



7 filtering techniques for getting better data

Learn how to hone and clean up your survey results for survey analysis.

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Why use filters?

Looking at raw data isn't always informative. If you look only at individual responses or only at overall averages, you'll miss seeing some valuable trends. It's often only once you've cleaned up and organized your data into distinct sections that you start to see patterns emerge.

One of the best (and most basic) tools for analyzing survey data with SurveyMonkey is the Filter tool. It allows you to organize your responses so that you can home in on a specific subset of your data.

The beauty of filters is in their versatility. This guide will show you how to use them in two ways:

Data analysis: Learn to use basic and advanced filtering techniques to get a more detailed picture of your data.

Data quality: Find out how to use filters to sort out bad or unwanted responses so that your data is squeaky clean before you start your analysis.

How to use filters in SurveyMonkey:

Click on the +Filter button at the top left of the Analyze page. From there, you can create a new filter, which gets saved in your left-hand-side navigation bar.

As you go through your analysis, you can turn each filter you create on or off without deleting the filters themselves.

Using filters for deeper analysis

Filters are key for data analysis. You can use basic filters to track broad trends in your data or zoom in and look at the most subtle patterns in your responses. Let's start with the most basic filtering techniques and move on to the advanced.

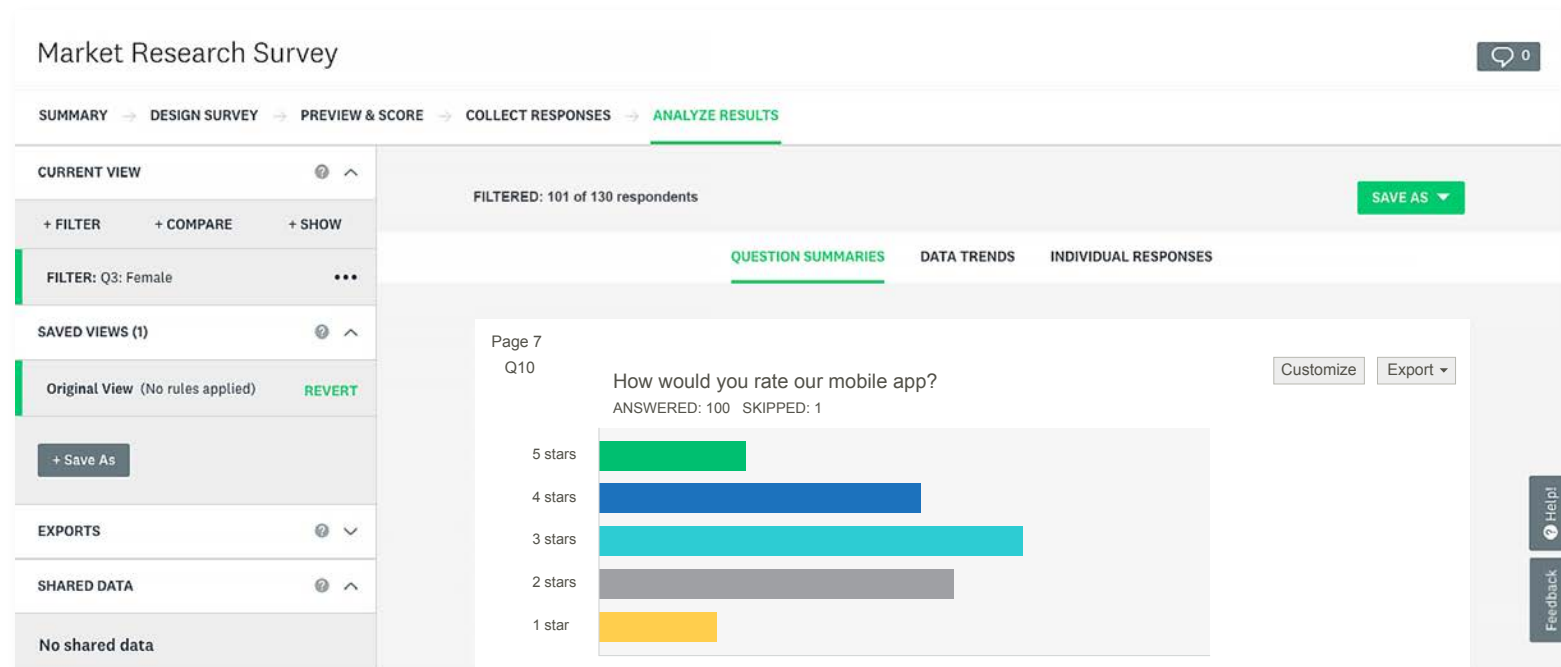
Filter by question and answer

Filtering by question and answer lets you see only the responses from people who responded to a question in a certain way.

