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Most Democrats View Capitalism More Favorably Than Socialism – Except the 31% Who Identify as Democratic Socialists

National poll from Centerline Research & Strategy finds that democratic socialists and MAGA Republicans align in wanting Congress to fight for system overhauls rather than compromise, even if legislation is unlikely to pass[1]

WASHINGTON, DC — Democrats' views of capitalism are nearly as positive as their views of socialism when they are given simple definitions of the two economic systems, according to new national poll data from Centerline Research & Strategy. Prior to defining the terms, registered voters who are Democrats or lean Democratic are more likely to have a favorable view of socialism than capitalism (52% vs. 43%). After the definitions, 58% view socialism favorably and 55% view capitalism favorably. Among 69% of Democrats who do not identify as democratic socialists, 63% are favorable to capitalism and 47% to socialism after the definitions.

"We see a lot of headlines when polls show that Democrats are more favorable to socialism than capitalism, but those labels carry a lot of baggage and assumptions," said Natalie Jackson, Ph.D., founder and principal of Centerline Research & Strategy. "Unless we define the terms, we don't know whether answers reflect real views or are based on vibes. A baseline definition makes both look more palatable. For Democrats, capitalism looks a lot better when they're given a definition."

The 31% of Democrats and leaners who identify as democratic socialists are very negative toward capitalism and positive toward socialism. At the same time, around half of them have little or no trust in the government to manage industries that socialism would put under its control. A majority want Congress to fight to overhaul systems, even if it has little chance of becoming law, rather than compromise for small improvements, and they are more likely than other Democrats to say they would change their vote based on a single issue.

Defining socialism and capitalism increases favorability toward both

Respondents rated socialism and capitalism in a randomized block of favorability questions. Immediately after, they were given a short, simple definition of each concept and asked to rate it

[1] This poll was not conducted on behalf of any client, party, or partisan group. Centerline Research & Strategy is an independent polling firm. For more information, go to centerliners.com.

again (the order of the two definitions was randomized). Among all registered voters, favorable views of capitalism rose 9 points, from 54% to 63%, and favorable views of socialism rose 5 points, from 34% to 39%.

Democrats showed a large shift after hearing a definition of capitalism. Favorable views among Democrats and Democratic leaners jumped 12 points, from 43% to 55%, bringing it within a few points of socialism, whose favorability rose 6 points, from 52% to 58%.

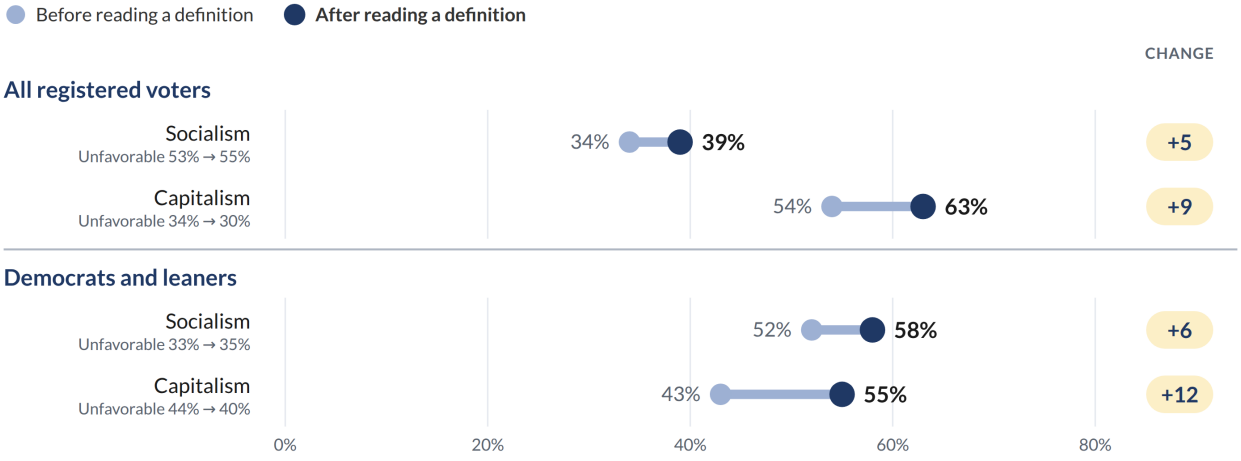
CHART 1

Democrats view capitalism nearly as favorably as socialism after defining both terms

Percent of registered voters with a favorable impression, before and after reading a short definition of each

SOCIALISM: DEFINITION SHOWN
Socialism is a way of running the economy where the government or the public owns and controls big businesses and resources, like factories, land, and power companies. The government or public decides what gets made and what it costs. The goal is to share all wealth equally.

