



BORN TO RULE

The Making and Remaking
of the British Elite

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Henry*

‘Complete Rubbish! I’ve never considered myself to be one of the elite. I consider myself, justifiably or not, to have been a successful professional. I don’t consider that elite... this belief that there is an elite that can dominate society, I have considerable doubts about that....If you are a successful lawyer, a successful banker or whatever you are within your profession, yes you have a fair amount of push, but do you have a general influence? No, none at all...’

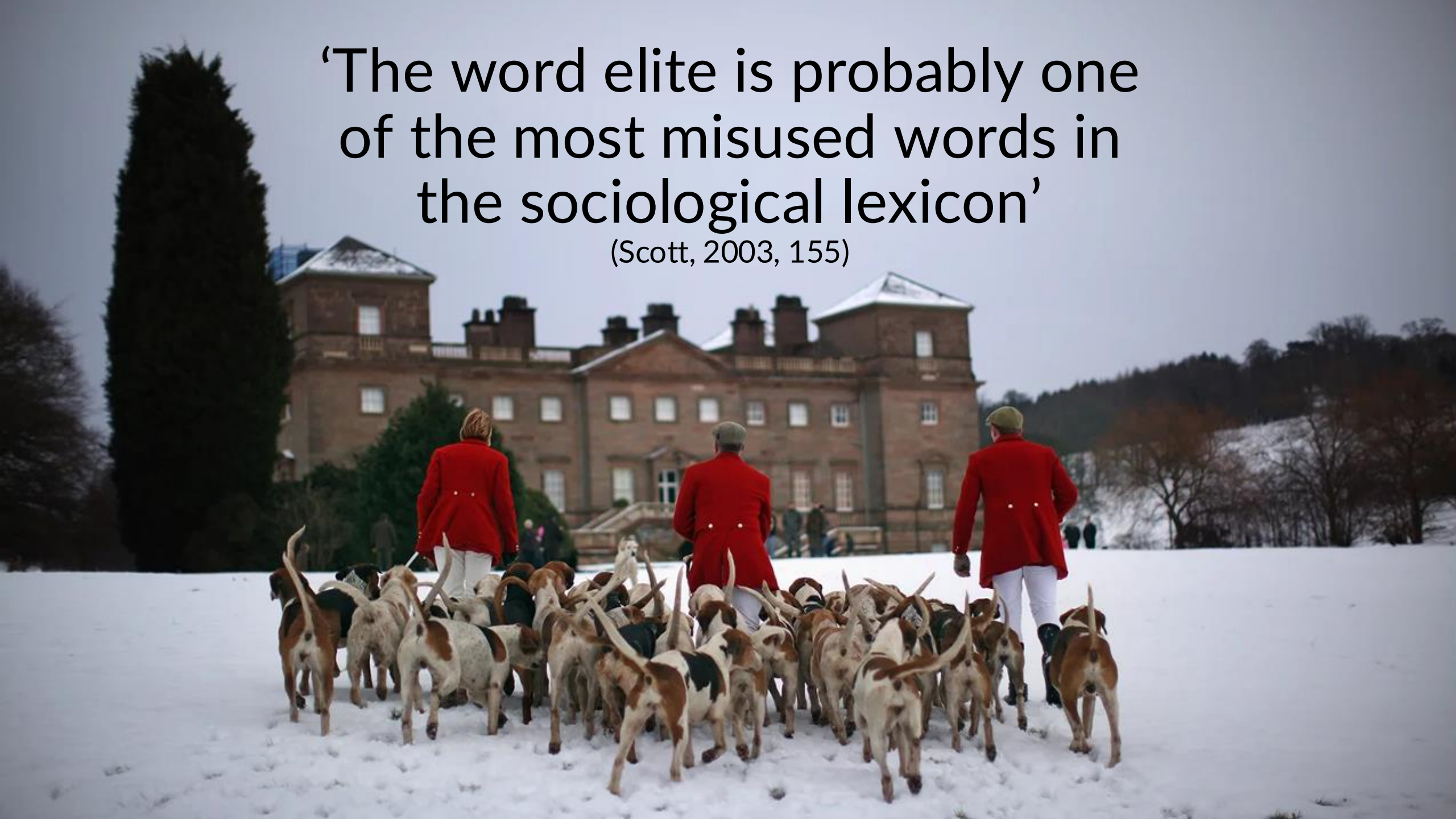
* – Not his real name and some details have been changed to protect anonymity

How has Britain's elite changed over the last 125 years?



‘The word elite is probably one
of the most misused words in
the sociological lexicon’

(Scott, 2003, 155)



‘Those with disproportionate access to, and control over, a range of economic, social, cultural and political resources’

KHAN, SHAMUS. ‘THE SOCIOLOGY OF ELITES’. ANNUAL REVIEW OF SOCIOLOGY 38, NO. 1 (2012): 361–77



WHO'S WHO 2016



168th annual edition

Dictionary of most 'noteworthy and influential' individuals

Compiled annually for 120 years

0.05% of UK population

Primarily documents a 'positional' elite

Data on schooling, university, clubs and recreations

WHO'S WHO 2016



168th annual edition

A Consecrated Elite

50% included automatically based on position (e.g. MPs, Ambassadors, Judges, FTSE100 CEOs)

50% selected by advisors based on reputation (e.g. perceived positional impact on British society)

Inclusion marker of consecration in its own right

But is *Who's Who* still too big?

‘Those with disproportionate access to, and control over, a **range of economic, social, cultural and political resources**’

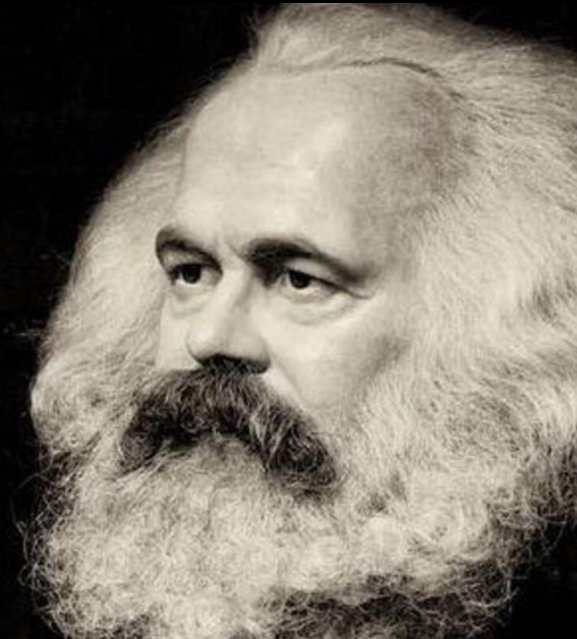


An elite-within-an elite Defining The Wealth Elite

Positional power (Included in *Who's Who*)

+

Economic power (Top 1% of wealth distribution)



Probate

Record of the estate of someone who died

Records kept between 1855 and 1995

Scraped all of this data (18m records)

We match probate with *Who's Who* to identify those in top 1% of (probate) wealth distribution

ROBERTS Alfred of 19 North Parade Grantham Lincs died
10 February 1970 Probate Nottingham 25 March. £8320.

ROBERTS Alfred of The Dell St. Lukes Rd Southport died
28 March 1970 Administration Liverpool 1 July. £551.

ROBERTS Alfred of 19 Moss Rd Northwich Cheshire died
28 June 1970 Probate Sheffield 19 August. £11519.

ROBERTS Alfred of 3 Norfolk Rd Luton died 5 August 1970
Probate Oxford 12 October. £8749.

Research Design

Longitudinal Mixed Methods

Quantitative

- Historical catalogue of Who's Who (N =125,000)
- Probate records 1855-1995 (15m) + genealogical records (n = 60,000)
- Survey of current Who's Who entrants (N = 3280)
- Archive of BBC Radio 4's *Desert Island Discs* (N = 2500)

Qualitative

- Secondary analysis of 70 interviews in British Library 'National Life Stories' series (matched to *Who's Who*)
- 147 interviews carried out by us and our post-docs
- Interviews organized into four birth cohorts
 - (1900-1920, 1920-40, 1940-1960, 1960-today)

Struggling to be ordinary



Pushing Back on Being 'Elite'

'I'm very cleared eyed about this, I'm not part of the elite at all. I have very limited influence and almost no power'
(Samantha, business, wealth elite)

Narratives of Opening up

'The truth is there's been masses of [social mobility]... I mean if I was thinking about a certain elite from the 30s, 40s, 50s, 60s then a really large number of people would've got their through a boarding [school]... And that would be a way you would identify people... now you wouldn't dream, I mean I can't imagine, sort of asking what school someone went to' (Duncan, Policy/Politics, wealth elite)

Deflecting Privilege

Victoria: I'm certainly not, I mean upper middle, I don't know what you call it... And I, you know, I don't particularly want to think about class, but I must have come from privileged background...I mean do you think I've got a slightly?...I mean I'm sometimes slightly shocked when I hear a recording of my voice that it sounds a bit upper...

Int: It's got a middle class sound, but it doesn't sound super posh to me.

Victoria: Well, good, well I don't want it to (Victoria, Higher Ed)

43% of those who
said they came
from working
backgrounds had
parents who
worked in
professional
occupations

(among 3000 people
surveyed in Who's Who)



Deflecting Privilege

INT: Why didn't you put your schooling in your Who's Who entry?

Rachel: Because I didn't want to draw attention to the fact I'd been to private school.

INT: Why is that, do you think?

Rachel: I can't remember for sure. There probably was an element of not wanting to draw attention to it... But yes, there probably is an element of not wanting people to make assumptions about my background, based on the school I went to (Rachel, CEO)

Elite identities in the early 20th Century

I mean I had quite a lot of capital from my father and my mother's side... So we have never been short of money. And my father was always very insistent on that, he said, 'if you have some capital, it gives you some freedom, you're not at the beck and call'... So, anyway I've never been other than comfortably off, and I've never felt I have to, you know, take every penny from my work. And that's just a bit of luck.'

(Jeremy Morse, University Chancellor)

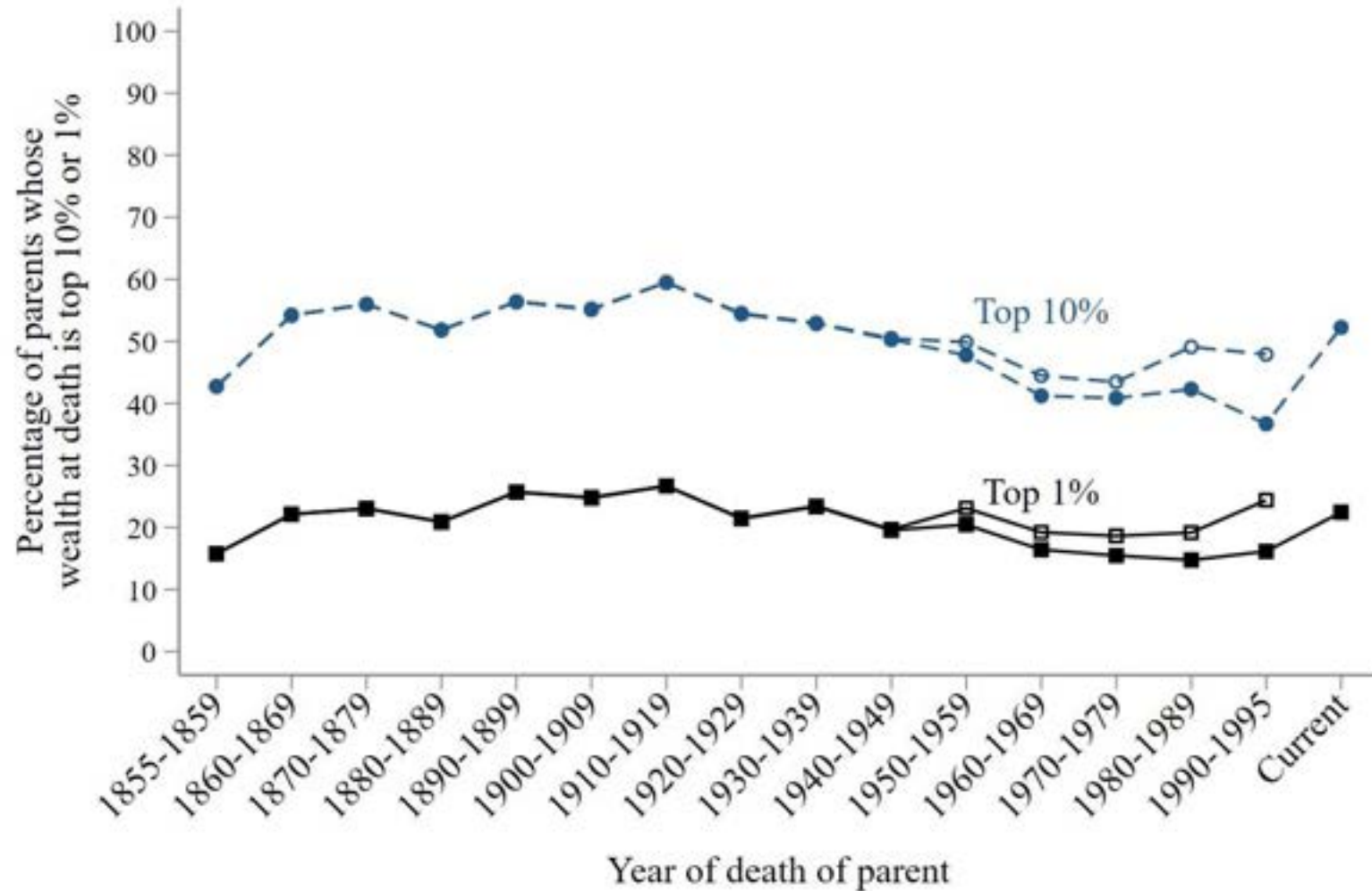


Silver Spoons

Are elite's narratives of opening up correct?



Elite reproduction has been (largely) stable

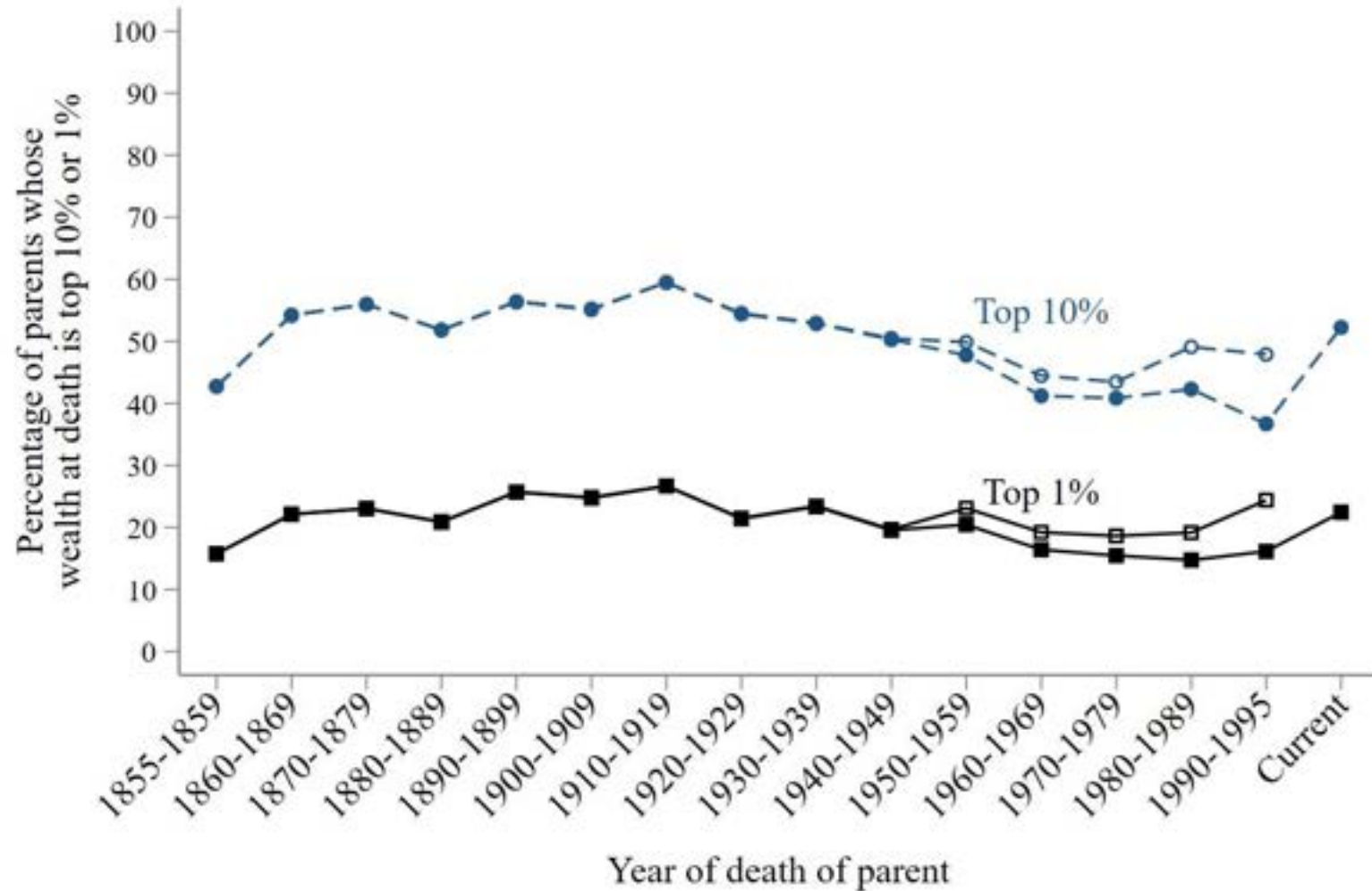


Hollow circles and squares
adjust for 'hidden wealth'

