



Social Mobility
Commission

Social Mobility Barometer

Public attitudes to social mobility in the UK

June 2017

Social Mobility Commission
Sanctuary Buildings
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About the Commission

The Social Mobility Commission is an advisory non-departmental public body established under the Life Chances Act 2010 as modified by the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016. It has a duty to assess progress in improving social mobility in the UK and to promote social mobility in England. It currently consists of four commissioners and is supported by a small secretariat.

The Commission board comprises:

- The Rt. Hon. Alan Milburn (Chair).
- The Rt. Hon. Baroness Gillian Shephard (Deputy Chair).
- Paul Gregg, Professor of Economic and Social Policy, University of Bath.
- David Johnston, Chief Executive of the Social Mobility Foundation.

The functions of the Commission include:

- Monitoring progress on improving social mobility.
- Providing published advice to ministers on matters relating to social mobility.
- Undertaking social mobility advocacy.

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Foreword

Britain's social mobility problem has been the subject of countless academic studies and political debates. But the public's view about the state of British society has often not been heard. In this report, which is published just a week after the General Election, we give voice to what Brits are thinking about the country in which they live.

The Social Mobility Barometer is a poll of nearly 5,000 people from across the nation. It is published for the first time this year and there will be follow-up polls in each of the next four years. It reveals a lot about the state of modern Britain's 'us and them' society.

Nearly half of people (48 per cent) believe that where you end up in society today is mainly determined by your background and who your parents are, compared to only 32 per cent who believe everyone has a fair chance to get on regardless of their background. Four in five people (79 per cent) believe that there is a large gap between the social classes in Britain today. A large majority of people believe that poorer people are held back at nearly every stage of their lives - from childhood, through education and into their careers.

The poll also exposes a deep geographical divide in Britain today with nearly three quarters of people (71 per cent) saying there are 'fairly or very' large differences in opportunity depending on where you live in the country. These feelings are particularly strong in places like Scotland, Wales and North East England. This growing sense that we have become a divided 'us and them' society is deeply corrosive of our cohesion as a nation.

Perhaps most shockingly, the Social Mobility Barometer uncovers feelings of deep social pessimism among young people with half (51 per cent) of 18-24 year olds believe that where you end up in society is largely determined by who your parents are compared with 40 per cent of those aged 65 and over.

Young people increasingly feel like they are on the wrong side of a profound unfairness in British society - and they are unhappy about it. The Barometer finds that half of young people think the situation is getting worse with only 30 per cent of 18-24 year olds believing it is becoming easier to move up in British society. Perhaps unsurprisingly, what could be dubbed the 'revenge of the young' was evident at the General Election with record numbers of young people turning out to vote.

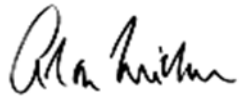
This stark intergenerational divide seems to be the product of pessimism about personal finances, job security and housing mobility. Just one-third (34 per cent) of 25-49 year olds say they are better off than their parents, compared to 73 per cent of those aged over 65. Only a fifth of 18-24 year olds believe they have a better level of job security compared to their parents and only 17 per cent say they have better job satisfaction. And while two-thirds of those aged 65 and over think they have had a better situation where it comes to housing than their parents did, barely a quarter (24 per cent) of those aged 25-49 feel the same.

The feelings of pessimism young people are expressing are borne out by the facts they are experiencing. Those born in the 1980s are the first post-war cohort not to start their working years with higher incomes than their immediate predecessors. Home ownership, the aspiration of successive generations of ordinary people, is in sharp decline, among the young especially. In the last ten years, the number of under-25-year-old home owners has more than halved. As wages have fallen, house prices have risen. Today's young generation is more reliant than ever on their parents for help to buy their first home: three times as many buyers used inherited funds to do so now compared to a decade ago.

Britain's deep social mobility problem, for this generation of young people in particular, is getting worse not better. The twentieth century promise that each generation would be better off than the preceding one is being broken. There is a stark message here for educators, employers and policy-makers. Quite simply Britain's social mobility problem cannot be ignored.

In particular, there is a wake-up call for the new government when six in ten people say not enough is being done to help the so-called “just about managing” families who are running hard just to stand still.

Cracking Britain’s social mobility problem has to become its defining domestic priority. That will require deep-seated social reform. And it will require a new coalition of the willing to be formed - from businesses, communities, councils, schools and universities - to champion the level playing field of opportunity that the British public, the young especially, crave.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alan Milburn". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

The Rt Hon Alan Milburn
Chair

Top line findings

- Nearly half of people (48%) say that where you end up in society is largely determined by who your parents are – compared with a third (32%) who say that everyone has a fair chance to get on regardless of their background.
- It is the younger generation who feel more acutely that background determines where you end up, with around half (51%) of 18-24 year olds agreeing with this statement compared with 40% of those aged 65 and over.
- Half of young people think the situation is getting worse with only 30% of 18-24 year olds believing it is becoming easier to move up in British society.
- Although almost half (47%) of people overall say they are better off financially than their parents and have a better standard of living, there is a significant generational divide. For instance, when looking at their financial situation, just 34% of 25-49 year olds say they are better off than their parents, compared to 73% of those aged 65+.
- Only a fifth of 18-24 year olds believe they have a better level of job security compared to their parents and only 17% say they have better job satisfaction.
- Two thirds of those aged 65 and over think that in terms of housing they have had a better situation than their parents did, with only a quarter (24%) of those aged 25-49 saying the same.

Top line findings continued

- 4 in 5 people (79%) say there is a large gap between social classes in Britain today – just 12% believe the gap is small. One third (34%) believe this gap is ‘very large’. Following on from this, 44% say that it is becoming harder for people from less advantaged backgrounds to move up in society – compared with just 18 per cent who say it is getting easier.
- Nearly half of all Brits (49%) consider themselves working class and just over a third (36%) think of themselves as middle class and just one per cent upper class. 78% of those who grew up in a working class family classify themselves as this now.
- Over three quarters of people (76%) say poorer people are less likely to go to a top university. Meanwhile, 66% say poorer people have less opportunity to get into a professional career.
- A quarter (23%) of people who say that their family was working class when they were growing up, said that their social background has held them back in their working life.
- Nearly two thirds of people feel that those who are ‘just about managing’ are not getting enough support from Government (61%) compared with 49% who say the least well off are not getting enough support.

Top line regional findings

- Nearly three quarters of people (71%) say there are 'fairly or very' large differences in opportunity depending on where you live in the country.
- Those living in Scotland (75%), Wales (75%) and the North East (76%) are most likely to think that differences in opportunities exist.
- Around 47 per cent of those who moved from where they grew up say if they had stayed where they were, they would not have got the best opportunities in life.
- Half of those who grew up outside London say that if they had stayed in that area they would not have been able to have as many opportunities or as much success.
- 61% of people living in the North East say the opportunities for people to progress (compared to other parts of the country) are poor.

Methodology

YouGov surveyed 4,723 UK adults and fieldwork was conducted between 6th – 9th March 2017.

The survey was carried out online and figures have been weighted and are representative of UK adults aged 18+

YouGov ensured the survey was made representative based on several criteria:

- Age and Gender
- Political Attention
- Region
- Education Level
- General Election Vote in 2015
- EU Referendum Vote 2016

YouGov is a member of the British Polling Council.



Social Mobility
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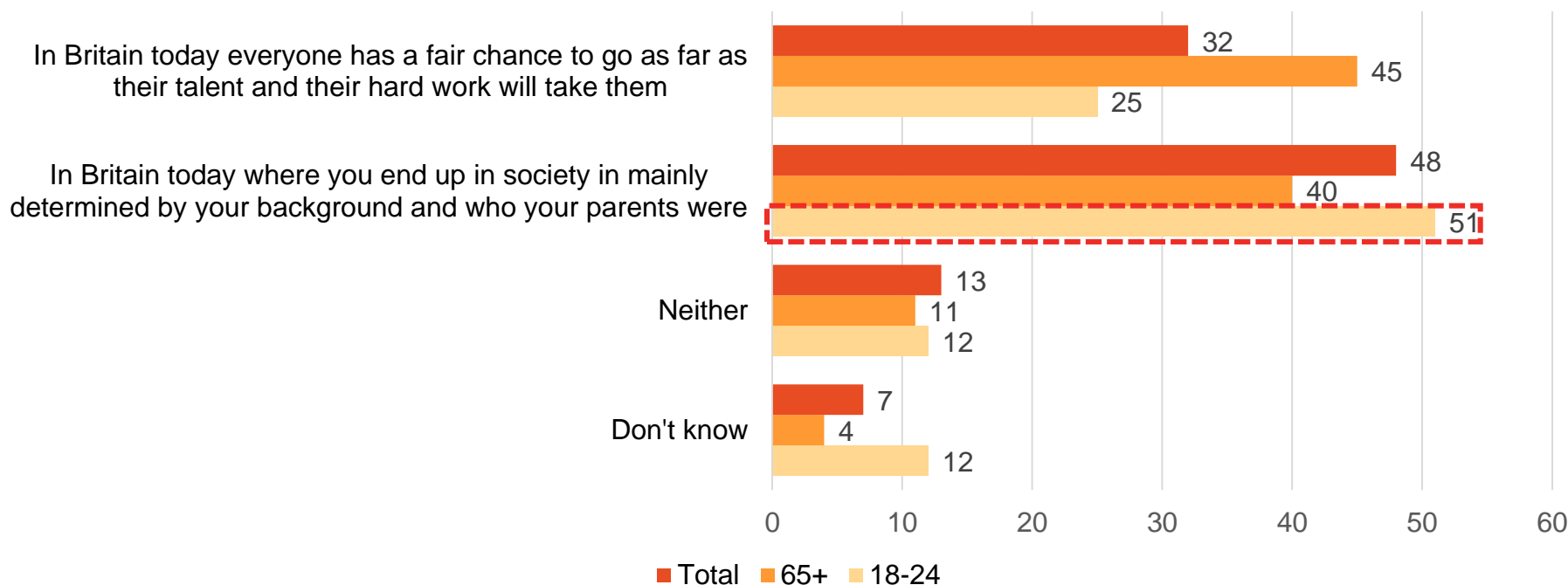
Full Report

