



## **THE DIMENSIONS OF DISGUST: Citizen Attitudes and Codes of Campaign Conduct**

A White Paper from the Institute for Global Ethics

by Dr. John C. Green of the Bliss Institute, University of Akron, Ohio,  
with a Foreword and Afterword by Brad Rourke of the Institute for Global Ethics

Eligible voters in the United States are turning away from the voting booth—and from politics—in record numbers. A major factor in this exodus is the candidates' increasing reliance on attack-based, negative campaigning.

Since 1997, the Institute for Global Ethics has directed the Project on Campaign Conduct, an effort to promote the use of voluntary, candidate-endorsed codes of campaign ethics to address attack advertising and the cynicism it engenders. The Institute's work in this area has included direct candidate and citizen engagement, major advertising campaigns, and conferences.

This project has also included significant, sustained public opinion research. This report is an overview and analysis of the Institute's groundbreaking Civic Values Surveys, a set of five public opinion polls administered by bipartisan researchers to various U.S. populations since 1998. The Civic Values Survey is a political survey without the "horse-race" questions: Instead of asking who the respondent is going to vote for, the survey is designed to probe attitudes about politics in general and political ethics in particular.

Among our findings:

More than eight in ten voters say attack-oriented campaigning is unethical, undermines democracy, lowers voter turnout, and produces less ethical elected officials.

Seventy-six percent of voters think negative campaigning produces less-ethical and less-trustworthy leaders.

More than 80 percent of voters think this type of campaigning makes people less likely to vote.

But voters aren't ready to throw in the towel. Instead, they are eager to hold candidates accountable for what they say and do to get elected, and are willing to reward those who take the high road.

This report was prepared by Dr. John C. Green, director of the Ray C. Bliss Institute of Applied Politics and professor of Political Science at the University of Akron in Akron, Ohio. Dr. Green is a prominent student of the U.S. electoral climate who has been an advisor to the Project on Campaign Conduct since its inception. The Foreword and Afterword were written by Brad Rourke,

who directed the Project on Campaign Conduct during the period (June 1998 through June 2002) covered by these studies. The authors and the Institute wish to thank the trustees of The Pew Charitable Trusts for their generous support of this project over six years. For more information on this report or the Project on Campaign Conduct, please contact the Institute for Global Ethics.

## **PROJECT ON CAMPAIGN CONDUCT NATIONAL ADVISORY BOARD**

Derek Bok  
*President Emeritus, Harvard University*

Alan Simpson  
*Former U.S. Senator for the state of Wyoming*

Susan Estrich  
*Professor of Law, University of Southern California*

Estus Smith  
*Vice President and COO, The Kettering Foundation*

Ron Faucheux  
*Editor-in-chief, Campaigns and Elections*

Timothy P. Smucker  
*Chairman, J. M. Smucker Company*

Carolyn Jefferson-Jenkins  
*Former President, League of Women Voters*

James Thurber  
*Director, Center for Congressional and Presidential Studies, American University (DC)*

Newton N. Minow  
*Former Chairman of the U.S. Federal Communications Commission*

Daniel Yankelovich  
*President, The Public Agenda Foundation*

J. W. Peltason  
*Former President, University of California*

Raul Yzaguirre  
*President, La Raza*

Patricia Schroeder  
*Former U.S. Representative for the state of California*  
*President and CEO, Association of American Publishers*



## FOREWORD

*by Brad Rourke of the Institute for Global Ethics*

The world's first campaign law didn't stem from Watergate. It was enacted around 300 B.C. in Rome, making it illegal to use chalk to artificially whiten one's toga and so appear more attractive. Even in ancient history, people were concerned enough with political behavior to pass laws regulating it.

In the United States, the first campaign finance law—the Naval Appropriations Act—was enacted in 1867, prohibiting government employees from seeking political funds. By the 1880s, the newly formed Civil Service was constantly being shaken down for political contributions in exchange for jobs, and so the law was expanded to include all government workers.

Many would argue that the current failings of our political system aren't new: They've existed for as long as the system itself. There are still great temptations for misbehavior when the stakes—the governance of a country—are so high. To combat those temptations, the United States has an intricate and wide-ranging set of laws and regulations designed to make sure the system works fairly. Many of these laws stem from a 1974 overhaul of the U.S. campaign finance system, though some date from earlier and others have developed since then.

Even so, most everyone agrees that rules just aren't enough. Many believe our political process makes it harder and harder for everyone—candidates and citizens alike—to participate. These days, taking an active role in politics and elections simply doesn't find a prominent place in people's lives.

But declining voter turnout isn't the only red flag. Evidence of a deep mistrust and suspicion of their leaders by the citizens is everywhere.

Contemporary polls suggest that many Americans have little faith in their elected leaders. They're suspicious of politicians' relationships with lobbyists. They feel that politicians care more about campaign funds than about constituents. And they no longer believe what is said on the campaign trail.

There are numerous causes for these suspicions. Many would agree that a growing gulf between the government and those it governs, the perception of a rising tide of scandal and a deepening ethical chasm in high places, and an increasing appetite for sensationalism on the part of the press all add to the problem.

Many say that a lingering resentment stems from the seemingly increasing prevalence of negative, attack campaigning. Members of Congress who have been in office for an extended period of time say that it is next to impossible to do the work of crafting thoughtful legislation



today. The new crops of legislators continue to ride in on such waves of vitriol that the vital bipartisan compromises can't be made.

But to focus simply on how much is “getting done” is to miss a broader problem: Research shows that increasingly, Americans are unhappy with the way we go about choosing our elected leadership—and that one of the factors underlying citizens' dissatisfaction is politicians' increasing reliance on negative, attack-oriented campaigning.

At the Institute for Global Ethics, we hope to change that.

In the 1998 election cycle, with support from The Pew Charitable Trusts, the Institute experimented with encouraging voluntary, consensus-based candidate codes of conduct in the congressional races in two test states, Ohio and Washington. The test was successful insofar as it demonstrated the viability of codes of conduct as a means of affecting the tone of elections. In 2000, again with support from Pew, the Institute sought to demonstrate the staying power of the codes-of-conduct approach by returning to Ohio and Washington and seeking more participation. The 2000 iteration demonstrated that, indeed, the elite political landscape had been altered sufficiently that it was demonstrably easier to obtain participation from a wider variety of players.

### **The Project on Campaign Conduct**

The Project on Campaign Conduct seeks to renew elections as meaningful events in the lives of citizens by turning the tide described above, encouraging a reengaged electorate.

Our belief is that the electorate stands ready for this involvement. Our research reveals an electorate that is frustrated with its leadership, primarily due to the high aspirations it has for the political process. Voters are ready, this research suggests, to demand better. We seek to help create a social movement for clean campaigning, the seeds of which are already present throughout the political landscape.

