NATIONAL LEADERSHIP INDEX 2006

A NATIONAL STUDY OF CONFIDENCE IN LEADERSHIP

CENTER FOR PUBLIC LEADERSHIP
JOHN F. KENNEDY SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT · HARVARD UNIVERSITY

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1 INTRODUCTION

October, 2006

"Perhaps no form of government needs great leaders so much as democracy," observed Lord Bryce early in the last century. If so, America is in trouble—or at least that's what most Americans believe.

A year ago, in the first national study of confidence in leadership, two-thirds of people across the United States said that there is a leadership crisis in our country, and nearly three-quarters said that unless our leaders improve, the U.S. would decline as a nation. A year later, this second study finds, confidence in American leaders has deteriorated even further: now some 70% believe there is a leadership crisis in the United States today.

The pages that follow chronicle an unhappy moment in our national life. Just look at the *National Leadership Index* for 2006, a ranking of the public's confidence in the leadership of the 11 major sectors of society. Americans say they have more than a moderate amount of confidence in only two of the 11 sectors: the military and medicine. All other sectors of leadership fail to win even a moderate amount of confidence. Moreover, in the 12 months that passed between the first survey in the early fall of 2005 and the second a year later, confidence fell in five of the sectors: education, religion, business, Congress, and the executive branch. Nor is it reassuring that the three lowest-ranked sectors in the nation today are Congress, the executive branch, and the press. Critics will find a little good news here—for example, more than 83% of Americans say that it is very important or extremely important for the U.S. to be a strong global leader—but overall, the pattern is one that would worry a Lord Bryce.

The research in these pages grows out of a partnership between the Center for Public Leadership at Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government and *U.S.News & World Report*. The purpose of the partnership is to explore public attitudes about our leaders and to identify—through a national selection committee—the best of today's leaders. (*U.S. News* is featuring in its October 30th edition the people who have been named "America's Best Leaders" for this year.) Working together, the Center and *U.S. News* created a survey of public opinion with the market research firm, Yankelovich, Inc., which then conducted more than 1,600 interviews in September, 2006.

In addition to identifying significant trends in the public's confidence in its leaders, this report highlights seven additional findings that should stimulate discussion among scholars and practitioners alike. In the next nine months, the Center for Public Leadership plans to publish a follow-on report devoted to a more targeted aspect of leadership. Both reports may be found on our Web site (http://www.ksg.harvard.edu/leadership/nli).

We owe special thanks to the chief architects of this project: Todd L. Pittinsky, Research Director of the Center and Assistant Professor of Public Policy at the Kennedy School, and his colleagues. We are extremely grateful for their incisive analysis.

Our hope is that this research will prove useful to the scholarly community and also contribute to our ongoing civic dialogue—deepening our understanding of ourselves and the pressing need for effective, responsible democratic leadership.

David Gergen
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2 FINDINGS

NATIONAL LEADERSHIP INDEX 2006 (NLI)

2006 OVERALL CONFIDENCE IN LEADERSHIP BY SECTOR

How much confidence do you have in the leadership of the following sectors?

Range: 1 (None at all) – 4 (Great Deal)

Notes ↓ indicates a significant decrease; nc indicates no significant change

The only types of leadership in which Americans have more than a moderate amount of confidence are military and medical leadership. Confidence in the leadership of five sectors—education, religion, business, Congress, and the executive branch—has declined since 2005. In no sector did confidence increase.

SEVEN OTHER SIGNIFICANT TRENDS

Between 2005 and 2006 …

1 … Men's confidence in congressional leadership dropped more than did women's.

2 … Americans who say that religion is very important to them gained confidence in educational leadership; all other Americans lost confidence in educational leadership.

3 … People who are politically conservative, but not liberal or moderate, gained confidence in the leadership of the press.

4 … Political Independents lost confidence in military leadership; Democrats and Republicans did not.

5 … Republicans lost confidence in the leadership of the executive branch of the federal government; Democrats and Independents did not. However, Republicans continue to have greater confidence than do Democrats and Independents.

6 … Americans without a college degree lost confidence in the leadership of 4 of the 11 sectors tracked: executive branch, Congress, religious, and business. By contrast, Americans with a college degree or higher did not lose confidence in any of the 11 sectors.

