

Public Support in Denver and Colorado for Government-Funded Attorneys in Immigration Court

The Vera Institute of Justice (Vera) partnered with the survey firm Lucid to conduct a public opinion poll to explore attitudes toward government-funded attorneys for people in immigration court in Colorado. The survey was administered online in January 2020 and included 1,000 adults (18 years and older) living in the state. The results are statistically weighted to be representative of the Colorado population with regard to age, education, gender, household income, race and ethnicity, and region of residence (percentage living in the Denver metro area and percentage of those living in Colorado outside of the Denver metro area). The survey asked respondents about the importance of access to attorneys and whether they supported or opposed government-funded legal representation for people in immigration court, among other questions.

Key findings

Denver metro area:

Ninety-four percent of people residing in the Denver metro area believe that access to attorneys for all people, including those in immigration court, is (somewhat or very) important.

Eighty-seven percent of people residing in the Denver metro area support government-funded attorneys for everyone, including people in immigration court.

Colorado State (including Denver):

Ninety-two percent of people in Colorado believe that access to attorneys for all people, including those in immigration court, is (somewhat or very) important. This belief is pervasive, held by:

- 90 percent of people residing outside of the Denver metro area;
- 93 percent of likely voters;
- 97 percent of people who self-identify as Democrats, 89 percent of those who self-identify as Republicans, and 91 percent of people who do not identify with either party; and
- nearly all Clinton voters (99.99 percent), 88 percent of Trump voters, and 87 percent of those who voted for third-party candidates (among those who voted in the 2016 presidential election).

Eighty-five percent of people in Colorado support government-funded attorneys for everyone, including people in immigration court. This support is widespread, existing among:

- 82 percent of people residing outside of the Denver metro area;
- 82 percent of likely voters;

- 91 percent of people who self-identify as Democrats, 71 percent of those who self-identify as Republicans, and 90 percent of people who do not identify with either party; and
- 96 percent of Clinton voters, 73 percent of Trump voters, and 78 percent of those who voted for third-party candidates.

Even among people who oppose immigration to the United States, 69 percent support the government funding attorneys for all, including people in immigration court.

The next sections include details about the results summarized above and additional findings.

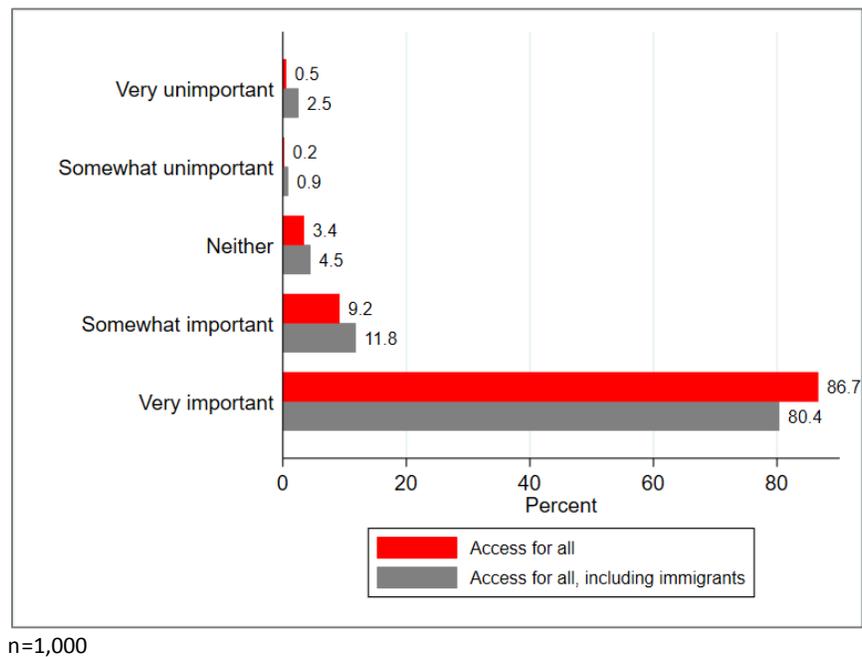
Access to attorneys

Respondents were randomly assigned to answer either question one or two, below.

1. How important is it for all people to have access to an attorney in a court of law?
2. How important is it for all people, including people in immigration court, to have access to an attorney in a court of law?

