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WHEN PUSH COMES TO SHOVE: ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF SOFT-PUSH-TO-WEB VERSUS HARD-PUSH-TO-WEB STRATEGIES IN MAILED ONLINE QUESTIONNAIRES

European Survey Research Association 2025 Conference
Session: Recruiting Web Surveys via Postal-Mail: Best-Practice, Experiments, and Innovation 2

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Background

- Rising costs for printing and postage of questionnaires a contemporary challenge for survey research
- Push-to-web strategies have been found to have negative effects on response rates (e.g. Saskhaug, 2019)
- However, recent evidence from our own institute found no negative effect on response rates (Sandelin, 2024)
- Reasons that push-to web strategies can be beneficial:
    - Lower costs related to printing and postage
    - Increased digital literacy
    - Expansion of internet access (96% internet coverage in Sweden)
    - Expansion of smartphone use (95% use in Sweden)

    - However, push-to-web approach can increase breakoffs/partials (Sandelin, 2024)
- How hard can we push people to web in mailed online questionnaires?

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Purposes

1. Test whether two different push-to-web strategies produced dissimilar:
   - Survey response rates
   - Data quality
   - Nonresponse bias

2. Test a potential field plan for the SOM Institute's new probability panel (Longitudinal Swedish Citizen Panel)

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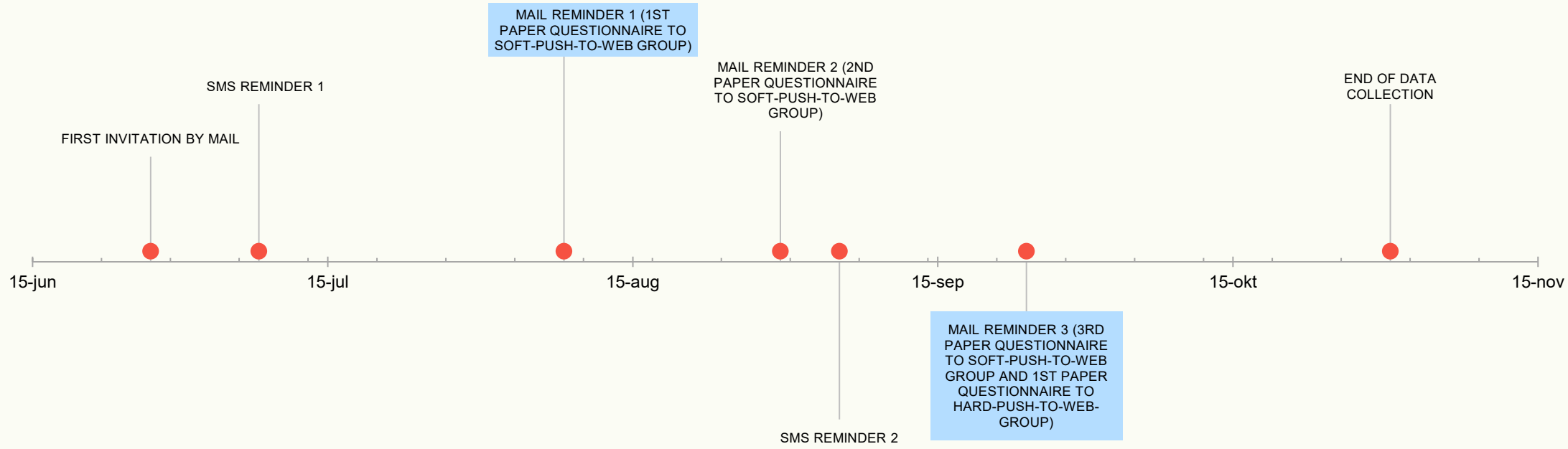
Procedure

- Push-to-web mixed-mode survey of a random probability sample in Sweden (N = 4,046)
- Field period: June-October 2024
- No incentives



