

# Oath Review and Drafting Task Force

## Meeting Agenda

May 18, 2026 – 2:00 – 3:30 p.m.

In person: Washington State Bar Association  
1325 Fourth Ave., Suite 600, Seattle, WA 98101-2539

Or remotely via Zoom:

<https://wsba.zoom.us/j/87663604335?pwd=Y08adD1PbZqbavxHN8FbtYi8oDBF34.1>

Meeting ID: 876 6360 4335

Passcode: 121684

1. Call to Order & Opening Ceremonies
2. Reading and Approval of [Minutes of March 23, 2026 Meeting](#)
3. Report: Meeting Materials
  - [The Promise of Civility in Our Profession](#), (Page 27) Justice Steven González
  - [The Oath's Impact: Attorney's Oath Continue to Have Influence Centuries After Original Drafts](#), Oregon State Bar, April 2026 (Pages 22-27), Melody Finnemore
  - [Upon Taking the Oath: More Than Magic Words](#), Oregon State Bar, November 2014, Tom Kranovich
  - Agenda for the ABA National Conference on Professional Responsibility presentation: [The Past, Present, and Future of the Oath of Attorney: Is It Time for a Change?](#) (Presenters: Professor Lauren Bartlett, Rajeev Majumdar, and Doug Ende) – *scroll to May 28, 2026, 10:50 a.m. Breakout #2 for details.*
4. Guest Speaker, Robert Gottfried, "[The Anatomy of Our Oath to Support the US Constitution](#)"
5. Report on Interim Presentation to Board of Governors
6. Report and Discussion: Data Analyst Survey Results:
  - [Attorney Oath Survey Results](#)
  - [LLLT Oath Survey Results](#)
7. Reports from subcommittees:
  - a. Subcommittee on Revision of Existing Oath Provisions: [Memo](#)
  - b. Subcommittee on Potential New Oath Provisions: [Ideas to Committee](#)
8. Discussion of Next Steps
9. Open Forum
10. Announcements
11. Adjourn

## OATH REVIEW AND DRAFTING TASK FORCE

### MEETING MINUTES

March 23, 2026

The meeting was held in person and remotely via Zoom.

Members present were Rajeev Majumdar (Chair), Angela Balconi, Hunter Abell, Kyle Sciuchetti, Hon. James Smith, Monte Mills, and Roger Wynne. Also present were Matthew Dresden (WSBA Board of Governors liaison), David Ward (Principal Legal Analyst, AOC), Sergio Flores (Access to Justice Board Member), Joshua Goodwin (JD Candidate University of Washington School of Law), Doug Ende (WSBA Chief Disciplinary Counsel), and Rachel Agent (WSBA Disciplinary Program and Systems Manager).

The Chair called the meeting to order at 2:00 p.m.

#### **1. Agenda Overview and Reading and Approval of Minutes of February 23, 2026 Meeting**

The Chair presented the meeting agenda. The minutes of the February 23, 2026 meeting were approved by unanimous consent.

#### **2. Report: Meeting Materials**

Chief Disciplinary Counsel Ende reviewed and commented on the meeting materials. Discussion ensued about the State Bar of California's requirement that licensees declare adherence to the oath as part of the annual licensing process.

#### **3. Report on Survey Final Results**

The Chair presented an overview of the survey results. Of note, 54% of attorneys were in favor of updating the oath, 75% of Limited License Legal Technicians were in favor of updating the oath, and 56% of Limited Practice Officers were in favor of updating the oath. Following a discussion, the Chair indicated that he will work with Sara Niegowski, WSBA Chief Communications and Outreach Officer, to obtain data analytics.

#### **4. Formation of Subcommittees**

Upon motion of the Chair approved by unanimous consent, the Task Force formed two subcommittees:

##### **Subcommittee on Revision of Existing Oath Provisions**

Roger Wynne, Subcommittee Chair

Courtney Hudak

Angie Balconi

##### **Subcommittee on Potential New Oath Provisions**

Hon. Rebecca Glasgow, Subcommittee Chair

Professor Monte Mills

Hon. James Smith

## **5. Discussion**

The Chair led a dialogue with the Task Force members and other present discussing whether the Task Force should recommend an oath re-attestation process as part of annual licensing. The Chair also noted there have been inquiries about whether already-licensed members would have to retake the oath if a new oath was adopted.

- There was an informal consensus that existing licensees would not be retroactively divested of their licensure. The oath has undergone many prior amendments, and licensees were not required to reattest.
- There were expressions of support for a process similar to The State Bar of California's, which requires licensees to reattest every year as part of license renewal. It was also noted that an annual checkbox attestation could devalue the oath.

## **6. Adjourn**

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 2:48 p.m.



©ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/PICCERELLA

## True Civility Requires More Than Being Polite

Justice Steven González, widely known for his commitment to access to justice, is highly regarded by his peers for his professionalism, reasonableness, and pro bono service. For this reason, Robert's Fund views him as an exceptional role model for civility in the profession and asked if he would write the first in the "Rallying the Role Models: The Promise of Civility in Our Profession" series of articles for *Bar News*.

BY JUSTICE STEVEN GONZÁLEZ

In an article for the Bar Association of San Francisco, Maria Yuen wrote that "one of the benefits of civility is the reduction of the cost of litigation for all parties involved." And I think she meant not just the financial cost, but different costs as well. She went on to say, "Another benefit of civility is that it makes our professional life more fulfilling when we can depend on courtesy, respect, and fairness from those we deal with."<sup>1</sup>

Courtesy, respect, and fairness only work if in the context of true civility. There is such a thing as false civility and I'll suggest to you that it is no better and sometimes even worse than open acrimony. We sometimes refer to false civility as passive-aggressive behavior or being manipulative. I make the distinction between true and false civility because I don't want to suggest that acting civilly means being obsequious, diffident, or a sycophant. I don't think any

of those things are civil. Further, I don't want to suggest that the civil advocate is anything less than a zealous advocate for his or her client, cause, or self.

Some attorneys think that being civil means being nice, which they believe runs counter to advocacy. They like to wrestle with opponents. While they acknowledge that there are lines that shouldn't be crossed in our profession, such as the use of bad words or physical punches, they don't want to be nice. I don't agree that being civil equals being nice. I think we can be direct and frank with each other. We can even be sarcastic from time to time. Civility is a way of connecting and interacting with people; of engaging and thinking about what our relationships are with one another, and of discerning what we care about it. It is about how we communicate and how we persuade and convince, because that's often what we're doing in our profession. If we've alienated people from the outset, it can be much harder to do that and to be effective.

Mark Twain said that "all emotion if sincere is involuntary." And so when we see our colleagues (possibly opposing counsel), or our clients, or others being uncivil, we should give them the benefit of the doubt that it wasn't a voluntary response. Of course, if it goes on for a long time, you can stop giving the benefit of the doubt. But at least start with the premise that they're sorry for their own bad behavior — or they will be when they reflect or when they've been able to calm down and get past what may have been an involuntary emotion. It certainly was clear that that was the case when I sat on the family law calendar for King County Superior Court. When I first took on that role, a now-retired judge sat me down and said, "Steve, I want you to remember that when the dissolution petition is filed and for 90 days thereafter, the parties are temporarily insane. So please remember that about them when you hear their case. They're doing things that they wouldn't otherwise do, they're saying things that they wouldn't otherwise say, and they'll regret it later if you give them the time to regret it and change their position."

There are times when people feel more comfortable when we're being formal, not informal. And I've noticed this particularly with the disenfranchised of an organization.

The Japanese have a phrase called *bakateinei*, which means literally “idiot politeness.” It can mean a number of things. It can mean to ridicule someone by being excessively polite to them; that is, being more polite than the situation calls for. Japanese has levels of honorifics. And if you go up too high and you are too honorific to someone, you're really making fun of them rather than honoring them. It also means being more polite to a person than the person deserves, given his or her role in life compared to yours. And, in some contexts, it means shaming the impolite person, the person who's been impolite to you, by being excessively polite back to them in response to their rudeness. Now, in English, we might sometimes call it patronizing but that doesn't really capture the full meaning of this phrase. It means being polite without being civil in some context and this is why I go back to the phrase “true civility,” not superficial civility. I want to distinguish those two and I want to distinguish civility from protocol, superficiality, and from custom.

In 1996, in *State v. Bright*,<sup>2</sup> the Washington State Supreme Court held that it is an abuse of formal courtroom protocol to address adult participants by their first names. In that case, counsel both for the state and the defense referred to the 24-year-old rape victim by her

first name. And so did the defendant, who was a commissioned officer and who had raped her while she was in his custody. When he took the stand, he referred to her by her nickname only, and he wasn't corrected by the court or by counsel. In the opinion, the court called this an arrogant depersonalization of the victim and went on to say that all the participants in court proceedings are entitled to be addressed with courtesy titles. That may suggest that some find solace in formality. There are times when people feel more comfortable when we're being formal, not informal. And I've noticed this particularly with the disenfranchised of an organization.

Let me mention, for example, attorneys of color who are sometimes mistaken for the defendant by the participants in criminal cases. How do we respond to that? Sometimes we are overly formal, by making sure that we're dressed particularly well and that our speech is particularly professional, just to let people know who we are because we're not always given the benefit of the doubt. I remember when I was a federal prosecutor, I was traveling with my wife to Texas and we went to the federal courthouse in Laredo. I was curious: I thought, I'm part of the federal family, so I'm going to go in and see what a different federal courthouse looks like. When I went into the courthouse, I started getting tailed by security; they followed me through the courthouse, and when I walked into a courtroom the clerk said, “Defendants sit to the left.” That was the first thing she said to me as I walked in. And I realized that, out of my suit, I looked to them like a suspicious person or a defendant in that context. So sometimes in response to that, we get formal. Please understand that people react differently to different contexts and that it goes directly to the point that civility depends on the person, the context, cultural factors, and on so many other things that there cannot be one rigid definition of civility.

*State v. Bright* cited a 1964 Supreme Court case, *Hamilton v. Alabama*,<sup>3</sup> as precedent. That case reversed a con-

tempt finding against Ms. Hamilton. She actually spent time in jail for contempt. Her contempt was insisting that she be called Ms. Hamilton instead of Mary and the judge put her in jail for that. Of course she was entitled to that dignity, and it was the court, frankly, that was contemptuous in that instance to her. But ask yourself, what if the lawyers in that case and the judge had referred to her as “Ms. Hamilton,” but did so with a voice dripping in sarcasm. Would that have been more civil than using her first name?

Civility is more complicated than protocol issues. Like the example of *bakateinei*, polite words alone do not amount to civility. It is the substance that brings dignity and true civility to our courts and to our system. As we consider who benefits from protocol, I'd like to also suggest that it's usually those in power who benefit from formality and protocol, because that respects us and preserves our position, doesn't it? As a judge, when you call me “Your Honor,” it is supporting my position because it is perceived as higher than yours — so as we think about civility and protocol, we need to think of

Charles Dickens wrote, “The civility which money will purchase is rarely extended to those who have none.”

them as very distinct things and consider who they benefit and for what they were designed.

Charles Dickens wrote, “The civility which money will purchase is rarely extended to those who have none.” So to repeat, it doesn't mean protocol, it doesn't mean etiquette; it must have a far deeper meaning. In the context, going back to my time on Superior Court both in family law and sitting in *ex parte*, my expe-



ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.” In our Constitution of this great nation, justice comes first. When you read it look at the order of things, it comes before tranquility, it comes before the common defense, and it even comes before our welfare. And I suggest to you that that order of things is not accidental. I believe it was intentional, because without justice, there isn’t tranquility; without justice, there

is little to defend. The common defense is even subordinate to justice. So how do we establish justice in our society in the context of an adversarial system? That is like telling a soldier we’re going to have sensitivity training and the first thing the soldier says is, “I have to get rid of my weapons, right?” And that’s what we see in as some lawyers’ reactions to this discussion.

rience was that the *pro se* litigant does not benefit from protocol. Certainly this litigant benefits from civility in its true meaning, but not from an application of the formalities of the courtroom. Those litigants, as I mentioned before, are often under great stress and emotion in going through what may be one of the most difficult times in their lives. And that is what true civility means. If you are the lawyer opposing a *pro se* party, it means speaking in plain language and bringing relevant cases, rules, and statutes to the court’s attention. In other words, it means bringing controlling authority to the court’s attention, even if it does not support your case, and not taking advantage of the *pro se* party by using legalese and a rigid adherence to procedure. In this way, your reputation will be enhanced because the court will know you’re honest with the court as a true officer of the court about the issues before the bench that day.

Let me give an example of what civility is not. This was the closing sentence in a summary judgment brief I received a couple of years ago in Superior Court. “If you do not grant this summary judgment motion, the only ones who will benefit are the liars who started this matter in the first place.” A strong ending, right? The lawyer actually had established in the briefing that the other side wasn’t being forthcoming, so this wasn’t good advocacy. It didn’t promote respect for the process or for his colleague. As a practice point, I would suggest that civility matters in every phase, and I’ll give one example. You know when you’re preparing a witness for a deposition or testimony, that preparing a witness on the substance is only part of your job. If you don’t prepare the witness to be challenged and to be prepared for the emotion, rigor, and endurance required to get through the

testimony, you’re not preparing them to be civil. And if they lose their civility and their composure, that can wash away all the good preparation that you’ve done on the substance.

Civility permeates every single part of the practice of law. One way to look at it is to strive to be the most reasonable person in the room — or at least to appear as if you’re the most reasonable person in the room. <sup>6N</sup>

in cooperation with



Before joining the Washington State Supreme Court in 2012, Justice Steven González served for 10 years as a trial judge on the King County Superior Court, hearing criminal, civil, juvenile, and family law cases. Prior to that, Justice González practiced both criminal and civil law. He was an assistant United States attorney for the Western District of Washington, a domestic violence prosecutor for the City of Seattle, and an associate in the business law department at the Seattle law firm of Hillis Clark Martin & Peterson.

He has received numerous professional awards, including two Department of Justice awards: the U.S. Attorney General’s Award for Distinguished Service and the Director’s Award for Superior Performance; three “Judge of the Year” awards from the Washington State Bar Association, the Washington Chapter of the American Board of Trial Advocates, and the Asian Bar Association of Washington; the Exceptional Member Award from the Latina/o Bar Association of Washington; and the Vanguard Award from the King County Chapter of Washington Women Lawyers.

#### NOTES

1. “Play Nice — It Makes for a Better Day in the Sandbox for All,” [www.sfbar.org/cle/tests/self-study-exams-aug2011.aspx](http://www.sfbar.org/cle/tests/self-study-exams-aug2011.aspx).
2. 129 Wash. 2nd 257 (1996).
3. 376 U.S. 650 (1964).



**OATH**  
FOR ADMISSION TO  
IN

STATE OF \_\_\_\_\_ )  
County of \_\_\_\_\_ ) ss.

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (Print Name)

That I will faithfully and honestly conduct myself in the  
the State of Oregon; that I will observe and abide by the  
approved by the Supreme Court of the State of Oregon; and  
and laws of the United States and of the State of Oregon;  
their counsel, I pledge fairness, integrity, and civility, not  
and oral communications.

# The Oath's Impact

of OFFICE  
D THE PRACTICE OF LAW  
OREGON

\_\_\_\_\_, swear (or affirm):

Office of an attorney in the courts of  
the Rules of Professional Conduct  
I that I will support the Constitution  
To the court, opposing parties and  
only in court, but also in all written

(Signature)

(Date)

Attorney's Oath Continues to  
Have Influence Centuries After  
Original Drafts

By Melody Finnemore

When Henry Perlstein received his law degree from the University of Florida in 2012, he took the attorney's oath as all American lawyers are required to do. In his case, he submitted a written version to the U.S. Supreme Court and then went on to work in sectors outside of the legal profession for the next several years.

In 2020, when Perlstein and his wife, Kat, moved to Oregon, he took a sabbatical to study for the Oregon bar exam, passed it in 2022 and, last May, had the opportunity to retake the oath orally in a ceremony that he describes as a "happy bookend" in his legal career.

"I was fortunate and got to meet the bar president and executive director, and I got to feel like part of the Oregon State Bar. It marked the beginning of my return," says Perlstein, who joined Schroeder Law Offices in Portland last October.

"It was so much more about the moral significance of that event. For me, it was to stand with other members of the bar in the audience of the Oregon Supreme Court and hear about something that is so timely and important, which is trust in the legal profession and the fundamental rule of law," he says.

Former OSB President Tom Kranovich eloquently described the purpose of the oath in his November 2014 President's Message ("Upon Taking the Oath: More Than Magic Words") published in the *Bulletin*.

Upon taking the oath one becomes a member in good standing of a bar with a long history of professional excellence and service; a bar with a decades-long commitment to highly collegial and ethical practices; a bar that actively promotes the rule of law and access to justice.

Upon taking the oath one not only inherits the ideals, customs and goals of the Oregon State Bar; one becomes the caretaker and custodian of its values, its aspirations and most importantly, its collective professional reputation. The oath confers all the rights, responsibilities and obligations that being a member of the Oregon State Bar entails. Upon taking the oath, one becomes the bar's future.

Kranovich noted in the column that every time he reads or hears the oath administered, it refreshes its power and promise in his mind. He suggested that perhaps attorneys should gather and renew their vows as officers of the court as a reminder of their commitment to it.

Perlstein found the experience of retaking his oath to be just as impactful. "It was really a very meaningful connection for me and it represented so much for me. I felt really honored and fortunate to be part of the event, and now to be a member of the bar is something I've worked really hard for," he says.

### Attorney Honesty Remains Central Throughout Evolutions

The attorney's oath has a rich and storied history, in Oregon and across the country. The first mention of any kind of oath in Oregon appears to be on Oct. 11, 1862, in "The Organic and Other General Laws of Oregon, 1843-1872."

A 1936 article in *The Oregonian* details the oath's introduction as a requirement for the state's federal court attorneys, at the direction of the American Bar Association. The oath published in the article reads:



Chief Justice Meagan Flynn provides remarks before the administration of the attorney oath retake in Salem last year.

I do solemnly swear: I will support the constitution of the United States.

I will maintain the respect due to courts of justice and judicial officers.

I will not counsel or maintain any suit or proceeding which shall appear to me to be unjust, nor any defense except such as I believe to be honestly debatable under the law of the land.

I will employ for the purpose of maintaining the causes confided to me such means only as are consistent with truth and honor, and will never seek to mislead the judge or jury by any artifice or false statement of fact or law.

I will maintain the confidence and preserve inviolate the secrets of my client, and will accept no compensation in connection with his business except from him or with his knowledge and approval.

I will abstain from all offensive personalities, and advance no fact prejudicial to the honor or reputation of a party or witness, unless required by the justice of the cause with which I am charged.

I will never reject from any consideration personal to myself the cause of the defenceless or oppressed or delay any man's cause for lucre or malice.

So help me God.

Leonard S. Goodman, in his 1967 *American Journal of Legal History* article titled, "This Historic Role of the Oath of Admission," traces the American oath's roots to England, where as early as 1237 "it was ordained that no one could serve as an advocate 'until he had taken an oath before his bishop to do his duty and not to pervert justice.'"

A statute from 1402 required all attorneys to be "sworn well and truly to serve in their offices, and especially that they make no suit in a foreign country." As English oaths evolved over the years, the language changed in various ways but central themes of attorney honesty, their full use of intellectual resources and the need to avoid delays remained.

Most of the U.S. colonies ultimately adopted shortened versions of the "do no falsehood" oath that originated in England. Goodman's article points to Rhode Island as the earliest statutory reference to attorney qualifications, which its legislature began requiring in 1647. By the 19th century, the Maryland and federal oaths shortened and diluted early versions of the English oath instead of modifying or embellishing it.

"The oath today is often more symbolic than substantive; the shortened form preserves it as an anachronism. Its history, however, suggests that it could be revived to serve more truly and completely as the lawyer's credo, which it has been for his profession from the earliest periods of English law," Goodman's article states.

### ABA Oath Sees Little Change Over Time

The American Bar Association took its cue from state bar associations and adopted model ethics standards in the form of an oath and Canons of Ethics in 1908, according to "The Lawyer's Oath: Both

EGONIAN, PORTLAND, JANUARY 26, 1936

### hful Officers Rewarded



at Buckman school last week received honor certificate for a year's work directing pupils safely across es. Front row: Mrs. Dorothy Andrews, safety lane he Parent-Teachers' association, looks on as Police iter Tyler awards a certificate to Walter Hage. Seco right: Earl Poletiek, Kenneth Hannum and Robert row: Bill Wrightson, Raymond Wilburn and Clar-

### onitors certificates

fficient service as strolmen went last boys at Buckman re than 300 of their d on. Certificates, officials and lead-roups in Portland, y Lieutenant Wal-Portland police bu- sion. the program was dreds, safety-lane ie Parent-Teacher awards followed a safety film, des- se children prepare t The Oregonian-Motor association ath" contest. the program was dreds, safety-lane ie Parent-Teacher awards followed a safety film, des- se children prepare t The Oregonian-Motor association ath" contest.

### VIEWED TIVE CLUB

d Meeting Here; r Granted

ational's board of its two-day semi- meeting yesterday hotel to review ac- of the past year and program. In attend- Hood, Portland, In- tee, who officiated in Armenia, inter- ent, Spokane; Will- international first Medford; Ed L. ational second vice- atchee; George K. ational secretary, C.; Charles F. A.

### GROTHJAN POSTER GIVEN TO COUNCIL

State Commander of Legion Makes Presentation

Presentation of a large hand-illuminated poster done by the late artist Edward Grothjan to sym- bolize the "melting pot" aspect of America to the immigrant, was ac- complished Wednesday before the city council by George L. Koehn, state department commander of the American Legion.

The presentation ceremony by Mr. Koehn was made in behalf of Miss Francesca Grothjan, sister of the northwestern artist and a resident of this city.

### Bennett Seeks Spot

Commissioner Bennett was named by the council to select a suitable spot for hanging the framed poster. Grothjan, a German immigrant, was said to have been so imbued with enthusiasm for the United States that the poster was a creation of appreciation. It is bordered with replicas of the flags of all nations and the text was all hand-lettered. The American flag occupies the position of honor at the top of the creation.

### Koehn Speech Given

Said Commander Koehn, in the close of the presentation address: What a contrast, gentlemen, under this form of government as represented by the flag here, compared with that which exists in the major portions of Europe today, where all these ideals of liberty and free government have been swept aside, where but to express an honest opinion, one is summarily met with a firing squad, and where one's property or profession, one's home, loved ones, or those things which he holds most dear in this life, are subject constantly to the changing whims and idiosyncrasies of a single individual called a dictator such as in Germany or Italy, or by cruel, relentless minorities such as found in Russia. The autocracies of

### NEW OATH RULED FOR COURTROOM

Attorneys in Federal Cases Affected by Edict

New rules for admission to practice in federal court in the district of Oregon and a new oath which each attorney must take in open court are contained in an order handed down Friday by Federal Judge McNary and Federal Judge Fee.

The oath was recommended by the American Bar association at its meeting last summer in Los Angeles and brought to the attention of the court by the address at that meeting of Judge Merrill E. Otis, Kansas City, Mo., district judge of the United States district court for the western district of Missouri.

New rules for admission provide that names of applicants for admission to practice in federal court must be in the hands of a committee on admission at least 60 days before the first day of any term of the court. The committee is then expected to investigate and not less than five days before the first day of the court transmit its report to the judge.

If the court is satisfied with the report of the committee, the applicant will be notified to appear for admission. "If the court shall not be satisfied, it may deny the application or order the application to be held in abeyance pending further investigation prior to admission," the rule provides.

### Group Plan Used

For admission the applicant must be "a person of good moral character and fair professional standing," and have been "admitted to the bar of the supreme court of the United States or the highest court of this state or the highest court of a sister state or an organized territory of the United States." Applicants for admission to practice in federal court will appear in groups before the court on an appointed day early in each term of court.

### The oath follows:

I do solemnly swear: I will support the constitution of the United States. I will maintain the respect due to courts of justice and judicial officers. I will not counsel or maintain any suit or proceeding which shall appear to me to be unjust, nor any defense except such as I believe to be honestly debatable under the law of the land. I will employ for the purpose of maintaining the causes confided to me such means only as are consistent with truth and honor, and will never seek to mislead the judge or jury by any artifice or false statement of fact or law. I will maintain the confidence and preserve inviolate the secrets of my client, and will accept no compensation in connection with his business except from him or with his knowledge and approval. I will abstain from all offensive personalities, and advance no fact prejudicial to the honor or reputation of a party or witness, unless required by the justice of the cause with which I am charged. I will never reject from any consideration personal to myself the cause of the defenceless or oppressed or delay any man's cause for lucre or malice. So help me God. The Portland committee on admission to practice in federal court includes: Thomas G. Greene, chairman; William C. Bristol, A. B. Ridgway, Ralph W. Wilbur, J. C. Veazie and James G. Wilson. Medford members are: William M. Colvig, A. E. Reames, Porter Neff and H. D. Norton of Grants Pass. Pendleton members are: Ray Easley, Charles Z. Randall and Stephen A. Lowell.

A 1936 article in *The Oregonian* details the oath's introduction as a requirement for the state's federal court attorneys, at the direction of the American Bar Association.



Henry Perlstein only had submitted a written oath when he lived in Florida. Retaking the oath, this time in person and in Oregon, was important to him. He is shown with 2025 OSB President Myah Kehoe.

Ancient and Modern,” a 2009 article written by University of Alabama School of Law Professor Carol Rice Andrews.

She describes the model oath as a reworked version of the Field Code duties, noting its “just” causes clause was at the center of the ABA’s primary drafting debate over the proper advocacy role of lawyers. The model oath originally shared equal prominence with the Canons and was the regulatory portion of the 1908 ethics compilation.

“Today the model oath has fallen into the shadows of the more detailed ‘black letter’ *Model Rules of Professional Conduct*,” Andrews wrote.

In that era of the American legal profession, attorneys were largely unregulated, especially compared to today’s standards. Many of the states’ oaths were so general that they provided little guidance for lawyers and even less for the courts charged with imposing discipline to them. While the oaths were an agreement that lawyers would comply with their public obligations, they did not define what those obligations were.

“Instead, the lawyer was supposed to learn or identify his obligations’ from ‘socialization, professional lore, independent reflection on the expectations of the lawyer’s professional office,” Andrews wrote.

States that stuck closer to the longer, more detailed English “do no falsehood” model provided more direction regarding attorney conduct, including their duties to the court and to their clients. In a shortened version of the oath, the attorney swore to behave “with all good fidelity, as well to the court as to the client, that [he would] use no falsehood, nor delay any person’s cause for lucre or malice.”

The longer, traditional version also stated that the attorney must not bring “false or groundless” suits and that he must inform the court of falsehoods made to the court, the article states, adding “these statements of litigation duties were broad enough to directly guide lawyers as to many ethical dilemmas in litigation.”

The Field Code, drafted in 1848 by David Dudley Field as a proposed code of civil procedure for New York, also was rapidly adopted by states. Distinctly different from an oath, the Field Code bound lawyers by statute and provided a means of professional discipline for a willful violation of duties. Some states simply added their oath to the Field Code and others converted the list of duties back into oath form.

The Field Code outlined eight statutory duties of a lawyer, including supporting the constitution and laws of the United States, maintaining the respect due to the courts of justice and judicial officers, protecting client confidentiality, and abstaining from conduct that is offensive or prejudicial. These statutory duties were included in the ABA’s model oath as well.

Andrews notes that even though the Field Code statement of duties is a modest list by modern standards, it helped develop and refine standards of lawyer conduct by adding substantive provisions that were not previously stated in American oaths or statutes. This included codifying duties of confidentiality and public service.

The ABA began working on its model oath and Canons of Ethics in 1905, when its president at the time asked the association to respond to criticism about lawyers and ethics, including disparaging remarks from President Theodore Roosevelt. The ABA asked a committee to draft a model code of ethics, which it did based on a survey of those that had been developed by the states.

For many years after the ABA adopted its model oath and Canons of Ethics in 1908, Andrews wrote, it prominently featured the model oath beside the Canons, including in its annual reports. Over time, however, the focus shifted to the Canons, which sparked increasing debate. The ABA reworked the Canons over the next 60 years. In 1970, in response to demand by lawyers and critics for more detailed regulatory standards, the ABA abandoned the Canons and adopted the *Model Code of Professional Responsibility*, which had broad ethical principles, disciplinary rules and commentary. In 1983, the ABA replaced that with its *Model Rules of Professional Conduct*, which dealt specifically with enforcement and discipline for lawyers.

The ABA’s model oath, on the other hand, underwent only one modification after its adoption in 1908. In 1977, the ABA deleted the “unjust” standard from the clause and subjected all litigation proceedings, claims and defenses, to the same “honestly debatable” standard.

Andrews states that this lone change had little practical impact, as no states adopted the 1977 version of the ABA model oath and either retained the 1908 language or the original Field Code statement of the “just” causes duty.

### Oregon Adds ‘Civility Oath’ in 2017 Amendment

While the ABA oath has remained largely unchanged since its inception, Oregon updated its oath in 2017 when the Oregon Supreme Court amended it to add the statement, “To the court, opposing parties and their counsel, I pledge fairness, integrity and civility, not only in court, but also in all written and oral communications.”

This “civility oath,” as it is referred to by the ABA, stems from grassroots efforts from within the Oregon legal community. Led by Portland attorney Jane Paulson, former president of the state’s chapter of the American Board of Trial Advocacy (ABOTA), it proposed that Oregon amend the oath of office to incorporate language addressing the principle of civility and underscoring the importance of integrity.

In a 2017 *Bulletin* article, Paulson noted that ABOTA was on a mission to see civility addressed in the lawyer oaths taken in all 50 states. Part of ABOTA’s constitution is “to elevate the standards of integrity, honor and courtesy in the legal profession.” Considering Oregon’s well-deserved national reputation for the civility, professionalism and congeniality of its legal community, the addition to the oath seemed like a natural fit. As Paulson explained in the article, “It is important in today’s era of texts, emails and fewer filters of what people write and say to be reminded that civility is a key part of our profession and is our professional obligation.”

The added focus on civility and integrity in the oath is consistent with Oregon’s legal traditions. The OSB’s Statement of Professionalism places similar emphasis on the importance of integrity and civility. The addition was not intended to establish a separate basis for seeking relief or discipline. Rather, it is to educate and underscore for new members the collective commitment Oregon lawyers make to respectful, forthright interaction with each other, clients and the courts.

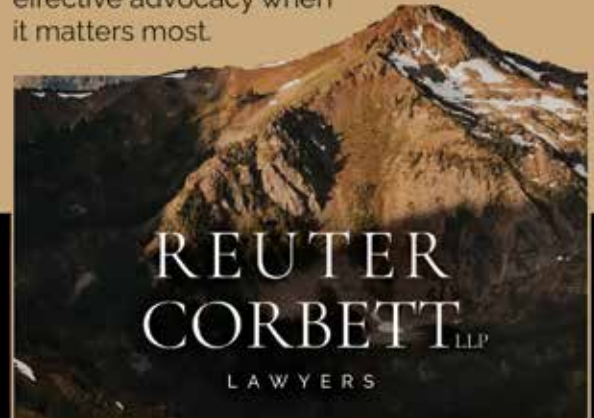
“Oregon is a small community. Your reputation goes with you,” Paulson said in a 2018 interview with the *Bulletin*, adding there is a clear distinction between being tough and being obnoxious. “Obnoxious is never good. Intentionally being rude serves no purpose.” ■

---

*Melody Finnemore is a Portland-area freelance writer. Reach her at [precisionpdx@comcast.net](mailto:precisionpdx@comcast.net).*

## Insider Experience. Trusted Ethics Defense.

Reuter Corbett represents attorneys in ethics investigations, disciplinary proceedings, and professional responsibility matters. Our attorneys bring decades of experience, including service within State Bar regulatory offices, providing informed strategy and effective advocacy when it matters most.



REUTER  
CORBETT LLP  
LAWYERS

All Consultations Confidential  
503-874-6166 | [reutercorbett.com](http://reutercorbett.com)

## Fire Loss Claims?

- 18 years experience as a General Contractor.
- Experienced fire and casualty insurance adjuster.
- Available to represent the insured party in maximizing recovery from the insurer.
- Fees contingent on increased recovery.



Millard & Bragg  
Attorneys at Law, PC

503-305-7806

419 5th Street Oregon City, OR 97045

[www.millardlaw.com](http://www.millardlaw.com)

Admitted to Practice in Oregon and Washington

## President's Message

**Upon Taking the Oath:  
More Than Magic Words**  
*By Tom Kranovich*

An attorney admitted to practice in this state is an officer of the court. ORS 9.010(1).

With the possible exception of a few of our senior members who graduated from law school without having first gone to college, most of us became officers of the court via a similar process. For at least the last 50 years, we have all been graduates of a four-year college. Indeed, some of us were the first in our family to do so. We all took the LSAT and many of us sweated out the admission process. Upon entering law school we were immersed in a culture and curriculum that likely was completely foreign. We started with classes such as torts and civil procedure for which our undergraduate experience provided little, if any, practical application, insight or assistance. Upon completing the core curriculum we went on to choose classes that we hoped would someday lead to an interesting and successful career. We studied, we persevered, we passed — only to be confronted with the bar review, the bar examination and the specter of being vetted by the bar's character and fitness process. Having successfully completed all of that, we all took the final step: solemnly taking the oath that made us not just members of the bar but also officers of the court.

I (state your name) do solemnly swear that I will faithfully and honestly conduct myself in the office of an attorney in the courts of the state of Oregon; that I will observe and abide by the Code of Professional Responsibility approved by the Supreme Court of the State of Oregon; and that I will support the Constitution and laws of the United States and of the state of Oregon.

In my youthful ignorance, I viewed the oath as a pro forma event: magic words I had to utter to open the doors to my future — not unlike Sinbad's "open sesame" or Hermione Granger's "Alohomora." In the years since, however, I have heard many others take the oath, either at swearing-in ceremonies for new admittees or at investitures for newly elected or appointed judges. As I grew older, each time I heard someone take the oath it had a more profound meaning than it did the time before.

Having seen the oath flaunted, forgotten or ignored, I now fully realize just how important honoring the oath is to our profession. I now know that each time someone breaches the sworn pledge made at the outset of their career, the rule of law suffers and the public's confidence in our justice system erodes. Every time someone betrays the oath, our detractors have fodder — which they can and do use — to debase our noble profession.

Upon taking the oath one becomes a member in good standing of a bar with a long history of professional excellence and service; a bar with a decades-long commitment to highly collegial and ethical practices; a bar that actively promotes the rule of law and access to justice. Upon taking the oath one not only inherits the ideals, customs and goals of the Oregon State Bar; one becomes the caretaker and custodian of its values, its aspirations and most importantly, its collective professional reputation. The oath confers all the rights, responsibilities and obligations that being a member of the Oregon State Bar entails. Upon taking the oath, one becomes the bar's future.

Like wedding vows, the attorney's oath of office carries with it certain legal and social ramifications. Violation of either set of solemn vows has the potential for serious, sometimes life altering, ramifications. I suspect that most actionable violations of our oath of office innocuously start out as an oversight or an act of forgetfulness or carelessness with little, if any, conscious concern about crossing ethical lines. As we grow more experienced and confident I wonder if it is easy to become more comfortable with what we think we know and less questioning of what we really know. In the process of maturing as a lawyer, can we unwittingly begin a journey through a perverse ethical penumbra that can take us closer and closer to a regrettable point? If this be true, what can we do to avoid entry into the ever darkening grey area?

Certainly education and continuing education are keys. The more one knows and/or the more one double checks to be sure of what one thinks he or she knows, the less likely it is that there will be some sin of omission. We know that experience can sometimes lead to a complacency that trumps knowledge. By way of example, the age group causing the highest exposure to the Professional Liability Fund is lawyers with 15-20 years' experience and not the plethora of newer admittees. While the number of disciplinary files opened over the last five years has remained flat we have seen calls to the client assistance office drop from 4,000 a year to 2,000.



Anecdotally and coincidentally this may be due, in no small part, to the implementation of our mandatory mentoring program and the efforts of the Oregon New Lawyers Division and our sections in providing excellent continuing education opportunities.

I doubt that anyone gets up in the morning with the goal of violating their oath of office. How then do we avoid complacency and keep the oath fresh in our minds? I suspect that there is no universal answer. I do know, however, that in working with law students I see how badly they want that which I have come to take for granted: the ability to appear as a lawyer in any court in the state. Witnessing their desire renews my appreciation for the rights granted to me by my having taken the oath. Every occasion I have to read or hear the oath administered, it refreshes, in my mind, its power and promise.

Hearing someone take the oath is not unlike attending a wedding ceremony and hearing two people profess their allegiance and loyalty to each other. Even though I know that statistically 50 percent of all marriages fail, I witness each one with the certainty that this one will make it. Likewise when I hear someone take the attorney oath I leave with the certainty that it will be honored and obeyed. Whether it is a wedding or a swearing-in ceremony, I walk away with an appreciation for and commitment to my own vows and I celebrate the fact that others have dedicated themselves to the ideals of the institution.

Should we periodically gather and renew our vows as officers of the court? Would that help us honor both the letter and the spirit of the oath? Would it rekindle the aspiration to not only maintain-but to increase-the levels of professionalism and collegiality that make Oregon a unique place in which to practice law? If we do not do it formally and collectively, should we pledge to do it privately?

As a practical matter we carry out our oath of office by exercising professionalism and collegiality, by adhering to the rule of law and by honestly and ethically providing services that promote access to justice. These are among our bar's proudest traditions. They are the heritage passed to each of us upon our taking of the oath. Through the power of the oath, they will be our legacy to the people of Oregon and to future generations of lawyers.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

OSB President Tom Kranovich practices law in Lake Oswego. Reach him at [president@osbar.org](mailto:president@osbar.org).

© 2014 Tom Kranovich

---

— *return to top*

— *return to Table of Contents*

# The Anatomy of Our Oath to Support the US Constitution

[Robert Anthony Gottfried](#)

Jan 08, 2021

## Summary

- As officers of the courts, lawyers are sworn to support the Constitution not just of the state in which they seek to practice, but above all, to support the Constitution of the United States.
- New attorneys are asked to “faithfully discharge the duties of the office of attorney.” Every state has its own code of professional conduct, many based on the ABA’s own [Model Rules of Professional Conduct](#).
- We have a duty to be civil, personify the values of honesty and integrity, and build up the reputation of the profession.

The road to becoming a practicing attorney is a long and arduous one. After years of law school and months of studying for the bar exam, one more step remains before we are officially licensed to practice. Every lawyer in the country must be sworn in and take their state’s oath of attorney. This ceremony may seem traditional and mundane, but it has never been more important. This oath binds each attorney to certain professional obligations and requires us, as lawyers, [to faithfully uphold and support the laws of our state and our country](#).

What does it mean to take an oath? *Merriam-Webster* [defines an oath](#) as “a solemn attestation of the truth or inviolability of one’s words.” We ask new attorneys to take an oath on the day they receive their licenses and as a condition of that license. The words in that oath are a mandate to all attorneys that they [practice with professionalism, integrity,](#)

[and respect](#). Each state’s oath varies in its wording, but they all require of us the same three duties:

- 1 to support the Constitution of the United States,
- 2 to faithfully discharge the duties of an attorney, and
- 3 to conduct oneself with integrity and civility.

## 1. “I solemnly swear that I will support the Constitution of the United States. . .”

As officers of the courts, lawyers are sworn to support the Constitution, not just of the state in which they seek to practice but, above all, to support the Constitution of the United States. This promise is included first in every state’s attorney oath and is the most important promise a new attorney will make. It commands an attorney to take action to ensure the supreme law of the land is followed and upheld. This promise is [a burden on all lawyers](#)—every lawyer must defend the US Constitution in all ways, at all times.

Current events have caused us to look closer at this promise. Are we obligated to defend the Constitution if a client pays us to do the opposite? Are we required to support the Constitution when our desired outcome justifies its subversion? Without question or qualification, the answer is “yes.” A prerequisite of your license is your inviolable promise that you will always support and defend the Constitution in all situations. Lawyers may not take actions, advocate for positions, or demand relief that would cause them to do otherwise; this is, above all, our most sacred promise.

## 2. “. . . that I will faithfully discharge the duties of the office of attorney. . .”

Next, new attorneys are asked to “faithfully discharge the duties of the office of attorney.” Every state has its own code of professional conduct, many based on the ABA’s [Model Rules of Professional Conduct](#). These rules define the nature of an attorney’s professional and personal life, prescribing what an attorney must do inside and outside the courtroom or in practice. We are required to take these rules seriously and work and live by the rules defining the duties of our office. They require us to maintain our client’s confidence, execute our professional functions competently and diligently, conform to the law’s requirements in our business and personal affairs, uphold the legal process, and seek improvement in the law and access to legal systems.

Herein is another burden imposed by our oaths: even when we think no one is watching, even when our client’s position would cause us to advocate for the opposite, even when we are engaging in business outside the practice of law, our oaths require us to remain honest and diligent and to uphold the rule of law even when it is difficult or adverse to our personal or professional objectives.

### 3. “... and that I will conduct myself at all times with integrity and civility.”

This last promise is not explicitly requested of attorneys in every state. However, integrity and civility are written into the codes of professional conduct in each state, and maintaining those qualities is a component of faithfully discharging the duties of our office.

That said, many states explicitly call out the need for attorneys to maintain integrity, civility, honesty, dignity, and courteousness. Turn on the news, and you will find that attorney dishonesty, incivility, and lack of integrity are omnipresent in our society. In our adversarial system, attacking opposing parties rather than working with them has become so common. Vitriol and stubbornness prevail more often than not.

This final promise in our oaths reminds us that we have a duty to comport ourselves oppositely. We have a duty to be civil, personify the values of honesty and integrity, and build up the reputation of the profession. This promise requires us to work together to achieve a fairer system—a system that represents the needs of our clients first and foremost, not the wants of their attorneys. In that sense, we see what the Oath of Attorney is about—it’s about devoting ourselves to the betterment of the profession and our communities, to ensuring that the rule of law is upheld, to advocating honestly and with integrity, and to making the system a fairer, more representative, and more just place for all.

**Author**



## Robert Anthony Gottfried

...

### [The Anatomy of our Oath to Support the US Constitution](#)

©2021 by the American Bar Association. Reprinted with permission. All rights reserved. This information or any portion thereof may not be copied or disseminated in any form or by any means or stored in an electronic database or retrieval system without the express written consent of the American Bar Association.

**ABA** American Bar Association |

[https://www.americanbar.org/groups/young\\_lawyers/resources/after-the-bar/professional-development/anatomy-of-our-oath/](https://www.americanbar.org/groups/young_lawyers/resources/after-the-bar/professional-development/anatomy-of-our-oath/)

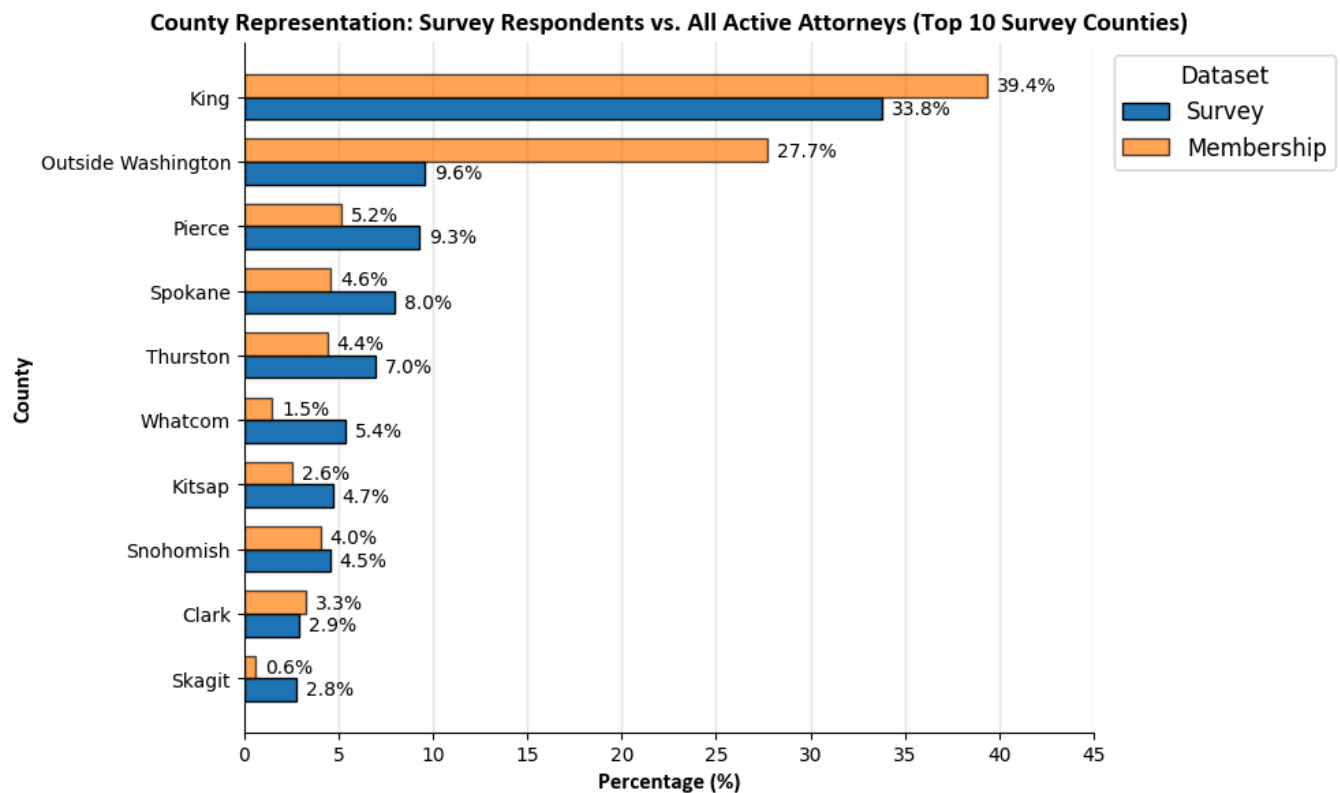
# Attorney Oath Survey Result Analysis

This report visualizes each survey question of the Attorney Oath Survey by showing how responses vary according to the respondent's years in practice, field of practice, and county.

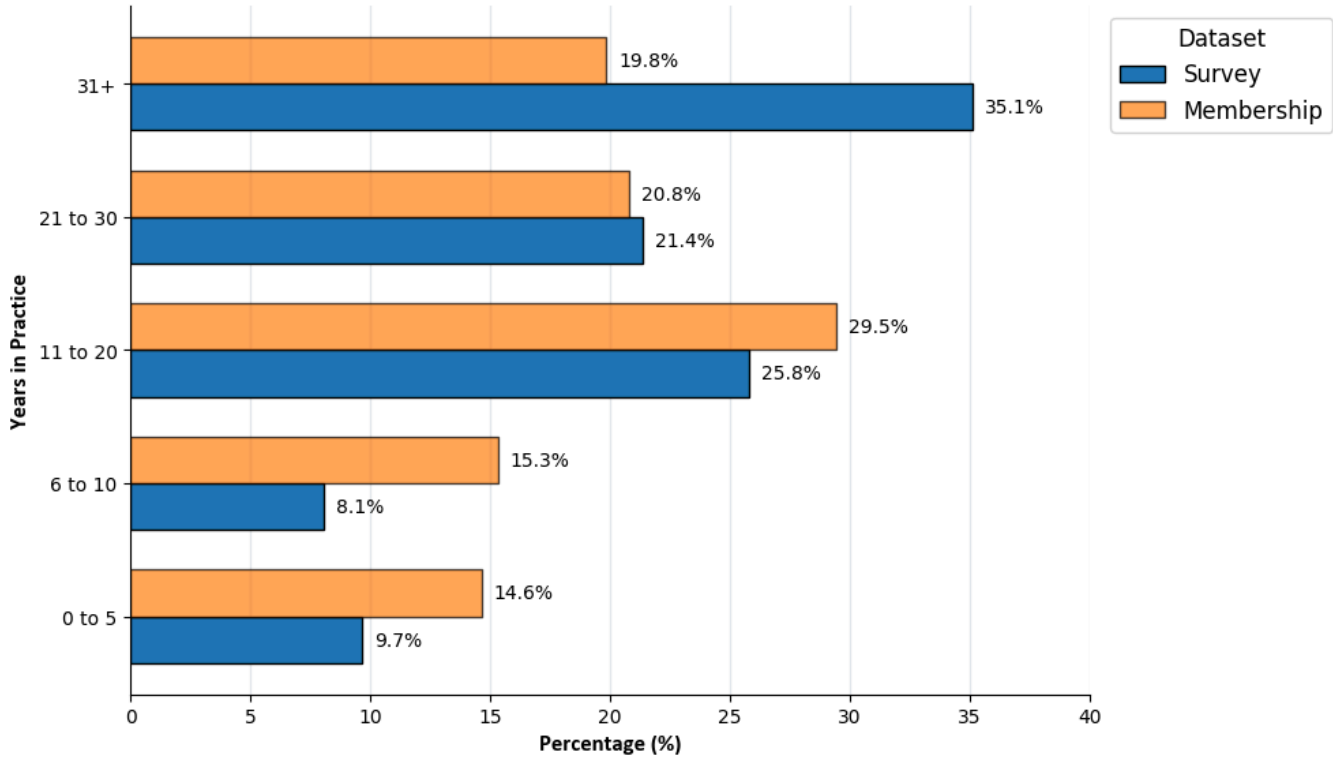
All visualizations and analyses in this report are based solely on responses that were submitted; any questions that were skipped or left unanswered are not included in the visualizations or quantitative summaries. Additionally, all qualitative response summaries were generated using Microsoft Copilot.

