

OMGUS Survey of Trends in German Public Opinion (1945–48)

Abstract

Between October 1945 and January 1948, the Americans carried out opinion polls in their occupation zone and in West Berlin on general trends in politics, the economy, and society. The results showed that more and more people regarded the supply situation as critical. Only about half of Germans had an adequate income. Germans continued to show signs of political apathy and many exhibited a lack of interest in obtaining regular information about the political situation. Among the parties, the Christian Democrats were losing support, while the conservative LDP/DVP was gaining ground. The percentage of Germans who did not fundamentally reject National Socialism remained high, and the willingness to accept responsibility for the war was declining. In the face of negative developments in the Soviet occupation zone, the rejection of Communism, on the other hand, was growing stronger. In equal measure, both the native population and newcomers regarded the expulsion of the Germans from Eastern Europe as unjust. The majority of Germans no longer believed that the occupation would lead to a unified Germany or that the Allies were cooperating. Confidence in Allied efforts to rebuild Germany was generally on the decline, and confidence in the U.S. recovered only after the announcement of comprehensive economic aid within the framework of the Marshall Plan. Most Germans expected that the U.S. would be the world's most influential power in the years ahead.

Source

Trends in German Public Opinion

Sample: the number of respondents varied from 365 in the first survey to 4,000 interviewed in January 1948; the total number of persons interviewed was over 16 million in the American Zone and West Berlin.

Interviewing dates: from October 26, 1945 to January 5, 1948 during which time more than fifty full-scale surveys were conducted. (43 pages)

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

Reorientation. In surveys conducted in 1947, an average of 52 per cent accepted National Socialism as a good idea badly carried out; this was a rise of five percentage points over the previous year but only two points higher than it had been in 1945. If forced to choose between communism and National Socialism, a plurality preferred the former in 1945, most people rejected both in 1946, and by 1947, although the "neither" category remained large, more chose National Socialism, and almost no one picked communism. Two years after the war's end, the number of Germans willing to assume responsibility for their country's part in bringing on the war continued a downward trend. About four in ten AMZON Germans felt that some races are more fit to rule than others.

Whereas before January 1948 over half the public had accepted the right of communists to speak on the radio, after this date only a little more than a third did so. From the outset, large majorities of AMZON Germans said that, if they had to choose, they would prefer a government guaranteeing jobs rather than one that promoted personal liberty.

Politics. The number of Germans who claimed to be informed about politics continued to drop after 1947 and the number of people who did not wish to see their sons enter politics remained at over 75 per cent. In all surveys, about a third of the people said that they thought about politics, with the rest leaving this task to "the others." In early 1947 a high of 72 per cent said that they thought political meetings were of value, but by the end of that year the figure had dropped to 45 per cent; in early 1948 it had again risen, but only to 58 per cent. Confidence in the motives of local German officials showed a definite downward trend; disenchantment with the performance of these officials was also growing.

Throughout AMZON, the CDU/CSU lost half the popular support it had enjoyed in the fall of 1945. Meanwhile the LDP/DVP gained, particularly in Wuerttemberg-Baden. At the same time, the number of people liking none of the parties tripled.

Media. Regular newspaper readership declined between early 1946 and the spring of 1947, leveling off at about half the AMZON population; in West Berlin about three-quarters claimed to be regular readers. In January 1948, 56 per cent of the AMZON population were regular or occasional radio listeners; more than four in ten consistently claimed to be nonlisteners. In January 1948 only 47 per cent felt that they were getting more accurate news coverage than during the war; the "no opinion" replies rose sharply from 22 per cent in January 1947 to 49 per cent in January 1948. In early 1946, 50 per cent of the AMZON public felt that newspaper coverage was more complete than that given on the radio; by January 1948 the two were given equal ratings.

The Occupation. Confidence in Allied efforts to rebuild Germany dropped from 43 per cent in September 1946 to only three in ten by January 1948. Confidence in American efforts to rebuild Germany, which had dropped from 70 to 44 per cent between 1945 and 1947, rose to 55 per cent in January 1948, possibly because of the Marshall Plan. No more than a third ever felt that the four powers would cooperate in rebuilding Germany; in early 1948, in fact, less than one in ten held this view.

Between January 1946 and January 1948, there was a sharp increase in pessimism regarding a united Germany as an end product of the occupation, from 71 per cent saying that the Allies would cooperate to 80 per cent saying that they would not.

Ever increasing numbers of Germans said that the United States would be the most influential country in the world throughout the next ten years and that this influence would be toward peace. Almost all who named the Soviet Union saw war as a result. Majority opinion continued to hold that the Americans ought to reconstruct Germany as soon as possible in order to prevent its falling prey to communism.

Economic Affairs. In January 1946, 67 per cent of the AMZON population said that their family incomes were sufficient to meet necessary expenses; two years later, however, only 57 per cent did so. Large majorities in West Berlin claimed that they could not meet living costs. There was no discernible trend in opinions concerning the direction which prices would take. Fluctuations also marked the trend in opinions on the future conditions in AMZON. On the whole, between January 1946 and June 1947 about as many people thought that the *Reichsmark* would not maintain its value as thought it would.

Increasingly large numbers of AMZON residents had come to the conclusion that a local black market existed and was serious. In February 1946, 51 per cent thought that there was no black market but by January 1948, 71 per cent recognized there was; similarly, at the earlier date only 15 per cent felt that it was serious, but by the later date 47 per cent thought so. At the same time, confidence in official efforts to stop the black market decreased sharply, although in early 1948 the trend seemed to be on the upswing once again.

Food. Increasing numbers of people cited food as their chief source of concern, having risen from only 17 per cent in AMZON in 1945 to 53 per cent in 1948. Clothing and shoes followed in importance and the

percentage mentioning them had also increased. Majority opinion in AMZON continued to hold that the ration card system was being handled fairly, although the number thinking so had decreased sharply from 93 per cent in late 1945 to 64 per cent in January 1948. Majorities, often large ones, maintained that they did not get enough food to do their jobs well; in West Berlin the figure was as high as eight in ten.

Expellees. By January 1948, as many as 93 per cent of Germans held the opinion that the expulsions had been unjustified. Both expellees and native residents were almost unanimous in feeling that the expellees would like to return to their homelands. As in the previous year, about half of the AMZON population said that the expellees would get along well with the local residents and about four in ten said that they would not; Hessians were most optimistic on this score, the residents of Wuerttemberg-Baden the most pessimistic. The expellees themselves were less satisfied in January 1948 with their reception in Germany than they had been in the fall of 1946.

Source: A. J. and R. L. Merritt, *Public Opinion in Occupied Germany. The OMGUS Surveys*. Urbana, IL, 1970, p. 210–13.

Recommended Citation: OMGUS Survey of Trends in German Public Opinion (1945–48), published in: German History in Documents and Images, <<https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/occupation-and-the-emergence-of-two-states-1945-1961/ghdi:document-4605>> [May 19, 2024].