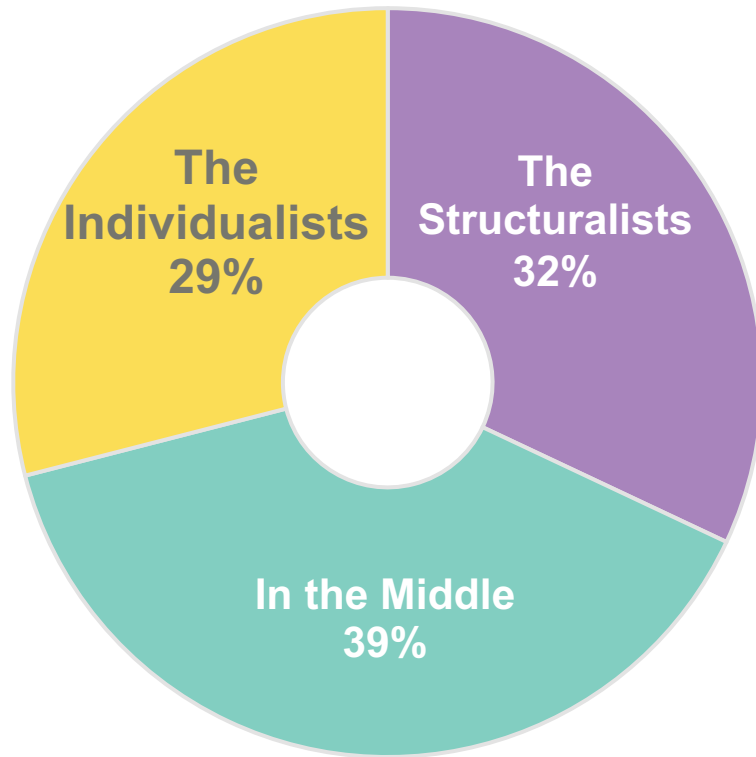


The Structuralists, the Individualists and those in the middle: how Britain is divided on questions of inequality

Rebecca Benson, Bobby Duffy, Rachel Hesketh, Kirstie Hewlett

Britain is made up of three groups with different inequality worldviews



These segments capture something distinct from political identities. For example, while just over half of the Structuralist group are Labour supporters, a large proportion support other parties. There are significant proportions of both Leave and Remain supporters in each group.

The Structuralists (32% of UK)

When it comes to what it takes to get ahead, this group recognises characteristics outside the individual's control, such as coming from a wealthy family, more than do other groups. This group is most likely to recognise inequalities and to describe UK society as unequal.

In the Middle (39%)

This group tends not to use the extreme options when responding to our questions: almost nothing is 'essential' or 'not at all' important for getting ahead in life; almost no one in this group described society as 'very' equal or unequal. From these data, it is not possible to tell whether this group is genuinely an intermediate mixture of the other two groups, or simply less engaged with the issues.

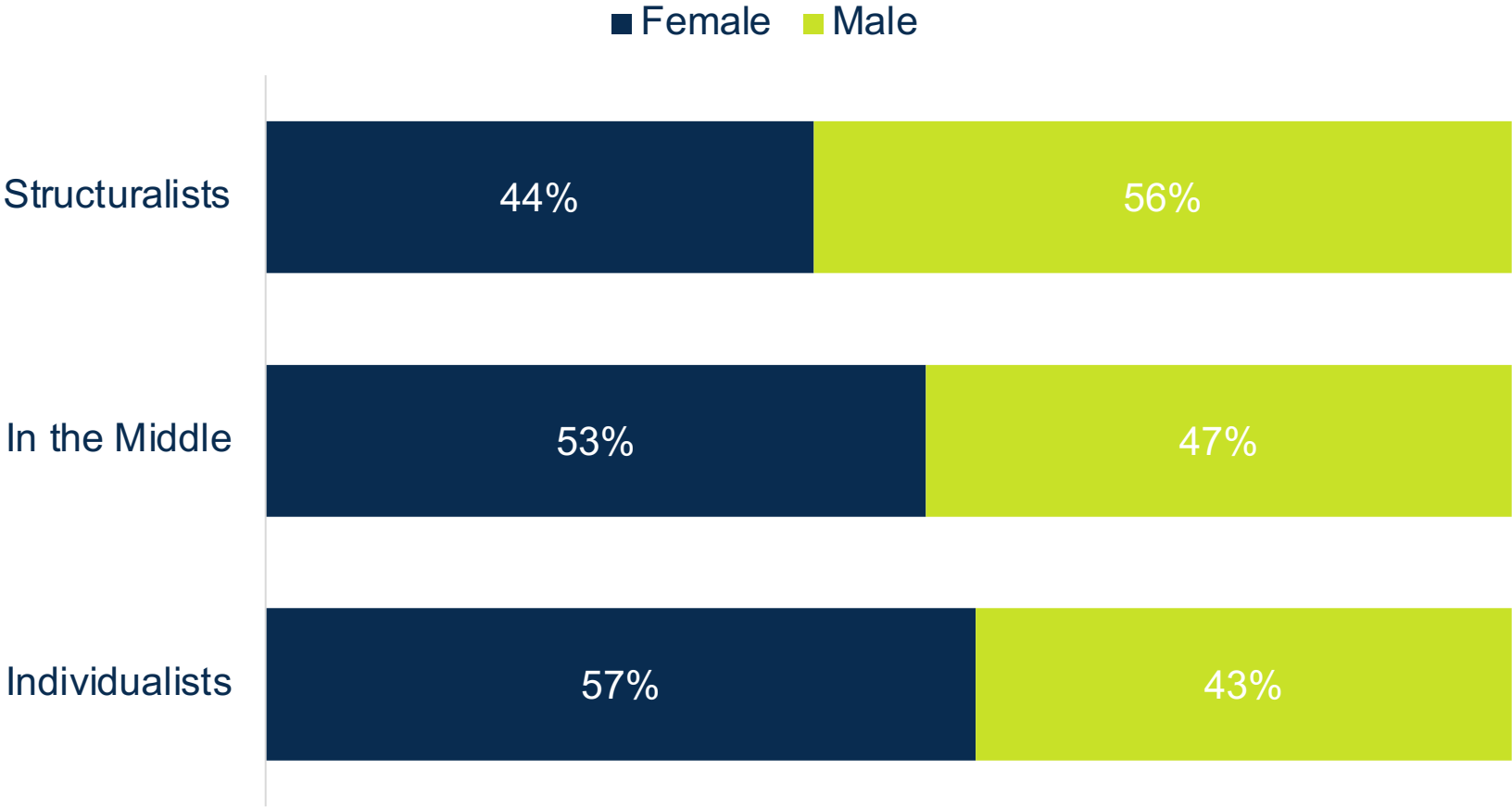
The Individualists (29%)

This group is eager to see the world as fair. It strongly rejects roles for coming from a wealthy family, race and religion in getting ahead, and generally does not consider factors beyond the individual's control to be important. While members of this group do tend to recognise inequalities, there is also quite a lot of endorsement for responses that deny their existence.

The groups differ in a number of ways...

The gender split of the sample as a whole is close to even, but this is not the case within groups. Men are overrepresented among Structuralists, while women are overrepresented among Individualists.

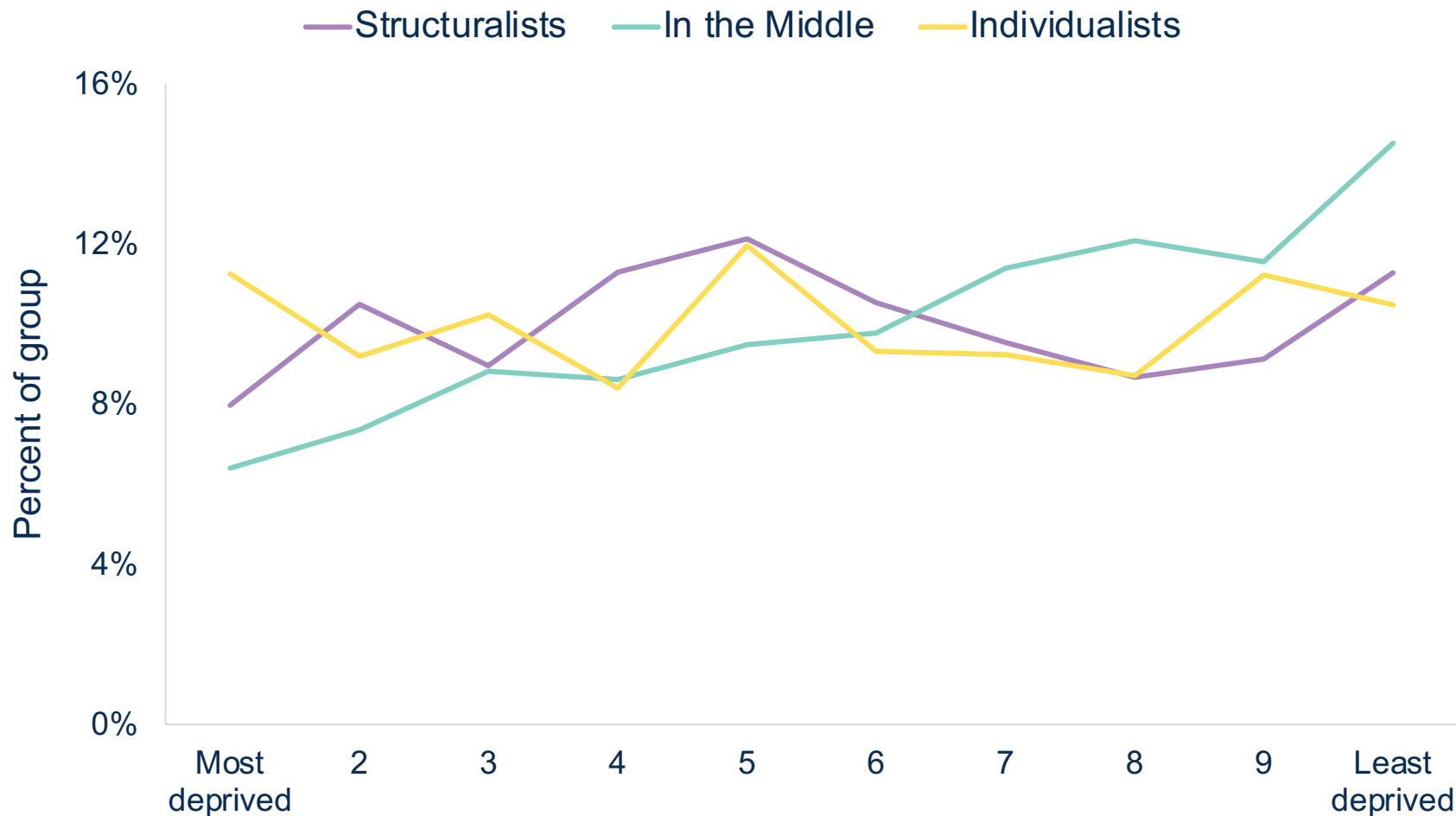
Breakdown of inequality worldview group by gender



The groups differ in a number of ways...