## Comparison of Survey Respondents and Active Attorneys

Visualizing the distribution of survey respondents alongside the full active membership to assess representativeness by demographic category of **County** and **Years in Practice**



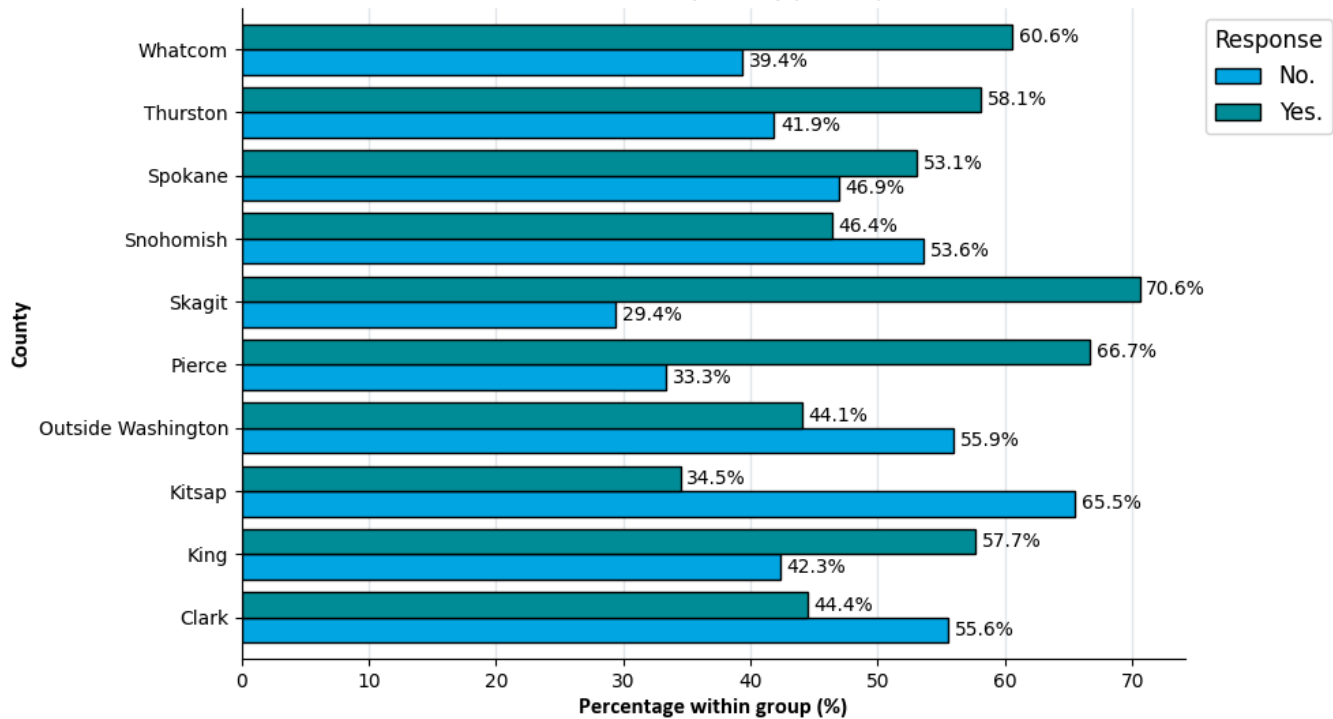
**Years in Practice Distribution: Survey Respondents vs. All Active Attorneys**



## Question 1

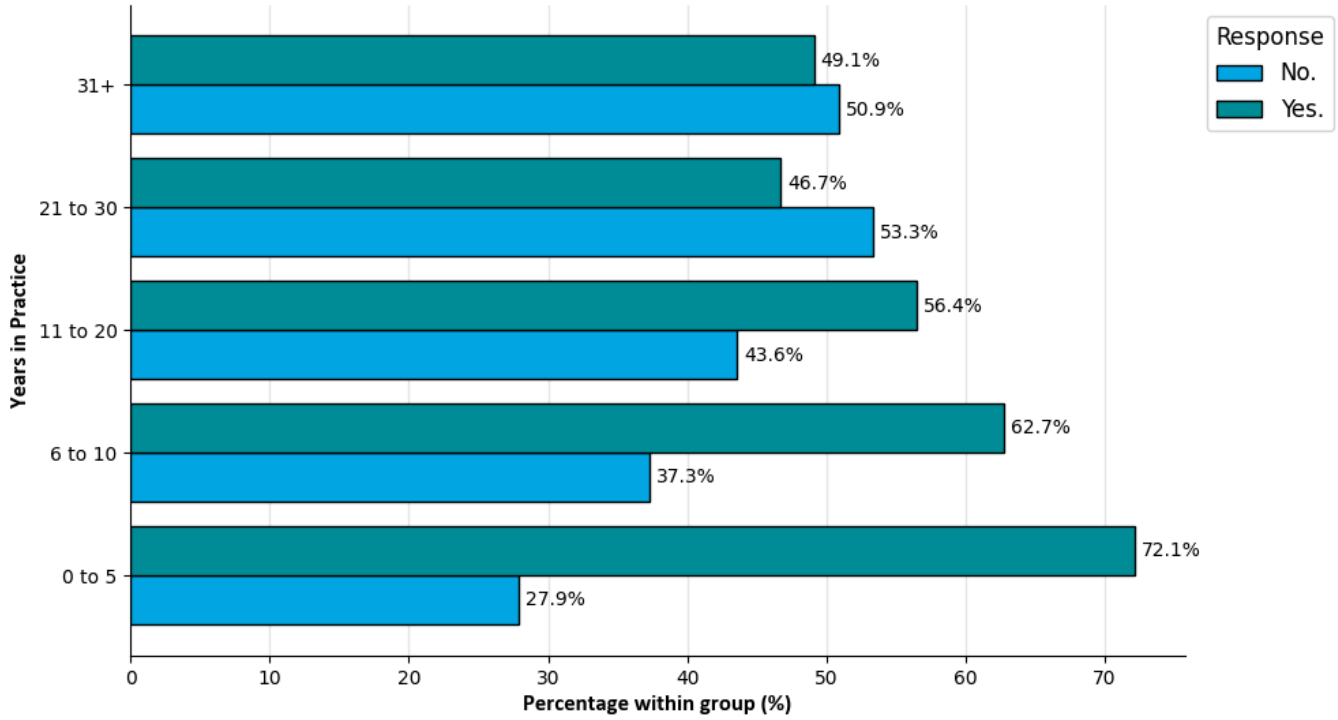
**Do you think the oath should be updated?**

Distribution by County (TOP 10)



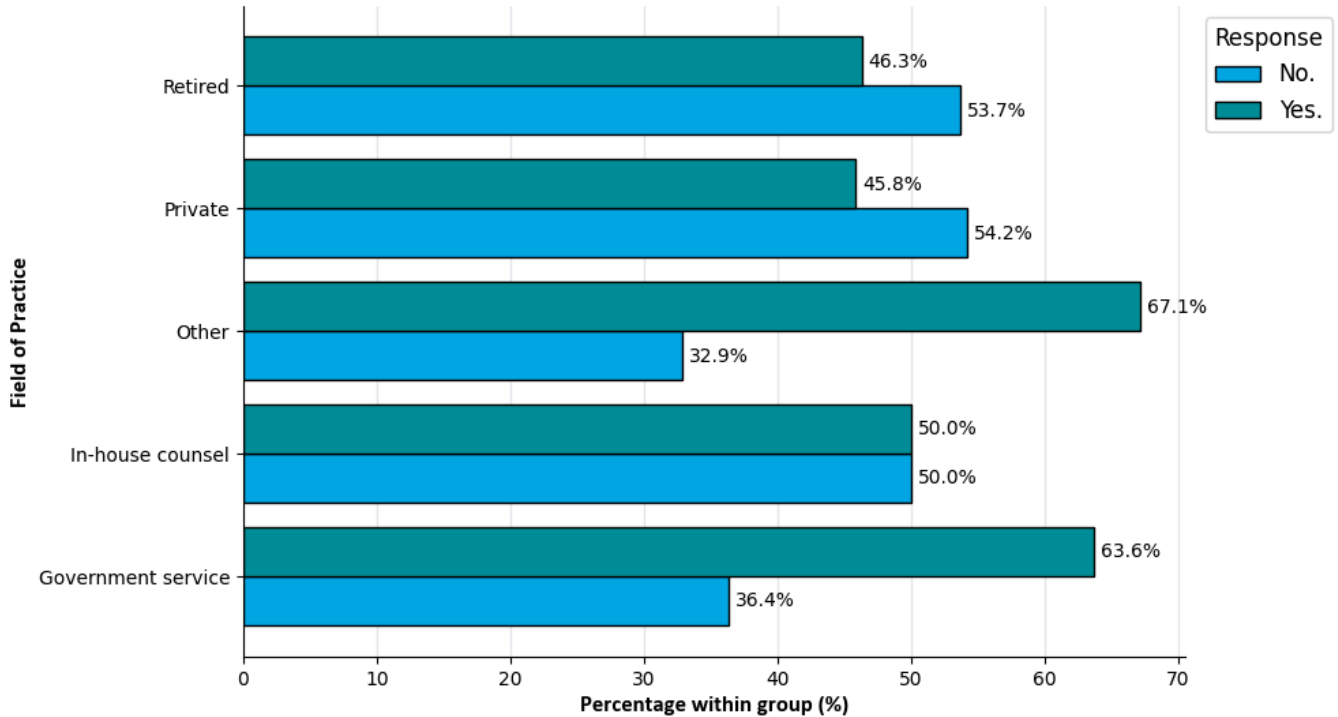
**Do you think the oath should be updated?**

Distribution by Years in Practice



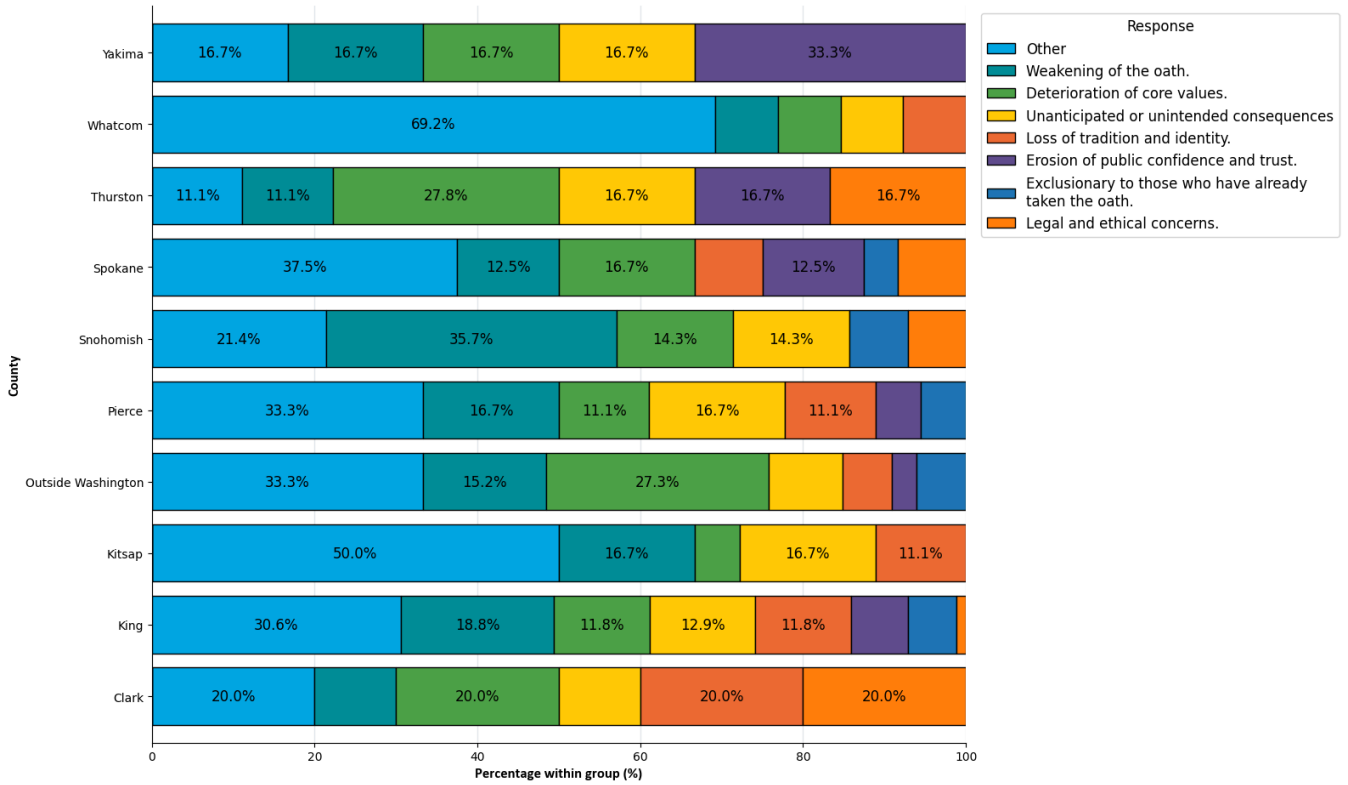
**Do you think the oath should be updated?**

Distribution by Field of Practice

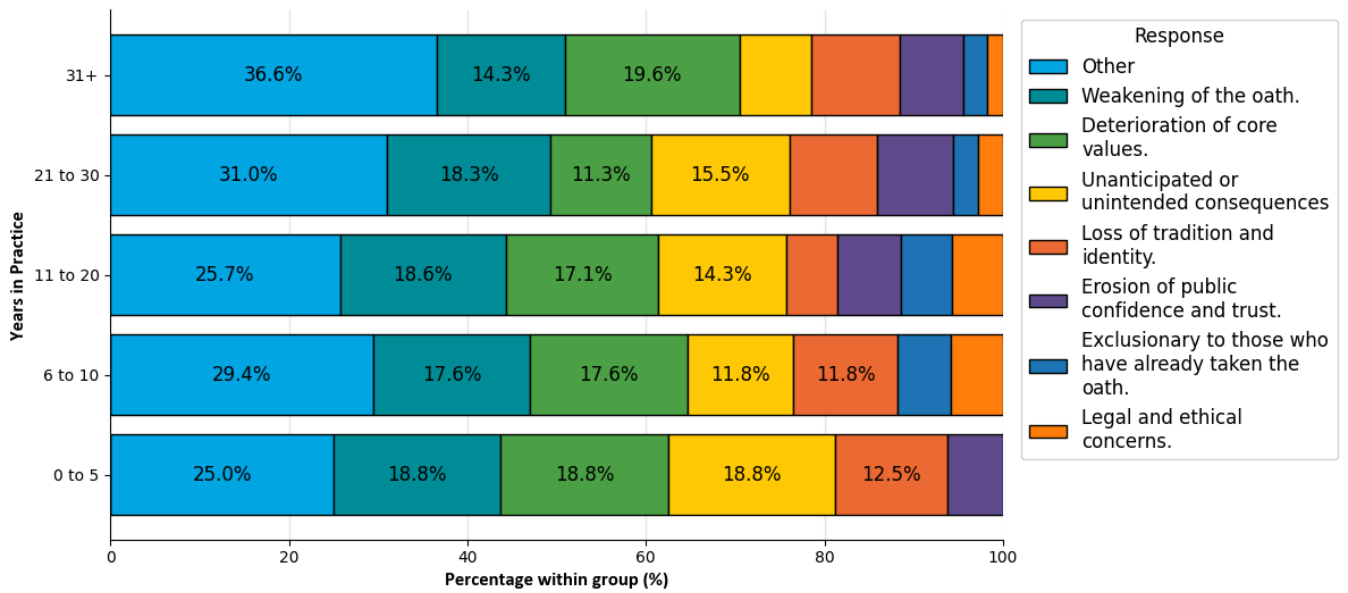


**Question 2**

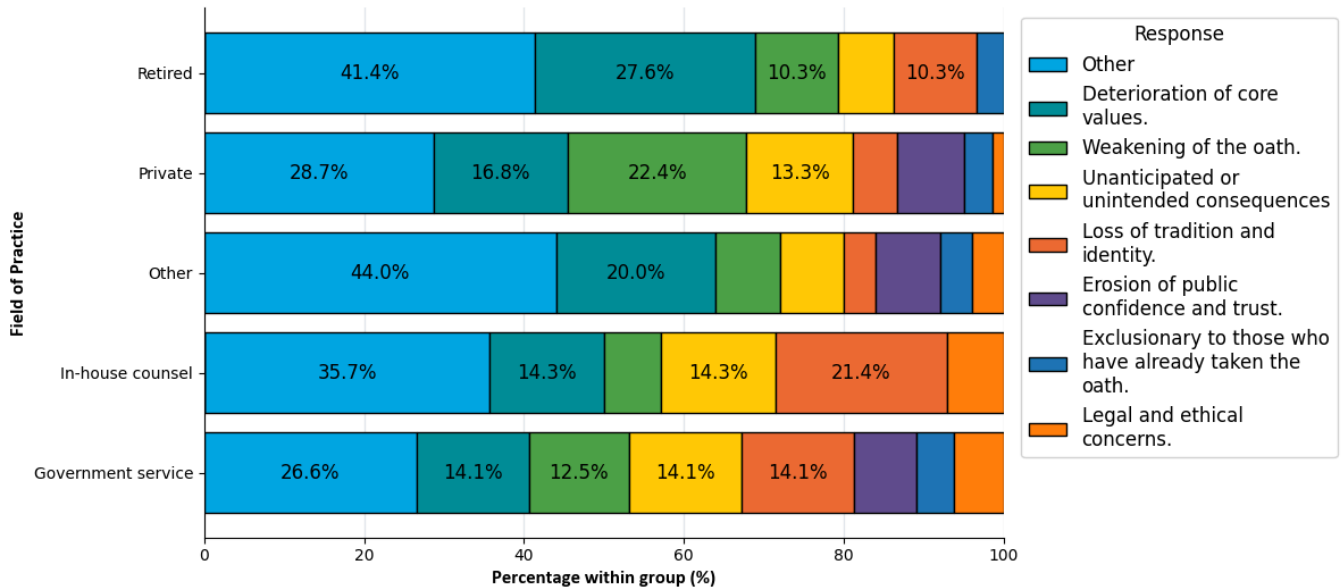
**What adverse impacts do you anticipate if the oath were to change?**  
Distribution by County (TOP 10)



**What adverse impacts do you anticipate if the oath were to change?**  
Distribution by Years in Practice



**What adverse impacts do you anticipate if the oath were to change?**  
Distribution by Field of Practice



## Summary of “Other” Responses: Anticipated Adverse Impacts

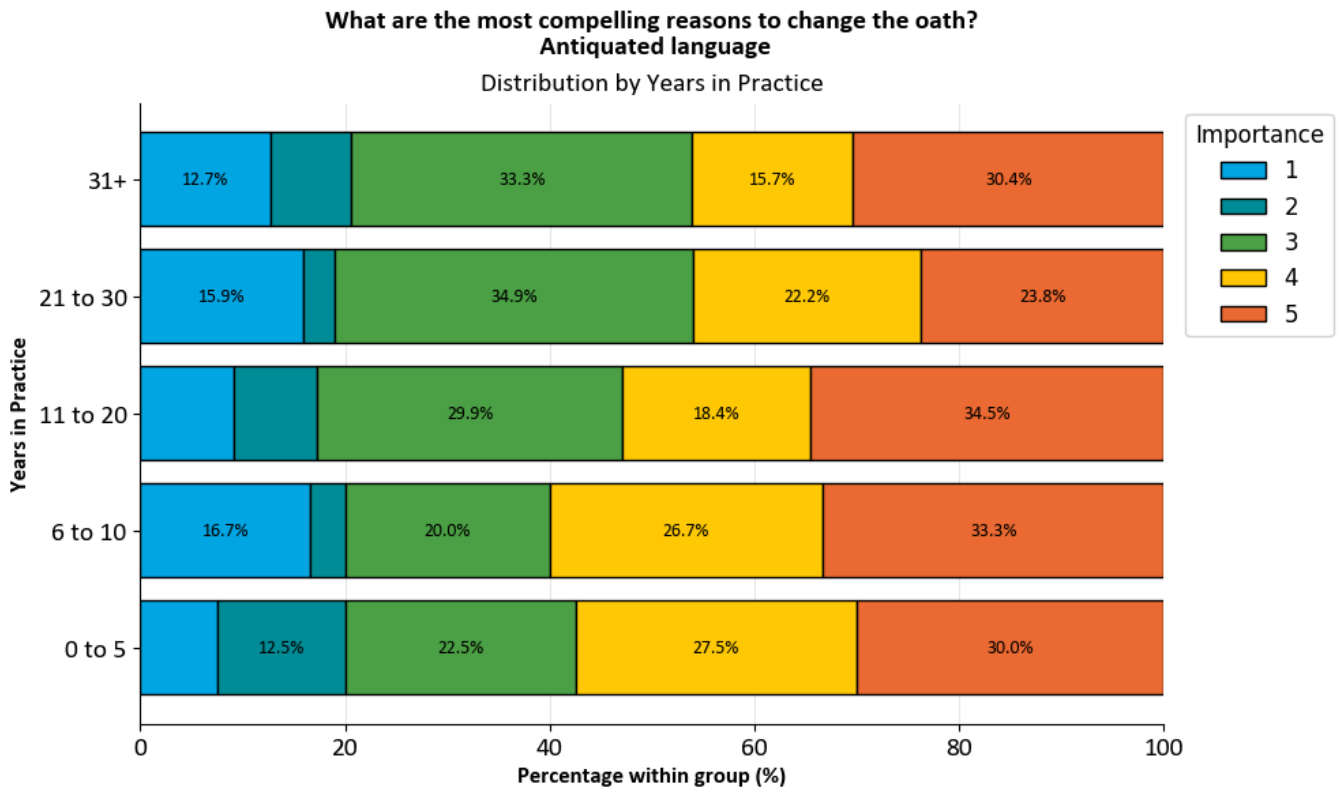
- **Many respondents selected “all of the above”** — they felt multiple adverse impacts could occur, not just one.
- **Politicization concerns** — fear that changes could introduce ideological or partisan language into the oath.
- **Loss of tradition / weakening the oath** — worry that revising long-standing wording could dilute its meaning or importance.
- **Erosion of public trust** — concern that inconsistent or politically influenced changes could reduce confidence in the profession.
- **Unintended or unpredictable consequences** — especially without seeing proposed language or understanding the purpose of the change.
- **Lack of clarity or context** — many said they cannot evaluate impacts without knowing what changes are being suggested.
- **Waste of time and resources** — some believe the oath is fine as is and changing it is unnecessary or inefficient.
- **Concern about survey design** — frustration that only one choice could be selected when multiple applied.
- **A minority expressed no concerns** or said impacts depend entirely on the specific wording.

## Question 3

### Summary of "Most Important Elements to Retain in the Current Oath"

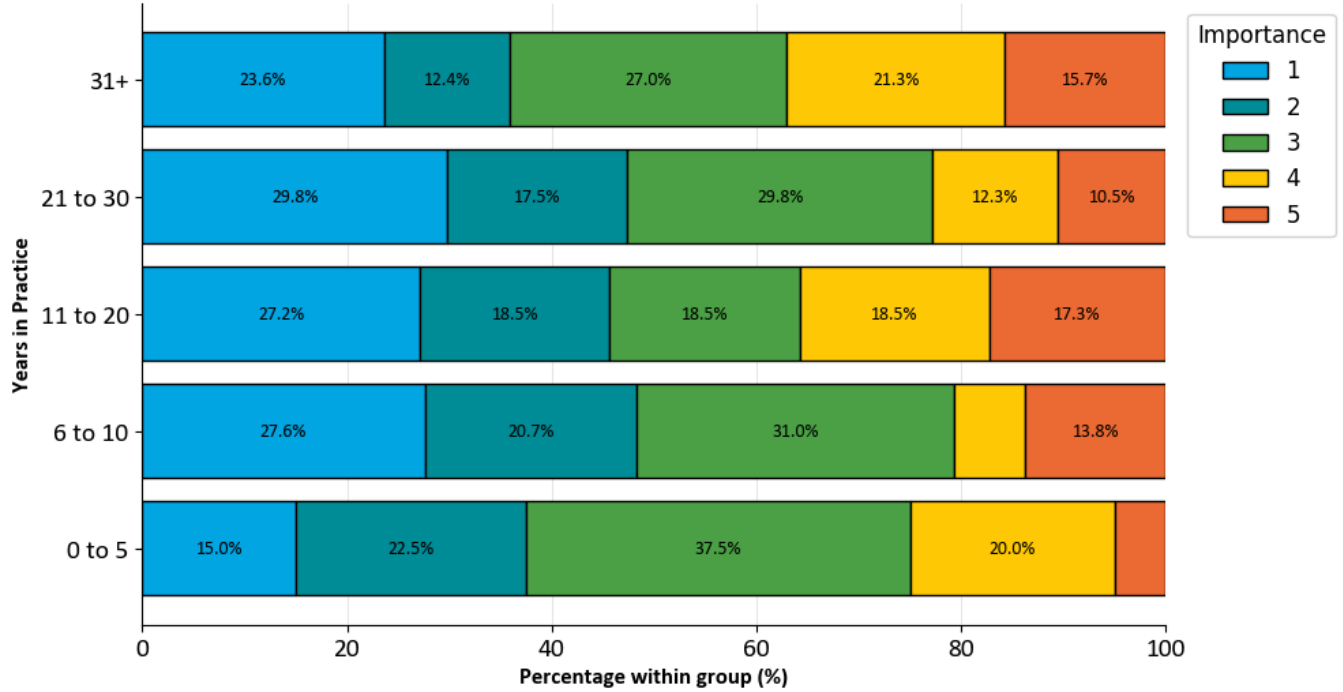
- **Many respondents want the entire oath kept as-is** — they see no need for changes and believe all provisions remain relevant and foundational.
- **Strong emphasis on upholding the U.S. and Washington State Constitutions** — repeatedly identified as the most essential element.
- **Ethics, honesty, integrity, and candor to the court** — widely viewed as core duties that must remain unchanged.
- **Attorney–client confidentiality** — frequently cited as a critical provision to preserve.
- **Commitment to avoid frivolous or unjust actions** — many respondents highlighted paragraph 5 as especially important.
- **Civility and professionalism** — some specifically referenced the “offensive personalities” clause, either valuing its tradition or wanting its intent preserved even if language is updated.
- **Duty to the defenseless or oppressed** — considered meaningful by many, though some noted the need for clarification.
- **Respect for courts and judicial officers** — identified as fundamental to the profession.
- **Tradition and continuity** — many respondents expressed that retaining a uniform oath across generations is important to identity, history, and unity within the profession.
- **Concerns about change** — numerous comments warned against politicizing the oath, adding modern ideological language, or incorporating “trendy” concepts.
- **Some support minor modernizing edits** — but only if the core concepts and intent remain intact.

## Question 4



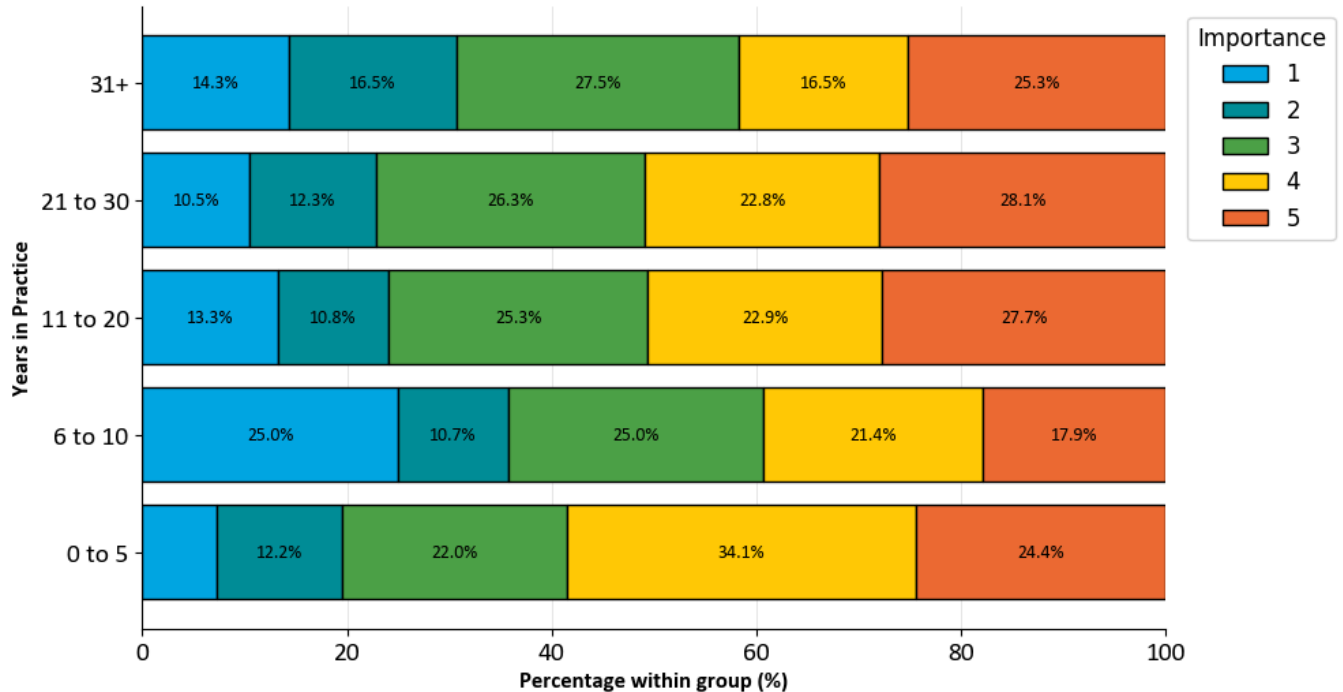
**What are the most compelling reasons to change the oath?  
Not inspirational**

Distribution by Years in Practice



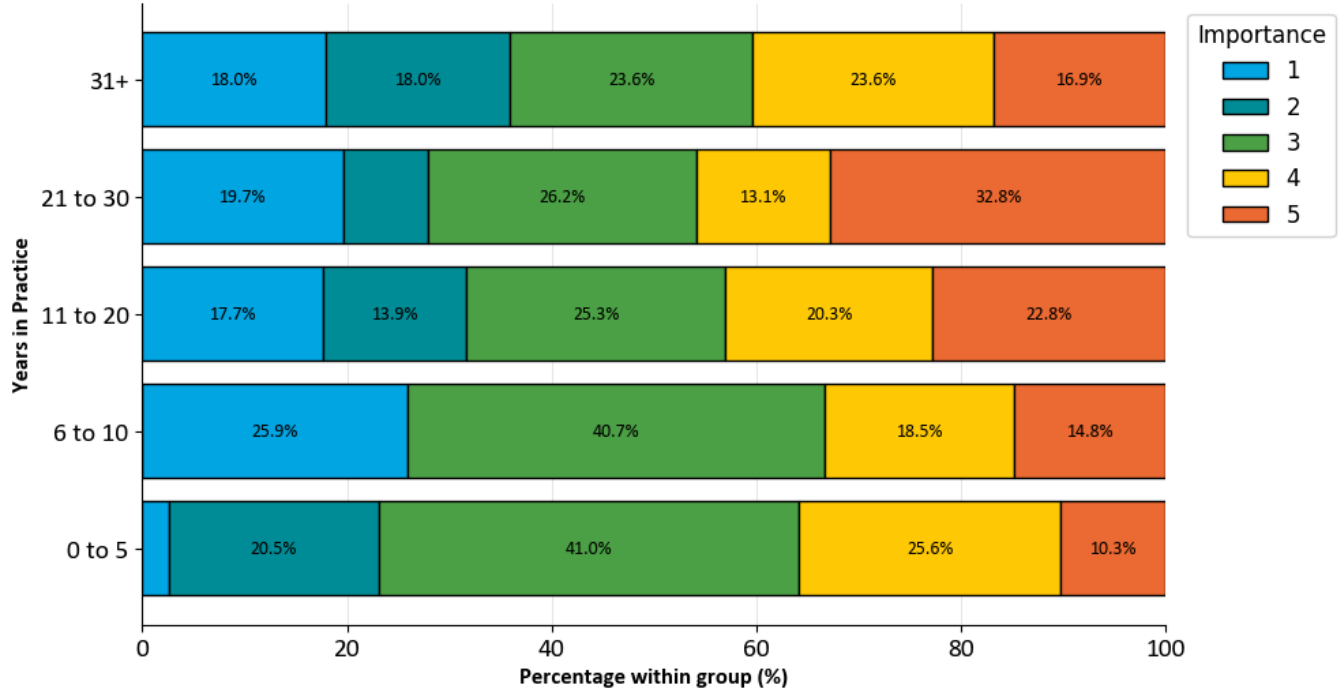
**What are the most compelling reasons to change the oath?  
Confusing**

Distribution by Years in Practice



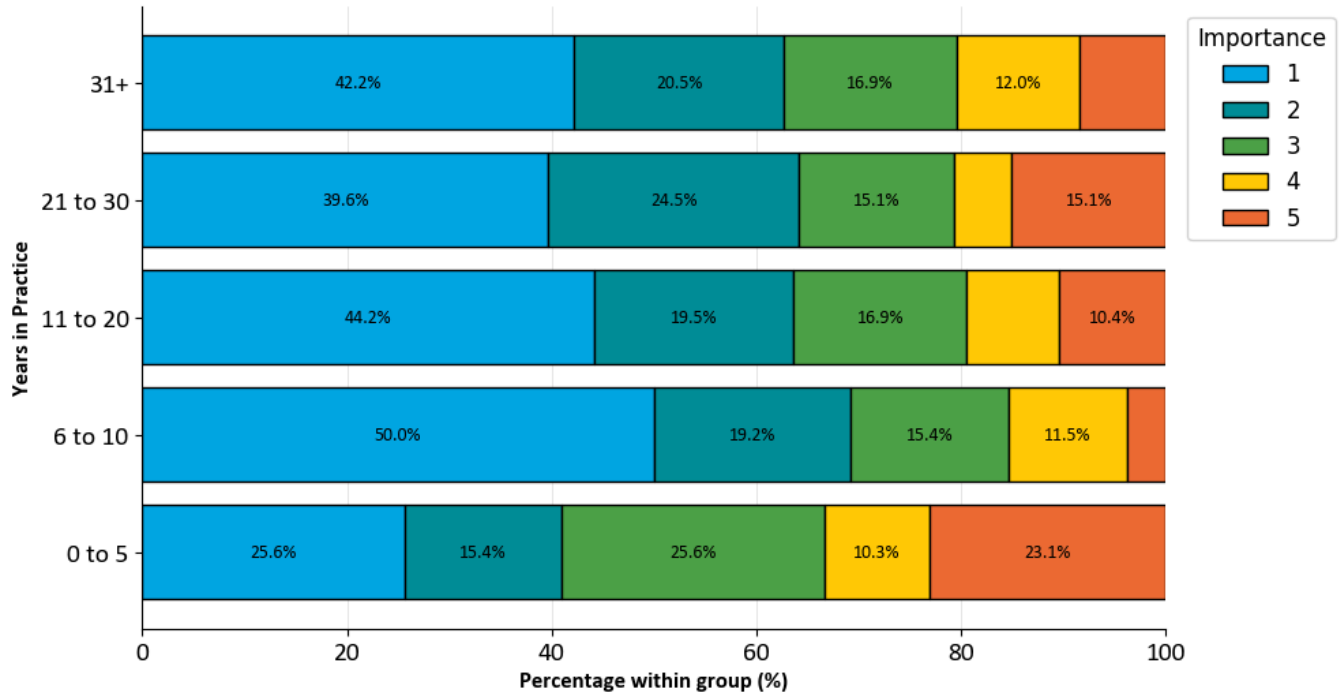
**What are the most compelling reasons to change the oath?  
Missing concepts**

Distribution by Years in Practice



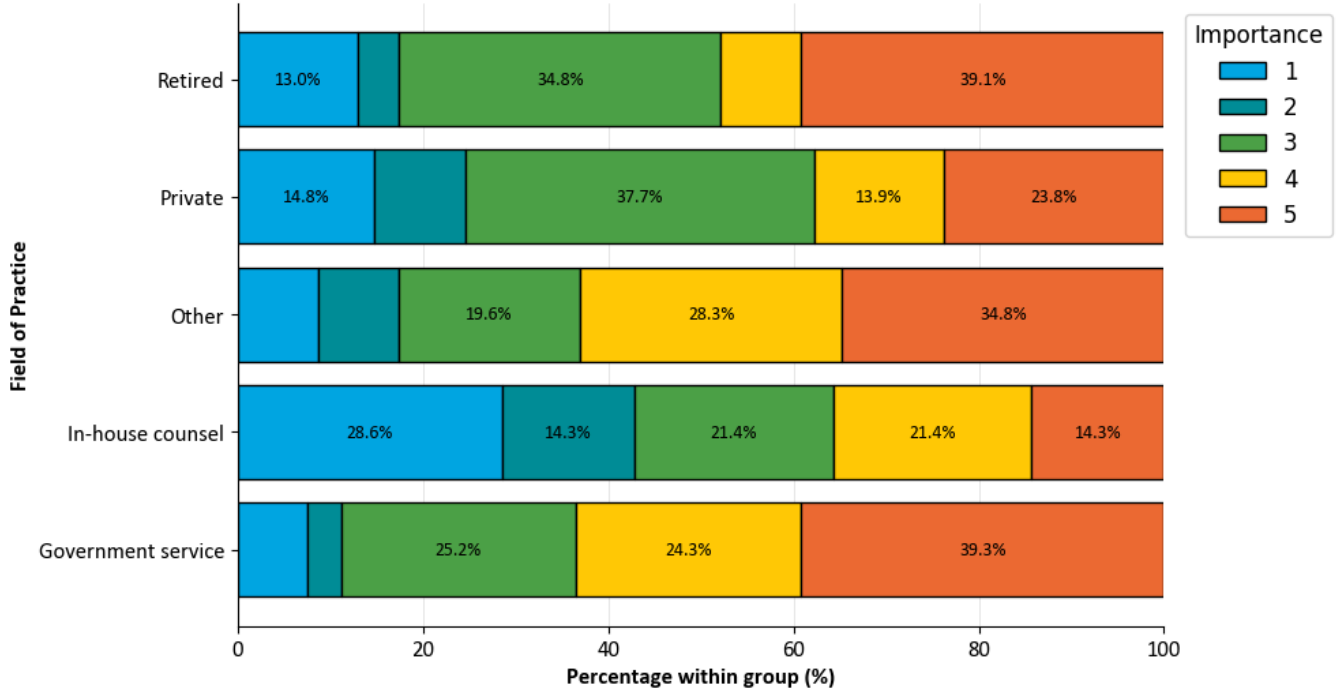
**What are the most compelling reasons to change the oath?  
Concepts you do not agree with**

Distribution by Years in Practice



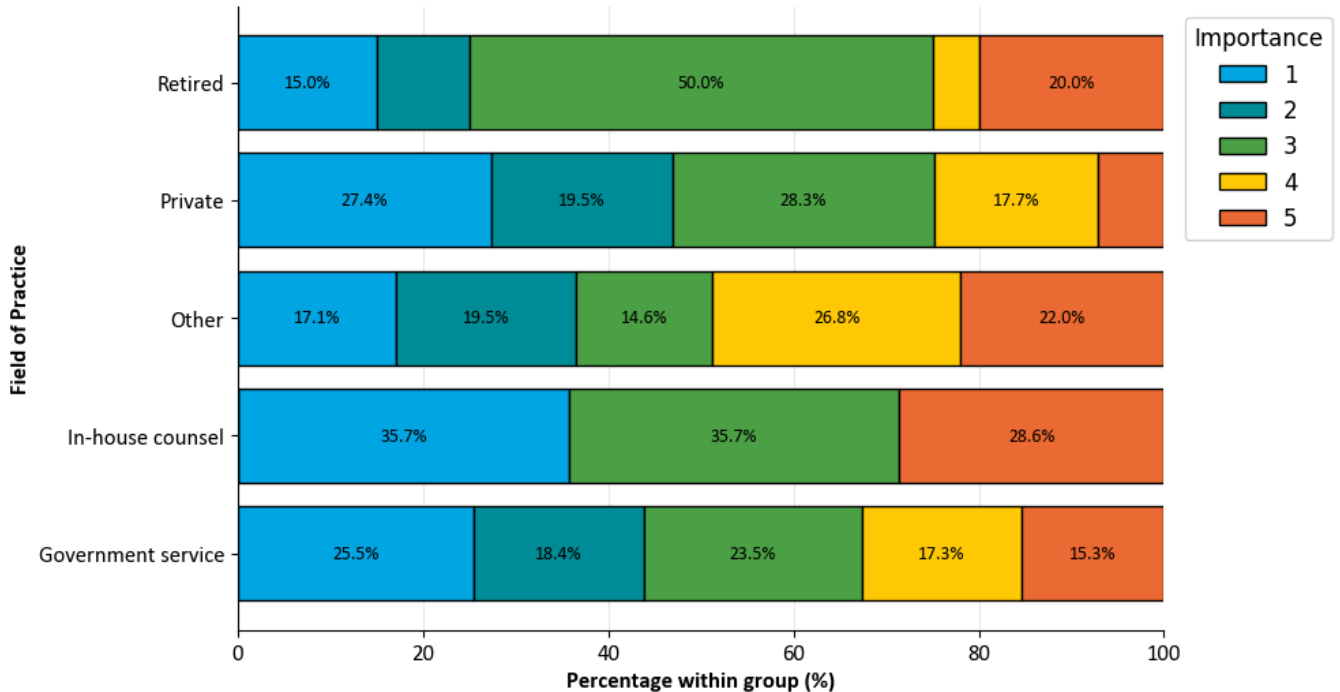
**What are the most compelling reasons to change the oath?  
Antiquated language**

Distribution by Field of Practice



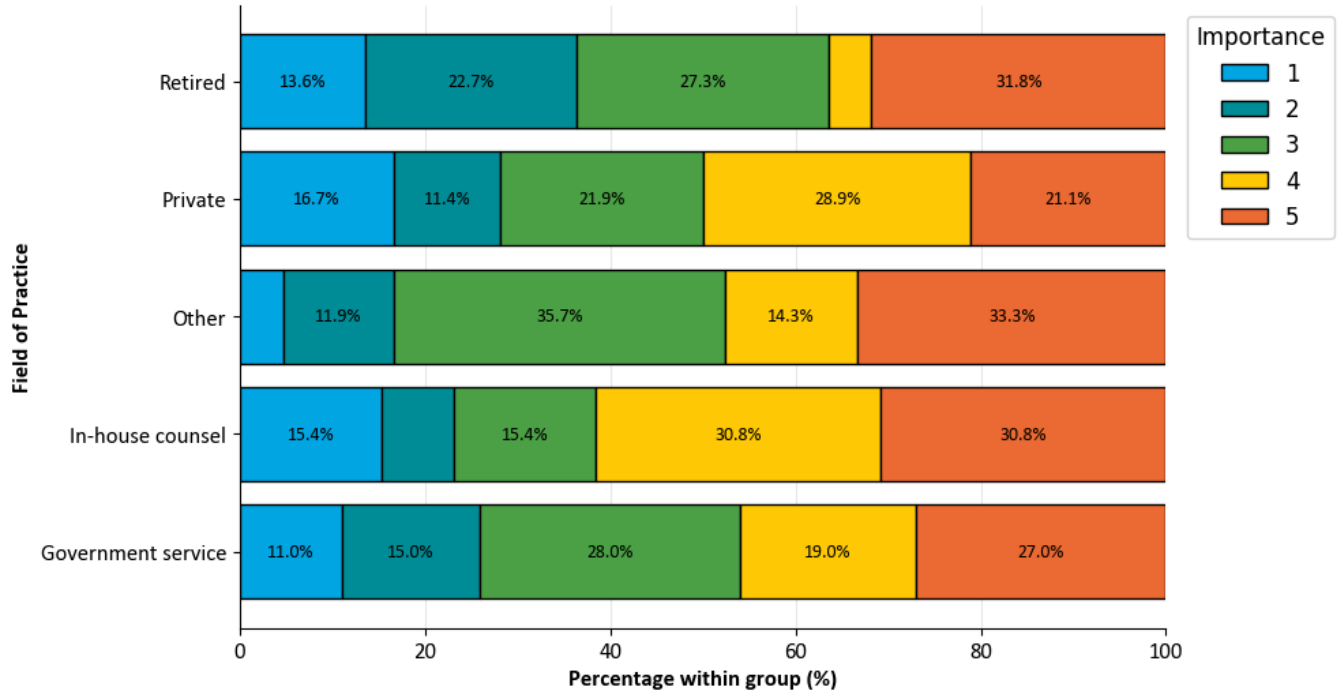
**What are the most compelling reasons to change the oath?  
Not inspirational**

Distribution by Field of Practice



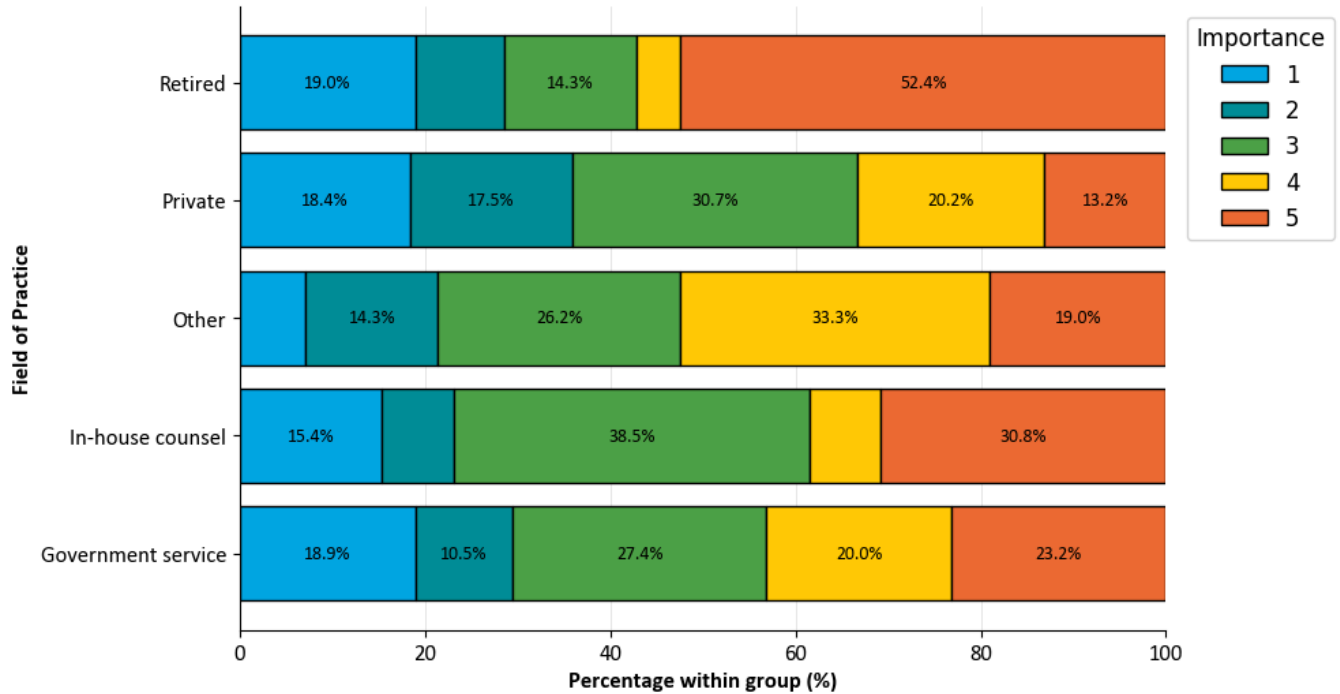
**What are the most compelling reasons to change the oath?**  
**Confusing**

Distribution by Field of Practice



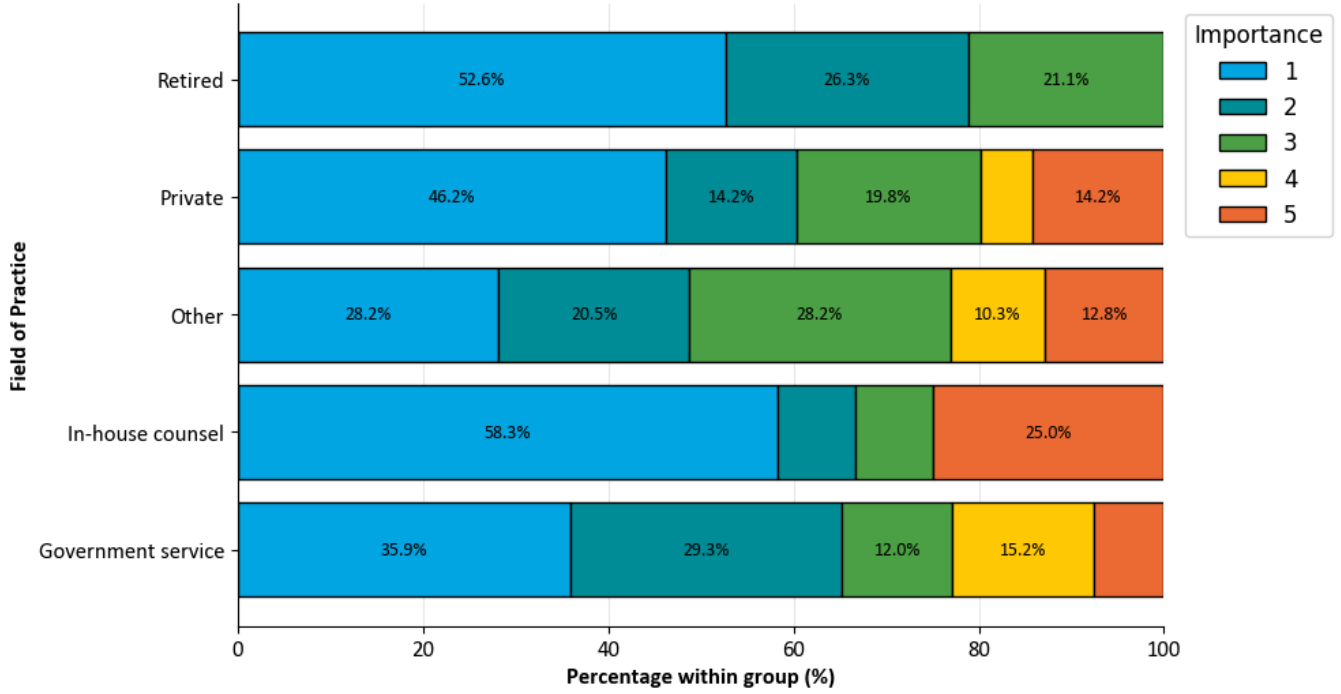
**What are the most compelling reasons to change the oath?**  
**Missing concepts**

Distribution by Field of Practice



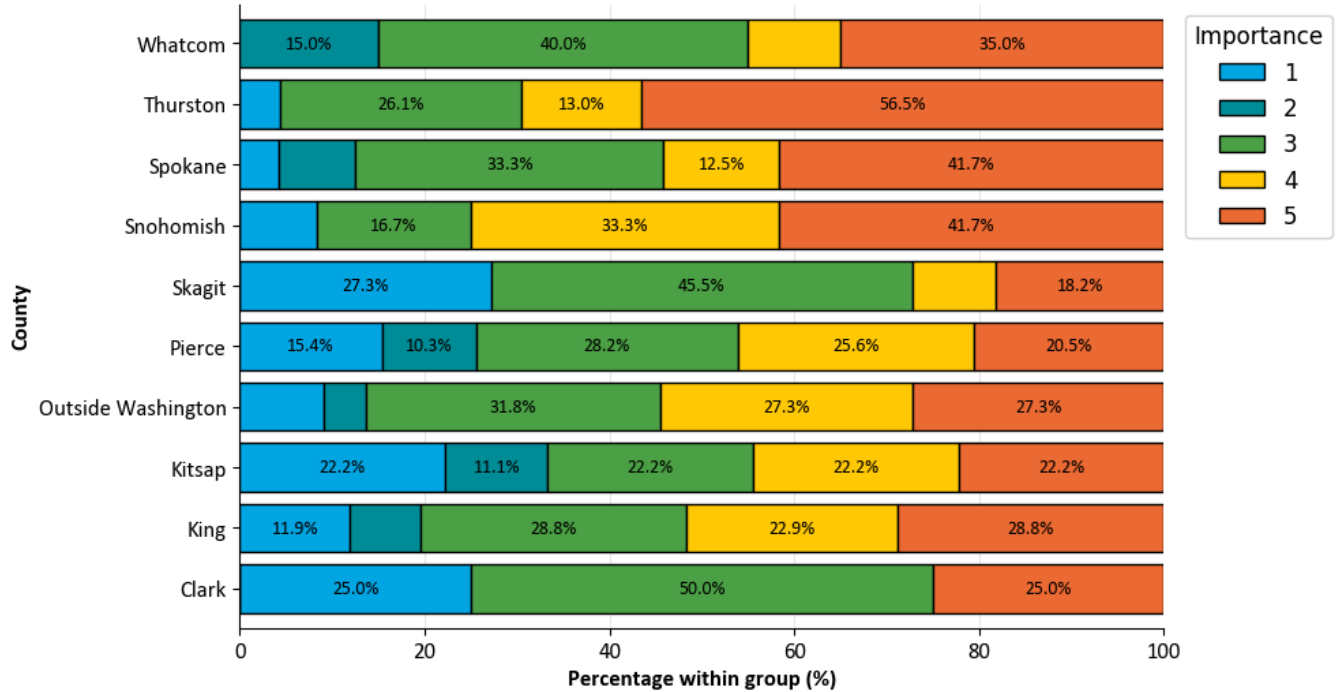
**What are the most compelling reasons to change the oath?  
Concepts you do not agree with**

Distribution by Field of Practice



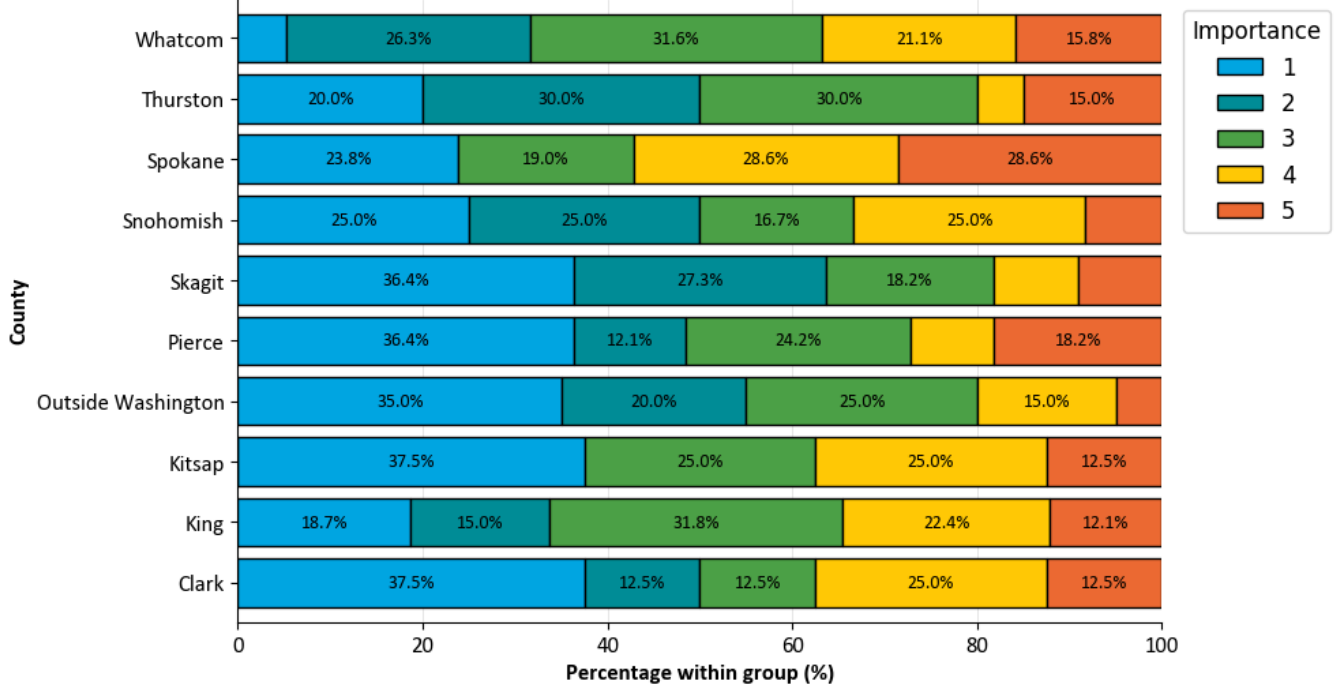
**What are the most compelling reasons to change the oath?  
Antiquated language**

Distribution by County (TOP 10)



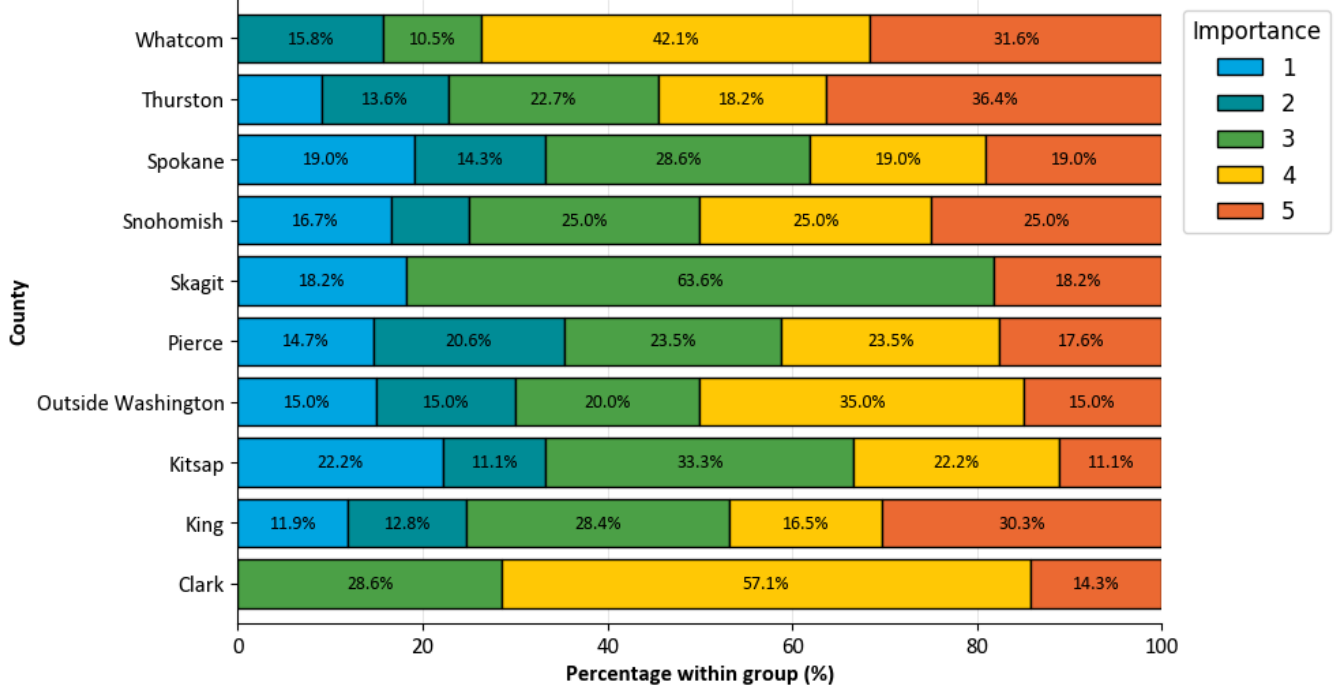
**What are the most compelling reasons to change the oath?  
Not inspirational**

Distribution by County (TOP 10)



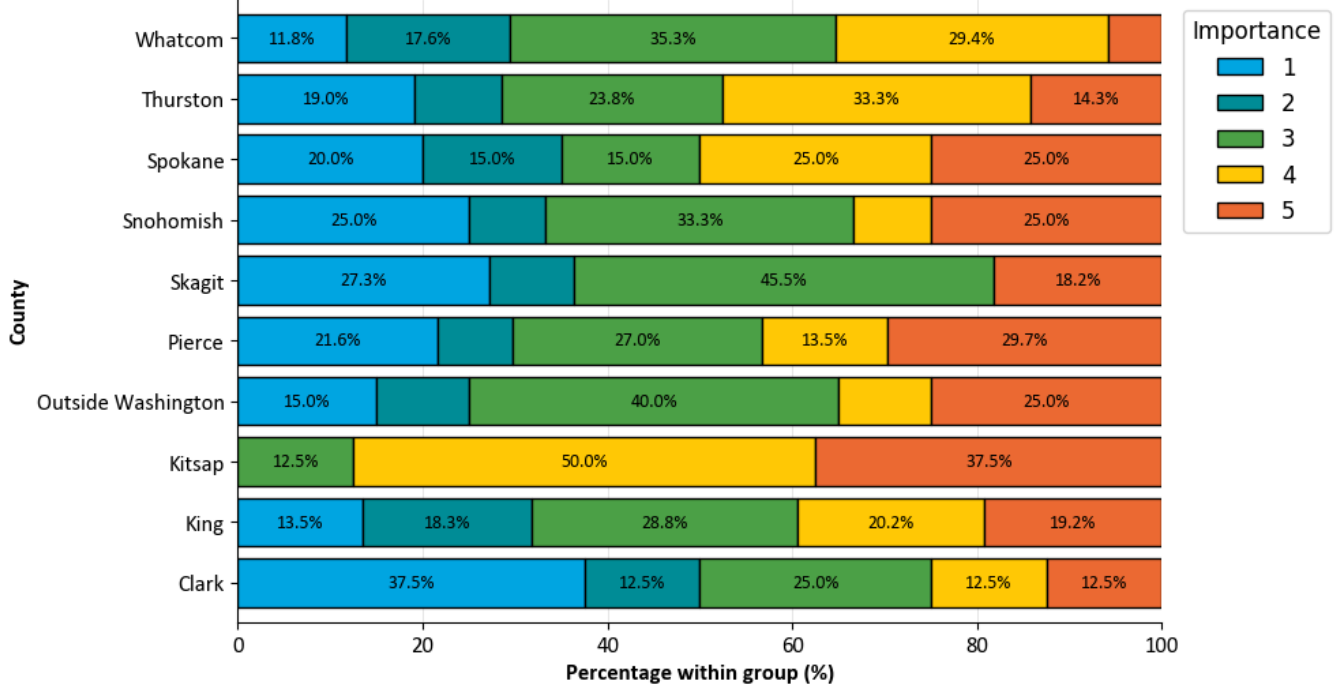
**What are the most compelling reasons to change the oath?  
Confusing**

Distribution by County (TOP 10)



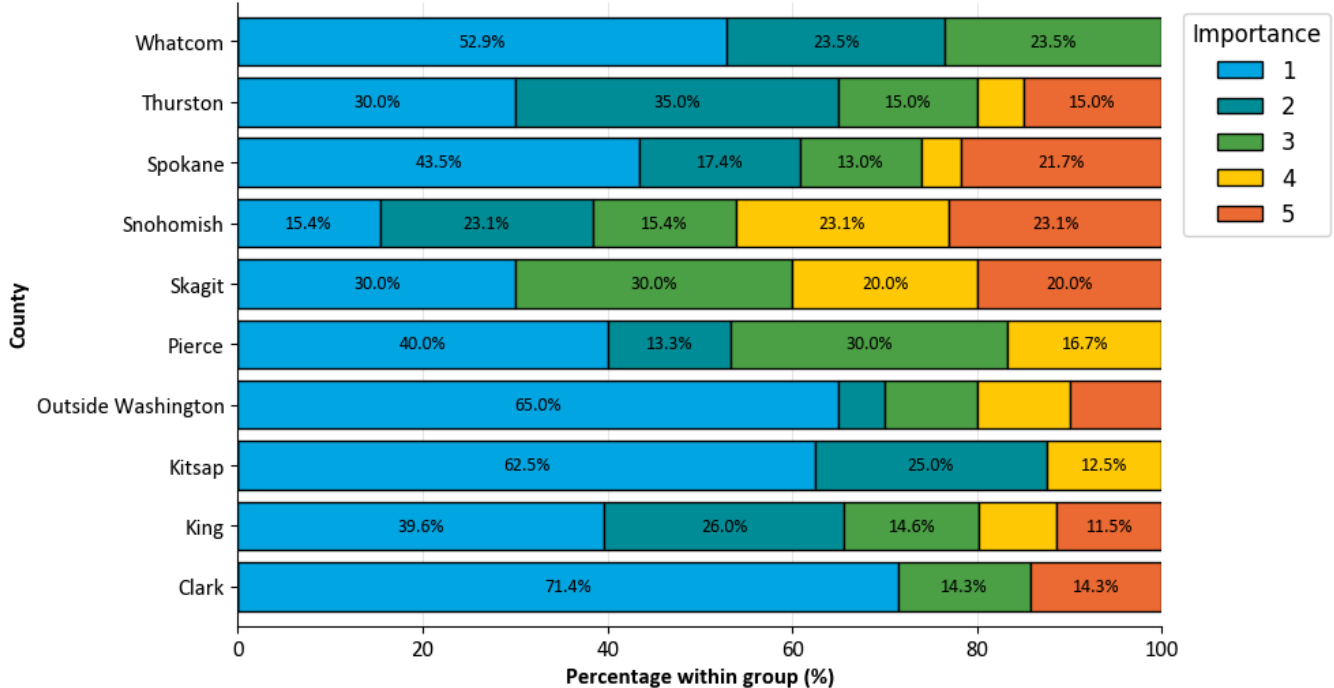
### What are the most compelling reasons to change the oath? Missing concepts

Distribution by County (TOP 10)



### What are the most compelling reasons to change the oath? Concepts you do not agree with

Distribution by County (TOP 10)

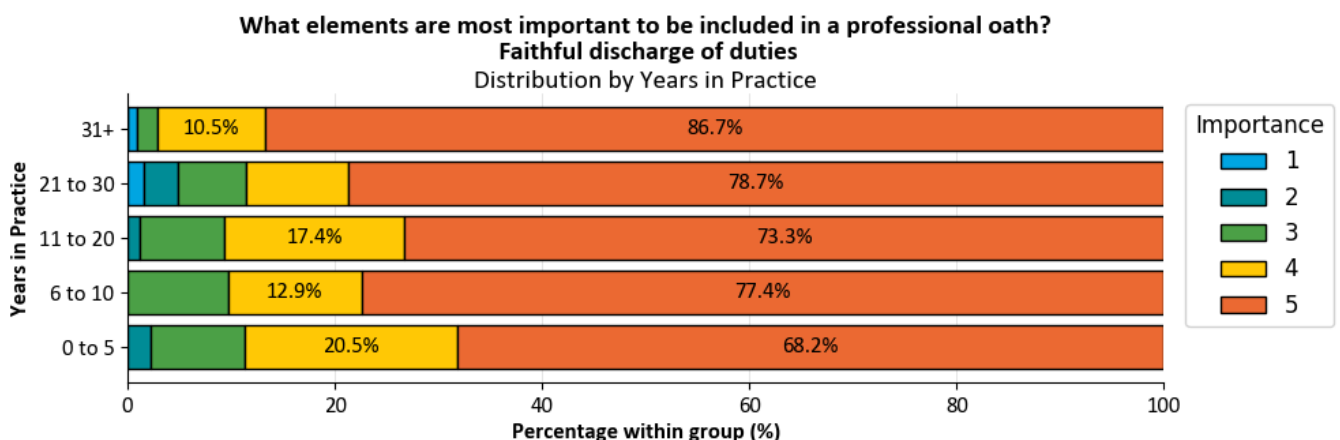
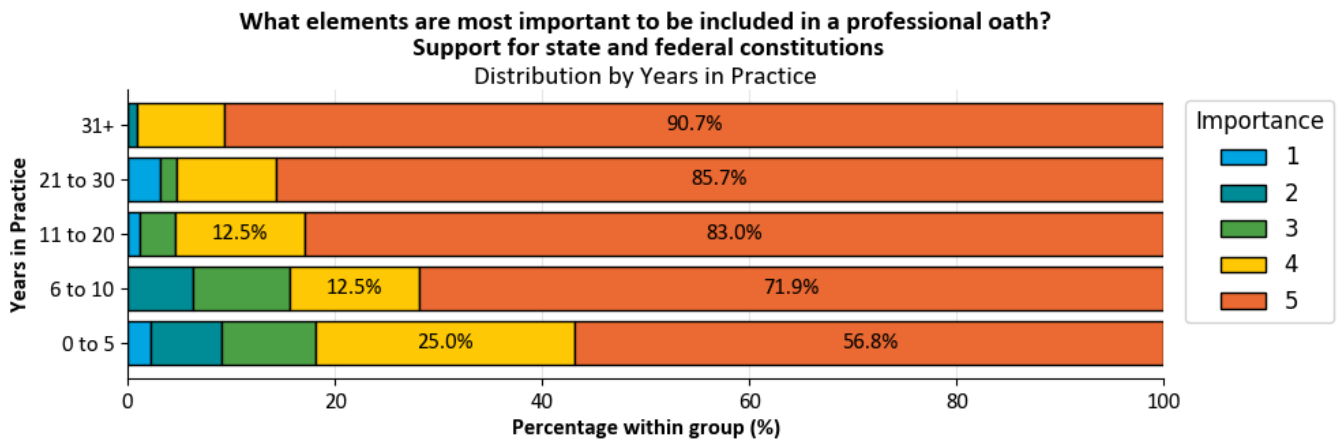


## Summary of "Other" Responses: Reasons to Change the Oath

- **The oath is too long** — many respondents said it should be shorter, simpler, and more concise.

