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**Legal
Services
Society**



LEGAL SERVICES SOCIETY

Legal Aid in BC

Prepared by: Ipsos Reid

- ◆ A series of questions added to the *BC Reid Express* provincial omnibus survey for March, 2008.
- ◆ Fieldwork conducted March 4th to 10th, 2008 by telephone.
- ◆ Survey results weighted to 2006 Census data by age and gender within region.
- ◆ RDD dialling, random selection of respondents at the household level.
- ◆ Methodology used in the 2008 research is identical to that conducted in 2005 and 2006. Comparisons to the 2005 and 2006 results are provided.
- ◆ Respondents screened to exclude people who are, or who live with, someone who is closely related to a Legal Services Society employee or a lawyer who provides legal aid services. This resulted in a net of 730 respondents
- ◆ Margin of error $\pm 3.6\%$, 19 times out of 20 on a base of 730 people.

Summary of Findings

- ◆ Most British Columbians are aware that legal aid is available in BC for people with low incomes. In fact, 85% of people say they know this. This figure is a little higher in the Lower Mainland (87%) than on Vancouver Island (83%). Nevertheless, awareness is relatively high across the province with awareness highest amongst those 35 years of age or more (90%).
- ◆ British Columbians are most aware of legal aid when it comes to criminal law matters. Almost nine-in-ten (89%) say they knew that it's available in criminal law cases. This is considerably higher than for family law matters (75%), immigration/refugee matters (55%) and other civil law matters (54%).
- ◆ People were also asked to rate how available legal aid is in different cases. Responses here are mixed. For the most part, legal aid is perceived to be either readily or somewhat available in criminal law, family law, immigration/refugee law and other civil matters. However, the most common responses in each case are in the “somewhat available” category. In other words, the legal aid is available, but could be more available. One area that stands out over the others is the availability of legal aid when it comes to family law matters. Twenty-eight percent of British Columbians feel that legal aid is not adequately available when it comes to family law matters.
- ◆ Support for legal aid services in BC remains very high. Ninety-three percent of British Columbians say that they support legal aid, with 61% saying they strongly support it, up from 54% in 2006. Just 6% of people say they oppose legal aid. Support for legal aid is broad-based across all regions and demographic groups.

Summary of Findings (cont'd)

- ◆ British Columbians generally agree that legal aid for low income people is important in all types of cases, but particularly in family court with 96% saying it is very or somewhat important. Ninety-four percent of people say legal aid is important in criminal court, 93% say it's important for other civil/legal proceedings, while 85% say it's important for immigration/refugee hearings.
- ◆ Just over one-half of British Columbians (53%) say that they believe legal aid services are not adequately funded. This compares with 36% who say that they are either adequately funded or over-funded, while the remaining 11% say they don't know.
- ◆ There is a fundamental belief in BC that everyone should have the right to access the justice system. Just 2% of people disagree with this idea. This is relatively unchanged over the 3 different years of this research. There is a little less agreement with the idea of the government giving legal aid the same priority as health care, education, welfare and child protection. Still, 78% of British Columbians feel that legal aid should get the same funding priority as these other social services. Just 21% disagree with this idea.
- ◆ When asked for ways in which legal aid services could be improved, the most common suggestion is for funding to be increased (25% give this response). This is followed by providing improved accessibility for all people (19%) and educating people about legal aid (12%).

Awareness of Legal Aid in BC

"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?"