Despite their different views, the Structuralists and Individualists both include people from areas of different levels of deprivation relatively uniformly. In contrast, people In the Middle are disproportionately from less deprived areas.

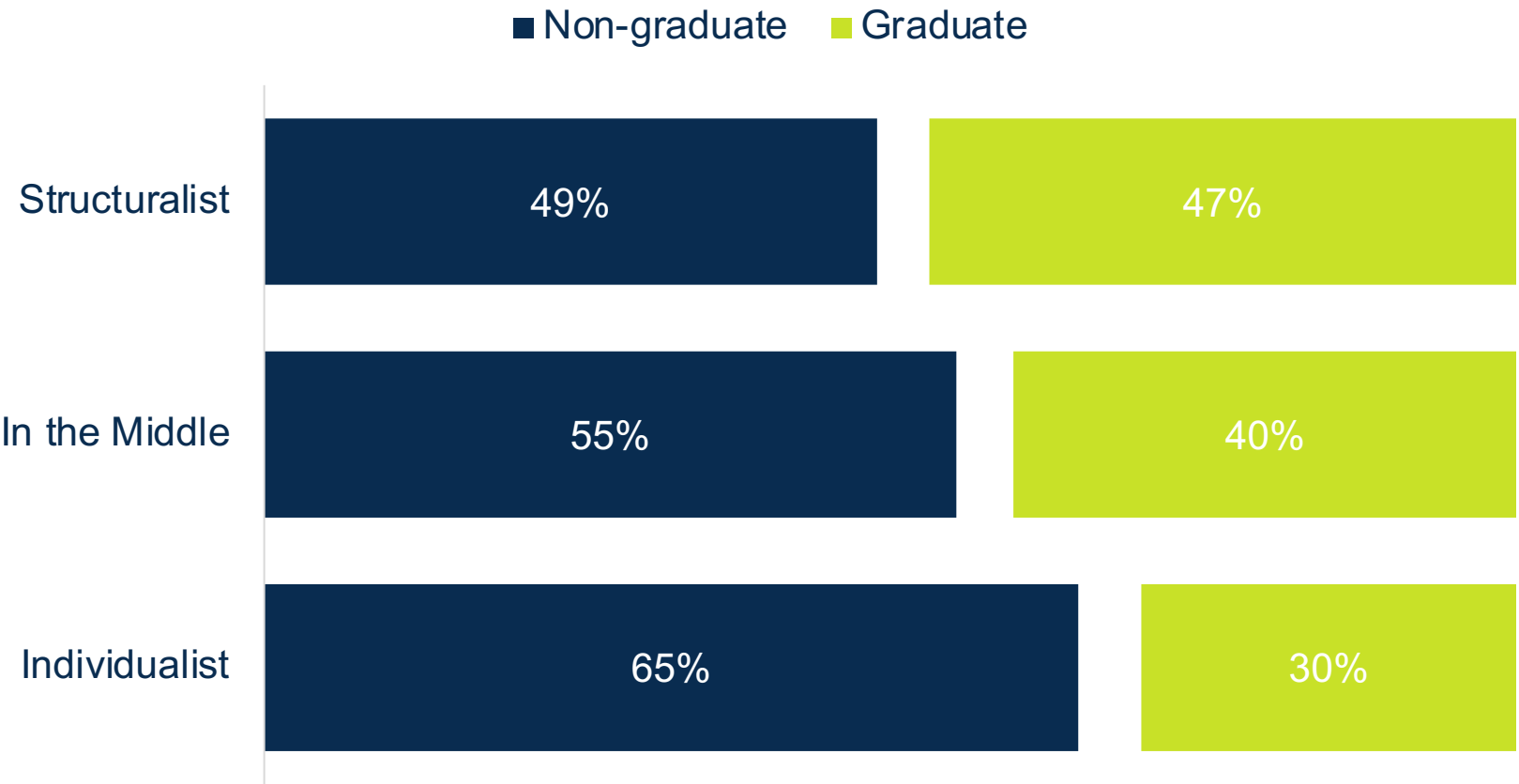
Breakdown of inequality worldview group by **deprivation level**



The groups differ in a number of ways...

Nearly half of Structuralists hold degrees or higher qualifications. In contrast, less than a third of Individualists are degree holders.

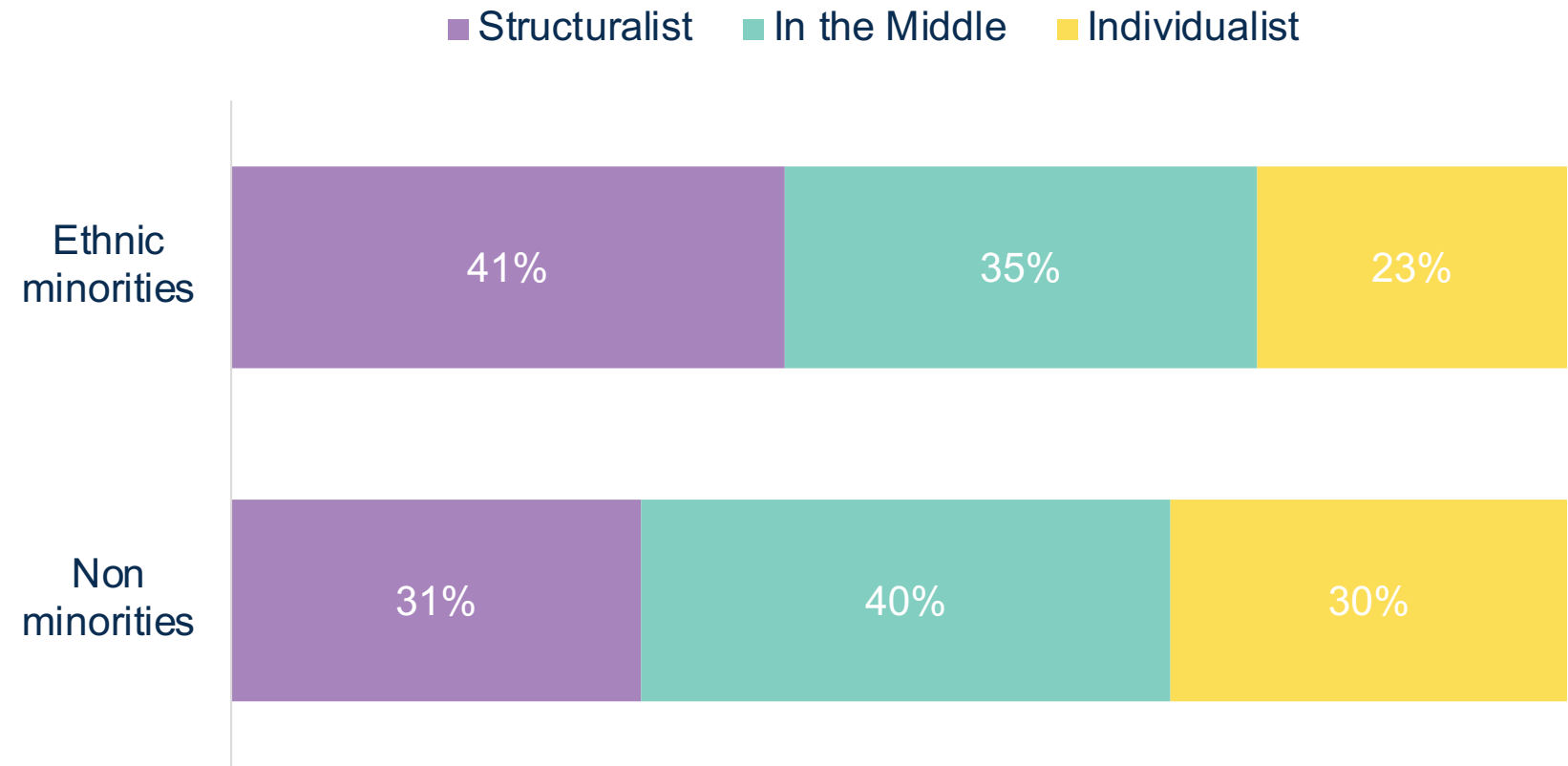
Breakdown of inequality worldview group by education level



The groups differ in a number of ways...

Population subgroups have different patterns of group membership. People from ethnic minority backgrounds are more likely to have Structuralist views, and less likely to have Individualist views, than people from non-minority backgrounds.

