

# **CHANGE VERSUS CONTINUITY IN WEST GERMAN PUBLIC ATTITUDES ON NATIONAL SECURITY AND NUCLEAR WEAPONS IN THE EARLY 1980s**

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**Abstract** This article first describes trends of a few key data on public opinion on national security in West Germany since 1970, and then examines in some detail the development and structure of public attitudes on NATO's double-track decision and its implementation in the early 1980s. It addresses the problems of measuring such attitudes and interpreting relevant public opinion data in the light of levels of public awareness and of the personal importance of these matters for respondents. In that context, the results of some methodological experiments to ascertain the impact of question formats and wordings on response distributions for defense policy survey items are also presented. Generational replacement and partisan polarization hypotheses to account for the dynamics of these attitudes are compared. The main finding here is that growing dissent among the major parties over missile deployment has played a much greater role in realigning public opinion than has the coming of age of a predominantly antinuclear and antidefense "successor generation."

One of the most ambiguous, imprecise and elusive aspects of security [is] that of the domestic factors influencing defense policies, doctrines and burdens. This . . . subject has generally been unexplored in traditional strategic studies. . . . As long as domestic consensus on these matters existed, there was no real pressure to address them; that idyllic state of affairs no longer exists. An important part of the public in our societies is no longer willing to trust governments or experts or even the media on matters of defense policy. (Bertram, 1983:1)

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## Introduction

Political scientists in the United States have long realized the importance of public opinion on foreign policy and national security (see, e.g., Rosenau, 1961; Russett and Stepan, 1973). In the Federal Republic, on the other hand, there has been little comparable scholarly research for a variety of reasons: First, mass protest against West German rearmament, against its possible nuclear component, and against NATO membership was a transient phenomenon that occurred during a period when the course of the country's postwar foreign policy still had to be defined and consolidated. Second, national security concerns ranked low in public political priorities and debates in the 1960s and 1970s. This statement is not contradicted by the public attention that "Ostpolitik" received after the SPD-FDP government came to power in 1969, because this attention mainly consisted of widespread *support* for the new coalition's goals, and because the national security context of "Ostpolitik" never played a major role. Third, national security debates in the Federal Republic have largely been restricted to the elite level, and even there they have predominantly been reflective of technological and/or doctrinal innovations originating from the United States. Up to the late 1970s the almost complete absence of a national security nonelite "issue public" in West Germany was often lamented, so it is not surprising that public opinion on these issues was rarely polled or analyzed systematically.

According to the above quotation, this "idyllic state of affairs" is gone, the paradise of popular national security consensus "in our societies" has been lost. Like many similar assertions that could be heard in the past couple of years, this refers to many West European nations, not only the Federal Republic. Most such statements proceed from the extent and intensity of protest against NATO's December 1979 double-track decision to negotiate with the USSR about nuclear weapons in Europe and to introduce new American systems (Pershing II and cruise missiles) should these negotiations fail to produce substantial Eastern reductions, and against subsequent preparations for deployment of intermediate-range nuclear forces (INF) in Western Europe. This protest was taken by many observers as an indication of radical change that, depending upon ideological predilections, was interpreted either as a long overdue democratization of defense policy or as a dangerous erosion of its societal foundations.

Regardless of such divergent interpretations, the alleged "revolt of the masses" of the early 1980s made national security analysts in many countries "discover" public opinion and survey research, formerly not central to their attention, and it made pollsters aware of the market for such data. As a consequence of this rediscovery of "linkage politics"

(Rosenau, 1969), the war of words over the double-track decision and its implementation was not only fought with the public's response in mind, but also with key arguments being drawn from its purported preferences, and even about what these preferences really looked like.

In this process of discovering public opinion and survey methodology many defense policy experts and decision makers also borrowed an explanatory paradigm already well established in political sociology, i.e., generational replacement (see, e.g., Inglehart, 1977). This explanation holds that public mobilization over national security issues away from established policies is due to the coming of age of new cohorts that lack the historical experiences and values that have shaped the design and goals of postwar Western efforts to provide peace and security. This "successor generation" hypothesis, by the way, is equally popular with those who view the developments of recent years with concern as with those who express their sympathies (see, e.g., Szabo, 1983, 1984; Mushaben, 1984).

Preoccupied (as they mostly have to be) with political matters of the day, many decision makers and national security experts approach relevant public opinion data in a style which sometimes appears rather breathless. Chasing after the most recent polling results (that hopefully fit one's own views) is often preferred over detached and systematic evaluation and analysis. From their point of view, attitudes on INF deployment, for example, are probably yesterday's news, since this process has already been going on now for quite some time without massive civil unrest. What would count today for them is data on public reactions to SDI, analogous European schemes, the Reykjavik summit, etc.

In this report on public attitudes on national security affairs in West Germany in the early 1980s, no effort will be made to satisfy such craving for the most up-to-date information. Instead, an attempt will be made to put the data available about the experience with the double-track decision and with INF into perspective, looking for lessons to be learned and for answers to a few general but basic questions. These questions are as follows: First, is there really evidence of the asserted radical changes in mass opinion on national security since the double-track decision was taken? Second, is it true, as the "successor generation" hypothesis posits, that such attitudes are more clearly polarized along generational divides than along most other social and political cleavages? Third, to what extent is it possible to describe survey responses on these matters as genuine opinions, i.e., stable attitudes based upon information and experience, that could even be defended against dissenting opinions or counterevidence?

In the following three sections we will, therefore, first have a look at a few trends of public attitudes on national security since 1970. In the

second step the polarization of such opinions in the early 1980s along generational lines will be compared to that along partisan lines. Finally, the sensitivity of survey responses on the double-track decision and on INF deployment in Western Europe vis-à-vis variations of question wording will be demonstrated. In that context, we will also summarize data about the level of the public's information on these matters and will present results from experiments designed to influence responses on defense policy survey items by question formats and wordings. This is the only part where our own data will be used; otherwise this article relies on secondary analysis of data compiled from a multitude of sources for reports published elsewhere (Rattinger, 1985; Rattinger and Heinlein, 1986).<sup>1</sup>