■ % Yes

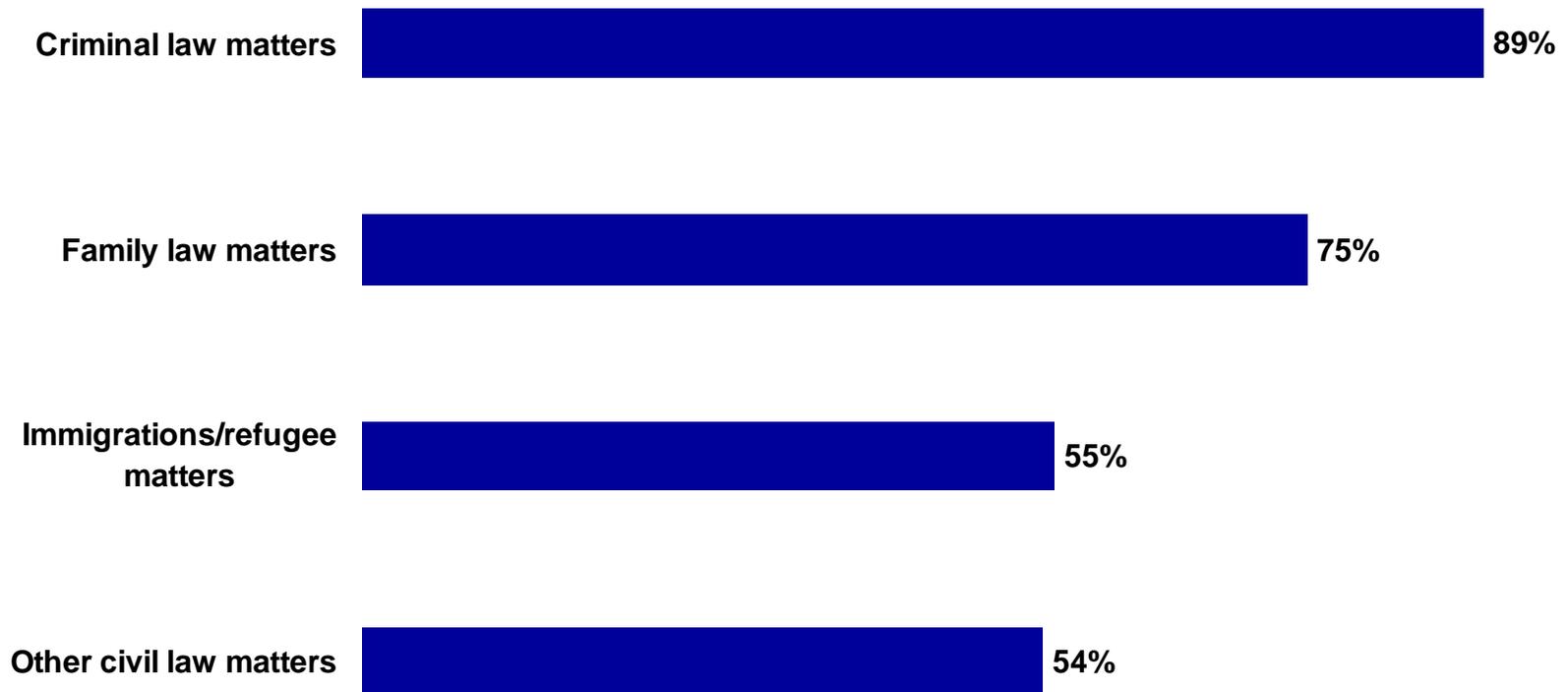


Base: All respondents (n=730)

