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PUBLIC OPINION AND THE WAR IN VIETNAM*

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I. PUBLIC OPINION AND FOREIGN POLICY

Foreign policy seems to command more public attention than domestic policy and yet—insofar as it has been researched—public opinion on foreign policy seems to have less impact on governmental decisions than does opinion in most other issue areas.[1] There are at least two reasons, one normative and one empirical, why public opinion can be regarded as pertinent to some foreign policy questions—especially those associated with "life and death." Normatively, it is desirable for political leaders in a democracy to commit national resources in ways generally approved by the populace. Large scale military commitments should, if at all possible, meet with the approval of public opinion. Empirically, if they do not, experience has shown there are circumstances in which public disapproval of the course of foreign policy may be registered in national elections. Specifically, our one recent experience with a situation of partial mobilization and a limited but large-scale and indefinite commitment to military action in Korea did in time produce a distribution of opinion that suggested the war was very unpopular. And though its precise impact on the 1952 presidential election is difficult to assess there is little doubt that the Korean issue contributed significantly to the Eisenhower landslide.[2]

Among the questions raised by the Korean experience is whether the American public will easily tolerate the prosecution of long drawn-out wars of partial mobilization. Therefore, it is not surprising that another such war, in Vietnam, has stimulated a concern with public opinion.

This paper reports the results of a survey study of American attitudes towards the war in Vietnam which attempted to probe somewhat more deeply into public attitudes on the war than have newspaper surveys and commercial polls.[3] The data help us clarify the role

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[1] See, for example, Warren E. Miller and Donald Stokes, "Constituency Influence in Congress" this REVIEW, 57 (March, 1963) 45–56; and Miller, "Voting and Foreign Policy" in James Rosenau (ed.), *Domestic Sources of Foreign Policy* (forthcoming).

[2] See Angus Campbell, *et al.*, *The American Voter*, (New York: Wiley, 1960), p. 527. For summaries of poll data on public support of World War II and the Korean War, see: J. T. Campbell and L. S. Cain, "Public Opinion and the Outbreak of War," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 9 (1965), 318–328.

[3] This survey was conducted in late February and early March, 1966, by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) with a questionnaire

played by public opinion in such limited wars, and will also, hopefully, shed some light on a question of growing importance: the nature of the emerging relationship of public opinion polling itself to foreign policy making.

At the time the present study was planned, the press was full of reports as to the importance to the President of public support. We were told that the President avidly followed the polls on the war. Furthermore, it was generally argued that the polls showed the American public firmly behind the President's policy. If he was under any pressure, it was from a growing group of opponents of his policy who wanted him to escalate the war.[4]

As students of public opinion familiar with the limitations of polling data, we were unsatisfied with these reports. Most recent academic studies of public attitudes have demonstrated that the public has little information on most issues and that most people do not have thought-out, consistent, and firmly-held positions on most matters of public policy; and this is especially the case the more "distant" the issue from the individual: e.g., attitudes on civil rights have more structure and consistency than those on foreign policy. In addition, these studies indicate differences between the political attitudes of elite groups and attitudes reflected in mass samples.[5] All this suggests that the marginal distributions of answers to simple issue-oriented questions asked of a cross-section sample of the population tell us relatively little.

Yet this is the "public opinion" that enters the public debate through the press and the commercial polls. The data on public opinion and the war in Vietnam were of this sort. A good example of this problem are the commercial poll reports of the support for the administration's policy in Vietnam which were based on questions as to whether one "approved or disapproved of the way in which the President was handling the situation in Vietnam." Such a question, we felt, was inadequate. Rather than being a question on support for the Vietnamese position of the administration, it seemed likely it was tapping generalized support for the Presidency, partisan affiliation, and/or attachment to the incumbent President for whom the bulk of the population had voted. We felt that a simple "approve" or "disapprove" answer told us very little and that there might be a more complex phenomenon behind that simple finding. In addition, evidence for the nature of the opposition to the President was both fragmentary and ambiguous,[6] so we felt that fuller information was needed.

designed and pre-tested at Stanford. The respondents were 1495 adults. To obtain the sample NORC drew probability samples of blocks within each of its seventy-five sampling points throughout the country and sent its interviewers to select men and women within those blocks (or comparable areal units) to correspond to the nation in age, sex, and employment status.

[4] *New York Times*, March 10, 1966, p. 10; see also C. L. Sulzberger, *New York Times*, March 7, 1966, Section IV; and *Newsweek*, March 7, 1966. These reports have references both to the "Harris Survey" (*Washington Post*, Feb. 28, 1966) and "private" polls.

[5] See, among others, Philip E. Converse, "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics," in David E. Apter (ed.), *Ideologies and Discontent* (New York: The Free Press, 1964); Herbert McClosky, Paul J. Hoffmann, and Rosemary O'Hara, "Issue Conflict and Consensus Among Party Leaders and Followers," this REVIEW, 44 (June, 1960), 406–427; V. O. Key, *Public Opinion and American Democracy*, (New York; Knopf, 1961); S. Stouffer, *Communism, Conformity and Civil Liberties*, (Garden City: Doubleday, 1954); and Gabriel Almond, *The American People and Foreign Policy* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1950).

[6] For example, the thrust of the February Harris Survey (*op.cit.*) was that the increasing disaffection with the "job President Johnson is doing in handling the war in Vietnam," was from those who favored increasing our military effort. This was interpreted in the White House (*New York Times*, March 10, 1966) as indicating that a majority of those opposing the President were "Hawks." But an analysis of the Harris report does not support this interpretation. If we examine the Harris data to ascertain whether those who had an opinion on escalation (8% were "not sure") approve or disapprove of the President's handling of the war we find the following:

	Jan. 1966 Attitude toward President's handling of the war		Feb. 1966 Attitude toward President's handling of the war	
	"good-excellent"	"fair-poor"	"good-excellent"	"fair-poor"
pro-escalation	50%	37%	63%	49%
anti-escalation	50%	63%	37%	51%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Compared with the January data, the February poll results show a trend in the direction of the interpretation but not majority support. The

II. THE PRESENT STUDY

Our approach was to ask some of the standard questions about the support of the President, but to go further by asking opinions on a wide range of policy alternatives as well as about the possible costs of such alternatives. In addition, we asked some questions about the extent of our respondents' information, their general concern about the war, their political activity, and the usual background demographic variables. Thus, we could look across a large number of policy alternatives and see how opinions on them were distributed, and relate these opinions to a variety of social, political and personal background factors. Our resources did not allow us to ask as many questions as we would have liked, but enabled us to go well beyond the usual commercial poll.

Thus, the study was "academic" in form because of our concern for a range of issue questions and the patterns among them as well as in our concern for background explanatory variables. But it was non-academic in that the purpose was to contribute to public understanding at a time of heated political debate. The results received national publicity and extensive editorial comment. In addition, our report was inserted in the *Congressional Record*—as was a blistering attack on it.[7]

TABLE 1. PERCENTAGE WHO APPROVE JOHNSON VIETNAM POLICY* BY PARTY AFFILIATION AND VOTE IN 1964

		Political Affiliation	
		Republican	Democratic
Vote Last Election	Johnson	67% (N = 80)	71% (N = 608)
	Goldwater	45% (N = 225)	39% (N = 56)

* The exact question wording was, "In general, do you approve or disapprove the way the Johnson administration is handling the situation in Vietnam?"

