

The State
of
**State
Courts**

★
2015
★

★
POLL
★

NCSC
National Center for State Courts

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METHODOLOGY



WHAT: NCSC nationwide telephone survey

WHO: Conducted by GBA Strategies

WHEN: October 26–29, 2015

POLLED: 1,000+ Registered Voters (plus African American oversample)

STATS: MOE +/- 3.1% 19 times out of 20

KEY FINDINGS



Support for the courts is stronger than in the heart of the recession, but shows signs of softening



Concerns about inefficiency and unfairness are deep-seated and real



Such concerns may be making the public enthusiastic about alternatives to traditional dispute resolution



African Americans express significantly less faith in the courts than the population as a whole

FIGURE #1

The public remains more optimistic about the work of the state courts than in 2012...

Q: “Do the following words or phrases describe the state courts very well, well, not very well or not well at all?”

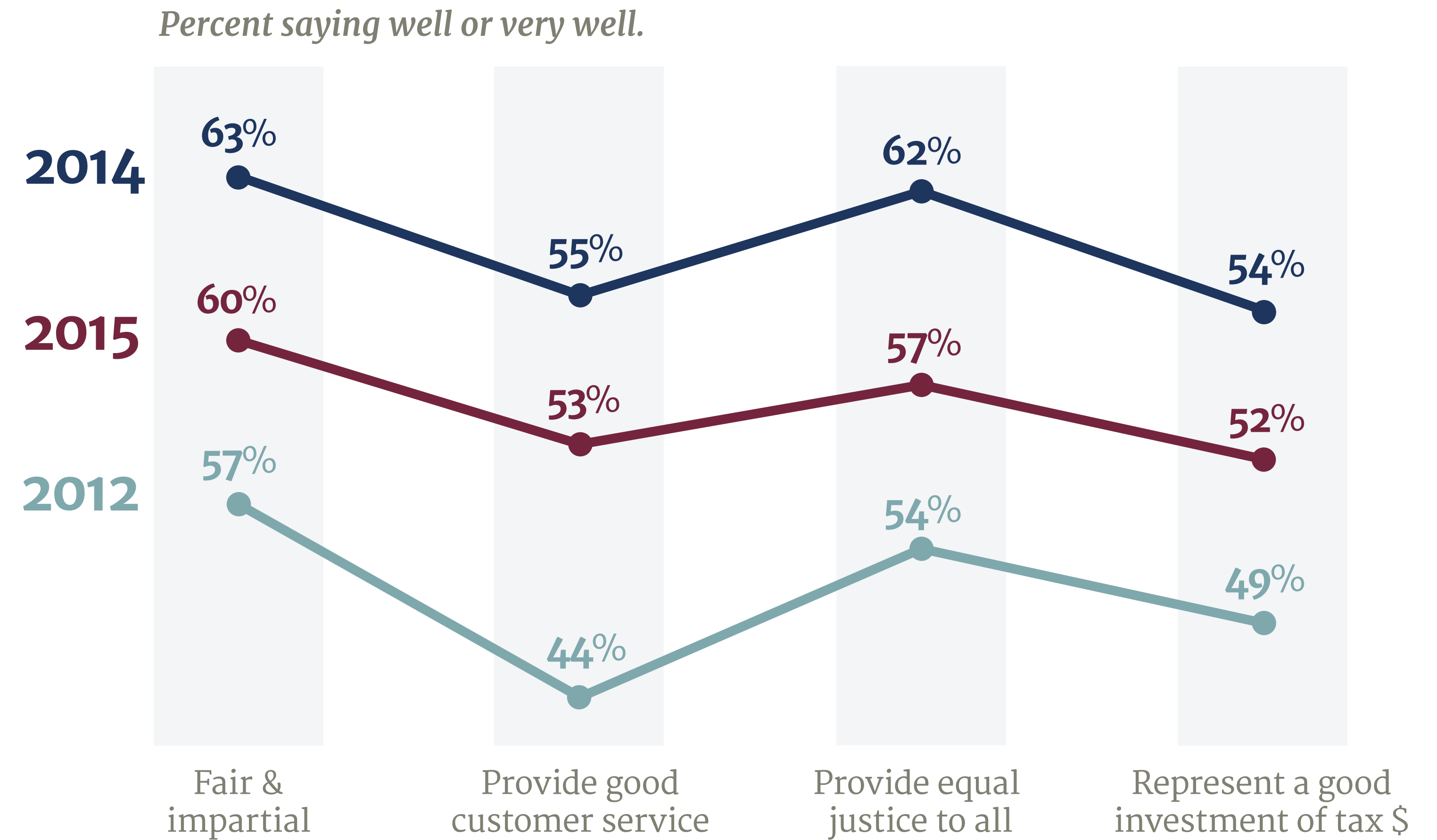
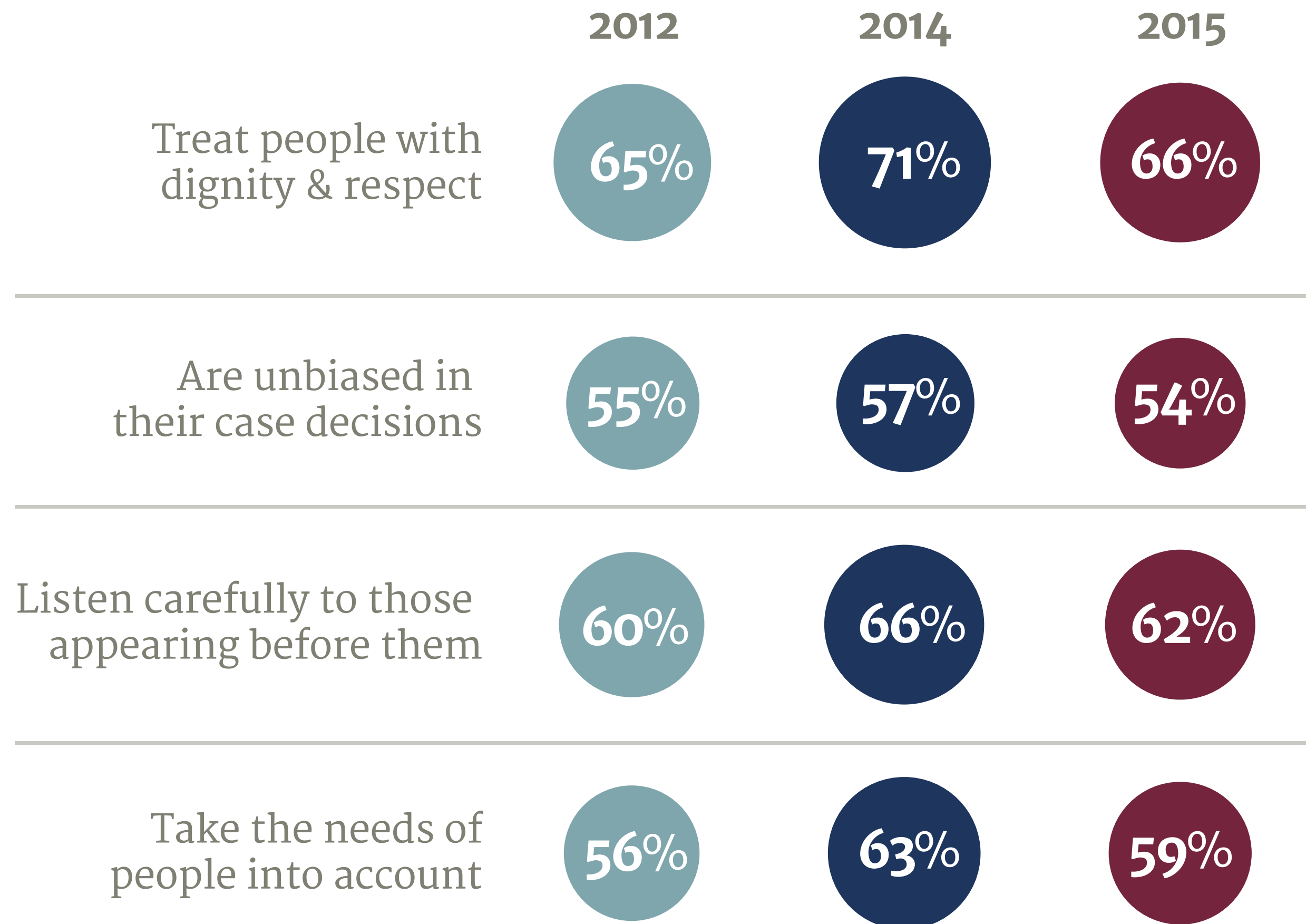


FIGURE #2

...But opinions have softened (slightly) in the last year.

Q: “Do you agree or disagree with the following statements about state courts?”



