

## Understanding Larry Sanders' influence on U.S Senator Bernie Sanders

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*"Let me be very honest with you and tell you that I do not know a heck of a lot about British politics, but I do know a lot about my brother, Larry Sanders. I know a lot about him because Larry has had a very, very strong influence over my life."*

*- [Bernie Sanders in an interview with USA Today](#)*

Most Americans are familiar with the name Bernie Sanders, but few know of his brother Larry Sanders and even fewer know of the influence he has had over Bernie's life. Growing up in Brooklyn, New York, Bernie and his older brother Larry shared a small, rent-controlled apartment with their mother and father, Elias and Dorothy Sanders. The two attended Public School 197 (aka PS 197) and would end their days with Hebrew school as their parents wanted the pair to have a Jewish upbringing. In an [interview with USA Today](#) where Sanders endorsed his brother for the United Kingdom's Green Party, he says "From when I was a very little kid Larry and I discussed issues of social justice, economic justice, and racial justice."

It became clear early on that Bernie looked up to his brother especially when it came to politics as Larry held very liberal, progressive views from an early age that Sanders took on and ultimately used to catalyze his career into politics. While Bernie was in high school, Larry became President of the Brooklyn College's Young Democrats Club, which likely inspired Bernie to run for class president. Despite his efforts, he came in last place after he centered his campaign around supporting orphans of the Korean War; not a topic that was of particular interest to students at his high school. Though, it remains unchallenged that Larry's conversations with Bernie about politics helped him develop the world view that he has built his livelihood around.

Prior to Bernie's career in United States Congress, he spent a large portion of his time forming his beliefs at the University of Chicago where he led the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and hosted one of the early civil rights sit-ins in the University of Chicago President's office for 13 days and nights. Through these experiences, Bernie noted in a 1991 interview with the LA Times that here he began to "understand the futility of liberalism."

In 1968, Larry immigrated to the United Kingdom where he went on to join the Labour Party but left it for the Green Party after realizing he was looking for a party with more leftist values that aligned closer to his beliefs. While Larry began his political career in the UK, Bernie had just graduated from UChicago and was spending time exploring film-making and carpentry; it wasn't until the 1980s that Bernie was elected as the mayor of Burlington, Vermont. For the next 8 years, Bernie began his policy-making career by instituting many of the socialist policies he and his brother passionately discussed as children.

As Sanders went on to be elected to the House of Representatives and then the U.S Senate in 2007, his brother continued his career in the East Oxford division in the Oxfordshire County Council as a member of the Green party. Although the two remained in different countries with different political systems, the conversations Larry had with Bernie when he was younger clearly defined much of his political career as Bernie has made a career out of being a third-party candidate and an 'outsider' in Congress. In May of 2016, Larry ran for Parliament in Oxford West and Abingdon as a member of the Green party and unfortunately lost his race. Though, it is clear that this loss did not lessen Bernie's view of him as he continued to demonstrate to Bernie how important

getting back up when you fail is. It is clear that Larry's failures have inspired Bernie's grit and determination that we have seen today in his many campaigns, both winning and losing ones.

Aside from his work serving on the House of Representatives and currently the U.S Senate, Bernie Sanders had two very strong presidential campaigns in 2016 and 2020. As previously mentioned, he has accredited his brother with helping shape his political beliefs and this has held true in both of his presidential campaigns. In an interview with [the Guardian](#) in 2016, Larry Sanders spoke of how his brother has shaped himself to be an outsider, "Bernard's campaign and Bernard's potential election is really about the most important political event in very, very many years. He is really very different from the other candidates." Larry also noted how important Bernie getting this difference across to the voters was during the same interview when he said it would be a deciding factor in, "whether he can get that across" during the primaries and general election.

Larry Sanders lost his race for Parliament in 2016 while Presidential Elections were going on in the United States. In a [2016 interview with the Guardian](#), Larry noted how his brother has inspired him, "I'm going by my brother's example. Anything is possible." It is easy to see how Larry inspired Bernie's notorious grit and determination, and that same grit that came from losing so many elections ended up inspiring Larry decades later in his own election. In the same interview, Larry goes on to say "He lost better and he will be probably the second-most important politician in America. So that's not too bad. I won't be." Although it's clear that Larry is upset about losing his own election, he has clearly developed a deep level of respect for his brother after watching Bernie's journey through the American political system.

Both brothers, despite currently identifying with different parties, still shared many of the same values as identified in their early political careers. In [an interview with France24](#), Larry Sanders comments, "I used to tell him that he was very boring and he used to say that I was unreliable because I used to say something different each time. I think he's right but he's right because he's right ... I didn't convince him that his way of doing it was wrong and the evidence is that he was right because he's done politically rather better than I have." As identified in this interview, Larry comments on the subtle differences in their politics over the years. While Bernie has remained extremely consistent on his values and beliefs, Larry's views have evolved and changed with him and it appears that Larry ultimately believes that Sanders' approach has led Sanders to be more politically successful than him. Though, I believe that it is a combination of Bernie's actions and his older brother's strong, positive influence on him that has made him the politician America knows today.