

Attitudes to Inequality

Workshop – interim findings and next steps

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Chapter context

- Public perceptions of and attitudes to inequality have important implications: more closely related to public demand to reduce inequalities than objective levels
- Large literature on attitudes to and perceptions of inequalities in income or wealth...
- ...but more limited evidence of perceptions of and attitudes to other forms of inequalities, eg education and place – and very little that looks across domains, or relates this wider set of inequalities to fairness/values
- Ingvild Almås et al at IIES commissioned to focus on economic inequality/UK in international context: our chapter aims to cover wider range of inequalities and focus on trends

Chapter aims

- Compare perceptions of and attitudes to inequality across a wide range of inequality domains, including:
 - **Unequal outcomes**: income or wealth, health, education, political participation
 - **Inequalities between groups with different characteristics**: gender, race/ethnicity, age, place of residence, immigration status and religion
- Track how attitudes to inequality have changed over time, e.g. in levels of concern, acceptability and demand for action to reduce inequalities
- Explore how attitudes to inequality relate to underlying values, particularly fairness

Approach

1. Literature review

General and targeted searches for the range of inequality types stated in aims

2. Secondary data analysis

Review of all major UK survey series for questions related to inequalities, to plug gaps in literature and draw out longer-term trends

3. Consultation with experts

Early review of findings with domain experts to assess sensitivity of literature searches and assessment of evidence base

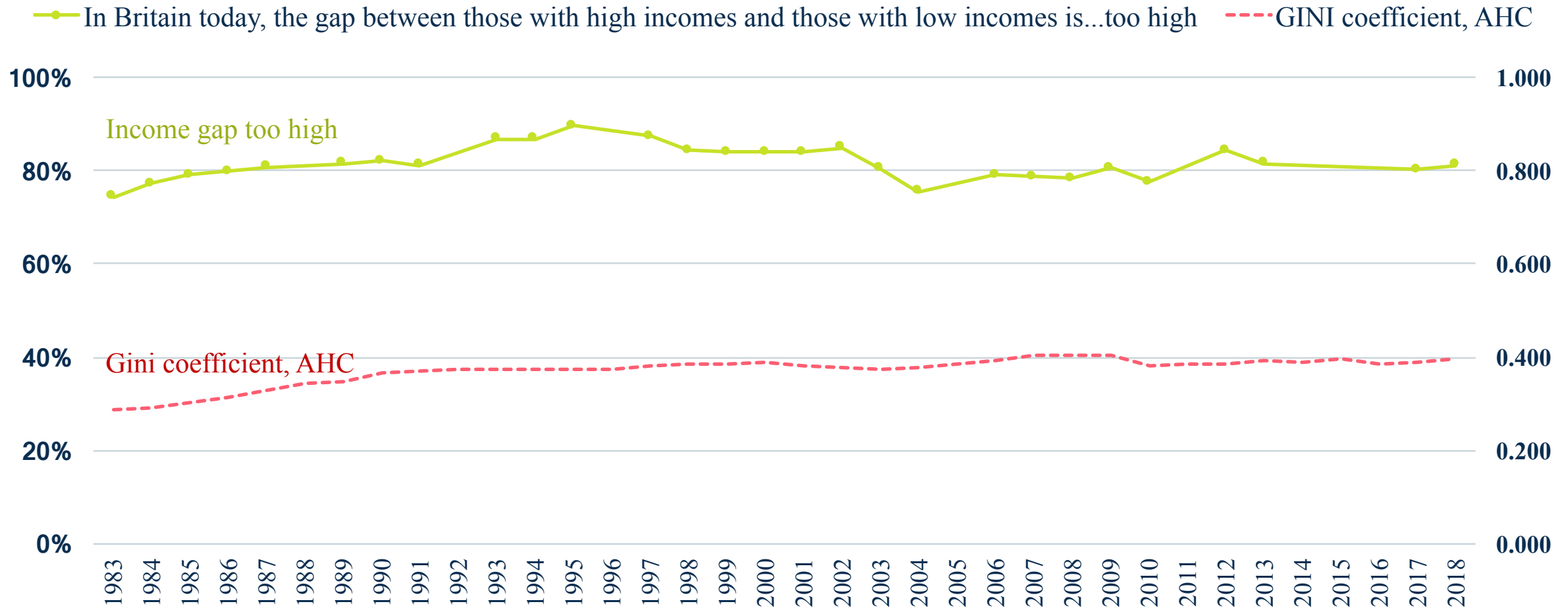
4. Generation of new data

New survey fielded in Britain, which allows us to look across inequality domains post-COVID (King's funded study)

1. The existence of inequalities is recognised across domains... but wide spectrum of views

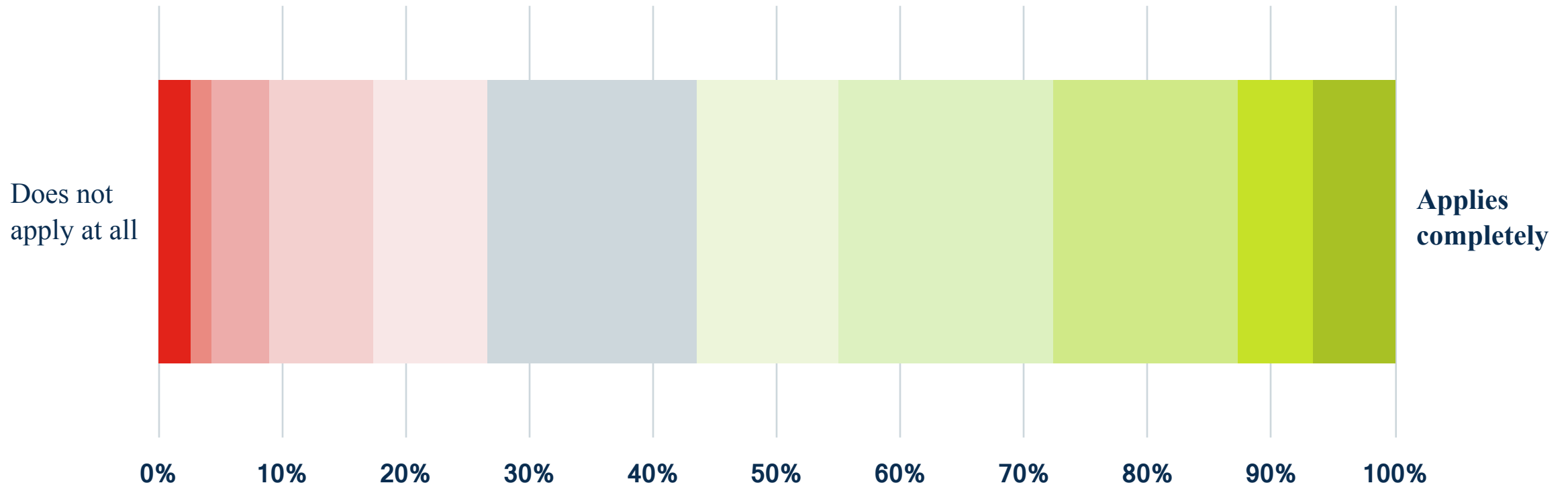


A large majority think income differences are too large...



Wide spectrum of views on education...

