

# THE DAV VETERANS PULSE SURVEY

A landmark study of the  
attitudes and perceptions  
of America's veterans



**DAV**<sup>®</sup>  
FULFILLING OUR PROMISES  
TO THE MEN AND WOMEN WHO SERVED

# Introduction

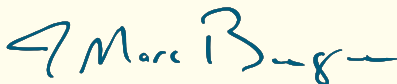
DAV (Disabled American Veterans), one of the nation's largest nonprofit veterans service organizations, supports more than 1 million veterans of all generations every year. DAV staff and volunteers experience firsthand both the contributions America's veterans make to their communities and our country, as well as the challenges many of them face.

The DAV Veterans Pulse Survey was conducted to further expand the collective understanding of veterans' perceptions and experiences, and how these differ by service era, as well as to inform decisions about policies and programs designed to support veterans. This survey, nationally representative of America's 22 million veterans, is the largest, most comprehensive assessment ever taken to reveal how generations of veterans from WWII through post-9/11 view their military experience, benefits and overall quality of life.

Results of this survey paint an illuminating—yet complex—picture of how veterans feel about their experience in the military, the impact it has on important personal relationships and their health, what it was like to transition from military to civilian life, and their feelings about how the government and the American public treat veterans.

The survey reveals that veterans are proud of their service—the vast majority would do it all over again. Yet many paid a price, either in terms of adverse impact on health or relationships, or the struggles inherent in transitioning to civilian life. Far too many do not believe the government and the American public treat veterans well or that they are receiving the benefits they were promised.

The findings reveal one clear conclusion: Our government and country need to do more to ensure that we are keeping the promises made to America's veterans. We hope you'll join DAV in this never-ending and important mission.



J. Marc Burgess  
*DAV National Adjutant and  
Chief Executive Officer*



Moses A. McIntosh Jr.  
*DAV National Commander*

# Executive Summary

The DAV Veterans Pulse Survey provides the most complete picture to date of the attitudes and perceptions of veterans of all generations—from how they look back on their time in the military, to the challenges faced when they transition to civilian life, to their views on the benefits they receive, to how they feel the government and American public treat veterans.

Conducted for DAV by global research firm GfK, utilizing KnowledgePanel®, the largest online panel representative of the United States, the survey was completed by 1,701 veterans. It is a national probability sample representative of the entire population of veterans in the United States. (See page 21 for a discussion of methodology.)

The DAV Veterans Pulse Survey yields a deep and nuanced look at veterans' attitudes and perceptions.

## VETERANS' VIEWS OF MILITARY SERVICE

Veterans of all generations have a very positive view of their military service. The vast majority of America's veterans would serve again—79% say they would choose to “do it all over again.”

Post-9/11 veterans, while just as likely as other veterans to say they would serve again, report that their military service took a toll on their physical and mental health. Nearly four out of 10 post-9/11 veterans say their time in the military had an adverse effect on their physical health. Almost three out of 10 say it negatively impacted their mental health.

## MALE AND FEMALE VETERANS: A DIFFERING PERSPECTIVE

Female veterans are also just as likely to say that if they had to do it all over again, they would repeat their military service. Yet only 44% of female veterans would encourage their daughters to serve in the military—significantly more than male veterans (34%) but still less than half. And 56% of women veterans do not believe they receive the same respect and appreciation as their male counterparts; only 34% of male veterans feel that women don't get the same respect.

## LESS THAN HALF OF VETERANS BELIEVE BENEFITS PROMISED HAVE BEEN DELIVERED

Just 37% of veterans say they know what benefits they are eligible for and how to access them. And less than half (44%) say they have received the veterans benefits they were promised. Only 18% believe that disabled veterans have received the benefits they were promised.

## MANY DON'T BELIEVE THE GOVERNMENT, AMERICAN PUBLIC TREAT VETERANS WELL

When asked if they feel the promises made to them by the government have been kept, only 48% of veterans responded “yes.” Only 22% agree that the federal government treats veterans well, and 53% feel the public treats veterans well.

# Executive Summary continued

## HEALTH CARE: A FEDERAL RESPONSIBILITY

The vast majority of veterans (87%) believe the federal government should provide a health care system dedicated to the needs of ill, injured and wounded veterans. But 50% do not believe the government is living up to its promise of providing quality, accessible health care to veterans.

## TRANSITIONING TO CIVILIAN LIFE

Moving from military to civilian life proves a significant challenge for many veterans. Only 38% of veterans feel that they had the support needed when re-entering civilian life. Veterans identify the challenges of daily living—such as finding employment, managing finances and securing housing—as the biggest hurdles they faced upon leaving the military.

Post-9/11 veterans are more likely than veterans who served previously to report that, upon leaving the military and becoming a civilian, they had a difficult time with their personal relationships. Nearly three out of 10 (27%), for example, say they had a difficult time with their relationship with their spouse or partner. They are also much more likely to report that finding meaningful employment after leaving the military is difficult—36% say it was tough.

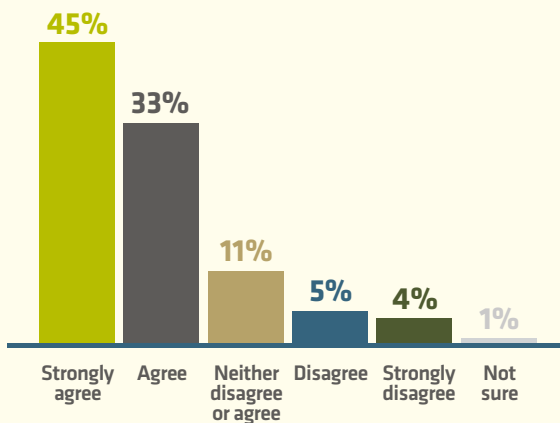
## SUPPORT MAKES A DIFFERENCE

Veterans who report that they did have the support they needed when they left the military are much more likely to feel their military service contributed to future success. For example, 92% who say they had the support they needed also believe military service had an overall positive impact on their life. Significantly less—73%—of the veterans who feel that upon leaving the military they did not have the support they needed say their military service had an overall positive impact on their life.

## CELEBRATING VETERANS

When it comes to celebrating Veterans Day, the most common activities for veterans include celebrating with family or friends, taking advantage of special offers at stores and restaurants and wearing a special piece of clothing or adornment. When it comes to being recognized for their service, 85% of veterans report that they appreciate it when somebody they don't know thanks them.

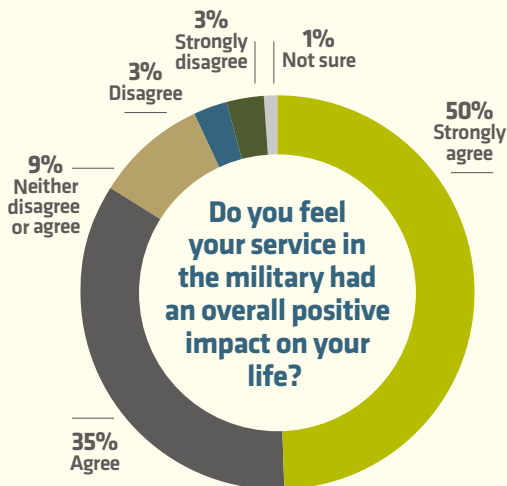
# Veterans look back on their military service in a very positive light