- **Use plain, modern language** — several cited confusing, outdated, or grammatically incorrect phrasing (especially “abstain from all offensive personalities”).
- **Improve clarity** — some sections are vague, contradictory, or difficult to interpret.
- **Align with RPCs** — respondents noted redundancy, suggesting the oath could simply reference the Rules of Professional Conduct.
- **Strengthen constitutional language** — a few wanted “support” changed to stronger terms such as “uphold” or “defend.”
- **Address outdated or unclear provisions** — especially paragraph 8 and parts of paragraph 5.
- **Reinforce civility, integrity, and professionalism** — some supported updating language to more clearly state these expectations.
- **Add clarity around modern expectations** — suggestions included referencing respect, candor, or modern values without being ideological.
- **Update to reflect contemporary legal practice** — e.g., acknowledging administrative hearings or money-handling obligations.
- **Some respondents saw no compelling reason to change the oath at all** — but answered because the question required input.

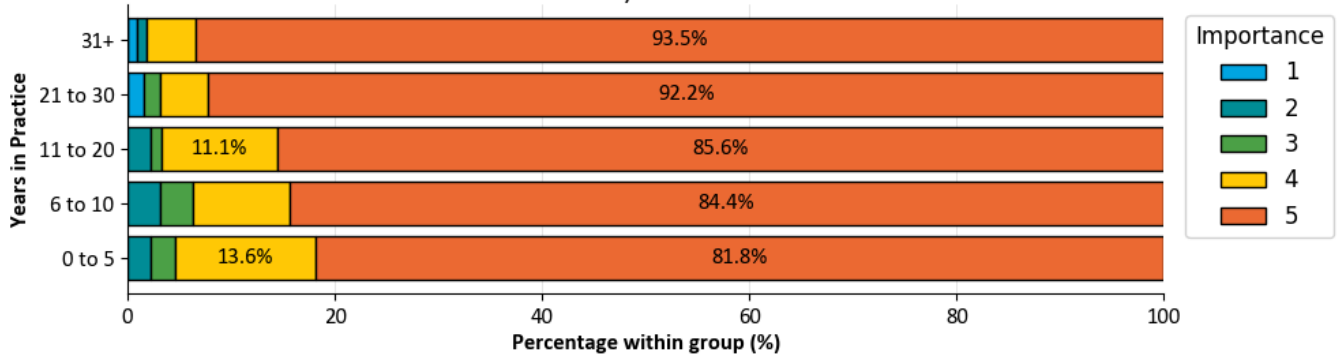
## Question 5



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**

**Honesty and honorable conduct**

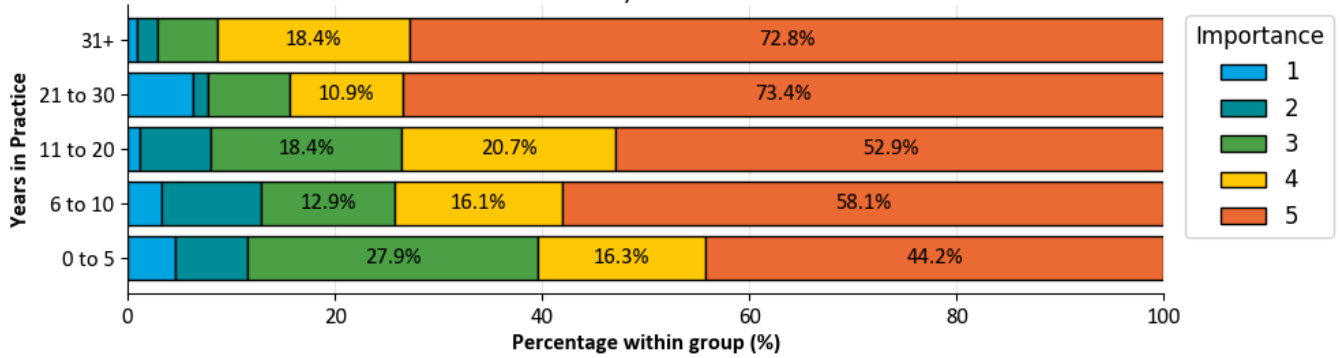
Distribution by Years in Practice



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**

**Maintain respect for the judiciary**

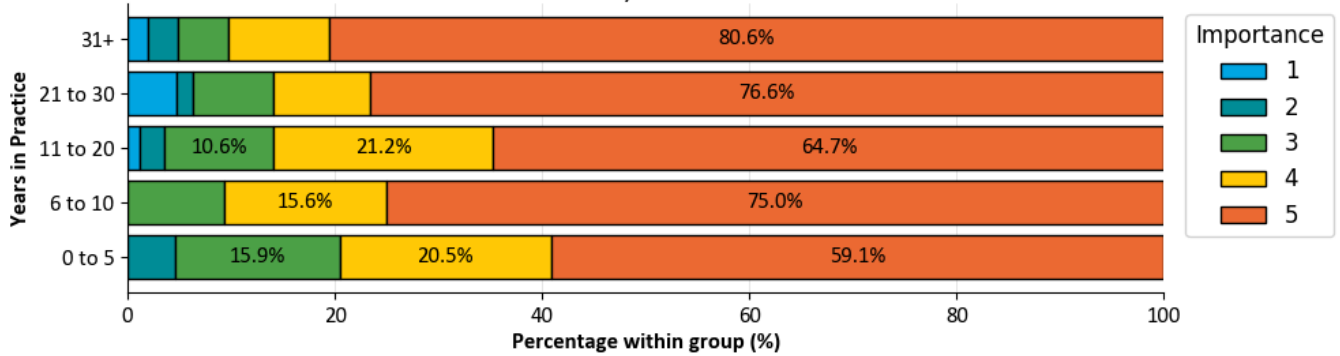
Distribution by Years in Practice



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**

**Confidentiality**

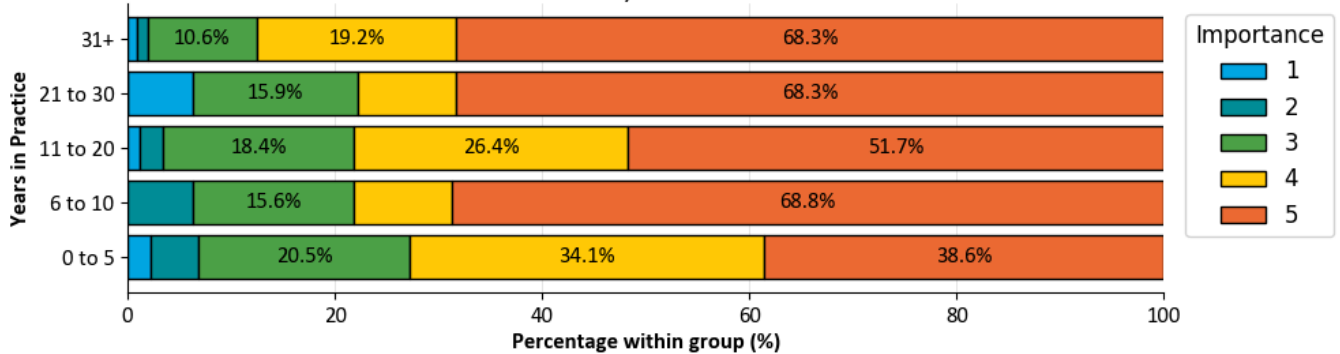
Distribution by Years in Practice



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**

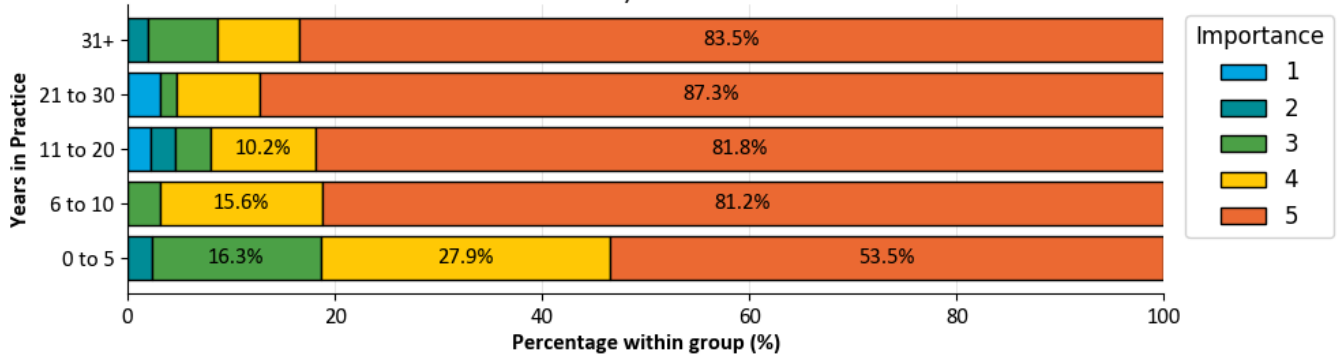
**Civility**

Distribution by Years in Practice



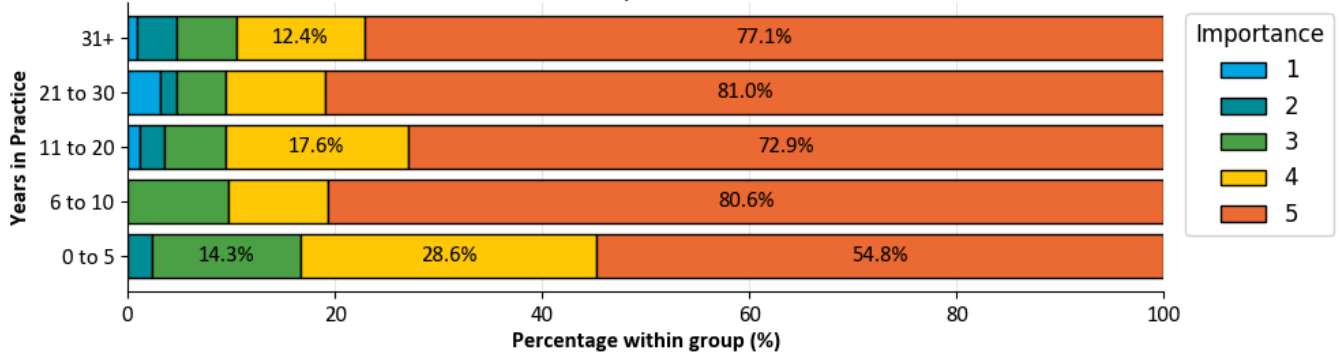
**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?  
Candor before the court**

Distribution by Years in Practice



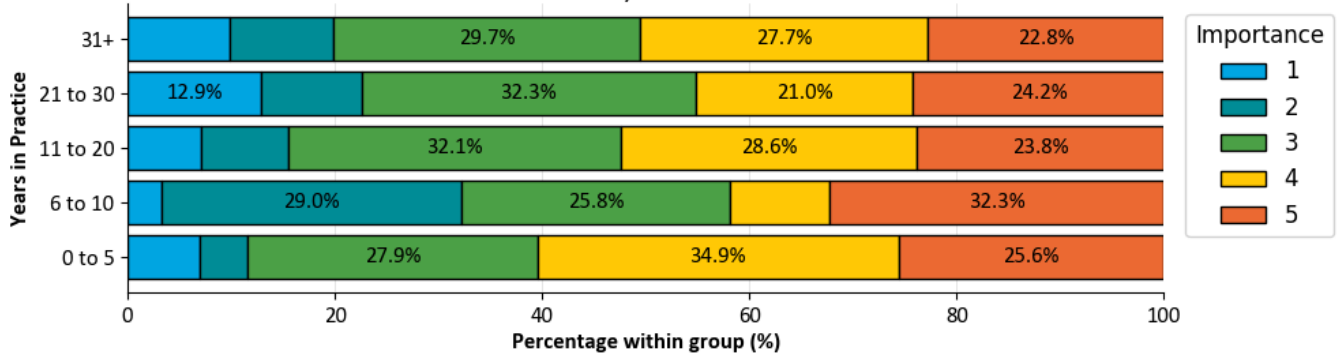
**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?  
Avoidance of false and misleading statements**

Distribution by Years in Practice



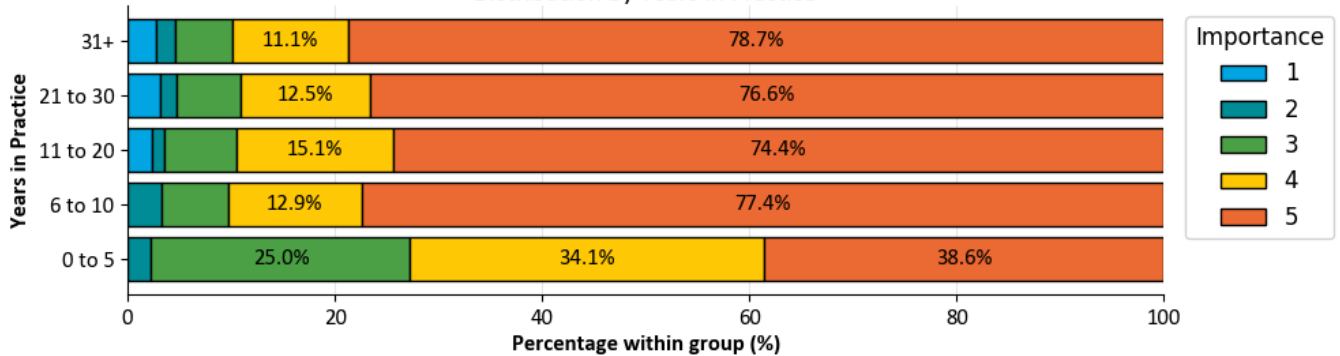
**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?  
Public service**

Distribution by Years in Practice



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?  
Adherence to Rules of Professional Conduct**

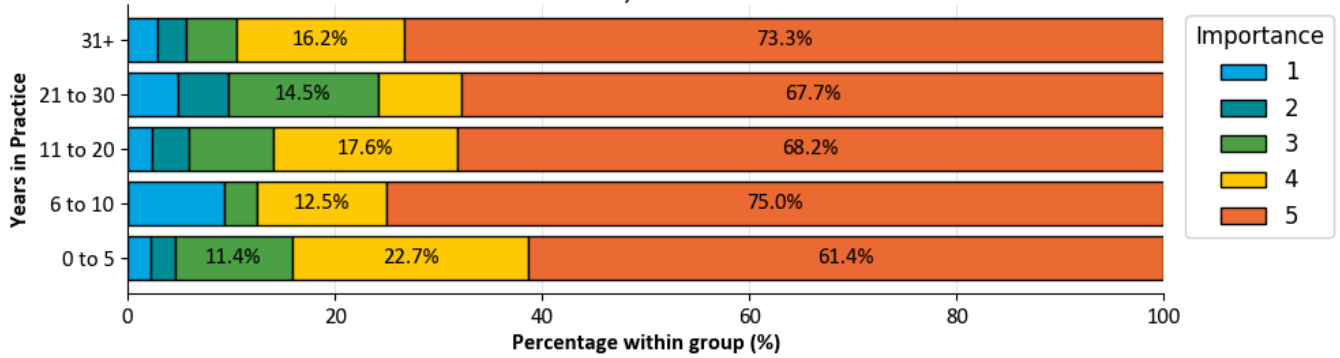
Distribution by Years in Practice



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**

**Integrity of the profession**

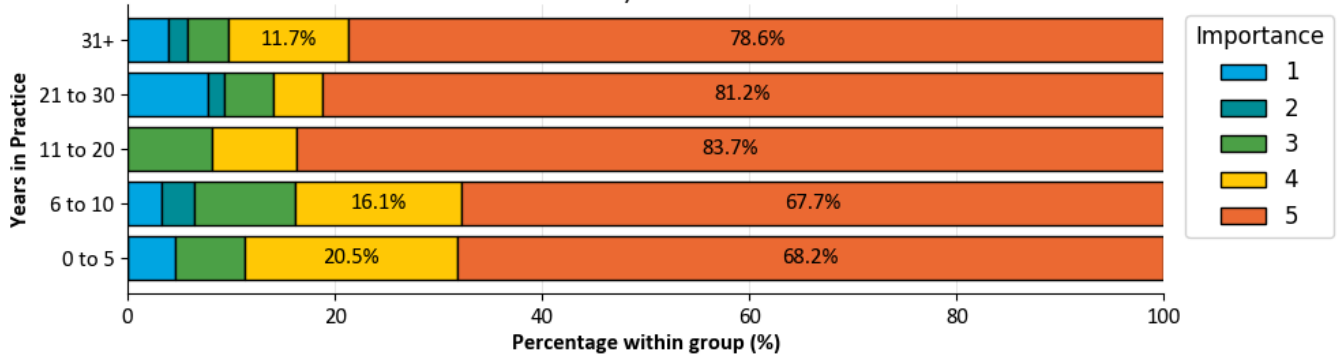
Distribution by Years in Practice



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**

**Upholding democracy and the rule of law**

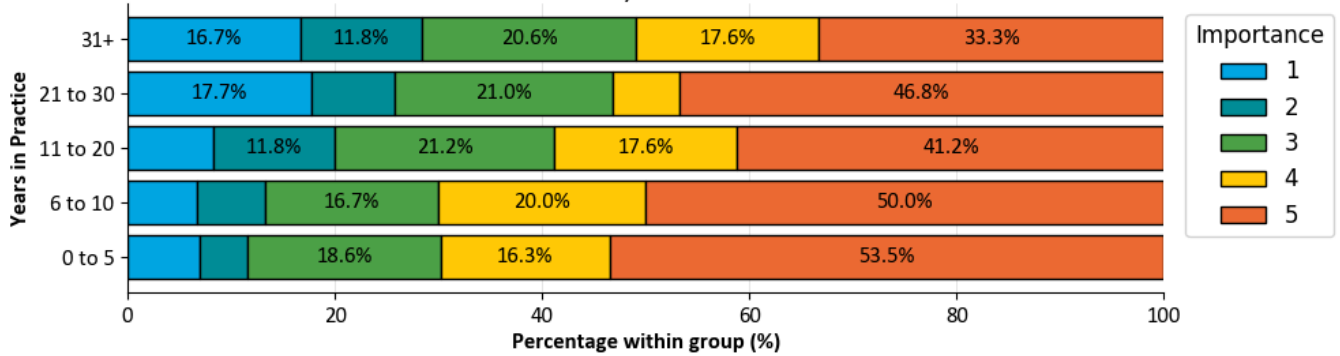
Distribution by Years in Practice



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**

**Ensuring the full realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms**

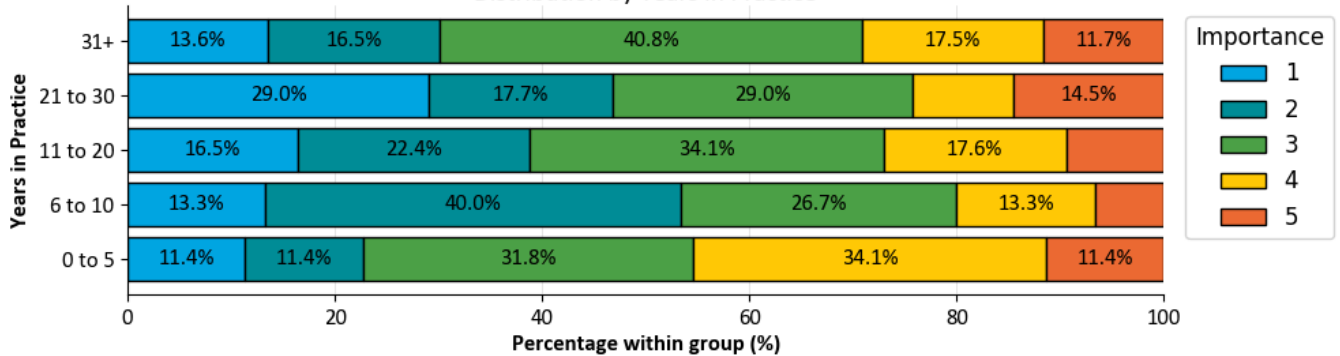
Distribution by Years in Practice



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**

**Pro bono service**

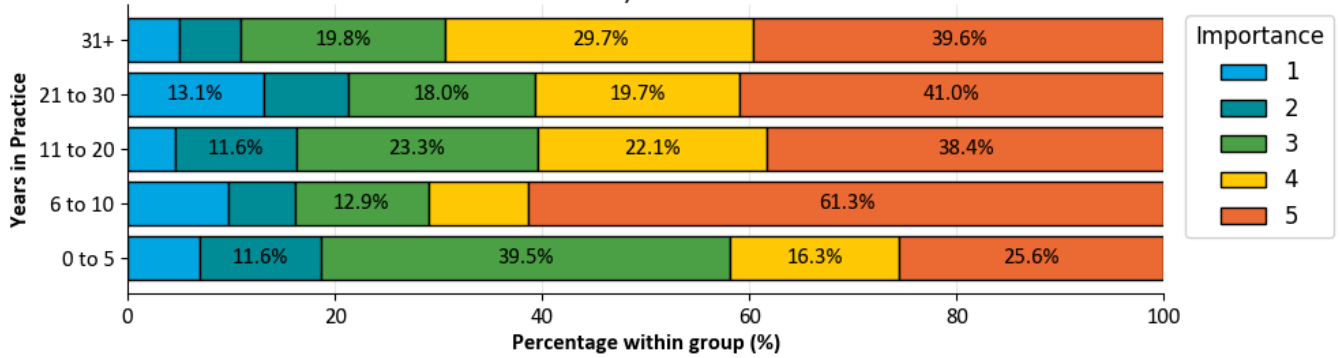
Distribution by Years in Practice



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**

**Dignity of the profession**

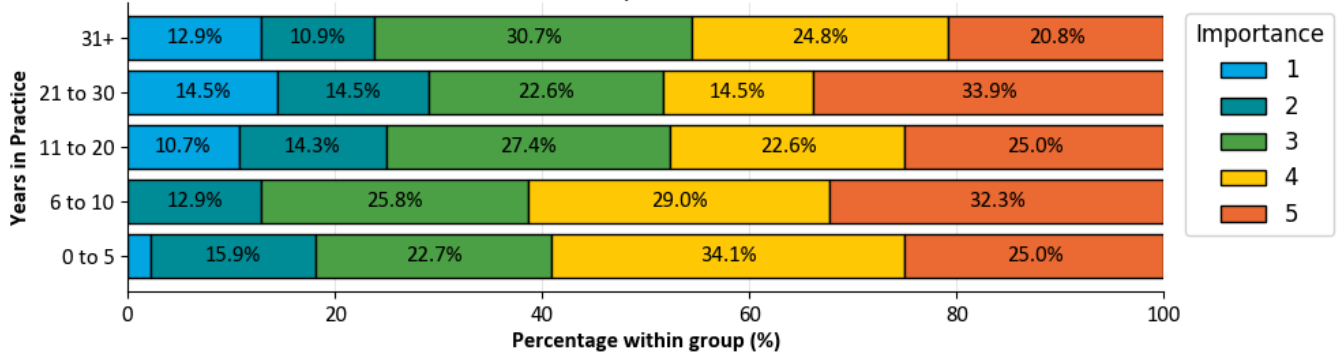
Distribution by Years in Practice



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**

**Improving the law**

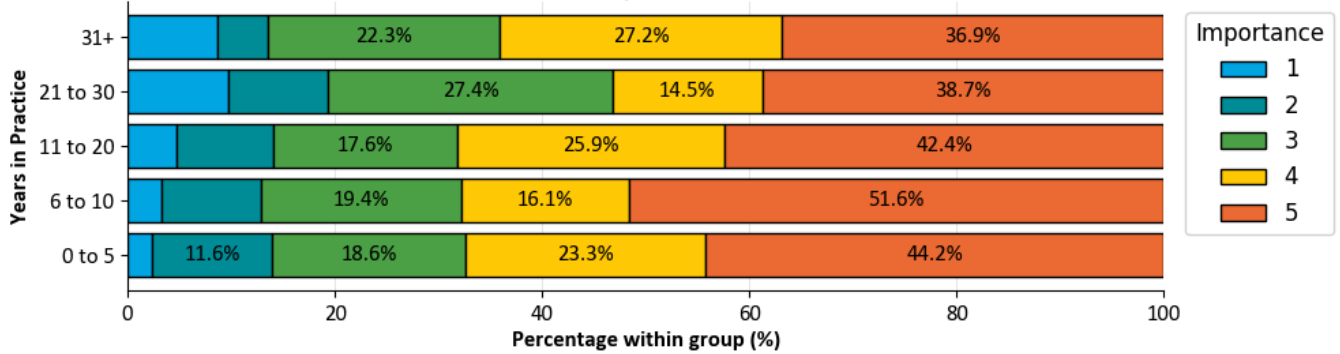
Distribution by Years in Practice



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**

**Access to justice**

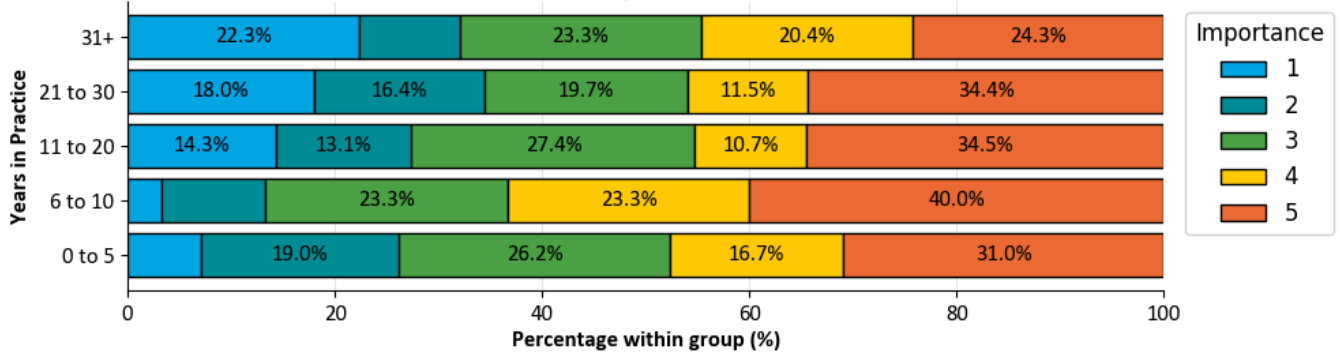
Distribution by Years in Practice



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**

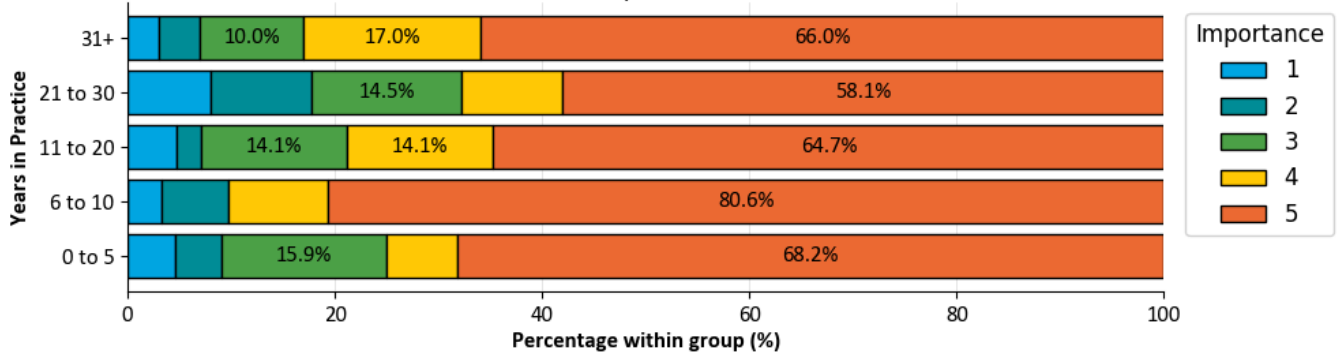
**Diversity, equity, and inclusion**

Distribution by Years in Practice



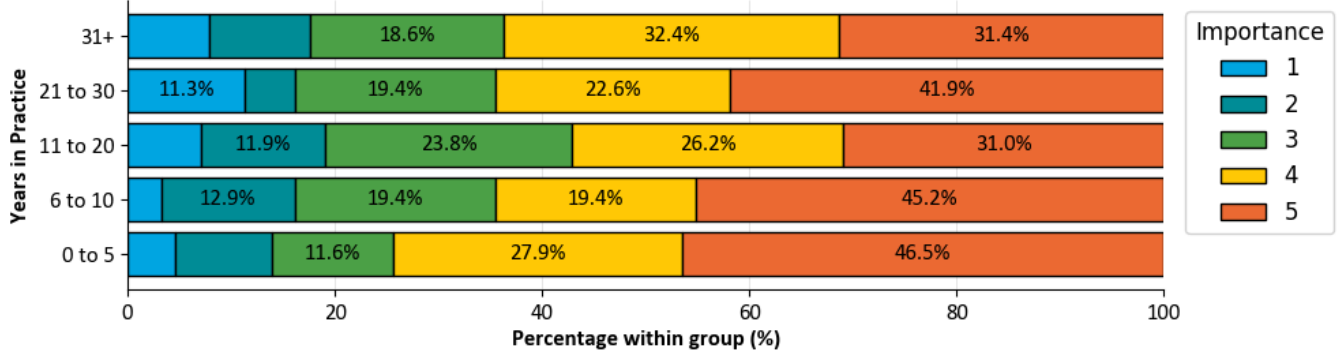
**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?  
Justice for all**

Distribution by Years in Practice



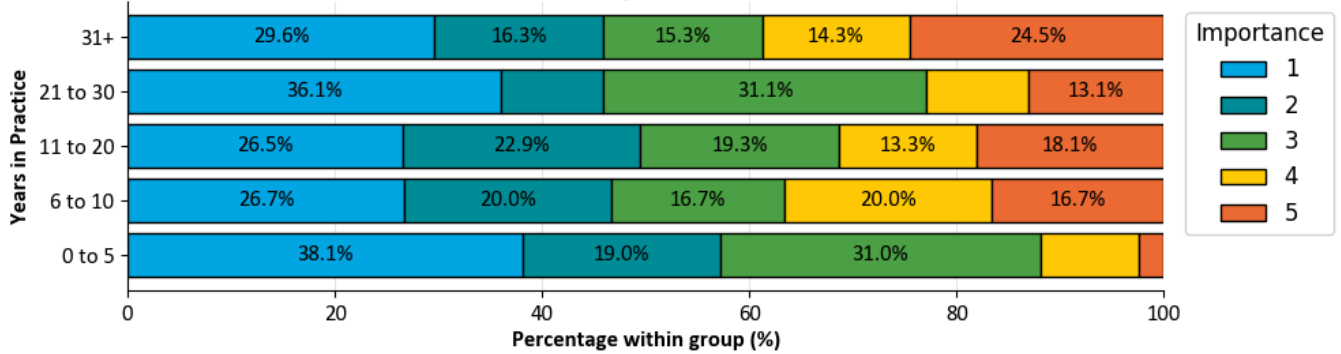
**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?  
Legal needs of the defenseless and oppressed**

Distribution by Years in Practice



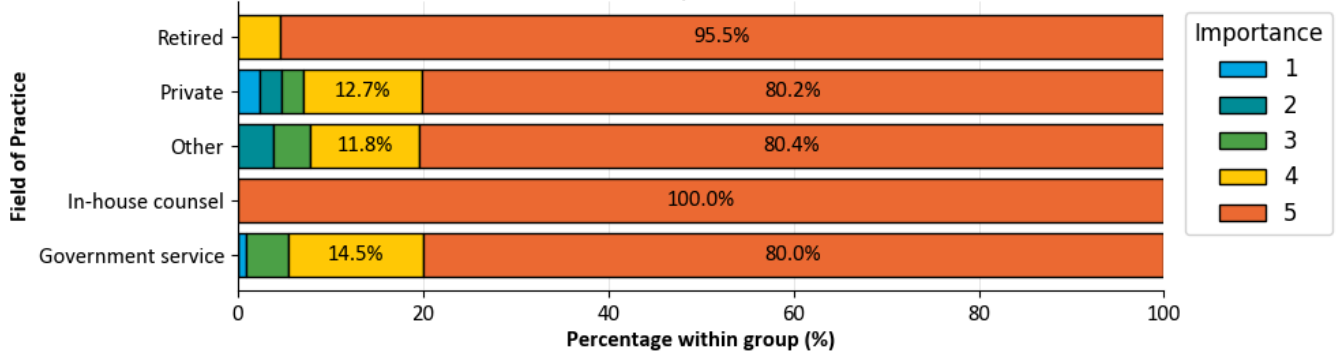
**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?  
Abstaining from all offensive personalities**

Distribution by Years in Practice



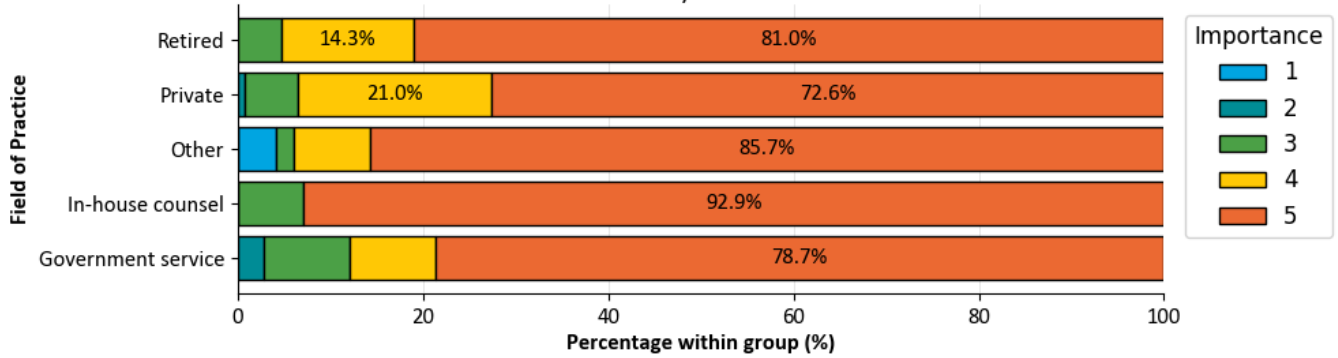
**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?  
Support for state and federal constitutions**

Distribution by Field of Practice



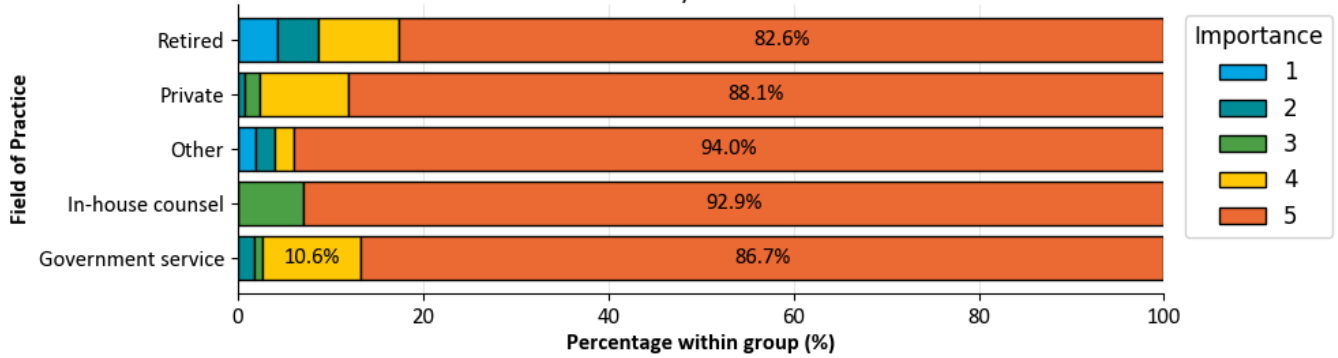
**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**

**Faithful discharge of duties**  
Distribution by Field of Practice



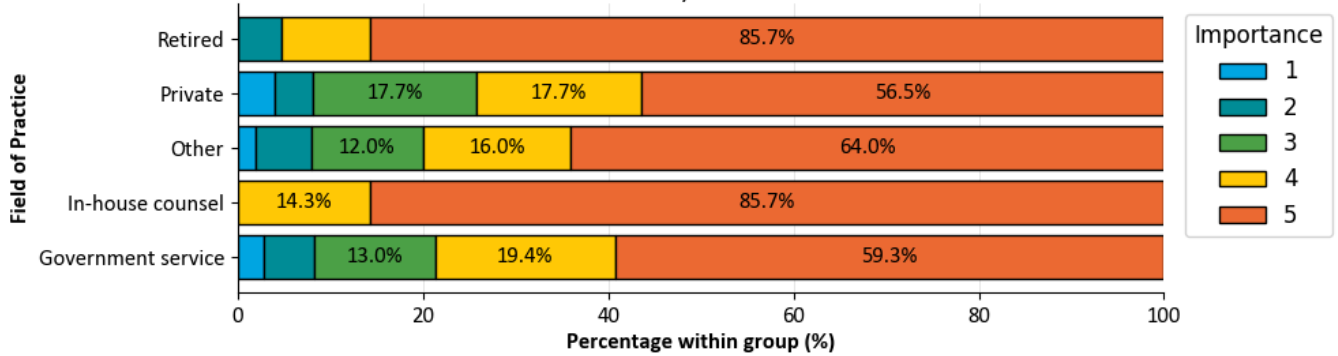
**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**

**Honesty and honorable conduct**  
Distribution by Field of Practice



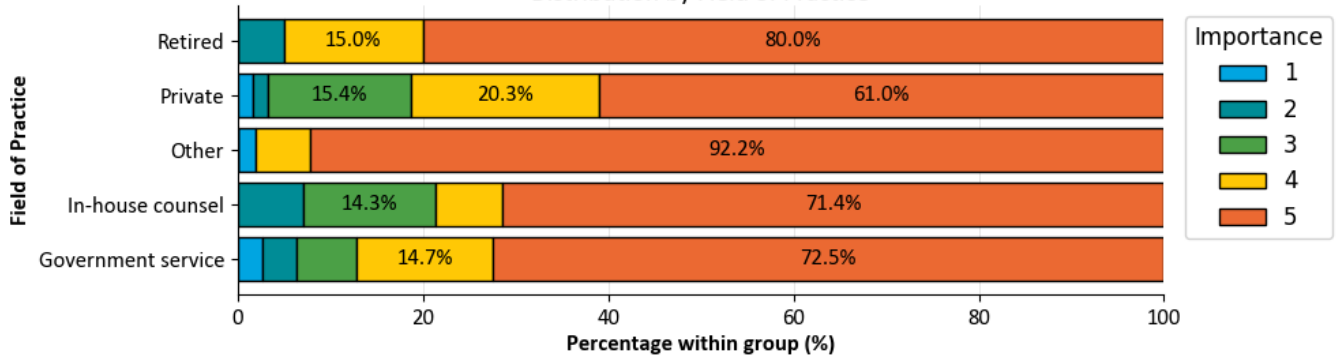
**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**

**Maintain respect for the judiciary**  
Distribution by Field of Practice



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**

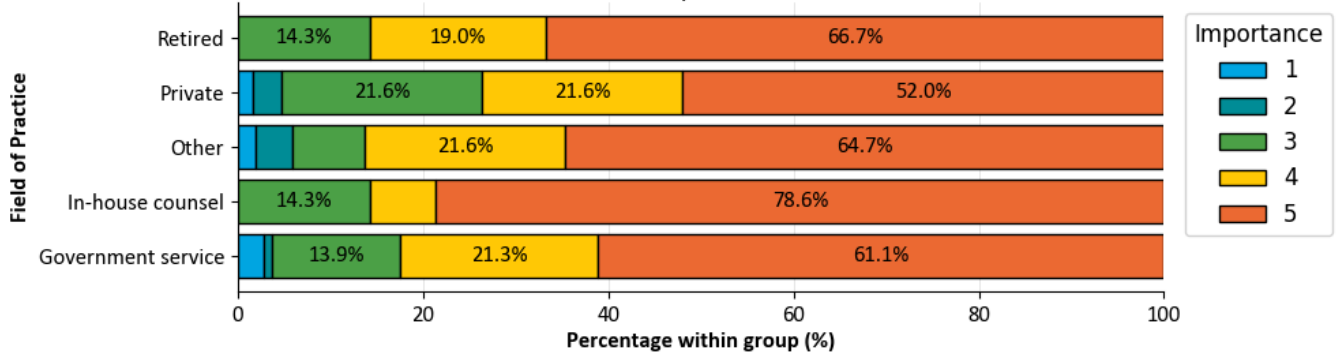
**Confidentiality**  
Distribution by Field of Practice



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**

**Civility**

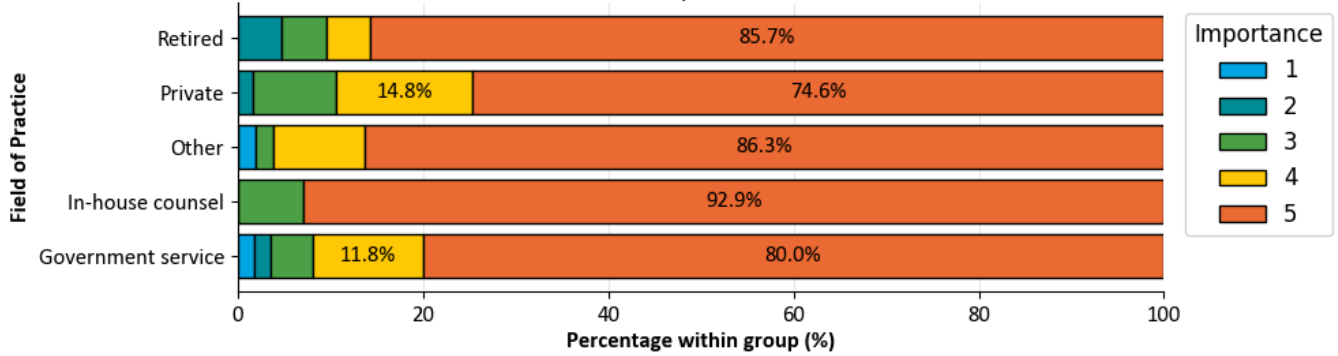
Distribution by Field of Practice



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**

**Candor before the court**

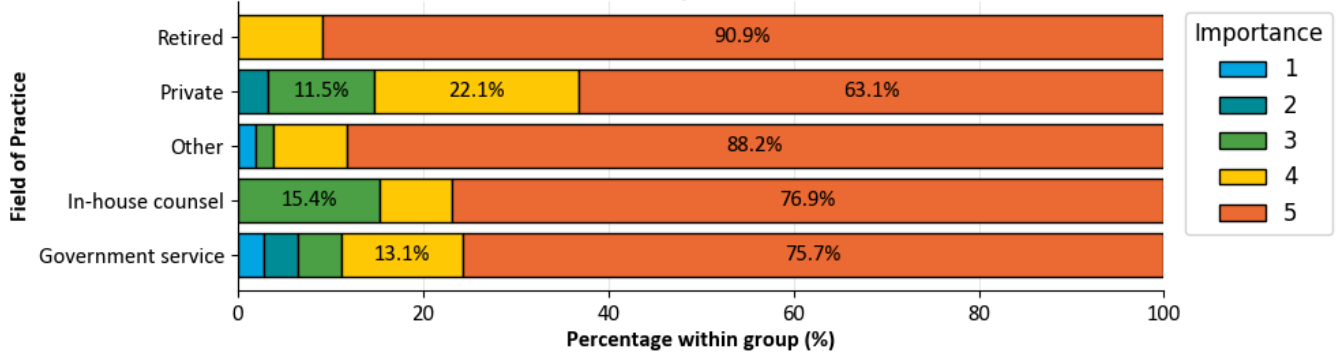
Distribution by Field of Practice



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**

**Avoidance of false and misleading statements**

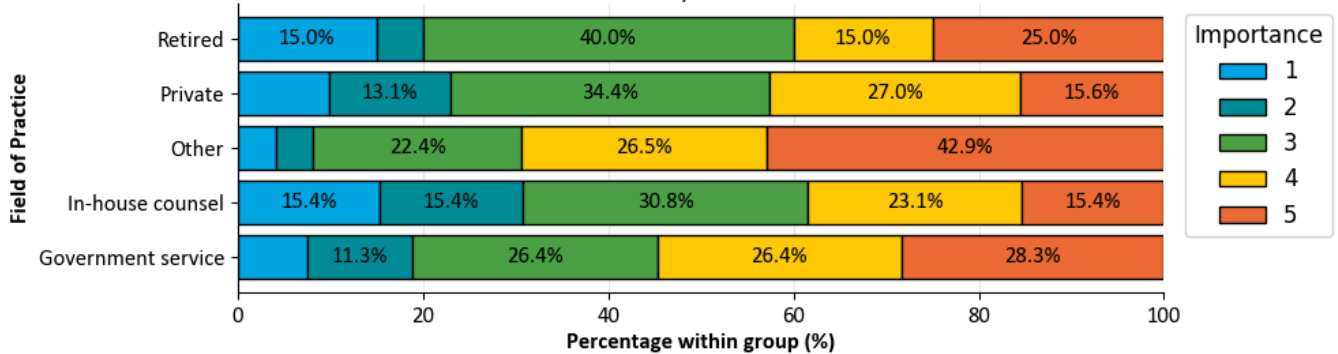
Distribution by Field of Practice



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**

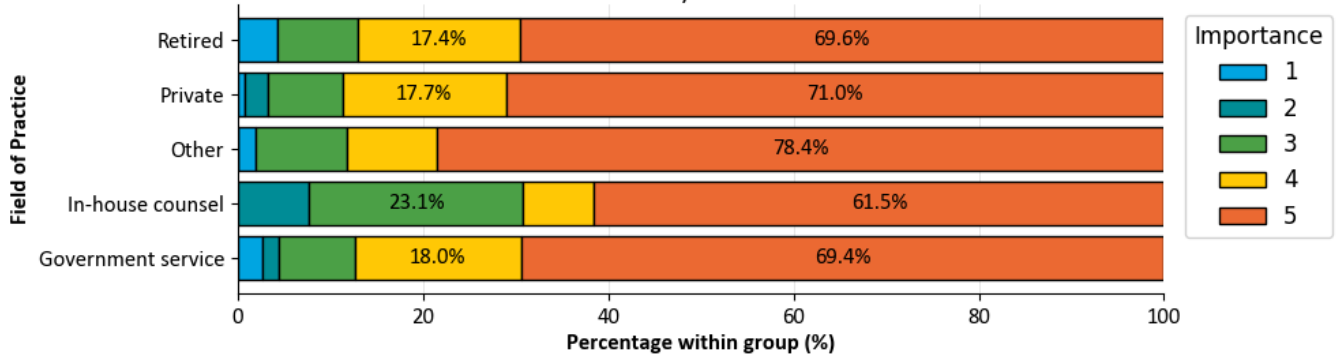
**Public service**

Distribution by Field of Practice



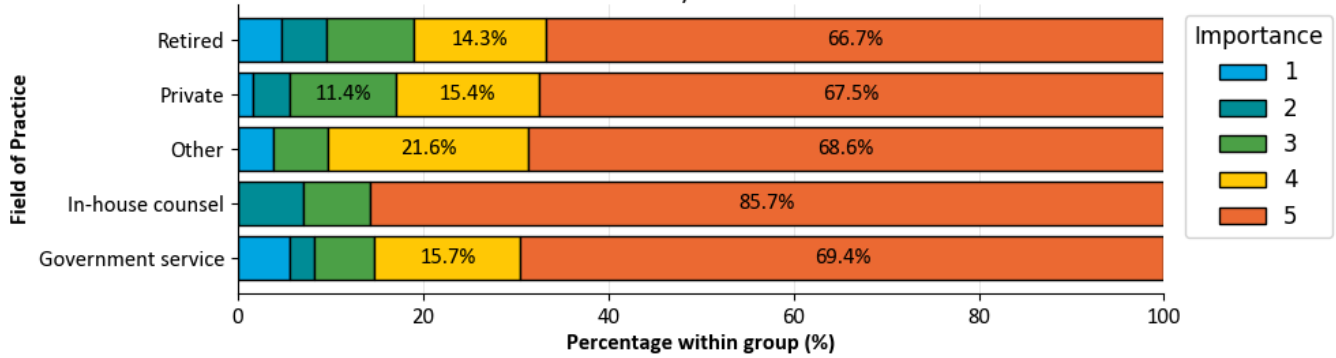
**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**  
**Adherence to Rules of Professional Conduct**

Distribution by Field of Practice



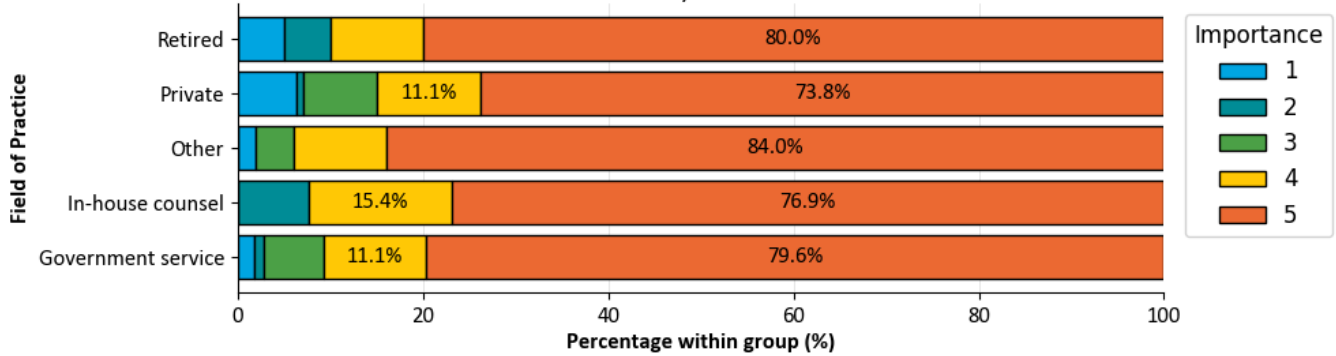
**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**  
**Integrity of the profession**

Distribution by Field of Practice



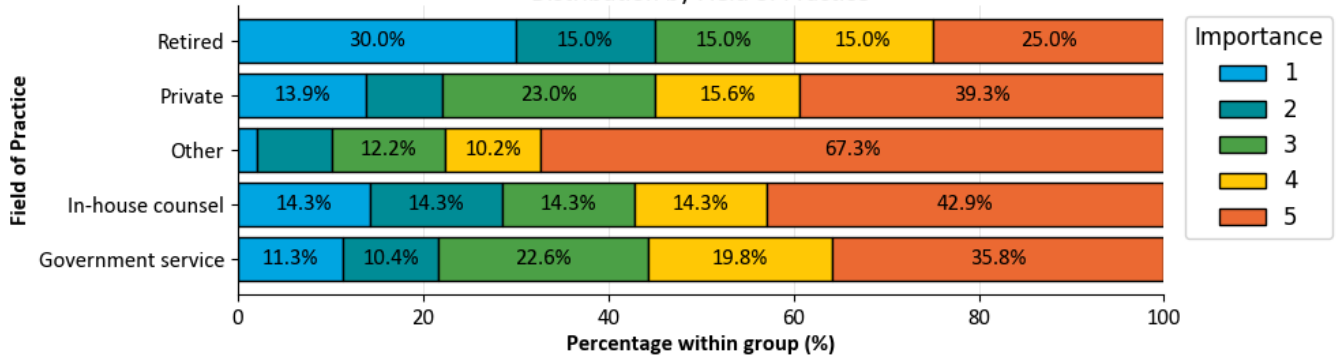
**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**  
**Upholding democracy and the rule of law**

Distribution by Field of Practice



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**  
**Ensuring the full realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms**

