

What Is the Real Reason for the Ending of McCarthyism?

Jintao Wang^{1,a,*}

¹Department of foreign languages, Huazhong University of Science and Technology, Wuhan, 430000, China

a. Wjt030720@163.com

*corresponding author

Abstract: This work mainly focuses on finding the truth of why McCarthyism fell from grace 1954, which is still debatable in the historical academia these days. Although some historians like Nathan Glazer and Alia Hoyt, both of whom study McCarthyism, believe that it is the McCarthy Hearing that lead to the downfall of McCarthy, based on the analyses of several prime sources as well as secondary sources, McCarthy's blunder in going after American military is the actual real reason. Even if the reality of McCarthy's downfall may not be helpful to the current American society, as the ending of McCarthyism-a vital part of the American human right movement, exploring and studying it is of great benefit to have a better understanding of how different social classes respectively influence the process of the human right movement, especially the role of government, which is seen as the first driving force for the rise and fall of McCarthyism for the first time.

Keywords: McCarthyism, Eisenhower, military, human right movement

1. Introduction

Joseph McCarthy is one of the most famous U.S. Senators of the 20th century. Like many Americans, he was vigorously anti-Communist, and was paranoid about Communist influence. His rise, then, is not surprising. But what is more surprising is his fall. Why, in 1954, did McCarthy fall from grace? The answer to this question tells us a great deal about Cold War America, including that of the human right. In this paper I'll try to justify it is Joseph McCarthy's big mistake in going after the American Military that lost him the support of both president Eisenhower and American people rather than the McCarthy hearing.

McCarthy dominated the US political climate in the early 1950s-a period that the fear of communism fueled following the Cold War tension through his sensational but unproven charges of communist subversion in high government circles, schools, broadcasts and so on. He obtained the chairmanship of the Committee on Government Operations of the Senate and of its permanent subcommittee on investigations from 1952. After that, his popularity soared, even reached the second most powerful man in Eisenhower government since 1953.

2. Secondary sources analyses

This topic is studied by multiple historians in the past explaining the reason why McCarthyism lost the support from the public sentiment, the historians Alia Hoyt and Schwarz respectively studied the subsequent reports and minute of the McCarthy hearing, thinking that it's the McCarthy hearing that

make American citizens know of the recklessness, bully tactics and impotence against challenge resulted in the downfall from prominence [1,2]. At the same time, Historians Nathan Glazer, Anthony Lewis and Sam Tanenhaus also believed that the McCarthy's poor performance in the hearing cause the doom of McCarthyism in public by citing words from Oshinsky, a commentator and Wisconsin newspapers.[3]

But both of them neglect a very important fact is that, before the hearing, the general sentiment has altered dramatically [4]. In other words, the hearing is the final step make McCarthy humiliated around the whole country, rather than the core reasons of it.

3. Primary sources analyses

To complete my research, I am going to compare the report commenting on the poll of the attitudes towards McCarthyism in 1953 (Figure 1) with that remarking the poll the attitudes towards McCarthyism in 1954 (Figure 2) to find out the variation of people's opinion after McCarthy's investigation to American army, which other historians studying the same topic don't pay attention to.

The first sources the writer will focus on are two reports mentioned in the beginning of fifth paragraph. In this group of sources, it is clear to see that the ratio of unfavorable opinion toward McCarthy suffered great increase—from 30 percent to 42 percent after his charge to American army, even if it shortly plummeted in January 1954, the rate of people who showed negative attitudes once again surged since March 1954. Until the very day-around twenty days before the McCarthy hearing the poll was published, it had peaked 46 percentage. [5-6] In other words, the general sentiment started its dramatic change just after McCarthy's attempts going after American army rather than after the hearing.

The Gallup Poll

The Public Appraises McCarthy

By George Gallup

Director, American Institute of Public Opinion

HOW DOES the public appraise the activities of Wisconsin's Sen. Joseph McCarthy today?

A Coast-to-Coast survey by the Institute reveals these highlights:

1. Sentiment today is about evenly divided pro and con among those who have formed an opinion about Sen. McCarthy.

2. The weight of sentiment holds that, at this point, his Senate Permanent Investigating Committee has accomplished more good than harm.

3. On the other hand, by a 2-to-1 ratio among those who have formed an opinion, the public disapproves of Sen. McCarthy's methods.

INTERVIEWERS asked everyone in the survey:

"Do you have an opinion about Sen. Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin?"

As a rule, the public does not follow closely the records and statements of individual Senators.

But in the case of Sen.

McCarthy, 43 percent hold definite opinions about his activities—a remarkable figure in polling annals. In fact, the number of persons having an opinion about McCarthy is up 6 points from two years ago.