How your background impacts
where you end up

Majority believe background and parents determines where you end up in society

- Nearly half of people (48%) say that where you end up in society is largely determined by who your parents are – compared with a third (32%) who say that everyone has a fair chance to get on regardless of their background.
- It is the younger generation who feel more acutely that background determines where you end up, with half (51%) of 18-24 year olds agreeing with this statement compared with 40% of those aged 65 and over.
- Over half (51%) of those who voted conservative in 2015 election thought that everyone has a fair chance to go as far as their talents and hard work take them, compared with less than a fifth (17%) of those who voted Labour.
- Those who went to a state comprehensive school were more likely, than those who went to private school, to believe that where you end up in society is mainly determined by your background and who your parents are

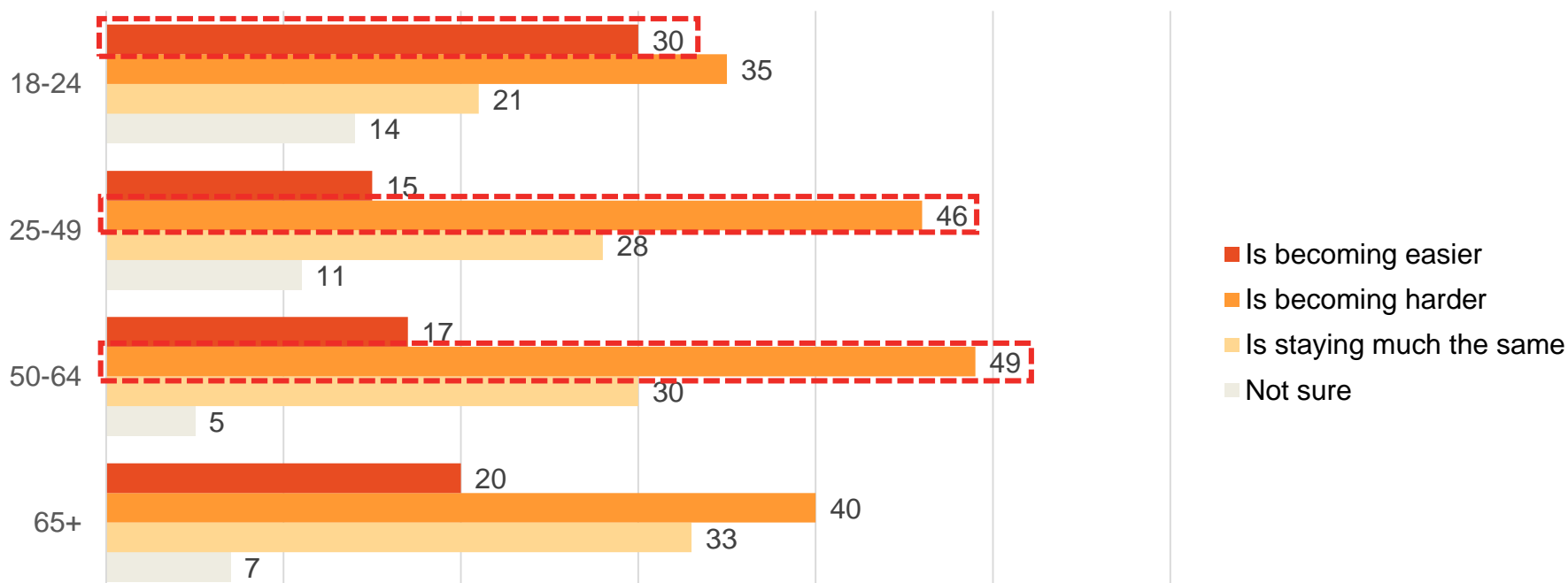
Q. Which of the following best reflects your view?



People think that social mobility is getting worse in Britain, especially 50 to 64 year olds

- Following on from this, 44% say that it is becoming harder for people from less advantaged backgrounds to move up in society – compared with just 18 per cent who say it is getting easier.
- These feelings are strongest among those between 50 and 64, where almost half think the situation is getting worse. In comparison 30% of 18-24 year olds think it is becoming easier to move up in British society
- There is not a huge amount of variance in views about whether it is harder or easier to move up in society between different household incomes, although those earning over £60,000 being distinctly more optimistic about it becoming easier. 47% for households earning under £20,000 compared with 37% for households earning more than £60,000

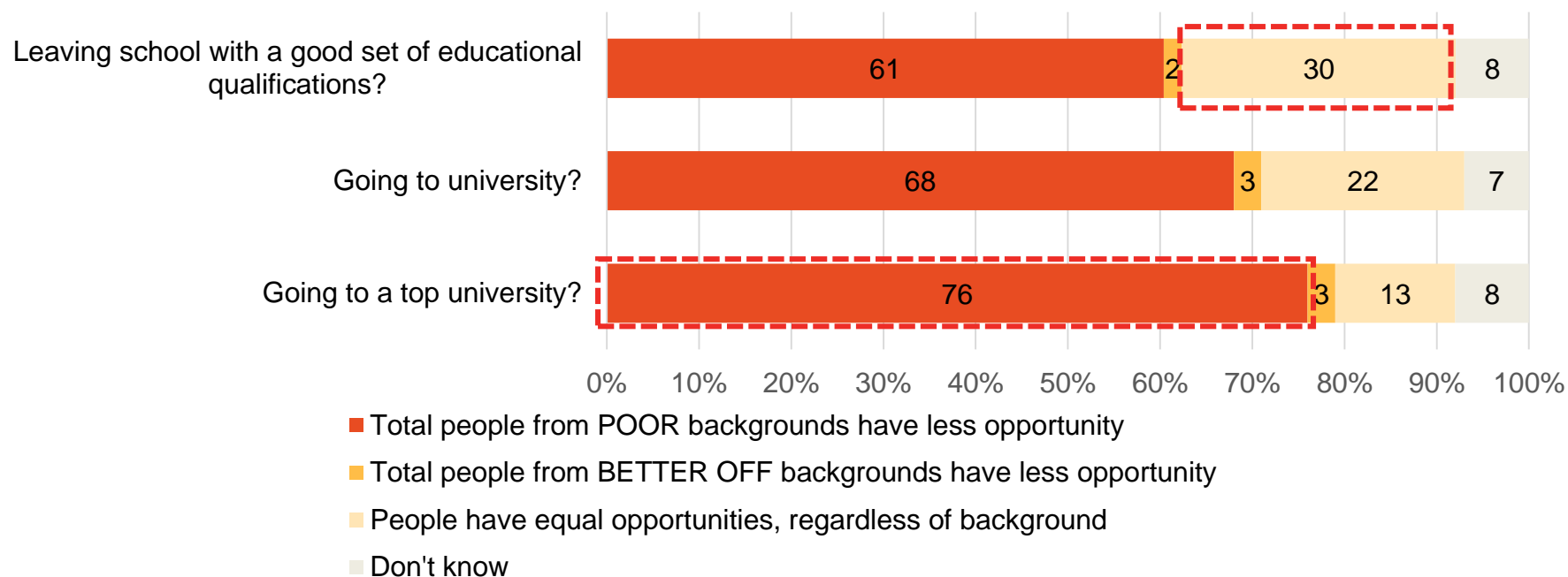
Q. Generally speaking, do you think it is becoming easier or harder for people from less advantaged backgrounds to move up in British society?



People think those from poor backgrounds have fewer educational opportunities

- Overall the public believe that those who are from a poorer background have less opportunity when it comes to getting a good set of qualifications and going to university. 61% say poorer people are less likely to leave school with a good set of qualifications, with 3 in 10 (30%) saying people have equal opportunity, regardless of background.
- There is even more consensus that when it comes to going to university that those from a poor background are disadvantaged. 68% say poorer people are less likely to go to university and three quarters (76%) say poorer people are less likely to go to a top university.
- Only 1 in 10 people (13%) believe that people have the same opportunities to go to a good university regardless of background.

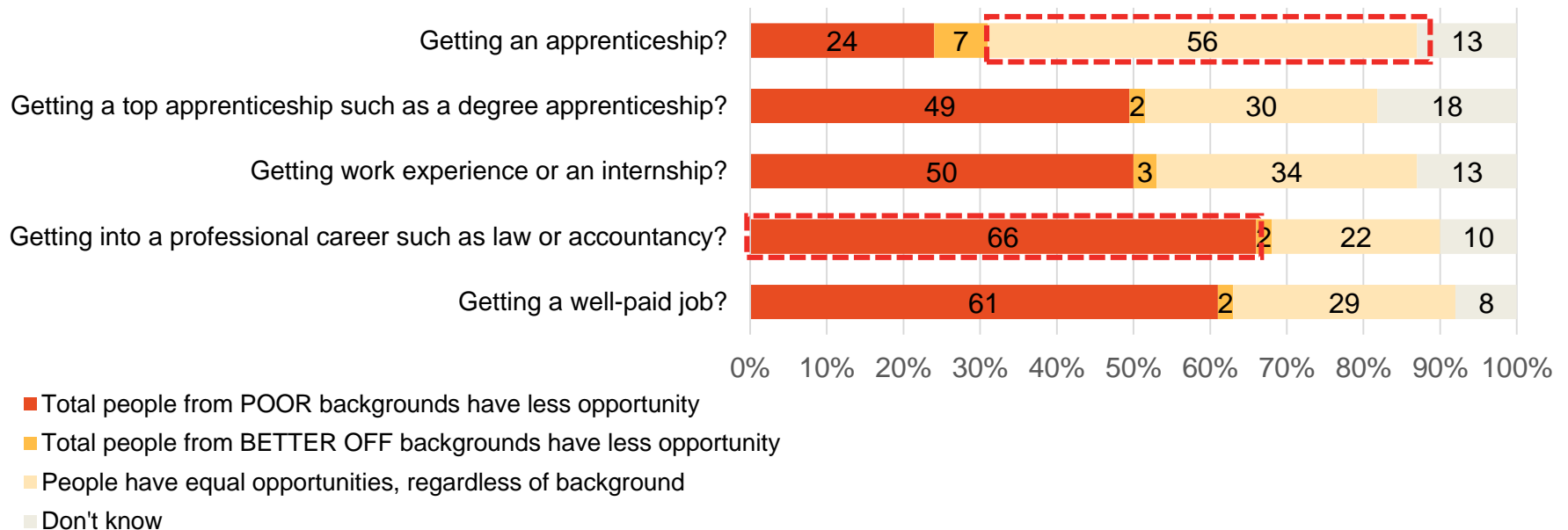
Q. Thinking about the opportunities that people from different backgrounds have in life, how do you think the opportunities open to people from poor backgrounds compare to those open to people from better off backgrounds in the following areas?



