

OMGUS Summary of Trends in German Public Opinion (December 17, 1947)

Abstract

The mood of the population in the American occupation zone declined over the course of 1946 and 1947. Difficult economic conditions meant that food and clothing were a central concern of growing numbers of Germans. On the whole, people preferred economic security to political freedom. Trust in local authorities and their leadership declined, as did trust in America's willingness to help and in Allied cooperation.

Source

Sample: not specified.

Interviewing dates: between November 1945 and late 1947. (6 pp.)

Food. In November 1945, 20 per cent of the population mentioned food as their chief source of concern. This figure held, on the average, until March 1946 when it rose to 30 per cent – following a cut in food rations – and then to 40 per cent where it remained until February 1947; by the end of 1947 it had risen still higher, to 50 per cent. In Berlin the situation was consistently worse, with the figures rising from 52 per cent in March 1946 to a high of 74 per cent in July 1947, just before the harvest, and then back down to 57 per cent at the end of the year, following the harvest.

Fuel. Concern about fuel closely followed seasonal needs, dropping to almost nothing in the summer, rising sharply in September, and with the peak in February. In AMZON, however, this peak was 14 per cent whereas in Berlin during the same winter the figure was 41 per cent.

Other Worries. Mentions of clothing and shoe shortages rose, with eight per cent citing this in 1945 but 35 per cent concerned about it by 1947. The percentage concerned about prisoners of war decreased. Financial worries increased slightly.

Politics. In the fall of 1945, 69 per cent of the population held political meetings to be desirable but, by August 1947, the number responding in this way had dropped to 45 per cent. Local government officials did not maintain the confidence of the people: Whereas in August 1946, 42 per cent thought they were doing their jobs well, only half as many (22%) gave them the same credit in October 1947. In 1945, 62 per cent said that they felt these officials were working for the good of the community, but by late 1947 only 45 per cent felt that this was the case. The number feeling that the jobs were being done for selfish reasons rose from 12 to 42 per cent.

Loss of confidence in the Americans also occurred. In August 1947, 44 per cent of the people said that they thought the United States was helping in the reconstruction of Germany; in November 1945, however, this positive attitude had been expressed by 70 per cent of the people. Confidence in Allied cooperation deteriorated radically as well: In January 1946, 15 per cent were pessimistic on this count; by the fall of 1947 the figure had risen to 70 per cent.

Confidence in news sources also declined, from a high of 75 percent reporting daily in January 1946 that they read a newspaper to 55 per cent saying they did so in the fall of 1947.

Concomitant with the loss of confidence in the Allies was a consistent reduction in the number of persons who would choose communism over National Socialism if forced to pick one: In the fall of 1945, 35 percent of the people said that they would take communism; in late 1947 only four per cent made this choice. Those saying “neither” tripled during this time from 22 to 66 per cent.

One figure that remained constant was the number of people (62%) who said they preferred economic security to guarantees of certain civil liberties.

Source: A.J. Merritt and R.L. Merritt, eds., *Public Opinion in Occupied Germany, The OMGUS Surveys*. Urbana, IL 1970, pp. 191–92.

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