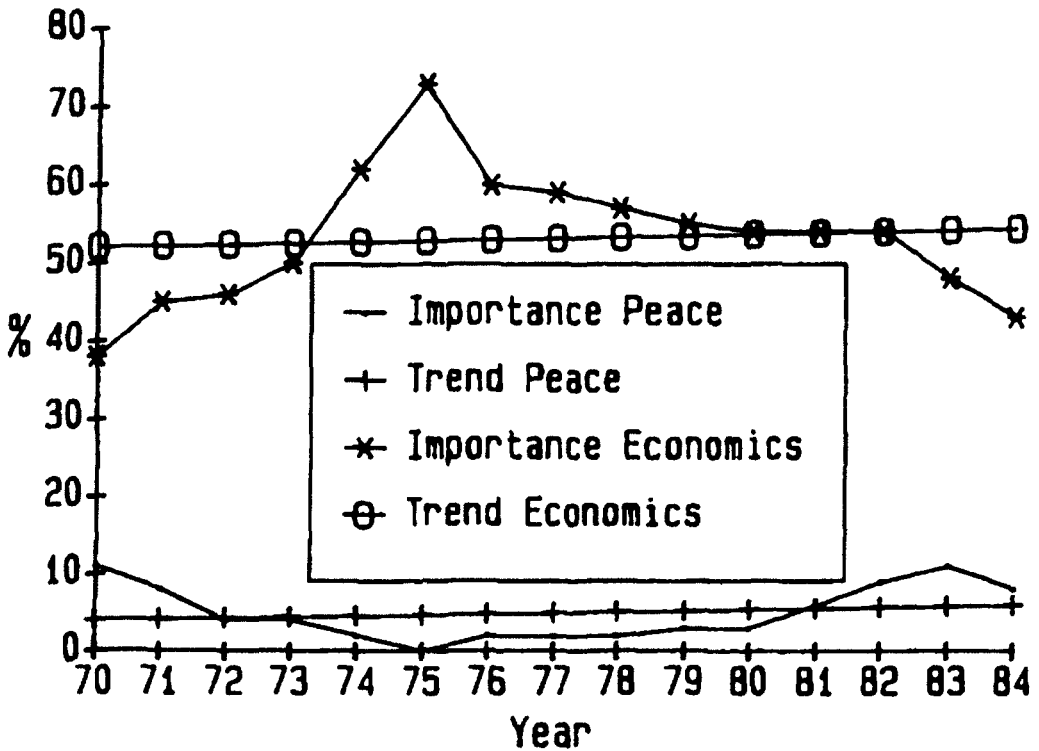
### Some Trends 1970–1984

In order to obtain a meaningful evaluation of the extent of changes in public opinion on defense policy in the early 1980s it is mandatory to have comparisons with earlier periods. If what has been said above regarding the discovery of this aspect of popular attitudes in the wake of the double-track decision is true, the scope for such comparisons obviously has to be limited. Prior to 1979 there was much less incentive to do this kind of polling, and what earlier data is available naturally does not refer to the subject matter of the more recent controversies. An abundance of up-to-date information on very detailed and specific aspects of defense-related attitudes stands in stark contrast to the relative paucity of comparable earlier findings that, moreover, mainly cover only broader orientations toward national security. Nevertheless, the longitudinal comparisons that can be made offer some useful insights.

In the past half decade one could often hear the argument that the surge of peace movement activities indicated a rapidly growing concern within the German population over the stability of peace. Figure 1 shows evaluations of the importance of economic problems and of the preservation of peace as political tasks for the Federal Republic from 1970 to 1984.<sup>2</sup> The difference in the order of magnitude of nominations

1. All Figures and Tables 1–3 of this article summarize findings from a large number of surveys taken by a variety of polling institutes. Without exception, these surveys were nationwide and among German nationals of voting age (i.e., 18 years and older). Numbers of respondents usually range from 1500 to 2000; occasionally sample size is only about 1000 to 1200. To maintain readability, complete question wordings are omitted from Table 1, and for the time series in Figures 1–4 there is no list of what institute supplied data for which years. This is fully documented in Rattinger and Heinlein, 1986, from which these tables and figures are condensed. Copies of these tables or of the underlying original reports by the survey research institutes will be supplied on request by the author.

2. The trend lines in Figures 1–4 have been computed by simple bivariate regression. For



**Figure 1.** Attitudes on the Importance of Peace and of Economic Issues, 1970–1984.

Percentages of total responses for *peace* on the one hand and *economic issues* (i.e., unemployment, inflation, and economic growth) on the other hand to the question "In your opinion, what are currently the most important political problems for the Federal Republic?" Multiple responses (up to three) were allowed. *Source:* Rattinger and Heinlein, 1986: table 1; data from Forschungsgruppe Wahlen in Mannheim (FGW), Institut für Demoskopie in Allensbach (IfD), Sozialwissenschaftliches Forschungsinstitut der Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung in Sankt Augustin (SFK), Zentralarchiv für empirische Sozialforschung in Cologne (ZA).

for the two policy arenas speaks for itself. Considering that with open-ended questions of this sort a respondent on the average names about 2.5 political problems, it is obvious that each respondent is expected to name *at least* one economic problem, whereas the share of people volunteering the preservation of peace as a political problem for the Federal Republic never much exceeded 20%, usually even being much lower. That the overall percentage of nominations for "peace" from 1980 to 1983 increased from 3% to 10% is not really surprising and by no means resembles radical change; similar values could already be observed in the early 1970s. Moreover, in 1984 this share was already declining again. If one wants to know what a quick and strong redefini-

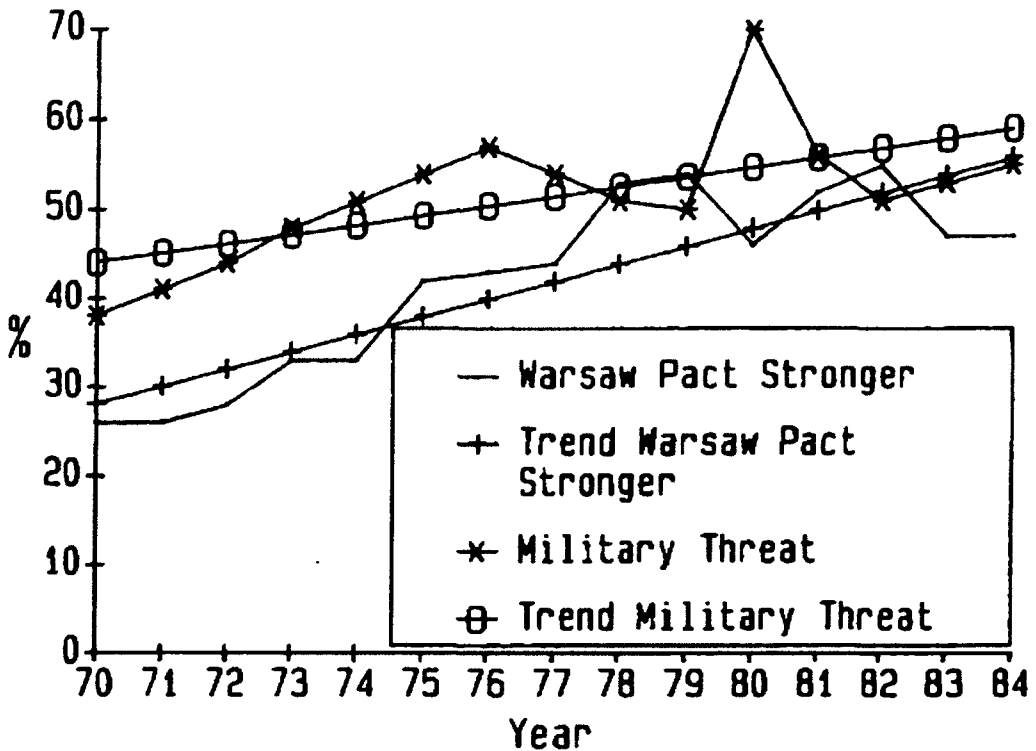
computing percentages for Figures 2, 3, and 4, "don't know," "undecided," and refusals were omitted. Mean values 1970–1984 are as follows: Importance Peace, 5; Importance Economics, 53; Warsaw Pact Stronger, 42; Military Threat, 52; Favor U.S. Withdrawal, 25; German NATO Membership, 61; Defense Possible, 49; Bundeswehr (very) Important, 74.

tion of popular priorities looks like, one can find it, instead, in the "importance of economics" curve that within two years soared from below 50% to well above 70% of overall responses when recession began to hit the Federal Republic in the wake of the increase of oil prices following the 1973 Middle East war.

During the debate over the double-track decision and its implementation it was also often asserted that one of the crucial changes in Western publics' attitudes was an increasing failure to recognize the Soviet military buildup and its consequences. Figure 2 demonstrates that this is somewhat of an overstatement for the West German population at large. Starting at under 30% in the early 1970s, the share of people perceiving Eastern military superiority has been oscillating between 40% and slightly above 50% since 1975, no systematic decline since 1980 being recognizable. Similarly, perceptions of a military threat emanating from the Eastern bloc, following a steady increase from 1970 to 1976 from below 40% to well above 50%, have since then fluctuated around 50%. The peak of 1980 most likely is reflective of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and maybe of the Iranian hostage crisis. Again, the data for the early 1980s indicate no reversal into a downward trend.

A third diagnosis frequently advanced within the framework of the "successor generation" hypothesis is that of pacifism, neutralism, and anti-Americanism spreading quickly in West Germany. Again, the development of mass opinion depicted in Figure 3 does not really support this diagnosis. Approval of German membership in NATO has increased rather consistently, reaching peak, and not minimum, values in the 1980s. In fact, support for NATO membership in the 1950s and 1960s usually was even lower than in the early 1970s, so that there has been a continuous upward trend for about three decades. The percentage of people favoring withdrawal of U.S. troops from Europe, on the other hand, declined over the 1970s. From 1980 through 1982 this demand again became somewhat more popular, but the level of the earlier 1970s was not reached, and the reversal of the trend did not last.