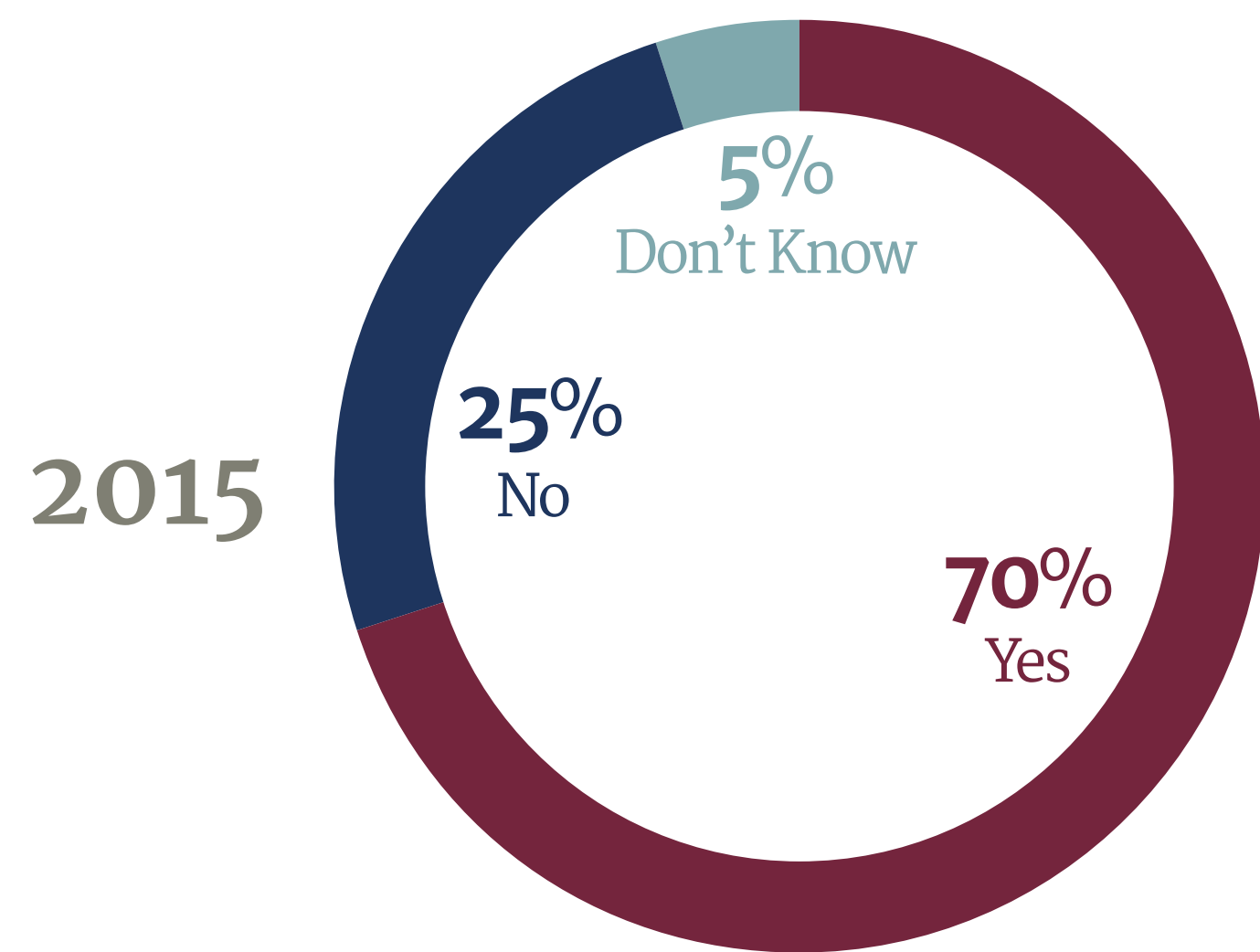
Percent saying well or very well.

FIGURE #3

Procedural fairness is seen as a strength of the court system...

...and job performance numbers are up.

Q: “Regardless of the outcome, were you satisfied with the fairness of the process in your dealings with the court system?”



(N=842 who reported they had been party to a family matter; or had been to court for a traffic or parking ticket; or had been involved in any way in a criminal case; or had filed a case, or had had one filed against them)

Q: “How would you rate the job being done by courts in (state)?”

