

VE Day: who defeated Hitler? Local experiences and local perceptions of global war¹

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VE Day, 8th May 1945, and the 75th Anniversary in 2020

In Spring 1945 Allied troops were advancing on Berlin, the Russians closing in on the city and entering it in the second half of April and into May. On 30th April Hitler committed suicide in his bunker in Berlin. The German surrender was signed on 7th May 1945. In order to please Stalin, the announcement was delayed and 8th May was declared to be VE Day, Victory in Europe. The streets of London were thronged with people rejoicing. Churchill stood on the balcony of Buckingham Palace with the King and the royal family waving to the cheering crowds below ...

... Friday 8th May 2020 was the 75th anniversary. The streets of London were deserted because of the Coronavirus. But suitably distanced celebrations were held. The Queen addressed the nation. Commemorative stamps were issued. The Times had a special front cover to mark the day. News items relating to VE Day in the week leading up to the 75th anniversary are listed in Display 1.

Display 1 News items relating to VE Day, 1st to 11th May 2020 in The Times and The Observer in the week leading up to the 75th anniversary of VE Day

We were complicit with Nazis, confess German bishops	1/29
Bittersweet joy of VE Day gives us a glimpse into our future	2/32-33
Vatican thought Jews were exaggerating	2/40
Battle scars help Berlin to remember	2/43
Fascism has never thrived in Britain but it haunts it mainstream politics	3/23
Russian author defends gulag-era story as TV series provokes backlash	3/39
Exhausted, relieved, yearning for change: Britain on VE Day	3/44-45
Booze, bonfires and a beef encounter	4/3
Snow discovers secret history of his grandfather's war record	4/3
Bodies littered the streets as Russians stormed Berlin	4/25
Soldiers' letters to wartime host unite families in time for VE day	5/13
Churchill delayed news of victory to keep Stalin happy	5/13
RAF veteran walks for tommy club in Flanders	5/13
Ancient German tapestry weaves a tale of defiance against Nazi looters	5/31
How Churchill won the war and lost power	6/17
Listing honour for victory beeches	6/17
Actor secured peace with 90-minute surrender paper	6/17
Let's not make the mistakes of 1945 again	6/23
Riddle over Putin's honour for Kim, hero of Second World War	6/32
Lost tales of Polish flying heroes ignored by VE Day's pageantry	7/21
They shouted 'it's over' but there were still hard times	7/21

¹ This is Paper 77.3, part of ANA Commentary for May 2020. **Draft:** 21 May 2020

<https://sites.google.com/site/gordonburmathsocsci/home/a-new-agenda>;

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Learning from the political mistakes of 1945	7/30
Fabulous prefabs	7/30
Queen leads nation into a day of distance memories	8/1
Joy of VE Day masked a hunger for change	8/25
Polish contribution	8/26
Uncertain future. Like the Second World War, the coronavirus marks a significant moment in history and shines a spotlight on shifting geopolitical currents	8/27
Historian hounded for blowing legend of rubble women to bits	8/32
Never give up: Queen sends VE Day hope	9/1
Nation packs up its troubles for a doorstep singsong	9/4
A stylish medley of music and nostalgia	9/4
Beware the old evil, Germans told	9/4
We led the war effort, say British (others disagree)	9/5
VE Day reminds us of sacrifice and sorrow. 6 letters.	9/26
Living history. The Queen again displayed her ability to unite the country. Editorial	9/27
Russians remove memorial to Poles killed by Stalin.	11/26
Russia angry at VE Day snub by White House.	11/26

Display 1 above shows how important the events of World War II still are in people's minds. It shows also the disagreements that exist

See:

[.http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/4508901.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/4508901.stm)

UK celebrated VE day on Friday 8 May

It has been the occasion of debate with differential valuing of 'self' and 'other'. Such debates are typical of these anniversaries. A world society view of World Wars I and II is given in the following extracts from the *Values, World Society and Modelling Yearbooks, 2014 and 2015*.

World War

Burt YB14 (4, 44., 87., 146); YB15 (99-108).

<https://sites.google.com/site/gordonburtmathsocsci/home/thinking-about-the-centenary-of-11th-november-1918>

The YouGov survey

"We led the war effort, say British (others disagree)."³

"People in Britain and the U.S. disagree on who did more to beat the Nazis ...
... Outside Britain, Europeans tend to say it was the United States that contributed most to winning WWII – and relatively few credit the USSR ...

