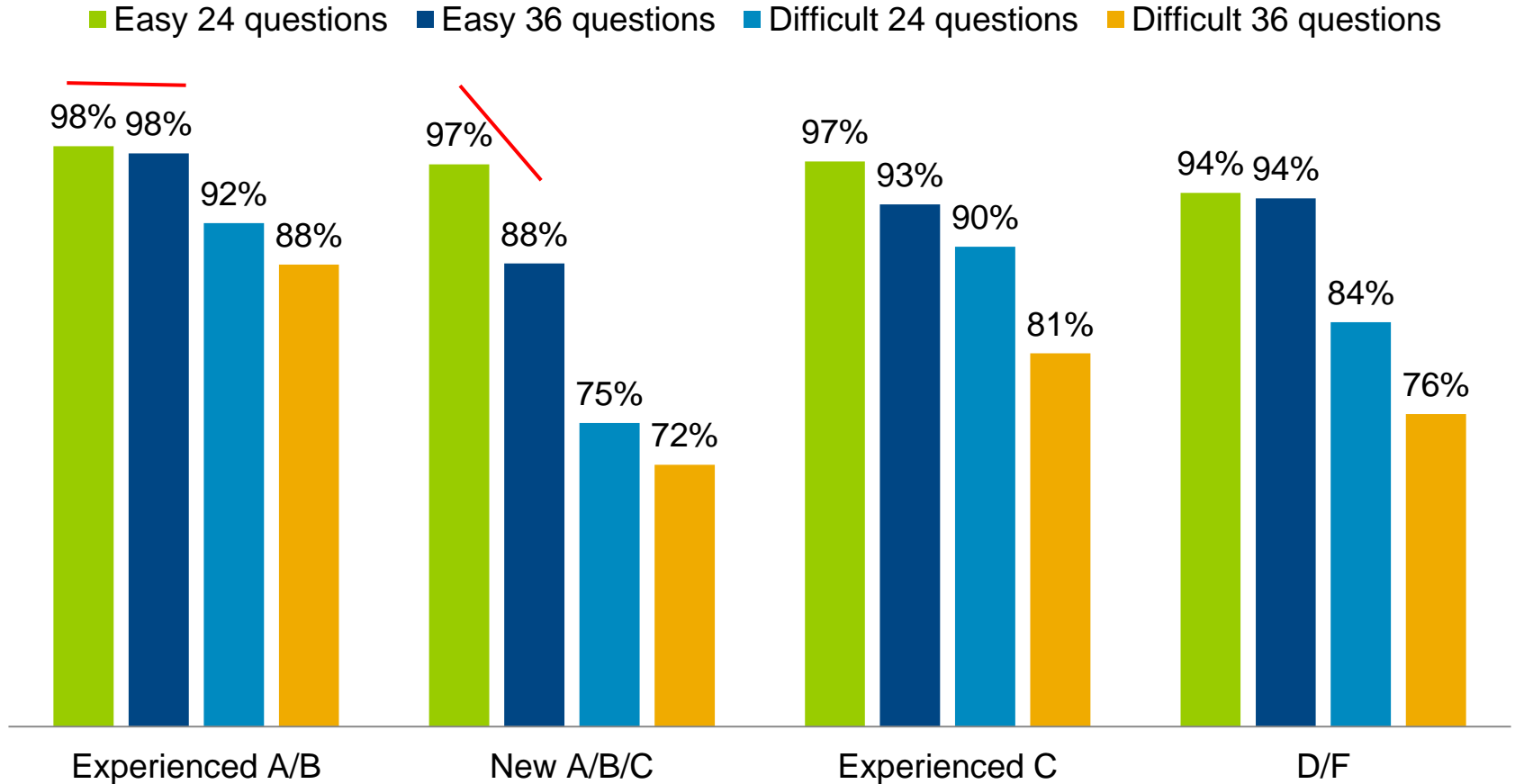
- Respond randomly and inconsistently, highly fraudulent



