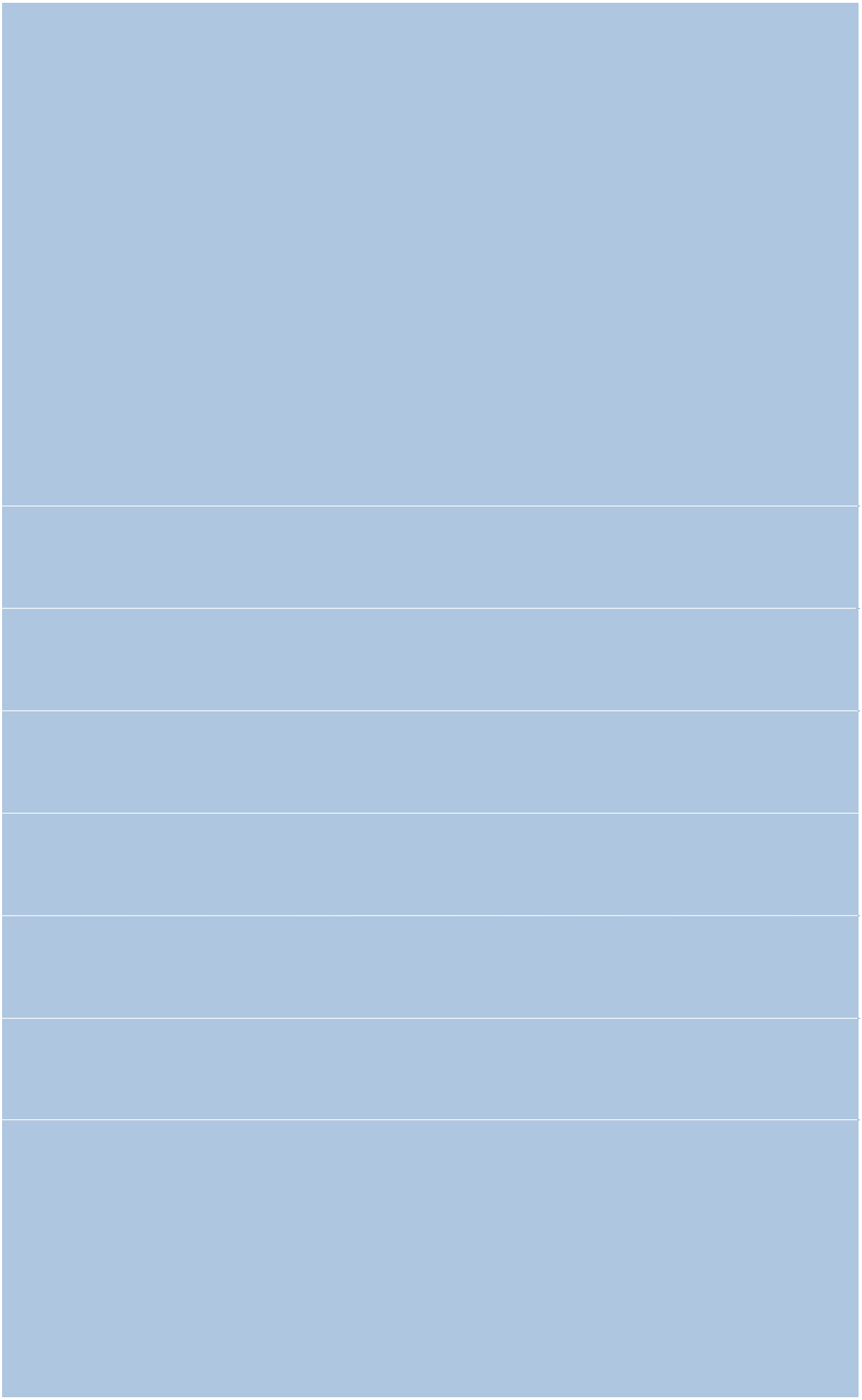
NATIONAL LEADERSHIP INDEX 2005

A NATIONAL STUDY OF CONFIDENCE IN LEADERSHIP

CENTER FOR PUBLIC LEADERSHIP

JOHN F. KENNEDY SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT | HARVARD UNIVERSITY



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Citation

Pittinsky, T.L., Rosenthal, S.A., Welle, B., & Montoya, R.M. (2005). *National Leadership Index 2005: A National Study of Confidence in Leadership*. Center for Public Leadership, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

INTRODUCTION 1

Autumn, 2005

"Perhaps," observed Lord Bryce, "no form of government needs great leaders so much as democracy." And rarely, he might have added were he with us today, has the American democracy needed great leaders so much as we do now.

The Center for Public Leadership (CPL) at Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government (KSG) was established five years ago with generous funding from the Wexner Foundation in order to promote excellence in leadership research, education, and development. Today the Center is engaged in a wide range of endeavors to improve the quality of leadership, including partnering with *U.S. News & World Report* to explore public attitudes toward current leaders and to identify–through a national selection committee–the best of them. Indeed, the October 31, 2005 issue of the magazine is devoted to that subject.

Through our partnership, the Center and *U.S. News* created a survey of public opinion with the market research firm Yankelovich, which then conducted some 1,300 interviews in September 2005. *National Leadership Index 2005: A National Study of Confidence in Leadership* is our inaugural report from that survey. We believe the twenty-five highlights on the pages that follow are of particular interest to scholars and practitioners. This study–along with, we expect, additional reports in the coming months–may also be found on our website: http://www.ksg.harvard.edu/leadership/nli.

The chief co-authors of this study are Todd L. Pittinsky, KSG Assistant Professor of Public Policy, and Seth A. Rosenthal, CPL Post-Doctoral Fellow. We owe them a debt of gratitude for their outstanding work and analysis.

Our hope is that these data will prove useful to the scholarly community and also contribute to our ongoing civic dialogue–deepening our understanding of ourselves and of democratic leadership.