Figure 4, finally, shows popular evaluations of the importance of the Bundeswehr (Federal Armed Forces) for the Federal Republic and of the chances that the country could be defended militarily in case of aggression. The latter time series, again, exhibits no significant shift since the onset of the new defense debates. The fact that only about one-half of those who respond to such survey items believe in the possibility of successful military defense certainly reflects a considerable degree of skepticism, but that is not at all a novel phenomenon. Evaluations of the Bundeswehr as "important" or "very important" for the country are comparatively easy to make as long as such questions do not require trade-offs or ranking institutions as to their impor-



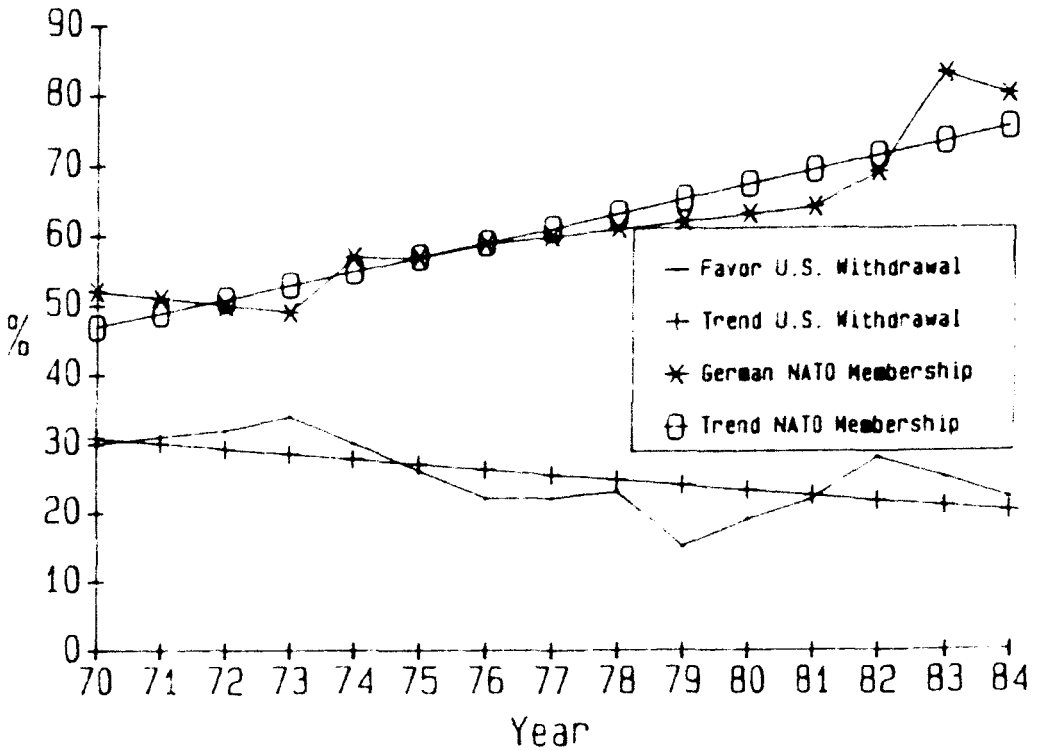
**Figure 2.** Attitudes on the Military Balance and the Military Threat, 1970–1984.

*Warsaw Pact Stronger:* Percentage replying "Warsaw Pact" or the "East" to the question "Who do you think is currently superior in military terms, NATO or the Eastern bloc, the Warsaw Pact, or are both equally strong?" *Source:* Rattinger and Heinlein, 1986: table 4; data from EMNID-Institut in Bielefeld (EMNID), FGW, IfD, Sozialwissenschaftliches Institut der Bundeswehr in Munich (SOWI).

*Military Threat:* Percentage indicating perceptions of threat in response to the question "What do you think, is the Federal Republic currently being threatened militarily by the East or not?" *Source:* Rattinger and Heinlein, 1986: table 6; data from FGW, IfD, Sozialwissenschaftliches Institut Nowak und Sörgel in Munich (SINUS), SOWI.

tance. The data in Figure 4, therefore, should not necessarily be read as reflecting great enthusiasm about the armed forces. What matters here, however, is that the decline visible in the early 1980s was not dramatic and did not lead to levels of support below those observed ten years earlier.

To sum up briefly the results presented so far: If one looks at a few key survey items on defense policy for which longitudinally comparable data are available, dramatic discontinuities in aggregate West German public opinion between the 1970s and the 1980s cannot be discerned. Instead, we observe a remarkable degree of stability—apart from a few outliers in our time series (like threat perception in 1980) that can plausibly be accounted for. To be sure, this statement refers to the West German public in total, whereas the "successor generation"



**Figure 3.** Attitudes on American Troops and German NATO Membership, 1970–1984.

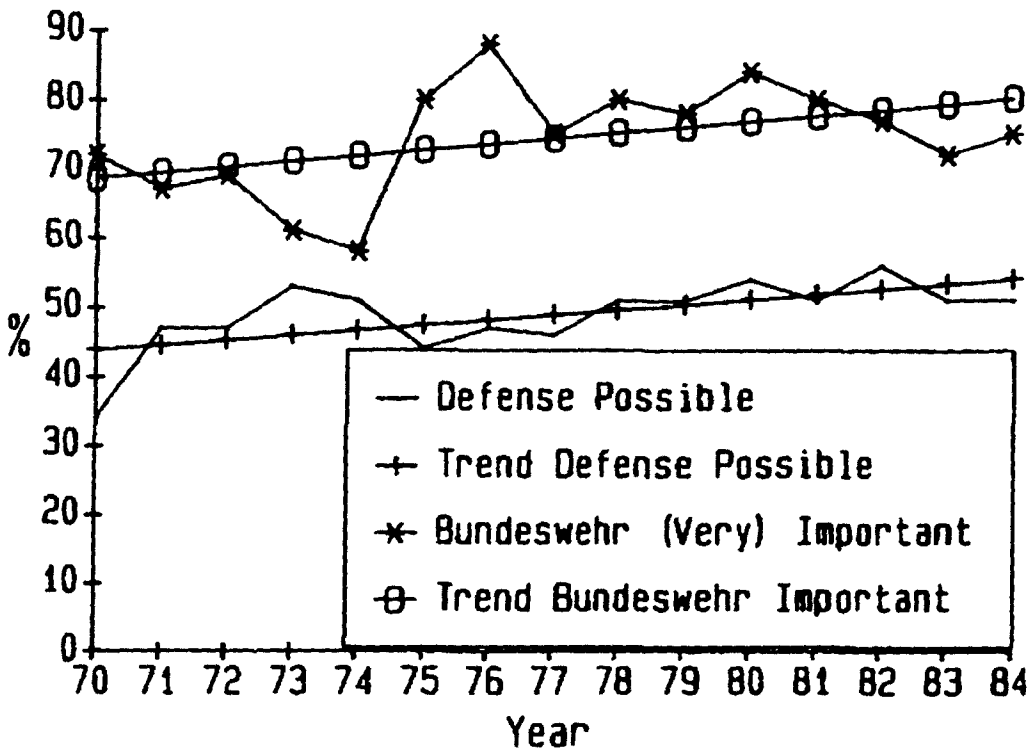
*Favor U.S. Withdrawal:* Percentage replying "welcome" in response to the question "If you would read in the newspapers tomorrow that the Americans withdraw their troops from Europe, would you welcome or regret that?" Source: Rattinger and Heinlein, 1986: table 12; data from IfD.

*German NATO Membership:* Percentage in favor of the Western alliance in response to the question "In your opinion, what would be the better policy, should we continue our firm military alliance with the Americans, or should we attempt to be neutral, like Switzerland, e.g.?" Source: Rattinger and Heinlein, 1986: table 17; data from EMNID, IfD, SINUS.

hypothesis talks about the dramatic break away from prior attitude patterns as being concentrated among younger cohorts.

