



**10th Annual New Partners for Smart Growth**  
**Building Safe, Healthy and Livable Communities**

# **BASICS OF POLLING**

## **February 4, 2011**

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# *There are two different types of public opinion research:*

## **Qualitative**

- Open-end discussion;
- Small groups of people;
- In-depth probing;
- Understanding perceptions, opinions, beliefs, and attitudes;
- Answers “why?” and “how?”

## **Quantitative**

- Closed-end questions;
- Large number of people;
- Limited number of questions;
- Broad data, generalized results;
- Answers “what?” and “how many?”

# ***Limited Resources?***



**Then do a survey – not a focus group.**

# The Sample

## Sample Size: How Many People Should We Interview?

- The number of people that are interviewed is largely dependent on resources/declining value for margin of error.
  - The more people you interview the more accurate your results will be.
- 
- Think of the population as an entire pot of soup.
  - Just a few spoonfuls will give you a taste;
  - But a lot of spoonfuls will give you a much better sense of the full flavor.



# Margin of Error

**Sample Size**

**Margin of Error**

**N=300**

**±5.66%**

**N=350**

**±5.24%**

**N=400**

**±4.9%**

**N=600**

**±4.00%**

**N=800**

**±3.46%**



# ***Selection of Sample***

- **Most voter surveys are conducted using land-line phones.**
- **The quality of voter files can vary wildly, but have the advantage of providing vote history – a telling indicator of likelihood to turn out.**
- **Not everyone answers surveys – but enough do that it is still an accurate indicator of voters' sentiment.**

# Who Pays for the Poll?

- Polls paid for by public agencies are PUBLIC records; this limits the kinds of questions you can ask, given that your opponents can request the results (although you may be able to submit a summary rather than entire survey).
- Polls paid for by private organizations and campaigns do not have to be released in any way shape or form. This gives you far more freedom to ask tough questions, and is a preferable approach.

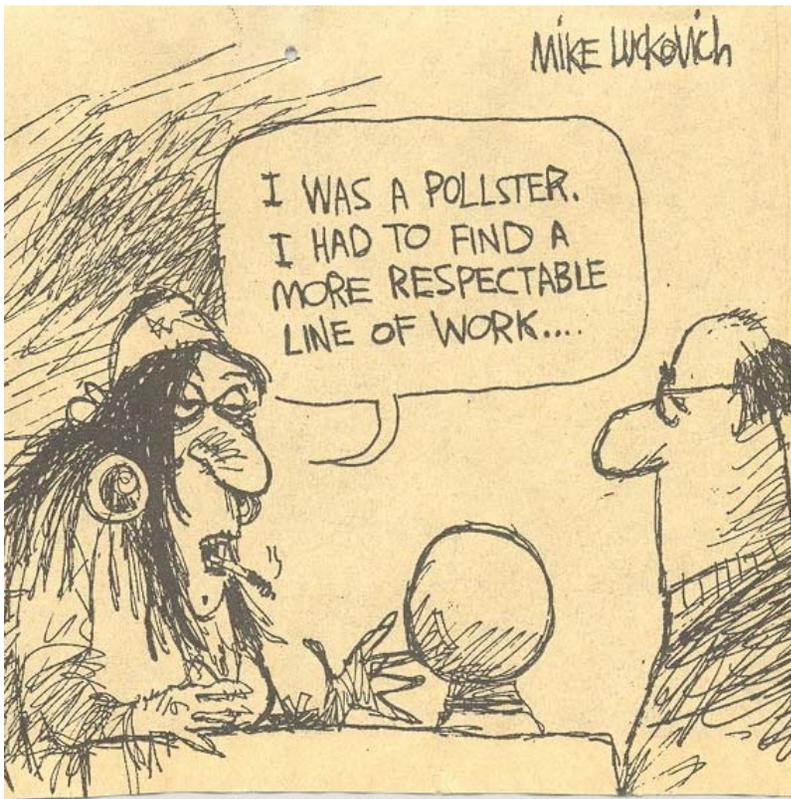
VIZARD OF ID

By Brant Parker and Johnny Hart



# Who Conducts the Poll?

## Look for a pollster who...



- Professional, full-time pollster who specializes in political or election-related research;
- Experience in polling on funding measures;
- Someone who will be seen as credible (because of past track record, partisan affiliation, geographic location, or existing relationships) with anyone you need to persuade with research results (donors, elected officials, opinion leaders, coalition members, etc.).