CAPITALISM: DEFINITION SHOWN
Capitalism is a way of running the economy where individual people and private companies own most businesses and property. They choose what to make and what to charge, hoping to earn a profit. Some will profit, and others will not. Prices are mostly set by buying and selling in a free market, not by the government.



Share with a very or somewhat favorable impression. Respondents rated each term, then read a short definition and rated it again; the order of the two definitions was rotated. Change is in percentage points.
Democrats and leaners, n=557.
Source: Centerline Research & Strategy national poll, September 26–October 1, 2026. Registered voters, n=1,239.

Democratic socialists and views of the DSA

Just under one-third of registered voters who are Democrats or lean Democratic say they consider themselves democratic socialists; this is about 14% of all registered voters. Young Democrats are much more likely to identify as democratic socialists: 53% of Democrats under 30 identify as democratic socialists, compared with 18% of those 65 and older.

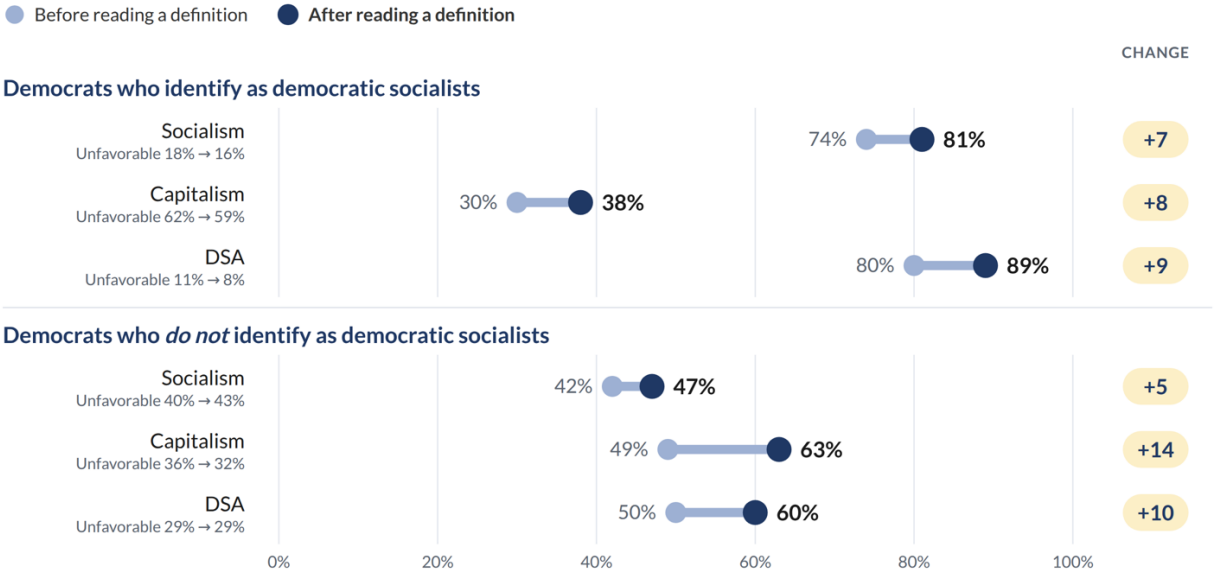
After reading a short description of the Democratic Socialists of America, voters warmed to the group.[2] Among all registered voters, favorable views of the DSA rose 9 points, from 34% to 43%, with about half unfavorable before and after the definition. Most Democrats and Democratic leaners (59%) already viewed the DSA favorably, and that increased to 69% after the definition. Those who identify as democratic socialists started at 80% favorable and increased to 89%, while all other Democrats started at 50% and increased to 60%.

Democratic socialists drive the party's warm views of socialism. Even before reading a definition, 74% of them viewed socialism favorably, rising to 81% afterward. Democratic socialists' low opinion of capitalism, before and after the definition (30% before; 38% after), are somewhat offset by the rest of Democrats, who favor capitalism more than socialism before the definitions (49% capitalism vs. 42% socialism) and after (63% capitalism vs. 47% socialism).

