

**NATIONAL  
LEADERSHIP  
INDEX  
2012**



**A NATIONAL STUDY**



**OF CONFIDENCE**



**IN LEADERSHIP**



**HARVARD Kennedy School**

**Center for Public  
LEADERSHIP**

in collaboration with MERRIMAN RIVER GROUP

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# INTRODUCTION

October 2012

For only the second time since the Center for Public Leadership began surveying public confidence in leadership in 2005, Americans' confidence in their leaders rose in 2012. Compared to last year, 9 percent more Americans believe that our leaders are effective and do a good job, and 7 percent fewer Americans believe the United States will decline as a nation unless we get better leaders.

The last time confidence rose, in 2009, a new president had taken office and renewed confidence in the executive branch helped buoy the *National Leadership Index*. This year, the sources of renewed confidence are found across the political spectrum and across the leadership of several sectors. For example, conservatives, moderates, and liberals all reported increased confidence in America's business leaders in 2012. Both liberals and conservatives also reported increased confidence in the nation's military leadership—a sector that has held the highest level of confidence of any sector every year since the Center first conducted the *National Leadership Index* seven years ago, and the only sector in which Americans have shown more than moderate confidence in all those years. Equally encouraging, confidence levels across sectors seem more stable than last year. This year, confidence increased in three sectors, remained the same in nine, and declined in only one. Last year, confidence declined in eight sectors, stayed the same in five, and did not increase for any.

While these modest gains are encouraging, they should not distract American leaders from the larger picture. Sixty-nine percent of Americans still believe we have a leadership crisis—8 percent lower than last year, but still very high. What's more, confidence in sectors that are critical to the nation's strength and strategic direction remain abysmally low. Congress retains the least amount of confidence of all sectors—dropping, for the first time, below Wall Street. Educational leadership, so important to the country's future competitive strength, continues to languish in fifth place from the bottom, among the sectors for whom Americans have “not much” confidence. Confidence in the Executive Branch is, not surprisingly, deeply polarized, with conservatives giving it the lowest ranking of all sectors and liberals among the highest. And confidence in the news media has dropped precipitously—a worrisome trend, since the news media is the window through which Americans perceive the performance of their leaders in all sectors. If Americans do not have confidence in their news media, how can they trust that they are getting the information they need to understand—and influence—the performance of the country's leaders?

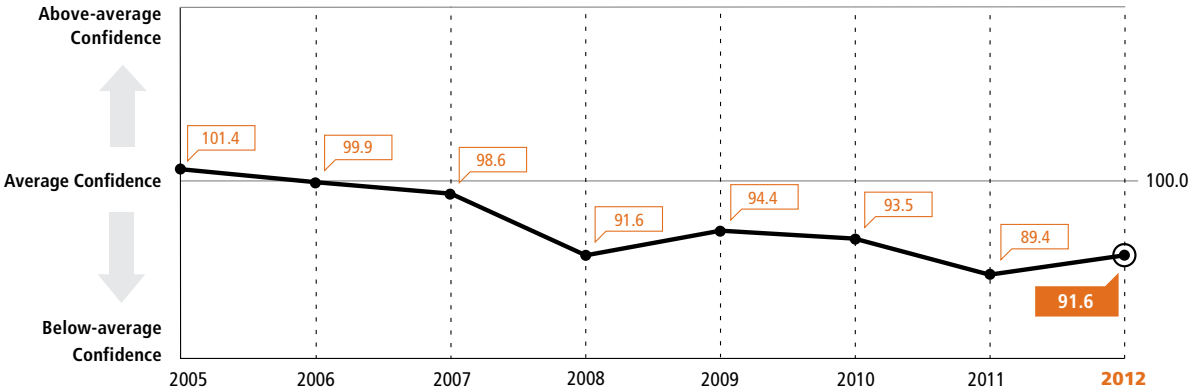
This year, to better understand those connections between Americans and their leaders, we explored whether, and how, Americans feel able to make the country's leadership more effective. The findings are encouraging: 61 percent of Americans feel they have a great deal or a moderate amount of power to help make America's leadership more effective. Moreover, 88 percent feel a personal responsibility to do so. When asked how, two-thirds chose voting as the best way for them, personally, to improve the country's leadership. In other words, Americans clearly still believe they have a significant role in moving the country's leadership in a better direction. As the nation heads to the polls, that is news to take comfort in.

**Donna Kalikow**  
*Executive Director*

**Owen Andrews**  
*Research Manager*

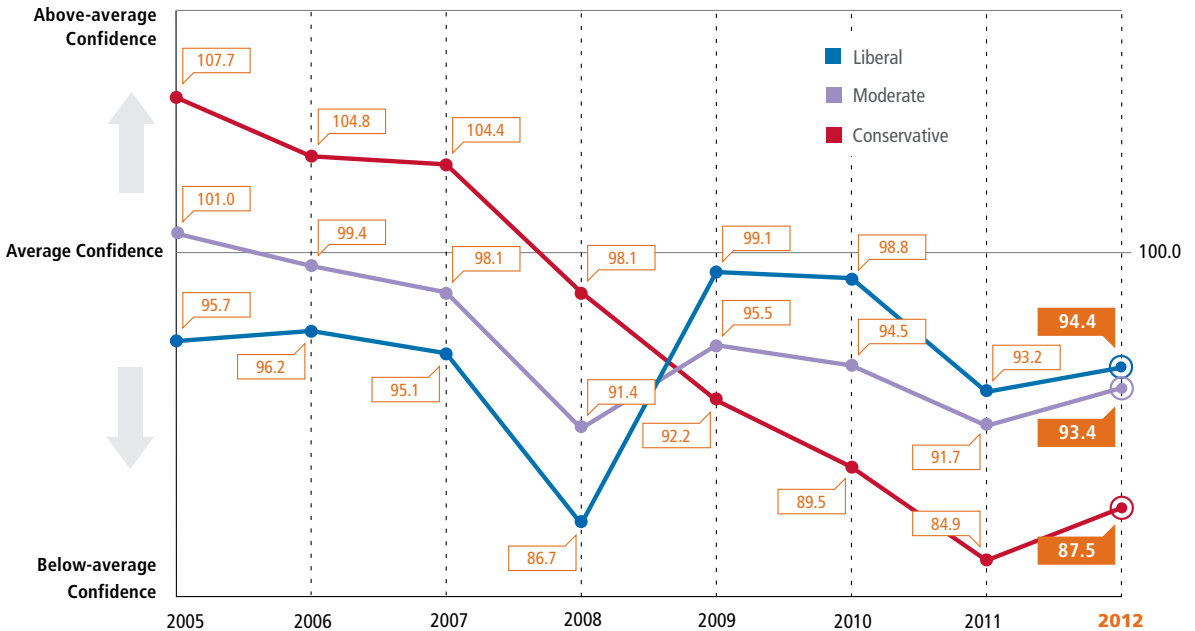
# SECTION 1 CONFIDENCE IN LEADERSHIP 2012

## AN INDEX OF AMERICANS' CONFIDENCE IN THEIR LEADERS



- Americans' confidence in their leaders rose significantly from 2011 to 2012.
- Yet for the fifth year in a row, Americans' overall confidence in their leaders remains below average.

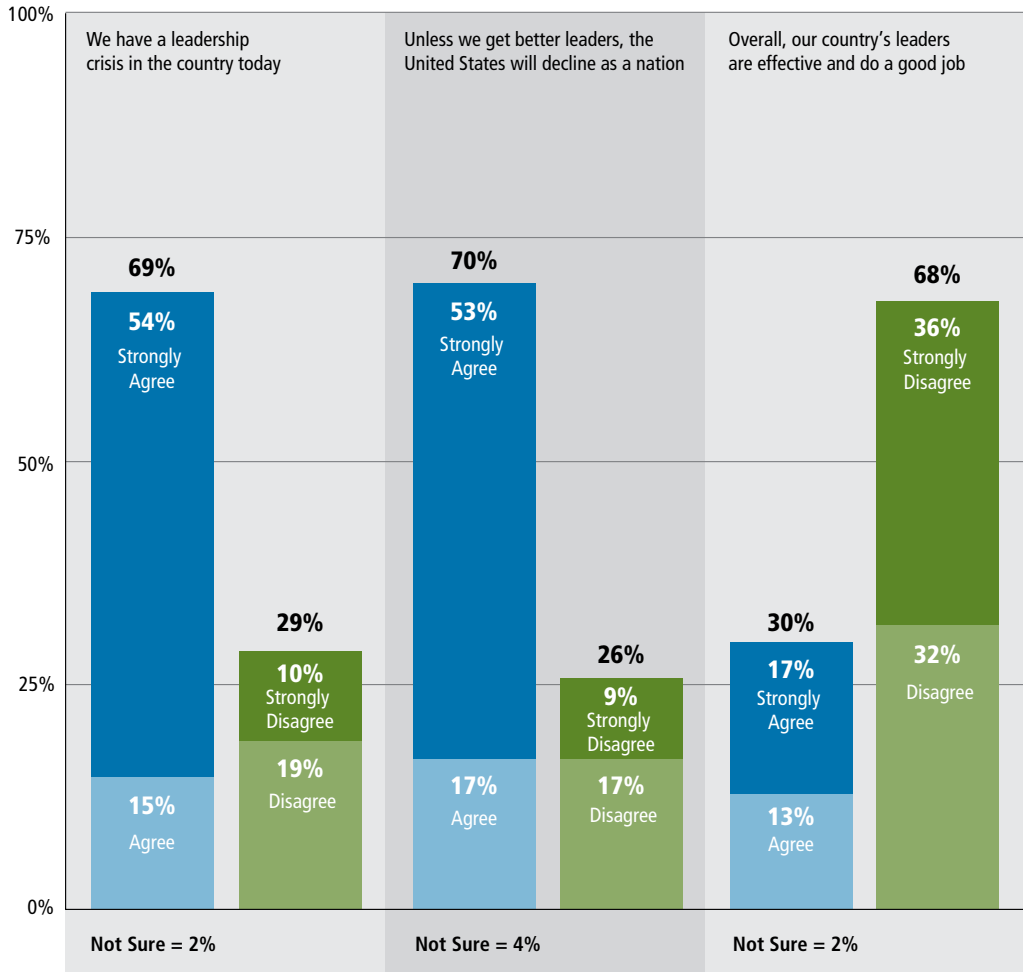
## THE POLITICS OF CONFIDENCE IN AMERICA'S LEADERS



- In 2012, liberals, moderates, and conservatives all had below-average confidence in America's leaders.
- However, conservatives' confidence rose from its 2011 level—the first time since this survey began in 2005 that conservatives' confidence has increased from the year before.
- Liberals and moderates maintained the same levels of confidence that they held in 2011.
- Liberals and moderates continue to have significantly higher confidence in America's leaders than do conservatives.