...

Next week will mark the 70th anniversary of VE day, the day Nazi Germany officially surrendered in the Second World War. Commemorations are being held across Europe, but in some cases may be overshadowed by tension between the West and Russia over the conflict in Ukraine. The snub of Moscow's VE Day event by many world leaders also evokes the Cold War, which divided the Western Allies from the Soviet Union soon after World War Two ended.

³ Fisher, Lucy. "We led the war effort, say British (others disagree)." *The Times*, May 9, 2020: 5.

...

YouGov recently conducted a poll in seven European nations, including France, Britain and Germany, as well as the United States, and asked respondents whether the US, the United Kingdom or the Soviet Union (USSR) contributed most to the defeat of Germany in WWII. The survey finds that no more than 27% in any of the countries believed the USSR contributed most, and in six out of the eight countries surveyed the US was the most popular response.”⁴

Further analysis and commentary

The study obtained opinion from people in eight countries, namely the USA and seven European countries: Britain, France and Germany and also all four Scandinavian countries - Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland. There were no countries from eastern Europe and no countries from southern Europe apart from France. In particular the study did not involve Russia. (It did not involve Canada or any British Commonwealth countries).

The question – see below – asked about the contributions by different countries to the defeat of Germany in World War Two. It offered three specific countries – USA, UK and USSR – and the option ‘another country’.

It asked about the ranking of the countries according to their contribution – it did not ask for the amount of the contribution. It asked for the country that contributed most – it did not ask for the full set of rankings. This form of question provides less information than other forms.

In your opinion, which one country would you say contributed most to the defeat of Germany in World War Two?

United States; United Kingdom; Soviet Union; Another Country; Don't Know

William Jordan’s report provided the results shown in Table 1 below, also shown as Figure 1. In the rest of this paper we shall carry out some further analysis and commentary on this data.

The table and figure order the countries in terms of decreasing percentage choosing the USA as contributing most. Of the percentages saying the USA contributed most, USA was the highest, France gives the second highest, followed by Germany. The four Scandinavian countries give lower and Britain gives lowest. Of the percentages saying the USSR contributed most, Germany, Finland and Norway gave the highest percentages. Relevant to these differences between countries in their perceptions are the following experiences of the war.

⁴ William Jordan YouGov. Politics and current affairs”

<https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2015/05/01/Britain-America-disagree-who-did-more-beat-nazis>;

Eurotrack data

http://cdn.yougov.com/cumulus_uploads/document/1zt117znes/Eurotrack_April_Website_WW2.pdf;

US data http://cdn.yougov.com/cumulus_uploads/document/op919jw0c9/toplines_OPI_ve_day_20150427.pdf;

France was liberated following the D-day landings in Normandy by USA, Britain and Canada in 1944.

