

# War and Defence Attitudes: A First Look at Survey Data from 14 Countries\*

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This article presents the empirical findings of attitudes towards war and defence from 14 countries as measured by the International Values Study in 1981-82. The US shows the highest level of fear that the country will be involved in a major war within the next five years. Hungary, the single Eastern European nation included, records a very low level of fear of war involvement, and is in this regard, close to Norway and Sweden. Hungary, Norway, Sweden, and the US all have a public that records a strong willingness to defend the country in case of war. The defence will is much weaker in the nations of continental Europe, especially Belgium, Italy, and West Germany. Some of the factors that can be used to account for differences between the countries are: Geopolitical vulnerability, historical experiences of defeat and sufferings in war, and the degree of international involvements of a nation.

## 1. Introduction

The 1980s have witnessed an increasing concern for the study of mass attitudes towards war, peace, and defence. This has particularly been true in Western Europe and is related to perceived military developments: the continuing buildup of military forces in the East, the deployment of more NATO nuclear missiles in Britain, West Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Italy, and the escalation of a new cold war between the superpowers. These developments have helped to revive the anti-nuclear movement from the early 1960s, and, in some countries, led to a strengthening of parties with various degrees of peace profiles.

It is probably correct to conclude that the impact of the peace movement has declined towards the middle of the decade, partly as a result of the resumption of the peace talks in Geneva, and also because major parties, like the Social Democrats in some countries, have incorporated some of the demands of the peace movement in their platforms. It could also be argued that the rise and de-

cline of social movements follow a cyclical pattern that is independent of particular political events. This might partly be accounted for by internal factors of such movements, i.e. the movements' ability to motivate their followers to give time and other resources to the cause over an extended period of time, or by external forces, such as the dynamics of the 'issue-attention cycle' (Downs 1972).

While the rise in interest relating to peace issues caused some worry in the military and political elites of NATO, poll evidence did not indicate any sign of slipping support for NATO among the mass publics (Lumsden 1983). Flynn & Rattinger (1985, p. 375) demonstrate that support for NATO even increased slightly in the period. And Crewe (1985, p. 67) explains the defeat of the British Labour party in the 1983 general election in the following way: 'It had the penalty for downgrading public opinion in favor of activist opinion and for confusing doubts about the case for new missiles with hostility to the Atlantic Alliance.'

However, opinion polls from nine Western nations demonstrate that the proportion of the people who believed that the security of the West rested upon cooperation between Western Europe and the United States declined from 1982 to 1983.<sup>1</sup> This

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opinion poll, and most of the opinion surveys in the period, were focused on the measurement of specific attitudes related to issues like the question of nuclear-free zones, the NATO double-track decision, etc. Such surveys, informative as they might be for conductors of public policy, do not convey any knowledge about the more general peace and war attitudes of the population. Furthermore, these surveys are normally restricted to single countries or to a limited group of Western nations. Valuable compilations of opinion polls in the area of peace and defence attitudes have been made by den Oudsten (1984; 1985).

Since war and peace issues more than any other question are dependent on the relations between the major political blocs of the world, data from the Soviet Union and other countries in Eastern Europe are strongly in demand. But, for too well known reasons, surveys of political attitudes from this area are a scarce commodity. In the data to be presented in this article, we are at least able to include one Eastern nation. Some social scientists may distrust survey data on political topics when they are collected in non-democratic nations. While the arguments in favour of such scepticism bear some merit, the position that they cannot be used at all seems to be to go too far. The inclusion of Hungary does not alter the Western bias in our survey evidence, but is nevertheless one of few occasions that make comparisons across the political watershed possible.

The data are derived from the surveys of the International Values Study and were collected from personal hour long interviews with the adult populations of 14 nations in 1981-82.<sup>2</sup> The purpose of the study was to analyze the fundamental belief systems and values in the areas of religion, work, family, leisure, and politics. The broad scope of the study made it impossible to allow for a detailed coverage of peace and war questions. Four relevant items are included in the survey: Fear of war, willingness to defend the country in case of war, what is worth sacri-

ficing one's life for, and confidence in the armed forces (the latter question was not asked in Hungary).

Problems with the reliability and validity of survey items across nations with different languages, cultures, and political systems should not be overlooked. In this case the feeling of the author is that key terms like 'war', 'armed forces', and 'defend the country' are fairly simple, and do not turn out to be different stimuli across the nations. Problematic as they might be as indicators of the 'true' underlying attitudes, it is not the cross-national dimension of the study that makes for the largest measurement problems.