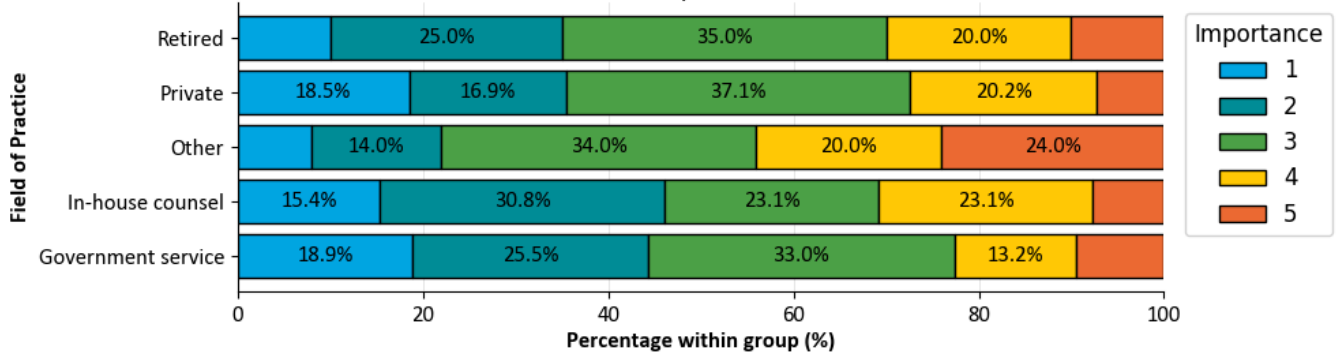
Distribution by Field of Practice



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**

**Pro bono service**

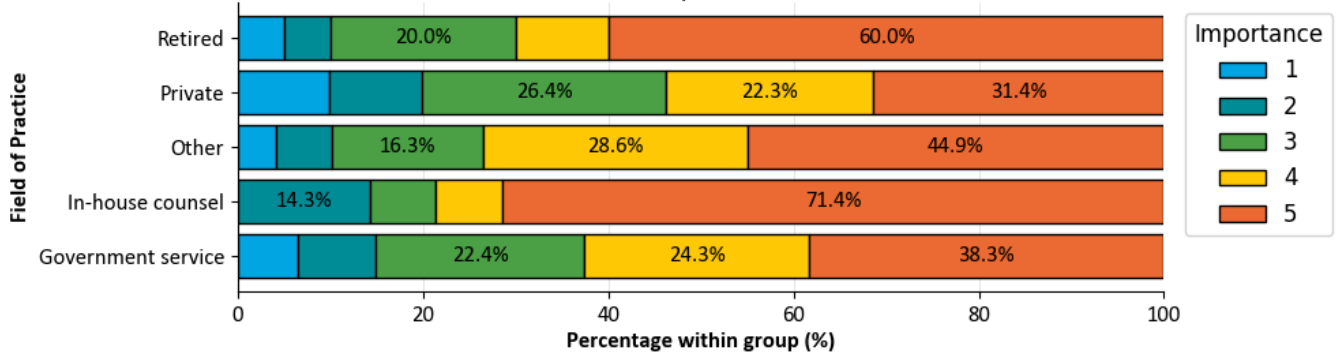
Distribution by Field of Practice



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**

**Dignity of the profession**

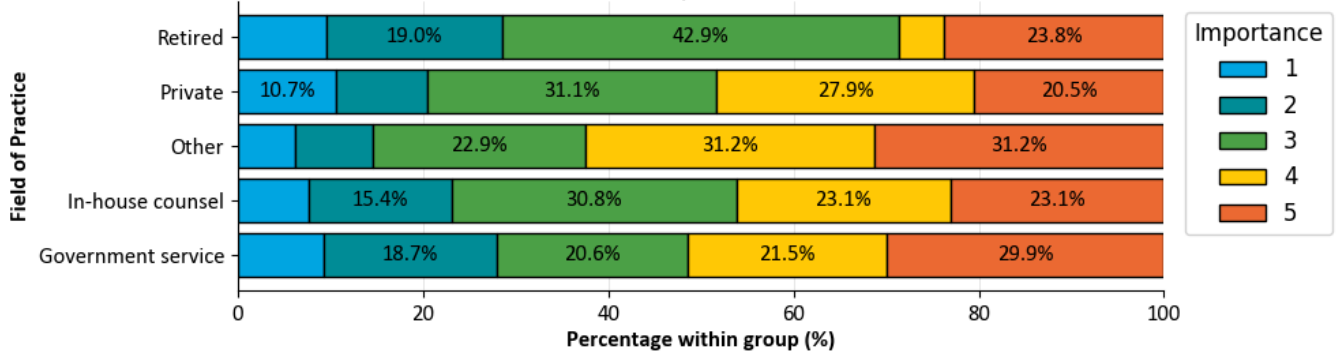
Distribution by Field of Practice



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**

**Improving the law**

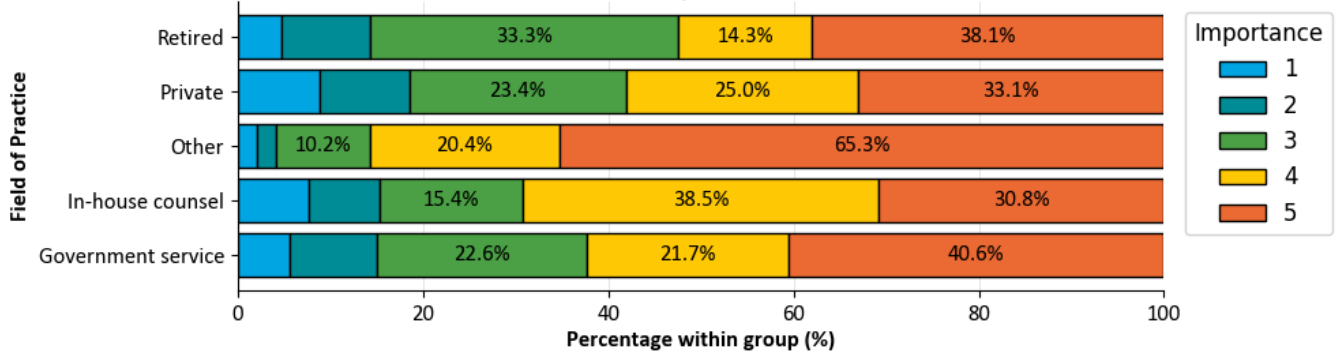
Distribution by Field of Practice



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**

**Access to justice**

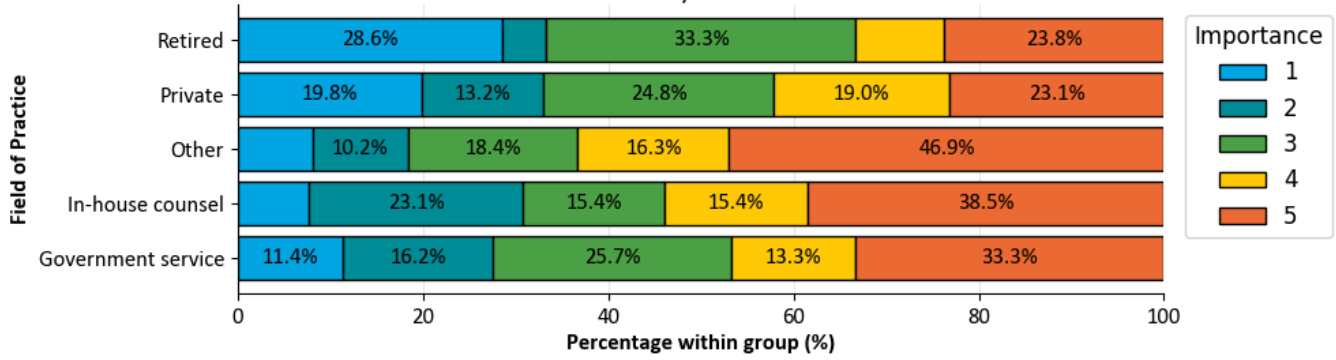
Distribution by Field of Practice



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**

**Diversity, equity, and inclusion**

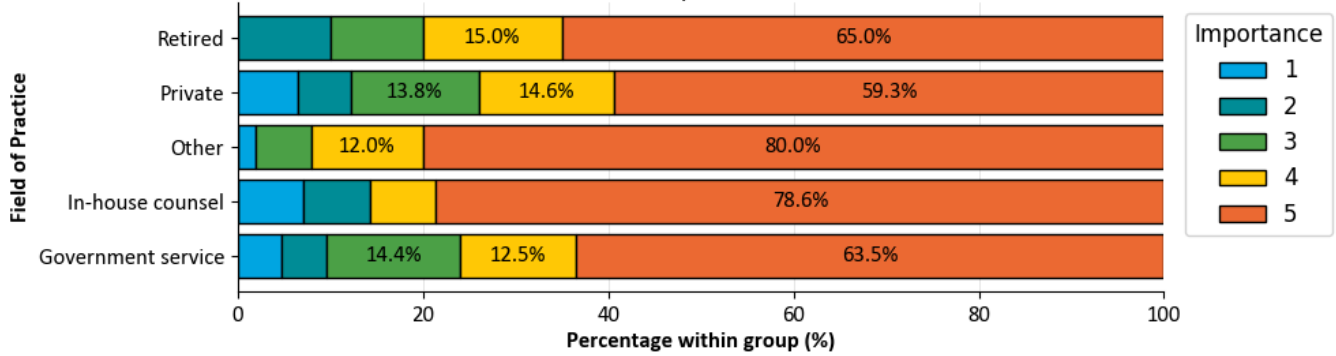
Distribution by Field of Practice



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**

**Justice for all**

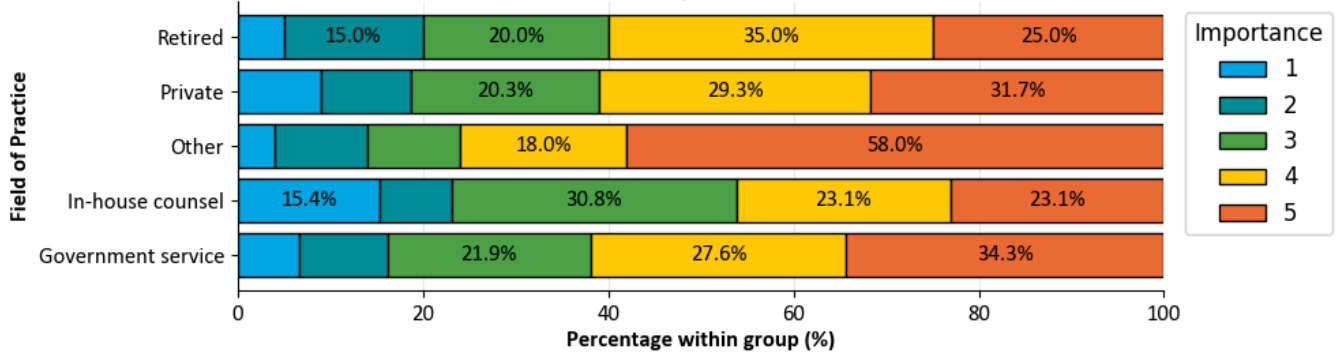
Distribution by Field of Practice



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**

**Legal needs of the defenseless and oppressed**

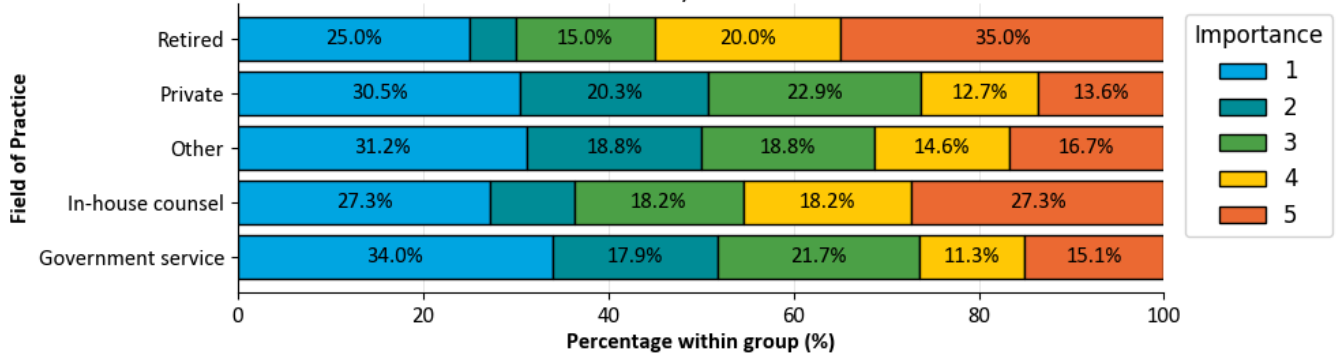
Distribution by Field of Practice



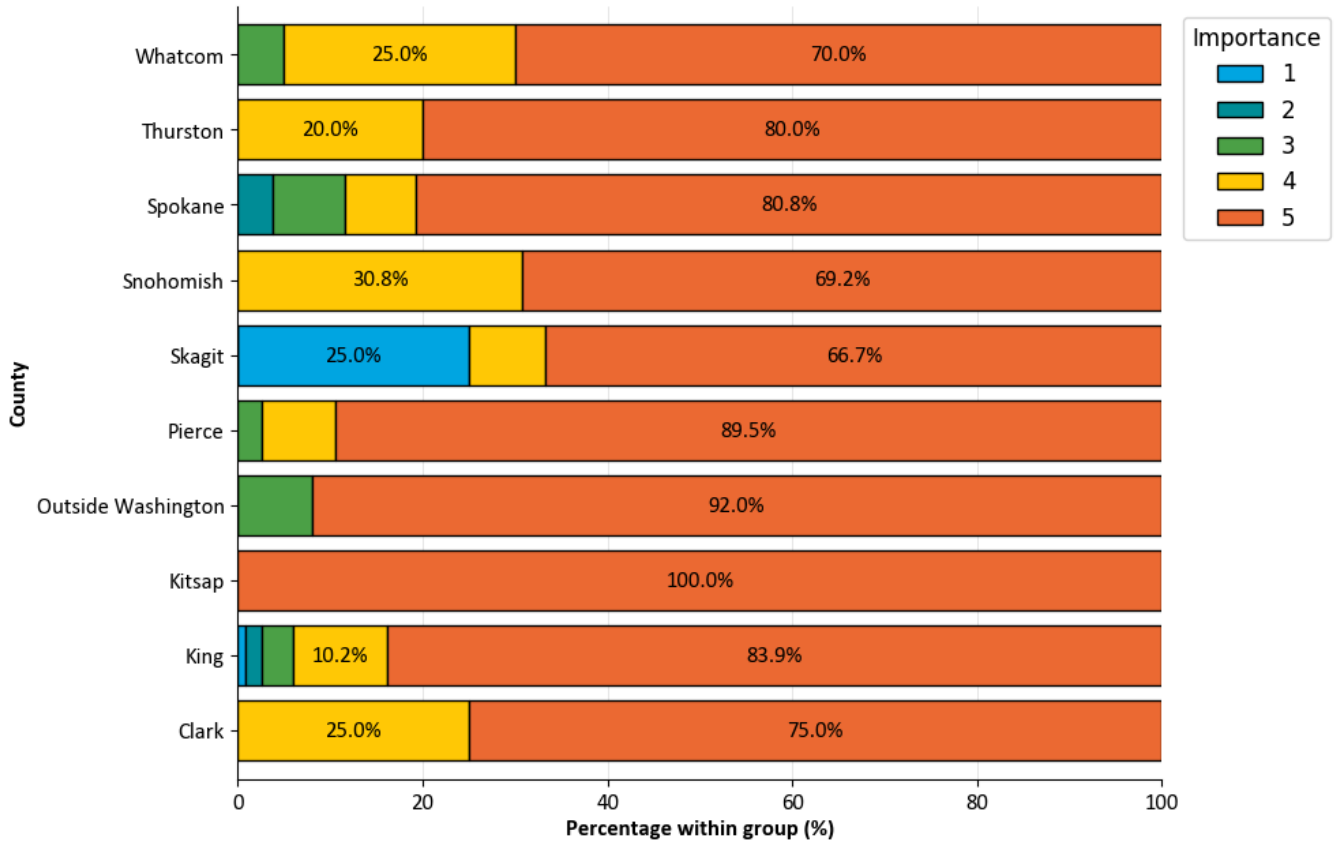
**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**

**Abstaining from all offensive personalities**

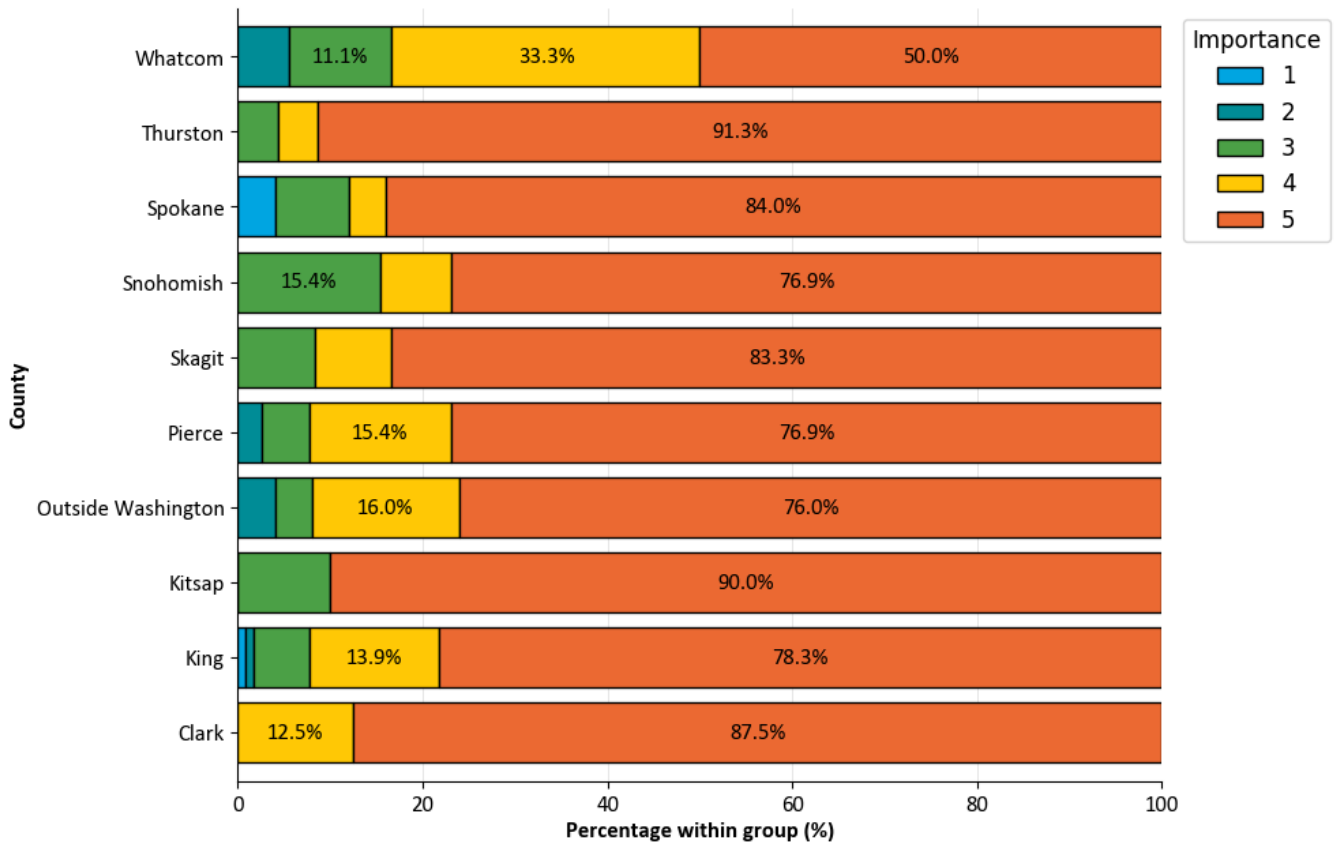
Distribution by Field of Practice



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**  
**Support for state and federal constitutions**  
 Distribution by County (TOP 10)

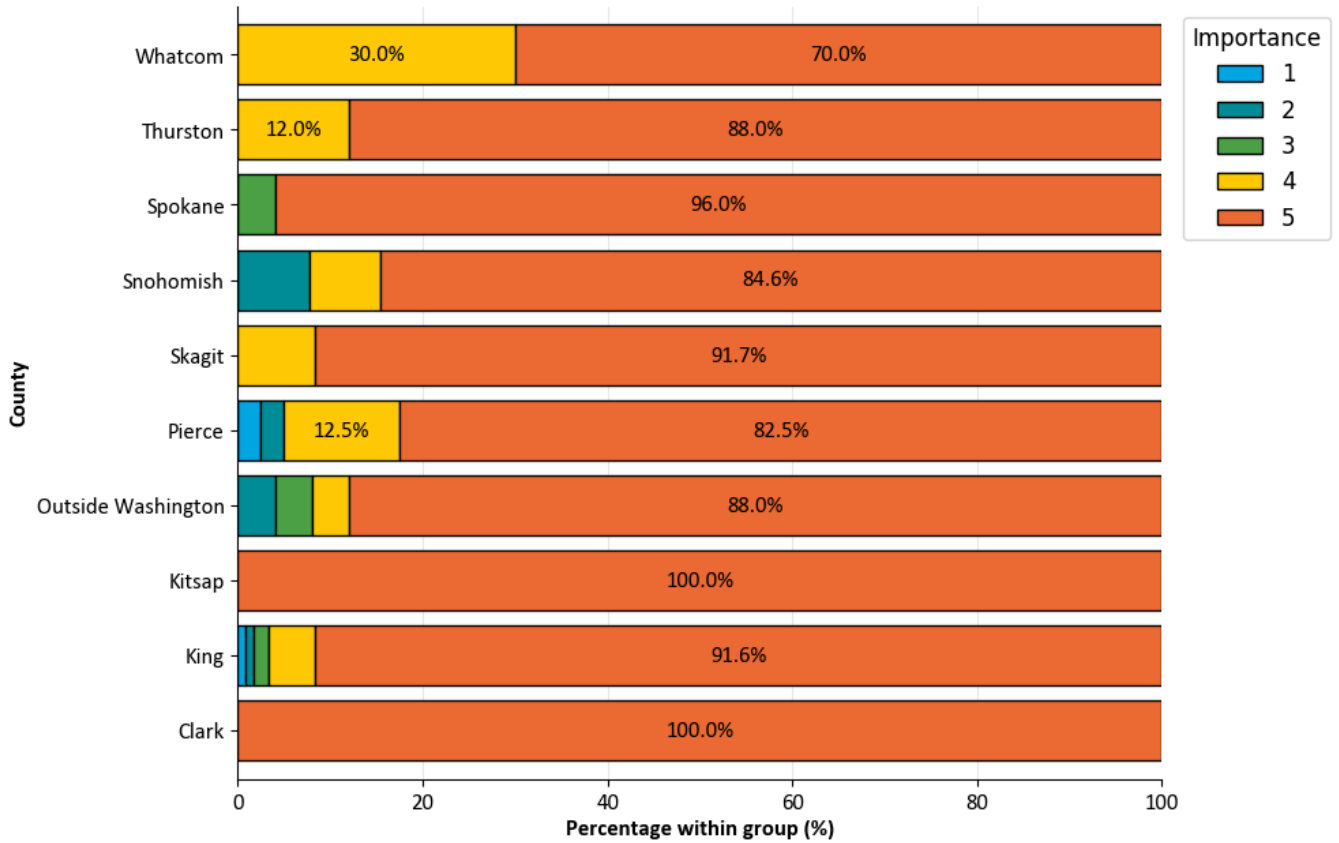


**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**  
**Faithful discharge of duties**  
 Distribution by County (TOP 10)



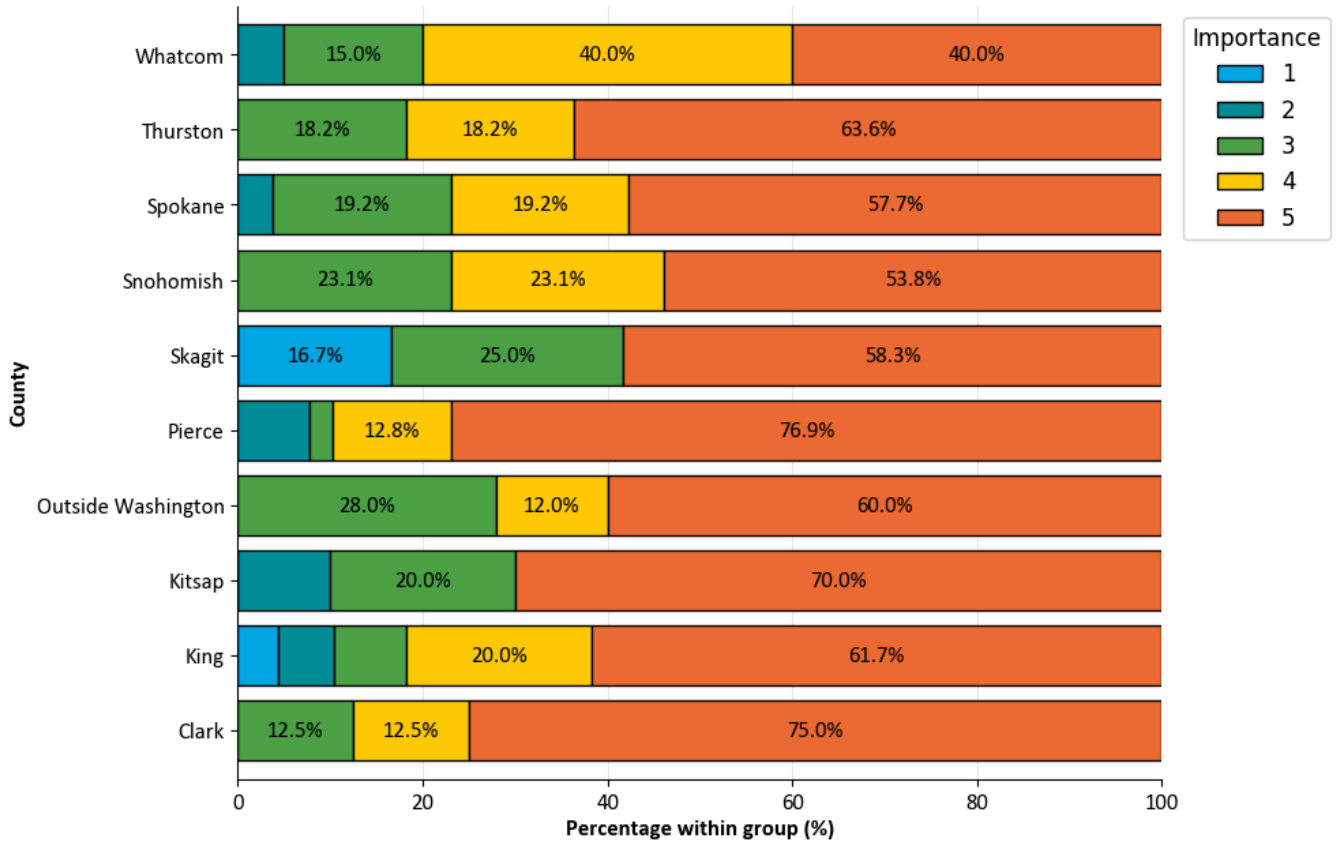
**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**

**Honesty and honorable conduct**  
Distribution by County (TOP 10)



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**

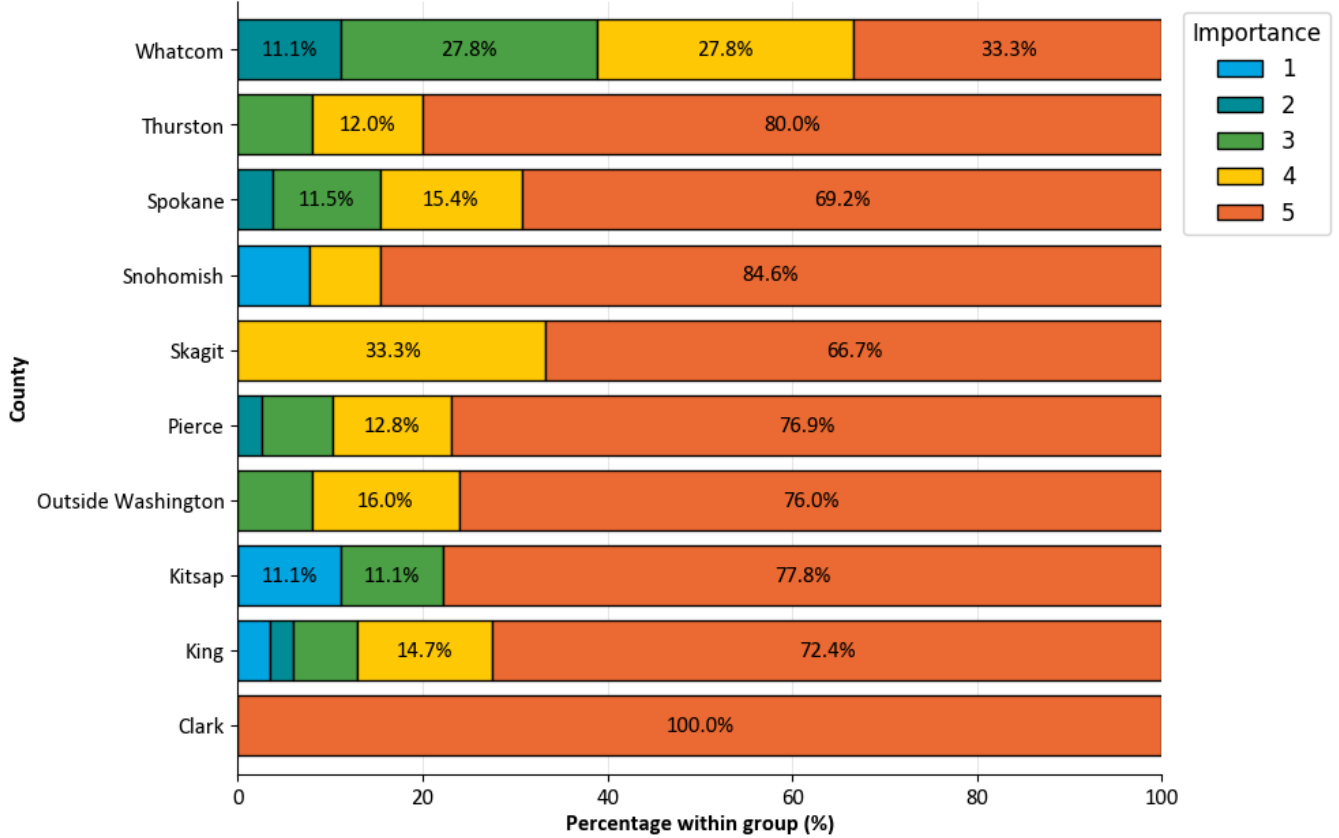
**Maintain respect for the judiciary**  
Distribution by County (TOP 10)



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**

**Confidentiality**

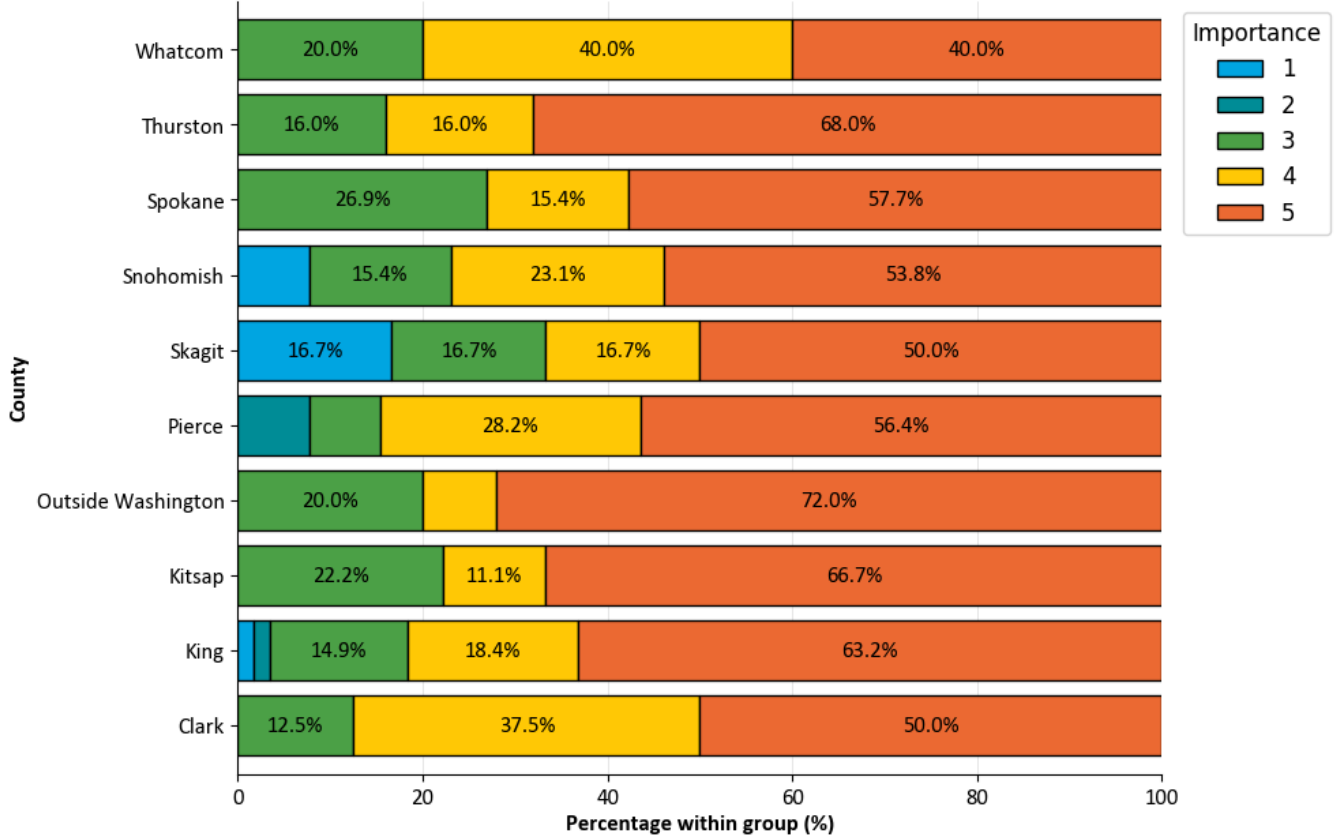
Distribution by County (TOP 10)



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**

**Civility**

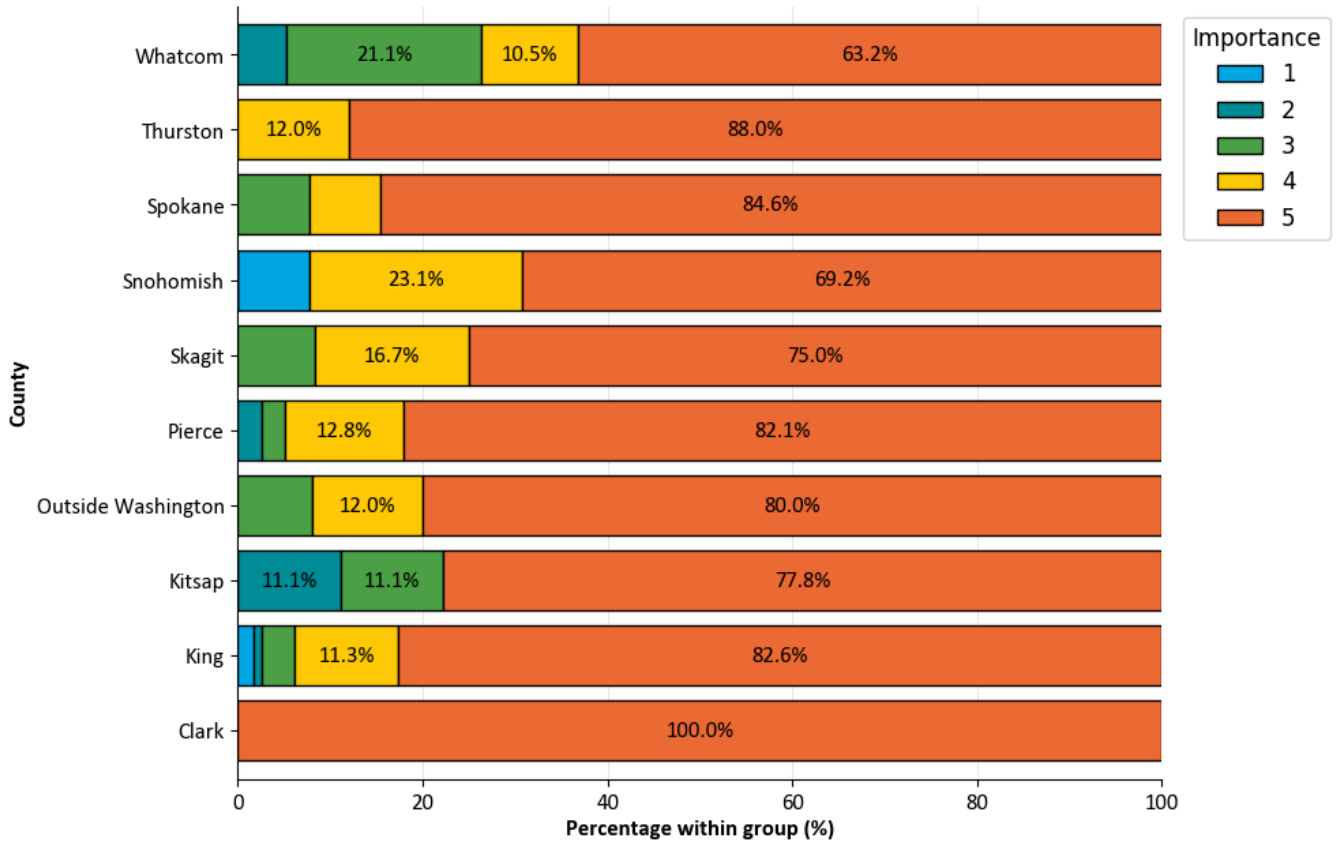
Distribution by County (TOP 10)



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**

**Candor before the court**

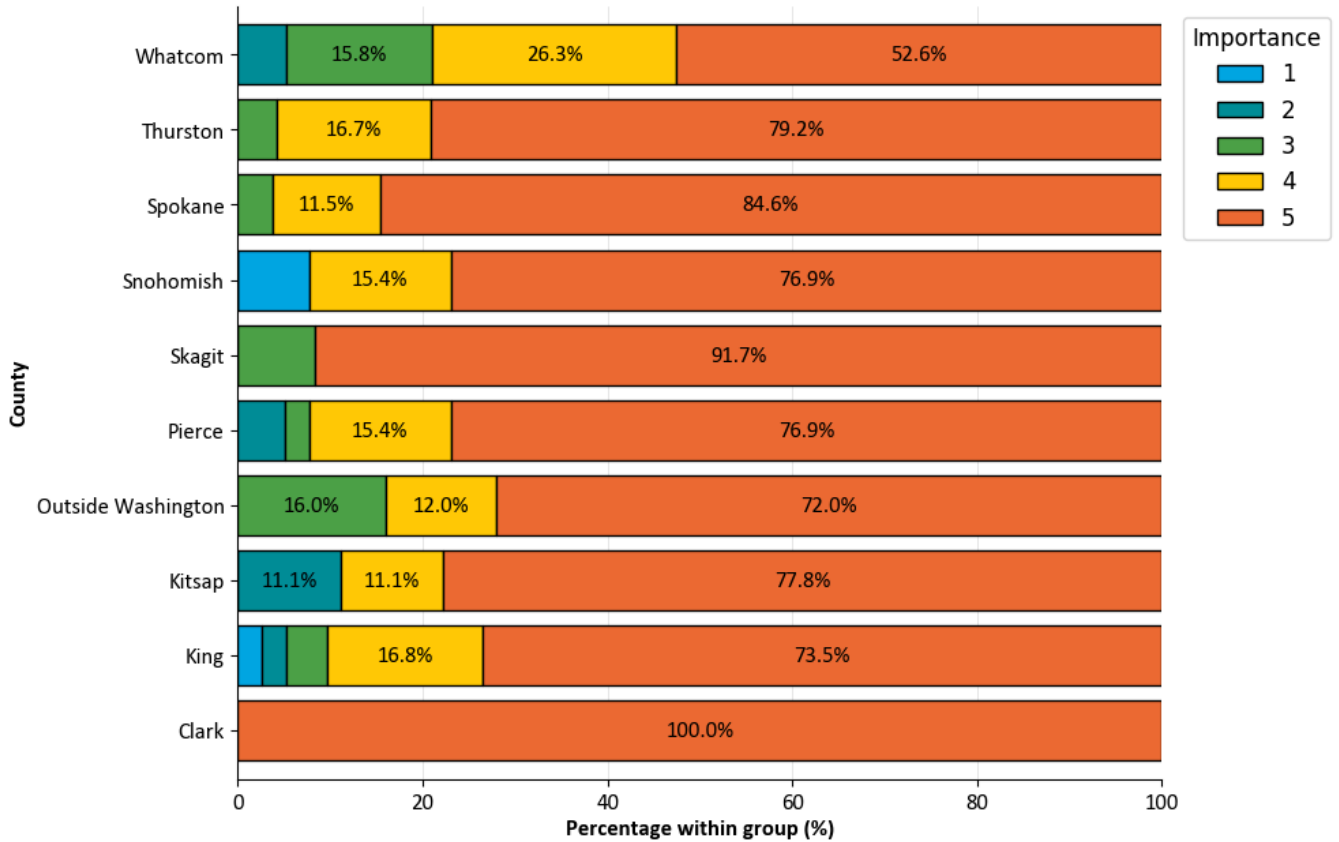
Distribution by County (TOP 10)



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**

**Avoidance of false and misleading statements**

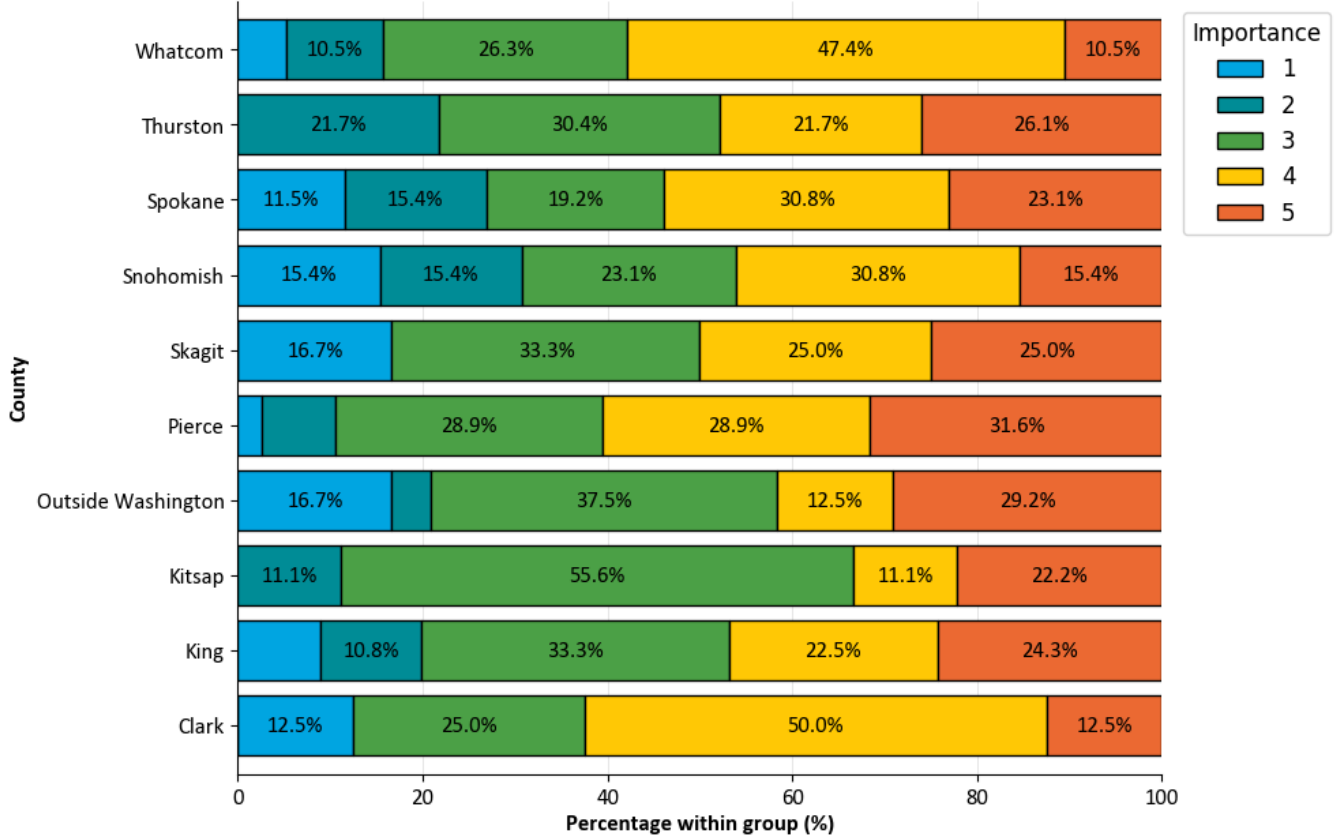
Distribution by County (TOP 10)



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**

**Public service**

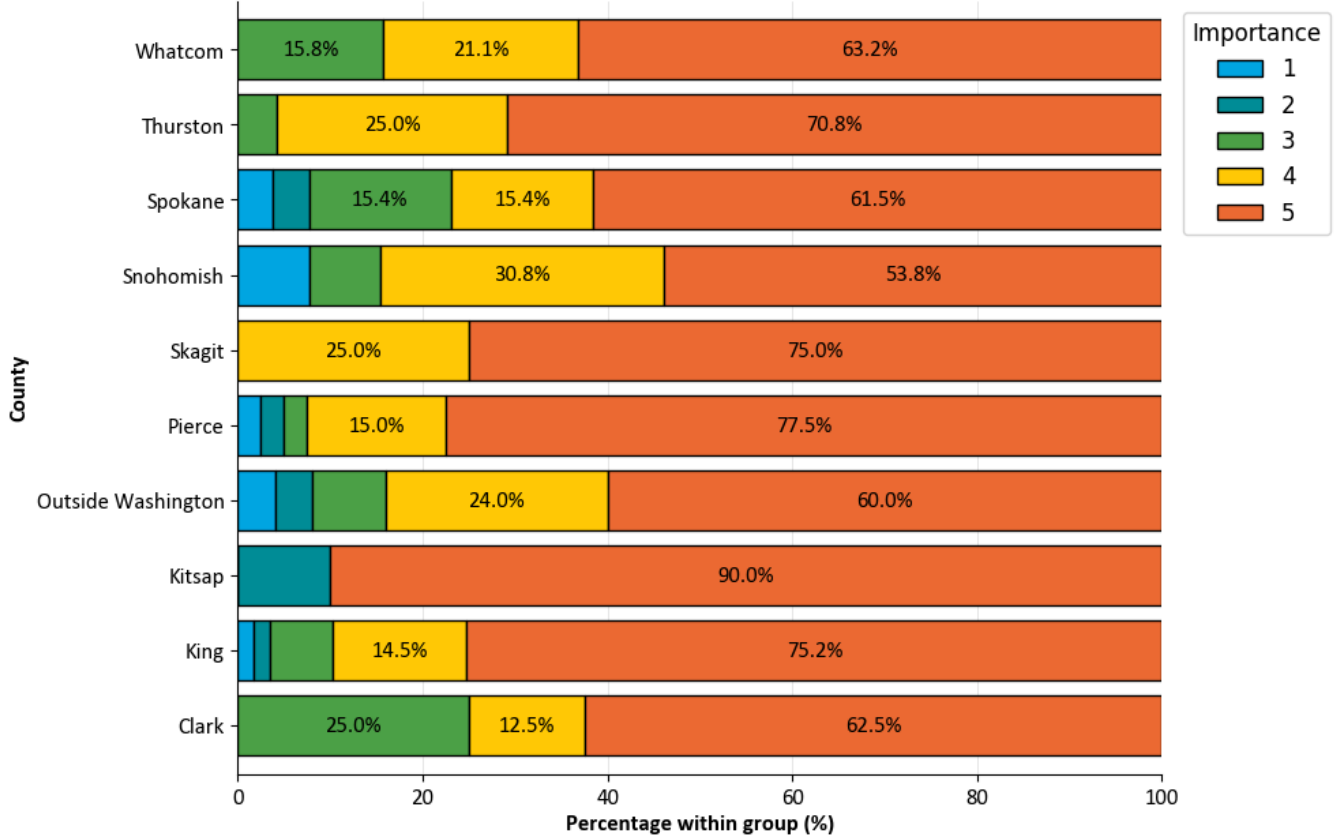
Distribution by County (TOP 10)



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**

**Adherence to Rules of Professional Conduct**

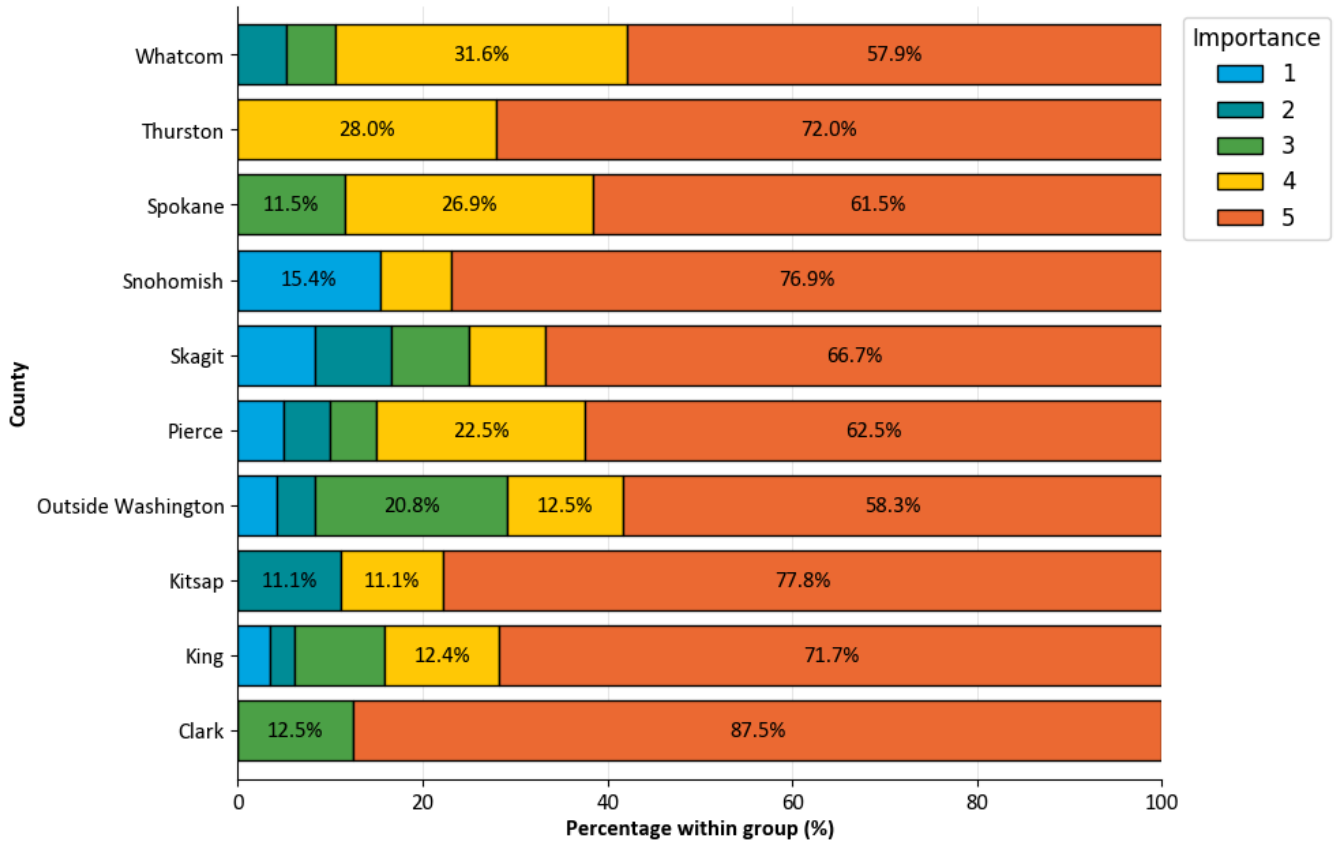
Distribution by County (TOP 10)



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**

**Integrity of the profession**

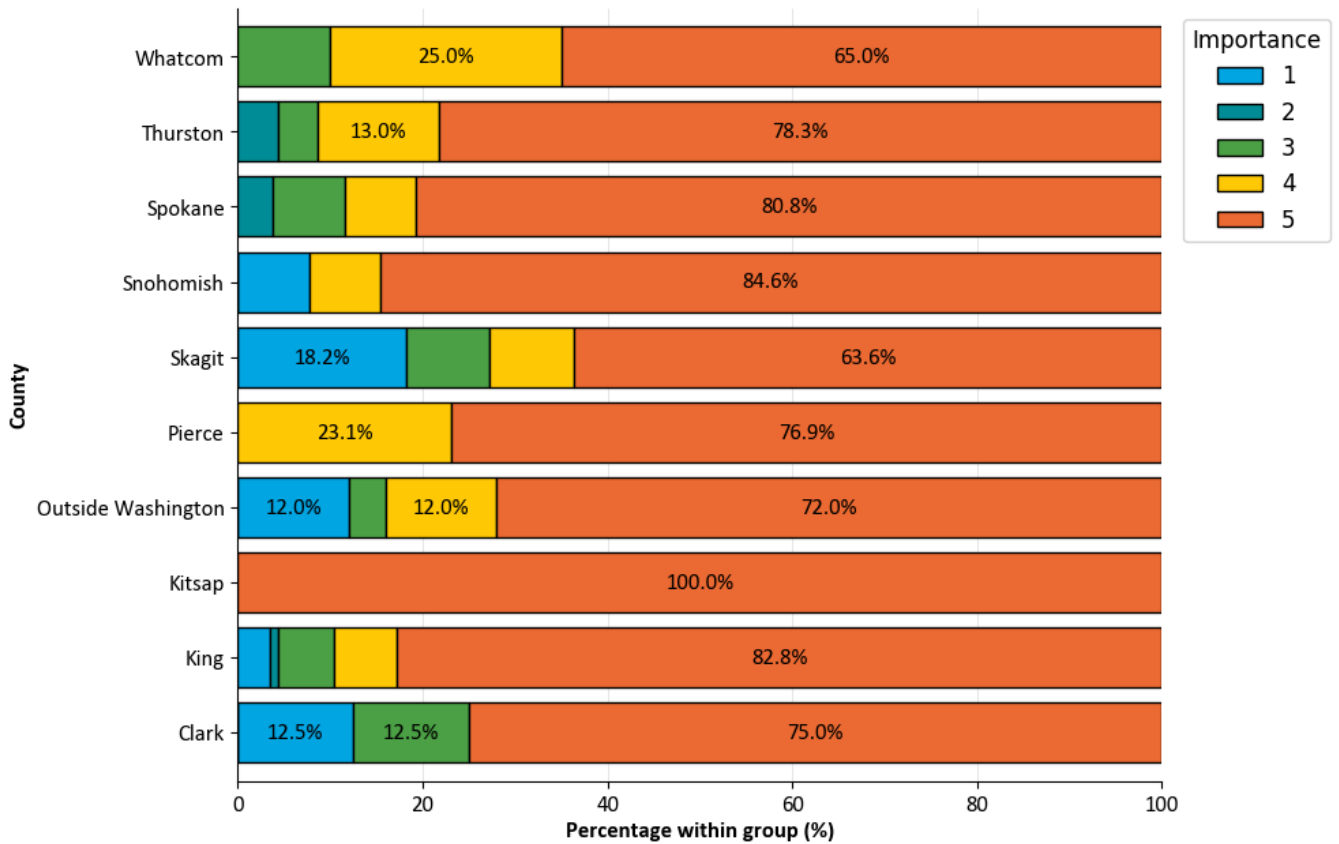
Distribution by County (TOP 10)



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**

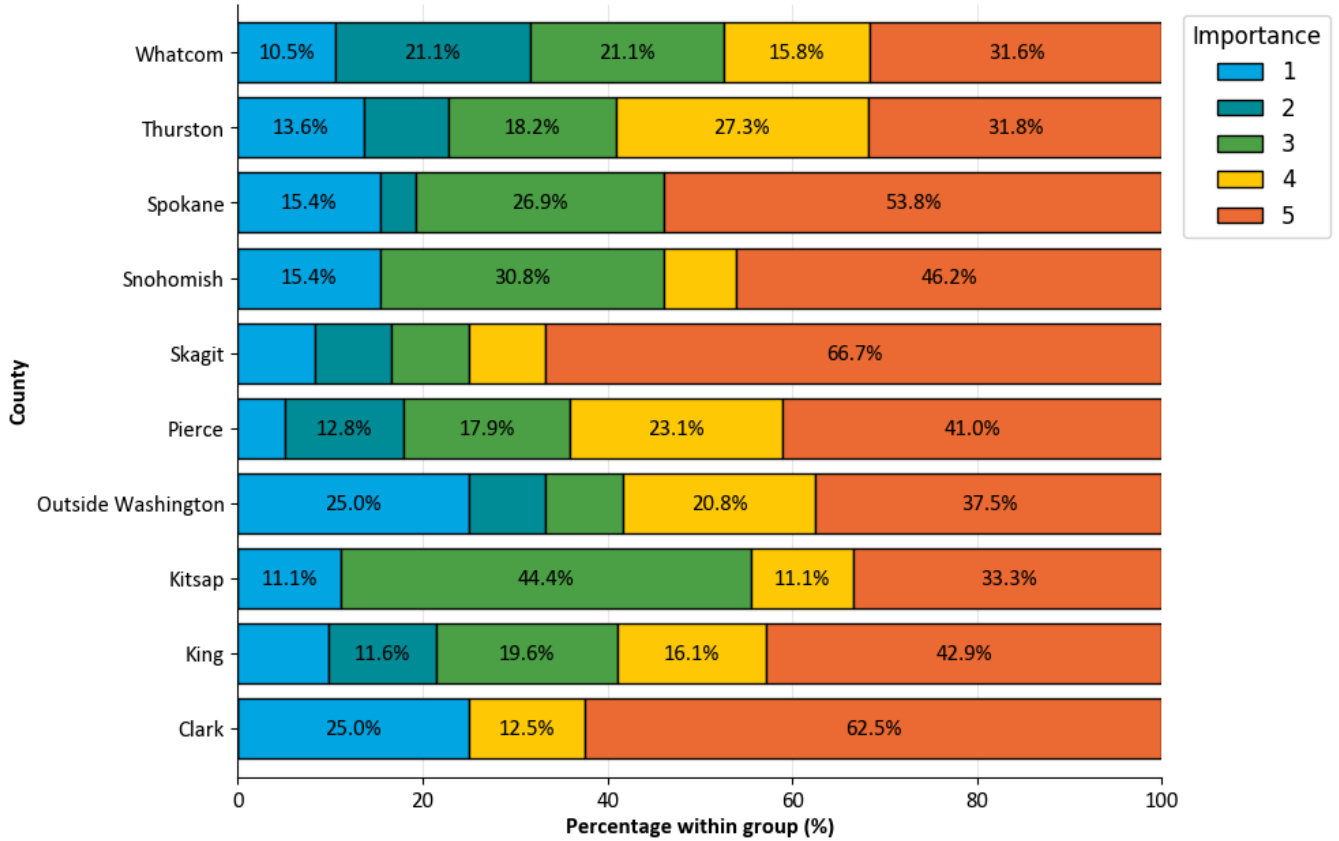
**Upholding democracy and the rule of law**

