

# Attitudes Toward the Korean War

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In the study described here, the authors investigate the complex relationship between three dimensions of political opinion: ideological conviction, partisan allegiance, and political knowledge. They find these three sets of criteria are sometimes in conflict with one

another and show how such conflicts affect student attitudes toward the role which the United States has been playing in Korea and toward their willingness to serve there.

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THE present conflict in Korea finds the American people fighting a shooting war on a foreign front while a political debate still continues to rage on the home front. Despite over 100,000 American casualties, the united and wholehearted support of public opinion which characterized the last war is conspicuous by its absence in the Korean war. Instead of consensus, we have partisanship—in place of conviction and faith, we have divided opinion and doubt.

This difference in wartime atmosphere is particularly significant for those groups called upon to serve their country. Studies during the last war<sup>1</sup> found that a basic factor in a soldier's acceptance of his role was an unquestioning belief in the rightness of our cause. Today, the young men of our nation are being called to arms at a time when the country, as a whole, is still in disagreement about the worthwhileness of the present conflict. With none of the fanfare of a nation at war, they are being asked to lay aside their work or studies and to postpone their future plans in order to serve their country. How do they feel about making this sacrifice? What are their attitudes and convictions about the war in Korea—what factors play an important part in determining this state of mind?

This study attempts to answer these questions for one segment of our nation's youth, the American college student. It is based upon the responses of 4,585 male students attending eleven universities. The study was sponsored by the Carnegie Corporation, with each university

<sup>1</sup> Stouffer, *et al.*, *The American Soldier*, Vol. I, Chapter 9, Princeton University Press, 1949.

cooperating by administering the questionnaire to a representative cross-section of its male undergraduate students.<sup>2</sup> Self-administered questionnaires were completed by 80 per cent of the randomly selected students during the months of April and May, 1952.

A composite cross-section of 2,975 students was selected from this total sample weighted according to the size of the male undergraduate student body at each university. While the sample of students selected may be considered a representative cross-section of each of the universities studied, it cannot be said to constitute a representative cross-section of all American college students. A comparison of the eleven universities on the eight major scale-variables constituting the main focus of this study, however, revealed relatively minor inter-university differences. On the average, for all the scales, the individual universities differed from the mean for all the universities together by only 4.5 per cent. This result increases the confidence with which we can view the findings of this report as applicable to male college students throughout the United States.

#### STUDENT OPINION CONCERNING KOREA

Student attitudes toward the Korean war were measured by means of three questions forming a Guttman scale (coefficient of reproducibility .96).<sup>3</sup> These questions are reproduced below in Table 1 which shows the frequency distribution of responses to each question and the combination of categories into favorable and unfavorable responses.

The present war in Korea does not command the wholehearted support of the male college student. Feelings that "the war in Korea is not worth fighting" have been experienced "very often" by 26 per cent of the students and "sometimes" by an additional 37 per cent. Our present foreign policy regarding Korea receives a mixed reception: for each student in favor of the policy there is another student opposed to it. This division of opinion on the college campuses indicates that the present Korean conflict is more a matter of political opinion than of ideological conviction. The Korean war has not achieved the status of a patriotic symbol around which the nation can rally.

<sup>2</sup> The universities were: California (UCLA), Cornell, Dartmouth, Fisk, Harvard, University of Michigan, University of North Carolina, University of Texas, Wayne, Wesleyan, and Yale. The cooperating universities were selected on the basis of varying locality, size, type of ROTC program, etc., in order to provide a range of differing conditions.

<sup>3</sup> Stouffer, *et al.*, *The American Soldier*, Vol. IV, Chapter 3, Princeton University Press, 1950.

TABLE I  
ATTITUDE-TOWARD-KOREAN WAR SCALE

Question	Favorable Responses			Unfavorable Responses		
	Never	Once in a while	Sometimes	Very often		
Do you ever get the feeling that the war in Korea is not worth fighting?	19	18	37	26		
How much do the things that the Korean war is being fought for (war aims) mean to you, personally?		Tremendously Impt.	Mean Quite a Bit	Un-decided	Not very much	Nothing
		20	41	12	22	5
In general, are you in favor of our foreign policy in Korea, or opposed to it?		Strongly in favor	In favor	Neutral	Against it	Strongly Against
		12	36	19	20	13

IDEOLOGICAL CONVICTION VS. POLITICAL OPINION

In studying the students' reactions to the Korean conflict, an important initial task is to distinguish between "values" based on a belief in the "American Creed," and "opinions" held as a matter of political leaning. To disentangle the two is not a simple task. The United States is a nation composed of many separate interest groups with legitimate differences of opinion. Southerners differ from Northerners over civil rights; labor, business, and farm groups defend different economic policies and interests; debate rages over opposing viewpoints as to the nation's proper role in international affairs. It is not easy to find criteria by which one or another of these positions can be styled more "American" than its contender.