Breakdown of different ethnic groups' inequality worldviews

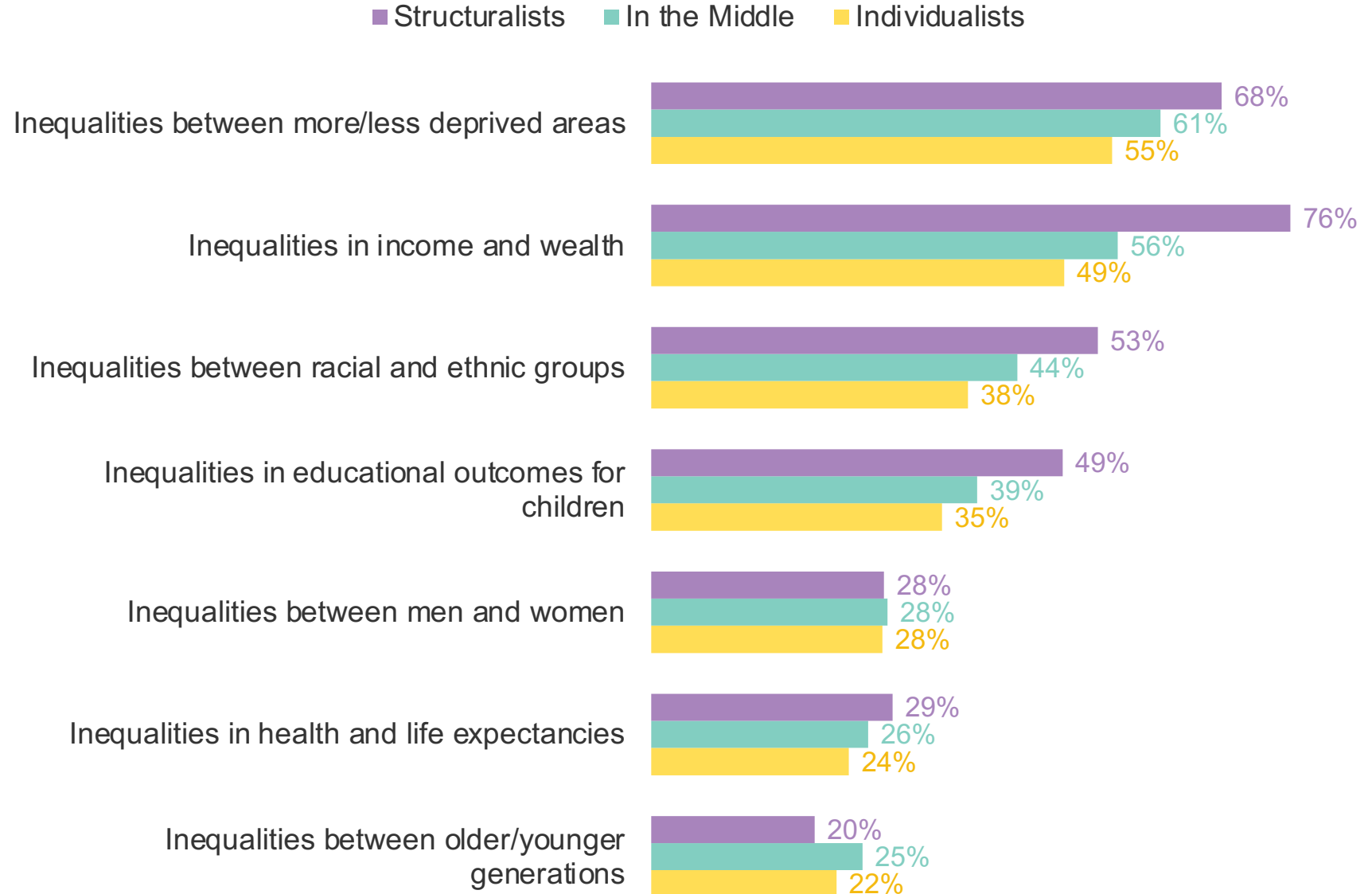


Both Structuralists and Individualists prioritise inequalities in income and between places, but Individualists are generally less concerned about most types of inequality.

Inequalities between genders and generations, and inequalities in health and life expectancy, attract relatively little concern from all groups.

These results seem to suggest the existence of a hierarchy of concerns about inequalities that is shared across attitudinal groups.

Which three or four of the following types of inequality, if any, do you think are most serious in Britain?



In most cases, majorities consider an increase in inequalities in life expectancy between different groups to be a big problem.

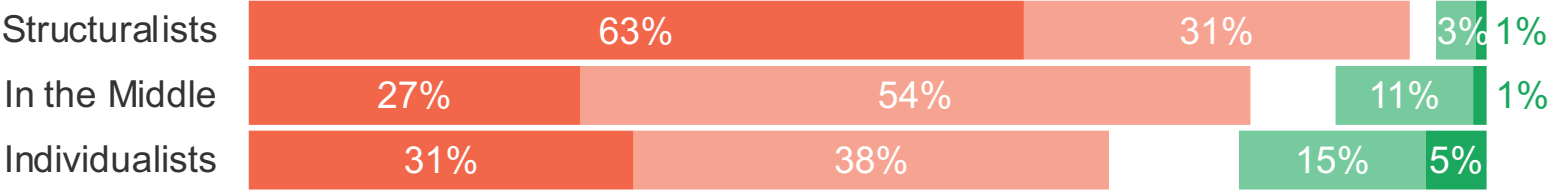
This is true of Individualists as well as Structuralists, though Individualists are typically much less likely to view an increase in the life expectancy gap between groups to be a very big problem.

An increase in the gap in life expectancy between men and women attracts the least concern from all three attitudinal groups.

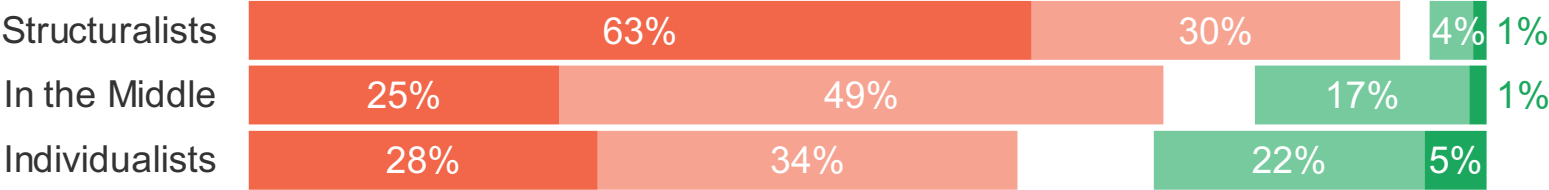
If the gap between the **life expectancy** of the following groups increases, would you consider this...

■ A very big problem ■ A fairly big problem ■ Not really a problem ■ Not a problem at all

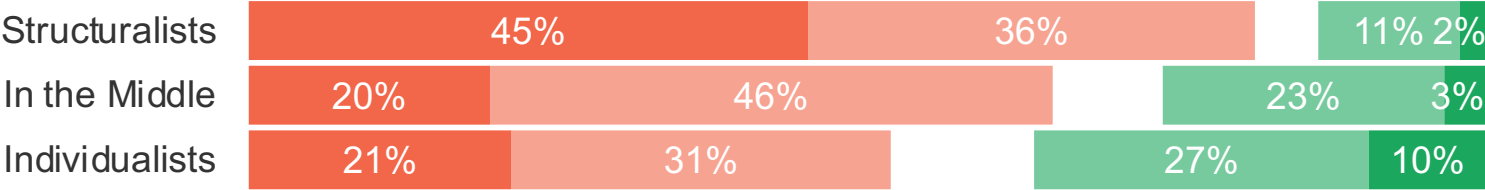
People living in more/less deprived areas



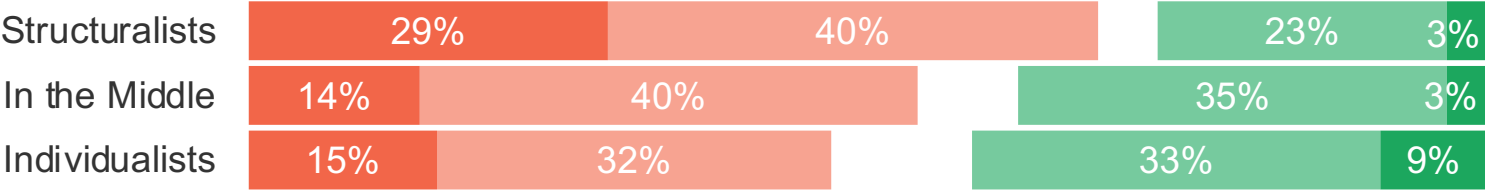
Rich people/poor people



Ethnic minorities/white people



Men/women



All groups consider a potential rise in income inequalities between groups to be a source of real concern.

As with a rise in health inequalities, concern varies according to the groups affected. Structuralists, Individualists and those In the Middle are all more concerned about rising income inequalities between rich and poor and more/less deprived places than between ethnic groups or genders.

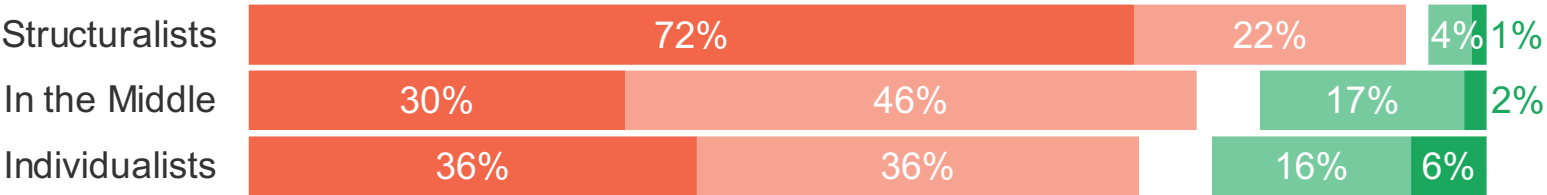
If the gap between the **income** of the following groups increases, would you consider this...

