

## Self-Sorting and Declining Trust in America

by *Emily Eindorf*

The United States is more politically and culturally divided than ever before. Various social media outlets and self-segregating communities have created an ever increasing political and cultural divide, despite the increasing ethnic diversity among American cities and states. This increasing diversity has allowed individuals to form self-segregated groups with individuals who have similar opinions or cultural traditions to themselves. These not so simple issues come with their own set of not so simple solutions. To decrease the rate of segregation, the United States will have to increase the political and cultural unity felt among Americans, which is easier said than done. The connection between declining trust and self-sorting helps to provide some answers for these issues, detailing that with increased trust in the government and political unity, the decrease in self-sorting will follow.

The election of President Donald Trump in November of 2016, along with several other factors, has created one of the largest political divides the United States has ever seen. Debates over environmental protection, race, and immigration have been the primary contributors, making “the partisan split between Democrats and Republicans . . . the widest it’s been in more than two decades” (Miller). Trump’s more extreme measures for dealing with these topics, such as building a wall to serve as the new and improved border between the United States and Mexico, has increased the level of dislike and disapproval between the Democratic and Republican parties. For example, “In 1994, fewer than 20 percent of Americans had a ‘very unfavorable’ view of the opposite party. Today, 44 percent of Democrats[/Republicans] and Democratic-leaning independents[/Republican-leaning independents] expressed a very

unfavorable opinion . . .” (Miller). This increase in political party divide has subsequently created increased self-sorting, where individuals tend to move toward like-minded individuals within the sub groups of the Democratic and Republican parties, undermining political unity. To halt the continual increase in self-imposed segregation, politically, there needs to be a balance and understanding between United States government officials. Government leaders need to increase the amount of cooperation between political parties and work toward finding solutions to the environmental protection, race, and immigration issues plaguing our country. The government needs to focus on uniting to solve these issues, rather than tearing each political party apart based on their views and solutions. Resolving these issues is practically impossible in the current state of America; however, progress needs to be made in these areas to see a decrease in self-sorting among everyday Americans.

The cultural divide in the United States is increasing at an alarming rate. The concept of diversity that was once the staple of large cities is now being erased and is posing critical consequences regarding empathy, behaviors, and socialization for future generations. Different aspects of culture in the United States are now becoming increasingly segregated based on familial income, race, and individual beliefs and values. Primarily, residential, educational, and community segregation are the leading causes of an increasingly dividing society. For example, “Residential segregation by income has increased during the past three decades across the United States and in 27 of the nation’s 30 largest major metropolitan areas . . .” (Blow). Especially in large urban areas, ethnic diversity, income, and location provide a means for individuals to self-sort, and more are opting to do so. Individuals tend to gravitate toward similar, like-minded individuals, providing a natural reason, among the several created ones, for this phenomena.

Finding a solution to this issue is not complex in thought, but rather in implementation. To reduce self-sorting culturally, Americans need to bring themselves out of segregated communities and schools, to mix with different residential, educational, and ethnic groups. This step is crucial to decreasing self-sorting as “even the attitudes of the most prejudiced people who did not mix with ethnic minorities became more tolerant over time as a result of living in areas where others were mixing on a daily basis” (Blow). Americans need to expose themselves to different groups in order to empathize, understand, and be comfortable around different cultural groups, eventually leading to a decrease in self-sorting throughout the United States.

Bill Bishop provides clear evidence for a connection existing between Americans’ declining trust in the government and the increase in self-sorting. He points out that as societies become larger and more wealthy, individuals depend less on government and “survival skills,” promoting individuality and the veering from convention. We are becoming “artists of our own lives, ignoring authorities and boosting traditions while turning power over to self” (Bishop). Our society praises individuality and individual invention, promoting self-sorting and the decrease in conformity and government trust. Although this is the primary argument laid out in his article, Bishop makes several other points in support or leading up to this one. Bishop argues that Americans’ distrust in government is not due to the government itself, but rather where individuals stand and the circumstances at hand. There has always been distrust in government and other institutions, not only in America, but all around the world. The increasing homogeneity has allowed for landslide victories in politics, reducing the amount of attention and care given to minorities and the lower class. All these factors play into the act of self-sorting and how it relates to decreased trust in the government.



In conclusion, the United States has become increasingly divided both politically and culturally. Recent political events such as the election of President Donald Trump and his proposed plans and actions have subsequently led to decreased political party cooperation and government unity, promoting self-segregation. Cultural divides created by individuals self-sorting based on residency, income, and education have also contributed to this divide. Simple solutions are not apparent for resolving these issues; therefore, careful thought and action must be put into place to encourage the move toward unity. Bishop outlines a connection between government distrust and self-sorting, which explains how the move toward individuality and the decrease in conformity due to government distrust leads everyday Americans to self-sort.

## Works Cited

- Bishop, Bill. "Americans Have Lost Faith in Institutions. That's Not Because of Trump or 'Fake News.'" *The Washington Post*, 3 Mar. 2017,  
[www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2017/03/03/americans-have-lost-faith-in-institutions-thats-not-because-of-trump-or-fake-news/?utm\\_term=.0651cade7269](http://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2017/03/03/americans-have-lost-faith-in-institutions-thats-not-because-of-trump-or-fake-news/?utm_term=.0651cade7269).
- Blow, Charles M. "The Self-Sort." *New York Times*, 11 Apr. 2014,  
[www.nytimes.com/2014/04/12/opinion/blow-the-self-sort.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/12/opinion/blow-the-self-sort.html).
- Miller, Leila. "America's Partisan Divide Grew Wider Than Ever in 2017." *PBS*, Public Broadcasting Service, 5 Oct. 2017, [www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/americas-partisan-divide-grew-wider-than-ever-in-2017/](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/americas-partisan-divide-grew-wider-than-ever-in-2017/).