The dramatic equalization of wealth



Elite reproduction has been (largely) stable



Hollow circles and squares
adjust for 'hidden wealth'

Public Schools



The Clarendon Schools



Eton



Harrow



Westminster



Rugby



Charterhouse



Merchant Taylors



St Paul's

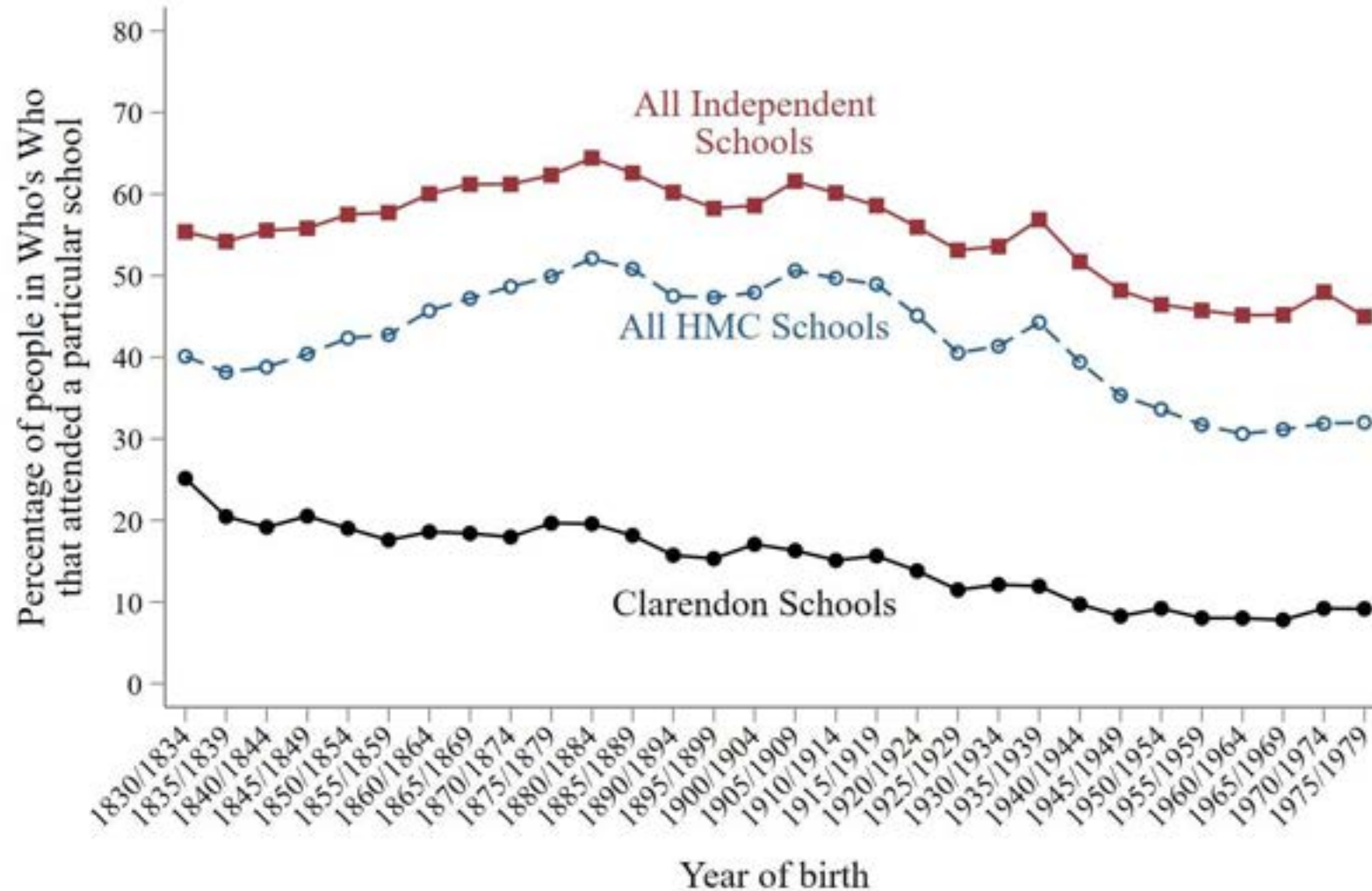


Shrewsbury

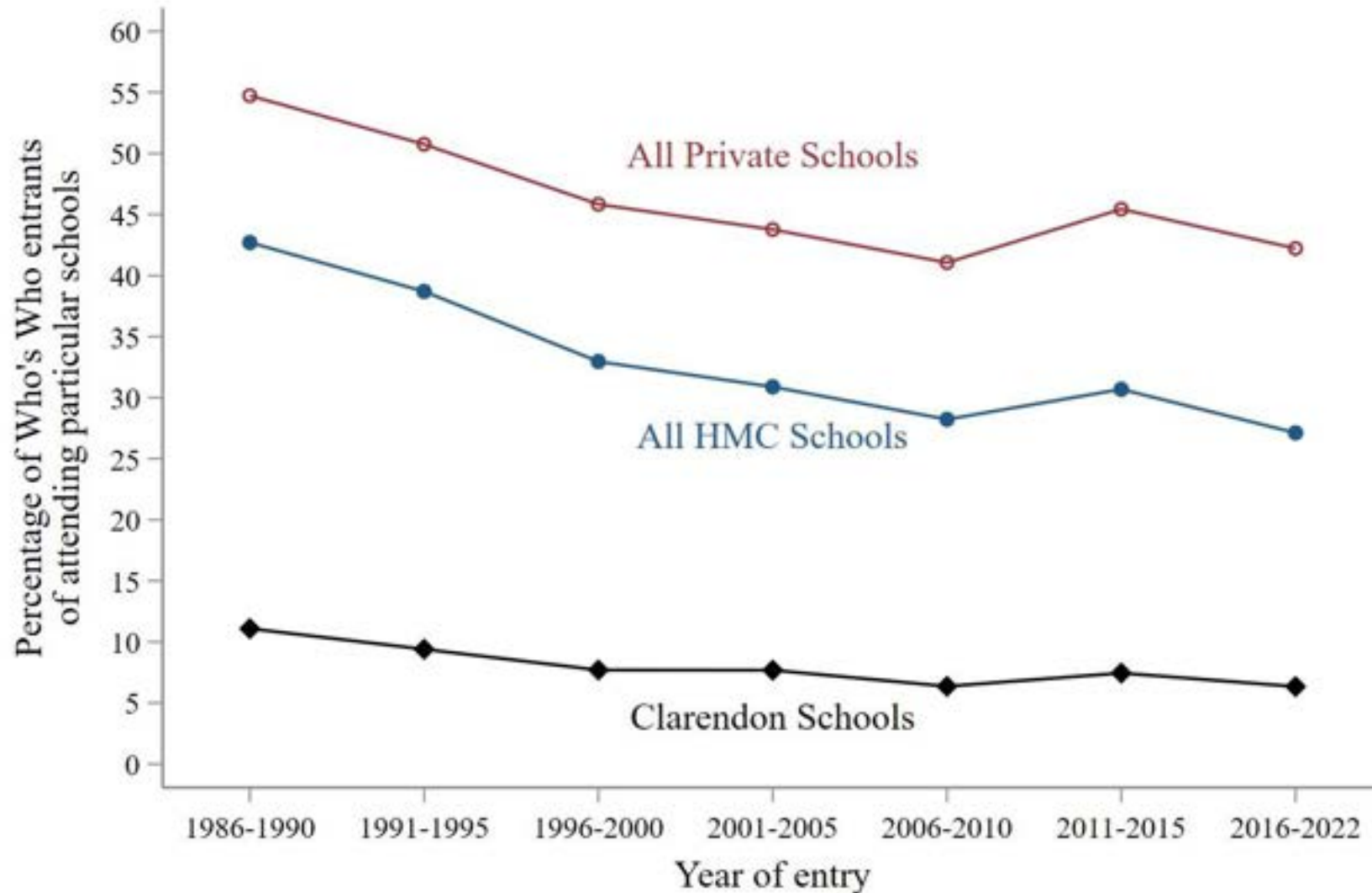


Winchester

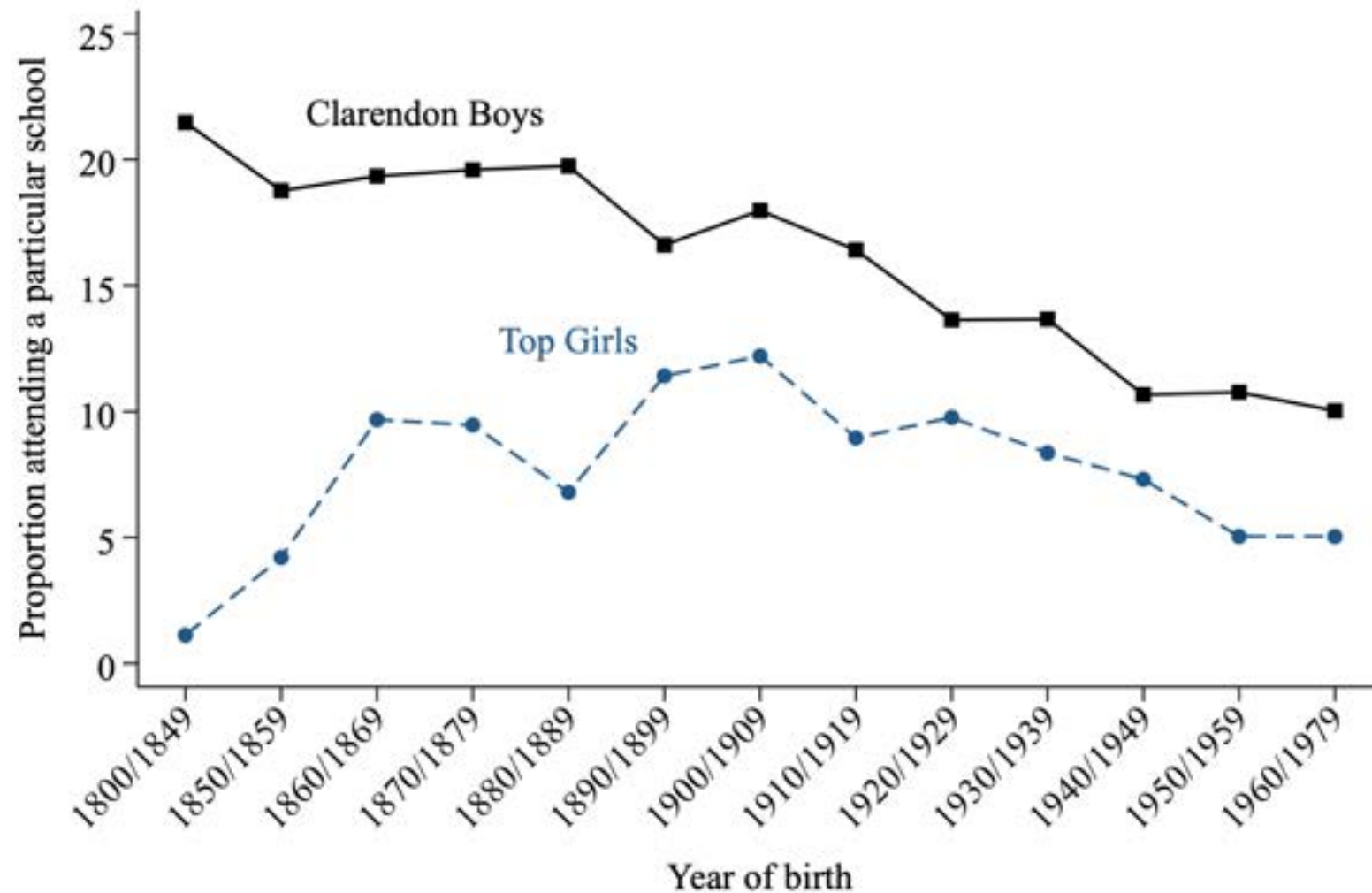
The decline of the old boy, 1830-1979



The persistence of the old boy, 1996-2022



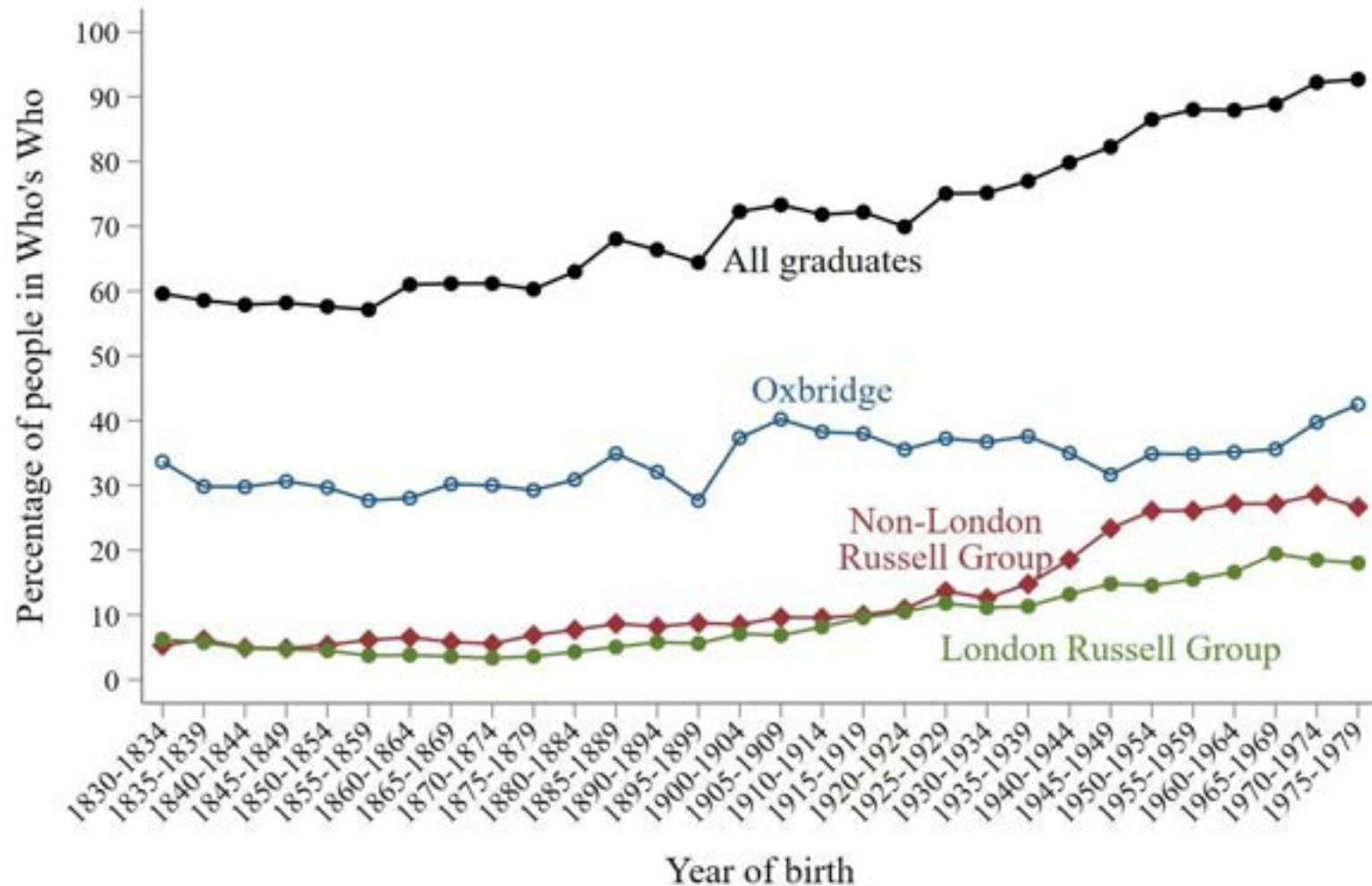
Elite girls schools have not been as successful as boys schools at getting their alumni into the elite



