Alienation in Oregon: Why 11 Counties Voted to Leave the State and Join Idaho

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Ideological disagreements have led to an inability of members of different political parties to co-exist. As a result, states such as Oregon risk being ripped apart as the divide deepens across party lines.

Long-held discontent in Eastern Oregon has begun to boil over, as the 11 counties (out of 36 total) have joined what is known as the “Greater Idaho Movement”, which seeks to move the border of Idaho so these counties can join the state and secede from Oregon, according to the [Seattle Times](https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation-politics/campaign-to-join-idaho-gains-support-of-two-more-oregon-counties/). This movement, which originated in 2020, has already become palatable to Eastern Oregonians as these counties voted to support the measure in the same year the organization was initiated.

This movement began as Eastern Oregonians, who live in an area that is dominated by the agricultural industry and have historically held strongly conservative viewpoints, feel that they are not being represented by Oregon’s state government.

The larger population in Western Oregon holds more liberal viewpoints, which has been reflected by state’s policies and elected officials. For example, Oregon has only had Democratic governors for the past 36 years, and both the House of Representatives and Senate have been under Democratic control for the past 10 years, as reported by the [National Govenor’s Assocation](https://www.nga.org/former-governors/oregon/) and [Ballotpedia](https://ballotpedia.org/Party_control_of_Oregon_state_government).

Proponents of the Greater Idaho Movement express that there are irreconcilable differences between the two regions that are rooted in political affiliation. Mike McCarter, a farmer and resident of La Pine, Oregon, states in an [op-ed for the East Oregonian](https://www.eastoregonian.com/opinion/columnists/other-views-why-voting-to-join-idaho-is-the-right-choice-for-eastern-oregon/article_2302f900-a6d4-11eb-8555-0fb4ff6b2dc0.html) that “Voting patterns prove that Eastern, Central and Southern Oregon do not belong in Oregon. It’s bigger than politics — it’s our culture.” McCarter’s insistence that party affiliation goes deeper than a difference of opinion, and instead defines the customs and values of a society, affirms the growing sense of polarization within communities.

On a national level, the extreme sense of polarization in current political discourse has led to divergence both between parties, and within parties. For instance, in the most recent vote for House Speaker, it took Republicans 15 rounds of voting to elect Kevin McCarthy based on ideological differences within their party, [according to NPR](https://www.npr.org/2023/01/06/1147470516/kevin-mccarthy-speaker-of-the-house-vote).

The most recent Republican response to the State of the Union, delivered by Arkansas Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders, also addresses the divide between Democrats and Republicans. Sanders states in a [video published to C-SPAN](https://www.npr.org/2023/02/08/1155329293/sarah-huckabee-sanders-republican-response-state-of-the-union-2023) and reported by NPR that the “the dividing line in America is no longer between right and left, it’s between normal or crazy.” Huckabee Sanders illustrates the national issues of being unable to see any merit or value in individuals of an opposing ideology, and exacerbating this severe polarization as a result.

Ultimately, even if unsuccessful, the Greater Idaho Movement provides a wake up call for Americans across the country. The divide between political ideologies has become increasingly more severe, and, if unchecked, may make it impossible to co-exist as a unified nation.