

OMGUS Survey of Trends in German Public Opinion (1945–47)

Abstract

Between October 1945 and April 1947, the Americans conducted a series of interviews involving more than 75,000 individuals. The interviews were held in the American zone and in the American and British sectors of Berlin. The interviews covered a range of topics from economic affairs to politics to the future of Germany.

Source

Trends in German Public Opinion

Sample: the number of respondents varied from 365 in the first survey to 3,500 interviewed in April 1947; the total number of persons interviewed was more than 75,000 in the American Zone and in the American and British Sectors of Berlin.

Interviewing dates: from 26 October 1945 to 7 April 1947 during which time forty complete studies of the American Zone were made as well as an additional 23 surveys of smaller size and in limited areas. (43 pp.)

This report summarizes in graphic form major trends of German opinion in the American occupied areas, covering seven major issues: economic affairs, food, the occupation, Nuremberg Trials, media, politics, and reorientation.

Economic Affairs. The proportion of the population who said that their incomes were adequate remained constant between November 1945 and July 1946 but then began to decline. General opinion that prices would rise increased sharply between January and June 1946; half the population believed that anti-inflationary measures would not succeed. In December 1945 nearly eight in ten people thought that conditions would improve within six months whereas in April 1947 only 45 per cent held this view. Confidence in the continued value of the *Reichsmark* suffered a constant decline after April 1946, when 54 per cent had such confidence; by October 1946, 43 per cent thought that its value would drop. Confidence in both Allied money and the German *Reichsmark* declined between April and October 1946, with over half saying that they saw no difference between the two.

Food. Although there was extensive complaining about the rationing of food, almost everyone agreed that the ration card system was being handled justly, with only a slight decrease between November 1945 and May 1946 from 93 to 88 per cent. Belief that the food ration was larger in some zones than in others gained less support in May 1946 (47%) than it did in March (60%). Between November 1945 and April 1947 people spoke of being worried about food more than about any other matter. Urban residents were three times as likely to mention it as were rural people; the latter, in turn, were twice as likely to complain about the lack of clothing and shoes as were city dwellers.

The Occupation. In November 1945, 70 per cent of those interviewed in AMZON said that the American occupation forces had furthered the reconstruction of Germany; by September 1946 this proportion had shrunk to 44 per cent of the population. At the same time there was a steady increase in the size of the group without an opinion on the issue and, in the last two surveys, there was a sharp increase in the proportion saying that the Americans were hindering that reconstruction.

Nuremberg Trials. A heavy majority of about eight in ten persons felt that the trials were conducted justly. Readership of newspaper reports concerning the trials declined from a high of eight in ten persons in January 1946 to 65 per cent in March 1946, and then rose once again to the original figure on the day following publication of the verdicts. As the trials progressed, waning confidence in the completeness and trustworthiness in the newspaper reports was displayed; nonetheless, even at the lowest point, seven in ten people were satisfied with the integrity and detail of the reports.

Media. The number of regular newspaper readers among AMZON residents declined 13 percentage points between January and October 1946, when it reached 63 per cent. Three surveys conducted between January and December 1946 revealed that slightly more than one-half of the population were radio listeners.

Politics. Claimed political interest rose gradually between October 1945 and June 1946 and then dropped off sharply, following the conclusion of general elections. The proportion of people considering political meetings to be worthwhile rose from 60 to 72 per cent between November 1945 and March 1946. In AMZON, until mid-summer 1946, the CDU/CSU enjoyed about 40 per cent plurality of membership or preference over other parties, with the SPD in second place, favored by about 30 per cent. Later studies revealed that while the SPD did not make any substantial gain, the CDU/CSU suffered a loss of about ten per cent of its following, with most of the defectors saying that they no longer favored any party. Less than one in ten supported the LDP/DVP and between two and three per cent favored the KPD. In Bavaria, the CSU was the foremost party (about 40 per cent); the SPD was second with about three in ten; about one-fourth of the people preferred no party; the KPD and the LDP each held about five per cent of the population; and the WAV claimed three to four per cent. In Berlin, from a low point of 36 per cent in the spring of 1946, the SPD increased its following to 68 per cent by December 1946; less than two in ten expressed a preference for the CDU; and very few people indicated that they had no party preference.

Reorientation. Although about 35 per cent of the population felt that the occupation was a humiliation, about 55 per cent did not think so. In the course of eleven surveys made between November 1945 and December 1946, an average of 47 per cent of the people thought that National Socialism was a good idea, badly carried out; 41 per cent said that it was a bad idea; 12 per cent held no opinion. The percentage of persons indicating satisfaction with the denazification process decreased from 57 per cent in March 1946 to 34 per cent in December 1946. The proportion of the German population indicating a preference for neither communism nor National Socialism rose from 22 per cent to 66 per cent between November 1945 and November 1946. Those favoring communism decreased in number, those favoring National Socialism remained constant, and a considerable decrease was noted in the number of those holding no opinion. About seven in ten said that the Germans were not responsible for the war. Approximately one in three people indicated that they were troubled by rumors, with the most frequently heard rumor being that of an impending war with the Soviet Union. Only half the respondents said that they considered themselves sufficiently well informed about political events. A majority of AMZON residents felt that the best way to achieve the reconstruction of Germany was through "hard work." Between ten and 15 per cent hoped for a new strong Fuehrer and/or the rebirth of the old national spirit.

Source: A. J. and R. L. Merritt, *Public Opinion in Occupied Germany. The OMGUS Surveys*. Urbana, IL, 1970, pp. 160-63.

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