■ A very big problem ■ A fairly big problem ■ Not really a problem ■ Not a problem at all

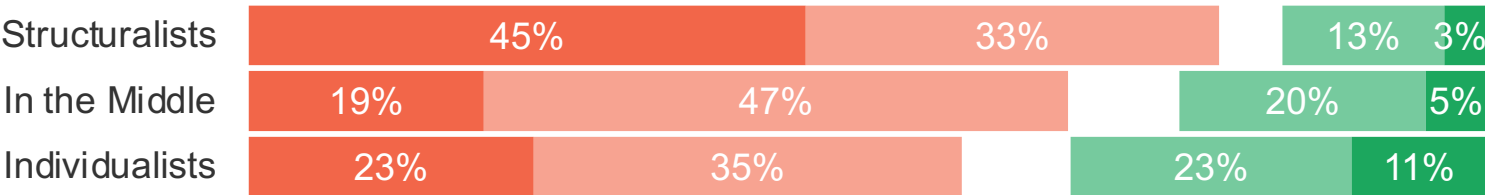
People living in more/less deprived areas



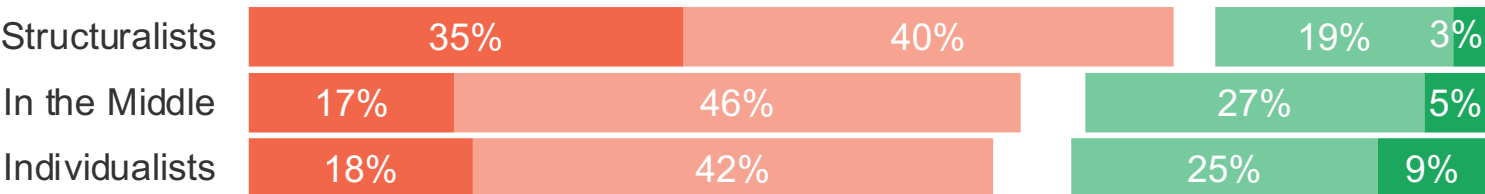
Rich people/poor people



Ethnic minorities/white people



Men/women

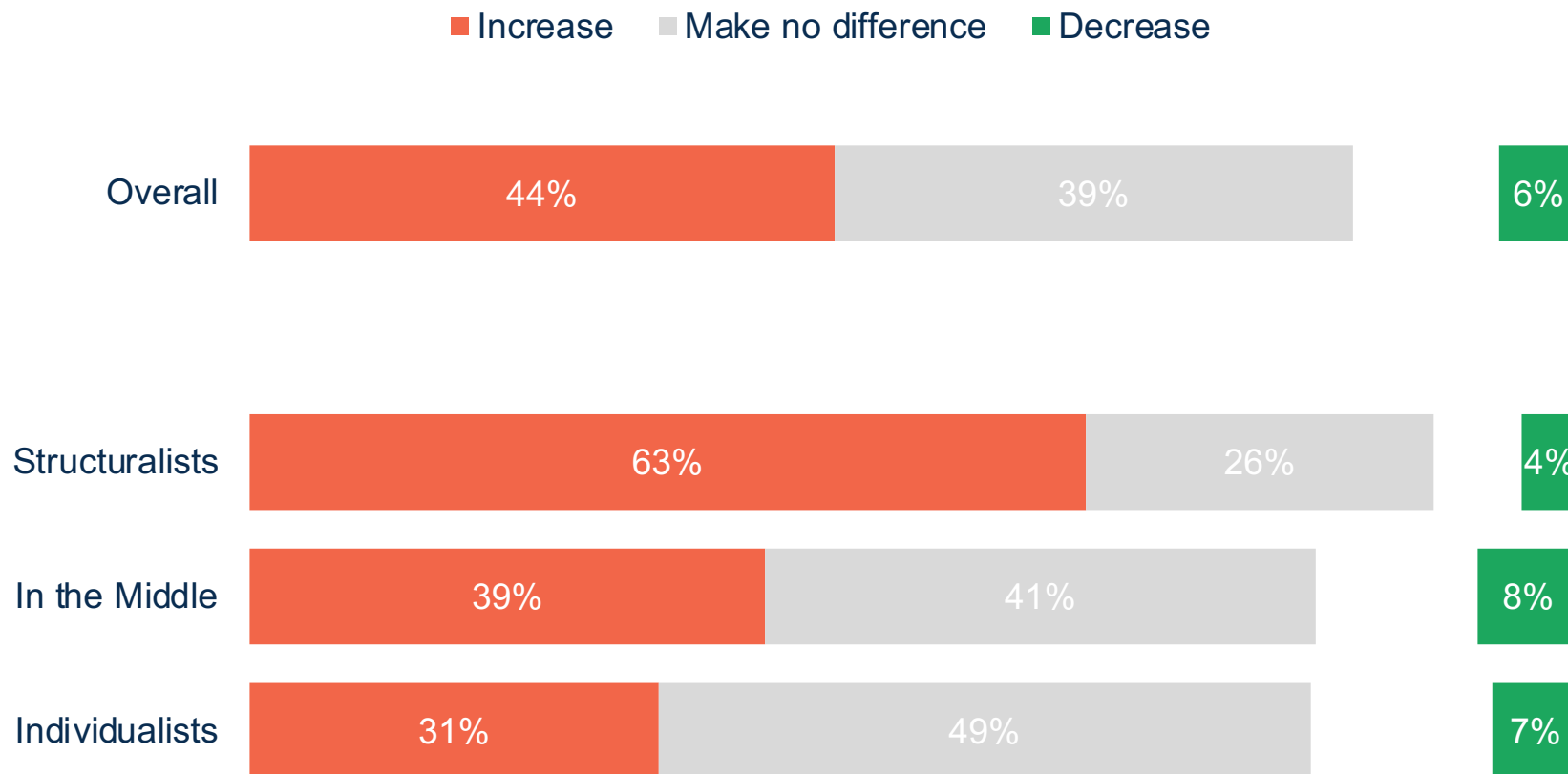


How people think the pandemic is likely to affect inequalities is important from a policy perspective, as it is likely to impact on the measures people support to address rising inequalities.

A majority of Structuralists believe the coronavirus crisis will deepen inequality in Britain, while the most common response for the other two groups is that it will make no difference.

Only tiny minorities believe the crisis will have a levelling effect.

Do you think the coronavirus crisis will **increase or decrease the level of inequality** in Britain compared with before the pandemic, or will it make no difference?



Structuralists are not only most likely to expect inequalities to increase as a consequence of the pandemic, but to be uncomfortable with this.

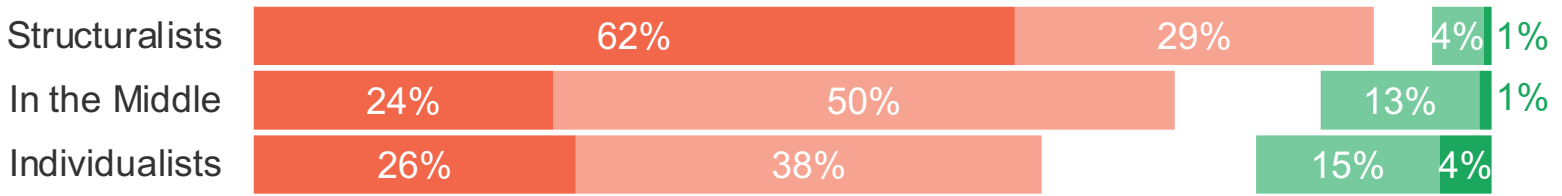
Structuralists are typically at least twice as likely as the other groups to consider an increase in income inequality in the context of the pandemic to be a very big problem – the most serious expression of concern.

Once again though, the extent of concern depends on the groups the inequality is between, with growing income inequality between men and women attracting the least concern from both Structuralists and Individualists.

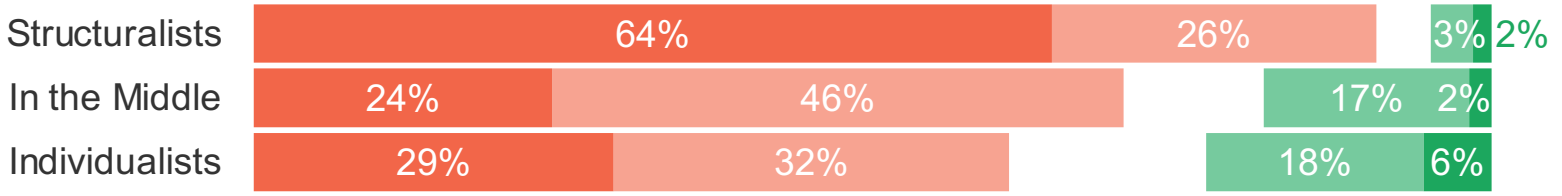
If the gap between the **incomes** of the following groups increases **as a result of the coronavirus crisis**, would you consider this...