Two thirds believe professional careers are harder to obtain for those from poorer backgrounds

- 56% say people have equal access to apprenticeships, but half (49%) say that poorer people have less access to top apprenticeships
- A third (34%) believe that the chances to obtain work experience and internships are not impacted by background, however 50% believe that those from poor backgrounds do have less opportunity in this area.
- When asked about how background impacts on 'getting into a professional career such as law or accountancy', 66% say poorer people have less opportunity to get into these careers. Furthermore, 61% say poorer people have less chance of getting a well-paid job.
- Like educational opportunities, only a handful believe that people from better off backgrounds have less opportunities in these areas.

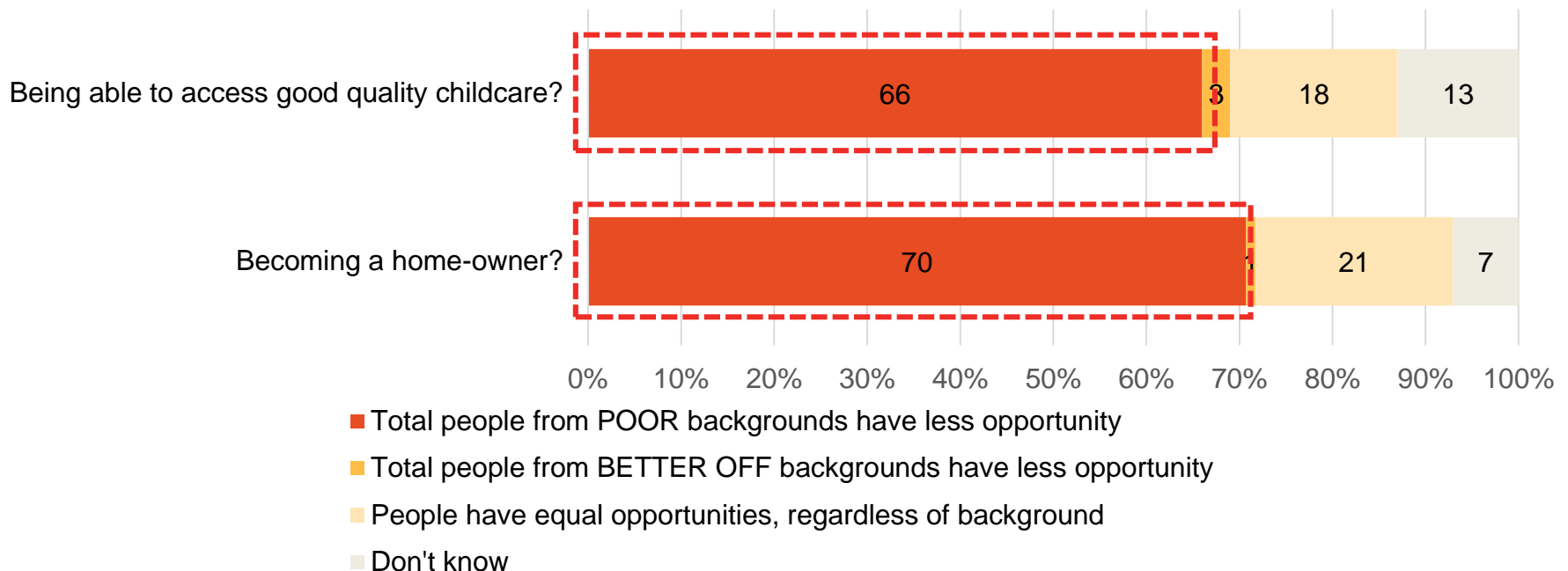
Q. Thinking about the opportunities that people from different backgrounds have in life, how do you think the opportunities open to people from poor backgrounds compare to those open to people from better off backgrounds in the following areas?



Two thirds think people from poor backgrounds are less able to access good quality childcare or own their own home

- 66% say poorer people have less access to high quality childcare, with less than a fifth (18%) believing that background has no impact on this aspect of life.
- Moreover, 7 in 10 of adults believe that opportunities to become a home owner are fewer for those from poor backgrounds. 77% of those whose family struggled financially when they were growing up believe this, compared with 70% who said their family was financially comfortable.

Q. Thinking about the opportunities that people from different backgrounds have in life, how do you think the opportunities open to people from poor backgrounds compare to those open to people from better off backgrounds in the following areas?

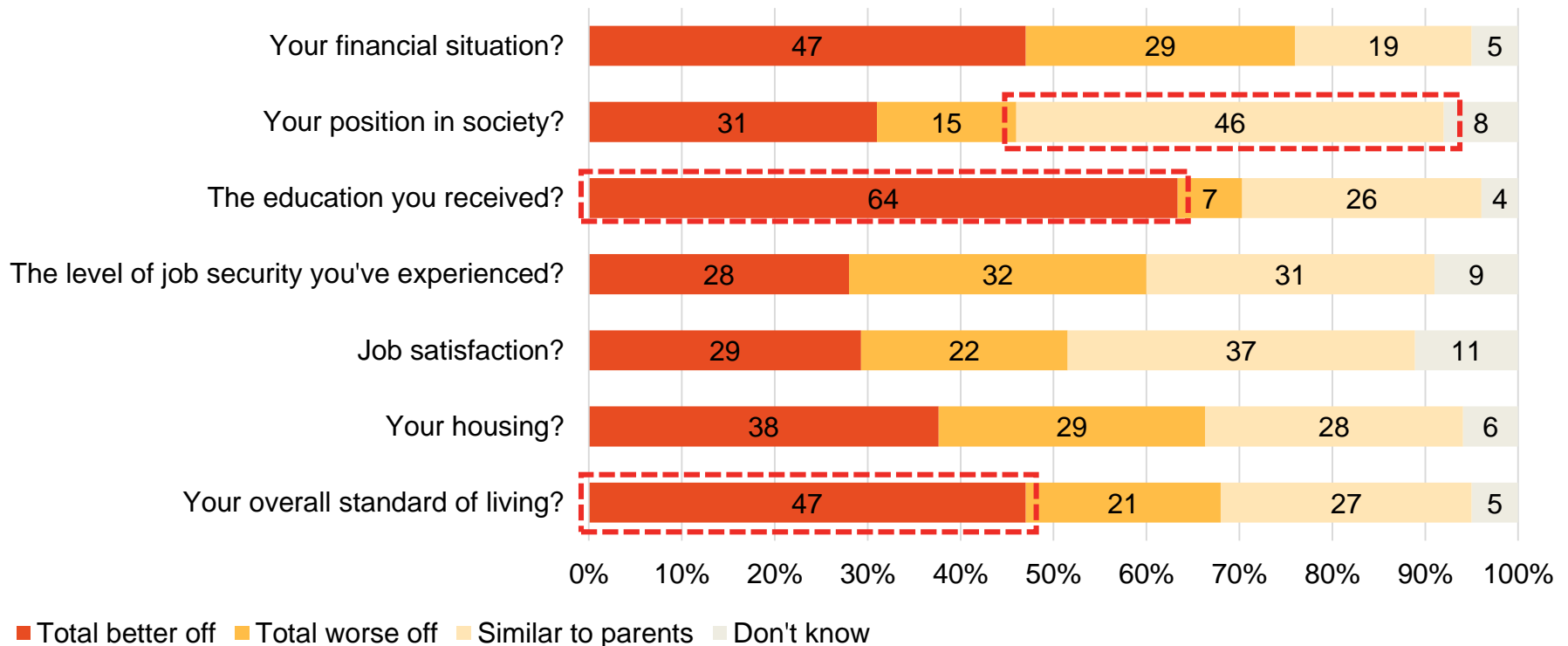


Are things better than they used to
be?

Most believe their lives are better or similar to their parents

- Generally speaking, people think that their situations are better than their parents, with almost half (47%) saying they are better off financially and overall they have a better standard of living. Moreover, two thirds of people (64%) say that they received a better education than their parents did.
- Nearly half of all people (46%) say their position in society is similar to their parents.
- 4 in 10 of those who said their family struggled a lot financially when they were growing up now believe that they have a better position in society and 62% say they are better off than their parents financially.
- Although the overall picture is positive, there are many who believe that in various aspects of life, particularly job security, financial situation and housing, they are worse off than their parents.

Q. Do you think you've been better or worse off than your parents were in terms of...

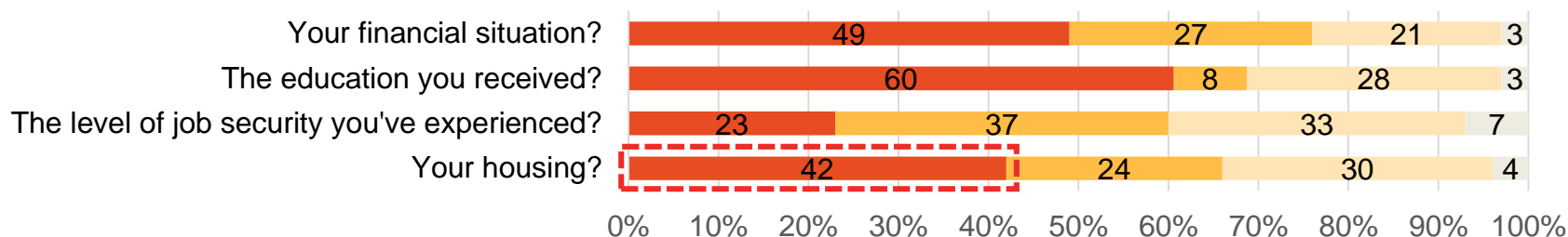


2 in 5 Londoners think they are worse off than their parents when it comes to housing

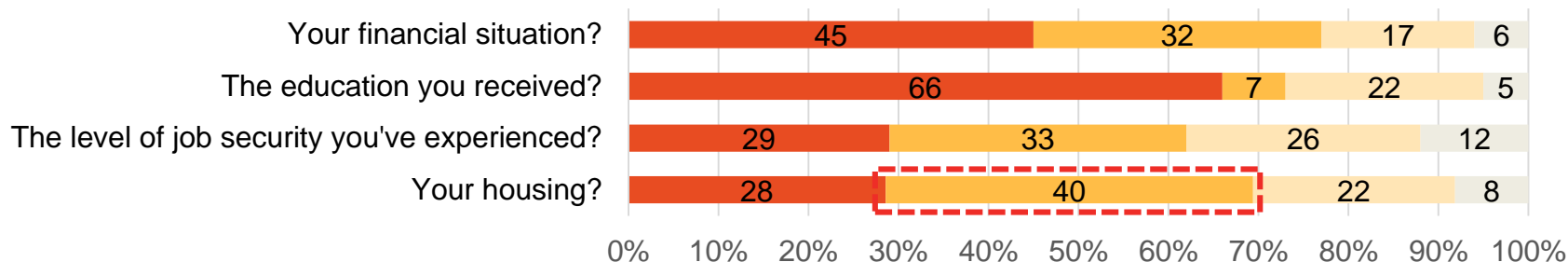
- There is some contrast between people's experiences compared with their parents depending on where in the UK they are living.
- People living in places like the North East and Yorkshire are more likely than those in London to think that they are better off, than their parents, than those living in London in regards to housing, job security and financial situation. For instance, 42% of those in the North East believe they are better off than their parents when it comes to housing, compared with 40% of those in London who say they are worse off.
- However those living in the North East were less likely to think they received a better education than their parents, compared to Londoners.