Filter by demographic: One common technique for using this filtering method is to ask demographic questions in your survey and then filter based on how people respond to them. **This allows you to find differences in opinion between men and women, older and younger respondents, or any other question you may have asked.**

For example, let's say you're writing a market research survey to learn what women think about your company's new mobile app. Here's what the results to that survey may look like

Notice how the filter for “Q3: Female” is checked, and the graph displays results just for the 100 of the 130 total respondents who are women.

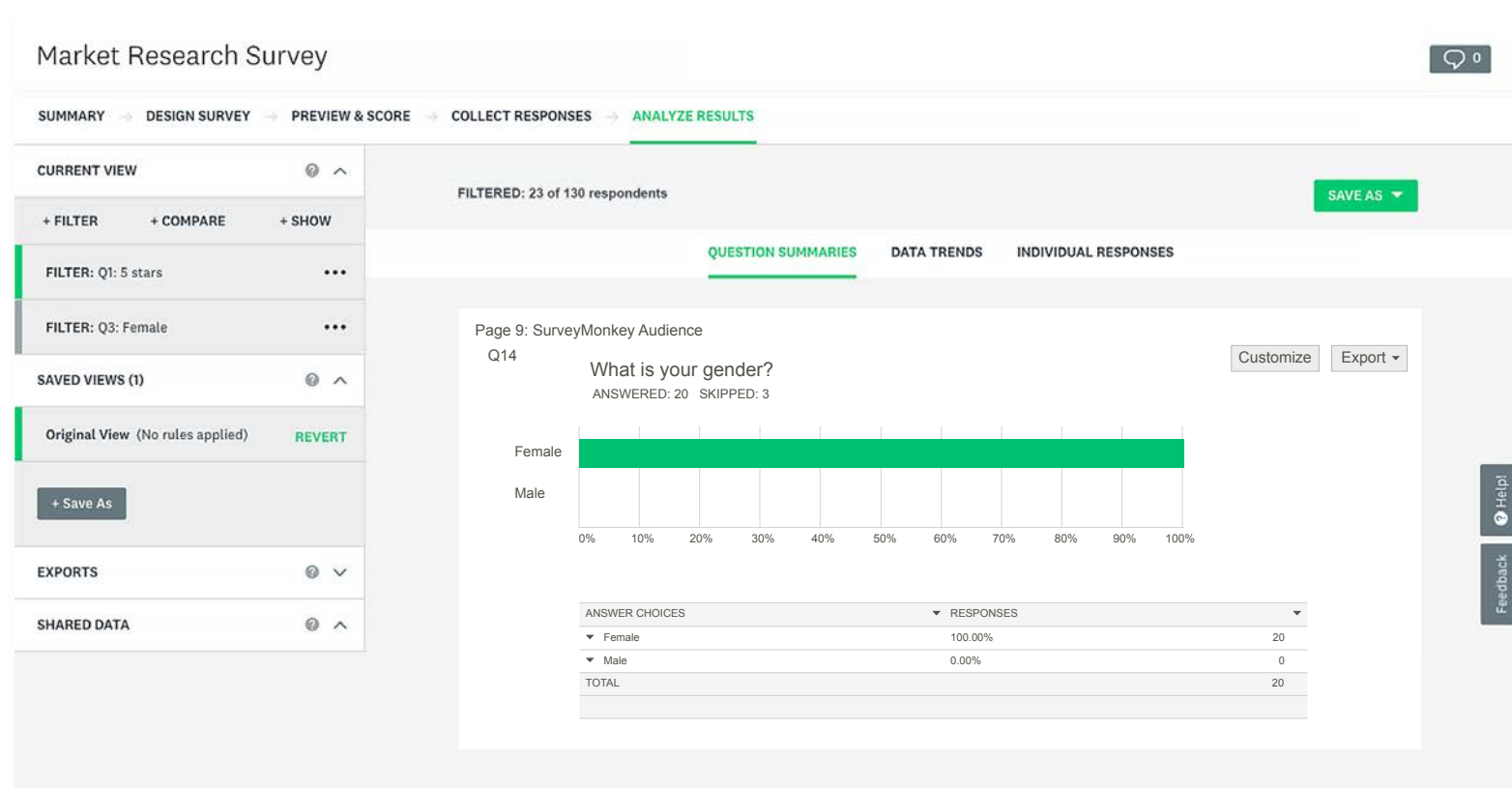


Filter by key item: Alternatively, question and answer filters also work great if there are a few questions in your survey that are the most important. If you're most interested in finding out how people rate your app, for example, it's probably a good idea to set up a filter for that question.

