



Voice of Consumer Survey

A Voice of the Consumer (VOC) survey was conducted online to solicit feedback on legal accessibility to the general public. The Ohio Legal Help Steering Committee believed that capturing a consumer/constituent point of view was necessary to successfully address the justice gap in civil legal services. 800 submissions were received and analyzed, representing 75 out of the 88 Ohio counties.

Key Findings

Results supported the need for low-cost, online legal information and referrals, including the urgent need to better inform Ohioans about legal and court processes in a simplified, direct manner, as costs and confusion about the legal system were widely reported by Ohioans as the largest access hurdles to resolution of their legal issues.

"Dealing with the confusing rules of the legal system and courts causes significant, often debilitating, anxiety."

68%

see the need for a portal that provides relevant legal information & tools

Highest Areas of Civil Legal Need



Family & Domestic Relations



Consumer & Debt



Housing

61% of Ohioans taking the survey saw a need for more legal education, stating that legal education would help them and their families better understand and thereby better navigate legal challenges.

65% of Ohioans taking the survey indicated that they would pay some modest amount to obtain limited scope representation, with 35% indicating that they could not afford any amount.

Executive Summary

- Of the 800 respondents, **58% had used the Internet to search for legal help**
- **Costs and confusion** about the legal system were **by far the biggest access hurdles**
- Certain groups in particular perceived themselves as being highly susceptible to these legal barriers:
 - Ohioans with a family income of \$30k/year or lower
 - Urban residents
 - Ohioans with less than a bachelor's degree
- **Support for a legal access portal was strong (68%)**
- **Target strategies to support portal success/adoption:**
 - **Directness and simplicity** – eliminating *“the use of legal mumbo jumbo.”*
 - **Cost-savings** – (ex. 35% could not afford any limited scope representation) giving users valuable, contextualized information
 - **Security protection** – moderate hesitancy existed for portal concepts, and respondents desired to see a reputable, trustworthy website

Qualtrics leveraged for survey responses

Leveraging
State Partners

Fielded through:

- Distribution through Legal Aid Societies
- Corporation for Appalachian Development

5%



Qualtrics
Surveys

Respondent requirements:

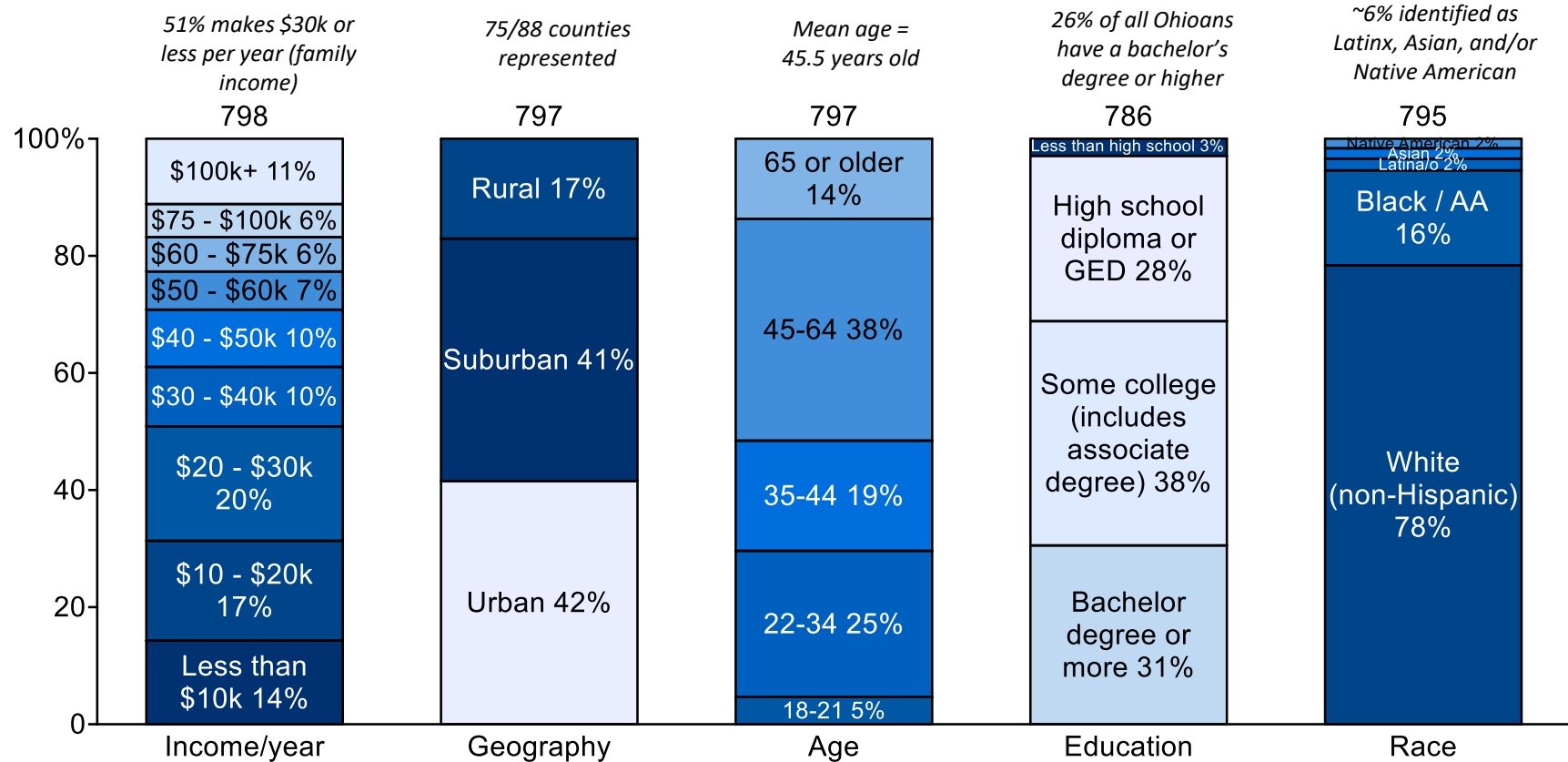
- At least 50% making \$30k/year or less
- At least 15% self-classified rural respondents, 40% minimum urban

Fielded through:

- Preexisting, Qualtrics-specific survey pool
- Conventional advertising techniques (e.g. Facebook, online shopping)