However, even such a crude analysis indicates that there might be some problems with this hypothesis if applied to the public at large. Over the fifteen years that the data in Figures 1 through 4 describe, considerable generational replacement had to take place, but the trends in the time series simply do not show that the opinions commonly ascribed to the new generations have become more frequent. On the contrary, these trends point instead in the opposite direction, even though these generations' share of the samples has become bigger each year. If one tries to save the argument by claiming that the new attitude patterns have lain dormant, in spite of generational replacement, until polarized debates set in after the NATO decision of 1979, there still is little evidence, because this would have to manifest itself in clear-cut shifts in aggregate public opinion in the early 1980s. Such





**Figure 4.** Attitudes on the Possibility of Defense and the Importance of Armed Forces, 1970–1984.

*Defense Possible:* Percentage replying "strong enough" in response to the question "Assuming that the Russians and the National People's Army of the GDR would attack us, do you believe that NATO, including the Bundeswehr [i.e., the FRG's army], would be strong enough to protect us effectively, or do you think that the Russians would overwhelm us?" *Source:* Rattinger and Heinlein, 1986: table 23; data from EMNID, IfD, SOWI.

*Bundeswehr (very) Important:* Percentage replying "important" or "very important" to the question "In our times and with the current situation of the world, do you believe that the Bundeswehr is very important, important, not that important, unimportant, superfluous, or dangerous?" *Source:* Rattinger and Heinlein, 1986: table 30; data from SOWI, Federal Ministry of Defense.

shifts, however, cannot be discerned. With this initial doubt in mind, let us now have a closer look at whether age really was the crucial dividing line along which national security attitudes in the Federal Republic have lined up in the past couple of years.

### Generational Replacement or Partisan Polarization?

Table 1 represents the polarization of 16 different defense policy attitude items from summer 1981 to summer 1983 according to age and partisan preference of the respondents. Since these items came from many different surveys and the data were taken from published material, the delineation of age cohorts was not the same in all cases. For all

**Table 1. Polarization of National Security Attitudes by Age and Party Preference**

Question (Month/Year)	Extreme Percentage in Any Age Group		Difference	Percentage among Party Voters		Difference
	30 and Below	40 and Above		Green Party	CDU/CSU	
1. There is a military threat to FRG (5/83)	44	47	3	46	77	31
2. FRG should accept the neutron bomb (8/81)	26	31	5	10	42	32
3. Agreement with INF deployment in respondent's area (6/83)	18	23	5	3	35	32
4. Opposition against INF in FRG (2/83)	59	51	8	73	40	33
5. FRG should accept U.S. leadership (5/82)	26	35	9	21	39	18
6. Détente should be continued (3/82)	71	61	10	84	52	32
7. FRG should leave NATO under no circumstances (3/82)	74	84	10	58	87	29
8. NATO is necessary for FRG (5/83)	82	93	11	56	96	40
9. FRG-U.S. relations are "good" (8/82)	49	62	13	44	61	17
10. Agree with production of neutron bomb (8/81)	29	42	13	13	54	41
11. If Geneva talks fail, continue talks and do not deploy INF (7/83)	86	72	14	96	62	34
12. Peace in Europe has become less secure in previous year (5/83)	57	72	15	73	27	46
13. Warsaw Pact is militarily superior (5/83)	35	52	17	24	52	28
14. Nuclear weapons are unacceptable for Christians (4/83)	65	38	27	85	33	52
15. Would participate in protest demonstrations in case of INF deployment (8/83)	27	0	27	49	2	47
16. Peace movement is necessary for FRG (5/83)	69	35	34	93	35	58
Mean			14			36

SOURCES: All questions except nos. 6, 7, and 15 were asked by Forschungsgruppe Wahlen (FGW), and published in its "Politbarometer" reports. Questions 6 and 7 come from CONTEST-CENSUS in Frankfurt, and no. 15 was asked by EMNID. Complete question wordings, response distributions, and breakdowns by age, sex, etc., can be found in these institutes' reports, or in Rattinger and Heinlein, 1986: tables 107-122.

items, therefore, the two age cohorts below 30 years and above 40 years that were widest apart in their responses were identified (first and second columns of Table 1). The difference in their opinions (third column of Table 1) is the maximum polarization between any two age groups, and the rows of Table 1 have been ordered with increasing magnitude of this difference. The maximum distances of opinion according to partisan preference without exception occurred between those who intended to vote for the CDU/CSU, and for the Green party, respectively, so columns four through six of Table 1 describe attitudes of these two partisan groups and their polarization.

The "successor generation" in the early 1980s clearly differed from older West Germans in its opinions on national security. On all sixteen items the extreme value for younger people shows them to be more antimilitary, anti-U.S., and anti-NATO. However, most of these differences are far from being dramatic, especially if one considers the way they were computed, i.e., searching for the *maximum* polarization between any younger and any older cohort. Moreover, only for four items (9, 13, 14, 16) is the majority reversed, and only for two of these items (14 and 16) is this reversal very strong: While about two-thirds of the respondents in the extreme cohort below 30 years held nuclear weapons to be basically unacceptable for Christians, and the peace movement to be necessary for the Federal Republic, only slightly above one-third of those in the extreme cohort over 40 years shared these views. With an average difference of 14 percentage points, the polarization according to age really does not support the notion of a radical break of the views of the "successor generation" from those of older Germans, even on such issues as the neutron bomb (ERW), NATO membership, or INF deployment. It is undoubtedly true that most antimilitary and anti-U.S. activists of the early 1980s have been younger people, but the reverse, that the young tend to be antimilitary and anti-U.S. activists, simply is not supported by the available data.

As can be seen in Table 1, public opinion on each item tended to be polarized much more strongly along partisan lines. With an average difference of 36 percentage points between sympathizers of the Green party and of the CDU/CSU, the former conform much more closely to the notions often advanced about the "successor generation" as a whole. Polarization along both criteria is least dissimilar for perceptions of the military balance, and for opinions on U.S.-West German relations (items 13, 5, and 9), and it is much more pronounced along partisan than along generational divides for all items relating to INF deployment, ERWs, détente, and threat perception. For eight items there is a reversal of majority between adherents of the Green party and of the CDU/CSU. In four cases this reversal is only moderate (items 1, 9, 10, 13), but for the other four items (4, 12, 14, 16) compara-

tively small minorities within one group correspond to outspoken majorities within the other group, and vice versa. However, even in spite of this rather significant extent of partisan polarization, majorities of both groups agree on such issues as support of German membership in NATO, skepticism about American leadership, the necessity to continue *détente*, and on preferring further disarmament talks over INF deployment.

The question now, of course, is what this all means in terms of the "successor generation" hypothesis. First, it is obvious that the wholesale departure from previous attitude patterns regarding national security issues is *not* characteristic of youth as a whole, but mostly of those younger people who sympathize with the Green party. In the 1987 Bundestag elections the Green vote in the 18–24 (25–34) age bracket was 15.5% (17.4%), so even equating the Green electorate with the better-educated segments of the younger cohorts would be a gross exaggeration. And even the Green electorate itself with its strong bias toward youth is quite far from being a monolithically antimilitary, anti-NATO, anti-U.S. bloc, as Table 1 shows. Younger people *outside* the Green electorate show little resemblance with the "successor generation" stereotype.

Second, the fact that the covariation of national security opinions is so much stronger with party preference than with age forces us to rethink the problem of causality. Between partisan preferences and attitudes on specific political issues a variety of causal patterns is conceivable. At the one extreme you have those who intend to vote for a particular party because it is closest to them on the issues that they judge most salient. At the other extreme are those who like a particular party best for a variety of other reasons and for the sake of consistency accept this party's positions in areas that are less salient for them. Regarding different political problems one and the same individual can easily fall into both groups. In the Federal Republic there is, of course, another political issue area that heavily, if not primarily, mobilizes Green support, namely, environmental problems. The fact that even the comparatively strongly mobilized Green electorate is far from monolithic in its defense policy opinions demonstrates that it is possible for Green voters to disagree with "their" party in this issue area. It is therefore equally possible that some of those who toe the party line in these opinions do not do so because these are the attitudes that tie them to this party, but simply because they support its proclaimed stand in most ongoing political debates, even if they do not center around the issues that have constituted the initial allegiance.