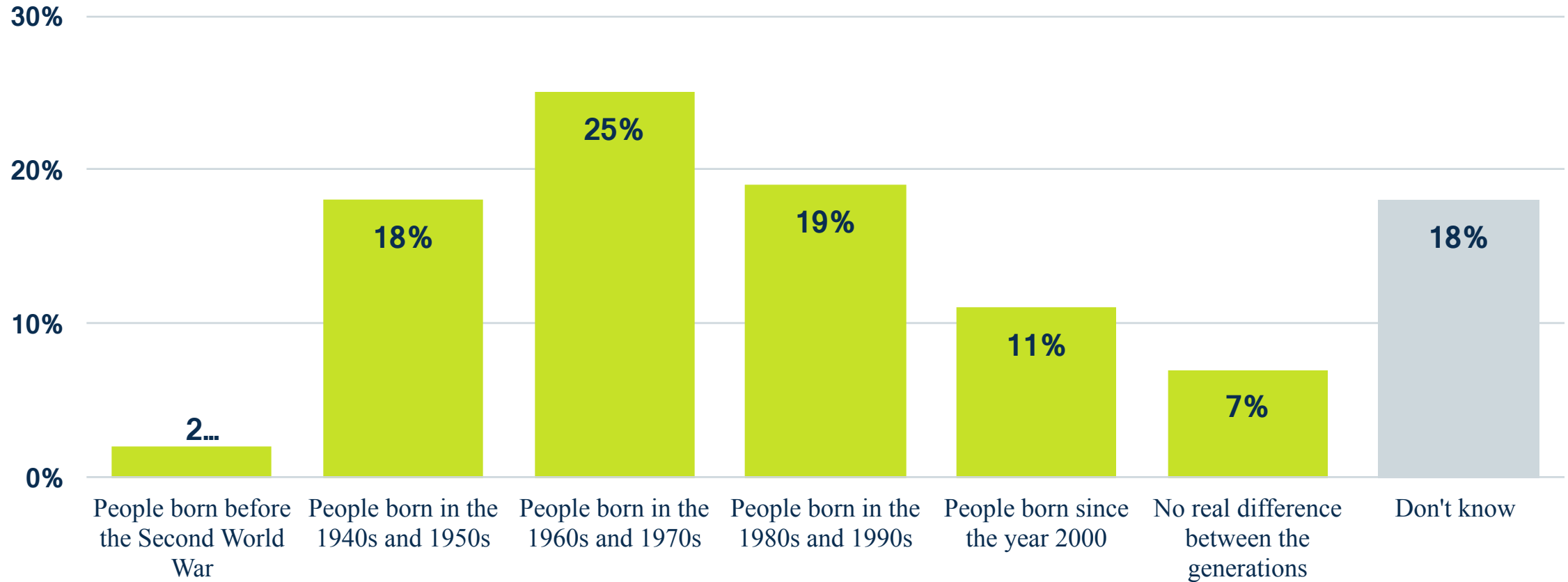
Overall, everyone in the UK has a fair chance of achieving the education they seek



Source: European Social Survey (2018)

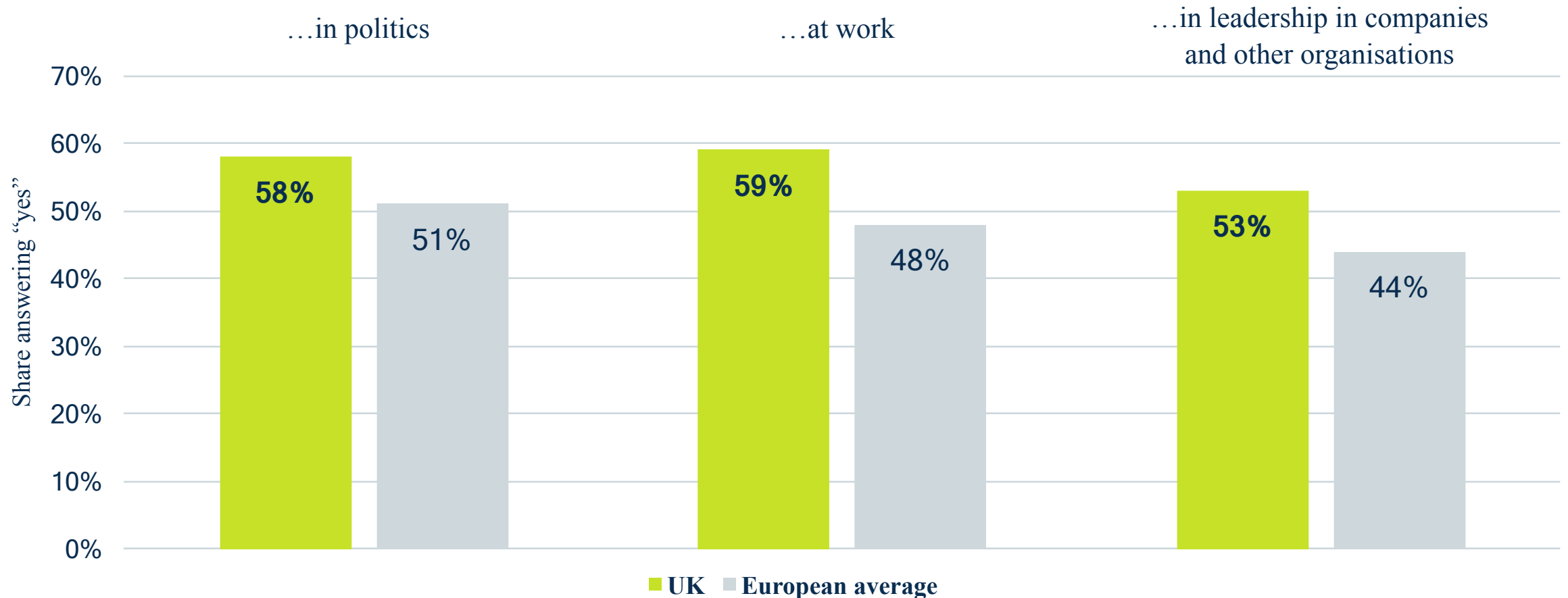
Only a weak sense of generational inequality...

Which generation has the best chance of getting ahead?



