

My love and passion for what I was writing about motivated me to write t.

No matter what time of day it is, we are living in a constant news cycle. Even if humans completely disconnected from technology and went off the grid, there is a chance they would still know who won the most recent election in their area. In this constant news cycle, it gets really hard to determine what is fact and what is fiction. In America, it seems that World War 3 will not be between two countries, it seems like it will be between the two main domestic American political beliefs, capitalism and socialism. Political polarization levels have risen to those not seen since the outbreak of the Civil War, and there is no sign that they are going to drop anytime soon. One prominent talking point from both sides is the idea of socialism. Some people love it, some people hate it, and some people have no idea what it is. One important historical event, the Red Scare, has caused a lot of people to develop an opinion on what they believe socialism is, and whether America should adopt socialist methods in the government. The social effects of the Red Scare, which lasted between the late 1940's and early 1950's and introduced an extreme sense of negativity towards communism, can still be felt today. Many of the older generations who were either directly affected or were raised by someone who was, believe that socialism is the new communism, and have stopped the United States from potentially adopting a socialist way of thinking.

To begin, background information and definitions that have been classified as important terms for this paper will be presented. After explaining these definitions, putting it into perspective will highlight the thinking of both the era of the Cold War and present day America. Then, evidence from today's America will be presented,

showing how people feel about socialism. Even though America today is drastically different from America during the Cold War, the past certainly impacts the present.

The last piece of this paper will be the analysis, in which the feelings of Cold War America and 21st century America will be compared and contrasted.

The starting point for modern anti-socialist sentiment in America was the Cold War. Dr. Paul Johnson, a professor of political science at Auburn University, defines socialism on his university website, which includes a glossary of political science terms that are pertinent to discussions surrounding politics. Quoted directly from his website, "A class of ideologies favoring an economic system in which all or most productive resources are the property of the government, in which the production and distribution of goods and services are administered primarily by the government rather than by private enterprise, and in which any remaining private production and distribution (socialists differ on how much of this is tolerable) is heavily regulated by the government rather than by market processes" (Johnson). Put simply, the blanket definition of socialism is the government owning production and distribution of goods, instead of private ownership. Any private ownership of business that remains is extremely regulated so that there are no monopolies placed on products. There have been many different ways that socialism has been added to state governments over the years.

The two main models of socialism that people talk about today are the Scandinavian model of socialism and the Soviet model of socialism. As a consequence of the anti-socialist feelings in America, both systems are lumped in together under the blanket definition of socialism, even though they have their differences. Both models also have their similarities, but they are quite different in how they chose to approach the process of adopting these ideals.

Beginning with the Scandinavian model, they integrated socialist values with a strong social welfare system that strongly benefits the citizens, not the government. Some Scandinavians don't actually think of themselves as socialists, but instead as free market capitalists who have a very successful welfare state. Factors of this model include a very generous social welfare system, strong property rights, high levels of unionization, a free market and trading system, and a partnership between the government, businesses, and unions, which allows for open communication and a model that works well for everyone involved (McKay). Meanwhile, the Soviet model of socialism was derived from Karl Marx, who believed that socialism should erase the state from existence, and public ownership of everything should be emphasized, instead of government ownership. He did believe that capitalism had to happen before socialism could be implemented, so Vladimir Lenin had the state become a centralized government because he believed that the state could bring Russia through the first stage of capitalism. Joseph Stalin took these models and turned them into a way of thinking for him to become a dictator and rule Russia as a totalitarian state. He allowed the local leaders and their governments to add the Marxist ideas to their areas, but they often only added in the ideas that would benefit them the most (Lumen). As it can be seen, these ways of interpreting and running socialism are very different, but as will be explored later, they are often put together as the same.

Continuing to lay foundations, The Cold War was not actually a real war. Following World War 2, the Cold War was more of a political and social rivalry between the United States and the communist Soviet Union, which lasted from 1947 to about 1990.