NORTH EAST

Q. Do you think you've been better or worse off than your parents were in terms of...



LONDON

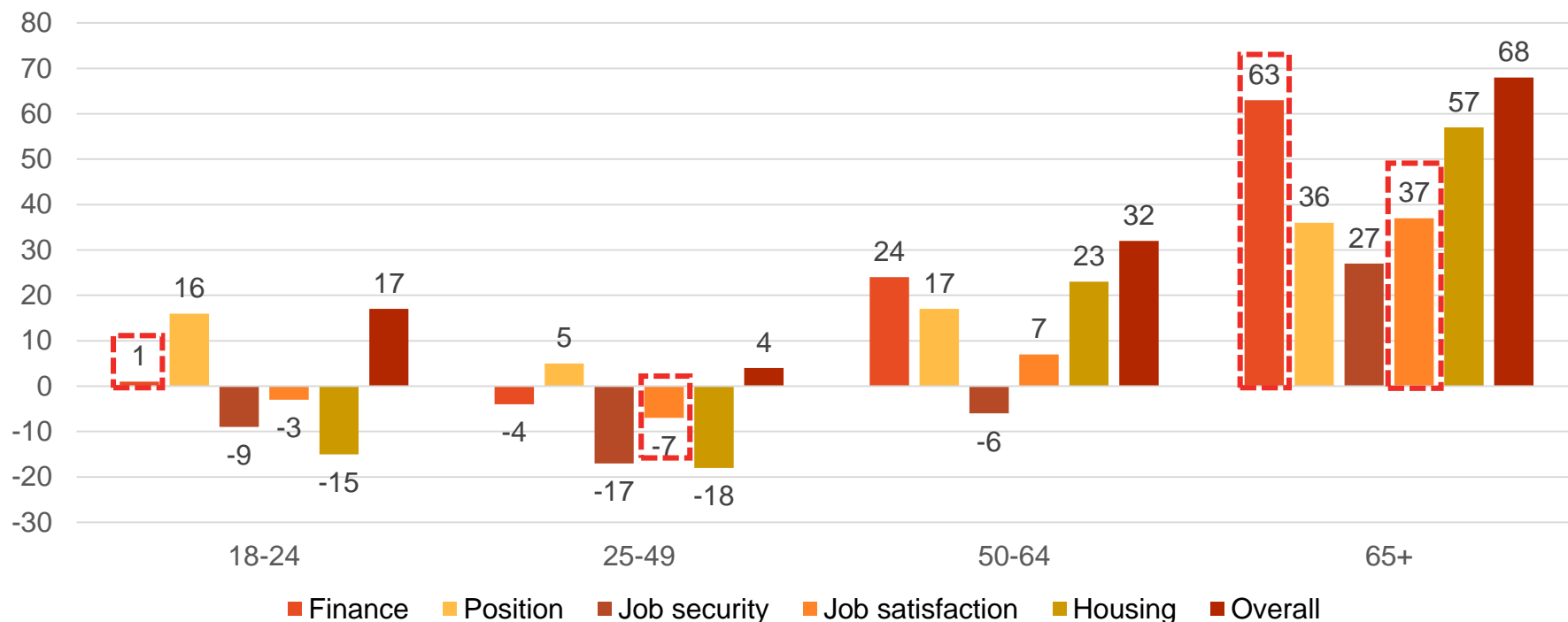


■ Total better off ■ Total worse off ■ Similar to parents ■ Don't know

Younger generations feel significantly worse off

- Across all the areas of life we asked about, those aged 50 and under are more likely to think that they are worse off than their parents. For instance, when looking at your financial situation 34% of 25-49 year olds say they are better off than their parents, compared to 73% of those aged 65+
- Only a fifth of 18-24 year olds believe they have a better level of job security compared to their parents and only 17% say they have better job satisfaction
- Two thirds of those aged 65 and over think that in terms of housing they have had a better situation than their parents did, with only a quarter (24%) of those aged 25-49 saying the same.
- The chart below shows the net score for difference aspects i.e. 'total better' minus 'total worse'

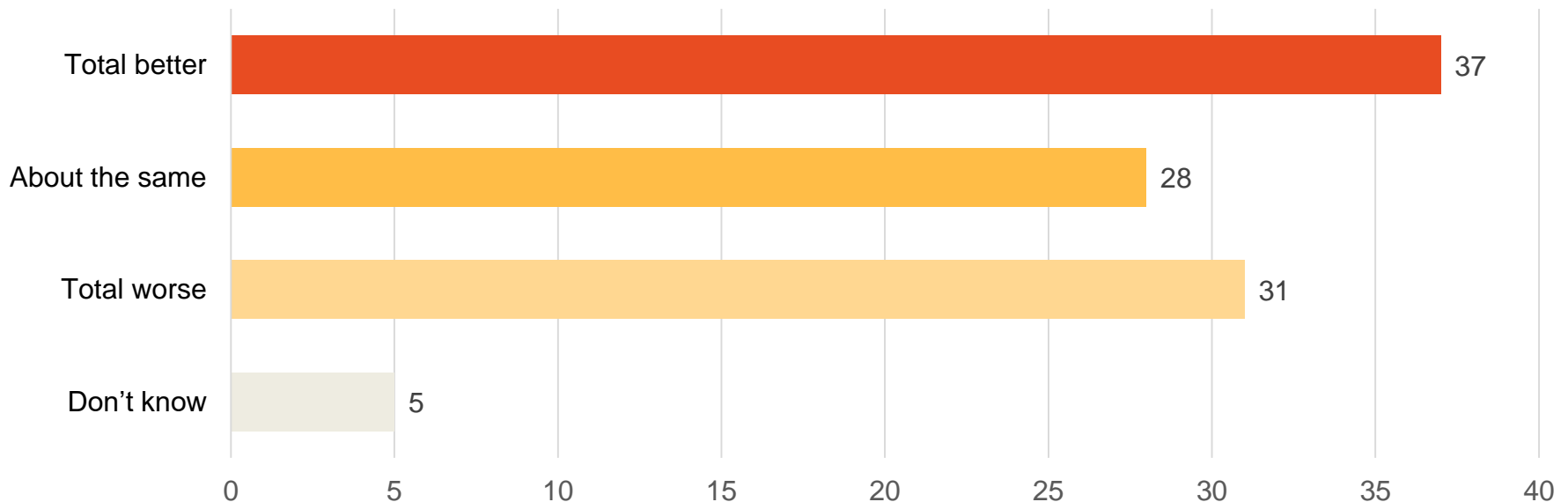
Q. Do you think you've been better or worse off than your parents were in terms of... (Net total better minus total worse)



Mixed views on finances compared to 10 years ago

- 37% of the public say that they are in a better financial situation than they were 10 years ago. This is compared to 31% who say they are in a worse situation and 28% who say their situation is the same
- Looking at the work status of individuals, 2 in 5 (43%) of those in full time employment think their financial situation has improved, whereas only 16% of those who are unemployed say the same.

Q. Generally speaking, would you say your current financial situation is better or worse than it was ten years ago or is it about the same?

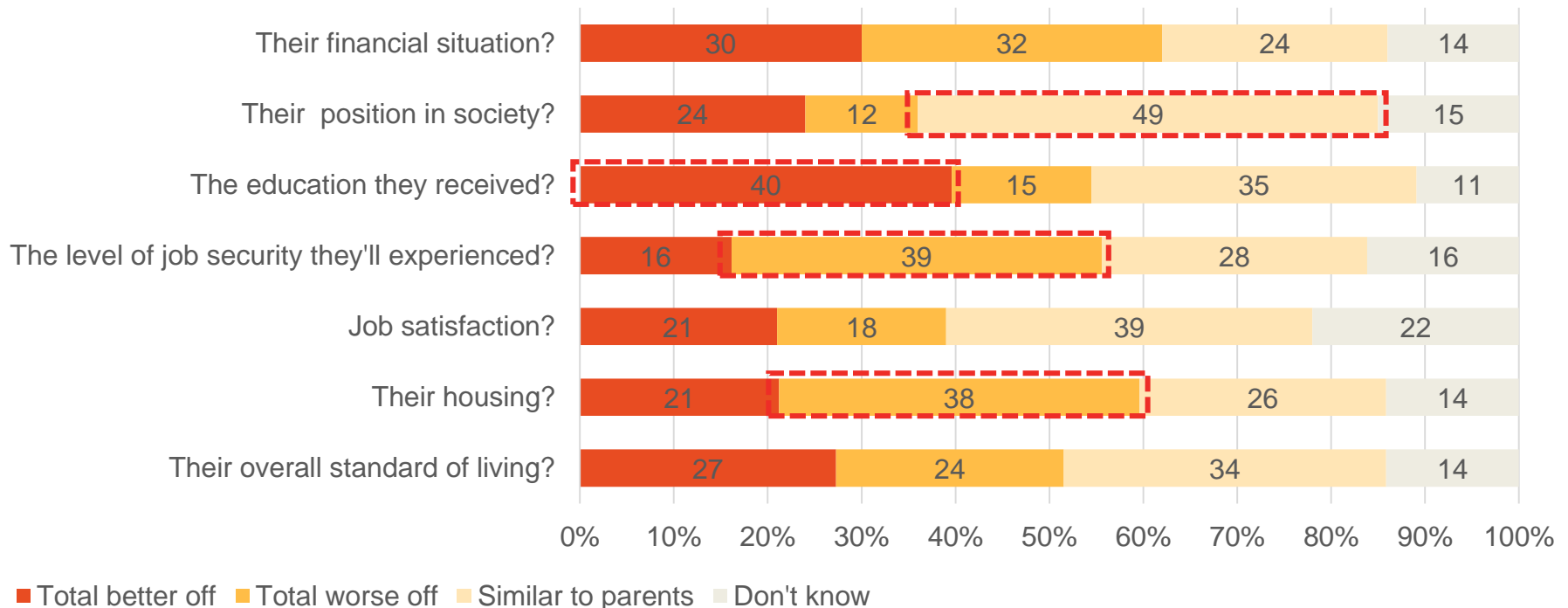


Looking forward to future
generations

Half of us don't expect things will get better for the next generation

- Thinking about the next generation, people were divided on whether or not they will be better or worse off, but half (49%) thought that their position in society would be the same.
- 2 in 5 believed that when it came to education the next generation will be better off than their parents, with only 15% thinking it will be worse
- The main areas that people think might get worse for the next generation is job security (with 39% saying it will get worse) as well as housing (35%)
- 35% of those who voted leave think that the next generation will be better off financially compared with 23% of those who voted remain, highlighting economic optimism about Brexit from this group