A similar difficulty confronts any attempt to decide whether college students today do or do not have ideological faith in the democratic cause. Certainly, the students are divided into opposing groups in most of their opinions. It would be a mistake, however, to view such cleavages apart from the existence of similar differences of opinion within the larger society. It is also important not to label the absence of unanimity

as indicative of bewilderment. To be sure many students are puzzled and often express doubts about the present course of the United States, but the correct answers are not easy to come by, even for our greatest statesmen.

Evidence of the divided state of student opinion about many political issues is seen from their answers to the following questions (N = 2975):

“Do you think it would be worth fighting an all-out war to stop Communism, or do you think an all-out war to stop Communism would not be worthwhile?”

Very worthwhile	26%
Fairly worthwhile	14
Hardly worthwhile	18
Not at all worthwhile	24
Undecided or no opinion	16
No answer	2
	—
Total	100

“How effective do you think the UN has been?”

Extremely effective	1%
Fairly effective	46
Fairly ineffective	36
Extremely ineffective	12
Undecided or no opinion	3
No answer	2
	—
Total	100

“Which do you, personally, count on as the more effective deterrent against war: the atom bomb or the UN?”

The atom bomb	51%
The UN	45
No answer	4
	—
Total	100

“Would you like to see our government show more concern for conditions in other countries, or would you prefer us to show less concern?”

Much more concern	15%
More concern	31
It's all right now	32
Less concern	18
Much less concern	2
No answer	2
	—
Total	100

The students read, discuss, and think about political matters. They are subject to all the pressures and cross-pressures of the various groups to which they—and their parents—belong. They reflect all the diverse opinions associated with these various groups of the larger society. Some students are convinced of the worthwhileness of the present national policies and programs while others are not, but in this respect they are in company with their parents, teachers, and political representatives. Divided opinion must not be mistaken for divided loyalty.

#### POLITICAL CONVICTION, ALLEGIANCE, AND KNOWLEDGE

For the purposes of this analysis of student attitudes toward the Korean war, we hypothesize three basic dimensions of political opinion—ideological conviction, partisan allegiance, and political knowledge. These three factors are related to each other in a rather complex manner.

Ideological conviction, we propose, represents a general value orientation toward political matters. These values are embedded in the basic cultural themes of the society and are characterized by almost universal acceptance. They are the slogans and symbols which unite a people who may be divided on the political issues of everyday life. In the present analysis ideological conviction will be studied in terms of the student's expression of faith that the present conflict is one between the free peoples of the world and dictatorship.

Partisan allegiance, on the other hand, represents one's specific position on the many controversial political problems facing any nation. The opinions one holds about the best way to solve these problems are an expression of political predisposition or partisanship. Like most partisan opinion, they are strongly affected by group affiliation or identification.

Finally, political knowledge enters the picture as the "face of reality." Both ideological conviction and partisan allegiance are tempered by the cold facts of actual events. The importance of information as a political conditioner depends upon the background of knowledge already possessed by the individual and his access to current facts.

These three sets of latent or underlying criteria which influence political judgment may be in conflict with each other. For example, a person may approve of a general policy of containment rather than appeasement; he may support the idea of UN interventionism; but if his knowledge of the Korean situation leads him to believe that "We seem to have reached a stalemate; nothing has improved for two years," he may arrive at an unfavorable evaluation of our policy in Korea. Or it may be that an individual believes in fighting a more active war in Korea but finds this in conflict with the position taken by party.

Our central hypothesis, then, is that the "political position" of the students is the resultant of three major dimensions or political forces which may pull them in opposite directions. Their values may incline them to accept politically idealistic positions; their political leanings and allegiances may predispose them to accept or reject certain party-endorsed opinions irrespective of idealism; their observations of the operation of foreign policy and of the UN may lead them to be disillusioned about specific measures irrespective of either faith or allegiance. We shall see in the next section how the data bear out these hypotheses in regard to the present Korean conflict.

#### THE KOREAN WAR AND PARTISAN ALLEGIANCE

Favorable or unfavorable attitudes toward our policy in Korea are strongly related to general partisan alignment. For example, interventionist students are more favorable in their attitudes, isolationist students less favorable. When asked: "Would you like to see our government show more concern for conditions in other countries, or would you prefer us to show less concern?", students who say "more concern" are more likely to approve of our Korean policy.

