

# Public Support in the Minneapolis-St. Paul Metropolitan Area for Government-Funded Attorneys in Immigration Court

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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 the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area. The survey was administered online in May and June 2020 and included 1,068 adults (18 years and older) living in the area. The results are statistically weighted to be representative of the Minneapolis-St. Paul population with regard to age, education, gender, household income, race and ethnicity, and region of residence.

## Key findings

**Three out of five people in the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area, or 61 percent, support government-funded attorneys for immigrants facing deportation.** This support is widespread, existing among:

- 74 percent of people residing in Hennepin County (where Minneapolis is located) and 75 percent of those residing in Ramsey County (where St. Paul is located); and
- 57 percent of likely voters.

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

## Government-funded attorneys in immigration court

Respondents were randomly assigned to answer either question one, two, or three, below.<sup>1</sup> The questions, while similar, contain important differences in wording. Randomly assigning respondents to answer one of the three questions allows for a comparison of attitudes towards government-funded attorneys in immigration court and how they may shift depending on the language used. The three questions are:

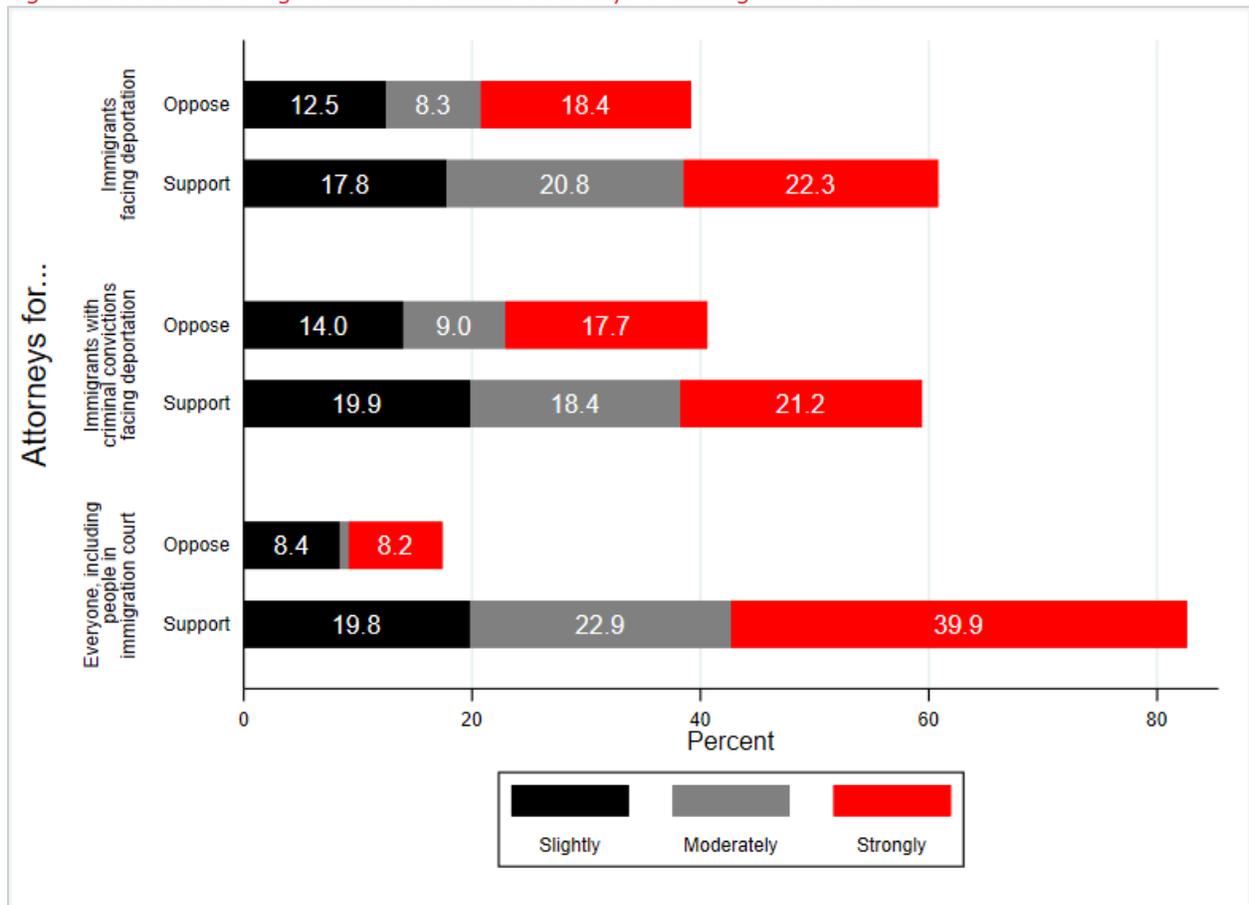
1. Do you support or oppose the government paying for an attorney for immigrants facing deportation who cannot afford one in immigration court?
2. Do you support or oppose the government paying for an attorney for immigrants with criminal convictions who are facing deportation and cannot afford one in immigration court?
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?