## Americans' confidence in their leaders rose slightly in 2012.

To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

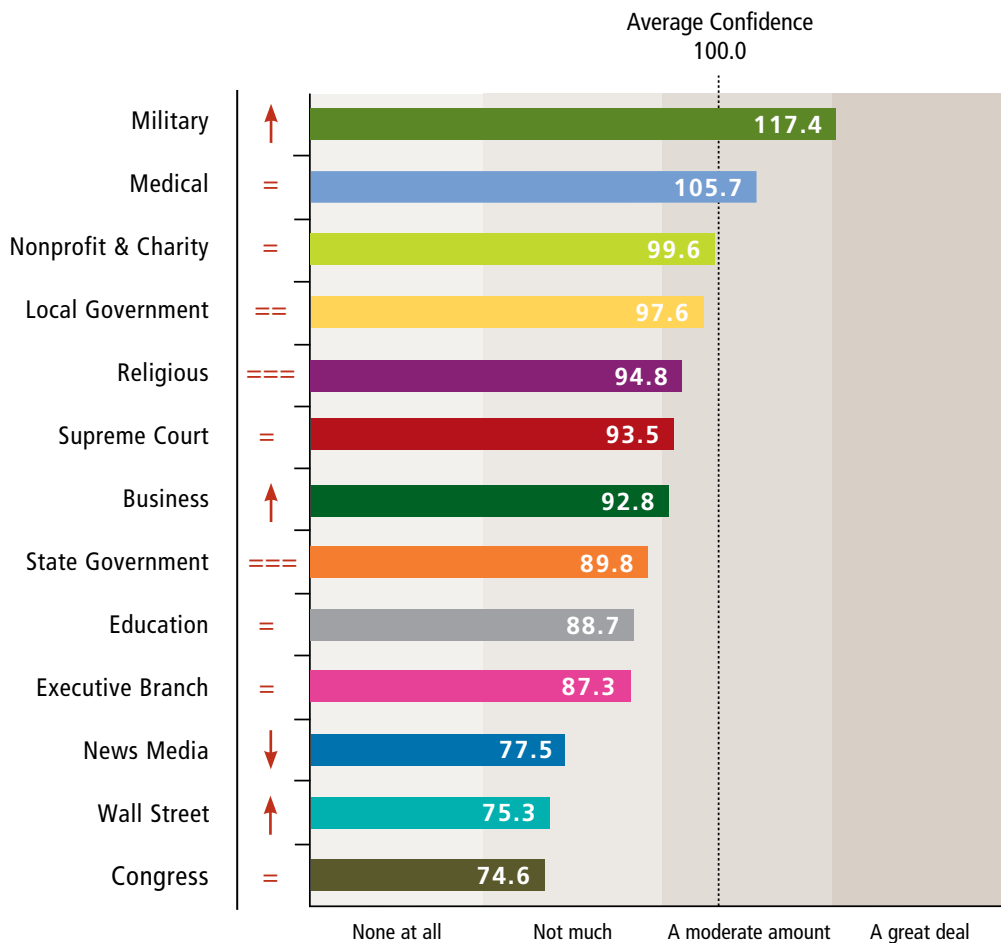


- In 2012, belief that the country has a leadership crisis declined 8% from the previous year.
- Even so, more than two-thirds of Americans—69%—*agree* or *strongly agree* that we have a leadership crisis.
- 70% of Americans *agree* or *strongly agree* that “unless we get better leaders, the United States will decline as a nation”—7% fewer than in 2011.
- 30% of Americans *agree* or *strongly agree* that our leaders “are effective and do a good job”—a 9% increase from 2011.

SECTION **2** CONFIDENCE IN SECTOR LEADERSHIP

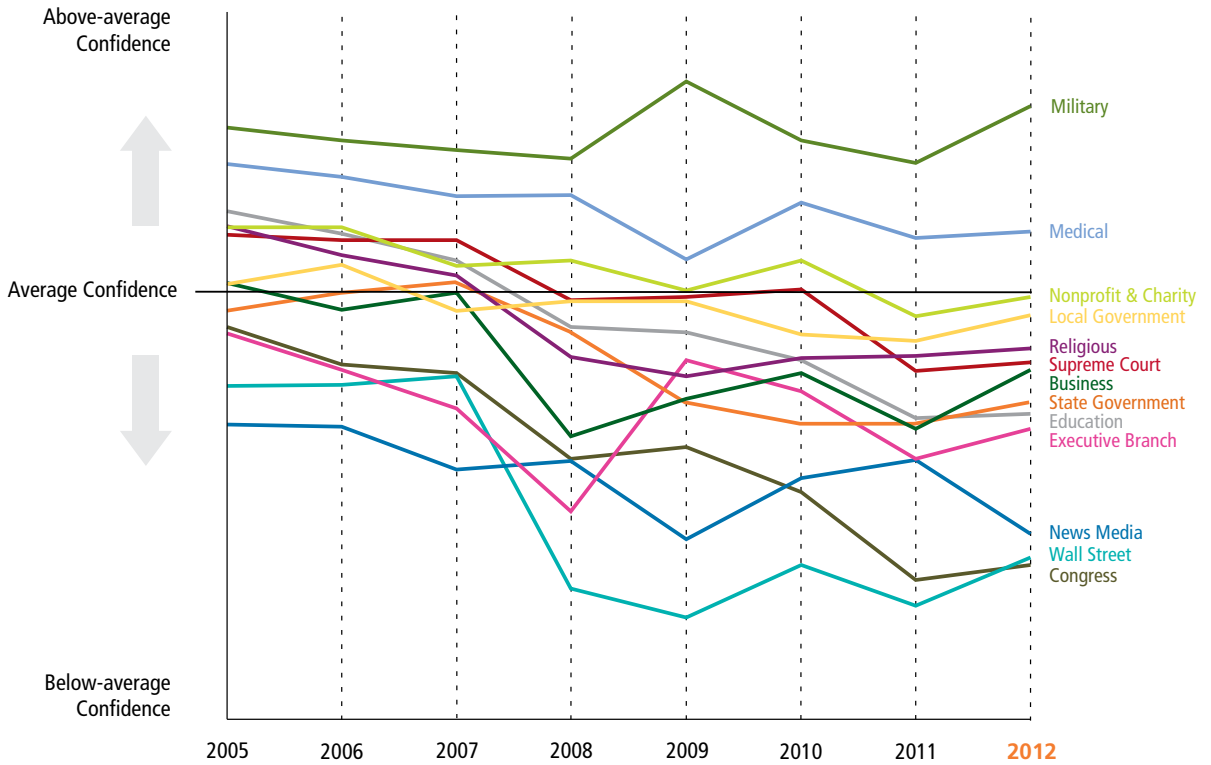
**CONFIDENCE IN SECTOR LEADERSHIP 2012**

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



- ↑ indicates a statistically significant increase from 2011
- ↓ indicates a statistically significant decrease from 2011
- = indicates no statistically significant change from 2011
- == indicates no change for two years in a row
- === indicates no change for three years in a row