The process is designed to bring each campaign to an agreement, facilitated by us, about what would comprise a code for that race. Each code is a consensus document. Unlike some previous efforts, the candidates themselves typically draft these codes. While we are there to help, we make it clear that we are not the “ethics police”: It is up to the candidates and the media—and ultimately the voters—to decide whether candidates have abided by the code.

The conceptual challenge such an effort faces lies in the need to reduce the negativity of campaigning without interfering with lively, vibrant campaign discourse.



Our goal is not to stifle the normal, vigorous debate present in any good political campaign. Our nation has a long and proud tradition of strong advocacy in matters affecting government. We encourage honest, forthright criticism of one’s opponent on issues where that is appropriate.

“Illegitimate attacks,” on the other hand, are attacks based on rumor or innuendo, that rely on unflattering and demeaning representations to get their point across, that rely on stereotyping and appeals to fear or prejudice, and that typically focus on personalities rather than issues. These are the behaviors that our polling and other research indicate that voters rightly despise. We seek to create an environment in which illegitimate attacks are less permissible and so, we hope, less used.

### Results of Past Efforts

In the 2000 election cycle in Ohio, there were a total of sixty-eight candidates in the nineteen congressional races on which we focused. We ultimately helped six races come to an agreement. In addition, fifty-seven candidates participated by submitting draft language to us, yielding an overall participation rate of 84 percent. All of the Ohio candidates in congressional districts 2, 3, 9, 11, 14, and 16 signed a code.

In Washington, again in the 2000 election cycle, out of thirty-one congressional candidates, twenty-four—77 percent—participated in one form or another, with all of the candidates in districts 1, 3, 7, and 9 agreeing to sign a code. Out of twenty-five statewide candidates, fourteen—56 percent—participated, with all of the candidates in the races for secretary of state, insurance commissioner, attorney general, and commissioner of public lands signing a code.

As figure 1 indicates, these numbers demonstrate a sharp increase in participation rates from 1998 to 2000.

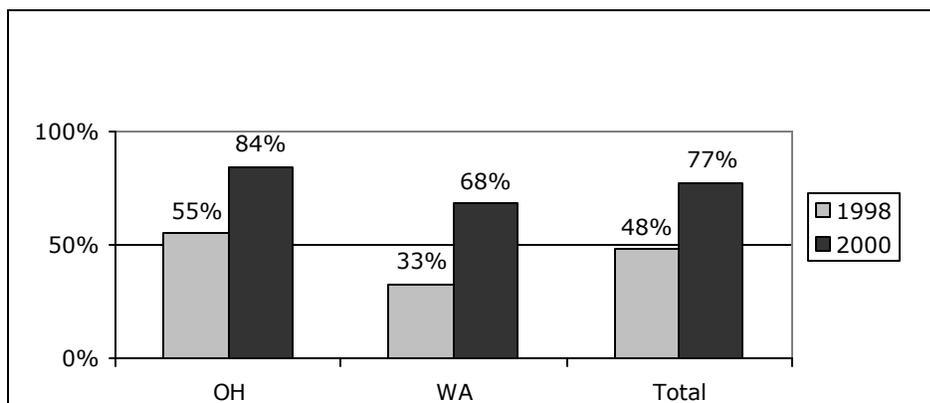


Fig. 1. Project Participation Rates, 1998 and 2000



In our view, our experiences in 1998 and 2000 have demonstrated both the possibility and the viability of codes of conduct as a means of encouraging a better quality of campaign. In 1998, the possibility was established, with a handful of key races choosing to participate in the project and experiencing a resulting change in quality of discourse. Perhaps most notable in 1998 was the race for Washington's Second District congressional seat between incumbent Jack Metcalf and challenger Margarethe Cammermeyer. This was a race that was expected to get quite ugly and, in fact, began to become so—until a code was negotiated and signed by the two candidates. This code changed the tone of the race from a bitter rivalry to a civil exchange, according to the candidates and staffers involved.

In 2000, having established the possibility of codes working, we sought to show their viability in today's political world. We needed to show that more than just a handful of candidates might sign on and that it was possible to institutionalize codes in the political landscape. This we did, boosting participation rates dramatically and solidifying the idea of code-based civic efforts in the minds of the key political insiders in both Ohio and Washington.

In 2002, the Institute sought to significantly expand the reach of the Project on Campaign Conduct. We set the ambitious goal of working in forty congressional races across the country—and we met this goal. In the summer of 2002, the Project on Campaign Conduct trained partners in twenty states, passing on to them our accumulated experience. We worked with the partners as they approached candidates, helped them develop local press strategies, and provided support as they negotiated with candidates in an effort to secure codes of conduct.

In the end, we achieved codes in eight states. In addition, we developed a trained network of dedicated organizations and volunteers, many of whom are already hard at work on municipal races scheduled for 2003.

### **The Civic Values Survey**

A cornerstone of the project was a body of polling research we commissioned in the hopes of determining just how much public support could be garnered for a clean-campaign movement. Conducted by two well-known public opinion research firms, Lake Snell Perry (Democrat) and John Deardourff/The Media Company (Republican), the surveys probed voter, nonvoter, and political donor attitudes with regard to ethics and politics. Did voters really despise negative, attack-oriented campaigning? How important were ethics and integrity when they checked off boxes (or punched ballot cards) in the voting booth? Would they be supportive of a voluntary codes-of-conduct effort? Would it change how they voted?



The following report, by John C. Green of the Bliss Institute at the University of Akron, analyzes the results of five separate surveys taken between 1998 and 2000:

June 1998: Statewide survey of 800 voters and likely voters in Ohio and Washington

November 1999: Nationwide survey of 800 citizens

March 2000: Nationwide survey of 600 donors to political campaigns

November 2000: Statewide survey of 800 voters in Ohio and Washington

June 2002: Nationwide survey of 800 voters

In some ways, our findings do not come as a surprise. Respondents believe that ethics matters in political campaigns, that things have gotten worse in the last twenty years, and that one solution holding promise is the promotion of voluntary candidate codes of conduct.

However, looking past the obvious, we find that U.S. citizens have a far more nuanced view of the political landscape than many insiders give them credit for, and have a consequently much more realistic view of what will work and what will not work to make things better.

Finally, the survey data suggests that some elements of conventional wisdom—especially the adage that political attack advertising may be disliked but works nonetheless—may be wrong.



**THE DIMENSIONS OF DISGUST:  
CITIZEN ATTITUDES AND CODES OF CAMPAIGN CONDUCT**  
by Dr. John C. Green of the Bliss Institute, University of Akron (Ohio)

A high level of public disaffection with the political process characterized U.S. politics during the last third of the twentieth century. In short, ordinary people were increasingly disgusted with politics and politicians. Scholars tracked the rise of this disaffection, beginning with *The Confidence Gap* (1983) and culminating in *Bowling Alone* (2000), and detected its impact on declining voter turnout, decaying party affiliation, and rising distrust of government.<sup>1</sup> Although the causes for this trend were many and complex, the conduct of campaigns played an important role.

