

Majority of Americans Believe Fall of Berlin Wall was Beginning of New World Order

Americans split on if fall of Berlin Wall has reduced threat of nuclear war

New York, N.Y. — November 10, 2009 — Twenty years ago people around the globe woke up to a different world as the previous day's events finally sunk in – the Berlin Wall had really come down. Freedom was real for the citizens of Eastern Europe and there was hope that maybe, just maybe, the world was becoming a safer place. That the Cold War and the threat of nuclear war were going to go away. The knowledge that Germany was going to be reunified was perhaps scary for some, but overall became considered a very good thing.

In fact, looking back at this historic day, three-quarters of Americans (75%) say the people of Eastern Europe are much freer now than they were then. In addition, three in five U.S. adults (59%) agree that the fall of the Berlin Wall was the beginning of a "new world order". Also, three-quarters of Americans (72%) say the reunification of what used to be East and West Germany is a good thing with 46% saying it is a very good thing. Just 2% believe it is a bad thing.

These are some of the results of **BBC World News America/ Harris Poll** of 2,116 adults surveyed online between November 3 and 5, 2009 by Harris Interactive.

The Berlin Wall's fall had other implications as well. Just over half of Americans (53%) agree that it made the world a safer place while three in ten (30%) disagree with that statement. The one area where people are divided is with nuclear war. This may have truly signaled the end of the Cold War, but just over two in five Americans (44%) agree that the fall of the Berlin Wall reduced the likelihood of nuclear war compared to just under two in five (39%) who disagree.

When it comes to who is most responsible for the fall of the Berlin Wall, a plurality of Americans (43%) believe it was Ronald Reagan, George Bush, Sr. and pressure from Western countries that was most responsible. Three in ten (30%) however, believe it was the people of Germany and 27% of Americans say Mikhail Gorbachev and like-minded leaders in the Eastern European countries are most responsible. There is also an age difference in opinion on this. Over half of those aged 55 and older (53%) say it was Western leaders and their pressure that was most responsible. Two in five of those aged 18-34 (40%) believe it were the German people themselves and those 35-44 and 45-54 years old (33% and 29%, respectively) are more likely to believe leaders in the East were most responsible for the fall of the Berlin Wall.

While it is an important change, the fall of the Berlin Wall may not be the most important change over the past twenty years. When asked which is the most important change over the past twenty years, the break-up of the Berlin Wall and the liberation of Eastern Europe or the growth of terrorism, over three-quarters of Americans (77%) say terrorism while 23% believe it is the liberation of Eastern Europe.

TABLE 1
FALL OF THE BERLIN WALL – 20 YEARS LATER

"The Berlin Wall fell 20 years ago, and it was followed by the break-up of the Soviet Union and the real independence of the countries in Eastern Europe. Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements."

Base: All adults

	AGREE (NET)	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	DISAGREE (NET)	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree	Not at all sure
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
The people of Eastern Europe are much freer now than they were then	75	36	39	12	9	3	13
It was the beginning of a "new world order."	59	18	41	24	15	9	17
This has made the world a safer place.	53	15	38	30	21	9	17
It has reduced the likelihood of nuclear war	44	12	32	39	23	15	17
It was "the end of history."	24	8	15	59	23	37	17

Note: Percentages may not add up exactly to 100% due to rounding.

TABLE 2
REUNIFICATION OF GERMANY

"Overall, how do you feel about the reunification of what used to be East and West Germany?"

Base: All adults

	Total	By Age			
		18-34	35-44	45-54	55+
	%	%	%	%	%
GOOD (NET)	72	66	70	71	81
A very good thing	46	41	43	44	53
A somewhat good thing	27	25	27	27	28
BAD (NET)	2	2	3	3	2
A somewhat bad thing	2	1	2	2	2
A very bad thing	1	1	1	1	1
Not sure	25	32	27	26	17

Note: Percentages may not add up exactly to 100% due to rounding.

TABLE 3
WHO'S MOST RESPONSIBLE FOR FALL OF THE BERLIN WALL

"There are many people and groups who helped contribute to the fall of the Berlin Wall. While all may have played a role, which one of the following do you think is most responsible for it coming down?"

Base: All adults

	Total	By Age			
		18-34	35-44	45-54	55+
	%	%	%	%	%
Ronald Reagan, George Bush, Sr. and pressure from Western countries	43	35	36	42	53
The people of Germany	30	40	31	29	21
Mikhail Gorbachev and like-minded leaders in the Eastern European countries	27	25	33	29	25

Note: Percentages may not add up exactly to 100% due to rounding.

TABLE 4
MOST IMPORTANT CHANGE OF THE LAST 20 YEARS

"Of these, which do you think is the most important change over the last 20 years?"

Base: All adults

	Total	By Age			
		18-34	35-44	45-54	55+
	%	%	%	%	%
The break-up of the Soviet Union and the liberation of Eastern Europe	23	31	28	20	16
The growth of terrorism	77	69	72	80	84

Note: Percentages may not add up exactly to 100% due to rounding.

Methodology

This **BBC World News America/Harris Poll** was conducted online within the United States November 3 and 5, 2009 among 2,116 adults (aged 18 and over). Figures for age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, region and household income were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents' propensity to be online.

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including sampling error, coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments. Therefore, Harris Interactive avoids the words "margin of error" as they are misleading. All that can be calculated are different possible sampling errors with different probabilities for pure, unweighted, random samples with 100% response rates. These are only theoretical because no published polls come close to this ideal.

Respondents for this survey were selected from among those who have agreed to participate in Harris Interactive surveys. The data have been weighted to reflect the composition of the adult population. Because the sample is based on those who agreed to participate in the Harris Interactive panel, no estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated

These statements conform to the principles of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.

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