Socialism, Capitalism, and Democracy

Breakout Discussion

NCHC 2019

**Ground Rules for a Forum (from National Issues Forum)**

* Focus on the options.
* All options should be considered fairly.
* No one or two individuals should dominate.
* Maintain an open and respectful atmosphere.
* Help the moderator keep the conversation on track.
* Everyone is encouraged to participate.
* Listen to each other.

**Additional rules:**

* Acknowledge assumptions.
* Clarify definitions.
* Find common ground.

**Quotes:**

“I pass the test that says a man who isn't a socialist at 20 has no heart, and a man who is a socialist at 40 has no head.” William Casey, Quoted in the Washington Post, 7 May 1987.

“Socialism has no moral justification whatsoever; poor people are not morally superior to rich people, nor are they owed anything by rich people simply because of their lack of success. Charity is not a socialist concept - it is a religious one, an acknowledgment of God's sovereignty over property, a sovereignty the Left utterly rejects.” Ben Shapiro

“America was founded on liberty and independence -- not government coercion, domination and control. We are born free, and we will stay free. Tonight, we renew our resolve that America will never be a socialist country." Donald Trump, State of the Union Address, 2019

“I don't understand why it has to be either - or - either socialism or democracy. Why can't we combine things to get the best of each system?” Tim Allen

**Definitions:**

1. **Socialism**. “[Socialism](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socialism) is a range of [economic](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economic_systems) and [social systems](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_system) characterised by [social ownership](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_ownership) and [democratic control](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Workers%27_self-management) of the [means of production](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Means_of_production)[[10]](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Types_of_socialism#cite_note-10) as well as the political theories and movements associated with them.[[11]](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Types_of_socialism#cite_note-Socialism_at_The_Free_dictionary-11) Social ownership may refer to forms of [public](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/State_ownership), [collective](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Collective_ownership) or [cooperative](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cooperative) ownership, or to [citizen ownership of equity](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Citizen_ownership_of_equity).[[12]](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Types_of_socialism#cite_note-12) There are many varieties of socialism and there is no single definition encapsulating all of them,[[13]](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Types_of_socialism" \l "cite_note-Peter_Lamb_2006._p._1-13) though social ownership is the common element shared by its various forms.[[5]](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Types_of_socialism#cite_note-Busky1-5)[[14]](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Types_of_socialism#cite_note-14)[[15]](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Types_of_socialism#cite_note-15) [Socialist economic systems](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socialist_economics) can be further divided into [market](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Market_(economics)) and non-market forms.[[16]](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Types_of_socialism#cite_note-Kolb-16) The word [socialism](https://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socialism) thus refers to a broad range of theoretical and historical [socioeconomic](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socioeconomic) systems and has also been used by [many political movements throughout history](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_socialism) to describe themselves and their goals, generating numerous types of socialism.” Wikipedia.
   1. Is this definition accurate? Is it complete? Is it how the term is currently used?
   2. What kinds of assumptions do people make about Socialism? Why?
   3. What is good about Socialism? What problems might there be (in theory or in practice)?
   4. Can you think of any examples of “pure Socialism?” How does it work?
2. **Capitalism**. “Capitalism is an [economic system](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economic_system) based on the [private ownership](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Private_ownership) of the [means of production](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Means_of_production) and their operation for [profit](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Profit_(economics)).[[1]](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Capitalism#cite_note-1)[[2]](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Capitalism#cite_note-2)[[3]](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Capitalism#cite_note-3)[[4]](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Capitalism#cite_note-4) Characteristics central to capitalism include [private property](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Private_property), [capital accumulation](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Capital_accumulation), [wage labor](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wage_labor), [voluntary exchange](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Voluntary_exchange), a [price system](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Price_system) and [competitive markets](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Competition_(economics)).[[5]](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Capitalism#cite_note-5)[[6]](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Capitalism#cite_note-6) In a capitalist [market economy](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Market_economy), decision-making and investments are determined by every owner of wealth, property or production ability in [financial](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Financial_market) and [capital markets](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Capital_market), whereas prices and the distribution of goods and services are mainly determined by competition in goods and services markets.” Wikipedia.
   1. Is this definition accurate? Is it complete? Is it how the term is currently used?
   2. What kinds of assumptions do people make about Capitalism? Why?
   3. What is good about Capitalism? What problems might there be (in theory or in practice)?
   4. Can you think of any examples of “pure Capitalism?” How does it work?
3. **Democrac**y. “Democracy ([Greek](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek_language): δημοκρατία *dēmokratía*, literally "rule by people") is a form of [government](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Government) in which [the people](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/People) have the [authority](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Authority) to choose their governing [legislation](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legislation). Who people are and how authority is shared among them are core issues for democratic development and [constitution](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constitution). Some cornerstones of these issues are [freedom of assembly](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freedom_of_assembly) and [speech](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freedom_of_speech), [inclusiveness](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_exclusion#Social_inclusion) and [equality](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_equality), [membership](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Citizenship), [voting](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Voting_rights), [right to life](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Right_to_life) and [minority rights](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minority_rights).

