



## Legal Aid in BC

Prepared by Ipsos Reid for the Legal Services Society of  
British Columbia



# Methodology

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- ◆ A series of questions added to the BC Reid Express provincial omnibus survey for March, 2009.
- ◆ Fieldwork conducted March 10 to 15, 2009 by telephone.
- ◆ Survey results weighted to 2006 Census data by age and gender within region.
- ◆ Random digit dialling, random selection of respondents at the household level.
- ◆ Methodology used in the 2009 research is identical to that conducted in 2005, 2006 and 2008. Comparisons to the 2005, 2006 and 2008 results are provided.
- ◆ Respondents screened to exclude people who are, who live with, or who are closely related to a Legal Services Society employee or a lawyer who provides legal aid services. This resulted in a net of 753 respondents
- ◆ Margin of error  $\pm 3.6\%$ , 19 times out of 20 on a base of 753 people.

## Summary of Findings

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- ◆ A strong majority of British Columbians (86%) are aware that legal aid is available in BC for people with low incomes. Awareness of the availability of this service is significantly higher among those who earn more than \$80 thousand a year than among those who earn less than this amount.
- ◆ British Columbians are most aware of legal aid when it comes to criminal law matters. Nine-in-ten (92%) say they know that it's available in criminal law cases. This is considerably higher than the awareness of legal aid for family law matters (77%), immigration/refugee matters (56%) and other civil law matters including poverty law (44%). Lower Mainland residents are more aware of the availability of legal aid than residents outside the Lower Mainland. Men are more aware of the availability of legal aid services for criminal law than women, who in turn are more aware of the availability of legal aid services for family law than men.
- ◆ When asked to rate the availability of legal aid in different cases, the majority perceive legal aid to be either readily or somewhat available in criminal law, family law, immigration/refugee law and other civil matters including poverty law. However, the most common responses in each case are in the “somewhat available” category. In other words, legal aid is available, but could be more available. Since 2008 there have been significant increases in the number of British Columbians who say that legal aid is not adequately available for immigration/refugee law (up 7 points) and other civil matters including poverty law (up 13 points). Men are significantly more likely than women to say that legal aid is readily available when it comes to criminal law and immigration/refugee law.