Awareness of Legal Aid in Different Types of Cases

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

■ % Yes

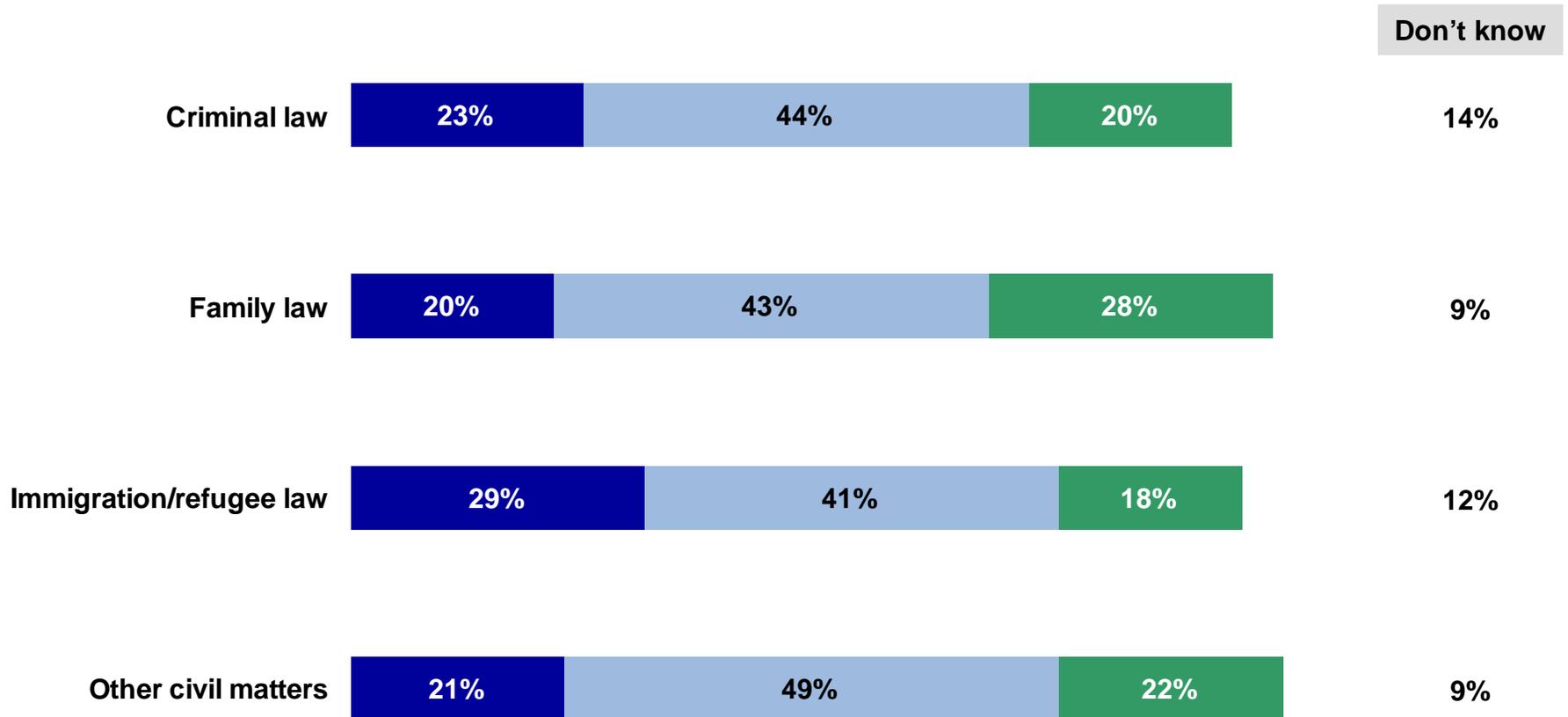


Base: Aware of legal aid services (n=645)

Perceived Availability of Legal Aid

“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?”