For these reasons, the Civic Values Surveys from the Institute for Global Ethics sought to measure the level and variety of public disaffection with politics. Tables 1.1 and 1.2 provide a useful benchmark of public disgust in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The 1999 national sample of the public was asked if national election campaigns had “gotten better or worse” in the last twenty years in terms of “ethics and values.” More than one-half of the respondents reported that campaigns had gotten worse in this regard, and less than one-seventh believed they had gotten better.

---

<sup>1</sup> Seymour Martin Lipset and William Schneider, *The Confidence Gap*. New York: Free Press, 1983. Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000.



**TABLE 1.1**  
**Assessment of National Campaign Ethics by the Public (Percent)**

	Public 1999	Donors 2000
Gotten better	12	7
Stayed about the same	32	32
Gotten worse	56	60

**Question:** Overall, in terms of ethics and values, do you think election campaigns in this country have gotten better or worse in the last twenty years? (N=800 (Public 1999), 600 (Donors 2000))

**TABLE 1.2**  
**Assessment of State Campaign Ethics by the Public (Percent)**

	Ohio 1998	Washington 1998	Public 1999	Public 2002
Gotten better	28	20	14	22
Stayed about the same	39	40	40	47
Gotten worse	33	40	46	31

**Question:** Overall, in terms of ethics and values, do you think election campaigns in your state have gotten better or worse in the last twenty years? (N=800)

A similar perception was shared by a sample of donors to political campaigns taken in 2000: Two-thirds claimed campaigns had declined in terms of ethics and values, while only 7 percent reported an improvement. Since donors know a great deal about campaigns by virtue of their high degree of political involvement, these results are particularly telling: They were even more critical of campaign conduct than the public.

This question was not asked in the 2002 national sample of voters, and instead, the respondents were asked to evaluate the 2000 presidential campaign in terms of its ethics. Some 20 percent of the respondents reported that the Bush and Gore campaigns were more ethical than past presidential campaigns, 44 percent felt they were about the same, and 33 percent felt the campaigns were worse in this regard. While hardly a rousing endorsement of the major candidates' conduct, these figures suggest some perceived improvement between 1999 and 2000.

State campaigns fared a bit better than their national counterparts: Nearly one-half of the 1999 national sample reported that campaign ethics and values had declined in their state, while only about one-sixth believed the situation had improved. In November 2000, the situation was a little better in Ohio and Washington, the two pilot states where the Project on Campaign Conduct was undertaken in 1998 and 2000. In Ohio, one-third of survey respondents reported that ethics and values had declined, while more than one-quarter felt the situation had improved. In Washington, two-fifths reported a decline and one-fifth an improvement. It could be that presidential campaigns were the chief culprits in this regard, although the state figures hardly constitute a ringing endorsement of subnational campaigns.



An evaluation of state campaigns showed an improved outlook in the 2002 national sample, with more than one-fifth claiming that campaigns had gotten better, almost one-half claiming they had stayed about the same, and a little less than one-third feeling they had gotten worse. Essentially, there appears to have been some perceived improvement in the quality of state campaigns between 1999 and 2002.

## **Two Dimensions of Disgust**

The Civic Values Surveys asked a number of questions concerning disaffection with politics and found no shortage of complaints. For example, there was considerable criticism of campaign finance, with over one-half of the public very concerned about the cost of campaigns and the influence of special interest groups. The news media were also an object of criticism: Almost three-fifths of the public strongly agreed that “the media has just become another part of negative personal attack campaigns.” And the public had some sobering thoughts about itself: More than one-half strongly agreed or agreed that “most people don’t seem to be able to tell right from wrong.”

However, a statistical analysis of the survey questions reveals that two dimensions of disgust were especially important—One related to negative campaigning and the other to distrust of politics. Table 2 illustrates these dimensions for the public in 1999, campaign donors in 2000, and the public in 2002.



**TABLE 2**  
**Dimensions of Disgust: Attitudes of Public and Campaign Donors (Percent)**

	Public 1999	Donors 2000	Public 2002
<b>Views of negative campaigning</b>			
Negative, attack-oriented campaigning is unethical	87	74	86
Negative, attack-oriented campaigning produces less ethical leaders	84	70	76
Negative, attack-oriented campaigning hurts democracy	83	69	81
<b>Trust in the political process</b>			
Don't trust the federal government to do the right thing	69	57	56
All or most candidates deliberately twist the truth	60	54	55
Most elected officials don't seem able to tell right from wrong	59	45	53
All or most candidates make unfair personal attacks on opponents	44	40	52

N=800 (Public 1999, Public 2002), 600 (Donors 2000)

On the first dimension of disgust, almost nine in ten respondents in the 1999 national sample strongly or somewhat agreed that “negative, attack oriented campaigning is unethical.” Slightly fewer people feel that negative, attack oriented campaigning produces “less ethical leaders” and “hurts democracy.” Many of respondents were deeply concerned that candidates attacked each other instead of addressing issues (data not shown).

A similar pattern held for the campaign donors, but these highly engaged citizens are less critical of negative campaigning than the public by an average of 14 percentage points. This difference may reflect activists’ greater tolerance for the rough and tumble of campaigns.

A very similar pattern held for the 2002 national sample: Almost the same proportion as in 1999 believed that negative campaigning was unethical and that it undermined democracy. There was, however, a modest decline in the proportion that felt negative campaigning produced less ethical leaders (76 percent to 84 percent).

On the second dimension of disgust, more than two-thirds of the public distrusted the federal government in 1999, claiming it could be trusted “almost never” or “only some of the time.” Three-fifths believed that all or most candidates “deliberately twist” the truth, and that most elected officials “don’t seem to be able to tell right from wrong.” However, less than one-half of the public agreed that all or most candidates “make unfair personal attacks on opponents.”

Once again, the campaign donors show a lower level of distress than the public, by an average of 12 percentage points. These findings suggest that this kind of distrust may result from the much-



publicized misbehavior of a few candidates, and that increased involvement with campaign activity produces greater tolerance for the behavior of candidates.

On this second set of items, there was a consistent improvement in the 2002 national sample: Fewer respondents distrusted the federal government (56 percent versus 69 percent in 1999), believed that candidates deliberately twist the truth (55 percent versus 60 percent), and felt elected officials could not tell right from wrong (53 percent versus 59 percent). These figures fit with the modest improvement in the overall evaluation of campaign conduct between 1999 and 2002 (see tables 1.1 and 1.2). However, the proportion of respondents who felt that politicians made unfair personal attacks on their opponents rose in 2002 (from 44 percent to 52 percent).

One reason for these changes in public attitudes between 1999 and 2002 may be the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. Certainly the increased trust of the federal government measured by our survey is consistent with other polling. In the wake of this national tragedy, the U.S. public increased its support for public institutions and the political process—at least temporarily.