■ A very big problem ■ A fairly big problem ■ Not really a problem ■ Not a problem at all

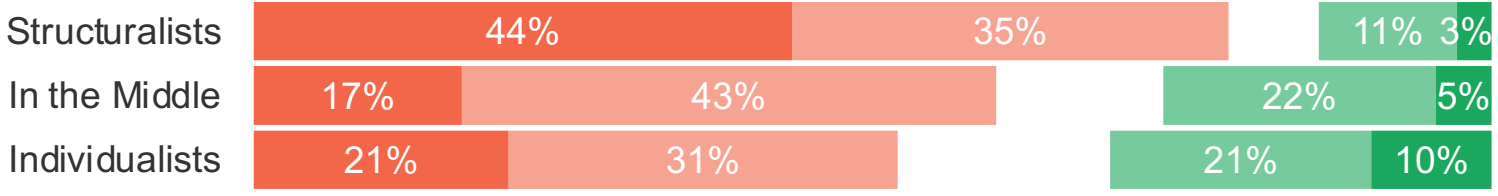
People living in more/less deprived areas



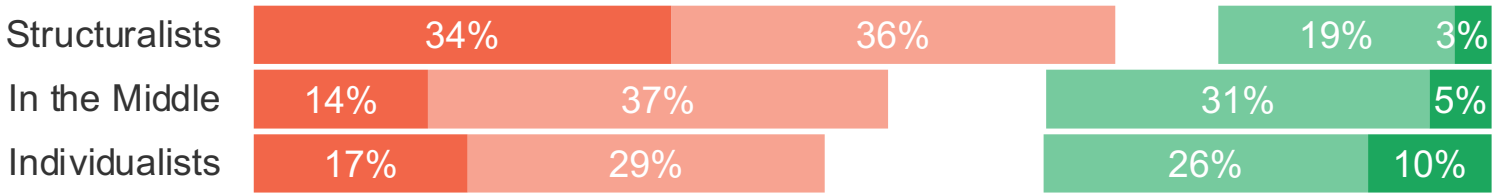
Rich people/poor people



Ethnic minorities/white people



Men/women



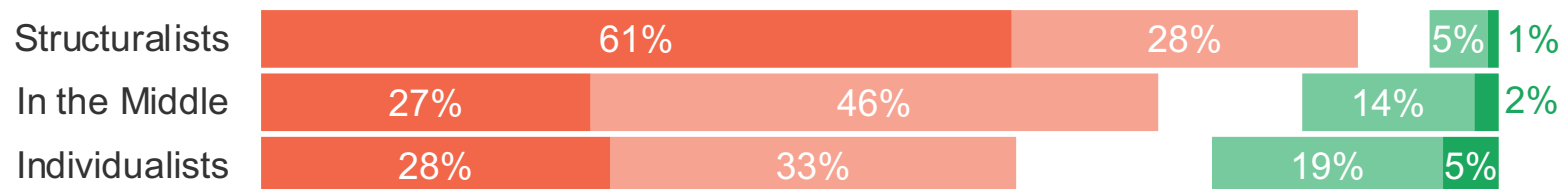
All groups find increasing life expectancy gaps as a result of the pandemic between more and less deprived areas and rich and poor most problematic, and increases in the life expectancy gap between the genders the least problematic.

Structuralists are again much more likely to think rising inequalities in life expectancy as a result of the pandemic are a 'very big problem' than Individualists and people In the Middle.

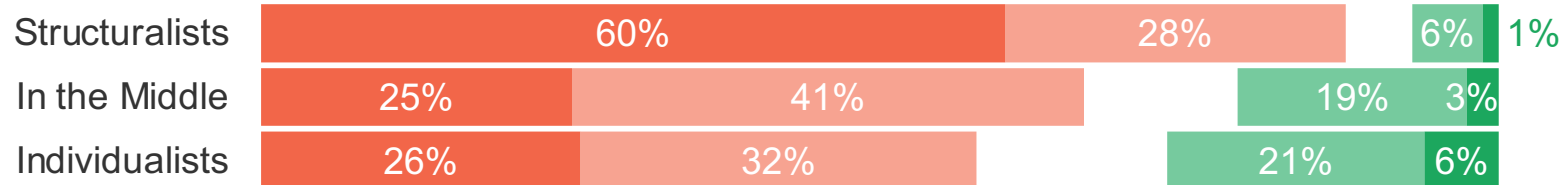
If the gap between the **life expectancy** of the following groups increases as a result of the **coronavirus crisis**, would you consider this...

■ A very big problem ■ A fairly big problem ■ Not really a problem ■ Not a problem at all

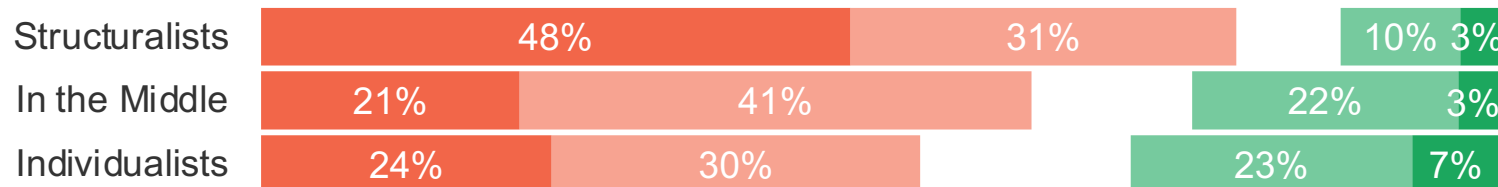
People living in more/less deprived areas



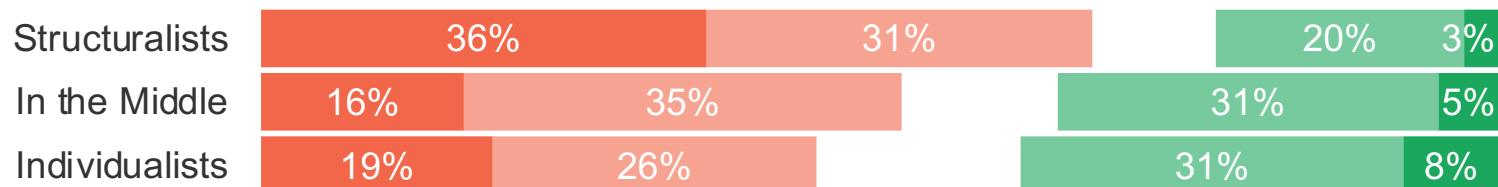
Rich people/poor people



Ethnic minorities/white people



Men/women



Looking at beliefs about what makes society fair, all groups share a belief in the importance of hard work being rewarded, and of society taking care of those in need, regardless of their contribution to society.

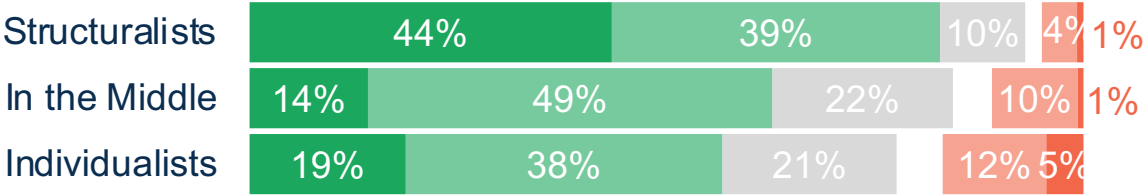
There is an important difference in the perceived importance of equality for fairness. A majority (59%) of Structuralists believe society is fair when income and wealth are equally distributed, notably higher than among other groups.

There are many different views as to what makes a society fair or unfair. How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

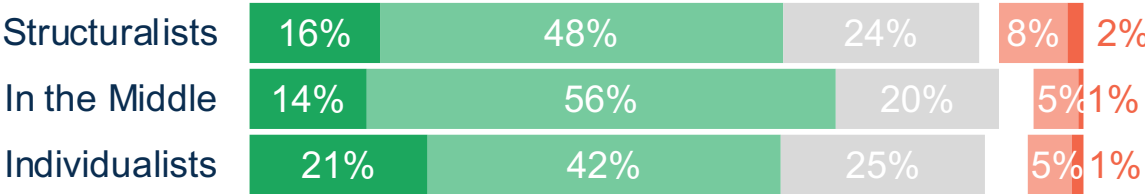
Strongly agree
Agree
Neither agree nor disagree
Disagree
Strongly disagree

A society is fair when...

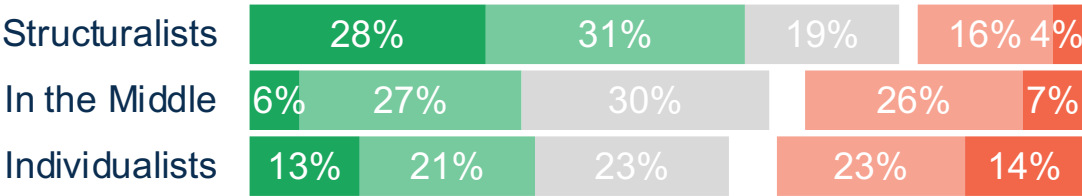
... it takes care of those who are poor and in need regardless of what they give back to society



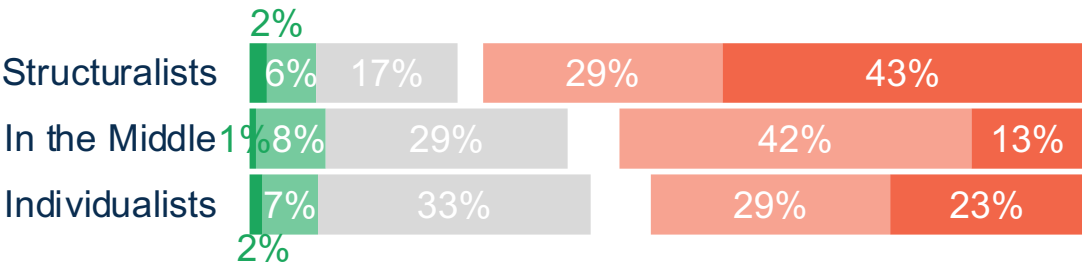
... hard-working people earn more than others