# ***How do you write survey questions?***

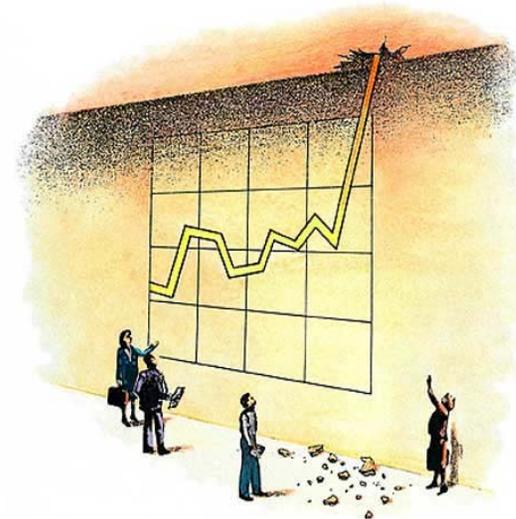
- **Tell your pollster what you need to find out, and they'll draft the questions. That's what you're paying them for.**
- **Shorter and simpler is always better.**
- **Ask yourself how your campaign will use every survey question; if you don't have an answer, leave it out.**
- **The language and sequence of the ballot question is critical.**



# WHY CONDUCT A SURVEY?

# ***Why Conduct a Poll?***

- 1. Polls are NOT very good at predicting the future – they are a road map or planning tool. As a snapshot of voters at a specific point in time, attitudes can and should change.**



# ***Why Conduct a Poll?***

- 2.** To assess the feasibility of a potential ballot measure by testing very close to actual language. Generally efforts that have 60% support or higher can sustain that support. Intensity also drives voters, so pay attention to “strong” or “definite” support.



# ***Why Conduct a Poll?***

- 3.** To test ballot language since the inclusion or exclusion of key concepts and words can make or break a campaign.



# ***Ballot language matters!***

## ***2008 BALLOT LANGUAGE***

Shall St. Louis County, Missouri impose, in addition to an existing County-wide sales **tax** of one-quarter of one percent for the same purpose, a county-wide sales **tax** of one-half of one percent (0.50%) which shall have a sunset date twenty years from the date on which the **tax** is first imposed, for the purpose of providing a source of **funds** for public transportation purposes, with the **revenues** from one-quarter of one percent (0.25%) to be used for expansion of a light rail system and **revenues** from the remaining one-quarter of one percent (0.25%) to be used for the maintenance and operation of existing public transit facilities?

