



Social Mobility

The Sutton Trust

Ipsos MORI



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The literature - definitions

- Social mobility is typically defined as the movement of individuals across occupational class or income structure over time
- Social mobility may be **INTER**-generational or **INTRA**-generational
 - *Inter*-generational refers to movement across the class or income structure *between* the generations i.e. mobility from childhood to current location in adulthood
 - *Intra*-generational refers to movement across an individual's working life i.e. mobility from first job to final job
- Social mobility may be **ABSOLUTE** or **RELATIVE**
 - **Absolute mobility rates** refer to changes in the occupational class or income structure at the aggregate level and are most useful when the focus of interest is on describing structural change. Rates will inevitably be positive given the general upgrading of the occupational structure and incomes over time
 - **Relative mobility rates** refer to movement across the occupational or income structure, *controlling for* aggregate change. They measure changes in the chances of respondents from different class backgrounds achieving different class destinations, and thus give a measure of social inequality
 - Absolute and relative mobility rates are very different measures and it is quite plausible for a society to exhibit high levels of absolute mobility whilst at the same time low levels of relative mobility

The literature – why does it matter?

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- Social mobility has been of interest to social scientists and policy makers since the beginning of the twentieth century
- Social mobility can be of interest in its own right, or as something that needs to be explained through other processes
 - As an explanator, the focus of interest is on the movement of individuals across the occupational class structure
 - As an explanandum, social mobility is of secondary interest and the real focus is on something else, such as education, deprivation or health
- A meritocratic society is generally associated with a mobile society, allowing the most capable individuals to rise to the highest rank, irrespective of social background
- The allocation of individuals to their social position on the basis of ability rather than ascription leads to a more even distribution of talents, improves economic efficiency and raises living standards for everyone
- Some recent research has indicated that **inter-generational income mobility** fell in Britain for those born in the late-1950s and 1970 and is now at a relatively low level compared with other advanced countries. Other research suggests that **social class mobility** in Britain has been static in recent decades and is at a relatively low level

The Ipsos MORI Public Affairs Monitor

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- Approximately 2,000 British adults aged 16 years + are interviewed each wave as part of the survey
- Interviewing is carried out at around 210 sampling points, geographically spread across Britain (England, Scotland and Wales)
- All interviews are carried out face-to-face in the respondent's own home using CAPI (computer aided personal interviewing)
- The research reported here was conducted 15-20 May 2008; 2,060 respondents were interviewed
- Data were weighted at the analysis stage to reflect the known national profile

Topics covered

- Respondents' perceptions of social mobility opportunities in Britain, NOW and IN THE PAST
- How opportunities for social mobility in Britain compare to opportunities in other countries
- Where respondents place their current household wealth in relation to other households
- Where respondents place the wealth of the household they grew up in compared to others at the time
- Respondents' income and their perceptions of how their income compares with that of others
- Attitudes towards opportunity, differences in wealth and the Government's responsibility in levelling income differences

Summary of key findings

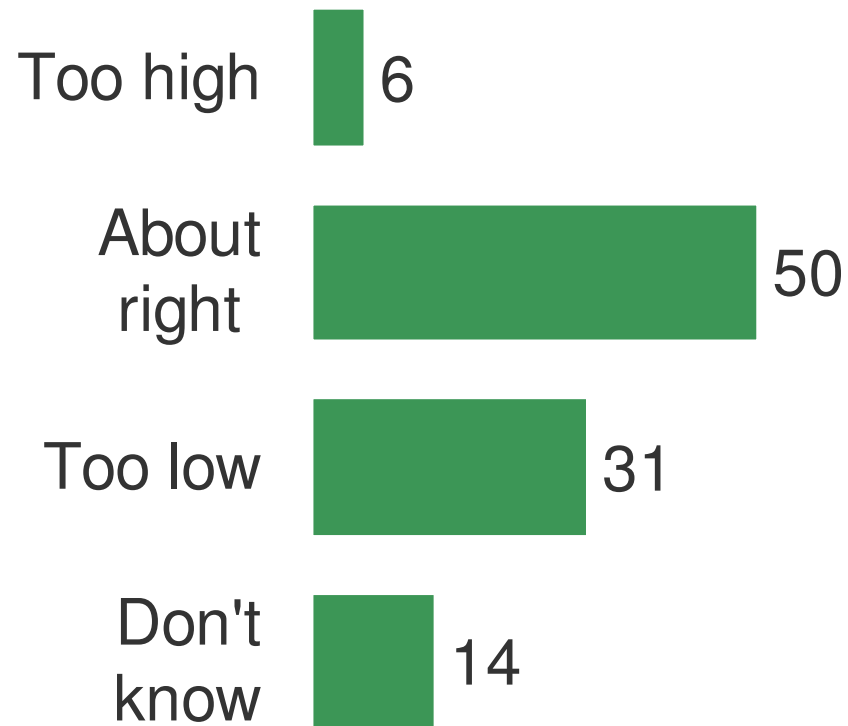
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- Only half of us believe that opportunities for social mobility in Britain are “about right”, with nearly a third of us believing them to be too low
- Perceptions of current wealth are closely associated with perceptions of background wealth. For example, only 10% of adults who reported growing up in the poorest 25% of households now believe themselves to occupy the richest 25% of households
- Overall, only three in ten respondents say they lived in a poorer household than the one they occupy in adulthood
- Around two in three of us are able to gauge our actual place in the income hierarchy
- The majority (69%) agree that parents’ income plays too large a part in their children’s life chances. Similarly, nearly three in four (74%) respondents believe that income differences in Britain are too large
- However, when it comes to taking action, only half (52%) agree that the Government should be involved in reducing income differences

Half the population believe that opportunities for social mobility are about right, but nearly a third say that opportunities are too low

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In general would you say that opportunities for social mobility in Britain are too high, about right or too low?

