



**THE PEW RESEARCH CENTER**  
**For The People & The Press**

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**A Political Rhetoric Test**

**“SOCIALISM” NOT SO NEGATIVE, “CAPITALISM” NOT SO POSITIVE**

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## A Political Rhetoric Test

### **“SOCIALISM” NOT SO NEGATIVE, “CAPITALISM” NOT SO POSITIVE**

“Socialism” is a negative for most Americans, but certainly not all Americans. “Capitalism” is regarded positively by a majority of the public, though it is a thin majority. There are certain segments of the public – notably, young people and Democrats – where both “isms” are rated about equally. And while most Americans have a negative reaction to the word “militia,” the term is viewed more positively by Republican men than most other groups.

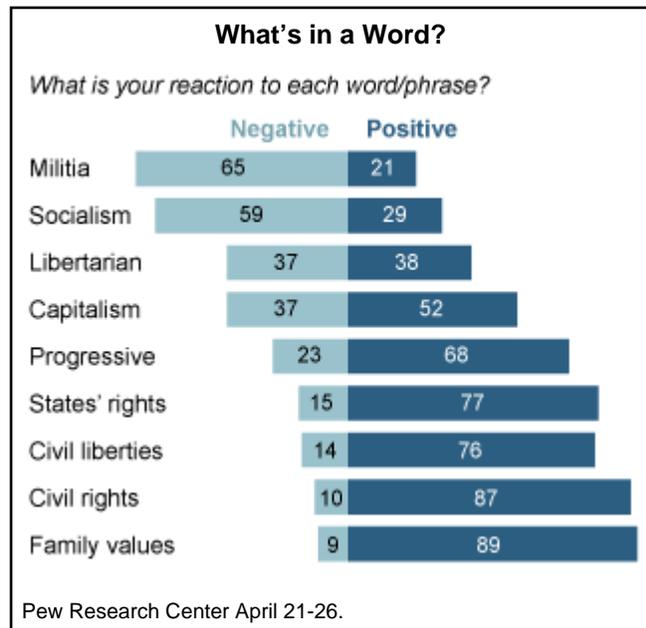
These are among the findings of a national survey by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press that tests reactions to words and phrases frequently used in current political discourse. Overall, 29% say they have a positive reaction to the word “socialism,” while 59% react negatively. The public’s impressions of “capitalism,” though far more positive, are somewhat mixed. Slightly more than half (52%) react positively to the word “capitalism,” compared with 37% who say they have a negative reaction.

A large majority of Republicans (77%) react negatively to “socialism,” while 62% have a positive reaction to “capitalism.” Democrats’ impressions are more divided: In fact, about as many Democrats react positively to “socialism” (44%) as to “capitalism” (47%).

Reaction to “capitalism” is lukewarm among many demographic groups. Fewer than half of young people, women, people with lower incomes and those with less education react positively to “capitalism.”

The survey, conducted April 21-26 among 1,546 adults, measured reactions to nine political words and phrases. The most positive reactions are to “family values” (89% positive) and “civil rights” (87%). About three-quarters see “states’ rights” (77%) and “civil liberties” (76%) positively, while 68% have a positive reaction to the word “progressive.”

Reactions to the word “libertarian” are evenly divided – 38% positive, 37% negative. On balance, Republicans view “libertarian” negatively, Democrats are divided, while independents have a positive impression of the term. “Militia” elicits the most negative reaction of the nine



terms tested: Just 21% have a positive reaction compared with 65% who have a negative response.

### Partisan Divide over “Socialism”

The most striking partisan differences come in reactions to the word “socialism.” Just 15% of Republicans react positively to “socialism” while 77% react negatively. By more than two-to-one (64% to 26%), independents also have a negative impression of “socialism.” However, Democrats are evenly divided – 44% have a positive reaction to “socialism” while 43% react negatively.

“Capitalism” elicits a less partisan reaction. About six-in-ten Republicans (62%) react positively to “capitalism,” compared with 29% who have a negative reaction. About half of independents (52%) have a positive impression while 39% react negatively. Among Democrats, 47% react positively to “capitalism” while nearly as many (43%) react negatively.

There is a substantial partisan divide in views of the word “progressive.” However, majorities of Democrats (81%), independents (64%) and Republicans (56%) have a positive reaction to “progressive.”

More than four-in-ten independents (44%) react positively to the word “libertarian,” while 32% have a negative reaction. Democrats are nearly evenly divided (39% positive, 37% negative). However, Republicans on balance have a negative impression of this term (44% negative, 31% positive).

Majorities of Democrats (70%), independents (66%) and Republicans (59%) react negatively to the word “militia.” Nearly twice as many Republicans (27%) as Democrats (15%) have a positive view of this term.