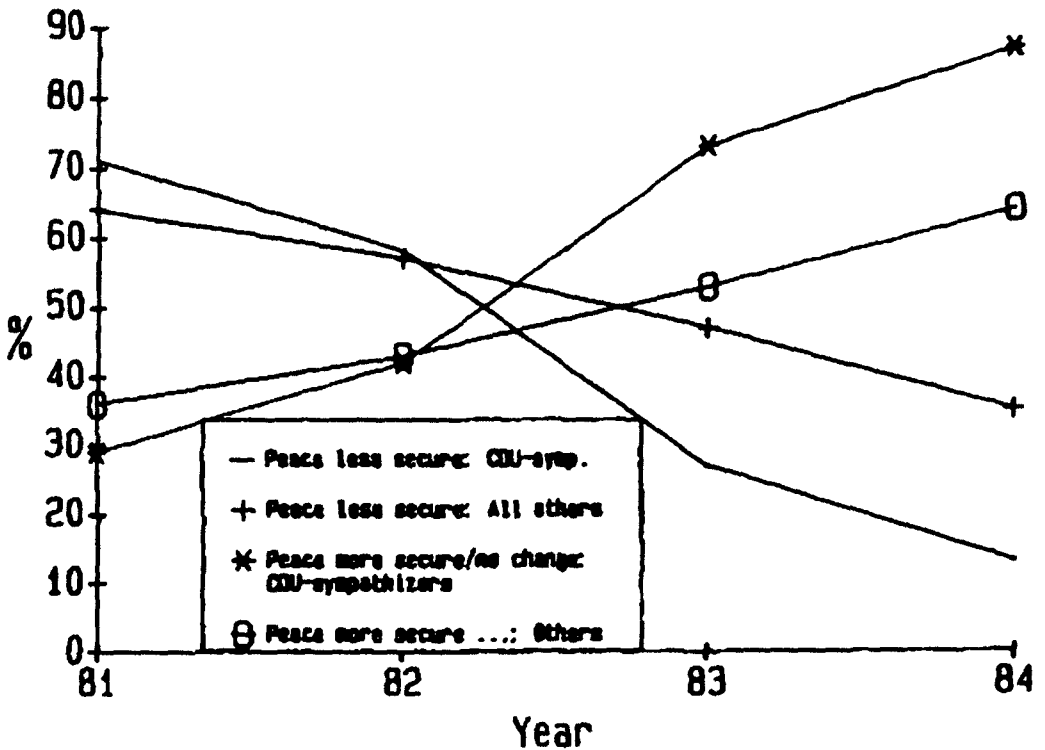
Such an interpretation of elite–mass interactions is much broader than the "successor generation" hypothesis, indeed comprises it as a special case. It is possible that societal conflict and elite political de-

bates are brought about by the polarization of mass attitudes due to generational replacement, but it is equally possible that polarization at the mass level in part *results* from polarization of elite conflict over particular issues. In the short run, both processes might look very similar at the aggregate level, but they should differ considerably in terms of long-run consequences. Generational replacement is a slow historical process that cannot be halted and can be only slowly counteracted by life cycle effects. Polarization along party lines both at the elite and at the mass level, on the other hand, can come about quite quickly, with the issues of the day, relevant issue publics, and dividing lines more or less in flux.

From the data presented so far it seems safe to conclude that the "successor generation" hypothesis can hardly be proclaimed as the clear-cut winner. This becomes even more obvious if one considers the changes of defense policy attitudes that could be observed in the early 1980s for adherents of even the two major established parties of the Federal Republic, the CDU/CSU and the SPD, changes that to a considerable degree occurred irrespective of age. For reasons of space it is impossible here to trace at any length how the SPD's electorate followed the party's withdrawal from support of NATO's 1979 decision; it happened gradually at first and then quite rapidly after the overthrow of the Schmidt government in late 1982. Only a small but impressive example of the direct impact of partisan attitudes on national security opinions will be presented.

From 1981 through 1984 "Forschungsgruppe Wahlen" in Mannheim regularly polled whether peace in Europe was evaluated as having become more or less secure over the past year. In the total population, perceptions of peace as having become less secure fell between 1981 and 1984 from 67% to 27% (1982, 57%; 1983, 37%), while perceptions of no change or greater stability of peace increased from 33% to 73%. Whether this trend signals either the dissolution of earlier alarmist notions or evaluations that things were already so bad they couldn't get worse is irrelevant here. All we are concerned with is the breakdown of this trend according to party preference for the CDU/CSU or all other parties combined, presented in Figure 5.

In 1982 CDU/CSU voters were exactly like the rest; in 1981 they had been somewhat more pessimistic. In 1983, however, their pessimism regarding the stability of peace dropped by more than 30 percentage points and then paralleled the general downward trend, but at a much lower level. On the whole, within these three years pessimism among CDU/CSU voters fell by almost 60 percentage points, among all others by less than 30. The reason for this phenomenal short-term development clearly is the change in government. With "their" party in power, most Christian Democratic voters simply accepted the new govern-



**Figure 5.** Attitudes on the Stability of Peace by Partisanship, 1981-1984

ment's position that there was no reason to worry about the stability of peace in Europe, even with Western INF deployment imminent. Neither the strong aggregate short-term downward trend of pessimism (that was evident even among Green voters whose pessimism fell from 82% to 63% between 1981 and 1984) nor its clear-cut differentiation along partisan lines can be made to square with generational explanations. Instead, we see that even "cognitions" of factual conditions in the "real world" of security policy can change quickly and dramatically according to partisan attitudes.

### Attitudes, Nonattitudes, and Information on National Security

Up to here it has (implicitly) been assumed that people who are being polled for their opinions on defense policy actually do have such attitudes, and that these attitudes can be adequately measured. As long as one only wants to follow trends of response distributions over time or to compare them between subsamples, as has been done so far, this assumption does not pose much of a problem—at least as long as one is willing to additionally assume that those without attitudes believe the

same and that distortions of measurement are the same all the time and within all subsamples. However, when it comes to what polling is all about for most of its consumers, i.e., to say what public attitudes really look like and how they are distributed, things are far more complicated. In this final section this problem will be approached in three steps: First, we will have a closer look at the range of survey results that were obtained on the double-track decision and its implementation in the Federal Republic. Assuming that the variations that can be observed might have something to do with the knowledge people have about these things, some data on levels of relevant information will then be presented. Third, and finally, we will briefly report some methodological experiments to test the impact of question formats and wordings on national security opinions.

The major survey research institutes in the Federal Republic did not conduct such experiments of their own in the early 1980s. They were too busy trying to find out what people *really* thought about the NATO decision and INF deployment. In doing so a whole variety of questions on this subject were asked, sometimes almost exactly at the same time, and a variety of contradictory findings were reported—and greedily absorbed into the political debates. In that way, however, a large-scale experiment was conducted involuntarily.

Table 2 contains results from eight different questions on the double-track decision and INF deployment that were asked between only one to eight different times between January 1981 and October 1983 by various institutes. For all these questions except one, a high proportion of refusals (between one-fourth and one-third) to choose from the closed-ended responses is visible. This exception is whether INF should be deployed after the scheduled date if no success were to emerge from the Geneva talks, a question that also produced the largest antideployment majority. Opposition still greatly outnumbers favorable responses for the next two questions, but with the invocation of Soviet SS-20s targeted on Western Europe in the fourth question the gap begins to close. Questions 3 and 5 are particularly interesting because they form the only genuine split-half experimental design. The third question was put to a subsample in October 1981 without explaining the number of SS-20 warheads targeted on Western Europe and the fact that there were no comparable weapons in the West. Not surprisingly, there is a reversal of the majority between the two question formats; given this prior information in question 5 more respondents favored deployment than opposed it. In spite of this experiment, the version *containing* this information was continued and the other was not.

