

OMGUS Survey on Public Attitudes toward Denazification (1946–47)

Abstract

Before the end of the war, the Allies had already decided on the “denazification” of the Germans, and they reaffirmed this decision at the Potsdam Conference in August 1945. This poll was conducted in the American occupation zone and in West Berlin at the end of 1946; it showed that a large segment of the German population was well-informed about the implementation and the challenges of the denazification program.

Source

Public Attitudes toward Denazification

Sample: 3,005 adults in the American Zone and 409 in West Berlin.

Interviewing dates: ten-day periods in the months of December 1946, January and February 1947. (10 pp.)

Educational background, and perhaps even more importantly, direct interest in the proceedings affected knowledge about the denazification program. Those in higher socioeconomic groups (64%), the better educated (73%), as well as former NSDAP members (62%) were much more likely than others to know about how denazification was carried out, and much more likely to have heard or read about General Lucius Clay's speech to the *Laenderrat* criticizing the way in which denazification was being carried out. A fifth (21%) were so uninterested or so unaffected by denazification that they held no discernible attitude toward denazification. The general public favored, by a small plurality (36%), the then-current plan, in which Germans carried out denazification under American scrutiny. Nearly as many (30%), however, would have liked to see the Americans assume full responsibility for the program.

Nearly half (47%) of the people had heard or read about General Clay's speech to the *Laenderrat*. Probably because the speech was given in Stuttgart, residents of Wuerttemberg-Baden (56%) were more likely to have heard about it than were Bavarians (45%), Hessians (45%), or West Berliners (37%). Most (72%) of those who had heard about General Clay's speech thought the remarks justified; but few (13%) had observed any change in denazification methods in the first weeks following the speech.

Results of ten separate samplings since November 1945 showed that the percentage satisfied with denazification had declined about 15 per cent, whereas the percentage dissatisfied or expressing no opinion had increased in size. About as many (34%) said in December 1946 that they were satisfied with the way denazification was being carried out as were dissatisfied (32%). About 14 per cent thought the *Spruchkammer* rulings too lenient. A quarter (25%) would have differentiated more clearly between Activists and Followers, between guilty and not guilty. A seventh (14%) would have punished Activists more strictly.

In the American Zone, a majority (62%) opposed both noting former NSDAP membership on identification cards and keeping former NSDAP members from their former jobs. Former NSDAP members were all but unanimous in opposing these measures.

Source: A. J. and R. L. Merritt, *Public Opinion in Occupied Germany. The OMGUS Surveys*. Urbana, IL, 1970, pp. 154–55.

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