There were many factors of this “war.” There was an attempted blockade from the Soviets of West Germany, which led to NATO, the Soviet backed government of North Korea invading South Korea in 1950, and there was a nuclear arms race, where the Soviets became the first country to explode a nuclear warhead since America had done it in during World War 2 (Atomic Heritage Foundation). While the United States and the Soviet Union never came into direct violent contact with each other, the Cold War led to a very high period of anti-Soviet sentiment. This was only exacerbated by the Red Scare. The Red Scare was caused by United States leaders telling citizens to be aware of possible communists, or socialists, in their lives, and to make sure none of them were going to be influenced by that way of thinking. Between 1950 and 1954, Senator Joseph McCarthy (R-WI), launched a series of investigations into high ranking officials in America, claiming that he knew who in America was a communist. He opened investigations into multiple government officials, even members of the Army (UVA). He used his power as chair of the Senate Committee on Government Operations to hold very publicized hearings alleging that government officials or government contracted workers, were members of the Communist Party. Once he was finished accusing members of the government, he moved to accusing people from all over America. While Senator McCarthy and his staff usually had little to no evidence of their accusations, these hearings were still powerful enough to ruin people’s lives. Even if the hearing led to nothing, whoever was called before the committee had their careers and their lives ruined, and they usually had no chance to try and prove their innocence to the public, because the damage had already been done (Pufong).

This created fear amongst Americans of the alleged threat of communism, socialism, and the Soviet Union because according to the government, their next door neighbors could be a communist. It went so far in some places to even spawn a very popular phrase, "Better dead than red." Even if this phrase was born out of comedy, it still implies that people in the United States would be better off if they were dead than being seen embracing socialism. This phrase is still around today, but it is used with a very satirical tone. Americans have historically feared enemies that hide within their own country, so a country wide movement against socialism was not shocking (Storrs). America's opinions of communism in the '40s and '50s are very clear. The Red Scare and the Cold War were so long ago, however, those sentiments remain very high.

It is clear that there is a generational gap in who likes socialism, and who dislikes socialism. While some political theorists believe that support for socialism has never been higher, support for it might not be as high as they claim it is. This conversation can be seen in huge events recently in history, especially the 2020 Presidential Election primaries. Throughout the Democratic primaries, it looked like the two front-runners would be Bernie Sanders, a self described socialist, and Joe Biden, a centrist at best. It is important to note that Sanders was not advocating for a Soviet Union style socialist government, but a model which followed the Scandanavian approach, a progressive tax system, and a strong welfare system. These two men clashed a lot during the campaign, and their supporters could not have been more opposite from each other. As can be seen on the graph (referred to as figure 1) below, on February 29, 2020, Bernie Sanders was leading the polls with nearly 29%, while Joe Biden was distant at around 17% (FiveThirtyEight).

Figure 1 showed that maybe, America was ready to have a socialist in charge. Everyone in the country was talking about what it would be like for Bernie Sanders vs. Donald Trump, but those conversations were quickly stopped. Despite Sanders' momentum, Joe Biden came back and won the nomination and eventually the presidency.

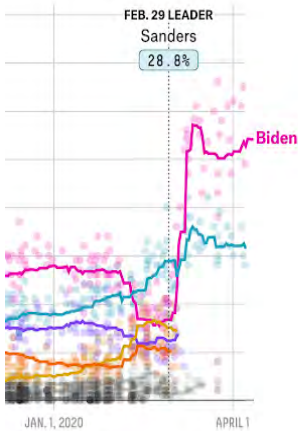


Figure 1.

While Joe Biden won the presidency, it was a very bad election for self-proclaimed progressive and socialist candidates. President Trump and his allies used the word “socialism” as a scare word, and their tactics worked extremely well across certain states, including Florida. The Latin Americans who have had their culture tied to Cuba and Fidel Castro for decades believed the attacks on socialists and voted Republican in larger numbers than in 2016 (Soave). While Democrats made some gains in normally Republican places, progressive candidates had a much worse showing than they did in 2018. There is also a possibility that 2020 was a more “normal election” than the 2016 presidential election, where Bernie Sanders became very popular.

