

The Year Was...

1940

Americans watched anxiously through 1940 as developments unfolded in the war in Europe. Sometimes it was hard to tell exactly what was going on—the public placed relatively little faith in the news coming from London, and even less in that emanating from Berlin. Many continued to hope for the best, believing not only that Adolf Hitler might still offer peace, but that the wisest course of action for England and France would be to take it.

However, this hope was increasingly strained as country after country fell to the Germans. Americans recognized, too, that the price being demanded for peace—to let Germany keep Poland, to give up Czechoslovakia, to do nothing as armies swept into Denmark, Norway, and Sweden—was becoming far too high to pay.

As we sit today in a troubled world, waiting in suspense to see to what extent we will be affected by warfare in places far away, what the next fanatical leader of fanatics might do, when the next terrorists will strike, it is not difficult to imagine the apprehensiveness of Americans on the cusp of World War II. Even as most clung to their insistence that their country stay out of the war no matter what, they foretold dire consequences should Germany win it. In 1940, it was still possible to hope for the best.

But the worst was coming.

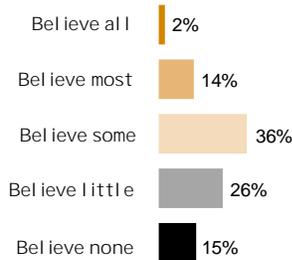
—Lisa Ferraro Parmelee

Darkness and Doubt

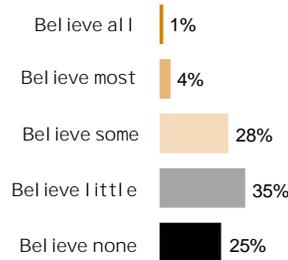
Question:

How much do you believe the official news reports...

...from London?



...from Berlin?

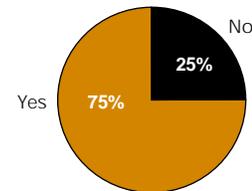


Source: Survey by People's Research, May 4-9, 1940.

Not in the Cards

Question:

If Hitler offers to make peace this spring, do you think England and France should meet with the Germans and try to end the war?

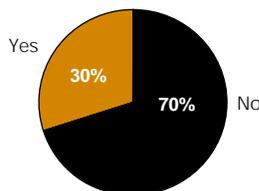


Source: Survey by the Gallup Organization, February 22-27, 1940.

They All Fall Down

Question:

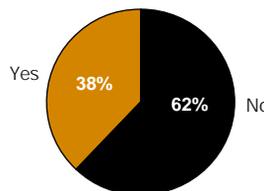
If peace could be reached [in the war in Europe between Germany and England and France] by letting Germany keep Poland, would you favor this?



Source: Survey by the Gallup Organization, February 22-27, 1940.

Question:

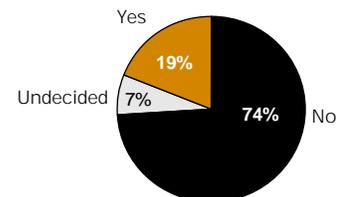
If peace could be reached by letting Germany keep Czechoslovakia, would you favor this?



Source: Survey by the Gallup Organization, February 22-27, 1940.

Question:

Should the United States do anything about [Germany's marching into Denmark and Norway and Sweden]?

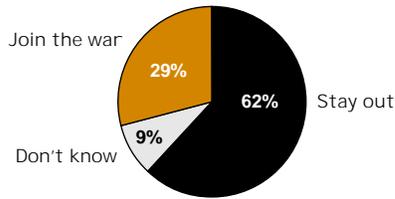


Source: Survey by the Gallup Organization, April 11-16, 1940.

Stay Out of It

Question:

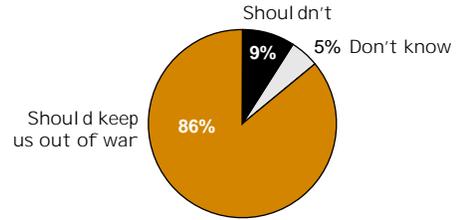
Would it be wiser for us to join the war if the allies seem to be losing, or try to stay out in the hope that we can live in peace with the new German empire if Hitler wins?



Source: Survey by People's Research, May 23-27, 1940.

Question:

Which of these things do you think the next administration should do and which shouldn't it do?... Keep us out of war unless we are attacked, no matter what happens abroad.

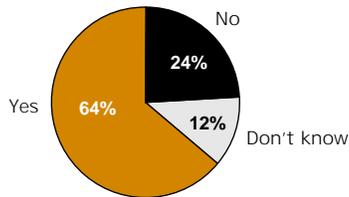


Source: Survey by the Roper Organization, March 1940.

Big Risk

Question:

Suppose the United States does not go into the war, and Germany defeats England and France, do you think you, personally, would be affected by this German victory?

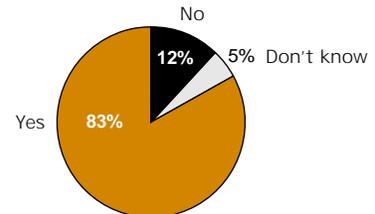


Source: Survey by the Gallup Organization, May 25-30, 1940.

Bigger Risk

Question:

Do you think you, personally, would be affected if the United States went into the European war?

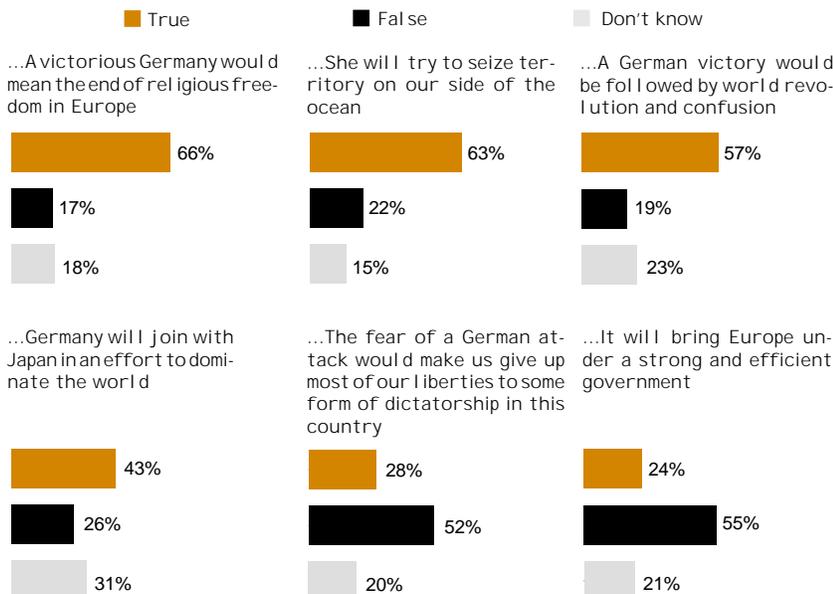


Source: Survey by the Gallup Organization, June 1-6, 1940.

Dire Predictions

Questions:

If Germany should win the war, which of the following statements do you believe would be true, which false?



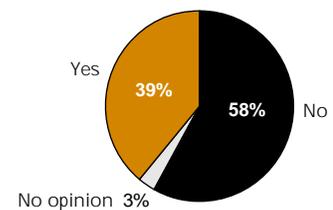
Source: Survey by the Roper Organization, June 1940.

Still Hoping

for the Best

Question:

At the present time do you find yourself worrying more than usual about your own future?



Source: Survey by the Gallup Organization, November 21-26, 1940.