The purpose here is to make some first explorations into the data. With the exception of Norway, we have had access only to marginal distributions for each country, and it is very little one can possibly do by way of statistical analysis of 14 cases with aggregated survey data. There is also scant theoretical guidance available. The analytical steps to be taken here will consequently be based on simple comparisons and post facto interpretations. In the Norwegian case we will report some findings from a more elaborate multivariate analysis.

## 2. Findings from the cross-national data

At the time of the collection of our data (1981-82), the fear of war among the publics of the West probably had peaked. This is demonstrated by time-series data in articles by Russett & Deluca (1983), who see the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan as the source of the rise in fear of war, and by den Oudsten (1985). Partly contradictory is a finding reported by den Oudsten (1984) showing that in most of the nine Western nations polled 'the threat of war' and 'nuclear war' were listed as increasing concerns from 1982 to 1983. It is unfortunate that not all surveys of the Values Study were done within a shorter time span since the opinion on fear of war changed considerably in this period.

Table I gives the distribution for the fear of war in the 14 countries. It is important to

Table I. Assessment of L

	Brit- ain	North- ern Ireland
Not at all		
1	23	13
2	12	13
3	12	15
4	7	11
5	13	10
6	8	6
7	7	7
8	5	6
9	3	7
10	5	2
Very likely		
Don't know	6	10
Average	4.1	4.4

The wording of the question will be involved

remember that the nations that the country will be involved, and the major world war, also more included. And the question is thinkable to

That the US combination with the highly unexpected. It is democratic in the sense (at least as included) But for smaller war nation will be inv variations. The US long ago been involved in Vietnam. Current tin America can a mote a fear of war

Some part of the used for a superpower can also, albeit less for big powers like France. Both France involved in wars in to their status of

Table I. Assessment of Likelihood of Major War (%)

	Britain	Northern Ireland	Irish Republic	France	Belgium	West Germany	Netherlands	Spain	Italy	Denmark	Sweden	Norway	US	Hungary
Not at all														
1	23	13	17	14	10	15	12	10	36	23	34	31	6	35
2	12	13	11	10	13	16	11	7	14	10	18	20	5	13
3	12	15	15	13	11	17	13	10	10	9	15	17	8	10
4	7	11	8	9	8	9	10	8	7	5	6	5	6	6
5	13	10	9	21	13	15	13	9	9	16	9	13	16	11
6	8	6	8	8	8	8	11	9	4	6	5	5	11	3
7	7	7	7	7	7	5	8	9	4	6	4	2	12	2
8	5	6	7	6	6	5	6	6	4	7	2	3	13	2
9	3	7	4	3	3	2	2	3	2	1	1	1	7	2
10	5	2	3	3	3	3	2	3	2	6	2	2	11	2
Very likely														
Don't know	6	10	9	7	17	6	9	21	9	11	5	3	3	16
Average	4.1	4.4	4.3	4.4	4.5	3.9	4.5	4.7	3.1	4.2	3.0	3.0	5.9	2.9

The wording of the question was: 'How likely do you think it is that there will be another major war in which your country will be involved within the next five years?'

remember that the question explicitly mentions that the country of the respondent will be involved, and that the war should be 'major'. Major war does not necessarily mean world war, also more limited wars can be included. And the question is, as has been alluded to by other authors, if a total nuclear war is thinkable to the mass publics.

That the US comes out so strongly as the nation with the highest fear of war is not totally unexpected. Total nuclear war is democratic in the sense that most of the nations (at least as included in our study) will suffer. But for smaller wars, the probability that a nation will be involved will show greater variations. The United States has not too long ago been involved in a protracted war in Vietnam. Current US involvement in Latin America can also have helped to promote a fear of war among Americans.

Some part of the argument that can be used for a superpower like the United States can also, albeit less strongly, be made valid for big powers like Great Britain and France. Both France and Britain have been involved in wars in recent years that relate to their status of being (former) colonial

powers. The most prominent case is of course the Falklands war. While the conflict over the Falkland islands erupted after the time of data collection in the Values Study, it can serve as an indicator of a class of events that can impinge on the public's assessment of how likely war is: Big powers with economic and political interests abroad will be perceived as more likely to be involved in wars than are smaller, self-contained nations. Obviously the size or power of a nation is only one factor that is relevant for the problem under discussion. It is, for example, interesting to observe in Table I that the level of fear of war is higher in Northern Ireland and in the Irish Republic than in Britain. This can indicate that the conflict level in an area also may contribute to a fear of a major war: One can expect that the experience of internal war or a high national conflict level with strong incidences of violence, can promote a fear of more escalated forms of war.