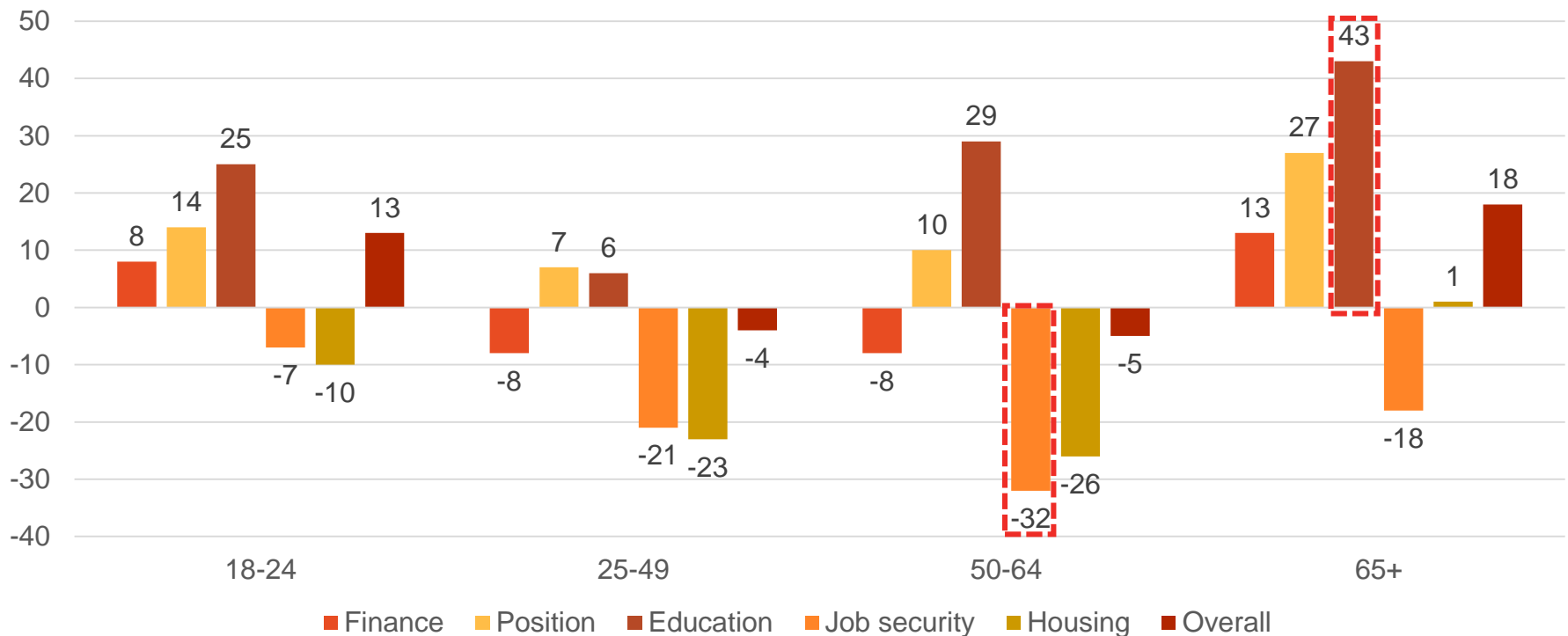
Q. Do you think your children/the next generation will be better or worse off than you have been in terms of...



Job security and housing will be worse for future generations

- Across all the age groups, job security is predicted to get worse for the next generation, with all age groups showing a negative net score. However, those aged between 50 and 64 are particularly pessimistic with half (47%) believing job security will get worse and only 15% thinking it will get better
- Education is seen as getting better for future generations across the age cohorts, but those aged 65 and over are particularly optimistic, with over half (54%) thinking education future generations will receive will get better, compared with 11% who think it will get worse

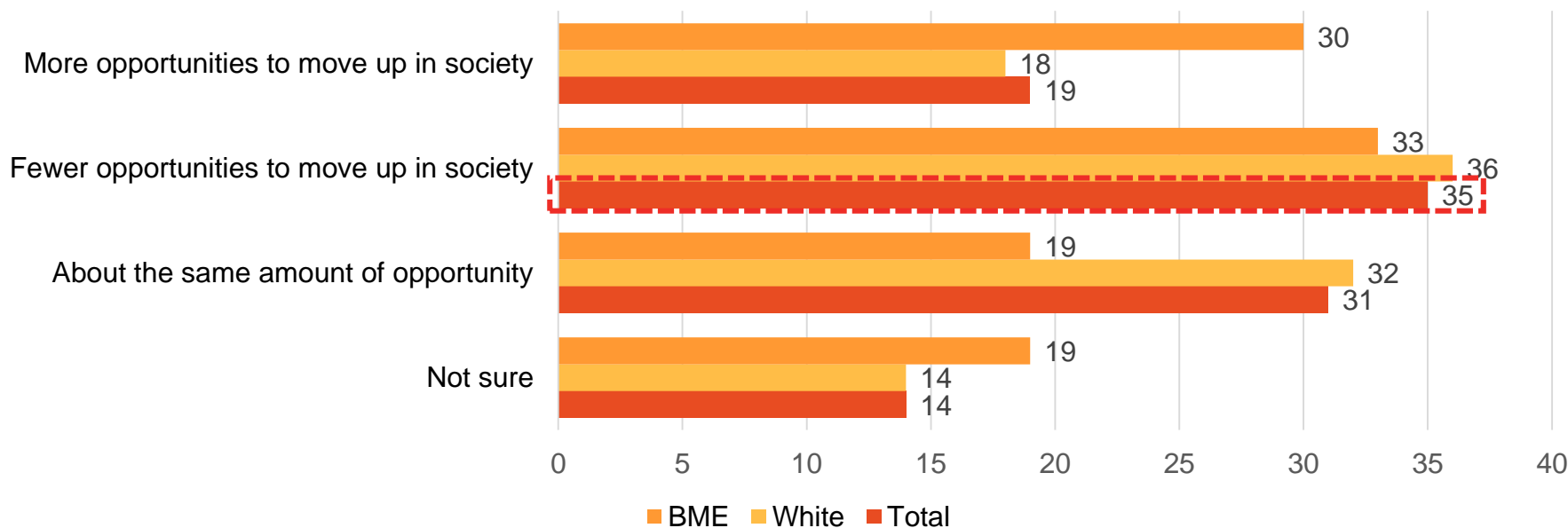
Q. Do you think your children/the next generation will be better or worse off than you have been in terms of... (Net total better minus total worse)



35% think the next generation will have fewer opportunities to move up in society

- When asked overall whether people thought the next generation will have more or fewer opportunities to move up in society than your generation did 66% believe they will have fewer or the same amount of opportunities
- A quarter of those who voted Conservative in the last election (26%) think there will be more opportunities, compared with 1 in 10 (13%) of those who voted Labour
- 3 in 10 ethnic minorities think that their will be more opportunities, compared with 18% of those who are white.

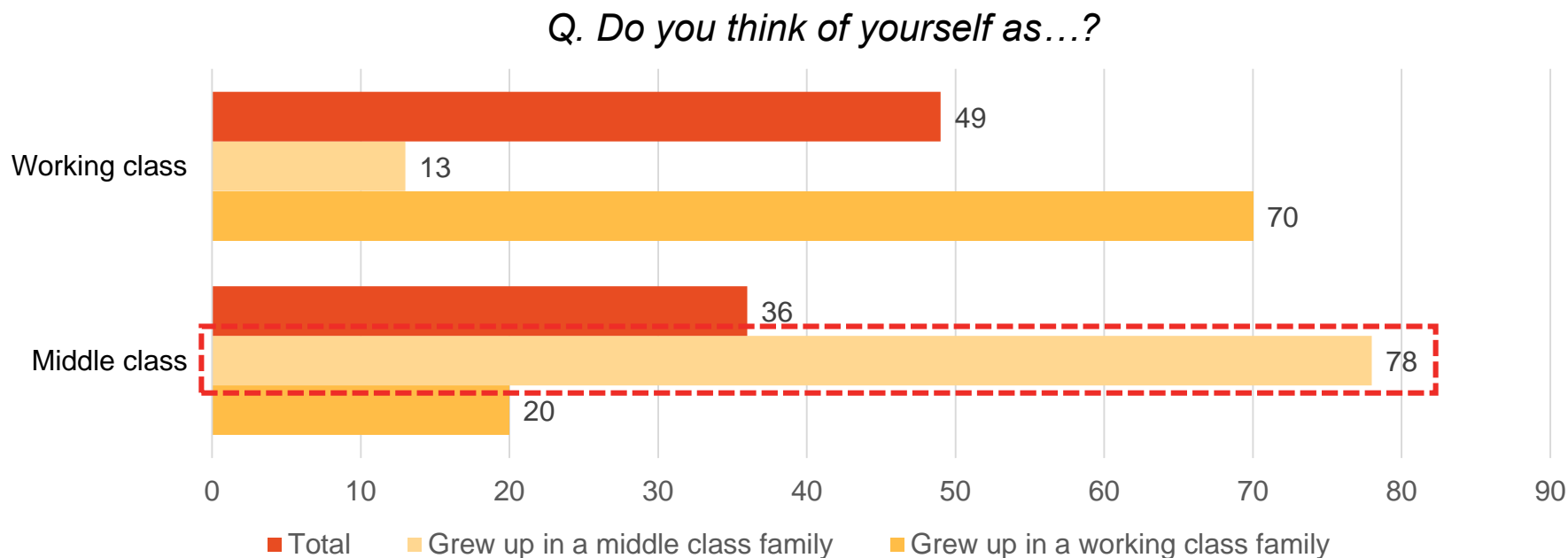
Q. And generally speaking, do you think the next generation will have more or fewer opportunities to move up in society than your generation did?