Among those who say they  
would prefer us to show:

More concern  
Same  
Less concern

*Favorable Attitude Toward  
Korean War*

41% (1385)  
37 (934)  
15 (593)

Similarly, the more faith the student has in the work of the United Nations, the more likely he is to believe that the present conflict in Korea is worthwhile.

"How effective do you think the United Nations has been?"

	<i>Favorable Attitude Toward Korean War</i>
Extremely or fairly effective	42% (1415)
Fairly ineffective	30 (1081)
Extremely ineffective	17 (359)

Attitude toward Korea also appears to be closely linked to attitudes toward the present conflict between Communism and democracy, as shown from the responses to the following question:

"Do you think it would be worth fighting an all-out war to stop Communism, or do you think an all-out war to stop Communism would not be worthwhile?"

	<i>Favorable Attitude Toward Korean War</i>
Worthwhile	41% (1194)
Undecided	31 (364)
Not worthwhile	30 (1239)

Support of our Korean policy, then, seems to be reinforced by general political opinions which are, in turn, associated with political affiliation or partisan allegiance: U.S. participation in world affairs, estimates of UN effectiveness, and all-out war against Communism. Now let us see how it is related to matters of political faith or ideological conviction.

#### THE KOREAN WAR AND IDEOLOGICAL CONVICTION

There is evidence that one's attitude toward the Korean war also reflects one's ideological conviction. Those who agree with the statement that, "We are fighting today for an ideal—the free peoples of the world against dictatorship" are about twice as likely to express a favorable attitude toward the Korean policy in general, than are those who disagree with this ideological statement (Table 2). Thus, the more one believes we are fighting for an ideal, the more favorably will he view the Korean situation.

Approval of intervention in Korea is also related to faith in the worthwhileness of World War II. The more one believes that World War II was worth fighting, the more likely is it that one believes in the

present Korean conflict (Table 3). This would seem to indicate that something more than partisan political differences of opinion in foreign policy is involved in a student's attitude toward Korea.

TABLE 2  
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ATTITUDE TOWARD KOREAN WAR AND  
IDEOLOGICAL CONVICTION

*Question:* "Do you agree or disagree? We are fighting today for an ideal—the free peoples of the world against dictatorship."

<i>Attitude-toward-Korean War</i> Score	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Undecided</i>	<i>Disagree</i>
(Unfav.) 1-2	30	43	51
3	30	28	26
(Fav.) 4	40	29	23
Total percent	100	100	100
Total cases	1819	306	816

TABLE 3  
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ATTITUDE TOWARD KOREAN WAR AND FAITH  
IN WORLD WAR II

*Question:* "Do you ever get the feeling that World War II was not worth fighting?"

<i>Attitude-toward-Korean War</i> Score	<i>Very Often</i>	<i>Sometimes Once in a while</i>	<i>Never</i>
(Unfav.) 1-2	71	44	30
3	17	29	30
(Fav.) 4	12	27	40
Total percent	100	100	100
Total cases	216	836	1893

Attitude toward Korean policy, then, is related positively to the ideological convictions of the student. What about the third component, political knowledge? How does attitude toward Korea relate to the amount of information possessed by the student?

#### THE KOREAN WAR AND POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE

Based on a political knowledge test of four items, the students were graded according to the number of items they could answer correctly.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Validity of this score is indicated by its correlation with other knowledge variables. The higher political knowledge scores are obtained by those students who have the higher

Students who are politically more knowledgeable are more likely to express a favorable attitude toward the Korean conflict. (Table 4). It would appear that the more a student has the facts before him, the more likely he is to understand and to approve of our role in Korea.

TABLE 4  
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE AND ATTITUDE  
TOWARD THE KOREAN WAR

<i>Attitude-toward-Korean War</i> Score	<i>Political Knowledge Score</i>			
	(Low) 0	1	2	(High) 3
(Unfav.) 1-2	52	41	37	26
3	29	28	27	31
(Fav.) 4	19	31	36	43
Total percent	100	100	100	100
Total cases	446	754	992	783

The relationship between knowledge and approval of Korean policy is not specific to political knowledge. Students with higher grades—in contrast to those with poorer grades—are more likely to approve of our policy in Korea.

