

Did U.S. Make a Mistake Getting Involved in Vietnam?				
March, 1966	Total	21-29	30-49	50+
Made a mistake	25	21	23	30
Did not	59	71	63	48
Don't know	16	8	14	22
	100	100	100	100
May, 1970				
Made a mistake	56	49	53	61
Did not	36	48	41	26
Don't know	8	3	6	13
	100	100	100	100

Source: Gallup

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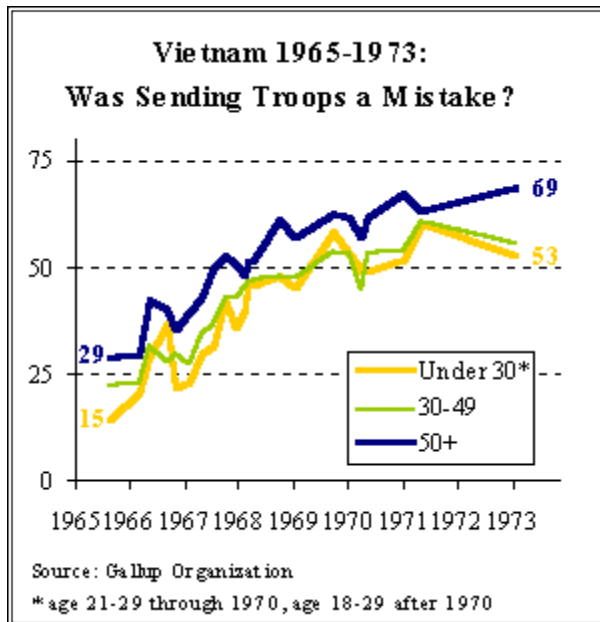
Youth and War

From Vietnam to Iraq, Generations Disagree About the Use of Military Force

by Nicole Speulda

There is a generation gap over U.S. military interventions but it is older Americans, not young people, who typically show the greatest wariness about using military force. This was evident during the war in Vietnam and remains the case today. Pew surveys now show that roughly half of those in every age group except for those ages 50 to 64 believe the decision to go to war in Iraq was right.

During the Vietnam War, Gallup surveys showed that not only were older people less supportive of President Lyndon Johnson's Vietnam policies early on, but they also were more likely to say the United States made a mistake in sending troops to fight there. **In August 1965, just 41% of those ages 50 and older approved of Johnson's handling of the Vietnam situation. Americans under age 30 were far more positive toward Johnson's performance on Vietnam (56% approval).**



The generation gap in attitudes toward the Vietnam War did not erode over time. Gallup surveys conducted between 1965 and 1973 show that over time people of all ages increasingly expressed the view that U.S. involvement in Vietnam was a mistake, but **the broadest criticism always came from older generations. In August of 1965, people ages 50 and older were already twice as likely as those under 30 (by a 29% to 15% margin) to say sending troops to Vietnam was a mistake.** Nearly eight years later, as U.S. forces were about to be completely withdrawn, majorities in all age groups saw Vietnam as a mistake, but **younger people remained far less likely to take this view (53%) than those age 50 and older (69%).**

Older Americans are more opposed to the use of military force than those in other age groups, but most believe that, in principle, the best way to ensure peace is through military strength rather than effective diplomacy. Americans under age 30 generally favor the opposite approach. Since 1987, the belief in military strength as the best way to ensure peace has never fallen below 60% among those ages 65 and older, while on average only 44% of younger Americans subscribe to that opinion.

Despite their wariness of U.S. military action, older Americans are more likely than those in younger age groups to hold the view that “we should all be willing to fight for our country, whether it is right or wrong.” In August 2003, 64% of those over 65 supported this tenet, while barely half (51%) of those under age 30 agreed. This gap has persisted since the late 1980s.

The consistent generational pattern in views of the Vietnam and Iraq wars stands in stark contrast to an analysis of partisan divides. **Partisanship was never a major factor in views of the Vietnam conflict – Gallup surveys show that at the outset majorities in both parties said sending troops was correct, and by the end majorities in both parties said it was a mistake, and the partisan gap never widened beyond 10 percentage point.**