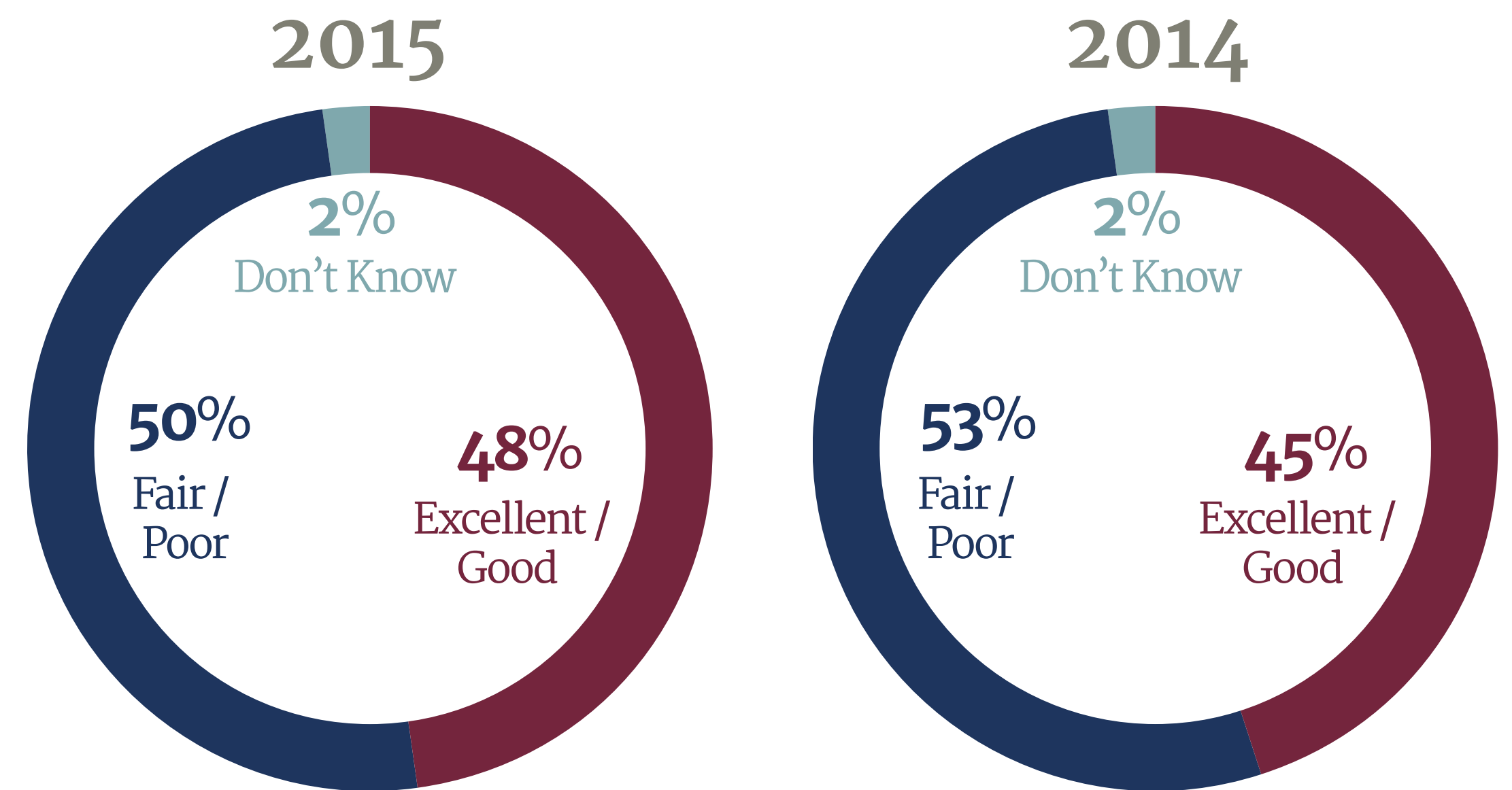


FIGURE #4

Key findings from 2014 were replicated in the 2015 survey.



Courts remain the most trusted branch of government



Respondents who reported direct contact with the courts give lower ratings on customer service and job performance



Courts are not seen as doing enough with technology to improve customer service



Concerns persist about the influence of politics and personal beliefs in case decision making

FIGURE #5

Beliefs in unequal justice are deep-seated and widespread.

Q: “Tell me whether you believe that group is treated the same as other groups by the (court/justice) system, or whether you believe they are treated differently than others by the (court/justice) system.”