A third source of fear is the geopolitical location of a nation, and how likely it is that the soil of the country will provide the battleground for a major war. This will be de-

Table II. Willing to Fight for Your Country in War (%)

	Britain	Northern Ireland	Irish Re- public	France	Bel- gium	West Ger- many	Ne- ther- lands	Spain	Italy	Den- mark	Swe- den	Nor- way	US	Hun- gary
Yes	62	46	49	42	25	35	44	53	28	59	78	82	71	71
No	27	33	31	46	49	41	35	27	57	22	11	10	20	10
Don't know	11	22	20	12	27	24	21	20	15	19	11	8	9	19

The wording of the question was: 'Of course, we all hope that there will not be another war, but if it were to come to that would you be willing to fight for your country?'

terminated from historical experience and the current military situation. Based on this perspective we should expect that fear of war should be higher in central parts of Europe than in the northern and southern peripheries. To some extent this is also supported in the data. The average on the ten-point scale is high in Belgium, the Netherlands, France, and low in Sweden, Norway, and Italy. Denmark is closer to the level for continental Europe, and West Germany is located in between. Spain is also, unexpectedly, high on this measure. Hungary records the absolute lowest level of fear of war, close to the readings for Norway, Sweden, and Italy. This indicates that the feeling that war is imminent is at a low level in Eastern Europe. It should also be added that the phrasing of the question in Hungary did not use 'major' which theoretically should make it easier to give a high rating.

Besides considering the differences between nations and factors that can explain these, the absolute level on the ten-point scale is also of interest. The balance in all nations, with the single exception of the US, is towards the lower end of the scale, which means that most people think that a major war is unlikely. It is of interest to compare our findings from the early 1980s with a study from the mid 1960s. In a pioneering survey, Halle (1966, p. 58) demonstrated that only a small fraction of the population in three European nations believed that war would break out within five years. The percentages for France, Norway, and Poland

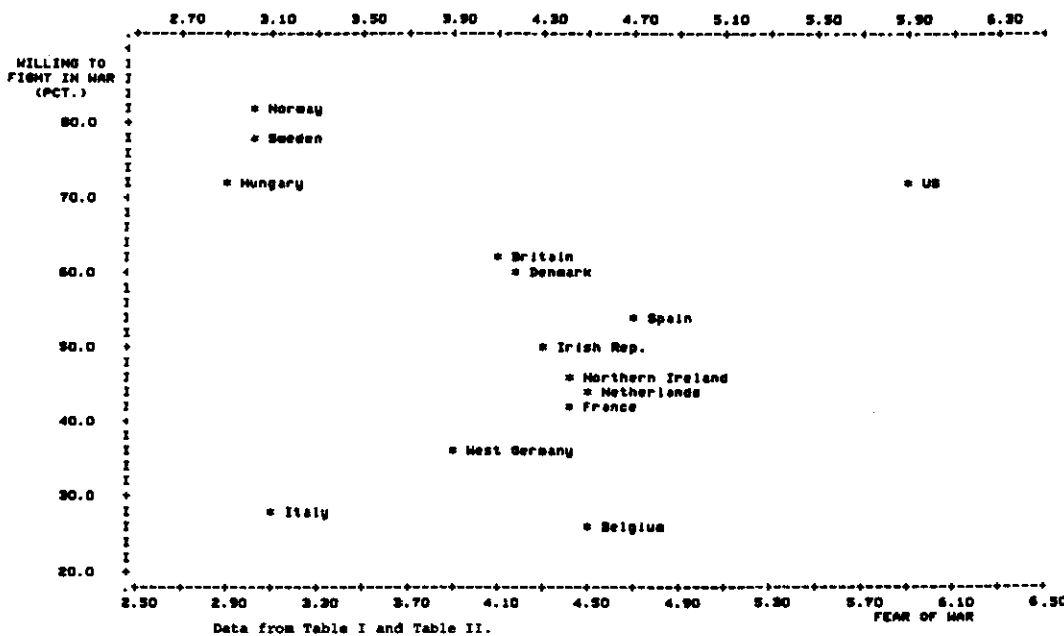
were 4, 3, and 6, respectively. When the timespan was widened to 20 years the percentages expecting war were, for the same countries, 9, 10, and 17. In this comparison, the one Eastern Nation that was included, Poland, recorded a higher fear of war than Norway and France. In the recent data, the single nation from the East, Hungary, lies in the opposite end and shows a very low level of fear of war.