Distribution by County (TOP 10)



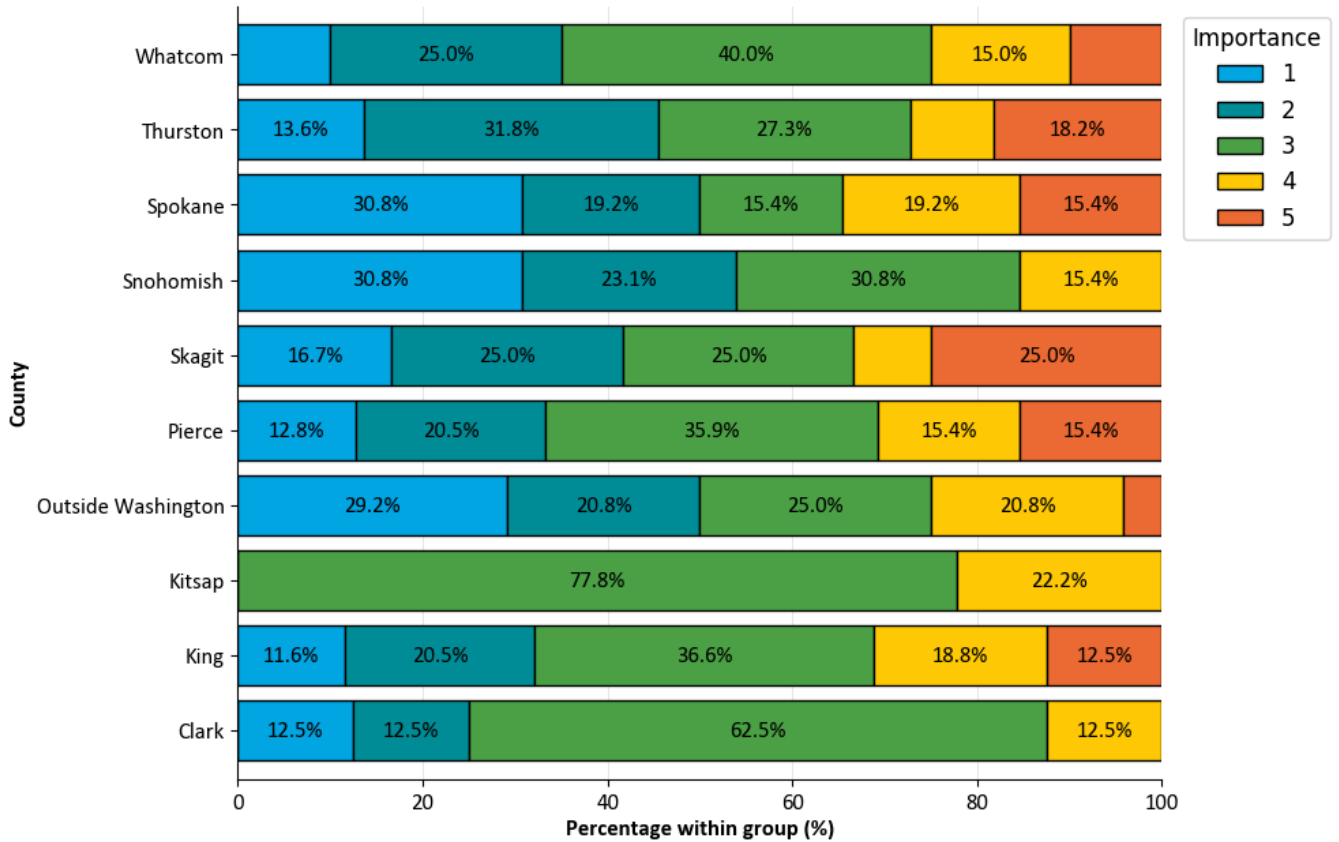
**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?  
Ensuring the full realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms**

Distribution by County (TOP 10)



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?  
Pro bono service**

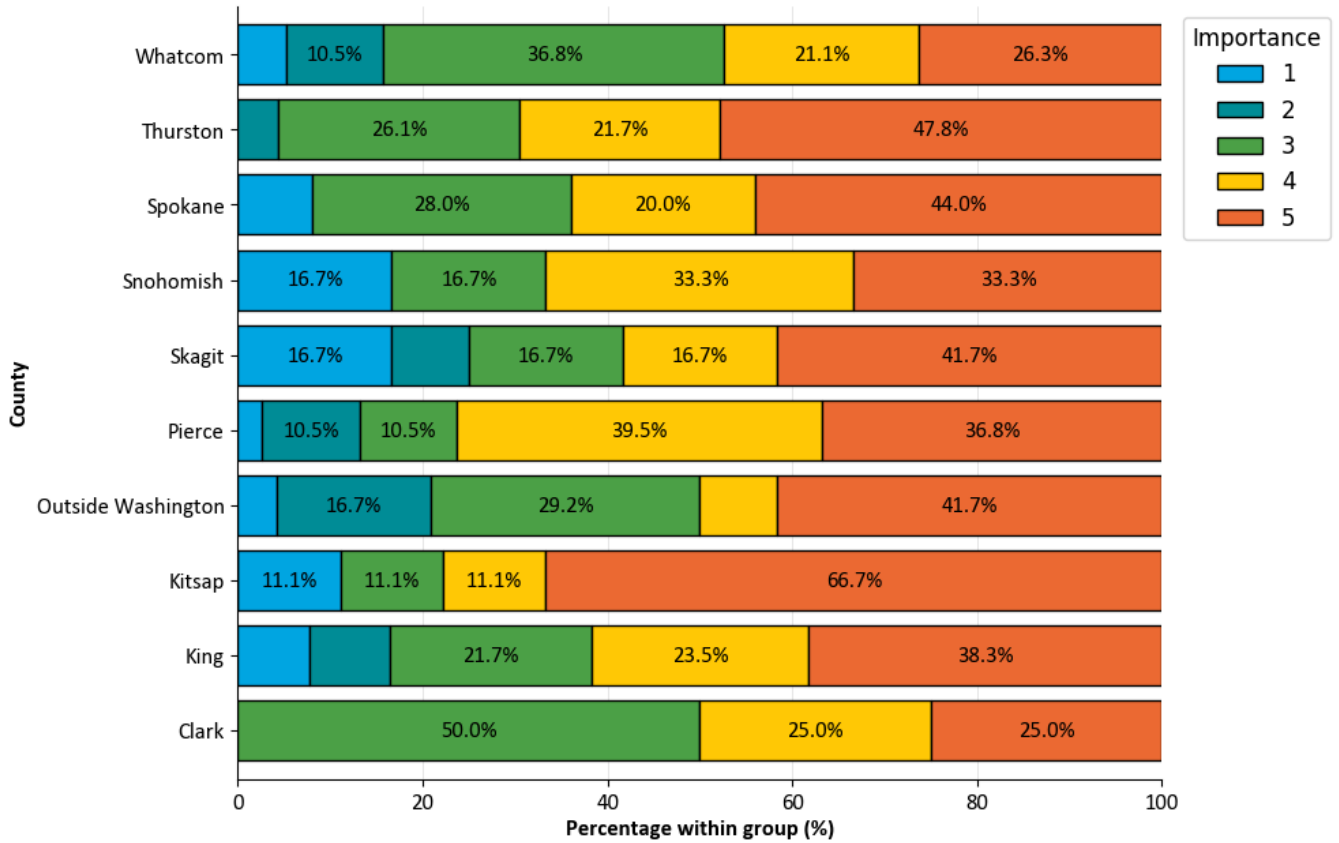
Distribution by County (TOP 10)



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**

**Dignity of the profession**

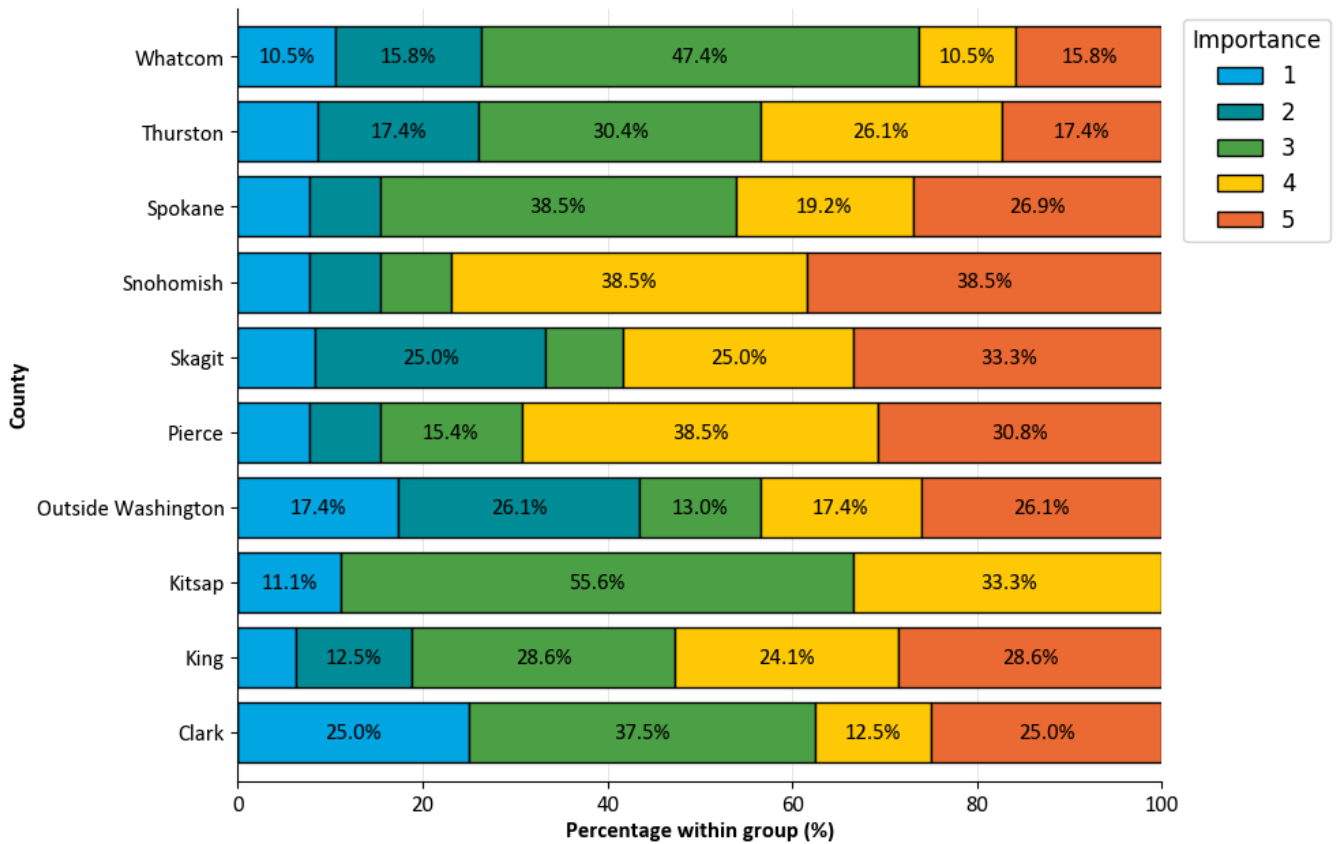
Distribution by County (TOP 10)



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**

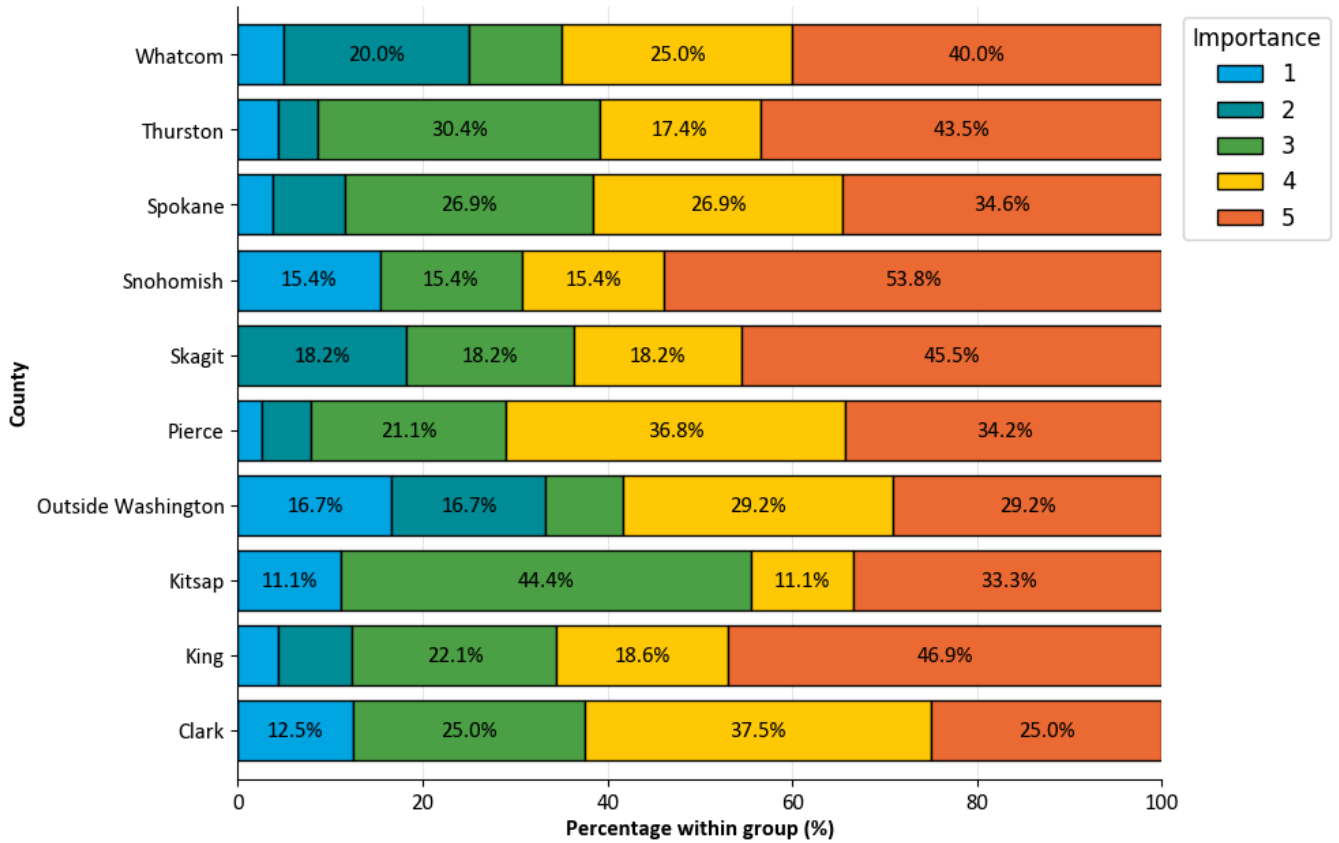
**Improving the law**

Distribution by County (TOP 10)



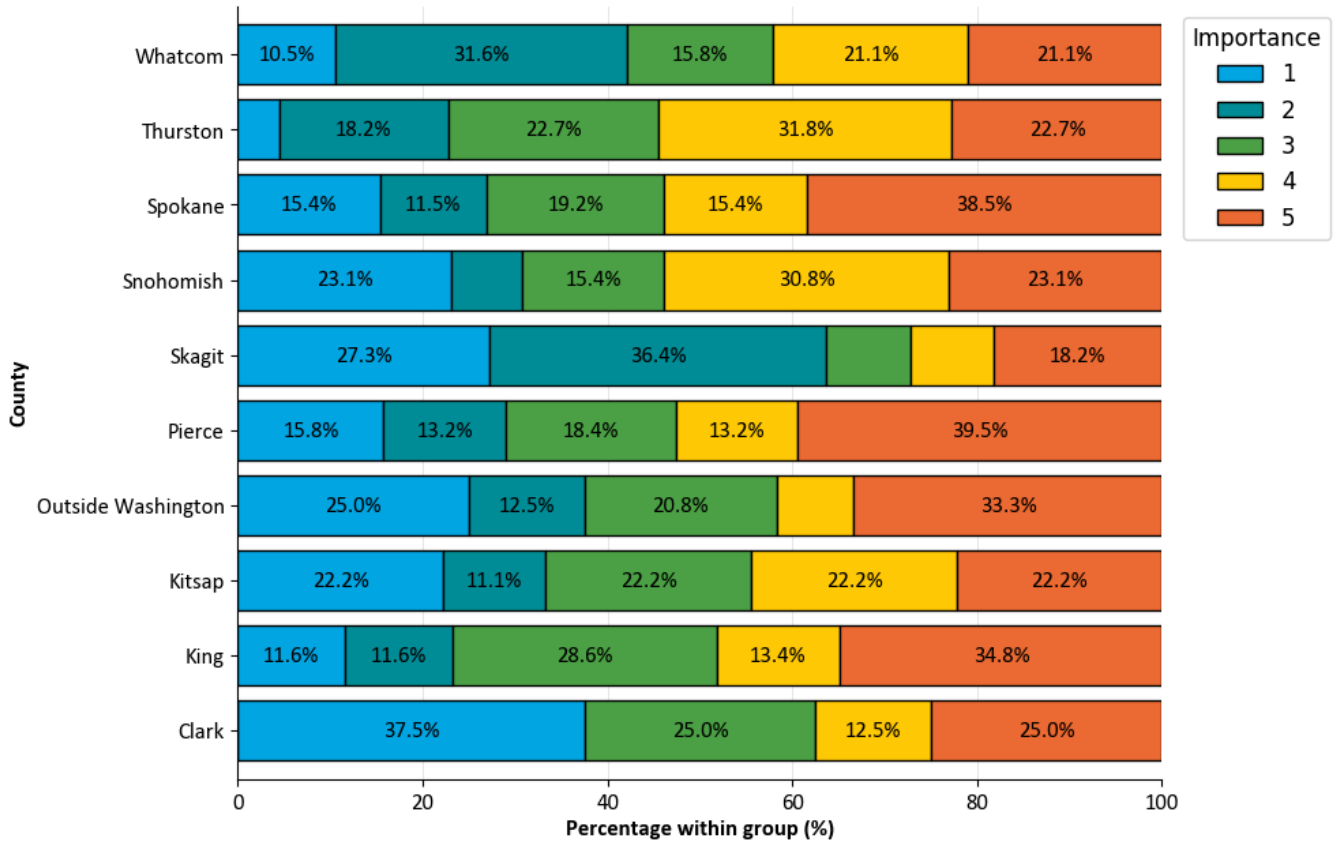
**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**  
**Access to justice**

Distribution by County (TOP 10)



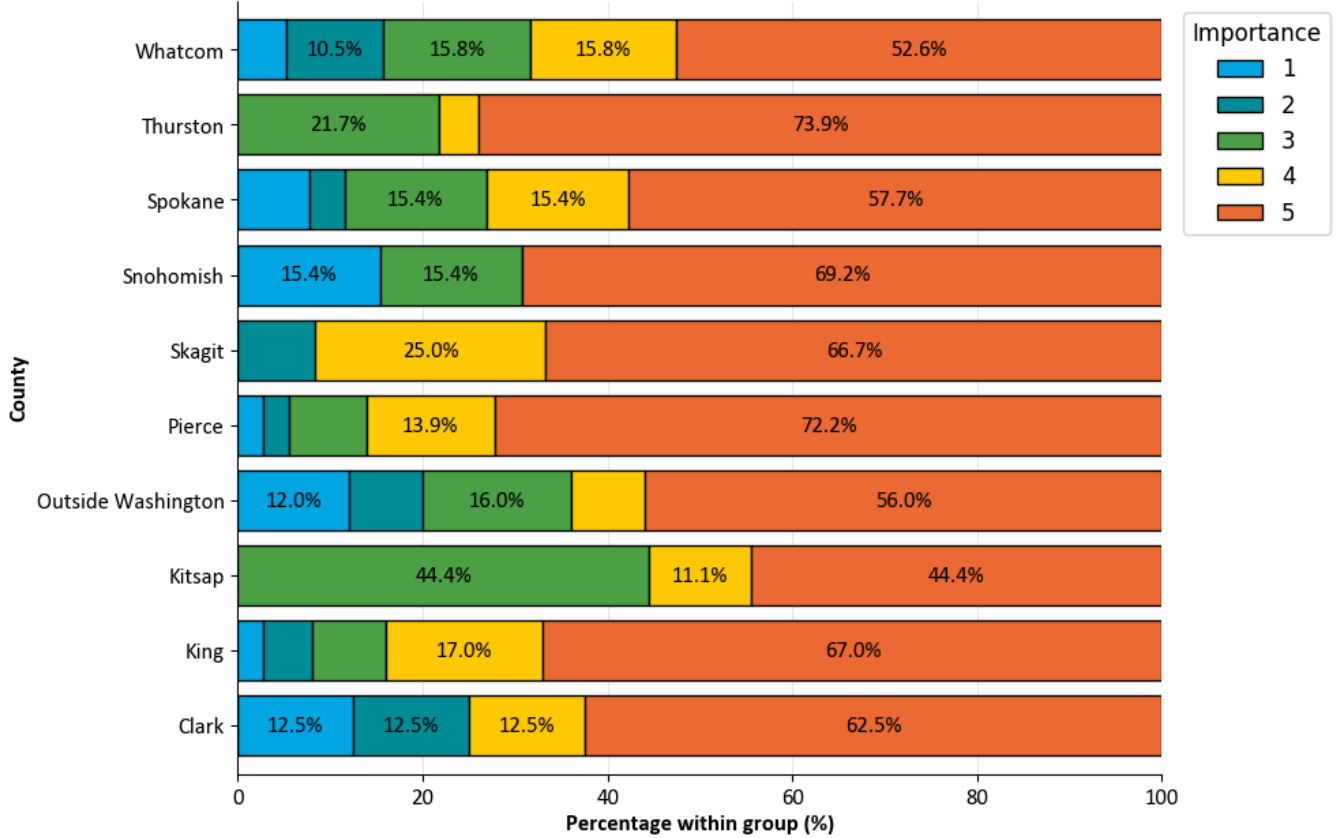
**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**

**Diversity, equity, and inclusion**  
 Distribution by County (TOP 10)



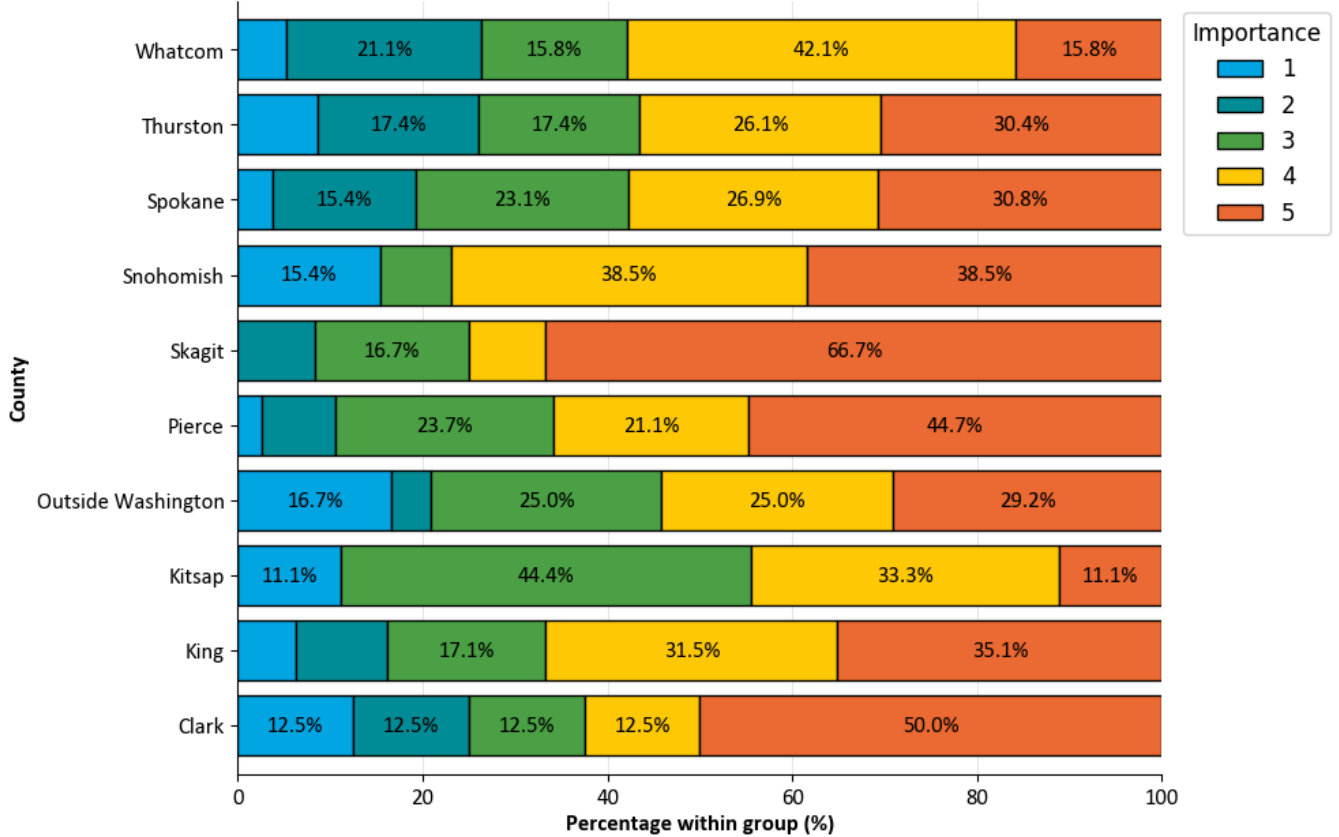
**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**  
**Justice for all**

Distribution by County (TOP 10)



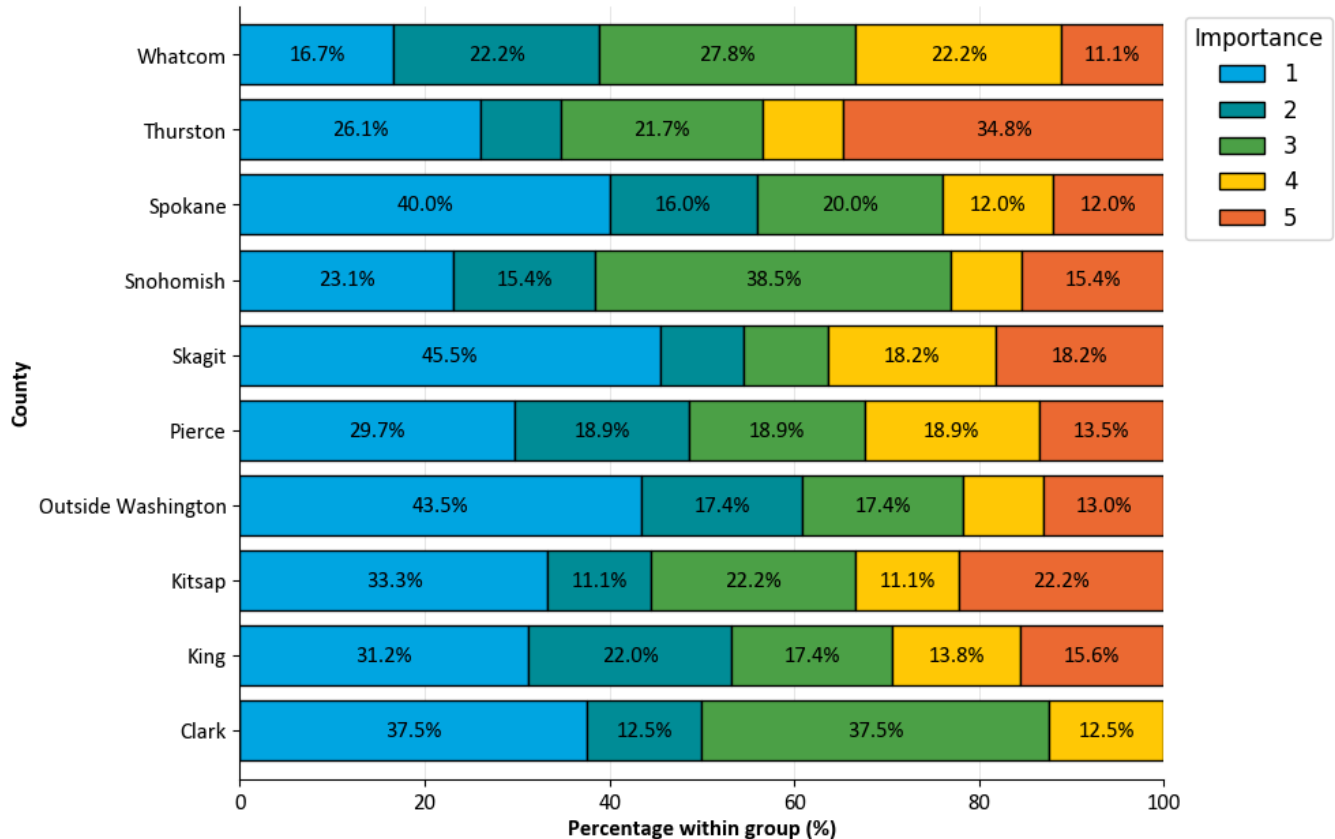
**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**  
**Legal needs of the defenseless and oppressed**

Distribution by County (TOP 10)



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?  
Abstaining from all offensive personalities**

Distribution by County (TOP 10)



## Summary of “Other” Responses: Elements Most Important in a Professional Oath

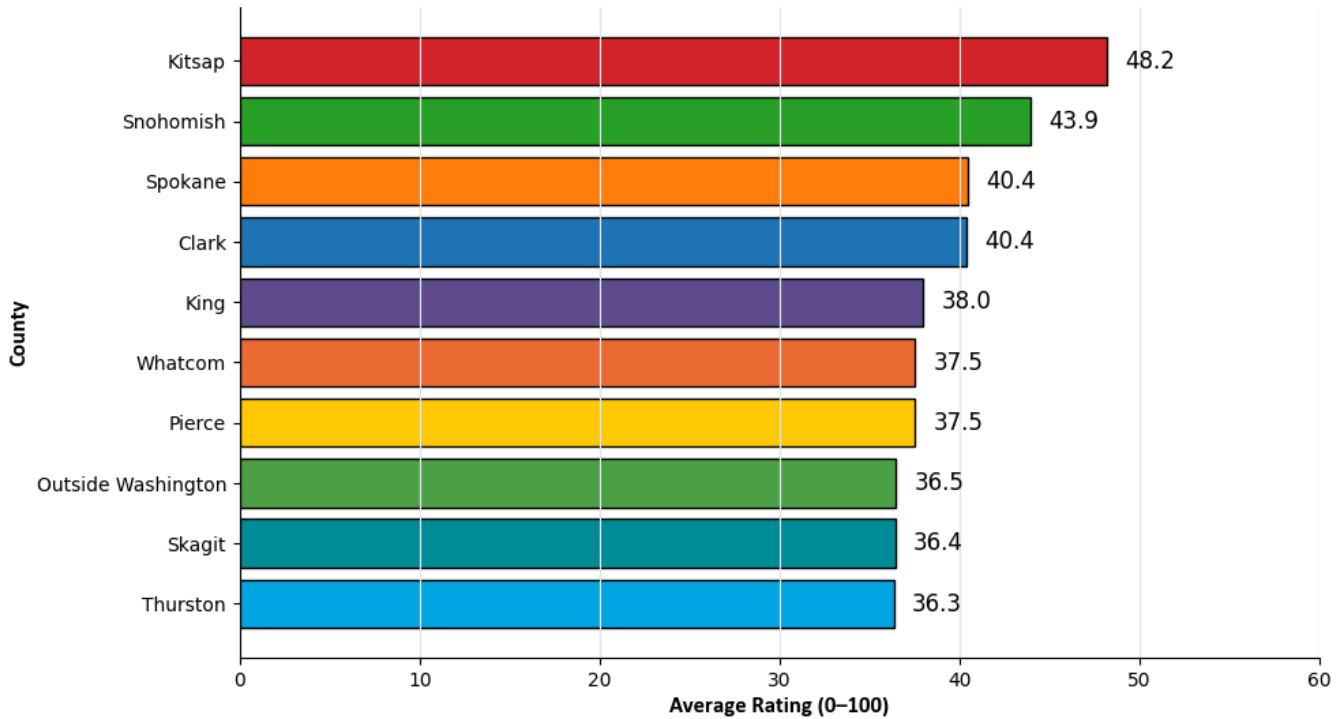
- **Clarify or replace “abstaining from all offensive personalities”** — overwhelmingly cited as unclear, outdated, confusing, or needing modern language about civility, respect, or professionalism.
- **Plain, modern, and clear language** — requests to remove antiquated phrasing, vague wording, and confusing grammar.
- **Focus on core ethical duties** — honesty, integrity, candor to courts, respect for all parties, and avoidance of frivolous actions.
- **Stronger constitutional commitment** — some want clearer or stronger language about upholding the U.S. and Washington constitutions.
- **Access to justice** — including efficiency, reduced cost, and good-faith advising on mediation and arbitration.
- **Broaden civility concepts** — kindness, respect, professionalism, and avoidance of harassment or abusive conduct.
- **Clarify vague or subjective concepts** — e.g., “justice for all,” “improving the law,” “dignity of the profession,” “defenseless or oppressed.”
- **Additions related to modern practice** — e.g., responsible use of AI, cooperation with investigations.

- **Protect rights of all people** — comments calling for explicit respect for all identities, regardless of federal protections.
- **Avoid requirements to take certain cases** — objections to language interpreted as forcing representation.
- **Concerns about duplicative categories** — several noted elements already covered by RPCs or overlapping concepts.

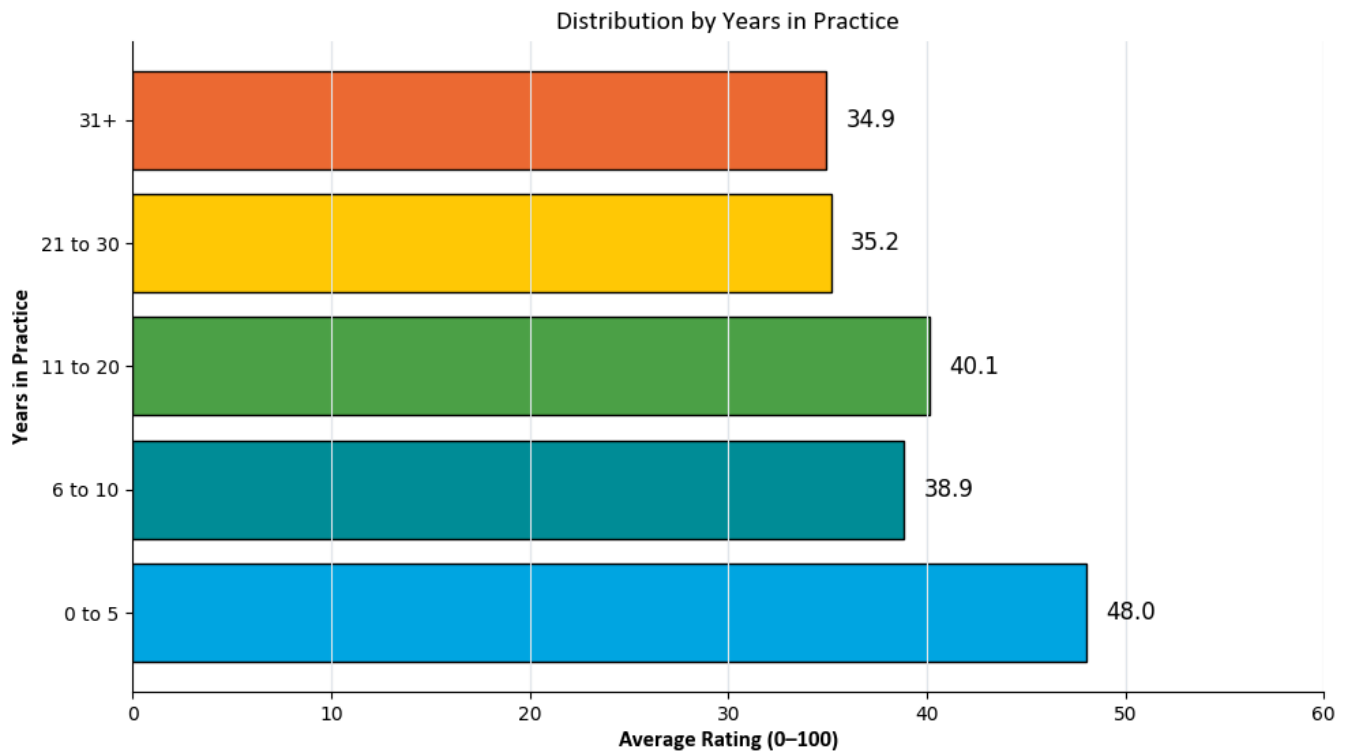
## Question 6

On this spectrum, please rate the style of language in which the oath should be written.

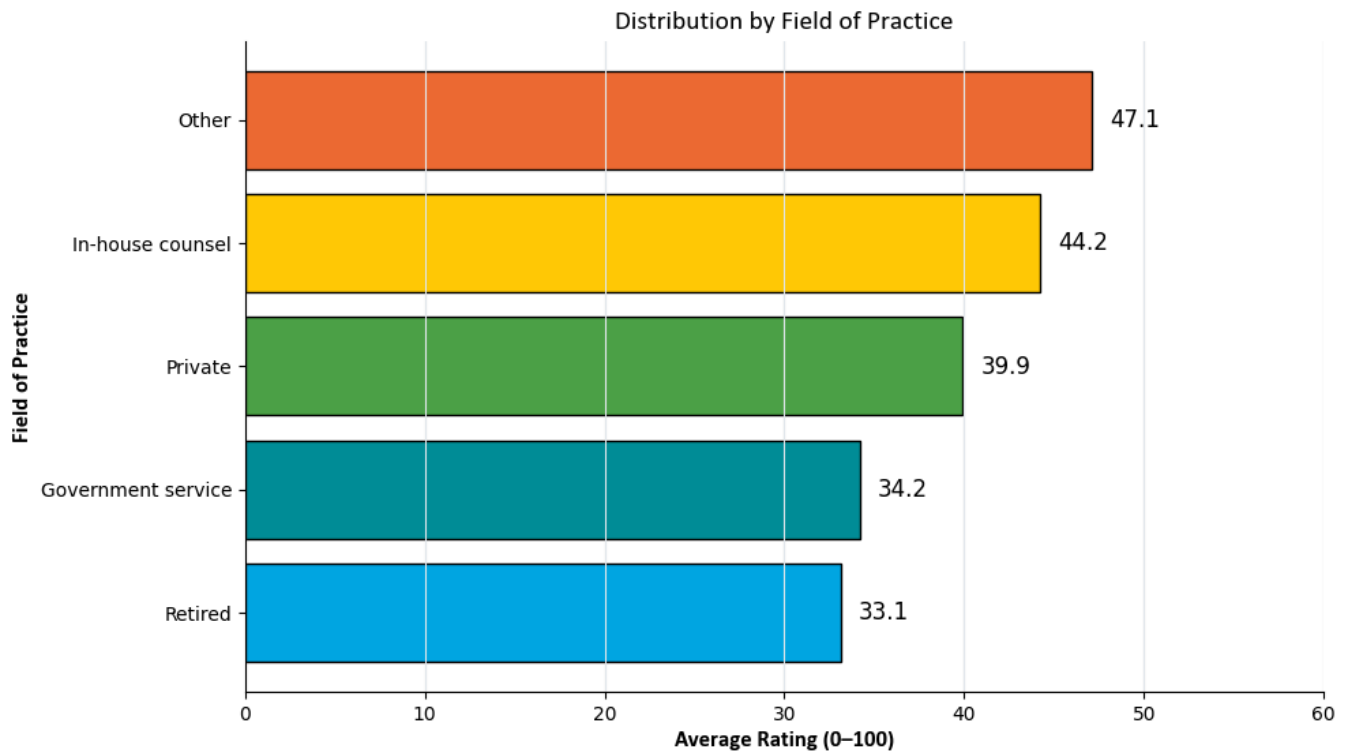
Distribution by County (Top 10)



On this spectrum, please rate the style of language in which the oath should be written.



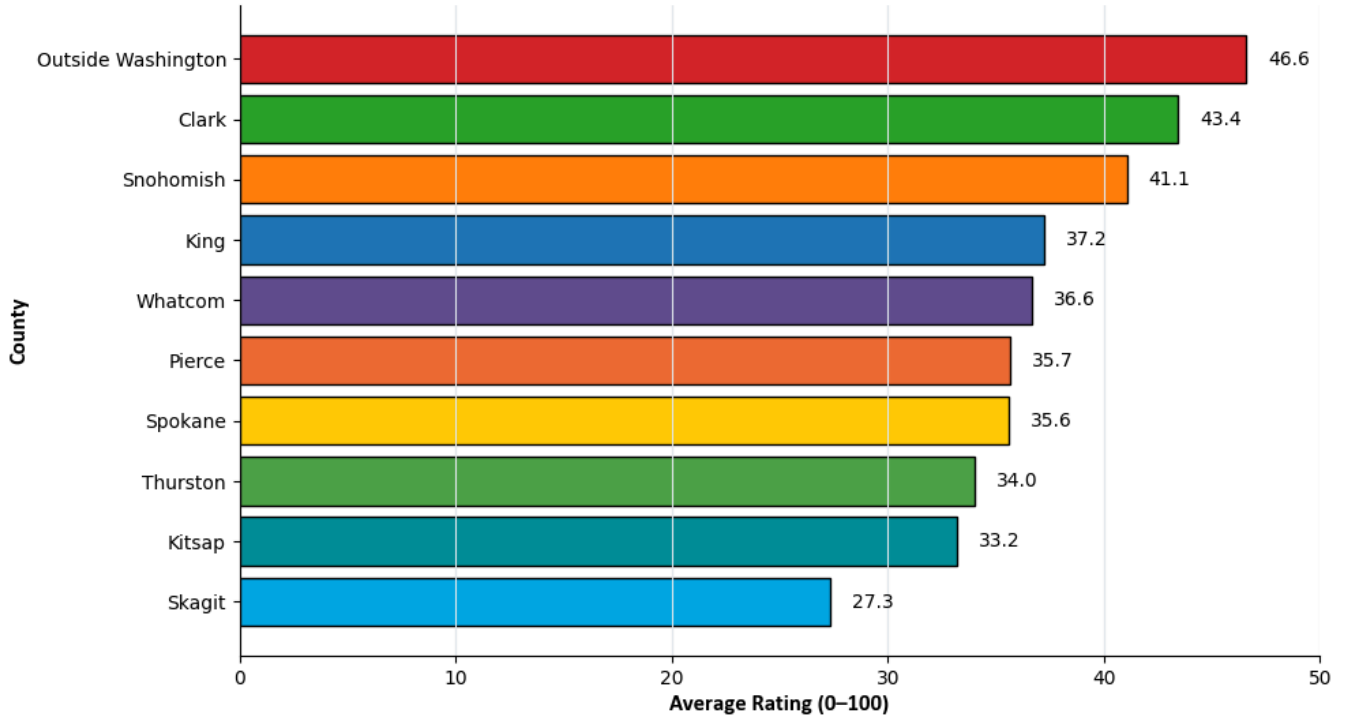
On this spectrum, please rate the style of language in which the oath should be written.



## Question 7

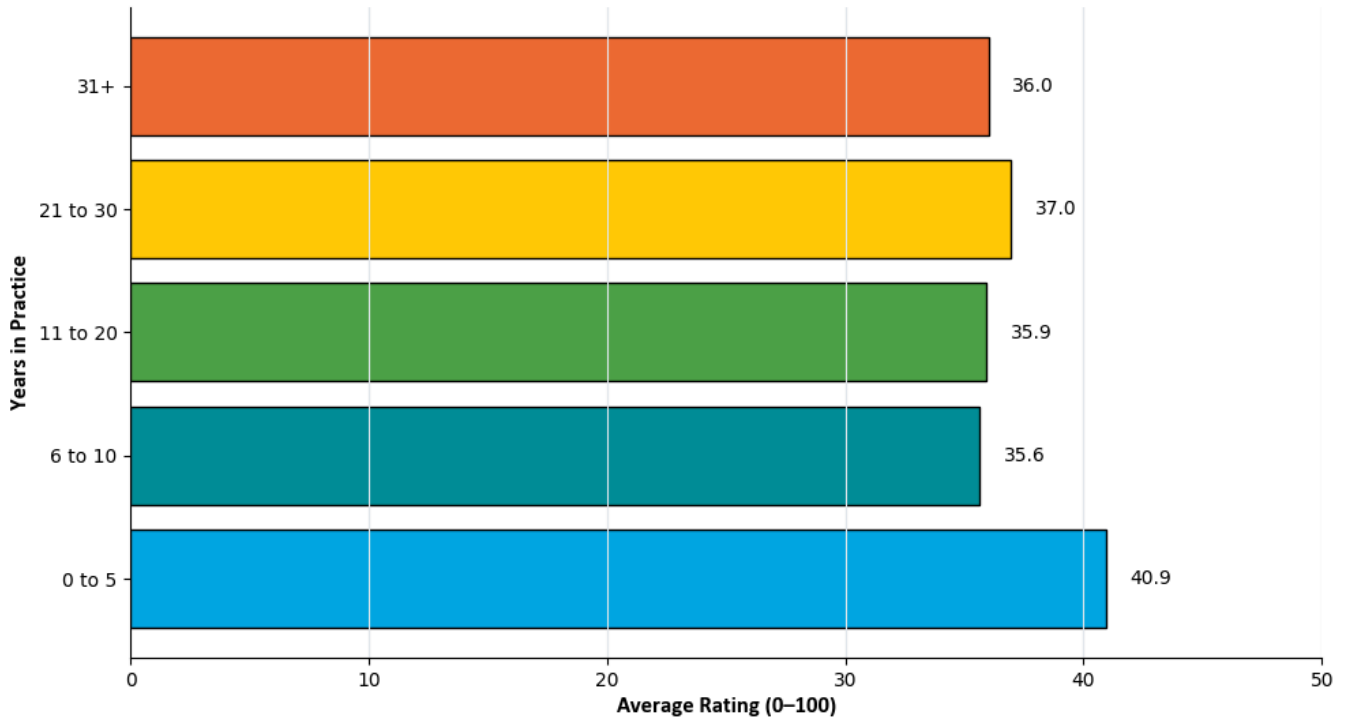
On this spectrum, please rate how long the oath should be.

Distribution by County (Top 10)



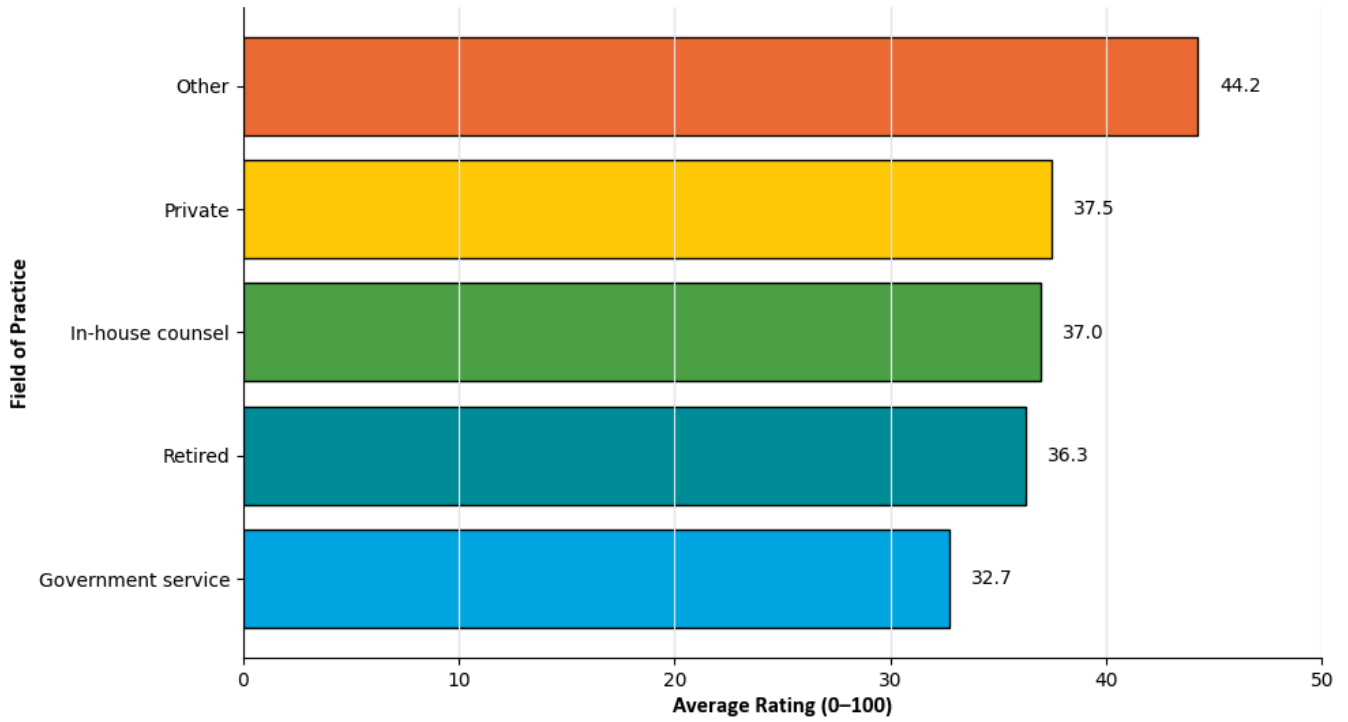
On this spectrum, please rate how long the oath should be.

Distribution by Years in Practice



On this spectrum, please rate how long the oath should be.

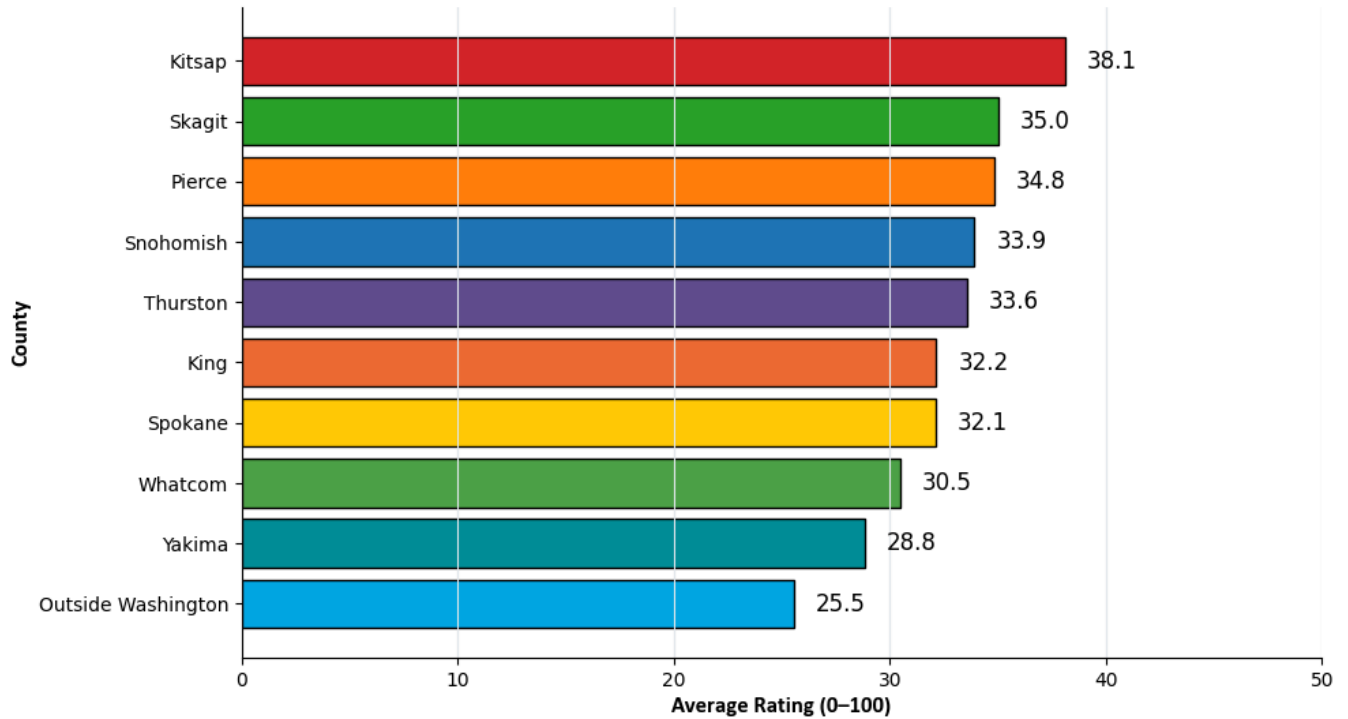
Distribution by Field of Practice



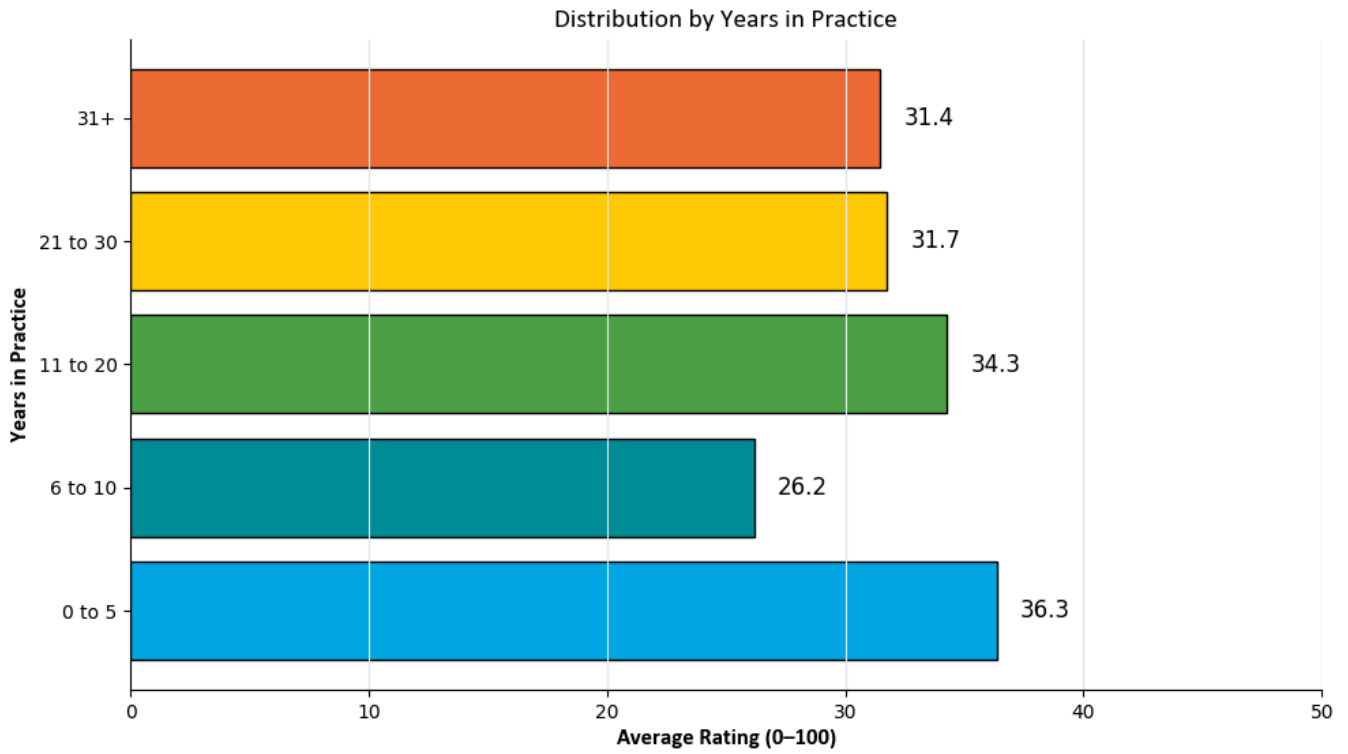
## Question 8

On this spectrum, please rate the audience to whom the oath should speak and inspire.

