



Redesigning Economist Charts Activity

Icon: chart by Setyo Ari Wibowo from the Noun Project



Redesigning Economist Charts

Group Activity Instructions

- Split class into groups of 2-4 people
- Each group will receive a chart
- Answer the following questions about the chart:
 - What message is the chart trying to get across?
 - What is misleading about this chart or preventing the message from getting across?
 - With the above questions in mind, how would you redesign the chart? Sketch out or use your preferred visualization software to redesign the chart.
- Share redesigns and discuss.

[slide that you would show the class]



Redesigning Economist Charts

Group Activity Instructions (for instructor)

- Split class into small groups (2-4 people)
- Give each group an original chart from <https://medium.economist.com/mistakes-weve-drawn-a-few-8cdd8a42d368>
- Ask each group to answer the following questions about the chart:
 - What message is the chart trying to get across?
 - What is misleading about this chart or preventing this message from getting across?
 - With the above questions in mind, how would you redesign the chart? Sketch out or use your preferred visualization software to redesign the chart.
- If possible, pop into each group briefly to make sure they're not overwhelmed/spiralling
- Ask each group to share their redesign and show the better versions from the article.
 - Discuss the misleading and confusing elements and if the group found something different than the article. Great chance to talk about differences in perspectives and the many ways to visualize the same data.
 - If demonstrating a particular software, you could also demonstrate how to adjust scale and colors

Possible concern is that students may not be as familiar with Western economics concepts like trade deficit, GDP, and surplus so maybe be prepared to provide some context if needed

Some interesting themes that might come up in discussion: who is the likely audience of this publication? What can they be expected to understand?

If these examples are not great for your audience, here are some other thoughts:

- <https://www.alteryx.com/input/coronavirus-data-visualizations-and-how-charts-lie>
- <https://www.makeovermonday.co.uk/makeovers/>
- <https://nsgrantham.shinyapps.io/tidyuesdayrocks/>

Three levels of interpretation of the actual redesign:

1. What principles of “good design” / “bad design” do you see here? How do they change from initial design to redesign?
2. What do you think this redesign says about the context in which it was released (The Economist) and the intended audience? Why do you think this team made these decisions?
3. What ideas and assumptions are embedded in this redesign? What might the

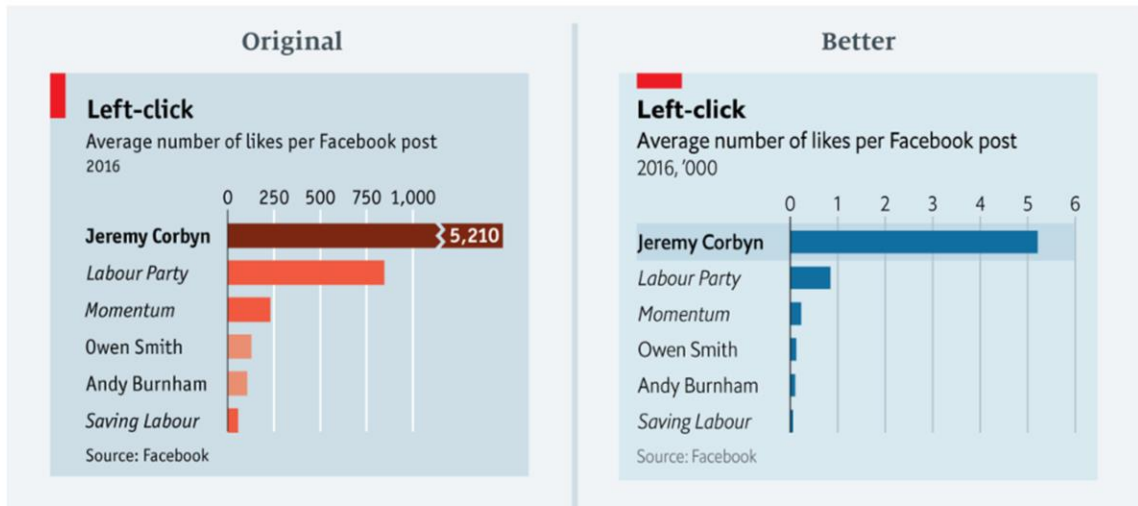
team have done differently (ie missed in the redesign) that could have helped the audience understand the ideas better?



