

No Truth in Misrepresentation: Democratic Socialism

The vacancy left in the conversation of American politics isn't a who, it's a what. Misrepresentation of democratic socialism plagues news media, debates, and campaigns. As 2020's upcoming presidential election looms over the American consciousness, the phrase has appeared on the tongues of candidates, journalists, and citizens alike. The dramatic intensities of support and critique beg the question: what is democratic socialism and why does it matter to Americans?

In the context of modern-day America, democratic socialism takes the form of a politically democratic state with a version of a decentralized, planned economy. The idea of democratic control over economics ensures that those institutions are controlled by the many as opposed to only acting on the interests of the elite few. This kind of flexible organization allows for open interpretation when implementing a type of democratic socialism in America, but it also lacks clear definition, which confuses those unfamiliar with the concept. Unfamiliarity breeds criticism and misrepresentation - the crux of the issue of American media.

A key example of democratic socialism's misrepresentation comes from the often negative connotation of socialism. Regardless of the differences between democratic socialism and true socialism, politicians and media (especially the right wing) often reference true socialism when discussing democratic socialism. Because true socialism (a common mention of this system in American media being Venezuela's economy) is, in terms of executed plans throughout history, less successful than democratic socialism, critics often associate true socialism's downfalls with democratic socialism. They misconstrue the potential outcomes of implementing democratic socialist policy as only encompassing consequences of true socialism.

Because the American audience experiences this twisted review of democratic socialism, they cannot form truthfully educated opinions on the philosophy.

The significance of Americans' lack of access to truth concerning democratic socialism is evident at present in the debates and campaigns preceding the 2020 presidential election. Democratic candidate Senator Bernie Sanders, a self-described democratic socialist, receives critiques on his proposed policies for education, healthcare, and student loan relief based on their misinterpreted labels as "socialist" - not their merits and obstacles. Debates focus on incendiary accusations of "socialist policies" and leave American voters and media lacking understanding of the contested policies. With only vilification to serve as democratic socialism's definition, Americans miss the truth of candidates.

As always, the ever-expanding divide between American political parties further hampers the promotion of truth. Democratic socialism is nearly exclusively associated with left-wing politics, thus alienating right-wing support bases. Unbiased education is available and accessible, but party-specific media preferences often editorialize in favor of their biased audience. When media focuses on maintaining a political slant's support as opposed to advocating for truth, it's impossible for their readership to comprehend the reality of issues they report.

The solution to democratic socialism's grim reputation is, simply, education. Misrepresentation has no power over knowledge. Clarifying what democratic socialism means for Americans, without political bias, is up to the media. Journalist truth comes from journalists who know what they write; democratic socialism's truth needs to be available to Americans.