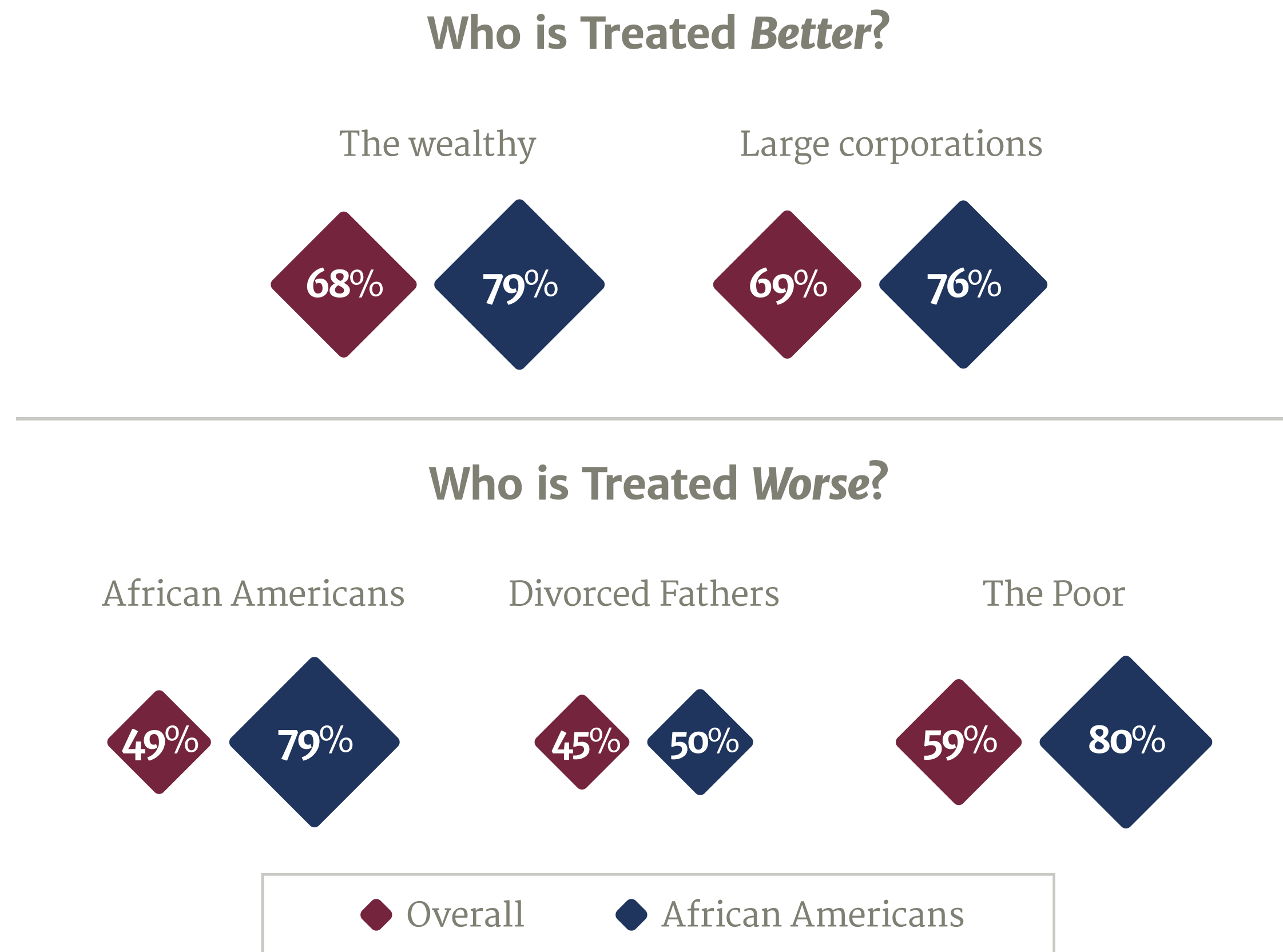


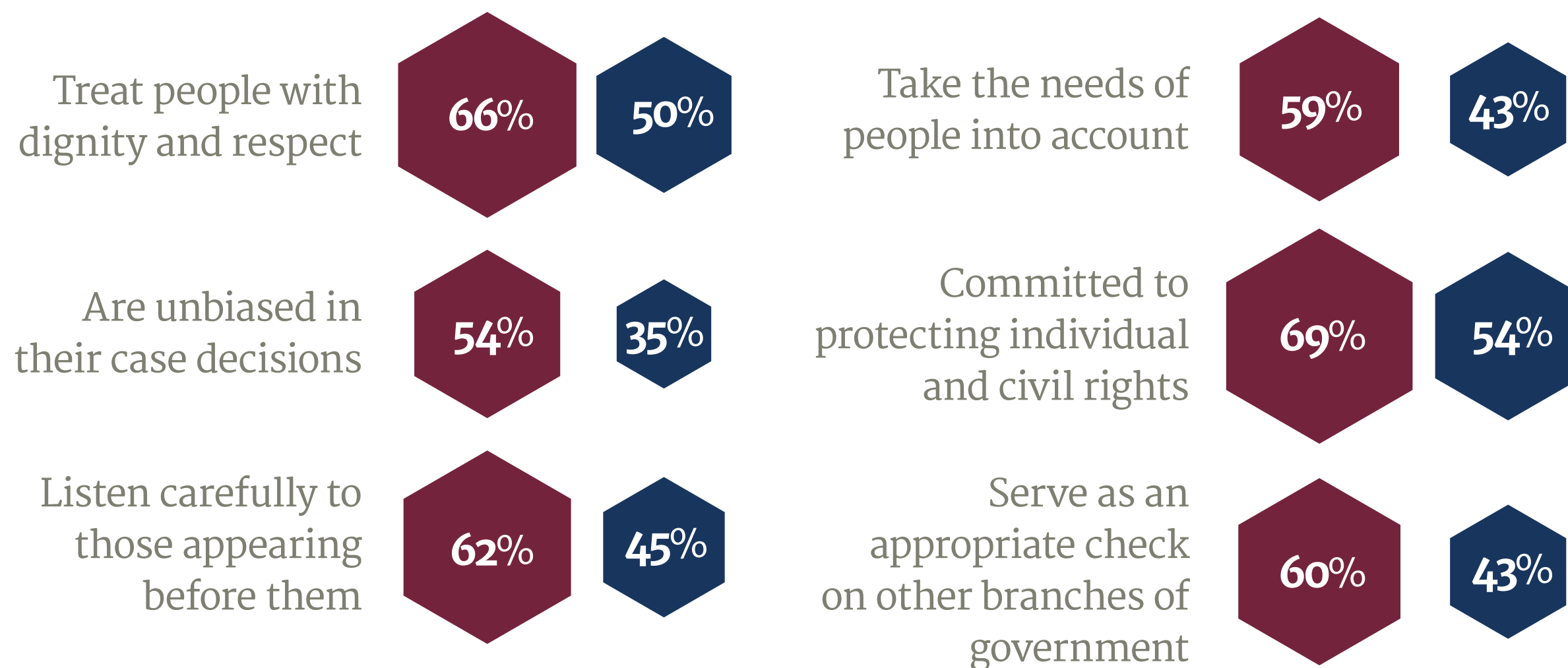
FIGURE #6

*Percent saying agree or strongly agree.
 **Percent saying well or very well.

Race impacts perceptions of fairness...

...and less than a third of African Americans believe courts provide equal justice.

Q: “Do you agree or disagree with the following statements about state courts?”*



Q: “How well does each of the following describe state courts?”**



Overall African Americans

FIGURE #7

Not surprisingly, Americans express a personal preference to avoid taking their disputes to court.

Q:
“Would you prefer to use the (STATE) court system or alternative dispute resolution?”



FIGURE #8

Even after adding more information, voters gravitate to ADR.

Q: “Which statement comes closer to your own view?”

Statement 1

“The court system is the best way to resolve disputes, because it protects individual rights and is accountable to the rule of law.”

Statement 2

“Alternative ways to resolve disputes, like mediation, are faster, cheaper, and more responsive to the needs of the people they serve than the court system.”

