1. Based on your reading of the article, what is your definition of democratic socialism?
2. What are the basic arguments for and against democratic socialism in the US and who makes them?
3. Do you think that democratic socialism is something we should have in our country? Why or why not?
4. From the anticipation guide: Do you think that some knowledge is too dangerous to be revealed to the society, and thus should be kept secret? Why or why not?
5. From the anticipation guide: Do you think that a person has the right to defy the laws of his society if he deems the laws unethical or immoral? Why or why not?

**Is Democratic Socialism the right path for America?**

**http://www.cnn.com/2015/10/27/opinions/opinion-roundup-socialism/**

**(CNN)**At the first Democratic debate, Sen. Bernie Sanders acquainted many Americans with the [term](http://www.cnn.com/2015/10/22/politics/bernie-sanders-democratic-socialism/index.html) he uses to describe his program: "[democratic socialism](http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/article/2015/aug/26/bernie-sanders-socialist-or-democratic-socialist/)," touching off debate about exactly what the term means and why many Americans have traditionally reacted poorly to the socialist label.

What is democratic socialism and how would it change America's capitalist economy? And is it the right path for the United States?

CNN Opinion invited political scientists, economists and other experts to weigh in. What do you think?

Peter Dreier: What is democratic socialism, American-style?

In the early 1900s, socialists led the movements for women's suffrage, child labor laws, consumer protection laws and the progressive income tax. In 1916, Victor Berger, a socialist congressman from Milwaukee, sponsored the first bill to create "old age pensions." The bill didn't get very far, but two decades later, in the midst of the Depression, President Franklin D. Roosevelt persuaded Congress to enact Social Security. Even then, some critics denounced it as un-American. But today, most Americans, even conservatives, believe that Social Security is a good idea. What had once seemed radical has become common sense.



Peter Dreier

Much of FDR's other New Deal legislation -- the minimum wage, workers' right to form unions and public works programs to create jobs for the unemployed -- was first espoused by American socialists.

Socialists were in the forefront of the civil rights movement from the founding of the NAACP in 1909 through the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Socialists have long pushed for a universal health insurance plan, which helped create the momentum for stepping-stone measures such as Medicare and Medicaid in the 1960s and Obamacare today.

In the 1890s, a socialist Baptist minister, Francis Bellamy, wrote "The Pledge of Allegiance" and a socialist poet, Katherine Lee Bates, penned "America the Beautiful." Throughout our history, some of the nation's most influential activists and thinkers, such as Jane Addams, John Dewey, Helen Keller, W.E.B. DuBois, Albert Einstein, A. Philip Randolph, Walter Reuther, Martin Luther King, Eugene V. Debs, and Gloria Steinem, embraced democratic socialism.

During the Cold War, many Americans confused democratic socialism with communism. In fact, democratic socialists opposed the totalitarian governments of the Soviet Union, China and their satellites. That's because democratic socialism is about democracy -- giving ordinary people a greater voice in both politics and the workplace.

Although Sanders says that America needs a "grassroots political revolution," he is actually a reformer, not a revolutionary. His version of democratic socialism is akin to what most people around the world call "social democracy," which seeks to make capitalism more humane. [*Read full essay.*](http://www.cnn.com/2015/10/27/opinions/dreier-democratic-socialism/index.html)

*Peter Dreier is professor of politics at Occidental College and author of "*[*The 100 Greatest Americans of the 20th Century: A Social Justice Hall of Fame*](http://www.amazon.com/The-Greatest-Americans-20th-Century/dp/1568586817)*" (Nation Books, 2012).*

Daron Acemoglu: Socialism vs. social democracy

There is much that's broken about the American economic and political system. The very high levels of income inequality, to which neither Republicans nor Democrats have yet articulated a coherent response, and the increasing political dominance of a few dozen very wealthy donors who hold both parties hostage, are the two most visible and symptomatic ills of our current malaise. So it should be no surprise that Bernie Sanders' talk of socialism has awakened us to alternative political paths.

Is more socialism a solution for America? No.



Daron Acemoglu

Merriam-Webster defines socialism as "any of various economic and political theories advocating collective or governmental ownership and administration of the means of production and distribution of goods." But when the means of production are under government ownership, political decision-making becomes centralized, often dominated by a single party.