Questions one and two are nearly identical, except that question one asks about access to attorneys in court generally, while question two specifies the inclusion of immigration court. Randomly assigning respondents to answer one question allows for a comparison of attitudes on whether representation in court is a right that people in the United States generally value (in question one) and, separately, whether they hold this belief when people in immigration court are explicitly included (in question two). Answer options for both questions are: very important, somewhat important, neither important nor unimportant, somewhat unimportant, and very unimportant. Responses to questions one and two are presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Importance of access to an attorney



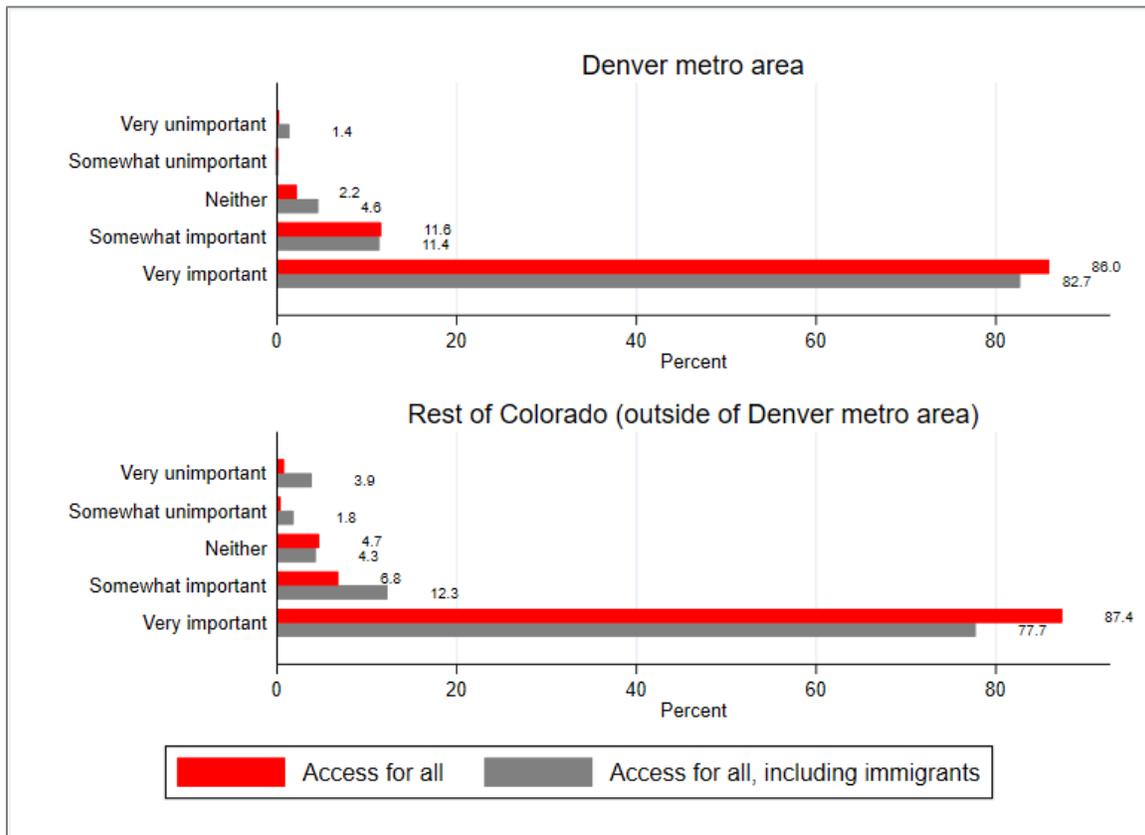
Key findings from Figure 1:

- People in Colorado overwhelmingly believe that access to attorneys is important, and this support remains high when immigrants are explicitly included.¹
- Ninety-two percent of respondents believe access to attorneys is (somewhat or very) important for all people, *including people in immigration court*.
- More than 80 percent of people in Colorado believe such access, including for people in immigration court, is *very* important.

Figure 2, below, is analogous to Figure 1 but separates the results by region of residence within Colorado between two geographic regions: the Denver metro area and the rest of Colorado outside of the Denver metro area.

¹ A t-test that compares mean responses to questions one and two reveals a significant difference in responses between the two questions ($p=0.019$). This means that there is a lower likelihood of believing access to attorneys is important when immigrants are specified in the question compared to when people in immigration court are not mentioned. Nonetheless, the belief that access to attorneys is important is strong across both questions. In t-tests, responses are coded to range from 0 (very unimportant) to 1 (very important).

