

Public Support in Los Angeles 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 Los Angeles County. The survey was administered in January 2020 and included 1,000 adults (18 years and older) living in the County. The results are statistically weighted to be representative of the Los Angeles County population with regard to age, education, gender, household income, and race and ethnicity.

Key findings

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

- 96 percent of likely voters;
- 95 percent of people who self-identify as Democrats, 94 percent of those who self-identify as Republicans, and 92 percent of people who do not identify with either party; and
- 97 percent of Clinton voters, 93 percent of Trump voters, and 91 percent of people who voted for third-party candidates (among those who voted in the 2016 presidential election).

Ninety-two percent of people in Los Angeles support government-funded attorneys for people in immigration court. This support is widespread, existing among:

- 93 percent of likely voters;
- 95 percent of people who self-identify as Democrats, 90 percent of those who self-identify as Republicans, and 88 percent of people who do not identify with either party; and
- 97 percent of Clinton voters, 85 percent of Trump voters, and 91 percent of people who voted for third-party candidates.

Eighty-nine percent of people in Los Angeles support government-funded attorneys for people in immigration court *with criminal convictions*. This support is pervasive, found among:

- 90 percent of likely voters;
- 95 percent of people who self-identify as Democrats, 79 percent of those who self-identify as Republicans, and 84 percent of people who do not identify with either party; and
- 93 percent of Clinton voters, 81 percent of Trump voters, and 79 percent of people who voted for third-party candidates.

Even among people who oppose immigration to the United States, more than three out of four support the government funding attorneys for people in immigration court, including for people *with criminal convictions*.

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

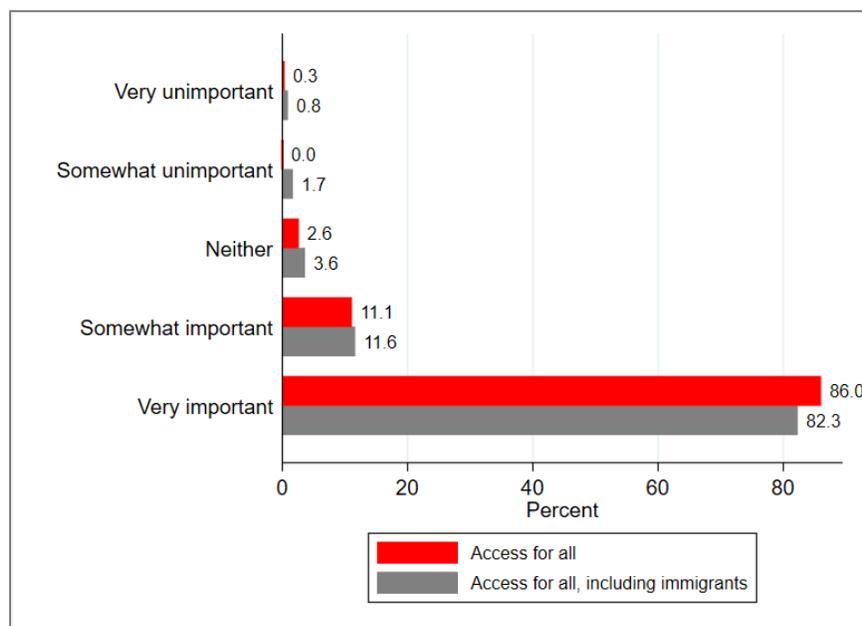
Access to attorneys

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 (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



n=1,000

Key findings from Figure 1:

- People in Los Angeles overwhelmingly believe that access to attorneys is important, and this support remains high when immigrants are explicitly included.¹
- Ninety-four 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 Los Angeles believe such access, including for people in immigration court, is *very* important.