THOSE PERSONS who said they had formed an opinion were then asked:

"What is your opinion of Sen. McCarthy?"

Among the 43 percent who had formed an opinion, sentiment is about evenly divided, as the following table shows:

Favorable to McCarthy	19%
Unfavorable	22
Neutral	2

The third question:

"Do you think his investigating committee has accomplished more good than harm—or more harm than good?"

More good than harm	21%
More harm	17
No opinion	5

Whether your opinion of the net accomplishment of the McCarthy committee up to now has been more harmful than helpful depends to a great extent on the amount of edu-

cation you have had and on your political affiliation.

THE FINAL QUESTION in today's survey:

"Do you approve or disapprove of the methods used by McCarthy?"

Approve	13%
Disapprove	25
No opinion	5

Among persons who classify themselves as Republicans, the survey found a higher vote of approval of the Senator's methods than among Democrats or Independents.

THE SURVEY also finds that the more education a person has had the more likely he is to disapprove of the methods used by the Wisconsin Senator.

Here is the vote by education levels and by politics of those who had formed an opinion on McCarthy:

	Col.	High	Grade
	lege	School	School
Approve	19%	13%	10%
Disapprove	45	28	13
No opinion	6	5	4

	Rep.	Dem.	Ind.
Approve	20%	8%	13%
Disapprove	22	27	29
No opinion	6	4	6

Figure 1: The first report issued on April 12th 1953 showed that the majority of American appraised McCarthy.

Source: "The public appraises McCarthy", The Washington Post, April 12 1953

Poll Reverses McCarthy Rating

By George Gallup

Director, American Institute of Public Opinion.

SENATOR JOSEPH McCarthy has lost a good deal of popular support in the last three weeks.

A coast-to-coast survey just completed by the Institute finds the number of people expressing unfavorable opinions toward the Wisconsin Senator outnumber those expressing favorable opinions by a ratio of 46 to 38 percent, while 16 percent hold no opinion.

This is virtually the reverse of the findings reported three weeks ago.

At that time, the Institute found favorable opinions outnumbered unfavorable opinions by a ratio of 46 to 36 percent, while 18 percent held no opinion.

During this three-week period, the most important event undoubtedly has been the exchange of charges between

Senator McCarthy and the Army over the case of Pvt. G. David Schine.

TO FIND OUT what the country thinks about the Wisconsin Senator today, the Institute had interviewers in all sections of the country question a representative sample of the voting population. The sample was selected to include persons in all walks of life.

Here is the trend since June, 1953:

	Favorable	Unfavorable	No Opin.
June, 1953	35%	30%	35%
Aug., 1953	34	42	24
Jan., 1954	50	29	21
Mar., 1954	46	36	18
TODAY	38	46	16

Today's survey is the first time since August of last year that the weight of sentiment Nation-wide toward Senator McCarthy has been on the unfavorable side.

At that time, McCarthy's stock went down following the Matthews incident and charges of infiltration of the clergy and the teaching profession by Communists.

THE LATEST SURVEY finds the Senator has lost popularity among all major population groups.

Of particular interest is the

fact that the greatest loss of support comes from persons in the lower education levels.

Up to now, the weight of sentiment among those who attended high school and grade school has been on the favorable side, while those who attended college have consistently been on the unfavorable side.

Today, a majority of college-trained voters disapprove of the Senator and the weight of sentiment among the high school and grade school group also is on the unfavorable side, as the following table shows:

	Favorable	Unfavorable	No Opin.
College	38%	54%	8%
High school	40	47	13
Gr. school	35	40	25

Other survey highlights:

There has been an 11-point drop in McCarthy's popularity among rank-and-file GOP voters, who divide today as follows: Favorable, 50 percent; unfavorable, 35 percent, and no opinion, 15 percent. Three weeks ago the comparable figures were: Favorable, 61 percent; unfavorable, 25 percent, and no opinion, 14 percent.

Among Catholics there has been a 10-point drop in the Senator's popularity, while among Protestants there has been an 8-point drop.

Catholics vote today as follows: Favorable, 46 percent; unfavorable, 41 percent, and no opinion, 13 percent.

The vote of Protestants: Favorable, 37 percent; unfavorable, 46 percent, and no opinion, 17 percent.

Geographically speaking, McCarthy's greatest loss of support in the last three weeks shows up in the Far West.

