

April 23, 2024

## What became of communism in Vietnam?

By [Greg Young](#)

Rainer Zitelmann's book, [How Nations Escape Poverty](#), is particularly interesting for American veterans who served as G.I.s in Vietnam or for those who may have lost their fathers or family members in [the conflict](#).

The irony of history is that the communists initially won — however, upon establishing their socialist regime across Vietnam, they came to realize what a huge mistake they had made. Today, young Vietnamese in particular admire the USA and capitalism, as Zitelmann's book shows. He asked the Vietnamese which economic systems they admire and which they reject. According to the survey data, people in Vietnam have a strong preference for the economic systems in Japan, South Korea, and Singapore, while hardly anyone approves of North Korea. And among the younger generation in Vietnam, the USA is in second place.

What made America the most successful and greatest country in history? Two things: first, capitalism (the belief in the superiority of the [market economy](#) and entrepreneurship) and second, the American spirit — i.e., the belief that you are responsible for your own life and can achieve anything through good ideas and hard work.

In recent years, these two convictions have weakened. A growing number of young Americans, in particular, have come to doubt the superiority of capitalism. This is a failure of our school system and our universities. Many young Americans simply do not know enough about the history of socialism and capitalism.

Rainer Zitelmann is a world-renowned German historian and sociologist whose books have been published in over 30 languages. In his book, he delves into the topic in a particularly captivating and insightful way. Don't worry — you don't need to know anything about economics, and the book is not full of technical jargon.

Zitelmann describes how Vietnam, the poorest country in the world in 1990, overcame poverty and became a prosperous country by abolishing the planned economy and introducing private property rights. By examining the case of Poland, which was among the poorest countries in Europe in the 1980s but has since emerged as Europe's growth champion for the past three decades, Zitelmann shows how capitalism makes people's lives better.

Standing in line developed into a full-fledged science in socialist Poland: even for the most basic everyday items, you needed ration cards and had to stand in endless lines with no guarantee that your wait would be worth it or that the products you wanted would not be sold out by the time you got to the front. With lines everywhere and people often having to wait for hours and hours — or even several days in the case of furniture or household products — some clever systems emerged. One of them was called the “line list,” which was used when people had to wait for days, not hours. In that case, a list was made of all the people waiting in line so that they didn't need to physically be there all the time.

Every several hours, the list was read aloud, and people needed to report present or otherwise — and if they were no longer in line, they would be crossed off the list. The schedule for taking the register was announced ahead of time. When the waiting period was days, not hours, people needed to report three to four times a day. Some people took a leave of absence from work, some just asked supervisors to let them go and come back quickly, and some paid others to report on their behalf (it was called “hiring a stander”). Custody over the line list was taken care of by a self-proclaimed line committee. And all this wasn't happening sometime in the 1950s, but in the 1980s! Just take a moment to remember your life in the USA in the '80s! That was when [Ronald Reagan](#) made our country great and successful again.

In Vietnam, the situation was even more dire than in Poland. Before ushering in a series of economic reforms in the 1980s, Vietnam was poorer than the poorest countries in Africa. People suffered from hunger and lived in abject poverty.

While Zitelmann tells the stories of these two countries, he has also conducted opinion polls to explore how people's thinking has changed. Interestingly, his research reveals that there is less envy toward the rich and successful in Vietnam and Poland than in Western countries. In Vietnam in particular, successful entrepreneurs and the rich are seen as role models — not as scapegoats, as in many Western countries.

Students at school or university should read the book and use the facts it contains to confront their left-wing teachers and professors, who tell them that capitalism is to blame for hunger and poverty. The opposite is true. As Adam Smith already knew — and as Zitelmann shows in his impressive first chapter — economic freedom is the key to overcoming hunger and poverty.

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