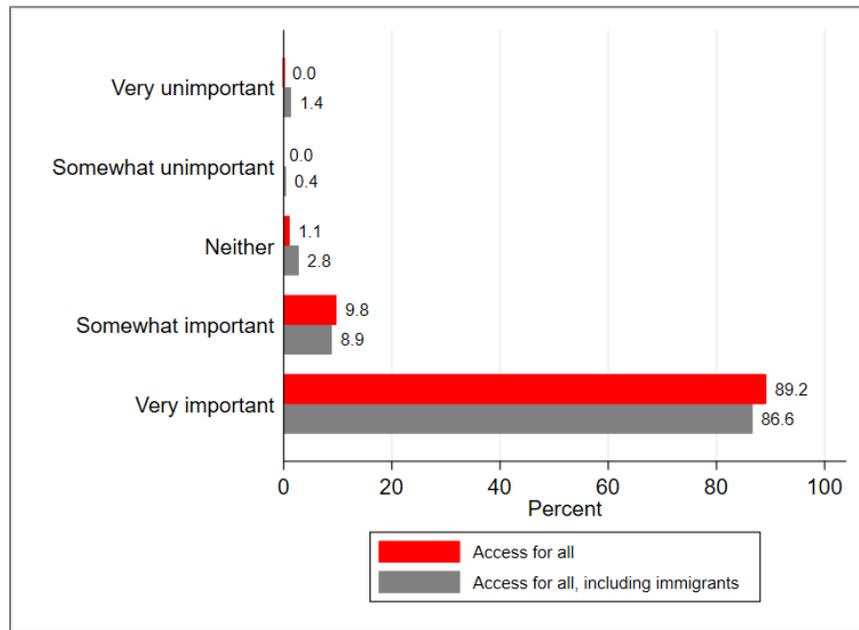
Figure 2, below, is analogous to Figure 1, but includes responses only from people who are likely to vote. Likely voters are defined as people who reported that they were registered to vote and planned to vote in 2020. Respondents aged 22 years or older were only included if they reported having voted in the 2016 presidential election and recalled for whom they voted (those under 22 may not have been old enough to vote in 2016 and were therefore not held to this requirement).² Sixty-six percent of Los Angeles respondents were categorized as likely voters.³

¹ T-tests that compare mean responses to questions one and two reveal only a marginally significant difference in responses ($p=0.090$). This means that people are answering the two questions in a similar manner, although there might be a slightly lower likelihood of believing access to attorneys is important when immigrants are specified in the question. 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).

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, 57 percent of the voting eligible population in Los Angeles County voted in the 2016 general election. See California Secretary of State, “November 8, 2016 – General Election,” <https://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/statistics/voter-participation-stats-county/>. This means that the Vera/Lucid sample may be overestimating the percentage of likely voters in Los Angeles County. Alternatively, the Vera/Lucid likely voter estimate may be reflecting real voter intentions, indicating that there will be an increase in 2020 voting turnout rates.

Figure 2: Importance of access to an attorney among likely voters



n=660

Key findings from Figure 2:

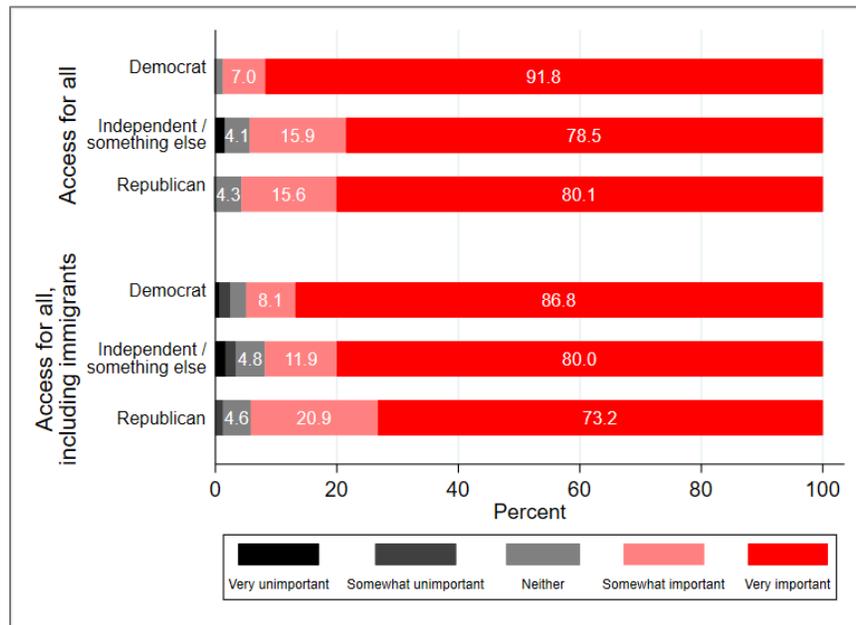
- Likely voters in Los Angeles overwhelmingly believe that access to attorneys is important—both in general and in immigration court.⁴
- Ninety-six percent believe access to attorneys is (somewhat or very) important for all people, *including people in immigration court*.
- More than 86 percent of likely 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 3) and by their 2016 vote choice (Figure 4). Responses to question one (about access to attorneys for *all people*) in Figures 3 and 4 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

⁴ T-tests that compare mean responses to questions one and two—where responses are coded to range from 0 (very unimportant) to 1 (very important)—reveal that there is no significant difference in responses between the two questions ($p=0.110$).