The percentages in the above table are the percentages of the respondents who said they approved.

Our original report made, we believe, an important contribution to the public debate on the nature of foreign policy attitudes by indicating that they were not as had been assumed; and that the phenomenon under study was not as simple as previous reports had suggested. This article reports further analysis of the nature of American foreign policy attitudes.

Overview of Results: Our general substantive findings can be briefly summarized.[8] We found that the war in Vietnam was a salient problem. More respondents (61%) reported "worrying" about it than about four other public issues—crime and juvenile delinquency (51%), Negro-White relations (32%), inflation and the cost of living (46%), and air and water pollution (27%). And we found relatively high levels of information on the issue.[9] Our study confirmed

trend, moreover, was apparently temporary; by late April, according to Harris (*Washington Post*, May 9, 1966), support for the President had dropped to 47% "good-excellent," 53% "fair-poor" and anti-escalation sentiment had increased:

	April	Feb.	Jan.
pro-escalation	43%	49%	45%
anti-escalation	48%	43%	48%
not sure	9%	8%	7%
	100%	100%	100%

Since the May press release does not report the cross-tabulation of support and escalation sentiment, it is not certain that Johnson opposers were anti-escalation but it is a reasonable surmise.

[7] *Congressional Record*, March 17, 1966, p. 5863 and April 28, 1966, p. A2320. For editorial comment on the poll, see, for instance, *New York Times*, March 17, 1966; *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, March 16, 1966; and *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 16, 1966. See *The Washington Post*, April 7, 1966, p. A25 for the original attack on our survey and *ibid.* April 16, 1966, Letters to the Editor Column, for our reply. For an account of press reaction to our initial report, see: Nelson W. Polsby, "Doves, Hawks, and the Press," *Transaction* (April, 1967).

[8] For a full report on all questions and all marginal results, consult *Public Opinion and the War in Vietnam* (March 15, 1966, Institute of Political Studies, Stanford University, Stanford, California).

This report has been published, in Spanish: "La opinión publica en Estados Unidos de América sobre la guerra de Vietnam," *Revista Mexicana de Sociologia*, 28 (Abril–Junio, 1966) 357–76.

[9] For instance, 86% of our respondents knew that Congress had not declared war, 68% knew we were bombing targets in the North at the time of the survey, 47% could name the capital of South Vietnam and 41% could name the cap-

the findings of others that the President had strong support at that time: 61% approved of his handling of the situation in Vietnam, while 29% disapproved.[10] But the data also supported our suspicion that the standard question used to tap support for the President's "handling of the situation" in Vietnam reflected in good part general support for the President rather than support for his particular policies. As Table 1 indicates, those who voted for Johnson in 1964 are much more likely to support his policy in Vietnam than are those who voted against him. And the fact (to be discussed below) that there is little relationship between party affiliation or previous party vote and specific policy preferences on Vietnam supports this interpretation. (See below, Table 6.)

We also found a greater openness to various moves to negotiate a settlement of the war than had been previously suggested. Majorities were willing to negotiate with the Vietcong (88%), to hold free elections even if the Vietcong might win (54%), and to allow a coalition government including the Vietcong (52%).[11]

At the same time however, majorities rejected alternatives that implied a sudden withdrawal from Vietnam or a complete abandonment of our commitments there. Thus, 55% rejected the alternative of "withdrawing our troops and letting the Vietnamese work out their own problems," and 81% said they would disapprove "if President Johnson were to announce tomorrow that we were going to withdraw from Vietnam and let the Communists take over." In addition to the above, we found a considerable reluctance to pay the domestic costs of the war, (among both doves and hawks) and a growing opposition as the escalation steps presented to the respondents became more severe.

Furthermore, contrary to previous press reports, we found strong evidence that those opposed to the President were more likely to be "doves" than "hawks."[12] On all policy issues those who reported being opposed to the President were more likely to take the "dove" response than were those who favored him. This point is made clearer when we compare those who "approve" of the President's handling of the situation with those who "disapprove" in terms of their scores on "escalation" and "de-escalation" scales.[13]

ital of North Vietnam. It is hard to be certain whether to consider these figures "high" or "low." It is our impression that they represent fairly high levels of information on an issue of foreign policy.

[10] The Gallup Polls, covering the period in which we were in the field, show results on the same question somewhat at variance with our results. AIPO reported lower levels of "approval" than we found although the level of "disapproval" was about the same:

"In general, do you approve or disapprove of the way President Johnson is handling the situation in Vietnam?"

	Approve	Disapprove	DK (no opinion)
12/65 AIPO[a]	56%	26%	18%
1/66 AIPO	57%	27%	15%
2/66 AIPO	50%	33%	17%
Stanford/NORC Poll	61%	29%	10%
3/66 AIPO	56%	26%	18%

a. AIPO data are from press releases carried in the San Francisco *Chronicle*, March 9, and April 6, 1966.

[11] Since these results might be affected by who it was that the respondent perceived the Vietcong to be—their identification as North Vietnamese-dominated or indigenous South Vietnamese rebels being a matter of debate—we cross-tabulated these results against identification of the Vietcong. Attitudes toward negotiations with them is not dependent upon the way in which they are indentified or mis-identified.

[12] See footnote 4 above.

[13] Guttman scaling procedures were used to test whether sets of items which seemed intuitively to measure the same underlying attitude were in fact related in a unidimensional pattern. An eight-item 'escalation' scale and an eight-item 'de-escalation' or peace-initiative scale met the criteria for satisfactory Guttman scales in two separate random subsamples of the total. Coefficients of reproducibility were in excess of .90. Coefficients of scalability were in excess of .60 (see Herbert Menzel, "A new coefficient for scalogram analysis," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 17, 1953, 268–280). The distribution of scale scores was significantly different from chance by chi square test at the $p < .001$ levels.

The escalation scale included questions asking approval or disapproval of the level of military involvement at the time of the survey. The respondents were asked whether they would be willing to continue the fight in Vietnam if it meant: bombing of military targets in North Vietnam (77% approved), 200,000 troops in Vietnam (61% approved); questions asking about increases in manpower involvement: 500,000

Table 2 shows the distribution of supporters and opponents of the President's policy on the escalation and de-escalation scales. Johnson's supporters are much more likely to be found in the upper-right corner of the table indicating support for escalation and opposition to de-escalation, while Johnson's opponents are more likely to be in the lower left corner of the table indicating support for de-escalation and opposition to escalation. If we consider, for instance, cells b, c, and f which represent moderate or extreme "hawklike" positions, we find 43% of Johnson's supporters in these boxes and only 24% of his opponents. And in cells d, g, and h representing moderate or extreme "dovelike" positions we find 23% of Johnson's supporters, but 51% of his opponents. In sum, those who approved of the President's position scored higher on the escalation scale ($\bar{x}=4.4$) than those who disapproved ($\bar{x}=2.8$) ($t=8.7$, $p<.001$). And Johnson supporters scored lower on the de-escalation scale ($\bar{x}=4.0$), than his opponents ($\bar{x}=4.8$) ($t=5.8$, $p<.001$).

