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Weaponization of The Socialist Label in Modern American Politics

Matthew Schubert
University of Dayton

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Weaponization of The Socialist Label in Modern American Politics



Honors Thesis

Matthew Schubert

Department: Political Science

Advisor: Christopher Devine, Ph.D.

April 2020

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Abstract

This thesis studied the attitude of people in the United States toward the idea of socialism. The first section of my thesis examined how people define socialism, and whether there is any definition that is common among a large group of people. It also looked to see if this definition was different than their definition of democratic socialism. The next section addressed people's support of a bill or political candidate identified as a socialist. The goal was to see if people would be willing to support a candidate or bill with socialist ideas, but shy away when they see the word "socialist." The effects of this label were then examined across party lines to see if it had different results among Democrats and Republicans.

Disclaimer

All participants in this research were informed that the information they were provided was fictional and why using fictional information was necessary.

Acknowledgements

First, I would like to thank Christopher Devine. Without his constant mentorship through this process I would never have been able to achieve the results that I did. It is no exaggeration to say that I could not have done this without him. I have learned so much from him in the classroom and out, and there was never a moment in which I was discouraged in my project thanks to his support. I would like to thank my parents for their support and helping me read over my thesis to make sure I make sense. Lastly, I would like to thank Bro. Ray Fitz. Bro. Ray introduced me to the world of research as a first year and gave me ample room to grow as a professional and person under his leadership.



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Introduction

Socialism has gained increased prominence in the time leading up to the 2020 Democratic primary and presidential election. Senator Bernie Sanders, a self-identified democratic socialist, is running for the office. Republican and Democratic opponents have been quick to capitalize on this identity targeting Sanders and other candidates as socialist and saying that socialism undermines the core values of the American people. This begs the question of whether the tactic of labeling Sanders and other candidates as socialists or democratic socialists is working to persuade individuals from voting them into office or is affecting support for their policies. The question extends to the use of this label as a weapon for Democratic candidates in general. This has clearly been seen in the 2019 electoral race in Kentucky where Governor and Former Attorney General of Kentucky Andy Beshear was labeled as a socialist in an ad by the Republican Governors Association in order to scare potential voters. It is important to note that Beshear does not accept the socialist label and is considered a relatively moderate Democrat as seen in an article by Bruce Schreiner for LEX-18. He has filled many positions in his cabinet with Republicans.

This study examines the effect of the label of “socialism” and “democratic socialism” on the level of support for a candidate running for office or the enactment of a policy. In addition, this study aims to find how the American public defines socialism and whether they see a difference between socialism and democratic socialism. These questions are also isolated by political party to see the effect that identity will have on support and definition. While there has been literature on past socialist candidates and the

historical decline of socialism in American politics, there have been few studies on the effect of the label of socialism on policy and candidate support. In order to determine these effects, I test several hypotheses on the definition of socialism and democratic socialism and test experimentally the effect of the label of “socialist” on support for a candidate and bill.

Hypotheses

The first three hypotheses relate to questions about the definition of socialism and how they compare to definitions of democratic socialism.

- Hypothesis 1: Most respondents when asked about the definition of socialism will not have an accurate or complete definition.
- Hypothesis 2: Republican respondents will be more likely to define socialism as authoritarianism than Democrat respondents.
- Hypothesis 3: Most respondents will not be able to differentiate between socialism and democratic socialism.

The next three hypotheses pertain to the support for a candidate or bill when the label of socialist is attached or not.

- Hypothesis 4: Attaching the label of “socialist” to a candidate or policy will decrease its public support among the general population.
- Hypothesis 5: Attaching the label of “socialist” to a candidate or policy will have a greater negative effect on support among Republicans than among Democrats.

- Hypothesis 6: The difference in public support when the socialist label is attached will be the same for both the candidate and the bill.

These several hypotheses are necessary for analyzing the nuances among the data collected for definition and public support. One possible reason that individuals may be less likely to give their support is a lack of understanding of what socialism and democratic socialism are. Recent Gallup polls have shown that despite differences among parties, most people view socialism as standing for equality (in rights, distribution, or standing) or greater government control, but the poll did not indicate how people differentiate socialism from democratic socialism (Newport 2018). This study shows that using the socialist label can be harmful to support when attached to a candidate or policy, and the degree of this harm depends on which political party individuals belong to.

Literature Review

While there have been studies on the use of labels and stigmatization in politics, most studies do not examine political parties. Many focus on the labeling of crime. Labeling theory is a sociological concept that has been used mainly to study how labels influence the individuals that carry them in negative or, more recently, positive ways (Thomas 2014). Studies of the use of labeling have shown how labels affect people's perception in several different areas, but the focus has still been on crime or other deviant behavior. Picket and Bushway (2017) performed a study that showed that changing a label such as "convicted felon" to "person with felony" can improve the level of success that felons have in reentry. This is largely due to people's perception on hearing either of those two labels.

Some literature such as Jarvis's "Talk of the Party" shows that political labels do have a great effect, especially in rallying other party members together. In the past, the label of liberal, an ideology often associated with the Democratic party became stigmatized. People were and still are less likely to support ideas if they have the label of liberal attached. The reason for this stigmatization is from the Republican party's use of the word with negative connotation since 1964. Other labels such as independent have had the opposite treatment. There have been very few negative statements about independents said in the media or by a political candidate, and independents are portrayed by elites as open-minded and respectable (Jarvis 2005). This explains an individual's inclination to identify as an independent when ideologically like a Republican or Democrat. This

phenomenon is often seen in political “leaning”. The sentiment behind the word liberal can be seen in the rhetoric of today with negative perceptions of the “liberal media.”

Many individuals associate the term liberal with weakness or excess and view the conservative label with higher esteem on account of their conservative religion or its association with the elite (Neiheisel 2016). This perception of bias in the media makes Americans distrustful of the information that they are receiving. Another important factor in the acceptance of labels, particularly applied to candidates, is the disproportional way that individuals accept negative and positive information. Due to the relative infrequency of negative information in public discourse, people are more likely to place a heavier weight on it (Lau 1985). There is no reason to believe that only the socialist or liberal label could be changed into something less than ideal. The main reason that both labels were discarded is that they were attacked and not defended by those that used them. The conservative label was not linked and attacked as a radical idea by opponents, while the liberal label was. The socialist label was also attacked and abandoned during historical conflict. This fact combined with the information about the effect of labels demonstrates how negative labels have a powerful potential in political discourse.