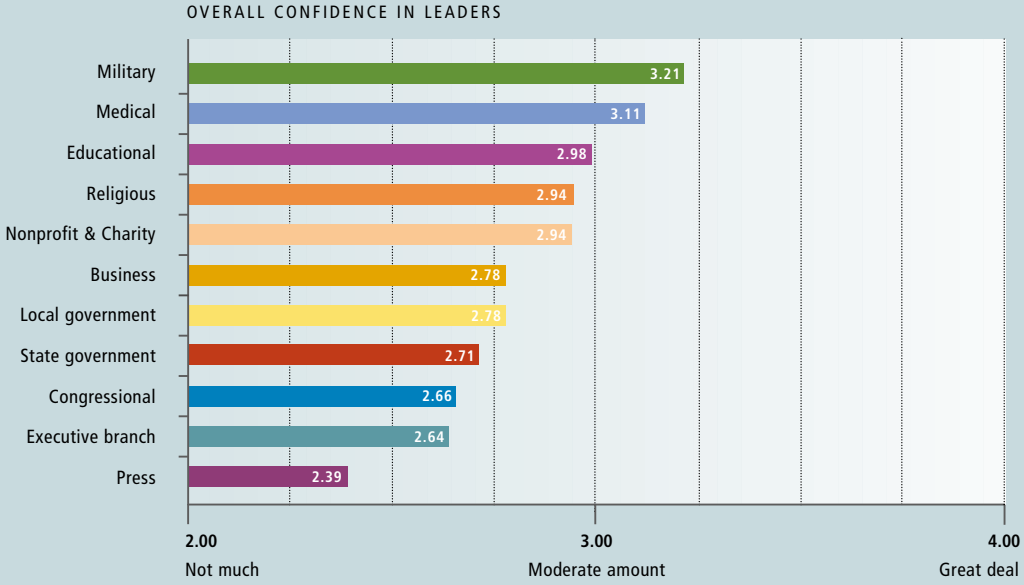
David Gergen
Director,
Center for Public Leadership

Betsy Myers
Executive Director,
Center for Public Leadership

2 FINDINGS

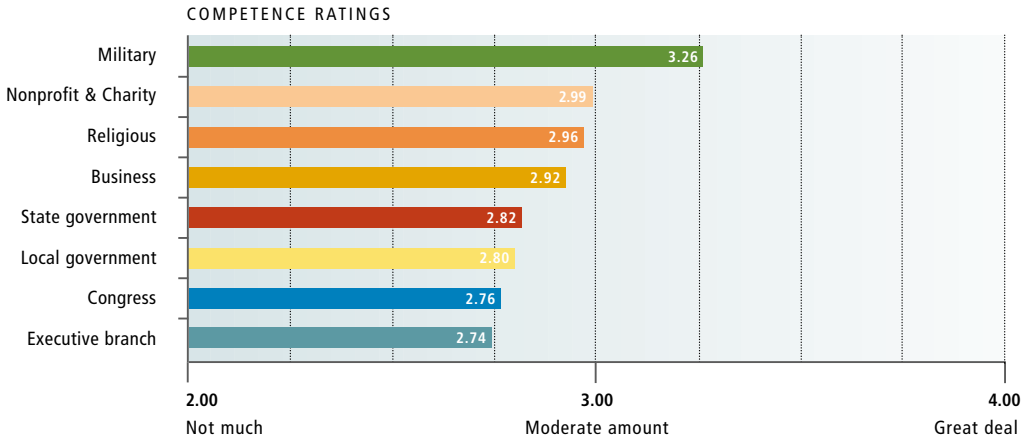
NATIONAL LEADERSHIP INDEX 2005 (NLI)

OVERALL CONFIDENCE



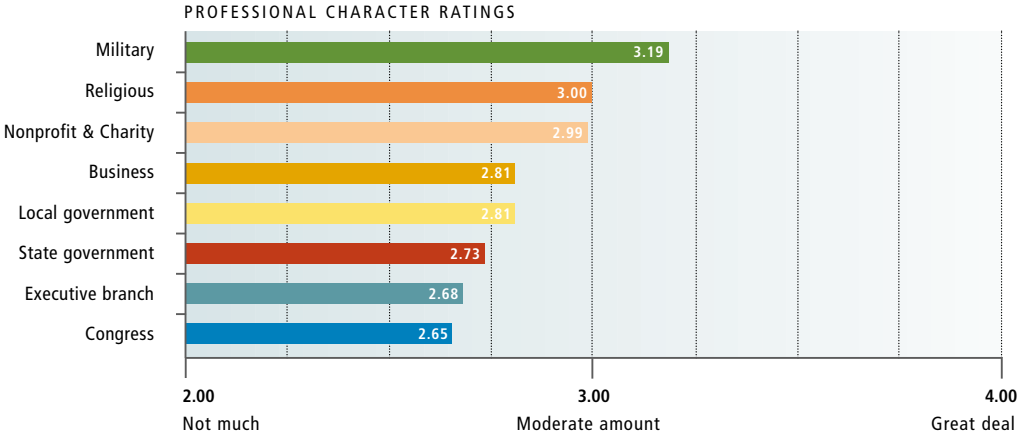
CONFIDENCE IN LEADERS' COMPETENCE

How much confidence do you have in the knowledge, skills, and abilities of the leaders of the following sectors?