CHART 2

Democrats who identify as democratic socialists drive the party's favorable views of socialism

Percent of Democratic and Democratic-leaning registered voters with a favorable impression, before and after reading a short definition



Share with a very or somewhat favorable impression. Respondents rated each item, then read the short definitions shown in Chart 1 and in the text and rated each again. Change is in percentage points.
"Do you consider yourself to be a democratic socialist?" was asked of Democrats and Democratic leaners. Yes, n=164; no or not sure, n=393.
Source: Centerline Research & Strategy national poll, September 26–October 1, 2026. Registered voters who are Democrats or lean Democratic, n=557.

[2] Text shown to respondents: "Here is a little more information about the Democratic Socialists of America. DSA is a political group that wants to replace our economy with socialism to distribute wealth equally and give people more power over the economy and government. They support ideas like free health care and stronger unions. Some DSA members run for office as Democrats and want to move the party toward socialism."

Few trust the government to run the industries socialism would put in its charge

Among the tenets of socialism is nationalizing certain industries and putting the government in charge. Only 10% to 16% of registered voters say they would have complete trust or a lot of trust in the government to run the healthcare system, major utilities, major industries such as air travel, housing, or large corporations such as Amazon and Google, while 60% to 68% would have little or no trust.

Despite favorable views toward socialism, most Democrats are wary, with over half reporting little or no trust (51% to 65%). Even among democratic socialists, trust is low. Between 21% and 31% would have complete or a lot of trust in the government to run each, while about half (49% to 53%) would have little or no trust. These figures might increase if a Democrat were president and the party held majorities in Congress.

Republicans are the most skeptical, with 68% to 72% expressing little or no trust. Even though their party controls the federal government, nationalizing industries runs counter to the conservative ideology of free markets and capitalism that Republicans embrace.

TABLE 1

Even half of those who identify as democratic socialists have little or no trust in government to run industries

How much trust registered voters would have in the federal government to own and run each of the following (%)

	All registered voters		Republicans and leaners		Democrats and leaners		Democratic socialists	
	Complete / a lot	A little / none	Complete / a lot	A little / none	Complete / a lot	A little / none	Complete / a lot	A little / none
The healthcare system	16	60	14	68	22	51	**29**	**49**
Major utilities, like electricity and water	14	63	13	69	19	56	**27**	**49**
Major industries, like air travel	14	63	13	68	18	57	**31**	**49**
Housing, including renting and homeownership	11	68	12	71	13	64	**23**	**51**
Large industries and corporations, such as Amazon, Google and AI companies	10	68	9	72	12	65	**21**	**53**

Question: "How much trust would you have in the federal government to own and run each of the following?" Response options: complete trust, a lot of trust, some trust, a little trust, no trust at all, not sure. Some trust and not sure are not shown. Democratic socialists are Democrats and Democratic leaners who answered yes to "Do you consider yourself to be a democratic socialist?"

Republicans and leaners, n=519; Democrats and leaners, n=556; democratic socialists, n=164.

Source: Centerline Research & Strategy national poll, September 26–October 1, 2026. Registered voters, n=1,238.

Democratic socialists and MAGA Republicans want to fight, even if it won't get legislation passed

Registered voters tilt toward favoring "compromise to pass legislation that makes only small changes, even if it means progress is very slow" (47%) over "fight for completely overhauling systems, even if there is not much chance it will get the support it needs to become law" (40%). Two opposing factions go the other way: 55% of democratic socialists and 50% of MAGA Republicans would rather see legislators fight than compromise. Majorities of non-MAGA Republicans and Democrats who do not identify as democratic socialists prefer compromising to get small victories.