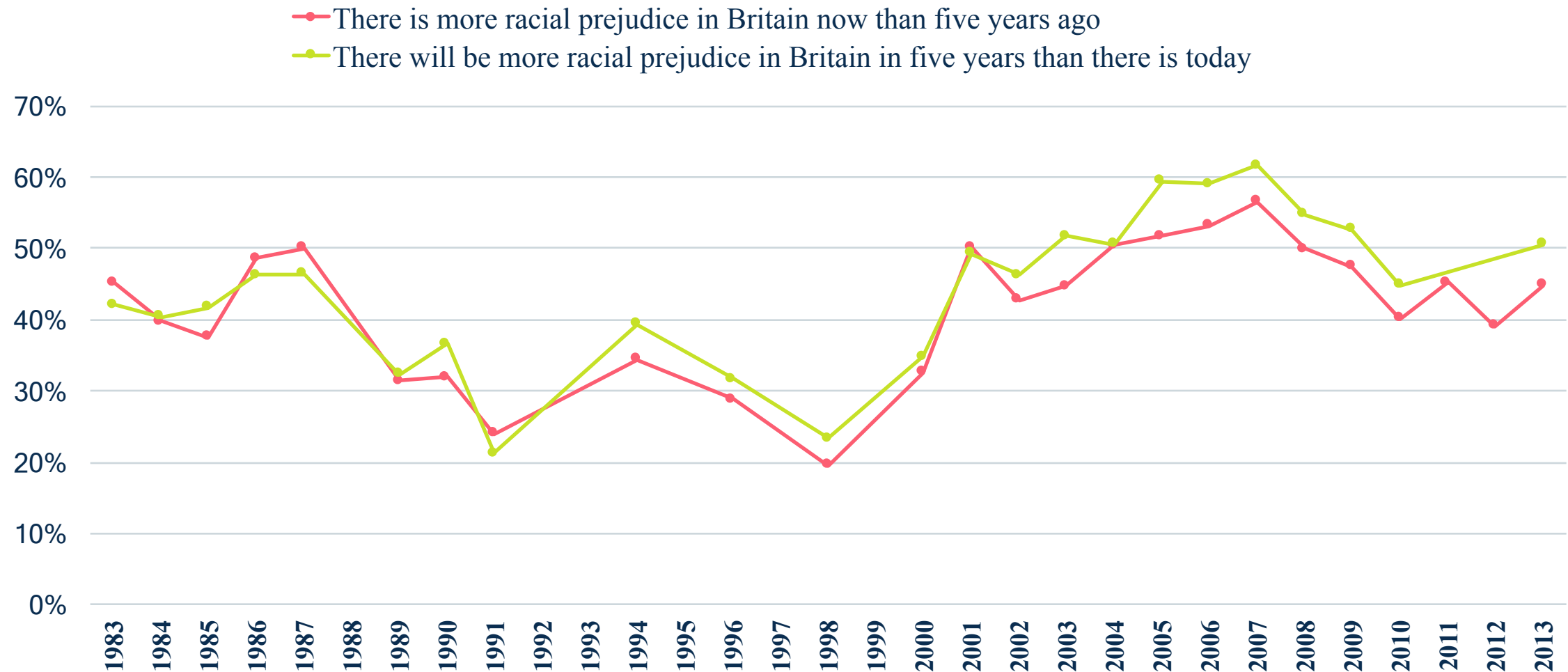
Majorities in the UK believe gender equality has been achieved in various domains

Has gender equality been achieved in [COUNTRY]...




Source: European Commission (2017) Special Eurobarometer 465: Gender equality, stereotypes and women in politics

Erratic view of racial prejudice (difficult to interpret)

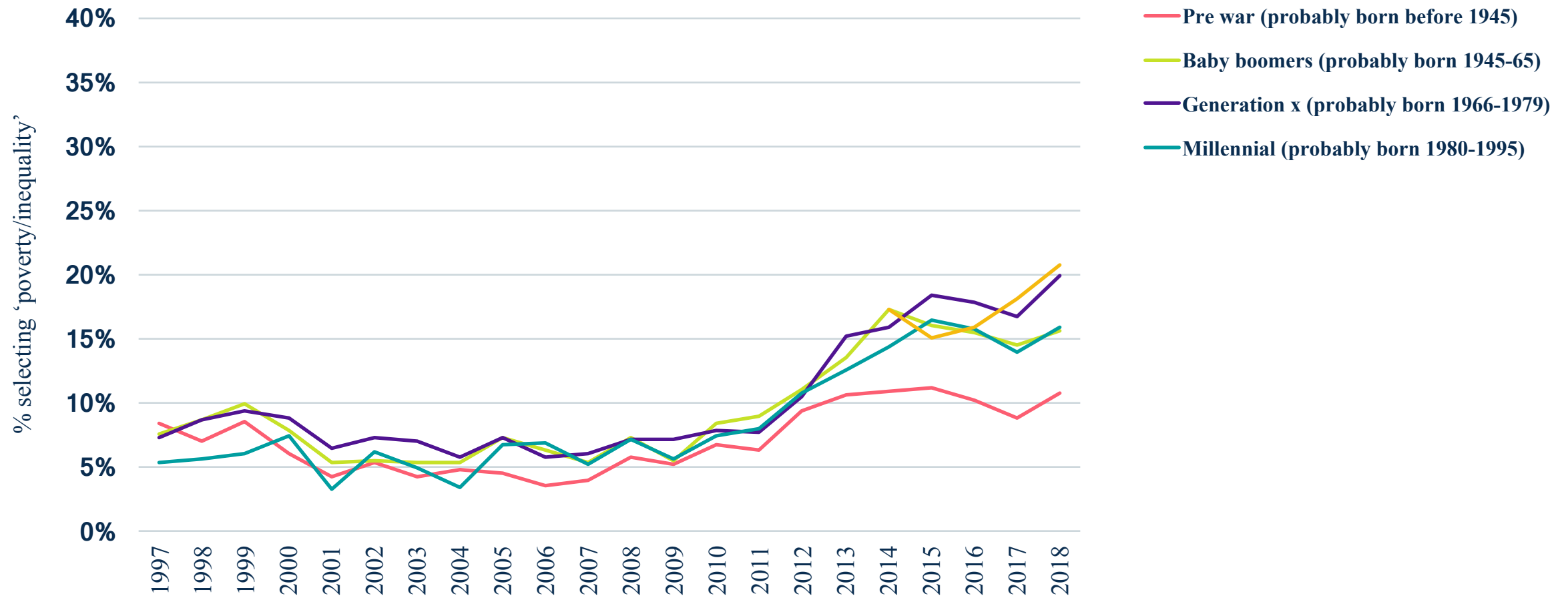


2. Salience of economic inequality is rising – but not a top priority, and some sign of ‘backlash’/persistence on other inequalities...

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Increased salience from 2010s, but way behind other issues

What do you see as the main/other important issues facing Britain today?