## CONFIDENCE IN SECTOR LEADERSHIP 2005–2012

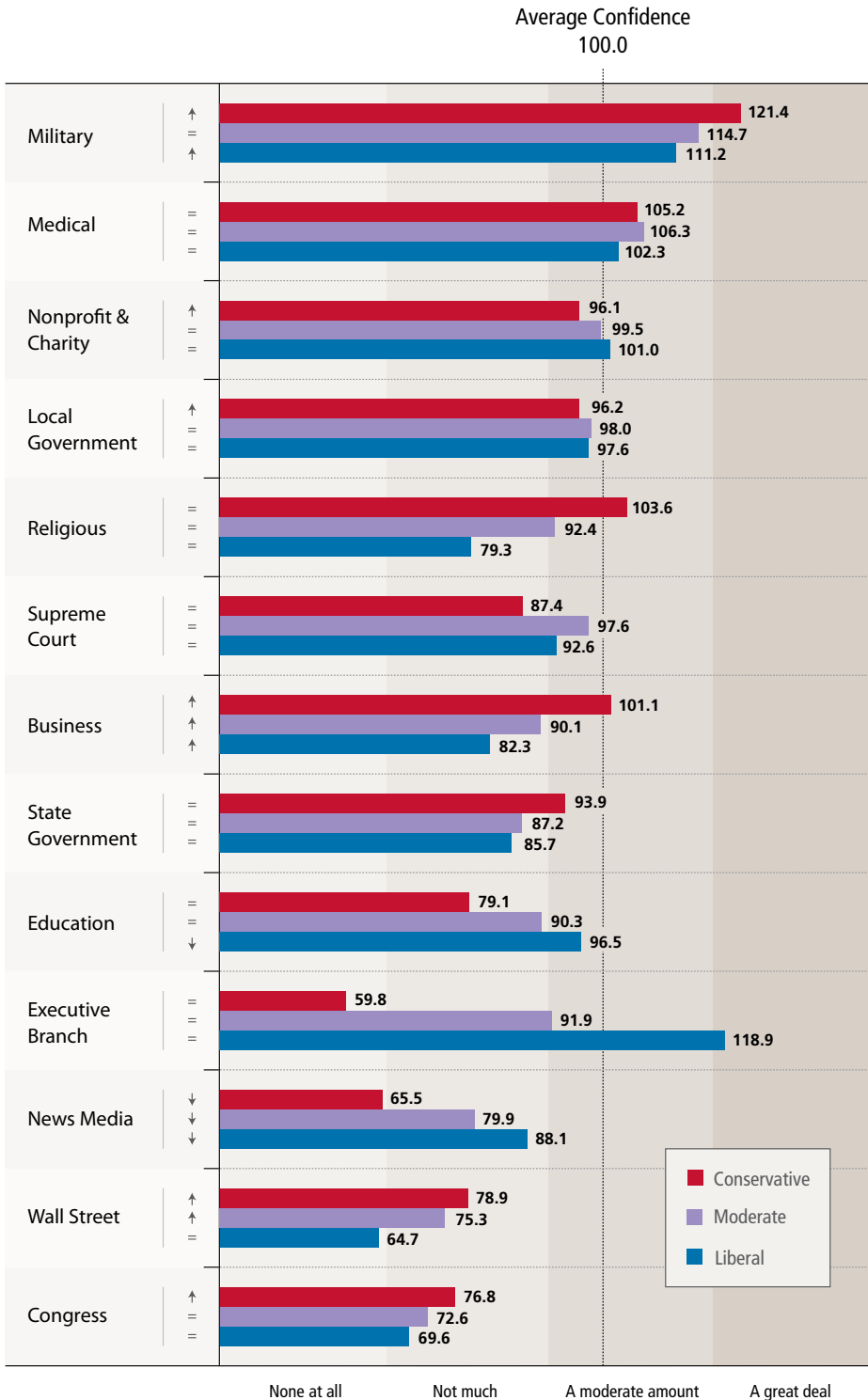


### Key Findings

- Americans have above-average confidence in the leadership of only two sectors: military and medical. The same was true in 2011.
- For the eighth year in a row, military leadership inspires the most confidence out of the 13 sectors.
- Confidence increased during the past year in the leadership of 3 sectors: military, business, and Wall Street.
- Confidence decreased during the past year in the leadership of the news media.
- Confidence was unchanged from last year in the leadership of 9 sectors: medical, nonprofit & charity, local government, religious, the Supreme Court, state government, education, the Executive Branch, and Congress.
- By comparison, in 2011, confidence did not increase for the leadership in any sector—it declined for 8 sectors and remained the same for 5 sectors.

SECTION **3** THE POLITICS OF SECTOR CONFIDENCE

POLITICAL ORIENTATION AND CONFIDENCE 2012



↑ indicates a statistically significant increase from 2011  
 ↓ indicates a statistically significant decrease from 2011  
 = indicates no statistically significant change from 2011