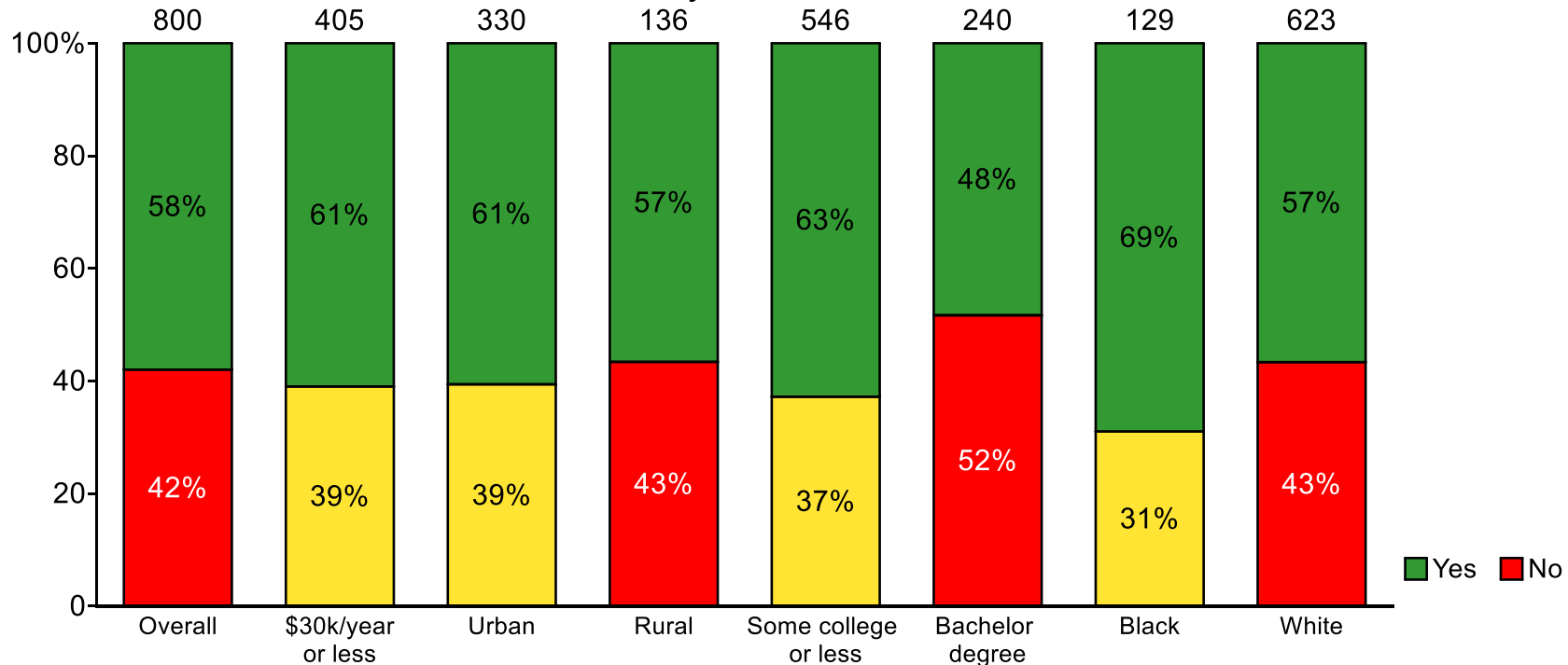
95%

Demographics mostly mirror OH population



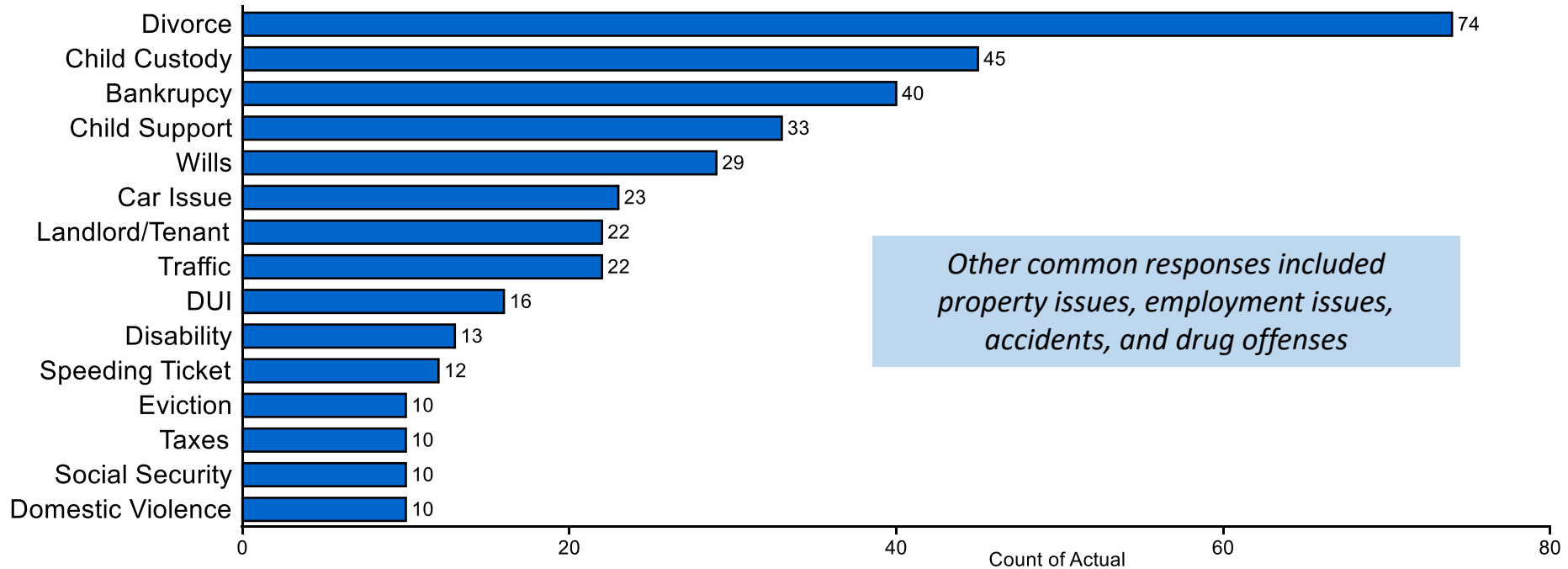
A majority of demographic groups have searched for legal help

"Have you ever used the Internet to look for help about a legal problem, either for yourself or for someone else?"



Top legal searches predictively dealt with family, consumer, traffic, and housing

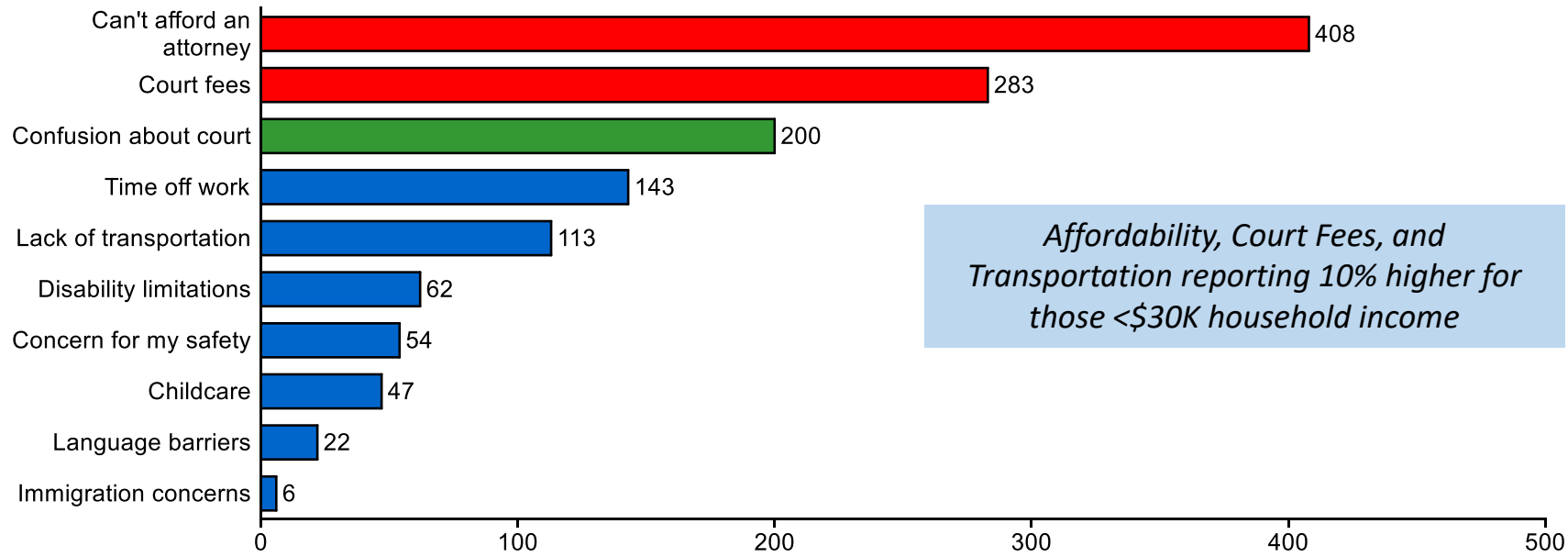
*[If yes to having searched for legal problem]
“What kind of legal problem(s) was it? Write up to three responses.”*



Costs and confusion dominate legal access hurdles

"Have you experienced any of the following challenges when dealing with a legal problem, either for yourself or for someone else? Select all that apply."

N = 798



Costs were overwhelmingly cited as the most common legal challenge

“I believe **the legal system is a money game**. If you have money, you can buy your way out of legal issues. If you don't, you suffer.”

“The legal system favors large corporations who can afford expensive lawyers.”

“When looking for legal help, **you have to pay for something even for simple questions** answered.”

