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# Why do celebrities love Bernie Sanders?

Many of America's most glamorous, influential people are all-in on a candidate who repeatedly slams the wealthy and powerful.



Actor Danny DeVito, right, shows support for Democratic presidential candidate Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., left, before speaking during a campaign rally at Affton High School on Sunday, March 13, 2016, in St. Louis.

**Mini Racker**

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**H**ollywood royalty and uber-rich pop stars may not seem like natural allies for a 78-year-old democratic socialist taking on millionaires and billionaires. But of the presidential candidates, it's Sen. Bernie Sanders who lands what feel like daily celebrity endorsements, thanks to the campaign's outreach efforts and the power of young voters.

Sanders counts many A-listers among his fans, with three of his most notable supporters earning record of the year nominations at the Grammys: Ariana Grande, who [tweeted](https://twitter.com/ArianaGrande/status/1197257294477701123?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1197257294477701123&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.rollingstone.com%2Fmusic%2Fmusic-news%2Fariana-grande-bernie-sanders-915571%2F) ([https://twitter.com/ArianaGrande/status/1197257294477701123?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1197257294477701123&ref\\_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.rollingstone.com%2Fmusic%2Fmusic-news%2Fariana-grande-bernie-sanders-915571%2F](https://twitter.com/ArianaGrande/status/1197257294477701123?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1197257294477701123&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.rollingstone.com%2Fmusic%2Fmusic-news%2Fariana-grande-bernie-sanders-915571%2F)) photos with the senator in November; Lizzo, who last summer [urged](https://thehill.com/blogs/in-the-know/in-the-know/458680-lizzo-decries-ageism-in-2020-race-listen-to-what-sanders-has-to) (<https://thehill.com/blogs/in-the-know/in-the-know/458680-lizzo-decries-ageism-in-2020-race-listen-to-what-sanders-has-to>) fans to listen to his message; and indie folk band Bon Iver, which will perform at a Bernie Caucus Concert in Iowa on Friday evening.

The list goes on. Actress Chloë Sevigny [endorsed](https://deadline.com/2019/09/chloe-sevigny-says-democrats-must-fight-to-vote-out-trump-1202740597/) (<https://deadline.com/2019/09/chloe-sevigny-says-democrats-must-fight-to-vote-out-trump-1202740597/>) him. Actor Jack Nicholson [attends](https://twitter.com/GaryGrumbach/status/1208150513876787201?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1208150513876787201&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fpeople.com%2Fpolitics%2F2020-presidential-candidate-celebrity-endorsements%2F) ([https://twitter.com/GaryGrumbach/status/1208150513876787201?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1208150513876787201&ref\\_url=https%3A%2F%2Fpeople.com%2Fpolitics%2F2020-presidential-candidate-celebrity-endorsements%2F](https://twitter.com/GaryGrumbach/status/1208150513876787201?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1208150513876787201&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fpeople.com%2Fpolitics%2F2020-presidential-candidate-celebrity-endorsements%2F)) his rallies. Actress Shailene Woodley, who [said](https://www.thedailybeast.com/shailene-woodley-is-still-feeling-the-bern-we-just-need-to-fucking-get-a-good-person-in-office) (<https://www.thedailybeast.com/shailene-woodley-is-still-feeling-the-bern-we-just-need-to-fucking-get-a-good-person-in-office>) she wasn't ready to endorse in September, still gave more than \$3,000 to him in the first half of 2019, forgoing donations to anyone else.

While Sanders's crew of the famous came together throughout 2019, January saw a surge in star-power. Celebrity surrogates have [stumped](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/01/27/bernie-sanders-iowa-sprint-106960) (<https://www.politico.com/news/2020/01/27/bernie-sanders-iowa-sprint-106960>) for the senator

in Iowa while he stayed in Washington for the Senate impeachment trial. Meanwhile, his campaign posted a flurry of YouTube videos featuring celebrities speaking straight to camera. Model and actress [Emily Ratajkowski](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rbtgZDkvTMk&list=PL_2NQfDPoJsOLvy3h1r6LKUoRpVJceG-w&index=11) ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rbtgZDkvTMk&list=PL\\_2NQfDPoJsOLvy3h1r6LKUoRpVJceG-w&index=11](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rbtgZDkvTMk&list=PL_2NQfDPoJsOLvy3h1r6LKUoRpVJceG-w&index=11)), as well as actors [Danny Devito](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y9o3UcBXgQE&list=PL_2NQfDPoJsOLvy3h1r6LKUoRpVJceG-w&index=4) ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y9o3UcBXgQE&list=PL\\_2NQfDPoJsOLvy3h1r6LKUoRpVJceG-w&index=4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y9o3UcBXgQE&list=PL_2NQfDPoJsOLvy3h1r6LKUoRpVJceG-w&index=4)), [John Cusack](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yOFhNCqccLA) (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yOFhNCqccLA>), and [Kendrick Sampson](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XZkpsGGmmjg&list=PL_2NQfDPoJsOLvy3h1r6LKUoRpVJceG-w&index=25) ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XZkpsGGmmjg&list=PL\\_2NQfDPoJsOLvy3h1r6LKUoRpVJceG-w&index=25](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XZkpsGGmmjg&list=PL_2NQfDPoJsOLvy3h1r6LKUoRpVJceG-w&index=25)) all appeared in campaign videos this month. Singer-songwriter Jason Mraz performed at an early January event for him in Las Vegas and released a four-minute-long music [video](https://www.instagram.com/p/B7qpl9xg1Cu/) (<https://www.instagram.com/p/B7qpl9xg1Cu/>) on the senator's behalf last week.

