



Stockholm
University

Demography Unit

Department of
Methodology



'Improving your image'

Visual rhetoric and data visualisation

Some motivations you might have

To improve images in your publications:

'How can I make my tables, charts and figures look better?'

To improve images in presentations:

*'If I can't show them all of my results, then what should I present?
And how can I communicate my results successfully.'*

To improve your image in broader sense:

'Oh my god, I'm about to present my research! Will they think I'm a complete idiot? What if my voice sounds nervous? Maybe I should have worn some nicer clothes? And did I change that mistake on slide 4? Was that the version that I uploaded onto my memory stick? Oh shit, we're about to start...'

More simply

I want people to be engaged by my research

And this means thinking about:

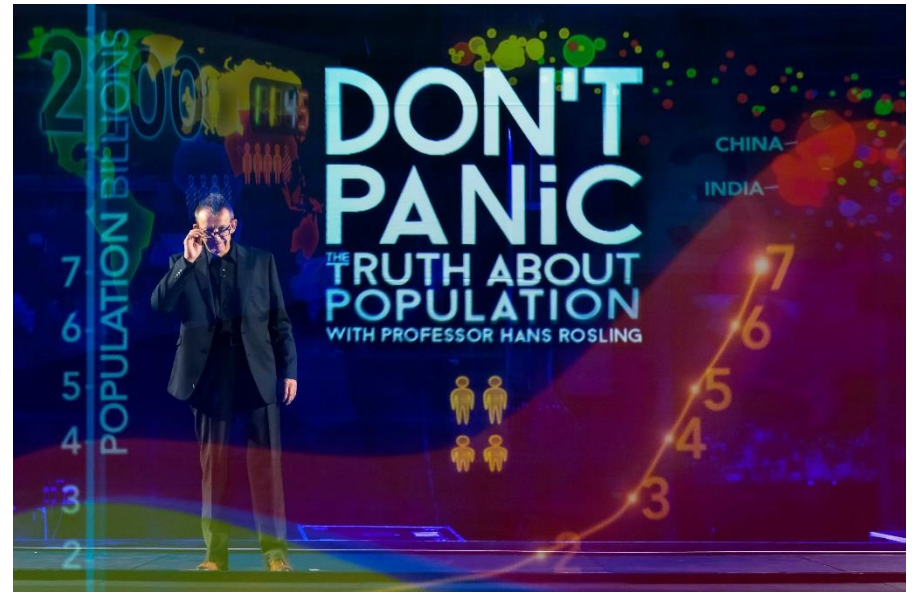
- charts, maps and figures

As well as less obvious things like:

- tables, footnotes, text formatting

And more broadly:

- communication, rhetoric, audience psychology, visual perception, and what is your message!



Hans Rosling; pioneer of data visualisation

More than just pretty pictures

Visual rhetoric:

Using visual information to communicate a message

Incorporates theories about visualisation and communication

Here, we focus on:

Data visualisation:

Displaying data in a visual format

Rhetoric:

The art of discourse and persuasion

These topics are potentially very complex, especially when you consider research in psychology, media studies and design (etc.) on perception, attention, bias, (and more...)

Some principles of visual rhetoric

Arrangement

the **organization of visual elements** so that readers can see their structure

Emphasis

making certain parts more prominent than others by changing their **size, shape and colour**

Clarity

helping the reader to **decode the message**, to understand it quickly and completely

Conciseness

generating designs that are **appropriately succinct** to a particular situation

Tone

tone reveals the designer's **attitude towards the subject matter**

Ethos

earning the **trust** of the person receiving the message

(Kostelnick and Roberts 1998)

Some principles of data visualisation

Content

show the data and do not distort it – **good visualisation cannot save poor quality content**

Comparison

the essence of understanding data is in making comparisons, so **allow the eye to compare**

Explanation

graphics need a (causal) story to **help the reader explain the data**

Multivariate and multilevel

don't compromise; **show the complexity** of multivariate micro/macro relationships

Integration

integrate all visual elements (words, numbers, images)
combat ambiguity with clear headings, labels, legends, and footnotes
don't relegate important text to the legend/footnotes/accompanying text

remove 'chartjunk'

consider the data/ink ratio

(Tufte 2001)

More simply

- The good

Good visuals **help** the reader to understand the data your message

- The bad

Bad visuals **hinder** the reader in understanding the data and your message

- The ugly

Often obvious which images are ugly, but remember that beauty is in the eye of the beholder



Note that all visuals/images have connotations, including those intended as a joke

~ Are my visuals clear and self-contained?

- Could they be understood by a non-expert? (Ask someone!)
- Is the main message clear and dominant?
- Is everything clearly labelled and well formatted?

~ Could they be simplified?

- Does anything obscure or distort the actual information?
- Is anything confusing, conflicting, or distracting?
- Are there extra elements that could be removed?

~ Do you need extra information to interpret the data?

- Is it difficult to work out what's what?
- Does it need a lot of explanation when you present to an audience?
- Could you add more information to the labels or footnotes?

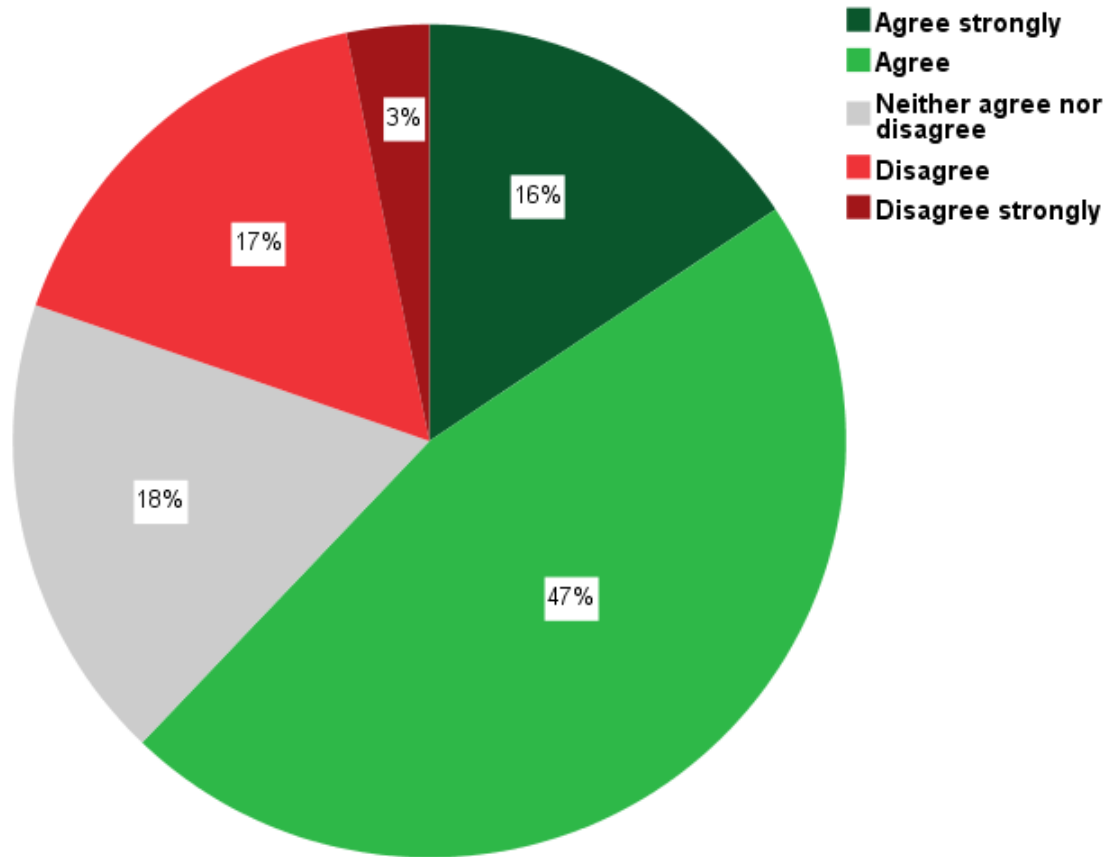
The story so far...

Visual rhetoric is about more than just cool graphics

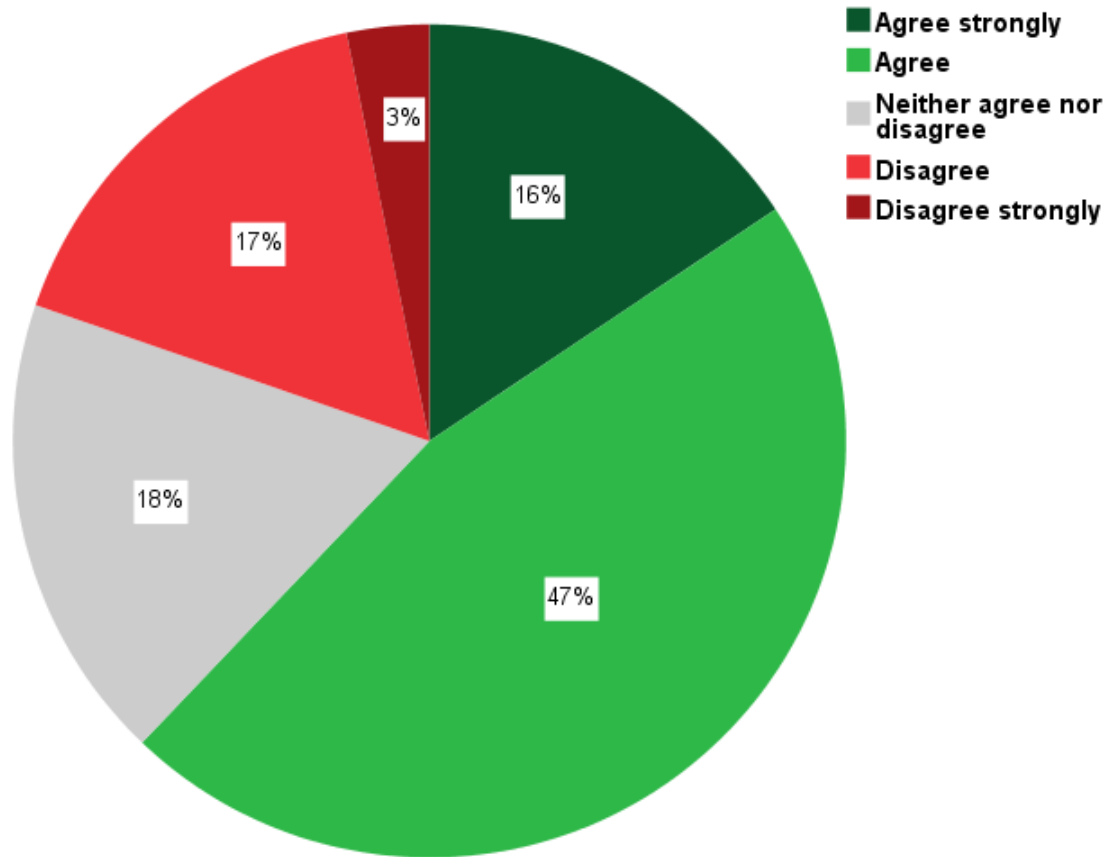
**There's a bunch of principles,
which are tried and tested,
and we can lean on the work of others
(like Rosling and Tufte)**

But it is hard to learn these principles,
and how to improve your use of visual rhetoric
and data visualisation without discussing
and evaluating real examples

Consider a pie chart



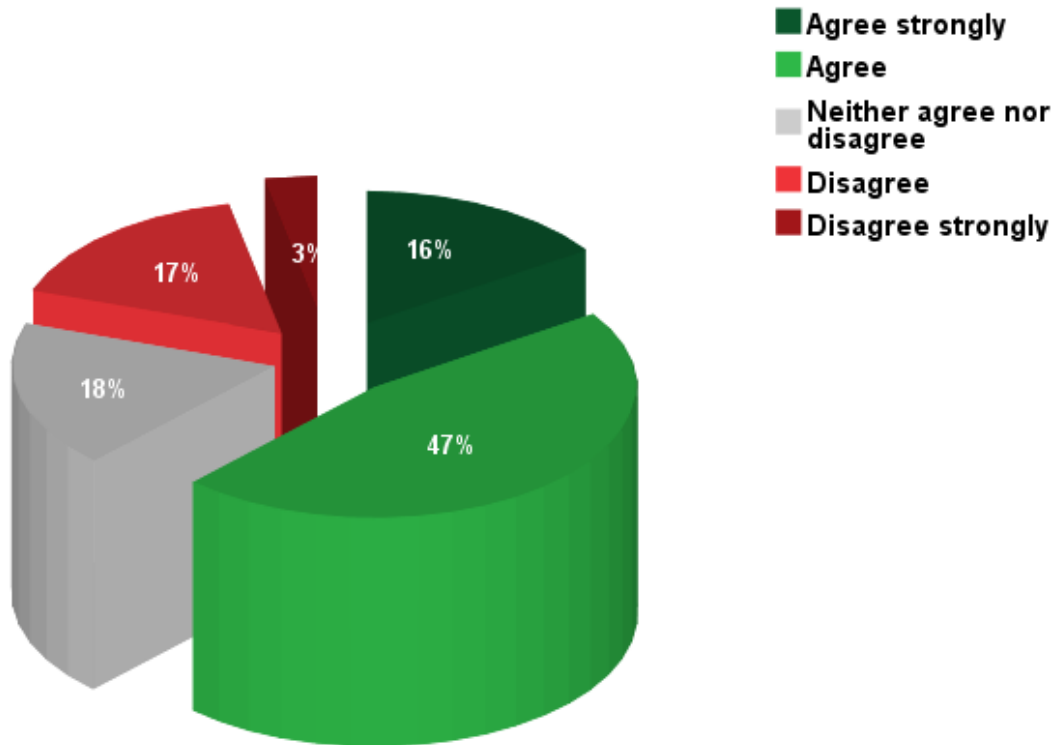
Consider a pie chart



What are the visual principles of a pie chart?

How does a pie chart communicate?

A pie chart should never resemble a real pie

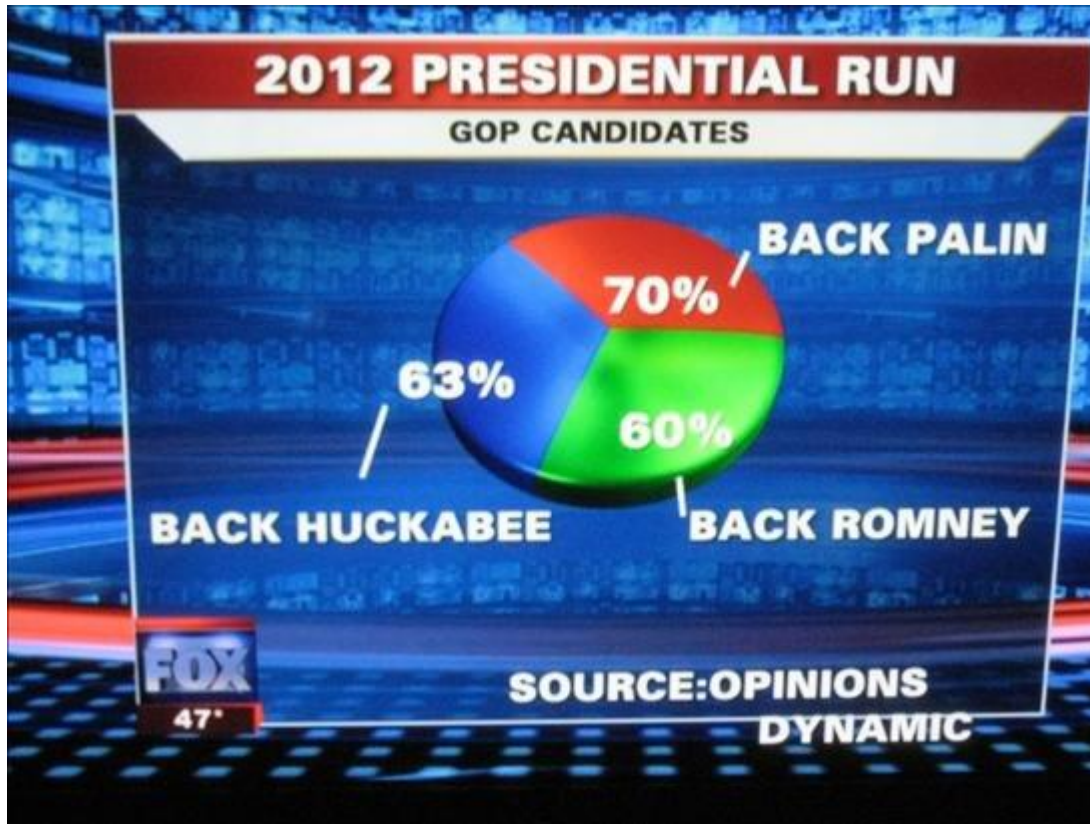


Depth (3d effect) is entirely made up – nothing to do with the data

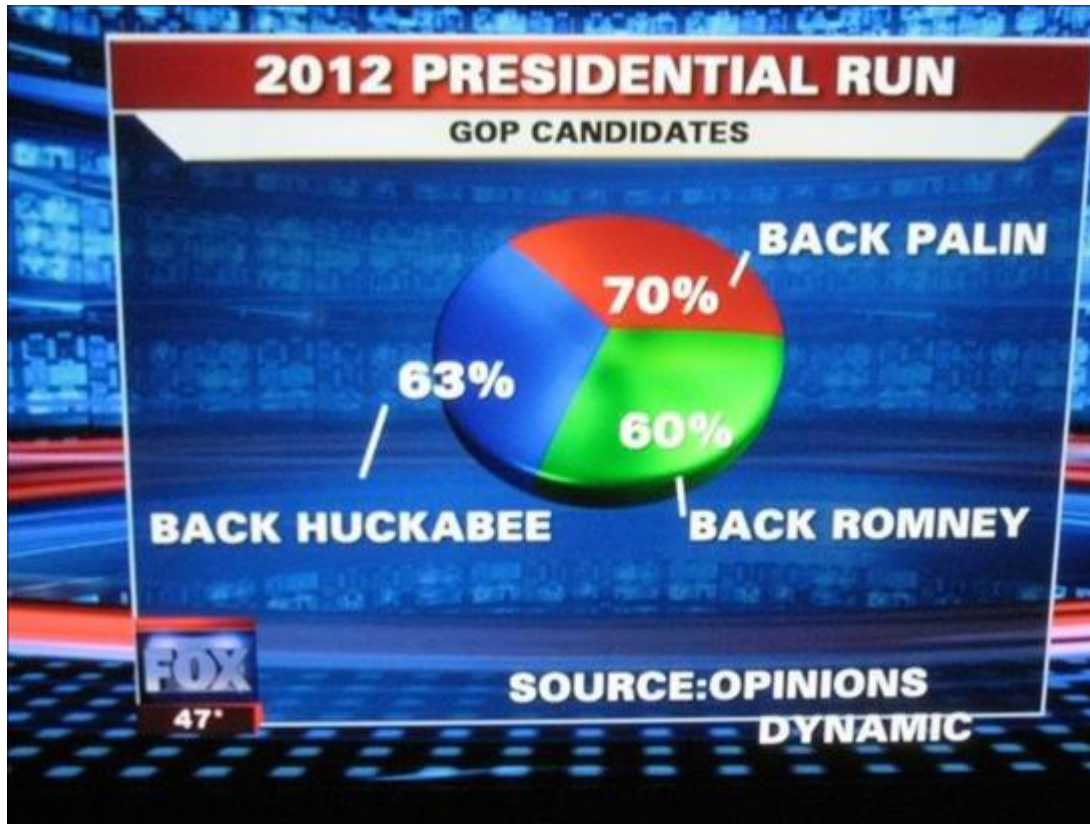
Foreshortening (angle of display) makes it difficult to compare slice sizes