Even though there is no reference to *new* nuclear weapons in question 6, at that time it had to become interpreted in terms of imminent

**Table 2.** Attitudes on INF Deployment and the Double-Track Decision, 1981-1983

Question	No. of Surveys	Dates of Surveys	Attitudes on INF and NATO's Double-Track Decision		Percent Don't Know, Undecided
			Percent Favorable	Percent Opposed	
1	6	5-9/83	24(25)	72(75)	4
2	4	5/81-1/82	28(38)	45(62)	27
3	1	10/81	28(39)	44(61)	28
4	2	8-10/83	34(44)	43(56)	23
5	4	1/81-4/82	38(52)	35(48)	27
6	5	7/81-4/82	40(61)	26(39)	34
7	1	8/83	46(68)	22(32)	32
8	8	5/81-8/83	51(70)	22(30)	27
Mean			37(49)	39(51)	24

NOTE: Numbers in parentheses are percentages without "don't know" or "undecided."

QUESTIONS: 1. If the Geneva talks fail to yield an agreement until fall, what should be done? Deploy INF (with or without continuing negotiations) vs. continue talks without deployment. (FGW, Institut für angewandte Sozialwissenschaft in Bad Godesberg [INFAS]; Rattinger and Heinlein, 1986: tables 81-83)

2. NATO plans to deploy American INF in Europe, and in the FRG, to balance Soviet INF. Do you welcome this or not? (IfD; Rattinger and Heinlein, 1986: table 49)

3. Do you favor deployment of new nuclear missiles, that can reach the Soviet Union, in the FRG or not? (United States International Communications Agency [USICA]; Rattinger and Heinlein, 1986: table 52)

4. If the Geneva talks fail to yield an agreement until fall and the Soviet Union keeps its SS 20 missiles targeted on Western Europe, should new American INF be deployed in the FRG according to the double-track decision or not? (IfD; Rattinger and Heinlein, 1986: table 84)

5. Question as in 3, with previous information: As you might know, the Russians have about 450 nuclear warheads on new missiles, the SS 20s, targeted on Western Europe, whereas NATO does not have such missiles that are targeted on the Soviet Union. In view of this fact, . . . ? (USICA; Rattinger and Heinlein, 1986: table 51)

6. Do you believe that nuclear weapons in Europe help prevent a Soviet attack, or do you think that they make a Soviet attack more likely? (USICA; Rattinger and Heinlein, 1986: table 56)

7. Assuming we can only choose between leaving NATO or deploying the new American missiles in the FRG, what should we do? (IfD; Rattinger and Heinlein, 1986: table 85)

8. In the double-track decision NATO nations have agreed to balance Soviet INF by deploying similar missiles in Central Europe while initiating negotiations with the Soviet Union on the reduction of armaments. Do you think that this double-track decision is good or not good? (IfD; Rattinger and Heinlein, 1986: table 47)



INF deployment. Precisely because there is no such reference, favorable responses exceed opposition, but there is a great deal of insecurity. Question 7 shows how people can be pushed into favoring INF, even though new deployment in the Federal Republic is explicitly mentioned, by posing withdrawal from NATO as the alternative. Question 8, finally, by focusing on the NATO decision and mentioning its intention to negotiate arms reductions, produces the highest share of favorable responses. Thus, in the early 1980s a wide range of results of surveys on this topic was available to choose from. Depending on one's predilections one could claim either that only one-fourth or that more than half of the West German population agreed with the December 1979 decision and its implications. If, as is often done, don't knows and undecided respondents are excluded, one could describe about 70% as either in favor or opposed, depending on the survey results utilized.

Logically this does not make sense, of course. However, as soon as one allows the possibility that many respondents reply to such questions without these matters being of much personal salience and without a great deal of relevant information or experience, these seeming inconsistencies are not at all surprising. As the problem of personal salience of national security issues has been dealt with at great length elsewhere (Rattinger, 1985; Rattinger and Heinlein, 1986), it should suffice here to simply recall the low importance ascribed to the preservation of peace as a political problem for the Federal Republic (Fig. 1), or to consider the high proportion of undecided respondents in Table 2. If low personal salience and low information are combined, we come into segments of opinion where so-called nonattitudes (Converse, 1970) increasingly play a role. Under such conditions survey responses are still made (if only to please the interviewer), but they are not a reliable and valid measure of the attitude to be assessed, because such an attitude barely exists. Instead, responses will be influenced by a multitude of other factors, like contextual information, question wording, and affects vis-à-vis the actors that are being referred to, etc. Within this realm of nonattitudes, many "logically" incompatible responses make perfect sense, even for one and the same individual. This "logic" of choosing whatever "feels best" in a given situation presupposes, of course, that there is little knowledge of the relevant facts and of strategic intricacies. Let us, therefore, now briefly turn to the question of how much people know about these things.

As Table 3 shows, the range of statements on people's information on the double-track decision and related matters that could be supported by data is even wider than for opinions on these things themselves. However, it does not take too close a look to discover that actually those questions that show large proportions of respondents as

**Table 3. Information About INF, the Double-Track Decision, and the Geneva Talks, 1981-1983**

Question	No. of Surveys	Dates of Surveys	Percent Informed, Correct Answer	Percent Not Informed, Wrong Answer	Percent Don't Know, No Answer
1	1	12/81	86(86)	14(14)	0
2	1	2/83	83(83)	17(17)	0
3	3	5/81-8/83	75(77)	22(23)	3
4	1	8/83	67(67)	33(33)	0
Mean "soft" items (1-4)			77(78)	22(22)	1
5	1	2/82	55(83)	11(17)	34
6	1	2/83	27(49)	28(51)	45
7	1	9/83	20(20)	78(80)	2
8	1	3/81	15(25)	46(75)	39
9	2	5-7/81	10(18)	46(82)	44
Mean "hard" items (5-9)			23(35)	43(65)	34
Mean all items			50(60)	33(40)	17

NOTE: Numbers in parentheses are percentages without "don't know" or "no answer."

QUESTIONS: 1. In Geneva, Americans and Russians have recently started negotiations on disarmament. Have you heard about this or not? (IfD; Rattinger and Heinlein, 1986: table 39)

2. In the context of the Geneva disarmament negotiations, you increasingly hear about the so-called zero option. This means . . . [explanation]. Have you heard about the zero option? (IfD; Rattinger and Heinlein, 1986: table 41)

3. In December 1979 NATO has agreed upon the so-called double-track decision, in order to . . . [explanation]. Have you heard or read about this decision? (EMNID, INFAS; Rattinger and Heinlein, 1986: tables 32-33)

4. In the FRG American Pershing I missiles have been deployed now for an extended period of time. Did you know this? (IfD; Rattinger and Heinlein, 1986: table 43)

5. Do you know whether or not the U.S. and the Soviet Union currently negotiate about limitations of INF in Europe? (USICA; Rattinger and Heinlein, 1986: table 40)

6. Do you happen to know who proposed the zero option, the Germans, the Americans, or the Russians? (IfD; Rattinger and Heinlein, 1986: table 42)

7. Assuming new INF will be stationed according to the double-track decision: Will this increase or decrease the number of nuclear warheads in the FRG, or will it remain the same? (EMNID; Rattinger and Heinlein, 1986: table 44)

8. If you hear or read the word "NATO-Nachrüstung" [i.e., INF deployment according to the double-track decision], can you tell me what this means? (IfD, open-ended; Rattinger and Heinlein, 1986: table 35)

9. In your opinion, what is NATO's double-track decision about? (INFAS, open-ended; Rattinger and Heinlein, 1986: table 34)

correctly informed have to be classified as very "soft." In items 1 through 4 the existence of the Geneva talks, the zero option, the double-track decision, and the presence of Pershing I missiles in the Federal Republic were mentioned and even partially explained. Only then were people asked whether they had previously been aware of all of this. With a question format like this the only surprising thing is that the percentages claiming to have been aware are not even higher. One-third of respondents admitting to not having known about the Pershing I missiles is an admirable degree of honesty, but most likely still falls considerably short of the actual amount of ignorance.