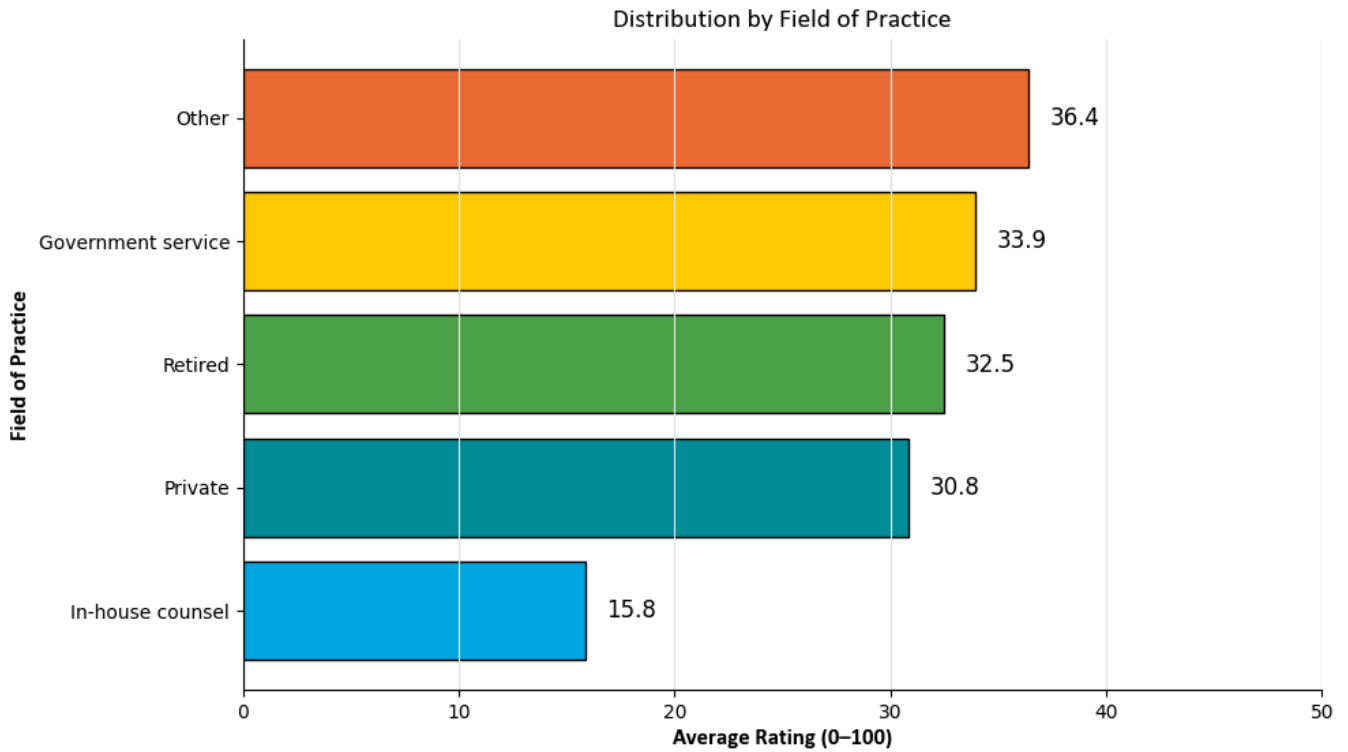
Distribution by County (Top 10)



On this spectrum, please rate the audience to whom the oath should speak and inspire.



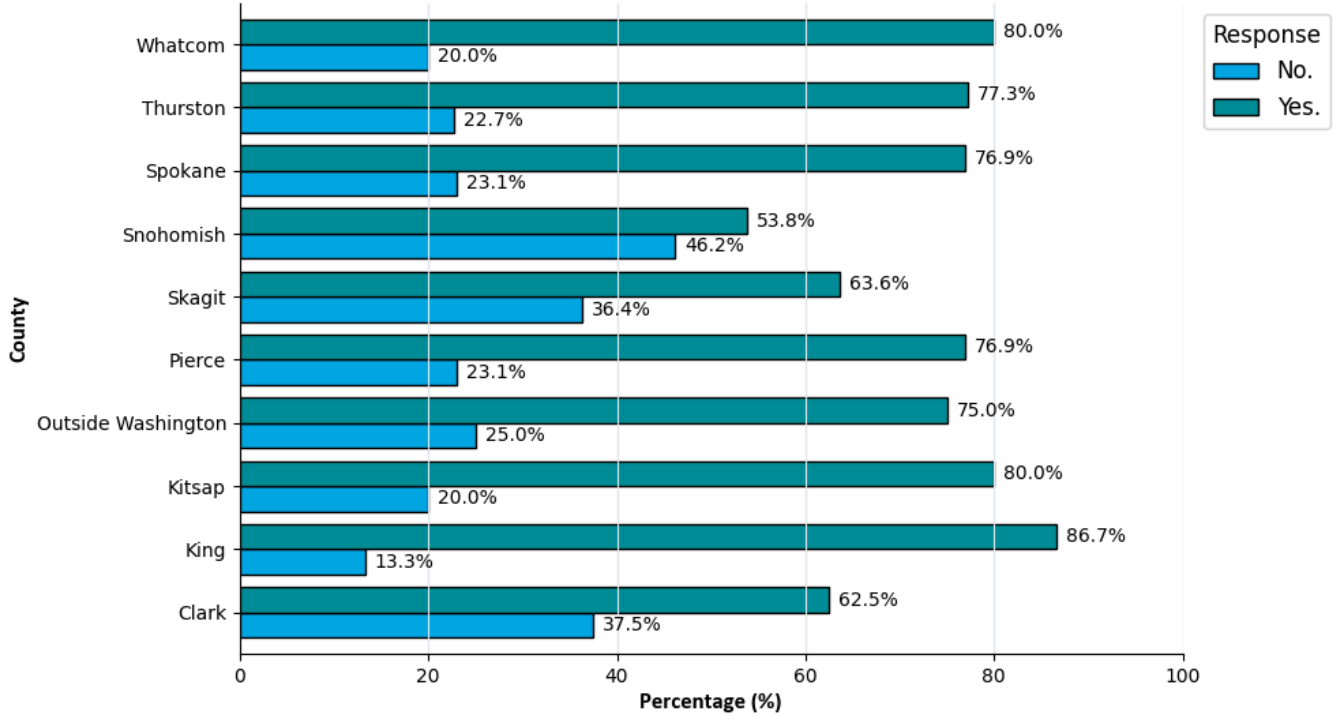
On this spectrum, please rate the audience to whom the oath should speak and inspire.



## Question 9

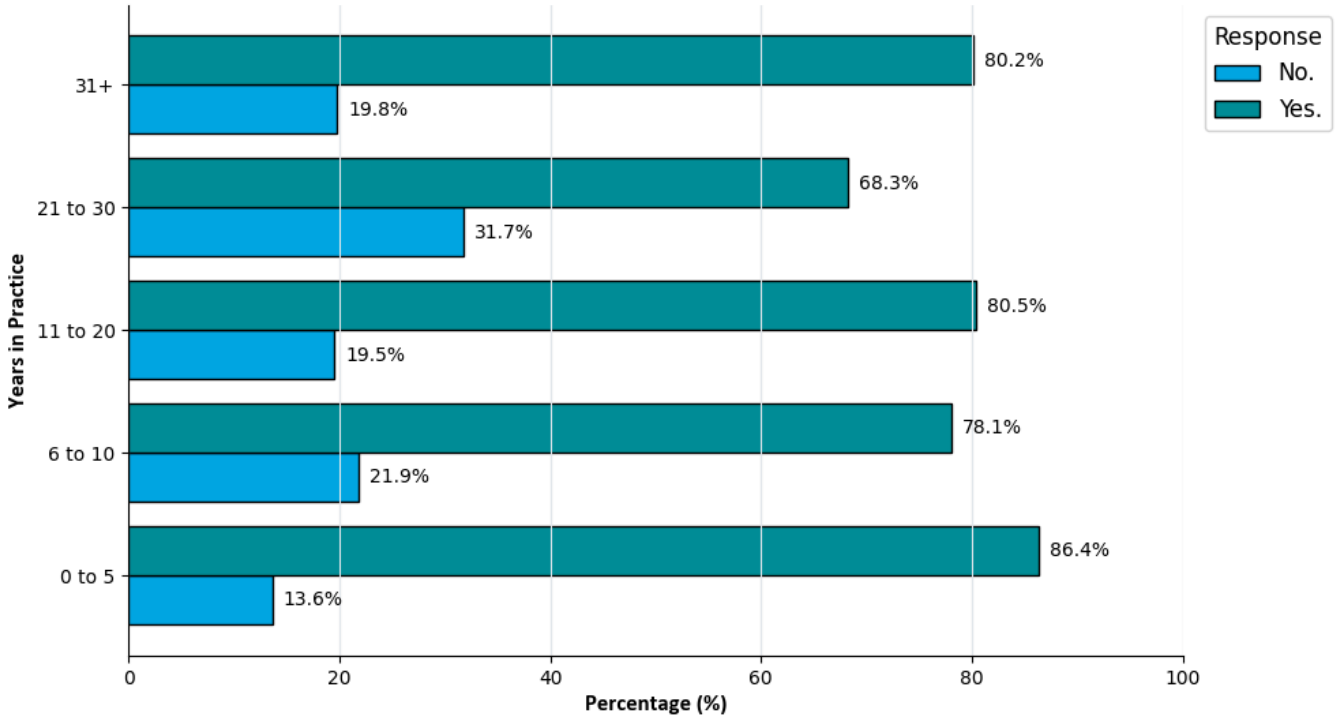
**Should the oath be inspirational to those who take it?**

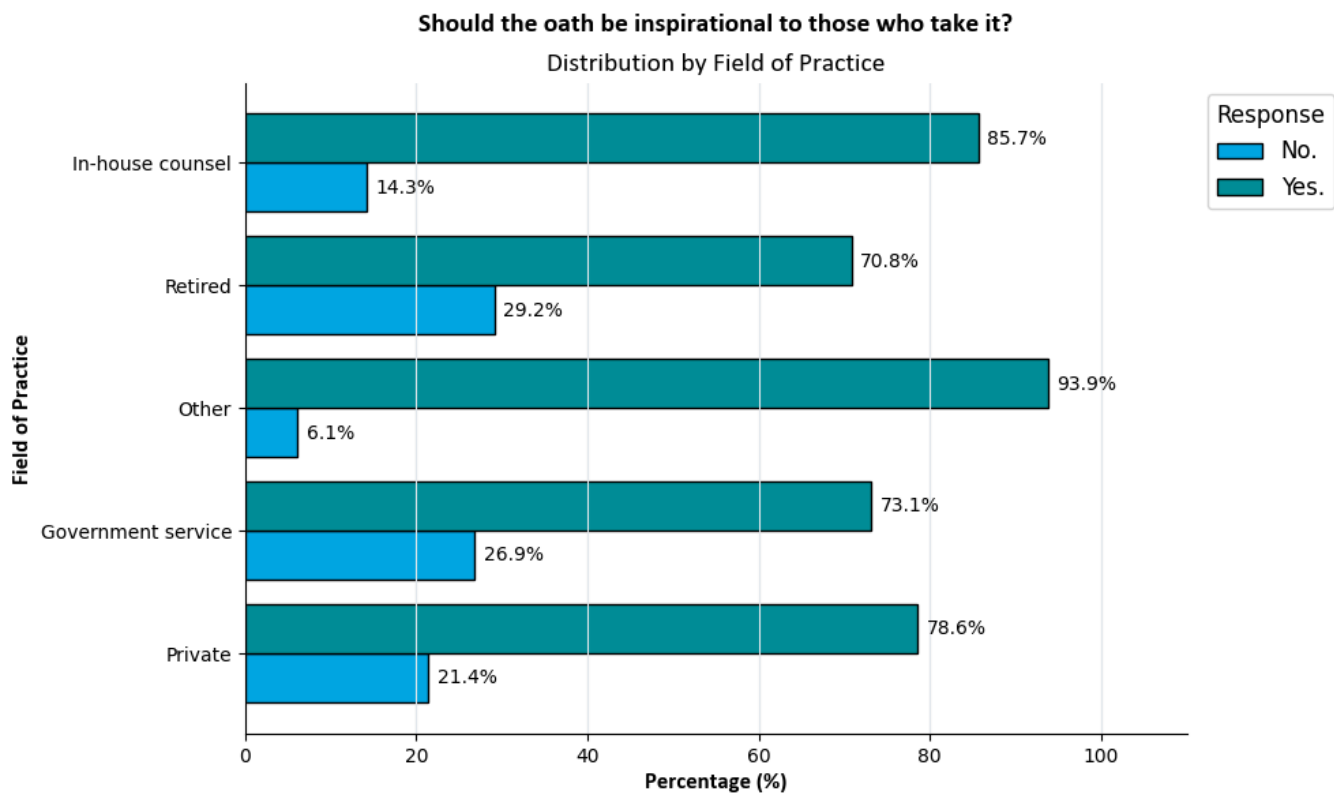
Distribution by County (Top 10)



**Should the oath be inspirational to those who take it?**

Distribution by Years in Practice





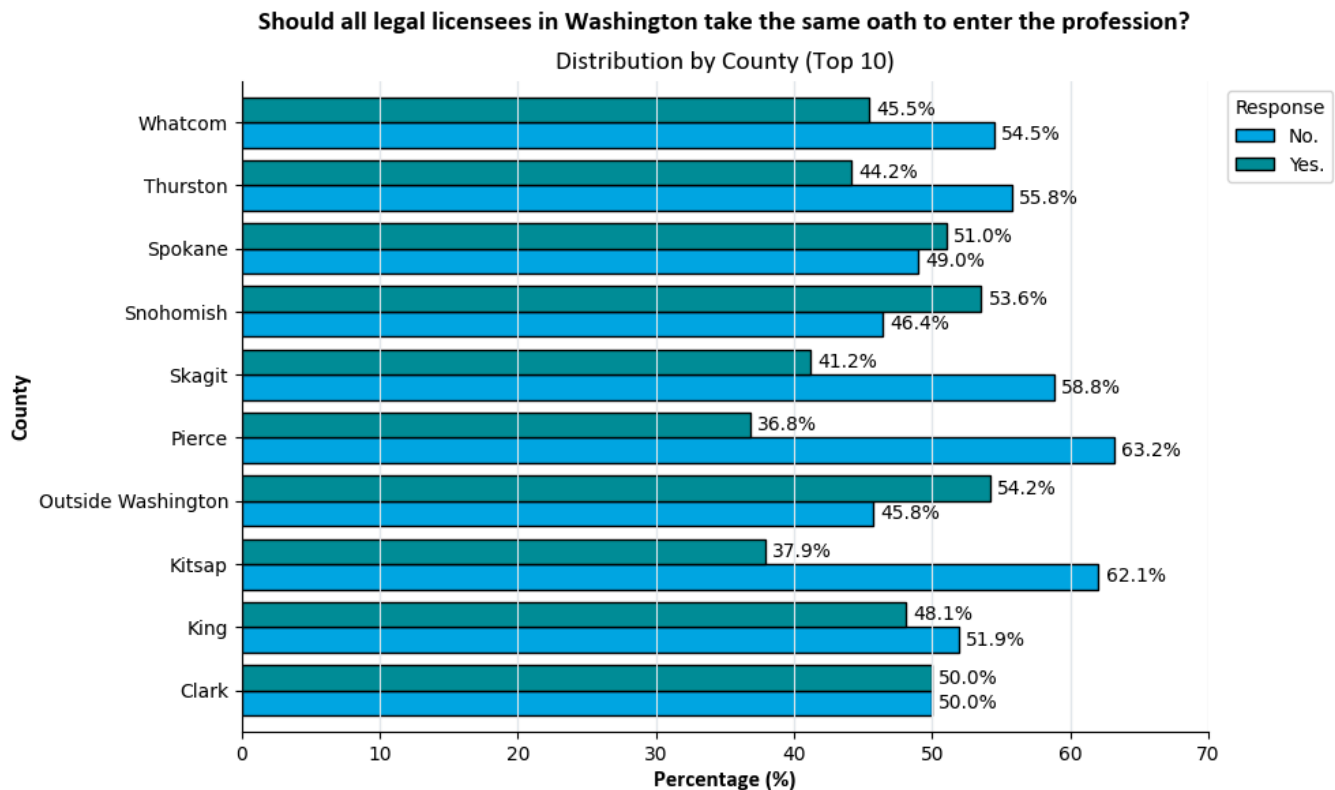
## Question 10

### Summary of Responses: What Would Make the Oath Inspirational

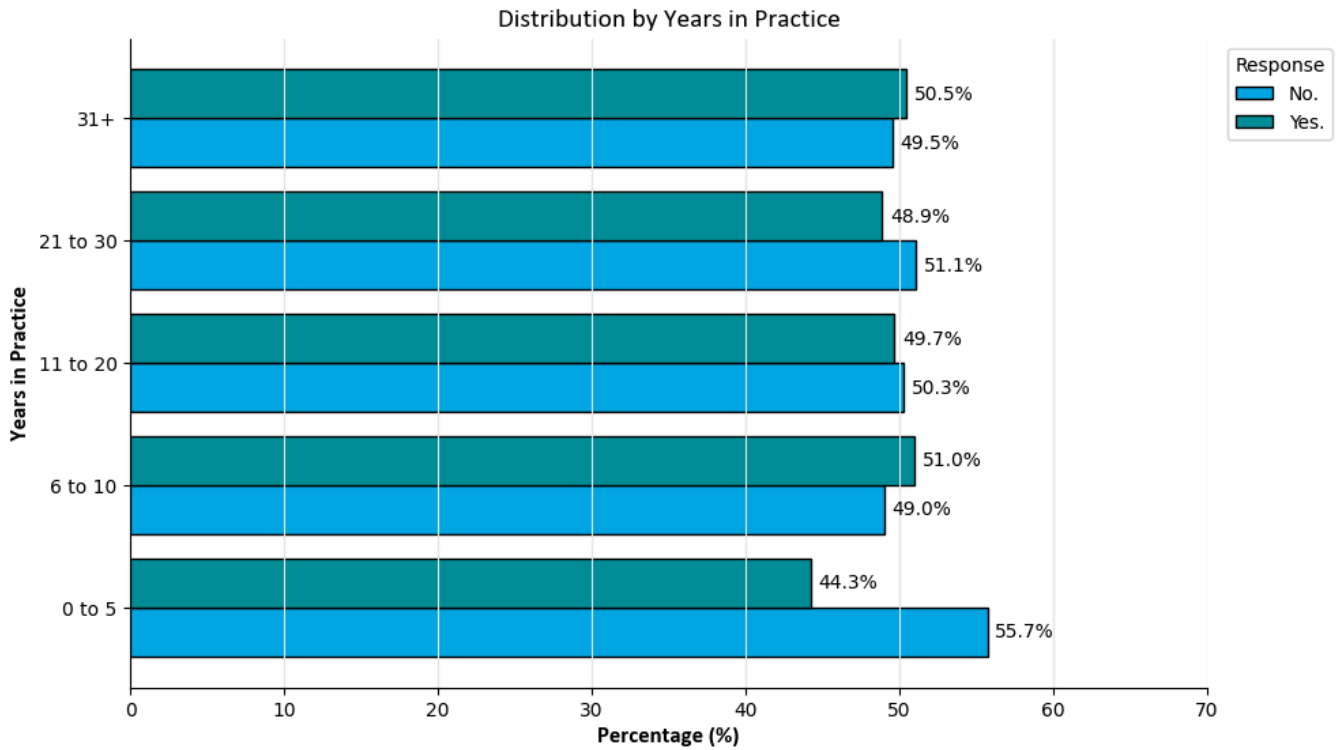
- **Clear, modern, and plain language** — removal of antiquated, confusing, or vague wording (especially “offensive personalities”); use of strong, active, memorable phrasing.
- **Emphasis on the rule of law and constitutional duty** — highlighting the attorney’s role in defending the U.S. and Washington Constitutions, democratic principles, and the integrity of legal institutions.
- **Aspirational vision of the profession** — focusing on justice, fairness, ethical responsibilities, service to others, and the higher purpose of the legal profession.
- **Civility, integrity, and professionalism** — invoking commitments to truth, respect, decorum, candor, and ethical behavior toward courts, clients, and the public.
- **Recognition of the privilege and responsibility of practicing law** — framing law as a calling, not just a job; acknowledging the public trust placed in attorneys.
- **Connection to tradition and history** — referencing the long lineage of the profession, rule-of-law foundations, and Washington-specific legal heritage.
- **Highlighting service and access to justice** — encouraging support for the vulnerable, improving justice system accessibility, and advocating responsibly.
- **Stronger inspirational structure** — use of preambles, short impactful statements, poetic or mission-oriented language, or clear separation of aspirational vs. mandatory duties.

- **Clarity of purpose** — focusing on why lawyers matter to society, how their actions uphold civil society, and how they contribute to justice, stability, and democracy.
- **Language about personal growth and higher standards** — challenging attorneys to rise to high ideals, act with integrity, and understand the impact of their conduct.
- **Recognition of attorneys' unique power** — emphasizing responsibility to use legal expertise for good, uphold justice, and safeguard civic values.
- **A more ceremonial or meaningful swearing-in experience** — some noted that the setting and delivery of the oath also influence its inspirational impact.
- **Shorter, clearer, more memorable statements** — brevity, clarity, and emotional resonance help the oath feel more meaningful.

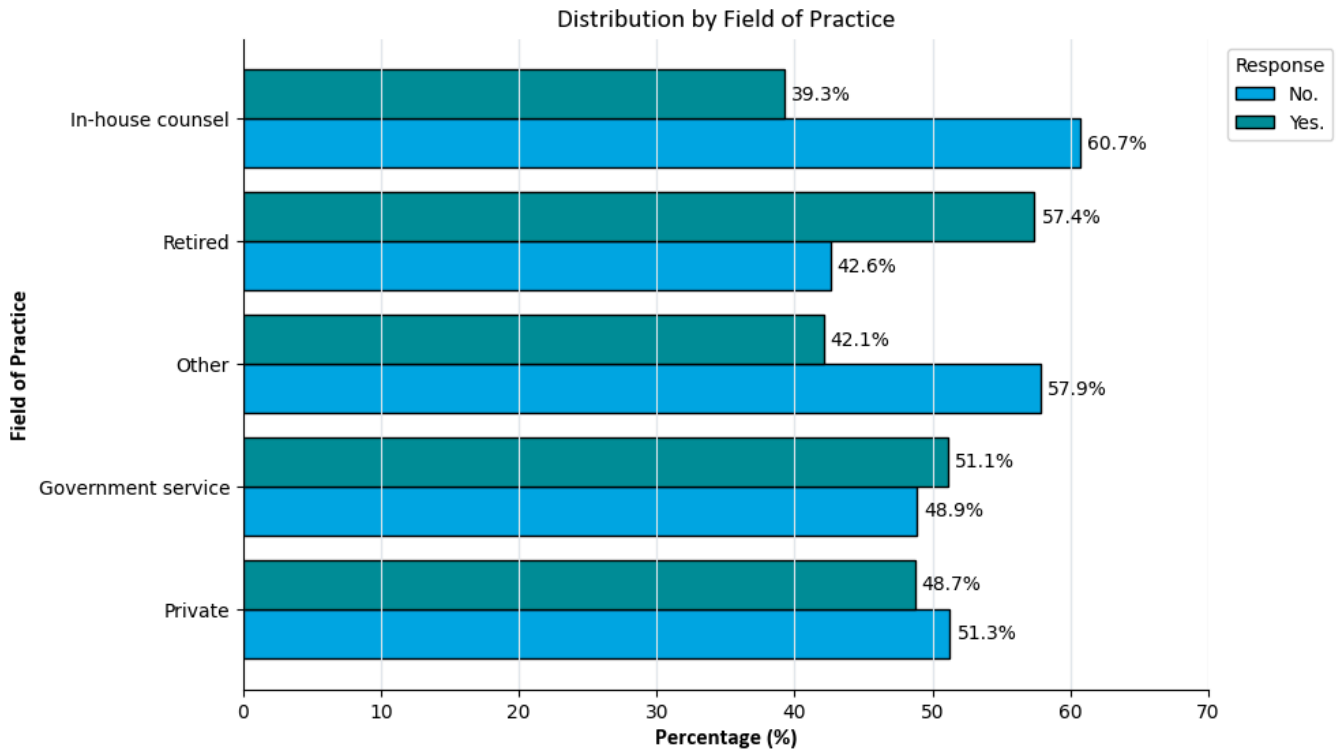
## Question 11



**Should all legal licensees in Washington take the same oath to enter the profession?**



**Should all legal licensees in Washington take the same oath to enter the profession?**



## Question 12

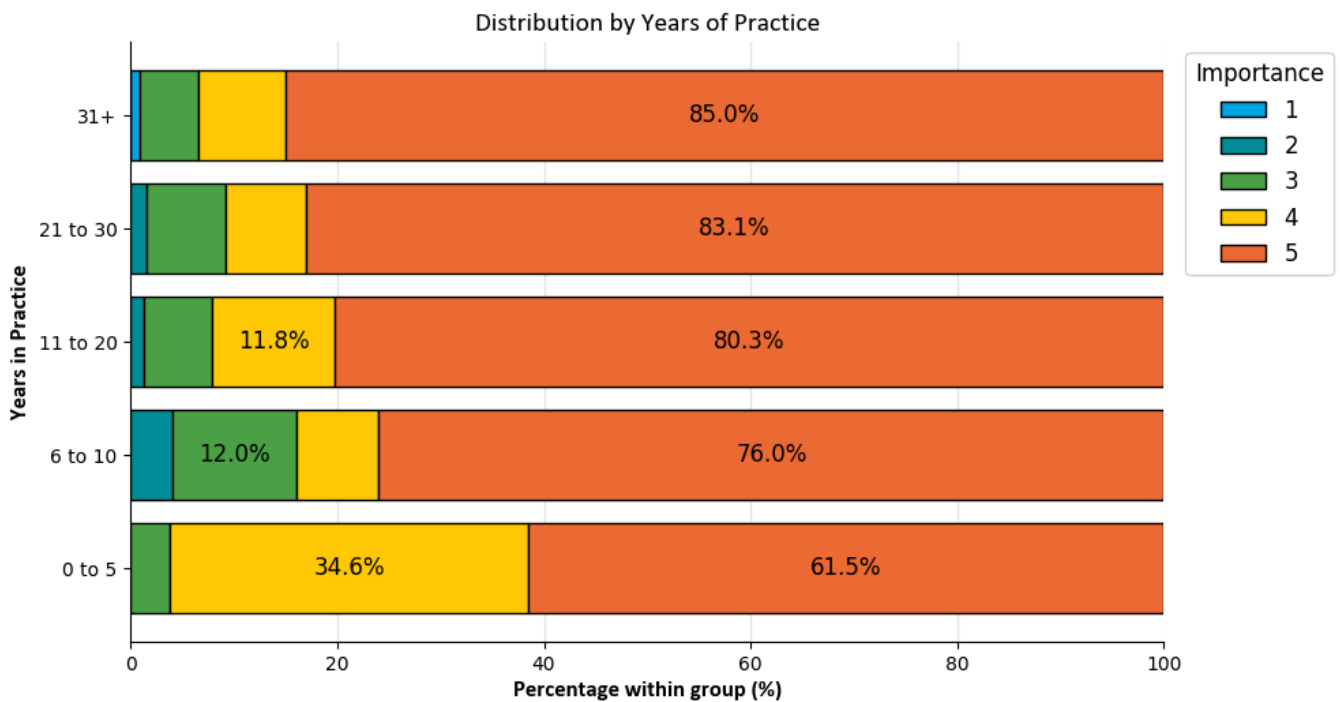
### Summary of Responses: Reasons to Keep the Attorney Oath Separate & Unique Elements

- **Attorneys have broader powers and responsibilities**
  - Full authority to practice law, appear in court, advise clients, and make strategic legal judgments.
  - Greater ability to impact outcomes—and cause harm—than LPOs or LLLTs.
- **Higher ethical and fiduciary duties**
  - Attorneys carry heightened obligations: confidentiality, candor, court integrity, duty to justice.
  - Many emphasized that attorneys are officers of the court and should have standards that reflect that role.
- **Different training, education, and licensure level**
  - Years of law school, bar exam, and professional vetting justify a distinct oath.
  - Respondents stressed the significant effort and expertise required to become an attorney.
- **Clear role distinction for the public**
  - A shared oath could blur lines between attorneys and limited-license professionals.
  - Public must understand who is (and is not) qualified to provide full legal representation.
- **Unique responsibilities attorneys hold**
  - Representing clients in court
  - Supervising limited licensees
  - Upholding constitutional and democratic principles
  - Advocating for the unpopular or vulnerable
  - Full professional accountability under the RPCs
- **Need to reflect the attorney's broader scope of practice**
  - Limited licensees have narrow practice rights; their oaths need to reflect limitations.
  - Attorney oath must reflect full, unrestricted practice authority.
- **Preservation of tradition, history, and professional identity**
  - Many view the attorney oath as a symbol of the profession's heritage and prestige.
  - Keeping it distinct honors the legacy of the legal profession.
- **Protecting the integrity of the profession**
  - Concerns that merging oaths would dilute standards or diminish the value of being an attorney.
  - Some expressed frustration that the attorney role is increasingly undervalued or eroded.
- **Elements many said should remain unique to attorneys**
  - Duty of candor to judges and the court
  - Duty to the constitutions
  - Duty to avoid frivolous or unjust actions
  - Confidentiality and fiduciary obligations
  - Duty to the defenseless or oppressed (though some noted it may need clarification)
  - Professional honor, integrity, and civility
  - Broad obligation to the justice system as a whole

- **Limited licensees need different commitments**
  - Oaths should emphasize limitations of their authority and obligation to disclose those limits.
  - They do not share the same representational or advocacy duties.
- **Some respondents indicated uncertainty**
  - A minority said they did not know enough about the other license types to compare.

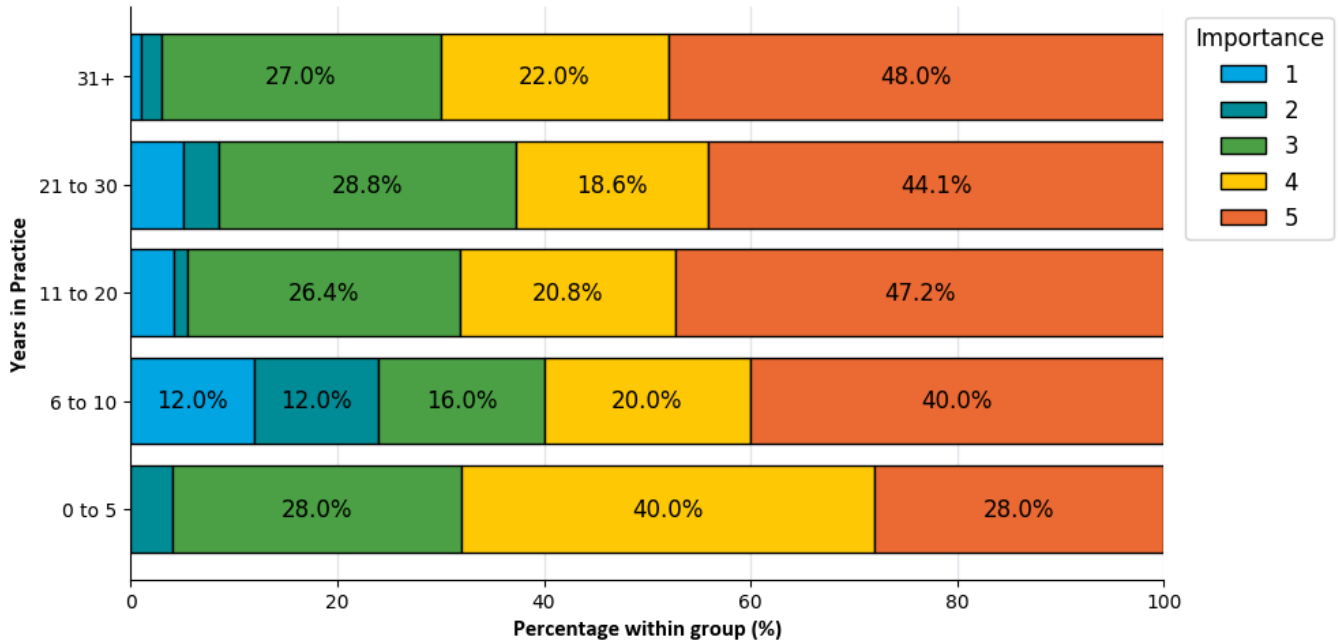
## Question 13

Why do you think it is important for there to be one common oath for all legal professionals in Washington?  
Common ethical responsibilities and duties among all legal licensees.



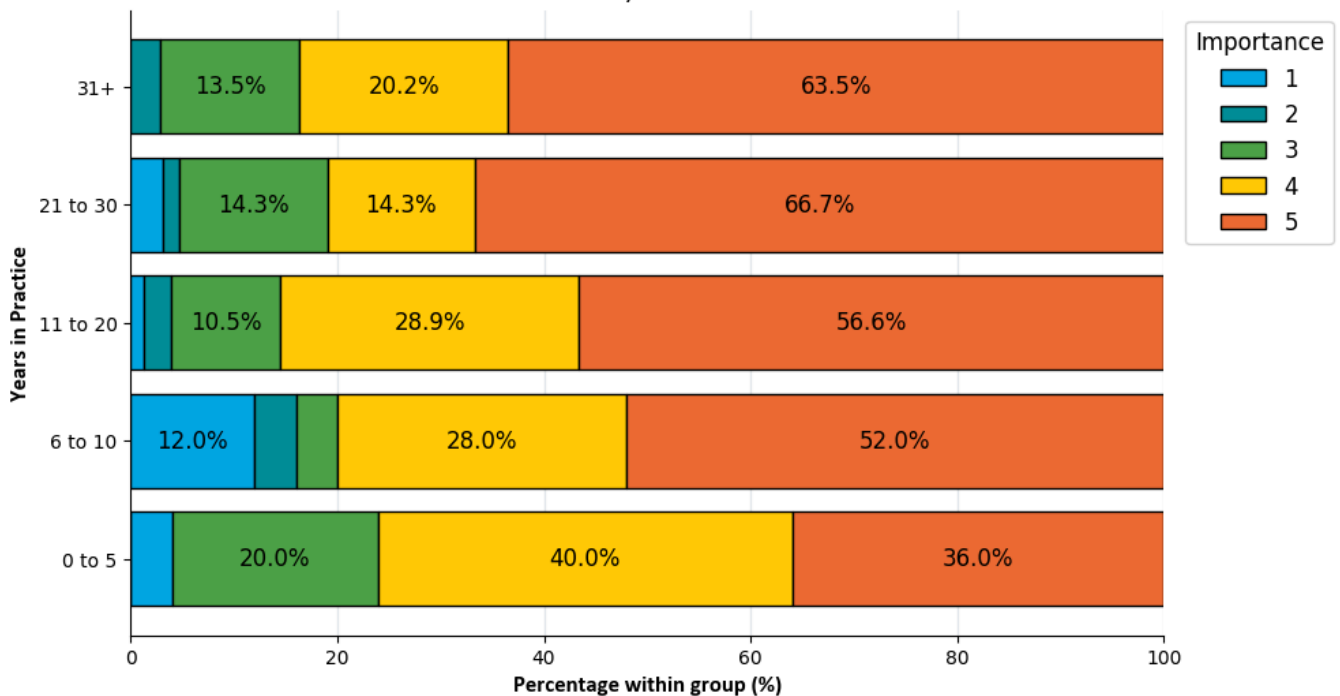
**Why do you think it is important for there to be one common oath for all legal professionals in Washington?  
It's not necessary to reference specific rules with limitations for certain licensees if there is language about following all ethical rules and expectations.**

Distribution by Years of Practice



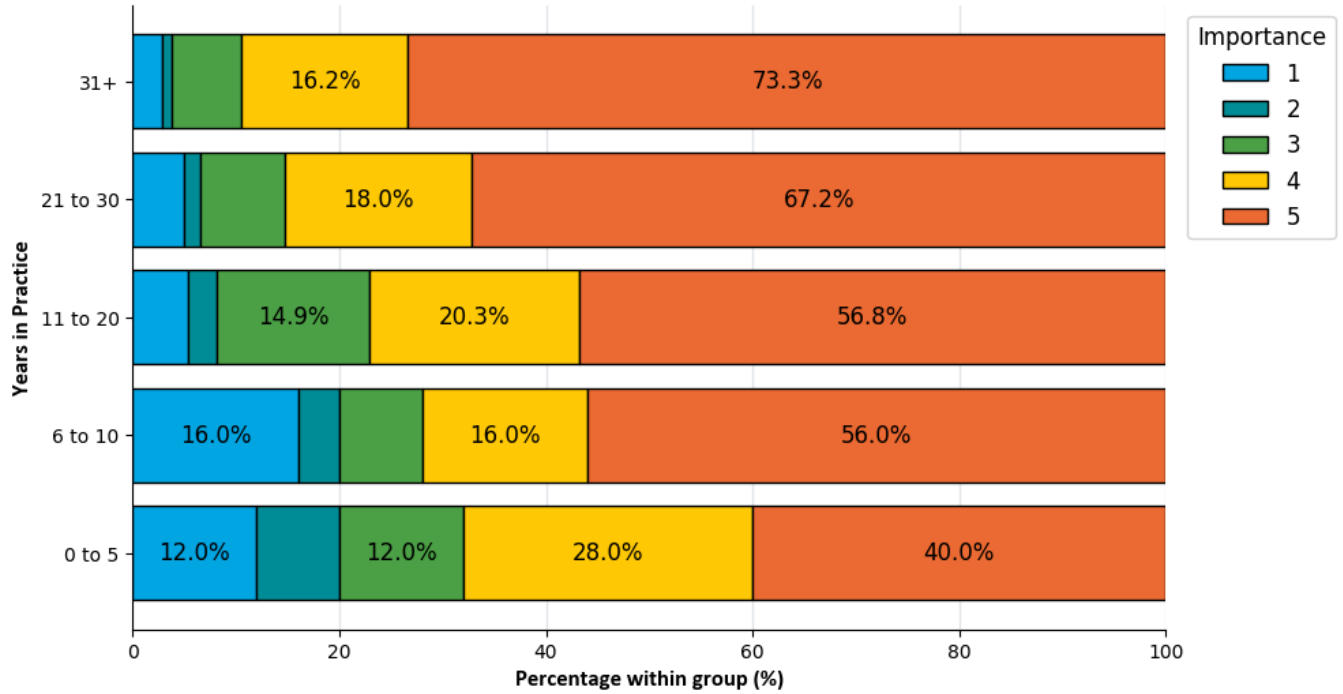
**Why do you think it is important for there to be one common oath for all legal professionals in Washington?  
Unified approach and treatment for all legal licensees.**

Distribution by Years of Practice



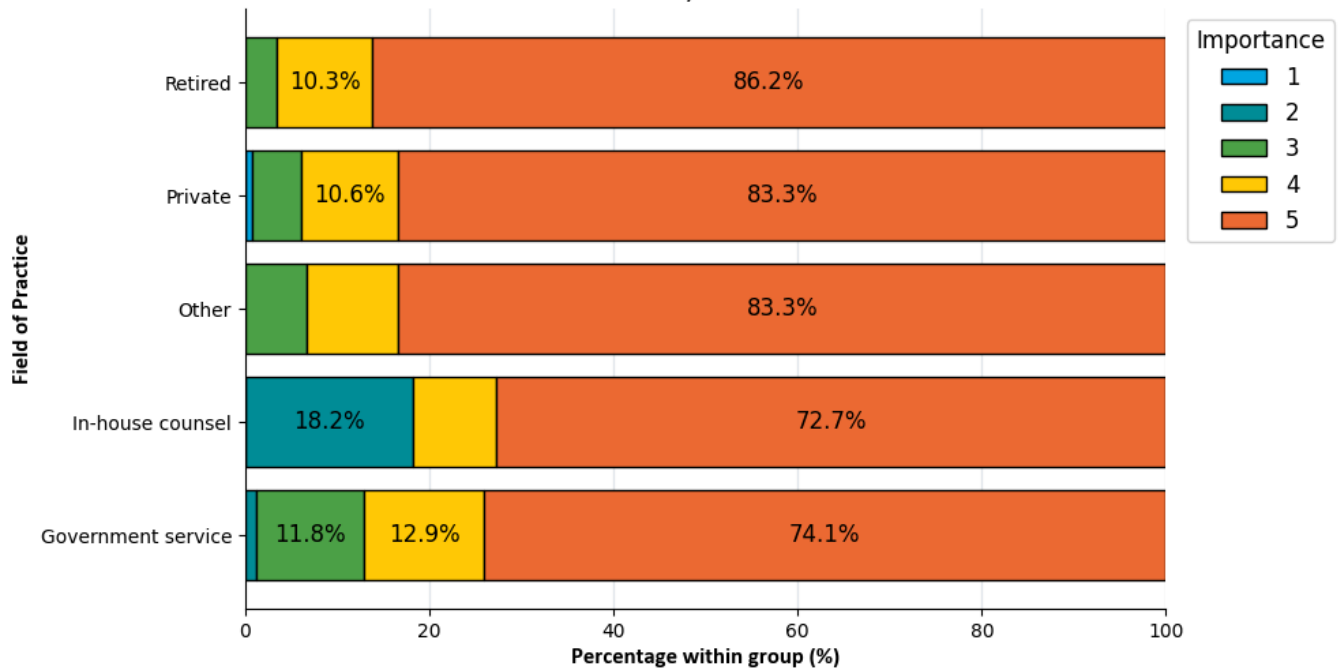
**Why do you think it is important for there to be one common oath for all legal professionals in Washington?  
Unified message to the public about legal licensees.**

Distribution by Years of Practice

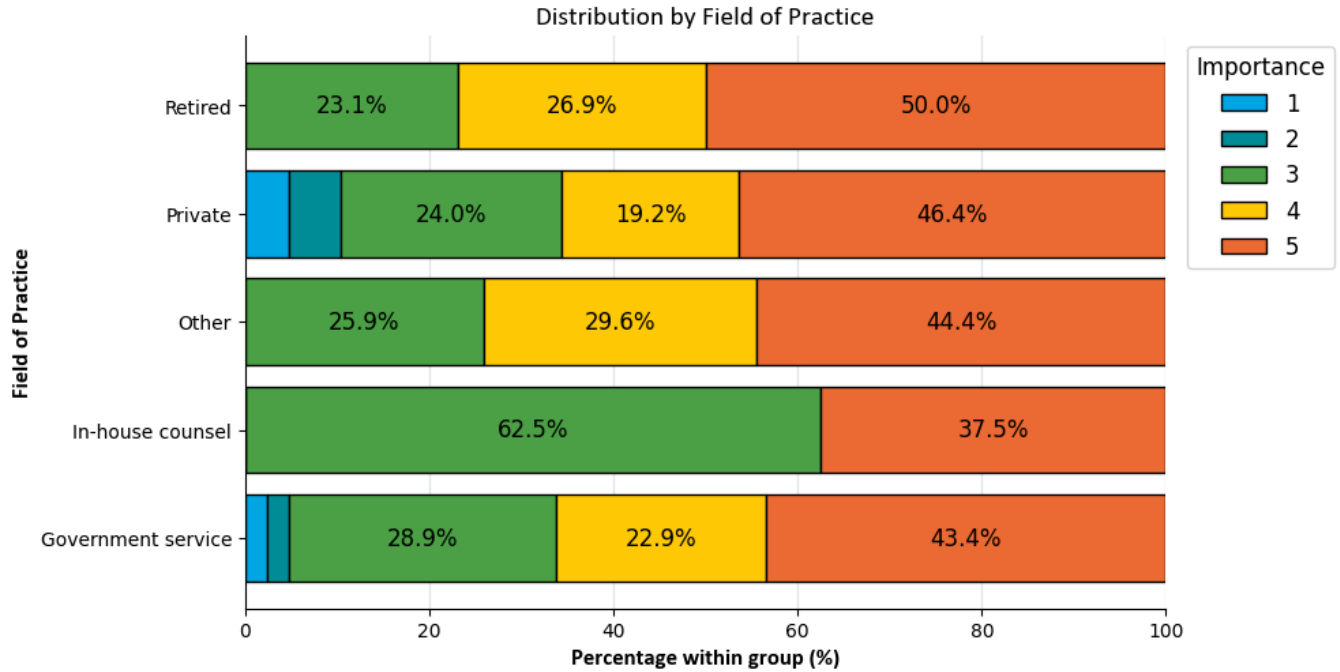


**Why do you think it is important for there to be one common oath for all legal professionals in Washington?  
Common ethical responsibilities and duties among all legal licensees.**

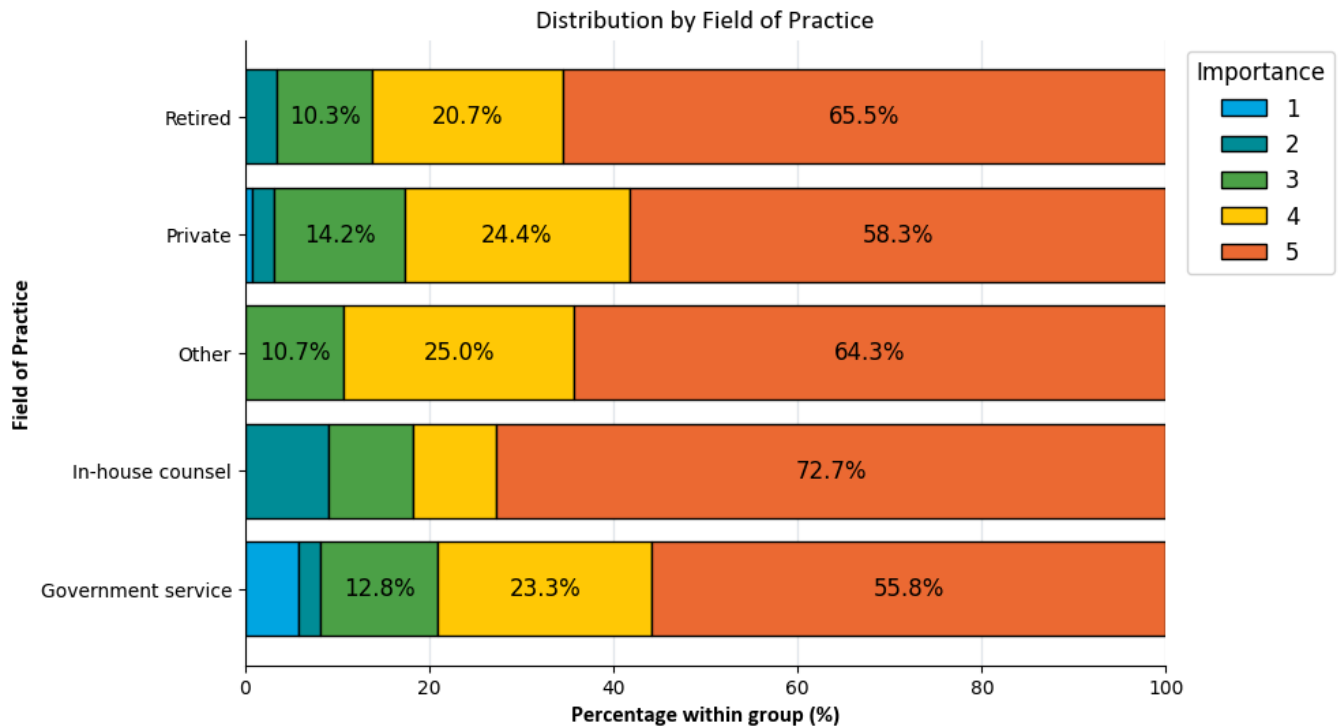
Distribution by Field of Practice



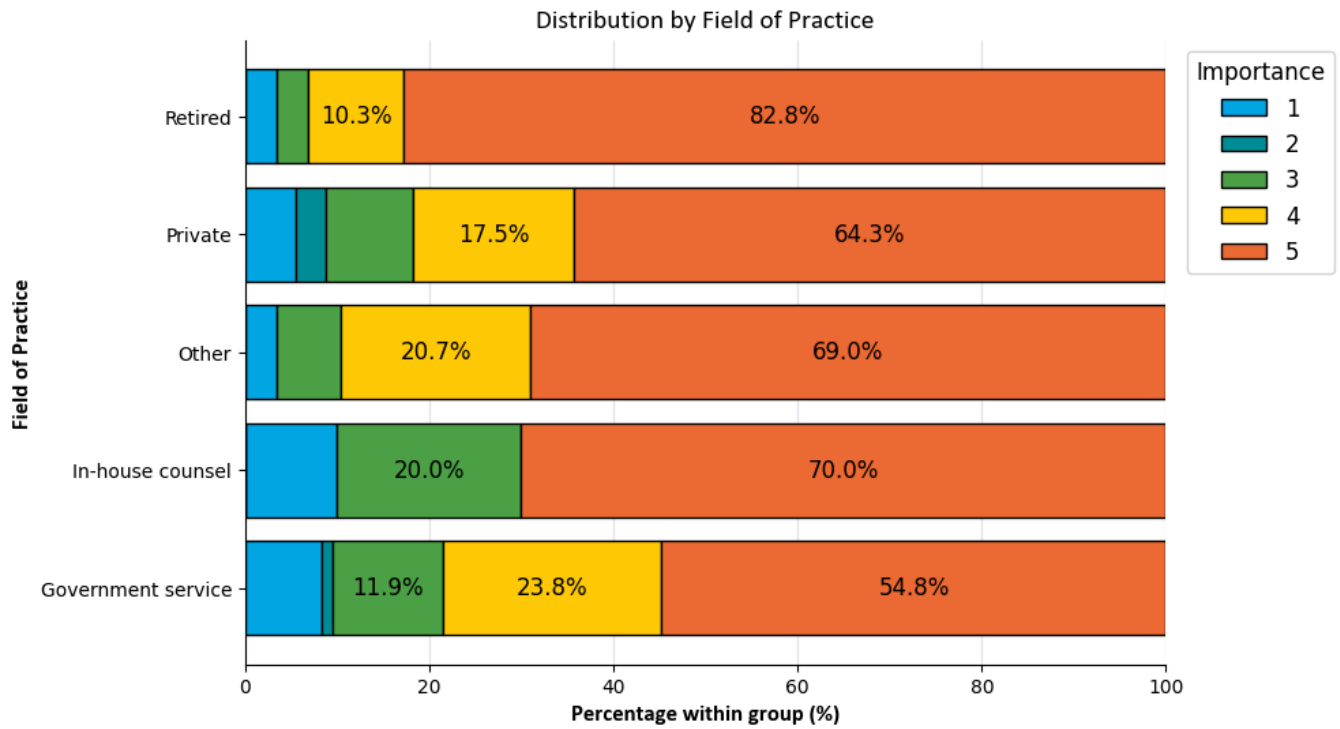
**Why do you think it is important for there to be one common oath for all legal professionals in Washington?  
It's not necessary to reference specific rules with limitations for certain licensees if there is language about following all ethical rules and expectations.**



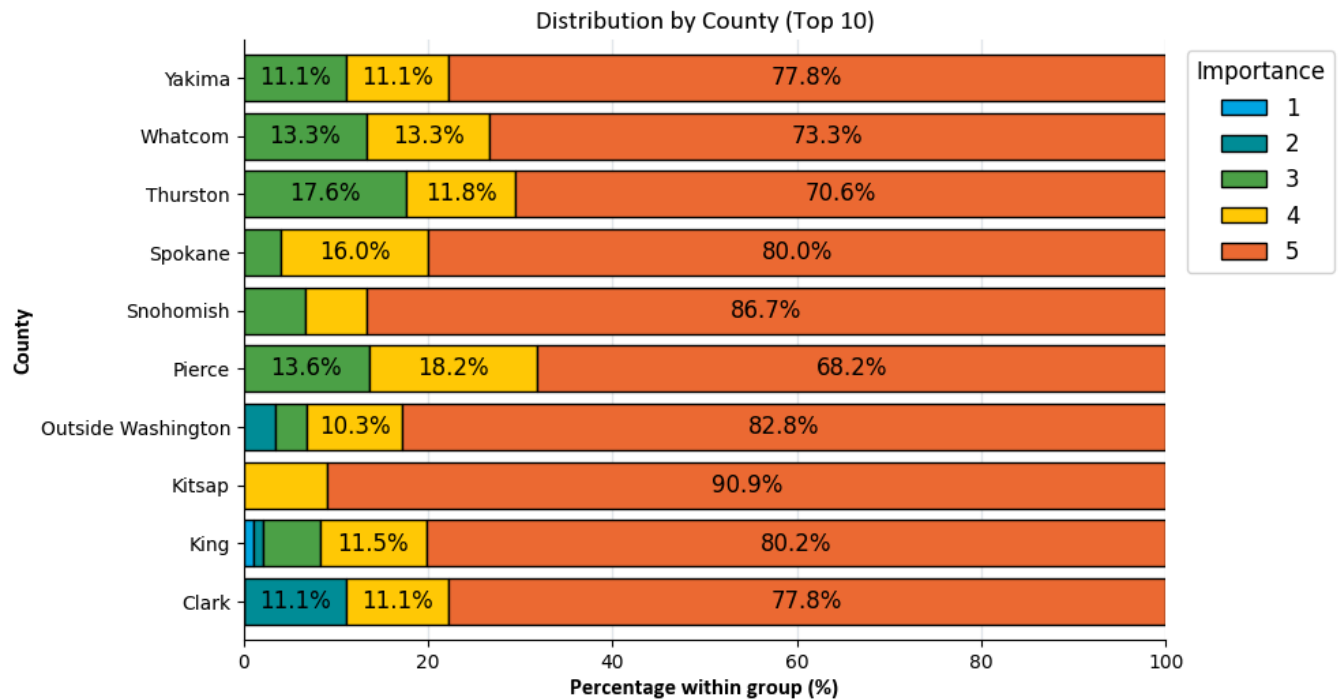
**Why do you think it is important for there to be one common oath for all legal professionals in Washington?  
Unified approach and treatment for all legal licensees.**



**Why do you think it is important for there to be one common oath for all legal professionals in Washington?  
Unified message to the public about legal licensees.**

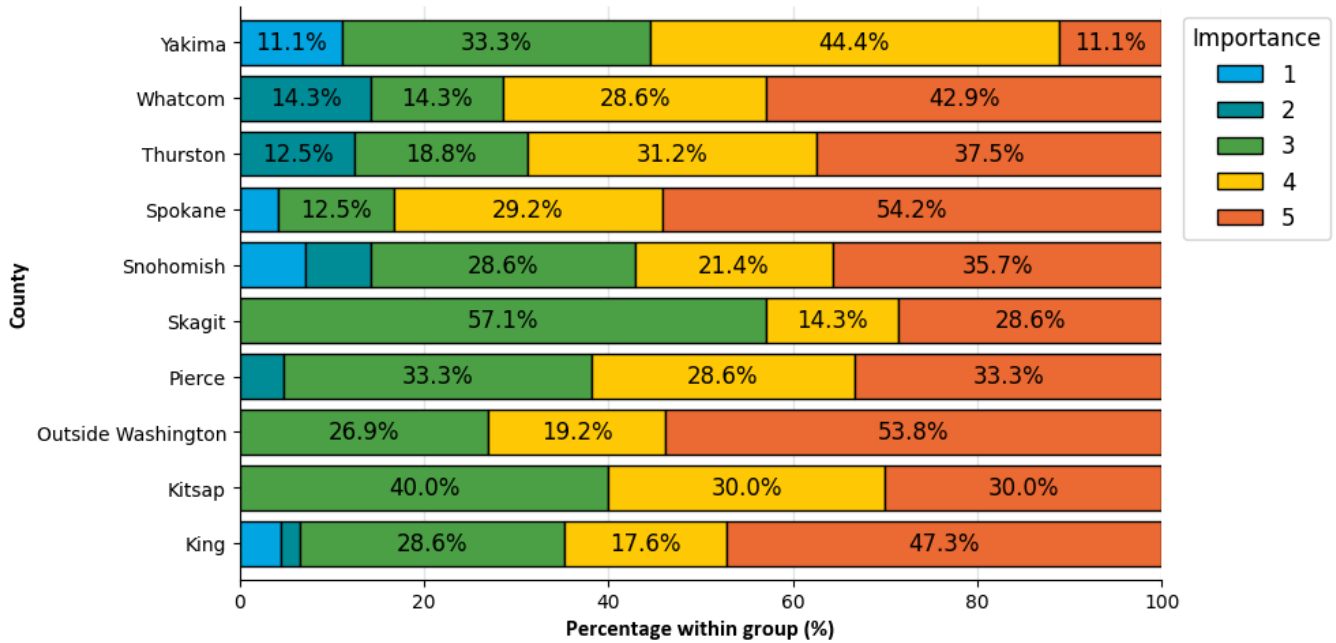


**Why do you think it is important for there to be one common oath for all legal professionals in Washington?  
Common ethical responsibilities and duties among all legal licensees.**



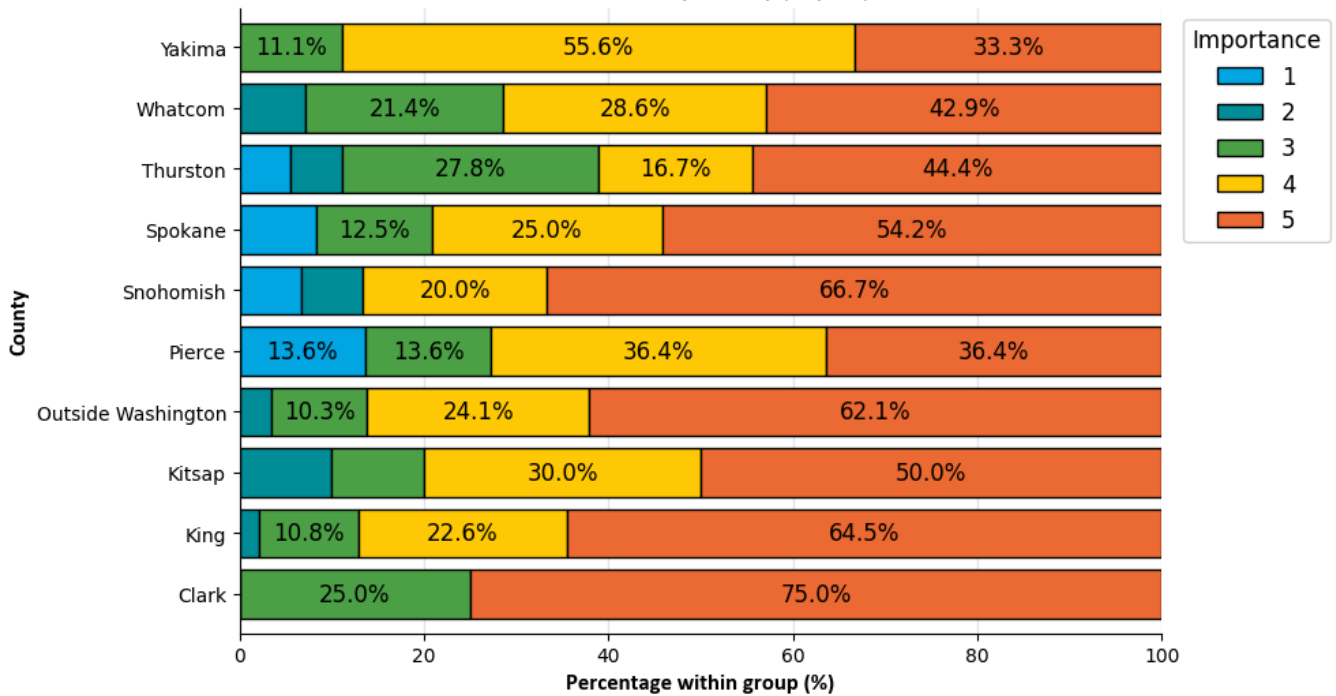
**Why do you think it is important for there to be one common oath for all legal professionals in Washington?  
It's not necessary to reference specific rules with limitations for certain licensees if there is language about following all ethical rules and expectations.**

Distribution by County (Top 10)



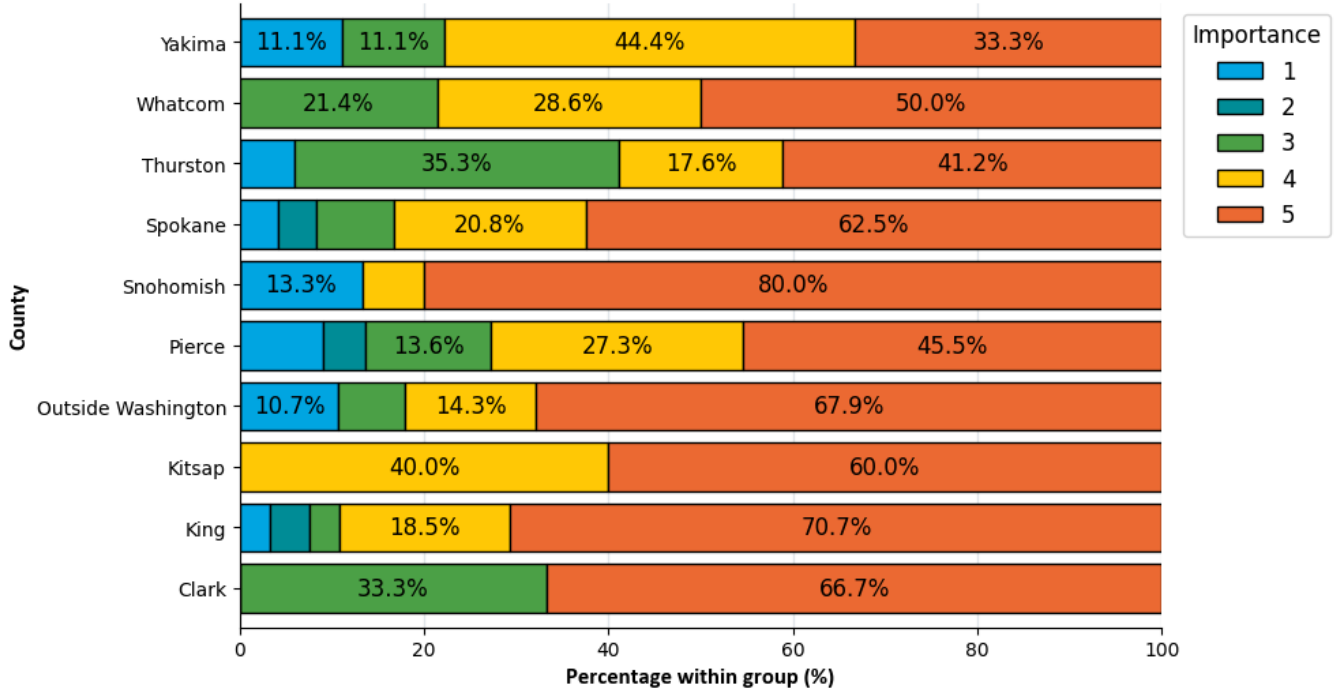
**Why do you think it is important for there to be one common oath for all legal professionals in Washington?  
Unified approach and treatment for all legal licensees.**

Distribution by County (Top 10)



**Why do you think it is important for there to be one common oath for all legal professionals in Washington?  
Unified message to the public about legal licensees.**

Distribution by County (Top 10)



## Summary of “Other” Responses: Reasons for One Common Oath

- Some support a shared oath to reinforce **common ethical values** across all legal professionals.
- A single oath could provide **clear baseline expectations** for the public.
- It may **reduce confusion** and be easier to administer.
- Could signal **respect for all licensure paths** into the profession.
- Some believe limited-license professionals should take the oath **more seriously**, and a shared oath might help.
- A few value **reducing hierarchy** between attorneys and other legal professionals.
- Several were **uncertain** or felt they didn’t know enough to answer.