Question one asks about the government paying for attorneys for “immigrants facing deportation.” Question two is nearly the same, but asks about attorneys for “immigrants *with criminal convictions*.” Question three differs from questions one and two by asking about attorneys for “everyone...including people in immigration court.” All questions specify that government-funded attorneys are for those who cannot afford one. The main differences, then, are that questions one and two are directly about government-funded attorneys in deportation proceedings (question two taking a step further than question one by specifying immigrants with criminal convictions as recipients of attorneys), while question three allows for an exploration of whether support for government-funded attorneys is higher when framed as a universal right—as part of a system that provides attorneys “for everyone,” inclusive of “people in immigration court.” Moreover, question three does not use the words “immigrant” or “deportation,” instead humanizing the foreign-born population by specifying that these are *people* in immigration court. Answer options for all three questions are: strongly support, moderately support, slightly support, slightly oppose, moderately oppose, and strongly oppose. Responses to the questions are presented in Figure 1.

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<sup>1</sup> Question one was the primary question of interest, as the main goal of the research was to understand attitudes toward government-funded attorneys for immigrants facing deportation. Therefore, most respondents (about half) were randomly assigned to answer this question. Questions two and three were added to see how support may increase or decrease depending on the language used compared to question one. Therefore, fewer respondents were assigned to questions two and three than to question one (about a quarter were assigned to question two and a quarter to question three).

Figure 1: Attitudes on government-funded attorneys in immigration court



n=1,068

### Key findings from Figure 1:

- Solid majorities of people in the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area support government-funded attorneys in immigration court across all three questions.
  - Sixty-one percent express support for government-funded attorneys for immigrants facing deportation (question one); a similar proportion of people—59 percent—support government-funded attorneys for immigrants *with criminal convictions* (question two).<sup>2</sup>

