

Pacific University

CommonKnowledge

---

Humanities Capstone Projects

College of Arts and Sciences

---

2017

## A Specter is Haunting: America Bernie Sanders and Socialism in 2016

Jenny Keyt  
*Pacific University*

### Recommended Citation

Keyt, Jenny, "A Specter is Haunting: America Bernie Sanders and Socialism in 2016" (2017). *Humanities Capstone Projects*. 29.

<https://commons.pacificu.edu/cashu/29>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Arts and Sciences at CommonKnowledge. It has been accepted for inclusion in Humanities Capstone Projects by an authorized administrator of CommonKnowledge. For more information, please contact [CommonKnowledge@pacificu.edu](mailto:CommonKnowledge@pacificu.edu).

---

## A Specter is Haunting: America Bernie Sanders and Socialism in 2016

### Abstract

How did socialism come to be an increasingly legitimate political option in the United States? Why did Bernie Sanders emerge as a serious candidate for the 2016 Democratic presidential nomination, but ultimately fail to become the nominee? This analysis incorporates a cyclical theory of the presidency and evaluates pertinent changes in American political cultural opinions, social attitudes and economic trends, using historic data and 2016 election-cycle opinion polls and statistics. Increased receptiveness toward socialism and Bernie Sanders in 2016 occurred due to the convergence of widespread economic hardship and discontent, and a desire for nontraditional political alternatives. There was not an overt increase in support for socialism. Similarly, standard electoral factors, and Sanders' pursuit of a style of presidential authority and leadership that was ill-suited for the current political climate, were to blame for his loss in the nomination process.

### Document Type

Thesis

### Department

Politics/Government

### Subject Categories

American Politics | Political Science

### Comments

Best Paper, 2017 CommonKnowledge Senior Project Writing Award

Jenny Keyt

10 May 2017

## **A Specter is Haunting America**

### **Bernie Sanders and Socialism in 2016**

#### **ABSTRACT**

How did socialism come to be an increasingly legitimate political option in the United States? Why did Bernie Sanders emerge as a serious candidate for the 2016 Democratic presidential nomination, but ultimately fail to become the nominee? This analysis incorporates a cyclical theory of the presidency and evaluates pertinent changes in American political cultural opinions, social attitudes and economic trends, using historic data and 2016 election-cycle opinion polls and statistics. Increased receptiveness toward socialism and Bernie Sanders in 2016 occurred due to the convergence of widespread economic hardship and discontent, and a desire for nontraditional political alternatives. There was not an overt increase in support for socialism. Similarly, standard electoral factors, and Sanders' pursuit of a style of presidential authority and leadership that was ill-suited for the current political climate, were to blame for his loss in the nomination process.

More than 28,000 people, flooded Brooklyn's Prospect Park in April 2016 to "Feel the Bern." They were there to see Bernie Sanders, a self-proclaimed democratic socialist running for the Democratic presidential nomination. A longtime independent senator from Vermont, Sanders turned out to be an unexpectedly competitive candidate, routinely drawing tens of thousands to his campaign rallies with his radically progressive stump speeches.<sup>1</sup> His plan to transform America along social democratic lines included reforms to slash income inequality and restructure Wall Street, raise wages, provide universal healthcare, tuition free college education, greatly expand social services and government investment. Bernie Sanders does not shy away from the socialist label and proudly states his support for creating Scandinavian style social democracy right here in America.<sup>2</sup>

Socialism has long been a dangerously tainted association for those running for office in the United States. A damaging label for any but the most leftwing and radical national politicians operating outside the boundaries of the two-party system, socialism was something un-American, impossible in this bastion of free-market capitalism. Openly socialistic policies were rarely discussed in earnest as viable reforms. Rather, it was demonized, and the persecution and ostracization its adherents faced is well known.<sup>3</sup> Even its more tame offshoot, social democracy, which accepts basic principles of capitalism but intervenes significantly in the economy and society through social welfare programs and taxes to advance equality and ensure a high quality of life, was infeasible.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Landers, "Bernie Sanders draws 'record' crowd in Prospect Park," *CNN*, 18 April 2016, [cnn.com](http://cnn.com).

<sup>2</sup> John Nichols, *The S Word: A Short History of an America Tradition... Socialism*, (London: Verso, 2015): ix.

<sup>3</sup> Nichols, *S Word*, 128–131.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Harrington, *Socialism: Past and Future*, (London: Verso Publishing, 1989): 103.

However, socialism did not always, and perhaps does not now, carry this ruinous implication. So called “sewer socialists” won, and occasionally continue to win, local and state elections on platforms advocating increased infrastructure and public work investment, economic reforms and workers’ rights.<sup>5</sup> Yet these successes are all relatively limited to local elections, and on a nationwide level, in the preeminent race for the presidency, socialists, third parties and social democrats are less successful.<sup>6</sup>

Now here was Bernie Sanders, experiencing an incredible surge of popularity and prominence in the 2016 presidential election. Socialism burst onto the national political stage, refusing to be ignored, demanding to be taken seriously. People and parties are being forced to consider socialism, to discuss and debate its ideas and policies in a way unseen before. Bernie Sanders could represent a reorientation of American politics, toward previously unthinkable reforms and programs. Or he may be a mere blip, creating a leftwing ripple that will be unable to alter the national trajectory. Largely it depends on what gave rise to Sanders and social democracy in this moment, was it the result of long lasting or mainly momentary factors and trends. This thesis analyzes how and why Bernie Sanders emerged as a serious candidate but lost the nomination and how socialism came to be increasingly accepted as a legitimate political option.

---

<sup>5</sup> Chris McGreal, “Socialist politician credits Bernie Sanders after re-election in Seattle,” *The Guardian*, 6 November 2015, [theguardian.com](http://theguardian.com). James Gregory and Jack Ross, “Socialist Party Votes, Membership, Newspapers, and Elected Officials by States and Counties,” *Mapping American Socialist Movements Through the 20th Century*, <http://depts.washington.edu/moves>, 2016.

<sup>6</sup> Nichols, *S Word*, 108.

# LITERATURE REVIEW

## THE PRESIDENCY

### SITUATIONAL AND CYCLICAL FRAMEWORKS

As Senator Sanders and socialism gained renewed public attention within the context of his bid for the presidency, it is necessary to consider theories particular to that office to understand his rise. Few areas of American politics garner the level of public attention and importance as the presidency. Perhaps this is because the presidency occupies a unique position, combining both an administrative office which operates as part of the larger governmental and political structure, and a highly personalistic position from which one individual wields great influence and authority.<sup>7</sup> Scholarship of the presidency tends to reflect this fascinating juxtaposition; explaining the presidency based on an assessment of personal characteristics and skills or through contextualizing and grounding the presidency within a situational or historical framework. A personal skills approach sees presidential power as deriving from some combination of individual talents, persuasive power, emotional intelligence and personality.<sup>8</sup>

However, in this thesis greater emphasis will be placed on theoretical frameworks which contextualize the presidency within the broader historical and political climate in order to illuminate the Sanders phenomena, and explore whether he was a revolutionary anomaly or part of a predictable political cycle. Countering the individualistic approach, Stephen Skowronek contends that fruitful analysis must take into account the political time in which presidents act, a

---

<sup>7</sup> George C. Edwards III and Stephen J. Wayne, *Presidential Leadership: Politics and Policy Making*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 17.

<sup>8</sup> Richard Neustadt, *Presidential Power: the Politics of Leadership*, (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1961), 10; James David Barber, *The Presidential Character: Predicting Performance in the White House*, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1972), 6; Fred Greenstein, *The Presidential Difference: Leadership Style from FDR to Barack Obama*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 3.

temporal context that can greatly impact presidential leadership, possibilities, victories and defeats in office.<sup>9</sup> This political time consists of the dominant structures and norms governing politics, authority, societal attitudes and expectations.<sup>10</sup> It is episodic and is best characterized as a series of regimes, organized around a set of basic governing commitments, that have occurred throughout American history.<sup>11</sup> In Skowronek's analysis, there have been six clear regimes thus far; with the New Deal Liberalism forged in 1932 by Franklin Roosevelt being replaced in 1980 by a dominant conservative regime established by Ronald Reagan.<sup>12</sup>

Reagan crafted the conservative regime by redefining the conditions and terms that legitimize national government and repudiating New Deal liberalism.<sup>13</sup> He articulated a new narrative against "tax and spend" policies, large government, extensive social programs, and even the very word "liberal."<sup>14</sup> The conservative regime places focus on tax cuts, increases in military expenditures, domestic budget cuts and deregulating business.<sup>15</sup> Yet there has been debate as to whether Reagan did in fact create a new era, with some scholars pointing to the endurance of liberal public policies and the lack of realignment in the Republican party.<sup>16</sup> Reagan's reconstruction was different than past regime builders and may appear to some to be a less fundamental regime transition because he was unable to enact sweeping changes to the

---

<sup>9</sup> Stephen Skowronek, *Presidential Leadership in Political Time: Reprise and Reappraisal*, (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas Press, 2008), 77.

<sup>10</sup> Skowronek, *Presidential Leadership in Political Time*, 19.

<sup>11</sup> Skowronek, *Presidential Leadership in Political Time*, 20.

<sup>12</sup> Skowronek, *Presidential Leadership in Political Time*, 84.

<sup>13</sup> Skowronek, *Presidential Leadership in Political Time*, 96.

<sup>14</sup> Skowronek, *Presidential Leadership in Political Time*, 97.

<sup>15</sup> Stephen Skowronek, *The Politics Presidents Make: Leadership from John Adams to Bill Clinton*, (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of the Harvard University Press, 1997), 417.

<sup>16</sup> Larry Schwab, *The Illusion of the Reagan Revolution*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1991); Mary Allen Eisner and Kenneth J. Meier, "Presidential Control versus Bureaucratic Power: Explaining the Reagan Revolution in Antitrust" *American Journal of Political Science* 34, no. 1 (Feb. 1990), doi: 10.2307/2111519; Aaron L Haberman, "Tracing the Limits of the Reagan Revolution: The Christian Right and the Fate of School Prayer in the Age of Fracture, 1982–1984," *The Journal of the Historical Society* 13, no. 4 (December 2013), doi: 10.1111/jhis.12030.

institutional framework of New Deal liberalism.<sup>17</sup> Skowronek identifies that with each consecutive regime builder the institutional resilience of government has increased and is better able to withstand presidential attempts to fundamentally recast American politics.<sup>18</sup> Unable to directly eliminate the institutional hallmarks of New Deal liberalism such as Social Security, Reagan attempted to use the budget to starve liberalism over time.<sup>19</sup> As such there was a less seismic break with the old regime than has occurred in the past. However, numerous scholars have recognized that Reagan's election substantively altered the basic set of commitments and norms in American politics.<sup>20</sup>

Regimes can be weak or strong, depending on whether or not a majority of Americans still believe in their established principles and ideology. Furthermore, a president is either affiliated with or opposed to the party of the regime.<sup>21</sup> Skowronek creates a typology of these possibilities to identify four recurrent structures of political authority. When there is a vulnerable regime and affiliated president, it is the politics of disjunction whereas a president opposed to a weak regime is in the politics of reconstruction. If the president opposes a regime by critiquing the basic ideological commitments, at a time when the regime still commands considerable public support, it is the politics of preemption. In articulation politics a president is associated with the strong

---

<sup>17</sup> Skowronek, *Presidential Leadership in Political Time*, 98.

<sup>18</sup> Skowronek, *Politics Presidents Make*, 413.

<sup>19</sup> Skowronek, *Presidential Leadership in Political Time*, 98.

<sup>20</sup> Andrew E. Busch, *Reagan's Victory: The Presidential Election of 1980 and the Rise of the Right*, (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2006), 169; Jon A. Shields, "Fighting Liberalism's Excesses: Moral Crusades During the Reagan Revolution," *Journal of Policy History* 26, no. 1 (Jan. 2014), doi: 10.1017/S0898030613000390; Meg Jacobs and Julian E Zelizer, *Conservatives in Power: The Reagan Years, 1981–1989*, (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's Publishing, 2011); Robert M. Collins, *Transforming America: Politics and Culture During the Reagan Years*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); Robert Mason, "Ronald Reagan and the Republican Party: Responses to Realignment" in *Ronald Reagan and the 1980s: Perceptions, Policies, Legacies*, eds. Cheryl Hudson and Gareth Davies (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

<sup>21</sup> Skowronek, *Presidential Leadership in Political Time*, 29.



regime. Articulative presidents espouse dedication to orthodox regime principles and formulate those principles into concrete actions.<sup>22</sup>

**Figure 1. Structures of Political Authority**

|                 |            | President's Relation to Regime |                            |
|-----------------|------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------|
|                 |            | Affiliated                     | Opposed                    |
| Regime Strength | Vulnerable | Politics of disjunction        | Politics of reconstruction |
|                 | Resilient  | Politics of articulation       | Politics of preemption     |

Each type creates a unique set of circumstances, leadership opportunities and challenges that substantially assist or circumscribe a president's behavior and effectiveness.<sup>23</sup> For instance, a president in the politics of reconstruction, such as Ronald Reagan, is in a position to become a regime builder by crafting and implementing a new epoch in political time.<sup>24</sup> On the other hand preemptive presidents, like Bill Clinton or Richard Nixon, struggle against the confines of the prevailing order and battle to enact signature policies.<sup>25</sup> Disjunctive presidents, such as Carter, are affiliated with a weak regime and attempt to revive it even as the desires of the American public become increasingly disjoined from the core principles and ideology.<sup>26</sup>

Utilizing this broader framework enabled the study of Bernie Sanders and his bid for the presidency to escape the confines of the personalistic, horserace politics of the election and instead examined what he demonstrates about larger trends in America. Historically rooted and reoccurring schemes prevent an overemphasis on individuals that could obscure the true

<sup>22</sup> Skowronek, *Presidential Leadership in Political Time*, 85.

