OMGUS Survey on Attitudes toward Collective Guilt (December 1946)

Abstract

According to a poll in the American zone, at the end of 1946 a majority of Germans were willing to accept responsibility for the crimes of the Nazi regime or to acknowledge their shared responsibility. Most Germans, however, believed that they were not to blame for the outbreak of World War II, and they maintained that both sides committed war crimes. But no less than a third of respondents refused to accept shared responsibility for the crimes of the Nazi regime or to admit to the millions of murders committed against the peoples of Europe.

Source

Attitudes toward Collective Guilt in the American Zone of Germany

Sample: 3,005 persons in the American Zone.

Interviewing dates: last two weeks of December 1946. (16 pp.)

Respondents in the American Zone were asked seven questions to ascertain their acceptance or rejection of collective guilt for the events of the Nazi era. Scores were computed by totaling the percentages rejecting each of the seven questions. Those scoring zero accepted responsibility on all seven questions; those scoring seven rejected collective responsibility on all seven questions. The median score for the total AMZON population was 3.8. On the whole, there were only slight variations among population groups in their acceptance or rejection of collective guilt. Those most likely to reject guilt were residents of Wuerttemberg-Baden (3.82), the less well-educated (3.83), those aged 30 to 39 (3.85) or 60 years of age or older (3.92), women (3.96), Protestants (3.88), the lowest socioeconomic (3.85) and income (3.90) groups. Intensely anti-Semitic respondents were particularly likely to reject any collective guilt.

On specific questions: 63 per cent felt that the German people were at least partly to blame for acts of the Hitler regime because they had supported that regime; 28 per cent felt that the Germans were to blame for the outbreak of World War II; 68 per cent stated that the harshness of the Versailles Treaty did not give the German people the right to start another war, but 52 per cent said the Versailles Treaty was a cause of the war; 46 per cent denied that Germany had attacked Poland to protect Germans living there; 56 per cent felt that Germany often found itself in a difficult situation because other people had no understanding of Germany; 83 per cent believed that both sides in World War II committed many crimes against humanity and peace; and 59 per cent agreed that Germany had tortured and murdered millions of helpless Europeans.

Source: A. J. and R. L. Merritt, *Public Opinion in Occupied Germany. The OMGUS Surveys*. Urbana, IL, 1970, p. 149.

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