Don't Know

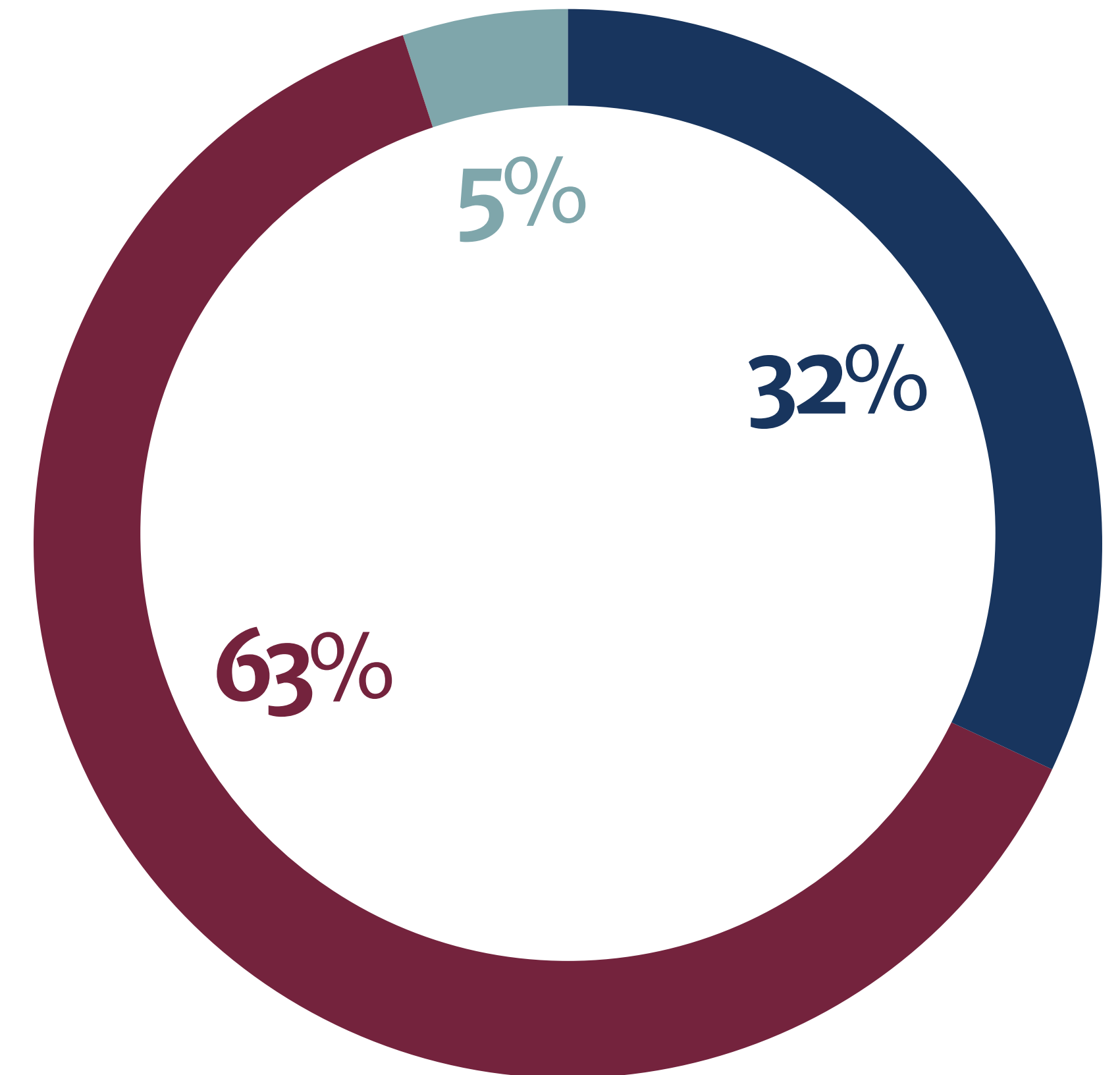


FIGURE #9

The public is not happy with customer service, but will give the courts a chance to improve before calling for an overhaul.

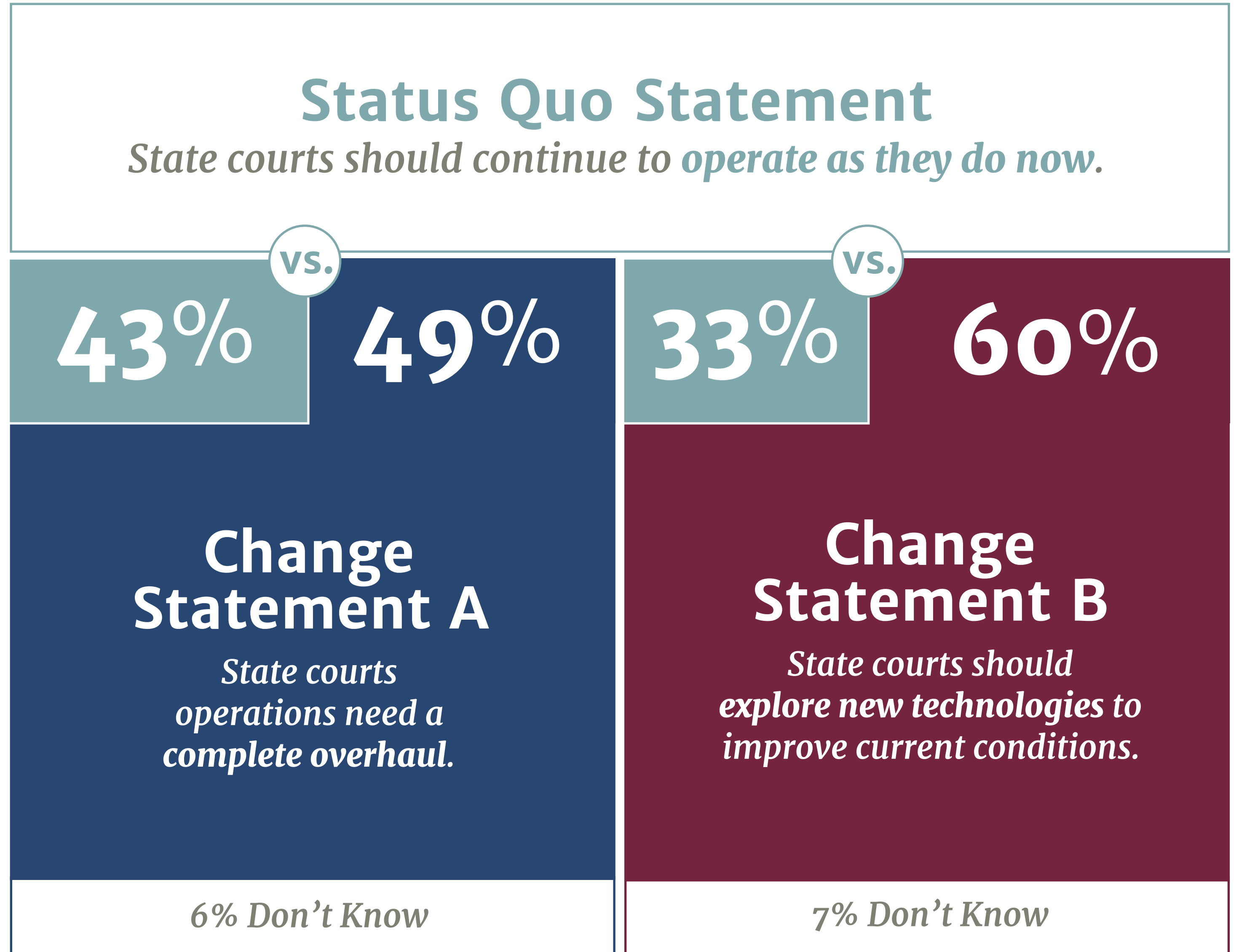


FIGURE #10

First steps:
Improve self-help options.