In general our study found that few respondents took consistent "dove" or "hawk" positions. The opinions of most tended to be moderate.[14] Our findings showed a relatively permissive majority behind the President, suggesting that the public would support him in some escalation of the war, but would oppose extreme escalation. There seemed to be more willingness to see a reduction of the war but, symmetrical with the opposition to major escalation, was an opposition to precipitous withdrawal. We did not find, as much writing suggests we should have found, a populace that wanted some quick and precipitate resolution of the situation. We concluded our original report as follows:

> "The American public is clearly concerned about Vietnam. . . . But their opinions appear to be moderate and responsible. They do not want to pay the domestic costs of commitment in Vietnam, but this is consistent with their desire for a negotiated settlement. And though the settlement they prefer involves a willingness to deal with the Vietcong that goes beyond present administration policy, they reject those solutions that require irresponsible abandonment of our commitments."

An editorial in the New York *Times* on March 17 interpreted these results as follows:

> "There is little support in the country—as a recent Stanford University poll showed—for the extreme alternatives of withdrawal or all-out war. But there is substantial support for a

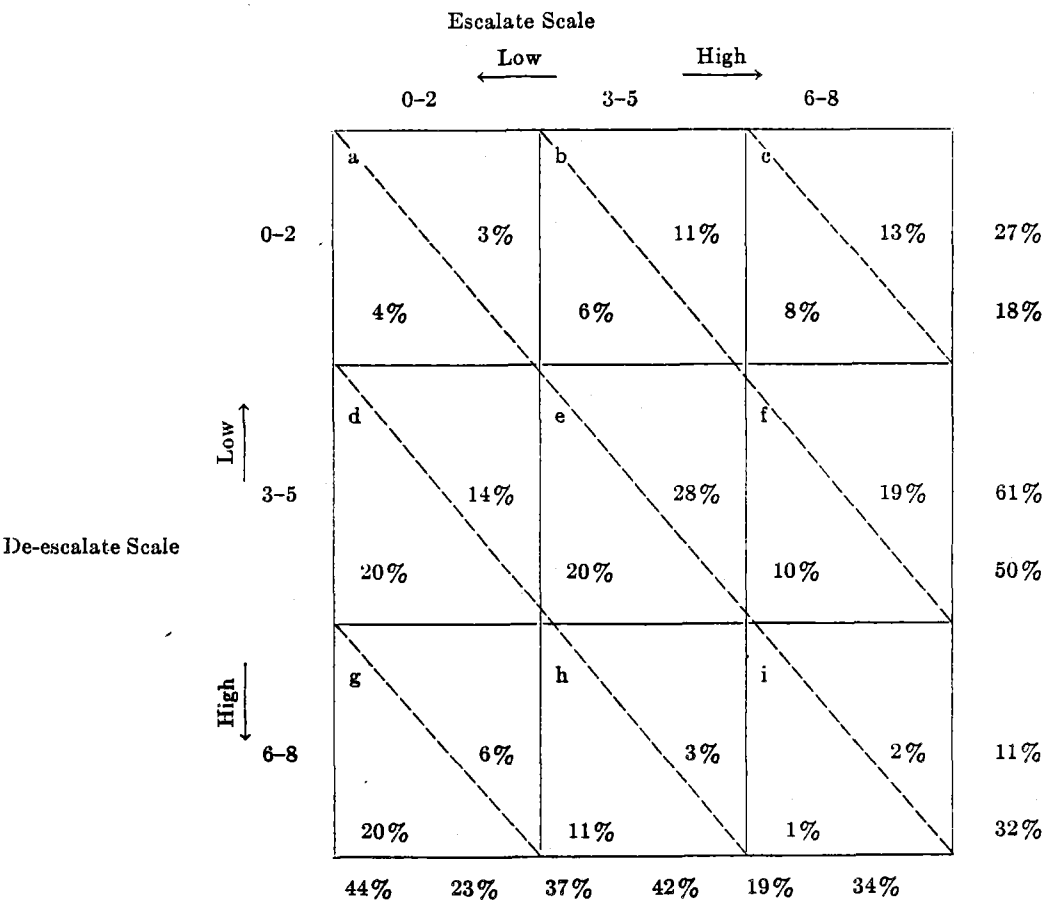
troops (45%), all-out mobilization (40%); and escalation questions involving China and Russia: fighting the Chinese in Vietnam (56%), fighting the Chinese in China (32%), fighting an atomic war with China (29%), and fighting an atomic war with Russia (22%).

The de-escalation scale included items ranging from approval of withdrawal from Vietnam even if it meant a Communist takeover in Laos and Thailand as well as Vietnam (13% approve) to approval of negotiations with the Vietcong (88% approve). Items in between included: immediate withdrawal (15%), letting Vietcong eventually gain control (28%), gradual withdrawal while letting Vietnamese work out their own problems (39%), letting the Vietcong participate in a coalition government (52%), permitting free elections (54%), and agreeing to a UN-supervised truce (69%). That both sets of items—those on escalation and those on de-escalation—can be ordered on Guttman scales and that these orderings parallel the ordering of items that a politically sophisticated observer would arrive at as being more or less extreme escalation or de-escalation measures (atomic war with Russia being a more extreme move than atomic war with China, for instance) lends support to the argument that attitudes on the war form a meaningful pattern.

We asked respondents several questions concerning their willingness to pay possible domestic economic and welfare costs "if we are to continue the fighting." Approval for "increasing taxes at home" was 31% and disapproval 66%. "Putting ting government controls over wages and prices" got 41% approval and 53% disapproval. "Reducing aid to education" got 19% approval and 79% disapproval. "Spending less money for the War on Poverty" recived approval from 46% and disapproval from 51%. "Reducing the Medicare program" received 28% approval and 65% disapproval. For correlational analysis we combined the three welfare costs items into a single index and the two economic items into another index. (Guttman scaling analysis indicated that the two kinds of items were not sufficiently correlated to justify a combined scale).

[14] See our original report (cited in footnote 8) for a full report of these data. Consistent "hawks" took the following positions on four items: they favored increasing our commitment to 500,000 men and favored bombing North Vietnam cities; they opposed a coalition government that included the Vietcong and opposed elections if there were a chance the Vietcong might win. Consistent "doves" took the opposite four positions. We found 6% of our sample to be consistent "hawks" and 14% to be consistent "doves."

TABLE 2. PERCENTAGE OF JOHNSON APPROVERS AND DISAPPROVERS IN VARIOUS SCALE CATEGORIES ON THE ESCALATION AND DE-ESCALATION SCALES



upper diagonal = Johnson Approvers, N = 855
lower diagonal = Johnson Disapprovers, N = 436

policy of holding military operations at their present level while taking new initiatives to seek peace. The Stanford poll demonstrated that the country is far ahead of the Administration in its willingness to take such initiatives, even if they should entail serious risks."