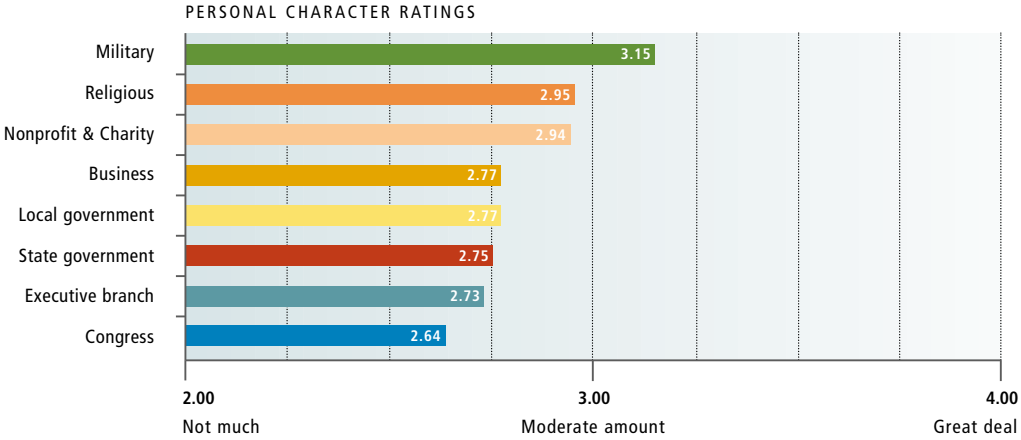
CONFIDENCE IN LEADERS' PROFESSIONAL CHARACTER

How much confidence do you have in the honesty, integrity, and ethics in the *professional* lives of the leaders of the following sectors?



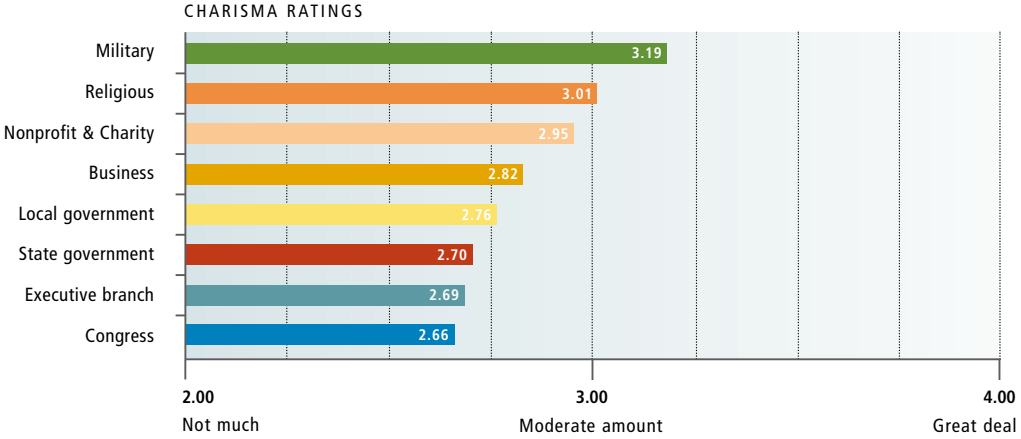
CONFIDENCE IN LEADERS' PERSONAL CHARACTER

How much confidence do you have in the honesty, integrity, and ethics in the *personal* lives of the leaders of the following sectors?



CONFIDENCE IN LEADERS' CHARISMA

How much confidence do you have in the ability to inspire followers' loyalty and enthusiasm of the leaders of the following sectors?



FINDINGS

TWENTY FIVE HIGHLIGHTS

FINDING 1

Nearly two-thirds (66%) of Americans agree that we have a leadership crisis in the country today.

FINDING 2

Americans have significantly more confidence in military leaders than in leaders from any other sector of public life, and significantly less confidence in leaders in the press than in leaders from any other sector.

FINDING 3

Well over half of adult men and women believe the country would be better off if there were more women in leadership positions. However, women are significantly less likely than men to agree. This is especially true for Republican women—they are the least likely of any group to believe the country would be better off with more women leaders.

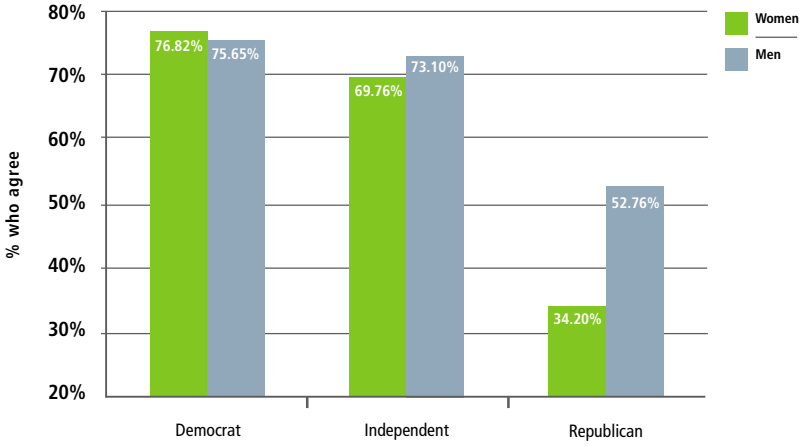
Do you think this country would be better off if there were more women in leadership positions?

	MEN	WOMEN	SIGNIFICANCE
% Yes	68.57%	60.72%	$p < .05$
% No	31.43%	39.28%	$p < .05$

Note
All statistically significant differences in the Highlights section are at the $p < .05$ level.

Republican women are significantly less likely than other groups to believe that having more women in leadership would be good for the country...

THE COUNTRY WOULD BE BETTER OFF IF THERE WERE MORE WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP POSITIONS



FINDING 4

Across all demographic groups, the highest confidence ratings were given by Republicans to military and executive branch leadership. The lowest confidence ratings were given by Democrats to executive branch leadership, and by Republicans to leadership in the press.