Figure 2: The second report issued on April 4th 1954 showed that the support rate of McCarthy suffered great drop in since the August, 1953

Source: "Poll Reserves McCarthy Rating", The Washington Post and Time Herald, April 4, 1954

And then look closely at the source, there are plenty of quotations that can support writer's thesis statement, for instance, at the start of the report in 1954, the reporter pointedly showed that "McCarthy lost a great deal of popular support in the past three weeks, after his charge to American army" [6]. Additionally, at the paragraph that capitalized the phrase "latest survey", the reporter clearly indicates that "the senator has lost popularity among all major population group, especially those persons from lower education levels following the Matthews incident and charges of infiltration of the clergy and the teaching profession by communists" [6]

The second source we are going to pay attention to is a report by Joseph Alsop on June 17, 1953, headlining "Matter of Fact-McCarthy is beaten". Though this incident fell before McCarthy's investigation to the army in August, 1953, there is a point that has indirectly implied Eisenhower's complete discredit to McCarthy after his attempt to investigate the army.

That point is at the beginning of the first paragraph, showing that "the Administration strategists are still seeking to preserve the meaningless façade of republican unity and allowed McCarthy to conceal his defeat behind a typical smoke-screen of misleading statement" [7] From this sentence, it indicated that even if the president Eisenhower and McCarthy outbroke confrontation in the case of

William Bundy, the core official of the CIA and “has found courage to meet a McCarthy challenge head on” at last [6], Eisenhower had no intention to abort the unity with McCarthy. That may be because, according to the words from Ike, the president himself, Eisenhower hoped to use indirect approach to juggle the peace of his team and counterbalance of McCarthy and his allies all the time rather than battle with him right [8]. Therefore, the only possible reason that let Eisenhower give up his support to McCarthy is his action in charging with the American army- as it truly violated the redline of Eisenhower, who firmly believed that military is crucial in keeping the peace and property [9], to say nothing about his special relationship with the American army as well as the backup from military making him win the election. Just as what Ike mentioned, “I had no choice but to fight back.” [8]

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, it is McCarthy’s attempt to charge American army that disappointed American people and Eisenhower, as well as his final downfall. Honestly speaking, the whole process of the ouster of McCarthy as well as his McCarthyism is very ironic. That is because, the McCarthyism should become more popular when he was going after regular people, the group that really suffered great trauma and violation in human right. In contrast, this very cruel idealism was instantly abolished, coupled with the doom of McCarthy’s career, as soon as he tried to trespass Eisenhower’s redline- American army. Perhaps in the 21st century, the study or research about the reality of McCarthy’s downfall isn’t useful to the American development, from the writer’s perspective, it does matter in many other aspects: The first is in discovery of why some people claim that human rights is coming to a close, especially in the era that the popularity of anti-communism, nationalism and right-wing once again upsurged, while the last time those ridiculous idealism being the mainstream of American society is in the McCarthyism era. The second but the most important is in exploration of American government’s contribution to the human right advancement. Just as the writer mentioned before, the downfall of McCarthy was completely fulfilled by the will of Eisenhower, who felt threat because of McCarthy’s aggression and then made up his mind to take actions to sanction McCarthy. In a country that claimed democratic and equal since its foundation, Eisenhower’s authoritarian acts should have such great power in influencing the progress of American human right movement, which doubtless became a special phenomenon in the American government, that is worth being further studied to shed new lights on important figures of American government’s role for the development of American human right, ignoring by historians in a way.

References

- [1] Alia Hoyt, “How McCarthyism Worked”, *howstuffworks* (n.d), available here: <http://history.howstuffworks.com/historical-figures/mccarthyism.htm> Schwarz
- [2] Chwarz, Frederic D. “1954: The Demagogue’s Downfall.” *American Heritage*. Nov/Dec 2004, available here: <https://www.americanheritage.com/content/1954-demaogues-downfall>
- [3] Nathan Glazer, Anthony Lewis, Sam Tanenhaus, “Have You No Sense of Decency?” *McCarthyism 50 Years Later*, *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, Vol. 57, No.3(Spring, 2004) pp 22
- [4] Hudson.M. “Why did Joseph McCarthy’s influence decline?”, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, September 9, 2019, available here: <https://www.britannica.com/story/why-did-joseph-mccarthys-influence-decline>
- [5] George Gallup, “The public appraises McCarthy” *The Washington Post* (1923-1954), Apr 12, 1953, pg B5
- [6] George Gallup, “Poll Reserves McCarthy Rating”, *The Washington Post and Time Herald* (1954-1959), April 4, 1954, pg B5
- [7] Joseph Alsop, “McCarthy Is Beaten”, *The Wahington Post* (1923-1954): July 17, 1953, pg 25
- [8] Miller Center, University of Virginia, “McCarthyism And The Red Scare”, available here: <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/educational-resources/age-of-eisenhower/mccarthyism-red-scare>
- [9] Angry staff officer, “The Real Point Of Eisenhower’s Warning About The Military-Industrial Complex”, *TASK&PURPOSE*, January 15, 2016, available here: <https://taskandpurpose.com/history/the-real-point-of-eisenhowers-warning-about-the-military-industrial-complex>