A Closer Look at These Attitudes: The data reported above told us more, we believe, about the nature of opinion on the war in Vietnam than earlier polls had told us. But there are still many unanswered questions as to the internal structure and sources of these attitudes. We will here explore these questions more fully than was possible in our original report.

The findings we report below are somewhat paradoxical. Our original findings were that there was more pattern and consistency in public attitudes on the war in Vietnam than we had originally expected. The war is an issue in foreign policy; foreign policy issues do not tend to generate coherent structures because individuals have little in the way of a concrete frame of reference such as that which often underpins attitudes on domestic policies. But, though we found many inconsistencies and much confusion, we also found more information about the war than one might have expected and in general the responses formed meaningful patterns. This is not to argue that we found sophistication among the public or attitudes that would provide a guide for the decision maker. Far from it. The differences in responses to similar questions worded differently indicates a lack of clear crystallization of opinion among many,[15] and there was much

[15] See S. M. Lipset, "The President, the Polls, and Vietnam," *Trans-action* (Sept.-Oct. 1966), p. 20.

TABLE 3. PRODUCT-MOMENT CORRELATIONS* (UPPER HALF OF MATRIX) AND ETA** COEFFICIENTS (LOWER HALF OF MATRIX) FOR 8 DEMOGRAPHIC AND ATTITUDINAL VARIABLES

	Education	Income	Information	Escalation	De-escalation	Costs	Welfare Costs	Race
Education		.42	.37	−.05	−.06	−.01	.06	.15
Income	.43		.29	.00	−.03	.04	.05	.24
Information	.37	.30		.12	−.19	.12	.10	.22
Escalation	−.07	.08	.14		−.37	.37	.30	.13
De-escalation	−.10	−.07	−.19	−.40		−.10	−.18	−.15
Econ. Costs	−.03	.11	.14	.37	−.12		.20	.02
Welfare Costs	.11	.07	.11	.32	−.20	.23†		.14
Race	.17	.26	.24	.16	−.19	.08	.17	

* N = 1209, $p < .05$ when $r > .06$, $p < .01$ when $r > .08$, $p < .001$ when $r > .11$ (N is less than 1495 because cases with missing data were excluded from this analysis.)

** Curvilinear correlation coefficient calculated for each pair with the variable higher (or further left) in the matrix as the independent variable. Sign of the eta coefficient is the same as the corresponding Pearson product-moment correlation.

† Curvilinear correlation is significantly different from the linear relationship, $< .001$.

inconsistency and much confusion. But the pattern of responses suggested to us that we were not dealing with a mere random phenomenon.

The results reported above thus have somewhat more of an internal structure than we might have expected. But paradoxically, as we shall report below, the preferences have little of the kind of external order we might have expected. Unlike candidate preference 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 (with the partial and important exception of race, to be discussed below). Thus we seem to have a major political issue about which large numbers of ordinary citizens express opinions, claim to be concerned, and on which they seem relatively well informed. Yet their opinions on this issue are almost totally uncorrelated with the major dimensions of social structure that usually pattern political attitudes.

Patterns of Consistency. Correlation among various scales of attitudes toward the war suggest that there is consistency in public attitudes. As the data in Table 3 indicate, those who favor increasing the war are more likely to

TABLE 4. MEAN SCORES ON ATTITUDE SCALES AND INDEX OF INFORMATION BY LEVEL OF EDUCATION

Attitude	Level of Education					
	No High School	Some High School	Completed High School	Some College	Completed College	Total
Escalation	4.1	4.0	3.8	4.0	3.6	3.9
De-escalation*	4.0	3.9	3.6	3.6	3.8	3.8
Information**	3.6	4.1	4.7	5.3	5.8	4.5
Sample size	267	264	367	166	145	1209

* $p < .05$
** $p < .001$

be willing to pay the costs of that increase. The correlations between the escalation scale and the economic costs and welfare costs indices were .37 and .30, respectively.[16] Conversely, there is a tendency (though less marked) for those who favor de-escalation to oppose the payment of these costs. The correlation between the de-escalation scale and willingness to pay economic and welfare costs was −.10 and −.18, respectively. In addition, the escalation and de-escalation scales were negatively correlated −.37. In general, the attitudes form a meaningful pattern with all coefficients significant beyond the .001 level in the expected direction.[17]

[16] See footnote 13 for a description of these scales.

[17] The pattern of consistency can also be observed if we look at the mean escalation scores in relation to willingness to see taxes raised and aid to education cut "if needed to continue the war." Those who approve of reducing aid to education and raising taxes have the highest mean escalation score, while those who oppose raising taxes and reducing education aid have the lowest.

MEAN ESCALATION SCORES BY OPINIONS ON TAX INCREASE AND REDUCED AID TO EDUCATION

Increase Taxes (if needed to continue war)	*Reduce Aid to Education* (if needed to continue war)	
	Approve	Disapprove
Approve	Mean: 5.89 (N = 129)	Mean: 4.92 (N = 313)
Disapprove	Mean: 3.94 (N = 138)	Mean: 3.04 (N = 771)

(Variable N due to missing data cases; DK, etc., omitted.)

Social group and policy preferences: Are there different patterns of policy preference among different strata of the society? Our evidence suggests not. There is little relationship between such standard status variables as income or occupation and policy preferences on the war in Vietnam (Table 3). Similarly, we find little differences among sub-groups with different levels of education. The highly educated are little different from the less highly educated in their policy preferences (Tables 3 and 4). And neither religion nor strength of religious belief was correlated with preferences on the war. An analysis of attitude scales by region indicates that the Southwest and Western states were more in favor of escalation while the South was most in favor of de-escalation (Table 5).

The lack of clear relationship between social status and preferences on the war in Vietnam is not unexpected. The conflict, after all, does not involve domestic status politics. In the same way, one would not expect partisan affiliation to structure preferences very much—particularly in a country with a long tradition of a bipartisan foreign policy. Other literature also suggests that party affiliation is not closely related to preferences on foreign policy[18] and the crossing of positions by the President—who in 1964 attacked Goldwater for various schemes to increase the war that the President himself later introduced—ought to have dulled the edge of any division based on vote in 1964. This is confirmed in Table 6.

There is some tendency for Democrats to have higher mean escalation scores than Republicans; and for those who voted for Goldwater in 1964 to have higher escalation scores than those who voted for Johnson. But neither of these differences achieve statistical significance (by analysis of variance). When we com-

[18] See Warren Miller, "Voting and Foreign Policy," in Rosenau, *op. cit.*

TABLE 5. MEAN SCORES ON ATTITUDE SCALES AND INDEX OF INFORMATION BY REGION

Attitude	Region					
	East	North Central	South	Southwest	West	Total
Escalation**	3.8	3.9	3.5	4.3	4.2	3.9
De-escalation*	3.9	3.6	4.1	3.8	3.7	3.8
Information*	4.8	4.7	4.3	4.3	4.5	4.5
Sample Size	305	322	216	156	210	1209

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$

bine party affiliation and party vote we find that those who crossed party lines to vote for the candidate of the opposite party have the more extreme positions on the escalation scale. The lowest escalation score is found among the Republicans who voted for Johnson. Those who voted consistently with their party affiliation—Johnson Democrats or Goldwater Republicans—have similar scores on the escalation scale.