## Summary of Findings (cont.)

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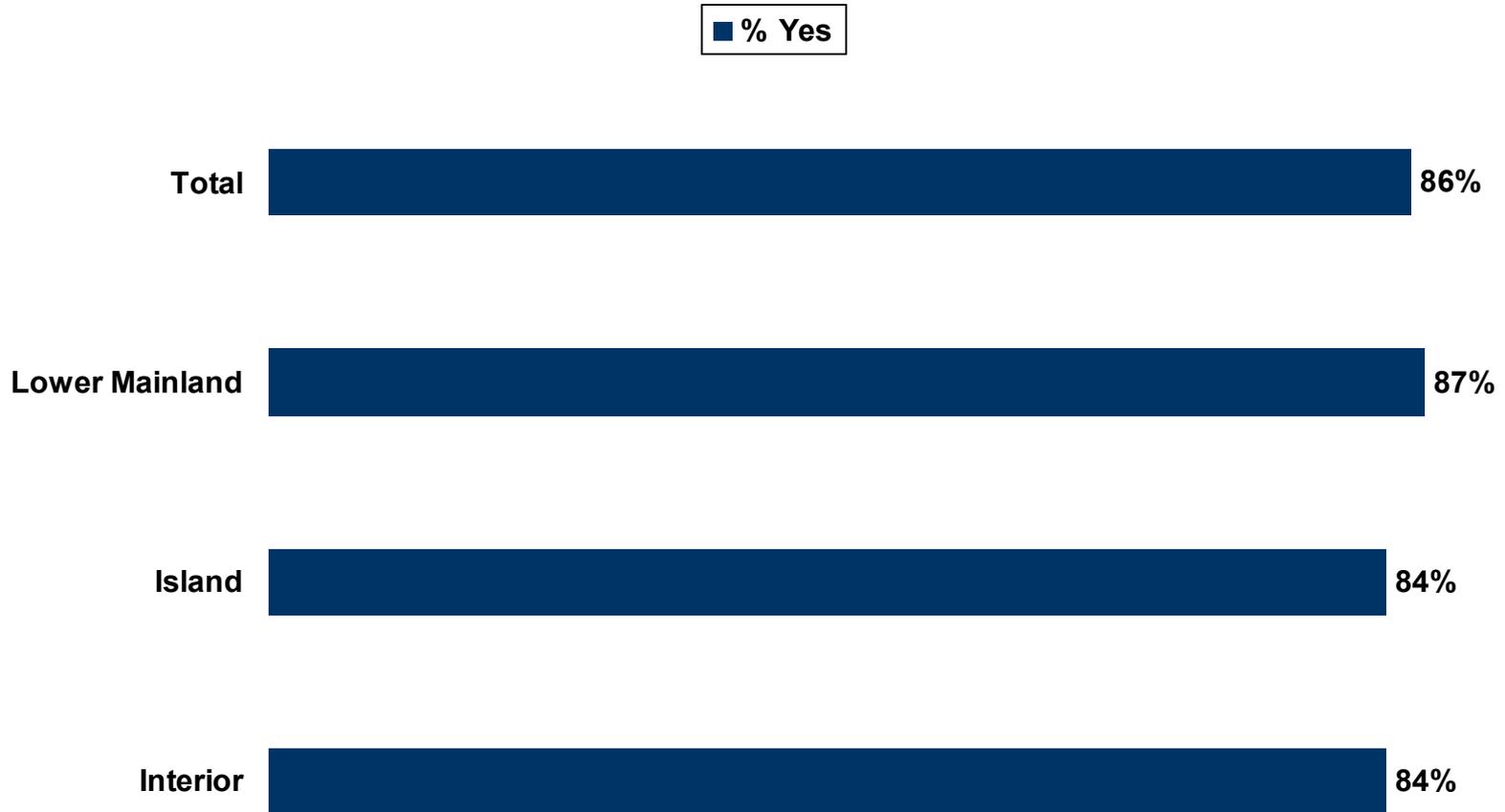
- ◆ Support for legal aid services in BC remains very high. Ninety-four percent of British Columbians say that they support legal aid, with 61% saying they “strongly support” it. Since 2008, the number of Vancouver Island residents who say they “strongly support” legal aid has significantly increased (up 15 points) while the number of Lower Mainland residents who say they “strongly support” legal aid has significantly decreased (down 7 points). Women are more likely to support legal aid services than men.
- ◆ British Columbians generally agree that legal aid for low income people is important in all types of cases. Ninety-six percent say it is very or somewhat important in family court, 94% say legal aid is important in criminal court, 93% say it’s important for other civil/legal proceedings and 89% say it’s important for immigration/refugee hearings. Women are significantly more likely than men to agree that legal aid is important in all types of cases with the exception of criminal court cases.
- ◆ Just over one-half of British Columbians (54%) say that they believe legal aid services are inadequately funded. This compares with 35% who say that they are either adequately funded or over-funded, while the remaining 11% say they don’t know. Since 2008, there has been an increase in the number of Vancouver Island residents who say legal aid services are inadequately funded (up 7 points) and in those who say they don’t know if they are adequately funded or not (up 5 points).
- ◆ There is a fundamental belief in BC that everyone should have the right to access the justice system. Only 3% of people disagree with this idea. Although the proportion who hold this belief has remained relatively unchanged over the 4 different years of this research, in the last year there has been a significant increase in the number of British Columbians who say they “strongly agree” that everyone should have the right to access the justice system (up 5 points).

## Summary of Findings (cont.)

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- ◆ There is somewhat less agreement with the idea that the government should give legal aid the same priority as they give funding for other social services such as health care, education, welfare and child protection. Still, a strong majority (79%) of British Columbians feel that legal aid should get the same funding priority as other social services. Significantly more British Columbians who earn less than \$40 thousand a year agree that legal aid should receive the same priority as funding for other social services than those who earn more than this amount.
- ◆ By far the most common source for hearing or getting information about legal aid is through stories in the media (43%). The next most popular sources are television ads (17%), community service agencies (14%) and radio ads (12%). Women are more likely than men to hear about legal services through community service agencies and libraries. Significantly more British Columbians who earn less than \$40 thousand a year hear about legal aid through community service agencies, courthouses, the phone book, libraries and other sources than those who earn more than this amount.
- ◆ When asked for ways in which legal aid services could be improved, the most common suggestion is for funding to be increased (22%), followed by providing improved accessibility (18%) and more advertising or promotion to increase public awareness (14%). Women are significantly more likely than men to say that legal services could be improved by having more lawyers available and British Columbians who earn more than \$80 thousand a year are significantly more likely to say they could be improved by having better guidelines as to who should qualify for legal aid.