In 2016, voters became enthusiastic about both Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders because they offered something different than the status quo, which had been reinforced through out both the Bush and Obama administrations. Donald Trump offered populist ideas which excited the conservative voters, and Sanders offered some socialist ideas, which excited the liberal voters. Once Donald Trump took office and the Democratic party was looking to beat him, voters decided to go with a more “back to normal” candidate, who was Joe Biden. Sanders’ appeal had dropped in voters across the country because the extreme views of Donald Trump on the right turned people off to the extreme views of Bernie Sanders on the left. While both men could not be more different from each other politically, they are both seen as drawing support from “extreme” sides of their parties, and it could be argued that in the same vein that populism is too radical for some conservatives, socialism is too radical for some liberals.

Young people across the country were fired up for President Bernie Sanders and progressive candidates, how could they suffer such a devastating defeat? It was a combination of factors, but one of the main ones was that the electorate who voted in the primaries, made up of mainly the oldest 3 generations, did not want a self proclaimed socialist to be their nominee. According to a recent Axios poll, also known as figure 2, 70% of millennials and 64% of Generation Z would be willing to vote for a socialist candidate. But, only 44% of Generation X, 36% of baby boomers, and 33% of silent generation members would vote for a socialist candidate (Kight). There is no split in this poll between what form of socialism the candidate would be advocating for, which is a definite reason why Bernie Sanders struggled so much. While his supporters knew that he wasn’t going to be the next Joseph Stalin, his opponents painted him as that, and he couldn’t shake the stigma that he was a “crazy socialist”.

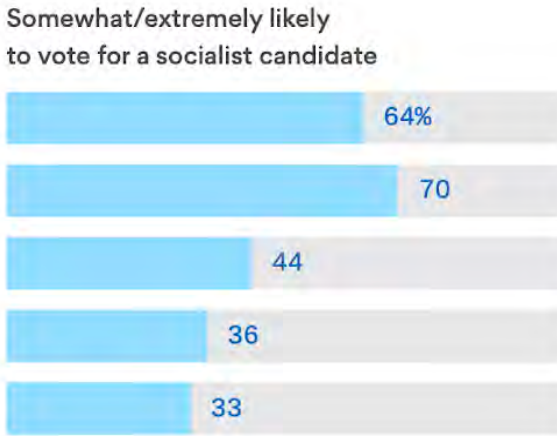
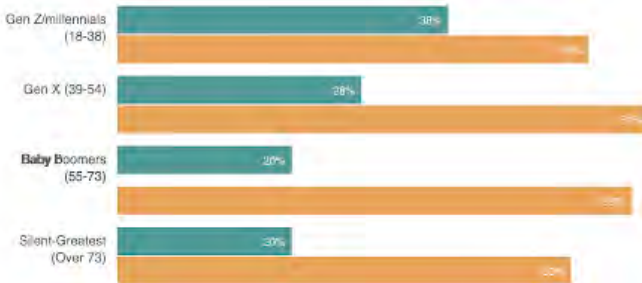


Figure 2.

Gallup conducted a poll simply asking Americans what their reaction to socialism was, not splitting it up by generation. They also gathered the results of various polls across the country from different news sources. Their results showed that only 39% of people interviewed have positive opinions of socialism, versus 57% who have negative opinions of it. Another poll showed a 55% negative score for socialism, but no positive score was given. The last poll showed that there was a 19% positive rating for socialism, and a 53% negative rating (Newport).

According to a poll from NPR, also referred to as figure 3, capitalism is rated as much more favorable than socialism with people between Generation X and the silent generation.

Figure 3.



