

The Power of Unity

Throughout history, strong social unity and cooperation have underpinned national success. In mid-20th-century America, for example, the highest federal income-tax rates exceeded 90% [wolterskluwer.com](https://www.wolterskluwer.com), reflecting a shared commitment to collective goals. That era produced extraordinary achievements, victory in World War II, the Manhattan Project, the Apollo moon landings, and the rise of world-class research universities, driven by large-scale public investment and common purpose.

Modern social-science research confirms that this cohesion matters: economists report a **“positive relationship between social cohesion and economic growth,”** since trust and togetherness help strengthen institutions and drive innovation idos-research.de. In fact, social cohesion is “not only a valuable goal in itself but also a key condition” for sustainable economic growth idos-research.de. In short, when people trust one another and pull together, nations grow stronger and more prosperous.

By contrast, division erodes that foundation. Today the United States faces intense political polarization. Scholars note a **“clear consensus”** that extreme party polarization leads to legislative **“gridlock, stalemate, [and] incapacity,”** effectively paralyzing Congress amacad.org. In practical terms, this means fewer compromises, fewer major bills passed, and long-running feuds over narrow issues. Congress is now almost perpetually split (in fact, divided government has prevailed about 69% of the time since the 1970s amacad.org), and studies show that more polarized Congresses pass *fewer* significant laws amacad.org amacad.org. This gridlock has real costs: national challenges – from crumbling infrastructure to pandemic preparedness – go unresolved. Meanwhile, public debt has soared. The Congressional Budget Office projects that U.S. federal debt will soon surpass its record World-War-II high (debt-to-GDP over 100% by the 2030s) pgpf.org. In short, America’s internal divides and partisan fights have coincided with mounting deficits and a sense of stagnation. Not surprisingly, analysts describe our era as one of **“divided polarization”** – a time when cooperation is rare and democratic institutions struggle to act amacad.org amacad.org.

From Shared Progress to Partisan Battles

In recent decades, political debate has often focused on culturally charged issues affecting relatively small segments of society. Gun control, abortion rights, and other “culture wars” dominate media cycles, even as global challenges loom large. Many observers argue that this sharp turn to narrow fights began around the 1980s. The Reagan administration’s tax cuts inaugurated a long era of small-government, low-tax conservatism. Reagan slashed the top income-tax rate, but did *not* fully cut spending

accordingly. As the Brookings Institution notes, the 1981 tax cut “was huge,” but it “didn’t pay for itself” – deficits swelled and many promised spending cuts never materialized [brookings.edu](https://www.brookings.edu). Subsequent decades saw further tax reductions for the wealthy (e.g. under George W. Bush and Trump), funded by even larger deficits.

Crucially, decades of tax cuts have not delivered the broad prosperity often promised. Academic research shows that cutting taxes for high earners tends mainly to boost the fortunes of the rich, without generating extra jobs or growth. In a long-term international study of 18 advanced economies over 50 years, economists David Hope and Julian Limberg found that when governments cut taxes on the rich, **“the rich get richer, while unemployment and economic growth are unaffected.”** [lse.ac.uk](https://www.lse.ac.uk) In other words, the “trickle-down” theory of expanding everyone’s wealth through tax cuts for the top has repeatedly failed in the data. Indeed, they conclude that such reforms increase income inequality without producing any gain in GDP. On the other hand, periods of higher tax rates like the 1950s and 1960s coincided with faster middle-class wage growth and strong public investments.

This ideological shift from shared sacrifice to “every man for himself” has had a political payoff. As Northwestern sociologist Monica Prasad explains, **“Republicans are obsessed with tax cuts... because tax cuts are the only issue that unifies their coalition.”** [ipr.northwestern.edu](https://www.ipr.northwestern.edu) In practice, this has meant that Republican leaders emphasize rhetoric of liberty and freedom while advocating deep cuts in public spending on education, health care, and social programs. Critics point out the irony: policies marketed as promoting freedom often end up reducing the very public investments (schools, hospitals, infrastructure) that help give ordinary Americans real opportunity and security.

Academics studying public policy echo this concern. When government revenue shrinks, **social programs tend to bear the brunt**. For example, after the 2017 tax overhaul in the U.S. (which heavily cut taxes on corporations and the wealthy), the Congressional Budget Office projected higher deficits and even cuts to Medicaid and other programs in order to hold the budget together. Meanwhile, broad measures of well-being (like infant mortality, life expectancy gaps, or child poverty) have worsened in recent years even as GDP rose [lse.ac.ukbrookings.edu](https://www.lse.ac.uk/brookings.edu). In sum, the past forty years of policy have seen a steeper drop in taxes on high incomes and modest earners, paired with higher debt, rising inequality, and underinvestment in public goods, outcomes that many experts link to partisan priorities rather than actual economic necessity.