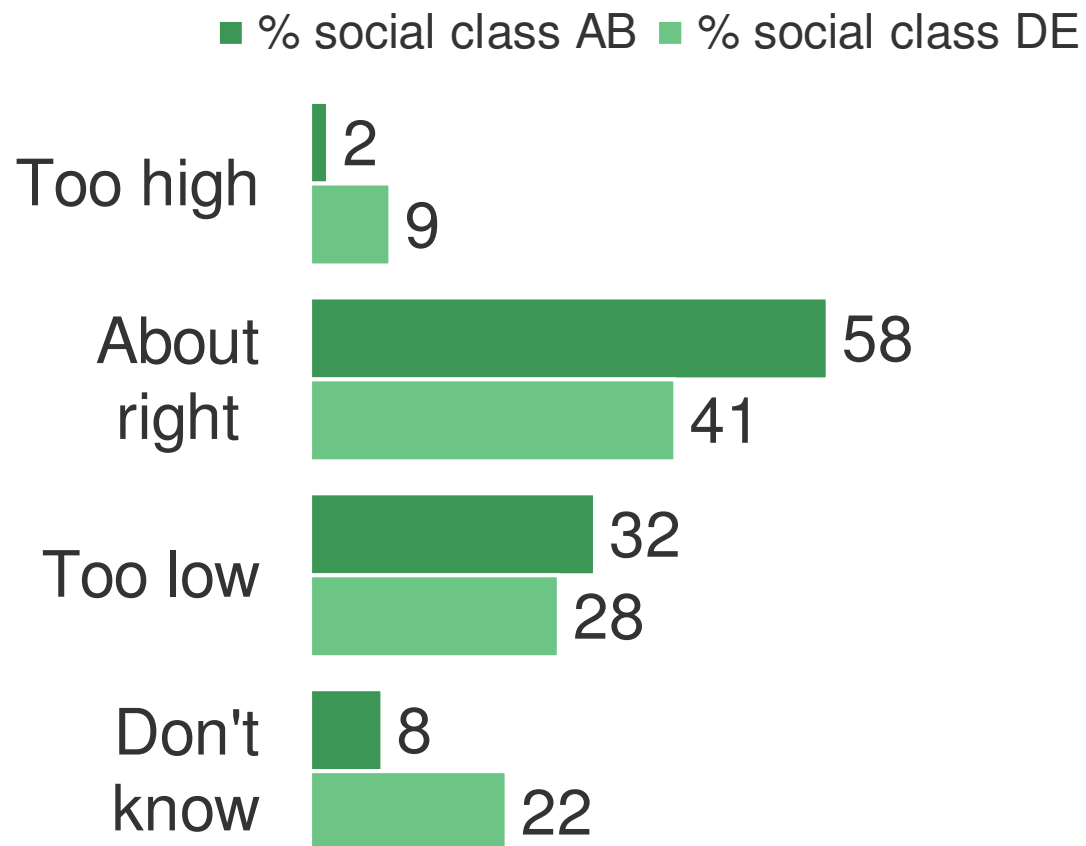


Base: 2,060 British adults, Ipsos MORI Public Affairs Monitor; fieldwork 15-20 May 2008

Respondents in social class AB are more likely to agree that opportunities are “about right”, DEs to say they “don’t know”

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In general would you say that opportunities for social mobility in Britain are too high, about right or too low?

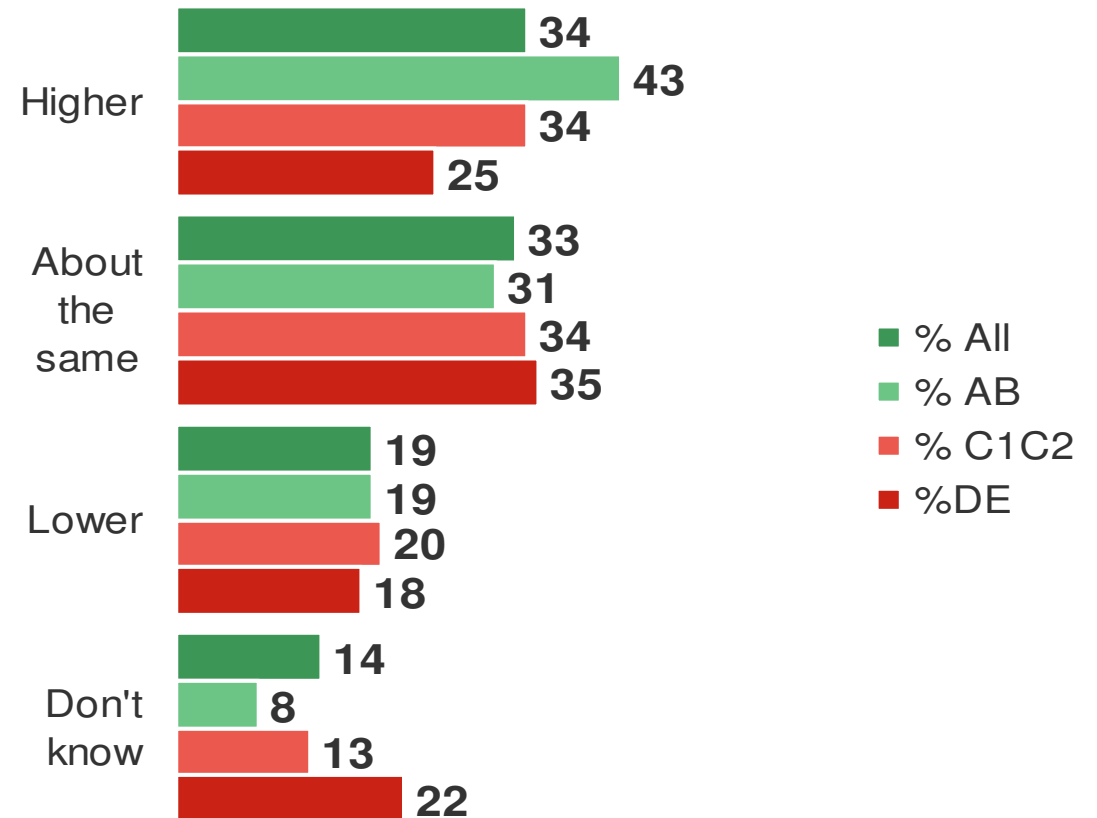


Base: 2,060 British adults, Ipsos MORI Public Affairs Monitor; fieldwork 15-20 May 2008

Only 1 in 5 believe that opportunities for social mobility are lower than in the past, but **social class** and ethnicity affect perceptions

In general would you say that opportunities for social mobility in Britain NOW are higher, about the same or lower than they were IN THE PAST?

- ABs significantly more likely than DEs to believe that society has become more open
- Likelihood that respondents 'don't know' rises as social class lowers