‘Exploded’ effect makes comparisons of slices even harder

An example of 'best practice'



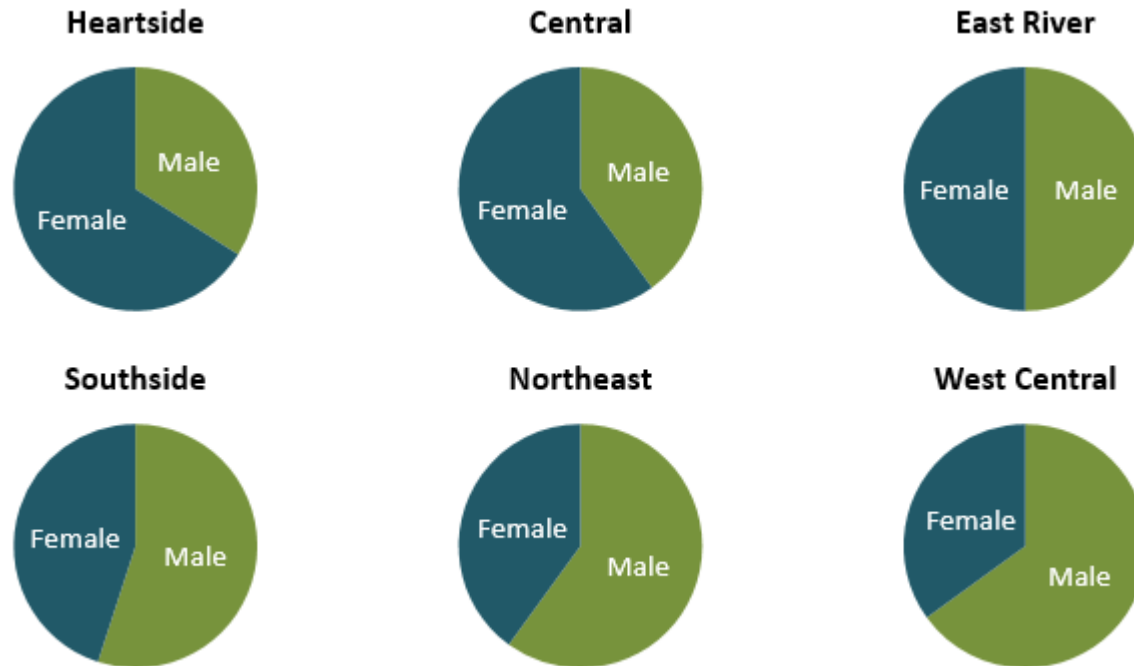
An example of 'best practice'



An infamous example...

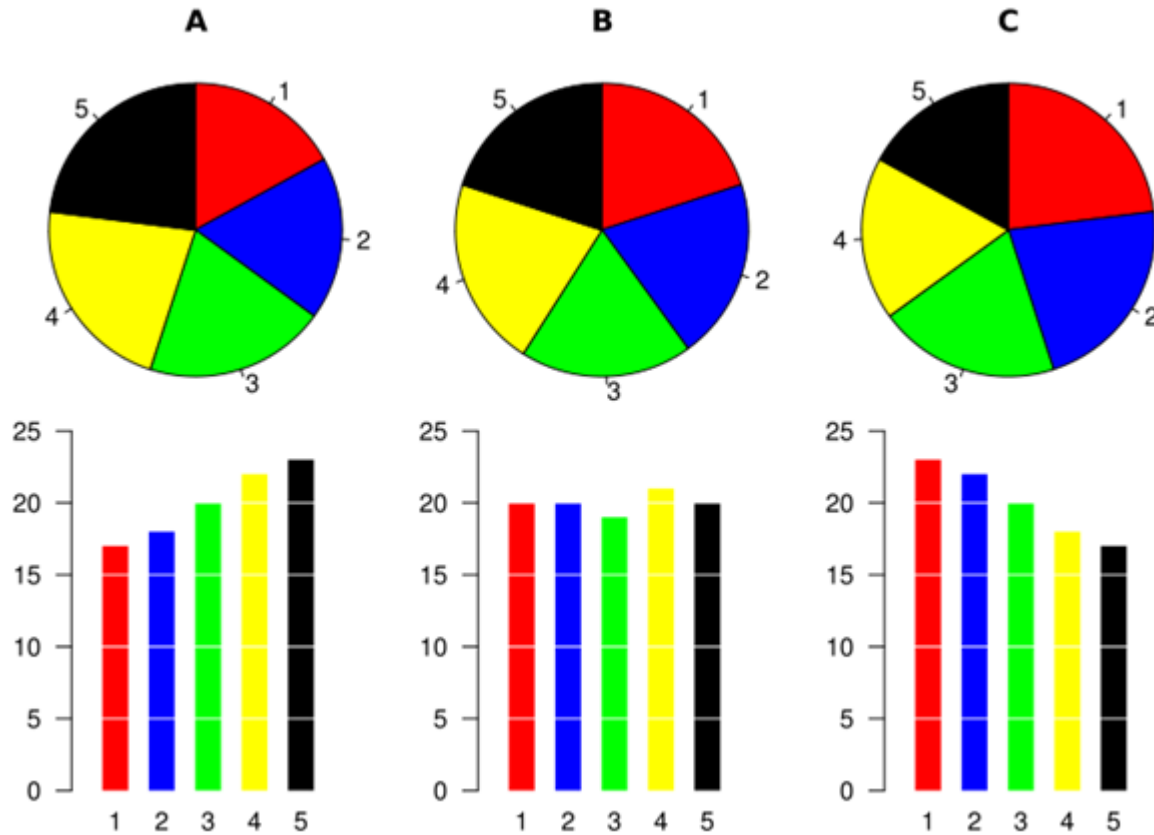
Search for "Fox news pie chart" to read more

A good example



Small multiples
facilitate comparison
...consciously and
subconsciously

Another problem with pie charts

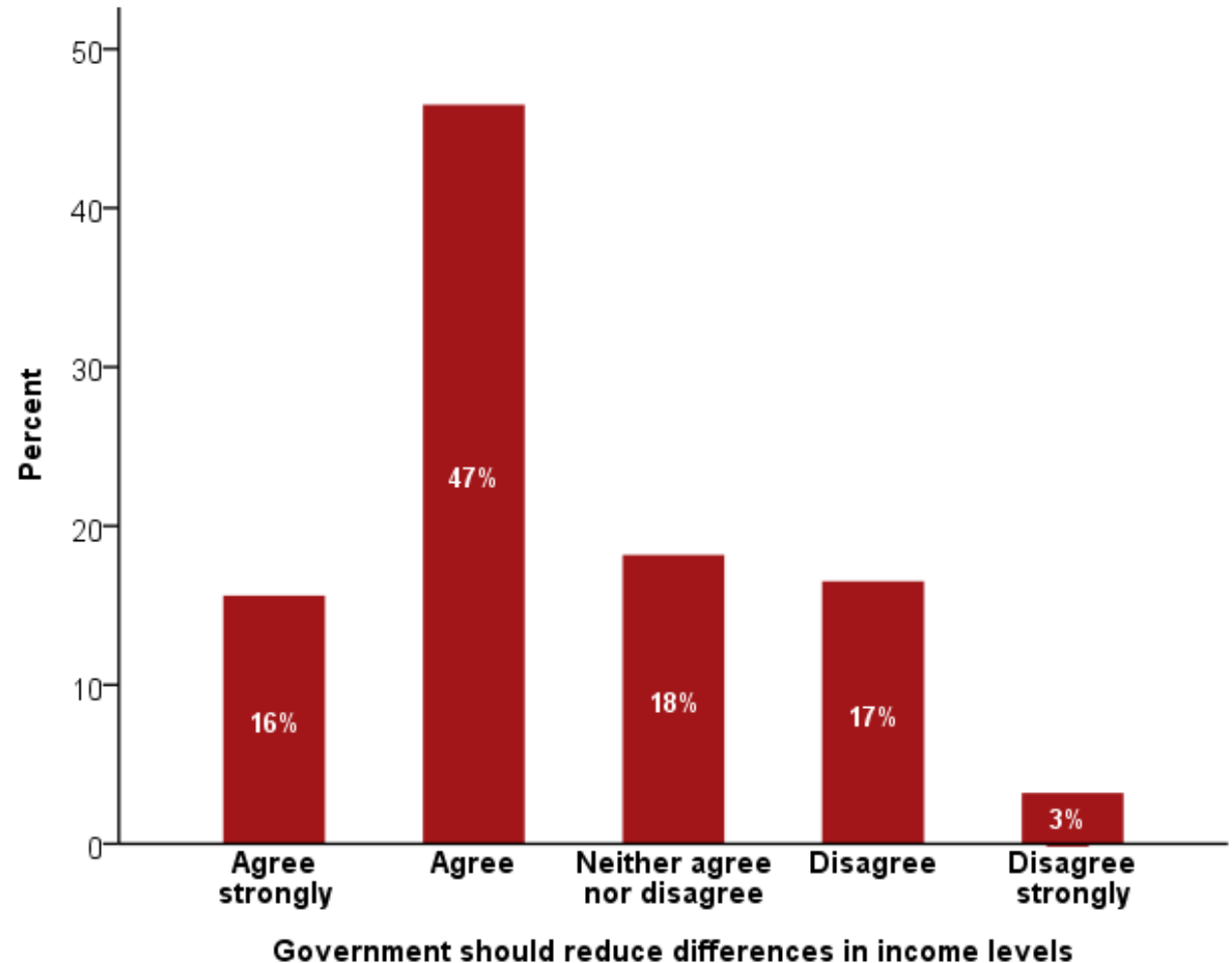
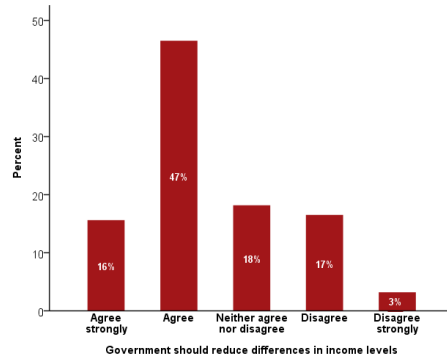


Is it easier to compare the groups using:

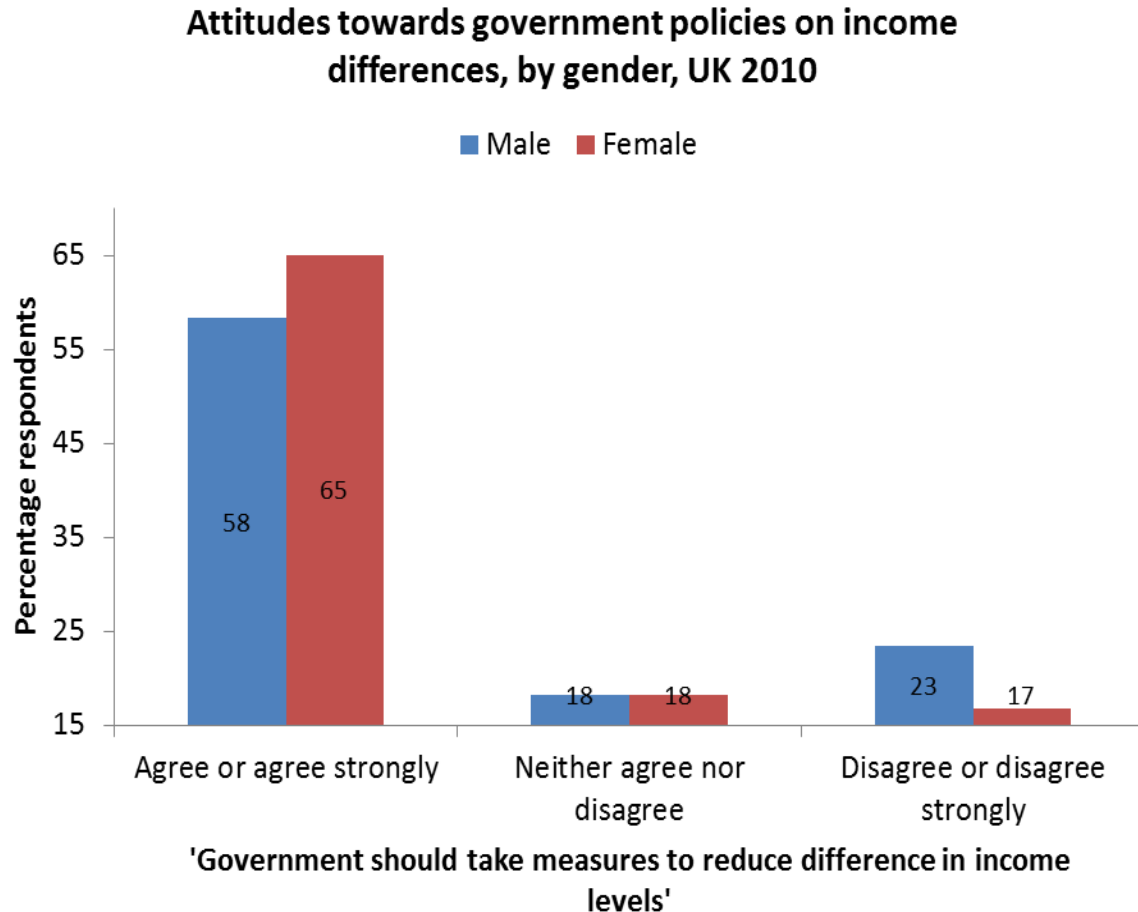
(a) pie charts

(b) bar charts

Often a bar chart is more effective

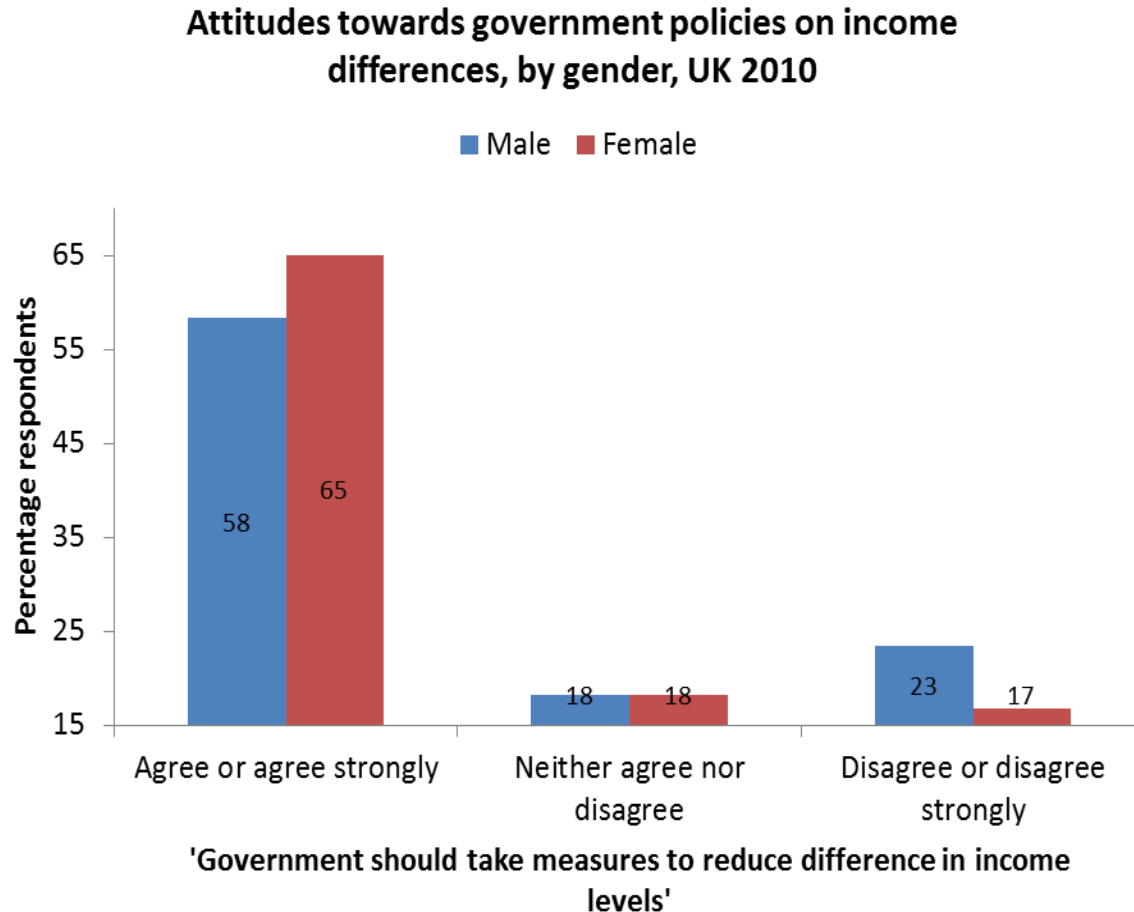


Bar charts are very useful for comparison



Here we can quickly see that there is almost no disagreement

But bar charts can be distorted

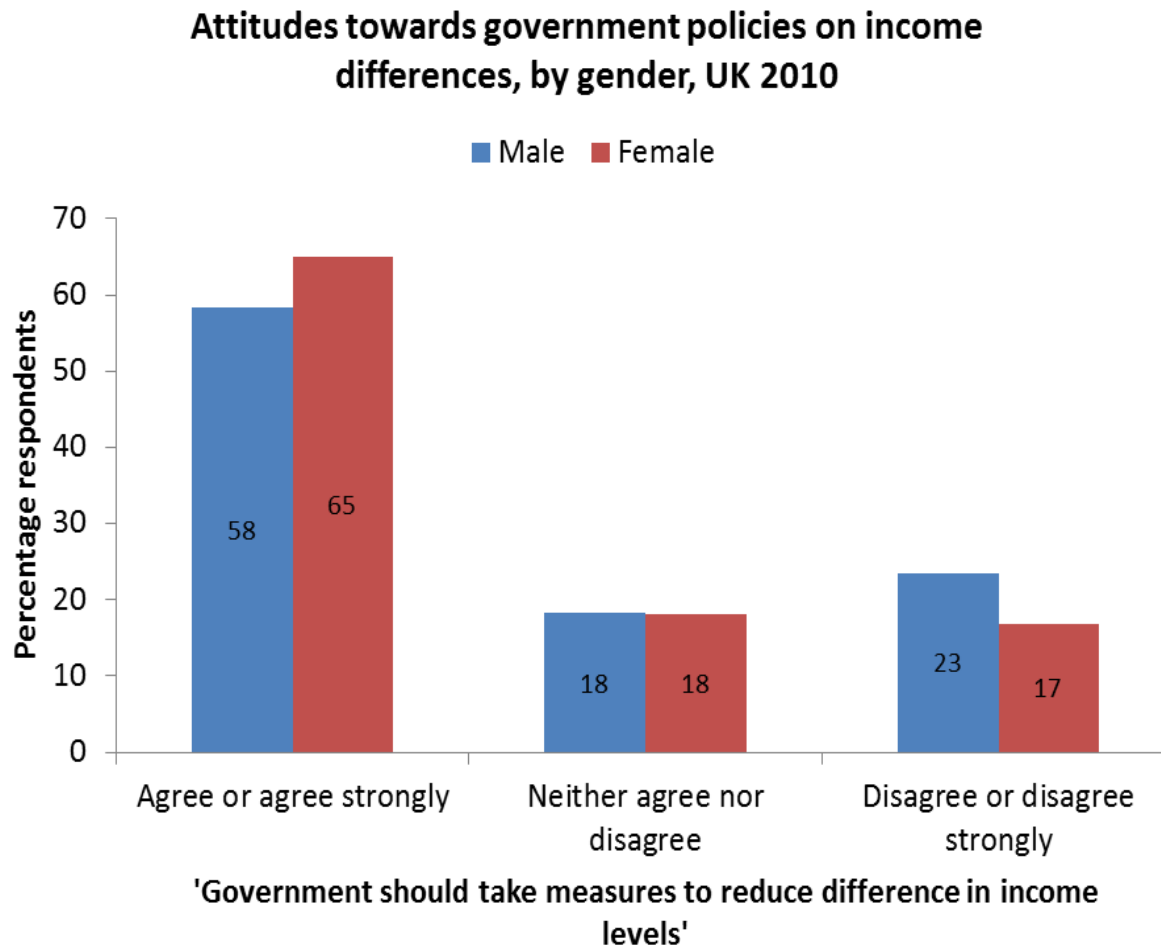


Except that the message is exaggerated

Your eye 'reads' the bar heights before it reads the vertical axis labels

Here, the y-axis starts at 15

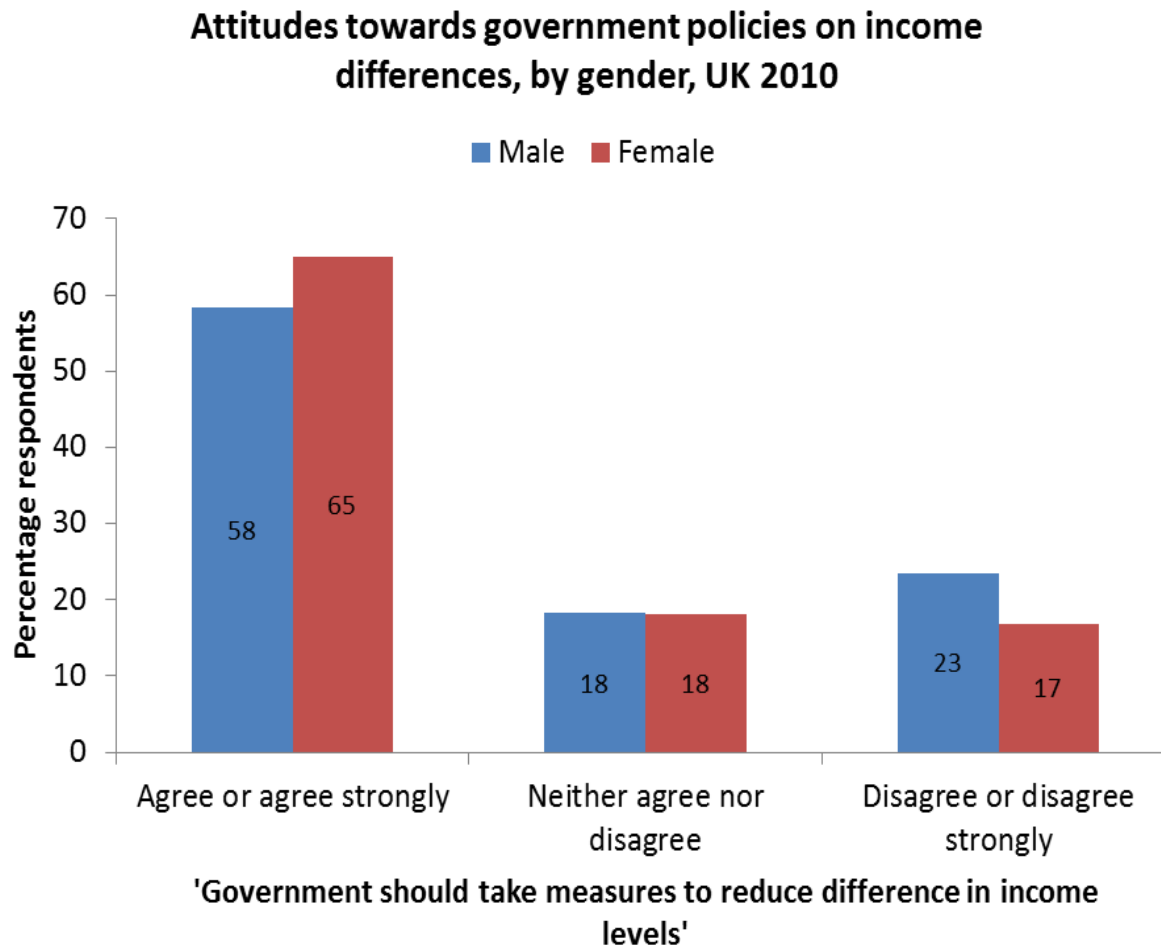
Distort the axes at your peril



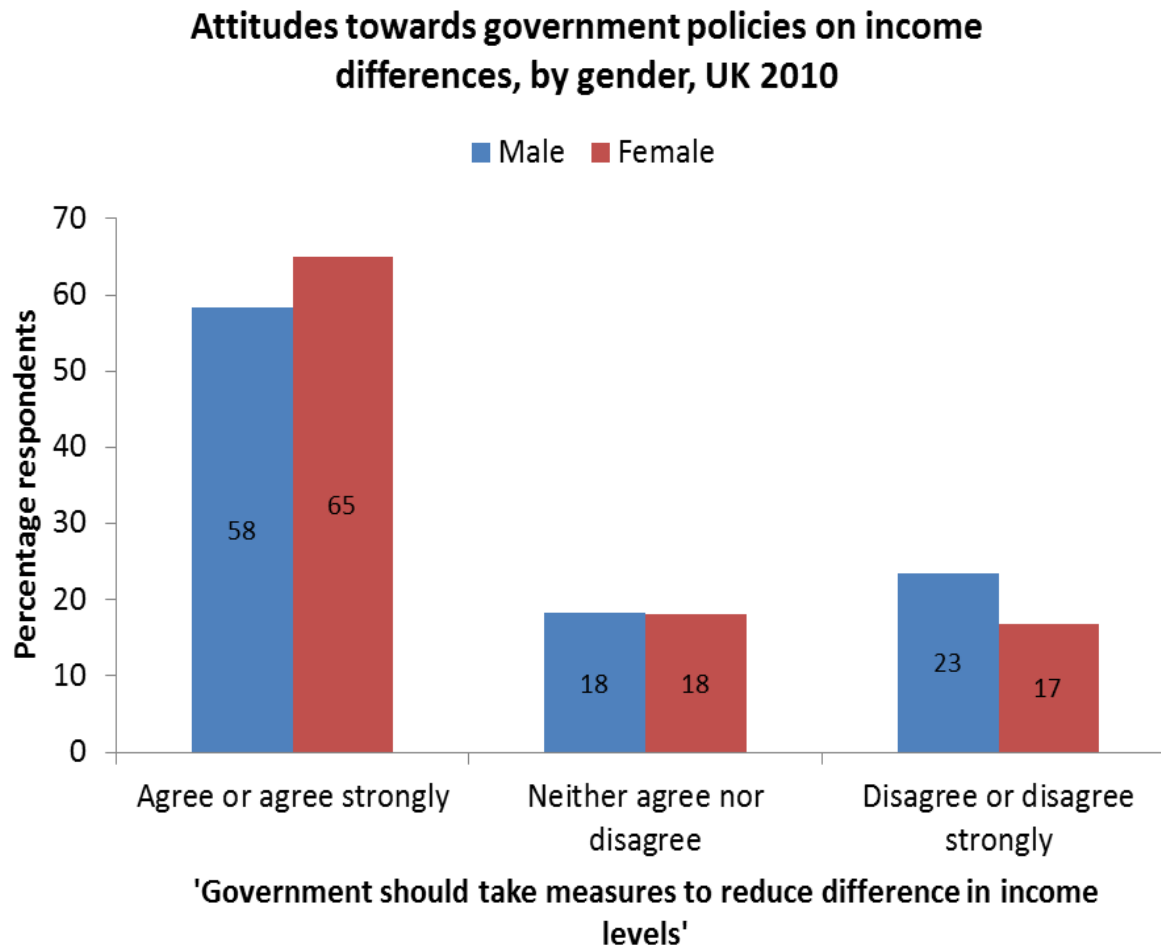
Here is the more honest version

Note: it probably would be harder to notice the distortion if we hadn't included the actual percentages

How else could this figure could be improved?



How else could this figure could be improved?



Some ideas:

remove percentages?

change colours?

space between bars?

add footnotes?

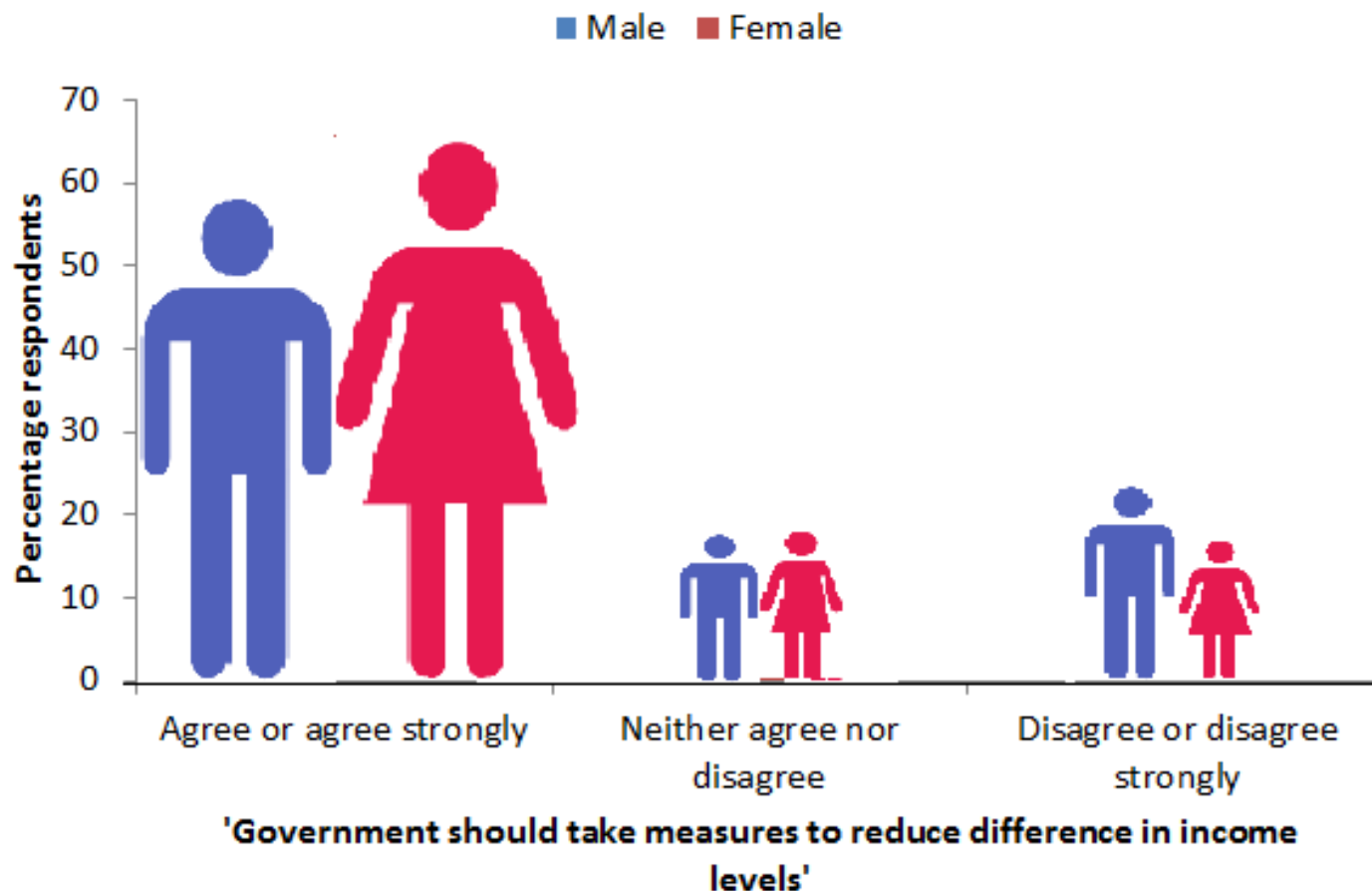
change font?

change title?

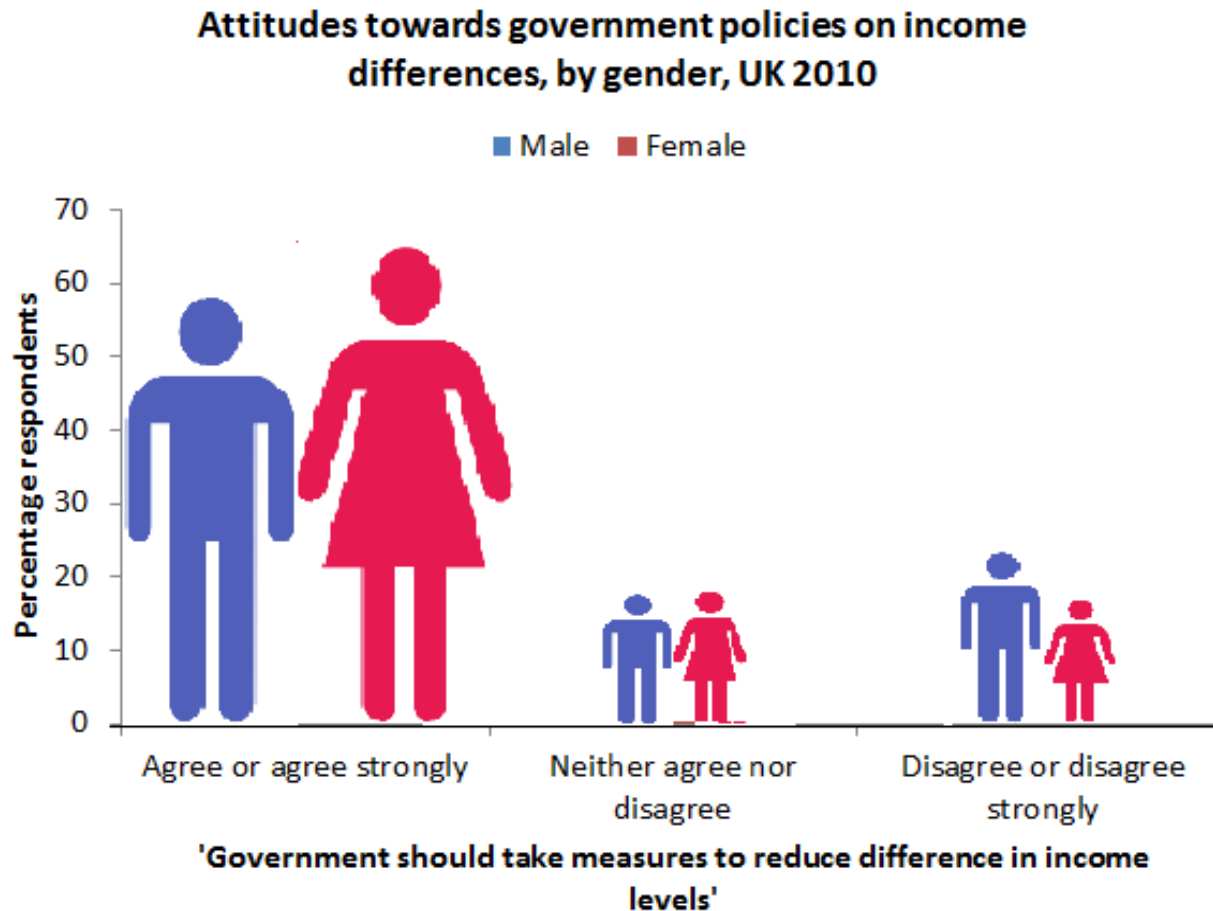
do something radical?