7 … Americans with an annual household income of less than $100,000 lost confidence in business leadership; confidence in business leadership did not change for those with a household income of $100,000 or more.

FINDINGS

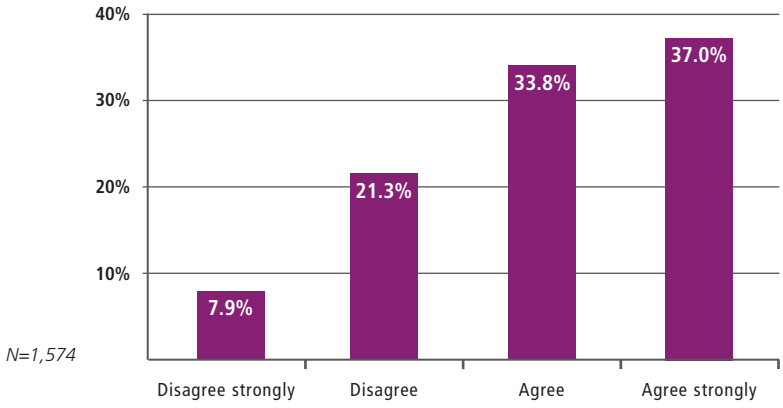
SEVEN HIGHLIGHTS

HIGHLIGHT 1

The Leadership Crisis

More than seven in ten Americans (70.8%) agree or agree strongly that there is a leadership crisis in the United States today.

To what extent do you agree with this statement: "We have a leadership crisis in this country today"?



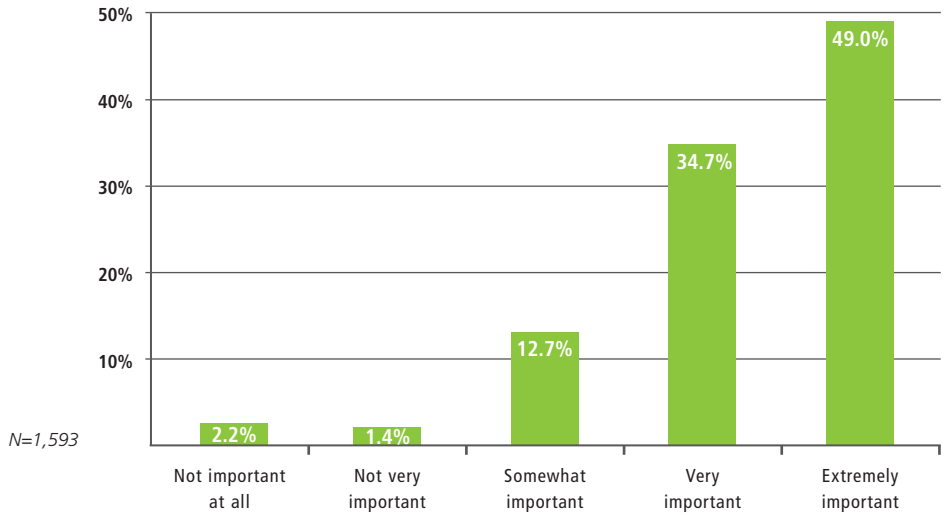
N=1,574

HIGHLIGHT 2

America as a Global Leader

The vast majority of Americans (83.7%) believe that it is very important or extremely important for the United States to be a strong global leader.

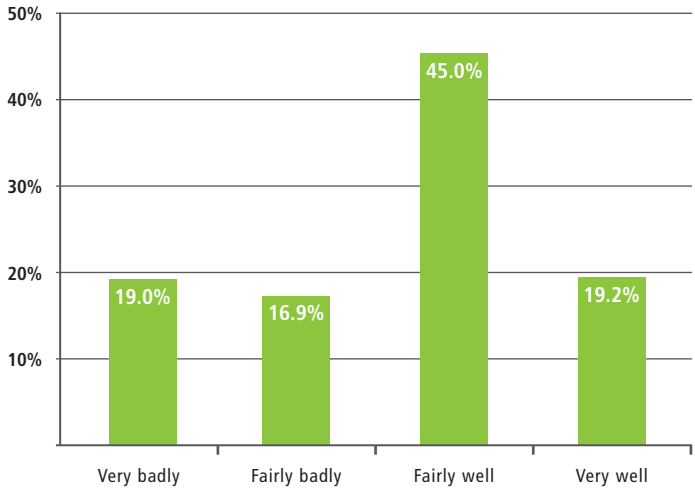
How important do you think it is for the United States to be a strong global leader in the world today?