... income and wealth are equally distributed among all people



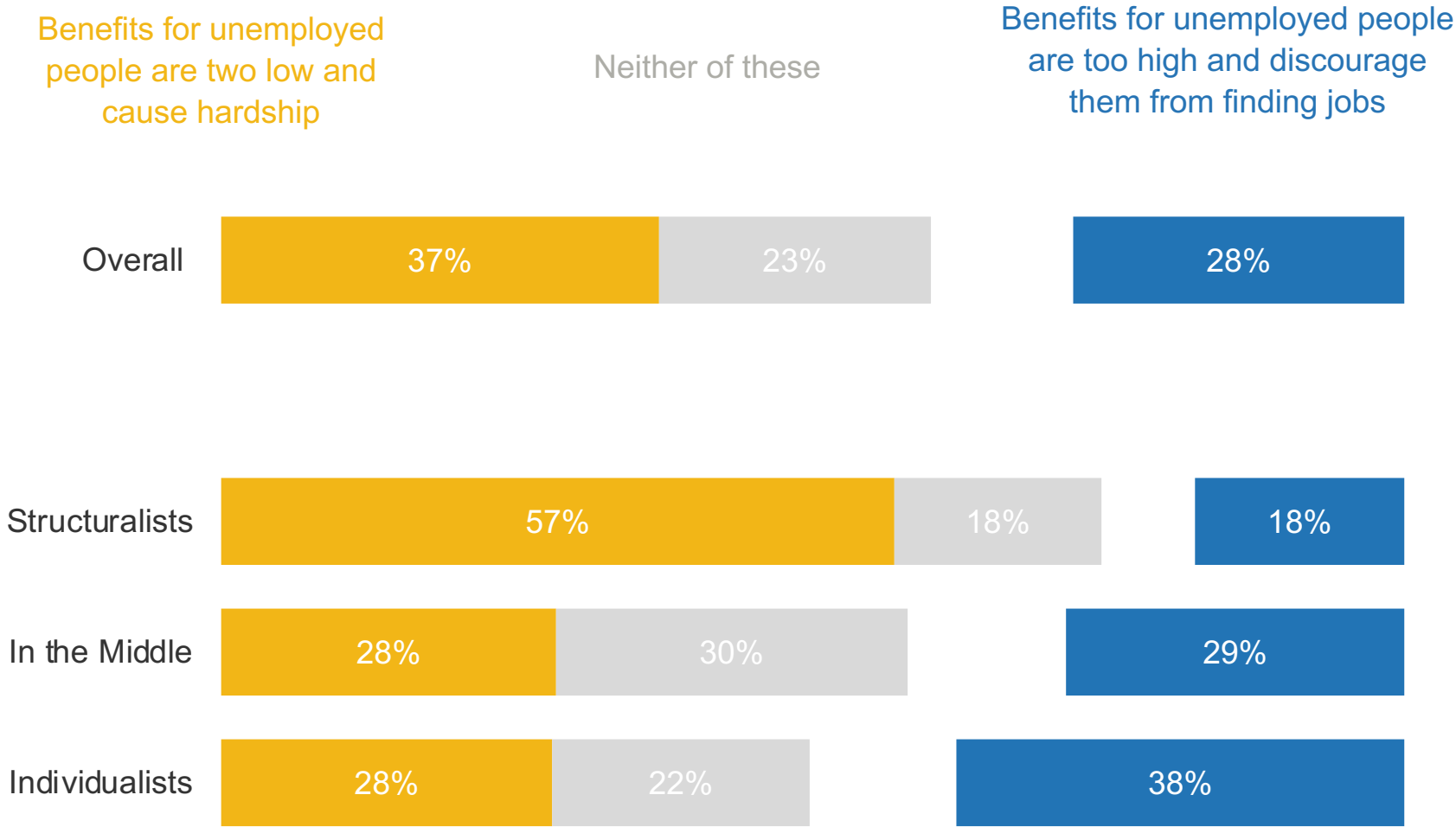
... people from families with high social status enjoy privileges in their lives



There are substantial differences in views of benefit adequacy by inequality world view. 57% of Structuralists believe unemployment benefit levels are too low, while Individualists are most likely to believe benefit levels to be too high and disincentive job searching (38%).

Structuralists are a little more certain in their views, with fewer neither or don't know responses than either In the Middle or Individualists.

Opinions differ about the level of benefits for unemployed people. Which of these two statements comes closest to your own view?



Despite differing attitudes towards unemployment benefits, Structuralists, Individualists and those In the Middle are in strong agreement as to the importance of the furlough scheme for protecting jobs and livelihoods. 80% or more of each group agree with this position.

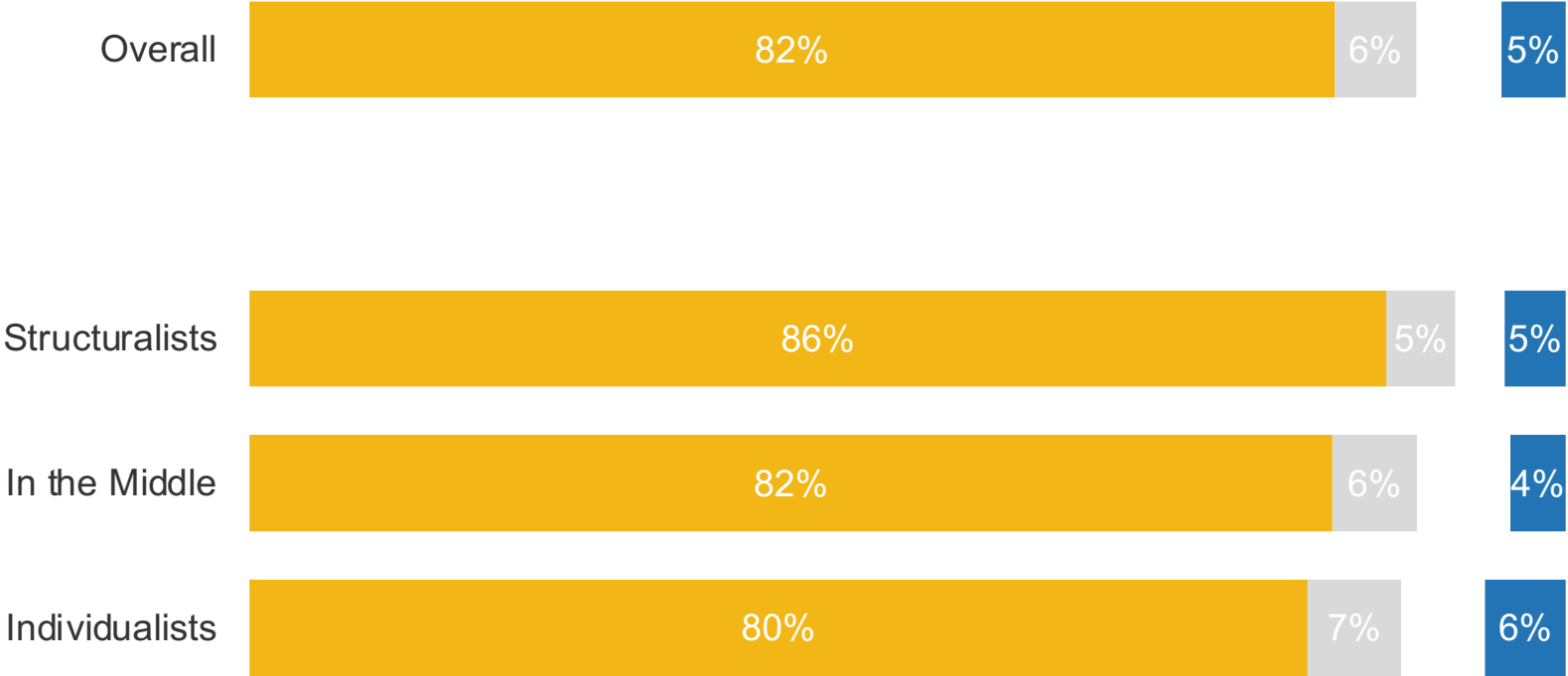
Only a tiny minority – 5% of Structuralists and 6% of Individualists – believe the government should not be intervening in the economy through the furlough scheme.

Many people who have been unable to work due to the coronavirus crisis have had most of their wages paid by government under the Job Retention Scheme, or ‘furlough’ scheme. Which of the following statements comes closest to your view?

The government’s furlough scheme is essential to protect people’s livelihoods

Neither of these

The government should not be interfering in the labour market through the furlough scheme – the economy should be left to adjust itself



Large majorities of all groups see positive effects of the furlough scheme: 90% of Individualists and 94% of Structuralists agree it helps people facing difficult times through no fault of their own, and 71% of Individualists and 84% of Structuralists agree it helps to prevent child poverty and hunger.

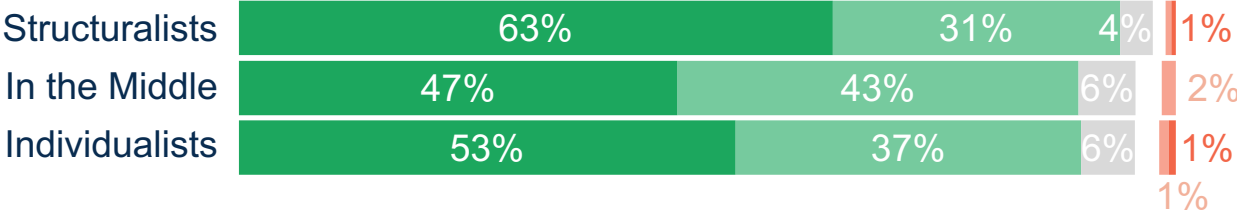
Individualists are more likely to associate furlough with negative effects than Structuralists and those In the Middle, but these views are still the minority within the group.

Here are some opinions people have expressed about **furlough**. For each of the following statements, please say to what extent you agree or disagree with it.

Strongly agree Agree Neither agree nor disagree Disagree Strongly disagree

The furlough scheme...

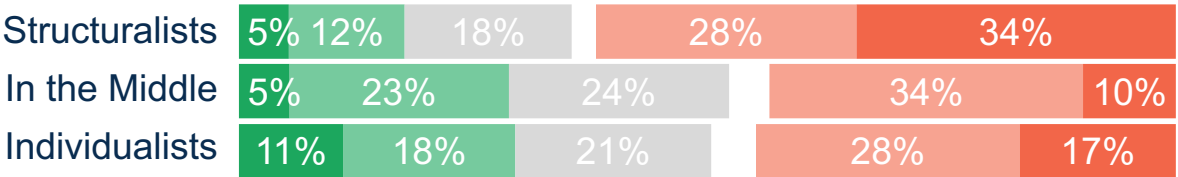
...helps people who are facing difficult times through no fault of their own



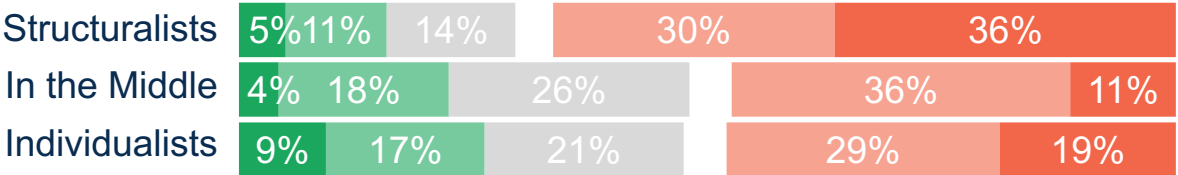
...helps to prevent child poverty and hunger



...encourages reliance on the state



...discourages people from looking for new and more secure jobs



All groups feel more positive towards the furlough scheme than towards unemployment benefits.