Here, we've set up a filter for Q1, instead of Q3, filtering to see only those who gave it 5 stars.

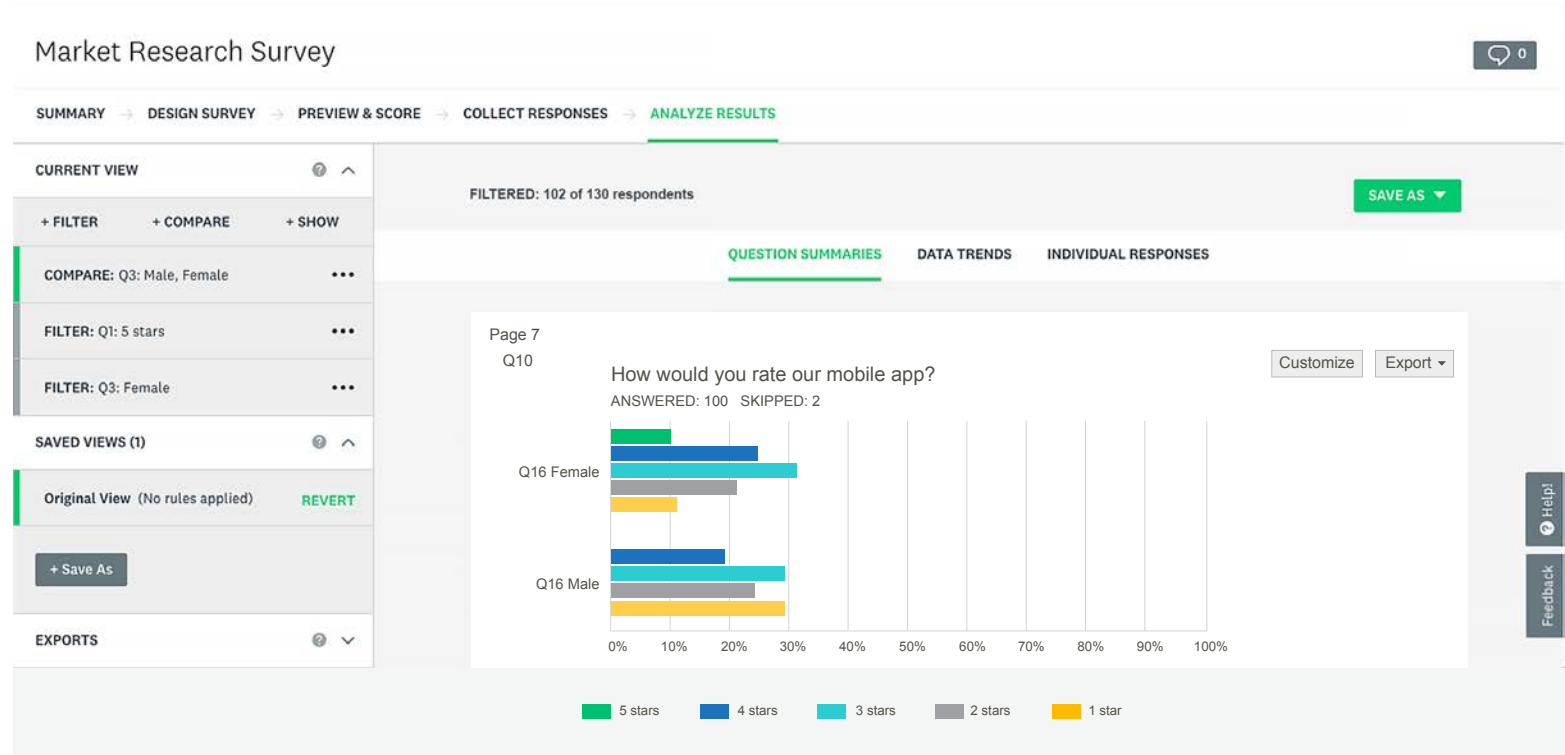
That way, you can work backward, looking at the demographics or other responses of the people who gave your app 5 stars, 4 stars, 3 stars, etc.

Here, we can see that all 20 respondents who gave the app 5 stars were women.



Tip:

Click **+Compare** instead of +Filter if you want to view responses for two or more groups side by side.