For reference, the blue bar on top represents the favorability rating of socialism, and the orange bar on the bottom represents the favorability rating of capitalism. As figure 3 displays, gen Z and millennials have the highest favorability rating of socialism, at 38%. As the graph moves down, Generation X has only a 28% favorable rating, while both baby boomers and silent-greatest have 20%. The greatest separation between both answers is in baby boomers, where 39 points separates socialism and capitalism. Meanwhile, capitalism scored in the low fifties to low sixties in each group, highlighting a great difference between which system is viewed as positive. There was no information highlighting people who didn't have an opinion on either socialism or capitalism. (Montanaro).

For a final poll showing the opinion of socialism, I conducted a poll on social media of people in my personal life. Respondents were asked two questions, "What is your immediate, gut reaction to socialism?" and "What is your generation?" The options for the first question were extremely favorable, favorable, no opinion, unfavorable, and extremely unfavorable. The options for the second question were silent generation, baby boomer, Generation X, millennial, and Generation Z. 39 people responded to this poll. For the first question, 15.4% of respondents said extremely favorable, 43.6% said favorable, 12.8% said no opinion, 15.4% said unfavorable, and 12.8% said extremely unfavorable. However, once it is broken down by generation, the differences are more clear. Generation Z and millennials said more favorable than unfavorable, and Generation X and baby boomers said more unfavorable than favorable. It is very clear throughout all of these polls that even though socialism's ratings are more negative than positive across the country, once it is split up by generation, the generations who either lived through

the Red Scare or whose parents lived through the Red Scare, have much more negative opinions of socialism than the younger generations. Another possible explanation of the negativity on socialism in older generations can be the propaganda that they were shown in America during the Red Scare.

During the Red Scare, propaganda targeting the Soviets and socialism was very common. Christy Schroeder, who wrote their thesis at Georgia State University on this topic, believes that the messaging of the propaganda is very clear. They believe that the images show the socialists as small and dirty, and usually of a skin color that isn't white. This figure can appear with torn clothes and looks really worn down. The American figure is usually strong, clean-shaven, white, and appears in a position of power over the smaller, allegedly communist figure (Schroeder). This propaganda that was fed to Americans was clearly designed to try and convince Americans that socialism was weak and needed to be beaten down by the stronger, tough man. As briefly stated above, Americans were very scared of enemies that existed within their own borders, or enemies that were hiding in the shadows. This propaganda that is written about by Schroeder tries to send the message that people who look weak and dirty could be socialists, and they need to be weeded out and found by the American people who believe in freedom, liberty, and hard work.

The social effects of the Red Scare, while it was nearly 70 years ago, can still be felt today. It appears that younger generations are open to adopting socialism as a way of running this country, but the older generations, which make up most of the electorate, are unwilling to look at ideas that people claim are from "radical left socialists".

There are ideas and political mandates that are from Republican candidates, and as soon as they get branded as socialism, they are dead in the water. In America, the top 3 oldest generations make up a majority of the electorate. The oldest people vote in every single election, whether it be a school board official, town manager, or a presidential candidate, they will vote and make their voices heard. Meanwhile, the younger generations have had a really hard time turning out high numbers of themselves to vote, aside from the most recent election. There is a phenomenon where the more progressive, socialist candidates can be seen as the favorite to win because of their social media presence, which the younger generations contribute to much more than the older generations are able to. A lot of the voices online singing praise to well known socialists Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez might not even be old enough to vote, but because they like them, they post about them and amplify their online presence. Even though this online platform for these socialist candidates is great, it is clear that their high online presence does not translate to the polls as much as one might expect.

Whether it be because younger generations are at school or work more than the retired, older generations, or young people just don't care enough to vote because they don't understand the power that their vote has, young people just simply do not turn out to vote as much as the older generations do. As seen in all of the graphs above, the generations that make up the majority of the electorate have very negative opinions of socialism, even if they don't fully understand what it really means. Especially in the case of the survey that I conducted, I simply asked people what their gut reactions were to socialism, not if they could define it or pick something out in history that they thought reflected socialism in action.