53% of Individualists strongly agree that the furlough scheme helps people who are facing difficult times through no fault of their own, while just 29% of this group believe this about unemployment benefits.

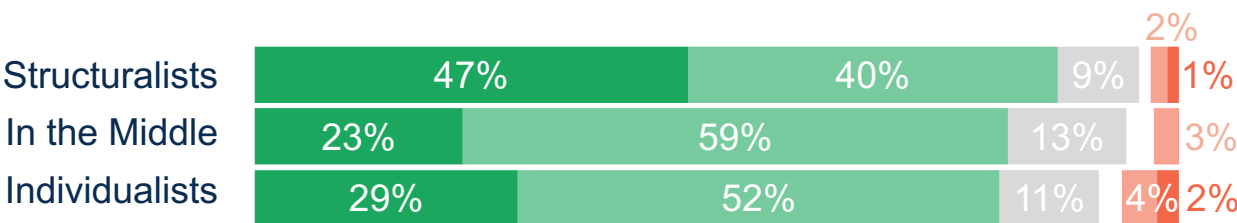
Similarly, people are more likely to associate unemployment benefits with negative outcomes. While just 17% of Structuralists believe furlough encourages reliance on the state, this rises to 33% when considering unemployment benefits.

Here are some opinions people have expressed about **unemployment benefits**. For each of the following statements, please say to what extent you agree or disagree with it.

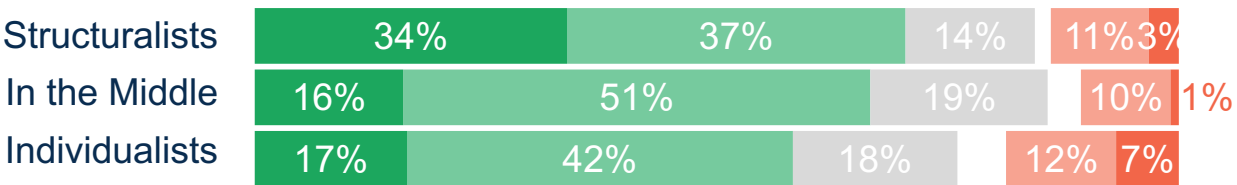
Strongly agree Agree Neither agree nor disagree Disagree Strongly disagree

Unemployment benefits...

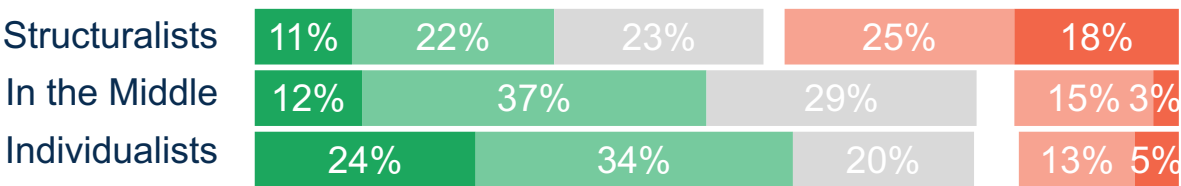
...help people who are facing difficult times through no fault of their own



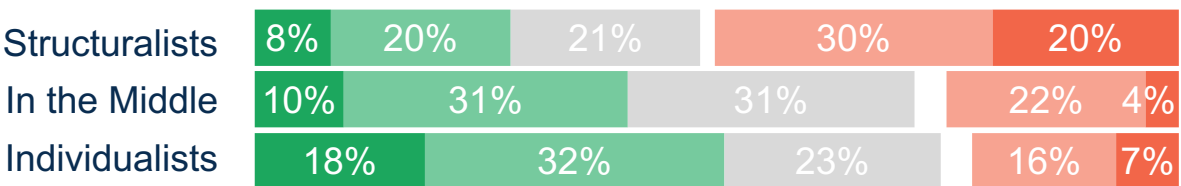
...help to prevent child poverty and hunger



...encourage reliance on the state



...discourage people from looking for new and more secure jobs

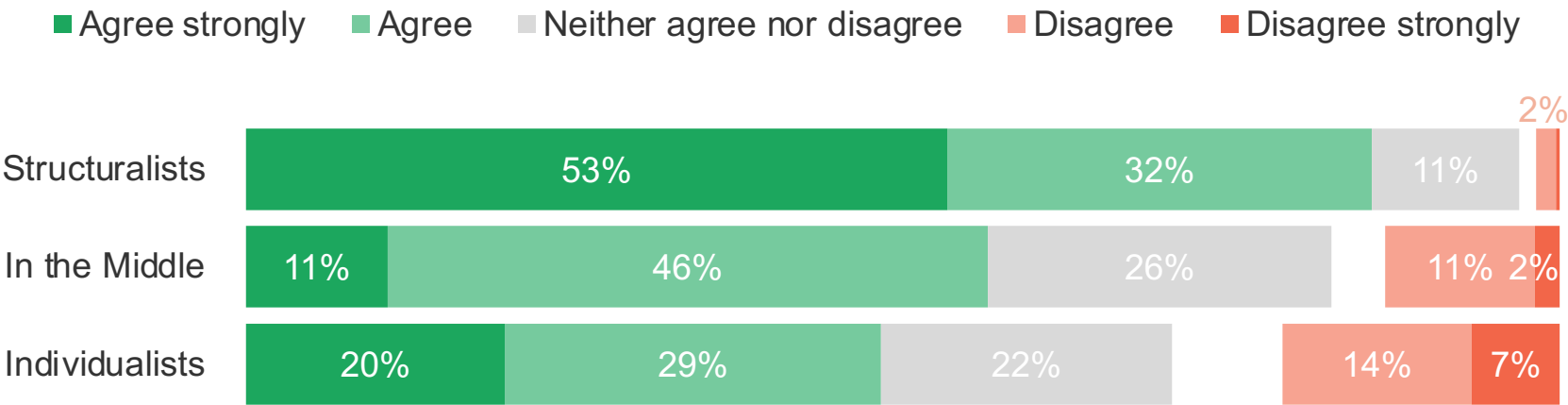


Support for government action to address inequalities depends to some extent on how this action is framed.

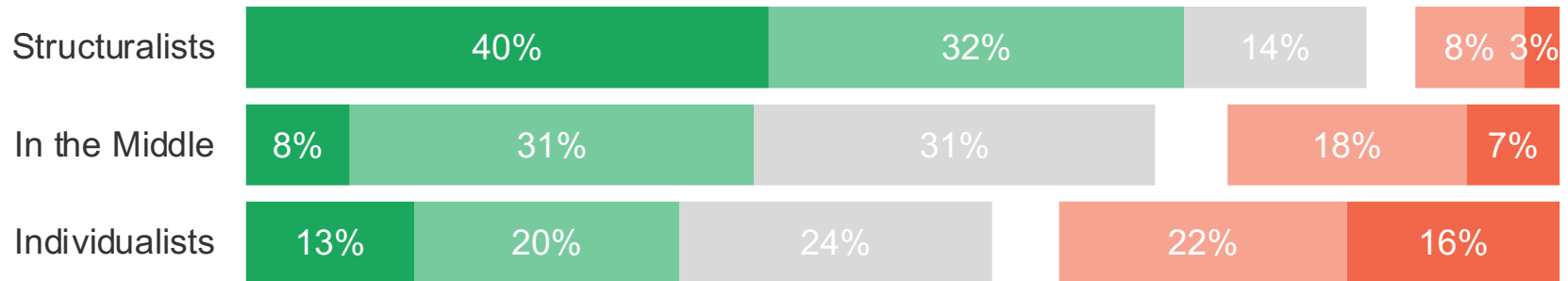
All groups are more likely to support government “taking measures” to reduce differences in income levels than to support government “redistributing income”.

The views of Individualists those In the Middle change most sharply with the change in framing. For e.g., while 39% of those In the Middle express support for redistribution, this rises to 57% when the framing of “taking measures” is used.

Please say to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements:
“The government should **take measures** to reduce differences in income levels”



