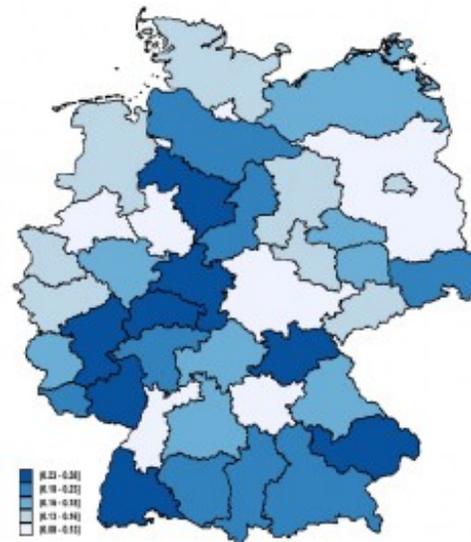


Mapping German Anti-Semitism

by Asya Pereltsvaig

Since 1945, anti-Semitism in Germany went from official policy to taboo, but nonetheless a striking proportion of the German population to this day holds—and confesses to—anti-Jewish views. In a series of “cultural economy” studies, German scholars Nico Voigtländer and Hans-Joachim Voth set out to map and explain spatial patterns in the distribution of anti-Semitic attitudes in Germany. The data in Voigtländer and Voth’s study comes from the German Social Survey (ALLBUS) that examined attitudes towards Jews by asking a battery of questions including: Do you think that Jews partly brought persecution in the 20th century on themselves? Would you mind if you had Jewish neighbors? Would you mind if a Jew married into your family? Should Jews have equal rights? Do Jews have too much influence in the world? Jews are exploiting their victim status for their own financial gain – do you agree? The answers ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree); the segment of the population giving a score of 5, 6, or 7 were considered anti-Semitic.* Interestingly, Voigtländer and Voth have found considerable differences at the regional level, depicted on the map on the left (which shows regional differences for answers to the question of whether Jews are partly responsible for their own persecution). In some areas, only 8% think that the Jews are to blame; in others, 38% think so. While mapping present-day anti-Semitism is in and of itself a worthwhile project, it is the two correlations accounting for the distribution of attitudes across space—discovered by Voigtländer and Voth—that are especially interesting.



The first finding is the persistence of regional patterns: deep-rooted historical attitudes, expressed through voting results for anti-Semitic parties in the late Imperial period (1890-1912), votes for the Nazi Party in the 1920s, and votes for the Nazis in the 1930s, closely correlate with the prevalence of anti-Jewish views held in various districts today. In a different study, the same authors have shown that “the long shadow of the past” is even longer than that: towns that murdered their Jews during the Black Death (1348-1350) were also much more likely to commit violence or engage in anti-Semitic acts in interwar Germany, nearly 600 years later, suggesting that racial hatred can persist over centuries. This is particularly surprising because Germany experienced massive population movements, even if we consider only the 1940s and 1950s: refugees from cities fled the bombing first, then the Eastern expellees flooded into West Germany, and then GDR residents escaped from Communist rule (until the building of the Wall).

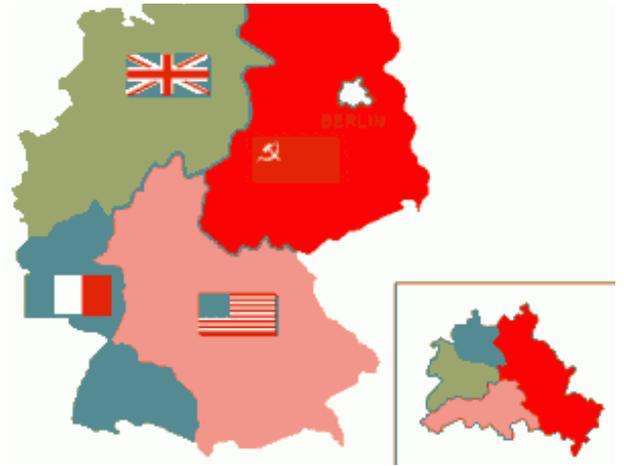


The second and perhaps even more surprising finding concerns the effects of the different approaches to de-Nazification adopted by the four allied countries during the



post-war occupation of Germany. As Nico Voigtländer and Hans-Joachim Voth put it:

“The American authorities ran a highly ambitious and punitive programme which resulted in many incarcerations and convictions, with numerous, low-ranking officials banned and punished. Citizens were confronted with German crimes, forced to visit concentration camps, and attend education films about the Holocaust. There was a considerable backlash, and perceived fairness was low. The Jewish Advisor to the American Military Government concluded in 1948 that “... if the United States Army were to withdraw tomorrow, there would be pogroms on the following day.” In contrast, the British authorities pursued a limited and pragmatic approach that focused on major perpetrators. Public support was substantial, perceived fairness was higher, and intelligence reports concluded that the population even wanted more done to pursue and punish Nazi officials.”



So which policy was more effective in curbing anti-Jewish sentiment in the long run? According to Voigtländer and Voth, “the former British zone today has by far the least anti-Semitic beliefs... The American zone, on the other hand, has strong levels of support for anti-Jewish views”. Admittedly, the correlation are not visually apparent from a comparison of the anti-Semitism map at the top of this post and the map of occupying powers, as one has to control for pre-1945 differences. The backlash against the harsher U.S. policies may seem counterintuitive at first, but several younger Germans have expressed similar attitudes to me in personal conversations: “Enough with all of this Holocaust education and the talk about how bad the Germans were. We are fed up with it.”

*As the authors of the study correctly point out, because of the anathema nature of anti-Semitism in post-war Germany, “the fact that some people confess to it to the extent that they do, even in front of an interviewer who might elicit responses that are widely approved, suggests that privately-held views are probably even more anti-Jewish”.