



Socialism

Discussion Guide

Let's review

At the start of each discussion, review the conversation ground rules for returning and new members alike to set the stage for active participation by all. You may want to use a timer as you go around the room.

And don't forget to decide who will take notes and post a discussion recap.

- **Be open and curious:** Everyone has a unique perspective, so listen and be prepared to hear a different point of view. Remember, you do not need to share your political affiliation; this is a discussion and exchange of ideas, not politics.
- **Be respectful and engaged:** Be sure that everyone has a chance to speak before adding a second comment or perspective. Encourage each other's participation.
- **Be focused and concise:** Keep the conversation centered on the issue and the brief.

The "Table-it" Rule: If the group has gone off-topic but the area is of interest, the group can table the conversation and save it for another time to be addressed in a different manner.

Let's begin

*Each member is invited to answer the following questions in a **two-three minute reaction** to the brief.*

- Introduce yourself, and share what "lens of care" did you wear when reviewing this brief (e.g. personal, professional, community, state, nation, global)?
- What did you find most interesting or surprising from reading the brief? What matters?

Let's discuss

Pick 2 or 3 questions that resonate with the group and discuss, or choose your own.

- In your opinion, what is the priority in regards to current issues facing the U.S. regarding socialism and capitalism?
- Were there some points with which you strongly agreed or disagreed? Was there a perspective that was missing?
- The U.S. economy is often described as mixed - which parts are more socialist? Which are more capitalist?
- What parallels and differences do you see between countries labelled as socialist and current policy discussions in the U.S.?
- What are the services provided by the government and what are those provided by the private sector? What does each do well?

Let's act

Spread the Word: Some Facts to Share

- The term "[socialism](#)" dates back to the early 19th century and was generally used to refer to "collectively-owned businesses and forms of government."
- [In the early 1900s](#), socialist governors in the U.S. held offices in over 300 cities and socialist presidential candidate [Eugene V. Debs](#) earned 6% of the popular vote in the 1912 election.
- In the 18th century, the [gap in living standards](#) between London and Beijing was roughly 2:1; in the 20th century, when the U.K. saw the benefits of free trade while China lived under socialism, that gap expanded to 6:1.
- [Socialist takeovers of agriculture](#) over the course of the 20th century resulted in drastic drops in food production and even famine in the U.S.S.R., China, Cuba, and Venezuela.
- Today, about [one-fifth of the world's population](#) lives under regimes falling on the socialist/communist spectrum, mainly in China, Cuba, Laos, North Korea, Vietnam, and Venezuela.
- Despite being labelled as socialist, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, and Iceland are [actually all more free market-oriented than the U.S.](#) Each of these countries scores higher than the U.S. in terms of security of property rights, monetary freedom, and trade freedom, and scores practically equal in terms of business freedom, investment freedom, and overall economic freedom.

Engage Locally

- *Learn more:*
 - **Research your elected representatives' positions** on social and economic policies, and their vision for how to tackle the challenges facing Americans and your community.
 - Your legislators, state comptroller, attorney general and other local elected officials want to know their constituents. Write to them about your interest in economic and social policies.
 - You can find contact information for federal, state, and local government officials [here](#). Your state or municipality's websites will also have information to contact leaders. Try looking at the drop-down menu for a *Government* tab.
 - **Explore the impact of economic and social policies in your community.**
 - Changes to economic and social policies affect practically all aspects of life. Search on your state's website for agencies, departments, or webpages relating to healthcare, taxes, business, and employment to familiarize yourself with your state's policies.
 - Talk to local business owners and entrepreneurs, or share your experiences, with regard to how policies affect businesses, economic growth, and job creation.
- *Reach out:*
 - Explore what organizations, legislators, and journalists you could contact to ask questions, learn more and get engaged.

- If you have trouble finding the information you are looking for on your municipality's website, consider contacting agency or department heads. You can find the contact information for federal, state, and local government officials [here](#).
- The Policy Circle offers a number of resources for engaging on the local level. Learn how to write a letter to the editor on [The Policy Circle website](#).
- It's easy to establish a relationship with your legislators. Start by introducing yourself. You can also learn to write to your representatives or set up a meeting with a legislator on [The Policy Circle website](#).

Post a Recap/Dive Deeper

- Summarize your discussion to share thoughts with members not present. Designate who will post a meeting recap on your circle page.
- Decide your next meeting topic. Want to discuss a related brief at your next meeting? Related briefs include:
 - [Socialism: Venezuela](#)
 - [Free Enterprise & Economic Freedom](#)
 - [Government Regulation](#)
 - [Taxes](#)
 - [Economic Growth](#)
- Dive Deeper into this area. If this is an area you would like to pursue further consider taking possible steps to influence policy. The Policy Circle offers resources for [developing a message about your issue](#) and [organizing a petition](#) to amplify your voice and raise awareness.