

OMGUS Survey: The Public Compares Present and Past Economic Conditions (July 1949)

Abstract

In July 1949, about half of Germans in the American zone assessed their economic conditions more positively than they had a year earlier. The currency reform of June 1948 and Marshall Plan aid from the U.S. contributed to this assessment. Nevertheless, one-fifth of those surveyed still complained about insufficient income and poor economic prospects.

Source

Sample: 3,000 in the American Zone, 500 in West Berlin, and 250 in Bremen.

Interviewing dates: July 1949. (4 pp.)

Most people (48 per cent in AMZON, 57 per cent in West Berlin, and 61 per cent in Bremen) felt that their economic situation was better in July 1949 than it had been a year earlier. Those who felt they were worse off (17 per cent in AMZON and West Berlin, 14 per cent in Bremen) were not any particular, well-defined, cohesive group. To be sure, many more people in the lower income brackets than in the higher brackets said that they were not getting along as well as they had in the previous year. Also, people with grammar schooling only, or those in the lower socioeconomic levels were more likely than the better-educated or upper social groups to make this complaint. But the differences were not usually marked, and in no case did a single group reverse the general trend of attitudes.

People who felt that they were worse off in July 1949 tended to view other related economic issues somewhat more pessimistically than did those who said that they were better off than in the previous year, or than did the AMZON population as a whole. They were inclined to take a bleaker view of future prospects in the American Zone of Occupation, although the plurality view was that conditions would be better. They were also slightly more pessimistic about future prices and the value of the Mark. Their buying expectations were substantially less, and considerably fewer of them claimed that they had enough food to perform their jobs adequately. Finally, many more said that they could not make ends meet with their current incomes.

THE MARSHALL PLAN AND WESTERN GERMANY

Sample: an unspecified number of respondents representing a cross-section of residents of the American Zone, West Berlin, and Bremen.

Interviewing dates: last two weeks of August 1949. (8 pp.)

Large majorities (67 per cent in AMZON, 73 per cent in West Berlin, and 76 per cent in Bremen) felt that economic conditions in West Germany had improved during the previous year. Foreign aid ranked second to currency reform as a voluntarily stated reason for this improvement.

Seven in ten AMZON residents (69%) were aware of American aid to Europe and majorities (53%) could identify this aid program with the name Marshall Plan, ERP, or ECA. Awareness that West Germany and West Berlin were receiving Marshall Plan aid was very extensive (67 per cent of the total population, 97 per cent of those who knew of an American aid plan), particularly among men, the more highly educated,

and the upper socioeconomic groups. Along those aware of ERP, 71 per cent knew that the Soviet Union was not included and 62 per cent knew that the Soviets had not wished to participate.

Marshall Plan aid was generally (84 per cent in AMZON, 94 per cent in West Berlin, and 88 per cent in Bremen) regarded as favorable to West Germany. A minority of AMZON Germans (29%) felt that the United States would use the Marshall Plan to influence political and commercial life in West Germany, and an additional 45 per cent thought that the United States would control the allocation of money and materials without any interference in German affairs; only 17 per cent expected the United States merely to provide the money and materials, leaving their allocation up to the Germans. Few thought that such aid was being given unconditionally. In AMZON 63 per cent felt that the primary motive for giving assistance was United States desire to curb the advance of communism.

Source: A. J. und R. L. Merritt, *Public Opinion in Occupied Germany, The OMGUS Surveys*. Urbana, IL, 1970, pp. 312–13.

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