# Respondent Clusters



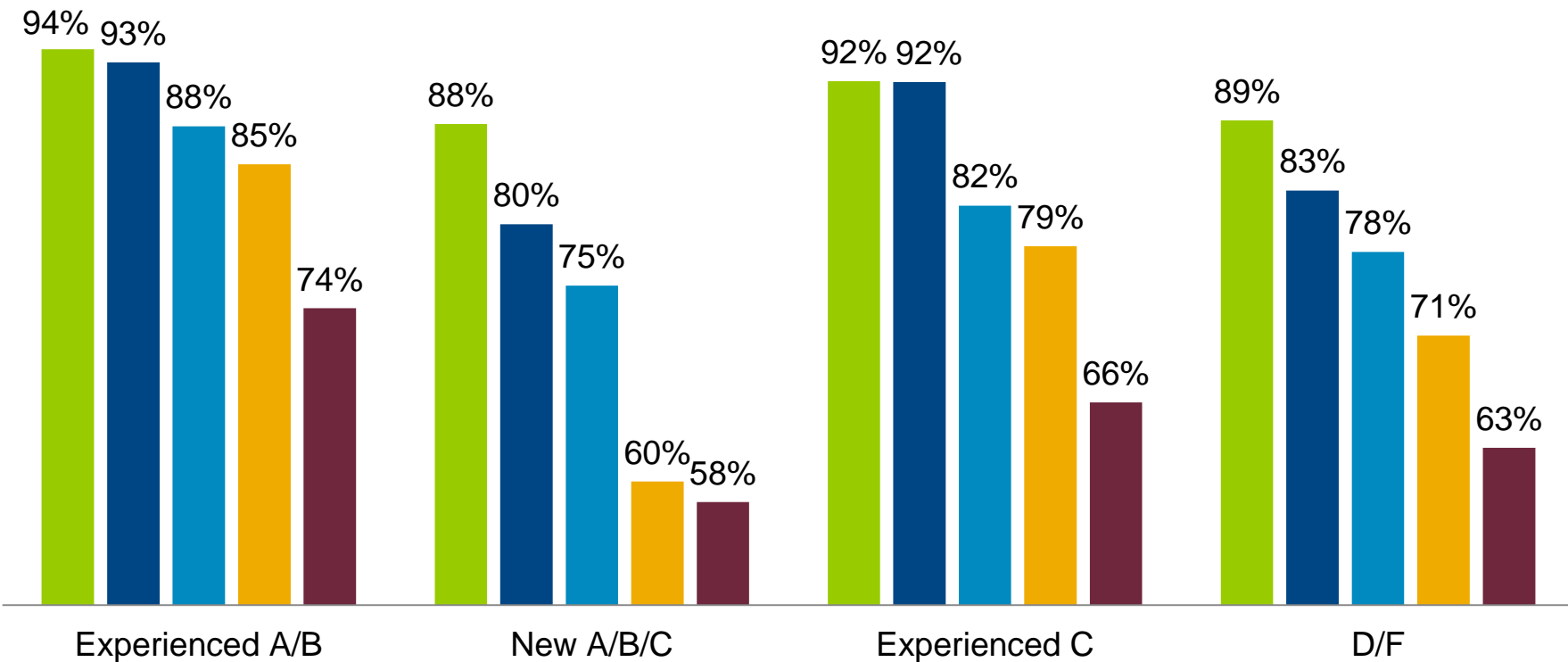
# Percent who completed the survey



Panelists have varying reactions to the conditions

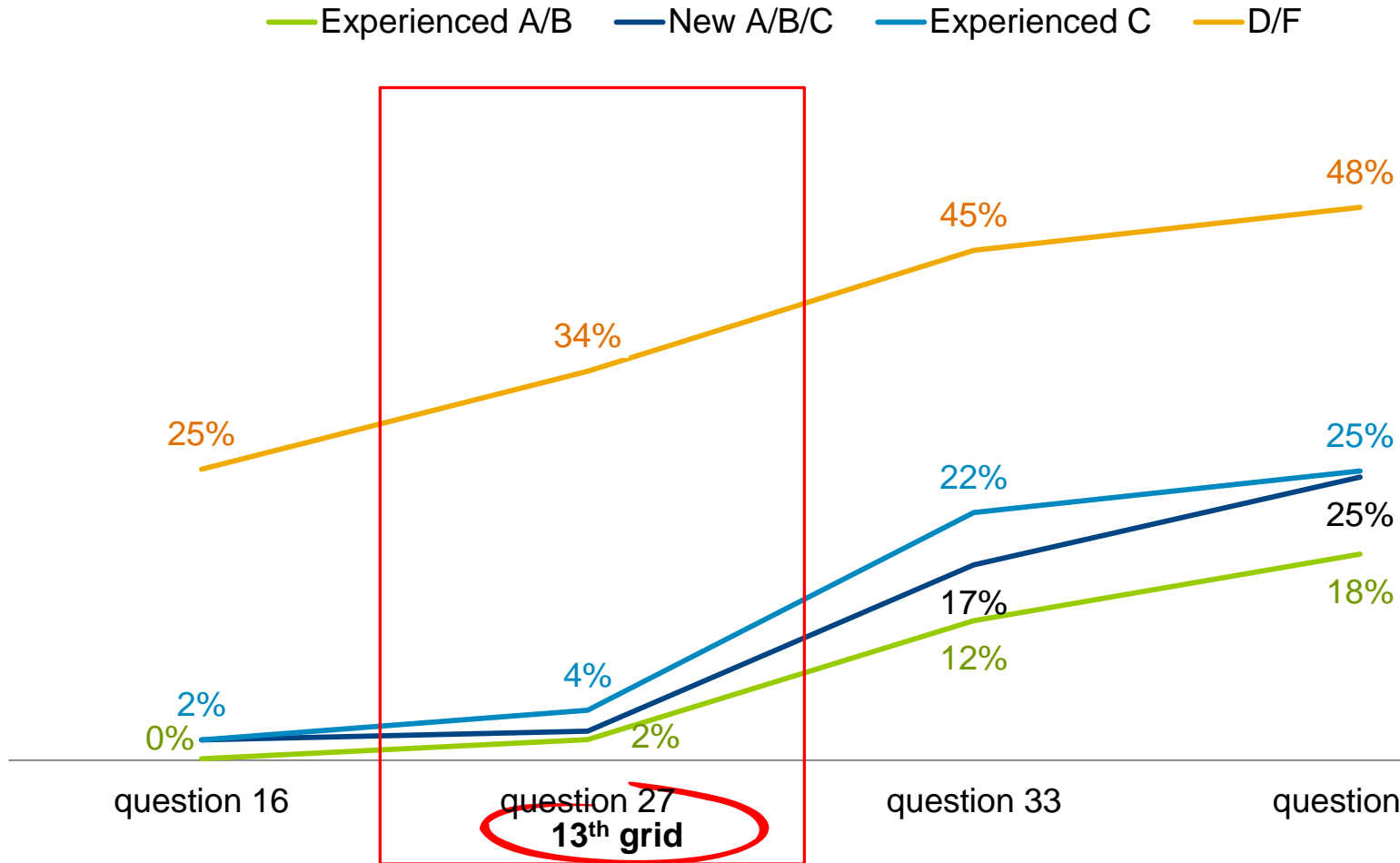
# Percent who completed and found it worthwhile

■ 12 questions ■ Easy 24 questions ■ Easy 36 questions ■ Difficult 24 questions ■ Difficult 36 questions