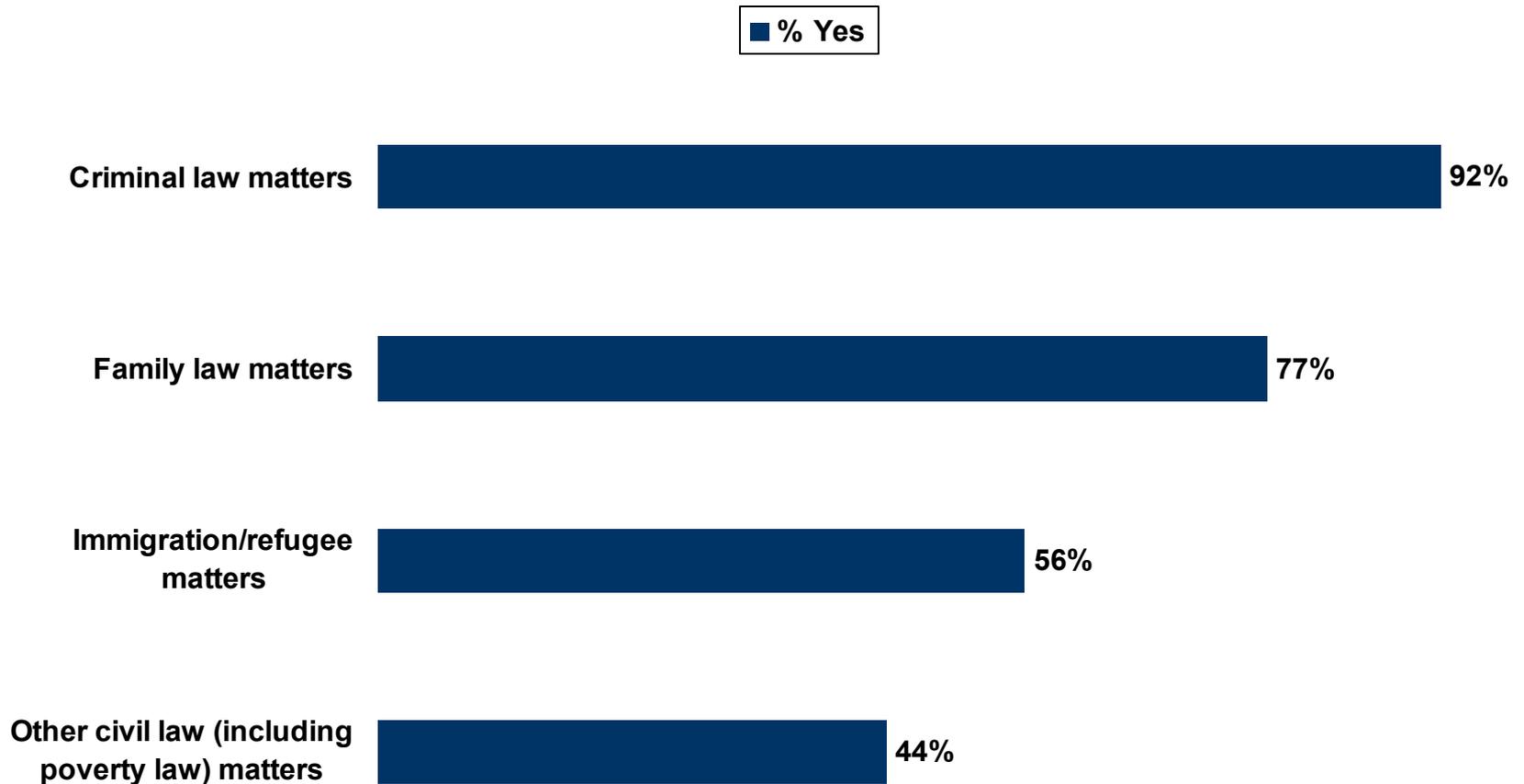
# Awareness of Legal Aid in BC



Base: All respondents (n=753)

*"I would like to ask you a few questions about legal aid. First of all, are you aware that there are legal aid services in BC for people with low incomes?"*

