

socialism

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so·cial·ism | \ ˈsɔʊ-shə-lee-zəm |

Definition of socialism

- any of various economic and political theories advocating collective or governmental ownership and administration of the means of production and distribution of goods
- a system of society or group living in which there is no private property
 - a system or condition of society in which the means of production are owned and controlled by the state
- a stage of society in Marxist theory transitional between capitalism and communism and distinguished by unequal distribution of goods and pay according to work done

Socialism vs. Social Democracy: Usage Guide

Communism, Socialism, Capitalism, and Democracy

Example Sentences

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Socialism vs. Social Democracy: Usage Guide

In the many years since *socialism* entered English around 1830, it has acquired several different meanings. It refers to a system of social organization in which private property and the distribution of income are subject to social control, but the conception of that control has varied, and the term has been interpreted in widely diverging ways, ranging from statist to libertarian, from Marxist to liberal. In the modern era, "pure" socialism has been seen only rarely and usually briefly in a few Communist regimes. Far more common are systems of *social democracy*, now often referred to as *democratic socialism*, in which extensive state regulation, with limited state ownership, has been employed by democratically elected governments (as in Sweden and Denmark) in the belief that it produces a fair distribution of income without impairing economic growth.

Communism, Socialism, Capitalism, and Democracy

Communism, *socialism*, *capitalism*, and *democracy* are all among our top all-time lookups, and user comments suggest that this is because they are complex, abstract terms often used in opaque ways. They're frequently compared and contrasted, with *communism* sometimes equated with *socialism*, and *democracy* and *capitalism* frequently linked.

Part of the confusion stems from the fact that the word *communism* has been applied to varying political systems over time. When it was first used in English prose in the mid-19th century, *communism* referred to an economic and political theory that advocated the elimination of private property and the common sharing of all resources among a group of people; in this use, it was often used interchangeably with the word *socialism* by 19th-century writers.

The differences between communism and socialism are still debated, but generally English speakers use *communism* to talk about the political and economic ideologies that find their origin in Karl Marx's theory of revolutionary socialism, which advocates a proletariat overthrow of capitalist structures within a society; societal and communal ownership and governance of the means of production; and the eventual establishment of a classless society. The most well-known expression of Marx's theories is the 20th-century Bolshevism of the U.S.S.R., in which the state, through a single authoritarian party, controlled a society's economic and social activities with the goal of realizing Marx's theories. *Socialism*, meanwhile, is most often used in modern English to refer to a system of social organization in which private property and the distribution of income are subject to social control. (The term is also often used in the phrase *democratic socialism*, which is discussed here.)

Communism and *socialism* are both frequently contrasted with *capitalism* and *democracy*, though these can be false equivalencies depending on the usage. *Capitalism* refers to an economic system in which a society's means of production are held by private individuals or organizations, not the government, and where products, prices, and the distribution of goods are determined mainly by competition in a free market. As an economic system, it can be contrasted with the economic system of communism, though as we have noted, the word *communism* is used of both political and economic systems. *Democracy* refers not to an economic system but to a system of government in which supreme power is vested in the people and exercised through a system of direct or indirect representation which is decided through periodic free elections. (For discussion about whether the United States is accurately described as a democracy or as a republic, see the article [here](#).)

Readers should consult the individual entries for a full treatment of the various ways in which each of these four words is used.

Examples of socialism in a Sentence

// She is quite right, for example, to stress that Thatcher's crusade against *socialism* was not merely about economic efficiency and prosperity but that above all, "it was that *socialism* itself—in all its incarnations, wherever and however it was applied—was morally corrupting."

— Stephen Pollard, *New York Times Book Review*, 18 Jan. 2009

// Lenin's great genius, of course, was for ideology, which was redefined all too often to support the tactical requirements of the moment. But owing to his fanatical conviction of his own righteousness, especially where *socialism* was concerned, and also to the Promethean force of his will, his pronouncements were enshrined by his followers as universal truths.

— Michael Scammell, *New Republic*, 20 Dec. 1999

Recent Examples on the Web

// One thing that makes Colombia and Venezuela different from much of Latin America is that *socialism* as a brand has a very specific, very high salience meaning in those countries.

— James Freeman, *WSJ*, "The Emerging Conservative Coalition," 3 Mar. 2021

// According to Konczal, America beat a tragic retreat from *socialism* during the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

— Stephen Elide, *National Review*, "America's Supposedly Socialist History," 15 Jan. 2021

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1833, in the meaning defined at [sense 1](#)

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Style: MLA

More Definitions for socialism

socialism



English Language Learners Definition of socialism

a way of organizing a society in which major industries are owned and controlled by the government rather than by individual people and companies

See the full definition for *socialism* in the English Language Learners Dictionary

socialism

so·cial·ism | \ ˈsɔʊ-shə-lee-zəm |

Kids Definition of socialism

a social system or theory in which the government owns and controls the means of production (as factories) and distribution of goods

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Thesaurus: All synonyms and antonyms for *socialism*

Nglish: Translation of *socialism* for Spanish Speakers

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And waiting to get ours.

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We're intent on clearing it up

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We're gonna stop you right there

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