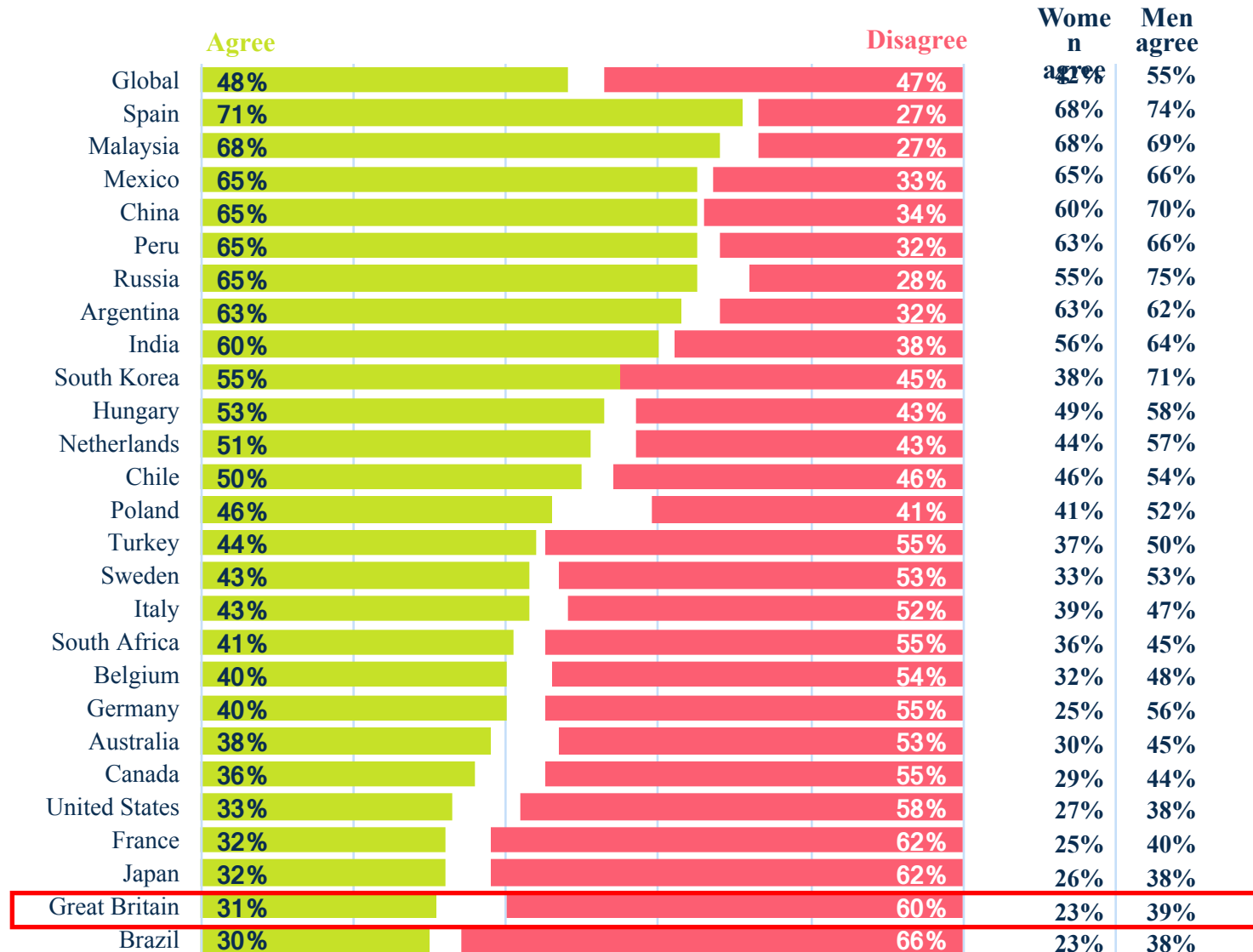


Significant minorities think women's rights gone far


enough

When it comes to giving women equal rights with men, things have gone far enough in my country

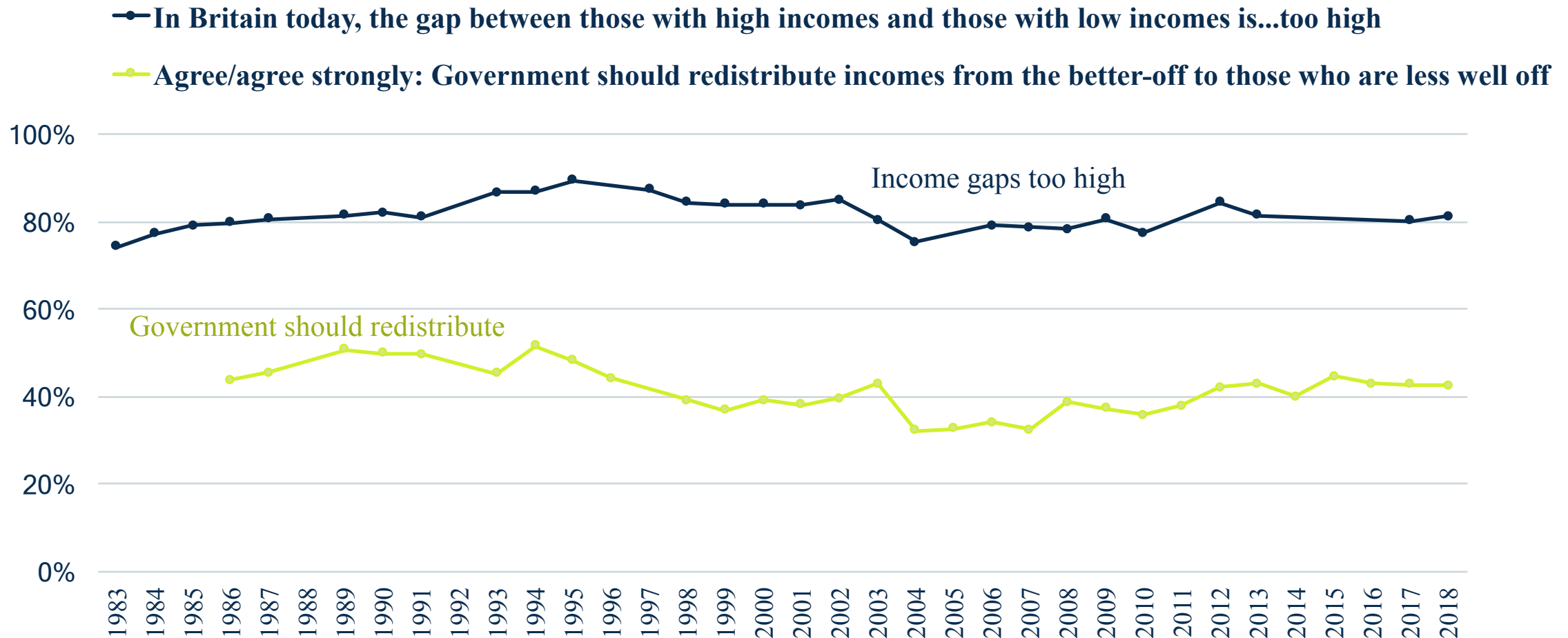
Overestimate pace of progress: guess that gender pay gap will be closed by 2035, when trends suggest 2117



**3. Consistent gaps between
recognition of issue and call for action
– and more support for general action
than redistribution in some domains...**