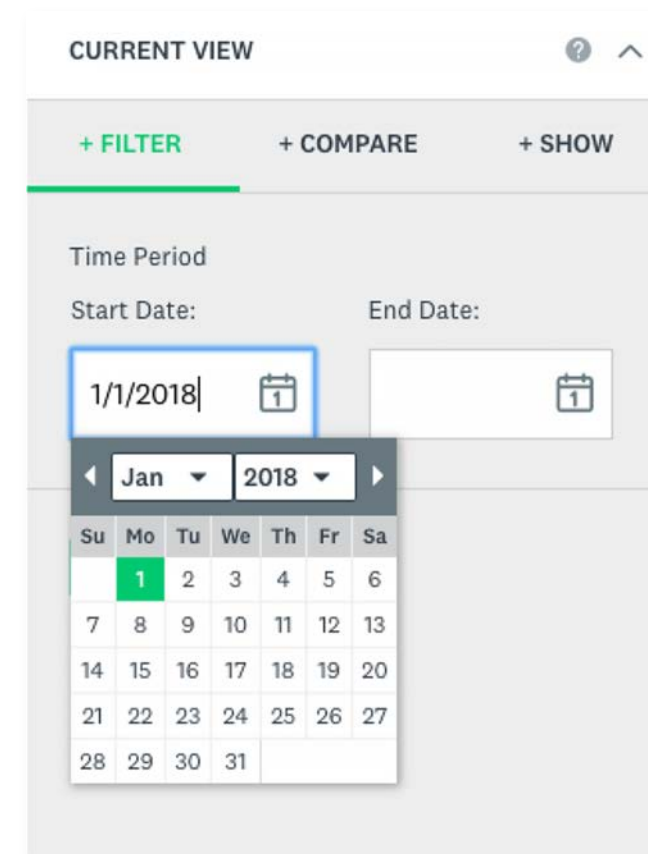


Filter by date

If you're thinking ahead, you can time your survey to set up a natural experiment, in which some event outside of your control divides your analysis into two distinct groups.

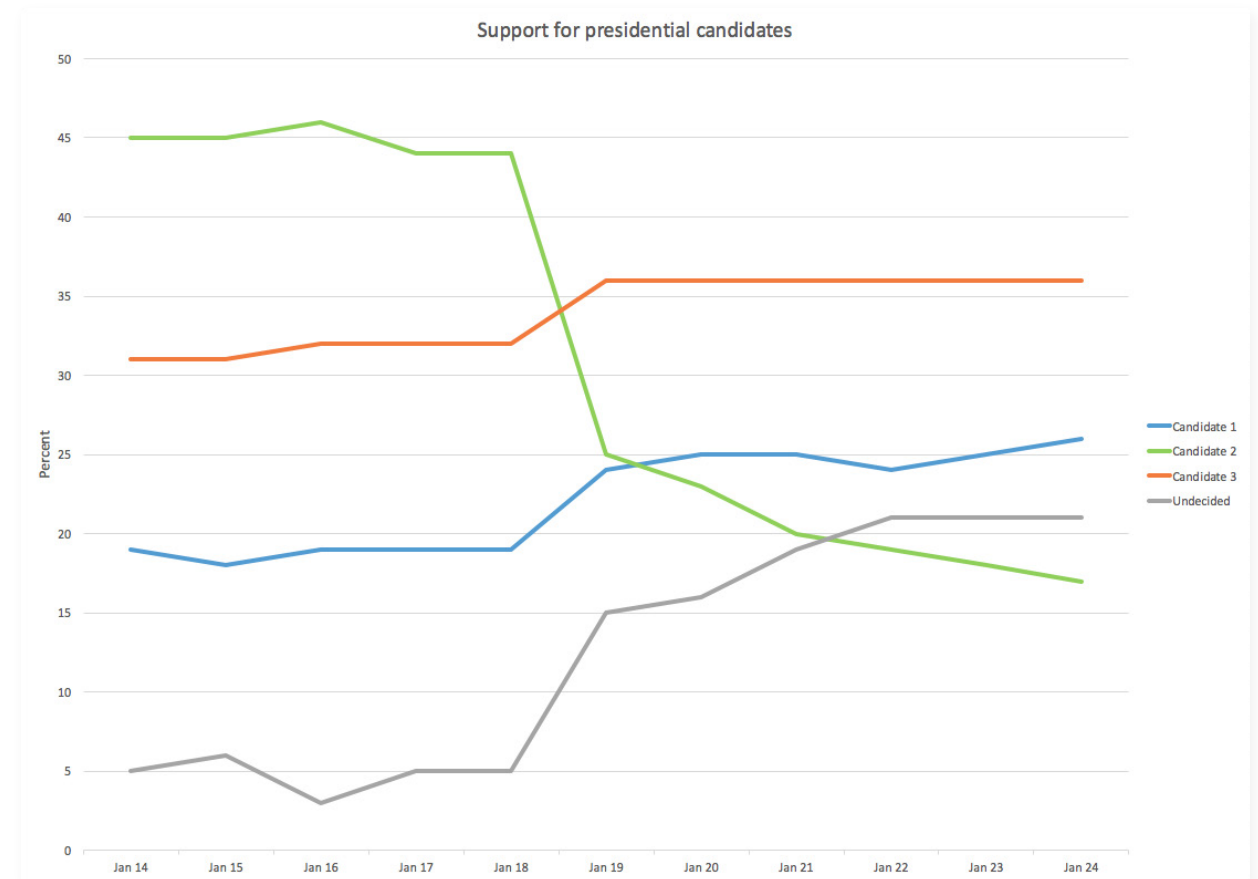
For example, say you're running a political poll. If you know an important debate is scheduled for a certain date, start your survey a few days prior and continue surveying for a few days after the debate to see how opinions change in real time.