What's in a Word?					
Reactions to...	Total %	Rep %	Dem %	Ind %	R-D diff
<b>Socialism</b>					
Positive	29	15	44	26	-29
Negative	59	77	43	64	
<b>Progressive</b>					
Positive	68	56	81	64	-25
Negative	23	34	12	26	
<b>Libertarian</b>					
Positive	38	31	39	44	-8
Negative	37	44	37	32	
<b>Civil liberties</b>					
Positive	76	72	80	75	-8
Negative	14	16	11	17	
<b>Civil rights</b>					
Positive	87	84	91	86	-7
Negative	10	10	8	11	
<b>Family values</b>					
Positive	89	94	83	91	+11
Negative	9	4	15	8	
<b>Militia</b>					
Positive	21	27	15	20	+12
Negative	65	59	70	66	
<b>States' rights</b>					
Positive	77	85	71	78	+14
Negative	15	9	21	16	
<b>Capitalism</b>					
Positive	52	62	47	52	+15
Negative	37	29	43	39	
N	1546	413	499	554	

Pew Research Center April 21-26 Q39a-jF1.

## Young People Lukewarm Toward “Capitalism”

Young people are more positive about “socialism” – and more negative about “capitalism” – than are older Americans. Among those younger than 30, identical percentages react positively to “socialism” and “capitalism” (43% each), while about half react negatively to each. Among older age groups, majorities view “socialism” negatively and “capitalism” positively.

People 65 and older have a particularly negative reaction to “socialism” – 73% have a negative impression of the term compared with just 14% who are positive. But those 65 and older are no more likely than those ages 30 to 64 to have a positive reaction to “capitalism” (56% vs. 55%).

More than twice as many blacks as whites react positively to “socialism” (53% vs. 24%). Yet there are no racial differences in views of “capitalism” – 50% of African Americans and 53% of whites have a positive reaction.

Those with a high school education or less are evenly divided over “capitalism” (44% positive vs. 42% negative). Among those with some college experience, 49% react positively to “capitalism” as do 68% of college graduates. Those with a high school education or less are more likely to express a positive view of “socialism” than do those with more education.

People with family incomes of \$75,000 or more are the only income group in which a clear majority (66%) reacts positively to the word “capitalism.” Views of “socialism” also are much more negative among those in this income category (71% negative) – and those with incomes of \$30,000 to \$75,000 (64% negative) – than those with incomes of less than \$30,000 (46% negative).

**Reactions to “Socialism” and “Capitalism”**

	Socialism		Capitalism		N
	Pos- itive %	Neg- ative %	Pos- itive %	Neg- ative %	
Total	29	59	52	37	1546
Men	25	65	59	34	740
Women	33	54	47	40	806
White, non-Hispanic	24	65	53	37	1172
Black, non-Hispanic	53	35	50	40	171
18-29	43	49	43	48	218
30-49	33	56	55	37	433
50-64	23	63	54	35	505
65+	14	73	56	29	373
College grad+	23	64	68	24	586
Some college	25	67	49	43	395
HS or less	35	53	44	42	562
<i>Family income</i>					
\$75,000 or more	19	71	66	25	440
\$30-74,999	24	64	47	47	496
Less than \$30,000	44	46	47	40	423
Cons Rep	12	84	67	26	302
Mod/Lib Rep	21	65	51	37	100
Independent	26	64	52	39	554
Cons/Mod Dem	44	45	48	40	303
Liberal Dem	44	40	44	49	178
<i>Obama job</i>					
Approve	42	44	50	39	720
Disapprove	15	79	59	34	676
<b>Among whites</b>					
College grad+	19	68	71	21	459
Some college	19	72	49	44	307
HS or less	30	60	42	45	404
<i>Family income</i>					
\$75,000 or more	15	75	69	22	355
\$30-74,999	22	68	49	46	382
Less than \$30,000	36	53	43	44	296

Pew Research Center April 21-26 Q39a & Q39g.  
Figures read across.

Conservative Republicans stand out for their overwhelmingly negative reactions to “socialism” (84% negative) and highly positive reactions to “capitalism” (67% positive). No more than about half in other political groups, including moderate and liberal Republicans (51%), have a positive impression of “capitalism.”

Perhaps surprisingly, opinions about the terms “socialism” and “capitalism” are not correlated with each other. Most of those who have a positive reaction to “socialism” also have a positive reaction to “capitalism”; in fact, views of “capitalism” are about the same among those who react *positively* to “socialism” as they are among those who react *negatively* (52% and 56%, respectively, view “capitalism” positively). Conversely, views of “socialism” are just as negative among those who have a positive reaction to “capitalism” (64% negative) as those who react negatively (61% negative).