The larger studies of labeling theory have shown that labels affect the way people perceive ideas and people. Murray Edelman explains in *Political Language* that not only does language help explain things happening in politics, but it is also a part of the politics itself and affects the framing of issues. For example, the framing of impoverished as the “deserving poor” begs the question of why the government is not helping this group (Edelman 1977). Labeling of political parties is tied strongly to individual identity.

Through identifying with a party and labeling others as “outsiders”, individuals are reinforcing this identity and connecting to the larger group (Kenski, Filer, and Conway-Silva 2017). The term socialist is being used to vilify different candidates, politicians, and policies like the way that the label of liberal has been used to deter people from “liberal” policies or candidates. One possible reason for these attacks is the resurgence of the popularity of socialism.

Socialism became popular in the U.S. around the same time that socialist movements were developed across the world. Democratic socialism has made a comeback in recent years. While the meaning of both terms has changed over time, socialism is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as “a political and economic theory of social organization which advocates that the means of production, distribution, and exchange should be owned or regulated by the community as a whole.” While this is one definition it does not capture the entirety of what socialism is. Socialism is primarily about the redistribution of goods, but there is also a component of how the community controls the production, distribution, and exchange. Socialism was popularized by German philosopher Karl Marx, in his writing about class struggles through history and in the *Communist Manifesto*. Marx predicted that class conflict is inevitable and eventually the working class would rise against those who were controlling the means of production in order to redistribute wealth. Marx also predicted that private property would be abolished in this system, which is the distinguishing feature between communism and socialism (Marx 1848). socialism is often performed through the government. Socialist ideas can be applied through government programs but can also be

done by individuals without the government. In simple terms, socialism is when distribution and property are subject to social control. Democratic socialists also believe in distribution and property being subject to social control, but they distinguish themselves from socialists and communists by focusing on democratic principles such as individual voting rights and emphasis on the majority. In addition to these principles, democratic socialism advocates a more gradual transition to social ownership and the possibility of market competition. The common thread in all definitions is the inevitability of inequalities in a capitalist economy (Busky 2000, Kurian 2010, Schweickart 2007).

Socialism never gained mass public approval in America, although there was a somewhat successful socialist campaign for president in the past with Eugene Debs. The success of Eugene Debs winning 6% of the vote in 1912 and over 900,000 votes in 1920 was significant. This was part of a national trend that focused on the strength of a national socialist party in order to solve problems that were afflicting people that felt disenfranchised. Socialists had some small successes. They were able to acquire positions in 11 different state legislatures and held mayoral offices in several different cities and states. Because of the difficulty in gaining political ground, many self-identified socialists started identifying with the Democratic party, hoping to make changes from within the party itself (Altman 2019). Writers of the time argued that the ultimate demise of socialism was the ability to achieve programs that promoted greater social equality without going through the socialist party, essentially what Franklin D. Roosevelt was trying to do during his presidency with the New Deal. A nationalist socialist party

became unnecessary and most individuals abandoned it to join the Democratic party (Morgan 1964). This does not explain the way that many Americans perceive socialism. Some argue that the reason for this opposition is that socialism is contrary to the idea of social mobility and the “American Dream” (Foner 1984). It also faced severe backlash in wake of the Cold War and the multiple waves of “Red Scares.” During the Cold War, the United States battled against the Soviet Union in various proxy wars and through economic and technological races. The main purpose of this war was to establish the dominant political system in the world: socialism or capitalism. As a capitalistic society, the USA tried to stop the global spread of socialism and in turn created a national antipathy against socialism. The “Red Scares” were a part of this movement. The first Red Scare occurred before the Cold War when a series of strikes and anarchist bombing took place in 1919 leading to concern of a domestic uprising. The second major Red Scare occurred as part of the Federal Loyalty Program developed in 1947. The program created a list of possible subversives to the U.S. government. Senator Joseph McCarthy furthered the movement by making it easier to dismiss people with less evidence and made outrageous claims to advance his political strategy. (Storrs 2015)

In wake of the Cold War and McCarthyism, socialists were grouped together with communists and stigmatized (Schrecker 1998). This sentiment has evolved into politics today and many individuals still hold negative attitudes toward socialism, especially those of the Republican party. A recent poll shows that most Americans, 55%, have a negative view of socialism for reasons including that it may incentivize people not

working hard or the fact that it has failed in other countries historically when practiced as a form of government (Hartig 2019).

Other polls have shown that the younger generation is more likely to have a positive view of socialism. 51% of people aged 18-29 have a positive view of socialism compared to 45% that have a positive view of capitalism (Newport 2016). One of the reasons for this discrepancy may be the positive support for the rise of democratic socialists such as Alexandria Ocasio Cortez, House Representative of the 14th district of New York, and Senator Bernie Sanders.

Another reason may be the public perception of President Obama. During the Obama era, several Obama policies were labeled socialist which allowed people who supported Obama to start viewing the word in a positive light (Nichols 2011). Senator Bernie Sanders advocated for free college tuition in his 2016 primary race and was runner up and has had a strong campaign in the 2020 primary winning several state primaries and again being one of the two front runners. U.S. House Rep Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez is a freshman to politics, but she has wide support from her base, and she advocates for a variety of policies that are on the socialist spectrum, such as Medicare for all and tuition-free public institutions. Sanders and Ocasio-Cortez's popularity among progressive groups comes primarily from their denunciation of neo-liberal capitalism and their frustration with the inequality between the top 1% and the rest of the 99% in the U.S. (Rehman 2016). Progressives were frustrated with the healthcare and education policies in both the Democratic and Republican parties that supported the wealthy and did not

think politicians did enough to address the huge difference between the wealthiest and least wealthy groups.