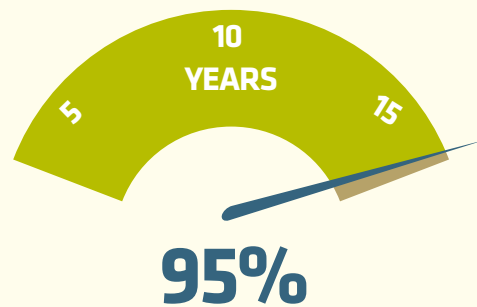
**If I had to do it all over again, I would repeat my military service**



**Nearly 8 out of 10 veterans would serve again**



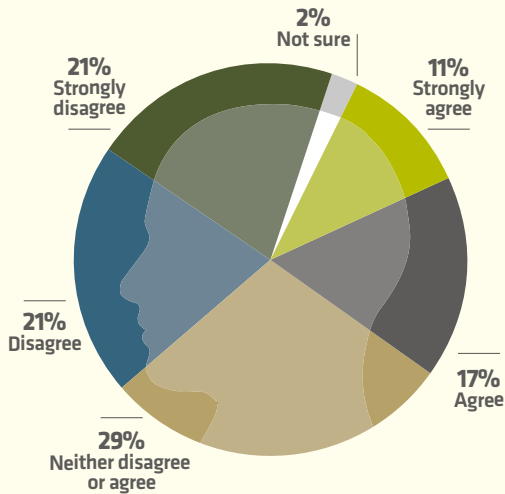
**Do you feel your service in the military had an overall positive impact on your life?**



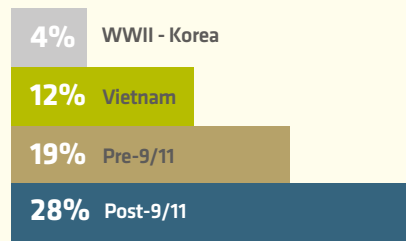
**95% who served 15 years or more strongly agree/agree that military service had an overall positive impact on his or her life**

Percentages may exceed or be less than 100% due to rounding.

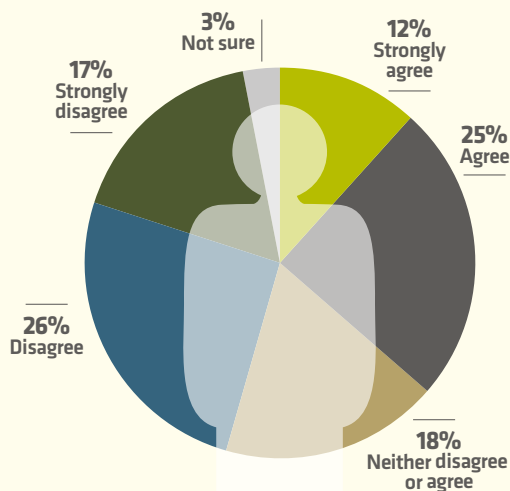
# 84% of post-9/11 veterans say military service had an overall positive impact on their lives but report more health effects than other service eras



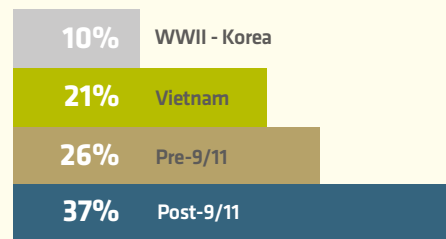
**Post-9/11 veterans:**  
Thinking back on my military service, it had a negative effect on my **mental health**



**Post-9/11 veterans are significantly more likely than other veterans to report a negative impact on **mental health****



**Post-9/11 veterans:**  
Thinking back on my military service, it had a negative effect on my **physical health**

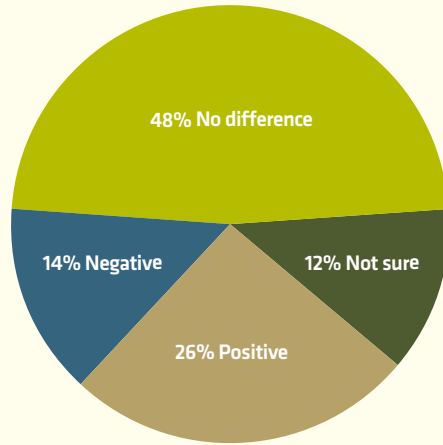


**Post-9/11 veterans are significantly more likely than other veterans to report a negative impact on **physical health****

Post-9/11 refers to September 2001 or later. Pre-9/11 refers to Gulf War and Desert Shield/Storm (Aug. 1990 to Aug. 2001). Statements of significant difference among subsamples refer to statistically significant difference at the 0.05 level of significance or less. Percentages may exceed or be less than 100% due to rounding.

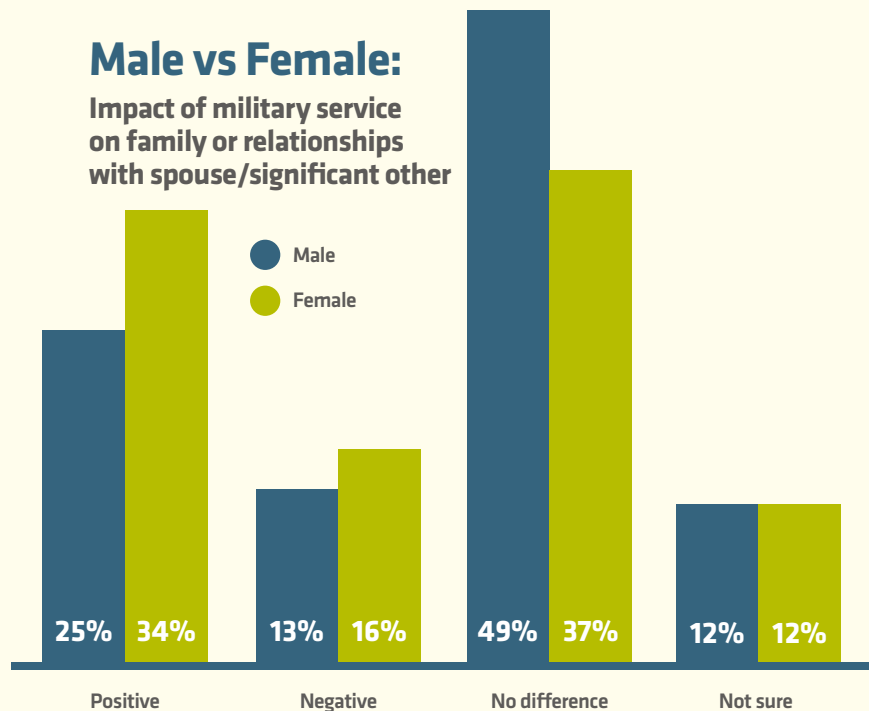
# Male veterans and female veterans often report different views

**While about half** of all veterans say their military service made no difference on their relationship with their family or spouse/significant other, female veterans are more likely to say it had a positive impact.