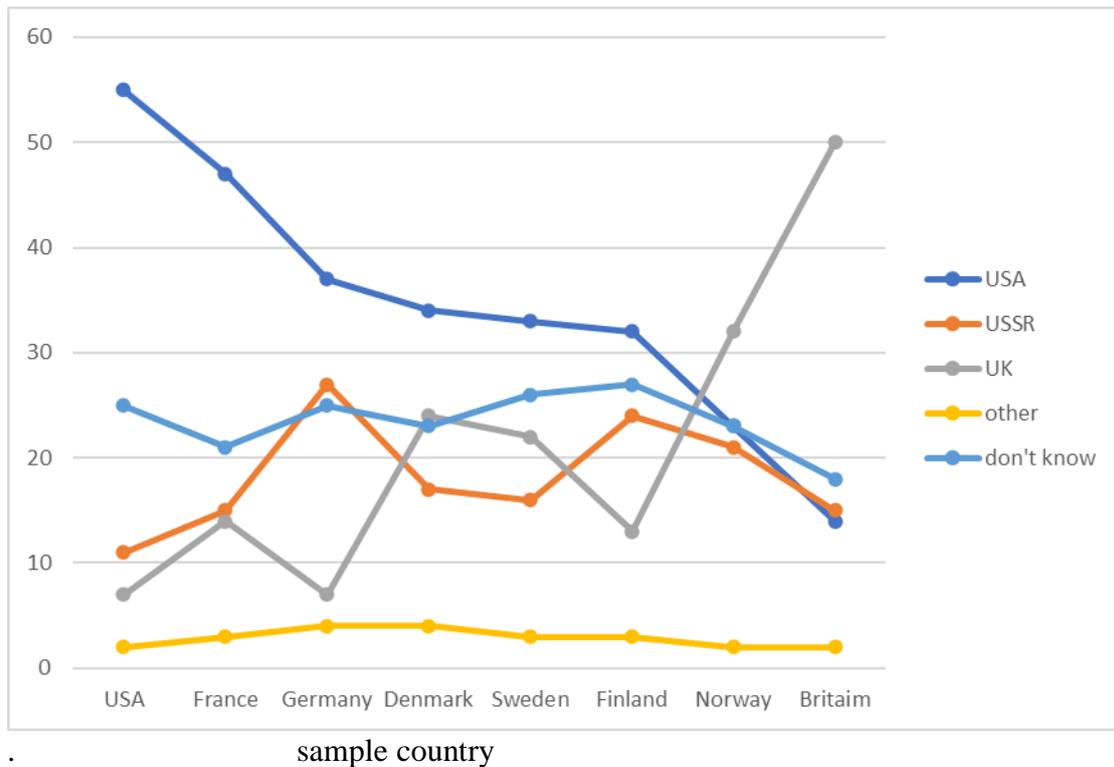
Finland had become independent from Russia in 1917 (with support from Imperial Germany) but then fought two wars with the USSR in 1939-1940 and 1941-1944, the latter with support from Nazi Germany. Then in the Lapland War in 1944-1945 Finland forced German troops out of Lapland back into the north of German-occupied Norway. Separately refugees from Nazi-occupied Denmark and Norway had fled to neutral Sweden (as well as to Britain) in anticipation of a return. USA, Canada and UK participated in the Arctic convoys which took supplies to the USSR, skirting the coast of Nazi-occupied Norway.

Table 1 The percentage in the sample country saying the contributor country made the most contribution

sample country	contributors to the defeat of Germany				
	USA	USSR	UK	other	don't know
USA	55	11	7	2	25
France	47	15	14	3	21
Germany	37	27	7	4	25
Denmark	34	17	24	4	23
Sweden	33	16	22	3	26
Finland	32	24	13	3	27
Norway	23	21	32	2	23
Britain	14	15	50	2	18
mean	34.4	18.3	21.3	2.9	23.5

Figure 1 The percentage in the sample country saying the contributor country made the most contribution

% identifying that country as making the most contribution



A key feature of the data is the negative relationship between the perceived USA and UK contributions, in other words the greater the percentage saying the USA made the most contribution, the lower the percentage saying the UK made the most contribution. To see this compare the USA and UK columns in Table 1 and compare the descending USA line and the ascending UK line in Figure 1 above.

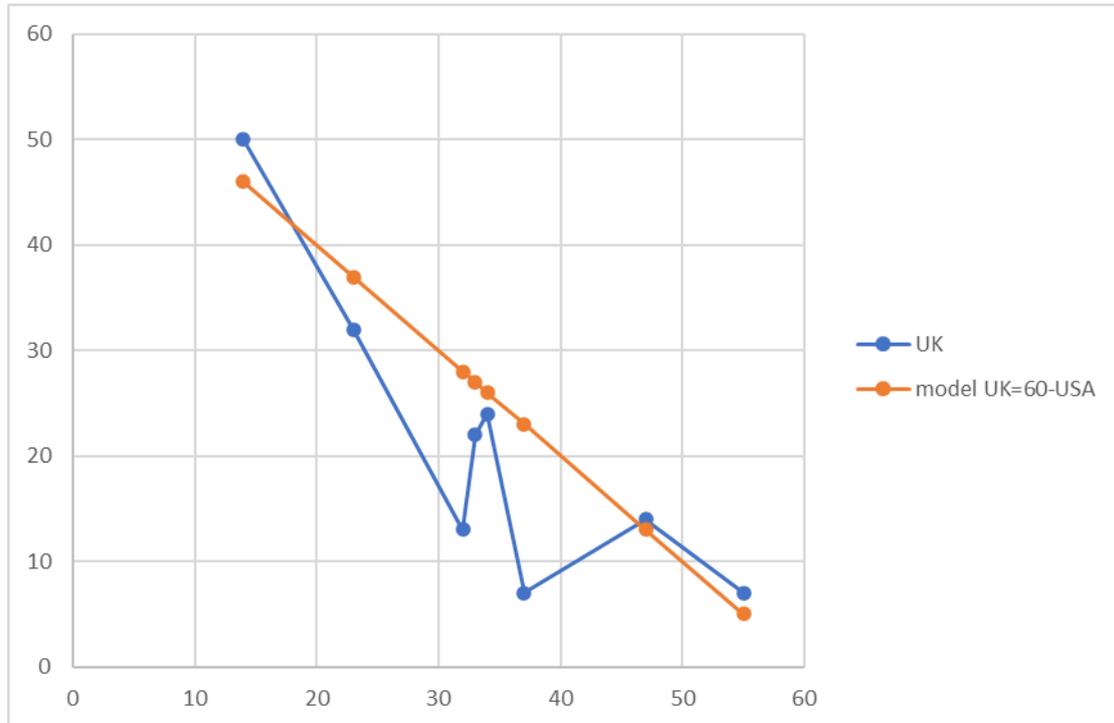
Figure 2 shows that the relationship can be approximated by the indicative equation [1] below. Six countries are close to this line. Two countries, Germany and Finland, are some way below this line.