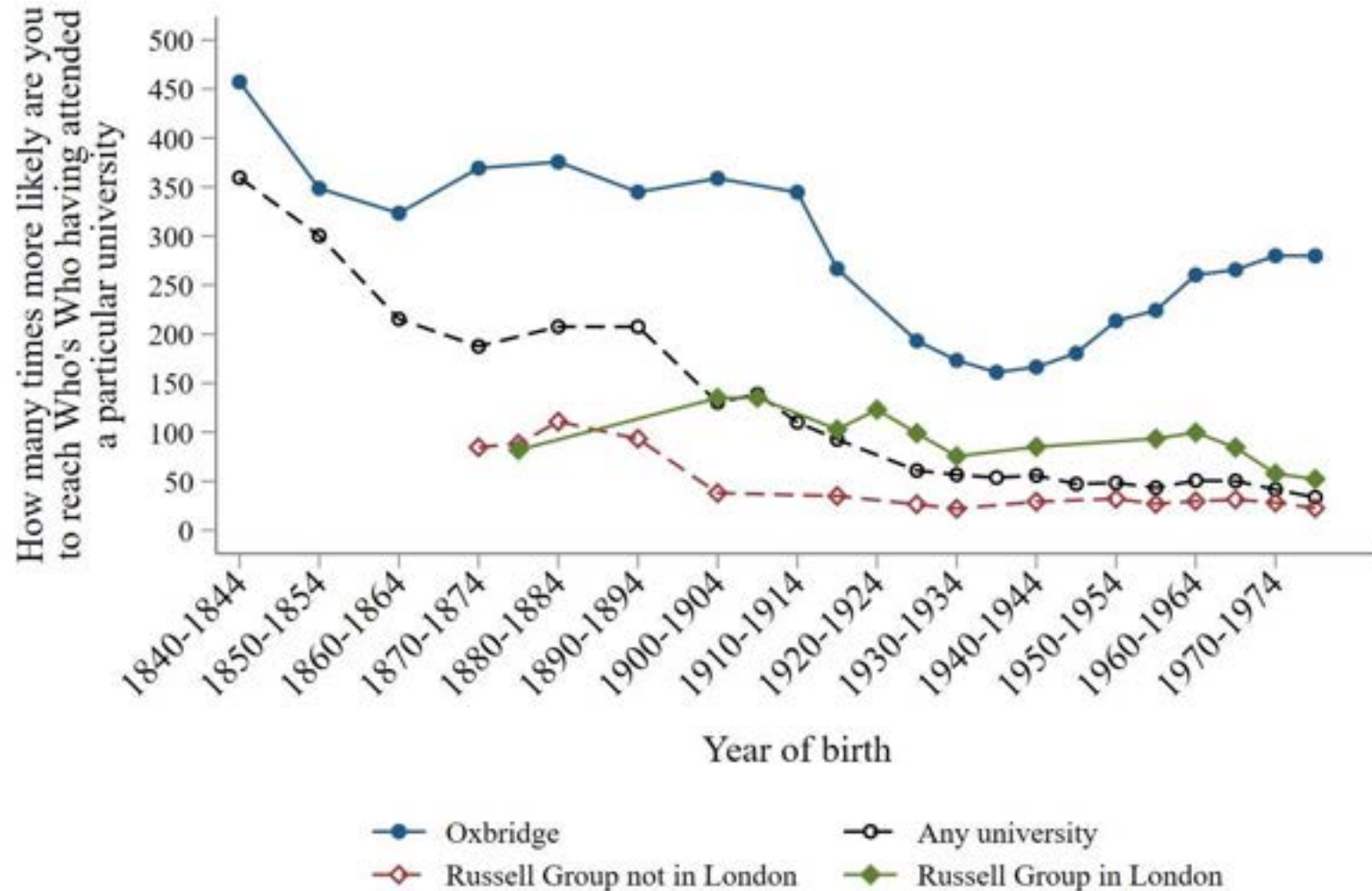


Oxbridge

The proportion of people in Who's Who from Oxbridge has been stable



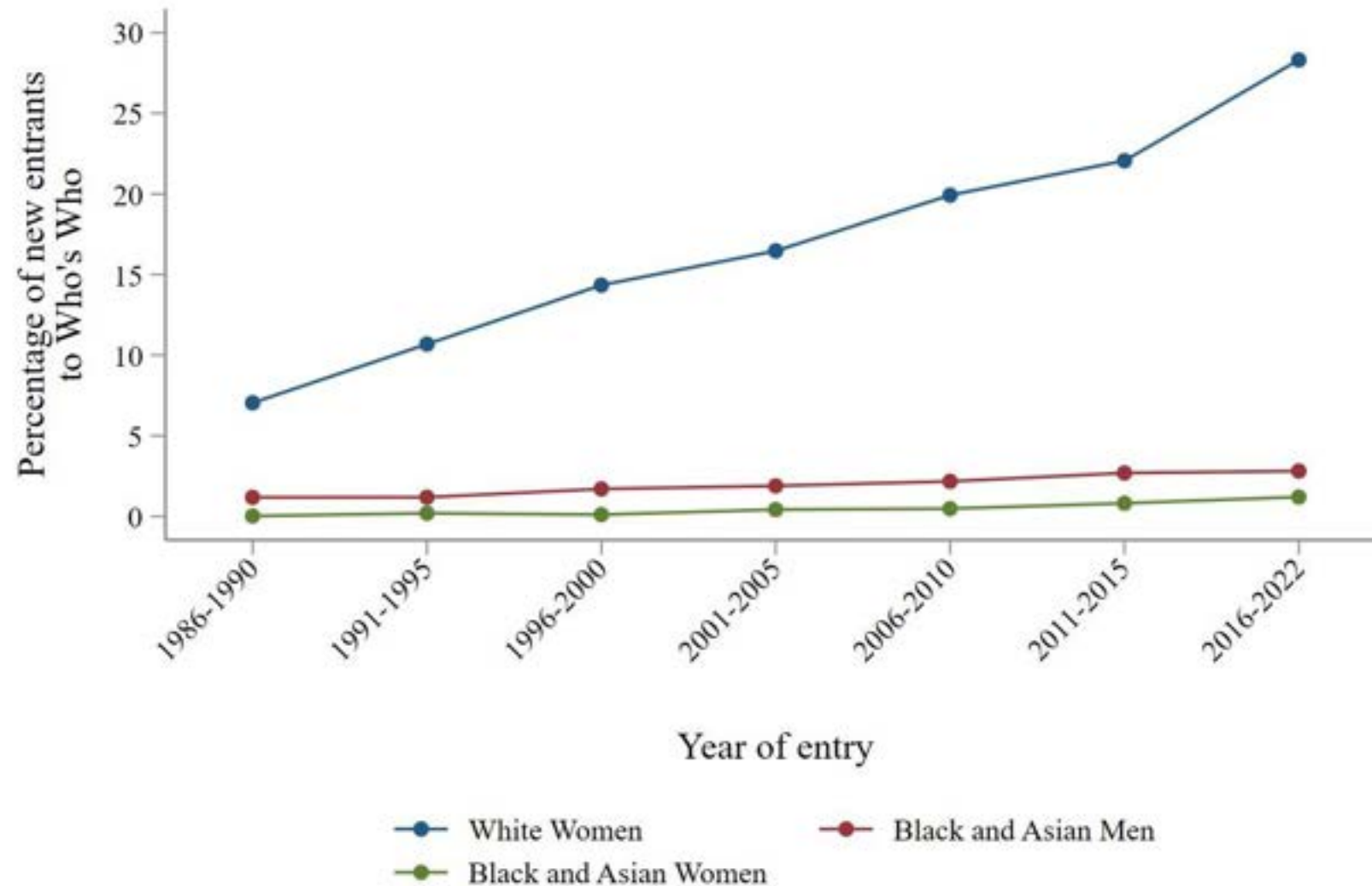
But the propulsive power of Oxbridge has changed over time



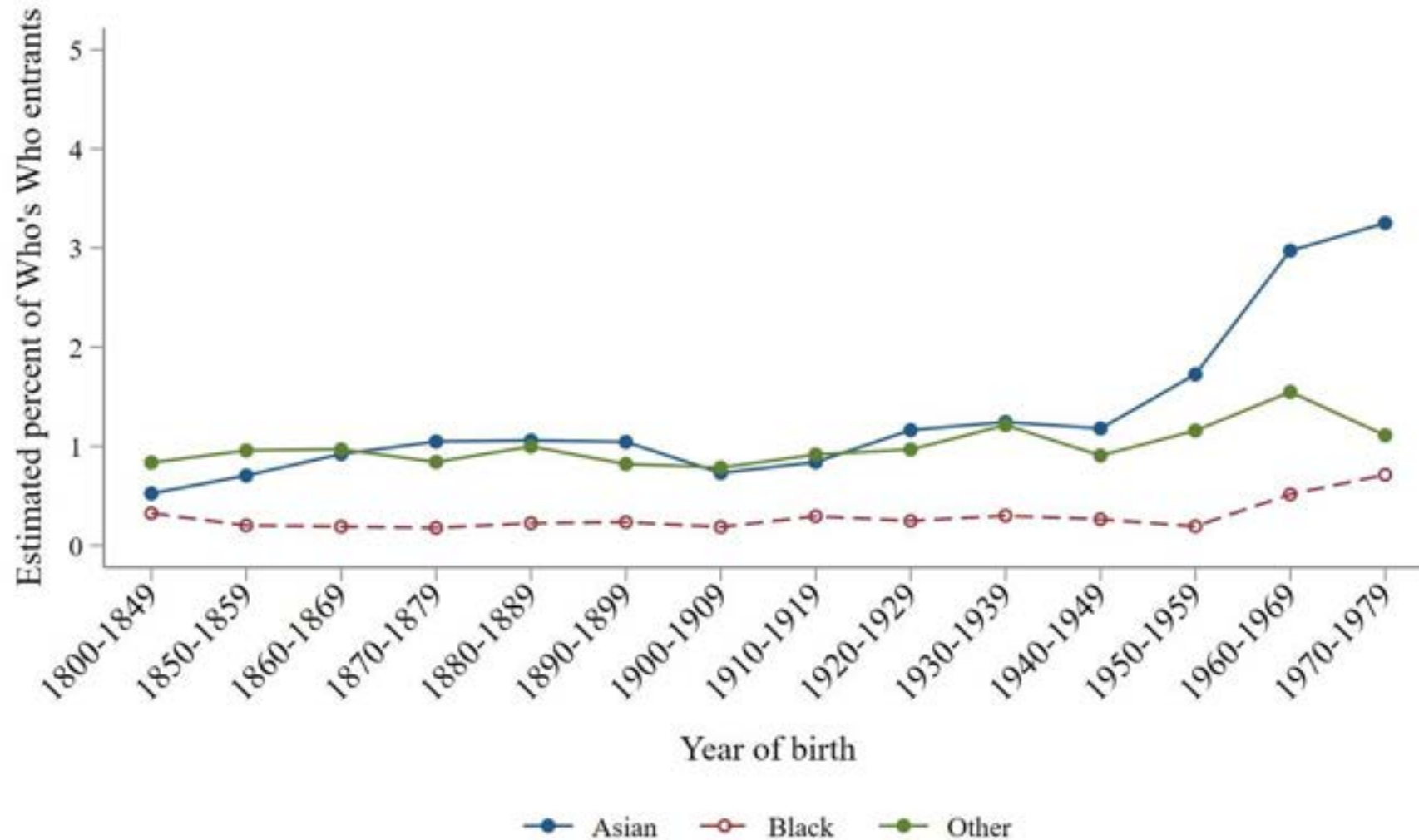
Who have elites
included and **excluded**?



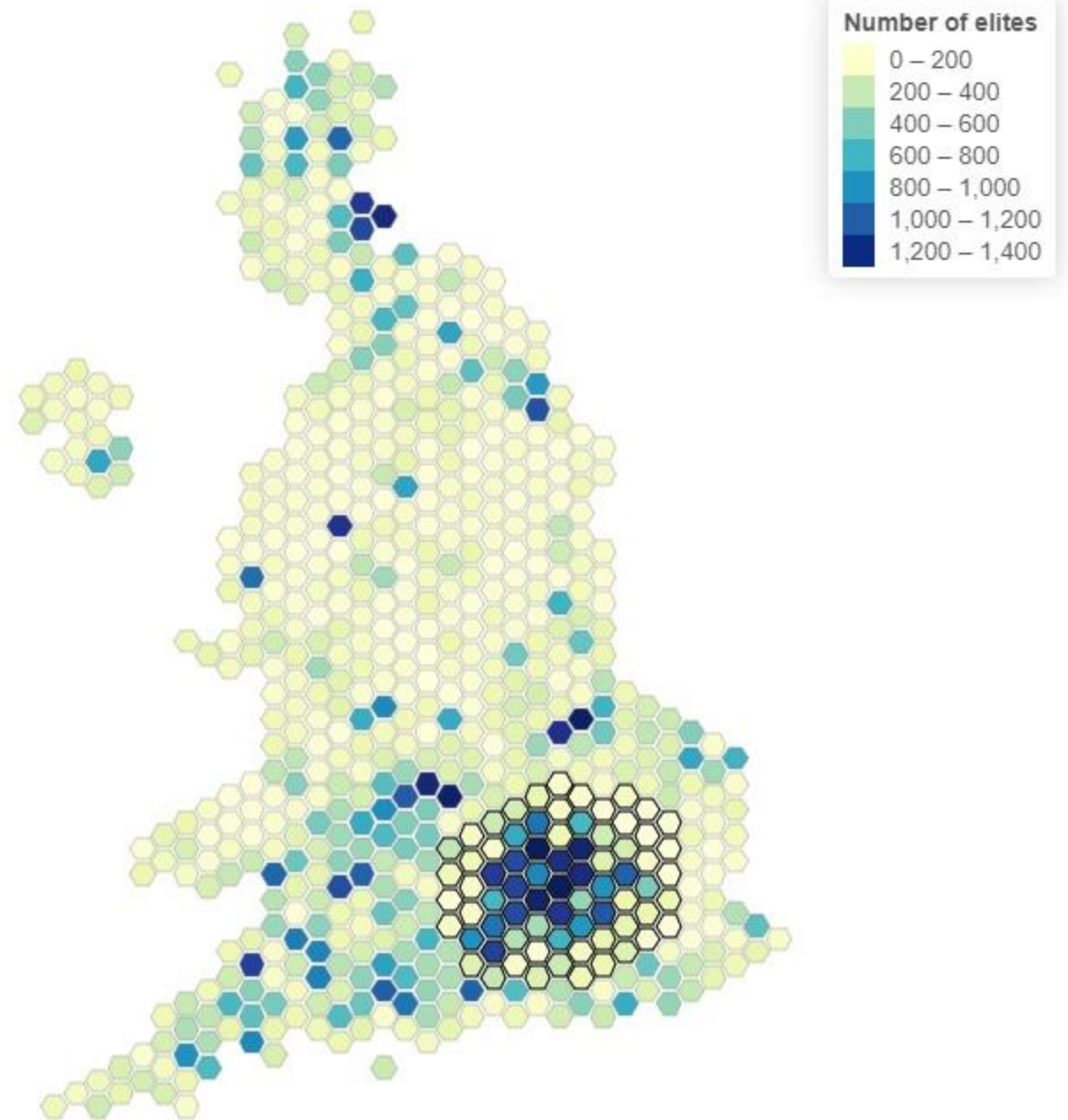
Proportion of new entrants to Who's Who who are women



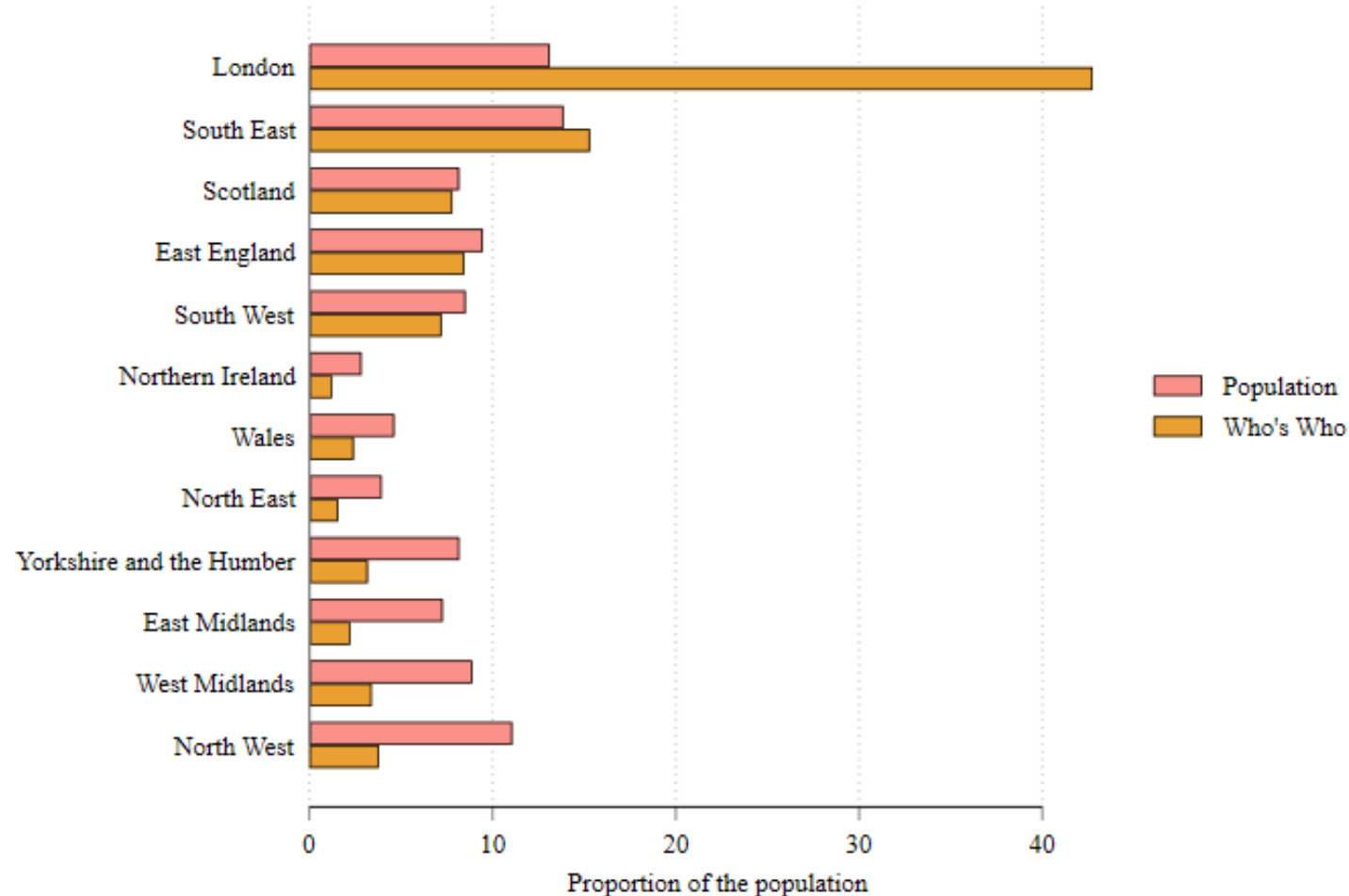
The vast majority of the British elite are white



Where do the elite live?