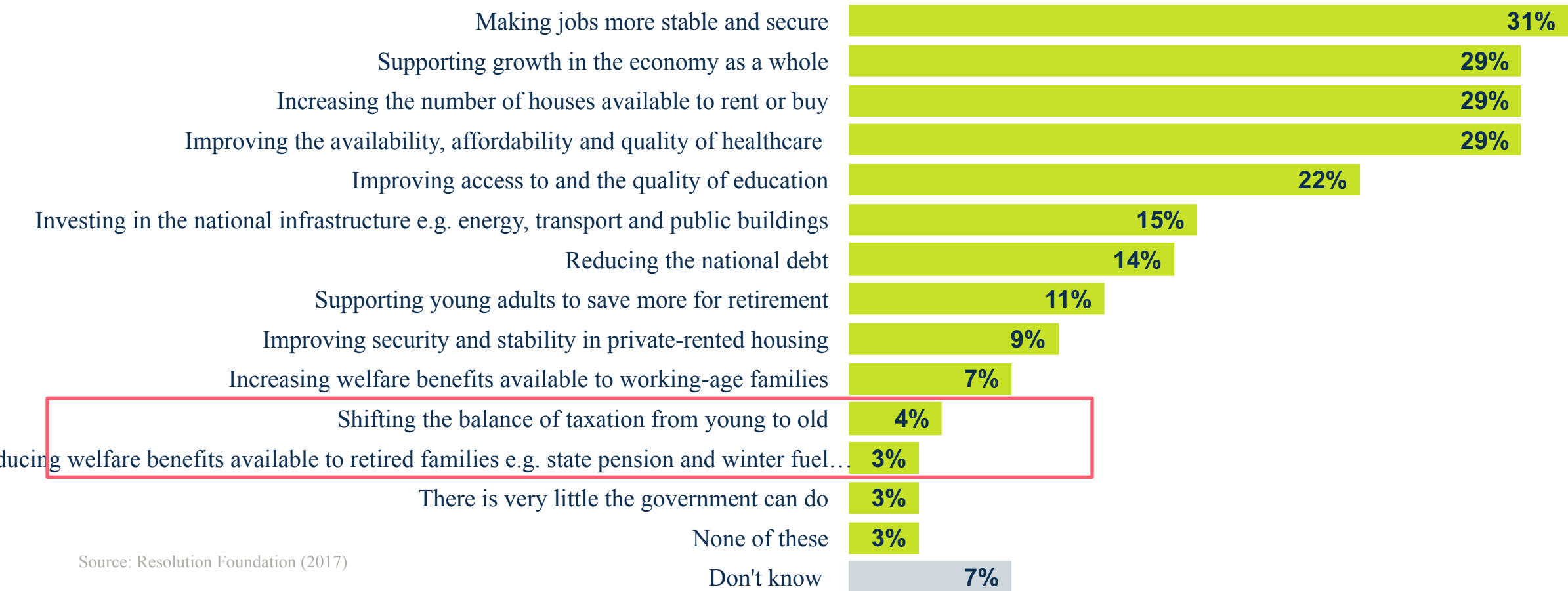
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Support for redistribution is consistently lower than the proportion believing income differences are too high



Much less support for age/generational redistribution than for general measures to benefit all

Which two or three, if any, do you think are most important for the government to focus on in order to improve the chances of young adults having a better life than their parents?



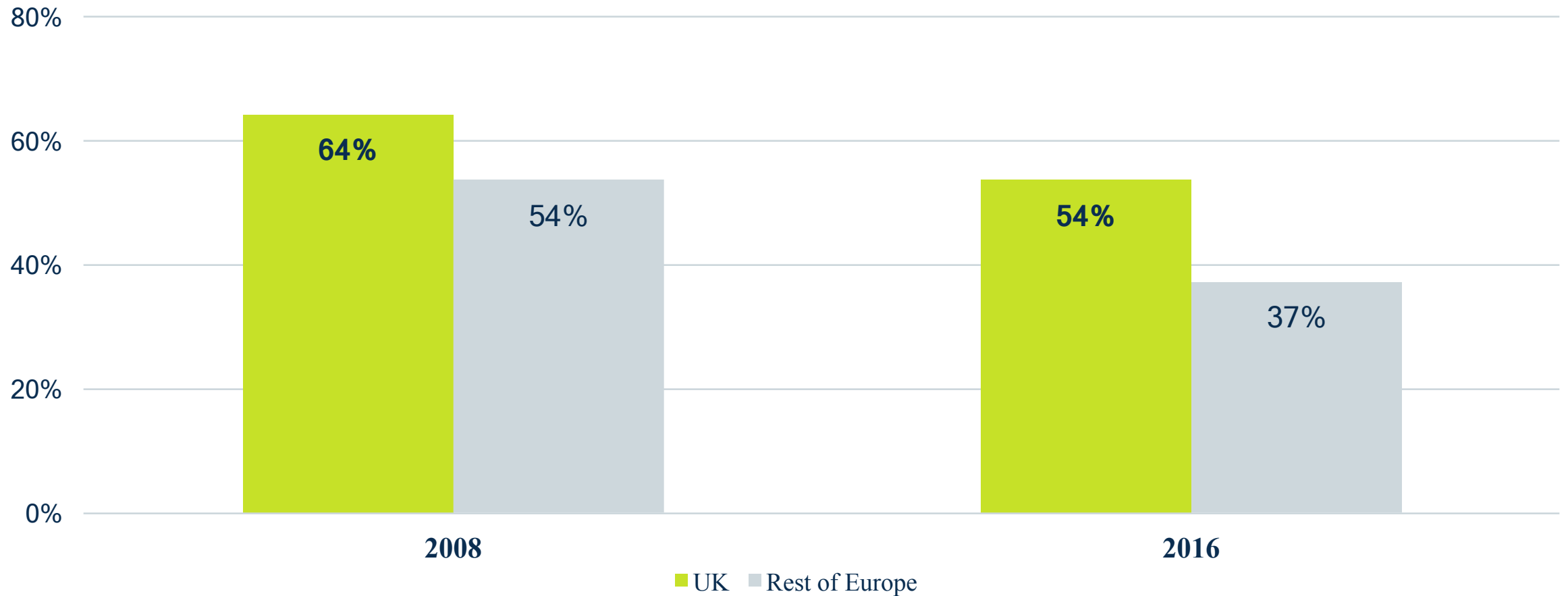
Source: Resolution Foundation (2017)

4. Belief in meritocracy and growing individualism seem to be important – sometimes driven by significant generational change...

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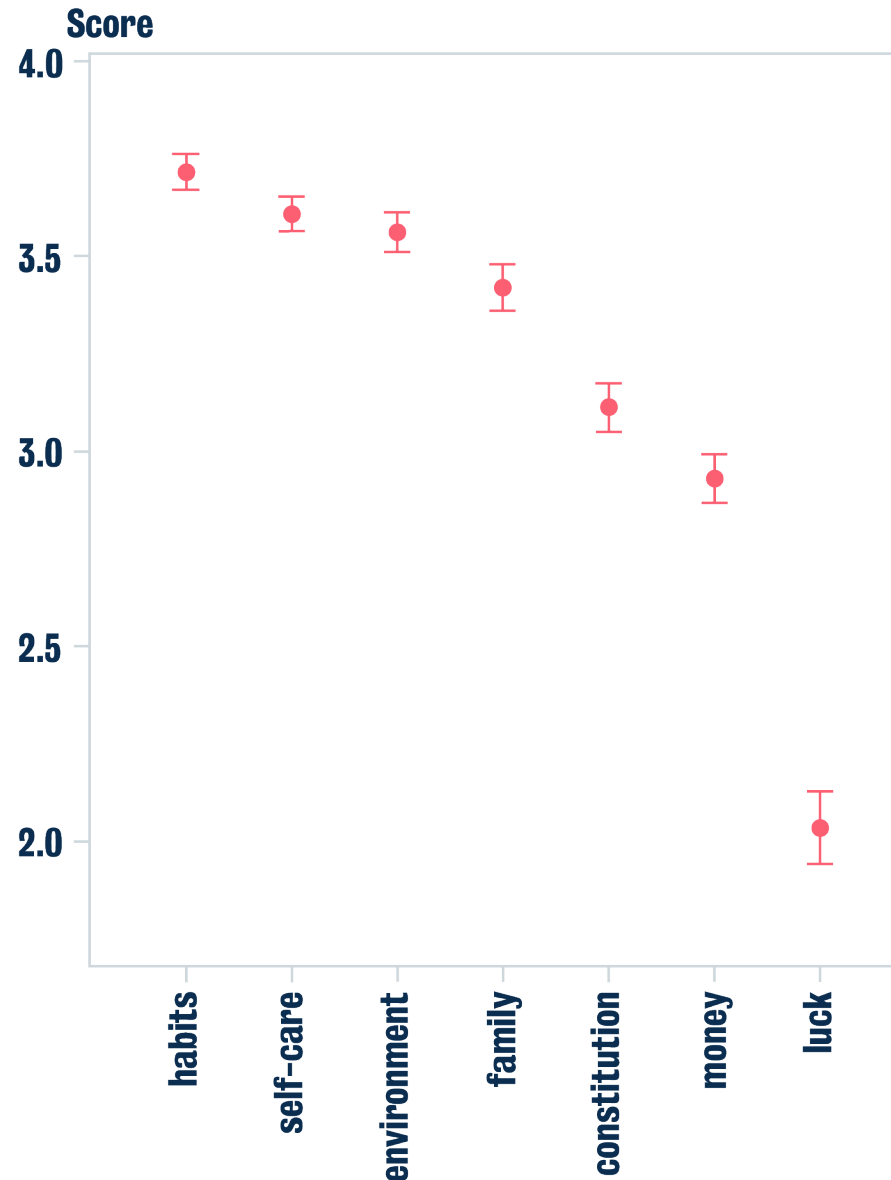
Majority still support income inequality driven by merit – but reducing