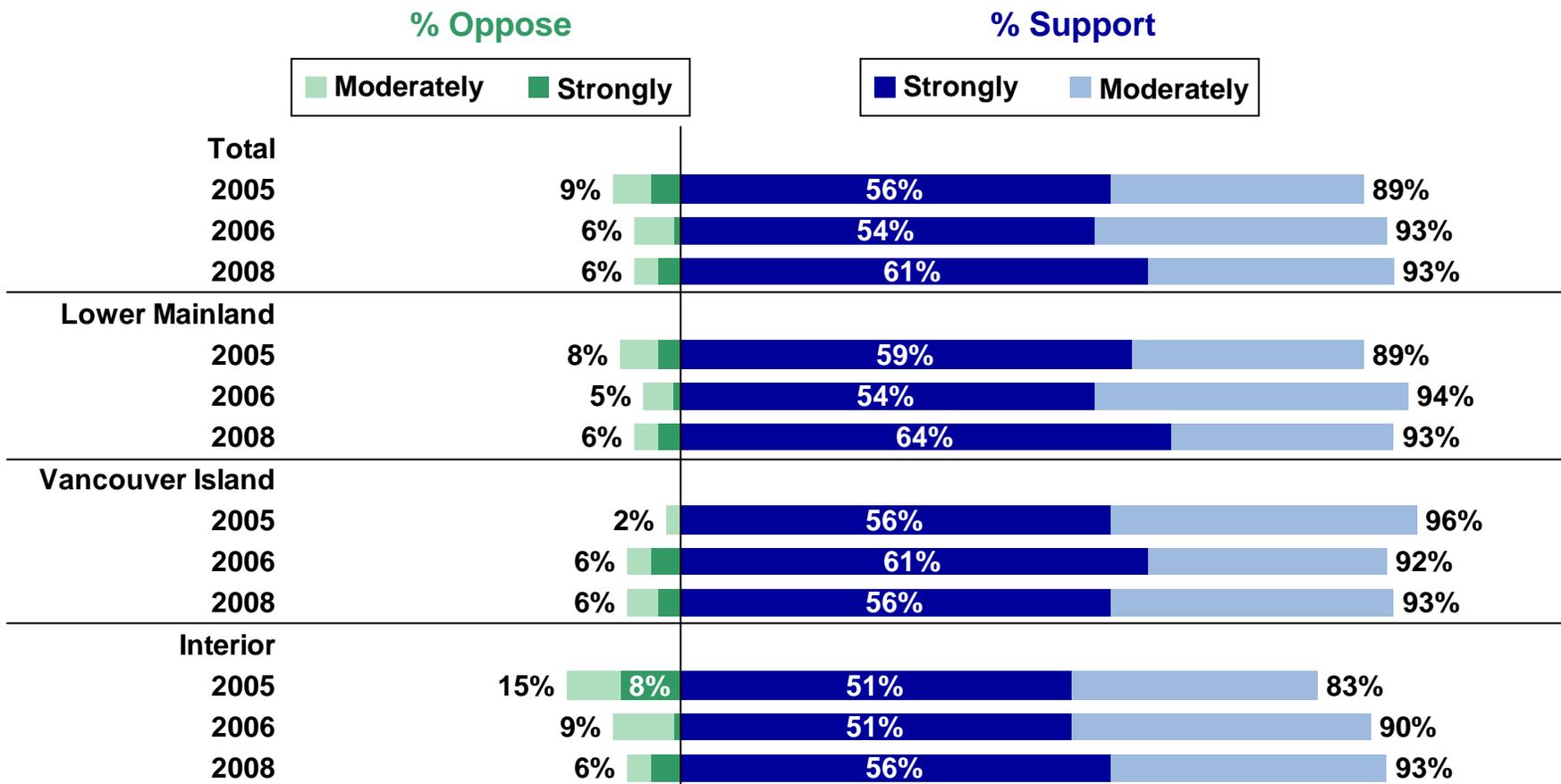
■ Readily available ■ Somewhat available ■ Not adequately available



