

OMGUS Survey on Antisemitism in the American Zone (December 1946)

Abstract

After years of radical antisemitic policies and propaganda by the Nazi regime, many were eager to know whether antisemitic attitudes persisted among Germans. A poll conducted in the American zone and in West Berlin at the end 1946 showed that prejudice against Jews was still quite widespread. Germans with antisemitic attitudes tended to be less well-educated, less well-informed, and more negative toward the Allies. Generally speaking, they still regarded National Socialism as a basically good idea.

Source

Anti-Semitism^[1] in the American Zone

Sample: 3,006 persons in the American Zone and 409 in West Berlin.

Interviewing dates: last two weeks in December 1946. (19 pp.)

Nationalistic sentiment and racism had been shown in earlier surveys to provide a convenient base for anti-Semitism. With an increase in nationalistic feeling and racism, there was more anti-Semitic expression in the American Zone. This survey used a Guttman scale, based on eight questions bearing directly or indirectly on attitudes toward Jews. It distinguished among five groups: those with little bias (20%), nationalists (19%), racists (22%), anti-Semites (21%), and intense anti-Semites (18%).

Different population groups exhibited different amounts of bias. West Berlin was comparatively less biased, with 45 per cent classified as racists, anti-Semites, and intense anti-Semites. Among the *Laender*, Bavaria had fewest in this biased category (59%), followed by Hesse (63%), and Wuerttemberg-Baden (65%). When examined by party preference, those supporting the KPD were least likely to be in the three biased groups (43%). Bias decreased as education increased: 63 per cent of those with seven years of education, compared to 48 per cent of those with 12 years or more of education fell into the biased groups. Those of upper middle or higher socioeconomic status (53%) were less biased than other groups. Professionals were less biased (48%) than other occupational groups. Catholics (61%) were less biased than Protestants (69%); those of both faiths who attended church irregularly (60 per cent Catholics, 57 per cent Protestants), however, were less biased than regular churchgoers. Women were markedly more biased than men: Considering only men and women able to work, 50 per cent of the former and 67 per cent of the latter were classified as racists, anti-Semites, and intense anti-Semites.

Frustration did not seem to play a role in bias. The most intensely anti-Semitic groups were not more seriously troubled by day-to-day difficulties than was the least biased group. A certain amount of apathy did characterize more biased groups. Only 12 per cent of the intense anti-Semites read magazines and less than half (46%) listened to the radio. As the level of bias increased, the proportion of those who knew how denazification was being carried out declined (from 66 per cent among those with little bias to 42 per cent among the intense anti-Semites), as did those who agreed that research had shown that the Germans tortured and murdered millions of helpless Europeans (from 72 to 41 per cent, respectively).

Criticism of the Allies also increased with the level of bias. On the question of Allied limitations on the number and types of industries that Germany could have in the future, the percentage thinking the policy just declined (from 17 per cent among those with little bias to 5 per cent among the intense anti-

Semites), although the percentage declaring it unjust remained roughly constant (72 and 74 per cent, respectively). The percentage satisfied with the way in which denazification was being carried out declined from 35 to 28 per cent, respectively.

Differences were more marked on questions of general orientation. The percentage saying that National Socialism was a bad idea rather than a good idea badly carried out declined from 51 per cent among the least biased to 27 per cent among the intense anti-Semites. Similarly, the proportion denying that it was a national humiliation for Germany to be occupied by foreign powers declined from 67 per cent among the least biased to 43 per cent among the intense anti-Semites.

NOTES

[1] Editorial note: while we use the more current spelling “antisemitism” in our editorial texts, we have retained the original spelling in our sources.

Source: A. J. and R. L. Merritt, *Public Opinion in Occupied Germany. The OMGUS Surveys*. Urbana, IL, 1970, pp. 146–48.

Recommended Citation: OMGUS Survey on Antisemitism in the American Zone (December 1946), published in: German History in Documents and Images, <<https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/occupation-and-the-emergence-of-two-states-1945-1961/ghdi:document-4083>> [July 03, 2025].