It is tempting to interpret these data to suggest that party affiliation is not related to preferences in relation to the war in Vietnam, but that those who left their partisan affiliation to vote for the candidate of the opposite party did so (in part) because of the perceived foreign policy positions of the candidates—Goldwater having been perceived as more in favor of escalation. However, the variations within each of the groups is such that the overall differences are quite likely to be the result of chance variation in the sample: none achieve statistical significance. And similar non-significant results are found using the de-escalation scale. Perhaps the safest interpretation is that there is no relationship between party affiliation and vote, and preferences on this policy issue.

In contrast with the above findings, two demographic characteristics are related to preference on Vietnam. As Table 7 indicates, men are more likely than women to support escalation policies and women are more likely than men to support de-escalation policies. The mean escalation score for men is 4.4 compared with 3.7 for women. The mean de-escalation score is 4.1 for men and 4.5 for women. (In addition, men are more likely to be better informed, as measured by our information test. The average number correct among men was 5.0 and among women was 3.7.)

A stronger predictor of attitudes toward Vietnam policy was race (Table 8). Negroes were significantly more opposed to escalation than whites (they have a mean escalation score of 3.4 in contrast to 4.1 among white), and they are more willing to support de-escalation policies (Negroes have a 5.5 de-escalation versus a 4.1 score for whites). Since Negroes are significantly less well-informed than whites, we tested to see whether the difference is due to information level. But the relationship is even stronger when the level of information is controlled. The partial correlation between race and escalation with information level controlled is .16, and between race and de-escalation with information level controlled is −.20.

To sum up our findings thus far: There is little group difference in position on the war in Vietnam. Social status shows little relation to policy position and neither does party affilia-

TABLE 6. MEAN ESCALATION SCORES BY PARTY PREFERENCE AND VOTE IN LAST ELECTION

Party Preference	Vote in Last Election		
	Johnson ↓	Goldwater ↓	Didn't Vote ↓
Republican	3.3 (71)*	4.0 (194)	3.9 (64)
Democrat	3.9 (440)	4.1 (44)	3.8 (147)
Independent	4.2 (75)	4.0 (29)	3.9 (95)

* Sample sizes in parentheses. Neither the effect of party preference or vote, nor the interaction between the two reached statistical significance (by analysis of variance). (F values for rows, columns, and interaction are 0.7, 0.5 and 1.6, respectively.)

TABLE 7. MEANS AND VARIANCES ON ATTITUDE SCALES AND INDEX OF INFORMATION BY SEX

Attitude	*Male* (N = 486)		*Female* (N = 554)	
	Mean	Variance	Mean	Variance
Escalation***	4.4	6.46	3.7	8.45
De-escalation**	4.1	4.56	4.5	4.86
Information***	5.0	4.27	3.7	3.83

** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$

TABLE 8. MEANS AND VARIANCES ON ATTITUDE SCALES AND INDEX OF INFORMATION BY RACE

Attitude	*White* (N = 856)		*Non-White* (N = 162)	
	Mean	Variance	Mean	Variance
Escalation**	4.1	7.31	3.4	9.04
De-escalation***	4.1	4.41	5.5	5.08
Information***	4.5	4.29	3.1	3.56

** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$

tion and vote. On the other hand, women are more likely to oppose escalation and favor de-escalation and—more strongly—Negroes oppose escalation and favor de-escalation.

Non-Demographic Correlates of Policy Preference. The social characteristics of our respondents (with the important exceptions of sex and race) did not relate to policy preferences. What about measures deriving from the individual's cognitive and affective position vis-à-vis the war in Vietnam? One such measure is the extent to which respondents were worried about the war in Vietnam. There is a slight tendency for those who were worried about the war to favor de-escalation. When we compare those who report that they are worried about the war in Vietnam (n = 829) with those who report they are not worried (n = 526), we find a mean escalation score of 3.8 among the worriers and a mean score of 4.1 among the non-worriers. And the worriers have a mean de-escalation score of 3.9 in contrast with a score of 3.7 among the non-worriers. (Both differences are significant at the .01 level.)

The Informed Public. Of more interest from a theoretical as well as a policy point of view are differences in policy preference based on level of information.[19] Many have argued that the informed public should be attended to when it comes to policy guidance. How do the informed differ from the less-well-informed on their attitudes toward the Vietnam war? Those who expect the informed citizen to be more in favor of negotiations and de-escalation will find little comfort in our data, while those who expect the informed to favor a more militant policy will receive some—but not much—support for their position.[20] Respondents with high information scores were more likely to favor escalation and less likely to favor de-escalation. The correlations are small—a correlation of .12 between information and escalation and −.19 between information and de-escalation. Although significance tests show that both are reliable relationships that could happen as a result of sampling variation less than once in a thousand samples (see Table 3), it should be noted that the amounts of shared variance between information and policy preferences are about one and four percent respectively. Mean escalation and de-escalation scores in each of the levels on the information test are presented in Table 9.

The relationship between sex and race and policy preferences and between information and policy preferences led us to look further into the relation among all these variables. Men and whites have significantly more information than women or Negroes, and perhaps the explanation of these information differences lies in the interrelationship among sex,

[19] The eight information items in the questionnaire failed to fit the Guttman scale pattern, and were combined into an arbitrary index ranging from 0 to 8, with the higher score indicating more correct answers. Questions included identification of the capitals of North and South Vietnam, knowledge of number of U.S. troops in Vietnam and number of U.S. casualties at the time of the survey, whether Congress had declared war, whether North Vietnam was then being bombed, and identification of the Vietcong. For the last item, both North Vietnamese or South Vietnamese communists were accepted as "correct" answers.

[20] For an exploration of three models of the relation of information and opinion, see: W. A. Gamson and A. Modigliani, "Knowledge and Foreign Policy Opinions: Some Models for Consideration," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 30 (1966), 187–199.

TABLE 9. MEAN SCORES ON ATTITUDE SCALES BY LEVEL OF INFORMATION

Attitude	0–1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Total
Escalation*	3.3	3.4	3.6	3.9	4.0	4.4	4.3	4.0	3.9
De-escalation*	4.4	4.3	4.0	4.0	3.6	3.6	3.2	3.4	3.8
Sample Size	74	122	186	232	184	180	152	79	1209

* $p < .001$

race and information, and policy position. If the differences between men and women in policy opinions are merely the result of men being, on the average, better informed than women, then better informed persons in both sexes should be more likely to support escalation policies than less well-informed people in the same sex. On the other hand, if sex is a primary causal factor, then the correlation between information and policy opinion should decrease or disappear when the analysis is run separately for men and for women. The same argument applies to the relationship between race and information.