There are some differences in the relationship between these terms by demographic groups, although the association is not particularly strong among any group. For instance, among college graduates, 71% of those with a positive reaction to “capitalism” have a negative reaction to “socialism.” By contrast, among college graduates who have a negative view of “capitalism” a smaller proportion have a negative view of “socialism” (51%).

## Gender Differences in Views of “Militia”

While the word “militia” is viewed negatively, there are gender and partisan differences in reactions to this term. Overall, twice as many men (28%) as women (14%) say they have a positive reaction to the word “militia.” In addition, more Republicans (27%) than independents (20%) or Democrats (15%) have positive impressions.

Republican men have a more positive impression of “militia” (36% positive) than do Democratic men (19%). Moreover, GOP men have a more positive reaction than do Republican women (18% positive).

There also is a sizeable gender gap in independents’ reactions to “militia.” Among independents, 28% of men have a positive reaction to “militia,” compared with just 10% of women. The gender differences are more modest among Democrats (19% positive among men vs. 12% among women).

Reactions to “Militia”			
	Pos- itive %	Neg- ative %	N
Total	21	65	1546
Men	28	60	740
Women	14	69	806
White, non-Hispanic	21	66	1172
Black, non-Hispanic	17	62	171
18-29	25	65	218
30-49	17	70	433
50-64	20	67	505
65+	24	51	373
College grad+	18	71	586
Some college	20	68	395
HS or less	22	58	562
<b>Among men</b>			
Republican	36	53	198
Democrat	19	74	195
Independent	28	59	305
<b>Among women</b>			
Republican	18	65	215
Democrat	12	68	304
Independent	10	76	249

Pew Research Center April 21-26 Q39c.  
Figures read across.

## ABOUT THE SURVEY

Results for this survey are based on telephone interviews conducted under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates International among a national sample of 1,546 adults living in the continental United States, 18 years of age or older, from April 21-26, 2010 (1,006 respondents were interviewed on a landline telephone, and 540 were interviewed on a cell phone, including 203 who had no landline telephone). Both the landline and cell phone samples were provided by Survey Sampling International. Interviews were conducted in English. For detailed information about our survey methodology, see <http://people-press.org/methodology/>.

The combined landline and cell phone sample are weighted using an iterative technique that matches gender, age, education, race/ethnicity, region, and population density to parameters from the March 2009 Census Bureau's Current Population Survey. The sample is also weighted to match current patterns of telephone status and relative usage of landline and cell phones (for those with both), based on extrapolations from the 2009 National Health Interview Survey. The weighting procedure also accounts for the fact that respondents with both landline and cell phones have a greater probability of being included in the combined sample and adjusts for household size within the landline sample. Sampling errors and statistical tests of significance take into account the effect of weighting.

The following table shows the error attributable to sampling that would be expected at the 95% level of confidence for different groups in the survey:

<b>Group</b>	<b>Sample Size</b>	<b>Plus or minus...</b>
Total sample.....	1,546 .....	3.0 percentage points
Form 1 .....	779.....	4.5 percentage points
Form 2.....	767.....	4.5 percentage points
Republicans.....	413.....	6.0 percentage points
Democrats.....	499.....	5.5 percentage points
Independents.....	554.....	5.0 percentage points

In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

## ABOUT THE CENTER

The Pew Research Center for the People & the Press is an independent opinion research group that studies attitudes toward the press, politics and public policy issues. We are sponsored by The Pew Charitable Trusts and are one of seven projects that make up the Pew Research Center, a nonpartisan "fact tank" that provides information on the issues, attitudes and trends shaping America and the world.

The Center's purpose is to serve as a forum for ideas on the media and public policy through public opinion research. In this role it serves as an important information resource for political leaders, journalists, scholars, and public interest organizations. All of our current survey results are made available free of charge.

All of the Center's research and reports are collaborative products based on the input and analysis of the entire Center staff consisting of:

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**PEW RESEARCH CENTER FOR THE PEOPLE & THE PRESS**  
**APRIL 2010 POLITICAL AND FUTURE SURVEY**  
**FINAL TOPLINE**  
 April 21-26, 2010  
 N=1546

**QUESTIONS 1-38 PREVIOUSLY RELEASED**

**ASK ALL:**

Q.39 As I read a list of words and phrases, please tell me what your reaction is to each ... (First,) do you have a positive or negative reaction to the word/phrase... **[INSERT ITEM; RANDOMIZE; OBSERVE FORM SPLITS]**? How about **[NEXT ITEM]**? **[IF NECESSARY: do you have a positive or negative reaction to the word/phrase (REPEAT ITEM)]**