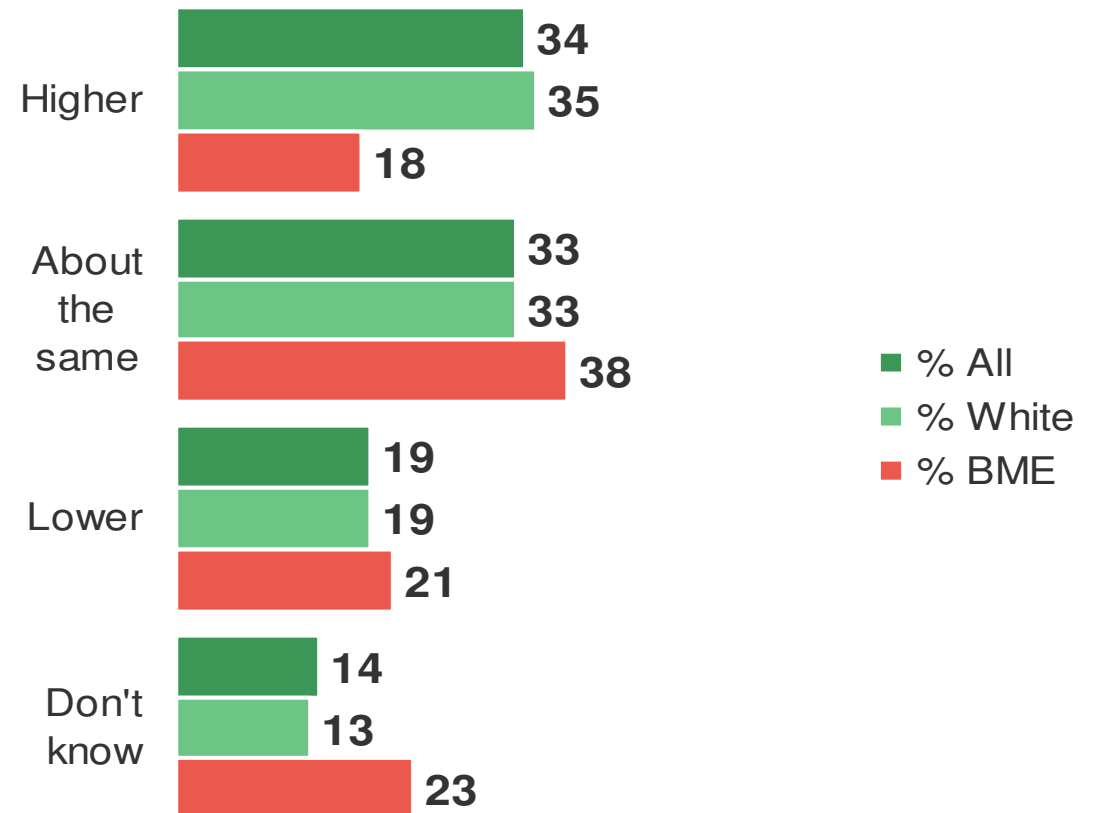


Base: 2,060 British adults, Ipsos MORI Public Affairs Monitor; fieldwork 15-20 May 2008

Only 1 in 5 believe that opportunities for social mobility are lower than in the past, but social class and ethnicity affect perceptions

In general would you say that opportunities for social mobility in Britain NOW are higher, about the same or lower than they were IN THE PAST?

- Black and minority ethnic (BME) respondents are less likely to believe that opportunities have improved compared with white respondents
- A significantly greater proportion of BMEs do not know whether opportunities for social mobility have changed over time

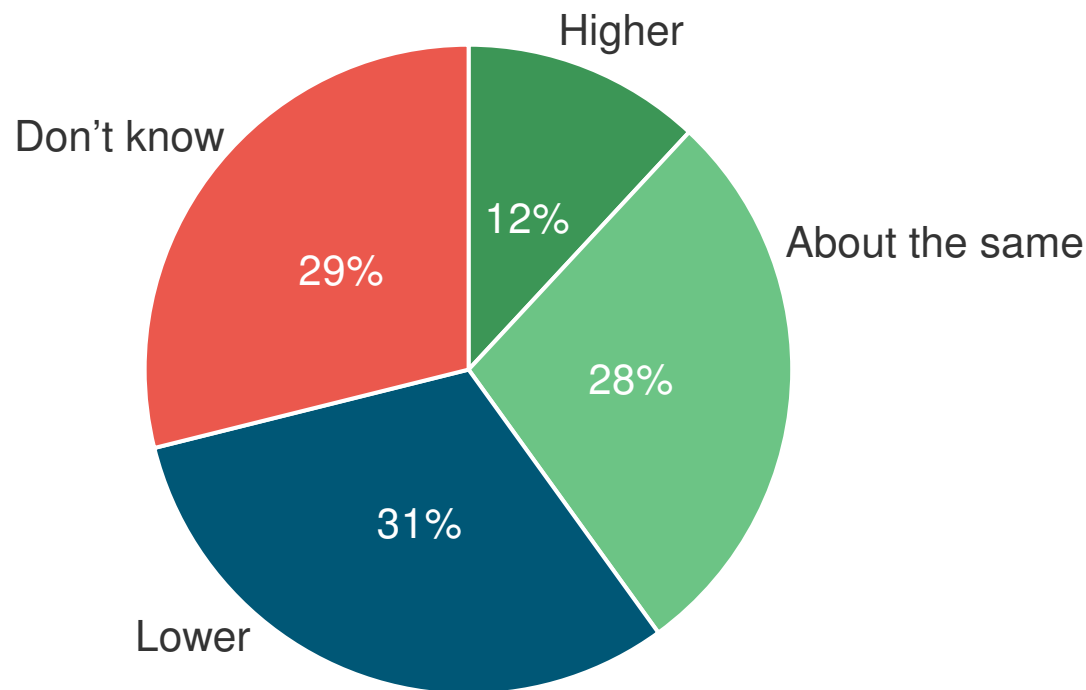


Base: 2,060 British adults, Ipsos MORI Public Affairs Monitor; fieldwork 15-20 May 2008

Nearly a third of us believe that opportunities for social mobility in Britain fall short of those available in other countries

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And in general, would you say that opportunities for social mobility in Britain are higher, about the same or lower than they are in countries across Europe and countries such as the United States, Canada and Australia?



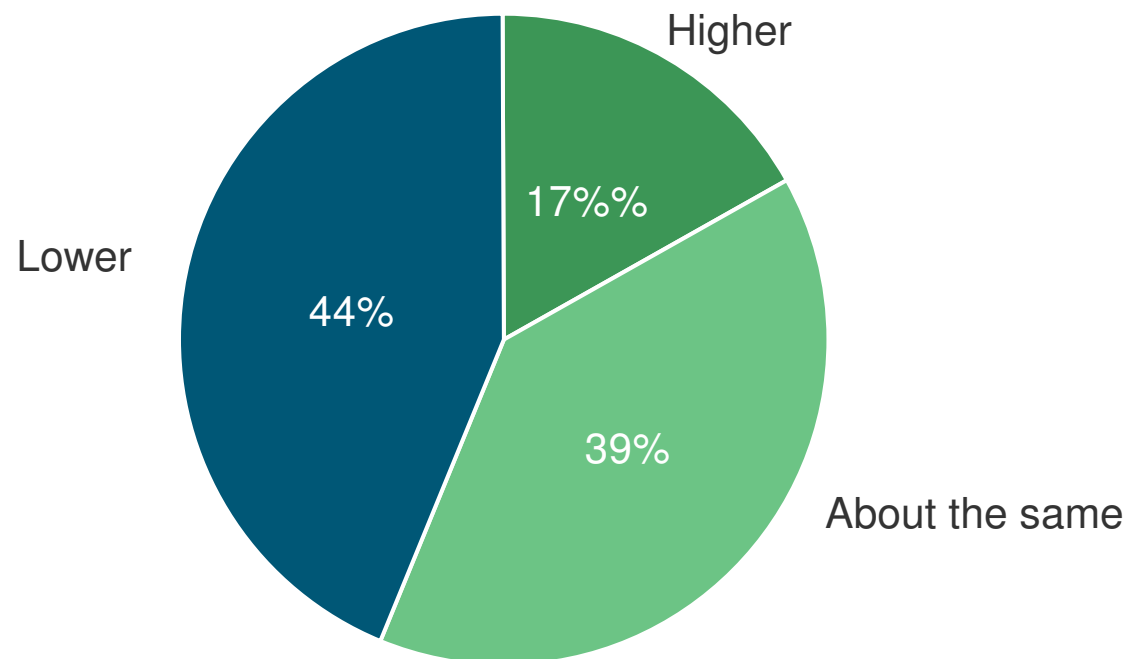
- ABs are more likely than average (37%) to say that opportunities here are lower
- DEs are more likely than average (33%) to say they don't know
- BMEs are more likely than white respondents to say that opportunities here are higher (18% versus 12%)