New panelists have little tolerance for additional questions, or mental effort

# Straightlining – Easy Condition

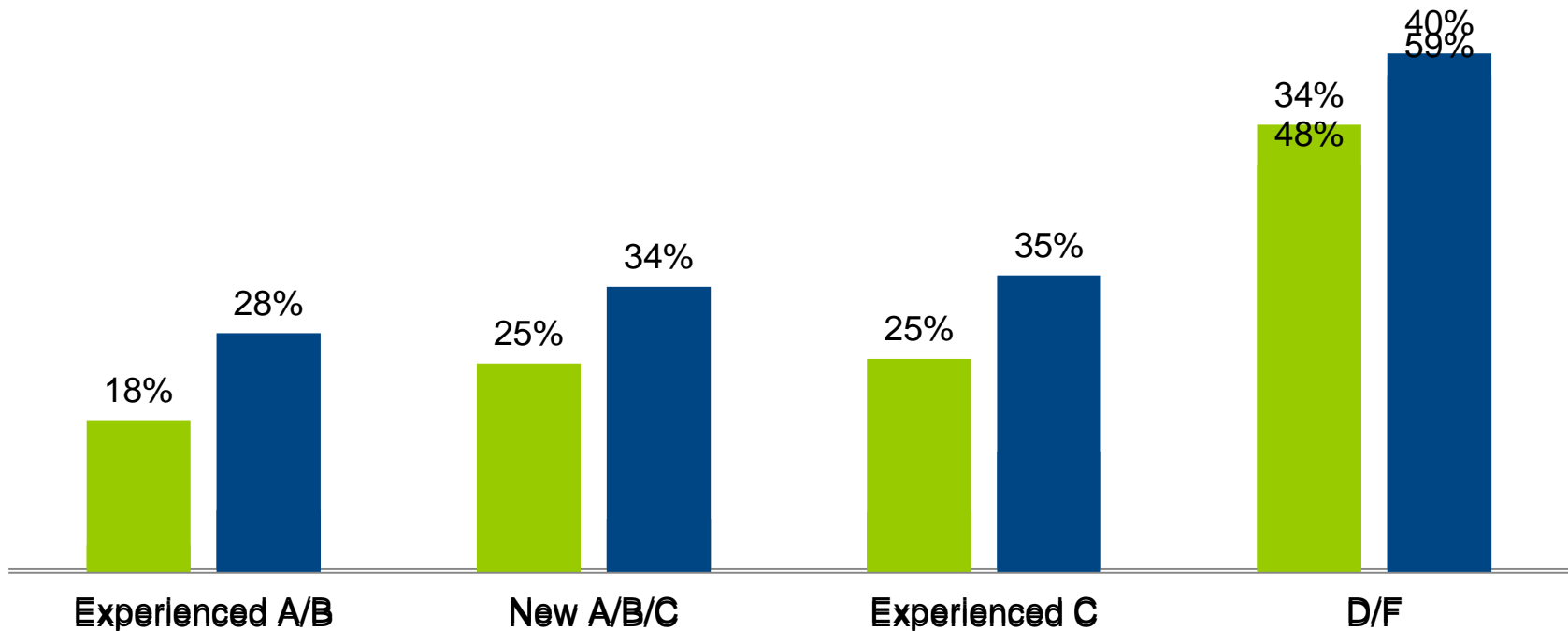


Additional questions create straightlining but at various degrees

# Straightlining – Easy versus Difficult

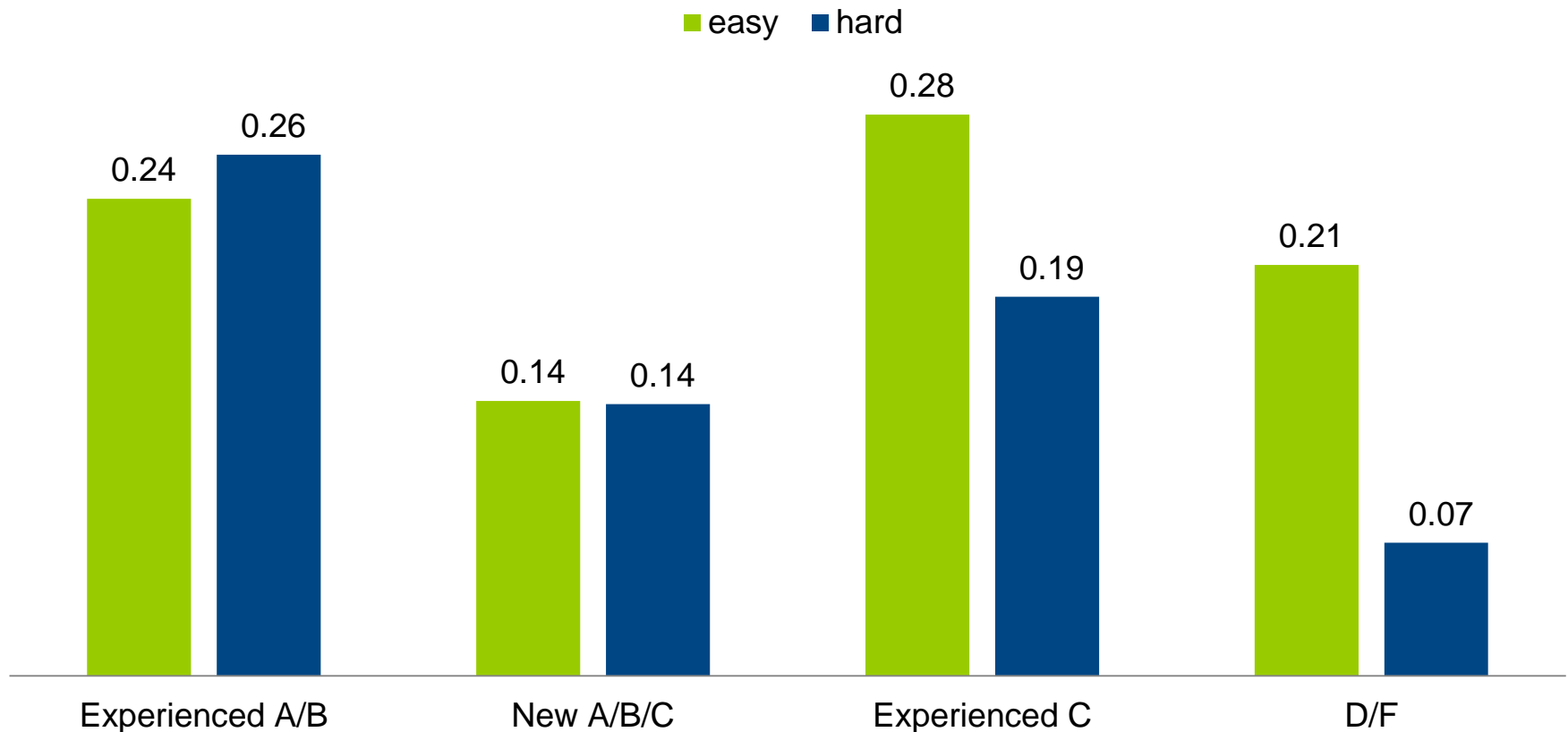