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

Support/Oppose Legal Aid Services

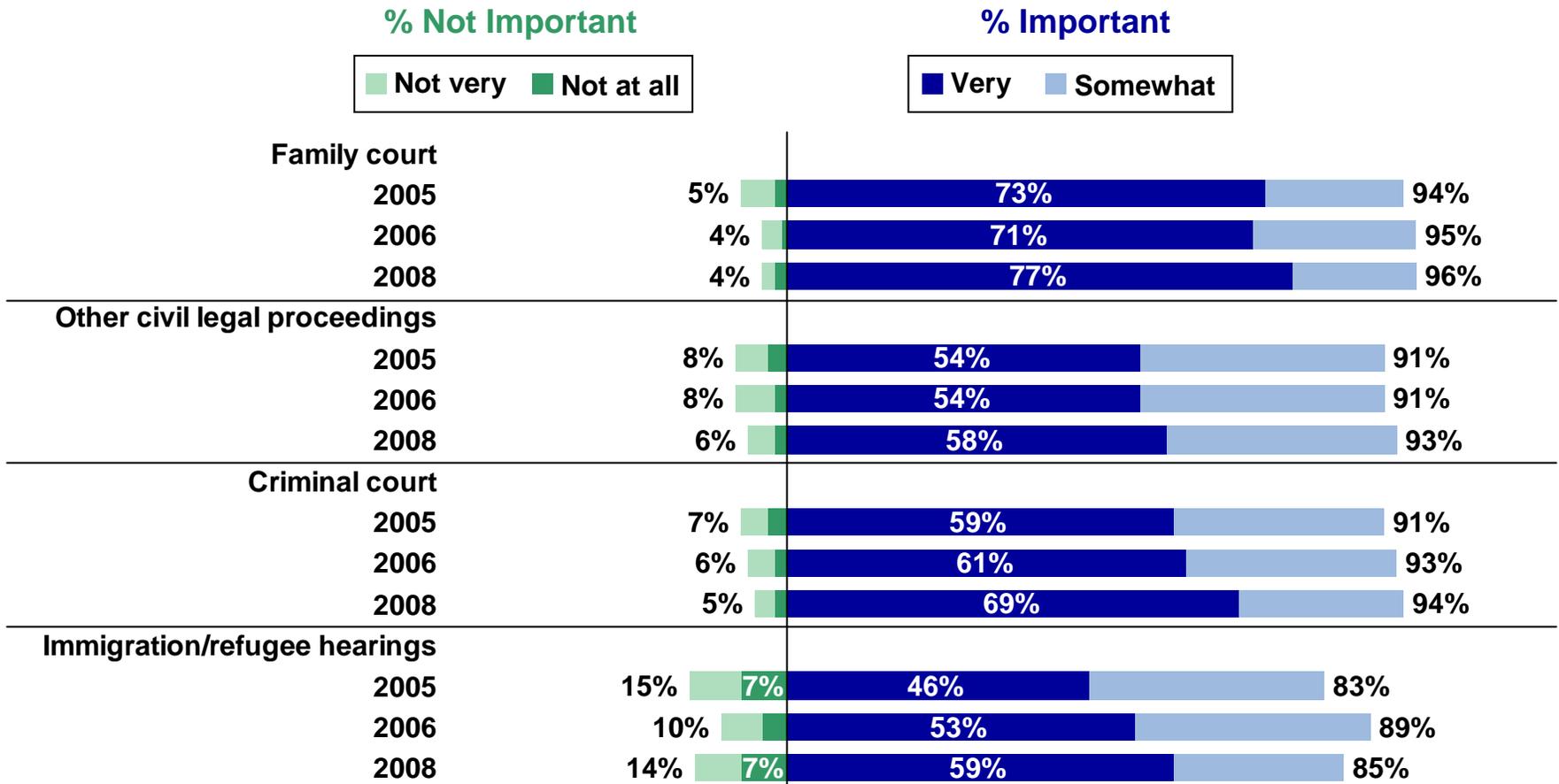
“As you may already know, legal aid services provide low income people with legal information, advice, and/or representation in court. This can include providing them with a self-help kit, giving them a few hours of legal advice, or paying a lawyer to represent them in court for serious family, criminal,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