Social class and background

78% of those who grew up in a working class family still classify themselves as this now

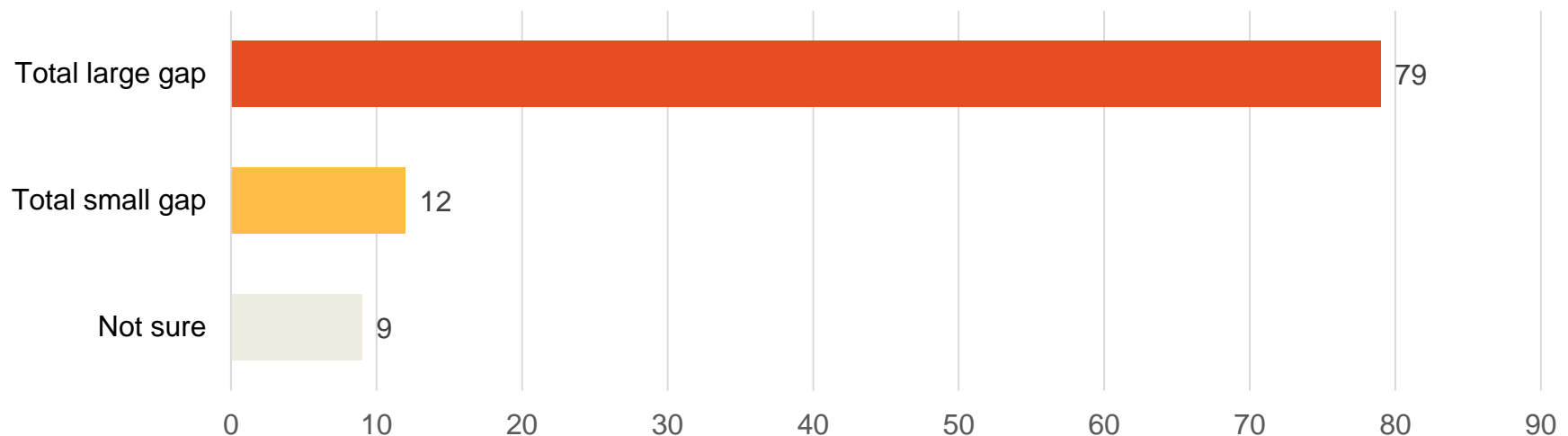
- Nearly half of all Brits (49%) consider themselves working class and just over a third (36%) think of themselves as middle class and just one per cent upper class. 78% of those who grew up in a working class family classify themselves as this now.
- Interestingly, over one in ten people (12%) earning over £100,000 and 6% earning over £150,000 identify themselves as 'working class'
- One in five people (19%) who attended a private school, identify themselves as working class.
- Regionally, people living in the North East, North West, Yorkshire and the Humber and East Midlands are most likely to identify as working class, while those living in London, South East and the South West are more likely to say they are middle class.



Large gap perceived between social classes

- 4 in 5 people (79%) say there is a large gap between social classes in Britain today – just 12% believe the gap is small
- A third (34%) go as far as to say that there is a very large gap between the difference social classes in Britain
- This belief that there is a large gap is felt across different age groups and across the country.

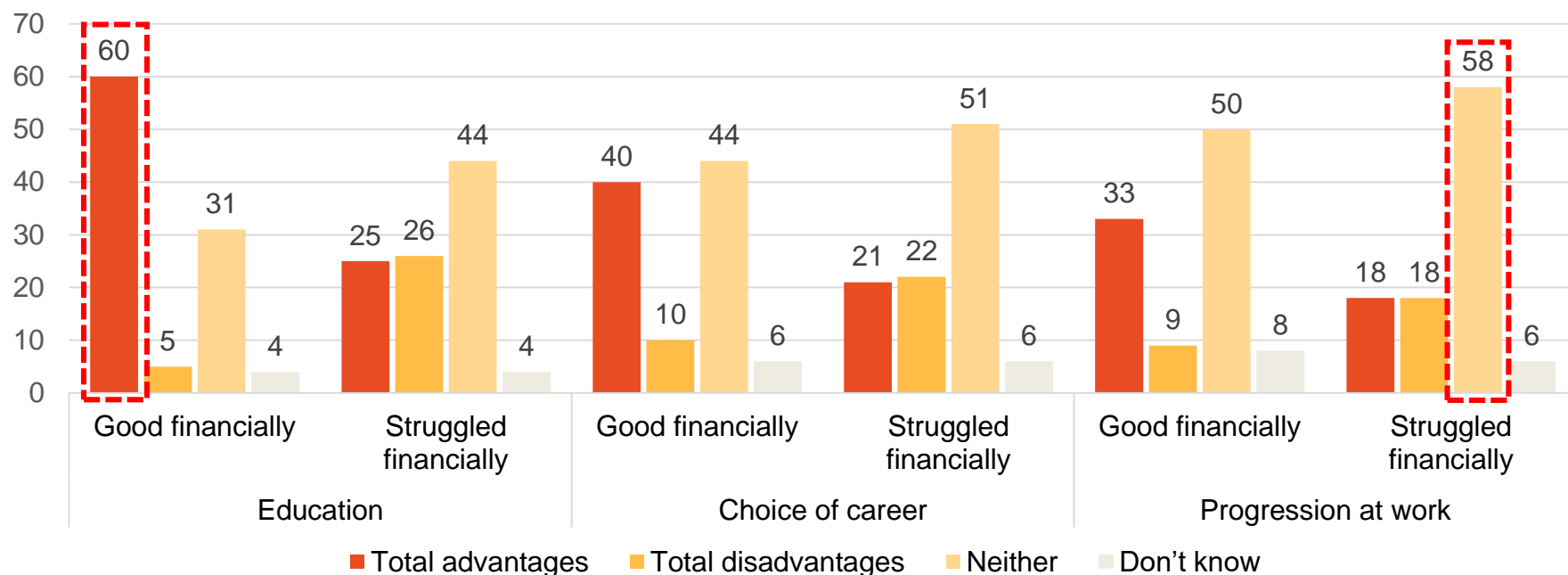
Q. How large or small do you think the gap is between different social classes in Britain today?



People think growing up with good finances gave advantages in education

- People who saw their family background as more affluent do think it benefitted them, but those who think their background was less affluent do not think it hindered them.
- 60% of those who say they were well off financially or comfortable financially when they were growing up, had 'a lot' or 'some' advantages in education.
- 58% of those who say their family struggled financially say that this had no impact on their ability to progress at work

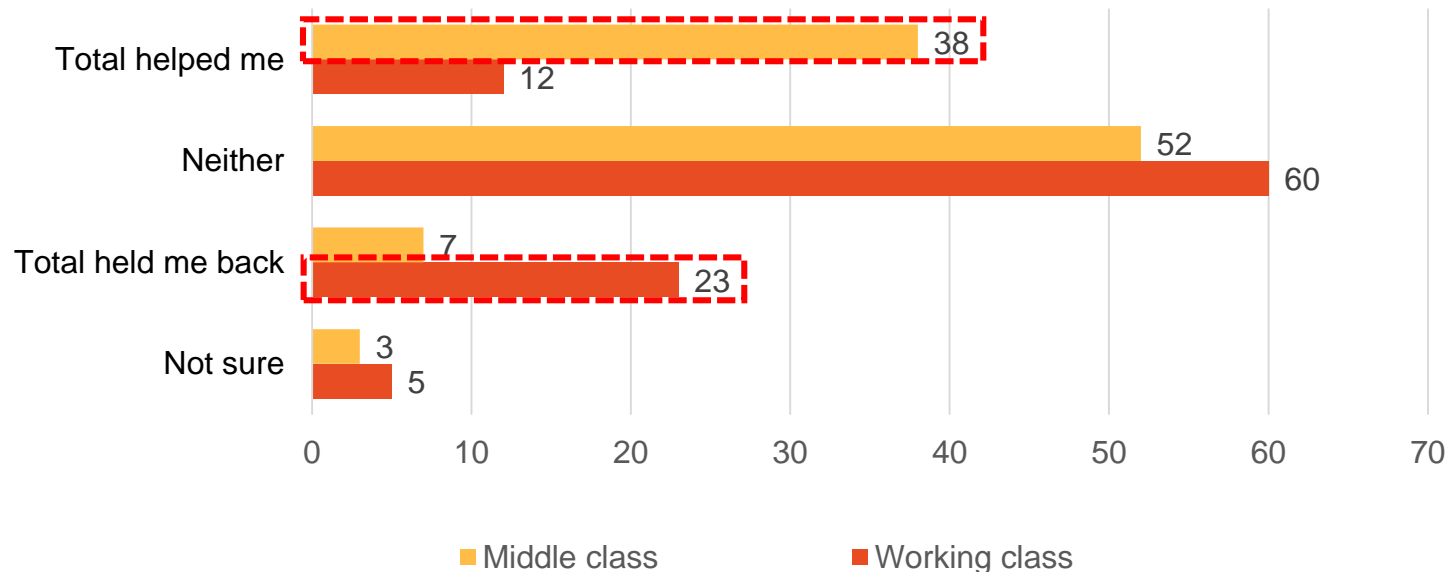
Q. Thinking about your family background, do you think it gave you any advantages or disadvantages in...



The impact of social background at work – seen as helping middle class, holding back working class

- When we asked about whether or not social connections have helped or held people back in their working life, the majority believed that it made no difference.
- A quarter (23%) of people who say that their family was working class when they were growing up, said that their social background has held them back in their working life. In contrast, over a third (38%) of those who say they grew up in a middle class family said their working life was helped by their social background.
- The research also shows that those who grew up in a middle class family are more likely to say that their background and circle of people they know has had a positive effect on their career (41%).
- 34% of those who are from a working class background say that they find it difficult to fit in around people who come from more affluent backgrounds.

