

OMGUS Survey on Political Views (1945–46)

Abstract

This survey of political views was taken in the American zone in the winter of 1945–46; among other findings, it shows that a clear majority of respondents – presumably soured by the negative experiences of the Weimar Republic – wished to limit the number of political parties to three or four. Roughly half of the respondents regarded themselves as sufficiently informed in matters of politics. Sixty percent of those surveyed thought that certain groups of individuals should be banned from entering politics, with former NSDAP members and functionaries being judged most worthy of exclusion. Among those surveyed, former NSDAP members were the least likely to vote in future elections.

Source

Some Political Attitudes Probed on Recent Surveys

Sample: from 364 to 996 American Zone residents.

Interviewing dates: 14 surveys from 26 November 1945 to 15 March 1946. (9 pp.)

A third (33%) of the respondents polled in March 1946 preferred the SPD to other parties then in existence. Asked which party they would choose in the event of a merger between the SPD and the Communist Party, a third of these SPD adherents indicated support for the new party, but 37 per cent said that they would switch either to the CDU (19%) or the CSU (18%), and another three per cent thought that they would support one of the smaller, right-wing parties in that event.

Regarding political awareness, the number feeling that the Germans had learned in recent months how to govern themselves better varied from 61 per cent in January to 47 per cent in March. Roughly half felt themselves sufficiently informed about political affairs; and somewhat over a third of the remainder indicated that, although they were not sufficiently informed, they were making an effort to inform themselves. Only 15 per cent could name an outstanding German who, in their opinion, could hold an important position at the *Land* level.

Regarding political participation, in March only seven per cent claimed membership in a political party, although another 16 per cent indicated their intention to join one. About two-thirds (63%) in March wanted to exclude all but three or four political parties, and as many as 11 per cent wanted to exclude all but one. A solid majority, ranging from 60 per cent in November 1945 to 72 per cent in March 1946, felt that political meetings were desirable. By March as many as 25 per cent of the entire population said that they had attended such a meeting. Three in five respondents (60%) thought that some categories of individuals should not be permitted to enter politics, as opposed to another fifth (20%) favoring no such discrimination: Almost all of those opting for a discriminatory policy listed former NSDAP members or functionaries as the most undesirable. Support for the SPD grew and for the conservative parties (CDU, CSU, LDP) declined with the population size of the town. Of the former NSDAP members, somewhat over a quarter (28%) supported leftist parties (SPD, KPD) in early 1946, almost twice that number (52%) favored conservative parties.

Those least likely to vote in elections taking place in early 1946 were individuals without party affiliation (54%), former Nazi Party members (58%), men (36%), and persons under the age of 30 (45%). Most voters in the January elections were able to give a reason for having voted. Vaguely defined issues were alluded

to by a majority, while a sizable minority said that they had voted merely out of a sense of civic duty (35%) or just to express an opinion once again (4%). Issues referred to indirectly included leadership (23%), reconstruction (12%), interparty rivalry (10%), voting against the Communist Party (5%), and political reorientation (7%).

Source: A. J. and R. L. Merritt, *Public Opinion in Occupied Germany. The OMGUS Surveys*. Urbana, IL, 1970, pp. 71–72.

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