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16	18	3/29/1972	<input type="checkbox"/>	Campaign	Memo	From: Thomas W. Benham To: H.R. Haldeman RE: President Nixon's Approval Base. Original attached. 14 pgs.

Opinion Research Corporation

NORTH HARRISON STREET, PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY 08540

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THOMAS W. BENHAM
President

M E M O R A N D U M

March 29, 1972

TO: H. R. Haldeman
FROM: Thomas W. Benham
SUBJECT: President Nixon's Approval Base

The question of how to raise the base of public approval for the President certainly does not yield to any simple solutions. There are some observations that should be made about this phenomenon of presidential approval:

- a. The ratings of previous presidents have shown -- without exception -- that the trend from time of taking office to the end of the term is one of general decline in popularity. Obviously, as the chief executive must face the serious problems and crises that arise during his term, he must make decisions and accept responsibility for actions that cannot please everyone. He may also be the victim of factors beyond his control, as failures at any administrative level tend to reflect back on the head.
- b. The Gallup popularity rating is also quite a sensitive barometer. A look at Exhibit 1 shows that some of the major reversals in downtrend that have occurred so far during President Nixon's term have come about when he went directly to the people, in a highly visible manner, to seriously discuss some important problem. Note the jump after his Vietnam speech of November 1969, the increase after the commitment of troops to Cambodia, the reversal after the scheduled withdrawal from Cambodia. Notice the uptrend with the serious economic discussions of Phase 1 and Phase 2. And finally, the trend upward after the highly visible Peking trip.

The President has exhibited the ability to capture the public's attention and to get them to listen to somewhat complex discussions of our serious problems -- and get good reactions. More about this later.



March 29, 1972

- c. While it may be frustrating to break away from the 50% level in popularity, and then fall back, it may well be unrealistic to expect to establish a base as high as the 60% level. Exhibit 2 graphically demonstrates the point that President Nixon came in with a much lower level of general enthusiasm than his four predecessors in the White House. He has -- so far -- maintained an extremely high average of approval when this basic fact is taken into account, and when one considers that he has sprung from a minority party, and was elected by a narrow margin as a minority candidate. He obviously could not have maintained a base at the 50% level unless many critics had been won over to respect for his leadership and performance.

It is also apparent in Exhibit 2 that the approval of Presidents Johnson and Truman went to disastrous levels when each finally came face to face with an unsolvable problem -- in Truman's case, the Korean War, and in Johnson's case, the Vietnam War. Certainly if some such "unsolvable problem" (e.g., rampant inflation, another war somewhere) came up, a similar result could be President Nixon's lot.

- d. Most fundamental, of course, is the simple fact of life that Republicans are outnumbered almost two to one by Democrats. As shown in Exhibit 3, the sales curve of the Republican Party has not looked good for thirty years. President Nixon has done a remarkable job of maintaining public support in spite of this imbalance. To expect a one-fifth greater level of approval (from a base around 50% to a base around 60%) almost assumes a radical change in our political culture. It is hard to see how this could occur in the short period of any president's term in office. It assumes a state of public happiness and contentment that seems highly unlikely in this period of conflicting pressures and problems.

So what are some of the implications?

1. The President should continue to be unafraid to tackle and discuss difficult issues with the public. He has done it successfully in the past. He can continue to do it. He has managed to snatch some issues right out of the hands of the opposition.

One topic that presently might become a candidate for such a discussion with the public is the recent burst of high food prices. While sympathizing with the housewife, perhaps the President can explain that food is taking a smaller share of the family budget than it did 20 years ago; that our situation compared with the rest of the world -- whether it be our allies or our opponents -- is unique in this regard.

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In this same presentation he could again point out (what the public already accepts) that big labor must bear its share of the blame and, specifically, the union leaders. Labor leaders apparently never took on their real assignment to represent all working people -- not just their own narrow constituency.

Also on the economic side is the number of employed versus unemployed. The positive side of this story is not getting across.

2. Another way to keep the base up and to hopefully improve it is to work with issues on the key subgroups that have been most reluctant to show high approval for the President.

Independent voters comprise a large proportion of the public with open minds politically. This group will vote basically on how well they feel problems are being handled, and the leadership provided by the President, rather than on the basis of party loyalty.

