

Social envy & environmental hysteria: Now SUV drivers are in the firing line in Europe

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

In a public referendum, Parisians voted in favor of a drastic increase in parking fees for hefty off-road vehicles. But only six percent of eligible voters actually bothered to vote. For SUVs and other heavyweight vehicles, an hour's parking in the center of the French capital will soon cost 18 euros instead of the usual six euros, and in the outer districts twelve instead of four euros. Six hours of parking in the city center will cost 225 euros instead of the previous 75 euros.

1.3 million Parisians were called to vote under the slogan "More or fewer SUVs in Paris?" But only just under six percent of eligible voters took part. Around 54.5 percent of those who did vote approved parking fee hike, while around 45.5 percent voted against. This means that around three percent of those eligible to vote decide how much SUV drivers will have to pay for parking. In referendums, there is usually a required quorum, for example 25 percent of eligible voters, who must participate for any result to be valid. This was not the case in Paris.

However, the special rate for SUV-style vehicles will only apply to visitors who park in downtown Paris. Residents will be exempt, as will tradesmen and health workers. The tariff will apply to combustion and hybrid models weighing more than 1.6 metric tons and electric

models weighing more than two metric tons. Perhaps this is why not so many residents bothered to take part in the referendum, as the vote was about disadvantages for others, i.e. for visitors.

The referendum marks the latest stage in the red-green government's strategy to gradually ban cars from the center of Paris. The red-red-green government in Germany's capital city Berlin also pursued a similar strategy when it was in power.

Critics of the new regulations in France have pointed out that environmentally friendly electric cars will also be penalized, while older combustion engine vehicles will not.

In Germany, the so-called German Environmental Aid Association (DUH) has immediately called on all cities to introduce higher parking fees for SUV-style vehicles. "These monster SUVs are increasingly blocking sidewalks and green spaces and endangering pedestrians and cyclists. The tyranny of SUVs must be stopped," said DUH Federal Managing Director Jürgen Resch.

I think the arguments for higher parking charges are a pretext. In fact, left-wing green groups have been trying to merge climate issues and social envy for some time. In Germany, the "Last Generation" doomsday sect has already damaged golf courses and sprayed paint on private jets and luxury stores. Their motto: "We can no longer afford the rich." The rich are defamed as destroying the planet.

An international survey conducted by the public opinion research institutes Allensbach and Ipsos MORI in 13 countries has shown that social envy is more pronounced in France than in any other country – with Germany in second place. The social envy coefficient SEC, which measures the ratio of social envious to non-envious in a given country, is 1.26 in France and 0.97 in Germany. By comparison, it is 0.42 in the United States and only 0.21 in Poland.

The populations of France and Germany bear a grudge against the rich, a fact confirmed by another of the survey's findings. Respondents were presented with two alternative statements: 1. The taxes on the rich should be high but not excessively high because they have generally worked hard to earn their wealth. 2. The rich should not only pay high taxes, but they should pay very high taxes. In France and Germany, 53 and 51 percent respectively expressed support for extremely high taxes on the rich, while only 19 and 32 percent thought taxes should not be excessive. The exact opposite was true in Poland and Sweden, where half of respondents were against excessive taxes on the rich and only a quarter and a third of respondents respectively were in favor of very high taxes on the rich.

As one of the rich myself, I can actually see something positive in the high parking fees that will soon be charged in Paris: I don't particularly mind whether I pay six or 18 euros an hour for parking, but I am happy if it means there are a few more parking spaces. In Singapore, the most capitalist country in the world according to the *Index of Economic Freedom* and also one with the highest density of millionaires in the world, a permit to drive a mid-range

car costs the equivalent of 100,000 euros. This is to avoid congested roads. Multimillionaires don't mind, they are happy not to have to share the road and parking spaces with so many low and average earners. As is so often the case, social envious end up hurting themselves more than they do the rich.

Rainer Zitelmann is the author of the book *The Power of Capitalism*

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