Methods

This study used a mixture of short multiple-choice and open-ended questions to understand whether socialism influences policy/candidate support and how people define socialism and democratic socialism. To answer these questions, I created an online survey using Amazon Mechanical TURK to form an experiment on the influence of the socialist label. It surveyed a random sample of (approximately) 600 individuals. In order to assess different definitions of socialism and democratic socialism, the survey prompted the questions “Suppose a friend were to ask you: ‘What is socialism?’ How would you answer this question?” and “Suppose the same friend were to ask you: ‘What is the difference between 'socialism' and 'democratic socialism?' How would you answer this question?” Afterward, I analyzed the answers and identified several themes that reoccurred throughout respondent answers and placed answers in categories corresponding to those themes or in a category for responses that had no common theme. Answers could be placed in multiple categories if they had a definition that fit into several themes. For example, responses that defined socialism as authoritarian were also classified as responses that defined it under increased government control.

To determine if the label of socialism had any effect on the public support of a candidate or policy, the survey included an experiment in which two identical policies and candidates were presented with and without the socialist label. Survey respondents were placed in one of four different treatment groups. In the first two treatments groups, individuals would be asked about their support for a candidate with or without the socialist label attached. In the third and fourth groups, individuals would be asked about

their support for a proposed bill with or without the label attached. The independent variable in this experiment was the presence of the socialist label and it was incorporated into the survey question without altering any substantial piece of the question. The question on the survey gave the following prompt for the question containing the condition for a candidate and the treatment group without the socialist label:

“Jody Clark recently announced plans to run for the U.S. House of Representatives in 2020. Clark has served as a state legislator since 2012. Health care will be the focus of Clark’s campaign. Clark says that the United States should adopt a single-payer health care system, run by the federal government, that guarantees coverage to all Americans and eliminates private health insurance companies. This, Clark says, would drive down health care costs and ensure equal treatment for all Americans. _
“Health care is a fundamental human right,” Clark said at a campaign rally last week.
“We cannot let some people enjoy this right, and not others. It’s time for fundamental change, and I will bring that to Washington if you elect me to the United States Congress.”

The other treatment used the same prompt as the one above but added the phrase *“Clark is a socialist”* before stating that she has served as a state legislator.

Similarly, to determine the effect of the label of socialism on a specific bill we used the following prompt for question containing the condition for a bill and the treatment group without the socialist label:

Jody Clark recently announced plans to introduce a new health care bill in the U.S. House of Representatives. Clark is a socialist, who has served in the House since

2012. Clark's bill would require the United States to adopt a single-payer health care system, run by the federal government, that guarantees coverage to all Americans and eliminates private health insurance companies. This, Clark says, would drive down health care costs and ensure equal treatment for all Americans. "Health care is a fundamental human right," Clark said at a rally outside the U.S. Capitol last week. "We cannot let some people enjoy this right, and not others. It's time for fundamental change, and we will bring that to the United States if this bill is passed into law."

As before, the other treatment group used the same prompt as the one above but added the phrase *"Clark is a socialist"* before stating that she has served in the House.

After reading these prompts, respondents were asked "Would you vote to elect Jody Clark to the U.S. House of Representatives?" or, "Do you think this healthcare bill should be passed into law?" Then, respondents answered more specific questions such as, "How strongly would you support Jody Clark's election to the U.S. House of Representatives?" or "Do you lean toward supporting or opposing Jody Clark's election to the U.S. House of Representatives?" The same questions were asked regarding support for the bill. I coded these responses into a scale from 1-7 based on how strong the respondent's level of support or opposition was. I also provide a prompt asking "How would you rate your feelings about Jody Clark, the candidate for U.S. House that you just read about, on the following scale? Notice that this scale ranges from 0 (very negative) to 100 (very positive). A score of 50 is neutral, meaning that you do not feel positively or negatively about Jody Clark," or similar prompt asking about "the proposed health care bill." This rating is often referred to in literature as a "feeling thermometer rating" and is

used to gauge more precisely how individuals feel. To analyze this data, we used an independent means test and I compared the means scores of each of the dependent variables through SPSS in independent samples T-test to see if any of the differences between the means were statistically significant. This determined any effects that the independent variable had on vote, level of support, and rating of the bill or candidate. I also analyzed the demographic composition of those taking the test (Race, Age, Party) to determine the accuracy of the means test in representing the overall U.S. Population

As shown in Table 1 below, Survey respondents tended to be somewhat young, male and college-educated. The results were also skewed toward Democrats. In terms of age, the majority of those who responded (69.9%) were between the ages of 25 and 44. Around 5% were between the ages of 18-24, and the rest were over the age of 44. In terms of gender, 55.2% of respondents were male and the remaining 44.8% were female. The group was overall fairly educated with 50.3% obtaining a two- or four-year college degree. Around 10% obtained higher degrees and the remaining obtained a GED equivalent or lower. There were a variety of religious affiliations among respondents, but most were Christian. About 45% of individuals identified as Christian and nearly the same amount responded they were agnostic or atheist. The remaining individuals belonged to a variety of other religious sects. 16% of those who responded also elaborated that they are evangelical Christians.

While the survey sampling was random, the majority of those who responded (61.7%) identified as being a Democrat. Only 12.3% responded that they were independent and 25.9% responded that they were Republican. While some individuals in

the survey identified as an independent, several responded that they were closer to either the Democratic or Republican parties. For the purpose of this study, these “leaning” individuals were counted as members of the party that they leaned towards. In terms of race, more than 3 in 4 people (76%) responded that they were White. Around 8% responded that they were Asian and almost the same amount was Black. An additional 5.2% were Hispanic and the remaining were native American or another race. Ultimately the political characteristics, as well as the age of respondents, is not representative of the American population. This is likely because Amazon Mechanical Turk tends to skew demographically toward Democratic and younger individuals. (Levay, Freese, and Druckman 2016).