Something radical...

Attitudes towards government policies on income differences, by gender, UK 2010



Consider how information is conveyed...



First man icon looks much more than 3 times larger than second man

Data represented by heights only, but eye perceives and compares areas; differences appear to be larger than they actually are

- Men/agree: 58%

- Men/neither agree nor disagree: 18%

- Ratio of 3.2

There are good examples of the use of symbols

Climate Consensus?

How many US scientists disagree with human-induced climate change?

% publishing scientists who disagree



11%

any scientific field

% publishing climatologists who disagree

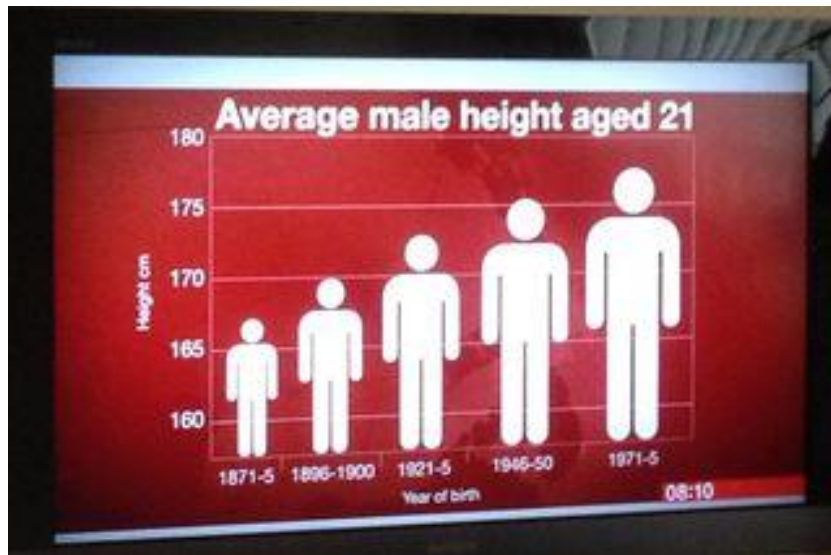


1%

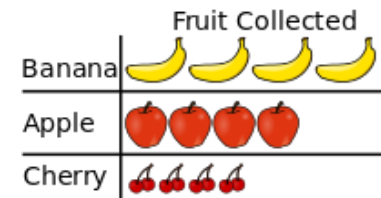
50%+ of published papers on climate change

source: Survey of 10,257 earth scientists, Nolan and Zimmerman 2009
(numbers rounded)

And bad examples



Trends in male height
Source: BBC breakfast TV

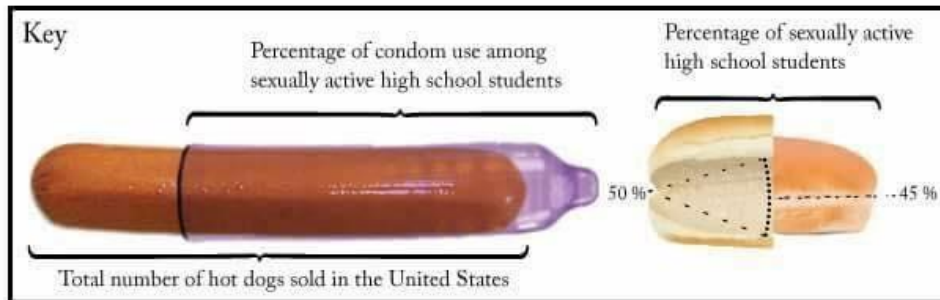
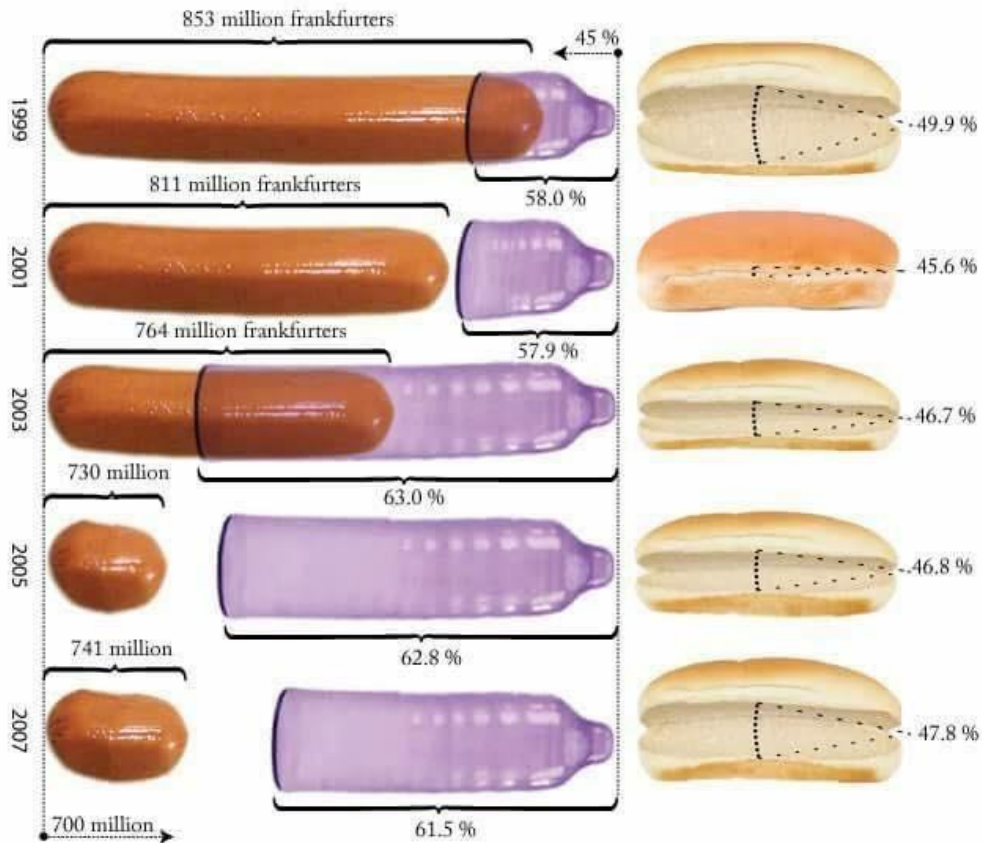


The same frequency

Source:

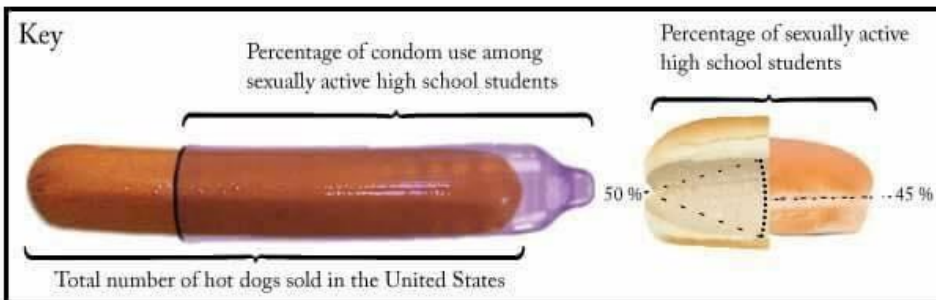
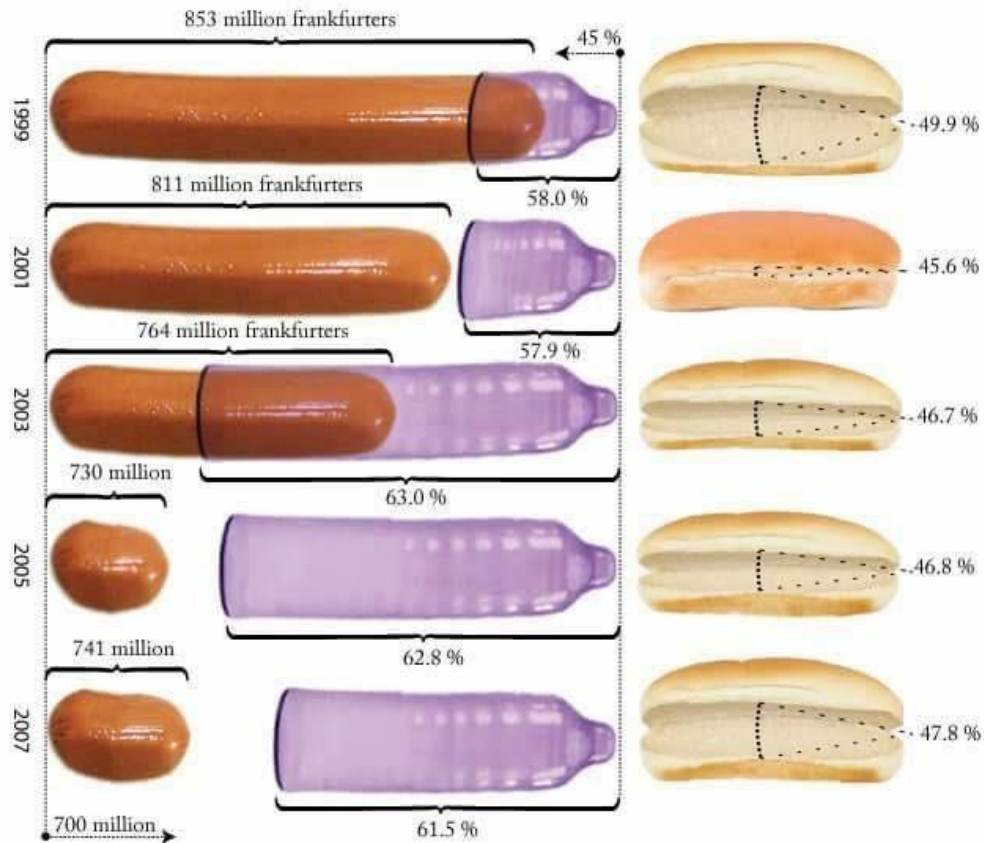
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Misleading_graph

And really bad examples



**Condom use versus
hotdog consumption**
Source: <http://viz.wtf/>

And really bad examples



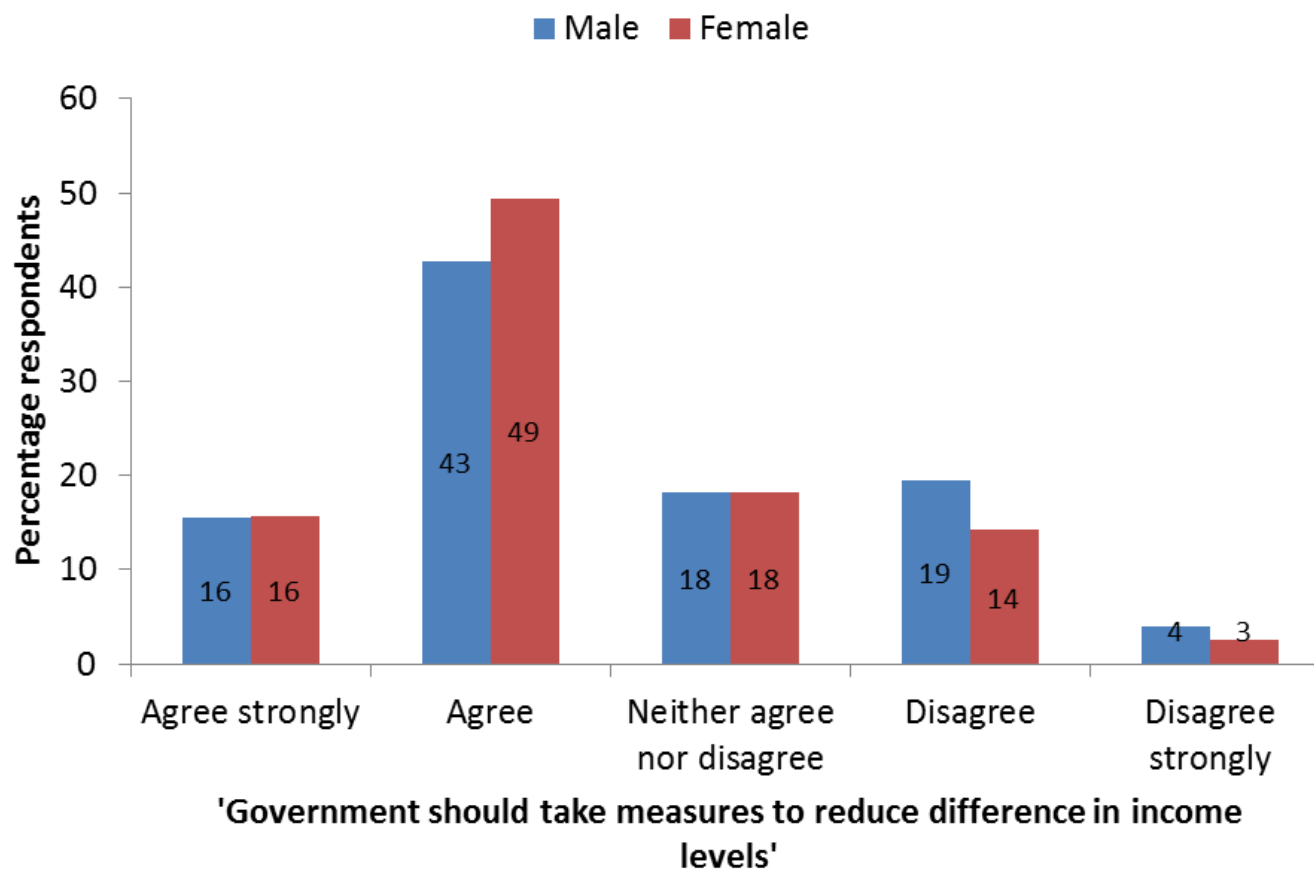
There are too many things wrong with this to list here!!

Suffice to say that there is a difference between communicating academic research and making 'funny' or 'pretty' pictures

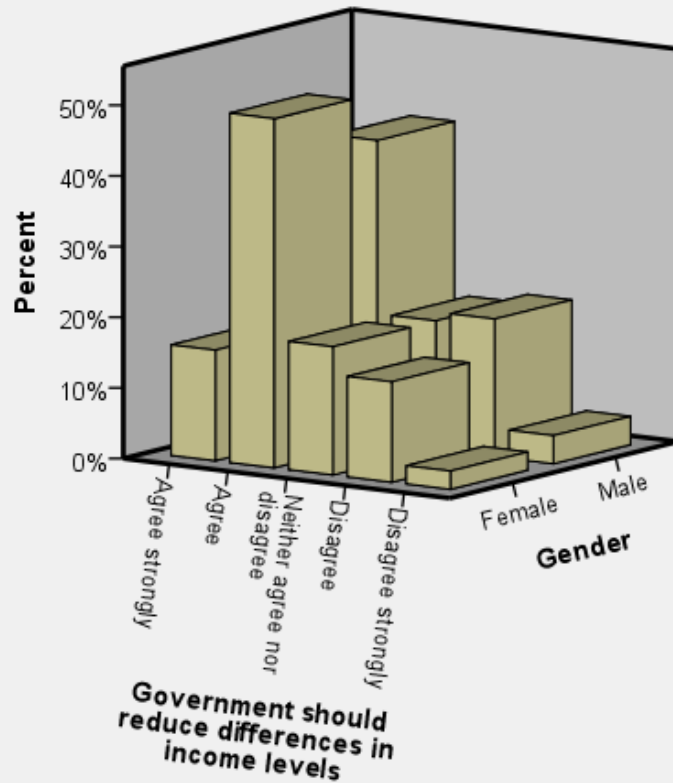
Condom use versus hotdog consumption
Source: <http://viz.wtf/>

Back to our more 'conservative' bar chart

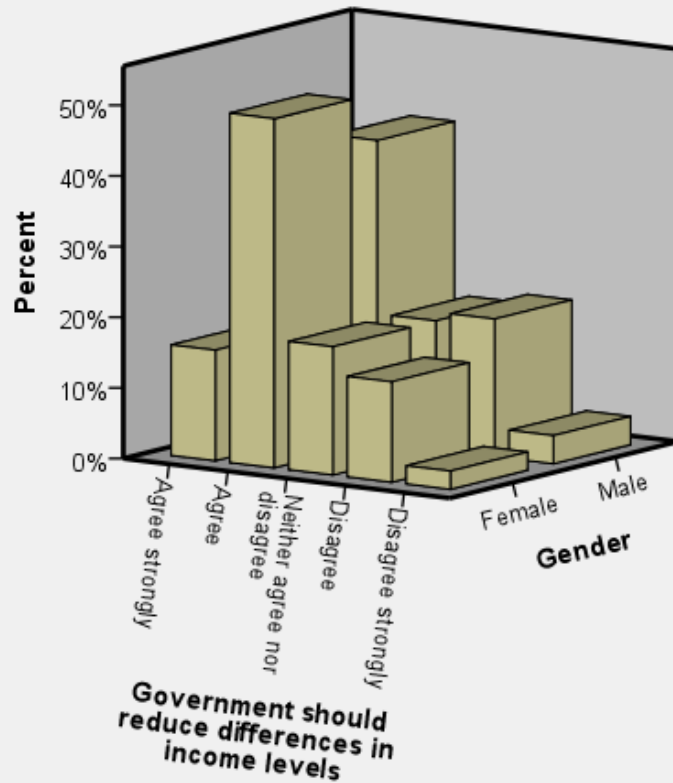
Attitudes towards government policies on income differences, by gender, UK 2010



Surely we can make this more exciting!