N=1,593

The majority of Americans (64.2%) agree that the United States is doing fairly well or very well at carrying out its responsibilities as a global leader.

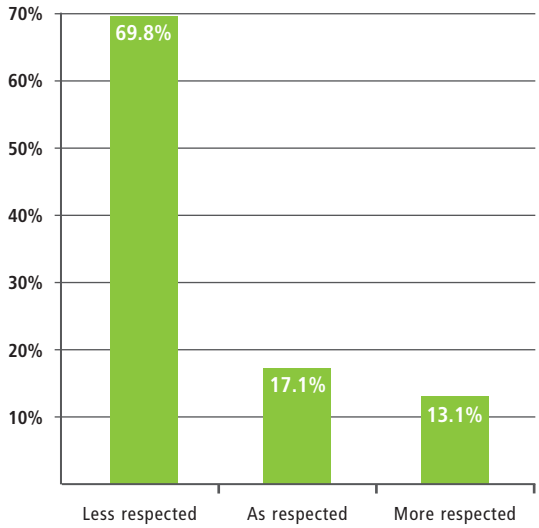
How well do you think the United States is carrying out its responsibilities as a global leader?



N=1,589

However, even though Americans believe the United States is doing a good job as a global leader, they also believe that the United States is losing respect as a global leader—69.8% of Americans believe that the United States is less respected in its role as a global leader than it was in the past.

Compared to the past, do you think the United States is more respected for its global leadership role, less respected, or as respected?



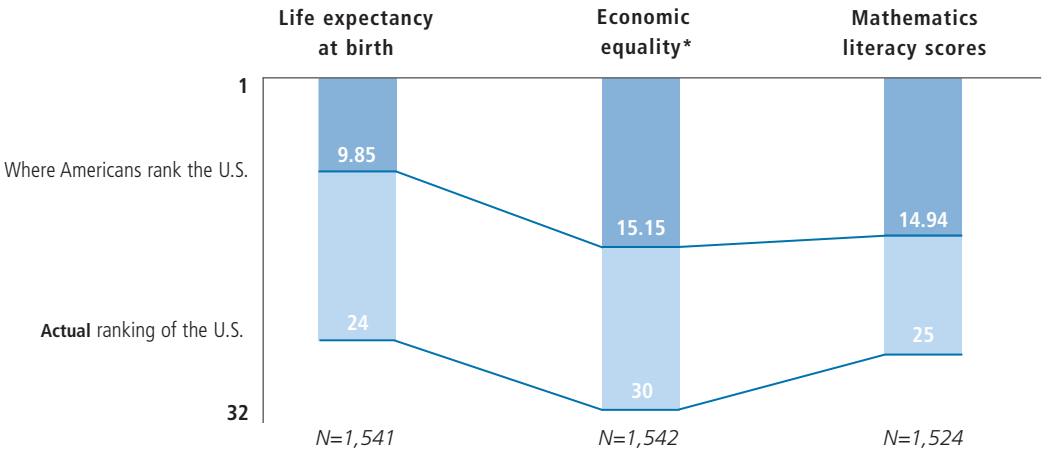
N=1,558

HIGHLIGHT 3

Americans' Overestimation of the United States' Ranking

Americans overestimate the United States' standing relative to other industrialized nations on three key indices of human development: life expectancy at birth, economic equality, and mathematics literacy scores.

Using data from the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the United Nations Development Program's (UNDP) Human Development Report, the top 32 industrialized nations, including the United States, were ranked. Where do you think the United States ranks on each of the following?