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

Importance of Fairness in the Justice System

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

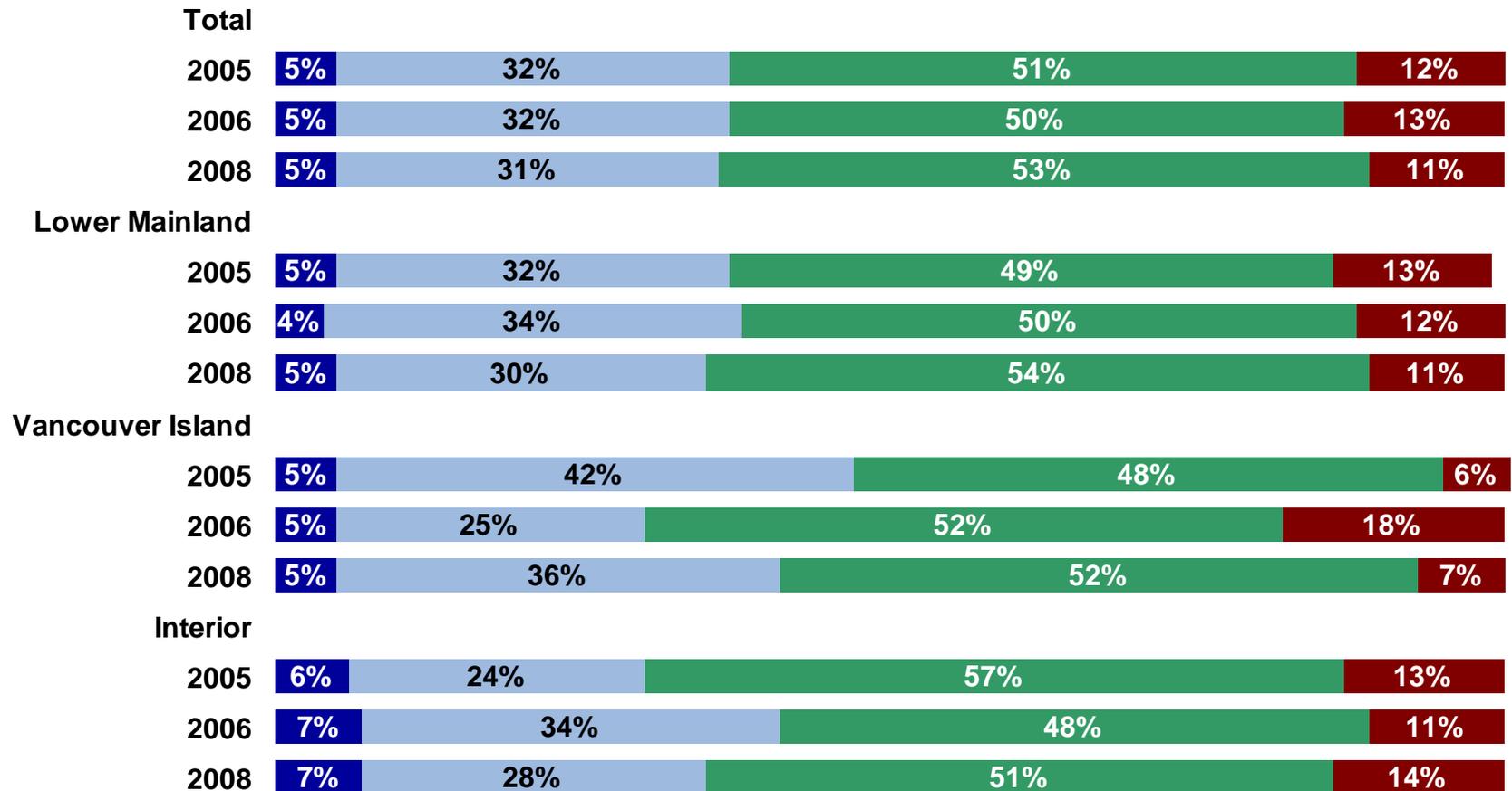


Base: All respondents (n=763 in 2005 / n=745 in 2006, n=730 in 2008)