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RESULTS

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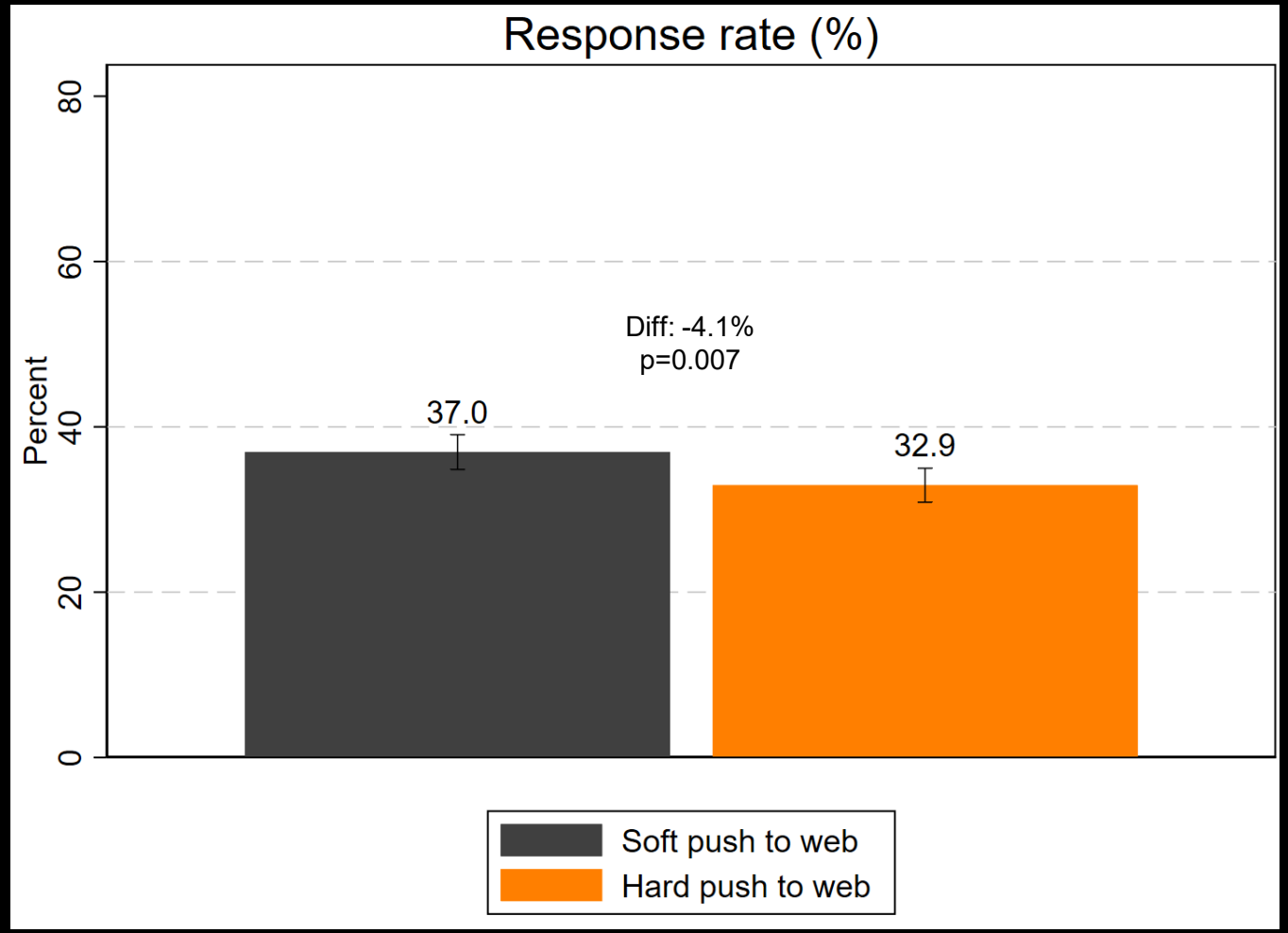
Response rate (RR1)