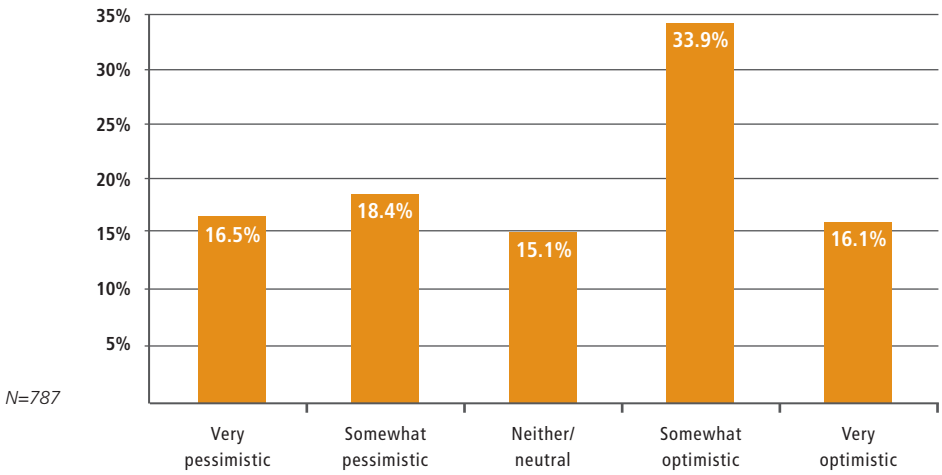
* Economic equality is measured by the ratio of the richest 10% to the poorest 10% in income or consumption.
A rank of **1** means the country has the **most** economic equality; a rank of **32** means the country has the **least** economic equality.

HIGHLIGHT 4

Global Leadership and Fear

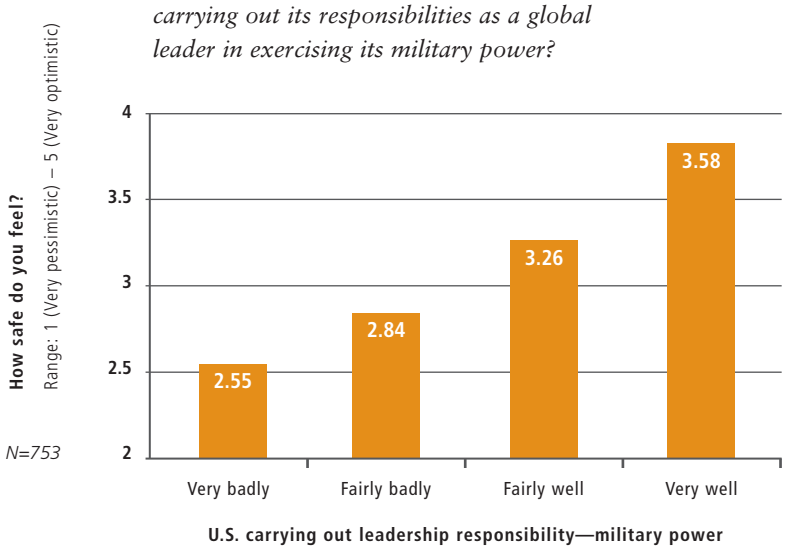
One half of Americans feel optimistic about the safety of the United States from a terrorist attack.

How optimistic do you feel about the safety of the United States from a terrorist attack?



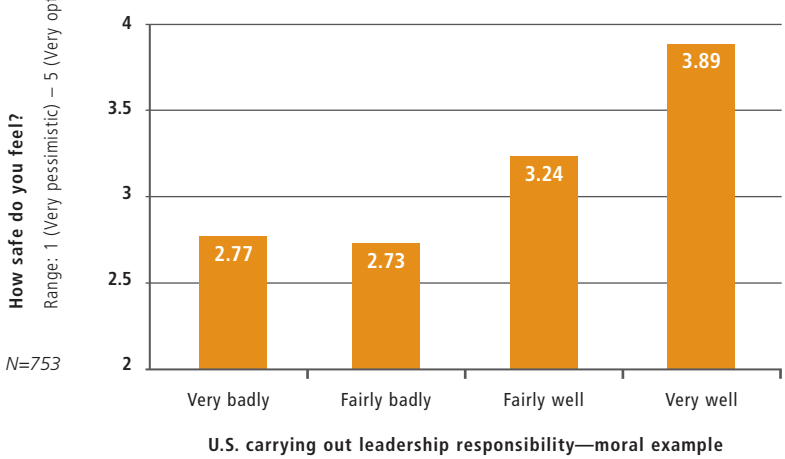
The more Americans feel the United States is doing a good job exercising its military power, the safer they feel from a terrorist attack.