Age		Race	
18-24	5.1%	Asian	7.6%
25-34	42.1%	Black or African American	7.8%
35-44	27.8%	Hispanic or Latino/a	5.2%
45-54	12.5%	Native American	1.8%
55-64	10.3%	White or Caucasian	76.1%
65+	2.2%	Other	0.6%
Gender		Religion	
Male	55.2%	Atheist/Agnostic	43.7%
Female	44.8%	Christian	44.5%
		Jewish	1.4%
		Hindu	1.0%
Education			
High school degree/GED, or less	17.8%	Muslim	0.6%
Some College, No degree	20.2%	Buddhist	1.3%
College, two-year degree	10.5%	Other	7.5%
College, four-year degree	39.9%		
Masters Degree	9.3%		
Advanced graduate degree	2.4%		
Party ID			
Democrat	47.4%		
Republican	20.6%		
Independent	28.2%		
Libertarian	2.8%		
Green	1.1%		

Table 1

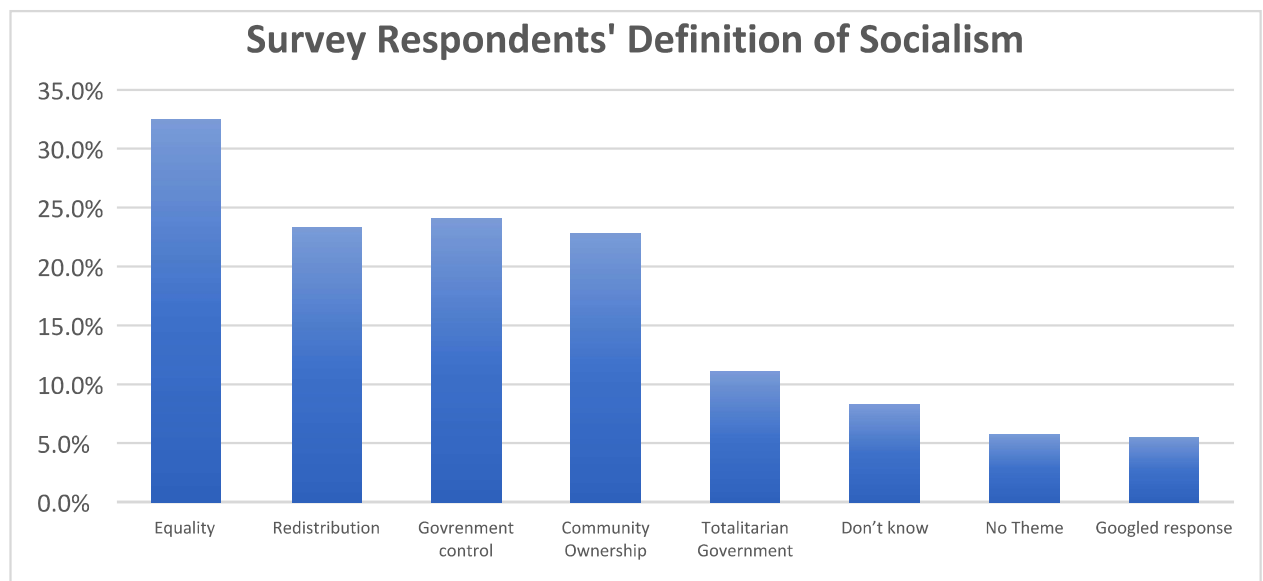
Results

One objective of this analysis is to determine whether the label of “socialist” had any effect on support of a candidate or policy. A second objective was to assess people’s current understanding of what either “socialism” or “democratic socialism” mean and how they differ, if at all. First, I examined these definitions.

Definitions of Socialism and Democratic Socialism

To determine how individuals defined socialism, the survey asked the question of how a respondent would define socialism if asked by a friend and then how they would define democratic socialism in the question after. In response to the first question as seen in figure 1, when asked about the definition of socialism, approximately one third (32.7%) viewed socialism as a means to equalize society. Many simply wrote that socialism makes everyone equal, but there were also several that explained the process by which money is taken and distributed more evenly that allows for struggling individuals to have a better standing in society. About a quarter (23.3%) of individuals defined socialism in a classic sense as the redistribution of goods, whether this is in a positive or negative light. These individuals generally had answers closest to the operational definition. About half (46%) of the individuals interviewed also explained a transfer in power through the means of production to the government or community. Half of that group of individuals (24.1%) viewed socialism as the government having a greater ability to influence people’s lives through policy, social programs, or other means. A smaller percentage of these individuals, about 11%, viewed socialism as totalitarian and a way

for the government to exercise tyranny over individuals and control every aspect of their life. The other half focused on the community ownership of the means of production. While some made up nonsensical definitions, many admitted to their lack of knowledge. About 8% wrote that they did not know what socialism was. Another 5.6% did not know, googled the definition, and copied and pasted part or all the first or second result. During analysis, many of the answers were the same, and the word cloud software used to visualize the data had highlighted these words. To see if there was a mistake, I googled the definition of socialism and found that many respondents used the dictionary entry on google or one of the first links to a dictionary. The last category of people were outliers that did not fit into a theme. They often described a specific policy or candidate as an example or wrote short vague statements that were true but unsubstantial such as “this is



a political ideology”.

Figure 1

The definitions shown in figure 1 were obtained through analysis of all responses, but responses by party showed slightly different trends. In Republican responses seen in figure 2, the percentage of people who viewed socialism as a means of obtaining equality was only 27.1% and the amount of people who viewed socialism as community ownership was 12.8%. This is 10.1% lower than the percentage that viewed socialism in this way than the total sample. The greatest change, however, is the percentage that viewed socialism as totalitarian rule at 25.6%. Nearly 1 in 4 Republicans who responded believed that socialism was total government domination of people. The other themes were consistent or varied little from what was seen in the responses from the entire survey.