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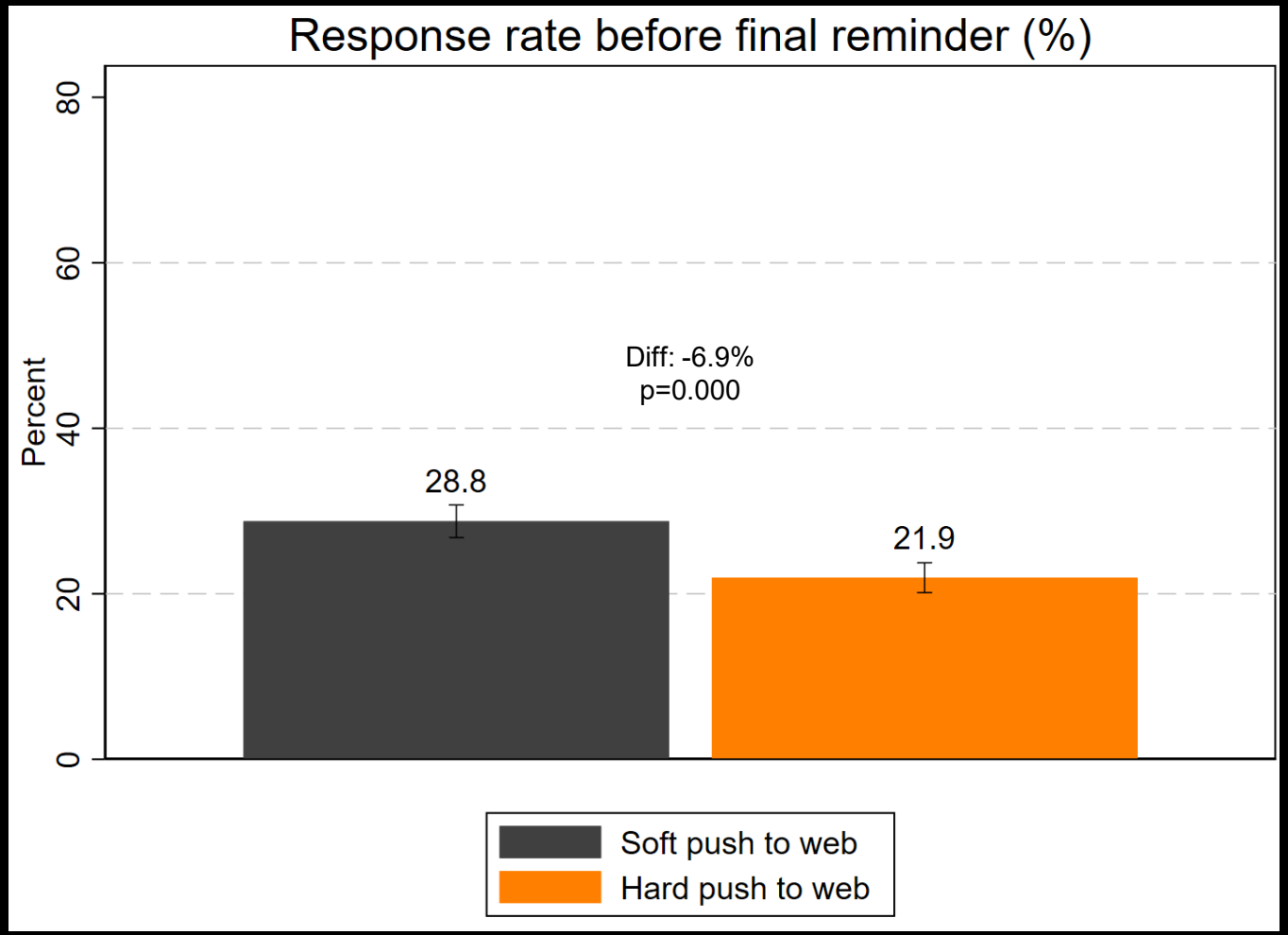
Response rate before last reminder (RR1)



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Response rates across demographic groups

	Difference between experiment groups (%)	Significant difference <u>before</u> last reminder?
Gender		
Women	4,3*	***
Men	3,6	**
Age		
18-34	-0,7	
35-49	1,6	
50-64	8,5**	***
65-85	5,0	***
Education		
Low	2,3	***
Medium	0,3	
High	7,1**	**
Origin		
Born in Sweden	4,8**	***
Born abroad	0,1	

