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## Why the Poles don't envy the rich

By Rainer Zitelmann

In the 1980s, Poland was one of the poorest countries in Europe. But after Polish workers overthrew the socialist dictatorship and capitalism was introduced in Poland in 1990, the country developed into Europe's growth champion. The standard of living has risen massively since then.

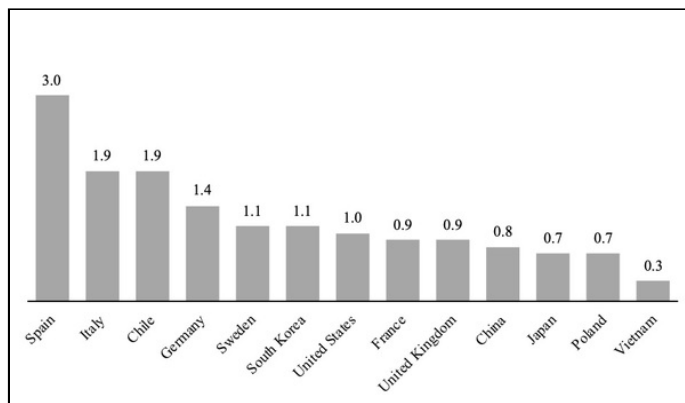
This positive development is a result of market economy reforms, but it is also the result of a specific mental attitude among Poles. Unlike in many other countries, people in Poland do not see the rich as scapegoats -- they have a very positive view of the rich, as confirmed by a recent opinion poll.

Ipsos MORI asked people in 13 countries [what they think about the rich](#). Respondents in each country were presented a list of seven positive and seven negative personality traits and asked which of them were most likely to apply to rich people. In Poland, the three most frequently mentioned traits are all positive -- namely bold and daring, imaginative, and industrious. Poles view the rich much more positively than other nationalities, including neighboring Germany.

For instance, 19 percent of Poles think the rich are self-centered, in contrast to 62 percent of Germans; 25 percent of Poles but 49 percent of Germans think rich people are greedy. And 24 percent of Poles compared with 43 percent of Germans think rich people are arrogant.

When we calculate the average percentage with which Poles attribute positive and negative personality traits to the rich, we arrive at the PTC -- Personality Trait Coefficient. A PTC greater than 1 means that the population of a given country tends to attribute more negative traits to the rich, while a PTC less than 1 means that respondents are more likely to associate the rich with positive personality traits. Poland has a PTC of 0.7. The only surveyed country in which the population assesses the personality traits of the rich more positively than Poland is Vietnam.

### The Personality Trait Coefficient PTC in international comparison

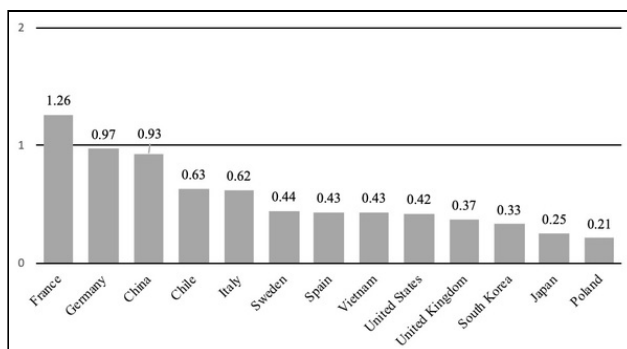


Source: Zitelmann, *How Nations Escape Poverty*.

The survey included many other questions, including a number of items that can be considered indicators of envy. For example, Ipsos MORI asked people if they would be in favor of increasing taxes substantially for rich people, even if they would not benefit from it personally (in Poland 44 percent agreed with this statement, in Germany it was 65 percent). One question was used to determine *Schadenfreude* and asked respondents what they think when a rich person loses a lot of money as the result of a risky business deal. "It serves him right" say 15 percent of Poles (but 40 percent of Germans). We also asked whether Poles would be in favor of drastically reducing the salaries of top-level managers and redistributing the money more evenly among their employees, even if that would mean that employees would only get a few more zloty per month -- only 23 percent of Poles were in favor, compared with twice as many in Germany (46 percent).

Based on responses to these questions, which were asked in all countries, we calculated what we call the Social Envy Coefficient. This coefficient depicts the ratio of enviers to non-enviers in every surveyed country. In Poland, for example, 13 percent of respondents are social enviers, compared with 61 percent who are non-enviers, resulting in a coefficient of 0.21. In Germany, 33 percent are enviers and 34 percent are non-enviers (SEC = 0.97). The higher the social envy coefficient, the greater the prevalence of social envy in that country. You can see here that in none of the 13 countries where we conducted the survey is social envy as low as in Poland:

### The Social Envy Coefficient in international comparison



Source: Zitelmann, *How Nations Escape Poverty*

Rainer Zitelmann is the author of the recently published book [How Nations Escape Poverty](#).