**ELECTION RESULT: Lost 48% to 52%**



***This cleaner language met with success.***

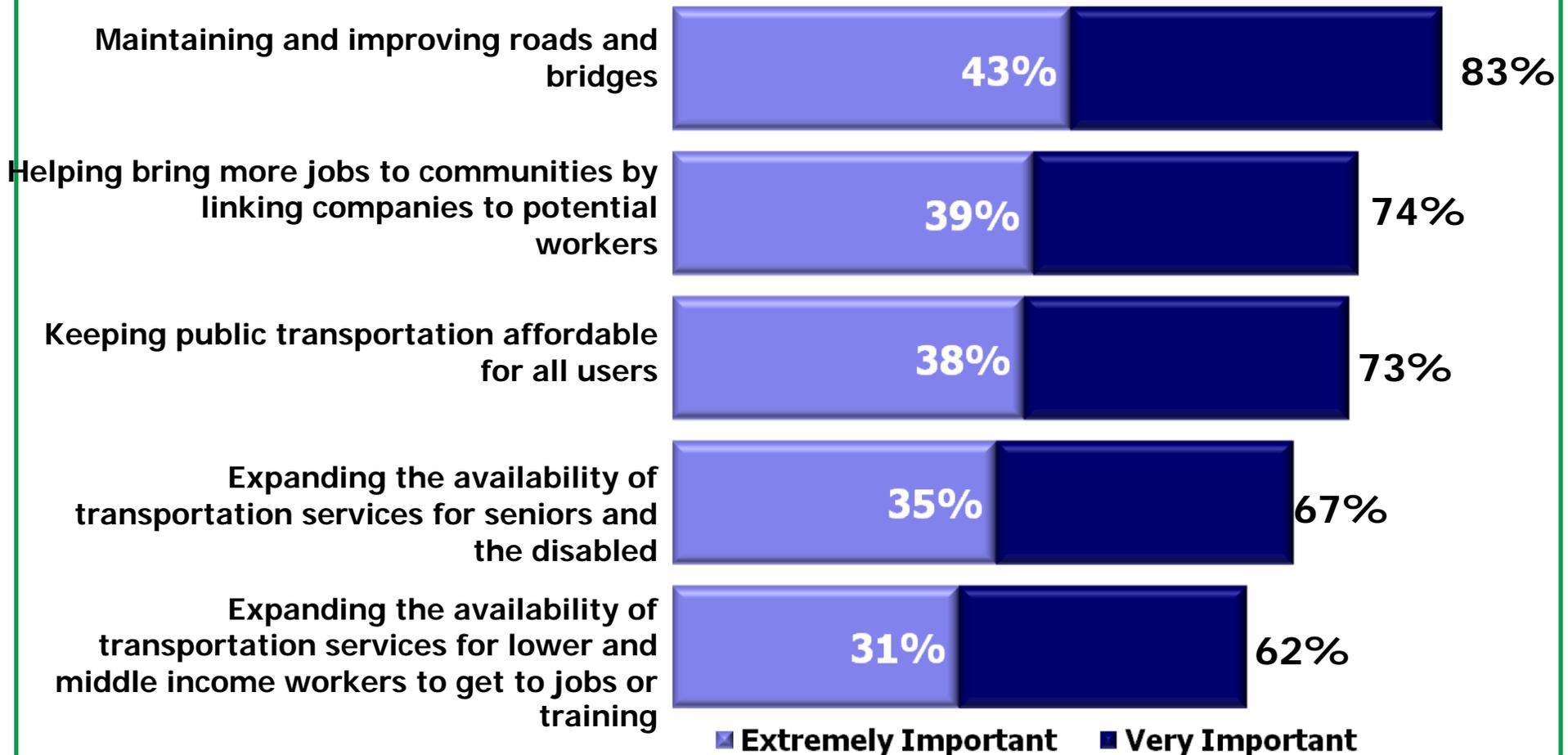
## ***2010 BALLOT LANGUAGE***

**Shall the County of St. Louis impose a countywide sales tax of one-half of one percent for the purpose of providing a source of funds for public transportation purposes including the restoration, operation and expansion of MetroLink, MetroBus, disabled and other senior transportation, in addition to an existing sales tax of one-quarter of one percent for the same purpose?**