TABLE 5  
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ATTITUDE TOWARD KOREAN WAR AND  
CUMULATIVE AVERAGE GRADE

<i>Attitude-toward-Korean War</i> Score	<i>Cumulative Average Grade</i>		
	Under 70	70-84	85 or more
(Unfav.) 1-2	37	37	32
3	39	29	24
(Fav.) 4	24	34	44
Total percent	100	100	100
Total cases	127	2368	317

Ideological conviction and political knowledge (as well as general knowledge) are both related, then, to the student's political position regarding the Korean war. The more idealistic he is about the present international conflict, and the more knowledge he has about world affairs, the more favorable will he be toward the Korean situation. What is the relative weight of each of these factors?

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average grades, who receive higher scores on the Selective Service College Qualification Test, and who are further advanced toward their college degrees.

Taking both factors into account simultaneously indicates that these two variables are independent of each other and about equally important. Regardless of whether the student's knowledge score is high or low, those who view the present conflict "idealistically" are more likely to express a favorable attitude toward the Korean war. Similarly, regardless of whether the student agrees or disagrees that the present fight is for an ideal, those who score high on knowledge are more likely to express a favorable attitude toward the Korean situation. The greatest contrast, of course, is provided when those students who have neither faith nor knowledge are compared to those who have both faith and knowledge. Among the former group, 9 per cent are in favor of our Korean policy; among the later, 50 per cent. (Table 6).

TABLE 6  
ATTITUDE TOWARD KOREAN WAR AS RELATED TO IDEOLOGICAL CONVICTION  
AND POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE

<i>Political Knowledge Score</i>	<i>Percent favorable toward Korea among those who answer the question, "Do you agree that we are fighting today for an ideal—the free peoples of the world against dictatorship."</i>		
	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Undecided</i>	<i>Agree</i>
(Low) 1	9 (109)	14 (49)	24 (279)
2	19 (200)	22 (78)	38 (471)
3	25 (279)	32 (105)	41 (596)
(High) 4	30 (228)	44 (75)	50 (475)

POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE AND IDEOLOGICAL CONVICTION

There is, then, a strong interrelationship between political opinion (in this case, being in favor or opposed to our policy in Korea), ideological conviction, and knowledge. The relationship between knowledge and ideological conviction alone, however, is by no means so clearcut. Equivalent proportions of students on all knowledge levels express such ideological conviction. (Table 7).

It would appear that in certain cases a "realistic" appraisal of the facts may lead the more informed individual to lose some of his ideological convictions. This will probably occur most frequently when actual events seem to be reacting against "idealistic" solutions, so that in spite of his greater idealism, the more knowledgeable person in face of the facts must express more "cynical" opinions.

For example, we find the student with greater political knowledge somewhat more likely to rely on the atomic bomb as a deterrent to war rather than upon the United Nations. (Table 8).

TABLE 7  
IDEOLOGICAL CONVICTION AMONG STUDENTS ON DIFFERENT LEVELS  
OF POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE

*Question:* "Do you agree or disagree? We are fighting today for an ideal—the free peoples of the world against dictatorship."

	<i>Political Knowledge Score</i>			
	(Low)			(High)
	1	2	3	4
Agree	63	63	62	61
Undecided	11	10	10	10
Disagree	26	27	28	29
Total percent	100	100	100	100
Total cases	437	749	980	778

TABLE 8

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE AND USE OF THE ATOMIC BOMB

*Question:* "Which do you, personally, count on as the more effective deterrent against war, the atomic bomb or the United Nations?"

<i>Political Knowledge Score</i>	<i>Percent Responding Atomic Bomb</i>
High	59 (783)
Medium	52 (1746)
Low	45 (446)

Students who are most informed are *not* the ones, then, who view the United Nations as a realistic solution to the problem of war in the present international situation. The general picture is that the better informed students are somewhat more likely to show "realistic" disaffection from ideal solutions.

#### PERSONAL COMMITMENT

So far we have been dealing with the rather impersonal values and opinions of the students. An important question remains to be answered. To what extent are these attitudinal factors related to the student's desire for personal involvement in the present Korean war? How do the student's convictions, allegiance, and knowledge with respect to Korea affect his attitude toward being called into military service?

A series of seven questions forming a Guttman scale (Reproducibility = .94) determined how willing or reluctant the students were to enter the army.<sup>5</sup> This scale contained such questions as:

"Which of the following statements comes closest to describing your own feelings about going into full-time military service?"

