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A Political Rhetoric Test

Little Change in Public's Response to 'Capitalism,' 'Socialism'

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A Political Rhetoric Test

Little Change in Public's Response to 'Capitalism,' 'Socialism'

The recent Occupy Wall Street protests have focused public attention on what organizers see as the excesses of America's free market system, but perceptions of *capitalism* – and even of *socialism* – have changed little since early 2010 despite the recent tumult.

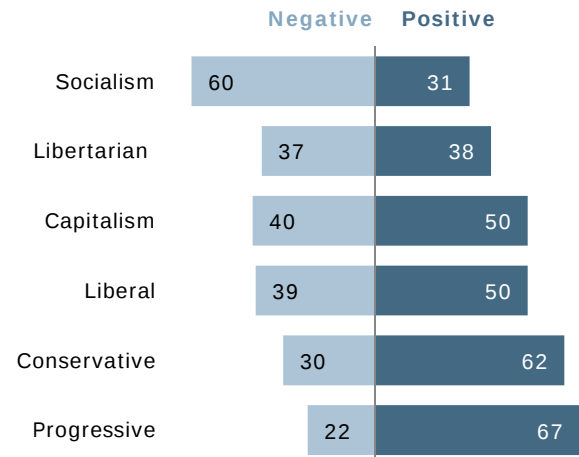
The American public's take on *capitalism* remains mixed, with just slightly more saying they have a positive (50%) than a negative (40%) reaction to the term. That's largely unchanged from a 52% to 37% balance of opinion in April 2010.

Socialism is a negative for most Americans, but certainly not all. Six-in-ten (60%) say they have a negative reaction to the word; 31% have a positive reaction. Those numbers are little changed from when the question was last asked in April 2010.

Of these terms, *socialism* is the more politically polarizing – the reaction is almost universally negative among conservatives, while generally positive among liberals. While there are substantial differences in how liberals and conservatives think of *capitalism*, the gaps are far narrower. Most notably, liberal Democrats and Occupy Wall Street supporters are as likely to view *capitalism* positively as negatively. And even among conservative Republicans and Tea Party supporters there is a significant minority who react negatively to *capitalism*.

These are among the findings of the latest national survey by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, conducted Dec. 7-11, 2011 among 1,521 adults that tests reactions to words frequently used in current political discourse. Another term in the news, *libertarian*, continues to receive a mixed public reaction: 38% have a positive view, 37% negative, and nearly a quarter (24%) have no opinion either way. Interestingly, some of the most positive views of libertarianism come from groups on

Public's Views of Political Terms



PEW RESEARCH CENTER Dec. 7-11, 2011.

both the left and the right of the political spectrum. People who agree with the Tea Party movement see libertarianism positively by a 51% to 36% margin, as do liberal Democrats by a 47% to 32% margin. And while the word *libertarian* receives a very positive reaction from younger Americans, older people tend to view it negatively.

Both of the ideological descriptions used most frequently in American politics – *conservative* and *liberal* – receive more positive than negative reactions from the American public. But the positives for *conservative* (62%) are higher than for *liberal* (50%). This gap mainly reflects the balance of what people call themselves; more people consistently call themselves conservative than liberal in public opinion polling. Those who think of themselves as politically “moderate” give similarly positive assessments to both words.

As many Democratic strategists have argued, the term *progressive* receives a far more positive reaction from the American public than the term *liberal* (67% vs 50%), though the difference is primarily among Republicans.

‘Socialism’ and ‘Capitalism’

The term *capitalism* elicits more positive (50%) than negative (40%) reactions from the American public, but not by much. And while Americans of different incomes and ideological perspectives offer different opinions on *capitalism*, the divides are not as wide as on other terms measured.

More affluent Americans, as well as conservative Republicans, are more likely to offer positive than negative reactions to *capitalism* by two-to-one. And among people who agree with the Tea Party movement, 71% view *capitalism* positively. Yet within each of these groups, a quarter or more say they have a negative reaction to *capitalism*.

Notably, liberal Democrats and supporters of the Occupy

Wall Street movement are not overtly critical of *capitalism*. In fact, as many offer positive as negative reactions in each of these groups.