Then, you'll have results from two very different groups of people: those who responded before the debate and those who responded after it. If one candidate has a disastrous debate performance, you can filter by date to see if there was a direct effect on your data.



The beauty of filtering by date for surveys that you're running continuously is that you can see exactly how even unexpected events affect your data.

For example, let's say there was no debate on January 18. Instead, it was the day a big scandal about Candidate 2 was revealed. If you're continuously surveying and filtering by date, you can still see how the scandal might affect the data—even if you weren't expecting the news to break.



Filtering by collector

Probably the simplest way to sort your survey responses is to filter by collector. Collectors are the delivery devices for your surveys and can generally be broken into 3 types:

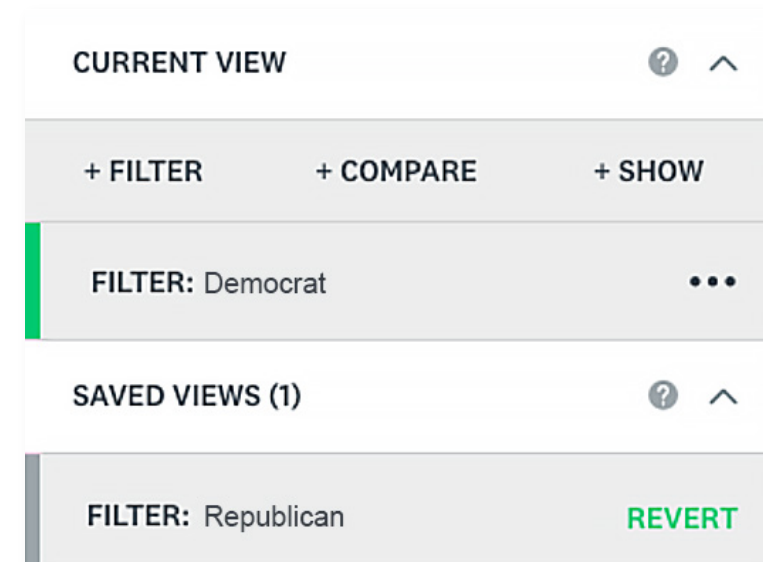
- Web (or social) link
- Email invitation
- Website embed

Filtering by collector is perfect for seeing how different groups of people respond differently to your surveys.

For example, let's say it's an election year and you want to poll people in your area about which presidential candidate they support. The local Republican and Democratic parties each give you a list of emails for everyone who voted in the last primary.

Rather than sending a separate survey to each of these groups, you can create a single survey and assign each group a different collector. Once you have your results, you can filter by collector to track how Democratic and Republican voters compare.

To view only the responses from Democrats or only those from Republicans, turn on the corresponding filter; to view all responses together, turn both filters off.



Stacking filters

If you have a Standard, Advantage or Premier SurveyMonkey account, you can set up multiple filters to drill down even further.

Let's say you want to look not just at women's opinions, but mothers of teenagers who have high household income and live in California.