Agree/strongly agree: Large differences in income are acceptable to reward talent and effort

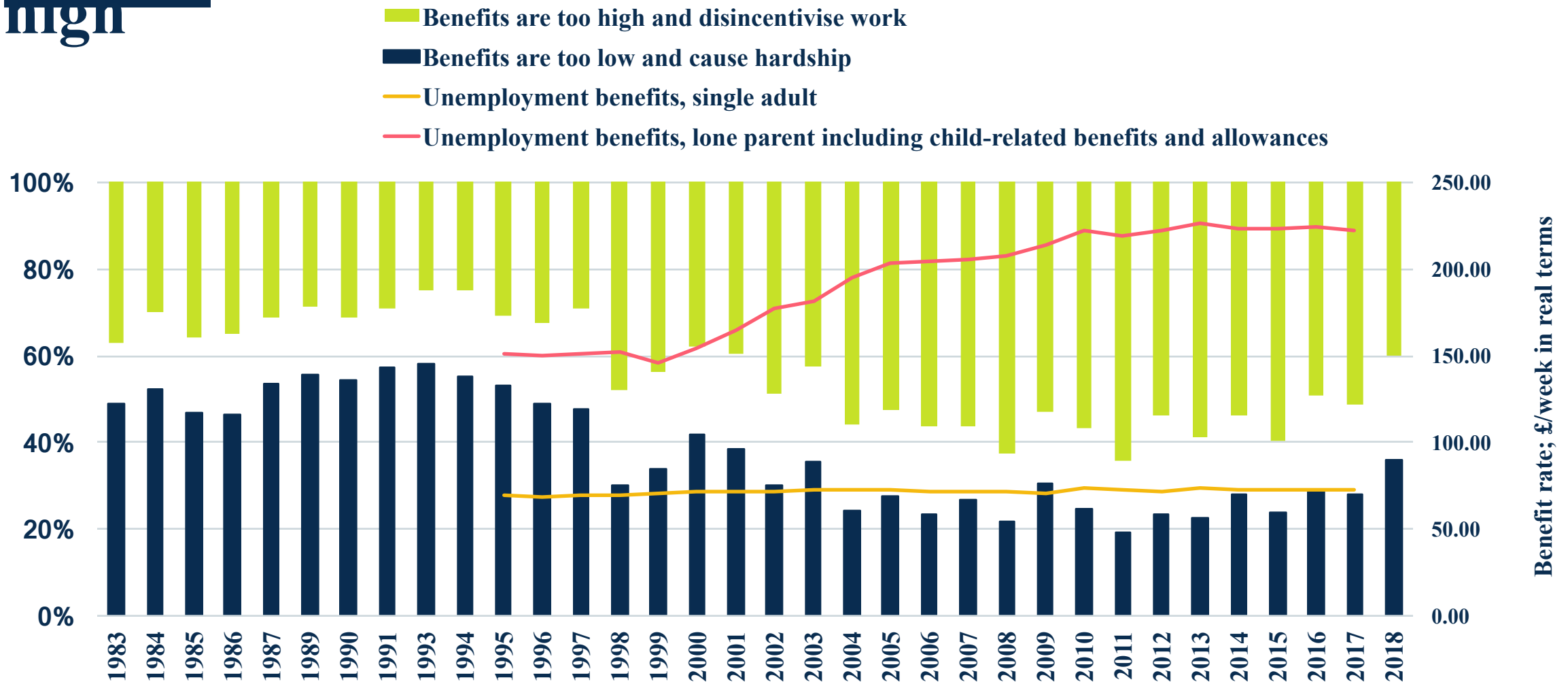


Individualistic beliefs also seen in health outcomes

Perceived causes of health inequalities

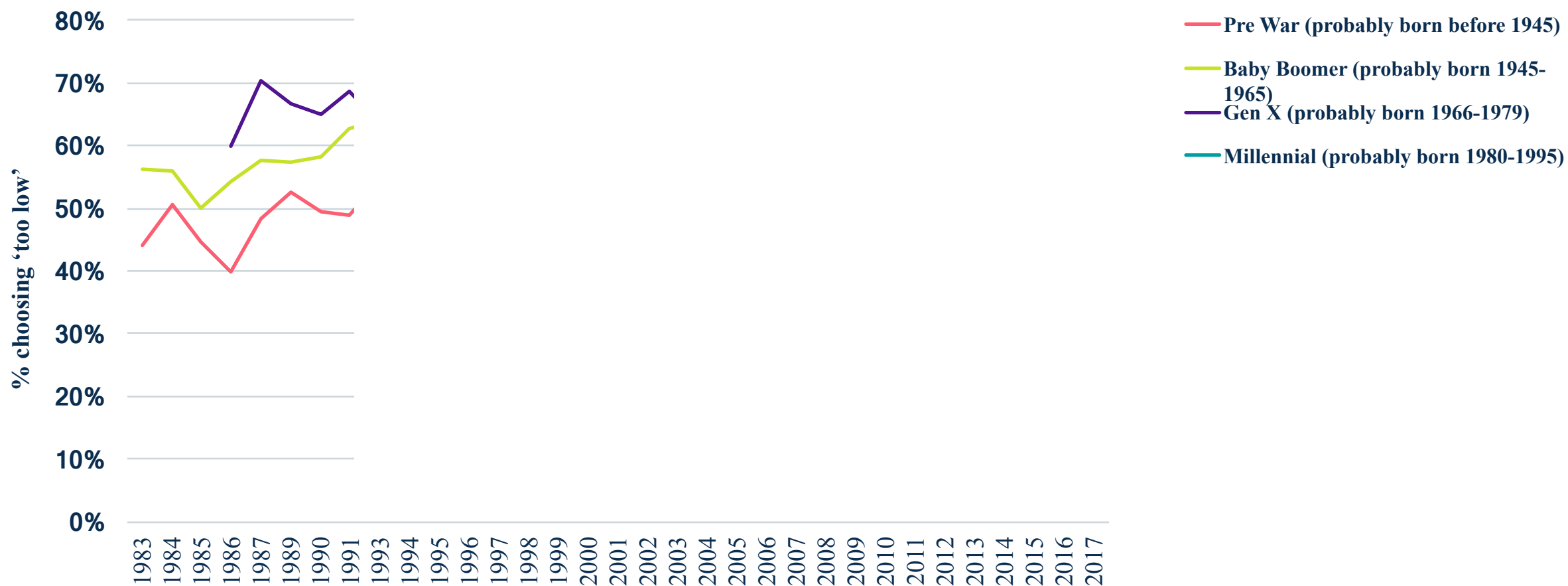


Increased belief that unemployment benefits are too high



...driven by significant period and cohort effects...