<sup>23</sup> Skowronek, *Presidential Leadership in Political Time*, 83.

<sup>24</sup> Skowronek, *Presidential Leadership in Political Time*, 93.

<sup>25</sup> Skowronek, *Presidential Leadership in Political Time*, 113.

<sup>26</sup> Skowronek, *Presidential Leadership in Political Time*, 87.

magnitude and character of changes in the political culture. Moreover, being out of step with political time by pursuing a political structure incompatible with current circumstances would circumscribe Sanders' chances, regardless of other factors which abetted the rise of socialism in 2016.

## PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATION

No consideration of Bernie Sanders would be complete without looking at the candidate selection and nomination process of the presidential election. These theories will help to explain how he fared, the role socialism did or did not play in the strength of his candidacy, and what that denotes about the American political climate. Questions exist as to what matters to voters or party officials in the selection of a candidate, be it viability, momentum, personal character or some combination thereof. Examination of how key these traditional considerations were to his success and losses in the state primary races is crucial, given that many claimed Sanders' true popularity was not accurately reflected by the 2016 nomination process.<sup>27</sup>

Following reforms in the late 1960s some scholars felt voters had gained control over candidacy selections. Though evolving reforms over the years have favored the selection of certain candidates, they conclude that it is a vastly more democratic selection procedure than before.<sup>28</sup> Prior to the reforms, party leaders and top politicians controlled conventions and delegate selection with the few state primaries largely functioning to verify that the chosen candidate was acceptable to voters.<sup>29</sup> Now voters in state primaries and caucuses select the delegates who nominate the candidate at the national conventions. Others, however, argue

---

<sup>27</sup> Dino P. Christenson and Erik D. Heidemann, "Superdelegates or *Supertrustees*? The Timing and Consistency of Superdelegate Decisions," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 46, no. 3 (September 2016), doi: 10.1111/psq.12292

<sup>28</sup> Edwards and Wayne, *Presidential Leadership*, 24, 28.

<sup>29</sup> Marty Cohen, David Karol, Hans Noel, John Zaller, *The Party Decides: Presidential Nominations Before and After Reform*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 2.

political parties retain control through backdoor political arrangements and currying favor with crucial interest groups.<sup>30</sup>

Regardless of this debate, questions remain as to what factors matter to voters or party elites when selecting a nominee. There is significant evidence that viability is an important factor, though disagreements over the scale of its impact and interaction with other elements abound. Viability is the chance a candidate has of becoming the nominee while electability is the possibility of becoming president.<sup>31</sup> Collingwood, Barreto and Donovan argue viability's saliency is demonstrated by voters changing candidate preference based on perceptions of viability within the larger phenomenon of momentum.<sup>32</sup> In the ideological and policy-starved environment of the primary race, Guerran and Gurian contend that voters rely on a combination of viability and personal character, especially early in the contest.<sup>33</sup> Edwards and Wayne likewise point to viability, either in the form of front-runner status or a surge in momentum, as a crucial factor for nominees. Yet they too stress the importance of an individual's qualities and favorability.<sup>34</sup> This attention to candidate qualities has been challenged by Martin Wattenburg, who demonstrates the import of personal characteristics to voters has declined while party identification has gained greater significance.<sup>35</sup> These factors of nomination, candidate viability, and the dynamics of momentum are of vital importance to examining Bernie Sanders' run for the

---

<sup>30</sup> Cohen, Karol, Noel, Zaller, *The Party Decides*, 3, 5–7; Lara M. Brown, "Inside Parties: The Politics of Earning the Presidential Nomination" in *From Votes to Victory: Winning and Governing the White House in the 21st Century*, ed. Meena Bose, (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2011), 13; Wayne P. Steger, *A Citizen's Guide to Presidential Nominations*, (New York: Routledge, 2015), 4.

<sup>31</sup> Loren Collingwood, Matt A Barreto, Todd Donovan, "Early Primaries, Viability and Changing Preferences for Presidential Candidates," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 42, no. 2 (2012): 233, doi: 10.1111/j.1741-5705.2012.03964.x.

<sup>32</sup> Collingwood, Barreto, Donovan, "Viability and Preferences for Candidates," 234.

<sup>33</sup> Daniel G. Guerran and Paul-Henri Gurian, "The Changing Impact of Viability During the Presidential Primary Season," *The Social Science Journal* 33, no. 2 (1996): 140, doi: 10.1016/S0362-3319(96)90032-4.

<sup>34</sup> Edwards and Wayne, *Presidential Leadership*, 39, 56–57, 67.

<sup>35</sup> Martin P. Wattenburg, "The Declining Relevance of Candidate Personal Attributes in Presidential Election," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 46, no. 1 (March 2016):, 126, 138, Gale Academic OneFile.

presidency in 2016. Perceptions of his electability were inseparable from American attitudes regarding socialism, its feasibility in the United States and the potential long term shifts in political expectations this represents.

### SOCIALISM

Neither Sanders, nor the current attitudes toward socialism, can be explained without a thorough grounding in the social and political history of American socialism. The question of why socialism or social democracy failed to gain hold in the United States has engendered many hypotheses and little to no consensus among scholars. Myriad factors and comparisons with other western industrial nations have been offered, each with its own merits and faults, scholarly detractors and defenders. Broadly, these explanations can be categorized as focusing on either the structural and institutional factors, or the cultural and social elements that impeded socialism. An examination of the increased prominence of socialism in 2016, what this may indicate about the lasting impacts of the Bernie Sanders campaign, and the broader political atmosphere in the U.S. must look at the continued pertinence of these various factors. Historical elements and theories articulated here are incorporated throughout the thesis in relation to the presidential framework and the electoral dynamics elucidated above.

Theodore Lowi posits that the unique constitutional structure in the United States—the separation of powers, electoral system and most importantly federalism—prohibited the rise of a Socialist or Labor party.<sup>36</sup> Plurality “winner-take-all” voting inhibits the formation of third parties as voters view these parties as a wasted vote. Added to this, the direct election of executives exacerbates vote-maximizing tendencies and the infeasibility of electing outsiders to

---

<sup>36</sup> Theodore Lowi, “Why is there no socialism in the United States?” *Society* 22, no. 2 (1985), doi: 10.1007/BF02695379, 37.

high office.<sup>37</sup> As influential as these elements are, Lowi argues it is the federalist structure, which allocates different powers and responsibilities for the federal and state governments, that most impeded a nationwide socialist movement. Conditions and laws affecting labor were controlled by individual states and varied across the country. Therefore, the ire and efforts of workers was directed toward state laws, local officials and political machines—not the national government.<sup>38</sup> The lack of shared political experience and grievance among workers created little unity on which socialists could build a convincing critique of American capitalism.<sup>39</sup> Konstantin Vossing expanded on this to explain the incorporation of workers and labor grievances by establishment parties disincentivized the formation of a third party or socialist agitation, and drove labor unions to choose nonpolitical moderate syndicalism over social democracy.<sup>40</sup>

Another structurally based theory offered by John Kaustkey cites the lack of feudalism, which elsewhere resulted in socially and politically isolated workers.<sup>41</sup> However, in America workers did not view themselves as radically different or excluded from the other classes.<sup>42</sup> Rather, quite the opposite myth existed that the top was open to all and even the lowliest could strive hard and be accepted there. Therefore the formation of a clear class consciousness was severely impeded in America.<sup>43</sup>

There are multiple social and cultural elements particular to the United States that scholars view as proscribing socialist growth. Seymour Martin Lipset and Gary Marks, in *It Didn't Happen Here: Why Socialism Failed in the United States*, expound on this notion of American

---

<sup>37</sup> Lowi, “No Socialism in the United States?” 38.

<sup>38</sup> Lowi, “No Socialism in the United States?” 39.

<sup>39</sup> Lowi, “No Socialism in the United States?” 40.

<sup>40</sup> Konstantin Vossing, “Predictably Exceptional: The failure of social democracy and the formation of American labor politics in comparative perspective” *Party Politics* 20, no. 5 (2014), 768–773, doi:10.1177/1354068812453371.

<sup>41</sup> John Kautsky, *Social Democracy and Aristocracy*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2002), 33.

<sup>42</sup> Kautsky, *Social Democracy and Aristocracy*, 134.

<sup>43</sup> Kautsky, *Social Democracy and Aristocracy*, 135.

exceptionalism. Lipset and Marks describe American values, that is “Americanism,” as almost an ideology in itself, opposed to many socialist tenets and appeals. They summarize Americanism as anti-statism, laissez faire economics, individualism, populism and egalitarianism.<sup>44</sup> Socialist calls for an interventionist state, a heavily controlled supervised economy, collectives and group effort appear to stand in clear opposition to “Americanism.” Despite being critiqued as overstating the divergence between the United States and other nations, scholars continue to offer interpretations following this basic premise.<sup>45</sup>

A particular feature that garnered considerable attention by Lipset and Marks is the lack of homogeneity in the working class as compared to other Western industrial countries.<sup>46</sup> The working class in the U.S. was astonishingly diverse. Unity and class solidarity, cornerstone principles of socialism, were hard to attain within a class split between the America-born and “new immigrants,” ethnic diversity, skilled and unskilled labor, animosity between Protestants and Catholics and black and white workers.<sup>47</sup>

The wealth and relative affluence of workers in America is seen by some, including Lipset and Marks, Buhle and Lowi, as another component that diminished the desire for socialism and revolution.<sup>48</sup> First proposed by Werner Sombart in 1906, the logic was that the material comfort of American laborers, higher real wages and standard of living compared to Europeans

---

<sup>44</sup> Lipset and Marks, *It Didn't Happen Here*, 30.

<sup>45</sup> Lowi, “No Socialism in the United States?” 36; Robin Archer, *Why Is There No Labor Party in the United States?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 2.

<sup>46</sup> Lipset and Marks, *It Didn't Happen Here*, 132.

<sup>47</sup> Lipset and Marks, *It Didn't Happen Here*, 127, Archer, *Why Is There No Labor Party*, 198; Lipset and Marks, *It Didn't Happen Here*, 136.

<sup>48</sup> Lipset and Marks, *It Didn't Happen Here*; Paul Buhle, *Marxism in the United States*, (London: Verso Publishing, 2013); Lowi, “No Socialism in the United States?”

diminished anger over poor conditions and the need for socialistic changes.<sup>49</sup> Robin Archer contends that, while the comparison holds for England and Germany, this factor cannot be overstated as workers enjoying similar conditions elsewhere formed labor parties regardless.<sup>50</sup>

Consideration of these factors is necessary to fully understand the current challenges facing socialism and the possibilities of its revival in America today. Of immediate concern and direct relevance is which factors remain salient in modern America and which are lasting structural impediments. Each of these pieces is used as a lens with which to view Sanders, and the current American political and social landscape, to detect the changes that contributed to socialism's recent surge. To reveal potential shifts in political culture and public attitudes that may help explain Bernie Sanders' rise, both recent developments regarding socialism and individual historical factors are reexamined for relevance in 2016.

#### PROSPECTS

Socialism failed to catch on in America, but what do scholars believe is the possible future of socialism in America? Such ideas contextualize Bernie Sanders' run as a socialist in the 2016 election within the larger milieu of leftwing politics, activism and theory. Explanations offered here on the popularity and prospects of socialism are of pressing importance and consequence to the topic and are applied directly to Bernie Sanders.

While some propose a gradualist path toward a new modern socialism, others, like Paul Buhle, suggest Marxism, class struggle and consciousness are still relevant.<sup>51</sup> He points to the 2011 Wisconsin Uprising, the weeks-long occupation of the capitol building to defend unions and the

---

<sup>49</sup> Werner Sombart, "American Capitalism's Economic Rewards," in *Failure of a Dream? Essays in the History of American Socialism, Revised edition*, ed. John H. M. Laslett and Seymour Martin Lipset (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), 458.

<sup>50</sup> Archer, *Why Is There No Labor Party*, 24.

<sup>51</sup> Harrington, *Socialism: Past and Future*, Buhle, *Marxism in the United States*.

2011 Occupy movement, as demonstrating an undercurrent which could be tapped for socialist change.<sup>52</sup> Similarly, Noam Chomsky has framed the Occupy movement as developing from decades of class warfare—its lasting accomplishments are the movement building associations and networks it formed among leftwing activists.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, other scholars point to the Movements’ effectiveness in raising national awareness of economic inequality and injustice as a measure of its success.<sup>54</sup>

Lane Kenworthy, in *Social Democratic America*, predicts that the rising wealth in the U.S., an increasingly risky, uncertain economy and faltering supportive institutions, like labor unions, will compel social democratic changes.<sup>55</sup> He details the economic feasibility and construction of programs often championed by Sanders, including expanded social insurance, job training and higher minimum wage.<sup>56</sup> After countering myriad arguments he concludes social democracy is not only necessary, but a viable political alternative supported by Americans.<sup>57</sup>

In a distinct contrast to many of the above scholars, John Nichols largely rejects the notion that socialism failed in the United States.<sup>58</sup> Rather, he traces the strong socialist threads in American history, seen in the hundreds of socialists who have governed at the state and local level, to show that it is not alien or anti-American, but deeply rooted in the country.<sup>59</sup> When applied to Bernie Sanders, this casts his mayorship and steady ascendance in electoral politics in a less anomalous,

---

<sup>52</sup> Buhle, *Marxism in the United States*, xvi, xvii.

<sup>53</sup> Noam Chomsky, *Occupy: Reflections on Class War, Rebellion and Solidarity*, (Westfield, NJ: Zuccotti Park Press, 2013).