## Question 27

■ easy ■ difficult



Greater straightlining for “bad” panelists, for difficult versions, and for later grids

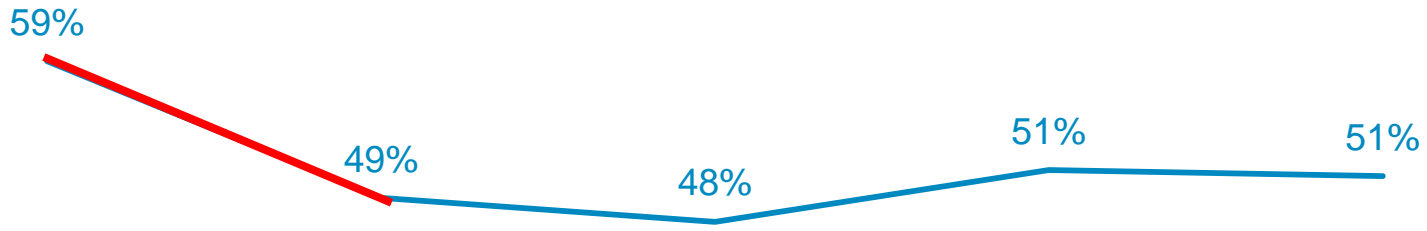
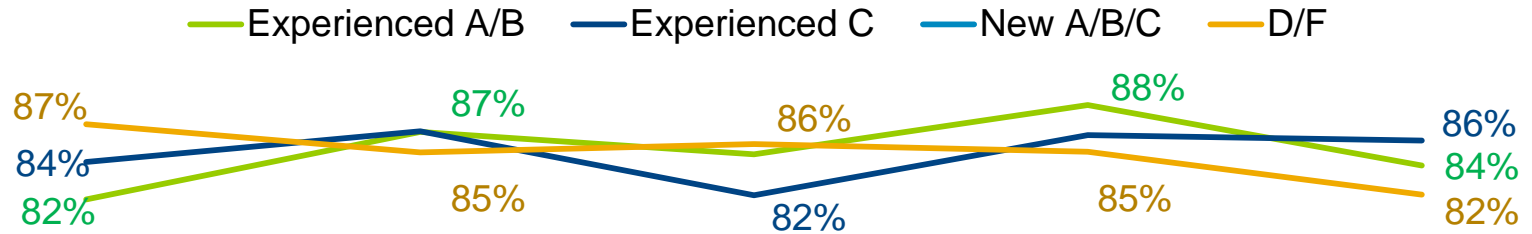
# Correlation between Income and Concern about Personal Financial Situation