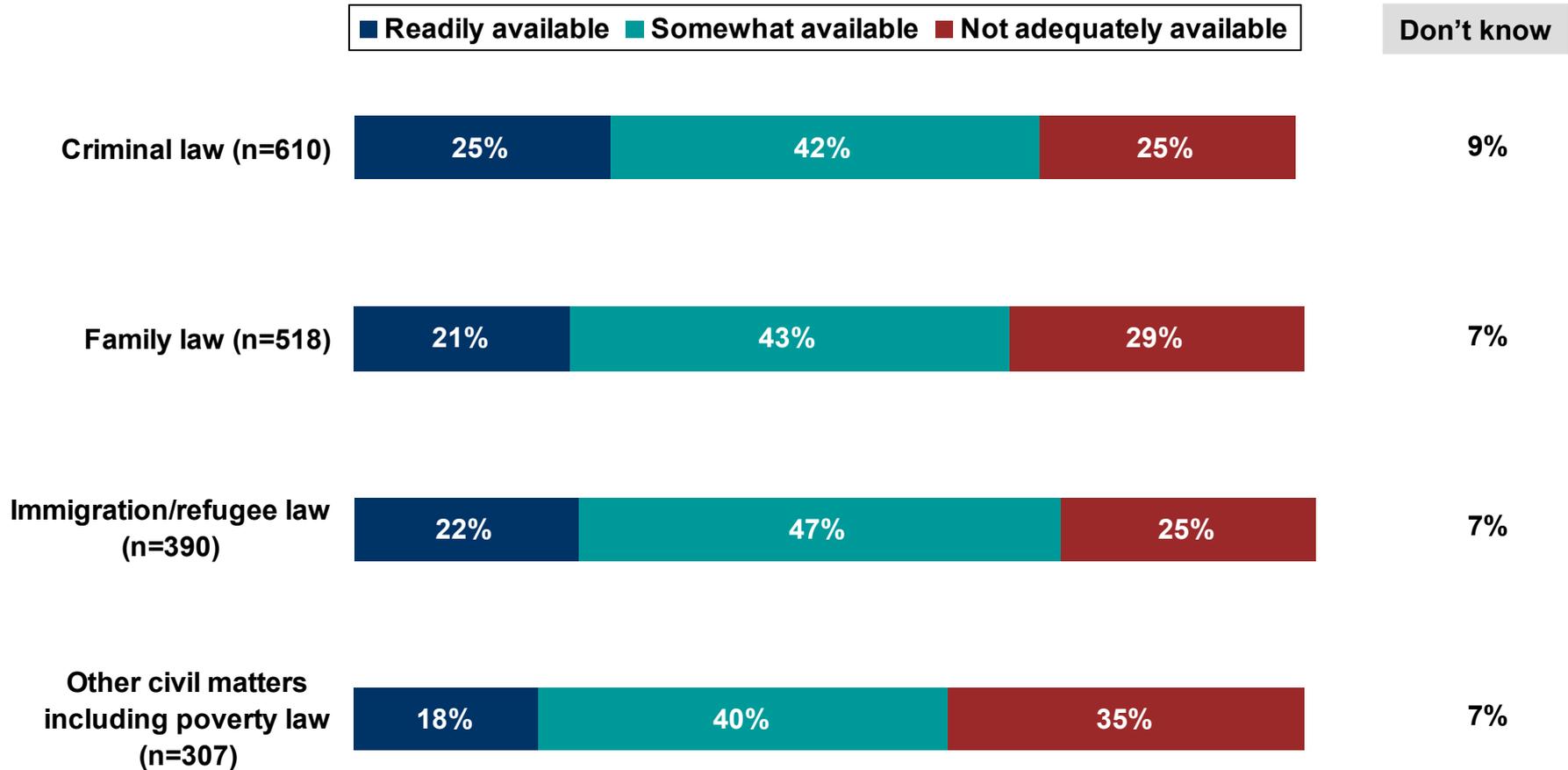
# Awareness of Legal Aid in Different Types of Cases



Base: Aware of legal aid services (n=668)

*“Did you know that legal aid services are available for people facing criminal law/family law/immigration/refugee/other civil law including poverty law matters?”*