Are benefits for unemployed people too low and cause hardship, or are they too high and discourage them from finding jobs?

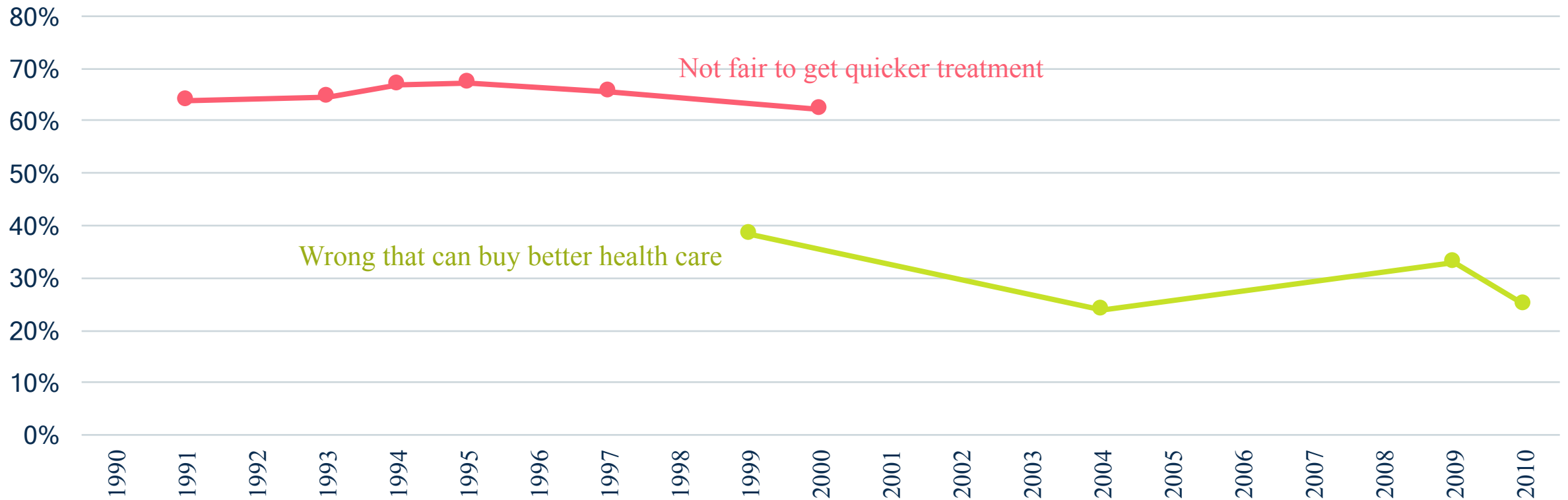


6. Very specific features of inequality and how question is framed affect how fair/unfair it's seen to be and levels of support...

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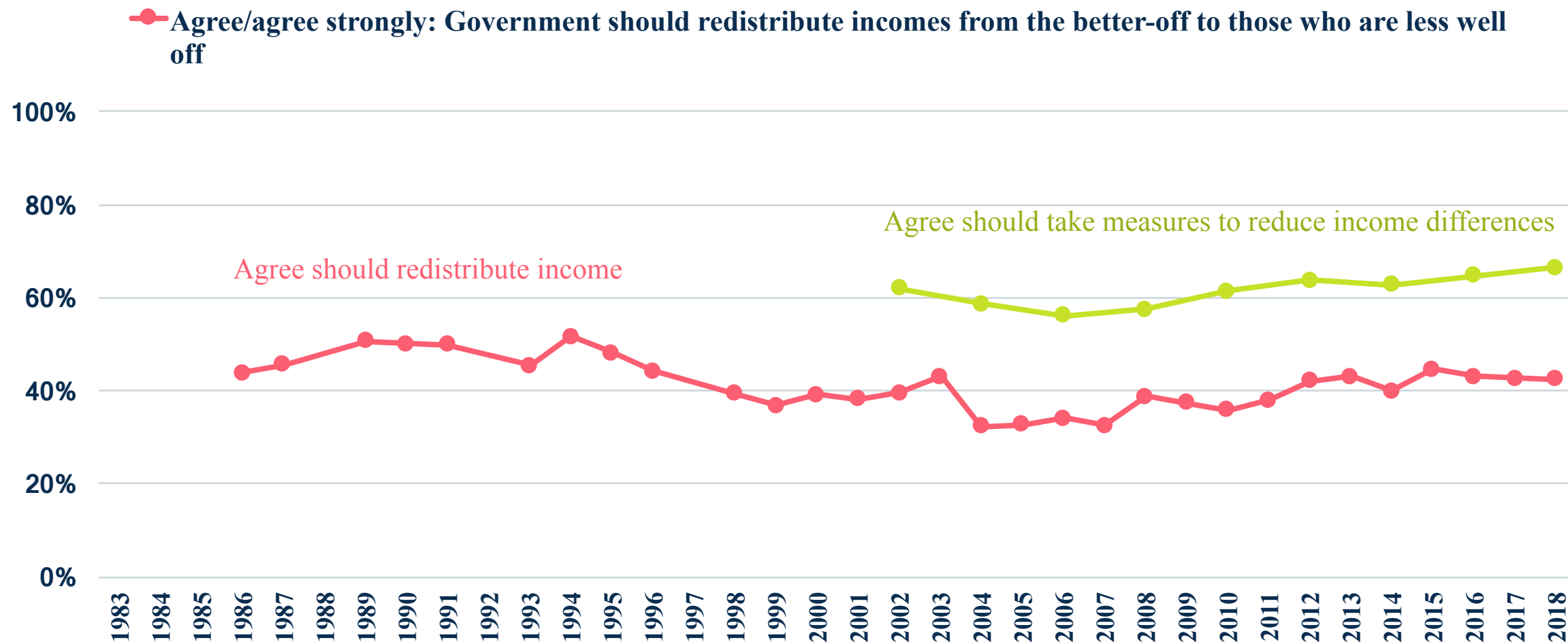
Big gaps in comfort between better and quicker medical treatments...

- Wrong or very wrong: People with higher incomes can afford to buy better health care than people with lower incomes
- Agree or strongly agree: It is not fair that some people can get medical treatment before others, just because they can afford to pay for it



Sources: Wrong/very wrong: British Social Attitudes survey, weighted data; agree/strongly agree: British Household Panel Study, unweighted data

Taking measures vs redistributing income...