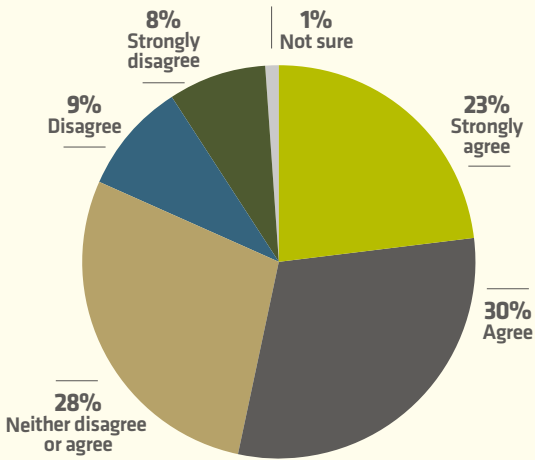
**What effect did your service in the military have on your family or your relationship with your spouse/significant other?**  
(all veterans)

## Male vs Female: Impact of military service on family or relationships with spouse/significant other

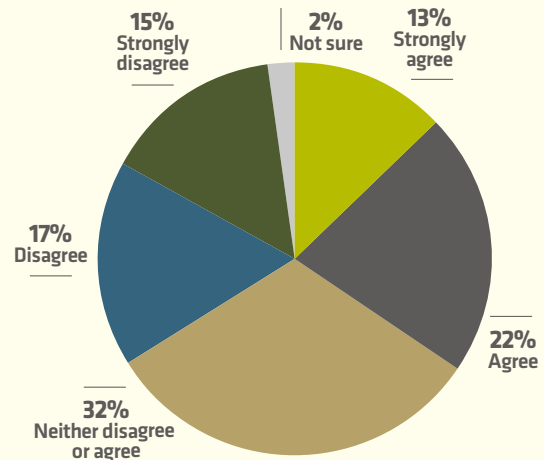


Percentages may exceed or be less than 100% due to rounding.

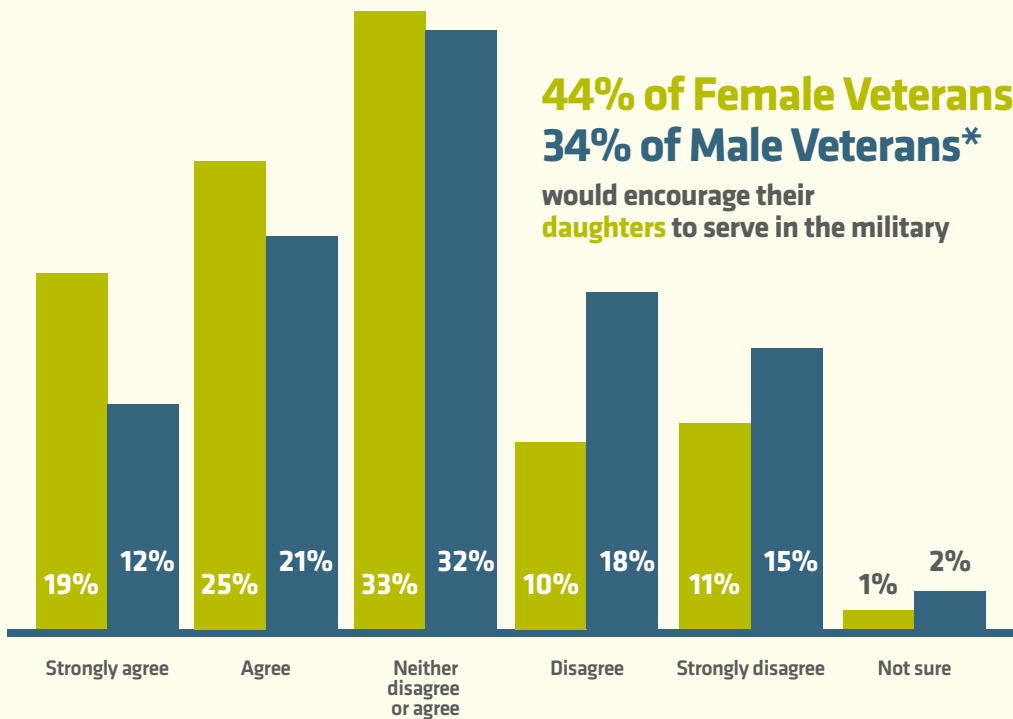
# How veterans feel about their sons and daughters serving



**I would encourage my son to serve in the military**  
(responses by all veterans with a son)



**I would encourage my daughter to serve in the military**  
(responses by all veterans with a daughter)



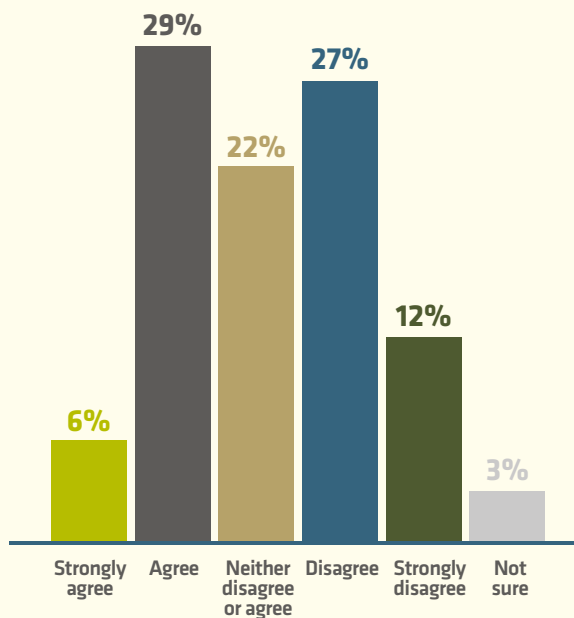
\*34% represents rounding when combining "strongly agree" and "agree" responses  
Percentages may exceed or be less than 100% due to rounding.



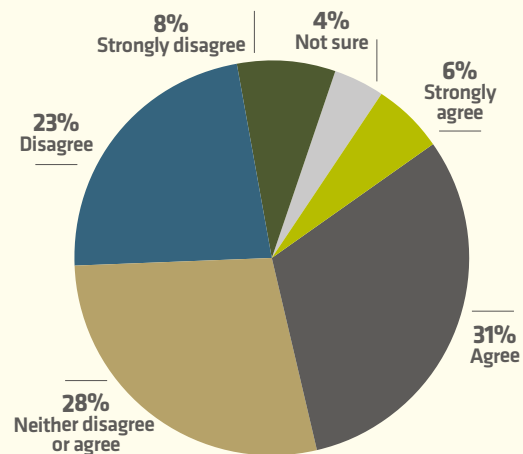
# Many do not believe veterans get the benefits they have earned



**Only about a third of veterans say,**  
upon leaving the military, benefits were explained to them



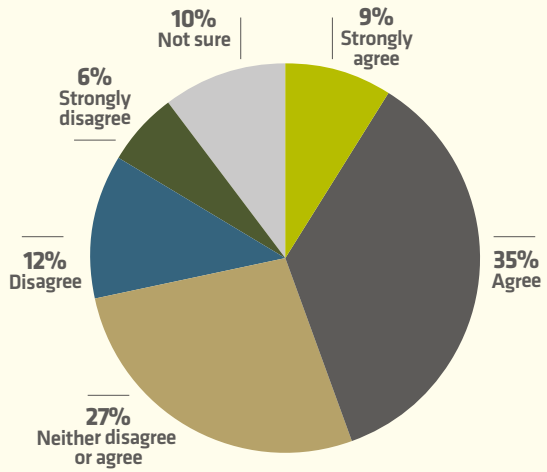
**When I left the military,  
my benefits were clearly explained to me**



**I am aware of all the veterans  
benefits I am eligible for and how to  
take advantage of them**

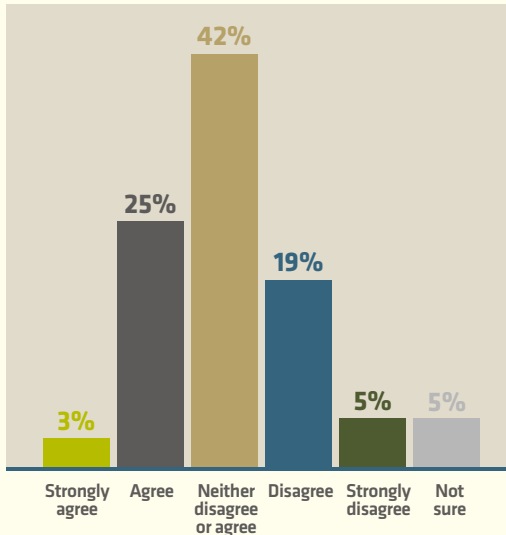
Percentages may exceed or be less than 100% due to rounding.