Economic growth and shared prosperity are best cultivated under economic systems that rely on the market, while at the same time regulating the market to prevent monopoly and malpractice, and providing education, health, infrastructure and security to their population. Such an economic system can only survive in a durable fashion in a politically inclusive society, blending individual freedom and democratic decision-making.

Socialism is consistent neither with such an economic system nor with its political underpinnings, and consequently, the track record of socialist countries to create prosperity has been pitiful.

But wait. Don't the socialist Scandinavian countries achieve high levels of income per capita with limited inequality? Doesn't China, with its one-party socialist/communist political system, outpace the United States? No and no.

The [Nordic system](http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/05/29/why-cant-america-be-sweden/?_r=0), which Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden have followed for most of their postwar history, is social democracy, not socialism. It fosters markets and private entrepreneurship, but with a powerful welfare state providing a strong level playing field.

China's mixture of socialist (or communist) political system and state capitalism may have worked well for transforming an agricultural, poverty-stricken economy to an industrial one, but cannot and will not generate the innovations that are the lifeblood of any advanced economy.

The market economy is the only game in town for creating prosperity, and the question is how to find the right balance between incentivizing creativity, hard work and risk-taking and creating the essential public services, social safety nets and equality of opportunity.

*Daron Acemoglu is Elizabeth and James Killian Professor of Economics at Massachusetts Institute of Technology.*

Sally Kohn: Why Sanders asked us to look

In the first Democratic debate, Sen. Bernie Sanders was asked to explain "democratic socialism." His response was, "I think we should look to countries like Denmark, like Sweden and Norway."

So, when we look there what do we get? We see less economic inequality and more concern for the well-being of citizens. Let's look at some details.



Sally Kohn

Whereas in the United States, federal law allows people to take three months of unpaid parental leave, [Swedish law](http://www.npr.org/sections/babyproject/2011/08/09/139121410/parental-leave-the-swedes-are-the-most-generous)gives new parents a combined 16 months of leave that they can use however they want during the first 8 years of their child's life. The law also entitles parents to receive 80% of their wages during leave.

In [average life expectancy](http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/releases/2014/world-health-statistics-2014/en/), the U.S. is behind more than 30 countries. Spain, which boasts [one of the best health care systems](http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=112014770) in the world, has a single-payer universal health care model. Switzerland, France, Norway, Sweden and Finland -- which have government-funded universal health care -- also rank higher than the U.S.

In the U.S., the average CEO makes 354 times more money than the average worker. In [Germany](http://fortune.com/2014/11/04/why-do-american-ceos-make-twice-as-much-as-german-ceos/), one of the world's leading economies, CEOs make only 147 times more than workers -- which is still a lot, but less than double the rate in the U.S. Why is Germany less unequal? Because labor representatives and workers sit on corporate boards. That means when issues of pay come up, there are people in positions of power to speak up for workers' salaries and not just CEO and shareholder interests. It's no wonder that the average worker income in Germany is 16% greater than the average income in the U.S.

When you learn the details, democratic socialism looks pretty good, doesn't it?

*Sally Kohn is an activist, columnist and television commentator.*

Tara Setmayer: It's antithetical to American exceptionalism

American exceptionalism wasn't built on the idea of redistributing wealth and big government promises of free stuff. Instead, success of this country derives from its historical roots of political liberty and economic freedom.



Tara Setmayer

Some, like Sen. Bernie Sanders, may point to countries like Denmark as examples of where democratic socialism works. But does it? Scandinavian countries have exorbitantly high taxes and a lot of welfare. Do you think this is the intent of our Founding Fathers?

Socialist countries strip individuals of their God-given rights to succeed in favor of the collective good. That is not the American way. Although socialism continues to be romanticized by leftist ideologues, they tend to ignore the historical failures of the socialist construct. Socialism fails because it not only discourages incentives to strive for excellence, it fosters a sense of entitlement.

Free stuff may sound great in theory but not in the real world. As the great Margaret Thatcher once said, "the problem with socialism is you eventually run out of other people's money."

America is the Land of Opportunity because of its equal protection for any individual to pursue life, liberty and happiness. Not the government's forceful hand in the name of equality at the expense of freedom.

*Tara Setmayer is former communications director for Rep. Dana Rohrabacher, R-California, and is a CNN political commentator. Follow her on Twitter*[*@tarasetmayer.*](https://twitter.com/TaraSetmayer?ref_src=twsrc%5egoogle|twcamp%5eserp|twgr%5eauthor)