Surely we can make this more exciting!



Oh no!

Not 3D!!

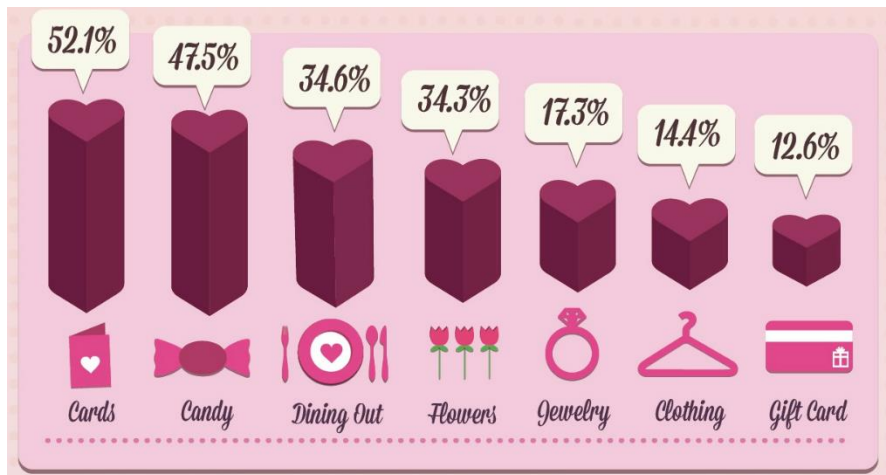
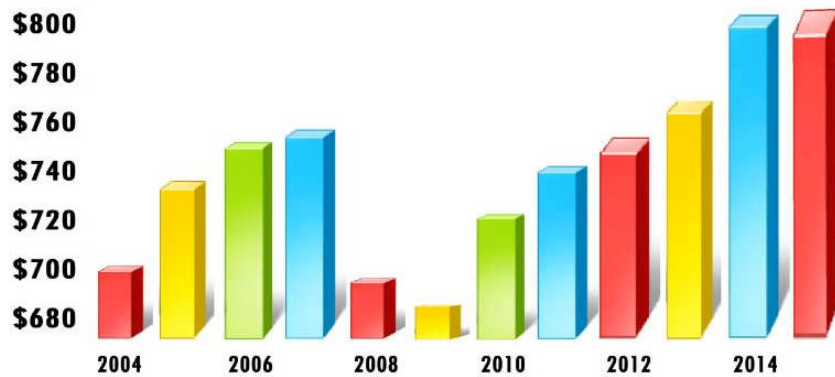
Don't do this!!!

Please!!!!

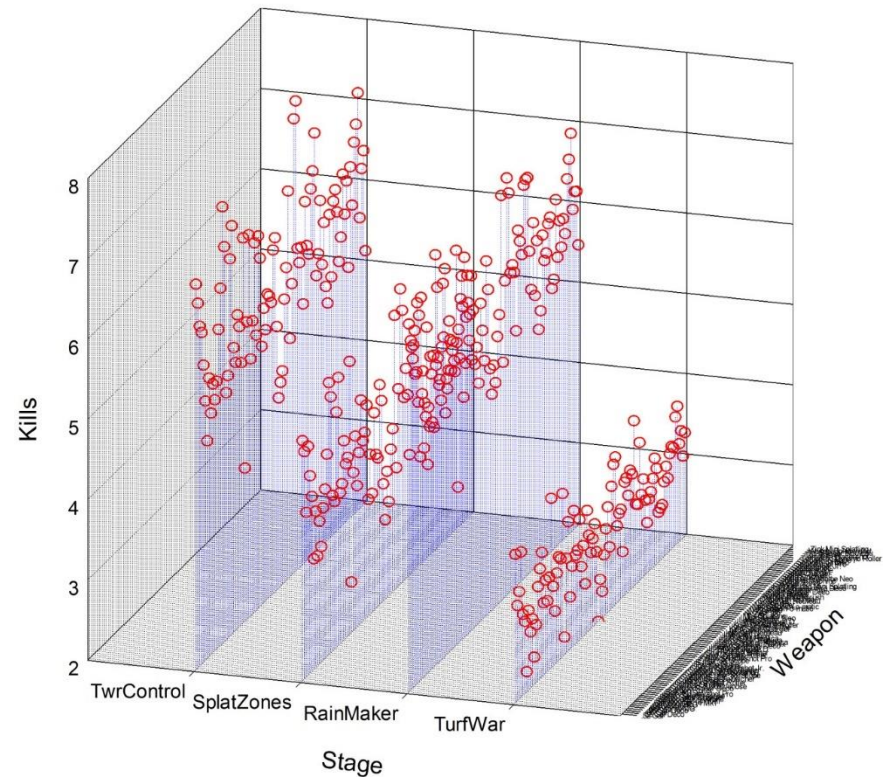
**Fake 3D always
distorts your
results.**

Sometimes it's best to 'keep it simple'

Per Person Holiday Spending
Average Spend

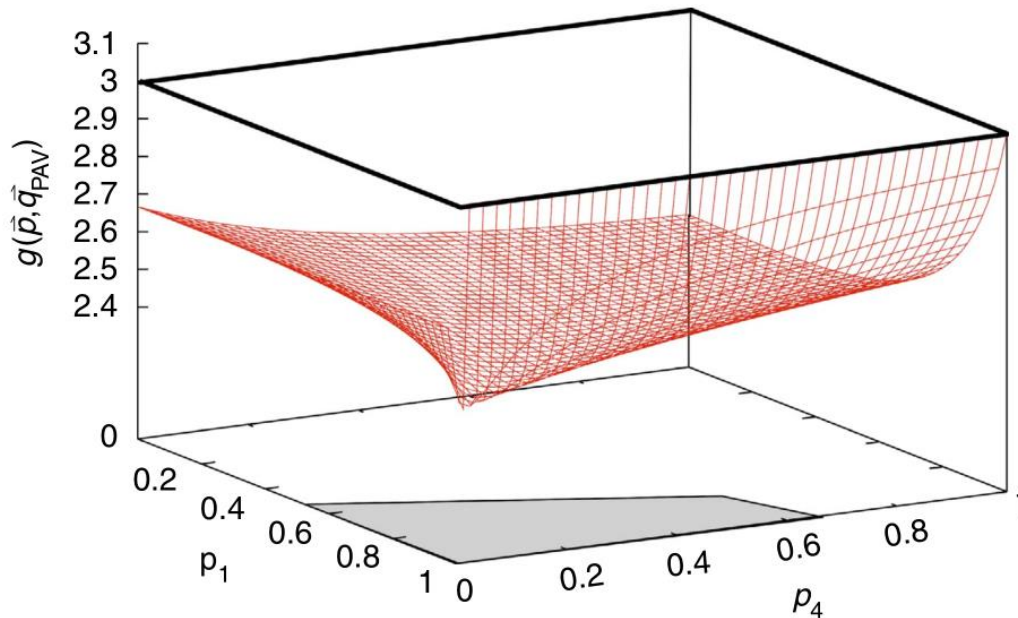


3D Category Scatter



Source: <http://viz.wtf/>

And examples of bad practice are everywhere



Taken from the journal:
Nature communications

(Adami and Hintze 2013)

Figure 1 | Mean expected payoff of arbitrary ZD strategies playing 'Pavlov'. The payoff $g(\vec{p}, \vec{q}_{\text{PAV}})$ (red surface) defined by the allowed set (p_1, p_4) (shaded region) against the strategy Pavlov, given by the probabilities $\vec{q}_{\text{PAV}} = (1, 0, 0, 1)$. As $g(\vec{p}, \vec{q}_{\text{PAV}})$ is everywhere smaller than $h(\vec{q}_{\text{PAV}}) = 3$ (except on the line $p_1 = 1$), it is Pavlov, which is the ESS for all allowed values (p_1, p_4) , according to equation (6). For $p_1 = 1$, ZD and Pavlov are equivalent as the entire payoff matrix (6) vanishes (even though the strategies are not the same).

And the worst ever chart...

According to Tufte in *The visual display of quantitative information*

A chart published in *American Education* magazine in the 1970s depicting the age structure of college students:

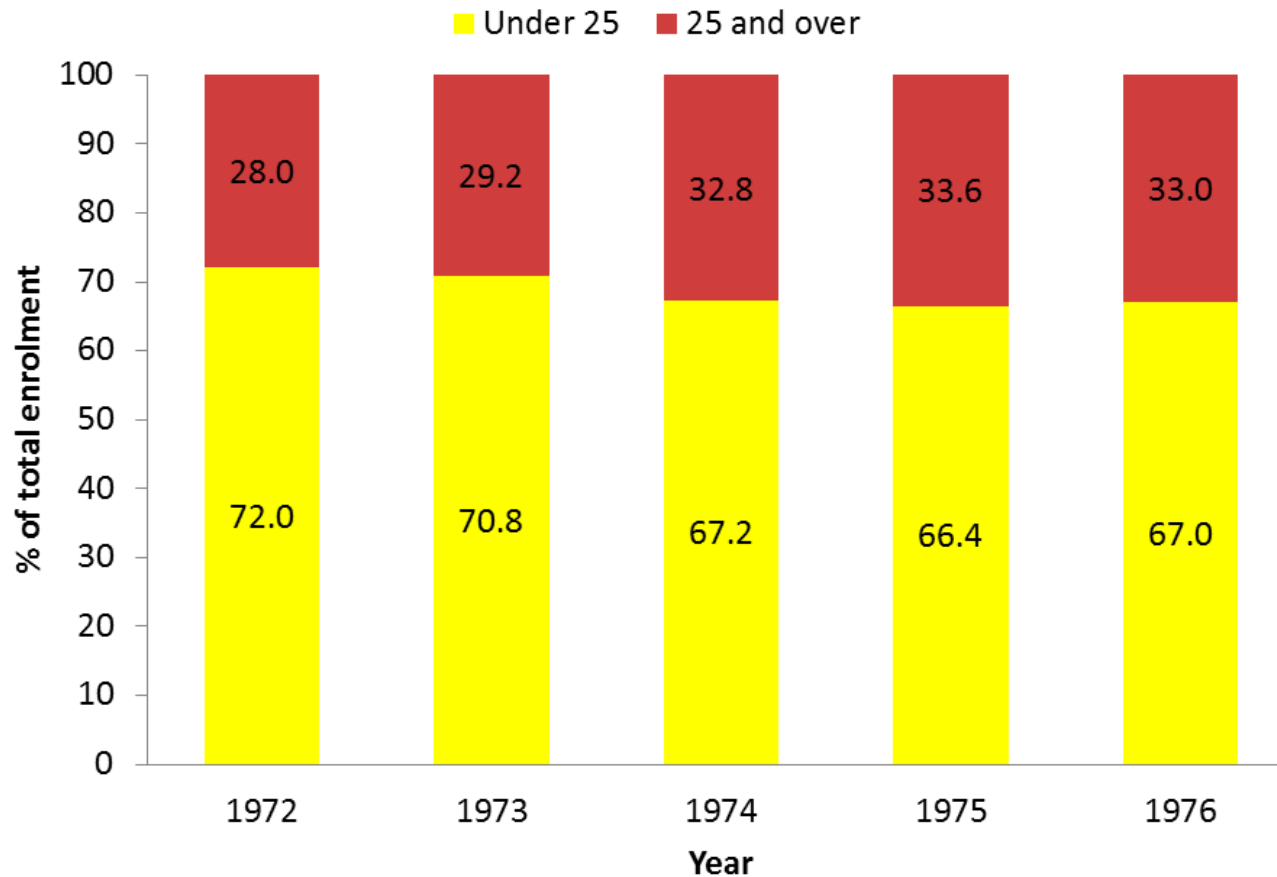
Year	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976
% students under 25 years old	72.0	70.8	67.2	66.4	67.0

A pretty unremarkable set of five percentages over five years

How would you plot these?

Perhaps something like this

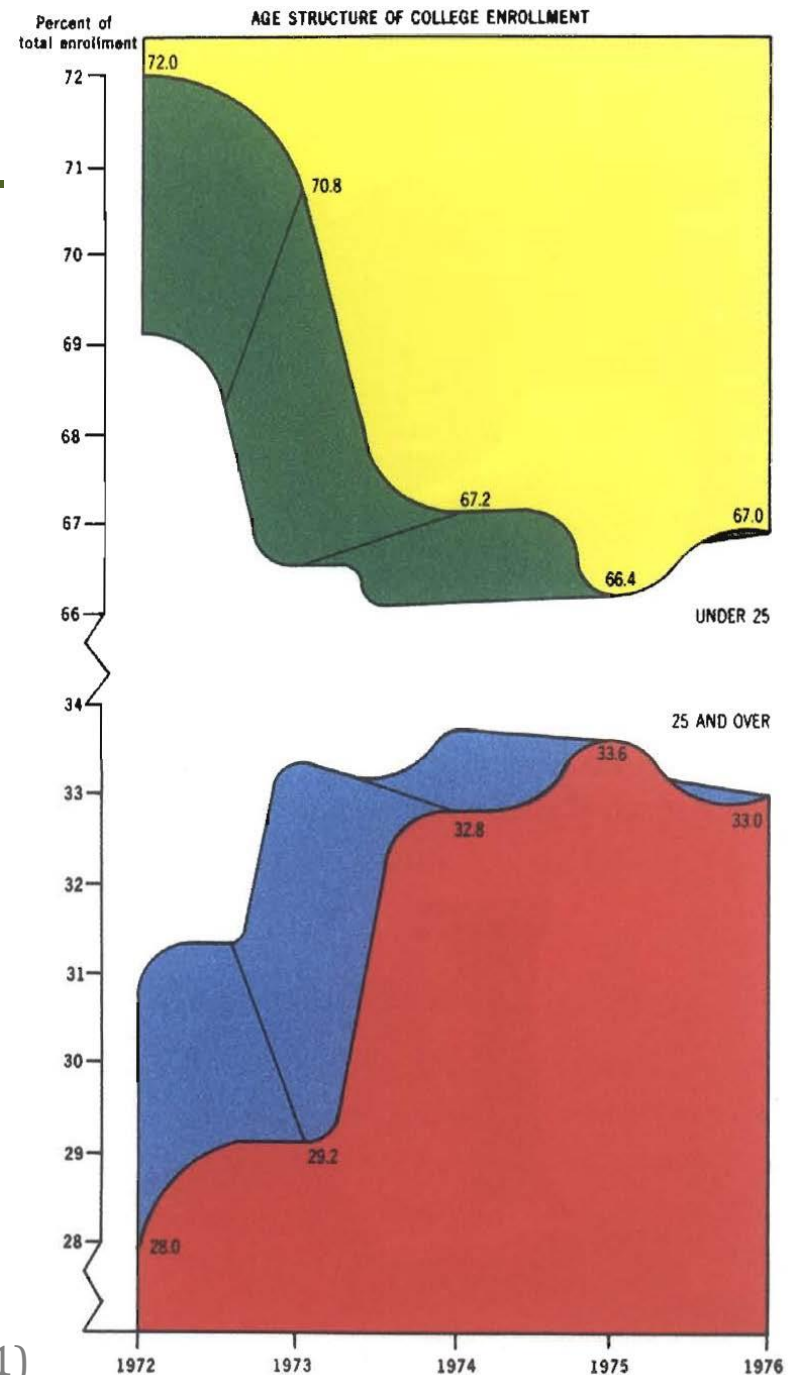
Age structure of college enrolment, 1972-1974



And not like this

Although not as obviously wrong, or grotesque as other examples, this shows:

- how a complex graphic can distort a simple and unremarkable set of data
- how many elements of a graphic are potentially redundant and/or repetitive
- why it is often better to use a table



(Tufte 2001)

Tables: *'the visual underdog'*

TABLE I: *Proportions of women experiencing each adult outcome by age at first birth (per cent)*

Outcome	Age at first birth				All women
	Under age 20	20–22	23–32	No birth	
Extra-marital birth	34.5	17.2	10.4	0.1	11.9
Ever lone mother	53.0	34.8	13.6	0.2	18.6
Social housing	45.2	30.8	9.7	6.2	16.9
Any benefits	43.0	33.4	17.0	8.0	20.7
No qualifications	36.5	23.8	7.7	7.4	13.6
Low household income	43.9	32.4	20.7	25.1	26.4
No telephone	18.2	12.2	4.2	4.2	7.2
Ill-health	23.5	18.8	10.9	11.5	13.9
Current smoker	56.4	44.3	24.7	29.2	32.8
High malaise	23.9	18.4	8.4	9.4	12.1
Low life satisfaction	32.3	25.9	18.0	22.2	22.0
Number in sample	664	937	2689	1342	5632*

Note:

* Sample sizes vary according to outcome, being especially reduced for the measure of household income

(Hobcraft and Kiernan 2001)

Some principles for **table design**

General:	Treat tables just like other visualisations
Vertical lines:	Avoid these
Horizontal lines:	Use sparingly
Alignment:	Text should be left aligned, numbers right aligned (on the decimal point)
Precision:	Avoid spurious precision, two significant figures is often more than enough
Order:	Consider sorting rows or columns
Formatting:	Make use of clear fonts and white space
Multiple tables:	It often makes sense to break up large tables