State of Legal Aid Services in BC

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

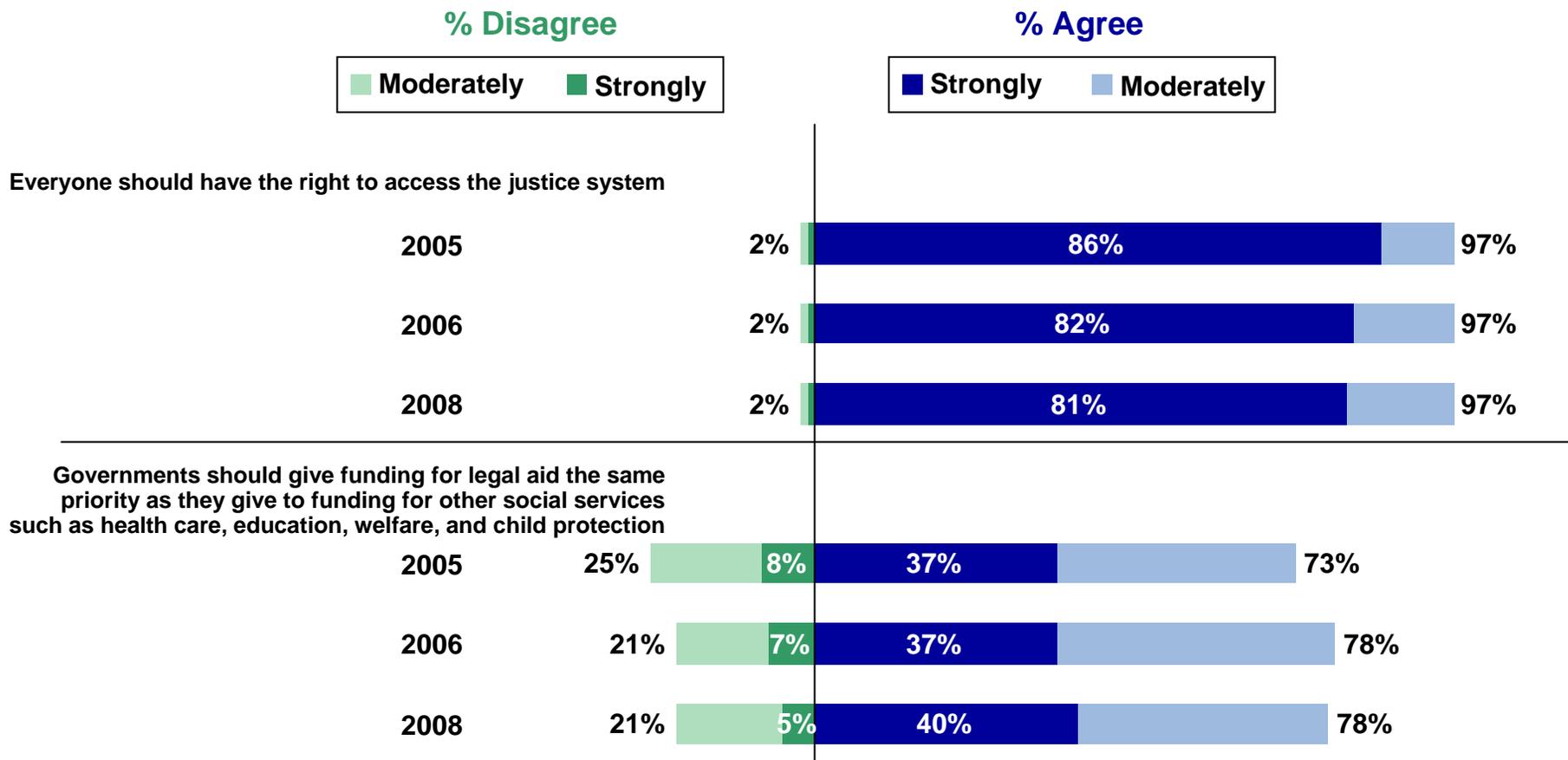
■ More than adequately funded
 ■ Adequately funded
 ■ Not adequately funded
 ■ Don't know



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

Public Positions on the Justice System and Legal Aid

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



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

Suggested Improvements for Legal Aid Services

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

	2008 (n=730) %
Improved funding	25
Improved access/availability	19
More advertising/promotion/public awareness	12
More information on how to obtain legal aid	7
More lawyers available	6
Better guidelines as to who should qualify for legal aid	5
Make the system more efficient (legal/judicial/courts)	3
More qualified legal representation	1
Other	8
None/no improvement necessary	6
Don't know/not stated	32