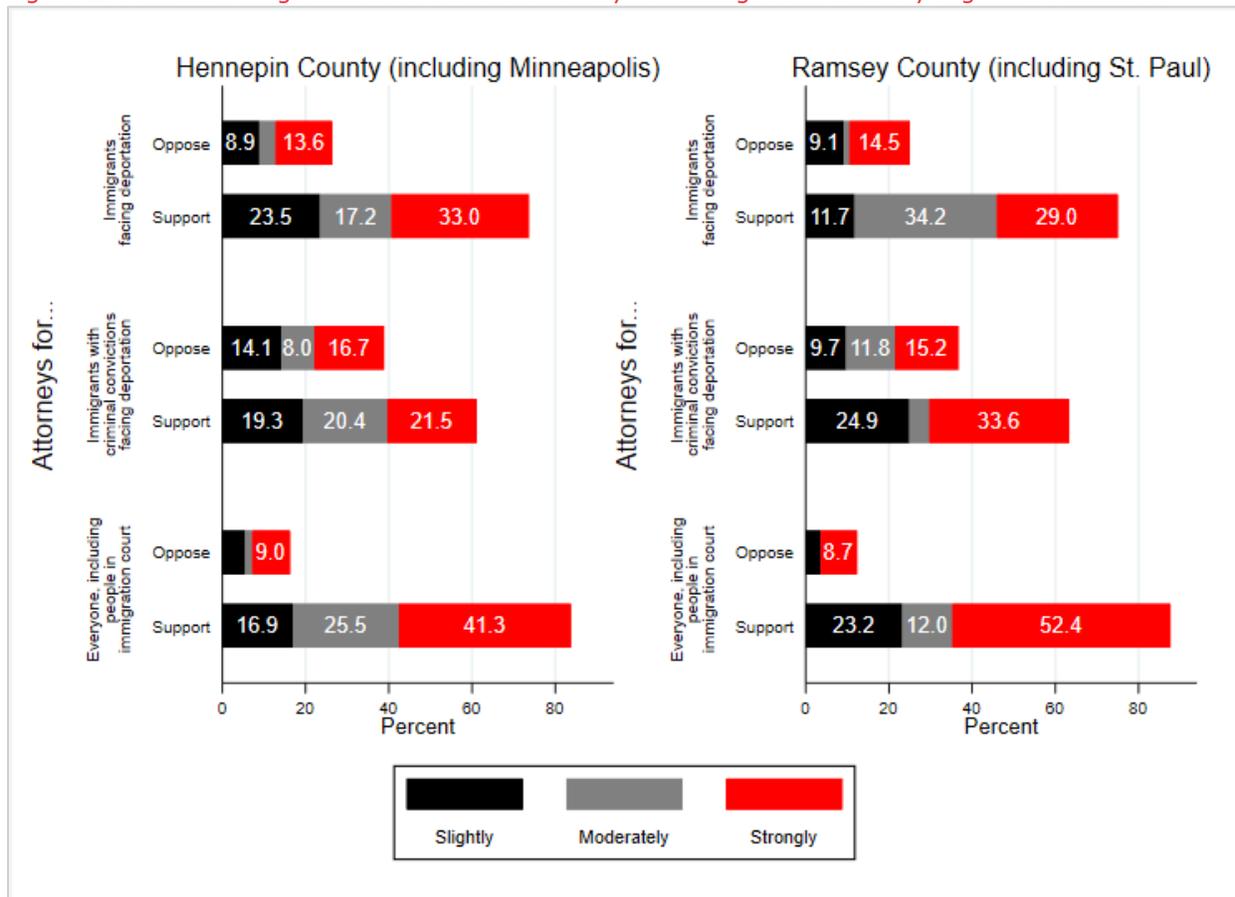
<sup>2</sup> A t-test that compares mean responses to questions one and two reveals that there is no significant difference between the two ( $p=0.742$ ). This means that respondents are answering the two questions in a similar manner, indicating that support for government-funded attorneys is just as high when immigrants with criminal convictions are specified as the recipients of lawyers compared to when people are asked about lawyers for immigrants generally (without an explicit mention of immigrants with criminal convictions). In all t-tests referenced in this document, responses are coded to range from 0 (strongly oppose) to 1 (strongly support), with all other values falling evenly in between (moderately oppose = 0.2, slightly oppose = 0.4, etc.).

Additionally, the percentages displayed in Figure 1 for those supporting attorneys for immigrants with criminal convictions of 19.9, 18.4, and 21.2 sum to 59.5—or 60 percent when rounded. However, the full values are 19.85, 18.39, and 21.16, which sum to 59.4, or 59 percent when rounded, as indicated in the text. Rounding instances, as described here, account for other small discrepancies between values presented in figures and text.

- Support increases substantially when attorneys in immigration court are framed as part of a larger system of attorneys for all (question 3), with 83 percent of respondents expressing support.<sup>3</sup>

Figure 2, below, is analogous to Figure 1, but focuses on respondents who reside in Hennepin and Ramsey Counties, where Minneapolis and St. Paul are located, respectively. (The overall sample includes residents of the wider Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area, which spans areas beyond the Hennepin and Ramsey County lines—495 respondents live outside of these county lines and are not included in Figure 2.)

Figure 2: Attitudes on government-funded attorneys in immigration court by region of residence



n = 573

### Key findings from Figure 2:

- Within Hennepin and Ramsey Counties, the same patterns emerge as observed in Figure 1, with robust support for attorneys for immigrants facing deportation (question 1). Support persists

<sup>3</sup> T-tests that compare mean responses between questions one and three and between questions two and three reveal significant differences ( $p=0.000$  in both comparisons).

when immigrants with criminal convictions are specified as the recipients of lawyers (question 2), and support is even higher when attorneys for immigrants are framed as part of a larger system of attorneys for all (question 3).