I'd like to get in	10%
I'd just as soon stay out if possible	63
I don't want to go in at all	24
No answer	3
	—
Total percent	100 (2202) <sup>6</sup>

Analysis of this scale of attitude toward being called showed it to be positively related to attitude toward the Korean war and ideological conviction. The more favorably the student views this country's role in the present Korean situation, the more favorable he is to being called into service himself. About one-third of those students who are relatively opposed toward our action in Korea have positive scores on the attitude-toward-being-called scale. This is in contrast to those students who approve of our Korean policy, among whom about half have positive attitudes toward being called up. (Table 9).

TABLE 9  
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SCORE ON ATTITUDE-TOWARD-THE-KOREAN WAR AND  
ATTITUDE-TOWARD-BEING-CALLED SCALE

<i>Attitude-toward-Being-Called Score</i>	<i>Attitude-toward-the-Korean War Score</i>		
	(Neg.)		(Pos.)
	0-1	2	3
(Neg.) 1-2	31	20	20
3-4	32	32	28
5-6	23	25	27
(Pos.) 7-10	14	23	25
Total percent	100	100	100
Total cases	822	626	765

<sup>5</sup> The development and analysis of this scale is presented in detail in a report, *Students to Soldier*, mimeographed, Social Science Research Center, Cornell University.

<sup>6</sup> These questions were not asked of veterans, 4F's and other students who did not expect to be called to serve.

TABLE 10  
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN IDEOLOGICAL CONVICTION AND ATTITUDE TOWARD  
BEING CALLED

		<i>Positive (Scores 5-10)</i>
"We are fighting today for an ideal—the free peoples of the world against dictatorship." "Do you agree or disagree?"	Agree	48 (1377)
	Undecided	42 (210)
	Disagree	39 (599)
"Do you ever get the feeling that World War II was not worth fighting?"	Never	49 (1476)
	Once in a while	42 (289)
	Very often or sometimes	36 (427)
"Do you think it would be worth fighting an all-out war to stop Communism, or do you think an all-out war to stop Communism would not be worthwhile?"	Worthwhile	53 (904)
	Undecided	42 (275)
	Not worthwhile	40 (908)

Other questions also show that students who express ideological convictions are relatively more favorably disposed to being called, themselves.

Contrary to expectation, the degree to which the student is informed about current events does not affect his attitude toward serving. This willingness turns out to be more a function of conviction than of information. Again contrary to expectation, no relationship was found between faith in the United Nations and attitude toward serving. Students who believe in the United Nations are no more likely to express a positive attitude toward serving than those students who do not. This would tend to indicate that attitudes toward the United Nations do not represent a clearcut ideological stand. The United Nations as an ideal appears to be giving way to the United Nations as a political issue. Political issues, as a whole, do not seem to be related to a student's attitude toward service. Republican and Democratic students do not differ from each other in their willingness or reluctance. A difference in political opinions among the students does not appear to correspond to any difference in their attitude toward being called.

#### SUMMARY

An analysis of the political beliefs of male college students reveals extremely divergent opinions. Students do not agree about such mat-

ters as the worthwhileness of the present conflict in Korea, the effectiveness of the United Nations, American aid to Europe, and other current political matters. While these results might be interpreted as indicative of a lack of faith, the internal evidence indicates that they are less likely to indicate "confusion and doubt" than a realistic appraisal of the current world. The differences of opinion among students furthermore are strongly reflective of the differences present in the larger society.

Three basic dimensions of political opinion are hypothesized: ideological conviction, partisan allegiance, and political knowledge. The student's attitude toward the Korean war is related to each of these three variables. The stronger his ideological conviction (that is, the more he believes that the present war is being fought for an ideal), the more likely he is to have faith in the worthwhileness of the present fighting in Korea. In regard to partisan allegiance, the more "internationalistic" his opinions, the more he will favor our present foreign policy in Korea. Finally, the greater his political knowledge, the more likely is he to be in favor of the present Korean conflict.

The interrelationship among all three variables is complex. Partisan allegiance may lead one to adopt a political position contrary to one's general ideological conviction, while increased knowledge about world developments may disillusion an individual irrespective of either faith or allegiance. There is some evidence from this study that in the case of the Korean war and the United Nations, the lack of success in these two areas seems to react against the ideological convictions of an individual so that despite a greater idealism, the more informed individual appears to express more "cynical" opinions.

Personal commitment, in the form of a favorable attitude toward being called into military service, is related to both ideological conviction and attitude toward the Korean war. Those students who approve of our action in Korea and who feel that the present fight is one of a free people against dictatorship, are more likely to express positive attitudes toward serving in the armed forces. Knowledge does not relate to this attitude. It would appear, therefore, that a favorable attitude toward military service today, is more the result of faith than of facts.