**Only 44%**  
of veterans agree they  
have received the benefits  
they were promised



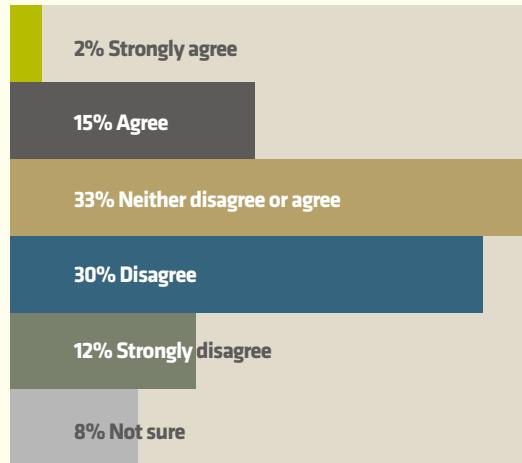
**I have received the veterans benefits (health, disability, financial, education) that I was promised**

**Only 28% agree**  
that other veterans get the benefits  
they earned



**I believe that other veterans have received the benefits they were promised**

**Few agree that veterans with disabilities are receiving the benefits they were promised**

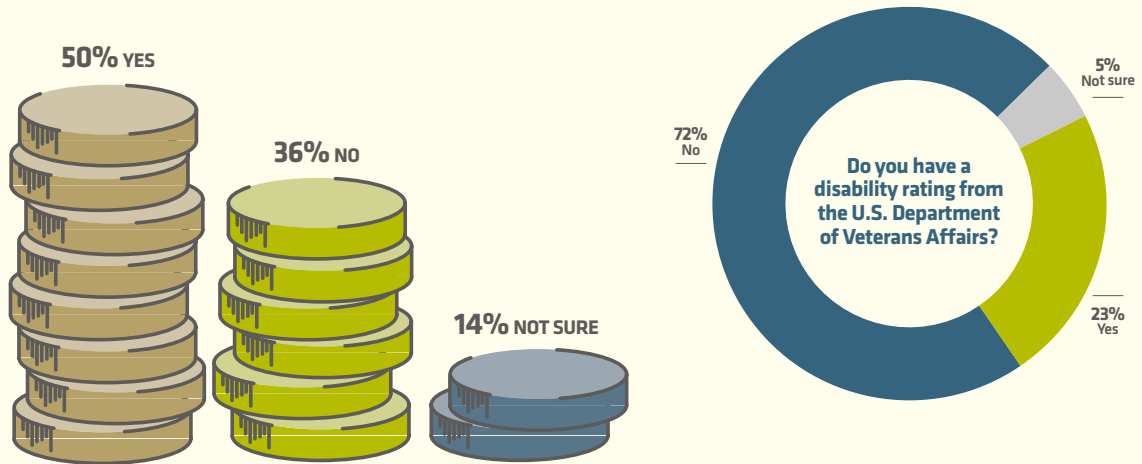


**Disabled veterans have received the benefits they were promised**

Percentages may exceed or be less than 100% due to rounding.

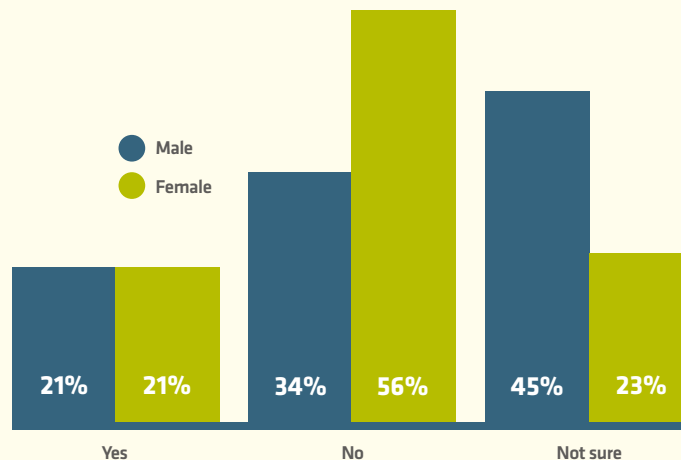
# Many veterans do not feel that disability compensation is fair

**Of veterans with a disability rating, only half say their disability compensation is fair**



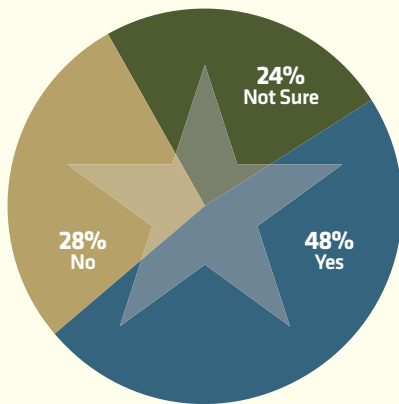
**If you have a disability rating, do you believe the amount of compensation you are receiving is fair?**

# More than half of women veterans feel they do not get the same respect as their male counterparts

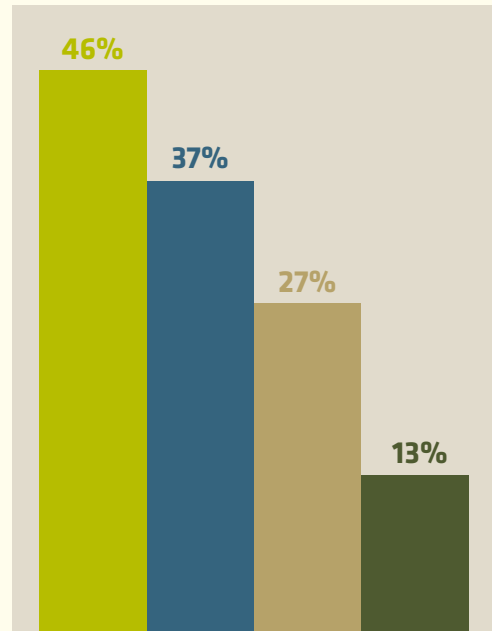


**Do women veterans receive the same respect and appreciation as male veterans?**

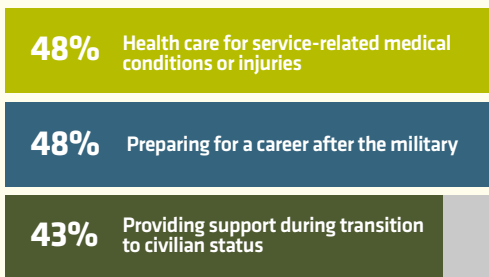
# Many veterans do not feel promises made by the government have been kept