- Three in four people in Hennepin and Ramsey Counties (or 74 percent and 75 percent, respectively) support government-funded attorneys for immigrants facing deportation (question one).
- More than 60 percent of people in both counties support attorneys for immigrants with criminal convictions (question two).
- Support increases to more than 80 percent among people in Hennepin and Ramsey Counties when attorneys are framed as part of a larger system of attorneys for everyone who cannot afford one (question three).

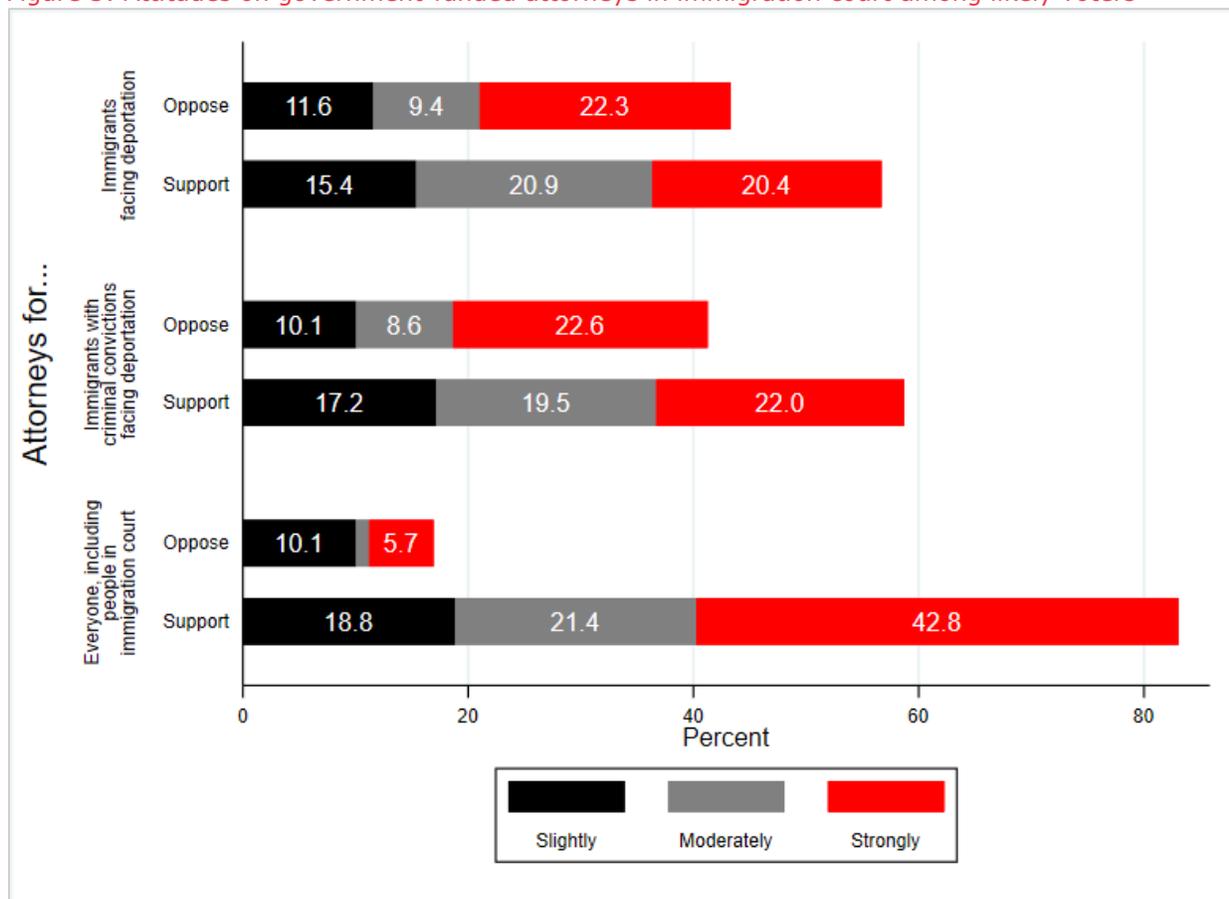
Figure 3, below, includes responses only from people who are likely to vote. Likely voters are defined as people who reported that they were registered to vote and planned to vote in 2020. Respondents aged 22 years or older were only included if they reported having voted in the 2016 presidential election 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).<sup>4</sup> Sixty-six percent of survey respondents were categorized as likely voters.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> 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>.

