



Written by [Charles Scaliger](#) on January 20, 2016

## Is America Ready for Socialism?

With Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders breathing down her neck, Democratic establishment candidate of choice Hillary Clinton is starting to “feel the Bern.” Optimistic Sanders supporters and some sympathetic pollsters are now pointing out that Sanders’ poll numbers vis-à-vis Clinton’s are much better than those of Candidate Obama’s at a comparable point in the 2008 campaign. By all accounts, Sanders is looking more and more like a legitimate contender, which brings up the question, articulated in the title of a recent *Christian Science Monitor* [article](#): “Is America finally ready for socialism?”



As noted by article author Cathaleen Chen, a new poll “found that 43 percent of likely voters in the Feb. 1 Democratic Iowa caucuses would use the word ‘socialist’ to describe themselves.” Moreover, only 37 percent of those polled self-identified as “capitalist.”

Nor is this sort of thinking confined to comparatively liberal, Democratic Iowa. A national Gallup poll last June found that 47 percent of *all* voters surveyed nationwide would vote for a socialist, with the number rising to 59 percent among registered Democrats. A *New York Times* poll taken last fall found that 56 percent of Democrats were comfortable with socialism as a governing philosophy, while only 29 percent were not.

These are astonishing numbers. We are only a generation removed from an era when a presidential candidate such as George Bush in 1988 could effectively deep-six the campaign of his Democratic rival, Michael Dukakis, merely by labeling him a “liberal” and getting it to stick. Thanks in no small measure to the charisma of Bernie Sanders, socialism is becoming hip (occupying rhetorical territory once claimed by “progressivism” and “liberalism”), to the point where America faces the very real prospect of electing a professed socialist as president later this year.

There are some obvious contributing factors driving America’s new love affair with socialism. One is the fact that our old socialist nemeses, the Soviet Union and Red China, along with their satellite states, have undergone dramatic sociopolitical changes, allowing “democratic socialists” such as Bernie Sanders to portray Stalinism, Maoism, and other brands of Marxist totalitarianism as aberrations, instances of a benign philosophy taken to irrational, fanatical extremes. Instead Scandinavia — not the former Soviet Union — with its high standard of living, benevolent safety nets, and cheerful, well-to-do citizenries, is the real face of socialism, as Sanders never tires of telling his young, idealistic fan base.

Another factor in socialism’s current popularity is the ongoing economic crisis which — like the Great Depression 80 years ago — has provided cover for the enemies of freedom and laissez-faire capitalism to blame them, instead of an excess of Big Government, for the crisis. To the majority of Americans who have little idea how the Fed and fractional reserve banking work, or the extent to which government controls throttle free enterprise and distort pricing, the Great Recession was yet another example of the



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excesses of the free market wreaking havoc — excesses that supposedly needed to be brought to heel by more layers of regulatory oversight.

In many respects, the Great Recession and its aftermath — which we are still experiencing — were foreshadowed by the Great Depression of the 1930s. Then as now, many Americans' faith in freedom was severely shaken, allowing the unscrupulous FDR to foist the New Deal, with all of its new and unconstitutional regulations, on an impoverished, desperate, unresisting electorate. It was the FDR era that brought about many of the first examples of Big Government control — federal gun laws, federal regulation of banks and financial markets, fiat money, Big Government make-work programs, Social Security, and federal welfare — that remain features of the American Nanny State to this day. It was the New Deal era, in fact, when America really began her long flirtation with socialism — flirtation that is now turning into a full-blown romance.

Sanders is right when he insists that the New Deal (as well as other Big Government schemes, such as Johnson's Great Society, that have built upon it) is in fact socialism. He is also partly correct in pointing out that FDR's famous "four freedoms" — freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear — meet with socialism's stamp of approval. While the first two originated long before socialist theory, and were heartily approved of by the Founders, the latter two are purely socialist innovations. It is, after all, impossible to guarantee freedom from want and freedom from fear without compelling others to provide those goods. "Freedom from want" and "freedom from fear" are thus no different from other faux freedoms and rights promised by socialists, such as the "right" to medical care and employment.

The dreary truth is that America has been a partly socialist country since the early 20th century, even though the likes of FDR (and most Democratic politicians since) have been loath to call socialism by its real name. Not only that, socialism is no longer the guiding philosophy of "liberal Democrats" only; nearly all modern Republican politicians openly promote programs and institutions, such as Social Security, Medicare, and the Federal Reserve system, that are socialist. Only a very few Republicans in Washington have the courage to oppose socialism on principle, while all Democrats, whether "moderate" or "radical," are died-in-the-wool socialists by conviction.

The difference between Hillary Clinton and her rival from the Green Mountain State is one of style alone; in substance both are hard-core socialists. Among the Republicans vying for the chance to oppose them in the general election, only a couple are not at least milquetoast socialists, with the majority (including all the GOP establishment preferences, such as Jeb Bush and Chris Christie, as well as The Donald himself) unapologetically socialist in supporting the likes of the Fed, corporate welfare, and cherished "entitlement" programs that Americans allegedly cannot live without.

Thus the Sanders campaign is not so much about whether America is ready for socialism. It is about whether Americans are ready to be honest enough with themselves to call it by its real name — and perhaps, after generations of flirtation and romance with the arch foe of freedom — to finally call off the engagement.

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