The screenshot shows the SurveyMonkey 'ANALYZE RESULTS' page for a 'Market Research Survey'. The breadcrumb trail is: SUMMARY → DESIGN SURVEY → PREVIEW & SCORE → COLLECT RESPONSES → ANALYZE RESULTS. The current view is 'FILTERED: 30 of 130 respondents'. On the left sidebar, under 'CURRENT VIEW', several filters are stacked: FILTER: Q4: California, FILTER: Q7: Income brackets 3 & 4, FILTER: Q6: Children age 13-18, FILTER: Q1: 5 stars, and FILTER: Q3: Female. Below this, under 'SAVED VIEWS (1)', there is a saved view named 'Mothers of children age 13-18, in California, Income brackets 3 & 4' with 'SAVE' and 'REVERT' buttons. The main content area shows 'QUESTION SUMMARIES' for 'Page 7 Q10: How would you rate our mobile app?'. The chart shows the distribution of ratings: 5 stars (green, ~12%), 4 stars (blue, ~32%), 3 stars (teal, ~20%), 2 stars (grey, ~18%), and 1 star (yellow, ~18%). The x-axis represents percentages from 0% to 100%. There are 'Customize' and 'Export' buttons for the chart.

Notice how we started with 100 female respondents, but after adding additional filters for “children age 13-18,” “income bracket 3 & 4”, and “California,” we’ve narrowed that down to the 30 people who fit the exact criteria that we want.

Tip

If you’re happy with the filters you’ve set, save them as a **View**. That way, the next time you log in to your account, you don’t have to mess with your filter settings again. See the saved View in the example above.

You can also create multiple views, like those for Mothers of children age 0-12 and Women without children above, and toggle between them to examine the differences in responses.

Checking for data quality with filters

Filters are an easy way to generate the tables and charts you need, but they're also a quick way to check for problems with your data so you can clean and edit it.

