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Editor's note: We present this Executive Summary of "The New Political Compass" by **Academy Fellow Paul H. Ray, Ph.D.** as food for thought for our fall Fellows' meeting. Paul is co-author of the best-selling book *The Cultural Creatives: How 50 Million People Are Changing the World*. To review the "discussion draft" of "The New Political Compass" in its entirety, please see the website referenced below.

Paul believes that we stand at the cusp of a major realignment in political parties, the kind of dramatic shift that happened when the Whig party gave way to the Republican party in the early 19th century. A new political constituency is emerging which Paul calls the New Progressives (they reflect the concerns of all the new social movements and consciousness movements that have emerged over the last 40 years). The easiest way to describe them is that they are at right angles to Liberal left and Social Conservative right, and they are directly opposed to Big Business Conservatism. What is evident is that people want politicians to start dealing with the real emerging problems that threaten our children's future.

The New Political Compass Executive Summary

The New Progressives are In-Front, Deep Green,
Against Big Business and Globalization, and Beyond Left vs. Right

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"Every few hundred years in Western history there occurs a sharp transformation. Within a few short decades, society — its world view, its basic values, its social and political structures, its arts, its key institutions — rearranges itself. And the people born then cannot even imagine a world in which their grandparents lived and into which their own parents were born. We are currently living through such a transformation."

Peter Drucker, Post-Capitalist Society

This longish paper shows a new way to picture political constituencies, as a political compass, with four directions, instead of our usual bankrupt left-right description. The new imagery says: east vs. west, north vs. south and would allow us to describe any departure from where we now are as being at an angle, say northwest. This image of a compass heading points the way to helpful redefinitions of who constituencies are, and what they stand for, and offers the possibility of a new democratic politics. It also has the symbolic value of pointing out that a compass is orienting us to what we need to see, rather than just labeling someone as right or left.

We are entering into a time of transformation, i.e., changing shape and function, of many of our institutions. Our political institutions are very much in need of repair or replacement, and this paper shows how to look at the emerging culture of our time as a support for positive change. Indeed, it says that political culture, which is the substrate politics rests on, has already been changing for some decades now, and at this point in history, leads to new kinds of political demand. Today's politics is dismal in part because of its rigidity, its corruption and its inability to supply what people want. We are looking at the political equivalent of what would be called market failure in economics and business: the breakdown of supply and demand. Our democracy is at great risk of turning into a plutocracy: rule by and for the benefit of the rich.

In partisan political terms, we are looking at a slow decline of both left and right and of both political parties. The term “center” doesn’t communicate anything, and my research suggests it is a fiction. Social conservatism is slowly declining as its underlying culture slowly dies off. In the last fifty years, Traditionals have shrunk from about half the population to under a quarter. We are also looking at the demise of the left, since only about twelve to fifteen percent of the people identify with it any more. Big business is distrusted by over 70 percent of Americans and they can get only 14 to 19 percent of the voters, so they depend on money power to keep control. Politicians are rated down there with used car salesmen as an occupation. Voting is still at an all time low.

Figure 2 (see <http://www.spiraldynamics.org/documents/NewPoliticalCompassV7.3.pdf>) at the end of this Executive Summary is based on survey data and shows the casual reader the main idea. A new political constituency is emerging, whom I call the New Progressives, and the easiest way to describe them is that they are at right angles to Liberal left and Social Conservative right, and they are directly opposed to Big Business Conservatism. That means that politics really has two dimensions, but we have not recognized it yet.

There really is no center for timorous politicians to run to: all that is in this center are the politically alienated and ignorant who don’t vote. The second dimension pits globalization and big business interests against ecological sustainability, women’s issues, consciousness issues, national health care, national education, and an emerging concern for the planet and the future of our children and grandchildren on it.

On the four points of the compass, this new group is definitely not “the center” or mushy middle of Clinton lore. And they are also the biggest of the four constituencies at 36 percent of population and 45 percent of likely voters. I describe the new constituency as New Progressives, because they reflect the concerns of all the new social and consciousness movements that have emerged over the last 40 years. Most of their issues are claimed by the Left, and sworn at by the Right, but they don’t identify with either left or right. They are no more similar to liberal left or religious right than business conservatives are. And they also reflect the wave of values change that has been slowly moving through American life for the same time period, which gave rise to the subculture whom I call Cultural Creatives. Some 55 percent look like a relaxed definition of who are Cultural Creatives.

The New Progressives are more likely to be volunteers and give money to good causes, are more likely to have been in multiple social movement constituencies, and care more about changing the culture than the rest of society. They are at the intersection of all the movement constituencies, and the marginal cost of mobilizing them should be small. If they are mobilized under a single banner, as a big political tent that contains the movements, they may wind up replacing one of the political parties and dominating American politics for the next generation or more. This paper gives several pages of questionnaire responses by New Progressives to show what they look like on values, attitudes, opinions and issues. What is evident is that people want politicians to start dealing with the real emerging problems that threaten our children’s future.

The paper describes all four sides of the compass and then shows how this has emerged from cultural change, answering the question ‘What happened to the Left?’ in detail. In brief, the answer is that the leaders of the left have not kept up with the changes in political culture upon which all of our political institutions and political activity depend. And because those changes grow out of all the new social movements of the last 40 years, the corporate media are very careful not to cover them, or interpret them accurately. They’re mostly bad for business as usual, and it is those movements which also set in motion the Cultural Creatives, who are creating the emerging culture of the 21st century.

I also show the six underlying dimensions of the wave of cultural change that produced this change and how the data resembles a wave of change. Imagine politics-as-usual as a tightly knit ball of ongoing conflict that is supported by the cupped hands of the political culture. Without the continual support of those webs of agreements, norms, values, social interpretations, worldviews and daily practices, no institution can survive. What happens next if the culture moves on and the politicians and institutions are so preoccupied with power and locked in their conflicts that they rigidly refuse to change? Probably they fall out of those cupped hands, splat on the floor! That is, legitimacy and confidence are withdrawn from politics.

I end by speculating on the future of the New Progressives' politics. Political parties have been declining for a generation or more, and the last round of campaign finance reform will weaken them even further. Nature abhors a vacuum in politics at least as much as anywhere else. We stand at the cusp of a major realignment in political parties, the kind of dramatic shift that happened when the Whig party gave way to the Republican party in the early 19th century. Any big tent mobilization strategy for political North must start with a recognition of the enormous overlap of the constituencies of all the movements, an overlap occupied by the Cultural Creatives. With effective mobilization and legislative strategies, the political North will rule at some time in the future. A four party political system is quite conceivable, and I speculate on how that would go.

The New Political Compass © Paul H. Ray, 2002

To view the paper in its entirety: <http://www.spiraldynamics.org/documents/NewPoliticalCompassV7.3.pdf>

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