**ELECTION RESULT: Passed 63% to 37%**

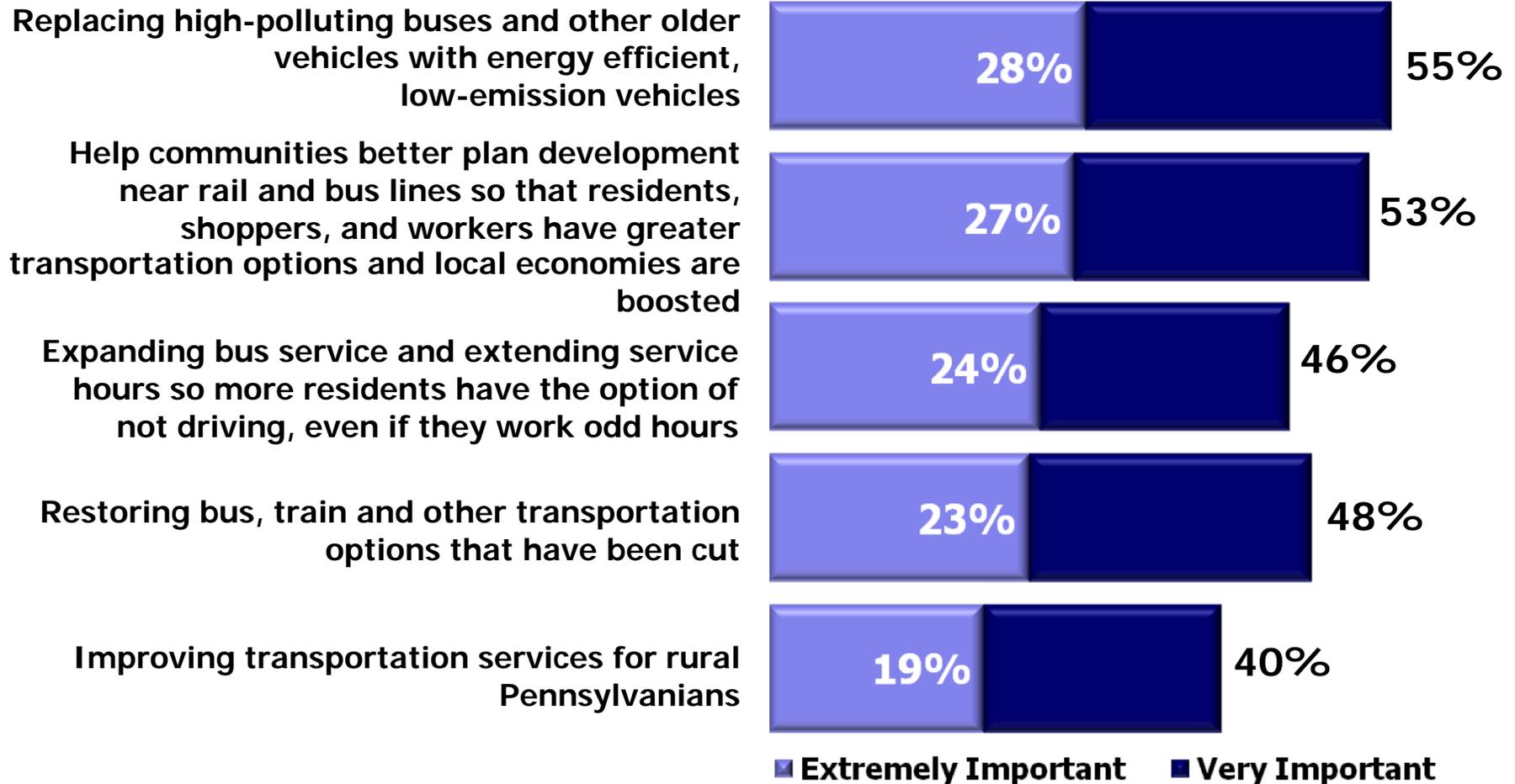


# PA voters demonstrate that how the benefits of transit are described can make transit more personally important.



*Now I am going to read you a list of specific projects that might be funded by one of these transportation proposals. After I read each one, please tell me how important it is to you that each project or service be funded. Is it... extremely important, very important, somewhat important, or not important...*

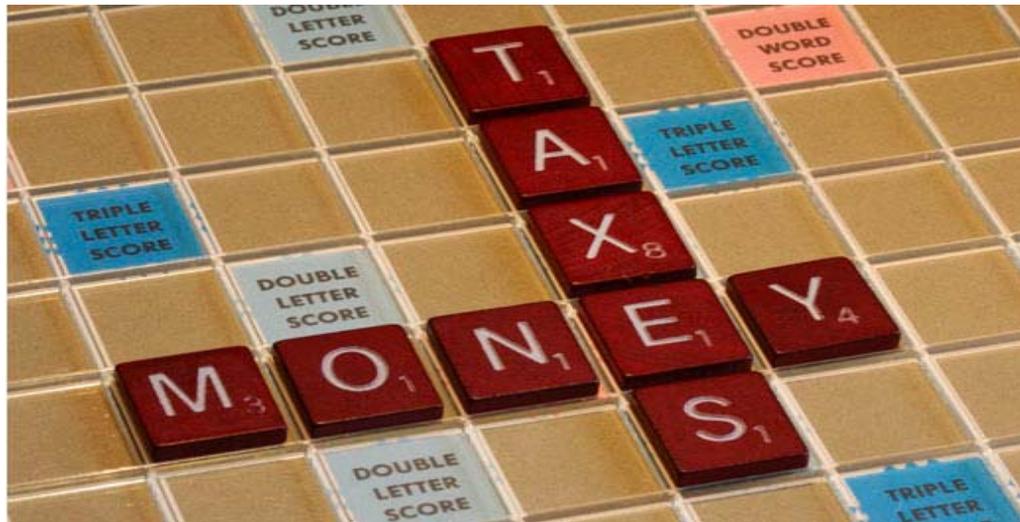
## These uses of funds resonated with fewer Pennsylvanians.