With the exception of grids, data quality remained high for “good panelists” in the more difficult condition



# Response rate to the next survey from NPD



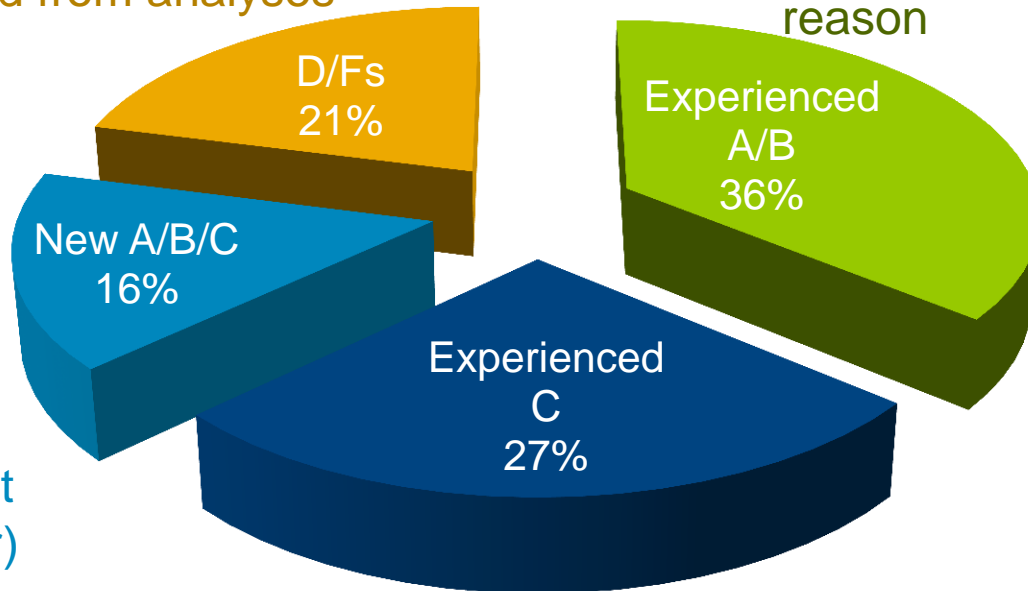
12 questions	24 questions	36 questions	24 questions	36 questions
	Easy		Difficult	

Current experience has little impact on future experience

# To summarize...

This group should be removed from analyses

This group can handle longer, more difficult surveys – within reason



This group is not invested, just curious – short and sweet (or don't bother)