“**Court fees are outrageous.**”

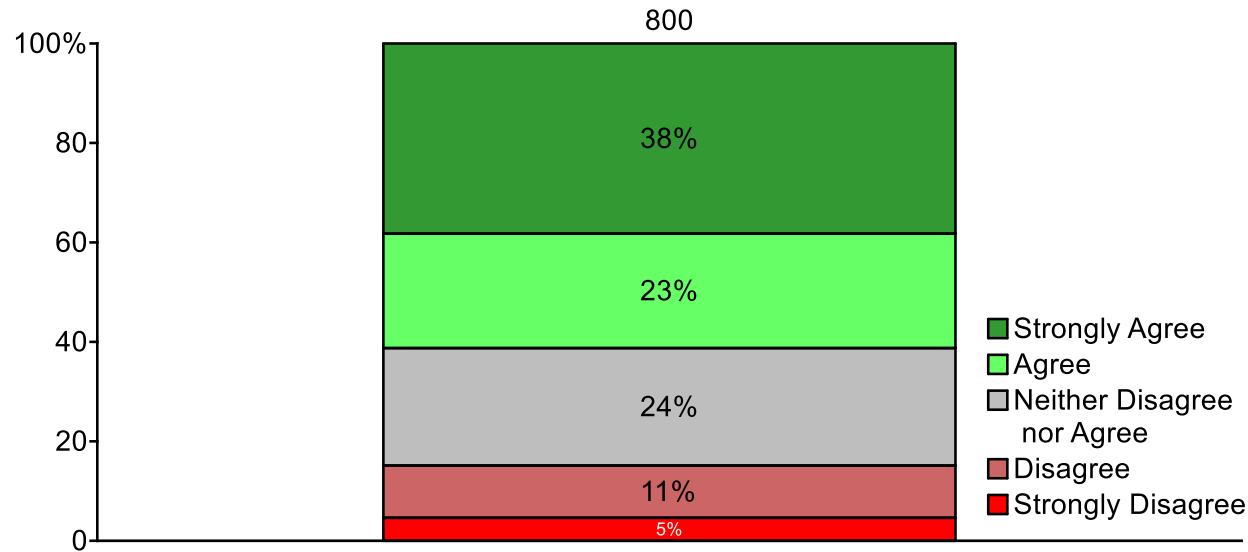
“We filed bankruptcy. The only challenge we really had was finding the money to pay for the attorney. Especially since we were broke.”

“You **have to pay exorbitant amounts of money**, and even getting to be heard in court takes longer sometimes than just riding out the problem naturally.”

“Trying to find a lawyer that would not charge hour fees just to find out they could not help.”

61% saw a need for more legal education

"It would help my family to have a better understanding of the legal system and how the court works."

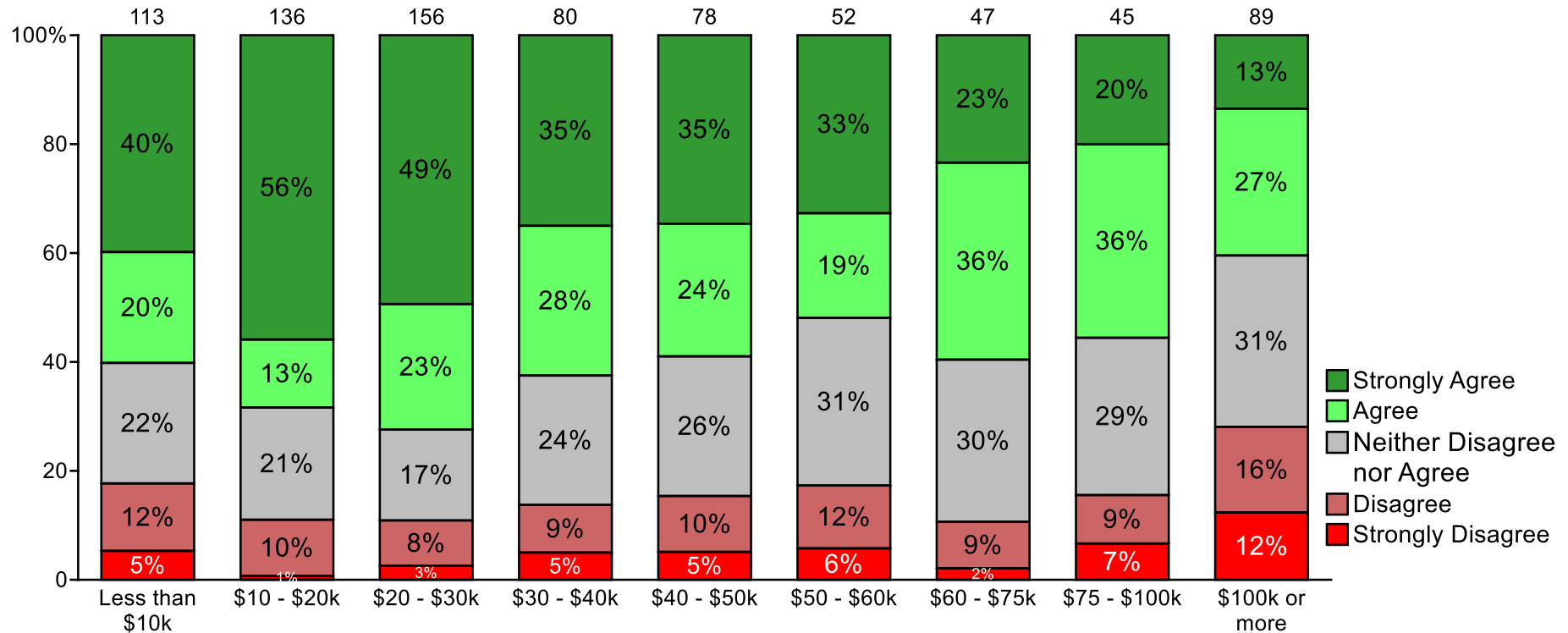


"It's just so complicated. It's hard to even know where to start, let alone find what your specific needs are. I think they do that on purpose."

"I need lots of help to navigate through [legal challenges]."

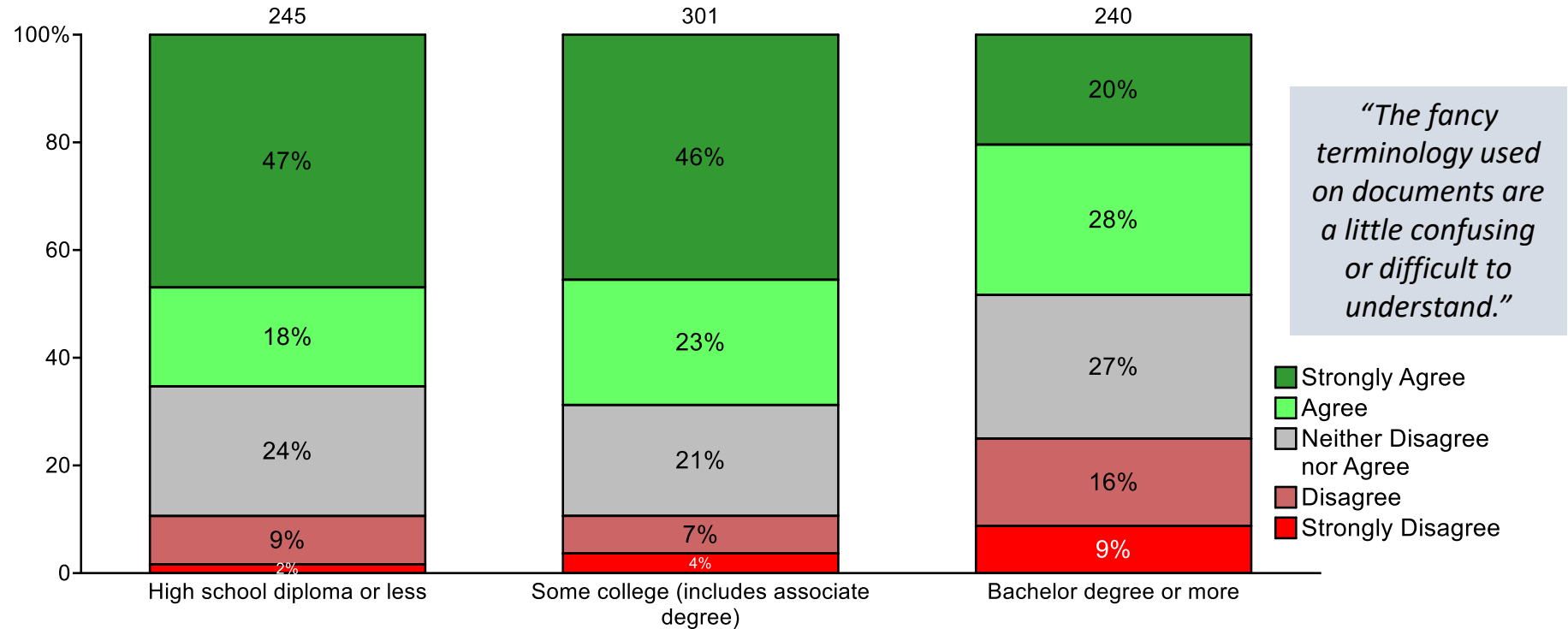
With lower income again signaling more support for increased legal education

"It would help my family to have a better understanding of the legal system and how the court works."



