

Is This the Future of Politics?

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Politicians are not leaders but follow the trends of society. The past 100 years has seen the rise of a modern materially-oriented society globally, and the relative decline of a more traditional, old fashioned way of life. Political leaders in the West and East have followed this trend and promoted economic development and the material “good life”. But this is now changing. A new vanguard of people is growing rapidly, people who reject the excesses of modern materialism and embrace a more ethical, authentic and caring way of life. They make up about a third of the voting population, more where voting is not compulsory. However, existing major political parties have not yet adapted to their needs. As a consequence there is a large gap between what many voters want and what the major parties are promoting. Whichever political organisation can close this gap will gain an increasing number of progressive voters, but it will need to overhaul its practices in order to do so.

Who make up this new vanguard? They are people throughout the world who care deeply about the plight of our planet and are working in many fields to preserve its life support systems and to create a far better world. Their concerns include relationships, peace, social justice, ecology, equality of education, adequate health care, equality for women, spirituality (not just religion) and self-actualisation. Authenticity, or practicing ones beliefs, is important to them. This is essential to understand for any political group seeking to engage them, as they easily see through and do not tolerate PR and spin.

Sociologist Dr Paul Ray calls this vanguard the Cultural Creatives (CCs) because they are distinguished by having a holistic, integral and creative understanding of our role on our planet.¹ The CCs are a surprisingly large body of people who have the potential to lead the world from its present dangers to a safer and better place. Surveys from 1995 to the present in North America, Western Europe and Japan show that a third of their national adult populations have the remarkable qualities needed for world renovation. Further surveys are being conducted in other parts of the world that are expected to reveal similar numbers.

Other major groupings are the Moderns, who make up about 40% of the USA adult population, and the Traditionals, comprising 15%. The Moderns are financial materialists who focus on conventional ideas of success and modern technologies, but largely ignore inner or ‘spiritual’ development, altruism and a contribution to ecological well-being. Traditionals favour a patriarchal family life, conservative religion, militarism and are anti-immigration. A further 10% of the adult population are Transitionals, who are in the process of changing from Moderns to CCs, or from Traditionals to Moderns.

¹ Survey and other references are at www.wisdomuniversity.org/CCsReport2008SurveyV3.pdf, www.culturalcreatives.org/straightfacts.html, www.lohas.com/journal/cultural_creatives.html, www.worldforum.org/cultural-opportunity.htm, www.alternativemagazine.com/18/ray.html. See the book by Paul H. Ray, PhD and Sherry Ruth Anderson, PhD, *The Cultural Creatives: How 50 Million People Are Changing the World*, New York: Harmony Books, October, 2000.

Cultural Creatives are truly the leader group influencing the progress of civilisation. Ray divides them into “green” and “core” CCs. The latter are more focussed on ecological sustainability and the climate crisis as whole planet wisdom, on spiritual self-development, authenticity (or living one’s values) and on countering the depredations of big business conservatism and of jingoism. All CCs are concerned, if the green CCs a little less so, about big business, idealism and self-actualisation. The significance of CCs today is that they are the only large grouping of people that are both aware of the major problems of the planet and that are focussed on and determined to take wise and selfless action to do something about it. They are very active in many private, progressive civil society organisations that aim to improve personal relations, society, the global ecology, economic methods and political aims and action.² Their activities are changing the political culture just as the movements for racial freedom, women’s liberation and gay rights did many decades ago.

Of course the CCs have to contend with the inertia and vested interests of the remaining two thirds or more of their national populations. However, Dr Ray has found that CC numbers are increasing by around 2.5% per annum in the USA. We can expect similar rates of growth elsewhere. At this rate they will be more than 50% of the USA voting public by 2020, with a similar percentage in other economically developed countries. In numbers, there are currently 80 million CCs in the USA, 130 million in Western Europe, and 35 million in Japan. The world adult percentage is probably well more than 15% and growing.

A political analysis of CCs in the USA shows that they identify neither with the traditional left nor right parties, being disappointed with the lack of civilised progress of both.³ The research shows that there is a strong axis of progressive/regressive views that is at right angles to the left/right dimension of politics. The CCs make up the progressive pole and business conservatives make up the regressive pole. However, neither the Democrat nor the Republican parties have “captured” the CC vote. The gap is such that in 2003 CCs made up 36% of actual voters, while business conservatives had the support of 19% of voters. The left/right parties had about 30% combined, with 20% alienated non voters. There is a political opportunity here, in that a third of voters want much better policies than the major parties are presenting. Since then, in the USA the Democrats with President Obama have attracted some of the CC votes. Whether they will remain attracted depends on the extent to which the Democrats concede activities to the business conservatives. Elsewhere in the world, it is the “green” progressive parties that are attracting CC voters.⁴

The world is now entering a turbulent period of potential conflict about the environment, global warming, food and water supplies, natural resources, pollution, bad business practices on a global scale that threaten livelihoods, and increasing military presence with potent weapons in many countries. The growing numbers of CCs brings some hope that, as they mobilise politically, we can survive a dangerous future and become a much better world

² For examples of the latter see www.avaaz.org, www.getup.org, and www.newdemocracy.com.au.

³ see www.wisdomuniversity.org/NewPolitCompass7-5-5.pdf.

⁴ See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Green_party and www.greens.org.