By contrast, *socialism* is a far more divisive word, with wide differences of opinion along racial, generational, socioeconomic and political lines. Fully nine-in-ten conservative Republicans (90%) view *socialism* negatively, while nearly six-in-ten liberal Democrats (59%) react positively. Low-income Americans are twice as likely as higher-income

Views of ‘Capitalism’ and ‘Socialism’

Reaction to ...	Capitalism		Socialism		Diff in % positive
	Pos	Neg	Pos	Neg	
	%	%	%	%	
Total	50	40	31	60	+19
White	55	35	24	68	+31
Black	41	51	55	36	-14
Hispanic	32	55	44	49	-12
18-29	46	47	49	43	-3
30-49	50	40	34	58	+16
50-64	53	39	25	68	+28
65+	52	32	13	72	+39
<i>Family income</i>					
\$75,000+	68	28	22	71	+46
\$30,000-\$74,999	52	43	27	68	+25
Less than \$30,000	39	47	43	46	-4
<i>Party and ideology</i>					
Conserv Republican	66	29	6	90	+60
Mod/Lib Republican	54	40	25	66	+29
Independent	52	39	32	60	+20
Cons/Mod Democrat	42	49	37	51	+5
Liberal Democrat	46	47	59	33	-13
<i>Occupy Wall Street</i>					
Support (44%)	45	47	39	52	+6
Oppose (35%)	67	28	18	76	+49
<i>Tea Party movement</i>					
Agree (19%)	71	26	12	85	+59
Disagree (27%)	53	39	37	53	+16
No opinion (50%)	42	46	35	55	+7

PEW RESEARCH CENTER Dec. 7-11, 2011. Whites and Blacks are non-Hispanic only; Hispanics are of any race.

Americans to offer a positive assessment of *socialism* (43% among those with incomes under \$30,000, 22% among those earning \$75,000 or more).

People under age 30 are divided in their views of both *capitalism* and *socialism*. But to Americans age 65 and older, *socialism* is clearly a negative (72%), not a positive (13%), term.

Mixed Views of ‘Libertarian’

The American public remains divided over the word *libertarian*, with 38% offering a positive reaction, 37% a negative reaction, and 24% offering that they don’t have a reaction either way.

The steepest divide in reactions to the term *libertarian* are not political but generational. By a 50% to 28% margin, people under age 30 have more positive than negative feelings toward the term *libertarian*. Views are more split among those age 30-64, while those age 65 and older offer more negative (43%) than positive (25%) reactions.

Overall, there is only a small partisan divide when it comes to views of libertarianism – Republicans offer slightly more negative reactions than do Democrats or independents (45% vs. 35% and 37%, respectively).

Independents have more positive reactions (44%) than either Republicans (34%) or Democrats (36%).

Liberal Democrats offer relatively positive assessments of libertarianism – 47% have a positive reaction and just 32% have a negative reaction. This is matched by the positive ratings among people who agree with the Tea Party movement – by a 51% to 36% margin they react positively to the word *libertarian*.

Young, Liberals, Tea Partiers Like ‘Libertarian’ Label

	Reaction to “Libertarian”		
	Posi- tive %	Nega- tive %	Other / DK %
Total	38	37	24=100
18-29	50	28	22=100
30-49	41	35	24=100
50-64	35	43	22=100
65+	25	43	31=100
Republican	34	45	20=100
Conserv Republican	35	47	17=100
Mod/Lib Republican	35	44	21=100
Democrat	36	35	29=100
Cons/Mod Democrat	31	37	32=100
Liberal Democrat	47	32	21=100
Independent	44	37	18=100
<i>Tea Party movement</i>			
Agree	51	36	13=100
Disagree	32	43	24=100
No opinion	37	36	27=100

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‘Conservative’ and ‘Liberal’

Republicans see the terms *conservative* and *liberal* in particularly stark terms. By an 89% to 8% margin they view the former positively, and by a 70% to 20% margin they view the latter negatively. Democrats are not as universal in their views. By a 68% to 22% margin they have a positive reaction to the word *liberal*, and at the same time they are equally likely to have a positive as a negative reaction to the word *conservative* (47% vs. 44%).

There is a sharp difference by age when it comes to the word *liberal* – while 61% of people under age 30 react positively, just 34% of those age 65 and older say the same. By contrast, reactions to the word *conservative* are almost identical across all age groups.

Public reactions to the word *progressive* are far more favorable than to the word *liberal*; two-thirds have a positive reaction to the former compared with just half for the latter. There is very little difference among Democrats – who view both terms favorably. The largest difference is among Republicans most (55%) of whom have a positive reaction to the word *progressive*, and a negative (70%) reaction to the word *liberal*.