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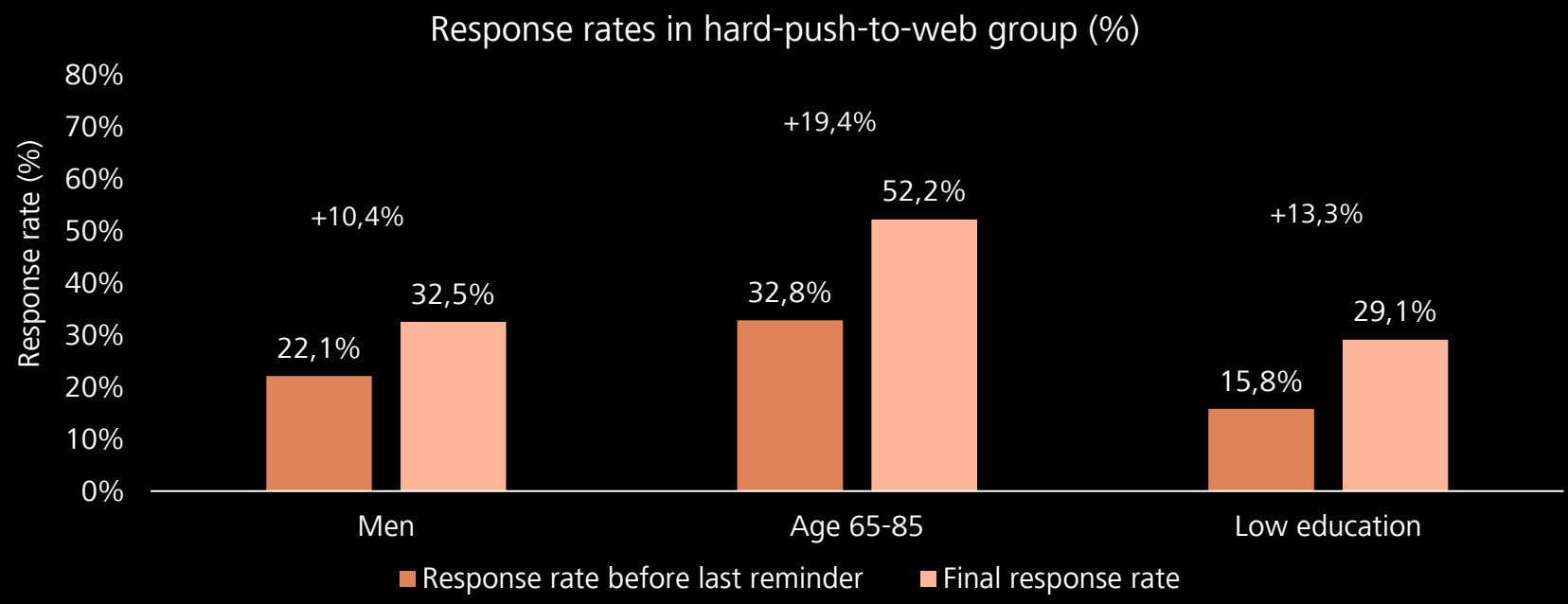
Response rates before and after paper questionnaire in hard-push-to web group

- Paper questionnaire in the last reminder had a statistically significant effect in three demographic groups



- After the last reminder, statistically significant differences in response rate between experiment groups disappeared among men, 65-85 year olds and persons with low education