And those with less education also desiring more legal education

"It would help my family to have a better understanding of the legal system and how the court works."



Confusion on the legal system's complexity was widespread

“Dealing with the **confusing rules of the legal system and courts cause significant, often debilitating, anxiety.**”

“I couldn't understand the legal stuff on the website, ended up going to a lawyer through my husbands union.”

“**I don't understand legal talk.**”

“It was **hard to understand how to plead** when I received my driving ticket. It confused me why I had to plead the way I did to make the charges and fee less.”

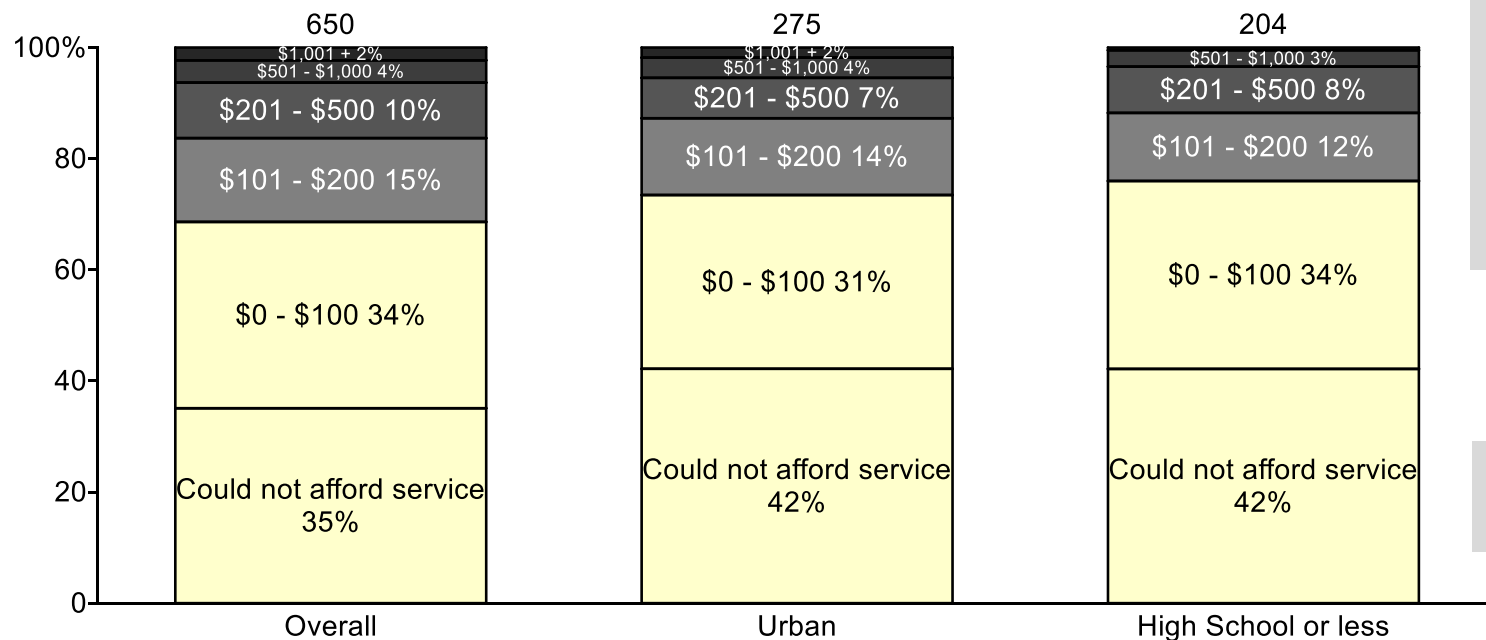
“**Knowing how to even start!** Afraid of my lack of knowledge. To trust myself to make any choices or decisions needed to move forward in what to do next...”

“The **number one problem is not understanding it.** There are a lot of questions, but when reading things or trying to research things I do not understand them.”

“**The way they speak isn't even English!** The whole system seems to be designed to confuse lay people.”

Price sensitivity for limited scope representation

"Many people can't afford a lawyer to take their entire case. What is the most that you would pay to talk to a lawyer for help only about how to represent yourself?"

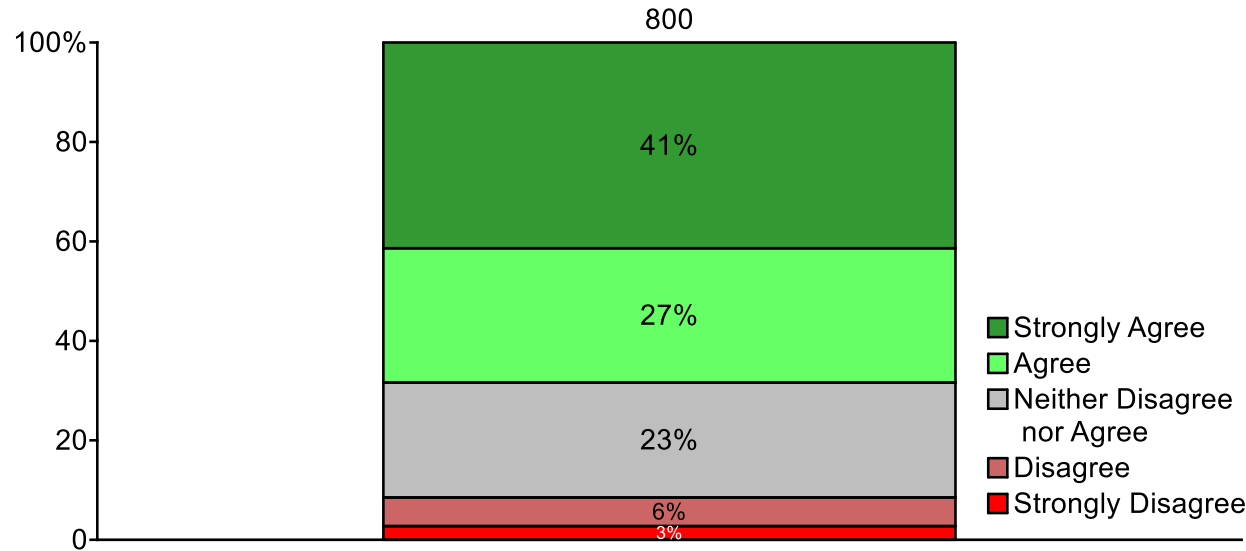


"[It's a challenge] to find someone knowledgeable enough to answer a single obscure legal question, but nothing that merits a retainer or a \$300 fee."

"I couldn't afford the hourly rate of it all."

68% see the need for a portal that provides relevant information and tools

“There is a need for a website in Ohio with useful information and tools about legal problems.”

