



AUSTIN - DEMONSTRATORS FROM THE TEA PARTY MOVEMENT. MANIFESTANTES DEL MOVIMIENTO DE TEA PARTY.

◉ tored into the new equation. Two decades later (2000) in "Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community", Robert Putnam, a sociologist who had analyzed the Italian regional systems for two decades, detected the following social trends in his own country.

### Bowling alone

Americans were becoming increasingly disconnected from their family, friends, neighbors, and their democratic structures.

Americans were even "bowling alone." In other words, more Americans were still bowling than ever before, but they were not bowling in leagues or teams. Putnam showed how changes in work, family structure, age, suburban life, television, computers, women's roles and other factors, contributed to this decline of

togetherness at the "micro" level. Putnam warned that Americans' stock of social capital - the very fabric of Americans' connections with each other - had plummeted, impoverishing lives and communities. With this, the "declining social capital" led to the continued and growing distrust in government, explaining the general low voting turnouts or the rise of the recent "Tea Party movement." The "Tea Party" became the standard-bearer against a government seen as spendthrift and invasive.

This trend triggered lower attendance percentages (a 58% drop) at club meetings; family dinners suffered a 43% drop and even having friends at home declined by 35%, Putnam found. But one more factor was working its way through the demographic shifts. "The Big Sort," a book writ-

ten in 2008 by the Texas journalist Bill Bishop (in collaboration with sociologist Robert Cushing), was becoming the landmark story of how America has come to be, nowadays, a country of swelling cultural division, economic separation, and political polarization. Going far beyond the simplistic red state/blue state divide, Bishop marshaled original data and incisive reporting to show how Americans have "sorted" themselves geographically, economically, and politically into like-minded communities over the last three decades.

This is the "Big Sort," the self-selection of people into increasingly like-minded communities at microscopic levels of society. This did not necessarily mean that people were "bowling together," but maybe they were just living more closely together with their group affinities. So paradoxically, the more diverse America becomes, the more locally homogenous it becomes.

### More divided

States are now more divided. The division between rural America and urban America has grown wider.

People have just kept "sorting"! Bishop proclaimed, "Americans have clustered in communities of sameness, among people with similar ways of life, beliefs and, in the end, politics."

Bishop's claim was that the local landslide effect has been largely the result of "demographic resorting," in effect relegating the concept of