What were the solutions from
The Economist?



Left-click



<https://medium.economist.com/mistakes-weve-drawn-a-few-8cdd8a42d368>

Message the chart is trying to get across: How far Jeremy Corbyn surpasses other British political parties and candidates in the number of Facebook likes.

What is misleading about this chart or preventing this message from getting across:

The truncated scale.

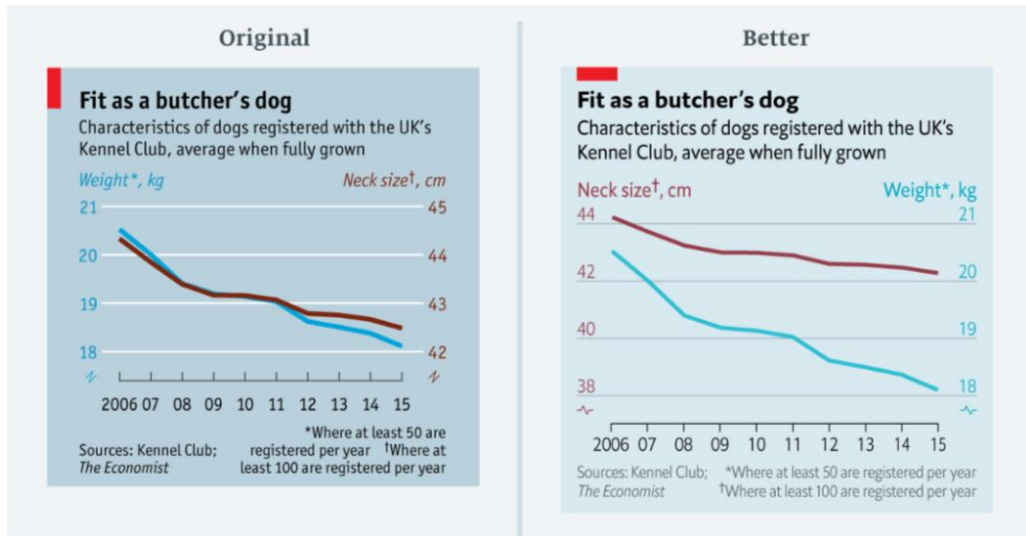
Other improvements made to the chart: move to a single color for the bars

Other things to note: Potential confusion of thousands notation in better chart

Easy



Fit as a butcher's dog



<https://medium.economist.com/mistakes-weve-drawn-a-few-8cdd8a42d368>

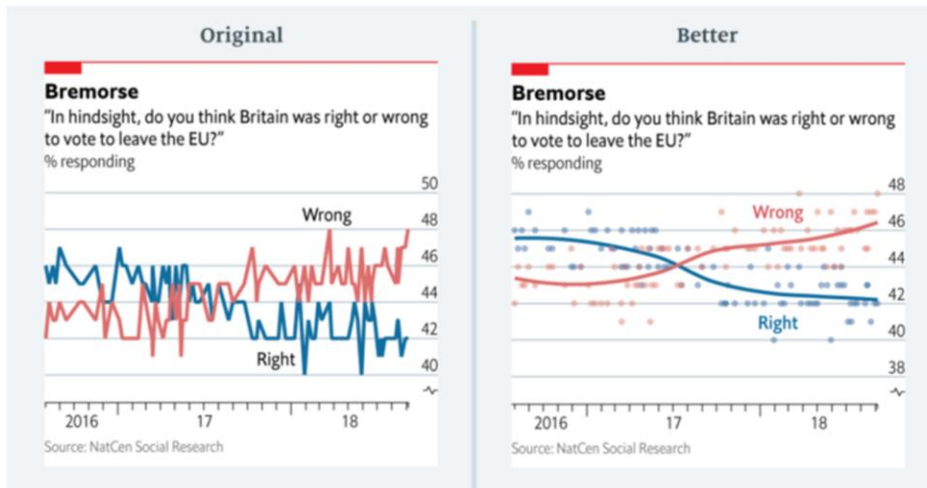
Message the chart is trying to get across: Neck size and weight dogs registered with the UK's Kennel Club are decreasing at the same rate

What is misleading about this chart or preventing this message from getting across: Forced relationship by selecting scales. Issues of indexing, starting point of a scale.