<sup>54</sup> Christopher Malone and Violet Fredericks, “OWS and US Electoral Politics: An Early Critical Assessment” in *Occupy Political Science*, eds. Emily Welty, Mathew Bolton, Meghana Nayak and Christopher Malone, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

<sup>55</sup> Lane Kenworthy, *Social Democratic America*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 4.

<sup>56</sup> Kenworthy, *Social Democratic America*, 49–54, 70.

<sup>57</sup> Kenworthy, *Social Democratic America*, 150, 177–180.

<sup>58</sup> Nichols, *S Word*, xxiv.

<sup>59</sup> Nichols, *S Word*, 106; Jack Ross, *The Socialist Party of America: A Complete History*, (New York: Potomac Press, 2015).



and prophetic light. Instead, the popularity of socialism and Sanders becomes a question of reintroducing a long present, but overlooked, strand of American political culture.<sup>60</sup> The predictions of these authors is analyzed against the actual trajectory of the Sanders' campaign, along with the most up-to-date polls and surveys, in order to uncover the elements, themes and theories that help to explain Sanders and socialism in 2016.

## METHODOLOGY

This thesis is a single, explanatory case study covering the contest for the Democratic nomination in the 2016 U.S. presidential election. Specifically it looks at the candidacy of Senator Bernie Sanders, focusing on and aiming to explain public attitudes towards, and increased acceptance of, socialism. In order to measure and contextualize crucial changes data was gathered not only from the fifteen month period of Sanders' campaign but from public opinion polls and economic statistics stretching back over the last decade and into the 20th century when available.

Firstly, this thesis establishes a guiding theoretical framework by examining how Bernie Sanders fits into the structures of political authority—determined by the resilience of the regime and an individuals' relationship to it—and if he positioned himself as the candidate best suited for the current realities of political time or not.<sup>61</sup> A Democratic president elected in 2016 could be in a disjunctive, preemptive or articulative structure depending on whether Obama was reconstructive and forged a new regime, or was preemptive and the conservative regime endures today. Sanders' own rhetoric can be used as a measure; from his less than adulatory remarks about President Obama, to branding himself an outsider and calling his campaign a political

---

<sup>60</sup> Nichols, *S Word*, 266.

<sup>61</sup> Skowronek, *Presidential Leadership in Political Time*, 167–192.

revolution—all indicated he was pursuing reconstructive politics.<sup>62</sup> As reconstructive leaders follow disjunctive presidents, which Obama most certainly was not, this appears to be out of step with political time.<sup>63</sup> Differing possible combinations are used to determine whether Sanders' relative successes and failures as a candidate were in spite of, due to, or regardless of his socialist label. After presenting the implication of this broader theory—in order to clearly identify and examine changes over time—the thesis is then grouped into three thematically related sections: economic considerations, electoral factors and elements pertaining to social and political culture.

Changes to the various political and social attitudes that once hindered socialism in the U.S. are reexamined for relevance in 2016 using data drawn from pertinent polls. The American public's changing opinion of socialism can be measured by looking at surveys such as the YouGov poll asking, "Do you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of socialism?" and a Pew survey that asked "Do you have a positive or negative reaction to the word socialism?"<sup>64</sup> Similarly, comparing historic and current polling results reveals changes to the social conditions contributing to socialism's historic failure: from shifts in the ideology of "Americanism" to perceptions of class and equality, social mobility, opportunity and divisions of race or ethnicity.<sup>65</sup> The persistence or diminution of American views against active government, the possibility of

---

<sup>62</sup> Bernie Sanders with Huck Gutman, *Outsider in the White House*, (London: Verso, 2015); Jim Tankersley, "Bernie Sanders on America's 'grotesquely unfair' society," *The Washington Post*, 16 July 2015, <http://washingtonpost.com>.

<sup>63</sup> Skowronek, *Presidential Leadership in Political Time*, 168–170.

<sup>64</sup> William Jordan, "Democrats More Divided on Socialism," *YouGov US*, 28 January 2016, <http://today.yougov.com>; "Survey on Capitalism and Socialism," YouGov, PDF, (25–27 January 2016); "Little Change in Public's Response to 'Capitalism,' 'Socialism,'" *Pew Research Center for the People and the Press*, 11 December 2011, [people-press.org](http://people-press.org); "Survey on Political Rhetoric," Pew, PDF, (7–11 December 2011).

<sup>65</sup> Justin McCarthy, "In U.S., Socialist Presidential Candidates Least Appealing," *Gallup*, 22 June 2015, <http://www.gallup.com>; Jeff Jones and Lydia Saad, "Voting for Candidates—Characteristics," Gallup, June Wave 1; Full Questions and Results, (2–7 June 2015).

economic and social advancement and the prominence of racial divisions would explain growing acceptance toward socialism in the 2016 campaign and the rise of Bernie Sanders.

The electoral factors section examines what effect structural elements in the nomination of candidates and changing public attitudes in light of electoral wins and losses had on Sanders' campaign. Factors that historically diminished votes for socialists—such as federalism, vote maximizing and worker acceptance of the two party system—are analyzed by looking at past and current electoral data and polls on whether Americans still view the two party system as sufficiently representative, how desire and support for third parties has changed, if independent identification has increased. The endurance of vote maximizing can be seen by comparing pre-election support of third party candidates to actual electoral results. Measuring the proliferation of federal versus state labor laws and polls on whether citizens are more concerned about economic issues controlled at the state or federal level show changes that might have spurred voters to direct economic dissatisfaction toward national politics. Polls of voters showing Bernie Sanders' viability and electability increasing, in comparison to both Hillary Clinton and Republican front runners, after primary wins, and mounting and fading momentum indicate how important the socialist label was to voters in comparison to other considerations. This section incorporates relevant historical parallels to, and polling data on, figures such as socialist Eugene Debs and the populist Robert LaFollete to parse how Sanders and the circumstances of 2016 differed.

Economic elements and their role in garnering support for socialism and Sanders in 2016 were analyzed. Recent surveys and statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau and the Bureau of Labor Statistics were used to measure changes to the standard of living, wages and economic security

that have been credited with disincentivizing workers from socialism to see if significant decreases prompted a turn toward socialistic ideas among Americans. This was coupled with polls measuring American perceptions of capitalism, economic inequality and opportunity. Finally, the role of movements like Occupy Wall Street and the Fight for a \$15 minimum wage in bringing issues relevant to socialism—such as economic injustice and class division—to the fore of American politics is considered using appropriate polls tracking saliency and the timeline of the movement.

## **STUDY**

### POLITICAL TIME




The success and failures of Bernie Sanders' campaign, from his meteoric rise to his ultimate inability to capture the Democratic nomination, are due not only to perceptions of socialism but also to how Sanders was situated within political time and fit into the structure of political authority. Current political time is largely determined by whether Barack Obama was a reconstructive or preemptive president, and if he forged a new regime or if Reagan's conservative one is still in ascendance. These possibilities would constrict Bernie Sanders' appropriateness in political time depending on how he in turn presented himself—as a preemptive, articulative or transformative leader. While Sanders' socialist label is obviously intertwined with his self-presentation, the import of socialism here should not be overstated. Being at odds with political time would contribute to his failure and diminish the role socialism had in his inability to secure a majority of voters in the primary.

One potential interpretation of President Obama is he was a reconstructive leader who spurned the conservative regime and founded a new epoch in American politics.<sup>66</sup> There are several conditions matching the historic trends which support this conclusion and refute key arguments

**Figure 2. Political Time in 2016**

| <b>Obama's Potential Leadership Structure</b> |  |   |
|---|--|---|
|   | <b>Reconstructive</b>  | <b>Preemptive</b>   |
| <i>Evidence For</i>                           | -2008 financial crash potentially discredited old regime<br>-Previous presidency weakened conservatism   | -Denounce conservative regime<br>-Personalistic coalition building<br>-Pursue signature issue (healthcare)<br>-Old regime not yet fully discredited |
| <i>Evidence Against</i>                       | -No mass social movement or party realignment<br>-George Bush not disjunctive<br>-No clean break with old institutions<br>-Second president opposing regime never reconstructive | -Old regime weakened after Bush presidency, 2008 financial crash<br>-Message of change, new start for America                                       |

| <b>Possible Structure for a Democratic President in 2016</b>  |  |  |
|---|--|--|
|   |    |  |
| <b>Articulation</b>   | <b>Preemptive</b>  | <b>Reconstructive</b>  |
| -Would build on Obama legacy<br>-Solidify new regime principles into government actions<br>-Loyal defense of key Obama policies | -Even stronger attack on conservative regime<br>-Push signature issue (income inequality)<br>-Coalition building<br>-Independence from party | -Rhetoric of change<br>-Attempt party realignment                                    |

against it. Firstly, reconstruction has followed directly after a calamitous event which thoroughly discredited the old regime and an affiliated disjunctive leader whose attempts to reinvigorate the enervated system failed. President George W. Bush and the financial crisis of 2008 fit with this pattern—exposing the weakness of old commitments and opening the door to an out-right repudiation of the regime by Obama.<sup>67</sup> Claims that Obama could not be a transformative leader due to his pursuit of unity and rhetoric of consensus falter given that characteristically

<sup>66</sup> Skowronek, *Presidential Leadership in Political Time*, 165.

<sup>67</sup> Skowronek, *Presidential Leadership in Political Time*, 173.

reconstructive presidents have all presented a unifying message and initiate cooperation on key reform programs.<sup>68</sup> If true that a new regime had begun then the historical cycle and conditions would indicate a Democratic president following Obama would be an orthodox innovator, aligned with the resilient regime.

Orthodox presidents directly following transformative leaders, such as Harry Truman after FDR or George H. W. Bush after Reagan, generally build upon, refine and push through the goals of the dawning epoch.<sup>69</sup> Often appearing as reign-extending surrogates of the reconstructive president, these presidents must deal with the practical business of creating a concrete system of government out of the newly founded orders' commitments.<sup>70</sup> A Democratic presidential candidate pursuing articulation—and in alignment with the trend of political time—would therefore project an agenda of building upon the legacy of Barack Obama.

Bernie Sanders has by no means disavowed President Obama or his signature policy initiatives, but neither has he been effusive and unreserved in his praise. While supporting the Affordable Care Act, Sanders claims the bill did not go far enough, advocating for a single-payer, universal healthcare system instead.<sup>71</sup> He criticized Obama for going against his campaign promises and siding with Republicans to cut Social Security cost-of-living adjustments.<sup>72</sup> Along those lines Sanders objected to deal-making with Republicans that resulted in what he called weak legislative agreements that disappointed millions of Americans.<sup>73</sup> Sanders hesitated to endorse

---

<sup>68</sup> Skowronek, *Presidential Leadership in Political Time*, 174.

<sup>69</sup> Skowronek, *Presidential Leadership in Political Time*, 99.

<sup>70</sup> Skowronek, *Presidential Leadership in Political Time*, 100.

<sup>71</sup> Jonathan Tasini, *The Essential Bernie Sanders and his Vision for America*, (White River Junction, VT, Chelsea Green Publishing: 2015), 17.

<sup>72</sup> Tasini, *Essential Bernie Sanders*, 66.

<sup>73</sup> Bernie Sanders, interviewed by Thom Hartmann, "A Primary Challenger for Obama?," Live interview, recorded by Thom Hartmann Radio Program, 22 July 2011, YouTube video, <https://www.youtube.com>. Manu Raju and Marin Cogan, "Some Dems refuse to back Obama," *Politico*, 11 November 2011, <http://www.politico.com>.

Obama in 2012 and stated they have categorical disagreements on certain policies, for instance saying, “he’s [Obama] wrong on the trade issue, dead wrong.”<sup>74</sup> Such careful and delineated distancing indicates that as a candidate for president Bernie Sanders was not aiming to be a leader refining the narrative of the fledgling regime, as the political time model would call for if Obama were a reconstructive president.

At least a portion then of Sanders’ failure as a nominee would be due to this and Hillary Clintons’ ability to cast her potential presidency as a consolidation of Obamas’ reconstructive charge. She emphasized building on the accomplishments of the Affordable Care Act and continuing Obama’s approach on foreign policy.<sup>75</sup> Even Clinton’s struggle to unite members of the coalition is characteristic of first round orthodox leaders, as disparate elements brought together by the new regime argue over the implementation and purity of foundational commitments.<sup>76</sup> Fitting well into the historical rhythm of presidential leadership structures strengthened Clinton’s campaign, regardless of whether Bernie Sanders was espousing socialism or not.

However, there are numerous reasons to doubt President Obama was a reconstructive leader and instead argue the conservative regime endures today. In this case, Obama would be in the politics of preemption, opposed to the dominant regime while in office. Several key elements that have always accompanied reconstructive presidents are missing from Obama’s situation which point strongly towards him being an opposition leader. Notably there have always been at least two opposition presidents prior to the transformative leader taking office. Barack Obama

---

<sup>74</sup> Tankersley, “Bernie Sanders on America’s ‘grotesquely unfair’ society.”

<sup>75</sup> “Health Care: Universal, Quality, Affordable Health Care for Everyone in America,” Hillary for America, <http://hillaryclinton.com>, 2016.; “National Security: With Policies that Keep us Strong and Safe, America will Lead the World in the 21st Century,” Hillary for America, <http://hillaryclinton.com>, 2016.