<sup>5</sup> For reference, 81 percent of the Hennepin County voting-age population (VAP) and 75 percent of the Ramsey County VAP voted in the 2016 presidential election. See Office of the Minnesota Secretary of State, “2016 Election Statistic Maps,” <https://www.sos.state.mn.us/elections-voting/election-results/2016/2016-general-election-results/2016-election-statistics-maps/>.

Figure 3: Attitudes on government-funded attorneys in immigration court among likely voters



n = 703

### Key findings from Figure 3:

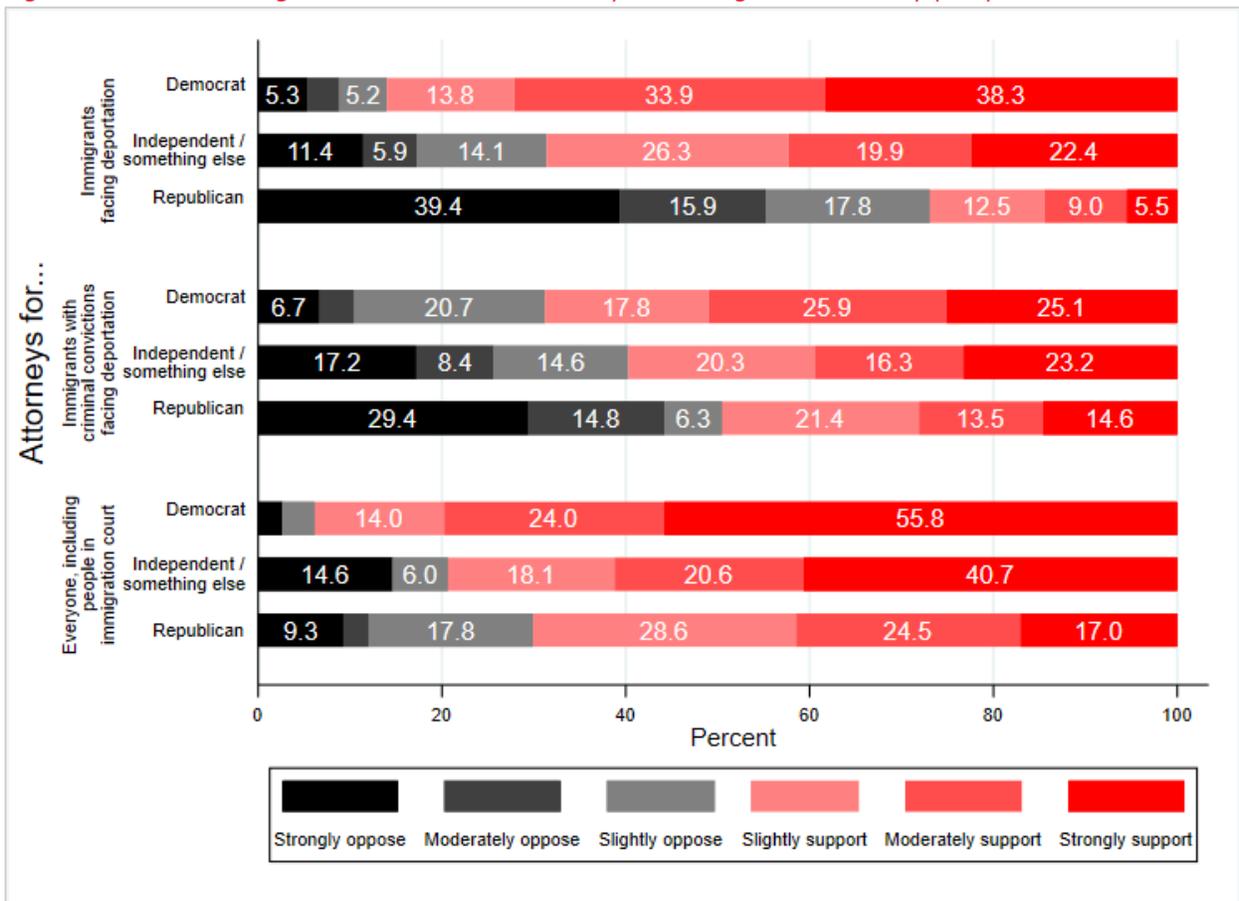
- Once again, the results show that there is majority support for government-funded attorneys in immigration court, this time among likely voters. Support remains steady even when immigrants with criminal convictions are specified as the recipients of lawyers, and support increases significantly when attorneys for immigrants are framed as part of a larger system of attorneys for all.<sup>6</sup>
  - Fifty-seven percent of likely voters support government-funded attorneys for immigrants facing deportation (question one).
  - Fifty-nine percent express support when immigrants with criminal convictions are specified (question two).

