



When is an online response a real human response?



In our world, online surveys are the survey norm. However, online survey methodologies expose themselves to 'scams' of one type or another (e.g., 'speeders' and 'straight-liners', BOTS).

The trend is most obvious with online surveys which involve an 'open' survey audience (i.e., survey invitations are not personalised and sent to named individuals).

Below is a list (our policy) of what we do to ensure an online response is a real response, by an actual human who has taken the time to actually read and consider the survey questions before providing a response.

As part of the development of an online survey, we include:

- A captcha at the beginning of the survey.
- An open-ended question (or several), which requires a human response.

During the interviewing itself, and post-interviewing before any analysis is completed, the survey response is checked for:

- 'Speeders' and 'straight-liners'.
- Duplicate responses to structured questions, often within seconds of each other.
- Duplicate answers to open-ended questions and answers which make absolutely no sense.
- AI composed answers to open-ended questions, although we note that some respondents are increasingly using AI to 'polish' their answers to these questions.
- Consistency of response (e.g., a positive correlation between age and income).
- Multiple responses from the same location (IP address), or if the IP address is one that is based overseas.

Responses which are clearly suspect are immediately removed and replaced if possible, and those which are suspected of being fraudulent are more thoroughly checked, usually against protocols set beforehand with the client.

Legitimising surveys

Relatedly, and to avoid appearing to be scammers ourselves when we launch our online surveys, we offer multiple options for potential respondents to access these surveys (in addition to the usual practice of clicking on a link) including:

- Copying and pasting the link into their browser's URL bar.
- Going to our website <https://www.researchnz.com/surveys> and clicking on the specific survey they wish to complete and entering a personalised 'Survey Access Code' they have been provided in the survey invitation email.
- Or, calling **0800 500 168** and quoting the specific ID number. All projects have a specific public email folder which is monitored on a daily basis.

We also encourage our clients to send a 'heads-up' email to potential respondents and provide them with a contact email address for validation purposes, as well as provide information about the survey on our website.

Annual penetration testing

We have just successfully completed our annual penetration test with Bastion Security (an independent cyber security provider based in Wellington). For those who don't know, this is a controlled simulation of cyberattacks on systems, networks, or applications to identify and fix vulnerabilities before malicious actors exploit them.

Polling

With forecasters and politicians suggesting that the economy is showing some 'green shoots', house sales and retail figures point to the opposite, with the rate of inflation on the rise again and the unemployment rate being the highest it's been since 2015.

Against this background, we decided to complete another one of our cost-of-living polls; the sixth in the series, with the first completed three years ago in March 2023.

The following table presents the current results in comparison to the previous five polls.

"IN A NUTSHELL, THIS POLL SHOWS THAT FOR MANY NEW ZEALANDERS, THE SITUATION IS UNCHANGED, WITH ONE-IN-EVERY TWO RESPONDENTS REPORTING THEY STRUGGLED TO PAY FOR EVERYDAY ITEMS IN THE LAST 3 MONTHS OR SIMPLY WENT WITHOUT."



Time series - Given the current cost of living crisis, which of the following (if any) have applied to you in the last three months? Have you ...?

	TOTAL FEB 2026	TOTAL JUL 2025	TOTAL FEB 2025	TOTAL MAY 2024	TOTAL JUL 2023	TOTAL MAR 2023
Unweighted base =	1009	1024	1004	1016	1000	1000
Struggled to pay for essential bills such as power/water/internet.	36%	34%	33%*	28%*	32%*	27%
Gone without medical or a doctor's care when feeling unwell due to cost concerns (including prescriptions, visits, telehealth etc.).	34%	34%	33%	34%	33%	32%
Been unable to buy things that were needed (such as clothing or school supplies).	30%	31%	31%	30%	33%	30%
Struggled to pay for the cost of transport (for example bus or train tickets, or fuel for a car, etc.).	29%	30%	29%	28%*	32%	29%
Struggled to pay rent or mortgage payments .	26%*	30%*	26%*	23%*	29%*	24%
Gone without basics such as food and groceries.	25%	25%	24%	24%	26%	23%

* Statistically significant result in comparison to previous poll.

If you would like to contact us, please do so by ringing Emanuel Kalafatelis (Managing Partner) on **027 500 4401**, or emailing him on emanuel@researchnz.com.

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