Base: 2,060 British adults, Ipsos MORI Public Affairs Monitor; fieldwork 15-20 May 2008

Removing “don’t knows”, the majority believe that opportunities in Britain are *lower* than in other countries

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And in general, would you say that opportunities for social mobility in Britain are higher, about the same or lower than they are in countries across Europe and countries such as the United States, Canada and Australia?



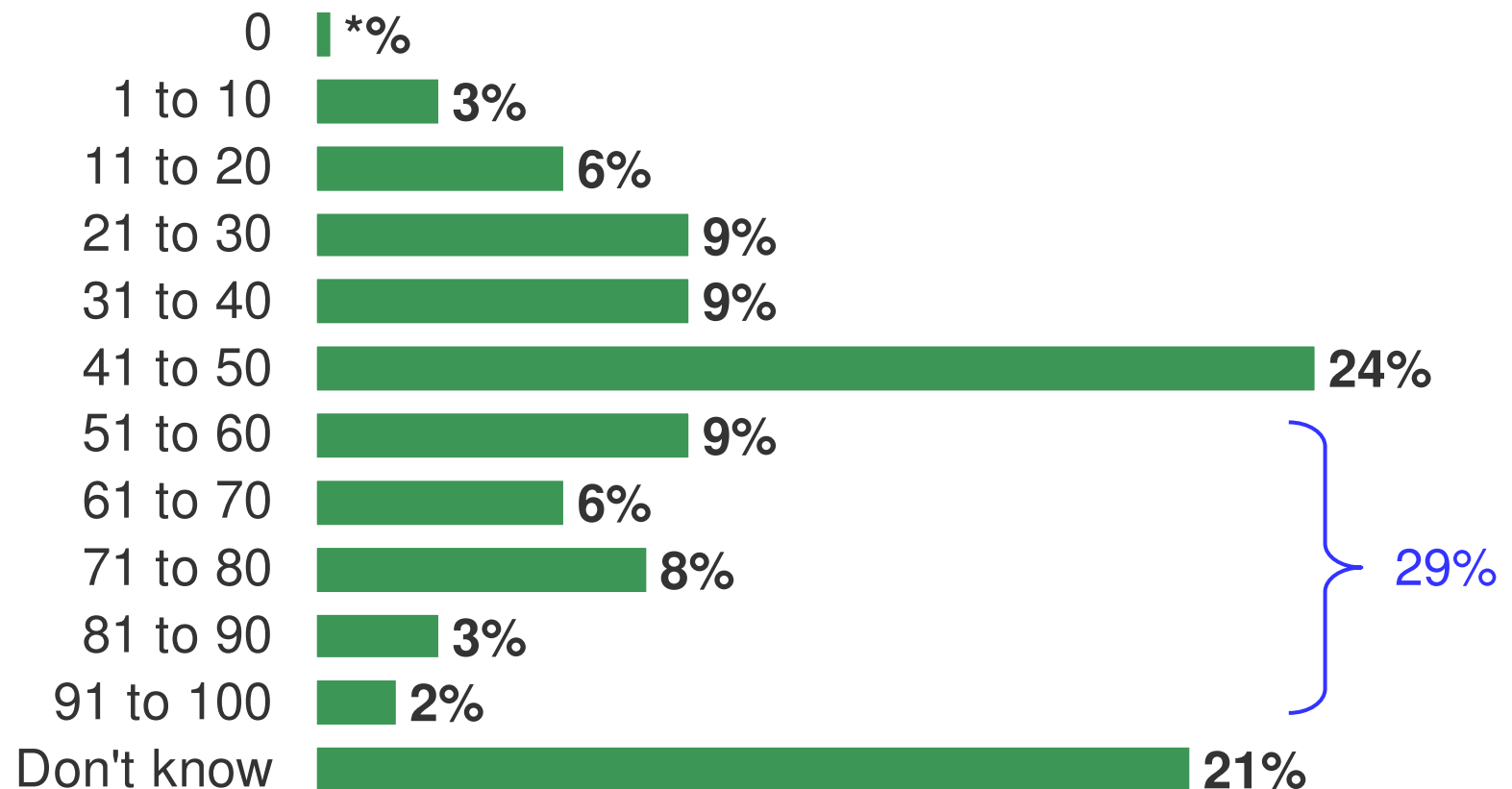
- Britain is still viewed by many as a class-bound society with fewer opportunities for social mobility than other advanced countries
- ABs significantly more likely (49%) to say opportunities here are lower

Base: 1,455 British adults (all giving a definite response), Ipsos MORI Public Affairs Monitor; fieldwork 15-20 May 2008

Nearly 3 in 10 of us believe that half of all households in Britain are better off than their own

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In Britain, some households are financially better off than others. Of every 100 household in this country, how many would you say are financially better off than yours?