Wide Age, Ethnic Differences in Reactions to ‘Liberal’ Label

	Positive view of...		Cons-Lib Diff
	Conser-vative %	Liberal %	
Total	62	50	+12
White	64	45	+19
Black	60	54	+6
Hispanic	56	67	-11
18-29	61	61	0
30-49	63	53	+10
50-64	62	47	+15
65+	62	34	+28
College grad +	53	52	+1
Some college	64	54	+10
HS or less	65	47	+18
Republican	89	20	+69
Democrat	47	68	-21
Independent	60	54	+6
Conservative	86	28	+58
Moderate	60	54	+6
Liberal	31	86	-55

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‘Progressive’ vs. ‘Liberal’ – Bigger Gaps among Republicans

% w/ <u>positive</u> view of	Prog-ressive	Lib-eral	Prog-Lib Diff
Total	67	50	+17
Republican	55	20	+35
Democrat	76	68	+8
Independent	68	54	+14

PEW RESEARCH CENTER Dec. 7-11, 2011.

About the Survey

The analysis in this report is based on telephone interviews conducted December 7-11, 2011 among a national sample of 1,521 adults, 18 years of age or older, living in all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia (914 respondents were interviewed on a landline telephone, and 607 were interviewed on a cell phone, including 284 who had no landline telephone). The survey was conducted by interviewers at Princeton Data Source under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates International. A combination of landline and cell phone random digit dial samples were used; both samples were provided by Survey Sampling International. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. Respondents in the landline sample were selected by randomly asking for the youngest adult male or female who is now at home. Interviews in the cell sample were conducted with the person who answered the phone, if that person was an adult 18 years of age or older. For detailed information about our survey methodology, see <http://people-press.org/methodology/>

The combined landline and cell phone sample are weighted using an iterative technique that matches gender, age, education, race, Hispanic origin, region, and population density to parameters from the March 2010 Census Bureau's Current Population Survey. The sample also is weighted to match current patterns of telephone status and relative usage of landline and cell phones (for those with both), based on extrapolations from the 2010 National Health Interview Survey. The weighting procedure also accounts for the fact that respondents with both landline and cell phones have a greater probability of being included in the combined sample and adjusts for household size within the landline sample. Sampling errors and statistical tests of significance take into account the effect of weighting. The following table shows the sample sizes and the error attributable to sampling that would be expected at the 95% level of confidence for different groups in the survey:

Group	Sample Size	Plus or minus ...
Total sample	1,521	3.5 percentage points
Republicans	380	6.5 percentage points
Democrats	489	5.5 percentage points
Independents	569	5.0 percentage points

Sample sizes and sampling errors for other subgroups are available upon request.

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

PEW RESEARCH CENTER FOR THE PEOPLE & THE PRESS
 DECEMBER 2011 POLITICAL SURVEY
 FINAL TOPLINE
 December 7-11, 2011
 N=1521

QUESTIONS 1-2, 12-13, 15, 18-19, PARTY, 25-36, 41-46, 49-52 PREVIOUSLY RELEASED

NO QUESTIONS 3, 10-11, 14, 16-17, 20-24, 37-40, 47

QUESTIONS 4-9 HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE

ASK ALL:

Q.48 As I read a list of words, please tell me what your reaction is to each ... (First,) do you have a positive or negative reaction to the word... **[INSERT ITEM; RANDOMIZE]**? How about **[NEXT ITEM]**? **[IF NECESSARY: do you have a positive or negative reaction to the word (REPEAT ITEM)]**

		<u>Positive</u>	<u>Negative</u>	(VOL.) <u>Neither/ Neutral</u>	(VOL.) <u>DK/Ref</u>
a.	Socialism				
	Dec 7-11, 2011	31	60	3	6
	Apr 21-26, 2010	29	59	6	5
b.	Progressive				
	Dec 7-11, 2011	67	22	3	8
	Apr 21-26, 2010	68	23	4	6
c.	Libertarian				
	Dec 7-11, 2011	38	37	7	17
	Apr 21-26, 2010	38	37	9	16
d.	Capitalism				
	Dec 7-11, 2011	50	40	3	7
	Apr 21-26, 2010	52	37	4	7
e.	Liberal				
	Dec 7-11, 2011	50	39	5	6
f.	Conservative				
	Dec 7-11, 2011	62	30	4	4