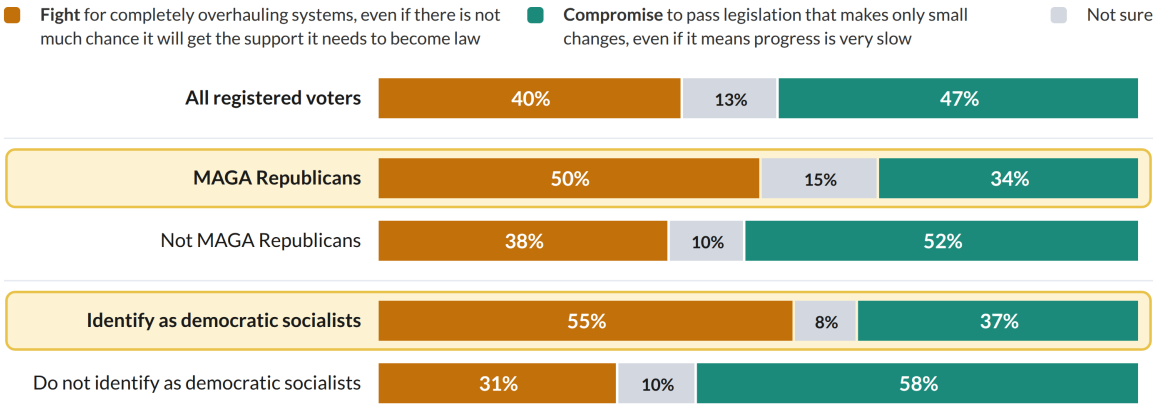
Although aligned on the principle of fighting for overhauling systems, MAGA Republicans and democratic socialists diverge on whether the country's major systems need that overhaul. Among all registered voters, about half say the economy (54%), healthcare (52%), Congress (50%), and immigration (50%) need change but can be fixed, while roughly a third or more say each is broken and needs to start over completely: 39% for healthcare and Congress, 34% for immigration, and 32% for the economy. Only 7% to 13% say any of these systems is working fine.

Most democratic socialists want to overhaul healthcare (61%), the economy (58%), and Congress (54%), though only 42% want the same for immigration. MAGA Republicans are the least likely of any group to want to start over, with only 17% to 27% saying so on each system.

CHART 3

Democratic socialists and MAGA Republicans would rather see Congress fight than compromise

How registered voters would rather see members of Congress spend their time (%)



Question: "If they have to choose how to spend their time between these two options, would you rather see [Democrats / Republicans / representatives] in Congress:" The party named matched the respondent's choice on the congressional ballot; others saw "representatives." MAGA Republicans are Republicans and Republican leaners who consider themselves part of the Make America Great Again movement; democratic socialists are Democrats and Democratic leaners who consider themselves democratic socialists.
MAGA Republicans, n=267; not MAGA Republicans, n=233; democratic socialists, n=158; not democratic socialists, n=382. "Not" groups include those who said no or not sure.
Source: Centerline Research & Strategy national poll, September 26–October 1, 2026. Registered voters, n=1,198.

Cost of living and deportations are most likely to move votes across party lines

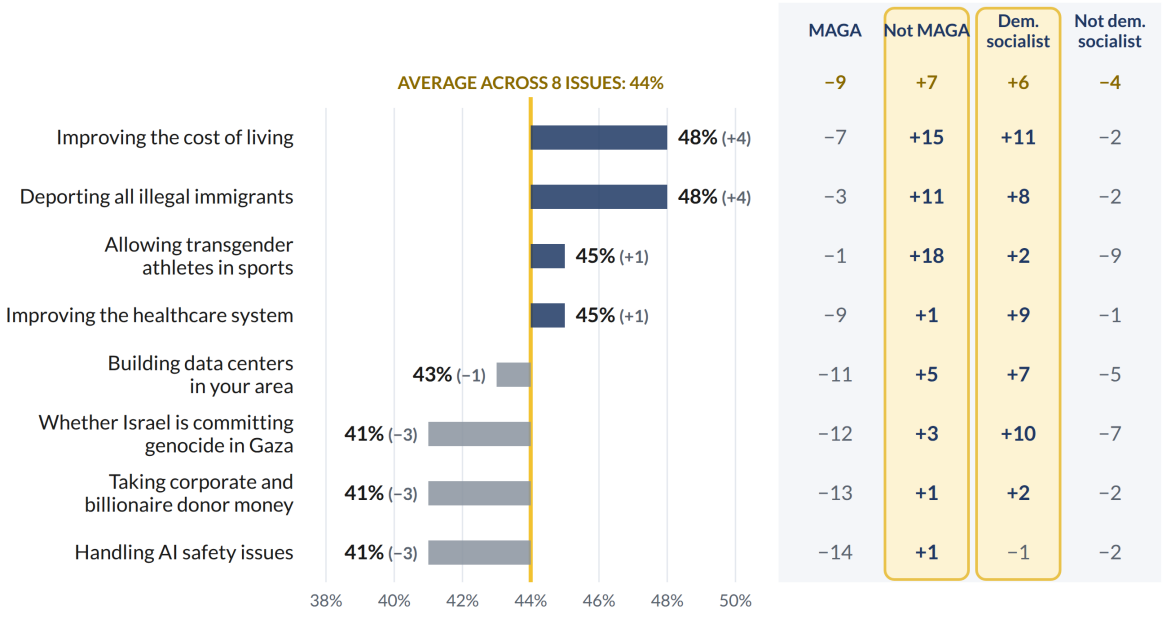
Voters were asked what they would do if their preferred congressional candidate held the opposite view on an issue from theirs, while the other party's candidate shared their exact view. Across eight issues, an average of 44% of registered voters said they would switch parties based on that one issue, likely overstating how many voters would cross the aisle. However, comparing each issue to that average offers an interesting look at which issues are more and less likely to drive crossover voting.