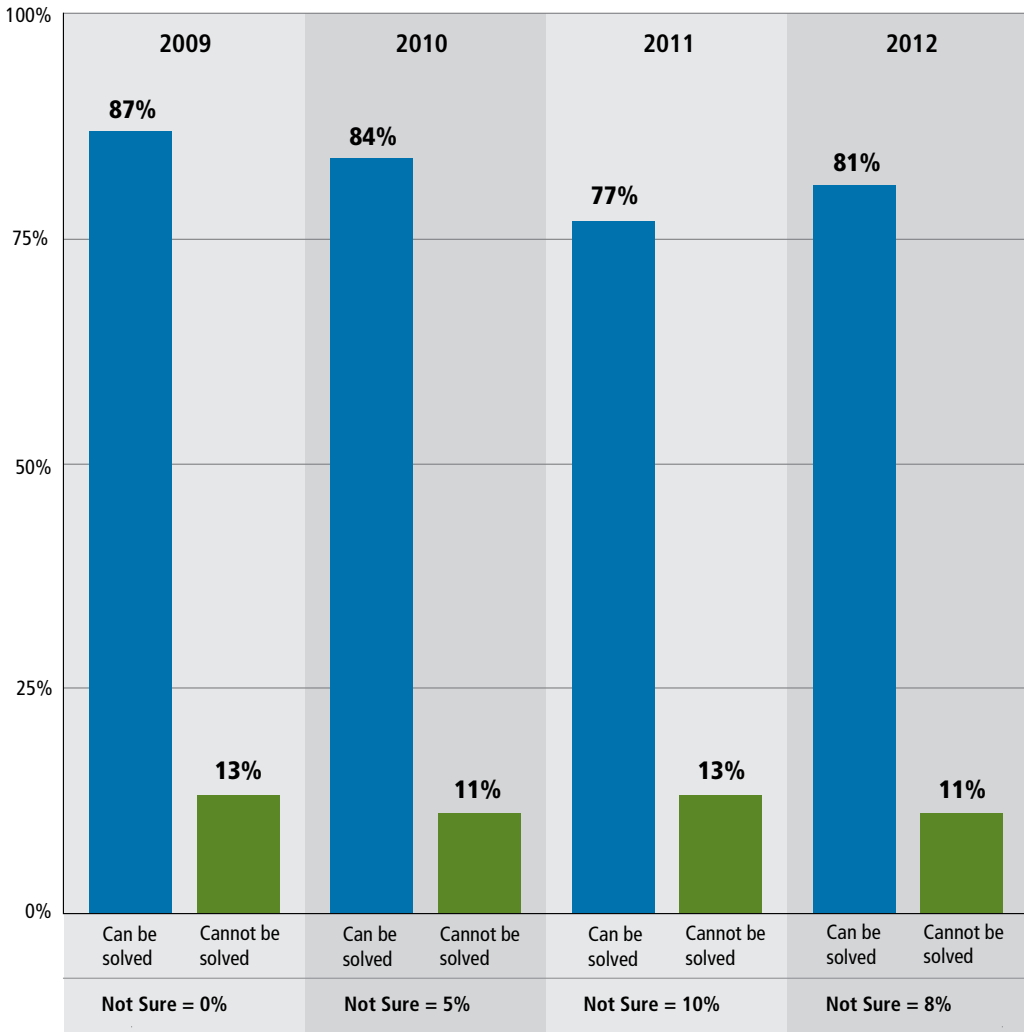
### **Key Findings About Political Orientation and Sector Confidence**

- Conservatives, moderates, and liberals all reported increased confidence in America's business leaders in 2012. This was the only sector to inspire increased confidence across the political spectrum.
- Conservative confidence in America's leadership also increased for the military, nonprofits, local governments, Wall Street, and Congress.
- Moderates joined conservatives in having increased confidence in Wall Street.
- Liberals joined conservatives in having increased confidence in America's military leadership.
- Liberals alone felt increased confidence in the leadership of the Executive Branch.
- Confidence in the news media fell sharply among conservatives, moderates, and liberals.

SECTION **4** THE ROLE OF CITIZENS IN EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP

**AMERICANS REMAIN OPTIMISTIC THAT THE COUNTRY'S PROBLEMS CAN BE SOLVED WITH EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP**

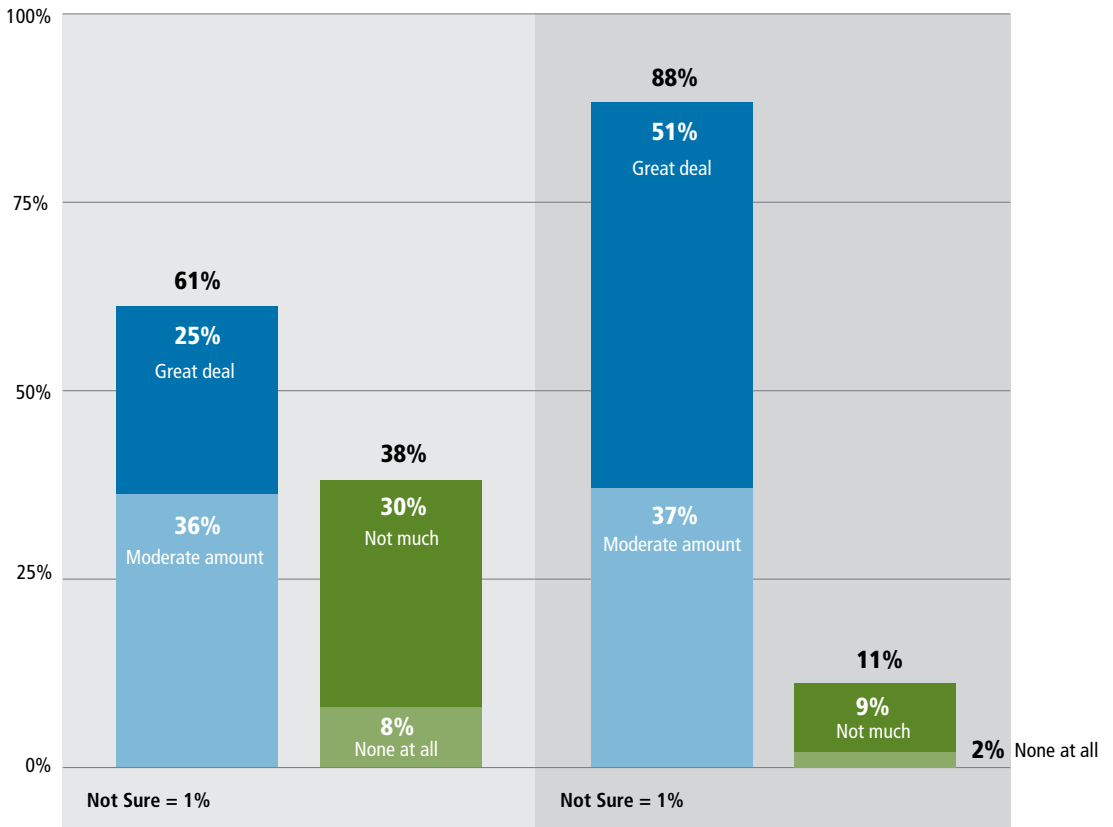
*Would you say that the problems we face today can be solved through effective leadership, or that they cannot be solved no matter who our leaders are?*



- More than 80% of Americans still believe the nation's problems can be solved with effective leadership.
- That figure has remained the same, statistically, for three years.