The results of this analysis are presented in Table 10. The positive correlation between information and willingness to escalate disappears when controlled by race and sex. The .20 correlation in the Negro female group approaches the .05 level of significance, but in none of the four groups can the results be accepted as reliably different from a zero correlation. The correlations between information and support for de-escalation policies are not so dramatically reduced. In fact, the negative correlation between information and de-escalation policies becomes slightly stronger (to −.22) among white males. But, in general, this analysis suggests that there is little explanatory value in the information variable as far as policy preferences are concerned.[21]

We might, however, expect the informed to differ from the ill-informed in the structure of their preferences if not in the direction. For one thing, we would expect them to be more consistent in their policy positions. Much evidence from surveys suggests that uninformed respondents will have incompatible preferences—they will express approval for contrary policies, or prefer policies but be unwilling to pay the costs of these policies. Table 11 compares the "informed" and the "less well-informed" in terms of the consistency of their policy positions. (The informed are here defined as those who score in the upper half of our information scale, the less well-informed as those who score in the lower half.) As the table shows, the informed are more consistent in policy preference than the less well-informed. The negative correlation between scores on the escalation scale and scores on the de-escalation scale was −.47 for the informed and −.25 for the less well-informed. Thus the informed respondent who favors escalation is less likely to favor de-escalation at the same time. On the other hand, the informed differ little from the less well-informed in terms of their willingness to pay the costs of their policy preferences. Thus, among the informed, there is a correlation of .38 between scores on the escalation scale and scores on the scale of willingness to bear economic costs of the involvement in the war and a correlation of .26 between escalation scores and willingness to pay welfare costs. This is not significantly different from the correlations of .35 and .22, respectively, for the less well-informed group. Thus our hypothesis of greater

[21] To keep these conclusions in perspective it might be useful to point out that, even though the correlations are significantly different from zero, the approximately −.20 correlation between information and support for de-escalation policies means that less than 5 percent of the variation in policy scores can be accounted for by differences in information level.

TABLE 11. CORRELATION MATRIX: ESCALATION, DE-ESCALATION, ECONOMIC COSTS, WELFARE COSTS

(High information groups: upper triangle. Low information groups: lower triangle)

	Escalation	De-esc.	Econ. Costs	Welfare Costs
Escalation		−.47	.38	.26
De-escalation	−.25		−.13	−.19
Economic Cost	.35	−.03		.24
Welfare	.22	−.03	.15	

N = 599 for high information group
N = 625 for low information group

TABLE 10. CORRELATIONS OF INFORMATION SCORES WITH ESCALATION AND DE-ESCALATION SCALES, CONTROLLING FOR RACE AND SEX

Race and Sex	Escalation	De-escalation	(N)
White Males	.00	−.22*	(588)
White Females	.03	−.07	(583)
Negro Males	.05	−.11	(94)
Negro Females	.20	−.17	(90)

* $p < .001$

consistency among the informed receives only partial confirmation.

There is a further way in which the structure of the opinions of the informed might be expected to differ from that of the less well-informed. Though they might on the average have the same policy preferences—i.e., not be more "hawk" or "dove"—one might expect them to differ in the degree of polarization of their attitudes. But on the latter point, it is hard to say in which way they might differ. One might argue that the more one knows about the war in Vietnam, the more one is likely to want *some* solution—either by increasing the war or decreasing it. On this assumption, we should expect to find that the informed would take more extreme positions, while the less well-informed would take more moderate ones. On the other hand, one could argue that the war is so confusing, that the more one knows, the more ambivalent his position. The less well-informed, on this argument, would be more likely to take extreme positions.

Our data support neither position. The standard deviation of the scores on the escalation scale was 2.52 for the less well-informed and 2.39 for the informed—a slight tendency (if any) for the less well-informed to have more polarized opinions ($f = 1.1$ and is not significant). On the de-escalation scale the standard deviations for the less well-informed and the informed are 1.82 and 1.80, respectively, indicating that the groups do not differ in their likelihood to take extreme positions. This is further reflected in Table 12 where we compare the informed and the less well-informed in their response to a question that offered three unpleasant alternatives. The question read, "Suppose you had to choose among continuing the present situation indefinitely, fighting a major war with hundreds of thousands of casualties, or a withdrawal of American troops leading to an eventual Communist takeover. Which would you choose?" If we compare the two groups we find little difference between them. (Compare especially the two groups with those who answered "don't know" removed. This controls for the greater tendency of those who are less well-informed to give a "don't know" answer.) The informed are slightly more likely to prefer the present situation and slightly less likely to prefer withdrawal. But the shape of the opinion of the two groups is remarkably similar.

The informed, in summary, cannot be said to form a particularly distinct policy public. Their preferences differ, but not substantially, from those of the less well-informed; they are a bit more consistent, but the evidence is mixed on this; and in terms of their degree of polarization they are little different from the rest of the populace.

The Articulate Public. There is one further special public that deserves attention: the group that volunteers its position on public matters, in this case by writing letters to public officials or newspapers. The survey research respondent has to be sought out by the interviewer. The letter writer puts forth his views without the stimulus of the interview and, in this way, demonstrates his involvement. It has been argued that the letter writer differs from those who do not write letters substantially in his preferences, and this in part explains the mistakes politicians make in attempting to predict elections on the basis of opinion as they perceive it—i.e., form the mail they receive, the letters they see in newspapers and so forth.[22]

Converse, Clausen and Miller found that

[22] See Philip E. Converse, Aage R. Clausen and Warren E. Miller, "Electoral Myth and Reality: The 1964 Election," this REVIEW, 59 (June, 1965), 321–323.

TABLE 12. CHOICE AMONG CONTINUANCE OF PRESENT SITUATION, MAJOR WAR, OR WITHDRAWAL

Preference	High Information	Low Information	Total	High Information	Low Information	Total
				(Don't know's removed)		
Present situation	53%	46%	43%	56%	52%	54%
Major War	24	22	23	26	25	26
Withdrawal	17	20	19	18	22	20
Don't Know	5	12	9	—	—	—
	100%	100%	100%	99%	99%	99%
Number of Cases	678	817	1495	643	717	1360

TABLE 13. ESCALATION AND DE-ESCALATION SCALE SCORES BY LETTER WRITING

	Escalation Scale Score ← Low								→ High		
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
Letter Written	13%	9%	10%	12%	14%	12%	11%	4%	12%	3%	.....100% (n=239)
Not Written	9%	12%	11%	12%	12%	11%	11%	6%	10%	6%	.....100% (n=1251)

Mean: Letter written 3.9; not written 3.9.
Standard deviation: Letter written 2.52; not written 2.46.

	De-escalation Scale Score ← Low								→ High		
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
Letter Written	3%	6%	16%	21%	21%	13%	7%	3%	6%	3%	.....100% (n=239)
Not Written	2%	6%	14%	20%	22%	13%	9%	3%	5%	6%	.....100% (n=1251)

Mean: Letter written 3.8; not written 3.8.
Standard deviation: Letter written 1.93; not written 1.83.

letter writers were much more likely to take positions on the extreme right than non-writers (and a bit more likely to take them on the left as well). Is the articulate public that writes letters a "hawk" public? In Table 13 we compare the letter writers with those who have never sent a letter on a public issue to a government official or to the newspapers.[23] We find no difference in direction of preference. The scores on the escalation scale and de-escalation scale are the same for the two groups: the letter writers have a mean score of 3.9 on the escalation scale as do the non-writers; and they both have the same mean score of 3.8 on the de-escalation scale.