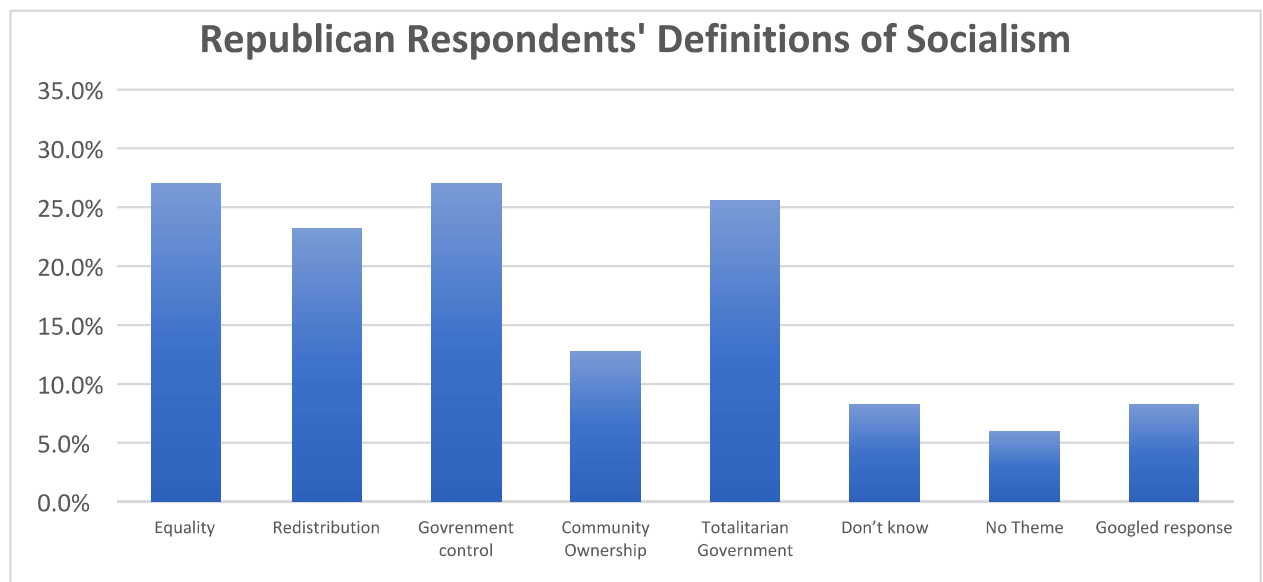
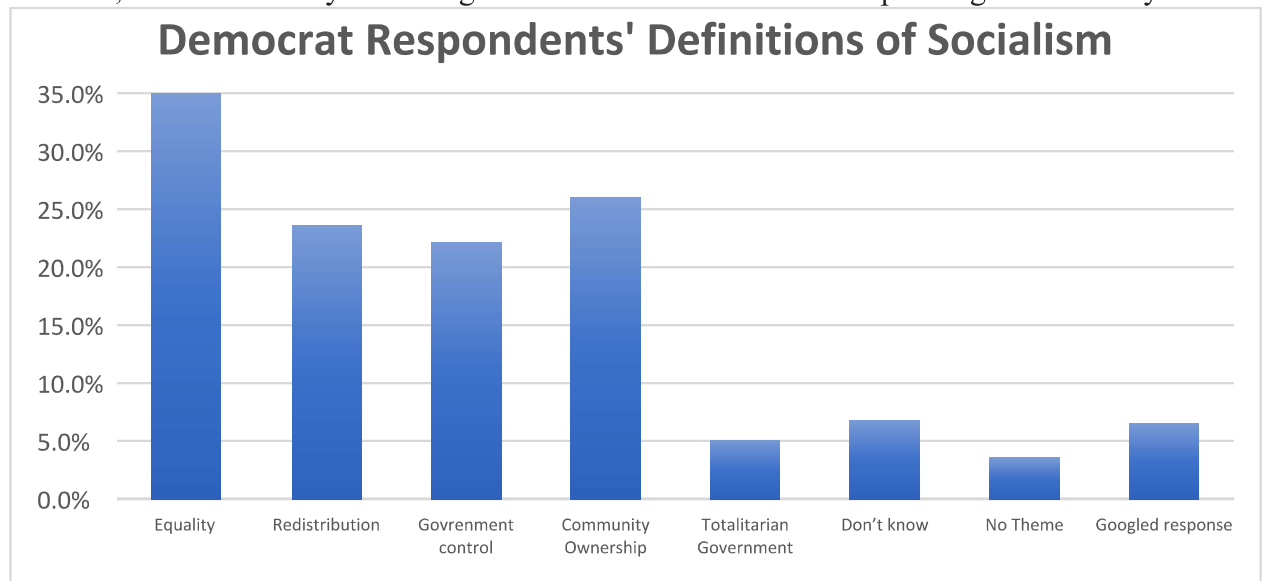


Figure 2

Democrat respondents, in figure 3, showed the opposite trend in the differences in their percentages. Democrats were more likely to view socialism as a means for equality (35.1%) and Community ownership (26%) and were less likely to view socialism as

totalitarian (5.2%). The other response percentages were also like the percentages of the total survey. Overall, Democrat responses aligned more closely with the responses from the total, and this is likely due to a greater number of Democrats responding to the survey

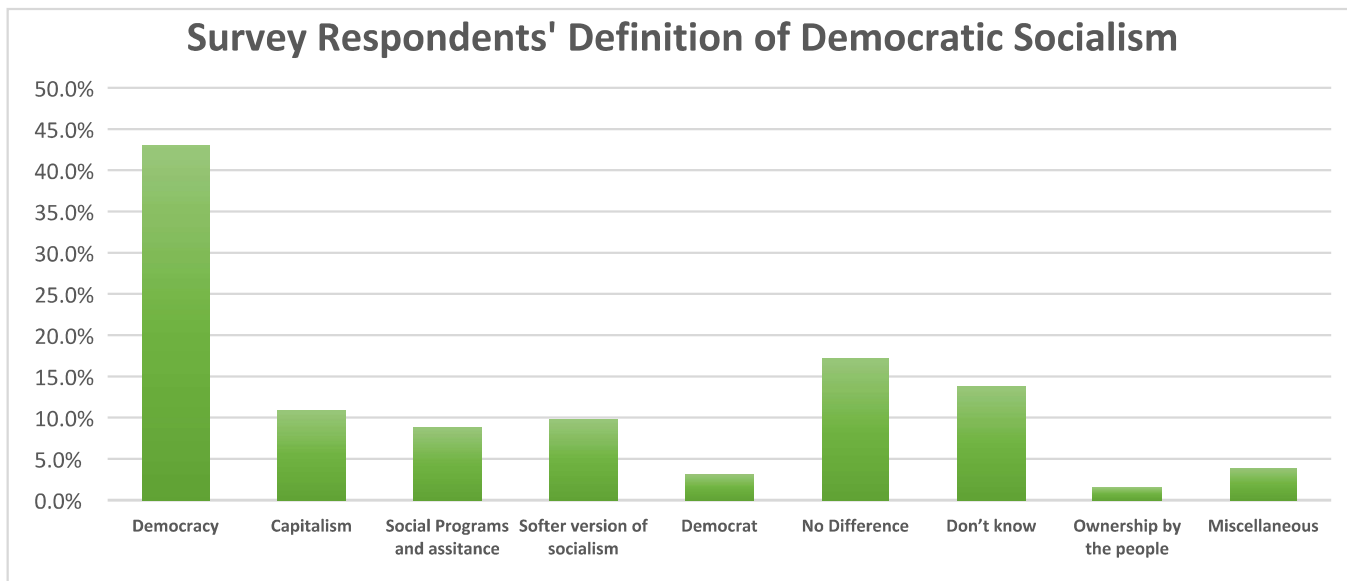


than any other political party.