People from Northern Ireland are under-represented among the elite



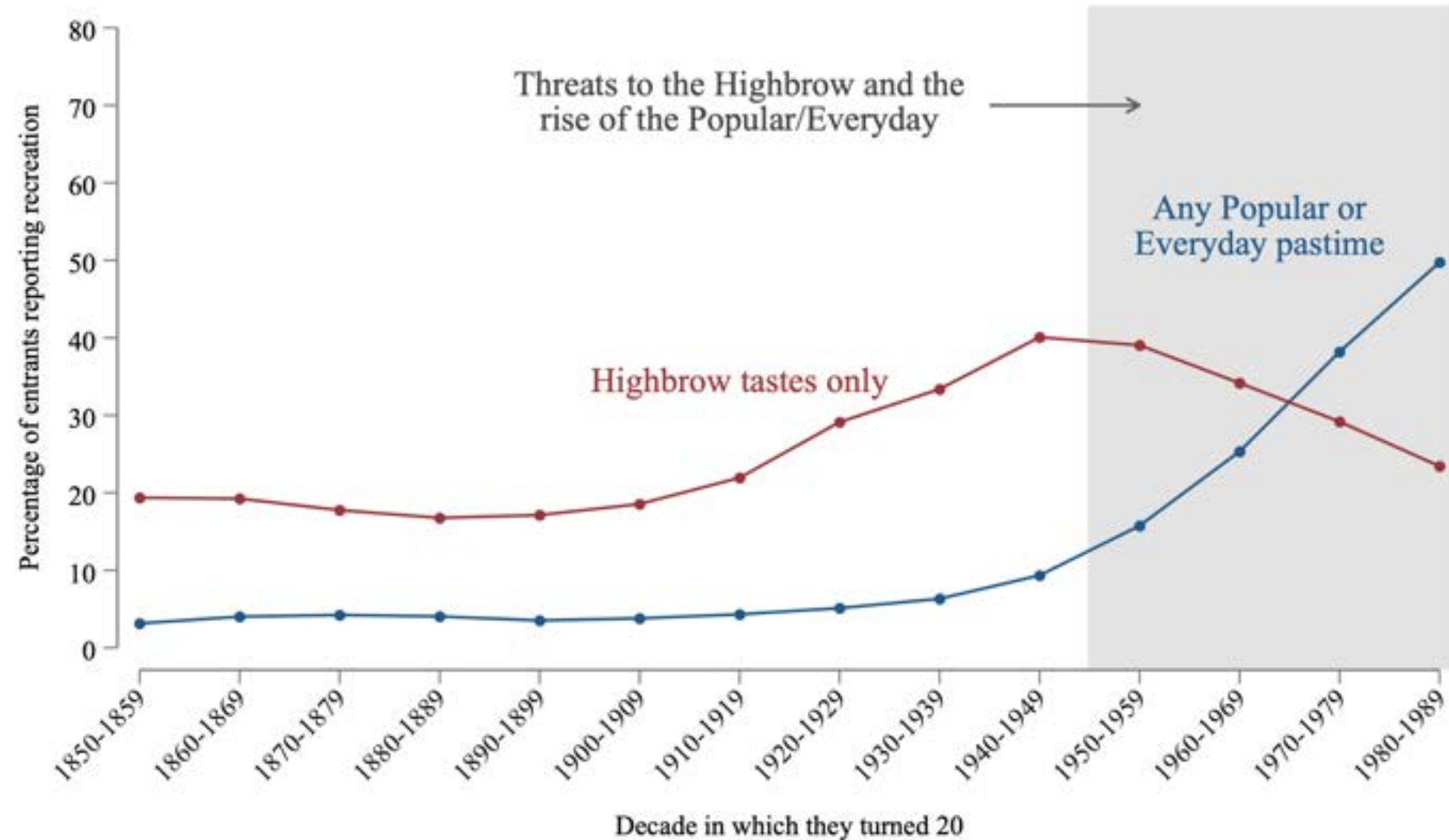
Alumni of the HMC schools
were 2x more likely to end up in
Who's Who than the alumni of
HMC schools in NI



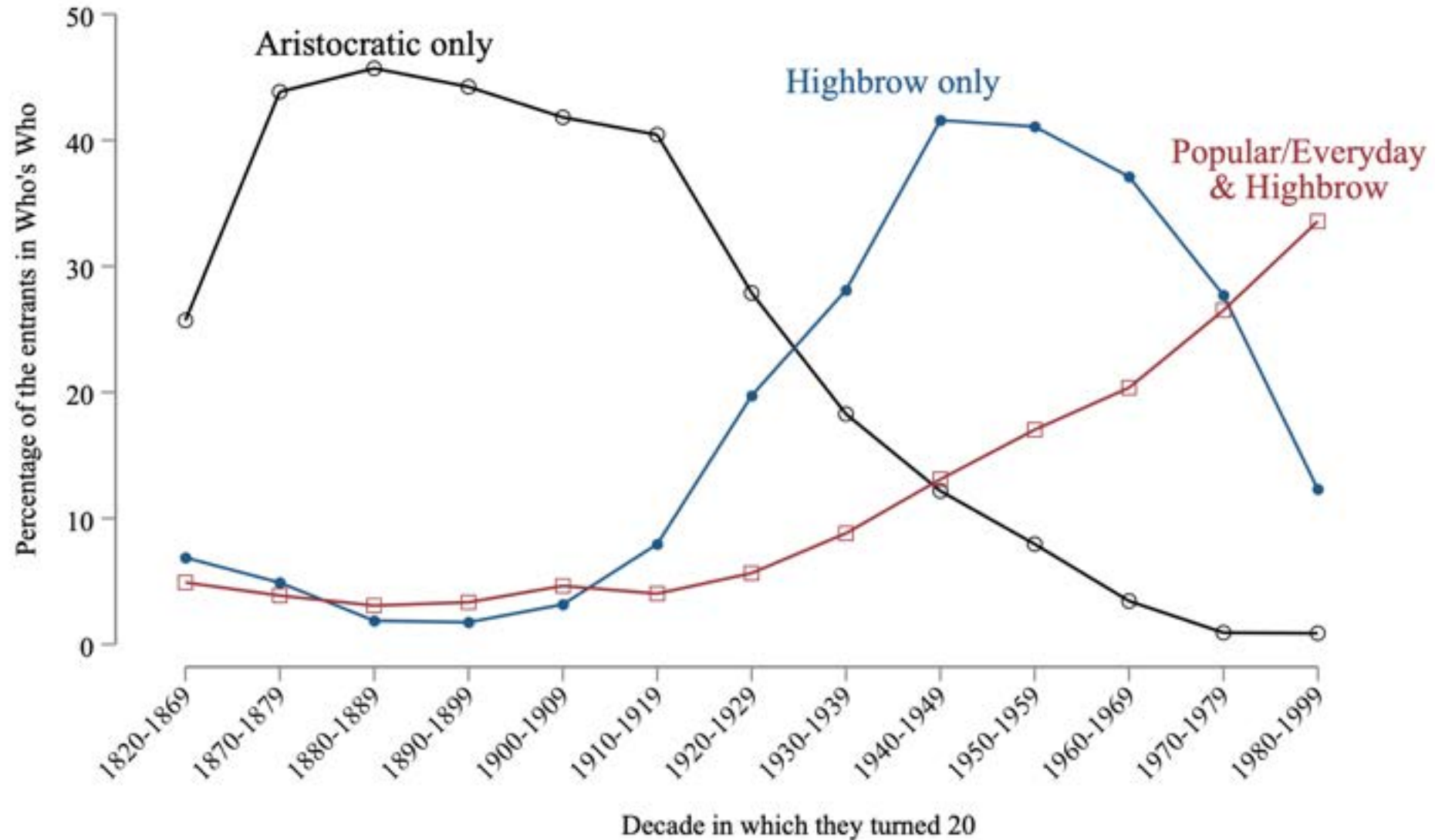
Culture and the rise of ordinariness



The rise of popular/everyday culture among elites



The rise of the Elite 'Omnivore'



Saying openness and doing snobbery

Amanda's Who's Who profile

Running, visiting old churches,
and shouting answers at TV quiz
shows.

Amanda's interview

Opera, theatre, I mean they tell
you something fundamental
about human beings... I don't
want to go to my grave knowing I
have had a meal out somewhere.
But I want to go to my grave
knowing that I have sat through
the last act of the Marriage of
Figaro.

The symbolic
market for
ordinariness



Uncovering the symbolic market for ordinariness

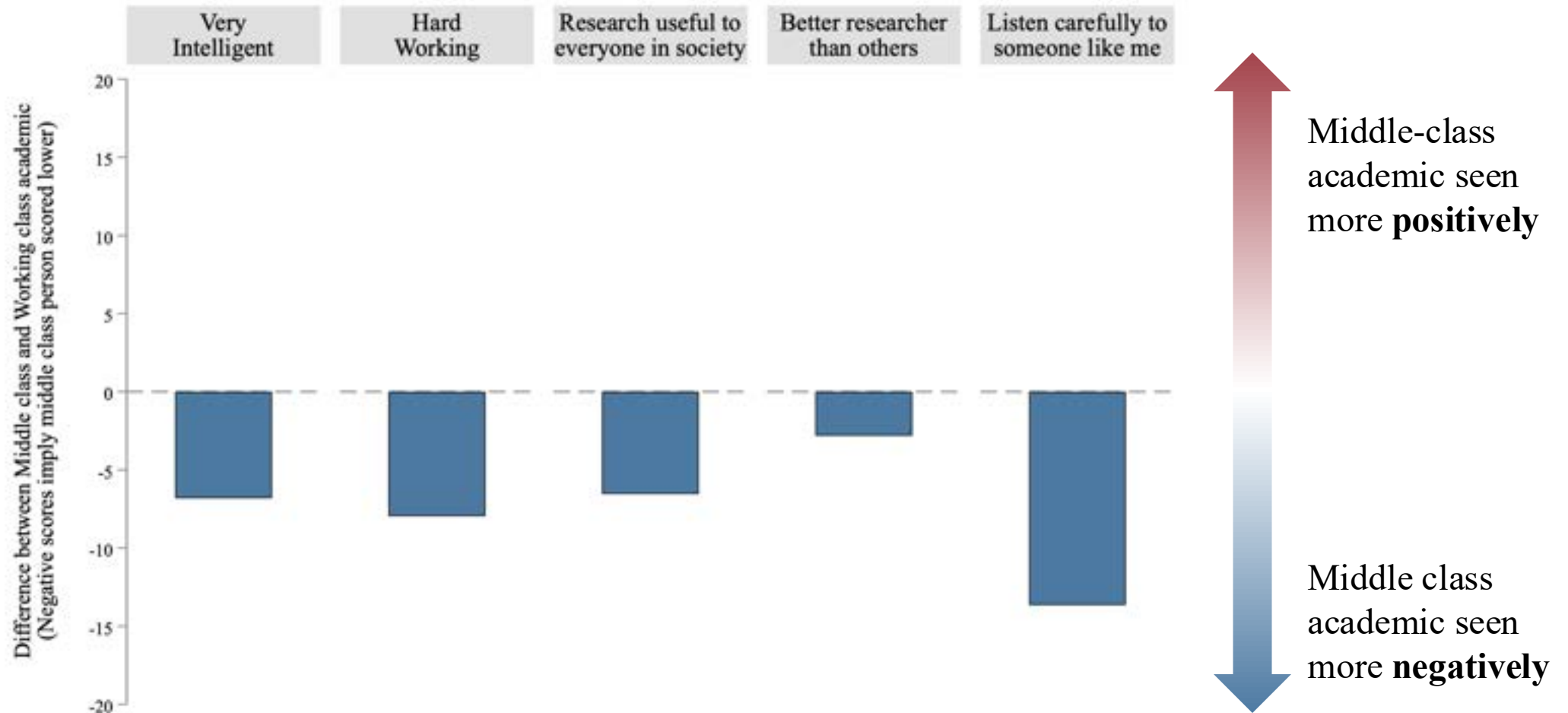
Vignette 1

Imagine you see an academic on TV who is talking about their research. In the TV show, the academic explains how they developed their research interests. You find out that **her father worked as a maintenance assistant and it was his experiences that informed her research...** She did her PhD in Sheffield, the university where **her father worked in maintenance.**

Vignette 2

Imagine you see an academic on TV who is talking about their research. In the TV show, the academic explains how they developed their research interests. You find out that **her father was an academic and it was his experiences that informed her research...** She did her PhD in Sheffield, the university where **her father was a professor.**

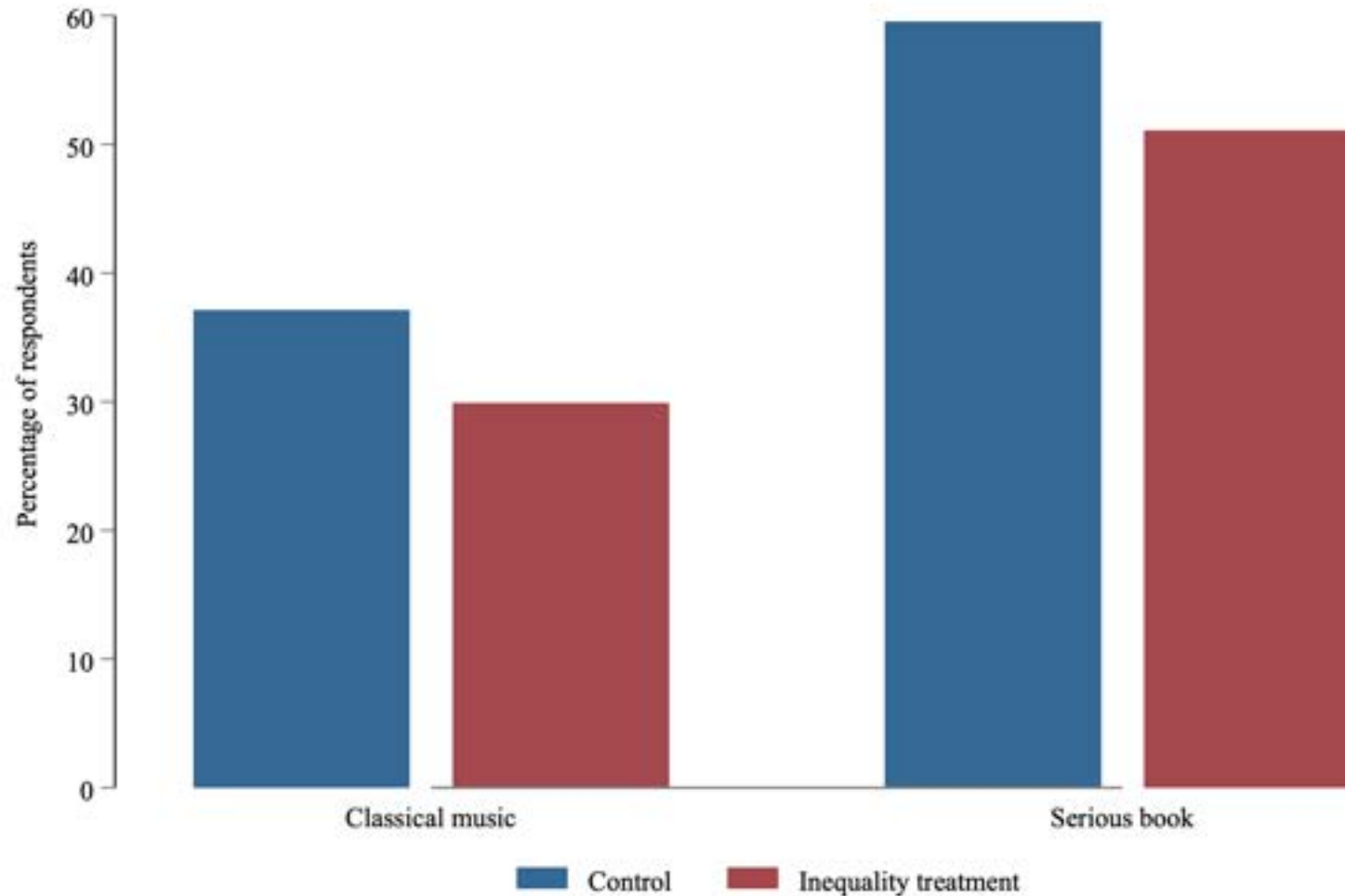
The 'middle-class' academic is not viewed as positively as the 'working-class' academic



Why has this shift happened? (Another experiment)

Income inequality has gone up since the late 1970s and the very richest households have captured a larger share of national income over time. In addition, the people in Who's Who are very affluent. Over 33 percent of Who's Who entrants are in the top 1 percent of the wealth distribution. Given this, how worried are you about some of the (potential) negative effects of inequality listed below?