Another group are new voters. While this group is registering more Democratic ~~and~~ Republican, a large proportion are refusing to affiliate with either party. Even those who do commit to a party will be less strong in their commitment than voters who have habitually pulled a particular party lever. The President already has made inroads in this group with his deescalation in Vietnam and his daring initiative in Peking.

One issue that should be dramatized with youth is what the President has done to eliminate the draft, where there is a tremendous statistical story that needs to be told dramatically.

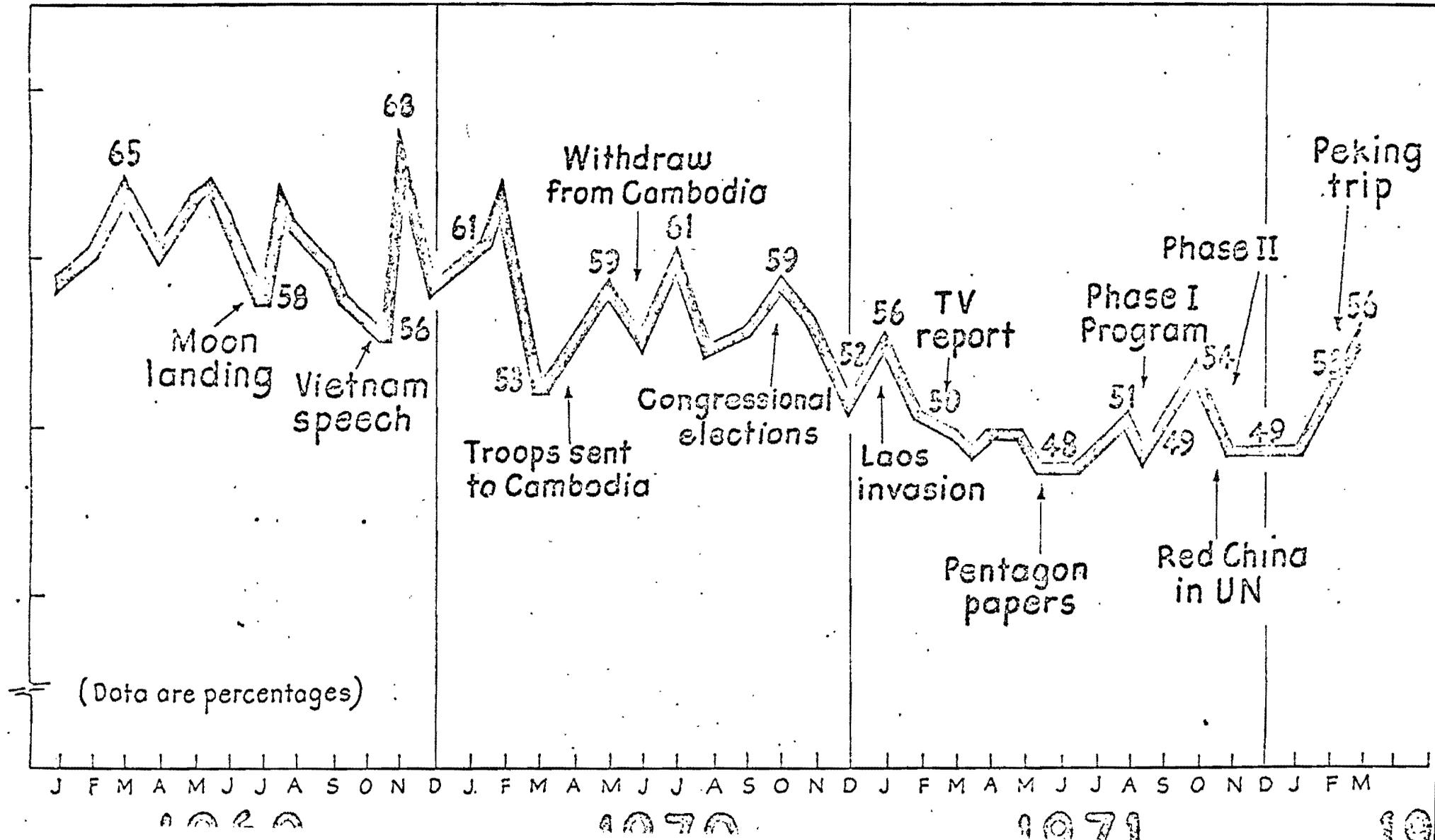
Women. Trial heats show the President running less well among women than among men. This may well be related to prices and inflation, and possibly a lack of appreciation of any interest the President may have in women's problems as a group, and the bettering of their general status in terms of equal opportunity. It would be a mistake to assume that because the Nixon Administration has appointed more women to high positions than any of its predecessors that this fact will speak for itself. It needs to be demonstrated and told again and again.