Figure 2: Importance of access to an attorney by region of residence in the state



n=1,000 (Denver metro area= 598, rest of Colorado = 402)

Percent labels next to each bar are omitted from the figures for all values less than 1 percent.

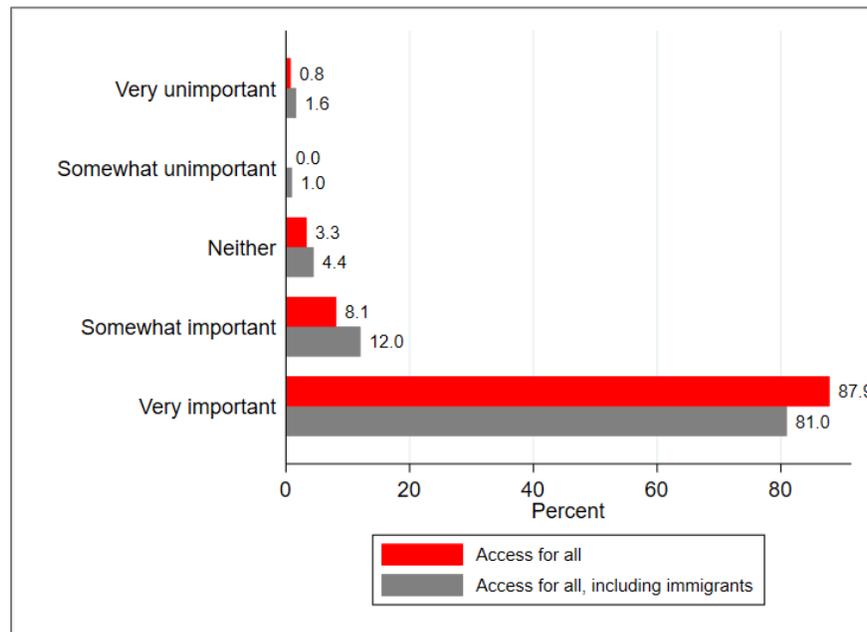
Key findings from Figure 2:

- The belief that access to attorneys is important, including attorneys for people in immigration court, is pervasive across Colorado—both within the Denver metro area and outside of Denver.
- Ninety-four percent of Denver metro area residents and 90 percent of those residing outside of the Denver metro area believe that access to attorneys, including access for people in immigration court, is (somewhat or very) important.

Figure 3, below, includes responses only from people who are likely to vote. Likely voters are defined as people who reported that they were registered to vote and planned to vote in 2020. Respondents who were 22 years or older were only included if they reported having voted in the 2016 presidential election and recalled for whom they voted (those younger than 22 may not have been old enough to vote in 2016

and were, therefore, not held to this requirement).² Sixty-six percent of Colorado respondents were categorized as likely voters.³

Figure 3: Importance of access to an attorney among likely voters



n=663

Key findings from Figure 3:

- Likely voters in Colorado overwhelmingly believe that access to attorneys is important—both in general and in immigration court.⁴

² For discussions of how to measure likely voters in surveys, see Scott Keeter and Ruth Igielnik, “Can Likely Voter Models Be Improved?” Pew Research Center, January 7, 2016, <https://www.pewresearch.org/methods/2016/01/07/can-likely-voter-models-be-improved/>; and Michael Dimock, Scott Keeter, Mark Schulman et al., *A Voter Validation Experiment: Screening for Likely Voters in Pre-Election Surveys* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2001), <https://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2001/05/12.pdf>.

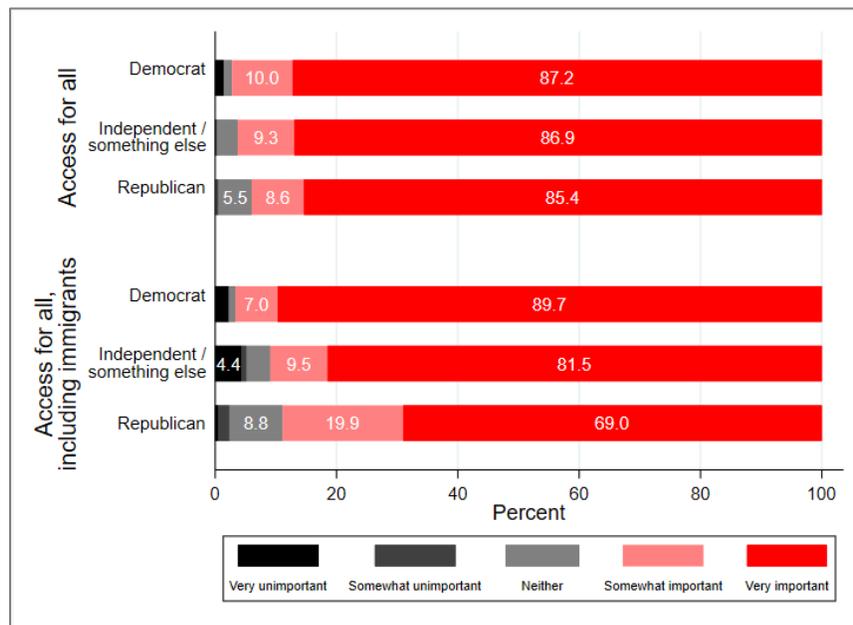
³ For reference, 64 percent of the Colorado population who were 18 years old or older voted in the 2016 presidential election. See U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, “Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2016,” Table 4a, <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/voting-and-registration/p20-580.html>.