FINDING 5

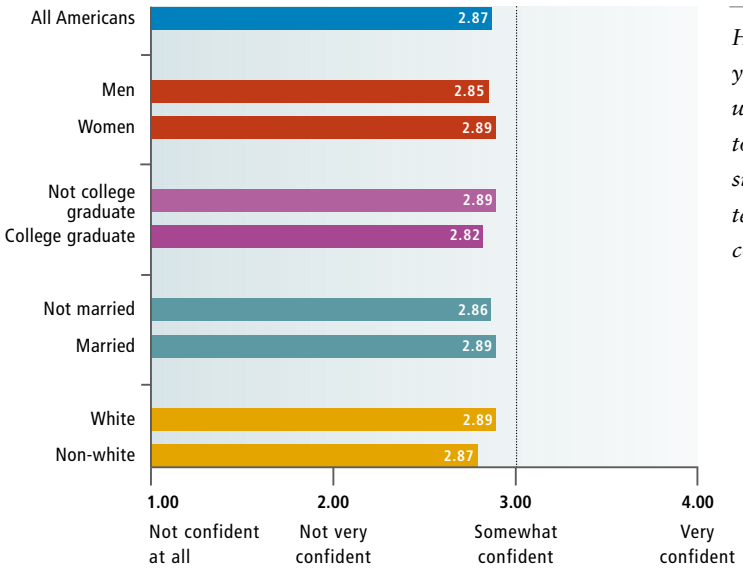
People in households earning less than $20,000 per year have significantly less confidence in military leaders than do those in any other income bracket.

FINDING 6

Nearly three-quarters of Americans (72%) believe that unless the country's leaders improve, the United States will decline as a nation.

FINDING 7

Americans are not confident that their leaders are prepared to lead in a crisis. This view is shared across gender, political parties, geography, and age groups.



How confident are you that your local and state leaders will respond effectively to an emergency crisis — such as a natural disaster or terrorist attack — in the community where you live?

	MEAN	SIGNIFICANCE
All Americans	2.55	—
Men	2.57	NS
Women	2.52	
Not married	2.57	NS
Married	2.51	
White	2.59	NS
Non-white	2.46	

How confident are you that government leaders in Washington will respond effectively to an emergency crisis — such as a natural disaster or terrorist attack?

Range: 1 (Not confident at all) – 4 (Very confident)

	MEAN	SIGNIFICANCE
All Americans	2.65	—
Men	2.64	NS
Women	2.65	
Not married	2.66	NS
Married	2.63	
White	2.66	NS
Non-white	2.65	

How confident are you that your local leaders and government leaders in Washington will work together effectively in an emergency crisis such as a natural disaster?

Range: 1 (Not confident at all) – 4 (Very confident)

FINDING 8

Adults aged 25–34 have significantly more confidence in religious leaders than do those in any other age group.

FINDING 9

Americans who have the greatest confidence that leaders in Washington will respond effectively to a local emergency are: those who do not have a college degree, those for whom religion is very important, and Republicans.

	MEAN	SIGNIFICANCE
All Americans	2.55	—
Not college graduate	2.59	$p < .05$
College graduate	2.43	
Organized religion very important	2.72	$p < .05$
Organized religion less or not important	2.39	
Democrat	2.11	$p < .05$
Independent	2.41	
Republicans	3.19	

How confident are you that government leaders in Washington will respond effectively to an emergency crisis — such as a natural disaster or terrorist attack — in the community where you live?

Range: 1 (Not confident at all) – 4 (Very confident)

These same patterns hold for a second measure of crisis leadership, "How confident are you that your local leaders and government leaders in Washington will work together effectively in an emergency crisis — such as a natural disaster or terrorist attack — in the community where you live?"

- Those without a college degree are significantly more confident than those with a college degree (M = 2.68 and 2.56, respectively)
- Those for whom organized religion is very important are significantly more confident than those for whom organized religion is less important (M = 2.80 and 2.51, respectively)
- Republicans are significantly more confident than Independents, who are significantly more confident than Democrats (M = 3.09, 2.51, and 2.39, respectively).

FINDING 10

Confidence in leaders in the executive branch of the federal government and in Congress is significantly lower than confidence in any other sector of leadership except for the press.

FINDING 11

The older an American is, the less confidence she or he has in leaders of nonprofits and charities.

FINDING 12

Nearly three-quarters of Americans (73%) believe that their leaders are out of touch with the average person.

FINDING 13

In the event of a crisis such as a natural disaster or terrorist attack, Americans overwhelmingly believe that they personally have the greatest responsibility to ensure their safety — more responsibility than the local government or the federal government. However, those for whom organized religion is very important, Democrats, and non-whites without a college degree, are more likely than other Americans to believe that the government bears responsibility for ensuring their safety during a crisis.

In the event of an emergency crisis, such as a natural disaster or terrorist attack, who has the greatest responsibility to ensure your personal safety?

	FEDERAL GOVERNMENT	LOCAL GOVERNMENT	YOU PERSONALLY	SIGNIFICANCE
Americans overall	16.8%	21.4%	61.8%	—
Organized religion less or not important	15.2%	19.5%	65.3%	$p < .05$
Organized religion very important	18.9%	23.4%	57.7%	
Democratic	21.9%	23.2%	54.9%	$p < .05$
Independent	17.2%	17.9%	64.9%	
Republican	9.8%	23.1%	67.1%	
Whites	13.3%	20.3%	66.4%	$p < .05$
Non-whites	26.3%	27.2%	46.5%	
Whites — College graduate	16.1%	18.4%	65.5%	$p < .05$
Whites — Not college graduate	12.3%	20.7%	67.0%	
Non-whites — College graduate	19.0%	23.8%	57.1%	
Non-whites — Not college graduate	27.4%	27.8%	44.9%	

Interestingly, non-whites who believe that the federal government should be responsible are significantly more confident in the ability of the federal government to respond to a crisis than are whites who believe the federal government should be responsible.

How confident are you that government leaders in Washington will respond effectively to an emergency crisis — such as a natural disaster or terrorist attack — in the community where you live?

	MEAN	SIGNIFICANCE
Non-whites who believe federal government is responsible	2.58	$p < .05$
Whites who believe federal government is responsible	2.26	

Range: 1 (Not confident at all) – 4 (Very confident)

Non-whites who believe that they themselves should be responsible for their personal safety in a crisis were not confident in the federal government's ability to respond effectively in a time of crisis.

How confident are you that government leaders in Washington will respond effectively to an emergency crisis — such as a natural disaster or terrorist attack — in the community where you live?