Note: because percentages add up (over the set of options) to zero, there is necessarily some negative aspect in the relationship between the associated percentage variables.

$$\text{perception of UK} = 60 - \text{perception of USA} \quad [1]$$

Figure 2 The relationship between the perception of the USA and the perception of the UK in relation to which made the most contribution to defeating Germany

percentage saying USA made most contribution



percentage saying USA made most contribution

We now consider the mean opinion across the eight countries. This is given in the last row in Table 1 above. From this we can deduce the opinion in each country relative to the overall mean opinion, the deviation from the mean – see Figure 3.

country deviation from the mean = country percentage – mean percentage

The largest deviation from the mean was Britain’s self-image as making the most contribution.

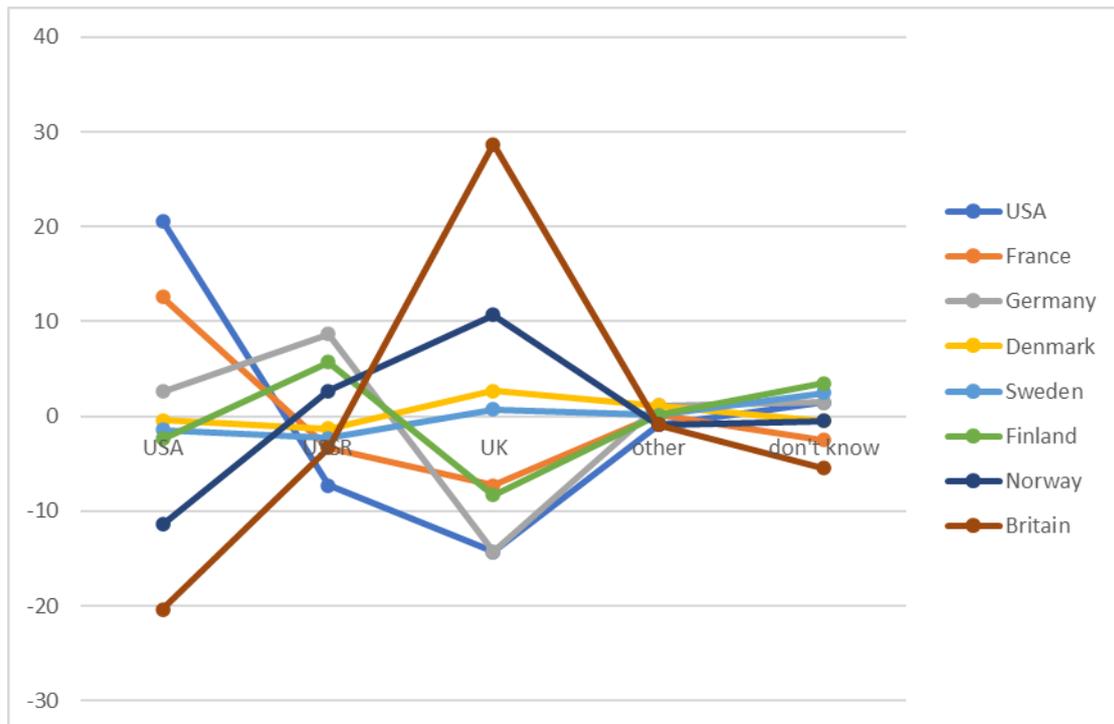
The second largest deviation from the mean was USA’s self-image as making the most contribution.