As one proceeds to the "hard" knowledge items (those that do not supply what they ask for) refusals soar to one-third of samples and well above. Question 5 is not yet completely "hard," as the way it is asked suggests that there *are* such negotiations. Moreover, had each of the respondents who have not admitted ignorance simply flipped an honest coin, 33% of the total sample still would have given a correct answer. Similarly, for questions 6 and 7, regarding who proposed the zero option and on the number of nuclear warheads in the Federal Republic after deployment of new INF, the percentages of correct responses have to be set against the proportions that would be obtained by random guessing. For question 6, with three alternatives provided, this percentage would be 18, so there is a surplus of only 9 percentage points of the total sample being correctly informed over random expectation; for question 5 this surplus is 22 percentage points.

Question 7 is fascinating. Because it proceeds from the assumption of new INF deployment, respondents are very confident that they can reply (only two percent "don't know"), and they overwhelmingly state that the number of warheads would go up, an answer that is indeed suggested to the nonexpert by the question. However, the double-track decision actually called for more old warheads to be withdrawn than new ones deployed, so "*decrease*" would have been the correct answer. Not surprisingly, this was chosen by virtually no one. If one therefore also classifies "remain the same" (meaning no increase) as correct, as has been done in Table 3, one sees that an honest coin would have led to "correct" responses for an additional 29% of the total sample. The actual level of information falls considerably short of random expectation, so it is fair to say that very few people really *knew* what would happen to the number of nuclear warheads in the Federal Republic.

The open-ended questions 8 and 9 show that correcting for random responses in the previous questions *does* bring us closer to an adequate assessment of the level of information in the population at large. With 40% or more "don't knows," only 15% and 10% of total samples in 1981 could adequately characterize the meaning of "Nachrüstung" and

the contents of the double-track decision, respectively.<sup>3</sup> With such a low level of knowledge we can safely conclude that a considerable number of nonattitudes will certainly be obtained when questions like the ones in Table 2 are asked on these matters.

In order to get a better understanding of the effects that variations of survey instruments can have under such conditions of low personal salience of, and low information on, the subject matter to be surveyed, a series of experiments with a small sample of local students were performed in summer of 1985<sup>4</sup> (see Schuman and Presser, 1981, for the logic and many results of such studies). As we briefly report some results from this study, it should be understood that, if anything, we are going to *underestimate* the impact of different question formats, because students generally are better informed about defense policy than the rest of the population and ascribe greater personal importance to this policy arena. The experiments on which we will report here fall into three classes. First, we investigate the effects of omitting or explicitly offering "don't know" alternatives or neutral "middle" responses. Second, the effects of minor variations of question wording are assessed. Third, we will have a look at the impact of reversing question order.

Explicitly offering "don't know" or "middle" response categories or not is a purely formal device on which different survey research institutes have very different philosophies. Table 4 demonstrates that such responses are seldom volunteered but are quite popular when they are permitted, and that the amount of uncertainty among respondents varies considerably between items. However, that can only be detected if such answers are explicitly allowed. Only then does it become visible, for example, that uncertainty about Soviet trustwor-

3. The distinction between "correct" and "wrong" was made by the author on the basis of the grouped responses reported by the survey institutes. The criteria for being "correct" were rather mild ones: For question no. 8, all responses referring to new or modern weapons for NATO were regarded as correct (even without reference to *nuclear* weapons, or to *missiles* to be stationed in *Europe*); for question no. 9 all responses referring to *simultaneous* negotiations and preparations for deployment of new weapons were classified as correct.

4. In June 1985 90 students of the University of Bamberg were interviewed for their attitudes on nuclear weapons and national security with a standardized questionnaire (32 items) within a split-half design. Interviews lasted about 25 minutes, on the average. All of approximately 120 students from one particular dorm (housing students from all schools of the university) were to be interviewed within two days; 30 of them could not be contacted or refused to participate. Interviewers were students from a class on national security policy and its social context the author taught in summer 1985 (in the U.S. system it would have been called a graduate course). Randomization of forms was achieved by tossing coins; 47 respondents were thus interviewed with the standard questionnaire, 43 with the experimental questionnaire (in Tables 4-7 these are referred to as versions A and B, respectively). Concerning the relative positions of one pair of questions in the interview a split-four design was used (see note to Table 6). I thank all students who were involved for their interest and their contribution.

**Table 4. Split-Half Experiments on Students' National Security Attitudes with Explicit "Don't Know" and "Middle" Categories**

Question	Form	Percent "Liberal" Response	Percent Middle Response	Percent "Conser- vative" Response	Per- cent Don't Know
1. Acceptance of nuclear deterrence	A	90	—	5	5
	B	85	—	5	10
2. Should FRG become neutral	A	60	—	35	5
	B	40	—	42	18**
3. Freedom or peace more important	A	58	—	35	7
	B	54	—	28	18*
4. Can Soviets be trusted to honor treaties	A	55	—	38	7
	B	33	—	34	33***
Mean questions 1-4	A	66	—	28	6
	B	53	—	27	20
5. Accept member of Green party as defense minister	A	60	7	23	10
	B	50	15	30	5
6. More or less military expenditures for FRG	A	85	12	3	0
	B	63	28**	7	2
7. Possibility of military defense of FRG	A	30	0	63	7
	B	20	42***	38	0
8. Acceptance of U.S. troops in town	A	55	25	20	0
	B	38	55***	7	0
Mean questions 5-8	A	58	11	27	4
	B	43	35	21	1

NOTES: *Questionnaire form A*: "Don't know" (questions 1-4) or "middle" category (questions 5-8) not offered ( $N = 47$ ). *Questionnaire form B*: "Don't know" or "middle" category offered ( $N = 43$ ). Significance measures are based on a one-tailed Z-test for difference of proportions of "don't know" or "middle" responses.

QUESTIONS: 1. Can you accept the notion that the national security of the Federal Republic is based upon a concept of nuclear deterrence, or can't you accept this notion (or don't you have an opinion)?

2. What kind of foreign policy should the Federal Republic pursue: Should we continue our military alliance with the Americans, or should we try to be neutral, like Switzerland, e.g. (or don't you have an opinion)?

3. Nobody knows what is going to happen, but what do you think: If some day we might be faced with the choice to surrender Europe to the Soviets or to defend ourselves with all the means we have, what would be more important, to defend democratic freedom, even if this means war, or to prevent war, even if this means living under a communist government (or don't you know)?

4. Do you think that the Soviet Union can be trusted to honor the treaties it has concluded with the Federal Republic and with the Western powers, or don't you think it can be trusted (or don't you have an opinion)?

5. Could you accept a member of the Green party as defense minister, (would you care about this at all,) or couldn't you accept that?

6. Do you think that in the future the Federal Government should spend more, (the current amount,) or less on military defense?

7. Assuming the Federal Republic would be attacked by the East, do you think NATO could defend against such an attack, (do you think successful defense would be uncertain,) or do you believe that defense would not be possible?

8. Do you like the idea that U.S. troops are stationed here in town, (do you care about this at all,) or don't you like it?

\* $p < .1$ . \*\* $p < .05$ . \*\*\* $p < .01$ .

thiness is much stronger than about the desirability of West German neutrality, or that indifference is the most frequent reaction to U.S. troops in town.

In the second group of experiments it was attempted to push respondents in the experimental group even further into the antimilitary and anti-U.S. camp (already quite popular with students, of course) by small modifications of question wording. Table 5 shows considerable success in this regard. Reminding people of conditions in the GDR and of a possible risk that assisting West Germany and Berlin might pose to the United States were least effective in reducing enthusiasm about a military person as defense minister or trust in U.S. security guarantees, respectively. The tiny word "even" (*sogar*), tied to the use of nuclear weapons for military defense of the Federal Republic, made quite a difference in terms of support for this course of action. Defining the same time period for comparison of judgments on the quality of West German-American relations either by the number of years or by reference to the tenure of President Reagan in office dramatically reversed majority judgment between the two groups. In these experiments we also see that variations of questions wording can either increase or decrease respondents' insecurity. Questions 2 and 4 are examples of the former, 1 and 3 of the latter. The Reagan question in particular illustrates what "nonattitudes" on foreign and defense policy mean, even with a student sample: How can the average person make a judgment of changes in relations between the United States and the Federal Republic? As soon as a clue is offered that evokes well-defined affective connotations (like the U.S. president does for many students), such judgments are made more readily and in line with the clue.