## Question 14

### Summary of Responses: Drawbacks of Unifying the Three Legal-Licensee Oaths

- **Public confusion about roles and qualifications**
  - Risk that clients may assume all license types have the same training, authority, and scope of practice.
  - Could blur the distinction between attorneys and limited-license professionals.

- **Dilution or “watering down” of attorney standards**
  - Concern that a unified oath may lower expectations for attorneys or imply all legal providers carry equal responsibilities.
  - Some fear this would undermine the prestige and rigor of the attorney role.
- **Mismatch between oath language and actual scope of practice**
  - Certain duties in the attorney oath (e.g., court advocacy, fiduciary obligations, full representation) do not apply to LLLTs or LPOs.
  - A single oath may include irrelevant or misleading commitments for some roles.
- **Potential for misrepresentation**
  - Limited-license professionals might believe (or imply) they have the same authority as attorneys because they took the same oath.
- **Difficulty tailoring ethical expectations**
  - Each license type has different restrictions, obligations, and oversight mechanisms; a single oath could gloss over those differences.
- **Risk of lowering or defaulting to the “lowest common denominator”**
  - Concern that the unified version would need to be simplified to apply broadly, weakening the attorney-specific commitments.
- **Loss of clarity for the public and profession**
  - Reduced transparency about who can do what and who bears ultimate responsibility.
  - Important for accountability and consumer protection.
- **Some saw no drawbacks**
  - A minority believed unification would not cause problems or felt unsure due to limited knowledge of the other licenses.

## Question 15

### Summary of “Other” Responses: Memories of First Taking the Oath of Attorney

- **Sense of pride, honor, and accomplishment**
  - Many recalled feeling proud, excited, or deeply honored to join the profession.
  - For some, it marked a major personal milestone after years of hard work.
- **Solemnity and seriousness of the moment**
  - Respondents often described the ceremony as formal, meaningful, or weighty.
  - The courtroom setting, presence of judges, or family made it feel significant.

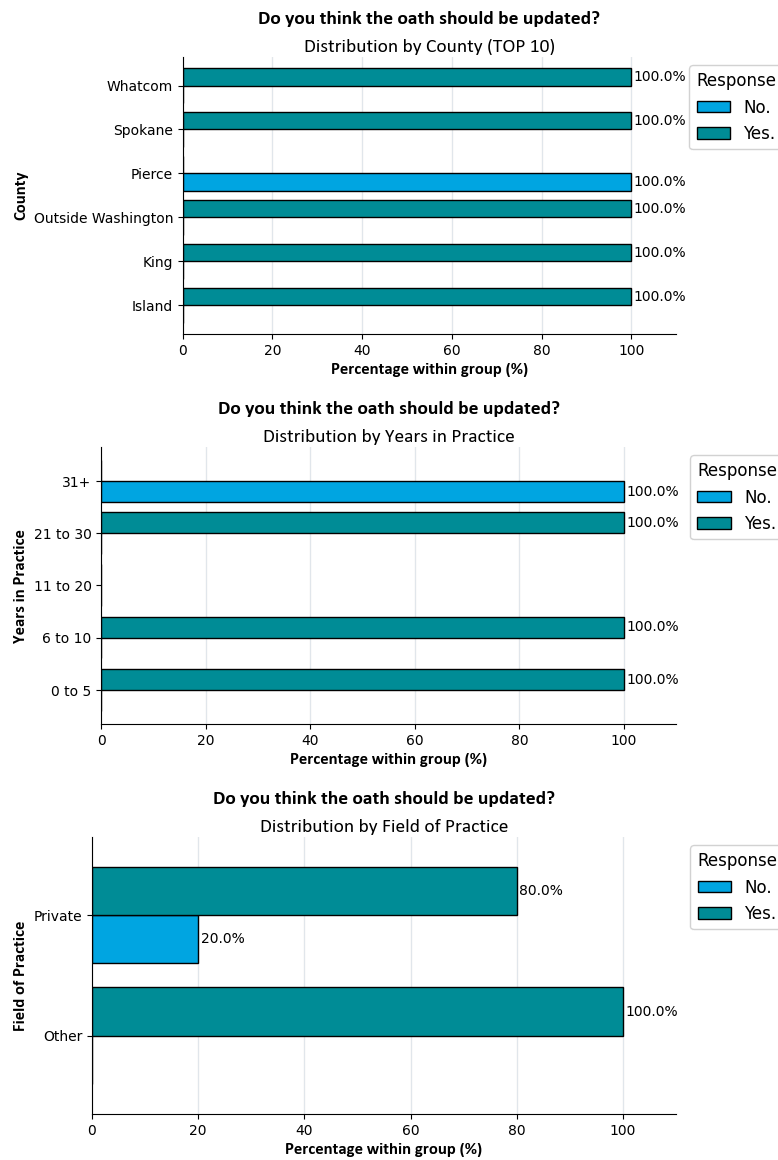
- **Feeling the responsibility of becoming an attorney**
  - Many remembered sensing the gravity of their ethical duties, public trust, and obligations under the law.
- **Language was long, outdated, or confusing**
  - A very common theme: the oath felt cumbersome, wordy, hard to recite, or unclear.
  - “Abstaining from offensive personalities” was repeatedly remembered as odd, confusing, or humorous.
- **Tradition and history**
  - Some were inspired by the continuity of taking the same oath as generations before them.
  - The historic or ceremonial aspects stood out more than the specific words.
- **Emotional or personal significance**
  - People remembered who administered the oath, who attended, or the importance of sharing it with family.
  - Some were moved to tears or felt humbled.
- **Little or no memory of the actual wording**
  - Many said they remembered almost nothing of the oath itself—only the setting or the feeling of the moment.
- **COVID-era swearing-in felt less meaningful**
  - Those sworn in remotely described the moment as quick, impersonal, or forgettable.
- **Mixed impact**
  - Some found it inspirational; others thought it was just a procedural step.

# LLLT Oath Survey Analysis

This report visualizes each survey question of the LLLT Oath Survey by showing how responses vary according to the respondent's years in practice, field of practice, and county.

All visualizations and analyses in this report are based solely on responses that were submitted; any questions that were skipped or left unanswered are not included in the visualizations or quantitative summaries. Additionally, all qualitative response summaries were generated using Microsoft Copilot.

## Q1



## Q2

### Summary of Responses: Anticipated Adverse Impacts

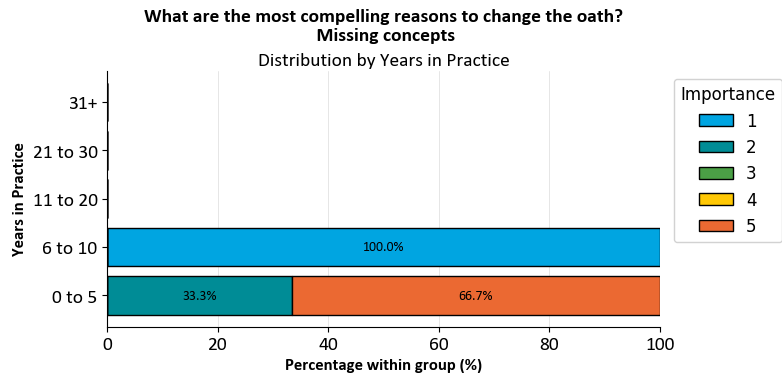
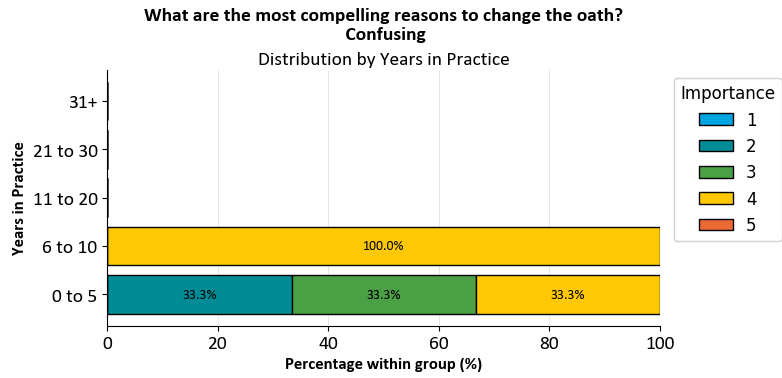
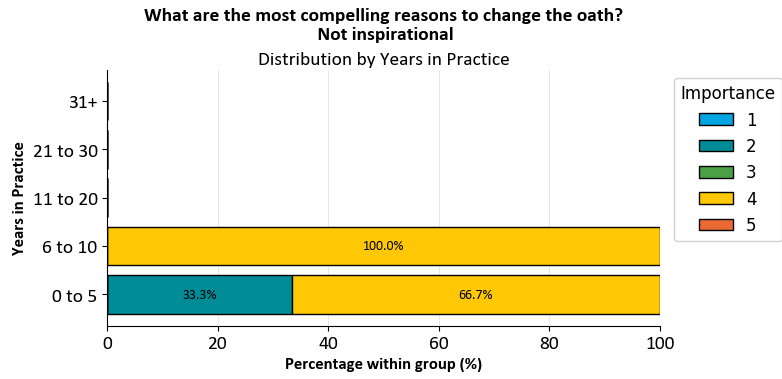
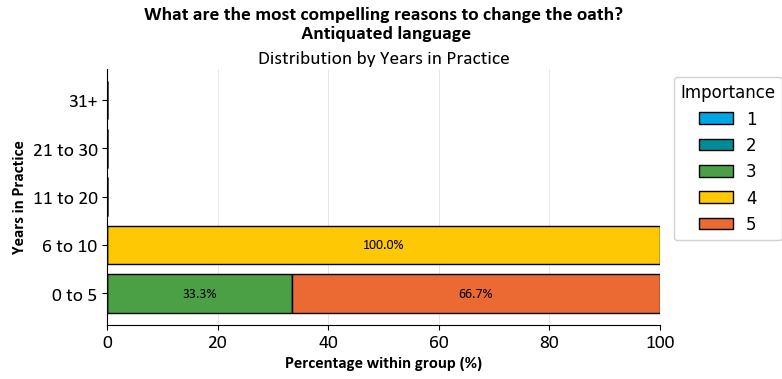
- Unanticipated or unintended consequences
- Deterioration of core values

## Q3

What elements of the current oath are most important to you and should be retained if the oath were to be updated?

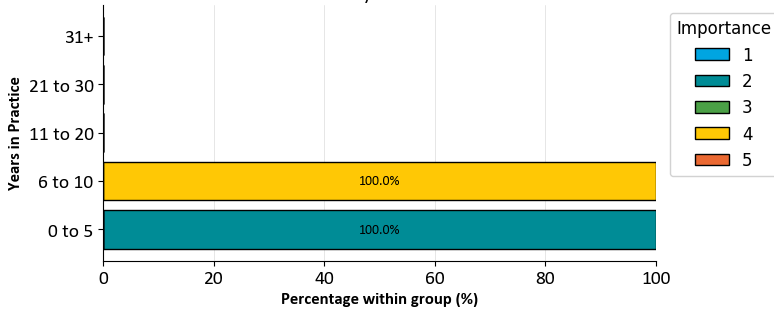
- To uphold the constitutions of the United States and the State of Washington

Q4



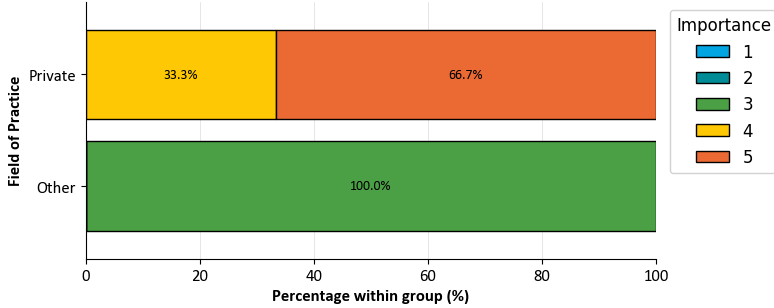
**What are the most compelling reasons to change the oath?  
Concepts you do not agree with**

Distribution by Years in Practice



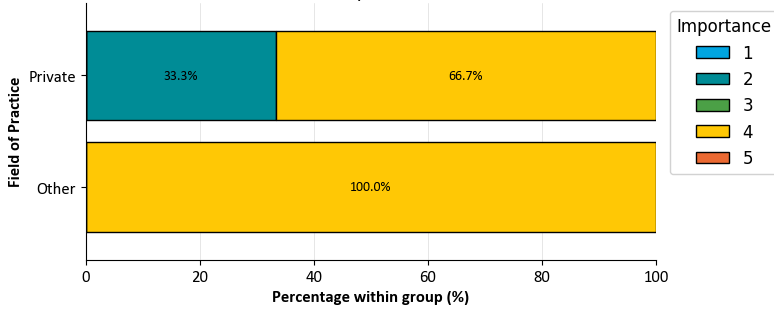
**What are the most compelling reasons to change the oath?  
Antiquated language**

Distribution by Field of Practice



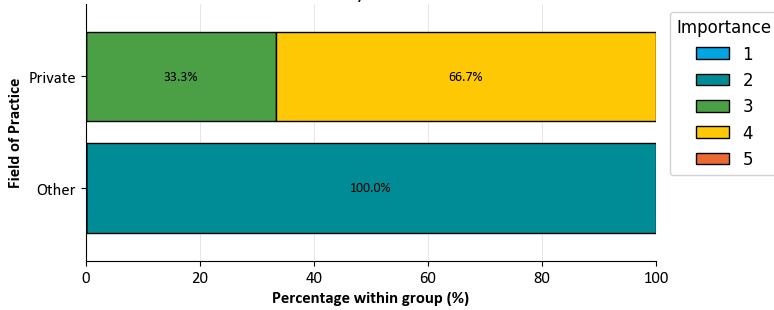
**What are the most compelling reasons to change the oath?  
Not inspirational**

Distribution by Field of Practice



**What are the most compelling reasons to change the oath?  
Confusing**

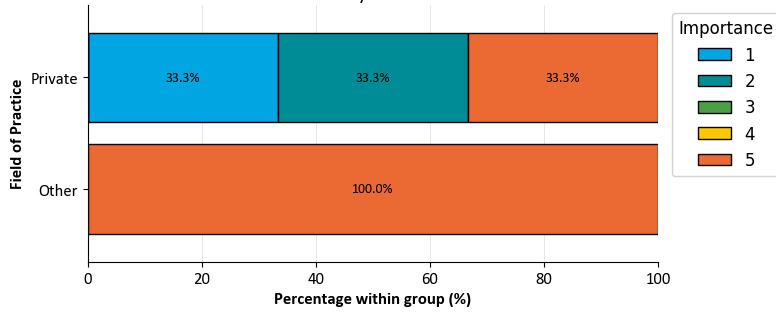
Distribution by Field of Practice



**What are the most compelling reasons to change the oath?**

**Missing concepts**

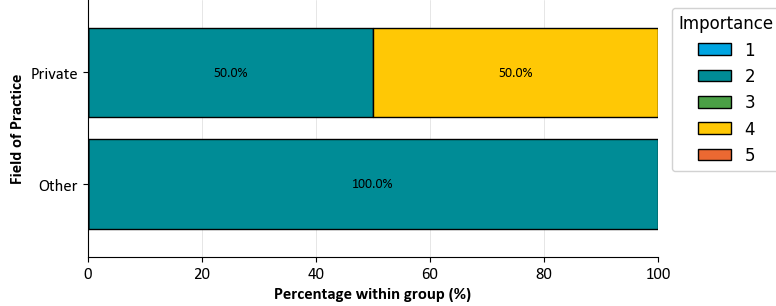
Distribution by Field of Practice



**What are the most compelling reasons to change the oath?**

**Concepts you do not agree with**

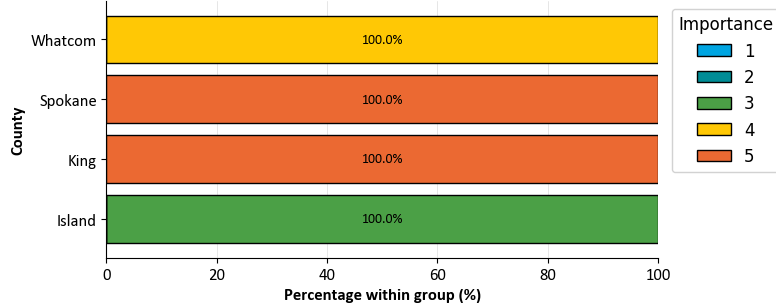
Distribution by Field of Practice



**What are the most compelling reasons to change the oath?**

**Antiquated language**

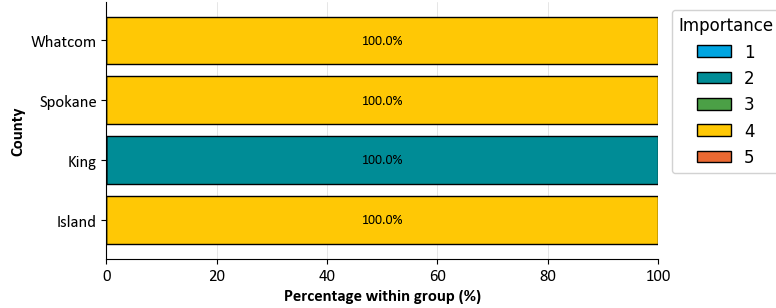
Distribution by County



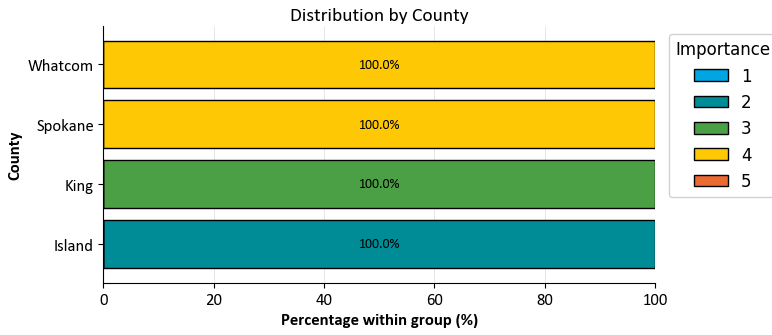
**What are the most compelling reasons to change the oath?**

**Not inspirational**

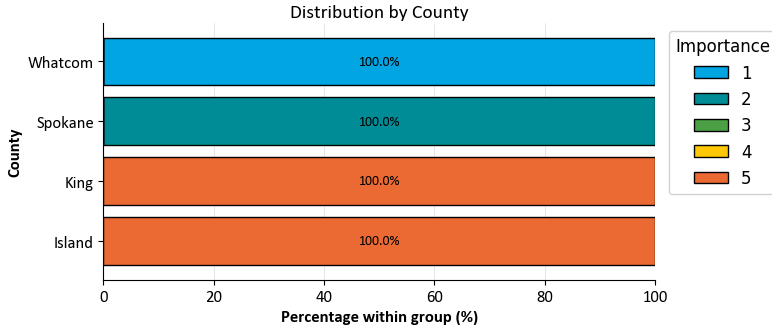
Distribution by County



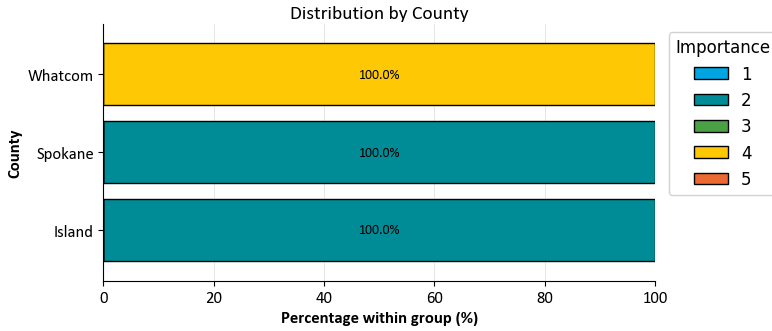
**What are the most compelling reasons to change the oath?  
Confusing**



**What are the most compelling reasons to change the oath?  
Missing concepts**



**What are the most compelling reasons to change the oath?  
Concepts you do not agree with**

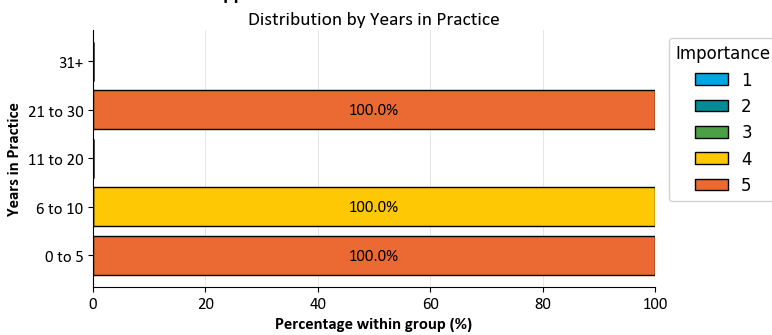


**Summary of "Other" Responses: Reasons to Change the Oath**

- **Clarify confusing or contradictory language**
  - Paragraph 7 appears to require rejecting people based on their "personality."
  - Paragraph 8 seems to imply accepting clients even when the attorney does not support the cause.
  - These sections create confusion about the voluntary nature of the attorney-client relationship.
- **Desire for consistency across legal professionals**
  - Some respondents believe all licensed legal professionals should share the same oath.
  - View that attorneys should not be considered "more important" than LLLTs or other licensees.

**Q5**

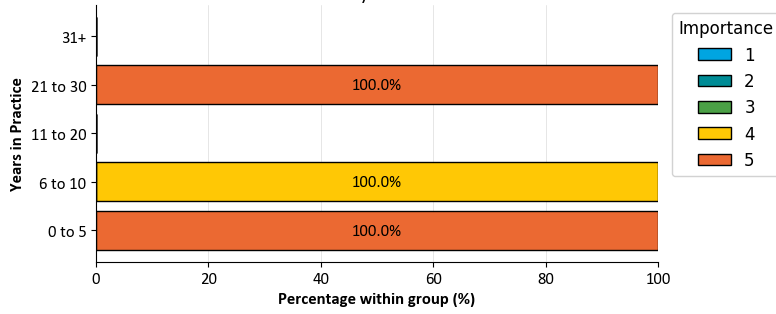
**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?  
Support for state and federal constitutions**



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**

**Faithful discharge of duties**

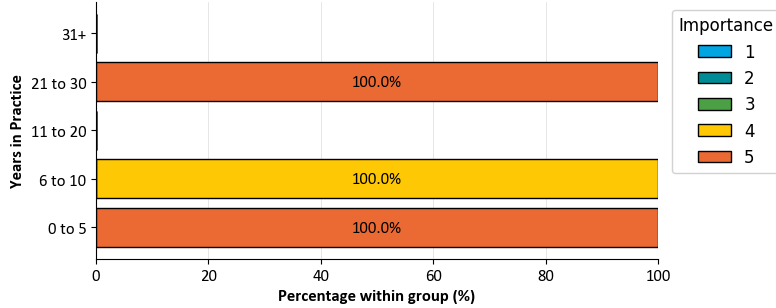
Distribution by Years in Practice



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**

**Honesty and honorable conduct**

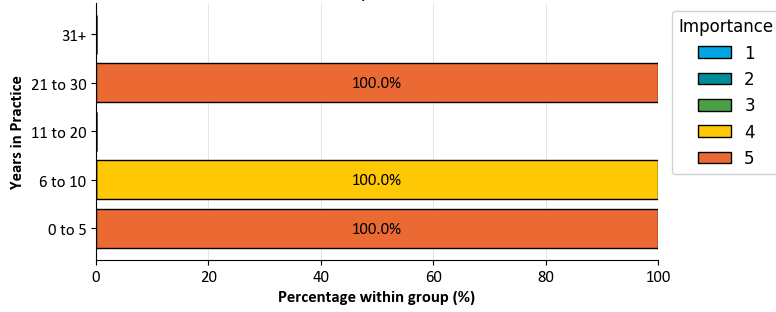
Distribution by Years in Practice



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**

**Maintain respect for the judiciary**

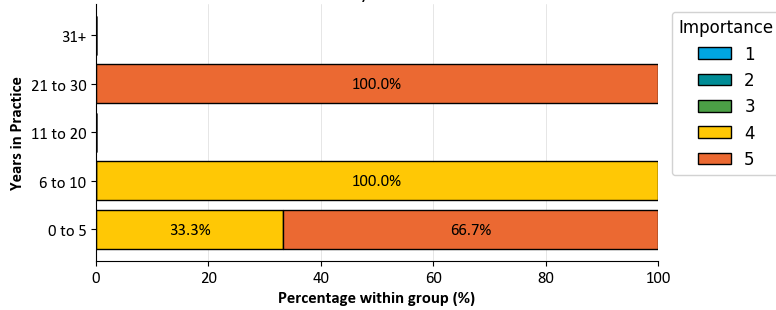
Distribution by Years in Practice



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**

**Confidentiality**

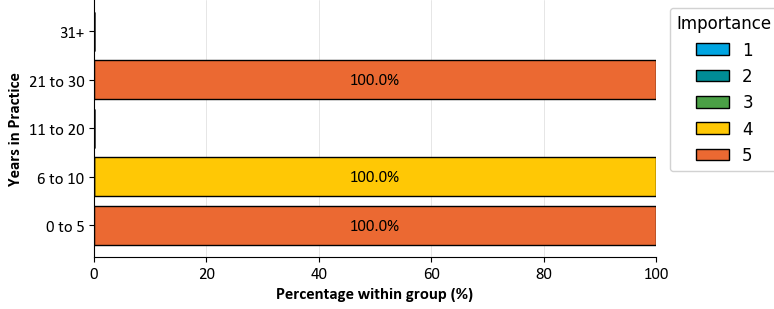
Distribution by Years in Practice



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**

**Civility**

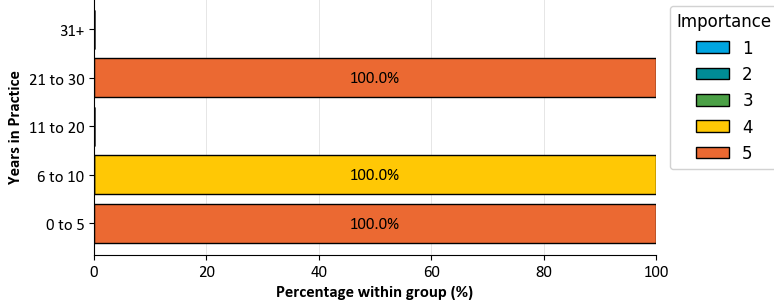
Distribution by Years in Practice



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**

**Candor before the court**

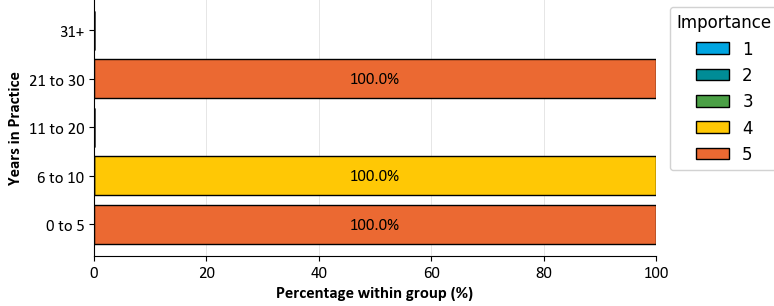
Distribution by Years in Practice



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**

**Avoidance of false and misleading statements**

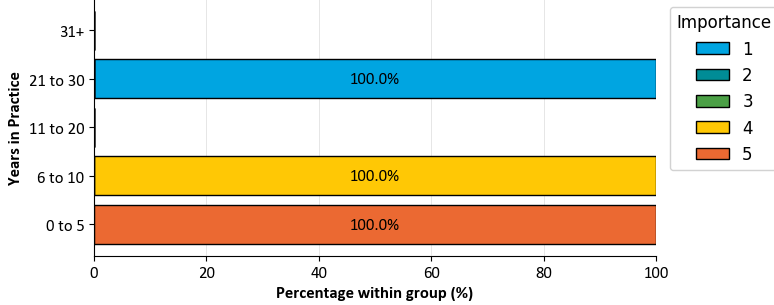
Distribution by Years in Practice



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**

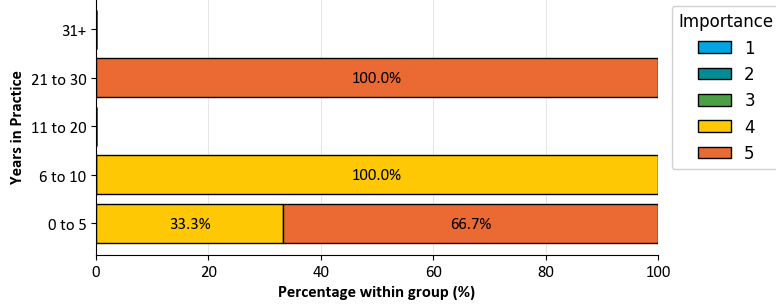
**Public service**

Distribution by Years in Practice



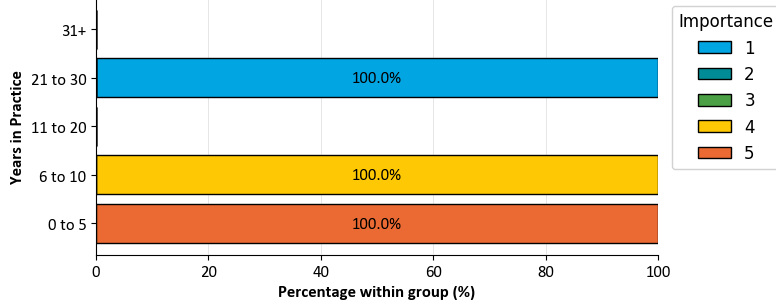
**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?  
Adherence to Rules of Professional Conduct**

Distribution by Years in Practice



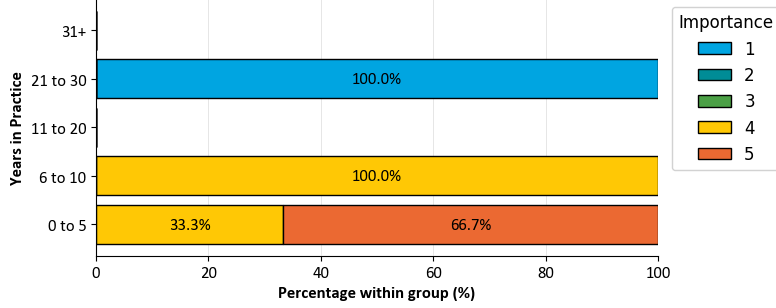
**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?  
Integrity of the profession**

Distribution by Years in Practice



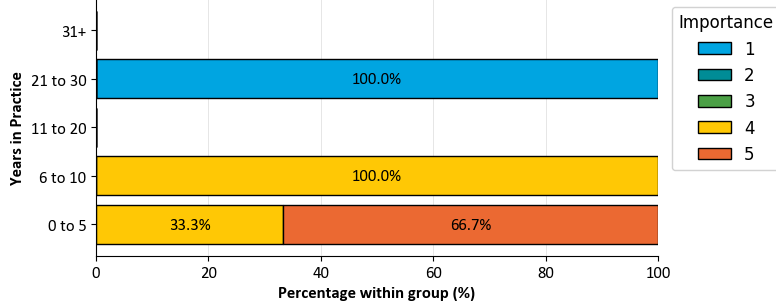
**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?  
Upholding democracy and the rule of law**

Distribution by Years in Practice



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?  
Ensuring the full realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms**

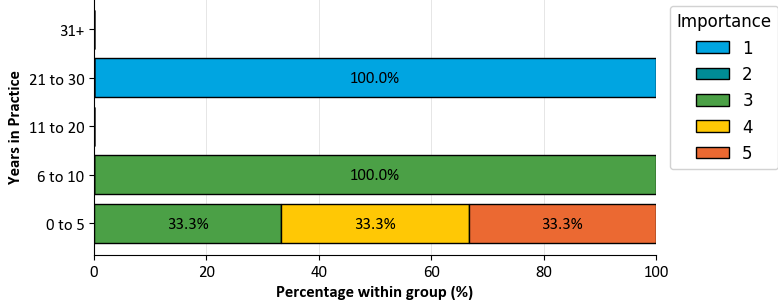
Distribution by Years in Practice



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**

**Pro bono service**

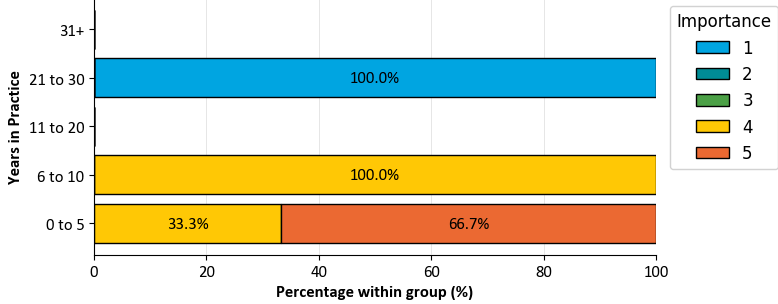
Distribution by Years in Practice



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**

**Dignity of the profession**

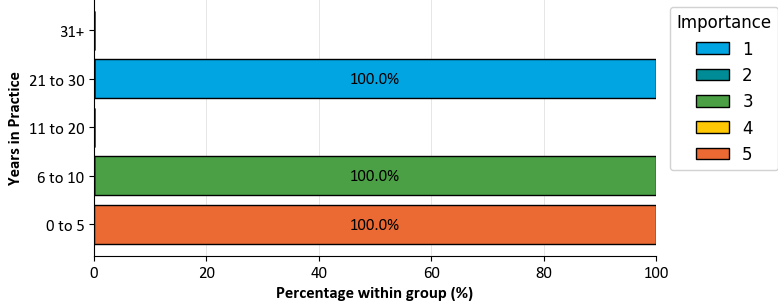
Distribution by Years in Practice



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**

**Improving the law**

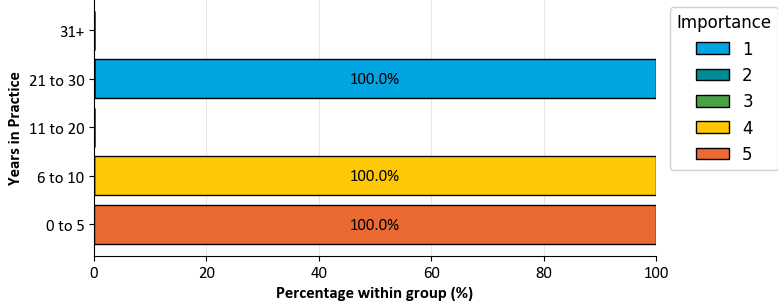
Distribution by Years in Practice



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**

**Access to justice**

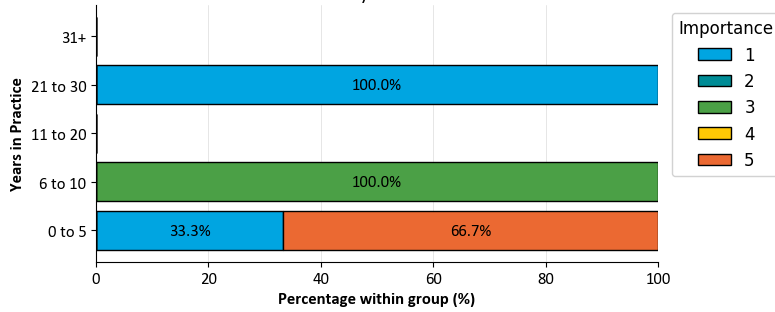
Distribution by Years in Practice



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**

**Diversity, equity, and inclusion**

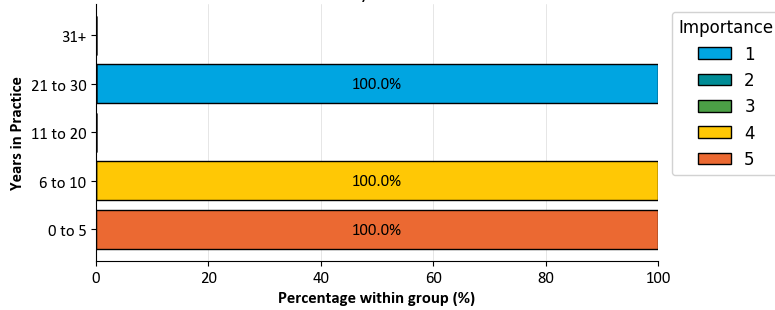
Distribution by Years in Practice



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**

**Justice for all**

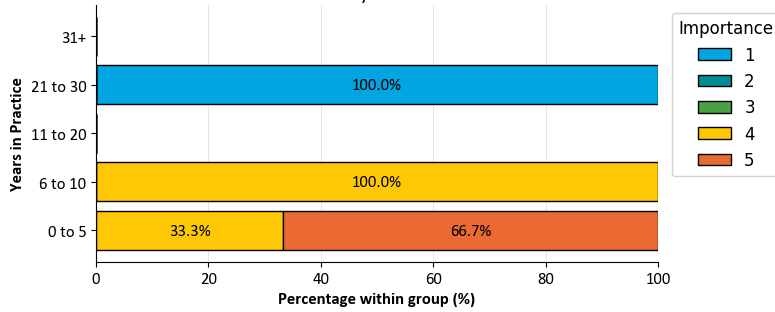
Distribution by Years in Practice



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**

**Legal needs of the defenseless and oppressed**

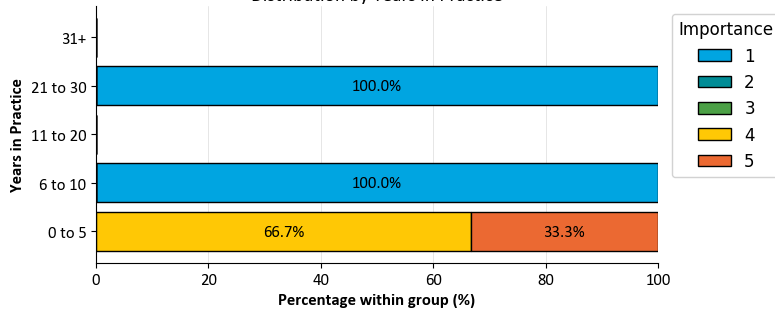
Distribution by Years in Practice



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**

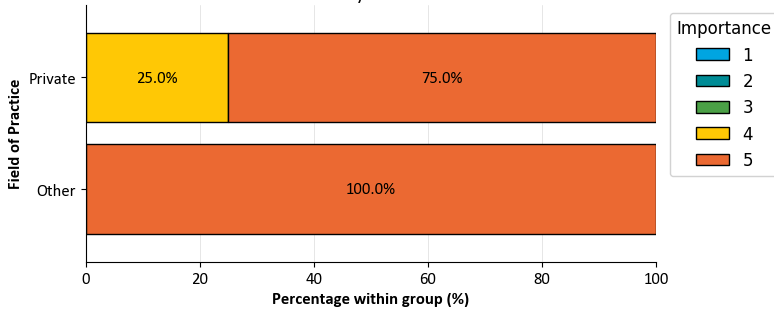
**Abstaining from all offensive personalities**

Distribution by Years in Practice



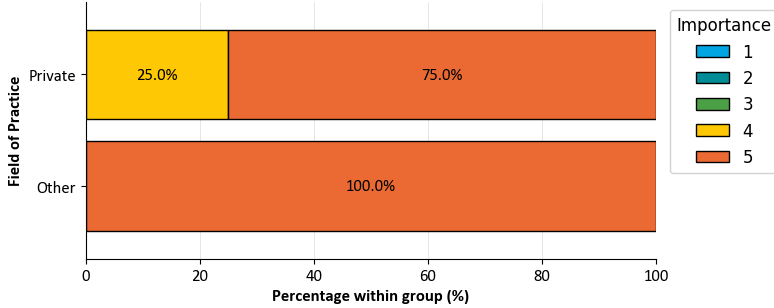
**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?  
Support for state and federal constitutions**

Distribution by Field of Practice



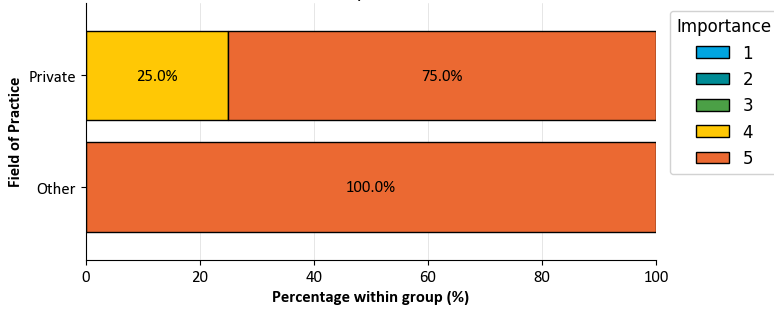
**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?  
Faithful discharge of duties**

Distribution by Field of Practice



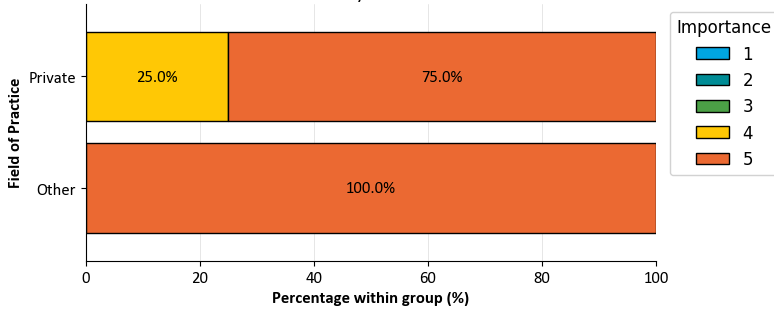
**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?  
Honesty and honorable conduct**

Distribution by Field of Practice



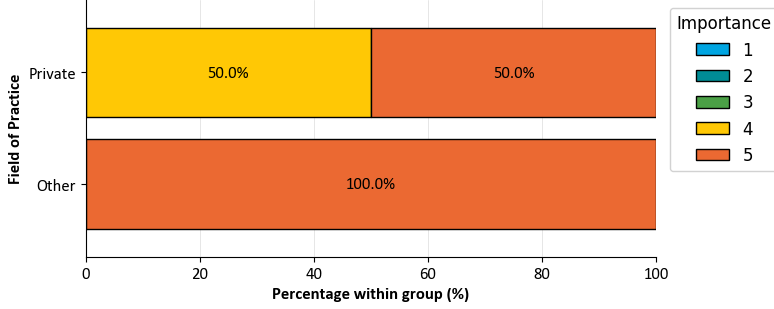
**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?  
Maintain respect for the judiciary**

Distribution by Field of Practice



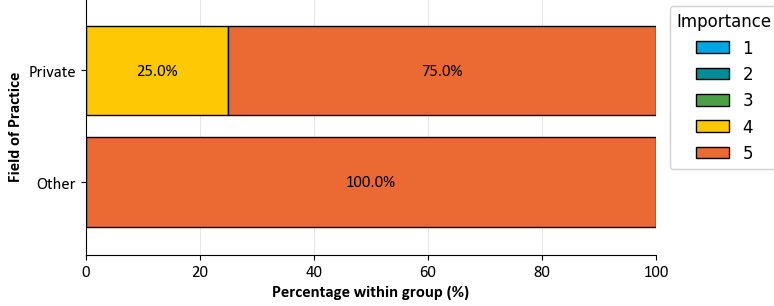
**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**  
**Confidentiality**

Distribution by Field of Practice



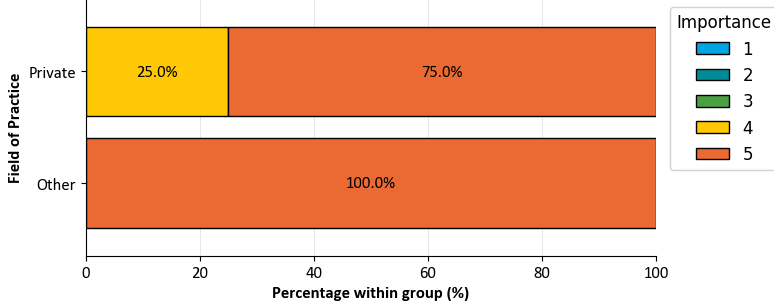
**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**  
**Civility**

Distribution by Field of Practice



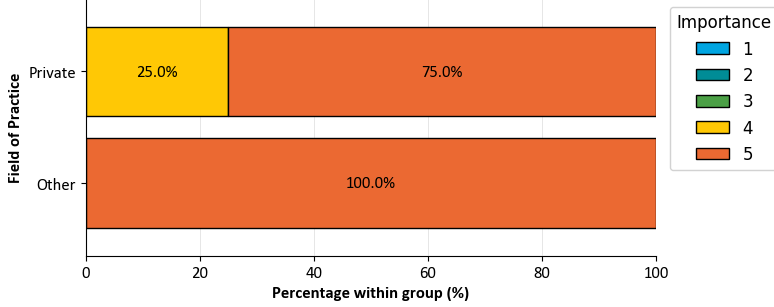
**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**  
**Candor before the court**

Distribution by Field of Practice



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**  
**Avoidance of false and misleading statements**

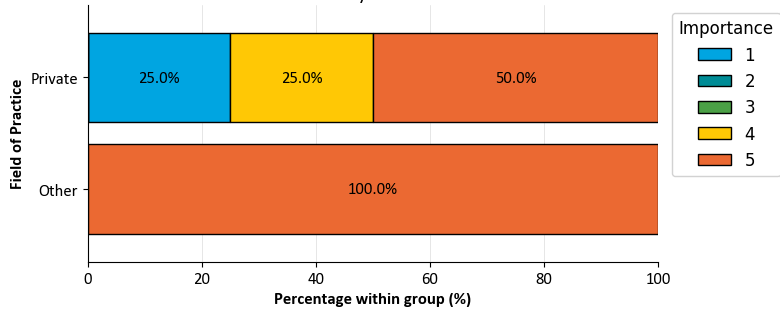
Distribution by Field of Practice



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**

**Public service**

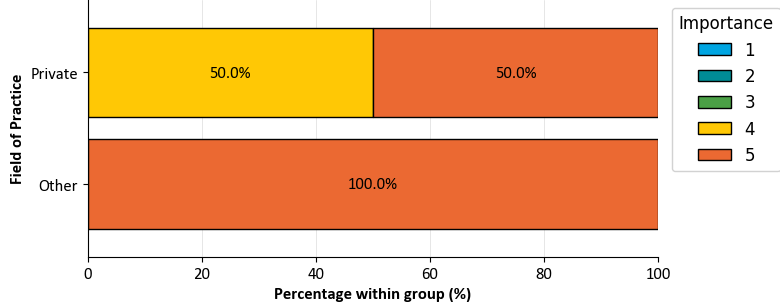
Distribution by Field of Practice



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**

**Adherence to Rules of Professional Conduct**

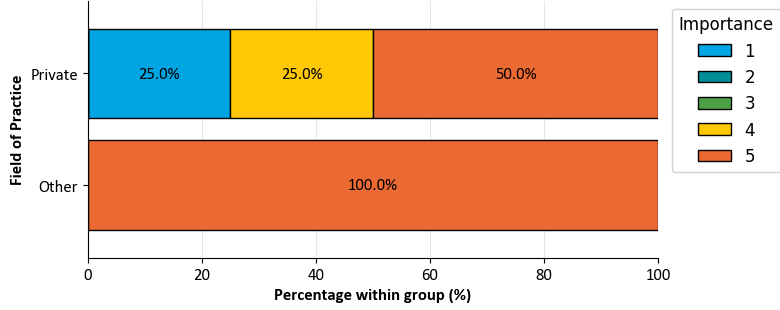
Distribution by Field of Practice



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**

**Integrity of the profession**

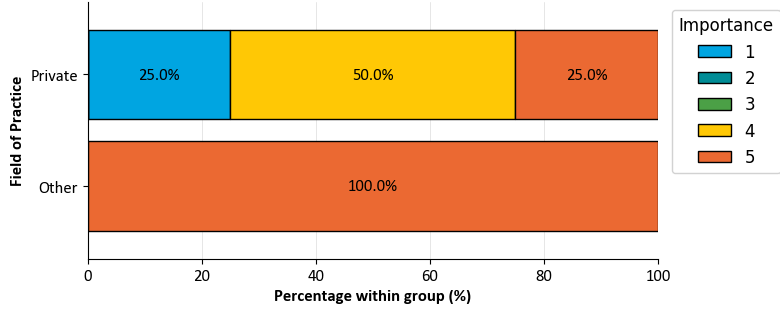
Distribution by Field of Practice



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**

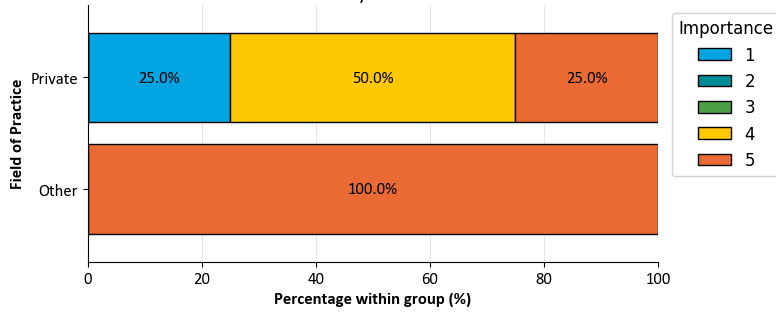
**Upholding democracy and the rule of law**

Distribution by Field of Practice



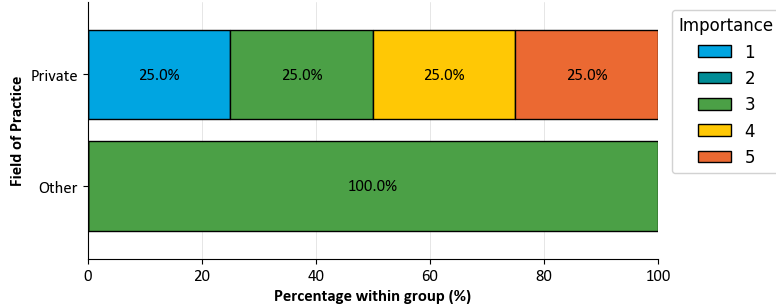
**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?  
Ensuring the full realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms**

Distribution by Field of Practice



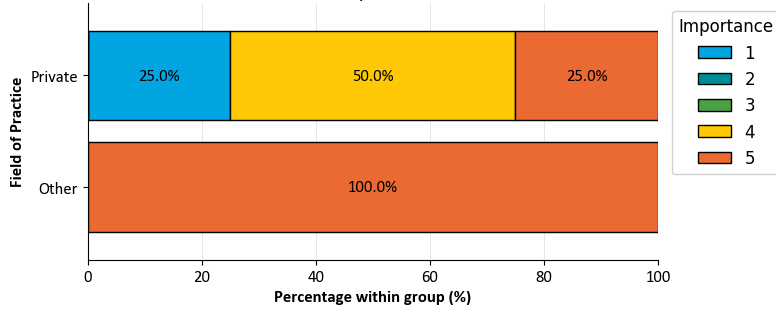
**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?  
Pro bono service**

Distribution by Field of Practice



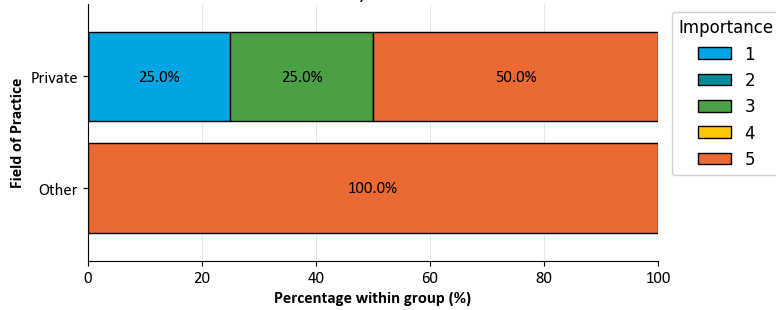
**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?  
Dignity of the profession**