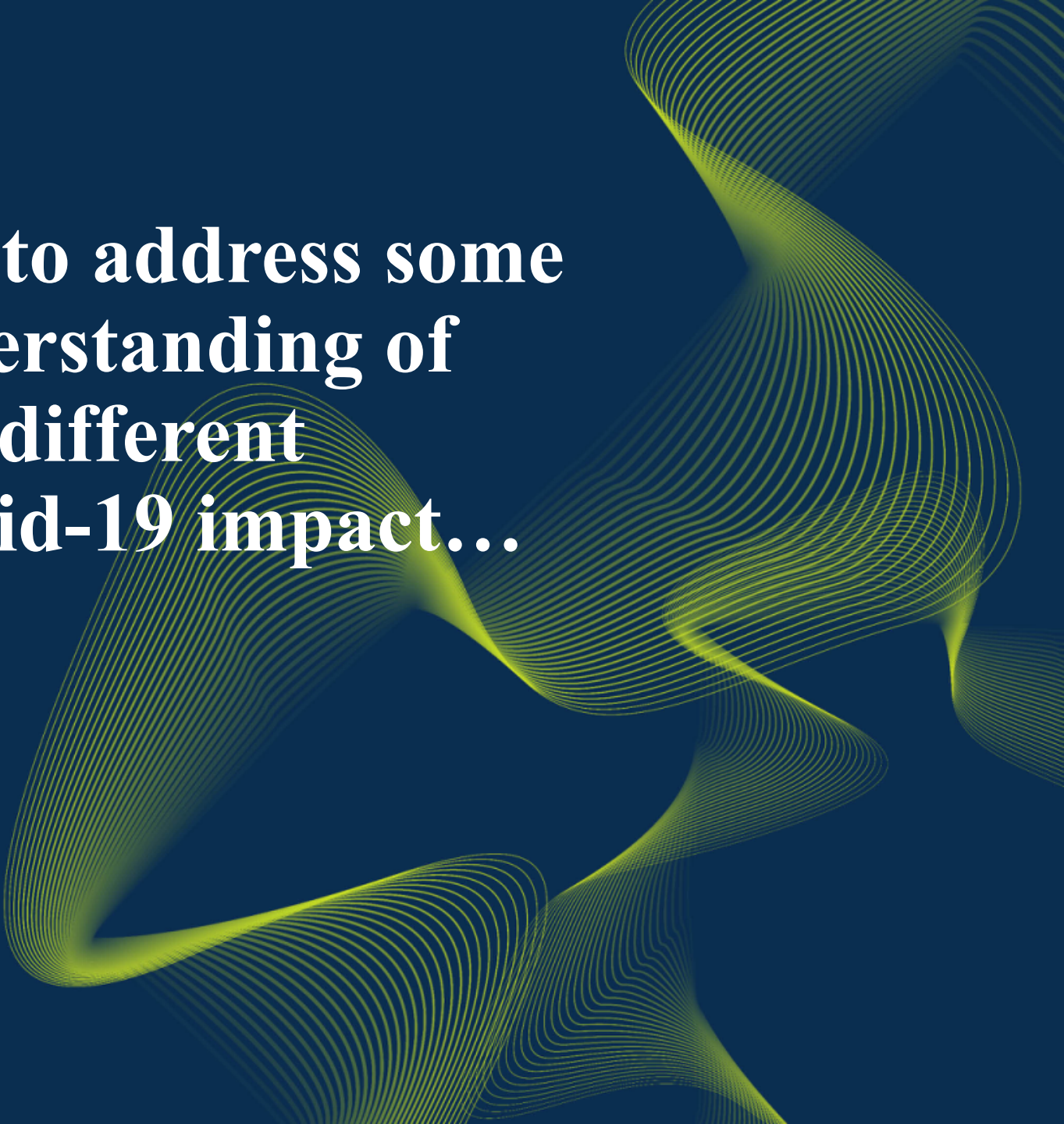


Sources

Government should redistribute incomes: British Social Attitudes survey

Government should take measures to reduce income differences: European Social Survey

Fielding a new survey to address some of the gaps in our understanding of how people feel about different inequalities – and Covid-19 impact...

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The survey will ask collect information in five areas related to perceptions of and attitudes towards inequality

1. Perceptions of and attitudes to inequalities: across domains in single study
2. Perceptions of how Covid-19 is affecting inequalities, and whether this is considered to be a problem
3. Attitudes to redistribution and government interventions both in general and in the context of Covid-19
4. Perceptions of fairness and belief in meritocracy
5. Respondents' underlying values

Survey design

- Sample of 2,000 adults in Britain (fielded via YouGov omnibus)
- Drawing on validated questions from existing surveys as far as possible (BSA, BHPS, ESS, ISSP, GSS)
- Collection of data for extensive sub-group analysis (inc. age, income, gender, ethnicity, education level, political affiliation, employment status etc.)
- Fielding end Oct

Do people hold consistent attitudes across different types of inequality, and which types are most concerning?

- Questions to allow comparisons across domains in single instrument
- ... including which cause the greatest concern/are highest salience:
 - Inequalities in income
 - Inequalities in wealth
 - Inequalities in educational outcomes for children
 - Inequalities in health and life expectancies
 - Inequalities between men and women
 - Inequalities between older generations and younger generations
 - Inequalities between racial or ethnic groups
 - Inequalities between more and less deprived areas in the UK

How do underlying values relate to attitudes towards inequality?

- Inclusion of different measures of underlying values:
 - Schwartz Human Values
 - Moral Foundations Theory (Haidt et al.)
- Assessing whether different underlying values are associated with different attitudes towards inequality

- E.g. sample from MFT questionnaire:

When you decide whether something is right or wrong, to what extent are the following considerations relevant to your thinking?

- Whether or not someone suffered emotionally
- Whether or not some people were treated differently than others
- Whether or not someone's action showed love for his or her country
- Whether or not someone showed a lack of respect for authority
- Whether or not someone violated standards of purity and decency
- Whether or not someone cared for someone weak or vulnerable
- ...

How has COVID-19 impacted on belief in role of luck vs. merit, and attitudes to government intervention?

E.g. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements:

- The coronavirus crisis has shown how vulnerable many people's jobs and income are
- The coronavirus has shown how important luck is in determining how well people can get on in life
- The coronavirus crisis has made me more likely to support government providing direct funding to keep people in work and out of poverty, even after the immediate crisis is over
- The economic support the government has given to protect jobs and businesses during the crisis needs to be a one-off, and we need to get back to people and businesses looking after themselves

[Plus questions on whether attitudes towards people on the JRS differ to those claiming unemployment benefits]

How does the framing of survey questions about fairness and inequality affect responses?

- Split sample questions to better understand whether framing matters for how people respond.

E.g. does framing of right and wrong vs. fair or unfair matter?

- SPLIT SAMPLE, GROUP A: Is it right or wrong that people with higher incomes can buy better health care than people with lower incomes?
- SPLIT SAMPLE, GROUP B: To what extent do you agree with the statement 'It is not fair that people with higher incomes can buy better health care than people with lower incomes'?

E.g. does framing of redistribution vs. reducing income differences matter?

- SPLIT SAMPLE, GROUP A: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Government should redistribute income from the better-off to those who are less well off.
 - SPLIT SAMPLE, GROUP B: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement: It is the responsibility of the government to reduce the differences in income between people with high incomes and those with low incomes.
- Happy to share questionnaire, thoughts very welcome...

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