How well do you think the United States is carrying out its responsibilities as a global leader in exercising its military power?



Americans who believe that the United States is doing very well at setting a moral example for other countries feel especially safe from a terrorist attack; those who feel the United States is doing fairly well feel less safe; those who think the United States is doing badly feel the least safe.

How well do you think the United States is carrying out its responsibilities as a global leader in setting a moral example for other countries?



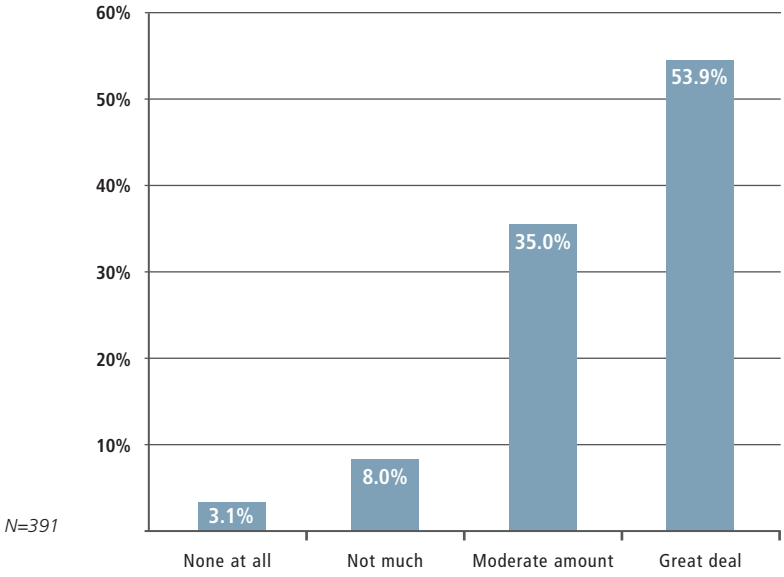
HIGHLIGHT

5

Willingness to Accept Inconvenience

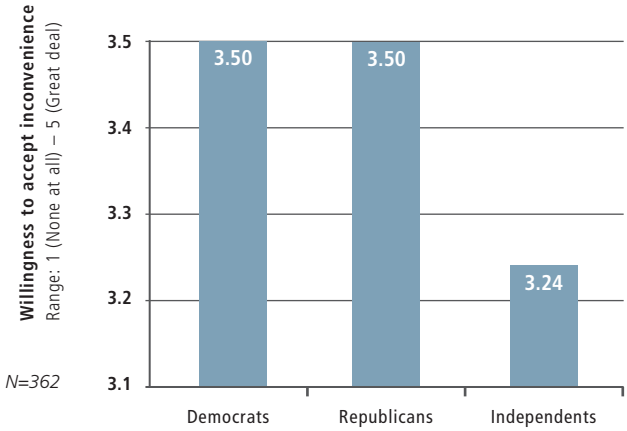
More than half of Americans (53.9%) say that they are willing to accept a great deal of inconvenience in their day-to-day lives to make America safer and more powerful.

To what extent would you accept inconveniences in your day-to-day life to make America safer and more powerful?



N=391

Republicans (*mean = 3.65*) are significantly more willing than Democrats (*mean = 3.41*) and Independents (*mean = 3.21*) to accept inconveniences in their day-to-day lives to make America safer and more powerful. However, when confidence in the executive branch is factored out, Republicans and Democrats are *equally* willing to accept such inconveniences.