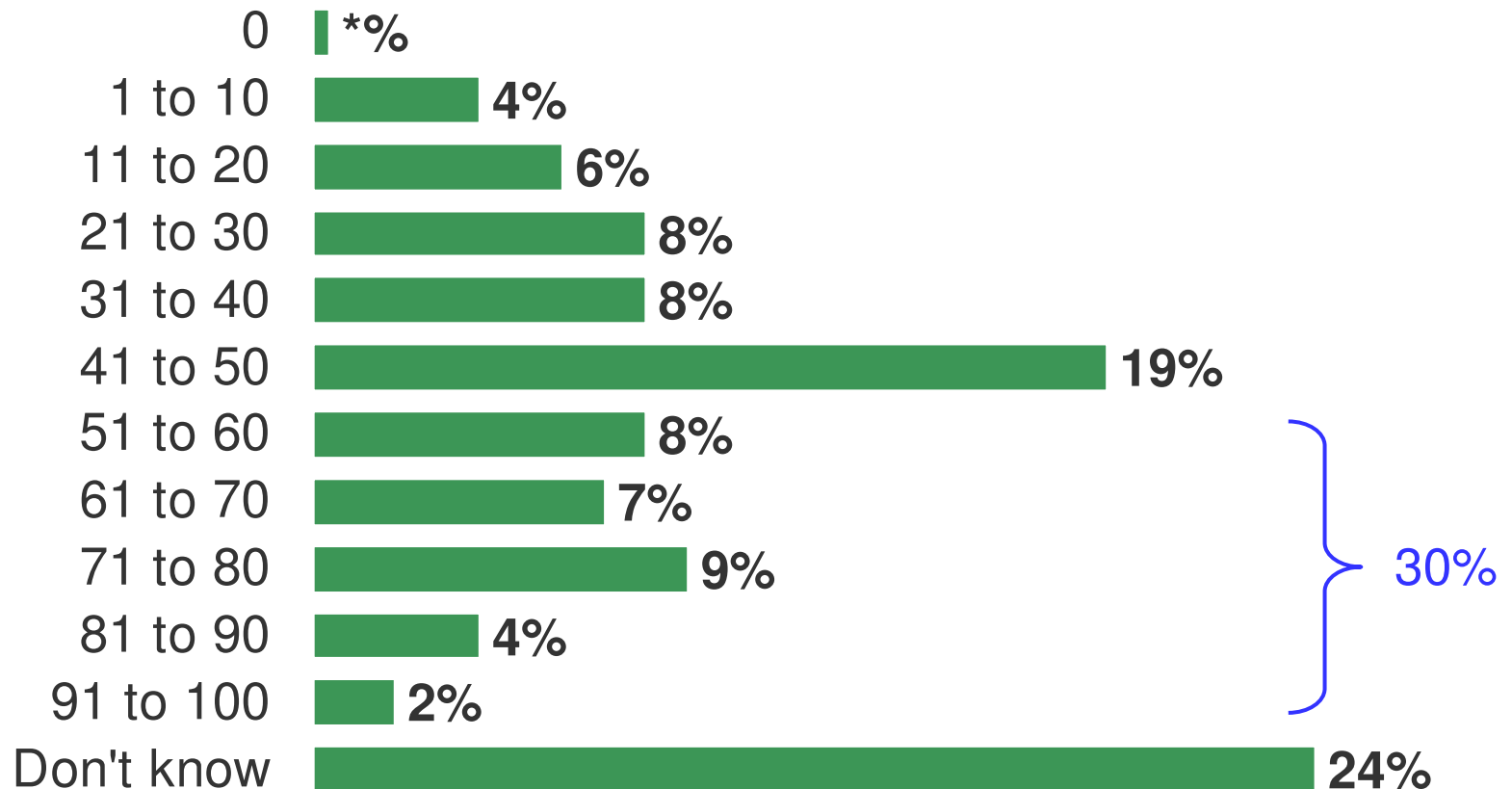


Base: 2,060 British adults, Ipsos MORI Public Affairs Monitor; fieldwork 15-20 May 2008

Meanwhile, 3 in 10 of us believe that half of all households in Britain were better off than the one in which they grew up

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And thinking about the household you lived in when you were 16 years old, of every 100 households in this country, how many would you say were financially better off than yours?



Base: 2,060 British adults, Ipsos MORI Public Affairs Monitor; fieldwork 15-20 May 2008

Evidence of inter-generational class stability: a large proportion of respondents report a similar household wealth, past and present

- The **main diagonal** gives the number of respondents occupying the same relative income position as the household in which they grew up. These respondents have experienced **relative inter-generational class stability** [45% of all who gave a definite response]
- Respondents **below** the main diagonal have experienced **downwards relative inter-generational class mobility** [24%]
- Respondents **above** the main diagonal have experienced **upwards relative inter-generational class mobility** [31%]

Proportion of hh wealthier than your own when growing up

	1-25	26-50	51-75	76-100
1-25	99 7%	72 5%	26 2%	25 2%
26-50	104 7%	383 26%	185 12%	82 6%
51-75	29 2%	139 9%	114 8%	73 5%
76-100	13 1%	53 4%	23 2%	68 5%

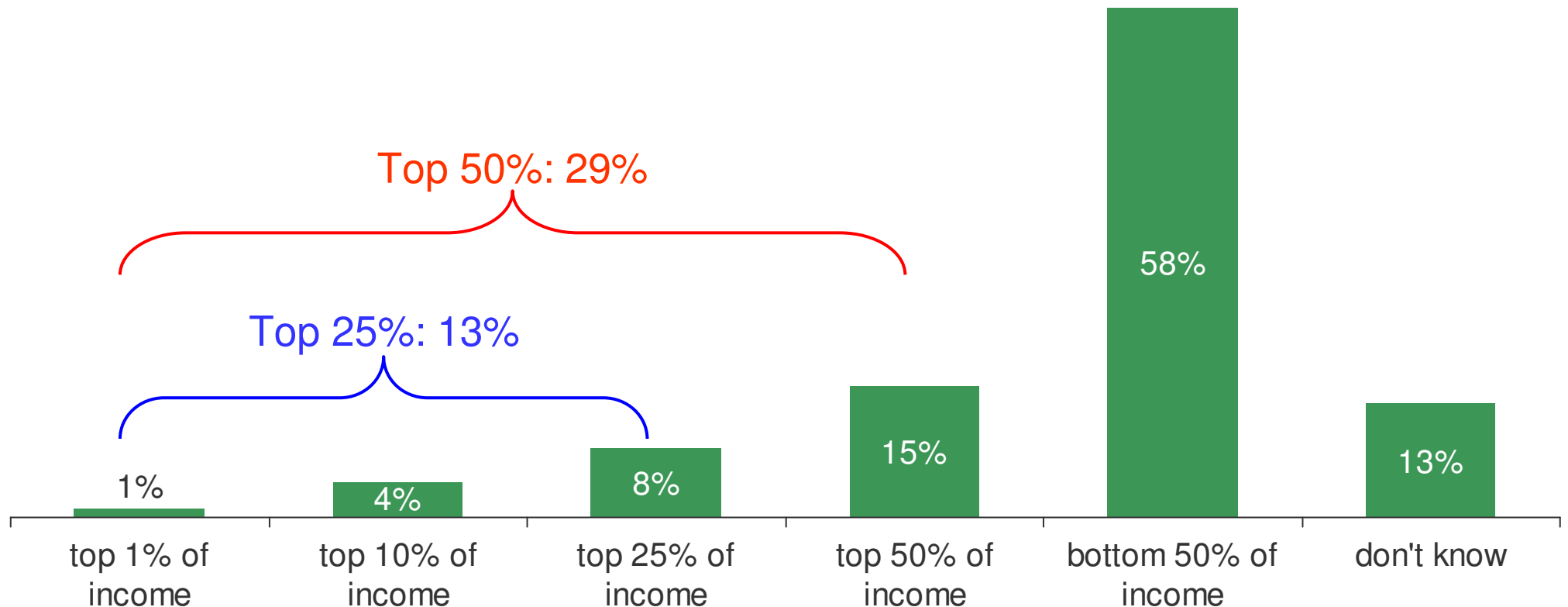
Proportion of hh wealthier than your own now