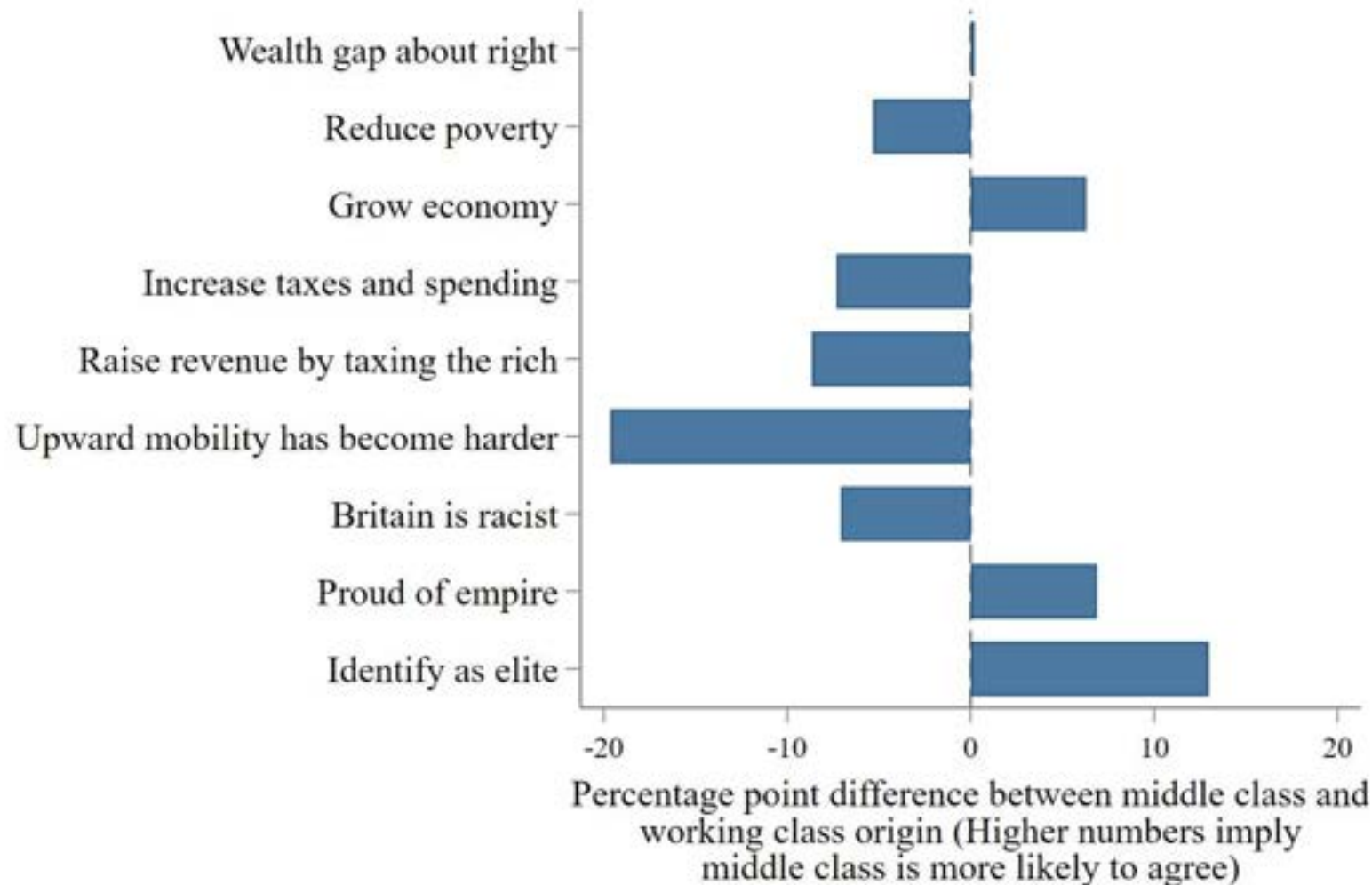
Why has this shift happened?



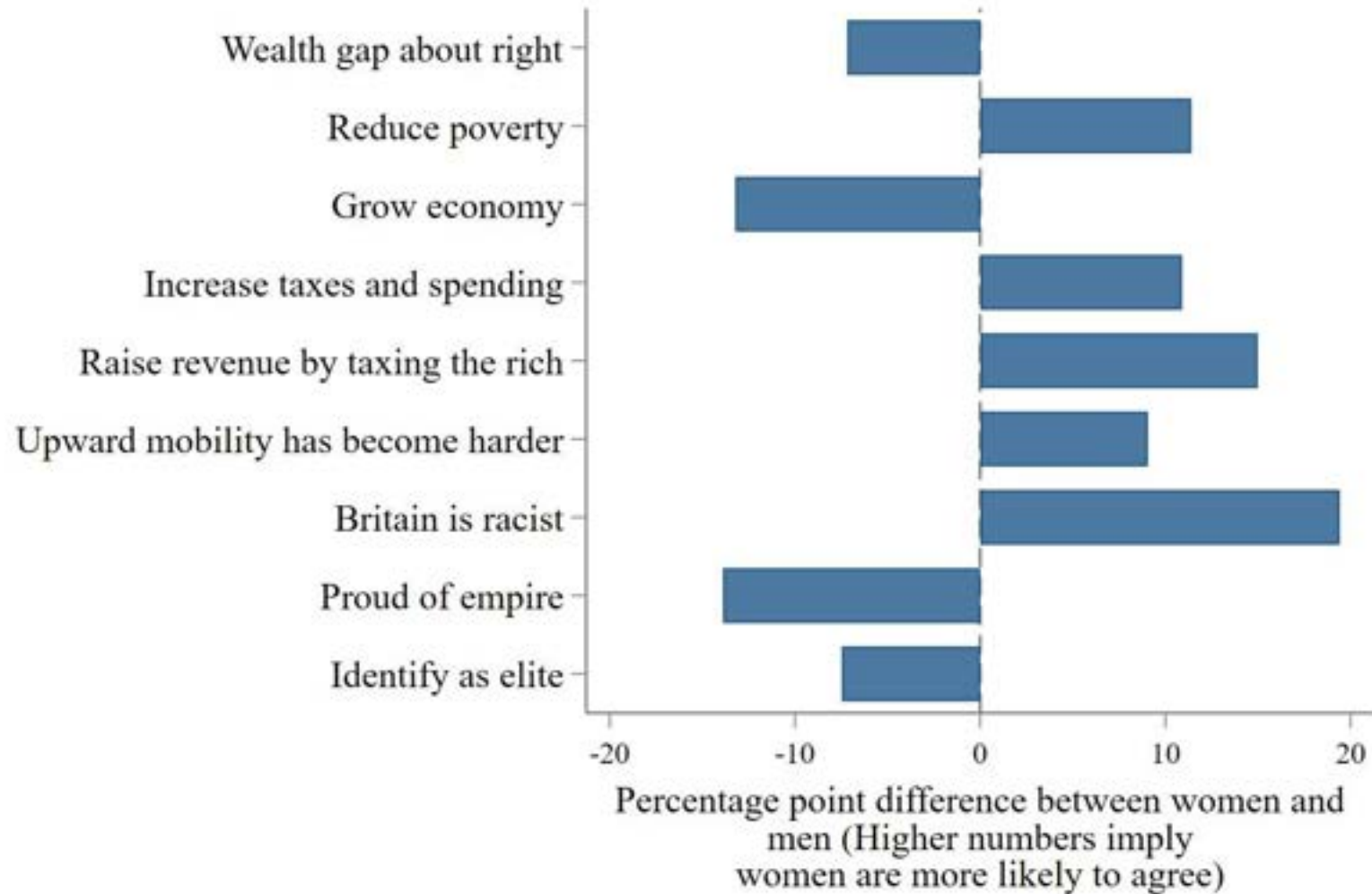
Why does it matter who gets into the elite?



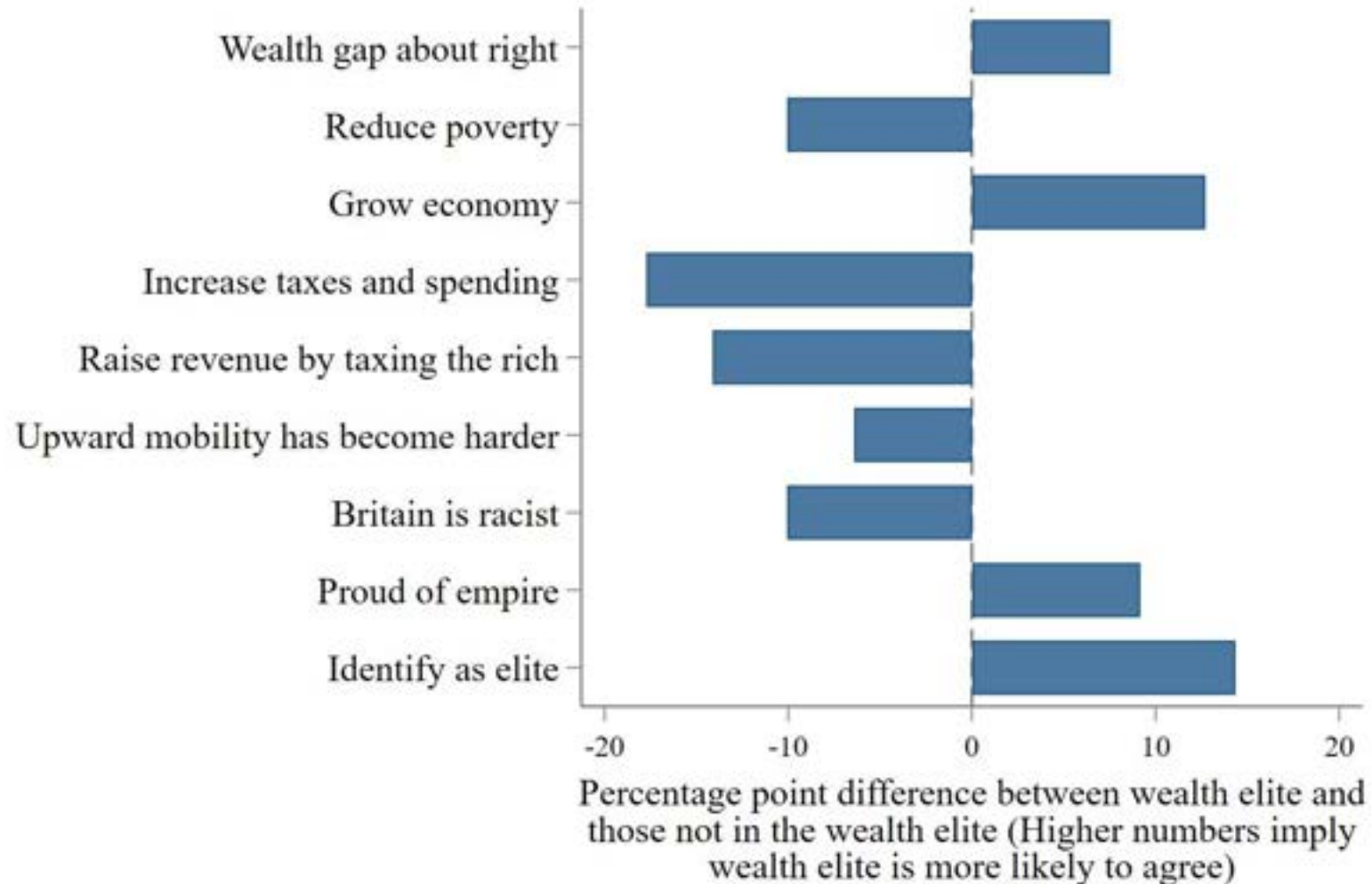
Elites from middle-class origins are more Right-leaning



Women are more Left-leaning



Wealth elites are more Right-leaning



Limitations

- Measurement error (change over time?)
- It is hard to see what elites are actually doing
- *Who's Who* may miss certain kinds of elites
- Probate may underestimate inheritance
- Imperfect (and potentially problematic) measure of ethnicity in *Who's Who*
- We struggle to tap elite networks – the degree of 'chumocracy'
- Local dynamics among the elite (McCrone on Edinburgh)

**British elite perform ordinariness
(drawing distinctions with an aristocratic past)**



**The
performance
of ordinariness
shores up
legitimacy**





A high degree of continuity

**Masks ideological differences between
the elite and everyone else**



Annual wealth tax of 0.6% on those with more than £2m

(Net and not including main home)



A group of young men, likely students, are walking in a courtyard. They are wearing black academic gowns over white shirts and dark trousers. The background shows a brick building with arched windows and doorways. The ground is paved with cobblestones.

**Restrict number of privately educated students
at Russell Group Universities to 10%**



**Eradicate applications and randomly recruit
above an attainment threshold**



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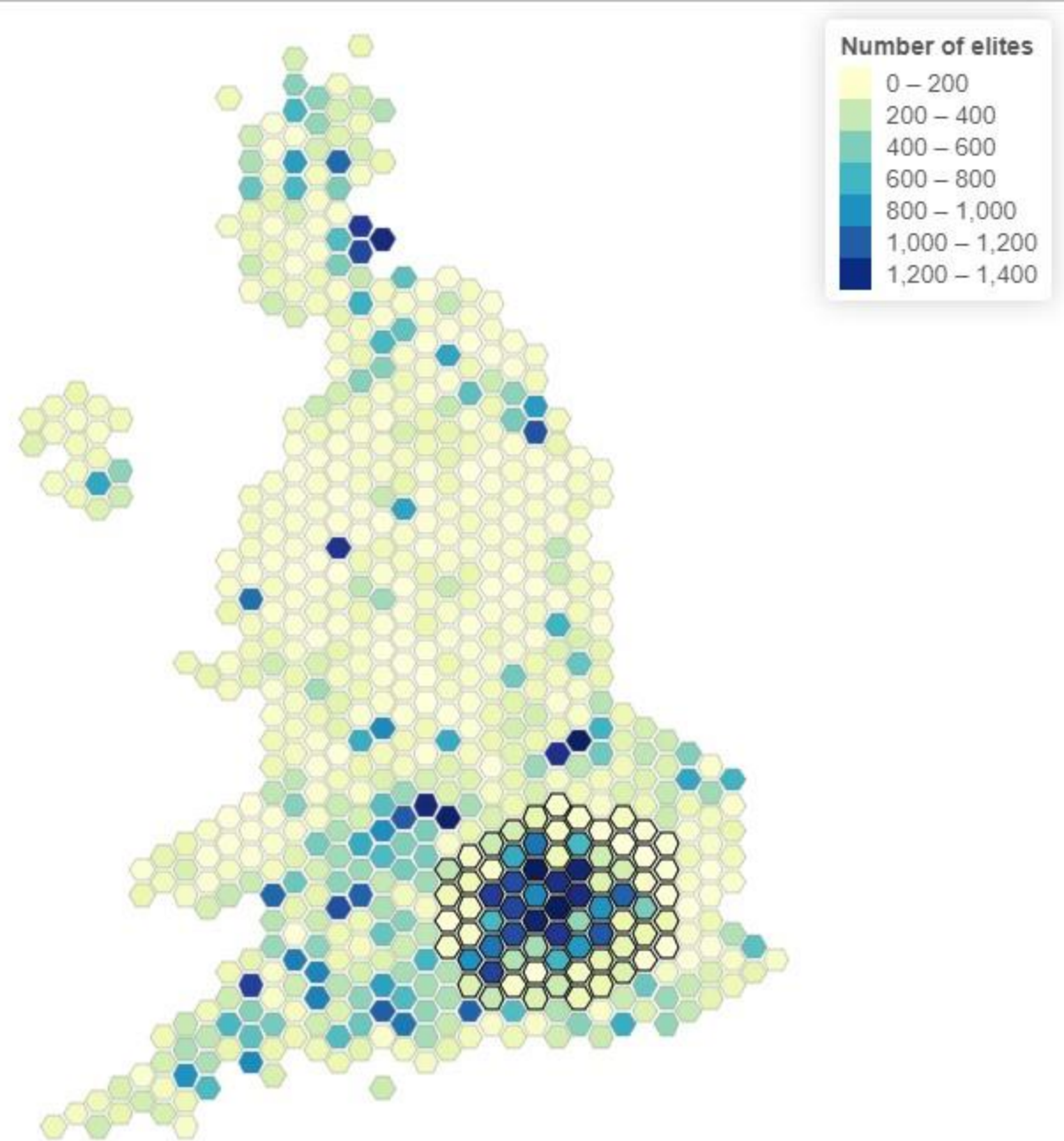
The Making and Remaking
of the British Elite