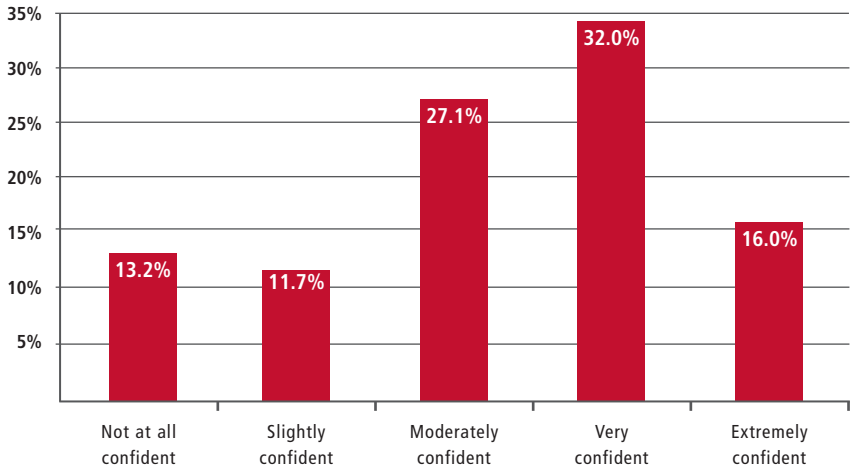
N=362

HIGHLIGHT 6

Fear of Flying

Although nearly half of Americans (48%) feel very or extremely confident that they would be safe from a terrorist attack while flying, more than one in eight Americans (13.2%) are not at all confident that they would be safe.

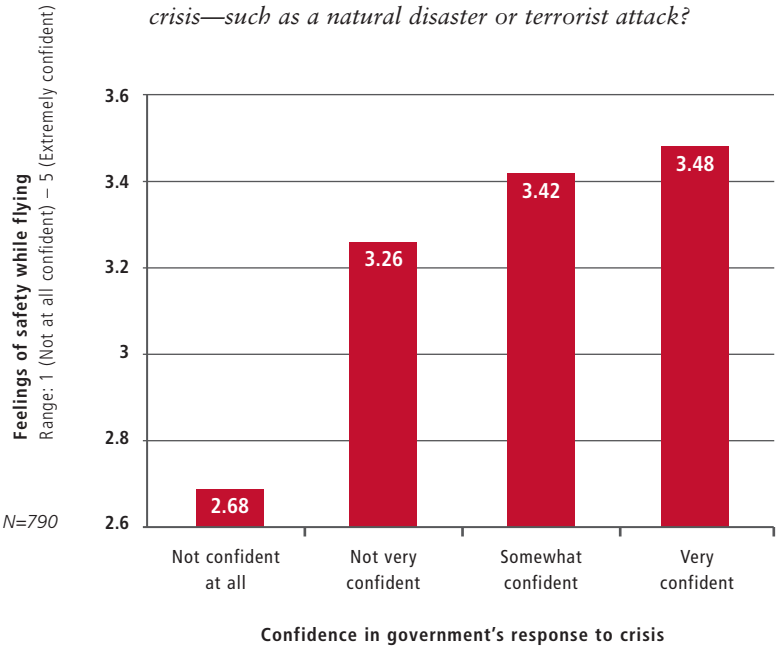
Overall, if you flew today, how confident do you feel that you would be safe from terrorist harm on a domestic flight?



N=804

Americans who are not confident at all that government leaders in Washington will respond effectively to an emergency crisis are less confident than other Americans about their safety from a terrorist attack on a domestic flight.

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



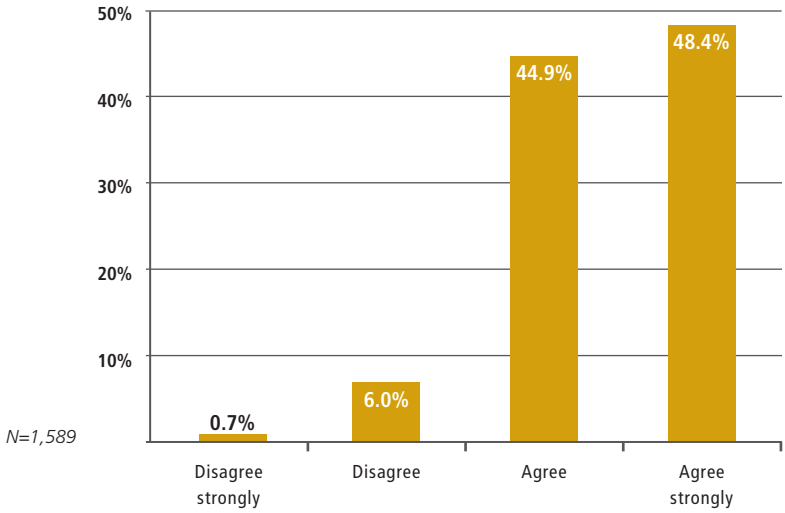
N=790

HIGHLIGHT 7

Leadership Across the Aisle

More than 9 out of 10 Americans (93.3%) believe that their political leaders spend too much time attacking members of the other party.