Tables are very good at communicating dense information

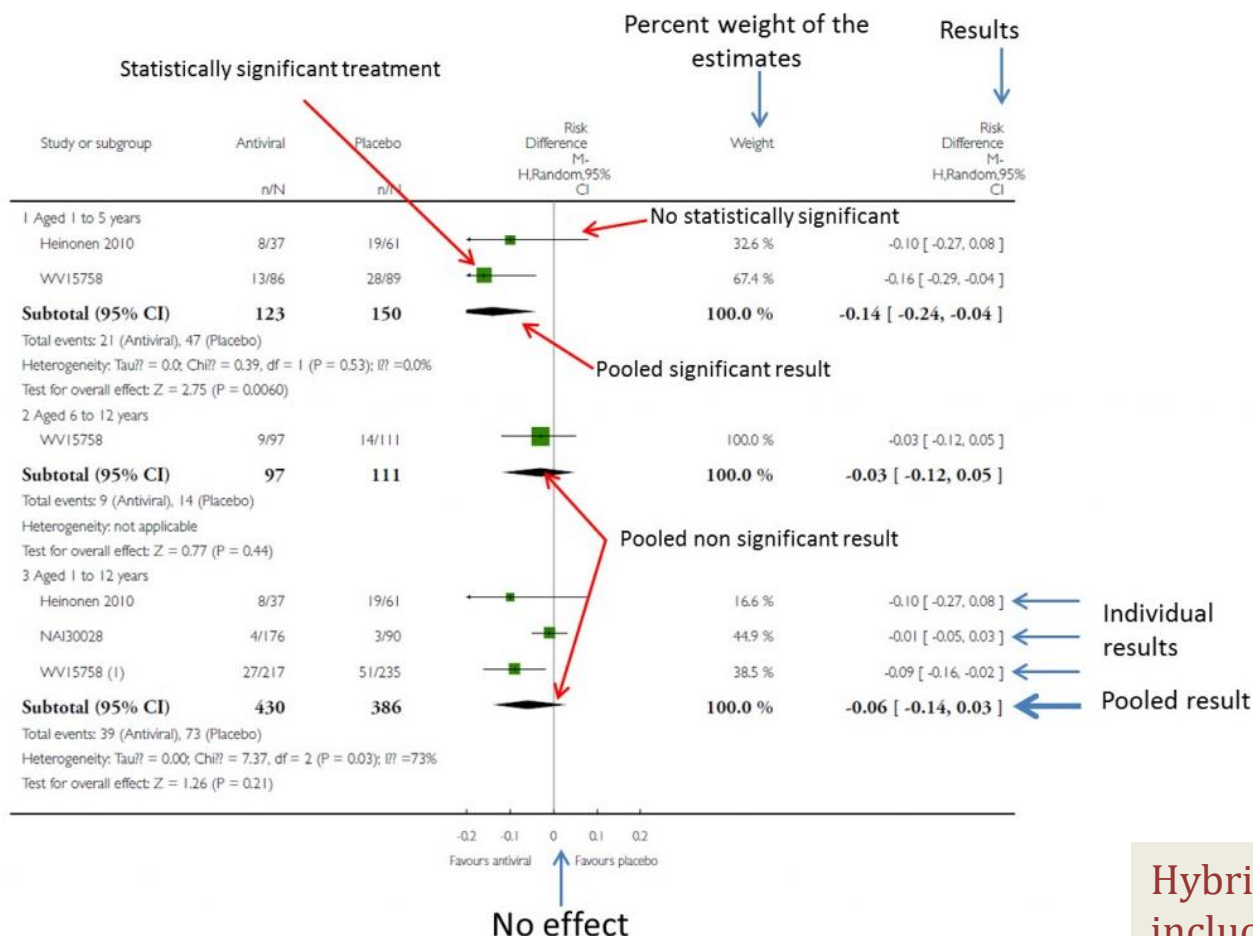
	Region	Age (years)	Length of follow-up (years)	Institutional population included	Sample size	Indicator	Yearly change (age-adjusted)	p value
1987–2001 ³⁶	Netherlands	>55	14	No	2708–3474	Men: walking up stairs, carrying 5–10 kg, lifting object while standing, walking 400 m	–4.86%	0.05
1987–2001 ³⁶	Netherlands	>55	14	No	2708–3474	Women: walking up stairs, carrying 5–10 kg, lifting object while standing, walking 400 m	–3.64%	0.05
1986–1999 ⁶⁷	Spain	>65	13	Part	750 192 men	Walking up stairs, walking out of house, chairfast, bedfast, serious difficulty standing up or getting out of bed or chair	–3.56%	..
1986–1999 ⁶⁷	Spain	>65	13	Part	1 323 261 women	Walking up stairs, walking out of house, chairfast, bedfast, serious difficulty standing up or getting out of bed or chair	–2.57%	..
1991/92–1996/97 ⁴⁷	UK	65–69	5	Yes	689–687	Walking up stairs, chairfast, bedfast	5.00%	0.09
1985/89–1993/99 ⁷⁶	Finland	65–79	8	Yes, but under-represented	2213–2911	Men: use of stairs	–1.70%	..
1985/89–1993/99 ⁷⁶	Finland	65–79	8	Yes, but under-represented	2213–2911	Men: walking outside	–3.29%	..
1985/89–1993/99 ⁷⁶	Finland	65–79	8	Yes, but under-represented	2251–2934	Women: use of stairs	–0.52%	..
1985/89–1993/99 ⁷⁶	Finland	65–79	8	Yes, but under-represented	2251–2934	Women: walking outside	–1.88%	..
1993–2002 ⁷⁰	Japan	>66	9	No	1786–2391	Walking 200–300 m	–1.47%	ns
1993–2002 ⁷⁰	Japan	>66	9	No	1786–2391	Standing	–0.37%	ns
1993–2002 ⁷⁰	Japan	>66	9	No	1786–2391	Walking up stairs	–1.83%	ns
1993–2002 ⁷⁰	Japan	>66	9	No	1786–2391	Use of stairs or walking	–1.74%	ns
1988–2000 ⁷⁷	Europe	>70	12	No	3496	Men: moving outdoors, walking up stairs, walking 400 m, carrying 5 kg	–0.17%	ns
1988–2000 ⁷⁷	Europe	>70	12	No	3496	Women: moving outdoors, walking up stairs, walking 400 m, carrying 5 kg	–0.33%	ns
1992–2002 ^{37,44,45,78*}	Sweden	>77	10	Yes	537–561	Walking 100 m, walking up stairs, rising from chair, standing	4.00%	0.01
1977–1999 ⁶⁹	USA	79–88	22	No	177–174	Women: walking up stairs to 2nd floor	–3.34%	0.01†
1977–1999 ⁶⁹	USA	79–88	22	No	177–174	Women: walking 0.5 miles	–2.62%	0.01†
1977–1999 ⁶⁹	USA	79–88	22	No	103–119	Men: walking up stairs to 2nd floor	–4.55%	0.01†
1977–1999 ⁶⁹	USA	79–88	22	No	103–119	Men: walking 0.5 miles	–0.61%	0.01†
1895 cohort vs 1905 cohort ⁷⁹	Denmark	>100	10	Yes	50–78	Community-dwelling women: walking indoors	–7.50%	0.01
1895 cohort vs 1905 cohort ⁷⁹	Denmark	>100	10	Yes	50–78	Community-dwelling women: getting outdoors	–5.13%	0.01
1895 cohort vs 1905 cohort ⁷⁹	Denmark	>100	10	Yes	50–78	Community-dwelling women: walking up stairs	–4.50%	0.01
1895 cohort vs 1905 cohort ⁷⁹	Denmark	>100	10	Yes	110–107	Women in institutions: walking indoors	–1.82%	0.23
1895 cohort vs 1905 cohort ⁷⁹	Denmark	>100	10	Yes	110–107	Women in institutions: getting outdoors	–4.19%	0.01
1895 cohort vs 1905 cohort ⁷⁹	Denmark	>100	10	Yes	110–107	Women in institutions: walking up stairs	–2.67%	0.01

Calculation of yearly change based on prevalences: (last year–first year)/first year/number of years in follow-up×100. Calculation of yearly change based on odds ratio: $-(1-OR)/\text{number of years in follow-up} \times 100$. Positive values show an increase in disability. Negative values show a reduction in disability. ns=not significant. *Data are derived from reference 37. †Significant for any limitations of the Rosow-Breslau scale: heavy work around the house, walk up or down stairs to second floor, walk 0.5 miles.

Table 3: Studies of yearly changes in mobility-related disabilities in high-income countries

Source: The Lancet
(Christensen et al.
2009)

'Mixed methods': The forest plot



Hybrid tables can be used to include numerical data alongside visualisations (in an orderly fashion)

Source:

<http://www.cienciasinseso.com/en/tag/forest-plot-en/>

The forest plot and regression results

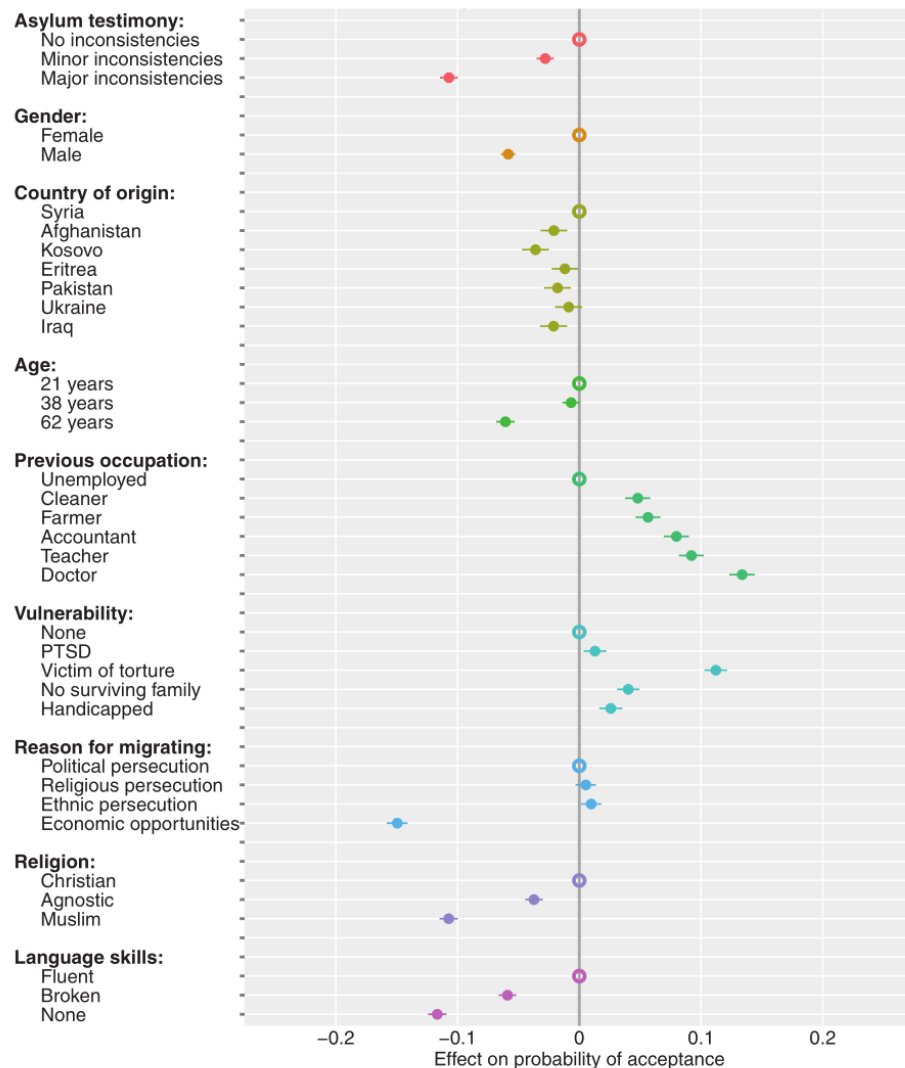
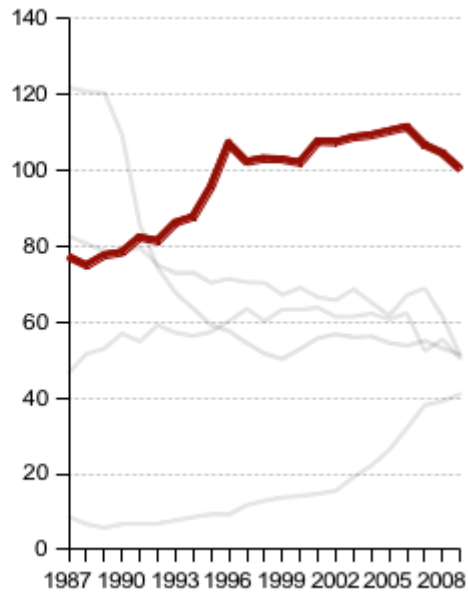
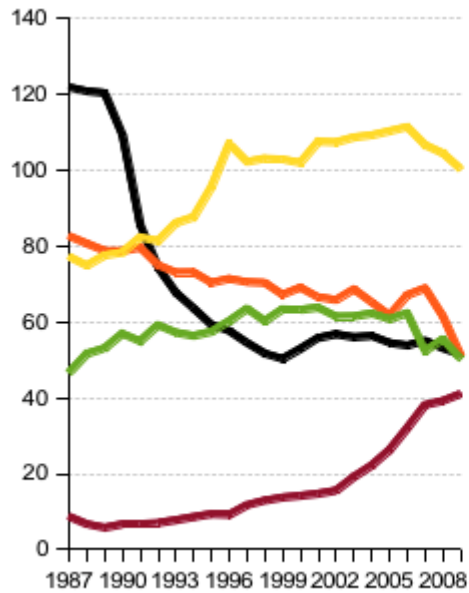


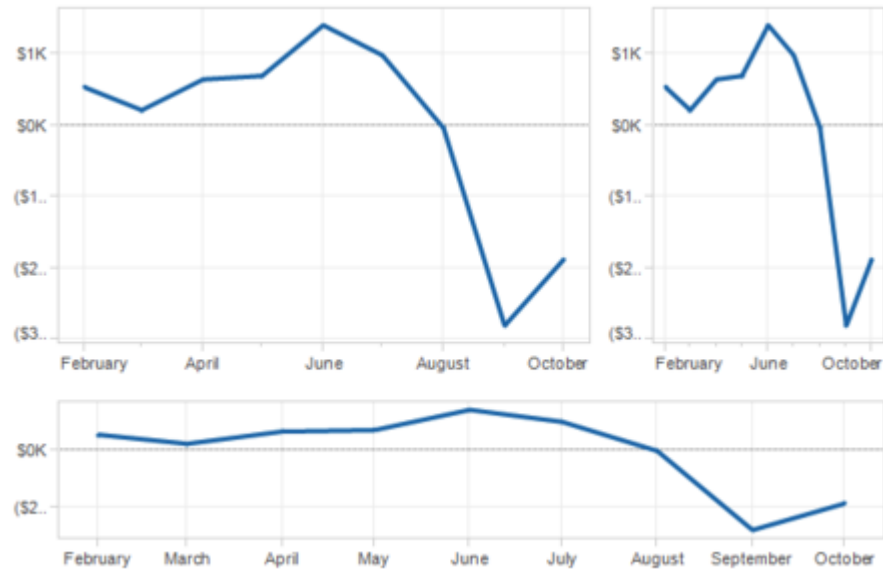
Fig. 2. Effects of asylum-seeker attributes on the probability that respondents accept the asylum seeker. Dots with horizontal lines indicate point estimates with cluster-robust 95% confidence intervals (CI) from linear (weighted) least squares regression. The unfilled dots on the zero line denote the reference category for each asylum-seeker attribute. Table S9 (model 1) displays the underlying regression results.

Some other quick thoughts

Highlighting the story



Using the correct aspect ratio



Colours

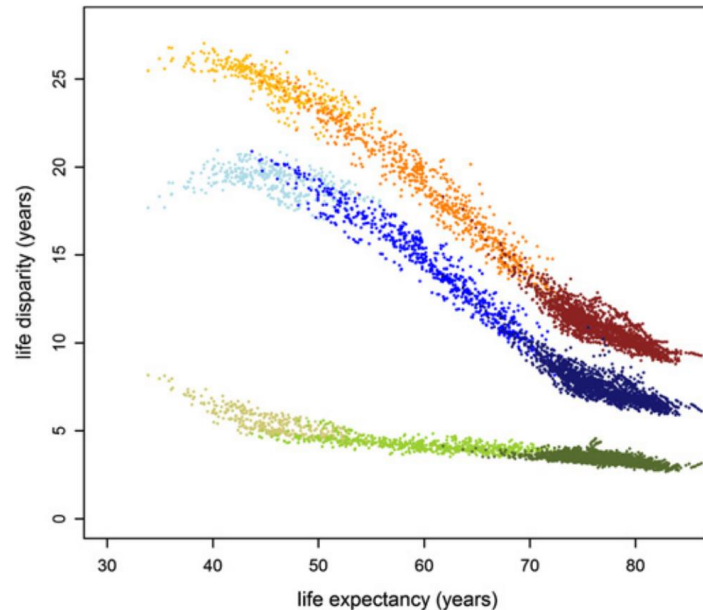
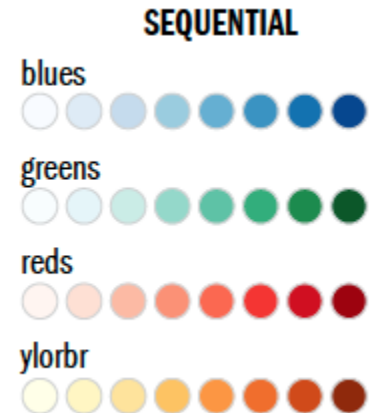


Figure 2 The relationship between total life disparity (red), early-life disparity up to the threshold age (blue) and late-life disparity after the threshold age (green). The darkest hues relate to data from 1950–2009, middle hues 1900–1949 and lightest hues 1840–1899. Total disparity is an additive function of early-life disparity and late-life disparity. Since 1840 the decrease in total life disparity has resulted from reductions in early-life disparity. The correlation coefficient between early-life disparity and total life disparity is 0.997 (95% CI 0.997 to 0.997). Late-life disparity has remained remarkably constant at about 5 years across a wide range of life expectancies. Hence, according to this measure, there has been neither a marked compression nor expansion of mortality at advanced ages as life expectancy has increased. Data are for females from the 40 countries and regions of the Human Mortality Database (see online supplementary table 1).