Figure 3

As for the difference between democratic socialism and socialism, as seen in figure 4 below, the majority did see some difference, and many gave a response that fit into the possible definitions of democratic socialism. Nearly half of all respondents (43%) answered that it is a socialist system with certain aspects of a democracy, whether that be through voting for leaders or through more direct democratic principles. 10.9% of respondents believed that it is a system that contains elements of both socialism and capitalism, with one possibly maintaining a greater role. Many who answered in this way also indicated the presence of social programs that redistribute wealth. Along with others, 8.8% responded about social programs such as single-payer health care. Nearly 10% of respondents believed that democratic socialism was just a softer version of socialism with

less force or power. A very small percentage, 3% and 1.4% respectively, believed that it is socialism controlled by Democrats or a political party or the community ownership of property. While these groups all saw some defining difference between the two systems, about 17% did not see any difference in the two definitions and said they were the same or a way to disguise the original word. An additional 13.7% did not know the difference between the two words. The last group of respondents did not fit into any category or responded with vague answers and this 4% of respondents were categorized as



miscellaneous.

Figure 4

Definitions for democratic socialism also varied by political party. Only 38.2% of Republican respondents defined democratic socialism as a socialist system with democratic principles. There was a similar decrease in the percentage that saw democratic socialism as a combination of capitalism and socialism with only 5.3% of

Republican respondents answering this way. The greatest difference was the 32.1% of respondents that answered that socialism and democratic socialism were the same.

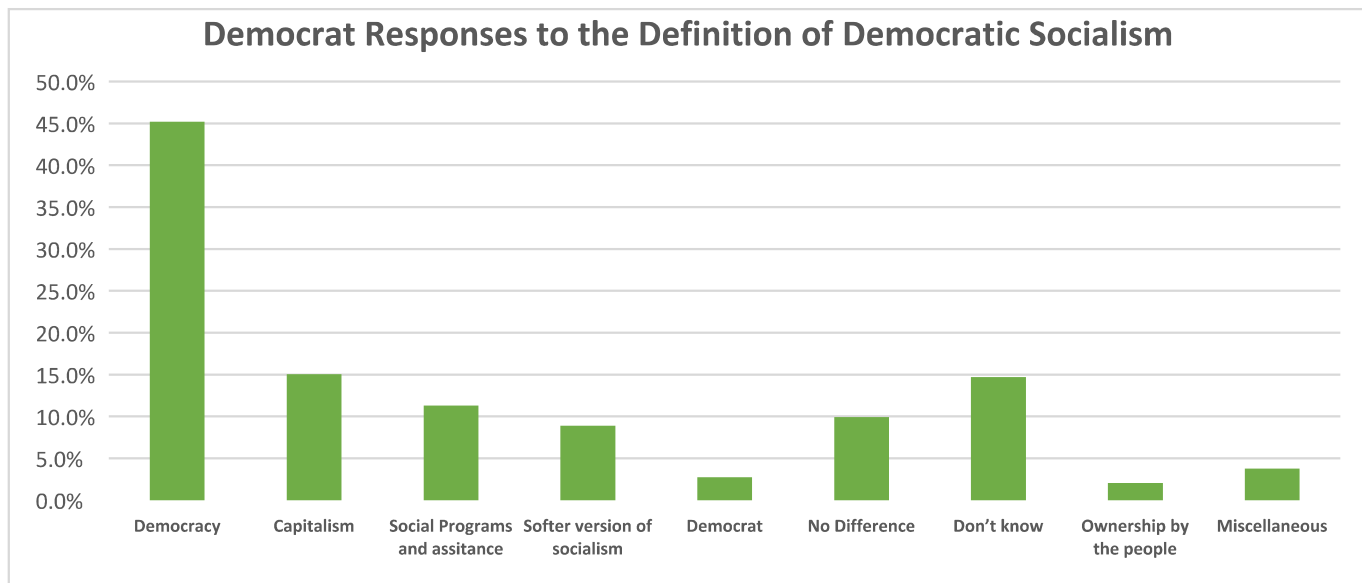
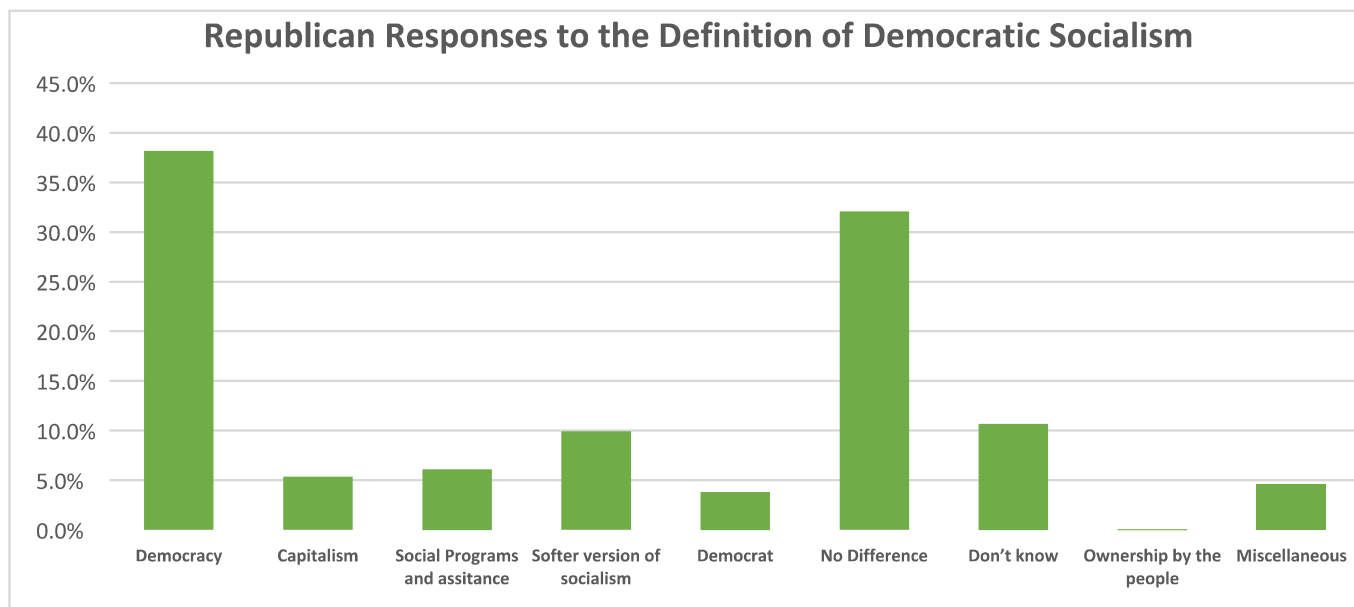


