



Scholar: Millennials prefer socialism “until they get jobs”

Rebecca Downs

March 28, 2016

Unlike any other generation, the majority of millennials have a favorable view of socialism. In a [column](#) for *The Washington Post*, Emily Ekins of the Cato Institute claimed “millennials like socialism — until they get jobs,” suggesting that young voters prefer socialism because they don’t fully understand it.

The reason so many young people support Sen. Bernie Sanders for president could actually be because he identifies himself as a “democratic socialist.” A December [Harvard IOP poll](#) showed the “socialist” label either made no difference, or made young voters more likely to support Sanders. Ekins also pointed to a [Reason-Rupe poll](#), which showed 53 percent of Americans under 30 have a favorable view of socialism. Results [from Gallup](#), which Ekins called “astounding,” showed 69 percent were willing to vote for a socialist candidate for president.

And yet, millennials don’t like what socialism actually is: government ownership of production, or government running businesses. Like other generations, [they prefer](#) a free-market economic system, especially as they get older and begin to earn more money. A wide margin, 64-to-32 percent, favored a free-market system when it was explained to them.

Last month, Frank Luntz polled younger millennials, ages 18-26, and had them describe problems with the country, in one word. While words like “corruption,” “greed,” and “inequality” topped the list, so did “government,” coming in at 26 percent.

Ekins suggested that, to millennials, socialism means an expansion of social welfare programs. Fifty-two percent of millennials favor big government that provides services. But, favoring “a Scandinavian social democracy” may not last. Again, people want to keep their money rather than see it redistributed.

Millennials’ preferences also change depending on how the question is asked:

When tax rates are *not* explicit, millennials say they’d prefer larger government offering more services (54 percent) to smaller government offering fewer services (43 percent). However when larger government offering more services is described as requiring high taxes, [support flips](#) and

57 percent of millennials opt for smaller government with fewer services and low taxes, while 41 percent prefer large government.

As Ekins closed:

...what this generation has to decide is whether higher education and health-care innovation, access, and high quality can be *best* achieved through opening these sectors to more free-market reforms or through increased government control. This is a debate we should be glad to have.

While it's troubling that millennials support a system they don't seem to fully understand, they learn through experience that socialism doesn't actually work.