Base:
1,488 of all British adults who gave a definite response to both questions, Ipsos MORI Public Affairs Monitor; fieldwork 15-20 May 2008

Twice as many respondents would place their personal income in the bottom 50% versus the top 50% of incomes in Britain

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Looking at this card, where would you say your personal income places you in comparison to other earners in this country?



Base: 2,060 British adults, Ipsos MORI Public Affairs Monitor; fieldwork 15-20 May 2008

Around 2 in 3 of us correctly gauge our place in the income hierarchy

Earnings distribution: individual earnings pre-tax (2007 estimates)# 8

Perceived place in the income hierarchy

	Bottom 50%	Top 50%	Top 25%	Top 10%	Top 1%
Bottom 50% (<£25k)	857 58%	109 7%	30 2%	30 2%	15 1%
Top 50% (£25-40k)	92 6%	97 7%	37 3%	12 1%	1 *%
Top 25% (£40-50k)	24 2%	27 2%	24 2%	3 *%	- 0%
Top 10% (£50-100k)	5 *%	30 2%	45 3%	24 2%	1 *%
Top 1% (>£100k)	2 *%	1 *%	3 *%	6 *%	- 0%

Reported personal income and corresponding place in income hierarchy

Of those working full-time:

- 50% earn more than £24,200 (gross)
- 25% earn more than £34,300
- 10% earn more than £48,000
- 1% earn more than about £95,000
- 0.5% earn more than about £120,000

- **Correctly** assess place [68% of all who gave a definite response]
- **Under-estimate** place [16%]
- **Over-estimate** place [16%]

Base: 1,475 of all British adults who gave a definite response to both questions, Ipsos MORI Public Affairs Monitor; fieldwork 15-20 May 2008

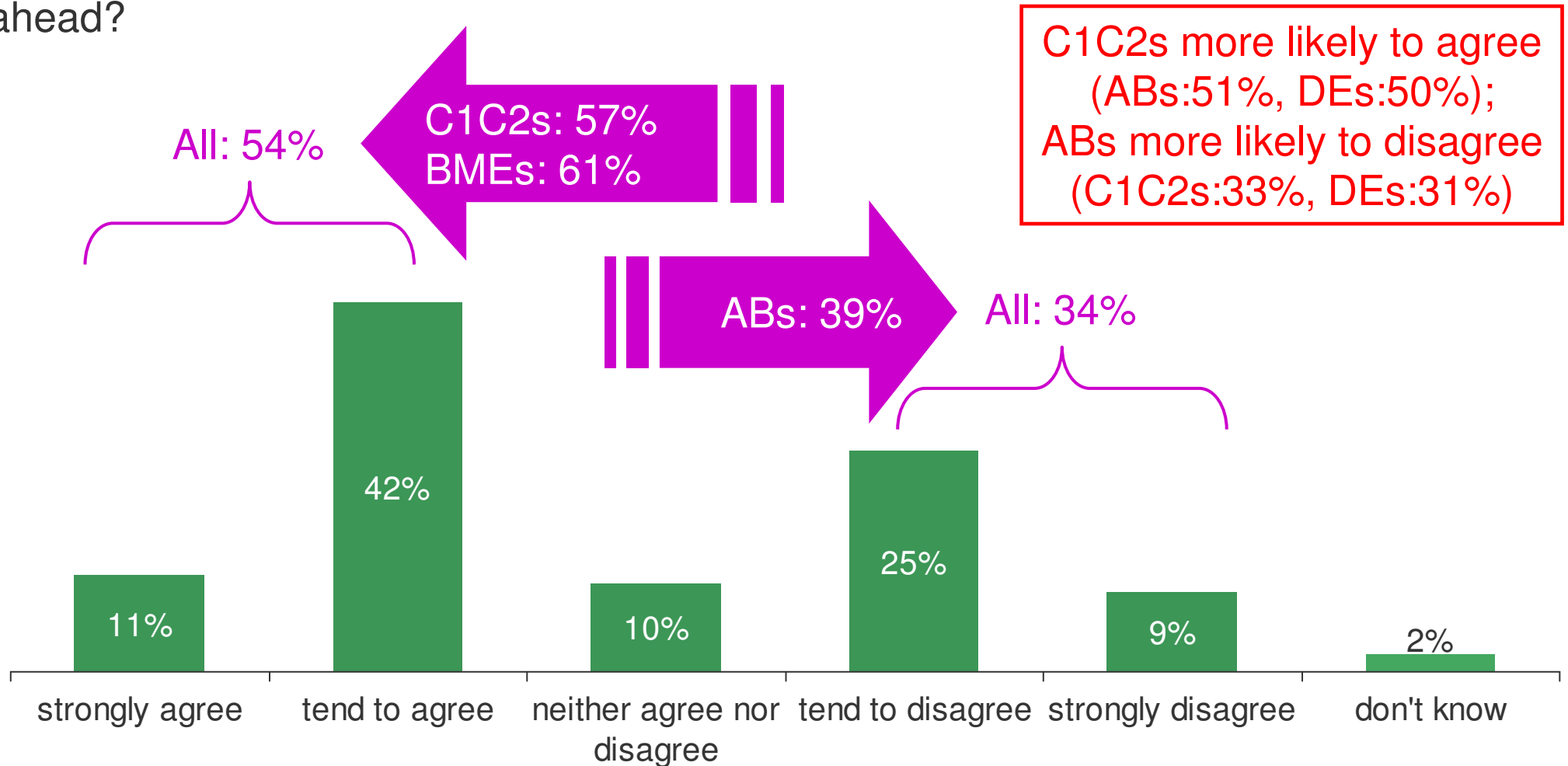
* an asterisk represents a value of less than half a percent, but greater than zero

source of earnings distribution data: Professor John Hills, CASE LSE

Just over half of us (54%) agree that we have equal opportunities to get ahead

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To what extent do you agree/disagree that people have equal opportunities to get ahead?