Aaron Reeves and Sam Friedman

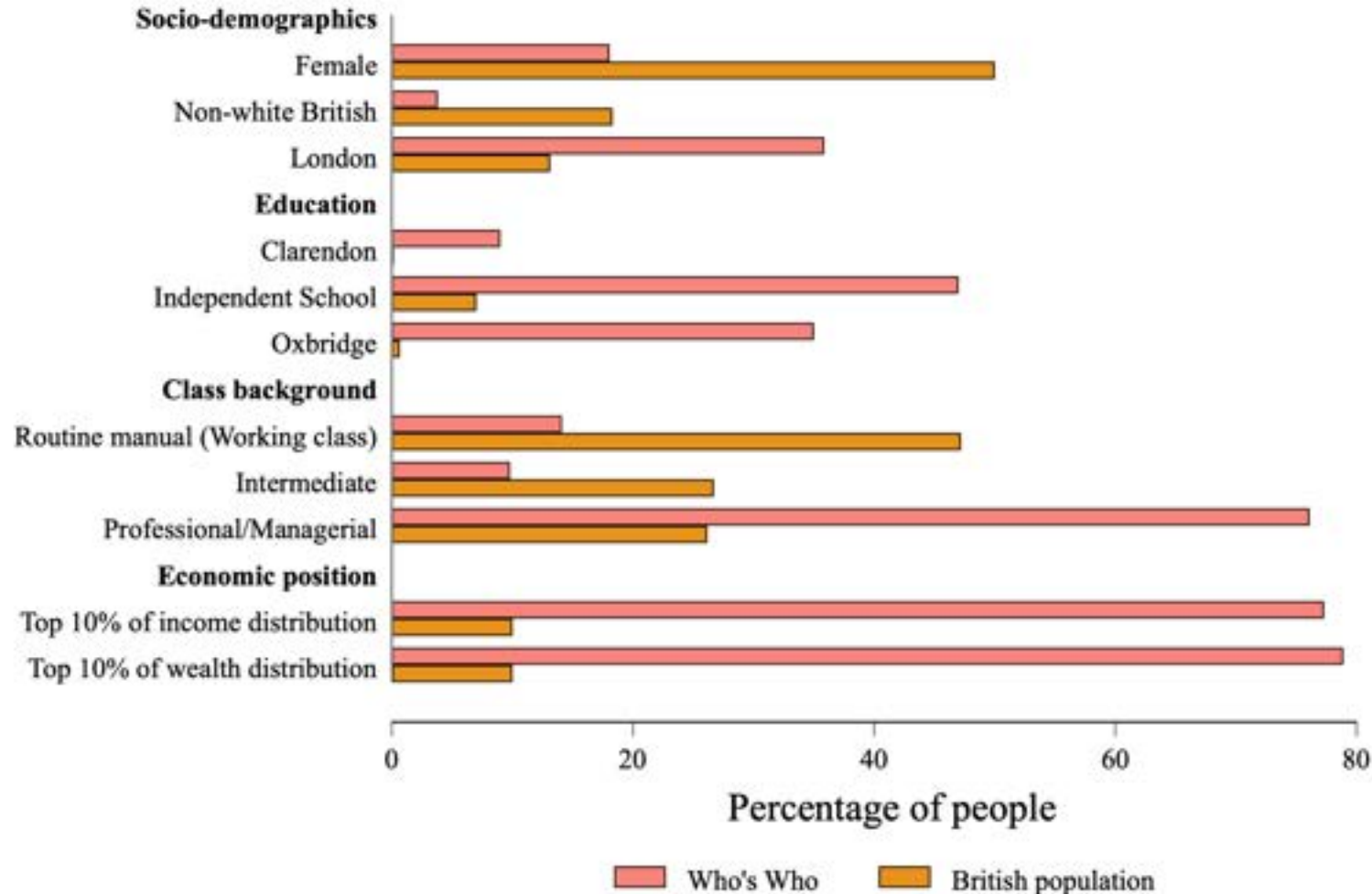
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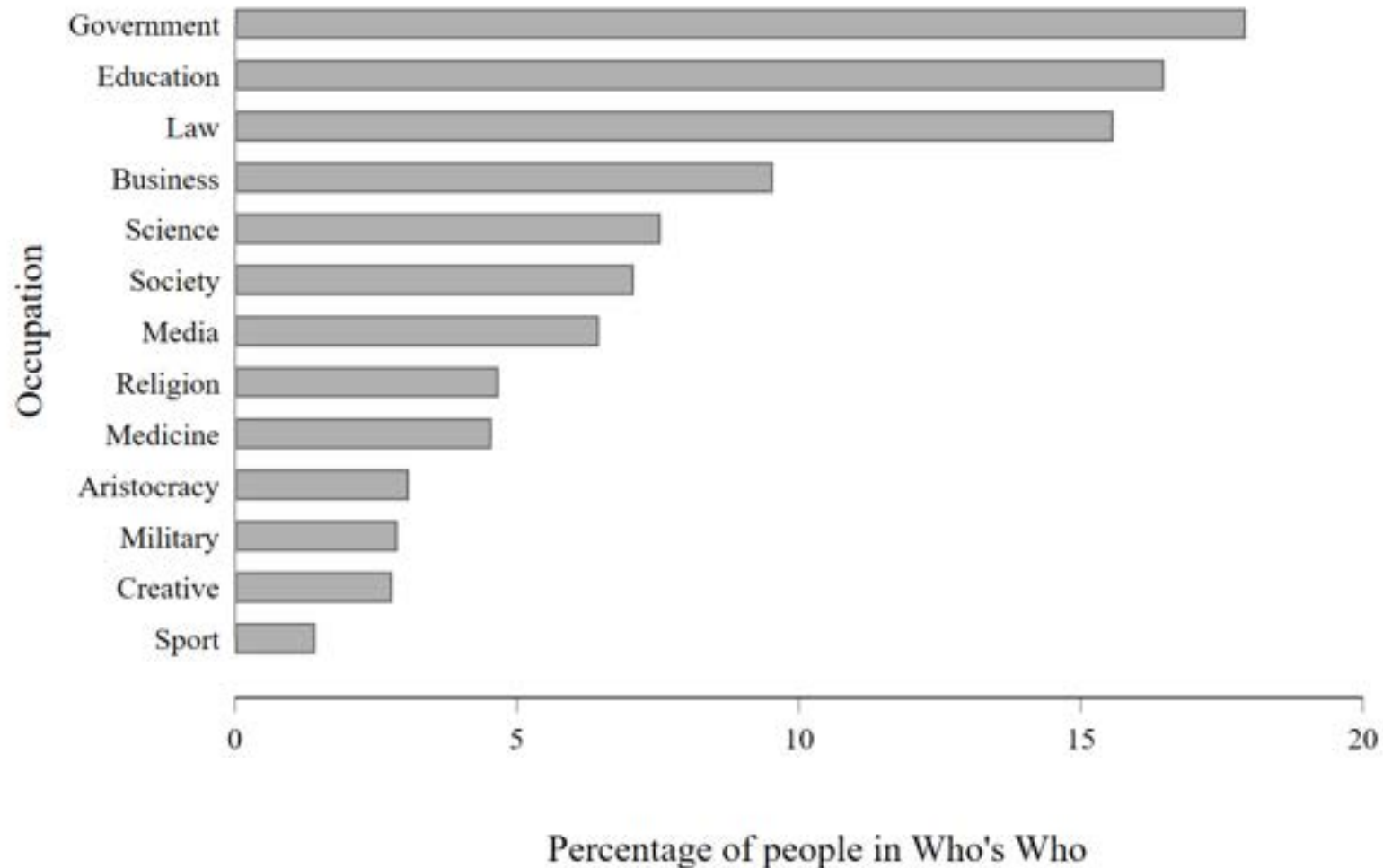
Where do the elite live?



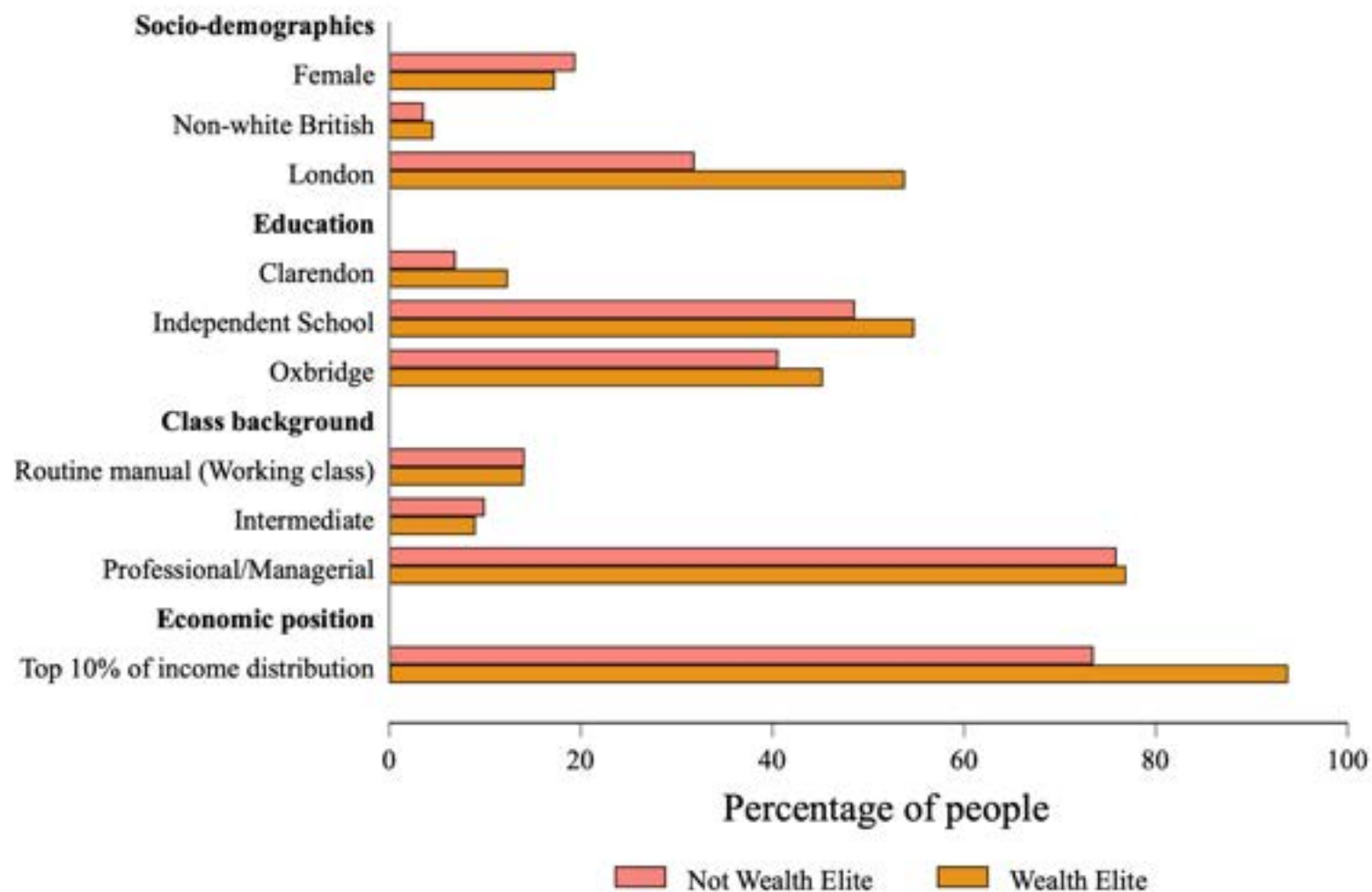
So, who are the contemporary British elite?



The occupational composition of Who's Who

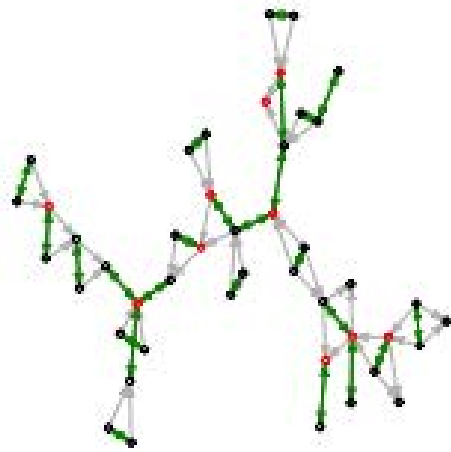


Who are the wealth elite?