Source: BMJ Open
(Vaupel et al. 2011)



Use gradients / shades / line-types

Watch for colour-blindness

Don't rely on the colours

And remember that colours have meaning

Colours



Source:

<http://flowingdata.com/2012/11/09/incredibly-divided-nation-in-a-map/>

Ensure can be read in black & white
Avoid hatching and background shading

Maps

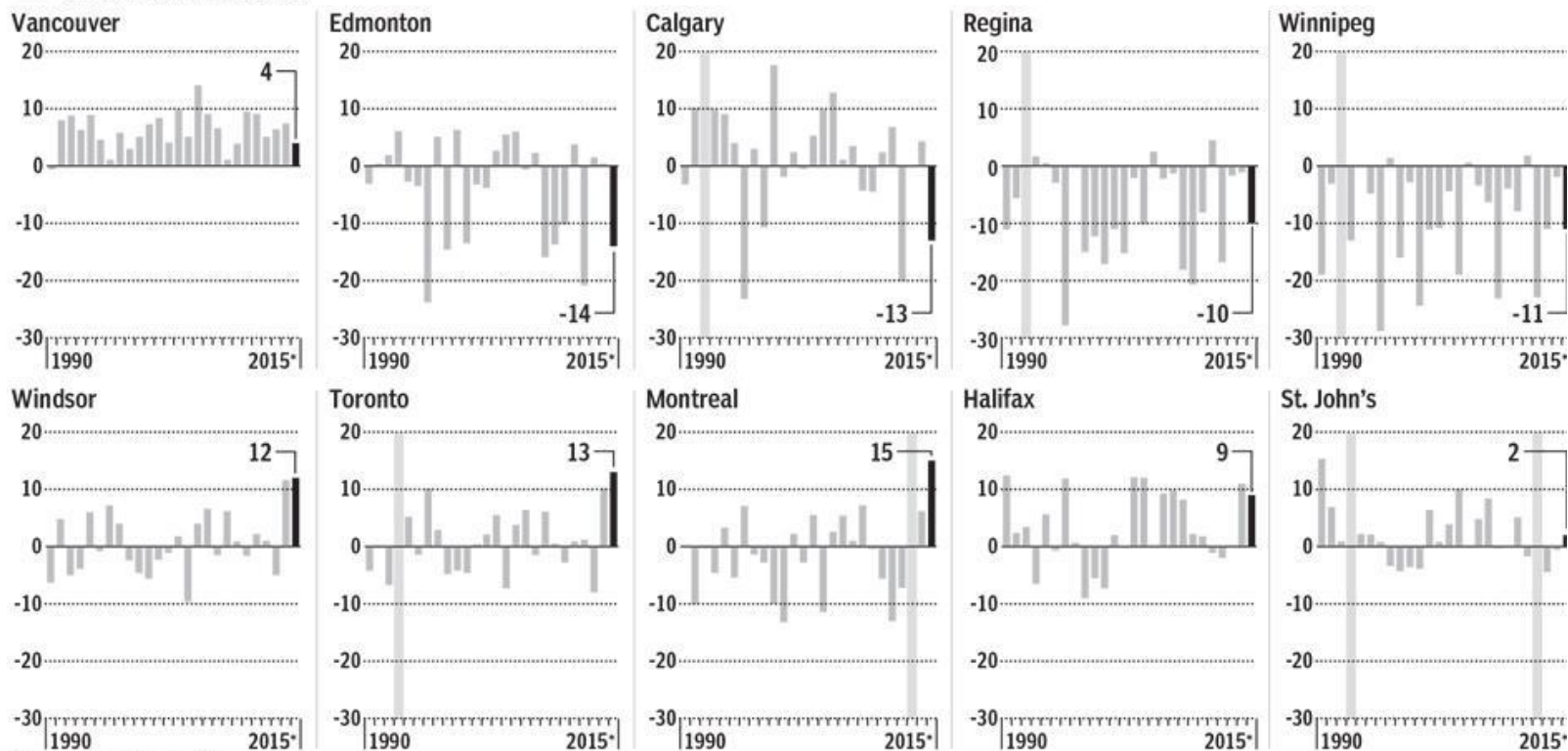


A specialist subject
Although the same principles apply

Small multiples

TEMPERATURE HIGHS FOR DEC. 24 IN DEGREES CELSIUS

DATA UNAVAILABLE



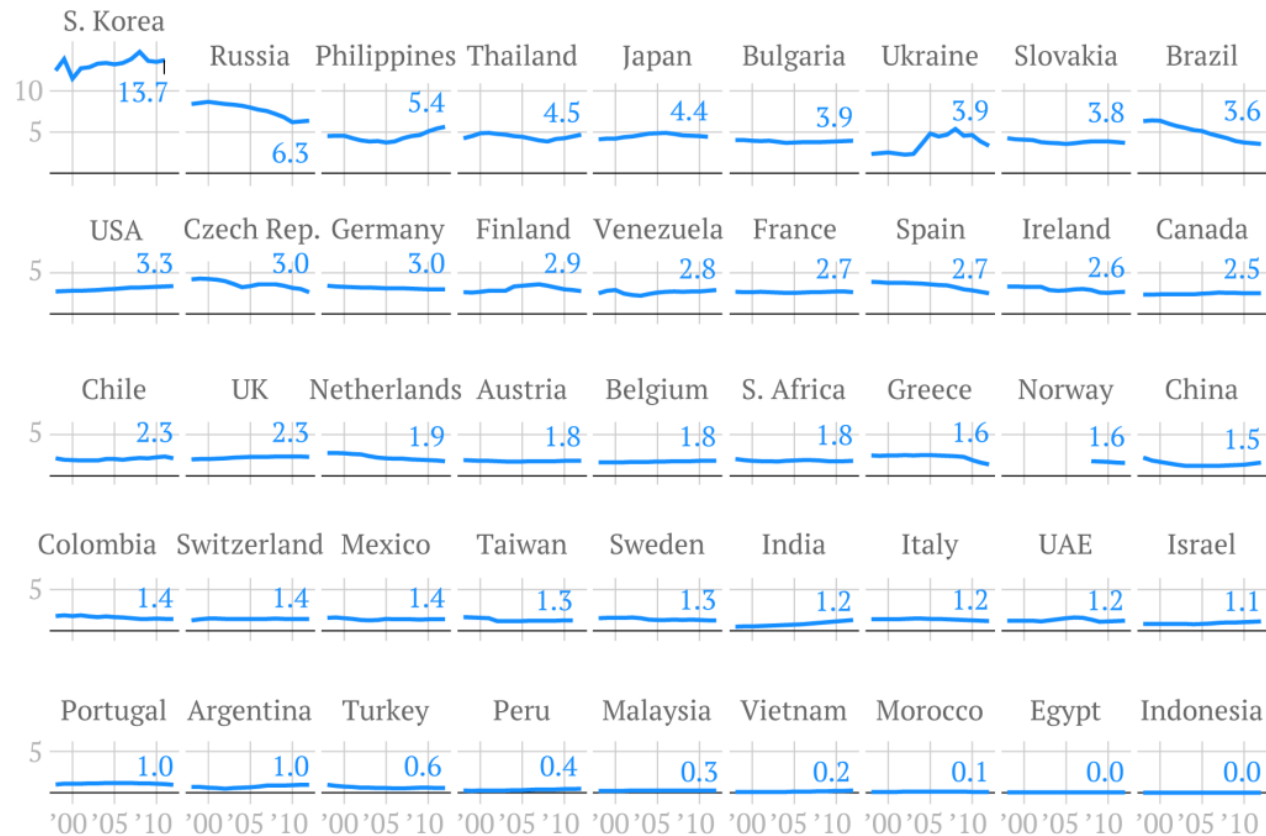
*Forecast as of press time
SOURCE: ENVIRONMENT CANADA

JONATHON RIVAIT / NATIONAL POST

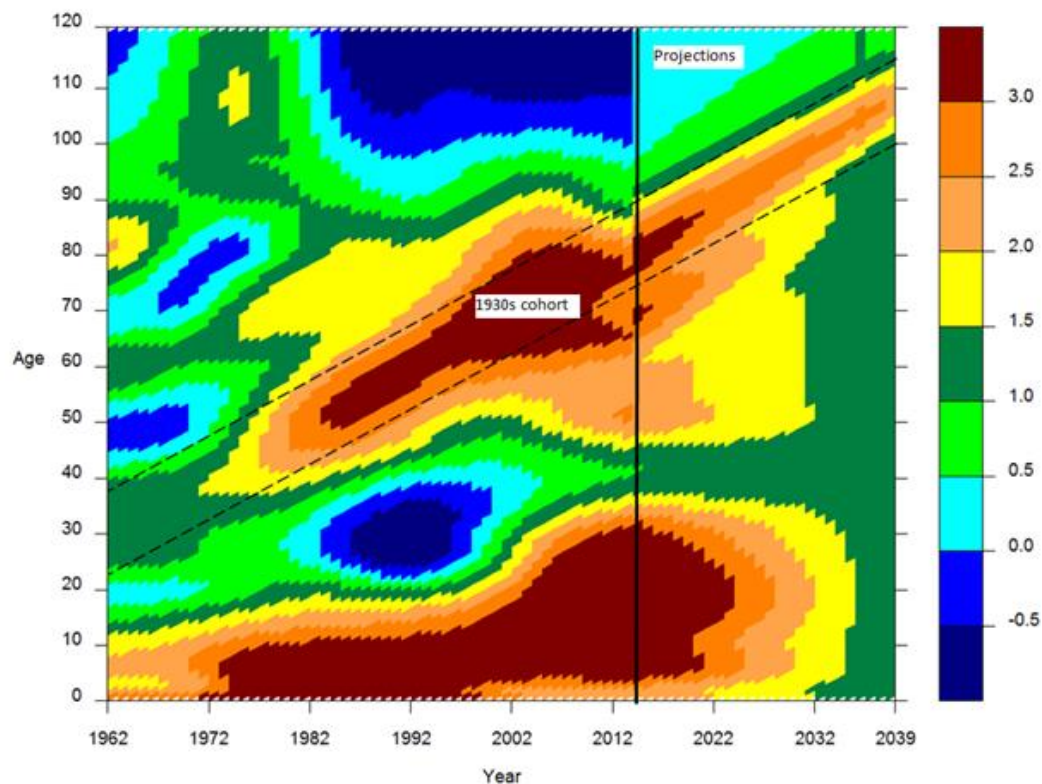
Ranked small multiples

The average amount of liquor consumed by a person of drinking age

Shots per week of any spirit



Specialist visualisations: The heat map



Note that some visualisations require knowledge or experience in order to interpret the data and the main story

They can be powerful if used appropriately...

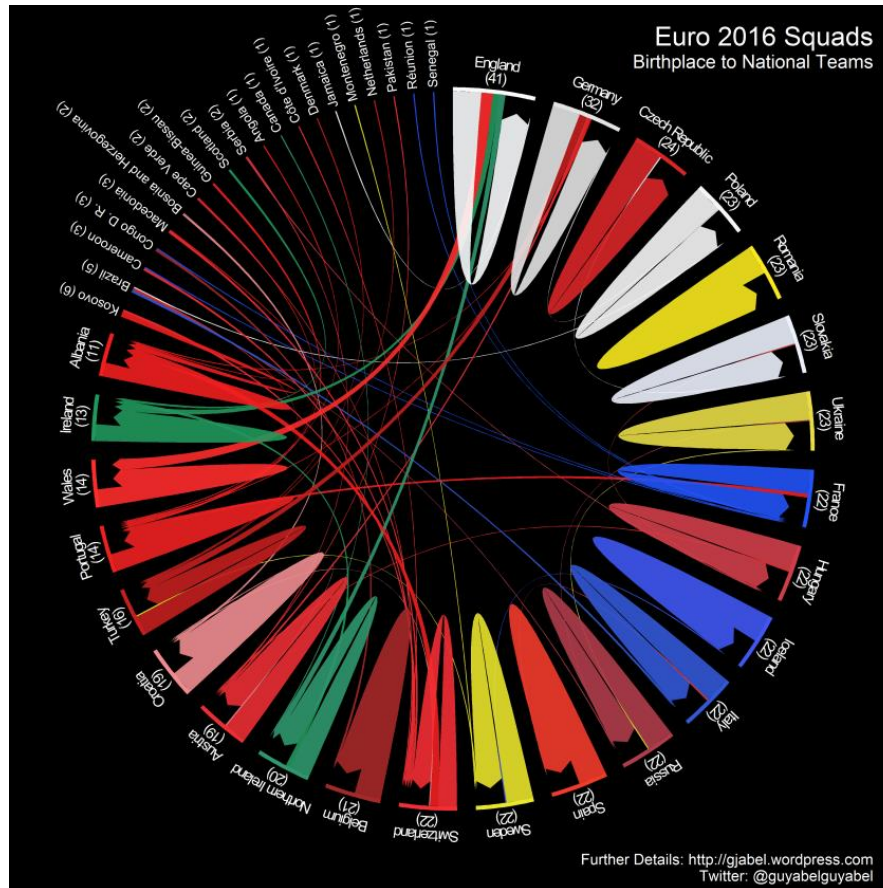
...but be aware that you need to explain, especially to the uninitiated

Source: ONS

Annualised rate of improvement in aggregate standardised mortality rates in England and Wales

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationprojections/compendium/nationalpopulationprojections/2014basedreferencevolumeseriespp2/chapter4mortality2014basednationalpopulationprojectionsreferencevolume>

Specialist visualisations: The circular plot



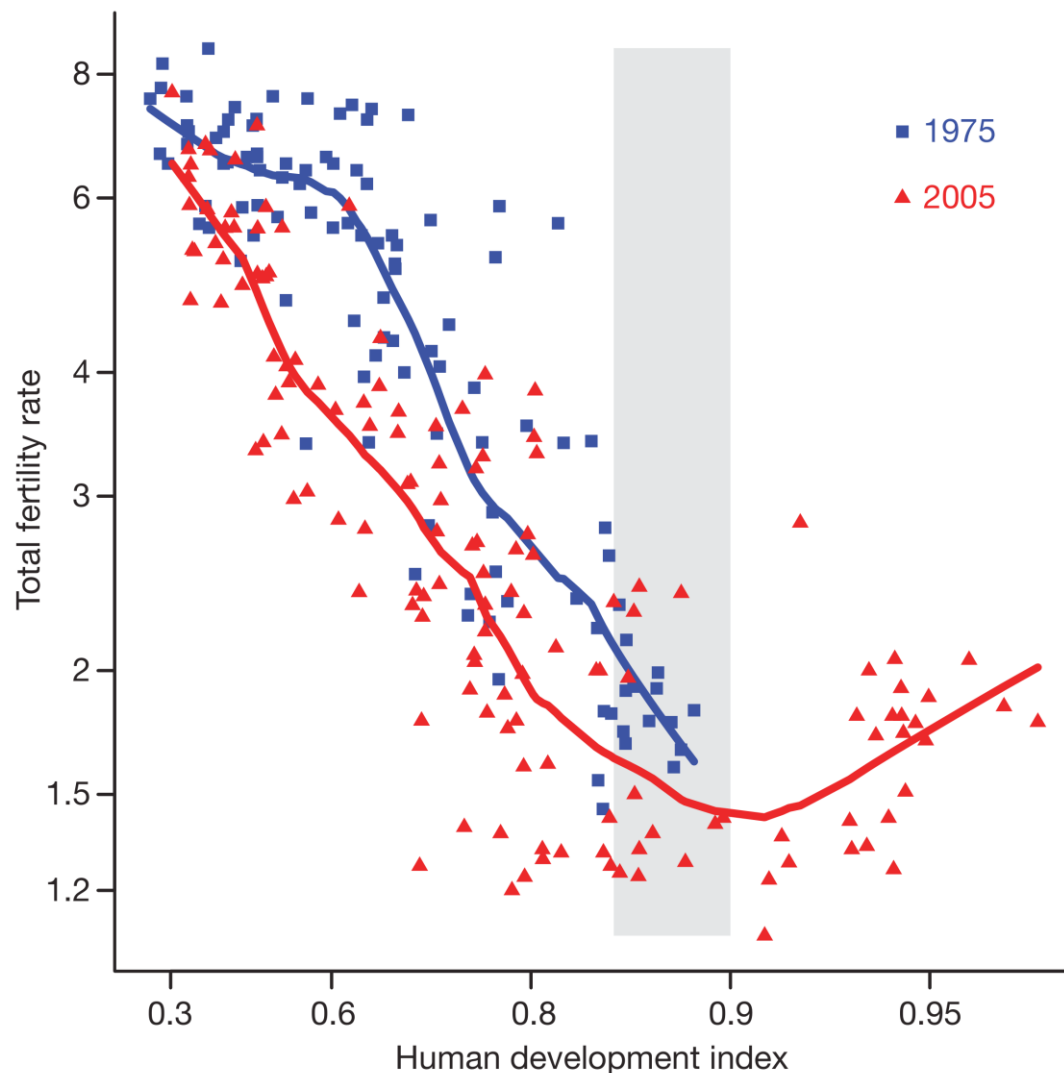
Note that some visualisations require knowledge or experience in order to interpret the data and the main story

They can be powerful if used appropriately...