Self Service Society

“If at all possible, I would prefer to handle a problem myself rather than have a lawyer represent me.”



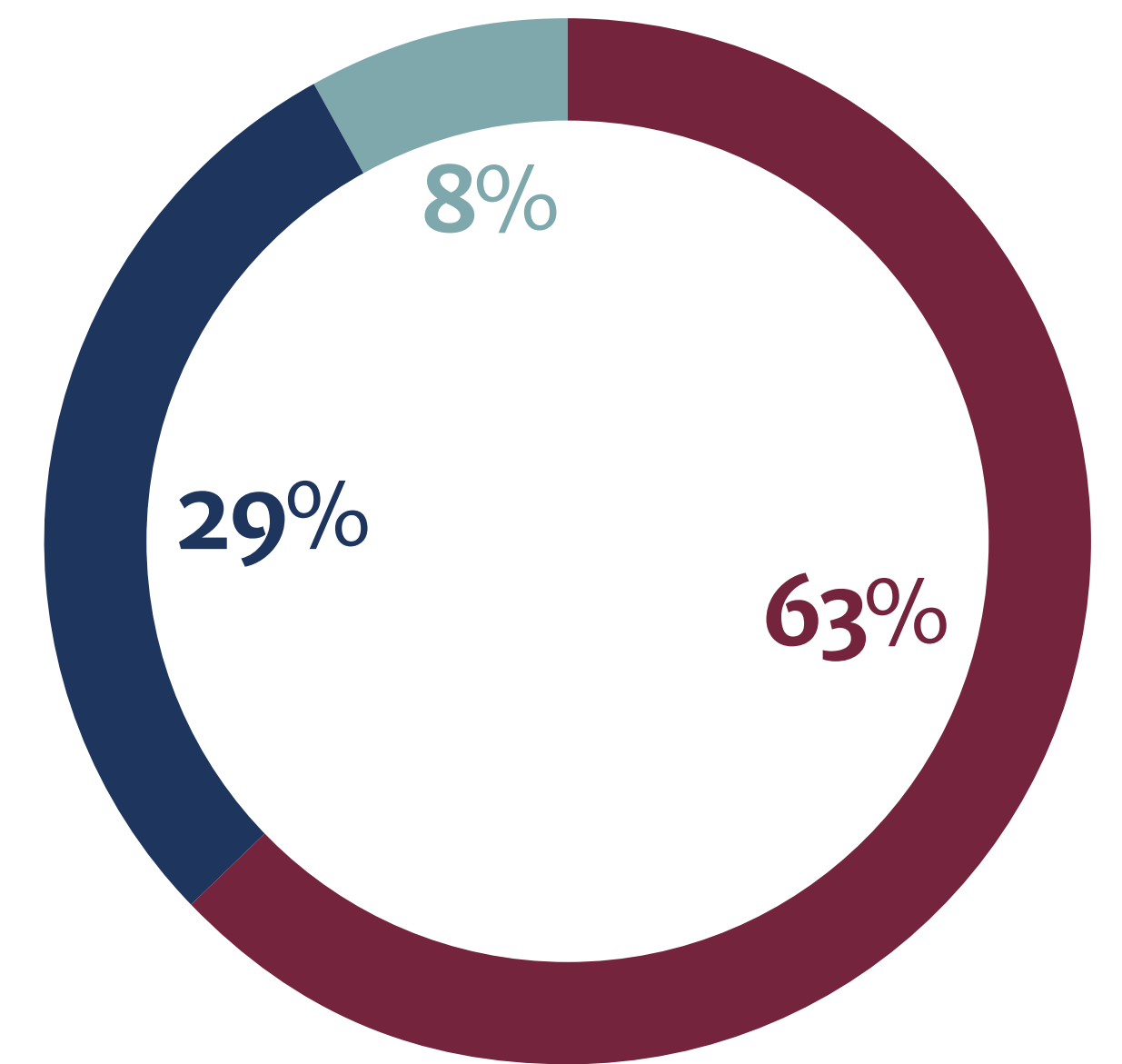
Statement 1

*“(State) courts are **effectively providing information and assistance** so that individuals can navigate the court system without hiring an attorney.”*

Statement 2

*“(State) courts **are not doing enough to empower regular people** to navigate the court system without an attorney.”*

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