Figure 5



Democrats who responded to this question showed a similar percentage to the total for those that viewed democratic socialism in line with democratic principles (45.2%), but they showed an opposite trend to Republicans from the total for the other two variables that differed. 15.1% of Democrats viewed democratic socialism as the incorporation of socialist and capitalist principles and only 9.9% responded that there is no difference between the two definitions.

Experimental Results of the Socialism Label

Candidate

The main objective of the experimental question in the survey was to determine if the socialist label would sway public support for a candidate or policy. The results for the support of candidates showed a clear pattern when attaching this label. In the independent samples T-test for the level of support, the results of the test showed that there is a statistically significant effect on support for a candidate when the socialist label is attached. Both samples were composed of nearly 115 respondents. The original support in the no-label treatment group showed a support level of 5.39. This number is part of a 7-point scale where 1 is very strongly opposing and 7 is very strongly supporting. 5 on this scale is leaning toward supporting. This number dropped to 4.74 when the label was introduced. While both results showed that the overall support for the candidate leaned positive, there was a difference in the mean between the two samples of .65 with a P value of .045. The results of the experiment were only significant if the P-value was under .05, meaning that there is less than 5% chance that the label did not cause the

decrease in support. The decrease in support still shows that the sample still leans toward supporting the candidate.

These results showed that while the population overall would be willing to vote for this candidate, the support for the candidate dropped when the label of socialism was introduced. Results from the feelings thermometer rating showed the same pattern. The rating used a scale of 0 to 100 with 0 meaning individuals feel very negatively about the candidate, and 100 meaning they feel very positive. The no-label group showed a mean rating of 70.74 and the label treatment group had a mean rating of 59.21. Once again respondents leaned toward supporting the candidate in both groups, but there is a difference in the means of 11.53 in the direction of negative feelings for the candidate. The rating was still leaning toward viewing the candidate positively. Overall the rating showed a clearer difference between the group that received a label and the group that did not, and it was statically significant with a P value of .002. Both the scale and feeling thermometer rating for the candidate provided a better understanding of the effect than the amount that would vote and would not vote for the candidate.

The next question was whether political party influenced whether respondents were likely to support the candidate, or if they were more likely to be influenced by the socialist label. The independent means test for measuring the scale of support did not produce any statistically significant results. The results for the scale showed a P value of .187 for the support scale meaning the data collected was not statistically significant. The test for the rating, however, did show a significant effect from the socialism label. The mean for those in the group without a label was 79.30 and the mean for those in the

treatment group with a label was 70.84. With a difference in means of 8.5 and a P value of .011, the test showed that the level of positivity toward the candidate decreased when the label was attached. Both means were higher than the average for the total population that received a label meaning that Democrats are more likely to have positive feelings regardless of a label.

Republicans showed the same trend as the general population but to a much greater degree. In the means test for the support scale of Republicans, the mean was 4.21 in the group without a label showing that Republicans were mostly neutral about supporting the candidate but leaned toward supporting them. The mean for the group that received a label was 2.28 which is clear opposition. The difference is statistically significant with a P value of .003 and a difference between the two means of 1.93. The difference in the means for the rating of feelings for the candidate showed the same pattern. In the group with no label, the mean was 54.43. This shows that Republican respondents were neutral toward the candidate but leaned toward having positive feelings. The group that had the socialist label introduced had a mean of 25.68, showing negative feelings toward the candidate. The results were again significant with a P value of .001 and a difference in means of 28.75. This is a key finding in the results. Both the P value and the large difference show that the label had a strong effect on Republican respondents and that absent the label Republicans were not opposed to the socialist ideas. Overall the effect of the socialist label has a minimal effect, but a much more pronounced effect among Republicans.

Bill

Individuals may be likely to vote for a candidate that they don't necessarily agree with policy-wise, so the experimental questions concerning the bill were to test the support of a typically socialist policy with and without the socialist label. The label had less of an effect on the bill than it did on the candidate overall. The independent means test showed that the label had no statistically significant effect on support of the respondents when applied to the bill. The P value for total respondents was .594 for the scale and .552 for the feeling thermometer rating. Both are well above the range of statistically significant data. Similar results were found when isolating Republican respondents for the support of the bill and feelings toward the bill. The P-value for the scale for Republicans was .197 and was .464 for the feeling thermometer rating.

Democrats were the only group That was significantly affected by the bill being labeled as socialist. The mean level of support for the bill among Democrats for the group that received no label was 6.69 and was 6.22 for the group that did. The result although not showing as great a difference as many groups in the tests measuring support for a candidate, was still statistically significant with a difference in means of .47 and a P value of .032. Although there was nearly a half point difference, the support for the bill was still overwhelmingly positive with over a 6 on the 7-point scale. The feeling thermometer rating did not yield statistically significant results, but unlike every other test, the test analyzing how many thinks that the bill should be passed into law did show a significant effect of the label. The mean of the no-label group that answered yes was .92 and the

mean of the group with the label was .75. The results showed a P Value of .008 and a difference of .17 which shows that it is statistically significant.

The results for Republicans' respondents on the bill are surprising given the difference and statistical significance in the responses for candidate support. The discrepancy most likely lies once again within the difference between Republican and Democratic responses to the survey. With less Republican responses in this experiment, it is much more difficult to get significant data that shows a trend in support for a bill with or without a label.