The general consensus of the older generations is that socialism is bad, no matter what the word is applied to.

The difference in generations can also be seen in how generations define socialism. There will always be people who don't know what it is, and those can be seen in every generation. However, it can be said that the older generations define socialism as the Soviet style, with a totalitarian government, and the younger generations define it as the Scandinavian style, with strong social programs and tax brackets, which provide funding for public projects much better than America can. Older generations will immediately think of socialism as the Stalin dictatorship and poor living conditions, while younger generations will think of the newer, updated versions of socialism seen in Norway, Sweden, and Scandinavia.

The two oldest generations, the silent generation and baby boomers, lived through the Cold War. They had to live through the constant news cycle of Senator McCarthy's hearings, where he convinced people that their next door neighbor could be an evil socialist from Soviet Russia and that they wanted to take over America and force the country to become a communist state. It was later revealed that McCarthy didn't have much of a basis for his claims and he was censured from the Senate, but the damage had already been done. Even if absolutely no one that McCarthy had said was a communist was actually one, the average American would still believe they were. They had to deal with the political fluctuation back and forth with the world's political state, with the formation of NATO and the Korean War. They were constantly told, in real time, that the socialists in Russia were to blame for all of these problems that America was now going to fix, and they were scared and full of anger because of it.

Fear and anger are huge motivators. Americans were still in the stage that they mostly trusted their government and the information that they were given from government employees.

The propaganda given out to American citizens also had a huge impact on how people felt about socialism during the Red Scare. Coupled with the anger and fear felt, the images of weak and dirty people labeled as “reds”, “socialists” and “communists” created an environment for hatred towards the people in the images. Not only did the imaging of the weak socialists create this, but the strong Americans who are clean shaved, wrapped in the American flag, who are beating down these socialists resonated with Americans. It has the same effect that action movies have now. They were able to put themselves into the place of the strong Americans, and they wanted to beat down the villains just like the men on the posters were. It created a real hero vs. villain story for a lot of Americans during that time, and everyone wanted to do their part to stop the evil socialists and become the hero they were seeing.

These sentiments were then passed down to their children, or Generation X. There doesn't need to be a huge psychological explanation for this, it is very apparent that parents have a huge effect on what their children believe. Even if the children were too young to understand what socialism actually was, or how serious the Cold War and Red Scare were, their parents likely just taught them that socialism is bad and that they shouldn't support anyone who espouses views similar to socialism. They were also taught to adopt their parent's definition of socialism, which is the Soviet model that characterizes socialism as evil.

However, the reason that Generation X isn't as extreme as the older two generations in their dislike of socialism is because they didn't live through the Cold War. They heard the stories from their parents and learned it in school, but they themselves didn't feel the fear of a socialist living next door. They were taught by their parents, but they didn't feel it themselves. That is also why millennials and members of Generation Z are warming back up to socialism. Not only are they two generations away from people who lived through the Red Scare, but they have not been forced to adopt the same definition of socialism. Younger people believe socialism to be a totally different form of socialism than the Cold War was fought against, which can explain why they are so welcoming to the idea of it. Their grandparents likely do not have as big of an influence on them that their parents do, so if their parents are not feeding them negative views on socialism, they can form their own opinions of it.

Despite positive views of socialism from the younger generations, the social effects of the Red Scare are still felt in American society today, and the result of that is America not being able to adopt a socialist way of life. The older generations lived through the Red Scare, and as a direct result from both their experiences and American propaganda targeting socialists, developed a hatred for socialism. As the older generations make up most of the American electorate, there is a very low chance that any huge governmental changes will reflect socialism, because all of those voters still remember the traumatic years of their life, when socialism was the scariest thing in the world to them. There is always a chance that because of the younger generations seemingly embracing socialism, that America sees leaders who have socialist views in offices all across the country. That will take a lot of time and a lot of work in scrubbing memories of the Red Scare out of American culture, and showing people that change can be good.

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