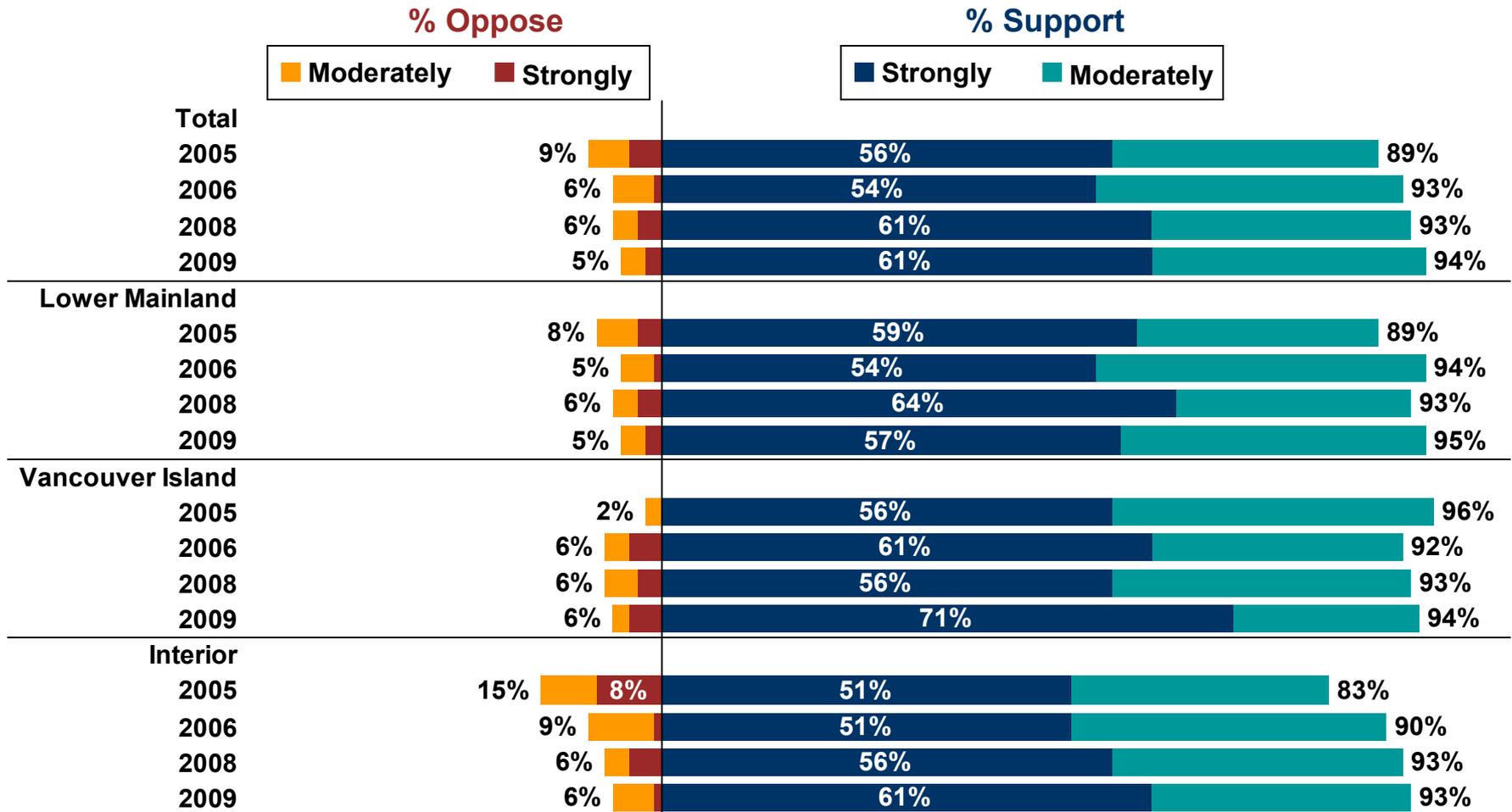
# Perceived Availability of Legal Aid



Base: Aware that legal aid services are available for each area of law

*“Overall, for those who need it, would you say that legal aid in BC is readily available, somewhat available, or not adequately available when it comes to criminal law/family law/immigration/refugee/other civil law including poverty law?”*