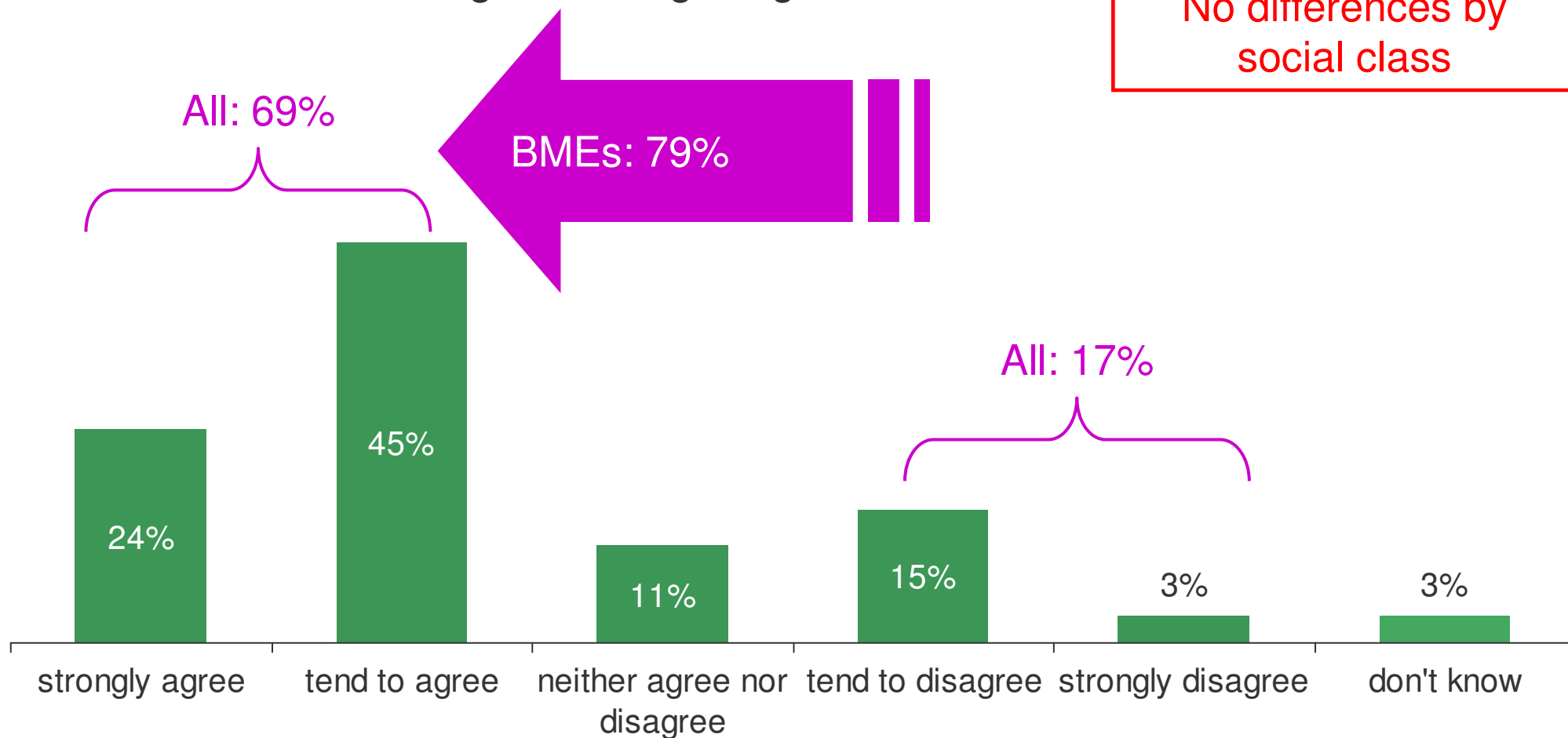


Base: 2,060 British adults, Ipsos MORI Public Affairs Monitor; fieldwork 15-20 May 2008

But nearly 7 in 10 believe that parents' income plays too big a part in children's life chances ...

To what extent do you agree/disagree that parents' income plays too big a part in children's chances of doing well and getting on in life?