**Do you feel that promises the government made to you as a veteran have been kept?**

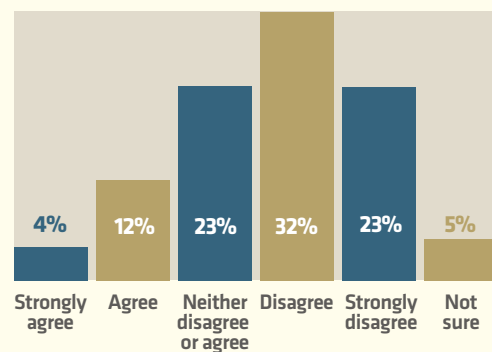


**Almost half of post-9/11 veterans say the government has **not kept** promises made to them as veterans**



**The top three promises veterans identified as not kept by the government**

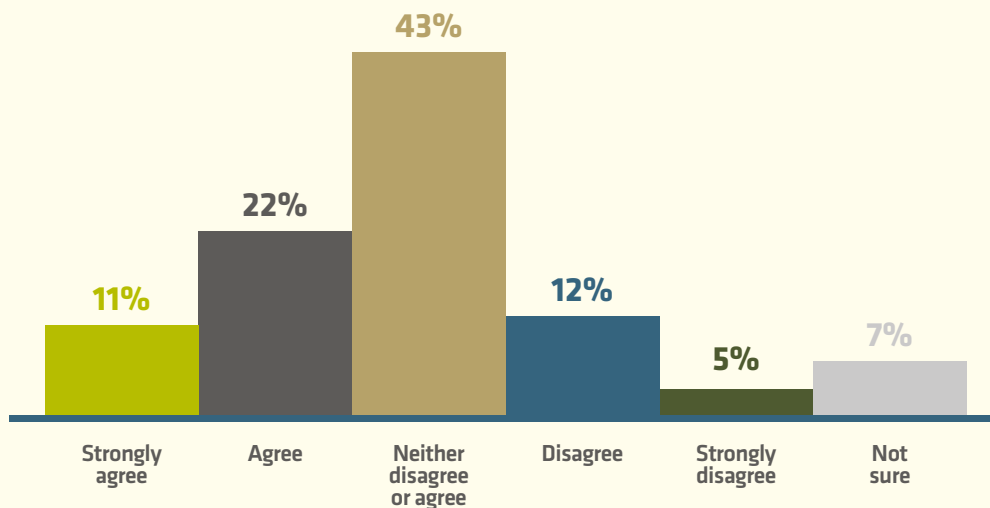
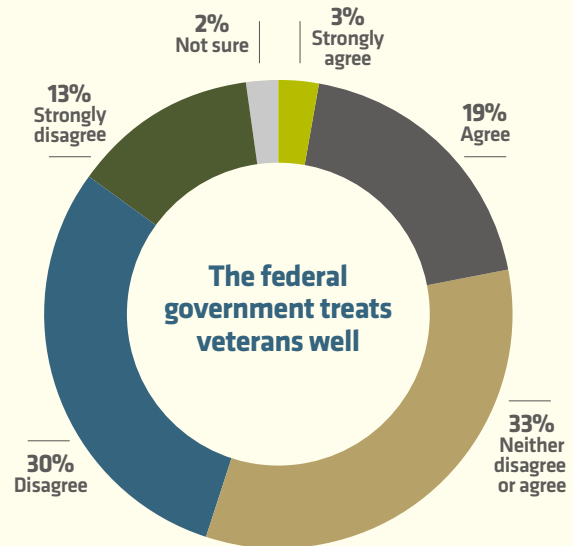
## There is adequate federal funding for veterans benefits and services



Percentages may exceed or be less than 100% due to rounding.

# How veterans feel the federal government treats veterans

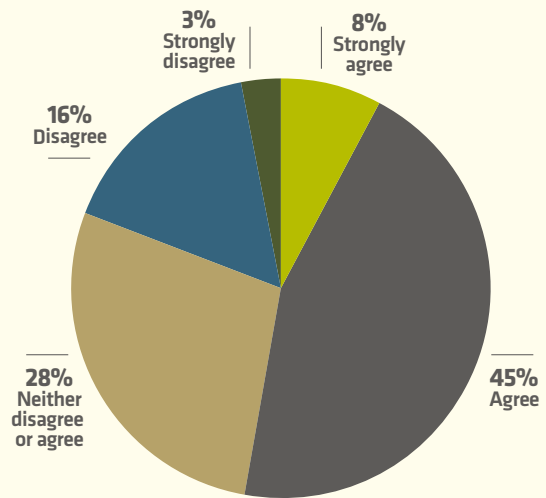
**Only about 1 in 5**  
veterans agree  
the federal government  
treats veterans well



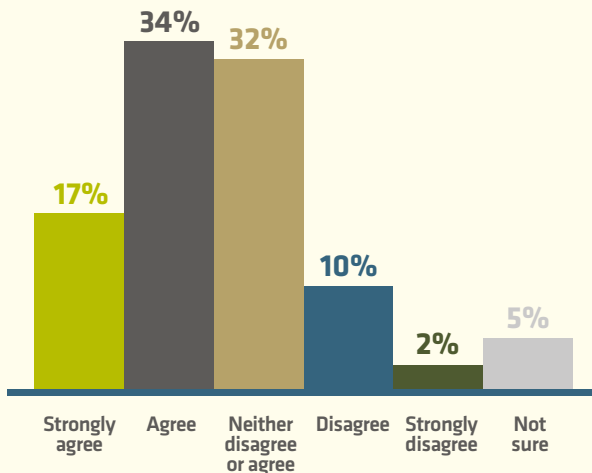
**The federal government treats veterans who served after 9/11 better than it treats veterans who served before 9/11**

# How veterans feel the American public treats veterans

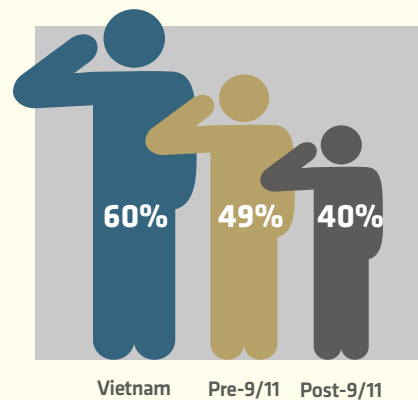
**Only about 1 in 2**  
veterans agree  
the American public  
treats veterans well



**The American public treats veterans well**

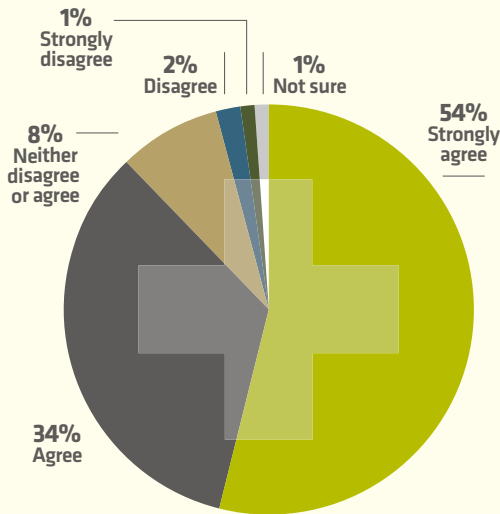


**The American public treats veterans who served after 9/11 better than they treat veterans who served before 9/11**



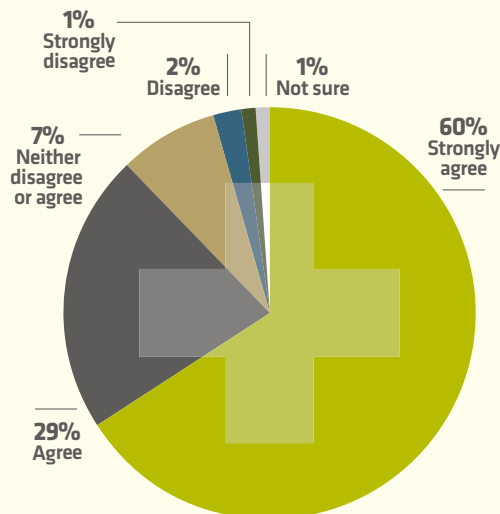
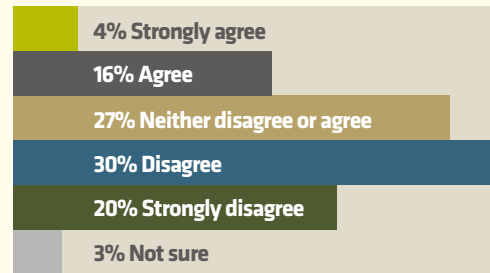
**Vietnam veterans are more likely to strongly agree or agree that the American public treats veterans who served after 9/11 better than they treat veterans who served before 9/11**