Distribution by Field of Practice



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?  
Improving the law**

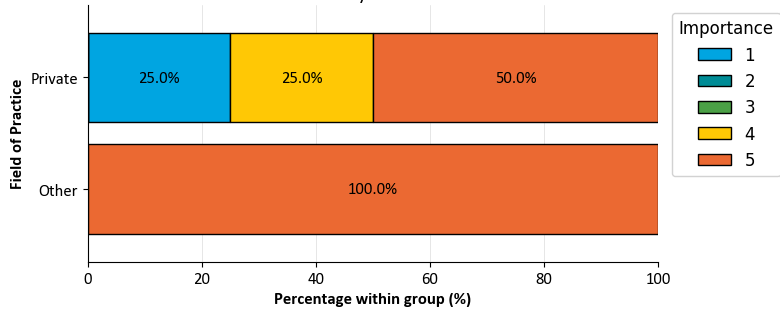
Distribution by Field of Practice



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**

**Access to justice**

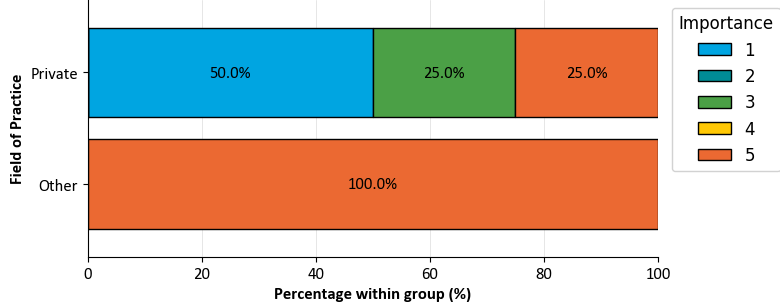
Distribution by Field of Practice



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**

**Diversity, equity, and inclusion**

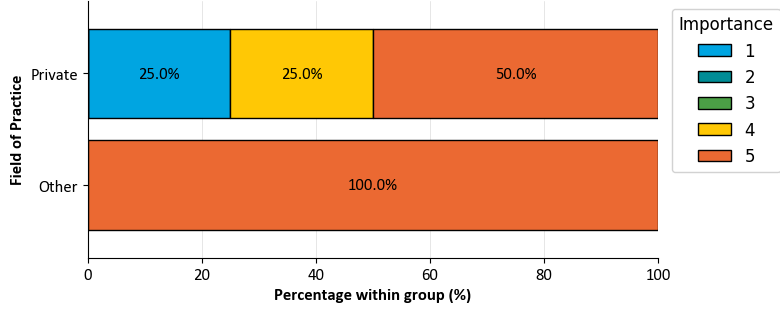
Distribution by Field of Practice



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**

**Justice for all**

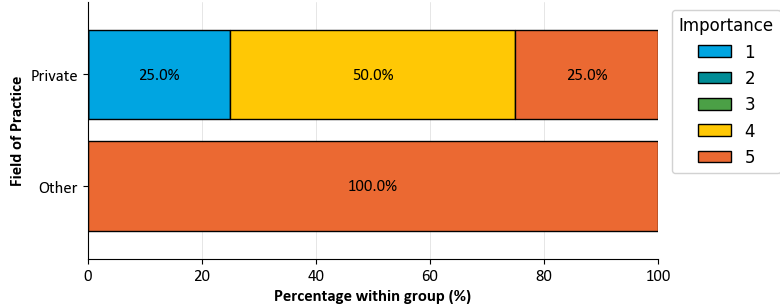
Distribution by Field of Practice



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**

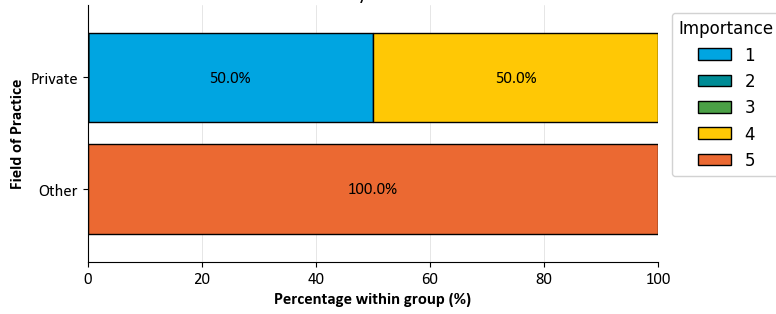
**Legal needs of the defenseless and oppressed**

Distribution by Field of Practice



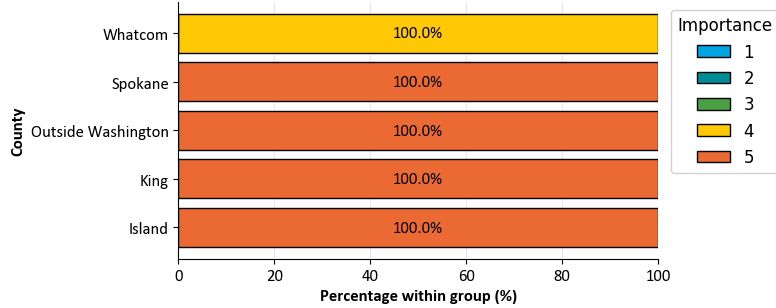
**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?  
Abstaining from all offensive personalities**

Distribution by Field of Practice



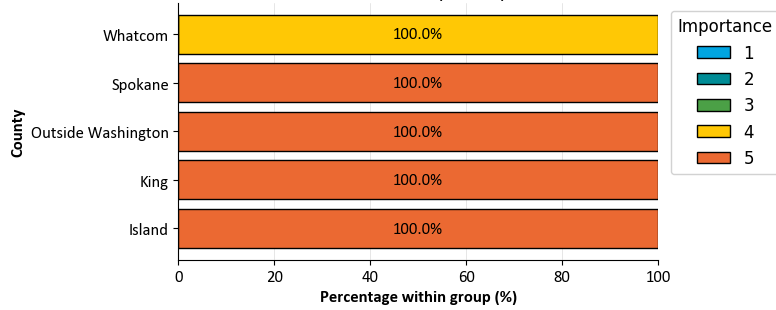
**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?  
Support for state and federal constitutions**

Distribution by County



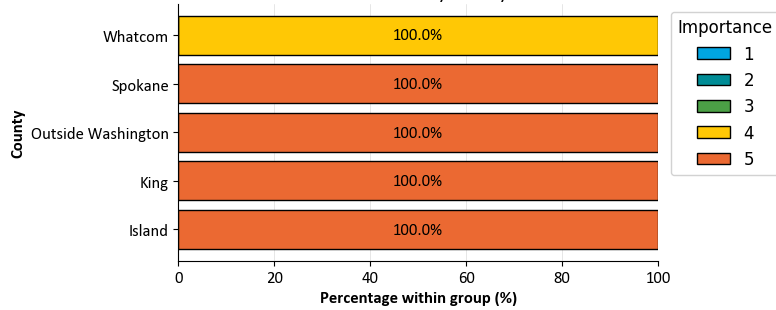
**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?  
Faithful discharge of duties**

Distribution by County

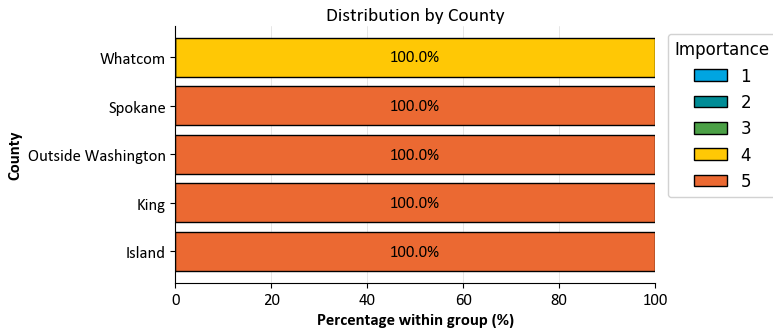


**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?  
Honesty and honorable conduct**

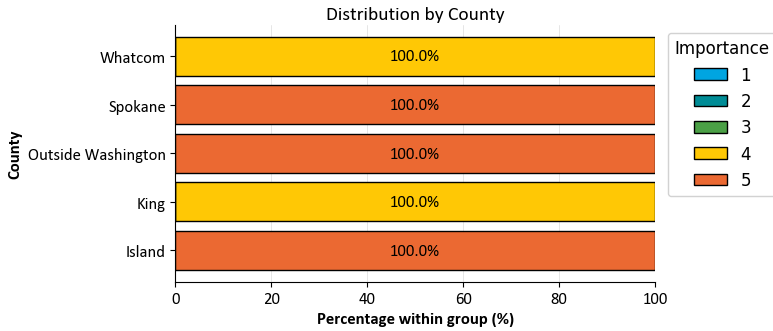
Distribution by County



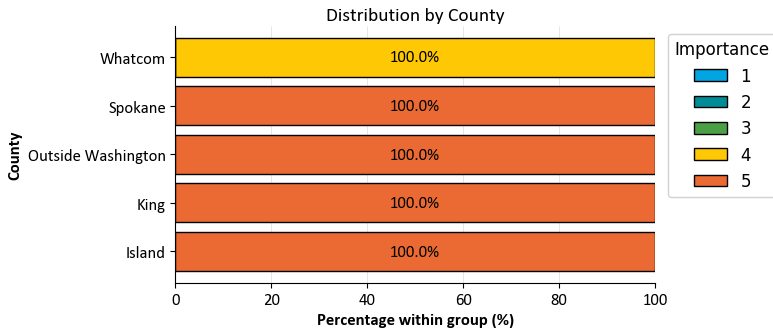
**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?  
Maintain respect for the judiciary**



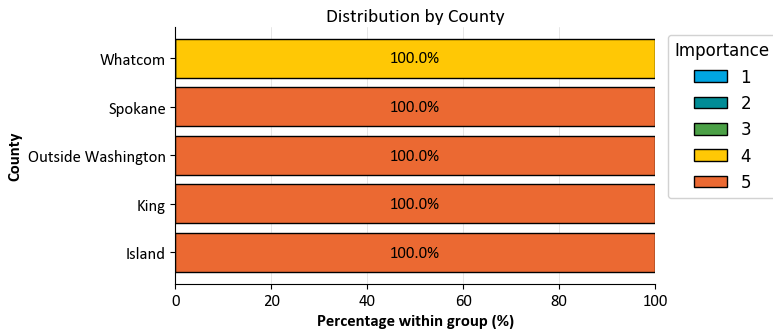
**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?  
Confidentiality**



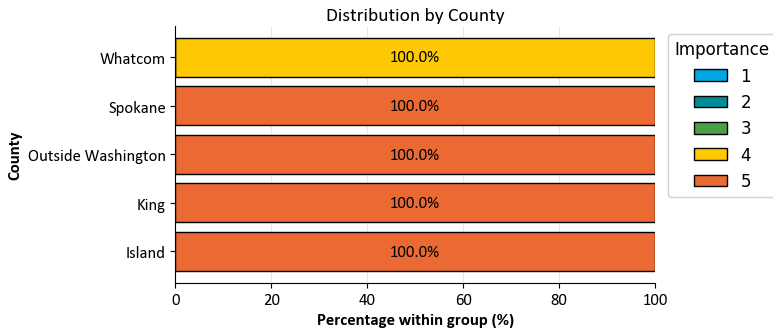
**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?  
Civility**



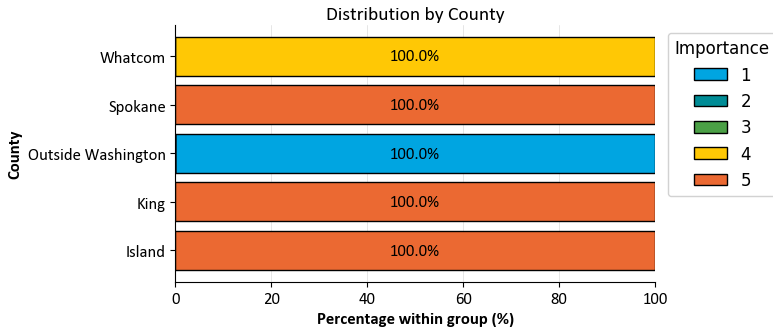
**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?  
Candor before the court**



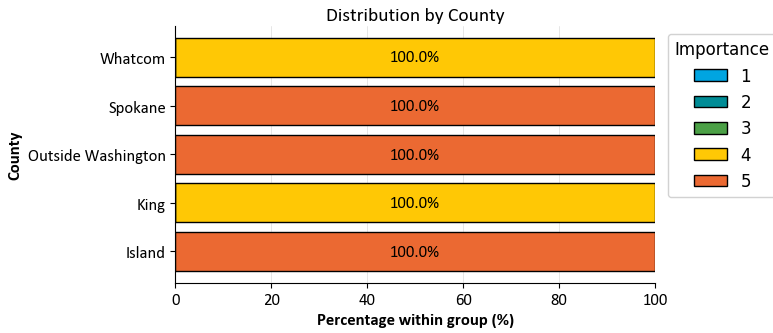
**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**  
**Avoidance of false and misleading statements**



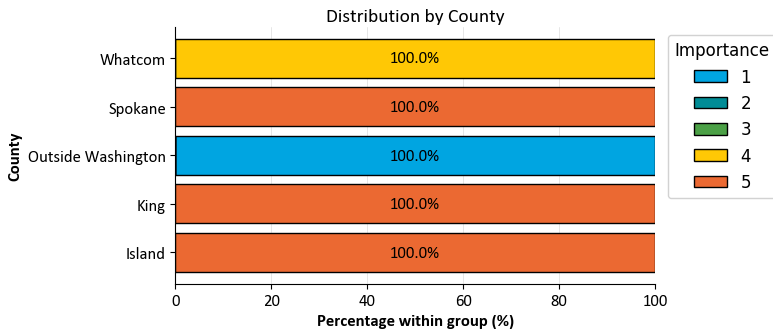
**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**  
**Public service**



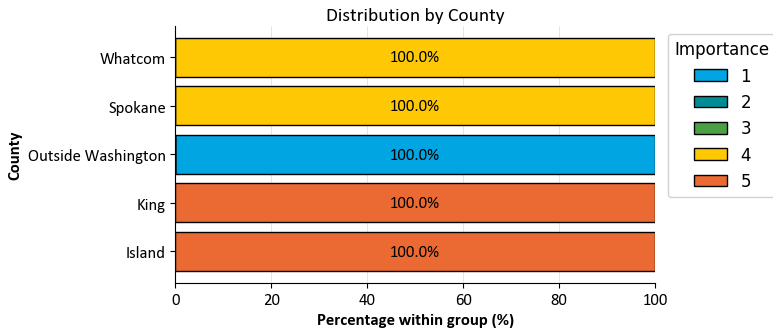
**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**  
**Adherence to Rules of Professional Conduct**



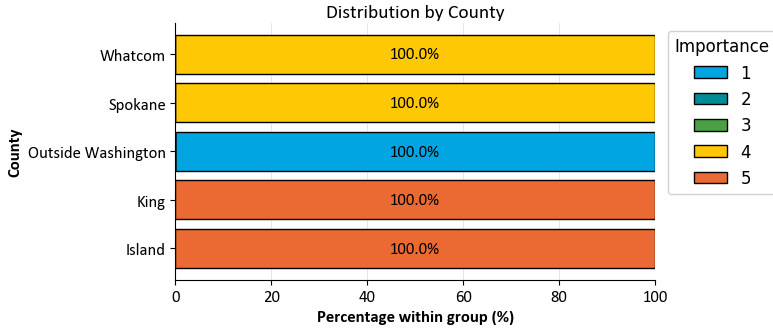
**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**  
**Integrity of the profession**



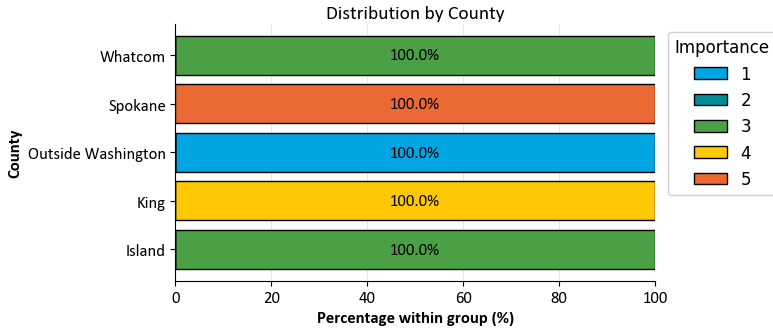
**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**  
**Upholding democracy and the rule of law**



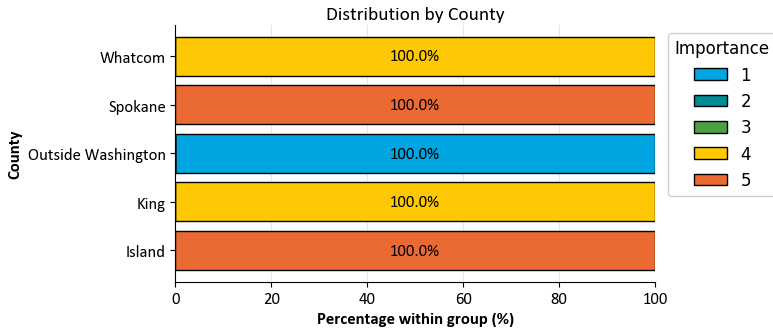
**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**  
**Ensuring the full realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms**



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**  
**Pro bono service**



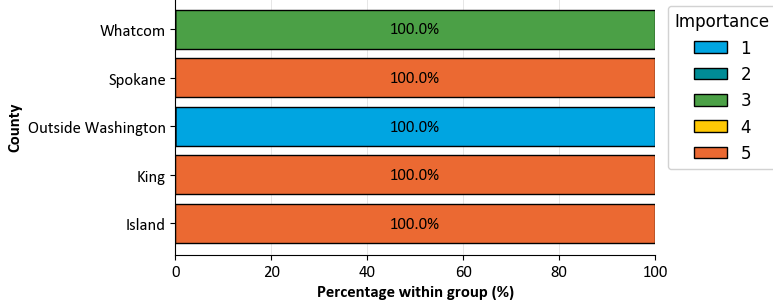
**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**  
**Dignity of the profession**



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**

**Improving the law**

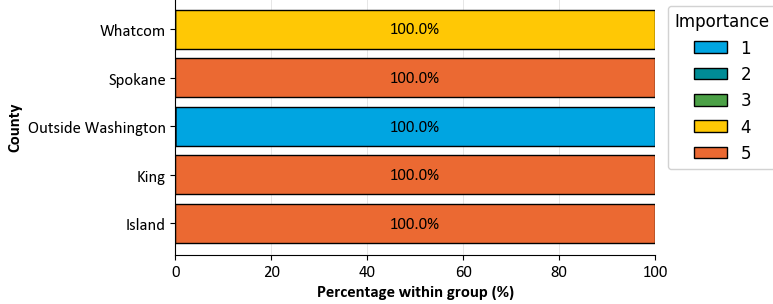
Distribution by County



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**

**Access to justice**

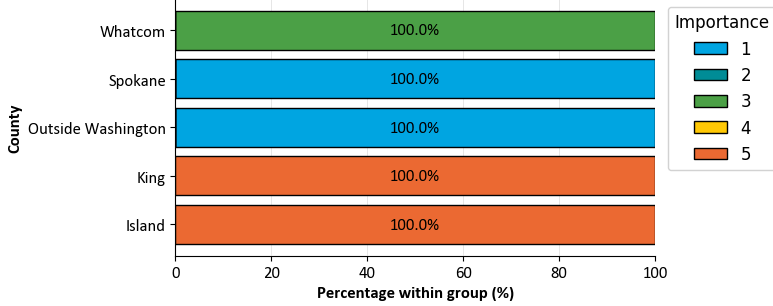
Distribution by County



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**

**Diversity, equity, and inclusion**

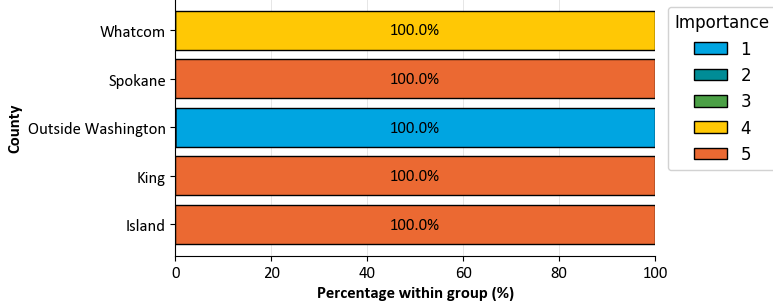
Distribution by County



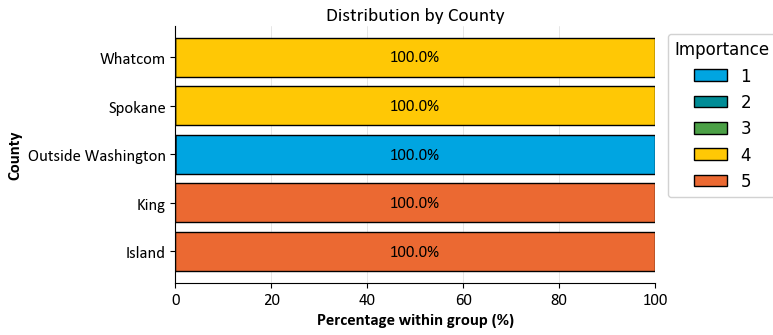
**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?**

**Justice for all**

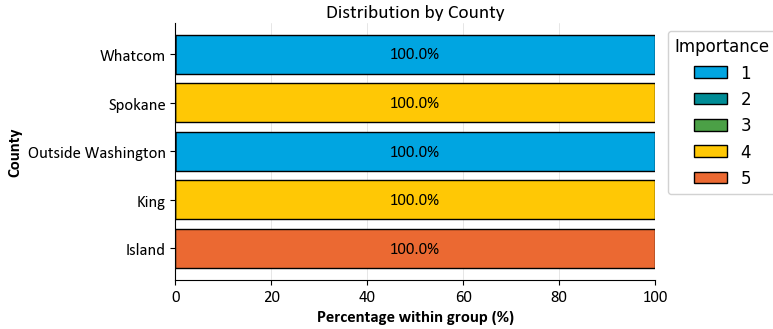
Distribution by County



**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?  
Legal needs of the defenseless and oppressed**

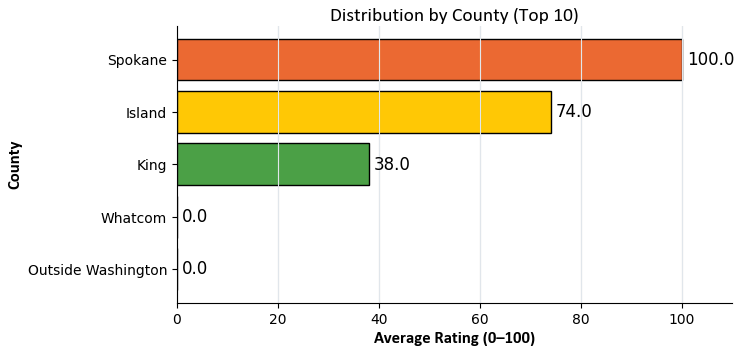


**What elements are most important to be included in a professional oath?  
Abstaining from all offensive personalities**

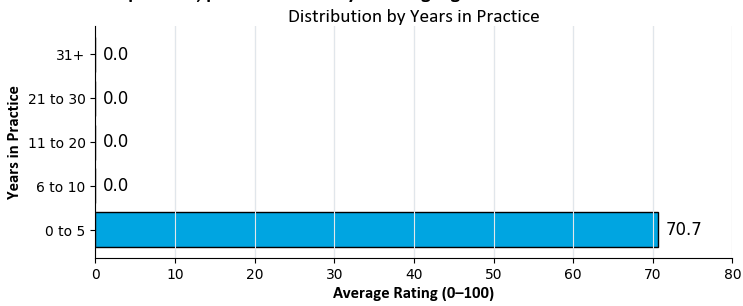


**Q6**

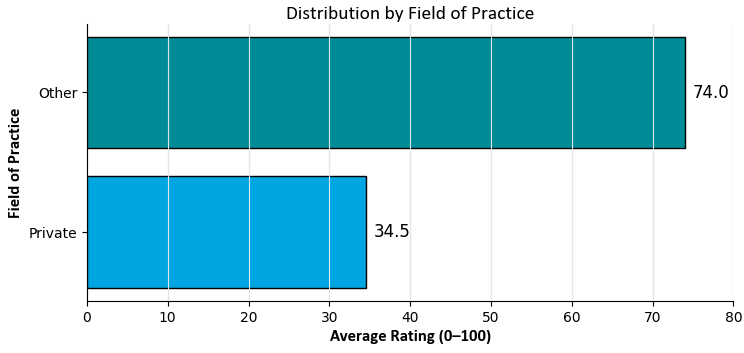
**On this spectrum, please rate the style of language in which the oath should be written.**



**On this spectrum, please rate the style of language in which the oath should be written.**

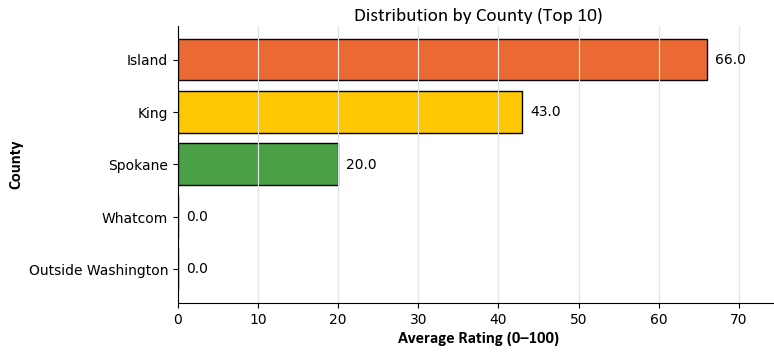


On this spectrum, please rate the style of language in which the oath should be written.

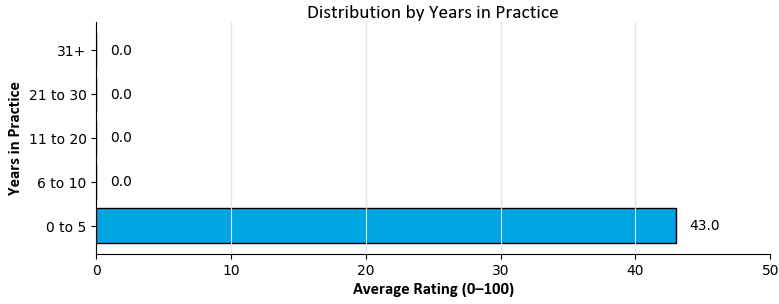


Q7

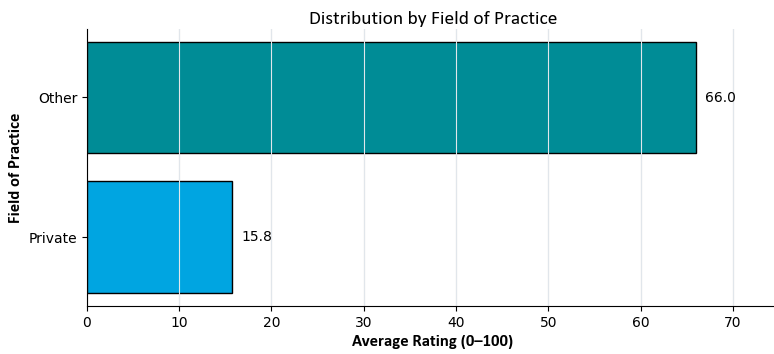
On this spectrum, please rate how long the oath should be.



On this spectrum, please rate how long the oath should be.

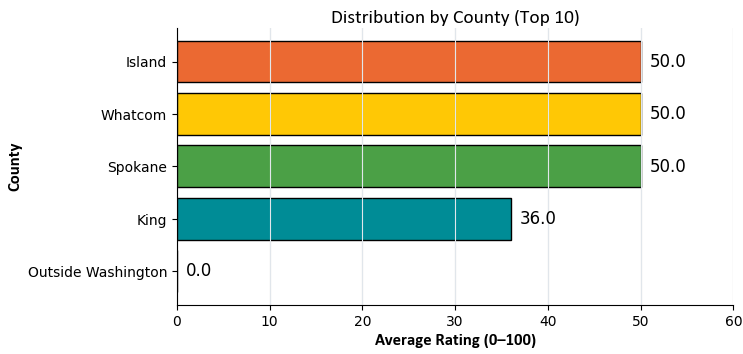


On this spectrum, please rate how long the oath should be.

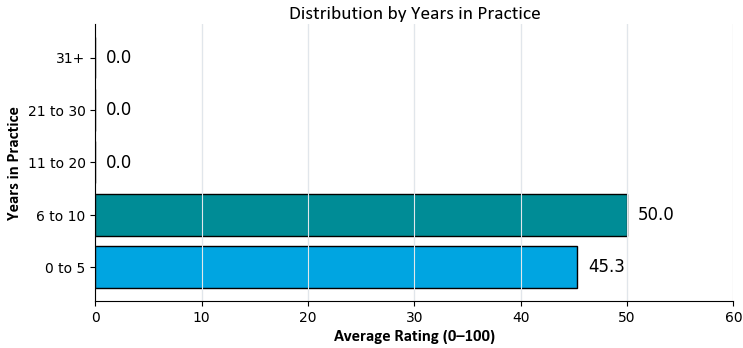


Q8

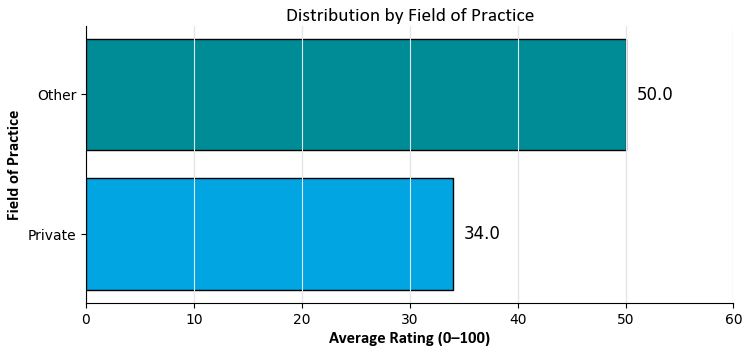
On this spectrum, please rate the audience to whom the oath should speak and inspire.



On this spectrum, please rate the audience to whom the oath should speak and inspire.

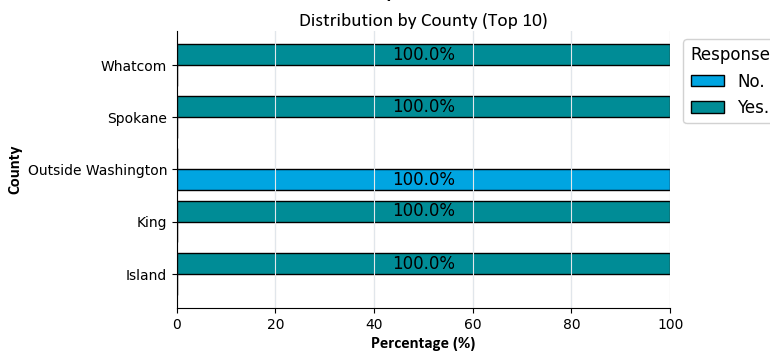


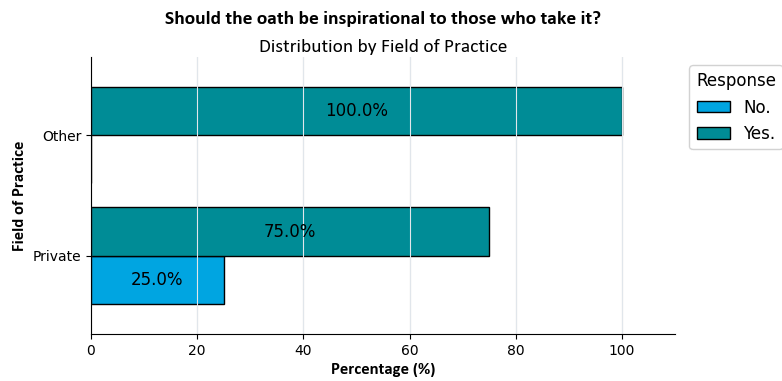
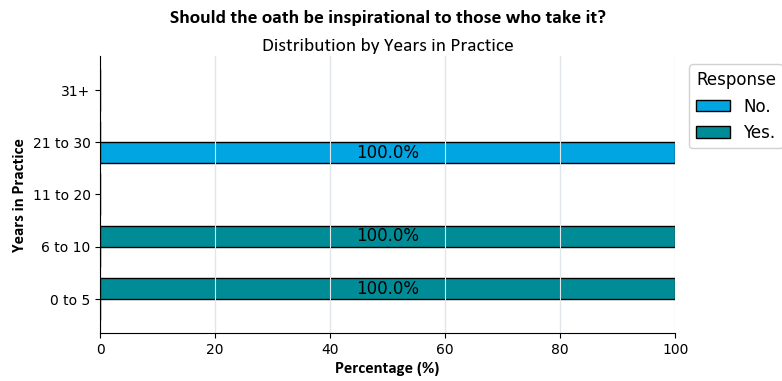
On this spectrum, please rate the audience to whom the oath should speak and inspire.



Q9

Should the oath be inspirational to those who take it?



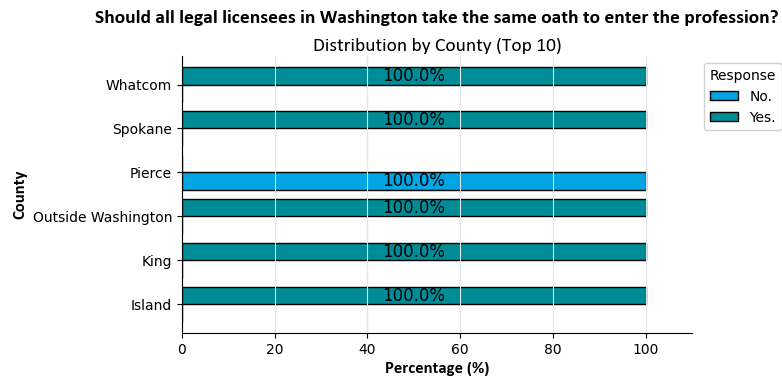


**Q10**

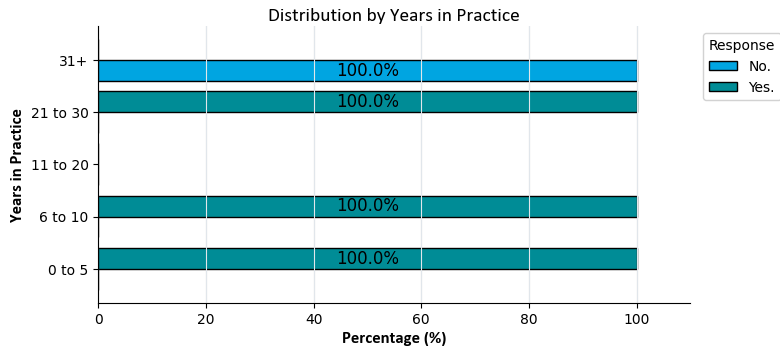
**Summary of “Other” Responses: What Would Make the Oath Inspirational**

- **Emphasizing service to others**
  - Highlighting a commitment to serve people who need legal help.
  - Centering the oath on helping, supporting, and advocating for those who rely on legal professionals.
- **Reinforcing the trust placed in legal professionals**
  - Acknowledging the significant responsibility that comes with client trust.
  - Stressing the seriousness of being entrusted with people’s rights and futures.
- **Framing the profession as a calling to justice**
  - Language that recognizes lawyers as helpers and public servants.
  - Encouraging attorneys to seek justice above self-interest and uphold their duty to the community.

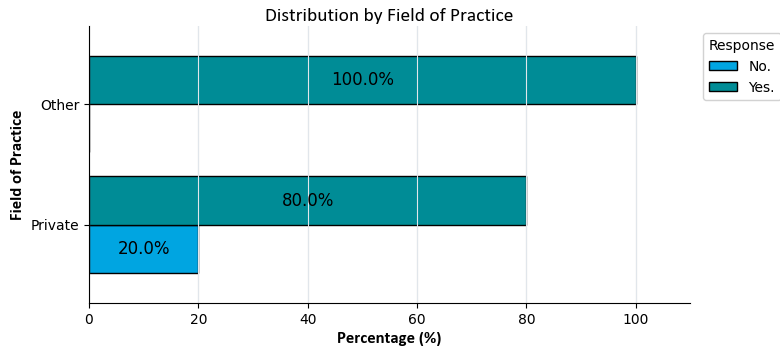
**Q11**



**Should all legal licensees in Washington take the same oath to enter the profession?**



**Should all legal licensees in Washington take the same oath to enter the profession?**

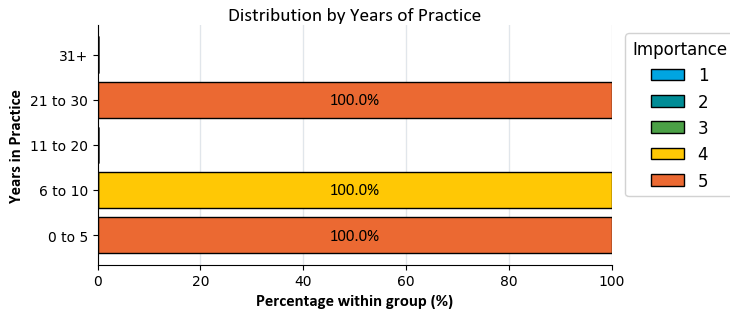


**Q12**

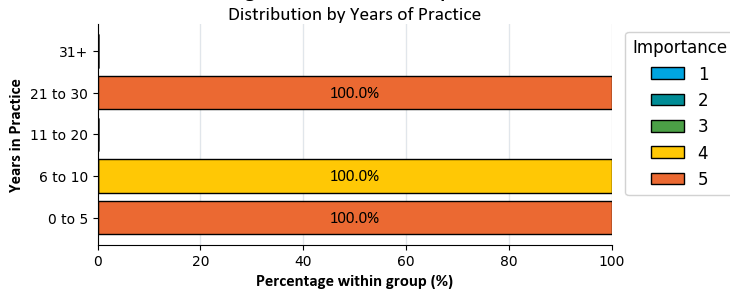
N/A

**Q13**

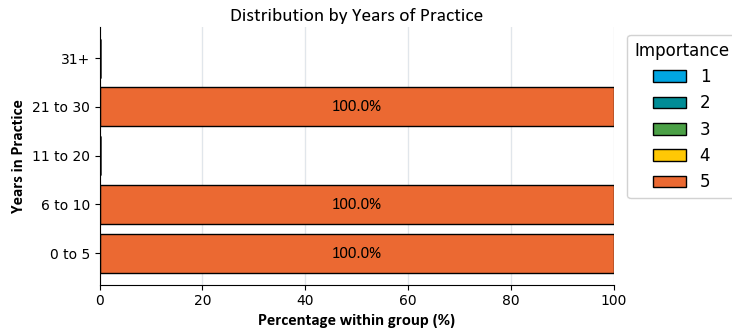
**Why do you think it is important for there to be one common oath for all legal professionals in Washington?  
Common ethical responsibilities and duties among all legal licensees.**



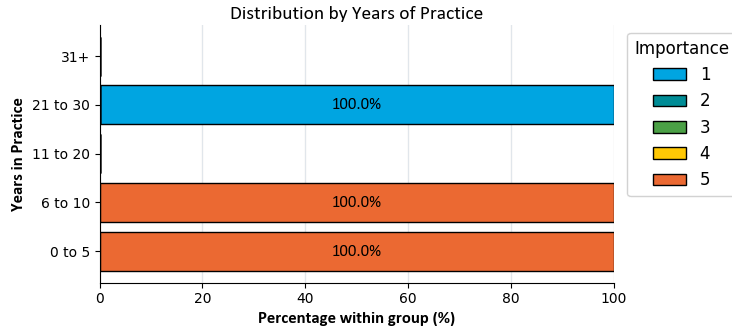
**Why do you think it is important for there to be one common oath for all legal professionals in Washington?  
It's not necessary to reference specific rules with limitations for certain licensees if there is language about following all ethical rules and expectations.**



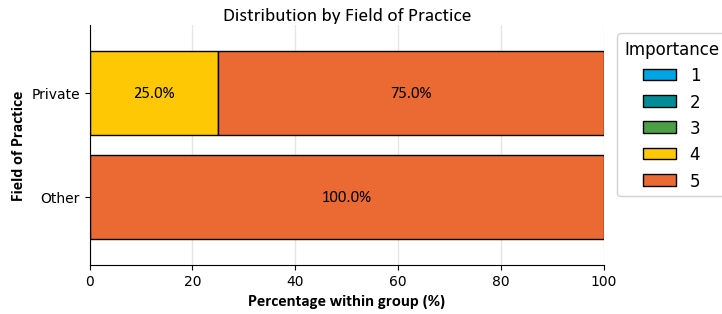
**Why do you think it is important for there to be one common oath for all legal professionals in Washington?  
Unified approach and treatment for all legal licensees.**



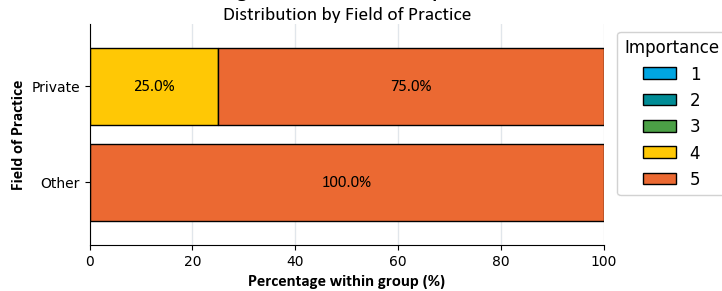
**Why do you think it is important for there to be one common oath for all legal professionals in Washington?  
Unified message to the public about legal licensees.**



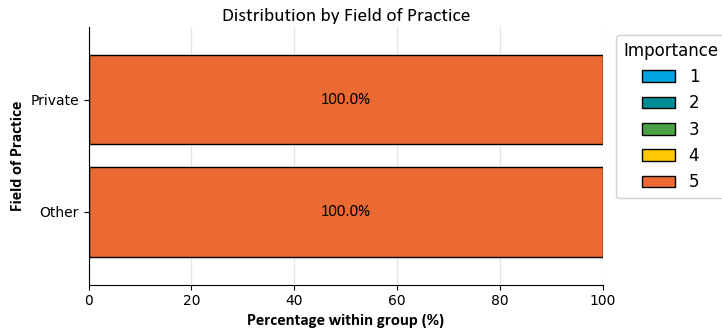
**Why do you think it is important for there to be one common oath for all legal professionals in Washington?  
Common ethical responsibilities and duties among all legal licensees.**



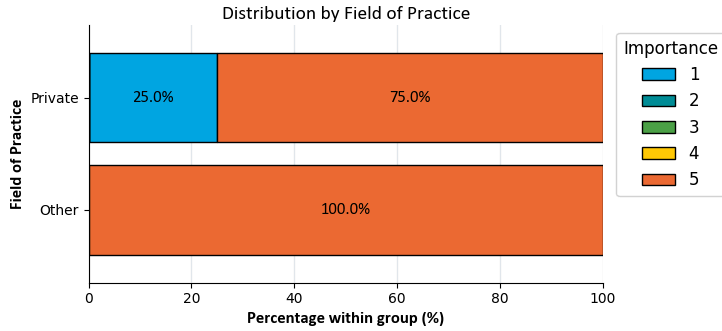
**Why do you think it is important for there to be one common oath for all legal professionals in Washington?  
It's not necessary to reference specific rules with limitations for certain licensees if there is language about following all ethical rules and expectations.**



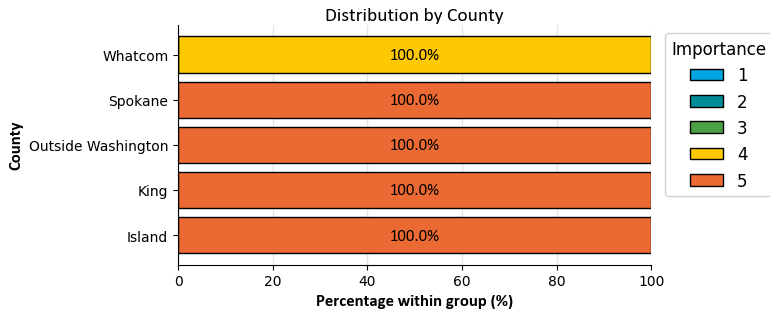
**Why do you think it is important for there to be one common oath for all legal professionals in Washington?  
Unified approach and treatment for all legal licensees.**



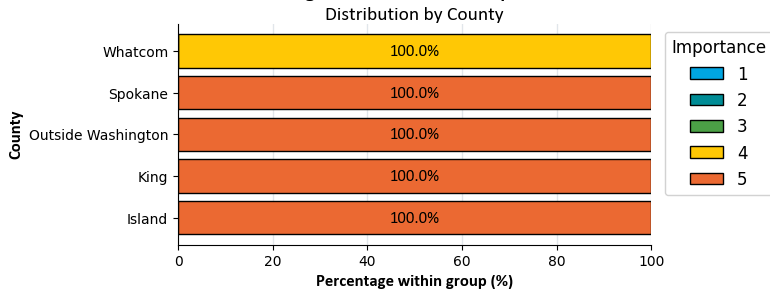
**Why do you think it is important for there to be one common oath for all legal professionals in Washington?  
Unified message to the public about legal licensees.**



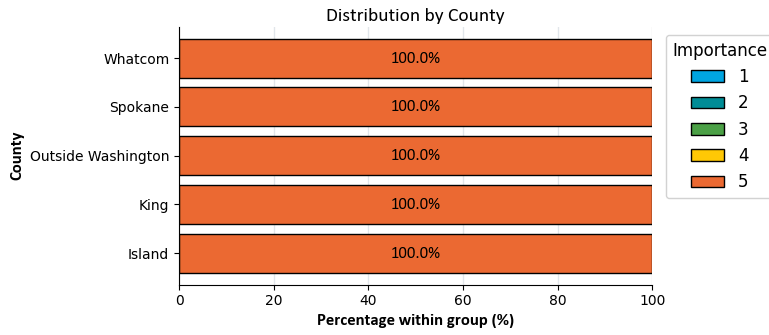
**Why do you think it is important for there to be one common oath for all legal professionals in Washington?  
Common ethical responsibilities and duties among all legal licensees.**



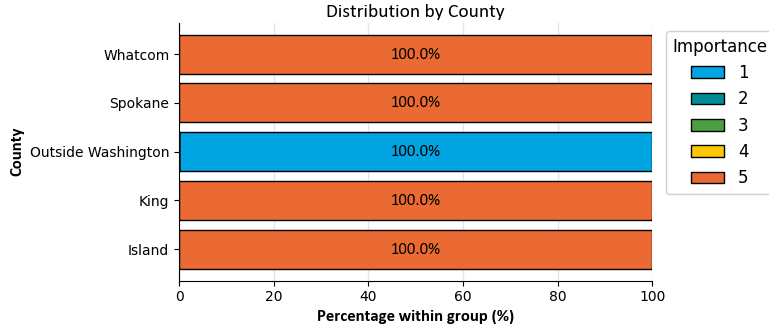
**Why do you think it is important for there to be one common oath for all legal professionals in Washington?  
It's not necessary to reference specific rules with limitations for certain licensees if there is language about following all ethical rules and expectations.**



**Why do you think it is important for there to be one common oath for all legal professionals in Washington?  
Unified approach and treatment for all legal licensees.**



**Why do you think it is important for there to be one common oath for all legal professionals in Washington?  
Unified message to the public about legal licensees.**



**Q14**

**Summary of Responses: Memories of Taking the Oath of Limited License Legal Practitioner**

- **Memorable or meaningful ceremony**
  - Several respondents recalled a meaningful swearing-in ceremony, often influenced by the judge who administered it.
- **Seen as a required final step**
  - Some described it as simply the last procedural step after passing exams.
- **General sense of seriousness**
  - A few respondents remembered the moment feeling serious or formal.
- **Limited memory of the event**
  - Some stated they remembered very little about the experience.
- **Perception of wording issues**
  - One respondent recalled the oath as very wordy and felt it positioned LLTs as "less than" compared to attorneys.

**MEMO**

TO: Rajeev Mujumdar, Oath Task Force Chair

FROM: Existing Oath Subcommittee  
Angie Balconi  
Courtney Hudak  
Roger Wynne

SUBJECT: Subcommittee report

DATE: May 8, 2026

You asked us to consider the existing oath and report back our thoughts on its provisions. We did this through a shared document where we entered our thoughts. For a fuller picture of our opinions, the substance of that document is attached as an appendix. Although there are eight numbered sections of the existing oath, we considered each sentence separately.

This chart attempts to summarize points of consensus:

1. I am fully subject to the laws of the State of Washington and the laws of the United States and will abide by the same.	Retain, but perhaps simplify and move more to the bottom.
2. I will support the constitution of the State of Washington and the constitution of the United States.	Retain, adding “support <i>and defend</i> .”
3. I will abide by the Rules of Professional Conduct approved by the Supreme Court of the State of Washington.	Retain in abbreviated form: “I will abide by the Washington State Rules of Professional Conduct.”
4. I will maintain the respect due to the courts of justice and judicial officers.	Retain.

<p>5[a]. I will not counsel, or maintain any suit, or proceeding, which shall appear to me to be unjust, or any defense except as I believe to be honestly debatable under the law, unless it is in defense of a person charged with a public offense.</p> <p>5[b]. I will employ for the purpose of maintaining the causes confided to me only those means consistent with truth and honor.</p> <p>5[c]. I will never seek to mislead the judge or jury by any artifice or false statement.</p>	<p>Either omit because they are covered by the RPCs or consolidate and rework to be more direct.</p>
<p>6[a] I will maintain the confidence and preserve inviolate the secrets of my client,</p>	<p>Retain the concept; consider rephrasing in light of RPCs.</p>
<p>6[b] and will accept no compensation in connection with the business of my client unless this compensation is from or with the knowledge and approval of the client or with the approval of the court.</p>	<p>Omit.</p>
<p>7[a]. I will abstain from all offensive personalities,</p>	<p>Omit.</p>
<p>7[b]. and advance no fact prejudicial to the honor or reputation of a party or witness unless required by the justice of the cause with which I am charged.</p>	<p>Omit.</p>
<p>8. I will never reject, from any consideration personal to myself, the cause of the defenseless or oppressed, or delay unjustly the cause of any person.</p>	<p>Replace with something like: “I will advance equal justice under law for all persons.”</p>

Please let us know if you have any questions about our input.

Attachment

cc: Rachel Agent  
Doug Ende  
Hon. Rebecca Glasgow

APPENDIX  
Full Subcommittee Comments

**1. I am fully subject to the laws of the State of Washington and the laws of the United States and will abide by the same.**

Roger	I think I'm a lone voice in thinking this is silly. The first part is stating an obvious legal conclusion: we are all subject to applicable laws. Fine. Do we need to say that? If so, why omit local and other applicable laws we are also "fully subject" to? And do we really mean we will obey all laws? We won't ever speed or cross against a crosswalk signal?
Courtney	I'm with the majority in favor of keeping it. I think particularly in times of legal upheaval, it's worthwhile to start with a declaration of being subject to the law. I think a rewrite could be more elegant though. I'd like to consider options on a rewrite but would be inclined toward something broader. I'd also be inclined to moving this statement to the bottom of the oath rather than having it at the top.
Angie	I am in favor of keeping this or some version of it, I believe it is symbolically important and reinforces that lawyers are not above the law. Although I do agree it is self-evident. Possibly simplifying the statement and I also agree it could be moved closer to the end of the oath.

**2. I will support the constitution of the State of Washington and the constitution of the United States.**

Roger	I like this. Perhaps add "support <i>and defend</i> "?
Courtney	At a recent WSBA CLE, one of the presenters talked about the importance of our legal oath and specifically called out a couple of clauses - this was one of them! I second Roger's suggestion to include <i>defend</i> in this section.  I like this clause as the first statement of the oath better! Especially updated to read "support and defend."
Angie	I am on the same page with adding 'defend' as it mirrors other public oaths and makes it feel more active rather than passive.

**3. I will abide by the Rules of Professional Conduct approved by the Supreme Court of the State of Washington.**

Roger	I think we need to keep this, but not sure we need “approved by the Supreme Court of the State of Washington.” Too wordy? Maybe this?: “I will abide by the Washington Rules of Professional Conduct.”
Courtney	Agree with Roger’s suggestion.
Angie	This clause appropriately links to the governing ethical framework and I also agree with Roger on suggested abbreviated language.

**4. I will maintain the respect due to the courts of justice and judicial officers.**

Roger	I like this.
Courtney	I like this, too.
Angie	This is concise and meaningful; I like it too.

**5[a]. I will not counsel, or maintain any suit, or proceeding, which shall appear to me to be unjust, or any defense except as I believe to be honestly debatable under the law, unless it is in defense of a person charged with a public offense.**

Roger	I vote to omit this. The RPCs cover this, using slightly different language. This might have made sense when the oath was first drafted, which I think(?) predated the RPCs, but we now have them and the oath can just say we will abide by them.
Courtney	I think 5a-c need reworking. Any rewrites will invite argument and discussion! But at very least they can be written to be more direct. For example:  I will act with truth and honor. I will not take up causes that I believe to be unjust. I will tell the truth. I will not mislead judge or jury with artifice (maybe something more plainspoken?) or falsehoods.
Angie	These are interesting (5a-c). I think they can either be removed entirely due to what Roger noted with the RPC’s or they could be consolidated into one more modern principal.

**5[b]. I will employ for the purpose of maintaining the causes confided to me only those means consistent with truth and honor.**

Roger	I'm OK with this. Play nice in the sandbox.
Courtney	See comment above
Angie	See above.

**5[c]. I will never seek to mislead the judge or jury by any artifice or false statement.**

Roger	Hard to argue against this, but I think 5[b] covers it.
Courtney	See comment above.
Angie	See above.

**6[a] I will maintain the confidence and preserve inviolate the secrets of my client,**

Roger	See 5[a]. Duplicates the RPCs.
Courtney	I think it's worth stating in some way that we will maintain our clients' confidences. Perhaps a solution would be to move things around slightly, so that we begin with supporting and defending the constitutions, and then go to respecting the courts, and then the statement about the RPCs. Below that statement, we move to statements that may be duplicative of the RPCs, like items 5a-c and at very least, 6a, rewritten to state more directly "I will maintain the confidence of my clients."
Angie	Although I agree this is already covered in the RPC's it is also a defining obligation of the profession, maybe a more simple and powerful version as Courtney noted.

**6[b] and will accept no compensation in connection with the business of my client unless this compensation is from or with the knowledge and approval of the client or with the approval of the court.**

Roger	See 5[a]. Duplicates the RPCs.
Courtney	I agree that this statement seems unnecessary in the oath.
Angie	Agreed, I feel like this is more regulatory than aspirational and is unnecessary in the oath.

**7[a]. I will abstain from all offensive personalities,**

Roger	I just find this antiquated and a bit silly.
Courtney	Agree that this can/should be removed.
Angie	The concept of civility remains important, but the phrase “offensive personalities” is antiquated and risks diminishing the seriousness of the oath. I would vote to remove it.

**7[b]. and advance no fact prejudicial to the honor or reputation of a party or witness unless required by the justice of the cause with which I am charged.**

Roger	I could be convinced to keep this, even though I think it might be a concept covered by the RPCs.
Courtney	I think this, too, could be removed.
Angie	It feels bit redundant; I would vote to either remove it or fold it into a broader integrity/civility statement.

**8. I will never reject, from any consideration personal to myself, the cause of the defenseless or oppressed, or delay unjustly the cause of any person.**

Roger	Read literally, this sets a standard we frankly never hold one another to. I would be in favor of something less specific. Perhaps something like: “I will advance the cause of equal access to justice under the law for all.”
Courtney	I like Roger’s suggestion for a rewrite here.
Angie	Agreed, it sets the standard and I too would be in favor of a modernized version while preserving the character. I like Roger’s suggestion and a slightly shorter version could be “I will advance equal justice under law for all persons”.

## Oath Drafting Task Force

### New Language Subcommittee Ideas

#### **1. Add pledge to *defend* the constitutions of the United States and the State of Washington, as well as *the rule of law***

Possible wording: I pledge/promise to.....support and defend the constitution of the United States, the constitution of the state of Washington, and the rule of law.

#### **2. Some version of the first value/principle expressed in the RPC preamble**

RPC preamble: “A lawyer, as a member of the legal profession, is a representative of clients, and officer of the court[,] and a public citizen[\*] having special responsibility for the quality of justice.”

\*Note: A person does not have to be a citizen to obtain a WA law license.

Possible wording (building on the prior suggestion): I pledge/promise to.....support and defend the constitution of the United States and the constitution of the state of Washington. I pledge/promise to.....support, defend, and strive to improve the justice system and the rule of law, consistent with my special responsibility for the quality of justice.

#### **3. Express clear commitment to value diversity of experience**

Possible wording: I pledge/promise to respect and value the diverse perspectives and experiences represented in the legal profession and the people of Washington State.

#### **4. Make more explicit the duty to accept appointment from courts to represent indigent clients (a more explicit statement of duty contemplated in clause #8).**

Possible wording: I pledge/promise to.....fulfill my duty to accept all court appointments to represent indigent clients.

#### **5. Add concise pledge to fulfill core values**

Possible wording (like Oregon): To the court, opposing parties, and their counsel, I pledge to act with honesty, integrity, [fairness], and respect in all written and oral communications.

\*Note: Articles about civility. González, S. “True Civility Requires More Than Being Polite,” *Washington State Bar News* (September 2012), 25-28. (<https://wabarnews.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Bar-News-Sept.-2012.pdf> page 27 of the pdf)

See also: <https://sites.utexas.edu/tjclcr/wp-content/uploads/sites/3748/2025/02/03-Civility-as-Moral-Oppression-pp.-89-129.pdf>