Improving the cost of living (48%) and deporting all illegal immigrants (48%) are the issues most likely to move voters, while transgender athletes in sports (45%), healthcare (45%), and building data centers (43%) are roughly average. Whether Israel is committing genocide in Gaza (41%), taking corporate and billionaire donor money (41%), and AI safety (41%) are less likely to change votes.

CHART 4

Cost of living and deportations are policies most likely to move voters across party lines; large variance by party factions

Percent of registered voters who would vote for the other party's candidate over a single issue, compared with the average across eight issues



	MAGA	Not MAGA	Dem. socialist	Not dem. socialist
AVERAGE ACROSS 8 ISSUES: 44%	–9	+7	+6	–4
Improving the cost of living	–7	+15	+11	–2
Deporting all illegal immigrants	–3	+11	+8	–2
Allowing transgender athletes in sports	–1	+18	+2	–9
Improving the healthcare system	–9	+1	+9	–1
Building data centers in your area	–11	+5	+7	–5
Whether Israel is committing genocide in Gaza	–12	+3	+10	–7
Taking corporate and billionaire donor money	–13	+1	+2	–2
Handling AI safety issues	–14	+1	–1	–2

Question: "For each issue below, please consider what you would do if your preferred candidate for Congress holds the opposite view from you on this issue, and the other party's candidate shares your exact view. Would disagreement on that single issue cause you to vote for the other party's candidate, rather than your preferred candidate?" Bars show the share who would vote for the other party's candidate, measured from the average of the eight issues; numbers in parentheses are percentage points above or below that average. Answer options for sticking with their preferred candidate or would not vote are not shown. Table shows difference from average for all registered voters.

MAGA, n=277; not MAGA, n=240; democratic socialists, n=164; not democratic socialists, n=391.

Source: Centerline Research & Strategy national poll, September 26–October 1, 2026. Registered voters, n=1,234.

Factions with less firm commitment to their parties are most willing to consider crossover votes. Republicans who do not identify with MAGA are more willing than MAGA Republicans to cross over, especially over transgender athletes in sports (62%) and the cost of living (59%). MAGA Republicans are the least likely to indicate willingness to cross party lines: on average, 35% say they would switch, and they are below the average for all registered voters on every issue. Democratic socialists are also more willing than average to switch (50% on average), particularly on the cost of living (55%) and Gaza (54%), while other Democrats are less likely than average on every issue to say they would shift their vote.

About the poll

The Centerline National Poll surveyed 1,570 U.S. adults from September 26 to October 1, 2026, using a hybrid design: 1,145 respondents from a nonprobability online panel and 425 probability-based text-to-web respondents sampled from the voter file. After fielding, 107 cases were removed for data-quality reasons. Results are reported for 1,239 registered voters and 930 likely voters. Data are weighted to population benchmarks for demographics, region, area type, and religious affiliation. Because the survey combines probability and nonprobability samples, a margin of sampling error cannot be calculated. For a fully probability-based sample of the same size, the margin of error would be plus or minus 3.2 percentage points for registered voters and 3.8 points for likely voters, including design effects. Margins are larger for subgroups.

Full topline results and methodology are available on the Centerline Research and Strategy website.

About Centerline Research & Strategy

Centerline Research & Strategy is an independent public opinion research and advisory firm founded and led by Natalie Jackson, Ph.D., a nationally recognized expert with two decades of public opinion experience. Centerline specializes in quantitative and qualitative opinion research and strategic counsel for select private clients and nonprofits. This survey was not conducted for any client or entity. For more information, go to centerliners.com.

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