Predictably, national politics became much more civil as political leaders came together to respond to the national crisis. The 2002 sample perceived such a change: Almost two-thirds agreed with the statement, “Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, there has been more civility in government and politics.”

However, the public also appears to have become less tolerant of negative campaigning in a period of national crisis. Three-quarters of the 2002 sample agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, I think it is even more important to get negative attacks out of politics.”

## A Typology of Disgust

How do the two dimensions of disgust fit together? Table 3 outlines a four-fold typology for the public and campaign donors, using the 1999 national sample and the 2000 survey of campaign contributors.<sup>2</sup> (It should be noted that the 1998 state surveys and the 2002 national samples produced very similar results.)

For ease of presentation, we have labeled the largest group of respondents as *Angry*. These citizens are concerned with negative campaigning and also are distrustful of the political process in general. Accounting for roughly three of ten members of the public and campaign donors, they come closest to the common image of disgusted citizens, with frustration with negative campaigns creating distrust of the political process.

---

<sup>2</sup> These categories were produced in two steps. First, factor analysis of the items in tables 1.1 and 1.2 was conducted, producing two factors with eigenvalues greater than one. The factor scores from this analysis were dichotomized at mean and then cross-tabulated to produce the four categories shown in table 3.



**TABLE 3**  
**Typology of Public and Donors Based on the Dimensions of Disgust (Percent)**

	Public 1999	Donors 2000
Angry	30	29
Disillusioned	21	22
Worried	28	28
Complacent	21	21

N=800 (Public 1999), 600 (Donors 2000)

The other three groups fit such an image less perfectly. We have labeled the next group *Disillusioned*. Making up about one-fifth of the public and campaign donors, this group is distrustful of politics, but not particularly concerned with negative campaigning. Here distrust actually may have generated the expectation that candidates would engage in negative campaigning.

We called the next group *Worried*. They are the opposite of the *Disillusioned*—concerned with negative campaigning, but trusting the political process. Almost as numerous as the *Angry*, their concern with negative campaigning may arise from a desire to see the political process work better.

The final group, the *Complacent*, are the opposite of the *Angry*: They are unconcerned with negative campaigning and trusting of the political process. Accounting for the remaining one-fifth of both the public and donor samples, they appear to be reasonably satisfied with the status quo.

### Characteristics of the Typology of Disgust

What are the characteristics of the *Angry*, *Disillusioned*, *Worried*, and *Complacent*? Table 4 lists the salient traits of these groups in the public, providing some hints as to the sources of disgust.



**TABLE 4**  
**Characteristics of Typology of Disgust: Public in 1999 (Percent by type)**

	Angry	Disillusioned	Worried	Complacent
<b>Female</b>	49	54	57	41
<b>Married</b>	55	66	60	52
<b>Non-white</b>	17	18	15	24
<b>Born-again/fundamentalist</b>	46	48	46	55
<b>College degree or graduate training</b>	28	30	41	29
<b>Never volunteer in groups</b>	41	38	30	35
<b>Never read newspaper</b>	39	38	28	30
<b>Probable voter in 2000</b>	60	63	72	73
<b>Party Identification</b>				
Democrat	29	34	46	38
Independent / No affiliation	39	38	28	30
Republican	32	28	26	32
<b>Age</b>				
55 years old or more	38	22	28	25
36 to 54 years old	37	53	42	44
35 years old or less	25	25	30	31

N=800

First, the Worried contains the most women and the Complacent the least, with the other groups resembling the sample mean. The Disillusioned holds the largest number of married respondents and the Complacent the least. So gender and family status are important factors in the varieties of disgust.

The Angry are the oldest group, with almost two-fifths age 55 years or older, and the Complacent and Worried are almost tied for the youngest groups. Thus, age is a factor as well: The older generations are most concerned with the conduct of campaigns. The Complacent contain the largest number of nonwhite and born-again or fundamentalist members—traits on which the other groups differ little. These findings suggest that there are reservoirs of trust and idealism among social groups often thought of as disaffected: youth, minorities, and fundamentalists.

The Worried are the best educated, with 41 percent having a college degree or post-graduate training. The Angry and Complacent tied for the least educated. Not surprisingly, the best-educated citizens respond to campaign conduct in the most sophisticated way—decrying questionable practices, but supporting the ultimate value of politics.

There are also some interesting differences by party identification. The Angry and Disillusioned contain the largest number of Independents and respondents with no party affiliation—arguably the people least connected to the political process. The Worried, followed by the Complacent, are the most Democratic. These groups may represent much of the traditional constituency for political reform in the United States.



It is worth noting, too, that the Angry and the Complacent are tied for the largest number of Republicans. Thus, Republicans appear to be more divided over negative campaigning and trust in government than Democrats.

As one might expect, the Angry and Disillusioned are the most likely to report they “never” volunteer in community organization or read newspapers. They were also the least likely to vote in the 2000 election. Whether this detachment from civic and political affairs is a cause or a consequence of their disgust with politics is hard to say for sure. In contrast, though, the Worried and Complacent appear less detached from civic and political life.

Due to their greater personal wealth and involvement in campaigns, campaign donors have strikingly different views than the public on many matters. For example, donors are more trusting of the government and more tolerant of negative campaigning. Despite these differences, however, the four categories of disgust occur among donors as well.

On a more positive note, relatively few respondents are deeply cynical about the democratic process. For example, more than one-half of the public strongly disagreed with the statement, “It doesn’t matter what you have to do to get elected as long as you behave yourself once you are in office.” And almost three-quarters agreed with the statement, “I prefer elected officials to be honest and fair in their dealings even if they are unsuccessful at getting the best results for the public.” Even the Angry respondents report strong support for democratic ideals despite their disgust with the actual practice of politics. Taken together, these findings suggest that citizens might well find codes of campaign conduct appealing.

### **Codes of Campaign Conduct**

In order to assess the potential support for campaign codes, the Civic Values Surveys asked the public in 1999 and campaign donors in 2000 about their support for a nonpartisan-brokered code of campaign conduct.

Table 5 reports the results for both samples and then for the typology of disgust.



**TABLE 5**  
**Support for Campaign Conduct Codes: Public 1999 (Percent)**

	ALL	Angry	Disillusioned	Worried	Complacent
Extremely good idea	40	52	32	44	29
Very good idea	22	16	21	30	20
Good idea	13	11	17	11	17
Mixed reaction / No opinion	13	9	14	11	21
Not so good an idea	11	12	17	5	13
Mean level of support (10-point scale)	7.6	7.9	7.0	8.2	6.9

**Question:** Suppose that in the elections for Congress and other offices this year, there was a nonpartisan effort to get candidates to publicly sign a code of campaign conduct, promising to campaign ethically and honestly and refrain from negative attack-oriented campaigns. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being not a good idea at all and 10 being an extremely good idea, how would you rate the idea of having a code of campaign conduct? (N=800)

Overall, the idea of campaign codes of conduct is quite popular: Two-fifths of the public sees codes as an extremely good idea (a 10 on the ten-point scale). More than one-third feel codes are a very good or good idea (6 to 9 on the ten-point scale). Less than one-quarter has mixed or negative reactions (1 to 5 on the ten-point scale) to campaign codes.