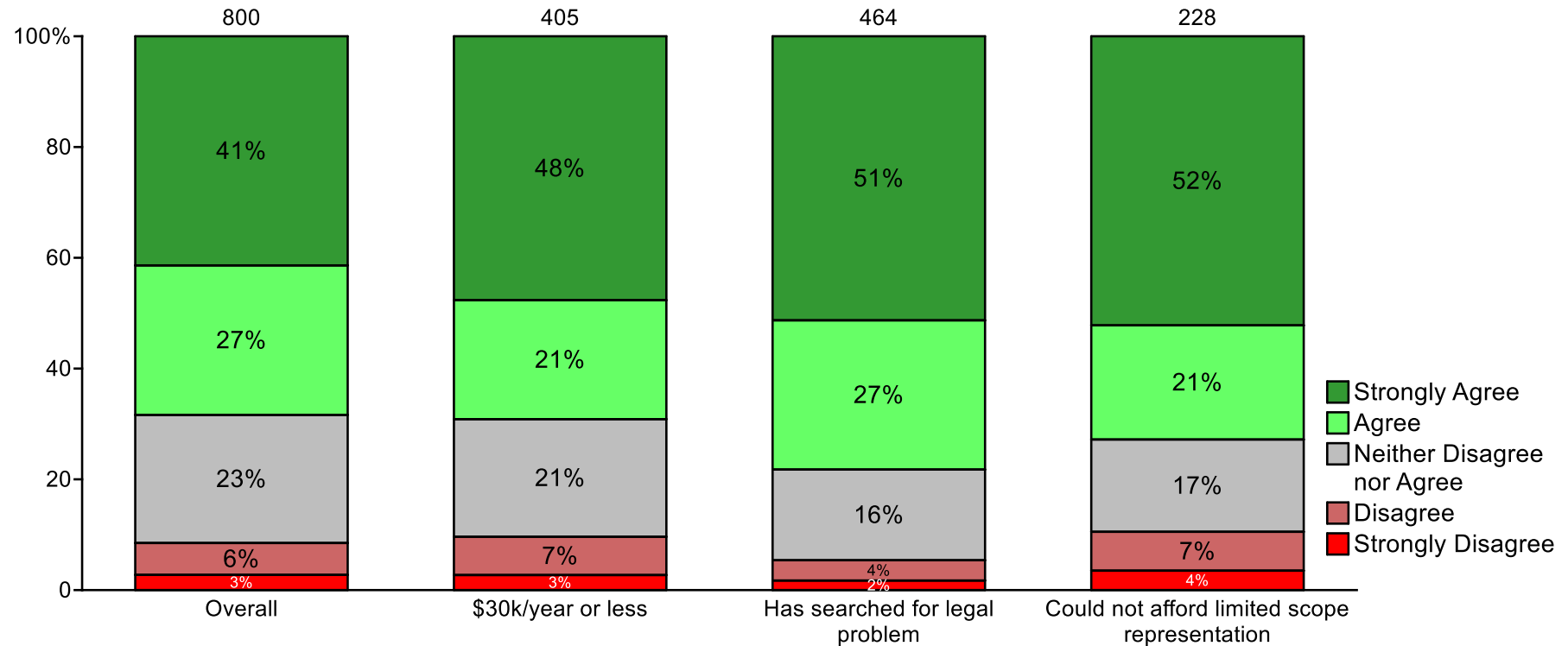


60%+ support seen across all demographic groups, including those with bachelor degrees and those making over \$100k/year

*Example [For Illinois Legal Aid Online]: In 2015 alone, there were **3 million visitors to the website.***

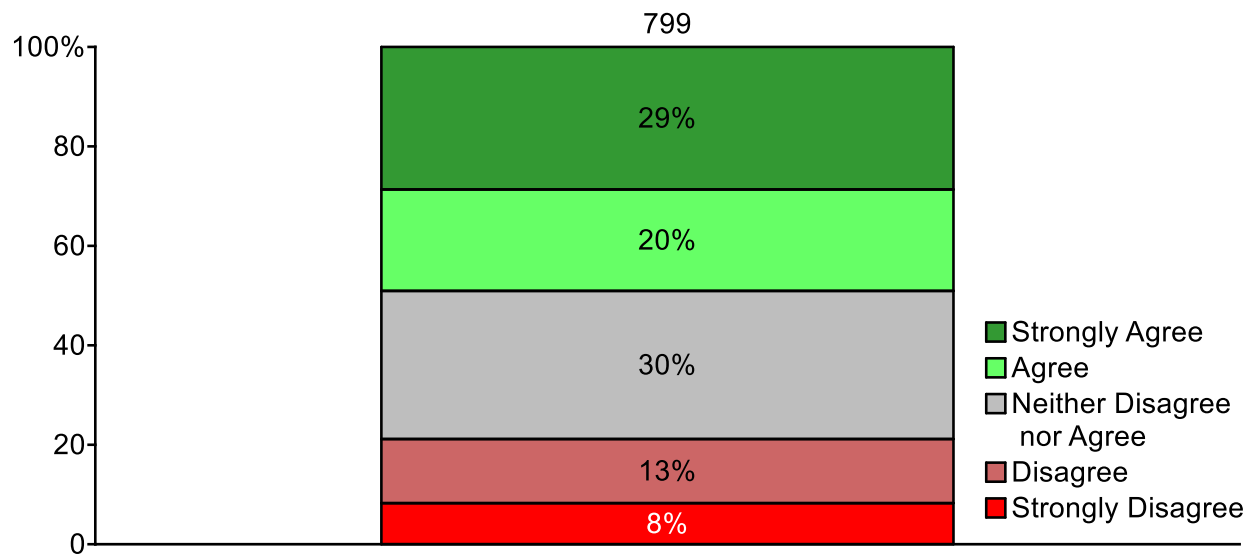
Certain groups perceived this need with more intensity

"There is a need for a website in Ohio with useful information and tools about legal problems."



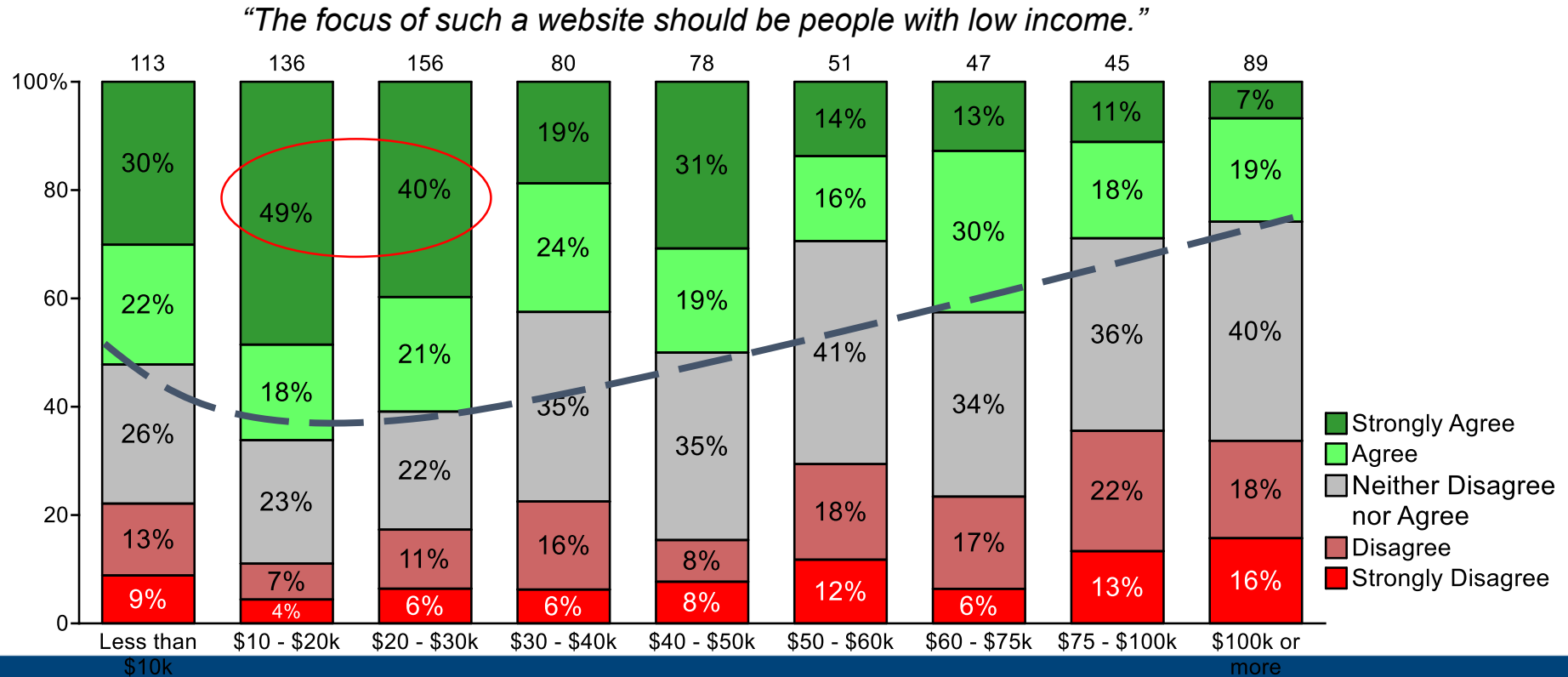
Close to half believe the portal should mostly target low-income people

"The focus of such a website should be people with low income."