<sup>76</sup> Skowronek, *Presidential Leadership in Political Time*, 103.

was the second Democratic president after Bill Clinton and, as is historically typical, his rejection of Reagan's order was more forceful than Clinton's.<sup>77</sup> As noted above, reconstruction follows disjunction and a strong case can be made that George W. Bush did not fit this mold. His presidency did not engender a protracted crisis of confidence in, and widespread discrediting of, the conservative regime.<sup>78</sup> The potential crisis of legitimacy posed by the 2008 financial meltdown offered no clean break with the conservative regime because Obama was involved in stabilizing the very system he was attempting to repudiate.<sup>79</sup> Furthermore, the movement that accompanied Barack Obama's 2008 election was more akin to previous second round preemptive leaders—who build coalitions that will form the base for later transformative presidents—than of a reconstructive president. Typically, broad-based mass social movements, developed during the disjunctive phase of the old regime, are independent from but bolster an ascending reconstructive leader. By contrast, the force supporting Barack Obama's 2008 campaign was mainly personalistic.<sup>80</sup> Finally, the election of Donald Trump weakens the claim of reconstruction as well because all true regime builders have been followed directly by another president from their party. The weight of the evidence indicates Obama was the second round preemptive leader in the conservative regime that still forms the foundation of current American political norms and expectations.

Given this perspective on Obama and political time two structures of political authority, preemption or reconstruction, would be possible for the next Democratic president. He or she would intensify the criticism of Reagan's regime, expanding on Obama's denunciation just as he

---

<sup>77</sup> Skowronek, *Presidential Leadership in Political Time*, 177.

<sup>78</sup> Skowronek, *Presidential Leadership in Political Time*, 178.

<sup>79</sup> Skowronek, *Presidential Leadership in Political Time*, 180.

<sup>80</sup> Skowronek, *Presidential Leadership in Political Time*, 181.



did on Bill Clinton's. Akin to Barack Obama, Woodrow Wilson, and Richard Nixon, the next preemptive leader could build an ever stronger coalition against the dominant structures.<sup>81</sup> Yet paradoxically he or she may also be more independent of the party, attempting to forge a third way and reach beyond the base. This is because preemptive leaders are attempting to find an alternative conception of national government just as transformative leaders do, but flounder against the still resilient regime.<sup>82</sup> For this reason preemptive leaders also often have a signature issue or area of concern rather than a more comprehensive government wide repudiation.<sup>83</sup>

Senator Sanders displays, to some degree, all of these emblematic features of preemptive leadership. For all that Sanders discusses a variety of policies, from the environment to foreign affairs, but he consistently emphasized economic issues—particularly income inequality, the super rich and the “rigged economy.”<sup>84</sup> This has been his signature issue from his time as a mayor in Vermont through his tenure in the Senate.<sup>85</sup> Even though this often comes couched in the language of large scale change, it is limited to a particular sector, just as Bill Clinton's issue was health care or Wilson's was transforming international relations through the League of Nations. Sanders escalated the charge against the conservative regime, disparaging its basic commitments by calling for tax increases and growing social programs.<sup>86</sup> The appearance of pursuing reconstructive politics may be due to the especially strident nature of his preemptive attacks, again not historically uncommon for similarly placed opposition leaders.<sup>87</sup> Regarding preemptive presidents autonomy from the party, Bernie Sanders was, of course, an independent

---

<sup>81</sup> Skowronek, *Presidential Leadership in Political Time*, 177

<sup>82</sup> Skowronek, *Presidential Leadership in Political Time*, 107.

<sup>83</sup> Skowronek, *Presidential Leadership in Political Time*, 109.

<sup>84</sup> Tamara Keith, “Bernie Sanders has Stuck to the Same Message for 40 Years,” *NPR Morning Edition*, 11 December 2015, <http://www.npr.org>.

<sup>85</sup> Bernie Sanders with Huck Gutman, *Outsider in the White House*. (London: Verso, 2015), xvii.

<sup>86</sup> Tasini, *Essential Bernie Sanders*, 39–43, 65–69.

<sup>87</sup> Skowronek, *Presidential Leadership in Political Time*, 178.

for the vast majority of his political career, only joining the Democratic party in 2015 in order to run for the presidential nomination.<sup>88</sup> While such opposition leadership is correct for the political time, Sanders' failure in the primary could be due to the perception that he was pursuing reconstruction and only in part to other elements such as socialism. Again this represents a rejection of Sanders' reconstructive argument by Democratic voters who selected the nominee, not an electorate-wide mandate against transformation. Democratic voters, in selecting Hillary Clinton, favored the consolidation of Obama's legacy rather than the reconstructionist argument against both Republican and Democratic elites espoused by Sanders.

Under the conditions of political time there is a slight chance that the next Democratic president could be transformative, but coming directly after another Democrat diminishes the probability. The same issues that stunted Obama's ability to be transformative, namely the lack of a developed disjunctive phase and national disillusionment with the conservative regime, would even more severely impede a Democratic president in 2017. No social movement against the conservative regime had ripened into a mass force comparable in scale to the previous abolition or conservative movements. Past regime builders have succeeded presidents from the other party, never presidents of the same political orientation, and such an occurrence would be highly implausible and unprecedented. Bernie Sanders portraying his candidacy as crafting a new regime and fundamentally altering the national trajectory and governing objectives would be grossly out of line with political time.

Yet, based on his own rhetoric and behavior during the 2016 race for the Democratic presidential nomination, Senator Sanders indicated he would attempt regime reconstruction as

---

<sup>88</sup> Sanders, *Outsider in the White House*, 343.

president and be a transformative leader. The evidence for this is writ large in Sanders' campaign book, his speeches, his interviews and his official policies.<sup>89</sup> Sanders speaks of a political revolution, one that would move America toward what it should really be about; equality and democracy.<sup>90</sup> Sanders spoke often of changing the status quo of American politics. This is a classic reconstructive appeal, as is his continual, and legitimate, claims to be an outsider to the established political system.<sup>91</sup> Sanders attempted considerable coalition building, which Sanders has emphasized dating back to his time as mayor and U.S. representative.<sup>92</sup> Along the reconstructive mold this was framed as a realignment of the party, of making the economically downtrodden, the young, the working class and their issues the core of the Democratic party.<sup>93</sup> As detailed above, an attempt could be made to frame Sanders as oppositional. However, the key issue is not the actual structure of authority Sanders' presidency would have developed had he been elected, but which structure he portrayed himself as pursuing during the race.

Ultimately, regardless of whether Obama was a transformational president or an oppositional one, the 2016 race was not suited for a Democratic candidate to fruitfully pursue reconstructive politics. Such profound discordance with political time, with the structure of leadership most feasible under current political conditions and the demonstrated trends of American presidents, surely hurt the chances of Sanders' campaign. Neither groups newly-disillusioned by the old regime, nor a mass social movement created over years of opposition, were in place to usher Sanders to victory. The so-called Obama coalition, widely supporting his actions and gains, did

---

<sup>89</sup> Sanders, *Outsider in the White House*; Tasini, *The Essential Bernie Sanders*; "Bernie Sanders On the Issues," Bernie 2016, <http://berniesanders.com>, 2016;—Bernie Sanders, "What is a Socialist?" (speech, Georgetown, VA, 19 November 2015).

<sup>90</sup> Sanders, *Outsider in the White House*, xv, xvii.

<sup>91</sup> Sanders, *Outsider in the White House*.

<sup>92</sup> Sanders, *Outsider in the White House*, 40.

<sup>93</sup> Bernie Sanders, interviews by Sam Frizell, "Q&A: Bernie Sanders on the Future of the Democratic Party," *Time Magazine*, 26 May 2016, <http://time.com>.

not look favorably at that moment toward a candidate hoping to break a new path and an alternate coalition. Being out of sync in political time left Bernie Sanders without either a new, broad-based movement nor the stalwart, traditional party voters to draw support from.

Of course the reconstructive vision Sanders formulated was based on social democratic policies, but the inability to secure the nomination and forge a new regime can be credited at least in large part to inopportune political time. Further detailed discussion of how socialism and how the socialist aspect furthered and hindered Sanders' campaign is covered below. From an analysis of larger presidential and cyclical trends it can be concluded that it was not only socialism, but the discordance between the attempted and the feasible political structures that influenced Sanders' successes and failures.

#### SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ATTITUDES

Perhaps the most crucial elements to consider in this thesis are those pertaining to a potential change in the social and political attitudes of Americans which opened the door for socialism and Sanders as serious political options in 2016. This includes not just public opinion of socialism directly but also factors that once hindered the appeal of socialism in the United States. Declines in anti-statist sentiments, in cleavages over race, in the belief that upward mobility is possible and the class hierarchy is fluid, would all create an environment more ripe for socialism than existed in previous decades. By the same measure, persistence of these attitudes would mitigate the potential positive effect other elements—such as Sanders' electability as a candidate or a dismal economic situation—had on his campaign and socialism in 2016.

In order to account for the rise of Bernie Sanders and socialism it is critical to determine what the current general public opinion in America of socialism is, and how that has changed over

time. As no single public opinion poll has consistently inquired into views on socialism over multiple decades, various sporadic surveys utilizing different questions were used to analyze trends. One of the earliest public opinion surveys of Americans from 1936 seems to show a stark distaste for socialism. Fewer than 2% of respondents described themselves as “socialists” rather than Republicans, Democrats or Independents. Furthermore, if forced to choose between living under fascism or communism, 35% to 25% picked fascism. Yet this poll may exaggerate the negative view of socialism, as it had many flaws and methodological errors impermissible today. The sample was not representative of American society, skewing heavily male, well-off, and white. Potentially sympathetic views towards socialism held by the poor and minorities were obscured.<sup>94</sup>

More regular polling on American attitudes regarding socialism began in 2010, with research conducted by both Gallup and Pew Research Center. The fact that the question was even asked is itself noteworthy. That socialism had become a topic which warranted serious, nationwide investigation by reputable research organizations speaks to the rising awareness and prominence of socialism in the United States. In a January 2010 Gallup poll, when asked if they had a positive or negative view of socialism, 36% of Americans replied a positive view, given the margin of error the “true” number could be between 32 and 40 percent.<sup>95</sup> An April 2010 Pew poll portrayed slightly less favorability at a mere 29%, however once the 3.5% variability of the poll is factored in it is possible that no substantive shift in either direction was seen. By 2011 the number ticked up slightly to 31%  $\pm$ 2.5%.<sup>96</sup> A further slight increase, to 39%, was visible in

---

<sup>94</sup> Jodie T. Allen, “How a Different America Responded to the Great Depression,” *Pew Research Center for the People and the Press*, 14 December 2010, <http://pewresearch.org>.

<sup>95</sup> Frank Newport, “Socialism Viewed Positively by 36% of Americans,” *Gallup*, 4 February 2010, <http://www.gallup.com>.

<sup>96</sup> “Survey on Political Rhetoric,” Pew, PDF, (7–11 December 2011).

Gallup's 2012 survey. Here, accounting for the respective margins of error, the minimum increase in support was 2.5% but could be as high as 15%.<sup>97</sup>

Just weeks after Bernie Sanders' informal announcement of his candidacy in April 2015, YouGov conducted a survey of socialism's favorability in the United States. Support had actually decreased, to a meager 26%  $\pm$ 4%, while the favorability of capitalism hovered at 52%  $\pm$ 4%. However 28%  $\pm$ 4% reported being enthusiastic or comfortable with presidential candidates describing themselves as socialists.<sup>98</sup> By June an astounding 47%  $\pm$ 3% indicated they would vote for the party nominee who, being otherwise generally well qualified, happened to be a socialist.<sup>99</sup> It should be noted this incredible number may not reflect an actively positive view, nor personal identification with socialism, so much as the attitude toward others who espouse socialism. What is key is so many agree, even implicitly, that a socialist could ever be well qualified to be president of the United States. Favorability of socialism then inched up marginally by January 2016 to 29%  $\pm$  4.4% but the Gallup poll indicated little change, at 35%  $\pm$ 4% positivity in May 2016.<sup>100</sup>

Among the general populace the favorability and positive outlook toward socialism stayed relatively static from 2010 through the 2015–2016 candidacy of Bernie Sanders. Unfavorability—which denotes a more active and hostile outlook toward socialism—also did not decline to any significant degree. A change here could have indicated that while Americans did not increasingly like socialism many felt less outright hostility and opposition to it. This was clearly not the

---

<sup>97</sup> Frank Newport, "Americans View of Socialism, Capitalism are Little Changed," *Gallup*, (6 May 2016), <http://www.gallup.com>.

<sup>98</sup> "Favorability of Socialism and Capitalism," YouGov, PDF, (6–8 May 2015).

<sup>99</sup> Jeff Jones and Lydia Saad, "Voting for Candidates—Characteristics," Gallup, June Wave 1; Full Questions and Results, (2–7 June 2015).

<sup>100</sup> "Survey on Capitalism and Socialism," YouGov, PDF, (25–27 January 2016).; Newport, "View of Socialism Little Changed."

case.<sup>101</sup> While not unspeakably low, support for socialism as an idea in itself—not as a secondary candidate characteristic—remained solidly below 40%. Clearly no great sea change on socialism occurred prior to Sanders’ candidacy to explain his rise, nor did his run coalesce into a sudden upswell of support for socialism. Yet closer analysis of respondents under the age of 30 shows a nuanced view that helps to explain Sanders and the prominence of socialism.

Young people between the ages of eighteen and thirty demonstrated not just generally higher levels of support for socialism but also increased support over time. The same YouGov poll noted above showed that favorability of socialism rose 7% between May 2015 and January 2016 among those under 30. In fact the favorability of socialism overtook that of capitalism, which fell 7%, though a considerable margin of error in both polls makes the possible change in support as high as 15 or a low as 2 percent. A larger number of young people said they were more likely to vote for Sanders because of his socialism than those over the age of thirty.<sup>102</sup> Results from a Harvard poll show a solid 16% of eighteen to twenty-nine year olds identify as socialists, barely below the 19% identifying as capitalists. The slight margin of error makes it likely that the true support is roughly the same, given the range of 13.5% to 18.5% support for socialism and 16.5% to 21.5% for capitalism.<sup>103</sup> A remarkable 55% in May 2016 held a positive view of socialism.<sup>104</sup> So while most Americans, especially older and more conservative individuals, remained lukewarm toward socialism the considerable support among young people may have proved critical in shifting Sanders and socialism toward political feasibility.<sup>105</sup> Despite this, the overall

---

<sup>101</sup> “Favorability of Socialism and Capitalism,” YouGov, PDF, (6–8 May 2015); “Survey on Capitalism and Socialism,” YouGov, PDF, (25–27 January 2016).