The mean level of support for campaign codes was 7.6 for the 1999 national sample; the comparable figure for campaign donors in 2000 was 7.0. And the 2002 national sample showed greater support for codes: The mean score on the ten-point scale was 7.9, and an identical two-fifths of the samples thought codes were an extremely good idea (a “10” on the ten-point scale). There was a small shift toward the middle from low scores between 1999 and 2002.

There are some important differences by the typology of disgust, as identified in table 5. The Angry are the most likely to give codes the highest mark (over one-half), followed by the Worried (more than two-fifths), which is the group that is most supportive overall. In contrast, the Disillusioned and Complacent are less enthusiastic, though on balance supportive. (The row of mean scores offers a useful summary of the groups’ evaluations).

Campaign donors are less enthusiastic about campaign codes, but also on balance positive. For example, only one-quarter think codes are an extremely good idea, and one-third has mixed or negative reactions. No doubt these results reflect the lower levels of disgust among donors we noted above, but may also represent skepticism arising from practical experience. However, the same basic pattern holds for the typology of disgust: The Angry and the Worried are the most enthusiastic, and the Disillusioned and Complacent the least enthusiastic. However, it is the Angry who report the most overall support for codes among donors.

These patterns make intuitive sense. The groups most concerned with negative campaigning, the Angry and the Worried, are the most enthusiastic about the idea of campaign codes. The Disillusioned and the Complacent do not share this concern and are thus less supportive.



## The Contents of a Code

This strong support for the idea of campaign codes begs an important question: What should be in a campaign code? The Civic Values Surveys asked the 1999 national sample and the 2000 sample of campaign donors about a variety of requirements that could be part of a code. The 2002 national sample showed results similar to the earlier surveys, although the 2002 figures reveal somewhat less tolerance for negative campaigning.

**TABLE 6**  
**What Should be in a Campaign Conduct Code: Responses of “Very Important / Important that the Candidates Agree” (Percent)**

	Public 1999	Donors 2000
Not to use any language or images that define candidates based on personal characteristics	75	54
To participate in forums where the public can question candidates directly	69	60
To participate in public debates	68	58
That any ads by outside groups that mention a candidate will disclose who paid for the ads	65	52
Not to make any personal attacks on the other candidates	64	33
Not to pay for investigations of other candidates’ personal backgrounds	52	35
To add an identifiable symbol to all campaign materials designating official campaign literature	45	39
Not to say anything negative at all about the other candidates	44	19
That every campaign ad include the voice and picture of the candidate who paid for the ads	44	38
Not to publicly question another candidate’s patriotism	42	29
Not to publicly question another candidate’s honesty or integrity	40	20
That if one candidate breaks any of the rules, then all of the rules are off	38	19

N=800 (Public 1999), 600 (Donors 2000)

A very popular requirement is the prohibition of stereotyping a candidate by personal characteristics, such as gender or race. Three-quarters of the public feels such a requirement is a very important or important element of a campaign code. The campaign donors are much less supportive of this stipulation, with only about one-half rating this feature as important. This difference appears throughout table 6: The donors are always less supportive of potential code elements than the public, probably reflecting donors’ lesser support for campaign codes in general.

Requirements that candidates participate in public forums and debates were also popular elements of codes. The campaign donors expressed considerable support for these provisions as well. A rule that outside groups must disclose their names when running ads mentioning a



candidate was also popular with both groups. (We understand that this last provision may be unworkable in a code signed by candidates; however, it was included in an effort to develop data about the public's concern with such independent activities. Here the 2002 national sample adds some additional information: Three-quarters agreed or strongly agreed that the codes should oblige candidates to demand that outside groups pull unfair ads from the airwaves.)

Almost two-thirds of the public believe that a code of campaign conduct should prohibit personal attacks on the other candidate, a prime complaint about negative campaigning. But only one-third of the campaign donors hold this position. One reason for this difference may be a fear that a campaign code, while limiting personal attacks, also would interfere with necessary debate in a campaign. About one-half of the public also supports a ban on background or opposition research about other candidates, a measure supported by only a minority of donors.

All of the remaining topics were regarded as important by roughly two-fifths of the public, including requiring an identifiable symbol on all campaign literature, agreement "not to say anything negative at all about the other candidates," a requirement that every campaign ad include the voice and picture of the candidate paying for the ad and prohibitions on questioning an opponent's patriotism or integrity. The least popular of the potential code elements is the rule, "If one candidate broke the code, then all the rules are off."

How do these opinions relate to the dimensions of disgust? The answer is straightforward: Angry and Worried groups are the most likely to support all of the elements in codes. However, the overall order of items in table 6 holds across the typology of disgust.

In contrast, the typology does not vary on two related matters: notions of what is fair in campaigns and what citizens want to know about candidates. Expectations on these matters appear to transcend the dimensions of disgust.

### **What is Fair in Campaigns?**

Increasing fairness and improving the quality of information in campaigns are primary goals of campaign codes. Table 7 assesses the "fairness" of various objects of criticism in campaigns, for both the 1999 national sample of the public and the 2000 sample of campaign donors. The first seven items concern a candidate's public and private activities that seem to have direct bearing on fitness to serve in office. A majority of both the public and the campaign donors believe these topics are fair game in campaigns. For instance, more than two-thirds of the public feels it is very fair or fair to criticize an opponent for "talking one way and voting another." Almost as many feel it is fair to criticize a candidate for not paying taxes on time. The remaining topics include taking campaign contributions from special interests or from individuals with ethical problems, or discussing current substance abuse problems, past voting record, or business practices.



**TABLE 7**  
**What is Fair Campaign Conduct? Responses of “Very Fair / Somewhat Fair to Criticize an Opponent for” (Percent)**

	Public 1999	Donors 2000
Talking one way and voting another	68	90
Not paying their taxes on time	65	75
Taking campaign contributions from special interests	59	77
Taking campaign contributions from individuals with ethical problems	58	75
Current troubles, like alcoholism or smoking marijuana	58	65
His or her voting record	57	88
Business practices	56	68
Marital infidelity	39	40
Using illegal drugs like cocaine as a young adult	38	37
Past troubles, like alcoholism or smoking marijuana	34	37
His or her sexual practices	30	na*
Past personal financial troubles	26	na*
Not having served in the military	25	na*
The behavior of family members	14	15

\*na = Not asked in the survey (N=800 (Public 1999), 600 (Donors 2000))

Once again, there is a consistent difference between the public and campaign donors: Donors are more likely see to these kinds of criticisms as fair. For example, nine of ten donors believe it is fair to criticize a candidate for “talking one way and voting another.” The most striking difference occurs on a candidate’s past voting record. Here, 88 percent of the donors believe such a criticism is fair, while only 57 percent of public feel the same—a gap of 31 percentage points. Most political observers view criticism of a candidate’s past voting record to be central to a valid campaign. Clearly, donors and the public have different views of what aspects of the public record should be raised in a campaign. (However, in the 2002 national sample, 68 percent of the public felt it was fair to attack an opponent’s voting record.)