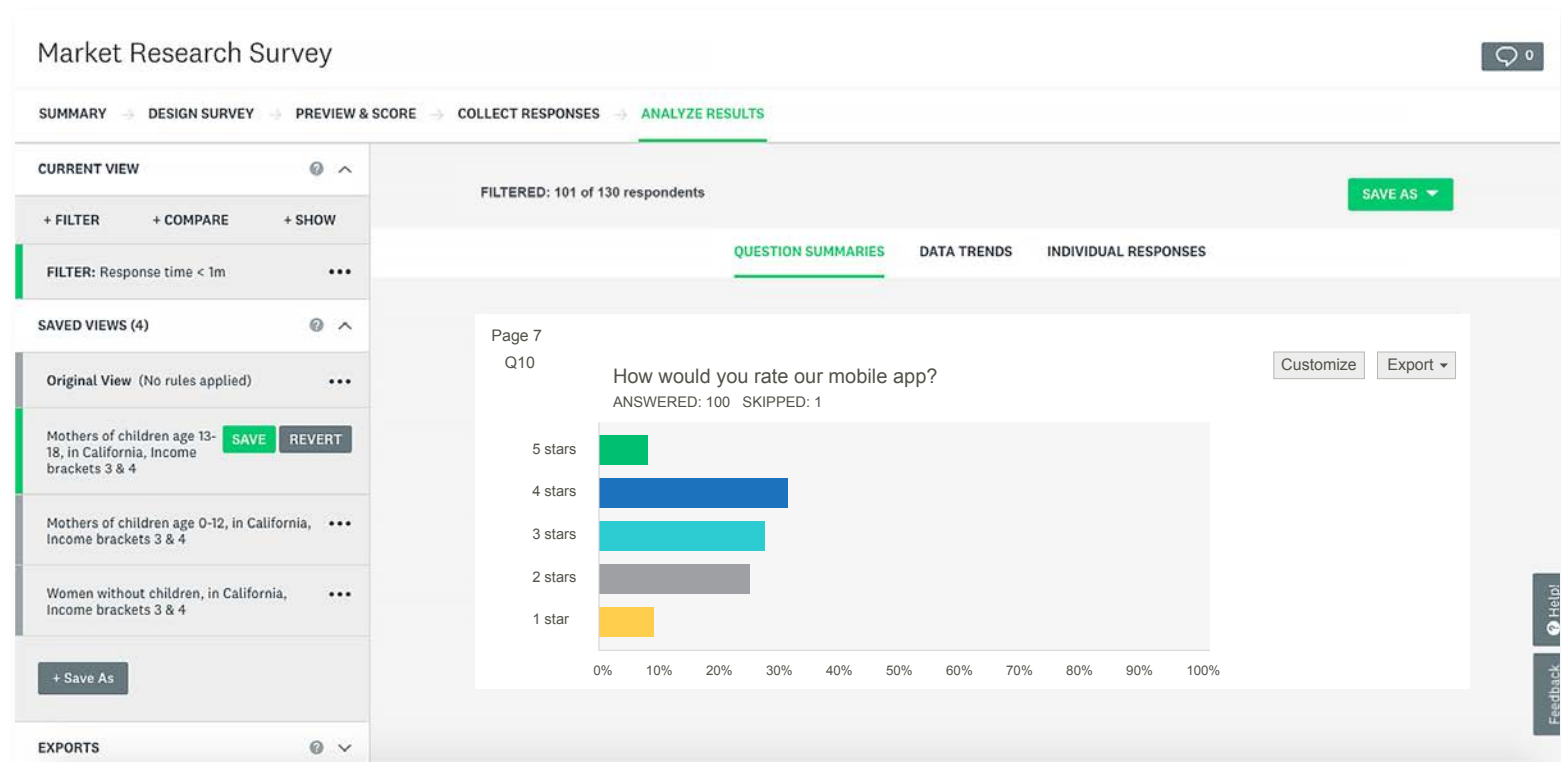
Filter out speeders

Respondents who speed through your survey might not be giving their best responses. Speeding is associated with poor data quality, like skipping questions and giving shorter answers to open-ended questions.

- Estimate how long it should take someone to complete your survey
- Set a filter to differentiate between those who took less and those who took more time from start to finish.
- Examine your data to see whether the results from the “speeders” look different than the results from everyone else.

From there, it’s up to you to make a judgment call about whether to remove those speeders from your analysis or leave them in.

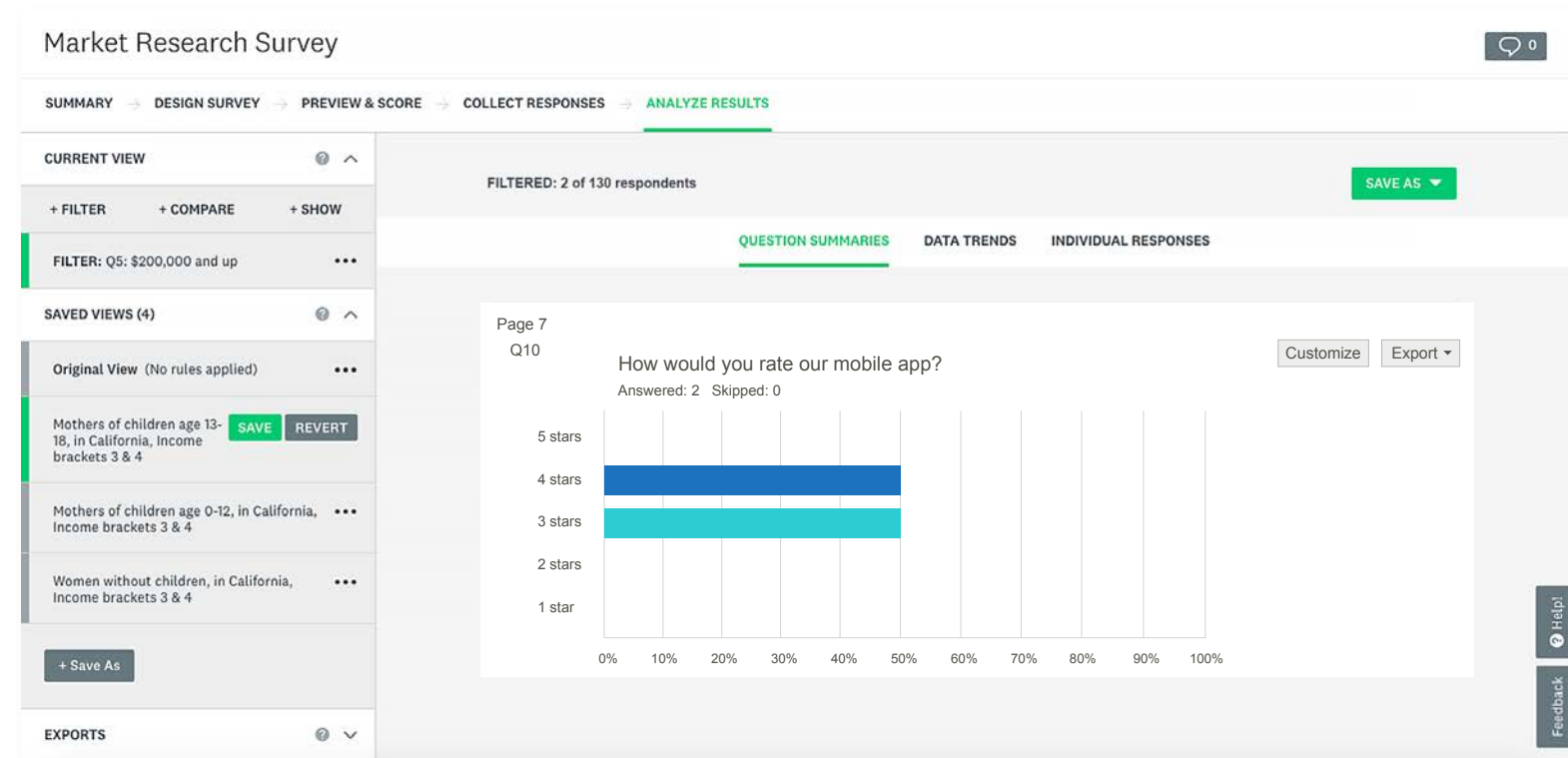
Here, it looks like the speeders had a similar distribution of product reviews as your total respondents. Your data is looking good!



