

"WHAT ASPIRATIONS DO WE HAVE FOR POLITICAL CONDUCT?"

"I WANT A CANDIDATE TO GIVE ME A SPECIFIC, DIRECT ANSWER TO AN ISSUE-ORIENTED QUESTION."

- Citizen Assembly participant, Louisville

How many times have you heard the question, "What's wrong with politics today?"

More than a decade ago, The Harwood Institute for Public Innovation began to ask a fundamentally different question of Americans: "What are our aspirations for politics?" In response, we

heard more than the typical barrage of complaints.

*America's Aspirations for Political Conduct* is an expression of the hope people hold for the conduct of political leaders, new media and fellow citizens – and why each of us must act.

It was developed with citizens from across the country, over a number of years, through an innovative Citizen Assembly process.

People are using *America's Aspirations* every day to gauge the performance of political leaders, news media and citizens, to reshape our public discourse on politics, and to spark action.

"MEDIA NEGATIVITY IS THE HARDEST TO OVERCOME. IT'S ALL ABOUT RATINGS."

- Citizen Assembly participant, Louisville

There is much unfinished work to do in America – from ensuring that every child receives a good education, to creating strong communities and safe neighborhoods in which people can live, to improving race relations. For us to engage in this unfinished work, we need improved political conduct in our communities and across the nation.

*America's Aspirations* is part of the New Patriotism Project. Visit [www.newpatriotismproject.org](http://www.newpatriotismproject.org) for more information on the project and how you and your community can get involved. Also order your free copy of *A New Political Covenant*, The Harwood Institute's book that details in depth the aspirations and sets of specific behaviors Americans seek from political leaders, news media and citizens.

"WE NEED TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR HOW WE REVIEW AND ADDRESS POLITICIANS AND POLITICS, AND ONCE WE'VE DONE THAT, SPREAD THE WORD."

- Citizen Assembly participant, Baltimore



**THE NEW PATRIOTISM PROJECT** is an initiative of The Harwood Institute. It moves Americans beyond flag-waving to a higher level of public and political engagement. This initiative is providing people with the tools and vision to improve the way political leaders, the news media and citizens conduct themselves, community by community across the country.



The Harwood Institute for Public Innovation is a nonpartisan, non-profit organization based in Bethesda, Maryland. The Harwood Institute invigorates citizens, leaders and organizations to work for the kind of country we all seek. The Harwood Institute's approach is to conduct innovative research, create practical tools, and inspire people and organizations to make lasting change in communities across the nation.

We believe that America can do better.

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AMERICA'S ASPIRATIONS FOR POLITICAL CONDUCT



The Harwood Institute for Public Innovation

# AMERICA'S ASPIRATIONS FOR POLITICAL CONDUCT

## ASPIRATIONS FOR POLITICAL LEADERS

## ASPIRATIONS FOR NEWS MEDIA

## ASPIRATIONS FOR CITIZENS

WHAT WE'VE GOT:	FACTORS	WHAT WE WANT:	WHAT WE'VE GOT:	FACTORS	WHAT WE WANT:	WHAT WE'VE GOT:	FACTORS	WHAT WE WANT:
Political leaders fail to clearly explain why they seek public office and who they are.	<b>Tell us who you are</b>	Tell us what inspires them to seek office, what their values are, who supports them and why, and about their past.	News coverage doesn't add up. It's hard to make sense of what's going on and to sort out reality from fiction.	<b>Give us the whole story</b>	Help us piece together what is happening, why and how it all connects, keeping news separate from opinion and entertainment.	People don't know enough about political leaders, accept too much information without checking it out, and get swayed too easily by the media.	<b>Make informed judgments</b>	Take responsibility for using a variety of information sources, pay attention to politics and public life, and make independent judgments.
Political leaders are disconnected and out of touch - they don't understand people and their concerns.	<b>Know us</b>	Genuinely know how all people in their community live, and the challenges the community faces. Show a deep understanding of people and their concerns.	A mountain of news coverage exists, but fails to focus on what people need and want to know.	<b>Really cover political leaders</b>	Provide us with a full sense of political leaders' track records, their stands on issues, their character, and the bad and good in their past.	People expect far too much from political leaders - to "solve" all problems, to know answers to all questions, and to agree with them on everything.	<b>Be reasonable</b>	Hold reasonable expectations for what political leaders can do, and give leaders room to explain themselves and their views.
Political leaders don't tell people what's truly being proposed, at what cost, for what benefit. They promise the moon.	<b>Explain where you stand</b>	Offer a vision for what they want to achieve and why - without overblown promises - and put the tough issues and trade-offs on the table.	News media focus on one candidate over others and predict early winners.	<b>Treat all political leaders fairly</b>	Cover all candidates throughout the course of the election; do not crown early victors.	People complain about political leaders but don't do anything to get them to change.	<b>Hold political leaders accountable</b>	Work to get political leaders to focus on issues of concern, keep track of what they say, and know their voting records. Make our voices heard when leaders fail to respond, and applaud those who do.
Political leaders seek to tear down opponents, not make their own case. They bluff their way through the questions.	<b>Be forthright</b>	Tell us what they're about from the start and take on questions and challengers in direct, honest, straightforward ways.	Political leaders are allowed to duck questions while the news media play "gotcha."	<b>Hold political leaders accountable</b>	Get political leaders to answer tough questions and give the why's and how's behind their answers, and help us see what they do and don't say.	People don't watch news media coverage of politics much at all, or if they do they fail to use a critical eye and turn away when they don't like the coverage.	<b>Hold news media accountable</b>	Determine if political coverage is informative and helpful, and tell the media when it isn't, when it is, and what we're looking for.
Political leaders don't seem to give respect to the office they seek, let alone their opponents.	<b>Set the right tone</b>	Pursue a tone that is aggressive and respectful, not mean-spirited and negative.	News coverage crosses the line of good journalism and becomes biased, sensational and negative.	<b>Don't be negative or sensational</b>	Pursue aggressive news coverage that helps us understand political leaders, but is not biased, sensational or negative.	People don't vote, and they fail to encourage others to vote.	<b>Voting</b>	Vote and actively encourage others to vote, long before election day
			News media are disconnected and out of touch with people and their concerns.	<b>Know us</b>	Produce news stories that reflect a deep understanding of the community, its different perspectives, and how issues relate to our lives.	People too often turn away from politics because they don't like what they see - complaining and dropping out.	<b>Take a stand</b>	Step up and set the tone for politics - for instance, talk with each other about important issues; join a group to change things; actively support candidates; get others involved.