# When it comes to health care, veterans want better from the federal government



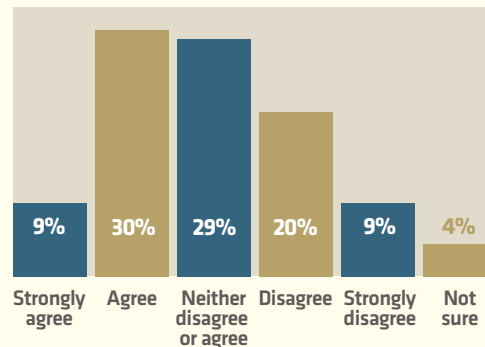
**The federal government should provide a health system dedicated to the needs of ill, injured and wounded veterans**

## The federal government is living up to its promise of providing quality, accessible health care to veterans



**The federal government should provide free health care to veterans who were wounded, injured or made ill as a result of their military service**

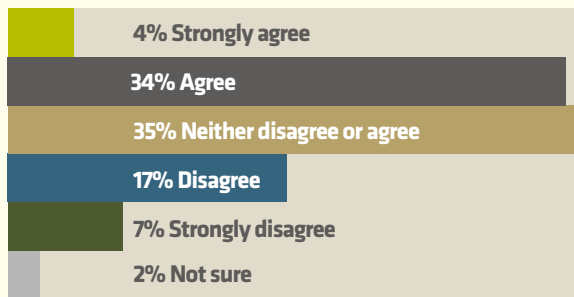
## The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is uniquely qualified to provide specialized care for ill, injured and wounded veterans



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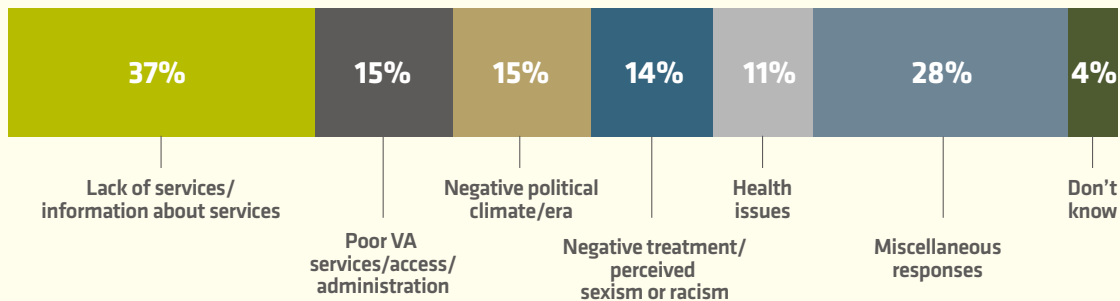
# For many veterans, transitioning to civilian life presents challenges

When I left the military and re-entered civilian life, I felt I had the support I needed

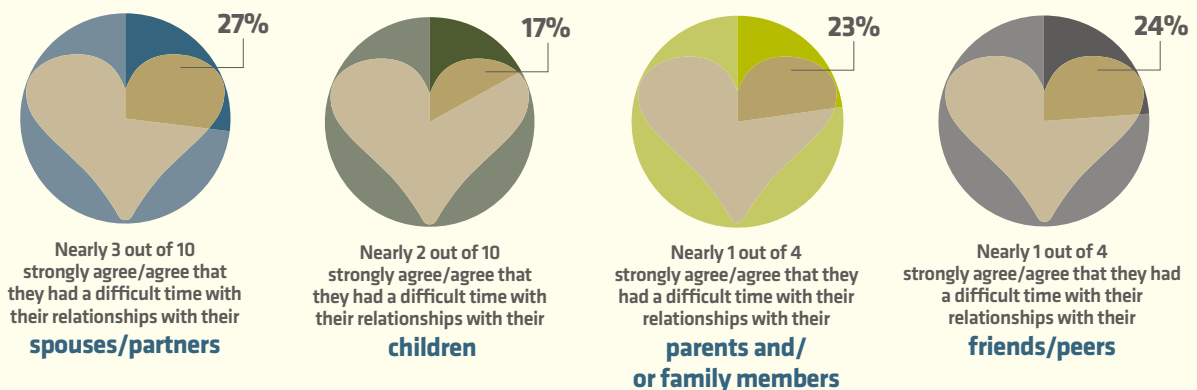


**92% of veterans** who feel they had the support needed when they left the military think military service had an overall positive impact on their lives. But only 73% who say they did not have the support they needed feel this way.

Why do you feel you did not have the support you needed?\*



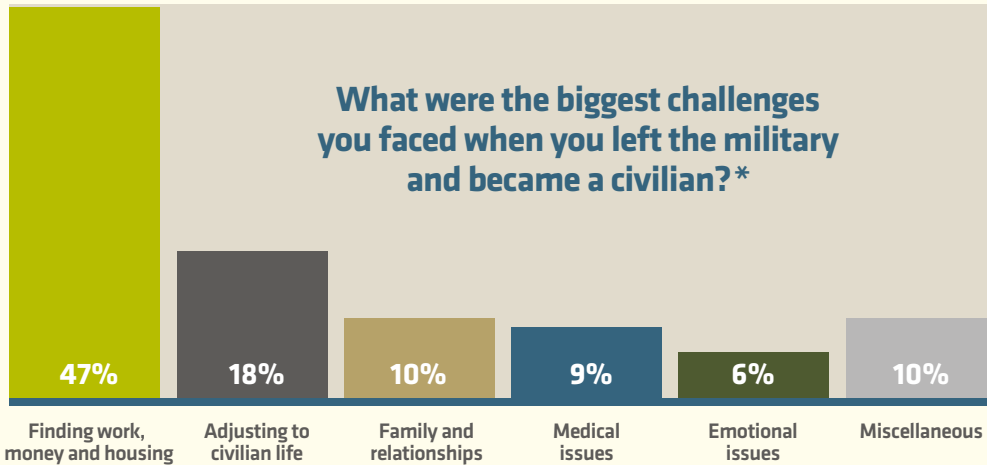
**For many post-9/11 veterans,**  
leaving the military and becoming a civilian created stress in personal relationships



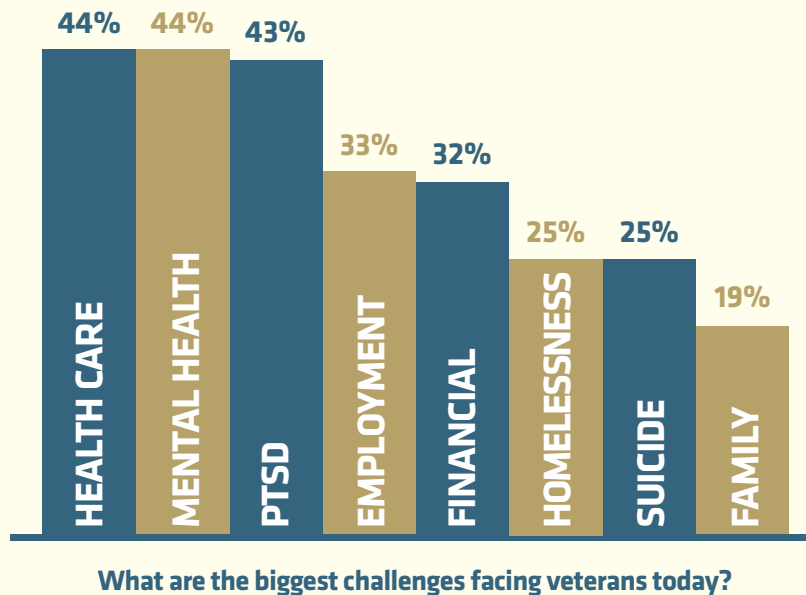
\*Note that these are general types of responses to open-ended questions; percentages exceed 100% because multiple responses allowed. Percentages may exceed or be less than 100% due to rounding.