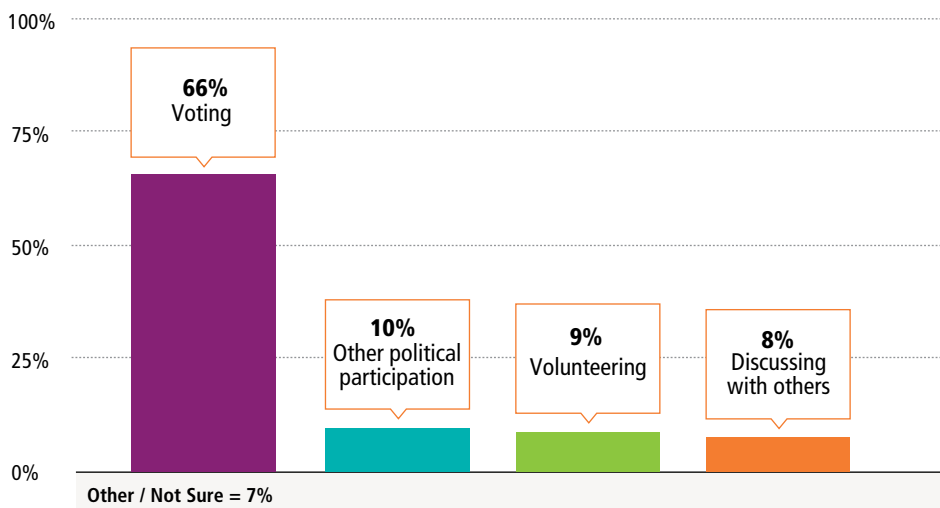
How much power would you say ordinary citizens have to help make America's leadership more effective?

How much personal responsibility do you feel to actively participate in making America's leadership more effective?



- 61% of Americans believe that ordinary citizens have a *great deal* or a *moderate amount* of power to help make America's leadership more effective.
- 88% of Americans feel they have a *great deal* or a *moderate amount* of personal responsibility to participate in making America's leadership more effective.

Which of the following actions do you believe is the best way for you, personally, to help make America's leadership more effective—voting in local and national elections; participating in politics in some other way, such as by working on political campaigns; volunteering in your community through charity and non-profit groups; or discussing the issues with your family, friends, and neighbors?



- A substantial majority of Americans—66%—believe voting is the best way to help make America's leadership more effective.

## ABOUT THE STUDY

The National Study of Confidence in Leadership is a social science research program examining Americans' attitudes toward the nation's leaders. The study includes the *National Leadership Index 2012*, a multidimensional measure of the public's confidence in leadership within different sectors of society.

The National Study of Confidence in Leadership was launched in 2005. Since then, the study has continued to bring new insights to our understanding of the public's confidence in America's leadership. For the 2005–2011 reports and information on the long-term scope, goals, and contributions of the study, please visit the project website:

<http://hks.harvard.edu/leadership>

## METHODS

Survey results were obtained through telephone interviews of a weighted, representative sample of United States citizens, 18 years of age or older, residing in the fifty states and District of Columbia. Study data were collected by Merriman River Group using using automated (IVR) surveys.

Interviews were conducted September 17, 18, 19, 20, and 23, 2012 during evening hours appropriate to each local time zone. A total of 1,013 interviews were completed. Current U.S. Census figures were used to weight the sample based on the demographic dimensions of age, sex, race/ethnicity, marital/relationship status, and region to ensure that the sample was representative of the adult population. Statistical weighting was conducted by the study's author.

# APPENDICES

## Appendix 1 DEMOGRAPHICS

Telephone interviews were conducted with a random sample of 1,013 adult U.S. citizens. The tables present rounded, weighted characteristics of the survey sample.

**Table 1.1: Personal Characteristics**

		PERCENT
<b>Gender</b>	Male	49
	Female	51
<b>Age</b>	18–24	10
	25–34	21
	35–49	27
	50–64	25
	65 & over	17
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	White	64
	African American/Black	11
	Asian American/Asian	1
	Hispanic/Latino	16
	Other/mixed	8
<b>Marital Status</b>	Married	56
	Single, never married	22
	Divorced/Separated	11
	Widowed	8
	Living with a partner	3
<b>Military Family</b>	Yes	18
	No	82

**Table 1.2: Socioeconomic Position**

		PERCENT
<b>Education</b>	No degree	5
	High school degree	36
	College degree	37
	Postgraduate degree	22
<b>Employment Status</b>	Employed full-time	42
	Employed part-time	10
	Self-employed	8
	Student	1
	Retired	24
	Homemaker	6
	Unemployed	9
<b>Annual Household Income</b>	Less than \$50,000	45
	\$50,000–\$100,000	35
	\$100,000 or above	20

**Table 1.3: Geographic Location**

		PERCENT
<b>Region</b>	Northeast	18
	Midwest	22
	South	37
	West	23
<b>Community</b>	Big city	22
	Small city	26
	Suburb	22
	Small town	21
	Rural area	9

**Table 1.4: Civic/Communal Values**

		PERCENT
<b>Political Affiliation</b>	Democrat	32
	Republican	27
	Independent	37
	Other	3
	Not sure	1
<b>Political Orientation</b>	Liberal	20
	Moderate	39
	Conservative	35
	Not sure	6
<b>Tea Party</b>	Yes	12
	No	78
	Not sure	10
<b>Importance of Organized Religion</b>	Very important	46
	Somewhat important	24
	Not very important	17
	Not important at all	11
<b>Born-again/ Evangelical Christian</b>	Yes	34
	No	58
	Not sure	8