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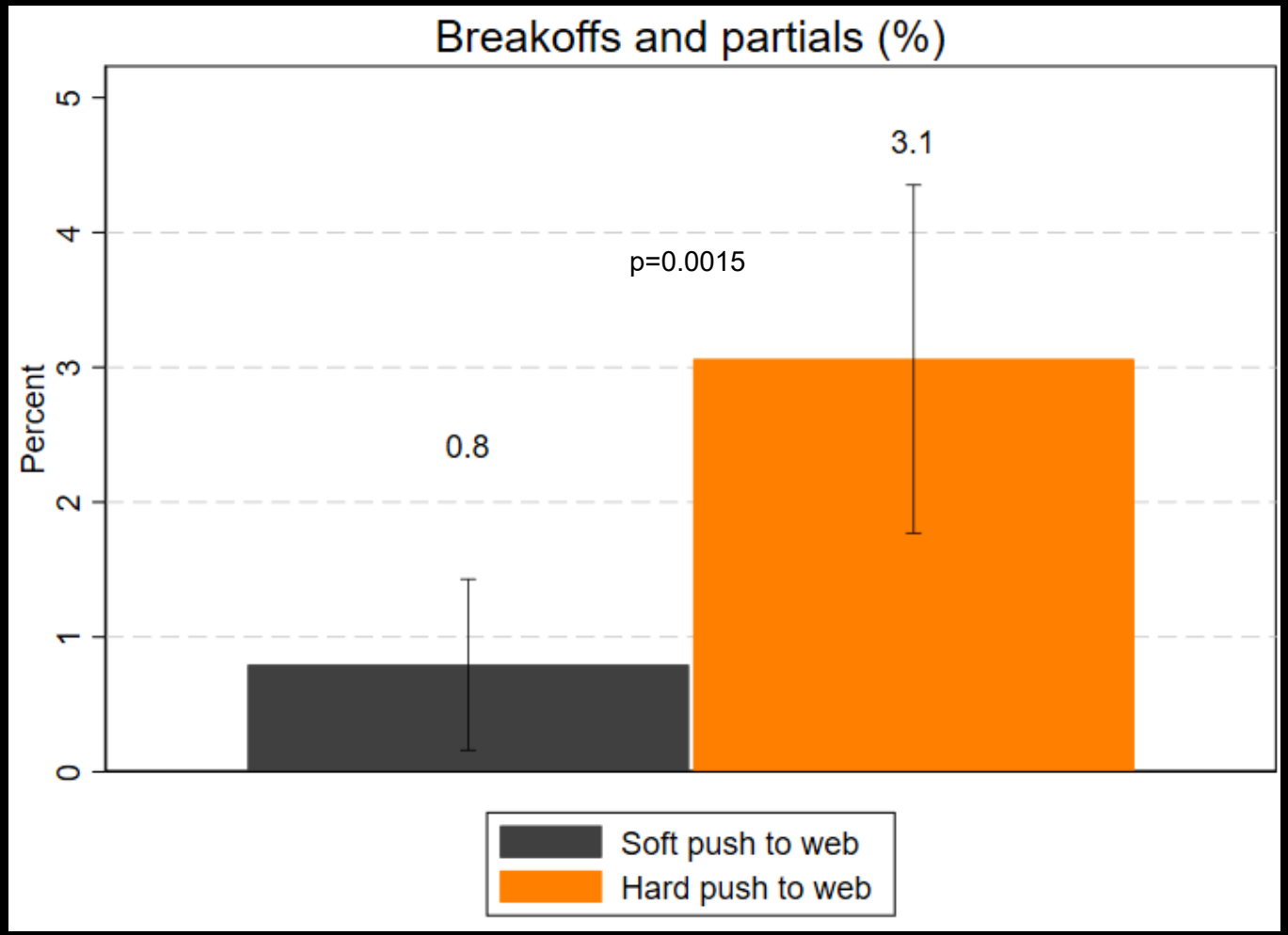
Data quality (breakoffs/partials)



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Non-response bias

Experiment group	R-indicator	Confidence intervals
Soft-push-to-web group	0.63 (.01)	[.599, 671]
Hard-push-to-web group	0.71 (.01)	[.673, 750]

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Conclusions

- Compared to a soft-push-to-web strategy, a hard-push-to-web strategy generated:
  - A statistically significant lower response rate (-4,1%)
  - A statistically significant higher share of partials and breakoffs
  - Higher representativeness and less nonresponse bias

Take home messages

- Choice of push-to-web strategy is a trade-off between response rate and representativeness
- Choice of push-to-web strategy might impact representation of some demographic groups more than others

Cost decrease

- Sending paper questionnaire only in the third and final reminder to half the sample saved us
  ≈ 2,900 euros (33,000 SEK)

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Thank you for listening!

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Resources

- **Notes on Survey Methodology at the SOM Institute:**

  https://www.gu.se/en/som-institute/publications/research-on-survey-methodology