Generally there are two types of democracy, direct or representative. In a [direct democracy](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Direct_democracy), the people directly [deliberate](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deliberate) and decide on [legislature](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legislature). In a [representative democracy](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Representative_democracy) the people elect representatives to deliberate and decide on legislature, such as in [parliamentary](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parliamentary_democracy) or [presidential democracy](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Presidential_democracy). Combining those basic types is done in [liquid democracy](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liquid_democracy).” Wikipedia.

* 1. What does Democracy have to do with Socialism or Capitalism?
  2. Is Democracy an unambiguous good?

1. **Democratic Socialism**. “Democratic socialism is a [socialist](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socialist) [political philosophy](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_philosophy) which advocates political [democracy](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democracy) alongside a [socially owned](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_ownership) economy,[[1]](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democratic_socialism#cite_note-Busky1-1) with an emphasis on [workers' self-management](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Workers%27_self-management) and [democratic control](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Workplace_democracy) of economic institutions within a [market](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Market_economy#Market_socialism) or some form of a [decentralised planned](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Decentralised_planning) [socialist economy](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socialist_economy).[[2]](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democratic_socialism#cite_note-Anderson,_Herr_448-2) Democratic socialists argue that capitalism is inherently incompatible with the values of [freedom](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freedom), [equality](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egalitarianism) and [solidarity](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Solidarity) and that these [ideals](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ideal_(ethics)) can be achieved only through the realisation of a [socialist society](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socialist_mode_of_production#Mode_of_production). Although most democratic socialists are seeking a very gradual transition to socialism,[[3]](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democratic_socialism#cite_note-3) democratic socialism can support either [revolutionary](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Revolutionary_socialism) or [reformist](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reformist_socialism) politics as a means to establish socialism.” Wikipedia.
2. **Democratic Capitalism. “**Democratic capitalism, also known as **capitalist democracy**, is a [political](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politics) [ideology](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ideology) and [economic theory](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economic_theory) that combines [liberal democracy](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberal_democracy) with [capitalism](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Capitalism) in support of [individual freedom](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Individualism#Liberalism) and [pluralism](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pluralism_(political_philosophy)).[[1]](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democratic_capitalism#cite_note-1)[[2]](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democratic_capitalism#cite_note-2) It stands in contrast to [corporatism](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corporatism) by limiting the influence of [special interest groups](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Advocacy_group), including [corporate](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corporation) [lobbyists](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lobbying), on politics.”
   1. Is Socialism or Capitalism more Democratic?
   2. Where should the US be more Capitalistic (and why)?
   3. Where should the US be more Socialistic (and why)?
   4. Where do we agree? Where do we disagree? Where is the common ground?

Resources: Choices for the 21st Century, a program of the History Dept. at Brown University, has developed excellent materials for talking about current events and historical issues. <https://www.choices.edu/>