The third largest deviation from the mean was Britain’s infrequent image of the USA as making the most contribution.

The USSR making the most contribution receives its highest percentage from Germany and two of the Scandinavian countries, Finland and Norway.

Figure 3 .The deviations from the mean, the opinion in each country relative to the overall mean opinion of the country making the most contribution

percentage opinion in sampled countries



country making the most contribution to the defeat of Germany

Figure 3 above takes the mean as the baseline. It shows that the German sample gives above-average percentages for USA and USSR and a much lower than average percentage for Britain. Given that the question asks about the contributions to the defeat of Germany, it may be worthwhile taking the perceptions of the German sample as the baseline.

Relative to the German perception ...

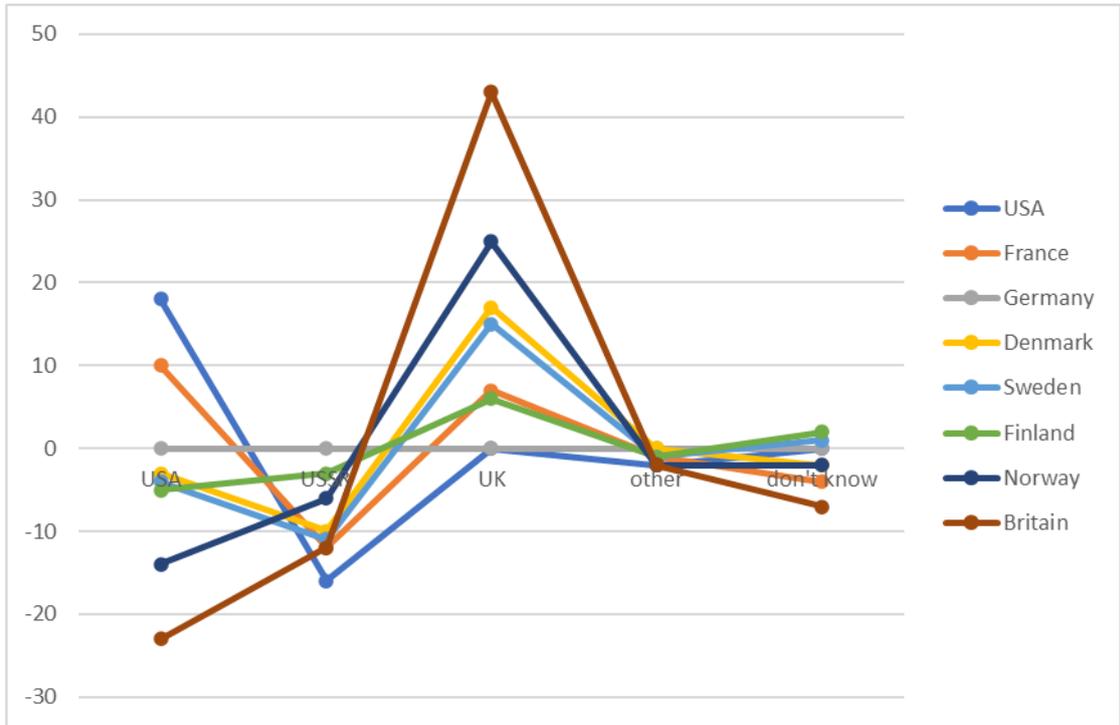
... countries are more likely to perceive Britain as making the most contribution, very strongly so in the case of British perceptions;

... countries are less likely to perceive USSR as making the most contribution, very strongly so in the case of British perceptions, but Norway and Finland each gives a percentage close to the Germany benchmark;

... some countries are more likely and some countries are less likely to perceive the USA as making the most contribution, USA and France being more likely whereas Norway and Britain are less likely.

Figure 4 The deviations from the Germany baseline, the opinion in each country relative to the opinion in Germany of the country making the most contribution

percentage opinion in sampled countries



country making the most contribution to the defeat of Germany