	MEAN	SIGNIFICANCE
Non-whites who believe they are personally responsible	2.14	$p < .05$
Non-whites who believe local or federal government is responsible	2.72	
Whites who believe they are personally responsible	2.59	
Whites who believe local or federal government is responsible	2.58	

Range: 1 (Not confident at all) – 4 (Very confident)

FINDING 14

Republicans have significantly greater confidence in all sectors of government than do Democrats or Independents.

FINDING 15

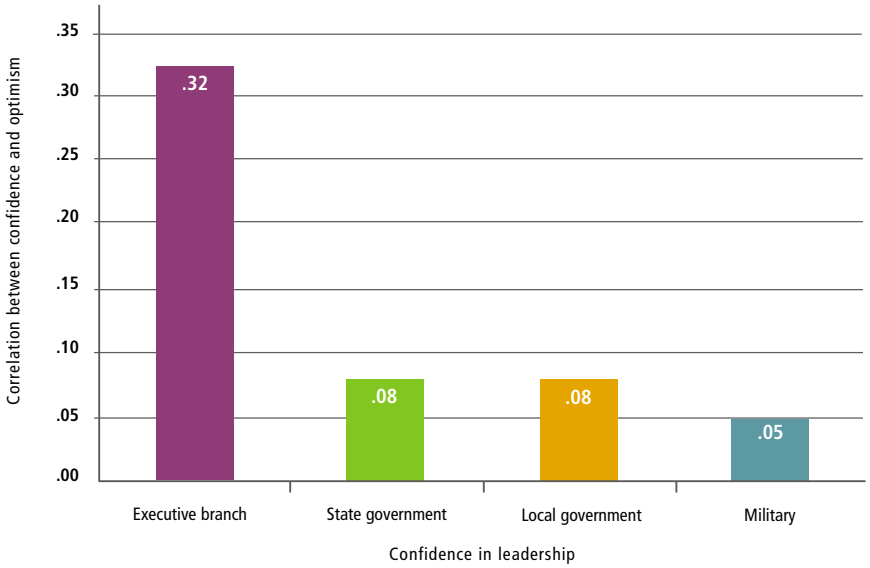
Americans have the same degree of confidence in their state government leaders regardless of the type of community in which they live (big city, suburb, rural area, etc.).

FINDING 16

Confidence in the executive branch—rather than confidence in local government, state government, or the military—is most strongly associated with feeling safe from future terrorist attacks.

How safe is the United States from a terrorist attack?

CORRELATION BETWEEN CONFIDENCE IN LEADERSHIP AND OPTIMISM ABOUT THE SAFETY OF THE U.S. FROM A TERRORIST ATTACK



FINDING 17

Young adults (ages 18–24) have more confidence in the leadership of nongovernmental sectors (military, medicine, education, religion, nonprofits and charities, business, and press) than do members of any other age group. However, young adults do not have more confidence in government leadership than do older adults.

FINDING 18

Republicans express significantly greater confidence in local government leaders than do Democrats or Independents.

FINDING 19

Men and women agree on the importance to good leadership of stereotypically masculine leadership traits, such as decisiveness and taking charge. However, women are significantly more likely than men to see stereotypically feminine leadership traits — for example, empathy, open-mindedness, communication skills, and the ability to cooperate and build consensus — as important to good leadership.

Men and women agree on the importance of traditionally masculine leadership traits to good leadership ...

How important are each of the following traits to being a good leader?

	MEN	WOMEN	SIGNIFICANCE
Taking charge	4.21	4.22	NS
Decisiveness	4.10	4.12	NS

Range: 1 (Not at all) - 5 (Extremely)

... however, women are significantly more likely than men to believe in the importance of traditionally feminine leadership traits to good leadership.

How important are each of the following traits to being a good leader?

	MEN	WOMEN	SIGNIFICANCE
Empathy with others	3.90	4.18	$p < .05$
Open mindedness	4.07	4.22	$p < .05$
Ability to communicate	4.32	4.43	$p < .05$
Cooperating with others	4.12	4.26	$p < .05$
Building consensus	3.59	3.77	$p < .05$

Range: 1 (Not at all) - 5 (Extremely)

FINDING 20

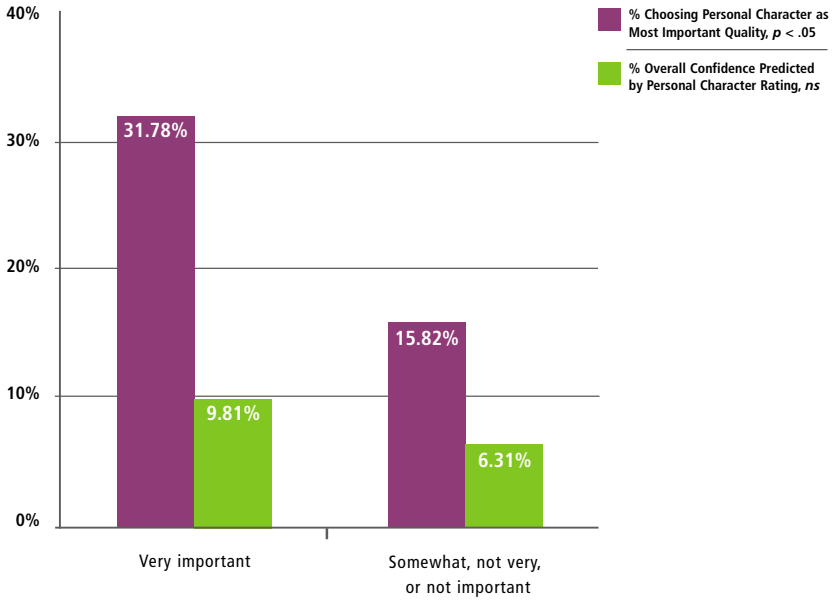
Independents are more likely than Democrats or Republicans to choose competence as the most important quality for having confidence in a leader.

FINDING 21

Americans have the same degree of confidence in business leaders regardless of their race, education level, gender, or community type (big city, suburb, rural area, etc.).

