

Survey in 35 countries: In no other country do people love capitalism as much as in Poland (not even in the United States)

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Op-ed views and opinions expressed are solely those of the author.

I commissioned a survey on the image of the market economy and capitalism in 35 countries between June 2021 and October 2023. In Poland, Ipsos MORI surveyed a total of 1,096 randomly selected people from July 30 to August 9, 2021, and a total of 35,550 respondents were surveyed in all 35 countries.

The survey differs from many other surveys on the market economy and capitalism not only in its depth (i.e., in the level of detail of the questions asked), but also in a particular method: the hypothesis before the survey began was that some people are repelled by the word 'capitalism' in particular, even though their actual views would put them more in the pro-capitalist camp. Thus, one set of questions (on 'Economic Freedom') consistently avoided the word 'capitalism.' Respondents were presented with a total of six statements, of which three statements favored economic freedom and a market economy and three advocated a strong role for the state.

In contrast, the term 'capitalism' was used in the two other sets of questions. First, we wanted to know exactly what the survey's respondents associate with the word 'capitalism,' then we presented each respondent with a total of 18 statements about capitalism. By combining the data for the last two sets of questions, we are able to determine what people think if the word 'capitalism' is mentioned. It is interesting to compare this with the first set of questions, where the answers reveal how people feel about capitalism when the word is not mentioned.

An analysis of the responses to the pro-state and pro-market statements reveals that statements in favor of a stronger role for the government meet with 15 percent approval, compared with 37 approval for pro-market statements in favor of a reduced role for the government. Dividing the average of positive statements by the average of negative statements yields a coefficient of 2.40. A coefficient greater than 1.0 mean that pro-economic freedom attitudes dominate, a coefficient less than 1.0 mean that anti-economic freedom opinions dominate.

The statement that elicited the greatest agreement by far (46 percent) in Poland was: "I think private businesses alone should decide what products to manufacture and what prices to charge for them; the state should not be involved in that". And the lowest agreement by far (10 percent) was for the statement: "We need a lot more state intervention in the economy, since the market fails time and again".

In none of the 35 countries was approval of the market economy as high as in Poland. The United States, Czech Republic, South Korea, and Japan all follow Poland by a wide margin.

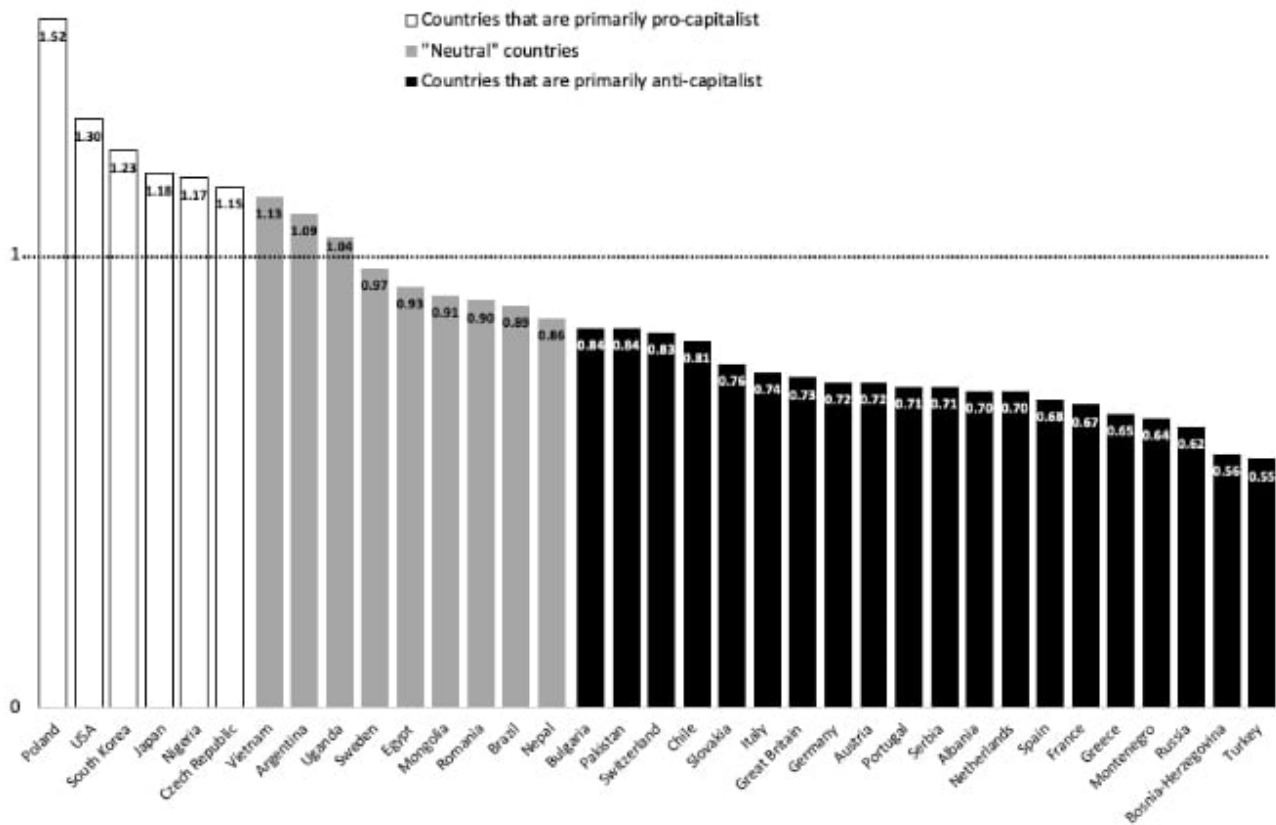
In the next set of questions, respondents were presented with an association test with five positive and five negative terms associated with the word 'capitalism' and with a total of 18 statements about capitalism, ten of which were negative and eight of which were positive.

In Figure 1 you can see that 'capitalism' has a more positive image in Poland, even if the word itself is used, than in all 35 countries (combining the figures for economic freedom and the two capitalism questions results in a coefficient of 1.52).

Taking all of the questions together, i.e. those in which the word capitalism was used and those in which it was not, then the United States, South Korea and Japan follow Poland at the top by a clear margin.

Figure 1

Overall coefficient on attitudes toward capitalism in 35 countries



Note: The lower the coefficient, the stronger the anti-capitalist attitude

Source: Rainer Zitelmann, *How Nations Escape Poverty*

Anyone familiar with Poland and its history is unlikely to be surprised by the survey's findings. In the 1980s, during the socialist era, Poland was one of the poorest countries in Europe. After the capitalist reforms in the early 1990s, Poland became Europe's growth champion and one of the fastest-growing national economies in the world. In my book *How Nations Escape Poverty*, I tell the story of how the Poles managed to improve their standard of living so sensationally in just a few decades. Other countries can learn from what happened in Poland.

Rainer Zitelmann is the author of the recently published book *How Nations Escape Poverty* <https://nations-escape-poverty.com/>

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