⁴ A t-test that compares mean responses to questions one and two—where responses are coded to range from 0 (very unimportant) to 1 (very important)—reveals that there is a marginally significant difference in responses between the two questions ($p=0.071$). This means that likely voters are largely answering the two questions similarly, but there may be a slightly lower likelihood of believing access to attorneys is important when immigrants are specified in the question. Overall, however, the belief that access to attorneys is important is high across both questions.

- Ninety-three percent believe access to attorneys is (somewhat or very) important for all people, *including people in immigration court*.
- More than eight in 10 likely voters believe access for all people, *including people in immigration court*, is *very* important.

The next two graphs plot the percentage of people giving each response by their political party identification (Figure 4) and by their 2016 vote choice (Figure 5). Responses to question one (about access to attorneys for *all people*) in Figures 4 and 5 appear in the top half of each graph, and answers to question two (about access to attorneys for *all people, including people in immigration court*) are displayed in the bottom half. Each bar sums to 100 percent.⁵

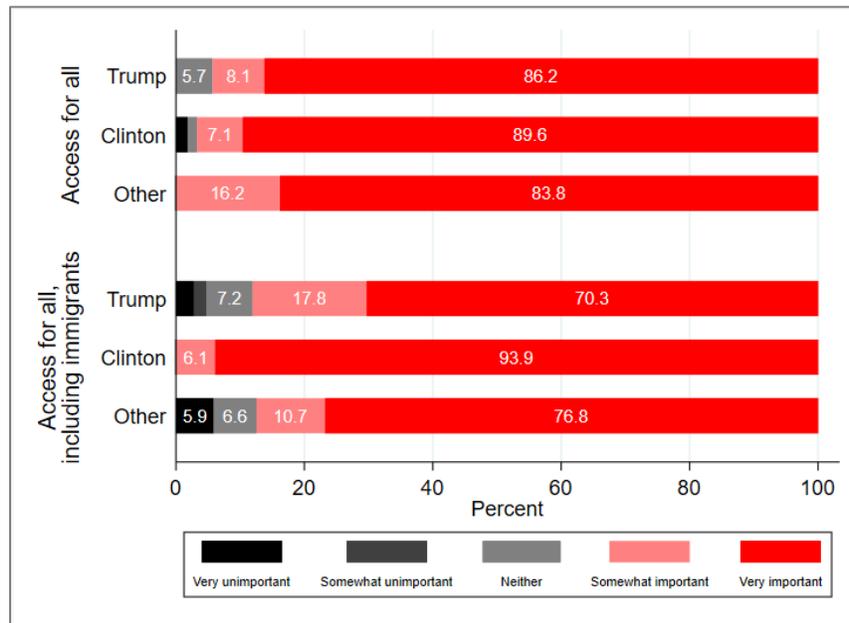
Figure 4: Importance of access to an attorney by party identification



n=995 (305 Democrats, 388 independents/something else, and 302 Republicans). Percent labels for each bar are omitted from the figures for values less than 4 percent.

⁵ Although the percentages displayed in the bottom half of Figure 5 for people who voted for a third-party candidate (labeled “Other” in the graph) of 76.8 and 10.7 sum to 87.5 (or 88 percent when rounded), the true percentage of these people who believe access to attorneys is important for all, including those in immigration court, is 87 percent, as indicated on page one. This is because the values were rounded to the first decimal place in Figure 5. The full values are 76.77 and 10.69, which sum to 87.46, or 87 percent when rounded. Rounding instances, as described here, account for other small discrepancies between values presented in figures and text.