<sup>6</sup> T-tests that compare mean responses among likely voters between the questions show that there is no significant difference between questions one and two ( $p=0.842$ ), but there are significant differences when question three is compared to questions one and two ( $p=0.000$  in both comparisons).

- Eighty-three percent of likely voters express support for lawyers when attorneys in immigration court are framed as part of a larger system of “attorneys for everyone who cannot afford one” (question three).

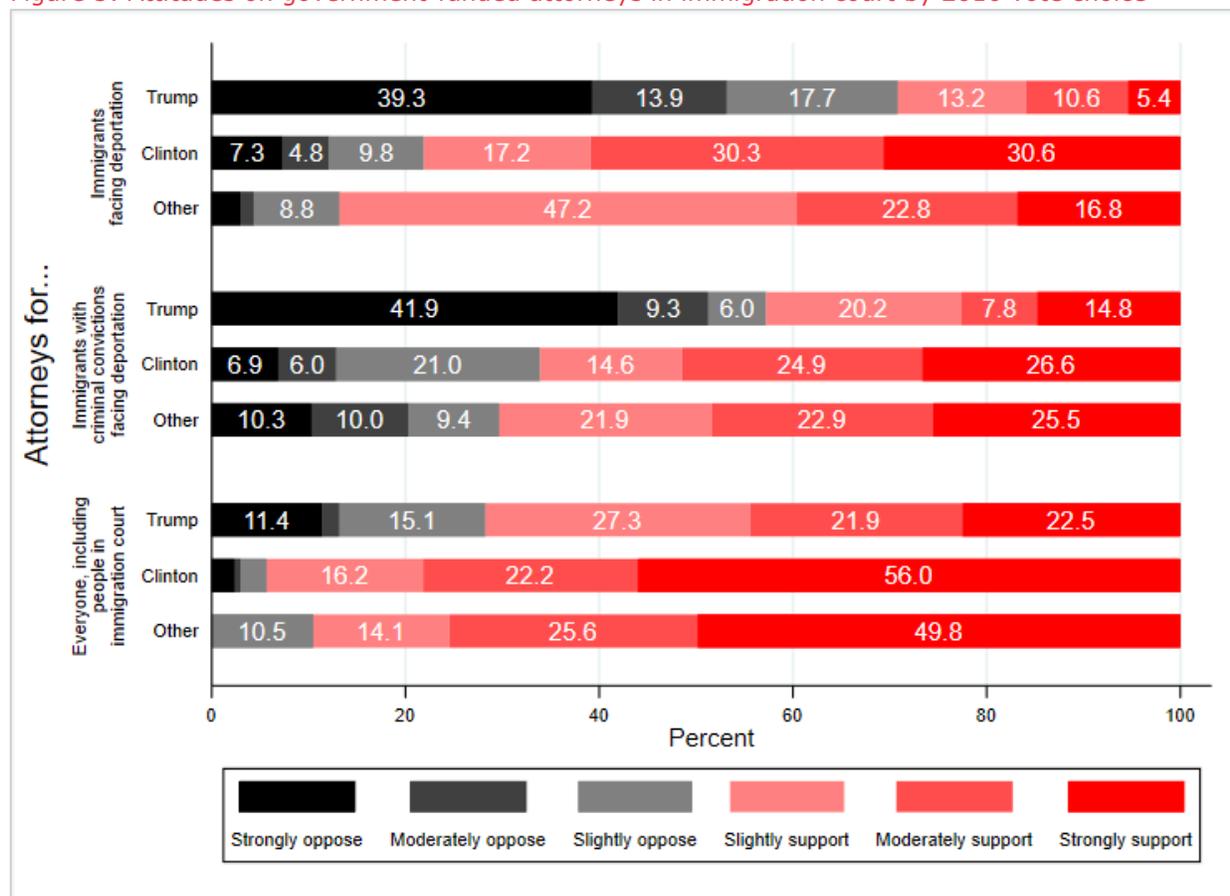
The next two graphs plot the percentages of people giving each response by their political party identification (Figure 4) and by their 2016 vote choice (Figure 5). Responses to question one in Figures 4 and 5 appear in the top third of each graph, answers to question two are displayed in the middle of the graphs, and responses to question three are shown in the bottom third. Each bar sums to 100 percent.