The second seven items in table 7 pertain more to the private lives of candidates, with less than one-half of the public viewing these criticisms as fair. On these items, the public and the donors were largely in agreement. For example, only about two-fifths of both samples believe that martial infidelity is a fair campaign topic, and roughly the same number see an attack on past substance abuse as fair. Less than one-third of the public feel that a candidate’s sexual practices are fair game, and only one-quarter think a candidate’s personal financial troubles should be criticized. (The donor survey lacked these particular items, but based on the existing items, it seems likely that the donors held similar views.) Less than one-sixth of both samples feels that the behavior of family members is a fair issue for criticism in a campaign.

The 2002 national sample had similar questions and a similar pattern of results. This survey contained two new items of particular interest after 9/11: Only about one-third of the sample agreed or strongly agreed that it was fair to criticize an opponent for not being “patriotic enough”



or because they did not support the president “strongly enough.” These figures are comparable to the perceived fairness of criticism of past troubles such as alcoholism or smoking marijuana.

### **What Does the Public Want to Know from Campaigns?**

Table 8 turns to another important question: What kind of information does the public want to know from campaigns? Most of these questions were asked only of the 1999 national sample, and they help clarify our previous findings. The top item is the candidate’s positions on issues, with some four-fifths of the public claiming it is very important or important to them. The top five topics also include a candidate’s voting record, sources of campaign funds, arrest record, and, interestingly, whether or not the candidate signed and followed a campaign code. (The 2002 national sample also asked about the importance of knowing whether or not a candidate signed and followed a campaign code, with nearly the same results.)

The next most valued information is whether the candidate voted in past elections, information about their business dealings, and endorsements of interest groups. Interest group endorsement is the last item to receive majority support in the survey, while endorsements by community groups and political parties fall just below the 50 percent mark.



**TABLE 8**  
**What Information Does the Public Want from Campaigns? (Percent)**

	Public 1999
Positions on the issues	81
Voting record in office	73
Sources of campaign funds	68
Arrest record	64
<b>SIGNED AND FOLLOWED A CAMPAIGN CODE</b>	<b>63</b>
Whether voted in past elections	61
Business dealings	58
Endorsements by interest groups	53
Endorsement by community groups	47
Endorsements by political parties	46
Ever used illegal drugs like cocaine	45
Gambles or places bets	40
Drinking habits	39
Personal financial records	30
Paid prostitute for sex	28
Looked at pornography on the Internet	27
Had an affair while in public office	26
Candidate's upbringing	25
Sexual Preference	25
Endorsements of local newspapers	25
Accusations by opponents	21
Religious beliefs	20
Whether candidate has children	19
Ever smoked marijuana	19
Driving record	19
Had an affair while in public office twenty years ago	16
Opinions of journalists	15
Grades in college	13
Candidate or spouse had an abortion	13
Candidate's children's problems	10

N=800

The remaining kinds of information are regarded as less valuable, ranging from whether a candidate ever used illegal drugs (45 percent) to a candidate's children's problems (10 percent). Most of these topics deal with the personal lives of candidates. However, some of these items do have a public character, such as endorsement by local newspapers, accusations by opponents, or the opinions of journalists. It may be that the public connects the latter with unfair criticism of candidates. Thus, the public most values information on the public activities of candidates, especially their positions on issues, and puts less value on the personal information that is often used in negative attacks.

### **Will Campaign Codes Work?**

Will codes of campaign conduct actually work in the real world of politics? The Civic Values Surveys provides some additional data that suggests they might. For starters, recall that more



than three-fifths of the public in the 1999 national sample valued knowing whether a candidate had signed and followed a campaign code—about the same number as are interested in knowing about a candidate’s arrest record. In addition, the survey respondents claim they would respond favorably to codes.

## Codes and Citizen Response

Table 9 shows that nearly three-quarters of the public surveyed in 1999 say they would have more or much more respect for a candidate who signed a campaign code, Almost two-thirds say they would have less respect for a candidate who refused to sign a code.

**TABLE 9**  
**Citizen Response to Campaign Codes: Responses of “More” and “Somewhat More” (Percent)**

	Public 1999
<b>Respect for candidates</b>	
Would you have more respect for a candidate who signed a code?	74
Would you have less respect for a candidate who refused to sign?	65
<b>VOTING DECISION</b>	
Would you be more likely to vote for a candidate who signed a code?	71
Would you be less likely to vote for a candidate who broke a code?	74
<b>TURNOUT</b>	
Would you want to vote more if candidates signed a code?	53
Would you want to vote less if candidates refused to sign a code?	38

N=800

What about voting decisions? Seven of ten members of the public claim they would be more or much more likely to vote for a candidate who signed a code. Almost three-quarters say they would be less likely to vote for a candidate who broke a code they had signed. A smaller effect appears for the public’s decision to go to the polls: About half claim they would be more likely to want to vote if all of the candidates running had signed a code. However, less than two-fifths report they would want to vote less if the candidates did not sign a code.

The 2002 national sample produced similar results. For example, 32 percent of the respondents claim they would be a lot more likely to turn out to vote if a candidate had signed and followed a campaign code, and another 28 percent claim they would be somewhat more likely to turn out. Citizens certainly believe that negative campaigning depresses turnout: Eighty-two percent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “Negative attack-oriented campaigning is making people less likely to go out and vote.”



What about the typology of disgust? The Worried report the most respect for a candidate who signed a code—and the most lack of respect for candidates who do not. The Angry are a close second on these questions and are the most likely to claim that a code would influence their vote for a candidate or encourage them to vote. The Complacent trail the Angry in all these regards, while the Disillusioned rank last on all of these questions.

The campaign donors were not asked about their voting behavior. However, they were asked if a campaign code would affect their decision to give funds to a candidate. Some 60 percent claim they would be more likely to contribute to a candidate who signed a code, 15 percent say they would be less likely to do so for candidates who signed, and the remaining one-quarter feel it would make no difference. When asked how signing a campaign code would compare to all of the other characteristics of a candidate in their decision, 35 percent claim signing a campaign code is extremely or very important, 33 percent claim it is of some importance, and 31 percent feel it is not important at all.

### **Will Candidates Follow a Campaign Code?**

Table 10 shows that some two-thirds of the 1999 national sample of the public and three-fifths of the 2000 sample of campaign donors believe it is very or somewhat likely that a candidate would follow a code to which they agreed. Roughly the same percentage of the public believe that a campaign code would be very or somewhat effective if designed by the candidates themselves. Here the campaign donors are much less positive, expressing considerable skepticism about candidate-designed codes.