Figure 5: Importance of access to an attorney by 2016 presidential vote choice



n=716 (315 Trump, 287 Clinton, and 114 third-party candidate voters).
Only those who reported voting in 2016 are included in Figure 5.

Key findings from Figures 4 and 5:

- Regardless of one’s party identification and 2016 presidential vote choice, people overwhelmingly believe that access to attorneys is (somewhat or very) important—both in general and when explicitly including people in immigration court.
- The vast majority of people in each group, 69 percent or more, answered *very* important.

Government-funded attorneys in immigration court

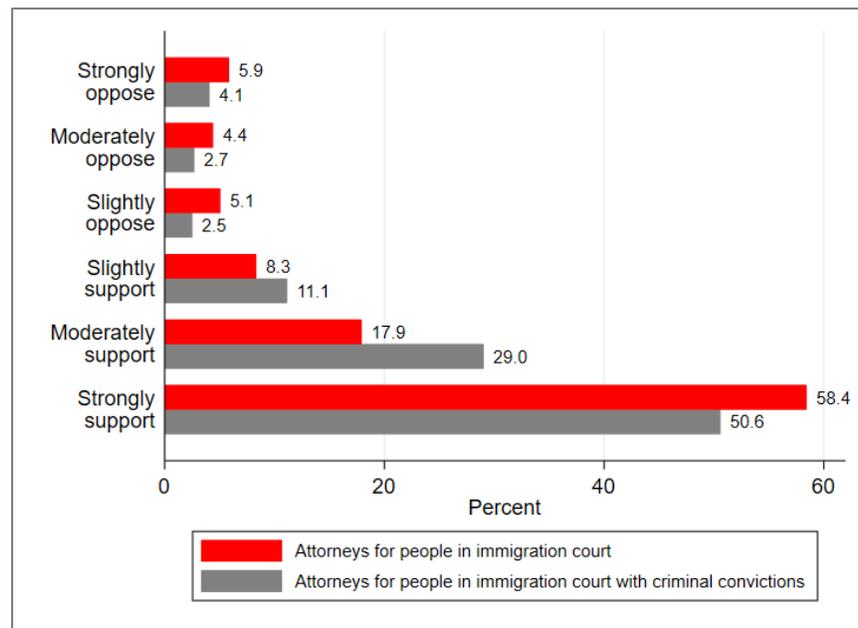
Beyond asking about *access* to attorneys, the survey also explored attitudes toward *government-funded* attorneys in immigration court. Half of the respondents were randomly assigned to question three and the other half to question four, below.

3. Do you support or oppose the government paying for an attorney for everyone who cannot afford one in a court of law, including people in immigration court?
4. Do you support or oppose the government paying for an attorney for everyone who cannot afford one in a court of law, including people in immigration court with criminal convictions?

Questions three and four are nearly identical in asking about government-funded attorneys for everyone who cannot afford one in court. However, while question three includes people in immigration court as

recipients of attorneys, question four allows for an exploration of whether such attitudes change when immigrants with criminal convictions are explicitly included. Answer options for both questions are: strongly support, moderately support, slightly support, slightly oppose, moderately oppose, and strongly oppose. As in the previous section, this section will first present responses to the questions among all respondents (Figure 6), then by region of residence within Colorado (Figure 7), then among likely voters (Figure 8), followed by graphs that present responses by party identification and 2016 vote choice (Figures 9 and 10).

Figure 6: Attitudes on government-funded attorneys for everyone, including people in immigration court