<sup>102</sup> “Favorability of Socialism and Capitalism,” YouGov, PDF, (6–8 May 2015).

<sup>103</sup> “Survey of Young Americans’ Attitudes toward Politics and Public Service,” Harvard University Institute of Politics, PDF, (18 March–13 April 2016).

<sup>104</sup> Newport, “View of Socialism Little Changed.”

<sup>105</sup> “Favorability of Socialism and Capitalism,” YouGov, PDF, (6–8 May 2015).

lack of direct support for socialism indicates other shifts in political attitudes must account more heavily in explaining the renewed viability of socialism and Sanders.

The anti-statist views of Americans have long been counted as a black mark against socialism, as public opposition to government power and intervention undermines implementing numerous socialistic policies.<sup>106</sup> Softer feelings toward big government in recent years would partially explain Sanders' rhetoric catching on in 2016.

Earlier in the 20th century Americans displayed a remarkably high level of support for increasing the size and scope of government. In the late 1930s 76% favored the government providing free medical care for the poor, 59% wanted public ownership of the electric power industry and a plurality supported the concentration of power in the federal rather than state government. While the polls from 1937 must be contextualized by the intense and partially anomalous circumstances of the Great Depression, they also indicate abiding historic roots for such sentiments among modern Americans.<sup>107</sup> Moreover, this hints at a trend in attitude toward government that persists today; Americans dislike sizable and powerful government in the abstract but favor a plethora of actual or proposed government programs. For more than a decade over half of Americans have said the federal government has too much power and big government is a larger threat to the future of the country than big business or big labor.<sup>108</sup> However, the General Social Survey (GSS) indicated when it came to actual programs and issues Americans were quite receptive and enthusiastic about government action. Since the late 1970s the GSS has shown that over 80% believe the government spends the right amount or too little

---

<sup>106</sup> Kautsky, *Social Democracy and Aristocracy*, 135; Lipset and Marks, *It Didn't Happen Here*.

<sup>107</sup> Allen, "How a Different America Responded to the Great Depression."

<sup>108</sup> Jim Norman, "Public Remains Wary of Federal Government Power," *Gallup*, 9 October 2016, <http://www.gallup.com>; Rebecca Riffkin, "Big Government Still Names as Biggest Threat to U.S.," *Gallup*, 22 December 2016, <http://www.gallup.com>.



on improving the education system, improving the nation's health, Social Security and on "assistance to the poor."<sup>109</sup> The increased viability of socialism is then in line with sentiments supportive of government actions, and Bernie Sanders was successful in simply linking long held desires with the idea of socialism. This is consistent with the analysis of John Nichols, who details regional socialist victories in the United States—largely due to and maintained by the kind of popular social and infrastructure programs proposed by Sanders—as indicative of deeply rooted socialist traditions and sentiments in the United States.<sup>110</sup> Obviously, government programs alone do not constitute socialism, and this is not to imply Americans do not have a more complicated and nuanced conception of the term. Surely there are many who cherish certain programs, like Medicare, while heartily decrying socialism. However, given Sanders himself emphasized such programs as a key component of his socialist message, public opinions are an additional and helpful overtone to the discussion of socialism in 2016.

As an idea necessitating considerable class unity, the development of socialism suffered in the United States due to deep social divisions based on race.<sup>111</sup> Whether this roadblock was overcome in 2016 to a degree that abets socialism is unclear, as racial tensions and concerns are high, but so is optimism and support for a solution. Nearly 60 percent of Americans in 2015 thought that diversity makes the U.S. a better place to live, but the perception of racism and division in the country was increasingly grim.<sup>112</sup> From 2009 to 2016 there was an increase, of between 4 to 16 percent, in those who believed black people suffered from widespread racism

---

<sup>109</sup> Kenworthy, *Social Democratic America*, 152

<sup>110</sup> Nichols, *S Word*, 106.

<sup>111</sup> Buhle, *Marxism in the United States*, 45; Archer, *Why Is There No Labor Party*, 198; Lipset and Marks, *It Didn't Happen Here*, 136.

<sup>112</sup> "Beyond Distrust: How Americans View Their Government," Pew Research Center, PDF, (23 November 2015).

and the number of Americans saying that black-white relations were good reached the lowest point since 2001.<sup>113</sup> While an increasing number are concerned a “great deal” about race relations it was not even among the top ten issues of greatest concern in 2016.<sup>114</sup> However, hopes are high that an eventual solution will be worked out, and an increasing percentage of Americans favor the government playing a major role in improving the social and economic condition of minorities.<sup>115</sup> The outright prejudices that had once driven working class Americans to prioritize racial divisions over economic solidarity may have diminished to a point where they could be overcome when combined with other economic incentives and political attitudes favoring socialism.

Yet there is another distinct possibility indicated by recent polling. A 2015 survey found half of white Americans believe that racism against whites has become as big of a problem as discrimination against blacks and other minorities. Among working class whites the number skyrockets to 60% ±2.6%.<sup>116</sup> It is highly probable that working class individuals, especially whites, do not necessarily prioritize race *over* economic problems so much as associate and blame those economic issues on racial minorities

A final cultural element that massively impacts political attitudes and possibilities in the United States is the belief in social and economic mobility for all, the American Dream that given hard work all people in America can succeed.<sup>117</sup> Collapse in support for this narrative would create an

---

<sup>113</sup> Jeffery M. Jones, “Six in 10 Americans Say Racism Against Blacks is Widespread,” *Gallup*, 17 August 2016, <http://www.gallup.com>; Jeffery M. Jones, “Americans View of Black-White Relations Deteriorate,” *Gallup*, 6 August 2016, <http://www.gallup.com>.

<sup>114</sup> Jim Norman, “U.S. Worries About Race Relations Reach a New High,” *Gallup*, 11 April 2016, <http://www.gallup.com>.

<sup>115</sup> Frank Newport, “Majority in U.S. Still Hopeful for Solution to Race Problems,” *Gallup*, 14 July 2016, <http://www.gallup.com>; “How Americans View Their Government,” Pew Research Center.

<sup>116</sup> Robert P. Jones, Daniel Cox, Besty Cooper, and Rachel Lienesch, “Anxiety, Nostalgia and Mistrust: Findings from the 2015 American Values Survey,” Public Religion Research Institute, PDF, 17 November 2015.

<sup>117</sup> Lipset and Marks, *It Didn't Happen Here*.

environment more welcoming of socialist policies promoting equality and Bernie Sanders' language about transforming the United States into a place where all can get ahead regardless of wealth. A large number of Americans consistently say working hard is critical to success but a slightly decreasing percentage are satisfied with the level of opportunity these hard workers have to get ahead. In 2009 79%  $\pm$ 3.4% believed it possible to get ahead with over 80%  $\pm$ 3.4% saying hard work and ambition were essential, far above those who credited family wealth or luck for an individuals' success.<sup>118</sup> Polls spanning from 1994 to 2012 indicate a steady belief in the ability to get ahead, with only slight and periodic dips during economic downturns.<sup>119</sup> Yet in 2013 a bare majority stated there was "plenty of opportunity" to advance, part of a steady decline from 87%  $\pm$ 4% in 1952.<sup>120</sup> Similarly, satisfaction with the opportunity to progress through hard work declined from 77%  $\pm$ 4% in 2002 to 62%  $\pm$ 4% in 2016, after falling to 53%  $\pm$ 4% in 2012.<sup>121</sup> At the moment the survey was conducted temporary economic conditions effected, perhaps unduly, the level of satisfaction but a trend can still be parsed from the fluctuating numbers

While Americans still think it is possible to move up if someone is willing to work hard, they also feel the struggle is too difficult, and there should be greater opportunity. A plurality agreed government generally does more to hurt than help mobility, but a wide majority actually supported programs designed to increase opportunity for individuals—such as making education affordable, reducing healthcare costs and providing job training.<sup>122</sup> As Sanders commonly expressed the same frustration with the opportunity to advance and sought to implement those

---

<sup>118</sup> "Findings from a National Survey and Focus Groups on Economic Mobility," The Pew Charitable Trusts Economic Mobility Project, Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research, PDF, (12 March 2009).

<sup>119</sup> "July 2012 Middle Class Update Survey," Pew Research Center, PDF, (July 15–July 26 2012).

<sup>120</sup> Andrew Dugan and Frank Newport, "In U.S. Fewer Believe 'Plenty of Opportunity' to get Ahead," *Gallup*, 25 October 2013, <http://www.gallup.com>.

<sup>121</sup> Frank Newport, "Americans' Satisfaction with Ability to Get Ahead Edges Up," *Gallup*, 21 January 2016, <http://www.gallup.com>.

<sup>122</sup> "National Survey on Economic Mobility," The Pew Charitable Trusts Economic Mobility Project.

policies, the shift in American attitudes surely contributed to how well his candidacy was received in 2016.

#### ELECTORAL FACTORS

It is clear that the detectable shifts and persistence in social and political attitudes are enormously helpful for explaining the surprising openness toward socialism and Bernie Sanders in 2016 but alone are only a small part of the larger puzzle. Other explanatory elements must be added and examined in order to more thoroughly and satisfactorily answer the question of Sanders and socialism in 2016. It is also crucial to remember Sanders, for all his unexpected success, failed to capture the Democratic presidential nomination. Therefore, the elements which once damaged the potential electoral success of socialist candidates in the United States were examined. If such barriers had diminished then the final failure of Sanders had more to do with voters' opposition to him and or to his socialist ideas than the system itself. Moreover, examining the correlation between the rise and fall of Sanders in the polls and his wins and losses in primary elections illustrate how crucial socialism was in contrast to traditional considerations like momentum and name recognition.

The electoral success of the Socialist Party was forestalled by workers' widespread acceptance of the two party system as capable of representing and addressing lower class grievances.<sup>123</sup> Yet even in the late 1930s there is evidence that, compared to the last twenty five years of the nineteenth century, variability in voting had expanded and Americans were increasingly willing to abandon party loyalty in favor of alternative candidates.<sup>124</sup> Since then an ever growing

---

<sup>123</sup> Vossing, "The failure of social democracy," 770.

<sup>124</sup> William F. Ogburn and Abe J. Jaffe, "Voting in Presidential Elections," *American Journal of Sociology* 42, no. 2 (September 1936), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2768784>.

percentage of Americans have expressed dissatisfaction with the two party system in the United States, especially in the the last decade. When asked if Republicans and Democrats do an adequate job representing America or if a third party is needed only 37%  $\pm$ 4% in September 2016 believed the two parties were sufficient. This is an enormous decrease from the 56%  $\pm$ 4% in 2003 who supported the two party formulation. A massive 57%  $\pm$ 4% in 2016 thought a third party was needed, compared to just 40%  $\pm$ 4% in 2003.<sup>125</sup> Such shifts in electoral views abet the emergence of, and openness toward, socialism and Bernie Sanders—as it is clear the American public is receptive toward alternatives to either Republicans or Democrats.

Historically, Americans avoided voting for third party candidates, practicing vote maximization due to fear of wasting a ballot on an unelectable candidate.<sup>126</sup> Indeed for all Americans affirm support of third party presidential candidates in pre-election polls, there is a documented gap between those surveys and the actual number of votes outsiders received. Third party candidates, polling well in the summer prior to an election, always experience a substantial drop by November. This has been true for independents and third-party candidates of all ideological stripes, from Strom Thurmond in 1948, George Wallace in 1968, John Anderson in 1980, Ross Perot in both 1992 and 1996 and Ralph Nader in 2000.<sup>127</sup> Looking further back, to candidates more akin to Sanders, such as Eugene Debs or Robert La Follette, is difficult due to a lack of pre-election survey data. In the crowded four-way election of 1912, Socialist Party nominee Eugene Debs failed to carry a single state but amassed 6% of the total popular vote.<sup>128</sup> During the 1924

---

<sup>125</sup> Jeff Jones and Lydia Saad, “Gallup Social Series: Governance,” Gallup, PDF, Final Topline, (7–11 September 2016).

<sup>126</sup> Lowi, “No Socialism in the United States?” 38.

<sup>127</sup> Evan Horowitz, “Americans Love Third-Party Candidates...Until Election Day,” *Boston (MA) Globe*, 15 July 2016.

<sup>128</sup> Gerhard Peters and John Woolley, “Election of 1912,” The American Presidency Project, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu>, 2017.

race the progressive populist from Wisconsin, La Follete, won his home state and close to 5 million votes and 17% nationally.<sup>129</sup>

Cleverly, Sanders may have managed in 2016 to find the most feasible way to bridge Americans' entrenched wariness of third party independents and the growing desire for political options outside the Republican or Democratic camps. Obviously, Bernie Sanders ran in the Democratic primary but in his entire previous political career he was officially an independent.<sup>130</sup> It was then possible for him to legitimately present himself as an outsider, to gain support from and tap into frustrations with the status quo, while suffering few of the challenges socialist third party candidates in the past faced. This also fits perfectly into Sanders presentation of himself as a reconstructive leader about to found a new era for America—which, while being incorrect for political time may have damaged his chances even as it addressed one systematic stumbling block.