**TABLE 10**  
**How Effective Would Campaign Codes Be? Responses of “Very” and “Somewhat” (Percent)**

	Public 1999	Donors 2000
<b>How likely are candidates to follow a code they signed?</b>	69	62
<b>How effective would code be:</b>		
If designed by candidates themselves	63	37
If designed by nonpartisan group	74	63
<b>How much would you trust a code:</b>		
If designed by candidates themselves	49	38
If designed by nonpartisan group	75	66

N=800 (Public 1999), 600 (Donors 2000)

However, almost three-quarters of the public feel that a code would be effective if designed by a nonpartisan group instead of the candidates themselves. Here the donors agree. On the tougher question of trusting a code, almost one-half of the public claims it would trust a candidate-designed code, a position held by less than two-fifths of the donors. However, both the public and the donors express the most trust in a code designed a nonpartisan group.



How do these findings fit with the typology of disgust? The Worried are by far the most optimistic about the various ways that codes might be created, as well as about the chances that candidates would follow the codes. The Angry are more skeptical than the Worried, but on balance believe candidates would follow a code; they are less trusting of candidate-created codes, but match the Worried in trusting a code created by a nonpartisan group. The Complacent fall in between the Worried and the Angry on all of these questions. Once again, the Disillusioned are the most skeptical that candidates would follow codes, and are not particularly sanguine about the source of codes.

## **A Tale of Two Experiments**

The Civic Values Surveys included an experiment designed to assess how the public might respond to the operation of a campaign code in a real campaign. In the 1998 surveys in Ohio and Washington, respondents were asked to imagine two candidates, A and B, and were given sufficient biographical and ideological background to differentiate them.<sup>3</sup> One-half of the respondents were told that candidates A and B had not signed a code, and the other half were told that the candidates had done so. Each subgroup was further divided, with one-half hearing that candidate A had attacked candidate B on personal grounds, and the other half hearing that candidate A had attacked candidate B on policy grounds. In all cases, candidate B complained of a “negative” attack, but stuck to the code and did not respond in kind. Table 11 shows the differential impact of these various conditions on the respondents’ assessment of the attacks and their subsequent support for the candidates.

---

<sup>3</sup> An example of the hypothetical situations presented to the respondents follows: “Now imagine that it is an election year and that in your area there are two candidates running for a seat in Congress. I’ll call them candidate A and candidate B. I’m going to read you some hypothetical situations involving actions by the two candidates, A and B, then I will ask you a few questions about each one: ‘In a very close election, both candidates have been talking about the issues they intend to work on if they are elected, and how their experience makes them the best candidate. Two weeks before election day, candidate A airs a campaign advertisement that attacks candidate B, saying that B has been arrested and convicted twice for drunk driving, most recently six years ago. A’s ad also mentions that candidate B was once accused of sexual harassment by his secretary. Candidate B responds that A is running a negative campaign, but instead of attacking back, he will stick to a positive campaign about the issues.’ ”



**TABLE 11**  
**Survey Experiment: Effects of Campaign Attacks and Campaign Code on Voter Perceptions of Hypothetical Candidates, Ohio and Washington, 1998. "Would Vote for" Responses (Percent)**

	Candidate A	Candidate B	Unsure
<b>NO CAMPAIGN CODE IN PLACE</b>			
Personal attack (deemed negative by 73 percent of respondents)	20	66	14
Policy attack (deemed negative by 47 percent of respondents)	42	44	14
<b>CAMPAIGN CODE IN PLACE</b>			
Personal attack (deemed negative by 84 percent of respondents)	12	68	20
Policy attack (deemed negative by 43 percent of respondents)	41	41	18

N=800

The first thing to note is how the respondents view the two attacks by candidate A. In both subgroups, a large majority of the respondents see the personal attack as negative, while only about two-fifths saw the policy attack the same way. This difference is interesting in its own right because it suggests that many people can distinguish between personal and policy criticism. However, note that when a campaign code is in place, the respondents are 11 percentage points more likely to see the personal attack as negative. The policy attack is also seen in a less-negative light when a campaign code is in place, although the difference was small.

These conditions also have an impact on the hypothetical votes of the respondents. When no code is in place, candidate A receives 20 percent of the vote after the personal attack, and candidate B receives 66 percent, with 14 percent undecided. In contrast, when a campaign code is in place, the vote for candidate A (the attacker) drops to 12 percent (8 percentage points), candidate B increases slightly to 68 percent, and the undecided rises to 20 percent. Note that the presence of a code makes very little difference with regard to the policy attack—in both scenarios, support for the candidates in this situation is essentially even.

This experiment suggests that campaign codes could make a difference by setting a standard against which voters can judge the behavior of candidates. The 8 percentage point difference in the consequences of negative personal attack when a code is in place would be more than enough to determine the winner in a close election.

The Civic Values Surveys offers another interesting bit of evidence on the impact of campaign codes. As noted in the Foreword, a real-world exercise in campaign codes was conducted in Ohio and Washington in 1998 and 2000. The previously discussed surveys conducted in Ohio and Washington sought to assess the impact of this effort in both states. Table 12 offers some modest evidence that the codes may have had a positive effect.



**TABLE 12**  
**Change in Perception of Campaign Ethics, Ohio and Washington, 1998–2000 (Percent)**

	Ohio			Washington		
	1998	2000	Net Change	1998	2000	Net Change
Gotten better	13	28	+15	11	20	+ 9
Stayed about the same	40	39	- 1	45	40	- 5
Gotten worse	47	33	-14	44	40	- 4

**Question:** Overall, in terms of ethics and values, do you think election campaigns in your state have gotten better or worse in the last twenty years? (N=800)

In 1998, 47 percent of a random sample of Ohio voters claimed that campaigns had gotten worse in the state over the previous twenty years. In 2000, after the Project on Campaign Conduct’s work, this figure had fallen to 33 percent—a decline of 14 percentage points. And there was a parallel increase in the percentage of respondents who felt campaigns had gotten better—from 13 percent to 28 percent. A similar but less-dramatic change occurred in Washington: The proportion of respondents who claimed campaigns had gotten better increased by 9 percentage points. As we saw in tables 1.1 and 1.2, these figures were higher than for the national sample of the public in 1999. The Ohio figures were larger than the 2002 national figures and the Washington figures roughly the same.

Of course, there could be many reasons for these changes that are not related to the Project on Campaign Conduct and cannot be accounted for in these surveys, so the results must be viewed with great caution. It could be that candidates are responding to public disgust by improving the quality of their campaigns. But it is also possible that campaign code experiments in Ohio and Washington changed the perception—and perhaps even the reality—of campaign conduct in these two states.