Figure 4: Attitudes on government-funded attorneys in immigration court by party identification



n = 1,062 (412 Democrats, 356 independents/something else, and 294 Republicans).

Figure 5: Attitudes on government-funded attorneys in immigration court by 2016 vote choice



n = 803 (293 Trump, 405 Clinton, and 105 third-party candidate voters). Only those who reported voting in 2016 are included in Figure 5.

### Key findings from Figures 4 and 5:

- Democrats, those who do not identify with Democrats nor Republicans, Clinton voters, and those who voted for a third-party candidate in the 2016 presidential election are very supportive of government-funded attorneys in immigration court across all three questions.
  - At the lower end, 60 percent of people who do not identify with Democrats nor Republicans (Independents/something else) expressed support for attorneys for immigrants with criminal convictions (question 2).
  - At the upper end, 94 percent of Clinton voters supported government-funded attorneys for everyone, including people in immigration court (question 3).
- Although Republicans and Trump voters tend to oppose government-funded attorneys for immigrants facing deportation (in question one) and for immigrants with criminal convictions (in question two), nearly three out of four Republicans and Trump voters support government-funded attorneys in question three.
  - These results suggest that messaging that frames attorneys in immigration court as part of a larger system of attorneys for all might be a successful strategy to build support for

lawyers in immigration court among people who might be inclined to oppose legal representation for immigrants.

## 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:

4. 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 four 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 percentages of people in the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area who think immigration to the United States should be increased, decreased, or kept the same. The Minneapolis-St. Paul 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.<sup>7</sup> The table shows that immigration attitudes among the Minneapolis-St. Paul sample are similar to attitudes across national surveys, where one third want to decrease immigration, about one third would like no change to current immigration levels, and about one third support increased immigration to the United States.

Table 1: Standard immigration question across four surveys

Immigration to the U.S. should be...	Survey			
	Minneapolis-St. Paul/Vera	ANES	Gallup	Pew
Increased	32%	31%	34%	32%
Kept the same	36%	35%	36%	38%
Decreased	32%	33%	28%	24%

<sup>7</sup> See American National Election Studies, “2018 Pilot Study,” <https://electionstudies.org/data-center/2018-pilot-study/>; Gallup, “Immigration,” (3 percent of the 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/>.

Finally, Table 2 shows the percentages of respondents who support government-funded attorneys in questions one through three by their responses to the standard immigration question (question four above).

Table 2: Support for government-funded attorneys by responses to the standard immigration question

**Percentage supporting government-funded attorneys for...**

Immigration to the U.S. should be...	<b>Immigrants facing deportation</b>	<b>Immigrants with criminal convictions facing deportation</b>	<b>Everyone, including people in immigration court</b>
Increased	87%	80%	96%
Kept the same	71%	61%	86%
Decreased	25%	34%	64%

n=1,068

**Key findings from Table 2:**

- There is strong support for government-funded attorneys among the 68 percent of respondents who believe immigration to the United States should be kept at present levels or increased. Among these people, support was high across all three questions, ranging from:
  - 61 percent of those who answered question two (about lawyers for immigrants with criminal convictions) and who believe immigration levels to the United States should be kept the same, to
  - 96 percent among those who answered question 3 (where attorneys in immigration court are framed as part of a larger system of attorneys for all) and who support increased immigration to the United States.
- Among people who oppose immigration to the United States, one in four or more support government-funded attorneys for immigrants facing deportation (in questions one and two).
  - However, when attorneys for immigrants are framed as part of a system of attorneys for everyone, 64 percent of people who oppose immigration to the United States express support for government-funded attorneys (in question three).

The findings presented in this report suggest that the majority of people in the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area support government-funded attorneys in immigration court, and support persists even when immigrants with criminal convictions are specified as the recipients of lawyers. Finally, support is even higher when attorneys in immigration court are framed as part of a larger legal representation system for everyone who cannot afford one.