At the presidential level, socialists also suffered from the fact that most individuals directed economic ire and concern toward local and state, rather than federal, government.<sup>131</sup> Now, however, the proliferation and reach of national labor laws means American workers more directly experience the effects of federal level action. Over 180 statutes cover everything from child labor to worker safety regulations and the minimum wage in twenty one states is determined by the federally mandated minimum wage.<sup>132</sup> Coupled with this are the economic issues Americans consider top priorities—unemployment, poverty, taxes and the budget—which

---

<sup>129</sup> Gerhard Peters and John Woolley, "Election of 1924," The American Presidency Project, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu>, 2017.

<sup>130</sup> Sanders, *Outsider in the White House*, 343.

<sup>131</sup> Lowi, "No Socialism in the United States?" 39.

<sup>132</sup> "Summary of the Major Laws of the Department of Labor," United States Department of Labor, 2016, <http://dol.gov>; Judson MacLaury, "A Brief History: The U.S. Department of Labor," United States Department of Labor, 2016, <http://dol.gov>; "Minimum Wage Laws in the States—August 1, 2016," Wage and Hour Division, United States Department of Labor, 2016, <http://dol.gov>.

are often addressed at the federal level.<sup>133</sup> It is pragmatic, in 21st century America, to focus economic dissatisfaction toward the national government as it never was before, providing conditions far more amenable to a socialist presidential candidate campaigning on economic issues than when Eugene Debs was running in the 1910s.

For all that the Bernie Sanders' campaign was self consciously attempting to be revolutionary, and outside of the mainstream political process, it is clear that he was subject to the vagaries of momentum caused by voter familiarity with a candidate, wins and losses in primaries, and comparison to leading candidates of the other party. This demonstrates that the idea of socialism and a socialist candidate for president did not so immediately repel voters to the point of forestalling traditional electoral factors. For a substantial number of voters, calling himself a socialist and expressing a desire for Nordic style social democratic programs did not make Bernie Sanders automatically ineligible for office. While perhaps hasty to say socialism was a non-issue in the campaign, at the very least for many it did not disqualify Sanders from consideration as a serious candidate and a viable political option in 2016. Proof of this can be seen by looking at the timing of his primary wins and losses and the change in support and favorability ratings.

There were an incredible number of opinion polls taken over the 15-month primary campaign and though several were conducted regularly throughout, the use of just one or two of these surveys has the potential to be misleading. Therefore, using the *Huffington Post* poll chart that aggregated over 350 opinion polls of who was favored to win the nomination, Hillary Clinton or Bernie Sanders, will show how his chances among voters varied over time. Name recognition

---

<sup>133</sup> "Americans' Priorities for 2016," *The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research*, 2016, <http://www.apnorc.org>.

and familiarity are obvious early factors in Bernie Sanders' campaign. After the official launch of his candidacy in May 2015 and the resulting news coverage his numbers doubled from around 6% in March to 13% in early June.<sup>134</sup> Here a revulsion for socialism would have resulted in a subsequent drop in support as his ideology and rhetoric became better known to voters. Yet Sanders' climb in the polls is remarkably steady from this point on, even after he gave a much publicized speech at Georgetown University on November 19, 2015 detailing what it means to him to be a social democrat.<sup>135</sup>

Momentum, which is essentially the snowballing of support for a candidate accumulating electoral victories, was also clearly at work for Sanders.<sup>136</sup> On February 4, 2016 Sanders had a growing but still meagre 34% of Democratic voters supporting him, but after winning the New Hampshire primary—a victory that surprised few given the proximity to his home state of Vermont—support jumped to around 40% ten days later. He proceeded to perform well in the Nevada caucus, then on March 1 win the caucuses in Colorado and Minnesota and the primary in Oklahoma. Of the next six contests Sanders won three caucuses and the open primary in Michigan, and his numbers continued to increase.<sup>137</sup> Indeed, Sanders was within several hundred pledged delegates of Hillary Clinton at this point and—despite the fact that her early superdelegate lead made it unlikely for him to capture the nomination—primary victories continued to drive his polling numbers upward.<sup>138</sup> On April 13 Sanders polled at 46% compared to Clintons' 49%. Yet a slowdown in momentum, caused by a decisive defeat in the New York primary, began a long and continued decline for Sanders in the polls. After further losses in April

---

<sup>134</sup> “2016 National Democratic Primary,” HuffPost Pollster, [elections.huffingtonpost.com](http://elections.huffingtonpost.com), 2016.

<sup>135</sup> Sanders, “What is a Socialist?”

<sup>136</sup> Edwards and Wayne, *Presidential Leadership*, 39.

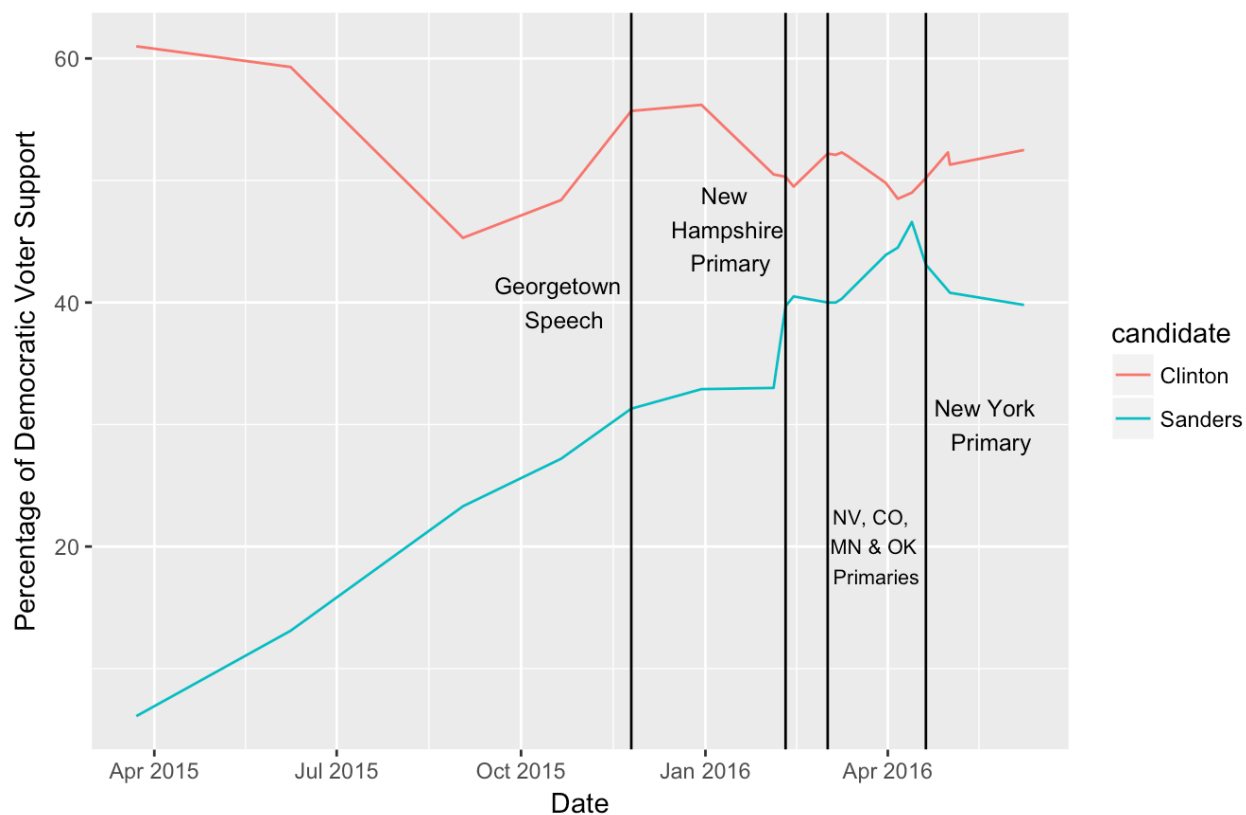
<sup>137</sup> “2016 National Democratic Primary,” HuffPost Pollster.

<sup>138</sup> Christenson and Heidemann, “Timing and Consistency of Superdelegate Decisions,” 641.



and May, Sanders stood at 41% on the eve of his defeat in California, from which his position in the polls never recovered.<sup>139</sup> It is of note that these declines did not accompany a decline in favorability ratings for Sanders, indicating lost support had more to do with lost primaries than distaste based on personal characteristics or the revelation of an unpopular policy stance.<sup>140</sup>

Figure 3. 2016 Democratic Presidential Primary Race  
Hillary Clinton vs Bernie Sanders



While his viability as a candidate, that is the chance of becoming the party nominee, was falling, Sanders argued his electability as president against a Republican was greater than Clinton's. It is true that a slightly larger number of polls indicated Sanders would beat Republican nominee Donald Trump in the general election by a larger margin than Hillary

<sup>139</sup> "2016 National Democratic Primary," HuffPost Pollster.

<sup>140</sup> "Polls—Sanders: Favorable/Unfavorable," *RealClear Politics*, 8 October 2016, realclearpolitics.com.

Clinton.<sup>141</sup> Such polls do not account for the high level of scrutiny and attack both Trump and Clinton faced as their party's respective nominee; attention Bernie Sanders was at least partially shielded from.<sup>142</sup> Regardless of whether he would have been stronger than Clinton in a general election, polls indicating that Sanders is an electable candidate at all are remarkable. They show that socialism is not a decisive blow against a national politician. The primary race against Clinton indicates standard electoral factors of name recognition, viability and momentum—not socialism—were decisive factors in Sanders' loss. While this may seem disappointing to Sanders supporters, it strengthens the evidence that electoral features which proved particularly damaging to socialism have substantially diminished, or in the case of a third party candidacy, alternative solutions were formulated in 2016. Presentation of himself as a reconstructive politician, when this was out of sync with historical precedents and current political cycles, also hindered Sanders' bid regardless of his association with socialism.

#### ECONOMIC FACTORS

The economic situation of Americans has not only direct bearing on views toward socialism but greatly influences the impact of other factors, such as changes to political cultural and electoral limitation. Strong arguments have been made that the high level of prosperity enjoyed by Americans drove large numbers of the working class to accept capitalism in exchange for its' economic rewards.<sup>143</sup> For many, a secure, sufficient livelihood outweighed the potential risk of

---

<sup>141</sup> Louis Jacobson, "Bernie Sanders Says He Polls Better Against Donald Trump than Hillary Clinton," *PolitiFact*, 29 May 2016, politifact.com. Ben Tulchin, Ben Krompak and Kiel Brunner, "Sanders Continues to Run Much Stronger Than Clinton Against Trump in National and Swing State General election Polling," Tulchin Research, PDF, 20 May 2016.

<sup>142</sup> Nate Cohen and Toni Monkovic, "Bernie Sanders Does Better vs. Trump? Wouldn't be Prudent to Assume That," *The New York Times*, 23 May 2016, <http://nytimes.com>; Hannah Hartig, John Lapinshi and Stephanie Psyllos, "Why Does Sanders do Better than Clinton Against Trump?," *MSNBC*, 6 May 2016.

<sup>143</sup> Lipset and Marks, *It Didn't Happen Here*; Buhle, *Marxism in the United States*; Lowi, "No Socialism in the United States?"; Sombart, "American Capitalism's Economic Rewards."

supporting socialism and challenging the system which provided relatively substantial benefits. An economic downturn and any number of economic woes—from falling wages, decreased security, less economic mobility and greater income inequality—would lessen the appeal of capitalism and make Americans more amenable to socialism in 2016.

The economic wellbeing of the average American and the working class has sustained a number of damaging blows, including stagnating real wages, limited accumulation of wealth and low levels of economic mobility. Since the late 1970s inflation-adjusted real wages for the bottom 50th percentile of Americans has barely increased.<sup>144</sup> Even more wide ranging statistics dating to 1964 show hourly wages went up less than two dollars when adjusted for inflation, meaning the purchasing power of workers has remained practically the same for fifty years.<sup>145</sup> Nor has the situation improved in recent years. Bureau of Labor statistics show the median weekly wage, adjusted for inflation, in 2014 was virtually identical to that of 2004.<sup>146</sup> Indeed, for low income workers in the bottom 10th percentile, real hourly wages fell 5% from 1979.<sup>147</sup> Furthermore, three separate studies using three separate sets of data all indicate Americans are increasingly likely to experience sudden sharp declines in income, a sign of spreading financial precariousness.<sup>148</sup> While a decrease would obviously incite greater immediate ire among Americans than mere stagnation, the persistent lack of growth steadily wears on the perception that capitalism is economically worthwhile despite any other objections with the system. Moreover, this stagnation does not reflect a general stagnation in the American economy but a

---

<sup>144</sup> Kenworthy, *Social Democratic America*, 66.

<sup>145</sup> Drew DeSilver, “For Most Workers, Real Wages have Barely Budged for Decades,” *Pew Research Center*, 9 October 2014, <http://www.pewresearch.org>.

<sup>146</sup> “Median Weekly Earnings, 2004–2015,” Bureau of Labor Statistics, 23 April 2014, <http://bls.gov>.

<sup>147</sup> Lawrence Mishel, Elise Gould and Josh Bivens, “Wage Stagnation in Nine Charts,” *Economic Policy Institute*, 6 January 2015, <http://www.epi.org>.

<sup>148</sup> Kenworthy, *Social Democratic America*, 26.

growing accumulation of wealth, wage increases, and income for a small number of rich Americans.

It is undeniable that the distribution of income and wealth in the United States has grown increasingly unequal over the last several decades. As middle class wages lagged and low class wages fell, those with very high wages saw a 41% increase from 1979 levels.<sup>149</sup> Using the Gini coefficient, calculated on disposable income, as a measure of the income distribution of the nation's residents, income inequality increased 18% from 1979 to 2010. Even more striking is the wealth distribution; the top 10% have 80% of all the net worth in the country and the very highest 1% have 22%, a level not seen since the Great Depression. The bottom 90% of Americans share of the nation's wealth has fallen since the mid-1980s, to pre-World War II levels. While this level of inequality is unprecedented in the United States, the steep accumulation of wealth at the top since 2000 is shocking given the previously outlined stagnation in wages experienced by the majority of Americans during the same period.<sup>150</sup> The level of mobility in America is another component that potentially increased the disillusionment with capitalism's economic rewards and strengthens a case for socialism.