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Women are a potential source for strong organizational effort. While there are more women eligible to vote than men, their performance turnoutwise has historically been lower (4 percentage points lower than men in 1968 -- 66% versus 70%). Some of the more active women's groups will be making a greater effort to get them to the polls -- mainly in behalf of Democratic candidates.

4. Timing for the President's presentations seems to be very important from now until election day. The President needs periodic presentations to keep the base from slipping, obviously with the objective of building a peak in late October. The key would be that the President come through as President providing leadership in key problems, rather than as candidate presenting a partisan point of view.

Nixon's Popularity



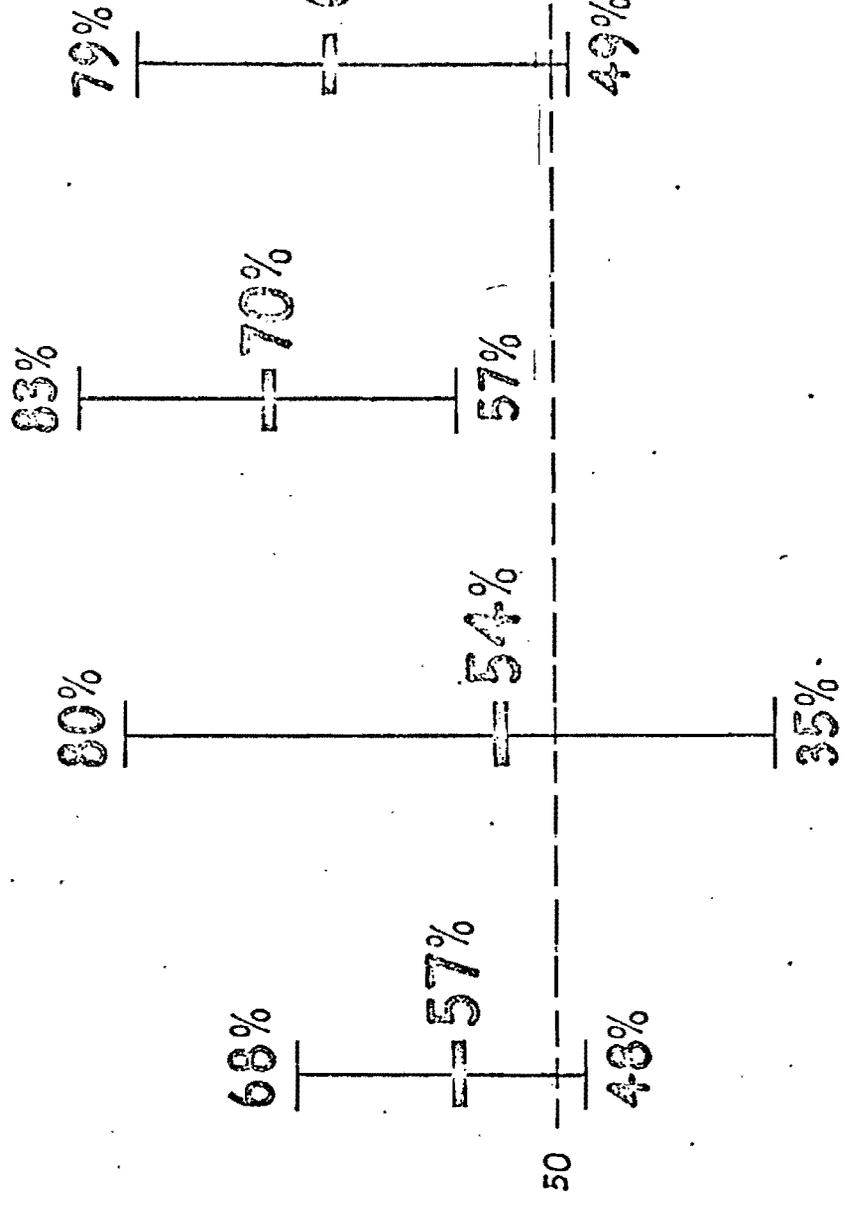
Presidential Popularity

Nixon Johnson Kennedy Eisenhower Truman

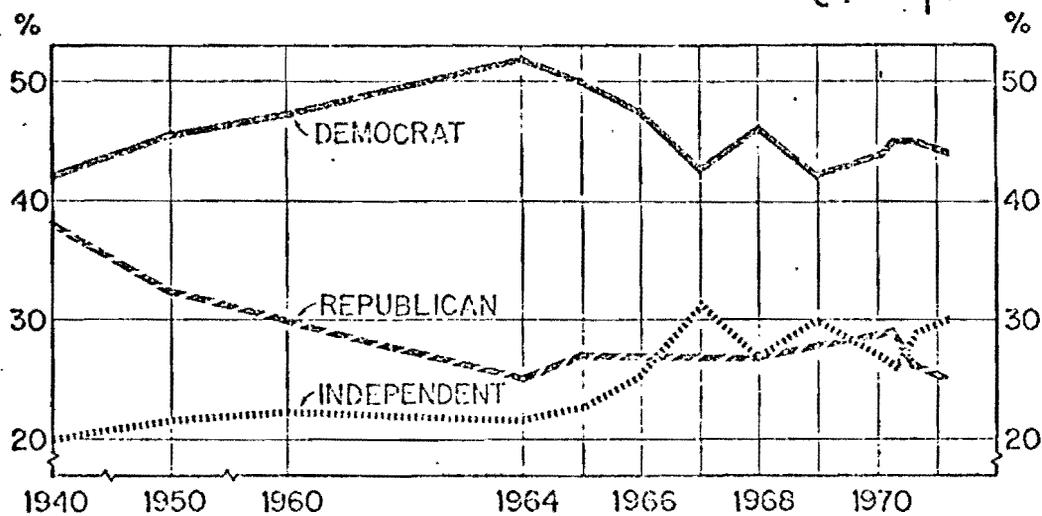
High

Average

Low



PARTY AFFILIATION: 1940 - 1971 (Gallup)



In politics, as of today do you consider yourself a Republican, Democrat or Independent?

Following is the 31-year trend:

18 and Older			
	Rep. %	Dem. %	Ind. %
LATEST	25	44	31
Jan.-March	26	45	29
21 and Older			
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May-June, '69	28	42	30
June, '68	27	46	27
Oct., '67	27	42	31
Feb.	27	46	27
1966	27	48	25
1965	27	50	23
1964	25	53	22
1960	30	47	23
1950	33	45	22
1940	38	42	20

