

# Public Support in Santa Ana 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 Santa Ana, California. The survey was administered online in April 2020 and included 115 adults (18 years and older) living in the city. Given the small sample size, readers should interpret these results to be suggestive of patterns that might exist in Santa Ana; more respondents are required for a fully representative sample of the population. Nonetheless, the results found in Santa Ana are in line with [national polling results](#) on support for government-funded attorneys in immigration court.<sup>1</sup>

## Key finding

**Seventy-nine percent of respondents in Santa Ana support government-funded attorneys for immigrants facing deportation.**

The next section includes details about the key finding and additional results.

## Government-funded attorneys in immigration court

Respondents were randomly assigned to answer either question one or two, below. The two questions, while similar, contain important differences in wording. Randomly assigning respondents to answer one of the two questions allows for a comparison of how attitudes towards government-funded attorneys in immigration court may shift depending on the language used. The two 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 everyone who cannot afford one in a court of law, including people in immigration court?

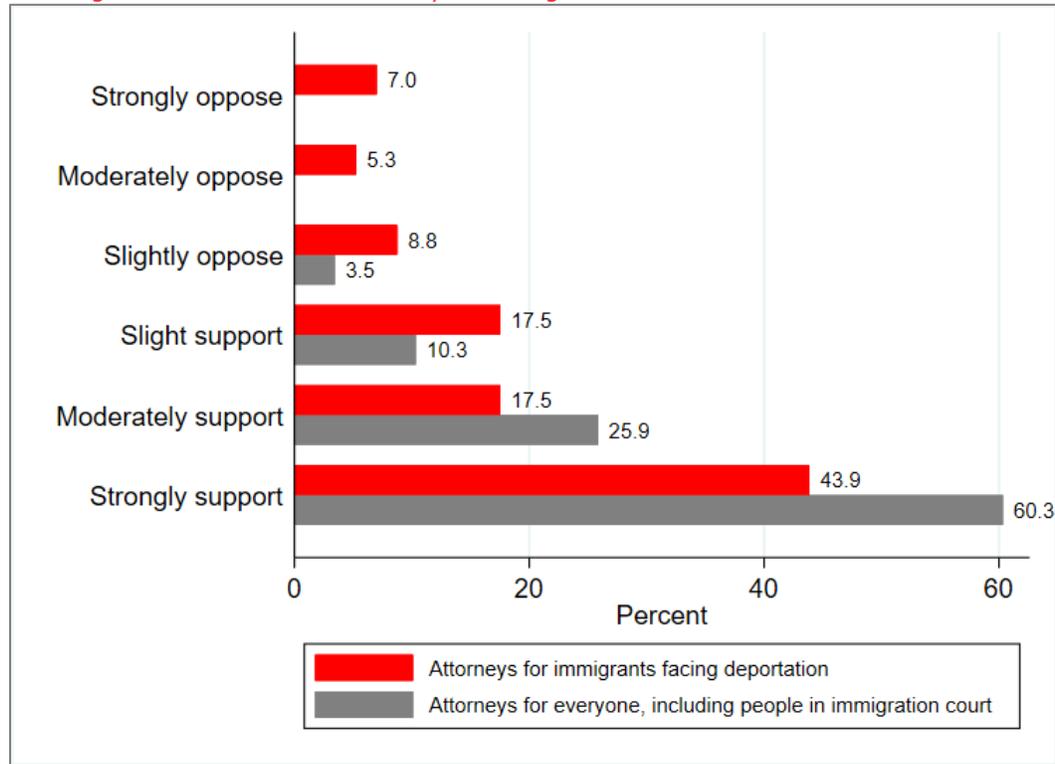
Question one asks about the government paying for attorneys for “immigrants facing deportation,” while question two asks about attorneys for “everyone...including people in immigration court.” The main differences, then, are that question one is directly about government-funded attorneys in immigration court, while question two 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 two does not use the words “immigrant” or “deportation,” instead humanizing the foreign-born population by specifying that these are *people* in

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<sup>1</sup> For national polling results and the results of polls conducted in local jurisdictions across the country, see Vera Institute of Justice, “Taking the Pulse,” <https://www.vera.org/publications/taking-the-pulse>.

immigration court. Answer options for both questions are: strongly support, moderately support, slightly support, slightly oppose, moderately oppose, and strongly oppose. Responses to questions one and two are presented in Figure 1.

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



n=115

**Key findings from Figure 1:**

- There is tremendous support among respondents in Santa Ana for government-funded attorneys in immigration court.
- Respondents are significantly more supportive of attorneys in immigration court in question two than in question one, suggesting that support increases when language is used that frames government-funded attorneys for immigrants as part of a larger system of attorneys for all, including people in immigration court.<sup>2</sup>
- Nonetheless, support for legal representation in immigration court is high across the board, as more than three out of four respondents in Santa Ana support government-funded attorneys in immigration court, regardless of which question they answered.
- Seventy-nine percent support government-funded attorneys for immigrants facing deportation in question one.

<sup>2</sup> A t-test that compares mean responses to questions one and two reveals a significant difference between the two ( $p=0.001$ ). In the t-test, responses are coded to range from 0 (strongly oppose) to 1 (strongly support).

- Ninety-seven percent express support for government-funded attorneys for everyone, including people in immigration court, in question two.

Support for government-funded attorneys for immigrants facing deportation (in question one) among respondents in Santa Ana is widespread, existing among:

- 73 percent of likely voters;<sup>3</sup>
- 88 percent of people who self-identify as Democrats, 64 percent of those who self-identify as Republicans, and 79 percent of people who do not identify with either party; and
- 76 percent of people who voted for Hillary Clinton and 57 percent of those who voted for Donald Trump in the 2016 presidential election (among those who voted).

The corresponding percentages for question two are even higher than found in question one and indicate that support is widespread among different political groups. This provides more evidence that public support for government-funded attorneys in immigration court is strong among respondents in Santa Ana. As stated above, the overall Santa Ana sample is relatively small, and these numbers get even smaller when data is broken up by subgroups such as likely voters, party identification, etc. Therefore, the percentages listed above should not be interpreted as representative of the Santa Ana population, but instead are suggestive of patterns that might exist. These patterns are in line with the findings of a national survey that includes 6,000 respondents (see <https://www.vera.org/downloads/publications/taking-the-pulse-national-polling.pdf> for more information).

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<sup>3</sup> 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. Respondents under 22 may not have been old enough to vote in 2016 and were, therefore, not held to this requirement. Forty-eight percent of Santa Ana respondents were categorized as likely voters. For reference, 62 percent of the voting-eligible population in Orange County (where Santa Ana is located) 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 underestimating the percentage of likely voters in Santa Ana. For discussions of how to measure likely voters in surveys, see Scott Keeter and Ruth Igielnik, *Can Likely Voter Models Be Improved?* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2016), <https://www.pewresearch.org/methods/2016/01/07/can-likely-voter-models-be-improved/>; and Michael Dimock et al., Pew Research Center, “A Voter Validation Experiment: Screening for Likely Voters in Pre-election Surveys,” (A paper presented at the 56th Annual American Association for Public Opinion Research Conference, Montreal, Quebec, Canada, March 17-20, 2001), <https://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2001/05/12.pdf>.