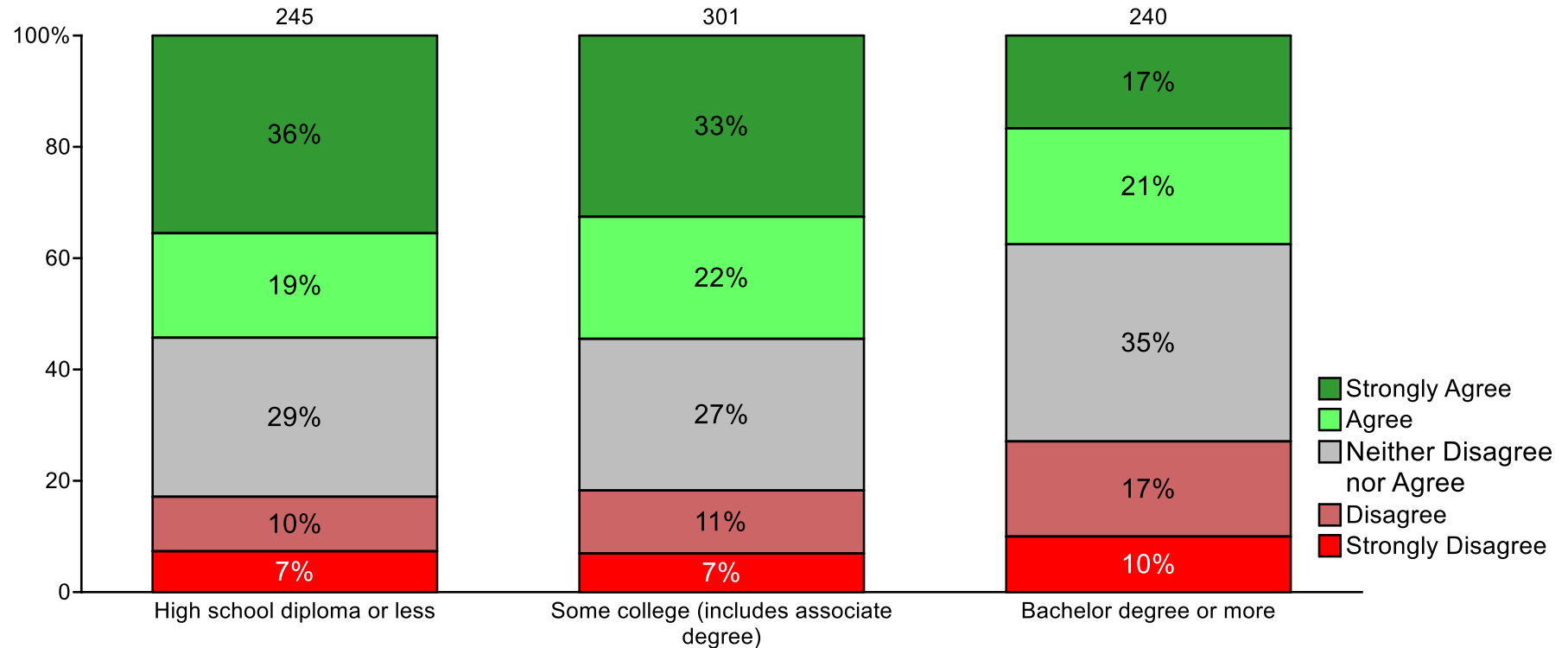
"86% of the civil legal problems reported by low-income Americans in the past year received inadequate or no legal help."
-LSC 2017 Justice Gap Study

Low-income people believed this more strongly



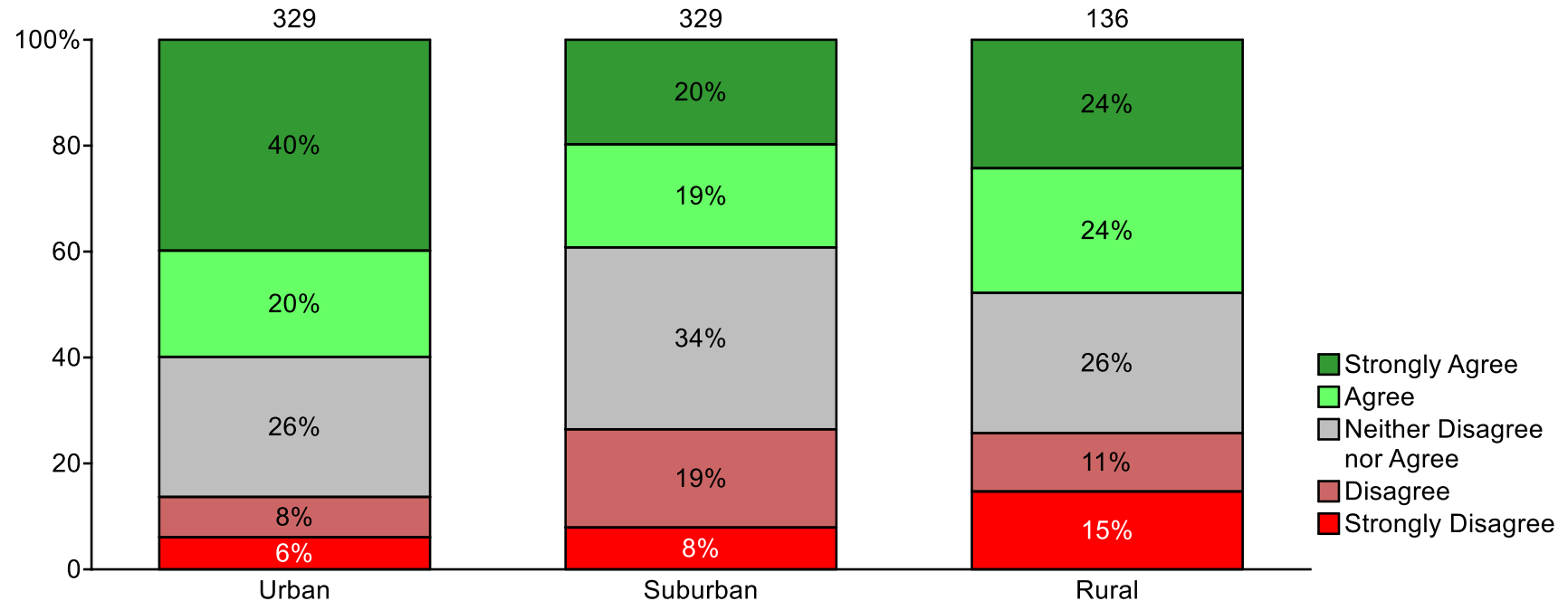
In addition to those with less education...

"The focus of such a website should be people with low income."