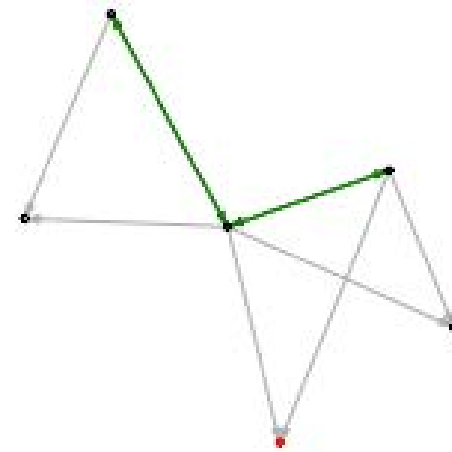


Elite networks are far more dense

Network for Who's Who

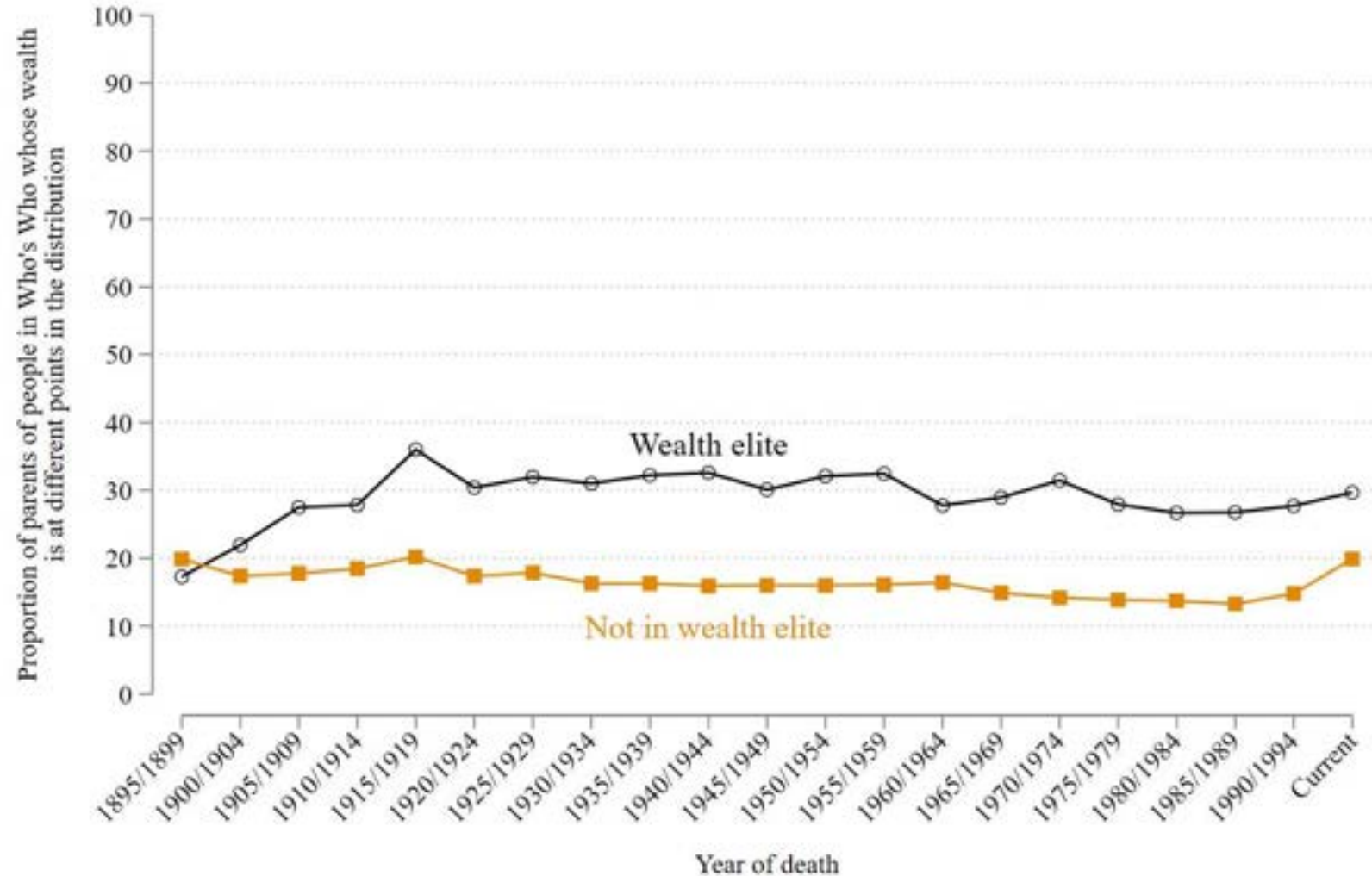


Network for random sample



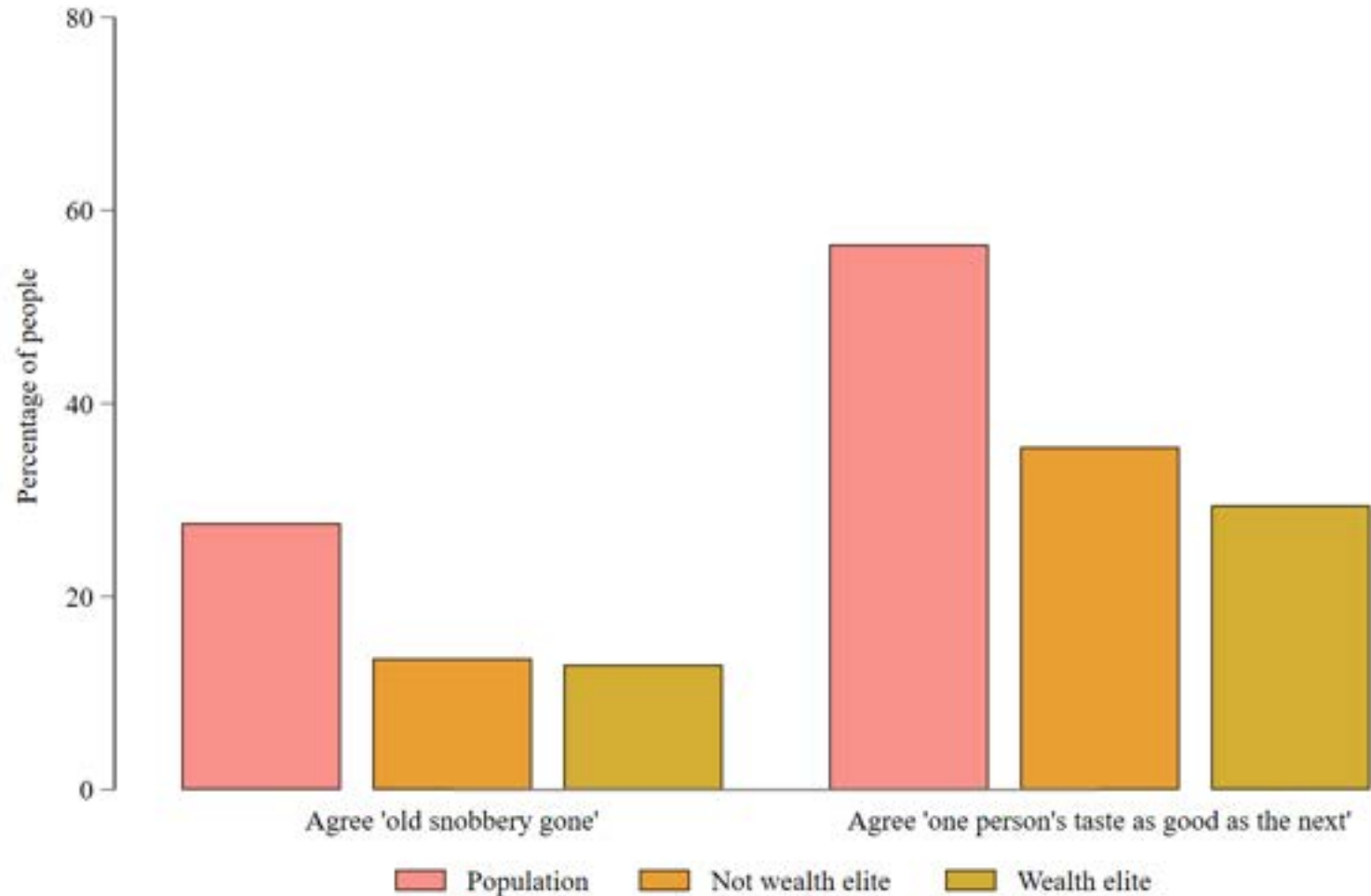
Elite Nepo Babies

Parental wealth and the wealth elite

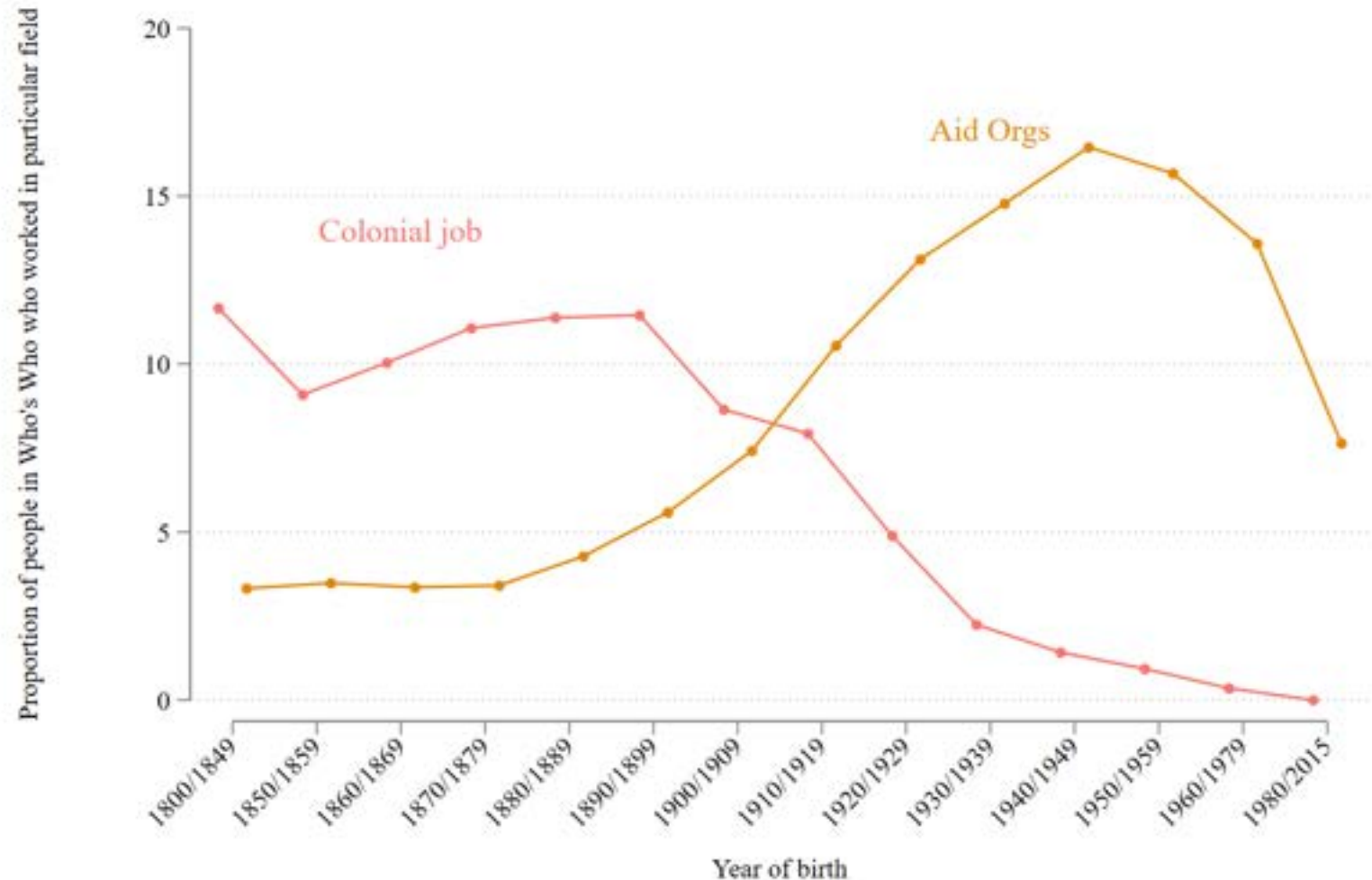


Elites are snobbier than the average British person

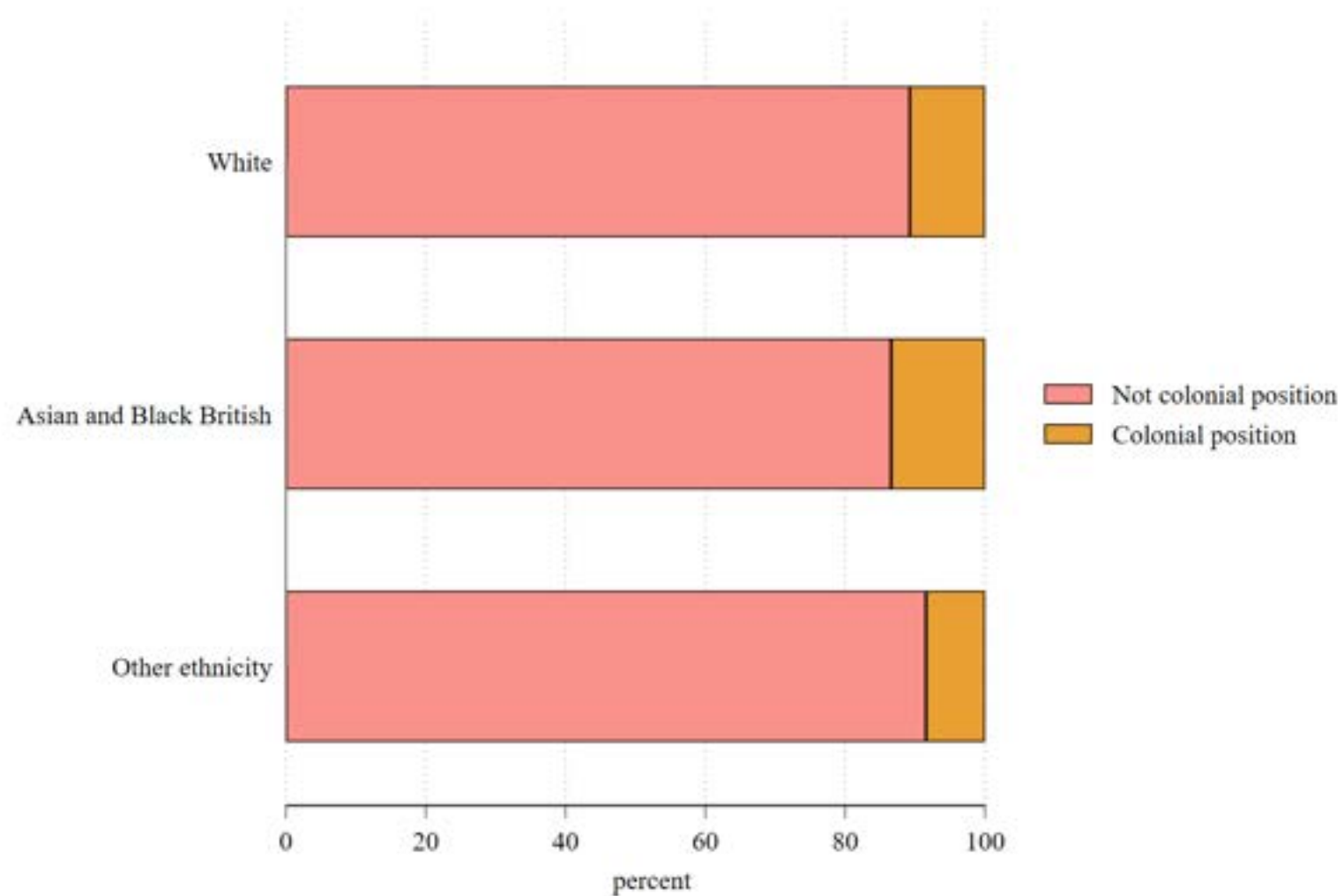
(Sources: Sample = Survey of Who's Who entrants; Population = CCSE)



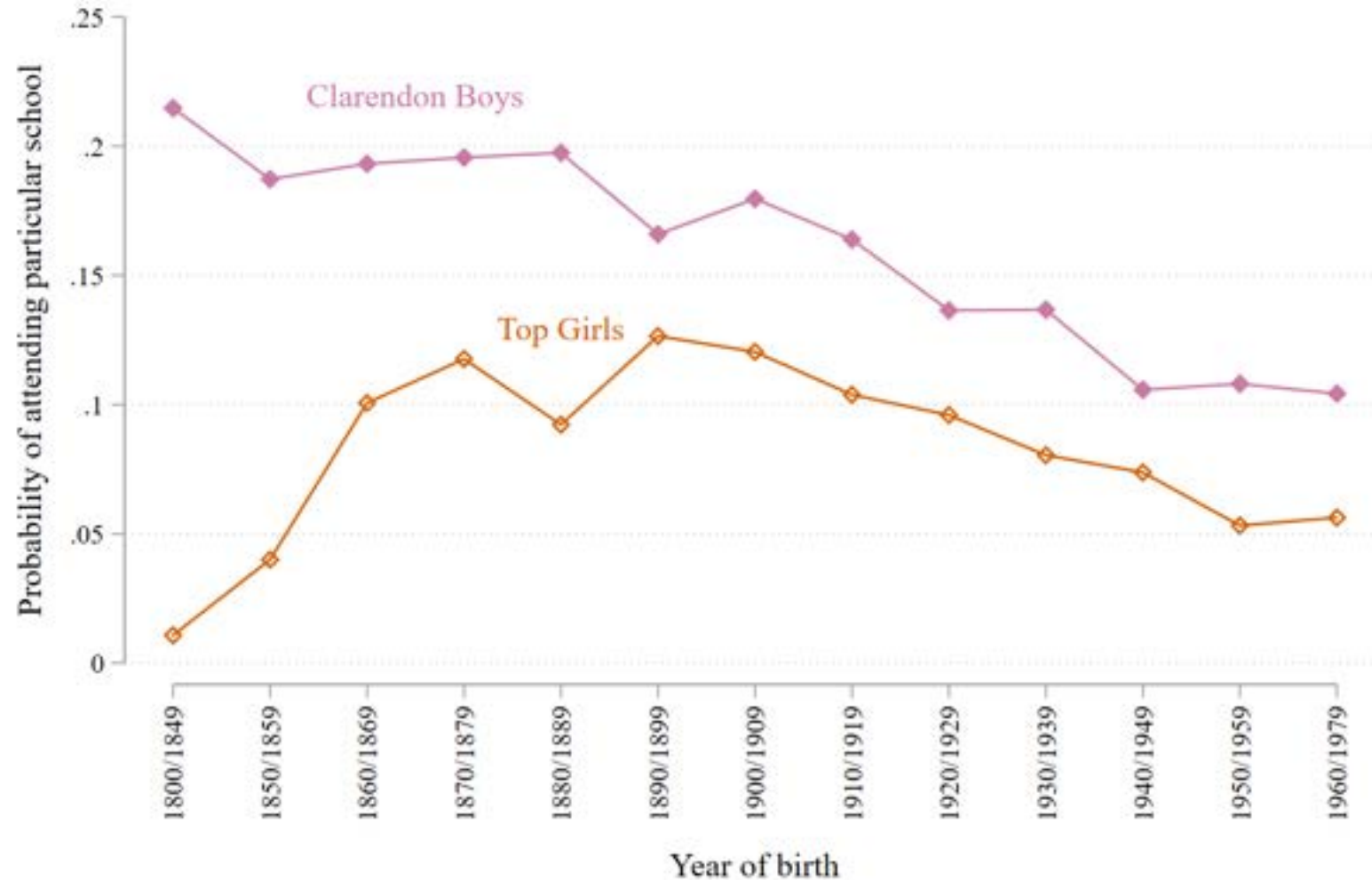
The British elite and shifting forms of colonialism