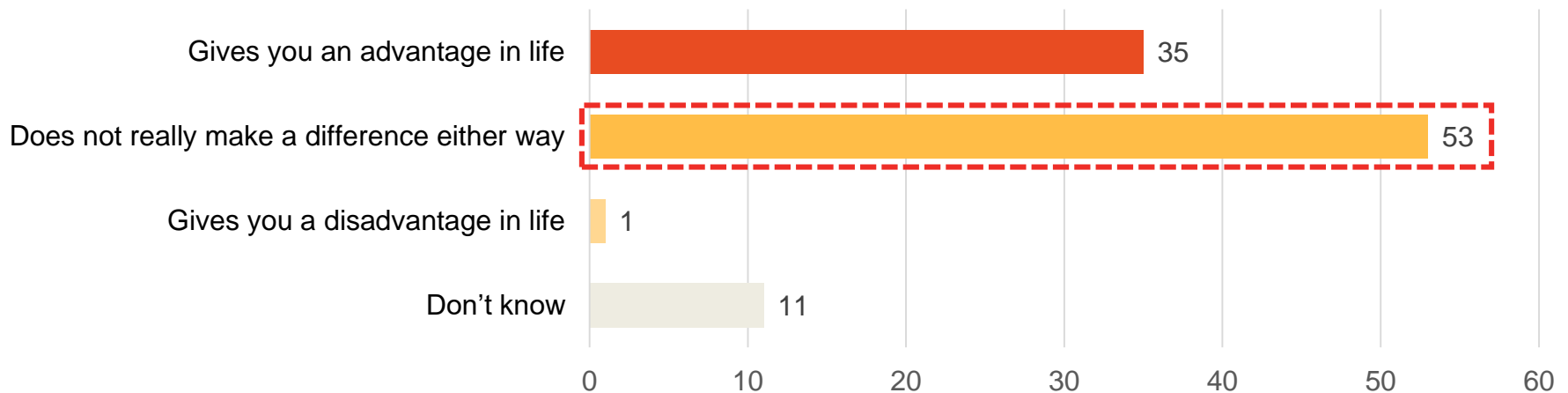
Q. Do you think your social background has helped you or held you back in your working life?



Those who participate in cultural activities think it gives them an advantage

- Half of the UK public (50%) rarely takes part in cultural activities e.g. going to the theatre, museums, classical music concerts, with 34% occasionally and 12% regularly doing so. There is a stark contrast to the amount people participate in these activities between those living in London and the rest of the UK. 23% of Londoners regularly take part in cultural activities compared with just 9% of those in the Midlands and 10% of those in the North.
- The majority of people (53%) don't believe that engaging in cultural events when growing up gives you an advantage in life. However, this is linked to how much you participate yourself e.g. 62% of those who do take part regularly in these activities think they give you an advantage in life.

Q. And generally speaking, do you think engaging in cultural activities (e.g. going to the theatre, museums, classical music concerts) when growing up gives you an advantage or disadvantage in life or does it not really make much difference either way?

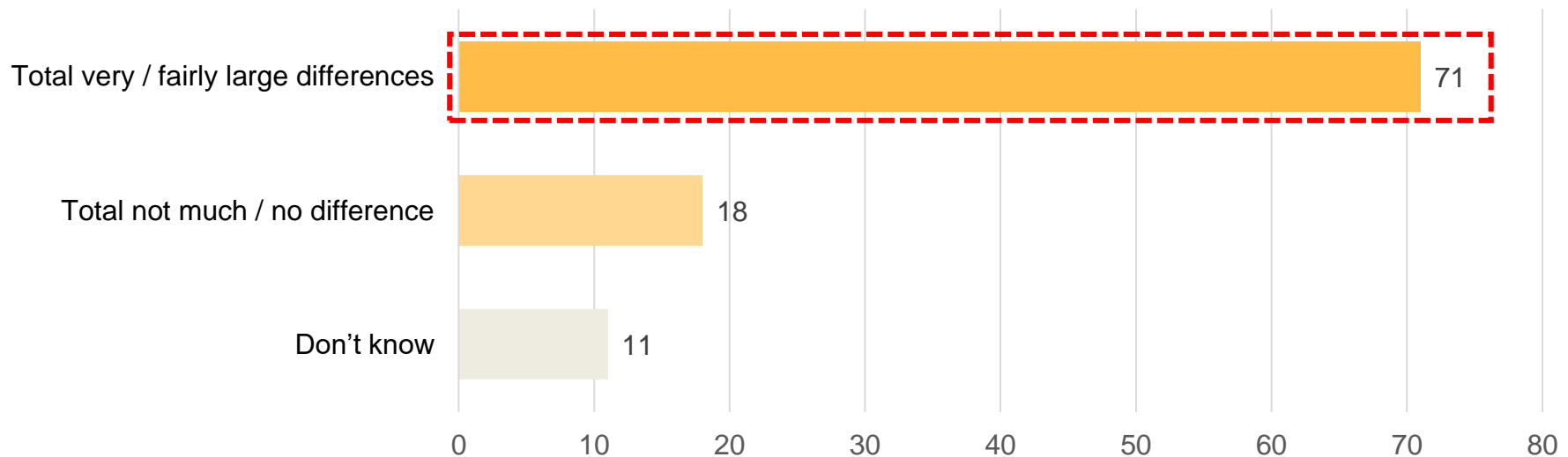


Regional differences

People think a geographic postcode lottery exists

- 7 in 10 believe that there is a very or fairly large difference in the opportunities available in different parts of Britain today, with only 1 in 50 respondents (2%) saying there is no difference at all.
- Although the majority believe this throughout the UK, those living in Scotland (75%), Wales (75%) and the North East (76%) are most likely to think that differences in opportunities exist. A fifth of those living in the South East (22%) think there is not very much difference in the opportunities available in different parts of Britain

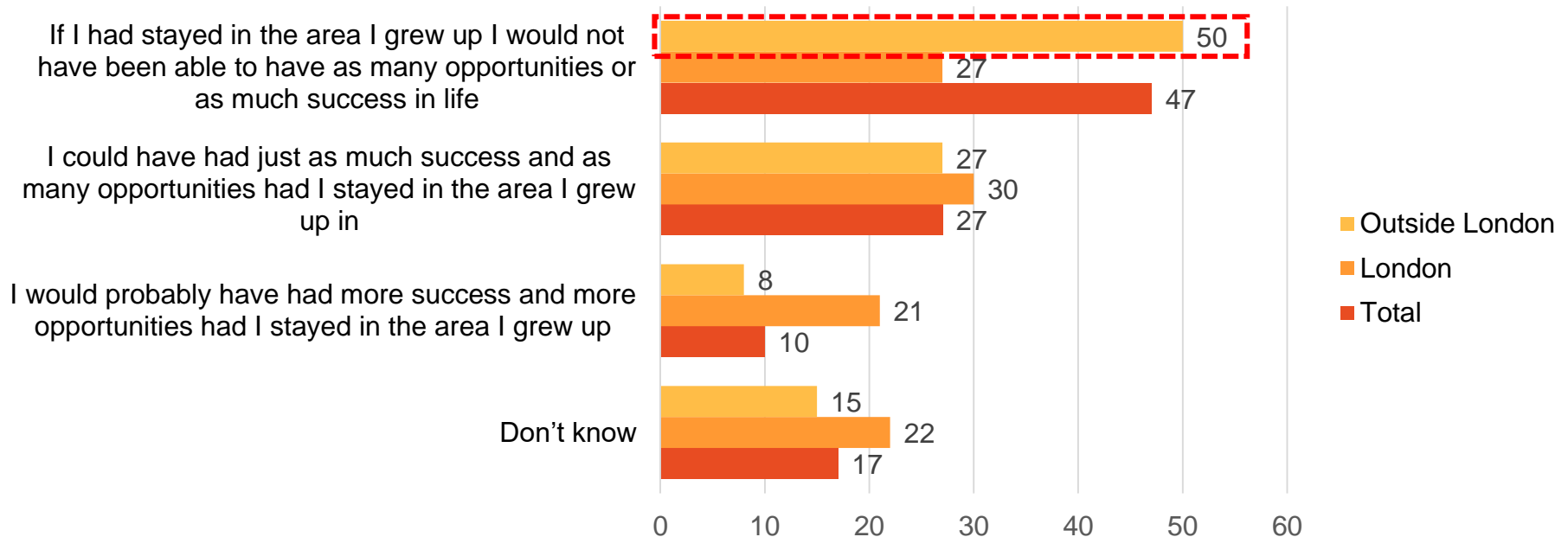
Q. How much difference, if any, do you think there is in the opportunities available in different parts of Britain today?



Half who grew up outside London think they would have less opportunities if they'd stayed in that area

- 45% of those contacted have moved away from the area they grew up in, although this movement was spread throughout the country.
- However, around 47 per cent of people who moved away from the area they grew up in say that if they had stayed where they were, they would not have got the best opportunities in life.
- Most strikingly, 50% of those who grew up outside London say that if they had stayed in that area they would not have been able to have as many opportunities or as much success.