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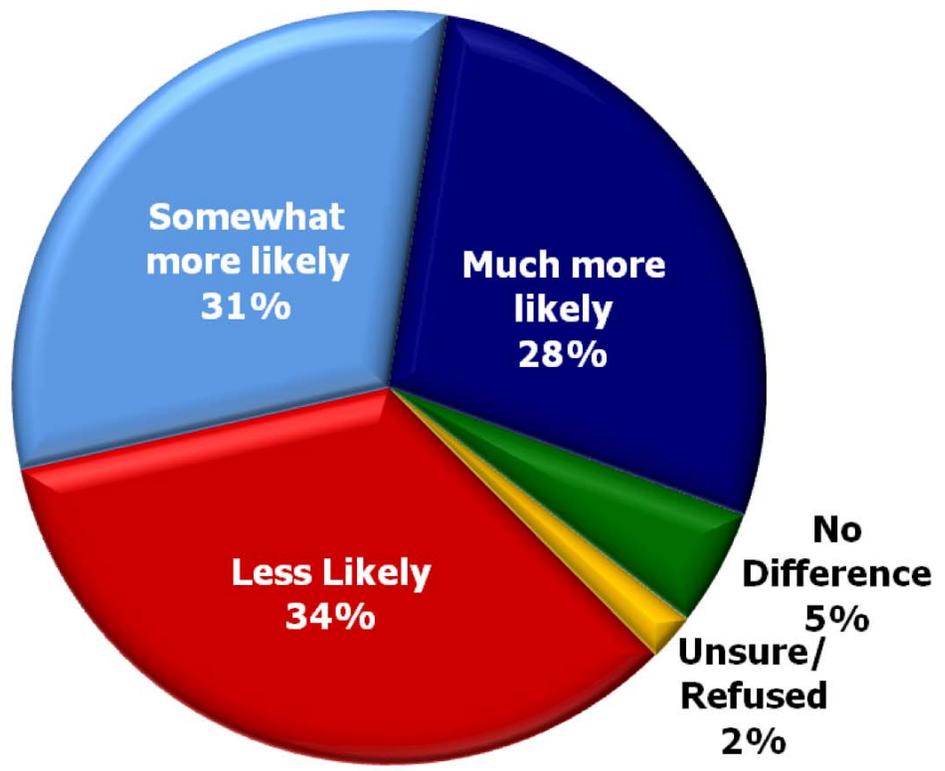
# *Why Conduct a Poll?*

- 5.** To assess the impact that structural components of the ballot measure can make on support (e.g. accountability provisions, funding mechanisms, or amount).



# New Jersey voters were more supportive if they know that funds would be constitutionally dedicated to transportation.

<b>Total More Likely</b>	<b>59%</b>
<b>Total Less Likely</b>	<b>34%</b>



*Thinking just about the proposal for an increase in the gas tax, this could be structured so that, by law, legislators would be constitutionally prevented from using the funds for any purpose other than improving and maintaining our roads, bridges and public transportation through the Transportation Trust Fund. Would you be more likely or less likely to find an increase in the gas tax acceptable if you knew that these funds would be constitutionally dedicated to transportation?*

# ***Why Conduct a Poll?***

- 6.** To test messages AND messengers. In other words, what do you say and who should say it? More importantly, what impact does that have on vote intentions?



*% Very Convincing*

*Accountable*

Government officials must be held accountable for how our transportation tax dollars are spent. We cannot afford to build more roads, while existing roads are in disrepair.

52%

*Income*

Expanding and improving our transportation options will help those of poor or modest incomes or those without cars have a way to get to their jobs, training programs or school.

48%

*Health*

A better network of roads and trails that are safe for walking and bicycling would help Americans stay active and healthy. Kids could walk or bike to school, families and workers would have better transportation options, and those who choose to walk or bicycle can be healthier.

44%

*Progress*

It has been 50 years since government really looked at our transportation needs. We need our leaders to have their eyes on the future and invest in modern transportation options, including public transportation. We cannot rely on yesterday's transportation options in our 21st century economy.

41%

# ***Demographics***

- **Age**
- **Education**
- **Party**
- **Transportation use**
- **Ideology**
- **Ethnicity**
- **Gender**

# What should I be looking for in the survey results and cross-tabs?

*Focus on the following:*

- Do voters initially support your measure? How strongly?
- Which groups of voters support your measure, which oppose it, and who are the swing voters?
- What messages and messengers are most persuasive?
- How effective are your opponents' messages?
- After they've heard both sides, will voters support you?
- Is the conventional wisdom or "insiders' assessment" of the measure correct, or does the voting population have a different view?





PUBLIC OPINION  
STRATEGIES

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