It is more interesting to compare the letter writers and the non-writers in terms of the polarization of their opinions. Converse, Clausen and Miller[24] found sharp differences between the public that had never written letters to public officials and the public that had written letters. The articulate public, they found, is more ideologically oriented and more likely to take a position on either end of a policy continuum. And this is quite understandable, given the fact that they have volunteered their opinions—their greater motivation to express themselves would, we would expect, come from stronger policy preferences. This would lead us to expect that letter writers are more likely to be either "hawk" or "dove" with the non-writers taking the more mild middle positions. The data in Table 13 indicate this is not the case; letter writers are *not* more likely to take extreme positions. The standard deviation of their scores on the escalation scale is 2.52 compared with one of 2.46 for the non-writers; and for the de-escalation scale, the scores are 1.93 and 1.83, respectively. Neither difference is significant by the F-test.

Table 14 shows that responses to the "three-alternative" question—present situation, major war, or withdrawal—which also yields little difference in the response patterns of writers

[23] It must be pointed out that we are not talking of letter writers specifically on the Vietnamese war. We found only 17% of our respondents had ever written a letter on any subject, and any attempt to isolate a specific group that had written on the Vietnamese war would have given us too few cases to analyze. This limits the meaning of the following analysis, but not completely. The Converse, Clausen and Miller article uses a similar general measure of letter writing. But this illustrates the limitation of the cross-section survey in obtaining enough cases of significant policy groups.

[24] *Op. cit.*, pp. 332–336.

TABLE 14. CHOICE OF PRESENT SITUATION OR WITHDRAWAL BY LETTER WRITING

Preference	Letter Written	Not written	Total
Present situation	52%	49%	49%
Major War	23	23	23
Withdrawal	20	18	19
Don't Know	5	10	9
	100%	100%	100%
Number of cases	239	1251	1495

and non-writers. Writers are a shade more likely to prefer the present situation and slightly more likely to prefer withdrawal; while the non-writers are somewhat more likely to have no opinion. But the differences are not significant (basically, letter writers are not different from non-writers.)[25]

These results must stand as significant negative findings. Our expectations—reinforced by the Converse, Clausen and Miller findings—had been that the letter writers would tend to take more extreme positions. Indeed, the fact that they are so similar to the inarticulate population leaves us puzzled.[26] It might be that the key lies in the fact that the measure of letter writing is not specific to the Vietnam situation. If we had a sample of letter writers on Vietnam we would be more likely to find the expected polarization. On the other hand, the results parallel those for the information items—and those were information items specific to Vietnam. We shall return to this point.

When we compare the articulate and informed publics with the less articulate and less well-informed publics we find differences, but not as substantial as we might have expected. Their policy preferences differ little. They are no more likely to take extreme positions than the rest of the public—a finding more striking for the articulate public than for the informed public. And though they are somewhat more consistent in their preferences, even this pattern is less than clear.

III. CONCLUSIONS

The data reported in this article bring us a little closer to an understanding of the nature of public attitudes on the war in Vietnam—though they leave many questions unanswered. It becomes clear why public opinion—though it is often invoked—is not an effective guide to policy and does not represent a major constraint on the administration.

1. Our first finding is that public opinion is relatively orderly. The public expressed concern about the war and was relatively informed about it. The correlational analysis among scales shows patterns of consistency among the population; and many of the inconsistencies can be interpreted as more apparent than real. An overwhelming majority (88%) expressed willingness to negotiate with the Vietcong and a similar majority (81%) would oppose withdrawal of our troops "tomorrow." One can argue that many respondents are taking positions at the opposite ends of the spectrum at the same time; but this is not necessarily the case since the two policies are not in conflict. Negotiations do not necessarily imply precipitous withdrawal.

But though the preferences we found among the population were patterned, they were patterned in a more complex way than would be suggested by the summaries of public attitudes found in the standard surveys based upon one, two or three questions. Despite the consistency found, few respondents could be called "hawks" or "doves"; rather, they took more

[25] They differ, however, from the non-writers in terms of consistency roughly as do the informed from the less-well-informed. They are somewhat more likely to be consistent in that the negative correlations between escalation and de-escalation scales are larger, (−.52 for the letter writers and −.34 for the non-writers), the correlation between escalation scores and willingness to pay welfare costs is higher, (.39 for the letter writers and .21 for the non-writers.) But, as with the information items, the distinction is not clear. They are no more likely than the non-writers to be willing to pay the economic costs of escalation. The correlation between escalation scores and willingness to pay economic costs is .37 for both writers and non-writers.

[26] Actually, a closer look at the findings in the Converse, Clausen and Miller article suggests that their findings are similar to ours in one important respect. Though they find a sharp difference between the mass public and the letter writers on most issues, they find much greater similarity on the one foreign policy issue that is reported, "negotiation with the communists." The discrepancies on this issue are so slight in comparison with the discrepancies discovered on the domestic issue (*op. cit.*, figures 2a–e, p. 334), that the analysis of opinion on this issue via letters could have served as a reasonable estimate of the shape of the distribution of public opinion. On the four domestic issues, in contrast, expression through letters was a highly inaccurate guide to public opinion. See below for a further discussion.

moderate positions somewhere nearer the center of the spectrum.

2. A major finding is that though the preferences of respondents have internal structure, they are not related to the broad social groupings around which political and social attitudes often cluster. Variables of social status—occupation, income, or education—do not relate to policy preferences on the Vietnamese war; nor do such variables as religion or region. (The latter makes some difference though not much.) In addition, party affiliation does not relate to policy preferences; a fact that illustrates why it is difficult to make foreign policy the subject of political campaigns.[27]

When it comes to policy preference on the Vietnamese war, the average citizen can receive relatively little guidance from the ordinary reference groups that help him pattern his attitudes. And perhaps the most significant lack is in the relation to party affiliation—the citizen looking for guidance among his fellow partisans will find little. In turn, of course, this means that the pattern of preferences is such that political leaders have a harder time taking them into account. Aside from the gross marginal distributions—"is the President more popular today than yesterday?"—the political leader may have trouble calculating the consequences of patterns of attitudes of the war since they cannot be assigned to the ordinary group categories of political structure.

3. Two differences among social groups do stand out, however. One is the difference between men and women, with women more in favor of de-escalation; and the other between whites and Negroes with the Negroes more in favor of de-escalation. Both findings need further study for adequate explanation, though it is easy enough to suggest some reasons. The male-female difference is consistent with other findings that women differ from men in their political behavior in being somewhat more opposed to policies that could be considered "aggressive"—whether these be capital punishment or universal military service.[28]

The racial patterns are particularly interesting. This does not appear to be a social class phenomenon in disguise, but a difference patterned by the racial distinction. The *ad hoc* explanation is obvious; at the present moment the American Negro is alienated from American society and unimpressed by arguments that our commitment is necessary to preserve freedom and justice for ourselves and others in Southeast Asia.[29] In addition, he may be aware of criticisms of the draft that suggest a disproportionate Negro contribution to the war effort. All this is speculation. But if true, it suggests a relatively high level of self-consciousness among the Negro population that allows the connections to be made between their social position and the war; and it also means that we have found an instance in which the preferences on the war are closely related to one of the major dimensions of social grouping that often pattern political attitudes.