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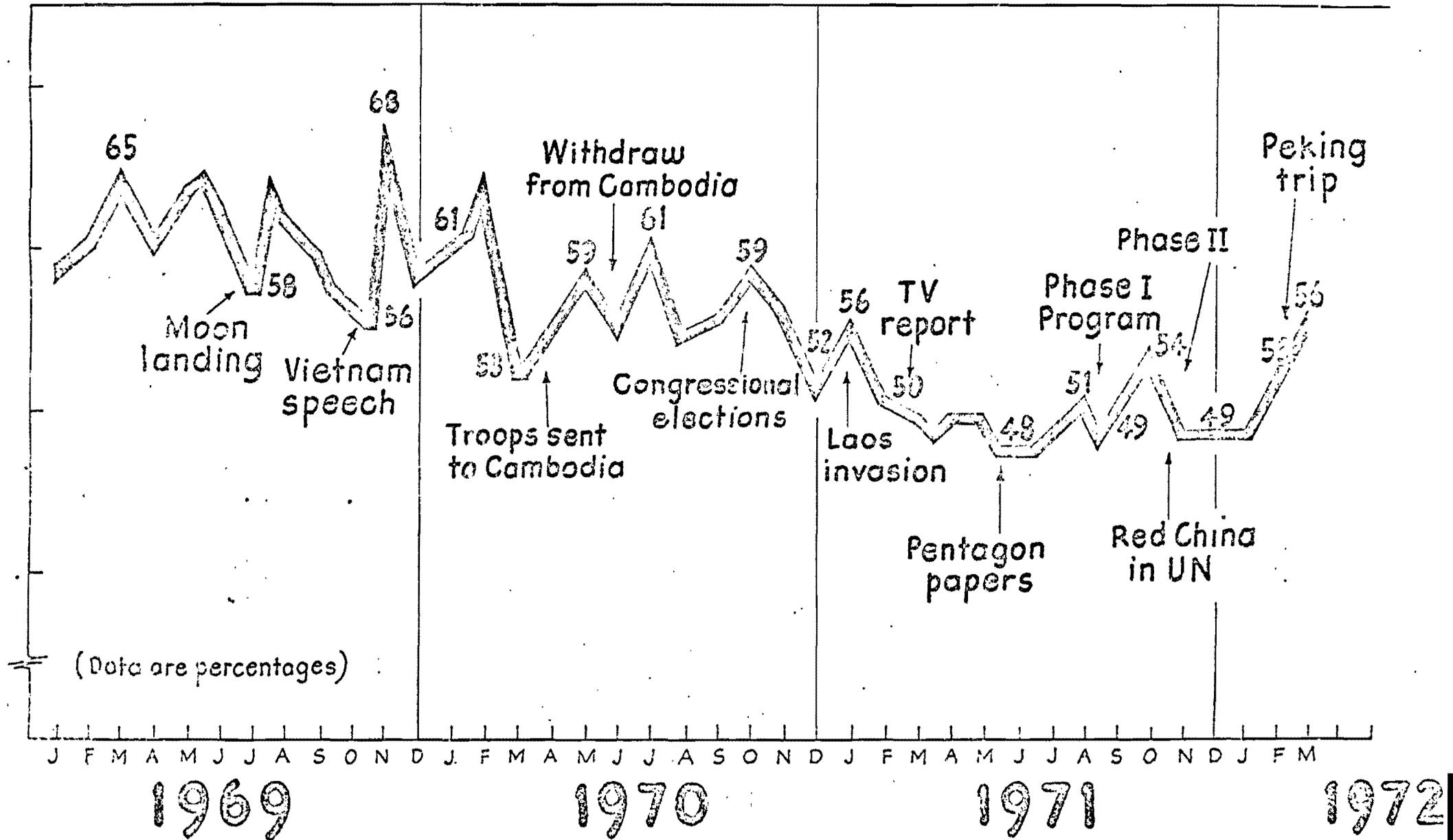
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Presidential Popularity