n=1,000

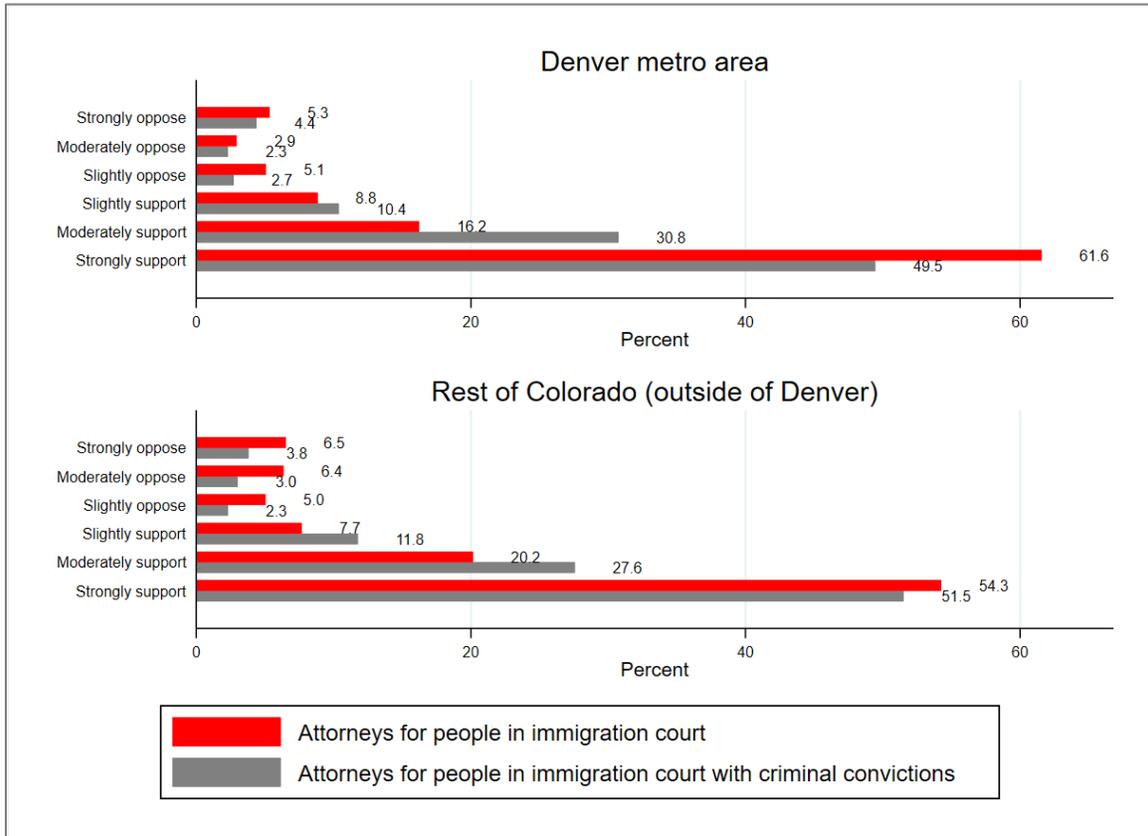
Key findings from Figure 6:

- There is tremendous support among people in Colorado for government-funded attorneys for everyone, including people in immigration court, and including those with criminal convictions.⁶
- Eighty-five percent of people in Colorado support government-funded attorneys for people in immigration court.
- Ninety-one percent support government-funded attorneys for people in immigration court *with criminal convictions*.

⁶ A t-test that compares mean responses to questions three and four reveals no significant difference between the two ($p=0.550$). This means that people are answering the two questions similarly, suggesting they are just as supportive of lawyers for immigrants with criminal convictions as they are for immigrants in general. In t-tests, responses are coded to range from 0 (strongly oppose) to 1 (strongly support).

- A majority of people in Colorado *strongly* support the government paying for attorneys in immigration court—both in general and for people with criminal convictions.

Figure 7: Attitudes on government-funded attorneys for everyone, including people in immigration court, by region of residence in the state

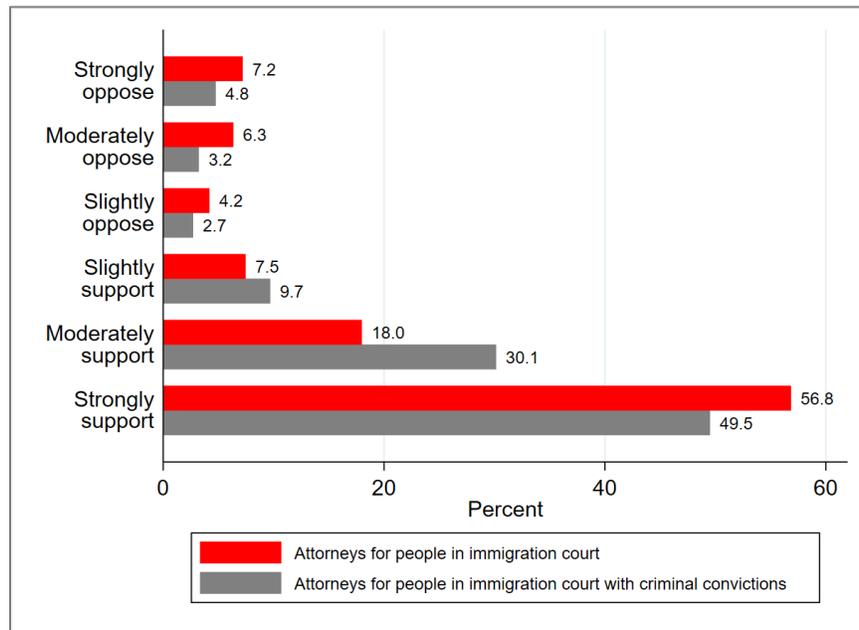


n=1,000 (Denver metro area = 598, rest of Colorado = 402)