Filter out outliers

Sometimes you'll get responses that are way off the charts; these are known as outliers. You might want to filter out any respondents who are giving answers that seem unlikely (for example, someone who says he's 120 years old) or unrepresentative of your population of interest (for example, someone who has a very high income).

In this example, we filtered out the 2 respondents who had annual incomes greater than \$200,000.



Filter out partial completes

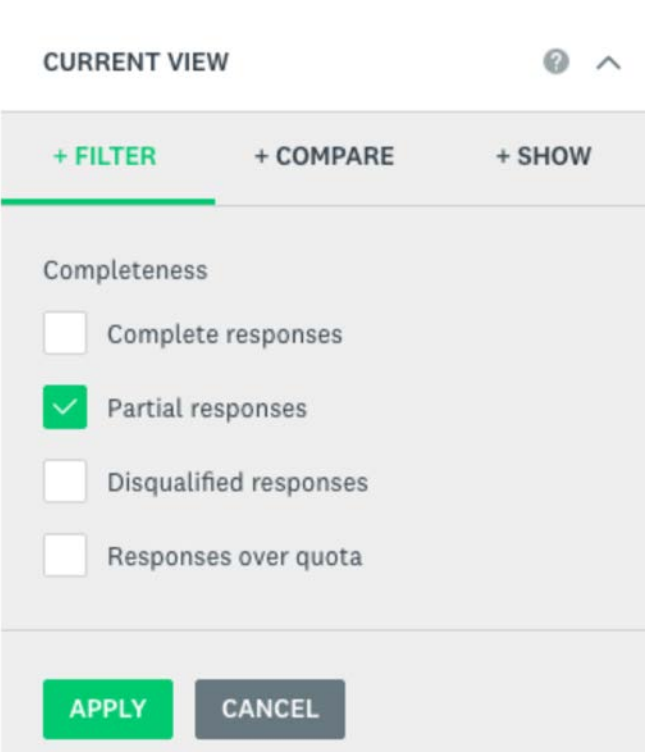
There will always be some people who start your survey but abandon it later for one reason or another. Those people are known as “partial completes,” while the people that make it to the end of your survey and click the **Done** button are counted as “completes.”

Tip

One thing you want to watch out for is having a large number of partial completes who drop out at the same point in the survey. **It might be the result of a flawed question or a poor survey design.**

Filtering out the partial completes will let you see whether one question had a particularly steep drop-off in respondents so you can understand any flaws in your survey and plan better for the next round.

Filtering just for completes ensures that you’re only looking at data that comes from those people who’ve made it all the way through your survey.



The screenshot shows the 'CURRENT VIEW' filter menu in SurveyMonkey. At the top, there are three tabs: '+ FILTER' (highlighted with a green underline), '+ COMPARE', and '+ SHOW'. Below the tabs, under the heading 'Completeness', there are four options with checkboxes:

- Complete responses
- Partial responses
- Disqualified responses
- Responses over quota

At the bottom of the menu, there are two buttons: 'APPLY' (in green) and 'CANCEL' (in grey).

Conclusion

Filters are useful throughout the analysis phase of your survey projects. They help give you clean, focused data that produce impactful, accurate insights. Knowing the different functions of the Filter tool and when and how to use them is critical to this. Whether you use them to zoom in on an important subset of your respondents or to make sure you're getting responses from only your most engaged respondents, filters can be invaluable for uncovering meaningful insights.