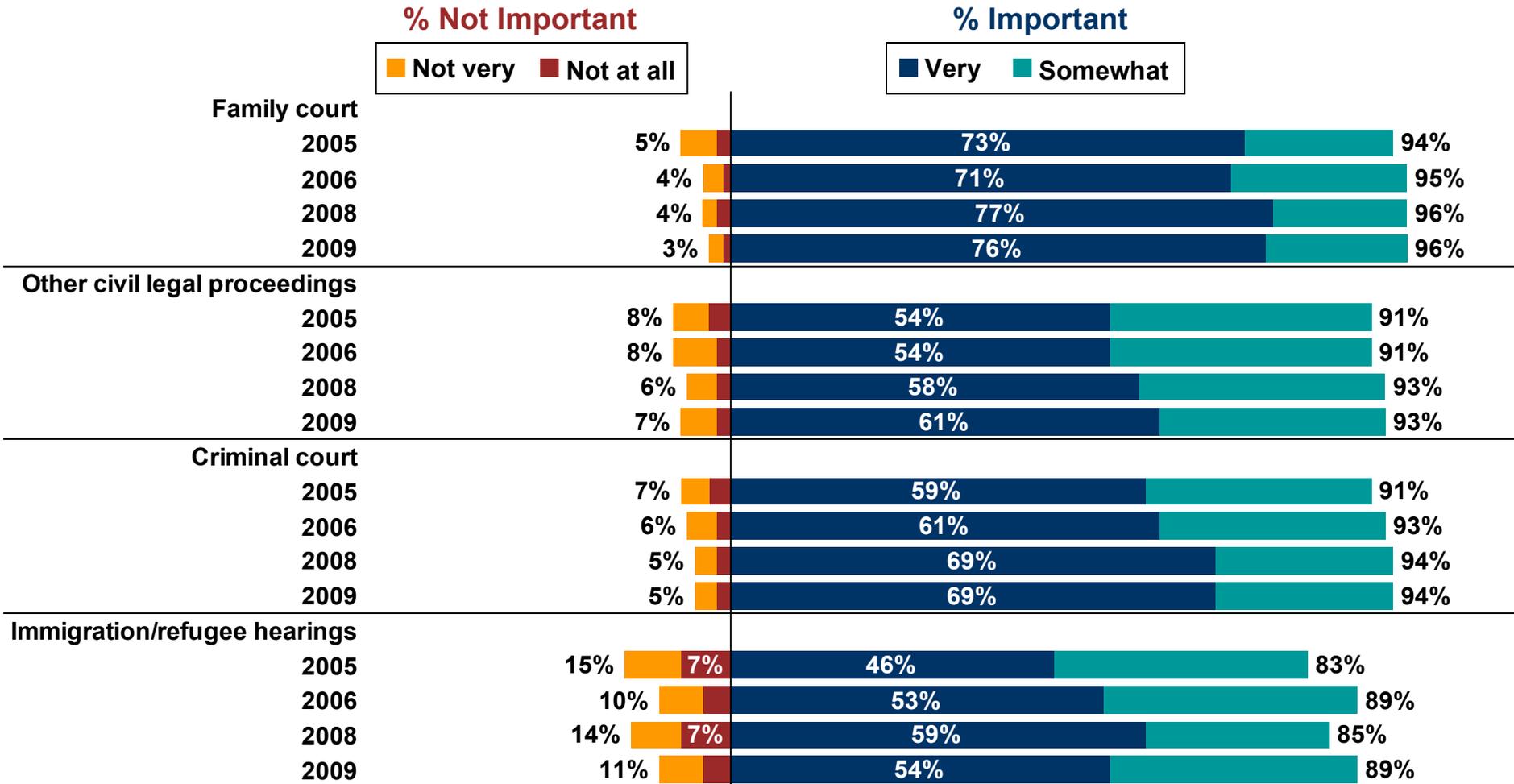
# Support/Oppose Legal Aid Services



Base: All respondents (n=763 in 2005 / n=745 in 2006 / n=730 in 2008 / n=753 in 2009)

*“As you may already know, legal aid services provide low income people with legal information, advice, and/or representation in court. This can include providing them with a self-help kit, giving them a few hours of legal advice, or paying a lawyer to represent them in court for serious family, criminal, or immigration/refugee problems. Knowing this, to what extent do you support or oppose legal aid services?”*