FINDING 22

People who say that organized religion is very important to them are also more likely than others to report that personal character is the most important leadership quality to inspire their confidence. However, when the *actual* confidence ratings of such people are examined, personal character turns out to be no more important in their ratings of confidence than it is for people who are less religious.



There are similar results when comparing Republicans to Democrats and Independents. Republicans, more than Democrats and Independents, say that personal character is most important to their confidence in leadership. However, confidence in personal character is no more important to Republicans' actual confidence ratings than it is to Democrats' and Independents' actual ratings.

FINDING 23

Young adults (ages 18–24) are more likely than any other group to choose charisma as the most important quality for having confidence in a leader.

FINDING 24

Non-whites have significantly greater confidence in congressional leaders than do whites.

FINDING 25

Female Independents for whom organized religion is very important have high confidence in executive branch leaders, whereas less religious female Independents have low confidence. Religiosity does not influence the confidence that male Independents have in executive branch leaders.

http://www.ksg.harvard.edu/leadership/nli

3 ABOUT THE STUDY

The National Study of Confidence in Leadership (NSCL) is a social science survey research program examining the attitudes of the American public toward the nation's leadership. The study includes the *National Leadership Index 2005* (NLI), a multidimensional measure of the public's confidence in the leadership of different sectors of society.

Launched in 2005, in collaboration with *U.S. News & World Report*, the national study is intended to be an ongoing research program that brings new insights to our understanding of public confidence in America's leadership.

The NLI and the NSCL make several unique contributions to the public discussion and understanding of leadership:

BREADTH OF LEADERSHIP INQUIRY The NSCL is focused wholly on leadership. Polls typically devote only a small subset of questions to leadership. In addition, the NSCL examines confidence in leadership across different sectors. Poll data on leadership typically focus on particular individuals or social institutions, rather than sectors.

DEPTH The NSCL explores the public's perception of leadership in depth. For example, most polling programs examine public confidence in leadership as a unidimensional construct. The NLI examines confidence in four distinct dimensions of leadership: competence, professional character, personal character, and charisma.

POLL AND STUDY As a national poll and study, the NSCL complements national polling programs that collect data on leadership. While there are no absolute criteria for differentiating between a polling program and a study program, several key features are associated with each:

- **GOALS** A poll is an opinion survey used to estimate public opinion on a specific issue by questioning a sample intended to be representative of the whole population. A study, by contrast, is devoted to the detailed consideration of a question or the detailed description of a phenomenon—in this case, confidence in leadership. A study can include polling data, but typically it includes other information coupled with in-depth analysis.

- **QUESTIONS ADDRESSED** A poll on confidence in leadership would principally address the question: What are the attitudes of the American public toward the leaders of its major institutions, and toward individual leaders? A study of confidence in leadership would measure attitudes, like a poll, but examine them in greater depth.

- **COMPLEXITY OF DATA COLLECTED** A third key difference between polls and research programs is the level of complexity of data collected. Polling programs often collect data in broad categories, to facilitate rapid reporting and interpretation. But the NSCL, as a national study, collects data in more detail. This enables additional statistical analyses to be performed.

- **DIRECT EXAMINATION OF CONFIDENCE IN CONTEXT OF KEY ISSUES** Polls typically collect data at important times and infer connections to the issues of the day. A study, in contrast, will directly measure the related issues of practical and theoretical import, and examine relationships not just by inference, but also by statistical analysis. The NSCL explicitly measures the public's confidence in leadership in the context of critical issues of the day—for example, leader preparedness to deal with crises.

Additional resources for data on confidence in leadership include (in alphabetical order):

- Corporate consulting firms (e.g., Gantz Wiley Research, Opinion Research Corporation)
- Polling groups (e.g., Harris Polling Group, Gallup Organization, Yankelovich Partners)
- University-based research centers (e.g., University of Chicago's National Opinion Research Center's General Social Survey, Michigan Center for Political Studies' Trust in Government Index)
- Public interest think tanks (e.g., Pew Research Center)

http://www.ksg.harvard.edu/leadership/nli

4 METHODS

Survey results were obtained through telephone interviews among a representative sample of adults (18 years of age or older) in the continental United States. Study data were collected by Yankelovich, Inc.

A total of 1,374 respondents were interviewed, including an oversample of 18- to 24-year-olds.

Random-digit dialing was used to ensure that individuals with unlisted numbers as well as listed numbers would be included in the study. U.S. Census data (2004 Current Population Survey) were used to weight the study on key demographic dimensions to make certain it was representative of the adult population.

The interviews were conducted from September 13–23, 2005. Calls were made weeknights from 5:30–9:00PM in each local time zone; Saturdays and Sundays, noon –6:00PM in each time zone. The sampling error among the nationally representative sample was plus or minus 2.8%. The response rate for this study was 22%.

ABOUT THE INDEX

The NLI incudes the following six questions to assess the public's confidence in the leadership of different sectors. It is both a global measure of confidence, and a measure of confidence in four specific leadership qualities (competence, professional character, personal character, and charisma):

1 How much confidence do you have in [sector of leadership] — a great deal, a moderate amount, not much, or none at all? (global measure)

2 How much confidence do you have in the knowledge, skills, and abilities of [sector of leadership]—a great deal, a moderate amount, not much, or none at all? (competence)

3 How much confidence do you have in the honesty, integrity, and ethics in the professional lives of [sector of leadership] a great deal, a moderate amount, not much, or none at all? (professional character)

4 How much confidence do you have in the honesty, integrity, and ethics in the personal lives of [sector of leadership]—a great deal, a moderate amount, not much, or none at all? (personal character)

5 How much confidence do you have in the ability to inspire followers' loyalty and enthusiasm of [sector of leadership]—a great deal, a moderate amount, not much, or none at all? (charisma)

Responses to questions 2-5 are good predictors of global confidence (question 1).

We also assess the relative importance that respondents ascribe to each of the four specific leadership qualities with the following question:

6 Various factors contribute to our having confidence in leaders. Of the following four factors, which one is the most important to you in having confidence in leaders?

