

Sweden is more capitalist than the United States

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The film “What Sweden Got Right” by Polish filmmaker Tomasz Agnecki and German historian and sociologist Rainer Zitelmann was awarded as “Best International Short Documentary” on July 11 at the Anthem Film Festival in Las Vegas. The Anthem Film Festival is the world’s largest libertarian film festival and is held annually as part of FreedomFest, which this year attracted 2000 attendees.

The film explores the reasons behind Sweden’s remarkable economic success and high standard of living. Many people regard Sweden as a socialist country. In a survey conducted by the polling institute Insa, respondents were asked: “Which of the following countries has more billionaires relative to its population?” The question was posed in both the United States and Germany. In both countries, an overwhelming majority (89 percent in the United States and 75 percent in Germany) believed that the United States has more billionaires relative to its population. As the film demonstrates, this belief is incorrect: Sweden actually has more billionaires per capita than the United States.

This is partly because Sweden, after negative experiences in the 1970s, completely abolished inheritance, gift, and wealth taxes. As a result, many billionaires who had left the country during Sweden’s socialist period in the 1970s returned.

More broadly, Sweden is significantly more capitalist than the United States. In the Heritage Foundation’s 2026 Index of Economic Freedom, which ranks 176 countries according to their level of economic freedom, Sweden ranks 11th, while the United States ranks only 22nd.

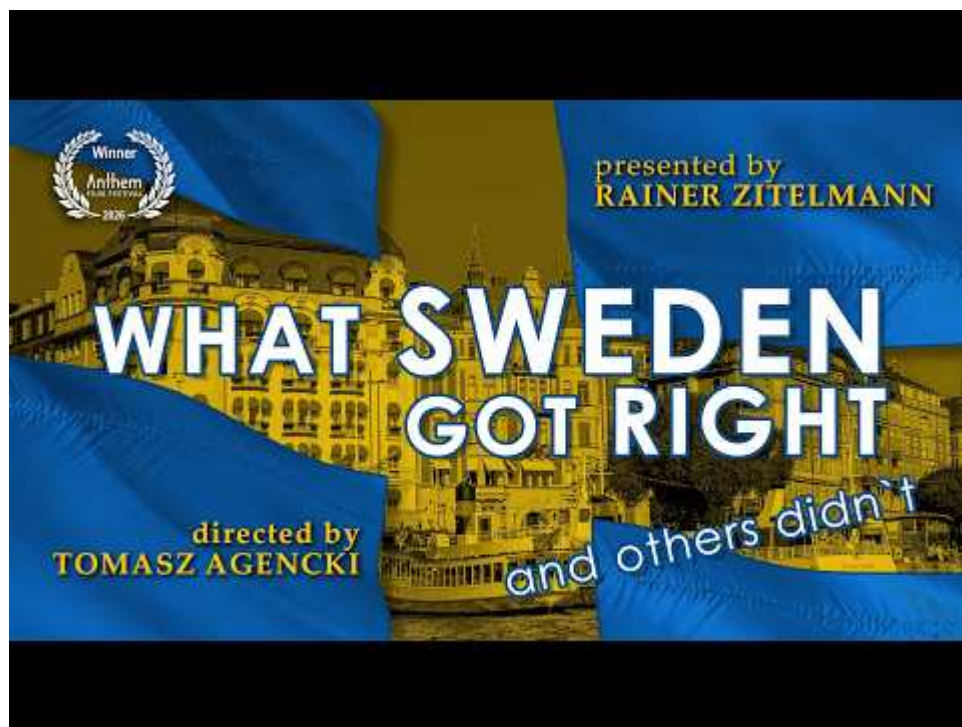
The index measures economic freedom according to twelve criteria. Sweden scores higher than the United States in Property Rights, Judicial Effectiveness, Government Integrity, Fiscal Health, Trade Freedom, and Investment Freedom, while both countries receive the same score for Financial Freedom. The largest difference is in the category of Fiscal Health, where Sweden scores 97.5 out of 100 points compared with only 18.5 points for the United States. Sweden performs worse than the United States mainly in the categories of Tax Burden, Government Spending, and Labor Freedom.

Sweden’s image does not correspond to reality. In the same survey, respondents were also asked which of the two countries—Sweden or the United States—they

considered more capitalist. In both the United States and Germany, more than four out of five respondents believed that the United States was more capitalist than Sweden.

The film shows how Sweden's anti-rich policies in the 1970s drove successful entrepreneurs, such as Ikea founder Ingvar Kamprad, out of the country and seriously damaged the Swedish economy through increasing government intervention. During the 1980s and 1990s, however, Sweden implemented market-oriented reforms that led to economic growth and rising living standards.

The film therefore contains many lessons for other countries that are harming their economies through increasing government intervention and hostility toward the wealthy. Swedish experts featured in the film explain that entrepreneurs were viewed with suspicion in the 1970s, whereas today they are role models for young people. The film also demonstrates that envy toward the rich is significantly lower in Sweden than in countries such as France, Germany, and many other European nations, and is roughly comparable to the level found in the United States.



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