# Importance of Fairness in the Justice System

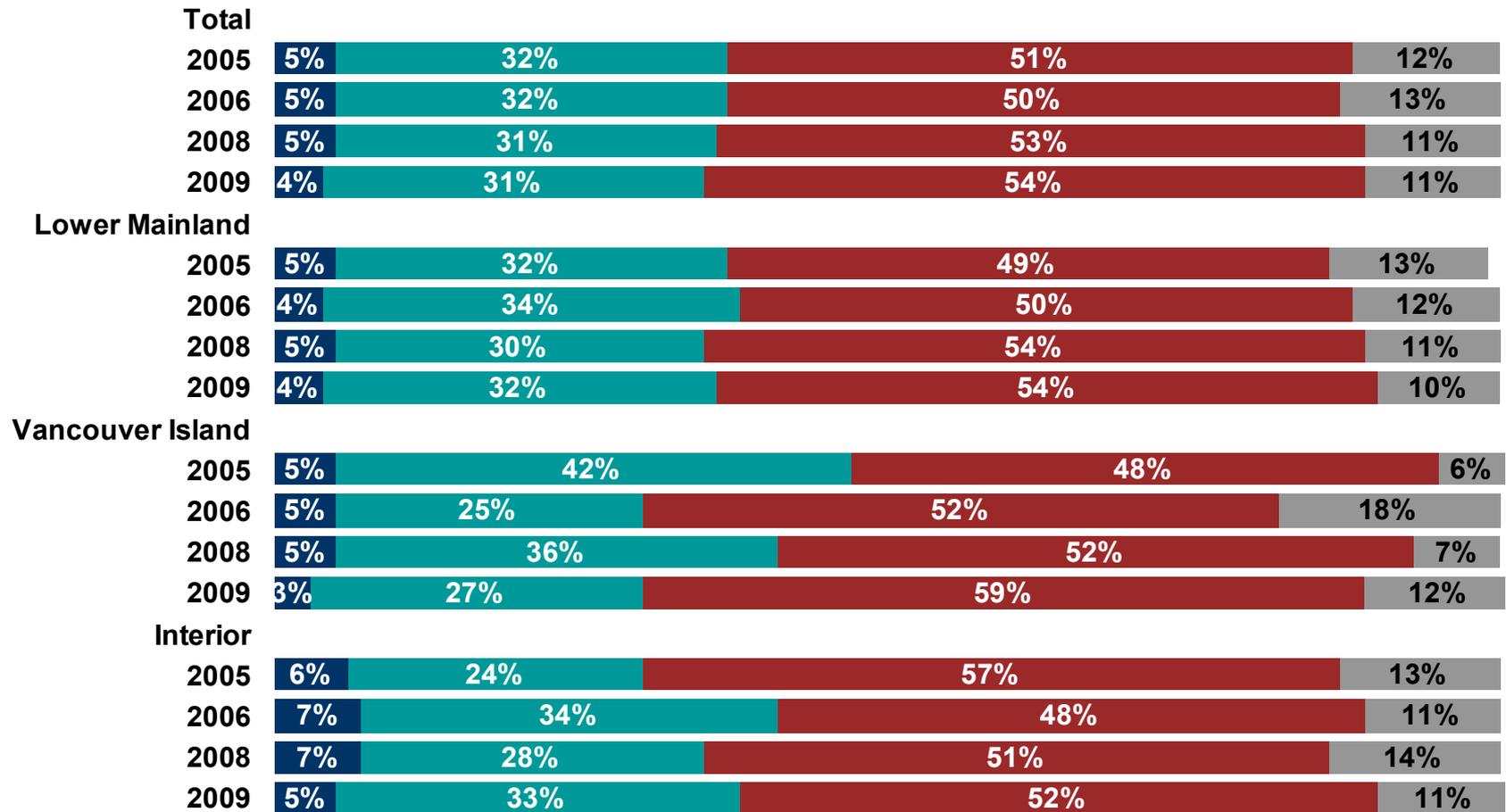


Base: All respondents (n=763 in 2005 / n=745 in 2006 / n=730 in 2008 / n=753 in 2009)

*"In your opinion, how important is it to fairness in the justice system for BC to provide low income people with legal aid in ...?"*

# State of Legal Aid Services in BC

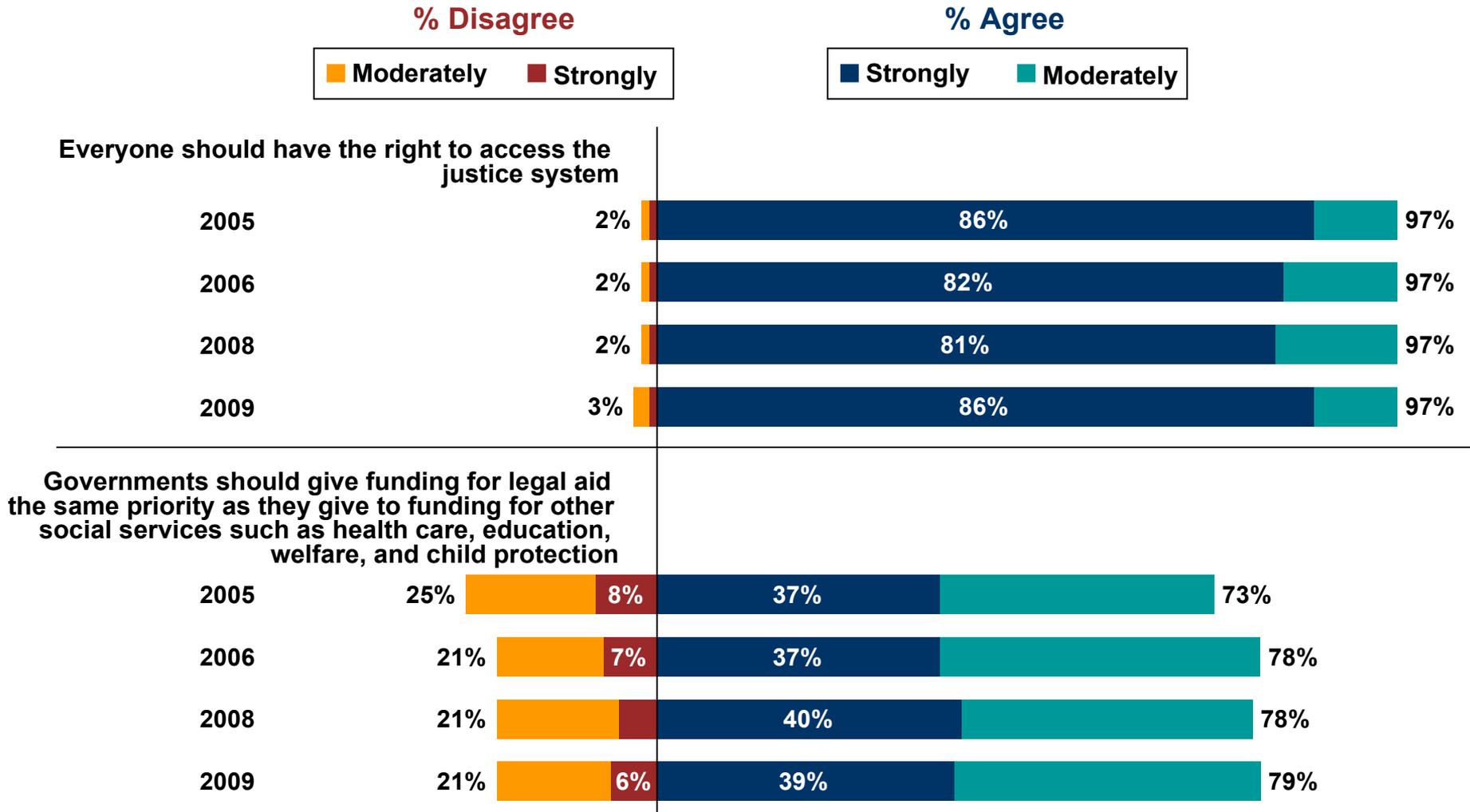
■ More than adequately funded ■ Adequately funded ■ Not adequately funded ■ Don't know



Base: All respondents (n=763 in 2005 / n=745 in 2006 / n=730 in 2008 / n=753 in 2009)

“Based on anything you may have read, heard, or seen, would you say that legal aid services in British Columbia are ...?”