Political leaders today spend too much time attacking members of the other party:



N=1,589

3 ABOUT THE STUDY

The National Study of Confidence in Leadership (NSCL) is a social science research program examining the attitudes of the American public toward the nation's leadership. The study includes the *National Leadership Index 2006* (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* and Yankelovich, Inc., the national study brings new insights to our understanding of the public's confidence in America's leadership.

For more details on the general scope, goals, and contributions of the NSCL and NLI, please see the 2005 report, *National Leadership Index 2005* (Pittinsky, Rosenthal, Welle, & Montoya, 2005), available at the NSCL project Web site:

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

Reference:

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 Government, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

4 METHODS

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

A total of 1,604 respondents were interviewed. Random-digit dialing was used to ensure that individuals with unlisted numbers would also be included in the study. U.S. Census data were used to weight key demographic dimensions to ensure that the study was representative of the adult population.

The interviews were conducted from September 5–17, 2006. Calls were made weeknights from 5:30 p.m.–9:00 p.m. and Saturdays and Sundays from noon–6 p.m. in each local time zone. For all frequencies reported, there is a sampling error of plus or minus 2.6%. The response rate was 33%.

The questions in the Index and Highlights 1–3 and 7 were asked of the full sample. Highlights 4–6 were asked of a sub-sample. For the data featured, missing responses (i.e., those who refused to answer or were unsure of their opinion) were not included.

All findings are statistically significant at $p < .05$.

DEMOGRAPHICS

For this survey, telephone interviews were conducted with a random sample of 1,604 adults. The table below presents the weighted characteristics of the survey sample. (Percentages may not total 100% because of rounding.)

Table 1.1: Personal Characteristics		*N*	PERCENT
Gender	Male	775	48.3
	Female	829	51.7
	Total	1,604	100
Age	18–24	164	10.2
	25–34	331	20.6
	35–49	484	30.2
	50–64	364	22.7
	65 & over	260	16.2
	Total	1,604	100
Race/Ethnicity	White	1,189	74.1
	Black	196	12.2
	Asian	19	1.2
	Hispanic	85	5.3
	Other	101	6.3
	(Missing)	(15)	0.9
	Total	1,604	100
Marital Status	Married	902	56.2
	Single, never married	354	22.1
	Divorced/separated	160	10.0
	Widowed	140	8.7
	Living with a partner	42	2.6
	(Missing)	(6)	0.4
	Total	1,604	100

Table 1.2: Socioeconomic Position		*N*	PERCENT
Education	8th grade or less	45	2.8
	Some high school	205	12.8
	High school graduate	508	31.7
	Some college	433	27.0
	College graduate	254	15.9
	Postgraduate study	147	9.2
	(Missing)	(11)	0.7
	Total	1,604	100
Employment Status	Employed full-time	684	42.7
	Employed part-time	120	7.5
	Self-employed	150	9.3
	Student	57	3.6
	Retired	298	18.5
	Homemaker	171	10.7
	Unemployed	123	7.7
	(Missing)	(1)	0.1
	Total	1,604	100
Income	Less than $20,000	234	14.6
	$20,000–$34,999	242	15.1
	$35,000–$49,999	214	13.3
	$50,000–$74,999	293	18.3
	$75,000–$99,999	192	12.0
	$100,000–$124,999	133	8.3
	$125,000–$149,999	71	4.4
	$150,000 or above	86	5.4
	(Missing)	(139)	8.7
	Total	1,604	100

Table 1.3: Geographic Location		*N*	PERCENT
Region	North	305	19.0
	Midwest	361	22.5
	South	582	36.3
	West	356	22.2
	Total	1,604	100
Community	Big city	346	21.6
	Suburb	364	22.7
	Small city	287	17.9
	Small town	344	21.4
	Rural area	256	16.0
	(Missing)	(6)	0.4
	Total	1,604	100