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Average

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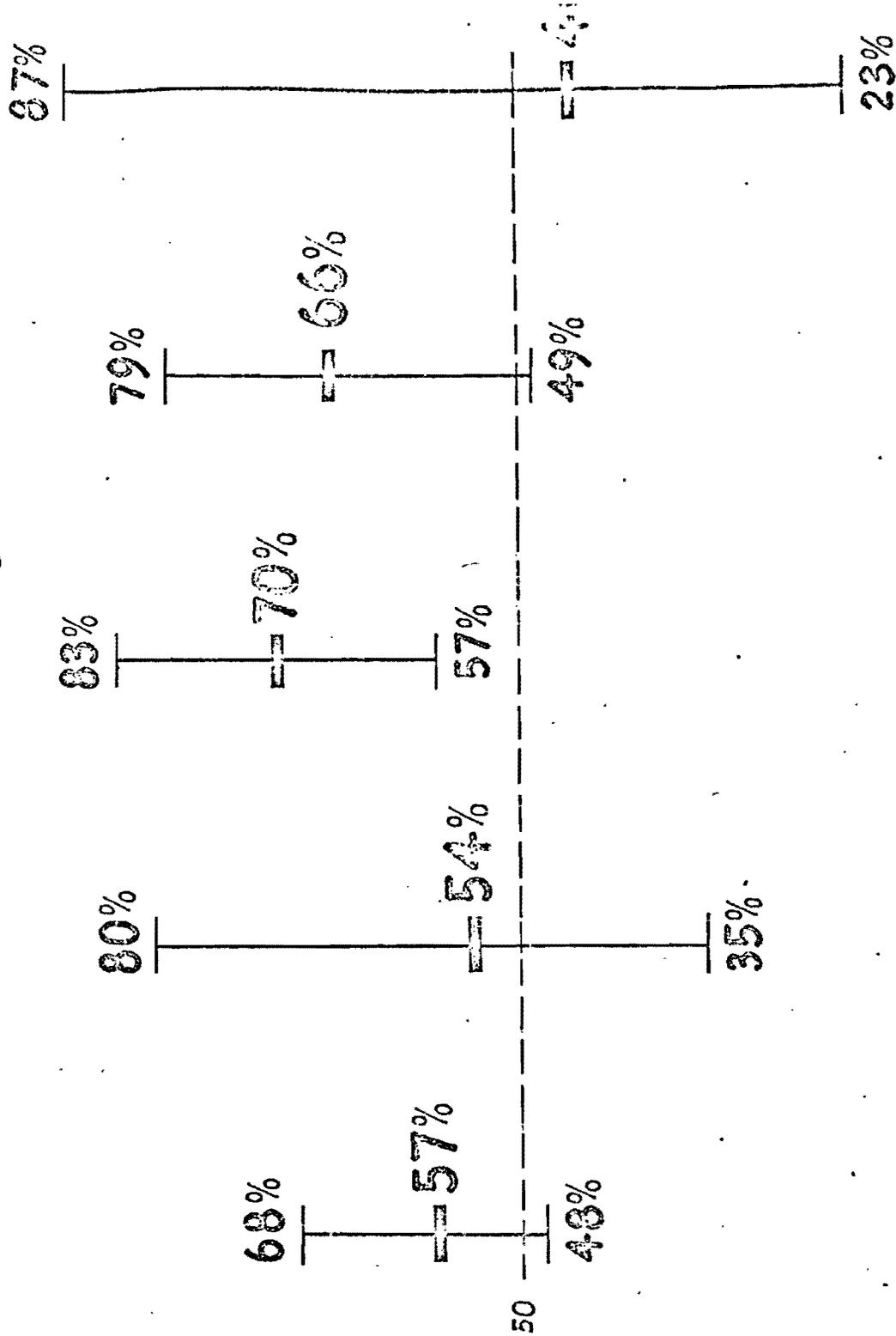
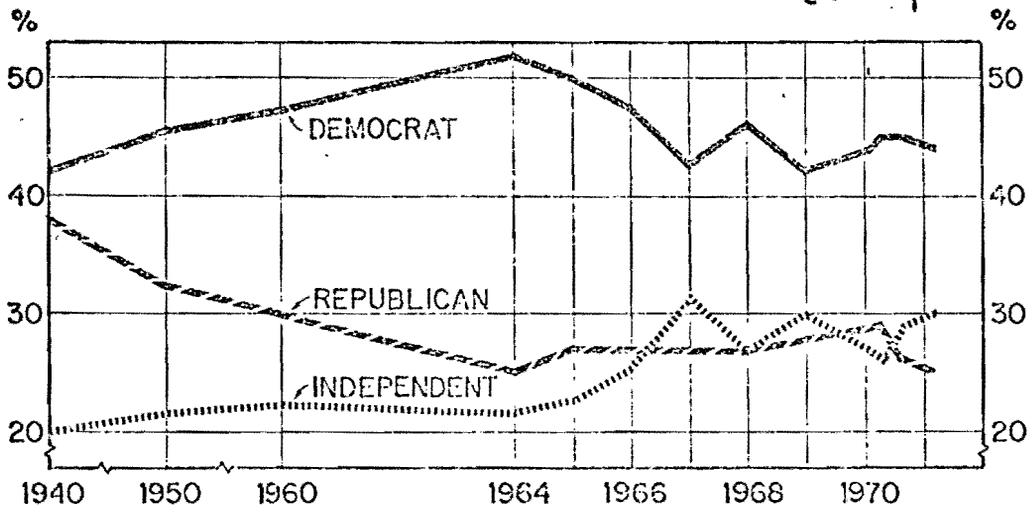


EXHIBIT THREE

PARTY AFFILIATION: 1940 - 1971 (Pollup)



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