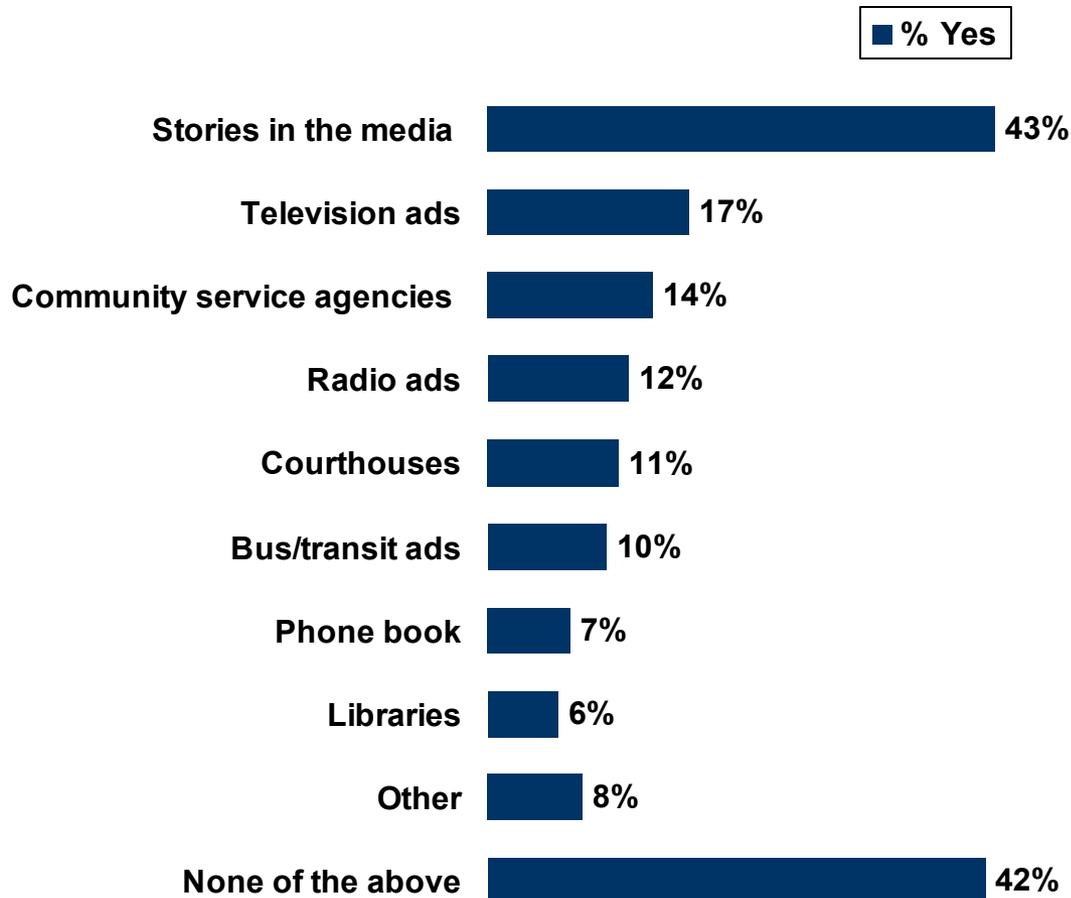
# Public Positions on the Justice System and Legal Aid



Base: All respondents (n=763 in 2005 / n=745 in 2006 / n=730 in 2008 / n=753 in 2009 )

“Would you agree or disagree with the following statement ...? Would that be strongly or moderately?”

# Sources of Legal Aid Information



Base: All respondents (n=753)

*"In the past few months, did you hear about (get information about) legal aid from any of the following sources?"*

# Suggested Improvements for Legal Aid Services

	2009 (n=753) %
<b>Improved funding</b>	<b>22%</b>
<b>Improved access/availability</b>	<b>18%</b>
<b>More advertising/promotion/public awareness</b>	<b>14%</b>
<b>More lawyers available</b>	<b>8%</b>
<b>Better guidelines as to who should qualify for legal aid</b>	<b>5%</b>
<b>Improved access/availability of lower income people</b>	<b>4%</b>
<b>Make the system more efficient (legal/judicial/courts)</b>	<b>3%</b>
<b>More information on how to obtain legal aid</b>	<b>2%</b>
<b>More qualified legal representation</b>	<b>2%</b>
<b>Provide more services/programs</b>	<b>2%</b>
<b>Other</b>	<b>10%</b>
<b>None/no improvement necessary</b>	<b>2%</b>
<b>Don't know/not stated</b>	<b>32%</b>

*“How do you think legal aid services in British Columbia could be improved?”*