The Cost of Division: Partisan Gridlock and Lost Progress

All this plays out against an international backdrop where cohesion is more important than ever. Other major powers (China, the EU, even regional blocs like ASEAN) are able to make long-term plans and investments without the kind of gridlock that hobbles Washington. In science, education, and infrastructure, they increasingly pull ahead. Meanwhile, the U.S. Congress, nearly evenly split between parties, struggles to pass bipartisan bills. Political scientists find that today's Congress is riddled with **“legislative paralysis,”** which undermines government effectiveness amacad.org. For example, one analysis notes that party polarization makes it much harder for any bill to clear Congress's multiple veto points (committees, bicameral votes, filibusters, etc.), so *“the result of polarization is paralysis.”* amacad.org

The practical fallout is clear: rather than investing in new generation research or global competitiveness, lawmakers squabble over polarizing symbols. Meanwhile, critical goals go unmet. This divided environment has coincided with record-high deficits brookings.edu, ballooning national debt pgpf.org, and only limited legislative achievements. (One independent study found that a polarized, divided Congress passes very few landmark laws amacad.org.) In short, Americans are devoting huge resources to contentious internal debates rather than common challenges.

Toward a Christian Ethos of Compassion and Unity

Some folks have likened America to a Christian nation. If taken literally, it would imply structuring society around the teachings of Jesus. Christ's message was unmistakably one of compassion, generosity, and unity. Instead of blaming others or hoarding wealth, Jesus emphasized caring for the needy and loving one's neighbor. In His own words (NASB):

- **“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”** (Mark 12:31) biblegateway.com. Jesus declared this the second-greatest commandment, putting our fellow humans on par with loving God.
- **“I give you a new commandment, that you love one another; even as I have loved you.”** (John 13:34) biblehub.com. He explicitly tied unity to His followers' identity: “by this all people will know that you are My disciples,” by their love.
- **“For I was hungry and you gave Me something to eat; ... I was a stranger and you invited Me in; ...”** (Matthew 25:35–36) biblegateway.com. In teaching about the final judgment, Jesus identified Himself with the poor and vulnerable. Feeding the hungry, welcoming the stranger, and caring for the sick are, in effect, doing these acts to Christ Himself.
- **“Go and do the same.”** (Luke 10:37) biblegateway.com. After telling the Parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus told a Jewish teacher to emulate the Samaritan's mercy.

In other words, stop quibbling over who is the “neighbor”, just love whoever needs help.

- **“Do to others as you would have them do to you.”** (Luke 6:31) biblegateway.com. Often called the Golden Rule, Jesus urged us to treat every person with the basic dignity and kindness we seek for ourselves. This simple ethic can form the basis of a cooperative society.
- **“Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you.”** (Luke 6:37–38) biblegateway.com. Jesus taught that generous, forgiving hearts multiply goodness. Rather than punishing or blaming, we should pardon faults and share with those in need, trusting that blessing follows such love.
- **“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.”** (Matthew 5:7) biblegateway.com. He declared that showing mercy (compassion for others’ suffering) is itself a virtue rewarded by God’s mercy.
- **“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.”** (Matthew 5:9) biblegateway.com. Christians are called to be agents of reconciliation, actively healing divisions rather than deepening them.
- **“One thing you lack: go, sell all you possess and give to the poor... and come, follow Me.”** (Mark 10:21) biblegateway.com. To the rich young ruler who asked how to inherit eternal life, Jesus did not say “keep your wealth”, He said abandon your material security for the sake of others.
- **“No one can serve two masters... You cannot serve God and wealth.”** (Matthew 6:24) biblegateway.com. Here Jesus explicitly warns against worshiping money. A true Christian society would not let wealth be an idol; instead, it would use its resources to serve people.

These teachings emphasize unity, humility, and care for the disadvantaged. They cut directly against exclusion and division. If Americans truly embraced this spirit, we would see less finger-pointing and more mutual aid. In a “Christian” sense, policies that feed the poor, educate all children, and promote common welfare are not optional extras but the very essence of walking in Christ’s footsteps. As the parable of the Good Samaritan teaches, the true neighbor is the one to whom we show compassion without asking qualification biblegateway.com.

History and research alike show that unity, not division, brings prosperity and resilience. Societies that pull together enjoy stronger economies, higher trust, and greater accomplishments idos-research.de. By contrast, internal strife, partisan

polarization, and widening inequality have stalled U.S. progress amacad.orglse.ac.uk. If we take to heart the values long associated with our nation, or with the words of Jesus Christ, we would prioritize the common good over narrow interests. Feeding the hungry, educating all children, protecting health, and forgiving neighbors are not just charitable acts; they strengthen the entire fabric of society. The evidence is clear: **unity and mutual care are the forgotten paths to real prosperity**. In these polarized times, remembering those principles could help America heal its divides and live up to its highest ideals.