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OMGUS Survey of Trends in Attitudes toward National Socialism (1945-47)

Despite the lost World War and the spread of information on Nazi crimes, about half of the Germans in the American occupation zone between 1945 and 1947 clung to the National Socialist program and merely criticized its implementation. This attitude was especially prevalent among younger Germans who had spent their formative political years in the “Third Reich,” among Protestants, and among the supporters of the newly founded Liberal Party, which initially served as a catch-all for right-wing forces. By contrast, this view was decidedly rejected in the heavily Catholic area of Bavaria.

Trends in Attitudes toward National Socialism

Sample: unspecified number, representing a cross-section of the adults in the American Zone and the American and British Sectors of Berlin.

Interviewing dates: between November 1945 and August 1947. (5 pp.)

Despite fluctuations, the percentage of Germans describing National Socialism as a good idea badly carried out remained at a fairly high number – starting at 53 per cent in November 1945, dipping to a low of 42 per cent in July 1946, and rising again to 55 per cent by August 1947. Those regarding it as a bad idea rose from 41 per cent in November 1945 to 48 per cent in July 1946 but dropped once more to 35 per cent in August 1947. Another way of describing this trend is to say that, in the period from November 1945 to July 1946, the average number of people who thought National Socialism basically a good idea was 48 per cent; between December 1946 and August 1947 it was 52 per cent.

In July 1947, opinions on this issue were related to attitudes toward democracy, individual liberty as against economic security, and the responsibility of Hitler and his advisers for his acts. People who tended to excuse National Socialism were most ready to pick flaws in the working of democracy (42%), to choose security (70%) rather than liberty (22%), and to throw the blame for Hitler's acts on his advisers (32%) rather than on Hitler himself (25%), with another 37 per cent blaming both.

In August 1947, the population groups containing the largest proportion of persons describing National Socialism as a good idea badly carried out were persons with eight years of education (60%), those under 30 (68%), Protestants (64%), LDP/DVP party adherents (68%). More West Berliners (62%) held this view than Hessians (61%), residents of Wuerttemberg-Baden (60%),

and Bavarians (50%); Bavarians led the list of those who rejected Nazism as a bad idea (38%), followed by West Berliners and Hessians (33%), and residents of Wuerttemberg-Baden (31%).

Source: A. J. and R. L. Merritt, *Public Opinion in Occupied Germany. The OMGUS Surveys*. Urbana, IL, 1970, pp. 171-72.