That level of celebrity involvement can be achieved with the help of intentional strategizing by a campaign, as it was last cycle, when Hillary Clinton's campaign hired figure skater Michelle Kwan to conduct surrogate outreach. (Kwan is now reprising the role for former Vice President Joe Biden.) However, Adrienne Elrod, a Democratic strategist who worked on Clinton's campaign, said she doubted any campaign this cycle has the money to run the same kind of surrogate outreach that Clinton did in 2016.

But it does appear that the Sanders campaign hired at least two staffers focused on national surrogate outreach this month. The campaign's website lists job openings for a national surrogate intern to "support the work of the National Surrogates Department, including the Director of Surrogates," as well as for a national surrogate scheduling intern.

While other top-polling campaigns have worked on celebrity outreach throughout the cycle, they are not listing openings for surrogate-focused roles on their websites, nor do they seem to be making the same early 2020 push for

celebrity support. Senior officials on Biden's campaign, for instance, have focused their surrogate strategy on the elected officials and political figures who they believe can turn out their communities more effectively than actors and musicians.

But demographics may play an even bigger role than campaign strategy in earning superstars' support.

"[Sanders] does speak to young people," Elrod said. "His base is largely filled with young millennials of all ethnicities, and he's crushing it with that base. A lot of the celebrities who endorsed him are that base."

She elaborated that most celebrity support went to Clinton ahead of 2016, when she was a safe choice and when many famous women hoped to support the first female president. Now that some of the same stars—Grande, for instance—have had a few years to get to know Sanders, they're backing him. (It is notable, however, that Grande had donated to only one candidate as of Sept. 30, 2019: Sen. Kamala Harris, in July.)

In addition to turning out voters for their preferred candidates, stars may have another motive when making endorsements—to boost their own social capital among fans.

"The younger celebrities are trying to appeal to young people," said Dr. Valerie R. O'Regan, a political-science professor at California State University, Fullerton, who conducts research on celebrities' political influence. "With most celebrities, they're thinking of their fan base a lot of times."

O'Regan added that, because there are more people "defined as celebrities" than ever, celebrity endorsements are on the rise.

“It used to just be actors, and what, comedians, and maybe some sports figures,” she said. “Now it's the reality show people, and it's other internet people, influencers.”

As the cultural definition of celebrity expands to include different kinds of people—people like Instagram influencer [Caroline Calloway](#)

([https://twitter.com/TaylorLorenz/status/1222258948981563398?](https://twitter.com/TaylorLorenz/status/1222258948981563398?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1222258948981563398&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.dailydot.com%2Firl%2Fcaroline-calloway-bernie-sanders%2F)

[ref\\_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1222258948981563398&ref\\_url=https](https://twitter.com/TaylorLorenz/status/1222258948981563398?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1222258948981563398&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.dailydot.com%2Firl%2Fcaroline-calloway-bernie-sanders%2F)

[%3A%2F%2Fwww.dailydot.com%2Firl%2Fcaroline-calloway-bernie-sanders%2F](https://twitter.com/TaylorLorenz/status/1222258948981563398?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1222258948981563398&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.dailydot.com%2Firl%2Fcaroline-calloway-bernie-sanders%2F)), for instance—

Sanders, who paints himself as a different kind of candidate, has an even better chance at picking up support from famous people. But even among those who gained acclaim the old-fashioned way, many cite connections to their humbler roots when explaining what they like about Sanders.

“I love Bernie, too” said actor Justin Long, introducing the senator at a November rally in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. “I grew up in a middle-class family, my mom was an actress, which, for most actors, means you’re unemployed, and my dad was a teacher, a philosophy teacher, so that’s where all the money was. ... but I lived between a very depressed city of Bridgeport and a very wealthy town. I saw a lot of imbalance, a lot of inequality.”

Actor Mark Ruffalo gave similar reasoning.

“I grew up in a factory town,” he said in his endorsement video, referring to Kenosha, Wisconsin. “I grew up in those working class neighborhoods where my neighbors worked at American Motors or Anchor Hocking or Anaconda Brass. I saw those companies closed down and I saw my community devastated. The thing about the working-class people that I grew up with was they had a real kind of moral center to them. I think that’s partially why Bernie resonates with me, because he feels like those people.”

Framing themselves as part of a coalition of regular people, Long, Ruffalo, and others are driving home a classic celebrity narrative: Stars—they're just like us.