No differences by social class

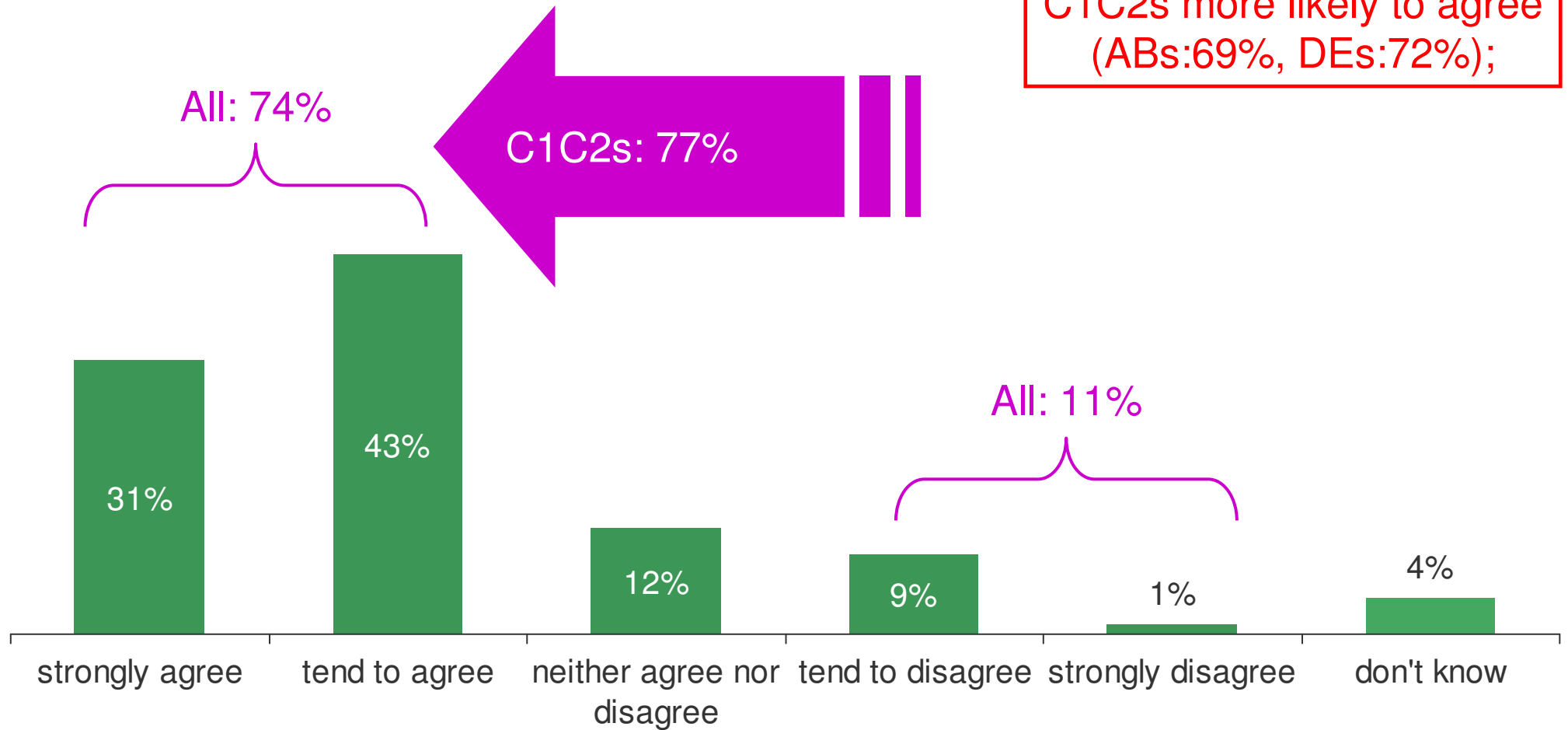


Base: 2,060 British adults, Ipsos MORI Public Affairs Monitor; fieldwork 15-20 May 2008

... and three-quarters of us (74%) say that differences in income in Britain are too large

To what extent do you agree/disagree that differences in income in Britain are too large?

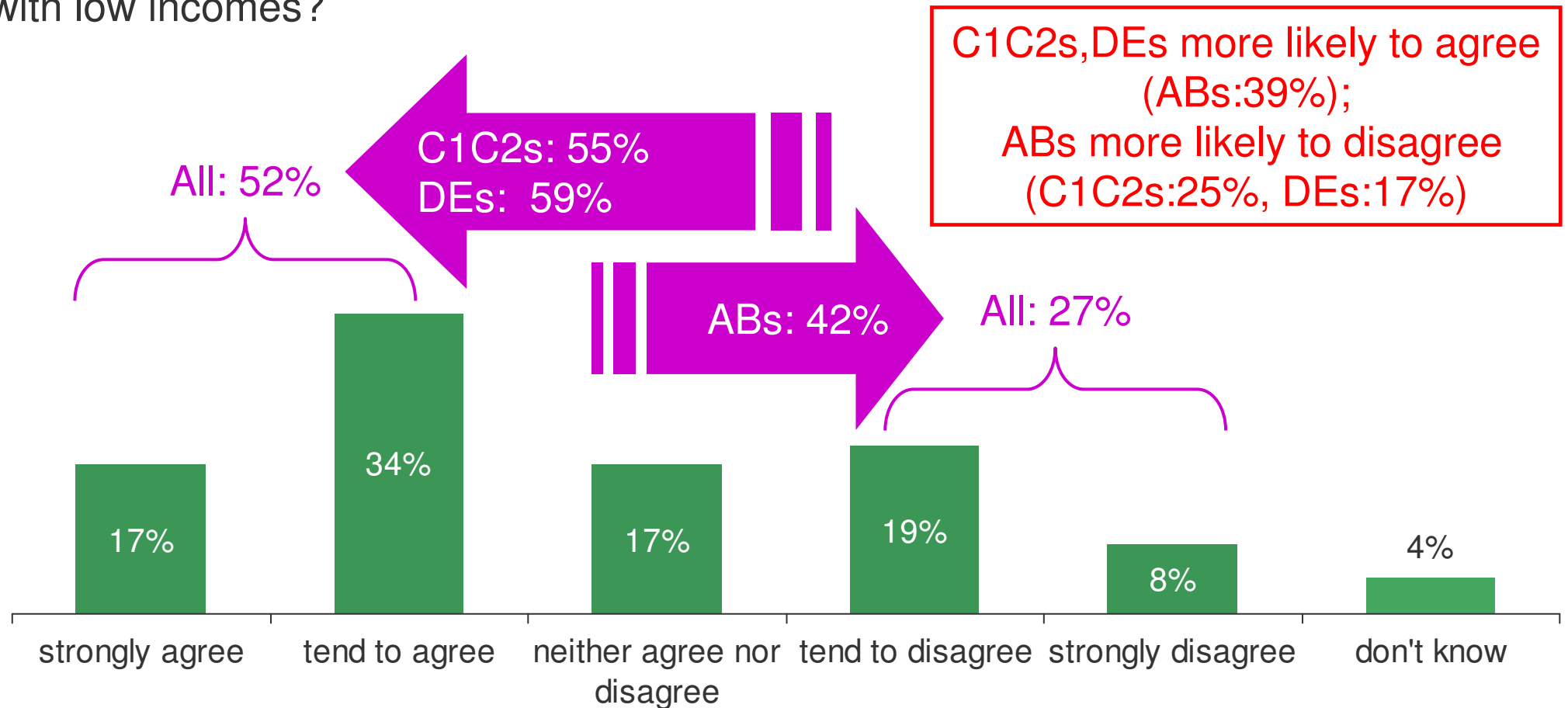
C1C2s more likely to agree (ABs:69%, DEs:72%);



Base: 2,060 British adults, Ipsos MORI Public Affairs Monitor; fieldwork 15-20 May 2008

Even so, only half (52%) agree that Government has a role in reducing income differences in this country

To what extent do you agree/disagree that it is the responsibility of the Government to reduce the differences in income between people with high incomes and those with low incomes?



Base: 2,060 British adults, Ipsos MORI Public Affairs Monitor; fieldwork 15-20 May 2008

Conclusions

- Only half of us believe that opportunities for social mobility in Britain are “about right”, with nearly a third of us believing them to be too low
- Many do believe, though, that opportunities are higher than they were in the past
 - The upgrading of the occupational class structure with the expansion of non-manual work and contraction of manual work has undoubtedly fed into this belief
 - The reality is more complex and whilst absolute mobility has improved for everyone, relative mobility rates have (if anything) contracted over time
- Perceptions of current wealth are closely associated with perceptions of background wealth. For example, only 10% of adults who reported growing up in the poorest 25% of households now believe themselves to occupy the richest 25% of households
- Overall, only three in ten respondents say they lived in a poorer household than the one they occupy in adulthood

Conclusions

- Around two in three of us are able to gauge our actual place in the income hierarchy; as many under-estimate as over-estimate their place
- The majority (69%) agree that parents' income plays too large a part in children's life chances. Similarly, seven in ten (70%) of us believe that income differences in Britain are too large
- However, when it comes to taking action, only half (52%) agree that the Government should be involved in reducing income differences
 - May be an element of (natural) self-preservation here by the higher social classes - DEs more likely to agree
- It is entirely consistent to believe in equality of opportunity and inequality of outcome: this is the definition of 'meritocracy'
- However, for respondents to favour greater equality of opportunity *and* greater equality of outcome without Government intervention is counter-intuitive, and may be reflective of more general lack of faith in Government effectiveness and/or perceptions of Government micro-management/interference

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