Table II demonstrates that there are great variations in the willingness to defend one's country in the case of war. Belgium is at the bottom of the list with only 25%, and Norway is at the top with 82%. It should be noted that the proportion of DK is largest in the countries with a low level of willingness to fight. A recalculation of percentages, excluding DK's, will increase the percentage of the population that will defend the country, but the overall ranking of the nations will only be marginally affected.

How can the differences be accounted for? It could be tempting to look for the level of fear of war as an explanatory factor. Fig. 1 plots the variables of Table I and Table II.

Is there a relationship or not? Certainly the plot indicates that the expected negative correlation is lurking in the background: Increasing fear of war goes with a lowering of the willingness to stand up and fight for the country. But outliers make the pattern less clear than one theoretically would like to see. The two obvious outliers are the US, which has the highest fear of war and at the

Fig. 1. Fear of War and Willingness to Defend the Country



same time a high proportion of the population wanting to fight for the country in war, and Italy with the reverse combination — a low level of fear of war and a hesitant population when it comes to willingness to fight for their country.

A post-facto explanation of these deviating countries would, for the Italian case, stress the effect of losing the Second World War, which makes the population sceptical towards fighting a new one, even if this is not seen as an imminent possibility. That West Germany behaves in the same direction, partly strengthens this explanation. In the US case, one could muster the argument that fear of war primarily relates to involvement abroad, with geographical distance to the potential battlefield, which weakens the psychological reality of potential participation among the citizens. This argument is supported by the fact that the US has fought its wars on the soil of other countries. And following the idea that American fear of war, to a higher extent than in Europe, is related to limited, non-nuclear war, this can

be used to explain why fear of war does not necessarily lower the willingness to fight in the US.

Past experience of military defeat in war can be used to explain the low level of defence willingness in Italy and West Germany, and in Japan, where data from the Values Study show that only 20% are willing to defend their country (Heald 1982). The importance of the past is also pointed out by Rose (1985), who demonstrates that positive attitudes towards defence are linked to national pride in all nations that are included in the Values Study. But national pride does not contribute very much to explaining cross-national variations since the effect of national pride is greatest where the numbers affected are least, meaning that only tiny fractions in these countries say that they are not proud of their country (Rose 1985, p. 95).

The data indicate that the relevance of past experience not only may include military defeat, but the sufferings and costs of war as well. It is evident that the people of

Norway	US	Hungary
82	71	71
10	20	10
8	9	19

actively. When the 20 years the were, for the same in this comparison, that was included, r fear of war than the recent data, the t, Hungary, lies in vs a very low level

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Table III. Worth Sacrificing Everything, even Risking Life for (%)

	Britain	Northern Ireland	Irish Re- public	France	Bel- gium	West Ger- many	Ne- ther- lands	Spain	Italy	Den- mark	Swe- den	Nor- way	US	Hun- gary
My country	7	5	6	3	5	5	2	13	3	4	5	24	18	21
Save another's life	20	15	17	16	18	4	14	21	26	9	21	36	23	11
Justice	2	1	2	2	5	1	6	11	5	0	2	8	3	5
Freedom	3	3	2	6	4	3	9	9	8	2	3	12	6	9
Peace	3	4	2	3	5	1	7	13	5	1	3	10	2	16
Religious beliefs	4	8	9	2	3	2	4	7	5	1	2	5	13	3
Nothing, other, don't know	71	70	63	76	73	83	67	57	52	82	69	49	55	N.a.

The wording of the question was: 'Apart from your family, in your opinion, is there anything that you would consider sacrificing everything for, even risking your life if necessary?'

Multiple answers were permitted.

N.a.: Not available.

continental European countries like France, Belgium, and the Netherlands were more severely affected by the war than were Denmark, Norway and Sweden (the latter country being neutral during the war). And, finally it could also be argued that the current geopolitical location of the countries makes for differences in vulnerability, making the publics in continental Europe more tuned to the losses that they might bear in a war than people in the northern peripheries. Speculative as these comments might be, they can partly be substantiated with the data shown in Table III.