## Appendix 2

## INDEXING WEIGHTS, CONFIDENCE SCORES, AND MEAN CHANGES BY SECTOR

Sector	Indexing Weight	2005 Mean (SD)	2006 Mean (SD)	2007 Mean (SD)	2008 Mean (SD)	2009 Mean (SD)	2010 Mean (SD)	2011 Mean (SD)	2012 Mean (SD)	Mean change (2010–2011)	Cohen's <i>d</i> (2010–2011)
Business	0.08	100.9 (26.1)	98.4 (26.1)	100.0 (25.3)	86.6 (29.0)	90.1 (28.2)	92.5 (25.3)	87.3 (29.7)	92.8 (28.1)	5.4*	0.19
Congress	0.10	96.8 (28.7)	93.3 (28.0)	92.5 (28.5)	84.5 (29.6)	85.6 (30.9)	81.4 (27.6)	73.2 (27.8)	74.6 (27.6)	1.5	0.05
Education	0.02	107.6 (27.4)	105.5 (28.0)	103.0 (28.2)	96.8 (29.8)	96.3 (29.2)	93.7 (28.9)	88.3 (31.9)	88.7 (30.6)	0.5	0.01
Executive Branch	0.21	96.2 (37.2)	92.8 (36.2)	89.2 (35.9)	79.6 (36.2)	93.7 (39.4)	90.8 (36.7)	84.5 (39.9)	87.3 (42.4)	2.8	0.07
Local Government	0.05	100.8 (28.5)	102.6 (27.8)	98.3 (29.6)	99.2 (28.7)	99.2 (28.8)	96.1 (28.2)	95.5 (28.6)	97.9 (27.4)	2.3	0.08
Medical	0.05	112.0 (24.4)	110.8 (25.8)	109.0 (26.6)	109.1 (27.3)	103.1 (28.7)	108.4 (25.8)	105.1 (28.4)	105.7 (27.2)	0.6	0.02
Military	0.12	115.4 (27.3)	114.2 (28.4)	113.3 (29.1)	112.5 (29.9)	119.7 (25.8)	114.2 (26.7)	112.1 (29.5)	117.4 (25.1)	5.3*	0.19
News Media	0.03	87.7 (30.6)	87.5 (30.3)	83.5 (30.7)	84.3 (30.8)	77.0 (30.2)	82.7 (27.7)	84.4 (31.9)	77.5 (30.9)	-6.9*	-0.22
Nonprofit & Charity	0.02	106.1 (27.5)	106.1 (27.9)	102.5 (26.1)	103.0 (28.3)	100.2 (28.9)	103.0 (25.5)	97.8 (28.0)	99.6 (27.3)	1.8	0.07
Religious	0.07	106.2 (29.5)	103.5 (30.6)	101.6 (30.3)	94.0 (33.5)	92.2 (31.6)	93.9 (30.0)	94.1 (31.8)	94.8 (31.4)	0.7	0.02
State Government	0.08	98.5 (29.5)	100.0 (29.7)	101.0 (29.0)	96.4 (29.7)	89.8 (31.9)	87.8 (29.0)	87.8 (31.4)	89.8 (31.9)	2.0	0.06
Supreme Court	0.09	105.4 (28.7)	104.9 (28.6)	104.9 (28.0)	99.3 (31.1)	99.6 (29.0)	100.3 (27.7)	92.7 (29.2)	93.5 (29.0)	0.8	0.03
Wall Street	0.08	91.3 (28.1)	91.4 (28.0)	92.2 (28.8)	72.4 (28.1)	69.7 (27.4)	74.6 (27.0)	70.8 (27.2)	75.3 (28.1)	4.5*	0.16

## NOTES

- Completed Interviews:
  - 2005:  $N = 1,374$ ; margin of error  $\pm 2.6\%$ .
  - 2006:  $N = 1,604$ ; margin of error  $\pm 2.5\%$ .
  - 2007:  $N = 1,207$ ; margin of error  $\pm 2.8\%$ .
  - 2008:  $N = 997$ ; margin of error  $\pm 3.1\%$ .
  - 2009:  $N = 1,040$ ; margin of error  $\pm 3.0\%$ .
  - 2010:  $N = 1,029$ ; margin of error  $\pm 3.1\%$ .
  - 2011:  $N = 1,065$ ; margin of error  $\pm 3.0\%$ .
  - 2012:  $N = 1,013$ ; margin of error  $\pm 3.1\%$ .
- Results from the 2005–2008 *National Leadership Index* publications were rescaled to match the current scale, where 100.0 denotes an average level of confidence (see Appendix 3).
- Asterisk (\*) denotes all changes from 2011–2012 that are statistically significant at the  $p < .05$  level.
- Cohen's *d* provides a standardized estimate of the magnitude of the difference in means (effect size), which is calculated by dividing the difference in means by the pooled standard deviation.