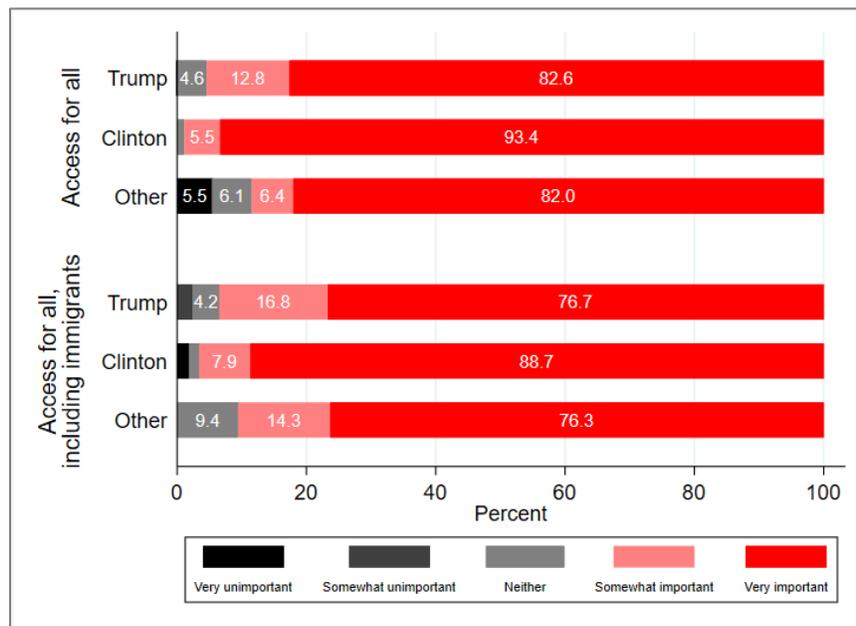
⁵ Although the percentages displayed in the bottom half of Figure 4 for Trump voters of 76.7 and 16.8 sum to 93.5 (or 94 percent when rounded), the true percentage of these people who believe access to attorneys is important for all, including those in immigration court, is 93 percent, as indicated on page one. This is because the values were rounded to the first decimal place in Figure 4. The full values are 76.70 and 16.78, which sum to 93.48, or 93

Figure 3: Importance of access to an attorney by party identification



n=999 (495 Democrats, 261 independents/something else, and 243 Republicans).

Figure 4: Importance of access to an attorney by 2016 presidential vote choice



n=740 (242 Trump, 412 Clinton, and 86 third-party candidate voters).

Only those who reported voting in 2016 are included in Figure 4.

percent when rounded. Rounding instances, as described here, account for other small discrepancies between values presented in figures and text.

Key findings from Figures 3 and 4:

- 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, 73 percent or more, answered *very* important.

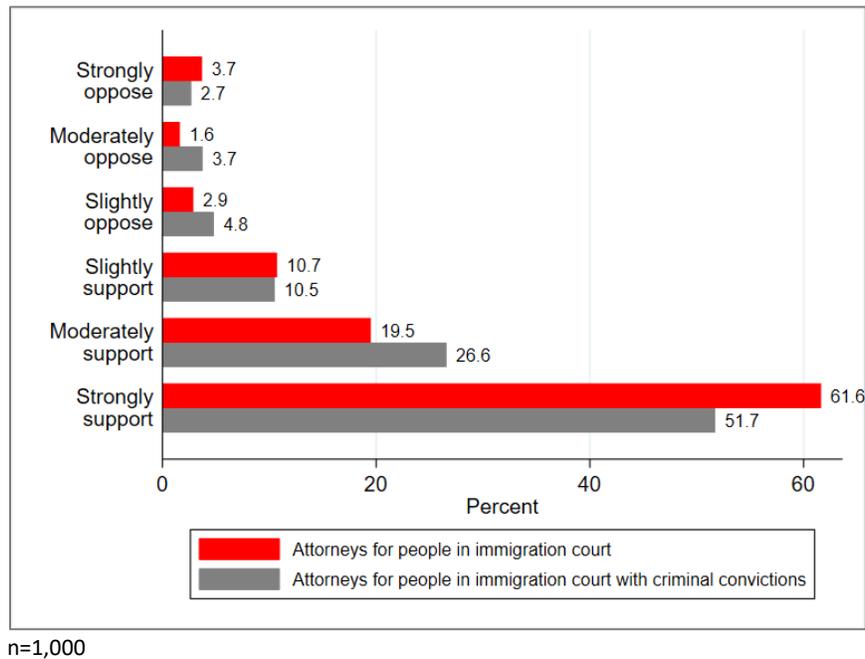
Government-funded attorneys in immigration court

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, except question three asks about government-funded attorneys for people in immigration court, while 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 display responses to the questions among all respondents (Figure 5), then among likely voters (Figure 6), followed by graphs that display responses by party identification and 2016 vote choice (Figures 7 and 8).