		<u>Positive</u>	<u>Negative</u>	<u>(VOL.) Neither/ Neutral</u>	<u>(VOL.) DK/Ref</u>
a.	Socialism Apr 21-26, 2010	29	59	6	5
b.	Progressive Apr 21-26, 2010	68	23	4	6
c.	Militia Apr 21-26, 2010	21	65	4	11
d.	Libertarian Apr 21-26, 2010	38	37	9	16
e.	States' rights Apr 21-26, 2010	77	15	3	5

**NO ITEM f.**

g.	Capitalism Apr 21-26, 2010	52	37	4	7
h.	Family values Apr 21-26, 2010	89	9	1	1

**ASK FORM 2 ONLY [N=767]:**

i.F2	Civil liberties Apr 21-26, 2010	76	14	4	6
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**ASK FORM 1 ONLY [N=779]:**

j.F1	Civil rights Apr 21-26, 2010	87	10	1	2
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**NO QUESTIONS 40-44**

**QUESTIONS 45-56 HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE**

**ASK ALL:**

PARTY In politics TODAY, do you consider yourself a Republican, Democrat, or Independent?

**ASK IF ANSWERED 3, 4, 5 OR 9 IN PARTY:**

PARTYLN As of today do you lean more to the Republican Party or more to the Democratic Party?

	<u>Republican</u>	<u>Democrat</u>	<u>Independent</u>	(VOL.) No preference	(VOL.) Other party	(VOL.) DK/Ref	Lean Rep	Lean Dem
Apr 21-26, 2010	26	33	36	3	1	3	16	13
Apr 8-11, 2010	23	32	38	5	*	2	17	13
Apr 1-5, 2010	24	29	40	3	1	3	17	15
Mar 18-21, 2010	24	30	40	2	1	3	17	13
Mar 11-21, 2010	28	34	32	3	*	3	13	12
Mar 10-14, 2010	22	33	37	6	*	3	14	13
Feb 3-9, 2010	26	31	37	3	*	3	14	17
Jan 6-10, 2010	22	33	42	2	1	2	17	16
Dec 9-13, 2009	25	32	38	2	*	2	14	15
Oct 28-Nov 8, 2009	27	35	32	3	*	2	13	13
Sep 30-Oct 4, 2009	23	34	37	3	1	3	16	14
Sep 10-15, 2009	23	34	34	4	*	5	13	17
Aug 20-27, 2009	26	32	36	3	*	3	14	16
Aug 11-17, 2009	23	33	38	3	*	3	16	15
Jul 22-26, 2009	22	34	37	5	*	2	15	14
Jun 10-14, 2009	25	34	34	3	*	3	11	16
Apr 28-May 12, 2009	23	39	29	4	*	4	9	14
<b>Yearly Totals</b>								
2009	23.9	34.4	35.1	3.4	.4	2.8	13.1	15.7
2008	25.3	35.8	31.7	3.8	.3	3.1	10.5	15.4
2007	25.4	32.9	33.7	4.6	.4	3.1	10.7	16.7
2006	27.6	32.8	30.3	5.0	.4	3.9	10.2	14.5
2005	29.2	32.8	30.3	4.5	.3	2.8	10.2	14.9
2004	29.7	33.4	29.8	3.9	.4	2.9	11.7	13.4
2003	29.8	31.4	31.2	4.7	.5	2.5	12.1	13.0
2002	30.3	31.2	30.1	5.1	.7	2.7	12.6	11.6
2001	29.2	33.6	28.9	5.1	.5	2.7	11.7	11.4
2001 Post-Sept 11	30.9	31.8	27.9	5.2	.6	3.6	11.7	9.4
2001 Pre-Sept 11	28.2	34.6	29.5	5.0	.5	2.1	11.7	12.5
2000	27.5	32.5	29.5	5.9	.5	4.0	11.6	11.6
1999	26.6	33.5	33.7	3.9	.5	1.9	13.0	14.5
1998	27.5	33.2	31.9	4.6	.4	2.4	11.8	13.5
1997	28.2	33.3	31.9	4.0	.4	2.3	12.3	13.8
1996	29.2	32.7	33.0	5.2	--	--	12.7	15.6
1995	31.4	29.7	33.4	5.4	--	--	14.4	12.9
1994	29.8	31.8	33.8	4.6	--	--	14.3	12.6
1993	27.4	33.8	34.0	4.8	--	--	11.8	14.7
1992	27.7	32.7	35.7	3.9	--	--	13.8	15.8
1991	30.9	31.4	33.2	4.5	--	--	14.6	10.8
1990	31.0	33.1	29.1	6.8	--	--	12.4	11.3
1989	33	33	34	--	--	--	--	--
1987	26	35	39	--	--	--	--	--