4. If social position (with the exception of sex and race) fails to organize policy preference on this issue, what succeeds? One possible answer is that they are patterned by the respondent's cognitive and affective relationship to the war itself—i.e., that it is not a group-related set of attitudes but a set of attitudes related to the object of the attitude. Some evidence for this is found in the differences in policy preferences between the "worriers" and the "non-worriers" and weaker evidence is found in the differences between the "informed" and the "less well-informed." One would need more data on perceptions of the war, estimates of likely outcomes, and the like, to see whether this type of patterning is significant.[30] The point is that in the absence of the ordinary guidelines of group position that would allow the citizen to adopt the position of those like him or the guideline of group-relatedness that would allow the citizen to adopt a position he perceives as relevant for the groups with which he identifies, cognitive and affective relationship to the events themselves may structure attitudes.

5. One striking finding is the similarity between the informed and articulate population on the one hand, and the rest of the population on the other. All writing on foreign policy attitudes makes a sharp distinction between

[27] See Miller, *op. cit.*, and John Corry's news story on Vietnam as an issue in the 1966 Congressional election (*New York Times*, Oct. 20, 1966, p. 1).

[28] See Fred Greenstein, "Sex-Related Political Differences in Childhood," *Journal of Politics*, 23 (May, 1961), 353–371; Robert E. Lane, *Political Life*, (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1959), 209–216; and Maurice Duverger, *The Political Role of Women* (Paris, 1955).

[29] Gamson and Modigliani (*op. cit.*, p. 189) hypothesize and demonstrate that "the greater the attachment to the mainstream, the greater the degree of conformity of one's foreign policy opinions to official policy."

[30] cf. P. Ekman, E. Tufte, K. Archibald and R. Brody, "Coping with Cuba; Divergent Policy Preferences of State Political Leaders," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 10 (1966), 180–197.

"elite opinion" and the rest. The distinction is still important; but our findings indicate that on this particular issue the shape of opinion differs little between these levels of society. The informed and articulate differ little from others in the direction of their preferences. They are somewhat more likely to have consistent positions (but less so than we would expect). But their positions are not consistently more extreme or consistently more moderate and middle-of-the-road. Commentators have often suggested that if the public "only understood the situation better" they would take positions quite different from the uninformed masses. Or they have believed that visible public opinion (as revealed in letters-to-the-editor columns, for instance) gives an inaccurate picture of the opinion among the populace. It is perhaps a token of the complexity and ambiguity of the war in Vietnam that the informed and articulate (on our simple measures) do not differ from the rest of the population in their preferences or in the likelihood that they take either extreme or moderate positions. As one gets closer to the situation (as one gets more information, for instance) the problem remains unclear. This phenomenon may be true of many political situations, but it appears at any rate truer about the war in Vietnam. Indeed, the similarity among the informed and articulate groups and the mass of the population in their distribution of policy preferences—similar proportions in both groups want escalation or de-escalation, while the bulk lie somewhere in between—continues up the ladder to political leaders and activists in and out of the government. There is no position found by us among the mass public that does not have its advocates in Washington.

In the light of this argument, it is intriguing to compare a poll of members of Congress conducted by the *Congressional Quarterly* with our survey. Congressmen were divided into those who indicated support for present policy, those who wanted to increase the war and those who wanted to see it diminished. The results (as indicated on Table 15) are remarkably close to the results we obtained from a similar choice presented to our national sample. The very close parallel in results must be considered fortuitous since the question asked of the Congressmen, though it offered a similar set of alternatives to the question we asked of our respondents, was phrased quite differently and

TABLE 15. CONGRESSIONAL AND MASS OPINION COMPARED

*Congressional Opinion, October, 1966** Policy Choice		Stanford Survey, February 1966 Policy Choice	
"Basic course U.S. is following"	48.5%	Present Situation	49%
"More decisive military action by the United States to meet communist aggression and achieve victory in the war"	26.4%	Major War	23%
"More emphasis on peace talks, increased steps toward de-emphasis of the conflict and eventual accommodation with the Vietcong"	15.1%	Withdrawal	19%
Unascertained	10.0%	Don't Know	9%
	100%		100%
Number of cases	535		1495

* These data are based on a mail poll conducted by the *Congressional Quarterly* and reported in the *New York Times*, Oct. 29, 1966. The mail questionnaires were followed-up by telephone queries in cases of no response. Those who did not reply were assigned to a position based on previous public statements.

The *Congressional Quarterly* reported 58.5% as backing the basic position of the administration. But, according to the *New York Times* this figure was arrived at by placing most of the 10% who did not respond and who could not be placed on the basis of public statements in the category indicating basic approval of the administration. According to the *New York Times*, the theory used was that "silence indicated acquiescence." We have taken the more cautious position of leaving this 10% in an "unascertained" category.

The data are by no means directly comparable with our survey, since the question was different and the time nine months later. See Table 12 and the relevant text for our question wording.

the time of the Congressional survey was nine months later. But the Congressional poll confirms our point that the general shape and distribution of policy preference is parallel between the mass public and elite groups such as the informed and articulate.

The lack of difference between the "elite" and "mass" opinions may be related, furthermore, to the lack of "group structure" of the issues. On various domestic issues the more informed and the more involved can pick up cues as to the group or party relevance of the policy issue. Thus the more informed and involved are more likely to take positions on one side of the issue or the other. But in connection with the war in Vietnam, the informed and the involved receive few cues of this sort. Thus, they differ little from the rest of the population.

6. The public opinion we have been discussing does not seem to possess much potential for controlling or limiting the alternatives of the administration. If anything, it mirrors the complexities of the debate in Washington and probably reflects a permissiveness in either direction. Our data suggest a higher permissiveness for reduction of the war, but evidence from other polls since then suggests that the President's support increases no matter what he does—increase the war or talk of negotiations—as long as he does something. The increase in support, however, tends to be temporary. But above all, the lack of structure of preferences along party or class lines means that attitudes toward the war are not likely to affect electoral outcome and are less likely to be taken into account in making policy calculations.

Indeed, if we are right in suggesting that the range of preferences among the populace as a whole and among the articulate and informed subsections of the populace mirrors the range of preferences found in elite groups, we can see what kind of relation public opinion polling data have to policy making. The relation is probably circular. A leader—be it the President or someone opposed to his policies—adopts a position. He then finds support for that position among the public—support easier to find if one asks the type of survey question that highlights one part of the range of preferences and obscures the others. He then uses this finding to justify and legitimize his position. This may not be an inaccurate summary of the use of the polls by the President. But it suggests that the careful student of public opinion will want to look at a more complex and variegated picture of public attitudes before coming to conclusions as to what the public wants, or what it will or will not accept.