Discussion

The results above proved different for each of my 6 hypotheses, so I will go over each individually. Hypothesis 1 was partially proved correct and incorrect. The definition of socialism, as I stated previously has changed throughout the course of history, and a complete definition must factor in different practices and possibilities. Few individuals were able to give a full and accurate depiction of what socialism is, but most people responding were able to identify one key aspect or the most important aspect as a redistribution of resources.

Hypothesis 2 was proven to be correct. While only 5.2% of Democrat respondents replied that socialism is authoritarian or totalitarian control, 25.6% of Republicans viewed socialism in this way. The Republican responses percentage is even much greater than the 11.2% of the total sample. Democrat respondents were also more likely to define socialism as community ownership or a means for equality than Republican respondents.

Hypothesis 3 was proven incorrect, but the data allowed for more analysis than I anticipated. Most respondents did see some distinct difference between socialism and democratic socialism, but the percentage of respondents that did see a difference varied greatly by political party. Republican respondents were more likely than Democrat respondents to view the two as the same thing, or as a rebranding of the same essential ideas. This is important to the second part of the study and to the current political climate because this means the socialist label and the democratic socialist label would have the same effect on these individuals.

Moving on to the experimental data, the results of the survey experiment proved hypothesis 4 correct. While the results from the experiment differed depending on if the label was applied to a candidate running for election or if it was applied to a bill that was proposed, the overall pattern was the same. The support on the scale and the number on the feeling thermometer rating fell when the label of socialist was included in the prompt. While there was a difference between parties, as seen in the results for hypothesis 5 below, the support only decreased when the socialist label was attached.

Hypothesis 5 was also proven correct. Republican respondents were much more likely to have more negative feelings for a candidate than the general population and Democratic respondents. The data for candidate support among Republicans showed the lowest P-values among the data analyzed and showed a difference in the means of 1.93 in the scale and a difference of 28.75 points in the feeling thermometer rating. The support among Republican respondents with the label attached also was the only data that showed negative feelings for the candidate and leaning toward opposing the candidate. It is also important to note, that Republican respondents in the group that did not receive the socialist label were leaning toward having positive feelings and were leaning toward supporting the candidate. If these results are taken into consideration along with the party's association with the definition of democratic socialism, the label of either socialism or democratic socialism could have negative effects.

The results of this study imply that there are definitive negative consequences for identifying as a socialist or having a socialist label associated or attached. This may indicate less success in general elections throughout the U.S. if this label is used to

characterize a candidate. If consistent with data from the 7-point support scale, a candidate would have a .65-point drop in their overall level of support if they identify as a socialist. It may seem likely that this will not matter if Republican respondents are more likely to vote for a candidate that is not socialist or Democratic in the first place, but it is also important in considering those on the fence, Democrats, and the general population. This data placed Republican leaners into the Republican category. The results also showed that when the label was not attached, Republican individuals had a more positive view of the candidate and were leaning toward support. After the label was attached level of support on the scale dropped by 1.93 points. Leaners may be put off by the label and deterred to vote for a candidate that is identified as socialist. Although the general population's decrease in support was smaller than that of the Republican party, in a contentious race, that support could influence the result of the election.

Unfortunately, there were not as many statistically significant results among the experiment measuring support for the bill with the socialist label attached, disproving Hypothesis 6. The results for support for the candidate provided clearer results than the results for the bill. The only statistically significant results for the bill showed that Democrats were less likely to support a bill when the socialist label was attached. This is different than data for candidate that showed no difference in support for a candidate when the label was attached. This may mean that Democrats would be willing to vote for a socialist candidate but would not be as likely to want them to enact socialist policies. Overall more analysis needs to be done regarding support for the bill. With the limited

sample size, an accurate representation of the general populations and Republican support was not found and is essential to determine the effect of the socialist label.

One piece of information that is important to acknowledge in this study is that although support often decreased in Democrats and in the general population, it still leaned toward support. This is likely due to the disproportionate number of Democrats and young people in the sample. Data has shown that Democrats and young people are more likely to use Amazon Mechanical Turk to take surveys and in addition to creating an uneven sample, it skews the data in the direction of support for the candidate and bill. The younger generation has a more positive view of socialism and that is likely what is being seen in the results.

Other limitations of this study are the general sample size and the selection of socialist policies. While a sample of around 600 seems a great number, when they were divided into different treatment groups of around 100 people for the experiment and then isolated into political party to groups of closer to 30-70, the statistical significance of the label is much harder to determine. There are likely more differences than seen in the results, but they are not able to be accurately represented with this sample size, and a greater sample would solve this problem. Additionally, the general population may have more support for some socialist policies than others. People may be more likely to support a socialist healthcare program than another socialist policy. Many Democrats already support a comprehensive and more expansive health care program, and this could lead to more individuals willing to vote for these policies or a candidate that endorses these policies. Individuals across the aisle may also be frustrated with the current health

care situation and be willing to support a bill or candidate advocating for this. On the other hand, both Democrats and Republicans may be hesitant to support a limit on the amount of private property or wealth that an individual can have. A wealth cap is a democratic socialist policy common in democratic socialist countries. Another policy that may have varying levels of support could be free tuition for university. Analyzing different socialist policies would be an important next step in this line of research.

Conclusion

This research has shown that people are likely to view democratic socialism and socialism in similar lenses, but that most individuals believe that there is a difference in their definitions. This is important because the label of socialism has an impact on the mean support and positivity that a candidate has from the general population and an even greater impact on the support from Republicans. The label also affects Democrat's support for a traditionally democratic socialist policy in a bill. This is vital information for politicians and political strategists especially in near future primaries and presidential campaigns.

Just as an emphasis on the label of liberal has shifted to the label of progressive or to a focus on the label of Democrat, it may be necessary to distance oneself from the socialist label. This data combined with evidence from recent polling also shows support for the trend that the feelings surrounding the word socialist may be changing with the younger generation. The data skewed toward a younger population and even with the drop-in support when the label was attached, the results still showed a positive lean toward the candidate and bill in the total sample. This study contributes to the body of labeling research and confirms that there is an effect when a single label is given to an otherwise similar policy. While significant, this is even more significant in the political context. A drop in support of a fraction of a point or even a few points may seem insignificant, but in the context of a contentious election, these points could determine who the next mayor, representative, senator, or even who the next president of the United States is.

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