- Leaders' knowledge, skills, and abilities
- Leaders' honesty, integrity, and ethics in their professional life
- Leaders' honesty, integrity, and ethics in their personal life
- Leaders' ability to inspire followers' loyalty and enthusiasm

After answering, respondents are asked to choose the second most important quality from among the remaining three.

For this survey, telephone interviews were conducted with a randomly selected sample of 1,374 adults. The table below presents the weighted characteristics of the survey sample. (Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.)

SURVEY SAMPLE, PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

		N	PERCENT
Gender	Male	669	(48.7)
	Female	705	(51.3)
	Total	1374	(100)
Age	18-24	180	(13.1)
	25-34	235	(17.1)
	35-49	406	(29.6)
	50-64	326	(23.7)
	65 & over	226	(16.4)
	Total	1374	(100)
Race/Ethnicity	White	997	(72.6)
	Black	149	(10.6)
	Asian	10	(0.7)
	Hispanic	138	(10.0)
	Other	56	(4.1)
	(Missing)	(24)	(1.7)
	Total	1350	(100)
Marital Status	Married	763	(55.6)
	Single, never married	323	(23.6)
	Divorced/ separated	149	(10.8)
	Widowed	107	(7.8)
	Living with a partner	13	(0.9)
	(Missing)	(18)	(1.3)
	Total	1356	(100)

SURVEY SAMPLE, SOCIOECONOMIC POSITION

		N	PERCENT
Education	8th grade or less	31	(2.2)
	Some high school	160	(11.6)
	High school graduate	440	(32.0)
	Some college	377	(27.4)
	College graduate	220	(16.0)
	Postgraduate study	130	(9.4)
	(Missing)	(18)	(1.3)
	Total	1356	(100)
Employment Status	Employed full-time	629	(45.7)
	Employed part-time	96	(7.0)
	Self-employed	117	(8.5)
	Student	60	(4.4)
	Retired	276	(20.1)
	Homemaker	90	(6.6)
	Unemployed	102	(7.4)
	(Missing)	(3)	(0.2)
	Total	1371	(100)
Household Income	Less than $20,000	189	(13.8)
	$20,000 – $34,999	189	(13.8)
	$35,000 – $49,999	178	(13.0)
	$50,000 – $74,999	245	(17.8)
	$75,000 – $99,999	153	(11.1)
	$100,000 – $124,999	112	(8.2)
	$125,000 – $149,999	37	(2.7)
	$150,000 or above	91	(6.6)
	(Missing)	(178)	(13.0)
	Total	1196	(100)

SURVEY SAMPLE, GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION

		N	PERCENT
Region	North	263	(19.2)
	Midwest	316	(23.0)
	South	486	(35.4)
	West	308	(22.4)
	Total	1374	(100)
Community	Big city	251	(18.2)
	Suburb	256	(18.6)
	Small city	321	(23.4)
	Small town	233	(23.4)
	Rural area	203	(23.5)
	(Missing)	(21)	(1.5)
	Total	1353	(14.7)

SURVEY SAMPLE, CIVIC AND COMMUNAL VALUES

		N	PERCENT
Political Affiliation	Democrat	464	(33.8)
	Republican	407	(29.6)
	Independent	399	(29.0)
	Other	34	(2.5)
	Not sure	32	(2.3)
	(Missing)	(37)	(2.7)
	Total	1337	(100)
Liberal/ Conservative Orientation	Very liberal	98	(7.1)
	Liberal	300	(21.8)
	Moderate	434	(31.6)
	Conservative	370	(27.0)
	Very conservative	115	(8.4)
	Other	11	(0.8)
	Not sure	23	(1.7)
	(Missing)	(21)	(1.5)
	Total	1353	100
Importance of Organized Religion	Very important	640	(46.6)
	Somewhat important	388	(28.2)
	Not very important	157	(11.4)
	Not important at all	170	(12.4)
	(Missing)	(20)	(1.5)
	Total	1354	(100)

5 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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We gratefully acknowledge the collaboration of *U.S. News & World Report* in envisioning and partnering with us to create the first National Study of Confidence in Leadership and the first report of the National Leadership Index. In particular we thank Brian Duffy, Lee Wilcox, Bill Holiber, Susan Headden, and Nancy Morrissey.

We are also indebted to Hal Quinley, Ph.D., Sarah Catlett, and Sharon Romer of Yankelovich, Inc., for their work on the study.

We thank colleagues at the Center for Public Leadership — notably Loren Gary and Jeremy Licht — as well as the members of the Leadership Research Lab at the Center — especially Jeong Oh, Winmar Way, Evgenia Peeva, Laura Bacon, and Alex Messiter — for their valuable input at critical junctures.

Finally, we thank Barbara Kellerman, Ph.D., Research Director at the Center for Public Leadership, for creating a scholarly community in which leadership research blooms.

ABOUT THE CENTER FOR PUBLIC LEADERSHIP 6

The Center for Public Leadership (CPL) at Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government was established in 2000 with a generous grant from the Wexner Foundation. Committed to the idea that effective public leadership is essential to the common good, CPL serves people in the public, private, and nonprofit sectors through cutting-edge research, teaching, and leadership development efforts. Specifically, CPL offers:

- Courses, seminars, workshops, and executive programs for current and prospective leaders in the U.S. and abroad;
- Financial support for scholars and practitioners, including research awards, master's and doctoral fellowships, and programs for visiting scholars and leaders in residence;
- Publications and international conferences; and
- Public events at the Kennedy School, including conversations about leadership with the world's foremost scholars and practitioners.

By "public leadership," we mean the acts, large and small, of individuals and groups as they tackle challenges facing a community or society. For instance: politicians and grassroots organizers; activists who raise awareness about issues related to peace, religious tolerance, public health, or the plight of the poor; founders of charities and nonprofits; the superintendents of schools and the business leaders who work in partnership with them; and artists whose influence on a particular medium goes beyond the purely aesthetic. Such persons embody what CPL endeavors to foster, study, and support.