There is considerable debate as to whether the level of economic mobility has decreased or stayed relatively steady over the last half century. Some studies demonstrate mobility remained about the same, or slightly better, from 1971 to 1993.<sup>151</sup> Others paint a picture of a declining chances to move up and increased odds of falling down the economic ladder.<sup>152</sup> Regardless, even

---

<sup>149</sup> Mishel, Gould and Bivens, "Wage Stagnation in Nine Charts."

<sup>150</sup> Gabriel Zucman, "Wealth Inequality," *Pathways: A Magazine on Poverty, Inequality and Social Policy*, PDF, 2016; Jonathan Fisher and Timothy M. Smeeding, "Income Inequality," *Pathways: A Magazine on Poverty, Inequality and Social Policy*, PDF, 2016.

<sup>151</sup> "Mobility, Measured," *The Economist*, 1 February 2014, <http://www.economist.com>

<sup>152</sup> Alana Semuels, "Poor at 20, Poor for Life," *The Atlantic*, 14 July 2016, <http://theatlantic.com>; Miles Corak, "Inequality, Equality of Opportunity, and Intergenerational Mobility," *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* 27, no. 3 (Summer 2013), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41955546>.

if the level of mobility has not declined, the data displays a distressingly low level of intergenerational class movement in the United States. Using the most generous calculations, a child born in the 5th quintile has less than a 10% chance to move into the top 5th quintile and even an individual from the 4th quintile has below a 30% chance.<sup>153</sup> While not yet proven that mobility is decreasing, a consistent, but poor chance, of advancement since the 1970s adds to the list of reasons average Americans have to feel that capitalism failed to fulfill the promise of financial wellbeing as it may once have.

Indeed, polling demonstrates Americans are neither ignorant of nor pleased with these economic trends. Americans consistently stated wealth distribution is a problem in the country and a majority now think their own generation is better off economically than their children will be.<sup>154</sup> Yet in 2013 54%  $\pm$ 2.4% still believed capitalism worked at least somewhat well.<sup>155</sup> However, 52%  $\pm$ 2.4% of young people below the age of thirty-five in 2016 said they do *not* support capitalism, and only the barest majority of those thirty-five to sixty-four said they did.<sup>156</sup> Clearly the steadfast and unwavering belief in capitalism, and the allure of its economic rewards, has been rattled by the long term economic trends endured by average Americans. There has been an opening towards discussing the flaws of the system and perhaps exploring alternative approaches such as socialism and the policies espoused by Bernie Sanders. The opening was likely hastened by movements such as Occupy Wall Street and the Fight for \$15, which focused

---

<sup>153</sup> "Mobility, Measured," *The Economist*.

<sup>154</sup> Frank Newport, "Americans Continue to Say U.S. Wealth Distribution is Unfair," *Gallup*, 4 May 2015, <http://gallup.com>; E.J. Dionne, Daniel Cox, Juhem Navarro-Rivera, William A. Galson and Robert P. Jones, "Do Americans Believe Capitalism and Government are Working?," *Brookings*, 18 July 2013, <http://brookings.edu>.

<sup>155</sup> Dionne, Cox, Navarro-Rivera, Galson and Jones, "Do Americans Believe Capitalism and Government are Working??"

<sup>156</sup> "Survey of Young Americans' Attitudes toward Politics," Harvard University Institute of Politics.

attention on economic problems that have been, according to the data above, affecting average Americans for decades.

Two movements, the Occupy Wall Street protests and the strikes by fast food workers to raise the minimum to \$15 an hour, emerged in 2011 and 2012. Following the physical occupation in September 2011 of Zuccotti Park in New York City by Occupy Wall Street (OWS) protesters, news coverage of income inequality skyrocketed. In the months prior the number of newspaper articles on income inequality was below 200. That count jumped to over 500 a month until bottoming out in March 2012. Even after the decline, media mentions of income inequality remained well above pre-OWS levels.<sup>157</sup> The issue saliency of income inequality rose dramatically and continued action such as the Fight for \$15 kept the financial situation of working class Americans relevant, even as the OWS Movement physically and organizationally dissipated.

Started in November 2012 by fast food workers in New York City, the effort to raise the minimum wage to fifteen dollars an hour—later branded the Fight for \$15—spread across the country.<sup>158</sup> Recent polls show there is considerable public support for increasing the minimum wage, though not always to such a high level. While a June 2015 poll indicates that 71% ±3% want the minimum wage increased, only 38% ±3% would support \$15 an hour for fast food workers.<sup>159</sup> Yet, even by April 2016, 59% ± 3.9% of respondent to a YouGov survey favored a \$12 wage and 48% ± 3.9% were amenable towards \$15 an hour.<sup>160</sup> Both New York state and

---

<sup>157</sup> Malone, Christopher and Violet Fredericks, “ows and US Electoral Politics” 201–204.

<sup>158</sup> Steven Greenhouse, “With Day of Protests, Fast-Food Workers Seek More Pay,” *New York Times*, 29 November 2012, <http://nytimes.com>.

<sup>159</sup> “Americans’ Views on Income Inequality and Workers’ Rights,” *New York Times/CBS News*, PDF, (28–31 June 2015).

<sup>160</sup> “Survey on the Minimum Wage,” YouGov, PDF, (8–10 April 2016).

California passed legislation to raise the minimum wage, gradually over a period of several years, to \$15 an hour.<sup>161</sup> Local city and county wide ordinances to make the minimum wage a living wage, occasionally estimated to \$12 or \$13 according to the geographic region, have proliferated. In 2015 the National Employment Law Project reported fourteen cities or states passed such legislation and twenty-five states or localities approved minimum wage increases in 2016. Fifty-one states and cities, more than ever before in United States history, have raised the minimum wage since 2012, evidence that raised awareness toward the issue can result in real political openings and momentum.<sup>162</sup>

The economic situation and agitation leading up to the 2016 presidential primary led to an environment in which socialist ideals of equality and workers rights, and Bernie Sanders' calls for redistributive programs and greater opportunity, had incredible resonance. His support for both the OWS protest and the \$15 minimum wage tapped into the swell of economic discontent seen since the Great Recession.<sup>163</sup> It was also in line with his attempt at reconstructive politics, that these were potential sources of a social movement which could aid his ascent into office and creation of a new regime. However, as discussed at length above, political time was partially incorrect for reconstruction because there was no massive, well-organized social movement formed during a period of growing disillusionment with conservatism. OWS and Fight for \$15 were either too narrowly issue focused, or too diffuse and incoherent, to provide the essential electoral and regime building assistance Sanders sought.

---

<sup>161</sup> Patrick McGeehan, "New York Plans \$15-an-Hour Minimum Wage for Fast Food Workers," *New York Times*, 22 July 2015, <http://nytimes.com>.

<sup>162</sup> "Fight for \$15 Impact Report," National Employment Law Project, April 2016, PDF.

<sup>163</sup> "Issues—A Living Wage," Bernie 2016, 2016.

## CONCLUSION

Of the numerous factors considered above it is possible to identify several key trends and shifts that occurred to create an environment, in 2016, apt for socialism to emerge as a legitimate political possibility and the rise Bernie Sanders as a candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination. On an economic level, the lack of significant growth in wages or wealth for average Americans over the course of several decades, coupled with skyrocketing income and wealth inequality, paved the way for socialistic criticism of the system. Numbers of Americans grew to feel the level of opportunity was unsatisfactory for those willing to work hard to get ahead. This simmering dissatisfaction was then accelerated by movements which focused national attention on the financial plight of average Americans, strongly in line with Sanders' message in 2016. Additionally, even as wariness toward government persists, an openness toward government programs, especially to expand equality of opportunity, increased. Electorally, Americans are now more than ever directing this desire for economic change toward national government, and display a mounting willingness to support third party and outsider candidates. Sanders also overcame a number of the persistent problems faced by socialists of the past by participating in the Democratic primary, instead of competing as an independent. As each component tended to reinforce and magnify the effects of the others, it is clear the simultaneous convergence of these factors in 2016 was crucial to the legitimization of Sanders and socialism.

The persistence and continuance of several elements can also be observed as contributing to the ultimate failure of Bernie Sanders in the primary, and the remaining reticence of many Americans toward socialism. It is notable that a majority of Americans still do not directly approve of socialism, even as it grows in popularity among young people and the allure of



capitalism fades. Moreover, unity within the working and lower class remains elusive as deep racial tension and resentment persists in modern America. The misalignment between political time, and the structure of presidential authority that Sanders pursued, is key to understanding the limits of Sanders' and socialism's success. Regardless of the socialist tinge his reconstruction carried, the moment in 2016 was deeply wrong for Democratic regime building and that disadvantaged Sanders' candidacy profoundly. Socialism itself is much less at fault for Sanders' failure to capture the Democratic nomination than was a misreading of which leadership style was most appropriate for, and desired by, Democratic voters in that moment. While socialism was a component to his success—in allowing him to tap into and offer more radical solutions to the economic discontent, and desire for outsider political candidates felt by numerous Americans—it is conceivable that this could have been accomplished regardless of whether Sanders called himself a democratic socialist or not.

What Donald Trump's victory in the general election, and a Republican presidency, mean for the future chances of a socialist candidate is uncertain. Any opportunity for a leftwing resurgence may be over—racial divisions may deepen, an ossified Democratic party may fail to address desire for alternative political candidates, and a progressive movement could be starved of necessary energy by either disillusionment or improved economic conditions. On the other hand, a Trump presidency may set the stage for true regime reconstruction in 2020, by a socialist or similarly radical Democratic candidate.

Donald Trump's presidency could result in a national crisis of confidence in the conservative regime—as its principles and commitment become increasingly unable to meet the challenges facing the nation and satisfy the desires of the American people. Either a singular catastrophic

event, be it a natural disaster or diplomatic emergency, or the protracted inability to accomplish a key goal, such as effectively repealing the Affordable Care Act, would precipitate and clarify delegitimization. A truly mass movement of discontented individuals could grow from this period of disjunction. Chances for a reconstructive president are stronger should this movement gain enough political force within a year or two to swing the political pendulum in the 2018 midterms against conservative politicians. The traditional coalition of both parties may break apart and realign in significant ways. Growing divisions within the Republican Party, especially between the executive and Congress, over the next year and in the midterm elections—perhaps even resulting in an internecine fight over the 2020 presidential nominee—would bode well for a reconstructive Democratic espousing socialist ideals. Political time would then be correct in 2020 or 2024 in a way it is was not in 2016. Conversely, success advancing key conservative priorities and programs paramount to Trump’s supporters; from jobs in the Rust belt and infrastructure spending, to strident action against immigration and access to abortion, would boost the conservative regime. Trump would be cemented as an articulative president and the feasibility or victory of a socialist candidate in 2020 would grow increasingly dim with each year and conservative accomplishment. Bernie Sanders 2016 campaign would be shown to have been a momentary anomaly, an interesting but largely insignificant socialist curiosity, lost within the larger conservative political milieu of the United States.

## Bibliography

- “2016 National Democratic Primary.” Pollster, HuffPost. <http://elections.huffingtonpost.com>. 2016.
- Allen, Jodie T. “How a Different America Responded to the Great Depression.” *Pew Research Center for the People and the Press*. 14 December 2010. <http://pewresearch.org>.
- “Americans’ Priorities for 2016.” *The Associated Press–NORC Center for Public Affairs Research*. 2016.
- “Americans’ Views on Income Inequality and Workers’ Rights.” New York Times/CBS News. PDF. (28–31 June 2015).
- Archer, Robin. *Why Is There No Labor Party in the United States?* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010.
- “Big Government Still Names as Biggest Threat to U.S.” *Gallup*. 22 December 2016. <http://www.gallup.com>.
- “Bernie Sanders On the Issues.” Bernie 2016. <http://berniesanders.com>. 2016.
- “Beyond Distrust: How Americans View Their Government.” Pew Research Center. PDF. 23 November 2015.
- Brown, Lara M. “Inside Parties: The Politics of Earning the Presidential Nomination.” in *From Votes to Victory: Winning and Governing the White House in the 21st Century*. ed. Meena Bose, 11–29. College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2011.
- Buhle, Paul. *Marxism in the United States*. London: Verso Publishing, 2013.
- Busch, Andrew E. *Reagan’s Victory: The Presidential Election of 1980 and the Rise of the Right*, Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2006.
- Chomsky, Noam. *Occupy: Reflections on Class War, Rebellion and Solidarity*. Westfield, NJ: Zuccotti Park Press, 2013.
- Cohen, Marty, David Karol, Hans Noel, John Zaller. *The Party Decides: Presidential Nominations Before and After Reform*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008.
- Cohen, Nate and Toni Monkovic. “Bernie Sanders Does Better vs. Trump? Wouldn’t be Prudent to Assume That.” *The New York Times*. 23 May 2016.
- Collingwood, Loren, Matt A Barreto, Todd Donovan. “Early Primaries, Viability and Changing Preferences for Presidential Candidates.” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 42, no. 2 (2012): 231–255. doi: 10.1111/j.1741-5705.2012.03964.x
- Collins, Robert M. *Transforming America: Politics and Culture during the Reagan Years*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007.
- Corak, Miles. “Inequality, Equality of Opportunity, and Intergenerational Mobility.” *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* 27, no. 3 (Summer 2013): 79–102. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41955546>.