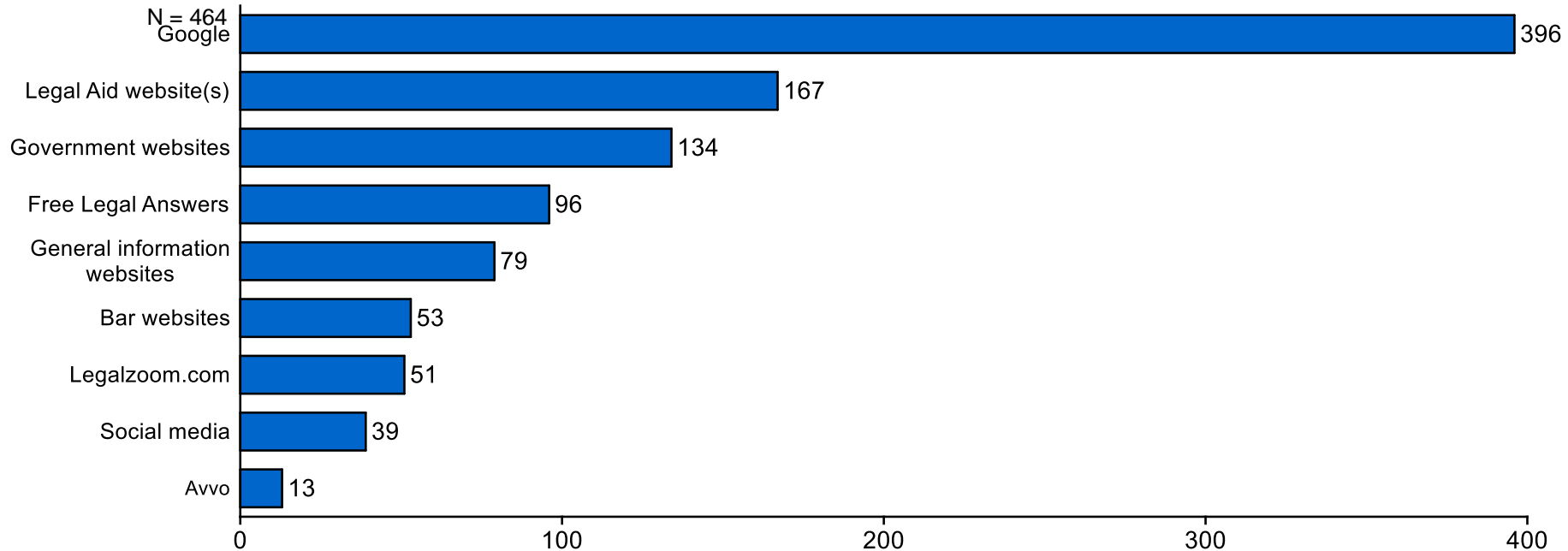
Urban respondents also favored a low-income focus as well

"The focus of such a website should be people with low income."



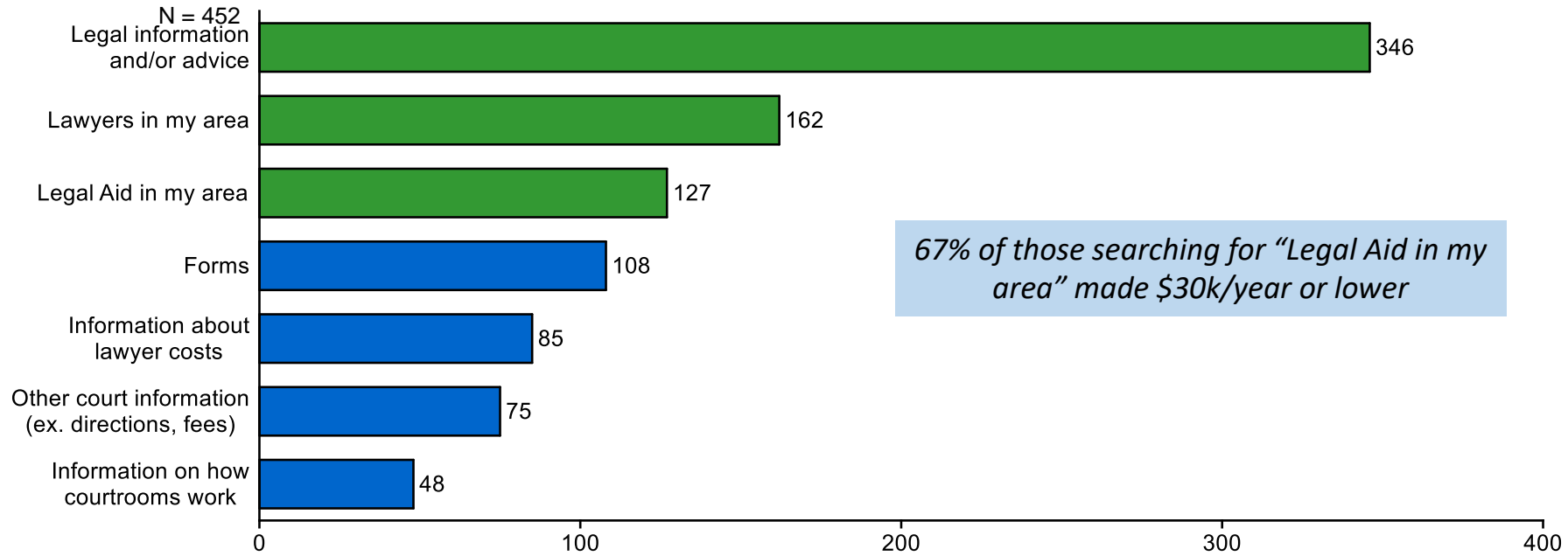
Google is the main legal entry point; result multiplicity can exacerbate confusion

*[If yes to having searched for legal problem]
“Where did you search for help on the Internet? Select all that apply.”*



Lawyer availability and legal information were most sought after

[If yes to having searched for legal problem] “What did you search for on the Internet? Select all that apply.”



Clear consensus: an effective portal would be a major step in reducing these access gaps

“Such a website, especially if for a nominal fee, [where] we could discuss issues with a lawyer, would be a benefit to society. I'm for it.”

“When getting divorced, I **couldn't afford an attorney so I tried to use a kit found at Office Max.**

Several years after a felony conviction, I cannot find information or assistance to have my personal record expunged.”

“It can be ambiguous and hard for the individual to understand. It seems like **the law system is not made for the small person.**”

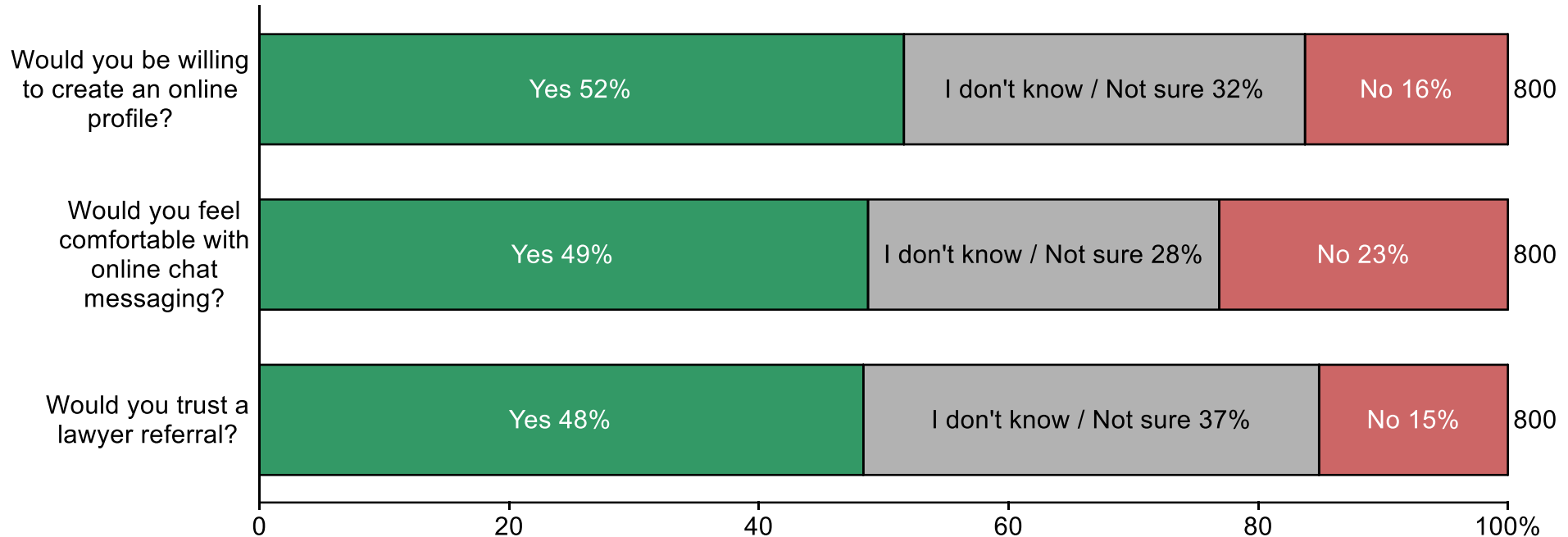
“They use **too many big words** + it's rigged against us.”

“I want a website that is written by lawyers...and verified that information is 100% correct. I've seen too much contradictory information online. Also, use simpler language and shorter explanations. Hard to understand and so overwhelming.”