Figure 5: Attitudes on government-funded attorneys in immigration court

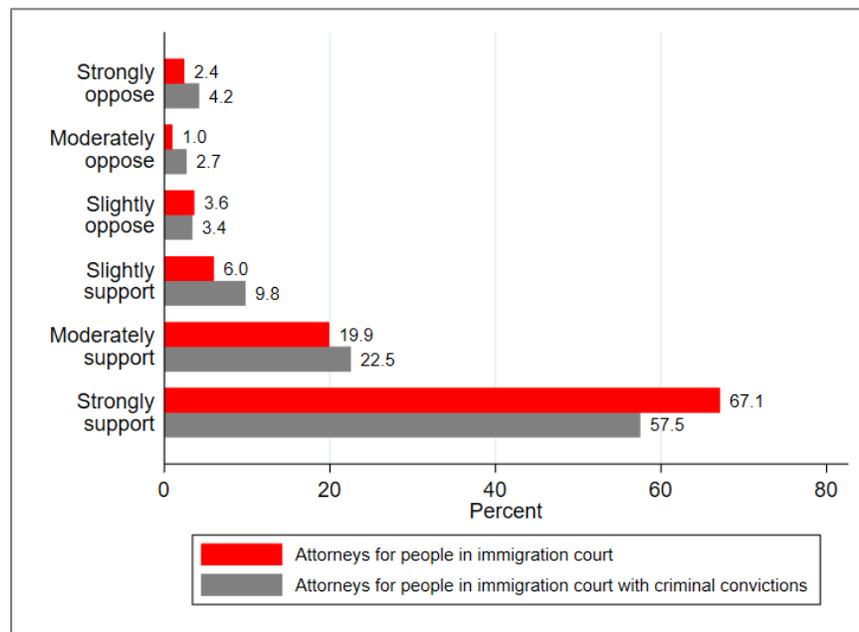


Key findings from Figure 5:

- There is tremendous support among people in Los Angeles for government-funded attorneys for people in immigration court, including for people with criminal convictions.⁶
- Ninety-two percent of people in Los Angeles support government-funded attorneys for people in immigration court.
- Eighty-nine percent support government-funded attorneys for people in immigration court *with criminal convictions*.
- A majority of people in Los Angeles *strongly* support the government paying for attorneys in immigration court—both in general and for people with criminal convictions.

⁶ T-tests that compare mean responses to questions three and four reveal no significant difference between the two ($p=0.194$). 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).

Figure 6: Attitudes on government-funded attorneys in immigration court among likely voters



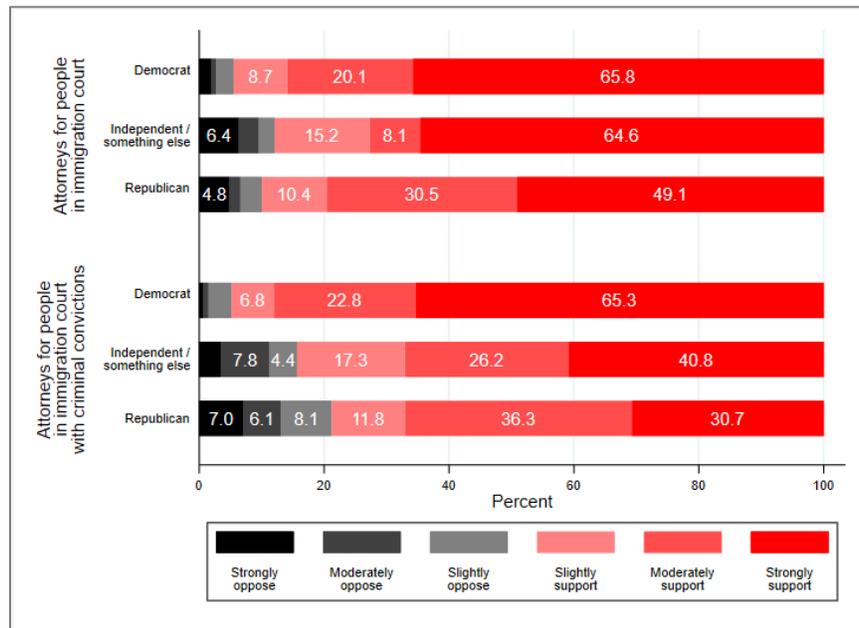
n=660

Key findings from Figure 6:

- There is great support among likely voters in Los Angeles for government-funded attorneys for people in immigration court, including for people with criminal convictions.⁷
- Ninety-three percent of likely voters in Los Angeles support government-funded attorneys for people in immigration court.
- Ninety percent of likely voters in Los Angeles support government-funded attorneys for people in immigration court *with criminal convictions*.
- More than 57 percent of likely voters in Los Angeles *strongly* support the government paying for attorneys, including for people in immigration court with criminal convictions.