## Appendix 3 NUMERIC VALUES FOR SECTION 3

Sector	2011 Mean (SD)	2012 Mean (SD)	Mean Change (2011–2012)	Cohen's <i>d</i> (2011–2012)
<b>CONSERVATIVE</b>				
Business	94.7 (31.0)	101.1 (26.5)	6.4*	0.22
Congress	71.8 (25.0)	76.8 (27.3)	5.0*	0.19
Education	75.7 (28.2)	79.1 (30.7)	3.3	0.11
Executive	60.1 (30.3)	59.8 (30.6)	-0.3	0.01
Local Gov't	91.4 (29.3)	96.2 (28.0)	4.8*	0.17
Medical	103.4 (29.0)	105.2 (27.6)	1.7	0.06
Military	116.0 (26.4)	121.4 (22.2)	5.4*	0.22
News Media	72.6 (31.3)	65.5 (28.5)	-7.2*	0.24
Nonprofit	91.2 (29.1)	96.1 (28.7)	4.9*	0.17
Religious	100.0 (29.6)	103.6 (27.2)	3.6	0.13
State Gov't	90.7 (33.5)	93.9 (34.2)	3.2	0.10
Supreme Court	85.1 (29.1)	87.4 (27.6)	2.3	0.08
Wall Street	74.2 (27.2)	78.9 (28.3)	4.7*	0.17
<b>MODERATE</b>				
Business	85.7 (28.7)	90.1 (27.2)	4.4*	0.16
Congress	72.2 (27.9)	72.6 (26.6)	0.3	0.01
Education	89.3 (29.8)	90.3 (29.6)	0.9	0.03
Executive	91.2 (40.3)	91.9 (41.7)	0.7	0.02
Local Gov't	97.6 (28.0)	98.0 (27.0)	0.4	0.01
Medical	104.4 (28.6)	106.3 (26.0)	1.9	0.07
Military	111.6 (29.7)	114.7 (25.2)	3.2	0.12
News Media	85.6 (29.8)	79.9 (30.8)	-5.7*	0.19
Nonprofit	99.8 (27.1)	99.5 (26.1)	-0.3	0.01
Religious	92.7 (31.5)	92.4 (31.6)	-0.3	0.01
State Gov't	86.8 (31.5)	87.2 (31.1)	0.4	0.01
Supreme Court	95.9 (29.3)	97.6 (28.0)	1.7	0.06
Wall Street	69.5 (28.0)	75.3 (27.7)	5.8*	0.21
<b>LIBERAL</b>				
Business	77.0 (25.7)	82.3 (28.2)	5.3*	0.20
Congress	71.9 (29.8)	69.6 (29.6)	-2.3	0.08
Education	102.7 (31.0)	96.5 (30.2)	-6.2*	0.20
Executive	109.9 (33.8)	118.9 (32.9)	9.0*	0.27
Local Gov't	94.4 (29.6)	97.6 (27.7)	3.2	0.11
Medical	105.9 (27.5)	102.3 (29.5)	-3.6	0.11
Military	105.4 (32.5)	111.2 (29.2)	5.8*	0.19
News Media	95.0 (30.6)	88.1 (29.7)	-6.9*	0.23
Nonprofit	101.5 (28.6)	101.0 (26.3)	-0.4	0.02
Religious	81.4 (32.3)	79.3 (31.5)	-2.1	0.07
State Gov't	83.7 (29.4)	85.7 (29.6)	2.0	0.07
Supreme Court	93.5 (27.0)	92.6 (32.1)	-0.9	0.03
Wall Street	65.0 (26.0)	64.7 (26.8)	-0.3	0.01

• Asterisk (\*) denotes all changes from 2011–2012 that are statistically significant at the  $p < .05$  level.

• Cohen's *d* provides a standardized estimate of the magnitude of the difference in means (effect size), which is calculated by dividing the difference in means by the pooled standard deviation.

## Appendix 4 INDEX CALCULATIONS

Sector leadership confidence and the overall confidence score of the *National Leadership Index* are centered on a score of 100.0, which represents Americans' average level of leadership confidence. Calculations were conducted using benchmark data from the 2005–2007 *National Leadership Index* surveys as follows:

- The benchmark for indexing confidence scores was calculated as the average score for each individual respondent from the 2005, 2006, and 2007 surveys on two questions: “We have a leadership crisis in America today” and “Unless we get better leaders, the United States will decline as a nation.” Responses to those items were coded on a linear scale in which *strongly agree* = 4, *agree* = 3, *disagree* = 2, and *strongly disagree* = 1.
- Confidence scores of each respondent for each sector were coded on a linear scale in which *a great deal of confidence* = 4, *a moderate amount* = 3, *not much* = 2, and *none at all* = 1.
- Correlations of confidence scores for each of the 13 sectors to the benchmark were then calculated. The indexing weight for each sector was calculated as the magnitude of that sector’s correlation with the benchmark relative to the magnitude of the correlations of the 12 other sectors to the benchmark so that the 13 weights summed to 1.00.
- Weighted mean sector confidence scores were calculated by multiplying sector means by their respective weights.
- A grand mean of the 13 weighted mean sector confidence scores was then calculated. This weighted grand mean, which equaled 2.75 (on the 1–4 scale) represents the average overall level of Americans’ leadership confidence across sectors and years.
- The weighted national average confidence score of 2.75 was rescaled to equal 100.0.
- Sector confidence scores and weighted *National Leadership Index* scores were then calculated and rescaled around the weighted grand mean of 100.0 with a possible range of 41.6 to 141.6.
- Ranges for confidence scale anchors were then calculated: *none at all* = 41.6–66.6, *not much* = 66.7–91.6, *a moderate amount* = 91.7–116.6, *a great deal* = 116.7–141.6.



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### *Center for Public Leadership*

Established through a generous gift from the Wexner Foundation, the Center for Public Leadership at Harvard Kennedy School seeks to advance the frontiers of knowledge about leadership through research and teaching. It is equally committed to broadening and deepening the pool of leaders for the common good through cocurricular activities that include skill-building workshops, public service fellowships, and programming in leadership for social change.

[www.hks.harvard.edu/leadership](http://www.hks.harvard.edu/leadership)

### *Harvard Kennedy School*

The mission of Harvard Kennedy School is to train enlightened public leaders and to generate the ideas that provide the answers to our most challenging public problems. Through our rigorous education programs and cutting-edge research initiatives, we seek to influence and improve governance and the development of smart public policy at all levels.



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### *Merriman River Group*

Merriman River Group is a consulting organization, founded in 1998, that specializes in public opinion research, election supervision and administration, and communications. Their products and services have been used by media outlets, political campaigns, universities, labor unions, corporations, and government agencies.

Merriman River Group's Research and Communication Services Division offers opinion research and analysis, voter outreach tools, and automated reverse notification systems. In 2010, they launched the NexGen IVR automated polling system, which provides affordable, rapid, and accurate opinion research and analysis. NexGen IVR has been used to conduct public and private national surveys and local polls throughout the U.S.—from New England to Hawaii.

Merriman River Group became leaders in election management by applying advanced technology to improve voting systems. They have designed proprietary, user-friendly systems that increase voter access while providing greater security, accuracy, and verification.

Merriman River Group has offices in Hamden, Connecticut and Los Angeles, California. For more information, please visit [www.merrimanriver.com](http://www.merrimanriver.com).



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