When it comes to what is worth sacrificing everything for, even one's life, three of the four countries that showed the strongest willingness to fight for the country in war also have the highest proportion saying that they are ready to sacrifice for their country. It is only Sweden among the four countries (which also includes Norway, the US, and Hungary) that is on the level with the rest of the nations. The percentage saying that they will sacrifice for their country is somewhat overestimated for Norway and the US (probably also for Hungary), since more alternatives are mentioned in these nations. But even correcting for this, these countries stand out.

Since peace is the opposite of war, it is interesting to see if the people are willing to sacrifice for this goal. And, as can be read from Table III, it is only tiny minorities in nearly all countries that express this preference. Hungary, Spain, and Norway can be said to have a weakly higher proportion of people with strong peace values (we assume that you have to hold a strong value if you are willing to give your life for it). But peace falls in company with other abstract ideals like justice and freedom in that people do not seem intended to risking life for such goals. If people are hesitant to sacrifice for abstract ideals, their willingness to give a lot to save another's life is stronger. In most of the countries this category receives the highest proportion of positive answers.

The final item to be discussed is the public's confidence in the armed forces, a variable which also shows fairly large differences between the nations.

The support for the armed forces is strongest in Britain and Ireland, and weakest in continental Europe. This matches the result for the willingness to defend the country, but note also that Norway and Sweden do not rank as high on confidence in the armed forces as could be expected from the

Table IV. Confidence in the Armed Forces (%)

	Britain	Northern Ireland	Irish Republic	France	Belgium	West Germany	Netherlands	Spain	Italy	Denmark	Sweden	Norway	US
A great deal	38	33	33	14	8	11	6	23	18	9	7	17	36
Quite a lot	43	43	42	39	33	43	36	38	40	32	51	51	45
Not very much	15	19	21	22	34	36	41	26	27	43	32	28	16
None at all	2	3	4	19	17	9	14	11	15	15	10	4	2
Don't know	1	1	0	5	9	0	3	2	0	1	0	1	1
Average	3.2	3.1	3.1	2.5	2.3	2.6	2.4	2.8	2.6	2.4	2.6	2.8	3.1

The wording of the question was: 'Please look at this card, and tell me, for each item listed, how much confidence you have in them, is it a great deal, quite a lot, not very much or none at all?' Besides the armed forces, the following institutions were listed: The church, the education system, the legal system, the press, trade unions, the police, parliament, civil service, major companies.

high level of willingness to fight for the country.

Since the level of confidence in the military institution is tapped along with nine other institutions of society, some interest also relates to the relative ranking of the military. Overall, the armed forces is ranked among the highest, but not as high as another agency of order, the police, which ranks as number one in 11 of the 13 countries surveyed. Support for the armed forces is ranked number one in the US, number two in Britain and in Northern Ireland, and receives the lowest relative ranking in the Netherlands and Denmark (six in both countries), and in France and Norway (five). It is also important to note that there is a positive balance in the support of the military in all nations. But this holds for government institutions in general. Public institutions enjoy a higher level of support than private institutions (Rose 1984, p. 179) do. While this finding may come as a surprise to the critics of big government, it probably reflects the fact that government institutions to a greater extent than institutions in the private sphere must build on a social and political consensus. For additional analyses on the confidence in institutions, see Listhaug (1984).

3. *A multivariate analysis of Norway*  
Mysen (1984) has conducted an elaborate

multivariate analysis of the Norwegian data. The main findings from his regression models can be summed up in the following sentences: Among the demographic variables, gender has the strongest and most consistent impact on the four items: Women more than men felt that war was likely, were hesitant to say that they would defend the country, did not want to risk their lives for their country, and also had lower confidence in the armed forces. As noted by Boulding (1984), this finding adds to a large number of earlier publications that have found women to be in greater opposition to military spending and to the military institution in general, than men. Confidence in the military, willingness to defend the country and risking one's life are linked to left-right self-placement, with leftist persons showing lower confidence and being less willing to fight for the country. But even on the extreme left in Norway a strong majority say they are willing to fight in a war. The multivariate test also confirms that national pride increases both the confidence in the armed forces and the willingness to fight and sacrifice for the country.

4. *Conclusion*

Our first explorations into survey data on attitudes towards war and defence from 14 countries cannot be used to formulate definitive conclusions, but some interesting patterns stand out. Hungary, as the single East-

Sweden	Norway	US	Hungary
5	24	18	21
21	36	23	11
2	3	3	5
3	6	6	9
3	10	2	16
2	5	13	3
9	55	N.a.	

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