Key findings from Figure 7:

- Support for government-funded attorneys for everyone, including people in immigration court and those with criminal convictions, is pervasive across the state, within the Denver metro area and outside of Denver.
- Eighty-seven percent of Denver residents and 82 percent of those residing outside of the Denver metro area support government-funded attorneys for people in immigration court.
- Ninety-one percent of Denver residents and 91 percent among those residing outside of Denver support government-funded attorneys for people in immigration court *with criminal convictions*.

Figure 8: Attitudes on government-funded attorneys for everyone, including people in immigration court, among likely voters



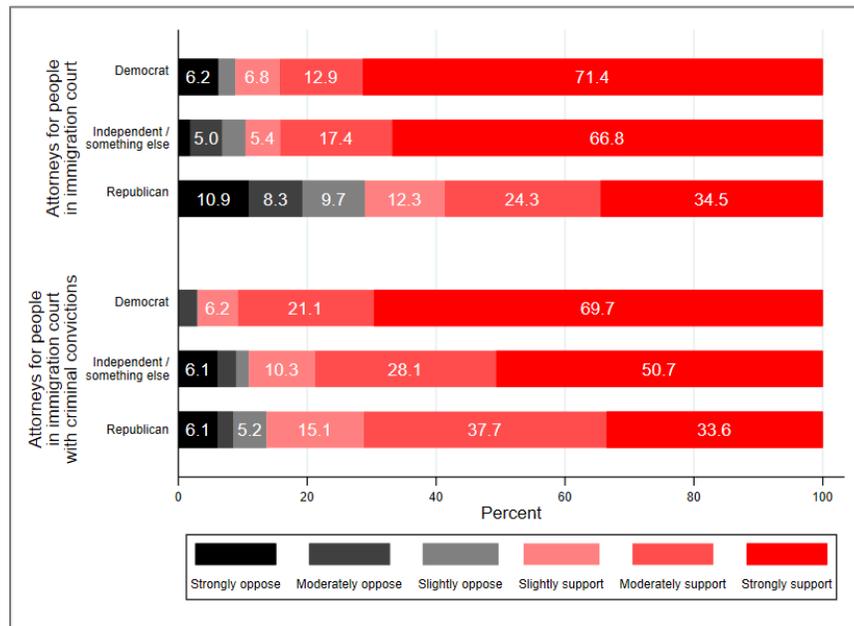
n=663

Key findings from Figure 8:

- There is great support among likely voters in Colorado for government-funded attorneys for everyone, including people in immigration court and those with criminal convictions.⁷
- Eighty-two percent of likely voters in Colorado support government-funded attorneys for people in immigration court.
- Eighty-nine percent of likely voters in Colorado support government-funded attorneys for people in immigration court *with criminal convictions*.
- More than 49 percent of likely voters in Colorado, roughly half, *strongly* support the government paying for attorneys, including for people in immigration court with criminal convictions.

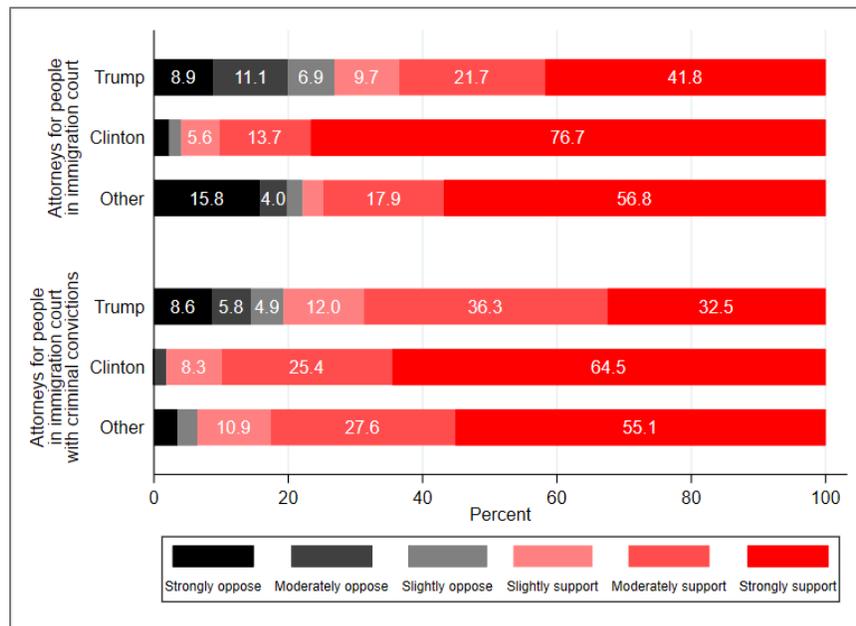
⁷ A t-test that compares mean responses to questions three and four shows that there is no significant difference in responses between the two questions ($p=0.386$). In t-tests, responses are coded to range from 0 (strongly oppose) to 1 (strongly support).