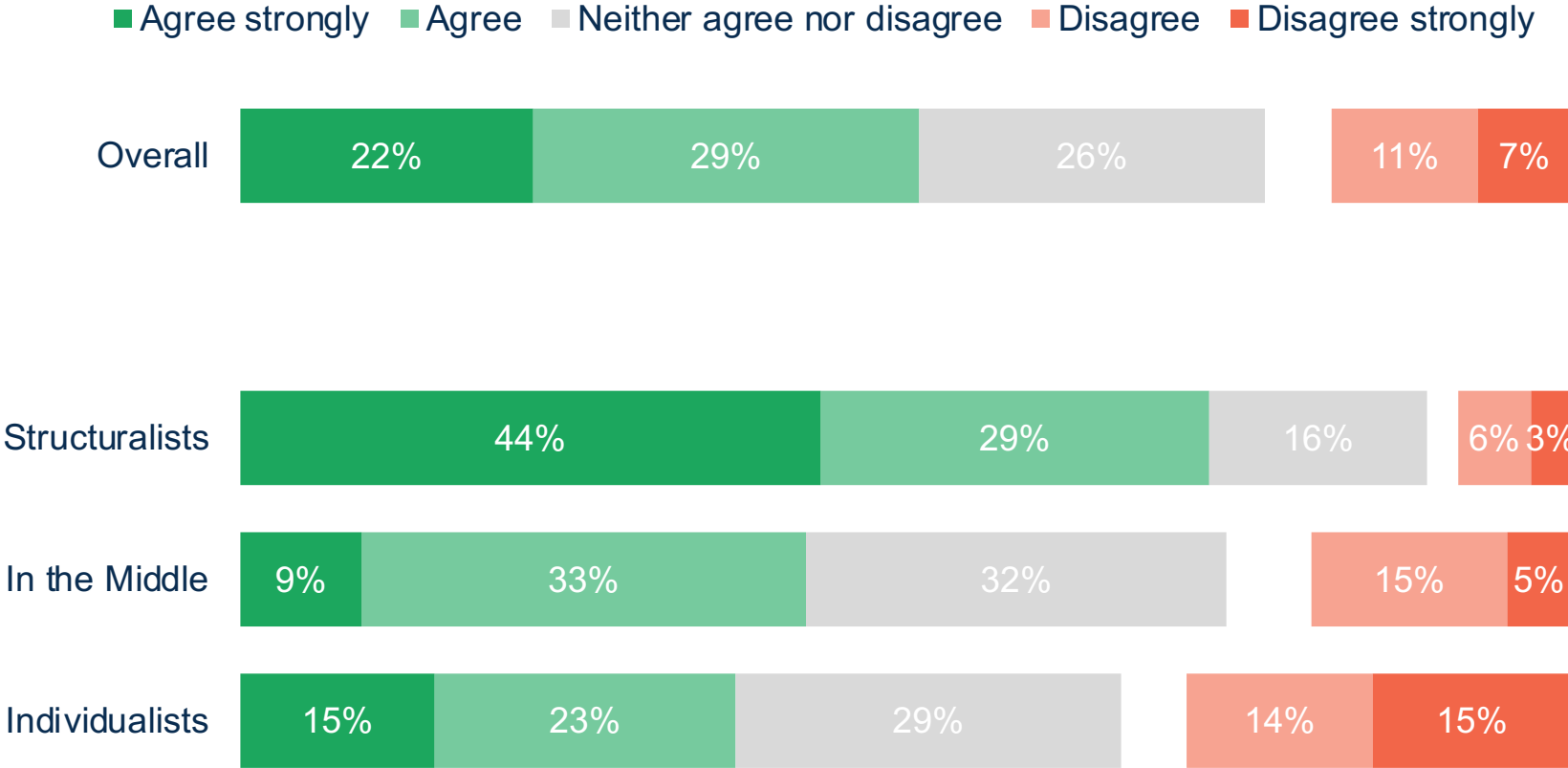
“Government should **redistribute income** from the better-off to those who are less well off”



There is widespread belief that the pandemic strengthens the case for redistribution, with half of the public (51%) agreeing that the coronavirus crisis means there is more of a need for government to redistribute income.

Structuralists are much more likely than the other groups to believe this, with 73% in agreement. There is substantial support even among Individualists, however, with 37% of this group in agreement that the pandemic increases the need for government to redistribute income.

To what extent do you agree with the following statement: “the coronavirus crisis means there is more of a need for government to **redistribute income** from the better-off to those who are less well off”?

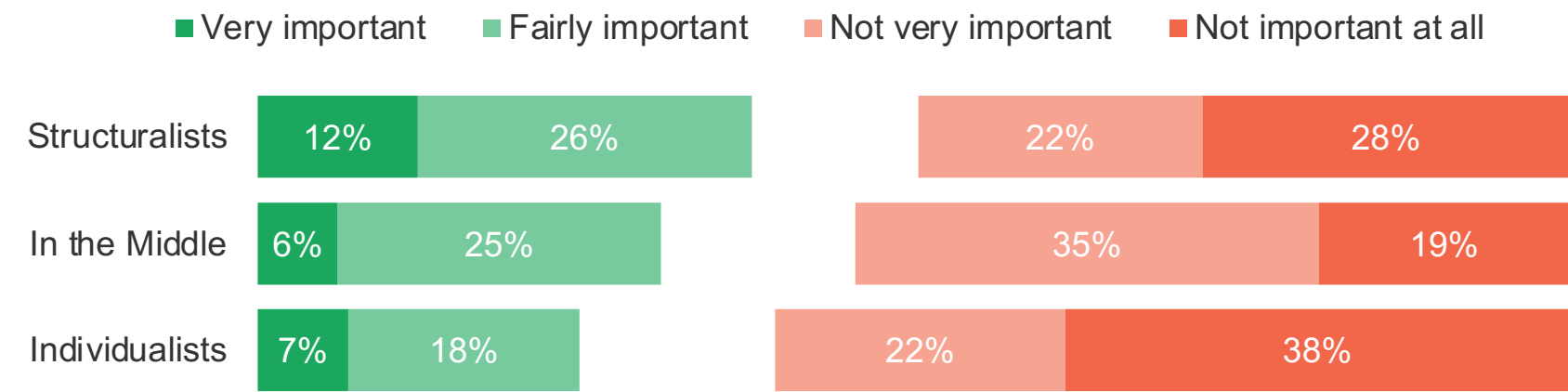


Despite the coronavirus crisis representing a huge, external shock outside of any one person's control, many of us take a meritocratic view of reasons for job loss during the pandemic.

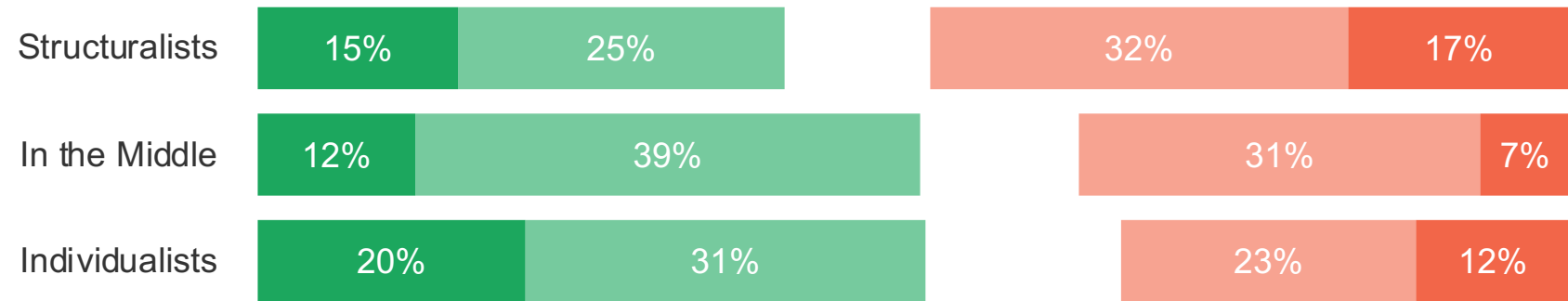
All groups are more likely to attribute job loss as a result of the coronavirus crisis to performance at work than to luck.

Structuralists are a little more likely than other groups to believe luck to be important, and slightly less likely to link job loss to personal performance.

Some people have already lost their jobs as a result of the coronavirus crisis, and others are likely to in the coming months. How important do you think **luck** is in determining whether people lose their jobs at this time?



And how important do you think **how well people are performing at their jobs** is in determining whether people lose their jobs at this time?

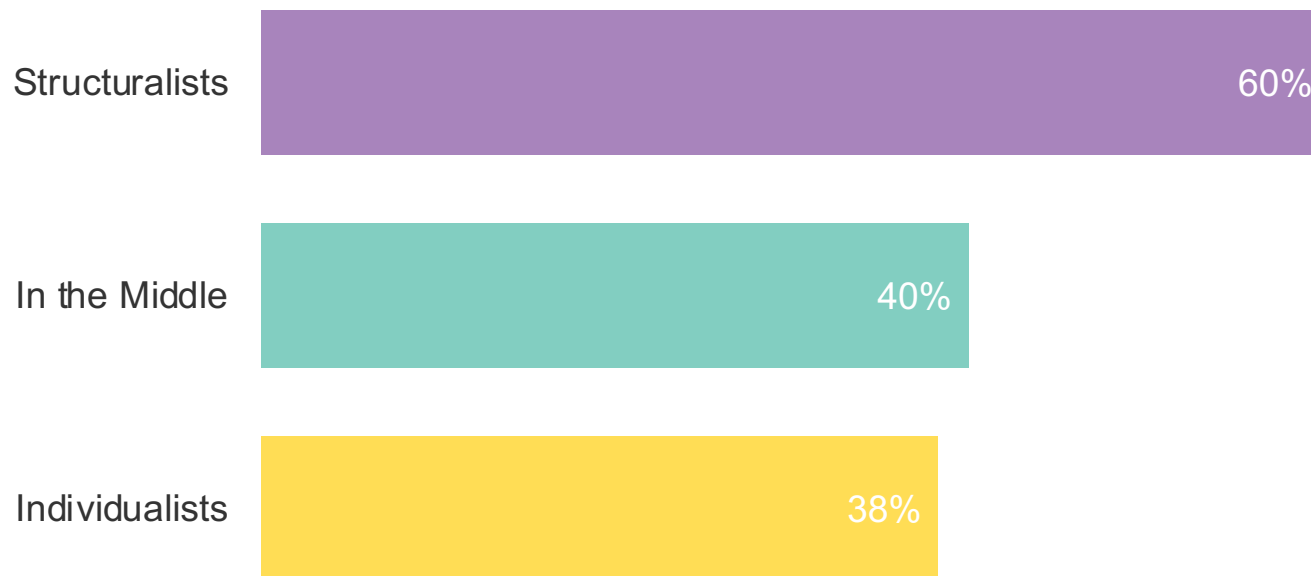


Unsurprisingly, Structuralists are most likely to believe that the experience of coronavirus crisis strengthens the case for more interventionist government in the future, with 60% of this group saying this accords with their views.

However, substantial minorities (around 40%) of both Individualists and those In the Middle also express support for this position. This suggests the crisis may provide an opening for more active government.

Which of the following statements comes closest to your view?

% agree: Government support for people and businesses during the coronavirus crisis **strengthens the case for government playing a more active role in the economy in the future**



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