...but be aware that you need to explain, especially to the uninitiated

Source: Guy Abel's website
<https://gjabel.wordpress.com/>

Find good examples in your research area



(Myrskylä et al. 2009)

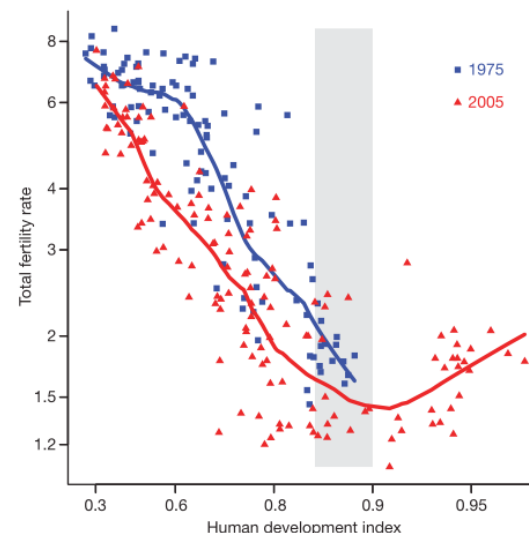
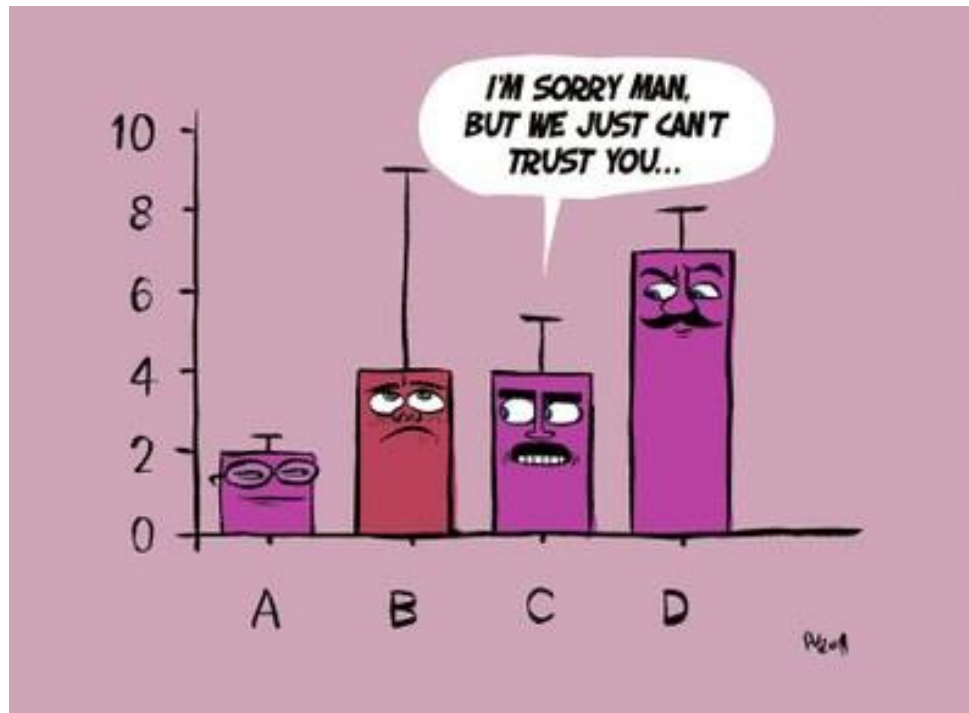


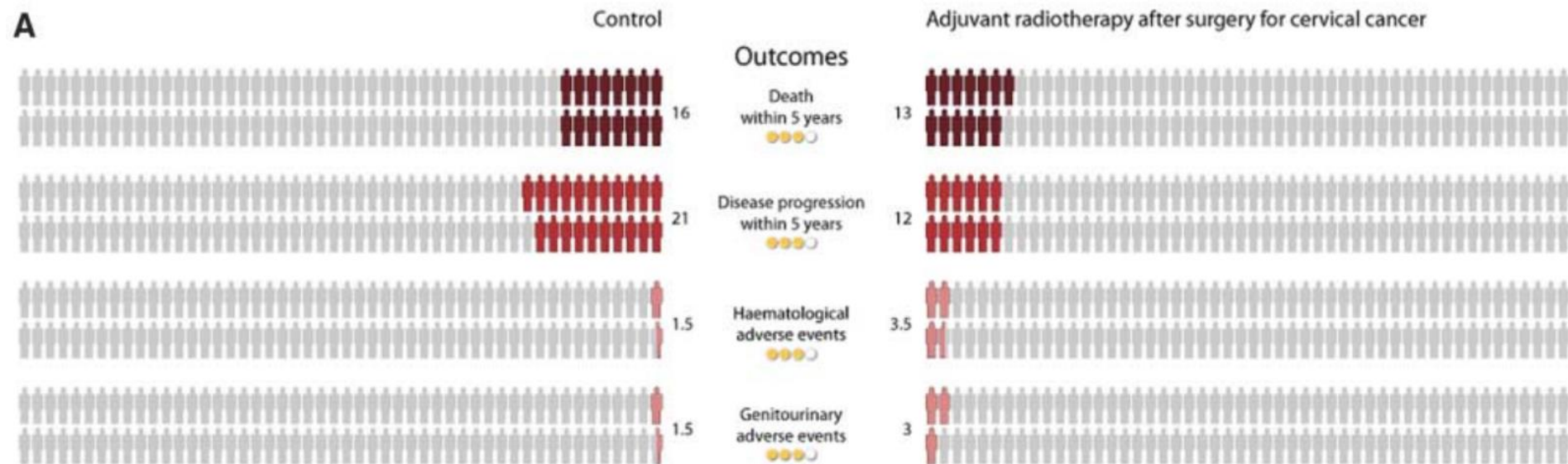
Figure 1 | Cross-sectional relationship between TFR and HDI in 1975 and 2005. The TFR reflects the number of children that would be born to a woman during her lifetime if she experienced the age-specific fertility rates observed in a calendar year. The HDI is the primary index used by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to monitor and evaluate broadly defined human development, combining with equal weight indicators of a country's health conditions, living standard and human capital¹¹. An HDI of 0.9 roughly corresponds to 75 years of life expectancy, a GDP per capita of 25,000 US dollars in year 2000 purchasing power parity, and a 0.95 education index (a weighted sum of standardized literacy rate and primary, secondary and tertiary level gross enrolment ratios). The 1975 data include 107 countries, with 1975 HDI levels ranging from 0.25 to 0.887, and 1975 TFR levels ranging from 1.45 to 8.5; the 2005 data include 140 countries, with 2005 HDI levels ranging from 0.3 to 0.966, and 2005 TFR levels ranging from 1.08 to 7.7. The Spearman's rank correlation between HDI and TFR in 1975 is -0.85 ($P < 0.01$); the Spearman's rank correlation between HDI and TFR in 2005 is -0.84 ($P < 0.01$) for countries with $\text{HDI} < 0.85$, and 0.51 ($P < 0.01$) for countries with $\text{HDI} \geq 0.9$. For further details, see Supplementary Information. Countries with a 2005 HDI ≥ 0.9 include (2005 HDI in parentheses): Australia (0.966), Norway (0.961), Iceland (0.956), Ireland (0.95), Luxembourg (0.949), Sweden (0.947), Canada (0.946), Finland (0.945), France (0.945), the Netherlands (0.945), the United States (0.944), Denmark (0.943), Japan (0.943), Switzerland (0.942), Belgium (0.94), New Zealand (0.938), Spain (0.938), the United Kingdom (0.936), Austria (0.934), Italy (0.934), Israel (0.922), Greece (0.918), Germany (0.916), Slovenia (0.913) and South Korea (0.911).

And don't be afraid to communicate complexity or uncertainty



Source: The importance of uncertainty, Berkeley Science review.

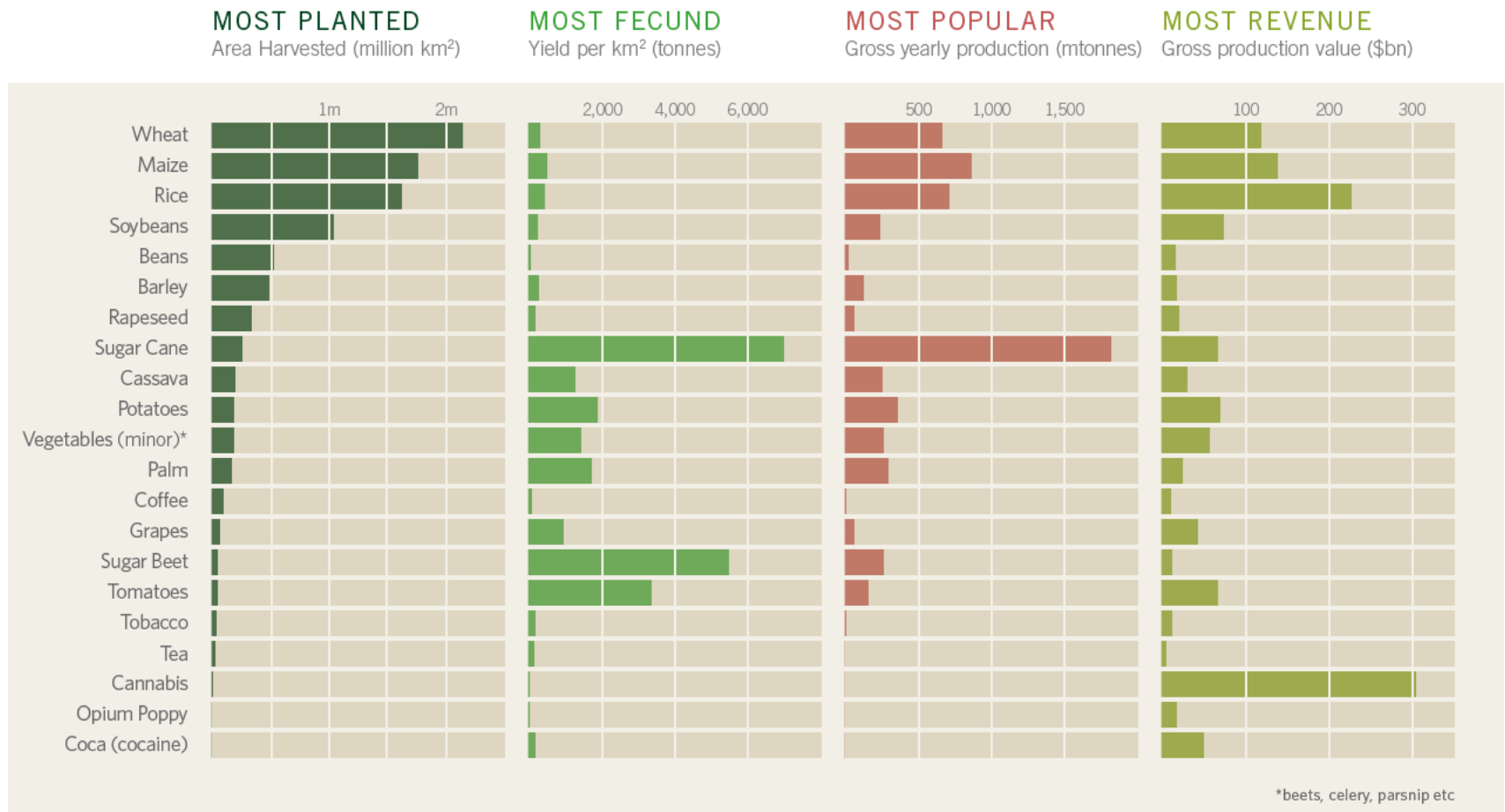
Visualizing uncertainty



Spiegelhalter, D., Pearson, M., & Short, I. (2011).
Visualizing uncertainty about the future. *Science*,
333(6048), 1393–1400.

For inspiration, you can look at the work of (some) graphic designers

What is the world's biggest cash crop?



Source: David McCandless - <http://www.informationisbeautiful.net/>

Also, consider historical examples

- Florence Nightingale (1820–1910)
- British nurse working during the Crimean War (1853-1856)
- Reformer of nursing and sanitation for the rest of her life
- The first female Fellow of the Royal Statistical Society



Image from <http://www.royal.gov.uk/output/Page3943.asp>
[Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons

Also, consider historical examples

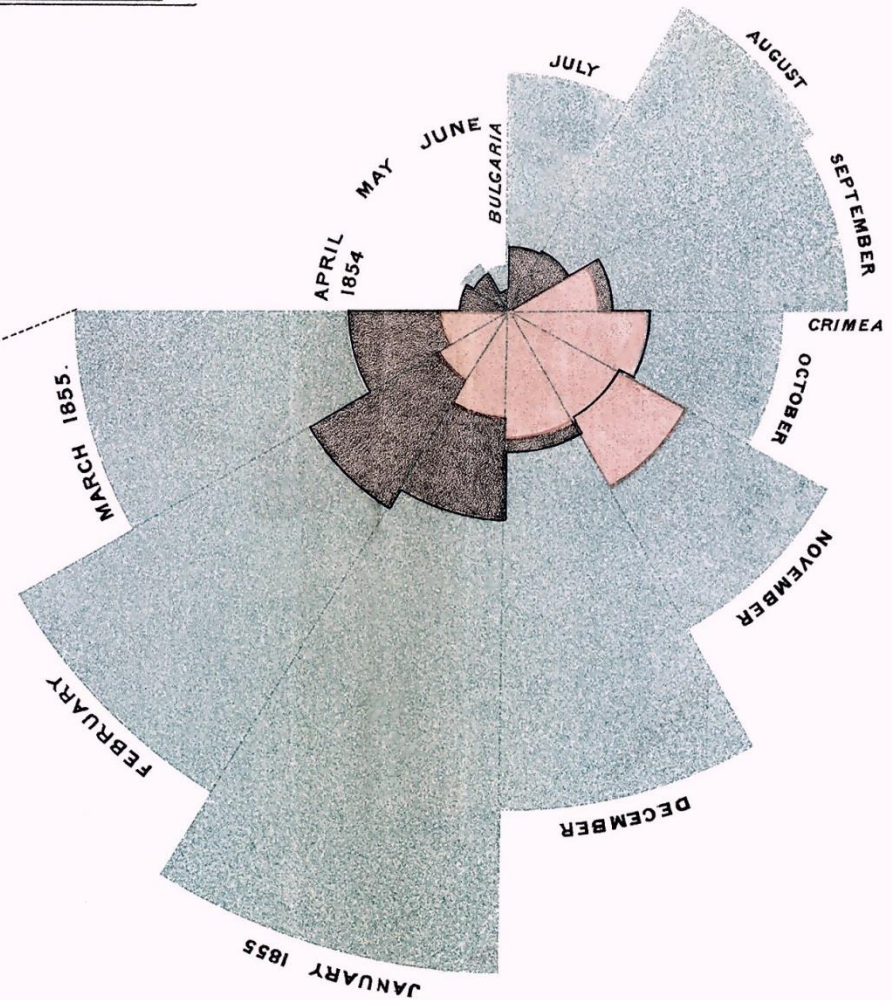
- In field hospitals in the Crimea, realised fatalities were more often caused by poor sanitation, hygiene and malnutrition than directly by battle wounds
- Collected and published statistical data to campaign for improved standards in hospitals



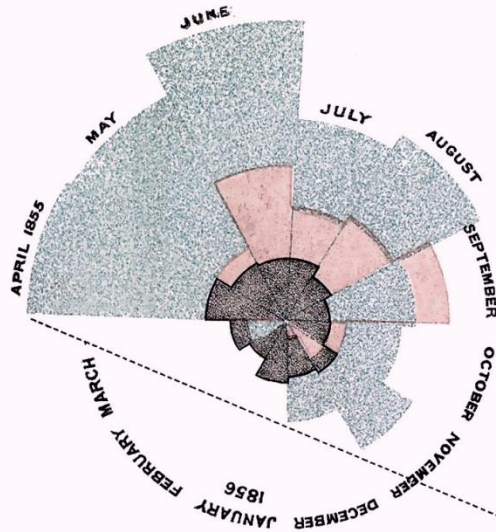
Famous 'coxcomb' charts, published in Notes on Matters Affecting the Health, Efficiency, and Hospital Administration of the British Army in 1858

DIAGRAM OF THE CAUSES OF MORTALITY IN THE ARMY IN THE EAST.

1.
APRIL 1854 TO MARCH 1855.



2.
APRIL 1855 TO MARCH 1856.



The Areas of the blue, red, & black wedges are each measured from the centre as the common vertex.

The blue wedges measured from the centre of the circle represent area for area the deaths from Preventable or Mitigable Zymotic diseases; the red wedges measured from the centre the deaths from wounds; & the black wedges measured from the centre the deaths from all other causes.

The black line across the red triangle in Nov. 1854 marks the boundary of the deaths from all other causes during the month.

In October 1854, & April 1855, the black area coincides with the red; in January & February 1856, the blue coincides with the black.

The entire areas may be compared by following the blue, the red & the black lines enclosing them.

Charles Booth

Maps

Descriptive of London Poverty (1898-99)

From the project *Survey into Life and Labour in London*, 1886-1903








Based on observations made by investigators accompanying policemen on their beats around London

- › A series of maps produced covering various areas of London, with streets colour coded according to the level of wealth as judged by the investigators
 - a categorical variable with 7 categories
- › Extensive qualitative documentation and commentary on what the investigators observed in each street

LSE Library curates the Booth archives: <http://booth.lse.ac.uk/>

LSE Digital Library with the Geography Dept is piloting a mobile app to allow students to reproduce the methodology of the study <http://phone.booth.lse.ac.uk/>

Charles Booth's map

-  **BLACK:** Lowest class. Vicious, semi-criminal.
-  **DARK BLUE:** Very poor, casual. Chronic want.
-  **LIGHT BLUE:** Poor. 18s. to 21s. a week for a moderate family
-  **PURPLE:** Mixed. Some comfortable others poor
-  **PINK:** Fairly comfortable. Good ordinary earnings.
-  **RED:** Middle class. Well-to-do.
-  **YELLOW:** Upper-middle and Upper classes. Wealthy.



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References and resources

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<http://www.guardian.co.uk/data>

<http://junkcharts.typepad.com/>

<http://visualrhetoric.ac.uk/>

<http://viz.wtf/>

Also, have a look at the work of graphic designers like David McCandless:

<http://www.informationisbeautiful.net/>