Bridging the gap between theory and practice

At the heart of CPL's mission is the enrichment of leadership research and teaching. By creating opportunities for reflection and discovery for students, scholars, and practitioners from different disciplines, sectors, cultures, and nations, CPL promotes a dynamic exchange of ideas.

As vital as this work is, CPL realizes that equipping people to handle the complexities of modern leadership requires more than traditional academic coursework. To be effective, leaders must combine the tools of strategic, financial, and policy analysis with self-understanding and an appreciation for the way their behavior influences others.

For this reason, CPL has committed itself to providing cutting-edge training in leadership development. The better understanding of personal strengths and weaknesses acquired through such training extends the impact of the "hard skills" students hone in the classroom.

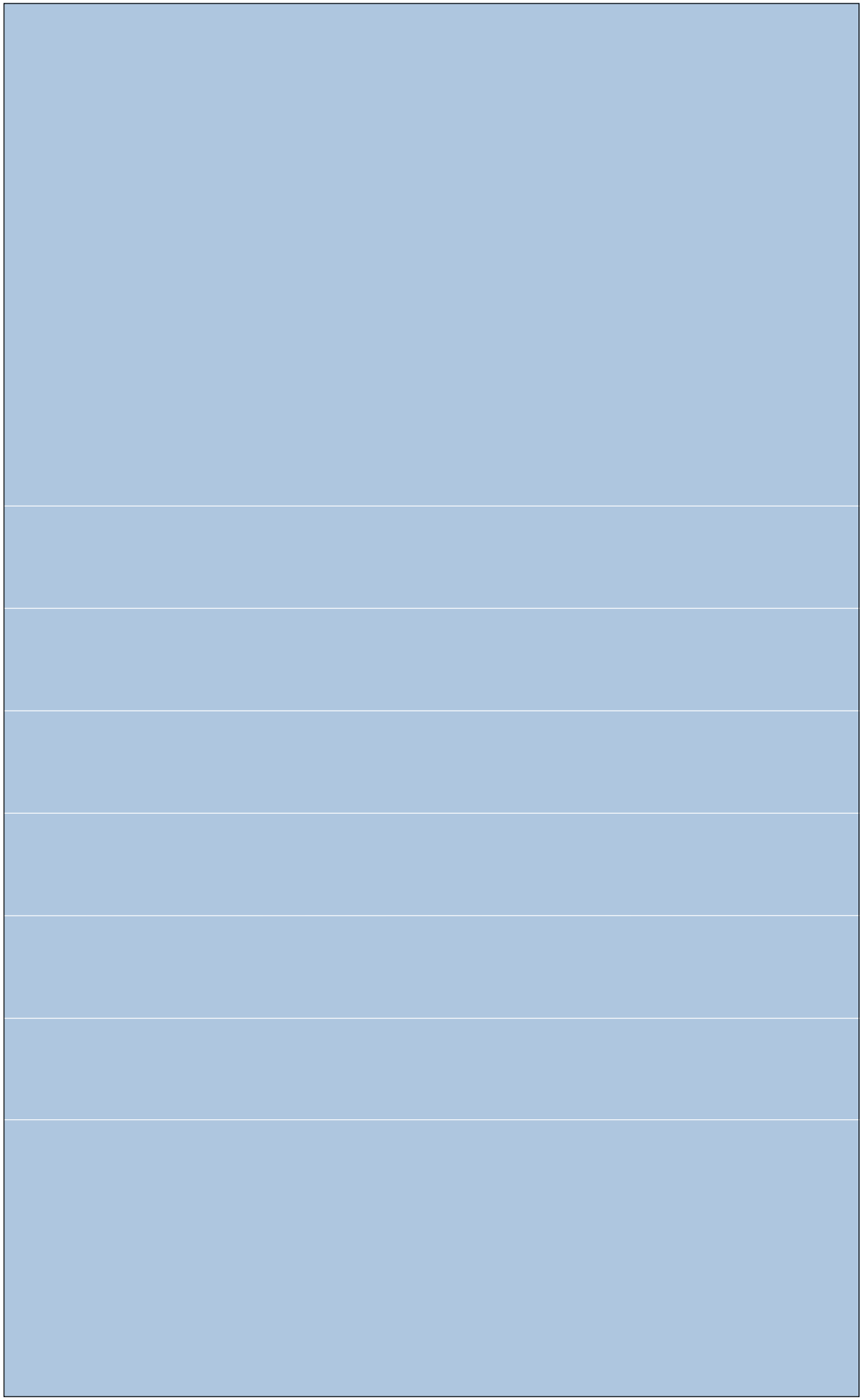
The road ahead

The challenges confronting the world today are legion. With the fall of communism and the emergence of capitalism in every corner of the world, we now struggle with the inequities wrought by economic globalization. In our rush to communicate more cheaply and frequently in a networked world, we discover that our real communities are in decline. Just as the possibility of a new golden age of enlightened democratic leadership seems within our grasp, we are visited by the horrors of ethnic conflict and the specter of terrorism. The tsunami in Asia, the waves of genocide plaguing Africa, the hurricanes along the U.S. Gulf Coast, and the earthquake in Pakistan have further underscored the need for coordinated crisis preparedness. Moreover, frustration with government at all levels has prompted many to try to harness the power of market forces to ameliorate social ills.

In response to these global challenges, as well as to the myriad issues related to protecting and enhancing local communities everywhere, the cry for effective leadership grows increasingly urgent. Mobilizing people to define, acknowledge, and address the problems that threaten the common good calls for analytical reasoning, strong interpersonal skills, the ability to plan and manage, a certain comfort in dealing with complexity and ambiguity, as well as perseverance. But something more is also required. In the words of Vaclav Havel, the playwright and former president of the Czech Republic: "Our conscience must catch up with our reason, otherwise we are lost."

The Center for Public Leadership is committed to helping people develop the full skill set that 21st-century leadership demands.

NOTES



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NATIONAL LEADERSHIP INDEX 2005

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