Table 1.4: Civic/Communal Values		*N*	PERCENT
Political Affiliation	Democrat	547	34.1
	Republican	432	26.9
	Independent	501	31.2
	Other	48	3.0
	Not sure	38	2.4
	(Missing)	(39)	2.4
	Total	1,337	100
Liberal/ Conservative Orientation	Very liberal	94	5.9
	Liberal	308	19.2
	Moderate	560	34.9
	Conservative	357	22.2
	Very conservative	196	12.2
	Other	27	1.7
	Not sure	50	3.1
	(Missing)	(13)	0.8
	Total	1,604	100
Importance of Religion	Very important	790	49.3
	Somewhat important	387	24.1
	Not very important	197	12.3
	Not important at all	221	13.8
	(Missing)	(8)	0.5
	Total	1,354	100

5 APPENDIX

GENERAL CONFIDENCE IN LEADERSHIP BY SECTOR IN 2005 AND 2006

	2005 Mean (SD)	2006 Mean (SD)	Mean change (2005-2006)	Effect size (Cohen's *d*)
Business	2.78 (.78)	2.70 (.78)	-.08*	.09
Congress	2.66 (1.12)	2.55 (1.09)	-.11*	.12
Education	2.98 (.82)	2.92 (.84)	-.06*	.08
Executive Branch	2.64 (1.12)	2.54 (1.09)	-.10*	.09
Local Government	2.78 (.85)	2.83 (.83)	.05	.06
Medical	3.11 (.73)	3.08 (.77)	-.03	.05
Military	3.21 (.82)	3.18 (.85)	-.03	.05
Nonprofit & Charitable	2.94 (.82)	2.93 (.84)	-.01	.00
Press	2.39 (.92)	2.38 (.90)	-.01	.01
Religious	2.94 (.89)	2.86 (.92)	-.08*	.09
State Government	2.71 (.89)	2.75 (.89)	.04	.06

Range: 1 (None at all) – 4 (Great deal)

Notes

- For 2005, N = 1374; for 2006, N = 1604
- "*" indicates a statistically significant change at the $p < .05$ level.
- SD = Standard deviation, a measure of variance around the means.
- Cohen's *d* statistic provides a standardized estimate of the magnitude of the difference in means (effect size). It is calculated by dividing the difference in means by the pooled standard deviation.

6 ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Founded in 1933, *U.S. News* is devoted to investigative journalism and reporting and to analyzing national and international affairs, politics, business, health, science, technology, and social trends. Through its annual rankings of *America's Best Colleges, America's Best Graduate Schools,* and *America's Best Hospitals,* as well as its *News You Can Use* brand, *U.S. News* has earned a reputation as the leading provider of service news and information that improves the quality of life of its readers.

Yankelovich, Inc.
We are indebted to Hal Quinley, Ph.D., for his work on the study and his collaboration on the overall project. Hal has been an invaluable collaborator at all junctures, helping to define the research protocol and manage the data collection.

Yankelovich, Inc. delivers measurable breakthroughs in marketing productivity for its clients. For more than 30 years, the Yankelovich MONITOR has tracked and forecasted consumer value and lifestyle trends. The Segmentation Company (TSC), a division of Yankelovich, is a full-service custom research division conducting research for business, the media, associations, and government.

Center for Public Leadership
Research colleagues at the Center made important contributions at crucial junctures—especially Connie Hadley, Maria Levis, Katie Wheeler, and Marc Alexander. Thanks also to Loren Gary for his guidance and stewardship in the production of the report.

ABOUT THE CENTER FOR PUBLIC LEADERSHIP 7

The John F. Kennedy School of Government's Center for Public Leadership (CPL) at Harvard University 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 who mobilize diverse constituencies to work together; 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 leadership embodies what CPL endeavors to 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 innovative leadership development opportunities that help students deepen their personal and interpersonal awareness. Such experiences do not simply complement the academic training—they help students discern how to apply that training. Personal and interpersonal awareness is thus a crucial component of the skill set that 21st century leadership requires.

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