
MOST GERMANS FEEL SAFE DESPITE TERRORISM

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A new poll suggests that most people in Germany feel a sense of safety, despite the recent terror attack in Berlin. Trust in Germany's intelligence agencies, however, has weakened.

Most Germans have reacted relatively calmly to the recent terror attack in Germany. According to the Infratest Dimap polling institute, 73 percent of those surveyed feel "rather safe," while just 26 percent feel "rather unsafe." The poll was conducted by public broadcaster ARD and newspaper "Die Welt" at the start of the year, just two weeks after the attack in Berlin. Twelve people were killed and around 50 injured when a truck was driven through a crowded Christmas market in the German capital.

Overall, most Germans seem to be much less fearful than many politicians suspect. That is particularly clear for the fear of terrorism threats. The consent for increased video surveillance has actually dropped. There was also a decline in the attentiveness towards suspicious-looking people or objects. And despite the recent criticism of security authorities in the wake of the Berlin attack, most Germans feel sufficiently protected from the threat of terrorist attacks.

Politicians overestimate anxiety of voters

One state authority, which was the subject of a racism discussion at the end of 2016, fared well in the poll: the police. A year ago, following mass sexual assaults in Cologne and other cities, law enforcement was viewed much more critically. Now, that trust has been somewhat regained - 88 percent of people have a "great" or "very great" trust in the police. That is an approval rating that German intelligence authorities can only dream of. More than half of those surveyed had "little" or "absolutely no" trust Germany's domestic (BfV) and foreign (BND) intelligence agencies.

The NSA scandal has not helped the BND's reputation

One can only speculate on the reasons why. It is possible, however, the BfV's connection with the right-wing extremist National Socialist Underground (NSU) group played a part. For the BND, its role in the NSA surveillance scandal did not help its popularity. Nonetheless, confidence in the federal government overall has grown 6 percent.

Refugee crisis the biggest issue

Domestic security and guarding against terrorist threats is only the second most-important issue for German voters. In fact, only 11 percent of those surveyed believe it should be the government's top priority. The number one issue for most people is the refugee crisis. Some 40

percent believe it should be the priority. At the same time, there has been a slight increase in the fear of crime (plus 3 percent) and a drop in job market confidence (minus 10 percent).

In comparison to December, the political sentiment in the country has shifted in favor of the ruling conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and its Bavarian cousins, the Christian Social Union (CSU), as well as for the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD). Both gained two percentage points in the so-called "Sunday Question" ("Which party would you vote for if the national election were on Sunday?"). The center-left Social Democrats (SPD), junior coalition partners with the CDU/CSU, as well as the Greens, saw an equivalent drop in their popularity. The Left party remains at 9 percent, while the liberal Free Democrats (FDP), who dropped out of parliament in the 2013 election, fell by a point to 5 percent.

Another 'Grand Coalition' looks likely

According to the current figures, another so-called "Grand Coalition" between the SPD (which sits at 20 percent) and the CDU/CSU (37 percent) would be possible. Both camps, however, garner little sympathy. A CDU/CSU coalition with the Greens would only be considered if the FDP again failed to clear the 5 percent parliamentary hurdle. An SPD-Greens-Left partnership, meanwhile, sits quite far from a majority at 38 percent support. The populist AfD is left on the outside looking in at 15 percent, as no other party has said it would be willing to make a coalition with them. A three-way coalition between the CDU/CSU, SPD and Greens, however, is theoretically possible.

It is some time until the national election in September, but that has not stopped the parties from focusing on the upcoming vote. Chancellor Angela Merkel, of the CDU, has already announced her candidacy. The SPD will officially unveil its candidate at the end of January, but most expect it to be party leader and current Economy Minister Sigmar Gabriel.

Kaynak/Source: