

**PUBLIC OPINION DURING THE VIETNAM WAR:  
A REVISED MEASURE OF THE PUBLIC WILL<sup>1</sup>**

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## 1. Introduction

There is a fundamental tension in American politics between the desire to ensure political equality and the belief that the intensity of individual interests should somehow matter in the political process. To make the compromises and tradeoffs essential to the functioning of a democratic political system, we need information about both the direction and intensity of the public will. Direct political participation facilitates fairly well the transmission of intense preferences and perspectives to political elites. If citizens care enough about a particular issue, they may convey their particular wants, needs, and desires to the government in a variety of ways. They may, for example, contact political officials, attend political meetings, or become involved in campaigns. Participation, however, addresses only one of these concerns. Direct participation may represent adequately some intense interests, but it does a poor job of guaranteeing political equality. Political activists, after all, do not come to the political world by chance. Instead, they are drawn disproportionately from those groups more advantaged in the resources that aid participation – such as education and disposable income. Activists therefore differ in politically consequential ways from those who do not participate in politics. As Verba, Scholzman, and Brady conclude, “the voice of the people as expressed through participation comes from a limited and unrepresentative set of citizens” (1995, 2). The guarantee of free political expression, in other words, does not ensure the equal expression of the political wants, needs, and desires of all members of the public.

But where traditional forms of participation fail, opinion polls may succeed. Though polls may have several shortcomings, they do seem to guarantee that a full spectrum of political interests will be heard in the political system. Polls, if executed correctly, are conducted through random sampling. In other words, every individual has an equal chance of being selected to be

heard in a poll, regardless of her personal circumstance. Polls hold special appeal as a form of gauging the public's will because they appear to be free of the compositional bias that plagues traditional forms of participation.

This conception of opinion polls as “broadly representative” of public sentiment has long pervaded academic and popular discussions of polls. In 1939, polling pioneer George Gallup advanced the virtues of surveys as a means for political elites to assess the collective “mandate of the people.” If properly designed and conducted, Gallup argued, polls would act as a “sampling referendum” and provide a more accurate measure of popular opinion than more traditional methods, such as reading mail from constituents and attending to newspapers (see also Gallup and Rae 1940; for a contrary view, see Ginsberg 1986, Herbst 1993). More recently, Verba has argued, “sample surveys provide the closest approximation to an unbiased representation of the public because participation in a survey requires no resources and because surveys eliminate the bias inherent in the fact that participants in politics are self-selected ... surveys produce just what democracy is supposed to produce – equal representation of all citizens”(1996, 3). Thus, while surveys may be limited in several respects they appear to provide a requisite egalitarian compliment to traditional forms of political participation. Through opinion polls, the voice of “the people,” writ broadly, may be heard.

Or maybe not. In this paper, I reconsider this conventional wisdom. Specifically, I demonstrate that the imbalance in political rhetoric surrounding the Vietnam War disadvantaged those groups who were the natural opponents of the War. I investigate the effect of accounting for “don't know” responses on the shape of public opinion on the Vietnam issue using a number of datasets from the 1960s and early 1970s and find that analyses that use very different data sources converge to the same conclusion. The process of collecting opinion on Vietnam excluded

a dovish segment of the population from the collective opinion signal in the early part of the war. However, this bias shrank over time as anti-war messages became more common in the public sphere. To use the language of Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, the “voice” of those who abstained from the Vietnam questions was different from those who responded to such items. So while there may indeed have been a “silent majority” – as President Nixon maintained during the early years of his presidency – it was a majority that opposed, rather than supported, the war.

## **2. Understanding Exclusion Bias**

Conventional theories of public opinion have treated the survey response as the product of individuals’ attempts to reveal their fixed preference on a given policy issue. Recently, a more fluid view of the survey response has emerged, based in part on theories of preference construction developed in cognitive psychology (see, for example, Fischhoff 1991; Slovic 1995). This view, advanced most forcibly by Zaller and Feldman (Zaller and Feldman 1992; Feldman 1989; Zaller 1992), argues that “individuals do not typically possess ‘true attitudes’ on issues, as conventional theorizing assumes, but a series of partially independent and often inconsistent ones.” (Zaller 1992, p. 93). According to this “new look” in public opinion research, a survey response is not necessarily a revealed preference. Instead, answers to survey questions can be considered a stochastic draw from an individual’s underlying response distribution, which itself is an aggregation across one’s potentially diverse feelings and ideas concerning political issues. Attitudes, then, are not fixed objects – evaluations pulled from a mental “file drawer” – but are, instead, constructed judgments (Wilson and Hodges 1992).

But if attitudes are fluid constructions – temporally changing and subject to contextual cues – then the line between answering a question and abstaining from a question should be fluid as well. From this perspective, an individual might arrive at a don’t know answer when trying to

form an opinion because they cannot draw upon a coherent base of politically relevant considerations at the time of the interview. Such a response does not necessarily indicate that the respondent does not possess politically relevant wants, needs, and desires. Instead, the respondent may simply have poorly developed connections between these underlying factors and the political controversy addressed in the survey question. A don't know response does not therefore indicate the lack of articulated political concerns or political thought, but rather the lack of political thought *structured enough* to form a summary evaluation in response to the survey question. Put another way, some people may have difficulty linking their personal situation to the world of politics. Given additional time to explore the matter, respondents may be able to draw on many politically relevant considerations. For example, in-depth open-ended interviews on the subjects of rights and liberties (Chong 1993), social welfare policy (Hochschild 1981) and equality and freedom (Lane 1962) reveal that, given the opportunity, individuals – even those individuals whom we would expect to be reticent in such situations – will expound at length about a given political controversy, even though there may be little strategy to that discourse (Lane 1962).

Some individuals might, therefore, find it difficult to answer closed-ended survey questions, even if they have politically relevant wants, needs, and desires and engage in – albeit loosely structured – political thought. Simply because respondents are unable to translate their thoughts and feelings into a summary judgment does not mean that those concerns should be irrelevant to those who are interested in how the mass public regards the goings-on of the political world. It is critical, therefore, to focus not only on the marginals of surveys but also to consider what politically relevant considerations might lie behind the don't know response.

## **2.1 Exclusion Bias and the Egalitarian properties of Opinion Polls**

This view of the don't know response has important implications for the consideration of the egalitarian properties of opinion polls. When individuals fail to answer survey questions they, in effect, silence their political voice. If don't knows are random — if there is no rhyme or reason to the decision to abstain from survey questions — the traditional view of polling advanced by Gallup and Verba is correct. But if there is a systematic process to the decision to offer a don't know response, and if the same underlying considerations influence both the direction of opinion *and* the ability to give an opinion, particular interests will be excluded from collective opinion.

The degree of compositional bias in public opinion is directly related to the strength of the link between opinion position taking and opinion giving. If the two processes are independent, there should be no systematic relationship between opinion holding and opinion direction. That is, those respondents who are able to express an opinion on a given controversy are no more likely to possess considerations favoring one side of a controversy as they are to possess considerations favoring the other. Under these circumstances, there is no “exclusion” of any particular opinions; non-respondents are as likely to be of one stripe than another. On the other hand, if the determinants of opinion position and opinion giving overlap significantly, the potential for bias is great because those individuals whose considerations would lead them toward one end of the opinion spectrum will be pressed toward a don't know response and, ultimately, removed from public opinion. Put simply, if the same factors that predispose a respondent to offer an answer to a survey question also push them to one end of the response scale, public opinion will suffer from the truncation of those individuals who would be otherwise predisposed to give survey answers on that end of the scale. This process can lead to what I call

“exclusion bias” – the systematic elimination of a particular type of sentiment from aggregate public opinion.

### **3.2 Exclusion Bias: Individual and Political Factors**

In previous work, I have explored how the characteristics of individuals serve as the root of exclusion bias in aggregate public opinion. In the realm of social welfare policy, for example, I find that inequalities in politically relevant resources disadvantage those individuals who possess predispositions that make them natural supporters of the welfare state (Berinsky 2001). These supporters – the economically disadvantaged and those who support principles of political equality – are less easily able to form coherent and consistent opinions on such policies than those well endowed with politically relevant resources. Those predisposed to champion the maintenance and expansion of welfare state programs are, as a result, less likely to articulate opinions on surveys. Thus, public opinion on social welfare policy controversies gives disproportionate weight to respondents opposed to expanding the government’s role in the economy.

But while the characteristics of individuals are an important determinant of the nature and degree of exclusion bias, they are not the only source of such bias. In other issue areas, the goings-on of the political world can more directly influence the composition of the public’s voice. In particular, the balance and tone of elite discourse may play a significant role in determining whose politically relevant wants, needs, and desires finds voice in the political sphere, and whose remain unheard.

### **3.3 The Power of Elite Discourse**

A significant body of evidence suggests that the character of elite discourse is a central determinant of the types of opinions ordinary citizens express in opinion surveys (Key 1961,

Page and Shapiro 1992, Zaller 1992). Public opinion, in the words of Key “is not self-generating; in the main, it is a response to the cues, the proposals, and the visions propagated by political activists: (1963, 557).

From this evidence, we might conclude that the mass public is so disengaged with the political world that they simply “parrot back” the views of politicians when answering survey questions. At one extreme Zaller’s (1992) “Parable of Purpleland” posits such a process (see Chapter 12). But this interpretation is not the only plausible reading of the empirical evidence. The fact that elite discourse guides and shape mass opinion does not mean that public opinion is a mere reflection of elite preferences. Even if mass opinion depends on the information and analyses carried in elite discourse (Zaller 1992) the underlying balance of considerations in the mass public shapes public opinion. These considerations – wants, needs, and desires of individuals – are the building blocks of opinions; without these underlying feelings and ideas political cognition, much less responses to survey questions is not possible. Elite discourse may guide mass opinion, but it cannot create that opinion out of thin air. To assess the true power of elite discourse, therefore, we must see how that discourse interacts with the characteristics of particular individuals to create public opinion.

### **3.4 The Power of Elite Discourse: Linking the Personal and the Political**

Determining the relevance and relative weight with which particular predispositions should be used to understand a given political controversy is not a straightforward task. The issues taken up by government are complex and, as such, they are always subject to alternative interpretations by citizens. On any given controversy, numerous politically relevant considerations can come into play. For example, the decision to allow a public rally by the KKK can be understood as a question of free speech, or as one of public order (Nelson et al. 1997).

The NATO bombing of Kosovo can be seen as a humanitarian intervention, or as a risky undertaking that endangered the lives of American soldiers (Berinsky and Kinder 2001). Without guidance, the tricky business of relating the world of self to the world of politics is difficult for ordinary citizens to perform adequately.

Most often, the hard work of defining what an issue is “about” is done by those who have the largest stake in getting the public to view an issue *their* way. Political elites therefore constantly attempt to define, or “frame,” issues in a way that makes it seem that their interests – the consideration most important to them – are the ones most significant to comprehend ongoing political controversies. Through elite discourse, citizens are bombarded with – often contradictory – suggestions about how issues should be understood. Elite discourse helps citizens make sense of the great blooming confusion of the political world and allow individuals to draw links between their personal wants, needs, and desires and ongoing political problems. Elite discourse, in other words, provide recipes of sorts; they enable ordinary citizens to sort their many, and potentially conflicting, predispositions into coherent attitudes.

### **3.5 The Limits of Elite Discourse**

Elite discourse is not, however, magic; it cannot create political opinions from thin air. Particular ways of understanding the political world appeal to particular individuals because they resonate with the underlying wants, needs, and desires of those individuals. In *Public Opinion and American Democracy*, V.O. Key pointed to the importance of the elite portion of this relationship: “The voice of the people is but an echo. The output of an echo chamber bears an inevitable and invariable relation to the input. As candidates and parties clamor for attention and vie for popular support, the peoples’ verdict can be no more than a selective reflection from among the alternatives and outlooks presented to them.” But the public also plays an important

role here, through their underlying distribution of considerations. Elite rhetoric may indeed echo back off the public. But it does so only after reaching individuals whose considerations are consistent with that rhetoric. The top-down process of public opinion observed by Key and Zaller can be thought of something akin to Sonar. Through discourse, elites send out “signals” concerning how the political world can be organized and related to human concerns. When that discourse reaches individuals with considerations that are in harmony with that discourse, those individuals adopt the recipes championed by elites. When answering survey questions on relevant topics, these individuals will respond with opinions consistent with the elite discourse. They do so not because they have been brainwashed or because they are parroting back whatever they last heard in the news. Rather, they will respond with opinions consistent with elite discourse because that discourse resonates with their underlying wants and values. In sum, elite rhetoric does facilitate the expression of the mass public’s underlying wants, needs, and desires. But it does not necessarily achieve this end through persuasion. Instead elite rhetoric can guide opinion by helping people find a political voice for their underlying predispositions.

#### **4. Elite Discourse and the Don’t Know Response**

The ability of elite discourse to enable ordinary citizens to link their underlying wants, needs, and desires to the world of politics can greatly impact the shape of the public voice. Exclusion bias develops when certain types of interests are more likely than others to become visible in the political arena. The role of discourse here is straightforward. Elite discourse enables ordinary citizens to make meaningful connections between their personal concerns and the world of politics. Elite discourse, in other words, helps individuals find their *political* voice.

The presence of elite discourse advocating a particular form of action on an issue should increase the expression of citizen interests conducive to that position. Elite discourse, after all,

helps citizens understand how particular issues impact considerations they hold dear. Empirical studies of frames in opinion surveys support the notion that the elite discourse increases the volume of *political* voice consistent with that discourse. Kinder and Nelson (1998), for example, find that reminding individuals about relevant considerations through question-wording frames – which mimic those found in elite discourse – increases the proportion of respondents who offered opinions on survey questions. Kinder and Nelson, moreover, find that these additional opinions are not “flimsy fabrications created by the momentary presence of persuasive-sounding frames” (1998, 11) but are instead the expression of real, politically relevant political voice. Similarly, Zaller (1990) finds that opinion questions framed using the language of elite discourse yield fewer question abstentions than unframed items. Like Kinder and Nelson, he finds that these additional answers come without any loss in the quality of response. In short, as we would expect, the use of frames drawn from elite discourse increases the expression of political opinion.

But this process can cut both ways; what elite discourse gives it can also take away. The absence of elite discourse could hinder the expression of particular considerations. If particular types of considerations are not championed in particular discourse, individuals with those considerations might not see how a particular political controversy impacts their interests. Consequently, these individuals might not offer opinions in opinion surveys.

The balance of the volume and salience of elite discourse on a particular issue can, therefore, greatly impact political equality. Where elite rhetoric gives strong expression to interpretations on all sides of a given controversy, no particular set of considerations will be advantaged over any other. Every political viewpoint will have the recipes that enable individuals to link their personal concerns to the world of politics. But, if certain types of interests are not promoted in elite discourse, those interests will be disadvantaged on the

rhetorical stage. To return to Key's metaphor of the echo chamber, if one side of a particular controversy is not discussed by political elites, that silence will echo back from the mass public.

### **5. Public Opinion and Vietnam**

One issue area where the nature and balance of elite rhetoric may have impacted the egalitarian character of aggregate measures of public opinion is American involvement in the Vietnam conflict. Even if the mass public's views concerning American involvement abroad are not as malleable as Almond's (1960) "mood theory" suggests, the balance of empirical evidence indicates that public opinion concerning foreign policy is less structured than opinion concerning domestic policy (see, for example, Hurwitz and Peffley 1987; for a recent survey of public opinion concerning foreign policy, see Sobel 2001). The Vietnam War therefore presented a situation where elite discourse might have played a large role in shaping the expression of public opinion.

The discussion in the last section suggests the presence of elite discourse on one side of a controversy will aid the expression of opinion supportive of that position. Similarly, the absence of such rhetoric will hinder the expression of opinion conducive to that view. In the case of Vietnam, if the volume and salience of elite rhetoric advocating intervention was as great as that against intervention, neither groups who held, on balance, pro-war or anti-war considerations would be advantaged in the public sphere. Individuals whose underlying wants, needs, and desires pushed them to a pro-war or an anti-war stance would both have the "recipes" necessary to link their personal considerations to the political controversy over the Vietnam War. So, for example, individuals predisposed to take aggressive action to protect American interests could find support for their position in Lyndon Johnson's contention that the issue of Vietnam "is the future of southeast Asia as a whole. A threat to any nation in that region is a threat to all, and a

threat to us... This is not just a jungle war, but a struggle for freedom on every front of human activity.” Conversely, elite rhetoric opposing involvement in Southeast Asia enabled individuals with anti-intervention sentiment to give voice to their views. So, for example, individuals who were uncomfortable with sending American soldiers abroad could find justification for such views in anti-war rhetoric – such as arguments that the Vietnam conflict was a foreign war that did not directly endanger U.S. interests.

But empirical work strongly suggests that the flow of elite rhetoric concerning Vietnam did not achieve such a balance. Until the mid 1960s, elite rhetoric was heavily tilted toward the pro-war view. Zaller’s (1992) content analysis of news magazine coverage of the Vietnam War finds that the prowar message was much stronger than the antiwar message in the period from 1964 to 1968, reaching its high point of disparity in 1966. The flow of elite rhetoric was not, however, constant over the war. In the early part of 1968, the anti-war message began to gain steam. By 1970, in fact, that the antiwar message was as powerful (if not more so) than the prowar message (Zaller 1992).

If the argument in the last section is correct, the dynamic changes in the volume and salience of elite messages concerning the Vietnam War should have led to a differential balance of the expression of considerations at different points in the war. In the early years of U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia, individuals who on balance held considerations that conformed to pro-war rhetoric would be more likely to be heard in opinion polls. Conversely, respondents who possessed considerations that did not fit with the dominant pro-war message should have been under-represented in aggregate public opinion. To use the language introduced above, in the first portion of the war, public opinion should have suffered from a pro-war exclusion bias.

That is, on balance, anti-war sentiment would have been excluded from aggregate opinion.<sup>1</sup> Over the course of the war, as the balance of the volume and salience of elite rhetoric changed and both pro-war and anti-war views were represented in public discourse, the size of exclusion bias should have reduced and eventually disappeared. In short, as the mix of elite rhetoric concerning the war changed over time, the nature of exclusion bias should have changed as well

Previous empirical work has not directly spoken to the question of whether certain opinions were favored above others during the Vietnam War. But some suggestive evidence exists. The first piece of data comes from Modigliani's (1972) study of public opinion concerning the Korean War. Modigliani's work does not explicitly address the nature of the balance of sentiment that may have been lost by excluding question abstainers from aggregate opinion. But some of his analysis provides indirect evidence concerning the nature of that sentiment. Specifically Modigliani finds that the incidence of don't know responses was highest among respondents who – on the questions they did answer – tended to oppose international involvement. Moving to more directly relevant evidence, Jackson (1993) models both the respondents' decision to take a position on Vietnam and their propensity to choose a don't know response (which he terms "uncertainty"). Jackson finds that respondents who answered survey questions but were uncertain of their preference on U.S. policy towards Vietnam were more likely to take a dovish position, as opposed to a hawkish opinion. Jackson concludes that this "guessing" created a picture of aggregate public sentiment that was more dovish than true public sentiment. However if these uncertain doves reflected the sentiments of the abstainers from the Vietnam placement questions – as my hypothesis suggests – then it could be that true sentiment

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<sup>1</sup> This is not to say that there were necessarily Doves who remained silent. Rather, people who were uneasy with the war effort could not find a rhetoric recipe to match their sentiments to the Vietnam conflict. So what was missing in the early part of the war is not so much an active call for disengagement as much as a general unease with the war effort.

towards American policy in Vietnam was, in fact, *more* anti-interventionist than opinion polls indicated.

### **5.1 The Roots of Exclusion Bias in Opinion Concerning the War**

To examine the existence and nature of exclusion bias in opinion concerning the war, we must proceed in two steps. First, we should look at an individual-level analysis of the roots of this bias. Second, we should move to an aggregate-level examination of the effects of the bias on the nature of the public voice.

To explore the roots of exclusion bias, it is necessary to begin at the individual level and look at the link between item response and opinion position. Specifically, we need to take a close look at the “ingredients” of individual opinion and see how the factors that determine the direction of response are related to the factors that determine whether the respondents will answer a question on the survey. Insofar as these two sets of factors are closely related, the potential for exclusion bias is great.

At the individual level, two factors stand out. The first, and most obvious, is the direct effect of exposure to elite rhetoric. In the early years of the war – where the balance of rhetoric largely favored U.S. involvement – we would expect that exposure to such rhetoric would enable those with pro-war predispositions to see how their underlying wants, needs, and desires related to the conflict in Vietnam. These individuals predisposed to favor the war would be likely to answer questions concerning Vietnam. On the other hand, respondents who held underlying predispositions that led them to oppose the war would find little in elite discourse to enable them to link their personal concerns to the Vietnam controversy. These individuals would have a difficult time finding their political voice on opinion surveys. Thus, in the early part of the war, respondents who were highly exposed to elite accounts of American involvement in Vietnam

should have been more likely to support American involvement *and* should have been more likely to answer questions concerning the war.

Looking at the effects of exposure to elite discourse on the Vietnam War is certainly a sensible first step in investigating the individual-level roots of exclusion bias. But it is not always possible to measure exposure to such rhetoric. A wise additional strategy, therefore, is to seek to determine the types of individuals who hold those predispositions from which elite rhetoric would resonate. In some cases, it is possible to directly measure the holding of these predispositions. One might, for example, measure the tendency of certain individuals to take a firm and aggressive stand towards foreign nations. But we can also look at the characteristics of individuals – such as their race and gender – to determine the kinds of groups that might be particularly receptive to a pro-war or an anti-war message. It should be noted that the characteristics of individuals are not intended here to serve as causal factors. Rather, they serve as a signal of membership in groups who hold predispositions that, on balance, would lead them to be particularly favorable or unfavorable to the war.

At first glance, such a search does not seem especially promising. One striking finding of early scholarship investigating public opinion concerning the Vietnam War was the minimal structuring of that opinion. As Verba et al write, “Unlike candidate preferences in an election, or opinions on domestic policies, attitudes on the war in Vietnam do not pattern along the standard dimensions of social structure. The respondent’s social characteristics – class, party, place of residence – have little relationship to preference” (p. 323). But though opinion on Vietnam may have not followed the standard political cleavages of the 1960s, some important cleavages did exist. First, Verba et al. (1967) found that men were more likely than women to support policies that escalated U.S. involvement in Vietnam, while women were more likely than men to support

policies of de-escalation. These conclusions were largely supported by Muller's (1973) analysis of Gallup data from the late 1960s. Muller found that women were generally less favorable to escalation of war efforts than men, and were less likely to oppose de-escalation policies.<sup>2</sup> Second, researchers found that race was a significant determinant of preferred Vietnam policy. Verba et al. (1967) found a similar pattern to that of the gender gap. Blacks were significantly more opposed to escalation than whites and were more likely to support de-escalation policies. Again, these conclusions were supported by Muller's analysis. Finally, some indicators of group membership show a significant, though somewhat weaker, relationship to pro-intervention considerations. Contrary to popular perceptions, younger Americans tended to take a more hawkish position on the war than did older citizens. Muller (1973) and Rosenberg, Verba, and Converse (1970) both find that age had a negative relationship with support for taking an aggressive position vis-à-vis North Vietnam.

The work of these scholars, therefore, allows us to identify some basic factors to look at for the roots of exclusion bias. These factors are certainly not as involved and detailed as found in the study of social welfare policy (Berinsky 2001). But they do give us a rough sense of whether the roots of exclusion bias exist, and whether such bias could damage our ability to properly assess public opinion concerning the war in Vietnam. If the roots of exclusion bias can be found in measures of exposure to elite rhetoric and membership in groups that, on balance, possess pro-war predispositions, it is possible to move forward to the aggregate level and take up the more interesting question of implications of this bias for the shape of public opinion on the Vietnam War.

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<sup>2</sup> However, Muller finds that they were only slightly more likely to take an opposition view. Thus Muller concludes that "the sexual difference is mostly manifested in women's relative unwillingness to voice support for wars, not in their expressed opposition to them" (p. 146).

## 6. Exclusion Bias in the Early War: The Public Opinion and the War in Vietnam Study

The literature reviewed above suggests that exclusion bias would be particularly large in the early years of the war. Specifically, Zaller's work indicates that the balance of elite rhetoric should have excluded dovish sentiment from collective opinion concerning Vietnam in the years before 1968. It is especially important, therefore, to gauge the presence and nature of exclusion bias in public opinion concerning American involvement in Vietnam in this early period.

Fortunately, data appropriate to this purpose is available. In late February and Early March of 1966, Verba and his colleagues directed the "Public Opinion and the War in Vietnam Study." This survey is well suited to gauge the presence and nature of exclusion bias in opinion because it asked a series of questions concerning the proper direction of future U.S. involvement in Vietnam. These questions measured sentiment concerning both actions that would escalate involvement in the Vietnam war – such as "having 200,000 troops in South Vietnam" and "bombing military targets in North Vietnam" – and actions that would de-escalate the U.S. presence in Southeast Asia – such as "holding free elections in South Vietnam even if the Viet Cong might win" and "gradually withdrawing our troops and letting the South Vietnamese work out their own problems."<sup>3</sup> Specifically, the researchers asked eight questions relating to

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<sup>3</sup> At first glance, it is not apparent why such of division of items is necessary. Most retrospective accounts of the mass response to the Vietnam War – including my account above – have attempted to separate the American public into two clear camps. On one side of the divide lie the "Hawks" – those individuals who believed we should escalate our involvement in Vietnam. On the other side are the "Doves" – those citizens who argued that the U.S. should actively seek to reduce its military commitment in the pursuit of peace. But while these distinctions may serve as convenient rhetorical groupings, previous empirical work suggests these grouping may not be differentiated enough to accurately characterize the opinions of the public at large. In early 1966, Verba and his colleagues (1967) conducted a survey of public attitudes toward future involvement in Vietnam. The investigators found that few respondents took strict "hawk" or "dove" positions. Instead, they found that many individuals held a somewhat conflicted attitude toward the war. The investigators discovered that individual sentiment towards the Vietnam War was best characterized by two correlated, but independent factors: one relating to escalating involvement in the war (escalation), and the other related to withdrawal from southeast Asia (desescalation). Respondents varied in their positions on these scales and, in some cases, they could hold both pro-escalation and pro-desescalation beliefs. Such individuals were not dim-witted. A respondent could, for example, believe that America should either win the Vietnam War or get out entirely (see Rosenberg, Verba, and Converse 1970). Modigliani's (1972) study of public opinion on the Korean War suggests that this two-dimensional structuring of attitudes towards war is not limited to

escalation and eight questions related to de-escalation. Thus, a close examination of the data can give us a clear picture of exclusion bias in 1966, a critical early moment in the war.

## 6.1 Individual-Level Analysis

As noted in the last section, to explore the roots of exclusion bias, it is first necessary to examine the link between item response and opinion position. Specifically, we need to take a close look at the “ingredients” of individual opinion and see how the factors that determine the direction of response are related to the factors that determine whether the respondents will offer an opinion on a given question. Insofar as these two sets of factors are closely related, the potential for exclusion bias is great.

To this end, I constructed separate models of opinionation (whether the respondent answered the question concerning future action in Vietnam) and opinion direction (whether they supported a dovish position).<sup>4</sup> At one level, this effort could be viewed as a descriptive

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Vietnam. Modigliani factor analyzed a series of questions from Gallup Polls in 1955 and 1956 concerning American involvement in Korea. Like Verba et al, he finds that the items measuring desired future action separate into two distinct clusters of questions – one relating to disengagement, the other relating to escalation. Modigliani labels the first dimension “international interventionism” – which captures how committed individuals are to an interventionist foreign policy – and the second dimension “administration distrust” – how dissatisfied the individual is with the performance of government. Attempts to collapse opinion concerning prospective courses of future action into a single “hawk/dove” dimension may not necessarily accurately characterize public sentiment toward the war (see also Muller 1973). My expectation is that it was, on balance, Dovish (meaning pro de-escalation and anti-escalation) opinion that was missing from collective opinion in the early years of the war. But to properly represent the Verba et al. data in its original form, in the analyses that follow, I will separately consider sentiment towards escalation and escalation.

<sup>4</sup> The decision to answer the question is modeled as a probit, and the decision to take a particular stand on the question is modeled as a probit. Simply modeling the decision to answer a question and the particular placement on a question independently is not always a wise strategy. We must also attend to issues of selection bias. Selection bias arises in cases where the relationships between the independent variables and the dependent variable – *the coefficients* – differ for the sample of question-answerers and the full sample (the exclusion bias I refer to in this paper arises in cases where the sample of question-answerers and the sample of question-abstainers differ on the *values* of key independent variables). Previous work has demonstrated that accounting for item non-response on questions measuring support for policies designed to ensure racial equality greatly alters our understanding of the structure of opinion on those policies (see Berinsky 1999). While there is no reason to think that individuals would self-censor their views on Vietnam at the opinion expression stage, it is important to ensure that the Vietnam data is not contaminated by selection bias that could arise from other factors relating to non-response. Selection bias, after all, will arise in any situation where the sample of observed cases differs in systematic ways from the sample of unobserved cases, regardless of the roots of those differences. I therefore used the bivariate probit selection model (see Green 1997) and estimate: (1) the determinants of item response, (2) the determinants of expressed issue position, and (3) the link between *unmeasured* factors affecting the two processes. I found no selection bias,

enterprise. If the same factors increase an individual's propensity to take a dovish position and decrease their tendency to answer the question, exclusion bias will develop, regardless of the roots of the commonalities in the opinion ingredients predicting opinion direction and opinion giving.

But the search for such common factors is not a blind one. Exposure to elite rhetoric and pro-war predispositions should make it more likely first that the respondent will offer an opinion on particular questions and, second, that they should offer an opinion favoring continued intervention in Vietnam. In the Public Opinion and the War in Vietnam Study, there are a number of factors that measure these quantities of interest. First, there are direct measures of receptivity of elite rhetoric. Specifically, the study contains a number of questions testing the respondents' factual knowledge of the Vietnam War. As Zaller's (1992) work has shown, factual knowledge of politics is a good measure of exposure and reception of elite rhetoric. The measure of information is especially advantageous here because the questions directly gauge exposure to elite rhetoric *concerning Vietnam*.<sup>5</sup>

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indicating that the opinion direction and opinion giving processes are independent and can be considered separately. We can therefore proceed to examining the direct links between the *measured* variables in the two processes (results of the selection bias analysis are available from the author upon request). This result may, at first glance, seem somewhat puzzling. The analyses in this paper, after all, show that non-response and the direction of response share common predictors. But selection bias occurs only when the *unobserved* factors predicting selection are correlated with the *unobserved* factors predicting opinion direction. In the analyses presented here, I actually observe many the factors that predict both opinion direction and selection. So the lack of selection bias should be expected. It should be noted that it appears that selection bias is present when only a few factors (such as race, gender, and age) are used to predict item response and opinion positions. But when more fully specified models are used, the apparent selection bias disappears. In the analyses that follow, I use the more fully specified models (available from the author upon request) to project opinion positions. The more limited analyses presented in the paper are intended to illustrate the common roots of opinion giving and opinion direction. Finally, it should be noted that the projected opinion positions are robust to model respecification; no matter which variables are used to predict opinion, the results are virtually identical.

<sup>5</sup> The six items used to create the information scale are: (1) "What is the capital of South Vietnam?" (2) "What is the capital of North Vietnam?" (3) "As far as you know, are we currently bombing any targets in North Vietnam?" (4) "As you understand it, who are the Viet Cong – the government we are supporting in South Vietnam, the South Vietnamese Communists, North Vietnamese, or who?" (5) "As you understand it, was the current South Vietnamese government freely elected by the people?" and (6) "As far as you know, has the Congress declared war in Vietnam?" These items scale together well. An exploratory factor analysis indicates that a single factor solution is appropriate and the scale created from the six measures has a reasonable alpha (alpha=0.60).

In addition to measures of exposure to elite rhetoric on Vietnam, the Public Opinion and the War in Vietnam Study contains both direct and indirect measures of hawkish predispositions. First, the study contains a measure of the respondents' general anti-communism tendencies. Specifically, the study asks whether the U.S. policy towards Russia, China, and Cuba has been "too tough, just about right, or too soft." The survey also contains indirect measures of predispositions through membership in groups that, on balance, would favor a hawkish position toward U.S. involvement, namely whites, younger citizens, and men.<sup>6</sup>

I therefore modeled both the decision to offer an opinion and the direction of opinion as a function of: information about the Vietnam War, anti-communist tendencies, race, gender, and age. These analyses reveal that, as expected, the tendency to offer an opinion on the Vietnam policy questions and the direction of that opinion are closely linked through the independent variables included in both models. Table 1 presents, as an example, the determinants of opinion holding and position concerning the question of bombing targets in North Vietnam. Respondents who are male, white, hold strong anti-communism views, and are knowledgeable about events in Vietnam are both significantly more likely to offer a response to the item, and are significantly less likely to oppose escalating U.S. involvement in Vietnam. This result is not particular to the bombing item. Instead, on many of the questions on the survey, the same opinion ingredients that lead a respondent to the Hawkish side of the opinion spectrum also lead them to offer a response to the items. On questions concerning both the escalation and de-escalation of involvement in the war, the significant determinants of these two processes are quite similar (for full results, see Appendix A).

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<sup>6</sup> It should again be noted that the role of group membership is not causal. Instead, the group labels indicate the kinds of people that, on average, would hold political predispositions of a particular type

It appears, then, the same factors in part drive both the decision to give an opinion on the Vietnam questions and the direction of that opinion. Those individuals who are exposed to elite rhetoric on Vietnam are more likely to express opinions, and opinions with a hawkish bent. Furthermore, those individuals who are likely to hold hawkish predispositions – whites, men, younger respondents, and respondents with strong anti-communist views – are more likely to answer survey questions. Thus, there some evidence that population of respondents who abstain from the issue placement questions differ from those respondents who answer the items in their political preferences concerning what should be done on the question of Vietnam. Given this state of affairs, to fairly represent public sentiment in the early part of the war, we need to somehow correct for this uneven expression of political predispositions.

## **6.2 Exclusion Bias: Estimation and Interpretation**

It is possible to compute empirically the degree of exclusion bias in Vietnam opinion and determine just whose political voice is missing from opinion polls. Because the exclusion bias works through the independent variables, we can use what we know about the opinions of the question-answers to characterize the opinions of those individuals who declined to answer the question. In effect, we can determine what the non-answerers would have said if they were able to give voice to their politically relevant wants, needs, and desires.<sup>7</sup> We can then compare this

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<sup>7</sup> Specifically, I use the coefficients presented in Table 1 to predict the issue positions of the non-respondents (actually, I use the results from a more fully specified model which also includes variables measuring partisanship, demographics, and other politically relevant variables). This approach is valid because, as noted in footnote 4, there was no selection bias in the data. The  $\beta$  for the sample under analysis (the sample which excludes the non-scale placers) is therefore the full sample  $\beta$ . Thus, the relationship between the independent and dependent variables is not different for the people who answer the social welfare policy question compared to those who are unable to form coherent opinions on those issues. I also replicated these analyses using both more and less extensive models of opinion direction. In all cases, the predicted differences between the respondents who did not answer the question and those who gave answers to the items remained stable. Put another way, the differences found between question answerers and non-answerers is robust to model specification.

constructed mean to the mean of those individuals who place themselves on the issue scales to gauge the extent – not simply the presence – of exclusion bias.<sup>8</sup>

As expected, the differences in mean opinion between scale placers and those individuals who do not answer items are significant across almost all of the escalation and de-escalation items (see Tables 2-3). In 14 of the 16 cases, the mean predicted probability of giving a dovish response is higher for non-placers than placers. This difference is almost five percentage points, on average and is especially significant because non-respondents show consistently more dovish positions on both the escalation and de-escalation items. In short, Tables 2 and 3 demonstrate that the differences between the respondents and the non-respondents on the various opinion ingredients – the resources and values that determine positions on the war – have real consequences for the types of Vietnam policy opinions we would expect them to hold.

### **6.3 Validating the Imputation**

Given that I assessed the differences between scale placers and non-placers using opinion placements constructed, in part, by imputing interests to individuals who opted out of answering survey questions, a healthy degree of skepticism is understandable. However, such skepticism is unfounded; the finding of a hawkish tilt among the population of issue placers extends from the imputed interests to expressed opinions.

Many respondents who abstained from one of the Vietnam placement items answered at least one of the other seven items in the escalation or de-escalation scales. We therefore have a measure of opinion concerning future action in Vietnam for some respondents who declined to answer particular scale items. For example, of the 139 respondents who did not answer the question of whether half a million troops should be sent to South Vietnam, 95 percent answered

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<sup>8</sup> It should be noted that though the predictors of item response do not always reach statistical significance in Tables 1 and 2, the placers and non-placers differ significantly in the composition of their opinion ingredients. Put another

at least one of the other items. The actual answers these “partial respondents” gave can be compared to the answers of the item placers to see if the differences found in Tables 2 and 3 are mirrored in measured opinions. To this end, I created escalation and de-escalation scales for each item on the survey representing the average support for the escalation and de-escalation positions on the other seven items in the scale. The scales range from 0 to 100, with higher values indicating more dovish positions. These scores are presented in Tables 4 and 5. Replicating the differences found in Tables 2 and 3, those individuals who were not able to form an opinion on one of the issue questions were significantly more dovish than placers on those items they *did* answer.

These findings are especially important because they indicate that citizens did not choose the don’t know response because of a “spiral of silence” (Noelle-Neuman 1984). Noelle-Neuman argues that individuals who hold viewpoints that they perceive as being in the minority will remain silent for fear that expressing their views will lead to social isolation. In theory such an argument could apply to the Vietnam case. But, as the data demonstrate, individuals who failed to answer one or more of the Vietnam items were willing to offer dovish responses on other items. Thus, the data support my contention that the silence found in opinions polls is a result of an imbalance in elite rhetoric, not of a fear of social isolation.

## **7. Tracing Trends Over Time: 1964 to 1972**

The Public Opinion and the War in Vietnam data gives us clear evidence of the expected exclusion bias in the early years of U.S. involvement in Vietnam. But the existence of such bias in the early part of the war is only half the story. Previous work suggests that as the balance of hawkish messages in elite rhetoric changed over the course of the war, the nature of exclusion

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way, at a bivariate level, nearly all predictors of opinion holding in Tables 1 and 2 are significant.

bias should have changed as well. To see if this prediction is supported by the data, we need to move to a dynamic examination of public opinion concerning the Vietnam War.

Two series of datasets exist which are useful for these purposes. The first is the bi-annual National Elections Study (NES) data. The second is a series of opinion polls conducted by the Gallup organization. Both of these data series contain repeated measures of an item that asks whether it was a “mistake” for the U.S. to become involved in Vietnam. Specifically, the NES asks, “Do you think we did the right thing in getting into the fighting in Vietnam, or should we have stayed out?” The Gallup survey asks, “In view of the developments since we entered the fighting in Vietnam, do you think the U.S. made a mistake sending troops to fight in Vietnam?”<sup>9</sup>

The mistake question is by no means perfect. It cannot, for example, allow us to gauge respondent’s beliefs concerning the proper course of future U.S. action. But the mistake question does have certain advantages; it can serve as a measure of broad support or opposition to the war effort. As Muller (1973) argues, “the question always asks for the respondent’s general opinion on the wisdom of the war venture itself, and thus it seems to be a sound measure of a sort of general support for the war” (p. 43). The question is phrased to highlight the overall assessment of the war effort and may tap a “gut” retrospective evaluation of the war effort (Fiorina 1981). More importantly, the mistake question was asked often by various survey organizations over the course of the war. The mistake item is therefore well suited to capture the dynamics of general unease with the war effort in the 1960s and 1970s. While these data are not as rich as the Verba study, they do enable us to trace opinion using a broad summary question over the course of the war.

## **7.1 Tracing the Trend: NES Data**

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<sup>9</sup> This question is the central dependent variable in Muller’s classic analysis of opinion on Korea and Vietnam.

The analyses begin here with the NES data. The first step is to see whether the roots of exclusion bias can be found in the ingredients of opinion, as was the case with the Verba data. The expectation here is that in the early years of the war, the same factors that led an individual to say that becoming involved in Vietnam was not a mistake would also lead them, to offer an opinion on the question. Eventually, however, the relationship between opinion direction and opinion giving should weaken. As Table 6 demonstrates, this is indeed the case. Over the course of the war certain variables – such as gender – are consistent predictors of opinion giving and opinion direction. But other factors – such as race – wane in their influence.<sup>10</sup> As expected, in the early part of the war, there are significant differences between opinion holders and question abstainers on the “opinion ingredients” that lead to a dovish opinion. Over time, these differences fade.

The more interesting story, however, lies at the aggregate level. Here we have clear predictions regarding the size and direction of the aggregate exclusion bias in opinion concerning the Vietnam War. Based on Zaller’s work, we would expect that in the early years of the war aggregate opinion concerning Vietnam would exclude a base of dovish opinion. Over time, however, the disparity between expressed and unexpressed opinion should diminish.

To gauge the size of the difference in the opinions of these two groups, I computed predicted opinion positions for both respondents and non-respondents, as I did for the Public Opinion and the War in Vietnam study. These results are presented graphically in Figure 1. As expected, the question abstainers are more dovish than the question answers in the early part of the war. This gap, in fact, rises from 1964 to 1966, mirroring the difference in elite rhetoric

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<sup>10</sup> There is some evidence that the change in the predictive power of race is due to a change in how African-American elites framed their discussions of the Vietnam conflict. I discuss this matter in detail in Section 8, below.

found by Zaller. After 1966, however, the gap shrinks consistently and by 1972, the difference disappears almost entirely.

While these analyses show that respondents and non-respondents differ in their sentiment towards the Vietnam War, the effect of correcting for individual-level opinion distortions on the aggregate shape of Vietnam opinion remains to be estimated.

If we look to the NES to determine how the nation as a whole viewed the Vietnam War by measuring the mean position given by the scale placers, we will arrive at a biased picture of the national sentiment. The true mean, after all, depends not only on the mean for question-answerers but also on the mean for question abstainers.<sup>11</sup> The degree of bias in the estimate of the sample mean depends both on the proportion of question abstainers in the sample and the difference between the mean of the answers and the mean of the abstainers. With measures of these quantities, then, we can estimate the degree of exclusion bias in Vietnam opinion. All of this information is readily available.<sup>12</sup> These results are also presented graphically in Figure 1. As expected, this bias is present in the early part of the war, but shrinks over time, reaching insignificant levels after 1968.

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<sup>11</sup> This mean may be expressed, following Kalton (1983) as:

$$\bar{Y} = W_r \bar{Y}_r + W_m \bar{Y}_m$$

Where  $\bar{Y}$  is the population mean,  $\bar{Y}_r$  is the population mean for the respondents,  $\bar{Y}_m$  is the population mean for the non-respondents (the subscript r denotes respondents, and the subscript m – for “missing” – denotes non-respondents), and  $W_r$  and  $W_m$  are the proportion of the population in these two groups ( $W_r + W_m = 1$ ). Since the survey fails to collect data for the non-respondents, it estimates  $\bar{Y}_r$ , not the population mean  $\bar{Y}$ . The difference between  $\bar{Y}_r$  and the population parameter  $\bar{Y}$  is the bias that results from using the respondent mean in place of the overall mean and is given by:

$$BIAS = W_m (\bar{Y}_r - \bar{Y}_m)$$

<sup>12</sup> We can estimate the respondent mean ( $\bar{Y}_r$ ) and the non-response rate ( $W_m$ ) for the Vietnam “mistake” questions using data from the NES, and we can use the estimates of the mean position of the non-placers from computed for Figure 1 to estimate  $\bar{Y}_m$ . I use for comparison the predicted values generated by the regression estimates, rather than the actual response frequency distributions, because I wish to control for the fact that my model of opinion formation is imperfect. By using predicted values generated by a model, I hold constant the predictive power of that model across the estimates of the aggregate public opinion.

## **7.2 Validating the Trend: Gallup Data**

The pattern of results found in the NES data is mirrored in the Gallup data. Figure 2 replicates the analyses presented in Figure 1.<sup>13</sup> Though the pattern is not quite as clear as it was for the NES data, the level of exclusion bias and the bias in opinion is relatively large in the 1965-1967 period but grows smaller over the course of the years. These results are important because they give us greater confidence that the expected trend found in the NES data is genuine.

## **8. A Case Study of Elite Rhetoric: African-American Opinion**

To this point, I have presented suggestive evidence indicating that a change in the volume and salience of elite rhetoric over the course of the Vietnam War caused the dynamic changes in the levels of bias in aggregate opinion concerning that War. I close this paper with more direct evidence of this hypothesis. Specifically, I argue that a change in the volume of anti-war messages among African-American elites directly lead to a reduction in exclusion bias among blacks in the years after 1967.

In the early to mid-1960s, Civil rights leaders tread carefully around the issue of the Vietnam War. Leaders refrained from open opposition to the war, for fear of diluting their equal rights message and compromising their legitimacy as patriotic Americans. In 1967, however, this began to change. In March of that year, at an Easter peace march in Chicago, Martin Luther King spoke out for the first time against U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia, calling the Vietnam War, “a blasphemy against all that America stands for.” King’s stand was certainly controversial and not all civil rights activists followed his lead. The NAACP, for example, voted unanimously the next week against uniting the civil rights and anti-war movement. But many leaders – including the Southern Christian Leadership Council – followed King’s lead (Zaroulis and Sullivan 1984).

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<sup>13</sup> The probit coefficients used to impute these results are available from the author upon request.

In the African-American community after 1967, therefore, there was a marked change in the nature of rhetoric concerning the war (see also Gartner and Segura 2000).

The question most relevant for present purposes is whether this shift in rhetoric was mirrored in Black's willingness to voice opposition to the war. Based on the argument presented above, we would expect that the change in the volume of anti-war rhetoric among black elites would decrease the rate of don't know responses among blacks, but should have had no effect on the direction of their opinions – blacks should always oppose the war.

This prediction is strongly born out in the NES data. Figure 3 demonstrates that African Americans held higher levels of opposition to the war than whites. The size of this difference is, in fact, almost completely stable over time.<sup>14</sup> But what did change over the eight-year period was the willingness of Blacks to offer responses to the Vietnam question. Over the course of the War, in fact, the gap between Blacks and Whites on question-answering rates closes completely. As predicted, the largest drop in this gap occurs between 1966 and 1968, coinciding with the shift in rhetoric among African American elites.

Figure 4 replicates the analysis presented in Figure 1, but for Blacks only. As expected, the trend in Figure 4 largely follows that of Figure 1; the question abstainers are more dovish than the question answers in the early part of the war. The size of the exclusion bias is, however, larger for the blacks only sample.

Thus, while the analyses presented in Figures 3 and 4 are by no means conclusive, they are highly suggestive. As predicted, a sudden change in the balance of rhetoric among African-American elites led to a similar change in exclusion bias among Blacks in America.

## 9. Conclusion

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<sup>14</sup> The trend in the graph is not simply a trick of the eye. The null hypothesis of differences in opinion direction among blacks by year of the survey can be rejected at the .35 level.

The results offered in this paper deepen our understanding of biases in opinion polls in particular, and political participation more generally. The balance in the volume and salience of elite rhetoric on given issues may greatly impact the shape of aggregate opinion in politically consequential ways. In the case presented here, analyses that use very different data sources converge to the same conclusion. A significant – though admittedly small – dovish segment of the population was excluded from opinion concerning Vietnam in the early part of the war. However, this bias shrank over time as anti-war messages became more common in the public sphere. Over time, as the flow of elite rhetoric reached a balance reflective of the underlying considerations of the American public, a more complete picture of the public's views were expressed. Thus, the increase of elite anti-war messages cues not only that segment of the mass public who consistently answer survey questions (Zaller 1992) but also allows an important segment of the public to give voice to their politically relevant wants, needs, and desires.

In sum, while opinion polls may serve as important complements to traditional measures of political participation, they cannot substitute for them. The point here is not that polls are inequalitarian; perhaps they are the most egalitarian possible measures of the public's will. However, it is important to recognize that they may suffer from the same biases as other forms of political expression.

**TABLE 1:  
1966 PUBLIC OPINION AND THE WAR IN VIETNAM DATA**

**DISAPPROVE OF BOMBING MILITARY TARGETS IN NORTH VIETNAM?**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Coefficient (SE)</i>
Constant	0.21 (0.21)
Vietnam Information Level	-0.49 (0.17)**
Too Soft on Russia/China/Cuba	-1.21 (0.19)**
Black	0.59 (0.11)**
Male	-0.43 (0.09)**
Age	0.17 (0.26)

**OPINION HOLDING**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Coefficient (SE)</i>
Constant	2.12 (0.35)**
Vietnam Information Level	0.58 (0.25)**
Too Soft on Russia/China/Cuba	0.40 (0.27)
Black	-0.30 (0.15)**
Male	0.78 (0.15)**
Age	-1.06 (0.37)**

\* =  $p < .10$ ; \*\* =  $p < .05$

**TABLE 2:  
1966 PUBLIC OPINION AND THE WAR IN VIETNAM DATA:  
MEAN PREDICTED PROBABILITY OF ANTI-ESCALATION RESPONSE**

<b>Item</b>	<i>Opinion Holders</i>	<i>No Answer</i>	<i>Difference</i>
Disapprove of 200,000 American Troops in South Vietnam?	34% n=1331	39% n=87	5%
Disapprove of bombing military targets in North Vietnam?	17% n=1345	26% n=73	9%
Disapprove of half a million troops in South Vietnam?	50% n=1294	55% n=120	5%
End involvement in Vietnam if it means fighting the Chinese Army?	38% n=1325	45% n=107	8%
End involvement in Vietnam if it means A ground war in China?	65% n=1316	68% n=115	3%
End involvement in Vietnam if it means atomic war with China?	69% n=1327	74% n=86	5%
End involvement in Vietnam if it means atomic war with Russia?	76% n=1336	76% n=79	0%
End Involvement in Vietnam if it means total mobilization of US army?	56% n=1306	61% n=109	5%

Note: The use of T-Tests to gauge the difference between the two groups is inappropriate because this table compares projected issue placements to actual issue placements.

**TABLE 3:  
1966 PUBLIC OPINION AND THE WAR IN VIETNAM DATA:  
MEAN PREDICTED PROBABILITY OF PRO-DE-ESCALATION RESPONSE**

<b>Item</b>	<i>Opinion Holders</i>	<i>No Answer</i>	<i>Difference</i>
To end fighting, form South Vietnam govt. in which Viet Cong takes part?	59% n=1264	62% n=154	3%
To end fighting, hold elections in South Vietnam even if Viet Cong may win?	62% n=1254	56% n=164	-6%
To end fighting, a truce with each side holding the territory it now has?	76% n=1308	82% n=108	6%
To end fighting, troop withdrawal and let South Vietnam work it out?	40% n=1343	52% n=71	11%
End fighting, if it means Viet Cong eventually controlling South Vietnam?	31% n=1292	37% n=124	7%
End fighting, if it means loss of independence for Laos and Thailand?	15% n=1299	19% n=118	4%
Approve American negotiations with Viet Cong, if they were willing?	91% n=1368	95% n=47	3%
Approve if Pres Johnson withdrew troops letting communists rule?	15% n=1374	22% n=50	6%

Note: The use of T-Tests to gauge the difference between the two groups is inappropriate because this table compares projected issue placements to actual issue placements.

**TABLE 4:**  
**1966 PUBLIC OPINION AND THE WAR IN VIETNAM DATA:**  
**MEAN ANTI-ESCALATION SCORE ON ITEMS ANSWERED (0-100)**

Item	<i>Opinion Holders</i>	<i>No Answer</i>	<i>Difference</i>
Disapprove of 200,000 American Troops in South Vietnam?	53 n=1389	61 n=96	8**
Disapprove of bombing military targets in North Vietnam?	55 n=1399	74 n=82	19**
Disapprove of half a million troops in South Vietnam?	50 n=1351	60 n=132	9**
End involvement in Vietnam if it means fighting the Chinese Army?	52 n=1366	62 n=118	10**
End involvement in Vietnam if it means A ground war in China?	49 n=1364	51 n=122	2
End involvement in Vietnam if it means atomic war with China?	49 n=1385	41 n=97	-8
End involvement in Vietnam if it means atomic war with Russia?	48 n=1394	38 n=90	-11
End Involvement in Vietnam if it means total mobilization of US army?	50 n=1362	54 n=122	4

\* =  $p < .10$ ; \*\* =  $p < .05$

**TABLE 5:**  
**1966 PUBLIC OPINION AND THE WAR IN VIETNAM DATA:**  
**MEAN PRO-DE-ESCALATION SCORE ON ITEMS ANSWERED (0-100)**

Item	<i>Opinion Holders</i>	<i>No Answer</i>	<i>Difference</i>
To end fighting, form South Vietnam govt. in which Viet Cong takes part?	47 n=1315	55 n=168	8**
To end fighting, hold elections in South Vietnam even if Viet Cong may win?	47 n=1307	53 n=177	6**
To end fighting, a truce with each side holding the territory it now has?	46 n=1364	48 n=118	3
To end fighting, troop withdrawal and let South Vietnam work it out?	50 n=1402	53 n=76	3
End fighting, if it means Viet Cong eventually controlling South Vietnam?	53 n=1350	63 n=131	12**
End fighting, if it means loss of independence for Laos and Thailand?	53 n=1345	69 n=133	16**
Approve American negotiations with Viet Cong, if they were willing?	43 n=1431	46 n=52	3
Approve if Pres Johnson withdrew troops letting communists rule?	54 n=1426	74 n=55	20**

**TABLE 6:  
NES DATA**

**OPINION DIRECTION: IT WAS A MISTAKE TO GET INVOLVED IN VIETNAM**

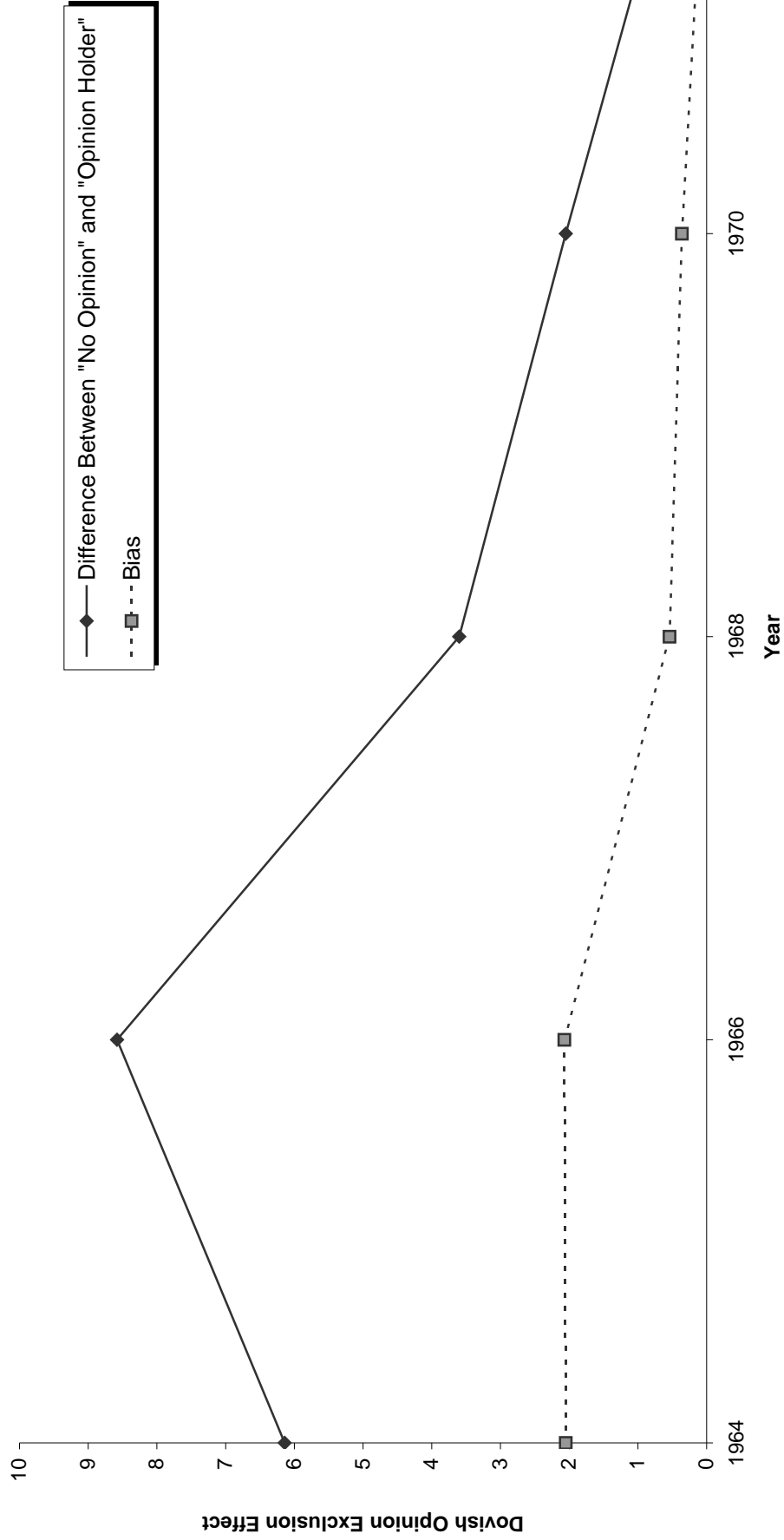
<i>Variable</i>	<i>1964</i>	<i>1966</i>	<i>1968</i>	<i>1970</i>	<i>1972</i>
Constant	-0.83 (0.14)**	-0.67 (0.13)**	-0.17 -0.11	-0.46 (0.11)**	-0.12 -0.08
Age	1.43 (0.28)**	1.09 (0.27)**	1.42 (0.23)**	1.74 (0.23)**	1.27 (0.16)**
Black	0.39 (0.16)**	0.27 (0.15)*	0.24 (0.13)*	0.57 (0.14)**	0.53 (0.10)**
Male	-0.26 (0.09)**	-0.24 (0.08)**	-0.34 (0.07)**	-0.15 (0.08)*	-0.11 (0.06)**
N	902	928	1273	1193	2304
Log-Likelihood	-583.18	-608.97	-806.95	-752.64	-1420.07

**OPINION HOLDING**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>1964</i>	<i>1966</i>	<i>1968</i>	<i>1970</i>	<i>1972</i>
Constant	0.67 (0.11)**	1.05 (0.13)**	1.19 (0.12)**	1.06 (0.12)**	1.52 (0.10)**
Age	-0.91 (0.22)**	-1.18 (0.24)**	-0.70 (0.24)**	-0.66 (0.22)**	-0.68 (0.20)**
Black	-0.48 (0.11)**	-0.40 (0.12)**	-0.19 (0.12)	-0.05 (0.13)	0.14 (0.13)
Male	0.32 (0.07)**	0.46 (0.08)**	0.34 (0.08)**	0.35 (0.08)**	0.35 (0.08)**
N	1426	1258	1525	1473	2530
Log-Likelihood	-908.44	-690.49	-669.19	-701.61	-742.64

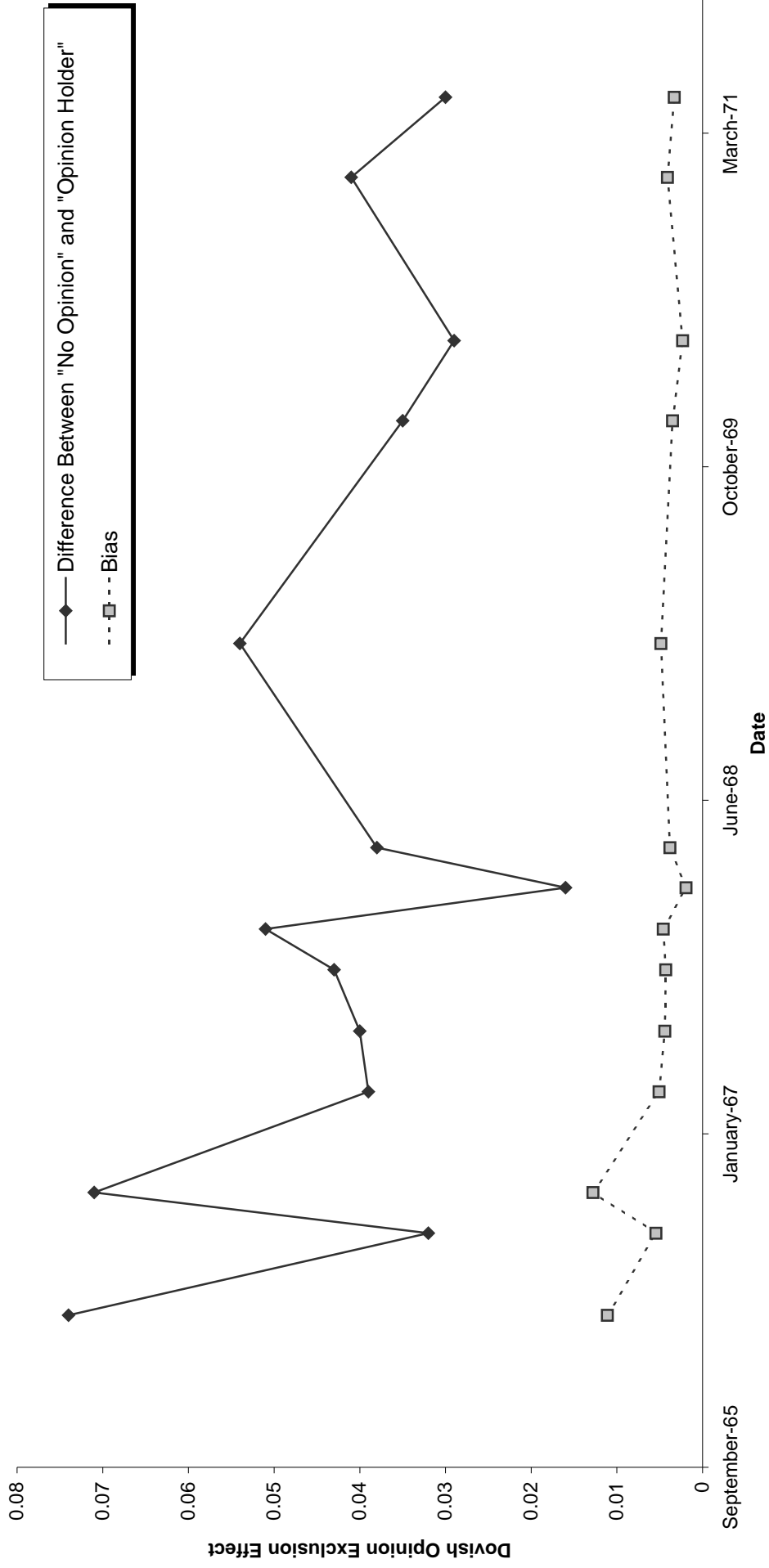
\* =  $p < .10$ ; \*\* =  $p < .05$

**Figure 1:  
NES Data: 1964-1972**



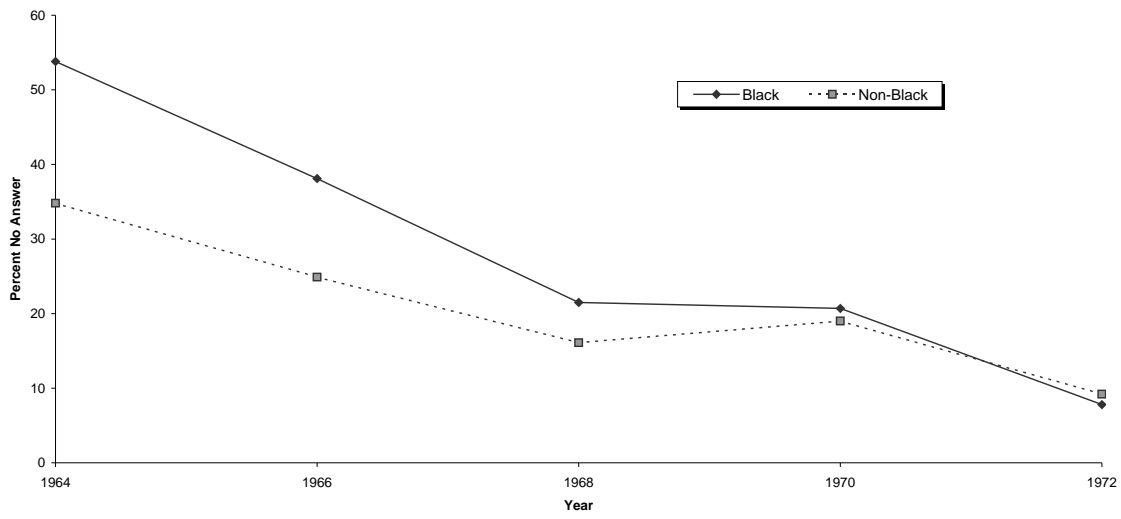
Note: "Difference" is the difference between imputed opinion among those respondents who did not express an opinion and those who did give their views on Vietnam. "Aggregate bias" is the difference between the (imputed) opinion of the full sample and the opinion of those who did give their views on Vietnam.

**Figure 2:  
Gallup Data: 1965-1971**

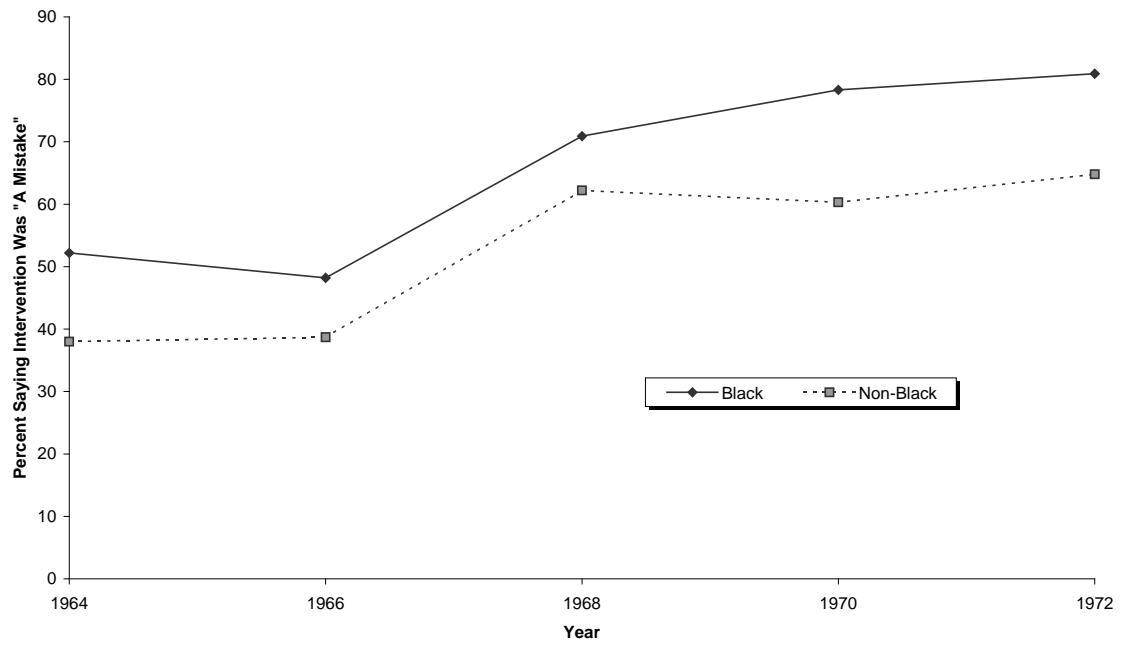


# Figure 3

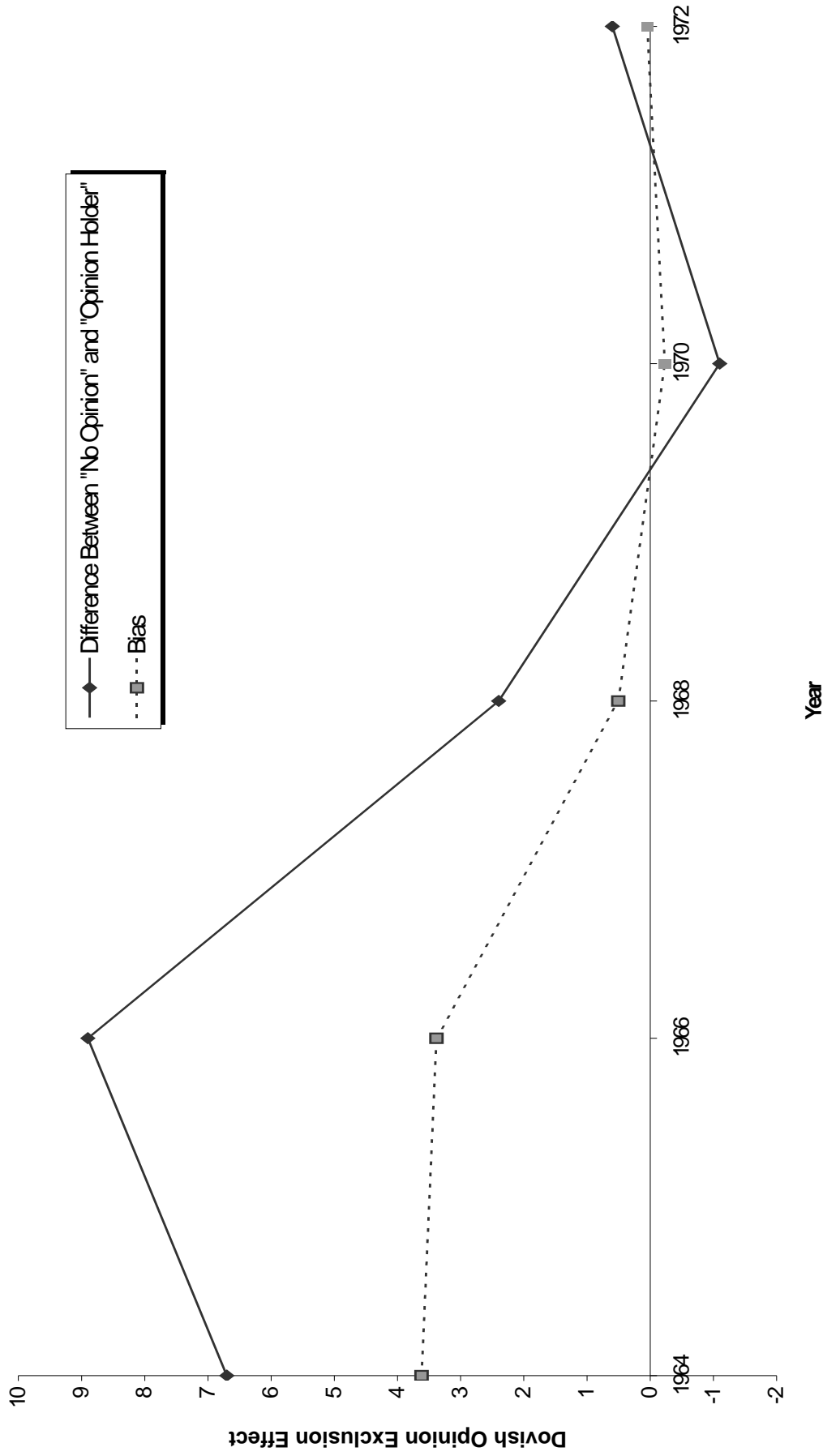
## No Opinion Rates on U.S. Should Have Stayed out of Vietnam: 1964-1972



## U.S. Should Have Stayed out of Vietnam: 1964-1972



**Figure 4:**  
**NES Data: 1964-1972 (Blacks Only)**



Note: "Difference" is the difference between imputed opinion among those respondents who did not express an opinion and those who did give their views on Vietnam. "Aggregate bias" is the difference between the (imputed) opinion of the full sample and the opinion of those who did give their views on Vietnam.

**APPENDIX A:  
1966 PUBLIC OPINION AND THE WAR IN VIETNAM DATA FULL RESULTS**

**DISAPPROVE OF 200,000 AMERICAN TROOPS IN SOUTH VIETNAM?**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Coefficient (SE)</i>
Constant	-0.04 (0.20)
Vietnam Information Level	-0.37 (0.14)**
Too Soft on Russia/China/Cuba	-0.49 (0.16)**
Black	0.46 (0.10)**
Male	-0.34 (0.07)**
Age	0.00 (0.00)

**OPINION HOLDING**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Coefficient (SE)</i>
Constant	1.30 (0.31)**
Vietnam Information Level	0.84 (0.23)**
Too Soft on Russia/China/Cuba	0.44 (0.25)*
Black	0.24 (0.17)
Male	0.44 (0.12)**
Age	-0.01 (0.00)*

**DISAPPROVE OF BOMBING MILITARY TARGETS IN NORTH VIETNAM?**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Coefficient (SE)</i>
Constant	-0.22 (0.23)
Vietnam Information Level	-0.49 (0.17)**
Too Soft on Russia/China/Cuba	-1.21 (0.19)**
Black	0.59 (0.11)**
Male	-0.43 (0.09)**
Age	0.00 (0.00)

**OPINION HOLDING**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Coefficient (SE)</i>
Constant	2.12 (0.35)**
Vietnam Information Level	0.58 (0.25)**
Too Soft on Russia/China/Cuba	0.40 (0.27)
Black	-0.30 (0.15)*
Male	0.78 (0.15)**
Age	-0.01 (0.00)**

\* =  $p < .10$ ; \*\* =  $p < .05$

**DISAPPROVE OF HALF A MILLION TROOPS IN SOUTH VIETNAM?**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Coefficient (SE)</i>
Constant	0.62 (0.20)**
Vietnam Information Level	-0.14 (0.14)
Too Soft on Russia/China/Cuba	-0.63 (0.16)**
Black	0.10 (0.11)
Male	-0.35 (0.07)**
Age	-0.01 (0.00)**

**OPINION HOLDING**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Coefficient (SE)</i>
Constant	1.42 (0.28)**
Vietnam Information Level	0.64 (0.20)**
Too Soft on Russia/China/Cuba	0.53 (0.23)**
Black	-0.09 (0.14)
Male	0.49 (0.11)**
Age	-0.01 (0.00)**

**END INVOLVEMENT IN VIETNAM IF IT MEANS FIGHTING THE CHINESE ARMY?**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Coefficient (SE)</i>
Constant	-0.01 (0.21)
Vietnam Information Level	-0.32 (0.15)**
Too Soft on Russia/China/Cuba	-0.88 (0.17)**
Black	0.48 (0.10)**
Male	-0.41 (0.07)**
Age	0.01 (0.00)**

**OPINION HOLDING**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Coefficient (SE)</i>
Constant	1.17 (0.29)**
Vietnam Information Level	1.32 (0.23)**
Too Soft on Russia/China/Cuba	0.32 (0.24)
Black	0.05 (0.15)
Male	0.44 (0.12)**
Age	-0.01 (0.00)**

\* =  $p < .10$ ; \*\* =  $p < .05$

**END INVOLVEMENT IN VIETNAM IF IT MEANS A GROUND WAR WITH CHINA?**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Coefficient (SE)</i>
Constant	0.37 (0.21)*
Vietnam Information Level	0.27 (0.15)*
Too Soft on Russia/China/Cuba	-0.81 (0.17)**
Black	0.12 (0.11)
Male	-0.41 (0.08)**
Age	0.01 (0.00)**

**OPINION HOLDING**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Coefficient (SE)</i>
Constant	1.42 (0.28)**
Vietnam Information Level	1.08 (0.21)**
Too Soft on Russia/China/Cuba	-0.11 (0.24)
Black	-0.09 (0.14)
Male	0.32 (0.11)**
Age	-0.01 (0.00)

**END INVOLVEMENT IN VIETNAM IF IT MEANS ATOMIC WAR WITH CHINA?**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Coefficient (SE)</i>
Constant	0.99 (0.22)**
Vietnam Information Level	-0.10 (0.15)
Too Soft on Russia/China/Cuba	-0.58 (0.17)**
Black	0.15 (0.11)
Male	-0.57 (0.08)**
Age	-0.01 (0.00)**

**OPINION HOLDING**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Coefficient (SE)</i>
Constant	1.27 (0.31)**
Vietnam Information Level	1.13 (0.23)**
Too Soft on Russia/China/Cuba	0.07 (0.25)
Black	0.13 (0.16)
Male	0.33 (0.12)**
Age	0.00 (0.00)

\* =  $p < .10$ ; \*\* =  $p < .05$

**END INVOLVEMENT IN VIETNAM IF IT MEANS ATOMIC WAR WITH RUSSIA?**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Coefficient (SE)</i>
Constant	1.00 (0.22)**
Vietnam Information Level	0.41 (0.16)**
Too Soft on Russia/China/Cuba	-0.56 (0.18)**
Black	0.17 (0.12)
Male	-0.45 (0.08)**
Age	-0.01 (0.00)**

**OPINION HOLDING**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Coefficient (SE)</i>
Constant	1.17 (0.31)**
Vietnam Information Level	1.38 (0.24)**
Too Soft on Russia/China/Cuba	0.09 (0.26)
Black	0.21 (0.17)
Male	0.09 (0.12)
Age	-0.01 (0.00)*

**END INVOLVEMENT IN VIETNAM IF IT MEANS TOTAL MOBILIZATION OF US ARMY?**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Coefficient (SE)</i>
Constant	0.99 (0.21)**
Vietnam Information Level	-0.23 (0.14)
Too Soft on Russia/China/Cuba	-0.94 (0.17)**
Black	0.30 (0.11)**
Male	-0.35 (0.07)**
Age	0.00 (0.00)**

**OPINION HOLDING**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Coefficient (SE)</i>
Constant	0.96 (0.28)**
Vietnam Information Level	0.97 (0.21)**
Too Soft on Russia/China/Cuba	0.47 (0.23)**
Black	0.15 (0.15)
Male	0.19 (0.11)*
Age	-0.01 (0.00)*

\* =  $p < .10$ ; \*\* =  $p < .05$

**TO END FIGHTING, FORM SOUTH VIETNAM GOVT. IN WHICH VIET CONG TAKES PART?**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Coefficient (SE)</i>
Constant	0.72 (0.21)**
Vietnam Information Level	-0.26 (0.14)*
Too Soft on Russia/China/Cuba	-0.86 (0.17)**
Black	0.10 (0.11)
Male	-0.09 (0.07)
Age	0.01 (0.00)**

**OPINION HOLDING**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Coefficient (SE)</i>
Constant	1.72 (0.28)**
Vietnam Information Level	1.45 (0.21)**
Too Soft on Russia/China/Cuba	-0.29 (0.23)
Black	-0.29 (0.12)**
Male	0.41 (0.10)**
Age	-0.01 (0.00)**

**TO END FIGHTING, HOLD ELECTIONS IN SOUTH VIETNAM EVEN IF VIET CONG MAY WIN?**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Coefficient (SE)</i>
Constant	-0.04 (0.21)
Vietnam Information Level	0.69 (0.15)**
Too Soft on Russia/China/Cuba	-0.64 (0.17)**
Black	-0.10 (0.11)
Male	0.06 (0.08)
Age	0.01 (0.00)**

**OPINION HOLDING**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Coefficient (SE)</i>
Constant	1.51 (0.26)**
Vietnam Information Level	1.17 (0.19)**
Too Soft on Russia/China/Cuba	-0.28 (0.22)
Black	-0.31 (0.12)**
Male	0.33 (0.10)**
Age	-0.01 (0.00)**

\* =  $p < .10$ ; \*\* =  $p < .05$

**TO END FIGHTING, A TRUCE WITH EACH SIDE HOLDING THE TERRITORY IT NOW HAS?**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Coefficient (SE)</i>
Constant	0.99 (0.23)**
Vietnam Information Level	-0.69 (0.16)**
Too Soft on Russia/China/Cuba	-0.32 (0.18)*
Black	-0.11 (0.11)
Male	-0.27 (0.08)**
Age	0.01 (0.00)**

**OPINION HOLDING**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Coefficient (SE)</i>
Constant	1.38 (0.29)**
Vietnam Information Level	1.31 (0.22)**
Too Soft on Russia/China/Cuba	0.03 (0.24)
Black	0.00 (0.14)
Male	0.26 (0.11)**
Age	-0.01 (0.00)**

**TO END FIGHTING, TROOP WITHDRAWAL AND LET SOUTH VIETNAM WORK IT OUT?**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Coefficient (SE)</i>
Constant	0.36 (0.21)*
Vietnam Information Level	-0.94 (0.14)**
Too Soft on Russia/China/Cuba	-0.64 (0.16)**
Black	0.63 (0.11)**
Male	-0.28 (0.07)**
Age	0.00 (0.00)

**OPINION HOLDING**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Coefficient (SE)</i>
Constant	1.86 (0.33)**
Vietnam Information Level	0.62 (0.24)**
Too Soft on Russia/China/Cuba	0.15 (0.27)
Black	-0.31 (0.15)**
Male	0.30 (0.12)**
Age	-0.01 (0.00)**

\* =  $p < .10$ ; \*\* =  $p < .05$

**END FIGHTING, IF IT MEANS VIET CONG EVENTUALLY CONTROLLING SOUTH VIETNAM?**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Coefficient (SE)</i>
Constant	0.66 (0.22)**
Vietnam Information Level	-0.99 (0.15)**
Too Soft on Russia/China/Cuba	-0.78 (0.17)**
Black	0.46 (0.11)**
Male	-0.03 (0.08)
Age	0.00 (0.00)

**OPINION HOLDING**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Coefficient (SE)</i>
Constant	1.10 (0.27)**
Vietnam Information Level	1.02 (0.20)**
Too Soft on Russia/China/Cuba	0.32 (0.23)
Black	-0.02 (0.14)
Male	0.35 (0.10)**
Age	-0.01 (0.00)*

**END FIGHTING, IF IT MEANS LOSS OF INDEPENDENCE FOR LAOS AND THAILAND?**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Coefficient (SE)</i>
Constant	-0.61 (0.25)**
Vietnam Information Level	-0.54 (0.18)**
Too Soft on Russia/China/Cuba	-0.45 (0.20)**
Black	0.54 (0.11)**
Male	0.03 (0.09)
Age	0.00 (0.00)

**OPINION HOLDING**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Coefficient (SE)</i>
Constant	1.12 (0.28)**
Vietnam Information Level	1.19 (0.21)**
Too Soft on Russia/China/Cuba	0.63 (0.23)**
Black	-0.07 (0.14)
Male	0.46 (0.11)**
Age	-0.01 (0.00)**

\* =  $p < .10$ ; \*\* =  $p < .05$

**APPROVE AMERICAN NEGOTIATIONS WITH VIET CONG, IF THEY WERE WILLING?**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Coefficient (SE)</i>
Constant	2.46 (0.32)**
Vietnam Information Level	-1.06 (0.21)**
Too Soft on Russia/China/Cuba	-0.76 (0.24)**
Black	-0.15 (0.15)
Male	-0.23 (0.10)**
Age	0.00 (0.00)

**OPINION HOLDING**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Coefficient (SE)</i>
Constant	2.07 (0.38)**
Vietnam Information Level	1.10 (0.30)**
Too Soft on Russia/China/Cuba	0.04 (0.32)
Black	-0.28 (0.17)
Male	0.46 (0.15)**
Age	-0.01 (0.00)**

**APPROVE IF PRES JOHNSON WITHDREW TROOPS LETTING COMMUNISTS RULE?**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Coefficient (SE)</i>
Constant	-0.14 (0.24)
Vietnam Information Level	-0.67 (0.17)**
Too Soft on Russia/China/Cuba	-1.09 (0.19)**
Black	0.47 (0.11)**
Male	-0.02 (0.09)
Age	0.00 (0.00)

**OPINION HOLDING**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Coefficient (SE)</i>
Constant	0.78 (0.35)**
Vietnam Information Level	0.90 (0.27)**
Too Soft on Russia/China/Cuba	0.83 (0.29)**
Black	-0.10 (0.17)
Male	0.07 (0.14)
Age	0.00 (0.00)

\* =  $p < .10$ ; \*\* =  $p < .05$

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