## Challenges veterans identified when leaving the military and becoming a civilian



## Veterans see health care and mental health as the biggest challenges facing veterans today, followed by finding a job<sup>‡</sup>

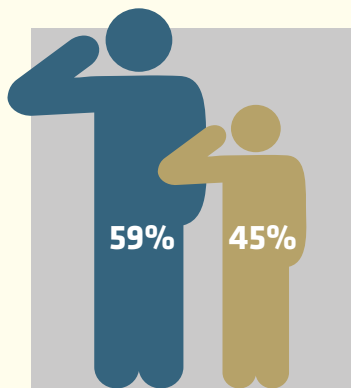


\*Note that these are general types of responses to open-ended questions.

<sup>‡</sup>Multiple responses allowed to this question.

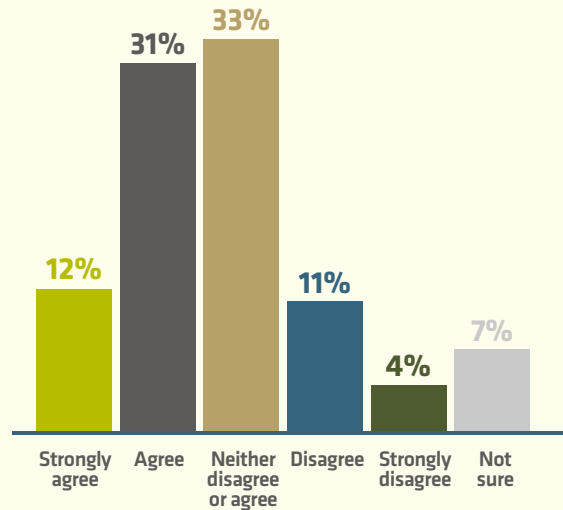
# Veterans often feel civilians cannot understand what they experienced

**While many veterans believe people who never served cannot understand what they went through, post-9/11 veterans are most likely to feel this way**

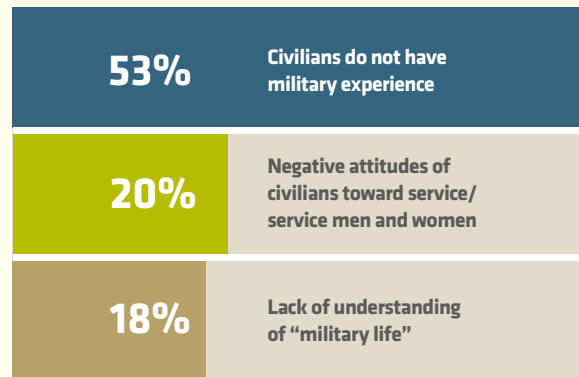


Post-9/11 Vietnam

**6 out of 10 (59%) post-9/11 veterans feel that people who never served could not understand, significantly more than Vietnam veterans (45%)**



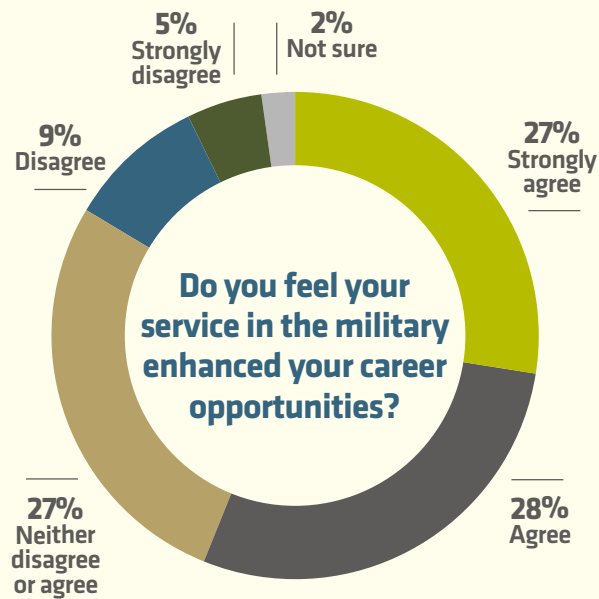
**When I left the military and re-entered civilian life, people who had never served in the military could not understand what I was dealing with, feeling and/or experiencing.**  
(all veterans)



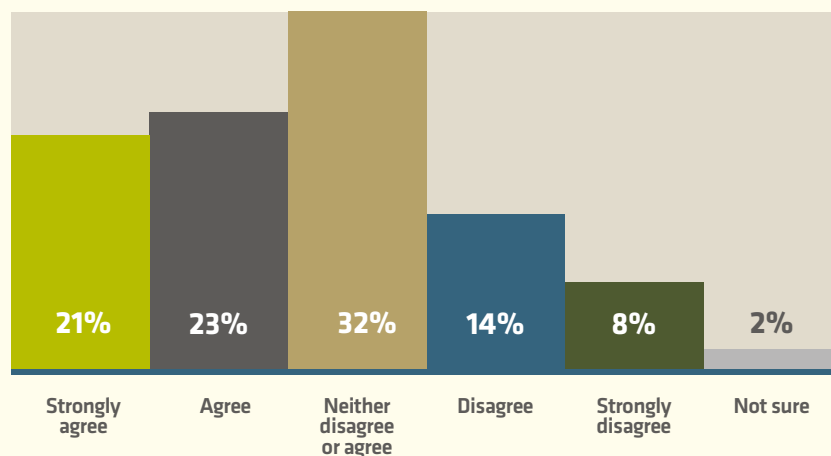
**Why do you feel people who never served in the military did not understand what you were dealing with, feeling and/or experiencing?\***

\*Note that these are general types of responses to open-ended questions. Percentages may exceed or be less than 100% due to rounding.

# How military service contributes to career and financial opportunities

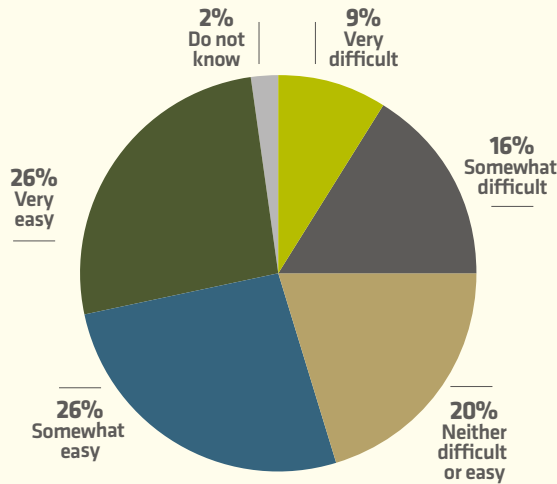


## Do you feel your service in the military contributed to your becoming financially secure?

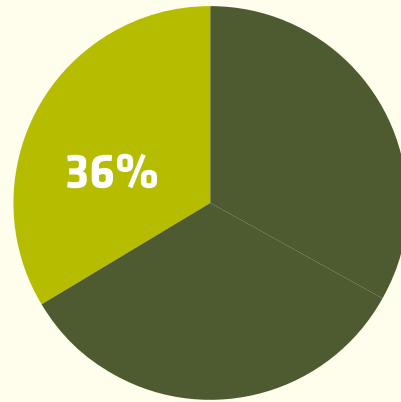


Percentages may exceed or be less than 100% due to rounding.