Figure 9: Attitudes on government-funded attorneys for everyone, including people in immigration court, by party identification



n=995 (305 Democrats, 388 independents/something else, and 302 Republicans).

Figure 10: Attitudes on government-funded attorneys for everyone, including people in immigration court, by 2016 presidential vote choice



n=716 (315 Trump, 287 Clinton, and 114 third-party candidate voters). Only those who cast a vote in 2016 are included in Figure 10.

Key findings from Figures 9 and 10:

- Regardless of respondents' party identification and 2016 presidential vote choice, there is tremendous support for government-funded attorneys for everyone, including people in immigration court and those with criminal convictions.
- More than 32 percent of people across all groups, about one in three, *strongly* support government-funded attorneys for people in immigration court, including people with criminal convictions.

Support for government-funded attorneys by general immigration attitudes

The survey included a standard immigration question that researchers have asked across many prominent surveys over many years. Including a standardized question allowed Vera to compare the sample with respondents to other surveys of immigration attitudes. The standard immigration question is:

5. Do you think the number of immigrants from foreign countries who are permitted to come to the United States to live should be increased, decreased, or kept the same as it is now?

Answer options to question five are: increased a lot, increased a moderate amount, increased a little, kept the same as now, decreased a little, decreased a moderate amount, and decreased a lot. Table 1 presents the percentage of people in Colorado who think immigration to the United States should be increased, decreased, or kept the same. The Colorado sample appears in the first column of results, and the following columns present percentages of responses across three recent, prominent, national surveys: the American National Election Studies (ANES), Gallup, and the Pew Research Center.⁸ The table shows that immigration attitudes among the Colorado sample are similar to attitudes across national surveys, where roughly one third of people think immigration should be increased, about one third want to decrease immigration, and one third would like no change to current immigration levels.

⁸ See American National Election Studies, "2018 Pilot Study," <https://electionstudies.org/data-center/2018-pilot-study/>; Gallup, "Immigration," (2 percent of Gallup respondents are coded as "no opinion"), <https://news.gallup.com/poll/1660/immigration.aspx>; and Pew Research Center, "Shifting Public Views on Legal Immigration Into the U.S.," June 28, 2018, <https://www.people-press.org/2018/06/28/shifting-public-views-on-legal-immigration-into-the-u-s/>.

Table 1: Standard immigration question across four surveys

Immigration to the U.S. should be...	Survey			
	Colorado/Vera	ANES	Gallup	Pew
Increased	36%	31%	27%	32%
Kept the same	33%	35%	37%	38%
Decreased	31%	33%	35%	24%

Finally, Table 2 shows the percentage of respondents who support government-funded attorneys generally and for immigrants with criminal convictions by their responses to the standard immigration question (question five above).

Table 2: Support for government-funded attorneys for everyone, including people in immigration court, by responses to the standard immigration question

Immigration to the U.S. should be...	Percentage supporting government-funded attorneys for everyone, including...	
	People in immigration court	People in immigration court with criminal convictions
Increased	93%	97%
Kept the same	89%	90%
Decreased	69%	84%

n=2,000

Key findings from Table 2:

- Among those who support increased immigration to the United States and among those who want to keep immigration levels as they currently are, 89 percent or more support government-funded attorneys for everyone, including for people in immigration court and those with criminal convictions.
- Even among people who oppose immigration to the United States, 69 percent of people support the government paying for attorneys for everyone, including people in immigration court, and 84 percent extend this support to lawyers for people with criminal convictions.