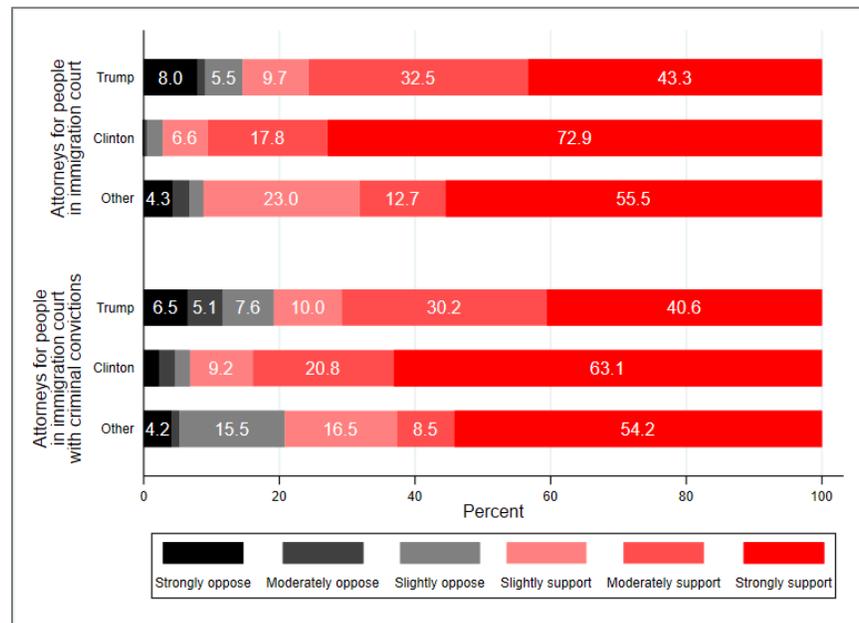
⁷ T-tests that compare mean responses to questions three and four reveal a marginally significant difference in responses between the two questions ($p=0.071$). This means that people are slightly more supportive for lawyers in immigration court generally than they are when people with criminal convictions are explicitly mentioned in the question. Yet, support is very high across the board, regardless of which questions respondents answered. In t-tests, responses are coded to range from 0 (strongly oppose) to 1 (strongly support).

Figure 7: Attitudes on government-funded attorneys in immigration court by party identification



n=999 (495 Democrats, 261 independents/something else, and 243 Republicans).

Figure 8: Attitudes on government-funded attorneys in immigration court by 2016 presidential vote choice



n=740 (242 Trump, 412 Clinton, and 86 third-party candidate voters).

Only those who cast a vote in 2016 are included in Figure 8.

Key findings from Figures 7 and 8:

- Regardless of respondents' party identification and 2016 presidential vote choice, there is tremendous support for government-funded attorneys for people in immigration court, including for people with criminal convictions.
- More than 43 percent of people across all groups *strongly* support government-funded attorneys for people in immigration court.
- More than 30 percent of people across all groups *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 Los Angeles who think immigration to the United States should be increased, decreased, or kept the same. The Los Angeles 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 Los Angeles sample are somewhat more favorable toward immigration than are immigration attitudes across national surveys. One would expect Los Angeles County, a blue county in a blue state, to be more liberal regarding immigration than the United States as a whole.

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 | | | |
|--------------------------------------|------------------|------|--------|-----|
| | Los Angeles/Vera | ANES | Gallup | Pew |
| Increased | 45% | 31% | 27% | 32% |
| Kept the same | 30% | 35% | 37% | 38% |
| Decreased | 25% | 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 in immigration court by responses to the standard immigration question

| Immigration to the U.S. should be... | Percentage supporting government-funded attorneys | |
|--------------------------------------|---|-------------------------------------|
| | Generally | For those with criminal convictions |
| Increased | 97% | 95% |
| Kept the same | 95% | 88% |
| Decreased | 77% | 78% |

n=2,000

Key findings from Table 2:

- Among those who support increased immigration to the United States, support for government-funded attorneys is nearly universal—with 95 percent or more in support—including for people with criminal convictions.
- Among those who want to keep immigration levels as they currently are, 95 percent support government-funded attorneys, and 88 percent support attorneys for people with criminal convictions.
- Even among people who oppose immigration to the United States, more than three out of four people support the government paying for attorneys in immigration court, including for people with criminal convictions.