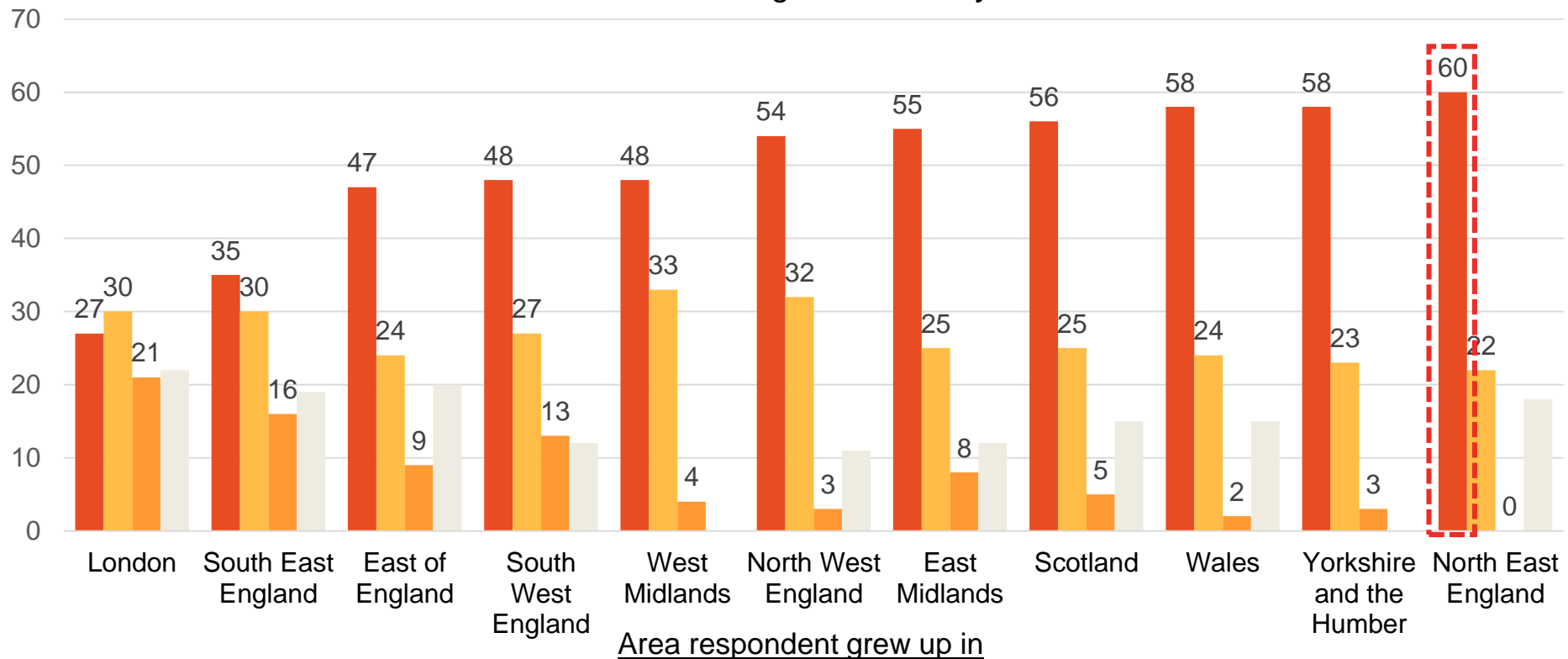
Q. Which of the following best reflects your view? n=2182



Perceived need to move South for opportunities

- Only 35% of those from the South East who moved away think their opportunities would have been limited if they had stayed compared with 3 in 5 (60%) of those who grew up but moved away from the North East.
- It is only those who grew up in London and the South who say that they would probably have had more success and more opportunities had they stayed in the area they grew up in.

Q. Which of the following best reflects your view?

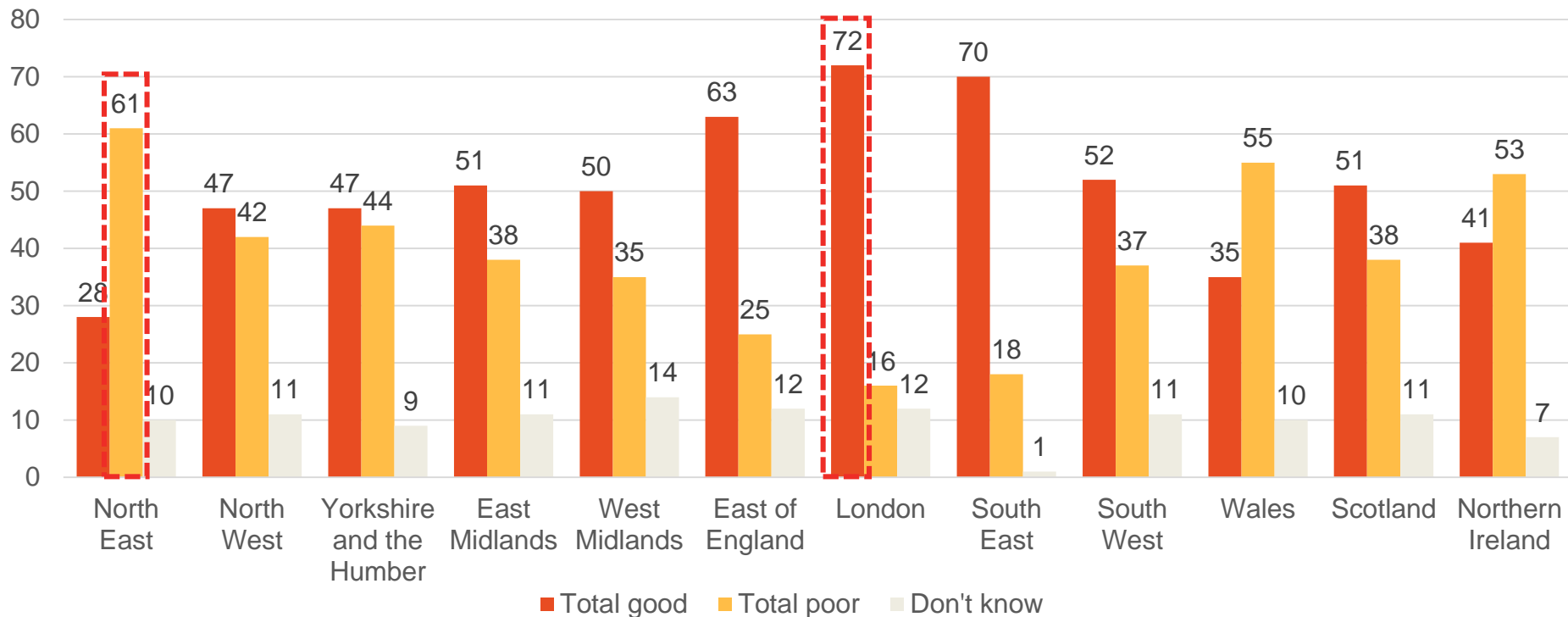


- If I had stayed in the area I grew up I would not have been able to have as many opportunities or as much success in life
- I could have had just as much success and as many opportunities had I stayed in the area I grew up in
- I would probably have had more success and more opportunities had I stayed in the area I grew up in
- Not sure

3 in 5 people living in the North East think opportunities are better elsewhere in the UK

- Thinking about where people currently live, the differences in opportunities according to geography are further illustrated. 61% of people living in the North East say the opportunities for people to progress (compared to other parts of the country) are poor. In London, 72% say good.
- In Scotland, half (51%) believe that there are better opportunities available to people, compared to elsewhere in the UK, whereas in Wales 55% think there are worse opportunities.
- In all areas apart from the North East, Wales and Northern Ireland those who thought there were good opportunities available exceeded those who thought there were poor opportunities available

Q. Thinking about the area you **currently live in**, compared to other parts of the United Kingdom do you think the opportunities available for people to progress are ...

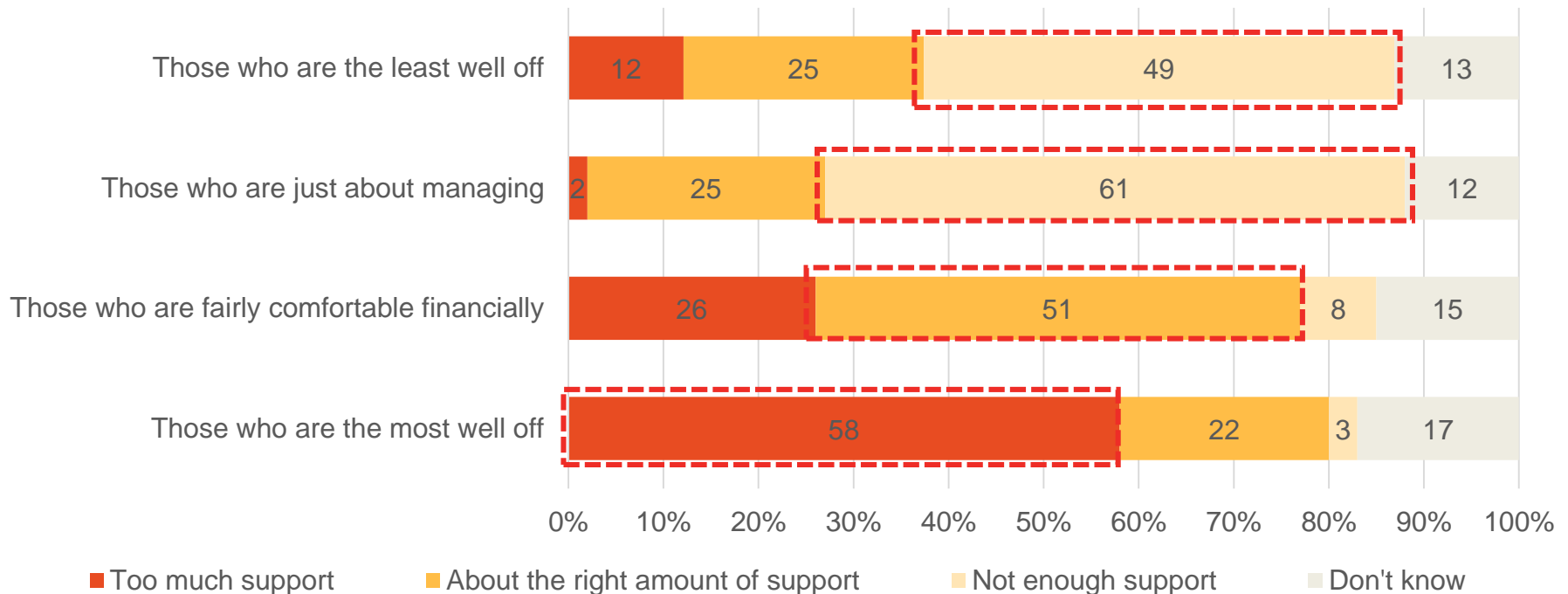


Government support

Government needs to do more for those at the bottom

- 3 in 5 (61%) believe that those who are just about managing (JAMS) are not getting enough support – only 2% think this group are receiving too much support. Half of UK adults (49%) think that the Government is not providing enough support to those who are the least well off in society.
- 60% of those who have a household income of less than £20,000 per year say that the government is not giving the least well off enough support compared with 41% of those with a household income over £60,000.
- Half (51%) believe that those who are comfortable financially are receiving about the right amount of support from the government, although 30% of those with less that £20,000 gross household income, say they are receiving too much.

Q. Thinking about different groups in society, generally speaking do you think each of the following get too much, not enough or about the right amount of support from the Government?





Social Mobility Commission

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