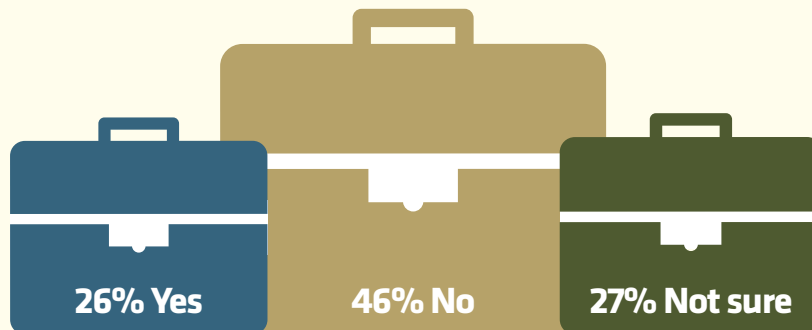
# Finding meaningful employment can be a challenge for some veterans



**When you left the military, how easy or difficult was it to find meaningful employment?**  
(all veterans)

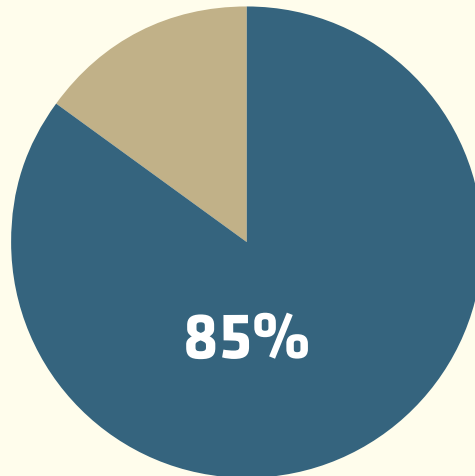


**More than one out of three post-9/11 veterans say it was very or somewhat difficult to find work, significantly more than veterans who served in earlier eras**

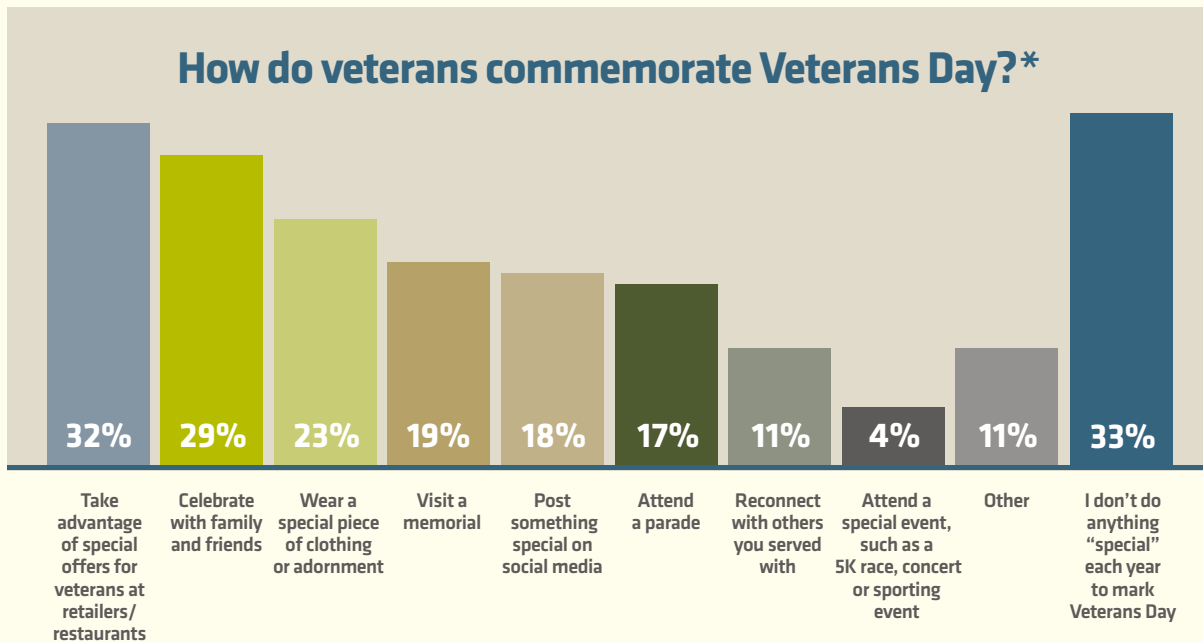


**Do you feel that civilian employers understand how your military qualifications translate to civilian jobs?**  
(all veterans)

# Celebrating veterans



**85% of veterans say they appreciate it when somebody they don't know thanks them for their service**



\*Multiple responses allowed to this question.

# Methodology

DAV engaged GfK, which utilized KnowledgePanel®, a probability-based web panel designed to be representative of the United States, to conduct The DAV Veterans Pulse Survey.

The target population for the sample consisted of noninstitutionalized adults ages 18 and over, residing in the United States, who previously served on active duty in the U.S. military for six months or longer, but were no longer on active duty. The survey consisted of two stages: an initial screening survey for veterans' status and the main survey with the study-eligible respondents.

Timeframes for data collection for this survey were:

Pre-Test:        Start Date: 7/24/15   End Date: 7/25/15  
Main Survey:    Start Date: 8/4/15     End Date: 8/19/15

For this survey, the sampling plan included three components:

- An oversample of all female KnowledgePanel® members who were 18 years of age or older, previously on active duty in the U.S. military for six months or longer, but no longer on active duty
- An oversample of all male panel members between the ages of 18 and 40, previously on active duty in the U.S. military for six months or longer, but no longer on active duty
- A nationally representative sample of males 41 years of age or older, excluding panel members from households that included a member selected as part of one of the previous oversamples, previously on active duty in the U.S. military for six months or longer, but no longer on active duty

1,701 qualified respondents completed the survey.

GfK weighted all qualified respondents by utilizing benchmark distributions from the August 2013 Census Bureau Current Population Survey's (CPS) Veteran Supplement including age, race and ethnicity, gender, metropolitan status, geographical region, education, military branch and length of service.

- The margin of error for the entire sample is +/-2.9 percent.
- The margin of error for the female veterans sample is +/-6.8 percent.
- The margin of error for the male veterans sample is +/-3.2 percent.
- The margin of error for the Vietnam-Era veterans sample is +/-4.5 percent.
- The margin of error for the pre-9/11 veterans sample is +/-6.1 percent.
- The margin of error for the September 2001 or later (OIF/OEF) veterans sample is +/-7.6 percent.

# About DAV

DAV is a nonprofit organization that provides a lifetime of support for veterans of all generations. Every year, DAV helps more than 1 million veterans in meaningful ways by helping them access the benefits they earned, such as health care and disability, and connecting them to meaningful employment opportunities.

DAV is the nation's most resourceful veterans service organization, keeping the promise to support America's veterans.

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