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# Pursuing the American Dream: Economic Mobility Across Generations



The [Pew Charitable Trusts](#) is driven by the power of knowledge to solve today's most challenging problems. Pew applies a rigorous, analytical approach to improve public policy, inform the public and stimulate civic life.

By forging broad, nonpartisan agreement on the facts and drivers of mobility, the [Economic Mobility Project](#) fosters policy debate and action on how best to improve economic opportunity and ensure that the American Dream is kept alive for future generations.

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*The analysis and recommendations included in this report are solely those of The Pew Charitable Trusts and do not necessarily reflect the views of outside reviewers.*

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Analysis for the report was conducted by Leonard Lopoo, associate professor of Public Administration and International Affairs of Syracuse University, and Thomas DeLeire, director of the La Follette School of Public Affairs of the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

The Economic Mobility Project thanks all team members, Laura Fahey, Kimberly Furdell, Harry Holzer, Samantha Lasky, Susan Mayer, and Liz Voyles for providing valuable feedback on the report. Design expertise was provided by Willie/Fetchko Graphic Design, Carla Uriona, and Evan Potler.

The report benefited from the insights and expertise of two external reviewers, Angela Fertig, an assistant professor in the Department of Public Administration and Policy at the University of Georgia; and Deirdre Bloome, a doctoral candidate in Sociology and Social Policy at Harvard University. Although they have reviewed the report, neither they nor their organizations necessarily endorse its findings or conclusions.

This report is intended for educational and informational purposes.

For additional information on The Pew Charitable Trusts and the Economic Mobility Project, please visit [www.economicmobility.org](http://www.economicmobility.org) or email us at [info@economicmobility.org](mailto:info@economicmobility.org).

### Americans' relative mobility outcomes by family income show a glass half empty.

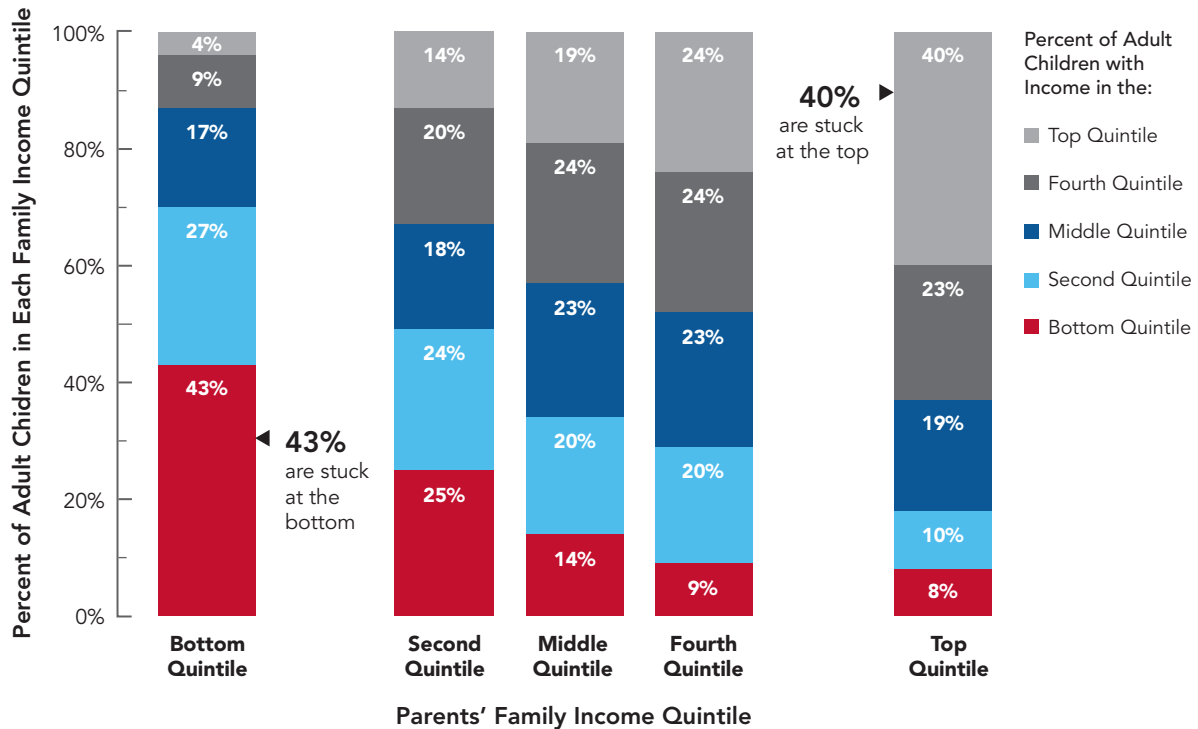
Americans raised at the top and bottom of the income ladder are likely to remain there themselves as adults. Forty-three percent of those who start in the bottom are stuck there as adults, and 70 percent remain below the middle quintile. Only 4 percent of adults raised in the bottom make it all the way to the top, showing that the “rags-to-riches” story is more often found in Hollywood than in reality. At the other end of the ladder, 40 percent of those raised in the top stay there as adults, and 63 percent remain above the middle quintile.

This lack of relative mobility is called “stickiness at the ends” because those at the ends of the income distribution tend to be stuck there over a generation. By contrast, those raised in the middle income quintile come closer to experiencing mathematically perfect mobility, in which they are equally likely to end up in each quintile of the distribution.

**Figure 3**

### Americans Raised at the Top and Bottom Are Likely to Stay There as Adults

Chances of moving up or down the family income ladder, by parents' quintile



Note: Numbers are adjusted for family size.