- Christenson, Dino P. and Erik D. Heidemann, "Superdelegates or *Supertrustees*? The Timing and Consistency of Superdelegate Decisions," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 46, no. 3 (September 2016): 640–668, doi: 10.1111/psq.12292.
- DeSilver, Drew. "For Most Workers, Real Wages have Barely Budged for Decades." *Pew Research Center*. 9 October 2014. <http://www.pewresearch.org>.
- Dionne, E.J., Daniel Cox, Juhem Navarro-Rivera, William A. Galson and Robert P. Jones. "Do Americans Believe Capitalism and Government are Working?." *Brookings*, 18 July 2013. <http://brookings.edu>.
- Dugan, Andrew and Frank Newport. "In U.S. Fewer Believe "Plenty of Opportunity" to get Ahead." *Gallup*. 25 October 2013. <http://www.gallup.com>.
- Edwards, George C III and Stephen J. Wayne. *Presidential Leadership: Politics and Policy Making*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990.
- Eisner, Mary Allen and Kenneth J. Meier. "Presidential Control versus Bureaucratic Power: Explaining the Reagan Revolution in Antitrust" *American Journal of Political Science* 34, no. 1 (Feb. 1990): 269–287. doi: 10.2307/2111519.
- "Favorability of Socialism and Capitalism." YouGov. PDF. 6–8 May 2015.
- "Fight for \$15 Impact Report." National Employment Law Project. April 2016. PDF.
- "Findings from a National Survey and Focus Groups on Economic Mobility." The Pew Charitable Trusts Economic Mobility Project. Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research. PDF. 12 March 2009.
- Fisher, Jonathan and Timothy M. Smeeding. "Income Inequality." *Pathways: A Magazine on Poverty, Inequality and Social Policy*. Special edition 2016. 32–38. PDF.
- Greenhouse, Steven. "With Day of Protests, Fast-Food Workers Seek More Pay." *The New York Times*. 29 November 2012. <http://nytimes.com>.
- Greenstein, Fred. *The Presidential Difference: Leadership Style from FDR to Barack Obama*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009.
- Gregory, James and Jack Ross. "Socialist Party Votes, Membership, Newspapers, and Elected Officials by States and Counties." *Mapping American Socialist Movements Through the 20th Century*. <http://depts.washington.edu/moves>. 2016.
- Guerran, Daniel G. and Paul-Henri Gurian. "The Changing Impact of Viability During the Presidential Primary Season." *The Social Science Journal* 33, no. 2 (1996), 137–147. doi: 10.1016/S0362–3319(96)90032–4.
- Haberman, Aaron L. "Tracing the Limits of the Reagan Revolution: The Christian Right and the Fate of School Prayer in the Age of Fracture, 1982–1984" *The Journal of the Historical Society* 13, no. 4 (Dec. 2013), 491–528. doi: 10.1111/jhis.12030.
- Harrington, Michael. *Socialism: Past and Future*. London: Verso Publishing, 1989.

- Hartig, Hannah, John Lapinshi and Stephanie Psyllos. "Why Does Sanders do Better than Clinton Against Trump?." *MSNBC*. 6 May 2016.
- "Health Care: Universal, Quality, Affordable Health Care for Everyone in America." Hillary for America. <http://hillaryclinton.com>. 2016.
- Horowitz, Evan. "Americans Love Third-Party Candidates...Until Election Day." *Boston (MA) Globe*. 15 July 2016.
- Jacobs, Meg and Julian E Zelizer. *Conservatives in Power: The Reagan Years, 1981–1989*. Boston: Bedfords/St. Martin's Publishing, 2011.
- Jacobson, Louis. "Bernie Sanders Says He Polls Better Against Donald Trump than Hillary Clinton." *PolitiFact*. 29 May 2016. [politifact.com](http://politifact.com).
- Jones, Jeff and Lydia Saad. "Gallup Social Series: Governance." Gallup. PDF. Final Topline. 7–11 September 2016.
- Jones, Jeff and Lydia Saad. "Voting for Candidates—Characteristics." Gallup, June Wave 1; Full Questions and Results. 2–7 June 2015.
- Jones, Jeffery M. "Americans View of Black-White Relations Deteriorate." *Gallup*. 6 August 2016. <http://www.gallup.com>.
- Jones, Jeffery M. "Six in 10 Americans Say Racism Against Blacks is Widespread." *Gallup*. 17 August 2016. <http://www.gallup.com>.
- Jones, Robert P. Daniel Cox, Betsy Cooper, and Rachel Lienesch. "Anxiety, Nostalgia and Mistrust: Findings from the 2015 American Values Survey." Public Religion Research Institute. PDF. 17 November 2015.
- Jordan, William. "Democrats More Divided on Socialism." *YouGov US*, 28 January 2016. <http://today.yougov.com>.
- "July 2012 Middle Class Update Survey." Pew Research Center. PDF. July 15–July 26 2012.
- Kautsky, John. *Social Democracy and Aristocracy*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2002.
- Keith, Tamara. "Bernie Sanders has Stuck to the Same Message for 40 Years." *NPR Morning Edition*. 11 December 2015. <http://www.npr.org>.
- Kenworthy, Lane. *Social Democratic America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.
- Landers, Elizabeth. "Bernie Sanders draws 'record' crowd in Prospect Park." CNN. 18 April 2016.
- Lipset, Martin Seymour and Gary Marks. *It Didn't Happen Here: Why Socialism Failed in the United States*. New York: W.W Norton and Company, 2000.
- "Little Change in Public's Response to 'Capitalism,' 'Socialism.'" *Pew Research Center for the People and the Press*. 11 December 2011. <http://people-press.org>.

- Lowi, Theodore. "Why is there no socialism in the United States?" *Society* 22, no. 2 (1985): 34–42. doi:10.1007/BF02695379
- MacLaury, Judson. "A Brief History: The U.S. Department of Labor." United States Department of Labor (website). <http://dol.gov>.
- Malone, Christopher and Violet Fredericks. "OWS and US Electoral Politics: An Early Critical Assessment" in *Occupy Political Science*. eds. Emily Welty, Mathew Bolton, Meghana Nayak and Christopher Malone, 191–223. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.
- Mason, Robert. "Ronald Reagan and the Republican Party: Responses to Realignment" in *Ronald Reagan and the 1980s: Perceptions, Policies, Legacies*. eds. Cheryl Hudson and Gareth Davies, 151–172. New York: Palgrave Macmillan: 2008.
- McCarthy, Justin. "In U.S, Socialist Presidential Candidates Least Appealing." *Gallup*, 22 June 2015. <http://www.gallup.com>.
- McGeehan, Patrick. "New York Plans \$15-an-Hour Minimum Wage for Fast Food Workers." *The New York Times*. 22 July 2015. <http://nytimes.com>.
- McGreal, Chris. "Socialist politician credits Bernie Sanders after re-election in Seattle." *The Guardian*. 6 November 2015. [theguardian.com](http://theguardian.com).
- "Median Weekly Earnings, 2004–2015." Bureau of Labor Statistics. 23 April 2014.
- "Minimum Wage Laws in the States–August 1, 2016." Wage and Hour Division. United States Department of Labor (website). <http://dol.gov>
- Mishel, Lawrence, Elise Gould and Josh Bivens. "Wage Stagnation in Nine Charts." *Economic Policy Institute*. 6 January 2015. <http://www.epi.org>.
- "Mobility, Measured." *The Economist*. 1 February 2014. <http://economist.com>.
- "National Security: With Policies that Keep us Strong and Safe, America will Lead the World in the 21st Century," Hillary for America, <http://hillaryclinton.com>, 2016.
- Neustadt, Richard. *Presidential Power: the Politics of Leadership*. New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1961.
- Newport, Frank. "Americans Continue to Say U.S. Wealth Distribution is Unfair." *Gallup*. 4 May 2015. <http://www.gallup.com>.
- Newport, Frank. "Americans' Satisfaction with Ability to Get Ahead Edges Up." *Gallup*. 21 January 2016. <http://www.gallup.com>
- Newport, Frank. "Americans View of Socialism, Capitalism are Little Changed." *Gallup*. 6 May 2010. <http://www.gallup.com>.
- Newport, Frank. "Majority in U.S. Still Hopeful for Solution to Race Problems." *Gallup*. 14 July 2016. <http://www.gallup.com>.
- Newport, Frank. "Socialism Viewed Positively by 36% of Americans." *Gallup*. 4 February 2010. <http://www.gallup.com>.

- Nichols, John. *The S Word: A Short History of an America Tradition... Socialism*. London: Verso, 2015.
- Norman, Jim. "Public Remains Wary of Federal Government Power." *Gallup*. 9 October 2016. <http://www.gallup.com>.
- Norman, Jim. "U.S. Worries About Race Relations Reach a New High." *Gallup*. 11 April 2016. <http://www.gallup.com>.
- Ogburn, William F. and Abe J. Jaffe. "Voting in Presidential Elections." *American Journal of Sociology* 42, no. 2 (September 1936): 186–201. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2768784>.
- Peters, Gerhard and John Woolley. "Election of 1912." The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu>. 2017.
- Peters, Gerhard and John Woolley. "Election of 1924." The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu>. 2017.
- "Polls—Sanders: Favorable/Unfavorable." *RealClear Politics*. 8 October 2016. [realclearpolitics.com](http://realclearpolitics.com).
- Raju, Manu and Marin Cogan. "Some Dems refuse to back Obama," *Politico*. 11 November 2011. <http://www.politico.com>.
- Rifkin, Rebecca. "Big Government Still Names as Biggest Threat to U.S." *Gallup*. 22 December 2016. <http://www.gallup.com>.
- Ross, Jack. *The Socialist Party of America: A Complete History*. New York: Potomac Press, 2015.
- Sanders, Bernie interviewed by Thom Hartmann. "A Primary Challenger for Obama?" Live interview, recorded by Thom Hartmann Radio Program. 22 July 2011. YouTube video. <https://www.youtube.com>.
- Sanders, Bernie, interviewed by Frizell Sam. "Q&A: Bernie Sanders on the Future of the Democratic Party." *Time Magazine*, 26 May 2016. <http://time.com>.
- Sanders, Bernie with Huck Gutman, *Outsider in the White House*. London: Verso, 2015.
- Sanders, Bernie. "What is a Socialist?" Speech delivered to Georgetown University, Georgetown, VA, 19 November 2015.
- Schwab, Larry. *The Illusion of the Reagan Revolution*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1991.
- Samuels, Alana. "Poor at 20, Poor for Life." *The Atlantic*. 14 July 2016. <http://theatlantic.com>.
- Shields, Jon A. "Fighting Liberalism's Excesses: Moral Crusades During the Reagan Revolution." *Journal of Policy History* 26, no. 1 (Jan. 2014): 103–120. doi: 10.1017/S0898030613000390.

- Skowronek, Stephen. "The Changing Political Structures of Presidential Leadership." in *Debating Democracy: A Reader in American Politics*, Seventh Edition, eds. Bruce Miroff, Raymond Seidelman, Todd Swanstrom, 268–286. Boston: Wadsworth Cengage Learning.
- Skowronek, Stephen. *The Politics Presidents Make: Leadership from John Adams to Bill Clinton*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of the Harvard University Press, 1997.
- Skowronek, Stephen. *Presidential Leadership in Political Time: Reprise and Reappraisal*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas Press, 2008.
- Sombart, Werner. "American Capitalism's Economic Rewards." in *Failure of a Dream? Essays in the History of American Socialism*, Revised edition. ed. John H. M. Laslett and Seymour Martin Lipset, 452–467. Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 1984.
- "Summary of the Major Laws of the Department of Labor," United States Department of Labor. <http://dol.gov>.
- "Survey on Capitalism and Socialism." YouGov, PDF. 25–27 January 2016.
- "Survey on the Minimum Wage." YouGov. PDF. (8–10 April 2016).
- "Survey on Political Rhetoric." Pew. PDF. 7–11 December 2011.
- "Survey of Young Americans' Attitudes toward Politics and Public Service." Harvard University Institute of Politics. PDF. 18 March–13 April 2016.
- Steger, Wayne P. *A Citizen's Guide to Presidential Nominations*. New York: Routledge, 2015.
- Tankersley, Jim. "Bernie Sanders on America's 'grotesquely unfair' society." *The Washington Post*. 16 July 2015. <http://washingtonpost.com>.
- Tasini, Jonathan. *The Essential Bernie Sanders and his Vision for America*. White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing, 2015.
- Tulchin, Ben, Ben Krompak and Kiel Brunner. "Sanders Continues to Run Much Stronger Than Clinton Against Trump in National and Swing State General election Polling." Tulchin Research. PDF. 20 May 2016.
- Vossing, Konstantin. "Predictably Exceptional: The failure of social democracy and the formation of American labor politics in comparative perspective." *Party Politics* 20, no. 5 (2014): 767–777. doi: 10.1177/1354068812453371.
- Wattenburg, Martin P. "The Declining Relevance of Candidate Personal Attributes in Presidential Election." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 46, no. 1 (March 2016): 125–139. GALE Academic OneFile.
- Zucman, Gabriel. "Wealth Inequality." *Pathways: A Magazine on Poverty, Inequality and Social Policy*. Special edition 2016. 39–44. PDF.



| President | Jimmy Carter | Ronald Reagan  | George H.W. Bush | Bill Clinton | George Bush  | Barack Obama | Donald Trump                |
|-----------|--------------|----------------|------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|-----------------------------|
| Type      | Disjunctive  | Reconstructive | Articulative     | Preemptive   | Articulative | Preemptive   | Disjunctive<br>Articulative |
| Term      | 1977-1981    | 1981-1989      | 1989-1993        | 1993-2001    | 2001-2009    | 2009-2017    | 2017-                       |