This group can handle lengthy but easy surveys

# Who are these “good” experienced panelists?

## ■ High on Introversion

- Enjoy time alone, are more reflective, less outgoing

## ■ Low on Conscientious

- More laid back, less goal oriented

## ■ Low on Openness

- Conventional, uncreative, not attracted to novelty

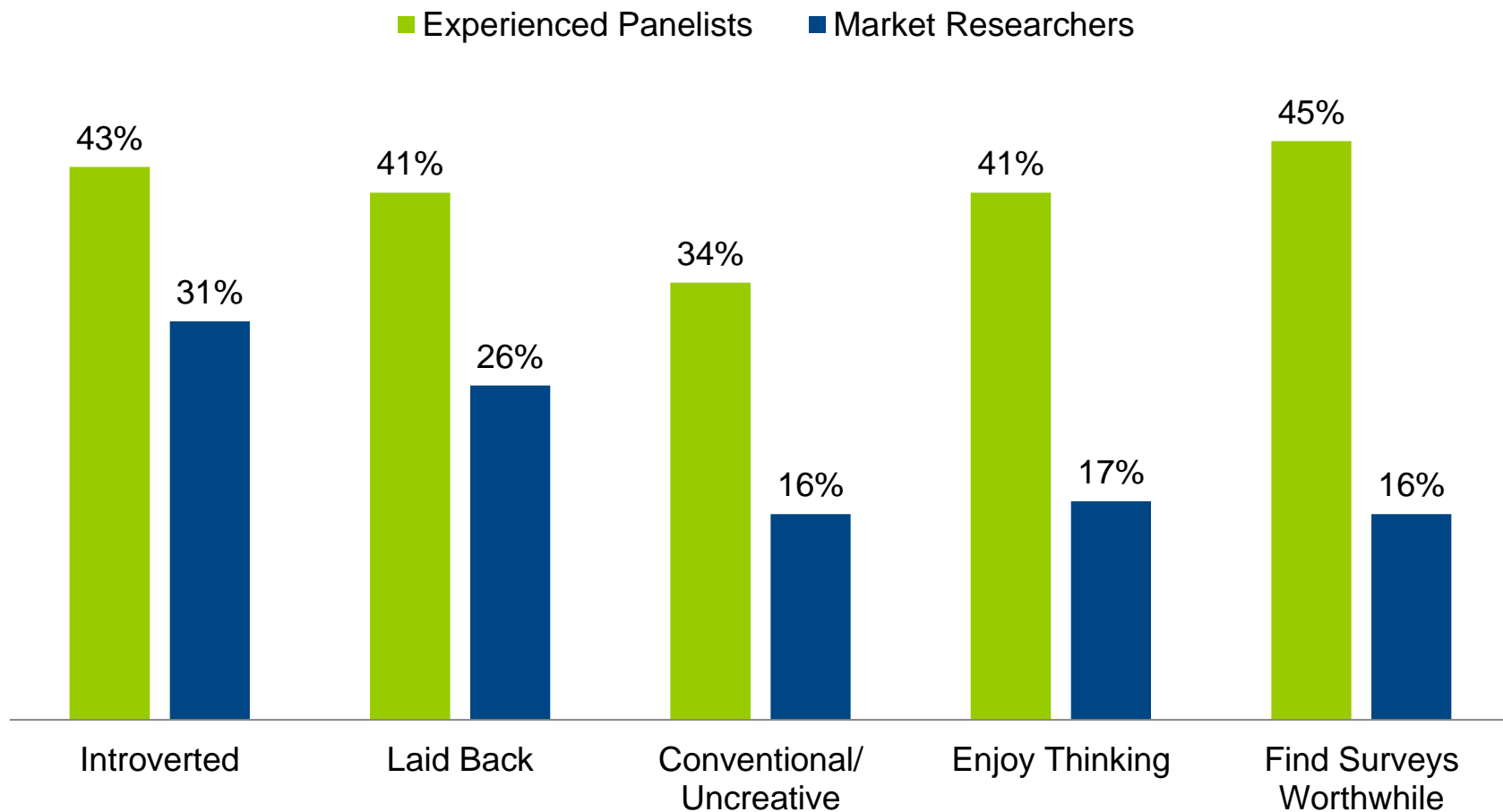
## ■ High need for cognition

- Enjoy thinking, prefer complex to simple problems

## ■ Like surveys

- Find surveys worthwhile

# Experienced Panelists versus Market Researchers



Those of us trying to create a “better” survey experience are not like those experiencing the surveys

# So what do we do with the 45 minute survey?

Simplify, before cutting

If grids have straightlining over 20%, they need to go.

Consider a short (not shorter) version for NEW panelists

When doing analyses on survey engagement consider the audience...

# Q&A

# Thank You



## Industries

Automotive  
Beauty  
Entertainment  
Fashion  
Food / Foodservice  
Home  
Office Supplies  
Sports  
Technology  
Toys  
Video Games  
Wireless

## Countries

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Austria  
Belgium  
Brazil  
Canada  
China  
France  
Germany  
Italy  
Japan  
Mexico  
Netherlands  
New Zealand  
Poland  
Portugal  
Russia  
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