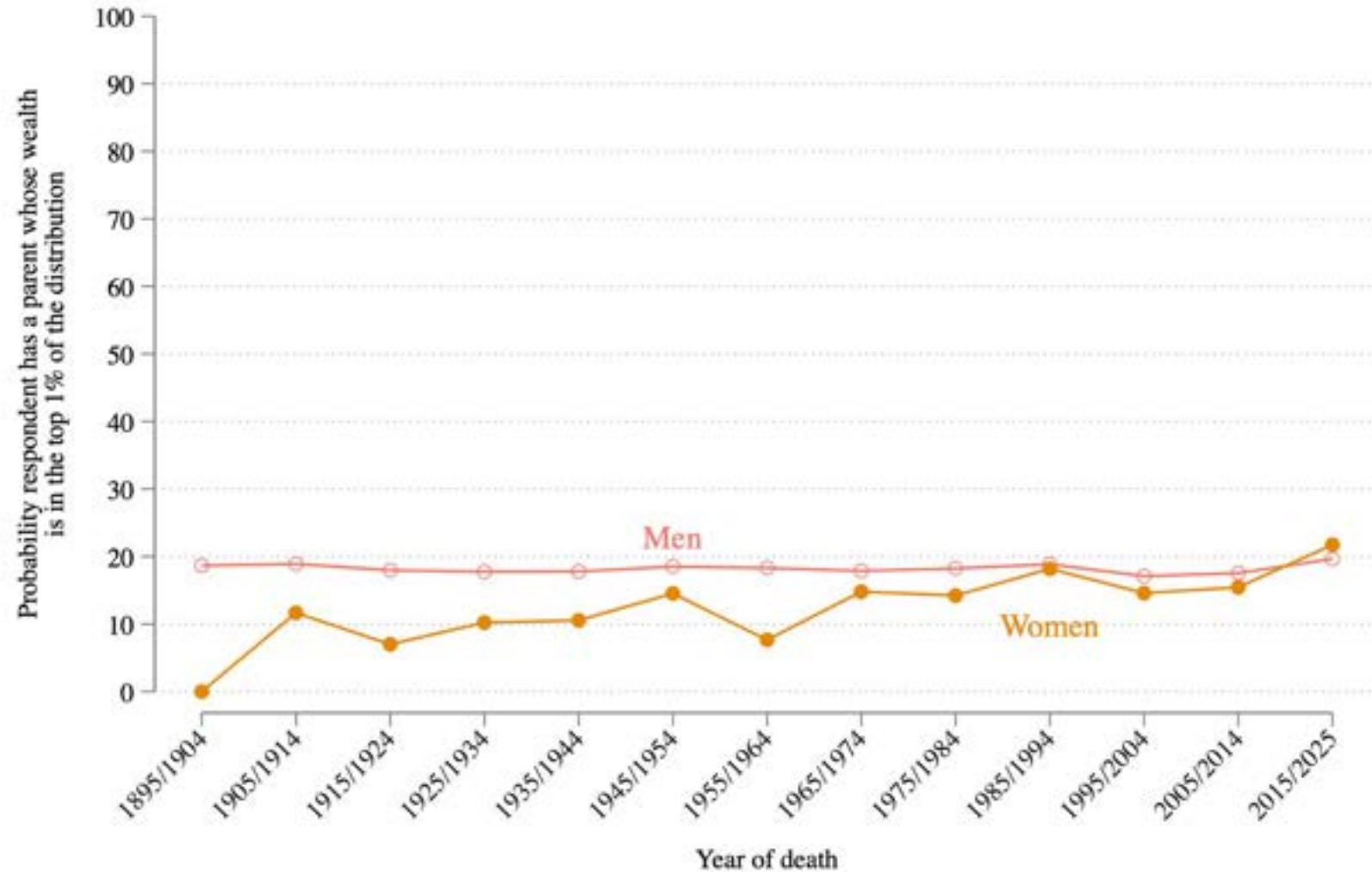
Colonial positions and non-white elites



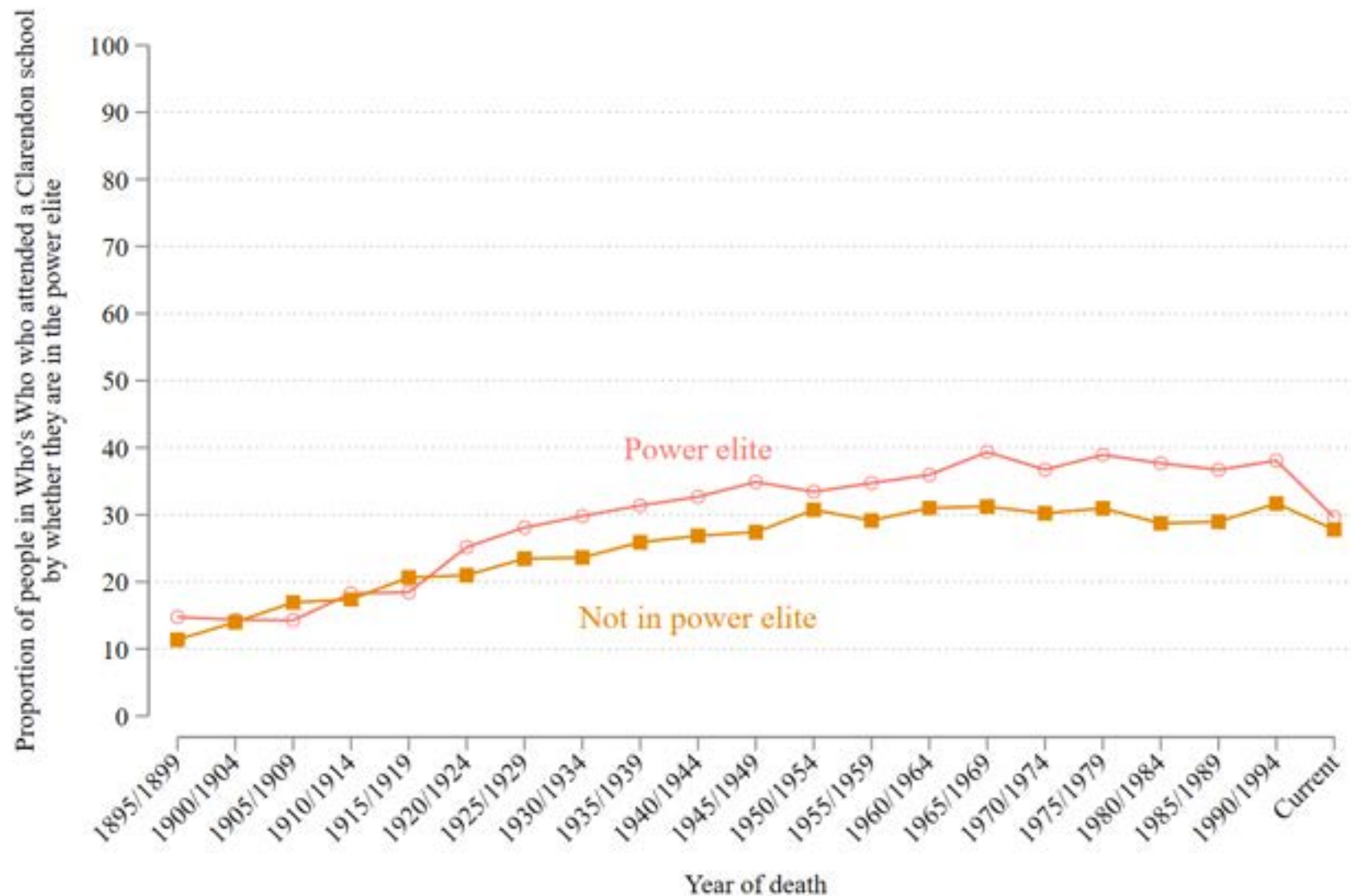
Women in the elite are NOT more likely to be educated at elite schools



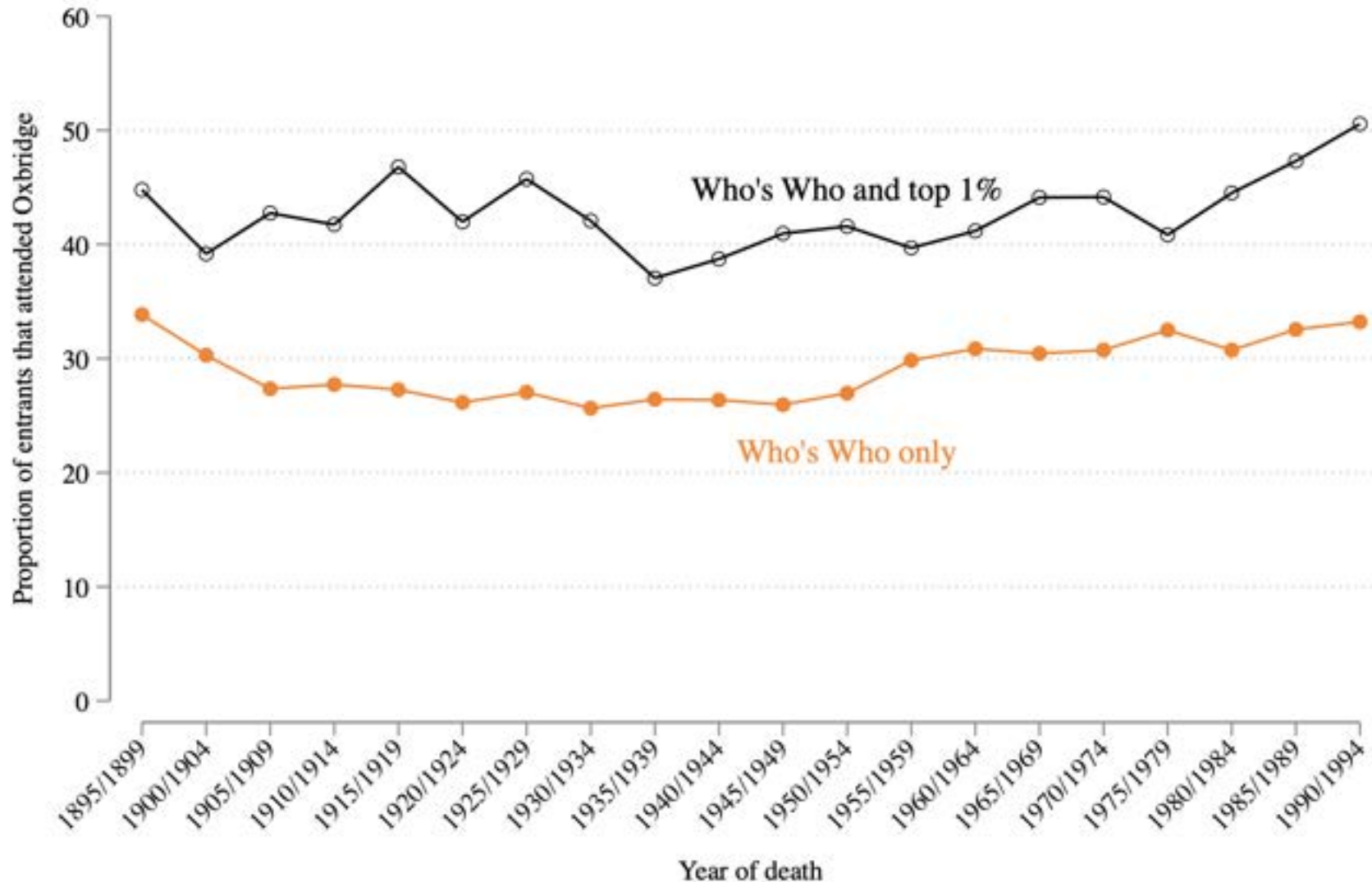
Women in the elite are NOT from wealthier backgrounds



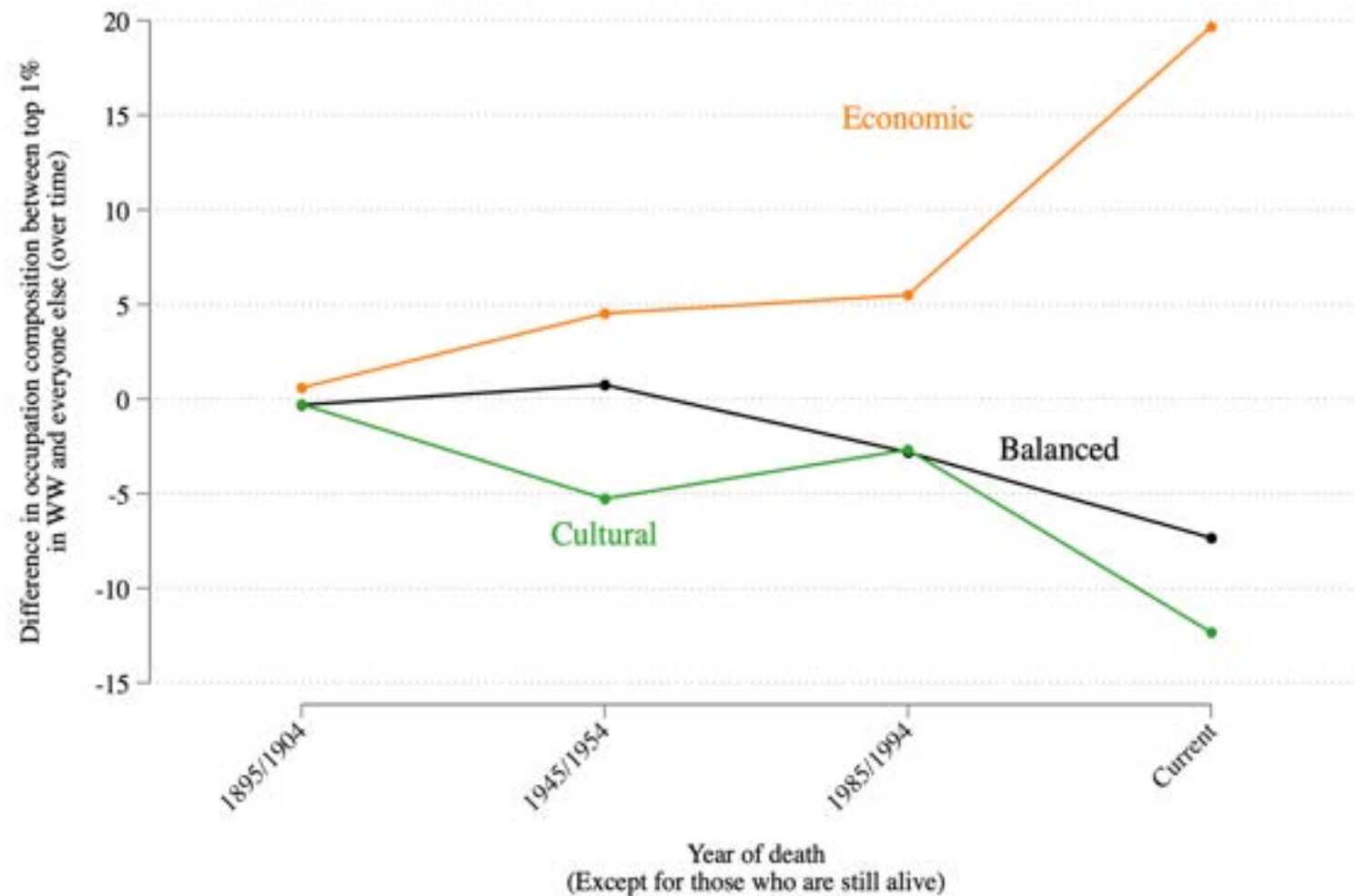
Propulsive Power of The Headmasters Conference Schools (200 top private schools – 2.5% of all pupils)



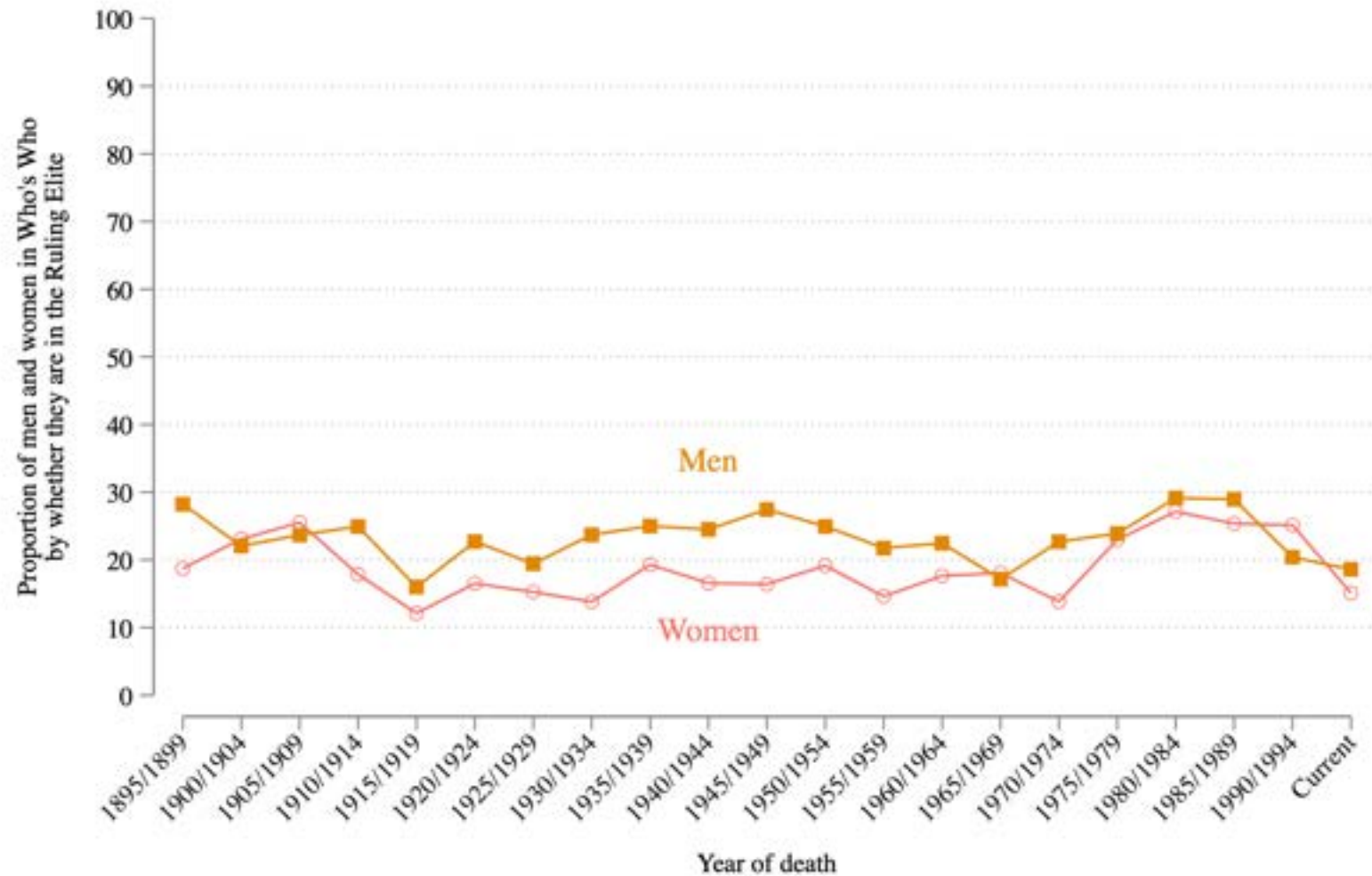
The Power of Oxbridge



Ruling elite is increasingly dominated by business



Women are no longer underrepresented in the wealth elite (and the difference was small in the past)



We asked 5 key attitudinal/policy questions in our survey

1. One of government's top 2 priorities should be economic growth
2. Should government increase taxes and spend on health, education, and social security?
3. If government is going to increase taxes, should they increase taxes on the rich?
4. Agree that Britain is racist
5. Do you think the countries that were colonised by Britain are better off or worse off for being colonized?

These cluster together to form 3 distinct ideological formations