#### CONCLUSION

*by Brad Rourke of the Institute for Global Ethics*

Since 1998, the Institute for Global Ethics has been examining citizen attitudes toward politics with the Civic Values Surveys. The results—that citizens are fed up with the content and manner of modern political campaigns—have not been surprising. However, two aspects of the data are unexpected: the strength and unanimity with which the public feels this way and the nuanced sense they have of the realities of the political process and of their own aspirations for government. Taken together, these suggest that the Institute’s approach to civic reengagement, which involves voluntary candidate codes of campaign conduct, may well be a viable one. Some of the time-series survey data supports this conclusion as well.



If, as we believe, codes of campaign conduct are feasible and potentially effective tools to have in the civic reform arsenal, then what might be the best way to approach their use? To answer, an illustration from the field may serve best.

## **Toledo, Cradle of Civility**

Great civic movements start in the unlikeliest of places—the front section of the Montgomery bus from which Rosa Parks refused to move, the Sacramento steak house where Mothers Against Drunk Driving first met, Sproul Plaza at the University of California at Berkeley where Mario Savio’s filibuster began the Free Speech Movement. To these history may one day allow us to add another: the restaurant in Toledo, Ohio, where a group of citizens met one night in August 2001 to discuss what they could do to demand a better quality of political campaign.

After a particularly tense debate between the mayoral candidates, the local daily newspaper, the *Toledo Blade*, had called on the front-runners (Lucas County treasurer Ray Kest and state representative Jack Ford) to sign a code of conduct to help keep the campaign out of the mud. To the surprise of many observers, they agreed. Brought together by the Toledo League of Women Voters, a group of citizens met at Mountain Jack’s restaurant on the outskirts of town for the first of many meetings devoted to monitoring the code. Thus was born the Lucas County Citizens Clean Campaign Committee.

It was an effort that succeeded where many thought it would fail. By the end of the campaign, the talk-radio hosts who had derided the committee were quoting it, and the *Blade* would only cover accusations of negative campaigning if the committee had already weighed in. What factors were needed for the Toledo Clean Campaign Committee experiment to work so well? Four things:

1. **Good faith.** The members of the committee needed to take their charge seriously, to act as guardians of the process of democracy, rather than as a part of the campaign. At first, there were troubling questions. Who were these people and who appointed them the “ethics police”? And who really cares about how civil the candidates are toward one another so long as an effective future mayor wins? Valid questions, and many of them were asked unsympathetically in the local talk-radio shows. But the committee stuck to its job and did not get sidetracked.
2. **Local roots.** The committee could not be a bunch of out-of-town academics, but instead had to be a diverse group of local people, themselves affected by the very campaigns they were charged with monitoring. The code itself was adapted by the *Blade* from a draft code of conduct that the Institute for Global Ethics has been promoting throughout Ohio and Washington states since 1998 as part of its Project on Campaign Conduct, an effort funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts. So, while it was rooted in commonly accepted



shared values such as honesty and responsibility, the language of the code had come from “away.” For that reason, it was all the more important that the committee come from the community. Without local roots, the committee would have had no legitimacy.

3. **A clear, agreed-upon framework.** So-called “negative campaigning” is frequently left undefined, with the hope that voters will simply know it when they see it. However, this is not a sufficient basis for judgment. By signing a clear code of conduct, outlining both what is acceptable as well as unacceptable, the candidates provided a means of holding themselves accountable for their behavior. Without this clear agreement by the candidates, the committee would not have had a leg to stand on.
4. **Protection.** Yes, protection. It would have been easy for either candidate to go on the attack against the committee itself, and to accuse it of being a tool for the opposition. In fact, at the Institute we advise local groups promoting codes of conduct to avoid situations in which they are the monitors of candidate behavior, encouraging them instead to allow citizens to make up their own minds. In this case, however, the local newspaper was not only widely read but also enthusiastic about the enterprise. It would have editorially skewered any candidate foolish enough to attack the committee. Without this implicit protection, though, the committee would not have had the freedom to operate in the way it did.

Late in October, with only days left until the election, the campaign, which had been largely civil, thanks to the committee’s presence, took a turn for the worse. The Kest campaign began using very negative rhetoric and running attack ads that many believed were over the line. The committee issued press releases deploring the behavior in question. The *Blade* prominently ran stories covering the decisions.

Ultimately, Ford won dramatically, with more than 60 percent of the vote. Many factors contributed to his victory, but it is clear from the lopsided results that voters were turned off by one side’s overly vitriolic campaigning style. It would be an exaggeration to say that the clean campaign committee put the winner in office. But it would not be an exaggeration to say that the committee made it possible to focus on the issue of campaign conduct as one way of determining who to support. In that sense—insofar as it laid the groundwork for the debate and the ground rules for how that debate should take place—the committee succeeded wildly.

What can we learn from the experience in Toledo? We have learned much about all that must be in place for such a voluntary innovation to work. But more important, we have seen a success story that includes not only a parable of the dangers of unfair attack campaigning, but also an example of winning by sticking to the high road. Local elections are frequently precursors to broader trends that become apparent in the following year’s congressional elections. If that is the case, the Toledo experience may contain the seed of a larger movement, one that could sweep the



nation as local people, fed up with partisan rancor, take back the political process and renew elections as meaningful events in the lives of citizens.



## **ABOUT THE INSTITUTE FOR GLOBAL ETHICS**

The Institute for Global Ethics is a nonprofit organization promoting ethics through public discourse and practical action. Founded in 1990 and supported by members throughout the world, the Institute publishes a weekly online newsletter, *Ethics Newslines*, consults with corporations and educational institutions in the United States and overseas, and conducts frequent ethics seminars. Funding comes from members, fee-for-service work, and major foundations. For more information, visit the Institute online at [www.globalethics.org](http://www.globalethics.org), or contact:

Institute for Global Ethics  
P.O. Box 563  
11 Main Street  
Camden, ME 04843 USA

phone: 207-236-6658  
fax: 207-236-40104  
email: [ethics@globalethics.org](mailto:ethics@globalethics.org)

## **ABOUT DR. JOHN C. GREEN**

Dr. John C. Green is director of the Ray C. Bliss Institute of Applied Politics and professor of Political Science at the University of Akron in Akron, Ohio. He has done extensive research on the political process and has been an advisor to the Project on Campaign Conduct since its inception.

## **ABOUT BRAD ROURKE**

When this report was written, Brad Rourke was vice president, Public Policy, at the Institute for Global Ethics. He oversaw all of the Institute's work relating to public policy and civic life, including directing the Institute's groundbreaking Project on Campaign Conduct. Rourke has been active in public affairs at all levels. He served on the staffs of then-Controller of California (now Governor) Gray Davis and U.S. Rep. Jane Harman (California), served as deputy California campaign manager for the National Health Care Campaign, and was state government relations representative for Northrop Grumman Corporation. Prior to joining the Institute, Rourke owned a public affairs firm specializing in legislative advocacy for alternative transportation, lobbying successfully to change the state vehicle codes in all of the Pacific states. He can be reached at [bradrourke@earthlink.net](mailto:bradrourke@earthlink.net).