The experiments finally to be described on question order effects go far beyond what generally is done in analyzing survey data. If a defense policy item is not completely isolated in an interview, the rest dealing with other subjects, it is conceivable that responses to former questions shape later answers as much as nuances of question design do. This is not necessarily an indication of nonattitudes but can also reflect different interpretations of question meaning due to context. The two questions in Table 6 obviously evoke some kind of reciprocity norm and therefore are expected to be particularly subject to such transfer effects, and indeed, they are clearly visible. In the aggregate, in the student sample 10% more replied that the Soviet Union should withdraw INF from the GDR to further détente than said the same thing for American INF in the Federal Republic. However, for both superpowers there was more agreement with this demand when this question followed second, and, as expected, this transfer effect was strongest when the two items immediately followed each other. In the USSR-

**Table 5.** Split-Half Experiments on Students' National Security Attitudes with Variations of Question Wording

Question	Form	Pro-U.S., Promilitary	Anti-U.S., Antimilitary	Don't Know
1. Soldier as defense minister	A	18	75	7
	B	7	90**	3
2. Defense with nuclear weapons	A	25	75	0
	B	2	88*	10
3. Quality of U.S.-FRG relations	A	48	37	15
	B	30	65***	5
4. Trust in U.S. assistance	A	75	15	10
	B	61	26*	13
Mean (B version minus A version)		-17	17	0

QUESTIONS: 1A. Should the FRG's defense minister be a soldier?

1B. In the GDR the defense minister normally is a soldier. Should the FRG's . . . ?

2A. Do you favor military defense of the FRG, if nuclear weapons have to be used for that purpose?

2B. Do you favor military defense of the FRG, *even* ("sogar") if . . . ?

3A. Have U.S.-FRG relations improved or deteriorated over the past five years?

3B. Have U.S.-FRG relations improved or deteriorated since President Reagan came into office?

4A. Do you believe that the U.S. would assist the FRG and West Berlin in crisis situations?

4B. Do you believe . . . , or don't you believe that the U.S. would take that risk?

\* $p < .1$ .    \*\* $p < .05$ .    \*\*\* $p < .01$ .

U.S. sequence 70% (Soviet withdrawal) and 80% (U.S. withdrawal) agreement were obtained, respectively; in the reverse order these percentages are 90% (Soviet withdrawal) and 60% (U.S. withdrawal). Substantively, and politically, these are very different messages: 10% more for United States than for Soviet Union withdrawal in one case, 30% less in the other. We know, however, that this difference is simply the product of a small modification in method.

In Table 7 we do not have two "symmetrical" questions, but rather questions reflecting two different cognitive representations of the Federal Republic's security environment. We see that, in the aggregate, there was no transfer from perceptions of the military balance to judgments on whether the Federal Republic could be subjected to political pressure by the Soviet Union due to its military potential. When the order is reversed, however, such effects are obvious, response insecurity and perceptions of Eastern superiority declining strongly after people have made their judgment on the possibility of political blackmail. It is interesting to note that these effects are minimal for the one-third

**Table 6.** Split-Half Experiment with Variations of Question Order: Students' Attitudes on INF Withdrawal

Question	Agreement (Form)		Transfer Effect (Second minus First)
	Asked First	Asked Second	
Questions Separated by Eight Other Items ( <i>N</i> = 45)			
Soviet Union should withdraw INF from GDR	74 (A)	90 (B)	16*
U.S. should withdraw INF from FRG	74 (B)	72 (A)	-2
Questions Immediately Following Each Other ( <i>N</i> = 45)			
Soviet Union should withdraw INF from GDR	70 (A)	90 (B)	20**
U.S. should withdraw INF from FRG	60 (B)	80 (A)	20*
Total ( <i>N</i> = 90)			
Soviet Union should withdraw INF from GDR	72 (A)	90 (B)	18**
U.S. should withdraw INF from FRG	67 (B)	76 (A)	9

QUESTIONS: In order to get détente in Europe going again, it is necessary that the Soviet Union (U.S.) starts to withdraw its theater nuclear weapons (i.e., INF) from the GDR (FRG). Do you agree or not?

In the standard questionnaire A the USSR question was asked first; in the experimental questionnaire B the U.S. question was asked first. For these two questions there were two versions of each questionnaire with different distances between these two questions. Form A was used for 24 respondents with these two questions immediately following each other, and for 23 respondents with eight items separating them; for form B these numbers were 21 and 22, respectively.

\* $p < .1$ .    \*\* $p < .05$ .

of students that see the Federal Republic subject to Soviet pressure, whereas among the other two-thirds, who first reject such a possibility, there is then a quite massive need to bring the second answer in line with the first one, resulting in a substantial drop of "don't knows" and "perceptions" of Warsaw Pact superiority. If even students, with their comparatively good knowledge of defense policy and with above average personal salience of these matters, can react so strongly to the context of questions in their responses to basic perceptual items, it is not hard to imagine that what is published as survey results on national



**Table 7. Split-Half Experiment with Variations of Question Order: Students' Attitudes on the Military Balance and Its Political Importance**

Question	Response	Asked First	Asked Second	Transfer Effect (Second minus First)
Total ( <i>N</i> = 90)				
Can FRG be blackmailed by Soviet Union	Yes	37	36	- 1
	No	63	64	1
		( <i>N</i> = 43)	( <i>N</i> = 47)	
Who is stronger in military power	Warsaw Pact	35	20	- 15*
	NATO	23	35	12
	Both equal	17	33	16**
	Don't know	25	12	- 13*
		( <i>N</i> = 47)	( <i>N</i> = 43)	
FRG Can Be Blackmailed ( <i>N</i> = 33)				
Who is stronger in military power	Warsaw Pact	21	26	5
	NATO	24	20	- 4
	Both equal	30	27	- 3
	Don't know	25	27	2
		( <i>N</i> = 16)	( <i>N</i> = 17)	
FRG Cannot Be Blackmailed ( <i>N</i> = 57)				
Who is stronger in military power	Warsaw Pact	44	16	- 28**
	NATO	22	44	22**
	Both equal	9	37	28***
	Don't know	25	3	- 22***
		( <i>N</i> = 27)	( <i>N</i> = 30)	

QUESTIONS: In your opinion, can the Soviet Union use its military potential for political blackmail of the FRG?

Considering the military balance between NATO and the Warsaw Pact, who is stronger?

In the standard questionnaire A the question on the military balance was asked first; in the experimental questionnaire B the question on the possibility of blackmail was asked first.

\**p* < .1.    \*\**p* < .05.    \*\*\**p* < .01.

security public opinion at large frequently will have come about through similar, and possibly even stronger, processes and distortions. But all we usually get to know is response distributions; most of the time their background remains obscure.

## Conclusion

The thrust of this article is largely nihilistic. We have shown that assertions about public opinion on defense policy in the Federal Republic having been transformed radically since the December 1979 NATO decision and thus having become a key factor requiring major policy changes in order to regain societal consensus are grossly overstated. We have also shown that normal partisan strife is at least as important as the notion of generational succession for explaining the polarization of mass opinions that has occurred. Finally, we have argued that, in spite of the importance public opinion surveys were ascribed in the political battles of the first half of this decade, there is little evidence of a rapid increase of relevant knowledge in the population at large and little certainty as to what its positions on the implementation of the double-track decision really looked like. Instead, a large amount of volatility of public opinion on these matters due to the pervasiveness of nonattitudes has to be acknowledged, even for the alleged core of "new realities" in the social context of defense policy, i.e., the young and better educated. The public's views in the Federal Republic on national security and nuclear weapons since 1979 have been important and interesting, and they deserve further study, but the joyful or alarmist diagnosis of a sudden "revolt of the masses," led by an emergent "successor generation," falls short of the complex realities that still need to be understood more adequately.

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