Difficult

Note: this might be difficult to pick out. The way to see the difference is look at difference in percentage. Could be a class example with the whole class at the end (either work through whole thing as a big group discussion or present the before to everyone and have them break out again to brainstorm redesigns) or challenge question (try this in your small group if you finish early).

Bremorse



<https://medium.economist.com/mistakes-weve-drawn-a-few-8cdd8a42d368>

Message this chart is trying to get across: Increasing number of respondents believe it was wrong for Britain to leave the EU, decreasing number of respondents believe it was right for Britain to leave the EU

What is misleading about this chart or preventing this message from getting across: Hard to see the general trend with the line chart type, overemphasizes the smaller fluctuations

Easy



Free markets and free workers



<https://medium.economist.com/mistakes-weve-drawn-a-few-8cdd8a42d368>

Message this chart is trying to get across: Relationship between trade deficit with China and manufacturing employment, trade deficit is increasing while manufacturing employment is decreasing

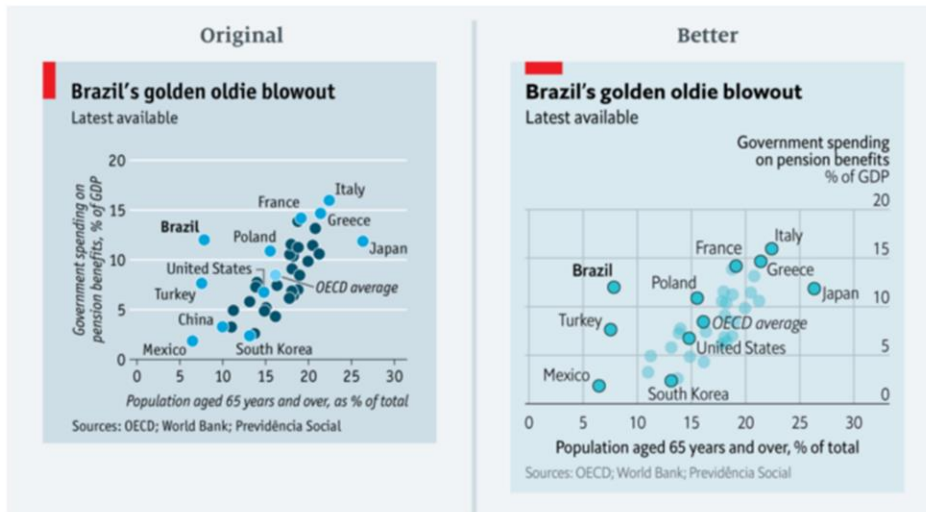
What is misleading about this chart or preventing this message from getting across: Difficult to read because left axis is negative and reads top to bottom, where the right axis reads from bottom to top

Hint for the group: look at the axes

Medium



Brazil's golden oldie blowout



<https://medium.economist.com/mistakes-weve-drawn-a-few-8cd8a42d368>

Message this chart is trying to get across: Brazil is paying a lot in pension considering it has a small portion of the population over 65, with other countries highlighted for comparison

What is misleading about this chart or preventing this message from getting across: color (specifically hue) implies there are different groups when there are no categories, multiple colors are distracting

Something to note: Inclusion of both gridlines to better highlight the intersection between the age and spending, why were these countries chosen to be labeled? Easy



The Economist

Menu Weekly edition Search

Finance & economics

Sep 3rd 2016 edition

Free exchange

More spend, less thrift

German budget surpluses are bad for the global economy

Germany compared to Greece, Netherlands, and Spain in the article



<https://medium.economist.com/mistakes-weve-drawn-a-few-8cdd8a42d368>

Message this chart is trying to get across: Highlight the amount of surplus in Germany's budget (very hard to get just by looking at the chart - better understanding of context based on article it appears in)

What is misleading about this chart or preventing this message from getting across: Too many colors, too many countries included (accompanying article only mentioned a few countries)

Note: probably should not be a stacked chart because positive and negative amounts not added together. Not sure if this is common in economics.

Might make more sense as a Fishbone diagram or waterfall chart

Medium (with article context) - easy fix for design, harder if you think about the numbers

Icon

- chart by Setyo Ari Wibowo from the Noun Project