“**Because of my low income**, and never having used a lawyer, **I didn't know what to expect** when going before the court.”

“The biggest issue aside from money was **the lack of knowledge of my own rights**. I have had...pro bono attorneys who weren't helpful in showing me my rights and how to address things in a more informed manner.”

Furthermore, there is general acceptance for portal concepts (with some ambiguity)



Transparency and a solid reputation will be key to earning user trust

"If the website referred you to a lawyer, would you trust the referral?"

Answer: "I don't know/ Not sure (optional- please explain why)"

"Because most referrals usually are because the lawyer has given them incentive to refer them."

"If just one I would suspect this was an ad but if several in area I would consider"

"Depends on the source of the website and its funding."

"It depends on the pool from which they chose and transparency in selection process of lawyers/offices to refer to."

"I would probably look into this **person's ratings** etc. first if available."

"Want to make sure the person is not biased. Has a good work reputation."

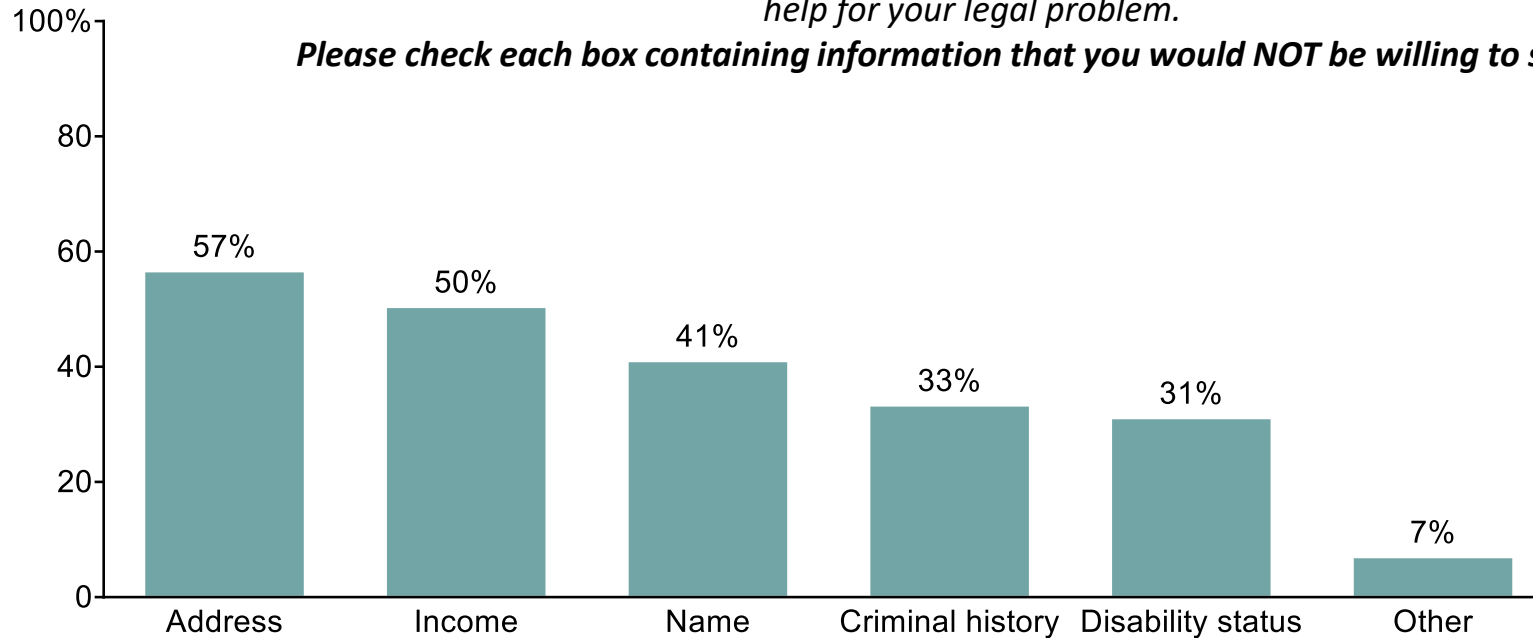
"I would want to know how the website goes about making its decisions on referrals."

"Only if the lawyer had been previously vetted and the website only had lawyers who they trusted."

Privacy concerns were a potential barrier

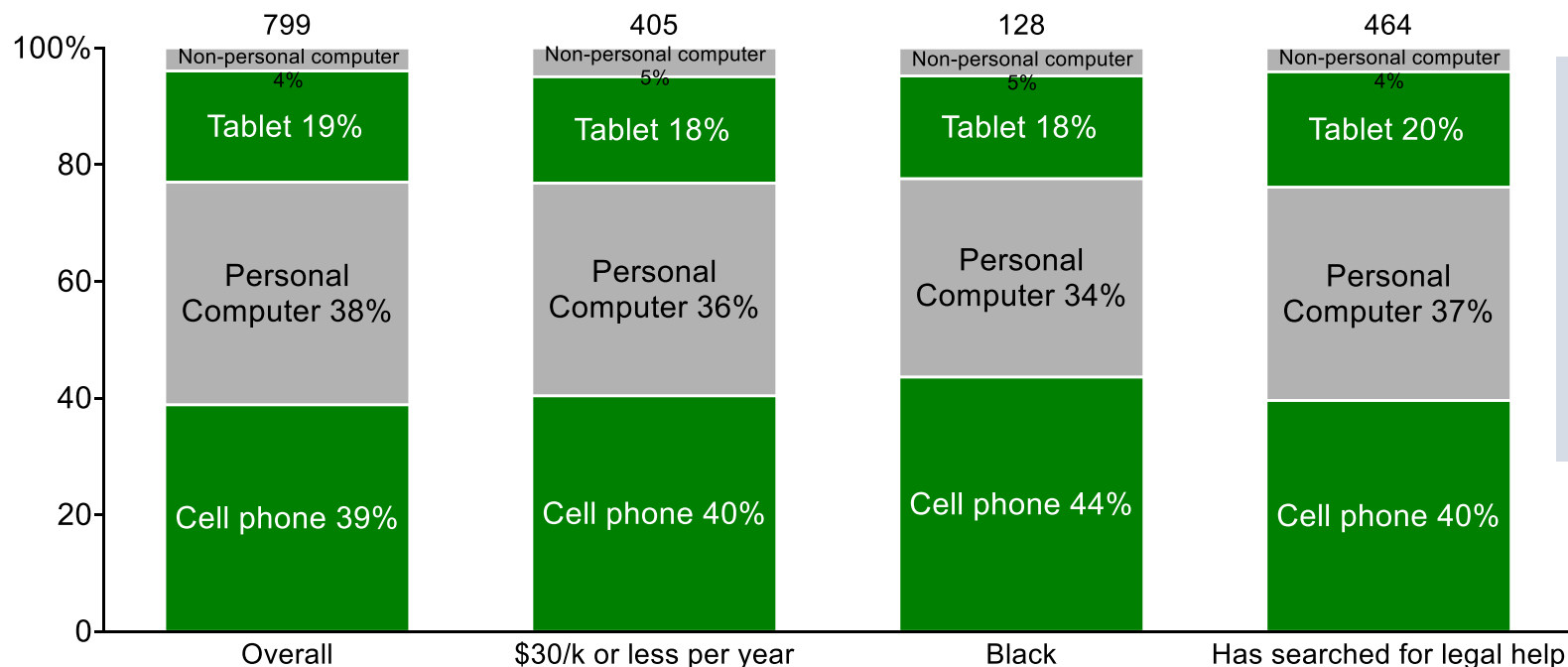
“If a legal resource website collected additional information from you, it could potentially provide more help for your legal problem.

Please check each box containing information that you would NOT be willing to share?”



And full mobile capabilities will also be essential to ensuring a broad reach

“How do you usually get on the internet?”



Example [For Illinois Legal Aid Online]: Nearly half of their 2015 traffic came through mobile devices, and that percentage is only expected to increase

Central lessons to take from the VOC survey

- Top barriers: legal costs, confusion about the legal system, and transportation
- Strong support for portal, especially among groups in need of the most aid
- Target principles for the portal according to respondents:
 - Digestible to the general public
 - Reputable (e.g. with lawyer referrals, third-party sourcing)
 - Secure and accessible platform (including confidentiality standards)

